Thig 15.1 — Isidāsī

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Text

Verses of the Senior Nuns 15.1

The Book of the Forties

Isidāsī

In Pāṭaliputta, the cream of the world,

the city named for a flower,

there were two nuns from the Sakyan clan,

both of them ladies of quality.

One was named Isidāsī, the second Bodhī.

They both were accomplished in ethics,

lovers of meditation and chanting,

learned, crushing corruptions.

They wandered for alms and had their meal.

When they had washed their bowls,

they sat happily in a private place

and started a conversation.

“You’re so lovely, Mistress Isidāsī,

your youth has not yet faded.

What problem did you see that made you

dedicate your life to renunciation?”

Being pressed like this in private,

Isidāsī, skilled in teaching Dhamma,

voiced the following words.

“Bodhī, hear how I went forth.

In the fine town of Ujjenī,
my father was a financier, a good and moral man.
I was his only daughter,
dear, beloved, and cherished.
Then some suitors came for me
from the top family of Sāketa.
They were sent by a financier abounding in wealth,
to whom my father then gave me as daughter-in-law.
Come morning and come evening,
I bowed with my head to the feet
of my father and mother-in-law,
just as I had been told.
Whenever I saw my husband's sisters,
his brothers, his servants,
or even he, my one and only,
I nervously gave them a seat.
Whatever they wanted—food and drink,
treats, or whatever was in the cupboard—
I brought out and offered to them,
ensuring each got what was fitting.
Having risen bright and early,
I approached the main house,
washed my hands and feet,
and went to my husband with cupped palms.
Taking a comb, adornments,
eyeshadow, and a mirror,
I myself did the makeup for my husband,
as if I were his beautician.
I myself cooked the rice;

I myself washed the pots.
I looked after my husband
like a mother her only child.
Thus I showed my devotion to him,
a loyal, virtuous, and humble servant,
getting up early, and working tirelessly:
yet still my husband did me wrong.
He said to his mother and father:
‘I’ll take my leave and go,
I can’t stand to live together with Isidāsī
staying in the same house.’
‘Son, don’t speak like this!
Isidāsī is astute and competent,
she gets up early and works tirelessly,
son, why doesn’t she please you?’
‘She hasn’t done anything to hurt me,
but I just can’t stand to live with her.
As far as I’m concerned, she’s just detestable.
I’ve had enough, I’ll take my leave and go.’
When they heard his words,
my father-in-law and mother-in-law asked me:
‘What did you do wrong?
Boldly tell how it occurred.’
‘I’ve done nothing wrong,
I haven’t hurt him, or said anything bad.
What can I possibly do,
when my husband finds me so hateful?’
They led me back to my father’s home,
distraught, overcome with suffering, and said:

‘By caring for our son,
we’ve lost her, so lovely and lucky!’
Next my dad gave me to the household
of a second wealthy family-man.
For this he got half the bride-price
of that which the financier paid.
In his house I also lived a month,
before he too wanted me gone;
though I served him like a slave,
virtuous and doing no wrong.
My father then spoke to a beggar for alms,
a tamer of others and of himself:
‘Be my son-in-law;
set aside your tonsure-cloth and pot.’
He stayed a fortnight before he said to my dad:
‘Give me back my tonsure-cloth,
my pot and my mug—
I’ll wander begging again.’
So then my mum and my dad
and my whole group of relatives said:
‘What has not been done for you here?
Quickly, tell us what we can do for you!’
When they spoke to him like this he said,
‘If I can make do for myself, that is enough.
I can’t stand to live together with Isidāsī
staying in the same house.’
Released, he left.
But I sat all alone contemplating:
‘Having taken my leave, I’ll go,

either to die or to go forth.’
But then Mistress Jinadattā,
learned and virtuous,
who had memorized the monastic law,
came resorting to my dad’s house for alms.
When I saw her,
I rose from my seat and prepared it for her.
When she had taken her seat,
I honored her feet and offered her a meal,
satiating her with food and drink,
treats, or whatever was in the cupboard.
Then I said:
‘Ma’am, I wish to go forth!’
But my dad said to me:
‘Child, practice Dhamma right here then!
With food and drink
satisfy ascetics and the twice-born.’
Then I said to my dad,
crying, my cupped palms raised to him:
‘I’ve done bad things in the past;
I shall wear that bad deed away.’
And my dad said to me:
‘May you attain awakening, the highest state,
and may you find the extinguishment
that was realized by the best of men!’
I bowed down to my mother and father,
and my whole group of relatives;
and then, seven days after going forth,
I realized the three knowledges.

I know my last seven lives;
I shall relate to you the deeds
of which this life is the fruit and result:
focus your whole mind on that.
In the city of Erakacca
I was a goldsmith with lots of money.
Drunk on the pride of youth,
I had sex with someone else's wife.
Having passed away from there,
I burned in hell for a long time.
Rising up from there
I was conceived in a monkey's womb.
When I was only seven days old,
I was castrated by the monkey chief.
This was the fruit of that deed,
because of adultery with another's wife.
Having passed away from there,
passing away in Sindhava grove,
I was conceived in the womb
of a lame, one-eyed she-goat.
I carried children on my back for twelve years,
and all the while I was castrated,
worm-eaten, and tail-less,
because of adultery with another's wife.
Having passed away from there,
I was reborn in a cow
owned by a cattle merchant.
A red calf, castrated, for twelve months
I drew a big plow.

I shouldered a cart,
blind, tail-less, feeble,
because of adultery with another's wife.
Having passed away from there,
I was born of a slave in the street,
with neither male nor female parts,
because of adultery with another's wife.
I died at thirty years of age,
and was reborn as a girl in a carter's family.
We were poor, of little wealth,
greatly oppressed by creditors.
Because of the massive interest we owed,
I was dragged away screaming,
taken by force from the family home
by a caravan leader.
When I was sixteen years old,
seeing I was a girl of marriageable age,
his son confined me as his wife—
Giridāsa was his name.
He also had another wife,
a virtuous and well-known lady of quality,
loyal to her husband;
yet I stirred up resentment in her.
As the fruit of that deed,
they abandoned me and left,
though I served them like a slave.
Now I've made an end to this as well."