

Isidasi Theri

(Third Precept)

Introduction – This is a very moving story related in her own words by Isidasi Theri after she attained her enlightenment. Life in this **Samsara** is a long and tedious journey through fair and rainy weather – some lives a comfortable life; and some miserable life. The moral lesson from this story is to live a virtuous life – observe five precepts. Not many would have thought how important is – *Ngar Par Thi La* – Five precepts – observing five precepts enable you to reap great benefits and breaking anyone of them will cost you to pay for that unwholesome deeds. .

Simple – Five Precepts: - Ngar Par Thi La.–

- ¹ I pledge to observe the precept of abstaining from killing any living beings.
- ² I pledge to observe the precept of abstaining from taking what is not given to me by the owner.
- ³ I pledge to observe the precept of abstaining from committing sexual misconduct
- ⁴ I pledge to observe the precept of abstaining from telling lies
- ⁵ I pledge to observe the precept of abstaining from taking any intoxicant (liquor) or drug that causes forgetfulness.

1. In our journey through the Samsara, one can take rebirth either as male or female depending on one's past Kamma.
2. Seducing other's wives or husband, Isidasi has to suffer as retribution for the demerits (unwholesome deeds – breaking the third precept) that she had caused.

Protect yourself with the five precepts we will surely end in Nibbana – in our “*Un Ti ma Ba wa*”– final existence.

By working hard on – Concentration and Jhanas – she quickly attained the ability to - *Within seven days she attained the higher knowledge. Isidasi could recollect her past lives, see the passing away and rebirth of beings and penetrate the knowledge required for the destruction of all suffering. Looking into her past lives Isidasi understood the cause of her failed marriages.*

Those with true parami could easily attain this state of supernatural power to recollect the past lives.

Notice the worse unwholesome deed and the result - In her previous birth she had caused disharmony and separated a husband and wife, causing great grief and

suffering. She now has to suffer the contempt and rejection of every man she married.

Isidasi Theri

In Pataliputta, which later became the capital of Emperor Ashoka, there lived two nuns named **Bodhi** and **Isidasi** who were good friends. They had both destroyed all defilements and attained enlightenment. One day the friends discussed their past histories and their initiation to the Noble Order. Bhikkhuní Bodhi, who was elderly, had undergone great suffering. She told her story to Isidasi and then asked the young and beautiful nun how someone as beautiful and likable as she had experienced the suffering of existence. Bodhi said,

*"You are lovely, noble Isidasi,
And your youth has not yet faded.
What was the flaw that you had seen
That led you to pursue renunciation?"*
-- (Therigatha 403)

Isidasi then told her life story. She had been born in the city of **Ujjeni** as the much-loved only daughter of a rich merchant. When she came of age, a wealthy merchant who was a friend of her father asked for her hand in marriage for his son. Isidasi's parents were overjoyed at the proposal as they knew the family well. Isidasi, who was a model daughter, displayed these qualities and behavior to her husband and in-laws. She soon won over the hearts of her parents-in-law. Isidasi also grew to love her husband. Disregarding the help offered by her servants she took care of all his meals and needs herself. However, despite her love and model behavior, her husband soon tired of her. Isidasi describes her life as follows:

*"By myself I cooked the rice,
By myself I washed the dishes.
As a mother looks after her only son,
So did I serve my husband.
I showed him devotion unsurpassed,
I served him with a humble mind,
I arose early, I was diligent, virtuous,*

And yet my husband hated me."
-- (Therigatha 412-413)

While admitting to his parents that Isidasi was blameless her husband insisted that he could no longer live with her. However, as she had done no wrong, he offered to leave the city and start a new life elsewhere. Isidasi's parents-in-law were devastated. They loved their daughter-in-law and did not want to lose her. Thinking that there was a problem that their son was hesitant to tell them, they questioned Isidasi. She answered truthfully as follows:

*"I have done nothing wrong,
I have done him no harm,
I have not spoken rudely to him.
What have I done that my husband hates me?"*
-- (Therigatha 418)

Her parents-in-law were perplexed and disappointed. They had grown to love Isidasi as a daughter. They did not, however, want their son to move away to another city. They decided to send Isidasi back to her parents, certain that with her beauty and kindness she would easily find another suitable partner. This rejection was devastating to Isidasi. Being sent back to one's parents was a disgrace and a shame in Indian society at the time of the Buddha. Isidasi describes her pain as follows:

*"Rejected, overcome by suffering,
They led me back to my father's house.
While appeasing our son, they exclaimed,
We have lost the beautiful goddess of fortune".*
-- (Therigatha 419)

Isidasi's parents were perplexed by what had happened. Accepting the inevitable they began looking for a suitable husband. Before long they found a wealthy young man who was so overcome by Isidasi's beauty and deportment that he offered to provide half of the usual marriage dowry that was given by the bride's father. Despite the fact that Isidasi lavished her attention on her new husband and treated him with utmost respect, the same pattern followed. Within a month he returned her to her father and annulled the marriage, though he could give no cause for his extreme dislike of his model wife.

Isidasi was devastated. This second rejection pierced her heart like a poisoned arrow. She moped around the house, dejected. When a mendicant came to their house begging for alms, Isidasi's desperate father offered her to the ascetic. The ascetic seemed to be unsatisfied with his solitary life. The prospect of a beautiful wife and a life of luxury in a splendid mansion appealed to him. Giving his begging bowl and robes to her father he accepted Isidasi as his wife. But after two weeks he brought her back and asked for his robe and bowl. "He preferred", he said, "to be the poorest man on earth than to live with Isidasi under the same roof." Despite the fact that they pleaded to know the reason for the rejection he could give none. "All he knew, he said, was that he could not live with her."

Isidasi was ready to commit suicide. The shame and sorrow of three rejections were too hard to bear. She was planning for her death when a Buddhist nun named **Jinaddata** came to their house for alms. Pleased by her serenity and countenance, Isidasi asked permission from her father to enter the Noble Order. Her father was hesitant as he did not want to lose her company, but seeing the suffering in his beloved daughter's eyes, he agreed. He then urged her to attain the supreme state of Nibbána.

*"Then my father said to me
Attain enlightenment and the supreme state
Gain Nibbána which the Best of Men
Has Himself already realized".
-- (Therigatha 432)*

After her ordination Isidasi concentrated her efforts on reaching the supreme bliss of Nibbána. *Within seven days she attained the higher knowledge. Isidasi could recollect her past lives, see the passing away and rebirth of beings and penetrate the knowledge required for the destruction of all suffering. Looking into her past lives Isidasi understood the cause of her failed marriages.*

She explained the cause of her present suffering to her friend Bodhi. Eight lifetimes ago Isidasi had been born a man – a rich, handsome and dashing goldsmith. Women had been attracted to him and he had taken advantage of them even though they were other men's wives and innocent girls. He flitted from woman to woman, breaking hearts, quite

oblivious to the pain and suffering he was causing. He wanted to take his pleasure again and again. He wanted change. The fact that he had broken many hearts and marriages did not bother him at all. They were all trophies that he could brag about.

He danced his last dance at death. He had to reap the effects of the suffering he had caused. At death he was reborn in hell and experienced the torment and suffering of the fiery realm for many, many years. Just as he had caused suffering with no regard to the pain of others, he suffered torment without mercy.

After suffering in hellish torment for the lifespan of the plane he was **reborn in the womb of a monkey**. Seven days after his birth the leader of the monkeys, seeing a threat to his position from the newborn monkey, bit his genitals and castrated him. Isidasi describes this act, done to prevent future rivalry, as follows:

*"A great monkey leader of the troops,
Castrated me when I was seven days old,
This was the fruit of that kamma
Because I had seduced others wives."
-- (Therigatha 437)*

At death he was reborn as a sheep, the offspring of a lame, one-eyed ewe. He lived in misery for twelve years, infected with intestinal worms, obliged to transport children and pull the plough and cart with hardly any rest. Hard work was what the frivolous goldsmith had avoided and hard work was what he now had to endure as a beast of burden. He had been castrated by his owner and his life was a misery of intense, hard work with loss of sight in his latter years.

After being in the animal realm for two births he was reborn in the **human world as a cross between a male and a female**. He was the child of a slave girl born in the gutter. He led a solitary life of suffering, shunned by both males and females and was treated as a freak.

In his next birth he (the former goldsmith) was reborn as a **female**. He had now become a woman, the object of his former desire. The woman's father was a good-for-nothing carter who failed at every endeavor. He gave his daughter to a rich merchant to pay his debts. Despite her pleas she found herself taken into the merchant's household as a slave girl.

She was sixteen years old and an attractive girl. After some time, the son of the household fell in love with her, and took her as his second wife. Naturally, the first wife was most displeased with this arrangement. The slave girl, however, did everything in her power to strike discord between the husband and wife, as she liked her new position. This resulted in much fighting and quarrelling in the household until she finally succeeded in breaking up the marriage and separating the husband and his first wife.

The fruits of her earlier unwholesome deeds as the goldsmith had been exhausted. But this new suffering she had caused had to bear fruit. The slave girl was reborn as **Isidasi**. In her previous birth she had caused disharmony and separated a husband and wife, causing great grief and suffering. She now had to suffer the contempt and rejection of every man she married. The text does not specify the meritorious deeds that she must have performed in her past, previous to her frivolous behavior, but her compassion, calm acceptance and devotion to her husbands created the opportunity for the past good deeds to mature. With effort and diligence Isidasi attained Nibbána. She explained her final liberation as follows:

*"This was the fruit of that past deed,
That although I served them like a slave,
They rejected me and went away;
Of that too I have made an end."
-- (Therigatha 447)*

We can all benefit from Isidasi's story. Over time, especially in the western world, moral values have deteriorated. Young men and women are very casual about sexual behavior and the media and television have glorified sex through advertisements, movies and magazines. What was once considered immoral is now considered moral. Despite the ignorance of humankind, the law of kamma operates. The Buddha laid down a very simple moral code to follow regarding sexual behavior. As Buddhists we are not only advised to refrain from adultery and rape, but we are cautioned **against inappropriate sexual behavior of any kind.** This includes relationships with those under the guardianship of parents, relatives and friends and relationships with members of religious orders who have taken the vows of celibacy. Buddhists should not indulge in casual sex but should exercise restraint and ensure that

they form meaningful, long-term relationships based on love and commitment before they give in to their desires. Buddhists should also actively work at preventing child abuse and the breaking up and disruption of marriages caused by casual relationships.