

FLEETING NATURE OF LIFE AND PLEASURES

Man In The Pit

A man was forcing his way through a thick forest beset with thorns and stones. Suddenly to his great consternation, an elephant appeared and gave chase. He took to his heels through fear and, seeing a well, he ran to hide in it. But to his horror he saw a viper at the bottom of the well. However, lacking other means of escape, he jumped into the well, and clung to a thorny creeper that was growing in it. Looking up, he saw two mice – a white one and black one – gnawing at the creeper. Over his face there was a beehive from which occasional drops of honey trickled.

This man, foolishly unmindful of this precarious position, was greedily tasting the honey. A kind person volunteered to show him a path of escape. But the greedy man begged to be excused till he had enjoyed himself.

The thorny path is samsara, the ocean of life. Man's life is not a bed of roses. It is beset with difficulties and obstacles to overcome, with opposition and unjust criticism, with attacks and insults to be borne, such is the thorny path of life.

The elephant here resembles death; the viper, old age; the creeper, birth; the two mice, night and day. The drops of honey correspond to the fleeting sensual pleasures. The kind man is the Buddha. This beautiful parable illustrates the fleeting nature of life and its alluring-pleasures.

Nibbana

Fish And The Turtle

“Once upon a time there was a fish. And just because it was a fish, it had lived all its life in the water and knew nothing whatever about anything else but water. And one day as it swam about in the pond where all its days had been spent, it happened to meet a turtle of its acquaintance that had just come back from a little excursion on the land.

“Good day, Mr. Turtle!” said the fish. “Have not seen you for a long time. Where have you been?”

“Oh” said the turtle, “I have just been for a trip on dry land”.

“On dry land!” exclaimed the fish. “What do you mean on dry land? There is no such thing as dry land. I had never seen it”

“Well,” said the turtle good-naturedly. “If you want to think so, of course you may, there is no one who can hinder you. But that’s where I’ve been, all the same.”

“O come,” said the fish. “Try to talk sense. Just tell me now what is this land of yours like? Is it all wet?”

“No, it is not wet,” said the turtle.

“Is it nice and fresh and cool?” asked the fish.

“No, it is not nice and fresh and cool,” The turtle replied.

“Is it clear so that light can come through it?”

“No, it is not clear. Light cannot come through it.”

“Is it soft and yielding, so that I could move my fins about it and push my nose through it?”

“No, is not soft and yielding. You could not swim in it.”

“Does it move or flow in streams?”

“No, it neither moves nor flow in streams.”

“Does it ever rise up into waves then, with white foams in them?” asked the fish impatient at this string of Noes.

“No!” replied the turtle truthfully. “It never rises up into waves that I have seen”

“There now,” exclaimed the fish triumphantly. “Didn’t I tell you that this land of yours was just nothing? I have just asked, and you have answered me that it is neither wet nor cool, not clear not soft and that it does not flow in streams nor rise up into waves. And if it isn’t a single one of these things what else is it but nothing? Don’t tell me.”

“Well, well,” said the turtle, “if you are determined to think that dry land is nothing, I suppose you must just go on thinking so. But anyone who knows what is water and what is land would say you were just a silly fish, for you think that anything you have never known is nothing just because you have never known it.”

“And with that the turtle turned away and, leaving the fish behind in its little pond of water, set out another excursion over the dry land that was nothing.”

It is evident from the significant parable that neither can the turtle, who is acquainted with both land and sea, explain to the fish the real nature of land, nor can the fish grasp what is land since it is acquainted with only the sea. In the same way Arahats who are acquainted with both the mundane and the supra-mundane cannot explain to a worldling what exactly the supra-mundane is in mundane terms, nor can a worldling the supra-mundane merely by mundane knowledge.