

Philosophy 438  
Indian Buddhist Philosophy  
Buddhist Views of the Self<sup>1</sup>

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# Course description

## Description

The most distinctive feature of Buddhist philosophy, especially in India, was the doctrine of non-self (*anātman* in Sanskrit, *anatta* in Pali). We shall begin by examining pre-Buddhist views of the self. Then we shall examine passages in early Buddhist scriptures in which the doctrine of non-self is first taught and introduced as a topic of meditation. We shall then see how two very influential Buddhist scholastics—Nāgārjuna (ca. 150 C.E.) and Vasubandhu (fifth century C.E.)—treated the doctrine of non-self.

In modern times, both Buddhist monks and academic scholars of Buddhism in Asia and the West have reflected on the meaning of the doctrine of non-self and how it can be reconciled with the doctrines of karma and rebirth and the Buddhist call for ethical responsibility. We shall look at two Western academics, Steven Collins and Peter Harvey, one of whom is a Buddhist and one who is not. Then we shall look at two writings by a modern Thai Buddhist monk who has written extensively on this topic, namely, Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa. Taking a position that is in some important respects diametrically opposed to Buddhādāsa is the modern American Buddhist monk, Thanissaro Bhikkhu. We shall read his influential essay “Mind Like Fire” and then finish the course with several short essays on Buddhist meditation on the theme of not-self written by Thanissaro Bhikkhu and a modern German Buddhist nun, Ayyā Khemā.

## Weekly schedule of lectures and readings

Dates	Topic	Readings
Jan. 15,17	Background: Pre-Buddhist views of self; Upaniṣads and Jainism	
22, 24	Hindu views of self: Sāṃkhya and Nyāya	
29, 31	The Buddha's teachings	Connected Discourses and Gradual Sayings (Readings chapters 1 and 2)
Feb. 5, 7	The Buddha's teachings	Middle-length Sayings and Long Discourses (Ch. 3 and 4)
12, 14	Milinda's Questions	Rhys Davids
19, 21	Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti	Sprung, "Self-existence"
26, 28	Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti	Sprung, "Self and the way things really are"
Mar. 5, 7	Vasubandhu	Stcherbatsky
19, 21	Steven Collins	Collins
26, 28	Peter Harvey	Harvey
Apr. 2, 4	Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa	Swearer, "Me and Mine"
9, 11		Swearer, "Dependent Origination"
16, 18	Thanissaro Bhikkhu	<i>Mind Like Fire</i> (Part III)
23, 25		<i>Mind Like Fire</i>
30, May 2	The practical dimension	Thanissaro (Ch. 6) & Ayyā Khemā (Ch. 5)

**References to chapters are to the numbers of chapters of this coursepack. The readings from Rhys Davids, Sprung, Stcherbatsky, Collins and Harvey are found in the coursepack after 172. The full bibliographic information of those published references, which you should cite in your essays, is as follows.**

Collins, Steven. *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Thevavāda Buddhism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Harvey, Peter. *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism*. Surry: Curzon Press, 1995.

Rhys Davids, T.W. (trans.) *The Questions of King Milinda*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1990.

Sprung, Mervyn (trans.) *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way: The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti*. Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1979.

Stcherbatsky, Theodore. *The Soul Theory of the Buddhists*. Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1976.

Swearer, Donald K. (trans.) *Me and Mind: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa*. Edited and with an introduction by Donald K. Swearer. Albany: State University of New York Press. 1989.



**Part I**

**Readings from the Pali  
Canon**



# Chapter 1

## Samyutta-nikāya The Connected Discourses

### 1.1 Samyutta Nikāya XXII.59 Anatta-lakkhana (Discourse on Not-self)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Varanasi in the Game Refuge at Isipatana. There he addressed the group of five monks:

“Form, monks, is not self. If form were the self, this form would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible [to say] with regard to form, ‘Let this form be thus. Let this form not be thus.’ But precisely because form is not self, form lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible [to say] with regard to form, ‘Let this form be thus. Let this form not be thus.’

“Feeling is not self..

“Perception is not self..

“[Mental] fabrications are not self..

“Consciousness is not self. If consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible [to say] with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’ But precisely because consciousness is not self, consciousness lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible [to say] with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’

“What do you think, monks—Is form constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, lord.”

“And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am?’”

“No, lord.”

“...Is feeling constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”...

“...Is perception constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”...

“...Are fabrications constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”...

“What do you think, monks—Is consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, lord.”

“And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am?’”

“No, lord.”

“Thus, monks, any body whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every body is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Any feeling whatsoever...”

“Any perception whatsoever...”

“Any fabrications whatsoever...”

“Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every consciousness is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple grows disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, ‘Fully released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is depleted, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the group of five monks delighted at his words. And while this explanation was being given, the hearts of the group of five monks, through not clinging (not being sustained), were fully released from fermentation/effluents.

## 1.2 Samyutta Nikāya XXII.99 Gaddula Sutta (The Leash)

At Savatthi. There the Blessed One said: “Monks, from an inconstruable beginning comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, although beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating and wandering on.

“There comes a time when the great ocean evaporates, dries up, and does not exist. But for beings—as long as they are hindered by ignorance, fettered by craving, transmigrating and wandering on—I don’t say that there is an end of suffering and stress.

“There comes a time when Sineru, king of mountains, is consumed with flame, is destroyed, and does not exist. But for beings—as long as they are hindered by ignorance, fettered by craving, transmigrating and wandering on – I don’t say that there is an end of suffering and stress.

“There comes a time when the great earth is consumed with flame, is destroyed, and does not exist. But for beings—as long as they are hindered by ignorance, fettered by craving, transmigrating and wandering on—I don’t say that there is an end of suffering and stress.

“Just as a dog, tied by a leash to a post or stake, keeps running around and circling around that very post or stake; in the same way, an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for people of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—assumes form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

“He assumes feeling to be the self. . . .

“He assumes perception to be the self. . . .

“He assumes (mental) fabrications to be the self. . . .

“He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness.

“He keeps running around and circling around that very form. . . that very feeling. . . that very perception. . . those very fabrications. . . that very consciousness. He is not set loose from form, not set loose from feeling. . . from perception. . . from fabrications. . . not set loose from consciousness. He is not set loose from birth, aging, and death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is not set loose, I tell you, from suffering and stress.

“But a well-instructed, noble disciple—who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed and disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for people of integrity, is well-versed and disciplined in their Dhamma—doesn’t assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

“He doesn’t assume feeling to be the self. . . .

“He doesn’t assume perception to be the self. . . .

“He doesn’t assume fabrications to be the self. . . .

“He doesn’t assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness.

“He doesn’t run around or circle around that very form. . . that very feeling. . . that very perception. . . those very fabrications. . . that very consciousness. He is set loose from form, set loose from feeling. . . from perception. . . from fabrications. . . set loose from consciousness. He is set loose from birth, aging, and death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs. He is set loose, I tell you, from suffering and stress.

### **1.3 Samyutta Nikāya XXII.122 Sīlavant Sutta (Discourse on the Virtuous)**

On one occasion Ven. Sariputta and Ven. Maha Kotthita were staying near Varanasi in the Deer Park at Isipatana. Then Ven. Maha Kotthita, emerging from seclusion in the late afternoon, went to Ven. Sariputta and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Sariputta, “Sariputta my friend, which things should a virtuous monk attend to in an appropriate way?”

“A virtuous monk, Kotthita my friend, should attend in an appropriate way to the five aggregates of clinging as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. Which five? Form as an aggregate of clinging, feeling. . . perception. . . fabrications. . . consciousness as an aggregate of clinging. A virtuous monk should attend in an appropriate way to these five aggregates of clinging as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a virtuous monk, attending in an appropriate way to these five aggregates of clinging as inconstant. . . not-self, would realize the fruit of stream-entry.”

“Then which things should a monk who has attained stream-entry attend to in an appropriate way?”

“A monk who has attained stream-entry should attend in an appropriate way to these five aggregates of clinging as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a monk who has attained stream-entry, attending in an appropriate way to these five aggregates of clinging as inconstant. . . not-self, would realize the fruit of once-returning.”

“Then which things should a monk who has attained once-returning attend to in an appropriate way?”

“A monk who has attained once-returning should attend in an appropriate way to these five aggregates of clinging as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a monk who has attained once-returning, attending in an appropriate way to these five aggregates of clinging as inconstant. . . not-self, would realize the fruit of non-returning.”

“Then which things should a monk who has attained non-returning attend to in an appropriate way?”

“A monk who has attained non-returning should attend in an appropriate way to these five aggregates of clinging as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. For it is possible that a monk who has attained non-returning, attending in an appropriate way to these five aggregates of clinging as inconstant. . . not-self, would realize the fruit of arahantship.”

“Then which things should an arahant attend to in an appropriate way?”

“An arahant should attend in an appropriate way to these five aggregates of clinging as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self. Although, for an arahant, there is nothing further to do, and nothing to add to what has been done, still these things—when developed and pursued—lead both to a pleasant abiding in the here-and-now and to mindfulness an alertness.”

## 1.4 Samyutta Nikāya XXIII.2 Sattā Sutta (A Being)

### *Translator’s note*

*A number of discourses (among them, SN XXXV.191; AN VI.63) make the point that the mind is fettered, not by things like the five aggregates or the objects of the six senses, but by the act of passion and delight for them. There are two ways to try to cut through this fetter. One is to focus on the drawbacks of passion and delight in and of themselves, seeing clearly the stress and suffering they engender in the mind. The other is to analyze the objects of passion and delight in such a way that they no longer seem worthy of interest. This second approach is the one recommended in this discourse: when the Buddha talks of “smashing, scattering, and demolishing form (etc.) and making it unfit for play,” he is referring to the practice of analyzing form minutely into its component parts until it no longer seems a fit object for passion and delight. When all five aggregates can be treated in this way, the mind is left with no conditioned object to serve as a focal point for its passion, and so is released—at the very least—to the stage of awakening called non-return.*

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Savatthi at Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery. Then Ven. Radha went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "A being, lord. 'A being,' it's said. To what extent is one said to be 'a being'?"

"Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for form, Radha: when one is caught up (satta) there, tied up (visatta) there, one is said to be 'a being (satta).'"

"Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for feeling... perception... fabrications..."

"Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for consciousness, Radha: when one is caught up there, tied up there, one is said to be 'a being.'"

"Just as when boys or girls are playing with little sand castles (lit: dirt houses): as long as they are not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, obsession, and craving for those little sand castles, that's how long they have fun with those sand castles, enjoy them, treasure them, feel possessive of them. But when they become free from passion, desire, love, thirst, obsession, and craving for those little sand castles, then they smash them, scatter them, demolish them with their hands or feet and make them unfit for play.

"In the same way, Radha, you too should smash, scatter, and demolish form, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for form.

"You should smash, scatter, and demolish feeling, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for feeling.

"You should smash, scatter, and demolish perception, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for perception.

"You should smash, scatter, and demolish fabrications, and make them unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for fabrications.

"You should smash, scatter, and demolish consciousness and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for consciousness—for the ending of craving, Radha, is Unbinding."

## 1.5 Samyutta Nikāya XXXV.191 Koṭṭhita Sutta (To Kotthita)

Once, Ven. Sariputta and Ven. Maha Kotthita were living near Varanasi, at Isipatana in the Deer Park. Then Ven. Maha Kotthita, in the late afternoon, left his seclusion and went to Ven. Sariputta. On arrival, he exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Sariputta, "Now tell me, friend Sariputta, is the eye the fetter of forms, or are forms the fetter of the eye? Is the ear...? Is the nose...? Is the tongue...? Is the body...? Is the intellect the fetter of ideas, or are ideas the fetter of the intellect?"

“No, my friend. The eye is not the fetter of forms, nor are forms the fetter of the eye. Whatever desire and passion arises in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there. The ear is not the fetter of sounds. . . . The nose is not the fetter of aromas. . . . The tongue is not the fetter of flavors. . . . The body is not the fetter of tactile sensations. . . . The intellect is not the fetter of ideas, nor are ideas the fetter of the intellect. Whatever desire and passion arises in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there.

“Suppose that a black ox and a white ox were joined with a single collar or yoke. If someone were to say, ‘The black ox is the fetter of the white ox, the white ox is the fetter of the black’—speaking this way, would he be speaking rightly?”

“No, my friend. The black ox is not the fetter of the white ox, nor is the white ox the fetter of the black. The single collar or yoke by which they are joined: That is the fetter there.”

“In the same way, the eye is not the fetter of forms, nor are forms the fetter of the eye. Whatever desire and passion arise in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there. The ear is not the fetter of sounds. . . . The nose is not the fetter of aromas. . . . The tongue is not the fetter of flavors. . . . The body is not the fetter of tactile sensations. . . . The intellect is not the fetter of ideas, nor are ideas the fetter of the intellect. Whatever desire and passion arises in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there.

“If the eye were the fetter of forms, or if forms were the fetter of the eye, then this holy life for the right ending of stress and suffering would not be proclaimed. But because whatever desire and passion arise in dependence on the two of them is the fetter there, that is why this holy life for the right ending of stress and suffering is proclaimed.

“If the ear were the fetter. . . .

“If the nose were the fetter. . . .

“If the tongue were the fetter. . . .

“If the body were the fetter. . . .

“If the intellect were the fetter of ideas, or if ideas were the fetter of the intellect, then this holy life for the right ending of stress and suffering would not be proclaimed. But because whatever desire and passion arise in dependence on the two of them is the fetter there, that is why this holy life for the right ending of stress and suffering is proclaimed.

“And through this line of reasoning one may know how the eye is not the fetter of forms, nor are forms the fetter of the eye, but whatever desire and passion arise in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there. The ear is not the fetter of sounds. . . . The nose is not the fetter of aromas. . . . The tongue is not the fetter of flavors. . . . The body is not the fetter of tactile sensations. . . . The intellect is not the fetter of ideas, nor are ideas the fetter of the intellect, but whatever desire and passion arises in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there. There is an eye in the Blessed One. The Blessed One sees forms with the eye. There is no desire or passion in the Blessed One. The Blessed One is well-released in mind.

“There is an ear in the Blessed One. . . .

“There is a nose in the Blessed One. . . .

“There is a tongue in the Blessed One. . . .

“There is a body in the Blessed One. . . .

“There is an intellect in the Blessed One. The Blessed One knows ideas with the intellect. There is no desire or passion in the Blessed One. The Blessed One is well-released in mind.

“It is through this line of reasoning that one may know how the eye is not the fetter of forms, nor are forms the fetter of the eye, but whatever desire and passion arise in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there. The ear is not the fetter of sounds. . . . The nose is not the fetter of aromas. . . . The tongue is not the fetter of flavors. . . . The body is not the fetter of tactile sensations. . . . The intellect is not the fetter of ideas, nor are ideas the fetter of the intellect, but whatever desire and passion arises in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there.”

## 1.6 Samyutta Nikāya XLIV.10

### Ānanda Sutta

#### (To Ananda [On Self, No Self, and Not-self])

Then the wanderer Vacchagotta went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat down to one side. As he was sitting there he asked the Blessed One: “Now then, Venerable Gotama, is there a self?”

When this was said, the Blessed One was silent.

“Then is there no self?”

A second time, the Blessed One was silent.

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer got up from his seat and left.

Then, not long after Vacchagotta the wanderer had left, Ven. Ananda said to the Blessed One, “Why, lord, did the Blessed One not answer when asked a question by Vacchagotta the wanderer?”

“Ananda, if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, that would be conforming with those priests and contemplatives who are exponents of eternalism [the view that there is an eternal, unchanging soul]. If I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self—were to answer that there is no self, that would be conforming with those priests and contemplatives who are exponents of annihilationism [the view that death is the annihilation of consciousness]. If I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, would that be in keeping with the arising of knowledge that all phenomena are not-self?”

“No, lord.”

“And if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self—were to answer that there is no self, the bewildered Vacchagotta would become even more bewildered: ‘Does the self I used to have now not exist?’”



## Chapter 2

# Āṅguttara-nikāya The Gradual Sayings

### 2.1 Āṅguttara Nikāya IV.42 Pañha Sutta Questions

“There are these four ways of answering questions. Which four? There are questions that should be answered categorically [straightforwardly yes, no, this, that]. There are questions that should be answered with an analytical (qualified) answer [defining or redefining the terms]. There are questions that should be answered with a counter-question. There are questions that should be put aside. These are the four ways of answering questions.”

First the categorical answer,  
then the qualified,  
third, the type to be counter-questioned,  
and fourth, the one to be set aside.

Any monk who knows which is which,  
in line with the Dhamma,  
is said to be skilled in the four types of questions:  
hard to overcome, hard to beat, profound, hard to defeat.

He knows what's worthwhile and what's not,  
proficient in (recognizing) both, he rejects the worthless, grasps  
the worthwhile.

He's called one who has broken through  
to what's worthwhile, prudent, wise.

## 2.2 **Āṅguttara Nikāya VI.63**

### **Nibbedhika Sutta**

#### **Penetrative**

“I will teach you the penetrative explanation that is a Dhamma explanation. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said: “And which penetrative sequence is a Dhamma explanation?”

“Sensuality should be known. The cause by which sensuality comes into play should be known. The diversity in sensuality should be known. The result of sensuality should be known. The cessation of sensuality should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of sensuality should be known.

“Feeling should be known. The cause by which feeling comes into play should be known. The diversity in feeling should be known. The result of feeling should be known. The cessation of feeling should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of feeling should be known.

“Perception should be known. The cause by which perception comes into play should be known. The diversity in perception should be known. The result of perception should be known. The cessation of perception should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of perception should be known.

“Fermentations (*āsava*) should be known. The cause by which fermentations come into play should be known. The diversity in fermentations should be known. The result of fermentations should be known. The cessation of fermentations should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of fermentations should be known.

“Kamma should be known. The cause by which kamma comes into play should be known. The diversity in kamma should be known. The result of kamma should be known. The cessation of kamma should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of kamma should be known.

“Stress should be known. The cause by which stress comes into play should be known. The diversity in stress should be known. The result of stress should be known. The cessation of stress should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of stress should be known.

[1] “Sensuality should be known. The cause by which sensuality comes into play. . . . The diversity in sensuality. . . . The result of sensuality. . . . The cessation of sensuality. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of sensuality should be known.’ Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said?

“There are these five strands of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing; sounds cognizable via the ear. . . . aromas cognizable via the nose. . . . flavors cognizable via the tongue. . . . tactile sensations cognizable via the

body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. But these are not sensuality. They are called strands of sensuality in the discipline of the noble ones.

The passion for his resolves is a man's sensuality,  
not the beautiful sensual pleasures  
found in the world.  
The passion for his resolves is a man's sensuality.  
The beauties remain as they are in the world,  
while the wise, in this regard,  
subdue their desire.

“And what is the cause by which sensuality comes into play? Contact is the cause by which sensuality comes into play.

“And what is the diversity in sensuality? Sensuality with regard to forms is one thing, sensuality with regard to sounds is another, sensuality with regard to aromas is another, sensuality with regard to flavors is another, sensuality with regard to tactile sensations is another. This is called the diversity in sensuality.

“And what is the result of sensuality? One who wants sensuality produces a corresponding state of existence, on the side of merit or demerit. This is called the result of sensuality.

“And what is the cessation of sensuality? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of sensuality; and just this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is the way leading to the cessation of sensuality.

“Now when a noble disciple discerns sensuality in this way, the cause by which sensuality comes into play in this way, the diversity of sensuality in this way, the result of sensuality in this way, the cessation of sensuality in this way, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of sensuality in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of sensuality.

“Sensuality should be known. The cause by which sensuality comes into play. . . . The diversity in sensuality. . . . The result of sensuality. . . . The cessation of sensuality. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of sensuality should be known.’ Thus it has been said, and in reference to this was it said.

[2] “Feeling should be known. The cause by which feeling comes into play. . . . The diversity in feeling. . . . The result of feeling. . . . The cessation of feeling. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of feeling should be known.’ Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said?

“There are these three kinds of feeling: a feeling of pleasure, a feeling of pain, and feeling of neither pleasure nor pain.

“And what is the cause by which feeling comes into play? Contact is the cause by which feeling comes into play.

“And what is the diversity in feeling? There is the feeling of pleasure connected with the baits of the world. There is the feeling of pleasure not

connected with the baits of the world. There is the feeling of pain connected with the baits of the world. There is the feeling of pain not connected with the baits of the world. There is the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain connected with the baits of the world. There is the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain not connected with the baits of the world. This is called the diversity in feeling. [See *The Wings to Awakening*, passage 179.]

“And what is the result of feeling? One who feels a feeling produces a corresponding state of existence, on the side of merit or demerit. This is called the result of feeling.

“And what is the cessation of feeling? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of feeling; and just this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is the way leading to the cessation of feeling.

“Now when a noble disciple discerns feeling in this way, the cause by which feeling comes into play in this way, the diversity of feeling in this way, the result of feeling in this way, the cessation of feeling in this way, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of feeling in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of feeling.

“‘Feeling should be known. The cause by which feeling comes into play. . . . The diversity in feeling. . . . The result of feeling. . . . The cessation of feeling. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of feeling should be known.’ Thus it has been said, and in reference to this was it said.

[3] “‘Perception should be known. The cause by which perception comes into play. . . . The diversity in perception. . . . The result of perception. . . . The cessation of perception. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of perception should be known.’ Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said?

“There are these six kinds of perception (mental labels): the perception of form, the perception of sound, the perception of aroma, the perception of flavor, the perception of tactile sensation, the perception of ideas.

“And what is the cause by which perception comes into play? Contact is the cause by which perception comes into play.

“And what is the diversity in perception? Perception with regard to forms is one thing, perception with regard to sounds is another, perception with regard to aromas is another, perception with regard to flavors is another, perception with regard to tactile sensations is another, perception with regard to ideas is another. This is called the diversity in perception.

“And what is the result of perception? Perception has expression as its result, I tell you. However a person perceives something, that is how he expresses it: ‘I have this sort of perception.’ This is called the result of perception.

“And what is the cessation of perception? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of perception; and just this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is the way leading to the cessation of perception.

“Now when a noble disciple discerns perception in this way, the cause by which perception comes into play in this way, the diversity of perception in this way, the result of perception in this way, the cessation of perception in this way, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of perception in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of perception.

“Perception should be known. The cause by which perception comes into play. . . . The diversity in perception. . . . The result of perception. . . . The cessation of perception. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of perception should be known.’ Thus it has been said, and in reference to this was it said.

[4] “Fermentations should be known. The cause by which fermentations come into play. . . . The diversity in fermentations. . . . The result of fermentations. . . . The cessation of fermentations. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of fermentations should be known.’ Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said?

“There are these three kinds of fermentations: the fermentation of sensuality, the fermentation of becoming, the fermentation of ignorance.

“And what is the cause by which fermentations comes into play? Ignorance is the cause by which fermentations comes into play.

“And what is the diversity in fermentations? There are fermentations that lead to hell, those that lead to the animal womb, those that lead to the realm of the hungry shades, those that lead to the human world, those that lead to the world of the devas. This is called the diversity in fermentations.

“And what is the result of fermentations? One who is immersed in ignorance produces a corresponding state of existence, on the side of merit or demerit. This is called the result of fermentations.

“And what is the cessation of fermentations? From the cessation of ignorance is the cessation of fermentations; and just this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is the way leading to the cessation of fermentations.

“Now when a noble disciple discerns fermentations in this way, the cause by which fermentations comes into play in this way, the diversity of fermentations in this way, the result of fermentations in this way, the cessation of fermentations in this way, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of fermentations in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of fermentations.

“Fermentations should be known. The cause by which fermentations come into play. . . . The diversity in fermentations. . . . The result of fermentations. . . . The cessation of fermentations. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of fermentations should be known.’ Thus it has been said, and in reference to this was it said.

[5] “Kamma should be known. The cause by which kamma comes into play should be known. The diversity in kamma should be known. The result of kamma should be known. The cessation of kamma should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of kamma should be known.’ Thus it has

been said. In reference to what was it said?

“Intention, I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, and intellect.

“And what is the cause by which kamma comes into play? Contact is the cause by which kamma comes into play.

“And what is the diversity in kamma? There is kamma to be experienced in hell, kamma to be experienced in the realm of common animals, kamma to be experienced in the realm of the hungry shades, kamma to be experienced in the human world, kamma to be experienced in the world of the devas. This is called the diversity in kamma.

“And what is the result of kamma? The result of kamma is of three sorts, I tell you: that which arises right here and now, that which arises later [in this lifetime], and that which arises following that. This is called the result of kamma.

“And what is the cessation of kamma? From the cessation of contact is the cessation of kamma; and just this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma.

“Now when a noble disciple discerns kamma in this way, the cause by which kamma comes into play in this way, the diversity of kamma in this way, the result of kamma in this way, the cessation of kamma in this way, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of kamma in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of kamma.

“‘Kamma should be known. The cause by which kamma comes into play. . . . The diversity in kamma. . . . The result of kamma. . . . The cessation of kamma. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of kamma should be known.’ Thus it has been said, and in reference to this was it said.

[6] “‘Stress should be known. The cause by which stress comes into play should be known. The diversity in stress should be known. The result of stress should be known. The cessation of stress should be known. The path of practice for the cessation of stress should be known.’ Thus it has been said. In reference to what was it said?

“Birth is stress, aging is stress, death is stress; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are stress; association with what is not loved is stress, separation from what is loved is stress, not getting what is wanted is stress. In short, the five aggregates for sustenance are stress.

“And what is the cause by which stress comes into play? Craving is the cause by which stress comes into play.

“And what is the diversity in stress? There is major stress and minor, slowly fading and quickly fading. This is called the diversity in stress.

“And what is the result of stress? There are some cases in which a person overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, grieves, mourns, laments, beats his breast, and becomes bewildered. Or one overcome with pain, his mind exhausted, comes to search outside, ‘Who knows a way or two to stop this

pain?” I tell you, monks, that stress results either in bewilderment or in search. This is called the result of stress.

“And what is the cessation of stress? From the cessation of craving is the cessation of stress; and just this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.

“Now when a noble disciple discerns stress in this way, the cause by which stress comes into play in this way, the diversity of stress in this way, the result of stress in this way, the cessation of stress in this way, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress in this way, then he discerns this penetrative holy life as the cessation of stress.

“‘Stress should be known. The cause by which stress comes into play. . . . The diversity in stress. . . . The result of stress. . . . The cessation of stress. . . . The path of practice for the cessation of stress should be known.’ Thus it has been said, and in reference to this was it said.

“And this is the penetrative explanation that is a Dhamma explanation.”

## **2.3 Āṅguttara Nikāya X.60 Girimananda Sutta To Girimananda**

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Savatthi, in Jeta’s Grove, Anathapindika’s monastery. And on that occasion Ven. Girimananda was diseased, in pain, severely ill. Then Ven. Ananda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, “Lord, Ven. Girimananda is diseased, in pain, severely ill. It would be good if the Blessed One would visit Ven. Girimananda, out of sympathy for him.”

“Ananda, if you go to the monk Girimananda and tell him ten perceptions, it’s possible that when he hears the ten perceptions his disease may be allayed. Which ten? The perception of inconstancy, the perception of non-self, the perception of unattractiveness, the perception of drawbacks, the perception of abandoning, the perception of dispassion, the perception of cessation, the perception of distaste for every world, the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications, mindfulness of in-and-out breathing.

[1] “And what is the perception of inconstancy? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘Form is inconstant, feeling is inconstant, perception is inconstant, fabrications are inconstant, consciousness is inconstant.’ Thus he remains focused on inconstancy with regard to the five aggregates. This, Ananda, is called the perception of inconstancy.

[2] “And what is the perception of not-self? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty

building—reflects thus: ‘The eye is not-self, forms are not-self; the ear is not-self, sounds are not-self; the nose is not-self, aromas are not-self; the tongue is not-self, flavors are not-self; the body is not-self, flavors are not-self; the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self.’ Thus he remains focused on not-selfness with regard to the six inner and outer sense media. This is called the perception of not-self.

[3] “And what is the perception of unattractiveness? There is the case where a monk ponders this very body—from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin, filled with all sorts of unclean things: ‘There is in this body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, muscle, tendons, bones, bone marrow, spleen, heart, liver, membranes, kidneys, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, gall, phlegm, lymph, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, oil in the joints, urine.’ Thus he remains focused on unattractiveness with regard to this very body. This is called the perception of unattractiveness.

[4] “And what is the perception of drawbacks? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling—reflects thus: ‘This body has many pains, many drawbacks. In this body many kinds of disease arise, such as: seeing-diseases, hearing-diseases, nose-diseases, tongue-diseases, body-diseases, head-diseases, ear-diseases, mouth-diseases, teeth-diseases, cough, asthma, catarrh, fever, aging, stomach-ache, fainting, dysentery, grippe, cholera, leprosy, boils, ringworm, tuberculosis, epilepsy, skin-disease, itch, scab, psoriasis, scabies, jaundice, diabetes, hemorrhoids, fistulas, ulcers; diseases arising from bile, from phlegm, from the wind-property, from combinations of bodily humors, from changes in the weather, from uneven care of the body, from attacks, from the result of kamma; cold, heat, hunger, thirst, defecation, urination.’ Thus he remains focused on drawbacks with regard to this body. This is called the perception of drawbacks.

[5] “And what is the perception of abandoning? There is the case where a monk does not tolerate an arisen thought of sensuality. He abandons it, destroys, it dispels it, and wipes it out of existence. He does not tolerate an arisen thought of ill-will. He abandons it, destroys, it dispels it, and wipes it out of existence. He does not tolerate an arisen thought of harmfulness. He abandons it, destroys, it dispels it, and wipes it out of existence. He does not tolerate arisen evil, unskillful mental qualities. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, and wipes them out of existence. This is called the perception of abandoning.

[6] “And what is the perception of dispassion? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, dispassion, Unbinding.’ This is called the perception of dispassion.

[7] “And what is the perception of cessation? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—reflects thus: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the stilling of all

fabrications, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the ending of craving, cessation, Unbinding.’ This is called the perception of cessation.

[8] “And what is the perception of distaste for every world? There is the case where a monk abandoning any attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or latent tendencies with regard to any world, refrains from them and does not get involved. This is called the perception of distaste for every world.

[9] “And what is the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications? There is the case where a monk feels horrified, humiliated, and disgusted with all fabrications. This is called the perception of the undesirability of all fabrications.

[10] “And what is mindfulness of in-and-out breathing? There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

“[i] Breathing in long, he discerns that he is breathing in long; or breathing out long, he discerns that he is breathing out long. [ii] Or breathing in short, he discerns that he is breathing in short; or breathing out short, he discerns that he is breathing out short. [iii] He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the entire body, and to breathe out sensitive to the entire body. [iv] He trains himself to breathe in calming the bodily processes, and to breathe out calming the bodily processes.

“[v] He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to rapture, and to breathe out sensitive to rapture. [vi] He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to pleasure, and to breathe out sensitive to pleasure. [vii] He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to mental processes, and to breathe out sensitive to mental processes. [viii] He trains himself to breathe in calming mental processes, and to breathe out calming mental processes.

“[ix] He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the mind, and to breathe out sensitive to the mind. [x] He trains himself to breathe in satisfying the mind, and to breathe out satisfying the mind. [xi] He trains himself to breathe in steadying the mind, and to breathe out steadying the mind. [xii] He trains himself to breathe in releasing the mind, and to breathe out releasing the mind.

“[xiii] He trains himself to breathe in focusing on inconstancy, and to breathe out focusing on inconstancy. [xiv] He trains himself to breathe in focusing on dispassion [literally, fading], and to breathe out focusing on dispassion. [xv] He trains himself to breathe in focusing on cessation, and to breathe out focusing on cessation. [xvi] He trains himself to breathe in focusing on relinquishment, and to breathe out focusing on relinquishment.

“This, Ananda, is called mindfulness of in-and-out breathing.

“Now, Ananda, if you go to the monk Girimananda and tell him these ten perceptions, it’s possible that when he hears these ten perceptions his disease may be allayed.”

Then Ven. Ananda, having learned these ten perceptions in the Blessed

One's presence, went to Ven. Girimananda and told them to him. As Ven. Girimananda heard these ten perceptions, his disease was allayed. And Ven. Girimananda recovered from his disease. That was how Ven. Girimananda's disease was abandoned.

## Chapter 3

# Majjhima-nikāya The Middle-length Sayings

### 3.1 Majjhima Nikāya 2 Sabbāsava Sutta All the Fermentations

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi, in Jeta’s Grove, Anathapindika’s monastery. There he addressed the monks: “Monks!”

“Yes, lord,” the monks replied.

The Blessed One said, “Monks, the ending of the fermentations is for one who knows and sees, I tell you, not for one who does not know and does not see. For one who knows what and sees what? Appropriate attention and inappropriate attention. When a monk attends inappropriately, unarisen fermentations arise, and arisen fermentations increase. When a monk attends appropriately, unarisen fermentations do not arise, and arisen fermentations are abandoned. There are fermentations to be abandoned by seeing, those to be abandoned by restraining, those to be abandoned by using, those to be abandoned by tolerating, those to be abandoned by avoiding, those to be abandoned by destroying, and those to be abandoned by developing.

“[1] And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by seeing? There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—does not discern what ideas are fit for attention or what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to ideas fit for attention and attends [instead] to ideas unfit for attention.

“And what are the ideas unfit for attention that he attends to? Whatever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen fermentation of sen-

suality arises in him, and the arisen fermentation of sensuality increases; the unarisen fermentation of becoming arises in him, and arisen fermentation of becoming increases; the unarisen fermentation of ignorance arises in him, and the arisen fermentation of ignorance increases. These are the ideas unfit for attention that he attends to.

“And what are the ideas fit for attention that he does not attend to? Whatever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen fermentation of sensuality does not arise in him, and the arisen fermentation of sensuality is abandoned; the unarisen fermentation of becoming does not arise in him, and arisen fermentation of becoming is abandoned; the unarisen fermentation of ignorance does not arise in him, and the arisen fermentation of ignorance is abandoned. These are the ideas fit for attention that he does not attend to. Through his attending to ideas unfit for attention and through his not attending to ideas fit for attention, both unarisen fermentations arise in him, and arisen fermentations increase.

“This is how he attends inappropriately: ‘Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?’ Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?’

“As he attends inappropriately in this way, one of six kinds of view arises in him: The view I have a self arises in him as true and established, or the view I have no self . . . or the view It is precisely by means of self that I perceive self . . . or the view It is precisely by means of self that I perceive not-self . . . or the view It is precisely by means of not-self that I perceive self arises in him as true and established, or else he has a view like this: This very self of mine—the knower that is sensitive here and there to the ripening of good and bad actions—is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity. This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering and stress.

“The well-instructed noble disciple—who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed and disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for men of integrity, is well-versed and disciplined in their Dhamma—discerns what ideas are fit for attention and what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to ideas unfit for attention and attends [instead] to ideas fit for attention.

“And what are the ideas unfit for attention that he does not attend to? Whatever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen fermentation of sensuality arises in him, and the arisen fermentation of sensuality increases; the unarisen fermentation of becoming arises in him, and arisen

fermentation of becoming increases; the unarisen fermentation of ignorance arises in him, and the arisen fermentation of ignorance increases. These are the ideas unfit for attention that he does not attend to.

“And what are the ideas fit for attention that he does attend to? Whatever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen fermentation of sensuality does not arise in him, and the arisen fermentation of sensuality is abandoned; the unarisen fermentation of becoming does not arise in him, and the arisen fermentation of becoming is abandoned; the unarisen fermentation of ignorance does not arise in him, and the arisen fermentation of ignorance is abandoned. These are the ideas fit for attention that he does attend to. Through his not attending to ideas unfit for attention and through his attending to ideas fit for attention, unarisen fermentations do not arise in him, and arisen fermentations are abandoned.

“He attends appropriately, This is stress. . . . This is the origination of stress. . . . This is the cessation of stress. . . . This is the way leading to the cessation of stress. As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: identity-view, doubt, and grasping at precepts and practices. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by seeing.

“[2] And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by restraining? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, dwells restrained with the restraint of the eye-faculty. The fermentations, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were to dwell unrestrained with the restraint of the eye-faculty do not arise for him when he dwells restrained with the restraint of the eye-faculty.

Reflecting appropriately, he dwells restrained with the restraint of the ear-faculty. . . .

Reflecting appropriately, he dwells restrained with the restraint of the nose-faculty. . . .

Reflecting appropriately, he dwells restrained with the restraint of the tongue-faculty. . . .

Reflecting appropriately, he dwells restrained with the restraint of the body-faculty. . . .

Reflecting appropriately, he dwells restrained with the restraint of the intellect-faculty. The fermentations, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were to dwell unrestrained with the restraint of the intellect-faculty do not arise for him when he dwells restrained with the restraint of the intellect-faculty. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by restraining.

“[3] And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by using? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, uses the robe simply to counteract cold, to counteract heat, to counteract the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles; simply for the purpose of covering the parts of the body that cause shame.

“Reflecting appropriately, he uses almsfood, not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification; but simply for the survival and continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, thinking, ‘Thus will I destroy old feelings [of hunger]

and not create new feelings [from overeating]. I will maintain myself, be blameless, and live in comfort.’

“Reflecting appropriately, he uses lodging simply to counteract cold, to counteract heat, to counteract the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles; simply for protection from the inclemencies of weather and for the enjoyment of seclusion.

“Reflecting appropriately, he uses medicinal requisites that are used for curing the sick simply to counteract any pains of illness that have arisen and for maximum freedom from disease.

“The fermentations, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to use these things [in this way] do not arise for him when he uses them [in this way]. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by using.

“[4] And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by tolerating? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, endures. He tolerates cold, heat, hunger, and thirst; the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and reptiles; ill-spoken, unwelcome words and bodily feelings that, when they arise, are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, displeasing, and menacing to life. The fermentations, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to tolerate these things do not arise for him when he tolerates them. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by tolerating.

“[5] And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by avoiding? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, avoids a wild elephant, a wild horse, a wild bull, a wild dog, a snake, a stump, a bramble patch, a chasm, a cliff, a cesspool, an open sewer. Reflecting appropriately, he avoids sitting in the sorts of unsuitable seats, wandering to the sorts of unsuitable habitats, and associating with the sorts of bad friends that would make his knowledgeable friends in the holy life suspect him of evil conduct. The fermentations, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to avoid these things do not arise for him when he avoids them. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by avoiding.

“[6] And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by destroying? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, does not tolerate an arisen thought of sensuality. He abandons it, destroys it, dispels it, and wipes it out of existence.

Reflecting appropriately, he does not tolerate an arisen thought of ill will

....

Reflecting appropriately, he does not tolerate an arisen thought of cruelty. . . .

Reflecting appropriately, he does not tolerate arisen evil, unskillful mental qualities. He abandons them, destroys them, dispels them, and wipes them out of existence. The fermentations, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to destroy these things do not arise for him when he destroys them. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by destroying.

“[7] And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by developing? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, develops mind-

fulness as a factor of awakening dependent on seclusion... dispassion... cessation, resulting in letting go. He develops analysis of qualities as a factor of awakening... persistence as a factor of awakening... rapture as a factor of awakening... serenity as a factor of awakening... concentration as a factor of awakening... equanimity as a factor of awakening dependent on seclusion... dispassion... cessation, resulting in letting go. The fermentations, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to develop these qualities do not arise for him when he develops them. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by developing.

“When a monk’s fermentations that should be abandoned by seeing have been abandoned by seeing, his fermentations that should be abandoned by restraining have been abandoned by restraining, his fermentations that should be abandoned by using have been abandoned by using, his fermentations that should be abandoned by tolerating have been abandoned by tolerating, his fermentations that should be abandoned by avoiding have been abandoned by avoiding, his fermentations that should be abandoned by destroying have been abandoned by destroying, his fermentations that should be abandoned by developing have been abandoned by developing, then he is called a monk who dwells restrained with the restraint of all the fermentations. He has severed craving, thrown off the fetters, and—through the right penetration of conceit—has made an end of suffering and stress.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

## 3.2 Majjhima Nikāya 58

### Abhaya-rāja-kumāra Sutta

#### (To Prince Abhaya [On Right Speech])

##### *Translator’s Introduction*

*In this discourse, the Buddha shows the factors that go into deciding what is and is not worth saying. The main factors are three: whether or not a statement is true, whether or not it is beneficial, and whether or not it is pleasing to others. The Buddha himself would state only those things that are true and beneficial, and would have a sense of time for when pleasing and unpleasing things should be said. Notice that the possibility that a statement might be untrue yet beneficial is not even entertained.*

*This discourse also shows, in action, the Buddha’s teaching on the four categories of questions and how they should be answered (see AN.IV.42). The prince asks him two questions, and in both cases he responds first with a counter-question, before going on to give an analytical answer to the first question and a categori-*

*cal answer to the second. Each counter-question serves a double function: to give the prince a familiar reference point for understanding the answer about to come, and also to give him a chance to speak of his own intelligence and good motives. This provides him with the opportunity to save face after being stymied in his desire to best the Buddha in argument. The Commentary notes that the prince had placed his infant son on his lap as a cheap debater's trick: if the Buddha had put him in an uncomfortable spot in the debate, the prince would have pinched his son, causing him to cry and thus effectively bringing the debate to a halt. The Buddha, however, uses the infant's presence to remove any sense of a debate and also to make an effective point. Taking Nigantha Nataputta's image of a dangerous object stuck in the throat, he applies it to the infant, and then goes on to make the point that, unlike the Niganthas – who were content to leave someone with a potentially lethal object in the throat—the Buddha's desire is to remove such objects, out of sympathy and compassion. In this way, he brings the prince over to his side, converting a potential opponent into a disciple.*

*Thus this discourse is not only about right speech, but also shows right speech in action.*

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rajagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Sanctuary.

Then Prince Abhaya went to Nigantha Nataputta and on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, Nigantha Nataputta said to him, "Come, now, prince. Refute the words of the contemplative Gotama, and this admirable report about you will spread afar: 'The words of the contemplative Gotama—so mighty, so powerful—were refuted by Prince Abhaya!'"

"But how, venerable sir, will I refute the words of the contemplative Gotama—so mighty, so powerful?"

"Come now, prince. Go to the contemplative Gotama and on arrival say this: 'Venerable sir, would the Tathagata say words that are unendearing and disagreeable to others?' If the contemplative Gotama, thus asked, answers, 'The Tathagata would say words that are unendearing and disagreeable to others,' then you should say, 'Then how is there any difference between you, venerable sir, and run-of-the-mill people? For even run-of-the-mill people say words that are unendearing and disagreeable to others.' But if the contemplative Gotama, thus asked, answers, 'The Tathagata would not say words that are unendearing and disagreeable to others,' then you should say, 'Then how, venerable sir, did you say of Devadatta that "Devadatta is headed for destitution, Devadatta is headed for hell, Devadatta will boil for an eon, Devadatta is incurable"?' For Devadatta was upset and disgruntled at those words of yours.' When the contemplative Gotama is asked

this two-pronged question by you, he won't be able to swallow it down or spit it up. Just as if a two-horned chestnut<sup>1</sup> were stuck in a man's throat: he would not be able to swallow it down or spit it up. In the same way, when the contemplative Gotama is asked this two-pronged question by you, he won't be able to swallow it down or spit it up."

Responding, "As you say, venerable sir," Prince Abhaya got up from his seat, bowed down to Nigantha Nataputta, circumambulated him, and then went to the Blessed One. On arrival, he bowed down to the Blessed One and sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he glanced up at the sun and thought, "Today is not the time to refute the Blessed One's words. Tomorrow in my own home I will overturn the Blessed One's words." So he said to the Blessed One, "May the Blessed One, together with three others, acquiesce to my offer of tomorrow's meal."

The Blessed One acquiesced with silence.

Then Prince Abhaya, understanding the Blessed One's acquiescence, got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One, circumambulated him, and left.

Then, after the night had passed, the Blessed One early in the morning put on his robes and, carrying his bowl and outer robe, went to Prince Abhaya's home. On arrival, he sat down on a seat made ready. Prince Abhaya, with his own hand, served and satisfied the Blessed One with fine staple and non-staple foods. Then, when the Blessed One had eaten and had removed his hand from his bowl, Prince Abhaya took a lower seat and sat down to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, "Venerable sir, would the Tathagata say words that are unendearing and disagreeable to others?"

"Prince, there is no categorical yes-or-no answer to that."

"Then right here, venerable sir, the Niganthas are destroyed."

"But prince, why do you say, 'Then right here, venerable sir, the Niganthas are destroyed?'"

"Just yesterday, venerable sir, I went to Nigantha Nataputta and . . . he said to me. . . 'Come now, prince. Go to the contemplative Gotama and on arrival say this: "Venerable sir, would the Tathagata say words that are unendearing and disagreeable to others?" . . . Just as if a two-horned chestnut were stuck in a man's throat: he would not be able to swallow it down or spit it up. In the same way, when the contemplative Gotama is asked this two-pronged question by you, he won't be able to swallow it down or spit it up.'"

Now at that time a baby boy was lying face-up on the prince's lap. So the Blessed One said to the prince, "What do you think, prince: If this young boy, through your own negligence or that of the nurse, were to take a stick or a piece of gravel into its mouth, what would you do?"

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<sup>1</sup>A two-horned chestnut is the nut of a tree (*Trapa bicornis*) growing in south and southeast Asia. Its shell looks like the head of a water buffalo, with two nasty, curved "horns" sticking out of either side.

“I would take it out, venerable sir. If I couldn’t get it out right away, then holding its head in my left hand and crooking a finger of my right, I would take it out, even if it meant drawing blood. Why is that? Because I have sympathy for the young boy.”

“In the same way, prince:

- 1 In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial (or: not connected with the goal), unendearing and disagreeable to others, he does not say them.
- 2 In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, unendearing and disagreeable to others, he does not say them.
- 3 In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, but unendearing and disagreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them.
- 4 In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, but endearing and agreeable to others, he does not say them.
- 5 In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, but endearing and agreeable to others, he does not say them.
- 6 In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing and agreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them. Why is that? Because the Tathagata has sympathy for living beings.”

“Venerable sir, when wise nobles or priests, householders or contemplatives, having formulated questions, come to the Tathagata and ask him, does this line of reasoning appear to his awareness beforehand—‘If those who approach me ask this, I—thus asked—will answer in this way’—or does the Tathagata come up with the answer on the spot?”

“In that case, prince, I will ask you a counter-question. Answer as you see fit. What do you think: are you skilled in the parts of a chariot?”

“Yes, venerable sir. I am skilled in the parts of a chariot.”

“And what do you think: When people come and ask you, ‘What is the name of this part of the chariot?’ does this line of reasoning appear to your awareness beforehand—‘If those who approach me ask this, I—thus asked—will answer in this way’—or do you come up with the answer on the spot?”

“Venerable sir, I am renowned for being skilled in the parts of a chariot. All the parts of a chariot are well-known to me. I come up with the answer on the spot.”

“In the same way, prince, when wise nobles or priests, householders or contemplatives, having formulated questions, come to the Tathagata and ask him, he comes up with the answer on the spot. Why is that? Because the property of the Dhamma is thoroughly penetrated by the Tathagata. From his thorough penetration of the property of the Dhamma, he comes up with the answer on the spot.”

When this was said, Prince Abhaya said to the Blessed One: “Magnificent, venerable sir! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what had been overturned, were to reveal what was hidden, were to show the way to one who was lost, or were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way the Blessed One has—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha of monks. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life.”

### **3.3 Majjhima Nikāya 72 Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta To Vacchagotta on Fire**

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying in Savatthi, at Jeta’s Grove, Anathapindika’s park. Then the wanderer Vacchagotta went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat down to one side. As he was sitting there he asked the Blessed One: “How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The cosmos is eternal: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The cosmos is not eternal: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The cosmos is finite: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The cosmos is infinite: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The soul and the body are the same: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The soul is one thing and the body another: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘After death a Tathagata exists: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘After death a Tathagata does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘After death a Tathagata both exists and does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“Then does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless?’”

“... no...”

“How is it, Master Gotama, when Master Gotama is asked if he holds the view ‘the cosmos is eternal...’ after death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless,’ he says ‘... no...’ in each case. Seeing what drawback, then, is Master Gotama thus entirely dissociated from each of these ten positions?”

“Vaccha, the position that ‘the cosmos is eternal’ is a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. It is accompanied by suffering, distress, despair, and fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation; to calm, direct knowledge, full awakening, Unbinding.

“The position that ‘the cosmos is not eternal’...

“... ‘the cosmos is finite’...

“... ‘the cosmos is infinite’...

“... ‘the soul and the body are the same’...

“... ‘the soul is one thing and the body another’...

“... ‘after death a Tathagata exists’...

“... ‘after death a Tathagata does not exist’...

“... ‘after death a Tathagata both exists and does not exist’...

“... ‘after death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist’... does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation; to calm, direct knowledge, full awakening, Unbinding.”

“Does Master Gotama have any position at all?”

“A ‘position,’ Vaccha, is something that a Tathagata has done away with. What a Tathagata sees is this: ‘Such is form, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is feeling, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is perception... such are mental fabrications... such is consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance.’ Because of this, I say, a Tathagata—with the ending, fading out, cessation, renunciation, and relinquishment of all constructions, all excogitations, all I-making and mine-making and tendencies to conceits—is, through lack of sustenance/clinging, released.”

“But, Master Gotama, the monk whose mind is thus released: Where does he reappear?”

“‘Reappear,’ Vaccha, doesn’t apply.”

“In that case, Master Gotama, he does not reappear.”

“‘Does not reappear,’ Vaccha, doesn’t apply.”

“... both does and does not reappear.”

“... doesn’t apply.”

“... neither does nor does not reappear.”

“... doesn’t apply.”

“How is it, Master Gotama, when Master Gotama is asked if the monk reappears... does not reappear... both does and does not reappear... neither does nor does not reappear, he says, ‘... doesn’t apply’ in each case. At this point, Master Gotama, I am befuddled; at this point, confused. The modicum of clarity coming to me from your earlier conversation is now obscured.”

“Of course you’re befuddled, Vaccha. Of course you’re confused. Deep, Vaccha, is this phenomenon, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. For those with other views, other practices, other satisfactions, other aims, other teachers, it is difficult to know. That being the case, I will now put some questions to you. Answer as you see fit. How do you construe this, Vaccha: If a fire were burning in front of you, would you know that, “This fire is burning in front of me?”

“... yes...”

“And suppose someone were to ask you, Vaccha, “This fire burning in front of you, dependent on what is it burning?” Thus asked, how would you reply?”

“... I would reply, “This fire burning in front of me is burning dependent on grass and timber as its sustenance.”

“If the fire burning in front of you were to go out, would you know that, “This fire burning in front of me has gone out?”

“... yes...”

“And suppose someone were to ask you, “This fire that has gone out in front of you, in which direction from here has it gone? East? West? North? Or south?” Thus asked, how would you reply?”

“That doesn’t apply, Master Gotama. Any fire burning dependent on a sustenance of grass and timber, being unnourished—from having consumed that sustenance and not being offered any other—is classified simply as ‘out’ (unbound).”

“Even so, Vaccha, any physical form by which one describing the Tathagata would describe him: That the Tathagata has abandoned, its root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of form, Vaccha, the Tathagata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the sea. ‘Reappears’ doesn’t apply. ‘Does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Both does and does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Neither reappears nor does not reappear’ doesn’t apply.

“Any feeling... Any perception... Any mental fabrication...”

“Any consciousness by which one describing the Tathagata would describe him: That the Tathagata has abandoned, its root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of consciousness, Vaccha, the Tathagata is deep, boundless, hard to fathom, like the sea. ‘Reappears’ doesn’t apply. ‘Does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Both does and does not reappear’ doesn’t apply. ‘Neither reappears nor does not reappear’ doesn’t apply.”

When this was said, the wanderer Vacchagotta said to the Blessed One: “Master Gotama, it is as if there were a great sala tree not far from a village or town: From inconstancy, its branches and leaves would wear away, its bark would wear away, its sapwood would wear away, so that on a later occasion—divested of branches, leaves, bark, and sapwood—it would stand as pure heartwood. In the same way, Master Gotama’s words are divested of branches, leaves, bark, and sapwood and stand as pure heartwood.

“Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what had been overturned, were to reveal what was hidden, were to show the way to one who was lost, or were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way Master Gotama has – through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha of monks. May Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life.”

### **3.4 Majjhima Nikāya Chachakka Sutta (The Six Sextets)**

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Savatthi in Jeta’s Grove, Anathapindika’s Monastery. There he addressed the monks: “Monks!”

“Yes, lord,” the monks responded to him.

“Monks, I will teach you the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end; I will expound the holy life both in its particulars and in its essence, entirely complete, surpassingly pure—in other words, the six sextets. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded.

The Blessed One said: “The six internal media should be known. The six external media should be known. The six classes of consciousness should be known. The six classes of contact should be known. The six classes of feeling should be known. The six classes of craving should be known.

“‘The six internal media should be known.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? The eye-medium, the ear-medium, the nose-medium,

the tongue-medium, the body-medium, the intellect-medium. 'The six internal media should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the first sextet.

"The six external media should be known.' Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? The form-medium, the sound-medium, the aroma-medium, the flavor-medium, the tactile sensation-medium, the idea-medium. 'The six external media should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the second sextet.

"The six classes of consciousness should be known.' Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye and forms there arises consciousness at the eye. Dependent on the ear and sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. Dependent on the nose and aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. Dependent on the tongue and flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. Dependent on the body and tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. Dependent on the intellect and ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. 'The six classes of consciousness should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the third sextet.

"The six classes of contact should be known.' Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye and forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the ear and sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the nose and aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the tongue and flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the body and tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the intellect and ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. 'The six classes of contact should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the fourth sextet.

"The six classes of feeling should be known.' Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye and forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the ear and sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the nose and aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the tongue and flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the body and tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the intellect and ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. 'The six

classes of feeling should be known.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the fifth sextet.

“‘The six classes of craving should be known.’ Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye and forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the ear and sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the nose and aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the tongue and flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the body and tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the intellect and ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. ‘The six classes of craving should be known.’ Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the sixth sextet.

“If anyone were to say, ‘The eye is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. The arising and falling away of the eye are discerned. And when its arising and falling away are discerned, it would follow that ‘My self arises and falls away.’ That’s why it wouldn’t be tenable if anyone were to say, ‘The eye is the self.’ So the eye is not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Forms are the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . . Thus the eye is not-self and forms are not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Consciousness at the eye is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . . Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Contact at the eye is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . . Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self, contact at the eye is not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Feeling is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . . Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self, contact at the eye is not-self, feeling is not self. If anyone were to say, ‘Craving is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. The arising and falling away of craving are discerned. And when its arising and falling away are discerned, it would follow that ‘My self arises and falls away.’ That’s why it wouldn’t be tenable if anyone were to say, ‘Craving is the self.’ Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self, contact at the eye is not-self, feeling is not self, craving is not-self.

“If anyone were to say, ‘The ear is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . .

“If anyone were to say, ‘The nose is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . .

“If anyone were to say, ‘The tongue is the self,’ that wouldn’t be ten-

able. . . .

“If anyone were to say, ‘The body is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . .

“If anyone were to say, ‘The intellect is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. The arising and falling away of the intellect are discerned. And when its arising and falling away are discerned, it would follow that ‘My self arises and falls away.’ That’s why it wouldn’t be tenable if anyone were to say, ‘The intellect is the self.’ So the intellect is not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Ideas are the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . . Thus the intellect is not-self and ideas are not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Consciousness at the intellect is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . . Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Contact at the intellect is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . . Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self, contact at the intellect is not-self. If anyone were to say, ‘Feeling is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. . . . Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self, contact at the intellect is not-self, feeling is not self. If anyone were to say, ‘Craving is the self,’ that wouldn’t be tenable. The arising and falling away of craving are discerned. And when its arising and falling away are discerned, it would follow that ‘My self arises and falls away.’ That’s why it wouldn’t be tenable if anyone were to say, ‘Craving is the self.’ Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self, contact at the intellect is not-self, feeling is not self, craving is not-self.

“This, monks, is the path of practice leading to self-identification. One assumes about the eye that ‘This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.’ One assumes about forms. . . . One assumes about consciousness at the eye. . . . One assumes about contact at the eye. . . . One assumes about feeling. . . . One assumes about craving that ‘This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.’

“One assumes about the ear. . . .

“One assumes about the nose. . . .

“One assumes about the tongue. . . .

“One assumes about the body. . . .

“One assumes about the intellect that ‘This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.’ One assumes about ideas. . . . One assumes about consciousness at the intellect. . . . One assumes about contact at the intellect. . . . One assumes about feeling. . . . One assumes about craving that ‘This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.’

“Now, this is the path of practice leading to the cessation of self-identification. One assumes about the eye that ‘This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.’ One assumes about forms. . . . One assumes about consciousness at the eye. . . . One assumes about contact at the eye. . . . One assumes about feeling. . . . One assumes about craving that ‘This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.’

“One assumes about the ear. . . .

“One assumes about the nose. . . .

“One assumes about the tongue. . . .

“One assumes about the body. . . .

“One assumes about the intellect that ‘This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.’ One assumes about ideas. . . . One assumes about consciousness at the intellect. . . . One assumes about contact at the intellect. . . . One assumes about feeling. . . . One assumes about craving that ‘This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.’

“Dependent on the eye and forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one relishes it, welcomes it, or remains fastened to it, then the underlying tendency to passion lies latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one sorrows, grieves, and laments, beats one’s breast, becomes distraught, then the underlying tendency to resistance lies latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one does not discern, as it actually is present, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling, then the underlying tendency to ignorance lies latent within one. That a person—without abandoning the underlying tendency to passion with regard to a feeling of pleasure, without abolishing the underlying tendency to resistance with regard to a feeling of pain, without uprooting the underlying tendency to ignorance with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, without abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing—would put an end to suffering and stress in the here and now: such a thing isn’t possible.

“Dependent on the ear and sounds. . . .

“Dependent on the nose and aromas. . . .

“Dependent on the tongue and flavors. . . .

“Dependent on the body and tactile sensations. . . .

“Dependent on the intellect and ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one relishes it, welcomes it, or remains fastened to it, then the underlying tendency to passion lies latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one sorrows, grieves, and laments, beats one’s breast, becomes distraught, then the underlying tendency to resistance lies latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one does not discern, as it actually is present, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling, then the underlying tendency to ignorance lies latent within one. That a person—without abandoning the underlying tendency to passion with regard to a feeling of pleasure, without abolishing the underlying tendency to resistance with regard to a feeling of pain, without uprooting the underlying tendency to ignorance with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, without abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing—would put an end to suffering and stress in the here and now:

such a thing isn't possible.

"Dependent on the eye and forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one does not relish it, welcome it, or remain fastened to it, then the underlying tendency to passion does not lie latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, beat one's breast or become distraught, then the underlying tendency to resistance does not lie latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns, as it actually is present, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, and escape from that feeling, then the underlying tendency to ignorance does not lie latent within one. That a person—through abandoning the underlying tendency to passion with regard to a feeling of pleasure, through abolishing the underlying tendency to resistance with regard to a feeling of pain, through uprooting the underlying tendency to ignorance with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, through abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing—would put an end to suffering and stress in the here and now: such a thing is possible.

"Dependent on the ear and sounds. . . .

"Dependent on the nose and aromas. . . .

"Dependent on the tongue and flavors. . . .

"Dependent on the body and tactile sensations. . . .

"Dependent on the intellect and ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one does not relish it, welcome it, or remain fastened to it, then the underlying tendency to passion does not lie latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, beat one's breast or become distraught, then the underlying tendency to resistance does not lie latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns, as it actually is present, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, and escape from that feeling, then the underlying tendency to ignorance does not lie latent within one. That a person—through abandoning the underlying tendency to passion with regard to a feeling of pleasure, through abolishing the underlying tendency to resistance with regard to a feeling of pain, through uprooting the underlying tendency to ignorance with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, through abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing—would put an end to suffering and stress in the here and now: such a thing is possible.

"Seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with consciousness at the eye, disenchanted with contact at the eye, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with craving.

"He grows disenchanted with the ear. . . .

“He grows disenchanted with the nose. . . .

“He grows disenchanted with the tongue. . . .

“He grows disenchanted with the body. . . .

“He grows disenchanted with the intellect, disenchanted with ideas, disenchanted with consciousness at the intellect, disenchanted with contact at the intellect, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with craving. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, ‘Fully released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted at his words. And while this explanation was being given, the hearts of 60 monks, through no clinging (not being sustained), were fully released from fermentation/effluents.

## Chapter 4

# Dīgha Nikāya The Long Discourses

### 4.1 Dīgha Nikāya 15 Mahanidāna Sutta The Great Causes Discourse

#### *Translator's Introduction*

*This is one of the most profound discourses in the Pali Canon. It gives an extended treatment of the teachings of dependent co-arising (paṭicca samuppāda) and not-self (anatta) in an outlined context of how these teachings function in practice.*

*The first part of the discourse takes the factors of dependent co-arising in sequence from effect to cause, tracing them down to the mutual dependency of name-and-form (mental and physical activity) on the one hand, and consciousness on the other. In connection with this point, it is worth noting that the word “great” in the title of the discourse may have a double meaning: modifying the word “discourse”—it’s a long discourse—and modifying “causes,” referring to the fact that name-and-form and consciousness as causal factors can account for everything describable in the cosmos.*

*After tracing the basic sequence of factors in the causal pattern, the discourse then reviews their inter-relationships, showing how they can explain stress and suffering both on the individual and on the social level.*

*The second part of the discourse, taking up the teaching of not-self, shows how dependent co-arising gives focus to this teaching in practice. It begins with a section on Delineations of a Self,*

*classifying the various ways in which a sense of “self” might be defined in terms of form. The scheme of analysis introduced in this section—classifying views of the self according to the variables of form and formless; finite and infinite; already existing, naturally developing in the future, and alterable through human effort—covers all the theories of the self proposed in the classical Upanisads, as well as all theories of self or soul proposed in more recent times. The inclusion of an infinite self in this list gives the lie to the belief that the Buddha’s teachings on not-self were denying nothing more than a sense of “separate” or “limited” self. The discourse points out that even a limitless, infinite, all-embracing sense of self is based on an underlying tendency in the mind that has to be abandoned.*

*The following section, on Non-delineations of a Self, shows that it is possible for the mind to function without reading a “self” into experience. The remaining sections focus on ways in which this can be done by treating the sense of self as it relates to different aspects of name-and-form. The first of these sections—Assumptions of a Self—focuses on the sense of self as it relates to feeling, one of the “name” factors in name-and-form. The next section—Seven Stations of Consciousness—focuses on form, formlessness, and perception, which is another one of the “name” factors that allows a place for consciousness to land and grow on the “macro” level in the cycle of death and rebirth. The last section—Eight Emancipations—focuses on form, formlessness, and perception on the “micro” level in the practice of meditative absorption (jhana).*

*In each of these cases, once the sense of attachment and identification with name-and-form can be broken, the mutual dependency between consciousness and name-and-form is broken as well. This brings about total freedom from the limits of “the extent to which there are means of designation, expression, and delineation. . . the extent to which the sphere of discernment extends, the extent to which the cycle revolves for the manifesting (discernibility) of this world—i.e., name-and-form together with consciousness.” This is the release at which the Buddha’s teachings are aimed.*

### **4.1.1 Dependent Co-arising**

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was living among the Kurus. Now, the Kurus have a town named Kammasadhamma. There Ven. Ananda approached the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: “It’s amazing, lord, it’s astounding, how deep this dependent

co-arising is, and how deep its appearance, and yet to me it seems as clear as clear can be.”

[The Buddha:] “Don’t say that, Ananda. Don’t say that. Deep is this dependent co-arising, and deep its appearance. It’s because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma that this generation is like a tangled skein, a knotted ball of string, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not go beyond transmigration, beyond the planes of deprivation, woe, and bad destinations.

“If one is asked, ‘Is there a demonstrable requisite condition for aging and death?’ one should answer, ‘There is.’

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition do aging and death come?’ one should say, ‘Aging and death come from birth as their requisite condition.’

“If one is asked, ‘Is there a demonstrable requisite condition for birth?’ one should answer, ‘There is.’

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does birth come?’ one should say, ‘Birth comes from becoming as its requisite condition.’

“If one is asked, ‘Is there a demonstrable requisite condition for becoming?’ one should answer, ‘There is.’

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does becoming come?’ one should say, ‘Becoming comes from clinging as its requisite condition.’

“If one is asked, ‘Is there a demonstrable requisite condition for clinging?’ one should answer, ‘There is.’

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does clinging come?’ one should say, ‘Clinging comes from craving as its requisite condition.’

“If one is asked, ‘Is there a demonstrable requisite condition for craving?’ one should answer, ‘There is.’

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does craving come?’ one should say, ‘Craving comes from feeling as its requisite condition.’

“If one is asked, ‘Is there a demonstrable requisite condition for feeling?’ one should answer, ‘There is.’

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does feeling come?’ one should say, ‘Feeling comes from contact as its requisite condition.’

“If one is asked, ‘Is there a demonstrable requisite condition for contact?’ one should answer, ‘There is.’

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does contact come?’ one should say, ‘Contact comes from name-and-form as its requisite condition.’

“If one is asked, ‘Is there a demonstrable requisite condition for name-and-form?’ one should answer, ‘There is.’

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does name-and-form come?’ one should say, ‘Name-and-form comes from consciousness as its requisite condition.’

“If one is asked, ‘Is there a demonstrable requisite condition for consciousness?’ one should answer, ‘There is.’

“If one is asked, ‘From what requisite condition does consciousness come?’ one should say, ‘Consciousness comes from name-and-form as its

requisite condition.’

“Thus, Ananda, from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form. From name-and-form as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging. From clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress.

### **Aging and Death**

“‘From birth as a requisite condition come aging and death.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from birth as a requisite condition come aging and death. If there were no birth at all, in any way, of anything anywhere—i.e., of devas in the state of devas, of celestials in the state of celestials, of spirits in the state of spirits, of demons in the state of demons, of human beings in the human state, of quadripeds in the state of quadripeds, of birds in the state of birds, of snakes in the state of snakes, or of any being in its own state—in the utter absence of birth, from the cessation of birth, would aging and death be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for aging and death, i.e., birth.

### **Birth**

“‘From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. If there were no becoming at all, in any way, of anything anywhere—i.e., sensual becoming, form becoming, or formless becoming—in the utter absence of becoming, from the cessation of becoming, would birth be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for birth, i.e., becoming.

### **Becoming**

“‘From clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from clinging as a requisite condition comes becoming. If there were no clinging at all, in any way, of anything anywhere—i.e., clinging to sensuality, clinging to precepts and

practices, clinging to views, or clinging to doctrines of the self—in the utter absence of clinging, from the cessation of clinging, would becoming be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for becoming, i.e., clinging.

### **Clinging**

“‘From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from craving as a requisite condition comes clinging. If there were no craving at all, in any way, of anything anywhere—i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for no becoming—in the utter absence of craving, from the cessation of craving, would clinging be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for clinging, i.e., craving.

### **Craving**

“‘From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. If there were no feeling at all, in any way, of anything anywhere—i.e., feeling born of contact at the eye, feeling born of contact at the ear, feeling born of contact at the nose, feeling born of contact at the tongue, feeling born of contact at the body, or feeling born of contact at the intellect—in the utter absence of feeling, from the cessation of feeling, would craving be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for craving, i.e., feeling.

### **Dependent on Craving**

“Now, craving is dependent on feeling, seeking is dependent on craving, acquisition is dependent on seeking, ascertainment is dependent on acquisition, desire and passion is dependent on ascertainment, attachment is dependent on desire and passion, possessiveness is dependent on attachment, stinginess is dependent on attachment, defensiveness is dependent on stinginess, and because of defensiveness, dependent on defensiveness, various evil, unskillful phenomena come into play: the taking up of sticks and knives; conflicts, quarrels, and disputes; accusations, divisive speech, and lies.

“And this is the way to understand how it is that because of defensiveness various evil, unskillful phenomena come into play: the taking up of

sticks and knives; conflicts, quarrels, and disputes; accusations, divisive speech, and lies. If there were no defensiveness at all, in any way, of anything anywhere, in the utter absence of defensiveness, from the cessation of defensiveness, would various evil, unskillful phenomena—the taking up of sticks and knives; conflicts, quarrels, and disputes; accusations, divisive speech, and lies—come into play?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for the coming-into-play of various evil, unskillful phenomena—the taking up of sticks and knives; conflicts, quarrels, and disputes; accusations, divisive speech, and lies—i.e., defensiveness.

“‘Defensiveness is dependent on stinginess.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how defensiveness is dependent on stinginess. If there were no stinginess at all, in any way, of anything anywhere, in the utter absence of stinginess, from the cessation of stinginess, would defensiveness be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for defensiveness, i.e., stinginess.

(Similarly back through the chain of conditions: stinginess, attachment, possessiveness, desire and passion, ascertainment, acquisition, and seeking.)

“‘Seeking is dependent on craving.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how seeing is dependent on craving. If there were no craving at all, in any way, of anything anywhere—i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for no becoming—in the utter absence of craving, from the cessation of craving, would seeking be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for seeking, i.e., craving. Thus, Ananda, these two phenomena [the chain of conditions leading from craving to birth, aging, and death, and the chain of conditions leading from craving to quarrels, etc.], as a duality, flow back into one place at feeling.

### **Feeling**

“‘From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. If there were no contact at all, in any way, of anything anywhere—i.e., contact at the eye, contact at the ear, contact at the nose, contact at the tongue, contact at the body, or contact at the intellect—in the utter absence of contact, from the cessation of contact, would feeling be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for feeling, i.e., contact.

**Contact**

“‘From name-and-form as a requisite condition comes contact.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how, from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes contact. If the qualities, traits, themes, and indicators by which there is a description of name-group (mental activity) were all absent, would designation-contact with regard to the form-group (the physical body) be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“If the permutations, signs, themes, and indicators by which there is a description of form-group were all absent, would resistance-contact with regard to the name-group be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“If the permutations, signs, themes, and indicators by which there is a description of name-group and form-group were all absent, would designation-contact or resistance-contact be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for contact, i.e., name-and-form.

(Name-and-form)

“‘From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form. If consciousness were not to descend into the mother’s womb, would name-and-form take shape in the womb?”

“No, lord.”

“If, after descending into the womb, consciousness were to depart, would name-and-form be produced for this world?”

“No, lord.”

“If the consciousness of the young boy or girl were to be cut off, would name-and-form ripen, grow, and reach maturity?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for name-and-form, i.e., consciousness.”

**Consciousness**

“‘From name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness. If consciousness were not to gain a foothold in name-and-form, would a coming-into-play of the origination of birth, aging, death, and stress in the future be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for consciousness, i.e., name-and-form.

“This is the extent to which there is birth, aging, death, passing away, and re-arising. This is the extent to which there are means of designation, expression, and delineation. This is the extent to which the sphere of discernment extends, the extent to which the cycle revolves for the manifesting (discernibility) of this world—i.e., name-and-form together with consciousness.

### 4.1.2 Delineations of a Self

“To what extent, Ananda, does one delineate when delineating a self? Either delineating a self possessed of form and finite, one delineates that ‘My self is possessed of form and finite.’ Or, delineating a self possessed of form and infinite, one delineates that ‘My self is possessed of form and infinite.’ Or, delineating a self formless and finite, one delineates that ‘My self is formless and finite.’ Or, delineating a self formless and infinite, one delineates that ‘My self is formless and infinite.’

“Now, the one who, when delineating a self, delineates it as possessed of form and finite, either delineates it as possessed of form and finite in the present, or of such a nature that it will [naturally] become possessed of form and finite [in the future/after death], or he believes that ‘Although it is not yet that way, I will convert it into being that way.’ This being the case, it is proper to say that a fixed view of a self possessed of form and finite lies latent [within that person].

“The one who, when delineating a self, delineates it as possessed of form and infinite, either delineates it as possessed of form and infinite in the present, or of such a nature that it will [naturally] become possessed of form and infinite [in the future/after death], or he believes that ‘Although it is not yet that way, I will convert it into being that way.’ This being the case, it is proper to say that a fixed view of a self possessed of form and infinite lies latent [within that person].

“The one who, when delineating a self, delineates it as formless and finite, either delineates it as formless and finite in the present, or of such a nature that it will [naturally] become formless and finite [in the future/after death], or he believes that ‘Although it is not yet that way, I will convert it into being that way.’ This being the case, it is proper to say that a fixed view of a self formless and finite lies latent [within that person].

“The one who, when delineating a self, delineates it as formless and infinite, either delineates it as formless and infinite in the present, or of such a nature that it will [naturally] become formless and infinite [in the future/after death], or he believes that ‘Although it is not yet that way, I will convert it into being that way.’ This being the case, it is proper to say that a fixed view of a self formless and infinite lies latent [within that person].

### 4.1.3 Non-Delineations of a Self

“To what extent, Ananda, does one not delineate when not delineating a self? Either not delineating a self possessed of form and finite, one does not delineate that ‘My self is possessed of form and finite.’ Or, not delineating a self possessed of form and infinite, one does not delineate that ‘My self is possessed of form and infinite.’ Or, not delineating a self formless and finite, one does not delineate that ‘My self is formless and finite.’ Or, not delineating a self formless and infinite, one does not delineate that ‘My self is formless and infinite.’

“Now, the one who, when not delineating a self, does not delineate it as possessed of form and finite, does not delineate it as possessed of form and finite in the present, nor does he delineate it as of such a nature that it will [naturally] become possessed of form and finite [in the future/after death], nor does he believe that ‘Although it is not yet that way, I will convert it into being that way.’ This being the case, it is proper to say that a fixed view of a self possessed of form and finite does not lie latent [within that person].

“The one who, when not delineating a self, does not delineate it as possessed of form and infinite, does not delineate it as possessed of form and infinite in the present, nor does he delineate it as of such a nature that it will [naturally] become possessed of form and infinite [in the future/after death], nor does he believe that ‘Although it is not yet that way, I will convert it into being that way.’ This being the case, it is proper to say that a fixed view of a self possessed of form and infinite does not lie latent [within that person].

“The one who, when not delineating a self, does not delineate it as formless and finite, does not delineate it as formless and finite in the present, nor does he delineate it as of such a nature that it will [naturally] become formless and finite [in the future/after death], nor does he believe that ‘Although it is not yet that way, I will convert it into being that way.’ This being the case, it is proper to say that a fixed view of a self formless and finite does not lie latent [within that person].

“The one who, when not delineating a self, does not delineate it as formless and infinite, does not delineate it as formless and infinite in the present, nor does he delineate it as of such a nature that it will [naturally] become formless and infinite [in the future/after death], nor does he believe that ‘Although it is not yet that way, I will convert it into being that way.’ This being the case, it is proper to say that a fixed view of a self formless and infinite does not lie latent [within that person].

### 4.1.4 Assumptions of a Self

“To what extent, Ananda, does one assume when assuming a self? Assuming feeling to be the self, one assumes that ‘Feeling is my self’ [or] ‘Feeling is not my self: My self is oblivious [to feeling]’ [or] ‘Neither is feeling my self, nor is my self oblivious to feeling, but rather my self feels, in that my

self is subject to feeling.’

“Now, one who says, ‘Feeling is my self,’ should be addressed as follows: ‘There are these three feelings, my friend—feelings of pleasure, feelings of pain, and feelings of neither pleasure nor pain. Which of these three feelings do you assume to be the self?’ At a moment when a feeling of pleasure is sensed, no feeling of pain or of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed. Only a feeling of pleasure is sensed at that moment. At a moment when a feeling of pain is sensed, no feeling of pleasure or of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed. Only a feeling of pain is sensed at that moment. At a moment when a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed, no feeling of pleasure or of pain is sensed. Only a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed at that moment.

“Now, a feeling of pleasure is inconstant, fabricated, dependent on conditions, subject to passing away, dissolution, fading, and cessation. A feeling of pain is inconstant, fabricated, dependent on conditions, subject to passing away, dissolution, fading, and cessation. A feeling of neither pleasure nor pain is inconstant, fabricated, dependent on conditions, subject to passing away, dissolution, fading, and cessation. Having sensed a feeling of pleasure as ‘my self,’ then with the cessation of one’s very own feeling of pleasure, ‘my self’ has perished. Having sensed a feeling of pain as ‘my self,’ then with the cessation of one’s very own feeling of pain, ‘my self’ has perished. Having sensed a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain as ‘my self,’ then with the cessation of one’s very own feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, ‘my self’ has perished.

“Thus he assumes, assuming in the immediate present a self inconstant, entangled in pleasure and pain, subject to arising and passing away, he who says, ‘Feeling is my self.’ Thus in this manner, Ananda, one does not see fit to assume feeling to be the self.

“As for the person who says, ‘Feeling is not the self: My self is oblivious [to feeling],’ he should be addressed as follows: ‘My friend, where nothing whatsoever is sensed (experienced) at all, would there be the thought, “I am?”’

“No, lord.”

“Thus in this manner, Ananda, one does not see fit to assume that ‘Feeling is not my self: My self is oblivious [to feeling].’

“As for the person who says, ‘Neither is feeling my self, nor is my self oblivious [to feeling], but rather my self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling,’ he should be addressed as follows: ‘My friend, should feelings altogether and every way stop without remainder, then with feeling completely not existing, owing to the cessation of feeling, would there be the thought, “I am?”’

“No, lord.”

“Thus in this manner, Ananda, one does not see fit to assume that ‘Neither is feeling my self, nor is my self oblivious [to feeling], but rather my self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling.’

“Now, Ananda, in as far as a monk does not assume feeling to be the self,

nor the self as oblivious, nor that ‘My self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling,’ then, not assuming in this way, he is not sustained by anything (does not cling to anything) in the world. Unsustained, he is not agitated. Unagitated, he is totally unbound right within. He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

“If anyone were to say with regard to a monk whose mind is thus released that ‘The Tathagata exists after death,’ is his view, that would be mistaken; that ‘The Tathagata does not exist after death’... that ‘The Tathagata both exists and does not exist after death’... that ‘The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death’ is his view, that would be mistaken. Why? Having directly known the extent of designation and the extent of the objects of designation, the extent of expression and the extent of the objects of expression, the extent of description and the extent of the objects of description, the extent of discernment and the extent of the objects of discernment, the extent to which the cycle revolves: Having directly known that, the monk is released. [To say that,] ‘The monk released, having directly known that, does not see, does not know is his opinion,’ that would be mistaken.

#### 4.1.5 Seven Stations of Consciousness

“Ananda, there are these seven stations of consciousness and two spheres. Which seven?

“There are beings with diversity of body and diversity of perception, such as human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms. This is the first station of consciousness.

“There are beings with diversity of body and singularity of perception, such as the devas of the Brahma hosts generated by the first [jhana]. This is the second station of consciousness.

“There are beings with singularity of body and diversity of perception, such as the Radiant Devas. This is the third station of consciousness.

“There are beings with singularity of body and singularity of perception, such as the Beautifully Lustrous Devas. This is the fourth station of consciousness.

“There are beings who, with the complete transcending of perceptions of [physical] form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, thinking, ‘Infinite space,’ arrive at the sphere of the infinitude of space. This is the fifth station of consciousness.

“There are beings who, with the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of space, thinking, ‘Infinite consciousness,’ arrive at the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness. This is the sixth station of consciousness.

“There are beings who, with the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, thinking, ‘There is nothing,’ arrive at the sphere of nothingness. This is the seventh station of consciousness.

“The sphere of non-percipient beings and, second, the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. [These are the two spheres.]

“Now, as for the first station of consciousness—beings with diversity of body and diversity of perception, such as human beings, some devas, and some beings in the lower realms: If one discerns that [station of consciousness], discerns its origination, discerns its passing away, discerns its allure, discerns its drawbacks, discerns the escape from it, would it be proper, by means of that [discernment] to take delight there?”

“No, lord.”

(Similarly with each of the remaining stations of consciousness and two spheres.)

“Ananda, when knowing—as they actually are—the origination, passing away, allure, drawbacks of—and escape from—these seven stations of consciousness and two spheres, a monk is released through lack of clinging, he is said to be a monk released through discernment.

#### 4.1.6 Eight Emancipations

“Ananda, there are these eight emancipations. Which eight?”

“Possessed of form, one sees forms. This is the first emancipation.

“Not percipient of form internally, one sees forms externally. This is the second emancipation.

“One is intent only on the beautiful. This is the third emancipation.

“With the complete transcending of perceptions of [physical] form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, thinking, ‘Infinite space,’ one enters and remains in the sphere of the infinitude of space. This is the fourth emancipation.

“With the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of space, thinking, ‘Infinite consciousness,’ one enters and remains in the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness. This is the fifth emancipation.

“With the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, thinking, ‘There is nothing,’ one enters and remains in the sphere of nothingness. This is the sixth emancipation.

“With the complete transcending of the sphere of nothingness, one enters and remains in the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. This is the seventh emancipation.

“With the complete transcending of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, one enters and remains in the cessation of perception and feeling. This is the eighth emancipation.

“Now, when a monk attains these eight emancipations in forward order, in reverse order, in forward and reverse order, when he attains them and emerges from them wherever he wants, however he wants, and for as long as he wants, when through the ending of the mental fermentations he enters and remains in the fermentation-free release of awareness and release of discernment, having directly known it and realized it in the here

and now, he is said to be a monk released in both ways. And as for another release in both ways, higher or more sublime than this, there is none.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Ananda delighted in the Blessed One’s words.



**Part II**

**Practical writings by  
modern teachers**



## Chapter 5

# Meditating on No-self by Sister Khema

*Sister Khemā was born in Germany, educated in Scotland and China, and later became a United States citizen. She now lives at Wat Buddha Dhamma Forest Monastery near Sydney Australia, which was established in 1978 on land purchased and donated by her. In 1979 she ordained as a Nun in Sri Lanka, and in 1982 she established the International Buddhist Women's Centre near Colombo. She spends most of her time teaching meditation course in different parts of the world. Rains Retreat is spent in Sri Lanka.*

In Buddhism we use the words “self” and “no-self,” and so it is important to understand just what this “no-self,” anatta, is all about, even if it is first just an idea, because the essence of the Buddha’s teaching hinges on this concept. And in this teaching Buddhism is unique. No one, no other spiritual teacher, has formulated no-self in just this way. And because it has been formulated by him in this way, there is also the possibility of speaking about it. Much has been written about no-self, but in order to know it, one has to experience it. And that is what the teaching aims at, the experience of no-self.

Yet in order to experience no-self, one has first to fully know self. Actually know it. But unless we do know what this self is, this self called “me,” it is impossible to know what is meant by “there is no self there.” In order to give something away, we have to first fully gave it in hand.

We are constantly trying to reaffirm self. Which already shows that this “self” is a very fragile and rather wispy sort of affair, because if it weren’t why would we constantly have to reaffirm it? Why are we constantly afraid of the “self” being threatened of its being insecure, of its not getting what

it needs for survival? If it were such a solid entity as we believe it to be, we would not feel threatened so often.

We affirm “self” again and again through identification. We identify with a certain name, an age, a sex, an ability, an occupation. “I am a lawyer, I am a doctor. I am an accountant, I am a student.” And we identify with the people we are attached to. “I am a husband, I am a wife, I am a mother, I am a daughter, I am a son.” Now, in the manner of speech, we have to use “self” in that way—but it isn’t only in speech. We really think that that “self” is who we are. We really believe it. There is no doubt in our mind that that “self” is who we are. When any of these factors is threatened, if being a wife is threatened, if being a mother is threatened, if being a lawyer is threatened, if being a teacher is threatened—or if we lose the people who enable us to retain that “self”—what a tragedy!

The self-identification becomes insecure, and “me” finds it hard to say “look at me,” “this is me.” Praise and blame are included. Praise reaffirms “me.” Blame threatens “me.” So we like the praise and we dislike the blame. The ego is threatened. Fame and infamy—same thing. Loss and gain. If we gain, the ego gets bigger; if we lose, it gets a bit smaller. So we are constantly in a quandary, and in constant fear. The ego might lose a little bit of its grandeur. It might be made a bit smaller by someone. And it happens to all of us. Somebody is undoubtedly going to blame us for something eventually. Even the Buddha was blamed.

Now the blame that is levied at us is not the problem. The problem is our reaction. The problem is that we feel smaller. The ego has a hard time reasserting itself. So what we usually do is we blame back, making the other’s ego a bit smaller too.

Identification with whatever it is that we do and whatever it is that we have, be it possessions or people, is, so we believe, needed for our survival. “Self” survival. If we don’t identify with this or that, we feel as if we are in limbo. This is the reason why it is difficult to stop thinking in meditation. Because without thinking there would be no identification. If I don’t think, what do I identify with? It is difficult to come to a stage in meditation in which there is actually nothing to identify with any more.

Happiness, too, may be an identification. “I am happy.” “I am unhappy.” Because we are so keen on survival, we have got to keep on identifying. When this identification becomes a matter of the life or death of the ego, which it usually is, then the fear of loss becomes so great that we can be in a constant state of fear. Constantly afraid to lose either the possessions that make us what we are, or the people that make us what we are. If we have no children, or if they all die, we are no longer a mother. So fear is paramount. The same goes for all other identifications. Not a very peaceful state of living and what is it due to? Only one thing: ego, the craving to be.

This identification results, of course, in craving for possessing. And this possessing results in attachment. What we have, what we identify with, we are attached to. That attachment, that clinging, makes it extremely difficult to have a free and open viewpoint. This kind of clinging, whatever it may

be that we cling to—it may not be clinging to motor cars and houses, it may not even be clinging to people—but we certainly cling to views and opinions. We cling to our world view. We cling to the view of how we are going to be happy. Maybe we cling to a view of who created this universe. Whatever it is we cling to, even how the government should run the country, all of that makes it extremely difficult to see things as they really are. To be open-minded. And it is only an open mind which can take in new ideas and understanding.

Lord Buddha compared listeners to four different kinds of clay vessels. The first clay vessel is one that has holes at the bottom. If you pour water into it, it runs right out. In other words, whatever you teach that person is useless. The second clay vessel he compared to one that had cracks in it. If you pour water into it, the water seeps out. These people cannot remember. Cannot put two and two together. Cracks in the understanding. The third listener he compared to a vessel that was completely full. Water cannot be poured in for it's full to the brim. Such a person, so full of views he can't learn anything new! But hopefully, we are the fourth kind. The empty vessels without any holes or cracks. Completely empty.

I dare say we are not. But may be empty enough to take in enough. To be empty like that, of views and opinions, means a lack of clinging. Even a lack of clinging to what we think is reality. Whatever we think reality is, it surely is not, because if it were, we would never be unhappy for a single moment. We would never feel a lack of anything. We would never feel a lack of companionship, of ownership. We would never feel frustrated, bored. If we ever do, whatever we think is real, is not. What is truly reality is completely fulfilling. If we aren't completely fulfilled, we aren't seeing complete reality. So, any view that we may have is either wrong or it is partial.

Because it is wrong or partial, and bounded by the ego, we must look at it with suspicion. Anything we cling to keeps us bound to it. If I cling to a table-leg, I can't possibly get out the door. There is no way I can move. I am stuck. Not until I let go will I have the opportunity to get out. Any identification, any possession that is clung to, is what stops us from reaching transcendental reality. Now we can easily see this clinging when we cling to things and people, but we cannot easily see why the five khandhas are called the five clung-to aggregates. That is their name, and they are, in fact, what we cling to most. That is an entire clinging. We don't even stop to consider when we look at our body, and when we look at our mind, or when we look at feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness – vedana, saa, sankhara, and viana. We look at this mind-and-body, nama-rupa, and we don't even doubt the fact that this is my feeling, my perception, my memory, my thoughts, and my awareness of my consciousness. And no one starts doubting until they start seeing. And for that seeing we need a fair bit of empty space apart from views and opinions.

Clinging is the greatest possessiveness and attachment we have. As long as we cling we cannot see reality. We cannot see reality because clinging is

in the way. Clinging colors whatever we believe to be true. Now it is not possible to say “all right, I’ll stop clinging.” We can’t do that. The process of taking the “me” apart, of not believing any more that this is one whole, is a gradual one. But if meditation has any benefit and success, it must show that first of all there is mind and there is body. There isn’t one single thing acting in accord all the time. There is mind which is thinking and making the body act. Now that is the first step in knowing oneself a little clearer. And then we can note “this is a feeling” and “I am giving this feeling a name” which means memory and perception. “This is the thought that I am having about this feeling. The feeling has come about because the mind-consciousness has connected with the feeling that has arisen.”

Take the four parts of the khandhas that belong to the mind apart. When we do that while it is happening—not now when we are thinking about it—but while it is happening, then we get a inkling that this isn’t really me, that these are phenomena that are arising, which stay a moment, and then cease. How long does mind-consciousness stay on one object? And how long do thoughts last? And have we really invited them?

The clinging, the clung-to, are what make the ego arise. Because of clinging the notion of “me” arises and then there is me, and me having all the problems. Without me would there be problems? If there weren’t anyone sitting inside me—as we think there is—who is called I or me or John, Claire, then who is having the problem? The khandhas do not have any problems. The khandhas are just processes. They are phenomena, and that is all. They are just going on and on and on. But because I am grasping at them, and trying to hold on to them, and saying: “it’s me, it’s me feeling, it’s me wanting,” then problems arise.

If we really want to get rid of suffering, completely and totally, then clinging has to go. The spiritual path is never one of achievement; it is always one of letting go. The more we let go, the more there is empty and open space for us to see reality. Because what we let go of is no longer there, there is the possibility of just moving without clinging to the results of the movement. As long as we cling to the results of what we do, as long as we cling to the results of what we think, we are bound, we are hemmed in.

Now there is a third thing that we do: we are interested in becoming something or somebody. Interested in becoming an excellent meditator. Interested in becoming a graduate. Interested in becoming something which we are not. And becoming something stops us from being. When we are stopped from being, we cannot pay attention to what there really is. All this becoming business is, of course, in the future. Since whatever there is in the future is conjecture, it is a dream world we live in. The only reality we can be sure of is this particular moment right now; and this particular moment as you must be able to be aware of—has already passed and this one has passed and the next one has also passed. See how they are all passing! That is the impermanence of it all. Each moment passes, but we cling, trying to hold on to them. Trying to make them a reality. Trying to make them a security. Trying to make them be something which they are not. See how they

are all passing. We cannot even say it as quickly as they are doing it.

There is nothing that is secure. Nothing to hold on to, nothing that is stable. The whole universe is constantly falling apart and coming back together. And that includes the mind and the body which we call "I." You may believe it or not, it makes no difference. In order to know it, you must experience it; when you experience it, it's perfectly clear. What one experiences is totally clear. No one can say it is not. They may try, but their objections make no sense because you have experienced it. It's the same thing as biting into the mango to know its taste.

To experience it, one needs meditation. An ordinary mind can only know ordinary concepts and ideas. If one wants to understand and experience extraordinary experiences and ideas, one has to have an extraordinary mind. An extraordinary mind comes about through concentration. Most meditators have experienced some stage that is different than the one they are used to. So it is not ordinary any more. But we have to fortify that far more than just the beginning stage. To the point where the mind is truly extraordinary. Extraordinary in the sense that it can direct itself to where it wants to go. Extraordinary in the sense that it no longer gets perturbed by everyday events. And when the mind can concentrate, then it experiences states which it has never known before. To realize that your universe constantly falls apart and comes back together again is a meditative experience. It takes practice, perseverance and patience. And when the mind is unperturbed and still, equanimity, evenmindedness, peacefulness arise.

At that time the mind understands the idea of impermanence to such an extent that it sees itself as totally impermanent. And when one sees one's own mind as being totally impermanent, there is a shift in one's viewpoint. That shift I like to compare with a kaleidoscope that children play with. A slight touch and you get a different picture. The whole thing looks quite different with just a slight shift.

Non-self is experienced through the aspect of impermanence, through the aspect of unsatisfactoriness, and through the aspect of emptiness. Empty of what? The word "emptiness" is so often misunderstood because when one only thinks of it as a concept, one says "what do you mean by empty?" Everything is there: there are the people, and there are their insides, guts and their bones and blood and everything is full of stuff—and the mind is not empty either. It's got ideas, thoughts and feelings. And even when it doesn't have those, what do you mean by emptiness? The only thing that is empty is the emptiness of an entity.

There is no specific entity in anything. That is emptiness. That is the nothingness. That nothingness is also experienced in meditation. It is empty, it is devoid of a specific person, devoid of a specific thing, devoid of anything which makes it permanent, devoid of anything which even makes it important. The whole thing is in flux. So the emptiness is that. And the emptiness is to be seen everywhere; to be seen in oneself. And that is what is called anatta, non-self. Empty of an entity. There is nobody there. It is all imagination. At first that feels very insecure.

That person that I've been regarding with so much concern, that person trying to do this or that, that person who will be my security, will be my insurance for a happy life—once I find that person—that person does not really exist. What a frightening and insecure idea that is! What a feeling of fear arises! But as a matter of fact, it's just the reverse. If one accepts and bears that fright and goes through it, one comes to complete and utter relief and release.

I'll give you a simile: Imagine you own a very valuable jewel which is so valuable that you place your trust in it so that should you fall upon hard times, it will look after you. It's so valuable that you can have it as your security. You don't trust anybody. So you have a safe inside your house and that is where you put your jewel. Now you have been working hard for a number of years and you think you deserve a holiday. So now, what to do with the jewel? Obviously you cannot take it with you on your seaside holiday. So you buy new locks for the doors to your house and you bar your windows and you alert your neighbors. You tell them about the proposed holiday and ask them to look after your house—and the safe in it. And they say they will, of course. You should be quite at ease and so you go off on your holiday.

You go to the beach, and it's wonderful. Marvelous. The palm trees are swaying in the wind, and the spot you've chosen on the beach is nice and clean. The waves are warm and it's all lovely. The first day you really enjoy yourself. But on the second day you begin to wonder; the neighbors are very nice people, but they do go and visit their children. They are not always at home, and lately there has been a rash of burglaries in the neighborhood. And on the third day you've convinced yourself that something dreadful is going to happen, and you go back home. You walk in and open the safe. Everything is all right. You go over to the neighbors and they ask, "Why did you come back? We were looking after your place. You didn't have to come back. Everything is fine."

The next year, the same thing. Again you tell the neighbors, "Now this time I am really going to stay away for a month. I need this holiday as I've been working hard." So they say, "Absolutely no need to worry, just take off. Go to the beach." So once more you bar the windows, lock the doors, get everything shipshape, and take off for the beach. Again, it's wonderful, beautiful. This time you last for five days. On the fifth day you are convinced that something dreadful must have happened. And you go home. You go home, and by golly, it has. The jewel is gone. You are in a state of complete collapse. Total desperation. Depressed. So you go to the neighbors, but they have no idea what has happened. They've been around all the time. Then you sit and consider the matter and you realize that since the jewel is gone, you might as well go back to the beach and enjoy yourself!

That jewel is self. Once it is gone, all the burden of looking after it, all the fears about it, all the barring of doors and windows and heart and mind is no longer necessary. You can just go and enjoy yourself while you're still in this body. After proper investigation, the frightening aspect of losing this

thing that seemed so precious turns out to be the only relief and release from worry that there is.

There are three doors to liberation: the signless, the desireless, and emptiness. If we understand impermanence, *anicca*, fully, it is called the signless liberation. If we understand suffering, *dukkha*, fully, it is the desireless liberation. If we understand no-self, *anatta*, fully, then it is the emptiness liberation. Which means we can go through any of these three doors. And to be liberated means never to have to experience an unhappy moment again. It also means something else: it means we are no longer creating *kamma*. A person who has been completely liberated still acts, still thinks, still speaks and still looks to all intents and purposes like anybody else, but that person has lost the idea that I am thinking, I am speaking, I am acting. *Kamma* is no longer being made because there is just the thought, just the speech, just the action. There is the experience but no experiencer. And because no *kamma* is being made any longer, there is no rebirth. That is full enlightenment.

In this tradition, three stages of enlightenment have been classified before one comes to the fourth stage, full enlightenment. The first stage, the one we can concern ourselves with—at least theoretically—is called *sotapanna*. Stream-enterer. It means a person who has seen Nibbana once and has thereby entered the stream. That person cannot be deterred from the Path any more. If the insight is strong, there may be only one more life-time. If the insight is weak, it can be seven more life-times. Having seen Nibbana for oneself once, one loses some of the difficulties one had before. The most drastic hindrance that one loses is the idea that this person we call "I" is a separate entity. The wrong view of self is lost. But that doesn't mean that a *sotapanna* is constantly aware of no-self. The wrong view is lost. But the right view has to be reinforced again and again and experienced again and again through that reinforcement.

Such a person no longer has any great interest, and certainly no belief, in rites and rituals. They may still be performed because they are traditional or that are customary, but such a person no longer believes they can bring about any kind of liberation (if they ever believed that before). And then a very interesting thing is lost: skeptical doubt. Skeptical doubt is lost because one has seen for oneself that what the Buddha taught was actually so. Until that time skeptical doubt will have to arise again and again because one can easily think: "Well, maybe. Maybe it's so, but how can I be sure?" One can only be sure through one's own experience. Then, of course, there is no skeptical doubt left because one has seen exactly that which has been described, and having seen it, one's own heart and mind gives an understanding which makes it possible to see everything else.

Dhamma must have as its base the understanding that there is no special entity. There is continuity, but there is no special entity. And that continuity is what makes it so difficult for us to see that there really isn't anybody inside the body making things happen. Things are happening anyway. So the first instance of having seen a glimpse of freedom, called stream-

entry, makes changes within us. It certainly does not uproot greed and hate—in fact, they are not even mentioned. But through the greater understanding such a person has, the greed and the hate lessen. They are not as strong anymore, and they do not manifest in gross ways, but do remain in subtle ways.

The next stages are the once-returner, then the non-returner, then the arahat. Once-returner, one more life in the five-sense world. Non-returner, no human life necessary, and arahat, fully enlightened. Sensual desire and hate only go with non-returners, and complete conceit of self, only with arahat.

So we can be quite accepting of the fact that since we are not arahats, we still have greed and hate. It isn't a matter of blaming oneself for having them: it's a matter of understanding where these come from. They come from the delusion of me. I want to protect this jewel which is me. That is how they arise. But with the continued practice of meditation, the mind can become clearer and clearer. It finally understands. And when it does understand, it can see transcendental reality. Even if seen for one thought-moment, the experience is of great impact and makes a marked change in our lives.

## Chapter 6

# No-self or Not-self by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

One of the first stumbling blocks that Westerners often encounter when they learn about Buddhism is the teaching on anatta, often translated as no-self. This teaching is a stumbling block for two reasons. First, the idea of there being no self doesn't fit well with other Buddhist teachings, such as the doctrine of kamma and rebirth: If there's no self, what experiences the results of kamma and takes rebirth? Second, it doesn't fit well with our own Judeo-Christian background, which assumes the existence of an eternal soul or self as a basic presupposition: If there's no self, what's the purpose of a spiritual life? Many books try to answer these questions, but if you look at the Pali Canon—the earliest extant record of the Buddha's teachings – you won't find them addressed at all. In fact, the one place where the Buddha was asked point-blank whether or not there was a self, he refused to answer. When later asked why, he said that to hold either that there is a self or that there is no self is to fall into extreme forms of wrong view that make the path of Buddhist practice impossible. Thus the question should be put aside. To understand what his silence on this question says about the meaning of anatta, we first have to look at his teachings on how questions should be asked and answered, and how to interpret his answers.

The Buddha divided all questions into four classes: those that deserve a categorical (straight yes or no) answer; those that deserve an analytical answer, defining and qualifying the terms of the question; those that deserve a counter-question, putting the ball back in the questioner's court; and those that deserve to be put aside. The last class of question consists of those that don't lead to the end of suffering and stress. The first duty of a teacher, when asked a question, is to figure out which class the question belongs to, and then to respond in the appropriate way. You don't, for example, say yes or no to a question that should be put aside. If you are the person asking the question and you get an answer, you should then determine how far the

answer should be interpreted. The Buddha said that there are two types of people who misrepresent him: those who draw inferences from statements that shouldn't have inferences drawn from them, and those who don't draw inferences from those that should.

These are the basic ground rules for interpreting the Buddha's teachings, but if we look at the way most writers treat the anatta doctrine, we find these ground rules ignored. Some writers try to qualify the no-self interpretation by saying that the Buddha denied the existence of an eternal self or a separate self, but this is to give an analytical answer to a question that the Buddha showed should be put aside. Others try to draw inferences from the few statements in the discourse that seem to imply that there is no self, but it seems safe to assume that if one forces those statements to give an answer to a question that should be put aside, one is drawing inferences where they shouldn't be drawn.

So, instead of answering "no" to the question of whether or not there is a self—interconnected or separate, eternal or not—the Buddha felt that the question was misguided to begin with. Why? No matter how you define the line between "self" and "other," the notion of self involves an element of self-identification and clinging, and thus suffering and stress. This holds as much for an interconnected self, which recognizes no "other," as it does for a separate self. If one identifies with all of nature, one is pained by every felled tree. It also holds for an entirely "other" universe, in which the sense of alienation and futility would become so debilitating as to make the quest for happiness—one's own or that of others—impossible. For these reasons, the Buddha advised paying no attention to such questions as "Do I exist?" or "Don't I exist?" for however you answer them, they lead to suffering and stress.

To avoid the suffering implicit in questions of "self" and "other," he offered an alternative way of dividing up experience: the four Noble Truths of stress, its cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. Rather than viewing these truths as pertaining to self or other, he said, one should recognize them simply for what they are, in and of themselves, as they are directly experienced, and then perform the duty appropriate to each. Stress should be comprehended, its cause abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed. These duties form the context in which the anatta doctrine is best understood. If you develop the path of virtue, concentration, and discernment to a state of calm well-being and use that calm state to look at experience in terms of the Noble Truths, the questions that occur to the mind are not "Is there a self? What is my self?" but rather "Am I suffering stress because I'm holding onto this particular phenomenon? Is it really me, myself, or mine? If it's stressful but not really me or mine, why hold on?" These last questions merit straightforward answers, as they then help you to comprehend stress and to chip away at the attachment and clinging—the residual sense of self-identification—that cause it, until ultimately all traces of self-identification are gone and all that's left is limitless freedom.

In this sense, the anatta teaching is not a doctrine of no-self, but a not-self strategy for shedding suffering by letting go of its cause, leading to the highest, undying happiness. At that point, questions of self, no-self, and not-self fall aside. Once there's the experience of such total freedom, where would there be any concern about what's experiencing it, or whether or not it's a self?



## **Part III**

# **The Mind Like Fire Unbound**



*The Mind Like Fire Unbound:  
An Image in the Early Buddhist Discourses*

by

Thanissaro Bhikkhu  
(Geoffrey DeGraff)

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Very well then, my friend, I will give you an analogy; for there are cases where it is through the use of an analogy that intelligent people can understand the meaning of what is being said.

## Abbreviations

### Vedic Texts:

AV .....	Atharva Veda
BAU .....	Brhadaranyaka Upanisad
ChU .....	Chandogya Upanisad
KathU .....	Katha Upanisad
KauU .....	Kausitaki Upanisad
MaiU .....	Maitri Upanisad
RV .....	Rg Veda
SvU .....	Svetasvatara Upanisad

### Pali Buddhist Texts:

A .....	Anguttara Nikaya
D .....	Digha Nikaya
Iti .....	Itivuttaka
Khp .....	Khuddaka Patha
M .....	Majjhima Nikaya
Mv .....	Mahavagga
S .....	Samyutta Nikaya
Sn .....	Sutta Nipata
Thag .....	Theragatha
Thig .....	Therigatha
Ud .....	Udana

References to D, Iti, Khp, M are to discourse (sutta). The reference to Mv is to chapter, section, and sub-section. References to other Pali texts are to section (samyutta, nipata or vagga) and discourse.

All translations are the author's own. Those from the Pali Canon are from the Royal Thai Edition (Bangkok: Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya, 1982).

Terms marked in the text with an asterisk (\*) are explained in the End Notes.

# Preface

To study ancient texts is like visiting a foreign city: Time and inclination determine whether you want a quick, pre-packaged tour of the highlights, a less structured opportunity for personal exploration, or both. This book on the connotations of the words *nibbana* (nirvana) and *upadana* in the early Buddhist texts is organized on the assumption that both approaches to the topic have their merits, and so it consists of two separate but related parts. Part I, The Abstract, is the quick tour—a brief survey to highlight the main points of the argument. Part II, The Essay, is a chance to make friends with the natives, soak up the local atmosphere, and gain your own insights. It takes a more oblique approach to the argument, letting the texts themselves point the way with a minimum of interference, so that you may explore and ponder them at leisure. Part I is for those who need their bearings and who might get impatient with the seeming indirection of Part II; Part II is for those who are interested in contemplating the nuances, the tangential connections, and the sense of context that usually get lost in a more structured approach.

Either part may be read on its own, but I would like to recommend that anyone seriously interested in the Buddha's teachings take the time to read reflectively the translations that form the main body of Part II. People in the West, even committed Buddhists, are often remarkably ignorant of the Buddha's original teachings as presented in the early texts. Much of what they know has been filtered for them, at second or third hand, without their realizing what was added or lost in the filtration. Although the quotations in Part II, by their sheer length and numbers, may at times seem like overkill, they are important for the context they give to the teachings. Once the teachings have context, you can have a surer sense of what is true Buddha Dhamma and what are filtration products.

This book has been many years in preparation. It began from a casual remark made one evening by my meditation teacher—Phra Ajaan Fuang Jotiko—to the effect that the mind released is like fire that has gone out: The fire is not annihilated, he said, but is still there, diffused in the air; it simply no longer latches on to any fuel. This remark gave me food for thought for a long time afterwards. When I came to learn Pali, my first interest was to explore the early texts to learn what views they contained about the workings of fire and how these influenced the meaning of

nibbana—literally, ‘extinguishing’—as a name for the Buddhist goal. The result of my research is this book.

Many people have helped in this project, directly or indirectly, and I would like to acknowledge my debts to them. First of all, Phra Ajaan Fuang Jotiko, in addition to being the original inspiration for the research, provided me with the training that has formed the basis for many of the insights presented here. The example of his life and teachings was what originally convinced me of Buddhism’s worth. A. K. Warder’s excellent Introduction to Pali made learning Pali a joy. Marcia Colish and J. D. Lewis, two of my professors at Oberlin College, taught me—with no small amount of patience—how to read and interpret ancient texts. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Donald Swearer, John Bullitt, Margaret Dornish, Robert Ebert, Michael Grossi, Lawrence Howard, and Doris Weir all read earlier incarnations of the manuscript and made valuable suggestions for improvements. I, of course, am responsible for any mistakes that may still remain.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this book in gratitude to my father, Henry Lewis DeGraff, and to the memory of my mother, Esther Penny Boucher DeGraff, who taught me the value of truth, inner beauty, and goodness from an early age.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu  
(Geoffrey DeGraff)  
Metta Forest Monastery  
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# Part One: The Abstract

“Released...with unrestricted awareness.”

According to the Pali Canon—the earliest record of the Buddha’s teachings now extant—nothing outside of the realm of differentiation can be properly described by the conventions of language. In one mode of analysis, this realm is divided into the six senses (counting the mind as the sixth) and their objects; in another, it is divided into the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, thought processes, and consciousness. The two modes cover mutually equivalent areas. However, one passage in the Canon points to another realm—where the six senses and their objects cease—which can be experienced although not otherwise described, even in terms of existing, not existing, both, or neither. The attainment of the Buddhist goal belongs to this second realm, and this of course raised problems for the Buddha in how to teach and describe the goal.

He solved the problem by illustrating the goal with similes and metaphors. The best-known metaphor for the goal is the name nibbana (nirvana), which means the extinguishing of a fire. Attempts to work out the implications of this metaphor have all too often taken it out of context. Some writers, drawing on modern, every-day notions of fire, come to the conclusion that nibbana implies extinction, inasmuch as we feel that a fire goes out of existence when extinguished. Others, however, note that the Vedas—ancient Indian religious texts that predate Buddhism by many thousands of years—describe fire as immortal: Even when extinguished it simply goes into hiding, in a latent, diffused state, only to be reborn when a new fire is lit. These writers then assume that the Buddha accepted the Vedic theory in its entirety, and so maintain that nibbana implies eternal existence.

The weakness of both these interpretations is that they do not take into account the way the Pali Canon describes (1) the workings of fire, (2) the limits beyond which no phenomenon may be described, and (3) the precise implications that the Buddha himself drew from his metaphor in light of (1) and (2). The purpose of this essay is to place this metaphor in its original context, so as to show what it was and was not meant to imply.

Any discussion of the way the Buddha used the term nibbana must begin with the distinction that there are two levels of nibbana (or, to use the

original terminology, two nibbana properties). The first is the nibbana experienced by a person who has attained the goal and is still alive. This is described metaphorically as the extinguishing of passion, aversion, and delusion. The second is the nibbana after death. The simile for these two states is the distinction between a fire that has gone out but whose embers are still warm, and one so totally out that its embers are cold. The Buddha used the views of fire current in his day in somewhat different ways when discussing these two levels of nibbana, and so we must consider them separately.

To understand the implications of nibbana in the present life, it is necessary to know something of the way in which fire is described in the Pali Canon. There, fire is said to be caused by the excitation or agitation of the heat property. To continue burning, it must have sustenance (*upadana*). Its relationship to its sustenance is one of clinging, dependence, and entrapment. When it goes out, the heat property is no longer agitated, and the fire is said to be freed. Thus the metaphor of nibbana in this case would have implications of calming together with release from dependencies, attachments, and bondage. This in turn suggests that of all the attempts to describe the etymology of the word nibbana, the closest is the one Buddhaghosa proposed in *The Path of Purification: Un- (nir) + binding (vana): Unbinding*.

To understand further what is meant by the unbinding of the mind, it is also important to know that the word *upadana*—the sustenance for the fire—also means clinging, and that according to the Buddha the mind has four forms of clinging that keep it in bondage: clinging to sensuality, to views, to precepts and practices, and to doctrines of the self. In each case, the clinging is the passion and desire the mind feels for these things. To overcome this clinging, then, the mind must see not only the drawbacks of these four objects of clinging, but, more importantly, the drawbacks of the act of passion and desire itself.

The mind does this by following a threefold training: virtue, concentration, and discernment. Virtue provides the joy and freedom from remorse that are essential for concentration. Concentration provides an internal basis of pleasure, rapture, equanimity, and singleness of mind that are not dependent on sensual objects, so that discernment can have the strength and stability it needs to cut through the mind's clingings. Discernment functions by viewing these clingings as part of a causal chain: seeing their origin, their passing away, their allure, the drawbacks of their results, and, finally, emancipation from them.

Although the Canon reports cases where individuals cut through all four forms of clinging at the same time, the more common pattern is for discernment first to cut through sensual clinging by focusing on the inconstancy and stressfulness of all sensory objects and on the worthlessness of any passion or desire directed to them. Thus freed, the mind can turn its discernment inward in a similar way to cut through its clinging to the practice of concentration itself, as well as to views in general and notions of 'self'

in particular. Once it no longer views experience in terms of self, the entire self/not-self dichotomy collapses.

The mind at this point attains Deathlessness, although there is no sense of 'I' in the attainment. There is simply the realization, 'There is this.' From this point onward the mind experiences mental and physical phenomena with a sense of being dissociated from them. One simile for this state is that of a hide removed from the carcass of a cow: Even if the hide is then placed back on the cow, one cannot say that it is attached as before, because the connective tissues that once held the hide to the carcass—in other words, passion and desire—have all been cut (by the knife of discernment). The person who has attained the goal—called a Tathagata in some contexts, an arahant in others—thus lives out the remainder of his/her life in the world, but independent of it.

Death as experienced by a Tathagata is described simply as, 'All this, no longer being relished, grows cold right here.' All attempts to describe the experience of nibbana or the state of the Tathagata after death—as existing, not existing, both, or neither—are refuted by the Buddha. To explain his point, he again makes use of the metaphor of the extinguished fire, although here he draws on the Vedic view of latent fire as modified by Buddhist notions of what does and does not lie within the realm of valid description.

To describe the state of the Tathagata's mind, there has to be a way of knowing what his/her consciousness is dependent on. Here we must remember that, according to the texts, a meditator may develop intuitive powers through the practice of concentration enabling him/her to know the state of another person's mind, or the destination of that person after death. To do so, though, that person's consciousness must be dwelling on a particular object, for it is only through knowledge of the object that the state of the mind can be known. With ordinary people this is no problem, for ordinary consciousness is always dependent on one object or another, but with Tathagatas this is impossible, for their consciousness is totally independent. Because terms such as existing, not existing, both, or neither, apply only to what may be measured against a criterion of knowing, they cannot apply to the Tathagata.

The Buddha borrows two points from the Vedic notion of fire to illustrate this point. Even if one wants to assume that fire still exists after being extinguished, it is (1) so subtle that it cannot be perceived, and (2) so diffuse that it cannot be said to go to any one place or in any particular direction. Just as notions of going east, west, north, or south do not apply to an extinguished fire, notions of existing and so forth do not apply to the Tathagata after death.

As for the question of how nibbana is experienced after death, the Buddha says that there is no limit in that experience by which it could be described. The word 'limit' here is the important one. In one of the ancient Vedic myths of creation, the universe starts when a limit appears that separates male from female, sky from earth. Thus the implication of the Bud-

dha's statement is that the experience of nibbana is so free from even the most basic notions making up the universe that it lies beyond description. This implication is borne out by other passages stating that there is nothing in that experience of the known universe—earth, water, wind, fire, sun, moon, darkness, coming, going, or stasis—at all.

Thus, when viewed in light of the way the Pali Canon describes the workings of fire and uses fire imagery to describe the workings of the mind, it is clear that the word nibbana is primarily meant to convey notions of freedom: freedom in the present life from agitation, dependency, and clinging; and freedom after death from even the most basic concepts or limitations—such as existence, non-existence, both, or neither—that make up the describable universe.

Here, Hemaka,  
 with regard to things that are dear  
 seen, heard, sensed, and cognized,  
 there is: the dispelling of desire and passion,  
 the undying state of Unbinding.  
 Those knowing this, mindful,  
 fully extinguished/unbound  
 in the here and now,  
 are forever calmed  
 have gone beyond  
 entanglement in the world.

Sn V.9

Freed, dissociated, and released from ten things, the Tathagata dwells with unrestricted awareness, Vahuna. Which ten? Freed, dissociated, and released from form... feeling... perception... processes... consciousness... birth... aging... death... stress\*... defilement, he dwells with unrestricted awareness. Just as a red, blue, or white lotus born in the water and growing in the water, rises up above the water and stands with no water adhering to it, in the same way the Tathagata—freed, dissociated, and released from these ten things—dwells with unrestricted awareness.

A X.81

Just as the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, even so does this doctrine and discipline have but one taste: the taste of release.

A VIII.19

# Part Two: The Essay

## Introduction

“The wise, they go out like this flame.”

The discourses of the Pali Canon make a frequent analogy between the workings of fire and those of the mind: The mind unawakened to the supreme goal is like a burning fire; the awakened mind, like a fire gone out. The analogy is made both indirectly and directly: indirectly in the use of terminology borrowed from the physics of fire to describe mental events (the word *nibbana* being the best-known example); directly in any number of metaphors:

I have heard that on one occasion, when the Master was newly Awakened—living at Uruvela by the banks of the Nerajara River in the shade of the Bodhi tree, the tree of Awakening—he sat in the shade of the Bodhi tree for seven days in one session, sensitive to the bliss of release. At the end of seven days, after emerging from that concentration, he surveyed the world with the eye of an Awakened One. As he did so, he saw living beings burning with the many fevers and aflame with the many fires born of passion, aversion, and delusion. . . .

Ud III.10

The All is aflame. Which All is aflame? The eye is aflame. Forms are aflame. Visual consciousness is aflame. Visual contact is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on visual contact, experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain, that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I tell you, with birth, aging, and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs.

The ear is aflame. Sounds are aflame. . . .

The nose is aflame. Aromas are aflame. . . .

The tongue is aflame. Flavors are aflame. . . .

The body is aflame. Tactile sensations are aflame. . . .

The intellect is aflame. Ideas are aflame. Mental consciousness is aflame. Mental contact is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on mental contact, experienced as pleasure, pain or neither pleasure nor pain, that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I tell you, with birth, aging, and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs.

S XXXV.28

The fire of passion burns in a man  
excited with sensual desires;  
the fire of aversion, in an angry man taking life;  
the fire of delusion, in a bewildered man ignorant of the Noble  
Teaching.

Not understanding these fires, people —fond of self-identity—  
unreleased from the shackles of death, swell the ranks of purga-  
tory,  
the wombs of common animals, demons, the realm of the hungry  
shades.

While those who, day and night, follow the teachings of the One  
Rightly Self-awakened,  
put out the fire of passion,  
constantly perceiving the repulsive.  
They, the highest men, put out the fire of aversion with good will,  
And the fire of delusion with the discernment leading to pene-  
tration.

They, the masterful, by night and day, having put out [the fires],  
Go totally out, without remainder,  
having totally comprehended stress, without remainder.

They, the wise, with an attainer-of-wisdom's noble vision  
with regard to right knowing, fully knowing the passing away of  
birth,  
return to no further becoming.\*

Iti 93

Not only is the extinguishing of passion, aversion, and delusion com-  
pared to the extinguishing of a fire, but so is the passing away of a person  
in whom they are extinguished.

Ended the old, there is no new taking birth:  
 Dispassioned their minds toward future becoming,  
 they, with no seed, no desire for growth,  
 the wise, they go out like this flame.

Khp 6

Sister Sumedha:

This, without aging, this without death,  
 this, the unaging, undying state with no sorrow hostility bonds  
 with no burning. . . .

Thig XVI.1

When the Master was totally gone out—simultaneously with the total  
 going out—Ven. Anuruddha uttered these stanzas:

He had no in-and-out breathing,  
 the one who was Such\*, the firm-minded one.  
 imperturbable and bent on peace: the sage completing his span.  
 With heart unbowed he endured the pain.  
 Like a flame's going out was the liberation of awareness.

D 16

The aim of this essay is to explore the implications of this imagery—to give a sense of what it was and was not intended to convey—by first making reference to the views concerning the physics of fire current in the Buddha's time. This, short of an actual experience of Awakening—something no book can provide—seems the most natural approach for drawing the proper inferences from this imagery. Otherwise, we are bound to interpret it in terms of our own views of how fire works, a mistake as misleading and anachronistic as that of painting a picture of the Buddha dressed as Albert Einstein or Isaac Newton.

The presentation here is more like a photomosaic than an exposition. Quotations have been aligned and overlapped so as to reflect and expand on one another. Comments have intentionally been kept to a bare minimum, so as to allow the quotations to speak for themselves. The weakness of this approach is that it covers several fronts at once and can make its points only incrementally. Its strength lies in its cumulative effect: revealing—beneath apparently disparate teachings—unifying patterns that might go unnoticed in a more linear narrative, much as satellite pictures can reveal buried archaeological remains that would go unnoticed by a person standing on the ground.

One of the noteworthy features of the Pali Canon is that common patterns of thought and imagery shape the extemporaneous words of a wide variety of people reported within it. Here we will hear the voices not only of the Buddha—the speaker in all passages from the Canon where none is identified—but also of lay people such as Citta, monks such as Vens. Ananda and MahaKaccayana, and nuns such as Sisters Nanda, Sumedha, and Patacara. Each has his or her own style of expression, both in poetry and in prose, but they all speak from a similarity of background and experience that makes it possible to view their message as a single whole, in structure as well as content.

The structure we are most concerned with here centers on the image of extinguished fire and its implications for the word 'nibbana' (nirvana) and related concepts. Used with reference to fire, nibbana means 'being out' or 'going out.' Used with reference to the mind, it refers to the final goal and to the goal's attainment. Our essay into the cluster of meanings surrounding this word is meant to read like a journey of exploration, but a brief preview will help us keep track both of where we are in relation to the map provided by the Abstract, and of where we are going.

The first chapter surveys ancient Vedic ideas of fire as subsisting in a diffused state even when extinguished. It then shows how the Buddha took an original approach to those ideas to illustrate the concept of nibbana after death as referring not to eternal existence, but rather to absolute freedom from all constraints of time, space, and being.

The remaining three chapters deal with the concept of nibbana in the present life. Chapter II introduces a cluster of Buddhist ideas concerning the nature of burning fire—as agitated, clinging, bound, and dependent—and draws out the implications that these ideas have for what happens when a fire goes out and, in parallel fashion, when the mind attains nibbana. In particular, it concludes that of all the etymologies traditionally offered for nibbana, Buddhaghosa's 'unbinding' is probably closest to the original connotations of the term.

Chapter III takes up the notion of clinging as it applies to the mind—as sensuality, views, precepts and practices, and doctrines of the self—to show in detail what is loosened in the mind's unbinding, whereas Chapter IV shows how, by detailing the way in which the practice of virtue, concentration, and discernment frees the mind from its fetters. This final chapter culminates in an array of passages from the texts that recapitulate the pattern of fire-and-freedom imagery covered in the preceding discussion. If read reflectively, they also serve as reminders that their perspectives on the concept of nibbana can best be connected only in light of that pattern.

We should note at the outset, though, that nibbana is only one of the Buddhist goal's many names. One section of the Canon lists 33, and the composite impression they convey is worth bearing in mind:

The unfashioned, the end,  
the effluent-less\*, the true, the beyond,

the subtle, the very-hard-to-see,  
the ageless, permanence, the undecaying,  
the featureless, non-differentiation,  
peace, the deathless,  
the exquisite, bliss, solace,  
the exhaustion of craving,  
the wonderful, the marvelous,  
the secure, security,  
nibbana,  
the unafflicted, the passionless, the pure,  
release, non-attachment,  
the island, shelter, harbor, refuge,  
the ultimate.

S XLIII.1-44

## Chapter I

“This fire that has gone out...  
in which direction from here has it gone?”

The discourses report two instances where Brahmins asked the Buddha about the nature of the goal he taught, and he responded with the analogy of the extinguished fire. There is every reason to believe that, in choosing this analogy, he was referring to a concept of fire familiar to his listeners, and, as they had been educated in the Vedic tradition, that he probably had the Vedic concept of fire in mind. This, of course, is not to say that he himself adhered to the Vedic concept or that he was referring to it in all its details. He was simply drawing on a particular aspect of fire as seen in the Vedas so that his listeners could have a familiar reference point for making sense of what he was saying.

Now, although the Vedic texts contain several different theories concerning the physics of fire, there is at least one basic point on which they agree: Fire, even when not manifest, continues to exist in a latent form. The Vedic view of all physical phenomena is that they are the manifestation of pre-existent potencies inherent in nature. Each type of phenomenon has its corresponding potency, which has both personal and impersonal characteristics: as a god and as the powers he wields. In the case of fire, both the god and the phenomenon are called Agni:

Agni, who is generated, being produced (churned) by men  
through the agency of sahas.

RV 6,48,5

‘Sahas’ here is the potency, the power of subjugation, wielded by Agni himself. Jan Gonda, in discussing this passage, comments, ‘The underlying theory must have been... that a man and his physical strength are by no means able to produce a god or potency of Agni’s rank. Only the cooperation or conjunction of that special principle which seems to have been central in the descriptions of Agni’s character, his power of subjugation, his overwhelming power, can lead to the result desired, the appearance of sparks and the generation of fire.’ Further, ‘a divine being like Agni was in a way already pre-existent when being generated by a pair of kindling sticks’ (1957, pp. 22-3). As fire burns, Agni ‘continues entering’ into the fire (AV 4,39,9). Scattered in many places—as many separate fires—he is nevertheless one and the same thing (RV 3,55). Other fires are attached to him as branches to a tree (RV 8,19).

When fire is extinguished, Agni and his powers do not pass out of existence. Instead, they go into hiding. This point is expressed in a myth, mentioned frequently in the Vedic texts, of Agni’s trying to hide himself from the other gods in places where he thought they would never perceive

him. In the version told in RV 10,51, the gods finally find the hidden Agni as an embryo in the water.

[Addressed to Agni]: Great was the membrane and firm, that enveloped you when you entered the waters. . . . We searched for you in various places, O Agni, knower of creatures, when you had entered into the waters and plants.

RV 10,51

As Chauncey Blair notes, 'The concept of Agni in the waters does not imply destruction of Agni. He is merely a hidden, a potential Agni, and no less capable of powerful action' (1961, p. 103).

The implications of Agni's being an embryo are best understood in light of the theories of biological generation held in ancient India:

The husband, after having entered his wife, becomes an embryo and is born again of her.

Laws of Manu, 9,8

Just as ancient Indians saw an underlying identity connecting a father and his offspring, so too did they perceive a single identity underlying the manifest and embryonic forms of fire. In this way, Agni, repeatedly reborn, was seen as immortal; and in fact, the Vedas attribute immortality to him more frequently than to any other of the gods.

To you, immortal! When you spring to life, all the gods sing for joy. . . . By your powers they were made immortal. . . . [Agni], who extended himself over all the worlds, is the protector of immortality.

RV 6,7

Not only immortal, but also omnipresent: Agni in his manifest form is present in all three levels of the cosmos—heaven, air, and earth—as sun, lightning, and flame-fire. As for his latent presence, he states in the myth of his hiding, 'my bodies entered various places'; a survey of the Vedas reveals a wide variety of places where his embryos may be found. Some of them—such as stone, wood, plants, and kindling sticks—relate directly to the means by which fire is kindled and fueled. Others relate more to fire-like qualities and powers, such as brilliance and vitality, present in water, plants, animals, and all beings. In the final analysis, Agni fills the entire universe as the latent embryo of growth and vitality. As Raimundo Panikkar writes, 'Agni. . . is one of the most comprehensive symbols of the reality that is all-encompassing' (1977, p.325).

Agni pervades and decks the heaven and earth... his forms are scattered everywhere.

RV 10,80

He [Agni] who is the embryo of waters, embryo of woods, embryo of all things that move and do not move.

RV 1,70,2

In plants and herbs, in all existent beings, I [Agni] have deposited the embryo of increase. I have engendered all progeny on earth, and sons in women hereafter.

RV 10,183,3

You [Agni] have filled earth, heaven, and the air between, and follow the whole cosmos like a shadow.

RV 1,73,8

We call upon the sage with holy verses, Agni Vaisvanara the ever-beaming, who has surpassed both heaven and earth in greatness. He is a god below, a god above us.

RV 10,88,14.

This view that Agni/fire in a latent state is immortal and omnipresent occurs also in the Upanisads that were composed circa 850–750 B.C. and later accepted into the Vedic Canon. The authors of these texts use this view to illustrate, by way of analogy, the doctrines of a unitary identity immanent in all things, and of the immortality of the soul in spite of apparent death.

Now, the light that shines higher than this heaven, on the backs of all, on the backs of everything, in the highest worlds, than which there are no higher—truly that is the same as the light here within a person. There is this hearing of it—when one closes one's ears and hears a sound, a roar, as of a fire blazing.

ChU 3.13.7–8

Truly, this Brahma [the god that the Upanisads say is immanent in the cosmos] shines when fire blazes, and disappears when it

does not blaze. Its brilliance goes to the sun; its vital breath to the wind.

This Brahma shines when the sun is seen, and disappears when it is not seen. Its brilliance goes to the moon, its vital breath to the wind. (Similarly for moon and lightning.)

Truly, all these divinities, having entered into wind, do not perish when they die (disappear) in the wind; indeed, from there they come forth again.

KauU 2.12

In the major non-canonical Upanisads—whose period of composition is believed to overlap with the time of the Buddha—the analogy is even more explicit:

As the one fire has entered the world  
and becomes corresponding in form to every form,  
so the Inner Soul of all things  
corresponds in form to every form, and yet is outside.

KathU 2.2.9

As the material form of fire,  
when latent in its source, is not perceived—  
and yet its subtle form is not destroyed,  
but may be seized again in its fuel-source—  
so truly both (the universal Brahma and the individual Soul)  
are (to be seized) in the body by means of (the meditation word)  
AUM.

Making one's body the lower friction stick, and AUM the upper  
stick,  
practicing the drill of meditative absorption,  
one may see the god, hidden as it were.

SvU 1.13–14

One interesting development in this stratum of the Vedic literature is the positive sense in which it comes to regard extinguished fire. The Vedic hymns and earlier Upanisads saw burning fire as a positive force, the essence of life and vitality. These texts, though, see the tranquillity and inactivity of the extinguished fire as an ideal image for the soul's desired destination.

To that God, illumined by his own intellect,  
do I, desiring liberation, resort for refuge— to him without parts,  
without activity, tranquil, impeccable, spotless,  
the highest bridge to the deathless,  
like a fire with fuel consumed.

SvU 6.18–19

As fire through loss of fuel grows still (extinguished) in its own  
source,  
so thought by loss of activeness grows still in its own source. . .  
For by tranquillity of thought  
one destroys good and evil karma.  
With tranquil soul, stayed on the Soul,  
one enjoys unending ease.

MaiU 6.34

Whether this re-evaluation of the image of fire—seeing its extinguishing as preferable to its burning—predated the founding of Buddhism, was influenced by it, or simply paralleled it, no one can say for sure, as there are no firm dates for any of the Upanisads. At any rate, in both stages of the Vedic attitude toward fire, the thought of a fire going out carried no connotations of going out of existence at all. Instead, it implied a return to an omnipresent, immortal state. This has led some scholars to assume that, in using the image of an extinguished fire to illustrate the goal he taught, the Buddha was simply adopting the Vedic position wholesale and meant it to carry the same implications as the last quotation above: a pleasant eternal existence for a tranquil soul.

But when we look at how the Buddha actually used the image of extinguished fire in his teachings, we find that he approached the Vedic idea of latent fire from another angle entirely: If latent fire is everywhere all at once, it is nowhere in particular. If it is conceived as always present in everything, it has to be so loosely defined that it has no defining characteristics, nothing by which it might be known at all. Thus, instead of using the subsistence of latent fire as an image for immortality, he uses the diffuse, indeterminate nature of extinguished fire as understood by the Vedists to illustrate the absolute indescribability of the person who has reached the Buddhist goal.

Just as the destination of a glowing fire struck with a [blacksmith's] iron hammer,  
gradually growing calm, isn't known:  
Even so, there's no destination to describe for those who are  
rightly released  
—having crossed over the flood of sensuality's bonds –  
for those who've attained unwavering ease.

## Ud VIII.10

‘But, Venerable Gotama [the Brahmin, Aggivessana Vacchagotta, is addressing the Buddha], the monk whose mind is thus released: Where does he reappear?’

‘“Reappear,” Vaccha, doesn’t apply.’

‘In that case, Venerable Gotama, he does not reappear.’

‘“Does not reappear,” Vaccha, doesn’t apply.’

‘... both does and does not reappear.’

‘... doesn’t apply.’

‘... neither does nor does not reappear.’

‘... doesn’t apply.’...

‘At this point, Venerable Gotama, I am befuddled; at this point, confused. The modicum of clarity coming to me from your earlier conversation is now obscured.’

‘Of course you’re befuddled, Vaccha. Of course you’re confused. Deep, Vaccha, is this phenomenon, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. For those with other views, other practices, other satisfactions, other aims, other teachers, it is difficult to know. That being the case, I will now put some questions to you. Answer as you see fit. How do you construe this, Vaccha: If a fire were burning in front of you, would you know that, “This fire is burning in front of me”?’

‘... yes...’

‘And suppose someone were to ask you, Vaccha, “This fire burning in front of you, dependent on what is it burning?” Thus asked, how would you reply?’

‘... I would reply, “This fire burning in front of me is burning dependent on grass and timber as its sustenance.”’

‘If the fire burning in front of you were to go out, would you know that “This fire burning in front of me has gone out”?’

‘... yes...’

‘And suppose someone were to ask you, “This fire that has gone out in front of you, in which direction from here has it gone? East? West? North? Or south?” Thus asked, how would you reply?’

‘That doesn’t apply, Venerable Gotama. Any fire burning dependent on a sustenance of grass and timber, being unnourished—from having consumed that sustenance and not being offered any other – is classified simply as “out” (nibbuta).’

‘Even so, Vaccha, any physical form by which one describing the Tathagata would describe him: That the Tathagata has abandoned, its root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. Freed from the classification of form, Vaccha, the Tathagata is deep, boundless, hard-to-fathom, like the sea. “Reappears” doesn’t apply. “Does not reappear” doesn’t apply. “Both does and does not reappear” doesn’t apply. “Neither reappears nor does not reappear” doesn’t apply.

‘Any feeling. . . . Any perception. . . . Any mental process. . . .

‘Any act of consciousness by which one describing the Tathagata would describe him: That the Tathagata has abandoned. . . . Freed from the classification of consciousness, Vaccha, the Tathagata is deep, boundless, hard-to-fathom, like the sea.’

M 72

The person who has attained the goal is thus indescribable because he/she has abandoned all things by which he/she could be described. This point is asserted in even more thoroughgoing fashion in a pair of dialogues where two inexperienced monks who have attempted to describe the state of the Tathagata after death are cross-examined on the matter by Sariputta and the Buddha himself.

Sariputta: How do you construe this, my friend Yamaka: Do you regard form as the Tathagata?

Yamaka: No, sir.

Sariputta: Do you regard feeling as the Tathagata?

Yamaka: No, sir.

Sariputta: . . . perception. . . ?

Yamaka: No, sir.

Sariputta: . . . mental processes. . . ?

Yamaka: No, sir.

Sariputta: . . . consciousness. . . ?

Yamaka: No, sir.

Sariputta: Do you regard the Tathagata as being in form? Elsewhere than form? In feeling? Elsewhere than feeling? In perception? Elsewhere than perception? In mental processes? Elsewhere than mental processes? In consciousness? Elsewhere than consciousness?

Yamaka: No, sir.

Sariputta: Do you regard the Tathagata as form-feeling-perception-mental processes-consciousness?

Yamaka: No, sir.

Sariputta: Do you regard the Tathagata as that which is without form, without feeling, without perception, without mental processes, without consciousness?

Yamaka: No, sir.

Sariputta: And so, my friend Yamaka—when you can't pin down the Tathagata as a truth or reality even in the present life—is it proper for you to declare, 'As I understand the Teaching explained by the Master, a monk with no more mental effluents, on the break-up of the body, is annihilated, perishes, and does not exist after death'?

Yamaka: Previously, friend Sariputta, I did foolishly hold that evil supposition. But now, having heard your explanation of the Teaching, I have abandoned that evil supposition, and the Teaching has become clear.

Sariputta: Then, friend Yamaka, how would you answer if you are thus asked: A monk, a worthy one, with no more mental effluents, what is he on the break-up of the body, after death?

Yamaka: Thus asked, I would answer, 'Form... feeling... perception... mental processes... consciousness... are inconstant. That which is inconstant is stressful. That which is stressful has stopped and gone to its end.'

#### S XXII.85

The Buddha puts the same series of questions to the monk Anuradha who—knowing that the Tathagata after death could not be described in terms of existence, non-existence, both, or neither—had attempted to describe the Tathagata in other terms. After receiving the same answers as Yamaka had given Sariputta, the Buddha concludes:

'And so, Anuradha—when you can't pin down the Tathagata as a truth or reality even in the present life—is it proper for you to declare, "Friend, the Tathagata—the supreme man, the superlative man, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described otherwise than with these four positions: The Tathagata exists after death, does not exist after death, both does and does not exist after death, neither exists nor does not exist after death"?''

'No, venerable sir.'

'Very good, Anuradha. Both formerly and now, Anuradha, it is only stress that I describe, and the stopping of stress.'

Thus none of the four alternatives—reappearing/existing, not reappearing/existing, both, and neither—can apply to the Tathagata after death, because even in this lifetime there is no way of defining or identifying what the Tathagata is.

To identify a person by the contents of his or her mind—such things as feelings, perceptions, or mental processes—there would have to be a way of knowing what those contents are. In ordinary cases, the texts say, this is possible through either of two cognitive skills that a meditator can develop through the practice of meditation and that beings on higher planes of existence can also share: the ability to know where a living being is reborn after death, and the ability to know another being's thoughts.

In both skills the knowledge is made possible by the fact that the ordinary mind exists in a state of dependency on its objects. When a being is reborn, its consciousness has to become established at a certain point: This point is what a master of the first skill perceives. When the ordinary mind thinks, it needs a mental object to act as a prop or support (*arammana*) for its thoughts: This support is what a master of the second skill perceives. The mind of a person who has attained the goal, though, is free from all dependencies and so offers no means by which a master of either skill can perceive it.

Then the Master went with a large number of monks to the Black Rock on the slope of Isigili. From afar he saw Ven. Vakkali lying dead on a couch. Now at that time a smokiness, a darkness was moving to the east, moved to the west, moved to the north, the south, above, below, moved to the intermediate directions. The Master said, 'Monks, do you see that smokiness, that darkness...?'

'Yes, Lord.'

'That is Mara\*, the Evil One. He is searching for the consciousness of Vakkali the Clansman: "Where is the consciousness of Vakkali the Clansman established?" But, monks, it is through unestablished consciousness that Vakkali the Clansman has attained total nibbana.'

[The Buddha describes the meditative state of a person who has achieved the goal and is experiencing a foretaste of nibbana after death while still alive. We will discuss the nature of this meditative state below. Here, though, we are interested in how this person appears to those who would normally be able to fathom another person's mind.]

There is the case, Sandha, where for an excellent thorough-bred of a man the perception of earth with regard to earth has ceased to exist; the perception of liquid with regard to liquid. . . the perception of heat with regard to heat. . . the perception of wind with regard to wind. . . the perception of the sphere of the infinitude of space with regard to the sphere of the infinitude of space. . . the perception of the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness with regard to the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness. . . the perception of the sphere of nothingness with regard to the sphere of nothingness. . . the perception of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception with regard to the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. . . the perception of this world with regard to this world. . . the next world with regard to the next world. . . and whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect: the perception with regard even to that has ceased to exist.

Absorbed in this way, the excellent thoroughbred of a man is absorbed dependent neither on earth, liquid, heat, wind, the sphere of the infinitude of space, the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, this world, the next world; nor on whatever is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after or pondered by the intellect—and yet he is absorbed. And to this excellent thoroughbred of a man, absorbed in this way, the gods, together with Indra, the Brahmas and their chief queens, pay homage even from afar:

Homage to you, O thoroughbred man. Homage to you,  
 O superlative man—  
 of whom we have no direct knowledge even by means  
 of that with which you are absorbed.

A XI.10

Thus the mind that has attained the goal cannot be known or described from the outside because it is completely free of any dependency—any support or object inside it—by which it might be known. This point forms the context for the dialogue in which the Brahmin Upasiva asks the Buddha about the person who attains the goal.

Upasiva:  
 If he stays there, O All-around Eye  
 unaffected for many years, right there  
 would he be cooled and released?  
 Would [his] consciousness be like that?

The Buddha:

As a flame overthrown by the force of the wind  
 goes to an end that cannot be classified,  
 so the sage freed from naming (mental) activity  
 goes to an end that cannot be classified.

Upasiva:

He who has reached the end: Does he not exist,  
 or is he for eternity free from affliction?

Please, sage, declare this to me  
 as this phenomenon has been known by you.

The Buddha:

One who has reached the end has no criterion  
 by which anyone would say that for him it doesn't exist.

When all phenomena are done away with  
 All means of speaking are done away with as well.

Sn V.6

The important term in the last verse is *pamāna*: 'criterion'. It is a pregnant term, with meanings both in philosophical and in ordinary usage. In philosophical discourse, it refers to a means of knowledge or a standard used to assess the validity of an assertion or object. In the Buddha's time and later, various schools of thought specialized in discussing the nature and role of such criteria. The Maitri Upanisad contains one of their basic tenets:

Because of its precision, this [the course of the sun through the zodiac] is the criterion for time. For without a criterion, there is no ascertaining the things to be assessed.

MaiU 6.14

Thus when a mind has abandoned all phenomena, there is no means or criterion by which anyone else could know or say anything about it. This much is obvious. But the verse also seems to be saying that the goal is indescribable from the inside—for the person experiencing it—as well. First, the verse is in response to Upasiva's inquiry into the goal as the Buddha has known it. Secondly, the line, 'for him it doesn't exist,' can mean not only that the person experiencing the goal offers no criteria to the outside by which anyone else might describe him/her, but also that the experience offers no criteria from the inside for describing it either. And as we have already noted, the outside criteria by which a person might be described are determined precisely by what is there inside the person's mind. Thus, for the person experiencing the goal, there would not even be any means of knowing whether or not there was a person having the experience. There would simply be the experience in and of itself.

This is where the ordinary meaning of *pamāna*—as limit or measurement—comes in. This meaning goes back to the Vedic hymns. There, the act of measuring is seen as an essential part of the process of the creation (or ‘building,’ like a house) of the cosmos. In one Rg Vedic hymn (X.129), for example, the creation of mind is followed by the appearance of a horizontal limit or measuring line separating male from female (heaven from earth). From this line, the rest of the cosmos is laid out.

So to say that no criterion/measurement/limit exists for the person experiencing the goal means that the person’s experience is totally free of all the most elementary perceptions and distinctions that underlie our knowledge of the cosmos. And the word ‘free’—one of the few the Buddha uses in a straightforward way to describe the mind that has attained the goal—thus carries two meanings: free from dependency, as we have already seen; and free from limitations, even of the most abstruse and subtlest sort.

This second reading of the verse—dealing with the limitlessness and indescribability of the goal for the person experiencing it—is supported by a number of other passages in the Pali Canon referring explicitly to the inner experience of the goal.

Consciousness without feature, without end luminous all  
around:

Here water, earth, fire, and wind have no footing.

Here long and short coarse and fine fair and foul  
name and form are all brought to an end.

With the stopping of [the activity of] consciousness, each is here  
brought to an end.

D 11

There is, monks, that sphere where there is neither earth nor water, nor fire nor wind, nor sphere of the infinitude of space, nor sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, nor sphere of nothingness, nor sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, nor this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor stasis, nor passing away, nor arising: without stance, without foundation, without support (mental object). This, just this, is the end of stress.

Ud VIII.1

Where water, earth, fire, and wind have no footing:

There the stars do not shine, the sun is not visible,  
the moon does not appear, darkness is not found.

And when a sage, a worthy one, through sagacity  
has known [this] for himself, then from form and formless,  
from pleasure and pain, he is freed.

Consciousness without feature, without end, luminous all around, does not partake of the solidity of earth, the liquidity of water, the radiance of fire, the windiness of wind, the divinity of devas (and so on through a list of the various levels of godhood to) the allness of the All.

The phrase ‘does not partake of the allness of the All’ can best be understood with reference to the following three passages:

What is the All? Simply the eye and forms, ear and sounds, nose and aromas, tongue and flavors, body and tactile sensations, intellect and ideas. This, monks, is termed the All. Anyone who would say, ‘Repudiating this All, I will describe another,’ if questioned on what exactly might be the grounds for his statement, would be unable to explain, and furthermore, would be put to grief. Why? Because it lies beyond range.

S XXXV.23

If the six senses and their objects—sometimes called the six spheres of contact—constitute the All, is there anything beyond the All?

MahaKotthita: With the remainderless stopping and fading of the six spheres of contact [vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and intellection] is it the case that there is anything else?

Sariputta: Do not say that, my friend.

MahaKotthita: With the remainderless stopping and fading of the six spheres of contact, is it the case that there is not anything else?

Sariputta: Do not say that, my friend.

MahaKotthita: . . . is it the case that there both is and is not anything else?

Sariputta: Do not say that, my friend.

MahaKotthita: . . . is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?

Sariputta: Do not say that, my friend.

MahaKotthita: Being asked. . . if there is anything else, you say, ‘Do not say that, my friend’. Being asked. . . if there is not anything else. . . if there both is and is not anything else. . . if there neither is nor is not anything else, you say, ‘Do not say that, my

friend'. Now, how is the meaning of this statement to be understood?

Sariputta: Saying . . . is it the case that there is anything else . . . is it the case that there is not anything else . . . is it the case that there both is and is not anything else . . . is it the case that neither is nor is not anything else, one is differentiating non-differentiation. However far the six spheres of contact go, that is how far differentiation goes. However far differentiation goes, that is how far the six spheres of contact go. With the remainderless fading and stopping of the six spheres of contact, there comes to be the stopping, the allaying of differentiation.

A IV.173

The sphere of non-differentiation, although it may not be described, may be realized through direct experience.

Monks, that sphere should be realized where the eye (vision) stops and the perception (mental noting) of form fades. That sphere is to be realized where the ear stops and the perception of sound fades . . . where the nose stops and the perception of aroma fades . . . where the tongue stops and the perception of flavor fades . . . where the body stops and the perception of tactile sensation fades . . . where the intellect stops and the perception of idea/phenomenon fades: That sphere should be realized.

S XXXV.116

This experience of the goal—absolutely unlimited freedom, beyond classification and exclusive of all else—is termed the elemental nibbana property with no 'fuel' remaining (anupadisesa-nibbana-dhatu). It is one of two ways in which nibbana is experienced, the distinction between the two being expressed as follows:

Monks, there are these two forms of the nibbana property. Which two? The nibbana property with fuel remaining, and the nibbana property with no fuel remaining.

And what is the nibbana property with fuel remaining? There is the case where a monk is a worthy one devoid of mental effluents, who has attained completion, finished the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, destroyed the bonds of becoming, and is released through right knowing. His five sense faculties still remain, and owing to their being intact, he is cognizant of the pleasant and the unpleasant, and is sensitive to pleasure and pain. That which is the passing away of passion,

aversion, and delusion in him is termed the nibbana property with fuel remaining.

And what is the nibbana property with no fuel remaining? There is the case where a monk is a worthy one... released through right knowing. All that is sensed by him, being unrelished, will grow cold right here. This is termed the nibbana property with no fuel remaining.

Iti 44

The phrase referring to the range of feeling as 'growing cold right here' is a set expression describing death as experienced by one who has reached the goal. The verse following this passage states explicitly that this is what is meant here.

These two nibbana properties proclaimed by the one with vision  
the one independent the one who is Such:

one property, here in this life with fuel remaining  
from the ending of craving, the guide to becoming  
and that with no fuel remaining after this life  
in which all becoming completely stops.

Those who know this state uncompounded their minds released  
through the ending of craving, the guide to becoming,  
they, attaining the Teaching's core, delighting in the ending of  
craving,  
have abandoned all becoming: they, the Such.

Iti 44

The Verses of the Elder Udayin suggest a simile to illustrate the distinction between these two nibbana properties:

A great blazing fire unnourished grows calm  
and while its embers exist is said to be out:  
Conveying a meaning, this image is taught by the cognizant.

Great Nagas\* will recognize the Naga as taught by the Naga  
as free from passion free from aversion  
free from delusion without mental effluent.  
His body discarded, the Naga will go totally out without effluent.

Thag XV.2

Here Ven. Udayin compares the nibbana property with fuel remaining—the state of being absolutely free from passion, aversion, and delusion—to a fire whose flames have died out, but whose embers are still glowing. Although he does not complete the analogy, he seems to imply that the nibbana property without fuel remaining—when the Worthy One discards his body at death—is like a fire so totally out that its embers have grown cold.

Thus the completely free and unadulterated experience we have been discussing is that of nibbana after death. There are, though, states of concentration which give a foretaste of this experience in the present life and which enabled the Buddha to say that he taught the goal on the basis of direct knowledge.

Ananda: In what way, venerable sir, might a monk attain concentration of such a form that he would have neither the perception of earth with regard to earth, nor of water with regard to water, nor of fire... wind... the sphere of the infinitude of space... the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness... the sphere of nothingness... the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception... this world... nor of the next world with regard to the next world, and yet he would still be percipient?

The Buddha: There is the case, Ananda, where he would be percipient of this: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the resolution of all mental processes; the relinquishment of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; stopping; nibbana.’

#### A X.6

[Ananda puts the same question to Sariputta, who responds that he himself once had experienced such a concentration.]

Ananda: But what were you percipient of at that time?

Sariputta: ‘The stopping of becoming—nibbana—the stopping of becoming—nibbana’: One perception arose in me as another perception stopped. Just as in a blazing woodchip fire, one flame arises as another flame disappears, even so, ‘The stopping of becoming—nibbana—the stopping of becoming—nibbana’: One perception arose in me as another one stopped. I was percipient of the stopping of becoming—nibbana.

#### A X.7

Ananda: It is amazing, my friend, it is marvelous, how the Master has attained and recognized the opportunity for the purification of beings... and the direct realization of nibbana, where the

eye will be, and forms, and yet one will not be sensitive to that sphere; where the ear will be, and sounds. . . where the nose will be, and aromas. . . where the tongue will be, and flavors. . . where the body will be, and tactile sensations, and yet one will not be sensitive to that sphere.

Udayin: Is one insensitive to that sphere with or without a perception in mind?

Ananda: . . . with a perception in mind. . . .

Udayin: . . . what perception?

Ananda: There is the case where with the complete transcending of perceptions dealing with form, and the passing away of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, thinking, ‘infinite space,’ one remains in the sphere of the infinitude of space: Having this perception in mind, one is not sensitive to that sphere.

Further, with the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of space, thinking, ‘infinite consciousness,’ one remains in the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness: Having this perception in mind, one is not sensitive to that sphere.

Further, with the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, thinking, ‘There is nothing,’ one remains in the sphere of nothingness: Having this perception in mind, one is not sensitive to that sphere.

Once, friend, when I was staying in Saketa at the Game Refuge in the Black Forest, the nun Jatila Bhagika went to where I was staying, and on arrival—having bowed to me—stood to one side. As she was standing to one side, she said to me: ‘The concentration whereby—neither pressed down nor forced back, nor with mental processes kept blocked or suppressed—still as a result of release, contented as a result of stillness, and as a result of contentment one is not agitated: This concentration is said by the Master to be the fruit of what?’

I said to her, ‘. . . This concentration is said by the Master to be the fruit of gnosis (the knowledge of Awakening).’ Having this sort of perception, friend, one is not sensitive to that sphere.

#### A IX.37

In this extraordinary state of mental poise—neither pressed, forced, blocked, or suppressed—*nibbana* in the present life is experienced as freedom from all perception dealing with the six sensory spheres and the spheres of meditative absorption. Although one is conscious, and these spheres are present, one does not partake of them.

On the level of ordinary sensory experience, however, nibbana in the present life is experienced by the Worthy One as the passing away of passion, aversion, and delusion. This implies that these three states are analogous to fire; and as we saw in the Introduction, they are directly referred to as fires at various points in the Canon. On the surface, the notion of passion and aversion as fires hardly requires explanation, but in order to gain a fuller appreciation of the analogies that the Canon draws between fire on the one hand, and passion, aversion, and delusion on the other, we first need some background on the specifically Buddhist views on fire it contains.

## Chapter II

“Fire burns with clinging, and not without clinging.”

Although the compilers of the Pali Canon were not concerned with teaching the physical sciences, there are frequent passages where they cite the behavior of the physical universe, in similes or examples, to illustrate points of doctrine. A number of these passages discuss questions of heat, motion, meteorology, the etiology of diseases, and so forth, in enough detail to show that a common theory underlies their explanation. That theory centers on the concept of ‘dhatu,’ property or potential. The physical properties presented in this theory are four: those of earth (solidity), liquid, heat, and wind (motion). Three of them—liquid, heat, and wind—are potentially active. When they are aggravated, agitated or provoked—the Pali term here, ‘pakuppati’, is used also on the psychological level, where it means angered or upset—they act as the underlying cause for activity in nature. Fire, for example, is said to occur when the heat property is provoked.

There comes a time when the external heat property is provoked and consumes village, town and city, countryside and rural area; and then, coming to the edge of a green district, the edge of a road, the edge of a rocky district, to the water’s edge, or to a lush, well-watered area, goes out from lack of sustenance.

M 28

Once a fire has been provoked, it needs ‘upadana’—commonly translated as fuel—to continue burning. Upadana has other meanings besides fuel, though—one is the nourishment that sustains the life and growth of a tree—and as we will see below, wind can also function as a fire’s upadana. Thus, ‘sustenance’ would seem to be a more precise translation for the term.

‘How do you construe this, young man: Which fire would be more brilliant, luminous, and dazzling—that which burned in dependence on a sustenance of grass and timber, or that which burned in dependence on having relinquished a sustenance of grass and timber?’

‘If it were possible, Gotama, for a fire to burn in dependence on having relinquished a sustenance of grass and timber, that fire would be the more brilliant, luminous, and dazzling.’

‘It’s impossible, young man, there is no way that a fire could burn in dependence on having relinquished a sustenance of grass and timber, aside from a feat of psychic power...’

M 99

‘Just as a fire, Vaccha, burns with sustenance, and not without sustenance, even so I declare the rebirth of one who has sustenance, and not of one without sustenance.’

‘But, Venerable Gotama, at the moment a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, what do you say is its sustenance then?’

‘Vaccha, when a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, I say that it is wind-sustained. The wind, Vaccha, is its sustenance at that time.’

‘And at the moment when a being sets this body aside and has not yet attained another body, what do you say is its sustenance then?’

‘Actually, Vaccha, when a being sets this body aside and has not yet attained another body, I say that it is craving-sustained. Craving, Vaccha, is its sustenance at that time.’

#### S XLIV.9

Another meaning for upadana is clinging, which suggests that, just as a tree clings to the soil that provides its sustenance, fire clings to its fuel. Thus the above passage could also read, ‘fire burns with clinging and not without clinging’—a characteristic of fire that was observed in other ancient Asian traditions, such as the Chinese I Ching, as well.

The clinging nature of fire is reflected in a number of other idioms used by the Pali Canon to describe its workings. For one, an object that catches fire is said to get ‘stuck’ (passive) or to ‘stick’ (active): Adherence is a two-way process.

Just as a wing bone or tendon parings, monks, thrown into a fire don’t catch fire (lit: ‘stick’ or ‘get stuck’), keep apart, turn aside, and are not drawn in; even so the heart of a monk who spends time often with a mind accustomed to focusing on the repulsive, doesn’t stick to the [thought of] engaging in the sexual act, keeps apart, turns aside, and is not drawn in, and remains either indifferent or repelled.

#### A VII.46

The second side of the attachment—that fire, in sticking to something, gets stuck—is reflected in yet another idiom in the Pali Canon: When it leaves a piece of fuel it has been clinging to, it is said to be released.

Just as fire...after being released from a house of reeds or a house of grass, burns even gabled houses, plastered, latched,

shut against the wind; even so, all dangers that arise, arise from fools, and not from wise people; all disasters...all troubles that arise, arise from fools and not from wise people.

M 115

This sense of fire's being entrapped as it burns echoes the stanza from the Svetasvatara Upanisad, quoted above p. 91, that refers to fire as being 'seized' when ignited by the friction of fire sticks. Apparently the Buddhists were not alone in their time in seeing attachment and entrapment as they watched a fire burn. And this would account for the way early Buddhist poetry tends to couple the image of an extinguished fire with the notion of freedom:

like a flame's going out  
was the liberation of awareness.

D 16

as a flame overthrown by the force of the wind...so the sage  
freed from mental activity...

Sn V.6

So, to summarize: The image of an extinguished fire carried no connotations of annihilation for the early Buddhists. Rather, the aspects of fire that to them had significance for the mind-fire analogy are these: Fire, when burning, is in a state of agitation, dependence, attachment, and entrapment—both clinging and being stuck to its sustenance. Extinguished, it becomes calm, independent, indeterminate, and unattached: It lets go of its sustenance and is released.

This same nexus of events, applied to the workings of the mind, occurs repeatedly in Canonical passages describing the attainment of the goal:

One attached is unreleased; one unattached is released. Should consciousness, when standing [still], stand attached to [a physical] form, supported by form [as its object], established on form, watered with delight, it would exhibit growth, increase, and proliferation. Should consciousness, when standing [still], stand attached to feeling... to perception... to mental processes... it would exhibit growth, increase, and proliferation. Were someone to say, 'I will describe a coming, a going, a passing away, an arising, a growth, an increase, or a proliferation of consciousness apart from form, from feeling, from perception, from mental processes,' that would be impossible.

If a monk abandons passion for the property of form. . . feeling. . . perception. . . mental processes. . . consciousness, then owing to the abandoning of passion, the support is cut off, and there is no base for consciousness. Consciousness, thus unestablished, not proliferating, not performing any function, is released. Owing to its release, it stands still. Owing to its stillness, it is contented. Owing to its contentment, it is not agitated. Not agitated, he [the monk] is totally 'nibbana-ed' right within. He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'

S XXII.53

This being the set of events—stillness, independence, unattachment—associated with the extinguishing of a fire and the attainment of the goal, it would appear that of all the etymologies offered to explain the word 'nibbana,' the one closest to its original connotations is that quoted by Buddhaghosa in *The Path of Purification* (VIII, 247). There he derives the word from the negative prefix 'nir,' plus 'vana,' or binding\*: 'Unbinding'.

Modern scholars have tended to scorn this derivation as fanciful, and they favor such hypotheses as 'blowing out,' 'not blowing' or 'covering.' But although these hypotheses may make sense in terms of modern Western ideas about fire, they are hardly relevant to the way nibbana is used in the Canon. Freedom, on the other hand, is more than relevant. It is central, both in the context of ancient Indian theories of fire and in the psychological context of attaining the goal: 'Not agitated, he is totally unbound right within.'

So 'Unbinding' would seem to be the best equivalent for nibbana we have in English. What kind of unbinding? We have already gained some idea—liberation from dependency and limitations, from agitation and death—but it turns out that nibbana is not the only term the Buddha borrowed from the workings of fire to describe the workings of the mind. Upadana is another, and a survey of how he applied it to the mind will help to show what is loosed in the mind's unbinding and how.

### Chapter III

“Forty cartloads of timber.”

Upadana carries both of its meanings—clinging and sustenance—when applied to the mind. It refers on the one hand both to mental clinging and to the object clung to, and on the other to both the act of taking mental sustenance and the sustenance itself. This, of course, raises the question, ‘Sustenance for what?’ In the description of dependent co-arising, upadana forms the condition for becoming and, through becoming, for birth, aging, death, and the entire mass of suffering and stress. Thus the answer: ‘Sustenance for becoming’ and its attendant ills.

Just as if a great mass of fire, of ten . . . twenty . . . thirty or forty cartloads of timber were burning, and into it a man would periodically throw dried grass, dried cow dung, and dried timber, so that the great mass of fire—thus nourished, thus sustained – would burn for a long, long time; even so, monks, in one who keeps focusing on the allure of those phenomena that offer sustenance (lit: ‘flammable phenomena’), craving develops; with craving as condition, sustenance; with sustenance as condition, becoming; with becoming as condition, birth; with birth as condition, aging, illness and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all come into play. Thus is the origin of this entire mass of suffering and stress.

Just as if a great mass of fire . . . were burning, into which a man simply would not periodically throw dried grass, dried cow dung, or dried timber, so that the great mass of fire—its original sustenance being consumed, and no other being offered—would, without nourishment, go out; even so, monks, in one who keeps focusing on the drawbacks of those phenomena that offer sustenance, craving stops. From the stopping of craving, sustenance stops. From the stopping of sustenance, becoming . . . birth . . . aging, illness and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all stop. Thus is the stopping of this entire mass of suffering and stress.

S XIII.52

The Buddha made a distinction between phenomena that offer sustenance and the sustenance itself.

And what, monks, are phenomena that offer sustenance? What is sustenance? Form, monks, is a phenomenon offering sustenance. Any desire or passion related to it, is sustenance related to it. Feeling . . . Perception . . . Mental processes . . . Consciousness is a phenomenon offering sustenance. Any desire or passion related to it, is sustenance related to it.

## S XXII.121

Thus passion and desire are both the act of taking sustenance and the sustenance itself, while form, feeling, mental processes, and consciousness simply offer the opportunity for them to occur.

Alternatively, we can translate the distinction as one between clingable phenomena and the clinging itself.

And what, monks, are clingable phenomena? What is clinging?  
Form, monks, is a clingable phenomenon. Any desire or passion related to it, is clinging related to it. Feeling... Perception...  
Mental processes... Consciousness is a clingable phenomenon.  
Any desire or passion related to it, is clinging related to it.

## S XXII.121

In this case, passion and desire are the act of clinging and the object clung to, while form, feeling, and the rest simply offer the opportunity for them to occur.

Still, the two sides of this distinction are so closely interrelated that they are hardly distinct at all.

Visakha: Is it the case that clinging/sustenance is the same thing as the five aggregates for clinging/sustenance [form, feeling, perception, mental processes and consciousness], or is it something separate?

Sister Dhammadinna: Neither is clinging/sustenance the same thing as the five aggregates for clinging/ sustenance, my friend, nor is it something separate. Whatever desire and passion there is with regard to the five aggregates for clinging/sustenance, that is the clinging/sustenance there.<sup>1</sup>

## M 44

The desire and passion for these five aggregates can take any of four forms.

Monks, there are four [modes of] sustenance for becoming. Which four? Sensuality as a form of sustenance, views as a form of sustenance, precepts and practices as a form of sustenance, doctrines of the self as a form of sustenance.

## M 11

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<sup>1</sup>The use of the word aggregate (khandha) here may relate to the fire image, as khandha can also mean the trunk of a tree.

These four modes of sustenance act as the focus for many of the passages in the Canon describing the attainment of the goal. Because they are so closely related to the notion of nibbana—they are the binding loosened in the unbinding of the mind—each of them deserves to be considered in detail.

**First, sensuality.** The Buddha recommended relinquishing attachment to sensuality, not because sensual pleasures are in any way evil, but because the attachment itself is dangerous: both in terms of the pain experienced when a relished pleasure inevitably ends, and in terms of the detrimental influence such attachment can have on a person's actions—and thus on his or her future condition.

It is with a cause, monks, that sensual thinking occurs, and not without a cause. . . . And how is it, monks, that sensual thinking occurs with a cause and not without a cause? In dependence on the property of sensuality there occurs the perception of sensuality. In dependence on the perception of sensuality there occurs the consideration of sensuality. . . . the desire for sensuality. . . . the fever for sensuality. . . . the quest for sensuality. Questing for sensuality, monks, an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person conducts himself wrongly through three means: through body, through speech, and through mind.

Just as if a man were to throw a burning firebrand into a dry, grassy wilderness and not quickly stamp it out with his hands and feet, and thus whatever animals inhabiting the grass and timber would come to ruin and loss; even so, monks, any contemplative or priest who does not quickly abandon, dispel, demolish, and wipe out of existence any wrong-headed, unwise perceptions once they have arisen, will dwell in stress in the present life—troubled, despairing, and feverish—and on the break-up of the body, after death, can expect a bad destination.

#### S XIV.12

This is not to deny that sensual pleasures provide a certain form of happiness, but that happiness must be weighed against the greater pains and disappointments sensuality can bring.

Now what is the allure of sensuality? There are, monks, these five strands of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. Sounds cognizable via the ear. . . . Aromas cognizable via the nose. . . . Flavors cognizable via the tongue. . . . Tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming,

endearing, fostering desire, enticing. Now whatever pleasure or joy arises in dependence on these five strands of sensuality, that is the allure of sensuality.

And what is the drawback of sensuality? There is the case where, on account of the occupation by which a clansman makes a living—whether checking or accounting or calculating or plowing or trading or cattle tending or archery or as a king's man, or whatever the occupation may be—he faces cold, he faces heat, being harassed by mosquitoes and flies, wind and sun and creeping things, dying from hunger and thirst.

Now this drawback in the case of sensuality, this mass of stress visible here and now, has sensuality for its reason, sensuality for its source, sensuality for its cause, the reason being simply sensuality.

If the clansman gains no wealth while thus working and striving and making effort, he sorrows, grieves, and laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught: 'My work is in vain, my efforts are fruitless!' Now this drawback too in the case of sensuality, this mass of stress visible here and now, has sensuality for its reason. . . .

If the clansman gains wealth while thus working and striving and making effort, he experiences pain and distress in protecting it: 'How will neither kings nor thieves make off with my property, nor fire burn it, nor water sweep it away, nor hateful heirs make off with it?' And as he thus guards and watches over his property, kings or thieves make off with it, or fire burns it, or water sweeps it away, or hateful heirs make off with it. And he sorrows, grieves, and laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught: 'What was mine is no more!' Now this drawback too in the case of sensuality, this mass of stress visible here and now, has sensuality for its reason. . . .

Furthermore, it is with sensuality for the reason, sensuality for the source, sensuality for the cause, the reason being simply sensuality, that kings quarrel with kings, nobles with nobles, priests with priests, householders with householders, mother with child, child with mother, father with child, child with father, brother with brother, sister with sister, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. And then in their quarrels, brawls, and disputes, they attack one another with fists or with clods or with sticks or with knives, so that they incur death or deadly pain. Now this drawback too in the case of sensuality, this mass of stress visible here and now, has sensuality for its reason. . . .

Furthermore, it is with sensuality for the reason, sensuality for the source. . . that (men), taking swords and shields and buck-

ling on bows and quivers, charge into battle massed in double array while arrows and spears are flying and swords are flashing; and there they are wounded by arrows and spears, and their heads are cut off by swords, so that they incur death or deadly pain. Now this drawback too in the case of sensuality, this mass of stress visible here and now, has sensuality for its reason. . . .

Furthermore, it is with sensuality for the reason, sensuality for the source. . . that (men), taking swords and shields and buckling on bows and quivers, charge slippery bastions while arrows and spears are flying and swords are flashing; and there they are splashed with boiling cow dung and crushed under heavy weights, and their heads are cut off by swords, so that they incur death or deadly pain. Now this drawback too in the case of sensuality, this mass of stress visible here and now, has sensuality for its reason, sensuality for its source, sensuality for its cause, the reason being simply sensuality.

M 13

Sumedha to her fiancé:

In the face of the Deathless,  
 what worth are your sensual pleasures?  
 For all delights in sensuality are  
 burning and boiling, aggravated, aglow. . . .

A blazing grass firebrand, held in the hand:  
 Those who let go do not get burned.  
 Sensuality is like a firebrand.  
 It burns those who do not let go.

Thig XVI.1

Even the more honorable emotions that can develop from sensual attraction—such as love and personal devotion—ultimately lead to suffering and stress when one is inevitably parted from the person one loves.

Once in this same Savatthi there was a certain man whose wife died. Owing to her death he went mad, out of his mind and—wandering from street to street, crossroads to crossroads—would say, ‘Have you seen my wife? Have you seen my wife?’ From this it may be realized how from a dear one, owing to a dear one, comes sorrow and lamentation, pain, distress, and despair.

Once in this same Savatthi there was a wife who went to her relatives’ home. Her relatives, having separated her from her husband, wanted to give her to another against her will. So she

said to her husband, ‘These relatives of mine, having separated us, want to give me to another against my will,’ whereupon he cut her in two and slashed himself open, thinking, ‘Dead we will be together.’ And from this it may be realized how from a dear one, owing to a dear one, comes sorrow and lamentation, pain, distress, and despair.

M 87

How do you construe this, monks: Which is greater, the tears you have shed while transmigrating and wandering this long time—crying and weeping from being joined with what is displeasing, from being separated from what is pleasing—or the water in the four great oceans? . . . This is the greater: The tears you have shed. . . . Why is that? From an inconstruable beginning, monks, comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating and wandering on. Long have you thus experienced stress, experienced pain, experienced loss, swelling the cemeteries—long enough to become disenchanted with all conditioned things, enough to become dispassionate, enough to be released.

S XV.3

A theme recurrent throughout the Canon is that complete knowledge of any object does not end with an understanding of its allure and drawbacks, but goes on to comprehend what brings emancipation from the mental fetters based on both.

And what is the emancipation from sensuality? Whatever is the subduing of passion and desire, the abandoning of passion and desire for sensuality, that is the emancipation from sensuality.

M 13

Sundara Samudda:

Ornamented, finely clothed garlanded, adorned,  
her feet stained red with lac, she wore slippers: a courtesan.

Stepping out of her slippers— her hands raised before me palm-  
to-palm over her heart—

she softly, tenderly, in measured words spoke to me first:

‘You are young, recluse. Heed my message: Partake of human  
sensuality. I will give you luxury.

Truly I vow to you, I will tend to you as to a fire.

When we are old, both leaning on canes,  
then we will both become recluses, winning the benefits of both  
worlds.’

And seeing her before me— a courtesan, ornamented, finely  
clothed, hands palm-to-palm over her heart—  
like a snare of death laid out,  
apt attention arose in me, the drawbacks appeared,  
disenchantment stood at an even keel:

With that, my heart was released. . . .

Thag VII.1

Seeing a form unmindfully, focusing on its pleasing features,  
one knows with mind enflamed and remains fastened to it.<sup>2</sup>

One’s feelings, born of the form, grow numerous.

Greed and provocation injure one’s mind.

Thus amassing stress one is said to be far from Unbinding.<sup>3</sup>

One not enflamed with forms—seeing a form with mindfulness  
firm—

Knows with mind unenflamed and does not remain fastened  
there.

While one is seeing a form—and even experiencing feeling—  
it falls away and does not accumulate.

Faring mindful. and thus not amassing stress, one is said to be  
in the presence of Unbinding.<sup>4</sup>

S XXXV.95

There are forms, monks, cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing,  
charming, endearing, fostering desire, enticing. If a monk relishes them,  
welcomes them, and remains fastened to them, he is said to be a monk  
fettered by forms cognizable by the eye. He has gone over to Mara’s camp;  
he has come under Mara’s power. The Evil One can do with him as he will.<sup>5</sup>

S XXXV.115

There are forms cognizable by the eye—agreeable. . . enticing. If  
a monk relishes them, welcomes them, and remains fastened to  
them, then. . . his consciousness is dependent on them, is sus-  
tained by them. With sustenance/clinging, the monk is not to-  
tally unbound. . . .

<sup>2</sup>Notice how these lines draw directly on the image of burning as entrapment.

<sup>3</sup>And so on with the rest of the six senses.

<sup>4</sup>And so on with the rest of the six senses.

<sup>5</sup>And so on with the rest of the six senses.

If he does not relish them, welcome them, or remain fastened to them, then... his consciousness is not dependent on them, is not sustained by them. Without sustenance/clinging, the monk is totally unbound.<sup>6</sup>

## S XXXV.118

Here again, we see the reciprocal nature of attachment: One is bound by what one relishes and latches onto—or rather, by the act of relishing and latching on, in and of itself.

Citta: Venerable sirs, it is just as if a black ox and a white ox were joined with a single collar or yoke. If someone were to say, ‘The black ox is the fetter of the white ox, the white ox is the fetter of the black’—speaking this way, would he be speaking rightly?

Some elder monks: No, householder. The black ox is not the fetter of the white ox, nor is the white ox the fetter of the black. The single collar or yoke by which they are joined: That is the fetter there.

Citta: In the same way, the eye is not the fetter of forms, nor are forms the fetter of the eye. Whatever desire and passion arises in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there. The ear is not the fetter of sounds... The nose is not the fetter of aromas... The tongue is not the fetter of flavors... The body is not the fetter of tactile sensations... The intellect is not the fetter of ideas, nor are ideas the fetter of the intellect. Whatever desire and passion arises in dependence on the two of them: That is the fetter there.

## S XLI.1

In other words, neither the senses nor their objects are fetters for the mind. Beautiful sights, sounds, and so forth, do not entrap it, nor do the senses themselves. Instead, it is trapped by the act of desire and passion based on such things.

Monks, there are these five strands of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable... enticing; sounds... aromas... flavors... tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable... enticing. But these are not sensuality. They are called strands of sensuality in the discipline of the Noble Ones.

<sup>6</sup>And so on with the rest of the six senses.

The passion for his resolves is a man's sensuality,  
 not the beautiful sensual pleasures found in the world.  
 The passion for his resolves is a man's sensuality.  
 The beauties remain as they are in the world,  
 while the wise, in this regard subdue their desire.

A VI.63

Thus sensual pleasures, which belong to the realm of form, are the 'clingable phenomena' that offer sustenance for the bond of desire and passion. Or, to borrow an image from Ven. Rahula, they are the bait—as long as one is blind to their true nature—for falling into the trap of one's own craving and heedlessness.

Rahula:

They [the unawakened]: blinded by sensual pleasures, covered  
 by the net,  
 veiled with the veil of craving, bound by the Kinsman of the  
 Heedless\*, like fish in the mouth of a trap.

Thag IV.8

For this reason, freedom from sensuality as a clinging/sustenance requires a two-pronged approach: to realize the true nature of the bait and to extricate oneself from the trap. The first step involves examining the unattractive side of the human body, for as the Buddha says,

Monks, I don't know of even one other form that stays in a man's mind and consumes it like the form of a woman... one other sound... smell... taste... touch that stays in a man's mind and consumes it like the touch of a woman. The touch of a woman stays in a man's mind and consumes it.

I don't know of even one other form that stays in a woman's mind and consumes it like the form of a man... one other sound... smell... taste... touch that stays in a woman's mind and consumes it like the touch of a man. The touch of a man stays in a woman's mind and consumes it.

A I.1

Just as if a sack with openings at both ends were full of various kinds of grain—wheat, rice, mung beans, kidney beans, sesame seeds, husked rice—and a man with good eyesight, pouring it out, were to reflect, "This is wheat. This is rice. These are mung beans. These are kidney beans. These are sesame seeds. This is

husked rice,' in the same way, monks, a monk reflects on this very body from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of unclean things:

'In this body there are head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine' . . .

Or again, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground—one day, two days, three days dead—bloated, livid and festering, he applies it to this very body, 'This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate' . . .

Or again, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground, picked at by crows, vultures, and hawks; by dogs, hyenas, and various other creatures. . . a skeleton smeared with flesh and blood, connected with tendons. . . a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, connected with tendons. . . a skeleton without flesh or blood, connected with tendons. . . bones detached from their tendons, scattered in all directions—here a hand bone, there a foot bone, here a shin bone, there a thigh bone, here a hip bone, there a back bone, here a rib, there a chest bone, here a shoulder bone, there a neck bone, here a jaw bone, there a tooth, here a skull. . . the bones whitened, somewhat like the color of shells. . . piled up, more than a year old. . . decomposed into a powder, he applies it to this very body, 'This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.' So he abides contemplating the body in and of itself, internally, externally or both internally and externally.

#### D 22

The purpose of this contemplation is not to develop a morbid fascination with the grotesque, but simply to correct the distortion of perception that tries to deny the unattractive aspects of the body and to admit only 'the sign of the beautiful'—its attractive side. Now of course this contemplation has its dangers, for it can go overboard into states of aversion and depression, but these are not incurable. At several points in the Canon, where the Buddha sees that monks have let the contemplation of foulness adversely affect their minds, he recommends that they calm their aversion by focusing on the in and out breath as a companion meditation.

Ultimately, as a more balanced perception of the body develops, one may make use of the second prong of the approach: turning one's attention from the object of the lust to the act of lust itself, seeing it as an act of mental fabrication—foolish, inconstant, and stressful—and so removing any sense

of identification with it. This, in turn, can calm the mind to an even deeper level and lead on to its Unbinding.

Vangisa:

With sensual lust I burn.  
My mind is on fire.  
Please, Gotama, from compassion,  
tell me how to put it out.

Ananda:

From distorted perception your mind is on fire.  
Shun the sign of the beautiful, accompanied by lust.  
See mental processes as other as stress as not-self.  
Extinguish your great lust. Do not keep burning again and  
again.

Thag XXI.1

For one who keeps focusing on the foulness [of the body], any underlying tendencies to lust for the property of beauty are abandoned. When mindfulness of breathing is internally well-established before one, there are no annoying inclinations to external thinking. For one who keeps focusing on the inconstancy of all processes, whatever is ignorance is abandoned; whatever is clear knowing arises.

Focusing on foulness with regard to the body, mindful of in and out breathing, seeing the calming of all processes—always ardent—the right-seeing monk, when released there, is truly a master of direct knowledge. Calm, he is truly a sage gone beyond bonds.

Iti 85

Sister Nanda:

As I, heedful, examined it aptly<sup>7</sup>  
this body—as it actually is— was seen inside and out.

Then was I disenchanted with the body and dispassionate  
within:  
Heedful, detached, calmed was I, unbound.

Thig V.4

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<sup>7</sup>a vision of a beautiful person growing sick, unclean and putrid

**Views** are the second mode of clinging/sustenance. And, as with the abandoning of attachment to sensuality, the abandoning of attachment to views can lead to an experience of Unbinding.

‘This I maintain,’ does not occur to one who would investigate what is seized [as a view] with reference to [actual] phenomena.

Looking for what is unseized with reference to views,  
and detecting inner peace, I saw.

#### Sn IV.9

Attachment to views can block an experience of Unbinding in any of three major ways. First, the content of the view itself may not be conducive to the arising of discernment and may even have a pernicious moral effect on one’s actions, leading to an unfavorable rebirth.

I have heard that once the Master was dwelling among the Koliyans. . . . Then Punna the Koliyan, a bovine, and Seniya, a canine naked ascetic, approached the Master. On arrival, Punna the Koliyan bovine, saluting the Master, sat down to one side, while Seniya, the canine naked ascetic, exchanged greetings with the Master, and having made agreeable polite conversation, sat down to one side, curling up like a dog. Punna the Koliyan bovine, as he sat to one side, said to the Master, ‘Sir, Seniya, this naked ascetic, is a canine, a doer-of-hard-tasks. He eats food that is thrown on the ground. He has long undertaken and conformed to that dog-practice. What is his future destination, what is his future course?’

[The Buddha at first declines to answer, but on being pressed, finally responds:] ‘There is the case where a person develops the dog-practice fully and perfectly. . . . Having developed the dog-practice fully and perfectly, having developed a dog’s virtue fully and perfectly, having developed a dog’s mind fully and perfectly, having developed a dog’s demeanor fully and perfectly, then on the break-up of the body, after death, he reappears in the company of dogs. But if he is of such a view as, “By this virtue or practice or asceticism or holy life I will become a greater or lesser god,” that is his wrong view. Now, Punna, there are two destinations for one with wrong view, I say: purgatory or the animal womb. So the dog-practice, if perfected, leads him to the company of dogs; if defective, to purgatory.’

Just as if in the last month of the hot season a maluva creeper pod were to burst open, and a maluva creeper seed were to fall at the foot of a sala tree. The deity living in the tree would become frightened, apprehensive, and anxious. Her friends and companions, relatives and kin—garden deities, forest deities, tree deities, deities living in herbs, grass, and forest monarchs—would gather together to console her: ‘Have no fear, have no fear. In all likelihood a peacock is sure to swallow this maluva creeper seed, or a deer will eat it, or a brush fire will burn it up, or woodsmen will pick it up, or termites will carry it off, and it probably isn’t really a seed.’

And then no peacock swallowed it, no deer ate it, no brush fire burned it up, no woodsmen picked it up, no termites carried it off, and it really was a seed. Watered by a rain-laden cloud, it sprouted in due course and curled its soft, tender, downy tendril around the sala tree.

The thought occurred to the deity living in the sala tree: ‘Now what future danger did my friends. . . foresee, that they gathered together to console me? . . . It’s pleasant, the touch of this maluva creeper’s soft, tender, downy tendril.’

Then the creeper, having enwrapped the sala tree, having made a canopy over it, and cascading down around it, caused the massive limbs of the sala tree to come crashing down. The thought occurred to the deity living in the tree: ‘This was the future danger my friends. . . foresaw, that they gathered together to console me. . . . It’s because of that maluva creeper seed that I’m now experiencing sharp, burning pains.’

In the same way, monks, there are some priests and contemplatives who hold to a doctrine, a view like this: ‘There is no harm in sensual pleasures.’ Thus they meet with their downfall through sensual pleasures. They consort with women wanderers who wear their hair coiled and long.

The thought occurs to them: ‘Now what future danger do those [other] priests and contemplatives foresee that they teach the relinquishment and analysis of sensual pleasures? It’s pleasant, the touch of this woman wanderer’s soft, tender, downy arm.’

Thus they meet with their downfall through sensual pleasures. With the break-up of the body, after death, they will go to a bad bourn, destitution, the realm of the hungry shades, purgatory. There they will experience sharp, burning pains. The thought will occur to them: ‘This was the future danger those priests and contemplatives foresaw that they taught the relinquishment and analysis of sensual pleasures. It’s because of sensual pleasures,

as a result of sensual pleasures, that we are now experiencing these sharp, burning pains.’

M 45

Secondly, apart from the actual content of the views, a person attached to views is bound to get into disputes with those who hold opposing views, resulting in unwholesome mental states for the winners as well as the losers.

Engaged in disputation in the midst of an assembly,  
—anxious, desiring praise— the one defeated is staggered.  
Shaken with criticism, he seeks for an opening.  
he whose doctrine is [judged as] demolished, defeated, by those  
judging the issue:  
He laments, he grieves—the inferior exponent— ‘He beat me,’ he  
mourns.

These disputes have arisen among contemplatives.  
In them are victory and defeat.  
Seeing this, one would abstain from disputes,  
for they have no other goal than the gaining of praise.

He who is praised there for expounding his doctrine in the midst  
of the assembly,  
laughs on that account and grows haughty, attaining his heart’s  
desire.  
That haughtiness will be his grounds for vexation, he’ll speak in  
pride and conceit.  
Seeing this, one should abstain from disputes. No purity is at-  
tained by them, say the wise.

Sn IV.8

Thirdly, and more profoundly, attachment to views implicitly involves attachment to a sense of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior,’ and to the criteria used in measuring and making such evaluations. As we saw in Chapter I, any measure or criterion acts as a limitation or bond on the mind.

That, say the skilled, is a binding knot: that in dependence on  
which you see others as inferior.

Sn IV.5

Whoever construes ‘equal’ ‘superior’ or ‘inferior,’ by that he’d dis-  
pute;

whereas to one unaffected by these three, 'equal' 'superior' do not occur.

Of what would the Brahmin\* say 'true' or 'false,' disputing with whom,  
he in whom 'equal' and 'unequal' are not. . . .

As the prickly lotus is unsmear'd by water and mud,  
so the sage, an exponent of peace, without greed, is unsmear'd  
by sensuality and the world.

An attainer-of-wisdom isn't measured made proud by views or  
by what is thought,  
for he isn't fashioned by them. He wouldn't be led by action,  
learning;

doesn't reach a conclusion in settled attachments.

For one dispassionate toward perception there are no ties;  
for one released by discernment, no delusions.

Those who seize at perceptions and views go about disputing in  
the world.

Sn IV.9

An important point to notice is that attachment to views must be abandoned through knowledge, and not through skepticism, agnosticism, ignorance, or a mindless openness to all views. This point is made clear in the Discourse of the Supreme Net. There the Buddha gives a list of 62 philosophical positions concerning the nature of the self, the cosmos, and the state of ultimate freedom in the immediate present. The list is intended to be exhaustive—the 'net' in the title of the discourse—covering all possible views and positions on these subjects divided into ten categories, one of the categories—equivocation—including cases of agnosticism.

There are, monks, some contemplatives and priests who, being asked questions regarding this or that, resort to verbal contortions, to eel-like wriggling, on four grounds. . . . There is the case of a certain priest or contemplative who does not discern as it actually is that 'This is skillful,' or that 'This is unskillful.' The thought occurs to him: 'I don't discern as it actually is that "This is skillful," or that "This is unskillful." If I. . . were to declare that "This is skillful," or that "This is unskillful," desire, passion, aversion, or irritation would occur to me; that would be a falsehood for me. Whatever would be a falsehood for me would be a distress for me. Whatever would be a distress for me would be an obstacle for me.' So, out of fear of falsehood, a loathing for falsehood, he does not declare that 'This is skillful,' or that 'This is unskillful.' Being asked questions regarding this or that, he resorts to verbal contortions, to eel-like wriggling: 'I don't think

so. I don't think in that way. I don't think otherwise. I don't think not. I don't think not not.'

[The second case is virtually identical with the first, substituting 'clinging' for 'falsehood.']

[The third case:] There is the case of a certain priest or contemplative who does not discern as it actually is that "This is skillful," or that "This is unskillful"... "If I, not discerning as it actually is that "This is skillful," or that "This is unskillful," were to declare that "This is skillful," or that "This is unskillful"—There are priests and contemplatives who are pundits, subtle, skilled in debate, who prowl about like hair-splitting marksmen, as it were, shooting philosophical positions to pieces with their dialectic. They might cross-question me, press me for reasons, rebuke me. I might not be able to stand my ground, that would be a distress for me... an obstacle for me.' So, out of a fear for questioning, a loathing for questioning... he resorts to verbal contortions, to eel-like wriggling....

[The fourth case:] There is the case of a certain priest or contemplative who is dull and exceedingly stupid. Out of dullness and exceeding stupidity, he—being asked questions regarding this or that—resorts to verbal contortions, to eel-like wriggling: 'If you ask me if there exists another world [after death], if I thought that there exists another world, would I declare that to you? I don't think so. I don't think in that way. I don't think otherwise. I don't think not. I don't think not not. If you asked me if there isn't another world... both is and isn't... neither is nor isn't... if there are beings who transmigrate... if there aren't... both are and aren't... neither are nor aren't... if the Tathagata exists after death... doesn't... both... neither... I don't think so. I don't think in that way. I don't think otherwise. I don't think not. I don't think not not.'

## D 1

Agnosticism, then, is not a way of abandoning standpoints but is simply another standpoint: Like all standpoints, it must be abandoned through knowledge. The type of knowledge called for—in which standpoints are regarded, not in terms of their content, but as events in a causal chain—is indicated by the refrain that follows each of the ten categories of the Supreme Net.

This, monks, the Tathagata discerns. And he discerns that these standpoints, thus seized, thus held to, lead to such and such a destination, to such and such a state in the world beyond. And he discerns what surpasses this. And yet discerning that, he does

not hold to that act of discerning. And as he is not holding to it, Unbinding (*nibbuti*) is experienced right within. Knowing, for what they are, the origin, ending, allure, and drawbacks of feelings, along with the emancipation from feelings, the Tathagata, monks – through lack of sustenance/clinging—is released.

D 1

Another list of speculative views—a set of ten positions summarizing the standard topics debated by the various schools of contemplatives in the Buddha’s time—recurs frequently in the Canon. Non-Buddhist debaters used it as a ready-made checklist for gauging an individual’s positions on the controversial issues of the day and they often put it to the Buddha. Invariably, he would reply that he did not hold to any of the ten positions.

‘Seeing what drawback, then, is the venerable Gotama thus entirely dissociated from each of these ten positions?’

‘*Vaccha*, the position that “the world is eternal” is a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. It is accompanied by suffering, distress, despair, and fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, stopping; to calm, direct knowledge, self-awakening, Unbinding.

‘The position that “the world is not eternal”... ‘... “the world is finite”... ‘... “the world is infinite”... ‘... “the soul and the body are the same”... ‘... “the soul is one thing and the body another”... ‘... “after death a Tathagata exists”... ‘... “after death a Tathagata does not exist”... ‘... “after death a Tathagata both exists and does not exist”... ‘... “after death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist”... does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, stopping; to calm, direct knowledge, self-awakening, Unbinding.’

‘Does Master Gotama have any position at all?’

‘A “position,” *Vaccha*, is something that a Tathagata has done away with. What a Tathagata sees is this: “Such is form, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is feeling, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is perception... such are mental processes... such is consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance.” Because of this, I say, a Tathagata,—with the ending, fading out, stopping, renunciation and relinquishment of all constrictings, all excogitations, all I-making and mine-making and tendencies to conceits—is, through lack of sustenance/clinging, released.’

M 72

The construing the Buddha relinquished include views not only in their fullblown form as specific positions, but also in their rudimentary form as the categories and relationships that the mind reads into experience. This is a point he makes in his instructions to Bahiya, which led immediately to the latter's attaining the goal. When the mind imposes interpretations on its experience, it is engaging implicitly in system-building and all the limitations of location and relationship that system-building involves. Only when it can free itself of those interpretations and the fetters they place on it, can it gain true freedom.

Then, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bahiya, there is no you in terms of that. When there is no you in terms of that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress.

Ud I.10

**Precepts and practices.** The Canon mentions a variety of precepts and practices—the third mode of clinging/sustenance. Prominent among them are Brahmanical rituals and Jain practices of self-torture, and according to the Commentary these are the precepts and practices referred to in this context. Yet although the goal will always remain out of reach as long as one remains attached to such practices, the abandonment of this attachment is never in and of itself sufficient for attaining the goal.

But there is another practice which, though a necessary part of the Buddhist path, can nevertheless offer sustenance for becoming; and which—as the object of attachment to be transcended—figures prominently in descriptions of the goal's attainment. That practice is jhana, or meditative absorption. It might be argued that this is stretching the term, 'practice' (*vata*), a little far, but jhana does not fall under any of the other three sustenances for becoming at all, and yet it definitely does function as such a sustenance, so there seems to be little choice but to place it here.

Different passages in the Canon number the levels of jhana in different ways. The standard description gives four, although the pure mindfulness and equanimity attained on the fourth level may further be applied to four progressively more and more refined formless sensations—termed the 'peaceful emancipations, formlessness beyond forms'—that altogether give eight levels, often referred to as the eight attainments.

A number of objects can serve as the basis for jhana. The breath is one, and an analysis of the Canon's description of the first stages of breath meditation will give an idea of what jhana involves.

The first step is simply being mindful of the breath in the present:

There is the case of a monk who, having gone to a forest, to the shade of a tree or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and keeping mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

Then comes evaluation: He begins to discern variations in the breath:

Breathing in long, he discerns that he is breathing in long; or breathing out long, he discerns that he is breathing out long. Or breathing in short, he discerns that he is breathing in short; or breathing out short, he discerns that he is breathing out short.

The remaining steps are willed, or determined: He 'trains himself,' first by manipulating his sense of conscious awareness, making it sensitive to the body as a whole. (This accounts for the term 'mahaggatam'—enlarged or expanded—used to describe the mind in the state of jhana.)

He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the entire body, and to breathe out sensitive to the entire body.

Now that he is aware of the body as a whole, he can begin to manipulate the physical sensations of which he is aware, calming them—i.e., calming the breath—so as to create a sense of rapture and ease.

He trains himself to breathe in calming the bodily processes, and to breathe out calming the bodily processes. He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to rapture, and to breathe out sensitive to rapture. He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to pleasure and breathe out sensitive to pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

Now that bodily processes are stilled, mental processes become apparent as they occur. These too are calmed, leaving—as we will see below—a radiant awareness of the mind itself.

He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to mental processes, and to breathe out sensitive to mental processes. He trains himself to breathe in calming mental processes and to breathe out calming mental processes. He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the mind, and to breathe out sensitive to the mind. . . .

<sup>8</sup>As we will see below, he maximizes this sense of rapture and pleasure, making it suffuse the entire body.

## M 118

The standard description of jhana, however, does not refer to any particular object as its basis, but simply divides it into four levels determined by the way the mind relates to the object as it becomes more and more absorbed in it.

Furthermore, monks, the monk—quite withdrawn from sensual pleasures, withdrawn from unskillful (mental) qualities—enters and remains in the first jhana: rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal, so that nothing of his entire body is unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal.

Just as a skilled bathman or bathman's apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again and again with water, so that his ball of bath powder – saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within and without—would nevertheless not drip; even so, monks, the monk permeates... this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal. And as he remains thus earnest, ardent and intent, any longings related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers and settles inwardly, unified and composed. That is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

And furthermore, with the stilling of directed thought and evaluation, he enters and remains in the second jhana: rapture and pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought and evaluation—internal assurance. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of composure, so that nothing of his entire body is unpervaded by rapture and pleasure born of composure.

Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from east, west, north, or south, and with the skies periodically supplying abundant showers, so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters; even so monks, the monk permeates... this very body with the rapture and pleasure born of composure. And as he remains thus earnest, ardent and intent... he develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

And furthermore, with the fading of rapture, he remains in equanimity, mindful and fully aware, and physically sensitive of plea-

sure. He enters and remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous and mindful, he has a pleasurable abiding.' He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture, so that nothing of his entire body is unpervaded by pleasure divested of rapture.

Just as in a blue-, white-, or red-lotus pond, there may be some of the blue, white, or red lotuses that, born and growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated and pervaded, suffused and filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, there being nothing of those blue, white, or red lotuses unpervaded by cool water; even so, monks, the monk permeates. . . this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. And as he remains thus earnest, ardent and intent. . . he develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

And furthermore, with the abandoning of pleasure and stress—as with the earlier disappearance of elation and sorrow—he enters and remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither pleasure nor stress. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness, so that nothing of his entire body is unpervaded by pure, bright awareness.

Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, monks, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. And as he remains thus earnest, ardent and intent. . . he develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

M 119

'Directed thought' mentioned in the reference to the first level of jhana corresponds, in the description of breath meditation, to the mindfulness directed to the breath in the present. 'Evaluation' corresponds to the discernment of variations in the breath, and to the manipulation of awareness and the breath so as to create a sense of rapture and pleasure throughout the body (the bathman kneading moisture throughout the ball of bath powder). The still waters in the simile for the third level of jhana, as opposed to the spring waters welling up in the second level, correspond to the stilling of mental processes. And the pure, bright awareness in the fourth level corresponds to the stage of breath meditation where the meditator is sensitive to the mind.

Thus as the mind progresses through the first four levels of jhana, it sheds the various mental activities surrounding its one object: Directed thought and evaluation are stilled, rapture fades, and pleasure is abandoned. After reaching a state of pure, bright, mindful, equanimous aware-

ness in the fourth level of jhana, the mind can start shedding its perception (mental label) of the form of its object, the space around its object, itself, and the lack of activity within itself. This process takes four steps—the four formlessnesses beyond form—culminating in a state where perception is so refined that it can hardly be called perception at all.

With the complete transcending of perceptions of [physical] form, and the passing away of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, thinking, ‘Infinite space,’ one enters and remains in the sphere of the infinitude of space. . . .

With the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of space, thinking, ‘Infinite consciousness,’ one enters and remains in the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness. . . .

With the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, thinking, ‘There is nothing,’ one enters and remains in the sphere of nothingness. . . .

With the complete transcending of the sphere of nothingness, one enters and remains in the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception.

#### D 15

To abandon attachment to jhana as a sustenance for becoming means, not to stop practicing it, but rather to practice it without becoming engrossed in the sense of pleasure or equanimity it affords, so that one can discern its true nature for what it is.

When this had been said, the Venerable Ananda asked the Master: ‘In the case, Sir, where a monk has reached the point that – (thinking) “It should not be, it should not occur to me; it will not be, it will not occur to me. What is, what has come to be, that I abandon”—he obtains equanimity. Would this monk be totally unbound, or not?’

‘A certain such monk might, Ananda, and another might not.’

‘What is the cause, what is the reason, whereby one might and another might not?’

‘There is the case, Ananda, where a monk has reached the point that—(thinking) “It should not be, it should not occur to me; it will not be, it will not occur to me. What is, what has come to be, that I abandon”—he obtains equanimity. He relishes that equanimity, welcomes it, remains fastened to it. As he does so, his consciousness is dependent on it, sustained by it. With sustenance, Ananda, a monk is not totally unbound.’

‘Being sustained, where is that monk sustained?’

‘The sphere of neither perception nor non-perception.’

‘Then, indeed, being sustained, he is sustained by the supreme sustenance.’

‘Being sustained, Ananda, he is sustained by the supreme sustenance; for this—the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception—is the supreme sustenance. There is [however] the case where a monk... reaches equanimity. He does not relish that equanimity, does not welcome it, does not remain fastened to it. Such being the case, his consciousness is not dependent on it, is not sustained by it. Without sustenance, Ananda, a monk is totally unbound.’

M 106

Once the mind can detach itself from the pleasure and equanimity offered by jhana, it can be inclined toward that which transcends jhana—the unconditioned quality of deathlessness.

There is the case, Ananda, where a monk... enters and remains in the first jhana: rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form, feeling, perceptions, mental processes, and consciousness as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, a void, not-self. He turns his mind away from those phenomena and, having done so, inclines it to the quality of deathlessness: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the resolution of all mental processes; the relinquishment of all mental acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; stopping; Unbinding.’

Having attained this point, he reaches the ending of the mental effluents. Or, if not, then—through passion and delight for this very phenomenon [the discernment inclining to deathlessness] and from the total ending of the first five of the Fetters\*—he is due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world. (Similarly with the other levels of jhana.)

M 64

The fact that the various levels of jhana are nurtured and willed, and thus dependent on conditions, is important: A realization of exactly how they are nurtured—a realization acquired only through practical experience with them—can give insight into the conditioned nature of all mental

events and is one of the ways in which the attachment to jhana, as sustenance for becoming, can be abandoned.

An indication of how this happens is given in outline form in the Discourse on Mindfulness of In and Out Breathing. To take up the description of breath meditation where we left off: Once there is direct awareness of the mind itself, the various levels of jhana are reviewed. Now, however, primary attention is focused, not on the object, but on the mind as it relates to the object—the different ways in which it can be satisfied and steadied, and the different factors from which it can be released by taking it through the different levels (e.g., releasing it from directed thought and evaluation by taking it from the first to the second level, and so forth).

He trains himself to breathe in satisfying the mind, and out satisfying the mind. He trains himself to breathe in steadying the mind, and out steadying the mind. He trains himself to breathe in releasing the mind, and out releasing the mind.

The states of satisfaction, steadiness, and release experienced on these levels, though, are willed and therefore conditioned. The next step is to focus on the fact that these qualities, being conditioned, are inconstant. Once the mind sees directly that inconstancy is inherent both in the pleasure offered by jhana and in the act of will that brings it about, one becomes dispassionate toward it, stops craving it, and can relinquish any and all attachment to it.

He trains himself to breathe in focusing on inconstancy, and out focusing on inconstancy. He trains himself to breathe in focusing on dispassion, and out focusing on dispassion. He trains himself to breathe in focusing on stopping, and out focusing on stopping. He trains himself to breathe in focusing on relinquishment, and out focusing on relinquishment.

M 118

At the conclusion to the discourse, the Buddha states that breath meditation, when practiced often and repeatedly in this way, results in the maturation of clear knowledge and release.

A more vivid description of how mastery of jhana can lead to the insight that transcends it, is given in the Discourse on the Exposition of the Properties:

[On attaining the fourth level of jhana] there remains only equanimity: pure and bright, pliant, malleable and luminous. Just as if a skilled goldsmith or goldsmith's apprentice were to prepare a furnace, heat up a crucible, and, taking gold with a pair of tongs, place it in the crucible. He would blow on it periodically, sprinkle

water on it periodically, examine it periodically, so that the gold would become refined, well-refined, thoroughly refined, flawless, free from dross, pliant, malleable and luminous. Then whatever sort of ornament he had in mind—whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain—it would serve his purpose. In the same way, there remains only equanimity: pure and bright, pliant, malleable and luminous. He [the meditator] discerns that ‘If I were to direct equanimity as pure and bright as this toward the sphere of the infinitude of space, I would develop the mind along those lines, and thus this equanimity of mine—thus supported, thus sustained—would last for a long time. (Similarly with the remaining formless states.)’

He discerns that ‘If I were to direct equanimity as pure and bright as this toward the sphere of the infinitude of space and to develop the mind along those lines, that would be fabricated. (Similarly with the remaining formless states.)’ He neither fabricates nor wills for the sake of becoming or un-becoming. This being the case, he is not sustained by anything in the world (does not cling to anything in the world). Unsustained, he is not agitated. Unagitated, he is totally unbound right within. He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

M 140

**Doctrines of the self** form the fourth mode of clinging/sustenance. The Canon reports a wide variety of such doctrines current in the Buddha’s time, only to reject them out-of-hand for two major reasons. The first is that even the least articulated sense of self or self-identification inevitably leads to stress and suffering.

‘Monks, do you see any clinging/sustenance in the form of a doctrine of self which, in clinging to, there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair?’

‘No, Lord.’

‘... Neither do I... How do you construe this, monks: If a person were to gather or burn or do as he likes with the grass, twigs, branches, and leaves here in Jeta’s Grove, would the thought occur to you, “It’s us that this person is gathering, burning, or doing with as he likes”?’

‘No, sir. Why is that? Because those things are not our self and do not pertain to our self.’

‘Even so, monks, whatever is not yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness and benefit. And what is not yours? Form (body) is not yours...’

Feeling is not yours. . . . Perception. . . . Mental processes. . . . Consciousness is not yours. Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term happiness and benefit.’

M 22

The second reason for rejecting doctrines of the self is that, whatever form they take, they all contain inherent inconsistencies. The Buddha’s most systematic treatment of this point is in the Great Discourse on Causation, where he classifies all theories of the self into four major categories: those describing a self (a) possessed of form (a body) and finite; (b) possessed of form and infinite; (c) formless and finite; and (d) formless and infinite. The text gives no examples for the categories, but we might cite the following as illustrations: (a) theories that deny the existence of a soul, and identify the self with the body; (b) theories that identify the self with all being or with the universe; (c) theories of discrete souls in individual beings; (d) theories of a unitary soul or identity immanent in all things.

Discussing these various categories, the Buddha states that people who adhere to any of them will state that the self already is of such a nature, that it is destined to acquire such a nature after death, or that it can be made into such a nature by various practices. He then goes on to discuss the various ways people assume a self as defined in relation to feeling.

‘In what respect, Ananda, does one assume when assuming a self? Assuming feeling to be the self, one assumes that “Feeling is my self” [or] “Feeling is not my self: My self is oblivious [to feeling]” [or] “Neither is feeling my self, nor is my self oblivious to feeling, but rather my self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling.”

‘Now, one who says, “Feeling is my self,” should be addressed as follows: “There are these three feelings, my friend—feelings of pleasure, feelings of pain, and feelings of neither pleasure nor pain. Which of these three feelings do you assume to be the self? At a moment when a feeling of pleasure is sensed, no feeling of pain or of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed. Only a feeling of pleasure is sensed at that moment. At a moment when a feeling of pain is sensed, no feeling of pleasure or of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed. Only a feeling of pain is sensed at that moment. At a moment when a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed, no feeling of pleasure or of pain is sensed. Only a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain is sensed at that moment.

“Now, a feeling of pleasure is inconstant, compounded, dependent on conditions, subject to passing away, dissolution, fading, and stopping. A feeling of pain. . . . A feeling of neither pleasure nor pain is inconstant. . . . subject to stopping. Having sensed a

feeling of pleasure as ‘my self,’ then with the stopping of one’s very own feeling of pleasure, ‘my self’ has perished. Having sensed a feeling of pain as ‘my self’... Having sensed a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain as ‘my self,’ then with the stopping of one’s very own feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, ‘my self’ has perished.”

‘Thus he assumes, assuming in the immediate present a self inconstant, entangled in pleasure and pain, subject to arising and passing away, he who says, “Feeling is my self.” Thus in this manner, Ananda, one does not see fit to assume feeling to be the self.

‘As for the person who says, “Feeling is not the self: My self is oblivious [to feeling],” he should be addressed as follows: “My friend, where nothing whatsoever is sensed (experienced) at all, would there be the thought, ‘I am’?”’

‘No, sir.’

‘Thus in this manner, Ananda, one does not see fit to assume that “Feeling is not my self: My self is oblivious [to feeling].”

‘As for the person who says, “Neither is feeling my self, nor is my self oblivious to feeling, but rather my self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling,” he should be addressed as follows: “My friend, should feelings altogether and every way stop without remainder, then with feeling completely not existing, owing to the stopping of feeling, would there be the thought, ‘I am’?”’

‘No, sir.’

‘Thus in this manner, Ananda, one does not see fit to assume that “Neither is feeling my self, nor is my self oblivious to feeling, but rather my self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling.”

‘Now, Ananda, in as far as a monk does not assume feeling to be the self, nor the self as oblivious, nor that “My self feels, in that my self is subject to feeling,” then, not assuming in this way, he is not sustained by anything in the world. Unsustained, he is not agitated. Unagitated, he is totally unbound right within. He discerns that “Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.”

‘If anyone were to say with regard to a monk whose mind is thus released that “The Tathagata exists after death,” is his view, that would be mistaken; that “The Tathagata does not exist after death”... that “The Tathagata both exists and does not exist after death”... that “The Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death” is his view, that would be mistaken. Why? Having directly known the extent of designation and the extent of the objects of designation, the extent of expression and the extent of the objects of expression, the extent of description and

the extent of the objects of description, the extent of discernment and the extent of the objects of discernment, the extent to which the cycle revolves: Having directly known that, the monk is released. [To say that,] “The monk released, having directly known that, does not see, does not know is his opinion,” that would be mistaken.’ (This last sentence means that the monk released is not an agnostic concerning what lies beyond the extent of designation, and so forth. He does know and see what lies beyond, even though – as Ven. Sariputta said to Ven. MahaKotthita—he cannot express it inasmuch as it lies beyond differentiation. See the discussion on pages 31-32.)

## D 15

Views of the self can center around not only feeling, but also physical form, perception, mental processes, and consciousness—the five aggregates for sustenance—which, according to another passage in the above discourse, cover the extent of what can be designated, expressed, and described, but none of which, on investigation, can rightfully be designated as self.

I have heard that on one occasion the Master was staying at Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana. There he addressed the group of five monks:

‘Physical form, monks, is not the self. If physical form were the self, this body would not lend itself to dis-ease. One could get physical form to be like this and not be like that. But precisely because physical form is not the self, it lends itself to dis-ease. And one cannot get physical form to be like this and not be like that.

‘Feeling is not the self. . . . Perception is not the self. . . . Mental processes are not the self. . . .

‘Consciousness is not the self. If consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not lend itself to dis-ease. One could get consciousness to be like this and not be like that. But precisely because consciousness is not the self, it lends itself to dis-ease. And one cannot get consciousness to be like this and not be like that.

‘How do you construe thus, monks—Is physical form constant or inconstant?’—‘Inconstant, Lord.’—‘And whatever is inconstant: Is it easeful or stressful?’—‘Stressful, Lord.’ – ‘And is it right to assume with regard to whatever is inconstant, stressful, subject to change, that “This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am”?’—‘No, Lord.’

‘... Is feeling constant or inconstant? ... Is perception constant or inconstant? ... Are mental processes constant or inconstant?...

‘Is consciousness constant or inconstant?’—‘Inconstant, Lord.’—  
 ‘And whatever is inconstant: Is it easeful or stressful?’—‘Stressful, Lord.’—  
 ‘And is it right to assume with regard to whatever is inconstant, stressful, subject to change, that “This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am”?’—‘No, Lord.’

‘Thus, monks, any physical form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle, common or sublime, far or near: every physical form—is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: “This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.”

‘Any feeling whatsoever... Any perception whatsoever... Any mental processes whatsoever...’

‘Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle, common or sublime, far or near: every consciousness—is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: “This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.”

‘Seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with mental processes, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he grows dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, “Released.” He discerns that “Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.”

That is what the Master said. Gratified, the group of five monks delighted at his words. And while this explanation was being given, the hearts of the group of five monks, through not clinging (not being sustained), were released from the mental effluents.

S XXII.59

On the surface, doctrines about the self would appear simply to be another variety of speculative view. They deserve separate treatment, though, because they all come down to a deeply rooted sense of ‘I am’—a conceit coloring all perception at the most basic level.

Monks, whatever contemplatives or priests who assume in various ways when assuming a self, all assume the five aggregates for sustenance, or a certain one of them. Which five? There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person... assumes the body to be the self, or the self as possessing the body, the

body as in the self, or the self as in the body. He assumes feeling to be the self. . . perception to be the self. . . mental processes to be the self. . . He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness.

Thus, both this assumption and the understanding, 'I am,' occur to him. And so it is with reference to the understanding 'I am' that there is the appearance of the five faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body (the senses of vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch).

Now, there is the intellect, there are ideas (mental qualities), there is the property of ignorance. To an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person, touched by experience born of the contact of ignorance, there occur [the thoughts]: 'I am,' 'I am thus,' 'I will be,' 'I will not be,' 'I will be possessed of form,' 'I will be formless,' 'I will be percipient (conscious),' 'I will be non-percipient,' or 'I will be neither percipient nor non-percipient.'

The five faculties, monks, continue as they were. And with regard to them the instructed noble disciple abandons ignorance and gives rise to clear knowing. Owing to the fading of ignorance and the arising of clear knowing, [the thoughts]—'I am,' 'I am this,' . . . 'I will be neither percipient nor non-percipient'—do not occur to him.

#### S XXII.47

The sense of 'I am' can prevent a person from reaching the goal, even when he feels that he has abandoned attachment to sensuality, speculative views, and the experience of jhana.

There is the case, monks, where a certain contemplative or priest, with the abandonment of speculations about the past and the abandonment of speculations about the future, from the thorough lack of resolve for the fetters of sensuality, and from the surmounting of the rapture of withdrawal [in the first level of jhana], of non-material pleasure, and of the feeling of neither pleasure nor pain [in the fourth level of jhana], thinks, 'I am at peace, I am unbound, I am without clinging/ sustenance!'

In this regard, the Tathagata perceives: 'This venerable contemplative or priest, with the abandonment of speculations about the past. . . thinks, "I am at peace, I am unbound, I am without clinging/sustenance!" To be sure, he affirms the practice conducive to Unbinding. Still, he clings, clinging to a speculative view about the past or. . . a speculative view about the future. . . or a fetter of sensuality. . . or the rapture of withdrawal. . . or

non-material pleasure... or a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain. And the fact that he thinks, "I am at peace, I am unbound, I am without clinging/sustenance!"—that in itself proclaims his clinging.'

Now, with regard to that—conditioned, gross—there is still this: the stopping of mental processes. Knowing this, seeing the emancipation from it, the Tathagata has gone beyond it.

M 102

Whereas the contemplative or priest under discussion in this passage reads an 'I' into what he is experiencing, the Buddha simply observes that 'There is this... ' This unadorned observation—which simply sees what is present in an experience as present, and what is absent as absent—is treated in detail in the Lesser Discourse on Voidness. There the Buddha describes how to develop it methodically, in ascending stages passing through the levels of jhana—in this case based on the object 'earth', or solidity—and leading ultimately to Awakening.

Ananda, just as this palace of Migara's mother [in the monastery constructed by Lady Visakha near Savatthi] is devoid of elephants, cattle, and mares, devoid of gold and silver, devoid of assemblies of women and men, and there is only this non-voidness—the singleness based on the community of monks; even so, Ananda, a monk—not attending to the perception (mental note) of village, not attending to the perception of human being—attends to the singleness based on the perception of forest. His mind takes pleasure, finds satisfaction, settles, and indulges in its perception of forest.

He discerns that 'Whatever disturbances that would exist based on the perception of village... that would exist based on the perception of human being, are not present. There is only this modicum of disturbance: the singleness based on the perception of forest.' He discerns that 'This mode of perception is void of the perception of village. This mode of perception is void of the perception of human being. There is only this non-voidness: the singleness based on the perception of forest.' Thus he regards it as void of whatever is not there. Whatever remains, he discerns as present: 'There is this.' And so this, his entry into voidness, accords with actuality, is undistorted in meaning, and pure.

Further, Ananda, the monk—not attending to the perception of human being, not attending to the perception of forest—attends to the singleness based on the perception of earth. His mind takes pleasure, finds satisfaction, settles, and indulges in its perception of earth. Just as a bull's hide is stretched free from wrinkles with a hundred stakes, even so—without attending to all

the ridges and hollows, the river ravines, the tracts of stumps and thorns, the craggy irregularities of this earth—he attends to the singleness based on the perception of earth. His mind... settles and indulges in its perception of earth.

He discerns that ‘Whatever disturbances that would exist based on the perception of human being... that would exist based on the perception of forest, are not present. There is only this modicum of disturbance: the singleness based on the perception of earth.’ He discerns that ‘This mode of perception is void of the perception of human being... void of the perception of forest. There is only this non-voidness: the singleness based on the perception of earth.’ Thus he regards it as void of whatever is not there. Whatever remains, he discerns as present: ‘There is this.’ And so this, his entry into voidness, accords with actuality, is undistorted in meaning, and pure.

Further, Ananda, the monk—not attending to the perception of forest, not attending to the perception of earth—attends to the singleness based on the perception of the sphere of the infinitude of space... (and so on through the four levels of formless jhana. Then:)

Further, Ananda, the monk—not attending to the perception of the sphere of nothingness, not attending to the perception of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception—attends to the singleness based on the signless concentration of awareness. His mind takes pleasure, finds satisfaction, settles, and indulges in its signless concentration of awareness.

He discerns that ‘Whatever disturbances that would exist based on the perception of the sphere of nothingness... that would exist based on the perception of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, are not present. And there is only this modicum of disturbance: that connected with the six sensory spheres, dependent on this very body with life as its condition.’ He discerns that ‘This mode of perception is void... (etc.)’

Further, Ananda, the monk—not attending to the perception of the sphere of nothingness, not attending to the perception of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception—attends to the singleness based on the signless concentration of awareness. His mind takes pleasure, finds satisfaction, settles, and indulges in its signless concentration of awareness.

He discerns that ‘This signless concentration of awareness is fabricated and mentally fashioned.’ And he discerns that ‘Whatever is fabricated and mentally fashioned is inconstant and subject to stopping.’ For him—thus knowing, thus seeing—the mind is released from the effluent of sensuality, the effluent of becoming,

the effluent of ignorance. With release, there is the knowledge, 'Released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'

He discerns that 'Whatever disturbances that would exist based on the effluent of sensuality... the effluent of becoming... the effluent of ignorance, are not present. And there is only this modicum of disturbance: that connected with the six sensory spheres, dependent on this very body with life as its condition.' He discerns that 'This mode of perception is void of the effluent of sensuality... becoming... ignorance. And there is just this non-voidness: that connected with the six sensory spheres, dependent on this very body with life as its condition.' Thus he regards it as void of whatever is not there. Whatever remains, he discerns as present: 'There is this.' And so this, his entry into voidness, accords with actuality, is undistorted in meaning, pure—superior and unsurpassed.

M 121

Ananda: It is said that the world is void, the world is void, lord. In what respect is it said that the world is void?

The Buddha: Insofar as it is void of a self or of anything pertaining to a self: Thus it is said that the world is void. And what is void of a self or of anything pertaining to a self? The eye is void of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Forms... Visual consciousness... Visual contact is void of a self or of anything pertaining to a self.

The ear... The nose... The tongue... The body...

The intellect is void of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Ideas... Mental consciousness... Mental contact is void of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Thus it is said that the world is void.

S XXXV.85

In abandoning the notion of self with regard to the world—here defined in the same terms as the 'All' (page 31, above)—the Buddha did not, however, hold to a theory that there is no self.

Having taken a seat to one side, Vacchagotta the wanderer said to the Master, 'Now then, Venerable Gotama, is there a self?' When this was said, the Master was silent.

'Then is there no self?' Again, the Master was silent.

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer got up from his seat and left.

Then, not long after Vacchagotta the wanderer had left, the Venerable Ananda said to the Master, ‘Why, sir, did the Master not answer when asked a question by Vacchagotta the wanderer?’

‘Ananda, if I, being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self, were to answer that there is a self, that would be conforming with those priests and contemplatives who are exponents of eternalism [i.e., the view that there is an eternal soul]. And if I . . . were to answer that there is no self, that would be conforming with those priests and contemplatives who are exponents of annihilationism [i.e. that death is the annihilation of consciousness]. If I . . . were to answer that there is a self, would that be in keeping with the arising of knowledge that all phenomena are not-self?’

‘No, Lord.’

‘And if I . . . were to answer that there is no self, the bewildered Vacchagotta would become even more bewildered: “Does the self that I used to have, now not exist?”’

#### S XLIV.10

This dialogue is one of the most controversial in the Canon. Those who hold that the Buddha took a position one way or the other on the question of whether or not there is a self have to explain away the Buddha’s silence, and usually do so by focusing on his final statement to Ananda. If someone else more spiritually mature than Vacchagotta had asked the question, they say, the Buddha would have revealed his true position.

This interpretation, though, ignores the fact that of the Buddha’s four express reasons for not answering the question, only the last is specific to Vacchagotta. The first two hold true no matter who is asking the question: To say that there is or is not a self would be to fall into one of two philosophical positions that the Buddha frequently attacked as incompatible with his teaching. As for his third reason, the Buddha wanted to be consistent with ‘the arising of knowledge that all phenomena are not-self,’ not because he felt that this knowledge was worth holding onto in and of itself (cf. his statement to Upasiva, on page 28, that in the experience of the goal all phenomena are done away with), but because he saw that the arising of such knowledge could, through causing the mind to let go of all forms of clinging/sustenance, lead to liberation.

This point becomes clear when we compare the exchange with Vacchagotta, given above, to this one with Mogharaja:

Mogharaja:

How does one view the world  
so as not to be seen by Death’s king?

The Buddha:

View the world, Mogharaja, as void—  
 always mindful, to have removed any view in terms of self.  
 This way one is above and beyond death.  
 This is how one views the world  
 so as not to be seen by Death's king.

Sn V.16

The fundamental difference between this dialogue and the preceding one lies in the questions asked: In the first, Vacchagotta asks the Buddha to take a position on the metaphysical question of whether or not there is a self, and the Buddha remains silent. In the second, Mogharaja asks for a way to view the world so that one can go beyond death, and the Buddha speaks, teaching him to view the world without reference to the notion of self.

This suggests that, instead of being a metaphysical assertion that there is no self, the teaching on not-self is more a strategy, a technique of perception aimed at leading beyond death to Unbinding—a way of perceiving things that involves no self-identification, no sense that 'I am', no attachment to 'I' or 'mine.' And this would be in keeping with the discernment the Buddha recommends in the Discourse on the Supreme Net (see page 64): one that judges views not in terms of their content, but in terms of where they come from and where they lead.

If a person aiming at Unbinding is not to view the world in terms of self, then in what terms should he or she view it? The Buddha's comment to Anuradha (page 25)—'It is only stress that I describe, and the stopping of stress'—suggests an answer, and this answer is borne out by a series of other passages in the Canon.

'Lord, "Right view, right view," it is said. In what respect is there right view?'

'By and large, Kaccayana, this world is supported by (takes as its object) a polarity, that of existence and non-existence. But when one sees the origin of the world as it actually is with right discernment, "non-existence" with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the stopping of the world as it actually is with right discernment, "existence" with reference to the world does not occur to one.

'By and large, Kaccayana, this world is in bondage to attachments, clingings (sustenances), and biases. But one such as this does not get involved with or cling to these attachments, clingings, fixations of awareness, biases, or latent tendencies; nor is one resolved on "my self." One has no uncertainty or doubt that, when there is arising, only stress is arising; and that when there

is passing away, only stress is passing away. In this, one's knowledge is independent of others. It is in this respect, Kaccayana, that there is right view.'

## S XII.15

There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person . . . does not discern what ideas are fit for attention, or what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to ideas fit for attention, and attends [instead] to ideas unfit for attention. . . . This is how he attends inappropriately: 'Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Will I be in the future? Will I not be in the future? What will I be in the future? How will I be in the future? Having been what, what will I be in the future?' Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?'

As this person attends inappropriately in this way, one of six kinds of view arises in him: The view I have a self arises in him as true and established, or the view I have no self. . . . or the view It is precisely because of self that I perceive self. . . . or the view It is precisely because of self that I perceive not-self. . . . or the view It is precisely because of not-self that I perceive self arises in him as true and established, or else he has a view like this: This very self of mine—the knower that is sensitive here and there to the ripening of good and bad actions—is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity. This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. He is not freed from stress, I say.

The well-taught noble disciple . . . discerns what ideas are fit for attention, and what ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he does not attend to ideas unfit for attention, and attends (instead) to ideas fit for attention. . . . He attends appropriately, This is stress. . . . This is the origin of stress. . . . This is the stopping of stress. . . . This is the way leading to the stopping of stress. As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: identity-view, doubt, and grasping at precepts and practices.

Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress: Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five aggregates for sustenance are stressful.

And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming—accompanied by passion and delight, relishing now here and now there—i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

And this, monks, is the noble truth of the stopping of stress: the remainderless fading and stopping, renunciation, relinquishment, release, and letting go of that very craving.

And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way leading to the stopping of stress: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of stress’ . . . ‘This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended’ . . . ‘This noble truth of stress has been comprehended’ . . . ‘This is the noble truth of the origination of stress’ . . . ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned’ . . . ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress has been abandoned’ . . . ‘This is the noble truth of the stopping of stress’ . . . ‘This noble truth of the stopping of stress is to be directly experienced’ . . . ‘This noble truth of the stopping of stress has been directly experienced’ . . . ‘This is the noble truth of the way leading to the stopping of stress’ . . . ‘This noble truth of the way leading to the stopping of stress is to be developed’ . . . ‘This noble truth of the way leading to the stopping of stress has been developed.’

And, monks, as long as this knowledge and vision of mine—with its three rounds and twelve permutations concerning these four noble truths as they actually are—was not pure, I did not claim to have directly awakened to the unexcelled right self-awakening. . . . But as soon as this knowledge and vision of mine—with its three rounds and twelve permutations concerning these four noble truths as they actually are—was truly pure, then did I claim to have directly awakened to the unexcelled right self-awakening. . . . The knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.’

## S LVI.11

Just as if there were a pool of water in a mountain glen—clear, limpid, and unsullied—where a man with good eyes standing on the bank could see shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also shoals of fish swimming about and resting, and it would occur to him, ‘This pool of water is clear, limpid and unsullied. Here are these shells, gravel and pebbles, and also these shoals of fish swimming about and resting.’ So too, the monk discerns as it actually is, that ‘This is stress. . . . This is the origination of stress. . . . This is the stopping of stress. . . . This is the way leading to the stopping of stress. . . . These are mental effluents. . . . This is the origination of mental effluents. . . . This is the stopping of mental effluents.’ His heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, is released from the effluent of sensuality, released from the effluent of becoming, released from the effluent of ignorance. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

This, great king, is a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here and now, more excellent than the previous ones and more sublime. And as for another visible fruit of the contemplative life, higher and more sublime than this, there is none.

## D 2

Thus for the person who aims at Unbinding, the Buddha recommends a technique of perception that regards things simply in terms of the four truths concerning stress, with no self-identification, no sense that ‘I am’, no attachment to ‘I’ or ‘mine’ involved. Although, as the following passage states, there may be a temporary, functional identity to one’s range of perception, this ‘identity’ goes no further than that. One recognizes it for what it is: inconstant and conditioned, and thus not worthy of being taken as a self—for in transcending attachment to it, there is the realization of deathlessness.

Ananda: ‘It is wonderful, sir; it is marvelous. For truly, the Master has pointed out the way to cross over the flood by going from one support to the next. But what then, sir, is the Noble Liberation?’

The Buddha: ‘There is the case, Ananda, where a noble disciple considers that “Sensual pleasure here and now and in lives to come; form here and now and in lives to come; perceptions

of form here and now and in lives to come; perceptions of imperturbability, perceptions of the sphere of nothingness, perceptions of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception: [All] that is an identity, to the extent that there is identity. [But] this is deathless: the liberation of the mind through lack of clinging/sustenance.”

M 106

Once the sense of self is transcended, its polar opposite—the sense of something standing in contradistinction to a self—is transcended as well. In the Discourse at Kalaka’s Park, the Buddha expresses this lack of a self/non-self polarity directly in terms of sensory experience. For a person who has attained the goal, experience occurs with no ‘subject’ or ‘object’ superimposed on it, no construing of experience or thing experienced. There is simply the experience in and of itself.

Monks, whatever in this world—with its gods, Maras and Brahmas, its generations complete with contemplatives and priests, princes and men—is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect: That do I know. Whatever in this world... is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect: That I directly know. That is known by the Tathagata, but the Tathagata has not been obsessed with it...

Thus, monks, the Tathagata, when seeing what is to be seen, does not construe an [object as] seen. He does not construe an unseen. He does not construe an [object] to-be-seen. He does not construe a seer.

When hearing... When sensing...

When cognizing what is to be cognized, he does not construe an [object as] cognized. He does not construe an uncognized. He does not construe an [object] to-be-cognized. He does not construe a cognizer.

Thus, monks, the Tathagata—being such-like with regard to all phenomena that can be seen, heard, sensed, and cognized—is ‘Such.’ And I tell you: There is no other ‘Such’ higher or more sublime.

Whatever is seen or heard or sensed and fastened onto  
as true by others,  
One who is Such—among those who are self-bound—  
would not further assume to be true or even false.  
Having seen well in advance that arrow where genera-  
tions are fastened and hung

—‘I know, I see, that’s just how it is!’— there is nothing  
of the Tathagata fastened.

A IV.24

A view is true or false only when one is judging how accurately it refers to something else. If one is regarding it simply as an event in and of itself, true and false no longer apply. Thus for the Tathagata—who no longer needs to impose notions of subject or object on experience, and can regard sights, sounds, feelings, and thoughts purely in and of themselves—views are not necessarily true or false, but can simply serve as phenomena to be experienced. With no notion of subject, there is no grounds for ‘I know, I see;’ with no notion of object, no grounds for ‘That’s just how it is.’ So—although a Tathagata may continue using ‘true’ and ‘false’ in the course of teaching others, and may continue reflecting on right view as a means of abiding mindfully and comfortably in the present—notions of true, false, self, and not self have lost all their holding power over the mind. As a result, the mind can see conditioned events in their suchness—‘such are the aggregates, such their origin, such their disappearance’—and is left free to its own Suchness: unrestrained, uninfluenced by anything of any sort.

\* \* \*

This concludes our survey of the four modes of clinging/sustenance—passion and delight for sensuality, for views, for precepts and practices, and for doctrines of the self—and should be enough to give a sense of what is loosed in the Unbinding of the mind. All that remains now is the question of how.

Many of the passages we have considered seem to suggest that total Unbinding may be realized by letting go of any one of these four modes of sustenance. What most likely happens in such cases, though, is that the abandoning of one mode immediately triggers an abandoning of the remaining three, for there are other cases reported in the Canon where the experience of Unbinding comes in stages spread over time: the arising of the eye of Dhamma, which frees one from passion and delight for doubt, self-identity views, and grasping at precepts and practices; the attainment of Non-returning, which frees one from passion and delight for sensuality; and the attainment of Arahantship, which frees one from passion and delight for all views, the practice of jhana, and the conceit ‘I am.’ Why these stages happen in this order, and how they relate to the practices meant to induce them, is what we will take up next.

## Chapter IV

“And taking a pin, I pulled out the wick.”

A theme recurrent in the passages we have been considering is that the abandonment of clinging/sustenance is effected through knowledge.

These four [modes of] sustenance have what as their cause, what as their origin, from what are they born, from what do they arise? These four [modes of] sustenance have craving as their cause, craving as their origin, are born from craving, and arise from craving.

And what does craving have as its cause...?... feeling... And what does feeling have as its cause...?... contact... And what does contact have as its cause...?... the six sense spheres... And what do the six sense spheres have as their cause...?... name and form... And what do name and form have as their cause...?... consciousness... And what does consciousness have as its cause...?... processes... And what do processes have as their cause...?... ignorance...

And, monks, as soon as ignorance is abandoned in a monk, and clear knowing arises, he—from the fading of ignorance and the arising of clear knowing—clings neither to sensual pleasures as sustenance, nor to views as sustenance, nor to precepts and practices as sustenance, nor to doctrines of the self as sustenance. Not clinging (unsustained), he is not agitated. Unagitated, he is totally unbound right within. He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

M 11

The word ‘vijja’—translated here as clear knowing—also means ‘science.’ And just as science implies a method, there is a method—a discipline—underlying the knowledge that leads to Unbinding. That method is described from a number of perspectives in the Canon, each description stressing different aspects of the steps involved. The standard formula, though, is the Noble Eightfold Path, also known as the middle way.

There are these two extremes that one who has gone forth is not to indulge in. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathagata—producing vision,

producing knowledge—leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding.

And what is the middle way realized by the Tathagata that—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding? Precisely this Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

#### S LVI.11

The eight factors of the path fall under three headings, the first two factors coming under discernment, the next three under virtue, and the final three under concentration. These three headings are called the Threefold Training; the dynamic among them, leading to the knowledge and vision of release, is one of natural cause and effect.

It is natural that in a virtuous person, one of consummate virtue, freedom from remorse will arise. . . . It is natural that in a person free from remorse gladness will arise. . . . that in a glad person rapture will arise. . . . that for an enraptured person the body will be calmed. . . . that a person of calmed body will feel pleasure. . . . that the mind of a person feeling pleasure will become concentrated. . . . that a person whose mind is concentrated will see things as they actually are. . . . that a person seeing things as they actually are will grow disenchanted. . . . that a disenchanted person will grow dispassionate. . . . that a dispassionate person will realize the knowledge and vision of release.

#### A XI.2

According to the standard description of the Eightfold Path, the heading of discernment includes seeing things in terms of the four noble truths about stress, and maintaining the resolve to release oneself from sensuality, to abandon ill will, and to avoid doing harm. Virtue includes abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from harsh speech, and from idle chatter; from killing, stealing, and having illicit sex; and from engaging in dishonest or abusive forms of making a living, such as dealing in poison, slaves, weapons, intoxicants, or animal flesh.

The factors that go into concentration, though, are somewhat more complex.

And what, monks is right effort? There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, arouses persistence, upholds and exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful

qualities that have not yet arisen. . . for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen. . . for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen. . . (and) for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, and culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This, monks, is right effort.

And what is right mindfulness? There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in and of itself—ardent, alert, and mindful—putting away greed and distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in and of themselves. . . . He remains focused on the mind in and of itself. . . . He remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves—ardent, alert, and mindful—putting away greed and distress with reference to the world.

Thus either internally he remains focused on the body in and of itself, or externally. . . or both internally and externally. . . or else he remains focused on the phenomenon of arising with reference to the body. . . or the phenomenon of passing away with reference to the body. . . or the phenomenon of arising and passing away with reference to the body. Or his mindfulness that ‘There is a body,’ is maintained just to the extent of knowledge and recollection. And he remains independent, not sustained by (clinging to) anything in the world. (Similarly with feelings, mind and mental qualities.)<sup>9</sup>

D 22

### **Right concentration is the practice of the four basic levels of jhana**

These three factors are component parts of a single whole. In fact, their balanced inter-relatedness is what makes them ‘right.’ The first level of jhana requires the abandoning of unskillful mental qualities (the Hindrances\*), which is part of the duty of right effort; and, as we saw in the description of breath meditation, jhana begins with mindfulness of the present. As jhana is practiced and mastered, skillful qualities (such as the Factors of Awakening\*) are fostered and maintained; physical processes are stilled so that mental qualities may become clearly apparent as they occur; mindfulness is made pure on the attainment of the fourth level of jhana; and all four of the Applications of Mindfulness are developed.

On whatever occasion, monks, a monk breathing in long discerns that he is breathing in long; or breathing out long, dis-

<sup>9</sup>See page 127 above, instructions to Bahiya.

cerns that he is breathing out long; or breathing in short discerns that he is breathing in short; or breathing out short, discerns that he is breathing out short; trains himself to breathe in... and... out sensitive to the entire body; trains himself to breathe in... and... out calming the bodily processes: On that occasion, monks, the monk remains focused on the body in and of itself—ardent, alert, and mindful—subduing greed and distress with reference to the world...

On whatever occasion a monk trains himself to breathe in... and... out sensitive to rapture; trains himself to breathe in... and... out sensitive to pleasure; trains himself to breathe in... and... out sensitive to mental processes; trains himself to breathe in... and... out calming mental processes: On that occasion the monk remains focused on feelings in and of themselves—ardent, alert, and mindful—subduing greed and distress with reference to the world...

On whatever occasion a monk trains himself to breathe in... and... out sensitive to the mind; trains himself to breathe in... and... out satisfying the mind; trains himself to breathe in... and... out steadying the mind; trains himself to breathe in... and... out releasing the mind: On that occasion the monk remains focused on the mind in and of itself—ardent, alert, and mindful—subduing greed and distress with reference to the world...

On whatever occasion a monk trains himself to breathe in... and... out focusing on inconstancy; trains himself to breathe in... and... out focusing on dispassion; trains himself to breathe in... and... out focusing on stopping; trains himself to breathe in... and... out focusing on relinquishment: On that occasion the monk remains focused on mental qualities in and of themselves—ardent, alert, and mindful—subduing greed and distress with reference to the world.

M 118

In the Great Discourse on the Applications of Mindfulness, the Buddha describes mindfulness of mental qualities in and of themselves, in part, in terms of the Hindrances and the Factors of Awakening, qualities that are respectively set aside and fostered in the practice of jhana.

And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the five Hindrances? There is the case where, there being sensual desire present within, a monk discerns that ‘There is sensual desire present within me.’ Or, there being no sensual desire present within, he discerns that

‘There is no sensual desire present within me.’ He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen sensual desire. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of sensual desire once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no further appearance in the future of sensual desire that has been abandoned. (The same formula is repeated for the remaining Hindrances: ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, and uncertainty). . . .

And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in and of themselves with reference to the seven Factors of Awakening? There is the case where, there being mindfulness as a Factor of Awakening present within, a monk discerns that ‘Mindfulness as a Factor of Awakening is present within me.’ Or, there being no mindfulness as a Factor of Awakening present within, a monk discerns that ‘Mindfulness as a Factor of Awakening is not present within me.’ He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen mindfulness as a Factor of Awakening. And he discerns how there is the development and consummation of mindfulness as a Factor of Awakening once it has arisen. (The same formula is repeated for the remaining Factors of Awakening: investigation of phenomena, persistence, rapture, serenity, concentration and equanimity.)

D 22

Thus the practice of right mindfulness does not repress undesirable mental qualities—i.e., it does not deny their presence. Rather, it notices them as they occur so that the phenomenon of their occurrence can be understood. Once they are understood for what they are as phenomena, they lose their power and can be abandoned.

However, the practice of right mindfulness focuses, not on the haphazard occurrence of mental qualities, but on the elimination of undesirable qualities—the Hindrances—that obstruct jhana, and on the development of desirable qualities—the Factors of Awakening—that jhana fosters. As these factors are strengthened through the continued practice of jhana, they make possible a clearer awareness of sensory processes as they occur. The factors of rapture, serenity, and equanimity, existing independently of the input of the five senses, make the mind less involved in sensory pleasures, less inclined to search for emotional satisfaction from them; the factors of mindfulness, investigation of phenomena, persistence, and concentration enable clear insight into the events that make up sensory perception.

To see events in the body and mind simply as that—events, conditioned, arising and passing away—creates a further sense of distance, disenchantment, and de-identification.

Knowing and seeing the eye as it actually is, knowing and seeing forms... visual consciousness... visual contact as they actually are, knowing and seeing whatever arises conditioned by visual contact—experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—as it actually is, one is not infatuated with the eye... forms... visual consciousness... visual contact... whatever arises conditioned by visual contact and is experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain....

Knowing and seeing the ear... Knowing and seeing the nose... Knowing and seeing the tongue... Knowing and seeing the body...

Knowing and seeing the intellect as it actually is, knowing and seeing ideas... mental consciousness... mental contact as they actually are, knowing and seeing whatever arises conditioned by mental contact—experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—as it actually occurs, one is not infatuated with the intellect... ideas... mental consciousness... mental contact... whatever arises conditioned by mental contact and is experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain.

For him—remaining uninfatuated, unattached, unconfused—the five aggregates for sustenance head toward future diminution. The craving that makes for further becoming—accompanied by passion and delight, relishing now this and now that—is abandoned by him. His bodily disturbances and mental disturbances are abandoned. His bodily torments and mental torments are abandoned. His bodily distresses and mental distresses are abandoned. He is sensitive both to ease of body and ease of awareness.

Any view belonging to one who has come to be like this is his right view. Any resolve, his right resolve. Any effort, his right effort. Any mindfulness, his right mindfulness. Any concentration, his right concentration: just as earlier his actions, speech, and livelihood were already well-purified. Thus for him the Noble Eightfold Path goes to the culmination of its development... the four Applications of Mindfulness go to the culmination of their development... the seven Factors of Awakening go to the culmination of their development. [And] for him these two qualities occur in concert: tranquillity and insight.

M 149

With the union of tranquillity and insight at the culmination of the path, Awakening occurs. The Canon records many instances where Awakening is sudden and total, and many where it occurs in stages: The reason for the

difference isn't stated, but perhaps in sudden Awakening the mind goes through the various stages in quick succession. At any rate, a brief look at the stages will give something of an idea of the dynamics of the mind's Unbinding.

The standard list of the stages gives four, and describes them in terms of how many of the ten Fetters the mind sheds: (1) self-identity views, (2) grasping at precepts and practices, (3) doubt, (4) sensual passion, (5) irritation, (6) passion for form, (7) passion for formlessness, (8) conceit, (9) restlessness, and (10) ignorance.

There are in this community of monks, monks who, with the total ending of [the first] three Fetters, are Stream-winners, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening. . . .

There are. . . monks who, with the total ending of [the first] three fetters and the thinning out of passion, aversion, and delusion, are Once-returners. After returning only once to this world they will put an end to stress. . . .

There are. . . monks who, with the total ending of the first five of the Fetters, are due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world. . . .

There are. . . monks who are Arahants, whose mental effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis.

M 118

An alternative way of classifying the stages lists three:

There is the case of the monk who has attained full accomplishment with regard to virtue, a modicum of accomplishment with regard to concentration, and a modicum with regard to discernment. . . .

There is the case of the monk who has attained full accomplishment with regard to virtue, full accomplishment with regard to concentration, and a modicum of accomplishment with regard to discernment. . . .

There is the case of the monk who has attained full accomplishment with regard to virtue, full accomplishment with regard to concentration, and full accomplishment with regard to discernment. With the ending of the mental effluents, he remains in the effluentless release of awareness and release of discernment, having known and made them manifest for himself right in the present.

## A III.88

As the text makes clear, Stream-winners and Once-returners are those who have fully developed virtue, Non-returners are those who have fully developed virtue and concentration, and Arahants are those who have fully developed all three parts of the path: virtue, concentration, and discernment.

This is not to say, however, that Stream-winners have not developed discernment to a fairly high degree. In fact, the unvarying definition of Stream-winners is that they have ‘seen with discernment,’ and their level of Awakening is called the arising of the Dhamma eye. What they see with this Dhamma eye is always expressed in the same terms:

Then Ven. Assaji gave this exposition of Dhamma to Sariputta the Wanderer:

‘Whatever phenomena arise from a cause: Their cause  
and their cessation.  
Such is the teaching of the Tathagata the Great Con-  
templative.’

Then to Sariputta the Wanderer, as he heard this exposition of Dhamma, there arose the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.

## Mv I.23.5

For this realization to occur, it must follow on a glimpse of what stands in opposition to ‘all that is subject to origination,’ i.e., a glimpse of the Unconditioned—deathlessness.

[Immediately after winning to the Stream] Sariputta the Wanderer went to where Moggallana the Wanderer was staying. Moggallana the Wanderer saw him coming from afar and, on seeing him, said, ‘Your faculties are bright, my friend; your complexion pure and clear. Could it be that you have attained the Deathless?’

‘Yes, my friend, I have. . . .’

## Mv I.23.5

Although their Awakening is not yet complete, Stream-winners see enough of the Deathless to remove all doubt in the Buddha’s teachings.

To Upali the householder, as he was sitting right there, there arose the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation. Then—having seen the Dhamma, having reached the Dhamma, known the Dhamma, plunged entirely into the Dhamma, having crossed over and beyond doubt, having had no more questioning—Upali the householder gained fearlessness and was independent of others with regard to the Teacher’s message.

M 56

Their glimpse of deathlessness is also enough to convince Stream-winners of the worthlessness of self-identity views that center on the five aggregates of sustenance, all of which come under the category of ‘all that is subject to origination.’

Magandiya, it is just as if there were a blind man who couldn’t see black objects... white... blue... yellow... red... the sun or the moon. Now suppose that a certain man were to take a grimy, oil-stained rag and fool him, saying, ‘Here, my good man, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, and clean.’ The blind man would take it and wear it.

Then suppose his friends, companions, and relatives took him to a doctor, and the doctor treated him with medicine: purges from above and purges from below, ointments and counter-ointments, and treatments through the nose. And thanks to the medicine his eyesight would appear and grow clear. Then together with the arising of his eyesight, he would abandon whatever passion and delight he felt for that grimy, oil-stained rag. And he would regard that man as an enemy and no friend at all, and think that he deserved to be killed. ‘My gosh, how long have I been fooled, cheated, and deceived by that man and his grimy, oil-stained rag!’—“Here, my good man, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, and clean.”

In the same way, Magandiya, if I were to teach you the Dhamma—this freedom from Disease, this Unbinding—and you on your part were to understand that freedom from Disease and see that Unbinding, then together with the arising of your eyesight, you would abandon whatever passion and delight you felt with regard for the five aggregates for sustenance. And it would occur to you, ‘My gosh, how long have I been fooled, cheated, and deceived by this mind! For in clinging, it was just form that I was clinging to... it was just feeling... just perception... just mental processes... just consciousness that I was clinging to. With my clinging as condition, there is becoming... birth... aging and

death. . . sorrow, lamentation, pains, distresses, and despairs all come into play. And thus is the origination of this entire mass of stress.'

## M 75

Because they realize that their glimpse of the goal came through an act of discernment, Stream-winners no longer grasp at precepts and practices. What this means is that they no longer view mere adherence to precepts and practices as a sufficient means to the goal in and of itself, although they continue to abide by the precepts of right speech, action, and livelihood and by the practice of jhana that fostered their discernment to begin with. Having seen the efficacy of their own actions, they will never intentionally do evil again. This is what perfects their virtue. Still, they have yet to fully comprehend the practice of jhana, and so their minds remain attached to the phenomena—with and without form—on which that practice is based. As the texts say, they are bound by their incomplete mastery of concentration and discernment, and by seven remaining Fetters to the cycle of birth and death.

As for Non-returners, they have mastered jhana to the extent that they can use it as a vantage point for watching the arising and passing away that occurs in reference to the five senses, while the pleasure, rapture, and equanimity it offers serve them as a fulcrum point for uprooting any desire for the pleasures of those five senses, together with all feelings of irritation that come when such desires are not met.

They, too, have seen the Deathless, but as with Stream-winners, their discernment is not yet fully comprehensive: They have yet to turn it on the act of seeing: the tools—tranquillity and insight—that lead to that discernment, and the subtle levels of passion and delight that accompany it.

The texts express this point in a variety of ways. Some passages simply list the Fetters that Non-returners have yet to abandon: passion for form, passion for formlessness, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. Others give more experiential accounts of what is happening in a Non-returner's mind. From reading these latter accounts it is possible to see how the five Fetters in the list are interconnected: Although Non-returners shed attachment to self-identity views back when they attained Stream entry, they still have a lingering sense of the conceit 'I am', associated with the five aggregates for sustenance—possessing form and formless—as they function subtly in the arising of tranquillity and insight as a process of becoming. And while they have gained enough insight into the five senses to let go of any attachment to them, they still suffer from a certain amount of ignorance concerning the subtler level of becoming inherent in that conceit. This leads to refined forms of passion and delight that keep them restless and bound to the sixth sense: the mind.

There is the case, Ananda, where a monk. . . enters and remains in the first jhana: refreshment and pleasure born of withdrawal,

accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. He regards whatever phenomena there that are connected with form (body), feeling, perceptions, mental processes, and consciousness as inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, a void, not self.

He turns his mind away from those phenomena, and having done so, inclines his mind to the quality of deathlessness: ‘This is peace, this is exquisite—the resolution of all mental processes; the relinquishment of all mental acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; stopping; Unbinding.’ Having attained this point, he reaches the ending of the mental effluents. Or, if not, then—through passion and delight for this very phenomenon [the discernment inclining to deathlessness] and from the total ending of the first five of the Fetters—he is due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world. (Similarly with each of the remaining levels of jhana.)

M 64

Several strands of our discussion converge at this passage. To begin with, the act of discernment described here—inclining the mind to the Deathless—is identical with the object of concentration described by the Buddha at A X.6 (see page 35). This would thus be an instance of tranquility occurring in concert with insight (see page 102).

Secondly, as the passage points out, the crucial difference between Arahants and Non-returners is whether or not the mind feels passion and delight for this act of discernment. Here the distinctions concerning sustenance and clinging raised at the beginning of Chapter III (see page 44) come subtly into play. Any act of discernment, even on this level, comes under the five aggregates for sustenance, as composed of perception, mental processes, and consciousness. If not fully seen for what it is, it can thus act as a phenomenon offering sustenance (or as a clingable phenomenon). Any passion and delight for it—and these themselves are perceptions and mental processes—function as refined sustenance/clinging in the modes of views (of inferior/superior), mental absorption, and a sense of ‘I am’ involved in the act of discerning. Thus the mind still contains the conditions for becoming on a refined level, and this stands in the way of its total freedom.

Bound by both the yoke of sensuality and the yoke of becoming,  
beings continue in transmigration, returning to birth and death.

Those who have abandoned sensuality without reaching the ending  
of the effluents,  
are bound by the yoke of becoming: Non-returners they are  
called.

While those who have cut off doubt have no more conceit or renewal of becoming.

They who have reached the ending of the effluents, while in the world, have gone beyond.

Iti 96

Ven. Khemaka, a Non-returner, speaks shortly before he attains Arahantship: ‘Just like the scent of a blue, red, or white lotus: If someone were to call it the scent of a petal or the scent of the color or the scent of a filament, would he be speaking correctly?’

‘No, friend.’

‘Then how would he describe it if he were describing it correctly?’

‘... As the scent of the flower.’

‘In the same way, friends, I don’t say that this “I am” is form, nor that this “I am” is other than form. I don’t say that this “I am” is feeling... perception... mental processes... I don’t say that this “I am” is consciousness, nor that this “I am” is other than consciousness. It’s just that for me the “I am” with regard to the five aggregates for sustenance has not been removed, although I don’t regard them as “This is me.”

‘... Just like a cloth, spotted and stained, whose owners give it over to a washerman: The washerman scrubs it with salt earth or lye or cow-dung and then rinses it in clear water. Now even though the cloth is clean and spotless, it still has a slight, lingering residual scent of salt earth or lye or cow-dung. The washerman gives it to the owners, the owners put it away in a wicker box filled with incense, and its slight, lingering residual scent of salt earth, lye, or cow-dung disappears.

‘In the same way, even though a noble disciple has abandoned the five lower Fetters, he still has with regard to the five aggregates for sustenance a slight, lingering residual “I am” conceit, an “I am” desire, an “I am” tendency. But at a later time he keeps focusing on the phenomena of arising and passing away with regard to the five aggregates of sustenance: “Such is form, such its origin, such its disappearance. Such is feeling... Such is perception... Such are mental processes... Such is consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance.” As he keeps focusing on the arising and passing away of these five aggregates for sustenance, the slight, lingering residual “I am” conceit, “I am” desire, “I am” tendency he had with regard to them disappears.’

S XXII.89

Only when discernment is so fully developed and totally comprehensive that it has no lingering conceits, desires, or tendencies for anything—not even for the mental processes of passion and delight that condition subtle levels of becoming around the act of discerning—can it complete its emancipation from the six spheres of sensory contact that make up the All.

Moggallana (shortly before becoming an Arahant): Briefly, sir, in what respect is a monk—released through the ending of craving—utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, a follower of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate: foremost among human and heavenly beings?

The Buddha: There is the case, Moggallana, of the monk who has heard, ‘All things are unworthy of attachment.’ Having heard that all things are unworthy of attachment, he fully knows every thing. Fully knowing every thing, he fully comprehends every thing. Fully comprehending every thing, then whatever feeling he experiences— pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain—he keeps focusing on inconstancy with regard to it, keeps focusing on dispassion, focusing on stopping, focusing on relinquishing. As he keeps focusing on inconstancy . . . dispassion . . . stopping . . . relinquishing with regard to that feeling, he is unsustained by (does not cling to) anything in the world. Unsustained, he is not agitated. Unagitated, he is unbound right within. He discerns: ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

It is in this respect, Moggallana, that a monk, in brief, is released through the ending of craving, utterly complete, utterly free from bonds, a follower of the utterly holy life, utterly consummate: foremost among human and heavenly beings.

A VII.58

One who knows the All from all around, who is not aroused by anything at all,  
having totally comprehended the All, has overcome all stress.

Iti 7

Now when a monk discerns—as they actually are—the origin and passing away of the six spheres of (sensory) contact, their allure, their drawbacks, and the emancipation from them, then he discerns what is superior to all these things.

D 1

With ignorance as condition, there occur processes; with processes as condition, [sensory] consciousness; with [sensory] consciousness as condition, name and form; with name and form as condition, the six sense spheres. . . .

But with the remainderless fading and stopping of ignorance, processes stop. With the stopping of processes, [sensory] consciousness stops. With the stopping of [sensory] consciousness, name and form. . . the six sense spheres. . . contact. . . feeling. . . craving. . . clinging. . . becoming. . . birth stops. With the stopping of birth—aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, and distress all stop. Thus is the stopping of this entire mass of stress.

M 115

That which arises in dependence on the eye as pleasure or joy, that is the allure of the eye. Whatever aspects of the eye are inconstant, stressful, and subject to change, that is the drawback of the eye. Whatever is the subduing of passion and desire, the abandoning of passion and desire for the eye, that is the emancipation from the eye. (Similarly with the ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect, and with forms, sounds, aromas, flavors, tactile sensations, and ideas.)

S XXXV.13-14

This, the unsurpassed, foremost state of peace, has been realized by the Tathagata: liberation, through lack of clinging/sustenance, having known, as they actually are, the origin, the passing away, the allure, the drawbacks of—and the emancipation from—the six spheres of [sensory] contact.

M 102

This unsurpassed, foremost state of peace that comes as the mind realizes emancipation from the All, is totally Unconditioned.

There is, monks, an unborn—unbecome—unmade—uncompounded. If there were not that unborn—unbecome—unmade—uncompounded, there would not be the case that emancipation from the born—become—made—compounded would be discerned. But precisely because there is an unborn—unbecome—unmade—uncompounded, emancipation from the born—become—made—compounded is thus discerned.

Where water, earth, fire and wind have no footing  
 There the stars do not shine the sun is not visible  
 the moon does not appear darkness is not found.

And when a sage, a Brahmin through sagacity has known [this]  
 for himself,  
 then from form and formless, from pleasure and pain, he is freed.

Having fully realized the Unconditioned, the mind no longer falls under the sway of stress and inconstancy. No longer engrossed, it finds that its sense of participation and engagement in all the processes of experience disbands once and for all.

Nandaka: ‘Sisters, it is just as if a skilled butcher or butcher’s apprentice, having killed a cow, were to carve it up with a sharp carving knife so that—without damaging the substance of the inner flesh, without damaging the substance of the outer hide—he would cut, sever, and detach only the skin muscles, connective tissues, and attachments in between; and having cut, severed, and detached the outer skin, and then covering the cow again with that very skin, he were to say that the cow was actually joined to the skin: Would he be speaking rightly?’

‘No, sir. Why is that?... because no matter how much he might say that the cow was actually joined to the skin, the cow would still be disjoined from the skin.’

‘This simile, sisters, I have given to convey a message. The message is this: The substance of the inner flesh stands for the six inner sense spheres (the senses); the substance of the outer hide stands for the six outer sense spheres (their objects). The skin muscles, connective tissues, and attachments in between stand for passion and delight. And the sharp knife stands for noble discernment, which cuts, severs, and detaches the defilements, fetters, and attachments in between.’

Although the senses and their objects are there just as before, the fundamental affective link that ties the mind to sensations has been cut. And its cutting means unconditional freedom for the mind.

MahaKaccayana: ‘Concerning the brief statement the Master made, after which he entered his dwelling without expounding the detailed meaning—i.e., “A monk should investigate in such a way that, his consciousness neither externally scattered and diffused, nor internally fixated, he would from lack of clinging/sustenance be unagitated. When... from lack of clinging/sustenance he would be unagitated, there is no seed for the conditions of future birth, aging, death, or stress”—I understand the detailed meaning of this statement to be this:

‘How is consciousness said to be scattered and diffused? There is the case where a form is seen with the eye, and consciousness follows the drift of (lit.: ‘flows after’) the image of the form, is tied to the attraction of the image of the form, is chained to the attraction of the image of the form, is fettered and joined to the attraction of the image of the form: Consciousness is said to be externally scattered and diffused. (Similarly with the remaining senses.)

‘And how is consciousness said not to be externally scattered and diffused? There is the case where a form is seen with the eye, and consciousness does not follow the drift of the image of the form, is not tied to... chained to... fettered, or joined to the attraction of the image of the form: Consciousness is said not to be externally scattered and diffused. (Similarly with the remaining senses.)

‘And how is the mind said to be internally fixated? There is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the first jhana. His consciousness follows the drift of the rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal, is tied to... chained... fettered, and joined to the attraction of the rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal. Or further... he enters and remains in the second jhana. His consciousness follows the drift of the rapture and pleasure born of composure, is tied to... chained... fettered, and joined to the attraction of the rapture and pleasure born of composure. Or further... he enters and remains in the third jhana... His consciousness follows the drift of the equanimity and pleasure... Or further... he enters and remains in the fourth jhana. His consciousness follows the drift of the neither pleasure nor pain, is tied to... chained to... fettered, and joined to the attraction of the neither pleasure nor pain: The mind is said to be internally fixated.

‘And how is the mind said not to be internally fixated? There is the case where a monk... enters and remains in the first jhana. His consciousness does not follow the drift of the rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal, is not tied to... chained to... fettered, or joined to the rapture and pleasure born of withdrawal. (And similarly with the remaining levels of jhana.)

‘And how is agitation caused by clinging/sustenance? There is the case of an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person. . . who assumes the body to be the self, or the self as possessing the body, or the body as in the self, or the self as in the body. His body changes and is unstable. Because of the change and instability of his body, consciousness alters in accordance with the change in the body. With the concomitant arising of agitation born from this alteration, the mind stays consumed. And because of the consumption of awareness, he feels fearful, threatened, and solicitous. It is thus, friends, that agitation is caused by clinging/sustenance. (And similarly with feeling, perception, mental processes and consciousness.)

‘And how is non-agitation caused by lack of clinging/ sustenance? There is the case of an instructed noble disciple. . . who does not assume the body to be the self, or the self as possessing the body, or the body as in the self, or the self as in the body. His body changes and is unstable, but consciousness does not for that reason alter in accordance with the change in the body. His mind is not consumed with any concomitant agitation born from such a change. Because his awareness is not consumed, he does not feel fearful, threatened, or solicitous. It is thus, friends, that non-agitation is caused by lack of clinging/sustenance. (And similarly with feeling, perception, mental processes and consciousness.)’

M 138

One who is dependent has wavering. One who is independent has no wavering. There being no wavering, there is calm. There being calm, there is no desire. There being no desire, there is no coming or going. There being no coming or going, there is no passing away or arising. There being no passing away or arising, there is neither a here nor a there nor a between-the-two. This, just this, is the end of stress.

Ud VIII.4

Sensing a feeling of pleasure, he (a person who has reached the goal<sup>10</sup>) discerns that it is fleeting, not grasped at, not relished. Sensing a feeling of pain. . . . Sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, he discerns that it is fleeting, not grasped at, not relished. Sensing a feeling of pleasure, he senses it disjoined from

<sup>10</sup>This is the continuation of the passage on page 133.

it. Sensing a feeling of pain. . . . Sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, he senses it disjoined from it. When sensing a feeling limited to the body, he discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.' When sensing a feeling limited to life, he discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling limited to life.' He discerns that 'With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is experienced, not being relished, will grow cold right here.'

Just as an oil lamp burns in dependence on oil and wick; and from the termination of the oil and wick—and from not being provided any other sustenance—it goes out unnourished; even so, when sensing a feeling limited to the body, he discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.' When sensing a feeling limited to life, he discerns that 'I am sensing a feeling limited to life.' He discerns that 'With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is sensed, not being relished, will grow cold right here.'

Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest resolve for discernment, for this—the knowledge of the passing away of all stress—is the highest noble discernment.

His release, being founded on truth, does not fluctuate, for whatever is deceptive is false; Unbinding—the undeceptive—is true. Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest resolve for truth, for this—Unbinding, the undeceptive—is the highest noble truth.

Whereas formerly he foolishly had taken on and brought to completion mental acquisitions, he has now abandoned them, their root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest resolve for relinquishment, for this—the renunciation of all mental acquisitions—is the highest noble relinquishment.

Whereas formerly he foolishly had greed—as well as desire and infatuation—he has now abandoned them, their root destroyed. . . . not destined for future arising. Whereas formerly he foolishly had malice—as well as ill-will and hatred—he has now abandoned them. . . . Whereas formerly he foolishly had ignorance—as well as delusion and confusion—he has now abandoned them, their root destroyed like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Thus a monk so endowed is endowed with the highest resolve for calm, for this—the calming of passions, aversions, and delusions—is the highest noble calm. 'One should not be negligent of discernment, should guard the truth, be devoted

to relinquishment, and train only for calm.' Thus it was said, and in reference to this was it said.

'He has been stilled where the currents of construing do not flow. And when the currents of construing do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace.' Thus it has been said. With reference to what was it said? 'I am' is a construing. 'I am this' is a construing. 'I will be' is a construing. 'I will not be'... 'I will be possessed of form'... 'I will not be possessed of form'... 'I will be percipient'... 'I will not be percipient'... 'I will be neither percipient nor non-percipient' is a construing. Construing is a disease, construing is a cancer, construing is an arrow. By going beyond all construing, he is called a sage at peace.

Furthermore, a sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die, is unagitated and free from longing. He does not have anything whereby he would be born. Not being born, will he age? Not aging, will he die? Not dying, will he be agitated? Not being agitated, for what will he long? It was in reference to this that it was said, 'He has been stilled where the currents of construing do not flow. And when the currents of construing do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace.'

M 140

Sariputta: And how, my friend, is a monk's mind well-composed by means of awareness? 'My mind is without passion'—his mind is well-composed by means of awareness. 'My mind is without aversion'... 'My mind is without delusion'... 'My mind is not subject to passion'... 'to aversion'... 'to delusion'—his mind is well-composed by means of awareness. 'My mind is destined not to return to states of sensuality'... 'to states of form'... 'to formless states'—his mind is well-composed by means of awareness.

Even if powerful forms cognizable by the eye come into the visual range of a monk whose mind is thus rightly released, his mind is neither overpowered nor even engaged. Being still, having reached imperturbability, he focuses on their passing away. And even if powerful sounds... aromas... flavors... tactile sensations... Even if powerful ideas cognizable by the intellect come into the mental range of a monk whose mind is thus rightly released, his mind is neither overpowered nor even engaged. Being still, having reached imperturbability, he focuses on their passing away.

Just as if there were a stone column, sixteen spans tall, of which eight spans were rooted below ground, and then from the east

there were to come a powerful wind storm: The column would not shiver nor quiver nor quake. And then from the west... the north... the south there were to come a powerful wind storm: The column would not shiver nor quiver nor quake. Why? Because of the depth of the root and the well-buriedness of the stone column. In the same way, my friend, even if powerful forms cognizable by the eye come into the visual range of a monk whose mind is thus rightly released... etc... his mind is neither overpowered nor even engaged.

## A IX.26

Everywhere the sage independent holds nothing dear or undear.  
In him lamentation and selfishness like water on a white lotus  
do not adhere.

As a water bead on a lotus leaf, as water on a red lily, does not  
adhere,  
so the sage does not adhere to the seen, the heard or the sensed;  
for, cleansed, he does not construe by means of the seen, the  
heard or the sensed.

In no other way does he ask for purity, for neither impassioned  
nor dispassioned is he.

## Sn IV.6

This radical freedom—unattached to sensation, untouched by the power of passion, aversion, and delusion—is the Unbinding experienced in the present life.

Sister Patacara:

Washing my feet, I noticed the water. And in watching it flow  
from high to low,  
my heart was composed like a fine thoroughbred steed.

Then taking a lamp, I entered the hut, checked the bedding, sat  
down on the bed.

And taking a pin, I pulled out the wick: Like the flame's unbinding was the liberation of awareness.

## Thig V.10

## Glossary

**Becoming (bhava):** States of sensuality, form, and formlessness that can develop from craving and clinging, and provide the condition for birth on both the internal and external levels.

**Binding (vāna):** Related terms (cf. nibbāna—nibbuta) would be vivata, open; sanvuta, closed, restrained, tied up; and parivuta, surrounded. See PTS Dictionary, \*Varati and \*Vunati.

**Brahmin:** The Brahmins of India have long maintained that they, by their birth, are worthy of the highest respect. Buddhists borrowed the term, ‘Brahmin,’ to apply to those who have attained the goal, to show that respect is earned not by birth, race, or caste, but by spiritual attainment.

**Effluent (āsava):** Four qualities—sensuality, views, becoming, and ignorance—that ‘flow out’ of the mind and create the flood (ogha) of the round of death and rebirth.

**Factors of Awakening (sambojjhaṅga):** The seven qualities, developed through jhana, that lead the mind to Awakening are (1) mindfulness, (2) investigation of phenomena, (3) persistence, (4) rapture, (5) serenity, (6) concentration, and (7) equanimity.

**Fetters (saṃyojana):** The ten Fetters that bind the mind to the round of death and rebirth are (1) self-identity views, (2) grasping at precepts and practices, (3) doubt, (4) sensual passion, (5) irritation, (6) passion for form, (7) passion for formlessness, (8) conceit, (9) restlessness, and (10) ignorance.

**Hindrances (nivāraṇa):** The five Hindrances that prevent the mind from gaining concentration are (1) sensual desire, (2) ill will, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) restlessness and anxiety, and (5) uncertainty.

**Kinsman of the Heedless:** An epithet for Mara.

**Mara:** The personification of evil and temptation.

**Nāga:** A term commonly used to refer to strong, stately, and heroic animals, such as elephants and magical serpents. In Buddhism, it is also used to refer to those who have attained the goal.

**Stress (dukkha):** Dukkha, which is traditionally translated in the Commentaries as, ‘that which is hard to bear,’ is notorious for having no truly adequate equivalent in English, but ‘stress’—in its basic sense as a strain on body or mind—seems to be as close as English can get. In the Pali Canon, dukkha applies both to physical and to mental phenomena, ranging from the intense stress of acute anguish or pain to

the innate burdensomeness of even the most subtle mental or physical fabrications.

**Such (tadi):** An adjective to describe one who has attained the goal. It indicates that the person's state is indefinable but not subject to change or influences of any sort.

**Tathāgata:** Literally, 'one who has become real (tatha-agata)' or 'one who has truly gone (tathā-gata),' an epithet used in ancient India for a person who has attained the highest religious goal. In Buddhism, it usually refers specifically to the Buddha, although occasionally it also refers to any of his disciples who have attained the Buddhist goal.

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