

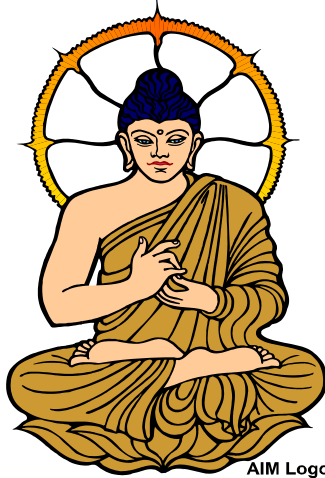
Selected Discourses from The Saṃyuttanikāya



by
Bhikkhu Pesala

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Bhikkhu Pesala

Association for Insight Meditation

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Foreword

These translations are my own. They differ on some key points from those of Bhikkhu Bodhi, Ajahn Thanissaro, and other translators. Translation from Pāli to English is an art rather than a science. My aim has always been to make them easy to understand rather than being literal. The meaning sometimes only becomes clear on knowing the context of the discourse.

My comments on the translation use a different font and indented paragraph settings to distinguish them from the translation of the actual text. I have also added footnote references and hyperlinks for further study. Footnote references to the Pāli texts refer to the Roman script edition of the Pali Text Society — in the translations these page numbers are given near the spine or in the body of the text within square brackets.

In several places I have added the Pāli term in parenthesis. An index serves as a glossary of Pāli terms used in the translation.

Issatta Suttam

The Archer

The Sāvatti introduction.¹ Sitting at one side, King Pasenadi of Kosala said to the Blessed One:–

“Where, venerable sir, should donations be given?”

“Wherever, great king, the mind is pleased.”

“Where, venerable sir, is a gift of great fruit?”

“This is one question, great king, ‘Where should a gift be given?’ and ‘Where given is a gift of great fruit?’ is another question. A gift given to the virtuous, great king, is of great fruit, not that given to the immoral. Then I will ask a counter-question, great king. Please answer it as you see fit.

“What do you think, great king, if you were at war and a great battle was imminent, if a warrior (*khattiya*)² youth came who was untrained (*asikkhito*), unpractised (*akatahattho*), undisciplined (*akatayoggo*), unskilled in archery (*akatūpāsano*), a coward (*bhīru*), petrified (*chambhī*), fearful (*utrāsī*), and liable to flee (*palāyī*), would you enlist that man, would he be of any use to you?”

“No, venerable sir, I would not enlist that man, he would not be of any use to me.”

“What do you think, great king, if a brahmin (*brāhmaṇa*) youth ... a merchant (*veśsa*) youth ... a worker (*sudda*) youth came who was untrained, unpractised, undisciplined, unskilled in archery, a coward, petrified, fearful, and liable to flee, would you enlist that man, would he be of any use to you?”

“No, venerable sir, I would not enlist that man, he would not be of any use to me.”

“What do you think, great king, if you were at war and a great battle was imminent, if a warrior youth came who was well-trained, practised, disciplined, skilled in archery, brave, not petrified, fearless, and not liable to flee, would you enlist that man, would he be of any use to you?”

“Yes, venerable sir, I would enlist that man, he would be of use to me.”

¹ The first discourse in the second chapter of the Kosala Saṃyutta (*the Sattajaṭila Sutta*) was given to King Pasenadi while the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti at the Eastern Monastery, in the Palace of Migāra’s mother (*Viśākhā*). The remainder, including this one just say “*Sāvattihinidānaṃ*,” i.e. with the same introduction. The first discourse in the first chapter was given while the Blessed One was staying at Sāvatti in Prince Jeta’s grove at Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. The remaining discourses in the first chapter also just say “*Sāvattihinidānaṃ*.” without elaborating, so presumably they were also all given in Prince Jeta’s grove, at Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery.

² There were four castes at the time of the Buddha: He himself was of the warrior or ruling caste. Those who were hunters, fishermen, and butchers, were regarded as outcastes (*vasala*). The Buddha ordained anyone who was suitable, whatever his family background.

“What do you think, great king, if a brahmin youth ... a merchant youth ... a worker youth came who was well-trained, skilled, disciplined, brave, not petrified, fearless, and not liable to flee, would you enlist that man, would he be of any use to you?”

“Yes, venerable sir, I would enlist that man, he would be of use to me.”

“In the same way, great king, from whatever family one goes forth from the household life to the homeless life, who has abandoned five factors and is endowed with five factors, whatever is given to them is of great fruit. What five factors are abandoned? Sensual desire is abandoned, ill-will is abandoned, sloth and torpor are abandoned, restless and remorse are abandoned, doubt is abandoned. These five factors are abandoned. With what five factors are they endowed? They are endowed with the aggregate of morality (*śīlakhandhehi*) of an Arahant (*asekkhena*), the aggregate of concentration of an Arahant, the aggregate of wisdom of an Arahant, the aggregate of liberation of an Arahant, the aggregate of knowledge and vision of liberation of an Arahant. They are endowed with these five factors. Thus having abandoned five factors and being endowed with five factors, what is given to them is of great fruit.”

Thus said the Blessed One. After the Fortunate One had spoken these words, the Teacher added:—

“An archer who is strong and energetic, a youth skilled in archery
A king preparing for battle would enlist, not a coward, on
account of his birth.

“Who is patient and obedient, established in those states
Noble and wise, one should prefer even one of low birth.

“Build delightful retreats and invite the learned to dwell therein,
Build water tanks in the wilderness and bridges over difficult terrain.

“Food and drink and eatables, clothes, beds, and seats,
Give to those of upright character, with a bright clear mind.

“As the storm with a hundred clouds thunders and flashes lightning
On hills and valleys, rains down on the earth, flooding them all.

“So the wise and learned with confidence, having prepared a meal,
Satisfying those who beg for alms, with food and drink.
Rejoicing he scatters gifts saying ‘Give, give!’

“That is his thundering, like the rain of the gods,
An abundant torrent of merit will rain down on the giver.”¹

¹ S.i.98

Sacetana Suttam

The Chariot Maker

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling near Benares in the deer park at Isipatana. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks, “Monks.” “Yes Lord,” the monks replied, and the Blessed One said:

“At one time, monks, there was a king named Sacetana. Then, monks, King Sacetana asked his chariot-maker, ‘Six months from now, good chariot-maker, there will be a battle. Can you make a new pair of wheels for my chariot?’

‘I can, master, the chariot-maker replied to King Sacetana.’

“Then, monks, in six days short of the six months, one wheel was finished. Then, monks, King Sacetana asked the chariot-maker, ‘Six days from now, good chariot-maker, there will be a battle, is the new pair of wheels finished?’

‘Master, in six days short of six months, one wheel is finished.’

‘Are you able, good chariot-maker, to finish the second wheel in six days?’

“Monks, having said, ‘I can, master,’ in six days, having finished the second wheel, he took the new pair of wheels and went to see King Sacetana, and having approached him, he said, ‘This new pair of wheels is finished, master.’

‘Good chariot-maker, is there any difference between this wheel made in six days short of six months and this wheel made in six days? I cannot see any difference.’

‘There is a difference, master. Please watch.’

“Then, monks, the chariot-maker set rolling the wheel made in six days, and having rolled as far as the momentum carried it, it fell over onto the ground. Then he set rolling the wheel made in six days short of six months. Having rolled as far as the momentum carried it, the wheel stood upright just where it stopped rolling.”

“[The king asked] ‘What is the reason, good chariot-maker, that this wheel made in six days, having rolled as far as the momentum carried it, fell over on the ground? What is the reason that this wheel made in six days short of six months, having rolled as far as the momentum carried it, stood upright just where it stopped rolling?’

‘Master, this wheel that was made in six days, its rim, spokes, and hub are crooked,¹ with knots,² and defects,³ that is why, having rolled as far as the momentum carried it, it fell over on the ground. The wheel that was

¹ *Avankā*: crooked. Not properly seasoned, planed, and sanded. A simile for bodily misconduct.

² *Sadosā*: knotted. Not carefully selected pieces of wood, but just whatever was available. A simile for verbal misconduct.

³ *Sakasāvā*: defective. A simile for mental misconduct, *i.e.* irascibility or wrong-views.

made in six days short of six months, its rim, spokes, and hub are not crooked, and are free from knots and defects, that is why, having rolled as far as the momentum carried it, it stood upright just where it stopped rolling.

“Monks, you should not think that the chariot-maker at that time was someone else. It should not be taken like that. I myself was the chariot-maker at that time. Then, monks, I was skilful in the crookedness, knots, and defects of wood. Now, monks, I am a Worthy Fully Enlightened One, who is skilled in bodily, verbal, and mental crookedness, knots, and defects.

Monks, whatever bhikkhu or bhikkhuṇī is negligent, with bodily, verbal, or mental crookedness, knots, and defects, will fall away from this Dhamma-vinaya, just like that wheel completed in six days will fall.

“Monks, whatever bhikkhu or bhikkhuṇī is not negligent, without bodily, verbal, or mental crookedness, knots, and defects, will not fall away from this Dhamma-vinaya, just like that wheel completed in six days short of six months.

“Therefore, monks, you should train yourselves, ‘We will eliminate bodily, verbal, and mental crookedness, knots, and defects.’ Thus you should train yourselves.”¹

¹S.i.110

Nakhasikhā Suttam

The Tip of a Fingernail

Thus have I heard — At one time the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in Prince Jeta’s grove at the monastery of Anāthapiṇḍika. Then the Blessed One picked up a small amount of dust on the tip of his fingernail and said to the monks: “What do you think, monks, which is greater? This small amount of dust on my fingernail, or the great earth?”

“Venerable sir, the great earth is far greater. The small amount of dust on the Blessed One’s fingernail is insignificant. The small amount of dust on the Blessed One’s fingernail is not even a hundredth, a thousandth, or even a hundred thousandth the amount of the great earth.”

“Even so, monks, a noble disciple endowed with right-view, an individual who has gained realisation, the suffering that is totally destroyed and exhausted is far greater; while that remaining is insignificant. Not even a hundredth part, or a thousandth part, or a hundred thousandth part of the former mass of suffering that has been totally destroyed and exhausted remains in a maximum of seven lifetimes. Thus, monks, realisation of the Dhamma is of such great benefit, that is the great benefit of gaining the eye of the Dhamma (*Dhammacakkhu*).”¹

The Tip of a Fingernail (2)

Thus have I heard — At one time the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in Prince Jeta’s grove at the monastery of Anāthapiṇḍika. Then the Blessed One picked up a small amount of dust on the tip of his fingernail and said to the monks: “What do you think, monks, which is greater? This small amount of dust on my fingernail, or the great earth?”

“Venerable sir, the great earth is far greater. The small amount of dust on the Blessed One’s fingernail is insignificant. The small amount of dust on the Blessed One’s fingernail is not even a hundredth, a thousandth, or even a hundred thousandth the amount of the great earth.”

“Even so, monks, few are those reborn again as human beings, those reborn elsewhere are far more numerous.² Therefore, monks, you should train yourselves: ‘I will dwell heedfully.’ Thus, monks, you should train yourselves.”³

¹ S.ii.133

² There are several similar passages in the Book of Ones (A.i.35ff) emphasising how rebirth in the human or celestial realms is extremely rare. See [A Precious Human Rebirth](#).

³ S.ii.263

Okkhā Suttaṃ

Pots of Food

Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti, in Prince Jeta's grove, in Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then the Blessed One said to the monks:—

“Monks, if someone gave a hundred pots of food in charity¹ in the morning, a hundred at mid-day, and a hundred in the evening; and another person were to develop a mind of loving-kindness — even for the time it takes to pull a cow's udder — in the morning, again at mid-day, and again in the evening, the latter would be of greater fruit than the former.

“Therefore, monks, you should train yourselves thus: ‘We will cultivate the liberation of the mind through loving-kindness,² we will develop it, make much of it, make it a vehicle, make it a base, establish it as a foundation, practice it and perfect it.’”³

¹ This theme that giving charity is inferior to other wholesome deeds is expounded in the Kūṭadanta Sutta of the Dīghanikāya. Of course, one can also give food in charity while cultivating loving-kindness to make merit in both ways, and in most cases those who donate charity do so. The importance of the mental state in making merit should be stressed. Even if giving only a little or poor quality alms, if the mind is wholesome the merit is great. Even if giving a lot of good quality gifts, if the mind is full of pride then the merit is less. See also the last section of the Pāyāsi Sutta, where the ideal manner of giving gifts is explained: “Give alms respectfully (*sakkaccaṃ dānaṃ detha*), give alms with your own hand (*sahatthā dānaṃ detha*), give alms thoughtfully (*cittikataṃ dānaṃ detha*), give alms not as if discarding something (*anapaviddhaṃ dānaṃ detha*).

² When the practice of loving-kindness (*mettā bhāvanā*) is well developed after breaking down the barriers discriminating between loved ones and enemies, without any limits to its extent, or direction, then it is very powerful.

³ S.ii.264

Anattalakkhaṇa Suttaṃ

The Discourse on the Characteristic of Not-self

Thus have I heard: At one time the Blessed One was staying at the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Benares. Then he addressed the group of five monks:

“Material form, monks, is not self. If material form were self, material form would not lead to affliction. It would be possible to say regarding material form, ‘Let material form be like this. Let material form not be like that.’ However, since material form is not self, material form leads to affliction. And it is not possible to say regarding material form, ‘Let material form be like this. Let material form not be like that.’

“Feeling is not self. If feeling were self, feeling would not lead to affliction. It would be possible to say regarding feeling, ‘Let feeling be like this. Let feeling not be like that.’ However, since feeling is not self, feeling leads to affliction. And it is not possible to say regarding feeling, ‘Let feeling be like this. Let feeling not be like that.’

“Perception is not self. If perception were self, perception would not lead to affliction. It would be possible to say regarding perception, ‘Let perception be like this. Let perception not be like that.’ However, since perception is not self, perception leads to affliction. And it is not possible to say regarding perception, ‘Let perception be like this. Let perception not be like that.’

“Mental formations are not self. If mental formations were self, mental formations would not lead to affliction. It would be possible to say regarding mental formations, ‘Let mental formations be like this. Let mental formations not be like that.’ However, since mental formations are not self, mental formations lead to affliction. And it is not possible to say regarding mental formations, ‘Let mental formations be like this. Let mental formations not be like that.’

“Consciousness is not self. If consciousness were self, consciousness would not lead to affliction. It would be possible to say regarding consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be like this. Let my consciousness not be like that.’ However, since consciousness is not self, consciousness leads to affliction. And it is not possible to say regarding consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be like this. Let my consciousness not be like that.’

“What do you think, monks? “Is material form permanent or impermanent?”
“impermanent, Venerable sir.”

“Is that which is impermanent pleasant or unpleasant?”

“Unpleasant, Venerable sir.”

“Is it fitting to regard what is impermanent, unpleasant, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“Indeed not, Venerable sir.”

Is feeling permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, Venerable sir.”

“Is that which is impermanent pleasant or unpleasant?”

“Unpleasant, Venerable sir.”

“Is it fitting to regard what is impermanent, unpleasant, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“Indeed not, Venerable sir.”

“Is perception permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, Venerable sir.”

“Is that which is impermanent pleasant or unpleasant?”

“Unpleasant, Venerable sir.”

“Is it fitting to regard what is impermanent, unpleasant, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“Indeed not, Venerable sir.”

“Are mental formations permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, Venerable sir.”

“Is that which is impermanent pleasant or unpleasant?”

“Unpleasant, Venerable sir.”

“Is it fitting to regard what is impermanent, unpleasant, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“Indeed not, Venerable sir.”

“Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, Venerable sir.”

“Is that which is impermanent pleasant or unpleasant?”

“Unpleasant, Venerable sir.”

“Is it fitting to regard what is impermanent, unpleasant, and subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. I am this’?”

“Indeed not, Venerable sir.”

“Thus, monks, any material form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near: every material form is to be seen as it really is with wisdom as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. I am not this.’

“Any feeling whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near: every feeling is to be seen as it really is with wisdom as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. I am not this.’

“Any perception whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near: every perception is to be seen as it really is with wisdom as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. I am not this.’

“Any mental formations whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near: every mental formation is to be seen as it really is with wisdom as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. I am not this.’

“Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near: every consciousness is to be seen as it really is with wisdom as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. I am not this.’

“Seeing thus, the well-instructed disciple of the Noble Ones grows disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with feelings, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with mental formations, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is freed. With freedom, there is the knowledge, ‘I am free.’ He knows ‘Birth has been destroyed, the holy life has been fulfilled, what should be done has been done. There is nothing further to be done here.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. Delighted, the group of five monks rejoiced in what the Blessed One had said; and while this exposition was being given, the minds of the five monks were fully released from the corruptions, without any remainder.¹

¹S.iii.66

Vāsijaṭa Suttaṃ

The Adze Handle

Thus have I heard — On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvātthi in Prince Jeta’s grove at the monastery of Anāthapiṇḍika. Then the Blessed One addressed the monk: “Monks.”

“Venerable sir,” the monks replied to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said —

“The destruction of the outflows (*āsava*),¹ monks, I declare is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and does not see. Knowing what, and seeing what, monks are the outflows destroyed? ‘Thus is matter, thus is the arising of matter, thus is the cessation of matter. Thus is feeling ... Thus is perception ... Thus are mental formations ... Thus is consciousness, thus is the arising of consciousness, thus is the cessation of consciousness — knowing thus, monks, seeing thus the outflows are destroyed.

“A monk who dwells not devoted to mental development, monks, might wish thus: ‘Oh, if only my mind could be free from outflows without any grasping,’ nevertheless his mind would not become free from the outflows without grasping. What is the reason? It should be said, ‘Due to his lack of mental development.’ What is undeveloped? The four foundations of mindfulness are undeveloped, the four right efforts are undeveloped, the four bases of success are undeveloped, the five controlling faculties are undeveloped, the five powers are undeveloped, the seven factors of enlightenment are undeveloped, the Noble Eightfold Path is undeveloped.²

“It is like, monks, a hen that has laid eight, ten, or twelve eggs. If that hen does not sit on them properly, does not hatch them properly, does not incubate them properly. Even though that hen might wish: ‘Oh, may my chicks break through the shells with their claws and beaks,’ it is not possible for those chicks to break through the shells with their claws and beaks. What is the reason? Because the hen did not sit on them properly, hatch them properly, and incubate them properly. Similarly, monks, even though a monk who does not dwell devoted to mental development might wish thus: ‘Oh, if only my mind could be free from outflows without any grasping,’ it is not possible. What is the reason? Because that monk has not properly developed the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success,

¹ See note 4 to the Kīṭāgiri Sutta. The four outflows are sensuality (*kāmāsava*), becoming (*bhavāsava*), views (*diṭṭhāsava*), and ignorance (*āviññāsava*).

² These spiritual qualities that should be developed are collectively known as the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment. See “A Manual of the Requisites of Enlightenment” for details.

the five control faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, he has not properly developed the Noble Eightfold Path.

“A monk who dwells devoted to mental development, monks, might not wish thus: ‘Oh, if only my mind could be free from outflows without any grasping,’ nevertheless his mind would become free from the outflows without grasping. What is the reason? It should be said, ‘Due to his mental development.’ What is developed? The four foundations of mindfulness are developed, the four right efforts are developed, the four bases of success are developed, the five controlling faculties are developed, the five powers are developed, the seven factors of enlightenment are developed, the Noble Eightfold Path is developed.

“It is like, monks, a hen that has laid eight, ten, or twelve eggs. If that hen sits on them properly, hatches them properly, incubates them properly. Even though that hen might not wish: ‘Oh, may my chicks break through the shells with their claws and beaks,’ it is possible for those chicks to break through the shells with their claws and beaks. What is the reason? Because the hen sits on them properly, hatches them properly, and incubates them properly. Similarly, monks, even though a monk who dwells devoted to mental development might not wish thus: ‘Oh, if only my mind could be free from outflows without any grasping,’ it is possible that his mind would become free from the outflows without grasping. What is the reason? Because that monk has developed the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success, the five control faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, he has developed the Noble Eightfold Path.

“It is like, monks, a mason (*palagaṇḍa*)¹ or a mason’s apprentice who, having looked at the handle of his adze, would see the wear made by his fingers and thumbs, but would not know: ‘This much was worn away today, that much was worn away yesterday, or that much on the day before yesterday.’ Nevertheless, he knows that it has become worn away. In the same way, monks, a monk who dwells devoted to mental development does not know: ‘Today so many outflows were worn way, yesterday so many were worn away,

¹ The PTS Dictionary gives “*Palagaṇḍa*” as a mason, bricklayer, or plasterer, but the Commentary explains this word as “*vaddhakissa*,” which is a carpenter, builder, architect, or mason. He shapes wood with his adze (*vāsijata*). The key point is that it is a craftsman who uses the same hand-tool all day in his work so that the handle becomes worn to the shape of his hand. To remove the fetters and outflows from mind requires constant daily work and is a gradual process requiring great persistence and patience. If diligence is lacking, progress will be slow. Even with persistent practice, progress is barely perceptible after one day or one week. It may take years for signs of progress to become obvious, so meditators should never despair, but just work harder and more effectively if they wish to see results.

or so many were worn away on the day before yesterday.’ Nevertheless, he knows that they are worn away when they are worn away.

“It is like, monks, an ocean-going ship,¹ rigged with masts and ropes, after six months or a year (*vassamāsāni*) on the ocean, is pulled up on shore for the winter, where it stays, weathered by the sun and wind, moistened by the storms of the rainy season, easily withers and rots away. In the same way, monks, when a monk dwells devoted to mental development, his fetters easily wither and rot away.”²

¹ This last simile accounts for the alternative title of this discourse as the Nava Sutta.

² S.iii.152

Āditta Suttam

The Fire Sermon

At one time the Blessed one was living near Gayā, at Gayā's head, with a thousand bhikkhus. Then the Blessed One addressed them:

“Everything, monks, is burning. What, monks, is everything that is burning? The eye, monks, is burning, form is burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning. The feeling that arises dependent on eye-contact, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, that also is burning. With what is it burning? It is burning with the fire of passion, the fire of hatred, the fire of delusion. I declare that it is burning with the fire of birth, decay, death, grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair.

The ear, monks, is burning, sound is burning, ... and despair.

The nose, monks, is burning, odour is burning, ... and despair.

The tongue, monks, is burning, taste is burning, ... and despair.

The body, monks, is burning, touch is burning, ... and despair.

The mind, monks, is burning, thought is burning, ... and despair.

Seeing thus, monks, the well-informed noble disciple is disgusted with the eye, is disgusted with forms, is disgusted with eye-consciousness, disgusted with eye-contact. He is disgusted with the feeling that arises dependent on eye contact, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. He is disgusted with the ear ... with the nose ... with the tongue ... with the body ... with the mind, with thoughts, with mind-contact, with the feeling that arises dependent on mind-contact, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

Being disgusted, he is dispassionate, being dispassionate he is freed. Being freed, he knows he is free, and he knows, “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been fulfilled, what should be done has been done, there is no more of this.”

Thus spoke the Blessed One. Those monks delighted in what the Blessed One had said. And while this discourse was being delivered the minds of those one thousand monks were liberated from defilements without any remainder.¹

About the Fire Sermon

This important discourse was given by the Buddha to a thousand fire-worshipping ascetics early in his dispensation. The account of the Buddha's meeting with the Kassapa brothers at Uruvela is told in the Vinaya Mahāvagga. After giving his first discourse — the Dhammacakka Sutta — and the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, the discourse on not-self, to his first five disciples they all attained Arahantship after the first Rains Retreat.

¹ Saṃyuttanikāya (S.iv.19), Saḷāyatanasaṃyuttam, Sabbavaggo, Ādittasuttam

The Buddha spent the second Rains Retreat at Uruvela, during which time he performed numerous feats of psychic power to humble the pride of the fire-worshipping ascetics, so that they gained faith in him and became his disciples. After the Buddha taught them the Ādittapariyāya Sutta, all one thousand of these bhikkhus became Arahants.

The Ādittapariyāya Sutta of the Vinaya Mahāvagga is called the Āditta Sutta in the Saḷāyatanavaggo of the Saṃyuttanikāya. “Pariyāya” means “instruction.” The Ādittapariyāya Sutta in the Saḷāyatanavaggo of the Saṃyuttanikāya (S.iv.168) is a different discourse on the fiery nature of the six senses.

All six sense spheres — the eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odours, the tongue and tastes, the body and touches, the mind and thoughts — are the basis for contact, feeling, and craving. Craving is like a fire that burns everything with which it comes into contact. If we are mindful of the feeling at the moment of sense contact, before feeling gives rise to craving, we can break the link between feeling and craving.

See also the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw’s Discourse on the Mālukiyaṭṭa Sutta. The knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-nāṇa*) is an advanced stage of insight knowledge where the mind sees nothing desirable in any sense object. This leads on to the higher stage of equanimity about formations or dispassion regarding pleasant and unpleasant sense objects, and finally to the realisation of nibbāna.

The early discourses like the Dhammacakka, Anattalakkhaṇa, and Āditta Sutta, seem very simple, but only those with well developed insight knowledge were able to gain the final goal on listening to them. Nowadays, meditators will need to practise insight meditation diligently for many months or years to gain similar realisations. For most of us, the objects of the six senses do not seem to be on fire, nor disgusting. On the contrary, our minds still takes delight in them, pursue them, and cling to them constantly. Unless we can change our perception through gaining insight, we cannot become aware of the danger that lies dormant therein.

Mālukyaputta Suttaṃ

A Discourse to Mālukyaputta

Then the Venerable Mālukyaputta approached the Blessed One, having approached he paid homage and sat down at one side. Sitting there the Venerable Mālukyaputta said to the Blessed One: "It would be good, venerable sir, if you would teach me the Dhamma in brief. Having heard the essence of Dhamma, I will practise it in solitude, abiding vigilant, strenuous, and with single purpose."

"Then what shall I say to other bhikkhus when you are making such a request? You are old, having reached the latter part of your life. Even so you ask for just the gist of the Dhamma from me."

"Venerable sir, although I am old, having reached the latter part of my life, nevertheless please teach me the Dhamma in brief, perhaps I will understand the meaning of the Blessed One's teaching. Perhaps I will become an heir to the teaching of the Blessed One."

"What do you think, Mālukyaputta? There are certain visible objects that you have never seen before, do not see now, nor hope to see in the future. Could such objects arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?"

"Indeed not, venerable sir."

"What do you think, Mālukyaputta? There are certain sounds that you have never heard before, do not hear now, and do not hope to hear in the future. Could such objects arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?"

"Indeed not, venerable sir."

"What do you think, Mālukyaputta? There are certain odours that you have never smelled before, do not smell now, and do not hope to smell in the future. Could such odours arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?"

"Indeed not, venerable sir."

"What do you think, Mālukyaputta? There are certain flavours that you have never tasted before, do not taste now, and do not hope to taste in the future. Could such flavours arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?"

"Indeed not, venerable sir."

"What do you think, Mālukyaputta? There are certain tangible objects that you have never touched before, that you are not touching now, and do not hope to touch in the future. Could such objects arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?"

"Indeed not, venerable sir."

"What do you think, Mālukyaputta? There are certain mind objects that you have never thought of before, which you do not think of now, and do

not hope to think of in the future. Could such object arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?"

"Indeed not, venerable sir."

"Mālukyaputta! As phenomena are seen, heard, thought of, or known, just let them be as they are seen, heard, thought of, or known at that moment. When you see, you just see it; when you hear, you just hear it; when you think, you just think it; and when you know, you just know it. If you note with mindfulness what you see, hear, think, or know, you will not get emotionally involved in those phenomena. Since you have nothing whatever to do with them, you will find no foothold on the sense-objects that you perceive. As you have no foothold on them, you are neither here nor there, nor anywhere, and because you exist nowhere it means that you have realised nibbāna where all suffering ceases."

"Venerable sir, this is how I understand the meaning of what the Blessed One has taught in brief:-

"Having seen a form one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from form, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

"Having heard a sound one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from sound, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

"Having smelled an odour one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from odour, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

"Having tasted a flavour one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from flavour, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes

burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

“Having felt a contact one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from contact, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

“Having cognised an idea one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from ideas, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the form that he has seen. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Looking at a visible object, he just sees it and just feels that he sees it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the sound that he has heard. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Hearing a sound, he just hears it and just feels that he hears it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the odour that he has smelled. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Smelling an odour, he just smells it and just feels that he smells it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the flavour that he has tasted. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Tasting a flavour, he just tastes it and just feels that he tastes it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the contact that he has felt. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Feeling a contact, he just feels it and just feels that he feels it, without

conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the idea that he has cognised. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Cognising an idea, he just cognises it and just feels that he cognises it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Venerable sir, this is how I understand the meaning of what the Blessed One has taught in brief.”

“Well said, Mālukyaputta! You have understood well, Mālukyaputta, the meaning in detail of what I said in brief.

“Having seen a form one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from form, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

“Having heard a sound one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from sound, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

“Having smelled an odour one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from odour, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

“Having tasted a flavour one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from flavour, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

“Having felt a contact one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from contact, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes

burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

“Having cognised an idea one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it. A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from ideas, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who accumulates suffering.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the form that he has seen. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Looking at a visible object, he just sees it and just feels that he sees it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the sound that he has heard. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Hearing a sound, he just hears it and just feels that he hears it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the odour that he has smelled. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Smelling an odour, he just smells it and just feels that he smells it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the flavour that he has tasted. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Tasting a flavour, he just tastes it and just feels that he tastes it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the contact that he has felt. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Feeling a contact, he just feels it and just feels that he feels it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the idea that he has cognised. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it. Cognising an idea, he just cognises it and just feels that he cognises it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.

“That is how, Mālukyaputta, what I said in brief should be understood in detail.”

Then the Venerable Mālukyaputta, having delighted in and approved of what the Blessed One had said, rose from his seat, paid homage to the Blessed One, and departed keeping him on his right side.

Then the Venerable Mālukyaputta, practised in solitude, abiding vigilant, strenuous, and with single purpose — before long realised for himself the goal of the holy life with direct knowledge, which is visible here and now, for the sake of which clansmen go forth from home to the homeless life: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what should be done has been done, there will be no more of this.” And the Venerable Mālukyaputta became one of the Arahants.¹

About the Mālukyaputta Sutta

This teaching on the practice of bare awareness, which was given to both Mālukyaputta and Bāhiya Dārucīriya, was frequently taught by the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw to the meditators practising at his meditation centres. An explanation in detail can be found in the Sayādaw’s teaching “A Discourse on the Mālukyaputta Sutta.” It may be described as the shortest possible route to nibbāna.

Since the discourse is not long, I have included the repetitions found in the Pāḷi text that are elided in the translations by Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ajahn Thanissaro.

There is another discourse — The Lesser Discourse to Mālukyaputta — about speculative views.

¹ S.iv.71

Tālapuṭa Suttaṃ

A Discourse to Tālapuṭa

Thus have I heard — On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagaha in the Squirrel Sanctuary in the Bamboo Grove.¹ Then Tālapuṭa, a leader of a troupe of actors, approached the Blessed One, and having approached, paid homage and sat at one side. Sitting at one side Tālapuṭa said to the Blessed One:—

“I have heard, venerable sir, as it has been passed down by the lineage of teachers of actors, ‘If an actor in the centre of the stage in the midst of a festival, makes the audience laugh,² after death on the breakup of the body he is reborn among the laughing deities.’ What does the Blessed One say about this?”

“Enough, headman, set this aside. Do not ask me this.”

A second time, Tālapuṭa ... a third time, Tālapuṭa said ...

“Evidently, I have not been able to get you to set this question aside, and not ask me this, so I will tell you. Headman, an actor in the centre of the stage in the midst of a festival, focuses on things that excite lust, those beings who

¹ This discourse is followed by three similar discourses: the Yodhājīva Suttaṃ (S.iv.308), the Hatthāroha Suttaṃ (S.iv.309), and the Assāroha Suttaṃ (S.iv.310). A soldier, an elephant mahout, and a cavalryman approached the Blessed One and asked him if it was true that warriors who were killed while fighting in battle were reborn in heaven. The Buddha explained, that since they were striving with ill-will, trying to kill others at the time of their death, they would be reborn in hell, and if they believed that they would be reborn in heaven, that was a wrong-view, with one of two definite results. At the end of each discourse, the warriors all took refuge, but they did not request the going-forth as Tālapuṭa had done. Apparently, their perfections were not yet ripe, or perhaps because they were still enlisted, they were not free to ordain. The monks cannot give the going-forth to someone who is still a member of the military. No doubt these teachings will be very unpopular with members of the military and their relatives, who have been tricked, deceived, and seduced for a long time by war films and propaganda that to fight the enemies of the state is an heroic and noble deed. If they read this, they should reflect carefully on what their mental state is when fighting in a battle, when killing or trying to kill enemy soldiers, and what their last thoughts will be like if they are killed while engaged in battle. If war and killing cannot be avoided, at least one should be aware that killing is an unwholesome deed, and is not something to be praised.

² This seems to refer to comedians or comic actors, but focusing the mind of the audience on lust, anger, and delusion is also done by movie or stage actors in dramas. War movies, disaster movies, sci-fi movies, even cartoons — they all excite unwholesome mental states. Only very few movies and plays stimulate wholesome mental states such as faith, moral shame, generosity, compassion, etc. Even in movies that include moral lessons, the entire story is often a complete fabrication, so delusion will predominate. Traditional Buddhist entertainments that relate stories from the Jātaka commentaries may be an exception to the general rule as they aim at teaching the Dhamma.

are not free from lust to start with, who are bound with the bond of lust, making them even more lustful. Headman, an actor in the centre of the stage in the midst of a festival, focuses on things that excite anger, those beings who are not free from anger to start with, who are bound with the bond of anger, making them even more angry. Headman, an actor in the centre of the stage in the midst of a festival, focuses on things that excite delusion, those beings who are not free from delusion to start with, who are bound with the bond of delusion, making them even more deluded. He, being intoxicated and heedless himself having made others intoxicated and heedless, after death on the breakup of the body he is reborn in the laughing hell. If one holds this view: 'If an actor in the centre of the stage in the midst of a festival, makes the audience laugh, after death on the breakup of the body he is reborn among the laughing deities,' this is a wrong-view. For an individual holding wrong-view, headman, I declare one of two destinations — hell or the animal womb."

When this was said, Tālapuṭa cried and shed tears.

"I was not able to get you to set this question aside, and not ask me this."

"I am not crying, venerable sir, because the Blessed One said this, but, venerable sir, for a long time I have been cheated, deceived, and seduced by the lineage of the teachers of actors that 'If an actor in the centre of the stage in the midst of a festival, makes the audience laugh, after death on the breakup of the body he is reborn among the laughing deities.'

"It is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvellous, venerable sir! It is as if, venerable sir, what was overturned was set upright, what was concealed was revealed, the right path was pointed out to one who was lost, or a light was brought into the darkness so that those with eyes could see forms. Thus the Blessed One has point out the Dhamma in various ways. Venerable sir, I take refuge in the Blessed One, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Venerable sir, may I obtain the going-forth in the presence of the Blessed One, may I receive the higher ordination?"

Then Tālapuṭa the leader of a troupe of actors received the going-forth and the higher ordination in the presence of the Blessed One. No long after his ordination the Venerable Tālapuṭa attained the goal for which clansmen rightly go forth, realising higher knowledge and abiding in it he knew: 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what should be done has been done, there will be no more of this.' The Venerable Tālapuṭa became another of the Arahants.¹

¹ S.iv.306. The Verses of Tālapuṭa are found in the Theragāthā. Thag.96, vv.1094-1148.

Maṇicūḷaka Suttaṃ

A Discourse to Maṇicūḷaka

“At one time the Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagaha at the squirrel’s sanctuary in the Bamboo grove. On that occasion this topic of conversation arose in the king’s court: “Money¹ is allowable for the monks, for the sons of the Sakyan. The monks consent to and accept money.”

Then the village headman (*gāmaṇi*), Maṇicūḷaka, said this: “Friends, do not speak thus. Money is not allowable for the monks, for the sons of the Sakyan. They do not consent to money, nor do they accept it. The monks have given up jewels (*maṇi*) and gold (*suvaṇṇa*), they are free from the stain of using money (*apetajātarūparajatā*).” However, Maṇicūḷaka was unable to convince that assembly.²

The headman Maṇicūḷaka thus approached the Blessed One, and have paid homage, sat down at one side. Sitting there, the headman Maṇicūḷaka said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, this topic of conversation arose in the king’s court: ‘Is money allowable for the monks, for the sons of the Sakyan? Do the monks consent to and accept money?’ When this was said, venerable sir, I said to the assembly: ‘Friends, do not speak thus. Money is not allowable for the monks, for the sons of the Sakyan. They do not consent to money, nor do they accept it. The monks have given up jewels and gold,

¹ Money (*jātarūparajataṃ*) may be coins of gold, silver, copper, lacquer, or (nowadays) paper money. It refers to any medium that can be freely exchanged for goods. Direct exchange of otherwise allowable goods such as robes for almsfood, or almsfood for building materials is covered by the training rules on bartering (Nissaggiya Pācittiya 19-20) rather than the offence involving confession with forfeiture for accepting money (Nissaggiya Pācittiya 18). Allowable requisites that have been acquired by unallowable means may be returned to the offending monk and used by him if he wishes. However, money that has been accepted must be forfeited to a Saṅgha (at least four bhikkhus). If a lay steward is present, he can take the money and use it to buy allowable requisites for all but the offending monk. If no lay steward is available, the Saṅgha must appoint a trustworthy monk to dispose of the money, who must then throw it away outside of the monastery compound taking no notice of where it falls. Gifts of money to monks are therefore a significant inconvenience for the Saṅgha. Cash donations should be given directly to a lay steward, who can then provide the needs of a monk or monks. The rule on the use of funds given to a lay steward (Nissaggiya Pācittiya 10) is the longest in the Pātimokkha. It makes it abundantly clear that the donated money does not belong to the monk, nor to the Saṅgha, nor to the steward. It still belongs to the donor who should be advised to recover his donation if the steward does not provide any requisites with the funds even after repeated reminders.

² This discourse is cited in the Vinaya Cūlavagga, Vin.ii.296-297, to refute the tenth of the ten points practised by the Vajjian monks who had deviated from the true practice of monks. This was the reason for the convening of the Second Buddhist Council of seven hundred monks. For more details please refer to [Money Makes the World Go Round](#).

they are free from the stain of using money.’ However, venerable sir, I was unable to convince that assembly. Speaking in that way, venerable sir, was I speaking truthfully in accordance with what you have said and not slandering the Blessed One with falsehoods, such that there may be grounds for criticism.”

“Speaking thus, headman, you surely speak truthfully in accordance with what I have said, and do not slander me with falsehoods. Indeed, headman, money is not allowable for the monks, for the sons of the Sakyan, they do not consent to it, nor accept it. The monks, the sons of the Sakyan, have given up jewels and gold, they are free from the stain of using money. Whoever, headman, for whom money is allowable the five strands of sensual pleasure are also allowable. Whoever, headman, for whom the five strands of sensual pleasure are allowable, money is also allowable. If the five strands of sensual pleasure are allowable for anyone, you can definitely know that he lacks the characteristics of a monk, of a son of the Sakyan. I say, headman, that whoever has need of thatch (*tiṇa*) may seek for thatch, whoever has need of wood (*dāru*) may seek for wood, whoever has need of a wagon (*sakaṭaṃ*) may seek for a wagon, whoever has need of a workman (*purisa*) may seek for a workman. However, headman, I do not say that in any way money may be consented to or sought for.”¹

¹ S.iv.325

Sedaka Suttam

A Discourse at Sedaka

Thus have I heard — At one time the Blessed One was dwelling in Sumbha at a market town of Sumbha named Sedaka. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks: “At one time, monks, a bamboo acrobat set up a bamboo pole and said to his apprentice “frying-pan:” ‘Dear frying-pan,¹ having climbed the bamboo pole stand on my shoulders.’ Having replied, ‘Very well. teacher,’ monks, frying-pan the apprentice climbed the pole and stood on the teacher’s shoulders.² Then, monks, the bamboo acrobat said to the apprentice frying-pan: ‘Dear frying-pan, you protect me, and I will protect you. Thus [169] guarding and looking after each other we will show our skill, earn our reward, and descend safely from the bamboo pole.’

When this was said, monks, frying-pan the acrobat’s apprentice said: “No, teacher, it should not be like this. You, teacher, protect yourself, I will protect myself, Thus we will each guard and protect ourselves, show our skill, earn our reward, and descend safely from the bamboo pole.”

“That method, monks, said by frying-pan the acrobat’s apprentice to the teacher should be followed to protect oneself with mindfulness, and to protect others with mindfulness.

“And how, monks, does one, by protecting oneself, protect others? By practising, developing, and making much of the four foundations of mindfulness, thus monks, by protecting oneself, one protects others.

“And how, monks, does one protect others by protecting oneself? By patience, harmlessness, loving-kindness, and compassion (*anudayatāya*) — thus, monks, by protecting others, one protects oneself.

“Thinking ‘I will protect myself,’ monks, the foundations of mindfulness should be practised; Thinking, ‘I will protect others’ the foundations of mindfulness should be practised. By protecting oneself, monks, one protects others.”³

¹ The apprentice may have been male although the gender of the word for frying-pan is female.

² The Commentary says that the trick was for the acrobat to balance the pole on his forehead and for the apprentice to climb the pole. The text suggests that they both climbed the pole and the apprentice stood on the teacher’s shoulders.

³ S.v.168

Vesāli Suttam

A Discourse at Vesāli

Thus have I heard — On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvattṥi at the Great Forest in the Peaked Hall. Then the Blessed One on that occasion taught in various ways on repulsiveness, praising repulsiveness, and praising meditation on repulsiveness.¹

Then the Blessed One addressed the monks — “Monks, I will spend the next fortnight in solitude.² No one should approach me, except for the one who brings my almsfood.”

“Very well, Venerable sir,” those monks replied to the Blessed One. No one approached him except for the one who brought him his almsfood.

Then those monks, thinking “The Blessed One has taught in various ways on repulsiveness, praising repulsiveness, and praising meditation on repulsiveness,” dwelt devoted to the meditation on repulsiveness in various ways. They became tormented, ashamed, and disgusted with the body so that in one day ten monks sought for an assassin ... twenty monks ... thirty monks sought for an assassin.

When that fortnight had passed, the Blessed One came out of seclusion and asked the Venerable Ānanda: “Why is the community of monks so depleted?”³

“The Blessed One taught the monks in various ways on repulsiveness, praising repulsiveness, and praising meditation on repulsiveness,” the monks dwelt devoted to the meditation on repulsiveness in various ways. They became tormented, ashamed, and disgusted with the body so that in one day ten monks sought for an assassin ... twenty monks ... thirty monks sought for an assassin. It would be good, Venerable sir, if the Blessed One would explain another method whereby the monks would be established in final knowledge.”

“Then, Ānanda, assemble all of the monks dwelling in dependence on Vesāli in the assembly hall.”

“Very well, Venerable sir,” the Venerable Ānanda replied to the Blessed One, and he assembled all of the monks dwelling in dependence on Vesāli

¹ Contemplation of the thirty-two parts of the body: head hair (*kesa*), body hair (*loma*), finger-nails (*nakha*), teeth (*danta*), skin (*taco*), flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys; heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs; large intestine, small intestine, stomach, faeces, [brain]; bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat; tears, grease, saliva, snot, synovial fluid, and urine. The Buddha may also have taught the cemetery contemplations.

² The monks assemble every fortnight for the Uposatha ceremony.

³ Although the Blessed One knew the reason, he wished to hear it from Venerable Ānanda.

in the assembly hall. Then he approached the Blessed One, saying: ‘The community of monks is assembled, Venerable sir. It is time for the Blessed One to do as he sees fit.’”

Then the Blessed One approached the assembly hall and, having approached, sat down on a seat that had been prepared for him. Sitting there, the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Monks, this concentration on mindfulness of the respiration, when developed (*bhāvito*) and made much of (*bahulīkato*), is peaceful (*santo*) and excellent (*pañīto*), a pure (*asecanako*) and blissful (*sukho*) abiding (*vihāro*) that instantly dispels evil unwholesome states that have arisen.”

“It is like, monks, during the last month of the hot season an out of season shower instantly removes any dust (*rajo*) or humidity (*jallaṃ*) from the air. Similarly, monks, this concentration on mindfulness of the respiration, when developed and made much of, is peaceful and excellent, a pure and blissful abiding that instantly dispels evil unwholesome states that have arisen. How, monks, is concentration on mindfulness of the respiration developed and made much of as peaceful and excellent, a pure and blissful abiding that instantly dispels evil unwholesome states that have arisen?

“Here, monks, a monk, having gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty place, having sat down cross-legged, keeping his body erect, establishes mindfulness in front of his face. Mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out ... ‘Contemplating relinquishment I will breathe in,’ he trains himself, ‘Contemplating relinquishment I will breathe out,’ he trains himself.¹ Thus, monks, he develops concentration on mindfulness of the respiration, developing it and making much of it, dwelling peacefully, and instantly dispelling evil unwholesome states that have arisen.”²

About the Vesāli Sutta

This story is also told in the Vinaya text. The Saṃyuttanikāya Commentary relates the past life story of the monks who were murdered or committed suicide. At one time in the past five hundred hunters lived in the forest for the whole life making a living by killing deer and birds. After death they were reborn in hell. Due to some other wholesome kamma, they were reborn during the Buddha’s time and went forth as monks. Knowing that their previous evil kamma still had some residue waiting to give its effect during that fortnight, the Buddha gave them the meditation object on

¹ The Pāli text is elided here. Please refer to [A Manual of Respiration](#) by the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw for the full text and translation of this passage.

² S.v.320

repulsiveness to remove attachment to the body, to ensure a fortunate rebirth after their inevitable death by suicide or homicide.¹

He therefore left strict instructions not to be disturbed during that fortnight, knowing that a large number of those monks would die as a result of their previous unwholesome kamma, which had to give its result at that time.

This story is often cited as a dilemma.² “If the Buddha was omniscient why did he teach the meditation on repulsiveness to those monks, because it made them disgusted with their bodies, and they therefore committed suicide?” The answer is, “If he had taught mindfulness of breathing or some other meditation method, those who were not Noble Ones would not have been able to abandon attachment to their bodies at the time of their death, and as a result they may have been reborn as hungry ghosts. Whatever kind of meditation they were given to practise, they were predestined to die during that fortnight due to their past kamma.”

¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi in his footnotes to this discourse finds it hard to reconcile a volitional action like suicide with the result of a kamma that is predetermined. In general, the law of kamma is not a doctrine of predestination. However, there are cases where the kamma inevitably has to bear fruit. A bullet or even a missile can be deflected, but a meteor cannot. The murder of Mahāmoggallāna is a well-known example. In a previous life he murdered his blind parents by beating them to death, pretending that they had been waylaid by robbers. As a result of that heavy evil kamma he was reborn in hell after his death. During the Buddha’s life time, some residue of that evil kamma remained, so in his final existence he was beaten to death by robbers. In spite of being an Arahant endowed with psychic powers, he could not escape, and even the Buddha was unable to prevent his murder. Suicide is a volitional action, not a resultant. However, urging others to commit suicide is a serious evil kamma that could have the result that one has to endure the same fate oneself. Those who do commit suicide feel that they have no other choice. Some encounter a rescuer who prevents them from taking that fatal last step, but some do not. The difference lies in the momentum and potency of the volition that led to the (inevitable) result.

² In his footnotes to this discourse, Bhikkhu Bodhi says that this dilemma is included in the Milindapañha. So far, I have been unable to find it there, but it is exactly the kind of dilemma one would expect to find there. There is also the dilemma that the Buddha asked Ānanda why the community of monks was so depleted although he already knew the reason. This was just the Buddha’s way of bringing up the subject.

Manussacutiniraya Suttaṃ

Deceased Human Beings Reborn in Hell

Then the Blessed One picked up a small amount of dust on the tip of his fingernail and said to the monks: “What do you think, monks, which is greater? This small amount of dust on my fingernail, or the great earth?”

“Venerable sir, the great earth is far greater. The small amount of dust on the Blessed One’s fingernail is insignificant. The small amount of dust on the Blessed One’s fingernail is not even a hundredth, a thousandth, or even a hundred thousandth the amount of the great earth.”

“Even so, monks, only a few deceased human beings are born again as human beings; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.”¹

Manussacutitiracchāna Suttaṃ

Deceased Human Beings Reborn as Animals

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased human beings are born again as human beings; far more numerous are those who are reborn as animals. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

Manussacutipettivisayasuttaṃ

Deceased Human Beings Reborn as Hungry Ghosts

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased human beings are born again as human beings; far more numerous are those who are reborn as hungry ghosts. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

¹ S.v.474

Manussacutidevanirayādisuttaṃ

Deceased Human Beings Reborn as Deities...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased human beings are born again as deities; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell ... as animals ... as hungry ghosts. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...¹

Devacutinirayādisuttaṃ

Deceased Deities Reborn as in Hell...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased deities are born again as deities; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell ... as animals ... as hungry ghosts. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

Devamanussanirayādisuttaṃ

Deceased Deities Reborn as Human Beings...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased deities are born again as human beings; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell ... as animals ... as hungry ghosts ... in hell. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

Nirayamanussanirayādisuttaṃ

Deceased Hell Beings Reborn as Human Beings...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased from hell are born again as human beings; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell ... as animals ... as hungry ghosts. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

¹ S.v.475

Nirayadevanirayādisuttam

Deceased Hell Beings Reborn as Deities...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased from hell are born again as deities; far more numerous are those who are reborn as animals ... as hungry ghosts ... in hell. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

Tiracchānamanussanirayādisuttam

Deceased Animals Reborn as Human Beings...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased animals are reborn as human beings; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell ... as animals ... as hungry ghosts. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...¹

Tiracchānadevanirayādisuttam

Deceased Animals Reborn as Deities...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased animals are reborn as deities; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell ... as animals ... as hungry ghosts. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

Pettimanussanirayādisuttam

Deceased Hungry Ghosts Reborn as Human Beings...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased hungry ghosts are reborn as human beings; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell ... as animals ... as hungry ghosts. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

¹ S.v.476

Pettidevanirayādisuttam

Deceased Hungry Ghosts Reborn as Deities...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased hungry ghosts are reborn as deities; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell ... as animals ... as hungry ghosts. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

Pettidevapettivisayasuttam

Deceased Hungry Ghosts Reborn as Deities...

... “Even so, monks, only a few deceased hungry ghosts are reborn as deities; far more numerous are those who are reborn in hell ... as animals ... as hungry ghosts. Therefore, monks, devote yourselves to contemplating, ‘This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path leading to the cessation of suffering’.” ...

Thus spoke the Blessed One. The monks rejoiced in what the Blessed One had said.¹

About the Chapter on Repetition of the Five Destinies

This last chapter of the Saṃyuttanikāya — the Pañcagatipeyyālavaggo — repeatedly stresses the great rarity of obtaining rebirth in the human realm. Even if reborn in the human or celestial realms after death, the next existence after that is much more likely to be in the lower realms. Only Stream-winners are guaranteed not to be reborn in lower realms, so all Buddhists should strive to attain, at the very least, insights on the preliminary path of practice leading to the attainment of the Noble Path. Only this will protect them from falling into the lower realms.

Similar discourses are given in the Jambudīpapeyyālo of Chapter Four of the Book of Ones, comparing the few lovely parks in the Continent of the Rose Apple (Jambudīpa, or India) to the vast areas of wilderness. Among human beings who are fortunate to be reborn as human beings in India during the time of the Buddha, very few gain faith in the Dhamma, penetrate its meaning, practise in accordance with it, and gain realisation, etc.

One should reflect wisely on *The Simile of the Blind Turtle*.

¹ S.v.477

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