AN 3.101 — AN 3:102 The Dirt-washer | Paṁsudhovaka Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The Dirt-washer

Paṁsudhovaka Sutta (AN 3:102)

“There are these gross impurities in gold: dirty sand, gravel, & grit. The dirt-washer or his apprentice, having placed (the gold) in a vat, washes it again & again until he has washed them away.

“When he is rid of them, there remain the moderate impurities in the gold: coarse sand & fine grit. He washes the gold again & again until he has washed them away.

“When he is rid of them, there remain the fine impurities in the gold: fine sand & black dust. The dirt-washer or his apprentice washes the gold again & again until he has washed them away.

“When he is rid of them, there remains just the gold dust. The goldsmith or his apprentice, having placed it in a crucible, blows on it again & again to blow away the dross. The gold, as long as it has not been blown on again & again to the point where the impurities are blown away, as long as it is not refined & free from dross, is not pliant, malleable, or luminous. It is brittle and not ready to be worked. But there comes a time when the goldsmith or his apprentice has blown on the gold again & again until the dross is blown away. The gold, having been blown on again & again to the point where the impurities are blown away, is then refined, free from dross, pliant, malleable, & luminous. It is not brittle, and is ready to be worked. Then whatever sort of ornament he has in mind—whether a belt, an earring, a necklace, or a gold chain—the gold would serve his purpose.

“In the same way, there are these gross impurities in a monk intent on heightened mind: misconduct in body, speech, & mind. These the monk—aware & able by nature—abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence. When he is rid of them, there remain in him the moderate impurities: thoughts of sensuality, ill will, & harmfulness. These he abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence. When he is rid of them there remain in him the fine impurities: thoughts of his caste, thoughts of his home district, thoughts related to not wanting to be despised. These he abandons, destroys, dispels, wipes out of existence.

“When he is rid of them, there remain only thoughts of the Dhamma. His concentration is neither peaceful nor refined, has not yet attained calm or unification, and is kept in place by the fabrication of forceful restraint. But there comes a time when his mind grows steady inwardly, settles down, grows unified & concentrated. His concentration is peaceful & refined, has attained calm & unification, and is no longer kept in place by the fabrication of forceful restraint.

“And then whichever of the higher knowledges he turns his mind to know & realize, he can witness them for himself whenever there is an opening.

“If he wants, he wields manifold supranormal powers. Having been one he becomes many; having been many he becomes one. He appears. He vanishes. He goes unimpeded through walls, ramparts, and mountains as if through space. He dives in and out of the earth as if it were water. He walks on water without sinking as if it were dry land. Sitting crosslegged he flies through the air like a winged bird. With his hand he touches and strokes even the sun and moon, so mighty and powerful. He exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahmā worlds. He can witness this for himself whenever there is an opening.

“If he wants, he hears—by means of the divine ear-element, purified and surpassing the human—both kinds of sounds: divine and human, whether near or far. He can witness this for himself whenever there is an opening.

“If he wants, he discerns the awareness of other beings, other individuals, having encompassed it with his own awareness. He discerns a mind with passion as ‘a mind with passion,’ and a mind without passion as ‘a mind without passion.’ He discerns a mind with aversion as ‘a mind with aversion,’ and a mind without aversion as ‘a mind without aversion.’ He discerns a mind with delusion as ‘a mind with delusion,’ and a mind without delusion as ‘a mind without delusion.’ He discerns a restricted mind as ‘a restricted mind,’ and a scattered mind as ‘a scattered mind.’ He discerns an enlarged mind1 as ‘an enlarged mind,’ and an unenlarged mind as ‘an unenlarged mind.’ He discerns a surpassed mind [one that is not at the most excellent level] as ‘a surpassed mind,’ and an unsurpassed mind as ‘an unsurpassed mind.’ He discerns a concentrated mind as ‘a concentrated mind,’ and an unconcentrated mind as ‘an unconcentrated mind.’ He discerns a released mind2 as ‘a released mind,’ and an unreleased mind as ‘an unreleased mind.’ He can witness this for himself whenever there is an opening.

“If he wants, he recollects his manifold past lives [literally: previous homes], i.e., one birth, two births, three births, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction and expansion, (recollecting,) ‘There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.’ Thus he remembers his manifold past lives in their modes and details. He can witness this for himself whenever there is an opening.

“If he wants, he sees—by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human—beings passing away and re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: ‘These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, and mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, and mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a good destination, a heavenly world.’ Thus—by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human—he sees beings passing away and re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their kamma. He can witness this for himself whenever there is an opening.

“If he wants, then through the ending of the effluents, he enters & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known and realized them for himself right in the here & now. He can witness this for himself whenever there is an opening.”

Notes

1. Mahaggataṁ. This term is used, together with “immeasurable / unlimited,” in the standard description of the awareness generated in the practice of the brahmavihāras (SN 42:8). According to Ven. Anuruddha in MN 127, however, an enlarged mind is not immeasurable. Its range of awareness is larger than the body but still measurable, ranging in distance from the shade of a tree to the earth bounded by the ocean.

2. On the various levels of release, see DN 15, MN 43, and AN 9:43—45.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 19–20; SN 51:20; AN 3:71; AN 5:28