AN 3.74 — Nigaṇṭha Sutta (The Nigaṇṭha – Jain Naked Ascetics)

English translation by Bhikkhu Candana.

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Text

74. Nigaṇṭha Sutta (The Nigaṇṭha – Jain Naked Ascetics) At one time, while the Venerable Ānanda was staying at the gabled hall in the Great Forest of Vesālī, the Licchavi Princes, Abhaya and Pandita Kumāra, went and approached the Venerable Ānanda, and after paying homage to him, they both sat down to one side.

Then, the Licchavi Prince Abhaya addressed the Venerable Ānanda, by saying:

“Bhante, Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta (The Jain Mahāvīra) claims himself to be all-knowing, all-seeing, with an all-embracing knowledge and vision that is complete, while stating:

‘Whether walking, standing, laying down or awake, my knowledge and vision is always established and is always present in me!’

“Furthermore, he instructs on finishing one’s Kamma [referring to the ‘fruits’ of past intentional actions] done earlier in one’s past, through the means of engaging in severe austerities, in order to ‘break down the bridge’ connecting them to those stains of kamma by canceling them out altogether, instead of starting or engaging in new actions.

“In this manner, he claims that with the very destruction of action (kamma), there occurs the destruction of suffering; with the destruction of suffering, the destruction of feelings; and with the destruction of feelings, the destruction of all suffering.

“Thus, he declares the ending of suffering, by claiming it to be none other than the chipping away and wearing down of these past actions and their stains, through the means of which one, here and now, becomes purified and transcended.

“Bhante, what does The Blessed One say about this?”

And the Venerable Ānanda replied, by saying:

“Abhaya, The Blessed One who knows and sees, who is in fact an actual Arahant, Perfectly Awakened, rightfully teaches these three kinds of chipping away and wearing down, the

kind of wearing down and obliteration that leads to the purification of beings, for the overcoming of all sorrows, grief and lamentation; for going beyond suffering and despair, and for gaining the very knowledge and realization of Nibbāna itself.

“Now what are these three?

a. “Here, Abhaya, the Bhikkhu lives a virtuous life, while observing and being restrained by the Pātimokkha rules, becoming disciplined, possessing a wholesome and beneficial conduct, shunning the possibility of even the slightest misconduct in himself. Thus, having taken on the training rules, he practices the Bhikkhu’s Code of Discipline (Vinaya). As such, he does not create new evil or unwholesome actions, while also working to eliminate the old evil and unwholesome actions, by having them decay, wither away, and wear down, right here and now.

“Now, this wearing down, Abhaya, is itself directly visible, inviting of inspection and fully testable, a method that is certainly applicable, leading one to progress, and therefore, is personally realized by the wise, for themselves.

b. “Further, Abhaya, by overcoming the obstructive five hindrances, the Bhikkhu trains by secluding his mind from running after things that have to do with sensuality; he pulls his attention inwards and becomes quite secluded from sensual pleasures. Thus secluded from unwholesome and bad merit-making states, he enters upon and remains in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thinking and planning, while experiencing a strong flood of spiritual joy and ecstasy, all resulting from such seclusion.

“Later, by stilling his thinking process and without fighting with himself, he turns his attention away from his thoughts by not engaging with them any further, and comes to experience the disappearance of both thinking and planning. In this way, he enters upon and remains in the second jhāna, which continues to be accompanied by a strong flood of spiritual joy and ecstasy, that are now the result of his growing and stable collectedness of heart (samādhi).

“Furthermore, the Bhikkhu goes deeper in his meditation by not holding on to anything, including the experience of spiritual joy, as he witnesses it beginning to vanish and cease. Thus, he abides in a state of equanimity, while being mindful and fully aware, still feeling a subtle ecstasy throughout, as he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, for which reason the Noble Ones declare:

‘It is such a one indeed, who is serenely mindful; Abiding in happiness, with an ever-present sense of equanimity.’

“Going further, the Bhikkhu gives up both pleasure and pain, and having already gone beyond joy and anguish, he remains in the continuous state of purifying mindfulness, with an ever-present sense of equanimity, as he enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, while experiencing neither pleasure nor pain, having now gone beyond both of them.

“Thus, the Bhikkhu does not create any new action (Kamma). Meanwhile, however, he keeps breaking the negative pattern of old kamma by no longer perpetuating such actions that he used to do in the past. Thereby, he lets those actions wear down and die out, right here and now.

“Here again, this wearing down is itself directly visible, inviting of inspection and fully testable, a method that is certainly applicable, leading one to progress, and therefore, is personally realized by the wise, for themselves.

c. “Further, Abhaya, by becoming virtuous and thus collected and settled in his mind, with the destruction of the contaminants, the Bhikkhu realizes, in this very life, with direct knowledge and by himself, the spotless liberation of mind through wisdom and dwells in that state here and now.

In this manner, he directly knows and sees as it actually is: ‘This is suffering.’ He directly knows and sees as it actually is: ‘This is the origin of suffering.’ He directly knows and sees as it actually is: ‘This is the cessation of suffering.’ He directly knows and sees as it actually is: ‘This is the Path leading to the cessation of suffering.’ He directly knows and sees as it actually is: ‘These are the contaminants (āsavas).’ He directly knows and sees as it actually is: ‘This is the origin of the contaminants.’ He directly knows and sees as it actually is: ‘This is the cessation of the contaminants.’ He directly sees and knows as it actually is: ‘This is the Path leading to the cessation of the contaminants.’

“And at that moment when the Bhikkhu knows and sees thus, his mind becomes fully liberated from the contaminant of sensual desire; freed from the contaminant of becoming; and from the contaminant of ignorance. And with the heart thus fully liberated and released through wisdom, he dwells in that state as he goes on living out the rest of his days.

“Throughout this process, the Bhikkhu does not engage in creating any new action; meanwhile, he keeps breaking the pattern of old evil and unwholesome Kamma, by no longer perpetuating such actions he had done earlier, as he lets them all wear down, wither away, and die out, here and now.

“And as stated before, this wearing down is itself directly visible, inviting of inspection and fully testable, a method that is certainly applicable, leading one to progress, and therefore, is personally realized by the wise, for themselves.

“Now, Abhaya, these are the three kinds of wearing down through purity that The Blessed One, The Arahant, who is indeed Perfectly Awakened, rightfully teaches for the purification of all beings, for the overcoming of all sorrows, grief and lamentation; for going beyond suffering and despair, and for gaining the knowledge and realization of Nibbāna itself.”

When this was said, the Licchavi Pandita Kumāra, while listening delightedly to these words spoken by the Venerable Ānanda, turned to his fellow Licchavi Abhaya, and said:

“Well, friend Abhaya, are you still not inspired in hearing these lovely and well-spoken words from the Venerable Ānanda?”

“My dear Friend, how could I possibly not be inspired by, and wholeheartedly appreciative for the lovely and well-spoken words of the Venerable Ānanda? For, if anyone were to sit here and listen to such lovely and well-spoken words and somehow to not get inspired or wholeheartedly appreciative, then their head would simply blow up into pieces, right where they sit!”