AN 5.49 — Kosala Sutta: The Kosalan

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

Translator's note: This discourse gives the Buddha's recommendations for how to deal with grief. The passage discussing eulogies, chants, etc., is a reference to funeral customs designed to channel the feelings of the bereaved in a productive direction. As the Buddha notes, as long as these seem to be serving a purpose, engage in them. Once they no longer seem to be serving a purpose, and one finds that one is indulging in grief, one should return to the important duties of one's life.

Once the Blessed One was staying near Savatthi in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery. Then King Pasenadi the Kosalan went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down, sat to one side. Now, at that time Queen Mallika died. Then a certain man went to the king and whispered in his ear: "Your majesty, Queen Mallika has died." When this was said, King Pasenadi the Kosalan sat there miserable, sick at heart, his shoulders drooping, his face down, brooding, at a loss for words. Then the Blessed One saw the king sitting there miserable, sick at heart... at a loss for words, and so said to him, "There are these five things, great king, that cannot be gotten by a contemplative, a brahman, a deva, a Mara, a Brahma, or anyone at all in the world. Which five?

"'May what is subject to aging not age.' This is something that cannot be gotten by a contemplative, a brahman, a deva, a Mara, a Brahma, or anyone at all in the world.

"'May what is subject to illness not grow ill.' This is something that cannot be gotten by a contemplative, a brahman, a deva, a Mara, a Brahma, or anyone at all in the world.

"'May what is subject to death not die.' This is something that cannot be gotten by a contemplative, a brahman, a deva, a Mara, a Brahma, or anyone at all in the world.

"'May what is subject to ending not end.' This is something that cannot be gotten by a contemplative, a brahman, a deva, a Mara, a Brahma, or anyone at all in the world.

"'May what is subject to destruction not be destroyed.' This is something that cannot be gotten by a contemplative, a brahman, a deva, a Mara, a Brahma, or anyone at all in the world.

"Now, it happens to an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person that something that is subject to aging ages. With the aging of what is subject to aging, he does not reflect: 'It doesn't happen only to me that what is subject to aging will age. To the extent that there are beings — past & future, passing away & re-arising — it happens to all of them that what is subject to aging will age. And if, with the aging of what is subject to aging, I were to sorrow, grieve, lament, beat my breast, & become distraught, food would not agree with me, my body would become unattractive, my affairs would go untended, my enemies would be gratified and my friends unhappy.' So, with the aging of what is subject to aging, he sorrows, grieves, laments, beats his breast, & becomes distraught. This is called an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person pierced by the poisoned arrow of sorrow, tormenting himself.

"Furthermore, it happens to an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person that something that is subject to illness grows ill... that something subject to death dies... that something subject to ending ends... that something subject to destruction is destroyed. With the destruction of what is subject to destruction, he does not reflect: 'It doesn't happen only to me that what is subject to destruction will be destroyed. To the extent that there are beings — past & future, passing away & re-arising — it happens to all of them that what is subject to destruction will be destroyed. And if, with the destruction of what is subject to destruction, I were to sorrow, grieve, lament, beat my breast, & become distraught, food would not agree with me, my body would become unattractive, my affairs would go untended, my enemies would be gratified and my friends unhappy.' So, with the destruction of what is subject to destruction, he sorrows, grieves, laments, beats his breast, & becomes distraught. This is called an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person pierced by the poisoned arrow of sorrow, tormenting himself.

"Now, it happens to a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones that something that is subject to aging ages. With the aging of what is subject to aging, he reflects: 'It doesn't happen only to me that what is subject to aging will age. To the extent that there are beings — past & future, passing away & re-arising — it happens to all of them that what is subject to aging will age. And if, with the aging of what is subject to aging, I were to sorrow, grieve, lament, beat my breast, & become distraught, food would not agree with me, my body would become unattractive, my affairs would go untended, my enemies

would be gratified and my friends unhappy.' So, with the aging of what is subject to aging, he does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, does not beat his breast or become distraught. This is called a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones who has pulled out the poisoned arrow of sorrow pierced with which the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person torments himself. Sorrowless, arrowless, the disciple of the noble ones is totally unbound right within himself.

"Furthermore, it happens to a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones that something that is subject to illness grows ill... that something subject to death dies... that something subject to ending ends... that something subject to destruction is destroyed. With the destruction of what is subject to destruction, he reflects: 'It doesn't happen only to me that what is subject to destruction will be destroyed. To the extent that there are beings — past & future, passing away & re-arising — it happens to all of them that what is subject to destruction will be destroyed. And if, with the destruction of what is subject to destruction, I were to sorrow, grieve, lament, beat my breast, & become distraught, food would not agree with me, my body would become unattractive, my affairs would go untended, my enemies would be gratified and my friends unhappy.' So, with the destruction of what is subject to destruction, he does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, does not beat his breast or become distraught. This is called a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones who has pulled out the poisoned arrow of sorrow pierced with which the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person torments himself. Sorrowless, arrowless, the disciple of the noble ones is totally unbound right within himself.

"These are the five things, great king, that cannot be gotten by a contemplative, a brahman, a deva, a Mara, a Brahma, or anyone at all in the world."

Not by sorrowing, not by lamenting, is any aim accomplished here, not even a bit. Knowing you're sorrowing & in pain, your enemies are gratified. But when a sage with a sense for determining what is his aim doesn't waver in the face of misfortune, his enemies are pained, seeing his face unchanged, as of old. Where & however an aim is accomplished through eulogies, chants, good sayings, donations, & family customs, follow them diligently there & that way. But if you discern that your own aim or that of others is not gained in this way, acquiesce [to the nature of things] unsorrowing, with the thought: 'What important work am I doing now?'