AN 6.62 — Knowledge of the Faculties of Persons

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Text

Numbered Discourses 6.62

6. The Great Chapter

Knowledge of the Faculties of Persons

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was wandering in the land of the Kosalans together with a large Saṅgha of mendicants when he arrived at a town of the Kosalans named Daṇḍakappaka. The Buddha left the road and sat at the root of a tree on the seat spread out. The mendicants entered Daṇḍakappaka to look for a guest house.

Then Venerable Ānanda together with several mendicants went to the Aciravatī River to bathe. When he had bathed and emerged from the water he stood in one robe drying his limbs.

Then a certain mendicant went up to Venerable Ānanda, and said to him, “Reverend Ānanda, when the Buddha declared that Devadatta was going to a place of loss, to hell, there to remain for an eon, irredeemable, did he do so after wholeheartedly deliberating, or was this just a way of speaking?”

“You’re right, reverend, that’s how the Buddha declared it.”

Then Venerable Ānanda went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and told him what had happened.

“Ānanda, that mendicant must be junior, recently gone forth, or else a foolish, incompetent senior mendicant. How on earth can he take something that I have declared categorically to be ambiguous? I do not see a single other individual about whom I have given such whole-hearted deliberation before making a declaration as I did in the case of Devadatta.

As long as I saw even a fraction of a hair’s tip of goodness in Devadatta I did not declare that he was going to a place of loss, to hell, there to remain for an eon, irredeemable. But when I saw that there was not even a fraction of a hair’s tip of goodness in Devadatta I declared that he was going to a place of loss, to hell, there to remain for an eon, irredeemable.

Suppose there was a sewer deeper than a man’s height, full to the brim with feces, and someone was sunk into it over their head. Then along comes a person who wants to help make them safe, who wants to lift them out of that sewer. But circling all around the sewer they couldn’t see even a fraction of a hair’s tip of that person that was not smeared with

feces.

In the same way, when I saw that there was not even a fraction of a hair's tip of goodness in Devadatta I declared that he was going to a place of loss, to hell, there to remain for an eon, irredeemable. If you would all listen, Ānanda, I will analyze the Realized One's knowledges of the faculties of persons."

"Now is the time, Blessed One! Now is the time, Holy One! Let the Buddha analyze the faculties of persons. The mendicants will listen and remember it."

"Well then, Ānanda, listen and apply your mind well, I will speak."

"Yes, sir," Ānanda replied. The Buddha said this:

"Ānanda, when I've comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand: 'Both skillful and unskillful qualities are found in this individual.' After some time I encompass their mind and understand: 'The skillful qualities of this individual have vanished, but the unskillful qualities are still present. Nevertheless, their skillful root is unbroken, and from that the skillful will appear. So this individual is not liable to decline in the future.' Suppose some seeds were intact, unspoiled, not weather-damaged, fertile, and well-kept. And they were sown in a well-prepared, productive field. Wouldn't you know that those seeds would grow, increase, and mature?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the same way, when I've comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand … This individual is not liable to decline in the future … This is how another individual is known to the Realized One by encompassing their mind. And this is how the Realized One knows a person's faculties by encompassing their mind. And this is how the Realized One knows the future origination of a person's qualities by encompassing their mind.

When I've comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand: 'Both skillful and unskillful qualities are found in this individual.' After some time I encompass their mind and understand: 'The unskillful qualities of this individual have vanished, but the skillful qualities are still present. Nevertheless, their unskillful root is unbroken, and from that the unskillful will appear. So this individual is still liable to decline in the future.' Suppose some seeds were intact, unspoiled, not weather-damaged, fertile, and well-kept. And they were sown on a broad rock. Wouldn't you know that those seeds would not grow, increase, and mature?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the same way, when I've comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand … This individual is still liable to decline in the future … This is how another individual is known to the Realized One …

When I've comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand: 'Both skillful and unskillful qualities are found in this individual.' After some time I encompass their mind and understand: 'This individual has not even a fraction of a hair's tip of goodness. They have absolutely dark, unskillful qualities. When their body breaks up, after death, they will be reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell.' Suppose some seeds were

broken, spoiled, weather-damaged. And they were sown in a well-prepared, productive field. Wouldn't you know that those seeds would not grow, increase, and mature?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the same way, when I've comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand … 'This individual has not even a fraction of a hair's tip of goodness. They have absolutely dark, unskillful qualities. When their body breaks up, after death, they will be reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell.' …"

When he said this, Venerable Ānanda said to the Buddha, "Sir, can you describe three other individuals who share a portion of these three?"

"I can, Ānanda," said the Buddha. "Ānanda, when I've comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand: 'Both skillful and unskillful qualities are found in this individual.' After some time I encompass their mind and understand: 'The skillful qualities of this individual have vanished, but the unskillful qualities are still present. Nevertheless, their skillful root is unbroken, but it's about to be totally destroyed. So this individual is still liable to decline in the future.' Suppose there were some burning coals, blazing and glowing, placed on a broad rock. Wouldn't you know that those coals would not grow, increase, and spread?"

"Yes, sir."

"Or suppose it's the late afternoon and the sun was going down. Wouldn't you know that the light was about to vanish and darkness appear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Or suppose that it's nearly time for the midnight meal. Wouldn't you know that the light had vanished and the darkness appeared?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the same way, when I've comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand … This individual is still liable to decline in the future …

When I've comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand: 'Both skillful and unskillful qualities are found in this individual.' After some time I encompass their mind and understand: 'The unskillful qualities of this individual have vanished, but the skillful qualities are still present. Nevertheless, their unskillful root is unbroken, but it's about to be totally destroyed. So this individual is not liable to decline in the future.' Suppose there were some burning coals, blazing and glowing, placed on a pile of grass or timber. Wouldn't you know that those coals would grow, increase, and spread?"

"Yes, sir."

"Or suppose it's the crack of dawn and the sun is rising. Wouldn't you know that the dark will vanish and the light appear?"

"Yes, sir."

“Or suppose that it’s nearly time for the midday meal. Wouldn’t you know that the dark had vanished and the light appeared?”

“Yes, sir.”

“In the same way, when I’ve comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand … This individual is not liable to decline in the future …

When I’ve comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand: ‘Both skillful and unskillful qualities are found in this individual.’ After some time I encompass their mind and understand: ‘This individual has not even a fraction of a hair’s tip of unskillful qualities. They have absolutely bright, blameless qualities. They will become extinguished in this very life.’ Suppose there were some cool, quenched coals, placed on a pile of grass or timber. Wouldn’t you know that those coals would not grow, increase, and spread?”

“Yes, sir.”

“In the same way, when I’ve comprehended the mind of an individual, I understand … ‘This individual has not even a fraction of a hair’s tip of unskillful qualities. They have absolutely bright, blameless qualities. They will become extinguished in this very life.’ This is how another individual is known to the Realized One by encompassing their mind. And this is how the Realized One knows a person’s faculties by encompassing their mind. And this is how the Realized One knows the future origination of a person’s qualities by encompassing their mind.

And so, Ānanda, of the first three individuals one is not liable to decline, one is liable to decline, and one is bound for a place of loss, hell. And of the second three individuals, one is liable to decline, one is not liable to decline, and one is bound to become extinguished.”