AN 9.34 — AN 9:34 Unbinding | Nibbāna Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

Unbinding

Nibbāna Sutta (AN 9:34)

I have heard that on one occasion Ven. Sāriputta was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels’ Sanctuary. There he said to the monks, “This unbinding is pleasant, friends. This unbinding is pleasant.”

When this was said, Ven. Udāyin said to Ven. Sāriputta, “But what is the pleasure here, my friend, where there is nothing felt?”

“Just that is the pleasure here, my friend: where there is nothing felt. There are these five strands of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing,

charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire; sounds cognizable via the ear… aromas cognizable via the nose… flavors cognizable via the tongue… tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire. Whatever pleasure or joy arises in dependence on these five strands of sensuality, that is sensual pleasure.

"Now there is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality,1 secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with sensuality, that is an affliction for him. Just as pain would arise in a healthy person as an affliction, even so the attention to perceptions dealing with sensuality that beset the monk is an affliction for him. Now, the Blessed One has said that whatever is an affliction is stress. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how unbinding is pleasant.

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with directed thought, that is an affliction for him….

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the fading of rapture, remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, senses pleasure with the body, and enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with rapture, that is an affliction for him….

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with equanimity,2 that is an affliction for him….

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity, (perceiving,) 'Infinite space,' enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with form, that is an affliction for him….

"Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) 'Infinite consciousness,' enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with the dimension of the infinitude of space, that is an affliction for him….

“Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) ‘There is nothing,’ enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, that is an affliction for him....

“Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. If, as he remains there, he is beset with attention to perceptions dealing with the dimension of nothingness, that is an affliction for him. Now, the Blessed One has said that whatever is an affliction is stress. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how unbinding is pleasant.

“Then there is the case where a monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And as he sees (that) with discernment, effluents are completely ended. So by this line of reasoning it may be known how unbinding is pleasant.”

Notes

1. AN 6:63 defines sensuality as follows: “There are these five strands of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire; sounds cognizable via the ear... aromas cognizable via the nose... flavors cognizable via the tongue... tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire. But these are not sensuality. They are called strands of sensuality in the discipline of the noble ones.

“The passion for his resolves is a man’s sensuality,

not the beautiful sensual pleasures

found in the world.

The passion for his resolves is a man’s sensuality.

The beauties remain as they are in the world,

While, in this regard,

the enlightened

subdue their desire.”

2. In other words, even though the fourth jhāna is characterized by equanimity, the act of taking mental note of that fact would disturb the stillness of the jhāna. This point is also found in AN 9:41.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 121; AN 9:42; Dhp 202–203; Dhp 381; Ud 2:1–2; Ud 8:1–4