AN 10.99 — AN 10:99 To Upāli | Upāli Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

To Upāli

Upāli Sutta (AN 10:99)

Then Ven. Upāli1 went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, “Lord, I want to spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings.”

“Upāli, it’s not easy to endure isolated wilderness & forest lodgings. It’s not easy to maintain seclusion, not easy to enjoy being alone. The forests, as it were, plunder the mind of a monk who has not gained concentration. Whoever would say, ‘I, without having gained concentration, will spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings,’ of him it can be expected that he will sink to the bottom or float away.

“Imagine, Upāli, a great freshwater lake. Then there would come a great bull elephant, seven or seven and a half cubits tall. The thought would occur to him, ‘What if I were to plunge into this freshwater lake, to playfully squirt water into my ears and along my back, and then—having playfully squirted water into my ears and along my back, having bathed & drunk & come back out—to go off as I please?’ So, having plunged into the freshwater lake, he would playfully squirt water into his ears and along his back, and then—having playfully squirted water into his ears and along his back, having bathed & drunk & come back out—he would go off as he pleased. Why is that? Because his large body finds a footing in the depth.

“Then a rabbit or a cat would come along. The thought would occur to it, ‘What’s the difference between me and a bull elephant? What if I were to plunge into this freshwater lake, to playfully squirt water into my ears and along my back, and then—having playfully squirted water into my ears and along my back, having bathed & drunk & come back out—to go off as I please?’ So, without reflecting, he jumps rashly into the freshwater lake, and of him it can be expected that he will either sink to the bottom or float away. Why is that? Because his small body doesn’t find a footing in the depth.

“In the same way, whoever would say, ‘I, without having gained concentration, will spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings,’ of him it can be expected that he will sink to the bottom or float away.

“Imagine, Upāli, a stupid baby boy, lying on his back, playing with his urine & excrement. What do you think? Isn’t that totally & completely a childish form of play?”

“Yes, lord.”

“Then, as the child grows and his faculties mature, he plays at children’s games: toy plows, stick games, somersaults, toy windmills, toy measures, toy carts, and a toy bow & arrow. What do you think? Aren’t these forms of play more excellent than the earlier form of play, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“At a later time, as the boy grows and his faculties mature (still further), he enjoys himself provided & endowed with the five strings of sensuality: forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, accompanied with 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, accompanied with sensual desire. What do you think? Aren’t these forms of play more excellent than the earlier forms of play, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“Now, Upāli, there is the case where a Tathāgata appears in the world, worthy & rightly self-awakened. He teaches the Dhamma admirable in its beginning, admirable in its middle, admirable in its end. He proclaims the holy life both in its particulars and in its essence, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure.

“A householder or householder’s son or one born in one clan or another hears that Dhamma. Having heard the Dhamma, he gains conviction in the Tathāgata. Being endowed with a gain in conviction, he reflects: ‘Household life is confining, a dusty path. Life gone forth is the open air. It isn’t easy, living at home, to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, a polished shell. What if I, having shaved off my hair & beard and putting on the ochre robe, were to go forth from the household life into homelessness?’

“So after some time he abandons his mass of wealth, large or small; leaves his circle of relatives, large or small; shaves off his hair & beard, puts on the ochre robes, and goes forth from the household life into homelessness.

Virtue

“When he has thus gone forth, endowed with the monks’ training & livelihood, then—abandoning the taking of life—he abstains from the taking of life. He dwells with his rod laid down, his knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings.

“Abandoning the taking of what is not given, he abstains from taking what is not given. He takes only what is given, accepts only what is given, lives not by stealth but by means of a self that has become pure. This, too, is part of his virtue.

“Abandoning uncelibacy, he lives a celibate life, aloof, refraining from the sexual act that is the villager’s way.

“Abandoning the telling of lies, he abstains from telling lies. He speaks the truth, holds to the truth, is firm, reliable, no deceiver of the world.

“Abandoning divisive speech, he abstains from divisive speech. What he has heard here he does not tell there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he does not tell here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus reconciling those who have broken apart or cementing those who are united, he loves concord, delights in concord, enjoys concord, speaks things that create concord.

“Abandoning abusive speech, he abstains from abusive speech. He speaks words that are soothing to the ear, that are affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing & pleasing to people at large.

“Abandoning idle chatter, he abstains from idle chatter. He speaks in season, speaks what is factual, what is in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, and the Vinaya. He speaks words worth treasuring, seasonable, reasonable, circumscribed, connected with the goal.

“He abstains from damaging seed & plant life.

“He eats only once a day, refraining from the evening meal and from food at the wrong time of day.

“He abstains from dancing, singing, instrumental music, and from watching shows.

“He abstains from wearing garlands and from beautifying himself with scents & cosmetics.

“He abstains from high & luxurious beds & seats.

“He abstains from accepting gold & money.

“He abstains from accepting uncooked grain… raw meat… women & girls… male & female slaves… goats & sheep… fowl & pigs… elephants, cattle, steeds, & mares… fields & property.

“He abstains from running messages… from buying & selling… from dealing with false scales, false metals, & false measures… from bribery, deception, & fraud.

“He abstains from mutilating, executing, imprisoning, highway robbery, plunder, & violence.

“He is content with a set of robes to provide for his body and alms food to provide for his hunger. Just as a bird, wherever it goes, flies with its wings as its only burden; so too is he content with a set of robes to provide for his body and alms food to provide for his hunger. Wherever he goes, he takes only his barest necessities along.

“Endowed with this noble aggregate of virtue, he is inwardly sensitive to the pleasure of being blameless.

Sense Restraint

“On seeing a form with the eye, he doesn’t grasp at any theme or details by which—if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. He practices for its restraint. He protects the faculty of the eye. He attains restraint with regard to the faculty of the eye. On hearing a sound with the ear…. On smelling an aroma with the nose…. On tasting a flavor with the tongue…. On touching a tactile sensation with the body…. On cognizing an idea with the intellect, he doesn’t grasp at any theme or details by which—if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the intellect—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. He practices for its restraint. He protects the faculty of the intellect. He attains restraint with regard to the faculty of the intellect. Endowed with this noble restraint over the sense faculties, he is inwardly sensitive to the pleasure of being blameless.

Mindfulness & Alertness

“When going forward & returning, he makes himself alert. When looking toward & looking away… when bending & extending his limbs… when carrying his outer cloak, his upper robe, & his bowl… when eating, drinking, chewing, & tasting… when urinating & defecating… when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, he makes himself alert.

Abandoning the Hindrances

“Endowed with this noble aggregate of virtue, this noble restraint over the sense faculties, this noble mindfulness & alertness, he seeks out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw. After his meal, returning from his alms round, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body erect, and brings mindfulness to the fore.

“Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will & anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic with the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will & anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth & drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth & drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness & anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty.

The Nine Attainments

“Having abandoned these five hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—then, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation.

“What do you think, Upāḷi? Isn’t this dwelling more excellent than the earlier dwellings, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“It’s when seeing this quality within themselves that my disciples spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings, but it’s not to this extent that they dwell having attained their true aim.

“And further, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, the monk enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance.

“What do you think, Upāḷi? Isn’t this dwelling more excellent than the earlier dwellings, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“It’s when seeing this quality within themselves that my disciples spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings, but it’s not to this extent that they dwell having attained their true aim.

“And further, with the fading of rapture, the monk remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’

“What do you think, Upāḷi? Isn’t this dwelling more excellent than the earlier dwellings, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“It’s when seeing this quality within themselves that my disciples spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings, but it’s not to this extent that they dwell having attained their true aim.

“And further, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joy & distress—the monk enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.

“What do you think, Upāḷi? Isn’t this dwelling more excellent than the earlier dwellings, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“It’s when seeing this quality within themselves that my disciples spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings, but it’s not to this extent that they dwell having attained their true aim.

“And further, 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,’ the monk enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space.

“What do you think, Upāḷi? Isn’t this dwelling more excellent than the earlier dwellings, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“It’s when seeing this quality within themselves that my disciples spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings, but it’s not to this extent that they dwell having attained their true aim.

“And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite consciousness,’ the monk enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness.

“What do you think, Upāḷi? Isn’t this dwelling more excellent than the earlier dwellings, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“It’s when seeing this quality within themselves that my disciples spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings, but it’s not to this extent that they dwell having attained their true aim.

“And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) ‘There is nothing,’ the monk enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness.

“What do you think, Upāḷi? Isn’t this dwelling more excellent than the earlier dwellings, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“It’s when seeing this quality within themselves that my disciples spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings, but it’s not to this extent that they dwell having attained their true aim.

“And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, the monk enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

“What do you think, Upāḷi? Isn’t this dwelling more excellent than the earlier dwellings, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“It’s when seeing this quality within themselves that my disciples spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings, but it’s not to this extent that they dwell having attained their true aim.

“And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, the monk enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And as he sees (that) with discernment, effluents are completely ended.

“What do you think, Upāḷi? Isn’t this dwelling more excellent than the earlier dwellings, and more refined?”

“Yes, lord.”

“It’s when seeing this quality within themselves that my disciples spend time in isolated wilderness & forest lodgings, and they dwell having attained their true aim.

“Please, Upāḷi, live with the Saṅgha. Living with the Saṅgha, you will have ease.”

Note

1. Ven. Upāli was the monk the Buddha praised as being foremost in his knowledge of the Vinaya. Perhaps it was because of this discourse that he stayed with the Saṅgha, instead of going into the wilderness, and was in a position to memorize and organize the disciplinary rules the Buddha laid down. See AN 7:80.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 4; MN 38; AN 5:98; AN 4:263; AN 6:42; AN 9:40