

Anguttara Nikāya

The Numerical Discourses

Ekādasakanipāta
(Book of the Elevens)

AN 11.9

Saddha Sutta

“The Venerable Saddha”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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At one time, The Blessed One was living at Nāḍika, in the brick house. It was then, that the Venerable Saddha approached The Blessed One, and after paying his respects, he went and sat to one side. Then, The Blessed One said this to him:

“Saddha, while meditating, your focus must be like that of a thoroughbred horse, and *not* like that of a wild colt! And why do I say this?

“Because, Saddha, when the colt is brought and tied securely to the wooden feeding trough, he is fully self-absorbed, while obsessively thinking to himself: *‘Food! Food!’*”

“And why does he do so?

“It is because, Saddha, that wild colt brought and tied securely to the wooden feeding trough, does not consider:

‘I wonder what kind of drills or tasks my trainer will have me go through today.’ Nor does he think: *‘How could I react to these tasks, in order to impress and please him with my performance?’*

“Instead, being self-absorbed in his instincts, he goes on obsessively thinking about *only* one thing: *‘Food! Food!’* while being tied securely to the wooden feeding trough.

“Now, in just the same manner, Saddha, someone who is essentially quite similar in behavior to a wild colt, although may withdraw himself to meditate by going to a secluded place or a forest, or sit among the roots of trees or in an empty room, nevertheless, he continues reflecting and

thinking about things that arouse passion and lust, led by his sensually obsessed mind, with a heart that is absorbed in sensory desire and stimulation.

“So, while being overwhelmed by the agitation of sensual desire, that inferior man who is like a wild colt, does not come to know, let alone experience, as it truly is, the way of stepping out and freeing himself from the snare of whatever sensual desire that may have surfaced in his heart, the moment it occurs.

“Now, as this person allows those sensual desires to continue to wreak havoc in his heart, he becomes more drenched in them by ruminating over them, and thus, soon enough finds himself obsessively identified with them, instead of meditating.

“Similarly, he finds himself ravaged by feelings of hatred or ill-will, which he allows to arise and continue to wreak havoc in his heart, as he becomes more drenched in them by ruminating over them, and thus, soon enough he finds himself obsessively identified with them, instead of meditating.

“Similarly, he finds himself drowning in dullness, as he experiences drowsiness and begins procrastinating, which he allows to surface and continue to wreak havoc in his heart, and as a result, he becomes more drenched in them and thus, soon enough he finds himself obsessively identified with them, instead of meditating.

“Similarly, he finds himself overtaken and tossed around by restlessness and worrisome thoughts, which he allows to surface and increasingly wreak havoc in his heart, as a result of which he becomes more drenched in them and thus, soon enough he finds himself obsessively identified with them, instead of meditating.

“And similarly, he finds himself haunted by feelings of uncertainty that arise due to his skeptical doubts, which he allows to surface, whereby they also increasingly wreak havoc in his heart, and as a result, he becomes more drenched in them and thus, soon enough he finds himself obsessively identified with them, instead of meditating.

“Led by these experiences, he goes on meditating but -

1. While looking at and perceiving earth, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
2. While looking at and perceiving water, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
3. While looking at and perceiving fire, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
4. While looking at and perceiving air, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.

5. Furthermore, while looking at and perceiving the dimension of boundless space, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
6. While looking at and perceiving the dimension of boundless consciousness, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
7. While looking at and perceiving the dimension of nothingness, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
8. While looking at and perceiving the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
9. And, while looking at and perceiving being in the world, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
10. Or, whether being in or perceiving another world, he comes to rely on it and see it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
11. And while perceiving visual objects with the eyes, perceiving audible sounds with the ears, perceiving smells with the nose, perceiving flavors with the tongue, perceiving tactile objects and contact with the body, he comes to rely on each of these and sees them as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.

“That is how someone, who is essentially like a wild colt, meditates, Saddha.

“On the other hand, Saddha, when a fine thoroughbred horse is brought and tied securely to the wooden feeding trough, he is not self-absorbed, nor goes on obsessively thinking to himself: *‘Food! Food!’*

“And why does he not do so?

“It is because, Saddha, when that fine thoroughbred horse is brought and tied securely to the wooden feeding trough, he considers:

‘I wonder what kind of drills or tasks my trainer will have me go through today.’ Also, he thinks: *‘How could I react to these tasks, in order to impress and please him with my performance?’*

“So, he does not become self-absorbed, nor obsessively thinks about *only* one thing: *‘Food! Food!’*

“Instead, while being tied securely to the wooden feeding trough, the fine thoroughbred horse is carefully engaged in considering the possibility of being struck by his trainer’s whip, which he sees as painfully annoying, as a liability, a defeat, and a failure on his part.

“Now, in just the same manner, Saddha, someone who is similar to a fine thoroughbred horse, withdraws himself to meditate by going to a secluded place or a forest, or sits among the roots of

trees, or finds himself an empty room, where he does not allow himself any thoughts that may arouse passion or lust, always keeping check so the mind does not become touched by sensual thoughts, let alone be obsessed by them. In this way, he protects the heart from ever getting caught up in them or being absorbed into sensory desires and stimulation.

“In the same way, while being restrained in his mind from experiencing the agitation of sensual desires, that superior man, who is like a fine thoroughbred horse, does come to know and experience, as it truly is, the way of stepping out and freeing himself from the snare of whatever sensual desire that may have surfaced in his heart, the moment it occurs, relinquishing it on the spot.

“So, as this person protects himself from any sensual desire arising, let alone remaining, in his heart, he does not become stuck in them nor ruminates over them, and thus, soon enough he finds himself freed from them, as he goes deeper in his meditation.

“Similarly, he restrains and protects himself against feelings of hatred or ill-will that may have arisen, not allowing them to be perpetuated or agitate his heart. Therefore, he does not become stuck in them nor ruminates over them, and thus, soon enough he finds himself freed from them, as he goes deeper in his meditation.

“Similarly, he restrains and protects himself against drowsiness and procrastination that may have arisen, not allowing them to be perpetuated or agitate his heart. Therefore, he does not become stuck in them nor ruminates over them, and thus, soon enough he finds himself freed from them, as he goes deeper in his meditation.

“Similarly, he restrains and protects himself against restlessness and worrisome thoughts that may have arisen, not allowing them to be perpetuated or agitate his heart. Therefore, he does not become stuck in them nor ruminates over them, and thus, soon enough he finds himself freed from them, as he goes deeper in his meditation.

“And similarly, he restrains and protects himself against skeptical doubts that may have arisen, not allowing them to be perpetuated or agitate his heart. Therefore, he does not become stuck in them nor ruminates over them, and thus, soon enough he finds himself freed from them, as he goes deeper in his meditation.

“Led by these experiences, he goes on meditating -

1. While looking at and perceiving earth, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
2. While looking at and perceiving water, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
3. While looking at and perceiving fire, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.

4. While looking at and perceiving air, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
5. Furthermore, while looking at and perceiving the dimension of boundless space, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
6. While looking at and perceiving the dimension of boundless consciousness, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
7. While looking at and perceiving the dimension of nothingness, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
8. While looking at and perceiving the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
9. And, while looking at and perceiving being in the world, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
10. Or whether being in or perceiving another world, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
11. And, while perceiving visual objects with the eyes, perceiving audible sounds with the ears, perceiving smells with the nose, perceiving flavors with the tongue, perceiving tactile objects and contact with the body, but without relying on any of these nor seeing them as ‘things’ to be grasped.

“Therefore, Saddha, that is how someone who is quite similar to a fine thoroughbred horse, meditates.

“And by meditating in this manner, Saddha, then even the Devas, along with their Ruler Lord Indra, as well as Mahā Brahmā Himself, with Pajāpati, bow down to him as they pay homage from afar and declare:

*‘Homage be to You, O Venerable!
O Thoroughbred among all mankind!
Homage to you, O Highest and Chief among all men!
For, we are now baffled and dumbfounded,
Since not even we ourselves know or understand,
As to what might be the basis of your meditation, O Venerable,
Upon which you are firmly anchored.’”*

When The Blessed One spoke these words of instruction, the Venerable Saddha asked this question, while addressing The Teacher:

“But Bhante, how exactly does the person who is like a fine thoroughbred horse, meditate, when he –

1. Looks at and perceives earth, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
2. Looks at and perceives water, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
3. Looks at and perceives fire, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
4. Looks at and perceives air, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
5. Looks at and perceives the dimension of boundless space, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
6. Looks at and perceives the dimension of boundless consciousness, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
7. Looks at and perceives the dimension of nothingness, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
8. Looks at and perceives the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
9. Looks at and perceives being in the world, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
10. Or when he is in, or perceives being in, another world, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped?
11. And, while perceiving visual objects with the eyes, perceiving audible sounds with the ears, perceiving smells with the nose, perceiving flavors with the tongue, perceiving tactile objects and contact with the body, how does he do so without relying on any of these, nor seeing them as ‘things’ to be grasped?

“Whereby, in witnessing this, even the Devas, along with their Ruler Lord Indra, as well as Mahā Brahmā Himself, with Pajāpati, bow down to him as they pay homage from afar, and declare:

*‘Homage be to You, O Venerable!
O Thoroughbred among all mankind!
Homage to you, O Highest and Chief among all men!
For, we are now baffled and dumbfounded,
Since not even we ourselves know or understand,*

*As to what might be the basis of your meditation, O Venerable,
Upon which you are firmly anchored. ’’*

The Blessed One then replied, while instructing the Venerable Saddha:

1. “Here, Saddha, while meditating, such a thoroughbred and superior person when looking at earth, does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, earth as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.
2. “Similarly, while looking at water, he does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, water as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.
3. “While looking at fire, he does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, fire as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.
4. “While looking at air, he does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, air as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.
5. “While looking at the dimension of boundless space, he does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, the dimension of boundless space as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.
6. “While looking at the dimension of boundless consciousness, he does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, the dimension of boundless consciousness as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.
7. “While looking at the dimension of nothingness, he does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, the dimension of nothingness as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.
8. “While looking at the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, he does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.
9. “While looking at the world he is in, he does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, the world itself as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.
10. “While looking at the other world in relation to this one, he does not become identified with it, because he will be perceiving it for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, the other world itself, as a ‘thing’ simply vanishes for him.

11. “While looking at the visual objects with the eyes, perceiving audible sounds with the ears, perceiving smells with the nose, perceiving flavors with the tongue, perceiving tactile objects with the body, he does not become identified with any of it, because he will be perceiving each of these for what it truly is: something insubstantial and passing. Therefore, he will not be perceiving them as actual ‘things,’ hence they all simply vanish for him.

“In this manner, Saddha, such a fine thoroughbred of a superior person goes on meditating -

1. While looking at and perceiving earth, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
2. While looking at and perceiving water, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
3. While looking at and perceiving fire, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
4. While looking at and perceiving air, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
5. Furthermore, while looking at and perceiving the dimension of boundless space, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
6. While looking at and perceiving the dimension of boundless consciousness, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
7. While looking at and perceiving the dimension of nothingness, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
8. While looking at and perceiving the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
9. And, while looking at and perceiving being in the world, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
10. Or, whether being in or perceiving another world, but without relying on it nor seeing it as a ‘thing’ to be grasped.
11. And, while perceiving visual objects with the eyes, perceiving audible sounds with the ears, perceiving smells with the nose, perceiving flavors with the tongue, perceiving tactile objects and contact with the body, but without relying on any of these nor seeing them as ‘things’ to be grasped.

“Therefore, Saddha, that is how someone, who is quite similar to a fine thoroughbred horse, meditates.

“And by meditating in this manner, Saddha, even the Devas, along with their Ruler Lord Indra, as well as Mahā Brahmā Himself, with Pajāpati, bow down to him as they pay homage from afar, and declare:

*‘Homage be to You, O Venerable!
O Thoroughbred among all mankind!
Homage to you, O Highest and Chief among all men!
For, we are now baffled and dumbfounded,
Since not even we ourselves know or understand,
As to what might be the basis of your meditation, O Venerable,
Upon which you are firmly anchored.’”*

Sādhu

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