

DN 15

Dīgha Nikāya
The Long Discourses

Mahā Nidāna Sutta

“The Great Discourse on the Principle of Causation”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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(Section on Dependent Arising)

I have personally heard this.

On one occasion, The Blessed One was living among the Kuru people, in one of their towns called Kammāsadhamma.

It was there, when the Venerable Ānanda approached The Blessed One and, having paid his respects by bowing at the feet of The Blessed One, he sat down at one side and exclaimed to The Blessed One:

“It is amazing, Blessed Lord!

“It is just astoundingly wonderful, Lord, how this Dependent Arising, though being so deep and in appearance too, for it *does* look deep, yet it seems quite simple to me - as clear as day!”

“Do not say that, Ānanda! Do not say that, Ānanda!” The Blessed One replied to the Venerable Ānanda, as He continued:

“This pattern of Dependent Arising is both profoundly deep in its essence *and* in its appearance as well, it is indeed deeply profound!

“But it is because of not fully understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma that this generation of beings is like a tangled bundle, a knotted ball of string, having become diseased and moldy, decayed and covered up with mossy twigs. As a result, it remains stuck in the endless cycles of *samsāra*, always bound to repeated rebirths into the planes of misery, where terrible suffering and anguish awaits, in the lower realms.

1. “Ānanda, if you were to be asked: *‘Is there a required condition, a causal relationship, that must be there for the experiencing of getting old, sick, and dying?’*

“Now, your reply to this must be: *‘Yes, there is.’*

“And if, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘In that case, what is the required condition, the causal relationship, that must be there for the experiencing of getting old, sick, and dying?’*

“As to this, your reply must be: *‘The causal relationship for getting old, sick, and dying is to be born in the first place. Thus, these things rely on the presence of birth, as their required condition.’*

2. “If, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘Is there a required condition, a causal relationship, that must be there in order for birth to take place?’*

“Your reply to this question must be: *‘Yes, there is.’*

“And if, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘In that case, what is the required condition, the causal relationship, that must be there for birth itself to occur?’*

“To this, your reply must be: *‘The causal relationship for being born is wanting to rebecome in the first place. Thus, being born relies on the presence of the desire for rebecoming, as its required condition.’*

3. “If, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘Is there a required condition, a causal relationship, that must be there for the desire to rebecome?’*

“Now, your reply to this must be: *‘Yes, there is.’*

“And if, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘In that case, what is the required condition, the causal relationship, that must be there for the desire to rebecome to occur?’*

“Here, your reply must be: *‘The causal relationship for having the desire to rebecome is grabbing on. Thus, it relies on the presence of grabbing on, as its required condition.’*

4. “If, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘Is there a required condition, a causal relationship, that must be there for grabbing on?’*

“To this, your reply must be: *‘Yes, there is.’*

“And if, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘In that case, what is the required condition, the causal relationship, that must be there for grabbing on itself to occur?’*

“Now, your reply to this must be: *‘The causal relationship for grabbing on is craving itself. Thus, it relies on the presence of craving, or being constantly thirsty for things, as its required condition.’*

5. “If, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘Is there a required condition, a causal relationship, that must be there for craving?’*

“Here, your reply must be: *‘Yes, there is.’*

“If then, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘In that case, what is the required condition, the causal relationship, that must be there for craving, or being constantly thirsty for things, to occur?’*

“To this, your reply must be: *‘The causal relationship for craving is feeling itself. Thus, it relies on the presence of feeling, as its required condition.’*

6. “And if, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘Is there a required condition, a causal relationship, that must be there for feeling to occur?’*

“To this, your reply must be: *‘Yes, there is.’*

“And if, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘In that case, what is the required condition, the causal relationship, that must be there for feeling to occur?’*

“To this, your reply must be: *‘The causal relationship for feeling is contact itself. Thus, it relies on the presence of contact, as its required condition.’*

7. “Now, Ānanda, if you were to be asked: *‘Is there a required condition, a causal relationship, that must be there for contact?’*

“To this, your reply must be: *‘Yes, there is.’*

“And if, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘In that case, what is the required condition, the causal relationship, that must be there for contact to occur?’*

“To this, your reply must be: *‘The causal relationship for contact is nāmarūpa. Thus, it relies on the presence of nāmarūpa, as its required condition.’*

8. “If, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘Is there a required condition, a causal relationship, that must be there for nāmarūpa?’*

“Here, your reply must be: *‘Yes, there is.’*

“And if, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘In that case, what is the required condition, the causal relationship, that must be there for nāmarūpa to occur?’*

“To this, your reply must be: *‘The causal relationship for nāmarūpa is consciousness itself. Thus, it relies on the presence of consciousness, as its required condition.’*

9. “And if, Ānanda, you were to be asked: *‘Is there a required condition, a causal relationship, that must be there for consciousness?’*

“To this, your reply must be: *‘Yes, there is.’*

“And here, Ānanda, if you were to be asked: *‘In that case, what is the required condition, the causal relationship, that must be there for consciousness to occur?’*

“Here, your reply must be: *‘The causal relationship for consciousness is nāmarūpa itself. Thus, it relies on the presence of nāmarūpa, as its required condition.’*

“Therefore, Ānanda, by having *nāmarūpa* as its required condition, consciousness arises. By having consciousness as its required condition, *nāmarūpa* itself arises. Also, by having *nāmarūpa* as its required condition, contact arises. By having contact as its required condition, feeling arises. With feeling as its required condition, craving arises. By having craving as its required condition, grabbing on arises. With grabbing on as its required condition, the desire to

rebecome arises. From the desire to rebecome as its required condition, birth arises. By having birth as its required condition, getting old, sickness, and dying arise, along with grieving, wailing, distress, torment, depression, and anguish that follow, as a result.

“In this way, the entire mass of suffering unfolds.

1. “*‘The causal relationship for getting old, sick, and dying is being born in the first place; thus, they rely on the presence of birth, as their required condition.’* This has just been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no birth taking place at all, in any shape, of any being and in any form, anywhere, and in any realm, as in no Devas being born into Deva realms, no *gandhabbas* born into the realm of *gandhabbas*, no *yakkhas* into the realm of *yakkhas*, no earth-bound spirits into their realm, no human beings born into the human state, no quadrupeds born into the state of quadrupeds, no birds into the state of birds, no reptiles into the state of reptiles, nor of any being born into its corresponding state of existence.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where absolutely no birth ever took place, from such a complete absence and utter cessation of birth, would there still be such things as getting old, sick, or dying?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, birth itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to getting old, sick, and dying, for it is their required condition.

2. “Further, Ānanda, *‘The causal relationship for being born is wanting to rebecome in the first place; thus, being born relies on the presence of the desire for becoming, as its required condition.’* This also has just been declared by me.

Here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no desire for becoming at all, in any shape, of any being, in any form, anywhere, and in any realm, such as, no desire to rebecome in the sensual realms, nor in the Brahmā or Form realms, nor in the Formless realms.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no desire for becoming at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of the desire to rebecome, would there still be such a thing as birth?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, the desire to rebecome itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to birth, for it is its required condition.

3. “*‘The causal relationship for having the desire to rebecome is grabbing; thus, it relies on the presence of grabbing and holding onto, as its required condition.’* This was also declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no grabbing on to anything at all, by any being, anywhere and in any realm, such as, no grabbing on to sensual pleasures, no grabbing on to views, opinions, training rules, traditions, various forms of practice, nor grabbing on to teachings or theories about the permanency or substantiality of a self, none whatsoever.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no grabbing at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of grabbing, would there still be such a thing as desire to rebecome?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, grabbing itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to the desire to rebecome, for it is its required condition.

4. “*‘The causal relationship for grabbing is craving itself; thus, it relies on the presence of craving, or being constantly thirsty for things, as its required condition.’* This was also declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no craving or thirst for anything at all, by any being, anywhere and in any realm, such as, no craving for any visible forms, no craving for any sounds, for any odors, flavors, touches, or of thoughts; also, no craving for any sensuality, no craving for becoming, as well as no craving for not to become, either.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no craving or thirst for anything at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of craving, would there still be such a thing as grabbing on?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, craving itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to grabbing on, for it is its required condition.

5. “*‘The causal relationship for craving is feeling itself; thus, it relies on the presence of feeling, as its required condition.’* This was also declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there were absolutely no feelings experienced for anything, at all, by any being, anywhere, such as, no feelings that occur through the eye due to contacting visible forms, no feelings that occur through the ear due to contacting audible sounds, no feelings that occur through the nose due to contacting odors, no feelings that occur through the tongue due to contacting flavors, no feelings that occur through the body due to contacting tangible objects, and no feelings that occur through the mind due to contacting mental objects or thoughts.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no feelings experienced for anything, at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of feelings, would there still be such a thing as craving?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, feeling itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to craving, for it is its required condition.

“Therefore, Ānanda, by having feeling as its required condition, craving arises. By having craving as a required condition, one starts seeking or longing after things. Seeking or longing itself then becomes the required condition for the desire to acquire things. The desire to acquire things has prejudice or favoritism as its required condition. With prejudice or favoritism as its required condition, passionate desire arises. With passionate desire as its required condition, holding on, while savoring things, takes place. Holding on, while savoring things, then becomes the required condition for wanting to take possession. By wanting to take possession as its required condition, one becomes stingy. With stinginess as its required condition, one becomes domineeringly jealous as a result.

“Now, as a consequence of being domineeringly jealous, all kinds of evil and unwholesome behaviors suddenly manifest in people, where people pick up sticks and knives and start attacking each other; all kinds of unwholesome, evil, and harmful actions, quarrels, fighting and disputes become commonplace; and accusations, divisive speech, and lies become dominant in the world.

6. *'As a consequence of being domineeringly jealous, all kinds of evil and unwholesome behaviors suddenly manifest in people, where people pick up sticks and knives and start attacking each other; all kinds of unwholesome, evil and harmful actions, quarrels, fighting and disputes become commonplace; and accusations, divisive speech, and lies become dominant in the world.'* This has just been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no presence of domineering jealousy in any being, towards anything, and anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no domineering jealousy in any being, towards anything, anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of domineering jealousy, would there still be evil, unwholesome, and harmful things taking place in the world?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, domineering jealousy itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to evil, unwholesome, and harmful actions, for it is their required condition.

7. *'With stinginess as its required condition, one becomes domineeringly jealous.'* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no presence of stinginess in any being, towards anything, anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no stinginess in any being, towards anything, and anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of stinginess, would there still be the presence of domineering jealousy in the world?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, stinginess itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to becoming domineeringly jealous, for it is its required condition.

8. *'Wanting to take possession as its required condition, one becomes stingy.'* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, if there was absolutely no presence of wanting to take possession of anything, by any being, anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no wanting to take possession of anything, and by any being, anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of wanting to take possession, would there still be the presence of stinginess in the world?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, wanting to take possession itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to becoming stingy, for it is its required condition.

9. *‘Holding on, while savoring things, becomes the required condition for wanting to take possession.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no presence of holding on, while savoring anything, by any being, anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no holding on, while savoring anything, and by any being, anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of holding on while savoring anything, would there still be the presence of wanting to take possession in the world?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, holding on, while savoring things, itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to wanting to take possession, for it is its required condition.

10. *‘With passionate desire as its required condition, holding on, while savoring things, takes place.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no presence of passionate desire towards anything by any being, anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no passionate desire towards anything, and by any being, anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of passionate desire towards anything, would there still be the presence of holding on, while savoring things in the world?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, passionate desire towards things itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to holding on, while savoring things, for it is its required condition.

11. *‘With prejudice or favoritism as its required condition, passionate desire arises.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no presence of prejudice or favoritism towards anything, by any being, anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no prejudice or favoritism towards anything, by any being, anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of prejudice or favoritism towards anything, would there still be the presence of passionate desire for things in the world?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, prejudice or favoritism towards things itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to having passionate desire for things, for it is its required condition.

12. *‘The desire to acquire things has prejudice or favoritism as its required condition.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no presence of desire to acquire anything, by any being, anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no desire to acquire anything, by any being, anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of the desire to acquire anything, would there still be the presence of prejudice or favoritism for things in the world?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, the desire to acquire things itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to having prejudice or favoritism for things, for it is its required condition.

13. *‘Seeking or longing itself then becomes the required condition for the desire to acquire things.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no presence of seeking or longing for anything, by any being, anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no seeking or longing for anything, by any being, anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of seeking or longing for anything, would there still be the presence of the desire to acquire things in the world?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, seeking or longing for things itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to having the desire to acquire things, for it is its required condition.

14. *‘By having craving as a required condition, one starts seeking or longing after things.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no presence of craving for anything, by any being, anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no craving for anything, by any being, anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of craving for anything, would there still be the presence of seeking or longing for anything in the world?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, craving for things itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to seeking or longing for things, for it is its required condition.

“In this manner, Ānanda, these are the two manifestations of feeling itself.

15. *‘The causal relationship for feeling is contact itself; thus, it relies on the presence of contact, as its required condition.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that there was absolutely no presence of contacting anything, by any being, anywhere at all.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no contacting of anything, by any being, anywhere at all, and from such a complete absence and utter cessation of contact of anything, would there still be the presence of feeling?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, contacting things itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to feeling, for it is its required condition.

16. *‘The causal relationship for contact is nāmarūpa; thus, it relies on the presence of nāmarūpa, as its required condition.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Now, here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Imagine, Ānanda, that the properties, qualities, indicators, and all other pertinent signs with which the *nāma* group could be represented, were all completely missing.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no way for the properties, qualities, indicators, and all other pertinent signs of the *nāma* group to function and be represented, and therefore, from such a complete absence and utter cessation of the functioning of the *nāma* group, would there still be the possibility for the mental designation contact to be made, to identify what is occurring with the *rūpa* group?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“And imagine also, Ānanda, that the properties, qualities, indicators, and all other pertinent signs with which the *rūpa* group could be represented, were all completely missing.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no way for the properties, qualities, indicators, and all other pertinent signs of the *rūpa* group to function and be represented, and therefore, from such a complete absence and utter cessation of the functioning of the *rūpa* group, would there still be the possibility for the sensory reflexive contact to be made by the *nāma* group?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“Now imagine also, Ānanda, that the properties, qualities, indicators, and all other pertinent signs with which both the *nāma* and *rūpa* groups could be represented, were all completely missing.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no way for the properties, qualities, indicators, and all other pertinent signs of both the *nāma* and *rūpa* groups to function and be represented, and therefore, from such a complete absence and utter cessation of the functioning of both the *nāma* and *rūpa* groups together, would there still be the possibility for mental designation contact or sensory reflexive contact to be made?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“Then imagine, Ānanda, that the properties, qualities, indicators, and all other pertinent signs with which *nāmarūpa* could be represented, were all completely missing.

“Now, if this were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no way for the properties, qualities, indicators, and all other pertinent signs of *nāmarūpa* to be represented, and therefore, from such a complete absence and utter cessation of *nāmarūpa*, would there still be the possibility for contact to occur?

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, *nāmarūpa* itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to contact, for it is its required condition.

17. *‘The causal relationship for nāmarūpa is consciousness itself; thus, it relies on the presence of consciousness, as its required condition.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Now, Ānanda, if no consciousness were to ever descend into a mother’s womb, would it still be possible for *nāmarūpa* to come together therein?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“How about, Ānanda, if once conceived in a mother’s womb, consciousness were to be cut off, would it still be possible for *nāmarūpa* to be formed into a living fetus?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“And once a child is born, Ānanda, if the consciousness of the little boy or girl were to get cut off, would it still be possible for *nāmarūpa* to grow and develop into maturity?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, consciousness itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to *nāmarūpa*, for it is its required condition.

18. *‘The causal relationship for consciousness is nāmarūpa itself; thus, it relies on the presence of nāmarūpa, as its required condition.’* This has also been declared by me.

“Here is how you must understand the meaning of that statement:

“Now, Ānanda, if consciousness were to never be established by nestling into *nāmarūpa*, would it then still be possible for the consequential instigation of more suffering to occur, as a result of birth, getting old, sickness, and dying?”

“No, Blessed Lord.”

“So, you see Ānanda, *nāmarūpa* itself is the very cause and reason, the one that has the direct causal relation to consciousness, for it is its required condition.

“Ānanda, this is the extent, and therefore the scope, whereby the process of being born, getting old, sick, dying, and being reborn could be discerned.

“This is also the scope and limitation of using linguistic expressions, descriptions, and designations, the extent to which intellectual understanding could reach; the span to which the cycles of continued existences take place as they stretch out, bringing the person to this form of

existence, which happens to be the manifestation of the coming together of *nāmarūpa* and consciousness, functioning together in a cohesive manner.

(Section on Designating “the self”)

“And how is it, Ānanda, that educated people describe ‘the self?’

“Ānanda, they either designate it as being confined and of a definite shape; being tangible and of a physical nature, while saying: *‘My self has a definite shape and is of a physical nature.’*

“Or, Ānanda, they would designate it as having a tangible form and a physical nature, but depicting it as unconfined and without boundaries, as they say: *‘Although my self has a physical nature, nevertheless, it remains without boundaries.’*

“Or, Ānanda, they would designate it as being of a formless and boundless nature, but while depicting it as confined and having a definite shape, as they say: *‘My self is formless in its nature; nevertheless, it remains finite.’*

“Or, Ānanda, they would designate it as having a formless and boundless nature, while also depicting it as infinite, as they say: *‘My self is both formless and infinite in its nature.’*

a. “Now, Ānanda, consider those who designate the ‘self’ as being confined and of a definite shape; being tangible and of a physical nature. They either claim that the ‘self’ has these particular qualities currently, or will have such qualities later in the future, at some point, perhaps after death, or they have convinced themselves that they would somehow transform it into having those qualities, while they affirm: *‘Even though the ‘self’ might not have those qualities now, yet, I believe I will transform and refine to become that way.’*

“As a result of such thinking, it is proper to say that those who make such designations, believing in such theories, are merely holding on to the view that the ‘self’ is confined and of a definite shape; being tangible and of a physical nature.

b. “Further, Ānanda, consider those who designate the ‘self’ as having a tangible form and a physical nature, but depicting it as unconfined and without boundaries. They either claim that the ‘self’ has these particular qualities currently, or will have such qualities later in the future, at some point, perhaps after death, or they have convinced themselves that they would somehow transform it into having those qualities, while they affirm: *‘Even though the ‘self’ might not have those qualities now, yet, I believe I will transform and refine to become that way.’*

“As a result of such thinking, it is proper to say that those who make such designations, believing in such theories, are merely holding on to the view that the ‘self’ has a tangible form and a physical nature, but depicting it as unconfined and without boundaries.

c. “Further, Ānanda, consider those who designate the ‘self’ as being of a formless and boundless nature, but while depicting it as confined and having a definite shape. They either claim that the ‘self’ has these particular qualities currently, or will have such qualities later in the future, at some point, perhaps after death, or they have convinced themselves that they would somehow transform it into having those qualities, while they affirm: *‘Even though the ‘self’ might not have those qualities now, yet, I believe I will transform and refine to become that way.’*

“As a result of such thinking, it is proper to say that those who make such designations, believing in such theories, are merely holding on to the view that the ‘self’ is of a formless and boundless nature, but while depicting it as confined and having a definite shape.

d. “Further, Ānanda, consider those who designate the ‘self’ as having a formless and boundless nature, while also depicting it as infinite. They either claim that the ‘self’ has these particular qualities currently, or will have such qualities later in the future, at some point, perhaps after death, or they have convinced themselves that they would somehow transform it into having those qualities, while they affirm: *‘Even though the ‘self’ might not have those qualities now, yet, I believe I will transform and refine to become that way.’*

“As a result of such thinking, it is proper to say that those who make such designations, believing in such theories, are merely holding on to the view that the ‘self’ is of a formless and boundless nature, while also depicting it as infinite.

“And that, Ānanda, is how educated people describe ‘the self.’

(Section on Not Designating “the self”)

“And how is it, Ānanda, that certain educated people, not wanting to describe ‘the self,’ end up designating it?

“Ānanda, they don’t designate it as being confined and of a definite shape; being tangible and of a physical nature, while saying: *‘My self has a definite shape and is of a physical nature.’*

“Nor would they designate it, Ānanda, as having a tangible form and a physical nature, but while depicting it as unconfined and without boundaries, as they say: *‘Although my self has a physical nature, nevertheless, it remains without boundaries.’*

“Nor would they designate it, Ānanda, as being of a formless and boundless nature, but while depicting it as confined and having a definite shape, as they say: *‘My self is formless in its nature; nevertheless, it remains finite.’*

“Nor would they designate it, Ānanda, as having a formless and boundless nature, while also depicting it as infinite, as they say: *‘My self is both formless and infinite in its nature.’*

a. “Now, Ānanda, consider those who don’t designate the ‘self’ as being confined and of a definite shape, being tangible and of a physical nature. They don’t claim that the ‘self’ has these particular qualities currently, nor will have such qualities later in the future, at some point, even after death, nor have they convinced themselves that they would somehow transform it into having those qualities, while affirming: *‘Even though the ‘self’ might not have those qualities now, yet, I believe I will transform and refine to become that way.’*

“As a result of such thinking, it is proper to say that those who make such designations, not believing in such theories, are not holding on to the view that the ‘self’ is confined and of a definite shape, being tangible and of a physical nature.

b. “Further, Ānanda, consider those who don’t designate the ‘self’ as having a tangible form and a physical nature, but depicting it as unconfined and without boundaries. They don’t claim that the ‘self’ has these particular qualities currently, nor will have such qualities later in the future, at some point, even after death, nor have they convinced themselves that they would somehow transform it into having those qualities, while affirming: *‘Even though the ‘self’ might not have those qualities now, yet, I believe I will transform and refine to become that way.’*

“As a result of such thinking, it is proper to say that those who make such designations, not believing in such theories, are not holding on to the view that the ‘self’ has a tangible form and a physical nature but depicting it as unconfined and without boundaries.

c. “Further, Ānanda, consider those who don’t designate the ‘self’ as formless and boundless in nature, but while depicting it as confined and having a definite shape. They don’t claim that the ‘self’ has these particular qualities currently, nor will have such qualities later in the future, at some point, even after death, nor have they convinced themselves that they would somehow transform it into having those qualities, while affirming: *‘Even though the ‘self’ might not have those qualities now, yet, I believe I will transform and refine to become that way.’*

“As a result of such thinking, it is proper to say that those who make such designations, not believing in such theories, are not holding on to the view that the ‘self’ is formless and boundless in nature, but while depicting it as confined and having a definite shape.

d. “Further, Ānanda, consider those who don’t designate the ‘self’ as having a formless and boundless nature, while also depicting it as infinite. They don’t claim that the ‘self’ has these particular qualities currently, nor will have such qualities later in the future, at some point, even after death, nor have they convinced themselves that they would somehow transform it into having those qualities, while affirming: *‘Even though the ‘self’ might not have those qualities now, yet, I believe I will transform and refine to become that way.’*

“As a result of such thinking, it is proper to say that those who make such designations, not believing in such theories, are not holding on to the view that the ‘self’ has a formless and boundless nature, while also depicting it as infinite.

“And that, Ānanda, is how certain educated people, not wanting to describe ‘the self,’ end up designating it.

(Section on Assumptions about “the self”)

“And what, Ānanda, are the assumptions of those who try to discuss ‘the self’?

“While becoming aware of a certain feeling, they assume that feeling to be the self, stating: *‘This feeling I’m experiencing is my self!’*

“Or they claim: *‘This feeling I’m experiencing has nothing to do with my ‘self,’ because my ‘self’ is impervious to feelings.’*

“Or they claim: *‘This feeling I’m experiencing is separate from my ‘self,’ because even though my ‘self’ **does** in fact experience feelings, nevertheless, it remains unaffected by them.’*

“Now, Ānanda, to those who claim, *‘This feeling I’m experiencing is my self!’*, your response should be the following –

‘Friend, there are three kinds of feelings: pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and neutral feeling. Now, which one out of the three do you assume to be your ‘self’?’

“After all, Ānanda, when you are experiencing a pleasant feeling, it would be at the exclusion of the other two. That is, at that instant, neither painful feelings nor neutral feelings would be experienced, but *only* a pleasant feeling would be present.

“And Ānanda, when you are experiencing a painful feeling, it would be at the exclusion of the other two. That is, at that instant neither pleasant feelings nor neutral feelings would be experienced, but *only* a painful feeling would be present.

“And similarly, Ānanda, when you are experiencing a neutral feeling, it would be at the exclusion of the other two. That is, at that instant neither pleasant feelings nor painful feelings would be experienced, but *only* a neutral feeling would be present.

“Remember, Ānanda, pleasant feelings are impermanent and causally manifested; they are habitual tendencies that are prepared and rely on various conditions, hence are subject to fade and waste away, for they all come to cessation, sooner or later.

“Similarly, Ānanda, painful feelings are impermanent and causally manifested; they are habitual tendencies that are prepared and rely on various conditions, hence are subject to fade and waste away, for they all come to cessation, sooner or later.

“Also, Ānanda, neutral feelings are impermanent and causally manifested, they are habitual tendencies that are prepared and rely on various conditions, hence are subject to fade and waste away, for they all come to cessation, sooner or later.

“While experiencing a pleasurable feeling, they exclaim: *‘This feeling I’m having is who I am, it is my ‘self,’ there is no separation between the two of us!’*

“And when that pleasurable feeling vanishes, this time they exclaim: *‘I have lost my ‘self!’*

“While experiencing a painful feeling, they exclaim: *‘This feeling I’m having is who I am, it is my ‘self,’ there is no separation between the two of us!’*

“And when that painful feeling vanishes, this time they exclaim: *‘I have lost my ‘self!’*

“While experiencing a neutral feeling, they exclaim: *‘This feeling I’m having is who I am, it is my ‘self,’ there is no separation between the two of us!’*

“And when that neutral feeling vanishes, this time they exclaim: *‘I have lost my ‘self!’*

“Thus, by assuming: *‘This feeling I’m experiencing is my self!’* what one would be referring to are conditioned things that are, by their very nature, impermanent and as a result, the person becomes entangled while being tossed around between the extremes of experiencing pleasure and pain, that are feelings subject to fading and wasting away, sooner or later.

“It is for this reason that feelings should not be regarded as or assumed to be ‘self.’

“Now, as for those who claim: *‘This feeling I’m experiencing has nothing to do with my ‘self,’ because my ‘self’ is impervious to feelings,’* your response to them should be the following –

‘But friend, when you’re not feeling or experiencing anything whatsoever, could there still be the possibility to assume: ‘I am this,’ in the first place?’

“No, Bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, for that reason it is incorrect to accept the assumption: *‘This feeling I’m experiencing has nothing to do with my ‘self,’ because my ‘self’ is impervious to feelings.’*

“And as for those who claim: *‘This feeling I’m experiencing is separate from my ‘self,’ because even though my ‘self’ **does** in fact experience feelings, nevertheless, it remains unaffected by them,’* your response to them should be the following –

‘Imagine friend, if feelings were to simply vanish altogether, with no trace left of them, and if that were to be the case, where there would be absolutely no feeling at all, could there still be the possibility to assume: “I am this,” in the first place?’

“No, Bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, for that reason it is incorrect to accept the assumption: *‘This feeling I’m experiencing is separate from my ‘self,’ because even though my ‘self’ **does** in fact experience feelings, nevertheless, it remains unaffected by them.’*

“Now, Ānanda, on account of a Bhikkhu no longer assuming feelings to be the self, also no longer assuming that the self is impervious to feelings, and no more claiming that even though the ‘self’ does experience feelings, nevertheless, it remains unaffected by them, being free from all these assumptions and views, then he stands unmoved and tranquil, for he no longer grabs onto anything as his own in the world.

“Ānanda, once the Bhikkhu directly knows and understands everything thus, he simply observes each of his feelings that arise, whether it is pleasant, painful, or neutral, as he sees that each of them are, in fact, impermanent and never lasting.

“When he sees this, he also understands that each of these feelings fade away and vanish, which leads him to become disenchanted with them. Then, in seeing and understanding how each of these feelings cease in their intensity, the Bhikkhu becomes dispassionate towards them. And this leads him to relinquish his grip from holding onto anything. By not grasping anything thus, he no longer becomes anxious, restless, or agitated. And by not becoming agitated anymore, he experiences the ultimate relief that is *Nibbāna*.

“It is at that very instant, when the Bhikkhu finally knows with direct understanding:

‘Birth is now finally destroyed. The Holy Life has now been fully lived, with its Goal achieved. There is no more coming back to any state of becoming.’

“Now, Ānanda, a Bhikkhu who has liberated himself by having reached this level of understanding, would never consider to be true or accurate any assumptions or views that pertain to the Tathāgata, such as:

‘After His death, The Tathāgata continues on living, by moving into another form of existence;’

Or that, *‘after His death, The Tathāgata no longer exists;’*

Or that, *‘after His death, The Tathāgata both exists and does not exist;’*

Or that, *‘after His death, The Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist;’*

“And why would he never consider such assumptions or views to be true or accurate at all?

“Ānanda, by understanding and directly knowing for himself the scope and, therefore, the very limitations of language and linguistic expression; the scope and limitations of naming and labeling things as such; the scope and limitations of all manner of expression, along with the use of various terms and principles; the scope and limitations of knowledge and the attempts at describing wisdom itself; and by understanding and directly knowing for himself the scope and the very limitations of rebirth through the cycles of Samsāra and to what length they could reach out, and to declare such a Liberated Bhikkhu as someone who does *not* ‘know and see,’ now *that* would be a complete mistake.

(The Seven Levels of Consciousness)

“Ānanda, there are these seven classes of consciousness and the two spheres. And what are these seven?

1. “There are beings who are different from each other in both their physical appearance, as well as in their thinking, much like human beings are, along with some Devas, and some other beings found within the lower realms. This is the first level of consciousness.

2. “There are beings who look different from each other in their physical appearance, but are unified in their thinking, such as those Devas living in the company of the Brahmā Gods. This is the second level of consciousness.

3. “There are beings who look the same as others in their physical appearance, but who are different from each other in their thinking, such as the Radiant or the *Ābhassarā* Devas. This is the third level of consciousness.

4. “There are beings, who are indistinguishable both in their physical appearance, as well as their thinking from those of others, such as the Beautifully Lustrous or the *Subhakiṇhā* Devas. Now this is the fourth level of consciousness.

5. “There are also beings who, having completely transcended by going beyond the confines of thinking in terms of the physical world and of tangibility, along with the disappearance of perceptions having to do with sensory reflexive contact, and by no longer paying any attention to the multiplicity of unending perceptions, and instead, while dwelling on the thought and experience of space being infinitely boundless, after the death of this body, they reappear in the realm called ‘Infinity of Space.’ This is the fifth level of consciousness.

6. “There are beings who, having completely transcended the state of space being infinitely boundless, and by experiencing how consciousness is infinite, after the death of this body, reappear in the realm called ‘Infinity of Consciousness.’ This is the sixth level of consciousness.

7. “And then, there are those beings who, having completely transcended the state of consciousness being infinitely boundless, and by experiencing the fact that there is nothing at all, after the death of this body, reappear in the realm called ‘Nothingness.’ This is the seventh level of consciousness.

“Finally, there is the sphere that pertains to beings that are no longer conscious or aware that they are perceiving; and secondly, the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. These, therefore, are the two spheres.

1. “Ānanda, as for the first level of consciousness where you have beings, who are different from each other in both their physical appearance, as well as in their thinking, much like human beings are, along with some Devas, and some other beings found within the lower realms –

“Now, if a person is able to know and see, while fully understanding how this level of consciousness comes about in the first place, how it goes out, how it becomes attractive to those wanting to indulge in it, and thus, its dangers and snares, and therefore, the manner in which one can escape from it completely, would it still be appropriate or even possible for someone with that depth of understanding to go seeking delight and enjoyment in that first level of consciousness?”

“No, Bhante.”

2. “Ānanda, as for the second level of consciousness where you have beings, who look different from each other in their physical appearance, but are unified in their thinking, such as those Devas living in the company of the Brahmā Gods;

“Now, if a person is able to know and see, while fully understanding how this level of consciousness comes about in the first place, how it goes out, how it becomes attractive to those wanting to indulge in it, and thus, its dangers and snares, and therefore, the manner in which one can escape from it completely, would it still be appropriate or even possible for someone with that depth of understanding to go seeking delight and enjoyment in that second level of consciousness?”

“No, Bhante.”

3. “Ānanda, as for the third level of consciousness where you have beings, who look the same as others in their physical appearance, but who are different from each other in their thinking, such as the Radiant or the *Ābhassarā* Devas;

“Now, if a person is able to know and see, while fully understanding, how this level of consciousness comes about in the first place, how it goes out, how it becomes attractive to those wanting to indulge in it, and thus, its dangers and snares, and therefore, the manner in which one can escape from it completely, would it still be appropriate or even possible for someone with that depth of understanding to go seeking delight and enjoyment in that third level of consciousness?”

“No, Bhante.”

4. “Ānanda, as for the fourth level of consciousness where you have beings, who are indistinguishable both in their physical appearance, as well as in their thinking from those of others, such as the Beautifully Lustrous or the *Subhakiṇhā* Devas;

“Now, if a person is able to know and see, while fully understanding how this level of consciousness comes about in the first place, how it goes out, how it becomes attractive to those wanting to indulge in it, and thus, its dangers and snares, and therefore, the manner in which one can escape from it completely, would it still be appropriate or even possible for someone with that depth of understanding to go seeking delight and enjoyment in that fourth level of consciousness?”

“No, Bhante.”

5. “Ānanda, as for the fifth level of consciousness where you have beings who, having completely transcended by going beyond the confines of thinking in terms of the physical world

and of tangibility, along with the disappearance of perceptions having to do with sensory reflexive contact, and by no longer paying any attention to the multiplicity of unending perceptions, and instead, while dwelling on the thought and experience of space being infinitely boundless, after the death of this body, they reappear in the realm called 'Infinity of Space;'

"Now, if a person is able to know and see, while fully understanding how this level of consciousness comes about in the first place, how it goes out, how it becomes attractive to those wanting to indulge in it, and thus, its dangers and snares, and therefore, the manner in which one can escape from it completely, would it still be appropriate or even possible for someone with that depth of understanding to go seeking delight and enjoyment in that fifth level of consciousness?"

"No, Bhante."

6. "Ānanda, as for the sixth level of consciousness where you have beings who, having completely transcended the state of space being infinitely boundless, and by experiencing how consciousness is infinite, after the death of this body, reappear in the realm called 'Infinity of Consciousness;'

"Now, if a person is able to know and see, while fully understanding how this level of consciousness comes about in the first place, how it goes out, how it becomes attractive to those wanting to indulge in it, and thus, its dangers and snares, and therefore, the manner in which one can escape from it completely, would it still be appropriate or even possible for someone with that depth of understanding to go seeking delight and enjoyment in that sixth level of consciousness?"

"No, Bhante."

7. "Ānanda, as for the seventh level of consciousness where you have beings who, having completely transcended the state of consciousness being infinitely boundless, and by experiencing the fact that there is nothing at all, after the death of this body, reappear in the realm called 'Nothingness;'

"Now, if a person is able to know and see, while fully understanding how this level of consciousness comes about in the first place, how it goes out, how it becomes attractive to those wanting to indulge in it, and thus, its dangers and snares, and therefore, the manner in which one can escape from it completely, would it still be appropriate or even possible, for someone with that depth of understanding to go seeking delight and enjoyment in that seventh level of consciousness?"

"No, Bhante."

“Further, Ānanda, regarding the two spheres, where one pertains to beings that are no longer conscious or aware that they are perceiving, and the second sphere to beings in the state of neither perception nor non-perception;

“Now, if a person is able to know and see, while fully understanding how these spheres come about in the first place, how they go out, how they become attractive to those wanting to indulge in them, and thus, their dangers and snares, and therefore, the manner in which one can escape from them completely, would it still be appropriate or even possible for someone with that depth of understanding to go seeking delight and enjoyment in either one of these two spheres?”

“No, Bhante.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, the Bhikkhu is able to know and see, while fully understanding how these levels of consciousness and the two spheres come about in the first place; how they go out; how they become attractive to those wanting to indulge in them, and thus, their dangers and snares, and therefore, the manner in which one escapes from them completely, and thus he is to be recognized as a Bhikkhu who, no longer grabbing onto anything, has ended the ceaseless cycle of misery, for he has liberated himself through Wisdom.

(The Eight Freedoms)

“Ānanda, there are these eight freedoms. Which eight?

“While still in this physical body, one sees forms. This is the first freedom.

“While not being able to see visible forms within himself, he nevertheless sees them externally. This is the second freedom.

“Intentionally seeing *only* what is beautiful. This is the third freedom.

“The person, having completely transcended by going beyond the confines of thinking in terms of the physical world and of tangibility, along with the disappearance of perceptions having to do with sensory reflexive contact, and by no longer paying any attention to the multiplicity of unending perceptions, and instead, while dwelling on the thought and experience of space being infinitely boundless, enters the ‘Infinity of Space’ *jhānic* state. This is the fourth freedom.

“By having completely transcended the state of space being infinitely boundless, and while experiencing how consciousness is infinite, the person enters the ‘Infinity of Consciousness’ *jhānic* state. This is the fifth freedom.

“And while having completely transcended the level of consciousness being infinitely boundless, and by experiencing the fact that there is nothing at all, the person enters the ‘Nothingness’ *jhānic* state. This is the sixth freedom.

“And with the complete surpassing of the Nothingness level of consciousness, the person enters and remains in the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. This is the seventh freedom.

“Finally, by completely transcending the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception, the person enters and remains in the cessation of perception and feeling. This is the eighth freedom.

“Now, Ānanda, when a Bhikkhu is able to attain these eight liberations by moving through them one by one, as he goes in and out of each, whenever, wherever, and however he may desire to, and for as long as he likes, and when such a Bhikkhu has destroyed the contaminants of the mind, the āsavas, he lives in the taintless liberation of the heart, and through his own realization and direct knowledge, he attains Full Awakening, by liberating himself through wisdom in this very life. Such a Bhikkhu is declared to be liberated in both ways.

“And Ānanda, there can be no other freedom, no liberation in both ways that may somehow be better or more sublime than this.”

That is what The Blessed One said.

Fully contented, the Venerable Ānanda and the other Bhikkhus were delighted in listening to The Blessed One’s words.

Sādhū

Sādhū

Sādhū

