Snp 5.6 — Upasiva-manava-puccha: Upasiva's Questions

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

[Upasiva:]

Alone, Sakyan, & with nothing to rely on, I can't venture across the great flood. Tell me, All-around Eye, the support to rely on for crossing over this flood.

[The Buddha:]

Mindfully focused on nothingness, [1] relying on 'There isn't,' you should cross over the flood. Abandoning sensual pleasures, abstaining from conversations, keep watch for the ending of craving, night & day.

[Upasiva:]

One free from passion for all sensual pleasures relying on nothingness, letting go of all else, released in the highest emancipation of perception: Does he stay there unaffected?

[The Buddha:]

One free from passion for all sensual pleasures relying on nothingness, letting go of all else, released in the highest emancipation of perception: He stays there unaffected.

[Upasiva:]

If he stays there, O All-around Eye, unaffected for many years, right there would he be cooled & released? Would his consciousness be like that?

[The Buddha:]

As a flame overthrown by the force of the wind goes to an end that cannot be classified,[2] so the sage free from naming activity goes to an end that cannot be classified.

[Upasiva:]

He who has reached the end: Does he not exist, or is he for eternity free from dis-ease? Please, sage, declare this to me as this phenomenon has been known by you.

[The Buddha:]

One who has reached the end has no criterion [3] by which anyone would say that — for him it doesn't exist. When all phenomena are done away with,[4] all means of speaking are done away with as well.

Notes

1.

"Nothingness" here denotes the dimension of nothingness, one of the four levels of mental absorption on formless themes. One attains this level, after surmounting the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, by focusing on the perception, "There is nothing." MN 26 tells us that Alara Kalama, the Buddha's first teacher when the latter was still a Bodhisatta, had attained this level of mental absorption and had thought that it was the highest possible attainment. The Bodhisatta left him upon realizing that it was not true liberation from stress and suffering. Nevertheless, the dimension of nothingness can be used as a basis for the insight leading to that liberation. On this point, see Sn.V.14 and AN 9.36.

2.

For a discussion of this passage in light of early Buddhist theories of fire, see The Mind Like Fire Unbound, Chapter 1.

3.

For a discussion of the meaning of "criterion" in this passage, see The Mind Like Fire Unbound, Chapter 1.

4.

Although Upasiva refers to the goal as a phenomenon (dhamma), the Buddha describes it as the transcending of all phenomena. For some of the implications of this statement, see AN 3.134.