Ud 6.1 — Ud 6:1 Relinquishment of the Life Force | Āyusama-osajjana Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

6 : Blind from Birth

Ud 6:1 Relinquishment of the Life Force (Āyusama-osajjana Sutta)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Vesālī at the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest. Then, early in the morning, he adjusted his under robe and–carrying his bowl & robes–went into Vesālī for alms. Then, having gone for alms in Vesālī, after the meal, returning from his alms round, he addressed Ven. Ānanda, “Get a sitting cloth, Ānanda. We will go to the Pāvāla shrine for the day’s abiding.”

Responding, “As you say, lord,” to the Blessed One, Ven. Ānanda followed along behind the Blessed One, carrying the sitting cloth. Then the Blessed One went to the Pāvāla shrine

and, on arrival, sat down on the seat laid out.

Seated, the Blessed One addressed Ven. Ānanda, "Vesālī is refreshing, Ānanda. Refreshing, too, are the Udena shrine, the Gotamaka shrine, the Sattamba shrine, the ManySon shrine, the Sāranda shrine, the Pāvāla shrine.1

"Anyone, Ānanda, in whom the four bases of power2 are developed, pursued, given a means of transport, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, and well-undertaken, could–if he wanted–remain for an eon or the remainder of an eon.3 In the Tathāgata, Ānanda, the four bases of power are developed, pursued, given a means of transport, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, and well-undertaken. He could–if he wanted–remain for an eon or the remainder of an eon."

But Ven. Ānanda–even when the Blessed One had given such a blatant sign, such a blatant hint–wasn't able to understand his meaning. He didn't request of him, "Lord, may the Blessed One remain for an eon. May the One-Well-Gone remain for an eon–for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of sympathy for the world, for the welfare, benefit, & happiness of human and divine beings." It was as if his mind was possessed by Māra.

A second time… A third time, the Blessed One addressed Ven. Ānanda, "Vesālī is refreshing, Ānanda. Refreshing, too, are the Udena shrine, the Gotamaka shrine, the Sattamba shrine, the ManySon shrine, the Sāranda shrine, the Pāvāla shrine.

"Anyone, Ānanda, in whom the four bases of power are developed, pursued, given a means of transport, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, and well-undertaken, could–if he wanted–remain for an eon or the remainder of an eon. In the Tathāgata, Ānanda, the four bases of power are developed, pursued, given a means of transport, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, and well-undertaken. He could–if he wanted–remain for an eon or the remainder of an eon."

But Ven. Ānanda–even when the Blessed One had given such a blatant sign, such a blatant hint–wasn't able to understand his meaning. He didn't request of him, "Lord, may the Blessed One remain for an eon. May the One-Well-Gone remain for an eon–for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of sympathy for the world, for the welfare, benefit, & happiness of human and divine beings." It was as if his mind was possessed by Māra.

Then the Blessed One addressed Ven. Ānanda, "Go, Ānanda. Do what you think it is now time to do."

Responding, "As you say, lord," to the Blessed One, Ven. Ānanda got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One and–after circling him to the right–went to sit under a tree not far from the Blessed One.

Then, not long after Ven. Ānanda had left, Māra the Evil One went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, stood to one side. As he was standing there he said to the Blessed One, "May the Blessed One totally unbind now, lord. May the One-Well-Gone totally unbind now, lord. Now is the time for the Blessed One's total unbinding, lord. After all, these words were said by the Blessed One: 'Evil One, I will not totally unbind as long as my monk disciples are not yet experienced, trained, attained to confidence, desiring rest from the yoke, learned, maintaining the Dhamma, practicing the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma, practicing masterfully, living in line with the Dhamma; declaring the Dhamma–after having learned it from their own teachers–teaching it, describing it, setting it forth, revealing it, explaining it, making it plain; well-refuting, in line with the Dhamma, any opposing teachings that have arisen; teaching the Dhamma with its marvels.'4

"But now, lord, the Blessed One's monk disciples are experienced, trained, attained to confidence, desiring rest from the yoke, learned, maintaining the Dhamma, practicing the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma, practicing masterfully, living in line with the Dhamma; declaring the Dhamma–after having learned it from their own teachers–teaching it, describing it, setting it forth, revealing it, explaining it, making it plain; well-refuting, in line with the Dhamma, any opposing teachings that have arisen; teaching the Dhamma with its marvels.

"May the Blessed One totally unbind now, lord. May the One-Well-Gone totally unbind now, lord. Now is the time for the Blessed One's total unbinding, lord. After all, these words were said by the Blessed One: 'Evil One, I will not totally unbind as long as my nun disciples… my male lay-follower disciples… my female lay-follower disciples are not yet experienced, trained, attained to maturity, desiring rest from the yoke, learned, maintaining the Dhamma, practicing the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma, practicing masterfully, living in line with the Dhamma; declaring the Dhamma–after having learned it from their own teachers–teaching it, describing it, setting it forth, revealing it, explaining it, making it plain; well-refuting, in line with the Dhamma, any opposing teachings that have arisen; teaching the Dhamma with its marvels.'

"But now, lord, the Blessed One's female lay-follower disciples are experienced, trained, attained to maturity, desiring rest from the yoke, learned, maintaining the Dhamma, practicing the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma, practicing masterfully, living in line with the Dhamma; declaring the Dhamma–after having learned it from their own teachers–teaching it, describing it, setting it forth, revealing it, explaining it, making it plain; well-refuting, in line with the Dhamma, any opposing teachings that have arisen; teaching the Dhamma with its marvels.

"May the Blessed One totally unbind now, lord. May the One-Well-Gone totally unbind now, lord. Now is the time for the Blessed One's total unbinding, lord. After all, these words were said by the Blessed One: 'Evil One, I will not totally unbind as long as this holy life of mine is not powerful, prosperous, widely-spread, disseminated among many people, well-expounded as far as there are devas & human beings.' But now, lord, the Blessed One's holy life is powerful, prosperous, widely-spread, disseminated among many people, well-expounded as far as there are devas & human beings.

“May the Blessed One totally unbind now, lord. May the One-Well-Gone totally unbind now, lord. Now is the time for the Blessed One’s total unbinding, lord.”

When this was said, the Blessed One said to Māra, the Most Evil One: “Relax, Evil One. It won’t be long until the Tathāgata’s total unbinding. In three months’ time from now, the Tathāgata will totally unbind.”

Thus at the Pāvāla shrine–mindful & alert–the Blessed One relinquished the fabrications of life.5 And as the Blessed One relinquished the fabrications of life, there was a great earthquake, frightening & hair-raising, along with cracks of thunder.

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed:

Comparing the incomparable6

with coming-into-being,

the sage relinquished

the fabrication of becoming.

Inwardly joyful,

centered,

he split his own

coming-into-being

like a coat of mail.7

Notes

1. As DN 16 makes clear, there were several times in the past where the Buddha, at several different locations, had commented to Ven. Ānanda on how refreshing it was to be in the location where they were staying. This apparently was meant as a sign that living on would not be a burden, for in each case he had then given a broad hint–as he does here–for Ven. Ānanda to invite him to extend his life. As says in the narrative immediately following the events portrayed in this udāna, he would have refused the invitation if offered only twice, but would have accepted it on the third offer. But now that he has abandoned the will to live, he cannot take it on again, so Ven. Ānanda’s final opportunity to make the invitation is lost.

2. “And what is the base of power? Whatever path, whatever practice, leads to the attainment of power, the winning of power: That is called the base of power.

“And what is the development of the base of power? There is the case where a monk develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on desire & the fabrications of exertion. He develops the base of power endowed with concentration

founded on persistence… concentration founded on intent… concentration founded on discrimination & the fabrications of exertion. This is called the development of the base of power." – SN 51:26

3. An eon, in the Buddhist cosmology, is an immensely long stretch of time. According to the Commentary here, it can also mean the full lifespan of a human being in that particular period of the eon (Buddhist cosmology allows for a huge fluctuation in human lifespans over the course of an eon). The Commentary adopts this second meaning in this passage, and so takes the Buddha's statement here as meaning that a person who has developed the bases of power could live for a full lifespan or for a little bit more. In this case, the Pali for the last part of this compound, kappāvasesaṁ, would mean, "an eon plus a remainder."

4. DN 11 defines the miracle of instruction as instruction in training the mind to the point of where it gains release from all suffering and stress.

5. In other words, the Buddha relinquished the will to live longer. It was this relinquishment that led to his total Unbinding three months later.

6. Reading tulaṁ as a present participle.

7. The image is of splitting a coat of mail with an arrow.