MN 1 — Mulapariyaya Sutta: The Root Sequence

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.001.than.html

Source revision: sha256:7c411108530c04aafcca0ac43267ed12227cbb2653320e8ae0bb686e566bb783

License: CC-BY-NC-4.0 — https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

License URL: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Copyright: ©1998 Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

License notice: The text of this page ("Mulapariyaya Sutta: The Root Sequence", by Thanissaro Bhikkhu) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of the license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/. Documents linked from this page may be subject to other restrictions.

Attribution: ©1998 Thanissaro Bhikkhu. The text of this page ("Mulapariyaya Sutta: The Root Sequence", by Thanissaro Bhikkhu) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of the license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/. Documents linked from this page may be subject to other restrictions. Transcribed from a file provided by the translator. Last revised for Access to Insight on 30 November 2013. How to cite this document (a suggested style): "Mulapariyaya Sutta: The Root Sequence" (MN 1), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013, https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.001.than.html .

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

Translator's Introduction

The Buddha taught that clinging to views is one of the four forms of clinging that tie the mind to the processes of suffering. He thus recommended that his followers relinquish their clinging, not only to views in their full-blown form as specific positions, but also in their rudimentary form as the categories & relationships that the mind reads into experience. This is a point he makes in the following discourse, which is apparently his response to a particular school of Brahmanical thought that was developing in his time — the Samkhya, or classification school.

This school had its beginnings in the thought of Uddalaka, a ninth-century B.C. philosopher who posited a "root": an abstract principle out of which all things emanated and which was immanent in all things. Philosophers who carried on this line of thinking offered a variety of theories, based on logic and meditative experience, about the nature of the ultimate root and about the hierarchy of the emanation. Many of their theories were recorded in the Upanishads and eventually developed into the classical Samkhya system around the time of the Buddha.

Although the present discourse says nothing about the background of the monks listening to it, the Commentary states that before their ordination they were brahmans, and that even after their ordination they continued to interpret the Buddha's teachings in light of their previous training, which may well have been proto-Samkhya. If this is so, then the Buddha's opening lines — "I will teach you the sequence of the root of all phenomena" — would have them prepared to hear his contribution to their line of thinking. And, in fact, the list of topics he covers reads like a Buddhist Samkhya. Paralleling the classical Samkhya, it contains 24 items, begins with the physical world (here, the four physical properties), and leads back through ever more refined & inclusive levels of being & experience, culminating with the ultimate Buddhist concept: Unbinding (nibbana). In the pattern of Samkhya thought, Unbinding would thus be the ultimate "root" or ground of being immanent in all things and out of which they all emanate.

However, instead of following this pattern of thinking, the Buddha attacks it at its very root: the notion of a principle in the abstract, the "in" (immanence) & "out of" (emanation) superimposed on experience. Only an uninstructed, run of the mill person, he says, would read experience in this way. In contrast, a person in training should look for a different kind of "root" — the root of suffering experienced in the present — and find it in the act of delight. Developing dispassion for that delight, the trainee can then comprehend the process of coming-into-being for what it is, drop all participation in it, and thus achieve true Awakening.

If the listeners present at this discourse were indeed interested in fitting Buddhist teachings into a Samkhyan mold, then it's small wonder that they were displeased — one of the few places where we read of a negative reaction to the Buddha's words. They had hoped to hear his contribution to their project, but instead they hear their whole pattern of thinking & theorizing attacked as ignorant & ill-informed. The Commentary tells us, though, they were later able to overcome their displeasure and eventually attain Awakening on listening to the discourse reported in AN 3.123.

Although at present we rarely think in the same terms as the Samkhya philosophers, there has long been — and still is — a common tendency to create a "Buddhist" metaphysics in which the experience of emptiness, the Unconditioned, the Dharma-body, Buddha-nature, rigpa, etc., is said to function as the ground of being from which the "All" — the entirety of our sensory & mental experience — is said to spring and to which we return when we meditate. Some people think that these theories are the inventions of scholars without any direct meditative experience, but actually they have most often originated among meditators, who label (or in the words of the discourse, "perceive") a particular meditative experience as the ultimate goal, identify with it in a subtle way (as when we are told that "we are the knowing"), and then view that level of experience as the ground of being out of which all other experience comes.

Any teaching that follows these lines would be subject to the same criticism that the Buddha directed against the monks who first heard this discourse.

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Ukkattha, in the shade of a royal Sal tree in the Very Blessed Grove. There he addressed the monks, "Monks!"

"Yes, lord," the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, "Monks, I will teach you the sequence of the root of all phenomena [or: the root sequence of all phenomena]. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, sir," they responded.

The Blessed One said: "There is the case, monks, where an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person — who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma — perceives earth as earth. Perceiving earth as earth, he conceives [things] about earth, he conceives [things] in earth, he conceives [things] coming out of earth, he conceives earth as 'mine,' he delights in earth. Why is that? Because he has not comprehended it, I tell you.

"He perceives water as water... fire as fire... wind as wind[1] ... beings as beings... gods as gods...Pajapati as Pajapati...Brahma as Brahma... the luminous gods as luminous gods... the gods of refulgent glory as gods of refulgent glory... the gods of abundant fruit as the gods of abundant fruit... the Conqueror as the Conqueror[2] ... the dimension of the infinitude of space as the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness as the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness as the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception[3] ... the seen as the seen... the heard as the heard... the sensed as the sensed... the cognized as the cognized[4] ... singleness as singleness... multiplicity as multiplicity[5] ... the All as the All[6] ...

"He perceives Unbinding as Unbinding.[7] Perceiving Unbinding as Unbinding, he conceives things about Unbinding, he conceives things in Unbinding, he conceives things coming out of Unbinding, he conceives Unbinding as 'mine,' he delights in Unbinding. Why is that? Because he has not comprehended it, I tell you.

The Trainee

"A monk who is a trainee — yearning for the unexcelled relief from bondage, his aspirations as yet unfulfilled — directly knows earth as earth. Directly knowing earth as earth, let him not conceive things about earth, let him not conceive things in earth, let him not conceive things coming out of earth, let him not conceive earth as 'mine,' let him not delight in earth. Why is that? So that he may comprehend it, I tell you.

"He directly knows water as water... fire as fire... wind as wind... beings as beings... gods as gods... Pajapati as Pajapati... Brahma as Brahma... the luminous gods as luminous gods... the gods of refulgent glory as gods of refulgent glory... the gods of abundant fruit as the

gods of abundant fruit... the Conqueror as the Conqueror... the dimension of the infinitude of space as the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness as the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness as the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception... the seen as the seen... the heard as the heard... the sensed as the sensed... the cognized as the cognized... singleness as singleness... multiplicity as multiplicity... the All as the All...

"He directly knows Unbinding as Unbinding. Directly knowing Unbinding as Unbinding, let him not conceive things about Unbinding, let him not conceive things in Unbinding, let him not conceive things coming out of Unbinding, let him not conceive Unbinding as 'mine,' let him not delight in Unbinding. Why is that? So that he may comprehend it, I tell you.

The Arahant

"A monk who is a Worthy One, devoid of mental fermentations — who has attained completion, finished the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, destroyed the fetters of becoming, and is released through right knowledge — directly knows earth as earth. Directly knowing earth as earth, he does not conceive things about earth, does not conceive things in earth, does not conceive things coming out of earth, does not conceive earth as 'mine,' does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because he has comprehended it, I tell you.

"He directly knows water as water... fire as fire... wind as wind... beings as beings... gods as gods... Pajapati as Pajapati... Brahma as Brahma... the luminous gods as luminous gods... the gods of refulgent glory as gods of refulgent glory... the gods of abundant fruit as the gods of abundant fruit... the Conqueror as the Conqueror... the dimension of the infinitude of space as the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness as the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness as the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception... the seen as the seen... the heard as the heard... the sensed as the sensed... the cognized as the cognized... singleness as singleness... multiplicity as multiplicity... the All as the All...

"He directly knows Unbinding as Unbinding. Directly knowing Unbinding as Unbinding, he does not conceive things about Unbinding, does not conceive things in Unbinding, does not conceive things coming out of Unbinding, does not conceive Unbinding as 'mine,' does not delight in Unbinding. Why is that? Because he has comprehended it, I tell you.

"A monk who is a Worthy One, devoid of mental fermentations... directly knows earth as earth. Directly knowing earth as earth, he does not conceive things about earth, does not conceive things in earth, does not conceive things coming out of earth, does not conceive earth as 'mine,' does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because, with the ending of passion, he is devoid of passion, I tell you.

"He directly knows water as water... the All as the All...

"He directly knows Unbinding as Unbinding. Directly knowing Unbinding as Unbinding, he does not conceive things about Unbinding, does not conceive things in Unbinding, does not conceive things coming out of Unbinding, does not conceive Unbinding as 'mine,' does not delight in Unbinding. Why is that? Because, with the ending of passion, he is devoid of passion, I tell you.

"A monk who is a Worthy One, devoid of mental fermentations... directly knows earth as earth. Directly knowing earth as earth, he does not conceive things about earth, does not conceive things in earth, does not conceive things coming out of earth, does not conceive earth as 'mine,' does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because, with the ending of aversion, he is devoid of aversion, I tell you.

"He directly knows water as water... the All as the All...

"He directly knows Unbinding as Unbinding. Directly knowing Unbinding as Unbinding, he does not conceive things about Unbinding, does not conceive things in Unbinding, does not conceive things coming out of Unbinding, does not conceive Unbinding as 'mine,' does not delight in Unbinding. Why is that? Because, with the ending of aversion, he is devoid of aversion, I tell you.

"A monk who is a Worthy One, devoid of mental fermentations... directly knows earth as earth. Directly knowing earth as earth, he does not conceive things about earth, does not conceive things in earth, does not conceive things coming out of earth, does not conceive earth as 'mine,' does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because, with the ending of delusion, he is devoid of delusion, I tell you.

"He directly knows water as water... the All as the All...

"He directly knows Unbinding as Unbinding. Directly knowing Unbinding as Unbinding, he does not conceive things about Unbinding, does not conceive things in Unbinding, does not conceive things coming out of Unbinding, does not conceive Unbinding as 'mine,' does not delight in Unbinding. Why is that? Because, with the ending of delusion, he is devoid of delusion, I tell you.

The Tathagata

"The Tathagata — a worthy one, rightly self-awakened — directly knows earth as earth. Directly knowing earth as earth, he does not conceive things about earth, does not conceive things in earth, does not conceive things coming out of earth, does not conceive earth as 'mine,' does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because the Tathagata has comprehended it to the end, I tell you.

"He directly knows water as water... fire as fire... wind as wind... beings as beings... gods as gods... Pajapati as Pajapati... Brahma as Brahma... the luminous gods as luminous gods...

the gods of refulgent glory as gods of refulgent glory... the gods of abundant fruit as the gods of abundant fruit... the Conqueror as the Conqueror... the dimension of the infinitude of space as the dimension of the infinitude of space... the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness as the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness... the dimension of nothingness as the dimension of nothingness... the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception... the seen as the seen... the heard as the heard... the sensed as the sensed... the cognized as the cognized... singleness as singleness... multiplicity as multiplicity... the All as the All...

"He directly knows Unbinding as Unbinding. Directly knowing Unbinding as Unbinding, he does not conceive things about Unbinding, does not conceive things in Unbinding, does not conceive things coming out of Unbinding, does not conceive Unbinding as 'mine,' does not delight in Unbinding. Why is that? Because the Tathagata has comprehended it to the end, I tell you.

"The Tathagata — a worthy one, rightly self-awakened — directly knows earth as earth. Directly knowing earth as earth, he does not conceive things about earth, does not conceive things in earth, does not conceive things coming out of earth, does not conceive earth as 'mine,' does not delight in earth. Why is that? Because he has known that delight is the root of suffering & stress, that from coming-into-being there is birth, and that for what has come into being there is aging & death. Therefore, with the total ending, fading away, cessation, letting go, relinquishment of craving, the Tathagata has totally awakened to the unexcelled right self-awakening, I tell you.

"He directly knows water as water... the All as the All...

"He directly knows Unbinding as Unbinding. Directly knowing Unbinding as Unbinding, he does not conceive things about Unbinding, does not conceive things in Unbinding, does not conceive things coming out of Unbinding, does not conceive Unbinding as 'mine,' does not delight in Unbinding. Why is that? Because he has known that delight is the root of suffering & stress, that from coming-into-being there is birth, and that for what has come into being there is aging & death. Therefore, with the total ending, fading away, cessation, letting go, relinquishment of craving, the Tathagata has totally awakened to the unexcelled right self-awakening, I tell you."

That is what the Blessed One said. Displeased, the monks did not delight in the Blessed One's words.

Notes

1.

Earth, water, fire, and wind are the four properties that comprise the experience of physical form.

2.

In this section of the list, "beings" denotes all living beings below the level of the gods. "Gods" denotes the beings in the sensual heavens. The remaining terms — Pajapati, Brahma, the luminous gods, the gods of refulgent glory, the gods of abundant fruit, & the Conqueror — denote gods in the heavens of form & formlessness.

3.

The dimension of the infinitude of space, the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, the dimension of nothingness, & the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception are four formless states that can be attained in concentration.

4.

"The seen, the heard, the sensed, & the cognized" is a set of terms to cover all things experienced through the six senses.

5.

Singleness = experience in states of intense concentration (jhana). Multiplicity = experience via the six senses.

6.

"What is the All? Simply the eye & forms, ear & sounds, nose & aromas, tongue & flavors, body & tactile sensations, intellect & ideas. This is termed the All. Anyone who would say, 'Repudiating this All, I will describe another,' if questioned on what exactly might be the grounds for his assertion, would be unable to explain, and furthermore, would be put to grief. Why is that? Because it lies beyond range." — SN 35.23 For more on this topic, see The Mind Like Fire Unbound, Chapter 1.

7.

Unbinding = nibbana (nirvana).

See also: AN 10.58