MN 7 — Vatthupama Sutta: The Simile of the Cloth

English translation by Nyanaponika Thera.

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Text

1. Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi, in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery. There he addressed the monks thus: "Monks." — "Venerable sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. "Monks, suppose a cloth were stained and dirty, and a dyer dipped it in some dye or other, whether blue or yellow or red or pink, it would take the dye badly and be impure in color. And why is that? Because the cloth was not clean. So too, monks, when the mind is defiled,[1] an unhappy destination [in a future existence] may be expected.

"Monks, suppose a cloth were clean and bright, and a dyer dipped it in some dye or other, whether blue or yellow or red or pink, it would take the dye well and be pure in color. And why is that? Because the cloth was clean. So too, monks, when the mind is undefiled, a happy destination [in a future existence] may be expected.

3. "And what, monks, are the defilements of the mind?[2] (1) Covetousness and unrighteous greed are a defilement of the mind; (2) ill will is a defilement of the mind; (3) anger is a defilement of the mind; (4) hostility...(5) denigration...(6) domineering...(7) envy...(8) jealousy...(9) hypocrisy...(10) fraud...(11) obstinacy...(12) presumption...(13) conceit...(14) arrogance...(15) vanity...(16) negligence is a defilement of the mind.[3]

4. "Knowing, monks, covetousness and unrighteous greed to be a defilement of the mind, the monk abandons them.[4] Knowing ill will to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing anger to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing hostility to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing denigration to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing domineering to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing envy to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing jealousy to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing hypocrisy to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing fraud to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing obstinacy to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing presumption to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing conceit to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing arrogance to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing vanity to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing negligence to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it.

5. "When in the monk who thus knows that covetousness and unrighteous greed are a defilement of the mind, this covetousness and unrighteous greed have been abandoned; when in him who thus knows that ill will is a defilement of the mind, this ill will has been abandoned;... when in him who thus knows that negligence is a defilement of the mind, this negligence has been abandoned — [5]

6. — he thereupon gains unwavering confidence in the Buddha[6] thus: 'Thus indeed is the Blessed One: he is accomplished, fully enlightened, endowed with [clear] vision and [virtuous] conduct, sublime, knower of the worlds, the incomparable guide of men who are tractable, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed.'

7. — he gains unwavering confidence in the Dhamma thus: 'Well proclaimed by the Blessed One is the Dhamma, realizable here and now, possessed of immediate result, bidding you come and see, accessible and knowable individually by the wise.

8. — he gains unwavering confidence in the Sangha thus: 'The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples has entered on the good way, has entered on the straight way, has entered on the true way, has entered on the proper way; that is to say, the four pairs of men, the eight types of persons; this Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the incomparable field of merit for the world.'

9. "When he has given up, renounced, let go, abandoned and relinquished [the defilements] in part,[7] he knows: 'I am endowed with unwavering confidence in the Buddha... in the Dhamma... in the Sangha; and he gains enthusiasm for the goal, gains enthusiasm for the Dhamma,[8] gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is

gladdened, joy is born in him; being joyous in mind, his body becomes tranquil; his body being tranquil, he feels happiness; and the mind of him who is happy becomes concentrated.[9]

10. "He knows: 'I have given up, renounced, let go, abandoned and relinquished [the defilements] in part'; and he gains enthusiasm for the goal, gains enthusiasm for the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is gladdened, joy is born in him; being joyous in mind, his body becomes tranquil; when his body is tranquil, he feels happiness; and the mind of him who is happy becomes concentrated.

11. "If, monks, a monk of such virtue, such concentration and such wisdom[10] eats almsfood consisting of choice hill-rice together with various sauces and curries, even that will be no obstacle for him.[11]

"Just as cloth that is stained and dirty becomes clean and bright with the help of pure water, or just as gold becomes clean and bright with the help of a furnace, so too, if a monk of such virtue, such concentration and such wisdom eats almsfood consisting of choice hill-rice together with various sauces and curries, even that will be no obstacle for him.

12. "He abides, having suffused with a mind of loving-kindness[12] one direction of the world, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, and so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself; he abides suffusing the entire universe with loving-kindness, with a mind grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will.

"He abides, having suffused with a mind of compassion... of sympathetic joy... of equanimity one direction of the world, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, and so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself; he abides suffusing the entire universe with equanimity, with a mind grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will.

13. "He understands what exists, what is low, what is excellent,[13] and what escape there is from this [whole] field of perception.[14]

14. "When he knows and sees[15] in this way, his mind becomes liberated from the canker of sensual desire, liberated from the canker of becoming, liberated from the canker of ignorance.[16] When liberated, there is knowledge: 'It is liberated'; and he knows: 'Birth is exhausted, the life of purity has been lived, the task is done, there is no more of this to come.' Such a monk is called 'one bathed with the inner bathing."[17]

15. Now at that time the brahman Sundarika Bharadvaja[18] was seated not far from the Blessed One, and he spoke to the Blessed One thus: "But does Master Gotama go to the Bahuka River to bathe?"

"What good, brahman, is the Bahuka River? What can the Bahuka River do?"

"Truly, Master Gotama, many people believe that the Bahuka River gives purification, many people believe that the Bahuka River gives merit. For in the Bahuka River many people wash away the evil deeds they have done."

16. Then the Blessed One addressed the brahman Sundarika Bharadvaja in these stanzas:[19]

Bahuka and Adhikakka,[20] Gaya and Sundarika, Payaga and Sarassati, And the stream Bahumati — A fool may there forever bathe, Yet will not purify his black deeds. What can Sundarika bring to pass? What can the Payaga and the Bahuka? They cannot purify an evil-doer, A man performing brutal and cruel acts. One pure in heart has evermore The Feast of Cleansing[21] and the Holy Day;[22] One pure in heart who does good deeds Has his observances perfect for all times. It is here, O brahman, that you should bathe[23] To make yourself a safe refuge for all beings. And if you speak no untruth, Nor work any harm for breathing things, Nor take what is not offered, With faith and with no avarice, To Gaya gone, what would it do for you? Let any well your Gaya be!

17. When this was said, the brahman Sundarika Bharadvaja spoke thus:

"Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent, Master Gotama! The Dhamma has been made clear in many ways by Master Gotama, as though he were righting the overthrown, revealing the hidden, showing the way to one who is lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms.

18. "I go to Master Gotama for refuge, and to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha. May I receive the [first ordination of] going forth under Master Gotama, may I receive the full admission!

19. And the brahman Sundarika Bharadvaja received the [first ordination of] going forth under the Blessed One, and he received the full admission. And not long after his full admission, dwelling alone, secluded, diligent, ardent and resolute, the venerable Bharadvaja by his own realization understood and attained in this very life that supreme goal of the pure life, for which men of good family go forth from home life into homelessness. And he had direct knowledge thus: "Birth is exhausted, the pure life has been lived, the task is done, there is no more of this to come."

And the venerable Bharadvaja became one of the Arahats.

Notes

1.

"So too, monks, if the mind is defiled..." Comy: "It may be asked why the Buddha had given this simile of the soiled cloth. He did so to show that effort brings great results. A cloth soiled by dirt that is adventitious (i.e., comes from outside; agantukehi malehi), if it is washed can again become clean because of the cloth's natural purity. But in the case of

what is naturally black, as for instance (black) goat's fur, any effort (of washing it) will be in vain. Similarly, the mind too is soiled by adventitious defilements (agantukehi kilesehi). But originally, at the phases of rebirth(-consciousness) and the (sub-conscious) life-continuum, it is pure throughout (pakatiya pana sakale pi patisandhi-bhavanga-vare pandaram eva). As it was said (by the Enlightened One): 'This mind, monks, is luminous, but it becomes soiled by adventitious defilements' (AN 1.49). But by cleansing it one can make it more luminous, and effort therein is not in vain."

2.

"Defilements of the mind" (cittassa upakkilesa). Comy.: "When explaining the mental defilements, why did the Blessed One mention greed first? Because it arises first. For with all beings wherever they arise, up to the level of the (Brahma heaven of the) Pure Abodes, it is first greed that arises by way of lust for existence (bhava-nikanti). Then the other defilements will appear, being produced according to circumstances. The defilements of mind, however, are not limited to the sixteen mentioned in this discourse. But one should understand that, by indicating here the method, all defilements are included." Sub.Comy. mentions the following additional defilements: fear, cowardice, shamelessness and lack of scruples, insatiability, evil ambitions, etc.

3.

The Sixteen Defilements of Mind:

abhijjha-visama-lobha, covetousness and unrighteous greed

byapada, ill will

kodha, anger

upanaha, hostility or malice

makkha, denigration or detraction; contempt

palasa, domineering or presumption

issa, envy

macchariya, jealousy, or avarice; selfishness

maya, hypocrisy or deceit

satheyya, fraud

thambha, obstinacy, obduracy

sarambha, presumption or rivalry; impetuosity

mana, conceit

atimana, arrogance, haughtiness

mada, vanity or pride

pamada, negligence or heedlessness; in social behavior, this leads to lack of consideration.

The defilements (3) to (16) appear frequently as a group in the discourses, e.g., in Majjh. 3; while in Majjh. 8 (reproduced in this publication) No. 15 is omitted. A list of seventeen defilements appears regularly in each last discourse of Books 3 to 11 of the Anguttara Nikaya, which carry the title Ragapeyyala, the Repetitive Text on Greed (etc.). In these texts of the Anguttara Nikaya, the first two defilements in the above list are called greed (lobha) and hate (dosa), to which delusion (moha) is added; all the fourteen other defilements are identical with the above list.

4.

"Knowing covetousness and unrighteous greed to be a defilement of the mind, the monk abandons them."

Knowing (viditva). Sub.Comy.: "Having known it either through the incipient wisdom (pubbabhaga-paññā of the worldling, i.e., before attaining to stream-entry) or through the wisdom of the two lower paths (stream-entry and once-returning). He knows the defilements as to their nature, cause, cessation and means of effecting cessation." This application of the formula of the Four Noble Truths to the defilements deserves close attention.

Abandons them (pajahati). Comy.: "He abandons the respective defilement through (his attainment of) the noble path where there is 'abandoning by eradication' (samucchedappahana-vasena ariya-maggena)," which according to Sub.Comy. is the "final abandoning" (accantappahana). Before the attainment of the noble paths, all "abandoning" of defilements is of a temporary nature. See Nyanatiloka Thera, Buddhist Dictionary, s.v. pahana.

According to the Comy., the sixteen defilements are finally abandoned by the noble paths (or stages of sanctity) in the following order:

"By the path of stream-entry (sotapatti-magga) are abandoned: (5) denigration, (6) domineering, (7) envy, (8) jealousy, (9) hypocrisy, (10) fraud.

"By the path of non-returning (anagami-magga): (2) ill will, (3) anger, (4) malice, (16) negligence.

"By the path of Arahatship (arahatta-magga): (1) covetousness and unrighteous greed, (11) obstinacy, (12) presumption, (13) conceit, (14) arrogance, (15) vanity."

If, in the last group of terms, covetousness is taken in a restricted sense as referring only to the craving for the five sense objects, it is finally abandoned by the path of non-returning; and this is according to Comy. the meaning intended here. All greed, however, including the hankering after fine material and immaterial existence, is eradicated only on the path of Arahatship; hence the classification under the latter in the list above.

Comy. repeatedly stresses that wherever in our text "abandoning" is mentioned, reference is to the non-returner (anagami); for also in the case of defilements overcome on stream-entry (see above), the states of mind which produce those defilements are eliminated only by the path of non-returning.

5.

Comy. emphasizes the connection of this paragraph with the following, saying that the statements on each of the sixteen defilements should be connected with the next' paragraphs, e.g., "when in him... ill will has been abandoned, he thereupon gains unwavering confidence..." Hence the grammatical construction of the original Pali passage — though rather awkward in English — has been retained in this translation.

The disciple's direct experience of being freed of this or that defilement becomes for him a living test of his former still imperfectly proven trust in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Now this trust has become a firm conviction, an unshakable confidence, based on experience.

6.

"Unwavering confidence" (aveccappasada). Comy.: "unshakable and immutable trust." Confidence of that nature is not attained before stream-entry because only at that stage is the fetter of sceptical doubt (vicikiccha-samyojana) finally eliminated. Unwavering confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are three of four characteristic qualities of a stream-winner (sotapañña ssa angani); the fourth is unbroken morality, which may be taken to be implied in Sec. 9 of our discourse referring to the relinquishment of the defilements.

7.

"When he has given up...(the defilements) in part" (yatodhi): that is, to the extent to which the respective defilements are eliminated by the paths of sanctitude (see Note 4). Odhi: limit, limitation. yatodhi = yato odhi; another reading: yathodhi = yatha-odhi.

Bhikkhu Ñanamoli translates this paragraph thus: "And whatever (from among those imperfections) has, according to the limitation (set by whichever of the first three paths he has attained), been given up, has been (forever) dropped, let go, abandoned, relinquished. "

In the Vibhanga of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, we read in the chapter Jhana-vibhanga: "He is a bhikkhu because he has abandoned defilements limitedly; or because he has abandoned defilements without limitation" (odhiso kilesanam pahana bhikkhu; anodhiso kilesanam pahana bhikkhu).

8.

"Gains enthusiasm for the goal, gains enthusiasm for the Dhamma" (labhati atthavedam labhati dhammavedam).

Comy.: "When reviewing (paccavekkhato)* the abandonment of the defilements and his unwavering confidence, strong joy arises in the non-returner in the thought: 'Such and such defilements are now abandoned by me.' It is like the joy of a king who learns that a rebellion in the frontier region has been quelled."

*["Reviewing" (paccavekkhana) is a commentarial term, but is derived, apart from actual meditative experience, from close scrutiny of sutta passages like our present one. "Reviewing" may occur immediately after attainment of the jhanas or the paths and fruitions (e.g., the last sentence of Sec. 14), or as a reviewing of the defilements abandoned (as in Sec. 10) or those remaining. See Visuddhimagga, transl. by Ñanamoli, p. 789.]

Enthusiasm (veda). According to Comy., the word veda occurs in the Pali texts with three connotations: 1. (Vedic) scripture (gantha), 2. joy (somanassa), 3. knowledge (ñana). "Here it signifies joy and the knowledge connected with that joy."

Attha (rendered here as "goal") and dhamma are a frequently occurring pair of terms obviously intended to supplement each other. Often they mean letter (dhamma) and spirit (or meaning: attha) of the doctrine; but this hardly fits here. These two terms occur also among the four kinds of analytic knowledge (patisambhida-ñana; or knowledge of doctrinal discrimination). Attha-patisambhida is explained as the discriminative knowledge of "the result of a cause"; while dhamma-patisambhida is concerned with the cause or condition.

The Comy. applies now the same interpretation to our present textual passage, saying: "Attha-veda is the enthusiasm arisen in him who reviews his unwavering confidence; dhamma-veda is the enthusiasm arisen in him who reviews 'the abandonment of the defilement in part,' which is the cause of that unwavering confidence..." Hence the two terms refer to "the joy that has as its object the unwavering confidence in the Buddha, and so forth; and the joy inherent in the knowledge (of the abandonment; somanassa-maya ñana)."

Our rendering of attha (Skt.:artha) b; "goal" is supported by Comy.: "The unwavering confidence is called attha because it has to be reached (araniyato), i.e., to be approached (upagantabbato)," in the sense of a limited goal, or resultant blessing.

Cf. Ang 5:10: tasmim dhamme attha-patisamvedi ca hoti dhammapatisamvedi ca; tassa atthapatisamvedino dhammapatisamvedino pamojjam jayati... This text continues, as our present discourse does, with the arising of joy (or rapture; piti) from gladness (pamojja). Attha and dhamma refer here to the meaning and text of the Buddha word.

9.

The Pali equivalents for this series of terms* are: 1. pamojja (gladness), 2. piti (joy or rapture), 3. passaddhi (tranquillity), 4. sukha (happiness), 5. samadhi (concentration). Nos. 2, 3, 5 are factors of enlightenment (bojjhanga). The function of tranquillity is here the calming of any slight bodily and mental unrest resulting from rapturous joy, and so transforming the latter into serene happiness followed by meditative absorption. This frequently occurring passage illustrates the importance given in the Buddha's Teaching to happiness as a necessary condition for the attainment of concentration and of spiritual progress in general.

* [Here the noun forms are given, while the original has, in some cases, the verbal forms.]

10.

"Of such virtue, such concentration, such wisdom" (evam-silo evam-dhammo evam-pañño). Comy.: "This refers to the (three) parts (of the Noble Eightfold Path), namely, virtue, concentration and wisdom (sila-, samadhi-, pañña-kkhandha), associated (here) with the path of non-returning." Comy. merely refers dhammo to the path-category of concentration (samadhi-kkhandha). Sub.Comy. quotes a parallel passage "evam-dhamma ti Bhagavanto ahesum," found in the Mahapadana Sutta (Digha 14), the Acchariya-abbhutadhamma Sutta (Majjh. 123), and the Nalanda Sutta of the Satipatthana Samyutta. The Digha Comy. explains samadhi-pakkha-dhamma as "mental states belonging to concentration."

11.

"No obstacle," i.e., for the attainment of the path and fruition (of Arahatship), says Comy. For a non-returner who has eliminated the fetter of sense-desire, there is no attachment to tasty food.

12.

"With a mind of Loving-kindness" (metta-sahagatena cetasa). This, and the following, refer to the four Divine Abidings (brahma-vihara). On these see Wheel Nos. 6 and 7.

13.

"He understands what exists, what is low, what is excellent" (so 'atthi idam atthi hinam atthi panitam...' pajanati).

Comy.: "Having shown the non-returner's meditation on the Divine Abidings, the Blessed One now shows his practice of insight (vipassana), aiming at Arahatship; and he indicates his attainment of it by the words: 'He understands what exists,' etc. This non-returner, having arisen from the meditation on any of the four Divine Abidings, defines as 'mind' (nama) those very states of the Divine Abidings and the mental factors associated with them. He then defines as 'matter' (rupa) the heart base (hadaya-vatthu) being the physical support (of mind) and the four elements which, on their part, are the support of the heart base. In that way he defines as 'matter' the elements and corporeal phenomena derived from them (bhutupadayadhamma). When defining 'mind and matter' in this manner, 'he understands what exists' (atthi idan'ti; lit. 'There is this'). Hereby a definition of the truth of suffering has been given."

"Then, in comprehending the origin of that suffering, he understands 'what is low.' Thereby the truth of the origin of suffering has been defined. Further, by investigating the means of giving it up, he understands 'what is excellent. Hereby the truth of the path has been defined."

14.

"... and what escape there is from this (whole) field of perception" (atthi uttari imassa saññaga-tassa nissaranam). Comy.: "He knows: 'There is Nibbana as an escape beyond that perception of the Divine Abidings attained by me.' Hereby the truth of cessation has been defined."

15.

Comy.: "When, by insight-wisdom (vipassana), he thus knows the Four Noble Truths in these four ways (i.e., 'what exists,' etc.); and when he thus sees them by path-wisdom (magga-paññña).

16.

Kamasava bhavasava avijjasava. The mention of liberation from the cankers (asava) indicates the monk's attainment of Arahatship which is also called "exhaustion of the cankers" (asavakkhaya).

17.

"Bathed with the inner bathing" (sinato antarena sinanena). According to the Comy., the Buddha used this phrase to rouse the attention of the brahman Sundarika Bharadvaja, who was in the assembly and who believed in purification by ritual bathing. The Buddha foresaw that if he were to speak in praise of "purification by bathing," the brahman would feel inspired to take ordination under him and finally attain to Arahatship.

18.

Bharadvaja was the clan name of the brahman. Sundarika was the name of the river to which that brahman ascribed purifying power. See also the Sundarika-Bharadvaja Sutta in the Sutta Nipata.

19.

Based on Bhikkhu Ñanamoli's version, with a few alterations.

20.

Three are fords; the other four are rivers.

21.

The text has Phaggu which is a day of brahmanic purification in the month of Phagguna (February-March). Ñanamoli translates it as "Feast of Spring."

22.

Uposatha.

23.

"It is here, 0 brahman, that you should bathe." Comy.: i.e., in the Buddha's Dispensation, in the waters of the Noble Eightfold Path. In the Psalms of the Sisters (Therigatha), the nun Punnika speaks to a brahman as follows:

Nay now, who, ignorant to the ignorant, Hath told thee this: that water-baptism From evil kamma can avail to free? Why then the fishes and the tortoises, The frogs, the watersnake, the crocodiles And all that haunt the water straight to heaven Will go. Yea, all who evil kamma work — Butchers of sheep and swine, fishers, hunters of game, Thieves, murderers — so they but splash themselves With water, are from evil kamma free!

— Transl. by C. A. F. Rhys Davids, from Early Buddhist Poetry, ed. I. B. Horner Publ. by Ananda Semage, Colombo 11