MN 101 — MN 101 At Devadaha | Devadaha Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

At Devadaha

Devadaha Sutta (MN 101)

Introduction

In this sutta, the Buddha refutes the theories of the Jains—here called the Nigaṇṭhas—an order of contemplatives flourishing in India during his time. Although on the surface this sutta may seem to be of strictly historical interest, it makes two important points that are very relevant to some common misunderstandings about Buddhism alive today.

The first point concerns the Buddhist teaching on action, or kamma (karma). The general understanding of this teaching is that actions from the past determine present pleasure

and pain, while present actions determine future pleasure and pain. Or, to quote a recent book devoted to the topic, "Karma is the moral principle that governs human conduct. It declares that our present experience is conditioned by our past conduct and that our present conduct will condition our future experience." This, however, does not accurately describe the Buddha's teaching on karma, and is instead a fairly accurate account of the Nigaṇṭha teaching, which the Buddha explicitly refutes here. As he interrogates the Nigaṇṭhas, he makes the point that if all pleasure and pain experienced in the present were determined by past action, why is it that they now feel the pain of harsh treatment when they practice asceticism, and no pain of harsh treatment when they don't? If past action were the sole determining factor, then present action should have no effect on their present experience of pleasure or pain.

In this way, the Buddha points to one of the most distinctive features of his own teaching on kamma: that the present experience of pleasure and pain is a combined result of both past and present actions. This seemingly small addition to the notion of kamma plays an enormous role in allowing for the exercise of free will and the possibility of putting an end to suffering before the effects of all past actions have ripened. In other words, this addition is what makes Buddhist practice possible, and makes it possible for a person who has completed the practice to survive and teach it with full authority to others. For more on these points, see the articles, "Karma," "A Refuge in Skillful Action," and "Five Piles of Bricks"; see also the Introduction to The Wings to awakening, along with the introductions to the sections on Skillfulness and Kamma & the End of Kamma in that book.

The second important point touched on in this sutta—how to put an end to pain and suffering—relates to the first. If the cause of present suffering were located exclusively in the past, no one could do anything in the present moment to stop that suffering; the most that could be done would be to endure the suffering while not creating any new kamma leading to future suffering. Although this was the Jain approach to practice, many people at present believe that it is the Buddhist approach as well. Meditation, according to this understanding, is the process of purifying the mind of old kamma by training it to look on with non-reactive equanimity as pain arises. The pain is the result of old kamma, the equanimity adds no new kamma, and thus over time all old kamma can be burned away.

In this sutta, however, the Buddha heaps ridicule on this idea. First he notes that none of the Nigaṇṭhas have ever come to the end of pain by trying to burn it away in this way; then he notes that they have based their belief in this practice entirely on their faith in their teacher and their approval of his ideas, but neither faith nor approval can act as guarantees of the truth. As he illustrates with his simile of the man shot with an arrow, only a person who has succeeded in going beyond pain would be in a position to speak with authority of the method that actually puts an end to pain. (What is not mentioned in this sutta is the Nigaṇṭha idea that the practice of austerities, to succeed completely in burning away old kamma, must culminate in a suicide by starvation. Thus there could be no living person who would be able to vouch for the efficacy of their method.)

The Buddha then provides his own account of how meditation actually works in putting an end to pain and suffering. His discussion shows that the problem underlying pain is not

past action, but passion—in the present—for the causes of pain. In other words, pain is not inevitable. Present suffering can be prevented by changing one's understanding of, and attitude toward, the cause of suffering in the present. The Buddha illustrates this principle with the simile of a man in love with a woman: As long as he feels passion for her, he will suffer when he sees her enjoying the company of another man; when, seeing the connection between his suffering and his passion, he abandons that passion, he will no longer suffer from that cause.

Thus the practice must focus on ways to understand and bring about dispassion for the causes of stress and pain here and now. As the Buddha points out in MN 106, equanimity plays an important role in this practice, but it can also become an object for passion and delight, which would then stand in the way of true release. Thus he notes here that, in some cases, dispassion can arise simply from on-looking equanimity directed at the causes of stress. In other cases, it can come only through exertion: the mental effort—through the fabrications of directed thought, evaluation, and perception—to develop the discernment needed to see through and abandon any and all passion.

The remainder of the sutta is devoted to a standard map of how the practice develops over time, showing how the proper mixture of on-looking equanimity combined with fabrication and exertion can lead to dispassion, and through dispassion to release from all stress and suffering.

* * *

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyans. Now the Sakyans have a city named Devadaha, and there the Blessed One addressed the monks: "Monks!"

"Yes, lord," the monks responded to him.

The Blessed One said, "Monks, there are some contemplatives & brahmans who teach in this way, who have this view: 'Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted.' Such is the teaching of the Niganṭhas.

"Going to Niganṭhas who teach in this way, I have asked them, 'Is it true, friend Niganṭhas, that you teach in this way, that you have this view: "Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress

will be exhausted"?'

"Having been asked this by me, the Nigaṇṭhas admitted it, 'Yes.'

"So I said to them, 'But friends, do you know that you existed in the past, and that you did not not exist?'

"'No, friend.'

"'And do you know that you did evil actions in the past, and that you did not not do them?'

"'No, friend.'

"'And do you know that you did such-and-such evil actions in the past?'

"'No, friend.'

"'And do you know that so-and-so much stress has been exhausted, or that so-and-so much stress remains to be exhausted, or that with the exhaustion of so-and-so much stress all stress will be exhausted?'

"'No, friend.'

"'But do you know what is the abandoning of unskillful qualities and the attainment of skillful qualities in the here & now?'

"'No, friend.'

"'So, friends, it seems that you don't know that you existed in the past, and that you did not not exist... you don't know what is the abandoning of unskillful qualities and the attainment of skillful qualities in the here & now. That being the case, it is not proper for you to assert that, "Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted."

"'If, however, you knew that you existed in the past, and that you did not not exist; if you knew that you did evil actions in the past, and that you did not not do them; if you knew that you did such-and-such evil actions in the past; you don't know that so-and-so much stress has been exhausted, or that so-and-so much stress remains to be exhausted, or that with the exhaustion of so-and-so much stress all stress will be exhausted; if you knew what is the abandoning of unskillful qualities and the attainment of skillful qualities in the here & now, then—that being the case—it would be proper for you to assert that, "Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what

was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted."

"'Friend Nigaṇṭhas, it's as if a man were shot with an arrow thickly smeared with poison. As a result of being shot with the arrow, he would feel fierce, sharp, racking pains. His friends & companions, kinsmen & relatives would provide him with a surgeon. The surgeon would cut around the opening of the wound with a knife. As a result of the surgeon's cutting around the opening of the wound with a knife, the man would feel fierce, sharp, racking pains. The surgeon would probe for the arrow with a probe. As a result of the surgeon's probing for the arrow with a probe, the man would feel fierce, sharp, racking pains. The surgeon would then pull out the arrow. As a result of the surgeon's pulling out the arrow, the man would feel fierce, sharp, racking pains. The surgeon would then apply a burning medicine to the mouth of the wound. As a result of the surgeon's applying a burning medicine to the mouth of the wound, the man would feel fierce, sharp, racking pains. But then at a later time, when the wound had healed and was covered with skin, he would be well & happy, free, master of himself, able to go wherever he liked. The thought would occur to him, "Before, I was shot with an arrow thickly smeared with poison. As a result of being shot with the arrow, I felt fierce, sharp, racking pains. My friends & companions, kinsmen & relatives provided me with a surgeon... The surgeon cut around the opening of the wound with a knife... probed for the arrow with a probe... pulled out the arrow... applied a burning medicine to the mouth of the wound. As a result of his applying a burning medicine to the mouth of the wound, I felt fierce, sharp, racking pains. But now that the wound is healed and covered with skin, I am well & happy, free, master of myself, able to go wherever I like."

"'In the same way, friend Nigaṇṭhas, if you knew that you existed in the past, and that you did not not exist... if you knew what is the abandoning of unskillful qualities and the attainment of skillful qualities in the here & now, then—that being the case—it would be proper for you to assert that, "Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted." But because you do not know that you existed in the past... you do not know what is the abandoning of unskillful qualities and the attainment of skillful qualities in the here & now, then—that being the case—it is not proper for you to assert that, "Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted."

“When this was said, the Nigaṇṭhas said to me, ‘Friend, the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta [the leader of the Nigaṇṭhas] is all-knowing, all-seeing, and claims total knowledge & vision thus: “Whether I am walking or standing, sleeping or awake, knowledge & vision are continuously & continually established in me.” He has told us, “Nigaṇṭhas, there are evil actions that you have done in the past. Exhaust them with these painful austerities. When in the present you are restrained in body, restrained in speech, and restrained in mind, that is the non-doing of evil action for the future. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted.” We approve of that (teaching), prefer it, and are gratified by it.’

“When this was said, I said to the Nigaṇṭhas, ‘Friend Nigaṇṭhas, there are five things that can turn out in two ways in the here & now. Which five? Conviction, liking, unbroken tradition, reasoning by analogy, & an agreement through pondering views. These are the five things that can turn out in two ways in the here & now. That being the case, what kind of conviction do you have for your teacher with regard to the past? What kind of liking? What kind of unbroken tradition? What kind of reasoning by analogy? What kind of agreement through pondering views?’ But when I said this, I did not see that the Nigaṇṭhas had any legitimate defense of their teaching.

“So I asked them further, ‘Friend Nigaṇṭhas, what do you think? When there is fierce striving, fierce exertion, do you feel fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment? And when there is no fierce striving, no fierce exertion, do you feel no fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment?’

“‘Yes, friend…’

“‘… Then it’s not proper for you to assert that, “Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted.”

“‘If it were the case that when there was fierce striving, fierce exertion, you felt fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment; and when there was no fierce striving, no fierce exertion, you still felt fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment, then—that being the case—it would be proper for you to assert that, “Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted.” But because when there is fierce striving, fierce exertion, you feel

fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment; and when there was no fierce striving, no fierce exertion, you feel no fierce, sharp, racking pains from harsh treatment, then—that being the case—it is not proper for you to assert that, "Whatever a person experiences—pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain—all is caused by what was done in the past. Thus, with the destruction of old actions through asceticism, and with the non-doing of new actions, there will be no flow into the future. With no flow into the future, there is the ending of action. With the ending of action, the ending of stress. With the ending of stress, the ending of feeling. With the ending of feeling, all suffering & stress will be exhausted.'" But when I said this, I did not see that the Nigaṇṭhas had any legitimate defense of their teaching.

"So I asked them further, 'Friend Nigaṇṭhas, what do you think? Can an action to be experienced in the here & now be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action to be experienced in the future life?'

"'No, friend.'

"'Can an action to be experienced in the future life be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action to be experienced in the here & now?'

"'No, friend.'

"What do you think? Can an action to be experienced as pleasure be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action to be experienced as pain?'

"'No, friend.'

"'Can an action to be experienced as pain be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action to be experienced as pleasure?'

"'No, friend.'

"What do you think? Can an action ripe to be experienced be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action not ripe to be experienced?'

"'No, friend.'

"'Can an action not ripe to be experienced be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action ripe to be experienced?'

"'No, friend.'

"What do you think? Can an action greatly to be experienced be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action barely to be experienced?'

"'No, friend.'

“‘Can an action barely to be experienced be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action greatly to be experienced?’

“‘No, friend.’

“What do you think? Can an action to be experienced be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action not to be experienced?’

“‘No, friend.’

“‘Can an action not to be experienced be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action to be experienced?’

“‘No, friend.’

“‘So, friends, it seems that an action to be experienced in the here & now cannot be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action to be experienced in the future life. An action to be experienced in the future life cannot be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action to be experienced in the here & now.... An action to be experienced cannot be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action not to be experienced. An action not to be experienced cannot be turned, through striving & exertion, into an action to be experienced. That being the case, the striving of the Nigaṇṭhas is fruitless, their exertion is fruitless.’

“Such is the teaching of the Nigaṇṭhas. And, such being the teaching of the Nigaṇṭhas, ten legitimate deductions can be drawn that give grounds for censuring them.

“[1] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on what was done in the past, then obviously the Nigaṇṭhas have done bad things in the past, which is why they now feel such fierce, sharp, racking pains.

“[2] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on the creative act of a supreme god, then obviously the Nigaṇṭhas have been created by an evil supreme god, which is why they now feel such fierce, sharp, racking pains.

“[3] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on sheer luck, then obviously the Nigaṇṭhas have evil luck, which is why they now feel such fierce, sharp, racking pains.

“[4] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on birth, then obviously the Nigaṇṭhas have had an evil birth, which is why they now feel such fierce, sharp, racking pains.

“[5] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on efforts in the here & now, then obviously the Nigaṇṭhas have evil efforts in the here & now, which is why they now feel such fierce, sharp, racking pains.

“[6] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on what was done in the past, the Niganṭhas deserve censure. Even if not, they still deserve censure.

“[7] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on the creative act of a supreme god, the Niganṭhas deserve censure. Even if not, they still deserve censure.

“[8] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on sheer luck, the Niganṭhas deserve censure. Even if not, they still deserve censure.

“[9] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on birth, the Niganṭhas deserve censure. Even if not, they still deserve censure.

“[10] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on efforts in the here & now, the Niganṭhas deserve censure. Even if not, they still deserve censure.

“Such is the teaching of the Niganṭhas, monks. And, such being the teaching of the Niganṭhas, these ten legitimate deductions can be drawn that give grounds for censuring them. This is how striving is fruitless, how exertion is fruitless.

“And how is striving fruitful, how is exertion fruitful? There is the case where a monk, when not loaded down, does not load himself down with pain, nor does he reject pleasure that accords with the Dhamma, although he is not infatuated on that pleasure. He discerns that ‘When I exert a [physical, verbal, or mental] fabrication against this cause of stress, then from the fabrication of exertion there is dispassion. When I look on with equanimity at that cause of stress, then from the development of equanimity there is dispassion.’ So he exerts a fabrication against the cause of stress for which dispassion comes from the fabrication of exertion, and develops equanimity with regard to the cause of stress for which dispassion comes from the development of equanimity. Thus the stress coming from the cause of stress where there is dispassion from the fabrication of exertion is exhausted, and the stress coming from the cause of stress where there is dispassion from the development of equanimity is exhausted.

“Suppose that a man is in love with a woman, his mind ensnared with fierce desire, fierce passion. He sees her standing with another man, chatting, joking, & laughing. What do you think, monks? As he sees her standing with another man, chatting, joking, & laughing, would sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair arise in him?”

“Yes, lord. Why is that? Because he is in love with her, his mind ensnared with fierce desire, fierce passion....”

“Now suppose the thought were to occur to him, ‘I am in love with this woman, my mind ensnared with fierce desire, fierce passion. When I see her standing with another man, chatting, joking, & laughing, then sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair arise within me. Why don’t I abandon my desire & passion for that woman?’ So he abandons his desire & passion for that woman, and afterwards sees her standing with another man, chatting, joking, & laughing. What do you think, monks? As he sees her standing with

another man, chatting, joking, & laughing, would sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair arise in him?"

"No, lord. Why is that? He is dispassionate toward that woman...."

"In the same way, the monk, when not loaded down, does not load himself down with pain, nor does he reject pleasure that accords with the Dhamma, although he is not infatuated with that pleasure. He discerns that 'When I exert a [physical, verbal, or mental] fabrication against this cause of stress, then from the fabrication of exertion there is dispassion. When I look on with equanimity at that cause of stress, then from the development of equanimity there is dispassion.' So he exerts a fabrication against the cause of stress for which dispassion comes from the fabrication of exertion, and develops equanimity with regard to the cause of stress for which dispassion comes from the development of equanimity. Thus the stress coming from the cause of stress where there is dispassion from the fabrication of exertion is exhausted, and the stress coming from the cause of stress where there is dispassion from the development of equanimity is exhausted.

"And further, the monk notices this: 'When I live according to my pleasure, unskillful qualities increase in me & skillful qualities decline. When I exert myself with stress & pain, though, unskillful qualities decline in me & skillful qualities increase. Why don't I exert myself with stress & pain?' So he exerts himself with stress & pain, and while he is exerting himself with stress & pain, unskillful qualities decline in him, & skillful qualities increase. Then at a later time he would no longer exert himself with stress & pain. Why is that? Because he has attained the goal for which he was exerting himself with stress & pain. That is why, at a later time, he would no longer exert himself with stress & pain.

"Suppose a fletcher were to heat & warm an arrow shaft between two flames, making it straight & pliable. Then at a later time he would no longer heat & warm the shaft between two flames, making it straight & pliable. Why is that? Because he has attained the goal for which he was heating & warming the shaft. That is why at a later time he would no longer heat & warm the shaft between two flames, making it straight & pliable.

"In the same way, the monk notices this: 'When I live according to my pleasure, unskillful qualities increase in me & skillful qualities decline. When I exert myself with stress & pain, though, unskillful qualities decline in me & skillful qualities increase. Why don't I exert myself with stress & pain?' So he exerts himself with stress & pain, and while he is exerting himself with stress & pain, unskillful qualities decline in him, & skillful qualities increase. Then at a later time he would no longer exert himself with stress & pain. Why is that? Because he has attained the goal for which he was exerting himself with stress & pain. That is why, at a later time, he would no longer exert himself with stress & pain.

"This is how striving is fruitful, how exertion is fruitful.

"And further, there is the case where a Tathāgata appears in the world, worthy & rightly self-awakened. He teaches the Dhamma admirable in its beginning, admirable in its middle, admirable in its end. He proclaims the holy life both in its particulars and in its

essence, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure.

“A householder or householder’s son, hearing the Dhamma, gains conviction in the Tathāgata and reflects: ‘Household life is confining, a dusty path. Life gone forth is the open air. It isn’t easy, living at home, to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, a polished shell. What if I, having shaved off my hair & beard and putting on the ochre robe, were to go forth from the household life into homelessness?’

“So after some time he abandons his mass of wealth, large or small; leaves his circle of relatives, large or small; shaves off his hair and beard, puts on the ochre robes, and goes forth from the household life into homelessness.

Virtue

“When he has thus gone forth, endowed with the monks’ training & livelihood, then—abandoning the taking of life—he abstains from the taking of life. He dwells with his rod laid down, his knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings.

“Abandoning the taking of what is not given, he abstains from taking what is not given. He takes only what is given, accepts only what is given, lives not by stealth but by means of a self that has become pure. This, too, is part of his virtue.

“Abandoning uncelibacy, he lives a celibate life, aloof, refraining from the sexual act that is the villager’s way.

“Abandoning false speech, he abstains from false speech. He speaks the truth, holds to the truth, is firm, reliable, no deceiver of the world.

“Abandoning divisive speech he abstains from divisive speech. What he has heard here he does not tell there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he does not tell here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus reconciling those who have broken apart or cementing those who are united, he loves concord, delights in concord, enjoys concord, speaks things that create concord.

“Abandoning abusive speech, he abstains from abusive speech. He speaks words that are soothing to the ear, that are affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing and pleasing to people at large.

“Abandoning idle chatter, he abstains from idle chatter. He speaks in season, speaks what is factual, what is in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, and the Vinaya. He speaks words worth treasuring, seasonable, reasonable, circumscribed, connected with the goal.

“He abstains from damaging seed and plant life.

“He eats only once a day, refraining from the evening meal and from food at the wrong time of day.

“He abstains from dancing, singing, instrumental music, and from watching shows.

“He abstains from wearing garlands and from beautifying himself with scents and cosmetics.

“He abstains from high & luxurious beds and seats.

“He abstains from accepting gold & money.

“He abstains from accepting uncooked grain… raw meat… women & girls… male & female slaves… goats & sheep… fowl & pigs… elephants, cattle, steeds, & mares… fields & property.

“He abstains from running messages… from buying & selling… from dealing with false scales, false metals, & false measures… from bribery, deception, & fraud.

“He abstains from mutilating, executing, imprisoning, highway robbery, plunder, & violence.

“He is content with a set of robes to provide for his body and alms food to provide for his hunger. Just as a bird, wherever it goes, flies with its wings as its only burden; so too is he content with a set of robes to provide for his body and alms food to provide for his hunger. Wherever he goes, he takes only his barest necessities along.

“Endowed with this noble aggregate of virtue, he is inwardly sensitive to the pleasure of being blameless.

Sense Restraint

“On seeing a form with the eye, he does not grasp at any theme or details by which—if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the eye—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. On hearing a sound with the ear…. On smelling an aroma with the nose…. On tasting a flavor with the tongue…. On touching a tactile sensation with the body…. On cognizing an idea with the intellect, he does not grasp at any theme or details by which—if he were to dwell without restraint over the faculty of the intellect—evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him. Endowed with this noble restraint over the sense faculties, he is inwardly sensitive to the pleasure of being blameless.

Mindfulness & Alertness

“When going forward & returning, he acts with alertness. When looking toward & looking away… when bending & extending his limbs… when carrying his outer cloak, upper robe,

& bowl… when eating, drinking, chewing, & tasting… when urinating & defecating… when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, he acts with alertness.

Abandoning the Hindrances

“Endowed with this noble aggregate of virtue, this noble restraint over the sense faculties, this noble mindfulness & alertness, he seeks out a secluded dwelling: a wilderness, the shade of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a heap of straw. After his meal, returning from his alms round, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body erect, and brings mindfulness to the fore.

“Abandoning covetousness with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will and anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic with the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will and anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth and drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth and drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness and anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty.

The Four Jhānas

“Having abandoned these five hindrances—imperfections of awareness that weaken discernment—then, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters and remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. This, too, is how striving is fruitful, how exertion is fruitful.

“Then, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters and remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. This, too, is how striving is fruitful, how exertion is fruitful.

“Then, with the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters and remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ This, too, is how striving is fruitful, how exertion is fruitful.

“Then, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—he enters and remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This, too, is how striving is fruitful, how exertion is fruitful.

The Three Knowledges

“With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives [lit: previous homes]. He recollects his manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two births, three births, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction and expansion, (recollecting,) ‘There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.’ Thus he recollects his manifold past lives in their modes and details. This, too, is how striving is fruitful, how exertion is fruitful.

“With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge of the passing away and re-appearance of beings. He sees—by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human—beings passing away & reappearing, and he discerns how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: ‘These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, & mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a good destination, a heavenly world.’ Thus—by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human—he sees beings passing away & reappearing, and he discerns how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma. This, too, is how striving is fruitful, how exertion is fruitful.

“With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, the monk directs and inclines it to the knowledge of the ending of effluents. He discerns, as it is has come to be, that ‘This is stress… This is the origination of stress… This is the cessation of stress… This is the way leading to the cessation of stress… These are effluents… This is the origination of effluents… This is the cessation of effluents… This is the way leading to the cessation of effluents.’ His heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, is released from the effluent of sensuality, the effluent of becoming, the effluent of ignorance. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’ This, too, is how striving is fruitful, how exertion is fruitful.

“Such is the teaching of the Tathāgata. And, such being the teaching of the Tathāgata, ten legitimate deductions can be drawn that give grounds for praising him.

“[1] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on what was done in the past, then obviously the Tathāgata has done good things in the past, which is why he now feels such pleasure free from effluents.

“[2] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on the creative act of a supreme god, then obviously the Tathāgata has been created by an excellent supreme god, which is why he now feels such pleasure free from effluents.

“[3] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on sheer luck, then obviously the Tathāgata has admirable luck, which is why he now feels such pleasure free from effluents.

“[4] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on birth, then obviously the Tathāgata has had an admirable birth, which is why he now feels such pleasure free from effluents.

“[5] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on efforts in the here & now, then obviously the Tathāgata has admirable efforts in the here & now, which is why he now feels such pleasure free from effluents.

“[6] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on what was done in the past, the Tathāgata deserves praise. Even if not, he still deserves praise.

“[7] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on the creative act of a supreme god Tathāgata deserves praise. Even if not, he still deserves praise.

“[8] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on sheer luck, the Tathāgata deserves praise. Even if not, he still deserves praise.

“[9] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on birth, Tathāgata deserves praise. Even if not, he still deserves praise.

“[10] If beings experience pleasure & pain based on efforts in the here & now, the Tathāgata deserves praise. Even if not, he still deserves praise.

“Such is the teaching of the Tathāgata. And, such being the teaching of the Tathāgata, these ten legitimate deductions can be drawn that give grounds for praising him.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 14; MN 26; MN 78; SN 35:145; SN 36:21; SN 42:8; SN 42:11; SN 46:53; SN 47:8; SN 51:20; AN 3:62; AN 3:99; AN 3:103; AN 9:13; AN 10:54