MN 11 — MN 11 The Shorter Lion’s Roar Discourse | Cūḷasīhanāda Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The Shorter Lion’s Roar Discourse

Cūḷasīhanāda Sutta (MN 11)

Introduction

In this sutta, the Buddha focuses on two points that, he says, distinguish his Dhamma from the teachings of all others. These points are so important that they account for why awakening can be found by following his teachings, but not the teachings of other contemplatives and brahmans.

The first point is his explanation of how to escape from two types of view: a view of becoming—one that teaches the survival of the self, in one form or another, after death—and a view of non-becoming: one that teaches the annihilation of the self after death.

The second point is the complete comprehension of clinging that his teaching provides. Other teachings, the Buddha says, may teach the comprehension of up to three types of clinging—sensuality clinging, view clinging, habit-&-practice clinging—but none of them teach the comprehension of a fourth: doctrine-of-self clinging. It's because he teaches the comprehension of all four types of clinging that those who follow his teachings can achieve the various stages of awakening.

When we look more closely at his discussion of these two points, however, we find that the first point derives from the second: You can escape from views of becoming and non-becoming only by comprehending doctrine-of-self clinging. At the same time, this act of comprehending is nothing other than seeing experience in terms of another one of the Buddha's teachings: dependent co-arising (paṭicca samuppada). This way of seeing experience is, ultimately, what sets his Dhamma apart.

Dependent co-arising focuses on the decisive role played by knowledge in terms of the four noble truths in putting an end to clinging, and it's in light of these truths—and the duties appropriate to each—that the importance of the two points highlighted in this sutta is best understood.

The second noble truth provides the context for the first point. It describes how suffering is caused by any form of craving that leads to further becoming—"becoming" meaning the assumption of an identity in a particular world of experience. There are three types of craving that play this role: craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, and craving for non-becoming. It's easy to see how the first two types of craving might result in becoming, but the way in which craving for non-becoming would also function in this way is less intuitive. Nevertheless, the Buddha stated that one of the most important insights of his awakening was that the act of searching for non-becoming actually entailed further becoming (MN 49).

Two passages in the Canon that quote views of non-becoming give a clue as to why: Both define annihilation in terms of the annihilation of a self (MN 102; Iti 49). The fact that both assume a self—a definition of an identity—shows that those who formulate these desires are still thinking in terms of becoming, and these terms will lead them to cling at death, assuming an identity around annihilation and oblivion, which could easily lead them to be reborn in a state of non-perception. This state, though oblivious, nevertheless counts as a state of becoming. On leaving it, the individual then resumes becoming on more conscious levels (DN 1; DN 15).

The role played by the concept of self in these views of becoming and non-becoming leads to the second point—the importance of comprehending doctrine-of-self clinging—as does the Buddha's statement in this sutta that a person who has escaped from views of

becoming and non-becoming has to be someone who is without clinging. The first noble truth defines suffering as clinging to any of the five aggregates, and SN 56:11 points out that the duty with regard to suffering is to comprehend it. Only then can it be transcended. According to SN 22:23, comprehension means understanding in a way that ends passion, aversion, and delusion for what is comprehended. This means that suffering cannot be ended until passion, aversion, and delusion around clinging in all forms related to the aggregates is brought to an end. Now, given the role played by an assumption of self in leading to further becoming, it's obvious that clinging cannot be fully comprehended unless the act of clinging to an assumption framed in terms of "self" is encompassed as well.

Thus the importance of these two points.

This leads, however, to a further question: What is the Buddha's strategy for implementing these two points? In other words, how does he avoid views of becoming and non-becoming? And how does he propose to end passion, aversion, and delusion for all doctrines of the self? Both issues present tactical challenges, for it would be all too easy to end passion for a particular view or doctrine by developing aversion for it, which would mean that it wasn't fully comprehended. At the same time, adopting an agnostic position toward views and doctrines—saying, for instance, that one doesn't know what happens to the self after death—would count as delusion. And as the Buddha himself points out in DN 1 and SN 22:81, agnosticism is a view that can be an object of clinging as much as any other view.

With regard to the first point: The Buddha follows at least two strategies in dealing with views about what happens at death. On a basic level, he explains the process of rebirth without reference to a self. In other words, he discusses how rebirth happens without defining what gets reborn (SN 44:9), for knowledge of the how is sufficient for putting an end to the process. On a more subtle level, he focuses not on the position taken by a view about survival after death, but on the act of creating and clinging to such a view.

He explains this approach in a variety of ways in different suttas. Here in MN 11, he divides his analysis into two parts. The first part comes right after the definition of the two types of views. There he states simply that those who discern, as they have come to be, the origination, the passing away, the allure, the drawbacks of—and the escape from—these two views are free from clinging and craving, and so are released from suffering and stress.

The second part of this analysis comes at the end of the sutta, where the Buddha analyzes the origination and passing away of views by listing the causal factors in dependent co-arising that lead to the act of clinging—including the act of clinging to views—tracing them back to ignorance. According to SN 12:2, ignorance in this context means "not knowing stress, not knowing the origination of stress, not knowing the cessation of stress, not knowing the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress," i.e., not knowing the four noble truths. Because all clinging ends when ignorance ends and clear-knowing arises, clinging to views ends when one has mastered the duties appropriate to each of

these truths (see SN 56:11). In other words, the true abandoning of views comes not through agnosticism but through knowledge of the processes by which views are formed and of the way to bring those processes to an end. The escape from views occurs when there is dispassion for ignorance and all the factors it engenders.

Other suttas help to further flesh out the four steps leading to escape from views. MN 102, for instance, lists various views of becoming and non-becoming, explaining the allure of some of those views by quoting the arguments their proponents give for them. It also points out the major drawback of views of non-becoming, observing that they inevitably lead to further becoming. DN 1 explains that all views originate in contact, and pass away when contact ceases. This is a step in dependent co-arising. The same sutta also discusses the drawbacks of views in terms of the destination to which they lead. This relates to the Buddha's insight on the night of his awakening, that views influence actions, and actions influence the way beings are reborn (MN 4). AN 10:93 points out the present-moment drawbacks of clinging to views: Given that all views are fabricated, and all fabrications are inconstant and stressful, to cling to a view is to subject oneself to stress. The implication in all cases is that, no matter how alluring a view may be, its allure is far outweighed by its drawbacks. When this realization hits home, dispassion arises, which in turn provides the escape from views.

It's in this way, by focusing on views as actions and avoiding the terms in which the views are expressed, that the Buddha can teach the ending of passion, aversion, and delusion with regard to all views.

Now, the way in which he avoids the concept of "self" central to views of becoming and non-becoming derives from his strategic approach to the second point. Instead of offering, as an alternative to doctrines of the self, a doctrine that there is no self, he rejects the questions that frame such views to begin with. In MN 2, he says that such questions as, "What am I? Do I exist? Do I not exist" are not appropriate objects of attention. Further, MN 2 lists the view "I have no self" together with the view "I have a self" as "a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, & death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering & stress." In other words, the doctrine that there is no self can act as an object of clinging just as much as the doctrine that there is a self. As an object of clinging, it can just as easily lead to further becoming.

So instead of counteracting doctrine-of-self clinging with a doctrine that there is no self, the Buddha does something much more radical: He offers a way of viewing experience in which questions concerning the existence or non-existence of the self are put aside. His most elaborate exposition of this view is dependent co-arising, part of which—the part tracing the causal factors for clinging back to ignorance—is given at the conclusion of this sutta. This view, instead of requiring a framework of "self" or "world" to explain it, provides a framework for understanding how views of "self" and "world" develop to begin with, and how they can be brought to an end. In this way, dependent co-arising provides an escape from the terms that would lead to views of becoming, non-becoming, and any doctrine of

the self.

And, as Anāthapiṇḍika—one of the Buddha's lay followers—explains in AN 10:93, the right view that puts an end to ignorance in turn provides the seeds for its own transcendence, undercutting any temptation to treat it, too, as an object of clinging: "Venerable sirs, whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stress. Whatever is stress is not me, is not what I am, is not my self. Having seen this well with right discernment as it has come to be, I also discern the higher escape from it as it has come to be."

So in both cases—his treatment of views of becoming and non-becoming, and his treatment of doctrine-of-self clinging—the Buddha shows what is truly distinctive in his approach to freeing the mind: avoiding clinging not only to the objects of views but also to the process of view-making itself, as explained in the terms of dependent co-arising. It does this by focusing on comprehending that process in a way that develops dispassion for it. That dispassion then provides the only escape: the opening to the experience of awakening.

This is why awakening occurs only in a Dhamma that teaches the points highlighted in this sutta.

* * *

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. There he addressed the monks: "Monks!"

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

The Blessed One said, "Monks, 'Right here there is the contemplative, here there is the contemplative of the second order, here there is the contemplative of the third order, here there is the contemplative of the fourth order.1 Other teachings are empty of knowledgeable contemplatives': Thus you rightly roar a lion's roar.

"Now, there exists the possibility, monks, that wanderers of other sects might say, 'But what is your assurance, what is your strength, on the basis of which, seeing it within yourselves, you venerable ones say, "Right here there is the contemplative, here there is the contemplative of the second order, here there is the contemplative of the third order, here there is the contemplative of the fourth order. Other teachings are empty of knowledgeable contemplatives"?'

"The wanderers of other sects saying that should be told this: 'Friends, there are four qualities pointed out by the Blessed One—the One Who Knows, the One Who Sees, the Worthy One, Rightly Self-awakened—that, seeing them within ourselves, we say, "Right here there is the contemplative, here there is the contemplative of the second order, here there is the contemplative of the third order, here there is the contemplative of the fourth order. Other teachings are empty of knowledgeable contemplatives." Which four? We have

confidence in our Teacher, we have confidence in the Dhamma, we have virtues that we have made complete, and our companions in the Dhamma—both lay & those gone forth—are dear and agreeable to us. These are the four qualities pointed out by the Blessed One—the One Who Knows, the One Who Sees, the Worthy One, Rightly Self-awakened—that, seeing them within ourselves, we say, "Right here there is the contemplative, here there is the contemplative of the second order, here there is the contemplative of the third order, here there is the contemplative of the fourth order. Other teachings are empty of knowledgeable contemplatives.'"

"Now, there exists the possibility, monks, that wanderers of other sects might say, 'But we, too, friends, have confidence in our Teacher, we, too, have confidence in the Dhamma, we, too, have virtues that we have made complete, and our companions in the Dhamma—both lay & those gone forth—are dear and agreeable to us as well. So what difference, what distinction, what distinguishing factor is there between you and us?'

"The wanderers of other sects saying that should be told this: 'But, friends, is the goal one or many?' Rightly answering, the wanderers of other sects would answer, 'The goal is one, not many.'

"'And friends, is that goal for one with passion or for one without passion?' Rightly answering, the wanderers of other sects would answer, 'The goal is for one without passion, not for one with passion.'

"'And friends, is that goal for one with aversion or for one without aversion?' Rightly answering, the wanderers of other sects would answer, 'The goal is for one without aversion, not for one with aversion.'

"'And friends, is that goal for one with delusion or for one without delusion?' Rightly answering, the wanderers of other sects would answer, 'The goal is for one without delusion, not for one with delusion.'

"'And friends, is that goal for one with craving or for one without craving?' Rightly answering, the wanderers of other sects would answer, 'The goal is for one without craving, not for one with craving.'

"'And friends, is that goal for one with clinging or for one without clinging?' Rightly answering, the wanderers of other sects would answer, 'The goal is for one without clinging, not for one with clinging.'

"'And friends, is that goal for one who is wise or for one who is foolish?' Rightly answering, the wanderers of other sects would answer, 'The goal is for one who is wise, not for one who is foolish.'

"'And friends, is that goal for one who embraces & rejects or for one who doesn't embrace & reject?' Rightly answering, the wanderers of other sects would answer, 'The goal is for one who doesn't embrace & reject, not for one who embraces & rejects.'

“‘And friends, is that goal for one who finds pleasure & delight in objectification or for one who finds pleasure & delight in non-objectification?’2 Rightly answering, the wanderers of other sects would answer, ‘The goal is for one who finds pleasure & delight in non-objectification, not for one who finds pleasure and delight in objectification.’

“Monks, there are these two views: the view of becoming and the view of non-becoming.3 Now, those contemplatives & brahmans who are attached to the view of becoming, who hold to the view of becoming, who relish the view of becoming reject the view of non-becoming. Whereas those contemplatives & brahmans who are attached to the view of non-becoming, who hold to the view of non-becoming, who relish the view of non-becoming reject the view of becoming.

“And those contemplatives & brahmans who don’t discern, as they have come to be, the origination, the passing away, the allure, the drawbacks of—or the escape from—these two views: They are with passion, with aversion, with delusion, with craving, with clinging. They are foolish; they embrace & reject; they find pleasure & delight in objectification. They are not released, from birth, aging, & death, from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. They are not released, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

“Whereas those contemplatives & brahmans who do discern, as they have come to be, the origination, the passing away, the allure, the drawbacks of—and the escape from—these two views: They are without passion, without aversion, without delusion, without craving, without clinging. They are wise; they don’t embrace & reject; they find pleasure & delight in non-objectification. They are released, from birth, aging, & death, from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. They are released, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

“Monks, there are these four clingings. Which four? Sensuality clinging, view clinging, habit-&-practice clinging, and doctrine-of-self clinging.

“There are some contemplatives & brahmans who, though claiming doctrines that comprehend all types of clinging, don’t rightly describe the comprehension of all types of clinging. They describe the comprehension of sensuality clinging, but not the comprehension of view clinging, habit-&-practice clinging, or doctrine-of-self clinging. Why is that? Because these contemplatives & brahmans don’t discern these three instances as they have come to be. That’s why, though claiming doctrines that comprehend all types of clinging, they don’t rightly describe the comprehension of all types of clinging. They describe the comprehension of sensuality clinging, but not the comprehension of view clinging, habit-&-practice clinging, or doctrine-of-self clinging.

“There are some contemplatives & brahmans who, though claiming doctrines that comprehend all types of clinging, don’t rightly describe the comprehension of all types of clinging. They describe the comprehension of sensuality clinging and view clinging, but not the comprehension of habit-&-practice clinging or doctrine-of-self clinging. Why is that? Because these contemplatives & brahmans don’t discern these two instances as they have come to be. That’s why, though claiming doctrines that comprehend all types of clinging,

they don't rightly describe the comprehension of all types of clinging. They describe the comprehension of sensuality clinging and view clinging, but not the comprehension of habit-&-practice clinging or doctrine-of-self clinging.

"There are some contemplatives & brahmans who, though claiming doctrines that comprehend all types of clinging, don't rightly describe the comprehension of all types of clinging. They describe the comprehension of sensuality clinging, view clinging, and habit-&-practice clinging, but not the comprehension of doctrine-of-self clinging.4 Why is that? Because these contemplatives & brahmans don't discern that one instance as it has come to be. That's why, though claiming doctrines that comprehend all types of clinging, they don't rightly describe the comprehension of all types of clinging. They describe the comprehension of sensuality clinging, view clinging, and habit-&-practice clinging, but not the comprehension of doctrine-of-self clinging.

"In a doctrine & discipline of this sort, monks, it's obvious that confidence in the teacher is not rightly directed, confidence in the doctrine is not rightly directed, the completion of virtues is not rightly directed, and the dearness & agreeability of one's companions is not rightly directed. Why is that? Because that's how it is, monks, in a poorly proclaimed doctrine & discipline—poorly expounded, not leading out, not leading to calm, expounded by one not rightly self-awakened.

"But the Tathāgata, monks—the Worthy One, the Rightly Self-awakened One—claiming a doctrine that comprehends all types of clinging, rightly describes the comprehension of all types of clinging. He describes the comprehension of sensuality clinging, view clinging, habit-&-practice clinging, and doctrine-of-self clinging.

"In a Dhamma & Vinaya of this sort, monks, it's obvious that confidence in the teacher is rightly directed, confidence in the doctrine is rightly directed, the completion of virtues is rightly directed, and the dearness & agreeability of one's companions is rightly directed. Why is that? Because that's how it is, monks, in a well-proclaimed Dhamma & Vinaya—well expounded, leading out, leading to calm, expounded by One Rightly Self-awakened.

"Now, these four clingings, monks, have what as their cause, what as their origination, what as their birth, what as their coming-into-existence? These four clingings have craving as their cause, craving as their origination, craving as their birth, craving as their coming-into-existence.

"And this craving has what as its cause, what as its origination, what as its birth, what as its coming-into-existence? Craving has feeling as its cause, feeling as its origination, feeling as its birth, feeling as its coming-into-existence.

"And this feeling has what as its cause, what as its origination, what as its birth, what as its coming-into-existence? Feeling has contact as its cause, contact as its origination, contact as its birth, contact as its coming-into-existence.

“And this contact has what as its cause, what as its origination, what as its birth, what as its coming-into-existence? Contact has the six sense media as its cause, the six sense media as its origination, the six sense media as its birth, the six sense media as its coming-into-existence.

“And these six sense media have what as their cause, what as their origination, what as their birth, what as their coming-into-existence? The six sense media have name-&-form as their cause, name-&-form as their origination, name-&-form as their birth, name-&-form as their coming-into-existence.

“And this name-&-form has what as its cause, what as its origination, what as its birth, what as its coming-into-existence? Name-&-form has consciousness as its cause, consciousness as its origination, consciousness as its birth, consciousness as its coming-into-existence.

“And this consciousness has what as its cause, what as its origination, what as its birth, what as its coming-into-existence? Consciousness has fabrications as its cause, fabrications as its origination, fabrications as its birth, fabrications as its coming-into-existence.

“And these fabrications have what as their cause, what as their origination, what as their birth, what as their coming-into-existence? Fabrications have ignorance as their cause, ignorance as their origination, ignorance as their birth, ignorance as their coming-into-existence.

“Now, when ignorance has been abandoned and clear-knowing has arisen in a monk, then from dispassion for ignorance and from the arising of clear-knowing, he clings neither to sensuality clinging, to view clinging, to habit-&-practice clinging, nor to doctrine-of-self clinging. Not clinging, he is not agitated. Not agitated, he fully unbinds right within. He discerns: ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world.’”

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

Notes

1. The four contemplatives are the four grades of noble disciples: the stream-winner, the once-returner, the non-returner, and the arahant. See the Buddha’s conversation with Subhadda the wanderer in DN 16. For descriptions of these four grades, see the beginning passages in MN 118.

2. Papañca. On the topic of objectification, see the introduction to MN 18 and the essay, “The Arrows of Thinking.” Nippapañca, non-objectification, is listed in SN 43 as an epithet of unbinding (nibbāna).

3. The view of becoming describes the survival of the self after death. The view of non-becoming describes the annihilation of the self at death. DN 1 lists 32 views of

becoming and seven views of non-becoming. MN 102 gathers a large number of views of becoming—some of which are not listed in DN 1—under three headings: those that describe the self after death as percipient, non-percipient, or neither percipient nor non-percipient. It treats all views of non-becoming as a single type. See the introductions to both of these suttas.

4. The fact that views of becoming and non-becoming cannot be comprehended until doctrine-of-self clinging has been comprehended raises a question here: When the Buddha says that other contemplatives and brahmans have taught the comprehension of view-clinging, what does he mean? It can't mean that they have successfully taught how to comprehend view-clinging. Instead, it must mean that they have advocated comprehending view-clinging, but have not successfully taught how to do it.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 12:15; SN 41:3; AN 8:30; Sn 4