MN 114 — What Should and Should Not Be Cultivated

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
Source: https://suttacentral.net/mn114/en/sujato
Source revision: 3bc8665e0e28e70518eba94304a2fafcab80f933
License: CC0-1.0 — https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/

Text

Middle Discourses 114

What Should and Should Not Be Cultivated

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. There the Buddha addressed the mendicants, "Mendicants!"

"Venerable sir," they replied. The Buddha said this:

"Mendicants, I will teach you an exposition of the teaching on what should and should not be cultivated. Listen and apply your mind well, I will speak."

"Yes, sir," they replied. The Buddha said this:

"I say that there are two kinds of bodily behavior: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is a kind of bodily behavior.

I say that there are two kinds of verbal behavior: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is a kind of verbal behavior.

I say that there are two kinds of mental behavior: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is a kind of mental behavior.

I say that there are two arisings of thought: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is an arising of thought.

I say that there are two acquisitions of perception: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is an acquisition of perception.

I say that there are two acquisitions of views: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is an acquisition of views.

I say that there are two kinds of incarnation: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And these are equally incarnation."

When he said this, Venerable Sāriputta said to the Buddha, "Sir, this is how I understand the detailed meaning of the Buddha's brief statement.

'I say that there are two kinds of bodily behavior: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is a kind of bodily behavior.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it? You should not cultivate the kind of bodily behavior which causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. And you should cultivate the kind of bodily behavior which causes unskillful qualities to decline while

skillful qualities grow.

And what kind of bodily behavior causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline? It's when someone kills living creatures. They're violent, bloody-handed, a hardened killer, merciless to living beings. They steal. With the intention to commit theft, they take the wealth or belongings of others from village or wilderness. They commit sexual misconduct. They have relations with women who have their mother, father, both mother and father, brother, sister, relatives, or clan as guardian. They have relations with a woman who is protected on principle, or who has a husband, or whose violation is punishable by law, or even one who has been garlanded as a token of betrothal. That kind of bodily behavior causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline.

And what kind of bodily behavior causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow? It's when someone gives up killing living creatures, renouncing the rod and the sword. They're scrupulous and kind, living full of sympathy for all living beings. They give up stealing. They don't, with the intention to commit theft, take the wealth or belongings of others from village or wilderness. They give up sexual misconduct. They don't have relations with women who have their mother, father, both mother and father, brother, sister, relatives, or clan as guardian. They don't have relations with a woman who is protected on principle, or who has a husband, or whose violation is punishable by law, or even one who has been garlanded as a token of betrothal. That kind of bodily behavior causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two kinds of bodily behavior: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is a kind of bodily behavior.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it.

'I say that there are two kinds of verbal behavior: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is a kind of verbal behavior.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it? You should not cultivate the kind of verbal behavior which causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. And you should cultivate the kind of verbal behavior which causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow.

And what kind of verbal behavior causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline? It's when someone lies. They're summoned to a council, an assembly, a family meeting, a guild, or to the royal court, and asked to bear witness: 'Please, my man, say what you know.' Not knowing, they say 'I know.' Knowing, they say 'I don't know.' Not seeing, they say 'I see.' And seeing, they say 'I don't see.' So they deliberately lie for the sake of themselves or another, or for some trivial worldly reason. They backbite. They repeat in one place what they heard in another so as to divide people against each other. And so they divide those who are harmonious, supporting division, delighting in division, loving division, speaking words that promote division. They speak harshly. They use the kinds of words that are cruel, nasty, hurtful, offensive, bordering on anger, not leading to immersion. They talk nonsense. Their speech is untimely, and is neither factual nor beneficial. It has nothing to do with the teaching or the training. Their words have no value, and are untimely, unreasonable, rambling, and pointless. That kind of verbal behavior causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline.

And what kind of verbal behavior causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow? It's when someone gives up lying. They're summoned to a council, an assembly, a family meeting, a guild, or to the royal court, and asked to bear witness: 'Please, my friend, say what you know.' Not knowing, they say 'I don't know.' Knowing, they say 'I know.' Not seeing, they say 'I don't see.' And seeing, they say 'I see.' So they don't deliberately lie for the sake of themselves or another, or for some trivial worldly reason. They give up backbiting. They don't repeat in one place what they heard in another so as to divide people against each other. Instead, they reconcile those who are divided and support those who are united, delighting in harmony, loving harmony, speaking words that promote harmony. They give up harsh speech. They speak in a way that's mellow, pleasing to the ear, endearing, going to the heart, polite, and likable and agreeable to the people. They give up talking nonsense. Their words are timely, true, and meaningful, in line with the teaching and training. They say things at the right time which are valuable, reasonable, succinct, and beneficial. That kind of verbal behavior causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two kinds of verbal behavior: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is a kind of verbal behavior.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it.

'I say that there are two kinds of mental behavior: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is a kind of mental behavior.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it? You should not cultivate the kind of mental behavior which causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. And you should cultivate the kind of mental behavior which causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow.

And what kind of mental behavior causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline? It's when someone is covetous. They covet the wealth and belongings of others: 'Oh, if only their belongings were mine!' They have ill will and malicious intentions: 'May these sentient beings be killed, slaughtered, slain, destroyed, or annihilated!' That kind of mental behavior causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline.

And what kind of mental behavior causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow? It's when someone is content. They don't covet the wealth and belongings of others: 'Oh, if only their belongings were mine!' They have a kind heart and loving intentions: 'May these sentient beings live free of enmity and ill will, untroubled and happy!' That kind of mental behavior causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two kinds of mental behavior: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is a kind of mental behavior.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it.

'I say that there are two arisings of thought: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is an arising of thought.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it? You should not cultivate the arising of thought which causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. And you should cultivate the arising of thought which causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow.

And what arising of thought causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline? It's when someone is covetous, and lives with their heart full of covetousness. They are malicious, and live with their heart full of ill will. They're hurtful, and live with their heart intent on harm. That arising of thought causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline.

And what arising of thought causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow? It's when someone is content, and lives with their heart full of contentment. They have good will, and live with their heart full of good will. They're kind, and live with their heart full of kindness. That arising of thought causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two arisings of thought: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is an arising of thought.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it.

'I say that there are two acquisitions of perception: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is an acquisition of perception.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it? You should not cultivate the acquisition of perception which causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. And you should cultivate the acquisition of perception which causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow.

And what acquisition of perception causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline? It's when someone is covetous, and lives with their perception full of covetousness. They are malicious, and live with their perception full of ill will. They're hurtful, and live with their perception intent on harm. That acquisition of perception causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline.

And what acquisition of perception causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow? It's when someone is content, and lives with their perception full of contentment. They have good will, and live with their perception full of good will. They're kind, and live with their perception full of kindness. That acquisition of perception causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two acquisitions of perception: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is an acquisition of perception.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it.

'I say that there are two acquisitions of views: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is an acquisition of views.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it? You should not cultivate the acquisition of views which causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. And you should cultivate the acquisition of views which causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow.

And what acquisition of views causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline? It's when someone has such a view: 'There's no meaning in giving, sacrifice, or offerings. There's no fruit or result of good and bad deeds. There's no afterlife. There's no such thing as mother and father, or beings that are reborn spontaneously. And there's no ascetic or brahmin who is rightly comported and rightly practiced, and who describes the

afterlife after realizing it with their own insight.' That acquisition of views causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline.

And what acquisition of views causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow? It's when someone has such a view: 'There is meaning in giving, sacrifice, and offerings. There are fruits and results of good and bad deeds. There is an afterlife. There are such things as mother and father, and beings that are reborn spontaneously. And there are ascetics and brahmins who are rightly comported and rightly practiced, and who describe the afterlife after realizing it with their own insight.' That acquisition of views causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two acquisitions of views: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And each of these is an acquisition of views.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it.

'I say that there are two kinds of incarnation: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And these are equally incarnation.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it? You should not cultivate the kind of incarnation that causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. You should cultivate the kind of incarnation that causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow.

And what kind of incarnation causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline? For one who generates a hurtful incarnation not for the sake of the state of perfection, unskillful qualities grow while skillful qualities decline. And what kind of incarnation causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow? For one who generates a pleasing incarnation for the sake of the state of perfection, unskillful qualities decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two kinds of incarnation: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. And these are equally incarnation.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it.

Sir, that's how I understand the detailed meaning of the Buddha's brief statement."

"Good, good, Sāriputta! It's good that you understand the detailed meaning of my brief statement in this way."

And the Buddha went on to repeat and endorse Venerable Sāriputta's explanation in full. Then he went on to explain further:

"I say that there are two kinds of sight known by the eye: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. I say that there are two kinds of sound known by the ear … two kinds of smell known by the nose … two kinds of taste known by the tongue … two kinds of touch known by the body … two kinds of idea known by the mind: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate."

When he said this, Venerable Sāriputta said to the Buddha:

"Sir, this is how I understand the detailed meaning of the Buddha's brief statement.

'I say that there are two kinds of sight known by the eye: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it? You should not cultivate the kind of sight known by the eye which causes unskillful

qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. And you should cultivate the kind of sight known by the eye which causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two kinds of sight known by the eye: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it.

'I say that there are two kinds of sound known by the ear … two kinds of smell known by the nose … two kinds of taste known by the tongue … two kinds of touch known by the body … two kinds of idea known by the mind: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it?

You should not cultivate the kind of idea known by the mind which causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. And you should cultivate the kind of idea known by the mind which causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two kinds of idea known by the mind: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it. Sir, that's how I understand the detailed meaning of the Buddha's brief statement."

"Good, good, Sāriputta! It's good that you understand the detailed meaning of my brief statement in this way."

And the Buddha went on to repeat and endorse Venerable Sāriputta's explanation in full. Then he went on to explain further:

"I say that there are two kinds of robes: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate. I say that there are two kinds of almsfood … lodging … village … town … city … country … individual: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate."

When he said this, Venerable Sāriputta said to the Buddha:

"Sir, this is how I understand the detailed meaning of the Buddha's brief statement. 'I say that there are two kinds of robes … almsfood … lodging … village … town … city … country … individual: that which you should cultivate, and that which you should not cultivate.' That's what the Buddha said, but why did he say it? You should not cultivate the kind of individual who causes unskillful qualities to grow while skillful qualities decline. And you should cultivate the kind of individual who causes unskillful qualities to decline while skillful qualities grow. 'I say that there are two kinds of individual: those who you should cultivate, and those who you should not cultivate.' That's what the Buddha said, and this is why he said it.

Sir, that's how I understand the detailed meaning of the Buddha's brief statement."

"Good, good, Sāriputta! It's good that you understand the detailed meaning of my brief statement in this way."

And the Buddha went on to repeat and endorse Venerable Sāriputta's explanation in full. Then he added:

"If all the aristocrats, brahmins, peasants, and menials were to understand the detailed meaning of my brief statement in this way, it would be for their lasting welfare and

happiness. If the whole world—with its gods, Māras, and divinities, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, gods and humans—was to understand the detailed meaning of my brief statement in this way, it would be for the whole world's lasting welfare and happiness."

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, Venerable Sāriputta approved what the Buddha said.