MN 128 — MN 128 Defilements | Upakkilesa Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

Defilements

Upakkilesa Sutta (MN 128)

Introduction

This sutta covers some of the events related to the quarrel at Kosambī reported in Mv X.1–4. That account contains some details not reported here, whereas this account gives in full the Dhamma lesson the Buddha gave to the monks in the Eastern Bamboo Park, a lesson that is mentioned only briefly in Mv X.4.6.

* * *

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Kosambī in Ghosita's monastery. And on that occasion the Kosambī monks kept arguing, quarreling, & disputing, stabbing one another with weapons of the mouth.

Then a certain monk went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, the Kosambī monks here keep arguing, quarreling, & disputing, stabbing one another with weapons of the mouth. It would be good, lord, if the Blessed One went to them, out of sympathy."

The Blessed One acquiesced with silence.

Then he went to those monks and, on arrival, said to them, "Enough, monks. Don't quarrel. Don't argue. Don't make strife. Don't dispute."

When this was said, a certain monk said to the Blessed One, "Wait, Lord Blessed One. May the Master of the Dhamma remain inactive, devoted to a pleasant abiding in the here-&-now, Lord Blessed One. We will be the ones who will be known for this argument, quarrel, strife, & dispute."

A second time...1 A third time, the Blessed One said to those monks, "Enough, monks. Don't quarrel. Don't argue. Don't make strife. Don't dispute."

A third time, that monk said to the Blessed One, "Wait, Lord Blessed One. May the Master of the Dhamma remain inactive, devoted to a pleasant abiding in the here-&-now, Lord Blessed One. We will be the ones who will be known for this argument, quarrel, strife, & dispute."

Then, early in the morning, the Blessed One—having adjusted his under robe and carrying his bowl & robes—went into Kosambī for alms. Having gone for alms in Kosambī, after the meal, returning from his almsround, having set his dwelling in order, taking his bowl & robes, he recited these verses while standing:

Loud-voiced

on a par with people at large,

no one considers himself

a fool.

Though the Saṅgha is splitting,

they don't consider

anything else more.

Completely forgotten:

the words of the wise

declaring the right range of speech.
Mouth-stretching
as far as they want,
led on where, by what,
they don’t know.

‘He insulted me,
hit me,
beat me,
robbed me’:
For those who brood on this,
hostility isn’t stilled.

‘He insulted me,
hit me,
beat me,
robbed me’:
For those who don’t brood on this,
hostility is stilled.

Hostilities aren’t stilled
through hostility,
regardless.
Hostilities are stilled
through non-hostility:
This, an unending truth.

Unlike those who don’t realize
that we’re here on the verge
of perishing,
those who do:
Their quarrels are stilled.

Bone-breakers, killers,

cattle thieves, robbers,

those who plunder the nation:

Even they have their fellowship.

Why shouldn’t you have yours?

If you gain a mature companion—

a fellow traveler,

right-living,

enlightened—

overcoming all dangers

go with him,

gratified,

mindful.

If you don’t gain a mature companion—

a fellow traveler,

right-living,

enlightened—

go alone like a king renouncing his kingdom,

like the elephant in the Mātaṅga wilds, his herd.

Going alone is better,

there’s no companionship with a fool.

Go alone,

doing no evil,

at peace,

like the elephant in the Mātaṅga wilds.

Having recited these verses while standing, the Blessed One went to Bālakaloṇakāraka Village. Now, on that occasion Ven. Bhagu was staying near Bālakaloṇakāraka Village. He saw the Blessed One coming from afar and, on seeing him, laid out a seat and water for washing the feet. The Blessed One sat down on the seat laid out and, seated, washed his feet. Ven. Bhagu, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting

there, the Blessed One said to him, "Is it tolerable, monk? Are you getting by? Are you weary from going for alms?"

"It's tolerable, O Blessed One. I'm getting by, O Blessed One. And I'm not weary, lord, from going for alms."

Then the Blessed One, having instructed, urged, roused, & encouraged Ven. Bhagu with a Dhamma talk, got up from his seat and went to the Eastern Bamboo Park.

On that occasion, Ven. Anuruddha, Ven. Nandiya, & Ven. Kimbila were staying in the Eastern Bamboo Park. The park warden saw the Blessed One coming from afar and, on seeing him, said to him, "Contemplative, don't enter the park. There are three sons of good families living there, apparently desiring their own (welfare). Don't disturb them."

Ven. Anuruddha heard the park warden conversing with the Blessed One and, on hearing him, said to the park warden, "Friend park warden, don't stand in the way of the Blessed One. It's our Teacher, the Blessed One, who has arrived!"

Then Ven. Anuruddha went to Ven. Nandiya & Ven. Kimbila and, on arrival, said to them, "Come out, venerables! Come out, venerables! It's our Teacher, the Blessed One, who has arrived!"

Then Ven. Anuruddha, Ven. Nandiya, & Ven. Kimbila went out to greet the Blessed One. One received his robe & bowl. Another laid out a seat. Another set out water for washing his feet. The Blessed One sat down on the seat laid out and, seated, washed his feet. They, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, the Blessed One said to Ven. Anuruddha, "Is it tolerable for you, Anuruddhas?2 Are you getting by? Are you weary from going for alms?"

"It's tolerable, O Blessed One. We're getting by, O Blessed One. And we're not weary, lord, from going for alms."

"But, Anuruddhas, are you living harmoniously, cordially, & without dispute, blending like milk & water, looking at one another with eyes of affection?"

"Yes, lord, we're living harmoniously, cordially, & without dispute, blending like milk & water, looking at one another with eyes of affection."

"But, Anuruddhas, how are you living harmoniously, cordially, & without dispute, blending like milk & water, looking at one another with eyes of affection?"

"Here, lord, the thought occurs to me, 'It's a gain for me, a great gain, that I'm living with companions like this in the holy life.' I'm set on bodily acts of goodwill with regard to these venerable ones, to their faces & behind their backs. I'm set on verbal acts… mental acts of goodwill with regard to these venerable ones, to their faces & behind their backs. The thought occurs to me, 'Why don't I, having cast aside my own mind, conduct myself in line

with the mind of these venerable ones?' So, having cast aside my own mind, I conduct myself in line with the mind of these venerable ones. We are separate in body, lord, but one—as it were—in mind."

Ven. Nandiya & Ven. Kimbila said to the Blessed One, "Here, lord, the thought occurs to me also, 'It's a gain for me, a great gain... We are separate in body, lord, but one—as it were—in mind."

[Ven. Anuruddha:] "This, lord, is how we are living harmoniously, cordially, & without dispute, blending like milk & water, looking at one another with eyes of affection."

"But, Anuruddhas, do you remain heedful, ardent, & resolute?"

"Yes, lord, we remain heedful, ardent, & resolute."

"But, Anuruddhas, how do you remain heedful, ardent, & resolute?"

"Here, lord, whichever of us returns first from going to the village for alms lays out the seats, sets out water for drinking & using, and sets out the refuse bucket. Whoever returns afterwards from going to the village for alms eats the leftovers—if there are any and if he wants to—and if not, he throws them out in a place where there are no crops or dumps them into water without living beings in it. He puts away the seats, puts away the water for drinking & using, puts away the refuse bucket after having washed it, and sweeps the meal hall.

"Whoever sees that the drinking-water jar, using-water jar, or rinsing-water jar [in the bathroom] are low or empty refills it. If it occurs to him, 'It's too much for me,' he calls another by waving—using hand signals—and they refill the drinking-water jar or using-water jar by joining hands. But we don't for that reason break into speech.

"And every five days we sit together for the whole night to discuss the Dhamma. That's how we remain heedful, ardent, & resolute."

"Excellent, Anuruddhas. Excellent. But, remaining heedful, ardent, & resolute in this way, do you have a comfortable abiding where a superior human attainment, a truly noble distinction of knowledge & vision, has been attained?"

"Lord, as we remain heedful, ardent, & resolute in this way, we perceive both light and a vision of forms, but not long afterward the light and the vision of forms disappears, and we haven't ferreted out the reason for that."

"Anuruddhas, you should ferret out the reason for that. Even I, before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened bodhisatta, perceived both light and a vision of forms. But not long afterward the light and the vision of forms disappeared. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why the light and the vision of forms have disappeared?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'Doubt has arisen in me, and

on account of the doubt my concentration fell away. With the falling away of concentration, the light and the vision of forms have disappeared. I will act in a way such that doubt doesn't arise in me again.'

"So—staying heedful, ardent, & resolute—I perceived light and a vision of forms. But not long afterward the light and the vision of forms disappeared. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why the light and the vision of forms have disappeared?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'Inattention has arisen in me…' … 'Sloth-&-drowsiness has arisen in me…' … 'Panic has arisen in me, and on account of the panic my concentration fell away. With the falling away of concentration, the light and the vision of forms have disappeared.' Suppose, Anuruddhas, that a man was traveling along a road, and murderers appeared on both sides. He would, for that reason, feel panic. In the same way, panic arose in me, and on account of the panic my concentration fell away. With the falling away of concentration, the light and the vision of forms disappeared. [I thought:] 'I will act in a way such that doubt, inattention, sloth-&-drowsiness, and panic don't arise in me again.'

"So—staying heedful, ardent, & resolute—I perceived light and a vision of forms. But not long afterward the light and the vision of forms disappeared. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why the light and the vision of forms have disappeared?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'Excitement has arisen in me, and on account of the excitement my concentration fell away. With the falling away of concentration, the light and the vision of forms have disappeared.' Suppose, Anuruddhas, that a man searching for portals to hidden treasure suddenly came across five portals to hidden treasure. He would, for that reason, feel excitement. In the same way, excitement arose in me…. [I thought:] 'I will act in a way such that doubt, inattention, sloth-&-drowsiness, panic, and excitement don't arise in me again.'

"So—staying heedful, ardent, & resolute—I perceived light and a vision of forms. But not long afterward the light and the vision of forms disappeared. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why the light and the vision of forms have disappeared?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'Boredom has arisen in me…' … 'Excess persistence has arisen in me, and on account of the excess persistence my concentration fell away. With the falling away of concentration, the light and the vision of forms have disappeared.' Suppose, Anuruddhas, that a man was grasping a baby quail tightly with both hands. It would die right there. In the same way, excess persistence arose in me…. [I thought:] 'I will act in a way such that doubt, inattention, sloth-&-drowsiness, panic, excitement, boredom, and excess persistence don't arise in me again.'

"So—staying heedful, ardent, & resolute—I perceived light and a vision of forms. But not long afterward the light and the vision of forms disappeared. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why the light and the vision of forms have disappeared?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'Slack persistence has arisen in me, and on account of the slack persistence my concentration fell away. With the falling away of concentration, the light and vision of forms have disappeared.' Suppose, Anuruddhas, that a man was holding a baby quail loosely. It would fly out of his hand. In the same way, slack

persistence arose in me, and on account of the slack persistence my concentration fell away. With the falling away of concentration, the light and the vision of forms disappeared. [I thought:] 'I will act in a way such that doubt, inattention, sloth-&-drowsiness, panic, excitement, boredom, excess persistence, and slack persistence do not arise in me again.'

"So—staying heedful, ardent, & resolute—I perceived light and a vision of forms. But not long afterward the light and the vision of forms disappeared. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why the light and the vision of forms has disappeared?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'A perception of multiplicity has arisen in me…' … 'Excess absorption in forms has arisen in me, and on account of the excess absorption in forms my concentration fell away. With the falling away of concentration, the light and the vision of forms have disappeared. I will act in a way such that doubt, inattention, sloth-&-drowsiness, panic, excitement, boredom, excess persistence, slack persistence, a perception of multiplicity, and excessive absorption in forms don't arise in me again.'

"So, understanding that 'doubt is a defilement of the mind,' I abandoned the doubt defilement of the mind. Understanding that 'inattention is a defilement of the mind'… 'sloth-&-drowsiness is a defilement of the mind'… 'panic is a defilement of the mind'… 'excitement is a defilement of the mind'… 'boredom is a defilement of the mind'… 'excess persistence is a defilement of the mind'… 'slack persistence is a defilement of the mind'… 'a perception of multiplicity is a defilement of the mind'… 'excessive absorption in forms is a defilement of the mind,' I abandoned the excessive-absorption-in-forms defilement of the mind.

"So—staying heedful, ardent, & resolute—I perceived light but I did not see forms, or saw forms but did not perceive light for an entire night, for an entire day, and for an entire day & night. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why I perceive light but I do not see forms, or see forms but do not perceive light for an entire night, for an entire day, and for an entire day & night?' The thought occurred to me, 'At the time when, not attending to the theme of forms, I attend to the theme of light, that is the time when I perceive light but do not see forms. But at the time when, not attending to the theme of light, I attend to the theme of forms, that is the time when I see forms but do not perceive light for an entire night, for an entire day, and for an entire day & night.

"So—staying heedful, ardent, & resolute—I perceived limited light and limited forms, and immeasurable light and immeasurable forms for an entire night, for an entire day, and for an entire day & night. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why I perceive limited light and limited forms, and immeasurable light and immeasurable forms for an entire night, for an entire day, and for an entire day & night?' The thought occurred to me, 'At the time when my concentration is limited, my (inner) eye is limited. With a limited eye, I perceive limited light and see limited forms. But at the time when my concentration is immeasurable, my (inner) eye is immeasurable. With an immeasurable eye, I perceive immeasurable light and see immeasurable forms for an entire night, for an entire day, and for an entire day & night.

“When, having understood that ‘doubt is a defilement of the mind’ and having abandoned doubt, having understood that ‘inattention… sloth-&-drowsiness… panic… excitement… boredom… excess persistence… slack persistence… a perception of multiplicity… excessive absorption in forms is a defilement of the mind,’ and having abandoned excessive absorption in forms, the thought occurred to me, ‘Those defilements of the mind are abandoned in me. What if I were to develop concentration in three ways?

“So, Anuruddhas, I developed concentration with directed thought & evaluation. I developed concentration without directed thought but with a modicum of evaluation. I developed concentration without directed thought or evaluation.3

“I developed concentration with rapture. I developed concentration without rapture.

“I developed concentration with enjoyment. I developed concentration with equanimity.

“When, in me, concentration with directed thought & evaluation was developed, concentration without directed thought but with a modicum of evaluation was developed, concentration without directed thought or evaluation was developed, concentration with rapture was developed, concentration without rapture was developed, concentration with enjoyment was developed, and concentration with equanimity was developed, knowledge & vision arose in me: ‘Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.’”

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

Notes

1. At this point in the narrative in Mv X, the Buddha tells the story of Prince Dīghavu. See Noble Warrior, Chapter 12.

2. It’s common in Pali, when speaking to a small group of individuals, to address them in the plural form of the name of the senior member of the group.

3. As the Commentary points out, these three types of concentration correspond to different levels of jhāna. Concentration with directed thought and evaluation corresponds to the first jhāna. Concentration without directed thought but with a modicum of evaluation corresponds to the second jhāna in cases where jhāna is divided into five levels. Concentration without directed thought or evaluation corresponds to the three highest levels of jhāna, both when divided into four and when divided into five levels.

Concentration with rapture corresponds to the first two levels when jhāna is divided into four levels, and the first three when it is divided into five. Concentration without rapture corresponds to the two highest levels of jhāna, both in the four-level and the five-level analysis.

Concentration with enjoyment corresponds to the first three levels when jhāna is divided into four levels, and the first four when it is divided into five. Concentration with equanimity corresponds to the highest level of jhāna, both in the four-level and the five-level analysis.

The organization of the Buddha's account of his own practice here seems to indicate how he would instruct those whose experience of concentration begins, not with an expanded awareness of the body, but with visions of light and forms. The visions are used as exercises for getting the focus of the mind properly balanced; then attention is turned to the body as experienced in the jhānas (see the similes for the jhānas given in DN 2, MN 119, and AN 5:28). The insight into fabrication gained by focusing on the body then provides a basis for liberating insight.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 31; SN 46:53; SN 51:20; AN 3:103; AN 3:131; AN 8:70