MN 139 — The Analysis of No Strife

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Text

Middle Discourses 139

The Analysis of No Strife

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 shall teach you the analysis of no strife. Listen and apply your mind well, I will speak."

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

"Don't indulge in sensual pleasure, which is low, crude, ordinary, ignoble, and pointless. And don't indulge in self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and pointless. Avoiding these two extremes, the Realized One understood the middle way of practice, which gives vision and knowledge, and leads to peace, direct knowledge, awakening, and extinguishment. Know what it means to flatter and to rebuke. Knowing these, avoid them, and just teach Dhamma. Know how to evaluate different kinds of pleasure. Knowing this, pursue inner pleasure. Don't talk behind people's backs, and don't speak sharply in their presence. Don't speak hurriedly. Don't insist on popular definitions and don't overstep normal labels. This is the summary recital for the analysis of no strife.

'Don't indulge in sensual pleasure, which is low, crude, ordinary, ignoble, and pointless. And don't indulge in self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and pointless.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? Indulging in the happiness of the pleasure linked to sensuality is low, crude, ordinary, ignoble, and pointless. It is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. Breaking off such indulgence is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. Indulging in self-mortification is painful, ignoble, and pointless. It is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. Breaking off such indulgence is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. 'Don't indulge in sensual pleasure, which is low, crude, ordinary, ignoble, and pointless. And don't indulge in self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and pointless.' That's what I said, and this is why I said it.

'Avoiding these two extremes, the Realized One understood the middle way of practice, which gives vision and knowledge, and leads to peace, direct knowledge, awakening, and extinguishment.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? It is simply this noble eightfold path, that is: right view, right purpose, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right

effort, right mindfulness, and right immersion. ‘Avoiding these two extremes, the Realized One understood the middle way of practice, which gives vision and knowledge, and leads to peace, direct knowledge, awakening, and extinguishment.’ That’s what I said, and this is why I said it.

‘Know what it means to flatter and to rebuke. Knowing these, avoid them, and just teach Dhamma.’ That’s what I said, but why did I say it?

And how is there flattering and rebuking without teaching Dhamma? ‘All those who indulge in the happiness of the pleasure linked to sensuality—low, crude, ordinary, ignoble, and pointless—are beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the wrong way.’ In speaking like this, one rebukes some here.

‘All those who have broken off indulging in the happiness of the pleasure linked to sensuality are free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the right way.’ In speaking like this, one flatters some here.

‘All those who indulge in self-mortification—painful, ignoble, and pointless—are beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the wrong way.’ In speaking like this, one rebukes some here.

‘All those who have broken off indulging in self-mortification are free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the right way.’ In speaking like this, one flatters some here.

‘All those who have not given up the fetter of continued existence are beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the wrong way.’ In speaking like this, one rebukes some here.

‘All those who have given up the fetter of continued existence are free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the right way.’ In speaking like this, one flatters some here. That’s how there is flattering and rebuking without teaching Dhamma.

And how is there neither flattering nor rebuking, and just teaching Dhamma? You don’t say: ‘All those who indulge in the happiness of the pleasure linked to sensuality—low, crude, ordinary, ignoble, and pointless—are beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the wrong way.’ Rather, by saying this you just teach Dhamma: ‘The indulgence is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way.’

You don’t say: ‘All those who have broken off indulging in the happiness of the pleasure linked to sensuality are free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the right way.’ Rather, by saying this you just teach Dhamma: ‘Breaking off the indulgence is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way.’

You don’t say: ‘All those who indulge in self-mortification—painful, ignoble, and pointless—are beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the wrong way.’ Rather, by saying this you just teach Dhamma: ‘The indulgence is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way.’

You don’t say: ‘All those who have broken off indulging in self-mortification are free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the right way.’ Rather, by saying this

you just teach Dhamma: ‘Breaking off the indulgence is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way.’

You don’t say: ‘All those who have not given up the fetter of continued existence are beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the wrong way.’ Rather, by saying this you just teach Dhamma: ‘When the fetter of continued existence is not given up, continued existence is also not given up.’

You don’t say: ‘All those who have given up the fetter of continued existence are free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and they are practicing the right way.’ Rather, by saying this you just teach Dhamma: ‘When the fetter of continued existence is given up, continued existence is also given up.’ That’s how there is neither flattering nor rebuking, and just teaching Dhamma. ‘Know what it means to flatter and to rebuke. Knowing these, avoid them, and just teach Dhamma.’ That’s what I said, and this is why I said it.

‘Know how to evaluate different kinds of pleasure. Knowing this, pursue inner pleasure.’ That’s what I said, but why did I say it? There are these five kinds of sensual stimulation. What five? Sights known by the eye, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. Sounds known by the ear … Smells known by the nose … Tastes known by the tongue … Touches known by the body, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. These are the five kinds of sensual stimulation. The pleasure and happiness that arise from these five kinds of sensual stimulation is called sensual pleasure—a filthy, common, ignoble pleasure. Such pleasure should not be cultivated or developed, but should be feared, I say. Now, take a mendicant who, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected. As the placing of the mind and keeping it connected are stilled, they enter and remain in the second absorption … third absorption … fourth absorption. This is called the pleasure of renunciation, the pleasure of seclusion, the pleasure of peace, the pleasure of awakening. Such pleasure should be cultivated and developed, and should not be feared, I say. ‘Know how to evaluate different kinds of pleasure. Knowing this, pursue inner pleasure.’ That’s what I said, and this is why I said it.

‘Don’t talk behind people’s backs, and don’t speak sharply in their presence.’ That’s what I said, but why did I say it? When you know that what you say behind someone’s back is untrue, false, and pointless, then to the best of your ability you should not speak. When you know that what you say behind someone’s back is true and correct, but pointless, then you should train yourself not to speak. When you know that what you say behind someone’s back is true, correct, and beneficial, then you should know the right time to speak. When you know that your sharp words in someone’s presence are untrue, false, and pointless, then to the best of your ability you should not speak. When you know that your sharp words in someone’s presence are true and correct, but pointless, then you should train yourself not to speak. When you know that your sharp words in someone’s presence are true, correct, and beneficial, then you should know the right time to speak. ‘Don’t talk behind people’s backs, and don’t speak sharply in their presence.’ That’s what I said, and this is why I said it.

‘Don’t speak hurriedly.’ That’s what I said, but why did I say it? When speaking hurriedly, your body gets tired, your mind gets stressed, your voice gets stressed, your throat gets sore, and your words become unclear and hard to understand. When not speaking hurriedly, your body doesn’t get tired, your mind doesn’t get stressed, your voice doesn’t get stressed, your throat doesn’t get sore, and your words are clear and easy to understand. ‘Don’t speak hurriedly.’ That’s what I said, and this is why I said it.

‘Don’t insist on popular definitions and don’t overstep normal labels.’ That’s what I said, but why did I say it? And how do you insist on popular definitions and overstep normal labels? It’s when among different populations they label the same thing as a ‘cup’, a ‘bowl’, a ‘jar’, a ‘scoop’, a ‘vessel’, a ‘dish’, or a ‘plate’. And however it is known among those various populations, you speak accordingly, obstinately sticking to that and insisting: ‘This is the only truth, anything else is futile.’ That’s how you insist on popular definitions and overstep normal labels.

And how do you not insist on popular definitions and overstep normal labels? It’s when among different populations they label the same thing as a ‘cup’, a ‘bowl’, a ‘jar’, a ‘scoop’, a ‘vessel’, a ‘dish’, or a ‘plate’. And however it is known among those various populations, you speak accordingly, thinking: ‘It seems that the venerables are referring to this.’ That’s how you don’t insist on popular definitions and don’t overstep normal labels. ‘Don’t insist on popular definitions and don’t overstep normal labels.’ That’s what I said, and this is why I said it.

Now, mendicants, indulging in the happiness of the pleasure linked to sensuality is low, crude, ordinary, ignoble, and pointless. It is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That’s why this is a principle beset by strife. Breaking off such indulgence is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. That’s why this is a principle free of strife.

Indulging in self-mortification is painful, ignoble, and pointless. It is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That’s why this is a principle beset by strife. Breaking off such indulgence is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. That’s why this is a principle free of strife.

The middle way of practice that was understood by the Realized One gives vision and knowledge, and leads to peace, direct knowledge, awakening, and extinguishment. It is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. That’s why this is a principle free of strife.

Flattering and rebuking without teaching Dhamma is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That’s why this is a principle beset by strife. Neither flattering nor rebuking, and just teaching Dhamma is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. That’s why this is a principle free of strife.

Sensual pleasure—a filthy, common, ignoble pleasure—is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That’s why this is a principle beset by strife. The pleasure of renunciation, the pleasure of seclusion, the pleasure of peace, the pleasure of awakening is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. That’s why this is a principle free of strife.

Saying untrue, false, and pointless things behind someone's back is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That's why this is a principle beset by strife. Saying true and correct, but pointless things behind someone's back is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That's why this is a principle beset by strife. Saying true, correct, and beneficial things behind someone's back is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. That's why this is a principle free of strife.

Saying untrue, false, and pointless things in someone's presence is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That's why this is a principle beset by strife. Saying true and correct, but pointless things in someone's presence is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That's why this is a principle beset by strife. Saying true, correct, and beneficial things in someone's presence is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. That's why this is a principle free of strife.

Speaking hurriedly is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That's why this is a principle beset by strife. Speaking unhurriedly is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. That's why this is a principle free of strife.

Insisting on popular definitions and overriding common usage is a principle beset by pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the wrong way. That's why this is a principle beset by strife. Not insisting on popular definitions and not overriding common usage is a principle free of pain, harm, stress, and fever, and it is the right way. That's why this is a principle free of strife.

So you should train like this: 'We shall know the principles beset by strife and the principles free of strife. Knowing this, we will practice the way free of strife.'

And, mendicants, the gentleman Subhūti practices the way free of strife."

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, the mendicants approved what the Buddha said.