MN 141 — Saccavibhanga Sutta: An Analysis of the Truths

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Varanasi in the Game Refuge at Isipatana. There he addressed the monks: "Monks!"

"Yes, lord," the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, "Monks, at Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Tathagatha — the worthy one, the rightly self-awakened one — set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by brahman or contemplative, deity, Mara, or Brahma or anyone at all in the cosmos: in other words, the declaration, teaching, description, setting-forth, revelation, explanation, and making-plain of the four noble truths. Of which four? The declaration, teaching, description, setting-forth, revelation, explanation, and making-plain of the noble truth of stress. The declaration, teaching, description, setting forth, revelation, explanation, and making-plain of the noble truth of the origination of stress... the noble truth of the cessation of stress... the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress. At Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Tathagatha — the worthy one, the rightly self-awakened one — set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by brahman or

contemplative, deity, Mara, or Brahma or anyone at all in the cosmos: in other words, the declaration, teaching, description, setting-forth, revelation, explanation, and making-plain of these four noble truths.

"Monks, associate with Sariputta & Moggallana. Consort with Sariputta & Moggallana. They are wise monks, sympathetic toward their fellows in the holy life. Like the mother giving birth: That's Sariputta. Like the nurse raising a child after it's born: That's Moggallana. Sariputta trains [others] to the fruit of stream-entry; Moggallana, to the highest goal.[1] Sariputta is capable of declaring, teaching, describing, setting forth, revealing, explaining, and making plain the four noble truths in detail."

That is what the Blessed One said. Having said it, he — the One Well-gone — rose from his seat and entered his dwelling.

Then Ven. Sariputta, not long after the Blessed One had left, addressed the monks, "Friends!"

"Yes, friend," the monks responded.

Ven. Sariputta said, "Friends, at Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Tathagatha — the worthy one, the rightly self-awakened one — set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by brahman or contemplative, deity, Mara, or Brahma or anyone at all in the cosmos: in other words, the declaration, teaching, description, setting-forth, revelation, explanation, and making-plain of the four noble truths. Of which four? The declaration, teaching, description, setting-forth, revelation, explanation, and making-plain of the noble truth of stress... the noble truth of the origination of stress... the noble truth of the cessation of stress... the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress. At Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Tathagatha — the worthy one, the rightly self-awakened one — set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by brahman or contemplative, deity, Mara, or Brahma or anyone at all in the cosmos: in other words, the declaration, teaching, description, setting-forth, revelation, explanation, and making-plain of these four noble truths.

"Now what, friends, is the noble truth of stress? Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; not getting what is wanted is stressful.[2] In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

"And what is birth? Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-be, coming-forth, appearance of aggregates, & acquisition of [sense] spheres of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth.

"And what is aging? Whatever aging, decrepitude, brokenness, graying, wrinkling, decline of life-force, weakening of the faculties of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called aging.

"And what is death? Whatever deceasing, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, completion of time, break up of the aggregates, casting off of the body, interruption in the life faculty of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called death.

"And what is sorrow? Whatever sorrow, sorrowing, sadness, inward sorrow, inward sadness of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing, that is called sorrow.

"And what is lamentation? Whatever crying, grieving, lamenting, weeping, wailing, lamentation of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing, that is called lamentation.

"And what is pain? Whatever is experienced as bodily pain, bodily discomfort, pain or discomfort born of bodily contact, that is called pain.

"And what is distress? Whatever is experienced as mental pain, mental discomfort, pain or discomfort born of mental contact, that is called distress.

"And what is despair? Whatever despair, despondency, desperation of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing, that is called despair.

"And what is the stress of not getting what is wanted? In beings subject to birth, the wish arises, 'O, may we not be subject to birth, and may birth not come to us.' But this is not to be achieved by wanting. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted. In beings subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair, the wish arises, 'O, may we not be subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair, and may aging... illness... death... sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair not come to us.' But this is not to be achieved by wanting. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted.

"And what are the five clinging-aggregates that, in short, are stressful? The clinging-aggregate of form, the clinging-aggregate of feeling, the clinging-aggregate of perception, the clinging-aggregate of fabrications, the clinging-aggregate of consciousness: These are called the five clinging-aggregates that, in short, are stressful.

"This, friends, is called the noble truth of stress.

"And what, friends, is the noble truth of the origination of stress? The craving that makes for further becoming — accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there — i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

"This is called the noble truth of the origination of stress.

"And what, friends, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress? The remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.

"This is called the noble truth of the cessation of stress.

"And what, friends, is the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress? Just this very noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

"And what is right view? Knowledge with reference to stress, knowledge with reference to the origination of stress, knowledge with reference to the cessation of stress, knowledge with reference to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.

And what is right resolve? The resolve for renunciation, for freedom from ill will, for harmlessness: This is called right resolve.

"And what is right speech? Abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, & from idle chatter: This is called right speech.

"And what is right action? Abstaining from taking life, from stealing, & from sexual misconduct: This is called right action.

"And what is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood: This is called right livelihood.

"And what is right effort? There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, arouses persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen... for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen... for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen... (and) for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen: This is called right effort.

"And what is right mindfulness? There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves... the mind in & of itself... mental qualities in & of themselves — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. This is called right mindfulness.

"And what is right concentration? There is the case where a monk — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful (mental) qualities — enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance. With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' With the abandoning of pleasure & pain — as with the earlier

disappearance of elation & distress — he enters & remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is called right concentration.

"This is called the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.

"Friends, at Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Tathagatha — the worthy one, the rightly self-awakened one — set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by brahman or contemplative, deity, Mara, or Brahma or anyone at all in the cosmos: in other words, the declaration, teaching, description, setting-forth, revelation, explanation, and making-plain of these four noble truths."

That is what Ven. Sariputta said. Gratified, the monks delighted in Ven. Sariputta's words.

Notes

1.

The Buddha declared Sariputta to be foremost among his disciples in terms of discernment; Moggallana, foremost in terms of psychic powers. It might seem strange, then, that Sariputta takes on what seems to be a lower job, but as many Buddhist teachers have commented, it is much harder to train an ordinary person to enter the stream than it is to train a stream-winner to reach the highest goal.

2.

In passages where the Buddha defines stress, (e.g., SN 56.11, DN 22), he includes the statements, "association with the unbeloved is stressful; separation from the loved is stressful," prior to "not getting what one wants is stressful." For some reason, in passages where Ven. Sariputta defines stress (here and at MN 9 and MN 28), he drops these statements from the definition.

See also: DN 22; SN 12.20; SN 56.11; AN 3.134.