MN 152 — MN 152 The Development of the Faculties | Indriya-bhāvanā Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN152.html

Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

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Text

The Development of the Faculties

Indriya-bhāvanā Sutta (MN 152)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Kajjaṅgalas in the Bamboo Forest. Then the young brahman Uttara, a student of Pārāsiri [Pārāsivi] went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged friendly greetings & courtesies. After this exchange of courteous greetings he sat to one side.

As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him: “Uttara, does the brahman Pārāsiri teach his followers the development of the faculties?”

“Yes, master Gotama, he does.”

“And how does he teach his followers the development of the faculties?”

“There is the case where one does not see forms with the eye, or hear sounds with the ear [in a trance of non-perception]. That’s how the brahman Pārāsiri teaches his followers the development of the faculties.”

“That being the case, Uttara, then a blind person will have developed faculties, and a deaf person will have developed faculties, according to the words of the brahman Pārāsiri. For a blind person does not see forms with the eye, and a deaf person does not hear sounds with the ear.”

When this was said, the young brahman Uttara sat silent & abashed, his shoulders slumped, his head down, brooding, at a loss for words. The Blessed One—noticing that Uttara was sitting silent & abashed, his shoulders slumped, his head down, brooding, at a loss for words—said to Ven. Ānanda, “Ānanda, the development of the faculties that the brahman Pārāsiri teaches his followers is one thing, but the unexcelled development of the faculties in the discipline of a noble one is something else entirely.”

“Now is the time, O Blessed One. Now is the time, O One Well-Gone, for the Blessed One to teach the unexcelled development of the faculties in the discipline of the noble one. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks will remember it.”

“In that case, Ānanda, listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” Ven. Ānanda responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said: “Now how, Ānanda, in the discipline of a noble one is there the unexcelled development of the faculties? There is the case where, when seeing a form with the eye, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). He discerns that ‘This agreeable (reaction) has arisen in me, this disagreeable (reaction)… this agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) has arisen in me. And that is fabricated, gross, dependently co-arisen. But this is peaceful, this is exquisite, i.e., equanimity.’ With that, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. Just as a man with good eyes, having closed them, might open them; or having opened them, might close them, that is how quickly, how rapidly, how easily, no matter what it refers to, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. In the discipline of a noble one, this is called the unexcelled development of the faculties with regard to forms cognizable by the eye.

“And further, when hearing a sound with the ear, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). He discerns that ‘This agreeable (reaction) has arisen in me, this disagreeable (reaction)… this agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) has arisen in me. And that is fabricated, gross,

dependently co-arisen. But this is peaceful, this is exquisite, i.e., equanimity.' With that, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. Just as a strong man might easily snap his fingers, that is how quickly, how rapidly, how easily, no matter what it refers to, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. In the discipline of a noble one, this is called the unexcelled development of the faculties with regard to sounds cognizable by the ear.

"And further, when smelling an aroma with the nose, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). He discerns that 'This agreeable (reaction) has arisen in me, this disagreeable (reaction)… this agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) has arisen in me. And that is fabricated, gross, dependently co-arisen. But this is peaceful, this is exquisite, i.e., equanimity.' With that, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. Just as drops of water roll off a gently sloping lotus leaf & do not remain there, that is how quickly, how rapidly, how easily, no matter what it refers to, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. In the discipline of a noble one, this is called the unexcelled development of the faculties with regard to aromas cognizable by the nose.

"And further, when tasting a flavor with the tongue, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). He discerns that 'This agreeable (reaction) has arisen in me, this disagreeable (reaction)… this agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) has arisen in me. And that is fabricated, gross, dependently co-arisen. But this is peaceful, this is exquisite, i.e., equanimity.' With that, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. Just as a strong man might easily spit out a ball of saliva gathered on the tip of his tongue, that is how quickly, how rapidly, how easily, no matter what it refers to, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. In the discipline of a noble one, this is called the unexcelled development of the faculties with regard to flavors cognizable by the tongue.

"And further, when touching a tactile sensation with the body, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). He discerns that 'This agreeable (reaction) has arisen in me, this disagreeable (reaction)… this agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) has arisen in me. And that is fabricated, gross, dependently co-arisen. But this is peaceful, this is exquisite, i.e., equanimity.' With that, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. Just as a strong man might easily extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, that is how quickly, how rapidly, how easily, no matter what it refers to, the arisen agreeable… disagreeable… agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. In the discipline of a noble one, this is called the unexcelled development of the faculties with regard to tactile sensations cognizable by the body.

"And further, when cognizing an idea with the intellect, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). He

discerns that 'This agreeable (reaction) has arisen in me, this disagreeable (reaction)... this agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) has arisen in me. And that is fabricated, gross, dependently co-arisen. But this is peaceful, this is exquisite, i.e., equanimity.' With that, the arisen agreeable... disagreeable... agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. Just as a strong man might let two or three drops of water fall onto an iron pan heated all day: Slow would the falling of the drops of water, but they quickly would vanish & disappear. That is how quickly, how rapidly, how easily, no matter what it refers to, the arisen agreeable... disagreeable... agreeable & disagreeable (reaction) ceases, and equanimity takes a stance. In the discipline of a noble one, this is called the unexcelled development of the faculties with regard to ideas cognizable by the intellect.

"And how is one a person in training, someone following the way? There is the case where, when seeing a form with the eye, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). He feels horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with the arisen agreeable... disagreeable... agreeable & disagreeable (reaction).

"When hearing a sound with the ear.... When smelling an aroma with the nose.... When tasting a flavor with the tongue.... When touching a tactile sensation with the body.... When cognizing an idea with the intellect, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). He feels horrified, humiliated, & disgusted with the arisen agreeable... disagreeable... agreeable & disagreeable (reaction).

"This is how one is a person in training, someone following the way.

"And how is one a noble one with developed faculties? There is the case where, when seeing a form with the eye, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome & what is. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not. If he wants—in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not—cutting himself off from both, he remains equanimous, alert, & mindful.

"When hearing a sound with the ear.... When smelling an aroma with the nose.... When tasting a flavor with the tongue.... When touching a tactile sensation with the body.... When cognizing an idea with the intellect, there arises in a monk an agreeable (reaction), a disagreeable (reaction), an agreeable & disagreeable (reaction). If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome & what is. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not. If he wants—in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not—cutting himself off from both, he remains equanimous, alert, & mindful.

“This is how one is a noble one with developed faculties.

“So, Ānanda, I have taught you the unexcelled development of the faculties in the discipline of a noble one; I have taught you how one is a person in training, someone following the way; I have taught you how one is a noble one with developed faculties. Whatever a teacher should do—seeking the welfare of his disciples, out of sympathy for them—that have I done for you. Over there are the roots of trees; over there, empty dwellings. Practice jhāna, Ānanda. Don’t be heedless. Don’t later fall into remorse. That is our message to you all.”

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

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 78; SN 35:153; SN 46:54; AN 6:55; AN 9:37; Ud 3:4; Ud 4:4