

MN 22

Majjhima Nikāya

The Middle Length Discourses

Opamma Vagga

The Section on Similes

Alagaddūpama Sutta

“The Simile of ‘Handling the Venomous Water-Snake’”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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1. ARIṬṬHA’S WRONG & CONVOLUTEDLY EVIL VIEW

I have personally heard this.

On one occasion, The Blessed One was living at the monastery in Jeta’s Park that was offered by the householder Anāthapiṇḍika, near the city of Sāvattthī.

It was during that time, when a certain Bhikkhu named Ariṭṭha, who had previously made his living by capturing vultures, began misrepresenting The Dhamma by promoting his own wrong and convolutedly evil view. To this end, he would state the following –

“The way I have come to understand The Dhamma as taught by The Blessed One, all those types of actions that The Blessed One has stated to be obstructions, in themselves, really have no impact on the one who engages in them. Thus, as far as I can see, in no way could such behaviors truly hinder or be damaging to the person who performs them.”

On hearing about this, many Bhikkhus decided to intervene as they went to the Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, and began questioning him –

“Friend Ariṭṭha, could it be true that you have been promoting such a wrong and convolutedly evil view, by declaring?

‘The way I have come to understand The Dhamma taught by The Blessed One, all those types of actions that The Blessed One has stated to be obstructions, in themselves, really have no impact on the one who engages in them. Thus, as far as I can see, in no way could such behaviors truly hinder or be damaging to the person who performs them.’

And the Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha replied by saying:

“That statement is true, friends. For, that is exactly the way I have figured it and therefore have come to understand The Dhamma as taught by The Blessed One, that is – all those types of actions that The Blessed One has stated to be obstructions, in themselves, really have no impact on the one who engages in them. Thus, as far as I can see, in no way could such behaviors truly hinder or be damaging to the person who performs them.”

Then, on witnessing this, those Bhikkhus eagerly endeavored to release Ariṭṭha from his wrong and convolutedly evil view, in his misrepresentation of The Dhamma. In this way, they tried and tried to challenge him, as they questioned and then cross-questioned him on various aspects of The Dhamma, in an effort to convince him to relinquish his evil interpretations, by telling him –

“Friend Ariṭṭha, do not make such false statements! Do not misrepresent The Blessed One, friend! For, it is wrong to be stating what is completely untrue, things that have nothing to do with The Blessed One! This, because The Blessed One would never say or teach such things.

“On the contrary, The Blessed One has repeatedly and in countless different ways declared and called out those hindering actions and behaviors to be just that: obstructive and hindering, given the simple fact that they do obstruct, hinder, impede and therefore block the very progress and growth of anyone who engages in them!

“Friend, The Blessed One has advised us again and again, that there is little satisfaction but much suffering, and with plenty of regrets, in pursuing passions and sensual lust, which ultimately bring nothing more than pure dissatisfaction, anguish and danger to the person who engages in them.

“Also, friend, in demonstrating the seriousness of this to us, The Blessed One has even used the simile of the skeleton, the simile of a lump of flesh, the simile of the grass torch, the simile of the pit of scorching charcoals, the simile of the dream, the simile of the borrowed goods, the simile of a fruit on a tree, the simile of the butcher’s knife and chopping block, the simile of the sharp stake, and the simile of the poisonous head of a snake. He has explained and clarified this on many an occasion to highlight for us the dangers and drawbacks that always follow that disappointing chase after sensual gratification. For, the very dangers and terrors it brings are far greater, outweighing and outlasting any sensual desire that one pursues!”

However, despite all their efforts at convincing the Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha of his wrong and convolutedly evil view, and although they tried pressing him by questions and then cross-questioning, nevertheless, he kept staunchly holding on to his wrong view so tenaciously, obstinately insisting on his misinterpretation and misunderstanding of The Dhamma, while claiming it to be correct.

Then, on realizing that they were unable to dissuade him from his wrong and convolutedly evil view and misrepresentation of The Dhamma, those Bhikkhus went and approached The Blessed One, and once having paid homage to The Teacher, they sat to one side and began reporting on what had taken place with the Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, while adding –

“Therefore, Bhante, the Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, who had previously made his living by capturing vultures, refused to give up his wrong and convolutedly evil view, despite our efforts at trying to convince and press him by questioning and then cross-questioning, as he kept staunchly holding on to his wrong view, and ever so tenaciously, obstinately insisting on his misinterpretation and misunderstanding of The Dhamma, claiming it to be correct. Realizing that we were unsuccessful in our efforts to dissuade him from his wrong and evil views, we decided that we must report this matter to The Blessed One Himself.”

Then, once this was said, The Blessed One addressed a certain Bhikkhu by instructing him –

“Go now, Bhikkhu, and in my name tell that Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, who previously had made his living by capturing vultures, that The Teacher is calling him.”

“Yes, Bhante,” that Bhikkhu replied, as he went to the Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha and informed him:

“The Teacher is calling you, friend Ariṭṭha.”

“Yes, friend,” replied the Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, as he went and approached The Blessed One. Then, after paying homage to The Teacher, he sat down to one side, and The Blessed One began questioning him –

“Ariṭṭha, is what we heard true? That you have been promoting such wrong and convolutedly evil views, by declaring:

‘The way I have come to understand The Dhamma taught by The Blessed One, all those types of actions that The Blessed One has stated to be obstructions, in themselves, really have no impact on the one who engages in them. Thus, as far as I can see, in no way could such behaviors truly hinder or be damaging to the person who performs them.’

And the Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha replied by saying:

“That statement is true, Bhante. For, that is exactly the way I have figured it and therefore have come to understand The Dhamma, as taught by The Blessed One, that is – all those types of actions that The Blessed One has stated to be obstructions, in themselves, really have no impact on the one who engages in them. Thus, as far as I can see, in no way could such behaviors truly hinder or be damaging to the person who performs them.”

On hearing this confirmation, The Blessed One admonished him, while chastising –

“You stupid and no-good-for-nothing idiot! How did you come up with such a devastatingly absurd thing? Who exactly was it that you witnessed to teach The Dhamma in such a manner?

“Foolish man, on countless occasions, I have repeatedly instructed, taught, and declared in so many ways, by calling out the hindering and obstructing actions and behaviors to be just that:

obstructive and hindering, given the simple fact that they do obstruct, hinder, impede and therefore block the very progress and growth of anyone who engages in them.

“Furthermore, in demonstrating the seriousness of this to you all, I have used so many metaphors and similes to make you understand, such as the simile of the skeleton, the simile of a lump of flesh, the simile of the grass torch, the simile of the pit of scorching charcoals, the simile of the dream, the simile of the borrowed goods, the simile of a fruit on a tree, the simile of the butcher’s knife and chopping block, the simile of the sharp stake, and the simile of the poisonous head of a snake. All this, I have explained and clarified on many an occasion to highlight for you the many dangers and drawbacks that always follow that disappointing and perilous pursuit after sensual gratification. For, the very dangers and terrors it brings are far greater, outweighing and outlasting any sensual desire that one pursues!”

“Yet, you stupid and no-good-for-nothing idiot, through your own deluded and convolutedly wrong understanding, you have been going ahead and misrepresenting Us with your evil notions and conclusion. As a result, you fool, you have now severely harmed and injured yourself, while accumulating such heavy and painful Kammic burdens, with terrible demerits that your actions have now accrued, all of which will work against you and to your own detriment and suffering, for a very long time to come.”

Then, The Blessed One spoke these words, while addressing the Bhikkhus:

“And what about you, Bhikkhus? What is your position regarding what is being said here?”

“Do you think that this Bhikkhu Aritṭha, who previously made his living by capturing vultures, has a spark of any level of discerning wisdom in him? Has he truly gained any level of higher understanding or insight in This Dhamma and Discipline, at all?”

And those Bhikkhus exclaimed with their fervent response –

“No way, Bhante! How could he, Blessed Lord, seeing that it would surely be an impossibility for him! There is no way that he has gained any level of higher understanding or insight whatsoever in This Dhamma and Discipline.”

Meanwhile, as this was being said, the Bhikkhu Aritṭha, who previously had made his living by capturing vultures, now sat there quietly and glum, unable to speak a word, dumbstruck and completely embarrassed, and utterly humiliated for having committed such a grave mistake.

Then, on witnessing this, The Blessed One spoke to him once more, by saying –

“You foolish and good-for-nothing idiot, you will certainly be recognized by your very own deluded and devastatingly harmful views with which you went misrepresenting This Dispensation.

“Now, I shall further question the rest of the Bhikkhus on this matter.”

And by addressing the Bhikkhus, The Blessed One then continued by saying –

“And how do you, Bhikkhus, understand The Dhamma that I have been teaching you thus far? Do you hold the view held by this Bhikkhu Aritṭha, who previously made his living by capturing vultures, and the way he has been grabbing onto his convolutedly wrong understanding, with which he has been going around and misrepresenting Us using his evil notions and conclusion, harming and injuring himself in the process, while accumulating such heavy and painful Kammic burdens, with terrible demerits for him that his actions have now accrued, all of which will work against him and to his own detriment and suffering, and for a very long time to come?”

And those Bhikkhus replied by exclaiming –

“Absolutely not, Bhante! After all, on countless occasions, The Blessed One has repeatedly instructed, taught, and declared to us and in so many ways, by calling out the hindering and obstructing actions and behaviors to be just that: obstructive and hindering, given the simple fact that they do obstruct, hinder, impede and therefore block the very progress and growth of anyone who engages in them.

“Furthermore, in demonstrating the seriousness of this to us all, The Blessed One has used so many metaphors and similes to make us understand, providing us the simile of the skeleton, the simile of a lump of flesh, the simile of the grass torch, the simile of the pit of scorching charcoals, the simile of the dream, the simile of the borrowed goods, the simile of a fruit on a tree, the simile of the butcher’s knife and chopping block, the simile of the sharp stake, and the simile of the poisonous head of a snake.

“All this, Bhante, You have explained and clarified on many an occasion to highlight for us the many dangers and drawbacks that always follow that disappointing and dangerously risky pursuit after sensual gratification. For, the very terrifying dangers it brings are far greater, outweighing and outlasting any sensual desire that one pursues!”

“Very good, very good, Bhikkhus! It is truly good that you all understand The Dhamma in this manner!

“After all, on countless occasions I have repeatedly instructed, taught, and declared to you in so many ways, by calling out the hindering and obstructing actions and behaviors to be just that: obstructive and hindering, given the simple fact that they do obstruct, hinder, impede and therefore block the very progress and growth of anyone who engages in them.

“Furthermore, in demonstrating the seriousness of this to you all, I have used so many metaphors and similes to make you understand, such as the simile of the skeleton, the simile of a lump of flesh, the simile of the grass torch, the simile of the pit of scorching charcoals, the simile of the dream, the simile of the borrowed goods, the simile of a fruit on a tree, the simile of the butcher’s knife and chopping block, the simile of the sharp stake, and the simile of the poisonous head of a snake. All this, I have explained and clarified on many an occasion in order to highlight for you the many dangers and drawbacks that always follow that disappointing and perilous pursuit after

sensual gratification. For, the very dangers and terrors it brings are far greater, outweighing and outlasting any sensual desire that one pursues!”

“Yet, this stupid and no-good-for-nothing Bhikkhu Arittha, who previously made his living by capturing vultures, through his own deluded and convolutedly wrong understanding, has been going ahead and misrepresenting Us with his evil notions and conclusion. As a result, this fool has now severely harmed and injured himself, while accumulating such heavy and painful Kammic burdens, with terrible demerits that his actions have now accrued, all of which will work against him and to his own detriment and suffering, for a very long time to come.

“Now, Bhikkhus, you must always remember this –

“It is impossible for someone to indulge in *any* sensual activity without first having and perpetuating sensual desires in one’s heart.

“Therefore, without there being any perceptions pertaining to sensual indulgence; without thinking or entertaining thoughts of sensuality, or lusting after sensual experiences, it would simply be impossible for anyone to ever want to engage or indulge in such behavior!

2. THE VENOMOUS WATER SNAKE SIMILE

a. “Here, Bhikkhus, there are those fools who go studying The Dhamma, whether by hearing the discourses, or those suttas that include a mixture of verse and prose, the expositions, the verse sections, the inspired utterances or *Udāna*, the ‘*Thus was said*’ sections or *Itivuttaka*, the birth stories or *Jatakas*, the amazing accounts, as well as the series on questions and answers. But despite having studied that much of The Teachings, they really do not spend the time nor the energy to genuinely examine their meanings with wisdom.

“Now, without such investigation or a serious effort placed to probe what is being studied through careful and wise scrutiny, they fail to penetrate The Dhamma, and therefore, it neither becomes integrated in them nor truly absorbed into becoming a deeply transformative understanding.

“Instead, however, they go on memorizing or even studying The Dhamma merely for the purpose of criticizing others and for winning in debates. As a result, they misunderstand and misinterpret This Good Dhamma, whereby they fail to ever come close, let alone experience, the very Goal which it makes accessible for all.

“Now, all those teachings they have memorized or somehow learned, due to being thus misunderstood and wrongly grasped by them, inevitably lead to their terrible harm and suffering, for a long time.

“And why is that the case?

“It is because such fools have misunderstood, misinterpreted and therefore wrongly grasped The Dhamma.

“Here, Bhikkhus, imagine there was a man who, needing the venom of a poisonous water-snake, wanted to go and obtain a water-snake. Thus, he heads out looking for ways to trap and get hold of such a venomous water-snake. Later, he is able to see a large venomous water-snake and reaches for it, trying to grab by its coiling body or its tail. But, in making such a terrible mistake, the snake would quickly turn its head and bite the man’s hand or arm, or any one of his limbs. As a result, that man will be mortally wounded and even face certainty of a very painful death, indeed.

“And why would that be the case?

“It is because of his wrong grasp of the venomous water-snake, for he tried to handle it incorrectly and without the respectful consideration it deserves.

“Now, in just the same manner, Bhikkhus, there are those fools who go studying The Dhamma whether by hearing the discourses, or those suttas that include a mixture of verse and prose, the expositions, the verse sections, the inspired utterances or *Udāna*, the ‘*Thus was said*’ sections or *Itivuttaka*, the birth stories or *Jatakas*, the amazing accounts, as well as the series on questions and answers. But despite having studied that much of The Teachings, they really do not spend the time nor the energy to genuinely examine their meanings with wisdom.

“So, without such investigation or a serious effort placed to probe what is being studied through careful and wise scrutiny, they fail to penetrate The Dhamma, and therefore, it neither becomes integrated in them nor truly absorbed into becoming a deeply transformative understanding.

“Instead, however, they go on memorizing or even studying The Dhamma merely for the purpose of criticizing others and for winning in debates. As a result, they misunderstand and misinterpret This Good Dhamma, whereby they fail to ever come close, let alone experience, the very Goal which it makes accessible for all.

“Now, all those teachings they have memorized or somehow learned, due to being thus misunderstood and wrongly grasped by them, inevitably lead to their terrible harm and suffering, for a long time.

“And why is that the case?

“It is because such fools have misunderstood, misinterpreted and therefore wrongly grasped The Dhamma.

b. “On the other hand, Bhikkhus, take the example of a good son of a family who goes on studying The Dhamma, whether by hearing the discourses, or those suttas that include a mixture of verse and prose, the expositions, the verse sections, the inspired utterances or *Udāna*, the ‘*Thus was said*’ sections or *Itivuttaka*, the birth stories or *Jatakas*, the amazing accounts, as well

as the series on questions and answers. Later, on having studied that much of The Teachings, he spends the necessary time and energy to genuinely examine their meanings with wisdom.

“Now, given his investigation and serious effort in probing what is being studied through his careful and wise scrutiny, he succeeds to penetrate The Dhamma, which becomes integrated in him and truly absorbed, thereby providing him with a deeply transformative understanding.

“Thus, because his efforts at memorizing and studying The Dhamma were never for the purpose of fault-finding, criticizing others or for winning in debates, as a result, he comes to understand and properly grasp This Good Dhamma, whereby he truly experiences the very Goal for which he had been studying, and which The Dhamma makes accessible for all.

“Now, all those teachings he had memorized and learned, due to being thus correctly understood and properly grasped by him, inevitably lead to his happiness and delightful wellbeing, for a long time indeed.

“And why is that the case, Bhikkhus?

“It is because he correctly understood and therefore truly grasped The Dhamma.

“Here, Bhikkhus, imagine there was a man who, needing the venom of a poisonous water-snake, wanted to go and obtain a water-snake. Thus, he heads out looking for ways to trap and get hold of such a venomous water-snake. Later, he finds a large venomous water-snake, and by using a forked piece of a stick, he carefully extends it towards the neck of the venomous water-snake and thus grabs it by the head.

“Now, despite the water-snake wiggling its body this way and that, or trying to coil its body around the man’s hands, he will still remain safe and beyond harm’s way, for the water-snake will be unable to release its head to bite either the man’s hand, arm, or any one of his limbs. Thus, as a result, that man will be secure and beyond any risk of harm, let alone of a very painful death.

“And why would that be the case?

“It is because of his correct grasp of the venomous water-snake, for he has handled it appropriately, and with the respectful consideration that the venomous water-snake deserves.

“Now, in just the same manner, Bhikkhus, that good son of a family who goes on studying The Dhamma, whether by hearing the discourses, or those suttas that include a mixture of verse and prose, the expositions, the verse sections, the inspired utterances or *Udāna*, the ‘*Thus was said*’ sections or *Itivuttaka*, the birth stories or *Jatakas*, the amazing accounts, as well as the series on questions and answers; on having studied that much of The Teachings, he spends the necessary time and energy to genuinely examine their meanings with wisdom.

“And given his investigation and serious effort in probing what is being studied through his careful and wise scrutiny, he succeeds to penetrate The Dhamma, which becomes integrated in him and truly absorbed, thereby providing him with a deeply transformative understanding.

“Thus, because his efforts at memorizing and studying The Dhamma were never for the purpose of fault-finding, criticizing others or for winning in debates, as a result, he comes to understand and properly grasp This Good Dhamma, whereby he truly experiences the very Goal for which he had been studying, and which The Dhamma makes accessible for all.

“Now, all those teachings he had memorized and learned, due to being thus correctly understood and properly grasped by him, inevitably lead to his happiness and delightful wellbeing, for a long time indeed.

“And why is that the case, Bhikkhus?

“It is because he correctly understood and therefore truly grasped The Dhamma.

“Therefore, Bhikkhus, if and when you truly grasp and genuinely understand what I have been teaching you, then strive to recall it often by carefully preserving them in your heart, while referring to them constantly.

“However, if and when you discover that you do not, in fact, truly grasp or quite understand the meaning of what I have been teaching you, then it is your duty to either come and approach Me by asking for a clarification on what was said, or to go and approach any one of those Bhikkhus, who are wiser than yourself and therefore have a clearer understanding and a proper grasp of The Dhamma.

3. THE WATER-RAFT SIMILE

“Now, Bhikkhus, I will describe to you how to look upon The Dhamma and relate to It, as though it were a raft, which you are supposed to use to travel and navigate over water, because The Dhamma itself is for the purpose of crossing over, and not something for you to grab hold of or somehow try to possess or own.

“Therefore, pay close attention to what I shall now teach you.”

“Yes, Bhante,” those Bhikkhus replied.

And The Blessed One continued instructing those Bhikkhus, by stating –

“Imagine, Bhikkhus, there was a man traveling through vast stretches of land who came upon a great and tumultuous ocean, intimidating and difficult to cross.

“Then, on realizing that the coastline he was standing on was terribly dangerous while exposing him to countless threatening conditions from all sides, he sees that there is protection and true safety to be found once he is able to cross over and make into the farther shore, a sanctuary that is utterly free from any danger. However, he also notices that there are no means of transport or a bridge to allow him to make the journey across from this shore to the safety beyond.

Then, he starts reflecting over his predicament while carefully considering:

‘I have come thus far, and now I see that there is this great and tumultuous ocean in front of me, but the coastline where I happen to stand is terribly dangerous too, exposing me to countless threatening conditions that surround me from all sides.

‘What if I leave this shore entirely and just cross over onto the farther shore, where there is safety to be found, a sanctuary that is utterly free from any danger? Unfortunately, though, there are no means of transport, as I see neither a ferryboat nor a bridge to allow me to make the journey across, from this perilous shore to the safety beyond!’

‘Well, what if I gather some branches and twigs, along with some grass and leaves and securely tie them up together, and thus make myself a water-raft, something that I could use that gives me a chance to cross over this great and tumultuous ocean, and make it to the safety of the other shore?’

“So, Bhikkhus, that man gets to work and diligently applies himself by gathering some branches and twigs, along with some grass and leaves, and securely ties them up together, and thus makes himself a water-raft. He then enters the ocean with it, as he pushes forward, paddling through its mighty waves supported by his hands and feet, until he does indeed make it to the safety of the other shore!

“Once standing on the safety of the farther shore, having already crossed the vast ocean with the support of his water-raft, that man might start considering:

‘Well, this raft has truly been a lifesaver for me, having given me the chance to abandon that terribly dangerous other shore, allowing me to cross this great and tumultuous ocean that now lies behind me, whereby I stand firmly upon the safety and security of this shore.

‘So, what if I were to pick up this water-raft, throw it over my shoulders and carry it with me, wherever I go?’

“Now, Bhikkhus, what do you think?

“Would you say that the man would be doing something smart to carry that water-raft with him or over his head, from one place to the next, seeing that it was useful in allowing him to cross the great ocean? Is that what one is supposed to do with the raft or boat that carried you to the beyond?”

“No, Bhante,” those Bhikkhus replied.

The Blessed One then continued instructing –

“And what, Bhikkhus, is one supposed to do instead, with the water-raft or boat after having made the journey?

“Here, Bhikkhus, once having made it to the safety of the farther shore, having already crossed the vast ocean with the support of his water-raft, that man might start considering:

‘Well, this raft has truly been a lifesaver for me, having given me the chance to abandon that terribly dangerous other shore, allowing me to cross this great and tumultuous ocean that now lies behind me, whereby I stand firmly upon the safety and security of this shore.

‘So, what if I were to haul up the water-raft further onto dry sand, or just set it adrift, leaving it behind in the water, as it has already served its purpose, while I go wherever I want to go?’

“That is, after all, what needs to be done with that water-raft, once it has served its purpose and carried you across to the safety of the farther shore, O Bhikkhus!

“So, The Dhamma I have taught you, Bhikkhus, is just like that water-raft, to be used merely for crossing over and *not* for grasping or holding on to, at all!

“Therefore, Bhikkhus, I have given you the simile of the water-raft as a reference to The Dhamma I have taught you, wherein by properly understanding the meaning of ‘how to relate with the water-raft,’ and the significance of leaving it behind, once it has served its purpose, you will no longer grab onto The Dhamma either, let alone all those teachings that are themselves adhamma, having nothing to do with This Dispensation, at all!

4. THE BASES FOR VARIOUS OPINIONS AND VIEWS

“Bhikkhus, there are these six bases for the various opinions and views that people hold.

“Now, what are the six?

“Here, Bhikkhus, the *puthujjana*, being an untrained and dense person, who is oblivious of The Dhamma, who neither seeks out the Noble Ones, nor respects them or even looks upon them with true veneration, on experiencing any forms, he regards and relates to them in this manner:

‘This is mine; this has everything to do with me; this is who and what I am!’

“Similarly, while experiencing feelings, he regards and relates to them in this manner:

‘This is mine; this has everything to do with me; this is who and what I am!’

“Also, while experiencing various perceptions, he regards and relates to them in this manner:

‘This is mine; this has everything to do with me; this is who and what I am!’

“Furthermore, while experiencing habitual drives or generative causes (*saṅkhārā*), he regards and relates to them in this manner:

‘This is mine; this has everything to do with me; this is who and what I am!’

“And similarly, whatever it is that he sees, hears, senses, cognizes; or whatever he attains that was sought after, pondered over and contemplated upon, all of it, he regards and relates to in this manner:

‘This is mine; this has everything to do with me; this is who and what I am!’

“And given the influence which serves as the basis for his opinions and views, he goes on reflecting:

‘With existence being eternal and the soul being identical to existence itself, once I am dead, then just like existence, I too will live forever, becoming eternal, unchanged and permanent, just like existence, never experiencing death, and lasting forever.’

And this too, he regards and relates to in the same manner:

‘This is mine; this has everything to do with me; this is who and what I am!’

“However, Bhikkhus, the well-taught and learned Noble Disciple, being a well-trained and disciplined person, who is deeply attuned to The Dhamma, who seeks out the Noble Ones, as he respects them and looks upon them with true veneration, on experiencing any forms, he regards and relates to them in this manner:

‘This is not mine; this has nothing to do with me; this is not who or what I am!’

“Similarly, while experiencing feelings, he regards and relates to them in this manner:

‘This is not mine; this has nothing to do with me; this is not who or what I am!’

“Also, while experiencing various perceptions, he regards and relates to them in this manner:

‘This is not mine; this has nothing to do with me; this is not who or what I am!’

“Furthermore, while experiencing habitual drives or generative causes (*saṅkhārā*), he regards and relates to them in this manner:

‘This is not mine; this has nothing to do with me; this is not who or what I am!’

“And similarly, whatever it is that he sees, hears, senses, cognizes; or whatever he attains that was sought after, pondered over and contemplated upon, all of it, he regards and relates to in this manner:

‘This is not mine; this has nothing to do with me; this is not who or what I am!’

“But given the influence which serves as the basis for his opinions and views, he goes on reflecting:

‘With existence being eternal, and the soul being identical to existence itself, once I am dead, then just like existence, I too will live forever, becoming eternal, unchanged and permanent, just like existence, never experiencing death, and lasting forever.’

Yet this too, he regards and relates to in the same manner:

‘This is not mine; this has nothing to do with me; this is not who or what I am!’

“And because he does not identify with any of it, he does not become agitated or experience any turmoil over things that never existed for him, in the first place. Thus, he considers such things as being irrelevant.”

5. ON AGITATION

Then, when this was said, a certain Bhikkhu addressed The Blessed One with a question, by asking:

“Bhante, could there still be any agitation experienced by a person, even in the absence of things that do not exist externally?

And The Blessed One replied by saying:

“There could be, Bhikkhu.

“For example, Bhikkhu, someone might keep thinking to himself:

‘Ah, it was once mine, but alas, it no longer is, it belongs to someone else!’
‘Ah, if only it could be mine, but alas, there’s no way that it could ever be mine!’

“As a result, he starts to grieve, moan and complain, cursing himself for his bad fortune, beating his chest while lamenting and wailing in anguish, becoming depressed.

“In this way, a person can still experience agitation, even in the absence of things, that do not exist externally.”

Then, that Bhikkhu inquired further by asking a follow-up question:

“And in what way could it be, Bhante, that a person does not experience any agitation, in the absence of things that do not exist externally?”

And The Blessed One replied by saying:

“That could take place in the following manner, Bhikkhu.

“When someone, Bhikkhu, does not entertain any such thoughts as:

‘Ah, it was once mine, but alas, it no longer is, it belongs to someone else!’

‘Ah, if only it could be mine, but alas, there’s no way that it could ever be mine!’

“Then, as a result, he does not grieve, nor mopes or complains, nor does he keep cursing himself for having a bad fortune; he does not go beating his chest, neither lamenting nor wailing in anguish, nor does he get depressed.

“In this way, a person protects himself from experiencing any agitation, due to the absence of certain things, that do not exist externally.”

Then, that Bhikkhu asked yet another question:

“But Bhante, could there be any agitation experienced by a person, even in the case of things being absent and thus not existing internally?”

And The Blessed One replied by saying:

“There could be, Bhikkhu.

“For example, Bhikkhu, someone might believe in certain things, such as:

‘With existence being eternal, and the soul being identical to existence itself, once I am dead, then, just like existence, I too will live forever, becoming eternal, unchanged and permanent, just like existence, never experiencing death, and lasting forever.’

“However, sometime later, he comes to hear either The Tathāgata or one of the Disciples of The Tathāgata teaching The Dhamma that is for the purpose of eliminating all obsessions, attachments, the taking of positions and perspectives as well as all underlying tendencies; teachings that are geared towards the stilling of all habitual drives (*saṅkhārā*), the relinquishing and total abandonment of all assets that one holds so dear; the very destruction of craving with its constant thirst for more; The Dhamma that leads to cessation itself, and to Extinction that is Nibbāna Supreme.

“Then, that person starts considering:

‘Oh no! That would mean I will be no more, though! I will be fully annihilated and destroyed and no longer exist!’

As a result, he starts to grieve, mope and complain, beating his chest while lamenting and wailing in anguish, and becoming depressed.

“In this way, a person could still experience agitation, even in the case of things being absent and thus not existing internally.

Then, the Bhikkhu asked a further question:

“But Bhante, how could it be, that a person does not experience any agitation, in the absence of things that do not exist internally?

And The Blessed One replied by saying:

“That could take place in the following manner, Bhikkhu.

“When, Bhikkhu, the person does not entertain any such thoughts as:

‘With existence being eternal, and the soul being identical to existence itself, once I am dead, then, just like existence, I too will live forever, becoming eternal, unchanged and permanent, just like existence, never experiencing death and lasting forever.’

“However, sometime later, he comes to hear either The Tathāgata or one of the Disciples of The Tathāgata teaching The Dhamma that is for the purpose of eliminating all obsessions, attachments, the taking of positions and perspectives as well as all underlying tendencies; teachings that are geared towards the stilling of all habitual drives (*saṅkhārā*), the relinquishing and total abandonment of all assets that one holds so dear; the very destruction of craving with its constant thirst for more; The Dhamma that leads to cessation itself, and to Extinction that is Nibbāna Supreme.

“Then, no deluded thoughts or worries come up for the person, such as –

‘Oh no! That would mean I will be no more, though! I will be fully annihilated and destroyed and no longer exist!’

“As a result, he does not grieve, nor mopes or complains, nor does he keep cursing himself for having a bad fortune, and he does not go beating his chest, neither lamenting nor wailing in anguish, nor does he get depressed.

“In this way, a person protects himself from experiencing any agitation, due to the absence of certain things that do not exist internally.”

6. IMPERMANENT & LACKING ANY SUBSTANTIALITY

a. “Now, Bhikkhus, if something or some personal or worldly possession were to be found that could somehow be permanent, stable, not susceptible to change, and thereby a thing that could last forever, remaining fixed and not perish at all, enduring endlessly, then, it might be understandable to try to acquire or attain it.

“But Bhikkhus, do you see or know, or could you point out the existence of such a thing or possession, anywhere?”

“No, Bhante, we could not!” replied those Bhikkhus.

“Very good, Bhikkhus. I also do not see nor can point out the existence of such a thing or possession that would be permanent, stable, not susceptible to change; a thing that could last forever, remaining fixed and not perish at all, enduring endlessly.

b. “Similarly, Bhikkhus, if there were a substantial or essential self or soul that somehow did not cause or bring about sorrow and pain, sadness, lamentation, depression and utter anguish, then it might be understandable to try and grab onto it, to identify with it and not let it go.

“But Bhikkhus, do you see or know, or could you point out the existence of such a thing as a substantial or essential self or soul, whereby one would want to somehow grab onto?”

“No, Bhante, we could not!” replied those Bhikkhus.

“Very good, Bhikkhus. I also do not see nor can point out the existence of such a substantial or essential self or soul that somehow did not cause or bring about sorrow and pain, sadness, lamentation, depression and utter anguish, whereby one would want to somehow grab onto.

c. “Similarly, Bhikkhus, if there were a certain view or worldview to rely on that somehow did not cause or bring about sorrow and pain, sadness, lamentation, depression and utter anguish, then it might be understandable to try and grab onto it, to identify with it and not let it go.

“But Bhikkhus, do you see or know, or could you point out the existence of such a view or worldview providing such reliance, whereby one would want to somehow grab onto?”

“No, Bhante, we could not!” replied those Bhikkhus.

“Very good, Bhikkhus. I also do not see nor can point out any such view or worldview to rely on, that somehow did not cause or bring about sorrow and pain, sadness, lamentation, depression and utter anguish, whereby one would want to grab onto.

d. “Similarly, Bhikkhus, if there really were a substantial and essential self or soul, then would it be appropriate to have such notions as: ‘*this is mine*’ or ‘*this has to do with or belong to me*’?”

“Yes, Bhante, it would.”

“And if there really is a self to call ‘*mine*’, then would it be understandable to have the notion of or to call it ‘*my self*’?”

“Yes, Bhante, it would.”

“Now Bhikkhus, since, as a matter of fact, such a substantial or essential self, or what may be assumed to belong to a self is nowhere to be seen or found in truth, then to go on believing in it or to make the claim –

‘With existence being eternal, and the soul being identical to existence itself, once I am dead, then, just like existence, I too will live forever, becoming eternal, unchanged and permanent, just like existence, never experiencing death and lasting forever’”

“Would it not mean that making such empty assumptions or false statements amounts to a false and foolish teaching?”

“How could it be otherwise, Bhante? For, it truly is nothing more than a false and an utterly foolish teaching!”

“Now, Bhikkhus, what do you think –

a. “Is form permanent or impermanent?”

“It is impermanent and transitory, Bhante.”

“And that which is impermanent, would you consider to be suffering or happiness?”

“I would consider it suffering, Bhante.”

“So, with what is impermanent, suffering, and thus unreliable in its changing nature, is it suitable for you to look upon it or claim it as: “*this is mine*,” “*this is happening to me*,” or “*this is myself*?”

“No Bhante, it is not suitable.”

b. “Do you consider feelings to be permanent or impermanent?”

“They too are impermanent and transitory, Bhante.”

“And that which is impermanent, would you consider to be suffering or happiness?”

“I would consider it suffering, Bhante.”

“So, with what is impermanent, suffering, and thus unreliable in its changing nature, is it suitable for you to look upon it or claim it as: “*this is mine*,” “*this is happening to me*,” or “*this is myself*?”

“No Bhante, it is not suitable.”

c. “Do you consider perceptions to be permanent or impermanent?”

“They are also impermanent and transitory, Bhante.”

“And that which is impermanent, would you consider to be suffering or happiness?”

“I would consider it suffering, Bhante.”

“So, with what is impermanent, suffering, and thus unreliable in its changing nature, is it suitable for you to look upon it or claim it as: “*this is mine*,” “*this is happening to me*,” or “*this is myself*?”

“No Bhante, it is not suitable.”

d. “Do you consider habitual drives to be permanent or impermanent?”

“They are also impermanent and transitory, Bhante.”

“And that which is impermanent, would you consider to be suffering or happiness?”

“I would consider it suffering, Bhante.”

“So, with what is impermanent, suffering, and thus unreliable in its changing nature, is it suitable for you to look upon it or claim it as: “*this is mine*,” “*this is happening to me*,” or “*this is myself*?”

“No Bhante, it is not suitable.”

e. “Do you consider consciousness to be permanent or impermanent?”

“They too are impermanent and transitory, Bhante.”

“And that which is impermanent, would you consider to be suffering or happiness?”

“I would consider it suffering, Bhante.”

“So, with what is impermanent, suffering, and thus unreliable in its changing nature, is it suitable for you to look upon it or claim it as: “*this is mine*,” “*this is happening to me*,” or “*this is myself*?”

“No Bhante, it is not suitable.”

“Therefore, Bhikkhus, whatever kind of form you may witness or experience, whether related to the past, future, or present, be it internal or external, gross or subtle, of an inferior or superior quality, whether far or near, you must look upon it as it truly is, and with the necessary wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine. This is not a part of me. This is not myself.’

“Whatever kind of feeling you may experience, whether related to the past, future, or present, be it internal or external, gross or subtle, of an inferior or superior quality, whether far or near, you must look upon it as it truly is, and with the necessary wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine. This is not a part of me. This is not myself.’

“Whatever kind of perceptions or memories you may experience, whether related to the past, future, or present, be it internal or external, gross or subtle, of an inferior or superior quality, whether far or near, you must look upon them as they truly are, and with the necessary wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine. This is not a part of me. This is not myself.’

“Whatever kind of habitual drives (*saṅkhārā*) you may experience, whether related to the past, future, or present, be it internal or external, gross or subtle, of an inferior or superior quality, whether far or near, you must look upon them as they truly are, and with the necessary wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine. This is not a part of me. This is not myself.’

“Whatever kind of sense awareness or consciousness you may experience, whether related to the past, future, or present, be it internal or external, gross or subtle, of an inferior or superior quality, whether far or near, you must look upon it as it truly is, and with the necessary wisdom, thus:

‘This is not mine. This is not a part of me. This is not myself.’

“Seeing things thus clearly, the wise and learned Noble Disciple becomes disenchanted and disgusted with form; disenchanted and disgusted with feelings; disenchanted and disgusted with

perceptions; disenchanted and disgusted with habitual drives; disenchanted and disgusted with consciousness.

“In becoming disenchanted and disgusted thus, he observes dispassion setting in as all desires he once had keep fading away.

“On having all passions faded away thus, he is then liberated, whereby the direct knowledge and understanding immediately manifests in him:

*“Birth is now finally destroyed. The Holy Life is fully lived.
What should have been done, is now done,
There’s nothing more left for me to do,
Nor there is any further existence left
Anywhere, for me to reappear into!”*

7. THE ARAHANT

“Bhikkhus, when the Bhikkhu is thus released in the heart, being fully liberated through wisdom, it is said that the Bhikkhu –

“Has removed the crossbar that was blocking his way,
Has already filled in all the moats,
Has pulled out the pillar blocking the gates,
He is one without any sensual binds and is full of results,
He is one who has lowered the flag; the one who has laid down the burden; he has finally released and thus freed himself from existence.

“And how, Bhikkhus, has the Bhikkhu removed the crossbar that was blocking his way?

“Here, the Bhikkhu has dispelled ignorance, having pulled it out with its roots, cutting it cleanly down like a palm tree, that is now turned into a dead stump, never to grow back ever again.

“In this manner, Bhikkhus, the Bhikkhu has removed the crossbar that was blocking his way.

“And how, Bhikkhus, has the Bhikkhu filled in the moats?

“Here, the Bhikkhu has relinquished wandering through future rebirths into various existences, having pulled it out with its roots, cutting it cleanly down like a palm tree, that is now turned into a dead stump, never to grow back ever again.

“In this manner, Bhikkhus, the Bhikkhu has filled in the moats.

“And how, Bhikkhus, has the Bhikkhu pulled out the pillar at the city gate?

“Here, the Bhikkhu has relinquished craving, having pulled it out with its roots, cutting it cleanly down like a palm tree, that is now turned into a dead stump, never to grow back ever again.

“In this manner, Bhikkhus, the Bhikkhu has pulled out the pillar at the city gate.

“And how, Bhikkhus, is the Bhikkhu one without any sensual binds and full of results?

“Here, the Bhikkhu has dispelled those shackles that bind him to the sensual world, having pulled it out with its roots, cutting it cleanly down like a palm tree, that is now turned into a dead stump, never to grow back ever again.

“In this manner, Bhikkhus, the Bhikkhu is one without any sensual binds and full of results.

“And how, Bhikkhus, has the Bhikkhu become one who has lowered the flag, the one who has laid down the burden, becoming one who is finally released and thus freed from existence?

“Here, the Bhikkhu has relinquished the conceit ‘*I am*,’ having pulled it out with its roots, cutting it cleanly down like a palm tree, that is now turned into a dead stump, never to grow back ever again.

“In this manner, Bhikkhus, the Bhikkhu is one who has lowered the flag, the one who has laid down the burden, who is finally released and thus freed from existence.

“Now, Bhikkhus, when the Bhikkhu’s heart is thus released fully, then even the Devas with their Ruler Lord Indra, as well as Mahā Brahmā Himself, along with Pajāpati, in searching and looking everywhere to find the very basis upon which the Bhikkhu rests, soon become baffled and dumbfounded, for failing to find that upon which he is securely anchored. Thus, they declare in astonishment:

‘This itself is where the consciousness of The Tathāgata is anchored, indeed!’

“And why is this the case, Bhikkhus?”

“It is because, I declare to you all, The Tathāgata is truly untraceable and impossible to ‘pin down’ even as he sits right here before you, at this very moment!”

8. MISREPRESENTING THE TATHĀGATA

“Bhikkhus, although I have declared The Dhamma in such a straightforward manner, nevertheless, many recluses and brahmins of other sects continue to speak words that are false, making baseless accusations against Me, lying and misrepresenting what I have been teaching all this time, by claiming:

‘The Recluse Gautama is an annihilationist who simply leads people astray by teaching and promoting the annihilation, the destruction and elimination of the existing and living being!’

“Thus, they go on misrepresenting Me, making ridiculous claims, lies, and false accusations against Me, saying things that I have never uttered nor taught. Nevertheless, while denying all facts, such people continue speaking words that are false, making baseless accusations against Me, lying and misrepresenting what I have been teaching all this time, as they claim:

‘The Recluse Gautama is an annihilationist who simply leads people astray by teaching and promoting the annihilation, the destruction and elimination of the existing and living being!’

“Now, remember Bhikkhus, as I have always declared to you –

“Just as I have done in the past, I continue to do so now: all I have been teaching is the existence of suffering, *and* the very cessation of suffering!

“And if it so happens that because of this, or for whatever reason, others abuse, insult, despise, rebuke, and harass The Tathāgata, then The Tathāgata will not become bitter or resentful, nor feel gloomy or dejected at heart.

“And if by contrast, because of what I teach and declare, others decide to honor, respect, admire, and worshipfully venerate The Tathāgata, then The Tathāgata will not become delighted or thrilled, joyful or elated at heart, either.

“Hence, when others go on honoring or showing respect, by worshipping or venerating The Tathāgata, then The Tathāgata acknowledges it by reckoning:

‘These beings are behaving in such a manner, doing these actions and providing various services, as a result of what they have already fully and directly understood.’

“Therefore, Bhikkhus, if others abuse, insult, despise, rebuke, and harass you, you should not become bitter or resentful, nor feel gloomy or dejected at heart.

“And if by contrast, others decide to honor, respect, admire, and worshipfully venerate you, then you should not become delighted or thrilled, joyful or elated at heart, either.

“Hence, when others go on honoring or showing respect, by worshipping or venerating you, then you must acknowledge it by reckoning:

‘These beings are behaving in such a manner, by doing these actions and providing various services, as a result of what they have already fully and directly understood.’

9. THEY’RE NOT YOURS!

“After all, Bhikkhus, whatever that is not yours, just give it up and abandon it. For, the moment you give it up and abandon it, you will gain much happiness and benefit as a result.

“And what, Bhikkhus, is it that is not yours?

“Form is not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give it up and abandon it. For, the moment you give it up and abandon it, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

“Feelings are not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give them up and abandon them. For, the moment you give them up and abandon them, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

“Perceptions are not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give them up and abandon them. For, the moment you give them up and abandon them, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

“Habitual drives (*saṅkhārā*) are not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give them up and abandon them. For, the moment you give them up and abandon them, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

“Consciousness is not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give it up and abandon it. For, the moment you give it up and abandon it, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

“Imagine for a moment, Bhikkhus, that there were some people who came by this Jeta’s Park, and started to collect dry grass, leaves, twigs, and branches of trees, to do with them whatever they wanted, whether to burn them or take them away.

“Now, in witnessing this, would you then start thinking to yourselves?

‘These laypeople have come to collect us, in order to burn us, or to carry us off with them, to do whatever they want with us’

“No, Bhante.

“And what is the reason for us not to be thinking this?

“It is because, Bhante, whatever heap of material those laypeople are collecting is neither ourselves, nor in any way belongs to us.”

“In just the same way, Bhikkhus, you must be reflecting as you carefully consider that, whatever is not yours, you should just give up and abandon. For, the moment you give it up and abandon it, you will gain much happiness and benefit, as a result.

“And what, Bhikkhus, is it that is not yours?

“Form is not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give it up and abandon it. For, the moment you give it up and abandon it, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

“Feelings are not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give them up and abandon them. For, the moment you give them up and abandon them, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

“Perceptions are not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give them up and abandon them. For, the moment you give them up and abandon them, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

“Habitual drives (*saṅkhārā*) are not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give them up and abandon them. For, the moment you give them up and abandon them, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

“Consciousness is not yours and never belonged to you! So, just give it up and abandon it. For, the moment you give it up and abandon it, you will gain much happiness and benefit for a very long time, as a result.

10. THE WELL-EXPOUNDED DHAMMA

“Now, Bhikkhus, This Dhamma I uncovered and revealed to you all, and by elucidating, clarifying, and instructing you in It, I have also removed all the unclear points from It for you to understand, by showing you Its seamless perfection, by stripping away whatever may have looked unclear, patchy or incongruent for you in the past.

“Therefore, Bhikkhus, while listening to and following this well-expounded and clearly elucidated Dhamma that is wide open, pristine and seamlessly perfect, and thus free of any patchwork, all those Arahants who have destroyed their contaminating influxes from the heart, thereby completing the Task by doing what had to be done, thus laying down the heavy burden and having fully lived This Holy Life, there can be no more rebirth for any of them! For, they have truly eliminated and shattered into pieces the fetters of rebecoming, releasing themselves through Full Awakening, and therefore, there can be no cycles of rebirth for them to go through anymore, ever again!

“Bhikkhus, while listening to and following this well-expounded and clearly elucidated Dhamma that is wide open, pristine and seamlessly perfect, and thus free of any patchwork, all those Bhikkhus who have abandoned the five lower fetters, are thereby reborn immediately into the

Pure Abodes, spontaneously reappearing into those realms of the Non-Returners. It is there that they will attain Extinction which is Nibbāna Supreme, and thus shatter into pieces the fetters of rebecoming, releasing themselves through Full Awakening, and therefore, they will never return back from that realm, as they too will end the cycles of rebirth for themselves, entirely!

“Bhikkhus, while listening to and following this well-expounded and clearly elucidated Dhamma that is wide open, pristine and seamlessly perfect, and thus free of any patchwork, all those Bhikkhus who have fully abandoned the three fetters, along with severely loosening up the lust, hatred, and delusion in the heart, have thereby become Once-Returners. Therefore, they are to return back to this world one more time, where they will put an end to all suffering, by also attaining Full Awakening within that lifetime, and thereby entirely ending the cycles of rebirth for themselves, as well!

“And Bhikkhus, while listening to and following this well-expounded and clearly elucidated Dhamma that is wide open, pristine and seamlessly perfect, and thus free of any patchwork, all those Bhikkhus who have ended the three fetters of lust, hatred, and delusion, entered The Dhamma Stream and thereby have become Stream Winners. Therefore, they will never again fall into a rebirth within the miserable lower realms, for they are now fixed on their direct and sure path to Full Awakening.

“Also, Bhikkhus, while listening to and following this well-expounded and clearly elucidated Dhamma that is wide open, pristine and seamlessly perfect, and thus free of any patchwork, all those Bhikkhus who have entered The Dhamma Stream and thereby become Stream Winners by attaining to the state of Dhamma-Follower or Faith-Follower, they too are now fixed on their direct and sure path to Full Awakening.

“Therefore, Bhikkhus, This Dhamma I uncovered and revealed to you all, and by elucidating, clarifying, and instructing you in It, I have also removed all the unclear points from It for you to understand, by showing you Its seamless perfection, stripping away whatever may have looked unclear, patchy or incongruent for you in the past.

“As such, while listening to and following this well-expounded and clearly elucidated Dhamma that is wide open, pristine and seamlessly perfect, and thus free of any patchwork, all those beings whose measure of love and trust in Me and in what I teach is boundless, after their death, will be reborn into the heavenly realms.”

This is what The Blessed One said.

Meanwhile, those Bhikkhus carefully listening to these instructions, were all utterly delighted in hearing these words spoken to them by The Blessed One Himself.

(Here ends The Alagaddūpama Sutta)



Sādhū

Sādhū

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Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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