MN 26 — MN 26 The Noble Search | Ariyapariyesana Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The Noble Search

Ariyapariyesana Sutta (MN 26)

Introduction

Some scholars have suggested that, of the many autobiographical accounts of the Buddha’s awakening presented in the Pali Canon, this is the earliest. From that assumption, they have further suggested that because this account does not mention the four noble truths, either in connection with the awakening or with the Buddha’s instructions to his first disciples, the four noble truths must have been a later doctrine.

There is little reason, however, to accept these suggestions. To begin with, the sutta does not recount the Buddha's period of austerities prior to his awakening, nor does it tell of how the group of five monks attended to him during that period and later left him when he abandoned his austerities, and yet toward the end of the sutta those two incidents are alluded to in a way that indicates that the Buddha assumes them to be familiar to his listeners. Thus, if anything, the accounts that do explicitly relate those events—such as the one in MN 36—would seem to be earlier.

Secondly, the lack of reference to the four noble truths does not indicate that they were not actually involved in the awakening or the first sermon. As is always the case in the Buddha's autobiographical accounts in the Canon, this account is designed to convey a lesson, and the lesson is clearly articulated toward the beginning of the sutta: the difference between noble search and ignoble search. The account then illustrates the Buddha's own noble search and his later teaching career in the terms introduced by the lesson: the search for the "unborn, aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, undefiled, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding." In particular, all the events mentioned in the account revolve around the issue of the deathless: the discovery of the deathless, the teaching of the deathless, and the Buddha's success in helping others to attain the deathless. Had the lesson of the sutta concerned the four noble truths, they would probably have been mentioned in the account. Thus there seems little reason to regard this sutta as "proof" that the four noble truths were a later teaching.

Nevertheless, this sutta offers many excellent lessons in the Dhamma, in addition to mentioning a few incidents in the Buddha's life that are found nowhere else in the Sutta Piṭaka.

* * *

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then early in the morning—having adjusted his lower robe and taking his bowl & outer robe—he went into Sāvatthī for alms. Then a large number of monks went to Ven. Ānanda and said, "It has been a long time, friend Ānanda, since we have heard a Dhamma talk in the Blessed One's presence. It would be good if we could get to hear a Dhamma talk in the Blessed One's presence."

"In that case, venerable ones, go to the hermitage of Rammaka the brahman. Perhaps you will get to hear a Dhamma talk in the Blessed One's presence."

"As you say, friend," the monks replied to Ven. Ānanda and left.

Then the Blessed One, having gone for alms, after his meal, on returning from his alms round, said to Ven. Ānanda, "Ānanda, let's go to the Eastern Park, the palace of Migāra's mother, for the day's abiding."

"As you say, lord," Ven. Ānanda replied to the Blessed One.

So the Blessed One, together with Ven. Ānanda, went to the Eastern Park, the palace of Migāra's mother, for the day's abiding. Then, emerging from his seclusion in the evening, he said to Ven. Ānanda, "Ānanda, let's go to the Eastern Gatehouse to bathe our limbs."

"As you say, lord," Ven. Ānanda replied to the Blessed One.

So the Blessed One, together with Ven. Ānanda, went to the Eastern Gatehouse to bathe his limbs. Having bathed his limbs at the Eastern Gatehouse, coming out of the water, he stood in his lower robe, drying his limbs. Then Ven. Ānanda said to him, "Lord, the hermitage of Rammaka the brahman is not far away. Pleasing is the hermitage of Rammaka the brahman. Delightful is the hermitage of Rammaka the brahman. It would be good if the Blessed One went to the hermitage of Rammaka the brahman out of sympathy." The Blessed One acquiesced through silence.

So the Blessed One went to the hermitage of Rammaka the brahman. Now at that time a large number of monks had gathered in the hermitage of Rammaka the brahman for a Dhamma discussion. The Blessed One stood outside the door waiting for the discussion to end. On knowing that the discussion had ended, clearing his throat, he tapped at the door. The monks opened the door for him. Entering the hermitage of Rammaka the brahman, the Blessed One sat down on a seat made ready. As he was sitting there, he addressed the monks: "For what discussion are you gathered together here? In the midst of what discussion have you been interrupted?"

"Lord, our interrupted Dhamma discussion was about the Blessed One himself, and then the Blessed One arrived."

"Good, monks. It's fitting that you, as sons of good families who have gone forth out of faith from home to the homeless life, should gather for Dhamma discussion. When you have gathered you have two duties: either Dhamma discussion or noble silence.1

"Monks, there are these two searches: ignoble search & noble search. And which is the ignoble search? There is the case where a person, being subject himself to birth, seeks (happiness in) what is likewise subject to birth. Being subject himself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, he seeks (happiness in) what is likewise subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement.

"And what may be said to be subject to birth? Spouses & children are subject to birth. Men & women slaves… goats & sheep… fowl & pigs… elephants, cattle, horses, & mares… gold & silver are subject to birth. Subject to birth are these acquisitions, and one who is tied to them, infatuated with them, who has totally fallen for them, being subject to birth, seeks what is likewise subject to birth.

"And what may be said to be subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement? Spouses & children… men & women slaves… goats & sheep… fowl & pigs… elephants, cattle, horses, & mares… gold & silver2 are subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement. Subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement are these acquisitions,

and one who is tied to them, infatuated with them, who has totally fallen for them, being subject to birth, seeks what is likewise subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement. This is the ignoble search.

"And which is the noble search? There is the case where a person, himself being subject to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, seeks the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Himself being subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeks the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, undefiled, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. This is the noble search.

"I, too, monks, before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened bodhisatta, being subject myself to birth, sought what was likewise subject to birth. Being subject myself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, sought (happiness in) what was likewise subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement. The thought occurred to me, 'Why do I, being subject myself to birth, seek what is likewise subject to birth? Being subject myself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, why do I seek what is likewise subject to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement? What if I, being subject myself to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, were to seek the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding? What if I, being subject myself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, were to seek the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, undefiled, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding?'

"So, at a later time, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life—and while my parents, unwilling, were crying with tears streaming down their faces—I shaved off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

"Having thus gone forth in search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I went to Āḷāra Kālāma and, on arrival, said to him: 'Friend Kālāma, I want to practice in this Dhamma & discipline.'

"When this was said, he replied to me, 'You may stay here, my friend. This Dhamma is such that an observant person can soon enter & dwell in his own teacher's knowledge, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.'

"It was not long before I quickly learned that Dhamma. As far as mere lip-reciting & repetition, I could speak the words of knowledge, the words of the elders, and I could affirm that I knew & saw—I, along with others.

"I thought: 'It isn't through mere conviction alone that Āḷāra Kālāma declares, "I have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge." Certainly he dwells knowing & seeing this Dhamma.' So I went to him and said, 'To what extent do you declare that you have entered & dwell in this Dhamma?' When this was said, he declared the dimension of nothingness.

“I thought: ‘Not only does Āḷāra Kālāma have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. I, too, have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. What if I were to endeavor to realize for myself the Dhamma that Āḷāra Kālāma declares he has entered & dwells in, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.’ So it was not long before I quickly entered & dwelled in that Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge. I went to him and said, ‘Friend Kālāma, is this the extent to which you have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge?’

“‘Yes, my friend....’

“‘This, friend, is the extent to which I, too, have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge.’

“‘It is a gain for us, my friend, a great gain for us, that we have such a companion in the holy life. So the Dhamma I declare I have entered & dwell in, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge. And the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma I declare I have entered & dwell in, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge. The Dhamma I know is the Dhamma you know; the Dhamma you know is the Dhamma I know. As I am, so are you; as you are, so am I. Come friend, let us now lead this community together.’

“In this way did Āḷāra Kālāma, my teacher, place me, his pupil, on the same level with himself and pay me great honor. But the thought occurred to me, ‘This Dhamma leads not to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, nor to unbinding, but only to reappearance in the dimension of nothingness.’ So, dissatisfied with that Dhamma, I left.

“In search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I went to Uddaka Rāmaputta and, on arrival, said to him: ‘Friend Uddaka, I want to practice in this Dhamma & discipline.’

“When this was said, he replied to me, ‘You may stay here, my friend. This Dhamma is such that an observant person can soon enter & dwell in his own teacher’s knowledge, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.’

“It was not long before I quickly learned that Dhamma. As far as mere lip-reciting & repetition, I could speak the words of knowledge, the words of the elders, and I could affirm that I knew & saw—I, along with others.

“I thought: ‘It wasn’t through mere conviction alone that Rāma declared, “I have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge.” Certainly he dwelled knowing & seeing this Dhamma.’ So I went to Uddaka and said, ‘To what extent did Rāma declare that he had entered & dwelled in this Dhamma?’ When this was said,

Uddaka declared the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

“I thought: ‘Not only did Rāma have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. I, too, have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. What if I were to endeavor to realize for myself the Dhamma that Rāma declared he entered & dwelled in, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.’ So it was not long before I quickly entered & dwelled in that Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge. I went to Uddaka and said, ‘Friend Uddaka, is this the extent to which Rāma entered & dwelled in this Dhamma, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge?’

“‘Yes, my friend….’

“‘This, friend, is the extent to which I, too, have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge.’

“‘It is a gain for us, my friend, a great gain for us, that we have such a companion in the holy life. So the Dhamma Rāma declared he entered & dwelled in, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge. And the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma Rāma declared he entered & dwelled in, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge. The Dhamma he knew is the Dhamma you know; the Dhamma you know is the Dhamma he knew. As he was, so are you; as you are, so was he. Come friend, lead this community.’

“In this way did Uddaka Rāmaputta, my companion in the holy life, place me in the position of teacher and pay me great honor. But the thought occurred to me, ‘This Dhamma leads not to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, nor to unbinding, but only to reappearance in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.’ So, dissatisfied with that Dhamma, I left.

“In search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I wandered by stages in the Magadhan country and came to the military town of Uruvelā. There I saw some delightful countryside, with an inspiring forest grove, a clear-flowing river with fine, delightful banks, and villages for alms-going on all sides. The thought occurred to me: ‘How delightful is this countryside, with its inspiring forest grove, clear-flowing river with fine, delightful banks, and villages for alms-going on all sides. This is just right for the exertion of a clansman intent on exertion.’ So I sat down right there, thinking, ‘This is just right for exertion.’

“Then, monks, being subject myself to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, seeking the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke, unbinding, I reached the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Being subject myself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeking the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, undefiled, unexcelled rest from the

yoke, unbinding, I reached the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, undefiled, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Knowledge & vision arose in me: 'Unprovoked is my release.3 This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.'

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise.4 But this generation delights in attachment, is excited by attachment, enjoys attachment. For a generation delighting in attachment, excited by attachment, enjoying attachment, this/that conditionality & dependent co-arising are hard to see. This state, too, is hard to see: the pacification of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding. And if I were to teach the Dhamma and others would not understand me, that would be tiresome for me, troublesome for me.'

"Just then these verses, unspoken in the past, unheard before, occurred to me:

'Enough now with teaching

what

only with difficulty

I reached.

This Dhamma is not easily realized

by those overcome

with aversion & passion.

What is abstruse, subtle,

deep,

hard to see,

going against the flow—

those delighting in passion,

cloaked in the mass of darkness,

won't see.'

"As I reflected thus, my mind inclined to dwelling at ease, not to teaching the Dhamma.

"Then Brahmā Sahampati, having known with his own awareness the line of thinking in my awareness, thought: 'The world is lost! The world is destroyed! The mind of the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Rightly Self-awakened One inclines to dwelling at ease, not to teaching the Dhamma!' Then, just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, Brahmā Sahampati disappeared from the Brahmā world and reappeared in front of

me. Arranging his upper robe over one shoulder, he knelt down with his right knee on the ground, saluted me with his hands before his heart, and said to me: 'Lord, let the Blessed One teach the Dhamma! Let the One-Well-Gone teach the Dhamma! There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are falling away because they do not hear the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma.'

"That is what Brahmā Sahampati said. Having said that, he further said this:

'In the past
there appeared among the Magadhans
an impure Dhamma
devised by the stained.
Throw open the door to the deathless!
Let them hear the Dhamma
realized by the Stainless One!

Just as one standing on a rocky crag
might see people
all around below,
so, intelligent one, with all-around vision,
ascend the palace
fashioned of Dhamma.
Free from sorrow, behold the people
submerged in sorrow,
oppressed by birth & aging.

Rise up, hero, victor in battle!
O Teacher, wander without debt in the world.
Teach the Dhamma, O Blessed One:
There will be those who will understand.'

"Then, having understood Brahmā's invitation, out of compassion for beings, I surveyed the world with the eye of an Awakened One. As I did so, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and those with much, those with keen faculties and those with dull, those with good attributes and those with bad, those easy to teach and those hard, some of them seeing disgrace & danger in the other world. Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses,

some lotuses—born & growing in the water—might flourish while immersed in the water, without rising up from the water; some might stand at an even level with the water; while some might rise up from the water and stand without being smeared by the water—so too, surveying the world with the eye of an Awakened One, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and those with much, those with keen faculties and those with dull, those with good attributes and those with bad, those easy to teach and those hard, some of them seeing disgrace & danger in the other world.

"Having seen this, I answered Brahmā Sahampati in verse:

'Open are the doors to the deathless.

Let those with ears show their conviction.

Perceiving trouble, O Brahmā,

I did not tell people

the refined,

sublime Dhamma.'

"Then Brahmā Sahampati, thinking, 'The Blessed One has given his consent to teach the Dhamma,' bowed down to me and, circling me on the right, disappeared right there.

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'To whom should I teach the Dhamma first? Who will quickly understand this Dhamma?' Then the thought occurred to me, 'This Āḷāra Kālāma is wise, competent, intelligent. He has long had little dust in his eyes. What if I were to teach him the Dhamma first? He will quickly understand this Dhamma.' Then a devatā came to me and said, 'Lord, Āḷāra Kālāma died seven days ago.' And knowledge & vision arose within me: 'Āḷāra Kālāma died seven days ago.' The thought occurred to me, 'A great loss has Āḷāra Kālāma suffered. If he had heard this Dhamma, he would have quickly understood it.'

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'To whom should I teach the Dhamma first? Who will quickly understand this Dhamma?' Then the thought occurred to me, 'This Uddaka Rāmaputta is wise, competent, intelligent. He has long had little dust in his eyes. What if I were to teach him the Dhamma first? He will quickly understand this Dhamma.' Then a devatā came to me and said, 'Lord, Uddaka Rāmaputta died last night.' And knowledge & vision arose within me: 'Uddaka Rāmaputta died last night.' The thought occurred to me, 'A great loss has Uddaka Rāmaputta suffered. If he had heard this Dhamma, he would have quickly understood it.'

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'To whom should I teach the Dhamma first? Who will quickly understand this Dhamma?' Then the thought occurred to me, 'They were very helpful to me, the group of five monks who attended to me when I was resolute in exertion. What if I were to teach them the Dhamma first?' Then the thought occurred to me, 'Where are the group of five monks staying now?' And with the divine eye, purified &

surpassing the human, I saw that they were staying near Bārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana.

“Then, having stayed at Uruvelā as long as I liked, I set out to wander by stages to Bārāṇasī. Upaka the Ājīvaka saw me on the road between Gayā and the (place of) awakening, and on seeing me said to me, ‘Clear, my friend, are your faculties. Pure your complexion, and bright. On whose account have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? In whose Dhamma do you delight?’

“When this was said, I replied to Upaka the Ājīvaka in verses:

‘All-vanquishing,

all-knowing am I,

with regard to all things,

unadhering.

All-abandoning,

released in the ending of craving:

having fully known on my own,

to whom should I point as my teacher?5

I have no teacher,

and one like me can’t be found.

In the world with its devas,

I have no counterpart.

For I am an arahant in the world;

I, the unexcelled teacher.

I, alone, am rightly self-awakened.

Cooled am I, unbound.

To set rolling the wheel of Dhamma

I go to the city of Kāsi.

In a world become blind,

I beat the drum of the deathless.’

“‘From your claims, my friend, you must be an infinite conqueror.’

“‘Conquerors are those like me

who have reached effluents’ end.

I’ve conquered evil qualities,

and so, Upaka, I’m a conqueror.’

“When this was said, Upaka said, ‘May it be so, my friend,’ and—shaking his head, taking a side-road—he left.

“Then, wandering by stages, I arrived at Bārāṇasī, at the Deer Park in Isipatana, to where the group of five monks were staying. From afar they saw me coming and, on seeing me, made a pact with one another, (saying,) ‘Friends, here comes Gotama the contemplative: living luxuriously, straying from his exertion, backsliding into abundance. He doesn’t deserve to be bowed down to, to be greeted by standing up, or to have his robe & bowl received. Still, a seat should be set out; if he wants to, he can sit down.’ But as I approached, they were unable to keep to their pact. One, standing up to greet me, received my robe & bowl. Another spread out a seat. Another set out water for washing my feet. However, they addressed me by name and as ‘friend.’

“So I said to them, ‘Don’t address the Tathāgata by name and as “friend.” The Tathāgata, friends, is a worthy one, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.’

“When this was said, the group of five monks replied to me, ‘By that practice, that conduct, that performance of austerities you did not attain any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. So how can you now—living luxuriously, straying from your exertion, backsliding into abundance—have attained any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one?’

“When this was said, I replied to them, ‘The Tathāgata, monks, is not living luxuriously, has not strayed from his exertion, has not backslid into abundance. The Tathāgata, friends, is a worthy one, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.’

A second time.... A third time, the group of five monks said to me, ‘By that practice, that conduct, that performance of austerities you did not attain any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. So how can you now—living luxuriously, straying from your exertion, backsliding into abundance—have attained any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one?’

“When this was said, I replied to the group of five monks, ‘Do you recall my ever having spoken in this way before?’

“‘No, lord.’

“‘The Tathāgata, monks, is not living luxuriously, has not strayed from his exertion, has not backslid into abundance. The Tathāgata, friends, is a worthy one, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.’

“And so I was able to convince them. I would teach two monks while three went for alms, and we six lived off what the three brought back from their alms round. Then I would teach three monks while two went for alms, and we six lived off what the two brought back from their alms round. Then the group of five monks—thus exhorted, thus instructed by me—being subject themselves to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, seeking the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke, unbinding, reached the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Being subject themselves to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeing the drawbacks of aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, seeking the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, undefiled, unexcelled rest from the yoke, unbinding, they reached the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, undefiled, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Knowledge & vision arose in them: ‘Unprovoked is our release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.’

“Monks, there are these five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire. Sounds cognizable via the ear—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire. Aromas cognizable via the nose—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire. Tastes cognizable via the tongue—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire. Tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked to sensual desire. These are the five strings of sensuality.

“And any contemplatives or brahmans tied to these five strings of sensuality—infatuated with them, having totally fallen for them, consuming them without seeing their drawbacks or discerning the escape from them—should be known as having met with misfortune, having met with ruin; Māra can do with them as he will. Just as if a wild deer were to lie bound on a heap of snares: it should be known as having met with misfortune, having met with ruin; the hunter can do with it as he will. When the hunter comes, it won’t get away as it would like. In the same way, any contemplatives or brahmans tied to these five strings of sensuality—infatuated with them, having totally fallen for them, consuming them without seeing their drawbacks or discerning the escape from them—should be known as having met with misfortune, having met with ruin; Māra can do with them as he will.

“But any contemplatives or brahmans not tied to these five strings of sensuality—uninfatuated with them, having not totally fallen for them, consuming them seeing their drawbacks and discerning the escape from them—should be known as not having met with misfortune, not having met with ruin; Māra cannot do with them as he will. Just as if a wild deer were to lie unbound on a heap of snares: it should be known as not having met with misfortune, not having met with ruin; the hunter cannot do with it as he will. When the hunter comes, it will get away as it would like. In the same way, any contemplatives or brahmans not tied to these five strings of sensuality—uninfatuated with them, having not totally fallen for them, consuming them seeing their drawbacks and discerning the escape from them—should be known as not having met with misfortune, not having met with ruin; Māra cannot do with them as he will.

“Suppose that a wild deer is living in a wilderness glen. Carefree it walks, carefree it stands, carefree it sits, carefree it lies down. Why is that? Because it has gone beyond the hunter’s range.6 In the same way, a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. This monk is said to have blinded Māra. Trackless, he has destroyed Māra’s vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.7

“And further, the monk, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. This monk is said to have blinded Māra. Trackless, he has destroyed Māra’s vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

“And further, the monk, with the fading of rapture, remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, senses pleasure with the body, and enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ This monk is said to have blinded Māra. Trackless, he has destroyed Māra’s vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

“And further, the monk, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This monk is said to have blinded Māra. Trackless, he has destroyed Māra’s vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

“And further, the monk, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space,’ enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. This monk is said to have blinded Māra. Trackless, he has destroyed Māra’s vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

“And further, the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite consciousness,’ enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. This monk is said to have blinded Māra. Trackless, he has

destroyed Māra's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"And further, the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) 'There is nothing,' enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. This monk is said to have blinded Māra. Trackless, he has destroyed Māra's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"And further, the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. This monk is said to have blinded Māra. Trackless, he has destroyed Māra's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"And further, the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And, having seen (that) with discernment, his mental effluents are completely ended. This monk is said to have blinded Māra. Trackless, he has destroyed Māra's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One. Having crossed over, he is unattached in the world. Carefree he walks, carefree he stands, carefree he sits, carefree he lies down. Why is that? Because he has gone beyond the Evil One's range."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words.

Notes

1. See Ud 2:2 and AN 10:69. Noble silence = the levels of jhāna beginning with the second.

2. The Burmese, Sri Lankan, and PTS editions of the Canon exclude gold and silver from the list of objects subject to illness, death, and sorrow, apparently on the grounds that they themselves do not grow ill, die, or feel sorrow. The Thai edition of the Canon includes gold and silver in the list of objects subject to illness, death, and sorrow in the sense that any happiness based on them is subject to change because of one's own illness, death, and sorrow.

3. See MN 29, note 3.

4. The section from here to Brahmā Sahampati's disappearance is recounted in the third person at SN 6:1.

5. This verse = Dhp 353.

6. For another use of the wild deer as a symbol for a free mind, see Ud 2:10.

7. As the Commentary points out, simply attaining the states of concentration from the first jhāna through the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception blinds Māra only temporarily. Only with the arising of discernment is Māra blinded for good. On Māra's

blindness, see Sn 5:15, AN 9:39, and SN 22:87 (the last chapter in The Mind Like Fire Unbound). For the meaning of “leaving no trace,” see Dhp 92–93, 179–180.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 4; MN 19; MN 36; AN 3:39; Iti 54–55; Sn 3:1; Sn 3:2