MN 29 — Maha Saropama Sutta: The Longer Heartwood-simile Discourse

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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

Text

In have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha on Vulture Peak mountain, not long after Devadatta had left. Referring to Devadatta, the Blessed One addressed the monks:

"Monks, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] 'I am beset by birth, by aging-&-death, by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs, beset by stress, overcome with stress. Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that gain, offerings, & fame he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I am a person with gain, offerings, & fame, but these other monks are unknown & of little influence.' He is intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, heedless about it, and falls into heedlessness. Being heedless, he dwells in suffering & stress.

"Just as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood — passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark, passing over the outer

bark — cutting away the twigs & leaves, were to go off carrying them, thinking, 'heartwood.' A man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man didn't know heartwood, didn't know sapwood, didn't know inner bark, didn't know outer bark, didn't know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood — passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark, passing over the outer bark — cutting away the twigs & leaves, went off carrying them, thinking, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served.'

"In the same way, monks, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] 'I am beset by birth, by aging-&-death, by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs, beset by stress, overcome with stress. Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that gain, offerings, & fame he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I am a person with gain, offerings, & fame, but these other monks are unknown & of little influence.' He is intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, heedless about it, and falls into heedlessness. Being heedless, he dwells in suffering & stress. This, monks, is called a monk who grasps the twigs & leaves of the holy life, and with that he falls short.

"Furthermore, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] '... Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I am a person of virtue, with fine qualities, but these other monks are unvirtuous, with evil qualities.' He is intoxicated with that consummation in virtue, heedless about it, and falls into heedlessness. Being heedless, he dwells in suffering & stress.

"Just as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood — passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark — cutting away the outer bark, were to go off carrying it, thinking, 'heartwood.' A man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man didn't know heartwood, didn't know sapwood, didn't know inner bark, didn't know outer bark, didn't know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood — passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark — cutting away the outer bark, went off carrying it, thinking, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served.'

"In the same way, monks, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] '...Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I am a person of virtue, with fine qualities, but these other monks are unvirtuous, with evil qualities.' He is intoxicated with that consummation in virtue, heedless about it, and falls into heedlessness. Being heedless, he dwells in suffering & stress. This, monks, is called a monk who grasps the outer bark of the holy life, and with that he falls short.

"Furthermore, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] '...Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in virtue, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in concentration. He is gratified with that consummation in concentration, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that consummation in concentration he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I am concentrated, my mind at singleness, but these other monks are unconcentrated, their minds scattered.' He is intoxicated with that consummation in concentration, heedless about it, and falls into heedlessness. Being heedless, he dwells in suffering & stress.

"Just as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood — passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood — cutting away the inner bark, were to go off carrying it, thinking, 'heartwood.' A man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man didn't know heartwood, didn't know sapwood, didn't know inner bark, didn't know outer bark, didn't know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood — passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood — cutting away the inner bark, went off carrying it, thinking, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served.'

"In the same way, monks, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] '...Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves

consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in virtue, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in concentration. He is gratified with that consummation in concentration, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that consummation in concentration he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I am concentrated, my mind at singleness, but these other monks are unconcentrated, their minds scattered.' He is intoxicated with that consummation in concentration, heedless about it, and falls into heedlessness. Being heedless, he dwells in suffering & stress. This, monks, is called a monk who grasps the inner bark of the holy life, and with that he falls short.

"Furthermore, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] '...Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in virtue, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in concentration. He is gratified with that consummation in concentration, but his resolve is not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in concentration, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves knowledge & vision. He is gratified with that knowledge & vision, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that knowledge & vision he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I dwell knowing & seeing, but these other monks dwell not knowing & not seeing.' He is intoxicated with that knowledge & vision, heedless about it, and falls into heedlessness. Being heedless, he dwells in suffering & stress.

"Just as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood — passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood — cutting away the sapwood, were to go off carrying it, thinking, 'heartwood.' A man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man didn't know heartwood, didn't know sapwood, didn't know inner bark, didn't know outer bark, didn't know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood — passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood — cutting away the sapwood, went off carrying it, thinking, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served.'

"In the same way, monks, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] '...Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves

consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in virtue, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in concentration. He is gratified with that consummation in concentration, but his resolve is not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in concentration, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves knowledge & vision. He is gratified with that knowledge & vision, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that knowledge & vision he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I dwell knowing & seeing, but these other monks dwell not knowing & not seeing.' He is intoxicated with that knowledge & vision, heedless about it, and falls into heedlessness. Being heedless, he dwells in suffering & stress. This, monks, is called a monk who grasps the sapwood of the holy life, and with that he falls short.

"Furthermore, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] 'I am beset by birth, by aging-&-death, by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs, beset by stress, overcome with stress. Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in virtue, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in concentration. He is gratified with that consummation in concentration, but his resolve is not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in concentration, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves knowledge & vision. He is gratified with that knowledge & vision, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that knowledge & vision he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He is not intoxicated with that knowledge & vision, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves a non-occasional liberation. And it is impossible, monks, there is no opportunity, for that monk to fall from that non-occasional release. [1]

"Just as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, cutting away just the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, were to go off carrying it, knowing, 'heartwood.' A man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man did know heartwood, did know sapwood, did know inner bark, did know outer bark, did know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, cutting away just the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, were to go off carrying it, knowing, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose will be served.'

"In the same way, monks, there is the case where a certain son of good family, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, [thinking,] 'I am beset by birth, by aging-&-death, by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs, beset by stress, overcome with stress. Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. He is not intoxicated with that gain, offerings, & fame, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in virtue, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves consummation in concentration. He is gratified with that consummation in concentration, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in concentration he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He is not intoxicated with that consummation in concentration, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves knowledge & vision. He is gratified with that knowledge & vision, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that knowledge & vision he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He is not intoxicated with that knowledge & vision, not heedless about it, and does not fall into heedlessness. Being heedful, he achieves a non-occasional liberation. And it is impossible, monks, there is no opportunity, for that monk to fall from that non-occasional release.

"Monks, this holy life doesn't have as its reward gain, offerings, & fame, doesn't have as its reward consummation of virtue, doesn't have as its reward consummation of concentration, doesn't have as its reward knowledge & vision, but the unprovoked [2]awareness-release: That is the purpose of this holy life, that is its heartwood, that its final end."

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

Notes

1.

This translation follows the Sri Lankan and Burmese editions of the Canon. The Thai and PTS editions at this point say, "Being heedful, he achieves an occasional liberation. And it is possible, monks, there is the opportunity, for that monk to fall from that occasional release." However, when the passage is repeated after the simile, the these editions read, "Being heedful, he achieves a non-occasional liberation. And it is impossible, monks, there is no opportunity, for that monk to fall from that non-occasional release." Because this inconsistency seems anomalous, the Sri Lankan/Burmese reading seems preferable.

Occasional liberation/release is the temporary release from such things as the hindrances, attained when entering right concentration, or the temporary release from some of the factors of lower states of jhāna, attained when entering higher states of jhāna. This release

lasts only as long as the necessary causal factors are still in place. Non-occasional liberation/release, according to the Commentary, covers all of the transcendent attainments: the paths and fruitions of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship, along with unbinding. Thus, if the Commentary is right here, non-occasional liberation/release has a broader meaning than the unprovoked release, mentioned below, as that covers only the fruition of arahantship and unbinding. Although the path factors are needed to reach these attainments, they do not cause them, just as a path to a mountain does not cause the mountain to be. This release is beyond time — and thus "non-occasional" — in that the falling away of the path factors would not end it.

2.

Akuppa. This term is sometimes translated as "unshakable," but it literally means, "unprovoked." The reference is apparently to the theory of dhātu, or properties underlying physical or psychological events in nature. The physical properties according to this theory are four: earth [solidity], liquid, heat, and wind [motion]. Three of them — liquid, heat, & wind — are potentially active. When they are aggravated, agitated, or provoked — the Pali term here, 'pakuppati', is used also on the psychological level, where it means angered or upset — they act as the underlying cause for natural activity. When the provocation ends, the corresponding activity subsides.

"Now there comes a time, friends, when the external liquid property is provoked, and at that time the external earth property vanishes...

"There comes a time, friends, when the external liquid property is provoked and washes away village, town, city, district, & country. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean drops down one hundred leagues, two hundred... three hundred... four hundred... five hundred... six hundred... seven hundred leagues. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean stands seven palm-trees deep, six... five... four... three... two palm-trees deep, one palm-tree deep. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean stands seven fathoms deep, six... five... four... three... two fathoms deep, one fathom deep. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean stands half a fathom deep, hip-deep, knee-deep, ankle deep. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean is not even the depth of the first joint of a finger...

"There comes a time, friends, when the external fire property is provoked and consumes village, town, city, district, & country; and then, coming to the edge of a green district, the edge of a road, the edge of a rocky district, to the water's edge, or to a lush, well-watered area, goes out from lack of sustenance. There comes a time when people try to make fire using a wing-bone & tendon parings...

"There comes a time, friends, when the external wind property is provoked and blows away village, town, city, district, & country. There comes a time when, in the last month of the hot season, people try to start a breeze with a fan or bellows, and even the grass at the fringe of a thatch roof doesn't stir."

— MN 28

A similar theory attributes the irruption of mental states to the provocation of the properties of sensuality, form, or formlessness.

"In dependence on the property of sensuality there occurs the perception of sensuality. In dependence on the perception of sensuality there occurs the resolve for sensuality… the desire for sensuality… the fever for sensuality… the quest for sensuality. Searching for sensuality, monks, an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person conducts himself wrongly through three means: through body, through speech, & through mind."

— SN 14.12

Even unbinding is described as a property (Iti 44). However, there is a crucial difference in how unbinding is attained, in that the unbinding property is not provoked. Any events that depend on the provocation of a property are inherently unstable and inconstant, subject to change when the provocation ends. But because true release is not caused by the provocation of anything, it is not subject to change.

See also: MN 30; SN 17.3; SN 17.5; SN 17.8; AN 8.7; AN 8.8; AN 10.58.