MN 29 — MN 29 The Longer Heartwood Simile Discourse | Mahā Sāropama Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The Longer Heartwood Simile Discourse

Mahā Sāropama Sutta (MN 29)

I 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.

"And further, 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.

"And further, 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.

"And further, 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.1 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.

"And further, 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.2

"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 unprovoked3 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. "Knowledge & vision" here apparently has the same meaning it does in AN 4:41—i.e., the various mundane psychic powers that can come from the development of concentration.

2. 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, 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 is 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.

3. 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. (See the description of the properties in 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.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 43; SN 17:3; SN 17:5; SN 17:8; SN 22:88; AN 8:7; AN 8:8; AN 10:58; Iti 35–36