

MN 44
Cūḷavedalla Sutta
“Shorter Discourse on a Series of Clarifications”
Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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I have personally heard this.

At one time the Blessed One lived in the squirrels' Sanctuary in the city of Rājagaha. Then, Visākha, the lay disciple, approached the Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā, and after paying his respects, sat to one side and said:

“*‘Personality, personality,’* it is said. Venerable Lady, what is it that The Blessed One speaks of while explaining this thing called *‘personality’*?”

“Friend Visākha, in explaining this thing called *‘personality,’* what The Blessed One is speaking of are none other than the five grabbing aggregates, which are: the aggregate of material form one keeps grabbing onto, the aggregate of feelings one keeps grabbing onto, the aggregate of memories or mental associations one keeps grabbing onto, the aggregate of habitual tendencies one keeps grabbing onto, and the aggregate of consciousness one keeps grabbing onto. In this way, the five grabbing aggregates are seen as none other than what is represented as *‘personality,’* according to the teaching of The Blessed One.

By saying, “Sādhū!” the lay disciple Visākha was joyfully delighted in hearing the explanation provided by the Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā, as he continued by asking a further question:

“*‘Source of personality, source of personality,’* it is said. Venerable Lady, what is it that The Blessed One speaks of while explaining this thing called *‘source of personality’*?”

“Friend Visākha, in explaining this thing called *‘source of personality,’* what The Blessed One is speaking of is this very same craving that leads to rebirth in the future, along with the desire and lust that seeks to be delighted here and there. In other words, it is the craving for more sensual pleasures, the craving for rebecoming, and the craving for no more being, that is meant when explaining the *‘source of personality,’* according to the teaching of The Blessed One.

“*‘The ending of personality, the ending of personality,’* Venerable Lady, what is it that The Blessed One speaks of while explaining *‘the ending of personality’*?”

“Friend Visākha, in explaining *‘the ending of personality,’* what The Blessed One is speaking of is the complete ending of that same craving mentioned; the dispassionate attitude that allows passions to fade away; the total and remainder-less detachment and destruction of craving, which is called the cessation of suffering. That, Friend Visākha, is what is meant when explaining *‘the ending of personality,’* according to the teaching of The Blessed One.

“*‘The way of practicing that leads to the ending of personality, the way of practicing that leads to the ending of personality,’* Venerable Lady, what is it that The Blessed One speaks of while explaining *‘the way of practicing that leads to the ending of personality’?*”

“Friend Visākha, in explaining *‘the way of practicing that leads to the ending of personality,’* what The Blessed One is speaking of is none other than the Noble Eightfold Path, which itself *is* the very way of practicing that brings about the ending of personality. That is: right view, right intentions, right speech, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right collectedness of mind.”

“But, Venerable Lady, could it be that what often is termed as ‘clinging’ or ‘grabbing’ is the same as the ‘grabbing of the five aggregates,’ mentioned earlier? Or is ‘grabbing’ one thing, and the ‘grabbing of the five aggregates’ something entirely different?”

“That is not so, Friend Visākha, for what often is termed as ‘clinging’ or ‘grabbing’ is not the same as the ‘grabbing of the five aggregates,’ mentioned earlier, nor is ‘grabbing’ one thing, and the ‘grabbing of the five aggregates’ something entirely different.

“Friend Visākha, the desire and lust for experiencing and holding onto the five aggregates are themselves the very same grabbing.”

“But, Venerable Lady, how does the view that one possesses a separate personality come about?”

“Here, Friend Visākha, the undisciplined mediocre person, who does not have the ability to recognize the Noble Ones, while remaining unskilled and unwise as it relates to learning the Dhamma, also lacks the ability to recognize any Superior Persons, nor is he skilled or wise as it relates to learning from the Dhamma that these Superior Persons teach.

“Furthermore, such an undisciplined mediocre person looks upon form as if it were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; believing that whatever has a self, must have its own separate form, or that whatever has form, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“Furthermore, such an undisciplined mediocre person looks upon feeling as if it were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; believing that whatever has a self, must have its own separate feeling, or that whatever has feeling, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“Furthermore, such an undisciplined mediocre person looks upon memory or any mental association as if it were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; believing that whatever has a self, must have its own separate memory, or that whatever has memory, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“Furthermore, such an undisciplined mediocre person looks upon habitual tendencies as if they were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; believing that whatever has a self, must have its own separate habitual tendency, or that whatever has habitual tendencies, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“Furthermore, such an undisciplined mediocre person looks upon consciousness as if it were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; believing that whatever has a self, must have its own separate consciousness, or that whatever has consciousness, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“This, Friend Visākha, is how the view that one possesses a separate personality comes about.”

“And how does, Venerable Lady, the view that one possesses a separate personality *not* come about?”

“Here, Friend Visākha, the disciplined Noble Disciple, who possesses the ability to recognize the Noble Ones, while remaining skilled and wise as it relates to learning the Dhamma, also has the ability to recognize Superior Persons, while he is skilled and wise as it relates to learning from the Dhamma that these Superior Persons teach.

“Furthermore, such a disciplined Noble Disciple does not look upon form as if it were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; nor believes that whatever has a self, must have its own separate form, nor thinks that whatever has form, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“Furthermore, such a disciplined Noble Disciple does not look upon feeling as if it were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; nor believes that whatever has a self, must have its own separate feeling, nor thinks that whatever has feeling, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“Furthermore, such a disciplined Noble Disciple does not look upon memory or any mental association as if it were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; nor believes that whatever has a self, must have its own separate memory, nor thinks that whatever has memory, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“Furthermore, such a disciplined Noble Disciple does not look upon habitual tendencies as if they were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; nor believes that whatever has a self, must have its own separate habitual tendency, nor thinks that whatever has habitual tendencies, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“Furthermore, such a disciplined Noble Disciple does not look upon consciousness as if it were to have a separate selfhood, a personality; nor believes that whatever has a self, must have its own separate consciousness, nor thinks that whatever has consciousness, must also, therefore, have its own separate self.

“This, Friend Visākha, is how the view that one possesses a separate personality does *not* come about.”

“And what, Venerable Lady, is the Noble Eightfold Path?

“Friend Visākha, it is none other than the Noble Eightfold Path delineated by the Blessed One, that is: right view, right intentions, right speech, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right collectedness of mind.”

“Venerable Lady, is the Noble Eightfold Path conditioned or not conditioned?”

“Friend Visākha, the Noble Eightfold path is conditioned.”

“Venerable Lady, are the Three Trainings included within the body of the Noble Eightfold Path or is the Noble Eightfold Path included within the Three Trainings?”

“Friend Visākha, it is not that the Three Trainings are included within the Noble Eightfold Path, but the Noble Eightfold Path is certainly included within the Three Trainings.

Thus, right speech, right action, and right livelihood come under the Training in Sīla. Right effort, right mindfulness, and right collectedness of mind come under the Training in Samādhi, whereas right view and right intentions come under the training in Paññā.

“And what, Venerable Lady, is samādhi (collectedness of mind)? What are the sharpening tools for samādhi? What are the requirements for samādhi? What leads to the steady development in samādhi?”

“Friend Visākha, when the mind comes together and becomes collected, that is samādhi. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are the sharpening tools for samādhi. The four right efforts are the requirements for samādhi. To constantly practice, develop oneself in, and be committed to these factors all lead to the steady development in samādhi.”

“Venerable Lady, how many are the saṅkhāras?”

“Friend Visākha, the saṅkhāras are three in number: bodily saṅkhāras, verbal saṅkhāras and mental saṅkhāras.”

“Venerable Lady, what are the bodily saṅkhāras? What are verbal saṅkhāras? And what are mental saṅkhāras?”

“Friend Visākha, the in-breaths and the out-breaths are the bodily saṅkhāras. Thinking and pondering are verbal saṅkhāras, while perceptions and feelings make up the mental saṅkhāras.”

“And how, Venerable Lady, are the in-breaths and the out-breaths considered to be bodily saṅkhāras? How are thinking and pondering verbal saṅkhāras? And how are perceptions and feelings mental saṅkhāras?”

“Friend Visākha, the in-breaths and the out-breaths have to do with the bodily processes and are therefore closely tied to the body; thus, in-breaths and out-breaths are bodily saṅkhāras.

“Friend Visākha, before one breaks into speech, one engages in thinking and pondering, therefore thinking and pondering are verbal saṅkhāras. Perceptions and feelings are considered to

be mental processes because they purely involve the mind, for they are things tied closely to the mind; therefore, perceptions and feelings are mental *saṅkhāras*.

“Venerable Lady, how is the cessation of perceptions and feelings attained?”

“Friend Visākha, it does *not* occur in a way where the Bhikkhu who attains to the cessation of perceptions and feelings would reflect to himself thus: “I am about to attain the cessation of perceptions and feelings,” or “I am now attaining to the cessation of perceptions and feeling,” nor “I have just attained the cessation of perceptions and feelings.” Rather, his mind has already been developed in such a manner that it naturally unfolds into and opens up to that state.”

“Venerable Lady, as the Bhikkhu is attaining to the cessation of perceptions and feelings, what ceases first: The bodily *saṅkhāras*? The verbal *saṅkhāras*? Or the mental *saṅkhāras*?”

“Friend Visākha, as the Bhikkhu is attaining to the cessation of perceptions and feelings, the verbal *saṅkhāras* are the ones to cease first, next, the bodily *saṅkhāras*, and then finally, the mental *saṅkhāras* are the ones to cease last.”

“And how, Venerable Lady, does one emerge from the state of cessation of perceptions and feelings?”

“Friend Visākha, in coming out of the cessation of perceptions and feelings, it does *not* happen in a way where the Bhikkhu would reflect to himself: “I am about to emerge from the cessation of perceptions and feelings,” or “I am now emerging from the cessation of perceptions and feelings,” nor “I have just emerged from the cessation of perceptions and feelings.” Rather, his mind has already been developed in such a manner that it naturally emerges from that state.”

“Venerable Lady, as the Bhikkhu is coming out of the cessation of perceptions and feelings, what arises first: The bodily *saṅkhāras*? The verbal *saṅkhāras*? Or the mental *saṅkhāras*?”

“Friend Visākha, as the Bhikkhu is emerging from the cessation of perceptions and feelings, the mental *saṅkhāras* are the ones to arise first, then the bodily *saṅkhāras*, and then the verbal *saṅkhāras* are the ones to arise last.”

“Venerable Lady, how many types of contact touch the Bhikkhu who emerges from the cessation of perceptions and feelings?”

“Friend Visākha, there are three types of contact that touch the Bhikkhu who emerges from the cessation of perceptions and feelings. These are the perception of emptiness, the perception of the sign-less, and the perception of the undirected, which touch the Bhikkhu who emerges from the cessation of perceptions and feelings.”

“Venerable Lady, in what direction does the mind of the Bhikkhu incline and lean towards, as he emerges from the cessation of perceptions and feelings?”

“Friend Visākha, the mind of the Bhikkhu who emerges from the cessation of perceptions and feelings naturally inclines towards seclusion, leans toward seclusion, and slopes into seclusion.”

“Venerable Lady, how many types of feelings are there?”

“Friend Visākha, there are three types of feelings: pleasant feelings, painful feelings, and neutral feelings.”

“And what, Venerable Lady, is a pleasant feeling? What is a painful feeling? What is a neutral feeling?”

“Friend Visākha, whatever agreeable or enjoyable feeling that is experienced, whether through the body or mind, is a pleasant feeling. Whatever disagreeable or unpleasant feeling that is experienced, whether through the body or mind, is a painful feeling. Whatever is experienced through the body or mind that is neither disagreeable nor agreeable, is a neutral feeling.”

“Venerable Lady, what is it that is pleasant and what is it that is painful, within what we call a pleasant feeling? What is it that is painful and what is it that is pleasant, within what we call a painful feeling? And what is it that is pleasant and what is it that is painful, within what we call a neutral feeling?”

“Friend Visākha, pleasant feeling is pleasant when it lingers, but becomes painful when it vanishes. Painful feeling is painful when it lingers, but becomes pleasant when it vanishes. Neutral feeling is pleasant when one knows and sees it as such, but becomes painful when one is lost in ignorance, and is neither able to know nor see it as just a neutral feeling.”

“Venerable Lady, what is the underlying latent tendency responsible for pleasant feelings? What is the underlying latent tendency responsible for painful feelings? And what is the underlying latent tendency responsible for neutral feelings?”

“Friend Visākha, the underlying latent tendency responsible for pleasant feelings is lust. The underlying latent tendency responsible for painful feelings is aversion. And the underlying latent tendency responsible for neutral feelings is ignorance.”

“In that case, Venerable lady, is the underlying latent tendency for lust responsible for *all* kinds of pleasant feelings? Similarly, is the underlying latent tendency for aversion responsible for *all* kinds of painful feelings? And is the underlying latent tendency for ignorance responsible for *all* kinds of neutral feelings?”

“No, they are not, Friend Visākha. The underlying latent tendency for lust is not responsible for all kinds of pleasant feelings. Similarly, the underlying latent tendency for aversion is not responsible for all kinds of painful feelings. And the underlying latent tendency for ignorance is not responsible for all kinds of neutral feelings.”

“Venerable Lady, what is it that must be expelled from pleasant feelings? What is it that must be expelled from painful feelings? And what is it that must be expelled from neutral feelings?”

“Friend Visākha, from pleasant feelings, it is the underlying tendency to lust that should be expelled. From painful feelings, it is the latent tendency to aversion that should be expelled. And from the neutral feelings, it is ignorance that should be expelled.”

“Venerable Lady, should the underlying tendency to lust be expelled from *all* pleasant feelings? Should the underlying tendency to aversion be expelled from *all* painful feelings? And should the underlying tendency to ignorance be expelled from *all* neutral feelings?”

“No, Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust need not be expelled from *all* pleasant feelings. Similarly, the underlying tendency to aversion need not be expelled from *all* painful feelings, and the underlying tendency to ignorance need not be expelled from *all* neutral feelings.

“Here, Friend Visākha, the Bhikkhu being secluded from sensual desires and unwholesome thoughts, enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thinking and pondering, with joy and pleasure that arise from such seclusion. Having experienced this, he relinquishes whatever lust may have been there in the past, and therefore, the underlying tendency to lust no longer becomes relevant.

Then, Friend Visākha, the Bhikkhu reflects thus:

‘O! when will I finally enter upon and abide in that sphere that the Noble Ones enter upon and abide in, right here and now?’

Thus, for the person in whom such a desire is aroused for the incomparable release, sadness arises as a result of that very longing that is in the heart, in not having yet experienced it. In realizing this, one expels the aversion, and thereby, the underlying tendency to aversion no longer becomes relevant.

“Then, Friend Visākha, by giving up both pleasure and pain, and having already gone beyond joy and anguish, the Bhikkhu abides in a state of purifying mindfulness with an ever-present sense of equanimity, while experiencing neither pleasure nor pain, having now gone beyond them, he attains to the fourth jhāna. Having experienced this, he relinquishes whatever ignorance may have been there in the past, and therefore, the underlying tendency to ignorance no longer becomes relevant.”

“Venerable Lady, what is considered to be the counterpart of pleasant feelings?”

“Friend Visākha, the counterpart of pleasant feelings are painful feelings.”

“Venerable Lady, what is considered to be the counterpart of painful feelings?”

“Friend Visākha, the counterpart of painful feelings are pleasant feelings.”

“Venerable Lady, what is considered to be the counterpart of neutral feelings?”

“Friend Visākha, the counterpart of neutral feelings is ignorance.”

“Venerable Lady, what is considered to be the counterpart of ignorance?”

“Friend Visākha, the counterpart of ignorance is true understanding.”

“Venerable Lady, what is considered to be the counterpart of true understanding?”

“Friend Visākha, the counterpart of true understanding is Release.”

“Venerable Lady, what is considered to be the counterpart of Release?”

“Friend Visākha, the counterpart of Release is Nibbāna.”

“Venerable Lady, what is considered to be the counterpart of Nibbāna?”

“Friend Visākha, your questions have gone far beyond their boundary, seeing that it is not possible for you grasp the limits of your questions.

“Friend Visākha, the Holy Life merges in Nibbāna, for Nibbāna is its ultimate aim, its end goal. Now, if you like, you may go ahead and approach The Blessed One and inquire further about this. And as The Blessed One explains it, so you must hold it close to your heart and remember it!”

Then the lay disciple Visākha, being delighted in hearing the words of the Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā, got up from his seat, and after paying his respects to her, and having circumambulated the Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā by keeping her to his right, he left to see the Blessed One.

Once having approached the Blessed One, the householder Visākha paid homage to Him, and then sat to one side and related the conversation that had taken place earlier between himself and the Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā.

Once Visākha finished speaking, The Blessed one said:

“Visākha, the Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā is very wise. For if you had posed these questions to me, I too would have given you the same exact answers! So, bear these explanations in your heart as the Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā has explained them, and remember them.”

This is what The Blessed One said, and the lay disciple Visākha was delighted in The Blessed One’s words.

Sadhu

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