SN 12.61 — SN 12:61 Uninstructed (1) | Assutavā Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/SN/SN12_61.html

Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

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Text

Uninstructed

Assutavā Sutta (SN 12:61)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. There he addressed the monks, “Monks, an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person might grow disenchanted with this body composed of the four great elements, might grow dispassionate toward it, might gain release from it. Why is that? Because the growth & decline, the taking up & putting down of this body composed of the four great elements are apparent. Thus the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person might grow disenchanted, might grow dispassionate, might gain release there.

“But as for what’s called ‘mind,’ ‘intellect,’ or ‘consciousness,’ the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is unable to grow disenchanted with it, unable to grow dispassionate toward it, unable to gain release from it. Why is that? For a long time this has been relished, appropriated, and grasped by the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person as, ‘This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.’ Thus the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is unable to grow disenchanted with it, unable to grow dispassionate toward it, unable to gain release from it.

“It would be better for the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person to hold to the body composed of the four great elements, rather than the mind, as the self. Why is that? Because this body composed of the four great elements is seen standing for a year, two years, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred years or more. But what’s called ‘mind,’ ‘intellect,’ or ‘consciousness’ by day and by night arises as one thing and ceases as another. Just as a monkey, swinging through a forest wilderness, grabs a branch. Letting go of that, it grabs another branch. Letting go of that, it grabs another one. Letting go of that, it grabs another one. In the same way, what’s called ‘mind,’ ‘intellect,’ or ‘consciousness’ by day and by night arises as one thing and ceases as another.

“The instructed disciple of the noble ones, (however,) attends carefully & appropriately right there at the dependent co-arising:

“‘When this is, that is.

“‘From the arising of this comes the arising of that.

“‘When this isn’t, that isn’t.

“‘From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.

“‘In other words:

“‘From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.

“‘From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness.

“‘From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form.

“‘From name-&-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media.

“‘From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact.

“‘From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling.

“‘From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving.

“‘From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance.

“‘From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming.

“‘From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth.

“‘From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.

“‘Now from the remainderless fading & cessation of that very ignorance comes the cessation of fabrications. From the cessation of fabrications comes the cessation of consciousness. From the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-&-form. From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of the six sense media. From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of stress & suffering.’

“Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness.1 Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’”

Note

1. The discussion here shifts from the framework of dependent co-arising to that of the five aggregates. It’s a useful exercise to relate the two teachings, and three good places to start this exercise are MN 28, SN 12:2, and SN 22:5.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: AN 1:48; Dhp 33–37