# SN 46.54 — Metta Sutta: Good Will

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

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

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Koliyans. Now there is a Koliyan town named Haliddavasa. Then, early in the morning, a large number of monks adjusted their under robes and — carrying their bowls & robes — went into Haliddavasana for alms. Then the thought occurred to them, "It's still too early to go for alms in Haliddavasana. Why don't we go to the park of the wanderers of other sects?"

So the monks went to the park of the wanderers of other sects. On arrival, they exchanged courteous greetings with the wanderers of other sects. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, they sat to one side.

As they were sitting there, the wanderers of other sects said to them, "Friends, Gotama the contemplative teaches the Dhamma to his disciples in this way: 'Come, monks — abandoning the five hindrances, the corruptions of awareness that weaken discernment — keep pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with good will, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, keep pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will.

"'Keep pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with compassion...

"'Keep pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with empathetic joy...

"'Keep pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, keep pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will.'

"Now, friends, we too teach our disciples in this way: 'Come, you friends, — abandoning the five hindrances, the corruptions of awareness that weaken discernment — keep pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with good will, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, keep pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will.

"'Keep pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with compassion...

"'Keep pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with empathetic joy...

"'Keep pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, keep pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will.'

"So, friends, what difference, what distinction, what distinguishing factor is there here between Gotama the contemplative and us, when comparing Dhamma teaching with Dhamma teaching, instruction with instruction?"

Then the monks neither delighted in the words of the wanderers of other sects, nor did they reject them. Without delighting or rejecting, they got up from their seats and left, (thinking,) "We will learn the meaning of these words in the presence of the Blessed One."

So, having gone for alms in Haliddavasana, after the meal, returning from their alms round, the monks went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there they [told him what had happened.]

"Monks, when wanderers of other sects speak in that way, they should be addressed in this way: 'But how, friends, is awareness-release [1] through good will developed, what is its destination, what is its excellence, its fruit, & its consummation? How is awareness-release through compassion developed, what is its destination, what is its excellence, its fruit, & its consummation? How is awareness-release through empathetic joy developed, what is its destination, what is its excellence, its fruit, & its consummation? How is

awareness-release through equanimity developed, what is its destination, what is its excellence, its fruit, & its consummation?

"Being asked in this way, the wanderers of other sects will be unable to respond and, on top of that, will fall into vexation. Why is that? Because it lies beyond their range. Monks, don't see anyone in this cosmos — with its devas, Maras, and Brahmas, with its people with their contemplatives & brahmans, their royalty & commonfolk — who would satisfy the mind with their answer to these questions, aside from the Tathagata, a disciple of the Tathagata, or one who had heard it from them.

"And how, monks, is awareness-release through good will developed, what is its destination, what is its excellence, its fruit, & its consummation?

"There is the case where a monk develops mindfulness as a factor for awakening accompanied by good will, dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. He develops analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening... persistence as a factor for awakening... rapture as a factor for awakening... serenity as a factor for awakening... concentration as a factor for awakening... equanimity as a factor for awakening accompanied by good will, dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome & what is. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not. If he wants — in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not — cutting himself off from both, he remains equanimous, alert, & mindful. Or he may enter & remain in the beautiful liberation. I tell you, monks, awareness-release through good will has the beautiful as its excellence — in the case of one who has penetrated to no higher release. [2]

"And how is awareness-release through compassion developed, what is its destination, what is its excellence, its fruit, & its consummation?

"There is the case where a monk develops mindfulness as a factor for awakening accompanied by compassion, dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. He develops analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening... persistence as a factor for awakening... rapture as a factor for awakening... serenity as a factor for awakening... concentration as a factor for awakening... equanimity as a factor for awakening accompanied by compassion, dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome & what is. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not. If he wants — in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not — cutting himself off from both, he remains equanimous, alert, &

mindful. Or, with the complete transcending of perceptions of [physical] form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, (perceiving,) 'Infinite space,' he enters & remains in the sphere of the infinitude of space. I tell you, monks, awareness-release through compassion has the sphere of the infinitude of space as its excellence — in the case of one who has penetrated to no higher release. [3]

"And how is awareness-release through empathetic joy developed, what is its destination, what is its excellence, its fruit, & its consummation?

"There is the case where a monk develops mindfulness as a factor for awakening accompanied by empathetic joy, dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. He develops analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening... persistence as a factor for awakening... rapture as a factor for awakening... serenity as a factor for awakening... concentration as a factor for awakening... equanimity as a factor for awakening accompanied by empathetic joy, dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome & what is. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not. If he wants — in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not — cutting himself off from both, he remains equanimous, alert, & mindful. Or, with the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) 'Infinite consciousness,' he enters & remains in the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness. I tell you, monks, awareness-release through empathetic joy has the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness as its excellence — in the case of one who has penetrated to no higher release.

"And how is awareness-release through equanimity developed, what is its destination, what is its excellence, its fruit, & its consummation?

"There is the case where a monk develops mindfulness as a factor for awakening accompanied by equanimity, dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. He develops analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening... persistence as a factor for awakening... rapture as a factor for awakening... serenity as a factor for awakening... concentration as a factor for awakening... equanimity as a factor for awakening accompanied by equanimity, dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in letting go. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome. If he wants, he remains percipient of loathsomeness in the presence of what is not loathsome & what is. If he wants, he remains percipient of unloathsomeness in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not. If he wants — in the presence of what is loathsome & what is not — cutting himself off from both, he remains equanimous, alert, & mindful. Or, with the complete transcending of the sphere of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) 'There is nothing,' he enters & remains in the sphere of

nothingness. I tell you, monks, awareness-release through equanimity has the sphere of nothingness as its excellence — in the case of one who has penetrated to no higher release."

Notes

1.

"Awareness-release" (ceto-vimutti) is a state of mind released from passion. This can either be the temporary release found in concentration (as here) or the arahant's full release from passion. See AN 2.30.

2.

The "beautiful" (subha) is a state of concentration that plays a role equivalent to that of the fourth jhana in leading to the formless jhanas. See MN 137 and SN 14.11 (also in The Wings to Awakening, passages §163 and §164).

3.

AN 4.125, when read in conjunction with AN 4.123, gives the impression that the development of good will as an immeasurable state can lead only to the first jhana, and that the remaining immeasurable states can lead, respectively, only to the second, third, and fourth jhanas. AN 8.63, on the other hand, states that all four immeasurable states can lead all the way to the fourth jhana, without saying that they can go no farther. The difference between AN 4.125 on the one hand, and AN 8.63 and this discourse on the other, apparently lies in how the person practicing these immeasurable states relates to them. In AN 4.125, the person simply enjoys the immeasurable states as a pleasurable abiding. In AN 8.63, the person deliberately uses the states as a basis for developing all the jhanas. Similarly, in this sutta, the person develops these states in conjunction with all the factors for awakening.