

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

*In the*  
Buddha's  
Words

An Anthology of Discourses  
from the Pāli Canon

Edited and introduced by  
Bhikkhu Bodhi



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THE DALAI LAMA

## FOREWORD

More than two thousand five hundred years have passed since our kind teacher, Buddha Śākyamuni, taught in India. He offered advice to all who wished to heed it, inviting them to listen, reflect, and critically examine what he had to say. He addressed different individuals and groups of people over a period of more than forty years.

After the Buddha's passing, a record of what he said was maintained as an oral tradition. Those who heard the teachings would periodically meet with others for communal recitations of what they had heard and memorized. In due course, these recitations from memory were written down, laying the basis for all subsequent Buddhist literature. The Pāli Canon is one of the earliest of these written records and the only complete early version that has survived intact. Within the Pāli Canon, the texts known as the Nikāyas have the special value of being a single cohesive collection of the Buddha's teachings in his own words. These teachings cover a wide range of topics; they deal not only with renunciation and liberation, but also with the proper relations between husbands and wives, the management of the household, and the way countries should be governed. They explain the path of spiritual development—from generosity and ethics, through mind training and the realization of wisdom, all the way up to the attainment of liberation.

The teachings from the Nikāyas collected here provide fascinating insights into how the Buddha's teachings were studied, preserved, and understood in the early days of Buddhism's development. Modern readers will find them especially valuable for reinvigorating and clarifying their understanding of many fundamental Buddhist doctrines. Clearly the Buddha's essential message of compassion, ethical responsibility, mental tranquillity, and discernment is as relevant today as it was more than twenty-five hundred years ago.

Although Buddhism spread and took root in many parts of Asia, evolving into diverse traditions according to the place and occasion, distance and differences of language limited exchange between Buddhists in the past. One of the results of modern improvements in

transport and communication that I most appreciate is the vastly expanded opportunities those interested in Buddhism now have to acquaint themselves with the full range of Buddhist teaching and practice. What I find especially encouraging about this book is that it shows so clearly how much fundamentally all schools of Buddhism have in common. I congratulate Bhikkhu Bodhi for this careful work of compilation and translation. I offer my prayers that readers may find advice here—and the inspiration to put it into practice—that will enable them to develop inner peace, which I believe is essential for the creation of a happier and more peaceful world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tenzin Gyatso', written in a fluid, cursive style.

Venerable Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama  
May 10, 2005

## PREFACE

The Buddha's discourses preserved in the Pāli Canon are called *suttas*, the Pāli equivalent of the Sanskrit word *sūtras*. Although the Pāli Canon belongs to a particular Buddhist school—the Theravāda, or School of the Elders—the *suttas* are by no means exclusively Theravāda Buddhist texts. They stem from the earliest period of Buddhist literary history, a period lasting roughly a hundred years after the Buddha's death, before the original Buddhist community divided into different schools. The Pāli *suttas* have counterparts from other early Buddhist schools now extinct, texts sometimes strikingly similar to the Pāli version, differing mainly in settings and arrangements but not in points of doctrine. The *suttas*, along with their counterparts, thus constitute the most ancient records of the Buddha's teachings available to us; they are the closest we can come to what the historical Buddha Gotama himself actually taught. The teachings found in them have served as the fountainhead, the primal source, for all the evolving streams of Buddhist doctrine and practice through the centuries. For this reason, they constitute the common heritage of the entire Buddhist tradition, and Buddhists of all schools who wish to understand the taproot of Buddhism should make a close and careful study of them a priority.

In the Pāli Canon the Buddha's discourses are preserved in collections called *Nikāyas*. Over the past twenty years, fresh translations of the four major *Nikāyas* have appeared in print, issued in attractive and affordable editions. Wisdom Publications pioneered this development in 1987 when it published Maurice Walshe's translation of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. Wisdom followed this precedent by bringing out, in 1995, my revised and edited version of Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's handwritten translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, followed in 2000 by my new translation of the complete *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*. In 1999, under the imprint of The Sacred Literature Trust Series, AltaMira Press published an anthology

of suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikāya, translated by the late Nyanaponika Thera and myself, titled *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*. I am currently working on a new translation of the entire Aṅguttara Nikāya, intended for Wisdom Publication's Teachings of the Buddha series.

Many who have read these larger works have told me, to my satisfaction, that the translations brought the suttas to life for them. Yet others who earnestly sought to enter the deep ocean of the Nikāyas told me something else. They said that while the language of the translations made them far more accessible than earlier translations, they were still grappling for a standpoint from which to see the suttas' overall structure, a framework within which they all fit together. The Nikāyas themselves do not offer much help in this respect, for their arrangement—with the notable exception of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, which does have a thematic structure—appears almost haphazard.

In an ongoing series of lectures I began giving at Bodhi Monastery in New Jersey in January 2003, I devised a scheme of my own to organize the contents of the Majjhima Nikāya. This scheme unfolds the Buddha's message progressively, from the simple to the difficult, from the elementary to the profound. Upon reflection, I saw that this scheme could be applied not only to the Majjhima Nikāya, but to the four Nikāyas as a whole. The present book organizes suttas selected from all four Nikāyas within this thematic and progressive framework.

This book is intended for two types of readers. The first are those not yet acquainted with the Buddha's discourses who feel the need for a systematic introduction. For such readers, any of the Nikāyas is bound to appear opaque. All four of them, viewed at once, may seem like a jungle—entangling and bewildering, full of unknown beasts—or like the great ocean—vast, tumultuous, and forbidding. I hope that this book will serve as a map to help them wend their way through the jungle of the suttas or as a sturdy ship to carry them across the ocean of the Dhamma.

The second type of readers for whom this book is meant are those, already acquainted with the suttas, who still cannot see how they fit together into an intelligible whole. For such readers, individual suttas may be comprehensible in themselves, but the texts in their totality appear like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle scattered across a table. Once one understands the scheme in this book, one should come away with



a clear idea of the architecture of the teaching. Then, with a little reflection, one should be able to determine the place any sutta occupies in the edifice of the Dhamma, whether or not it has been included in this anthology.

This anthology, or any other anthology of suttas, is no substitute for the Nikāyas themselves. My hope is twofold, corresponding to the two types of readers for whom this volume is designed: (1) that newcomers to Early Buddhist literature find this volume whets their appetite for more and encourages them to take the plunge into the full Nikāyas; and (2) that experienced readers of the Nikāyas finish the book with a better understanding of material with which they are already familiar.

If this anthology is meant to make any other point, it is to convey the sheer breadth and range of the Buddha's wisdom. While Early Buddhism is sometimes depicted as a discipline of world renunciation intended primarily for ascetics and contemplatives, the ancient discourses of the Pāli Canon clearly show us how the Buddha's wisdom and compassion reached into the very depths of mundane life, providing ordinary people with guidelines for proper conduct and right understanding. Far from being a creed for a monastic élite, ancient Buddhism involved the close collaboration of householders and monastics in the twin tasks of maintaining the Buddha's teachings and assisting one another in their efforts to walk the path to the extinction of suffering. To fulfill these tasks meaningfully, the Dhamma had to provide them with deep and inexhaustible guidance, inspiration, joy, and consolation. It could never have done this if it had not directly addressed their earnest efforts to combine social and family obligations with an aspiration to realize the highest.

Almost all the passages included in this book have been selected from the above-mentioned publications of the four Nikāyas. Almost all have undergone revisions, usually slight but sometimes major, to accord with my own evolving understanding of the texts and the Pāli language. I have newly translated a small number of suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikāya not included in the above-mentioned anthology. I have also included a handful of suttas from the Udāna and Itivuttaka, two small books belonging to the fifth Nikāya, the Khuddaka Nikāya, the Minor or Miscellaneous Collection. I have based these on John D. Ireland's translation, published by the Buddhist Publication Society in

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
Be	Burmese-script Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana ed.
Ce	Sinhala-script ed.
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
Ee	Roman-script ed. (PTS)
It	Itivuttaka
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
Mp	Manorathapūraṇi (Aṅguttara Nikāya Commentary)
Ppn	Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga translation)
Ps	Papañcasūdanī (Majjhima Nikāya Commentary)
Ps-pt	Papañcasūdanī-purāṇa-ṭikā (Majjhima Nikāya Subcommentary)
Skt	Sanskrit
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Spk	Sāratthappakāsini (Saṃyutta Nikāya Commentary)
Spk-pt	Sāratthappakāsini-purāṇa-ṭikā (Saṃyutta Nikāya Subcommentary)
Sv	Sumaṅgalavilāsini (Dīgha Nikāya Commentary)
Ud	Udāna
Vibh	Vibhaṅga
Vin	Vinaya
Vism	Visuddhimagga

All page references to Pāli texts are to the page numbers of the Pali Text Society's editions.

## KEY TO THE PRONUNCIATION OF PĀLI

### *The Pāli Alphabet*

Vowels: a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, o

### Consonants:

Gutturals	k, kh, g, gh, ṅ
Palatals	c, ch, j, jh, ñ
Cerebrals	ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ
Dentals	t, th, d, dh, n
Labials	p, ph, b, bh, m
Other	y, r, ḷ, l, v, s, h, ṃ

### *Pronunciation*

a as in "cut"	u as in "put"
ā as in "father"	ū as in "rule"
i as in "king"	e as in "way"
ī as in "keen"	o as in "home"

Of the vowels, *e* and *o* are long before a single consonant and short before a double consonant. Among the consonants, *g* is always pronounced as in "good," *c* as in "church," *ñ* as in "onion." The cerebrals (or retroflexes) are spoken with the tongue on the roof of the mouth; the dentals with the tongue on the upper teeth. The aspirates—*kh, gh, ch, jh, ṭh, ḍh, th, dh, ph, bh*—are single consonants pronounced with slightly more force than the nonaspirates, e.g., *th* as in "Thomas" (not as in "thin"); *ph* as in "putter" (not as in "phone"). Double consonants are always enunciated separately, e.g., *dd* as in "mad dog," *gg* as in "big gun." The pure nasal (*niggaḥita*) *ṃ* is pronounced like the *ng* in "song." An *o* and an *e* always carry a stress; otherwise the stress falls on a long vowel—*ā, ī, ū*,—or on a double consonant, or on *ṃ*.



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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

## UNCOVERING THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEACHING

Though his teaching is highly systematic, there is no single text that can be ascribed to the Buddha in which he defines the architecture of the Dhamma, the scaffolding upon which he has framed his specific expressions of the doctrine. In the course of his long ministry, the Buddha taught in different ways as determined by occasion and circumstances. Sometimes he would enunciate invariable principles that stand at the heart of the teaching. Sometimes he would adapt the teaching to accord with the proclivities and aptitudes of the people who came to him for guidance. Sometimes he would adjust his exposition to fit a situation that required a particular response. But throughout the collections of texts that have come down to us as authorized “Word of the Buddha,” we do not find a single *sutta*, a single discourse, in which the Buddha has drawn together all the elements of his teaching and assigned them to their appropriate place within some comprehensive system.

While in a literate culture in which systematic thought is highly prized the lack of such a text with a unifying function might be viewed as a defect, in an entirely oral culture—as was the culture in which the Buddha lived and moved—the lack of a descriptive key to the Dhamma would hardly be considered significant. Within this culture neither teacher nor student aimed at conceptual completeness. The teacher did not intend to present a complete system of ideas; his pupils did not aspire to learn a complete system of ideas. The aim that united them in the process of learning—the process of transmission—was that of practical training, self-transformation, the realization of truth, and unshakable liberation of the mind. This does not mean, however, that the teaching was always expediently adapted to the situation at hand. At times the Buddha would present more panoramic views of the Dhamma that united many components of the path in a graded or wide-ranging structure. But though there are several discourses that

The second type of benefit to which the Buddha's teaching leads is the subject of chapter V, called the welfare and happiness pertaining to the future life (*samparāyika-hitasukha*). This is the happiness achieved by obtaining a fortunate rebirth and success in future lives through one's accumulation of merit. The term "merit" (*puñña*) refers to wholesome kamma (Skt: *karma*) considered in terms of its capacity to produce favorable results within the round of rebirths. I begin this chapter with a selection of texts on the teaching of kamma and rebirth. This leads us to general texts on the idea of merit, followed by selections on the three principal "bases of merit" recognized in the Buddha's discourses: giving (*dāna*), moral discipline (*sīla*), and meditation (*bhāvanā*). Since meditation figures prominently in the third type of benefit, the kind of meditation emphasized here, as a basis for merit, is that productive of the most abundant mundane fruits, the four "divine abodes" (*brahmvihāra*), particularly the development of loving-kindness.

Chapter VI is transitional, intended to prepare the way for the chapters to follow. While demonstrating that the practice of his teaching does indeed conduce to happiness and good fortune within the bounds of mundane life, in order to lead people beyond these bounds, the Buddha exposes the danger and inadequacy in all conditioned existence. He shows the defects in sensual pleasures, the shortcomings of material success, the inevitability of death, and the impermanence of all conditioned realms of being. To arouse in his disciples an aspiration for the ultimate good, Nibbāna, the Buddha again and again underscores the perils of saṃsāra. Thus this chapter comes to a climax with two dramatic texts that dwell on the misery of bondage to the round of repeated birth and death.

The following four chapters are devoted to the third benefit that the Buddha's teaching is intended to bring: the ultimate good (*paramattha*), the attainment of Nibbāna. The first of these, chapter VII, gives a general overview of the path to liberation, which is treated analytically through definitions of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path and dynamically through an account of the training of the monk. A long sutta on the graduated path surveys the monastic training from the monk's initial entry upon the life of renunciation to his attainment of arahantship, the final goal.

Chapter VIII focuses upon the taming of the mind, the major emphasis in the monastic training. I here present texts that discuss the obstacles

to mental development, the means of overcoming these obstacles, different methods of meditation, and the states to be attained when the obstacles are overcome and the disciple gains mastery over the mind. In this chapter I introduce the distinction between *samatha* and *vipassanā*, serenity and insight, the one leading to *samādhi* or concentration, the other to *paññā* or wisdom. However, I include texts that treat insight only in terms of the methods used to generate it, not in terms of its actual contents.

Chapter IX, titled “Shining the Light of Wisdom,” deals with the content of insight. For Early Buddhism, and indeed for almost all schools of Buddhism, insight or wisdom is the principal instrument of liberation. Thus in this chapter I focus on the Buddha’s teachings about such topics pivotal to the development of wisdom as right view, the five aggregates, the six sense bases, the eighteen elements, dependent origination, and the Four Noble Truths. This chapter ends with a selection of texts on Nibbāna, the ultimate goal of wisdom.

The final goal is not achieved abruptly but by passing through a series of stages that transforms an individual from a worldlyling into an arahant, a liberated one. Thus chapter X, “The Planes of Realization,” offers a selection of texts on the main stages along the way. I first present the series of stages as a progressive sequence; then I return to the starting point and examine three major milestones within this progression: stream-entry, the stage of nonreturner, and arahantship. I conclude with a selection of suttas on the Buddha, the foremost among the arahants, here spoken of under the epithet he used most often when referring to himself, the Tathāgata.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE NIKĀYAS

The texts I have drawn upon to fill out my scheme are, as I said above, all selected from the Nikāyas, the main sutta collections of the Pāli Canon. Some words are needed to explain the origin and nature of these sources.

The Buddha did not write down any of his teachings, nor were his teachings recorded in writing by his disciples. Indian culture at the time the Buddha lived was still predominantly preliterate.<sup>1</sup> The Buddha wandered from town to town in the Ganges plain, instructing his monks and nuns, giving sermons to the householders who flocked

to hear him speak, answering the questions of curious inquirers, and engaging in discussions with people from all classes of society. The records of his teachings that we have do not come from his own pen or from transcriptions made by those who heard the teaching from him, but from monastic councils held after his *parinibbāna*—his passing away into Nibbāna—for the purpose of preserving his teaching.

It is unlikely that the teachings that derive from these councils reproduce the Buddha's words verbatim. The Buddha must have spoken spontaneously and elaborated upon his themes in countless ways in response to the varied needs of those who sought his guidance. Preserving by oral transmission such a vast and diverse range of material would have bordered on the impossible. To mold the teachings into a format suitable for preservation, the monks responsible for the texts would have had to collate and edit them to make them better fit for listening, retention, recitation, memorization, and repetition—the five major elements in oral transmission. This process, which may have already been started during the Buddha's lifetime, would have led to a fair degree of simplification and standardization of the material to be preserved.

During the Buddha's life, the discourses were classified into nine categories according to literary genre: *sutta* (prose discourses), *geyya* (mixed prose and verse), *veyyākaraṇa* (answers to questions), *gāthā* (verse), *udāna* (inspired utterances), *itivuttaka* (memorable sayings), *jātaka* (stories of past births), *abbhutadhamma* (marvelous qualities), and *vedalla* (catechism).<sup>2</sup> At some point after his passing, this older system of classification was superseded by a new scheme that ordered the texts into larger collections called Nikāyas in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, Āgamas in the North Indian Buddhist schools.<sup>3</sup> Exactly when the Nikāya-Āgama scheme became ascendant is not known with certainty, but once it appeared it almost completely replaced the older system.

The Cullavagga, one of the books of the Pāli Vinaya Piṭaka, gives an account of how the authorized texts were compiled at the first Buddhist council, held three months after the Buddha's parinibbāna. According to this report, shortly after the Buddha's death the Elder Mahākassapa, the de facto head of the Saṅgha, selected five hundred monks, all *arahants* or liberated ones, to meet and compile an authoritative version of the teachings. The council took place during the rains

retreat at Rājagaha (modern Rajgir), the capital of Magadha, then the dominant state of Middle India.<sup>4</sup> Mahākassapa first requested the Venerable Upāli, the foremost specialist on disciplinary matters, to recite the Vinaya. On the basis of this recitation, the Vinaya Piṭaka, the Compilation on Discipline, was compiled. Mahākassapa then asked the Venerable Ānanda to recite “the Dhamma,” that is, the discourses, and on the basis of this recitation, the Sutta Piṭaka, the Compilation of Discourses, was compiled.

The Cullavagga states that when Ānanda recited the Sutta Piṭaka, the Nikāyas had the same contents as they do now, with the suttas arranged in the same sequence as they now appear in the Pāli Canon. This narrative doubtlessly records past history through the lens of a later period. The Āgamas of the Buddhist schools other than the Theravāda correspond to the four main Nikāyas, but they classify suttas differently and arrange their contents in a different order from the Pāli Nikāyas. This suggests that if the Nikāya-Āgama arrangement did arise at the first council, the council had not yet assigned suttas to their definitive places within this scheme. Alternatively, it is possible that this scheme arose at a later time. It could have arisen at some point after the first council but before the Saṅgha split into different schools. If it arose during the age of sectarian divisions, it might have been introduced by one school and then been borrowed by others, so that the different schools would assign their texts to different places within the scheme.

While the Cullavagga’s account of the first council may include legendary material mixed with historical fact, there seems no reason to doubt Ānanda’s role in the preservation of the discourses. As the Buddha’s personal attendant, Ānanda had learned the discourses from him and the other great disciples, kept them in mind, and taught them to others. During the Buddha’s life he was praised for his retentive capacities and was appointed “foremost of those who have learned much” (*etadaggaṃ bahussutānaṃ*).<sup>5</sup> Few monks might have had memories that could equal Ānanda’s, but already during the Buddha’s lifetime individual monks must already have begun to specialize in particular texts. The standardization and simplification of the material would have facilitated memorization. Once the texts became classified into the Nikāyas or Āgamas, the challenges of preserving and transmitting the textual heritage were solved by organizing the textual specialists into

companies dedicated to specific collections. Different companies within the Saṅgha could thus focus on memorizing and interpreting different collections and the community as a whole could avoid placing excessive demands on the memories of individual monks. It is in this way that the teachings would continue to be transmitted for the next three or four hundred years, until they were finally committed to writing.<sup>6</sup>

In the centuries following the Buddha's death, the Saṅgha became divided over disciplinary and doctrinal issues until by the third century after the parinibbāna there were at least eighteen schools of Sectarian Buddhism. Each sect probably had its own collection of texts regarded more or less as canonical, though it is possible that several closely affiliated sects shared the same collection of authorized texts. While the different Buddhist schools may have organized their collections differently and though their suttas show differences of detail, the individual suttas are often remarkably similar, sometimes almost identical, and the doctrines and practices they delineate are essentially the same.<sup>7</sup> The doctrinal differences between the schools did not arise from the suttas themselves but from the interpretations the textual specialists imposed upon them. Such differences hardened after the rival schools formalized their philosophical principles in treatises and commentaries expressive of their distinctive standpoints on doctrinal issues. So far as we can determine, the refined philosophical systems had only minimal impact on the original texts themselves, which the schools seemed disinclined to manipulate to suit their doctrinal agendas. Instead, by means of their commentaries, they endeavored to interpret the suttas in such a way as to draw out ideas that supported their own views. It is not unusual for such interpretations to appear defensive and contrived, apologetic against the words of the original texts themselves.

## THE PĀLI CANON

Sadly, the canonical collections belonging to most of the early mainstream Indian Buddhist schools were lost when Indian Buddhism was devastated by the Muslims that invaded northern India in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These invasions effectively sounded the death knell for Buddhism in the land of its birth. Only one complete collection



of seven treatises which subject the Buddha's teachings to rigorous philosophical systematization.

The Abhidhamma Piṭaka is obviously the product of a later phase in the evolution of Buddhist thought than the other two Piṭakas. The Pāli version represents the Theravāda school's attempt to systematize the older teachings. Other early schools apparently had their own Abhidhamma systems. The Sarvāstivāda system is the only one whose canonical texts have survived intact in their entirety. Its canonical collection, like the Pāli version, also consists of seven texts. These were originally composed in Sanskrit but are preserved in full only in Chinese translation. The system they define differs significantly from that of its Theravāda counterpart in both formulation and philosophy.

The Sutta Piṭaka, which contains the records of the Buddha's discourses and discussions, consists of five collections called Nikāyas. In the age of the commentators they were also known as Āgamas, like their counterparts in northern Buddhism. The four major Nikāyas are:

1. The *Dīgha Nikāya*: the Collection of Long Discourses, thirty-four suttas arranged into three *vaggas*, or books.
2. The *Majjhima Nikāya*: the Collection of Middle Length Discourses, 152 suttas arranged into three *vaggas*.
3. The *Samyutta Nikāya*: the Collection of Connected Discourses, close to three thousand short suttas grouped into fifty-six chapters, called *samyuttas*, which are in turn collected into five *vaggas*.
4. The *Anguttara Nikāya*: the Collection of Numerical Discourses (or, perhaps, "Incremental Discourses"), approximately 2,400 short suttas arranged into eleven chapters, called *nipātas*.

The *Dīgha Nikāya* and *Majjhima Nikāya*, at first glance, seem to be established principally on the basis of length: the longer discourses go into the *Dīgha*, the middle-length discourses into the *Majjhima*. Careful tabulations of their contents, however, suggest that another factor might underlie the distinction between these two collections. The suttas of the *Dīgha Nikāya* are largely aimed at a popular audience and seem intended to attract potential converts to the teaching by demonstrating the superiority of the Buddha and his doctrine. The suttas of the *Majjhima Nikāya* are largely directed inward toward the Buddhist community and seem designed to acquaint newly ordained monks

with the doctrines and practices of Buddhism.<sup>9</sup> It remains an open question whether these pragmatic purposes are the determining criteria behind these two Nikāyas or whether the primary criterion is length, with these pragmatic purposes following as incidental consequences of their respective differences in length.

The Saṃyutta Nikāya is organized by way of subject matter. Each subject is the “yoke” (*saṃyoga*) that connects the discourses into a *saṃyutta* or chapter. Hence the title of the collection, the “connected (*saṃyutta*) discourses.” The first book, the Book with Verses, is unique in being compiled on the basis of literary genre. It contains suttas in mixed prose and verse, arranged in eleven chapters by way of subject. The other four books each contain long chapters dealing with the principal doctrines of Early Buddhism. Books II, III, and IV each open with a long chapter devoted to a theme of major importance, respectively, dependent origination (chapter 12: *Nidānasamṃyutta*); the five aggregates (chapter 22: *Khandhasamṃyutta*); and the six internal and external sense bases (chapter 35: *Salāyatanaṣamṃyutta*). Part V deals with the principal groups of training factors that, in the post-canonical period, come to be called the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*). These include the Noble Eightfold Path (chapter 45: *Maggaṣamṃyutta*), the seven factors of enlightenment (chapter 46: *Bojjhaṅgaṣamṃyutta*), and the four establishments of mindfulness (chapter 47: *Satipaṭṭhānaṣamṃyutta*). From its contents, we might infer that the Saṃyutta Nikāya was intended to serve the needs of two groups within the monastic order. One consisted of the doctrinal specialists, those monks and nuns who sought to explore the deep implications of the Dhamma and to elucidate them for their companions in the religious life. The other consisted of those devoted to the meditative development of insight.

The Aṅguttara Nikāya is arranged according to a numerical scheme derived from a peculiar feature of the Buddha's pedagogic method. To facilitate easy comprehension and memorization, the Buddha often formulated his discourses by way of numerical sets, a format that helped to ensure that the ideas he conveyed would be easily retained in mind. The Aṅguttara Nikāya assembles these numerical discourses into a single massive work of eleven *nipātas* or chapters, each representing the number of terms upon which the constituent suttas have been framed. Thus there is the Chapter of the Ones (*ekakanipāta*), the

Chapter of the Twos (*dukanipāta*), the Chapter of the Threes (*tikanipāta*), and so forth, up to and ending with the Chapter of the Elevens (*ekādasanipāta*). Since the various groups of path factors have been included in the Saṃyutta, the Aṅguttara can focus on those aspects of the training that have not been incorporated in the repetitive sets. The Aṅguttara includes a notable proportion of suttas addressed to lay followers dealing with the ethical and spiritual concerns of life within the world, including family relationships (husbands and wives, children and parents) and the proper ways to acquire, save, and utilize wealth. Other suttas deal with the practical training of monks. The numerical arrangement of this collection makes it particularly convenient for formal instruction, and thus it could easily be drawn upon by elder monks when teaching their pupils and by preachers when giving sermons to the laity.

Besides the four major Nikāyas, the Pāli Sutta Piṭaka includes a fifth Nikāya, called the Khuddaka Nikāya. This name means the Minor Collection. Perhaps it originally consisted merely of a number of minor works that could not be included in the four major Nikāyas. But as more and more works were composed over the centuries and added to it, its dimensions swelled until it became the most voluminous of the five Nikāyas. At the heart of the Khuddaka, however, is a small constellation of short works composed either entirely in verse (namely, the Dhammapada, the Theragāthā, and the Therīgāthā) or in mixed prose and verse (the Suttanipāta, the Udāna, and the Itivuttaka) whose style and contents suggest that they are of great antiquity. Other texts of the Khuddaka Nikāya—such as the Paṭisambhidāmagga and the two Niddesas—represent the standpoint of the Theravāda school and thus must have been composed during the period of Sectarian Buddhism, when the early schools had taken their separate paths of doctrinal development.

The four Nikāyas of the Pāli Canon have counterparts in the Āgamas of the Chinese Tripiṭaka, though these are from different early schools. Corresponding to each respectively there is a Dirghāgama, probably stemming from the Dharmaguptaka school, originally translated from a Prakrit; a Madhyamāgama and Samyuktāgama, both stemming from the Sarvāstivāda school and translated from Sanskrit; and an Ekottarāgama, corresponding to the Aṅguttara Nikāya, generally thought to have belonged to a branch of the Mahāsāṅghika school and

to have been translated from a dialect of Middle Indo-Aryan or a mixed dialect of Prakrit with Sanskrit elements. The Chinese Tripiṭaka also contains translations of individual sūtras from the four collections, perhaps from still other unidentified schools, and translations of individual books from the Minor Collection, including two translations of a Dhammapada (one said to be very close to the Pāli version) and parts of the Suttanipāta, which, as a unified work, does not exist in Chinese translation.<sup>10</sup>

### A NOTE ON STYLE

Readers of the Pāli suttas are often annoyed by the repetitiveness of the texts. It is difficult to tell how much of this stems from the Buddha himself, who as an itinerant preacher must have used repetition to reinforce his points, and how much is due to the compilers. It is obvious, however, that a high proportion of the repetitiveness derives from the process of oral transmission.

To avoid excessive repetitiveness in the translation I have had to make ample use of elisions. In this respect I follow the printed editions of the Pāli texts, which are also highly abridged, but a translation intended for a contemporary reader requires still more compression if it is to avoid risking the reader's wrath. On the other hand, I have been keen to see that nothing essential to the original text, including the flavor, has been lost due to the abridgment. The ideals of considerateness to the reader and fidelity to the text sometimes make contrary demands on a translator.

The treatment of repetition patterns in which the same utterance is made regarding a set of items is a perpetual problem in translating Pāli suttas. When translating a sutta about the five aggregates, for example, one is tempted to forgo the enumeration of the individual aggregates and instead turn the sutta into a general statement about the aggregates as a class. To my mind, such an approach risks turning translation into paraphrase and thereby losing too much of the original. My general policy has been to translate the full utterance in relation to the first and last members of the set and merely to enumerate the intermediate members separated by ellipsis points. Thus, in a sutta about the five aggregates, I render the statement in full only for form and consciousness, and in between have "feeling ... perception ... voli-

tional formations ...," implying thereby that the full statement likewise applies to them.

This approach has required the frequent use of ellipsis points, a practice that also invites criticism. When faced with repetitive passages in the narrative framework, I have sometimes condensed them rather than use ellipsis points to show where text is being elided. However, with texts of doctrinal exposition I adhere to the practice described in the preceding paragraph. I think the translator has the responsibility, when translating passages of doctrinal significance, to show exactly where text is being elided, and for this ellipsis points remain the best tool at hand.



## INTRODUCTION

Like other religious teachings, the Buddha's teaching originates as a response to the strains at the heart of the human condition. What distinguishes his teaching from other religious approaches to the human condition is the directness, thoroughness, and uncompromising realism with which he looks at these strains. The Buddha does not offer us palliatives that leave the underlying maladies untouched beneath the surface; rather, he traces our existential illness down to its most fundamental causes, so persistent and destructive, and shows us how these can be totally uprooted. However, while the Dhamma will eventually lead to the wisdom that eradicates the causes of suffering, it does not begin there but with observations about the hard facts of everyday experience. Here too its directness, thoroughness, and tough realism are evident. The teaching begins by calling upon us to develop a faculty called *yoniso manasikāra*, careful attention. The Buddha asks us to stop drifting thoughtlessly through our lives and instead to pay careful attention to simple truths that are everywhere available to us, clamoring for the sustained consideration they deserve.

One of the most obvious and inescapable of these truths is also among the most difficult for us to fully acknowledge, namely, that we are bound to grow old, fall ill, and die. It is commonly assumed that the Buddha beckons us to recognize the reality of old age and death in order to motivate us to enter the path of renunciation leading to Nibbāna, complete liberation from the round of birth and death. However, while this may be his ultimate intention, it is not the first response he seeks to evoke in us when we turn to him for guidance. The initial response the Buddha intends to arouse in us is an ethical one. By calling our attention to our bondage to old age and death, he seeks to inspire in us a firm resolution to turn away from unwholesome ways of living and to embrace instead wholesome alternatives.

Again, the Buddha grounds his initial ethical appeal not only upon a compassionate feeling for other beings, but also upon our instinctive concern for our own long-term welfare and happiness. He tries to

make us see that to act in accordance with ethical guidelines will enable us to secure our own well-being both now and in the long-term future. His argument hinges on the important premise that actions have consequences. If we are to alter our accustomed ways, we must be convinced of the validity of this principle. Specifically, to change from a self-stultifying way of life to one that is truly fruitful and inwardly rewarding, we must realize that our actions have consequences for ourselves, consequences that can rebound upon us both in this life and in subsequent lives.

The three suttas that constitute the first section of this chapter establish this point eloquently, each in its own way. **Text I,1(1)** enunciates the inevitable law that all beings who have taken birth must undergo aging and death. Although at first glance the discourse seems to be stating a mere fact of nature, by citing as examples members of the upper strata of society (wealthy rulers, brahmins, and householders) and liberated arahants, it insinuates a subtle moral message into its words. **Text I,1(2)** brings out this message more explicitly with its impressive simile of the mountain, which drives home the point that when “aging and death are rolling in” on us, our task in life is to live righteously and do wholesome and meritorious deeds. The sutta on the “divine messengers”—**Text I,1(3)**—establishes the corollary to this: when we fail to recognize the “divine messengers” in our midst, when we miss the hidden warning signals of old age, illness, and death, we become negligent and behave recklessly, creating unwholesome kamma with the potential to yield dreadful consequences.

The realization that we are bound to grow old and die breaks the spell of infatuation cast over us by sensual pleasures, wealth, and power. It dispels the mist of confusion and motivates us to take fresh stock of our purposes in life. We may not be ready to give up family and possessions for a life of homeless wandering and solitary meditation, but this is not an option the Buddha generally expects of his householder disciples. Rather, as we saw above, the first lesson he draws from the fact that our lives end in old age and death is an ethical one interwoven with the twin principles of kamma and rebirth. The law of kamma stipulates that our unwholesome and wholesome actions have consequences extending far beyond this present life: unwholesome actions lead to rebirth in states of misery and bring future pain and suffering; wholesome actions lead to a pleasant rebirth



and bring future well-being and happiness. Since we have to grow old and die, we should be constantly aware that any present prosperity we might enjoy is merely temporary. We can enjoy it only as long as we are young and healthy; and when we die, our newly acquired kamma will gain the opportunity to ripen and bring forth its own results. We must then reap the due fruits of our deeds. With an eye to our long-term future welfare, we should scrupulously avoid evil deeds that result in suffering and diligently engage in wholesome deeds that generate happiness here and in future lives.

In the second section, we explore three aspects of human life that I have collected under the heading “The Tribulations of Unreflective Living.” These types of suffering differ from those connected with old age and death in an important respect. Old age and death are bound up with bodily existence and are thus unavoidable, common to both ordinary people and liberated arahants—a point made in the first text of this chapter. In contrast, the three texts included in this section all distinguish between the ordinary person, called “the uninstructed worldling” (*assutavā puthujjana*), and the wise follower of the Buddha, called the “instructed noble disciple” (*sutavā ariyasāvaka*).

The first of these distinctions, drawn in **Text I,2(1)**, revolves around the response to painful feelings. Both the worldling and the noble disciple experience painful bodily feelings, but they respond to these feelings differently. The worldling reacts to them with aversion and therefore, on top of the painful bodily feeling, also experiences a painful mental feeling: sorrow, resentment, or distress. The noble disciple, when afflicted with bodily pain, endures such feeling patiently, without sorrow, resentment, or distress. It is commonly assumed that physical and mental pain are inseparably linked, but the Buddha makes a clear demarcation between the two. He holds that while bodily existence is inevitably bound up with physical pain, such pain need not trigger the emotional reactions of misery, fear, resentment, and distress with which we habitually respond to it. Through mental training we can develop the mindfulness and clear comprehension necessary to endure physical pain courageously, with patience and equanimity. Through insight we can develop sufficient wisdom to overcome our dread of painful feelings and our need to seek relief in distracting binges of sensual self-indulgence.

Another aspect of human life that brings to the fore the differences between the worldling and the noble disciple is the changing vicissitudes of fortune. The Buddhist texts neatly reduce these to four pairs of opposites, known as the eight worldly conditions (*aṭṭha lokadhammā*): gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. **Text I,2(2)** shows how the worldling and the noble disciple differ in their responses to these changes. While the worldling is elated by success in achieving gain, fame, praise, and pleasure, and dejected when confronted with their undesired opposites, the noble disciple remains unperturbed. By applying the understanding of impermanence to both favorable and unfavorable conditions, the noble disciple can abide in equanimity, not attached to favorable conditions, not repelled by unfavorable ones. Such a disciple gives up likes and dislikes, sorrow and distress, and ultimately wins the highest blessing of all: complete freedom from suffering.

**Text I,2(3)** examines the plight of the worldling at a still more fundamental level. Because they misconceive things, worldlings are agitated by change, especially when that change affects their own bodies and minds. The Buddha classifies the constituents of body and mind into five categories known as “the five aggregates subject to clinging” (*pañc’upādānakkhandhā*): form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness (for details, see pp. 305–07). These five aggregates are the building blocks that we typically use to construct our sense of personal identity; they are the things that we cling to as being “mine,” “I,” and “my self.” Whatever we identify with, whatever we take to be a self or the possessions of a self, can all be classified among these five aggregates. The five aggregates are thus the ultimate grounds of “identification” and “appropriation,” the two basic activities by which we establish a sense of selfhood. Since we invest our notions of selfhood and personal identity with an intense emotional concern, when the objects to which they are fastened—the five aggregates—undergo change, we naturally experience anxiety and distress. In our perception, it is not mere impersonal phenomena that are undergoing change, but our very identities, our cherished selves, and this is what we fear most of all. However, as the present text shows, a noble disciple has clearly seen with wisdom the delusive nature of all notions of permanent selfhood and thus no longer identifies with the five aggregates. Therefore the noble disciple can confront their change

and attend carefully to their existential plight. As **Text I,4(5)** states, they instead just keep revolving around the “five aggregates” in the way a dog on a leash might run around a post or pillar. Since their ignorance prevents them from recognizing the vicious nature of their condition, they cannot discern even the tracks of a path to deliverance. Most beings live immersed in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Others, driven by the need for power, status, and esteem, pass their lives in vain attempts to fill an unquenchable thirst. Many, fearful of annihilation at death, construct belief systems that ascribe to their individual selves, their souls, the prospect of eternal life. A few yearn for a path to liberation but do not know where to find one. It was precisely to offer such a path that the Buddha has appeared in our midst.

# I. THE HUMAN CONDITION

## 1. OLD AGE, ILLNESS, AND DEATH

### *(1) Aging and Death*

At Sāvathī, King Pasenadi of Kosala said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, is anyone who is born free from aging and death?”<sup>1</sup>

“Great king, no one who is born is free from aging and death. Even those affluent khattiyas—rich, with great wealth and property, with abundant gold and silver, abundant treasures and commodities, abundant wealth and grain—because they have been born, are not free from aging and death. Even those affluent brahmins ... affluent householders—rich ... with abundant wealth and grain—because they have been born, are not free from aging and death. Even those monks who are arahants, whose taints are destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached their own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, and are completely liberated through final knowledge: even for them this body is subject to breaking up, subject to being laid down.”<sup>2</sup>

“The beautiful chariots of kings wear out,  
This body too undergoes decay.  
But the Dhamma of the good does not decay:  
So the good proclaim along with the good.”

(SN 3:3; I 71 <163–64>)

### *(2) The Simile of the Mountain*

At Sāvathī, in the middle of the day, King Pasenadi of Kosala approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. The Blessed One then asked him: “Now where are you coming from, great king, in the middle of the day?”

“Just now, venerable sir, I have been engaged in those affairs of kingship typical for kings, who are intoxicated with the intoxication

of sovereignty, who are obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures, who have attained stable control in their country, and who rule having conquered a great sphere of territory on earth.”

“What do you think, great king? Suppose a man would come to you from the east, one who is trustworthy and reliable, and would tell you: ‘For sure, great king, you should know this: I am coming from the east, and there I saw a great mountain high as the clouds coming this way, crushing all living beings. Do whatever you think should be done, great king.’ Then a second man would come to you from the west ... a third man from the north ... and a fourth man from the south, one who is trustworthy and reliable, and would tell you: ‘For sure, great king, you should know this: I am coming from the south, and there I saw a great mountain high as the clouds coming this way, crushing all living beings. Do whatever you think should be done, great king.’ If, great king, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life, the human state being so difficult to obtain, what should be done?”

“If, venerable sir, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life, the human state being so difficult to obtain, what else should be done but to live by the Dhamma, to live righteously, and to do wholesome and meritorious deeds?”

“I inform you, great king, I announce to you, great king: aging and death are rolling in on you. When aging and death are rolling in on you, great king, what should be done?”

“As aging and death are rolling in on me, venerable sir, what else should be done but to live by the Dhamma, to live righteously, and to do wholesome and meritorious deeds?”

“Venerable sir, kings intoxicated with the intoxication of sovereignty, obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures, who have attained stable control in their country and rule over a great sphere of territory, conquer by means of elephant battles, cavalry battles, chariot battles, and infantry battles; but there is no hope of victory by such battles, no chance of success, when aging and death are rolling in. In this royal court, venerable sir, there are counselors who, when the enemies arrive, are capable of dividing them by subterfuge; but there is no hope of victory by subterfuge, no chance of success, when aging and death are rolling in. In this royal court, venerable sir, there exists abundant bullion and gold stored in vaults and lofts, and with such wealth we

are capable of mollifying the enemies when they come; but there is no hope of victory by wealth, no chance of success, when aging and death are rolling in. As aging and death are rolling in on me, venerable sir, what else should I do but live by the Dhamma, live righteously, and do wholesome and meritorious deeds?"

"So it is, great king! So it is, great king! As aging and death are rolling in on you, what else should you do but live by the Dhamma, live righteously, and do wholesome and meritorious deeds?"

This is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Fortunate One, the Teacher, further said this:

"Just as mountains of solid rock,  
Massive, reaching to the sky,  
Might draw together from all sides,  
Crushing all in the four quarters—  
So aging and death come  
Rolling over living beings—

"Khattiyas, brahmins, vessas, suddas,  
Outcasts and scavengers:  
They spare none along the way  
But come crushing everything.

"There's no hope there for victory  
By elephant troops, chariots, and infantry.  
One can't defeat them by subterfuge,  
Or buy them off by means of wealth.

"Therefore a person of wisdom here,  
Out of regard for his own good,  
Steadfast, should settle faith  
In the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha.

"When one conducts oneself by Dhamma  
With body, speech, and mind,  
They praise one here in the present life,  
And after death one rejoices in heaven."

(SN 3:25; I 100–102 <224–29>)

### *(3) The Divine Messengers*

“There are, monks, three divine messengers.<sup>3</sup> What three?

“There is a person of bad conduct in body, speech, and mind. On the dissolution of the body, after death, he is reborn in the plane of misery, in a bad destination, in a lower world, in hell. There the warders of hell seize him by both arms and take him before Yama, the Lord of Death,<sup>4</sup> saying: ‘This man, your majesty, had no respect for father and mother, nor for ascetics and brahmins, nor did he honor the elders of the family. May your majesty inflict due punishment on him!’

“Then, monks, King Yama questions that man, examines him, and addresses him concerning the first divine messenger: ‘Didn’t you ever see, my good man, the first divine messenger appearing among humankind?’

“And he replies: ‘No, Lord, I did not see him.’

“Then King Yama says to him: ‘But, my good man, didn’t you ever see a woman or a man, eighty, ninety, or a hundred years old, frail, bent like a roof bracket, crooked, leaning on a stick, shakily going along, ailing, youth and vigor gone, with broken teeth, with gray and scanty hair or bald, wrinkled, with blotched limbs?’

“And the man replies: ‘Yes, Lord, I have seen this.’

“Then King Yama says to him: ‘My good man, didn’t it ever occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, “I too am subject to old age and cannot escape it. Let me now do noble deeds by body, speech, and mind”?’

““No, Lord, I could not do it. I was negligent.’

“Then King Yama says: ‘Through negligence, my good man, you have failed to do noble deeds by body, speech, and mind. Well, you will be treated as befits your negligence. That evil action of yours was not done by mother or father, brothers, sisters, friends or companions, nor by relatives, devas, ascetics, or brahmins. But you alone have done that evil deed, and you will have to experience the fruit.’

“When, monks, King Yama has questioned, examined, and addressed him thus concerning the first divine messenger, he again questions, examines, and addresses the man about the second one, saying: ‘Didn’t you ever see, my good man, the second divine messenger appearing among humankind?’

““No, Lord, I did not see him.’

toward it. Since he harbors no aversion toward painful feeling, the underlying tendency to aversion toward painful feeling does not lie behind this. While experiencing painful feeling, he does not seek delight in sensual pleasure. For what reason? Because the instructed noble disciple knows of an escape from painful feeling other than sensual pleasure. Since he does not seek delight in sensual pleasure, the underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feeling does not lie behind this. He understands as it really is the origin and the passing away, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these feelings. Since he understands these things, the underlying tendency to ignorance in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling does not lie behind this.

“If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels it detached. If he feels a painful feeling, he feels it detached. If he feels a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he feels it detached. This, monks, is called a noble disciple who is detached from birth, aging, and death; who is detached from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair; who is detached from suffering, I say.

“This, monks, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the instructed noble disciple and the uninstructed worldling.”

(SN 36:6; IV 207–10)

## *(2) The Vicissitudes of Life*

“These eight worldly conditions, monks, keep the world turning around, and the world turns around these eight worldly conditions. What eight? Gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

“These eight worldly conditions, monks, are encountered by an uninstructed worldling, and they are also encountered by an instructed noble disciple. What now is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between an instructed noble disciple and an uninstructed worldling?”

“Venerable sir, our knowledge of these things has its roots in the Blessed One; it has the Blessed One as guide and resort. It would be good, venerable sir, if the Blessed One would clarify the meaning of that statement. Having heard it from him, the monks will bear it in mind.”

“Listen then, monks, and attend carefully. I shall speak.”

“Yes, venerable sir,” the monks replied. The Blessed One then spoke thus:



“When an uninstructed worldling, monks, comes upon gain, he does not reflect on it thus: ‘This gain that has come to me is impermanent, bound up with suffering, subject to change.’ He does not know it as it really is. And when he comes upon loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, he does not reflect on them thus: ‘All these are impermanent, bound up with suffering, subject to change.’ He does not know them as they really are. With such a person, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain keep his mind engrossed. When gain comes he is elated and when he meets with loss he is dejected. When fame comes he is elated and when he meets with disrepute he is dejected. When praise comes he is elated and when he meets with blame he is dejected. When he experiences pleasure he is elated and when he experiences pain he is dejected. Being thus involved in likes and dislikes, he will not be freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair; he will not be freed from suffering, I say.

“But, monks, when an instructed noble disciple comes upon gain, he reflects on it thus: ‘This gain that has come to me is impermanent, bound up with suffering, subject to change.’ And so he will reflect when loss and so forth come upon him. He understands all these things as they really are, and they do not engross his mind. Thus he will not be elated by gain and dejected by loss; elated by fame and dejected by disrepute; elated by praise and dejected by blame; elated by pleasure and dejected by pain. Having thus given up likes and dislikes, he will be freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair; he will be freed from suffering, I say.

“This, monks, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between an instructed noble disciple and an uninstructed worldling.”

(AN 8:6; IV 157–59)

### *(3) Anxiety Due to Change*

“Monks, I will teach you agitation through clinging and non-agitation through nonclinging.<sup>9</sup> Listen and attend carefully. I shall speak.”

“Yes, venerable sir,” those monks replied. The Blessed One said this:

“And how, monks, is there agitation through clinging? Here, monks, the uninstructed worldling, who is not a seer of the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who is not a seer of

superior persons and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form.<sup>10</sup> That form of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, his consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of form. Agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form remain obsessing his mind. Because his mind is obsessed, he is frightened, distressed, and anxious, and through clinging he becomes agitated.

“He regards feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That consciousness of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of consciousness, his consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of consciousness. Agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of consciousness remain obsessing his mind. Because his mind is obsessed, he is frightened, distressed, and anxious, and through clinging he becomes agitated.

“It is in such a way, monks, that there is agitation through clinging.

“And how, monks, is there non-agitation through nonclinging? Here, monks, the instructed noble disciple, who is a seer of the noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, who is a seer of superior persons and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, does not regard form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form.<sup>11</sup> That form of his changes and alters. Despite the change and alteration of form, his consciousness does not become preoccupied with the change of form. No agitation and constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form remain obsessing his mind. Because his mind is not obsessed, he is not frightened, distressed, or anxious, and through nonclinging he does not become agitated.

“He does not regard feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That consciousness of his changes and alters. Despite the change and alteration of consciousness, his consciousness does not become preoccupied with the change of consciousness. No agitation and constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of consciousness remain obsessing his mind. Because his mind is not obsessed, he is not

frightened, distressed, or anxious, and through nonclinging he does not become agitated.

“It is in such a way, monks, that there is non-agitation through non-clinging.”

(SN 22:7; III 15–18)

### 3. A WORLD IN TURMOIL

#### *(1) The Origin of Conflict*

The brahmin Ārāmaḍaṇḍa approached the Venerable Mahākaccāna,<sup>12</sup> exchanged friendly greetings with him, and asked him: “Why is it, Master Kaccāna, that khattiyas fight with khattiyas, brahmins with brahmins, and householders with householders?”

“It is, brahmin, because of attachment to sensual pleasures, adherence to sensual pleasures, fixation on sensual pleasures, addiction to sensual pleasures, obsession with sensual pleasures, holding firmly to sensual pleasures that khattiyas fight with khattiyas, brahmins with brahmins, and householders with householders.”

“Why is it, Master Kaccāna, that ascetics fight with ascetics?”

“It is, brahmin, because of attachment to views, adherence to views, fixation on views, addiction to views, obsession with views, holding firmly to views that ascetics fight with ascetics.”

(AN 2: iv, 6, abridged; I 66)

#### *(2) Why Do Beings Live in Hate?*

2.1. Sakka, ruler of the devas,<sup>13</sup> asked the Blessed One: “Beings wish to live without hate, harming, hostility, or enmity; they wish to live in peace. Yet they live in hate, harming one another, hostile, and as enemies. By what fetters are they bound, sir, that they live in such a way?”

[The Blessed One said:] “Ruler of the devas, it is the bonds of envy and niggardliness that bind beings so that, although they wish to live without hate, hostility, or enmity, and to live in peace, yet they live in hate, harming one another, hostile, and as enemies.”

This was the Blessed One’s reply, and Sakka, delighted, exclaimed: “So it is, Blessed One! So it is, Fortunate One! Through the Blessed One’s answer I have overcome my doubt and gotten rid of uncertainty.”

2.2. Then Sakka, having expressed his appreciation, asked another question: "But, sir, what gives rise to envy and niggardliness, what is their origin, how are they born, how do they arise? When what is present do they arise, and when what is absent do they not arise?"

"Envy and niggardliness, ruler of the devas, arise from liking and disliking; this is their origin, this is how they are born, how they arise. When these are present, they arise, when these are absent, they do not arise."

"But, sir, what gives rise to liking and disliking...?"—"They arise, ruler of the devas, from desire...."—"And what gives rise to desire...?"—"It arises, ruler of the devas, from thinking. When the mind thinks about something, desire arises; when the mind thinks of nothing, desire does not arise."

"But, sir, what gives rise to thinking...?"

"Thinking, ruler of the devas, arises from elaborated perceptions and notions.<sup>14</sup> When elaborated perceptions and notions are present, thinking arises. When elaborated perceptions and notions are absent, thinking does not arise."

(from DN 21: *Sakkapañha Sutta*; II 276–77)

### *(3) The Dark Chain of Causation*

9. "Thus, Ānanda, in dependence upon feeling there is craving; in dependence upon craving there is pursuit; in dependence upon pursuit there is gain; in dependence upon gain there is decision-making; in dependence upon decision-making there is desire and lust; in dependence upon desire and lust there is attachment; in dependence upon attachment there is possessiveness; in dependence upon possessiveness there is niggardliness; in dependence upon niggardliness there is defensiveness; and because of defensiveness, various evil unwholesome things originate—the taking up of clubs and weapons, conflicts, quarrels, and disputes, insults, slander, and falsehood."<sup>15</sup>

(from DN 15: *Mahānidāna Sutta*; II 58)

### *(4) The Roots of Violence and Oppression*

"Greed, hatred, and delusion of every kind are unwholesome.<sup>16</sup> Whatever action a greedy, hating, and deluded person heaps up—by deeds,

“Brahmin, many eons have elapsed and gone by. It is not easy to count them and say they are so many eons, or so many hundreds of eons, or so many thousands of eons, or so many hundreds of thousands of eons.”

“But is it possible to give a simile, Master Gotama?”

“It is possible, brahmin,” the Blessed One said. “Imagine, brahmin, the grains of sand between the point where the river Ganges originates and the point where it enters the great ocean: it is not easy to count these and say there are so many grains of sand, or so many hundreds of grains, or so many thousands of grains, or so many hundreds of thousands of grains. Brahmin, the eons that have elapsed and gone by are even more numerous than that. It is not easy to count them and say that they are so many eons, or so many hundreds of eons, or so many thousands of eons, or so many hundreds of thousands of eons. For what reason? Because, brahmin, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them.”

(SN 15:8; II 183–84)

### *(5) Dog on a Leash*

“Monks, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

“There comes a time, monks, when the great ocean dries up and evaporates and no longer exists, but still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

“There comes a time, monks, when Sineru, the king of mountains, burns up and perishes and no longer exists, but still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

“There comes a time, monks, when the great earth burns up and perishes and no longer exists, but still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

“Suppose, monks, a dog tied up on a leash was bound to a strong post or pillar: it would just keep on running and revolving around that same post or pillar. So too, the uninstructed worldling regards form

as self ... feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self.... He just keeps running and revolving around form, around feeling, around perception, around volitional formations, around consciousness. As he keeps on running and revolving around them, he is not freed from form, not freed from feeling, not freed from perception, not freed from volitional formations, not freed from consciousness. He is not freed from birth, aging, and death; not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair; not freed from suffering, I say."

(SN 22:99; II 149–50)

## II. The Bringer of Light

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## INTRODUCTION

The picture of the human condition that emerges from the Nikāyas, as sketched in the preceding chapter, is the background against which the manifestation of the Buddha in the world acquires a heightened and deepened significance. Unless we view the Buddha against this multi-dimensional background, extending from the most personal and individual exigencies of the present to the vast, impersonal rhythms of cosmic time, any interpretation we may arrive at about his role is bound to be incomplete. Far from capturing the viewpoint of the compilers of the Nikāyas, our interpretation will be influenced as much by our own presuppositions as by theirs, perhaps even more so. Depending on our biases and predispositions, we may choose to regard the Buddha as a liberal ethical reformer of a degenerate Brahmanism, as a great secular humanist, as a radical empiricist, as an existential psychologist, as the proponent of a sweeping agnosticism, or as the precursor of any other intellectual fashion that meets our fancy. The Buddha who stares back at us from the texts will be too much a reflection of ourselves, too little an image of the Enlightened One.

Perhaps in interpreting a body of ancient religious literature we can never fully avoid inserting ourselves and our own values into the subject we are interpreting. However, though we may never achieve perfect transparency, we can limit the impact of personal bias upon the process of interpretation by giving the words of the texts due respect. When we pay this act of homage to the Nikāyas, when we take seriously their own account of the background to the Buddha's manifestation in the world, we will see that they ascribe to his mission nothing short of a cosmic scope. Against the background of a universe with no conceivable bounds in time, a universe within which living beings enveloped in the darkness of ignorance wander along bound to the suffering of old age, sickness, and death, the Buddha arrives as the "torchbearer of humankind" (*ukkādhāro manussānaṃ*) bringing the light of wisdom.<sup>1</sup> In the words of **Text II,1**, his arising in the world is "the manifestation of great vision, of great light, of great radiance." Having

in the world long after his death. This is the side of the Buddha's nature that figures most prominently in the Nikāyas. Since it corresponds closely with contemporary agnostic attitudes toward the ideals of religious faith, it has an immediate appeal to those nurtured by modern modes of thought.

The other aspect of the Buddha's person is likely to seem strange to us, but it looms large in Buddhist tradition and serves as the bedrock for popular Buddhist devotion. Though secondary in the Nikāyas, it occasionally surfaces so conspicuously that it cannot be ignored, despite the efforts of Buddhist modernists to downplay its significance or rationalize its intrusions. From this perspective, the Buddha is seen as one who had already made preparations for his supreme attainment over countless past lives and was destined from birth to fulfill the mission of a world teacher. **Text II,2** is an example of how the Buddha is viewed from this perspective. Here, it is said, the future Buddha descends fully conscious from the Tusita heaven into his mother's womb; his conception and birth are accompanied by wonders; deities worship the newborn infant; and as soon as he is born he walks seven steps and announces his future destiny. Obviously, for the compilers of such a sutta as this, the Buddha was already destined to attain Buddhahood even prior to his conception and thus his struggle for enlightenment was a battle whose outcome was already predetermined. The final paragraph of the sutta, however, ironically hearkens back to the realistic picture of the Buddha. What the Buddha himself considers to be truly wondrous are not the miracles accompanying his conception and birth, but his mindfulness and clear comprehension in the midst of feelings, thoughts, and perceptions.

The three texts in section 3 are biographical accounts consistent with this naturalistic point of view. They offer us a portrait of the Buddha stark in its realism, bare in its naturalism, striking in its ability to convey deep psychological insights with minimal descriptive technique. In **Text II,3(1)** we read about his renunciation, his training under two famous meditation teachers, his disillusionment with their teachings, his solitary struggle, and his triumphant realization of the Deathless. **Text II,3(2)** fills in the gaps of the above narrative with a detailed account of the bodhisatta's practice of self-mortification, strangely missing from the previous discourse. This text also gives us the classic description of the enlightenment experience as involving

the attainment of the four *jhānas*, states of deep meditation, followed by the three *vijjās* or higher types of knowledge: the knowledge of the recollection of past lives, the knowledge of the passing away and rebirth of beings, and the knowledge of the destruction of the taints. While this text may convey the impression that the last knowledge broke upon the Buddha's mind as a sudden and spontaneous intuition, **Text II,3(3)** corrects this impression with an account of the Bodhisatta on the eve of his enlightenment reflecting deeply upon the suffering of old age and death. He then methodically traces this suffering back to its conditions by a process that involves, at each step, "careful attention" (*yoniso manasikāra*) leading to "a breakthrough by wisdom" (*paññāya abhisamaya*). This process of investigation culminates in the discovery of dependent origination, which thereby becomes the philosophical cornerstone of his teaching.

It is important to emphasize that, as presented here and elsewhere in the Nikāyas (see below, pp. 353-59), dependent origination does not signify a joyous celebration of the interconnectedness of all things but a precise articulation of the conditional pattern in dependence upon which suffering arises and ceases. In the same text, the Buddha declares that he discovered the path to enlightenment only when he found the way to bring dependent origination to an end. It was thus the realization of the *cessation* of dependent origination, and not merely the discovery of its origination aspect, that precipitated the Buddha's enlightenment. The simile of the ancient city, introduced later in the discourse, illustrates the point that the Buddha's enlightenment was not a unique event but the rediscovery of the same "ancient path" that had been followed by the Buddhas of the past.

**Text II,4** resumes the narrative of **Text II,3(1)**, which I had divided by splicing in the two alternative versions of the bodhisatta's quest for the path to enlightenment. We now rejoin the Buddha immediately after his enlightenment as he ponders the weighty question whether to attempt to share his realization with the world. Just at this point, in the midst of a text that has so far appeared so convincingly naturalistic, a deity named Brahmā Sahampati descends from the heavens to plead with the Buddha to wander forth and teach the Dhamma for the benefit of those "with little dust in their eyes." Should this scene be interpreted literally or as a symbolic enactment of an internal drama taking place in the Buddha's mind? It is hard to give a definitive answer to

this question; perhaps the scene could be understood as occurring at both levels at once. In any event, Brahmā's appearance at this point marks a shift from the realism that colors the earlier part of the sutta back toward the mythical-symbolic mode. The transition again underscores the cosmic significance of the Buddha's enlightenment and his future mission as a teacher.

Brahmā's appeal eventually prevails and the Buddha agrees to teach. He chooses as the first recipients of his teaching the five ascetics who had attended on him during his years of ascetic practices. The narrative culminates in a brief statement that the Buddha instructed them in such a way that they all attained the deathless Nibbāna for themselves. However, it gives no indication of the specific teaching that the Buddha imparted to them when he first met them after his enlightenment. That teaching is the First Discourse itself, known as "The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma."

This sutta is included here as **Text II,5**. When the sutta opens, the Buddha announces to the five ascetics that he has discovered "the middle way," which he identifies with the Noble Eightfold Path. In the light of the preceding biographical account, we can understand why the Buddha should begin his discourse in this way. The five ascetics had initially refused to acknowledge the Buddha's claim to enlightenment and spurned him as one who had betrayed the higher calling to revert to a life of luxury. Thus he first had to assure them that, far from reverting to a life of self-indulgence, he had discovered a new approach to the timeless quest for enlightenment. This new approach, he told them, remains faithful to the renunciation of sensual pleasures yet eschews tormenting the body as pointless and unproductive. He then explained to them the true path to liberation, the Noble Eightfold Path, which avoids the two extremes and thereby gives rise to the light of wisdom and culminates in the destruction of all bondage, Nibbāna.

Once he has cleared up their misunderstanding, the Buddha then proclaims the truths he had realized on the night of his enlightenment. These are the Four Noble Truths. Not only does he enunciate each truth and briefly define its meaning, but he describes each truth from three perspectives. These constitute the three "turnings of the wheel of the Dhamma" referred to later in the discourse. With respect to each truth, the first turning is the wisdom that illuminates the particular nature of that noble truth. The second turning is the understanding

that each noble truth imposes a particular task to be accomplished. Thus the first noble truth, the truth of suffering, *is to be* fully understood; the second truth, the truth of suffering's origin or craving, *is to be* abandoned; the third truth, the truth of the cessation of suffering, *is to be* realized; and the fourth truth, the truth of the path, *is to be* developed. The third turning is the understanding that the four functions regarding the Four Noble Truths have been completed: the truth of suffering *has been* fully understood; craving *has been* abandoned; the cessation of suffering *has been* realized; and the path *has been* fully developed. It was only when he understood the Four Noble Truths in these three turnings and twelve modes, he says, that he could claim that he had attained unsurpassed perfect enlightenment.

The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta illustrates once again the blending of the two stylistic modes I referred to earlier. The discourse proceeds almost entirely in the realistic-naturalistic mode until we approach the end. When the Buddha completes his sermon, the cosmic significance of the event is illuminated by a passage showing how the deities in each successive celestial realm applaud the discourse and shout the good news up to the deities in the next higher realm. At the same time, the entire world system quakes and shakes, and a great light surpassing the radiance of the gods appears in the world. Then, at the very end, we return from this glorious scene back to the prosaic human realm, to behold the Buddha briefly congratulating the ascetic Koṇḍañña for gaining "the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma." In one split-second, the Lamp of the Doctrine has passed from master to disciple, to begin its journey throughout India and across the world.

## II. THE BRINGER OF LIGHT

### 1. ONE PERSON

“Monks, there is one person who arises in the world for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans. Who is that one person? It is the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One. This is that one person.

“Monks, there is one person arising in the world who is unique, without a peer, without counterpart, incomparable, unequalled, matchless, unrivalled, the best of humans. Who is that one person? It is the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One. This is that one person.

“Monks, the manifestation of one person is the manifestation of great vision, of great light, of great radiance; it is the manifestation of the six things unsurpassed; the realization of the four analytical knowledges; the penetration of the various elements, of the diversity of elements; it is the realization of the fruit of knowledge and liberation; the realization of the fruits of stream-entry, once-returning, nonreturning, and arahantship.<sup>3</sup> Who is that one person? It is the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One. This is that one person.”

(AN 1: xiii, 1, 5, 6; I 22–23)

### 2. THE BUDDHA’S CONCEPTION AND BIRTH

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattṭhi in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park.

2. Now a number of monks were sitting in the assembly hall, where they had met together on returning from their almsround, after their meal, when this discussion arose among them: “It is wonderful, friends, it is marvelous, how mighty and powerful is the Tathāgata! For he is able to know about the Buddhas of the past—who attained

15. "I heard and learned this from the Blessed One's own lips: 'Other women give birth seated or lying down, but not so the Bodhisatta's mother. The Bodhisatta's mother gave birth to him standing up.' This too I remember as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Blessed One.

16. "I heard and learned this from the Blessed One's own lips: 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, first devas received him, then human beings.' This too I remember as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Blessed One.

17. "I heard and learned this from the Blessed One's own lips: 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, he did not touch the earth. The four young devas received him and set him before his mother saying: "Rejoice, O queen, a son of great power has been born to you."' This too I remember as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Blessed One.

18. "I heard and learned this from the Blessed One's own lips: 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, he came forth unsullied, unsmearred by water, humors, blood, or any kind of impurity, clean and unsullied. Suppose there were a gem placed on fine cloth, then the gem would not smear the cloth or the cloth the gem. Why is that? Because of the purity of both. So too when the Bodhisatta came forth ... he came forth clean and unsullied.' This too I remember as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Blessed One.

19. "I heard and learned this from the Blessed One's own lips: 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, two jets of water appeared to pour from the sky, one cool and one warm, for bathing the Bodhisatta and his mother.' This too I remember as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Blessed One.

20. "I heard and learned this from the Blessed One's own lips: 'As soon as the Bodhisatta was born, he stood firmly with his feet on the ground; then he took seven steps facing north, and with a white parasol held over him, he surveyed each quarter and uttered the words of the leader of the herd: "I am the highest in the world; I am the best in the world; I am the foremost in the world. This is my last birth; now there is no renewed existence for me."' This too I remember as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Blessed One.

21. "I heard and learned this from the Blessed One's own lips: 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, an immeasurable

great radiance surpassing the divine majesty of the devas appeared in the world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this population with its ascetics and brahmins, with its devas and human beings. And even in those abysmal world intervals of vacancy, gloom, and utter darkness, where the moon and the sun, mighty and powerful as they are, cannot make their light prevail—there too an immeasurable great radiance surpassing the divine majesty of the devas appeared in the world. And the beings reborn there perceived each other by that light: “So indeed, there are also other beings reborn here.” And this ten-thousand-fold world system shook, quaked, and trembled, and there too an immeasurable great radiance surpassing the divine majesty of the devas appeared in the world.’ That when the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother’s womb, an immeasurable great radiance surpassing the divine majesty of the devas appeared in the world ... this too I remember as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Blessed One.”

22. “That being so, Ānanda, remember this too as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Tathāgata: Here, Ānanda, for the Tathāgata feelings are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; perceptions are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; thoughts are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear.”<sup>9</sup> Remember this too, Ānanda, as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Tathāgata.”

23. “Venerable sir, since for the Blessed One feelings are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; perceptions are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; thoughts are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear—this too I remember as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Blessed One.”

That is what the Venerable Ānanda said. The Teacher approved. The monks were satisfied and delighted in the Venerable Ānanda’s words.

(MN 123: *Acchariya-abbhūta Sutta*, abridged; III 118–20; 122–24)

### 3. THE QUEST FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

#### *(1) Seeking the Supreme State of Sublime Peace*

5. “Monks, there are these two kinds of search: the noble search and the ignoble search. And what is the ignoble search? Here someone being himself subject to birth seeks what is also subject to birth; being