DN 9 — With Poṭṭhapāda

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
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Text

Long Discourses 9

With Poṭṭhapāda

1. On the Wanderer Poṭṭhapāda

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery.

Now at that time the wanderer Poṭṭhapāda was residing together with three hundred wanderers in Mallikā's single-halled monastery for philosophical debates, hedged by pale-moon ebony trees. Then the Buddha robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, entered Sāvatthī for alms.

Then it occurred to him, "It's too early to wander for alms in Sāvatthī. Why don't I go to Mallikā's monastery to visit the wanderer Poṭṭhapāda?" So that's what he did.

Now at that time, Poṭṭhapāda was sitting together with a large assembly of wanderers making an uproar, a colossal racket. They engaged in all kinds of low talk, such as talk about kings, bandits, and chief ministers; talk about armies, threats, and wars; talk about food, drink, clothes, and beds; talk about garlands and fragrances; talk about family, vehicles, villages, towns, cities, and countries; talk about women and heroes; talk at the street market and the place for water pots; talk about the departed; motley talk; tales of land and sea; and talk about being reborn in this or that place.

Poṭṭhapāda saw the Buddha coming off in the distance, and hushed his own assembly, "Be quiet, good fellows, don't make a sound. Here comes the ascetic Gotama. The venerable likes quiet and praises quiet. Hopefully if he sees that our assembly is quiet he'll see fit to approach." Then those wanderers fell silent.

Then the Buddha approached Poṭṭhapāda, who said to him, "Let the Blessed One come, sir! Welcome to the Blessed One, sir! It's been a long time since you took the opportunity to come here. Please, sir, sit down, here, a seat is ready."

The Buddha sat down on the seat spread out, while Poṭṭhapāda took a low seat and sat to one side. The Buddha said to him, "Poṭṭhapāda, what were you sitting talking about just now? What conversation was left unfinished?"

1.1. On the Cessation of Perception

When he said this, the wanderer Poṭṭhapāda said to the Buddha, “Sir, leave aside what we were sitting talking about just now. It won’t be hard for you to hear about that later.

Sir, a few days ago several ascetics and brahmins who follow various other religions were sitting together at the debating hall, and a discussion about the cessation of perception came up among them: ‘How does the cessation of perception happen?’

Some of them said: ‘A person’s perceptions arise and cease without cause or reason. When they arise, you become percipient. When they cease, you become non-percipient.’ That’s how some describe the cessation of perception.

But someone else says: ‘That’s not how it is, good fellows! Perception is a person’s self, which enters and departs. When it enters, you become percipient. When it departs, you become non-percipient.’ That’s how some describe the cessation of perception.

But someone else says: ‘That’s not how it is, good fellows! There are ascetics and brahmins of great power and might. They insert and extract a person’s perception. When they insert it, you become percipient. When they extract it, you become non-percipient.’ That’s how some describe the cessation of perception.

But someone else says: ‘That’s not how it is, good fellows! There are deities of great power and might. They insert and extract a person’s perception. When they insert it, you become percipient. When they extract it, you become non-percipient.’ That’s how some describe the cessation of perception.

That reminded me of the Buddha: ‘Surely it must be the Blessed One, the Holy One who is so very skilled in such matters.’ The Buddha is skilled and well-versed concerning the cessation of perception. How does the cessation of perception happen?”

1.2. Perception Arises With a Cause

“Regarding this, Poṭṭhapāda, those ascetics and brahmins who say that a person’s perceptions arise and cease without cause or reason are wrong from the start. Why is that? Because a person’s perceptions arise and cease with cause and reason. With training, certain perceptions arise and certain perceptions cease.

And what is that training?” said the Buddha.

“It’s when a Realized One arises in the world, perfected, a fully awakened Buddha … That’s how a mendicant is accomplished in ethics. …

Seeing that the hindrances have been given up in them, joy springs up. Being joyful, rapture springs up. When the mind is full of rapture, the body becomes tranquil. When the body is tranquil, they feel bliss. And when blissful, the mind becomes immersed.

Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, they enter and remain in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected. The sensual perception that they had previously ceases. At that time they have a subtle and true perception of the rapture and bliss born of seclusion. That’s how, with training, certain perceptions arise and certain perceptions cease. And this is that training,” said the Buddha.

“Furthermore, as the placing of the mind and keeping it connected are stilled, a mendicant enters and remains in the second absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of immersion, with internal clarity and mind at one, without placing the mind and keeping it connected. The subtle and true perception of the rapture and bliss born of seclusion that they had previously ceases. At that time they have a subtle and true perception of the rapture and bliss born of immersion. That’s how, with training, certain perceptions arise and certain perceptions cease. And this is that training,” said the Buddha.

“Furthermore, with the fading away of rapture, a mendicant enters and remains in the third absorption, where they meditate with equanimity, mindful and aware, experiencing for themselves the bliss of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous and mindful, one meditates in bliss.’ The subtle and true perception of the rapture and bliss born of immersion that they had previously ceases. At that time they have a subtle and true perception of bliss with equanimity. That’s how, with training, certain perceptions arise and certain perceptions cease. And this is that training,” said the Buddha.

“Furthermore, with the giving up of pleasure and pain and the disappearance of former happiness and sadness, a mendicant enters and remains in the fourth absorption, without pleasure or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness. The subtle and true perception of bliss with equanimity that they had previously ceases. At that time they have a subtle and true perception of neutral feeling. That’s how, with training, certain perceptions arise and certain perceptions cease. And this is that training,” said the Buddha.

“Furthermore, a mendicant, going totally beyond perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of impingement, not focusing on perceptions of diversity, aware that ‘space is infinite’, enters and remains in the dimension of infinite space. The perception of luminous form that they had previously ceases. At that time they have a subtle and true perception of the dimension of infinite space. That’s how, with training, certain perceptions arise and certain perceptions cease. And this is that training,” said the Buddha.

“Furthermore, a mendicant, going totally beyond the dimension of infinite space, aware that ‘consciousness is infinite’, enters and remains in the dimension of infinite consciousness. The subtle and true perception of the dimension of infinite space that they had previously ceases. At that time they have a subtle and true perception of the dimension of infinite consciousness. That’s how, with training, certain perceptions arise and certain perceptions cease. And this is that training,” said the Buddha.

“Furthermore, a mendicant, going totally beyond the dimension of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing at all’, enters and remains in the dimension of nothingness. The subtle and true perception of the dimension of infinite consciousness that they had previously ceases. At that time they have a subtle and true perception of the dimension of nothingness. That’s how, with training, certain perceptions arise and certain perceptions cease. And this is that training,” said the Buddha.

“Poṭṭhapāda, from the time a mendicant here takes charge of their own perception, they proceed from one stage to the next, progressively reaching the peak of perception. Standing on the peak of perception they think, ‘Intentionality is bad for me, it’s better to be

free of it. For if I were to intend and choose, these perceptions would cease in me, and other coarser perceptions would arise. Why don't I neither make a choice nor form an intention?' They neither make a choice nor form an intention. Those perceptions cease in them, and other coarser perceptions don't arise. They touch cessation. And that, Poṭṭhapāda, is how the progressive cessation of perception is attained with awareness.

What do you think, Poṭṭhapāda? Have you ever heard of this before?"

"No, sir. This is how I understand what the Buddha said: 'From the time a mendicant here takes charge of their own perception, they proceed from one stage to the next, progressively reaching the peak of perception. Standing on the peak of perception they think, "Intentionality is bad for me, it's better to be free of it. For if I were to intend and choose, these perceptions would cease in me, and other coarser perceptions would arise. Why don't I neither make a choice nor form an intention?" Those perceptions cease in them, and other coarser perceptions don't arise. They touch cessation. And that is how the progressive cessation of perception is attained with awareness.'"

"That's right, Poṭṭhapāda."

"Does the Buddha describe just one peak of perception, or many?"

"I describe the peak of perception as both one and many."

"But sir, how do you describe it as one peak and as many?"

"I describe the peak of perception according to the specific manner in which one touches cessation. That's how I describe the peak of perception as both one and many."

"But sir, does perception arise first and knowledge afterwards? Or does knowledge arise first and perception afterwards? Or do they both arise at the same time?"

"Perception arises first and knowledge afterwards. The arising of perception leads to the arising of knowledge. They understand, 'My knowledge arose from a specific condition.' That is a way to understand how perception arises first and knowledge afterwards; that the arising of perception leads to the arising of knowledge."

1.3. Perception and the Self

"Sir, is perception a person's self, or are perception and self different things?"

"But Poṭṭhapāda, do you believe in a self?"

"I believe in a solid self, sir, which is formed, made up of the four principal states, and consumes edible food."

"Suppose there was such a solid self, Poṭṭhapāda. In that case, perception would be one thing, the self another. Here is another way to understand how perception and self are different things. So long as that solid self remains, still some perceptions arise in a person and others cease. That is a way to understand how perception and self are different things."

“Sir, I believe in a mind-made self which is whole in its major and minor limbs, not deficient in any faculty.”

“Suppose there was such a mind-made self, Poṭṭhapāda. In that case, perception would be one thing, the self another. Here is another way to understand how perception and self are different things. So long as that mind-made self remains, still some perceptions arise in a person and others cease. That too is a way to understand how perception and self are different things.”

“Sir, I believe in a formless self which is made of perception.”

“Suppose there was such a formless self, Poṭṭhapāda. In that case, perception would be one thing, the self another. Here is another way to understand how perception and self are different things. So long as that formless self remains, still some perceptions arise in a person and others cease. That too is a way to understand how perception and self are different things.”

“But, sir, am I able to know whether perception is a person’s self, or whether perception and self are different things?”

“It’s hard for you to understand this, since you have a different view, creed, and belief, and another discipline and denomination.”

“Well, if that’s the case, sir, then what do you make of this: ‘The cosmos is eternal. This is the only truth, anything else is futile’?”

“This has not been declared by me, Poṭṭhapāda.”

“Then what do you make of this: ‘The cosmos is not eternal. This is the only truth, anything else is futile’?”

“This too has not been declared by me.”

“Then what do you make of this: ‘The cosmos is finite …’ … ‘The cosmos is infinite …’ … ‘The soul and the body are one and the same …’ … ‘The soul is one thing, the body another …’ … ‘A realized one still exists after death …’ … ‘A realized one no longer exists after death …’ … ‘A realized one both still exists and no longer exists after death …’ … ‘A realized one neither still exists nor no longer exists after death. This is the only truth, anything else is futile’?”

“This too has not been declared by me.”

“Why haven’t these things been declared by the Buddha?”

“Because they’re not beneficial or relevant to the fundamentals of the spiritual life. They don’t lead to disillusionment, dispassion, cessation, peace, insight, awakening, and extinguishment. That’s why I haven’t declared them.”

“Then what has been declared by the Buddha?”

“I have declared this: ‘This is suffering’ … ‘This is the origin of suffering’ … ‘This is the cessation of suffering’ … ‘This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering’.”

“Why have these things been declared by the Buddha?”

“Because they are beneficial and relevant to the fundamentals of the spiritual life. They lead to disillusionment, dispassion, cessation, peace, insight, awakening, and extinguishment. That’s why I have declared them.”

“That’s so true, Blessed One! That’s so true, Holy One! Please, sir, go at your convenience.” Then the Buddha rose from his seat and left.

Soon after the Buddha left, those wanderers beset Poṭṭhapāda on all sides with sneering and jeering. “No matter what the ascetic Gotama says, Poṭṭhapāda agrees with him: ‘That’s so true, Blessed One! That’s so true, Holy One!’ We understand that the ascetic Gotama didn’t give any categorical teaching at all regarding whether the cosmos is eternal and so on.”

When they said this, Poṭṭhapāda said to them, “I too understand that the ascetic Gotama didn’t give any categorical teaching at all regarding whether the cosmos is eternal and so on. Nevertheless, the practice that he describes is true, real, and accurate. It is the regularity of natural principles, the surety of natural principles. So how on earth could a sensible person such as I not agree that what was well spoken by the ascetic Gotama was in fact well spoken?”

2. On Citta Hatthisāriputta

Then after two or three days had passed, Citta Hatthisāriputta and Poṭṭhapāda went to the Buddha. Citta Hatthisāriputta bowed and sat down to one side. But the wanderer Poṭṭhapāda exchanged greetings with the Buddha, and when the greetings and polite conversation were over, he sat down to one side. Poṭṭhapāda told the Buddha what had happened after he left. The Buddha said:

“All those wanderers, Poṭṭhapāda, are blind and sightless. You are the only one whose eyes are clear. For I have taught and pointed out teachings that are categorical and also teachings that are not categorical.

And what teachings have I taught and pointed out as not categorical? ‘The cosmos is eternal’ … ‘The cosmos is not eternal’ … ‘The cosmos is finite’ … ‘The cosmos is infinite’ … ‘The soul is the same thing as the body’ … ‘The soul is one thing, the body another’ … ‘A realized one still exists after death’ … ‘A realized one no longer exists after death’ … ‘A realized one both still exists and no longer exists after death’ … ‘A realized one neither still exists nor no longer exists after death.’

And why have I taught and pointed out such teachings as not categorical? Because those things aren’t beneficial or relevant to the fundamentals of the spiritual life. They don’t lead to disillusionment, dispassion, cessation, peace, insight, awakening, and extinguishment. That’s why I have taught and pointed out such teachings as not categorical.

2.1. Teachings That Are Categorical

And what teachings have I taught and pointed out as categorical? ‘This is suffering’ … ‘This is the origin of suffering’ … ‘This is the cessation of suffering’ … ‘This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering’.

And why have I taught and pointed out such teachings as categorical? Because they are beneficial and relevant to the fundamentals of the spiritual life. They lead to disillusionment, dispassion, cessation, peace, insight, awakening, and extinguishment. That's why I have taught and pointed out such teachings as categorical.

There are some ascetics and brahmins who have this doctrine and view: 'The self is absolutely happy and free of disease after death.' I go up to them and say, 'Is it really true that this is the venerables' view?' And they answer, 'Yes'. I say to them, 'But do you meditate knowing and seeing an absolutely happy world?' Asked this, they say, 'No.'

I say to them, 'But have you perceived an absolutely happy self for a single day or night, or even half a day or night?' Asked this, they say, 'No.'

I say to them, 'But do you know a path and a practice to realize an absolutely happy world?' Asked this, they say, 'No.'

I say to them, 'But have you ever heard the voice of the deities reborn in an absolutely happy world saying, "Practice well, good fellows, practice directly so as to realize an absolutely happy world. For this is how we practiced, and we were reborn in an absolutely happy world"?' Asked this, they say, 'No.'

What do you think, Poṭṭhapāda? This being so, doesn't what they say turn out to have no demonstrable basis?"

"Clearly that's the case, sir."

"Suppose, Poṭṭhapāda, a man were to say: 'Whoever the finest lady in the land is, it is her that I want, her that I desire!' They'd say to him, 'My man, that finest lady in the land who you desire—do you know whether she's an aristocrat, a brahmin, a peasant, or a menial?' Asked this, he'd say, 'No.' They'd say to him, 'My friend, that finest lady in the land who you desire—do you know her name or clan? Whether she's tall or short or medium? Whether her skin is black, brown, or dingy? Whether she comes from such-and-such village, town, or city?' Asked this, he'd say, 'No.' They'd say to him, 'My man, do you desire someone who you've never even known or seen?' Asked this, he'd say, 'Yes.'

What do you think, Poṭṭhapāda? This being so, doesn't that man's statement turn out to have no demonstrable basis?"

"Clearly that's the case, sir."

"In the same way, the ascetics and brahmins who have that doctrine and view …

Doesn't what they say turn out to have no demonstrable basis?"

"Clearly that's the case, sir."

"Suppose a man was to build a ladder at the crossroads for climbing up to a stilt longhouse. They'd say to him, My friend, that stilt longhouse for which you're building a ladder—do you know whether it's to the north, south, east, or west? Or whether it's tall or short or medium?' Asked this, he'd say, 'No.' They'd say to him, 'My man, are you building a ladder for a longhouse that you've never even known or seen?' Asked this, he'd say, 'Yes.'

What do you think, Poṭṭhapāda? This being so, doesn't that man's statement turn out to have no demonstrable basis?"

"Clearly that's the case, sir."

"In the same way, the ascetics and brahmins who have those various doctrines and views …

Doesn't what they say turn out to have no demonstrable basis?"

"Clearly that's the case, sir."

2.2. Three Kinds of Incarnation

"Poṭṭhapāda, there are these three kinds of incarnation: a solid incarnation, a mind-made incarnation, and a formless incarnation. And what is a solid incarnation? It is formed, made up of the four principal states, and consumes edible food. What is a mind-made incarnation? It is formed, mind-made, whole in its major and minor limbs, not deficient in any faculty. What is a formless incarnation? It is formless, made of perception.

I teach the Dhamma for the giving up of reincarnation in these three kinds of incarnation. 'When you practice accordingly, corrupting qualities will be given up in you and cleansing qualities will grow. You'll enter and remain in the fullness and abundance of wisdom, having realized it with your own insight in this very life.' Poṭṭhapāda, you might think: 'Corrupting qualities will be given up and cleansing qualities will grow. One will enter and remain in the fullness and abundance of wisdom, having realized it with one's own insight in this very life. But such a life is suffering.' But you should not see it like this. Corrupting qualities will be given up and cleansing qualities will grow. One will enter and remain in the fullness and abundance of wisdom, having realized it with one's own insight in this very life. And there will be only joy and happiness, tranquility, mindfulness and awareness. Such a life is blissful.

Poṭṭhapāda, if others should ask us, 'But reverends, what is that solid incarnation for the giving up of which you teach?' We'd answer like this, 'This is that solid incarnation.'

If others should ask us, 'But reverends, what is that mind-made incarnation?' We'd answer like this, 'This is that mind-made incarnation.'

If others should ask us, 'But reverends, what is that formless incarnation?' We'd answer like this, 'This is that formless incarnation.'

What do you think, Poṭṭhapāda? This being so, doesn't that statement turn out to have a demonstrable basis?"

"Clearly that's the case, sir."

"Suppose a man were to build a ladder for climbing up to a stilt longhouse right underneath that longhouse. They'd say to him, 'My man, that stilt longhouse for which you're building a ladder—do you know whether it's to the north, south, east, or west? Or whether it's tall or short or medium?' He'd say, 'This is that stilt longhouse for which I'm building a ladder, right underneath it.'

What do you think, Poṭṭhapāda? This being so, doesn't that man's statement turn out to have a demonstrable basis?"

"Clearly that's the case, sir."

When the Buddha had spoken, Citta Hatthisāriputta said, "Sir, when reincarnated in a solid incarnation, are the mind-made and formless incarnations fictitious, and only the solid incarnation real? When reincarnated in a mind-made incarnation, are the solid and formless incarnations fictitious, and only the mind-made incarnation real? When reincarnated in a formless incarnation, are the solid and mind-made incarnations fictitious, and only the formless incarnation real?"

"When reincarnated in a solid incarnation, it's not referred to as a mind-made or formless incarnation, only as a solid incarnation. When reincarnated in a mind-made incarnation, it's not referred to as a solid or formless incarnation, only as a mind-made incarnation. When reincarnated in a formless incarnation, it's not referred to as a solid or mind-made incarnation, only as a formless incarnation.

Citta, suppose they were to ask you, 'Did you exist in the past? Will you exist in the future? Do you exist now?' How would you answer?"

"Sir, if they were to ask me this, I'd answer like this, 'I did exist in the past. I will exist in the future. I do exist now.' That's how I'd answer."

"But Citta, suppose they were to ask you, 'Is the reincarnation you had in the past your only real one, and those of the future and present fictitious? Is the reincarnation you will have in the future your only real one, and those of the past and present fictitious? Is the reincarnation you have now your only real one, and those of the past and future fictitious?' How would you answer?"

"Sir, if they were to ask me this, I'd answer like this, 'The reincarnation I had in the past was real at that time, and those of the future and present fictitious. The reincarnation I will have in the future will be real at the time, and those of the past and present fictitious. The reincarnation I have now is real at this time, and those of the past and future fictitious.' That's how I'd answer."

"In the same way, while in any one of the three reincarnations, it's not referred to as the other two, only under its own name.

From a cow comes milk, from milk comes curds, from curds come butter, from butter comes ghee, and from ghee comes cream of ghee. And the cream of ghee is said to be the best of these. While it's milk, it's not referred to as curds, butter, ghee, or cream of ghee. It's only referred to as milk. While it's curd or butter or ghee or cream of ghee, it's not referred to as anything else, only under its own name. In the same way, while in any one of the three incarnations, it's not referred to as the other two, only under its own name. These are the world's common usages, definitions, expressions, and descriptions, which the Realized One uses to communicate without getting stuck on them."

When he had spoken, the wanderer Poṭṭhapāda said to the Buddha, "Excellent, sir! Excellent! As if he were righting the overturned, or revealing the hidden, or pointing out

the path to the lost, or lighting a lamp in the dark so people with clear eyes can see what's there, so too the Buddha has made the teaching clear in many ways. I go for refuge to the Buddha, to the teaching, and to the mendicant Saṅgha. From this day forth, may the Buddha remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life."

2.3. The Ordination of Citta Hatthisāriputta

But Citta Hatthisāriputta said to the Buddha, "Excellent, sir! Excellent! As if he were righting the overturned, or revealing the hidden, or pointing out the path to the lost, or lighting a lamp in the dark so people with clear eyes can see what's there, so too the Buddha has made the teaching clear in many ways. I go for refuge to the Buddha, to the teaching, and to the mendicant Saṅgha. Sir, may I receive the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha's presence?"

And Citta Hatthisāriputta received the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha's presence. Not long after his ordination, Venerable Citta Hatthisāriputta, living alone, withdrawn, diligent, keen, and resolute, soon realized the supreme culmination of the spiritual path in this very life. He lived having achieved with his own insight the goal for which gentlemen rightly go forth from the lay life to homelessness. He understood: "Rebirth is ended; the spiritual journey has been completed; what had to be done has been done; there is nothing further for this place." And Venerable Citta Hatthisāriputta became one of the perfected.