MN 137 — The Analysis of the Six Sense Fields

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Text

Middle Discourses 137

The Analysis of the Six Sense Fields

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. There the Buddha addressed the mendicants, "Mendicants!"

"Venerable sir," they replied. The Buddha said this:

"Mendicants, I shall teach you the analysis of the six sense fields. Listen and apply your mind well, I will speak."

"Yes, sir," they replied. The Buddha said this:

"'The six interior sense fields should be understood. The six exterior sense fields should be understood. The six classes of consciousness should be understood. The six classes of contact should be understood. The eighteen mental preoccupations should be understood. The thirty-six positions of sentient beings should be understood. Therein, relying on this, give up that. The Noble One cultivates the establishment of mindfulness in three cases, by virtue of which they are a Teacher worthy to instruct a group. Of all meditation tutors, it is he that is called the supreme guide for those fit for training.' This is the summary recital for the analysis of the six sense fields.

'The six interior sense fields should be understood.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? There are the sense fields of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. 'The six interior sense fields should be understood.' That's what I said, and this is why I said it.

'The six exterior sense fields should be understood.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? There are the sense fields of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas. 'The six exterior sense fields should be understood.' That's what I said, and this is why I said it.

'The six classes of consciousness should be understood.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? There are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousness. 'The six classes of consciousness should be understood.' That's what I said, and this is why I said it.

'The six classes of contact should be understood.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? There is contact through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. 'The six classes of contact should be understood.' That's what I said, and this is why I said it.

'The eighteen mental preoccupations should be understood.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? Seeing a sight with their eyes, one is preoccupied with a sight that's a basis for

happiness or sadness or equanimity. Hearing a sound with their ears … Smelling an odor with their nose … Tasting a flavor with their tongue …

Encountering a touch with their body … Becoming conscious of an idea with their mind, one is preoccupied with an idea that's a basis for happiness or sadness or equanimity. So there are six preoccupations with happiness, six preoccupations with sadness, and six preoccupations with equanimity. 'The eighteen mental preoccupations should be understood.' That's what I said, and this is why I said it.

'The thirty-six positions of sentient beings should be understood.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? There are six kinds of domestic happiness and six kinds of renunciate happiness. There are six kinds of domestic sadness and six kinds of renunciate sadness. There are six kinds of domestic equanimity and six kinds of renunciate equanimity.

And in this context what are the six kinds of domestic happiness? There are sights known by the eye, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with the worldly pleasures of the flesh. Happiness arises when you regard it as a gain to obtain such sights, or when you recollect sights you formerly obtained that have passed, ceased, and perished. Such happiness is called domestic happiness. There are sounds known by the ear … Smells known by the nose … Tastes known by the tongue … Touches known by the body … Ideas known by the mind, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with the worldly pleasures of the flesh. Happiness arises when you regard it as a gain to obtain such ideas, or when you recollect ideas you formerly obtained that have passed, ceased, and perished. Such happiness is called domestic happiness. These are the six kinds of domestic happiness.

And in this context what are the six kinds of renunciate happiness? When you've understood the impermanence of sights—their perishing, fading away, and cessation—happiness arises as you truly understand through right understanding that both formerly and now all those sights are impermanent, suffering, and perishable. Such happiness is called renunciate happiness. When you've understood the impermanence of sounds … smells … tastes … touches … ideas—their perishing, fading away, and cessation—happiness arises as you truly understand through right understanding that both formerly and now all those ideas are impermanent, suffering, and perishable. Such happiness is called renunciate happiness. These are the six kinds of renunciate happiness.

And in this context what are the six kinds of domestic sadness? There are sights known by the eye, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with the worldly pleasures of the flesh. Sadness arises when you regard it as a loss to lose such sights, or when you recollect sights you formerly lost that have passed, ceased, and perished. Such sadness is called domestic sadness. There are sounds known by the ear … There are smells known by the nose … There are tastes known by the tongue … There are touches known by the body … There are ideas known by the mind, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with the worldly pleasures of the flesh. Sadness arises when you regard it as a loss to lose such ideas, or when you recollect ideas you formerly lost that have passed, ceased, and perished. Such sadness is called domestic sadness. These are the six kinds of domestic sadness.

And in this context what are the six kinds of renunciate sadness? When you've understood the impermanence of sights—their perishing, fading away, and cessation—you truly understand through right understanding that both formerly and now all those sights are impermanent, suffering, and perishable. Upon seeing this, you give rise to longing for the supreme liberations: 'Oh, when will I enter and remain in the same dimension that the noble ones enter and remain in today?' When you give rise to longing for the supreme liberations like this, sadness arises because of the longing. Such sadness is called renunciate sadness. When you've understood the impermanence of sounds … smells … tastes … touches … ideas—their perishing, fading away, and cessation—you truly understand through right understanding that both formerly and now all those ideas are impermanent, suffering, and perishable. Upon seeing this, you give rise to longing for the supreme liberations: 'Oh, when will I enter and remain in the same dimension that the noble ones enter and remain in today?' When you give rise to longing for the supreme liberations like this, sadness arises because of the longing. Such sadness is called renunciate sadness. These are the six kinds of renunciate sadness.

And in this context what are the six kinds of domestic equanimity? When seeing a sight with their eyes, equanimity arises for the unlearned ordinary person—a foolish ordinary person who has not overcome their limitations and the results of deeds, and is blind to the drawbacks. Such equanimity does not transcend the sight. That's why it's called domestic equanimity. When hearing a sound with their ears … When smelling an odor with their nose … When tasting a flavor with their tongue … When encountering a touch with their body … When knowing an idea with their mind, equanimity arises for the unlearned ordinary person—a foolish ordinary person who has not overcome their limitations and the results of deeds, and is blind to the drawbacks. Such equanimity does not transcend the idea. That's why it's called domestic equanimity. These are the six kinds of domestic equanimity.

And in this context what are the six kinds of renunciate equanimity? When you've understood the impermanence of sights—their perishing, fading away, and cessation—equanimity arises as you truly understand through right understanding that both formerly and now all those sights are impermanent, suffering, and perishable. Such equanimity transcends the sight. That's why it's called renunciate equanimity. When you've understood the impermanence of sounds … smells … tastes … touches … ideas—their perishing, fading away, and cessation—equanimity arises as you truly understand through right understanding that both formerly and now all those ideas are impermanent, suffering, and perishable. Such equanimity transcends the idea. That's why it's called renunciate equanimity. These are the six kinds of renunciate equanimity. 'The thirty-six positions of sentient beings should be understood.' That's what I said, and this is why I said it.

'Therein, relying on this, give up that.' That's what I said, but why did I say it?

Therein, by relying and depending on the six kinds of renunciate happiness, give up and go beyond the six kinds of domestic happiness. That's how they are given up.

Therein, by relying on the six kinds of renunciate sadness, give up the six kinds of domestic sadness. That's how they are given up.

Therein, by relying on the six kinds of renunciate equanimity, give up the six kinds of domestic equanimity. That's how they are given up.

Therein, by relying on the six kinds of renunciate happiness, give up the six kinds of renunciate sadness. That's how they are given up.

Therein, by relying on the six kinds of renunciate equanimity, give up the six kinds of renunciate happiness. That's how they are given up.

There is equanimity that is diversified, based on diversity, and equanimity that is unified, based on unity.

And what is equanimity based on diversity? There is equanimity toward sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. This is equanimity based on diversity.

And what is equanimity based on unity? There is equanimity based on the dimensions of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception. This is equanimity based on unity.

Therein, relying on equanimity based on unity, give up equanimity based on diversity. That's how it is given up.

Relying on not being determined by that, give up equanimity based on unity. That's how it is given up. 'Therein, relying on this, give up that.' That's what I said, and this is why I said it.

'The Noble One cultivates the establishment of mindfulness in three cases, by virtue of which they are a Teacher worthy to instruct a group.' That's what I said, but why did I say it?

The first case is when the Teacher teaches Dhamma to his disciples out of kindness and sympathy: 'This is for your welfare. This is for your happiness.' But their disciples don't want to listen. They don't actively listen or try to understand. They proceed having turned away from the Teacher's instruction. In this case the Realized One is not unhappy, he does not feel unhappiness. He remains unfestering, mindful and aware. This is the first case in which the Noble One cultivates the establishment of mindfulness.

The next case is when the Teacher teaches Dhamma to his disciples out of kindness and sympathy: 'This is for your welfare. This is for your happiness.' And some of their disciples don't want to listen. They don't actively listen or try to understand. They proceed having turned away from the Teacher's instruction. But some of their disciples do want to listen. They actively listen and try to understand. They don't proceed having turned away from the Teacher's instruction. In this case the Realized One is not unhappy, nor is he happy. Shunning both unhappiness and happiness, he remains equanimous, mindful and aware. This is the second case in which the Noble One cultivates the establishment of mindfulness.

The next case is when the Teacher teaches Dhamma to his disciples out of kindness and sympathy: 'This is for your welfare. This is for your happiness.' And their disciples want to listen. They actively listen and try to understand. They don't proceed having turned away from the Teacher's instruction. In this case the Realized One is happy, he does feel

happiness. He remains unfestering, mindful and aware. This is the third case in which the Noble One cultivates the establishment of mindfulness. ‘The Noble One cultivates the establishment of mindfulness in three cases, by virtue of which they are a Teacher worthy to instruct a group.’ That’s what I said, and this is why I said it.

‘Of all meditation tutors, it is he that is called the supreme guide for those fit for training.’ That’s what I said, but why did I say it? Driven by an elephant trainer, an elephant in training proceeds in just one direction: east, west, north, or south.

Driven by a horse trainer, a horse in training proceeds in just one direction: east, west, north, or south. Driven by an ox trainer, an ox in training proceeds in just one direction: east, west, north, or south. But driven by the Realized One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha, a person in training proceeds in eight directions:

Having physical form, they see forms. This is the first direction. Not perceiving physical form internally, they see forms externally. This is the second direction. They’re focused only on beauty. This is the third direction. Going totally beyond perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of impingement, not focusing on perceptions of diversity, aware that ‘space is infinite’, they enter and remain in the dimension of infinite space. This is the fourth direction. Going totally beyond the dimension of infinite space, aware that ‘consciousness is infinite’, they enter and remain in the dimension of infinite consciousness. This is the fifth direction. Going totally beyond the dimension of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing at all’, they enter and remain in the dimension of nothingness. This is the sixth direction. Going totally beyond the dimension of nothingness, they enter and remain in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. This is the seventh direction. Going totally beyond the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, they enter and remain in the cessation of perception and feeling. This is the eighth direction. Driven by the Realized One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha, a person in training proceeds in these eight directions.

‘Of all meditation tutors, it is he that is called the supreme guide for those fit for training.’ That’s what I said, and this is why I said it.”

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, the mendicants approved what the Buddha said.