MN 39 — The Longer Discourse at Assapura

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
Source: https://suttacentral.net/mn39/en/sujato
Source revision: 3bc8665e0e28e70518eba94304a2fafcab80f933
License: CC0-1.0 — https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/

Text

Middle Discourses 39

The Longer Discourse at Assapura

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying in the land of the Aṅgas, near the Aṅgan town named Assapura. There the Buddha addressed the mendicants, “Mendicants!”

“Venerable sir,” they replied. The Buddha said this:

“Mendicants, people label you as ascetics. And when they ask you what you are, you claim to be ascetics.

Given this label and this claim, you should train like this: ‘We will proceed having undertaken the things that make one an ascetic and a brahmin. That way our label will be accurate and our claim correct. The services of those whose robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicines and supplies for the sick we enjoy shall be very fruitful and beneficial for them. And our going forth will not be barren, but will be fruitful and fertile.’

And what are the things that make one an ascetic and a brahmin? You should train like this: ‘We will have conscience and prudence.’ Now, mendicants, you might think, ‘We have conscience and prudence. This is sufficient; enough has been done. We have achieved the goal of life as an ascetic. There is nothing more to do.’ And you might rest content with just that much. I declare this to you, mendicants, I announce this to you: ‘You who seek to be true ascetics, do not lose sight of the goal of the ascetic life while there is still more to do.’

What more is there to do? You should train like this: ‘Our bodily behavior will be pure, clear, open, neither inconsistent nor secretive. And we won’t glorify ourselves or put others down on account of our pure bodily behavior.’ Now, mendicants, you might think, ‘We have conscience and prudence, and our bodily behavior is pure. This is sufficient …’ I declare this to you, mendicants, I announce this to you: ‘You who seek to be true ascetics, do not lose sight of the goal of the ascetic life while there is still more to do.’

What more is there to do? You should train like this: ‘Our verbal behavior … mental behavior … livelihood will be pure, clear, open, neither inconsistent nor secretive. And we won’t glorify ourselves or put others down on account of our pure livelihood.’ Now, mendicants, you might think, ‘We have conscience and prudence, our bodily, verbal, and mental behavior is pure, and our livelihood is pure. This is sufficient; enough has been done. We have achieved the goal of life as an ascetic. There is nothing more to do.’ And you might rest content with just that much. I declare this to you, mendicants, I announce this to you: ‘You who seek to be true ascetics, do not lose sight of the goal of the ascetic life

while there is still more to do.'

What more is there to do? You should train yourselves like this: 'We will restrain our sense doors. When we see a sight with our eyes, we won't get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of sight were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of covetousness and displeasure would become overwhelming. For this reason, we will practice restraint, we will protect the faculty of sight, and we will achieve its restraint. When we hear a sound with our ears … When we smell an odor with our nose … When we taste a flavor with our tongue … When we feel a touch with our body … When we know an idea with our mind, we won't get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of mind were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of covetousness and displeasure would become overwhelming. For this reason, we will practice restraint, we will protect the faculty of mind, and we will achieve its restraint.' Now, mendicants, you might think, 'We have conscience and prudence, our bodily, verbal, and mental behavior is pure, our livelihood is pure, and our sense doors are restrained. This is sufficient …'

What more is there to do? You should train yourselves like this: 'We will not eat too much. We will only eat after reflecting rationally on our food. We will eat not for fun, indulgence, adornment, or decoration, but only to sustain this body, to avoid harm, and to support spiritual practice. In this way, we shall put an end to old discomfort and not give rise to new discomfort, and we will have the means to keep going, blamelessness, and a comfortable abiding.' Now, mendicants, you might think, 'We have conscience and prudence, our bodily, verbal, and mental behavior is pure, our livelihood is pure, our sense doors are restrained, and we don't eat too much. This is sufficient …'

What more is there to do? You should train yourselves like this: 'We will be dedicated to wakefulness. When practicing walking and sitting meditation by day, we will purify our mind from obstacles. In the first watch of the night, we will continue to practice walking and sitting meditation. In the middle watch, we will lie down in the lion's posture—on the right side, placing one foot on top of the other—mindful and aware, and focused on the time of getting up. In the last watch, we will get up and continue to practice walking and sitting meditation, purifying our mind from obstacles.' Now, mendicants, you might think, 'We have conscience and prudence, our bodily, verbal, and mental behavior is pure, our livelihood is pure, our sense doors are restrained, we don't eat too much, and we are dedicated to wakefulness. This is sufficient …'

What more is there to do? You should train yourselves like this: 'We will have mindfulness and situational awareness. We will act with situational awareness when going out and coming back; when looking ahead and aside; when bending and extending the limbs; when bearing the outer robe, bowl and robes; when eating, drinking, chewing, and tasting; when urinating and defecating; when walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking, and keeping silent.' Now, mendicants, you might think, 'We have conscience and prudence, our bodily, verbal, and mental behavior is pure, our livelihood is pure, our sense doors are restrained, we don't eat too much, we are dedicated to wakefulness, and we have mindfulness and situational awareness. This is sufficient …'

What more is there to do? Take a mendicant who frequents a secluded lodging—a wilderness, the root of a tree, a hill, a ravine, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a forest,

the open air, a heap of straw.

After the meal, they return from almsround, sit down cross-legged, set their body straight, and bring mindfulness to the present. Giving up covetousness for the world, they meditate with a heart rid of covetousness, cleansing the mind of covetousness. Giving up ill will and malevolence, they meditate with a mind rid of ill will, full of sympathy for all living beings, cleansing the mind of ill will. Giving up dullness and drowsiness, they meditate with a mind rid of dullness and drowsiness, perceiving light, mindful and aware, cleansing the mind of dullness and drowsiness. Giving up restlessness and remorse, they meditate without restlessness, their mind settled internally, cleansing the mind of restlessness and remorse. Giving up doubt, they meditate having gone beyond doubt, not undecided about skillful qualities, cleansing the mind of doubt.

Suppose a man who has gotten into debt were to apply himself to work, and his efforts proved successful. He would pay off the original loan and have enough left over to support his partner. Thinking about this, he'd be filled with joy and happiness.

Suppose a person was sick, suffering, gravely ill. They'd lose their appetite and get physically weak. But after some time they'd recover from that illness, and regain their appetite and their strength. Thinking about this, they'd be filled with joy and happiness.

Suppose a person was imprisoned in a jail. But after some time they were released from jail, safe and sound, with no loss of wealth. Thinking about this, they'd be filled with joy and happiness.

Suppose a person was a bondservant. They would not be their own master, but indentured to another, unable to go where they wish. But after some time they'd be freed from servitude. They would be their own master, not indentured to another, a freeman able to go where they wish. Thinking about this, they'd be filled with joy and happiness.

Suppose there was a person with wealth and property who was traveling along a desert road. But after some time they crossed over the desert, safe and sound, with no loss of wealth. Thinking about this, they'd be filled with joy and happiness.

In the same way, as long as these five hindrances are not given up inside themselves, a mendicant regards them as a debt, a disease, a prison, slavery, and a desert crossing. But when these five hindrances are given up inside themselves, a mendicant regards this as freedom from debt, good health, release from prison, emancipation, and a place of sanctuary at last.

They give up these five hindrances, corruptions of the heart that weaken wisdom. Then, 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. They drench, steep, fill, and spread themselves with rapture and bliss born of seclusion. There's no part of the body that's not spread with rapture and bliss born of seclusion. It's like when a deft bathroom attendant or their apprentice pours bath powder into a bronze dish, sprinkling it little by little with water. They knead it until the ball of bath powder is soaked and saturated with moisture, spread through inside and out; yet no moisture oozes out.

In the same way, a mendicant drenches, steeps, fills, and spreads themselves with rapture and bliss born of seclusion. There's no part of the body that's not spread with rapture and bliss born of seclusion.

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. They drench, steep, fill, and spread themselves with rapture and bliss born of immersion. There's no part of the body that's not spread with rapture and bliss born of immersion. It's like a deep lake fed by spring water. There's no inlet to the east, west, north, or south, and the heavens would not properly bestow showers from time to time. But the stream of cool water welling up in the lake drenches, steeps, fills, and spreads throughout the lake. There's no part of the lake that's not spread through with cool water.

In the same way, a mendicant drenches, steeps, fills, and spreads themselves with rapture and bliss born of immersion. There's no part of the body that's not spread with rapture and bliss born of immersion.

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.' They drench, steep, fill, and spread themselves with bliss free of rapture. There's no part of the body that's not spread with bliss free of rapture. It's like a pool with blue water lilies, or pink or white lotuses. Some of them sprout and grow in the water without rising above it, thriving underwater. From the tip to the root they're drenched, steeped, filled, and soaked with cool water. There's no part of them that's not soaked with cool water.

In the same way, a mendicant drenches, steeps, fills, and spreads themselves with bliss free of rapture. There's no part of the body that's not spread with bliss free of rapture.

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. They sit spreading their body through with pure bright mind. There's no part of the body that's not spread with pure bright mind. It's like someone sitting wrapped from head to foot with white cloth. There's no part of the body that's not spread over with white cloth.

In the same way, they sit spreading their body through with pure bright mind. There's no part of the body that's not spread with pure bright mind.

When their mind has become immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—they extend it toward recollection of past lives. They recollect many kinds of past lives, with features and details. Suppose a person was to leave their home village and go to another village. From that village they'd go to yet another village. And from that village they'd return to their home village. They'd think: 'I went from my home village to another village. There I stood like this, sat like that, spoke like this, or kept silent like that. From that village I went to yet another village. There too I stood like this, sat like that, spoke like this, or kept silent like that. And

from that village I returned to my home village.'

In the same way, a mendicant recollects their many kinds of past lives, with features and details.

When their mind has become immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—they extend it toward knowledge of the death and rebirth of sentient beings. With clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, they see sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. They understand how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds. Suppose there were two houses with doors. A person with clear eyes standing in between them would see humans entering and leaving a house and wandering to and fro.

In the same way, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, they see sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. They understand how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds.

When their mind has become immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—they extend it toward knowledge of the ending of defilements. They truly understand: '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.' They truly understand: 'These are defilements' … 'This is the origin of defilements' … 'This is the cessation of defilements' … 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of defilements.' Knowing and seeing like this, their mind is freed from the defilements of sensuality, desire to be reborn, and ignorance. When they're freed, they know they're freed. They understand: 'Rebirth is ended, the spiritual journey has been completed, what had to be done has been done, there is nothing further for this place.'

Suppose that in a mountain glen there was a lake that was transparent, clear, and unclouded. A person with clear eyes standing on the bank would see the clams and mussels, pebbles and gravel, and schools of fish swimming about or staying still. They'd think: 'This lake is transparent, clear, and unclouded. And here are the clams and mussels, pebbles and gravel, and schools of fish swimming about or staying still.'

In the same way, a mendicant truly understands: '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.' They understand: '… there is nothing further for this place.'

This mendicant is one who is called an 'ascetic', a 'brahmin', a 'bathed initiate', a 'knowledge master', a 'scholar', a 'noble one', and also a 'perfected one'.

And how is a mendicant an ascetic? They have assuaged the bad, unskillful qualities that are corrupting, leading to future lives, hurtful, resulting in suffering and future rebirth, old age, and death. That's how a mendicant is an ascetic.

And how is a mendicant a brahmin? They have banished the bad, unskillful qualities. That's how a mendicant is a brahmin.

And how is a mendicant a bathed initiate? They have bathed off the bad, unskillful qualities. That's how a mendicant is a bathed initiate.

And how is a mendicant a knowledge master? They have known the bad, unskillful qualities. That's how a mendicant is a knowledge master.

And how is a mendicant a scholar? They have scoured off the bad, unskillful qualities. That's how a mendicant is a scholar.

And how is a mendicant a noble one? They have nobbled their foes, the bad, unskillful qualities. That's how a mendicant is a noble one.

And how is a mendicant a perfected one? They are impeccably remote from the bad, unskillful qualities that are corrupting, leading to future lives, hurtful, resulting in suffering and future rebirth, old age, and death. That's how a mendicant is a perfected one."

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