SN 35.244 — Entailing Suffering

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Text

Linked Discourses 35.244

19. The Simile of the Vipers

Entailing Suffering

“Mendicants, when a mendicant truly understands the origin and disappearance of all things that entail suffering, then they’ve seen sensual pleasures in such a way that they have no underlying tendency for desire, affection, infatuation, and passion for sensual pleasures. And they’ve awakened to a way of conduct and a way of living such that, when they live in that way, bad, unskillful qualities of covetousness and displeasure don’t overwhelm them.

And how does a mendicant truly understand the origin and disappearance of all things that entail suffering?

‘Such is form, such is the origin of form, such is the disappearance of form. Such is feeling … perception … choices … consciousness, such is the origin of consciousness, such is the disappearance of consciousness.’

That’s how a mendicant truly understands the origin and disappearance of all things that entail suffering.

And how has a mendicant seen sensual pleasures in such a way that they have no underlying tendency for desire, affection, infatuation, and passion for sensual pleasures?

Suppose there was a pit of glowing coals deeper than a man’s height, filled with glowing coals that neither flamed nor smoked. Then a person would come along who wants to live and doesn’t want to die, who wants to be happy and recoils from pain. Two strong men would grab each arm and drag them toward the pit of glowing coals. They’d writhe and struggle to and fro. Why is that? For that person knows, ‘If I fall in that pit of glowing coals, that will result in my death or deadly pain.’

In the same way, when a mendicant has seen sensual pleasures as like a pit of glowing coals, they have no underlying tendency for desire, affection, infatuation, and passion for sensual pleasures.

And how has a mendicant awakened to a way of conduct and a way of living such that, when they live in that way, bad, unskillful qualities of covetousness and displeasure don’t overwhelm them?

Suppose a person was to enter a thicket full of thorns. They'd have thorns before and behind, to the left and right, below and above. So they'd go forward mindfully and come back mindfully, thinking, 'May I not get any thorns!'

In the same way, whatever in the world seems nice and pleasant is called a thorn in the training of the Noble One. Understanding that this is a thorn, they should understand restraint and lack of restraint.

And how is someone unrestrained?

Take a mendicant who sees a sight with their eyes. If it's pleasant they hold on to it, but if it's unpleasant they dislike it. They live with mindfulness of the body unestablished and their heart stunted. And they don't truly understand the freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom where those arisen bad, unskillful qualities cease without remainder.

They hear a sound … smell an odor … taste a flavor … feel a touch … know an idea with their mind. If it's pleasant they hold on to it, but if it's unpleasant they dislike it. They live with mindfulness of the body unestablished and their heart stunted. And they don't truly understand the freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom where those arisen bad, unskillful qualities cease without remainder.

This is how someone is unrestrained.

And how is someone restrained?

Take a mendicant who sees a sight with their eyes. If it's pleasant they don't hold on to it, and if it's unpleasant they don't dislike it. They live with mindfulness of the body established and a limitless heart. And they truly understand the freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom where those arisen bad, unskillful qualities cease without remainder.

They hear a sound … smell an odor … taste a flavor … feel a touch … know an idea with their mind. If it's pleasant they don't hold on to it, and if it's unpleasant they don't dislike it. They live with mindfulness of the body established and a limitless heart. And they truly understand the freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom where those arisen bad, unskillful qualities cease without remainder.

This is how someone is restrained.

Perhaps while that mendicant is conducting themselves and living in this way, bad, unskillful memories and thoughts that tighten the fetters arise every so often due to loss of mindfulness. Slowly mindfulness arises, but then they quickly give up, dispel, eliminate, and obliterate those thoughts.

Suppose there was an iron cauldron that had been heated all day, and a person let two or three drops of water fall onto it. Slowly the drops fall, but then they quickly dry up and evaporate.

In the same way, perhaps while that mendicant is conducting themselves and living in this way, bad, unskillful memories and thoughts that tighten the fetters arise every so often due to loss of mindfulness. Slowly mindfulness arises, but then they quickly give up, dispel, eliminate, and obliterate those thoughts.

This is how a mendicant has awakened to a way of conduct and a way of living such that, when they live in that way, bad, unskillful qualities of covetousness and displeasure don't overwhelm them.

While that mendicant conducts themselves in this way and lives in this way, it may be that rulers or their chief ministers, friends or colleagues, relatives or family would invite them to accept wealth, saying, 'Please, my man, why let these ocher robes torment you? Why follow the practice of shaving your head and carrying an alms bowl? Come, return to a lesser life, enjoy wealth, and make merit!' But it is quite impossible for a mendicant who conducts themselves in this way and lives in this way to resign the training and return to a lesser life.

Suppose that, although the Ganges River slants, slopes, and inclines to the east, a large crowd were to come along with a spade and basket, saying: 'We'll make this Ganges Riiver slant, slope, and incline to the west!'

What do you think, mendicants? Would they still succeed?"

"No, sir. Why is that? The Ganges River slants, slopes, and inclines to the east. It's not easy to make it slant, slope, and incline to the west. That large crowd will eventually get weary and frustrated."

"In the same way, while that mendicant conducts themselves in this way and lives in this way, it may be that rulers or their chief ministers, friends or colleagues, relatives or family should invite them to accept wealth, saying, 'Please, my man, why let these ocher robes torment you? Why follow the practice of shaving your head and carrying an alms bowl? Come, return to a lesser life, enjoy wealth, and make merit!' But it is quite impossible for a mendicant who conducts themselves in this way and lives in this way to resign the training and return to a lesser life.

Why is that? Because for a long time that mendicant's mind has slanted, sloped, and inclined to seclusion. So it's impossible for them to return to a lesser life."