



The Greater Discourse on Voidness

The “Mahā-Suññatā Sutta” (Majjhima Nikāya No. 122)
And the Commentary from the Papañcasūdanī

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Introduction

Retire within yourselves; but first prepare yourselves to receive yourselves there. It would be madness to trust yourselves to yourselves if you do not know how to control yourselves. There are ways of failing in solitude as well as in company.

—Montaigne

Often when the mind is tired and stale it needs the comfort and encouragement of a soothing kind. At other times such treatment can induce in it a false sense of security, and then it has to be jolted, woken up, even frightened if necessary, and injected with a sense of urgency. This discourse does precisely that. It does not offer comfort (which will be found elsewhere in the Canon). It urges forced marches to the goal, with awareness of present dangers as encouragement.

In more than one place in the Canon the Venerable Ānanda, the Buddha's faithful attendant, whose gentle concern with others' welfare led him now and then to neglect his own advancement to arahantship, suffers reproof for this wholly amiable trait. This discourse opens with a rebuke. And though elsewhere he was singled out for praise as the foremost of all the disciples in learning and remembering the discourses, he is here told that it is not enough merely to know about these things; they must be practised and put into effect. And the end carries a warning against underestimating the risks.

Voidness, the subject of the discourse, is not defined. It may be assumed, though, that the Venerable Ānanda, who remembered all the discourses he had heard, could recall others in which it is defined in the sense intended here. Similarly, the doctrine of no-self, which is the basis of such voidness, is taken for granted. (The explanation is in the commentaries, though not in the commentary to this Sutta which relies on commentaries to earlier Suttas in the *Majjhima Nikāya* for some of its material.) The discourse is concerned only with the purpose for which those already defined doctrines should be used, and not with the way in which we use them.

The discourse can be misunderstood if it is forgotten that the Buddha has described his teaching as having only one taste, that of deliverance, just as the sea has only one taste, that of salt (Udāna 5); and that he said of becoming: "Just as even a little dung stinks, so I do not recommend even a little becoming, not for so much as a finger snap" (AN 1 xviii. 13). And to understand its full force it must not be forgotten that one who ends selfish clinging (which maintains becoming), and reaches arahantship, figures as one who has achieved the good which surpasses all others for the benefit of the world. "To protect oneself, bhikkhus, the foundation of mindfulness should be cultivated. To protect another the foundation of mindfulness should be cultivated. One who protects himself protects another; one who protects another protects himself. And how, bhikkhus, does one who protects himself protect another? By cultivation, development, and repeated practice. And how, bhikkhus, does one who protects another protect himself? By patience, harmlessness, kindness and forbearance" (S V 169).

The "Mahā Suññatā Sutta" is mentioned in the commentaries as one of the *patipadā* suttas (see the Commentary to *Majjhima* No. 3), one of which would be adopted by a bhikkhu as a guide in the particular mode of practice (*patipadā*) that suited his temperament. Others of these *patipadā* suttas give prominence to such qualities as restraint and patience (MN 3), purity through the seven stages of purification (MN 24), and so forth. Here seclusion is stressed.

—Ñāṇamoli Thera

The Greater Discourse on Voidness

(Mahāsuññata Sutta; Majjhima Nikāya 122)

1. Thus I heard: At one time the Blessed One was living in the country of the Sakyans, at Kapilavatthu in Nigrodha's park.

2. Then when it was morning, the Blessed One dressed and taking his bowl and robe went into Kapilavatthu for alms. After he had returned from his almsround, after his meal, he went to spend the day at the dwelling of Kāḷakhemaka the Sakyan. On that occasion, however, there were many resting places prepared in the dwelling of Kāḷakhemaka the Sakyan. When the Blessed One saw this, he thought: "There are many resting places prepared in the dwelling of Kāḷakhemaka the Sakyan; do many bhikkhus live there?"

3. But on that occasion the Venerable Ānanda was engaged with many bhikkhus in making robes at the dwelling of Ghatā the Sakyan. Then when it was evening, the Blessed One rose from meditation and he went to the dwelling of Ghatā the Sakyan: on arriving there he sat down on the appointed seat; when he had done so, the Blessed One said to the Venerable Ānanda: "There are many resting places prepared in the dwelling of Kāḷakhemaka the Sakyan; do many bhikkhus live there?"

"Many resting places, Venerable Sir, are prepared in the dwelling of Kāḷakhemaka the Sakyan; many bhikkhus are living there. A time for making robes is permitted to us, Venerable Sir."

5. "A bhikkhu, Ānanda, does not shine forth by delighting in company, enjoying company, devoted to delight in company, delighting in society, enjoying society, finding satisfaction in society.

6. "Indeed, Ānanda, that a bhikkhu delighting in company, enjoying company, devoted to delight in company, delighting in society, enjoying society, finding satisfaction in society should come to obtain the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace the bliss of enlightenment at will, without trouble and in full, that is not possible. But when a bhikkhu lives alone, apart from society, that he may be expected to obtain the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace, the bliss of enlightenment at will, without trouble and in full, that is possible.

7. "Indeed, Ānanda, that a bhikkhu delighting in company, enjoying company, devoted to delight in company, delighting in society, enjoying society, finding satisfaction in society should enter upon and dwell in either the temporary, or the permanent and unshakeable, delectable mind deliverance, that is not possible. But when a bhikkhu lives alone, apart from society, that he may be expected to enter upon and dwell in the temporary, or the permanent and unshakeable, delectable mind deliverance, that is possible.

8. "I do not see, Ānanda, even one material form that, because of the change and alteration of that material form, will not cause sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief, and woe to arise in him who delights and takes pleasure therein.

9. "But this is the abiding, Ānanda, discovered by the Perfect One, that is, to enter upon and dwell in voidness internally by not bringing to mind any sign. If the Perfect One, Ānanda, dwelling therein by that abiding, is visited by bhikkhus or bhikkhunis, by men or women lay disciples, by kings or kings' ministers, by other sectarians or their followers, on such occasions, Ānanda, since his mind tends to seclusion, inclines to seclusion, is bent on seclusion, is detached, delights in renunciation and has put an end to all states that give rise to cankers, the Perfect One will assuredly give only such talk as is associated with dismissal.

10. "Therefore, Ānanda, if a bhikkhu should wish, 'May I enter upon and dwell in voidness internally,' that bhikkhu must settle, steady, unify and concentrate his mind internally.

11. "And how, Ānanda, does a bhikkhu settle, steady, unify, and concentrate his mind internally?

"Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu, secluded from sense desires, secluded from unprofitable things, enters upon and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied thought and sustained thought, and is filled with rapture and bliss born of seclusion.

"With the subsiding of applied and sustained thought, he enters upon and dwells in the second jhāna, which possesses internal serenity and singleness of mind and is without applied thought and without sustained thought, and is filled with rapture and bliss born of concentration.

With the fading away of rapture he dwells in equanimity, mindful and fully aware, and he feels with his mental faculties that bliss, of which the Noble Ones say: 'He who has equanimity and is mindful dwells happily;' thus he enters upon and dwells in the third jhāna.

"With the abandoning of bodily bliss and bodily pain, and with the disappearance of previous joy and grief, he enters upon and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which is neither painful nor pleasant and possesses mindfulness purified by equanimity.

"Thus, Ānanda, does a bhikkhu settle, steady, unify, and concentrate his mind internally.

12. "He brings to mind voidness internally. While bringing to mind voidness internally, still his mind does not enter into voidness internally, nor does it become settled, steady and resolute. When that is so, Ānanda, the bhikkhu understands thus: 'While bringing to mind voidness internally, still my mind does not enter voidness internally, nor does it become settled, steady and resolute.' Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

"He brings to mind voidness externally

"He brings to mind voidness internally and externally

13. "He brings to mind the imperturbable. While bringing to mind the imperturbable, still his mind does not enter into the imperturbable, nor does it become settled, steady and resolute. When that is so, Ānanda, the bhikkhu understands thus: 'While bringing to mind the imperturbable, still my mind does not enter into the imperturbable, nor does it become settled, steady and resolute.' Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

14. “That bhikkhu, Ānanda, must then continue to settle, steady, unify, and concentrate his mind internally in that same sign of concentration as before.

15. “He brings to mind voidness internally. While bringing to mind voidness internally, his mind enters into voidness internally, becomes settled, steady and resolute. When that is so, Ānanda, the bhikkhu understands thus: “While bringing to mind voidness internally, my mind enters into voidness internally, becomes settled, steady and resolute.” Thus he is possessed of full awareness herein.

“He brings to mind voidness externally

“He brings to mind voidness internally and externally

16. “He brings to mind the imperturbable. While bringing to mind the imperturbable, his mind enters into the imperturbable, becomes settled, steady and resolute. When that is so, Ānanda, the bhikkhu understands thus: ‘While bringing to mind the imperturbable, my mind enters into the imperturbable, becomes settled, steady and resolute.’ Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

17. “If, Ānanda, dwelling in this way, a bhikkhu’s mind inclines to walking, he walks: ‘Walking thus, the evil, unprofitable states of covetousness and grief will not invade me.’ Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

18. “If, Ānanda, dwelling in this way, a bhikkhu’s mind inclines to standing, he stands: ‘Standing thus, the evil, unprofitable states of mind will not invade me.’ Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

19. “If, Ānanda, dwelling in this way, a bhikkhu’s mind inclines to sitting, he sits

20. “If, Ānanda, dwelling in this way, a bhikkhu’s mind inclines to lying down, he lies down

21. “If, Ānanda, dwelling in this way, a bhikkhu’s mind inclines to talking he resolves: ‘Such talk as is low, vulgar, base, ignoble, as leads to harm, as leads not to revulsion, to fading away, to cessation, to pacification, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna; that is to say, talk of kings, robbers, ministers, armies, alarms, battles, food, drink, clothing, beds, garlands, perfumes, relatives, vehicles, villages, towns, cities, countries, women heroes, street inhabitants, wells, the dead, trivialities, the origin of the world, the origin of the sea, whether things are so or are not so—in such talk I shall not indulge.’ Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

22. “But Ānanda, he resolves: ‘Such talk as is concerned with effacement, as favours the mind’s release, as leads to complete revulsion, to fading away, to cessation, to pacification, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna; that is to say, talk on wanting little, on contentment, seclusion, aloofness from contact, strenuousness, virtuous conduct, concentration, understanding deliverance, knowledge and vision concerning deliverance—in such talk I shall indulge.’ Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

23. “If, Ānanda, dwelling in this way, a bhikkhu’s mind inclines to thinking, he resolves, ‘Such thoughts as are low, vulgar, base, ignoble, as lead to harm, as lead not to revulsion, to fading away, to cessation, to pacification, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna; that is to say, thoughts of lust, of ill-will, of cruelty—in such thoughts I shall not indulge.’ Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

24. "But, Ānanda, he resolves, 'Such thoughts as are noble, as lead forth from the round of rebirths, and lead on rightly to the destruction of suffering for him who practises them; that is to say, thoughts of renunciation, non-ill-will, non-cruelty—in such thoughts I shall indulge.' Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

25. "There are, Ānanda, these five cords of sense-desire. What five? Visible objects cognizable by the eye that are sought after, desired, pleasing, gratifying, associated with desire, and productive of greed; sounds cognizable by the ear ... ; odours cognizable by the nose ...; flavours cognizable by the tongue...; tangible objects cognizable by the body that are sought after, desired, pleasing, gratifying, associated with desire and productive of greed. These are the five cords of sense-desire wherein a bhikkhu should constantly review his own mind thus: 'Does there arise in me any mental attachment concerned with any source of defilement among these five cords of sense-desire?'

26. "If, Ānanda, while reviewing, the bhikkhu understands, 'There arises in me mental attachment concerned with some source of defilement among these five cords of sense-desire,' then the bhikkhu understands thus: 'Greed for the five cords of sense-desire is not abandoned in me.' Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

27. "But if, Ānanda, while reviewing, the bhikkhu understands: 'There does not arise in me any mental attachment concerned with any source of defilement among these five cords of sense-desire,' then the bhikkhu understands thus, "Greed for the five cords of sense-desire is abandoned in me.' Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

28. "There are, Ānanda, these five aggregates as objects of clinging, wherein a bhikkhu should dwell contemplating arising and passing away: 'Thus is matter, thus its arising, thus its passing away; thus is feeling, thus its arising, thus its passing away; thus is perception, thus its arising, thus its passing away; thus are formations, thus their arising, thus their passing away; thus is consciousness, thus its arising, thus its passing away.'

29. "In one who dwells contemplating arising and passing away of these five aggregates as objects of clinging, the conceit 'I am,' based on these five aggregates as objects of clinging is abandoned. This being so the bhikkhu understands thus: 'The conceit "I am," based on the five aggregates as objects of clinging is abandoned in me."

"Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein.

30. "These, Ānanda, are states of wholly profitable origin; they are noble, supramundane, inaccessible to the Evil one.

31. "What do you think, Ānanda? With what aim in view is a disciple justified in seeking the Master's company, even if resisted?"

32. "Our doctrines [dhamma], Venerable Sir, have their roots in the Blessed One; they have the Blessed One as their leader, have the Blessed One as their refuge. It would be good if the meaning of these words would occur to the Blessed One; having heard it, the bhikkhus will bear it in mind."

33. "A disciple, Ānanda, is not justified in seeking the Master's company for the sake of expositions of discourses and stanzas. Why is that? For long, Ānanda, these doctrines have been heard by you, borne in mind, recited by word, reviewed by the mind, thoroughly mastered by the understanding. But such talk as is concerned with

effacement, as favours the mind's release, as leads to complete revulsion, to fading away, to cessation, to pacification, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna; that is to say, talk on wanting little, contentment, seclusion, aloofness from contact, strenuousness, virtuous conduct, concentration, understanding, deliverance, knowledge, and vision concerning deliverance—for the sake of such talk, Ānanda, a disciple is justified in seeking the Master's company, even if resisted.

34. "Yet when this is so, Ānanda, there comes to be the teacher's undoing, there comes to be the pupil's undoing, and there comes to be the undoing of the dweller in the life of purity.

35. "And how, Ānanda, comes to be the teacher's undoing? Here, Ānanda, some teacher retires to a secluded abode: to the forest, the root of a tree, a rock, a hill cleft, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a woodland solitude, an open space, a heap of straw. While dwelling thus in retreat, priests and laymen from town and country visit him. When that happens, he goes astray, hungers, succumbs to craving, and reverts to abundance. This teacher, Ānanda, is said to be undone by the teacher's undoing. He has been struck down by evil unprofitable things that bring defilement; cause continued becoming; conduce to misery; result in pain; and produce future birth, ageing and death. Thus, Ānanda, there comes to be the teacher's undoing.

36. "And how, Ānanda, does there come to be the pupil's undoing? A pupil of that teacher, emulating the teacher's seclusion, retires to a secluded abode Thus, Ānanda, there comes to be the pupil's undoing.

37. "And how, Ānanda, does there come to be the undoing of the dweller in the life of purity? Here, Ānanda, the Perfect One appears in the world, Accomplished, Fully Enlightened, endowed with clear vision and virtuous conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable leader of men to be tamed, teacher of gods and men, Enlightened, Blessed. He retires to a secluded abode: to the forest, the root of a tree, a rock, a hill cleft, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a woodland solitude, an open space, a heap of straw. While dwelling thus in retreat, priests and laymen from town and country visit him. When this happens, he does not go astray, nor hunger, nor succumb to craving, nor revert to abundance. But a disciple of this teacher, emulating his teacher's seclusion, retires to a secluded abode While dwelling thus in retreat, priests and laymen from town and country visit him. When this happens, he goes astray, hungers, succumbs to craving and reverts to abundance. This dweller in the life of purity, Ānanda, is said to be undone by the undoing of the dweller in the life of purity. He has been struck down by evil, unprofitable things that bring defilement; cause continued becoming, conduce to misery; result in pain; and produce future birth, ageing and death. Thus, Ānanda, there comes to be the undoing of a dweller in the life of purity. And herein, Ānanda, the undoing of a dweller in the life of purity has a more painful result, a more bitter result, than the teacher's undoing or the pupil's undoing, and it even leads to rebirth in the states of woe.

38. "And herein, Ānanda, bear yourselves towards me in amity, not in hostility; long shall that be to your welfare and happiness.

39. "And how, Ānanda, do disciples bear themselves in hostility towards the Master, not in amity? Here, Ānanda, compassionate and seeking their welfare, the Master teaches the Truth [dhamma] to the disciples out of compassion: 'This is for your welfare, this is for your happiness.' His disciples do not want to hear, do not give ear, do not lend their minds to knowledge; erring, they turn aside from the

Master's teaching. Thus do disciples bear themselves in hostility towards the Master, not in amity.

40. "And how, Ānanda, do disciples bear themselves in amity towards the Master, not in hostility? Here, Ānanda, compassionate and seeking their welfare, the Master teaches the Truth to the disciples out of compassion: 'This is for your welfare, this is for your happiness.' His disciples want to hear, give ear, lend their minds to knowledge; nor, erring, do they turn aside from the Master's teaching. Thus do disciples bear themselves in amity towards the Master, not in hostility.

"Therefore, Ānanda, bear yourselves in amity towards me, not in hostility; long shall this be for your welfare and happiness.

41. "I shall not, Ānanda, treat you as the potter treats the raw damp clay. Repeatedly admonishing, repeatedly testing, I shall speak to you, Ānanda. He who is sound will stand the test."

So said the Blessed One. Glad at heart, the Venerable Ānanda rejoiced at his words.

Commentary

(What follows is a translation of the Commentary to the Majjhima Nikāya 122 in the Pāṇāśudānī, the "Mahāsuññatā Sutta," supplemented where necessary, and as indicated, with paragraphs from other commentaries to earlier Majjhima Nikāya discourses.)

1. Thus I heard: The Mahāsuññatā Sutta. (Comy. to MN 122)

Herein, *in the country of the Sakyans* means in the country so named; for that country came to be known as Sakyans because it was the Sakyans' residence. But the origin of the Sakyans has been handed down in the Commentary to the "Ambaṭṭha Sutta" (*Dīgha Sutta* 3). *At Kapilavatthu*: in the town so named; for that town was called Kapilavatthu ("Kapila land") because it had been the sage Kapila's residence. That was the village on which he depended for alms. *In Nigrodha's park*: the Sakyans named Nigrodha. When the Blessed One had come to Kapilavatthu at the time of the foregathering of his relatives, Nigrodha had a dwelling place made in his own park and assigned to the Blessed One. It means that he was living in it. (Commentary to MN 14)

2. *Of Kāḷākhemaka* (of "Black" Khemaka): He was called "Black" because of the colour of his skin; but his name was Khemaka. *Dwelling*: a dwelling (monastery) made in that same Nigrodha's park, in one part, by erecting a surrounding wall, building a gate house, constructing dwellings [like those called *haṃsa-vaṭṭaka*?], such as a meeting hall, a refectory, and so forth. *Many resting places*: bed, chair, mattress, pillow, straw mat, leather mat, spread grass, spread leaves, spread straw and so forth were prepared. They were placed bed touching bed ... spread straw touching spread straw, so that it resembled the dwelling place of bhikkhus who have formed themselves into a society. *Do many*: The Blessed One has no doubts, because of the complete destruction of all his defilements during the Session of Enlightenment. The question is a rhetorical one, and the word "do" is merely rhetorical. No one who is

uncertain gets to the acme of attainment. Before this, it seems, the Blessed One had not seen ten or twelve bhikkhus living in one place. Then it occurred to him: “This social life is developed to the utmost in the round of becoming. As water collects into rivers, so social life is developed by beings in hell, in the animal world, in the realm of ghosts, and in the Asura group; and also in the human world, the divine world, and the Brahma world. For hell is ten-thousand leagues across and is crammed with beings like a tube packed with bath powder. There is no counting or reckoning the beings in the place of torture by the fivefold binding [see MN 129 and 130]; likewise in the places of paring with adzes and so forth [see MN 129 and 130]. Such is the way they roast in society. As to the animal world there is no counting or reckoning the termites in a single termite hill; and likewise ants in each ants’ nest. Such is social life in the animal world too. And there are ghost cities a quarter or half a league across crowded with ghosts. Such is social life in the ghost realm, too. The ten-thousand league sphere of Asura demons is like an earring or hole when the needle is put into the ear [?]. Such is social life in the Asura Group too. As regards the human world, there were 5,700,000 in the large clans living at Sāvattḥī, and inside and outside Rājagaha 1,800,000 people [18 *koṭis*]. Such is social life in certain places of the human world too. Beginning with the earth deities, there is social life in the divine world and the Brahma world also. Each deity has two and a half *koṭis* of dancers, even up to nine *koṭis*. Also there are ten thousand Brahmas living in one place.”

Thereupon he thought: “For four incalculable ages and a hundred thousand aeons the Perfections have been fulfilled by me for the purpose of undoing living in societies. And as soon as these bhikkhus have formed themselves into a society and get to delight in society, they will act contrary to that.” Then feeling concern for the Dhamma, he thought again: “If it were possible to announce a training precept that two bhikkhus should not live in one place I would do so; but that is not possible. So I shall expound the discourse called The Great Way of Voidness which, for training clansmen, will be like an announced training precept, like a full-length looking glass placed at the city gate. After that, just as Khatṭiyas [nobles] and so on, seeing their blemishes in that looking glass get rid of them and become unblemished, so indeed, even for 5,000 years after I have attained complete extinction, clansmen delighting in solitude will make an end of the suffering due to the round of becoming by harkening to this discourse and avoiding society.” And the number of clansmen who, by harkening to this discourse and avoiding society have, as though fulfilling the Blessed One’s wish, made an end of suffering and attained complete extinction is past reckoning.

For in the Vālikapiṭṭhi Monastery [in Ceylon] the Abhidhamma scholar called the Elder Abhaya, after reciting this discourse together with a number of bhikkhus on the occasion of taking up residence for the rainy season, exclaimed: “The Fully Enlightened One enjoins us to act thus; and what are we doing?” And by avoiding society and delighting in solitude all of them attained arahatship within that same rainy season. This discourse is called the “breaker-up of societies.”

3. *Of Ghatā*: of the one so named. *At the dwelling*: This dwelling too, was built like Kāḷakhemaka’s dwelling, in a part of Nigrodha’s park. *Making robes*: the repairing of those already made by patching, washing, and so forth, old and dirty ones; and it is also the making up of unmade ones by arranging and sewing cloth provided for the purpose of robes. Both are right, but here making up of unmade ones is intended, for people had given the Elder Ānanda material for robes, which is why he was doing work on robes there with a number of bhikkhus.

4. And those bhikkhus, sitting from the time announced for the needle work in the morning, get up from it some time unannounced, thinking: "When the sewing is finished we shall set our resting places in order." They had not set them in order, as "It is our time for robe making." The Elder, it seems, thought: "Surely it is those resting places that have not been arranged by those bhikkhus that will have been seen by the Blessed One; consequently the Master is displeased and desires to give a severe reproof. I will be a support for those bhikkhus." That is why he spoke as he did. But the intention here is this: "Venerable Sir, these bhikkhus are living in this way not just because they delight in being busy, but on account of robe-making."

5. *A bhikkhu, Ānanda, does not shine forth*: "Ānanda, whether it is an instance of being busy or whether it is an instance of robe-making or not, still a bhikkhu who delights in company does not shine forth. Do not be a support where there is no occasion for support." Here, *company* is gathering with one's own community; *society* is gathering with different sorts of people. So whether he delights in company or in society, in either case a bhikkhu who likes the fullness of society, who is bound by the ties of society, does not shine forth. But it is when a bhikkhu sweeps out his daytime quarters after his meal and, after washing his feet well, takes up his basic meditation subject and devotes himself to delight in solitude, he shines forth in the Enlightened One's Dispensation.

6. *The bliss of renunciation*: the bliss in him who has renounced sense-desires. *The bliss of seclusion* is the bliss of seclusion from sense-desires too. But what leads to the pacification of greed and so forth is *the bliss of peace*, what leads to the enlightenment due to the path is the *bliss of enlightenment*. *Obtain ... at will*: one who obtains his desire, who obtains his wish without trouble; one who obtains without pain; one who obtains in abundance.

7. *Temporary*: free from defilement on any occasion of full absorption. *Delectable*: agreeable. *Mind deliverance*: the mind deliverance of the fine-material and immaterial worlds. For it is said: "The four absorptions [jhāna] and the four immaterial attainments, these are the temporary liberation." *Permanent*: not deliverance from defilements occasionally but rather deliverance which is perpetual and supramundane. For it is said: "The four noble paths and the four fruitions of recluship, these are the permanent liberation." *Unshakeable*: not to be shaken by defilements.

So far what has been said? A bhikkhu who delights in company, who is bound by the ties of society, will be unable to produce either mundane or supramundane special qualities. But by avoiding society and delighting in solitude he can do so. For just as in the case of the Bodhisatta Vipassi, as long as he wandered during seven years surrounded by eighty-four thousand homeless ones, he was unable to produce the special quality of omniscience; but by avoiding society and delighting in solitude he climbed to the summit of enlightenment and produced the special quality of omniscience in seven days. Also as long as our Bodhisatta wandered with the Group of Five during six years he was unable to produce the special quality of omniscience; but when they left him, by delighting in solitude he climbed the summit of enlightenment and produced the special quality of omniscience.

8. Having thus pointed out the lack of attainment of special qualities of one who delights in company, he said: *I do not see, Ānanda, etc.*, in order to point out how this flaw arises. Here, *one material form* is a physical body. *In him who delights ... therein*: in him who delights through greed for that material form; *will not cause ... to arise*: that

would not cause these things to arise in him who delights in that material form: “I do not see any such material form.” And then they arise, too, as they did in Sañjaya owing to the changed state of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, called their coming to the discipleship of Him of the Ten Powers [see Vinaya Mahā Vagga]; as they did in Nātha-puta owing to the changed state of the householder UPali [see MN 71]; and as they did in the rich man in the “Piyajātika Sutta” [see MN 87].

9. *But this ... Ānanda*, What is the sequence of meaning? For the purpose of removing the occasion in which any unintelligent bhikkhu newly gone forth should say: “The Fully Enlightened One leads us away from society like cattle sent into a field, and he exhorts us to solitude, but he himself lives surrounded by kings, kings’ ministers, and so on,” he began this part of the teaching in order to show that the Perfect One is alone even when sitting in the midst of a community extending over a world sphere.

Any sign: any sign [mark] of visible objects and so forth [of materiality, and so forth]. *Internally*: internally as regards place of occurrence. *Voidness*: fruition attainment through Voidness [Commentary to MN 122].

Fruition attainment is called voidness firstly in virtue of its own special quality But Nibbana as its object is also called voidness as it is void of greed, hate and delusion It is also explained according to the way of coming to the path; for insight is called “void” and “signless” and “desireless”. Herein, when a bhikkhu, after laying hold of formations as impermanent and seeing them in their impermanent aspect, causes emergence of the path in the impermanent aspect, his insight leading to emergence is called signless [*animitta*]. When after laying hold of them as painful and seeing them in their painful aspect, it is called desireless [*appanihita*]. When, after laying hold of them as no-self and seeing them in their aspect of no-self, he causes emergence of the path in the aspect of no-self, it is called void [*suñña*]. Herein the path due to signless insight is called signless and the fruition of the signless path is called signless. Likewise, the desireless and the void [Commentary to MN 44].

His mind tends to seclusion: tends to Nibbāna. It has put an end to, is without remainder of, unsupported by, dissociated from, states which give rise to cankers. *Associated with dismissal*: associated with such words as “You may go.” But at what periods did the Blessed One speak thus? Either during the period of activity following the meal, or during the period of activity in the first watch [of the night]. For after the meal the Blessed One adopts the lion’s pose in the Perfumed Cell and then he rises and sits absorbed in fruition attainment. At that time the community gathers for the purpose of hearing the Dhamma. Then the Blessed One, who knows the time, comes forth from the Perfumed Cell and goes to the Enlightened One’s exalted seat and he teaches the Dhamma. Then, not exceeding the time, like one judging the cooking of a medicinal oil, he dismisses the community with his mind inclining to seclusion. Also in the first watch of the night, he dismisses the community thus: “The night is well advanced; now it is time to do as you think fit.” For since reaching enlightenment even the Buddhas’ twofold five-door-consciousness incline to Nibbāna. [The twofold five-door consciousness are the kamma-resultant eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue- and body-consciousness, each with either a pleasant or an unpleasant object, as explained in the *Visuddhi Magga*, Ch. XIV. The sub-commentary (*Tikā*) to the *Papañcasūdanī* comments: “The two fivefold consciousness incline to Nibbāna owing to the mind-consciousness being intent upon it. For it is owing to the thoroughness of the Buddhas’ full-

understanding of formations that only the repugnant aspect appears evident even in refined objects which come into focus. How much more so in the others? The mind inclines only to Nibbāna because of Nibbāna's extreme peacefulness and sublimity, just as one who is harrassed by thirst inclines to a place where there is cool water."]

10–11. *Therefore, Ānanda:* because dwelling in voidness is peaceful and sublime, therefore. *Internally:* only internally as to the range of object (that is, not externally).

12. *Voidness internally:* in himself internally; the meaning is: produced in regard to his own five aggregates. [Commentary to MN 122]

"And which, friend, is the mind-deliverance of voidness? Here, friend, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty place, considers thus: 'This is void of self or property of a self'. [MN 43]

Of self: void of self, called personality, man, person, and so on. *Or property of a self:* Void of anything belonging to self called requisite of robes and so forth The mind-deliverance of voidness belongs to the sense-sphere as to plane, and its object is formations; for it is insight that is here meant by "voidness." [Commentary to MN 43]

Possessed of full awareness: fully aware through successfully knowing the meditation subject. *Externally:* in regard to another's five aggregates. *Internally and externally:* at one time internally, at another time externally.

13. *The imperturbable [āneñjā:* this is a term for the four immaterial attainments of the sphere of boundless space, and so forth]: he brings to mind the imperturbable immaterial attainment [resolving]: "I will become one who is Both Ways Released [*ubhato-bhāga-vimatto*, that is, one who has attained both all eight meditative attainments and arahatship"]

14. *In that same sign of concentration as before* is said with reference to jhāna treated as the basis for insight. For when one who has emerged from a basic jhāna which is still unfamiliar, and brings to mind voidness internally, his mind does not enter into voidness. Thereupon, thinking: "How about another's continuity [of aggregates]?" he brings it to mind externally. There also it does not enter into it. Thereupon thinking: "How about at one time in my own continuity and another time in another's continuity?" he brings to mind internally and externally. There also it does not enter into it. Thereupon, desiring to become one who is Both Ways Released, thinking: "How about the immaterial attainment?" he brings to mind the imperturbable. There also it does not enter into voidness. Now in that case he should not give up his effort and go following after supporters and so on, but the same basic jhāna should be thoroughly brought to mind again and again. Thus he said "In that same" and so on, in order to point out that it is like a tree cutter's axe that does not have its effect; but by resharpening the edge the axe may cut. Similarly, his repeatedly bringing to mind the basic jhāna will have its effect in regard to the meditation subject.

15–16. Now in order to point out that when one has practised this, his bringing to mind succeeds in respect to whatever he brings to mind, he *enters into*.

17. *Dwelling in this way:* in this way consisting of serenity [concentration] and insight [*samatha-vipassanā*]. *Thus he is possessed of full awareness therein:* so, when the meditation subject succeeds while he is walking, he is possessed of full awareness through knowing that his meditation subject has succeeded.

18–20. *Lies down*: stretches himself out. Here, after walking for any given length of time, now knowing, “I am able to walk for so long” he should stand, without breaking the sequence of postures; and so in each section. [Commentary to MN 122]

21. *Talk of kings* is talk about kings proceeding like this: “Mahāsammata, Mandhātu, Dhammāsoka had so much power” and so on. So too in the case of *robbers*, and so on. As regards these, such talk as “such and such a king is handsome, good looking” and so forth, is both worldly talk and “animal talk” [that is, pointless]. But if it proceeds “So and so who was so powerful came to destruction” it keeps within the meditation subject. And as regards robbers, talk about Mūladeva or Meghamāla being so powerful and about their deeds thus: “Ah, what heroes!” is worldly talk and “animal talk.” And as regards *battles*, it is “animal talk” when it is instigated by satisfaction of sense-desires thus: “In the Bhārata battle, and so forth, so and so was killed thus, was wounded thus”; but when it proceeds, “even they came to destruction,” then talk in each case conforms to a meditation subject. Moreover it is wrong to talk about *food* and so forth according to satisfaction of sense-desires thus: “We chewed, we ate, we drank, we used what looked like this, smelt like this, tasted like this, was like this to touch.” But it is right to talk of it meaningfully thus: “Formerly we gave food, drink, clothing, beds, garlands and perfumes that looked like this and so forth to the virtuous; we made such an offering at the shrine.” As regards *relatives* and so on, it is wrong to say, according to satisfaction of sense-desires, “our relatives are brave, capable” or “formerly we went about in vehicles like this.” But it should be said meaningfully thus: “even those relatives of ours have passed away” or “formerly we gave sandals like this to the Order.” *Villages*: it is wrong to talk of villages as good or bad to live in, or easy or hard to get alms in, or according to satisfaction of sense-desires thus: “The inhabitants of such and such a village are brave, capable”. But it is right to talk meaningfully thus: “They have faith, they have confidence” or “They have come to destruction and have passed away.” So too in the case of *towns, cities and countries*. Talk of *women* is wrong when instigated by satisfaction of sense-desires and is about appearance, figure, and so forth; it is right only if it proceeds thus: “they have faith, confidence” or “they have come to destruction.” Talk of *heroes* is wrong if it is in accordance with satisfaction of sense-desires thus: “the soldier called Nandamitta was a hero”; it is right only if it proceeds thus: “He had faith” or “He has come to destruction.” Talk of *street inhabitants* is wrong if it accords with satisfaction of sense-desires thus: “The people of such and such a street are easy to live with, brave, capable”; it is right only if it proceeds thus: “They have faith” or “They have come to destruction.” Talk of *wells* is said of talk of places for getting water, or it is talk of women water-carriers. It is wrong when concerned with satisfaction of sense-desires thus: “She is pretty, she is clever at dancing and singing”; it is right only if it begins, “She has faith, has confidence.” Talk of the *dead* is talk of past relatives; the definition here is the same as that for present relatives. Talk of *trivialities* is meaningless talk of different kinds that is not included in those already dealt with and still to be dealt with. Talk of *the origin of the world* is talk of the Lokāyatas,¹ sophists [*vitanda*] and chatter of the kind beginning, “This world was created by whom? It was created by so and so.” “A crow is white because its bones are white.” “A crane is red because its blood is red.” *Talk of the origin of the sea* is meaningless talk of the sea’s origin of the kind beginning thus: “Why [is it called] sea [*samudda*]? Because it was excavated by the god Sagara. Because he marked it with the seal [*muddō*] of his hand saying, ‘The

¹ A *Lokāyata* is a philosopher who engages in cosmological speculations.

ocean [sōgara] has been excavated by me, it is called sea [samudda].’ *Whether things are or are not* is talk asserting that for some meaningless reason or other there is consequently existence; there is consequently non-existence. And here “existence” is eternity and “non-existence” is annihilation; “existence” is increase, “non-existence” is diminution; “existence” sense-pleasure, “non-existence” is self mortification. So with this talk on *whether things are or are not*, “animal talk” is of thirty-two kinds. [Commentary to MN 76]

In such talk I shall not indulge. Thus he is possessed of full awareness: thus he is one who practises full awareness through knowing “*I shall not indulge.*” In the second paragraph he is one who practises full awareness through knowing, “*In such talk I shall indulge.*” This bhikkhu’s serenity and insight are fresh², and for the purpose of guarding them the seven kinds of suitable things are needed:

“Abode, resort, and speech, and person,
The food, the climate, and posture,
Select and cultivate of each
The kind that is most suitable.”

This is said for the purpose of pointing these out.

22. [For the ten kinds of suitable talk see below.]

23–24. As regards the two paragraphs dealing with thoughts, full awareness should be understood as knowing respectively the not thinking and the thinking of the thoughts.

25. Having thus stated two of the paths by the abandoning of wrong thoughts, he now said: *There are, Ānanda, these five cords of sense-desire*, and so on, speaking of the insight for the third path. *Concerned with any source of defilement:* concerned with any reason whatever among these five cords of sense-desire for the arising of defilements. *Attachment:* unabandoned defilement which appears as attachment.

26. *Then:* it being present. *Possessed of full awareness:* possessed of full awareness through knowing the insuccess of the meditation subject.

27. In the second paragraph, *possessed of full awareness* means possessed of full awareness through knowing the success of the meditation subject. For when he reviews thus: “Is desire and greed in regard to these five cords of sense-desire abandoned in me or not?” and knows that it is not abandoned, this bhikkhu exerts energy and abolishes it by means of the path of Non-Return. Thereupon, when he reviews after emerging from the fruition which follows next upon the path, he knows that it is abandoned. He is possessed of full awareness through knowing that, is what is meant.

28–29. Now speaking of the Arahāt path, he said, *There are, Ānanda, the five aggregates as objects of clinging*, and so on. *Is abandoned* means that the conceit “I am,” the desire, the inherent tendency to assert “I am” based on materiality, is abandoned; likewise that based on feeling and so on. Full awareness should be understood as previously stated.

30. *These, Ānanda, are states* is said with reference to the states of serenity [samatha] and insight [vipassana] and path and fruition set forth above. *Of ... profitable origin:*

² According to the *Visuddhi Magga*, “fresh [or weak] insight” (*taruna vipassani*) extends as far as the Contemplation of Danger, but from the Contemplation of Revulsion onwards it is “strong insight”. (See Chapter XXI)

come from what is profitable. For profitable states can be both profitable and derived from the profitable, that is to say, the first jhāna is profitable, the second jhāna is both profitable and derived from the profitable; the sphere of nothingness is profitable and the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is both profitable and derived from the profitable; the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is profitable and the path of Stream-entry is both profitable and derived from the profitable; the path of Non-Return is profitable and the path of Arahatsip is both profitable and derived from the profitable. Likewise the first jhāna is profitable and states associated therewith are both profitable and derived from the profitable; the path of Arahatsip is profitable and the states associated therewith are both profitable and derived from the profitable. *Noble*: free from defilements and purified. *Supramundane*: beyond the world and purified. *Inaccessible to the Evil One*: inaccessible to Māra, the Evil One. For Māra does not see the mind of a bhikkhu who sits absorbed in the eight attainments when they are made the basis of insight. Nor is he able to know the consciousness that occurs in dependence on that as object. That is why “inaccessible” is said.

31–32. *What do you think*. Why did he say this? He said it in order to point out that there is one advantage in society. *In seeking the Master’s company*: in going to, in frequenting.

33. *A disciple, Ānanda, is not*: Here, though one who is well-taught [who has studied much] has been compared by the Blessed One to a soldier possessed of the five weapons in the passage “The well-taught noble disciple, bhikkhus, abandons the unprofitable and develops the profitable, he abandons the reproachable and develops the irreproachable; and so he safeguards himself.” [A IV 109] Nevertheless, since he, who does not, after learning the scriptures, practise in conformity with them, lacks those weapons, but he who does so has them, he therefore said “a disciple, Ānanda, is not,” and so on, pointing out that he is not justified in seeking his company with that aim alone in view.

Now, in order to point out with what aim in view the Master’s company should be sought, he said *But such talk as is* and so on. So in this sutta, the ten examples of talk [that is, talk of wanting little, of contentment, and so forth] are given in three places: *in such talk I shall indulge* [Paragraph 22] they are given by way of the suitable and the unsuitable; in the passage *for the sake of expositions of discourses and stanzas* [Paragraph 33] they are given as scriptures learned by ear; and *in this place* [Paragraph 33] they are given directly, as something to be fulfilled. Therefore one who explains the ten examples of talk in this sutta should do so pausing here for that purpose. [The “ten examples of (suitable) talk” are treated in detail in the Commentary to MN 24.]

34. Now because there are some who dwell alone and who are not successful in getting at the meaning of the scriptures, he therefore said *Yet when this is so, Ānanda* and so on, pointing out the disadvantage in solitude with reference to that. Here, *Yet when this is so, Ānanda* means when this solitary state exists. The teacher is a teacher who is a sectarian outside the Dispensation.

35–37. *By the teacher’s undoing*: the undoing of the teacher is by the undoing due to defilements that have arisen inside him. So with the other kinds of undoing. *He has been struck down*: they [that is, the unsuitable things] have killed him; the death of his special qualities and virtues (not his physical death) is stated by this.

38. But why is it said that *the undoing of the dweller in the life of purity* has a more painful result, a more bitter result, and it even leads to rebirth in states of woe? Going

into homelessness outside the Dispensation brings small gain; there is no outstandingly great or special quality to be developed there, but only the eight [meditative] attainments and the five supernormal powers beginning with the miraculous powers. Accordingly, just as there is no great suffering for one who falls from the back of a donkey (his body merely gets covered with dust), so, since in a sect outside the Dispensation he falls only from worldly special qualities [*lokiya-guṇa*], it is not said in this way of the first two kinds of undoing. But going into homelessness in the Dispensation brings great gain. Here the outstandingly special qualities are the four paths, the four fruitions, and nibbāna. Accordingly, just as when a noble youth, wellborn on both parental sides, traversing a city and seated in the place of honour on the back of an elephant, falls from the elephant's back, he comes to great suffering; so, since in falling away from the Dispensation he falls away from the expectation of the [aforesaid] nine supramundane special qualities [*lokuttara-guṇa*], it is said in this way of the undoing of the dweller in the life of purity.

39–40. *Therefore*: the construing should be done both with the preceding meaning and with the following meaning thus: because the undoing of the dweller in the life of purity leads to greater suffering than the other two kinds, because the practice of hostility [towards the Blessed One, see the *Discourse* (Paragraphs 38–39)] for long leads to harm and suffering, but the practice of amity [towards the Blessed One] leads to welfare. *In amity*: by the practice of amity. *In hostility*: by the practice of hostility.

Erring, do they turn aside from the Master's teaching: one who transgresses on purpose even by as much as an offence of wrongdoing [*dukkata*] or wrong speech [*dubbhāsita*] is called one who “errs, turns aside.”

It is one who does not so transgress that is called one who “does not err, does not turn aside.”

41. *I Shall not, Ānanda, treat you as*: I shall not behave towards you like. *Raw*: unbaked. *Damp clay*: a raw, not quite dry pot. For a potter takes the raw, not quite dry, clay pot gently with both hands lest it should break. Accordingly, I shall not behave towards you as the potter behaves towards the damp clay. *Repeatedly admonishing*: after advising once I shall not be silent; I shall advise and instruct by repeatedly admonishing. *Repeatedly testing*: by repeatedly testing for flaws. Just as the potter tests for those that are cracked, split or faulty among the baked pots and puts them aside, and he takes only those that are well-baked after he has tapped them again and again, so I too shall advise and instruct by repeatedly testing. He who is sound will stand the test: he among you thus advised by me, who is sound, through having reached the path and its fruition, will stand the test Furthermore the worldly special qualities as well are here intended by “sound.”

The rest is clear throughout. (Commentary to MN 122)

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