

MN 52

The Man from Aṭṭhakanāgara

Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta

Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center

A Dhamma talk by Bhante Vimalaramsi

30-Aug-07

BV = Bhante Vimalaramsi

BJ = Bhante Jotikabhivamsa

BV: Ok –

MN:

1. **THUS HAVE I HEARD.** On one occasion the Venerable Ānanda was living at Beluvagamaka near Vesāli.

BV: Too bad they don't have American names, isn't it? You know, Chicago, San Diego.

MN:

2. Now on that occasion the householder Dasama of Aṭṭhakanāgara had arrived at Pāṭaliputta for some business or other. Then he went to a certain bhikkhu in Kukkuṭa's Park, and after paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and asked him: "Where does the venerable Ānanda live now, venerable sir? I wish to see the venerable Ānanda."

"The venerable Ānanda is living at Beluvagamaka near Vesāli, householder."

3. When the householder Dasama had completed his business at Pāṭaliputta, he went to the venerable Ānanda at Beluvagamaka near Vesāli. After paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and asked him:

"Venerable Ānanda, has any one thing been proclaimed by the Blessed One who knows and sees, accomplished and fully enlightened, wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute, his unliberated mind comes to be liberated, his undestroyed taints come to be destroyed, and he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before?"

"Yes, householder, one such thing has been proclaimed by the Blessed One."

"What is that one thing, venerable Ānanda?"

4. "Here, householder, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. He considers this and understands it thus: 'This first jhāna is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints.

BV: Now this is telling you, that even if you go into just the first jhāna, you can get to the destruction of the taints. You don't have to go through all of the jhānas. It's considerably easier when you do, but, you don't have to. It depends on, how you see things.

Look at that. Both of them have their head on the pillow. Isn't that something.

So, what I was telling you before, that if you attain jhāna, you have the potential, in this lifetime, to attain nibbāna. It's just, means that you have to be, wanting that to happen, by pointing your mind in that direction, and then working towards that, seeing how the process of everything works, without getting involved in the content, of it. Seeing the process, how does this arise? Why does it arise? Who cares? How does it arise? That's the key. And when you see that as part of a process, now you're seeing it as an impersonal process. And the more you see it as impersonal, the more freedom there is, the easier it is to let go of, the attachments to this or that.

MN:

But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints because of that desire for the Dhamma, that delight in the Dhamma, then with the destruction of the five lower fetters he becomes one due to reappear spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes.]

BV: Now we're talking about, if you didn't get to be an arahat after you got out of the first jhāna, than at least you'll get to be an anāgāmi.

MN:

and there attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world.

BV: And that's one of the advantages of being an anāgāmī. You are reborn in a brahma loca, and there's, there's six, brahma locas that you can reborn in, and this is where the idea of the Pure Abodes come from. But there's some real misunderstanding because they, the Pureland Mahāyāna sect, they really get into their heavenly realm and it's more beautiful than anything you've ever heard of before, and you're destined to get to nibbāna after you've experienced this. But, this is for people that are anāgāmīs. It's for that realm of being an anāgāmī. It is not for just anybody for repeating a word, over and over Amitābha, Amitābha, Amitābha. For one thing, the Buddha never taught mantras. That's Hindu. And when I put that in my book, The Mindfulness of Breathing book, you have no idea how angry that made some people that had been practicing Tibetan Buddhism, because they like their mantras.

Anyway, an anāgāmī, see you have, sotāpanna. If you're a sotāpanna, at the most, you will have seven more lifetimes before you get off of the wheel. You become, a sakadāgāmī, this is called a once returner. That means that you'll come back to the human realm, one more time, before you become, fully enlightened. The anāgāmī is called the no returner, because they're never going to be reborn in the human realm again. Now they might live for a real long time, in one of the brahma locas, and they do their work there, and become an arahat, and then when the karma of that life is burned out, then when they die, there is no more becoming. They're off of the wheel.

MN:

"This is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One who knows and sees, accomplished and fully enlightened, wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute, his unliberated mind comes to be liberated, his undestroyed taints come to be destroyed, and he

attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.

5. "Again, with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, a bhikkhu enters and abides in the second jhāna...He considers this and understands it thus: 'This second jhāna is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints.

BV: (To Ven. UJ) Now I have a question for you in the text itself. Because it's bringing up, just about anicca. It's just bringing up about impermanence. Does it say anything about the impersonal nature of this process, in the sutta?

BJ: Doesn't show.

BV: It doesn't show. Ok, thank you.

Now what they're doing, is ah, the commentary is real big on talking about impermanence, suffering, and not-self, and how you have to see that, in everything. But the actual practice, is seeing Dependent Origination, and how that works. If you just look at impermanence, suffering, and not-self, you don't go very deep, with your understanding of how this process works. It still stays pretty much on the surface. So, it's important to see that everything is impermanent, and it is a form of suffering, and it is a impersonal process. It's important to see that, but not near as important as it is to see how the process actually does work and the four noble truths intertwined in it.

Repeats (If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints.) Now, basically, what they're saying is:

Repeats (But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints.)

I have real problem with that statement. Because it's pushing you to look at impermanence, rather than going deeper into the process, and seeing the arising and passing away of all phenomena, at each one of the links, and it's not really mentioned here. So, and they don't bring up the word "wisdom" here, so I have some, some issue. Because we have to be careful how we, ah, how we develop our understanding. We have to be very careful with that. If we make up our mind that it's just- our understanding is really good, but it's at, impermanence and suffering, then you never even consider looking any deeper than that. You want to develop that mind that, that does penetrate deeper, that does look more closely at how the process works.

Ok-

MN:

But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints...without ever returning from that world.

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.

6. "Again, with the fading away as well of rapture, a bhikkhu...enters upon and abides in the third jhāna...He considers this and understands it thus: 'This third jhāna is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints. But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints...without ever returning from that world.

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.

7. "Again, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain...a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna...He considers this and understands it thus: This fourth jhāna is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' {If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints.}

BV: Boy, I'm really having problems with this sutta right now. It's like it's pointing away from the experience of nibbāna, rather than to the experience of nibbāna. Because it's not, it's, it's more involved with what is volitionally produced and it being impermanent, than seeing how the impersonal process is actually working. I guess, if you want to look at it this way: If he is steady in that, if he is steady in seeing the impermanence, and letting things be, and seeing that process, then attaining the cessation, you could say it that way, and that's how he would attain the destruction of the taints. I don't see any other way that that can happen.

MN:

But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints...without ever returning from that world.

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.

8. "Again, a bhikkhu abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted,

immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will. He considers this and understands it thus: 'This deliverance of mind through loving-kindness is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints. But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints...without ever returning from that world.

BV: Now the interesting thing about these statements, is, that the only way, that you can become an anāgāmi, or an arahat, is through the mental development of meditation. But it's not just the mental development of the meditation, it's the mental development of the meditation and your understanding. And during the time of the Buddha, there was a lot of people that did all kinds of weird meditation, and they would come to the Buddha, and he would straighten out their thinking, and because they had done so much meditation, they would start relaxing more and more because they hadn't seen the tension and tightness, and just while he was talking, they would become arahats, because they had the meditation already. They didn't have the understanding that needs to be there. That's the insight and the samatha, they need to be hooked together.

Yeah?

S: ~

BV: To become a sotāpana, a sakadāgāmi, you can do the meditation, or not, depending on your understanding. You can become a sotāpana, if your understanding is good enough, about the process of Dependent Origination. That's what happened to Sāriputta. He ran across the arahat, Assaji. And he'd been practicing meditation with somebody else. And the arahat was eating his meal, and Sāriputta got him some water and waited patiently until he got

done, and washed and cleaned up, then he said: "Who do you practice with, and what do they teach?" Now Assaji, he just simply said: "I practice with the Buddha, and everything that arises,"... no, that wasn't it. Bhante, what is the verse for Sāriputta, that, when he heard, he became a sotāpana?

BJ: ~

BV: Yeah, it is Dependent Origination, but he gave him the first part, and it was just two lines. And just his hearing that, his understanding was such, that he became a sotāpana. And then he heard the rest of the verse, and he said: "Thank you very much, I'm going to your teacher now." And he went to Moggallāna because they had made an agreement that whoever attained any super human state first, they would go and tell the other one. And then when he went to Moggallāna, he gave Moggallāna the whole verse, and Moggallāna became a sotāpana, just from hearing it. But they had developed their meditation before. Their understanding was quite brilliant.

S: ~

BV: They didn't realize it, but the Buddha recognized it, when they started coming. When Moggallāna saw Sāriputta, Sāriputta was very vibrant, and radiant, and very much in the present moment, and he noticed those kind of thing, because they'd been traveling around together a lot, you know . So, to become a sakadāgāmī or a sotāpana, you can, do that, with a minimum amount of, meditation, but it's always easier if there is some meditation. Now there's different kinds of sotāpana. There's one kind that's called a Dhamma sotāpana, there's one that's called a faith sotāpana. Now they have the experience of seeing nibbāna, but they have not

attained the fruition yet. And they will have a tendency to want to sit down and do meditation, and they start seeing how Dependent Origination is in everything, and how it works. For some, they think of it only as a very narrow, very fine thing, and you come along and say: "Well don't only look at it that way, it's in everything and it can be very big too." Or if they're looking at everything very big, you come along and say: "Well it's very fine and you can look at that way too." And that can be enough to trigger somebody's mind so they do have the experience.

Anyway.

The interesting part about this, right here, is that it's talking about practicing Loving-Kindness, and then attaining nibbāna. And it's not just any nibbāna, it's either having all of the taints destroyed, or becoming an anāgāmī. So, this belief that Loving-Kindness only leads you to the jhāna, right here, says not. That's not the way it works. And they've been trying to figure out the one-pointed jhāna, on how to make that work, for a millennium. Long periods of time, they've been working with that. And that's why there aren't so many arahats around today. Because they got off of the path. They just stopped following what the Buddha said, especially about, the relaxing step. Because that changes your entire meditation. There's no getting around that. And you see how important the relaxing step is now, when you start seeing that little twinkles and stuff, and you relax right then, it doesn't even come up into any kind of internal verbalization. So you're really starting to purify your mind with much more clarity and depth, absolutely.

MN:

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.

9. "Again, a bhikkhu abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion...without ill will. He considers this and understands it thus: This deliverance of mind through compassion is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints. But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints...without ever returning from that world.

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.

10. "Again, a bhikkhu abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with altruistic joy...without ill will. He considers this and understands it thus: This deliverance of mind through altruistic joy is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints. {But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints...without ever returning from that world.

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.}

BV: I have problems with: "If he is steady in that,". I have real problems with that, because that doesn't tell you what he's steady in. And you naturally start assuming that you're looking at the impermanence, rather than the process of Dependent Origination, and, impermanence.

Anyway -

MN:

11. "Again, a bhikkhu abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity...without ill will. He considers this and understands it thus: This deliverance of mind through equanimity is conditioned and volitionally produced. {But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints. But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints...without ever returning from that world.

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.}

BV: So.

MN:

12. "Again, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, aware that 'space is infinite.' a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of infinite space. He considers this and understands it thus: This attainment of the base of infinite space is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints. But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints...without ever returning from that world.

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.

13. "Again, by completely surmounting the base of infinite space, aware that 'consciousness is infinite,' a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of infinite consciousness. He considers this and

understands it thus: "This attainment of the base of infinite consciousness is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints. But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints...without ever returning from that world.

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before.

14. "Again, by completely surmounting the base of infinite consciousness, aware that 'there is nothing,' a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of nothingness. He considers this and understands it thus: 'This attainment of the base of nothingness is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' If he is steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints. But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints because of that desire for the Dhamma, that delight in the Dhamma, then with the destruction of the five lower fetters he becomes one due to reappear spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes] and there attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world.

"This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One who knows and sees, accomplished and fully enlightened, wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute, his unliberated mind comes to be liberated, his undestroyed taints come to be destroyed, and he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before."

15. When venerable Ānanda had spoken, the householder Dasama of Aṭṭhakanāgara said to him: "Venerable Ānanda, just as if a man seeking one entrance to a hidden treasure came all at once upon eleven entrances to a hidden treasure, so too, while I was seeking one door to the Deathless, I have come all at once to hear of eleven doors to the Deathless. Just as if a man had a house with eleven doors and when that house caught on fire, he could flee to safety by any one of these eleven doors, so I can flee to safety by any one of

these eleven doors to the Deathless. Venerable sir, these sectarians will even seek a teacher's fee for their teachers; why shouldn't I make an offering to the venerable Ānanda?"

16 Then the householder Dasama of Aṭṭhakanāgara assembled the Sangha of bhikkhus from Pāṭaliputta and Vesāli, and with his own hands he served and satisfied them with various kinds of good food. He presented a pair of cloths to each bhikkhu, and he presented a triple robe to the venerable Ānanda, and he had a dwelling worth five hundred built for the venerable Ānanda.

BV: I guess he got off on Ānanda, hun? (Laughs) Yes?

BJ: ~

BV: Here, when you hear: "subject to cessation", it makes you think: "Ah, this is leading to nibbāna", that kind of cessation, but, I don't think that's... I'm suspect of this sutta, very much. See, we have to have wisdom in there some where, but we don't. And that makes me suspect of this sutta. I hadn't thought of it that way before, but it's really pretty much true. It keeps your observations more surface. Any time you're just looking at impermanence, without seeing that Dependent Origination, it's way up here, and we want to be down here some where.

Anyway, any questions, statements, any thing like that?

Let's share some merit then.

May suffering ones, be suffering free

And the fear struck, fearless be

May the grieving shed all grief

And may all beings find relief.

May all beings share this merit that we have thus acquired

For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.

May beings inhabiting space and earth

Devas and nagas of mighty power

Share this merit of ours.

May they long protect the Lord Buddha's dispensation.

Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . .

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