

MN-106

The Way to the Imperturbable

Ānenjasappāya Sutta

Dhamma Talk presented by Bhante Vimalaramsi

at Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center

11-Oct-06

BV: This particular sutta's kind of fun, because we start off with the fourth jhāna, and go deeper from there on out.

MN:

1. **THUS HAVE I HEARD.** On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Kuru country where there was a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadhamma. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus."—"Venerable sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. "Bhikkhus, sensual pleasures are impermanent, hollow, false, deceptive; they are illusory, the prattle of fools. Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, [262] sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come—both alike are Mara's realm, Mara's domain, Mara's bait, Mara's hunting ground. On account of them, these evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and presumption arise, and they constitute an obstruction to a noble disciple in training here.

(THE IMPERTURBABLE)

3. "Therein, bhikkhus, a noble disciple considers thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come...constitute an obstruction to a noble disciple in training here. Suppose I were to abide with a mind abundant and exalted, having transcended the world and made a firm determination with the mind. When I do so, there will be no more evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and presumption in me, and with the abandoning of them my mind will be unlimited, immeasurable, and well developed.' When he practises in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base.

BV: He's talking about the fourth jhāna.

MN:

Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he resolves [upon it] with wisdom, on the dissolution of the body, after death it is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on [to rebirth] in the imperturbable.

BV: Rebirth in the imperturbable is in to the formless realm, the realm of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Now these imperturbable states when, if you would die after having experienced this, and had mastery in it, you would be reborn in a realm, if it was infinite space, that lasts for eight thousand mahākappas. We're talking about world cycles, so we're talking about pretty long time. If you have had the experience of infinite consciousness, and you have mastery in it, then you would be reborn in an immaterial realm, where it's just mind, and it would last for sixteen thousand mahākappas. If you experience the realm of nothingness, and you have mastery in it and you die, when you die you will go to the immaterial realm, and it lasts for sixty thousand mahākappas. If you have experience and mastery in neither-perception-nor-non-perception, when you die, you go to a realm that lasts for eighty four thousand mahākappas, and that's as high, and as long as you will ever live.

S: ~ mahākappa~?

BV: World cycle.

S: Which is?

BV: Expansion and contraction of the universe.

S: What is mastery? You..

BV: Go in at will. Yeah. And the mastery, I mean go in at will, for any length of time that you want, up to seven days.

S: ~

BV: That's how long you will live, in that realm. Now when you...When your karma...See this is how purified your mind becomes, to be able to live for that long a period of time in that kind of realm. There still is mental activity in that realm. When you would die out of the immaterial realm, you would be reborn in a Brahma loca, which goes from, now what is it? A third of a mahākappa to five hundred mahākappas. And then you would be reborn in a deva loca for a period of time, And then depending on your karma, from there you'll be reborn as a human being or an animal, or even in a hell realm after that, because you've burned away all of that good karma of that mental development.

MN:

This, bhikkhus, is declared to be the first way directed to the imperturbable.

4. "Again, bhikkhus, a noble disciple considers thus: '[There are] sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come; whatever material form [there is], all material form is the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements.' When he practises in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base. Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he

resolves [upon it] with wisdom. On the dissolution of the body, after death, it is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on [to rebirth] in the imperturbable. This, bhikkhus, is declared to be the second way directed to the imperturbable. [263]

5. "Again, bhikkhus, a noble disciple considers thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come, material forms here and now and material forms in lives to come, perceptions of forms here and now and perceptions of forms in lives to come—both alike are impermanent. What is impermanent is not worth delighting in, not worth welcoming, not worth holding to.' When he practises in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base. Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he resolves [upon it] with wisdom. On the dissolution of the body, after death, it is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on [to rebirth] in the imperturbable. This, bhikkhus, is declared to be the third way directed to the imperturbable.

BV: So we're talking about the fourth jhāna; we're talking about the realm of infinite space; we're talking about the realm of infinite consciousness. Now we get to the base of nothingness.

MN:

(THE BASE OF NOTHINGNESS)

6. "Again, bhikkhus, a noble disciple considers thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come, material forms here and now and material forms in lives to come, perceptions of forms here and now and perceptions of forms in lives to come, and perceptions of the imperturbable—all are perceptions.

BV: Perceptions basically means, the naming mind, the cognizing mind, the mind that has an experience before and remembers it.

MN:

Where these perceptions cease without remainder, that is the peaceful, that is the sublime, namely, the base of nothingness.'

BV: So you stop seeing things outside of your body, outside of yourself, and you start seeing only what's happening inside. And everything turns into mental factors, although, if there is contact, while you are sitting in the base of nothingness, you will feel it. That means an ant walking across your leg, a bare leg, or across your arm, or across your head, whatever, but, it's not going to make your mind shake at all. There's no attachment to it at all. It's just to see everything with this really strong balance of mind. But what you're starting to see now are factors arising and passing away. Different kinds of things still arise. You still have your five aggregates. There is still feeling. There is perception. There is formations, and there is consciousness. Now this is an incredibly interesting state to be in, because this is where you start balancing your energy, and you really fine tune your energy very well, and this is very much necessary, in order to continually, go deeper into your practice.

Now when you started out meditating, it seemed like you always put the same amount of energy in and you always had the same kind of experience, but as you go deeper into your meditation, you start noticing: "I'm putting in a little bit too much energy, and my mind's becoming restless. Need to back off from that. I'm not putting quite enough in, my mind's starting to dull out. Need to put a little bit more in." But, when I'm talking about tweak, I mean just barely tweak.

MN:

When he practises in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base. Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the base of nothingness now or else he resolves [upon it] with wisdom.

BV: Now I have a real strong suspicion that Bhikkhu Bodhi has done some tweaking on this particular sutta, because it says either you attain this now, or you do this with wisdom, and meaning insight,

and it's not both, together at the same time. So I have a strong suspicion that he's done some adjusting on this particular sutta. Do you see what I'm saying?

S: ~

BV: (Sighs)

MN:

On the dissolution of the body, after death, it is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on [to rebirth] in the base of nothingness. This, bhikkhus, is declared to be the first way directed to the base of nothingness.

7. "Again, bhikkhus, a noble disciple, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, considers thus: 'This is void of a self or of what belongs to a self.'" When he practises in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base.

BV: This is one of the meditations that is not mentioned in the Visuddhimagga, and it is the annata practice. And what is the annata practice? It is at first, mind saying whatever arises, this is not me, this is not mine, this is not who I am, and seeing it as impermanent like that. But, as you do that with the relaxing, then you start to change your concepts of reality. When you start mentally telling yourself that everything that you see, everything that you hear, everything that you taste, everything that you touch, everything that you smell, everything that you think, is part of an impersonal process, and then you relax and see that impersonal process, and you see how the awareness becomes much more clear, more bright, without any distraction in it, you start changing your perception of the way you see the world around you, and that's what this meditation is all about. I don't really teach this meditation to people, because it is kind of an advanced form and it takes a lot of explaining. But it is the practice of noticing when your mind takes off and likes this, and realizing that there's nothing to delight in. It's only a pleasant feeling, and it's not your pleasant feeling. It's only a

feeling. So you mentally are telling yourself: this is not me; this is not mine; this is only an impersonal process.

As you go deeper into the jhāna, you start seeing Dependent Origination more clearly. You start seeing how this impersonal process really is, just an arising and passing away of phenomena. And to me, that is the major insight, that the Buddha was trying to show us, by showing us Dependent Origination. It's just this cause and effect relationship. That's all it is. Everything that arises, all memories, all thoughts, all experiences, all ways of looking at things, are part of the Dependent Origination and it's impersonal. It's not us, at all.

That's a heavy duty realization, and when you're walking around during the day, as you develop the habit of seeing: this sight is not mine; this sound is not mine; it's not me; it's not any part of me; it's just sound waves hitting the ear, that's all; or sight, color and form hitting the eye, that's all. There's a kind of balance that happens in your mind when you start really using this as your object of meditation, but, there always has to be the relaxing with it. If there's not the relaxing with it, it doesn't lead near as deeply as it possibly could, because that's where the subtle cravings arise, and you have to be able to see those in order to let them go.

So-

MN:

Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the base of nothingness now or else he resolves [upon it] with wisdom. On the dissolution of the body, after death, it is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on [to rebirth] in the base of nothingness. This, bhikkhus, is declared to be the second way directed to the base of nothingness.

BV: To show you how incredibly wholesome what we're doing is, you start meditating, and you have an experience of jhāna. The wholesomeness of that one experience, if you never meditate again in your whole life, the joy that you felt, at the time of your death,

you will remember that, be reborn in a Brahma loca. That's how strong that one experience is. So as you gain your experience of going into the different jhānas, your mind becomes incredibly wholesome, and the joy and the happiness that arises now, because you're developing the habit of having that, it will arise at the time of death, and you'll be reborn in one of the Brahma locas, when you experience the deep practices. That's one of the reasons teaching is so exciting, because I know that when these people have this experience, it's such a powerful experience that it's going to affect positively, even if they don't continue with it. As a matter of fact, I had a long discussion with U. Thatilla about that, and I had some doubts as to whether that was really true or not, because I heard it before, and when I started asking him about it, he gave me so much confidence in it that I don't have any doubts now.

MN:

8. "Again, bhikkhus, a noble disciple considers thus: 'I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere, [264] nor is there anything belonging to me in anyone anywhere.' When he practises in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base.

BV: Now what you're really doing, when you're practicing and you're relaxing, is this practice, because you're letting go of the identification of all of the things that are arising. It's just phenomena, that's all. And as you go deeper and you start to see how mind starts to move a little bit and all of that, and you start going deeper, and deeper, that's how you go deeper into your practice. The necessity of the hindrances, is big. You have to have hindrances because that's where your attachments are. Your mindfulness, even though you can go into these deep states, your mindfulness will slip, become weak for whatever reason. It doesn't really even matter why. It just becomes weak. And when it becomes weak, then a hindrance arises. The hindrance is your teacher. That's where your attachment is. That's where you like and dislike of a feeling when it arises, really is there. And as you, relax, let it be without trying to control it, you're starting to see the impersonal nature of it, and, as you do that, eventually it fades away, your mind goes deeper, because of the

work that you had to do, letting go of that attachment. To realize that: 'I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere", I'm not here. There's only this process, arising and passing away, that's all there is. There is no I. There's no self. There's no my. There's only process. As you realize that more and more, and you start to see it more and more frequently, your mind will start to think and ponder on that, more and more, and as you think and ponder on that really being true, then it gets easier and easier to let go.

MN:

Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the base of nothingness now or else he resolves [upon it] with wisdom. On the dissolution of the body, after death, it is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on -

Talk ends.

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