

preliminary

MN- 121

The Shorter Discourse on Voidness Culasunnata Sutta

Dhamma Talk presented by Bhante Vimalaramsi

03-Apr-07, Woodinville, WA

Seattle Area Retreat

BV: This is a rather interesting discourse, because there's an awful lot of people that have different ideas about what voidness is, and what it isn't. So I thought it would be a good idea to go to the suttas, and see what the Buddha said about voidness.

1. **THUS HAVE I HEARD.** On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattī in the Eastern Park, in the Palace of Migāra's Mother.

2. Then, when it was evening, the venerable Ānanda rose from meditation, went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and said to the Blessed One:

3. "Venerable sir, on one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Sakyan country where there is a town of the Sakyans named Nagaraka. There, venerable sir, I heard and learned this from the Blessed One's own lips: 'Now, Ānanda, I often abide in voidness.' Did I hear that correctly, venerable sir, did I learn that correctly, attend to that correctly, remember that correctly?"

"Certainly, Ānanda, you heard that correctly, learned that correctly, attended to that correctly, remembered that correctly. As formerly, Ānanda, so now too I often abide in voidness.

4. "Ānanda, just as this Palace of Migāra's Mother is void of elephants, cattle, horses, and mares, void of gold and silver, void of the assembly of men and women, and there is present only this non-voidness, namely, the singleness dependent on the Sangha of bhikkhus;

BV: Now let me explain about Migāra's Mother's Palace. The Buddha's chief female supporter was named Visākhā, and she was from a super wealthy family. And when she got married, she married into Migāra's family. Migāra was actually her father in law. But, he didn't really like her very much, and he started to look for things that would cause her

embarrassment, and maybe he could get rid of her so she'd be sent back to the other family.

She had a favorite horse, and this horse was giving birth to a foal. So she stayed up all night with the horse, making sure that everything went well with it and that sort of thing, so she wasn't in the house in the morning, when the father-in-law got up. Now, one of the things that the tradition in India is that the son and his wife always paid homage to parents, right after they got up. She wasn't there to do that, so he started criticizing her for that.

Another time, Migāra was eating food. And a monk came to the door, and was on almsround. And Migāra ignored him. So Visākhā said: "Please monk, go somewhere else. Migāra is eating stale fare." Stale, is like stale food. And that really got him upset.

So, he wanted to cast her out of the house. But, she had eight very wise people. It was like a court. Any grievance, they had to judge if it was for real or not.

So they went and convened this court, and Migāra got up and he said: "She wasn't there to pay homage one morning, and that's the duty of his daughter-in-law to do that every morning. Why wasn't she there? She was out fooling around, in the stable." And she got up and said: "Well, actually, my favorite horse was giving birth, so I was helping with that process. And I stayed up all night so that I could help. And every thing turned out just great." So he begrudgingly said: "Ah, well, that's ok. But then there was the time I was eating, and my daughter-in-law said that I'm eating stale food. And she said: "No, I didn't say that you were eating stale food, I said you're eating stale fare, which means that your wealth right now has come to you because of your past action of generosity. But you're living on that action; you're not creating new action of generosity. So it's eating the stale karma, and not creating new karma. And that's why I said that." He became so impressed with her, that he said: "From now on I'm going to consider you my mother." So that's how Migāra's mother got to be in the suttas, but actually Visākhā was her name. And it's kind of an inside monk joke, to call it "The Palace of Migāra's Mother".

Oh, when she got married, she was quite an exceptional person. She was very strong in her body and very beautiful. Came from a super, super rich family. And the gown that she got married in, it was made out of gold, and many, many gems, diamonds, and rubies, and

sapphires, and all of those kind of things. And because she had such exceptional physical strength, she could wear this, without any problem. On day she, and one of her attendants went to listen to the Buddha give a talk after she was wearing this robe and she said: "Ah, I can't wear this in front of the Buddha; It's not right." So she gave it to her attendant, after folding it up very nicely, and her attendant sat it down, and then they went to listen to the Dhamma talk. And they were so inspired by the talk, that they left, and forgot the robe. So, Visākhā, instead of becoming angry with the attendant, she was very happy that this happened, and she said: "I want you to go back to the monastery to pick up this robe and bring it back. But if Venerable Ānanda has touched the robe, you have to leave it there."

Venerable Ānanda, his habit was always going around cleaning things up. So, of course he got the robe and he put it in a place that was safe, and she found out that Venerable Ānanda had touched the robe. So, she went back and Visākhā said: " Ah, you've given me an opportunity to make more merit." And she said: "What I'm going to do, is, I'm going to sell this robe, and then with the money I get for this robe, I'm going to build a monastery for all the monks." But nobody could afford it. So she bought it back herself. And then she used her money for.. It was such a spectacular place, that they called it a palace. It had many, many rooms, it had many stories, very nicely done; very well done. So. This gives you an idea, some of the inside jokes that we have, about this, with the monks. And when it says that there was no cattle, no horses, there was no elephants – of course not; it was a monastery. And they didn't allow those kind of things in the monastery, they had to be in stalls, outside.

Ok, repeats (4. "Ānanda, just as this Palace of Migāra's Mother is void of elephants, cattle, horses, and mares, void of gold and silver, void of the assembly of men and women, and there is present only this non-voidness, namely, the singleness dependent on the Sangha of bhikkhus;)

MN: so too, a bhikkhu—not attending to the perception of village, not attending to the perception of people— attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of forest. His mind enters into that perception of forest and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of village, those are not present here;

whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of people, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of forest.' He understands: This field of perception is void of the perception of village; this field of perception is void of the perception of people. There is present only this non-voidness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of forest.' Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this is his genuine, undistorted, pure descent into voidness.

BV: Now, did you understand that? If you go into the forest, from a village, where there's a lot of people, you leave the village, and you leave all of those people alone, and your only perception now is in the forest. So you're void of the village, and you're void of the people. Now your only perception is in the forest. And that's the way the Buddha was talking about voidness. They're saying these things are void, but there is the perception of something else that's there; it's not that everything is void. There's still the perception of the forest. And we go on and we go deeper and deeper into this. But this gives you more of the idea of what the Buddha was talking about, when he was talking about voidness, or emptiness. So your perception of the village, and your perception of people is empty in your perception; it's not there any more. There's only this perception: forest. So this statement: "' Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this is his genuine, undistorted, pure descent into voidness."

MN: 5. "Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu—not attending to the perception of people, not attending to the perception of forest—attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of earth.

BV: He's using earth as his meditation, which is a very specialized kind of meditation. But we can change that, we could say, instead of perception of earth, we could say perception of Loving-Kindness. It's basically the same thing, any of the objects of meditation that the Buddha taught, can be added in here.

MN: His mind enters into that perception of earth and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution. Just as a bull's hide becomes free from folds when fully stretched with a hundred pegs; so too, a bhikkhu—not attending to any of the ridges and hollows of this earth, to the rivers and ravines, the tracts of stumps and thorns, the mountains

and uneven places—attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of earth. His mind enters into that perception of earth and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of people, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of forest, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of earth.' He understands: This field of perception is void of the perception of people; this field of perception is void of the perception of forest. There is present only this non-voidness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of earth.' Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this too is his genuine, undistorted, pure descent into voidness.

6. "Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu—not attending to the perception of forest, not attending to the perception of earth—attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of infinite space.

BV: Now, before we get too far gone in this, what we're really talking about here, is he was talking about, with the earth, or with Loving-Kindness, what ever kind of meditation you are doing, getting to the fourth jhāna, and these are called the material jhānas. These are levels of understanding where there are certain things that happen. As you get from the first jhāna, the second jhāna the third jhāna, the fourth jhāna, your level of equanimity, balance of mind, it gets stronger, and stronger, and stronger.

And then you get into what the Buddha called the arūpa jhānas, the immaterial realms, and that is: infinite space; infinite consciousness; nothingness; neither perception-nor-non-perception. This is where you don't have any feeling in your body, unless, there is contact. If I come and I touch you, you will know that that happened. Sound, you will be able to hear, but your equanimity is so strong, that it doesn't make your mind shake. You hear the sound; it just goes through. This is different than the descriptions of a lot of the other, one-pointed kinds of concentration, where they say: "You don't have any feeling in your body at all no matter what happens. I can come and I can move your hand; you wouldn't know that your hand was moved. I can make loud sounds right beside your ear; you wouldn't hear that, at all; you wouldn't know that it happened." And that is the way that they test to see whether

someone is in deep concentration or not, by touching them and making sounds, and seeing if there's any kind of reaction. But that is when you don't add that extra step of relaxing. Your mind will become very deeply focused, just on one thing. You become very, very tranquil and very, very peaceful, but your mind just stays on one thing only. It doesn't move. When you're practicing the way that the Buddha was talking about, you're still able to see things, and hear things. And when I say see things, you're able to recognize with your mind, these things when they come up.

So you're still learning how this process of the Dependent Origination arises. So you're able to see that there's contact, and then there's feeling, and then there's craving, and then there's cling, and then there's habitual tendency. You'll be able to see these things. And, as soon as you start recognizing when mind starts to get tight, you start relaxing right then. You go deeper into your meditation. Now, one of the advantages of doing this meditation is, when your mindfulness slips, when your mindfulness is not always as sharp as it could be, what happens is, one of the hindrances can arise. And this is a good thing. The hindrances: "I like it." mind; "I don't like it." mind. That's greedy mind; hatred mind. Dullness; You don't have sleepiness at this level. Restlessness. You could still have some doubt, but it's really very faint, by this time.

When these hindrances arise, they will take you away from your meditation, but you recognize that and you let it be and you relax and you come back. Now you start to see how your mind's attention moves away from being with your object of meditation to being on the hindrance. See, that's always the test, and you get to see at deeper, and deeper levels, how this process works. You start catching it a lot more quickly, you start relaxing into it much more easily, and you're starting to see that all of these things is part of an impersonal process. It's part of, because this arose, then the feeling arose; because the feeling arose, the craving is there. Let go of the craving; your mind is brilliant, and clear, and bright. As you let go of the hindrance, then you go deeper into your meditation, so you need the hindrances.

When you practice one-pointed concentration, which is mostly being taught in the world today, that doesn't add that extra step of relaxing, and that extra step is very, very important for the Buddha's teaching. When you don't add that one extra step, your mind becomes very, very concentrated, but the force of the concentration stops the hindrances

from coming. So you don't really have that process of learning how all of these things arise and how to let go of them and you're not learning very much; your mind becomes just stuck on one thing. Even though it's peaceful and calm, being stuck on one thing, means that you don't gain more knowledge and vision. You don't gain more understanding of how the process works.

And the whole thing from the very first day that you start meditating, until you're done, until you attain nibbāna, the whole of the process is learning how to see mind's attention, how it moves from one thing to another. You're training yourself to see it more and more easily, more and more quickly, more and more clearly. And as you do that, it's so much easier to recognize, and not get caught personally with thoughts and feelings that arise. Now this is a process that you see very, very closely when you're sitting in meditation.

But as you're able to recognize that when you're doing your quiet meditation, then your daily meditation, you're able to see the hindrances when they come up more quickly and more easily. So you start letting go of those, so you start gaining balance, all of the time. In your daily life, your children or your husband, or your wife will start to notice that you don't get angry like you used to, that you take care of things without having the emotional ups and downs. Now you still have the problems, but they're not such big problems to you. And that's one of the ways that you tell that you're progressing in your practice, is that the things that used to get you mad, they don't get you mad so much any more, and your sense of humor starts to improve. You start laughing with things.

And you'll start noticing: somebody can come up and tell you a joke and it puts down one ethnic group or another, whatever, and it's not funny to you. But they come up and they tell you something that their child did that was just great, and you find yourself smiling and laughing because of that, because that was a happy moment. So your sense of humor starts to change, as you go deeper in your meditation.

Ok, so we were at the base of infinite space -

MN: His mind enters into that perception of the base of infinite space and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of forest, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of earth, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely,

the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of infinite space.' {He understands: This field of perception is void of the perception of forest; this field of perception is void of the perception of earth. There is present only this non-voidness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of infinite space.'}

S: You mentioned earlier on, that the earth was the object of meditation, so that means if you do the kasina ~~

BV: Sighs. You see, I've never run across a teacher that has been able to teach me kasinas to my satisfaction. And I've looked; believe me, I've looked. So I don't know how quite to answer you, because when you do the way the Buddha teaches and add that extra step, kasina has always been a one-pointed kind of concentration. And with that, you stay with, they call it the nimitta; it's a sign that comes up in your mind. It's like a silver moon, kind of shiny. So you wouldn't stay with the earth kasina any more when you have that arise. But the thing is, that arises before you get into the jhāna. So you wouldn't be with the earth kasina even while you were in the first jhāna. You would be with the perception of that nimitta, that sign that comes up in your mind, so that's why I suggested you could replace it with Loving-Kindness. And when you get to the fourth jhāna, the Loving-Kindness changes, or, right after the fourth jhāna, when you start to get into the arūpa jhānas; it changes. That's why I like that ~ example better, because I understand it.

S: How does it work if you would do anapanasati, watching the breath?

BV: You still have all of these things arising, but you're staying with the breath and relaxing. And then you notice the expansion of infinite space and that sort of thing. It doesn't really change; the breath doesn't change at all. It stays the same and you relax in the same way, but you start observing other things that arise.

This sutta is a blessing in some ways, and a curse in another, because it is talking about the kasinas, and like I said, I went through Burma, begging for somebody to teach me kasinas. Everybody talks about: "Well, there's real advantage to doing this kasina or that kasina." but nobody told me how to do it. And I went through Thailand; I went through Sri Lanka, looking. Couldn't find anybody. Everybody talks about it, but nobody talks about how, how to do it. And I have run across teachers that teach the meditation very similar to the way that I teach, and they can't explain the kasina meditation at all. They come up with some imaginary thing, but it doesn't have anything to do with the

actual practice. See, when I started out doing so much meditation, I wanted to be a very well rounded meditator that any kind of meditation that the Buddha taught, I wanted to be able to have the experience of being able to do it. And I couldn't do it because there wasn't a teacher of the kasinas. And that's eight meditations, right there.

S: ~

BV: Well, it's a one-pointed kind of meditation that is being practiced right now. I don't know how the Buddha taught it, or if he actually taught it.

See the thing is, about two hundred and fifty years after the Buddha died, there were a lot of Hindus and Brahmins that started wearing robes, but they were teaching their Hindu and the vedas and all of that sort of thing, and, they were mixing a lot of the meditation techniques, that the vedas say, and they were using Buddhist terminology.

Eventually, they were expelled so they couldn't wear those robes any more. They were questioned on what the Buddha had taught and they didn't know what the Buddha taught, so they had to disrobe. They took on the robes because they could get free food, and that was very appealing to them.

But a lot of their ideas are still mixed up in the suttas themselves. And the one-pointed concentration got very mixed up with the Buddha's teaching. And because of that, there's been major problems, with being able to attain nibbāna the way the Buddha was talking about, because the one-pointed concentration, he practiced that when he was a bodhisatta and he said: "I've gone as far as I can go with this; this does not lead to nibbāna. I quit! I don't want to do that any more. It doesn't work." So that's why he went out on his own. And he found this one extra step and the importance of adding that into the meditation, and how it changed the entire meditation, not just a little bit, but a lot. So you could see the individual pieces of how everything works. You can see that; you can recognize that; you can let it go. And when you do that, you let go of the suffering. It takes practice. This is a gradual teaching and a gradual learning. It happens a lot faster than it does with other meditations; I can guarantee you that. But still, it doesn't happen right away. So you have to have some patience when you do your practice.

But the earth kasina, what it basically is, the way that it's described in commentaries, which I find suspect, they had a lot of Vedic ideas in there, is a disk that's about this big. And you take soil, and mud, and

put on a piece of cloth over the disk, and let it dry, and then you hold it up, or hang it up, and you start staring at it, just saying: "Earth, earth, earth, earth, earth." Now they do that with all of the elements, and with some of the elements it's a hole that's cut out of the piece of wood or something like that, where they would put in front of a fire, and you would look at the fire and you say: "Fire, fire, fire, fire.", like that. So that's how the kasina... Kasina basically means a round disk. Now there can be a disk that you stare at, or it can be a disk that you're looking through.

And there's four colors, of which there's a lot of fighting about what those four colors are, some people say that brown is mixed in with it; other people say there's blue mixed in with it; some people say there's green. There's all of these different ideas of the colors. That leads me to think that that wasn't part of the Buddha's teaching. But the kasinas are mentioned, a few times in the suttas, and that might be because of the Brahmin influence. I just don't know, because I certainly haven't run across anybody that can understand it according to the way the Buddha teaches it. See, that extra step of relaxing is so incredibly important, and when it's not in that meditation, then it is suspect of being something other than the Buddha's teaching. And I haven't run across anybody that teaches it with the relaxing step in it. I have considered spending time doing the kasina with the relaxing step to see what happens.

So when you get to the realm of infinite space, what you feel is, there's a feeling of expansion. It just keeps going out and out and out. And it goes in all the directions at the same time. But there's no center point; it's just a feeling of expansion.

So -

MN: Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this too is his genuine, undistorted, pure descent into voidness.

7. "Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu—not attending to the perception of earth, not attending to the perception of the base of infinite space—attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of infinite consciousness. His mind enters into that perception of the base of infinite consciousness and acquires confidence, steadiness, and

resolution. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of earth, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of the base of infinite space, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of infinite consciousness.' He understands: This field of perception is void of the perception of earth; this field of perception is void of the perception of the base of infinite space. There is present only this non-voidness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of infinite consciousness. { Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this too is his genuine, undistorted, pure descent into voidness. }

BV: So, what happens when you get in infinite consciousness, is you start seeing individual consciousnesses arise and pass away. Now, (Snaps finger) that was a million consciousnesses arising and passing away, So we're talking about being able to see this very, very finely. And you're looking at something, and it will be like you're seeing something, but you're seeing it like it's a movie that's going too slow, and there's a flicker in between each picture. So that's what it's like, but it's like that with all of the sense doors, with the ear, with the tongue, with the nose, with the body feeling, and with mind. You see mind arising and passing away very quickly. When you see this, you are very, very convinced that everything is impermanent.

Nothing is like we think it is. We like to think that everything is permanent. We're always looking for things that are permanent. But when you start seeing the individual consciousnesses arise and pass away, arise and pass away, you start seeing the unsatisfactory nature of this. There's nothing that's permanent. Because of that, it's a form of suffering; it's a form of unsatisfactoriness, because it's always changing. And, you see that there is no controller, at all. These things happen because the conditions are right for you to see, so you see, and you see it as individual consciousnesses arising and passing away. But there's no self in that. It's not personal, at all. This is an impersonal process that is happening. Because the eye hits color and form, that meeting of the three is eye consciousness. That's called contact. ("Dependent on the eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises; the meeting of the three is contact") And then a feeling arises and then all the rest of the Dependent Origination. So what you're learning how to do when you

get to that, is see the individual consciousnesses and relax into that. Then you start looking more at the space in between those consciousnesses. And it's the blink in between, its a little bit longer and a little bit longer as you become more familiar with the process.

Ok -

MN: 8. "Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu—not attending to the perception of the base of infinite space, not attending to the perception of the base of infinite consciousness—attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of nothingness. His mind enters into that perception of the base of nothingness and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of the base of infinite space, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of the base of infinite consciousness, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of nothingness.' He understands: 'This field of perception is void of the perception of the base of infinite space; this field of perception is void of the perception of the base of infinite consciousness. There is present only this non-voidness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of nothingness.' {Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this too is his genuine, undistorted, pure descent into voidness.}

BV: Now when you get into the base of nothingness, what happens is, mind is not looking outside of itself any more. There's still things that are happening. But they're more like factors that arise. It's not so much seeing and thinking and getting caught up in the six senses any more, but you're starting to see mind, in a lot more clear way. And what you're starting to do is, to recognize how to keep that equanimity, that balance of mind going, without getting caught up with putting too much energy into watching, or not enough energy. So now you're starting to learn how to fine tune your meditation, when you get to this stage. I know an awful lot of monks that are teaching meditation and they won't even talk about these kind of things because they say: "It takes you years and years and years to get to this." I'm here to tell you it doesn't. It doesn't take years and years, when you're practicing with

that relaxing step. It can take up to a year, for some people. It depends on how much you do it, how much you meditate, how clear you are on what you're seeing while you're doing your meditation. I have seen some people that can do it in seven days, when they come and do a retreat. Some people are slow; they take eight.

S: I take ten days.

(Laughter)

BV: But this is probably the most interesting state in the meditation. At least it seems that to me. Because it is such fine tuning that you have to do with your little bit too much energy and watching and then your mind gets a little restless, and then you have to work with that, and let it go. And then not quite enough, your mind gets a little dull, and you have to work with that. So now you're getting to really see what fine tuning is all about, because it's just little tiny bits of energy that you're working with. And it's real fun.

MN: 9. "Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu—not attending to the perception of the base of infinite consciousness, not attending to the perception of the base of nothingness—attends to the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. His mind enters into that perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution. He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of the base of infinite consciousness, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of the base of nothingness, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.' He understands: This field of perception is void of the perception of the base of infinite consciousness; this field of perception is void of the perception of the base of nothingness. There is present only this non-voidness, namely, the singleness dependent on the perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.'

BV: What happens when you get into neither-perception-nor-non-perception, where before, you were feeling your mind expand out. Now it starts to get very, very small, very, very tiny. And it gets to be hard to tell whether it's really there or not. And there still is somethings that are arising in this state, but you won't notice it, until you get out of that

state, and then you start to reflect on what happened while you were in that meditation state.

By now, you've got the habit of relaxing. Every time mind wobbles a little tiny bit, then there's the relaxing and letting go of that. See, the relaxing is the state that brings up the cessation of all kinds of movement and suffering that happens in your mind. So, what you're doing is you're practicing how to become more and more calm, and when you do that, your mind might be moving like this, and as you practice more and more, it becomes less, and less, and less, and less, until finally it's hard to tell whether there's any movement there or not. There is some, but not much. There's still feeling there. There's still, kind of, there's still perception, it's hard to talk about, because it's such a tiny little bit. But this is not nibbāna yet.

MN: Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this too is his genuine, undistorted, pure descent into voidness.

10. "Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu—not attending to the perception of the base of nothingness, not attending to the perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception—attends to the singleness dependent on the signless concentration of mind. His mind enters into that signless concentration of mind and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution. He understand thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of the base of nothingness, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, that connected with the six bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life.'

BV: So what happens is, as you continually go, and you continually relax more and more, you will get to a state where there is no movement of mind. Body is still here, but you don't see it. It's just like somebody turning off the lights; you're not able to see anything at all. You'll be in that state for a little while. There's no movement of mind's attention at all, absolutely none.

You come out of that state, and the first thing you see, is how mind's attention, and how the process of mind occurring, happens. And you see ignorance, and with ignorance as condition, you see mental formations; with mental formations as condition, you see

consciousness; with consciousness as condition, you see mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality as condition, you see the six sense bases; with the six sense bases as condition, you see contact; with contact as condition, feeling arises; with feeling as condition, craving arises; with craving as condition, clinging arises; with clinging as condition, habitual tendency arises; with habitual tendency as condition, birth arises; with birth as condition, old age, and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, arise. This is this whole mass of suffering, this is how it works. And you see this, very clearly. Good place to stop, wasn't it? (Laughter)

Now what I'm telling you is the version of Dependent Origination that the Buddha was very clear in giving us, over and over again, he gave eighty four different discourses just in one section (in the Saṃyutta Nikāya) on Dependent Origination and how it works. So that gives you an idea of some of the importance of being able to understand this, according to the Buddha.

Now you will see this all automatically. It will happen very fast and your attention is so strong that you'll be able to recognize all of these different states. And then it will occur to you to notice that when ignorance does not arise, then the mental formations don't arise; if the mental formations don't arise, consciousness won't arise; if consciousness doesn't arise, mentality-materiality won't arise; if mentality-materiality doesn't arise, the six sense bases don't arise; if the six sense bases don't arise, contact won't arise; if contact doesn't arise, then feeling won't arise; if feeling won't arise, craving won't arise; when craving won't arise, clinging won't arise; when clinging won't arise, your habitual tendency won't arise; when the habitual tendency doesn't arise, birth doesn't arise; if birth doesn't arise, old age, and death, pain, sorrow, lamentation, they all will not arise. Now this is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. And when you see that, your understanding is so brilliant, at that time, that you experience nibbāna. That's the way you get to understand how the process works. That's how you never have any doubt again as to whether this is real or not. And you see that this is all part of an impersonal process. It carries on because of conditions. That's how it arises, and that's how it ceases. So when you have the experience of nibbāna, it's not this mystical, magical flash; what it is, is your deep understanding and seeing very clearly how this process works. So that's a little bit different than a lot of people are teaching these days.

S: Sounds like the end point is the space of emptiness.

BV: Well, when you see the cessation, the complete cessation, that is nibbāna, but it's not nothing. It is something. But it's difficult to talk about because it's an unconditioned state. Every thing we know is conditioned. So I get away from talking about what nibbāna is, because you can't talk about it. Any way of talking about it is putting conditions on it, and it's unconditioned, it's beyond that.

S: ~

BV: Yeah, you'll know, then come back and tell me. (Laughs) And the thing is, right after you have this experience, there is so much relief. You've been carrying around this burden of always thinking that everything is personal, and seeing things in a very distant way, not seeing closely. And now you understand (big sigh) and you will be happy for a few days, like you've never been happy before. And even after that experience, it still has effects on the way you see the world around you.

Now what I just described to you is called the path knowledge. That isn't the end of the road - just having the path knowledge; there is some personality change, but not a lot. You will have to have this experience again. That is the cessation of perception and feeling, and then when you get out of that, you will see Dependent Origination arising and passing away. When that happens, that is what you call the fruition knowledge, and that's where the personality development really takes place.

If you're doing it through meditation then that will happen in such a way that lust and hatred will never enter your mind again. Now think about that. Your mind will never get angry again. It's worth working for. You never have any doubt. You see everything as part of an impersonal process. You never take things personally any more. That means you have this balanced mind, that's balanced all the time. You never have any doubt whether this is the right way to go or not. You know it's the right way to go because of your deep experience. So it's really nice when you can get to fruition. Now the fruition can happen at any time. You do your meditation, and you get to path knowledge, and then you go home, and you start washing the dishes, and you feel your mind starting to go very deep. Or you're cleaning the house, or you're doing something, and you say: "Well, let's let that go.", and then you sit for a little while and you watch your mind go deep, and experience that cessation of perception and feeling, and then you see the Dependent

Origination arising and passing away. And you might see it three times, or you might see it four times, depending on what your experience is. And after that, it's completely unshakable that you will never have anger arise in your mind again. You never have lust, greed for things. Well, so it's definitely worth working for, I think. (Laughs) Ok, so -

MN: He understands: This field of perception is void of the perception of the base of nothingness; this field of perception is void of the perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. There is present only this non-voidness, namely, that connected with the six bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life.'

BV: In other words, you can sit for a period of time up to seven days, and your body will stay alive. But there's no disturbance in your mind, at all. There is no perception, there is no feeling. For seven days you can do this. And I did know one person that did that. And I said:

"Why?" And they said... See, I gave them a one word question; they gave me a one word answer: "Relief." Think about: you're not having any disturbance in your mind at all for that period of time. There's so much relief that happens because there is no movement and thoughts coming in and that sort of thing. It's just at ease. (Laughter)

S: ~eat~

BV: Unless I talk with the monks about that, I don't know. I'd have to talk with the individual monks to see what was happening. There is, states that you can get into that the devas, the heavenly beings, will pour food into your pores, so you don't have to eat for long periods of time, or drink. There are those states, and that might be what they're getting into, or maybe not; I'd have to talk with them individually to see. So it's a difficult question to give you a definite answer on.

Ok -

MN: {Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this too is his genuine, undistorted, pure descent into voidness.

11. "Again, Ānanda, a bhikkhu—not attending to the perception of the base of nothingness, not attending to the perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception—attends to the singleness dependent on the signless concentration of mind. His mind enters into that signless concentration of mind and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution.}

He understands thus: This signless concentration of mind is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.' When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of being, and from the taint of ignorance. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: 'It is liberated.' He understands: 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.'

12. "He understands thus: 'Whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the taint of sensual desire, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the taint of being, those are not present here; whatever disturbances there might be dependent on the taint of ignorance, those are not present here. There is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, that connected with the six bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life.' He understands: This field of perception is void of the taint of sensual desire; this field of perception is void of the taint of being; this field of perception is void of the taint of ignorance. There is present only this non-voidness, namely, that connected with the six bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life' Thus he regards it as void of what is not there, but as to what remains there he understands that which is present thus: 'This is present.' Thus, Ānanda, this is his genuine, undistorted, pure descent into voidness, supreme and unsurpassed.

13. "Ānanda, whatever recluses and brahmins in the past entered upon and abided in pure, supreme, unsurpassed voidness, all entered upon and abided in this same pure, supreme', unsurpassed voidness. Whatever recluses and brahmins in the future will enter upon and abide in pure, supreme, unsurpassed voidness, all will enter upon and abide in this same pure, supreme, unsurpassed voidness. Whatever recluses and brahmins in the present enter upon and abide in pure, supreme', unsurpassed voidness, all enter upon and abide in this same pure, supreme, unsurpassed voidness. Therefore, Ānanda, you should train thus: 'We will enter upon and abide in pure, supreme, unsurpassed voidness.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Ānanda was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.

BV: So, that gives you an idea of what to look forward to.

S: ~ that's so high that I can't comprehend.

BV: As you get more settled in your meditation, it will start to make more and more sense; I promise. I know that it was an advanced teaching today. But it's real good to become familiar with it even if you don't quite understand what I was saying, as you hear it over and over again, which you will, then it becomes more clear as you go deeper in your meditation.

Ok, 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 Buddha's dispensation.
Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . .

Sutta translation (C) Bhikkhu Bodhi 1995, 2001. Reprinted from The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya with permission of Wisdom Publications, 199 Elm Street, Somerville, MA 02144 U.S.A. www.wisdompubs.org

Text last edited: 06-Dec-07