

The Hindrances to Mental Development

Then the brahmin Sangarava approached the Blessed One, exchanged greetings with him, sat down to one side, and said:

"Master Gotama, why is it that sometimes even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited? And why is it that sometimes those texts that have not been recited over a long period recur to the mind, let alone those that have been recited?"

"Brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by sensual lust, overwhelmed by sensual lust, and one does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen sensual lust, on that occasion one neither knows nor sees as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both. Then even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Suppose, brahmin, there is a bowl of water mixed with red, yellow, blue, or crimson dye. If a man with good sight were to examine his own facial reflection in it, he would neither know nor see it as it really is. So too, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by sensual lust . . . even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Again, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by ill will, overwhelmed by ill will, and one does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen ill will, on that occasion one neither knows nor sees as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both. Then even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Suppose, brahmin, there is a bowl of water being heated over a fire, bubbling and boiling. If a man with good sight were to examine his own facial reflection in it, he would neither know nor see it as it really is. So too, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by ill will even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Again, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by dullness and drowsiness, overwhelmed by dullness and drowsiness, and one does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen dullness and drowsiness, on that occasion one neither knows nor sees as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both. Then even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Suppose, brahmin, there is a bowl of water covered over with water plants and algae. If a man with good sight were to examine his own facial reflection in it, he would neither know nor see it

as it really is. So too, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by dullness and drowsiness... even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Again, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by restlessness and remorse, overwhelmed by restlessness and remorse, and one does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen restlessness and remorse, on that occasion one neither knows nor sees as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both. Then even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Suppose, brahmin, there is a bowl of water stirred by the wind, rippling, swirling, churned into wavelets. If a man with good sight were to examine his own facial reflection in it, he would neither know nor see it as it really is. So too, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind Obsessed by restlessness and remorse ... even those texts that have recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Again, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by doubt, Overwhelmed by doubt, and one does not understand as it really is the escape from arisen doubt, on that occasion one neither knows nor sees as it really is one's own good, or the good of others, or the good of both. Then even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Suppose, brahmin, there is a bowl of water that is turbid, unsettled muddy, placed in the dark. If a man with good sight were to examine his own facial reflection in it, he would neither know nor see it as it really is. So too, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind obsessed by doubt ... even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"This, brahmin, is the reason why even those texts that have been recited over a long period do not recur to the mind, let alone those that have not been recited.

"Brahmin, when one dwells with a mind that is not obsessed by sensual lust, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, and doubt, on that occasion even those texts that have not been recited over a long period recur to the mind, let alone those that have been recited.

"Suppose, brahmin, there is a bowl of water that is not mixed with dyes; not bubbling and boiling; not covered over with water plants and algae; not stirred by the wind and churned into wavelets; clear, serene, limpid, set out in the light. If a man with good sight were to examine his own facial reflection in it, he would know and see it as it really is. So too, brahmin, when one dwells with a mind that is not obsessed by sensual lust, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, and doubt on that occasion even those texts that have not been recited over a long period recur to the mind, let alone those that have been recited.

"This, brahmin, is the reason why even those texts that have not been recited over a long period recur to the mind, let alone those that have been recited." ...

When this was said, the brahmin Sahgārava said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, Master Gotama!... Let Master Gotama accept me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from today until life's end."

(SN 46:55, abridged; V 121-26)

The Refinement of the Mind

"There are, O monks, gross impurities in gold, such as earth and sand, gravel and grit. Now the goldsmith or his apprentice first pours the gold into a trough and washes, rinses, and cleans it thoroughly. When he has done this, there still remain moderate impurities in the gold, such as fine grit and coarse sand. Then the goldsmith or his apprentice washes, rinses, and cleans it again. When he has done this, there still remain minute impurities in the gold, such as fine sand and black dust. Now the goldsmith or his apprentice repeats the washing, and thereafter only the gold dust remains.

"He now pours the gold into a melting pot, smelts it, and melts it together. But he does not yet take it out from the vessel, as the dross has not yet been entirely removed and the gold is not yet quite pliant, workable, and bright; it is still brittle and does not yet lend itself easily to molding. But a time comes when the goldsmith or his apprentice repeats the melting thoroughly, so that the flaws are entirely removed. The gold is now quite pliant, workable, and bright, and it lends itself easily to molding. Whatever ornament the goldsmith now wishes to make of it, be it a diadem, earrings, a necklace, or a golden chain, the gold can now be used for that purpose.

"It is similar, monks, with a monk devoted to the training in the higher mind: there are in him gross impurities, namely, bad conduct of body, speech, and mind. Such conduct an earnest, capable monk abandons, dispels, eliminates, and abolishes. "When he has abandoned these, there are still impurities of a moderate degree that cling to him, namely, sensual thoughts, thoughts of ill will, and thoughts of harming. Such thoughts an earnest, capable monk abandons, dispels, eliminates, and abolishes.

"When he has abandoned these, there are still some subtle impurities that cling to him, namely, thoughts about his relatives, his home country, and his reputation. Such thoughts an earnest, capable monk abandons dispels, eliminates, and abolishes.

"When he has abandoned these, there still remain thoughts about the teaching. That concentration is not yet peaceful and sublime; it has not attained to full tranquillity, nor has it

achieved mental unification; it is maintained by strenuous suppression of the defilements. "But there comes a time when his mind becomes inwardly steadied, composed, unified, and concentrated. That concentration is then calm and refined; it has attained to full tranquillity and achieved mental unification; it is not maintained by strenuous suppression of defilements.

"Then, to whatever mental state realizable by direct knowledge he directs his mind, he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions obtain.

"If he wishes: 'May I wield the various kinds of spiritual power: having been one, may I become many; having been many, may I become one; may I appear and vanish; go unhindered through a wall, through a rampart, through a mountain as if through space; dive in and out of the earth as if it were water; walk on water without sinking as if it were earth; travel through the sky like a bird while seated cross-legged; touch and stroke with my hand the moon and sun, so powerful and mighty; exercise mastery with my body even as far as the brahma world'—he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions obtain.

"If he wishes: 'With the divine ear element, which is purified and surpasses the human, may I hear both kinds of sounds, the divine and human, those that are far as well as near '—he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions obtain.

"If he wishes: 'May I understand the minds of other beings, of other persons, having encompassed them with my own mind. May I understand a mind with lust as a mind with lust; a mind without lust as a mind without lust; a mind with hatred as a mind with hatred; a mind without hatred as a mind without hatred; a mind with delusion as a mind with delusion; a mind without delusion as a mind without delusion; a contracted mind as contracted, and a distracted mind as distracted; an exalted mind as exalted, and an unexalted mind as unexalted; a surpassable mind as surpassable, and an unsurpassable mind as unsurpassable; a concentrated mind as concentrated, and an unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated; a liberated mind as liberated, and an unliberated mind as unliberated'—he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions obtain.

"If he wishes, 'May I recollect my manifold past lives...[see Text II,3(2)§38]...with their modes and details'—he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions obtain.

"If he wishes, 'With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, may I see beings passing away and being reborn, inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate ... [see Text II,3(2)§40]... and understand how beings fare on in accordance with their action'—he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions obtain.

"If he wishes, 'By the destruction of the taints, may I in this very life enter and dwell in the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, realizing it for myself with direct knowledge'—he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions obtain."

(AN 3:100 SSI-10; 1253-56)

The Removal of Distracting Thoughts

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatti in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. There he addressed the monks thus: "Monks."—"Venerable sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. "Monks, when a monk is pursuing the higher mind, from time to time he should give attention to five signs. What are the five?"

3. (i) "Here, monks, when a monk is giving attention to some sign, and owing to that sign there arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion, then he should give attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome. When he gives attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. Just as a skilled carpenter or his apprentice might knock out, remove, and extract a coarse peg by means of a fine one, so too ... when a monk gives attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome ... his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated.

4. (ii) "If, while he is giving attention to some other sign connected With what is wholesome, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion, then he should examine the danger in those thoughts thus: 'These thoughts are unwholesome, reprehensible, resulting in suffering.' When he examines the danger in those thoughts, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. Just as a man or a woman, young, youthful, and fond of ornaments, would be horrified humiliated, and disgusted if the carcass of a snake or a dog or a human being were hung around his or her neck, so too ... when a monk examines the danger in those thoughts . .. his mind becomes steadied inter. nally, composed, unified, and concentrated.

5. (iii) "If, while he is examining the danger in those thoughts, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion, then he should try to forget those thoughts and should not give attention to them. When he tries to forget those thoughts

and does not give attention to them, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. Just as a man with good eyes who did not want to see forms that had come within range of sight would either shut his eyes or look away, so too ... when a monk tries to forget those thoughts and does not give attention to them ... his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated.

6. (iv) "If, while he is trying to forget those thoughts and is not giving attention to them, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion, then he should give attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts. When he gives attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. Just as a man walking fast might consider: 'Why am I walking fast? What if I walk slowly?' and he would walk slowly; then he might consider: 'Why am I walking slowly? What if I stand?' and he would stand; then he might consider: 'Why am I standing? What if I sit?' and he would sit; then he might consider: 'Why am I sitting? What if I lie down?' and he would lie down. By doing so he would substitute for each grosser posture one that was subtler. So too ... when a monk gives attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts ... his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated.

7. (v) "If, while he is giving attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts, there still arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion, then, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he should beat down, constrain, and crush mind with mind. When, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he beats down, constrains, and crushes mind with mind, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. Just as a strong man might seize a weaker man by the head or shoulders and beat him down, constrain him, and crush him, so too ... when, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, a monk beats down, constrains, and crushes mind with mind ... his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated.

8. "Monks, when a monk is giving attention to some sign, and owing to that sign there arise in him evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, and delusion, then when he gives attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome, any such evil unwholesome thoughts are abandoned in him and subside, and with their abandoning his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. When he examines the danger in those thoughts his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. When he tries to forget those thoughts and does not give attention to them ... his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. When he gives attention to stilling the thought-formation of those thoughts ... his mind becomes steadied internally,

composed, unified, and concentrated. When, with his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he beats down, constrains, and crushes mind with mind, any such evil unwholesome thoughts are abandoned in him and subside, and with their abandoning, his mind becomes steadied internally, composed, unified, and concentrated. This monk is then called a master of the courses of thought. He will think whatever thought he wishes to think and he will not think any thought that he does not wish to think. He has severed craving, flung off the fetters, and with the complete penetration of conceit he has made an end of suffering."

That is what the Blessed One said. The monks were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.

(MN 20: Vitakkasanthana Sutta; I 118-22)

In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon. Edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005, 270–278.