

Excerpt from

The Middle Length
Discourses of the Buddha
(Majjhima Nikaya) translated
by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and
Bhikkhu Bodhi

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30 *Cūlasāropama Sutta*

The Shorter Discourse on the Simile
of the Heartwood

[198] 1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattṭhi in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park.

2. Then the brahmin Pingalakoccha went to the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side and said to the Blessed One:

“Master Gotama, there are these recluses and brahmins, each the head of an order, the head of a group, the teacher of a group, a well-known and famous founder of a sect regarded by many as a saint—that is, Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambalin, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, and the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta.³⁵⁰ Have they all had direct knowledge as they claim, or have none of them had direct knowledge, or have some of them had direct knowledge and some not?”

“Enough, brahmin! Let this be!—‘Have they all had direct knowledge as they claim, or have none of them had direct knowledge, or have some of them had direct knowledge and some not?’ I shall teach you the Dhamma, brahmin. Listen and attend closely to what I shall say.”³⁵¹

“Yes, sir,” the brahmin Pingalakoccha replied. The Blessed One said this:

3. “Suppose, brahmin, a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood. Passing over its heartwood, its sapwood, its inner bark, and its outer bark, he would cut off its twigs and leaves and take them away thinking they were heartwood. Then a man with good sight, seeing him, might say: ‘This good man did not know the heartwood, the sapwood, the inner bark, the outer bark, or the twigs and leaves. Thus, while needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering

in search of heartwood, he came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, and passing over its heartwood, its sapwood, its inner bark, and its outer bark, he cut off its twigs and leaves and took them away thinking they were heartwood. Whatever it was this good man had to make with heartwood, his purpose will not be served.'

4. "Suppose a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood. Passing over its heartwood, its sapwood [199] and its inner bark, he would cut off its outer bark and take it away thinking it was heartwood. Then a man with good sight, seeing him, might say: 'This good man did not know the heartwood...or the twigs and leaves. Thus, while needing heartwood...he cut off its outer bark and took it away thinking it was heartwood. Whatever it was this good man had to make with heartwood, his purpose will not be served.'

5. "Suppose a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood. Passing over its heartwood and its sapwood, he would cut off its inner bark and take it away thinking it was heartwood. Then a man with good sight, seeing him, might say: 'This good man did not know the heartwood...or the twigs and leaves. Thus, while needing heartwood...he cut off its inner bark and took it away thinking it was heartwood. Whatever it was this good man had to make with heartwood, his purpose will not be served.'

6. "Suppose a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood. Passing over its heartwood, he would cut off its sapwood and take it away thinking it was heartwood. Then a man with good sight, seeing him, might say: 'This good man did not know the heartwood...or the twigs and leaves. Thus, while needing heartwood...he cut off its sapwood and took it away thinking it was heartwood. Whatever it was this good man had to make with heartwood, his purpose will not be served.'

7. "Suppose a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, and cutting off only its heartwood, he would take it away knowing it was heartwood. Then a man

with good sight, seeing him, might say: 'This good man knew the heartwood, the sapwood, the inner bark, the outer bark, and the twigs and leaves. Thus, while needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, he came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, and cutting off only its heartwood, [200] he took it away knowing it was heartwood. Whatever it was this good man had to make with heartwood, his purpose will be served.'

8. "So too, brahmin, here some clansman goes forth out of faith from the home life into homelessness, considering: 'I am a victim of birth, ageing, and death, of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; I am a victim of suffering, a prey to suffering. Surely an ending of this whole mass of suffering can be known.' When he has gone forth thus, he acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: 'I have gain, honour, and renown, but these other bhikkhus are unknown, of no account.' So he arouses no desire to act, he makes no effort for the realisation of those other states that are higher and more sublime than gain, honour, and renown; he hangs back and slackens.³⁵² I say that this person is like the man needing heartwood, who came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, and passing over its heartwood, its sapwood, its inner bark, and its outer bark, cut off its twigs and leaves and took them away thinking they were heartwood; and so whatever it was he had to make with heartwood, his purpose will not have been served.

9. "Here, brahmin, some clansman goes forth out of faith from the home life into homelessness, considering: 'I am a victim of birth, ageing, and death, of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; I am a victim of suffering, a prey to suffering. Surely an ending of this whole mass of suffering can be known.' When he has gone forth thus, he acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is not pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is not fulfilled. He does not, on account of it, laud himself and disparage others. He arouses desire to act and he makes an effort for the realisation of those other states that are higher and more sublime than gain, honour, and renown; he does not hang back and slacken. He achieves the attainment of virtue. He is pleased with that attainment of virtue and his

intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: 'I am virtuous, of good character, but these other bhikkhus are immoral, of evil character.' So he arouses no desire to act, he makes no effort for the realisation of those other states that are higher and more sublime than the attainment of virtue; [201] he hangs back and slackens. I say that this person is like the man needing heartwood...who passing over its heartwood, its sapwood, and its inner bark, cut off its outer bark and took it away thinking it was heartwood; and so whatever it was he had to make with heartwood, his purpose will not have been served.

10. "Here, brahmin, some clansman goes forth out of faith from the home life into homelessness, considering: 'I am a victim of birth, ageing, and death, of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; I am a victim of suffering, a prey to suffering. Surely an ending of this whole mass of suffering can be known.' When he has gone forth thus, he acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is not pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is not fulfilled. He achieves the attainment of virtue. He is pleased with that attainment of virtue, but his intention is not fulfilled. He does not, on account of it, laud himself and disparage others. He arouses desire to act and he makes an effort for the realisation of those other states that are higher and more sublime than the attainment of virtue; he does not hang back and slacken. He achieves the attainment of concentration. He is pleased with that attainment of concentration and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: 'I am concentrated, my mind is unified, but these other bhikkhus are unconcentrated, with their minds astray.' So he arouses no desire to act, he makes no effort for the realisation of those other states that are higher and more sublime than the attainment of concentration; he hangs back and slackens. I say that this person is like the man needing heartwood...who passing over its heartwood and its sapwood, cut off its inner bark and took it away thinking it was heartwood; and so whatever it was he had to make with heartwood, his purpose will not have been served.

11. "Here, brahmin, some clansman goes forth out of faith from the home life into homelessness, considering: 'I am a victim of birth, ageing, and death, [202] of sorrow, lamentation, pain,

grief, and despair; I am a victim of suffering, a prey to suffering. Surely an ending of this whole mass of suffering can be known.' When he has gone forth thus, he acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is not pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is not fulfilled...He achieves the attainment of virtue. He is pleased with that attainment of virtue, but his intention is not fulfilled...He achieves the attainment of concentration. He is pleased with that attainment of concentration, but his intention is not fulfilled. He does not, on account of it, laud himself and disparage others. He arouses desire to act and he makes an effort for the realisation of those other states that are higher and more sublime than the attainment of concentration; he does not hang back and slacken. He achieves knowledge and vision. He is pleased with that knowledge and vision and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: 'I live knowing and seeing, but these other bhikkhus live unknowing and unseeing.' So he arouses no desire to act, he makes no effort for the realisation of those other states that are higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision; he hangs back and slackens. I say that this person is like the man needing heartwood...who passing over its heartwood, cut off its sapwood and took it away thinking it was heartwood; and so whatever it was he had to make with heartwood, his purpose will not have been served.

12. "Here, brahmin, some clansman goes forth out of faith from the home life into homelessness, considering: 'I am a victim of birth, ageing, and death, of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; I am a victim of suffering, a prey to suffering. Surely an ending of this whole mass of suffering can be known.' When he has gone forth thus, [203] he acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is not pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is not fulfilled...He achieves the attainment of virtue. He is pleased with that attainment of virtue, but his intention is not fulfilled...He achieves the attainment of concentration. He is pleased with that attainment of concentration, but his intention is not fulfilled...He achieves knowledge and vision. He is pleased with that knowledge and vision, but his intention is not fulfilled. He does not, on account of it, laud himself and disparage others. He arouses desire to act and he makes an effort for the realisation of those other states

that are higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision; he does not hang back and slacken.

“But what, brahmin, are the states that are higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision?”

13. “Here, brahmin, 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. This is a state higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision.³⁵³

14. “Again, with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration. This too is a state higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision.

15. “Again, with the fading away as well of rapture, a bhikkhu abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, on account of which noble ones announce: ‘He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.’ This too [204] is a state higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision.

16. “Again, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. This too is a state higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision.

17. “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. This too is a state higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision.

18. “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. This too is a state higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision.

19. “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. This too is a state higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision.

20. “Again, by completely surmounting the base of nothingness, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. This too is a state higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision.

21. “Again, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the cessation of perception and feeling. And his taints are destroyed by seeing with wisdom. This too is a state higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision. These are the states that are higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision.

22. “I say that this person, brahmin, is like a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, who came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, and cutting off its heartwood, took it away knowing it was heartwood; and so whatever it was he had to make with heartwood, his purpose will have been served.

23. “So this holy life, brahmin, does not have gain, honour, and renown for its benefit, or the attainment of virtue for its benefit, or the attainment of concentration for its benefit, or knowledge and vision for its benefit. But it is [205] this unshakable deliverance of mind that is the goal of this holy life, its heartwood, and its end.”

24. When this was said, the brahmin Pingalakoccha said to the Blessed One: “Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent, Master Gotama! Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms. I go to Master Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of bhikkhus. From today let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge for life.”

SUTTA 29

- 346 After Devadatta had unsuccessfully attempted to kill the Buddha and usurp control of the Sangha, he broke away from the Buddha and tried to establish his own sect with himself at the head. See Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, pp. 266–69.
- 347 “Knowledge and vision” (*ñāṇadassana*) here refers to the divine eye (MA), the ability to see subtle forms invisible to normal vision.
- 348 This translation follows BBS and SBJ, which read *asamaya-vimokkhaṃ* in the preceding sentence and *asamayavimuttiyā* in this sentence. The PTS ed., on which both Horner and Ñm based their translations, is evidently mistaken in reading *samaya* in the two compounds and *ñhānaṃ* instead of *aññhānaṃ*. MA cites the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (ii.40) for a definition of *asamayavimokkha* (lit., non-temporary or “perpetual” liberation) as the four paths, four fruits, and Nibbāna, and of *samayavimokkha* (temporary liberation) as the four jhānas and four formless attainments. See also MN 122.4.
- 349 “Unshakeable deliverance of mind” is the fruit of arahantship (MA). Thus “perpetual liberation”—as including all four paths and fruits—has a wider range of meaning than “unshakeable deliverance of mind,” which alone is declared to be the goal of the holy life.

SUTTA 30

- 350 These six teachers, the Buddha’s senior contemporaries, all stood outside the fold of orthodox Brahmanism, and their doctrines are indicative of the speculative audacity of the Buddha’s age. The six are often mentioned together in the Canon. Their teachings, as understood by the Buddhist community, are stated at DN 2.17–32/ii.52–59.
- 351 Precisely the same question is posed to the Buddha on the eve of his Parinibbāna by the wanderer Subhadda at DN 16.5.26–27/ii.150–52.
- 352 It is this sentence, used in place of the sentence beginning “He becomes intoxicated...,” that distinguishes these

passages of this sutta from the corresponding passages of the preceding sutta.

- 353 Although the jhānas may also have been included in the attainment of concentration set forth in §10, and knowledge and vision was described as higher than the attainment of concentration, the jhānas now become higher than knowledge and vision because they are being treated as the basis for the attainment of cessation and the destruction of the taints (in §21).

SUTTA 31

- 354 Ven. Anuruddha was the Buddha’s cousin; Vens. Nandiya and Kimbila were Anuruddha’s friends and constant companions.
- 355 These are three of the “six principles of cordiality” explained at MN 48.6.
- 356 MA identifies this *yakkha* as a celestial king (*devarāja*) included among the twenty-eight commanders of the *yakkhas* mentioned at DN 32.10/iii.205.

SUTTA 32

- 357 The four assemblies are those of bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs, men lay followers, and women lay followers. The seven underlying tendencies are enumerated at MN 18.8. Ven. Ānanda was declared by the Buddha to be the pre-eminent disciple among those who had learned much, and his discourses are said to have delighted the four assemblies (DN 16.5.16/ii.145).
- 358 *Yathā sakaṃ paṭibhānaṃ*. This phrase might also be rendered “according to his own intuition” or “according to his own ideal.” Ñm renders “as it occurs to him”; Horner, “according to his own capacity.”
- 359 Ven. Revata was declared the pre-eminent disciple among those who are meditators.
- 360 Ven. Anuruddha was the pre-eminent disciple among those who possessed the divine eye.
- 361 Mahā Kassapa was the pre-eminent disciple among those who observed the ascetic practices.