

Excerpt from

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

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44 *Cūlavēdalla Sutta* The Shorter Series of Questions and Answers

[299] 1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Sanctuary. Then the lay follower Visākha went to the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā,⁴⁵⁹ and after paying homage to her, he sat down at one side and asked her:

(IDENTITY)

2. "Lady, 'identity, identity' is said. What is called identity by the Blessed One?"

"Friend Visākha, these five aggregates affected by clinging are called identity by the Blessed One; that is, the material form aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling aggregate affected by clinging, the perception aggregate affected by clinging, the formations aggregate affected by clinging, and the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. These five aggregates affected by clinging are called identity by the Blessed One."⁴⁶⁰

Saying, "Good, lady," the lay follower Visākha delighted and rejoiced in the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā's words. Then he asked her a further question:

3. "Lady, 'origin of identity, origin of identity' is said. What is called the origin of identity by the Blessed One?"

"Friend Visākha, it is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being. This is called the origin of identity by the Blessed One."

4. "Lady, 'cessation of identity, cessation of identity' is said. What is called the cessation of identity by the Blessed One?"

"Friend Visākha, it is the remainderless fading away and ceasing, the giving up, relinquishing, letting go, and rejecting of that same craving. This is called the cessation of identity by the Blessed One."

5. "Lady, 'the way leading to the cessation of identity, the way leading to the cessation of identity' is said. What is called the way leading to the cessation of identity by the Blessed One?"

"Friend Visākha, it is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration."

6. "Lady, is that clinging the same as these five aggregates affected by clinging, or is the clinging something apart from the five aggregates affected by clinging?"

"Friend Visākha, that clinging is neither the same as these five aggregates affected by clinging [300] nor is clinging something apart from the five aggregates affected by clinging. It is the desire and lust in regard to the five aggregates affected by clinging that is the clinging there."⁴⁶¹

(IDENTITY VIEW)

7. "Lady, how does identity view come to be?"

"Here, friend Visākha, an untaught ordinary person, who has no regard for noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who has no regard for true men and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. He regards feeling as self, or self as possessed of feeling, or feeling as in self, or self as in feeling. He regards perception as self, or self as possessed of perception, or perception as in self, or self as in perception. He regards formations as self, or self as possessed of formations, or formations as in self, or self as in formations. He regards consciousness as self, or self as possessed of consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That is how identity view comes to be."⁴⁶²

8. "Lady, how does identity view not come to be?"

"Here, friend Visākha, a well-taught noble disciple, who has regard for noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, who has regard for true men and is skilled and

disciplined in their Dhamma, does not regard material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. He does not regard feeling as self, or self as possessed of feeling, or feeling as in self, or self as in feeling. He does not regard perception as self, or self as possessed of perception, or perception as in self, or self as in perception. He does not regard formations as self, or self as possessed of formations, or formations as in self, or self as in formations. He does not regard consciousness as self, or self as possessed of consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That is how identity view does not come to be."

(THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH)

9. "Lady, what is the Noble Eightfold Path?"

"Friend Visākha, it is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration."

10. "Lady, is the Noble Eightfold Path conditioned or unconditioned?"

"Friend Visākha, the Noble Eightfold Path is [301] conditioned."

11. "Lady, are the three aggregates included by the Noble Eightfold Path, or is the Noble Eightfold Path included by the three aggregates?"⁴⁶³

"The three aggregates are not included by the Noble Eightfold Path, friend Visākha, but the Noble Eightfold Path is included by the three aggregates. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood—these states are included in the aggregate of virtue. Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—these states are included in the aggregate of concentration. Right view and right intention—these states are included in the aggregate of wisdom."

(CONCENTRATION)

12. "Lady, what is concentration? What is the basis of concentration? What is the equipment of concentration? What is the development of concentration?"

"Unification of mind, friend Visākha, is concentration; the four foundations of mindfulness are the basis of concentration; the four right kinds of striving are the equipment of concentration;

the repetition, development, and cultivation of these same states is the development of concentration therein."⁴⁶⁴

(FORMATIONS)

13. "Lady, how many formations are there?"

"There are these three formations, friend Visākha: the bodily formation, the verbal formation, and the mental formation."

14. "But, lady, what is the bodily formation? What is the verbal formation? What is the mental formation?"

"In-breathing and out-breathing, friend Visākha, are the bodily formation; applied thought and sustained thought are the verbal formation; perception and feeling are the mental formation."⁴⁶⁵

15. "But, lady, why are in-breathing and out-breathing the bodily formation? Why are applied thought and sustained thought the verbal formation? Why are perception and feeling the mental formation?"

"Friend Visākha, in-breathing and out-breathing are bodily, these are states bound up with the body; that is why in-breathing and out-breathing are the bodily formation. First one applies thought and sustains thought, and subsequently one breaks out into speech; that is why applied thought and sustained thought are the verbal formation. Perception and feeling are mental, these are states bound up with the mind; that is why perception and feeling are the mental formation."⁴⁶⁶

(THE ATTAINMENT OF CESSATION)

16. "Lady, how does the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling come to be?"

"Friend Visākha, when a bhikkhu is attaining the cessation of perception and feeling, it does not occur to him: 'I shall attain the cessation of perception and feeling,' or 'I am attaining the cessation of perception and feeling,' or 'I have attained the cessation of perception and feeling'; but rather his mind has previously been developed in such a way that it leads him to that state."⁴⁶⁷ [302]

17. "Lady, when a bhikkhu is attaining the cessation of perception and feeling, which states cease first in him: the bodily formation, the verbal formation, or the mental formation?"

“Friend Visākha, when a bhikkhu is attaining the cessation of perception and feeling, first the verbal formation ceases, then the bodily formation, then the mental formation.”⁴⁶⁸

18. “Lady, how does emergence from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling come to be?”

“Friend Visākha, when a bhikkhu is emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, it does not occur to him: ‘I shall emerge from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling,’ or ‘I am emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling,’ or ‘I have emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling’; but rather his mind has previously been developed in such a way that it leads him to that state.”⁴⁶⁹

19. “Lady, when a bhikkhu is emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, which states arise first in him: the bodily formation, the verbal formation, or the mental formation?”

“Friend Visākha, when a bhikkhu is emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, first the mental formation arises, then the bodily formation, then the verbal formation.”⁴⁷⁰

20. “Lady, when a bhikkhu has emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, how many kinds of contact touch him?”

“Friend Visākha, when a bhikkhu has emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, three kinds of contact touch him: voidness contact, signless contact, desireless contact.”⁴⁷¹

21. “Lady, when a bhikkhu has emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, to what does his mind incline, to what does it lean, to what does it tend?”

“Friend Visākha, when a bhikkhu has emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, his mind inclines to seclusion, leans to seclusion, tends to seclusion.”⁴⁷²

(FEELING)

22. “Lady, how many kinds of feeling are there?”

“Friend Visākha, there are three kinds of feeling: pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.”

23. “But, lady, what is pleasant feeling? What is painful feeling? What is neither painful-nor-pleasant feeling?”

“Friend Visākha, whatever is felt bodily or mentally as pleasant and soothing is pleasant feeling. Whatever is felt bodily or mentally as painful and hurting is painful feeling. Whatever is felt bodily or mentally as neither soothing nor hurting [303] is neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.”

24. “Lady, what is pleasant and what is painful in regard to pleasant feeling? What is painful and what is pleasant in regard to painful feeling? What is pleasant and what is painful in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?”

“Friend Visākha, pleasant feeling is pleasant when it persists and painful when it changes. Painful feeling is painful when it persists and pleasant when it changes. Neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling is pleasant when there is knowledge [of it] and painful when there is no knowledge [of it].”

(UNDERLYING TENDENCIES)

25. “Lady, what underlying tendency underlies pleasant feeling? What underlying tendency underlies painful feeling? What underlying tendency underlies neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?”

“Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust underlies pleasant feeling. The underlying tendency to aversion underlies painful feeling. The underlying tendency to ignorance underlies neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.”⁴⁷³

26. “Lady, does the underlying tendency to lust underlie all pleasant feeling? Does the underlying tendency to aversion underlie all painful feeling? Does the underlying tendency to ignorance underlie all neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?”

“Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust does not underlie all pleasant feeling. The underlying tendency to aversion does not underlie all painful feeling. The underlying tendency to ignorance does not underlie all neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.”

27. “Lady, what should be abandoned in regard to pleasant feeling? What should be abandoned in regard to painful feeling? What should be abandoned in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?”

“Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust should be

abandoned in regard to pleasant feeling. The underlying tendency to aversion should be abandoned in regard to painful feeling. The underlying tendency to ignorance should be abandoned in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling."

28. "Lady, does the underlying tendency to lust have to be abandoned in regard to all pleasant feeling? Does the underlying tendency to aversion have to be abandoned in regard to all painful feeling? Does the underlying tendency to ignorance have to be abandoned in regard to all neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?"

"Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust does not have to be abandoned in regard to all pleasant feeling. The underlying tendency to aversion does not have to be abandoned in regard to all painful feeling. The underlying tendency to ignorance does not have to be abandoned in regard to all neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.

"Here, friend Visākha, 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. With that he abandons lust, and the underlying tendency to lust does not underlie that.⁴⁷⁴

"Here a bhikkhu considers thus: 'When shall I enter upon and abide in that base that the noble ones now enter upon and abide in?' In one who thus generates a longing for the supreme liberations, [304] grief arises with that longing as condition. With that he abandons aversion, and the underlying tendency to aversion does not underlie that.⁴⁷⁵

"Here, 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. With that he abandons ignorance, and the underlying tendency to ignorance does not underlie that."⁴⁷⁶

(COUNTERPARTS)

29. "Lady, what is the counterpart of pleasant feeling?"⁴⁷⁷

"Friend Visākha, painful feeling is the counterpart of pleasant feeling."

"What is the counterpart of painful feeling?"

"Pleasant feeling is the counterpart of painful feeling."

"What is the counterpart of neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?"

"Ignorance is the counterpart of neither-painful-nor pleasant feeling."⁴⁷⁸

"What is the counterpart of ignorance?"

"True knowledge is the counterpart of ignorance."

"What is the counterpart of true knowledge?"

"Deliverance is the counterpart of true knowledge."

"What is the counterpart of deliverance?"

"Nibbāna is the counterpart of deliverance."

"Lady, what is the counterpart of Nibbāna?"

"Friend Visākha, you have pushed this line of questioning too far; you were not able to grasp the limit to questions.⁴⁷⁹ For the holy life, friend Visākha, is grounded upon Nibbāna, culminates in Nibbāna, ends in Nibbāna. If you wish, friend Visākha, go to the Blessed One and ask him about the meaning of this. As the Blessed One explains it to you, so you should remember it."

(CONCLUSION)

30. Then the lay follower Visākha, having delighted and rejoiced in the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā's words, rose from his seat, and after paying homage to her, keeping her on his right, he went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and told the Blessed One his entire conversation with the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā. When he finished speaking, the Blessed One told him:

31. "The bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā is wise, Visākha, the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā has great wisdom. If you had asked me the meaning of this, I would have explained it to you [305] in the same way that the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā has explained it. Such is its meaning, and so you should remember it."⁴⁸⁰

That is what the Blessed One said. The lay follower Visākha was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.

MA also points out that the four deliverances are one in meaning because the terms—the immeasurable, nothingness, voidness, and the signless—are all names for Nibbāna, which is the object of the fruition attainment of arahantship.

SUTTA 44

- 459 Visākha was a wealthy merchant of Rājagaha and a non-returner. Dhammadinnā, his former wife in lay life, had attained arahantship soon after her ordination as a bhikkhuni. She was declared by the Buddha the foremost bhikkhuni disciple in expounding the Dhamma.
- 460 MA explains the compound *pañc'upādānakkhandhā* as the five aggregates that become the condition for clinging (MṬ: as its objects). Since these five aggregates are, in brief, the entire noble truth of suffering (MN 9.15; 28.3), it will be seen that the first four questions pose an inquiry into the Four Noble Truths expressed in terms of personal identity rather than suffering.
- 461 MA: Because clinging is only one part of the aggregate of formations (as defined here, greed), it is not the same as the five aggregates; and because clinging cannot be altogether disconnected from the aggregates, there is no clinging apart from the aggregates.
- 462 These are the twenty kinds of identity view. MA quotes Pṭs i.144–45 to illustrate the four basic modes of identity view in regard to material form. One may regard material form as self, in the way the flame of a burning oil-lamp is identical with the colour (of the flame). Or one may regard self as possessing material form, as a tree possesses a shadow; or one may regard material form as in self, as the scent is in the flower; or one may regard self as in material form, as a jewel is in a casket.
- 463 The word *khandha* here has a different meaning than in the more common context of the five aggregates affected by clinging. It here refers to a body of training principles, the three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path into virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).
- 464 The four foundations of mindfulness are the basis of

- concentration (*samādhinimitta*) in the sense of being its condition (MA). Here it would seem incorrect to translate *nimitta* as “sign,” in the sense of either distinctive mark or object. The four right kinds of striving are explained at MN 77.16.
- 465 MA: Dhammadinnā anticipated Visākha’s intention to ask about the formations that cease when one enters the attainment of cessation. Thus she explained the three formations in this way rather than as wholesome and unwholesome volitions of body, speech, and mind, the meaning relevant within the context of dependent origination.
- 466 MA explains further that the bodily formation and the mental formation are said to be formations “bound up” with the body and the mind in the sense that they *are formed by* the body and *by* the mind, while the verbal formation is a formation in the sense that it *forms* speech. The verb form *vitakketvā vicāretvā* has been rendered in a way that maintains consistency with the rendering of the nouns *vitakka* and *vicāra* as “applied thought” and “sustained thought.”
- 467 Cessation can be attained only by a non-returner or an arahant with mastery over the eight jhānic attainments. The meditator enters each attainment in turn, emerges from it, and contemplates it with insight as impermanent, suffering, and not self. After completing this procedure through the base of nothingness, he attends to certain preliminary duties, and then determines to be without mind for a particular length of time. He then briefly enters the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, after which mind and mental functions utterly cease. Thus his determination, backed by his previous accomplishments and preparations, leads him into the attainment of cessation. See Vsm XXIII, 32–43.
- 468 Applied and sustained thought cease first in the second jhāna; in-and-out breathing cease next in the fourth jhāna; and perception and feeling cease last in the attainment of cessation itself.
- 469 When the time decided upon by the determination for the attainment has lapsed, by reason of that prior determination

- the meditator spontaneously emerges from the attainment of cessation and the mind-process resumes.
- 470 MA: When one emerges from cessation, the consciousness of fruition attainment arises first, and the perception and feeling associated with that are the mental formation that arises first. Then, with the subsequent descent into the life continuum, the bodily formation, i.e., breathing, recommences. And subsequently, when the meditator resumes his ordinary activity, the verbal formation arises.
- 471 The first state of consciousness to arise on emerging from cessation is that of fruition attainment, which is called voidness, the signless, and the desireless because of its own inherent quality and because of its object, Nibbāna. Here these three names for fruition are assigned to the contact associated with fruition.
- 472 MṬ: Nibbāna, the object of the fruition consciousness that arises on emerging from cessation, is called seclusion (*viveka*) because it is secluded from all conditioned things.
- 473 MṬ: The three defilements are called *anusaya*, underlying tendencies, in the sense that they have not been abandoned in the mental continuum to which they belong and because they are capable of arising when a suitable cause presents itself.
- 474 MA explains that the bhikkhu suppresses the tendency to lust and attains the first jhāna. Having made the tendency to lust well suppressed by the jhāna, he develops insight and eradicates the tendency to lust by the path of the non-returner. But because it has been suppressed by the jhāna, it is said “the underlying tendency to lust does not underlie that.”
- 475 MA identifies “that base” (*tadāyatana*), as well as “the supreme liberations,” with arahantship. The grief that arises because of that longing is elsewhere called “the grief based on renunciation” (MN 137.13). MA explains that one does not actually abandon the tendency to aversion by means of that grief; rather, spurred on by the longing for the supreme liberations, one takes up the practice with firm determination and eradicates the tendency to aversion by attaining the path of the non-returner.

- 476 MA: The bhikkhu suppresses the tendency to ignorance with the fourth jhāna, makes it well suppressed, and then eradicates the tendency to ignorance by attaining the path of arahantship.
- 477 The word “counterpart” (*paṭibhāga*) is used to express the relationships of both opposition and supplementation.
- 478 Ignorance is its counterpart because neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling is subtle and difficult to recognise.
- 479 MṬ: Nibbāna does have an opposite counterpart, namely, conditioned states. But in the strict sense it has no supplementary counterpart, for how can there be anything to supplement Nibbāna, the unconditioned?
- 480 MA: By saying this, the Buddha makes this sutta Word of the Conqueror, stamped as it were with the seal of the Conqueror.

SUTTA 46

- 481 A full analysis of the things that should and should not be followed is presented in MN 114.

SUTTA 47

- 482 *Parassa cetopariyāyariṃ ajānantena*, reading the last word with BBS and SBJ rather than with PTS as *ājānantena*, which gives the positive sense “knowing.” In the context the negative is clearly required, since the bhikkhu who cannot know by direct cognition of the Buddha’s mind that he is fully enlightened must arrive at this conclusion by inference from his bodily and verbal behaviour and the other evidence adduced by the sutta.
- 483 Bodily actions are “states cognizable through the eye.” Words are “states cognizable through the ear.” MA: Just as one infers the presence of fish from the rippling and bubbling of water, so from a defiled action or utterance one infers that the mind originating it is defiled.
- 484 MṬ: “Mixed states” (*vitimissā dhammā*) refers to the conduct of one who is engaged in purifying his conduct but is unable to keep to it consistently. Sometimes his conduct is pure or bright, sometimes impure or dark.