

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

*In the*  
**Buddha's  
Words**



An Anthology of Discourses  
from the Pāli Canon

Edited and introduced by  
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Tamed, he is supreme among those who tame;  
At peace, he is the sage among those who bring peace;  
Freed, he is the chief of those who set free;  
Delivered, he is the best of those who deliver.

—*Āṅguttara Nikāya* 4:23



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# I. The Human Condition



## INTRODUCTION

Like other religious teachings, the Buddha's teaching originates as a response to the strains at the heart of the human condition. What distinguishes his teaching from other religious approaches to the human condition is the directness, thoroughness, and uncompromising realism with which he looks at these strains. The Buddha does not offer us palliatives that leave the underlying maladies untouched beneath the surface; rather, he traces our existential illness down to its most fundamental causes, so persistent and destructive, and shows us how these can be totally uprooted. However, while the Dhamma will eventually lead to the wisdom that eradicates the causes of suffering, it does not begin there but with observations about the hard facts of everyday experience. Here too its directness, thoroughness, and tough realism are evident. The teaching begins by calling upon us to develop a faculty called *yoniso manasikāra*, careful attention. The Buddha asks us to stop drifting thoughtlessly through our lives and instead to pay careful attention to simple truths that are everywhere available to us, clamoring for the sustained consideration they deserve.

One of the most obvious and inescapable of these truths is also among the most difficult for us to fully acknowledge, namely, that we are bound to grow old, fall ill, and die. It is commonly assumed that the Buddha beckons us to recognize the reality of old age and death in order to motivate us to enter the path of renunciation leading to Nibbāna, complete liberation from the round of birth and death. However, while this may be his ultimate intention, it is not the first response he seeks to evoke in us when we turn to him for guidance. The initial response the Buddha intends to arouse in us is an ethical one. By calling our attention to our bondage to old age and death, he seeks to inspire in us a firm resolution to turn away from unwholesome ways of living and to embrace instead wholesome alternatives.

Again, the Buddha grounds his initial ethical appeal not only upon a compassionate feeling for other beings, but also upon our instinctive concern for our own long-term welfare and happiness. He tries to

make us see that to act in accordance with ethical guidelines will enable us to secure our own well-being both now and in the long-term future. His argument hinges on the important premise that actions have consequences. If we are to alter our accustomed ways, we must be convinced of the validity of this principle. Specifically, to change from a self-stultifying way of life to one that is truly fruitful and inwardly rewarding, we must realize that our actions have consequences for ourselves, consequences that can rebound upon us both in this life and in subsequent lives.

The three suttas that constitute the first section of this chapter establish this point eloquently, each in its own way. Text I,1(1) enunciates the inevitable law that all beings who have taken birth must undergo aging and death. Although at first glance the discourse seems to be stating a mere fact of nature, by citing as examples members of the upper strata of society (wealthy rulers, brahmins, and householders) and liberated arahants, it insinuates a subtle moral message into its words. Text I,1(2) brings out this message more explicitly with its impressive simile of the mountain, which drives home the point that when "aging and death are rolling in" on us, our task in life is to live righteously and do wholesome and meritorious deeds. The sutta on the "divine messengers"—Text I,1(3)—establishes the corollary to this: when we fail to recognize the "divine messengers" in our midst, when we miss the hidden warning signals of old age, illness, and death, we become negligent and behave recklessly, creating unwholesome kamma with the potential to yield dreadful consequences.

The realization that we are bound to grow old and die breaks the spell of infatuation cast over us by sensual pleasures, wealth, and power. It dispels the mist of confusion and motivates us to take fresh stock of our purposes in life. We may not be ready to give up family and possessions for a life of homeless wandering and solitary meditation, but this is not an option the Buddha generally expects of his householder disciples. Rather, as we saw above, the first lesson he draws from the fact that our lives end in old age and death is an ethical one interwoven with the twin principles of kamma and rebirth. The law of kamma stipulates that our unwholesome and wholesome actions have consequences extending far beyond this present life: unwholesome actions lead to rebirth in states of misery and bring future pain and suffering; wholesome actions lead to a pleasant rebirth

and bring future well-being and happiness. Since we have to grow old and die, we should be constantly aware that any present prosperity we might enjoy is merely temporary. We can enjoy it only as long as we are young and healthy; and when we die, our newly acquired kamma will gain the opportunity to ripen and bring forth its own results. We must then reap the due fruits of our deeds. With an eye to our long-term future welfare, we should scrupulously avoid evil deeds that result in suffering and diligently engage in wholesome deeds that generate happiness here and in future lives.

In the second section, we explore three aspects of human life that I have collected under the heading "The Tribulations of Unreflective Living." These types of suffering differ from those connected with old age and death in an important respect. Old age and death are bound up with bodily existence and are thus unavoidable, common to both ordinary people and liberated arahants—a point made in the first text of this chapter. In contrast, the three texts included in this section all distinguish between the ordinary person, called "the uninstructed worldling" (*assutavā puthujjana*), and the wise follower of the Buddha, called the "instructed noble disciple" (*sutavā ariyasāvaka*).

The first of these distinctions, drawn in Text I,2(1), revolves around the response to painful feelings. Both the worldling and the noble disciple experience painful bodily feelings, but they respond to these feelings differently. The worldling reacts to them with aversion and therefore, on top of the painful bodily feeling, also experiences a painful mental feeling: sorrow, resentment, or distress. The noble disciple, when afflicted with bodily pain, endures such feeling patiently, without sorrow, resentment, or distress. It is commonly assumed that physical and mental pain are inseparably linked, but the Buddha makes a clear demarcation between the two. He holds that while bodily existence is inevitably bound up with physical pain, such pain need not trigger the emotional reactions of misery, fear, resentment, and distress with which we habitually respond to it. Through mental training we can develop the mindfulness and clear comprehension necessary to endure physical pain courageously, with patience and equanimity. Through insight we can develop sufficient wisdom to overcome our dread of painful feelings and our need to seek relief in distracting binges of sensual self-indulgence.

Another aspect of human life that brings to the fore the differences between the worldling and the noble disciple is the changing vicissitudes of fortune. The Buddhist texts neatly reduce these to four pairs of opposites, known as the eight worldly conditions (*aṭṭha lokadhammā*): gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. Text I,2(2) shows how the worldling and the noble disciple differ in their responses to these changes. While the worldling is elated by success in achieving gain, fame, praise, and pleasure, and dejected when confronted with their undesired opposites, the noble disciple remains unperturbed. By applying the understanding of impermanence to both favorable and unfavorable conditions, the noble disciple can abide in equanimity, not attached to favorable conditions, not repelled by unfavorable ones. Such a disciple gives up likes and dislikes, sorrow and distress, and ultimately wins the highest blessing of all: complete freedom from suffering.

Text I,2(3) examines the plight of the worldling at a still more fundamental level. Because they misconceive things, worldlings are agitated by change, especially when that change affects their own bodies and minds. The Buddha classifies the constituents of body and mind into five categories known as “the five aggregates subject to clinging” (*pañc’upādānakkhandhā*): form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness (for details, see pp. 305–07). These five aggregates are the building blocks that we typically use to construct our sense of personal identity; they are the things that we cling to as being “mine,” “I,” and “my self.” Whatever we identify with, whatever we take to be a self or the possessions of a self, can all be classified among these five aggregates. The five aggregates are thus the ultimate grounds of “identification” and “appropriation,” the two basic activities by which we establish a sense of selfhood. Since we invest our notions of selfhood and personal identity with an intense emotional concern, when the objects to which they are fastened—the five aggregates—undergo change, we naturally experience anxiety and distress. In our perception, it is not mere impersonal phenomena that are undergoing change, but our very identities, our cherished selves, and this is what we fear most of all. However, as the present text shows, a noble disciple has clearly seen with wisdom the delusive nature of all notions of permanent selfhood and thus no longer identifies with the five aggregates. Therefore the noble disciple can confront their change

without anxious concern, unperturbed in the face of their alteration, decay, and destruction.

Agitation and turmoil afflict human life not only at the personal and private level, but also in our social interactions. From the most ancient times, our world has always been one of violent confrontations and conflict. The names, places, and instruments of destruction may change, but the forces behind them, the motivations, the expressions of greed and hate, remain fairly constant. The Nikāyas testify that the Buddha was intensely aware of this dimension of the human condition. Although his teaching, with its stress on ethical self-discipline and mental self-cultivation, aims primarily at personal enlightenment and liberation, the Buddha also sought to offer people a refuge from the violence and injustice that rack human lives in such cruel ways. This is apparent in his emphasis on loving-kindness and compassion; on harmlessness in action and gentleness in speech; and on the peaceful resolution of disputes.

The third section of this chapter includes four short texts dealing with the underlying roots of violent conflict and injustice. We can see from these texts that the Buddha does not clamor for changes merely in the outer structures of society. He demonstrates that these dark phenomena are external projections of the unwholesome proclivities of the human mind and thus points to the need for inner change as a parallel condition for establishing peace and social justice. Each of the four texts included in this section traces conflict, violence, political oppression, and economic injustice back to their causes; each in its own way locates these causes within the mind.

Text I,3(1) explains conflicts between laypeople as arising from attachment to sensual pleasures, conflicts between ascetics as arising from attachment to views. Text I,3(2), a dialogue between the Buddha and Sakka, the pre-Buddhistic Indian ruler of the devas, traces hatred and enmity to envy and niggardliness; from there the Buddha traces them back to fundamental distortions that affect the way our perception and cognition process the information provided by the senses. Text I,3(3) offers another version of the famous chain of causation, which proceeds from feeling to craving, and from craving via other conditions to “the taking up of clubs and weapons” and other types of violent behavior. Text I,3(4) depicts how the three roots of evil—greed, hatred, and delusion—have terrible repercussions on a whole

society, issuing in violence, the lust for power, and the unjust infliction of suffering. All four texts imply that any significant and lasting transformations of society require significant changes in the moral fiber of individual human beings; for as long as greed, hatred, and delusion run rampant as determinants of conduct, the consequences are bound to be consistently detrimental.

The Buddha's teaching addresses a fourth aspect of the human condition which, unlike the three we have so far examined, is not immediately perceptible to us. This is our bondage to the round of rebirths. From the selection of texts included in the final section in this chapter, we see that the Buddha teaches our individual lifespan to be merely a single phase within a series of rebirths that has been proceeding without any discernible beginning in time. This series of rebirths is called *saṃsāra*, a Pāli word which suggests the idea of directionless wandering. No matter how far back in time we may seek a beginning to the universe, we never find an initial moment of creation. No matter how far back we may trace any given individual sequence of lives, we can never arrive at a first point. According to Texts I,4(1) and I,4(2), even if we were to trace the sequence of our mothers and fathers across world systems, we would only come upon still more mothers and fathers stretching back into the far horizons.

Moreover, the process is not only beginningless but is also potentially endless. As long as ignorance and craving remain intact, the process will continue indefinitely into the future with no end in sight. For the Buddha and Early Buddhism, this is above all the defining crisis at the heart of the human condition: we are bound to a chain of rebirths, and bound to it by nothing other than our own ignorance and craving. The pointless wandering on in *saṃsāra* occurs against a cosmic background of inconceivably vast dimensions. The period of time that it takes for a world system to evolve, reach its phase of maximum expansion, contract, and then disintegrate is called a *kappa* (Skt: *kalpa*), an eon. Text I,4(3) offers a vivid simile to suggest the eon's duration; Text I,4(4), another vivid simile to illustrate the incalculable number of the eons through which we have wandered.

As beings wander and roam from life to life, shrouded in darkness, they fall again and again into the chasm of birth, aging, sickness, and death. But because their craving propels them forward in a relentless quest for gratification, they seldom pause long enough to step back

and attend carefully to their existential plight. As Text I,4(5) states, they instead just keep revolving around the "five aggregates" in the way a dog on a leash might run around a post or pillar. Since their ignorance prevents them from recognizing the vicious nature of their condition, they cannot discern even the tracks of a path to deliverance. Most beings live immersed in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Others, driven by the need for power, status, and esteem, pass their lives in vain attempts to fill an unquenchable thirst. Many, fearful of annihilation at death, construct belief systems that ascribe to their individual selves, their souls, the prospect of eternal life. A few yearn for a path to liberation but do not know where to find one. It was precisely to offer such a path that the Buddha has appeared in our midst.

## I. THE HUMAN CONDITION

### 1. OLD AGE, ILLNESS, AND DEATH

#### (1) *Aging and Death*

At Sāvatti, King Pasenadi of Kosala said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, is anyone who is born free from aging and death?”<sup>1</sup>

“Great king, no one who is born is free from aging and death. Even those affluent khattiyas—rich, with great wealth and property, with abundant gold and silver, abundant treasures and commodities, abundant wealth and grain—because they have been born, are not free from aging and death. Even those affluent brahmins ... affluent householders—rich ... with abundant wealth and grain—because they have been born, are not free from aging and death. Even those monks who are arahants, whose taints are destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached their own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, and are completely liberated through final knowledge: even for them this body is subject to breaking up, subject to being laid down.”<sup>2</sup>

“The beautiful chariots of kings wear out,  
This body too undergoes decay.  
But the Dhamma of the good does not decay:  
So the good proclaim along with the good.”

(SN 3:3; I 71 <163-64>)

#### (2) *The Simile of the Mountain*

At Sāvatti, in the middle of the day, King Pasenadi of Kosala approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. The Blessed One then asked him: “Now where are you coming from, great king, in the middle of the day?”

“Just now, venerable sir, I have been engaged in those affairs of kingship typical for kings, who are intoxicated with the intoxication

of sovereignty, who are obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures, who have attained stable control in their country, and who rule having conquered a great sphere of territory on earth.”

“What do you think, great king? Suppose a man would come to you from the east, one who is trustworthy and reliable, and would tell you: ‘For sure, great king, you should know this: I am coming from the east, and there I saw a great mountain high as the clouds coming this way, crushing all living beings. Do whatever you think should be done, great king.’ Then a second man would come to you from the west ... a third man from the north ... and a fourth man from the south, one who is trustworthy and reliable, and would tell you: ‘For sure, great king, you should know this: I am coming from the south, and there I saw a great mountain high as the clouds coming this way, crushing all living beings. Do whatever you think should be done, great king.’ If, great king, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life, the human state being so difficult to obtain, what should be done?”

“If, venerable sir, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life, the human state being so difficult to obtain, what else should be done but to live by the Dhamma, to live righteously, and to do wholesome and meritorious deeds?”

“I inform you, great king, I announce to you, great king: aging and death are rolling in on you. When aging and death are rolling in on you, great king, what should be done?”

“As aging and death are rolling in on me, venerable sir, what else should be done but to live by the Dhamma, to live righteously, and to do wholesome and meritorious deeds?”

“Venerable sir, kings intoxicated with the intoxication of sovereignty, obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures, who have attained stable control in their country and rule over a great sphere of territory, conquer by means of elephant battles, cavalry battles, chariot battles, and infantry battles; but there is no hope of victory by such battles, no chance of success, when aging and death are rolling in. In this royal court, venerable sir, there are counselors who, when the enemies arrive, are capable of dividing them by subterfuge; but there is no hope of victory by subterfuge, no chance of success, when aging and death are rolling in. In this royal court, venerable sir, there exists abundant bullion and gold stored in vaults and lofts, and with such wealth we



are capable of mollifying the enemies when they come; but there is no hope of victory by wealth, no chance of success, when aging and death are rolling in. As aging and death are rolling in on me, venerable sir, what else should I do but live by the Dhamma, live righteously, and do wholesome and meritorious deeds?"

"So it is, great king! So it is, great king! As aging and death are rolling in on you, what else should you do but live by the Dhamma, live righteously, and do wholesome and meritorious deeds?"

This is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Fortunate One, the Teacher, further said this:

"Just as mountains of solid rock,  
Massive, reaching to the sky,  
Might draw together from all sides,  
Crushing all in the four quarters—  
So aging and death come  
Rolling over living beings—

"Khattiyas, brahmins, vessas, suddas,  
Outcasts and scavengers:  
They spare none along the way  
But come crushing everything.

"There's no hope there for victory  
By elephant troops, chariots, and infantry.  
One can't defeat them by subterfuge,  
Or buy them off by means of wealth.

"Therefore a person of wisdom here,  
Out of regard for his own good,  
Steadfast, should settle faith  
In the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha.

"When one conducts oneself by Dhamma  
With body, speech, and mind,  
They praise one here in the present life,  
And after death one rejoices in heaven."

(SN 3:25; I 100–102 <224–29>)

### (3) *The Divine Messengers*

"There are, monks, three divine messengers.<sup>3</sup> What three?"

"There is a person of bad conduct in body, speech, and mind. On the dissolution of the body, after death, he is reborn in the plane of misery, in a bad destination, in a lower world, in hell. There the warders of hell seize him by both arms and take him before Yama, the Lord of Death,<sup>4</sup> saying: 'This man, your majesty, had no respect for father and mother, nor for ascetics and brahmins, nor did he honor the elders of the family. May your majesty inflict due punishment on him!'

"Then, monks, King Yama questions that man, examines him, and addresses him concerning the first divine messenger: 'Didn't you ever see, my good man, the first divine messenger appearing among humankind?'

"And he replies: 'No, Lord, I did not see him.'

"Then King Yama says to him: 'But, my good man, didn't you ever see a woman or a man, eighty, ninety, or a hundred years old, frail, bent like a roof bracket, crooked, leaning on a stick, shakily going along, ailing, youth and vigor gone, with broken teeth, with gray and scanty hair or bald, wrinkled, with blotched limbs?'

"And the man replies: 'Yes, Lord, I have seen this.'

"Then King Yama says to him: 'My good man, didn't it ever occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, "I too am subject to old age and cannot escape it. Let me now do noble deeds by body, speech, and mind"?'"

"No, Lord, I could not do it. I was negligent.'

"Then King Yama says: 'Through negligence, my good man, you have failed to do noble deeds by body, speech, and mind. Well, you will be treated as befits your negligence. That evil action of yours was not done by mother or father, brothers, sisters, friends or companions, nor by relatives, devas, ascetics, or brahmins. But you alone have done that evil deed, and you will have to experience the fruit.'

"When, monks, King Yama has questioned, examined, and addressed him thus concerning the first divine messenger, he again questions, examines, and addresses the man about the second one, saying: 'Didn't you ever see, my good man, the second divine messenger appearing among humankind?'

"No, Lord, I did not see him.'

“But, my good man, didn't you ever see a woman or a man who was sick and in pain, seriously ill, lying in his own filth, having to be lifted up by some and put to bed by others?”

“Yes, Lord, I have seen this.”

“My good man, didn't it ever occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, “I too am subject to illness and cannot escape it. Let me now do noble deeds by body, speech, and mind”?”

“No, Lord, I could not do it. I was negligent.”

“Through negligence, my good man, you have failed to do noble deeds by body, speech, and mind. Well, you will be treated as befits your negligence. That evil action of yours was not done by mother or father, brothers, sisters, friends or companions, nor by relatives, devas, ascetics, or brahmins. But you alone have done that evil deed, and you will have to experience the fruit.”

“When, monks, King Yama has questioned, examined, and addressed him thus concerning the second divine messenger, he again questions, examines, and addresses the man about the third one, saying: ‘Didn't you ever see, my good man, the third divine messenger appearing among humankind?’

“No, Lord, I did not see him.”

“But, my good man, didn't you ever see a woman or a man one, two, or three days dead, the corpse swollen, discolored, and festering?”

“Yes, Lord, I have seen this.”

“Then, my good man, didn't it ever occur to you, an intelligent and mature person, “I too am subject to death and cannot escape it. Let me now do noble deeds by body, speech, and mind”?”

“No, Lord, I could not do it. I was negligent.”

“Through negligence, my good man, you have failed to do noble deeds by body, speech, and mind. Well, you will be treated as befits your negligence. That evil action of yours was not done by mother or father, brothers, sisters, friends or companions, nor by relatives, devas, ascetics, or brahmins. But you alone have done that evil deed, and you will have to experience the fruit.”

(from AN 3:35; I 138–40)

## 2. THE TRIBULATIONS OF UNREFLECTIVE LIVING

### (1) *The Dart of Painful Feeling*

“Monks, when the uninstructed worldling experiences a painful feeling, he sorrows, grieves, and laments; he weeps beating his breast and becomes distraught. He feels two feelings—a bodily one and a mental one. Suppose they were to strike a man with a dart, and then strike him immediately afterward with a second dart, so that the man would feel a feeling caused by two darts. So too, when the uninstructed worldling experiences a painful feeling, he feels two feelings—a bodily one and a mental one.

“While experiencing that same painful feeling, he harbors aversion toward it. When he harbors aversion toward painful feeling, the underlying tendency to aversion toward painful feeling lies behind this.<sup>5</sup> While experiencing painful feeling, he seeks delight in sensual pleasure. For what reason? Because the uninstructed worldling does not know of any escape from painful feeling other than sensual pleasure.<sup>6</sup> When he seeks delight in sensual pleasure, the underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feeling lies behind this. He does not understand as it really is the origin and the passing away, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these feelings.<sup>7</sup> When he does not understand these things, the underlying tendency to ignorance in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling lies behind this.

“If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels it attached. If he feels a painful feeling, he feels it attached. If he feels a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he feels it attached. This, monks, is called an uninstructed worldling who is attached to birth, aging, and death; who is attached to sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair; who is attached to suffering, I say.

“Monks, when the instructed noble disciple experiences a painful feeling, he does not sorrow, grieve, or lament; he does not weep beating his breast and become distraught.<sup>8</sup> He feels one feeling—a bodily one, not a mental one. Suppose they were to strike a man with a dart, but they would not strike him immediately afterward with a second dart, so that the man would feel a feeling caused by one dart only. So too, when the instructed noble disciple experiences a painful feeling, he feels one feeling—a bodily one, and not a mental one.

“While experiencing that same painful feeling, he harbors no aversion

toward it. Since he harbors no aversion toward painful feeling, the underlying tendency to aversion toward painful feeling does not lie behind this. While experiencing painful feeling, he does not seek delight in sensual pleasure. For what reason? Because the instructed noble disciple knows of an escape from painful feeling other than sensual pleasure. Since he does not seek delight in sensual pleasure, the underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feeling does not lie behind this. He understands as it really is the origin and the passing away, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of these feelings. Since he understands these things, the underlying tendency to ignorance in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling does not lie behind this.

"If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels it detached. If he feels a painful feeling, he feels it detached. If he feels a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he feels it detached. This, monks, is called a noble disciple who is detached from birth, aging, and death; who is detached from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair; who is detached from suffering, I say.

"This, monks, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the instructed noble disciple and the uninstructed worldling."

(SN 36:6; IV 207-10)

## (2) *The Vicissitudes of Life*

"These eight worldly conditions, monks, keep the world turning around, and the world turns around these eight worldly conditions. What eight? Gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

"These eight worldly conditions, monks, are encountered by an uninstructed worldling, and they are also encountered by an instructed noble disciple. What now is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between an instructed noble disciple and an uninstructed worldling?"

"Venerable sir, our knowledge of these things has its roots in the Blessed One; it has the Blessed One as guide and resort. It would be good, venerable sir, if the Blessed One would clarify the meaning of that statement. Having heard it from him, the monks will bear it in mind."

"Listen then, monks, and attend carefully. I shall speak."

"Yes, venerable sir," the monks replied. The Blessed One then spoke thus:

"When an uninstructed worldling, monks, comes upon gain, he does not reflect on it thus: 'This gain that has come to me is impermanent, bound up with suffering, subject to change.' He does not know it as it really is. And when he comes upon loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, he does not reflect on them thus: 'All these are impermanent, bound up with suffering, subject to change.' He does not know them as they really are. With such a person, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain keep his mind engrossed. When gain comes he is elated and when he meets with loss he is dejected. When fame comes he is elated and when he meets with disrepute he is dejected. When praise comes he is elated and when he meets with blame he is dejected. When he experiences pleasure he is elated and when he experiences pain he is dejected. Being thus involved in likes and dislikes, he will not be freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair; he will not be freed from suffering, I say.

"But, monks, when an instructed noble disciple comes upon gain, he reflects on it thus: 'This gain that has come to me is impermanent, bound up with suffering, subject to change.' And so he will reflect when loss and so forth come upon him. He understands all these things as they really are, and they do not engross his mind. Thus he will not be elated by gain and dejected by loss; elated by fame and dejected by disrepute; elated by praise and dejected by blame; elated by pleasure and dejected by pain. Having thus given up likes and dislikes, he will be freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair; he will be freed from suffering, I say.

"This, monks, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between an instructed noble disciple and an uninstructed worldling."

(AN 8:6; IV 157-59)

## (3) *Anxiety Due to Change*

"Monks, I will teach you agitation through clinging and non-agitation through nonclinging.<sup>9</sup> Listen and attend carefully. I shall speak."

"Yes, venerable sir," those monks replied. The Blessed One said this:

"And how, monks, is there agitation through clinging? Here, monks, the uninstructed worldling, who is not a seer of the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who is not a seer of

superior persons and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form.<sup>10</sup> That form of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, his consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of form. Agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form remain obsessing his mind. Because his mind is obsessed, he is frightened, distressed, and anxious, and through clinging he becomes agitated.

"He regards feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That consciousness of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of consciousness, his consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of consciousness. Agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of consciousness remain obsessing his mind. Because his mind is obsessed, he is frightened, distressed, and anxious, and through clinging he becomes agitated.

"It is in such a way, monks, that there is agitation through clinging.

"And how, monks, is there non-agitation through nonclinging? Here, monks, the instructed noble disciple, who is a seer of the noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, who is a seer of superior persons and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, does not regard form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form." That form of his changes and alters. Despite the change and alteration of form, his consciousness does not become preoccupied with the change of form. No agitation and constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form remain obsessing his mind. Because his mind is not obsessed, he is not frightened, distressed, or anxious, and through nonclinging he does not become agitated.

"He does not regard feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That consciousness of his changes and alters. Despite the change and alteration of consciousness, his consciousness does not become preoccupied with the change of consciousness. No agitation and constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of consciousness remain obsessing his mind. Because his mind is not obsessed, he is not

frightened, distressed, or anxious, and through nonclinging he does not become agitated.

"It is in such a way, monks, that there is non-agitation through nonclinging."

(SN 22:7; III 15–18)

### 3. A WORLD IN TURMOIL

#### (1) *The Origin of Conflict*

The brahmin Ārāmaḍaṇḍa approached the Venerable Mahākaccāna,<sup>11</sup> exchanged friendly greetings with him, and asked him: "Why is it, Master Kaccāna, that khattiyas fight with khattiyas, brahmins with brahmins, and householders with householders?"

"It is, brahmin, because of attachment to sensual pleasures, adherence to sensual pleasures, fixation on sensual pleasures, addiction to sensual pleasures, obsession with sensual pleasures, holding firmly to sensual pleasures that khattiyas fight with khattiyas, brahmins with brahmins, and householders with householders."

"Why is it, Master Kaccāna, that ascetics fight with ascetics?"

"It is, brahmin, because of attachment to views, adherence to views, fixation on views, addiction to views, obsession with views, holding firmly to views that ascetics fight with ascetics."

(AN 2: iv, 6, abridged; I 66)

#### (2) *Why Do Beings Live in Hate?*

2.1. Sakka, ruler of the devas,<sup>12</sup> asked the Blessed One: "Beings wish to live without hate, harming, hostility, or enmity; they wish to live in peace. Yet they live in hate, harming one another, hostile, and as enemies. By what fetters are they bound, sir, that they live in such a way?"

[The Blessed One said:] "Ruler of the devas, it is the bonds of envy and niggardliness that bind beings so that, although they wish to live without hate, hostility, or enmity, and to live in peace, yet they live in hate, harming one another, hostile, and as enemies."

This was the Blessed One's reply, and Sakka, delighted, exclaimed: "So it is, Blessed One! So it is, Fortunate One! Through the Blessed One's answer I have overcome my doubt and gotten rid of uncertainty."

2.2. Then Sakka, having expressed his appreciation, asked another question: "But, sir, what gives rise to envy and niggardliness, what is their origin, how are they born, how do they arise? When what is present do they arise, and when what is absent do they not arise?"

"Envy and niggardliness, ruler of the devas, arise from liking and disliking; this is their origin, this is how they are born, how they arise. When these are present, they arise, when these are absent, they do not arise."

"But, sir, what gives rise to liking and disliking...?"—"They arise, ruler of the devas, from desire...."—"And what gives rise to desire...?"—"It arises, ruler of the devas, from thinking. When the mind thinks about something, desire arises; when the mind thinks of nothing, desire does not arise."

"But, sir, what gives rise to thinking...?"

"Thinking, ruler of the devas, arises from elaborated perceptions and notions.<sup>14</sup> When elaborated perceptions and notions are present, thinking arises. When elaborated perceptions and notions are absent, thinking does not arise."

(from DN 21: *Sakkapañha Sutta*; II 276-77)

### (3) *The Dark Chain of Causation*

9. "Thus, Ānanda, in dependence upon feeling there is craving; in dependence upon craving there is pursuit; in dependence upon pursuit there is gain; in dependence upon gain there is decision-making; in dependence upon decision-making there is desire and lust; in dependence upon desire and lust there is attachment; in dependence upon attachment there is possessiveness; in dependence upon possessiveness there is niggardliness; in dependence upon niggardliness there is defensiveness; and because of defensiveness, various evil unwholesome things originate—the taking up of clubs and weapons, conflicts, quarrels, and disputes, insults, slander, and falsehood."<sup>15</sup>

(from DN 15: *Mahānidāna Sutta*; II 58)

### (4) *The Roots of Violence and Oppression*

"Greed, hatred, and delusion of every kind are unwholesome.<sup>16</sup> Whatever action a greedy, hating, and deluded person heaps up—by deeds,

words, or thoughts—that too is unwholesome. Whatever suffering such a person, overpowered by greed, hatred, and delusion, his thoughts controlled by them, inflicts under false pretexts upon another—by killing, imprisonment, confiscation of property, false accusations, or expulsion—being prompted in this by the thought, 'I have power and I want power,' all this is unwholesome too."

(from AN 3:69; I 201-2)

## 4. WITHOUT DISCOVERABLE BEGINNING

### (1) *Grass and Sticks*

The Blessed One said this: "Monks, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning." A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Suppose, monks, a man would cut up whatever grass, sticks, branches, and foliage there are in this Jambudipa<sup>18</sup> and collect them together into a single heap. Having done so, he would put them down, saying for each one: 'This is my mother, this my mother's mother.' The sequence of that man's mothers and grandmothers would not come to an end, yet the grass, sticks, branches, and foliage in this Jambudipa would be used up and exhausted. For what reason? Because, monks, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time, monks, you have experienced suffering, anguish, and disaster, and swelled the cemetery. It is enough to become disenchanted with all formations, enough to become dispassionate toward them, enough to be liberated from them."

(SN 15:1; II 178)

### (2) *Balls of Clay*

"Monks, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. Suppose, monks, a man would reduce this great earth to balls of clay the size of jujube kernels and put them down, saying [for each one]: 'This is my father, this my father's father.' The sequence of that man's fathers and grandfathers

would not come to an end, yet this great earth would be used up and exhausted. For what reason? Because, monks, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time, monks, you have experienced suffering, anguish, and disaster, and swelled the cemetery. It is enough to become disenchanted with all formations, enough to become dispassionate toward them, enough to be liberated from them."

(SN 15:2; II 179)

### (3) *The Mountain*

A certain monk approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him: "Venerable sir, how long is an eon?"<sup>19</sup>

"An eon is long, monk. It is not easy to count it and say it is so many years, or so many hundreds of years, or so many thousands of years, or so many hundreds of thousands of years."

"Then is it possible to give a simile, venerable sir?"

"It is possible, monk," the Blessed One said. "Suppose, monk, there was a great stone mountain a *yojana* long, a *yojana* wide, and a *yojana* high, without holes or crevices, one solid mass of rock.<sup>20</sup> At the end of every hundred years a man would stroke it once with a piece of fine cloth. That great stone mountain might by this effort be worn away and eliminated but the eon would still not have come to an end. So long is an eon, monk. And of eons of such length, we have wandered through so many eons, so many hundreds of eons, so many thousands of eons, so many hundreds of thousands of eons. For what reason? Because, monk, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

(SN 15:5; II 181-82)

### (4) *The River Ganges*

At Rājagaha, in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrel Sanctuary, a certain brahmin approached the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, he sat down to one side and asked him: "Master Gotama, how many eons have elapsed and gone by?"

"Brahmin, many eons have elapsed and gone by. It is not easy to count them and say they are so many eons, or so many hundreds of eons, or so many thousands of eons, or so many hundreds of thousands of eons."

"But is it possible to give a simile, Master Gotama?"

"It is possible, brahmin," the Blessed One said. "Imagine, brahmin, the grains of sand between the point where the river Ganges originates and the point where it enters the great ocean: it is not easy to count these and say there are so many grains of sand, or so many hundreds of grains, or so many thousands of grains, or so many hundreds of thousands of grains. Brahmin, the eons that have elapsed and gone by are even more numerous than that. It is not easy to count them and say that they are so many eons, or so many hundreds of eons, or so many thousands of eons, or so many hundreds of thousands of eons. For what reason? Because, brahmin, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.... It is enough to be liberated from them."

(SN 15:8; II 183-84)

### (5) *Dog on a Leash*

"Monks, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

"There comes a time, monks, when the great ocean dries up and evaporates and no longer exists, but still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

"There comes a time, monks, when Sineru, the king of mountains, burns up and perishes and no longer exists, but still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

"There comes a time, monks, when the great earth burns up and perishes and no longer exists, but still, I say, there is no making an end of suffering for those beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

"Suppose, monks, a dog tied up on a leash was bound to a strong post or pillar: it would just keep on running and revolving around that same post or pillar. So too, the uninstructed worldling regards form

as self ... feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self.... He just keeps running and revolving around form, around feeling, around perception, around volitional formations, around consciousness. As he keeps on running and revolving around them, he is not freed from form, not freed from feeling, not freed from perception, not freed from volitional formations, not freed from consciousness. He is not freed from birth, aging, and death; not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair; not freed from suffering, I say."

(SN 22:99; II 149–50)