

Tranquillity and Insight in Early Buddhist Discourse

by Bhikkhu Anālayo

lecture 6

MĀ 74 – Discourse on Eight Thoughts

(Parallel to AN 8.30 / AN IV 228)

main points:

8 qualities conducive to tranquillity and insight:

- 1) not advertising one's good qualities
- 2) contentment with what one has
- 3) bodily and mental seclusion, detachment with visitors
- 4) effort to overcome unwholesome, cultivate wholesome
- 5) being mindful / practice 4 *satipaṭṭhānas*
- 6) cultivating concentration up to 4 absorptions
- 7) having insight into impermanence
- 8) delighting in the cessation of proliferation, Nirvāṇa

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MĀ 75 – Discourse on the Path to Pure Imperturbability

(Parallel to MN 106/ MN II 261)

At that time the Blessed One addressed the monks: "Sensual pleasures are impermanent, unreal, false, of a false nature, being indeed illusory, deceptive, and delusive.

- 1) "Sensual pleasures now or in the future, material forms now or in the future – all of these are the domain of Māra; they are indeed Māra's bait, since because of them countless evil and unwholesome states arise in the mind, [states such as] covetousness, hatred, and

contention, which create an obstruction for a noble disciple in training. A learned noble disciple contemplates thus:

"The Blessed One has taught that sensual pleasures are impermanent ... and delusive.

"If I attain an expansive state of mind and dwell in it, overcoming worldliness [by] taking control of my mind, then in this way countless evil and unwholesome states will not arise in the mind, [states such as] covetousness, hatred, and contention, which create obstructions for a noble disciple in training.'

"By means of this practice, by means of this training, by cultivating thus, broadly and extensively, he attains purity of the mind in regard to that sphere. Having attained purity of the mind in regard to that sphere, such a monk will either gain entry into imperturbability right here, or else employ wisdom for the sake of liberation.

"At a later time, when the body breaks up and life ends, because of that former mental disposition he will certainly attain the imperturbable. This is reckoned the first explanation of the path to pure imperturbability.

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MN 106 at MN II 263

"the evolving consciousness may pass on to the imperturbable"
saṃvattanikaṃ viññāṇaṃ

D 4094 *ju* 228a2 or Q 5595 *tu* 260a7
bsgrubs pas rnam par shes pa

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2) "Again, a learned noble disciple contemplates thus: 'If there are forms, they are all [made up] of the four elements and what is

derived from the four elements. The four elements are of an impermanent nature, unsatisfactory, and [subject] to cessation'

... this is reckoned the second explanation of the path to pure imperturbability.

3) "Again, a learned noble disciple contemplates thus: 'Sensual pleasures now or in the future, forms now or in the future, sensual perceptions now or in the future, perceptions of form now or in the future – all of these perceptions are of an impermanent nature, unsatisfactory, and [subject] to cessation.'

... this is reckoned the third explanation of the path to pure imperturbability.

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summary of three approaches to imperturbability:

- 1) sensual pleasures are defiling and obstructing,
- 2) material forms are made up of the four elements,
- 3) the above [two] and perceptions of them are impermanent.

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MĀ 75

1) "Again, a learned noble disciple contemplates thus: 'Sensual perceptions now or in the future, perceptions of form now or in the future, and the perception of imperturbability – all of these perceptions are of an impermanent nature, unsatisfactory, and [subject] to cessation.'

"At that time he will attain the perception of nothingness ... This is reckoned the first explanation of the path to the sphere of pure nothingness.

2) "Again, a learned noble disciple contemplates thus: 'This world is empty, empty of a self and of anything belonging to a self, empty of anything permanent, empty of anything enduring, empty of continuous existence, empty of anything unchanging.'

... this is reckoned the second explanation of the path to the sphere of pure nothingness.

3) "Again, a learned noble disciple contemplates thus: 'I do not act for another, nor do I act for myself.'

... this is reckoned the third explanation of the path to the sphere of pure nothingness.

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MN 106:

- 1) cessation of perceptions is peaceful
- 2) empty of self
- 3) I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere, nor is there anything belonging to me in anyone anywhere

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MĀ 75

"Again, a learned noble disciple contemplates thus: 'Sensual pleasures now or in the future, forms now or in the future, sensual perceptions now or in the future, perceptions of form now or in the future, the perception of imperturbability, and the perception of the sphere of nothingness – all of these perceptions are of an impermanent nature, unsatisfactory, and [subject] to cessation.' At that time he will attain [neither-perception-nor]-non-perception.

"... this is reckoned the explanation of the path to pure [neither-perception-nor]-non-perception."

At that time the venerable Ānanda was fanning the Buddha. Then the venerable Ānanda, holding his hands with palms together toward the Buddha, said:

"Blessed One, suppose a monk practices thus: '[There is] no I, nor anything belonging to me; I will not be, what belongs to me will not be. If [something] has earlier [come to] exist, it will be extinguished,' and he attains equanimity [by practicing thus]. Blessed One, a monk who practices thus, will he ultimately attain final Nirvāṇa?"

The Blessed One replied: "Ānanda, this matter is uncertain. There are some who attain it, there are some who do not attain it ... Ānanda, if the monk delights in that equanimity, becomes attached to that equanimity, becomes established in that equanimity, Ānanda, then practicing thus the monk will certainly not attain final Nirvāṇa ... Ānanda, in his practice there is [still] a remainder [of clinging], namely to the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Among [states of] existence, this is supreme – [this is what] that monk is clinging to."

Venerable Ānanda said: "Blessed One, so that monk is practicing with a remainder of clinging?"

The Blessed One said: "Ānanda, in this way a monk is indeed practicing with a remainder of clinging."

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(if he practices without such clinging he will attain final Nirvāṇa)

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MĀ 75

Then the venerable Ānanda, holding his hands with palms together toward the Buddha, said: "The Blessed One has explained the path to pure imperturbability, he has explained the path to the sphere of pure

nothingness, he has explained the path to pure [neither-perception-nor]-non-perception, he has explained Nirvāṇa without remainder. Blessed One, what is noble liberation?"

The Blessed One replied: "Ānanda, a learned noble disciple contemplates thus: 'Sensual pleasures ... and the perception of [neither-perception-nor]-non-perception – all of these perceptions are of an impermanent nature, unsatisfactory, and [subject] to cessation. This is what is called one's own existence (*sakkāya*).

"If there is one's own existence, [then] there is birth, old age, disease, and death.' Ānanda, if there is this reality: total extinction, remainderless cessation, no further existence – then there will be no birth, old age, disease, and death.

"A noble [disciple] contemplates thus: 'If anything exists, it certainly has the nature of liberation. If there is Nirvāṇa without remainder, that is called the deathless.'

"With such contemplation and such view he will certainly attain liberation of the mind from the influx of sensual desire, from the influx of existence and from the influx of ignorance. Being liberated, he knows he is liberated, knowing as it truly is that 'birth is ended, the holy life has been established, what was to be done has been done. There will not be another existence.'

"Ānanda, I have now explained to you the path to pure imperturbability, I have explained the path to the sphere of pure nothingness, I have explained the path to pure [neither-perception-nor]-non-perception, I have explained Nirvāṇa without remainder, and I have explained noble liberation.

"What a teacher does for [his] disciples out of great compassion, with kind thoughts of empathy, seeking their benefit and welfare, seeking their peace and happiness, I have now done.

"You must, moreover, act yourselves. Go to a secluded place, to the base of a tree in a forest, to an empty quiet place, to meditate and reflect. Do not be negligent. Be diligent and increase your efforts, lest you later have regrets. This is my teaching, this is my instruction!"

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main point

- interrelationship of tranquillity and insight

"There is no absorption for one bereft of wisdom
there is no wisdom for one who does not meditate,
one who has [both] absorption and wisdom,
such a one is close to Nirvāṇa indeed."

(Dhp 372)