

Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) Sutta

The Exposition on Penetrating Insight

[A novel application of the Noble Truths as an overview of the way to spiritual liberation]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 6.63)

Translated with notes by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

This popular sutta is often quoted.¹ It is a summary of the whole Teaching as the Way in six parallel methods, each with six steps: sensual desire, feelings, perceptions, mental cankers, karma, and suffering—each to be understood by its definition, diversity (of manifestation), result, cessation and the way to its cessation.

Each of analytical scheme of the six defilements (sensual desire, etc) is built on the structure of **the Four Noble Truth** with the additional factors of “diversity” and of “result”. The Aṅguttara Comy glosses “diversity” as “various causes” (*vemattatā ti nānā, kāraṇaṃ*, AA 3:406). In other words, it serves as an elaboration of the 2nd Noble Truth, the various internal or subjective causes of *dukkha*. “Result” (*vipāka*), on the other hand, shows the external or objective causes of *dukkha*.

The Aṅguttara Commentary takes *pariyāya* here to mean “cause” (*kāraṇa*), that is, a means of penetrating (ie destroying) the defilements: “It is called ‘penetrative’ (*nibbedhika*) because it penetrates the mass of greed, etc, which had never before been penetrated or cleaved.”

The highlight of the exposition is found in these two remarkable lines of the sutta’s only verse:

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:
What is beautiful in the world remain as they are.

This essentially means that the world is what one thinks of it: it is one’s mind that one has to deal with without blaming the world (that it is evil, etc).

The list of spiritual methods listed here ends with that of dealing with suffering. This last method is related to the one given in **the Upanisā Sutta** (S 3:29-32/12.23) that applies the causal method of analysis:

Suffering (*dukkha*) is the immediate cause of faith,
Faith (*saddhā*)² is the immediate cause of joy,
Joy (*pamojjā*) is the immediate cause of zest,
Zest (*pīti*) is the immediate cause tranquility;
Tranquillity (*passaddhi*) is the immediate cause of gladness;
Gladness (*sukha*) is the immediate cause of concentration;
Concentration (*samādhi*) is the immediate cause of knowledge and vision of things as they really;

¹ UA 176; DhsA 369 f; etc.

² “Faith,” *saddhā*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlaka, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati, saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,8 401,23); also called *avecca-p.pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69). “Wise faith” is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). **Gethin** speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): “Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith in its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody... the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary.” (Gethin 2001:207; my emphases).

Knowledge and vision of things as they really (*yathā, bhūta, ñāna, dassana*) are is the immediate cause of disenchantment;
 Disenchantment (*nibbidā*) is the immediate cause of dispassion;
 Dispassion (*virāga*) is the immediate cause of release;
 Release (*vimutti*) is the immediate cause of the knowledge of the destruction [of the cankers].

The sutta closes on a very positive note, dropping a broad hint that one can work one's way out of suffering:

...there is one who although overwhelmed by suffering, his mind overcome by suffering, but is one who searches outside, asking, 'Who knows a way or two to end this suffering?'

The result of suffering, monks, is either confusion or search, I say!

(S 6.63.13/3:415)

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The Exposition on Penetrating Insight

[410]

1 “Monks, I shall teach you the Dharma exposition on penetrating insight. Listen to it, pay careful attention, I will speak.”

“Yes, venerable sir!” the monks replied to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this:

Synopsis

2a “And what, monks, is this Dharma exposition on penetrating insight?

Sensual desire (*kāma*),³ monks, should be known.

The origin (*nidāna, sambhava*)⁴ of sensual desire should be known.

The diversity (*vemattatā*) of sensual desire should be known.

The result (*vipāka*) of sensual desire should be known.

The cessation (*nirodho*) of sensual desire should be known.

The way to the cessation (*nirodha, gāmini, paṭipadā*) of sensual desire should be known.

2b Feelings (*vedanā*), monks, should be known.

The origin of feelings...

The diversity...

The result...

The cessation...

The way to the cessation of feelings should be known.

2c Perception (*saññā*), monks, should be known.

The origin of perceptions...

The diversity...

The result...

The cessation...

The way to the cessation of perceptions should be known.

2d The mental cankers (*āsava*), monks, should be known.

The origin of mental cankers...

The diversity...

³ See n on §3.

⁴ “Origin,” *nidāna, sambhavo*. I follow Comy: *nidānam eva sambhavo* (AA 3:406).

The result...
 The cessation...
 The way to the cessation of mental cankers should be known.
2e Karma (*kamma*), monks, should be known.
 The origin of karma...
 The diversity...
 The result...
 The cessation...
 The way to the cessation of karma should be known.
2f Suffering (*dukkha*), monks, should be known.
 The origin of suffering...
 The diversity...
 The result...
 The cessation...
 The way to the cessation of suffering should be known.

Sensuality

3a (1) **Sensual desires** (*kāma*),⁵ monks, should be known;
 The origin of desires should be known.
 The diversity desires should be known.
 The result of sensual desires **[411]** should be known.
 The cessation of sensual desires should be known.
 The way to the cessation of sensual desires should be known.

—So it is said, but in what connection is this said?

3b There are these **five cords of sensual pleasures** (*kāma,guṇa*):

Forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;
 Sounds cognizable by the ear that are...delightful;
 Smells cognizable by the nose that are...delightful;
 Tastes cognizable by the tongue that are...delightful;
 Touches cognizable by the body that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful.

—**Monks, these are not sensual objects** (*kāma*), **but in the Noble Discipline, they are called ‘cords of sensual desire’** (*kāma,guṇa*).⁶

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:
 There is no sensuality in what is beautiful (*citra*) in the world.
 The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:
 What is beautiful in the world remain as they are.
 So here the wise remove the desire for them.⁷

⁵ “Sensual desire,” *kāma*, here may refer to “the defilement of sensuality” (*kilesa,kāma*) or to “the object of sensuality” (*vatthu,kāma*), ie either to subjective sensuality (arising in the mind: *kāma-c, chanda, kāma,rāga*, etc) or to objective defilement (arising through any of the five physical senses, ie *kāma,guṇa*) (Nm 2). When both senses are applicable, the word “sensuality” is used. See BDict: Kāma.

⁶ *Api ca kho bhikkhave n’ete kāmā, kāma,guṇā nam’ete ariyassa vinaye vuccanti*. This is an enigmatic statement whose meaning is clarified in the verse that follows. See foll n.

⁷ This verse, which explains the previous prose sentence, “plays upon the double meaning of *kāma*, emphasizes that purification is to be achieved by mastering the defilement of sensuality, not by fleeing [from] sensually enticing objects.” (A:ÑB 1999:302 n34)

4a And what, monks, is **the origin of sensuality** (*kāmānaṃ nidāna.sambhavo*)?

Contact (*phassa*),⁸ monks, is the origin of sensuality.

4b And what, monks, is **the diversity of sensuality** (*kāmānaṃ vemattatā*)?

One desires for visual forms;
another desires for sounds;
another desires for smells;
another desires for tastes;
another desires for touches.

—This, monks, is called the diversity of sensuality.

4c And what, monks, is **the result of sensual desires** (*kāmānaṃ vipāko*)?

Monks, one having sensual desires is reborn as an individual into this or that existence depending on one's merit or on one's demerit.⁹

—This, monks, is called the result of sensual desires.

4d And what, monks, is **cessation of sensual desire** (*kāma,nirodho*)?

The cessation of contact (*phassa,nirodha*), monks, is the cessation of sensual desire. It is this Noble Eightfold Path that is the way to the cessation of sensual desire, that is to say:

right view,
right thought,
right speech,
right [412] action,
right livelihood,
right effort,
right concentration,
right mindfulness.

4e Monks, when the Noble Disciple knows sensual desire thus,
when he knows the origin of sensual desire thus,
when he knows the diversity of sensual desire thus,
when he know the result of sensual desire thus,
when he knows the cessation of sensual desire thus,
when he knows the way to the cessation of sensual desire thus,
that Noble Disciple knows this **holy life of penetrating insight**¹⁰ as the cessation of sensuality.*

4f Sensual desire, monks, should be known...etc...

The way to the cessation of sensual desire should be known.

—So it is said: it is in this connection that this is said.

5a (2) Feelings (*vedanā*), monks, should be known;

The origin of feelings should be known.

The diversity of feelings should be known.

The result of feelings should be known.

The cessation of feelings should be known.

The way to the cessation of feelings should be known.

—So it is said, but in what connection is this said?

5b Monks, there are these three kinds of feeling:

Pleasant feelings;

⁸ “Contact,” *phassa*. Comy: “Contact arisen simultaneously” (*sahajāta,phasso*) (AA 3:406), ie the coming together of consciousness and the sense-object through the sense-faculty: the “triangle of experience”.

⁹ *Yam kho bhikkhave kāmayamāno [v]l kamam vediyamāno [t]ajjam tajjam attabhāvam abhinibbatteti puñña,bhāgiyam vā apuñña,bhāgiyam vā.*

¹⁰ “Holy life of penetrating insight,” *nibbedhikham brahmacāriyam*. Comy: The holy life here is the supremundane path (Stream-entry, etc).

Unpleasant feelings;
Neutral feelings.

6a And what, monks, is **the origin of feelings**?

Contact, monks, is the origin of suffering.

6b And what, monks, is **the diversity of feelings**?

Monks, there is physical pleasant feeling;

There is non-physical pleasant feeling;

There is physical painful feeling;

There is non-physical painful feeling.

There is physical neutral feeling;

There is non-physical neutral feeling.

—This, monks, is called the diversity of feelings.

6c And what, monks, is **the result of feelings**.

Monks, one who feels is reborn as an individual into this or that existence depending on one's merit or on one's demerit

—This, monks, is called the result of feelings.

6d And what, monks, is **the cessation of feelings**.

The cessation of contact, monks, is the cessation of feelings. It is this Noble Eightfold Path that is the way to the cessation of feelings, that is to say:

right view,...etc...right mindfulness.

6e Monks, when the Noble Disciple knows feelings thus,
when he knows the origin of feelings thus,
when he knows [413] the diversity of feelings thus,
when he know the result of feelings thus,
when he knows the cessation of feelings thus,
when he knows the way to the cessation of feelings thus,
that Noble Disciple knows this **holy life of penetrating insight** as the cessation of feelings.

6f Feelings, monks, should be known...etc...

The way to the cessation of feelings should be known.

—So it is said: it is in this connection that this is said.

7a (3) **Perception** (*saññā*), monks, should be known;

The origin of perceptions should be known;

The diversity of perceptions should be known;

The result of perceptions should be known;

The cessation of perceptions should be known;

The way to the cessations should be known.

—So it is said, but in what connection is this said?

7b Monks, there are these six kinds of perception:

Form perception;

Sound perception;

Smell perception;

Taste perception;

Touch perception;

Thought perception.

8a And what, monks, is **the origin of perceptions**?

Contact, monks, is the origin of perceptions.

8b And what, monks, is **the diversity of perceptions**?

One perceives visual forms;

another perceives sounds;

another perceives smells;

another perceives tastes;
another perceives touches.

—This, monks, is called the diversity of perceptions.

8c And what, monks, is **the result of perceptions**?

Perceptions, monks, result in conventional speech (*vohāra*), I say! What one perceives, one expresses in conventional terms (*viharati*), saying, ‘I perceived it so!’

—This, monks, is the result of perceptions.

8d And what, monks, is **the cessation of perceptions**?

The cessation of contact, monks, is the cessation of perceptions. It is this Noble Eightfold Path that is the way to the cessation of perceptions, that is to say:

right view, ...etc...right mindfulness.

8e Monks, when the Noble Disciple knows perceptions thus,
when he knows the origin of perceptions thus,
when he knows [414] the diversity of perceptions thus,
when he know the result of perceptions thus,
when he knows the cessation of perceptions thus,
when he knows the way to the cessation of perceptions thus,
that Noble Disciple knows this **holy life of penetrating insight** as the cessation of perceptions.

8f Perceptions, monks, should be known...etc...

The way to the cessation of perceptions should be known.

—So it is said: it is in this connection that this is said.

9a (4) The mental cankers (*āsava*), monks, should be known;

The origin of mental cankers should be known;

The diversity of mental cankers should be known;

The result of mental cankers should be known;

The cessation of mental cankers should be known;

The way to the cessation of mental cankers should be known.

—So it is said, but in what connection is this said?

9b Monks, there are these three kinds of mental cankers:¹¹

The mental cankers of sensuality (*kām’āsava*);

The mental cankers of becoming (*bhav’āsava*);

The mental cankers of ignorance (*avijj’āsava*).

10a And what, monks, is **the origin of mental cankers**?

Ignorance, monks, is the origin of mental cankers.¹²

10b And what, monks, is **the diversity of mental cankers**?

There are mental cankers that lead one on to the hells (*niraya*).

There are mental cankers that lead one on to the animal kingdom (*tiracchāna,yoni*).

There are mental cankers that lead one on to the ghost realm (*pitti,visaya*).¹³

There are mental cankers that lead one on to the human world (*manussa,loka*).

¹¹ “Three kinds of mental cankers” (D 33/3:216; M 2/1:55, 9/3:41; S 4:256=5:56=189; A 3.59/3:414, 67, 6.63; Vbh 347). A later formula adds a fourth mental canker, that of “view” (*diṭṭh’āsava*) (V 3:5; D 2:81=84; A 1:241; Vbh 373). The four mental cankers are also known as “floods” (*ogha*, D 3:230; UA 362) and as “yokes” (*yoga*, D 3:230, 276; A 2:10).

¹² **The Sammā,diṭṭhi S** (M 9) says that mental cankers (incl ignorance) are the cause of ignorance (M 9.67/1:54), and ignorance is the cause of mental cankers (M 9.70/1:55). Comy explains that this conditioning of ignorance by ignorance should be understood to mean that the ignorance in any existence is conditioned by the existence in the preceding existence. “Having shown this, (it follows that) no point of ignorance can be discovered, and as such this cyclic existence (*samsāra*) has no discernible beginning.” (MA 1:224). See Ñāṇamoli (tr) 1991:22, 67.

¹³ *Pitti,visāya*, also tr as “realm of the departed”. See Jāṇussoṇī S (Sutta Discovery series, 2003).

There are mental cankers that lead one on to the heavenly world (*deva, loka*).

—This, monks, is called the diversity of mental cankers.

10c And what, monks, is **the result of mental cankers**?

Monks, one guided by ignorance (*avijjā*) is reborn as an individual into this or that existence depending on one's merit or on one's demerit.

—This, monks, is called the result of mental cankers.

10d And what, monks, is **the cessation of mental cankers**?

The cessation of ignorance, monks, is the cessation of mental cankers. It is this Noble Eightfold Path that is the way to the cessation of mental cankers, that is to say:

right view, ...etc...right mindfulness.

10e Monks, when the Noble Disciple knows mental cankers thus, when he knows the origin of mental cankers thus, when he knows the diversity of mental cankers thus, when he know the result of mental cankers thus, when he knows the cessation of mental cankers thus, when he knows the way to the cessation of mental cankers thus, that Noble Disciple knows this **holy life of penetrating insight** as the cessation of mental cankers. [415]

10f Mental cankers, monks, should be known...etc...

The way to the cessation of mental cankers should be known.

—So it is said: it is in this connection that this is said.

11a (5) Karma (*kamma*), monks, should be known;

The origin of karma should be known;

The diversity of karma should be known;

The result of karma should be known;

The cessation of karma should be known;

The way to the cessation of karma should be known.

—So it is said, but in what connection is this said?

11b Monks, **volition is karma, I say!** Having willed, one does karmic acts through the body, speech and the mind.

12a And what, monks, is **the origin of karma**?

Contact, monks, is the origin of karma.

12b And what, monks, is **the diversity of karma**?

There are karma¹⁴ that lead one on to the hells.

...to the animal kingdom.

...to the ghost realms.

...to the human world.

There are karma that lead one on to the heavenly world.

—This, monks, is called the diversity of karma.

12c And what, monks, is **the result of karma**?

There are, monks, these three kinds of karmic results,¹⁵ I say!

Those that arise [ripen] here and now (*diṭṭhe dhamme upapajje*);

Those that arise in the next (*apare*) life;

¹⁴ I've taken "karma" as an uncountable noun here. Alt tr: "karmic acts".

¹⁵ "Three kinds of karmic results," see (Kamma) Nidāna S (A 3.33/1:134-136) on causes and kinds of karma. See also Visuddhi, magga where these three types of karma are respectively named as *diṭṭha, dhamma vedanīya kamma, upapajja, vedanīya kamma* and *apara, pariya vedanīya kamma*—and a fourth, *ahosi kamma*, lapsed or ineffectual karma (Vism 19.14/601). The first two kinds of karma may be without karmic result if the circumstances required for their ripening are missing, or because of the presence of a stronger counteractive karma; as such, they are called *ahosi, kamma*: cf Loṇa, phala S (A 3.99) [see Sutta Discovery 2003]. See Vism:Ñ 19.14/696 n2.

Those that arise in subsequent future (*pariyāye*) lives.

—This, monks, is called the result of karma.

12d And what, monks, is **the cessation of karma**?

The cessation of contact, monks, is the cessation of karma. It is this Noble Eightfold Path that is the way to the cessation of karma, that is to say:

right view,...etc...right mindfulness.

12e Monks, when the Noble Disciple knows karma thus, when he knows the origin of karma thus, when he knows the diversity of karma thus, when he know the result of karma thus, when he knows the cessation of karma thus, when he knows the way to the cessation of karma thus, that Noble Disciple knows this **holy life of penetrating insight** as the cessation of karma.

12f Karma, monks, should be known...etc... [416]

The way to the cessation of karma should be known.

—So it is said: it is in this connection that this is said.

13a (6) Suffering (*dukkha*), monks, should be known;

The origin of suffering should be known;

The diversity of suffering should be known;

The result of suffering should be known;

The cessation of suffering should be known;

The way to the cessation of suffering should be known.

13b —So it is said, but in what connection is this said?

Birth is suffering,

decay¹⁶ is suffering,

disease is suffering,¹⁷

death is suffering;

grief, lamentation, pain, anguish and despair are suffering;

to be with the unpleasant is suffering;

to be without the pleasant is suffering;

not to get what one desires is suffering;

—in short, the five aggregates of clinging¹⁸ are suffering.

13c And what, monks, is **the origin of suffering**?

Craving (*tanhā*), monks is the origin of suffering.

13d And what, monks, is **the diversity of suffering**?

There is suffering that is excessive (*adhimatta*).

There is suffering that small [of no account] (*paritta*).

There is suffering that fades away slowly (*dandha, virāgi*);

There is suffering that fades away quickly (*khippa, virāgi*).

—This, monks, is called the diversity of suffering.

13e And what, monks, is **the result of suffering**?

Here, monks, there is one who is overwhelmed by suffering, his mind overcome by suffering: he grieves, moans, laments, beats his breast, weeps, becomes confused.

Or, there is one who although overwhelmed by suffering, his mind overcome by suffering, but is one who searches outside, asking, ‘Who knows a way or two to end this suffering?’

The result of suffering, monks, is either confusion or search, I say!

¹⁶ *jarā*, old age, aging.

¹⁷ Only here & in the Vinaya version; not mentioned in Comys.

¹⁸ *pañc’upadāna-k, khandha*, namely, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47; Vbh 1)..

—This, monks, is called the result of suffering.

13f And what, monks, is **the cessation of suffering**?

The cessation of craving, monks, is the cessation of suffering. It is this Noble Eightfold Path that is the way to the cessation of suffering, that is to say:

right view,...etc...right mindfulness.

13g Monks, when the Noble Disciple knows suffering thus, when he knows the origin of suffering, when he knows the diversity of suffering thus, when he know the result of suffering thus, when he knows the cessation of suffering thus, when he knows the way to the cessation of suffering thus, that Noble Disciple knows this **holy life of penetrating insight** as the cessation of suffering.

13h Suffering, monks, should be known...etc... **[416]**

The way to the cessation of suffering should be known.

—So it is said: it is in this connection that this is said.

This, indeed, monks, is the Dharma exposition on penetrating insight.”

—evam—

Bibliography

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