

MN 44: Cūḷavedalla Sutta

The Lesser Series of Questions

Translated by Suddhāso Bhikkhu

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagaha, in the Bamboo Grove, at the Squirrel Feeding Area. Then the lay disciple Visākha approached Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī¹; after approaching and venerating Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī, he sat to one side.

[*Self-Identity*]

When he was seated to one side, Visākha said to Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī, “Noble Lady, it is said 'self-identity, self-identity.' Noble Lady, what is called 'self-identity' by the Blessed One?”

“Sir Visākha, these five aggregates affected by clinging are called 'self-identity' by the Blessed One: the body-aggregate affected by clinging; the feeling-aggregate affected by clinging; the recognition-aggregate affected by clinging; the thought-aggregate affected by clinging; the consciousness-aggregate affected by clinging. Sir Visākha, these five aggregates affected by clinging are called 'self-identity' by the Blessed One.”

“Excellent, Noble Lady!” After delighting and rejoicing in Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī's statement, Visākha asked another question: “Noble Lady, it is said 'the origin of self-identity, the origin of self-identity.' Noble Lady, what is called 'the origin of self-identity' by the Blessed One?”

“Sir Visākha, there is craving, which produces further existence, is accompanied by delight and passion, and seeks delight in various places; namely, craving for sensuality, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence. Sir Visākha, this is called 'the origin of self-identity' by the Blessed One.”

“Noble Lady, it is said 'the cessation of self-identity, the cessation of self-identity.' Noble Lady, what is called 'the cessation of self-identity' by the Blessed One?”

“Sir Visākha, the remainderless fading away and cessation of that craving; giving it up, relinquishing it, releasing it, and being detached from it - Sir Visākha, this is called 'the cessation of self-identity' by the Blessed One.”

“Noble Lady, it is said 'the path of practice which leads to the cessation of self-identity, the path of practice which leads to the cessation of self-identity.' Noble Lady, what is called 'the path of practice which leads to the cessation of self-identity' by the Blessed One?”

“Sir Visākha, this very Noble Eightfold Path has been called 'the path of practice which leads to the cessation of self-identity' by the Blessed One; namely, right perspective, right

¹ Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī was a nun who the Buddha singled out as the best Dhamma teacher among all nuns at the time (AN 1.235).

attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.”

“Noble Lady, is that craving identical with the five aggregates, or is craving separate from the five aggregates?”

“Sir Visākha, that craving is not identical with the five aggregates, and it is also not separate from the five aggregates. Sir Visākha, the interest and passion as regards the five aggregates is the clinging there.”

“Noble Lady, how is there belief in self-identity²?”

“Here, Sir Visākha, an unlearned ordinary person – one who does not see noble beings, has not mastered the teachings of noble beings, is undisciplined in the teachings of noble beings, does not see good people, has not mastered the teachings of good people, and is undisciplined in the teachings of good people – regards the body as his self, or the body as owned by his self, or the body as contained within his self, or his self as contained within the body. He regards feeling as his self... regards recognition as his self... regards thoughts as his self... regards consciousness as his self, or consciousness as owned by his self, or consciousness as contained within his self, or his self as contained within consciousness. Sir Visākha, it is in this way that there is belief in self-identity.”

“Noble Lady, how is there no belief in self-identity?”

“Here, Sir Visākha, a learned ordinary person – one who sees noble beings, has mastered the teachings of noble beings, is well-disciplined in the teachings of noble beings, sees good people, has mastered the teachings of good people, and is well-disciplined in the teachings of good people – does not regard the body as his self, does not regard the body as owned by his self, does not regard the body as contained within his self, and does not regard his self as contained within the body. He does not regard feeling as his self... does not regard recognition as his self... does not regard thoughts as his self... does not regard consciousness as his self, does not regard consciousness as owned by his self, does not regard consciousness as contained within his self, and does not regard his self as contained within consciousness. Sir Visākha, it is in this way that there is no belief in self-identity.”

[*The Noble Eightfold Path*]

“Noble Lady, what is the Noble Eightfold Path?”

“Sir Visākha, it is this very Noble Eightfold Path; namely, right perspective, right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.”

“Noble Lady, is the Noble Eightfold Path conditional or non-conditional?”

² *Sakkāya-ditṭhi*. Translated here as “belief in self-identity.” A more literal rendering might be “self-identity perspective,” but such a translation fails to communicate the idiomatic meaning of this term.

“Sir Visākha, the Noble Eightfold Path is conditional.”

“Noble Lady, is the Noble Eightfold Path included in the Three Aggregates³, or are the Three Aggregates included in the Noble Eightfold Path?”

“Sir Visākha, the Noble Eightfold Path is not included in the Three Aggregates. The Three Aggregates are included in the Noble Eightfold Path. Sir Visākha, right speech, right action, and right livelihood are included in the virtue-aggregate. Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration are included in the concentration-aggregate. Right perspective and right attitude are included in the wisdom-aggregate.”

“Noble Lady, what is concentration, what are the objects of concentration, what phenomena are the supports of concentration, and what is the development of concentration?”⁴

“Sir Visākha, mental focus⁵ is concentration. The Four Establishments of Mindfulness⁶ are the objects of concentration. The Four Right Exertions are the supports of concentration. Practicing, developing, and repeating these is the development of concentration.”

[*The Three Formations*]

“Noble Lady, how many formations are there?”

“Sir Visākha, there are these three formations: the body-formation, the speech-formation, and the mind-formation.”

“Noble Lady, what is the body-formation? What is the speech-formation? What is the mind-formation?”

“Sir Visākha, breathing in and out is the body-formation, thought and consideration is the speech-formation, recognition and feeling is the mind-formation.”

“Noble Lady, why is breathing in and out the body-formation? Why is thought and examination the speech-formation? Why is recognition and feeling the mind-formation?”

“Sir Visākha, breathing in and breathing out are bodily phenomena bound to the body; therefore breathing in and out is the body-formation. Previously one thinks and considers, and afterwards one breaks into speech; therefore thought and examination is the speech-formation. Recognition and feeling are mental phenomena bound to the mind; therefore recognition and feeling is the mind-formation.”

3 *Sīla* (virtue), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom).

4 *Samādhi*, *samādhi-nimittā*, *samādhi-parikkhārā*, *samādhi-bhāvanā*.

5 *Cittassa ekaggatā*. Lit. “one-pointedness of mind.”

6 *Cattāro Satipaṭṭhānā*. See MN10 “Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta.”

[*Cessation of Recognition and Feeling*]

“Noble Lady, how is there the attainment of the cessation of recognition and feeling⁷?”

“Sir Visākha, when a monk is attaining the cessation of recognition and feeling, it does not occur to him 'I will attain the cessation of recognition and feeling,' or 'I am attaining the cessation of recognition and feeling,' or 'I have attained the cessation of recognition and feeling.' Rather it is the prior development of his mind that guides it to that state.”

“Noble Lady, when a monk is attaining the cessation of recognition and feeling, what phenomena cease first: the body-formation, the speech-formation, or the mind-formation?”

“Sir Visākha, when a monk is attaining the cessation of recognition and feeling, the speech-formation ceases first, then the body-formation, then the mind-formation.”

“Noble Lady, how is there emergence from the cessation of recognition and feeling?”

“Sir Visākha, when a monk is emerging from the cessation of recognition and feeling, it does not occur to him 'I will emerge from the cessation of recognition and feeling,' or 'I am emerging from the cessation of recognition and feeling,' or 'I have emerged from the cessation of recognition and feeling.' Rather it is the prior development of his mind that guides it to that state.”

“Noble Lady, when a monk is emerging from the cessation of recognition and feeling, what phenomena arise first: the body-formation, the speech-formation, or the mind-formation?”

“Sir Visākha, when a monk is emerging from the cessation of recognition and feeling, the mind-formation arises first, then the body-formation, then the speech-formation.”

“Noble Lady, when a monk has emerged from the cessation of recognition and feeling, how many kinds of contact touch him?”

“Sir Visākha, when a monk has emerged from the cessation of recognition and feeling, three kinds of contact touch him: emptiness contact, objectless contact, and undirected contact.”

“Noble Lady, when a monk has emerged from the cessation of recognition and feeling, what does his mind tend, lean, and incline towards?”

“Sir Visākha, when a monk has emerged from the cessation of recognition and feeling, his mind tends towards seclusion, leans towards seclusion, inclines towards seclusion.”

[*Feelings*]

7 *Saññā-vedayita-nirodha*. A state of deep concentration only accessible to those who have completely surmounted sensual desire and aversion - and thus are by definition either non-returners or Arahants.

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

“Sir Visākha, there are three kinds of feeling: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, and neutral⁸ feeling.”

“Noble Lady, what is pleasant feeling? What is unpleasant feeling? What is neutral feeling?”

“Sir Visākha, anything, physical or mental, that is felt as pleasant and agreeable is 'pleasant feeling.' Anything, physical or mental, that is felt as unpleasant and disagreeable is 'unpleasant feeling.' Anything, physical or mental, that is felt as neither agreeable nor disagreeable is 'neutral feeling.'”

“Noble Lady, in regard to pleasant feeling, what is pleasant and what is unpleasant? In regard to unpleasant feeling, what is pleasant and what is unpleasant? In regard to neutral feeling, what is pleasant and what is unpleasant?”

“Sir Visākha, a pleasant feeling is pleasant when it is stable and unpleasant when it changes. An unpleasant feeling is unpleasant when it is stable and pleasant when it changes. A neutral feeling is pleasant when there is knowledge and unpleasant when there is no knowledge.”

“Noble Lady, what tendency accompanies a pleasant feeling? What tendency accompanies an unpleasant feeling? What tendency accompanies a neutral feeling?”

“Sir Visākha, the tendency towards lust accompanies a pleasant feeling. The tendency towards aversion accompanies an unpleasant feeling. The tendency towards ignorance accompanies a neutral feeling.”

“Noble Lady, does the tendency towards lust accompany all pleasant feelings? Does the tendency towards aversion accompany all unpleasant feelings? Does the tendency towards ignorance accompany all neutral feelings?”

“Sir Visākha, the tendency towards lust does not accompany all pleasant feelings. The tendency towards aversion does not accompany all unpleasant feelings. The tendency towards ignorance does not accompany all neutral feelings.”

“Noble Lady, what should be abandoned in regard to a pleasant feeling? What should be abandoned in regard to an unpleasant feeling? What should be abandoned in regard to a neutral feeling?”

“Sir Visākha, lust should be abandoned in regard to a pleasant feeling. Aversion should be abandoned in regard to an unpleasant feeling. Ignorance should be abandoned in regard to a neutral feeling.”

8 *Adukkhamasukha*. Lit. “not unpleasant, not pleasant.”

“Noble Lady, does lust need to be abandoned in regard to all pleasant feelings? Does aversion need to be abandoned in regard to all unpleasant feelings? Does ignorance need to be abandoned in regard to all neutral feelings?”

“Sir Visākha, lust does not need to be abandoned in regard to all pleasant feelings. Aversion does not need to be abandoned in regard to all unpleasant feelings. Ignorance does not need to be abandoned in regard to all neutral feelings.

“Sir Visākha, in this case, a monk who is secluded from sensuality and from unwholesome phenomena attains and remains in the first Jhāna, which has thought and consideration, and the rapture and happiness produced by seclusion. By means of that lust is abandoned⁹; the tendency towards lust does not accompany that.

“Sir Visākha, in this case, a monk reflects in this way: ‘When will I attain and remain in that state of being which the noble ones have attained and now remain in?’¹⁰ With the establishment of longing for unsurpassed liberation, dejection arises on account of that longing. By means of that aversion is abandoned; the tendency towards aversion does not accompany that.

“Sir Visākha, in this case, with the abandoning of pleasure, the abandoning of pain, and the previous disappearance of elation and dejection, a monk attains and remains in the fourth Jhāna, which is neither unpleasant nor pleasant and has purity of equanimity and mindfulness. By means of that ignorance is abandoned; the tendency towards ignorance does not accompany that.”

“Noble Lady, what is the counterpart of pleasant feeling?”

“Sir Visākha, the counterpart of pleasant feeling is unpleasant feeling.”

“Noble Lady, what is the counterpart of unpleasant feeling?”

“Sir Visākha, the counterpart of unpleasant feeling is pleasant feeling.”

“Noble Lady, what is the counterpart of neutral feeling?”

“Sir Visākha, the counterpart of neutral feeling is ignorance.”

“Noble Lady, what is the counterpart of ignorance?”

“Sir Visākha, the counterpart of ignorance is knowledge.”

“Noble Lady, what is the counterpart of knowledge?”

“Sir Visākha, the counterpart of knowledge is liberation.”

9 This is to be understood as a temporary abandonment of lust; that is, lust is absent from the mind while it is in that state of concentration, but lust may later arise again in the mind after it emerges from concentration.

10 In other words, “When will I attain liberation/enlightenment?”

“Noble Lady, what is the counterpart of liberation?”

“Sir Visākha, the counterpart of liberation is Nibbāna.”

“Noble Lady, what is the counterpart of Nibbāna?”

“Sir Visākha, you have overstepped the [bounds of] inquiry. You were not able to understand the limitation of inquiries. Sir Visākha, the Spiritual Life¹¹ merges into Nibbāna, ends at Nibbāna, concludes with Nibbāna. Sir Visākha, if you wish, you may approach the Blessed One and ask him about this matter. You may remember it in whatever way the Blessed One explains it.”

Then the lay disciple Visākha delighted and rejoiced in Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī's speech, rose from his seat, and venerated Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī. Having done what was appropriate, he approached the Blessed One; after approaching and venerating the Blessed One, he sat to one side. When he was seated to one side, the lay disciple Visākha reported his conversation with Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī to the Blessed One. When this was said, the Blessed One said to Visākha, “Visākha, Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī is wise. Visākha, Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī has great wisdom. Visākha, if you had asked me about that matter, I would have explained it in the same way that Dhammadinnā Bhikkhunī explained it. That is the meaning of it. Remember it in that way.”

This is what the Blessed One said. Satisfied, the lay disciple Visākha delighted in the Blessed One's statement.

11 *Brahma-cariya*.