

MN 109: Mahāpuṇṇama Sutta

The Greater Discourse of the Full Moon Night

Translated by Suddhāso Bhikkhu

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti, in the Eastern Park, at the Palace of Migāra's Mother. Now on this occasion it was the Uposatha¹ day, the fifteenth [day of the fortnight], when the moon was full. The Blessed One was seated in the open air, surrounded by the community of monks. Then a certain monk rose from his seat, arranged his robe on one shoulder, extended his hands towards the Blessed One with the palms pressed together, and said to him:

“Bhante, I might ask about a particular point, if the Blessed One makes this an opportunity for the answer to a question.”

“Therefore, monk, sit on your own seat and ask what you wish.”

Then that monk sat on his own seat and said to the Blessed One, “Bhante, are these the five aggregates affected by clinging – the body-aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling²-aggregate affected by clinging, the recognition-aggregate affected by clinging, the thought-aggregate affected by clinging, and the consciousness-aggregate affected by clinging?”

“Monk, these are the five aggregates affected by clinging – the body-aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling-aggregate affected by clinging, the recognition-aggregate affected by clinging, the thought-aggregate affected by clinging, and the consciousness-aggregate affected by clinging.”

“Excellent, Bhante!” After delighting and rejoicing in the Blessed One's statement, that monk asked him another question: “Bhante, what is the root of these five aggregates affected by clinging?”

“Monk, the root of these five aggregates affected by clinging is interest³.”

“Bhante, is clinging identical with the five aggregates affected by clinging, or is clinging separate from the five aggregates affected by clinging?”

“Monk, clinging is not identical with the five aggregates affected by clinging, nor is clinging separate from the five aggregates affected by clinging. Monk, the interest and passion in regard to the five aggregates affected by clinging is the clinging there.”

1 Twice a month, on the days of the full moon and new moon, all the monks or nuns in the monastery gather together to recite the monastic training rules. This is also often used as an opportunity to discuss the teachings and meditate together.

2 *Vedanā*. This refers specifically to whether an experience – pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. It does not encompass emotions, which would be included under *saṅkhāra* (the thought-aggregate).

3 *Chanda*. Also translatable as “zeal,” “enthusiasm,” “desire,” “inclination,” etc. This term is notable in that it is often used in a positive sense (such as an enthusiasm for Dhamma), whereas other Pāli words translatable as “desire” (such as *taṇhā* and *rāga*) are almost always used in a negative sense.

“Bhante, can there be different kinds of interest and passion in regard to the five aggregates affected by clinging?”

“There can be, monk,” the Blessed One said. “Monk, here someone thinks, 'May the body be thus in the future, may feeling be thus in the future, may recognition be thus in the future, may thought be thus in the future, may consciousness be thus in the future.' Monk, it is in this way that there can be different kinds of interest and passion in regard to the five aggregates affected by clinging.”

“Bhante, how far does the term 'aggregate' extend?”

“Monk, any body - past, future, or present; internal or external; subtle or not subtle; inferior or superior; far or near - this is the body-aggregate. Any feeling - past, future, or present; internal or external; subtle or not subtle; inferior or superior; far or near - this is the feeling-aggregate. Any recognition - past, future, or present; internal or external; subtle or not subtle; inferior or superior; far or near - this is the recognition-aggregate. Any thought - past, future, or present; internal or external; subtle or not subtle; inferior or superior; far or near - this is the thought-aggregate. Any consciousness - past, future, or present; internal or external; subtle or not subtle; inferior or superior; far or near - this is the consciousness-aggregate. Monk, this is how far the term 'aggregate' extends.”

“Bhante, what is the cause of and reason for awareness⁴ of the body-aggregate? What is the cause of and reason for awareness of the feeling-aggregate? What is the cause of and reason for awareness of the recognition-aggregate? What is the cause of and reason for awareness of the thought-aggregate? What is the cause of and reason for awareness of the consciousness-aggregate?”

“Monk, the four great elements⁵ are the cause of and reason for awareness of the body-aggregate. Sense-contact is the cause of and reason for awareness of the feeling-aggregate. Sense-contact is the cause of and reason for awareness of the recognition-aggregate. Mind-and-body is the cause of and reason for awareness of the consciousness-aggregate.”

“Bhante, how is there belief in self-identity⁶?”

“Here, monk, 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

4 *Paññāpana*. Usually this means “designating,” “indicating” or “making known.” Here, however, the context seems to require a slightly different translation.

5 *Mahā-bhūtā*. Also called *dhātu*, this refers to the four basic characteristics of our subjective experience of physical reality - solidity, fluidity, heat, and motion. Any physical experience can be described in terms of one or more of these four characteristics.

6 *Sakkāya-ditṭhi*. This is identification of one's self with the five aggregates - such as believing “I am my body,” “I am my thoughts,” “I am my feelings,” etc.

self, or consciousness as contained within his self, or his self as contained within consciousness. Monk, it is in this way that there is belief in self-identity.”

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

“Here, monk, 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. Monk, it is in this way that there is no belief in self-identity.”

“Bhante, as regards the body, what is the gratification, what is the drawback, and what is the escape? As regards feeling... recognition... thoughts... consciousness, what is the gratification, what is the drawback, and what is the escape?”

“Monk, there is pleasure and elation that arises dependent on the body – this is the gratification as regards the body. The body is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to alteration⁷ – this is the drawback as regards the body. The removal of interest and passion as regards the body, the abandoning of interest and passion as regards the body – this is the escape as regards the body.

“Monk, there is pleasure and elation that arises dependent on feeling... recognition... thoughts... consciousness – this is the gratification as regards consciousness. Consciousness is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to alteration – this is the drawback as regards consciousness. The removal of interest and passion as regards consciousness, the abandoning of interest and passion as regards consciousness – this is the escape as regards consciousness.”

“Bhante, how does one know and see such that there is no I-making, my-making, or tendency towards conceit as regards this body, its consciousness, and all external appearances?”

“Monk, regarding any body – past, future, or present; internal or external; subtle or not subtle; inferior or superior; far or near – using correct wisdom, one accurately sees every body in this way: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.' Regarding any feeling... recognition... thought... consciousness – past, future, or present; internal or external; subtle or not subtle; inferior or superior; far or near – using correct wisdom, one accurately sees every consciousness in this way: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.' Monk, knowing and seeing in this way, there is no I-making, my-making, or

⁷ *Vipariṇāma*. This term connotes catastrophic or disastrous alteration, such as serious illness, derangement, or death.

tendency towards conceit as regards this body, its consciousness, and all external appearances.”

Then this line of thought arose in the mind of a certain monk: “Apparently the body is not self, feeling is not self, recognition is not self, thoughts are not self, and consciousness is not self. What self will experience the actions performed by not-self?”

Then the Blessed One, after reading the thoughts of that monk, addressed the monks: “Monks, it is possible that some foolish man here who has not understood, who is immersed in ignorance and dominated by craving, might think to override the Teacher's instructions by thinking, 'Apparently the body is not self, feeling is not self, recognition is not self, thoughts are not self, and consciousness is not self. What self will experience the actions performed by not-self?' Monks, I will question you about the teachings you have learned from me.

“What do you think, monks - is the body permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, Bhante.”

“Is that which is impermanent [a source of] suffering or [a source of] happiness?”

“Suffering, Bhante.”

“Is it appropriate to regard that which is impermanent, [a source of] suffering, and subject to alteration as 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self'?”

“Certainly not, Bhante.”

“What do you think, monks - is feeling... recognition... thought... consciousness permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, Bhante.”

“Is that which is impermanent [a source of] suffering or [a source of] happiness?”

“Suffering, Bhante.”

“Is it appropriate to regard that which is impermanent, [a source of] suffering, and subject to alteration as 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self'?”

“Certainly not, Bhante.”

“Therefore, monks, regarding any body - past, future, or present; internal or external; subtle or not subtle; inferior or superior; far or near - using correct wisdom, one accurately sees every body in this way: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.' Regarding any feeling... recognition... thoughts... consciousness - past, future, or present; internal or external; subtle or not subtle; inferior or superior; far or near - using correct wisdom, one accurately sees every consciousness in this way: 'This is not mine, I am not

this, this is not my self.' Monks, the learned noble disciple who sees in this way becomes disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with recognition, disenchanted with thoughts, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchantment causes dispassion. Dispassion liberates. When liberated, there is the knowledge 'Liberated.' One understands, 'Birth has been eliminated. The Holy Life has been consummated. What was to be done has been done. There will be no return to this state of existence.'"

This is what the Blessed One said. Satisfied, those monks delighted in the Blessed One's statement. While this explanation was being spoken, the minds of sixty monks were freed from the taints by means of non-clinging.