

MN 16: Cetokhila Sutta

Mental Desolation

Translated by Suddhāso Bhikkhu

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti, in Jeta's Grove, at Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. There the Blessed One addressed the monks: "Monks!" "Auspicious sir," those monks replied to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said this:

"Monks, when there is a monk for whom five kinds of mental desolation have not been abandoned and five kinds of mental imprisonment have not been destroyed¹, it is not possible for him to attain growth, development, and fulfillment in this Dhamma-Vinaya.

"What are the five kinds of mental desolation that have not been abandoned by him? Here, monks, a monk is uncertain and doubtful about the Teacher², and has not resolved his mind and become confident [in the Teacher]. Monks, when a monk is uncertain and doubtful about the Teacher and has not resolved his mind and become confident [in the Teacher], his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the first kind of mental desolation that has not been abandoned by him.

"Monks, this is another one: There is a monk who is uncertain and doubtful about the Dhamma... about the Saṅgha... about the training, and has not resolved his mind and become confident [in the training]. Monks, when a monk is uncertain and doubtful about the training and has not resolved his mind and become confident [in the training], his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the fourth kind of mental desolation that has not been abandoned by him.

"Monks, this is another one: There is a monk who is angry and dissatisfied with his co-practitioners, who has an afflicted mind and a callous nature. Monks, when a monk is angry and dissatisfied with his co-practitioners, when he has an afflicted mind and a callous nature, his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the fifth kind of mental desolation that has not been abandoned by him.

"These are the five kinds of mental desolation that have not been abandoned by him.

"What are the five kinds of mental imprisonment that have not been destroyed by him? Here, monks, in regards to sensuality, a monk is not free of passion, interest, affection, thirst, fever, and craving. Monks, when a monk is not free of passion, interest, affection, thirst, fever, and craving about sensuality, his mind does not tend towards ardency,

1 *Samucchinna*. Lit. "completely cut up" (*saṃ + ud + chinna*)

2 *Satthā*. This is an epithet of the Buddha.

commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the first kind of mental imprisonment that has not been destroyed by him.

“Monks, this is another one: In regards to the body... to a [visible] object, a monk is not free of passion, interest, affection, thirst, fever, and craving. Monks, when a monk is not free of passion, interest, affection, thirst, fever, and craving about a [visible] object, his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the third kind of mental imprisonment that has not been destroyed by him.

“Monks, this is another one: There is a monk who eats as much as he wishes to fill his stomach³, and dwells devoted to the pleasure of sleep, the pleasure of reclining, and the pleasure of lethargy. Monks, when a monk eats as much as he wishes to fill his stomach and dwells devoted to the pleasure of sleep, the pleasure of reclining, and the pleasure of lethargy, his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the fourth kind of mental imprisonment that has not been destroyed by him.

“Monks, this is another one: There is a monk who lives the Holy Life intent upon a particular group of devas⁴, [thinking] 'By means of this virtue⁵, practice, austerity, or holy life, I will become a deva or a particular kind of deva.' Monks, when a monk live the Holy Life intent upon a particular group of devas, [thinking] 'By means of this virtue, practice, austerity, or holy life, I will become a deva or a particular kind of deva,' his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind does not tend towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the fifth kind of mental imprisonment that has not been destroyed by him.

“These are the five kinds of mental imprisonment that have not been destroyed by him.

“Monks, when there is a monk for whom these five kinds of mental desolation have not been abandoned and these five kinds of mental imprisonment have not been destroyed, it is not possible for him to attain growth, development, and fulfillment in this Dhamma-Vinaya.

“Monks, when there is a monk for whom five kinds of mental desolation have been abandoned and five kinds of mental imprisonment have been well-destroyed, it is possible for him to attain growth, development, and fulfillment in this Dhamma-Vinaya.

3 *Udarāvadehaka*. The implication here is overeating.

4 *Deva*. A deva is a celestial being, such as an angel or demigod, who lives an extremely pleasant life.

5 *Sīla*. This can also mean “habit.”

“What are the five kinds of mental desolation that have been abandoned by him? Here, monks, a monk is not uncertain or doubtful about the Teacher... about the Dhamma... about the Saṅgha... about the training, and has resolved his mind and become confident [in the training]. Monks, when a monk is not uncertain or doubtful about the training and has resolved his mind and become confident [in the training], his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the fourth kind of mental desolation that has been abandoned by him.

“Monks, this is another one: There is a monk who is not angry or dissatisfied with his co-practitioners, who does not have an afflicted mind or a callous nature. Monks, when a monk is not angry or dissatisfied with his co-practitioners, when he does not have an afflicted mind or a callous nature, his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the fifth kind of mental desolation that has been abandoned by him.

“These are the five kinds of mental desolation that have been abandoned by him.

“What are the five kinds of mental imprisonment that have been well-destroyed by him? Here, monks, in regards to sensuality... to the body... to a [visible] object, a monk is free of passion, interest, affection, thirst, fever, and craving. Monks, when a monk is free of passion, interest, affection, thirst, fever, and craving about a [visible] object, his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the third kind of mental imprisonment that has been well-destroyed by him.

“Monks, this is another one: There is a monk who does not eat as much as he wishes to fill his stomach, and does not dwell devoted to the pleasure of sleep, the pleasure of reclining, or the pleasure of lethargy. Monks, when a monk does not eat as much as he wishes to fill his stomach and does not dwell devoted to the pleasure of sleep, the pleasure of reclining, or the pleasure of lethargy, his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the fourth kind of mental imprisonment that has been well-destroyed by him.

“Monks, this is another one: There is a monk who does not live the Holy Life intent upon a particular group of devas, [thinking] 'By means of this virtue, practice, austerity, or holy life, I will become a deva or a particular kind of deva.' Monks, when a monk does not live the Holy Life intent upon a particular group of devas, [thinking] 'By means of this virtue, practice, austerity, or holy life, I will become a deva or a particular kind of deva,' his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving. As his mind tends towards ardency, commitment, perseverance, and striving, this is the fifth kind of mental imprisonment that has been well-destroyed by him.

“These are the five kinds of mental imprisonment that have been well-destroyed by him.

“Monks, when there is a monk for whom these five kinds of mental desolation have been abandoned and these five kinds of mental imprisonment have been well-destroyed, it is possible for him to attain growth, development, and fulfillment in this Dhamma-Vinaya.

“He develops the basis of success⁶ which is endowed with the formation⁷ of concentration and striving based on interest... on energy... on mentality... on investigation, with exertion as the fifth. Monks, a monk who is endowed in this way with fifteen factors⁸ including exertion, it is possible for [him to attain] breakthrough⁹, it is possible for [him to attain] awakening, it is possible for [him to attain] arrival at unsurpassable security from bondage. Monks, it is like when there is a hen who has eight or ten or twelve eggs. She correctly sits on, incubates, and fully develops those eggs. Even if the hen does not produce the wish, 'May the chicks pierce the eggshells with their claws or beaks and break through safely,' it is still possible that those chicks will pierce the eggshells with their claws and beaks and break through safely. Monks, in the same way, a monk who is endowed with these fifteen factors including exertion, it is possible for [him to attain] breakthrough, it is possible for [him to attain] awakening, it is possible for [him to attain] arrival at unsurpassable security from bondage.”

This is what the Blessed One said. Satisfied, those monks delighted in the Blessed One's speech.

6 *Iddhipāda*. Lit. “success-path.”

7 *Saṅkhāra*. Often translated as “volitional formation.”

8 That is, abandonment of the five kinds mental desolation, destruction of the five kinds of mental imprisonment, endowment with the four bases of success, and exertion.

9 *Abhinibbidā*. This actually means “strong disenchantment.” However, based on the simile given below, it seems likely that this is a textual error for *abhinibbidhā* (breakthrough).