

MN 52: Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta

The Discourse to the Man from Aṭṭhaka City

Translated by Bhante Suddhāso

Thus have I heard. On one occasion Venerable Ānanda was living at Vesāli, in Beluva Village. On this occasion Dasama, a householder from Aṭṭhaka¹ City, had arrived at Pāṭaliputta because of some business. Then Dasama went to the Chicken Park and approached a certain monk, paid respects to him, and sat to one side. When he was seated to one side, Dasama said to that monk, “Bhante, where does Venerable Ānanda now live? We wish to see Venerable Ānanda.”

“Householder, Venerable Ānanda lives at Vesāli, in Beluva Village.”

Then after Dasama had finished his business in Pāṭaliputta, he went to Beluva Village in Vesāli, approached Venerable Ānanda, paid respects to him, and sat to one side. When he was seated to one side, Dasama said to Venerable Ānanda, “Bhante Ānanda, is there any one thing that was said by the Blessed One – the Knower, the Seer, the Arahant, the Fully Self-Awakened One – by means of which a vigilant, ardent, dedicated monk might liberate an unliberated mind, eliminate all the corruptions that have not yet been eliminated, and reach the unsurpassable freedom from bondage that has not yet been reached?”

“Householder, there is indeed one thing that was said by the Blessed One – the Knower, the Seer, the Arahant, the Fully Self-Awakened One – by means of which a vigilant, ardent, dedicated monk might liberate an unliberated mind, eliminate all the corruptions that have not yet been eliminated, and reach the unsurpassable freedom from bondage that has not yet been reached.”

“Bhante Ānanda, what was the one thing... by means of which a vigilant, ardent, dedicated monk might liberate an unliberated mind, eliminate all the corruptions that have not yet been eliminated, and reach the unsurpassable freedom from bondage that has not yet been reached?”

“Householder, secluded from sensuality and from unwholesome phenomena, a monk attains and remains in the first Jhāna, which has thought, examination, and the rapture and happiness born from seclusion. He reflects, ‘This is the first Jhāna; it is conditional² and volitional. Whatever is conditional and volitional is impermanent and will cease³.’ Being stable in that [perception], he reaches the elimination of the corruptions. If he does not reach the elimination of the corruptions, then because of that passion for the Dhamma, because of that delight in the Dhamma, then with the complete elimination of the five lower fetters he becomes a spontaneous-reappearer⁴; and there he will attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world. Householder, this is one thing... by means of which a vigilant, ardent, dedicated monk might liberate an unliberated mind, eliminate all the corruptions that have not yet been eliminated, and reach the unsurpassable freedom from bondage that has not yet been reached.

1 Lit. “consisting of eight,” “belonging to eight,” or “eighth.”

2 *Abhisāṅkhata*. This could also be rendered “constructed,” “concocted,” “fabricated,” etc.

3 *Nirodhadhamma*. Lit. “[has the] cessation-characteristic.” This means that *even while apparently existing it already has the characteristic of non-existence*. C.f. SN 12.15 Kaccānagotta Sutta.

4 *Opapātika*. Beings who come into existence fully formed, without passing through a natal phase. This is characteristic of the more refined forms of existence, such as the higher devas.

“Here is another one, householder. A monk attains and remains in the second Jhāna... the third Jhāna... the fourth Jhāna... He reflects, ‘This is the fourth Jhāna; it is conditional and volitional. Whatever is conditional and volitional is impermanent and will cease...’ This is another thing... by means of which a vigilant, ardent, dedicated monk might liberate an unliberated mind, eliminate all the corruptions that have not yet been eliminated, and reach the unsurpassable freedom from bondage that has not yet been reached.

“Here is another one, householder. A monk dwells having suffused the first direction with a mind of loving-kindness, as well as the second, third, and fourth [directions]. Above, below, around, and everywhere, impartially and all-encompassing, he dwells having suffused the entire world with a mind of loving-kindness - abundant, enormous, immeasurable, free of aversion and hostility. He reflects, ‘This is the mental liberation of loving-kindness; it is conditional and volitional. Whatever is conditional and volitional is impermanent and will cease...’

“Here is another one, householder. A monk dwells having suffused the first direction with a mind of compassion... a mind of sympathetic joy... a mind of equanimity...

“Here is another one, householder. By completely transcending all perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and by not paying attention to perceptions of diversity, [perceiving] infinite space, a monk attains and remains in the dimension of infinite space. He reflects, ‘This is the dimension of infinite space; it is conditional and volitional. Whatever is conditional and volitional is impermanent and will cease...’

“Here is another one, householder. By completely transcending the dimension of infinite space, [perceiving] infinite consciousness, a monk attains and remains in the dimension of infinite consciousness... By completely transcending the dimension of infinite consciousness, [perceiving] nothing existing, a monk attains and remains in the dimension of nothingness. He reflects, ‘This is the dimension of nothingness; it is conditional and volitional. Whatever is conditional and volitional is impermanent and will cease.’ Being stable in that [perception], he reaches the elimination of the corruptions. If he does not reach the elimination of the corruptions, then because of that passion for the Dhamma, because of that delight in the Dhamma, then with the complete elimination of the five lower fetters he becomes a spontaneous-reappearer; and there he will attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world. Householder, this is another thing... by means of which a vigilant, ardent, dedicated monk might liberate an unliberated mind, eliminate all the corruptions that have not yet been eliminated, and reach the unsurpassable freedom from bondage that has not yet been reached.”

When this was said, Dasama said to Venerable Ānanda, “Bhante Ānanda, it is just as if a person was seeking one treasure and gained eleven treasures; in the same way, Bhante, I was seeking one door to the Deathless and gained eleven doors to the Deathless that can be developed. Bhante, just as a person whose house has eleven doors can use any one of them to make himself safe if the house is on fire; in the same way, Bhante, I can use any of these eleven doors to the Deathless to make myself safe. Bhante, members of other religions will seek out money to give to their teacher; why don’t I also make an offering to Venerable Ānanda?”

Then Dasama gathered together the community of monks who lived in Vesāli, and satisfied them by serving them many kinds of excellent food with his own hands. Then he presented each monk with a pair of robes, presented Venerable Ānanda with a set of three robes, and had five hundred monastic dwellings constructed for Venerable Ānanda.