

SN 36.6: Salla Sutta

The Thorn

Translated by Bhante Suddhāso

“Monks, the unlearned commoner feels pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, and neutral feelings. Monks, a learned disciple of the noble ones also feels pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, and neutral feelings. Monks, in this case, what is the difference, what is the distinction, what is the variance between a learned disciple of the noble ones and an unlearned commoner?”

“Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, based on the Blessed One. Bhante, it would be wonderful if the Blessed One would elucidate the meaning of this statement. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will remember it.”

“Therefore, monks, listen and carefully pay attention; I will speak.”

“Yes, Bhante,” those monks replied to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said this:

“Monks, when an unlearned commoner is touched by a painful sensation, he sorrows, frets, and laments, beating his chest and wailing, and becomes confused. He feels two feelings - one physical and one mental. Monks, it is just like a person who has been pierced by a thorn. Then he is pierced again by a second thorn. Monks, in this way, the person feels the feeling of two thorns.

“Monks, in the same way, when an unlearned commoner is touched by a painful sensation, he sorrows, frets, and laments, beating his chest and wailing, and becomes confused. He feels two feelings - physical and mental. When touched by that painful feeling, he is aversive. Since he is aversive towards that painful feeling, the tendency of aversion towards painful feelings is latent in him.

“When touched by painful feelings, he seeks delights in sensual pleasure. Why is that? Monks, an unlearned commoner does not know any escape from painful feelings other than sensual pleasure. Since he seeks delights in sensual pleasure, the tendency of passion towards pleasant feelings is latent in him.

“He does not accurately understand the origin, disappearance, appeal, drawback, and escape regarding those feelings. Since he does not accurately understand the origin, disappearance, appeal, drawback, and escape regarding those feelings, the tendency of ignorance towards neutral feelings is latent in him.

“If he feels a pleasant feeling, he is trapped. If he feels a painful feeling, he is trapped. If he feels a neutral feeling, he is trapped. Monks, this is called ‘An unlearned commoner is trapped by birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, depression, and anguish; he is trapped by dissatisfaction,’ I say.

“Monks, when a learned disciple of the noble ones is touched by a painful sensation, he does not sorrow, fret, lament, beat his chest, wail, or become confused. He feels one feeling - physical, not mental. Monks, it is just like a person who has been pierced by a thorn. But he is not pierced again by a second thorn. Monks, in this way, the person feels the feeling of only one thorn.

“Monks, in the same way, when a learned disciple of the noble ones is touched by a painful sensation, he does not sorrow, fret, lament, beat his chest, wail, or become confused. He feels one feeling - physical, not mental. When touched by that painful feeling, he is not aversive. Since he is not aversive towards that painful feeling, the tendency of aversion towards painful feelings is not latent in him.

“When touched by painful feelings, he does not seek delight in sensual pleasure. Why is that? Monks, a learned disciple of the noble ones knows an escape from painful feelings other than sensual pleasure. Since he does not seek delights in sensual pleasure, the tendency of passion towards pleasant feelings is not latent in him.

“He accurately understands the origin, disappearance, appeal, drawback, and escape regarding those feelings. Since he accurately understands the origin, disappearance, appeal, drawback, and escape regarding those feelings, the tendency of ignorance towards neutral feelings is not latent in him.

“If he feels a pleasant feeling, he is not trapped. If he feels a painful feeling, he is not trapped. If he feels a neutral feeling, he is not trapped. Monks, this is called ‘A learned disciple of the noble ones is not trapped by birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, depression, and anguish; he is not trapped by dissatisfaction,’ I say.

“Monks, this is the difference, the distinction, the variance between a learned disciple of the noble ones and an unlearned commoner.

“The wise one who has learned much
Does not feel pleasure or pain.
This is the great distinction
Between a steadfast wholesome one and a commoner.

“When one has learned much of the recognized teachings,
Seeing clearing both this world and other worlds,
Then one’s mind is not agitated by desirable things
Or aversive towards what is undesirable.

“For that one, both approval and rejection
Have been vaporized, have disappeared, and do not exist.
Having known the path, flawless and sorrowless,
One fully understands, and transcends existence.”