

## **MN44 The Shorter Series of Questions and Answers Cūlavedalla Sutta**

Presented by Ven Bhante Vimalaramsi on 23 February 2007  
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BV: This is a rather deep sutta. So please pay attention closely. You can gain a lot of benefit from this.

MN: 1. **THUS HAVE I HEARD.** On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Sanctuary. Then the lay follower Visākha went to the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā, and after paying homage to her, he sat down at one side and asked her:

2. "Lady, 'identity, identity' is said. What is called identity by the Blessed One?"

BV: Now, this is a real interesting thing because Visākha and Dhammadinnā were married, they were husband and wife, and he was very wealthy; he's a business man. And then he started going and he started listening to the Dhamma talks given by the Buddha, and he would practice his meditations once in a while. And one day he was practicing his meditation, and he came home; always when he came home, Dhammadinnā would go out and greet him, and hug him and, and then they would go in, and they would eat together, and then they would go to bed.

Well this particular night, she went out to greet him, and he backed away from her giving him a hug, and then they ate together, and then they laid down. She laid down in the bed, and he got ready to go to sleep, and he laid down on the floor. And she thought that was kind of peculiar; he'd never done that before. So she got down on the floor, and as soon as she did that, he got up in the bed. And she's thinking: "Whoa, this is really strange. Have I done anything to cause him to be upset?"

So she started asking him and he said: "Well, I'm going to have to tell you that while I was meditating today, I became an anāgāmi, and I don't want any kind of sexual activity anymore. So what I'm going to do is, I'm going to go and live at the monastery as a layman, but still live in the monastery, and I'm going to give you the house and give you all of everything in it,

everything that you could possibly want, you can have, or we can live as brother and sister in the house, but we would have to have separate rooms.”

So she started thinking about that, and she said: “Well, since you want to do that, would you object if I became a bhikkhuni?” And he said: “No.” So she became a bhikkhuni, and she practiced meditation very ardently for a few months and became an arahat. So now, we have the husband is an anāgāmi, and the wife, was a wife, is now an arahat! And it’s really... in Indian culture, men would never even consider bowing to a woman, but he had such respect for her that he did. And he occasionally would go and talk about the Dhamma with her, and this is one of those occasions.

MN: {repeats} “Lady, ‘identity, identity’ is said. What is called identity by the Blessed One?”

“Friend Visākha, these five aggregates affected by clinging are called identity by the Blessed One;

BV: Now, this particular thing, when it’s talking about the aggregates being affected by clinging, this is very accurate, not putting anything else in with that - may or may not be affected - because we’re talking about identity right here. Anything that is affected by clinging, that means there’s ego identification with that aggregate.

MN: that is, the material form aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling aggregate affected by clinging, the perception aggregate affected by clinging, the formations aggregate affected by clinging, and the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. These five aggregates affected by clinging are called identity by the Blessed One.”

Saying, “Good, lady,” the lay follower Visākha delighted and rejoiced in the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā’s words. Then he asked her a further question:

3. “Lady, ‘origin of identity, origin of identity’ is said. What is called the origin of identity by the Blessed One?”

“Friend Visākha, it is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being. This is called the origin of identity by the Blessed One.”

BV: This is a formula that's in the book very often, when they're talking about craving, and it always talks about delight and lust, but you have to also understand it is also talking about aversion and dislike, the pushing away. So craving is always either wanting it and pulling it to you, or pushing it away. I don't know why it doesn't have both of them in there, but it can be confusing if you don't understand that.

MN: 4. "Lady, 'cessation of identity, cessation of identity' is said. What is called the cessation of identity by the Blessed One?"

"Friend Visākha, it is the remainderless fading away and ceasing, the giving up, relinquishing, letting go, and rejecting of that same craving. This is called the cessation of identity by the Blessed One."

BV: So what are we practicing, whenever we practice the six Rs? We're practicing the cessation of craving. When we have the cessation of craving, your mind becomes very clear, very bright, and very alert without any thoughts in it, and you're seeing things with a pure mind. This is a form of Nibbāna, but this is a mundane Nibbāna. Every time you practice the six Rs and you let go of that craving, then that is the cessation that's talked about here, and you lose the personal identification. You're able to see things as a process rather than: "This is me. This is mine. This is who I am." You're letting go of that, and you're seeing things the way they really are, as part of an impersonal process.

If you are chopping vegetables, or you do something and you miss and you cut, or you stub a toe, or you bang yourself in one way or another, the first thing that happens in mind is knowing that that happened. The next thing is the feeling arises right as that is occurring. Then there is the craving that arises and the thoughts about: "Oh, I shouldn't have done that. I wish I wouldn't have done that." Things like that; and your habitual tendency. When you see all of these different things arise, they arise because there was a condition that caused these things to be; there's a cause and effect. When you see them as individual parts, you see that there is no self involved in that. When you let go of the craving, you let go of that tension and tightness, and relax, there is no more personal identification with what arose, and you see it more and more clearly.

Now, why is it an impersonal process? Did you say and plan on: "I'm going to stick my finger right in front of that knife and cut the end of my finger off."? I

don't think so. It happened because the conditions were right. Your finger got too close to the knife blade, knife blade went down, feeling arose, craving arose, clinging arose, and habitual tendency arose. And it does it over and over again. If you get involved in your habitual tendency, quite often people wind up cursing in one way or another, wishing they hadn't done that. And that's when you take it personally. "I cut my finger. I don't like that."

When you let go of the craving, the finger is cut, now let's do something about it and take care of it, without getting involved in the story. Now you're seeing it as part of a process that's impersonal because you didn't ask it to arise, you can't control it once it has arisen. All you can do is relax, let it go. When the pain arises, start sending loving and kindness into the sensation. Now you're seeing it as an impersonal process. That's why this is called the cessation of identity by the Blessed One. Every time anything arises at any one of the sense doors there's contact, then there's feeling. In between the arising, and the feeling, and the craving, if your awareness is sharp enough, that's when you relax, and that's seeing this as part of a process. And it's much easier to let go and take care of whatever needs to be taken care of.

MN: 5. "Lady, 'the way leading to the cessation of identity, the way leading to the cessation of identity' is said. What is called the way leading to the cessation of identity by the Blessed One?"

"Friend Visākha, it is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, harmonious perspective, harmonious imaging, harmonious communication, harmonious movement, harmonious lifestyle, harmonious practice, harmonious observation, and harmonious collectedness." (Right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration).

6. "Lady, is that clinging the same as these five aggregates affected by clinging, or is the clinging something apart from the five aggregates affected by clinging?"

"Friend Visākha, that clinging is neither the same as these five aggregates affected by clinging nor is clinging something apart from the five aggregates affected by clinging. It is the desire and lust in regard to the five aggregates affected by clinging that is the clinging there."

BV: That's either the liking or disliking of what arose, and the story, the words, the verbalization in mind.

MN: 7. "Lady, how does identity view come to be?"

"Here, friend Visākha, an untaught ordinary person, who has no regard for noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who has no regard for true men and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, regards material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. He regards feeling as self, or self as possessed of feeling, or feeling as in self, or self as in feeling. He regards perception as self, or self as possessed of perception, or perception as in self, or self as in perception. He regards formations as self, or self as possessed of formations, or formations as in self, or self as in formations. He regards consciousness as self, or self as possessed of consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That is how identity view comes to be."

8. "Lady, how does identity view not come to be?" "Here, friend Visākha, a well-taught noble disciple, who has regard for noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, who has regard for true men and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, does not regard material form as self, or self as possessed of material form, or material form as in self, or self as in material form. He does not regard feeling as self, or self as possessed of feeling, or feeling as in self, or self as in feeling. He does not regard perception as self, or self as possessed of perception, or perception as in self, or self as in perception. He does not regard formations as self, or self as possessed of formations, or formations as in self, or self as in formations. He does not regard consciousness as self, or self as possessed of consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. That is how identity view does not come to be."

9. "Lady, what is the Noble Eightfold Path?"

"Friend Visākha, it is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, harmonious perspective, harmonious imaging, harmonious communication, harmonious movement, harmonious lifestyle, harmonious practice, harmonious observation, and harmonious collectedness."

**BV: Harmonious perspective** is seeing everything as being an impersonal process.

The **harmonious imaging**, we are continually pulling up images in our minds; what we like, what we don't like, what we wish we had, what we don't have. We pull up - say you stub your toe - at that moment your perspective is not a harmonious perspective because you start taking it personally: "This is my toe." And you have the image of disliking that feeling. Now, this is what it's talking about here with the harmonious imaging.

The **harmonious communication** is not only your verbal communication, but your mental communication with yourself. And to be in harmony with our communication means that we have to develop more and more loving kindness towards our self and towards everybody around us.

The **harmonious movement**, that's called right action. The harmonious movement is being able to see how mind's attention moves and how to recognize that movement.

**Harmonious lifestyle** is kind of an interesting thing because the texts always talks about right livelihood as being: not killing living beings, not using any poisons, not selling any poisons, not taking slaves; that's right livelihood, not selling slaves. Now, what does that have to do with your meditation practice? Now, if you'll remember, the first discourse that the Buddha gave, he talked about the Eightfold Path. These monks that he was teaching this to were very virtuous; they weren't going to kill any living beings; they weren't going to use any poisons or sell any poisons; they weren't going to take slaves and sell them. It doesn't make sense that this is a definition of right livelihood. So when we change the wording a little bit and we say harmonious lifestyle, now this is our practice of how we do our daily activities. With the harmonious communication taking place in our mind, and our harmonious movement of going from one place to another, it's how we develop our habitual tendencies towards the wholesome. That makes a lot more sense than the standard definition of right livelihood. For laymen... yeah ok, I can see that definition if they're not really doing any mental development, but with any kind of mental development that doesn't make sense at all.

Now, when you're practicing with some traditions, they will tell you that right speech, right action, and right livelihood are part of morality. So you don't really need to practice these because you're doing a retreat right now. So it changes the Eightfold Path into a fivefold path because they're saying it doesn't really have anything to do with what you're doing right now because you're automatically practicing these. I have been to retreats where I've seen

a lot of people not automatically practicing those. So when we start looking at the Eightfold Path as part of the meditation - and not a passive part and an active part of the meditation - but the whole Eightfold Path is active, then it starts to make more and more sense that you need to be very careful with your mind and practice this way, especially with the six Rs, so that you are fulfilling the Eightfold Path and the intent of the Eightfold Path.

The next part is called **harmonious practice**. Now, this is what they call right effort too. And harmonious practice is recognizing that your mind has become distracted, letting go of that distraction, relaxing, re-smiling, bringing up a wholesome object - your object of meditation - and continuing on with your object of meditation. That's harmonious practice.

Then we have **harmonious observation**, and that is remembering to observe how mind's attention is moving moment-to-moment. As you go subtler and deeper into your meditation, it becomes real fun to be able to observe tiny little movements when they first start. And when you're able to see these - and relax right then - then your mind is not going to get distracted away. It takes very sharp observation to be able to do that.

Now, the next part of the Eightfold Path is, they call it right concentration, but I shy away from the word 'concentration' because, in this country, concentration always refers to one-pointedness of mind. And that is not quite the flavour of the kind of concentration that the Buddha was talking about. The Buddha was talking about developing your samādhi. Samādhi is a word that the Buddha made up to describe this particular kind of practice. It is *not* one-pointed concentration, it is the tranquillity-vipassanā that he was talking about.

When you practice one-pointed concentration, your mind stays on one thing. You can get real peaceful and calm with that, but you don't really learn how mind's attention moves when it's stuck on one thing. So you're not really seeing the Eightfold Path the way it was intended to. One-pointed concentration and the tranquillity-vipassanā are two different kinds of jhāna. The one-pointed concentration jhāna, your mind will go very deep, and because of the depth of the concentration, that concentration will not allow any disturbances or hindrances to arise. This is what the Buddha found when he first became a monk, and started practicing meditation with his first two teachers. He went as far as each of those monks could teach him, and they say: "You can't go any further than this." Now, other people can match what

he did, nobody can go any further, and he wasn't satisfied. Why? Because when your hindrances arise, that is where your false idea in a self arises, and when you start believing that this hindrance is "me", it's "mine", it's who "I am", you're not practicing the Eightfold Path; your perspective is not in harmony with reality.

**Harmonious collectedness** is the four jhānas: first jhāna; second jhāna; third jhāna; fourth jhāna. The fourth jhāna has four parts to it. The immaterial realms: infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, neither-perception-nor-non-perception. So when he's talking about harmonious collectedness, he's talking about experiencing these jhānas. And again, they're not the same as the one-pointed jhāna. How do you know the difference when you're practicing? Because of the extra step of relaxing that changes the entire meditation. It doesn't allow mind's concentration to really go deep, and the force of the concentration stopping some of your experience from arising.

When you're practicing the kind of jhānas that the Buddha is talking about - you can get into any one of these jhānas except the eighth jhāna - you won't have hindrances arise in the eighth jhāna - but when your mindfulness wavers just a little bit, when that happens a hindrance arises. Now you have to deal with the hindrance. Letting it go, relax, coming back to your object of meditation. The hindrances are incredibly important because every time you let go of a hindrance, you go deeper into your meditation. You've let go of a false belief in a self, so when you do that, you're practicing the entire Eightfold Path.

Letting go of the craving is so important that it can't be understated. You've already heard what causes identity to arise and how you let go of that identity, and that's letting go of the craving. If you have hindrances, and the force of your concentration doesn't allow those to arise, then there's still the false belief in a self. And when you get up and start walking around, the hindrances have a tendency to arise big-time, and you have a tendency to get very strongly involved with them. You don't really see this as part of a process; you take the hindrance personally. And when you take the hindrance personally, you're caught by it. So the importance of - if you're practicing mindfulness of breathing, relaxing on the in-breath and relaxing on the out-breath - that extra step of relaxing, instead of just focusing on the breath itself, is absolutely essential, so that mind will not become absorbed into one object.



Now, this also has to do with the harmonious movement because as soon as that mindfulness wavers a little bit, then mind's attention starts going over to the distraction, the hindrance, whatever it is that arises. And then there is the letting go, and relaxing, and coming back, and then seeing how that process works, how mind's attention moves from one thing to another. It takes sharp observation to be able to do this, but it's absolutely essential, in order to understand exactly what the Buddha was talking about.

When I was practicing other practices, I was told that right concentration also means "access concentration" and "momentary concentration". That is *never* mentioned in the suttas. There's no such a thing as access concentration or momentary concentration, at all, in the suttas. Those are from commentaries, and the commentaries have been taken, in a lot of instances, to be the same as the Buddha's teaching. But if it's never mentioned in the suttas, I have a lot of doubt as to whether that's what the teaching of the Buddha was.

Access concentration is when you first start to have strong enough concentration that the hindrances are suppressed, pushed down, not allowed to arise. At this point, when you have access concentration, if you try to bring up a hindrance, your mind will not accept it. You bring up a thought of lust, your mind will say: "No!", and it'll just drop it right then. This is why it is said that access concentration is where you gain purity of mind. But true purity of mind only comes from letting go of craving. And when you get in to access concentration, the only way you can get into that is by practicing one-pointed concentration. Not the same.

MN: 10. "Lady, is the Noble Eightfold Path conditioned or unconditioned?"  
"Friend Visākhā, the Noble Eightfold Path is conditioned."

11. "Lady, are the three aggregates included by the Noble Eightfold Path, or is the Noble Eightfold Path included by the three aggregates?"

"The three aggregates are not included by the Noble Eightfold Path, friend Visākhā, but the Noble Eightfold Path is included by the three aggregates. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood—

BV: These aggregates that he's talking about are the morality, collectedness, and wisdom, and that's how they're divided up.

MN: {repeats} Right speech, right action, and right livelihood—these states are included in the aggregate of virtue. Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration—these states are included in the aggregate of concentration. Right view and right intention—these states are included in the aggregate of wisdom.”

12. “Lady, what is collectedness? What is the basis of collectedness? What is the equipment of collectedness? What is the development of collectedness?”

“Unification of mind, friend Visākha, is collectedness;

BV: Now, isn’t that interesting because the Pāli word for unification of mind is always translated as one-pointedness of mind, but here it’s saying that it is unification of mind. It’s the bringing together of the tranquillity and mindfulness, it’s the bringing together of this equanimity, so your mind is unified in that way. The Pāli word ekaggatā... they always try to break it up with “eka”, meaning one in Pāli. But the word ekaggatā is a word on its own. You can’t break it up too easily; “ekagga” means tranquillity or unified, and “tā” is the action of that, is the bringing together of that. So when you say ekaggatā, what you’re saying is unification of mind, you’re not saying one-pointedness of mind.

MN: the four foundations of mindfulness are the basis of collectedness; the four right kinds of effort are the equipment of collectedness; the repetition, development, and cultivation of these same states is the development of collectedness therein.”

BV: The four foundations of mindfulness: body, feeling, consciousness and dhammas. We’ll go more into that later in the week.

The four kinds of effort: seeing an unwholesome object, letting go of the unwholesome object, relaxing, bringing up a wholesome object, smiling, and keeping that wholesome object going.

MN: {repeats} “The repetition, development, cultivation of these same states is the development of collectedness ...”

BV: That’s the practice, and the six Rs do that.

MN: 13. “Lady, how many formations are there?”

“There are these three formations, friend Visākha: the bodily formation, the verbal formation, and the mental formation.”

14. “But, lady, what is the bodily formation? What is the verbal formation? What is the mental formation?”

“In-breathing and out-breathing, friend Visākha, are the bodily formation; thinking and examining thought are the verbal formation; perception and feeling are the mental formation.”

15. “But, lady, why are in-breathing and out-breathing the bodily formation? Why are thinking and examining thought the verbal formation? Why are perception and feeling the mental formation?”

“Friend Visākha, in-breathing and out-breathing are bodily, these are states bound up with the body; that is why in-breathing and out-breathing are the bodily formation. First one applies thinking and examining thought, and subsequently one breaks out into speech; that is why thinking and examining thought are the verbal formation.

BV: And they’re talking about internal verbalization.

MN: Perception and feeling are mental, these are states bound up with the mind; that is why perception and feeling are the mental formation.”

16. “Lady, how does the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling come to be?”

“Friend Visākha, when a monk is attaining the cessation of perception and feeling, it does not occur to him: ‘I shall attain the cessation of perception and feeling,’ or ‘I am attaining the cessation of perception and feeling.’ or ‘I have attained the cessation of perception and feeling’; but rather his mind has previously been developed in such a way that it leads him to that state.”

BV: So it kind of happens all by itself, automatically. You can’t make a determination for that to happen until after you become an anāgāmi with the fruition. Then you can make a determination for that to come up.

MN: 17. "Lady, when a monk is attaining the cessation of perception and feeling, which states cease first in him: the bodily formation, the verbal formation, or the mental formation?"

"Friend Visākha, when a monk is attaining the cessation of perception and feeling, first the verbal formation ceases, then the bodily formation, then the mental formation."

18. "Lady, how does emergence from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling come to be?"

"Friend Visākha, when a monk is emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, it does not occur to him: 'I shall emerge from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling.' or 'I am emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling.' or 'I have emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling'; but rather his mind has previously been developed in such a way that it leads him to that state."

BV: When this state arises it arises automatically and it lets go automatically. It doesn't happen for very long. Now, for somebody like venerable Sāriputta, while he was fanning the Buddha, and he let go of that last attachment to the Dhamma, he had the cessation of perception and feeling, and it was momentary, and he had the fruition, which is another cessation of perception and feeling. In between those two, he saw dependent origination arising and passing away very quickly. His attention was so strong that he saw it clearly, and that's why he could have that cessation of perception and feeling with the fruition. The fruition happened again right after the cessation of perception and feeling faded away, and that's why he got the fruition. That's how it happens.

MN: 19. "Lady, when a monk is emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, which states arise first in him: the bodily formation, the verbal formation, or the mental formation?"

"Friend Visākha, when a monk is emerging from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, first the mental formation arises, then the bodily formation, then the verbal formation."

20. "Lady, when a monk has emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, how many kinds of contact touch him?"

"Friend Visākha, when a monk has emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, three kinds of contact touch him: voidness contact, signless contact, desireless contact."

21. "Lady, when a monk has emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, to what does his mind incline, to what does it lean, to what does it tend?"

"Friend Visākha, when a monk has emerged from the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, his mind inclines to seclusion, leans to seclusion, tends to seclusion."

22. "Lady, how many kinds of feeling are there?"

"Friend Visākha, there are three kinds of feeling: pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling."

23. "But, lady, what is pleasant feeling? What is painful feeling? What is neither painful-nor-pleasant feeling?"

"Friend Visākha, whatever is felt bodily or mentally as pleasant and soothing is pleasant feeling. Whatever is felt bodily or mentally as painful and hurting is painful feeling. Whatever is felt bodily or mentally as neither soothing nor hurting is neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling."

24. "Lady, what is pleasant and what is painful in regard to pleasant feeling? What is painful and what is pleasant in regard to painful feeling? What is pleasant and what is painful in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?"

"Friend Visākha, pleasant feeling is pleasant when it persists and painful when it changes. Painful feeling is painful when it persists and pleasant when it changes. Neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling is pleasant when there is knowledge [of it] and painful when there is no knowledge [of it]."

25. "Lady, what underlying tendency underlies pleasant feeling? What underlying tendency underlies painful feeling? What underlying tendency underlies neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?"

"Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust underlies pleasant feeling. The underlying tendency to aversion underlies painful feeling. The underlying tendency to ignorance underlies neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling."

BV: Why is the underlying tendency to ignorance underlie neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling? Why is that tendency there? Because you have indifference to the feeling. Indifference is different than equanimity. Indifference is "I don't care". And there's identification with that. And ignorance is always ignorance of the Four Noble Truths, not seeing the Four Noble Truths, not seeing that that indifference means that you're identifying with it and you're taking it personally, you're not seeing it as part of a process.

MN:

26. "Lady, does the underlying tendency to lust underlie all pleasant feeling? Does the underlying tendency to aversion underlie all painful feeling? Does the underlying tendency to ignorance underlie all neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?"

"Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust does not underlie all pleasant feeling. The underlying tendency to aversion does not underlie all painful feeling. The underlying tendency to ignorance does not underlie all neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling."

27. "Lady, what should be abandoned in regard to pleasant feeling? What should be abandoned in regard to painful feeling? What should be abandoned in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?"

"Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust should be abandoned in regard to pleasant feeling. The underlying tendency to aversion should be abandoned in regard to painful feeling. The underlying tendency to ignorance should be abandoned in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling."

28. "Lady, does the underlying tendency to lust have to be abandoned in regard to all pleasant feeling? Does the underlying tendency to aversion have to be abandoned in regard to all painful feeling? Does the underlying

tendency to ignorance have to be abandoned in regard to all neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?"

"Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust does not have to be abandoned in regard to all pleasant feeling."

BV: Why? There are some pleasant feelings that arise that there's no attachment to. Getting into the first jhāna. Because it's a process and it's a pleasant abiding here and now. I mean that's described so many times, but there is no identification with that as being yours personally while you're in that jhāna.

Pointing your mind towards the jhāna is wholesome, but while you're in the jhāna there is no attachment to the jhāna.

MN: {repeats} "Friend Visākha, the underlying tendency to lust does not have to be abandoned in regard to all pleasant feeling.

BV: Now, this is one of the things that it talks about on the night of the Buddha's enlightenment. He started realizing that the ascetic practices, they were continually trying to stop joy from arising because they considered joy to be an attachment. And when he started reflecting, he started thinking: "Not all kinds of joy have attachment in them." And that's when he started doing his meditation. It's ok for some types of joy to arise.

MN: The underlying tendency to aversion does not have to be abandoned in regard to all painful feeling.

BV: Why?

BV: Not being attached to the pain, allowing it to be there without identifying with it.

MN: The underlying tendency to ignorance does not have to be abandoned in regard to all neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.

BV: Why? Well, it's the difference between the equanimity and the indifference. If it's indifference it has the ignorance in it, and if you have equanimity, you don't have to abandon the underlying tendency to ignorance,



but you see everything in a sense of balance.

MN: "Here, friend Visākha, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thinking and examining thought, with joy and happiness born of seclusion. With that he abandons lust, and the underlying tendency to lust does not underlie that.

"Here a monk considers thus: 'When shall I enter upon and abide in that base that the noble ones now enter upon and abide in?' In one who thus generates a longing for the supreme liberations, grief arises with that longing as condition. With that he abandons aversion, and the underlying tendency to aversion does not underlie that.

"Here, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, a monk enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. With that he abandons ignorance, and the underlying tendency to ignorance does not underlie that."

BV: See, that's the equanimity. When there is no indifference, there is equanimity. Equanimity is the highest feeling that you can have, and it is a definite feeling of mental balance, which is truly wonderful. And it's kind of fun because when people come and they're practicing real hard and they, they've been going through the hindrances, and they finally let them go, and they get into this state of equanimity. And then they come and they start talking to me about their meditation experience. As soon as they walk in the room, I know where they are. I mean they sit down, I say: "Well, how's it going?" And it's: "Yeah it's ok. Everything is fine." Their mind is such a pleasant state of balance that anything can happen, and: "Yeah, that's fine. That's ok. No problem." One woman came in, and I'd ask her the night before to describe certain states, and she came in and she had so much equanimity about her, that I said: "It's nice, isn't it?" And she said: "I thought you were going to get me to try to describe this, and I don't know how." It's a real strong feeling of balance, and it's very pleasant.

(COUNTERPARTS)

MN: 29. "Lady, what is the counterpart of pleasant feeling?"

"Friend Visākha, painful feeling is the counterpart of pleasant feeling."



“What is the counterpart of painful feeling?”

“Pleasant feeling is the counterpart of painful feeling.”

“What is the counterpart of neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling?”

“Ignorance is the counterpart of neither-painful-nor pleasant feeling.”

“What is the counterpart of ignorance?”

“True knowledge is the counterpart of ignorance.”

“What is the counterpart of true knowledge?”

“Deliverance is the counterpart of true knowledge.”

“What is the counterpart of deliverance?”

“Nibbāna is the counterpart of deliverance.”

“Lady, what is the counterpart of Nibbāna?”

“Friend Visākha, you have pushed this line of questioning too far; you are not able to grasp the limit to questions. For the holy life, friend Visākha, is grounded upon Nibbāna, culminates in Nibbāna, ends in Nibbāna. If you wish, friend Visākha, go to the Blessed One and ask him about the meaning of this. As the Blessed One explains it to you, so you should remember it.”

30. Then the lay follower Visākha, having delighted and rejoiced in the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā’s words, rose from his seat, and after paying homage to her, keeping her on his right, he went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and told the Blessed One his entire conversation with the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā. When he finished speaking, the Blessed One told him:

31. “The bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā is wise, Visākha, the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā has great wisdom. If you had asked me the meaning of this, I would have explained it to you in the same way that the bhikkhuni

Dhammadinnā has explained it. Such is its meaning, and so you should remember it.”

That is what the Blessed One said. The lay follower Visākha was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

BV: I like this sutta, I really do.

The bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā was the foremost bhikkhuni in wisdom. She was like the counterpart... of the male part, is Sāriputta. He was second to the Buddha in wisdom on the male side; she was second to the Buddha in wisdom on the female side. There’s another sutta that’s in the Aṅguttara Nikāya and I’m anxiously waiting for that to come out from Bhikkhu Bodhi; that she had another sutta in there that was truly magnificent, it was really good. So this is a very deep sutta and to me it’s quite interesting. I hope it was as interesting for you.

The practice of the six Rs: recognize, release, relax, re-smile, return, repeat. That can take you all the way to Nibbāna, and you will experience Nibbāna many, many times, in the mundane sense, and eventually the supramundane can occur, and it can occur in this lifetime. My teacher, U Silananda, one time he told me that anyone who can experience jhāna in this lifetime, can experience Nibbāna; and he was talking about the supramundane Nibbāna.

S: I’m not sure what you mean by ‘mundane Nibbāna’ ?

BV: Every time you practice the six Rs, you’re letting go of the craving, and that is the mundane Nibbāna. Eventually the big “Oh Wow” happens. And you can’t want it to happen; you can’t force it to happen; you have to have your beginner’s mind all of the time. You have to have that mind that’s curious, that wants to see what’s going to happen next. You get into the fun of the practice, and your interest stays high, and with that you have really strong balance; you have that equanimity in your practice. The more interested you are in how the process works, the more clearly you will see it. The more clearly you will see it, the more freedom there is that occurs, and eventually that does lead to deliverance and Nibbāna. Simple, right? You guys got another week!

BV: Yes ok, let’s go back to this...

{Bhante switches to MN 10.46 last paragraph}

“Let alone half a month, bhikkhus. If anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now,

BV: Becoming an arahat.

MN: or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return.

BV: Anāgāmi, seven days.

BV: Anāgāmi is the third stage of enlightenment. That is where your experience would be such that lust and hatred would never arise in your mind ever again. Think about that. I mean think about that! That’s really amazing, no aversion ever again. Ah!! That’s something to work towards, and your wholesome desire means that you point your mind in that direction – chanda. So if you can experience a jhāna in this life time, you can experience either becoming an anāgāmi or an arahat.

S: What is cessation of perception and feeling?

BV: That’s when the perception and the feeling no longer arises. It’s kind of like a blackout. I mean there’s nothing. It’s like somebody in a very dark night, they turn out the lights, and you can’t even see their hand in front of your face. And it’s the complete stopping of all the vibration in mind, complete stilling. When it starts vibrating again, the perception and feeling come back, and your mind is so clear at that time that you are able to see how dependent origination arises and how it ceases. And you will see it clearly, and you will understand it. With that understanding comes the true understanding of the Four Noble Truths, and the realization of that, and Nibbāna occurs.

S: So when your meditation is strong enough this occurs?

BV: Well, actually, falling into the stream does not have to occur through meditation. It has to occur through your understanding of the Four Noble Truths and dependent origination. And if you listen very attentively to dependent origination and discourses on that - and you understand it - you can have the experience of Nibbāna while you’re listening. That’s what

happened to Kondañña, when the Buddha, went to give his discourse to the five monks. He was listening to the Four Noble Truths and he finally, he got it. But mixed in with that had to be the dependent origination of course. But he understood it. And that's why the Buddha stopped his discourse, and he said: "Ah, Kondañña, you understand!"

And he got to that by listening and understanding. He didn't have the fruition of that experience, but he had the path, the path knowledge. And that can happen also with the second stage of enlightenment, called sakadāgāmi. Either one of those, you can - depending on your understanding at the time - you can have the experience of Nibbāna. It's not very strong. But when you do the meditation, and it's very plain from this sutta, it says either you're going to be fully enlightened or you're going to be an anāgāmi if you do it through meditation. Now, that doesn't mean to say that you can't become a sotāpanna through the meditation; you can; or a sakadāgāmi. But it's not fully understanding the Four Noble Truths, that stops you from going deeper... the Four Noble Truths and the four foundations, I should say. So there's a variety of ways that it can happen.

S: Is the difficulty with one-pointed concentration is that it ignores the six sense doors?

BV: When the concentration is deep. It's only a mental state and that's why mentality and materiality... it was like a revelation that the Buddha had when he saw mentality and materiality because they're interconnected. Everybody up until then, they were getting so deep in their one-pointed concentration that they lost the body; they didn't have any feeling in the body. They couldn't feel anything even if it got hit or an animal came and started biting on them, they wouldn't feel it. But when the Buddha came along and said: "There's a mind and body and they're interconnected, and they have to stay interconnected in order for you to attain Nibbāna"; that was a heavy duty revelation. And that's one of the reasons that when you do your mindfulness of breathing, you relax on the in-breath and relax on the out-breath. Why? Because you're letting go of tension in the body, and in the mind, when you let go of that craving. That's the way it really works.

S: Why can you not see this if you are in an "absorption" Jhana?

BV: Here's the difference. There can be all kinds of contact when you're in one-pointed concentration and you just don't see it. In other words you're not

seeing dependent origination at all while you're in the one-pointed concentration.

I got in a big discussion with a few monks about the cessation of perception and feeling, and they told me without a doubt - they were Theravāda monks - that without a doubt you cannot experience the cessation of perception and feeling until you become an anāgāmi, but that does not really agree too well with the suttas.

The thing is, an anāgāmi can make a determination, or an arahat can make a determination, to sit in cessation of perception and feeling for up to seven days, and they will do it. But from there they're taking that to mean that nobody can experience the cessation of perception and feeling before then, and that's just not quite right. Actually, it can arise when you're not an anāgāmi. It can arise because it arose for Sāriputta when he was a sotāpanna. You don't have control over that; that's what this sutta was talking about too. There's no control over it for it happening the first time, but after you attain to a certain level of purity of mind, then that's a situation.

There's a thing that happens when you get into one-pointed concentration where you can experience something similar to the cessation of perception and feeling, but it's not really; kind of like a blackout. But that's the, what do the Zen call it, the satori? Yes. And that's what I honestly believe that they're experience is. It's an experience that they call voidness; they call it all kinds of different things. But if you talk to them about their practice they never mention anything about letting go of the craving and relaxing, and that leads me to believe that this is a similar state, but it's not the actual one. They never talk about dependent origination after that. They talk about insight knowledges arising and passing away and things like that, but that's not the description that's given in the suttas; it doesn't match that.

S: Out of it, it was like all the sense doors just open up.

BV: When you get into neither-perception-nor-non-perception, into the eighth jhāna, those kind of experiences can happen, and you're not really cognizant of them at the moment, but when you get out of that jhāna, you can reflect that it was that; but that's not the liberation experience. And also there's another experience that can happen - if somebody's energy goes down a little bit, it's just like somebody took an eraser and erased everything, and there's nothing there. And this happens in a lot of different levels of the meditation.

It can happen, and that's because the body energy is too low. And the recommendation for that is, get up and do some active walking, get your energy pulled up again, the circulation.

See, the longest that you can stay with the cessation of perception and feeling is seven days. That's the longest; your body will die beyond that. I know a Mahāyāna monk who said that he sat for fourteen days in the cessation of perception and feeling, and I don't think that can happen.

There's one sutta in here where there was one of the current meditation teachers during the time of the Buddha, that he was sitting by the road and five hundred bullock carts came by, and it didn't disturb him at all. And somebody went to the Buddha and said: "This happened to him, isn't that wonderful?" And the Buddha said: "Well, I had an experience once when I was meditating in a barn, and I was meditating through the night, and lightening came down and struck animals right outside the door. And it killed some animals and maybe some people too, and I didn't even hear the lightening." And what the difference was, was this meditator that he said he wasn't disturbed at all by the bullock carts, there's a lot of noise and that sort of thing that happens - he was sitting in a one-pointed concentration of nothingness, and what the Buddha was sitting in was neither-perception-nor-non-perception. So he wouldn't even be aware of anything that was happening because there was no perception, there was no feeling. And that is in the Middle Length Sayings, in the sixties, I can't remember which sutta.

But the thing with the attainment of Nibbāna as I understand it is, you have to know and understand dependent origination, and you will see that right before the Nibbāna experience occurs. Everything else is just kind of grist for the mill as far as I can see. I don't know. Neither-perception-nor-non-perception, there is still some feeling, and the cessation of perception and feeling means that both of those cease. In neither-perception-nor-non-perception it's hard to see even the slightest vibration of mind; it's hard to tell whether it's really there or not. And the only way you know is when you get out of that state, and you start reviewing what happened while you were in that state. But without any perception and without any feeling, there's no movement or vibration of mind to know anything. I don't know how there could be a knowing if there is no way of perceiving; it's cessation. That means the ceasing of all perception and feeling.

Neither-perception-nor-non-perception is the eighth jhāna. While you're in that state, you don't know you're in that state until you get out and reflect on what happened in that state. That's neither-perception-nor-non-perception, and that's what it says in the suttas. But the cessation of perception and feeling is the state right beyond that, where there is no perception, and there is no feeling, and there is no knowing that you're in it. When you come out, you know that there was this ceasing, but you don't know in the present moment that you're in that state.

The cessation of perception and feeling, nirodha-samāpatti. You see dependent origination and then you experience Nibbāna. When you have the experience the first time, you have path knowledge. Then it can occur at any time that the cessation of perception and feeling arises, and you see dependent origination again, and then you have that fruition. That's the way it works.

S: But the falling away, you know that entering into this ~

BV: Entering into Nibbāna. Ok, there's some personality development when that happens, but it doesn't happen in a more permanent kind of way until there is the fruition, and that's what it talks about in the Saṃyutta Nikāya a lot.

{Bhante switches to MN 43.26}

26. "Friend, how many conditions are there for the attainment of the neither-painful-nor-pleasant deliverance of mind?"

"Friend, there are four conditions for the attainment of the neither-painful-nor-pleasant deliverance of mind: here, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, a monk enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. These are the four conditions for the attainment of the neither-painful-nor-pleasant deliverance of mind."

27. "Friend, how many conditions are there for the attainment of the signless deliverance of mind?"

BV: The signless deliverance of mind is what we've been talking about, the cessation of perception and feeling.

MN: "Friend, there are two conditions for the attainment of the signless deliverance of mind: non-attention to all signs and attention to the signless element. These are the two conditions for the attainment of the signless deliverance of mind."

28. "Friend, how many conditions are there for the persistence of the signless deliverance of mind?"

"Friend, there are three conditions for the persistence of the signless deliverance of mind: non-attention to all signs, attention to the signless element, and the prior determination [of its duration].

BV: Now, this is talking about an anāgāmi.

So, that didn't help at all because what it winds up saying is there's attention to the signless element, and I don't know what that means, I honestly do not. Every kind of words that you can use, like focus, means that there's some movement or vibration energy that occurs. When mind hits the cessation of perception and feeling there is no movement of mind; there is none. And also there is the fact that when you run across somebody that has had that experience, they just say: "Everything stopped. There was no... but when I came out, I saw the arising and passing away of everything that happened before and after that, but I can't tell you what happened during that."

S: And how does he know that?

BV: Well he knows that everything stopped. He knows what happened right before, and he knows what happened right after, but he's not able to recall anything in that space. There is no time, there's no anything that I can think of that could describe any of that.

The cessation is not Nibbāna; it hasn't occurred yet. Nibbāna only occurs through seeing, understanding and realizing dependent origination and the Four Noble Truths.

S: But why do they say that the Buddha would go into that state. For what purpose?



You can go into that cessation of perception and feeling as long as you make a determination when you're going to come out. When I talked with people that had that experience, they said that it was relief more than anything. So that's why he did it, just to get some relief from everybody bothering him for twenty-two hours a day or so.

Ok, why don't we share some merit now?

May suffering ones, be suffering free  
And the fear struck, fearless be  
May the grieving shed all grief  
And may all beings find relief.

May all beings share this merit that we have thus acquired  
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.

May beings inhabiting space and earth  
Devas and nagas of mighty power  
Share this merit of ours.

May they long protect the Buddha's dispensation.

Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . .

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