

MN-63
The Shorter Discourse to Mālunkyāputta
Cūlamālunkya Sutta
Venerable Bhante Vimalaramsi
31-Dec-05

MN: 1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattṭhi in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park.

2. Then, while the venerable Mālunkyāputta was alone in meditation, the following thought arose in his mind:

"These speculative views have been left undeclared by the Blessed One, set aside and rejected by him, namely: 'the world is eternal' and 'the world is not eternal'; 'the world is finite' and 'the world is infinite'; 'the soul is the same as the body' and 'the soul is one thing and the body another'; and 'after death a Tathāgata exists' and 'after death a Tathāgata does not exist' and 'after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist' and 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.' The Blessed One does not declare these to me, and I do not approve of and accept the fact that he does not declare these to me, so I shall go to the Blessed One and ask him the meaning of this. If he declares to me either 'the world is eternal' or 'the world is not eternal' or 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' then I will lead the holy life under him; if he does not declare these to me, then I will abandon the training and return to the low life.

BV: This is kind of an interesting sutta. This monk gets it set in his mind that these views are really important to understand – whether the world is eternal, whether it's not eternal, whether the soul is part of the body or not, and all of these kinds of things. But, these are all just conceptual thinking and they lead to a lot of philosophical discussion, but there is never any answer to give. Because, you take one position, I'm going to take the other position, and then we are going to discuss that all night, but there is no solution! So, when the Buddha was asked these kinds of things, he never answered it. And, this monk is making it up in his mind: "Well, if the Buddha is not

going to answer these kinds of things, then I don't want to be a monk anymore, because I want to know these things." So, he is trying to set it up in his mind that if he's not going to get the answers, then he'll just become a layman again. So...

MN: 3. Then, when it was evening, the venerable Mālunkyāputta rose from meditation and went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and told him:

"Here, venerable sir, while I was alone in meditation, the following thought arose in my mind: 'These speculative views have been left undeclared by the Blessed One. If he does not declare these to me, then I will abandon the training and return to the low life.' If the Blessed One knows 'the world is eternal,' let the Blessed One declare to me 'the world is eternal'; if the Blessed One knows 'the world is not eternal,' let the Blessed One declare to me 'the world is not eternal.' If the Blessed One does not know either 'the world is eternal' or 'the world is not eternal,' then it is straightforward for one who does not know and does not see to say: 'I do not know, I do not see.'

"If the Blessed One knows 'the world is finite,' ... 'the world is infinite,'... 'the soul is the same as the body,'... 'the soul is one thing and the body another,'... 'after death a Tathāgata exists.' ... 'after death a Tathāgata does not exist.'... If the Blessed One knows 'after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist,' let the Blessed One declare that to me; if the Blessed One knows 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' let the Blessed One declare that to me. If the Blessed One does not know either 'after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist' or 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' then it is straightforward for one who does not know and does not see to say: 'I do not know, I do not see.'"

BV: Now, this is when this monk gets slapped a little bit for demanding to have these kind of speculative answers.

MN: 4. "How then, Mālunkyāputta, did I ever say to you: 'Come, Mālunkyāputta, lead the holy life under me and I will declare to you "the world is eternal"...or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist"?'—"No, venerable sir."—"Did you ever tell me: 'I will lead the holy life under the Blessed One, and the Blessed One will declare to me "the world is eternal"...or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist"?'—"No, venerable sir."—"That being so, misguided man, who are you and what are you abandoning?"

BV: SLAP!

MN: 5. "If anyone should say thus: 'I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares to me "the world is eternal"...or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist." that would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata and meanwhile that person would die. Suppose, Mālunkyāputta, a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a surgeon to treat him. The man would say: 'I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble or a monk or a merchant or a worker.' And he would say: 'I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know the name and clan of the man who wounded me;...until I know whether the man who wounded me was tall or short or of middle height;...until I know whether the man who wounded me was dark or brown or golden-skinned;...until I know whether the man who wounded me lives in such a village or town or city;...until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a long bow or a crossbow;...until I know whether the bowstring that wounded me was fiber or reed or sinew or hemp or bark;...until I know whether the shaft that wounded me was wild or cultivated;...until I know with what kind of feathers the shaft that wounded me was fitted—whether those of a vulture or a heron or a hawk or a peacock or a stork;...until I know with what kind of sinew the shaft that wounded me was bound—whether that of an ox or a buffalo or a deer or a monkey;...until I know what kind of arrow it was that wounded me—

whether it was hoof-tipped or curved or barbed or calf-toothed or oleander.’

“All this would still not be known to that man and meanwhile he would die. So too, Mālunkyāputta, if anyone should say thus: ‘I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares to me: “the world is eternal” or “after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.”’ that would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata and meanwhile that person would die.

6. “Mālunkyāputta, if there is the view ‘the world is eternal.’ the holy life cannot be lived; and if there is the view ‘the world is not eternal.’ the holy life cannot be lived. Whether there is the view ‘the world is eternal’ or the view ‘the world is not eternal.’ there is birth, there is ageing, there is death, there are sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, the destruction of which I prescribe here and now.

“If there is the view ‘the world is finite,’ ... ‘the world is infinite,’ ... ‘the soul is the same as the body,’ ... ‘the soul is one thing and the body another,’ ... ‘after death a Tathāgata exists,’ ... ‘after death a Tathāgata does not exist,’ the holy life cannot be lived. If there is the view ‘after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist,’ the holy life cannot be lived; and if there is the view ‘after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.’ the holy life cannot be lived. Whether there is the view ‘after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist’ or the view ‘after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,’ there is birth, there is ageing, there is death, there are sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, the destruction of which I prescribe here and now.

BV: So, what he is basically saying is – get out of your concepts about these things – they don’t lead to the cessation of suffering. There is still birth, there is still... all of the links of Dependent Origination that arise when the conditions are right for them to arise. It goes from birth, all the way through death, ignorance, formations, consciousness, mentality/materiality, six-fold base, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, being... Don’t like that translation (of “being”) even yet – experience, habitual tendency... Birth, death and ageing again.

These processes are continually arising and passing away. Knowing whether the soul is one thing and the body is something else, doesn't lead to seeing this. It leads to a lot of mental gymnastics, so that you can get into good arguments and discussions, but it doesn't lead to the cessation of suffering – that's what the whole of the Buddha's teaching is about. He never guaranteed anybody that he would answer philosophical questions. He did, however, say: "If you follow this path, and you see this, and you see this, and you see this, it will lead to the cessation of suffering."

Every time you are sitting down to meditate, you sit with your back nicely straight, you sit in a comfortable posture – whether it's on a chair, on the floor, it doesn't really matter – you stay with your object of meditation. If you are practicing loving kindness, you stay with that glowing warm feeling of loving kindness, you make a wish for happiness – and feel that wish, whatever your wish happens to be. If you make a wish for somebody to be peaceful and calm, then feel that peace and calm. Put that peace and calm feeling into your heart, into that radiating warm glowing feeling, and stay with that feeling as long as you can. If there is a distraction, let go of the distraction. A distraction is anything that pulls your mind away from your object of meditation. Let go of the distraction – if it's a thought let the thought be there, but don't keep your attention on the thought. Notice that there is a tension or tightness and let that tension or tightness go. There's tension and tightness in both body and mind, especially, tension and tightness in the head. Let it be, relax, feel your mind expand and take a little step down. And then, take that mind that is very pure, that is very clear, that doesn't have any distraction in it, back to your object of meditation. It doesn't matter how many times your mind gets distracted, you still treat every distraction in the same way. Every time you let go of that distraction and relax, and gently come back to your object of meditation – you are developing your mindfulness so that it becomes sharper, more alert. So, any kind of distraction, even though you would call it a hindrance, is a very important aspect of the meditation that helps you! Too many times people will talk about just sitting in silence, or sitting in peace, or sitting in calm – and that's nice, but you don't really learn how your mind is working. The Buddha was real big on talking about The Four

Noble Truths. Every one of the links of Dependent Origination is a form of suffering. Every one of them! Every one of those links is a form of suffering. What's the cause of suffering? What's The Second Noble Truth? – what's the origin of that suffering? How do you get to the cessation of that suffering? There is the cessation when you let it be, and relax and come back. What is the way leading to the cessation of the suffering – or the cessation of the craving, because that's what it really boils down to? The Four Noble Truths are about the cause of craving, the cessation of craving and the way leading to the cessation of craving. When your mind becomes more clear, you begin to see hindrances when they first start to arise, and this is important! If you don't see a hindrance when it first arises, you will get caught by that hindrance and then you will have all kinds of emotional and physical problems arise because of it. Now, it doesn't matter whether that distraction is a sensation that arises in your body, or a mental feeling that arises in your mind. Either way, you treat feeling in the same way. When a feeling arises – the truth is it's there. Whether you like it to be there or not doesn't really matter. What you need to do is allow the feeling to be there, let go of that tight mental fist that's gripped around it, that doesn't want that feeling to be there, that wants the feeling to be different. Allow the feeling to be there and relax.

When a physical feeling arises, ninety eight percent of the time, there are thoughts about the feeling that arise: "I wish it wasn't there, why does it have to bother me now?!" Every thought about the feeling causes the feeling to be bigger and more intense. So first, you let go of the thoughts and relax. Next, you see the tight mental fist wrapped around the feeling – you allow the feeling to be there without any resistance at all, and relax. Bring that relaxed mind back to your object of meditation. It doesn't matter whether it's a physical feeling, or an emotional feeling – you treat all feeling in the same way. If it's sensation that arises – you get a pain in your knee, or a pain in your back – you treat it in the same way as you treat sadness, depression, unhappiness of whatever form it seems to take. You keep letting go, and letting that feeling be, relaxing and coming back. The essence of the Buddha's teaching is not about **WHY** things arise – that's for psychotherapists, that's for psychologists, they can

look at that if they want. The meditation is about **HOW** mind's attention moves from one thing to another, to another, to another. You want to be able to see very clearly **HOW** mind moves. And, the more clearly you see **HOW** mind moves, the easier it is to recognize it and let it go so the movement doesn't last as long. When that starts to happen, your mind starts to stay on your object of meditation by itself without any effort for longer and longer periods of time.

One of the things that I rather insist on when people are practicing Loving-Kindness especially, but also mindfulness of breathing, is that you smile. And smile all the time. Smile with your mind, smile with your eyes, even though your eyes are closed. Smile with your lips, a little Buddha smile, and smile with your heart. I had somebody yesterday tell me that they weren't about to walk around with a smile plastered on their face. And I said: "Why?" And he said: "Well, it's not a real smile." And honestly, it doesn't matter whether it's a real smile or not, at first. As you smile more and more, your mental state starts to go up. And, when your mental state goes up, joy has a tendency to arise. When joy arises, your mind is very alert, your mind is very clear, your mind is very agile, and it's easy to recognize when your mind starts to get pulled down, and you can let that go. This helps you to have equanimity all of the time. OK, so I'll get off my soap box now. (Laughs)

MN: 7. "Therefore, Mālunkyāputta, remember what I have left undeclared as undeclared, and remember what I have declared as declared. And what have I left undeclared? 'The world is eternal'—I have left undeclared. 'The world is not eternal'—I have left undeclared. 'The world is finite'—I have left undeclared. 'The world is infinite'—I have left undeclared. 'The soul is the same as the body'—I have left undeclared. 'The soul is one thing and the body another'—I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata exists'—I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist'—I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist'—I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist'—I have left undeclared.

8. “Why have I left that undeclared? Because it is unbeneficial, it does not belong to the fundamentals of the holy life, it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana. That is why I have left it undeclared.

9. “And what have I declared? ‘This is suffering’—I have declared. This is the origin of suffering’—I have declared. This is the cessation of suffering’—I have declared. This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’—I have declared.

10. “Why have I declared that? Because it is beneficial, it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life, it leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana. That is why I have declared it.

“Therefore, Mālunkyāputta, remember what I have left undeclared as undeclared, and remember what I have declared as declared.”

That is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Mālunkyāputta was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

BV: Sadhu.

So – Let’s share some merit.

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 Lord Buddha's dispensation.

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

BV: And that's the way it is.

Note:

Those who have always wondered about the fate of the monk who almost left the Buddha to satisfy his metaphysical curiosity will be gladdened to know that in his old age Mālunkyāputta received a brief discourse on the six sense bases from the Buddha, went off into solitary meditation, and attained arahantship. See SN 35:95/ iv.72-76. His verses are at Theragāthā 399-404 and 794-817.

Transcription: Pete Argli

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