

MN 106 The Way to the Imperturbable - Āneñjasappāya Sutta
Dhamma Talk by Venerable Bhante Vimalaramsi
10-Oct-05 DSMC

Key	Meaning
BV:	B. V. speaking,
BJ:	B. Jatikabhivamsa speaking
MN:	B. V. reading the sutta
S:	student speaking
~	speaking not clearly heard
TT:	Talk Time

BV: Ok, the sutta tonight is sutta number one o six, "The Way to the Imperturbable". This is from the Majjhima Nikāya.

MN: 1. **THUS HAVE I HEARD.** On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Kuru country where there was a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadhamma. There the Blessed One addressed the monks thus: "Monks."—"Venerable sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. "Monks, sensual pleasures are impermanent, hollow, false, deceptive; they are illusory, the prattle of fools. Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come—both alike are Mara's realm, Mara's domain, Mara's bait, Mara's hunting ground. On account of them, these evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and presumption arise, and they constitute an obstruction to a noble disciple in training here.

BV: Now this is kind of an interesting thing, because we're talking about sensual pleasures, then we're talking about sensual perceptions. Perceptions are the name that we give things. We see color and form, and our perception says: "This is a cup." And it

comes from our past experience. But it also carries on to future experiences. So when we perceive sensual pleasures like lust, we have a name for it. We have a name for that like of the sight or sound or taste or touch or odor, or thought. We have these group of things that we identify with and we call them our own, and we delight in them. So it's not only just the sensual pleasure itself, it's the perception of the sensual pleasure. The naming of the sensual pleasure and then you're just carried away with whatever it happens to be.

MN: 3. "Therein, monks, a noble disciple considers thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come, constitute an obstruction to a noble disciple in training here. Suppose I were to abide with a mind abundant and exalted, having transcended the world and made a firm determination with the mind.

BV: Now a mind that is abundant and exalted, is a mind that is in jhāna. When you look at the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, it talks about being able to recognize an exalted mind as an exalted mind. That means you recognize a mind in jhāna as a mind being in jhāna. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which really is talking about the practice of jhāna and mindfulness being together, they're yoked together, just like two oxen pulling a cart, they're held together by this yolk over their necks, they pull at the same time, they happen at the same time. The jhana, and your mindfulness, and insight, happens at the same time.

"Having transcended the world", another thing it says in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, is: "having an unworldly experience." An unworldly wholesome experience is being in jhāna, again.

MN: When I do so, there will be no more evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and presumption in me, and with the abandoning of them my mind will be unlimited, immeasurable, and well developed.'

BV: Now, we're not talking about the lower jhānas, we're not talking about the first three jhānas, we're starting to talk about the fourth jhāna, and the different aspects of the fourth jhāna.

A lot of people, when they give a talk, they talk about having eight jhānas, but that's just a way of talking. The fourth jhāna is divided into the realm of: infinite space; infinite consciousness; nothingness; neither-perception-nor-non-perception. These are all parts of the fourth jhāna. To keep everything straight, they talk about eight jhānas. Now talking about an unlimited and immeasurable mind, to me, what this is talking about is the Brahma Vihāras, because all of the Brahma Vihāras are unlimited and immeasurable.

TT: 05:20

MN: When he practices in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base. Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he resolves upon it with wisdom,

BV: Bhante, how does that translate in Pāli? (aside – He's an amazing Pāli scholar.)

BJ: ~

BV: That's ok..

MN: on the dissolution of the body, after death it is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on to rebirth in the imperturbable.

BV: That means going in to the Brahma locas, and these are the higher Brahma locas. The realm of infinite space, if you're reborn in that realm, it would last for sixteen thousand mahakappas. (Laughs) If you're reborn in infinite consciousness, you would stay in that realm for thirty two thousand mahakappas. If you died and you had the realm of nothingness, that would last for sixty thousand mahakappas. If you have neither-perception-nor-non-perception, that state would last for eighty four thousand mahakappas. Long, long,

long time, and you don't have a physical body, it's just consciousness.

S: Now that's if you're in that state when you pass away?

BV: If you have attained that state sometime in your life. See, just attaining jhāna, one time in your life, you'll be reborn in a Brahma loca, because it is such good merit having attained that, that unless you commit a pretty greivous offense, like killing your mother, killing your father, killing an arahat, attempting to kill a Buddha, causing a schism in the order, if you commit one of these five, they call them heinous crimes, you'll be reborn in a hell realm, doesn't matter. But, if you haven't done one of those bad things, you would be reborn in because of the power of the merit of getting into the jhāna, you would be reborn in a Brahma loca. All the Brahma locas last for a pretty long period of time, let's just put it that way.

BJ: ~

BV: So we're talking about, going back to this, what I don't understand, is when it says: "he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he resolves upon it with wisdom," and I really don't understand that statement. Ok, they spend more time in the imperturbable, instead of seeing Dependent Origination and gaining wisdom on how it works. See, I'm kind of a sneaky monk, and what I do, is I encourage you to have insight in each of the jhānas, so you're not just dwelling in the jhāna, with a completely clear, calm, still mind that doesn't move. I'm teaching you insight, and seeing a process of how things are continually changing. So you don't go quite as deeply into the jhāna as you could, but you're gaining wisdom in that process all the time, and I'm always encouraging you to resolve upon the imperturbable with wisdom.

BJ: ~

BV: This right here?

BJ: ~ he attains it there or ~, or as he resorts with wisdom on the dissolution of the body after death, no full stop.

BV: No full stop? Ah! That makes a difference.

BJ: Without, ~ after death.

TT: 10:00

BV: After death . . Ok.

BJ: No full stop.

BV: Ok, "Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he resolves upon it with wisdom on the dissolution of the body after death."

That doesn't take away from anything that I was just saying, but it does change the whole tenor of that statement. I'm going to have to consider that for a little while.

MN: This, monks, is declared to be the first way directed to the imperturbable.

4. "Again, monks, a noble disciple considers thus: ' There are sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come; whatever material form there is, all material form is the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements.' When he practices in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base. Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he resolves upon it with wisdom on the dissolution of the body, after death.

BV: That's saying that you continue on with your practice after you die, but you're seeing it more clearly when you get out of the gross material form, you're seeing it more clearly, and you're continuing on with your practice.

MN: It is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on to rebirth in the imperturbable. This, monks, is declared to be the second way directed to the imperturbable.

5. "Again, monks, a noble disciple considers thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come, material forms here and now and material forms in lives to come, perceptions of forms here and now and perceptions of forms in lives to come—both alike are impermanent. What is impermanent is not worth delighting in, not worth welcoming, not worth holding to.' When he practices in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base.

BV: That's when you're getting into the arūpa jhānas, you don't have any more physical body that you're feeling, unless you're being touched or something like that.

MN: Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he resolves upon it with wisdom on the dissolution of the body, after death, it is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on to rebirth in the imperturbable. This, monks, is declared to be the third way directed to the imperturbable.

BV: So, we're talking about the lower arūpa jhānas here; that's the realm of infinite space and infinite consciousness. Now we get into the higher arūpa jhānas, the base of nothingness.

MN: 6. "Again, monks, a noble disciple considers thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come, material forms here and now and material forms in lives to come, perceptions of forms here and now and perceptions of forms in lives to come, and perceptions of the imperturbable—all are perceptions. Where these perceptions cease without remainder, that is the peaceful, that is the sublime, namely, the base of nothingness.'

TT: 15:00

BV: Now you remember when I was describing about the base of nothingness, I was saying that now, you don't go outside of the body. All there is, is arising things, and passing away. But it's the arising and passing away of the five aggregates, of contact, it's not body any more, it's contact, feeling, perception, saṅkhāra, it's not thoughts any more, so much as it is volition, volition in directing your mind on what you want to see, and consciousness, Those are still here in the realm of nothingness. And you go back to Sāriputta's experience of nibbāna, and we're talking about the base of nothingness, the perception of the base of nothingness. When you're in the base of nothingness, you know you're in the base of nothingness.

(Brief excursion to MN-111)

MN-111: 16: And the unification of mind;

BV: You feel your mind becoming very still and unified and easily directed.

MN-111: the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; the enthusiasm, decision,

BV: That's another aspect of volition.

MN-111: energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred;

BV: This is what happens in the realm of nothingness. You still have the seven factors of enlightenment, and you're still able to recognize these factors, so there's still a lot of things that's going on in the realm of nothingness, but it's nothing outside of mind.

(Back to MN-106)

MN: When he practices in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base.

BV: You start recognizing all of these different things and you start being able to say: "Yeah, that's right! I know that. I know, I see it very clearly." And you're able to see subtle little things that normally you would have missed, but now you're starting to catch them. And as you're starting to catch them, you start seeing them more and more often, your confidence starts to get really, really good because: "Now I can really see this."

MN: Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the base of nothingness now or else he resolves upon it with wisdom on the dissolution of the body, after death. It is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on to rebirth in the base of nothingness.

BV: Sixty thousand mahakappas of nothing.

MN: This, monks, is declared to be the first way directed to the base of nothingness.

7. "Again, monks, a noble disciple, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, considers thus: 'This is void of a self or of what belongs to a self.'"

BV: You start seeing everything as just part of a process, and I'm continually encouraging you to see that process through Dependent Origination. You see the six sense doors, which ever one arises. You see the contact and that consciousness arising. You see feeling: pleasant; unpleasant; neutral. And you're seeing each one of these individually. You see craving begin arising as the tension or tightness. If your mindfulness is exceptionally sharp and quick at that time, as soon as a feeling comes up, pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, you start relaxing right then. Then you're not distracted. There's no hindrance that can ever arise, there's no pulling away from the process at all, there's just the observation of the process. If your mindfulness isn't sharp enough, then there is a little bit of tightness that occurs and there is the view of self still there. "This is me, this is happening to me, this is what I see, what I feel." And this is where your habitual tendencies kick in, and then there's birth and death, and all the other things that arise. So when you see this is void of a

self, or of what belongs to a self, when you really see it, that means you are no longer caught by craving, because you've let go of that slight pull in both mind, but you don't see it in body any more, it's only mind, although it does occur in body, it's just that you don't see it, so you relax right then.

TT: 20:03

The process of relaxing can never be stated enough, can never be practiced enough. It is the key to the cessation of suffering. And of course, you're practicing all of the eight-fold path while you're doing this. So, you're really starting to see very clearly that the four noble truths are something that's very real, and you're starting to come to realize that, realization becomes faster and faster.

MN: {...} Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the base of nothingness now or else he resolves upon it with wisdom on the dissolution of the body, after death. It is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on to rebirth in the base of nothingness.

BV: Even then, you can still see, you can still attain nibbāna, even though you've left the body.

MN: This, monks, is declared to be the second way directed to the base of nothingness.

8. "Again, monks, a noble disciple considers thus: 'I am not anything belonging to anyone anywhere, nor is there anything belonging to me in anyone anywhere.'

BV: That is a very, very strong statement of the impersonal nature of everything. Ok, this is a major insight, to really see that things arise just arise because the conditions are right for them to arise and there's **nothing** personal about it at all, it's just part of a process.

MN: When he practices in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base. Once there is full confidence,

BV: Now that's an interesting statement: "full confidence." You really, really know and realize, and nobody can tell you anything to change your mind, that's what full confidence is all about.

MN: he either attains to the base of nothingness now or else he resolves upon it with wisdom on the dissolution of the body after death. It is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on to rebirth in the base of nothingness. This, monks, is declared to be the third way directed to the base of nothingness.

BV: Now we get into the even more interesting state, the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

MN: 9. "Again, monks, a noble disciple considers thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come, material forms here and now and material forms in lives to come, perceptions of forms here and now and perceptions of forms in lives to come, perceptions of the imperturbable, and perceptions of the base of nothingness—all are perceptions.

BV: They're just names.

MN: Where these perceptions cease without remainder, that is the peaceful, that is the sublime,

BV: Neither-perception-nor-non-perception. See, one of the things that happens with a lot of the different religions is they get caught up in a concept of god, and they will go to a certain level in their meditations, and they'll only go to the realm of nothingness because that's where they can confirm that there is a God. But when you get into the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, your body is still alive, but you can't tell, the consciousness and your perception is so slight, that you can't say it's there or not, and this kind of shoots the idea of a God, because you can't tell, right? You still have perceptions, and you can still say those perceptions are from an outside source, but now you're going to something that's beyond an outside source. But you're still alive, and there's still awareness, but

this is such a subtle state, that while you're experiencing that state, you don't know what it is.

TT: 25:07

You come out of that state, and then you start reflecting on what you saw while you were in that state, and that changes your perspective entirely. You no longer ever rely on an exterior source. You don't give any energy to an exterior source, because you see that it's not there. This is why, when the Buddha was still a bodhisatta and he was practicing meditation with Rāmaputta. Rāmaputta only got to the realm of nothingness, and he didn't want to go any further. His father had gone further. But the reason that Rāmaputta didn't want to go any further was because he wanted to keep his belief in a God, and he was afraid that he would lose that if he went into a higher realm. But he did have the teaching from his father, and he told the Buddha, well I'm willing to teach you this if you want to go there, but I don't want to go there. So the Buddha went there. But the Buddha saw that there was still some slight hanging on, there's still some slight attachment even in that realm. That's why he went off and started practicing on his own. He started seeing on his own, when he started adding that little tiny step of continually relaxing, that there was no attachment to anywhere, to any thing. There was only this pure, clear, awareness, and that's why he could go deeper into the state that's beyond neither-perception-nor-non-perception; that's why he could go into the state of the cessation of perception and feeling. That's just the turning off of the consciousness completely. Because even when you're in the state of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, there is still some consciousness there, and when you get out of that state, you reflect on that. When you get to the cessation of perception and feeling, and you come back out and you try to reflect on what you saw, you saw there's nothing there; there was no consciousness there at all. And your mind becomes so clear from seeing the cessation of perception and feeling, that when perception and feeling start up again, you can see exactly how it arises – the perception and feeling, and that is seeing Dependent Origination exactly the way it is. It's not a philosophy, it's the reality of the way it works.

Ahhh. . .

Repeats (perceptions of the imperturbable, and perceptions of the base of nothingness—all are perceptions. Where these perceptions cease without remainder, that is the peaceful, that is the sublime,)

MN: namely, the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.' When he practices in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind acquires confidence in this base. Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception now or else he resolves upon it with wisdom on the dissolution of the body, after death. It is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on to rebirth in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

BV: Eighty four thousand mahakappas

MN: This, monks, is declared to be the way directed to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception."

BV: Now we get into an interesting thing, and it's called nibbāna.

MN: 10. When this was said, the venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, here a monk is practicing thus: 'It might not be, and it might not be mine; it will not be, and it will not be mine. What exists, what has come to be, that I am abandoning.' Thus he obtains equanimity. Venerable sir, does such a monk attain Nibbāna?"

BV: Interesting question.

MN: "One monk here, Ānanda, might attain Nibbāna, another monk here might not attain Nibbāna."

TT:29:57

“What is the cause and reason, venerable sir, why one monk here might attain Nibbāna, while another monk here might not attain Nibbāna?”

“Here, Ānanda, a monk is practicing thus: It might not be, and it might not be mine; it will not be, and it will not be mine. What exists, what has come to be, that I am abandoning.’ Thus he obtains equanimity. He delights in that equanimity, welcomes it, and remains holding to it. As he does so, his consciousness becomes dependent on it and clings to it.

BV: Just that slight little like of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, just the slightest little: “Ah! This is good, I like this.”

MN: A monk with clinging, Ānanda, does not attain Nibbāna.

BV: And also clinging here means the clinging to views, not only clinging to the idea of a self, but clinging to a view that this is good.

MN: 11. “But, venerable sir, when that monk clings, what does he cling to?”

“To the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, Ānanda.”

“When that monk clings, venerable sir, it seems he clings to the best object of clinging.” “When that monk clings, Ānanda, he clings to the best object of clinging; for this is the best object of clinging, namely, the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

BV: So, if you’re going to cling to something, cling to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

S: Klingon.(1) (Laughter)

BV: Klingon. Yeah, I like it.

MN: 12. “Here, Ānanda, a monk is practicing thus: It might not be, and it might not be mine; it will not be, and it will not be mine. What

exists, what has come to be, that I am abandoning.’ Thus he obtains equanimity. He does not delight in that equanimity, welcome it, or remain holding to it. Since he does not do so, his consciousness does not become dependent on it and does not cling to it. A monk without clinging, Ānanda, attains Nibbāna.”

13. “It is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvellous! The Blessed One, indeed, has explained to us the crossing of the flood in dependence upon one support or another. But, venerable sir, what is noble liberation?”

“Here, Ānanda, a noble disciple considers thus: ‘Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come, material forms here and now and material forms in lives to come, perceptions of forms here and now and perceptions of forms in lives to come, perceptions of the imperturbable, perceptions of the base of nothingness, and perceptions of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception—this is identity as far as identity extends. This is the Deathless, namely, the liberation of the mind through not clinging.

14. “Thus, Ānanda, I have taught the way directed to the imperturbable, I have taught the way directed to the base of nothingness, I have taught the way directed to the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, I have taught the crossing of the flood in dependence upon one support or another, I have taught noble liberation.

15. “What should be done for his disciples out of compassion by a teacher who seeks their welfare and has compassion for them, that I have done for you, Ānanda. There are these roots of trees, these empty huts. Meditate, Ānanda, do not delay, or else you will regret it later. This is our instruction to you.”

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

TT: 35:28

BV: So, what’s your job?

S: Meditate.

BV: Meditate now or you will regret it later.

That's a very interesting sutta, because it doesn't start at a beginner level, it starts right up at the start of the fourth jhāna and going through the fourth jhāna entirely.

Now, there's another sutta that I think is very interesting, and that's in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, and this is "The Two Ways of Teaching".

This is from the Saṃyutta Nikāya, The Book of Causation, Nidānasaṃyutta, number three, brackets number three. "The Two Ways" – the two ways of teaching.

SN 12:3 : At Sāvathī "Monks, I will teach you the wrong way and the right way. Listen to that and attend closely, I will speak."

"Yes, venerable sir," those monks replied. The Blessed One said this: "And what, monks, is the wrong way? With ignorance as condition, volitional formations come to be; with volitional formations as condition, consciousness comes to be; with consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality comes to be; with mentality-materiality as condition, the six fold base comes to be; with the six fold base as condition, contact comes to be; with contact as condition, feeling comes to be; with feeling as condition, craving comes to be; with craving as condition, clinging comes to be; with clinging as condition, being comes to be; with being as condition, birth comes to be; with birth as condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. This, monks, is called the wrong way.

BV: Interesting, isn't it? He just said this is Dependent Origination, and it's the wrong way to teach.

SN: "And what monks, is the right way? With the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of volitional formations comes cessation of consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness

comes cessation of mentality-materiality; with the cessation of mentality-materiality comes cessation of six sense bases; with the cessation of the six sense bases comes cessation of contact; with the cessation of contact comes cessation of feeling; with the cessation of feeling comes cessation of craving; with the cessation of craving comes cessation of clinging; with the cessation of clinging comes the cessation of being; with the cessation of being comes cessation of birth; with the cessation of birth comes cessation of aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. This, monks, is called the right way."

TT: 40:00

BV: Now why is it the right way? It's teaching the cessation, but when you have a hindrance arise, and I keep on asking you: "Well, how did that happen? What happened first? What happened after that? What happened after that?" It's teaching you the cessation of Dependent Origination. Because instead of getting caught in the story, and your habitual tendency, then you start seeing the thoughts, and then you let go of those and then you see: "Ah, there's the craving." And you let go of that, and you get to a place where your mind becomes completely still – the cessation of perception and feeling. That's why this is the right way, because it's teaching you the cessation directly and practically. This is how this works.

The more keenly interested you become in how everything works, the more clear your mindfulness will become. It all starts with interest. I've had some conversations with people about the seven enlightenment factors should actually be a few more. Curiosity, that's what kicks it off, and your sharp observation powers, and persistence. But you have to be persistent with it, because it's going to keep happening over and over again. But the whole point, even when you're talking about the five faculties, they should have curiosity first. Because you have to want to know how all of these things work, and you have to be persistent with it, with that curiosity before you're really going to see and have confidence, and energy, and mindfulness and collectedness and wisdom, and the wisdom is always defined as seeing Dependent Origination. You can't have

wisdom, true wisdom, if you're not looking at how the process works in minute detail. So I keep on trying to encourage you over and over again to . . . These things come up, fine, they come up, so what? How do you see them come up? What happens first? There's something that happens as the feeling fades away and craving starts to arise. It's very subtle; it's a kind of feeling. Look at the kind of feeling, and I'm not talking about whether it's pleasant or unpleasant or neutral now, I'm talking about it's almost like a mental sensation. You can see it; I know you can see it. It's just being able to recognize it when you see it, that's the kicker for it, and I'm not going to tell you what it is. (Laughs) "Oh, he's a dirty rat, but what can I say?"

This was a rather deep talk tonight, it wasn't a beginner's talk, that's for sure.

Ok, let's share some merit then:

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 . . .

Footnote 1. Student making a Star Trek pun.

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