

MN 122 The Greater Discourse on Voidness - Mahāsuññata Sutta  
Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center  
A Dhamma talk by Bhante Vimalaramsi 24-Aug-07

BV: This particular sutta's very interesting in a lot of ways, because it gives you the full description of what full awareness is. You hear a lot of talk about awareness and all of that sort of thing, and it's always done in a general way, but this one gets very specific with it.

MN:

1. **THUS HAVE I HEARD.** On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Sakyan country at Kapilavatthu in Nigrodha's Park.

2. Then, when it was morning, the Blessed One dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, went into Kapilavatthu for alms. When he had wandered for alms in Kapilavatthu and had returned from his almsround, after his meal he went for his daytime abiding to the dwelling of Kālakhemaka the Sakyan. Now on that occasion there were many resting places prepared in Kālakhemaka the Sakyan's dwelling. When the Blessed One saw this, he thought: "There are many resting places prepared in Kālakhemaka the Sakyan's dwelling. Do many monks live there?"

Now on that occasion the venerable Ānanda, along with many monks, was busy making robes at Ghata the Sakyan's dwelling. Then, when it was evening, the Blessed One rose from retreat and went to Ghata the Sakyan's dwelling. There he sat down on a seat made ready and asked the venerable Ānanda:

"Ānanda, there are many resting places prepared in Kālakhemaka the Sakyan's dwelling. Do many monks live there?"

"Venerable sir, many resting places have been prepared in Kālakhemaka the Sakyan's dwelling. Many monks are living there. This is our time for making robes, venerable sir.

BV: What that means is: right after the rain's retreat, we have what is called the, katina ceremony, and the katina robe is a special robe. It's made from scratch. It's made all in one day by the monks, and dyed, and then, at the ceremony, one monk is given that robe. And when you get the katina robe, that means that you're responsible for all of the robes, the extra robes, and bowls, and requisites, in the temple. And it's that way for a year. The way they pick a monk, quite often, is the monk with the shabbiest robe. But these days, no monks have real shabby holey robes, very much, but mine are of getting kind of like that. And then, they'll go around and they'll ask each monk: "How are your robes? Do you need a new robe?"—"No, venerable sir, I don't need a new robe." And they go to the next, and the next, and the next. And then there's a ceremony for the monk, accepting the robe, and accepting the responsibility for taking care of the requisites.

When I was staying at Bhavana, I was only going to be there until the end of the rain's retreat, and then I was going to leave. But they had these robes made, especially for a big person, and on the day of the katina ceremony, they asked me if I would take the robes, but because I couldn't take the responsibility for the other things, I was leaving, I wanted... it was cold. I was going South. So I told them that I appreciated the offer, but I wasn't going to be able to stay there and take care or do the responsibilities. So we got together, and decided that we would give the katina robe to a Thai man, about as tall as he is. Now they made a robe for me. Got an idea how big that robe was? That poor Thai guy, when he tried to wear that robe, he'd have it down where he was supposed to, and he'd flip it over his shoulder, and it would almost be touching him in back, when he flipped it over his shoulder.

Anyway –

MN:

3. "Ānanda, a monk does not shine by delighting in company, by taking delight in company, by devoting himself to delight in company; by delighting in society, by taking delight in society, by rejoicing in society. Indeed, Ānanda, it is not possible that a monk who delights

in company, takes delight in company, and devotes himself to delight in company, who delights in society, takes delight in society, and rejoices in society, will ever obtain at will, without trouble or difficulty, the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace, the bliss of enlightenment. But it can be expected that when a monk lives alone, withdrawn from society, he will obtain at will, without trouble or difficulty, the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace, the bliss of enlightenment.

4. "Indeed, Ānanda, it is not possible that a monk who delights in company, takes delight in company, and devotes himself to delight in company, who delights in society, takes delight in society, and rejoices in society, will ever enter upon and abide in either the deliverance of mind that is temporary and delectable or in the deliverance of mind that is perpetual and unshakeable. But it can be expected that when a monk lives alone, withdrawn from society, he will enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind that is temporary

BV: What is temporary deliverance of mind?

S: ~

BV: It's the letting go of craving.

MN:

and delectable or in the deliverance of mind that is perpetual and unshakeable.

BV: That means the fruition of one of the four stages of nibbāna.

MN:

5. "I do not see even a single kind of form, Ānanda, from the change and alteration of which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair in one who lusts for it and takes delight in it.

6. "However, Ānanda, there is this abiding discovered by the Tathāgata: to enter and abide in voidness internally by giving no

attention to all signs. If, while the Tathāgata is abiding thus, he is visited by monks or bhikkhunis, by men or women lay followers, by kings or kings' ministers, by other sectarians or their disciples, then with a mind leaning to seclusion, tending and inclining to seclusion, withdrawn, delighting in renunciation, and altogether done away with things that are the basis for taints, he invariably talks to them in a way concerned with dismissing them.

BV: Now what are we talking about here? He learns how to abide in voidness internally, by giving no attention to signs. That means not getting caught up, in the craving, and clinging, and habitual tendencies, and all of that sort of thing. So, when you're practicing the six Rs, and you start to do it, as more of a habit, you see your mind starting to do these things, and you let go and relax. You are experiencing the voidness internally, because you're letting go. Now that doesn't mean that you're not able to see something, or you're not able to hear something, or taste, or touch. It means you don't have the attachment to it. Right?

MN:

7. "Therefore, Ānanda, if a monk should wish: 'May I enter upon and abide in voidness internally,' he should steady his mind internally, quiet it, bring it to singleness, and collect it. And how does he steady his mind internally, quiet it, bring it to singleness, and compose it?"

8. "Here, Ānanda, quite secluded from sensual pleasures,

BV: Have you ever heard this one before?

MN:

secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters upon and abides in the first jhāna...the second jhāna...the third jhāna...the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. That is how a monk steadies his mind internally, quiets it, brings it to stillness, and composes it.

9. "Then he gives attention to voidness internally. While he is giving attention to voidness internally, his mind does not enter into voidness internally, {repeats: while he is giving attention to voidness internally, his mind does not enter into voidness internally} and acquire confidence, steadiness, and decision. When that is so, he understands thus: 'While I am giving attention to voidness internally, my mind does not enter into voidness internally and acquire confidence, steadiness, and decision.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

BV: What does that mean? Ok, listen to this again. When he gives attention to voidness internally, while he is giving attention to voidness internally, his mind does not enter into voidness internally. In other words, you can have the ability to be in jhāna, and have the experience of the jhāna factors, in other words, if you're experiencing equanimity, your mind has equanimity, and it doesn't matter what's happening outside, but you're not entering into that equanimity as that's my only object of meditation. You're keeping your equanimity going. You're keeping that balance of mind going with your other activities. And you're aware of that. You know how it feels when you have that balanced mind, and then somebody comes up and says something to you, and your mind just stays down, stride along with it. Now there's a huge amount of relief, when you have this kind of equanimity going all the time. Now you're not in the fourth jhāna, but you're experiencing the results of the fourth jhāna.

MN:

"He gives attention to voidness externally. He gives attention to voidness internally and externally. He gives attention to imperturbability.

BV: What's imperturbability? Having that balance of mind without having any hindrances, knocking you out.

MN:

While he is giving attention to imperturbability, his mind does not enter into imperturbability or acquire confidence, steadiness, and

decision. When that is so, he understands thus: 'While I am giving attention to imperturbability, my mind does not enter into imperturbability or acquire confidence, steadiness, and decision.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

10. "Then that monk should steady his mind internally, quiet it, bring it to singleness, and concentrate it on that same sign of concentration as before. Then he gives attention to voidness internally. While he is giving attention to voidness internally, his mind enters into voidness internally and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision. When that is so, he understands thus: 'While I am giving attention to voidness internally, my mind enters into voidness internally and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

BV: Now this is talking about doing your sitting. And you have full awareness of that. And the full awareness is what your experience is while you're in the sitting.

MN:

"He gives attention to voidness externally. He gives attention to voidness internally and externally. He gives attention to imperturbability. While he is giving attention to imperturbability, his mind enters into imperturbability and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision. When that is so, he understands thus: 'While I am giving attention to imperturbability, my mind enters into imperturbability and acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

BV: So you really know what your mind is doing in the present moment all the time. That's what we're talking about. Having full awareness of when you direct your mind towards imperturbability, sitting in imperturbability, and knowing that that's what it is.

MN:

11. "When a monk abides thus, if his mind inclines to walking, he walks, thinking: 'While I am walking thus, no evil unwholesome

states of covetousness and grief will beset me.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

BV: So when you have developed your ability, to keep, your meditation going all the time, and you get up and walk, now the walking, is real interesting when you keep your mind in the fourth jhāna, or, beyond. Because you don't feel anything except contact. You feel your head; you feel you feet as they touch the ground; don't feel anything in between. And that's how you recognize that you're in that jhāna. You have that strong equanimity; if you brush against something, you feel it; but unless there's contact, you don't.

Now this happened again at Bhavana; I was giving a Dhamma talk about being able to carry your meditation with you all the time. And the next person that gave a Dhamma talk made fun of that. So the next time I gave a discourse, guess what I started reading? (Pats book.) They said: "Well, the only time you can experience this deep jhāna, is while you're sitting, because you don't even have a body at that time; you don't even breathing at that time." Well, I'm sorry, but that's not the way it works. And, this is definitely talking about being in the jhāna, while you're walking, and knowing, that you don't have any hindrances arising, and you have full awareness of that. Now, you're still aware of things around you, but, you're staying with your object of meditation; you're staying with the Loving-Kindness, compassion, joy, whatever it happens to be. When it gets up into nothingness, it gets really interesting. We'll talk about that at some other time.

MN:

And when a monk abides thus, if his mind inclines to standing, he stands...If his mind inclines to sitting, he sits...If his mind inclines to lying down, he lies down, thinking: 'While I am lying down thus, no evil unwholesome states will beset me.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

12. "When a monk abides thus, if his mind inclines to talking, he resolves: 'Such talk as is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, unbeneficial, and which does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation,

peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment, and Nibbāna, that is, talk of kings, robbers, ministers, armies, dangers, battles, food, drink, clothing, beds, garlands, perfumes, relatives, vehicles, villages, towns, cities, countries, women, heroes, streets, wells, the dead, trivialities, the origin of the world, the origin of the sea, whether things are so or are not so: such talk I shall not utter.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

BV: Now we're talking about, during retreat, and, the more we can, let go of the frivolous talk, the better. Not saying what just pops in your mind, but keeping in mind that you want to have to do with leading to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment, and nibbāna. Those are the subjects that we like to hear about.

MN:

"But he resolves: 'Such talk as deals with effacement, as favors the mind's release, and which leads to complete disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment, and Nibbāna, that is, talk on wanting little, on contentment,

BV: What's contentment mean?

S: ~satisfied with what's happening ~

BV: Being content means loving what you're doing in the present moment.

MN:

seclusion, aloofness from society, arousing energy, virtue, concentration, wisdom, deliverance, knowledge and vision of deliverance: such talk I shall utter.'

BV: Hun. Now, isn't that interesting? Talk on, deliverance, arousing energy, virtue, collectedness, wisdom, deliverance, such talk, is allowable talk. And monks do that among themselves. There's this strange idea that you're never supposed to talk about your

experience of meditation with anybody else. And, when you can talk about Dhamma with each other, and say: "Well, my experience was this", you're giving confidence to the other people, that they can be able to experience that too, or maybe they've already had that experience and they were unsure of it, and now you start talking about: "This is what that experience was for me.", and they go: "Oh! Yeah! I had that same experience." Now, that not only gives for the other person, it gives confidence back to you. You both feel like you're on the right path. It's good to talk about these things.

MN:

In this way he has full awareness of that.

13. "When a monk abides thus, if his mind inclines to thinking, he resolves: 'Such thoughts as are low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, unbeneficial, and which do not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment, and Nibbāna, that is, thoughts of sensual desire, thoughts of ill will, and thoughts of cruelty: such thoughts I shall not think.'

BV: Now how do you not think those thoughts?

S: ~

BV: Noooo. When they come up, yoou..

S: Six R them ~

MN:

In this way he has full awareness of that.

BV: So there is, the harmonious practice, or right effort, of, noticing the unwholesome, letting go of the unwholesome and relaxing, bringing up a wholesome, smiling, and your object of meditation, and keep that, going.

MN:

"But he resolves: 'Such thoughts as are noble and emancipating, and lead the one who practices in accordance with them to the complete destruction of suffering, that is, thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of non-ill will,

BV: Metta.

MN:

and thoughts of non-cruelty:

BV: Compassion.

MN:

such thoughts I shall think.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

14. "Ānanda, there are these five cords of sensual pleasure. What five? Forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust. Sounds cognizable by the ear...Odors cognizable by the nose...Flavors cognizable by the tongue...Tangibles cognizable by the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust. These are the five cords of sensual pleasure.

15. "Herein a monk should constantly review his own mind thus: 'Does any mental excitement concerning any base among these five cords of sensual pleasure ever arise in me?' If, on reviewing his mind, the monk understands: 'Mental excitement concerning a certain base among these five cords of sensual pleasure does arise in me,' then he understands: 'Desire and lust for the five cords of sensual pleasure are unabandoned in me.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

BV: So if you know that you have one of the five cords that you're real attached to, than, you recognize that, and you start to recognize the mental excitement , caused by that, and you six R that right then, and you will start to lose this strong excitement of, ice cream.

SK: (Laughs)

MN:

But if, on reviewing his mind, the monk understands: 'No mental excitement concerning any base among these five cords of sensual pleasure arises in me,' then he understands: 'Desire and lust for the five cords of sensual pleasure are abandoned in me.' In this way he has full awareness of that.

16. "Ānanda, there are these five aggregates affected by clinging,

BV: Which may be affected by clinging.

MN:

in regard to which a monk should abide contemplating rise and fall thus: 'Such is material form, such its arising, such its disappearance; such is feeling, such its arising, such its disappearance; such is perception, such its arising, such its disappearance; such are formations, such their arising, such their disappearance; such is consciousness, such its arising, such its disappearance.'

17. "When he abides contemplating rise and fall in these five aggregates affected by clinging, the conceit 'I am' based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is abandoned in him. When that is so, that monk understands: 'The conceit "I am" based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is abandoned in me.' In that way he has full awareness of that.

BV: Now, I have a little bit of a problem with that, because it's not talking about craving, which is the actual start of the "I am that", it's talking about clinging, where the full blown idea, of "I am these thoughts, I am this aggregate", whatever it happens to be, where it gets really big. So, if I were writing this, what I would do would be talk, about, seeing the craving first, and by letting go of that, then of course there will be no other thoughts attached to "I am that" at all, and it has to be there, because if you don't see the craving, before the clinging, then you're just letting go of the surface, and the

philosophical idea of "I am that". You're not letting go of the cause of that.

MN:

18. "These states have an entirely wholesome basis; they are noble, supramundane, and inaccessible to the Evil One.

BV: Every time you let go of craving, your mind is entirely wholesome. That's why I call it your pure mind. If you don't let go until, the clinging, there is still some unwholesomeness in you. So it always comes back to the craving. Always, one hundred per cent.

MN:

19. "What do you think, Ānanda? What good does a disciple see that he should seek the Teacher's company even if he is told to go away?"

"Venerable sir, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, have the Blessed One as their resort. It would be good if the Blessed One would explain the meaning of these words. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will remember it."

20. "Ānanda, a disciple should not seek the Teacher's company for the sake of discourses, stanzas, and expositions. Why is that? For a long time, Ānanda, you have learned the teachings, remembered them, recited them verbally, examined them with the mind, and penetrated them well by view. But such talk as deals with effacement, as favors the mind's release, and which leads to complete disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment, and Nibbāna, that is, talk on wanting little, on contentment, seclusion, aloofness from society, arousing energy, virtue, collectedness, wisdom, deliverance, knowledge and vision of deliverance: for the sake of such talk a disciple should seek the Teacher's company even if he is told to go away.

21. "Since this is so, Ānanda, a teacher's undoing may come about, a pupil's undoing may come about, and the undoing of one who lives the holy life may come about.

22. "And how does a teacher's undoing come about? Here some teacher resorts to a secluded resting place: the forest, the root of a tree, a mountain, a ravine, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle thicket, an open space, a heap of straw. While he lives thus withdrawn, brahmins and householders from town and country visit him, and as a result he goes astray, becomes filled with desire, succumbs to craving, and reverts to luxury. This teacher is said to be undone by the teacher's undoing.

BV: Why? Because they come around and distract. Stayed with a guy in Sri Lanka for a little while, and he wanted to do some walking around. So we would walk for a little ways, just, a day's walk, and then we would sit and start to meditate, and the town's folks would notice that we were there, and they came, they wanted to talk, all night. And I didn't want to talk, and, the other monk, he said out of compassion I have to be able to talk, and then they just started chit chatting about this and that, and, not only was it boring, but I felt completely distracted, and I would get up to go away, but he didn't like that. He was senior to me, so I had to stay there. So I didn't wind up spending a whole lot of time with him. I like being alone. I truly do. But the seclusion leads to more clear kinds of mindfulness, and how your mind works, and this sort of thing. So when you go someplace and you give into, having these distractions, then they start bringing food around, and then they start: "Ah, we'll build you this place and you can be comfortable and..."

Ok, he "reverts to luxury. This teacher is said to be undone by the teacher's undoing."

MN:

He has been struck down by evil unwholesome states that defile, bring renewal of being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and lead to future birth, ageing, and death. This is how the teacher's undoing comes about.

BV: As a result, I didn't spend very long with him, I told him that I was dissatisfied, and would rather walk out by myself.

MN:

23. "And how does a pupil's undoing come about? A pupil of that teacher, emulating the teacher's seclusion, resorts to a secluded resting place: the forest...a heap of straw. While he lives thus withdrawn, brahmins and householders from town and country visit him, and as a result he goes astray, becomes filled with desire, succumbs to craving, and reverts to luxury. This pupil is said to be undone by the pupil's undoing. He has been struck down by evil unwholesome states that defile, bring renewal of being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and lead to future birth, ageing, and death. This is how the pupil's undoing comes about.

24. "And how does the undoing of one who lives the holy life come about? Here a Tathāgata appears in the world, accomplished and fully enlightened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of gods and humans, enlightened, blessed. He resorts to a secluded resting place: the forest...a heap of straw. While he lives thus withdrawn, brahmins and householders from town and country visit him, yet he does not go astray, or become filled with desire, succumb to craving, and revert to luxury. But a disciple of this teacher, emulating his teacher's seclusion, resorts to a secluded resting place: the forest...a heap of straw. While he lives thus withdrawn, brahmins and householders from town and country visit him, and as a result he goes astray, becomes filled with desire, succumbs to craving, and reverts to luxury.

BV: When I was in Thailand, I spent a fair amount of time in very secluded places, and I ran across this one kuti. It wasn't very far from the town, maybe a half of a mile or so. So it was good for going in and getting alms, and that sort of thing, and they knew that I wanted to meditate, but they would still come, and they would stand at the window, or they would stand at the door, and watch me meditate. They wouldn't say a word. Now I was secluded, but they wanted to come and be around, that kind of energy. So I didn't give into that at all, I just noticed that that's what was happening. It is a little bit disturbing, to be stared at while you're sitting. But after a

while, if you can put up with that, then their mind becomes calm, and it's not disturbing any more. So. It's really kind of interesting, what your intention is, and how you handle, disturbances when they come up. And then sometimes they would come into the little kuti that I was sitting in, and I'd be doing this or that, or writing this or that, didn't say a word, to each other. They'd be there for a half hour or forty five minutes, get up and walk out. Now, if you were treated like that in this country, you were to come into my room, and I would look at you and not say anything, and just go about what I was going to do, how offended would you be? (Laughs)

MN:

{...}

Thus there comes to be the undoing of one who leads the holy life. And herein, Ānanda, the undoing of one who leads the holy life has a more painful result, a more bitter result, than the teacher's undoing or the pupil's undoing, and it even leads to perdition.

BV: You got to be careful, especially as a monk.

MN:

25. "Therefore, Ānanda, behave towards me with friendliness, not with hostility. That will lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time. And how do disciples behave towards the Teacher with hostility, not with friendliness? Here, Ānanda, compassionate and seeking their welfare, the Teacher teaches the Dhamma to the disciples out of compassion: 'This is for your welfare, this is for your happiness.' His disciples do not want to hear or give ear or exert their minds to understand; they err and turn aside from the Teacher's Dispensation. Thus do disciples behave towards the Teacher with hostility, not with friendliness.

26. "And how do disciples behave towards the Teacher with friendliness, not with hostility? Here, Ānanda, compassionate and seeking their welfare, the Teacher teaches the Dhamma to the disciples out of compassion: This is for your welfare, this is for your

happiness.' His disciples want to hear and give ear and exert their minds to understand; they do not err and turn aside from the Teacher's Dispensation. Thus do disciples behave towards the Teacher with friendliness, not with hostility. Therefore, Ānanda, behave towards me with friendliness, not with hostility. That will lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time.

27. "I shall not treat you as the potter treats the raw damp clay. Repeatedly restraining you, I shall speak to you, Ānanda. Repeatedly admonishing you, I shall speak to you, Ānanda. The sound core will stand the test."

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

BV: It's really kind of amazing, sometimes to be invited to give a talk, and people already have their views set, and they don't, pay attention. I have a tendency to do that one time. I'll come and give a talk one time, and if they're not listening, they can invite me back a lot, I'm not interested. And this brings up an interesting thing. I have gone to a lot of talks, since I have been doing more and more with the suttas, but I am still very attentive to what somebody else says, whether I agree with what they say or not, because everybody has something that you can get, you know. Everything can be helpful in one way or another. So you don't close your mind down to what somebody else says. Real interesting.

The more attentive you can be, the closer you are to following the Buddha's teaching, when you're listening to a Dhamma talk.

Now if you what to not agree or disagree with what that person says, and you come back and you look into the sutta, to see if what they said was really true or not, then you can make your own conclusion as to whether that was the true teaching of the Buddha, or not. But you don't have to criticize. That leads to pride, and that can cause all kinds of problems. So, the more we keep an open mind, all of the time, without that judging aspect, the easier it is to, practice, what

the Buddha was actually trying to teach us. And the more you direct your mind towards, uplifting things, towards happiness and compassion for other people, the, easier your meditation becomes, and the easier your meditation becomes, the faster your progress is. It's just that simple.

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 . . .

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