

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Sanctuary.

2. Now on that occasion the novice Aciravata was living in a forest hut. Then Prince Jayasena, while wandering and walking for exercise, went to the novice Aciravata and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side and said to the novice Aciravata: "Master Aggivessana, I have heard that a bhikkhu who abides here diligent, ardent, and resolute can achieve unification of mind."

"That is so, prince, that is so. A bhikkhu who abides here diligent, ardent, and resolute can achieve unification of mind."

3. "It would be good if Master Aggivessana would teach me the Dhamma as he has heard it and mastered it."

"I cannot teach you the Dhamma, prince, as I have heard it and mastered it. For if I were to teach you the Dhamma as I have heard it and mastered it, you would not understand the meaning of my words, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me."

4. "Let Master Aggivessana teach me the Dhamma as he has heard it and mastered it. Perhaps I can understand the meaning of his words."

"I shall teach you the Dhamma, prince, as I have heard it and mastered it. If you can understand the meaning of my words, that will be good. But if you cannot understand the meaning, then leave it at that and do not question me about it further."

"Let Master Aggivessana teach me the Dhamma as he has heard it and mastered it. If I can understand the meaning of his words, that will be good. If I cannot understand the meaning, then I will leave it at that and I will not question him about it further."

5. Then the novice Aciravata taught Prince Jayasena the Dhamma as he had heard it and mastered it. After he had spoken, Prince Jayasena remarked: “It is impossible, Master Aggivessana, it cannot happen that a bhikkhu who abides diligent, ardent, and resolute can achieve unification of mind.” Then, having declared to the novice Aciravata that this was impossible and could not happen, Prince Jayasena rose from his seat and departed.

6. Soon after Prince Jayasena had left, the novice Aciravata went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to the Blessed One, he sat down at one side and reported to the Blessed One his entire conversation with Prince Jayasena. When he had finished the Blessed One said to him:

7. “Aggivessana, how is it possible that Prince Jayasena, living in the midst of sensual pleasures, enjoying sensual pleasures, being devoured by thoughts of sensual pleasures, being consumed by the fever of sensual pleasures, bent on the search for sensual pleasures, could know, see, or realize that which must be known through renunciation, seen through renunciation, attained through renunciation, realized through renunciation? That is impossible.

8. “Suppose, Aggivessana, there were two tamable elephants, horses, or oxen that were well tamed and well disciplined, and two tamable elephants, horses, or oxen that were untamed and undisciplined. What do you think, Aggivessana? Would the two tamable elephants, horses, or oxen that were well tamed and well disciplined, being tamed, acquire the behavior of the tamed, would they arrive at the grade of the tamed?” – “Yes, venerable sir.” – “But would the two tamable elephants, horses, or oxen that were untamed and undisciplined, being untamed, acquire the behavior of the tamed, would they arrive at the grade of the tamed, like the two tamable elephants, horses, or oxen that were well tamed and well disciplined?” – “No, venerable sir.” – “So too, Aggivessana, it is impossible that Prince Jayasena, living in the midst of sensual pleasures,...could know, see, or realize that which must be known through renunciation, seen through renunciation, attained through renunciation, realized through renunciation.

9. “Suppose, Aggivessana, there were a high mountain not far from a village or town, and two friends would leave the village or town and approach the mountain hand in hand. Having reached it, one friend would remain below at the foot of the mountain while the other would climb to the top. Then the friend who remained below at the foot of the mountain would say to the friend who stood on the top: ‘Well, friend, what do you see, standing on top of the mountain?’ And the other replied: ‘Standing on top of the mountain, friend, I see lovely parks,

lovely groves, lovely meadows, and lovely ponds.’ Then the first friend would say: ‘It is impossible, friend, it cannot happen that while standing on top of the mountain you should see lovely parks, lovely groves, lovely meadows, and lovely ponds.’

“Then the other friend would come down to the foot of the mountain, take his friend by the arm, and make him climb to the top of the mountain. After giving him a few moments to catch his breath, he would ask: ‘Well, friend, standing on top of the mountain, what do you see?’ And his friend would reply: ‘Standing on top of the mountain, friend, I see lovely parks, lovely groves, lovely meadows, and lovely ponds.’ Then the other would say: ‘Friend, just a little earlier we heard you say: “It is impossible, friend, it cannot happen that while standing on top of the mountain you should see lovely parks...lovely ponds.” But just now we heard you say: “Standing on top of the mountain, friend, I see lovely parks...lovely ponds.”’ Then the first friend would reply: ‘Because I was obstructed by this high mountain, friend, I did not see what was there to be seen.’

10. So too, Aggivessana, Prince Jayasena is obstructed, hindered, blocked, and enveloped by a still greater mass than this – the mass of ignorance. Thus it is impossible that Prince Jayasena, living in the midst of sensual pleasures,...could know, see, or realize that which must be known through renunciation, seen through renunciation, attained through renunciation, realized through renunciation.

11. “Aggivessana, if these two similes had occurred to you [with reference] to Prince Jayasena, he would have spontaneously acquired confidence in you, and being confident, would have shown his confidence to you.”

“Venerable sir, how could these two similes have occurred to me [with reference] to Prince Jayasena as they occur to the Blessed One, since they are spontaneous and have never been heard before?”

12. “Suppose, Aggivessana, a head-anointed noble king addresses his elephant woodsman thus: ‘Good elephant woodsman, mount the king’s elephant, enter the elephant wood, and when you see a forest elephant, bind him by the neck to the king’s elephant.’ Having replied ‘Yes, sire,’ the elephant woodsman mounts the king’s elephant, enters the elephant wood, and when he sees a forest elephant, binds him by the neck to the king’s elephant. The king’s elephant leads him out into the open. It is in this way that a forest elephant comes out in to the open; for the forest elephant clings to the elephant wood.

“Then the elephant woodsman informs the head-anointed noble king: ‘Sire, the forest elephant has come out in to the open.’ The king addresses his elephant tamer thus: ‘Come, good elephant tamer, tame the forest elephant. Subdue his forest habits, subdue his forest memories and intentions, subdue his distress, fatigue, and fever over leaving the forest. Get him to take delight in the town, inculcate in him habits congenial to human beings.’ Having replied ‘Yes, sire,’ the elephant tamer plants a large post in the earth and binds the forest elephant to it by the neck in order to subdue his forest habits...and to inculcate in him habits congenial to human beings.

“Then the elephant tamer addresses the elephant with words that are gentle, pleasing to the ear, and loveable, as go to the heart, are courteous, desired by many, and agreeable to many. When the forest elephant is addressed by such words, he listens, gives ear, and exerts his mind to understand. The elephant tamer next rewards him with grass-fodder and water. When the forest elephant accepts the grass-fodder and water from him, the elephant tamer knows: ‘Now the king’s elephant will live!’

“Then the elephant tamer trains him further thus: ‘Take up, put down!’ When the king’s elephant obeys his tamer’s orders to take up and put down and carries out his instructions, the elephant tamer trains him further thus: ‘Go forward, go back!’ When the king’s elephant obeys his tamer’s orders to go forward and go back and carries out his instructions, the elephant tamer trains him further thus: ‘Get up, sit down!’ When the king’s elephant obeys his tamer’s orders to get up and sit down and carries out his instructions, the elephant tamer trains him further in the task called imperturbability. He ties a giant plank to his trunk; a man with a lance in his hand sits on his neck; men with lances in their hands surround him on all sides; and the elephant tamer himself stands in front of him holding a long lance pole. When the elephant is being trained in the task of imperturbability, he does not move his forelegs or his hindlegs; he does not move his forequarters or his hindquarters; he does not move his head, ears, tusks, tail, or trunk. The king’s elephant is able to endure blows from spears, blows from swords, blows from arrows, blows from other beings, and the thundering sounds of drums, kettledrums, trumpets, and tomtoms. Being rid of all faults and defects, purged of flaws, he is worthy of the king, in the king’s service, considered one of the factors of a king.

13-14. “So too, Aggivessana, a Tathāgata appears in the world, accomplished, fully enlightened...(*as Sutta 51, ¶¶12-13*)...he shaves off his hair and beard, puts on the yellow robe, and goes forth from the home life into homelessness. It is in this way that a noble disciple comes out into the open; for gods and humans cling to the five cords of sensual pleasure.

15. “Then the Tathāgata disciplines him further: ‘Come, bhikkhu, be virtuous, restrained with the restraint of the Pātimokkha, be perfect in conduct and resort, and seeing fear in the slightest fault, train by undertaking the training precepts.’

16. “When, Aggivessana, the noble disciple is virtuous...and seeing fear in the slightest fault, trains by undertaking the training precepts, then the Tathāgata disciplines him further: ‘Come, bhikkhu, guard the doors of your sense faculties. On seeing a form with the eye, do not grasp at its signs and features. Since, if you were to leave the eye faculty unguarded, evil unwholesome states of covetousness and grief might invade you, practice the way of its restraint, guard the eye faculty, undertake the restraint of the eye faculty. On hearing a sound with the ear...On smelling an odor with the nose...On tasting a flavor with the tongue...On touching a tangible with the body...One cognizing a mind-object with the mind, do not grasp at its signs and features. Since, if you were to leave the mind faculty unguarded, evil unwholesome states of covetousness and grief might invade you, practice the way of its restraint, guard the mind faculty, undertake the restraint of the mind faculty.’

17. “When, Aggivessana, the noble disciple guards the doors of his sense faculties, then the Tathāgata disciplines him further: ‘Come, bhikkhu, be moderate in eating. Reflecting wisely, you should take food neither for amusement nor for intoxication nor for the sake of physical beauty and attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of this body, for ending discomfort, and for assisting the holy life, considering: “Thus I shall terminate old feelings without arousing new feelings and I shall be healthy and blameless and shall live in comfort.”’

18. “When, Aggivessana, the noble disciple is moderate in eating, then the Tathāgata disciplines him further: ‘Come, bhikkhu, be devoted to wakefulness. During the day, while walking back and forth and sitting, purify your mind of obstructive states. In the first watch of the night, while walking back and forth and sitting, purify your mind of obstructive states. In the middle watch of the night you should lie down on the right side in the lion’s pose with one foot overlapping the other, mindful and fully aware, after noting in your mind the time for rising. After rising, in the last watch of the night, while walking back and forth and sitting, purify your mind of obstructive states.’

19. “When, Aggivessana, the noble disciple is devoted to wakefulness, then the Tathāgata disciplines him further: ‘Come, bhikkhu, be possessed of mindfulness and full awareness. Act in full awareness when going forward and returning...when looking ahead and looking away...when flexing and extending your limbs...when wearing your robes and carrying your outer robes and bowl...when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting...when defecating and urinating...when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping

silent.’

20. “When, Aggivessana, the noble disciple possesses mindfulness and full awareness, then the Tathāgata disciplines him further: ‘Come, bhikkhu, resort 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, and open space, a heap of straw.’

21. “He resorts to a secluded resting place: the forest...a heap of straw. On returning from his almsround, after his meal he sits down, folding his legs crosswise, setting his body erect, and establishing mindfulness before him. Abandoning covetousness for the world, he abides with a mind free from covetousness; he purifies his mind from covetousness. Abandoning ill will and hatred, he abides with a mind free from ill will, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings; he purifies his mind from ill will and hatred. Abandoning sloth and torpor, he abides free from sloth and torpor, percipient of light, mindful, and fully aware; he purifies his mind from sloth and torpor. Abandoning restlessness and remorse, he abides unagitated with a mind inwardly peaceful; he purifies his mind from restlessness and remorse. Abandoning doubt, he abides having gone beyond doubt, unperplexed about wholesome states; he purifies his mind from doubt.

22. “Having thus abandoned these five hindrances, imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom, he abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings...mind as mind...mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.

23. “Just as, Aggivessana, the elephant tamer plants a large post in the earth and binds the forest elephant to it by the neck in order to subdue his forest habits...and to inculcate in him habits congenial to human beings, so these four foundations of mindfulness are the bindings for the mind of the noble disciple in order to subdue his habits based on the household life, to subdue his memories and intentions based on the household life, to subdue his distress, fatigue, and fever based on the household life, and in order that he may attain the true way and realize Nibbāna.

24. “Then the Tathāgata disciplines him further: ‘Come, bhikkhu, abide contemplating the body as a body, but do not think thoughts of sensual desire. Abide contemplating feelings as feelings...mind as mind...mind-objects as mind-objects, but do not think thoughts of sensual

desire.’

25. “With the stilling of applied and sustained thought, he enters upon and abides in the second jhāna...the third jhāna...the fourth jhāna.

26-29. “When his concentrated mind is thus purified...(as Sutta 51, ¶¶24-27)...He understands: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.’

30. “That bhikkhu is able to endure cold and heat, hunger and thirst, and contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, and creeping things; he is able to endure ill-spoken, unwelcome words and arisen bodily feelings that are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, distressing, and menacing to life. Being rid of all lust, hate, and delusion, purged of flaws, he is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutations, and unsurpassed field of merit for the world.

31. “If, Aggivessana, the king’s elephant dies in old age untamed and undisciplined, then he is considered an old elephant that has died an untamed death. If the king’s elephant dies when middle-aged untamed and undisciplined, then he is considered a middle-aged elephant that has died an untamed death. If the king’s elephant dies when young untamed and undisciplined, then he is considered a young elephant that has died an untamed death. So too, Aggivessana, if an elder bhikkhu dies with his taints undestroyed, then he is considered an elder bhikkhu who has died an untamed death. If a bhikkhu of middle status dies with his taints undestroyed, then he is considered a bhikkhu of middle status who has died an untamed death. If a newly ordained bhikkhu dies with his taints undestroyed, then he is considered a newly ordained bhikkhu who has died an untamed death.

32. “If, Aggivessana, the king’s elephant dies in old age well tamed and well disciplined, then he is considered an old elephant that has died a tamed death. If the king’s elephant dies when middle-aged well tamed and well disciplined, then he is considered a middle-aged elephant that has died a tamed death. If the king’s elephant dies when young well tamed and well disciplined, then he is considered a young elephant that has died a tamed death. So too, Aggivessana, if an elder bhikkhu dies with his taints destroyed, then he is considered an elder bhikkhu who has died a tamed death. If a bhikkhu of middle status dies with his taints destroyed, then he is considered a bhikkhu of middle status who has died a tamed death. If a newly ordained bhikkhu dies with his taints destroyed, then he is considered a newly ordained bhikkhu who has died a

tamed death.

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

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Majjhima Nikāya 125

Part Three— The Final Fifty Discourses (Uparipāṭi āsapāṭi)

The Division on Voidness (Suññatavagga)

Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṃ amoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi

Contributed by Chris Burke