

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Sakyan country where there was a town of the Sakyans named Devadaha. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus “Bhikkhus.” □ “Venerable sir,” they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. “Bhikkhus, there are some recluses and brahmins who hold such a doctrine and view as this: ‘Whatever this person feels, whether pleasure or pain or neither-pain-nor-pleasure, all that is caused by what was done in the past. So by annihilating with asceticism past actions and by doing no fresh actions, there will be no consequence in the future. With no consequence in the future, there is the destruction of action. With the destruction of action, there is the destruction of suffering. With the destruction of suffering, there is the destruction of feeling. With the destruction of feeling, all suffering will be exhausted.’ So speak the Nigaṇṭhas, bhikkhus.

3. “I go to the Nigaṇṭhas who speak thus and I say: ‘Friend Nigaṇṭhas, is it true that you hold such a doctrine and view as this: “Whatever this person feels...all suffering will be exhausted”?’ If, when they are asked thus, the Nigaṇṭhas admit this and say ‘Yes,’ I say to them:

4. “But, friends, do you know that you existed in the past, and that it is not the case that you did not exist?’ □ ‘No, friend.’ □ ‘But, friends, do you know that you did evil actions in the past and did not abstain from them?’ □ ‘No, friend.’ □ ‘But, friends, do you know that you did such and such evil actions?’ □ ‘No, friend.’ □ ‘But, friends, do you know that so much suffering has already been exhausted, or that so much suffering has still to be exhausted, or that when so much suffering has been exhausted all suffering will have been exhausted?’ □ ‘No, friend.’ □ ‘But, friends, do you know what the abandoning of unwholesome states is and what the cultivation of wholesome states is here and now?’ □ ‘No, friend.’

5. “So, friends, it seems that you do not know that you existed in the past and that it is not the case that you did not exist; or that you did evil actions in the past and did not abstain from them; or that you did such and such evil actions; or that so much suffering has already been exhausted, or that so much suffering has still to be exhausted, or that when so much suffering has been exhausted all suffering will have been exhausted; or what the abandoning of unwholesome states is and what the cultivation of wholesome states is here and now. That being so, it is not fitting for the venerable Nigaṇṭhas to declare: “Whatever this person feels, whether pleasure or pain or neither-pain-nor-pleasure, all that is caused by what was done in the past. So by annihilating with asceticism past actions and by doing no fresh actions, there will be no consequence in the future. With no consequence in the future...all suffering will be exhausted.”

6. “If, friend Nigaṅṅhas, you knew that you existed in the past and that it is not the case that you did not exist; or that you did evil actions in the past and did not abstain from them; or that you did such and such evil actions; or that so much suffering has already been exhausted, or that so much suffering has still to be exhausted, or that when so much suffering has been exhausted all suffering will have been exhausted; or what the abandoning of unwholesome states is and what the cultivation of wholesome states is here and now; that being so, it would be fitting for the venerable Nigaṅṅhas to declare: “Whatever this person feels...all suffering will be exhausted.”

7. “Friend Nigaṅṅhas, suppose a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and because of this he felt painful, racking, piercing feelings. Then his friends and companions, kinsmen and relatives, brought a surgeon. The surgeon would cut around the opening of the wound with a knife, probe for the arrow with a probe, pull out the arrow, and apply a medicinal cauteriser to the opening of the wound, and at each step the man would feel painful, racking, piercing feelings. Then on a later occasion, when the wound was healed and covered with skin, the man would be well and happy, independent, master of himself, able to go where he likes. He might think: “Formerly I was pierced by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and because of this I felt painful, racking, piercing feelings. Then my friends and companions, kinsmen and relatives, brought a surgeon. The surgeon cut around the opening of the wound with a knife, probed for the arrow with a probe, pulled out the arrow, and applied a medicinal cauteriser to the opening of the wound, and at each step I felt painful, racking, piercing feelings. But now that the wound is healed and covered with skin, I am well and happy, independent, my own master, able to go where I like.”

8. “So too, friend Nigaṅṅhas, if you knew that you existed in the past and that it is not the case that you did not exist... or what the abandoning of unwholesome states is and what the cultivation of wholesome states is here and now; that being so, it would be fitting for the venerable Nigaṅṅhas to declare: “Whatever this person feels...all suffering will be exhausted.”

9. “But since, friend Nigaṅṅhas, you do not know that you existed in the past and that it is not the case that you did not exist...or what the abandoning of unwholesome states is and what the cultivation of wholesome states is here and now, it is not fitting for the venerable Nigaṅṅhas to declare: “Whatever this person feels...all suffering will be exhausted.”

10. “When this was said, the Nigaṅṅhas told me: ‘Friend, the Nigaṅṅhas Nātaputta is omniscient and all-seeing and claims to have complete knowledge and vision thus: “Whether I am walking

or standing or asleep or awake, knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterruptedly present to me.” He says thus: “Nigaṇṭhas, you have done evil actions in the past; exhaust them with the performance of piercing austerities. And when you are here and now restrained in body, speech, and mind, that is doing no evil actions for the future. With no consequence in the future...all suffering will be exhausted.” We approve of and accept this, and so we are satisfied.’

11. “When this was said, I told the Nigaṇṭhas: ‘There are five things, friend Nigaṇṭhas, that may turn out in two different ways here and now. What five? They are: faith, approval, oral tradition, reasoned cogitation, and reflective acceptance of a view. These five things may turn out in two different ways here and now. Herein, what kind of faith do the venerable Nigaṇṭhas have in a teacher who speaks about the past? What kind of approval, what kind of oral tradition, what kind of reasoned cogitation, what kind of reflective acceptance of a view?’ Speaking thus, bhikkhus, I did not see any legitimate defense of their position by the Nigaṇṭhas.

12. “Again, bhikkhus, I said to the Nigaṇṭhas: ‘What do you think, friend Nigaṇṭhas? When there is intense exertion, intense striving, do you then feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion? But when there is no intense exertion, no intense striving, do you then not feel any painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion?’ ‘When there is intense exertion, friend Gotama, intense striving, then we feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion; but when there is no intense exertion, no intense striving, then we do not feel any painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion.’

13. “So it seems, friend Nigaṇṭhas, that when there is intense exertion...you feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion; but when there is no intense exertion...you do not feel any painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion. That being so, it is not fitting for the venerable Nigaṇṭhas to declare: “Whatever this person feels, whether pleasure or pain or neither-pain-nor-pleasure, all that is caused by what was done in the past. So by annihilating with asceticism past actions and by doing no fresh actions, there will be no consequence in the future. With no consequence...all suffering will be exhausted.”

14. “If, friend Nigaṇṭhas, when there was intense exertion, intense striving, then painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion were present, and when there was no intense exertion, no intense striving, then painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion were still present; that being so, it would be fitting for the venerable Nigaṇṭhas to declare: “Whatever this person feels...all suffering will be exhausted.”

15. “But since, friend Nigaṅṅhas, when there is intense exertion, intense striving, then you feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion, but when there is no intense exertion, no intense striving, then you do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to intense exertion, you are therefore feeling only the painful, racking, piercing feelings of your self-imposed exertion, and it is through ignorance, unknowing, and delusion that you mistakenly hold: “Whatever this person feels...all suffering will be exhausted.” Speaking thus, bhikkhus, I did not see any legitimate defence of their position by the Nigaṅṅhas.

16. “Again, bhikkhus, I said to the Nigaṅṅhas: ‘What do you think, friend Nigaṅṅhas? Is it possible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced here and now can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced in the next life?’ □ ‘No, friend.’ □ ‘But is it possible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced in the next life can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced here and now?’ □ ‘No, friend.’

17. “What do you think, friend Nigaṅṅhas? Is it possible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced as pleasant can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced as painful?’ □ ‘No, friend.’ □ ‘But is it possible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced as painful can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced as pleasant?’ □ ‘No, friend.’

18. “What do you think, friend Nigaṅṅhas? Is it possible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced in a matured [personality] can, by exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced in an immature [personality]?’ □ ‘No, friend.’ □ ‘But is it possible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced in an immature [personality] can, by exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced in a matured [personality]?’ □ ‘No, friend.’

19. “What do you think, friend Nigaṅṅhas? Is it possible that an action [whose result] is to be much experienced can, by exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be little experienced?’ □ ‘No, friend.’ □ ‘But is it possible that an action [whose result] is to be little experienced can, by exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be much experienced?’ □ ‘No, friend.’

20. “What do you think, friend Nigaṅṅhas? Is it possible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced can, by exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is not to be experienced?’

□ ‘No, friend.’ □ ‘But is it possible that an action [whose result] is not to be experienced can, by exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced?’ □ ‘No, friend.’

21. “So it seems, friend Nigaṇṭhas, that it is impossible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced here and now can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced in the next life, and impossible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced in the next life can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced here and now; impossible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced as pleasant can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced as painful, and impossible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced as painful can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced as pleasant; impossible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced in a matured [personality] can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced in an immature [personality], and impossible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced in an immature personality can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced in a matured [personality]; impossible that an action [whose result] is to be much experienced can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be little experienced, and impossible that an action [whose result] is to be little experienced can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be much experienced; impossible that an action [whose result] is to be experienced can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is not to be experienced, and impossible that an action [whose result] is not to be experienced can, through exertion and striving, become one [whose result] is to be experienced. That being so, the venerable Nigaṇṭhas’ exertion is fruitless, their striving is fruitless.’

22. So speak the Nigaṇṭhas, bhikkhus. And because the Nigaṇṭhas speak thus, there are ten legitimate deductions from their assertions that provide ground for censuring them:

(1) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by what was done in the past, then the Nigaṇṭhas surely must have done bad deeds in the past, since they now feel such painful, racking, piercing feelings.

(2) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by the creative act of a Supreme God, then the Nigaṇṭhas surely must have been created by an evil Supreme God, since they now feel such painful, racking, piercing feelings.

(3) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by circumstance and nature, then the Nigaṃṃ has surely must have bad luck, since they now feel such painful, racking, piercing feelings.

(4) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by class [among the six classes of birth], then the Nigaṃṃ has surely must belong to a bad class, since they now feel such painful, racking, piercing feelings.

(5) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by exertion here and now, then the Nigaṃṃ has surely must strive badly here and now, since they now feel such painful, racking, piercing feelings.

(6) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by what was done in the past, then the Nigaṃṃ has are to be censured; if not, then the Nigaṃṃ has are still to be censured.

(7) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by the creative act of a Supreme God, then the Nigaṃṃ has are to be censured; if not, they are still to be censured.

(8) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by chance, then the Nigaṃṃ has are to be censured; if not, they are still to be censured.

(9) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by class, then the Nigaṃṃ has are to be censured; if not, they are still to be censured.

(10) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by exertion here and now, then the Nigaṃṃ has are to be censured; if not, they are still to be censured.

“So speak the Nigaṃṃ has, bhikkhus. And because the Nigaṃṃ has speak thus, these ten legitimate deductions from their assertions provide grounds for censuring them. Thus their exertion is fruitless, their striving is fruitless.

23. “And how is exertion fruitful, bhikkhus, how is striving fruitful? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu is not overwhelmed by suffering and does not overwhelm himself with suffering; and he does not give up the pleasure that accords with Dhamma, yet he is not infatuated with that pleasure. He knows thus: ‘When I strive with determination, this particular source of suffering fades away in me because of that determined striving; and when I look on with equanimity, this particular source of suffering fades away in me while I develop equanimity.’ He strives with determination in regard to that particular source of suffering which fades away in him because of that determined striving; and he develops equanimity in regard to that particular source of suffering which fades away in him while he is developing equanimity. When he strives with determination, such and such a source of suffering fades away in him because of that determined striving; thus that suffering is exhausted in him. When he looks on with equanimity, such and such a source of suffering fades away in him while he develops equanimity; thus that suffering is exhausted in him.

24. “Suppose, bhikkhus, a man loved a woman with his mind bound to her by intense desire and passion. He might see that woman standing with another man, chatting, joking, and laughing. What do you think, bhikkhus? Would not sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair arise in that man when he sees that woman standing with another man, chatting, joking, and laughing?”

“Yes, venerable sir. Why is that? Because that man loves that woman with his mind bound to her by intense desire and passion; that is why sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair would arise in him when he sees her standing with another man, chatting, joking, and laughing.”

25. “Then, bhikkhus, the man might think: ‘I love this woman with my mind bound to her by intense desire and passion; thus sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair arise in me when I see her standing with another man, chatting, joking, and laughing. What if I were to abandon my desire and lust for that woman?’ He would abandon his desire and lust for that woman. On a later occasion he might see that woman standing with another man, chatting, joking, and laughing. What do you think, bhikkhus? Would sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair arise in that man when he sees that woman standing with another man...?”

“No, venerable sir. Why is that? Because that man no longer loves that woman; that is why sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair do not arise in him when he sees that woman standing with another man...”

26. “So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is not overwhelmed by suffering and does not overwhelm himself with suffering...(as in §23 above)...thus that suffering is exhausted in him. Thus, bhikkhus, the exertion is fruitful, the striving is fruitful.

27. “Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu considers thus: ‘While I live according to my pleasure, unwholesome states increase in me and wholesome states diminish; but when I exert myself in what is painful, unwholesome states diminish in me and wholesome states increase. What if I exert myself in what is painful?’ He exerts himself in what is painful. When he does so, unwholesome states diminish in him and wholesome states increase. At a later time he does not exert himself in what is painful. Why is that? The purpose for which that bhikkhu exerted himself in what is painful has been achieved; that is why at a later time he does not exert himself in what is painful.

28. “Suppose, bhikkhus, an arrow smith were warming and heating an arrow shaft between two flames, making it straight and workable. When the arrow shaft had been warmed and heated between the two flames and had been made straight and workable, then at a later time he would not again warm and heat the arrow shaft and make it straight and workable. Why is that? The purpose for which that arrow smith had warmed and heated the arrow and made it straight and workable has been achieved; that is why at a later time he would not again warm and heat the arrow shaft and make it straight and workable.

29. “So too, a bhikkhu considers thus...(as in §27 above)...that is why at a later time he does not exert himself in what is painful. Thus too, bhikkhus, the exertion is fruitful, the striving is fruitful.

30-37. “Again, bhikkhus, here a Tathāgata appears in the world, accomplished, fully enlightened...(as Sutta 51, §§12-19)...he purifies his mind from doubt.

38. “Having thus abandoned these five hindrances, imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, he enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Thus too, bhikkhus, the exertion is fruitful, the striving is fruitful.

39. “Again, bhikkhus, with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration. Thus too, bhikkhus, the exertion is fruitful, the striving is fruitful.

40. “Again, bhikkhus, with the fading away as well of rapture, a bhikkhu abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, on account of which the noble ones announce: ‘He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.’ Thus too, bhikkhus, the exertion is fruitful, the striving is fruitful.

41. “Again, bhikkhus, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. Thus too, bhikkhus, the exertion is fruitful, the striving is fruitful.

42. “When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives. He recollects his manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births... (as *Sutta 51*,

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)... Thus with their aspects and particulars he recollects his manifold past lives. Thus too, bhikkhus, the exertion is fruitful, the striving is fruitful.

43. “When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings... (as *Sutta 51*, §25)... Thus with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, he sees beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and he understands how beings pass on according to their actions. Thus too, bhikkhus, the exertion is fruitful, the striving is fruitful.

44. “When his concentrated mind is thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. He understands as it actually is: ‘This is suffering’;... ‘This is the origin

of suffering’;...‘This is the cessation of suffering’;...‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering’;...‘These are the taints’;...‘This is the origin of the taints’;...‘This is the cessation of the taints’;...‘This is the way leading to the cessation of the taints.’

45. “When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of being, and from the taint of ignorance. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: ‘It is liberated.’ 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.’ Thus too, bhikkhus, the exertion is fruitful, the striving is fruitful.

46. “So the Tathāgata speaks, bhikkhus. And because the Tathāgata speaks thus, there are ten legitimate grounds for praising him:

(1) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by what was done in the past, then the Tathāgata surely must have done good deeds in the past, since he now feels such taintless pleasant feelings.

(2) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by the creative act of a Supreme God, then the Tathāgata surely must have been created by a good Supreme God, since he now feels such taintless pleasant feelings.

(3) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by circumstance and nature, then the Tathāgata surely must have good luck, since he now feels such taintless pleasant feelings.

(4) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by class [among the six classes of birth], then the Tathāgata surely must belong to a good class, since he now feels such taintless pleasant feelings.

(5) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by exertion here and now, then the Tathāgata surely must strive well here and now, since he now feels such taintless pleasant feelings.

(6) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by what was done in the past, then the Tathāgata is to be praised; if not, then the Tathāgata is still to be praised.

(7) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by the creative act of a Supreme God, then the Tathāgata is to be praised; if not, then the Tathāgata is still to be praised.

(8) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by chance, then the Tathāgata is to be praised; if not, then the Tathāgata is still to be praised.

(9) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by class, then the Tathāgata is to be praised; if not, then the Tathāgata is still to be praised.

(10) “If the pleasure and pain that beings feel are caused by exertion here and now, then the Tathāgata is to be praised; if not, then the Tathāgata is still to be praised.

“So the Tathāgata speaks, bhikkhus. And because the Tathāgata speaks thus, there are these ten legitimate grounds for praising him.”

That is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

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Majjhima Nikāya 101

Part Three— The Final Fifty Discourses (Uparipavāsaṅgāya)

The Division at Devadaha (Devadahavagga)

Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi

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