

From In the Buddha's Words by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Ch. II, 3: The Quest for Enlightenment

(1) Seeking the Supreme State of Sublime Bliss [MN 26 *Ariyapariyasana Sutta*] Abridged.

(2) The Realization of the Three True Knowledges [MN 36 *Mahā Saccaka Sutta*]

(3) The Ancient City [SN 12:65]

1. Introduction to the Selections

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2. Main Translation of Selected Texts

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1. Introduction (to Selected Discourses in Ch II, 3).

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The three texts in section 3 are biographical accounts consistent with this naturalistic point of view. They offer us a portrait of the Buddha stark in its realism, bare in its naturalism, striking in its ability to convey deep psychological insights with minimal descriptive technique. In **Text II, 3(1)** we read about his renunciation, his training under two famous meditation teachers, his disillusion with their teachings, his solitary struggle, and his triumphant realization of the Deathless. **Text II, 3(2)** fills in the gaps of the above narrative with a detailed account of the Bodhisatta's practice of self-mortification, strangely missing from the previous discourse. This text also gives us the classic description of the enlightenment experience as involving the attainment of the four *jhānas*, states of deep meditation, followed by the three *vijjās*, or higher types of knowledge of the destruction of the taints. While this text may convey the impression that the last knowledge broke upon the Buddha's mind as a sudden and spontaneous intrusion, **Text II, 3(3)** corrects this impression with an account of the Bodhisatta on the eve of his enlightenment reflecting deeply upon the suffering of old age and death. He then methodically traces this suffering back to its conditions by a process that involves, at each step, "careful attention" (*yoniso manisikāra*) leading to "a breakthrough by wisdom (*paññāya abhisamaya*). This process of investigation culminates in the discovery of dependent origination, which thereby becomes the philosophical cornerstone of his teaching.

It is important to emphasize that as presented here and elsewhere in the Nikāyas, dependent origination does not signify a joyous celebration of the interconnectedness of all things but a precise articulation of the conditional pattern in dependence upon which suffering arises and ceases. In the same text, the Buddha declared that he discovered the path to enlightenment only when he found the way to bring dependent origination to an end. It was thus the realization of the *cessation* of dependent origination, and not merely the discovery of its original aspect, that precipitated the Buddha's enlightenment. The simile of the ancient city, introduced later in the discourse, illustrates the point that the Buddha's enlightenment was not a unique event but the rediscovery of the same "ancient path" that had been followed by the Buddha's of the past.

2. Main Translation of Selected Texts

II, 3. The Quest for Enlightenment

(1) Seeking the Supreme State of Sublime Peace

5. "Monks, there are these two kinds of search: the noble search and the ignoble search. And what is the ignoble search? Here someone being himself subject to birth seeks what is also subject to birth; being himself subject to ageing, seeks what is also subject to ageing, being himself subject to sickness, he seeks what is also subject to sickness, being himself subject to death, he seeks what is also subject to death; being himself subject to sorrow, he seeks what is also subject to sorrow; being himself subject to defilement, he seeks what is also subject to defilement.

6-11. "And what may be said to be subject to birth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow and defilement? Wife and children, men and women slaves, goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, elephants, cattle, horses and mares, gold and silver: these acquisitions are subject to birth, sickness, and death; to sorrow and defilement; and one who is tied to these things, infatuated with them, and utterly absorbed in them, being himself subject to birth ... to sorrow and defilement, Ps wII,II

it also subject to birth ... to sorrow and defilement.¹

12. “And what is the noble search? Here someone being himself subject to Birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, having understood the danger of what is subject to birth, seeks the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being him subject to aging, having understood the danger in what is subject to aging, he seeks the unaging supreme security from bondage, having being himself subject to sickness, having understood the danger in what is subject to sickness, he seeks the unaging supreme security from bondage, Nibbāṣṇa; being himself subject to death, having understood the danger in what is subject to death, he seeks the deathless supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being himself subject to sorrow, having understood the danger in what is subject to sorrow, he seeks the sorrowless supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being himself subject to defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to defilement, he seeks the undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna. This is the noble search.

13. “Monks, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened bodhisatta, I too, being myself subject to birth, sought what was also subject to birth, being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I sought what was also subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement. Then I considered thus: ‘Why, being myself subject to birth, do I seek what is also subject to birth? Why being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, do I seek what is also subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement? Suppose that, being myself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, I seek the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna. Suppose that, being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I seek the unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna.’

14. “Later, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the ochre robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

15. “Having gone forth, monks, in search of what is wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I went to Alāra Kālāma and said to him: ‘Friend Kālāma, I want to lead the spiritual life in this Dhamma and Discipline.’ Alāra Kālāma replied: ‘The venerable one may stay here. This Dhamma is such that a wise man can soon enter upon and dwell in it, realizing for himself through direct knowledge his own teacher’s doctrine.’ I soon quickly learned that Dhamma. As far as mere lip-reciting and rehearsal of his teaching went, I could speak with knowledge and assurance, and I claimed, ‘I know and see’ – and there were others who did likewise.

“I considered: ‘It is not through mere faith alone that Alāra Kālāma declares: “By realizing it for myself with direct knowledge, I enter upon and dwell in this Dhamma.” Certainly Alāra Kālāma dwells knowing and seeing this Dhamma.’ Then I went to Alāra Kālāma and asked him: ‘Friend Kālāma, in what way do you declare that by realizing it for yourself with direct knowledge you enter upon and dwell in this Dhamma?’ In reply he declared the base of nothingness.”²

“I considered: ‘Not only Alāra Kālāma has faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. I too have faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. Suppose I endeavor to realize the Dhamma that Alāra Kālāma declares he enters upon and dwells in by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge?’

“I soon quickly entered upon and dwelled in that Dhamma by realizing it for myself with direct knowledge. Then I went to Alāra Kālāma and asked him: ‘Friend Kālāma, is it in this way that you declare that you enter upon and dwell in this Dhamma by realizing; it for yourself with direct knowledge?’ – ‘That is the way, friend’ – ‘It is in this way, friend, that I also enter upon and dwell in this Dhamma by realizing it myself with direct knowledge.’ – ‘It is a gain for us, friend, it is a great gain for us that we have such a venerable one for our fellow monk. So the Dhamma that I declare I enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for myself with direct knowledge is the Dhamma that you enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for yourself with direct knowledge. And the Dhamma that you enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for yourself with direct knowledge is the Dhamma that I declare I enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for myself with direct knowledge. So you know the Dhamma that I know and I know the Dhamma that you know. As I am, so are you;

1. In the unabridged versions of this text, gold and silver are excluded from the things subject to sickness, death and sorrow, because they are subject to defilement, according to Ps, because they can be alloyed with metals of lesser worth.

2. *Akiñcaññāyatana*. This is the third formless meditative attainment; preceded by the four jhānas, it is the seventh of the eight attainments (*samāpatti*) in the scale of concentration. These attainments though spritually exalted, are still mundane, and divorced from insight, are not directly conducive to Nibbāna.

as you are, so am I. Come, friend, let us now lead this community together.’

“Thus Alāra Kālāma, my teacher, placed me, his pupil, on an equal footing with himself and awarded me the highest honor. But it occurred to me: ‘This Dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna, but only to rebirth in the base of nothingness.’³ Not being satisfied with that Dhamma, disappointed with it, I left.

16. “Still in search, monks, of what is wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I went to Uddaka Rāmaputta and said to him ‘Friend, I want to lead the spiritual life in this Dhamma and and discipline.’ Uddaka Rāmaputta replied: ‘The venerable one may stay here, This Dhamma is such that a wise man can soon enter upon and dwell in it, himself realizing through direct knowledge his own teacher’s doctrine.’ I soon quickly learned that Dhamma. As far as mere lip-recital and rehearsal of his teaching went, I could speak with knowledge and assurance, and I claimed, ‘I know and see’ – and there were others who did likewise.

“I considered: ‘It was not through mere faith alone that Rama declared: “By realizing it for myself with direct knowledge, I enter upon and dwell in this Dhamma.” Certainly Rama dwelled knowing and seeing this Dhamma.’ Then I went to Uddaka Rāmaputta and asked him ‘Friend, in what way did Rāma declare that by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge he entered upon and dwelled in this Dhamma?’ In reply Uddaka Ramaputta declared the base of neither-perception-nor-nonperception.⁴

“I considered: ‘not only Rāma had faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. Suppose that I realize the Dhamma that Rāma declared he entered upon and dwelled in by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge.’

“I soon quickly entered upon and dwelled in that Dhamma by realizing it for myself with direct knowledge. Then I went to Uddaka Rāmaputta and asked him: ‘Friend, was it in this way that Rāma declared that he entered upon and dwelled in this Dhamma by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge?’ – ‘That is the way, Friend.’ ‘It is in this way, friend, that I also enter upon and dwell in this Dhamma by realizing it for myself with direct knowledge.’ – ‘It is a gain for us, friend, it is a great gain for us that we have such a venerable one for our fellow monk. So the Dhamma that Rāma declared he entered upon and dwelled in by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge is the Dhamma that you enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for yourself with direct knowledge. And the Dhamma that you enter upon and dwell in by realizing it for yourself with direct knowledge is the Dhamma that Rama declared he entered upon and dwelled in by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge. So you know the Dhamma that Rama knew and Rama knew the Dhamma that you know. As Rama was, so are you; as you are, so was Rama. Come, friend, now lead this community.’

“Thus Uddaka Ramaputta, my fellow monk, placed me in the position of a teacher and accorded me the highest honor. But it occurred to me: ‘This Dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna, but only to rebirth in the base of neither-perception-nor-nonperception.’ Not being satisfied with that Dhamma, disappointed with it, I left.

17. “Still in search, monks, of what is wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I wandered by stages through the Magadhan country until eventually I arrived at Uruvelā near Senanigama. There I saw an agreeable piece of ground, a delightful grove with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearby a village for alms resort. I considered: ‘This is an agreeable piece of ground, this is a delightful grove with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearby a village for alms resort. This will serve for the striving of a clansman intent on striving.’ And I sat down there thinking: ‘This will serve for striving.’⁵

18. Then, monks, being myself subject to birth, having understood the danger of what is subject to birth, seeking the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna, I attained the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being myself subject to aging, having understood the danger in what is subject to aging, seeking the unaging

3. That is, it leads to rebirth in the plane of existence called the base of nothingness, the objective counterpart of the seventh meditative attainment. Here the lifespan is said to be 60,000 eons, but when that has elapsed one must pass away and return to a lower world. Thus one who attains this is still not free from birth and death.

4. *N’eva saññānāsaññāyatana*. This is the fourth and highest formless attainment. It should be noted that Uddaka Rāmaputta is Rāma’s son (*putta*), not Rāma himself. The text gives the impression that while Rāma had attained the base of neither-perception-nor-nonperception, Uddaka himself had not done so. The attainment of this base leads to rebirth in the base of neither-perception-nor-nonperception, the highest plane of rebirth in saṃsāra. The lifespan there is said to be 84,000 eons, but being conditioned and impermanent, it is still ultimately unsatisfactory.

5. **Text II, 3(2)** continues from this point with an extended account of Bodhisatta’s extreme ascetic practices followed by his discovery of the middle way.

security from bondage, Nibbāna, I attained the unaging security from bondage, Nibbāna; being myself subject to sickness having understood the danger in what is subject to sickness, seeking the supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna, I attained to the supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being myself subject to death, having understood the danger in what is subject to death, seeking the deathless supreme security from bondage, Nibbana, I attained the deathless supreme security from bondage, Nibbana; being myself subject to sorrow, having understood the danger in what is subject to sorrow, seeking the sorrowless supreme security from bondage, Nibbana, I attained the sorrowless supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna; being myself subject to defilement, having understood the danger in what is subject to defilement, seeking the undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna, I attained the undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nibbana. The knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘My liberation is unshakable. This is my last birth. Now there is no more renewed existence.’”

(from MN 26: Ariyapariyesana Sutta;1160-67)

(2) The Realization of the Three True Knowledges

11. [Saccake asked he Blessed One]⁶ “Has there never arisen in Master Gotama a feeling so pleasant that it could invade his mind and remain? Has there never arisen in Master Gotama a feeling so painful that it could invade his mind and remain?”

12. “Why not, Aggivessana? Here, Aggivessana, before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened bodhisatta, I thought: ‘Household life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open. It is not easy, while living in a home, to lead the holy life utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. Suppose I shave off my hair and beard, put on the ochre robe, and go forth from the home life into homelessness.’

13-16. “Later, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life [as in Text II, 3(II) §414–17] ... And I sat down there thinking: ‘This will serve for striving.’

17. “Now these three similes occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. Suppose there were a wet sappy piece of wood lying in water, and a man came with an upper fire-stick, thinking: ‘I shall light a fire, I shall produce heat.’ What do you think, Aggivessana? Could the man light a fire and produce heat by taking the upper fire-stick and rubbing it against the wet sappy piece of wood lying in the water?”

“No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it is a wet sappy piece of wood, and it is lying in water. Eventually the man would reap only weariness and disappointment.”

“So too, Aggivessana, as to those ascetics and brahmins who still do not live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, and whose sensual desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has not been fully abandoned and suppressed internally, even if those good ascetics and brahmins feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good ascetics and brahmins do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment. This was the first simile that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before.

18. “Again, Aggivessana, a second simile occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. Suppose there were a wet sappy piece of wood lying on dry land far from water, and a man came with an upper fire-stick, thinking: ‘I shall light a fire, I shall produce heat.’ What do you think, Aggivessana? Could the man light a fire and produce heat by taking the upper fire-stick and rubbing it against the wet sappy piece of wood lying on dry land far from water?”

“No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it is a wet sappy piece of wood, even though it is lying on dry land far from water. Eventually, the man would reap only weariness and disappointment.”

“So too, Aggivessana, as to those ascetics and brahmins who live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, but whose sensual desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has not been fully abandoned and suppressed internally, even if those good ascetics and brahmins feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good ascetics and brahmins do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment. This was the second simile that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard of before.

6. Saccaka was a debater whom, on an earlier occasion, the Buddha had defeated in a discussion. Aggivessana, the name by which the Buddha addresses him just below is probably his clan name. The present discourse begins with a discussion about pleasant and painful feeling which gives the cue for Saccaka to pose these questions to the Buddha.

19. “Again, Aggivessana, a third simile occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. Suppose there were a dry sapless piece of wood lying on dry land far from water, and a man came with an upper fire-stick, thinking: ‘I shall light a fire, I shall produce heat.’ What do you think, Aggivessana? Could the man light a fire and produce heat by rubbing it against the dry sapless piece of wood lying on dry land far from water?”

“Yes, Master Gotama. Why so? Because it is a dry sapless piece of wood, and it is lying on dry land far from water.”

“So too, Aggivessana, as to those ascetics and brahmins who live bodily withdrawn from sensual pleasures, and whose sensual desire, infatuation, thirst, and fever for sensual pleasures has been abandoned and suppressed internally, even if those good ascetics and brahmins feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment; and even if those good ascetics and brahmins do not feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, they are capable of knowledge and vision and supreme enlightenment.⁷ This was the third simile that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before. These are the three similes that occurred to me spontaneously, never heard before.

20. “I thought: ‘Suppose, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrain, and crush mind with mind.’ So, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrained, and crushed mind with mind. While I did so, sweat ran from my armpits. Just as a strong man might seize a weaker man by the head or shoulders, and beat him down, constrain him, and crush him, so too, with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against the roof of my mouth, I constrained, and crushed mind with mind, and sweat ran down my armpits. But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was overwrought and strained because I was exhausted by the painful striving. But such painful feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.⁸

21. “I thought: ‘Suppose I practice breathless meditation’. So I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth and nose. While I did so, there was a loud sound of winds coming out from my ear holes. Just as there is a loud sound when a smith’s bellows are blown, so too, while I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my nose and ears, there was a loud sound of winds coming out from my ear holes. But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was overwrought and strained because I was exhausted by the painful striving. But such painful feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

22. “I thought: ‘Suppose I practice further the breathless meditation.’ So I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nose, and ears. While I did so, violent winds cut through my head. Just as if a strong man were pressing against my head with the tip of a sharp sword, so too, while I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nose, and ears, violent winds cut through my head. But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was overwrought and strained because I was exhausted by the painful striving. But such painful feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

23. “I thought: ‘Suppose I practice further the breathless meditation.’ So I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nose, and ears. While I did so, there were violent pains in my head. Just as if a strong man were tightening a tough leather strap around my head as a headband, so too, while I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nose, and ears, there were violent pains in my head. But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was overwrought and strained because I was exhausted by the painful striving. But such painful feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

24. “I thought: ‘Suppose I practice further the breathless meditation.’ So I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nose, and ears. While I did so, violent winds carved up my belly. Just as if a skilled butcher or his apprentice were to carve up an ox’s belly with a sharp butcher’s knife, so too, while I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nose, and ears, violent winds carved up my belly. But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was overwrought and strained because I was exhausted by

7. It is puzzling that in the following paragraphs the Bodhisatta is shown engaging in self-mortification after he comes to the conclusion – in this passage – that such practices are useless for the attainment of enlightenment. This anomaly raises a suspicion that the narrative sequence of this sutta has become jumbled. The appropriate place for the simile of the fire-sticks, it seems, would be at the end of the Bodhisatta’s period of ascetic experimentation, when he has acquired a sound basis for rejecting self-mortification as a way to enlightenment.

8. This sentence repeated at the end of each of the following sections as well, answers the second of the two questions posed by Saccaka in section 11.

the painful striving. But such painful feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.’

25. “I thought: ‘Suppose I practice further the breathless meditation.’ So I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nose, and ears. While I did so, there was a violent burning in my body just as if two strong men were to seize a weaker man by both arms and roast him over a pit of hot coals, so too, while I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nose, and ears, there was a violent burning in my body. But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was overwrought and strained because I was exhausted by the painful striving. But such painful feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

26. “Now when deities saw me, some said: ‘The ascetic Gotama is dead’. Other deities said: ‘The ascetic Gotama is not dead, he is dying.’ Still other deities said: ‘The ascetic Gotama is neither dead nor dying; he is an arhant, for such is the way arahants dwell.’

27. “I thought: ‘Suppose I practice entirely cutting off food.’ Then deities came to me and said: ‘Good sir, do not practice entirely cutting off food. If you do so, we shall infuse heavenly food into the pores of your skin and this will sustain you.’ I considered: ‘If I claim to be completely fasting while these deities infuse heavenly food into the pores of my skin and this sustains me, then I shall be lying.’ So I dismissed those deities, saying: ‘There is no need.’

28. “I thought ‘Suppose I take very little food, a handful each time, whether of bean soup or lentil soup or vetch soup or pea soup.’ So I took very little food, a handful each time, whether of bean soup or lentil soup or vetch soup or pea soup. While I did so, my body reached a state of extreme emaciation. Because of eating so little my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems. Because of eating so little my backside became like a camel’s hoof. Because of eating so little the projections on my spine stood forth like corded beads. Because of eating so little my ribs jutted out as gaunt as the crazy rafters of an old roofless barn. Because of eating so little the gleam of my eyes sank far down in their sockets, looking like the gleam of water that has sunk far down in a deep well. Because of eating so little my scalp shriveled and withered as a green bitter gourd shrivels and withers in the wind and sun. Because of eating so little my belly skin adhered to my backbone; thus if I touched my belly skin I encountered my backbone and if I touched my backbone I encountered my belly skin. Because of eating so little, if I defecated or urinated, I fell over on my face there. Because of eating so little, if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair, rotted at its roots, fell from my body as I rubbed.

29. “Now when people saw me, some said: ‘The ascetic Gotama is black.’ Other people said: ‘The ascetic Gotama is not black; he is brown.’ Other people said: ‘The ascetic Gotama is neither black nor brown; he is golden-skinned.’ So much had the clear, bright color of my skin deteriorated through eating so little.

30. “I thought: ‘Whatever ascetics or brahmins in the past have experienced painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, this is the utmost; there is none beyond this. And whatever ascetics and Brahmins in the future will experience painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, this is the utmost; there is none beyond this. And whatever ascetics and brahmins at present experience painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, this is the utmost; there is none beyond this. But by this racking practice of austerities I have not attained any superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to enlightenment?’

31. “I considered: ‘I recall that when my father the Sakyan was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered and dwelled in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thought and examination, with rapture and happiness born of seclusion.’⁹ Could this be the path to enlightenment?’ Then, following on that memory, came the realization: ‘This is indeed the path to enlightenment.’

32. “I thought: ‘Why am I afraid of that happiness that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states?’ I thought: ‘I am not afraid of that happiness that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states.’

33. “I considered: ‘It is not easy to attain that happiness with a body so excessively emaciated. Suppose I ate some solid food – some boiled rice and porridge.’ And I ate some solid food – some boiled rice and porridge. Now at

9. Ps explains that when the Bodhisatta was a child, his father brought him along to attend the ceremonial plowing festival of the Sakyans. The young prince’s attendants left him under a rose-apple tree and went to watch the plowing ceremony. Finding himself all alone, the Bodhisatta spontaneously sat up in the meditation posture and attained the first jhāna through mindfulness of breathing. Through the sun moved, the shade of the tree remained over the Bodhisatta. When the attendants returned and found the boy seated in meditation they reported this to the king, who came and bowed in veneration to his son.

that time five monks were waiting upon me, thinking: ‘If our ascetic Gotama achieves some higher state, he will inform us.’ But when I ate the boiled rice and porridge, the five monks were disgusted and left me thinking ‘The ascetic Gotama now lives luxuriously; he has given up his striving and reverted to luxury.’

34. “Now when I had eaten solid food and regained my strength, then secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome thoughts, I entered and dwelled in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by thought and examination, with rapture and happiness born of seclusion. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.¹⁰

35. “With the subsiding of thought and examination, I entered and dwelled in the second *jhāna*, which has internal confidence and unification of mind, is without thought and examination, and has rapture and happiness born of concentration. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

36. With the fading away as well of rapture, I dwelled equanimous, and mindful and clearly comprehending, I experienced happiness with the body; I entered and dwelled in the third *jhāna* of which the noble ones declare: ‘He is equanimous, mindful, one who dwells happily.’ But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

37. “With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of joy and displeasure, I entered and dwelled in the fourth *jhāna*, which is neither painful nor pleasant and includes the purification of mindfulness by equanimity. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

38. “When my mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives. I recollected my manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many eons of world-contraction, many eons of world-expansion, many eons of world-contraction and expansion: ‘There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain such my lifespan; and passing away from there, I was reborn elsewhere, and there too I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my lifespan; and passing away from there, I was reborn here’. Thus with their aspects and particulars I recollected my manifold past lives.

39. “This was the first true knowledge attained by me in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who dwells diligent, ardent, and resolute. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

40. “When my mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the passing away and rebirth of beings. With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw beings passing away and being reborn, inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and I understood how beings fare on according to their actions thus: ‘These beings who behaved wrongly by body, speech, and mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong view, and undertook actions based on wrong view, with the breakup of the body, after death, have been reborn in a state of misery, in a bad destination, in the lower world, in hell; but these beings who behaved well by body, speech, and mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right view, and undertook action based on right view, with the breakup of the body, after death, have been reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world.’ Thus with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I saw beings passing away and being reborn, inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and I understood how beings fare on according to their actions.

41. “This was the second true knowledge attained by me in the middle watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who dwells diligent, ardent, and resolute. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.

42. “When my mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints. I directly knew 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.’ I directly knew as it actually is: ‘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.’

10. This sentence answers the first of the two questions posed by Saccaka in 11. This passage shows a change in the Bodhisatta’s evaluation of pleasure. When pleasure arises from seclusion and detachment it is no longer something to be feared and banished by the practice of austerities but becomes an adjunct of the higher stages along the path to enlightenment.

43 “When I knew and saw thus, my mind was liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of existence, and from the taint of ignorance. When it was liberated, there came the knowledge: ‘It is liberated.’ I directly knew: ‘Birth is destroyed, the spiritual life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming back to any state of being.’

44. “This was the third true knowledge attained by me in the last quarter of the night. Ignorance was banished and true knowledge arose, darkness was banished and light arose, as happens in one who dwells diligent, ardent, and resolute. But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain.”

(from MN 36: *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*; 1, 240-49)

(2) *The Ancient City*

“Monks, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisatta, not fully enlightened, it occurred to me: ‘Alas, this world has fallen into trouble, in that it is born, ages, and dies, it passes away and is reborn, yet it does not understand the escape from this suffering headed by aging-and-death. When now will an escape be discerned from this suffering headed by aging-and-death?’

“Then, monks, it occurred to me: ‘When what exists does aging-and-death come to be? By what is aging-and-death conditioned?’ Then, monks, through careful attention, there took place in me a break-through by wisdom: ‘When there is birth, aging-and-death comes to be; aging-and-death has birth as its condition.’

“Then, monks, it occurred to me: ‘When what exists does birth come to be? ... existence? ... clinging? ... craving? ... feeling? ... contact? ... the six sense bases? ... name-and-form? By what is name-and form conditioned?’ Then, monks, through careful attention, there I took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: ‘When there is consciousness, name-and-form comes to be; name-and-form has consciousness as its condition.’

“Then, monks, it occurred to me: ‘When what exists does consciousness come to be? By what is consciousness conditioned?’ Then, monks, through careful attention, there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom. ‘When there is name-and-form consciousness comes to be; consciousness has name-and-form as its condition.’¹¹

“Then, monks, it occurred to me: ‘This consciousness turns back; does not go further than name-and-form. It is to this extent that one may be born and age and die, pass away and be reborn, that is, where there is consciousness with name-and-form as its condition, and name-and-form with consciousness as its condition.¹² With name-and-form as condition, the six sense bases; with the six sense bases as condition, contact.... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.’

“‘Origination, origination’ – thus, monks, in regard to things unheard before there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetration, and light.

“Then, monks, it occurred to me: ‘When what does not exist does aging-and-death not come to be? With the cessation of what does the cessation of aging-and-death come about?’ Then, monks, through careful attention, there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: ‘Where there is no birth, aging-and-death does not come to be; with the cessation of birth comes cessation of aging-and-death.’

“It occurred to me: ‘When what does not exist does birth not come to be? ... existence? ... clinging? ... craving? ... feeling? ... contact? ... the six sense bases? ... name-and-form? With the cessation of what does the cessation of name-and-form come about?’ Then, monks, through careful attention, there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: ‘When there is no consciousness, name-and-form does not come to be; with the cessation of consciousness comes cessation of name-and-form.’

“It occurred to me: ‘When what does not exist does consciousness not come to be? With the cessation of what does the cessation of consciousness come about?’ Then, monks, through careful attention, there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: ‘When there is no name-and-form, consciousness does not come to be; with the cessation of

11. In the usual formula of dependent origination, consciousness is said to be conditioned by volitional formations (*sankāra paccayā viññāṇam*). This variant shows the interplay of consciousness and name-and-form to be the “hidden vortex” underlying all existence within the round of rebirths.

12. Spk: “*To this extent one may be born, age and die*: With consciousness as a condition for name-and-form, and with name-and-form as a condition for consciousness, to this extent one may be born and undergo rebirth. What is there beyond this that can be born or undergo rebirth? Isn’t it just this that is born and undergoes rebirth?”

name-and-form comes cessation of consciousness.’

“Then, monks, it occurred to me: ‘I have discovered this path to enlightenment, that is, with the cessation of name-and-form comes cessation of consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness comes cessation of name-and-form; with the cessation of name-and-form, cessation of the six sense bases; with the cessation of the six sense bases, cessation of contact Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.’¹³

“‘Cessation, cessation’ – thus monks in regard things unheard before there arose in vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetration, and light.

“Suppose monks, a man wandering through a forest would see an ancient path, an ancient road traveled upon by people in the past. He would follow it and would see an ancient city, an ancient capital that has been inhabited by people in the past, with parks, groves, ponds, and ramparts, a delightful place. Then the man would inform the king or a royal Minister: ‘Sire, know that while wandering through the forest I saw an ancient path, an ancient road traveled upon by people in the past. I followed it and saw an ancient city, an ancient capital that had been inhabited by people in the past, with parks, groves, ponds, and ramparts, a delightful place. Renovate that city, sire!’ Then the king or the royal Minister would renovate the city, and some time later that city would become successful and prosperous, well populated, filled with people, attained to growth and expansion.

“So too, monks, I saw the ancient path, the ancient road traveled by the Perfectly Enlightened Ones of the past. And what is that ancient path, that ancient road? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. I followed that path and by doing so I have directly known aging-and-death, its origin, its cessation, the way leading to its cessation. I have directly known birth ... existence ... clinging ... craving ... feeling ... contact ... the six sense bases ... name-and-form ... consciousness ... volitional formations, their origin, their cessation, and the way leading to their cessation.¹⁴ Having directly known them, I have explained them to the monks, the nuns, the male lay followers, and the female lay followers. This spiritual life, monks, has become successful and prosperous, extended, popular, widespread, well proclaimed among devas and humans.”

(SN 12:65; 11 104-7)

13. Note that the Buddha discovers the path to enlightenment by realizing the cessation of consciousness, name-and-form, and the other links of dependent origination. Cessation is realized with the experience of Nibbāna, the deathless element.

14. At this point the text introduces volitional formations. Its principal condition is ignorance, and thus by mentioning its origin, ignorance too is implied. In this way all twelve factors of the usual formula of dependent origination are included, at least by implication.