

## ❁ Selections from the *Sutta Piṭaka* (2<sup>nd</sup> part of the Pāli Canon)<sup>1</sup>

From *Samyutta-nikāya*, 56.11 <sup>2</sup>

*Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dharma (The First Sermon)*

These two extremes, O monks, are not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the world. What are the two? That conjoined with the passions, low, vulgar, common, ignoble, and useless—and that conjoined with self-torture, painful, ignoble, and useless. Avoiding these two extremes the Tathāgata [the Buddha] has gained the knowledge of the Middle Way, which gives sign and knowledge, and tends to calm, to insight, enlightenment, *nirvāṇa*.

What, O monks, is the Middle Way, which gives sight...? It is the noble Eightfold Path, namely, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, O monks, is the Middle Way...

(1) Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of pain [*dukkha*]: birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are painful. Contact with unpleasant things is painful, not getting what one wishes is painful. In short the five *khandhas* of grasping are painful.<sup>3</sup>

(2) Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the cause of pain: that craving which leads to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, finding pleasure here and there, namely, the craving for passion, the craving for existence, the craving for non-existence.

(3) Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of pain: the cessation without remainder of that craving, abandonment, forsaking, release, non-attachment.

(4) Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the way that leads to the cessation of pain: this is the noble Eightfold Path, namely, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mind, right concentration...

As long as in these noble truths my threefold knowledge and insight...was not well purified, even so long, O monks, in the world with its gods, Māra, Brahmā, with ascetics, *brahmins*, gods, and men, I had not attained the highest complete enlightenment. Thus I knew.

But when in these noble truths my threefold knowledge and insight...was well purified, then, O monks, in the world...I had attained the highest complete enlightenment. Thus I knew. Knowledge arose in me; insight arose that the release of my mind is unshakable; this is my last existence; now there is no rebirth.

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<sup>1</sup> The source-numbers below are the volume and page numbers from the Pāli Text Society's standard edition. Small changes were made to the translations to improve style, to be gender-inclusive, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Translation from E.J. Thomas (1927), *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*. Alfred A. Knopf, pp. 87-88.

<sup>3</sup> The five *khandhas* (groups or aggregates) are (bodily) form, feeling, perception, mental formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness. For the Buddha, suffering arises if one clings or identifies with any of these aggregates. Also, see the passages from *Samyutta-nikāya* 22 below.

**From *Majjhima-nikāya*, 141.23 <sup>4</sup>**

[What] leads to the cessation of suffering?—It is just the Noble Eightfold Path, consisting of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mind, and right concentration.

Right view is knowing of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

Right intention is the resolve to renounce the world and to do no hurt or harm.

Right speech is to abstain from lies and slander, from reviling, and from tattle.

Right action is to abstain from taking life, from stealing, and from lechery.

Right livelihood is that by which the disciple of the Noble One supports himself, to the exclusion of wrong modes of livelihood.

Right effort is when a mendicant brings the will to bear, puts forth endeavor and energy, struggles and strives with all one's heart, to stop bad and wrong qualities which have not yet arisen from ever arising, to renounce those which have already arisen, to foster good qualities which have not yet arisen, and, finally, to establish, clarify, multiply, enlarge, develop, and perfect those good qualities which are there already.

Right mindfulness is when realizing what the body is—what feelings are—what the heart is—and what the mental states are—a mendicant dwells ardent, alert, and mindful, in freedom from the wants and discontents attendant on any of these things.

Right concentration is when, divested of lusts and divested of wrong dispositions, a mendicant develops, and dwells in, the first ecstasy [*jhana*] with all its zest and satisfaction, a state bred of aloofness and not divorced from observation and reflection. By laying to rest observation and reflection, one develops and dwells in inward serenity, in [the] focusing of heart, in the zest and satisfaction of the second ecstasy, which is divorced from observation and reflection and is bred of concentration—passing thence to the third and fourth ecstasies.

This, friends, constitutes the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

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<sup>4</sup> Translation by Lord Chalmers (1927), *Further dialogues of the Buddha II*, Oxford UP, pp. 296-299.

**From *Samyutta-nikāya*, 22.59<sup>5</sup>**

*Discourse on Not-Self (The Second Sermon)*

The body, monks, is not the self [*anattā*]. If the body, monks, were the self, this body would not be subject to sickness, and it would be possible in the case of the body to say, “Let my body be thus, let my body not be thus.” Now, because the body is not the self, monks, therefore the body is subject to sickness, and it is not possible in the case of the body to say, “Let my body be thus, let my body not be thus.”

Feeling is not the self. . . perception is not the self. . . mental formations are not the self. . .

Consciousness is not the self. For if consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not be subject to sickness, and it would be possible in the case of consciousness to say, “Let my consciousness be thus, let my consciousness not be thus.” Now, because consciousness is not the self, therefore consciousness is subject to sickness, and it is not possible in the case of consciousness to say, “Let my consciousness be thus, let my consciousness not be thus.”

What think you, monks, is the body permanent or impermanent?

–Impermanent [*anicca*], Lord.

But is the impermanent painful or pleasant?

–Painful, Lord.

But is it fitting to consider what is impermanent, painful, and subject to change as, “this is mine, this am I, this is my self”?

–No indeed, Lord.

[And so of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.]

Therefore in truth, monks, whatever body, past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, low or eminent, near or far, is to be looked on by one who duly and rightly understands, as, “all this body is not mine, not this am I, not mine is the soul.”

[And so of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.]

Thus perceiving, monks, the learned noble disciple feels loathing for the body, for feeling, for perception, for mental reactions, for consciousness. Feeling disgust one becomes free from passion, through freedom from passion one is emancipated, and in the emancipated arises the knowledge of one’s emancipation. This disciple understands that destroyed is rebirth, the religious life has been led, done is what was to be done, there is naught beyond this world.

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<sup>5</sup> Translated by Thomas (op. cit.), pp. 88-89.

**From *Samyutta-nikāya*, 22.45 <sup>6</sup>**

Monks, form is impermanent [*anicca*]. What is impermanent is suffering [*dukkha*]. What is suffering is nonself [*anattā*]. What is nonself should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” When one sees this thus as it really is with correct wisdom, the mind becomes dispassionate and is liberated from this defilement by non-attachment.

[And so of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.]

By being liberated, the mind is steady; by being steady, it is content; by being content, a monk is not agitated. Being unagitated, one personally attains *nirvāṇa*. One understands: “Destroyed is birth, 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.”

**From *Khuddaka-nikāya*, 18.4 <sup>7</sup>**

*Milindapañha*

Then the venerable Nāgasena spoke to Milinda the king as follows:

Your majesty ... did you come afoot, or riding?

–*Bhante*, I do not go afoot: I came in a chariot.

Your majesty, if you came in a chariot, declare to me the chariot. Pray, your majesty, is the pole the chariot?

–Nay, verily, *bhante*.

Is the axle the chariot?

–Nay...

Are the wheels the chariot?...Is the chariot-body the chariot? ...Is the banner-staff the chariot?...Is the yoke?... Are the reins?... Is the goading-stick?... Pray, your majesty, are pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body, bannerstaff, yoke, reins, and goad unitedly the chariot?

–Nay, verily, *bhante*.<sup>8</sup>

Is it, then, your majesty, something else besides pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body, banner-staff, yoke, reins, and goad which is the chariot?

–Nay, verily, *bhante*.

Your majesty, although I question you very closely, I fail to discover any chariot. Verily now, your majesty, the word ‘chariot’ is a mere empty sound. What chariot is there here? Your majesty, you speak a falsehood, a lie: there is no chariot. Your majesty, you are the chief king in

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<sup>6</sup> Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005). *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*. Wisdom Publications.

<sup>7</sup> Translated by H.C. Warren (1915), *Buddhism in Translation*, Harvard UP, pp. 129-133.

<sup>8</sup> A negative answer is not obviously correct here, although perhaps the speaker has in mind some kind of sorites argument.

all the continent of India; of whom are you afraid that you speak a lie? Listen to me, my lords, ye five hundred Yonakas, and ye eighty thousand priests! Milinda the king here says thus: “I came in a chariot;” and being requested “Your majesty, if you came in a chariot, declare to me the chariot,” he fails to produce any chariot. Is it possible, pray, for me to assent to what he says?

When he had thus spoken, the five hundred Yonakas applauded the venerable Nāgasena... Then Milinda the king spoke to the venerable Nāgasena as follows:

“*Bhante* Nāgasena, I speak no lie: the word ‘chariot’ is but a way of counting, term, appellation, convenient designation, and name for pole, axle, wheels, chariot-body, and banner-staff.”

Thoroughly well, your majesty, do you understand a chariot. In exactly the same way, your majesty, in respect of me, Nāgasena, is but a way of counting, term, appellation, convenient designation, mere name for the hair of my head, hair of my body...brain of the head, form, feeling, perception, mental reactions, and consciousness. But in the absolute sense there is no ego here to be found.

Then the priestess Vajira, your majesty, said in the presence of the Blessed One:

Even as the word of ‘chariot’ means  
That members join to frame a whole;  
So when the groups appear to view,  
We use the phrase, ‘a living being.’

### From *Majjhima-nikāya*, 54<sup>9</sup>

Suppose a dog, overcome with weakness and hunger, were to come across a slaughterhouse, and there a skilled butcher or butcher's apprentice were to fling it a chain of bones: thoroughly scraped, without any flesh, smeared with blood. What do you think? Would the dog, gnawing on that chain of bones, thoroughly scraped, without any flesh, smeared with blood, appease its weakness and hunger?

“No, Lord...Because the chain of bones is thoroughly scraped, without any flesh, and smeared with blood. The dog would get nothing but its share of weariness and disappointment.”

In the same way, householder, a disciple of the noble ones considers this point: “The Blessed One has compared sensuality to a chain of bones, of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.” Seeing this with right discernment, as it actually is, then avoiding the equanimity that is diversified, based on diversity, one develops the equanimity that is unified, based on unity, where clinging to the baits of the world ceases without trace.

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<sup>9</sup> Translation by Ñānamoli Thera at <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.054x.than.html>

**From *Samyutta-nikāya*, 35.28** <sup>10</sup>

*The Fire Sermon*

Monks, Everything is on fire. What is on fire?

The eye is on fire; forms are on fire. Consciousness at the eye is on fire, and contact at the eye is on fire. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the eye—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too is on fire. On fire with what? With the fire of desire, the fire of aversion, the fire of illusion. On fire, I tell you, with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs.

The ear is on fire; sounds are on fire...The nose is on fire; aromas are on fire...The tongue is on fire; flavors are on fire...The body is on fire; tactile sensations are on fire...

The intellect is on fire; ideas are on fire. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the intellect—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too is on fire. On fire with what? With the fire of desire, the fire of aversion, the fire of illusion. On fire, I tell you, with birth, aging and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs.

Seeing thus, the well-instructed disciple of the noble one grows disenchanted with the eye and with forms, disenchanted with consciousness at the eye, disenchanted with contact at the eye. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the eye—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—with that, too, one grows disenchanted.

One grows disenchanted with the ear and with sounds...with the nose and with aromas...with the tongue and with flavors...with the body and with tactile sensations...

One grows disenchanted with the intellect and with ideas, disenchanted with consciousness at the intellect, disenchanted with contact at the intellect. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on contact at the intellect—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—with that, too, one grows disenchanted.

Disenchanted, the disciple becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, one is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, ‘Fully released,’ one discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing more for this world.’

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<sup>10</sup> Translation by Ñānamoli Thera at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn35/sn35.028.nymo.html>.

**From *Anguttara-nikāya*, 3.65 <sup>11</sup>**

*The Kalama Sutta*

...The Kalamas, who were inhabitants of Kesaputta sitting on one side, said to the Blessed One: “There are some monks and brahmins, venerable sir, who... expound and explain only their own doctrines; the doctrines of others they despise, revile, and pull to pieces. Some other monks and *brahmins* [do the same]. Venerable sir, there is doubt, there is uncertainty in us concerning them. Which of these reverend monks and brahmins spoke the truth and which falsehood?”

It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another’s seeming ability; nor upon the consideration “The monk is our teacher.”

Kalamas, when you yourselves know: “These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,” abandon them.

What do you think, Kalamas? Does greed occur for benefit or harm?

–For harm, venerable sir.

Kalamas, being given to greed, and being overwhelmed and vanquished mentally by greed, a person takes life, steals, commits adultery, and tells lies; this prompts others too, to do likewise. Will that be for harm and ill?

–Yes, venerable sir.

What do you think, Kalamas? Does hate occur for benefit or harm?... Does delusion occur for benefit or harm?...

What do you think, Kalamas? Are these things good or bad?

–Bad, venerable sir...

Undertaken and observed, do these things lead to harm and ill, or not? Or how does it strike you?

–Undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill. Thus it strikes us here...

Therefore, did we say, Kalamas, what was said thus, ‘Come Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another’s seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, “The monk is our teacher.”

Kalamas, when you yourselves know: “These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,” abandon them...

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<sup>11</sup> Translated by Soma Thera at <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel008.html>