

THE BEGINNINGS OF BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

Text 3

3. THE CHAPTER ON THE GOAL

(The Atthakavagga)

Scholars of religion are interested in origins, seeking evidence of how things began, before institutions and their often self-serving histories were created. Since the nineteenth century, scholars of Buddhism have sought to describe what has been termed "original Buddhism" or "primitive Buddhism"—that is, the Buddhism of the Buddha. As has already been noted, this is a difficult task, for a number of historical and linguistic reasons.

The Pali canon contains a work called the *Sutta Nipatta* or *Section of Discourses*, a collection of 1,149 verses (with some prose). One of its chapters, the "Atthakavagga" or "Chapter on the Goal" (presented in its entirety here), is believed by a number of scholars to contain some of the oldest extant Buddhist verse, which perhaps goes back to the time of the Buddha himself. Indeed, it has been suggested that some of the more "radical" statements regarding the rejection of all views derive from an ascetic group at the time of the Buddha that came to be incorporated into the monastic community. Evidence for the text's antiquity, in addition to various linguistic and metrical clues, includes its mention by name in three other canonical texts, as well as the existence of an early commentary on it.

But many questions remain about the chapter and its meaning, questions that add to its fascination. One basic question has to do with its title, which in the Pali tradition means "The Octet," reflecting its structure: the first four of the sixteen poems that constitute the work have eight verses. But the rendering into Chinese treats the first part of the title as *artha*, meaning "goal" or "aim," a reading followed by our translator. The work is largely free of the technical terminology and lists familiar to the tradition, suggesting to some that it predates them. The sage (*muni*) and the "true brahmin" are extolled more often than is the monk (*bhikkhu*).

The primary theme of the sections of the work (which may have been composed in different periods) is non-attachment—specifically, non-attachment to sensual pleasure, to views and beliefs generally, and to belief in the self. In the ninth poem, for example, the Buddha explains to Magandiya why he rejected his daughter when she was offered to him in marriage. Here, the misogyny of the text is quite consistent with the later tradition. However, scholars have paid most attention to the rejection of views, with some seeing an anticipation of the philosophical position of Nagarjuna (see the *Madhyamakakarika*, p. 366). The dangers of attachment to philosophical views and their disputation are indeed stated in stark terms at several points in the text, and commentators both ancient and modern have struggled with how to harmonize such statements with the importance of "right view," one of the constituents of the eightfold path. The commentary to the text, attributed to the Buddha's wisest disciple, Shariputra, seeks to resolve these apparent paradoxes.

PRONOUNCING GLOSSARY

Atthakavagga: *at-ta-ka-vag-ga*
 brahmana: *brah-ma-na*
 Magandiya: *mah-gan-di-ya*
 Mara: *mah-ra*

Pasura: *pa-su-ra*
 Sariputta: *sah-ri-put-ta*
 shramana: *shra-ma-na*
 Tissa Metteyya: *ti-sa may-tay-ya*

1. On Desire

If someone pursues the object of his desires and succeeds, that mortal being will truly rejoice, having found what he was seeking.

But, if that same person that was so desirous of this object when excited by desire should lose the object he seeks, he will be as if wounded by his own arrow.

A person who avoids desires, like someone stepping to the side to avoid a viper, he, ever mindful, will overcome this clinging to the world.

A person craving for land, property, gold, cattle, slaves and servants, wives and family, and all other objects of desire

will be overcome by his own weaknesses, crushed by his anguish; therefore, suffering will follow him, like water rushing into a broken ship.

Therefore, let him remain always mindful, avoiding desires. Having abandoned them he will cross the flood waters, like someone reaching the other shore after bailing out the water from his ship.

2. Eight Stanzas on the Cave

Stuck to his cave, he hides every which way, this human being sinking into darkness; for someone like this is far from detached solitude, for desire in this world is not easily abandoned.

Those imprisoned by desire, bound by the sweet tastes of existence, are not easily released, for no one but themselves could release them; they have their sight on the past and the future, on the object of their present desires, longing for the object of his desires here or beyond.

Greedy, clinging, confused, and miserly in all that they desire, they are bogged down in an uneven path; dragged into misery, they cry out, wondering, "What will become of us when we have left this life?"

A human being should therefore train here and now so that anything that he knows in this world to be uneven or crooked will not be a cause for uneven and crooked conduct; for life is short, as the resolute sages have declared.

I see living things in this world quivering, overcome by their thirst for existence. These abject humans cry out from within the jaws of death, unable to go beyond this thirst for coming to be this and stopping to be that.

Look at how they quiver like fish in a drying riverbed, obsessed with the thought of "mine, mine." Once you have seen this state of things, you should seek to act free of this "mine," no longer clinging to this coming to be this or that.

He should restrain and tame this wanting to be one thing or the other, free of self-seeking greed, having understood fully the nature of contact, he will do nothing that he should have to hide. This resolute sage will not cling to anything seen or heard.

Having understood thoroughly concept and perception, he should cross the torrent; the sage does not cling to possessions and possessing; having pulled out the barb, he lives undistracted, he does not yearn for anything in this life, or in any life to come.

3. *Eight Stanzas on the Impure*

Some speak with a tainted and clouded mind, others speak with a mind packed with truths. The sage, however, does not join in where these arguments arise, therefore the sage is nowhere hard or stubborn.

For, someone led by desire and firmly set in his preferences—one who labors seeking gain and success—how could he ever escape his own views and beliefs? Because, he can only speak of what he knows.

Those skilled in the teaching declare that someone who only speaks of himself, proclaiming to others his own moral conduct and vows, even when he is not asked about this, is not a person who follows a noble practice.

But, those skilled in the teaching declare, the calm mendicant who is at peace within himself will not go about talking up his good moral habits, saying, “I am like this” or like that; he is one following a practice that makes him noble, he who is not puffed up with conceit about anything in the world.

The one who dreams up and constructs truth and principle, preferring a truth not truly limpid, keeping an attentive eye on what he sees as self-interest, such a one leans on an unstable sense of peace.

For, it is not easy to overcome this setting root in views and beliefs—one should discern the grasping and holding that is in all things; therefore a person set in his deeply rooted ways will drop one truth only to take up another one.

For the one who is truly pure does not dream up views and beliefs about becoming or ceasing to be anywhere in the world; he is pure because he has abandoned deceit and conceit. Where would he go, he who does not seek a place to moor in?

For, one who seeks a place to moor in, joins in disputes; the one who seeks no such place, with whom and how would he enter into an argument? For he neither takes up nor rejects anything; he has cleansed himself even here in this life from opinions and beliefs.

4. *Eight Stanzas on the Pure*

Some rely on this conviction: “I now see the pure, supreme state of health. A person who has perceived this state gains complete purity. Having deeply understood this, knowing that this is the ultimate truth, one is an observer of the pure.”

But, if a person can become pure by mere views and beliefs, and if one could leave suffering behind by mere knowledge, then, while still seeking to acquire something or other, one can be made pure by something outside oneself. For, if someone speaks this way, he merely speaks of views and beliefs.

The true brahmin does not proclaim that purity is possible by something other than himself, whether it is in something seen or heard, by moral habits and vows, or by something imagined or conceived. He does not cling to good or evil; having left behind all possessiveness, he is not here engaged in constructing more of it.

They let go of this only to take up that, obediently following their excitement, they do not cross the swampland; they grasp at something, then let it go, like a monkey who lets go a branch only to hold on to the next.

A person taking up his own vows goes up and down, still trapped in concept and imagination. But understanding this, a person who discerns deeply does not go up and down, having approached his practice with full knowledge.

He gives up all things and ideas, be it those that are seen, or heard, or those that are thought or felt. He who sees things in this way, who behaves openly, what would he use to conceive notions about this world?

They fashion no preconceptions, they have no preferences, they never declare: “This is the highest purity.” They have undone the ropes that were tied with the knots of grasping, they form no longing for anything in the world.

He is a true brahmin who has crossed beyond all limitations; he possesses nothing, having once known and seen the nature of grasping and holding. He feels no excitement in passion, nor does he delight in dispassion. For him nothing more remains for him to grasp and hold.

5. *Eight Stanzas on the Ultimate*

The person who settles into views, thinking “this is supreme,” when he conceives something as “better” than anything else in the world, he will call everything else “inferior.” Therefore he has not gone beyond allegations and disputes.

When he sees in himself something praiseworthy, or something of value in what he has seen, or heard, or in moral habit or vows, or in what he thinks or feels, he clings to this and only this, and considers everything else as worthless.

Those who truly know also call “bondage” that which, when one relies on it, leads to thinking that everything else is inferior. Therefore, the mendicant should not lean on things seen or heard, thought or imagined, or on moral habit and vows.

Let him not fashion any views or beliefs about the world, by following his knowledge, his moral habits, or his vows. Let him not conform to thoughts of being equal; let him not think of “inferior” or “superior.”

Having given up gain and achievement, grasping no more, he does not lean even on knowledge; he does not take sides among those holding divergent views, and he does not rely even on any view or belief.

The person who does not aim at either one of these two extremes—becoming this or that, here or beyond—that person does not set roots anywhere, discerning what is grasping and holding in any and all things.

About what he has seen, heard, thought, or felt, he does not fashion even the most infinitesimal concept. This brahmin who does not hold on to any views or beliefs, how could anyone understand what distinguishes him in this world?

They fashion no preconceptions, they establish no preferences, they form no belief even about what is true. The true brahmin will not be led by moral habits or vows. Having crossed over to the other shore, only being the way he is, he does not rely on beliefs about anything.

6. *On Aging*

Short indeed is this life of ours! We die before we reach a hundred, and even those who can live more than this will also die of old age.

They grieve over what they have considered “mine,” for nothing can be held on to constantly. Understanding that separation is inevitable, give up the household life.

With death will fade away whatever this human person has regarded with the thought of “this is mine.” The wise person who has seen this is not one obsessed with himself, who would be inclined to imagine anything as “mine.”

As a person awakening from sleep no longer sees those he had met in his dreams, in the same way, once dead and departed, one will not see everything that is dear to us.

These very people we now see and hear, whose names we here call upon, from them only the names will remain for us to pronounce once they have died.

Those greedily longing for that which they regard as "mine" will not leave behind grief, lamentation, and envy. This is why sages abandon all grasping at possession and depart on the wandering life, they who know where the true resting place lies.

The mendicant who, living in a secluded dwelling, enjoys a well-collected mind, for him, they say, the highest point in life is reached when he no longer displays himself in his own dwelling.

The sage does not lean on anything anywhere, he does not imagine anything as dear nor does he imagine anything as hateful; neither regret nor envy adhere to him, as water does not stick to a leaf.

As a water bead does not cling to a lotus leaf or rainwater to a lotus blossom, the sage does not hold on to whatever he sees or hears, or to things thought or felt.

For, the truly cleansed does not hold thoughts about things seen or heard, thought or felt. He does not seek purity from anything outside himself, for he is neither excited by passion nor made indifferent by dispassion.

7. *Dialogue with Tissa Metteyya*

Tissa Metteyya asked,

"Tell me, respected teacher, which impediments are faced by one attached to sexual desire. Upon receiving your teachings, we will train ourselves in the life of seclusion."

The Blessed One replied,

"Metteyya, a person attached to sexual desire will only neglect the teaching, and will follow the wrong path, and in him will be absent the noble conduct.

"Someone who used to wander alone and now surrenders to sexual pleasure, he becomes like a carriage swerving off the road; the world regards him as lost, one more among common people.

"The honor and reputation he enjoyed in the past will be squandered away. Having understood this, you should train so that you may abandon sexual contact and desire.

"Overcome by the fantasy of his desires, he broods like a miserable wretch, hearing the scornful words of others. Someone like this lives troubled and confused.

"Then he readies his weapons, piqued by the censure of others; because he still has an intense longing, he sinks into mendacity.

"Regarded as wise when he followed a life of seclusion, once he engages in sexual contact he is despised as a fool.

"Once he has understood the risks and troubles found in this desire, the sage should consistently engage in the life of the lonely wanderer; he will not engage in sexual contact.

"He should train in a life of seclusion, the highest state of noble ones. But he will not because of this think himself better than anyone, even if he is already close to the cool and calm state.

"The wandering sage, in every way free, indifferent to desires, the one who has crossed the flood—he is envied by those who are tied down in desires."

8. *Discourse with Pasura*

Some say, "Purity is this and only this, and in the teachings of others you will find no purity." Whichever teaching they hold to, they regard as the best, so that each separately holds a different truth.

These glib debaters descend on the assembly hall and engage in arguments, taking each other as an adversary and a fool; because they still depend on something other than themselves, they bandy words about, hoping to win praise, calling themselves the experts.

In the midst of these assemblies, such a person engages in disputation, longing for praise and fearing defeat. In defeat he becomes downcast. He seeks flaws in others, and quivers in rage when criticized by others.

When those judging the question say his argument is faulty, refuted, he laments, he grieves, feeling his arguments are worthless, wailing, "They have defeated me!"

Such are the disputes we find among wandering mendicants, causing them now elation, now dejection. Understanding this, avoid arguments. For they have no other purpose than to gain praise.

On the one hand, he who is praised right there in the midst of the assembly for presenting a successful argument will feel elated and thrilled, for he has achieved the goal he so much desired.

But elation itself proves his downfall, for he talks on, with pride and arrogance. Understanding this, do not engage in disputes, for the true experts do not call this purity.

Like a brave champion fighter, goaded by his kingly lord, these shramanas¹ rush on, roaring, looking for a rival. But, you, true hero, go to where you will find one who has nothing to provoke a fight.

Those who argue over their chosen views maintain that this or that alone is the truth. If you engage them in conversation, you may tell them: "There is no opponent here to do battle with you."

From those who walk on, leaving all this behind, who do not counter one view with another, Pasura, what do you expect to gain from them? For them there is nothing left to accept or possess.

You came to me in deep reflection, in your mind pondering different views and opinions, in such a state you cannot walk along in the company of one who is truly pure.

9. *Dialogue with Magandiya*

"No sensual desire arose in me even when I saw those maidens called Thirst, Displeasure, and Passion. How would I then wish to touch this bag full of excrement and urine, even with the tip of my foot?"

"But, if you do not want this jewel of a woman, desired by so many princes and monarchs, then what sort of views, what kind of moral conduct, vows, and lifestyle do you propose, aspiring to what kind of rebirth?"

1. Austere wandering monks.

The Blessed One replied,

"Magandiya, it does not occur to him to propose anything, to him who would discern that there is grasping and holding in any and all things. Looking among views and beliefs for what is free of grasping, I realized and saw that peace is within me."

Magandiya replied,

"Oh sage, you speak of freedom from grasping and holding by clearly discerning everything that is constructed by the imagination. But, as regards what you call the 'peace within me,' tell me, how do resolute sages explain the meaning of this?"

The Blessed One replied,

"Magandiya, they teach that purity is not attained by things seen or heard, or by knowledge, or moral habit and vows. Nor is it attained by not seeing, not hearing, not knowing, or the absence of moral habit and vows. Discarding all of this, not grasping and holding, relying on nothing, at peace, he would not desire to become anything."

Magandiya replied,

"But, if one says that purity is not attained by things seen or heard, or by knowledge, or moral habit and vows, and that it is also not attained by not seeing, not hearing, not knowing, or the absence of moral habit and vows—this seems to me a teaching of confusion. There are others who accept and rely on a sense of purity that they understand through their views and beliefs."

The Blessed One replied,

"Magandiya, because you put your trust in views and beliefs even as you ask this question, you sink into the confusion of all things grasped and held. This is why you are unable to see even an atom of this notion; therefore it seems confused to you."

"He who imagines himself as equal, better, or even inferior, he is the one who will be willing to enter into a dispute with you; the thought of equal or superior does not occur to one who is not shaken by any of these conditions."

"What would the true brahmin call the true, what the false, and with whom would he enter into disputes? One for whom there is neither 'the same' nor 'not the same,' against whom would he initiate an argument?"

"Leaving behind life at home, wandering without a dwelling, the sage does not form bonds among village folk; separated from objects of sense desire, free of preferences, he would not engage in quarrelsome disputes with anyone."

"He who is like the noble elephant does not argue about all that he no longer grasps, what he has left behind to live the life of the wanderer in this world. Like the lotus blossom rises on its stalk above muddy waters unsoiled by soggy water, thus the sage who speaks of peace hankers after neither sensual desire nor the world, and remains unstained by the world."

"One who has attained to wisdom will not fall into pride because of his views or beliefs, or because of his ideas; for he is not shaped by these beliefs; he will not be led by past actions or acquired knowledge, he has not been led to anything where he could grow roots."

"No knots or fetters remain for the one who abstains from generating perceptions and concepts; no delusion remains for the one released by discernment. Those who hold on to conceptions and views and beliefs wander this world from one confrontation to another."

10. Before the Body Breaks Down

"Tell me, oh Gotama,² how it is that the one called 'completely calm' sees things, how does he behave? This I ask of the best of humans."

The Blessed One replied,

"One who before the breakdown of his body is already free from craving thirst, who does not rely on the past or the future, and does not build up a present, he holds no preferences."

"Free from anger and fear, never boastful, free from regret indeed is the sage, of wise words, placid when giving counsel."

"He holds no expectations for the future, he does not regret anything in the past; in the midst of contact with sense objects he perceives with collected discernment, and he is not led into views and beliefs."

"Withdrawn in solitude, without duplicity, free of ambitions, free of envy, modest and temperate, never contemptuous, he is not one to slander."

"He is not addicted to pleasurable tastes, not given to pride; soft-spoken but eloquent and alert; he is not credulous, nor is he indifferent."

"He does not engage in training with the hope of gain, nor is he disturbed when he gains nothing; craving thirst does not get in his way; he is not greedy for any pleasurable tastes."

"Observing with equanimity, mindful, he does not see anyone in this world as equal, superior, or inferior; he is not swollen with pride."

"One who does not seek support in anything, having known how things are does not support himself on anything; one free from the thirst that craves becoming or ceasing to become,"

"This is the person I call 'completely calm.' Remaining uninterested among sense pleasures, for him no tied knots remain; he has crossed beyond all clinging."

"He has neither children, nor cattle, nor land or property; in him you will not find any accepting or rejecting."

"He gives no weight to those opinions that would find blame in him, those of common people as well as those of shramanas and brahmanas;³ therefore, he is not perturbed in the midst of their arguments and disputes."

"He has left greed behind, he is free of envy; the sage does not speak of himself as being among the superior, or among equals or being among the inferior."

"He who has nothing of his own in the world, who does not regret the loss of anything, who does not pursue any thing or doctrine, he is said to be truly at peace."

11. Contentions and Disputes

"Whence arise contentions and disputes, grief and lamentation, together with envy, and conceit and arrogance, with grudges and slander to go with them? Please explain where they all come from."

"From holding things dear arise contentions and disputes, grief and lamentation, together with envy, and conceit and arrogance, with grudges and slander to go with them. Contentions and disputes are linked to envy; and slanderous words are born amid disputes."

2. That is, Gautama.

3. Brahmins, in the literal sense of "holy men."

"What is the cause of holding things dear in this world, and all the possessiveness that roams the world? And all the expectations and achievements that give humans a goal beyond, what is their cause?"

"Holding things dear in this world and all the possessiveness that roams the world are caused by wanting, so too are all the expectations and achievements that give humans a goal beyond."

"What is the cause of wanting in this world? And judgments and convictions, whence do they arise? And what of all the other conditions explained by the Shramana:⁴ anger, falsehood, and bewilderment?"

"When people think 'this is pleasurable' or 'this is not pleasurable'—on the basis of this conviction arises wanting. And, when they see the arising and ceasing of body and sense objects, people in this world fashion judgments and convictions.

"And, as to anger, falsehood, and bewilderment, they too arise whenever this same twofold division exists. The bewildered should train in the path of knowledge—taught by the Shramana who understands it well."

"But what is the cause from which arise what is pleasurable and what is not pleasurable, and in the absence of what, do these two cease? And, likewise, the matter of coming to be and ceasing to be, explain to me where is its cause."

"What is pleasurable and what is not pleasurable have their origin in contact. If contact is absent, they do not arise at all. And, likewise, coming to be and ceasing to be, I declare to you, also come from this same source."

"But, what is the cause of contact in this world? And grasping and holding, from what does it arise? In the absence of what is there no more sense of 'mine'? When what ceases are contacts no longer touched?"

"Contact arises by dependence on name and form, and grasping and holding is caused by wishing. If there were no wishing, there would be no 'mine.' When body and sense objects cease, contacts are no longer touched."

"The person for whom body and sense objects would cease, what need he attain? And how will pleasure and sorrow cease? Tell me how this ceasing takes place—this we all want to know; this is my heart's desire."

"When one no longer perceives any notion or idea, and does not have a perception of the absence of notions and ideas, and yet is not without perception, nor have one's perceptions ceased, then, with this practice, body and sense objects cease for him. For, the perception of notions and ideas is the cause of mental calculation and mental dispersion."

"You have given an answer to all our questions; but we still have one more question to ask—please tell us: Is it not the case that some wise men declare this to be the highest purification of the spirit, or do they say there is still something else beyond this?"

"Indeed there are some wise men who declare that this is the highest purification of the spirit, yet others who are regarded as experts on the state without remainder say it is to pass away;

"but the sage knows that these experts 'still depend'—he knows them and understands that on which they depend. Knowing this, he has become free. He enters no arguments. The resolute sage seeks not to become this or that."

12. *Shorter Discourse on Taking Sides in Disputes*

"Those who call themselves experts declare as they quarrel, each one stuck in his own views and beliefs: 'Whoever knows this knows the true state of things; whoever rejects this has not reached liberation.'

"In this way they quarrel and argue, declaring: 'He is a fool, he is not an expert.' Who among them speaks the truth? For they all declare themselves experts.

"If rejecting another person's truth makes a person a fool, a nitwit, short on discernment, then all are equally foolish, and equally lacking in discernment; for all are stuck in their own views and beliefs.

"And if each one would become perfectly pure by dint of holding their own views and beliefs, thus becoming a clear-sighted, insightful expert, then no one among them would be lacking in discernment, for the opinion of each and everyone would be equally valid.

"With regards to what foolish rivals will say to each other, I do not say, 'This is the truth.' Each one has decided that his own opinion is true and therefore brands his opponent a fool."

"What some call 'true, the truth,' others call, 'vanity, a lie.' In this way they argue, confronting each other. Why is it that shramanas do not speak with one voice?"

"Indeed truth is one, and not split into two, so that a discerning person could argue about it with another discerning person. The multiple truths they praise are only each one's own; this is why shramanas do not speak with one voice."

"Why is it then that those who call themselves experts defend so many different truths? Are truths indeed so many and diverse, or is it that they each follow their own reasoning?"

"Indeed truths are not so many and diverse, other than what follows from the idea of unchanging things in the world; and, when they direct and apply their own discursive faculties to opinions and beliefs, then they speak of teachings as split into 'true or false.'

"Relying on what he has seen, or heard, on his moral habits and his vows, and on what he has felt or thought, he haughtily looks down on others; unmoving in his conviction he mocks them: 'They are fools, they are not true experts,' he will say.

"He declares himself an expert merely by branding others as 'fools.' He proclaims himself an expert, despises all others, and thus promotes himself.

"Adopting the most absurd opinions, drunk with his own pride, he thinks himself accomplished, he bestows upon himself the title 'talented,' for this is how right and correct are his views and beliefs.

"For, if another person's pronouncement declares him worthless, then with him the other is also lacking completely in discernment. But, if this same person has attained true knowledge and is resolute in his wisdom, then no one is a fool among the shramanas.

"Those who promote any doctrine other than this one fail to reach purity, they are not liberated,' thus, everywhere the teachers of the various schools declare, for they have become intoxicated with a zeal for their own views.

"Some argue, 'Only here will you find purity,' they say there is no purity in any other teaching. In this way, everywhere the teachers of the various schools grow deep roots in these, their very own ways, obstinately defending them.

4. That is, the Buddha.

"And even if a person obstinately speaks of only his own way, why would he brand the other person here a fool? He will only bring conflict upon himself, by calling the other 'a fool, a follower of an impure teaching.'

"Unmoving in his convictions, he takes himself as the measure of everything else; for time to come he will be involved in polemics in this world. If he abandons this judging to form convictions, he will not be a person to initiate conflict in this world."

13. Longer Discourse on Taking Sides in Disputes

"Those who settle into views and beliefs, arguing 'only this is true,' will they all bring upon themselves only sneers, or will they also gain praise in the assembly?"

"Indeed all this struggle is insignificant, it is of no use in attaining peace. These two, praise and blame, I say, are the only fruits of disputes. Once having seen this, one will not engage in disputes, with one's eyes on tranquillity, that land that is free of strife.

"Whichever opinions might be held by consensus among the common folk, the person who has understood will not turn to any one among these. What would he seek, this person who seeks no more, who seeks nothing to accept in what is seen or heard?

"Those who regard moral practice as the highest practice declare that purity is attained through self-control. They take care to observe the vows they adopt: 'With these we shall train, for only here is found purity.' Dragged back into existence, they proclaim themselves experts.

"If one of them stumbles and falls from his moral rules and vows, he will tremble in anguish for the actions that he sees as his failings. He pines, yearning for his goal of purity—like the traveler when the caravan has departed and left him at home alone.

"Passing beyond all moral rules and vows, and those actions that are blameworthy as well as those that are praiseworthy, he will not seek what is thought to be purity or impurity, wandering without a stopping place, not holding on to peace.

"Some rely on extreme austerities, or on loathsome ascetic practices, or on something seen or heard, or thought or felt; they give out loud cries, wailing over purity, not free yet from the thirst of craving for one or another form of existence.

"For, as long as one holds to design and ambition one is either trapped by longing or likewise anguished by those things he constructs in his mind; but the person who in this world is free from passing away and being reborn, what would make him tremble in anguish, what would he long for?

"The very same doctrine that some call supreme, others will call inferior. Who among them then is speaking the truth? For they all proclaim 'I am the expert.'"

"For they regard their own doctrine as perfect, but the teachings of others they call despicable. Quarreling in this way, they continue their contending disputes. Each one among them calls his own opinion the truth.

"If the opponent's views become contemptible simply by being despised, then would none among these teachings be superior to any other? For usually they will call the teaching of others contemptible, and will obstinately defend their own as the highest.

"They also pay homage to their own doctrines, as much as they praise their own ways. All these teachings must be true, for each and all claim purity for themselves.

"The brahmin is not one to follow others, he has discerned what is grasping and holding in any and all things. Therefore, he has gone well beyond disputes, because he does not see any other teaching that is better than this.

"Thinking, 'I know, I perceive that this is just so,' some put their trust in purity attained by views and beliefs. But even if he perceives something, of what use is this for him? They proclaim purity, still relying completely on something other than themselves.

"Even as he sees, this man will see name and form, and having seen, he will only know these two; even if he has seen much or little, the truly adept say this is indeed not the way to purity.

"For, a person who speaks for his deeply settled views is not easily led in the right direction, one who follows his preferences for the views and beliefs he fashions, will declare excellent only that upon which he leans and relies; he will claim that this is purity, that in it he has seen things as they are.

"The true brahmin does not turn to conceptions and ideations, he is not one going about seeking views and beliefs, he does not seek the support of knowledge. Knowing the beliefs generated by the consensus of common people, he observes others with an even mind as they grasp and hold.

"The sage has undone all the knots found in this world; he will not join parties engaged in disputes. Calm among those who are flustered, he observes them with an even mind, not grasping and holding what others grasp and hold.

"He has left behind whatever flows from his past actions, and he does not create them anew. He is not moved by wants, he is not one to speak for deeply seated views; firm in his wisdom, he is completely free from the ways of opinions and beliefs. He does not cling to the world, he has nothing to reproach in himself.

"He has cast aside all things, whether they are seen, heard, thought, or felt, he is a sage who has laid down the load, has undone his ties, he will not fashion further notions, does not stop anywhere and seeks nothing."

14. The Quick Way

"I ask the Great Rishi,⁵ Descendant of the Sun, about solitude and the state of peace. With what manner of insight does the mendicant cool down, grasping at nothing in the world?"

The Blessed One replied,

"He should cut out the whole root of mental calculation and dispersion, the thought of 'I am.' He should train, ever mindful, to cast aside whatever form the thirst of craving may take in him.

"Whatever condition or state of being he may perceive, inwardly or outwardly, he will not use it as a point of pride—for good men do not call this the cool, calm state.

5. That is, the Buddha (a rishi is a holy sage or seer).

"Therefore, he should not think of anything or anyone as better, worse, or even comparable. Touched by multiple sense images, he will not dwell in them forming ideas about himself.

"The mendicant should become calm within himself, and seek peace nowhere else. For when one is inwardly placid and still, nothing is taken up, much less is anything rejected.

"As in the depths of the ocean arise no waves, but all stays still, so let it be with him—still, composed, the mendicant will not swell up with feelings of superiority with respect to anything."

"Your eyes open and clear, you have explained the truth that you have seen with your own eyes, which drives away all dread. Tell me, Venerable One, the path, the rules of restraint, and the practice of mental concentration to be practiced."

"A mendicant keeps his eyes from wandering wantonly, and his ears are deaf to village chatter. He is not greedy for new tastes in food; nor does he think of anything in the world as his own.

"When touched by sense contact, the mendicant finds nothing to regret in anything. And he will not wish for existence elsewhere, nor will he tremble when among fearful things.

"The mendicant would not store what is given to him—solid food, soft food, drink, or clothes to wear. And he will not be anxious if he does not get any of them.

"Rapt in meditation, he will not loiter, he will not be idle, he will not fret or feel regret, he will not behave heedlessly. The mendicant will dwell in a place with few noises, and there he will have his lodging and his bed.

"He should not sleep excessively. When he is awake he will ever be intently watchful. He will refrain from laughter, sloth, deception, games, sexual intercourse, and ornaments.

"He will not use the spells of the Atharva Veda,⁶ nor will he foretell things using dreams or omens, or the movement of heavenly bodies in the zodiac. My follower will not spend time interpreting bird cries or curing infertility, or dispensing medicines and cures.

"The mendicant should not be perturbed by blame or become conceited with praise. He will expel possessiveness, and envy as well, together with anger and slander.

"He does not engage in buying or selling. The mendicant will find fault in no one anywhere. When he meets people in the village, he is never brash, nor does he talk to them desiring gain.

"The mendicant should not boast, nor should he speak out of self-interest, he should not teach himself impudence, and he will not speak contentious words.

"He will not be drawn to falsehood. He would not willfully do anything that is a sham or that is dishonest. He should not look down upon another, feeling proud of his livelihood, his wisdom, or his observance of moral rules or vows.

"Even if he is vexed listening to the excessive talk of other wandering mendicants and ordinary people, he does not reply with harsh words; for men of calm do not retaliate.

"Understanding this teaching, the discerning mendicant should train himself, constantly mindful. When he realizes that being calm is peace, he will not be remiss in practicing the teaching of Gotama.

"For the undefeated conqueror did see this state of things, with his own eyes, not from lore handed down to him. Thus, diligently, without distraction, and with constant respect, should one apply oneself to train in the teachings of the Blessed One."

—Thus spoke the Blessed One.

15. *The Violent Way*

"From violence comes fear. Observe human beings in strife. I shall now tell you how I found myself disturbed by this anguish."

"I saw living beings thrashing about like fish in a drying riverbed, I saw how they assaulted each other, and I was overtaken by fear."

"Seeing how the whole world lacked safety and substance, and how it shook in every direction, I sought shelter for myself, but found no place that was not already inhabited."

"In the end, I saw only strife, nothing to give me pleasure; then, I saw in this a barb hidden, deeply lodged in the heart."

"A person pierced by this thorn will run about from one place to another; but if one were only to extract this thorn, one would no more need to run and would come to rest."

(Here one recites the rules of training:)

"Let him not be tied in the knotted ropes of the world. Penetrating in all their aspects the objects of desire, he will train in the attainment for himself of the cool and calm state."

"He should be truthful, modest and respectful, free of guile, not engaging in slander, free from anger; the sage will cross beyond greediness and the taint of possessiveness."

"This man, his thoughts focused in the cool and calm state, will not live in sleepiness, indolence, lassitude, and heedlessness, and will not rise in arrogance."

"He is not misled into falsehood, he does not generate affection for sense objects; he understands well the nature of conceit, he will live abstaining from violence."

"He will not hanker after the past, or seek things to accept in what is new; he will not grieve over what has been lost; he will not tie himself down with longing."

"Greed I call a flash flood, the agitation of desire I call an overflowing torrent. Yearning is an overflowing lake. The swamp of desires is difficult to cross."

"The sage does not stray from truth, the true brahmin stands firm, having renounced everything, he is indeed the one called 'truly calm.'"

"A master of knowledge who has thoroughly understood, he knows the true state of things and need not settle on anything; as he walks the path of right conduct he feels no envy toward anyone."

6. A Hindu sacred text that consists largely of spells and incantations.

"He who crosses beyond desire and the bonds, so difficult to surmount, he neither grieves nor pines over anything, he has stopped the torrent, has broken the chains."

"What happened in the past, let it wither away; let there be nothing in the future for you, and if you cling to nothing in the present, you will live perfectly calm."

"He who nowhere thinks of something that has name or form as 'my own,' and grieves not over what no longer is, he will suffer no loss in this world."

"He for whom with respect to anything whatsoever there is no thought of 'this is mine,' nor is there the thought 'this belongs to others,' who finds nothing to call 'my own,' never grieves thinking 'this is not mine.'"

"Free of envy, craving nothing, unperturbed, the same under all circumstances. These are, to answer your question, the many blessings enjoyed by those who remain unshaken by the world."

"For the one remaining unperturbed, understanding fully, there is nothing he needs to do, abstaining from ambitious effort, everywhere he finds a safe and tranquil home."

"The sage does not speak about equals, inferiors, superiors. Perfectly calm he has left envy behind, he does not seek to acquire or reject anything."

—Thus spoke the Blessed One.

16. Dialogue with Sariputta⁷

The venerable Sariputta said,

"Before today I had never seen, nor had I ever heard of anyone like the Master, with such a soothing voice, who has come down to us from the Heaven of the Tusita deities,⁸

"so that he, possessed of clear sight, removing all darkness, he alone having reached true satisfaction, now appears before the world, with its gods."

"He, the awakened one, in this way released, not hiding anything, having arrived to guide his followers, him I now approach asking a question for the benefit of all those who are here still bound."

"A mendicant who, disgusted by the world betakes himself to an isolated place to live, the root of a tree, a charnel ground, or a cave in the mountains,

"making his bed on lowlands or highlands—in such places, which terrible dangers will he face, dangers before which the mendicant will not tremble in his silent dwelling place?"

"What are the tribulations to be conquered in this world by one who has set out toward the state that is beyond dying, the mendicant who makes his home in a secluded place?"

"For the resolute mendicant, what shall be his daily activities, what should be here his mode of conduct, his moral habits and vows?"

"Which form of training will he, prudent, mindful, adopt single-mindedly so as to cleanse all taint from himself, as a silversmith removing dross from silver?"

7. That is, Shariputra, one of the Buddha's chief disciples.

8. The heaven in which all buddhas are reborn in

their last life before appearing on earth as the next buddha.

The Blessed One replied,

"Sariputta, all that is most beneficial for one averse to the world, once he has chosen to dwell in a secluded spot, seeking to awaken, all that is beneficial according to the right doctrine and practice, this I will now explain to you as I have come to discern it:

"The resolute sage should not fear these five fears, this mindful mendicant who practices within the limits of the rule: gadflies, mosquitos, reptiles, human contact, and wild beasts."

"Nor should he fear those who hold a different doctrine, although he may have seen that they can bring many fearsome troubles. The one who seeks his own true welfare should conquer these and other fears."

"When illness afflicts him, or if he is afflicted by hunger, or in cold or heat, he will endure all of this. As many times as he is met by these conditions in his homeless state, he will redouble his energy and his courage."

"He will not steal, he will speak no falsehood, he will approach kindly both the weak and the strong. When he becomes aware of mental confusion, he will expel it, thinking, 'This is the fruit of Mara's⁹ darkness.'"

"He will not give in to the power of anger and arrogance; he will remain firm, having dug out the root of these attitudes. And whether he comes across something dear or, likewise, across something that repels him, he will be the master who will conquer it."

"Letting himself be guided by discernment, full of the joy of goodness, he will defeat these dangers. He should overcome the discontents of life in seclusion, and he should overcome these four common causes of complaint:

"What shall I eat? Where will I eat? How poorly did I sleep! Where shall I sleep tonight? The disciple leading the homeless life will restrain this kind of rumination, which only leads to lamentations."

"When he is given food and shelter at the appropriate time, he will know in each case the exact measure necessary to satisfy his needs. Well guarded before the stream of sense impressions, he walks well restrained through the village. He will not pronounce harsh words even when he is provoked."

"He will walk with downcast eyes and will not loiter, engaged in intent meditation, fully awake and attentive; by being engaged in even-minded observation his whole self will become well concentrated, free of pondering and scrupulous regret."

"Let him mindfully accept counsel when admonished by others, let him soften any hardness or stubbornness toward those who follow the acetic life with him. Anytime he speaks, let his words be pertinent and timely. He will not worry about teachings and instructions bandied about among people."

"But, even more, he will learn to lead away from himself the five worldly dusts, ever mindful of them: he will overcome passion for objects of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch."

"Let him restrain this wanting directed at things and doctrines; the mendicant, mindful, with a fully liberated mind, observing and pondering what is real as time passes by, he will dispel darkness with focused attention."

—Thus spoke the Blessed One.

9. The personification of evil and temptation.