

Early Buddhist Discourses

Edited, with Translations, by
John J. Holder

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Discourse on the Noble Quest

(*Ariyapariyesana Sutta*)¹

Who was the Buddha? Why did he choose to live a religious life? What are the distinctive factors in the Buddha's path to religious liberation (*nibbāna*)? The Discourse on the Noble Quest provides some of the answers to these questions as it purports to contain the Buddha's own account of significant events in his quest for religious meaning.

This discourse focuses on the Buddha's "going forth" from his opulent domestic life to a life of homelessness in search of release from suffering, the supreme goal of the religious life. The Buddha's enlightenment and his decision to teach the *dhamma* are recounted here. The Buddha's initial reluctance to teach the *dhamma* (until prevailed upon by Brahmā Sahampati) raises some very intriguing questions about the Buddha's self-understanding in regard to his role as a religious teacher. But perhaps more than anything else, these autobiographical passages remind the reader that, although the Buddha was extraordinary in terms of his virtues, mental powers, and religious achievements, he was a human being. According to the early Buddhist tradition, the path blazed by the Buddha is a path available to all human beings who strive assiduously to attain the moral conduct (*sīla*), mental culture (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) taught by the Buddha.

As the title of the discourse suggests, the Buddha explains his search for religious fulfillment as the "noble quest." The discourse presents the "noble quest" in contrast to the "ignoble quest." According to the Buddha, the ordinary, unenlightened person is troubled by the vicissitudes of life—the profound existential problems of sickness, old age, and death—for reasons that run much deeper than most people realize. But the unenlightened person seeks happiness in the things "liable to birth," "liable to sickness," and so on, and therefore develops an infatuation with these things. Such behavior is bound to lead to suffering rather than genuine happiness, according to the Buddha. At the core of the ignoble quest is a corrupt mind, a morass of psychological factors, such as egotful attachments and self-indulgent sensualism, that spoils a person's existence and makes it nearly impossible for such a person to overcome the suffering that derives from sickness, old age, and death. Because sickness, old age, and death are unavoidable facts of any

¹ *Majjhima Nikāya* 1.160–175.

human life, these problems prevent the unenlightened person from achieving anything except the most superficial kinds of happiness in life.

The “noble quest,” on the other hand, is a way to a sublime happiness, in spite of sickness, old age, and death. The noble quest focuses on the abandonment of selfish attachments and self-indulgent sensualism. In early Buddhism, addiction to sensual pleasure is considered to be among the most insidious causes of selfishness and other moral impurities. For this reason, the development of a mind free from the unwholesome effects of unrestrained sensualism is one of the central aims of the training taught by the Buddha. The destruction of selfish and hedonistic attitudes requires the development of *restraint*, especially the control of sensory experiences that involve sensual pleasure.

This central teaching of early Buddhism is here put into a powerful narrative context. The Buddha recounts why he went forth from domestic life into the religious life and what his experience was as a student under two prominent teachers of his day. According to the Buddha’s own account, he mastered the spiritual knowledge and meditative powers of his teachers, Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. But having equaled or bettered his teachers in terms of knowledge and meditative powers, the Buddha did not achieve the breakthrough to religious liberation that he sought.

Having attained the four *jhānas* and such advanced meditative states as the “plane of no-thing” and the “plane of neither-perception-nor-non-perception,” the Buddha finds out that these meditative powers alone are not sufficient by themselves for achieving enlightenment. Only the complete and utter destruction of the defilements of the mind (*āsavas*) leads to the ultimate religious liberation (*nibbāna*). Thus, the Buddha’s noble quest is a revolutionary religious path. In contrast to the *metaphysical* path that culminates in knowledge of a transcendent reality or the *theistic* path that emphasizes developing a special relationship with God(s), the Buddha has laid out a spiritual quest for *ethical* transformation that focuses on the training of the mind.

Discourse

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1. Thus have I heard. At one time, the Exalted One² was living in Sāvattṭhi, in the Jeta forest at Anāthapiṇḍika’s park. Then the Exalted One, having dressed early in the morning, took his bowl and robe, and entered Sāvattṭhi for alms. Then a number of *bhikkhus* approached the venerable Ānanda.

² *Bhagavā*. This word is by far the most common term used to refer to the Buddha in the Pāli Canon. In other translations, *bhagavā* is often translated as “Blessed One” or “Lord.”

When they had approached the venerable Ānanda, they said this: “It has been a long time, brother Ānanda, since the Exalted One gave a talk on the *dhamma* face-to-face. It would be good, brother Ānanda, if it were possible for us to hear the Exalted One give a talk on the *dhamma* face-to-face.”

“In that case, you venerable ones should go to the hermitage of the Brahmin Rammaka. Perhaps there you may get to hear the Exalted One give a talk on the *dhamma* face-to-face.”

“Yes, brother,” those *bhikkhus* replied to the venerable Ānanda.

Then the Exalted One, having walked about in Sāvatti for alms, returned from his almsround after his meal, and addressed the venerable Ānanda: “Venerable Ānanda, we will go to the Eastern Park, the palace of Migāra’s mother, for the midday’s rest.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the venerable Ānanda to the Exalted One.

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Then the Exalted One went with the venerable Ānanda to the Eastern Park, to the palace of Migāra’s mother, for the midday’s rest. Then the Exalted One, having come out of seclusion in the evening, addressed the venerable Ānanda: “Venerable Ānanda, we will go to the Eastern Porch to bathe our limbs.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the venerable Ānanda to the Exalted One.

Then the Exalted One went with the venerable Ānanda to the Eastern Porch to bathe their limbs. Having bathed his limbs at the Eastern Porch and having emerged from the water, he stood in a single robe drying his limbs.

Then the venerable Ānanda said this to the Exalted One: “Sir, the hermitage of the Brahmin Rammaka is not far. The hermitage of the Brahmin Rammaka is lovely. Beautiful is the hermitage of the Brahmin Rammaka. It would be good, sir, if the Exalted One, out of compassion, were to approach the Brahmin Rammaka.”

The Exalted One assented by remaining silent.³ Then the Exalted One approached the hermitage of the Brahmin Rammaka. At that time a number of *bhikkhus* were sitting down in the Brahmin Rammaka’s hermitage talking about *dhamma*. The Exalted One stood outside the door waiting for the discussion to stop. Then, when he saw that they had stopped talking, the Exalted One coughed and knocked on the door. The *bhikkhus* opened the door for the Exalted One. Then the Exalted One entered the Brahmin Rammaka’s hermitage and sat down in the appointed seat.

When he was seated, the Exalted One addressed the *bhikkhus*: “When you were sitting down having a discussion just now, *bhikkhus*, what was the discussion among you that was interrupted?”

³ Remaining silent, that is, stating no objection to a proposed course of action, is a common way of indicating agreement in the early Buddhist texts.

“Sir, our *dhamma* talk that was interrupted earlier was about the Exalted One himself. Then the Exalted One arrived.”

“Good, *bhikkhus!* It is fitting, *bhikkhus,* that you—who are young men from good families who have gone forth from home to homelessness out of faith—are seated together talking about the *dhamma*. When you are gathered together, *bhikkhus,* there are two things to be done: discuss *dhamma* or maintain the noble silence.

2. “*Bhikkhus,* there are these two quests: the noble quest and the ignoble quest. What is the ignoble quest? In this regard, someone who is himself liable to birth seeks after what is also liable to birth; being himself liable to old age, seeks after what is also liable to old age; being himself liable to sickness, seeks after what is also liable to sickness; being himself liable to death, seeks after what is also liable to death; being himself liable to sorrow, seeks after what is also liable to sorrow; being himself liable to impurity, seeks after what is also liable to impurity.

“What would you say is liable to birth? Sons and wife are liable to birth; male and female servants are liable to birth; goats and sheep are liable to birth; cocks and pigs are liable to birth; elephants, cows, horses, and mares are liable to birth; gold and silver are liable to birth. These things one attaches to are liable to birth, and this person who is enslaved, infatuated, and addicted to them, being himself liable to birth, seeks after what is also liable to birth.

“What would you say is liable to old age? Sons and wife are liable to old age . . . seeks after what is also liable to old age.

“What would you say is liable to sickness? Sons and wife are liable to sickness . . . seeks after what is also liable to sickness.

“What would you say is liable to death? Sons and wife are liable to death . . . seeks after what is also liable to death.

“What would you say is liable to sorrow? Sons and wife are liable to sorrow . . . seeks after what is also liable to sorrow.

“What would you say is liable to impurity? Sons and wife are liable to impurity; male and female servants are liable to impurity; goats and sheep are liable to impurity; cocks and pigs are liable to impurity; elephants, cows, horses, and mares are liable to impurity, gold and silver are liable to impurity. These things one attaches to are liable to impurity, and this person who is enslaved, infatuated, and addicted to them, being himself liable to impurity, seeks after what is also liable to impurity. This is the ignoble quest.

3. “And what is the noble quest? In that case, someone who is himself liable to birth, having seen the danger in what is liable to birth, seeks the unborn, the unsurpassed escape from bondage that is *nibbāna*. Being himself liable to old age, having seen the danger in what is liable to old age, he

seeks the unaging, the unsurpassed escape from bondage that is *nibbāna*. Being himself liable to sickness, having seen the danger in what is liable to sickness, he seeks the unailing, the unsurpassed escape from bondage that is *nibbāna*. Being himself liable to death, having seen the danger in what is liable to death, he seeks the deathless, the unsurpassed escape from bondage that is *nibbāna*. Being himself liable to sorrow, having seen the danger in what is liable to sorrow, he seeks the sorrowless, the unsurpassed escape from bondage that is *nibbāna*. Being himself liable to impurity, having seen the danger in what is liable to impurity, he seeks the morally pure, the unsurpassed escape from bondage that is *nibbāna*. This is the noble quest.

4. “And I, too, before awakening, when I was not fully awakened and still a *bodhisatta*,⁴ being myself liable to birth, sought after what was likewise liable to birth. Being myself liable to old age, I sought after what was likewise liable to old age. Being myself liable to sickness, I sought after what was likewise liable to sickness. Being myself liable to death, I sought after what was likewise liable to death. Being myself liable to sorrow, I sought after what was likewise liable to sorrow. Being myself liable to impurity, I sought after what was likewise liable to impurity.

“Then I had this thought: ‘Why do I, being myself liable to birth, seek after what is likewise liable to birth? Why do I, being myself liable to old age, seek after what is likewise liable to old age? Why do I, being myself liable to sickness, seek after what is likewise liable to sickness? Why do I, being myself liable to death, seek after what is likewise liable to death? Why do I, being myself liable to sorrow, seek after what is likewise liable to sorrow? Why do I, being myself liable to impurity, seek after what is likewise liable to impurity? Suppose that, being myself liable to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, I seek *nibbāna*, the unborn, highest security from bondage. Suppose that being myself liable to old age, having understood the danger in what is subject to old age, I seek *nibbāna*, the unaging, highest security from bondage. Suppose that being myself liable to sickness, having understood the danger in what is subject to sickness, I seek *nibbāna*, the unailing, highest security from bondage. Suppose that being myself liable to death, having understood the danger in what is subject to death, I seek *nibbāna*, the deathless, highest security from bondage. Suppose that being myself liable to sorrow, having understood the danger in what is subject to sorrow, I seek *nibbāna*, the sorrowless, highest security from bondage. Suppose that being myself liable to impurity, having understood the danger in what is subject to impurity, I seek *nibbāna*, the morally pure, highest security from bondage.’

⁴ *Bodhisatta* is the term the Buddha used to refer to himself before his enlightenment. It denotes a person who is destined for awakening.

“Then, after a time, when I was a young man, my hair shiny black, endowed with radiant youth, in the prime of life—my unwilling parents wailing tearfully—I shaved off my hair and donned yellow robes, I went forth from home to homelessness.⁵ Having gone forth in this way, on a quest for what is good, searching for the unsurpassed, highest, path to peace, I approached Āḷāra Kālāma. When I had approached Āḷāra Kālāma, I said this: ‘Good Kālāma, I wish to take up the holy life in this *dhamma* and discipline.’

164 “Having said this, Āḷāra Kālāma said this to me: ‘Let the venerable one live [here]. This *dhamma* is such that, a wise person would soon master it and dwell in it, having understood and realized for himself his teacher’s doctrine.’ So I very soon and quickly mastered this *dhamma*. I spoke the doctrine of knowledge and the doctrine of the elders, as far as mere lip service and repetition were concerned. I acknowledged—I as well as others—that ‘I know and I see.’ Then I had this thought: ‘Āḷāra Kālāma does not merely proclaim this *dhamma* by means of faith. He proclaims: “Having understood and realized this for myself, I entered into it and dwell in it.” Certainly, Āḷāra Kālāma dwells knowing and seeing this *dhamma*.’

“Then I approached Āḷāra Kālāma. Having approached him, I said this to Āḷāra Kālāma: ‘To what extent do you, good Kālāma, proclaim this *dhamma*, having understood and realized it for yourself and entered into it?’ This having been said, Āḷāra Kālāma proclaimed the plane of no-thing. Then I had this thought: ‘It is not only Āḷāra Kālāma who has faith, but I, too, have faith. It is not only Āḷāra Kālāma who has energy, but I, too, have energy. It is not only Āḷāra Kālāma who has mindfulness, but I, too, have mindfulness. It is not only Āḷāra Kālāma who has concentration, but I, too, have concentration. It is not only Āḷāra Kālāma who has wisdom, but I, too, have wisdom. Suppose that I were to strive to achieve this *dhamma* which Āḷāra Kālāma proclaims: ‘Having understood and realized this for myself, I entered into and dwell in it.’ So very soon and very quickly, I entered into it and dwelled in it, having understood and realized this *dhamma* for myself.

“Then I approached Āḷāra Kālāma. Having approached him, I said this to Āḷāra Kālāma: ‘Is it to this extent that you, reverend Kālāma, proclaim this *dhamma* which, having understood and realized it for yourself, you entered into?’

[Āḷāra Kālāma:] “‘Friend, it is to that extent that I proclaim this *dhamma* which, having understood and realized it for myself, I entered into it.’

“‘Friend, it is to that extent that I, too, entered into and dwell in this *dhamma*, having understood and realized it for myself.’

⁵ “Going forth from home to homelessness” means leaving the domestic life for an ascetic or reclusive life devoted to religious goals. Such a practice is part of a number of Indian religious traditions (including Hinduism) and is not a peculiarly Buddhist practice.

[Āḷāra Kālāma:] “It is profitable for us, friend, it is a gain for us, friend, that we see such a venerable one as this, such a fellow seeker of a holy life. I proclaim this *dhamma* that I have entered, having understood and realized it for myself, is the *dhamma* that you entered and dwell in, having understood and realized it for yourself. That *dhamma* which you entered and dwell in, having understood and realized it for yourself, is the *dhamma* that I proclaim that I have entered, having understood and realized it for myself. This *dhamma* that I know is the *dhamma* that you know. This *dhamma* that you know is the *dhamma* that I know. Whatever I am, that you are. Whatever you are, that I am. Come now, friend, there being both of us, let us look after this group of followers.’

“In this way, Āḷāra Kālāma, my teacher, set me, the student, on the same level as himself. And he honored me with great honors. Then I had this thought: ‘This *dhamma* does not lead to aversion, nor to dispassion, nor to cessation, nor to calmness, nor to higher knowledge, nor to awakening, nor to *nibbāna*—only just as far as the achievement of the plane of no-thing.’ Not being satisfied with this *dhamma*, I abandoned it and went away.

5. “So, on a quest for what is good, searching for the unsurpassed, highest, path to peace, I approached Uddaka Rāmaputta. Having approached Uddaka Rāmaputta, I said this to him: ‘Friend, I wish to take up the holy life in this *dhamma* and discipline.’

“Having said this, Uddaka Rāmaputta said this to me: ‘Let the venerable one live [here]. This *dhamma* is such that, a wise person would soon master it and dwell in it, having understood and realized for himself his teacher’s doctrine.’ So I very soon and quickly mastered this *dhamma*. I spoke the doctrine of knowledge and the doctrine of the elders, as far as mere lip service and repetition were concerned. I acknowledged—I as well as others—that ‘I know and I see.’ Then I had this thought: ‘Rāma⁶ did not merely proclaim this *dhamma* by means of faith. He proclaimed: “Having understood and realized this for myself, I entered into it and dwell in it.” Certainly, Rāma dwelt knowing and seeing this *dhamma*.’

“Then I approached Uddaka Rāmaputta. Having approached him, I said this to Uddaka Rāmaputta: ‘To what extent did Rāma proclaim this *dhamma*, having understood and realized it for himself and entered into it?’ This having been said, Uddaka Rāmaputta proclaimed the plane of neither-perception-nor-nonperception. Then I had this thought: ‘It is not only Rāma who had faith, but I, too, have faith. It is not only Rāma who had

⁶ Apparently, Uddaka’s father, Rāma, had been the one who had achieved the high spiritual knowledge that Siddhartha studied under Uddaka. Uddaka himself had not fully achieved this spiritual knowledge. This matter explains why the Buddha compares himself to Rāma and not Uddaka.

energy, but I, too, have energy. It is not only Rāma who had mindfulness, but I, too, have mindfulness. It is not only Rāma who had concentration, but I, too, have concentration. It is not only Rāma who had wisdom, but I, too, have wisdom. Suppose that I were to strive to achieve this *dhamma* which Rāma proclaimed: ‘Having understood and realized this for myself, I entered into and dwell in it.’ So very soon and very quickly, I entered into it and dwelled in it, having understood and realized this *dhamma* for myself.

“Then I approached Uddaka Rāmaputta. Having approached him, I said this to Uddaka Rāmaputta: ‘Friend, is it to this extent that Rāma proclaimed this *dhamma* which, having understood and realized it for himself, he entered it?’

[Uddaka Rāmaputta:] “‘Friend, it is to that extent that Rāma proclaimed this *dhamma* which, having understood and realized it for himself, he entered into it.’

“‘Friend, it is to that extent that I, too, entered into and dwell in this *dhamma*, having understood and realized it for myself.’

[Uddaka Rāmaputta:] “‘It is profitable for us, friend, it is a gain for us, friend, that we see such a venerable one as this, such a fellow seeker of a holy life. The *dhamma* that Rāma proclaimed, which he entered and dwelled in, having understood and realized it for himself, is the *dhamma* that you proclaim, which you have entered and dwelled in, having understood and realized it for yourself. That *dhamma* that you proclaim, which you have entered and dwelled in, having understood and realized it for yourself, is the *dhamma* that Rāma proclaimed, which he entered and dwelled in, having understood and realized it for himself. This *dhamma* that Rāma knew is the *dhamma* that you know. This *dhamma* that you know is the *dhamma* that Rāma knew. Whatever Rāma was, that you are. Whatever you are, that Rāma was. Come now, friend, you look after this group of followers.’

“In this way, Uddaka Rāmaputta, a fellow seeker of the holy life and my teacher, set me, the student, on the same level as himself. And he honored me with great honors. Then I had this thought: ‘This *dhamma* does not lead to aversion, nor to dispassion, nor to cessation, nor to calmness, nor to higher knowledge, nor to awakening, nor to *nibbāna*—only just as far as the achievement of the plane of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.’ So I turned away from and abandoned this *dhamma*, having not attained enough by this *dhamma*.

167 6. “So, on a quest for what is good, searching for the unsurpassed, highest, path to peace, I walked in stages through Magadha and arrived at the camp-township of Uruvelā. There I saw a beautiful piece of land, a lovely wooded grove, a delightful, clear flowing river with beautiful banks and a nearby village that could offer almsfood. Then I had this thought: ‘Indeed,

sir, this is a beautiful piece of land, a lovely wooded grove, a delightful, clear flowing river with beautiful banks and a nearby village that could offer alms-food. Indeed, this is enough for the striving of a young man of a good family who is focused on the goal of striving.’ So, I sat down there thinking: ‘This is enough for striving.’

7. “So—being myself liable to birth, having seen the danger in what is liable to birth, on a quest for *nibbāna*, the unborn, unsurpassed security from bondage—I attained *nibbāna*, the unborn, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being myself liable to old age, having seen the danger in what is liable to old age, on a quest for *nibbāna*, the unaging, unsurpassed security from bondage—I attained *nibbāna*, the unaging, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being myself liable to sickness, having seen the danger in what is liable to sickness, on a quest for *nibbāna*, the unailing, unsurpassed security from bondage—I attained *nibbāna*, the unailing, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being myself liable to death, having seen the danger in what is liable to death, on a quest for *nibbāna*, the deathless, unsurpassed security from bondage—I attained *nibbāna*, the deathless, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being myself liable to sorrow, having seen the danger in what is liable to sorrow, on a quest for *nibbāna*, the sorrowless, unsurpassed security from bondage—I attained *nibbāna*, the sorrowless, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being myself liable to impurity, having seen the danger in what is liable to impurity, on a quest for *nibbāna*, the morally pure, unsurpassed security from bondage—I attained *nibbāna*, the morally pure, unsurpassed security from bondage. The knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘My liberation is unshakable. This is the last birth. There is now no rebirth.’⁷

8. “Then I had this thought: ‘This *dhamma* that I have attained is deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand, peaceful, excellent, beyond reasoning, subtle, and to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in worldly attachment, revels in worldly attachment, and rejoices in worldly attachment. For a generation delighting in worldly attachment, that takes delight in worldly attachment, and rejoices in worldly attachment, this doctrine is hard to see, namely, dependent arising which involves specific conditionality.⁸ Also, this doctrine is hard to see, namely, the tranquillizing of all dispositions to action, the renunciation of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, and *nibbāna*. So were I to teach this *dhamma* and others were not to understand me, that would be wearisome

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⁷ Religious freedom or liberation in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions is conceived as escape from the *saṃsāric* cycle, that is, the round of birth-death-rebirth.

⁸ *Idapaccayatā*—literally, “this-conditionality.”

and vexing for me.’ Moreover, these verses that have never been heard before occurred to me spontaneously:

‘I have attained it with difficulty
 Enough now of preaching!
 By those consumed with lust and hate
 This *dhamma* is not easily understood
 It goes against the stream, it is subtle, deep, hard to see, and delicate
 Those who are slaves to passion will not see it
 As they are covered in a mass of darkness.’

9. “Thinking it over in these ways, my mind was inclined toward indifference and not toward teaching the *dhamma*. Then Brahmā Sahampati read my mind with his mind, and he had this thought: ‘Sir, the world is lost. Sir, the world is destroyed, inasmuch as the *Tathāgata*, an *arahant*, a fully awakened one, is inclined toward indifference and not toward teaching the *dhamma*.’ Then, just as a strong man might stretch out a bent arm or bend back a stretched arm, in the same way Brahmā Sahampati disappeared from the Brahmā-world and appeared in front of me. Then Brahmā Sahampati, having arranged his upper robe over one shoulder, and having saluted me with his hands raised and joined in reverence, said this: ‘Sir, let the Exalted One teach the *dhamma*! Let the Well-Farer teach the *dhamma*! There are beings that have a nature with little passion who are wasting away from not hearing the *dhamma*. They will become knowers of the *dhamma*.’ This was what Brahmā Sahampati said. Having said this, he said another thing:

‘What has appeared in Magadha before
 Is an impure *dhamma*, as it was thought up by people with
 defilements;
 Open this door to the deathless.
 Let them hear the *dhamma*
 To which the stainless one has awoken.
 Just as a person standing on a rock at the crest of a mountain
 Might watch people all around
 Likewise, O wise, all-seeing one, ascend the terraced heights built
 of *dhamma*.
 Released from grief, look down at the people
 Afflicted with sorrow, oppressed with birth and old age.

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Arise hero, conqueror in battle, leader of the caravan who is
 without debt,
 Wander in the world.

O Exalted One, teach the *dhamma*
They will become knowers (of the *dhamma*).⁹

10. “Then, having heard Brahmā’s request, out of compassion for beings, I surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha.⁹ As I surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha, I saw beings that had a nature with little passion and others that had a nature with much passion, some with acute faculties and others with dull faculties, some with good qualities and others with bad qualities, some easy to teach, and others difficult to teach, and some who lived seeing fear and blame in another world. Just as in a pond of blue, red, or white lotuses,¹⁰ some of the blue, red, or white lotuses that are born in and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and some other lotuses that are born in and grow in the water rest on the surface of the water, and some other lotuses that are born in and grow in the water rise out of the water and stand untainted by the water. In the same way, I surveyed the world with the eye of a Buddha, and I saw beings having a nature with little passion and others having a nature with much passion, some with acute faculties and others with dull faculties, some with good qualities and others with bad qualities, some easy to teach and others difficult to teach, and some who live seeing fear and blame in another world. Then I replied to Brahmā Sahampati with the following verse:

‘The doors to deathlessness are opened for them, Brahmā,
Let those with ears show their faith.
Thinking it would be an annoyance, Brahmā,
I have not spoken
This *dhamma* that is profound and excellent for humankind.’

11. “Then Brahmā Sahampati thought: ‘I have created the opportunity for the Exalted One to teach the *dhamma*.’ Then having saluted me and having kept me on his right side,¹¹ he disappeared right then and there.

12. “I had this thought: ‘To whom should I first teach the *dhamma*? Who will quickly understand this *dhamma*?’ Then I had this further thought:

⁹ According to Buddhist tradition, Buddhas have special sensory and mental powers.

¹⁰ The lotus is an important image in Buddhist literature, especially in the texts of the Mahāyāna tradition. The lotus rises out of the mud and muck of a pond only to thrust forth a flower of unsullied and pristine beauty. But the lotus is still rooted in the pond. Likewise, the *arahant* emerges from the mire of the normal world as a morally purified being. But such a person is still rooted in the world—the Buddhist adept is *in* the world, but not *of* it.

¹¹ Respect and reverence is shown by keeping the respected person or object always to one’s right side.

170 ‘This Āḷāra Kālāma is wise, learned, and intelligent and for a long time has had a nature with little passion. Suppose, then, I were to teach Āḷāra Kālāma the *dhamma* first; he would understand this *dhamma* quickly.’ Then a *deva* approached me and said this: ‘Āḷāra Kālāma died seven days ago, sir.’ Then the knowledge and vision arose in me that ‘Āḷāra Kālāma died seven days ago.’ Then I had this thought: ‘Āḷāra Kālāma was a great man. If he had heard this *dhamma*, he would have understood it quickly.’

‘I had this thought: ‘To whom should I first teach the *dhamma*? Who will quickly understand this *dhamma*?’ Then I had this further thought: ‘This Uddaka Rāmaputta is wise, learned, and intelligent and for a long time has had a nature with little passion. Suppose, then, I were to teach Uddaka Rāmaputta the *dhamma* first; he would understand this *dhamma* quickly.’ Then a *deva* approached me and said this: ‘Uddaka Rāmaputta died last night, sir.’ Then the knowledge and vision arose in me that Uddaka Rāmaputta died last night. Then I had this thought: ‘Uddaka Rāmaputta was a great man. If he had heard this *dhamma*, he would have understood it quickly.’

‘I had this thought: ‘To whom should I first teach the *dhamma*? Who will quickly understand this *dhamma*?’ Then I had this further thought: ‘The group of five monks who looked after me when I was striving were of great service to me. Suppose, then, I were to teach the *dhamma* to that group of five monks first.’ Then I had this thought: ‘Where is that group of five monks living now?’ Then I saw with my *deva*-eye, purified and surpassing that of [normal] humans, that the group of five monks was living in Vārāṇasi (Benares) at the Deer Park in Isipatana. Then having stayed at Uruvelā for as long as was proper, I set out walking by stages to Vārāṇasi.

171 13. ‘Then Upaka, an Ājīvika,¹² saw me as I was walking along the main road between Gayā and the place of enlightenment. Having seen me, he said this to me: ‘Friend, your faculties are very pure and your skin complexion very clear and radiant. Under whom, friend, have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?’ This having been said, I replied to Upaka with these verses:

‘Conquering all, knowing all, am I.
 Undefined among all things
 Renouncing all, I am freed by the destruction of craving.
 Having understood all this for myself, whom should I declare as
 my teacher?

I have no teacher
 There is no equal to me

¹² Ājīvikas were naked wandering ascetics.

In the world, with its *devas*,
There is no person equal to me.

I am an *arahant* in the world
I am the unsurpassed teacher
I alone am the fully enlightened one
I have become cooled and blissful.

I go to the city of Kāsi
To turn the wheel of *dhamma*
In a world that has become blind
I will beat the drum of deathlessness.’

[Upaka said:] ‘In which case, friend, you claim that you are an *arahant*, an infinite victor.’

‘Victors are those like me
Who have attained the destruction of defilements
Evil things have been conquered by me
Therefore, Upaka, I am a victor.’

“This having been said, Upaka said: ‘May it be so, friend.’ Having said that, he shook his head and went away taking a different road.

14. “Then I set out walking by stages to the Deer Park at Isipatana in Vārāṇasi. And there I approached the group of five monks.¹³ The group of five monks saw me approaching at a distance. Having seen me, they came to an agreement among themselves: ‘Friend, this religious wanderer Gotama is coming. He lives in luxury and has wavered in his striving. He has gone back to a life of luxury, so he should not be greeted nor should we stand up out of respect for him, nor should we receive his bowl or robe. Yet perhaps a seat should be put out so he can sit down, if he wants.’ But as I approached, the group of five monks was not able to keep the agreement. Some of them came out to meet me and received my bowl and robe. Some of them prepared a seat. Some of them brought water for washing feet. And they addressed me by name and with the word ‘friend.’ When they had spoken thus, I said this to the group of five monks: ‘Monks, do not address the *Tathāgata* by name or with the word “friend.” Monks, the *Tathāgata* is an *arahant*, a fully enlightened one. Listen, monks, the deathless has been 172

¹³ The text reads “*bhikkhū*,” but here the term is translated as “monks,” rather than left untranslated, as when it refers specifically to Buddhist monks. The reason for this treatment is that at this point in the discourse, no Buddhist ordination has occurred.

attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the *dhamma*. If you practice in the way in which I advise you, you will soon attain the goal for which young men of good families rightly go forth from home to homelessness—that unsurpassed goal of the holy life¹⁴ here in this very world—and you will dwell in it, having entered it by understanding and realizing it for yourselves.’

“When this had been said, the group of five monks said this to me: ‘But, friend Gotama, by this conduct, practice, and performance of austerities you did not attain any superior human states, any knowledge and vision befitting a noble one. So how is it now, having reverted to living in luxury and wavering in striving, that you will have attained any superior human states, any knowledge and vision befitting a noble one?’

“When this had been said, I said this to the group of five monks: ‘Monks, the *Tathāgata* is not one who lives in luxury. He has not wavered in his striving or reverted to luxury. The *Tathāgata* is an *arahant*, a fully enlightened one. Listen, monks, the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the *dhamma*. If you practice in the way in which I advise you, you will soon attain the goal for which young men of good families rightly go forth from home to homelessness—that unsurpassed goal of the holy life here in this very world—and you will dwell in it, having entered it by understanding and realizing it for yourselves.’ And a second time, the group of five monks said this to me: ‘But, friend Gotama, by this conduct, practice, and performance of austerities you did not attain any superior human states, any knowledge and vision befitting a noble one. So how is it now, having reverted to living in luxury and wavering in striving, that you will have attained any superior human states, any knowledge and vision befitting a noble one?’ And a second time, *bhikkhus*, I said to the group of five monks: ‘Monks, the *Tathāgata* is not one who lives in luxury. He has not wavered in his striving or reverted to luxury. The *Tathāgata* is an *arahant*, a fully enlightened one. Listen, monks, the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the *dhamma*. If you practice in the way in which I advise you, you will soon attain the goal for which young men of good families rightly go forth from home to homelessness—that unsurpassed goal of the holy life here in this very world—and you will dwell in it, having entered it by understanding and realizing it for yourselves.’

“So a third time the group of five monks said this to me: ‘But, friend Gotama, by this conduct, practice, and performance of austerities you did not attain any superior human states, any knowledge and vision befitting a noble one. So how is it now, having reverted to living in luxury and wavering

¹⁴ *Brahmacariya*.

in striving, that you will have attained any superior human states, any knowledge and vision befitting a noble one?

“When this had been said, I said this to the group of five monks: ‘You know me by personal acquaintance, monks, have I ever spoken like this before?’

“No, sir.’

“Monks, the *Tathāgata* is an *arahant*, a fully enlightened one. Listen, monks, the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the *dhamma*. If you practice in the way in which I advise you, you will soon attain the goal for which young men of good families rightly go forth from home to homelessness—that unsurpassed goal of the holy life here in this very world—and you will dwell in it, having entered it by understanding and realizing it for yourselves.” 173

“And I was able to convince the group of five monks. Then I would teach two monks, while three monks went for alms. And the six of us lived on the alms the three had brought back. Sometimes I would teach three monks, while two monks went for alms. And the six of us lived on the alms the two brought back.

“Then the group of five monks, having been taught in this way and instructed in this way: being themselves liable to birth, having known the danger in what is liable to birth, seeking *nibbāna*, the unborn, unsurpassed security from bondage—they attained *nibbāna*, the unborn, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being themselves liable to old age . . . they attained *nibbāna*, the unaging, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being themselves liable to sickness . . . they attained *nibbāna*, the unailing, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being themselves liable to death . . . they attained *nibbāna*, the deathless, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being themselves liable to sorrow . . . they attained *nibbāna*, the sorrowless, unsurpassed security from bondage. Being themselves liable to impurity, having known the danger in what is liable to impurity, seeking *nibbāna*, the morally pure, unsurpassed security from bondage—they attained *nibbāna*, the morally pure, unsurpassed security from bondage. Knowledge and vision arose in us: ‘Our liberation is unshakable. This is the last birth. There is now no rebirth.’

15. “*Bhikkhus*,¹⁵ there are these five types of sensual pleasure. What are the five? Visible objects cognizable by the eye, alluring, desirable, pleasing, likable, connected with sense desire, and enticing; sounds cognizable by the ear . . . smells cognizable by the nose . . . tastes cognizable by the tongue . . . tangibles cognizable by the body, alluring, desirable, pleasing, likable,

¹⁵ At this point, the group of five can be referred to as “*bhikkhus*” because they have been converted to the Buddhist path. Compare this passage with the account in the “Mahāvagga” of the Discipline Basket. See *Vinaya* 1.8–14.

connected with sense desire, and enticing. These are the five types of sensual pleasure.

“Regarding those religious wanderers and Brahmins who experience these five types of sensual pleasure, who are tied to them, infatuated by them, addicted to them, who do not see the danger in them, and who do not know an escape from them, it should be understood that: ‘They have come to calamity, come to misfortune. The Evil One (Māra) does with them as he pleases.’ Just as in the forest a deer might be lying down bound up in a heap of snares. In such a case, it should be understood about the deer that: ‘It has come to calamity, come to misfortune. The hunter does with it as he pleases.’ For when the hunter comes, it will not go away as it wishes. So, too, regarding those religious wanderers and Brahmins who experience these five types of sensual pleasure, who are tied to them, infatuated by them, addicted to them, who do not see the danger in them, and who do not know an escape from them, it should be understood that: ‘They have come to calamity, come to misfortune. The Evil One does with them as he pleases.’

174 “Regarding those religious wanderers and Brahmins who experience these five types of sensual pleasure, but who are not tied to them, not infatuated by them, not addicted to them, who see the danger in them, and who know an escape from them, it should be understood that: ‘They have not come to calamity, not come to misfortune. The Evil One cannot do with them as he pleases.’ Just as in the forest a deer might not be lying down bound up in a heap of snares. In such a case, it should be understood about the deer that: ‘It has not come to calamity, come to misfortune. The hunter cannot do with it as he pleases.’ For when the hunter comes, it will go away as it wishes. So, too, regarding those religious wanderers and Brahmins who experience these five types of sensual pleasure, who are not tied to them, not infatuated by them, not addicted to them, who see the danger in them, and who know an escape from them, it should be understood that: ‘They have not come to calamity, not come to misfortune. The Evil One cannot do with them as he pleases.’

16. “Just as a deer in a forest roams the slopes of the forest confidently, stands confidently, sits down confidently, and sleeps confidently. What is the reason for this? It is beyond the hunter’s grasp. In the same way, having become detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental states, a *bhikkhu* lives, having entered the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by reasoning and cogitation, wherein there is joy and happiness born of detachment. This *bhikkhu* is called one who has made Māra blind and, having deprived Māra’s eyesight of its range, he lives unseen by the Evil One.

“Again, in a further case, by the calming of reasoning and cogitation, internally purified, a *bhikkhu* lives, having entered the second *jhāna*, which

has a one-pointed mind that is devoid of reasoning and cogitation and wherein there is joy and happiness born of concentration.¹⁶ This *bhikkhu* is called one who has made Māra blind and, having deprived Māra's eyesight of its range, he lives unseen by the Evil One.

"Again, in a further case, dwelling in equanimity, and with the cessation of joy, mindful and fully aware, a *bhikkhu* lives, having entered the third *jhāna*, wherein he experiences happiness with the body and that which the noble ones describe as: 'He who has equanimity and mindfulness lives happily.' This *bhikkhu* is called one who has made Māra blind and, having deprived Māra's eyesight of its range, he lives unseen by the Evil One.

"Again, in a further case, abandoning both happiness and suffering, from the extinction of the elation and despair he felt formerly, a *bhikkhu* lives, having entered the fourth *jhāna*, wherein there is neither suffering nor happiness, but the purity of mindfulness and equanimity. This *bhikkhu* is called one who has made Māra blind and, having deprived Māra's eyesight of its range, he lives unseen by the Evil One.

"Again, in a further case, by completely passing beyond the perception of physicality, by the extinguishing of repugnant perceptions, by giving no attention to perceptions of diversity,¹⁷ thinking 'space is infinite,' a *bhikkhu* lives having entered into the plane of infinite space. This *bhikkhu* is called one who has made Māra blind and, having deprived Māra's eyesight of its range, he lives unseen by the Evil One.

"Again, in a further case, by passing completely beyond the plane of infinite space, thinking 'consciousness is infinite,' a *bhikkhu* lives having entered into the plane of infinite consciousness. This *bhikkhu* is called one who has made Māra blind and, having deprived Māra's eyesight of its range, he lives unseen by the Evil One.

"Again, in a further case, by completely passing beyond the plane of infinite consciousness, thinking 'there is not anything,' a *bhikkhu* lives having entered into the plane of no-thing. This *bhikkhu* is called one who has made Māra blind and, having deprived Māra's eyesight of its range, he lives unseen by the Evil One.

"Again, in a further case, by completely passing beyond the plane of no-thing, a *bhikkhu* lives having entered into the plane of neither-perception-nor-nonperception. This *bhikkhu* is called one who has made Māra blind and, having deprived Māra's eyesight of its range, he lives unseen by the Evil One.

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¹⁶ *Samādhi*.

¹⁷ Apparently, this means ignoring the normal kind of differentiating experience in which one experiences a plurality of beings in the world. Instead, one experiences everything as a unified plenum.

“Again, in a further case, by completely passing beyond the plane of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, a *bhikkhu* lives having entered into the cessation of perception and feeling. Having seen this by his wisdom, the defilements¹⁸ are completely destroyed. This *bhikkhu* is called one who has made Māra blind and, having deprived Māra’s eyesight of its range, he lives unseen by the Evil One. He has crossed beyond his attachment to the world. He walks confidently, stands confidently, sits down confidently, and sleeps confidently. What is the reason for this? He is beyond the grasp of the Evil One.”

17. This was said by the Exalted One. Delighted, those *bhikkhus* rejoiced in what the Exalted One had said.

¹⁸ *Āsavas*. These are the mental factors that distort perceptions and corrupt the mind. There are three basic defilements: greed, hatred, and delusion.