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(Thīna,middha) Tissa Sutta

The Discourse to Tissa (on Sloth and Torpor) | S 22.84/3:106-109

Theme: Drowsiness can be overcome by insight

Translated by Piya Tan ©2008

1 Tissa the fat

1.1 TISSA'S CONCEIT. Tissa the fat (Thulla Tissa), the Buddha's own paternal cousin.¹ After joining the order, he lives in a forest community, but is proud of his birth. To worsen matters, he is also of senior years, fat and loves to wear rich robes (J 1:316). As such, he is often mistaken for a senior elder (*mahāthera*). However, his lack of spiritual attainment is clearly evident in due course. His captious tendency, habitually and inappropriately pointing out others' faults and lecturing them, makes him rather unpopular to the point that driving his colleagues to tease and vilify him.

The (Assūni) Tissa Sutta (S 21.9) relates how Tissa finally breaks down on account of his colleagues' negative reactions and goes to the Buddha in tears. The Buddha admonishes him, reminding him of the purpose of the holy life—in his case, to overcome anger, conceit, and scorn.²

1.2 TISSA'S UNMINDFULNESS. On another occasion, the Buddha, with his divine eye, sees Tissa sleeping with mouth agape during the noon-rest and, sending a radiant hologram of himself, wakes him. Tissa is filled with anguish and when he confesses his mental lethargy and dissatisfaction with the holy life, the Buddha teaches him the (Thīna,middha)Tissa Sutta (S 22.84), at the end of which he becomes an arhat.³

1.3 TISSA'S ATTAINMENT. The Dhammapada Commentary (DhA 1.3) calls him Thulla Tissa (Tissa the fat), and gives a slightly different version of his story. He joins the order in old age and becomes fat through idleness. He spends most of his time in the assembly hall (*upaṭṭhāna sāla*) donning rich robes. Monks, taking him for a senior elder, volunteer various services for him, such as massaging his feet.

But when his false front is uncovered, they revile him. Weeping, he goes before the Buddha, who instructs him to seek the pardon of those he has offended by failing to show them due honour. When he refuses, he relates to him the humorous story of Nārada and Devala.⁴ At the end of his instruction, the Buddha pronounces these twin verses:

*Akkocchi maṃ avadhi maṃ
ajini maṃ ahāsi maṃ
ye taṃ upanayhanti
veraṃ tesāṃ na sammati*

“He abused me! He beat me!
He defeated me! He stole from me!”
those who harbour such thoughts
their anger does not subside. (Dh 3)

*Akkocchi maṃ avadhi maṃ
ajini maṃ ahāsi maṃ
ye taṃ na upanayhanti
veraṃ tenūpasammati*

“He abused me! He beat me!
He defeated me! He stole from me!”
those who harbour *not* such thoughts
their anger as such subsides. (Dh 4)⁵

2 Sutta summary

The (Thīna,middha) Tissa Sutta (S 22.84) is one of the few discourses devoted entirely to one mental hindrance. In this case, it is sloth-and-torpor (*thīna,middha*), that is, the fourth of the five hindrances. This discourse opens with Tissa troubled by **sloth and torpor**, which makes him physically listless, as if drug-ged, and troubled by spiritual doubt and dissatisfaction with his monkhood. [§2]

¹ *Pitucchā,putta*, ie the son of the Buddha's paternal aunt, Amitā (MA 2:61): see DPPN, sv Tissa Thera (14). See Palikanon website: http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/t/tissa.htm.

² S 21.9/2:282 = SD 71.7; SA 2:239; ThaA 1:111.

³ Tha 39, cf 1162 (Moggallāna); S 12.65/2:106 f; ThaA 1:111.

⁴ DhA 1.3/1:37-44; SA 2:239.

⁵ On the psychological import of these verses, see **Self & Selves** = SD 26.9 (4.1).

Concerned monks report the matter to the Buddha who summons Tissa [§§3-8]. The Buddha begins the interview by gently questioning Tissa (who is after all of senior years). The thrust of this opening and engaging teaching is that one who has craving would invariably crave for one or other of **the five aggregates**: form, feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness. For such a person, attached to such an aggregate, would despair when he notices that it is impermanent and turning into something other than what he desires of it. [§9-15]

Craving. In the second part of the teaching, the Buddha presents its positive. One who has no craving would not be troubled at all by the impermanence and change that affect the five aggregates [§§16-18]. These two catechical [question-and-answer] sequences centre around the aggregates is to impress on Tissa the overbearing power of **craving**.

Then the Buddha goes into the third catechical sequence which is the well known “aggregate characteristics formula” [§19-23]. This sequence impresses on Tissa the universality of **impermanence**. Tissa clearly has all the basic spiritual understanding, erstwhile latent, and is being drawn out by the Buddha’s questions and answers by Tissa—and we must add, by the Buddha’s encouraging tone.

The lesson sequence builds up to that of “the not-self totality formula” [§§24a]. None of the aggregates has any abiding entity: they are all not-self. Such being the case, we should not “own” them, that is, we need to “**disown the pain**”—“This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” After all, the five aggregates form the key definition of the first noble truth.⁶

When all this is properly done and the practitioner is attentive enough, he would be revulsed (*nibbin-dati*)⁷ towards the aggregates, knowing them for what they really are. Revulsion (*nibbidā*) is a powerful sense of disenchantment or weariness that characterizes our direct vision into the true nature of the body. This body is burning with six fires—those of the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind—and, having been burnt over and again, we now have the courage and determination to say “no” to this burning. We do not hate the body-mind at all, but knowing its nature, we are very much wiser, and relate to it for the sake of spiritual evolution and attainment. [§24b]

The Buddha closes his teaching with a short parable, that of the two wayfarers, one familiar with the way, one not. The one familiar with the way is, of course, the Buddha, who tells the traveller (the practitioner) to avoid the left road and take the “right” (directionally and spiritually) road, that is, the noble eightfold path. Yet, even as we journey along this right road, warns the skilled wayfarer, there are still the dangers that lurk: “the dense woods” of ignorance, “the vast low-lying marsh” of sensual pleasures, and “the steep cliff” of anger and despair. Only when we carefully avoid these dangers, we finally and safely arrive at “the pleasant stretch of level ground” of nirvana. [§§25-30]

At the close of the discourse, the Buddha jubilantly assures Tissa that the Buddha is a teacher who is willing and able to care for his charges—with joy and wisdom. Tissa joyfully approves of the teaching.

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The Discourse to Tissa (on Sloth and Torpor)

S 22.84/3:106-109

1 [106] Originating in Sāvattihī.

Tissa is dissatisfied

2 Now at that time, the venerable Tissa, the Blessed One’s paternal cousin,⁸ told a number of monks, thus:

⁶ See **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 56.11.5/5:421) = SD 1.1.

⁷ See *Nibbidā* = SD 20.1.

⁸ *Bhagavato pitucchā,putto*: see Intro (1.1).

“Avuso, my body is as if drugged [drunk].⁹ I’m disoriented and things are unclear to me.¹⁰ Sloth and torpor persist in taking over my mind. I do not delight in living the holy life. And I have doubts regarding the teachings.”

The monks report to the Buddha

3 Then a number of monks approached the Buddha, saluted him, and sat down at one side.

4 Sitting thus at one side, those monks said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, the venerable Tissa, the Blessed One’s paternal cousin, told a number of monks, thus:

‘Avuso, my body is as if drugged [drunk]. I’m disoriented and things are unclear to me. Sloth and torpor persist in taking over my mind. I do not delight in living the holy life. And I have doubts regarding the teachings.’

The Buddha summons Tissa

5 Then the Blessed One addressed a certain monk:

“Come now, bhikshu, address the monk Tissa in my name with these words, thus:

‘Avuso Tissa, the teacher summons you.’”

6 “Yes, bhante,” the monk replied to the Blessed One. Then he approached the elder Tissa, and saluted him, and sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, the monk said this to the elder Tissa:

“Avuso Tissa, the teacher summons you.”

7 “Yes, avuso,” the elder Tissa replied to the monk. Then he approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side.

Tissa is questioned

8 As the elder Tissa was sitting thus at one side, the Buddha said this to him:

“Is it true, Tissa, [107] that you spoke thus to a number of monks:

‘Avuso, my body is as if drugged [drunk]. I’m disoriented and things are unclear to me. Sloth and torpor persist in taking over my mind. I do not delight in living the holy life. And I have doubts regarding the teachings.’?”

“Yes, bhante.”

The Buddha’s instruction: On The One With Craving

9 “What do you think, Tissa?

(1) For one who is *not* rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for **form**,¹¹

⁹ “My body is as if drugged,” *api me āvuso madhuraka, jāto viya kāyo*. Ānanda expresses the same sentiments at the parinirvana of Sāriputta (**Cunda (Samaṇ’uddesa) S**, S 47.13/5:162), and also at the Buddha’s parinirvana (D 16.2.-24/2:99) = SD 9 (qv). DPL says that *madhuraka* is “the Jīvaka plant,” quoting Abhidhānappadīpikā (ed W Subhūti), 1865:594. This probably led Rhys Davids to render it here as “my body has become weak as a creeper,” but PED rejects as erroneous (sv Madhuraka), saying that the usual tr has been “become languid or weak.” Comys paraphrase *madhuraka* as: “it has become heavy” (*sañjāta, garu, bhāvo*, AA 3:259); “it has become unwieldy, as if heavy” (*sañjāta, garu, bhāvo viya akammañño*, SA 2:309); “it has become unwieldy, stiff, like a person impaled with a stake” (*sañjāta, garu, bhāvo sañjāta, thaddha, bhāvo sūle uttāsita, puriso viya*, DA 2:547, SA 3:203; *madhuraka* also means “sweet, pleasant, charming,” but PED gives it as “full of sweet drink, intoxicated.” For *madhuraka viya kāya*, see **D 16.2.24/2:99; S 22.84/3:106 f, 47.9/5:153, 47.13/5:162; A 5.56/3:69-71** (*madhuraka c’eva kāya*); also UA 246. See also S:W 3:90 n2 & S:B 1078 n149.

¹⁰ *Disā’pi me na pakkhāyanti, dhammā pi maṃ na paṭibhanti bhagavato gelaññena*: **D 16.2.24/2:99; S 22.84/-3:106 f, 47.9/5:153, 47.13/5:162; A 5.56/3:70 f** (*madhuraka c’eva kāya*); also UA 246. See also S:W 3:90 n2 & S:B 1078 n149. On “things are unclear to me,” *dhammā pi maṃ na paṭibhanti*, cf A 5.56/3:69. For a psychological expl on this reaction, see **Udākūpama S** (A 7.15) = SD 28.6 Intro (1.2.5).

when there is change of that form, when it becomes something else, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”¹²

“Yes, bhante.”

10 “Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

For one not rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for form,

when there is change of that form, when it becomes something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair *would* arise in him.

11 (2) For one who is *not* rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for **feeling**,

when there is change or alteration of that feeling, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

For one not rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for feeling,

when there is change of that feeling, when it becomes something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair *would* arise in him.

12 (3) For one who is *not* rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for **perception**,

when there is change of that perception, when it becomes something else, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

For one not rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for perception,

when there is change of that perception, when it becomes something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair *would* arise in him.

13 (4) For one who is *not* rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for **formations**,

when there is change of those formations, when they become something else, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”

“Yes, bhante.”

14 “Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

For one not rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for formations,

when there is change of those formations, when they become something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair *would* arise in him.

(5) For one who is *not* rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for **consciousness**,

when there is change of that consciousness, when it becomes something else, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”

“Yes, bhante.”

15 “Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

¹¹ *Rūpe avigata,rāgassa avigata-c,chandassa avigata,pemassa avigata,pipāsassa avigata,pariāhassa avigata,-tanhassa.* Cf **Ceto,khila S** (M 16) where this sequence is applied respectively to sensual pleasures (*kāma*), the body (*kāya*) (one’s own body), and to form (*rūpa*) (to external forms) (M 16.8-10/1:101 f) = SD 32.14. These are the first 3 of the 5 kinds of mental bondage (*pañca cetaso vinibandha*).

¹² *Tassa rūpassa vipariṇāṃ ’aññathā,bhāvā uppajjanti soka,parideva,dukkha,domanass ’upāyāsā ti,* lit “of the form’s change and becoming-other state, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness and despair arise.”

For one not rid of lust, not rid of desire, not rid of love, not rid of thirst, not rid of fever, not rid of craving for consciousness,
when there is change of that consciousness, when it becomes something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair *would* arise in him.

The Buddha's instruction: On The One Without Craving

16 “What do you think, Tissa?”

(1) For one who *is* rid of lust, rid of desire, rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for **form**,

when there is change of that form, when it becomes something else, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”

“Not at all, bhante.”

17a “Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

For one rid of lust, rid of desire, rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for form, when there is change of that form, when it becomes something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair would *not* arise in him.

17b (2) For one who *is* rid of lust, rid of desire, rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for **feeling**,

when there is change or alteration of that feeling, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”

“Not at all, bhante.”

“Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

For one rid of lust, rid of desire, rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for feeling, when there is change of that feeling, when it becomes something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair would *not* arise in him.

17c (3) For one who *is* rid of lust, rid of desire, rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for **perception**,

when there is change of that perception, when it becomes something else, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”

“Not at all, bhante.”

“Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

For one rid of lust, rid of desire, rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for perception, when there is change of that perception, when it becomes something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair would *not* arise in him.

17d (4) For one who *is* rid of lust, rid of desire, rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for **formations**,

when there is change of those formations, when they become something else, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”

“Not at all, bhante.”

“Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

For one rid of lust, rid of desire, rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for formations, when there is change of those formations, when they become something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair would *not* arise in him.

17e (5) For one who *is* rid of lust, rid of desire, **[108]** rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for **consciousness**,

when there is change of that consciousness, when it becomes something else, would sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair arise in him?”

“Not at all, bhante.”

18 “Good, good, Tissa! So it is, Tissa:

For one rid of lust, rid of desire, rid of love, rid of thirst, rid of fever, rid of craving for consciousness,

when there is change of that consciousness, when it becomes something else, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair would *not* arise in him.

The aggregate characteristics formula¹³

19 (1) Now, what do you think, Tissa, is **form** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [painful] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?"¹⁴

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.?'"¹⁵

"No, bhante."

20 (2) "Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.?'"

"No, bhante."

21 (3) "Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **perception** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.?'"

"No, bhante."

22 (4) "Now, what do you think, bhikshus, are **formations** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.?'"

"No, bhante."

23 (5) "Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.?'"

"No, bhante."

¹³ From here until "Revulsion & Liberation" [§§19-24], mutatis mutandis, as at **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.-12-22/3:67 f) = SD 1.2. A shorter version of this and full sections are given as **Arahatā S 1** (S 22.76/3:82 f = SD 26.7) = **Arahatā S 2** (S 22.77/3:84, without verse).

¹⁴ *Dukkhaṃ vā sukhaṃ vā.*

¹⁵ *Etam mama, eso 'ham asmi, eso me attā ti.* These are "the 3 grasplings" (*ti, vidha gāha*), ie, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) (MA 2:111, 225). The notion "This is mine" arises through craving (*taṇhā*); the notion "This I am" arises through conceit (*māna*); the notion "This is my self" arises through views (*diṭṭhi*). These three considerations represent respectively the 3 kinds of mental proliferation (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), and of conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f). The opposite formula, *n'etaṃ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na mēso attā ti*, is applied below to the 5 aggregates [§§17-21]. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f.

The not-self totality formula¹⁶

24a (1) “Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **form** whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near¹⁷—all forms should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’¹⁸

(2) Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **feeling** whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all feelings should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(3) Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **perception** whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all perceptions should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(4) Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **formations** whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all formations should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(5) Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **consciousness** whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all consciousness should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

Revulsion & liberation

24b Seeing thus, bhikshus, the learned noble disciple is revulsed [disenchanted] with form, is revulsed with feeling, is revulsed with perception, is revulsed with formations, is revulsed with consciousness.

Through revulsion, he becomes dispassionate.

Through dispassion, his mind is liberated.

When he is liberated, there arises the knowledge: ‘Free am I!’ He understands: ‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is no more of this state of being.’”

¹⁶ This whole section is mutatis mutandis at **Cūḷa Saccaka S** (M 35.24b/1:234 f) = SD 26.5. These are the characteristics of a learner (*sekha*). The arhat, on the other hand, not only has the right view of not-self, but has also abandoned all clinging, as the Buddha explains in the foll §22. The “specific not-self formula” is the line, “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not the self.” The combined “aggregate characteristics formula” [§12-16] and the “not-self totality formula” [§17-21] is called the not-self general formula. From hereon on

¹⁷ See S 22.48/3:47. This classification of the aggregates (by way of the totality formula) is explained in detail in the Vibhaṅga and briefly in the Visuddhimagga: “**internal**” = physical sense-organs; “**external**” = physical sense-objects; “**gross**” = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “**subtle**” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “**inferior**” = unpleasant and unacceptable sense-experiences [sense-world existence]; “**superior**” = pleasant and acceptable sense-experiences [form & formless existences]; “**far**” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “**near**” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41).

¹⁸ *N’etaṃ mama, n’eso ’ham asmi, na mēso attā ti*. A brief version, “There can be no considering that (element) as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’” (*ahaṇ ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā*) is found in **Mahā Hatthi, padôpama S** (M 28/1:184-191 §§6b-7, 11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22). This is opp of “the 3 graspings” (*ti, vidha gāha*) formula: *etaṃ mama, eso ’ham asmi, eso me attā ti* [§§12-16]. In **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:68), these formulas is applied to the 5 aggregates & in **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/3:94-99 = SD 6.1) to the 4 primary elements. See also (**Dhātu**) **Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f). See **Pārileyya S**, SD 6.16 Intro (5). See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f.

Parable of two wayfarers

25 Suppose, Tissa, there are two persons: one man is familiar with the way, another is unfamiliar with the way [one skilled in the way, another unskilled in the way].¹⁹ The man who is unfamiliar with the way would ask the man familiar with the way. He would say thus:

“Come now, my good man, this is the path. Go on a bit. Having gone on a bit, you will see a fork in the road. Now avoid the left one, take the right.

Go on a bit more. Having gone a bit, you will see a dense woods.

Go on a bit more. Having gone a bit, you will see a vast low-lying marsh.

Go on a bit more. Having gone a bit, you will see a steep cliff.

Go on a bit more. Having gone a bit, you will see a pleasant stretch of level ground.

The parable: interpretation

26 Tissa, I have made up this parable to make a point, and the meaning here is this:²⁰

27 “The man unfamiliar with the way” (*amagga,kusala*): this, Tissa, is a term for the worldling.

28 “The man familiar with the way” (*magga,kusala*): this, Tissa, is a term for the Tathagata, the worthy fully self-awakened one.

29 “The fork in the path” (*dvedhā,patha*): this, Tissa, is a term for doubt. **[109]**

“The left path” (*vāma magga*): this, Tissa, is a term for the wrong eightfold path, that is to say, wrong view, wrong thought, wrong speech, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, wrong concentration.

“The right path” (*dakkhiṇa magga*): this, Tissa, is a term for the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

30 “The dense woods” (*tibba vana,saṇḍa*): this, Tissa, is a term for ignorance.

“The vast low-lying marsh” (*mahanta ninna pallala*): this, Tissa, is a term for sensual pleasures.

“The steep cliff” (*sobbha papāta*): this, Tissa, is a term for anger and despair.

“The pleasant stretch of level ground” (*sama bhūmi,bhāga ramaṇīyas*): this, Tissa, is a term for nirvana.

The Buddha comforts Tissa

31 Rejoice, Tissa! Rejoice, Tissa! Here I am with advice; here I am with support; here I am with instruction!”²¹

32 The Blessed One said this. The elder Tissa, with a joyful heart, approved of the Blessed One’s word.

— evaṃ —

100411; 100412; 101117

¹⁹ *Eko puriso amagga,kusalo, eko puriso magga,kusalo.*

²⁰ *Upamā kho my-āyaṃ, tissa, katā atthassa viññāpanāya:* S 22.84/3:108, 35.238/4:174, 35.245/4:194, 47.20/-5:170 (qu J 1:394).

²¹ *Abhirama, tissa, abhirama, tissa. Aham ovādena aham anuggahena aham anusāsaniyā ti:* S 22.84.31/3:109. See **Makhā,deva S** (M 83.15/2:80): “Rejoice, maharajah, amongst the devas by virtue of the devas” (*abhirāma mahā,rāja devesu devānubhāvenā ti*); **Nanda S** (U 3.2/23,6): “Rejoice, Nanda! Rejoice, Nanda! I guarantee that you will obtain 500 dove-footed celestial nymphs!” (*abhirāma nanda, abhirāma nanda. Aham te pāṭibhogo pañcannam accharā,satānam paṭilābhāya kakuṭa,pādānan ti*).