

Disowning the pain

Source: **(Thīna,middha) Tissa Sutta**, drowsiness can be overcome by insight (S 22.84, SD 32.12).¹ by Piya Tan © 2014.

2.1 DEDICATED SUTTA. 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 third of the 5 hindrances. This discourse opens with Tissa troubled by **sloth and torpor**, which makes him physically listless, as if drugged, and troubled by spiritual doubt and dissatisfaction with his monkhood. [§2]

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 5 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]

2.2 CRAVING. In the second part of the teaching, the Buddha presents its positive side. One who has no craving would not be troubled at all by the impermanence and change that affect the 5 aggregates [§§16-18]. These two catechetical [question-and-answer] sequences that centre around the aggregates are to impress on Tissa the overbearing power of **craving**.

Then the Buddha goes into the third catechetical 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.

2.3 DISOWNING THE PAIN. The lesson sequence builds up to that of “the non-self totality formula” [§§24a]. None of the aggregates has any abiding entity: they are all non-self. Such being the case, we should not “own” them, that is, we need to “**disown the pain**,” thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” After all, the 5 aggregates form the key definition of the first noble truth.²

When all this is properly done and the practitioner is attentive enough, he would be revulsed (*nibbindati*)³ 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

¹ SD 32.12: <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/32.12-Thinamiddha-Tissa-S-s22.84-piya.pdf>

² See **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 56.11,5/5:421), SD 1.1.

³ See **Nibbidā**, SD 20.1.

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]

2.4 PARABLE OF THE 2 WAYFARERS. 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, do 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.

R926 Inspirations 567

Piya Tan ©2025