

Overcoming the 5 mental bondages (2 of 2)

Source: **(Majjhima) Ceto,khila Sutta**, how to free the mind and liberate it (M 16, SD 32.14).¹ by Piya Tan © 2017.

4.2.4 Overcoming indulgence in food and sleep [§23]

4.2.4.1 The most common symptoms of sensual person—one who is easily attracted by sense-objects that are perceived as being attractive or distracted by their opposites—are the indulgence in food (over-eating and drinking) and sleep or a leisurely life of pleasure and abandon. For renunciants, who have avowedly live a life of simplicity and restraint dedicated to moral virtue, contemplation and wisdom, clearly indulgence in food and sleep do not conduce to spiritual growth.

4.2.4.2 Since the true renunciant life eschews any economic pursuits and physical work—dedicated to personal growth, mental development and spiritual awakening—the renunciant needs only minimal food and support. Hence, a renunciant, as a rule, needs only one main meal a day (between dawn and noon), simple monastic robes, spartan lodgings and basic medicine and health care.² These are donated by lay-supporters out of faith for the diligent renunciant living a minimalist life of spiritual quest.³

4.2.4.3 A life of indulgence in food and sleep, or pursuing a monastic life for the sake of creature comforts, or making a career of monkhood, is to blatantly abuse the path of world renunciation. Hence, it is a downward slide into subhuman states, even in this life itself. Although we have human body, our mind is turning more in a subhuman devolution. When the human body reaches its end, we will be re-born in accordance with our habitual mind.

4.2.4.4 To have faith in the life of **Dharma-spirited renunciation** is to diligently work in letting go of any residual layman conduct or mindset, to abandon any attachment to the world, and to restrain our body and speech to become the bases for mental cultivation for inner calm and clarity. The joyful calm and clear mind is then directed to clearing the mind of all hindrances⁴ and defilements,⁵ so that we see the path of awakening. We are now ready to take the first steps on this liberating path to nirvana.

4.2.5 Overcoming the desire for heaven and external agency [§24]

4.2.5.1 Even in the Buddha's time, there were those who claimed to have found answers to the sufferings and unsatisfactoriness of the world, or who claimed they were the way to heaven and to God. Amongst them, there were a few "true" teachers, but most of them were false ones. The "true" teachers were those who were deep meditators, including the eternalists, those who thought that the self and the

¹ SD 32.14: <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/32.14-Majjhima-Cetokhila-S-m16-piya.pdf>

² These are the 4 supports (*catu, paccaya*): see **Sabb'āsava S** (M 2,13-16), SD 30.3; **Santutṭhi S** (A 4.27), SD 104.8.

³ On the ignoble quest and the noble quest, see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,5-12) SD 1.11; **(Catukka) Pariyesanā S** (A 4:252), SD 50.9.

⁴ These are the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*), the overcoming of which brings dhyana [3.3.4.2].

⁵ These are the 10 mental fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*): see SD 40a.1 (15.4.4) n; SD 49.14 Table2. For details, see SD 10.16 (1.6.6).

world were eternal because, through their meditations, they were able to recall up to 100,000 past lives, and up to 40 world cycles, but no more, as stated in **the Brahma,jāla Sutta** (D 1).⁶

The false teachers were those who came up with their own views about the eternity of the self and the universe through reasoning or speculation.⁷ Through such experiences and speculations, these ancient Indian sages taught various ideologies and theologies about some eternal self and eternal God, and recorded these in their sacred texts. Understanding that such texts were only religious sources of doctrines, but not valid sources of empirical or verifiable knowledge, the Buddha unequivocally rejects them—along with other invalid sources of true knowledge—as he famously declares in the “10 doubt-worthy points” (*kaṅkhāniya-t,thāna*) in such discourses as **the Kesa,puttiya Sutta** (A 3.65), thus:

(1) Do not go ⁸ by tradition [aural revelation]. ⁹	<i>mā anussavena</i>
(2) Do not go by lineage [received wisdom].	<i>mā paramparāya</i>
(3) Do not go by hearsay.	<i>mā iti,kirāya</i>
(4) Do not go by scriptural authority.	<i>mā piṭaka,sampadānena</i>
(5) Do not go by pure reason [by logic].	<i>mā takka,hetu[,gāhena]</i>
(6) Do not go by inference (and deduction).	<i>mā naya,hetu[,gāhena]</i>
(7) Do not go by reasoned thought [by specious reasoning].	<i>mā ākāra,parivitakkena</i>
(8) Do not go by acceptance of [being convinced of] a view after pondering on it.	<i>mā diṭṭhi,nijjhāna-k,khantiyā</i>
(9) Do not go by (another’s) seeming ability.	<i>mā bhavya,rūpatāya</i>
(10) Do not go by the thought, ‘This recluse [holy man] is our teacher.’ [‘This recluse is respected by us.’]	<i>mā samaṇo no garū ti</i> (A 3.65,3.1), SD 35.4a

4.2.5.2 Buddhists—especially monastics—who aspire for heaven or some kind of paradise (Buddhist or otherwise) obviously do not understand the historical Buddha’s teaching on samsara and the 3 trainings [4.1.2.2], or they reject his teachings. Either way, they will never taste the freedom of the Dharma. Even the heavens of the traditional Buddhist cosmology are not eternal places. Such eternal places are simply inventions by dogmatic religions to “reward” their faithful with eternal heavens, and to “punish” those who reject or disobey them with eternal hells. There are no such *eternal places* for the simple reason that whatever exist must exist in time: they are all impermanent.

In early Buddhist teachings, the heavens and the hells are described as mythical realities. Whether these gods and subhuman beings exist or not, it is clear that their existences refer to **mental states** of prolonged joy or prolonged suffering. No matter how long such states may last, they are never eternal. In fact, according to **the (Nānā,karaṇa) Puggala Sutta 1** (A 4.123), even the gods, when the effects of their good karma end, they fall straight into the hellish states!¹⁰ The heavens are merely a long-winded way to the hells—unless we have attained the path as streamwinners and so on. Then, because of the nature of our minds and karma, we will never fall into the subhuman states.¹¹

⁶ D 1,31-33 (SD 25.2).

⁷ D 1,34 (SD 25.3).

⁸ Comy interprets as *mā gaṇhiṭṭha*, “Do not take hold of (a notion)” throughout (AA 2:305).

⁹ Here, “tradition” includes revelations, prophecies and so on,

¹⁰ A 4.123 (SD 23.8a).

¹¹ See any of the 10 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25), such as **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

4.2.5.3 Buddhist practitioners who understand and accept the Buddha's teaching of **self-reliance** and the 3 trainings [4.1.2.2] will reject rituals and vows, or any kind of reliance of external agency for spiritual salvation. Certain rituals, like bowing before the Buddha or puja (worship services) may, however, be helpful for fostering fellowship and reminders of certain Buddhist teachings—if we do such ritual with wisdom and focus. For example, we recollect the Buddha's virtues as we bow, or we make an effort to understand what we are chanting, and to reflect on them. In other words, all our 3 doors of actions are involved in a common wholesome gesture, such as reflecting on moral virtue or on impermanence. This is our faith in self-reliance.

4.2.5.4 The Kesa,puttiya Sutta (A 3.65) [4.2.5.1] closes with four important teachings: the disadvantages of doing bad, the advantages of doing good, practice of the divine abodes, and the 4 self-assurances. These teaching fitting close our section on an analysis of the 5 barrennesses and 5 bondages, with a clear vision of Dharma practice following the Buddha's teaching.

After listing the 10 well known doubtful points [4.2.5.1], the Buddha goes on to instruct us to carefully examine the disadvantages of unwholesome actions—which arise through the 3 unwholesome roots: through *greed, hate or delusion*, we are moved to kill, steal, commit sexual misconduct or lie. Such actions are not only unwholesome, but are also blamable (most people see no good in them) and condemned by the wise (those who understand human nature and goodness will reject them, too). “These things ... fully undertaken, bring about harm and suffering.” (A 3.65)¹²

4.2.5.5 The Kesa,puttiya Sutta then goes on to state the advantages of wholesome actions—which arise through the 3 wholesome roots: through *non-greed, non-hate or non-delusion*, we are moved not to break the precepts. Such actions are not only wholesome, but are also *not* blamable (most people see good in them) and praised by the wise. “These things ... fully undertaken, bring good and happiness.” (A 3.65)¹³

The Buddha thus exhorts us to cultivate these wholesome actions all our lives. Based on such a wholesome mental state, we are ready to cultivate **the 4 divine abodes**—which can also be called the 4 social emotions—because they conduce to fellowship as well as happiness here and now. In other words, they act as catalysts in our self-efforts in preparing us to walk the path. (A 3.65)¹⁴

4.2.5.6 The Kesa,puttiya Sutta (A 3.65), in its concluding instructions, teach us the 4 self-assurances or spiritual solaces (*assāsa*). The Buddha encourages us to at least accept the teachings of **karma and rebirth** as basic but provisional truths—or working truths or guiding principles—to guide our social lives and attitudes.

The Buddha wagers with us, as it were, that it is better to be good than otherwise. **The Buddha's wager** is like this. If karma and rebirth (the afterlife) are true—and we accept them as our life's guides—then, we will have a good rebirth. If they are false, we will still be happy here and now.

Secondly, the Buddha encourages us to accept that good and bad are real (they exist). If we accept this and live by it, and they are real; then, we face no bad karmic fruit. If there is neither good nor bad

¹² A 3.65,3-6 (SD 35.4a).

¹³ A 3.65,10-13 (SD 35.4a).

¹⁴ A 3.65,15 (SD 34.4a).

(they do not exist), then, we remain pure and unaffected anyway. Both ways, we win the wager. So why not accept karma and rebirth, and reject bad and cultivate good.¹⁵

The Buddha's wager is that we have every benefit of the doubt if we accept living a morally good life here and now, without the need of hoping for some heaven or paradise, and not to resort to any external agency, but to take the self as refuge. For, it is in our own self, our mind, that good or bad arises, and it is here that we must diligently work for personal growth and spiritual liberation. This is the essence of spiritual self-reliance.

R931 Inspirations 572

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¹⁵ A 3.65,17-18 + SD 35.4a, esp on the 4 self-assurances (7.2). See also SD 51.5 (5.1.3.7) diagram.