

## (Ekā,dasaka) Cetanā'karaṇīya Sutta

### The “Without Need of Intention” Discourse

A 11.2/5:312 f

Theme: Spiritual growth progresses naturally from moral virtue

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010

## Introduction

### 1 The nature of meditation progress

1.1 THE THREE TRAININGS. The (Ekā,dasaka) Cetanā'karaṇīya Sutta (A 11.2) uses the *nibbidā* (revulsion) formula twice: first, the full version [§§1-10] and the better but shorter *nibbidā* formula, but given in a positive manner, which is rare [§11]. The Sutta states that when we are morally virtuous, the other spiritual states arise *naturally*, without even the need for cultivating them volitionally (*cetanā'karaṇīya*), thus:

(1) For the morally virtuous ( <i>sīla,vata</i> ),	there arises freedom from remorse	( <i>appaṭisāra</i> ).
(2) For the remorseless,	there arises joy	( <i>pamudita</i> ).
(3) For the joyful,	there arises a zestful mind	( <i>pīta,mana</i> ).
(4) For the zestful minded,	there arises a calm body	( <i>passaddha,kāya</i> ).
(5) For the calm-bodied,	there arises happiness	( <i>sukha</i> ).
(6) For the happy,	there arises concentration	( <i>samādhi</i> ).
(7) For the concentrated,	there arises the vision of true reality	( <i>yathā,bhūta,ñāṇa</i> ).
(8) For one who sees true reality,	there arises revulsion	( <i>nibbidā</i> ).
(9) For the revulsed,	there is letting go [dispassion]	( <i>virāga</i> ),
(10) For the dispassionate,	there is (10) the knowledge and vision of liberation	( <i>vimutti,ñāṇa.dassana</i> )

(A 11.2/5:312 f) = SD 33.3b (abridged)<sup>1</sup>

This passage, in other words, elaborates on the three trainings (*ti,sikkhā*) into their various progressive stages, centred around meditation, that is, based on moral virtue (*sīla*) (1-2), we have good mental concentration (*samādhi*) (3-7), which in turn bring us liberating wisdom (*paññā*) (8-9).<sup>2</sup>

1.2 A GOOD FOUNDATION OF MORAL VIRTUE. The tenfold *nibbidā* formula begins with a statement on the vitality of moral virtue (*sīla*): “For the morally virtuous, there arises freedom from remorse” [§1]. Keeping the precepts and living a morally harmonious life is the foundation of the spiritual life. It is the basis for fruitful mind-training and meditation.

The reason for this is simple. When we are morally virtuous, we are less likely to fall into negative habits which would sap our mental energies. Immoral acts tend to attract blame and negative responses from others, especially the wise. This is a kind of “social” preparation for personal development. When we are at peace with the people around us, it is easier to grow as an individual.

However, it may not always be possible to cultivate a social environment that is positive for a sustained period because of the presence and influence of negative people. This should not prevent us from building up our moral strength *inwardly*, that is, by making every effort to keep the five precepts at least.<sup>3</sup> With a strong moral core that is boosted by lovingkindness, we can be sure be able to ward off negative karma, or at least minimize its effects.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A 10-factor *nibbidā* formula is given in (Dasaka) Cetanā'karaṇīya S (A 10.2/5:2-4) = SD 41.6. The Parivāra, a late Sinhala appendix to the Vinaya, has a similar list: Par 12.2 = V 5:164.

<sup>2</sup> On the 3 trainings (*sikkhā*), see see (Ti) Sikkhā S (A 3.88/1:235) = SD 24.10c.

<sup>3</sup> On the 5 precepts, see Veḷu,dvāreyya S (S 55.7/5:352-356) = SD 1.5 & *Sīlānussati* = SD 15.11 Intro (2.2).

## 1.3 THE EFFORT OF NON-EFFORT.

**1.3.1 How we are distracted from meditating.** The (Ekā, dasaka) Cetanā'karaṇīya Sutta (A 11.2) has two main themes: the first is that moral virtue is the foundation of a spiritual life whose goal is liberation, and second, that it is “the nature of things” (*dharmatā*) that good follows good. The Sutta opens with the statement that we do not need to wish for it, but “it is the nature of things, bhikshus, that *freedom from remorse* will arise for the morally virtuous” [§1].

In a similar vein, **the It̥ṭha Sutta** (A 5.43) declares:

Householder, there are these five things that are desirable, beloved and agreeable but difficult to obtain in the world, namely, long life, beauty, happiness, fame, and rebirth in heaven.

Of these five things, householder, I do not teach that they are to be obtained through prayer (*āyācana, hetu*) or through wishing (*patthanā, hetu*).<sup>5</sup> If one could obtain them through prayer or through wishing, who would not obtain them?

For a noble disciple, householder, who wishes to have *any of them*, it is not proper that he should pray for it or take delight in doing so. He should rather *follow a way of life that is conducive to it* [such as the practice of giving, moral conduct and mental cultivation]. By following such a path, he would obtain *earthly or heavenly long life, beauty, happiness, and fame, and rebirth in heaven.* (A 5.43/3:47-49) = SD 47.2; abridged

On a deeper level of mindfulness and meditation, the real reason that prayer and wishing would be because they are a *distraction!* Prayer and wishing involve discursive thought and a feeling of desperation, even panic, which actually hinder meditation. The very first of the five mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) is that of sensual lust (*kāma-c, chanda*), that is, a powerful, even if unavowed, desire for pleasures of pleasurable visual forms, of sounds, of smells, of tastes, and of touches. Such desires consume our energies, leaving us too distracted and exhausted to collect our minds.

Sensual lust is also called covetousness (*abhiḥhā*), desiring what others have or are enjoying. Both sensual lust and covetousness is rooted in a sense of inner lack and a quest to appropriate the “other.” What we perceive as lacking in us, we desire to take it in from outside. And when we fail to do this, we feel *ill will* (*vyāpāda*), a destructive emotion, which looks for someone or something to blame, except our own ignorance and craving.

Lust and ill will are consuming passions: they burn up our energies, and completely tire us, so that we are left with *sloth and torpor* (*thīna, middha*). After a while, there is a deep sense of unease, a feeling that are not doing anything to pursue our desires. Or worse, we now have the time to reflect on our failures: we look back into our past and feel remorseful, and we look ahead with hopes of greater success and happiness, ready to move into action, so that we become restless. *Restless and remorse* (*udhacca, kukkucā*) are a mental hindrance. The sum effect of this inner tussle and turmoil only leave us in *doubt* (*vicikicchā*) of our own spiritual powers.<sup>6</sup>

**1.3.2 How to progress in meditation.** We need to overcome the hindrances before we can go on to focus our minds. Since the hindrances are basically *body*-based distractions, one effective way of rising above them is to keep our minds of *happy thoughts*, such as one of the inspiring meditations<sup>7</sup> or on lovingkindness.<sup>8</sup> Even when nothing seems to work for a while, simply go on sitting doing nothing in particular—the point is that there is some *action* is our non-action: we are keeping the precepts even as we sit on in this manner.

<sup>4</sup> On how *lovingkindness* minimizes the effects of bad karma, see (Karaja, kāya) **Brahma, vihāra S** (A 10.208/-5:299-301) & SD 2.10 Intro (2).

<sup>5</sup> “Wishing,” *patthanā*, also “desire, request, aspiration, request, prayer, vow.”

<sup>6</sup> On **the 5 mental hindrances** (*pañca nīvaraṇa*), see **Nīvaraṇa** = SD 32.1.

<sup>7</sup> **The 6 inspiring meditation**, or 6 bases of recollection (*cha anussati-t, thāna*), are the recollections on (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, (3) the Sangha, (4) moral virtue, (5) charity, and (6) the devas. (A 6.26/3:314 f) = SD 15.6. See also **Mental Cultivation** = SD 5, & **Nimitta** = SD 19.7 (4.6.3(2)).

<sup>8</sup> On **cultivation of lovingkindness**, see **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Khp 9 = Sn 1.8) = SD 38.3.

Then, reflect on this “non-action” that generates a sense of moral virtue. As you do this, simply *smile* inwardly—we are momentarily remorseless (*avippaṭisāra*) even as we smile so—and simply let gladness (*pāmojja*) arise. This is the beginning of what the Sāmañña,phala Sutta (D 2), for example, call “blameless joy” (*anavajja,sukha*). Of this, the Sutta’s Commentary says:

“He experiences within himself a blameless, faultless, wholesome bodily and mental happiness accompanied by such phenomena as non-remorse, gladness, rapture, and tranquillity, which are based on moral virtue as their proximate cause.” (DA 1:183)

It is “a happiness free from faults” (*niddosa,sukha*, MA 2:214 = AA 3:198). Evidently, this joy arises on account of being free from the fear of being blamed of moral faults.<sup>9</sup>

If we just let this gladness be, it will grow in strength, fuelled by our inspiration and interest, as it were. It blossoms into zest (*pīti*), which is described as joyful interest, that is, we are so delighted with what we feel, that we just keep going on. As we do this, we begin to forget about our body, so that we feel comfortable with bodily tranquillity (*passaddhī*).

When our body is tranquil, we can only feel happy (*sukha*). Now, happiness is a *feeling*, which means that we have rise about words and thoughts. The mind that is free from such baggage begins to gain focus and samadhi (*samādhī*). If we allow this samadhi to go on, the mind becomes so still that it clears itself up, just as the dammed up river waters become still and clear, and we can directly see into it—this is the knowledge and vision of reality (*yathā,bhūta.ñāṇa,dassana*).

When we understand the true nature of things, we are no more deluded by them. It like having been burnt by fire: we will never touch it again—this is revulsion (*nibbidā*). The experience is so empowering that all our defilements are abandoned (at least momentarily), so that we are free from unwholesome passions (*virāga*). This then progresses naturally into the knowledge and vision of liberation (*vimutti,ñāṇa,-dassana*) itself. We know and see what it is like to be spiritually liberated.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 Related suttas

The theme or highlight of the (Ekā, dasaka) Cetanā’karaṇīya Sutta, as already stated [1.1], is revulsion” (*nibbidā*). Beginning with moral virtues, this Sutta shows, in ten stages, how revulsion (*nibbidā*) arises, which in turn leads to liberation. A shorter versions of this set—omitting dispassion (*virāga*), which is implicit in *nibbidā*—involving a total of nine factors (that is, eight stages), ending in the same manner, is found the (Dasaka) Cetanā’karaṇīya Sutta (A 10.2).<sup>11</sup>

The Upanisā Sutta (S 12.23) gives an identical sequence of factors, omitting on the very first, that of moral virtue, and in its place we find faith (*saddhā*), whose “immediate cause” (*upanisā*) is said to be suffering (*dukkha*), that is, to say, reflecting on the true nature of suffering. This is, in fact, a positive version of “dependent ending,” or “transcendental dependent arising.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf “undefiled joy” (*avyāseka,sukha*), in Sāmañña,phala S (D 2.64/1:70) = SD 8.10.

<sup>10</sup> For a similar list of factors, see the 7 awakening-factors (*satta bojjaṅga*): **Bojjhaṅga Sīla S** (S 46.3/5:67-70) = SD 10.15.

<sup>11</sup> A 10.2/5:2-4 = SD 41.6.

<sup>12</sup> **Upanisā S** (S 12.23/2:29-32) = SD 6.12.

## The “Without Need of Intention” Discourse (Elevens)

A 11.2/5:312 f

### The full *nibbidā* process

1 Bhikshus, for the morally virtuous, there is no need of the intention [an act of will],  
“May *freedom from remorse* arise in me!” (*avippaṭisāro me uppajjatū ti*)

It is the nature of things, bhikshus, that freedom from remorse will arise for the morally virtuous, possessed of moral virtue.

2 Bhikshus, for the one free of remorse, there is no need of the intention,  
“May *gladness* arise in me!” (*pāmojjaṃ me uppajjatū ti*)

It is the nature of things, bhikshus, that gladness will arise for the one free from remorse.

3 Bhikshus, for the one with gladness, there is no need of the intention,  
“May *zest* arise in me!” (*pīti me uppajjatū ti*)

It is the nature of things, bhikshus, that zest will arise for the one with gladness.

4 Bhikshus, for the zestful, there is no need of the intention,  
“May my body be *tranquil*!” (*kāyo me passambhatū ti*)

It is the nature of things, bhikshus, that bodily tranquillity will arise for the zestful.

5 Bhikshus, for the one tranquil in body, there is no need of the intention,  
“May I feel *happiness*!” (*sukhaṃ vediyāmi ti*)

It is the nature of things, bhikshus, that happiness will arise for the one whose body is tranquil.

6 Bhikshus, for the happy, there is no need of the intention,  
“May my mind *concentrate*!” (*cittaṃ me samādhīyatū ti*)

It is the nature of things, bhikshus, that mental concentration will arise for the happy.

7 Bhikshus, for the concentrated, there is no need of the intention,  
“May I *know and see according to reality*!” (*yathā, bhūtaṃ jānāmi passāmi ti*)

It is the nature of things, [313] bhikshus, that the concentrated will know and see according to reality.

8 Bhikshus, for the one who knows and sees according to reality, there is no need of the intention,  
“May I feel *revulsion*!” (*nibbindāmi ti*)

It is the nature of things, bhikshus, that revulsion will arise for the one who knows and sees according to reality.

9 Bhikshus, for the revulsed, there is no need of the intention,  
“May I *let go (of defilements)* [be free from passions]!” (*virajjāmi ti*)

It is the nature of things, bhikshus, that revulsed will let go (of defilements).

10 Bhikshus, for the one who has let go (of defilements) [the dispassionate], there is no need of the intention,

“May I realize *the knowledge and vision of liberation*!” (*vimutti, ñāṇa, dassanaṃ sacchikaromī ti*)

It is the nature of things, bhikshus, that the one who has let go (of defilements) will realize the knowledge and vision of liberation.

### The *nibbidā* process (in brief)

11 Thus, bhikshus,

for the one who has let go (of defilements) [the dispassionate], there is the goal and benefit of the knowledge and vision of liberation.

For the revulsed, there is the goal and benefit of letting go (of defilements).

For the one who knows and sees according to reality, there is the goal and benefit of revulsion,

For the concentrated, there is the goal and benefit of the knowledge and vision of reality.

For the happy, there is the goal and benefit of concentration.

For the tranquil, there is the goal and benefit of happiness.

For the zestful, there is the goal and benefit of tranquillity.

For the glad, there is the goal and benefit of zest.

For the remorseless, there is the goal and benefit of gladness.

Wholesome virtuous conduct has the goal and benefit of freedom from remorse.

12 Thus, bhikshus, the states permeate one another, the states fulfill one another,<sup>13</sup> going from this shore to the beyond.<sup>14</sup>

— evarū —

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<sup>13</sup> “Permeate...fulfill,” *abhisandenti...paripūrenti*: these 2 words appear only here (A 11.2) and in (Dasaka) *Cetanākaraṇīya S* (A 10.2.10/5.4) = SD 41.6. A similar but fuller phrase is *abhisandeti parisandeti paripūreti paripharati*, which is found in the def of the first 3 dhyanas: *Sāmañña,phala S* (D 2.75-80/1:73-75), *Subha S* (D 10.12-16/1:207); *Mahā Assa,pura S* (M 39.15-17/1:276 f), *Mahā Sākul’udāyi S* (M 25.25-27/2:15 f), *Kāya,gatā,sati S* (M 119.18-20/3:92-94); (*Samādhy-aṅga*) *Pañc’aṅgika S* (A 5.28/3:25 f) = SD 33.13. The language of dhyana is clearly at work here.

<sup>14</sup> *Iti kho, bhikkhave, dhammā dhamme abhisandenti, dhammā dhamme paripūrenti apārā pāraṃ gamanāyā ti.*