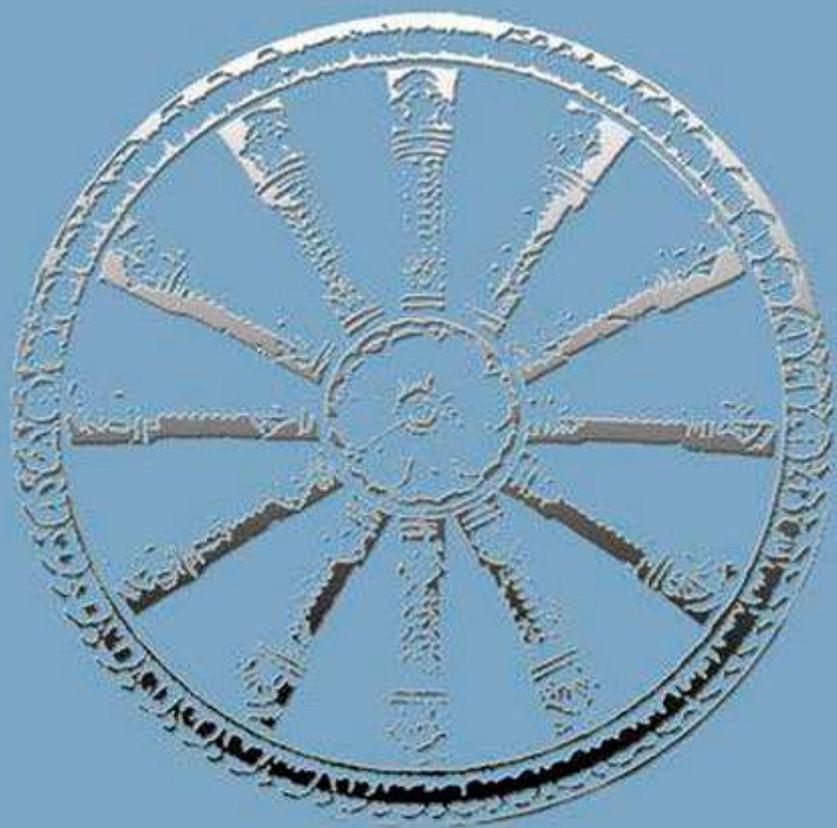


The Great Discourse on Causation



The Mahānidāna Sutta and its Commentaries
Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi

The Mahānidāna Sutta
The Great Discourse on Causation
The Fifteenth Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya

Translated from the Pali
by

Bhikkhu Bodhi

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translated and introduced by Bhikkhu Bodhi.

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The Mahānidāna Sutta

Dependent Arising

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Exalted One was living among the Kurus, where there was a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadhamma. Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Exalted One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. Seated, he said to the Exalted One:

“It is wonderful and marvellous, venerable sir, how this dependent arising is so deep and appears so deep, yet to myself it seems as clear as clear can be.”

“Do not say so, Ānanda! Do not say so, Ānanda! This dependent arising, Ānanda, is deep and it appears deep. Because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma, Ānanda, this generation has become like a tangled skein, like a knotted ball of thread, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not pass beyond saṃsāra with its plane of misery, unfortunate destinations, and lower realms.

2. “Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Are aging and death due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘They are.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there aging and death?’ one should say: ‘With birth as condition there is aging and death.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is birth due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there birth?’ one should say: ‘With existence as condition there is birth.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is existence due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there existence?’ one should say: ‘With clinging as condition there is existence.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is clinging due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what

condition is there clinging?' one should say: 'With craving as condition there is clinging.'

"Ānanda, if one is asked: 'Is craving due to a specific condition?' one should say: 'It is.' If one is asked: 'Through what condition is there craving?' one should say: 'With feeling as condition there is craving.'

"Ānanda, if one is asked: 'Is feeling due to a specific condition?' one should say: 'It is.' If one is asked: 'Through what condition is there feeling?' one should say: 'With contact as condition there is feeling.'

"Ānanda, if one is asked: 'Is contact due to a specific condition?' one should say: 'It is.' If one is asked: 'Through what condition is there contact?' one should say: 'With mentality-materiality as condition there is contact.'

"Ānanda, if one is asked: 'Is mentality-materiality due to a specific condition?' one should say: 'It is.' If one is asked: 'Through what condition is there mentality-materiality?' one should say: 'With consciousness as condition there is mentality-materiality.'

"Ānanda, if one is asked: 'Is consciousness due to a specific condition?' one should say: 'It is.' If one is asked: 'Through what condition is there consciousness?' one should say: 'With mentality-materiality as condition there is consciousness.'

3. "Thus, Ānanda, with mentality-materiality as condition there is consciousness; with consciousness as condition there is mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality as condition there is contact; with contact as condition there is feeling; with feeling as condition there is craving; with craving as condition there is clinging; with clinging as condition there is existence; with existence as condition there is birth; and with birth as condition, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this entire mass of suffering.

Aging and Death

4. “It was said: ‘With birth as condition there is aging and death.’ How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no birth of any kind anywhere—that is, of gods into the state of gods, of celestials into the state of celestials, of spirits, demons, human beings, quadrupeds, winged creatures, and reptiles, each into their own state—if there were no birth of beings of any sort into any state, then, in the complete absence of birth, with the cessation of birth, would aging and death be discerned?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for aging and death, namely, birth.

Birth

5. “It was said: ‘With existence as condition there is birth.’ How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no existence of any kind anywhere—that is, no sense-sphere existence, fine-material existence, or immaterial existence—then, in the complete absence of existence, with the cessation of existence, would birth be discerned?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for birth, namely, existence.

Existence

6. “It was said: ‘With clinging as condition there is existence.’ How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no clinging of any kind anywhere—that is, no clinging to sense pleasures, clinging to views, clinging to precepts and observances, or clinging to a doctrine of self—then,

in the complete absence of clinging, with the cessation of clinging, would existence be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for existence, namely, clinging.

Clinging

7. "It was said: 'With craving as condition there is clinging.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no craving of any kind anywhere—that is, no craving for visible forms, craving for sounds, craving for smells, craving for tastes, craving for tangibles, or craving for mental objects—then, in the complete absence of craving, with the cessation of craving, would clinging be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for clinging, namely, craving.

Craving

8. "It was said: 'With feeling as condition there is craving.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no feeling of any kind anywhere—that is, no feeling born of eye-contact, feeling born of ear-contact, feeling born of nose-contact, feeling born of tongue-contact, feeling born of body-contact, or feeling born of mind-contact—then, in the complete absence of feeling, with the cessation of feeling, would craving be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for craving, namely, feeling.

Dependent on Craving

9. "Thus, Ānanda, in dependence upon feeling there is craving; in dependence upon craving there is pursuit; in dependence upon pursuit there is gain; in dependence upon gain there is decision-making; in dependence upon decision-making there is desire and lust; in dependence upon desire and lust there is attachment; in dependence upon attachment there is possessiveness; in dependence upon possessiveness there is stinginess; in dependence upon stinginess there is safeguarding; and because of safeguarding, various evil unwholesome phenomena originate—the taking up of clubs and weapons, conflicts, quarrels, and disputes, insulting speech, slander, and falsehoods.

10. "It was said: 'Because of safeguarding, various evil unwholesome phenomena originate—the taking up of clubs and weapons, conflicts, quarrels, and disputes, insulting speech, slander, and falsehoods.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no safeguarding of any kind anywhere, then, in the complete absence of safeguarding, with the cessation of safeguarding, would those various evil unwholesome phenomena originate?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for those various evil unwholesome phenomena, namely, safeguarding.

11. "It was said: 'In dependence upon stinginess there is safeguarding.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no stinginess of any kind anywhere, then, in the complete absence of stinginess, with the cessation of stinginess, would safeguarding be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for safeguarding, namely, stinginess.

12. "It was said: 'In dependence upon possessiveness there is stinginess.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no possessiveness of any kind anywhere, then, in the complete absence of possessiveness, with the cessation of possessiveness, would stinginess be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for stinginess, namely, possessiveness.

13. "It was said: 'In dependence upon attachment there is possessiveness.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no attachment of any kind anywhere, then, in the complete absence of attachment, with the cessation of attachment, would possessiveness be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for possessiveness, namely, attachment.

14. "It was said: 'In dependence upon desire and lust there is attachment.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no desire and lust of any kind anywhere, then, in the complete absence of desire and lust, with the cessation of desire and lust, would attachment be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for attachment, namely, desire and lust.

15. "It was said: 'In dependence upon decision-making there is desire and lust.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no decision-making of any kind anywhere, then, in the complete absence of decision-

making, with the cessation of decision-making, would desire and lust be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for desire and lust, namely, decision-making.

16. "It was said: 'In dependence upon gain there is decision-making.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no gain of any kind anywhere, then, in the complete absence of gain, with the cessation of gain, would decision-making be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for decision-making, namely, gain.

17. "It was said: 'In dependence upon pursuit there is gain.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no pursuit of any kind anywhere, then, in the complete absence of pursuit, with the cessation of pursuit, would gain be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for gain, namely, pursuit.

18. "It was said: 'In dependence upon craving there is pursuit.' How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no craving of any kind anywhere—that is, no craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence, or craving for non-existence—then, in the complete absence of craving, with the cessation of craving, would pursuit be discerned?"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for pursuit, namely, craving.

“Thus, Ānanda, these two phenomena, being a duality, converge into a unity in feeling.

Feeling

19. “It was said: ‘With contact as condition there is feeling.’ How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If there were absolutely and utterly no contact of any kind anywhere—that is, no eye-contact, ear-contact, nose-contact, tongue-contact, body-contact, or mind-contact—then, in the complete absence of contact, with the cessation of contact, would feeling be discerned?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for feeling, namely, contact.

Contact

20. “It was said: ‘With mentality-materiality as condition there is contact.’ How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If those qualities, traits, signs, and indicators through which there is a description of the mental body were all absent, would designation-contact be discerned in the material body?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“If those qualities, traits, signs, and indicators through which there is a description of the material body were all absent, would impingement-contact be discerned in the mental body?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“If those qualities, traits, signs, and indicators through which there is a description of the mental body and the material body were all absent, would either designation-contact or impingement-contact be discerned?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“If those qualities, traits, signs, and indicators through which there is a description of mentality-materiality were all absent, would contact be discerned?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for contact, namely, mentality-materiality.

Mentality-Materiality

21. “It was said: ‘With consciousness as condition there is mentality-materiality.’

How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If consciousness were not to descend into the mother’s womb, would mentality-materiality take shape in the womb?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“If, after descending into the womb, consciousness were to depart, would mentality-materiality be generated into this present state of being?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“If the consciousness of a young boy or girl were to be cut off, would mentality-materiality grow up, develop, and reach maturity?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for mentality-materiality, namely, consciousness.

Consciousness

22. “It was said: ‘With mentality-materiality as condition there is consciousness.’ How that is so, Ānanda, should be understood in this way: If consciousness were not to gain a footing in mentality-

materiality, would an origination of the mass of suffering—of future birth, aging, and death—be discerned?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“Therefore, Ānanda, this is the cause, source, origin, and condition for consciousness, namely, mentality-materiality.

“It is to this extent, Ānanda, that one can be born, age, and die, pass away and re-arise, to this extent that there is a pathway for designation, to this extent that there is a pathway for language, to this extent that there is a pathway for description, to this extent that there is a sphere for wisdom, to this extent that the round turns for describing this state of being, that is, when there is mentality-materiality together with consciousness.¹

Descriptions of Self

23. “In what ways, Ānanda, does one describing self describe it? Describing self as having material form and as limited, one describes it thus: ‘My self has material form and is limited.’ Or describing self as having material form and as infinite, one describes it thus: ‘My self has material form and is infinite.’ Or describing self as immaterial and limited, one describes it thus: ‘My self is immaterial and limited.’ Or describing self as immaterial and infinite, one describes it thus: ‘My self is immaterial and infinite.’

24. “Therein, Ānanda, one who describes self as having material form and as limited either describes such a self (as existing only) in the present or he describes such a self (as existing) there in the future, or he thinks: ‘That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus.’ This being so, it can aptly be said that a settled view (of self) as having material form and as limited underlies this.

“One who describes self as having material form and as infinite either describes such a self (as existing only) in the present or he describes such a self (as existing) there in the future, or he thinks:

'That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus.' This being so, it can aptly be said that a settled view (of self) as having material form and as infinite underlies this.

"One who describes self as immaterial and limited either describes such a self (as existing only) in the present or he describes such a self (as existing) there in the future, or he thinks: 'That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus.' This being so, it can aptly be said that a settled view (of self) as immaterial and limited underlies this.

"One who describes self as immaterial and infinite either describes such a self (as existing only) in the present or he describes such a self (as existing) there in the future, or he thinks: 'That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus.' This being so, it can aptly be said that a settled view (of self) as immaterial and infinite underlies this.

"It is in these ways, Ānanda, that one describing self describes it.

Non-Descriptions of Self

25. "In what ways, Ānanda, does one not describing self not describe it? Not describing self as having material form and as limited, one does not describe it thus: 'My self has material form and is limited.' Or not describing self as having material form and as infinite, one does not describe it thus: 'My self has material form and is infinite.' Or not describing self as immaterial and limited, one does not describe it thus: 'My self is immaterial and limited.' Or not describing self as immaterial and infinite, one does not describe it thus: 'My self is immaterial and infinite.'

26. "Therein, Ānanda, one who does not describe self as having material form and as limited does not describe such a self (as existing only) in the present, nor does he describe such a self (as existing) there in the future, nor does he think: 'That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus.' This being so,

it can aptly be said that a settled view (of self) as having material form and as limited does not underlie this.

“One who does not describe self as having material form and as infinite does not describe such a self (as existing only) in the present, nor does he describe such a self (as existing) there in the future, nor does he think: ‘That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus.’ This being so, it can aptly be said that a settled view (of self) as having material form and as infinite does not underlie this.

“One who does not describe self as immaterial and limited does not describe such a self (as existing only) in the present, nor does he describe such a self (as existing) there in the future, nor does he think: ‘That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus.’ This being so, it can aptly be said that a settled view (of self) as immaterial and limited does not underlie this.

“One who describes self as immaterial and infinite does not describe such a self (as existing only) in the present, nor does he describe such a self (as existing) there in the future, nor does he think: ‘That which is not thus, I will convert towards the state of being thus.’ This being so, it can aptly be said that a settled view (of self) as immaterial and infinite does not underlie this.

“It is in these ways, Ānanda, that one not describing self does not describe it.

Considerations of Self

27. “In what ways, Ānanda, does one considering (the idea of) self consider it? One considering (the idea of) self either considers feeling as self, saying: ‘Feeling is my self.’ Or he considers: ‘Feeling is not my self; my self is without experience of feeling.’ Or he considers: ‘Feeling is not my self, but my self is not without experience of feeling. My self feels; for my self is subject to feeling.’

28. "Therein, Ānanda, the one who says 'Feeling is my self' should be asked: 'Friend, there are these three kinds of feeling—pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling. Of these three kinds of feeling, which do you consider as self?'

"Ānanda, on the occasion when one experiences a pleasant feeling one does not, on that same occasion, experience a painful feeling or a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling; on that occasion one experiences only a pleasant feeling. On the occasion when one experiences a painful feeling one does not, on that same occasion, experience a pleasant feeling or a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling; on that occasion one experiences only a painful feeling. On the occasion when one experiences a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling one does not, on that same occasion, experience a pleasant feeling or a painful feeling; on that occasion one experiences only a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling.

29. "Ānanda, pleasant feeling is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, falling away, fading out, and ceasing. Painful feeling is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, falling away, fading out, and ceasing. Neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, subject to destruction, falling away, fading out, and ceasing.

"If, when experiencing a pleasant feeling, one thinks: 'This is my self,' then with the ceasing of that pleasant feeling one thinks: 'My self has disappeared.' If, when experiencing a painful feeling, one thinks: 'This is my self,' then with the ceasing of that painful feeling one thinks: 'My self has disappeared.' If, when experiencing a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, one thinks: 'This is my self,' then with the ceasing of that neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling one thinks: 'My self has disappeared.'

"Thus one who says 'Feeling is my self' considers as self something which, even here and now, is impermanent, a mixture of pleasure and pain, and subject to arising and falling away.

Therefore, Ānanda, because of this it is not acceptable to consider: 'Feeling is my self.'

30. "Ānanda, the one who says 'Feeling is not my self; my self is without experience of feeling'—he should be asked: 'Friend, where there is nothing at all that is felt, could the idea "I am"³ occur there?'"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, because of this it is not acceptable to consider: 'Feeling is not my self; my self is without experience of feeling.'

31. "Ānanda, the one who says 'Feeling is not my self, but my self is not without experience of feeling. My self feels; for my self is subject to feeling'—he should be asked: 'Friend, if feeling were to cease absolutely and utterly without remainder, then, in the complete absence of feeling, with the cessation of feeling, could (the idea) "I am this" occur there?'"

"Certainly not, venerable sir."

"Therefore, Ānanda, because of this it is not acceptable to consider: 'Feeling is not my self, but my self is not without experience of feeling. My self feels; for my self is subject to feeling.'

32. "Ānanda, when a bhikkhu does not consider feeling as self, and does not consider self as without experience of feeling, and does not consider: 'My self feels; for my self is subject to feeling'—then, being without such considerations, he does not cling to anything in the world. Not clinging, he is not agitated. Not being agitated, he personally attains nibbāna. He understands: 'Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no returning to this state of being.'

"Ānanda, if anyone should say of a bhikkhu whose mind has been thus liberated, that he holds the view 'A Tathāgata exists after death'—that would not be proper; or that he holds the view 'A Tathāgata does not exist after death'—that would not be

proper; or that he holds the view ‘A Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death’—that would not be proper; or that he holds the view ‘A Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death’—that would not be proper. For what reason? Because that bhikkhu is liberated by directly knowing this: the extent of designation and the extent of the pathway for designation, the extent of language and the extent of the pathway for language, the extent of description and the extent of the pathway for description, the extent of wisdom and the extent of the sphere for wisdom, the extent of the round and the extent to which the round turns. To say of a bhikkhu who is liberated by directly knowing this that he holds the view ‘One does not know and does not see’—that would not be proper.

The Seven Stations for Consciousness

33. “Ānanda, there are these seven stations for consciousness and two bases. What are the seven?

“There are, Ānanda, beings who are diverse in body and diverse in perception, such as human beings, some gods, and some beings in the lower realms. This is the first station for consciousness.

“There are beings who are diverse in body but identical in perception, such as the gods of the Brahma-order who are generated through the first (jhāna). This is the second station for consciousness.

“There are beings who are identical in body but diverse in perception, such as the gods of streaming radiance. This is the third station for consciousness.

“There are beings who are identical in body and identical in perception, such as the gods of refulgent beauty. This is the fourth station for consciousness.

“There are beings who, through the complete surmounting of perceptions of material form, the passing away of perceptions of

impingement, and non-attention to perceptions of diversity, (contemplating) ‘Space is infinite,’ arrive at the base of the infinity of space. This is the fifth station for consciousness.

“There are beings who, having completely surmounted the base of the infinity of space, (contemplating) ‘Consciousness is infinite,’ arrive at the base of the infinity of consciousness. This is the sixth station for consciousness.

“There are beings who, having completely surmounted the base of the infinity of consciousness, (contemplating) ‘There is nothing,’ arrive at the base of nothingness. This is the seventh station for consciousness.

“The base of non-percipient beings and, second, the base of neither perception nor non-perception—(these are the two bases).

34. “Therein, Ānanda, if one understands the first station for consciousness, that of beings who are diverse in body and diverse in perception, and if one understands its origin, its passing away, its satisfaction, its unsatisfactoriness, and the escape from it, is it proper for one to seek enjoyment in it?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“If one understands the remaining stations for consciousness ... the base of non-percipient beings ... the base of neither perception nor non-perception, and if one understands its origin, its passing away, its satisfaction, its unsatisfactoriness, and the escape from it, is it proper for one to seek enjoyment in it?”

“Certainly not, venerable sir.”

“Ānanda, when a bhikkhu—having understood as they really are the origin, passing away, satisfaction, unsatisfactoriness, and escape in regard to these seven stations for consciousness and two bases—is liberated through non-clinging, then he is called a bhikkhu liberated by wisdom.

The Eight Emancipations

35. "Ānanda, there are these eight emancipations. What are the eight?"

"One possessing material form sees material forms. This is the first emancipation.

"One not perceiving material forms internally sees material forms externally. This is the second emancipation.

"One is released upon the idea of the beautiful. This is the third emancipation.

"Through the complete surmounting of perceptions of material form, the passing away of perceptions of impingement, and non-attention to perceptions of diversity, (contemplating) 'Space is infinite,' one enters and dwells in the base of the infinity of space. This is the fourth emancipation.

"Having completely surmounted the base of the infinity of space, (contemplating) 'Consciousness is infinite,' one enters and dwells in the base of the infinity of consciousness. This is the fifth emancipation.

"Having completely surmounted the base of the infinity of consciousness, (contemplating) 'There is nothing,' one enters and dwells in the base of nothingness. This is the sixth emancipation.

"Having completely surmounted the base of nothingness, one enters and dwells in the base of neither perception nor non-perception. This is the seventh emancipation.

"Having completely surmounted the base of neither perception nor non-perception, one enters and dwells in the cessation of perception and feeling. This is the eighth emancipation.

36. "Ānanda, when a bhikkhu attains these eight emancipations in forward order, in reverse order, and in both forward order and reverse order; when he attains them and emerges from them wherever he wants, in whatever way he wants, and for as long as he wants, and when, through the destruction of the cankers, he

here and now enters and dwells in the cankerless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, having realized it for himself with direct knowledge, then he is called a bhikkhu who is liberated in both ways. And, Ānanda, there is no other liberation in both ways higher or more sublime than this one.”

Thus spoke the Exalted One. The Venerable Ānanda, being pleased, rejoiced in the Exalted One’s words.

Here ends the Mahānidāna Sutta.