

The Exposition of Non-Conflict (Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta) (Majjhima Nikāya No. 139)

A Discourse of the Buddha

Translated by

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The Exposition of Non-Conflict (Araṇavibhaṅga sutta)

Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli

Thus I heard.

On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattṥi in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: "Bhikkhus." "Venerable Sir" they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. "Bhikkhus, I shall give you an exposition of the state of non-conflict. Listen and heed well what I shall say."

"Even so, Venerable Sir" the bhikkhus replied. The Blessed One said this:

3. "A man should not pursue sensual desires which are low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and connected with harm; and he should not pursue self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble and connected with harm.

The Middle Way avoiding both these extremes has been discovered by the Perfect One (*Tathāgata*) giving sight, giving knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

A man should know what it is to over-rate and what it is to under-rate and knowing both, he should neither over-rate nor under-rate but should speak only Dhamma.

He should know how to define pleasure,¹ and knowing that, he should pursue his own pleasure.

He should not utter covert speech, and he should not utter overt sharp speech.

He should speak unhurriedly, not hurriedly.

He should not insist on local language, and he should not override normal usage.

This is the summary of the Exposition of the State of Non-conflict.

4. "A man should not pursue sensual desires, which are low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, and connected with harm; and he should not pursue self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble and connected with harm." So it was said. And with reference to what was this said?

Such pursuit of enjoyment of one whose pleasure is linked to sensual desires, low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and connected with harm is a state² beset by pain, by vexation, by despair and by fever, and it is the wrong way. Disengagement from such pursuit of enjoyment of one whose pleasure is linked to sensual desires, low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, and connected with harm is a state without pain, without vexation, without despair and without fever, and it is the right way.

Such pursuit of self-mortification, painful, ignoble and connected with pain, is a state beset by pain, by vexation, by despair and by fever, and it is the wrong way. Disengagement from such pursuit of self-mortification, painful, ignoble and connected

¹ *Sukha*; alternative rendering: 'happiness.'

² The Pali term used here is *dhamma* in the sense of 'thing,' 'circumstance.'

with harm, is a state without pain, without vexation, without despair and without fever, and it is the right way.

So it was with reference to this that it was said, “A man should not pursue sensual desires which are low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and connected with harm; and he should not pursue self-mortification which is painful, ignoble and connected with harm.”

5. “The Middle Way avoiding both these extremes has been discovered by the Perfect One (*Tathāgata*), giving sight, giving knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.” So it was said, and with reference to what was this said?

It is precisely this Noble Eightfold Path—that is to say: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

So it was with reference to this that it was said “The Middle Way ... to Nibbāna.”

6. “A man should know what it is to over-rate what it is to underrate³ and knowing both, he should neither over-rate nor under-rate but should speak only Dhamma”; so it was said. And with reference to what was this said?

7. So, bhikkhus, how does there come to be over-rating and under-rating and failure to speak only Dhamma?

When a man says “All those engaged in such pursuit of enjoyment, which pleasure is linked to sensual desires, low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and connected with harm, beset by pain, by vexation, by despair and by fever, and they have entered upon the wrong way,” he thus under-rates some.

When a man says, “All those not engaged in such pursuit of enjoyment which pleasure is linked to sensual desires, low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and connected with harm, are without pain, without vexation without despair, and without fever, and they have entered upon the right way,” he thus over-rates some.

When a man says, “All those engaged in such pursuit of self-mortification, painful, ignoble, and connected with harm, are beset by pain, by vexation, by despair and by fever, and they have entered upon the wrong way,” then he under-rates some.

When a man says “All those not engaged in such pursuit of self-mortification, painful, ignoble and connected with harm, are without pain, without vexation, without despair and without fever, and they have entered upon the right way,” he thus over-rates some.

When a man says, “All those who have not abandoned the fetter of being⁴ are beset by pain, by vexation, by despair and by fever, and have entered upon the wrong way,” he thus under-rates some.

When a man says, “All those who have abandoned the fetter of being are without pain, without vexation, without despair, and without fever, and have entered upon the right way,” he thus over-rates some.

³ Other translations proposed by the Venerable Ñāṇamoli: commend, over-praise, condemn, detract.

⁴ *Bhava-saṃyojana*. The fetter which binds to “being” or existence, is craving (*taṇhā*).

This is how there comes to be overrating and underrating⁵ and failure to speak only Dhamma⁶.

8. And bhikkhus, how does there come to be neither overrating nor underrating but speaking only Dhamma?

When a man does not say, "All those engaged in such pursuit of self-mortification, painful, ignoble, and connected with harm, are beset by pain, by vexation, by despair and by fever, and they have entered upon the wrong way," and says instead "It is the "being engaged" that is a state beset by pain, by vexation, by despair and by fever, and it is the wrong way," then he speaks only Dhamma.

When a man does not say, "All those not engaged in such pursuit of self-mortification, painful, ignoble, and connected with harm, are without pain, without vexation, without despair and without fever, and they have entered upon the right way," and says instead, "It is the *not* being engaged that is a state without pain, without vexation, without despair and without fever, and it is the right way," then he speaks only Dhamma.

When a man does not say, "All those who have not abandoned the fetter of being are beset by pain, by vexation, by despair and by fever, and have entered upon the wrong way," and says instead "As long as the fetter of being is "unabandoned", being is "unabandoned," then he speaks only Dhamma.

When a man does not say, "All those who have abandoned the fetter of being are without pain, without vexation, without despair and without fever, and have entered upon the right way," and says instead, "When the fetter of being has been abandoned, being is abandoned," then he speaks only Dhamma.

So it was with reference to this that it was said, "A man should know what it is to over-rate and what it is to under-rate and knowing both, he should neither over-rate nor under-rate but should speak only Dhamma."

9. "He should know how to define pleasure, and knowing that, he should pursue his own pleasure': so it was said. And with reference to what was this said?

Bhikkhus, there are these five cords of sensual desire. What are the five?

Forms, cognizable through the eye, that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust.

⁵ The discourse illustrates "overrating and underrating" by mentioning sweeping statements about ideas. But it can be assumed that this warning of the Buddha also extends to exaggerated favourable or unfavourable opinions about persons, which is quite frequently a source of conflict. This application of the two terms is implied in the connotations of the two Pāli words as given in the footnote to § 6 of the Discourse. It is also implied in the following commentarial remarks, of which we give here a free and expanded version:

One should not overrate a person, being induced to do so by worldly motivations, for instance, out of affection (or liking: *anurodha*) (or out of calculated flattery). Nor should one underrate a person, being driven to do so by worldly motivations, for instance, dislike (*virodha*) for the person (or jealousy). All these motivations are mental defilements (*kilesa*), namely greed and aversion respectively. The Sub-Commentary adds that this does not refer to praise and criticism when they are based on facts and are free from the partiality of like and dislike.

It may be added that also the over-rating or under-rating of oneself may become a cause of inner conflict as well as of outer conflict.

⁶ *Speak only Dhamma.*—The commentators explain: one should speak only factually (*sabhāvaṃ eva*), as things actually are (*yaṭhābhūta-sabhāvaṃ eva*), without personal prejudices (*kassaci puggalassa anādesa-karaṇa-vasena*).

Sounds cognizable through the ear, that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust.

Odours cognizable through the nose, that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust.

Flavours cognizable through the tongue, that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust.

Tangibles, cognizable through the body, that are wished for, desired, agreeable and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust.

These are the five cords of sensual desire.

Now, the pleasure and joy that arise owing to these five cords of sensual desire are called pleasure in sensual desire, which is pleasure in filth, coarse pleasure, ignoble pleasure. I say of this kind of pleasure that it should not be cultivated, that it should not be developed, that it should not be repeatedly practised, and that it should be feared.

Now, bhikkhus, quite secluded from sensual desires, secluded from unprofitable *dhammas*, I entered upon and abode in the first *jhāna* which is accompanied by initial and sustained application, with happiness and (bodily) pleasure born of seclusion.

With the stilling of initial and sustained application, I entered upon and abode in the second *jhāna*, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind, without initial application and without sustained application, with happiness and pleasure born of concentration.

With the fading as well of happiness I abode in equanimity, mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, I entered upon and abode in the third *jhāna*, on which account Noble Ones announce, "He has pleasure abiding who has equanimity and is mindful."

With the abandoning of (bodily) pleasure and pain and with the previous disappearance of (mental) joy and grief I entered upon and abode in the fourth *jhāna*, which has neither pain nor pleasure and has purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.

This is called the pleasure of renunciation, which is pleasure of seclusion, pleasure of peace, pleasure of enlightenment. I say of this kind of pleasure that it should be cultivated, that it should be developed, that it should be repeatedly practised and that it should not be feared.

So it was with reference to this that it was said, "He should know how to define pleasure, and knowing that, he should pursue his own pleasure."

10. "He should not utter covert speech, and he should not utter overt, harsh speech." So it was said. And with reference to what was this said?

Here, bhikkhus, when a man knows covert speech to be untrue, incorrect and harmful, he should on no account utter it. When he knows covert speech to be true, correct and harmful, he should try not to utter it. But when he knows covert speech to be true, correct and beneficial, he may utter it, knowing the time to do so.

Here, bhikkhus, when a man knows overt, sharp speech to be untrue, incorrect and harmful, he should on no account utter it. When he knows overt, sharp speech to be true, correct and harmful, he should try not to utter it. But when he knows overt, sharp speech to be true, correct and beneficial, he may utter it, knowing the time to do so.

So it was with reference to this that it was said, "He should not utter covert speech. He should not utter overt, sharp speech."

11. 'He should speak unhurriedly, not hurriedly'. So it was said. And with reference to what was this said? Here, bhikkhus, when a man speaks hurriedly, his body gets tired, his mind excited, his voice strained, and his throat hoarse, and the speech of one who speaks hurriedly is indistinct and hard to apprehend.

Here, bhikkhus, when a man speaks unhurriedly, his body does not get tired, or his mind excited, or his voice strained, or his throat hoarse, and the speech of one who speaks unhurriedly is distinct and easy to apprehend.

So it was with reference to this that it was said, "He should speak unhurriedly, not hurriedly."

12. 'He should not insist on local language⁷. He should not override normal usage.' So it was said. And with reference to what was this said?

And how does there come to be insistence on local language and overriding of normal usage?

Here, bhikkhus, in different localities they call the same thing a "dish" (*pāti*) or they call it a "bowl" (*patta*) or they call it a "vessel" (*vittha*) or they call it a "saucer" (*sarava*) or they call it a "pan" (*dhāropa*) or they call it a "pot" (*poṇa*) or they call it a "mug" (*hana*) or they call it a "basin" (*pisīla*). So whatever they call it in such and such a locality, he speaks accordingly, firmly adhering to and insisting on that, "Only this is true, anything else is wrong." This is how there comes to be insistence on local language and overriding of normal usage.

And how does there come to be non-insistence on local language and non-overriding of normal usage?

Here, bhikkhus, in different localities ... they call it a "basin" (*pisīla*). So whatever they call it in such and such a locality, he speaks accordingly without adhering, (thus): "These Venerable Ones, it seems, are speaking with reference to this." This is how there comes to be non-insistence on local language and non-overriding of normal usage.

So it was with reference to this that it was said, "He should not insist on local language. He should not override normal usage."

13. Here, bhikkhus, such pursuit of the enjoyment of one whose pleasure is linked to sensual desires—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and connected with harm—is a state beset by pain, by vexation, by despair, and by fever, and it is the wrong way; therefore it is a state with conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, not being engaged in such pursuit of the enjoyment of one whose pleasure is linked to sensual desires—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and connected with harm—is a state without pain, without vexation, without despair and without fever, and it is the right way; therefore it is a state without conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, such pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble and connected with harm—is a state beset by pain ... and it is the wrong way; therefore it is a state with conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, not being engaged in such pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble and connected with harm—is a state without pain ... and it is the right way; therefore it is a state without conflict.

⁷ That is, dialect.

Here, bhikkhus, the Middle Way discovered by the Tathāgata, giving sight, giving knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna, is a state without pain... and it is the right way: therefore it is a state without conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, over-rating and under-rating and failure to speak Dhamma is a state beset by pain and it is the wrong way; therefore it is a state with conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, not over-rating nor under-rating and speaking only Dhamma is a state without pain ... and it is the right way; therefore it is a state without conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, the pleasure of sensual desires, which is pleasure in filth, coarse pleasure, ignoble pleasure, is a state beset by pain ... and it is the wrong way; therefore it is a state with conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, the pleasure of renunciation, which is pleasure of seclusion, pleasure of peace, pleasure of enlightenment, is a state without pain ... and it is the right way; therefore it is a state without conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, covert speech that is untrue, incorrect and harmful ... is a state with conflict.

Here, covert speech that is true, correct and harmful is a state with conflict.

Here, covert speech that is true, correct and beneficial ... is a state without conflict.

Here, overt, sharp speech that is untrue, incorrect and harmful is a state with conflict.

Here, overt, sharp speech that is true, correct and harmful is a state with conflict.

Here, overt, sharp speech that is true, correct and beneficial ... is a state without conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, the speech of one that hurries is a state beset by pain ... with conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, the speech of one who does not hurry is a state without pain ... without conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, insistence on local language and overriding normal usage is a state beset by pain ... with conflict.

Here, bhikkhus, non-insistence on local language and non-overriding of normal usage is a state without pain without vexation, without despair and without fever, and it is the right way; therefore it is a state without conflict.

So, bhikkhus, you should train thus: we shall know the state with conflict and we shall know the state without conflict, and knowing these, we shall enter upon the way without conflict.

Now, bhikkhus, Subhūti is a clansman who has entered upon the way without conflict".⁸

⁸ *Commentary and Sub-Commentary*: The Buddha, the Venerable Sāriputta and other disciples, in their instructions, sometimes commended or censured a monk for the sake of guiding and disciplining him. But the Venerable Subhūti refrained in his Dhamma talks from such personal references, limiting himself to saying that, "This is the wrong path" and "That is the right path." Therefore the Buddha singled out Subhūti by declaring him to be "the foremost of those dwelling in non-conflict (*araṇavihārinam*)" (AN 1). Also at the end of the present Discourse, he speaks of him as one who "has entered the practice-path of non-conflict" (*araṇa-paṭipadā*).

Subhūti was the younger brother of Anāthapiṇḍika. He attained sainthood on the basis of *mettā-jhāna*, the meditative absorption reached by the cultivation of loving-kindness. He could enter into *mettā-jhāna* with ease, even while standing at house-doors collecting alms food. As, in that way, he bestowed highest merit on the donors, he was declared by the Buddha as being foremost in another respect too, i.e. among

This is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were delighted and they rejoiced in the Blessed One's words.

Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta 139

Some Thoughts on Non-Conflict

Bhikkhu Khantipālo

Who does not wish to live without conflict? But wishes are not enough. If we desire the maximum peace here in this life and the minimum discord then we have to set up the conditions producing it. Peacefulness or non-conflict is not a situation which can arise without appropriate conditions. It is true that it may "by chance" occur but then it fades away again, usually rather quickly—and we are back with our conflicts again. Of course, it was not "by chance" that it occurred for a time in our lives, but as to *why* it happened we are no wiser and so cannot repeat the situation.

One has to try to think in terms of *cause-and-effect* (*hetu-phala*), which, one would think, should not be too difficult. After all, this is the foundation of all modern science and of a thousand ordinary things which we are inclined to take for granted. We press a switch and an engine roars into life. All—cause and effect. But though we apply cause-effect thinking to outside things quite well, we are less successful in applying the same principle to our "own" minds. We are greedy, envious, quarrelsome or whatever, and yet expect to be happy.

Now, happiness is an effect. For it to occur, the necessary causes must be present. This is largely what the Buddha's Teaching is all about. You like pain, grief, despair? No? Then do not produce the causes of them. You want peace, happiness, non-conflict? Of course! Then take good note of the conditions which produce them, listed by the Buddha at the beginning of the Araṇavibhaṅga sutta.

A quick glance through this list seems to show a rather miscellaneous collection but they are all united in one matter: when practised, non-conflict is the result.

What follows here is some reflection upon, and explanation of, these factors, why they bring about non-conflict and why the absence of them and presence of their opposites leaves us open to all kinds of troubles and difficulties.

In this type of sutta giving an "exposition" (*vibhaṅga*), a summary comes first of the contents which are afterwards described at length. The first item is nearly the same as the opening of the Buddha's first discourse, "Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dhamma", but there is one significant difference. In that discourse addressed to the five ascetics who would afterwards become the first Bhikkhus, the Buddha spoke of "two extremes which those who go forth should not practise." Here, however, the Buddha though addressing Bhikkhus just says "A man should not pursue sensual desires ..."

Now lay people will find this a bit difficult because much of the pleasure of their lives comes from the gratification of sensual desires. One likes to see beautiful forms and sights, one enjoys beautiful music, one delights in fragrance and craves for fine tastes while one seeks for pleasant tangibles as well. When one gets them, that is the *gratification* of sensual desires. But there is the *danger*, in them too—that one does not get what one wants (*dukkha*) or one gets what one does not want (*dukkha*), because then instead of pleasure arising, aversion and anger are liable to

those worthy of gifts (*dakkiṇeyyānaṃ*).

manifest. And there is more *danger* in them; they are all impermanent, transient, and subject to arising and passing away and so not satisfactory (*dukkha*). When one relies on them for happiness then one should realise their inherent nature, otherwise one suffers too the *disappointment* of sensual desires (*dukkha*). They are always glittering there before one's eyes, rich in promise of complete satisfaction, yet when one has obtained or enjoyed them and they are finished, one finds them just tinsel, just glitter.

So the pursuit of sensual desires does not lead to internal peace, but then neither does it make for peace in society. If everyone were to go all out for each one of their desires, chaos would reign. And as it is, with the "fulfilment" of desires encouraged commercially and psychologically, there is trouble enough. Desires, in fact mean conflicts. My desires and your desires may be quite different and we are each one of us quite sure that our own desires are the "right" ones, so there is bound to be conflict. The more desires people have, the more conflict is produced in society, as the developed countries of this world show so clearly. non-conflict then, goes with the way of renunciation and giving up—not with the way of getting and gain. But how can this apply to a lay person's life? Desires which will cause the strengthening of unwholesome mental states should be gradually given up by the power of Dhamma-practice. Desires, which are really unnecessary for life, just extravagance or showiness, should be abandoned as soon as one is aware of their real purpose. But those desires for necessary things which are moderate and reasonable cannot be sacrificed while the household life is lived. This leaves a good deal for individual judgement, of course, but almost everyone has some desires in which they could well cease to indulge. Renunciation of these things becomes easy as one matures in Dhamma, just as giving up playing at mud-pies becomes quite natural as children grow up. Therefore renunciation should not be forced or unnatural which would be one extreme, nor should one just let things slide, which is the other.

Some people instead of growing into renunciation perform a violent about-face. In the past they had been very indulgent sensualists and then, because of sudden "conversion" or guilt, they suddenly swing over to self mortification. This is the reason why this topic follows in the sutta upon the pursuit of sensual desires.

There are many accounts of this change, notably among "Saints" of the Christian Churches, who seem to have had little psychological insight as to the true nature of their change of life. When sensual desires are pursued, the evil root of greed directs the heart, but with the sudden conversion experiences (in which such ingredients as fear of God's Wrath, everlasting hellish torment and guilt and remorse all play their part), the evil root of aversion takes charge. This manifests as hatred of pleasure—in others as well as in oneself, hatred of oneself—as a sinner who will be damned, and hatred of beauty—which tempts one's now virtuous and straightened self.

All this is very unwholesome indeed. In many ways it is better to be an indulgent sensualist rather than a destructive self-hater. The former, however selfish he is, at least has some pleasure and may not cause others too much misery, but the latter neither enjoys himself nor permits others to do so. *Greed* can be accompanied by pleasure but aversion always goes along with *dukkha*.

But whether a person is ruled by greed or aversion, bad kamma is made. And bad, unwholesome kamma in time bears the fruits of *dukkha*, mental and physical. Therefore, both these courses are labelled in the sutta "the wrong way." Immediately after this section, follows "The Middle Way avoiding both these extremes ..." In what sense is it the middle? Does this mean halfway between greed and aversion, a sort of neutral compromise? The term "Middle Way" is used for the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path because it transcends all extremes—of views, of mental development and of moral conduct. Due to the presence of various defilements

in the mind it is easy to go to extremes and difficult to hold to a perfectly balanced course which does not depart from truth. The Noble Eightfold Path is such a perfectly balanced course and it can be tested in every aspect to see whether or not it adheres to truth. But this is a whole subject in itself for which we have no space here.⁹

Now we come to the subject of over-rating, under-rating and speaking only Dhamma. This long section is upon the use of correct terminology. The Dhamma is precise, it is the precision associated nowadays with technical and scientific subjects. It is in fact a technical and precise study of the mind and its workings, and how actions of body and speech arise dependently. Therefore, the formulation of Dhamma is important and words should be used carefully if a correct account of Dhamma is to be given. In particular, loose or ambiguous statements should be avoided, as the Buddha himself does. None of his words are hazy or admit of many interpretations, a great contrast to other religious "Classics" such as the *Tao Te King*, the *Bhagavad Gītā* or the New Testament.

Paragraph seven of the sutta gives us examples of loose generalities in which there is under-rating or over-rating, which is a form of going to extremes and so, a failure to speak what is Dhamma or Truth. Sweeping statements always very popular with people, certainly cause conflicts. People take exception to such wide generalities which are not true when closely examined, or only true, given certain conditions. If one wants to live without conflict, therefore, these types of statements should be avoided.

It is not for sweeping statements that the Buddha is famous, but for his analytic procedure. He was known as a *vibhajjavādī*, one who taught analytically, as illustrated in the present sutta where he analyses the conditions for non-conflict. And he does not only condemn broad generalities but in the following paragraphs shows how true statements should be phrased so as to avoid over-rating, under-rating and not speaking Dhamma.

The examples given here are interesting since sweeping condemnations and commendations involving masses of people are put aside by the Buddha in favour of pinpointing precisely what is right or wrong—the *dhamma* (or mental factor) "not being engaged" or "being engaged." It is not "all those people" who are wrong or right, but certain very exact mental attitudes; "being engaged" here is another way of saying "attachment"—and attachment (*upādāna*) always brings *dukkha*. "Not being engaged" on the other hand, is the same as "detachment," a mental state which will enhance non-conflict. In the case of the last pair, in both paragraphs seven and eight, which concern "the fetter of being", in the first case one has again an inaccurate formulation: "All those ..." but in the second the formulation is precise and cannot be misunderstood:

"As long as the fetter of being is "unabandoned", being is "unabandoned" and "When the fetter of being has been abandoned, being is abandoned." What lucid and wonderful depths of Dhamma these few precise words hold!

When one speaks in this way then one speaks according to Dhamma without distortion: Undistorted Dhamma is a great aid to non-conflict.

And with non-conflict we come back to the basic problem of happiness or "pleasure" (*sukha*) as Venerable Ñāṇamoli renders it. "Knowing how to define pleasure" means being clear in one's mind as to what actually produces untainted satisfaction, un-regretted happiness. First, the Buddha runs through the formula defining the "five cords (note the bondage inherent in this word) of sensual desire," "that are wished for, desired and provocative of lust." We have already outlined some thoughts upon these in connection with the first subject dealt with in the sutta. But the Buddha adds some words describing these desires and pleasures which give us a

⁹ See *The Eightfold Path and its Factors Explained* (The *Maggaṅgadīpāni* of the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw), Wheel No. 245-247 from B.P.S. Kandy, and *The Four Noble Truths*, (Wheel 34/35) B.P.S. Kandy.

pause: “pleasure in filth, coarse pleasure, ignoble pleasure.” This may seem too strong for many people, especially when it applies to some “innocent” and aesthetic diversion such as listening to inspiring music. How can this be called “filth” and so on? Of course, it depends on one’s scale of values. The higher aesthetic pleasures seem to be the peak of subtle enjoyment, until one has meditated, until one has gained jhāna.

The four jhānas, which are described in outline, completely transcend the limitations of sensual aesthetics. They do not require an exterior object for stimulating the senses, nor do they require the senses to be active. Thus they surpass sensual experience, even the finest, since they cannot cease because of the cessation of a sensual object but only because one withdraws from meditation, and since the senses not being active, the mind becomes brilliantly and forcefully one-pointed. The objects of jhāna are internal and thus much more easily controlled than those of sense-stimulation. From the viewpoint of a jhāna-gainer (*jhānalābhi*) the sense-pleasures, however subtle, appear like wavering shadows so easily displaced. And the fact that sensual desires are “provocative of lust” and therefore involve the activities of the three roots of unwholesomeness—greed, aversion and delusion—is sufficient reason for labelling them “pleasure in filth.” It is in points like this that one sees clearly the need to distinguish who the Buddha was speaking to. And on this occasion it was to Bhikkhus, those who have left behind the household life and its associated sensual pleasures. They can appreciate the use of such labels while it may be more difficult for lay people to do so.

While the happiness (or pleasure) derived from the senses should not be cultivated, that which arises in jhāna should be. The first is to be feared but the second is not. What does this mean? Fear arises dependent upon the unstable nature of the sense-objects and from the desire to possess, to make mine, to support my sense of self. This is all an elaborate fabrication of the mind. What I call “myself” is a collection of changing physical and mental processes in which no abiding “self or soul” can be found. All other existent objects are also changing processes, some with sentience—other beings, some without it. They cannot be really made “mine.” So fear lurks behind this complicated facade, for just as the ordinary liar fears that his inventions may be seen through, so the ego or self fears that the truth might be seen—and thereby dissolve it away. Then fear arises too from that very nature that things have—impermanence, that they may age, break, disappear, get lost or stolen. In this way fear lurks inseparable from sensual desires and their objects.

From knowing how to define pleasure and its true pursuit, we pass to speech that conduces to non-conflict. “Covert” speech includes words having a meaning different from what they seem to convey, a concealed or secret meaning. Now it is noticeable that the Buddha refrained from concealed and secret methods of teaching (although there are some who teach in his name, “esoteric Buddhism”) and condemned religious secrecy.¹⁰ His words and methods are straightforward and there is nothing “hidden” for favoured disciples to discover. In this he differs from many Indian teachers who have passed on their esoteric secrets to their favourite disciples. Religious secrecy, he perceived, easily became the shelter for the fraud, for the credulous and for all manner of priest craft which he as one intent on laying bare the truth, avoided, and required his disciples to avoid.

Covert speech has been classified by the Buddha into three:

1. Untrue and harmful: utter on no account;
2. True and harmful: try not to utter it;
3. True and beneficial: utter it knowing the right time.

¹⁰ See *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Book of the Threes, No. 129.

The first is lies and slander breaking the fourth Precept, the second is matters which, though true, lead to harm, while with the third, one should have wisdom to know when it should and should not be said. For instance, true and beneficial matters can, if spoken at the wrong time, be embarrassing to some people.

So the Buddha has allowed covert speech which is true and beneficial, as when perhaps only a hint is needed to correct someone. Similarly, the Buddha allowed overt, sharp speech which is both true and beneficial. This can be illustrated by a severe reprimand which can turn some person away from evil and back to practising Dhamma. But overt, sharp speech which is untrue and harmful, as spoken by an angry man trying to lay the blame on someone else, or that which is true and harmful—as a reprimand might be if spoken at the wrong time or in the wrong company, neither of these should be employed.

Other kinds of speech too help or hinder peacefulness. Consider the impetuous person who rushes into saying things but when only halfway through changes his mind so that his speech rushes off elsewhere. People who speak hurriedly tire themselves out and are tiresome to others, besides showing a great deal of their confused mental state in their way of talking. The Buddhist ideal in speaking is shown in this sutta—speaking unhurriedly in a well-considered and mindful way. The Buddha gives six advantages of this and even then does not exhaust the range of benefits. Steady, mindful speech is related to a “mindful mind” and when one cultivates this type of speaking it conduces to more mindfulness.

With “local language” and “normal usage” the Buddha touches upon some other important points favouring non-conflict. In northern India then, as now, there were many dialects and sub-languages. If someone insists on using special dialect forms their rigidity is a kind of dogmatism founded on pride: “Only this is true; anything else is wrong.” Conforming to normal usage straightens out a number of difficulties for a speaker. The Buddha always recommended the use of language which everyone could understand. Thus Pāli bears the marks of being a spoken and popular tongue, which has never been true of Sanskrit. The Buddha wished all to understand his words and so used popular and normal forms of speech.

The Discourse on Non-conflict closes with a long passage showing why some factors lead to conflict and others to non-conflict. All that remains for us is to select carefully those factors which will promote non-conflict in our own lives, until the very highest aspect of non-conflict is won in our own hearts, as was the case with the Venerable Subhūti Thera who was an Arahant.

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