

## SKILL IN QUESTIONS

“And what is the result of stress? There are some cases in which a person overcome with stress, his mind exhausted, grieves, mourns, laments, beats his breast, & becomes bewildered. Or one overcome with stress, his mind exhausted, comes to search outside, ‘Who knows a way or two to stop this stress?’ I tell you, monks, that stress results either in bewilderment or in search.” — AN 6:63

[Numbers for the passages correspond to those in the book, *Skill in Questions*.]

§ 1. “There are these four ways of answering questions. Which four? There are questions that should be answered categorically. There are questions that should be answered analytically. There are questions that should be answered with cross-questioning. There are questions that should be put aside. These are the four ways of answering questions.” — AN 4:42

### Categorical Answers

§ 21. As Ven. Ānanda was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, “I say categorically, Ānanda, that bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct should not be done.”

“Given that the Blessed One has declared, lord, that bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, & mental misconduct should not be done, what drawbacks can one expect when doing what should not be done?”

“... One can fault oneself; observant people, on close examination, criticize one; one’s bad reputation gets spread about; one dies confused; and—on the breakup of the body, after death—one reappears in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell....

“I say categorically, Ānanda, that good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct should be done.”

“Given that the Blessed One has declared, lord, that good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, & good mental conduct should be done, what rewards can one expect when doing what should be done?”

“... One doesn’t fault oneself; observant people, on close examination, praise one; one’s good reputation gets spread about; one dies unconfused; and—on the breakup of the body, after death—one reappears in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.” — AN 2:18

§ 43. “This is the way leading to discernment: when visiting a contemplative or brahman, to ask: ‘What is skillful, venerable sir? What is unskillful? What is blameworthy? What is blameless? What should be cultivated? What should not be cultivated? What, having been done by me, will be for my long-term harm & suffering? Or what, having been done by me, will be for my long-term welfare & happiness?’” — MN 135

§ 22. “Poṭṭhapāda, I have taught and declared some teachings to be categorical, and some teachings to be non-categorical. And which are the teachings that I have taught and declared to be non-categorical? ‘*The cosmos is eternal*’ I have taught and declared to be a non-categorical teaching. ‘*The cosmos is not eternal*’... ‘*The cosmos is finite*’... ‘*The cosmos is infinite*’... ‘*The soul & the body are the same*’... ‘*The soul is one*’

*thing and the body another'... 'After death a Tathāgata exists'... 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist'... 'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist'... 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist' I have taught and declared to be a non-categorical teaching. And why have I taught and declared these teachings to be non-categorical? Because they are not conducive to the goal, are not conducive to the Dhamma, are not basic to the holy life. They don't lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding. That's why I have taught and declared them to be non-categorical.*

*"And which have I taught and declared to be categorical teachings? 'This is stress' I have taught and declared to be a categorical teaching. 'This is the origination of stress'... 'This is the cessation of stress'... 'This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress' I have taught and declared to be a categorical teaching. And why have I taught and declared these teachings to be categorical? Because they are conducive to the goal, conducive to the Dhamma, and basic to the holy life. They lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding. That's why I have taught and declared them to be categorical." — DN 9*

### **Analytical Answers**

§ 62. Then Ven. Ānanda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Ānanda, every habit & practice, every life, every holy life that is followed as of essential worth: Is every one of them fruitful?"

"Lord, that is not [to be answered] with a categorical answer."

"Very well then, Ānanda, give an analytical answer."

"When—by following a life of habit & practice, a life, a holy life that is followed as of essential worth—one's unskillful qualities increase while one's skillful qualities decline: that sort of habit & practice, life, holy life that is followed as of essential worth is fruitless. But when—by following a life of habit & practice, a life, a holy life that is followed as of essential worth—one's unskillful qualities decline while one's skillful qualities increase: that sort of habit & practice, life, holy life that is followed as of essential worth is fruitful."

That is what Ven. Ānanda said, and the Teacher approved. Then Ven. Ānanda, (realizing,) "The Teacher approves of me," got up from his seat and, having bowed down to the Blessed One and circumambulating him, left.

Then not long after Ven. Ānanda had left, the Blessed One said to the monks, "Monks, Ānanda is still in training, but it would not be easy to find his equal in discernment." — AN 3:79

§ 66. As he was sitting to one side, Potaliputta the wanderer said to Ven. Samiddhi, "Face to face with Gotama the contemplative have I heard this, face to face have I learned this: 'Bodily action is barren, verbal action is barren, only mental action is true. And there is an attainment in which, on being attained, one doesn't feel anything.'"

"Don't say that, friend. Don't misrepresent the Blessed One. For it's not good to misrepresent the Blessed One, and the Blessed One would not say that: 'Bodily action is barren, verbal action is barren, only mental action is true.' But there is, friend, an attainment in which, on being attained, one doesn't feel anything."

"How long has it been, friend Samiddhi, since you went forth (into homelessness)?"

"Not long, friend. Three years."

"Then what now should I say about the elder monks, when a junior monk would suppose that his Teacher is to be defended in this way? Having intentionally done an action with body, with speech, or with mind, what does one experience?"

"Having intentionally done an action with body, with speech, or with mind, one experiences stress."

Then Potaliputta the wanderer neither delighted in nor scorned Ven. Samiddhi's words. Neither delighting nor scorning, he got up from his seat and left.

[Ven. Samiddhi then went to Ven. Ānanda to report this discussion. Ven. Ānanda then went, together with Ven. Samiddhi, to see the Blessed One and told him what had happened.]

When this was said, the Blessed One said, "I do not recall even having seen Potaliputta the wanderer, much less having that sort of discussion. And his question, which deserved an analytical answer, has been given a categorical answer by this worthless man, Samiddhi."

When this was said, Ven. Udāyin said to the Blessed One, "But what if Ven. Samiddhi was speaking in reference to this: 'Whatever is felt comes under stress'?"

When this was said, the Blessed One said to Ven. Ānanda, "Look, Ānanda, at how this worthless Udāyin interrupts. I knew just now that he would interrupt in an inappropriate way. From the very beginning, Potaliputta the wanderer was asking about the three kinds of feeling. When this worthless Samiddhi was asked by him in this way, he should have answered, 'Having intentionally done—with body, with speech, or with mind—an action that is to be experienced as pleasure, one experiences pleasure. Having intentionally done—with body, with speech, or with mind—an action that is to be experienced as pain, one experiences pain. Having intentionally done—with body, with speech, or with mind—an action that is to be experienced as neither-pleasure-nor-pain, one experiences neither-pleasure-nor-pain. Answering this way, this worthless Samiddhi would have rightly answered Potaliputta the wanderer.' — MN 136

§ 69. Then, when the Blessed One had eaten and had removed his hand from his bowl, Prince Abhaya took a lower seat and sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, would the Tathāgata say words that are unendearing & displeasing to others?"

"Prince, there is no categorical answer to that."

"Then right here, lord, the Nigaṇṭhas are destroyed."

"But prince, why do you say, 'Then right here, lord, the Nigaṇṭhas are destroyed'?"

"Just yesterday, lord, I went to Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta and... he said to me... 'Come now, prince. Go to Gotama the contemplative and on arrival say this: "Venerable sir, would the Tathāgata say words that are unendearing & displeasing to others?" ... Just as if a two-horned chestnut were stuck in a man's throat: he would not be able to swallow it down or spit it up. In the same way, when Gotama the contemplative is asked this two-pronged question by you, he won't be able to swallow it down or spit it up.'"

Now at that time a baby boy was lying face-up on the prince's lap. So the Blessed One said to the prince, "What do you think, prince: If this young boy, through your own negligence or that of the nurse, were to take a stick or a piece of gravel into its mouth, what would you do?"

"I would take it out, lord. If I couldn't get it out right away, then holding its head in my left hand and crooking a finger of my right, I would take it out, even if it meant drawing blood. Why is that? Because I have sympathy for the young boy."

“In the same way, prince:

[1] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial [or: not connected with the goal], unendearing & displeasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

[2] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, unendearing & displeasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

[3] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, but unendearing & displeasing to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them.

[4] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, but endearing & pleasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

[5] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, but endearing & pleasing to others, he doesn’t say them.

[6] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing & pleasing to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them. Why is that? Because the Tathāgata has sympathy for living beings.” — MN 58

### Cross-questioning

§ 73. “Monks, there are these two assemblies. Which two? The assembly trained in bombast and not in cross-questioning, and the assembly trained in cross-questioning and not in bombast.

“And which is the assembly trained in bombast and not in cross-questioning?

“There is the case where in any assembly when the discourses of the Tathāgata—deep, deep in their meaning, transcendent, connected with emptiness—are recited, the monks don’t listen, don’t lend ear, don’t set their hearts on knowing them; don’t regard them as worth grasping or mastering. But when discourses that are literary works—the works of poets, artful in sound, artful in expression, the work of outsiders, words of disciples—are recited, they listen, they lend ear, they set their hearts on knowing them; they regard them as worth grasping & mastering. Yet when they have mastered that Dhamma, they don’t cross-question one another about it, don’t dissect: ‘How is this? What is the meaning of this?’ They don’t make open what isn’t open, don’t make plain what isn’t plain, don’t dispel doubt on its various doubtful points. This is called an assembly trained in bombast, not in cross-questioning.

“And which is the assembly trained in cross-questioning and not in bombast?

“There is the case where in any assembly when discourses that are literary works—the works of poets, artful in sound, artful in rhetoric, the work of outsiders, words of disciples—are recited, the monks don’t listen, don’t lend ear, don’t set their hearts on knowing them; don’t regard them as worth grasping or mastering. But when the discourses of the Tathāgata—deep, deep in their meaning, transcendent, connected with emptiness—are recited, they listen, they lend ear, they set their hearts on knowing them; they regard them as worth grasping & mastering. And when they have mastered that Dhamma, they cross-question one another about it and dissect it: ‘How is this? What is the meaning of this?’ They make open what isn’t open, make plain what isn’t plain, dispel doubt on its various doubtful points. This is called an assembly trained in cross-questioning and not in bombast.” — AN 2:46

§ 91. I have heard that on one occasion Ven. Ānanda was staying in Kosambī at Ghosita’s park. Then a certain householder, a disciple of the Fatalists [Ājīvakas], went to him and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting

there he said to Ven. Ānanda, “Among us, sir, whose Dhamma is well-taught? Who has practiced well in this world? Who in the world is well-gone?”

“Very well then, householder, I will cross-question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. Now, what do you think? Those who teach a Dhamma for the abandoning of passion, for the abandoning of aversion, for the abandoning of delusion: Is their Dhamma well-taught or not? Or how does this strike you?”

“Sir, those who teach a Dhamma for the abandoning of passion, for the abandoning of aversion, for the abandoning of delusion: Their Dhamma is well-taught. That’s how it strikes me.”

“And what do you think, householder? Those who have practiced for the abandoning of passion, for the abandoning of aversion, for the abandoning of delusion: Have they practiced well in this world or not? Or how does this strike you?”

“Sir, those who have practiced for the abandoning of passion, for the abandoning of aversion, for the abandoning of delusion: They have practiced well in this world. That’s how it strikes me.”

“And what do you think, householder? Those whose passion is abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising; those whose aversion is abandoned... whose delusion is abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising: Are they, in this world, well-gone or not? Or how does this strike you?”

“Sir, those whose passion... aversion... delusion is abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising: They, in this world, are well-gone. That’s how it strikes me.”

“In this way, householder, you have answered yourself. ‘Those who teach a Dhamma for the abandoning of passion, for the abandoning of aversion, for the abandoning of delusion: Their Dhamma is well-taught. Those who have practiced for the abandoning of passion, for the abandoning of aversion, for the abandoning of delusion: They have practiced well in this world. Those whose passion... aversion... delusion is abandoned, its root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising: They, in this world, are well-gone.’”

“How amazing, sir! How astounding! There is neither extolling of one’s own Dhamma nor deprecation of another’s, but just the teaching of the Dhamma in its proper sphere, speaking to the point without mentioning oneself.” — AN 3:73

§ 93. “Lord, when wise nobles or brahmins, householders or contemplatives, having formulated questions, come to the Tathāgata and ask him, does this line of reasoning appear to his awareness beforehand—‘If those who approach me ask this, I—thus asked—will answer in this way’—or does the Tathāgata come up with the answer on the spot?”

“Very well then, prince, I will cross-question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think? Are you skilled in the parts of a chariot?”

“Yes, lord. I am skilled in the parts of a chariot.”

“And what do you think? When people come & ask you, ‘What is the name of this part of the chariot?’ does this line of reasoning appear to your awareness beforehand—‘If those who approach me ask this, I—thus asked—will answer in this way’—or do you come up with the answer on the spot?”

“Lord, I am renowned for being skilled in the parts of a chariot. All the parts of a chariot are well-known to me. I come up with the answer on the spot.”

"In the same way, prince, when wise nobles or brahmans, householders or contemplatives, having formulated questions, come to the Tathāgata and ask him, he comes up with the answer on the spot. Why is that? Because the property of the Dhamma is thoroughly penetrated by the Tathāgata. From his thorough penetration of the property of the Dhamma, he comes up with the answer on the spot." — *MN 58*

§ 112. Then the Blessed One, as soon as he perceived with his awareness the train of thought in Ven. Soṇa's awareness, disappeared from Vulture Peak Mountain—just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm—appeared in the Cool Wood right in front of Ven. Soṇa, and sat down on a prepared seat. Ven. Soṇa, after bowing down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Just now, as you were meditating in seclusion, didn't this train of thought appear to your awareness: 'Of the Blessed One's disciples who have aroused their persistence, I am one, but my mind is not released from effluents.... What if I were to disavow the training, return to the lower life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?'" — "Yes, lord."

"Now, what do you think, Soṇa? Before, when you were a house-dweller, were you skilled at playing the vīna?" — "Yes, lord."

"And what do you think? When the strings of your vīna were too taut, was your vīna in tune & playable?" — "No, lord."

"And what do you think? When the strings of your vīna were too loose, was your vīna in tune & playable?" — "No, lord."

"And what do you think? When the strings of your vīna were neither too taut nor too loose, but tuned to be right on pitch, was your vīna in tune & playable?"

"Yes, lord."

"In the same way, Soṇa, over-aroused persistence leads to restlessness, overly slack persistence leads to laziness. Thus you should determine the right pitch for your persistence, attune the pitch of the (five) faculties (to that), and there pick up your theme."

"Yes, lord," Ven. Soṇa answered the Blessed One.

Then, having given this exhortation to Ven. Soṇa, the Blessed One—as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm—disappeared from the Cool Wood and appeared on Vulture Peak Mountain.

So after that, Ven. Soṇa determined the right pitch for his persistence, attuned the pitch of the (five) faculties (to that), and there picked up his theme. Dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute, he in no long time reached & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now. He knew: "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world." And thus Ven. Soṇa became another one of the arahants. — *AN 6:55*

§ 127. As he was sitting there, Uṇṇabhā the brahman said to Ven. Ānanda: "Master Ānanda, what is the aim of this holy life lived under Gotama the contemplative?"

"Brahman, the holy life is lived under the Blessed One with the aim of abandoning desire."

"Is there a path, is there a practice, for the abandoning of that desire?"

"Yes, there is a path, there is a practice, for the abandoning of that desire."

"What is the path, the practice, for the abandoning of that desire?"

"Brahman, there is the case where a monk develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on desire & the fabrications of exertion. He develops the

base of power endowed with concentration founded on persistence... concentration founded on intent... concentration founded on discrimination & the fabrications of exertion. This, brahman, is the path, this is the practice for the abandoning of that desire."

"If that's so, Master Ānanda, then it's an endless path, and not one with an end, for it's impossible that one could abandon desire by means of desire."

"Very well then, brahman, I will cross-question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think? Didn't you first have desire, thinking, 'I'll go to the park,' and then when you reached the park, wasn't the corresponding desire allayed?"

"Yes, sir." ...

"So it is with an arahant whose effluents are ended, who has reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who is released through right gnosis. Whatever desire he first had for the attainment of arahantship, on attaining arahantship the corresponding desire is allayed.... So what do you think, brahman? Is this an endless path, or one with an end?"

"You're right, Master Ānanda. This is a path with an end, and not an endless one."  
— SN 51:15

§ 135. "Even if a monk is not skilled in the ways of the minds of others [not skilled in reading the minds of others], he should train himself: 'I will be skilled in reading my own mind.'

"And how is a monk skilled in reading his own mind? Imagine a young woman—or man—fond of adornment, examining the image of her own face in a bright, clean mirror or bowl of clear water: If she saw any dirt or blemish there, she would try to remove it. If she saw no dirt or blemish there, she would be pleased, her resolves fulfilled: 'How fortunate I am! How clean I am!' In the same way, a monk's self-examination is very productive in terms of skillful qualities [if he conducts it in this way]: 'Do I usually remain covetous or not? With thoughts of ill will or not? Overcome by sloth & drowsiness or not? Restless or not? Uncertain or gone beyond uncertainty? Angry or not? With soiled thoughts or unsoiled thoughts? With my body aroused or unaroused? Lazy or with persistence aroused? Unconcentrated or concentrated?'

"If, on examination, a monk knows, 'I usually remain covetous, with thoughts of ill will, overcome by sloth & drowsiness, restless, uncertain, angry, with soiled thoughts, with my body aroused, lazy, or unconcentrated,' then he should put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities. Just as when a person whose turban or head was on fire would put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness to put out the fire on his turban or head; in the same way, the monk should put forth extra desire, effort, diligence, endeavor, relentlessness, mindfulness, & alertness for the abandoning of those very same evil, unskillful qualities.

"But if, on examination, a monk knows, 'I usually remain uncovetous, without thoughts of ill will, free of sloth & drowsiness, not restless, gone beyond uncertainty, not angry, with unsoiled thoughts, with my body unaroused, with persistence aroused, & concentrated,' then his duty is to make an effort in establishing ['tuning'] those very same skillful qualities to a higher degree for the ending of effluents." — AN 10:51

§ 140. "What do you think, monks? Is form constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?" — "Stressful, lord."

"And is it valid to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?" — "No, lord."

[Similarly with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness.]

"Thus, monks, any form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen with right discernment as it has come to be: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

[Similarly with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness.]

"Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, 'Released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the group of five monks delighted in the Blessed One's words. And while this explanation was being given, the minds of the group of five monks, through no clinging [not being sustained], were released from effluents. — SN 22:59

§ 144. "There is a manner of reckoning whereby a monk who is a learner, standing at the level of a learner [i.e., a stream-winner, once-returner, or non-returner], can discern that 'I am a learner,' and whereby a monk who is an adept [i.e., an arahant], standing at the level of an adept, can discern that 'I am an adept.'

"And what is the manner of reckoning whereby a monk who is a learner, standing at the level of a learner, can discern that 'I am a learner'? There is the case where a monk is a learner. He discerns, as it has come to be, that '*This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.*' This is a manner of reckoning whereby a monk who is a learner, standing at the level of a learner, can discern that 'I am a learner.'

"Furthermore, the monk who is a learner reflects, 'Is there outside of this [Dhamma & Vinaya] any contemplative or brahman who teaches the true, genuine, & accurate Dhamma like the Blessed One?' And he discerns, 'No, there is no contemplative or brahman outside of this [Dhamma & Vinaya] who teaches the true, genuine, & accurate Dhamma like the Blessed One.' This too is a manner of reckoning whereby a monk who is a learner, standing at the level of a learner, can discern that 'I am a learner.'

"Furthermore, the monk who is a learner discerns the five faculties: the faculty of conviction... persistence... mindfulness... concentration... discernment. Having penetrated them with discernment, he sees what their destiny, excellence, rewards, & consummation are, but he does not dwell touching them with his body. This too is a manner of reckoning whereby a monk who is a learner, standing at the level of a learner, can discern that 'I am a learner.'

"And what is the manner of reckoning whereby a monk who is an adept, standing at the level of an adept, can discern that 'I am an adept'? There is the case where a monk who is an adept discerns the five faculties: the faculty of conviction... persistence... mindfulness... concentration... discernment. Having penetrated them with discernment, he sees what their destiny, excellence, rewards, & consummation are, and he dwells touching them with his body. This is a manner of reckoning

whereby a monk who is an adept, standing at the level of an adept, can discern that 'I am an adept.'

"Furthermore, the monk who is an adept discerns the six sense faculties: the faculty of the eye... ear... nose... tongue... body... intellect. He discerns, 'These six sense faculties will cease entirely, everywhere, & in every way without remainder, and no other set of six sense faculties will arise anywhere or in any way.' This too is a manner of reckoning whereby a monk who is an adept, standing at the level of an adept, can discern that 'I am an adept.'" — SN 48:53

### Questions Put Aside

§ 171. Then a brahman cosmologist went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "Now, then, Master Gotama, does everything exist?"

"'Everything exists' is the senior form of cosmology, brahman."

"Then, Master Gotama, does everything not exist?"

"'Everything does not exist' is the second form of cosmology, brahman."

"Then is everything a Oneness?"

"'Everything is a Oneness' is the third form of cosmology, brahman."

"Then is everything a plurality?"

"'Everything is a plurality is the fourth form of cosmology, brahman. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications...." — SN 12:48

§ 25. "There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person... doesn't discern which ideas are fit for attention, or which ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he doesn't attend to ideas fit for attention, and attends [instead] to ideas unfit for attention. And which are the ideas unfit for attention that he attends to? Whichever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen effluent of sensuality arises, and the arisen effluent of sensuality increases; the unarisen effluent of becoming... the unarisen effluent of ignorance arises, and the arisen effluent of ignorance increases.... This is how he attends inappropriately: 'Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?' Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?'

"As he attends inappropriately in this way, one of six kinds of view arises in him: The view *I have a self* arises in him as true & established, or the view *I have no self*<sup>1</sup>... or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive self*... or the view *It is precisely by means of self that I perceive not-self*... or the view *It is precisely by means of not-self that I perceive self*<sup>2</sup> arises in him as true & established, or else he has a view like this: *This very self of mine—the knower that is sensitive here & there to the ripening of good & bad actions—is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity.* This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person is not freed from birth, aging, & death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from stress.

“The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones... discerns which ideas are fit for attention, and which ideas are unfit for attention. This being so, he doesn’t attend to ideas unfit for attention, and attends [instead] to ideas fit for attention.... And which are the ideas fit for attention that he attends to? Whichever ideas such that, when he attends to them, the unarisen effluent of sensuality doesn’t arise, and the arisen effluent of sensuality is abandoned; the unarisen effluent of becoming... the unarisen effluent of ignorance doesn’t arise, and the arisen effluent of ignorance is abandoned.... He attends appropriately, *This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.* As he attends appropriately in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: self-identity-view, uncertainty, and grasping at habits & practices.” — MN 2

§ 162. Then Vacchagotta the wanderer went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat down to one side. As he was sitting there, he asked the Blessed One: “Now then, Venerable Gotama, is there a self?”

When this was said, the Blessed One was silent.

“Then is there no self?”

A second time, the Blessed One was silent.

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer got up from his seat and left.

Then, not long after Vacchagotta the wanderer had left, Ven. Ānanda said to the Blessed One, “Why, lord, did the Blessed One not answer when asked a question by Vacchagotta the wanderer?”

“Ānanda, if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, that would be in company with those contemplatives & brahmins who are exponents of eternalism [see Appendix Two]. If I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self—were to answer that there is no self, that would be in company with those contemplatives & brahmins who are exponents of annihilationism. If I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, would that be in keeping with the arising of knowledge that all phenomena are not-self?”

“No, lord.”

“And if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self—were to answer that there is no self, the bewildered Vacchagotta would become even more bewildered: ‘Does the self I used to have now not exist?’” — SN 44:10

§ 175. The Blessed One said, “From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications.... From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering.”

When this was said, a certain monk said to the Blessed One: “Which is the aging-&-death, lord, and whose is the aging-&-death?”

“Not a valid question,” the Blessed One said. “If one were to ask, ‘Which is the aging-&-death, and whose is the aging-&-death?’ and if one were to say, ‘Aging-&-death is one thing, and the aging-&-death is something/someone else’s,’ both of them would have the same meaning, even though their words would differ. When there is the view that the soul is the same as the body, there is no leading the holy life. And when there is the view that the soul is one thing and the body another, there is no leading the holy life. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma via the middle: From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death.”

— SN 12:35

§ 164. “When a disciple of the noble ones has seen well with right discernment this dependent co-arising & these dependently co-arisen phenomena as they have come to be, it is not possible that he would run after the past, thinking, ‘*Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past?*’ or that he would run after the future, thinking, ‘*Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?*’ or that he would be inwardly perplexed about the immediate present, thinking, ‘*Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?*’

“Such a thing is not possible. Why is that? Because the disciple of the noble ones has seen well with right discernment this dependent co-arising & these dependently co-arisen phenomena as they have come to be.” — SN 12:20

§ 192. Then Ven. Anurādha went to the Blessed One and on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Just now I was staying not far from the Blessed One in a wilderness hut. Then a large number of wandering sectarians came and... said to me, ‘Friend Anurādha, the Tathāgata—the supreme person, the superlative person, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described with [one of] these four positions: After death the Tathāgata exists; after death he does not exist; after death he both exists & does not exist; after death he neither exists nor does not exist.’

“When this was said, I said to them, ‘Friends, the Tathāgata—the supreme person, the superlative person, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described otherwise than with these four positions: After death the Tathāgata exists; after death he does not exist; after death he both exists & does not exist; after death he neither exists nor does not exist.’

“When this was said, the wandering sectarians said to me, ‘This monk is either a newcomer, not long gone forth, or else an elder who is foolish & inexperienced.’ So, addressing me as they would a newcomer or a fool, they got up from their seats and left.

“Then not long after the wandering sectarians had left, this thought occurred to me, ‘If I am questioned again by those wandering sectarians, how will I answer in such a way that will I speak in line with what the Blessed One has said, will not misrepresent the Blessed One with what is unfactual, will answer in line with the Dhamma, so that the legitimate implications of what I say give no grounds for criticism?’”

“What do you think, Anurādha? Is form constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, lord.”

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am?’”

“No, lord.”

[Similarly with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness.]

“Now, what do you think, Anurādha? Do you regard form as the Tathāgata?”

“No, lord.”

[Similarly with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness.]

“Now, what do you think, Anurādha? Do you regard the Tathāgata as being in form?... Elsewhere than form?... In feeling?... Elsewhere than feeling?... In

perception?... Elsewhere than perception?... In fabrications?... Elsewhere than fabrications?... In consciousness?... Elsewhere than consciousness?"

"No, lord."

"What do you think, Anurādha? Do you regard the Tathāgata as form-feeling-perception-fabrications-consciousness?"

"No, lord."

"What do you think, Anurādha? Do you regard the Tathāgata as that which is without form, without feeling, without perception, without fabrications, without consciousness?"

"No, lord."

"And so, Anurādha—when you can't pin down the Tathāgata as a truth or reality even in the present life—is it proper for you to declare, 'Friends, the Tathāgata—the supreme person, the superlative person, attainer of the superlative attainment—being described, is described otherwise than with these four positions: After death the Tathāgata exists; after death he does not exist; after death he both exists & does not exist; after death he neither exists nor does not exist?'"

"No, lord."

"Very good, Anurādha. Very good. Both formerly & now, it is only stress that I describe, and the cessation of stress." — SN 44:2

§ 199. As he was sitting there, Ven. Rādha said to the Blessed One: "A being,' lord. 'A being,' it's said. To what extent is one said to be 'a being?'"

"Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for form, Rādha: When one is caught up [*satta*] there, tied up [*visatta*] there, one is said to be 'a being [*satta*].'"

"Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for feeling... perception... fabrications..."

"Any desire, passion, delight, or craving for consciousness, Rādha: When one is caught up there, tied up there, one is said to be 'a being.'"

"Just as when boys or girls are playing with little sand castles: As long as they are not free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for those little sand castles, that's how long they have fun with those sand castles, enjoy them, treasure them, feel possessive of them. But when they become free from passion, desire, love, thirst, fever, & craving for those little sand castles, then they smash them, scatter them, demolish them with their hands or feet and make them unfit for play."

"In the same way, Rādha, you too should smash, scatter, demolish form, and make it unfit for play. Practice for the ending of craving for form."

"[Similarly with feeling, perception, fabrications, & consciousness.]" — SN 23:2

§ 181. [Vacchagotta the wanderer:] "Now, Master Gotama, what is the cause, what is the reason why—when wanderers of other sects are asked in this way, they answer that 'The cosmos is eternal,' or 'The cosmos is not eternal,' or 'The cosmos is finite,' or 'The cosmos is infinite,' or 'The soul is the same thing as the body,' or 'The soul is one thing and the body another,' or 'After death a Tathāgata exists,' or 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,' or 'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,' or 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' yet when Master Gotama is asked in this way, he does not answer that 'The cosmos is eternal,' or 'The cosmos is not eternal,' or 'The cosmos is finite,' or 'The cosmos is infinite,' or 'The soul is the same thing as the body,' or 'The soul is one thing and the body another,' or 'After death a Tathāgata exists,' or 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,' or 'After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist,' or 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,'?"

"Vaccha, the members of other sects assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form."

"They assume feeling to be the self....

"They assume perception to be the self....

"They assume fabrications to be the self....

"They assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. That is why, when asked in this way, they answer that '*The cosmos is eternal*'... or that '*After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.*'

"But the Tathāgata, worthy and rightly self-awakened, doesn't assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

"He doesn't assume feeling to be the self....

"He doesn't assume perception to be the self....

"He doesn't assume fabrications to be the self....

"He doesn't assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. That is why, when asked in this way, he does not answer that '*The cosmos is eternal*'... or that '*After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.*'" — SN 44:8

§ 182. When this had been said, Anāthapiṇḍika the householder said to the wanderers, "As for the venerable one who says, '*The cosmos is eternal. Only this is true; anything otherwise is worthless.*' This is the sort of view I have,' his view arises from his own inappropriate attention or in dependence on the words of another. Now this view has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen. Whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stressful. This venerable one thus adheres to that very stress, submits himself to that very stress." [Similarly for the other view-standpoints.]

When this had been said, the wanderers said to Anāthapiṇḍika the householder, "We have each & every one expounded to you in line with our own view-standpoints. Now tell us what views you have."

"Whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stressful. Whatever is stressful is not me, is not what I am, is not my self. This is the sort of view I have."

"So, householder, whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stressful. You thus adhere to that very stress, submit yourself to that very stress."

"Venerable sirs, whatever has been brought into being, is fabricated, willed, dependently co-arisen: That is inconstant. Whatever is inconstant is stressful. Whatever is stressful is not me, is not what I am, is not my self. Having seen this well with right discernment as it has come to be, I also discern the higher escape from it as it has come to be."

When this was said, the wanderers fell silent, abashed, sitting with their shoulders drooping, their heads down, brooding, at a loss for words. — AN 10:93