

63 *Cūḷamālunkya Sutta*
The Shorter Discourse to
Mālunkyāputta

1. **THUS HAVE I HEARD.** On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattḥī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park.

2. Then, while the venerable Mālunkyāputta was alone in meditation, the following thought arose in his mind:

"These speculative views have been undeclared by the Blessed One, set aside and rejected by him, namely: 'the world is eternal' and 'the world is not eternal'; 'the world is finite' and 'the world is infinite'; 'the soul is the same as the body' and 'the soul is one thing and the body another'; and 'after death a Tathāgata exists' and 'after death a Tathāgata does not exist' and 'after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist' and 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist.' The Blessed One does not declare these to me, and I do not approve of and accept the fact that he does not declare these to me, so I shall go to the Blessed One and ask him the meaning of this. If he declares to me either 'the world is eternal' or 'the world is not eternal'...or 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' then I will lead the holy life under him; if he does not declare these to me, then I will abandon the training and return to the low life." [427]

3. Then, when it was evening, the venerable Mālunkyāputta rose from meditation and went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and told him:

"Here, venerable sir, while I was alone in meditation, the following thought arose in my mind: 'These speculative views have been undeclared by the Blessed One...If he does not declare these to me, then I will abandon the training and return to the low life.' If the Blessed One knows 'the world is eternal,' let the Blessed One declare to me 'the world is eternal'; if the

Blessed One knows 'the world is not eternal,' let the Blessed One declare to me 'the world is not eternal.' If the Blessed One does not know either 'the world is eternal' or 'the world is not eternal,' then it is straightforward for one who does not know and does not see to say: 'I do not know, I do not see.'

"If the Blessed One knows 'the world is finite,'... 'the world is infinite,'... 'the soul is the same as the body,'... 'the soul is one thing and the body another,'... 'after death a Tathāgata exists,' [428]... 'after death a Tathāgata does not exist,'... If the Blessed One knows 'after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist,' let the Blessed One declare that to me; if the Blessed One knows 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' let the Blessed One declare that to me. If the Blessed One does not know either 'after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist' or 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' then it is straightforward for one who does not know and does not see to say: 'I do not know, I do not see.'"

4. "How then, Mālunkyāputta, did I ever say to you: 'Come, Mālunkyāputta, lead the holy life under me and I will declare to you "the world is eternal"...or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist"'?" – "No, venerable sir." – "Did you ever tell me: 'I will lead the holy life under the Blessed One, and the Blessed One will declare to me "the world is eternal"...or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist"'?" – "No, venerable sir." – "That being so, misguided man, who are you and what are you abandoning?"

5. "If anyone should say thus: 'I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares to me "the world is eternal"...or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,"' [429] that would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata and meanwhile that person would die. Suppose, Mālunkyāputta, a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a surgeon to treat him. The man would say: 'I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble or a brahmin or a merchant or a worker.' And he would say: 'I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know the name and clan of the man who wounded me;...until I know whether the

man who wounded me was tall or short or of middle height;... until I know whether the man who wounded me was dark or brown or golden-skinned;...until I know whether the man who wounded me lives in such a village or town or city;...until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a long bow or a crossbow;...until I know whether the bowstring that wounded me was fibre or reed or sinew or hemp or bark;...until I know whether the shaft that wounded me was wild or cultivated;... until I know with what kind of feathers the shaft that wounded me was fitted – whether those of a vulture or a crow or a hawk or a peacock or a stork;...until I know with what kind of sinew the shaft that wounded me was bound – whether that of an ox or a buffalo or a lion or a monkey;...until I know what kind of arrow it was that wounded me – whether it was hoof-tipped or curved or barbed or calf-toothed or oleander.' [430]

"All this would still not be known to that man and meanwhile he would die. So too, Mālunkyāputta, if anyone should say thus: 'I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares to me: "the world is eternal"...or "after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,"' that would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata and meanwhile that person would die.

6. "Mālunkyāputta, if there is the view 'the world is eternal,' the holy life cannot be lived; and if there is the view 'the world is not eternal,' the holy life cannot be lived. Whether there is the view 'the world is eternal' or the view 'the world is not eternal,' there is birth, there is ageing, there is death, there are sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, the destruction of which I prescribe here and now.

"If there is the view 'the world is finite,'... 'the world is infinite,'... 'the soul is the same as the body,'... 'the soul is one thing and the body another,'... 'after death a Tathāgata exists,'... 'after death a Tathāgata does not exist,' the holy life cannot be lived... [431] If there is the view 'after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist,' the holy life cannot be lived; and if there is the view 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' the holy life cannot be lived. Whether there is the view 'after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist' or the view 'after death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' there

is birth, there is ageing, there is death, there are sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, the destruction of which I prescribe here and now.

7. "Therefore, Mālunkyāputta, remember what I have left undeclared as undeclared, and remember what I have declared as declared. And what have I left undeclared? 'The world is eternal' – I have left undeclared. 'The world is not eternal' – I have left undeclared. 'The world is finite' – I have left undeclared. 'The world is infinite' – I have left undeclared. 'The soul is the same as the body' – I have left undeclared. 'The soul is one thing and the body another' – I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata exists' – I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist' – I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist' – I have left undeclared. 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist' – I have left undeclared.

8. "Why have I left that undeclared? Because it is unbeneficial, it does not belong to the fundamentals of the holy life, it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. That is why I have left it undeclared.

9. "And what have I declared? 'This is suffering' – I have declared. 'This is the origin of suffering' – I have declared. 'This is the cessation of suffering' – I have declared. 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering' – I have declared.

10. "Why have I declared that? Because it is beneficial, it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life, it leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. That is why I have declared it.

"Therefore, Mālunkyāputta, [432] remember what I have left undeclared as undeclared, and remember what I have declared as declared."

That is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Mālunkyāputta was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.⁶⁴⁸

- 641 MA: While Rāhula was following the Buddha, he noted with admiration the physical perfection of the Master and reflected that he himself was of similar appearance, thinking: "I too am handsome like my father the Blessed One. The Buddha's form is beautiful and so too is mine." The Buddha read Rāhula's thought and decided to admonish him at once, before such vain thoughts led him into greater difficulties. Hence the Buddha framed his advice in terms of contemplating the body as neither a self nor the possession of a self.
- 642 MA: Ven. Sāriputta, Rāhula's teacher, gave Rāhula this advice unaware that he had already been given different meditation instructions by the Buddha. He was misled by Rāhula's cross-legged posture into thinking that he was practising mindfulness of breathing.
- 643 MA: The Buddha here explains the meditation on the four great elements rather than mindfulness of breathing in order to dispel Rāhula's attachment to the body, which had not yet been removed by the brief instruction on the egolessness of material form. See n.329 for explanation of terms requiring comment.
- 644 Space (*ākāsa*) is not a primary material element but is classified under derivative material form (*upādā rūpa*).
- 645 MA: This passage (§13-17) is taught to show the quality of impartiality (*tādibhāva*).
- 646 For explanations of unclear terms in this first tetrad on mindfulness of breathing (§26), see nn.140-142. Terms needing clarification in the following three tetrads will be explained in the notes to MN 118, the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*.
- 647 That is, the meditator dies calmly, with mindfulness and awareness.

SUTTA 63

- 648 Those who have always wondered about the fate of the monk who almost left the Buddha to satisfy his meta-physical curiosity will be gladdened to know that in his old age Mālunkyāputta received a brief discourse on the six sense bases from the Buddha, went off into solitary

meditation, and attained arahantship. See SN 35:95/iv.72-76. His verses are at Thag 399-404 and 794-817.

SUTTA 64

- 649 The five lower fetters (*orambhāgiyāni samyojanāni*) are so called because they lead to rebirth in the sense-sphere planes. They are eradicated in their entirety only by the non-returner.
- 650 MA: The question may be raised: "When the Buddha had asked about the fetters and the Elder replied in terms of the fetters, why does the Buddha criticise his reply?" The reason is that Mālunkyāputta held the view that a person is fettered by the defilements only at times when they assail him, while at other times he is not fettered by them. The Buddha spoke as he did to show the error in this view.
- 651 *Anuseti tvev'assa sakkāyadiṭṭhānusayo*. On the *anusayas* or underlying tendencies, see n.473. In the commentaries the defilements are distinguished as occurring at three levels: the *anusaya* level, where they remain as mere latent dispositions in the mind; the *pariyuṭṭhāna* level, where they rise up to obsess and enslave the mind (referred to in §5 of this discourse); and the *vītikāma* level, where they motivate unwholesome bodily and verbal action. The point of the Buddha's criticism is that the fetters, even when they do not come to active manifestation, continue to exist at the *anusaya* level so long as they have not been eradicated by the supramundane path.
- 652 *Dhammā*. This could also have been rendered "things."
- 653 MA: The fetter and the underlying tendency are in principle not distinct things; rather, it is the same defilement that is called a fetter in the sense of binding, and an underlying tendency in the sense of being unabandoned.
- 654 *Uppadhivivekā*. MA glosses *upadhi* here as the five cords of sensual pleasure. Though the first three clauses of this statement seem to express the same ideas as the two more usual clauses that follow, Mṭ indicates that they are intended to show the *means* for becoming "quite