

Arāṇa, vibhaṅga Sutta

The Discourse on

The Analysis of Non-conflict

(Majjhima Nikāya 139)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

This is one of the most well-structured suttas in the Canon. It has an introduction (a summary) (§§1-2), a set of theses (§3), analyses of each thesis (§§4-12), a summation (§13) and a conclusion (§14), including mention of the exemplar of its teachings, namely, Subhūti.

Subhūti was the younger brother of Anāthapiṇḍika, and became a monk on the day that Jetavana was presented to the Sangha. The Buddha declared him to be the foremost disciple in two categories: those who live with non-conflict and those who are worthy of gifts. (A 1:24; MA 5:31 f)

The sutta Commentary here says that when Subhūti teaches Dharma, he is not interested in the differences amongst individuals but simply teaches: “This is a wrong course; this is the right course.” (MA 5:31).

The essence of this discourse is very clear: **consider the deed, not the doer**. It is a good example of how the doctrine of non-self is practised on a simple daily level of interpersonal relationships.

On a more academic level, this is the locus classicus for the Buddhist translation tradition, one that relies more on the spirit of right practice (orthopraxy) than on the weight of dogma (orthodoxy). Such a tradition encourages many Buddhists to attempt their own translation of the Buddhist texts; in short, to read the Pali texts themselves.

The Discourse on

The Analysis of Non-Conflict

The ninth (discourse)

Of the Chapter on Analysis, the fourth

Of the Final Fifty Discourses

Preamble

[230] 1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park, in Jeta’s Grove, near Sāvathī. There the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Monks!”

“Venerable sir,” the monks replied.

The Blessed One said this:

2 “Monks, I will teach you **the analysis of non-conflict**.¹ Listen and pay close attention to it: I am going to speak.”

“Yes, venerable sir,” the monks replied.

The Blessed One said this:

Summary

3 “You should not pursue sensual pleasure: it is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial. And you should not pursue self-mortification: it is painful, ignoble, not beneficial. Without turning to either of these extremes, there is the middle way awakened to by the Buddha. Thus Come, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana.²

¹ *Arāṇa*, non-conflict, also tr as peace; opp *sarāṇa*, conflict, disturbance; that is the peace that comes from the absence of defilements and the conflict that comes from their presence. Comy says that *arāṇa* means “free from passion or the defilements (*kilesa*)” (MA 5:32; cf AA 1:220, SA 1:101, *nikkilesa*). At Vbh 19 f the aggregate (*khandha*) of feeling is twofold: *sarāṇa* and *arāṇa*. See BHSD under *arāṇa* and *rāṇa*.

² This paragraph as in the First Discourse (S 56.11.3).

You should know what praise is and what blame is, and knowing what praise and blame are, you should neither praise nor blame, but teach only Dharma.

You should know how to discern joy, and knowing what joy is, you should pursue joy within yourself.

You should not utter secret speech;³ you should not utter strong words before another.

You should speak without hurry, not hurriedly.

You should not cling to a regional language; you should not reject common usage.

This is a summary of the analysis of non-conflict.

The middle way

4 ‘You should not pursue sensual pleasure: it is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial. And you should not pursue self-mortification: it is painful, ignoble, not beneficial.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

The pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure⁴—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way.

[231] Letting go of the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way.

The pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way.

Letting go of the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way.

So it is in reference to this that it is said: ‘You should not pursue sensual pleasure: it is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial.’

³ One should not defame another, i.e. carry tales to another.

⁴ *Kāma, paṭisandhi, sukhino somanassānuyogo.*

And you should not pursue self-mortification: it is painful, ignoble, not beneficial.’

5 ‘Without turning to either of these extremes, there is **the middle way** awakened to by the Buddha. Thus Come, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

It is this very Noble Eightfold Path; that is to say:

right view,
right thought,
right speech,
right action,
right livelihood,
right effort,
right mindfulness,
right concentration.

So it is in reference to this that it is said: ‘Without turning to either of these extremes, there is the middle way awakened to by the Buddha. Thus Come, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana.’

Teaching only Dharma

6 ‘You should know what praise is and what blame is, and knowing what praise and blame are, you should neither praise nor blame, but teach only Dharma.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

7 How, monks, do praise and blame, and the failure to teach only Dharma come about?

When you say, ‘All those who are bent on the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ you thus blame some.

When you say, ‘All those who have let go of the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—are without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ you thus praise some.

When you say: ‘All those who are bent on the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—[232] are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ you thus blame some.

When you say: ‘All those who have let go of the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—are without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ you thus praise some.

When you say, ‘All those who have not abandoned the fetter of being⁵ are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ you blame some.

When you say, ‘All those who have abandoned the fetter of being are without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ you praise some.

This is how, monks, praise and blame, and the failure to teach only Dharma come about.

8 And how, monks, is there neither praise nor blame but teaching only Dharma?

When you do not say, ‘All those who are bent on the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ but say instead ‘**The pursuit is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

When you do not say, ‘All those who have given up the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—are without suffering,

⁵ That is *taṭhā*, craving.

without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ but say instead ‘**The letting go is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

When you do not say, ‘All those who are bent on the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ but say instead ‘**The pursuit is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

When you do not say, ‘All those who have let go of the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—are without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ but say instead ‘**The letting go is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

When you do not say, ‘All those who have not abandoned the fetter of being are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ [233] but say instead, ‘**As long as the fetter of being is not abandoned, being too is not abandoned,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

When you do not say, ‘All those who have abandoned the fetter of being are without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ but say instead, ‘**As long as the fetter of being is abandoned, being too is abandoned,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

So it is in this connection that it is said, ‘You should know what praise is and what blame is, and knowing what praise and blame are, you should neither praise nor blame, but teach only Dharma.’

Pursuing joy within

9 ‘You should know how to discern⁶ joy,⁷ and knowing what joy is, you should pursue joy within yourself.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

⁶ *Vinicchaya*, Bodhi has “define”.

Monks, there are these **five sensual strands**.⁸ What five?

Forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desirable, agreeable, likeable, connected with sensuality, arousing lust.

Sounds cognizable by the ear...

Smells cognizable by the nose...

Tastes cognizable by the tongue...

Touch cognizable by the body that are wished for, desirable, agreeable, likeable, connected with sensuality, arousing lust.

Monks, these are the five sensual strands.

Now the physical and mental joy⁹ that arise dependent on these five sensual strands are called **sense-pleasure**¹⁰—a dung-like pleasure, a coarse pleasure, an ignoble pleasure. This pleasure should not be pursued; it should not be cultivated; it should not be developed; it should be feared, I say!

Here, monks, quite aloof from sensual pleasures, aloof from unwholesome states, a monk attains and abides in the first absorption...the second absorption...the third absorption...the fourth absorption. This is called the joy of renunciation, the joy of seclusion, the joy of peace, the joy of enlightenment. This joy should be cultivated; it should be developed; it should not be feared. [234]

So it is in reference to this that it is said, ‘You should know how to discern joy, and knowing what joy is, you should pursue joy within yourself.’

⁷ *Sukha*, happiness, pleasure, joy, bliss; one of the three feelings (*vedanā*) and may be physical or mental.

⁸ *Kāma, gūṇa*. Also tr as “strand(s) of sensual pleasure”.

⁹ *Sukha, somanassa*, also tr “happiness and pleasure”.

¹⁰ *Kāma, sukka*.

Secret speech and strong words

10 ‘You should not utter secret speech; you should not utter strong words¹¹ before another.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

Here, monks, when you know the **secret speech** to be not real, false,¹² not beneficial, you should on no account utter it.

When you know the secret speech to be real, true, but not beneficial, you should on no account utter it.

But when you know the secret speech to be real, true and beneficial, then you may utter it knowing the time to do so.

Here, monks, when you know the **strong words** uttered before another to be not real, false, not beneficial, you should on no account utter them.

When you know the strong words uttered before another to be real, true, but not beneficial, you should on no account utter them

But when you know the strong words uttered before another to be real, true and beneficial, then you may utter them knowing the time to do so.

So it is in reference to this that it is said, ‘You should not utter secret speech; you should not utter strong words before another.’

Speaking without hurry

11 ‘You should speak without hurry, not hurriedly.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

Here, monks, when you speak hurriedly, the body tires, the mind suffers, the voice suffers and the throat becomes sore. The

¹¹ *Khīṇa, vāda*. Comy explains *khīṇa* as *ākiṇṇa*, “confused, troubled” and as *kiliṭṭha*, “defiled, soiled” (MA 5:30). It means that one should not say what is detrimental, annoying or improper.

¹² Not real, false (*abhūta atacccha*); opp real, true (*bhūta taccha*, both of which overlap in meaning: true, real, correct). Bodhi: “false, incorrect” etc.

speech of one who speaks hurriedly is unclear and hard to understand.

Here, monks, when you speak unhurriedly, the body does not tire, the mind does not suffer, the voice does not suffer and the throat is not sore. The speech of one who speaks unhurriedly is clear and easy to understand.

So it is with reference to this that it is said, ‘You should speak without hurry, not hurriedly.’

Conventional language

12 ‘You should not cling to a regional language; you should not reject common usage.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

How, monks, is there clinging to a regional language and rejection of common usage?

Here, monks, in different regions, they call a “bowl” *pāṭi*, *patta*, *vitṭha*, *serāva*, *dhāropa*, *poṇa* or *pisīla*. So whatever they call it in such and such a region, they speak accordingly, firmly adhering (to the words) and insisting, ‘Only this is correct; anything else is wrong.’

This is how, monks, there is clinging to a regional language and rejection of common usage.

And how, monks, is there no clinging to a regional language and no rejection of common usage?

Here, monks, in different regions, they call a “bowl” *pāṭi*. [235] *patta*, *vitṭha*, *serāva*, *dhāropa*, *poṇa* or *pisīla*. So whatever they call it in such and such a region, without adhering (to the words), one speaks accordingly.

This is how, monks, there is no clinging to a regional language and no rejection of common usage.

So it is with reference to this that it is said, ‘You should not cling to a regional language; you should not reject common usage.’

Summation

13 Here, monk, the pursuit of pleasure of one whose is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, letting go of the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way. As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, monks, the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, letting go of the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way. [236] As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, monks, without turning to either of these extremes, there is the middle way awakened to by the Buddha. Thus Come, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana—this is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way. As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, monks, praise and blame and failure to teach only Dharma is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, not praising and not blaming and teaching only Dharma is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way. As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, monks, sense-pleasure—a dung-like pleasure, a coarse pleasure, an ignoble pleasure—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of seclusion, the happiness of peace, the happiness of enlightenment, is

a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way. As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, monks, secret speech that is false, incorrect, not beneficial is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, secret speech that is real, true, but not beneficial is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, secret speech that is real, true and beneficial is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way. As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, monks, strong words uttered before another that are not real, false, not beneficial are a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, strong words uttered before another that are real, true, but not beneficial are a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, strong words uttered before another that are real, true and beneficial are a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way. As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, monks, speech that is spoken hurriedly is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, speech that is spoken unhurriedly is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way. As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, monks, clinging to a regional language and rejecting common usage are a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, monks, not clinging to a regional language and not rejecting common usage is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way. As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

14 Therefore, monks, you should train yourself thus: ‘We will know a state of conflict and we will know a state of non-conflict, and knowing these, we will follow the way of non-conflict.’

Now, monks, Subhūti is a householder who has followed the way of non-conflict.”¹³

This is what the Blessed One said. The monks, being pleased, rejoiced in the Blessed One’s word.

The Discourse on the Analysis of Non-conflict

The ninth (discourse)

Of the Chapter on Analysis, the fourth

Of the Final Fifty Discourses

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¹³ Subhūti was the younger brother of Anāthapiṇḍika, and became a monk on the day that Jetavana was presented to the Sangha. The Buddha declared him to be the foremost disciple in two categories: those who live with non-conflict and those who are worthy of gifts. (A 1:24; MA 5:31 f)