

Monday Dharma talk, week 4

Gil Fronsdal

September 22, 2025

Keywords: satipaṭṭhāna, nibbāna, Therīgāthā, mettā, samādhi, three trainings, Dhamma, craving, bundles, Paṭācārā

So this sutta that has been the basis for the talks of this retreat begins and ends with the same passage. And as we get at the end, to read it from the end, here in this translation it says, this is the direct path. The word for path literally means to go. Sometimes it's used for journey and travel in ancient India. The famous book *Rāmāyaṇa* has the same *ayana*. So Rāma's travels, Rāma's journey.

And the word *ekka* can mean one. It can also mean part of a unification. As I said earlier, the confluence of rivers is called the *ekāyana*, the going to one of the rivers. An *ekā* can also mean solitary, individual, alone. An *ekāsana* is a solitary seat, a seat to sit alone in the woods. So, the direct path, unifying path, the personal journey, the individual journey, everyone needs to do for themselves.

The reason why it's so personal is that it's primarily internal, this process. There's certainly an interpersonal aspect to Dharma practice, a big part of it. But for this particular journey that this text offers, it's a journey within that we have to do for ourselves. So I'll read it this way. This is the personal journey for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of *nibbāna*, namely the four bases for awareness, four foundations for being aware.

So it has this very wonderful goal, the end of suffering, the disappearance of pain and grief, surmounting all sorrow, all grief and lamentation. Elsewhere, this goal is described as one abides not dependent on anything in the world. The translation is usually it gives because it's kind of simpler and from maybe in this local culture more inspiring. One abides independent, but there's a nuance of difference between independent and not dependent, not clinging to anything in the world. So with that as the introduction, the rest of this Dharma talk time, I'm

going to read poems from the *Therīgāthā*. Some of them the Enlightenment poems of the ancient nuns.

And for many of them, especially in the first chapter, the verses kind of have a wordplay with the names of the nuns. So the first one I'll read is... And some of these first verses are described by the commentary as not actually composed by the nun, but rather it's words that the Buddha spoke to the nuns, that then she turned into a poem, a verse, to recite and repeat to herself. In any case, they have a wonderful feeling, these verses of *mettā*, of goodwill, of care, caring. So her name is full, Puññā, Puṇṇā, Puṇṇā. So she's being spoken to, Puṇṇā.

Like the moon on a full moon night, be full of good states, be full of insight and shatter the mass of darkness. The next one, her name is Tissā, which means three. But the wordplay here is that, you'll see, it's also used for the three trainings, or referred to kind of in word play here with three trainings, because it refers to trainings. Tissā, train in the training. Don't let what binds you overcome you. Unbind all bounds, bonds, and walk the world staying free.

Don't let what binds overcome you. Unbind all bonds. Then Dīrā, her name means wise, the wise one. Dīrā, touch cessation, the happy stilling of concepts. Be pleased with release. The unsurpassed peace from bondage.

Mittā, her name means friend. Mittā, having gone forth out of faith, delight in friends, by cultivating skillful states, attain peace from bondage. Uttarā, meaning supreme, controlled in body, speech and mind, having pulled out craving at its root, I've become calm, released, quenched. Meaning here, meaning shining, though quite emaciated, sick and weak. So now she's speaking for herself. Walking, leaning on a stick, have ascended the mountain, having laid down my upper robe, turning over my bowl, and resting on a rock, the mass of darkness shattered.

Next one is Abhayā. Her name means fearless. And I read this as she's already quite old, maybe very close to dying. And so for that, she has this to say. And now she's being addressed, but she's now addressing herself by her own name. Abhayā, fragile is this body to which people cling. With understanding and awareness, I will lay this body down. Quite something for some to say, getting ready to die.

Two goes on. So I'll read it again. Abhayā, fragile is the body to which people cling. With understanding and awareness, I will lay this body down. Devoted to attention regarding all suffering states, I reached the destruction of craving and accomplished the Buddha's teaching. And then there's Sāmā. Her name means peaceful. But she writes, Not attaining mental peace and with no control of my mind, four, five times I left my hut, where she was practicing.

But then, eight nights ago, craving was abolished. Devoted to attention regarding all suffering states, I reached the destruction of craving and accomplished the Buddha's teaching.

Uttamā, here they call it as most excellent. Another one who was challenged. Not attaining mental peace, and with no control of my mind, four or five times I left my hut. I approached a nun who was trustworthy. She taught me the Dhamma, the bundles, sense bases, and elements. I listened to the Dhamma as she instructed me. For one week I sat cross-legged in one spot, filled with joy and happiness. On the eighth day, I straightened out my legs and shattered the mass of darkness.

I think that these poems by these ancient practitioners attest to the possibility of each of us to be liberated. Dantikā, Taṇṭikā, which means the tamed, the tamed one. Leaving my day's meditation on Vulture Peak, I saw at the river's edge an elephant emerging from its plunge, a man holding a pole with a hook said, Give me your foot. The elephant stretched out its foot and the man climbed up on its back, seeing... The untamed, tamed, and under human control, my mind finally entered into *samādhi*, what I had gone to the woods to do.

The next one's name is Nanduttarā, Nandā the Supreme. I venerated fire, the moon, the sun, and the gods. At the river crossing, I ritually entered the water. I undertook many religious practices, shaved half my head, slept on the ground, and ate no food at night. Then afflicted with passion for sensual pleasures, I delighted in ornaments and jewelry, and treated my body with baths and massage. Then, acquiring faith, I went forth into homelessness. Having seen the body as it really is, passion for sensual pleasures was abolished. Severed are wishes and desires for all states of becoming. Every bond is unbound. Mind has attained peace.

Next one's name is Mittākālī, which literally means black friend. I went forth in faith from home to homelessness. I wandered here and there, eager for gain and honor. Neglecting the ultimate goal, I pursued a lowly goal, controlled by defilements. I didn't know the renunciant's goal. Then, sitting in my hut, a sense of urgency arose, thinking, Under the control of craving, I have entered the wrong path. Short is my life. I am crushed by old age and illness. Soon this body will break apart. I have no time to be negligent.

Looking at the rising and passing of the bundles, as they actually are, I stood up with mind freed, having accomplished the Buddha's teachings. She had a sense of urgency, eager to practice. She had no time to be negligent, to wait. She practiced, and then she observed observing the rising and passing of the bundles as they actually are. Then I stood up with mind freed, having accomplished the Buddha's teachings.

The last poem is the poem of Paṭācārā, the nun for whom we have a statue here in the walk-

ing hall. So reflecting, she had this to say, plowing fields with plows, sowing seeds in the soil, caring for children and spouse, young people gain wealth. But why is it that I, thorough and virtuous conduct, doing the Buddha's instruction, not lazy or proud, have not attained release? With my feet washed, I watch the water, the foot-washing water, flow from high ground to low. With this, like a thoroughbred horse, mind concentrated. Taking an oil lamp, I entered my hut. Looking over the bed, I sat down on the bed. Taking a needle, I pulled out the wick. As the flame went out, was freed.

One of the wonderful things about Pāli is that the went out is a translation of *nibbāna*. As the flame nibbānaed, as the flame went out, my mind was freed. In some of these verses and many others, even more so, it depicts the great challenges these women had, and they persevered, and they became free. It is possible for you, no doubt, the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* brings you to the ability to observe the arising and passing of the bundles of suffering in such a way that the mass of darkness is shattered, the mind can be freed.