

## **Dīgha Nikāya - The Long Discourses**

Serene Faith (Sampasādanīya Sutta)

[99] 1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. Once the Lord was staying at Nālandā in Pāvārika's mango-grove. And the Venerable Sāriputta came to see the Lord, saluted him, sat down to one side, and said:<sup>856</sup> 'It is clear to me, Lord, that there never has been, never will be and is not now another ascetic or Brahmin who is better or more enlightened than the Lord.'

'You have spoken boldly with a bull's voice, Sāriputta, you have roared the lion's roar of certainty. How is this? Have all the Arahant Buddhas of the past appeared to you, and were the minds of all those Lords open to you, so as to say: "These Lords were of such virtue, such was their teaching, [100] such their wisdom, such their way, such their liberation"?' 'No, Lord.' 'And have you perceived all the Arahant Buddhas who will appear in the future?' 'No, Lord.' 'Well then, Sāriputta, you know me as the Arahant Buddha, and do you know: "The Lord is of such virtue, such his teaching, such his wisdom, such his way, such his liberation"?' 'No, Lord.' 'So, Sāriputta, you do not have knowledge of the minds of the Buddhas of the past, the future or the present. Then, Sāriputta, have you not spoken boldly with a bull's voice and roared the lion's roar of certainty with your declaration?'

2. 'Lord, the minds of the Arahant Buddhas of the past, future and present are not open to me. But I know the drift of the Dhamma. Lord, it is as if there were a [101] royal frontier city, with mighty bastions and a mighty encircling wall in which was a single gate, at which was a gatekeeper, wise, skilled and clever, who kept out strangers and let in those he knew. And he, constantly patrolling and following along a path, might not see the joins and clefts in the bastion, even such as a cat might creep through. But whatever larger creatures entered or left the city, must all go through this very gate. And it seems to me, Lord, that the drift of the Dhamma is the same. All those Arahant Buddhas of the past attained to supreme enlightenment by abandoning the five hindrances, defilements of mind which weaken understanding, having firmly established the four foundations of mindfulness in their minds, and realised the seven factors of enlightenment as they really are. All the Arahant

Buddhas of the future will do likewise, and you, Lord, who are now the Arahant, fully-enlightened Buddha, have done the same.

‘So I came once [102] to the Blessed Lord to listen to Dhamma. And the Blessed Lord taught me Dhamma most excellently and perfectly, contrasting the dark with the light. And as he did so, I gained insight into that Dhamma, and from among the various things I established one in particular, which was serene confidence<sup>857</sup> in the Teacher, that the Blessed Lord is a fully-enlightened Buddha, that the Dhamma is well taught by the Blessed Lord, and that the order of monks is well-trained.

3. ‘Also, lord, the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the wholesome factors is unsurpassed, that is to say: the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four roads to power, the five spiritual faculties, the five mental powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, the Noble Eightfold Path.<sup>858</sup> By these a monk, through the destruction of the corruptions, can in this very life, by his own super-knowledge, realise and attain the corruption-free liberation of heart and liberation by wisdom, and abide therein. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the wholesome factors. This the Blessed Lord fully comprehends, and beyond it lies nothing further to be comprehended; and in such understanding there is no other ascetic or Brahmin who is greater or more enlightened than the Blessed Lord, as regards the wholesome factors.

4. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the elucidation of the sense-spheres: there are the six internal and external sense-bases:<sup>859</sup> eye and visible objects, ear and sounds, nose and smells, tongue and tastes, body and tactiles, mind and mind-objects. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the sense-spheres ...

5. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the modes of rebirth in four ways: thus, one descends into the mother’s womb unknowing,<sup>860</sup> stays there unknowing, and leaves it unknowing. That is the first way. Or, one enters the womb knowing, stays there unknowing, and leaves it unknowing. That is the second way. Or, one enters the womb

knowing, stays there knowing, and leaves it unknowing. That is the third way. Or, one enters the womb knowing, stays there knowing, and leaves it knowing. That is the fourth way. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the modes of rebirth...

6. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the telling of thoughts<sup>861</sup> in four ways. Thus, one tells by a visible sign, saying: “This is what you think, this is in your mind, your thought is like this.” And however much one declares, it is so and not otherwise. That is the first way. Or, one tells not by a visible sign, but through hearing a sound made by humans, non-humans,<sup>862</sup> or devas ... That is the second way. Or one tells not by a sound uttered, [104] but by applying one’s mind and attending to something conveyed by sound ... That is the third way. Or one tells, not by any of these means, when one has attained a state of mental concentration without thinking and pondering, <sup>863</sup> by divining another’s thoughts in one’s mind, and one says: “As far as so-and-so’s mind-force is directed, so his thoughts will turn to that thing.” And however much one declares, it is so and not otherwise. That is the fourth way. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the telling of thoughts in four ways...

7. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the attainment of vision,<sup>864</sup> in four ways. Here, some ascetic or Brahmin, by means of ardour, endeavour, application, vigilance and due attention, reaches such a level of concentration that he considers just this body — upwards from the soles of the feet and downwards from the crown of the head, enclosed by the skin and full of manifold impurities: “In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, mesentery, bowels, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, tallow, saliva, snot, synovial fluid, urine.” (as Sutta 22, verse 5) That is the first attainment of vision. Again, having done this and gone further, [105] he contemplates the bones covered with skin, flesh and blood. This is the second attainment. Again, having done this and gone further, he comes to know the unbroken stream of human consciousness as established both in this world and in the next.<sup>865</sup> That is the third attainment. Again, having done this and gone still further, he comes to know the unbroken stream

of human consciousness that is not established either in this world or in the next.<sup>866</sup> That is the fourth attainment of vision. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the attainments of vision...

8. 'Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord's way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the designation of individuals.<sup>867</sup> There are these seven types: the Both-Ways-Liberated,<sup>868</sup> the Wisdom-Liberated,<sup>869</sup> the Body-Witness,<sup>870</sup> the Vision-Attainer,<sup>871</sup> the Faith-Liberated,<sup>872</sup> the Dhamma-Devotee,<sup>873</sup> the Faith-Devotee. <sup>874</sup> This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the designation of individuals...

9. 'Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord's way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the [106] exertions.<sup>875</sup> There are these seven factors of enlightenment: mindfulness, investigation of states, energy, delight, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the exertions...

10. 'Also unsurpassed in the Blessed Lord's way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the modes of progress,<sup>876</sup> which are four: painful progress with slow comprehension, painful progress with quick comprehension, pleasant progress with slow comprehension, pleasant progress with quick comprehension. In the case of painful progress with slow comprehension, progress is considered poor on account of both painfulness and slowness. In the case of painful progress with quick comprehension, progress is considered poor on account of painfulness. In the case of pleasant progress with slow comprehension, progress is considered poor on account of slowness. In the case of pleasant progress with quick comprehension, progress is considered excellent on account of both pleasantness and quick comprehension. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the modes of progress...

11. 'Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord's way of teaching Dhamma in regard to proper conduct in speech: how one should avoid not only any speech involving lying, but also speech that is divisive

877 or sneeringly triumphant,<sup>878</sup> but should use wise words, words to be treasured, words in season. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to proper conduct in speech...

12. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to a person’s proper ethical conduct. One should be truthful and faithful, not using deception, patter, hinting or belittling,<sup>879</sup> not [107] always on the make for further gains, but with sense-doors guarded, abstemious, a peace-maker, given to watchfulness, active, strenuous in effort, a meditator,<sup>880</sup> mindful, of fitting conversation, steady-going,<sup>881</sup> resolute<sup>882</sup> and sensible,<sup>883</sup> not hankering after sense-pleasures but mindful and prudent. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to a person’s proper ethical conduct...

13. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to modes of receptivity to instruction, of which there are four: The Blessed Lord knows by his own skilled observation:<sup>884</sup> “That one will, by following instructions, by the complete destruction of three fetters, become a Stream-Winner, no more subject to rebirth in lower worlds, firmly established, destined for full enlightenment”; “that one will, by following instructions, by the complete destruction of three fetters and the reduction of greed, hatred and delusion, become a Once-Returner, and having returned once more to this world, will put an end to suffering”; “that one will, by following instructions, by the complete destruction of the five lower fetters, be spontaneously reborn,<sup>885</sup> and there will reach Nibbāna without returning from that world”; “that one will, by following instructions, by the destruction of the corruptions, gain in this very life the deliverance of mind, the deliverance through wisdom which is uncorrupted, and which one has understood and realised by one’s own super-knowledge.” This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the modes of receptivity to instruction... [108]

14. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the knowledge of the liberation of others. The Blessed Lord knows, by his own skilled observation: “That one will, by the complete destruction of three fetters, become a Stream-Winner...; then with the reduction of greed, hatred and delusion, become a Once-Returner...; by the complete destruction of the five lower

fetters, be spontaneously reborn...; by the destruction of the corruptions, gain in this very life the deliverance of mind, the deliverance through wisdom which is uncorrupted ... ”

15. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the doctrine of Eternalism.<sup>886</sup> There are three such theories: (1) Here, some ascetic or Brahmin, by means of ardour, endeavour, ... recalls various past existences ...up to several hundred thousand births...(as Sutta 1, verse 1.31). [109] In this way he remembers the details of his various past lives, and he says: “I know the past, whether the universe was expanding or contracting,<sup>887</sup> but I do not know the future, whether it will expand or contract. The self and the world are eternal, barren, steady as a mountain-peak, rooted like a pillar. Beings run on, transmigrate, pass away and rearise, yet these persist eternally.” (2) Again, some ascetic or Brahmin recalls various existences ... (as (1), but “up to twenty aeons ... ”). [110] (3) Again, some ascetic or Brahmin recalls various existence... (as (i), but “up to ten, twenty, thirty, forty aeons...”’). This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the doctrine of Eternalism...

16. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to past lives. Here, some ascetic or Brahmin... recalls various past existences — one birth, two births, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand lives, many aeons of contraction, [111] of expansion, of contraction and expansion: “Then I was called so-and-so, this was my clan, my caste, I ate this, had these happy and unhappy experiences, lived for so long. And when I passed away from there I was reborn in such-and-such other circumstances. Passing away from there, I was reborn here.” In this way he remembers the details of his various past lives. There are devas whose life-span is not to be reckoned by counting or computation,<sup>888</sup> yet whatever existence <sup>889</sup> they have previously experienced, whether in the World of Form or in the Formless World, whether conscious, unconscious or neither-conscious-nor-unconscious, they remember the details of those past lives. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to remembrance of past lives...

17. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to knowledge of the death and rebirth of beings. Here, some ascetic or Brahmin ... attains to such concentration of mind

that he sees with the divine eye, purified and surpassing that of humans, beings passing away and arising: base and noble, well-favoured and ill-favoured, to happy and unhappy destinations as kamma directs them, and he knows: “These beings, on account of misconduct of body, speech or thought or disparaging the Noble Ones, have wrong view and will suffer the kammic fate of wrong view. At the breaking-up of the body after death they are reborn in a lower world, a bad destination, a state of suffering, hell. But these beings, on account of good conduct of body, speech or thought, of praising the Noble Ones, have right view and will reap the kammic reward of right view. At the breaking-up of the body [112] after death they are reborn in a good destination, a heavenly world.” Thus with the divine eye, purified and surpassing that of humans, he sees beings passing away and rearising... This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to knowledge of the death and birth of beings...

18. ‘Also unsurpassed is the Blessed Lord’s way of teaching Dhamma in regard to the supernormal powers. These are of two kinds. There is the kind that is bound up with the corruptions and with attachment,<sup>890</sup> which is called “un-Ariyan”, and there is the kind that is free of the corruptions and not bound up with attachment, which is called “Ariyan”. What is the “un-Ariyan” supernormal power? Here some ascetic or Brahmin enjoys various supernormal powers: being one, he becomes many — being many, he becomes one; he appears and disappears; he passes through fences, walls and mountains unhindered as if through air; he sinks into the ground and emerges from it as if it were water; he walks on the water without breaking the surface as if on land; he flies cross-legged through the sky like a bird with wings; he even touches and strokes with his hand the sun and moon, mighty and powerful as they are; and he travels in the body as far as the Brahma world. That is the “un-Ariyari” supernormal power. And what is the “Ariyan” supernormal power? Here a monk, if he wishes: “Let me abide with the disgusting<sup>891</sup> not feeling disgust”, can so abide, and if he wishes: “Let me [113] abide with the non-disgusting feeling disgust”, he can so abide, also feeling either disgust or non-disgust in the presence of both ... or: “Ignoring both the disgusting and the non-disgusting may I abide in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware”, he can so abide. That is the “Ariyan” supernormal power, that is free of the corruptions and not bound up with attachment. This is the unsurpassed teaching in regard to the supernormal powers. This the Blessed Lord fully comprehends, and beyond it lies nothing further to be comprehended; and in such understanding

there is no other ascetic or Brahmin who is greater or more enlightened than the Blessed Lord, as regards the supernormal powers.

19. ‘Whatever, Lord, it is possible for a clansman endowed with confidence to achieve by putting forth effort and by persistence, by human effort, human exertion and human endurance, <sup>892</sup> that the Blessed Lord has achieved. For the Blessed Lord gives himself up neither to the pleasures of the senses, which are base, vulgar, for worldlings and not for the Noble, and unprofitable, nor to self-torment, which is painful, ignoble and unprofitable.<sup>893</sup> The Blessed Lord is able, here and now,<sup>894</sup> to enjoy the surpassing<sup>895</sup> happiness of dwelling in the four jhānas.

‘Lord, if I were asked: “Well now, friend Sāriputta, have there ever been in the past any ascetics and Brahmins more exalted in enlightenment than the Blessed Lord?” I should say: “No.” If asked: “Will there be any such in the future?” I should say: “No.” [114] If asked: “Is there any such at present ?” I should say: “No.” Again, if I were asked: “Have there been any such in the past equal in enlightenment to the Blessed Lord?” I should say: “Yes.” If asked: “Will there be any such in the future?” I should say: “Yes.” But if I were asked: “Are there any such at present equal in enlightenment to the Blessed Lord?” I should say: “No.” And if I were then asked: “Venerable Sariputta, why do you accord this highest recognition to one and not the other?” I should say: “I have heard and received it from the Blessed Lord’s own lips: ‘There have been in the past, and there will be in the future, Arahant Buddhas equal in enlightenment to myself.’ I have also heard and received it from the Blessed Lord’s own lips that it is not possible, it cannot be that in one and the same world-system two Arahant supreme Buddhas should arise simultaneously. <sup>896</sup> No such situation can exist.”

‘Lord, if I were [115] to reply thus to such questions, would I be speaking in conformity with the Blessed Lord’s word, and not misrepresenting him by departing from the truth? Would I be explaining Dhamma correctly, so that no fellow-follower of the Dhamma could contest it or find occasion for censure?’



‘Certainly, Sāriputta, if you answered like this you would not misrepresent me, you would be explaining Dhamma correctly and not laying yourself open to censure.’

20. At this, the Venerable Udayi said to the Lord: ‘It is wonderful, Lord, it is marvellous how content the Blessed Lord is, how satisfied and restrained,<sup>897</sup> when being endowed with such power and influence he does not make a display of himself! If the wanderers professing other doctrines were able to discern in themselves even one of such qualities, they would proclaim it with a banner! It is wonderful ... that the Blessed Lord does not make display of himself!’

‘Well then, Udayi, just observe: so it is. If such wanderers were able to discern in themselves even one of such qualities, they would proclaim it with a banner. But the Tathagata is content,...he does not make a display of himself.’ [116]

21. Then the Lord said to Sariputta: ‘And therefore you, Sāriputta, should frequently speak about this matter to monks and nuns, to male and female lay-followers. And any foolish people who have doubts or queries about the Tathagata will, by listening to such talk, have their doubts and queries resolved.’

This was how the Venerable Sariputta proclaimed his confidence in the Lord. And so one name for this exposition is ‘The Serene Faith’.

<sup>856</sup> The first two verses are the same as DN 16.1.16ff, and the rest of the Sutta is a (doubtless later) expansion of that conversation.

<sup>857</sup> Sāriputta was thus established in terms of the ‘Mirror of Dhamma’: DN 16.2.8ff.

858 The 37 Bodhipakkhiya-Dhammā or ‘Requisites of Enlightenment’, listed at Sutta 33.23(2). See BDic and EB for further details.

859 The six sense-organs (mind being the sixth) and their objects.

860 These refer (1) to ordinary human beings, (2) to the eighty ‘Great Elders’, (3) to the two chief disciples of a Buddha, to Pacceka-Buddhas and Bodhisattas, 4) to ‘omniscient Bodhisattas’, i.e. those in their last rebirth, when about to become Buddhas (DA).

861 Cf. DN 11.3, here elaborated.

862 By Yakkhas and the like (DA).

863 This implies having gained the second jhāna.

864 Dassana-samāpatti. The first two of these approximate to the contemplation described in VM 6.

865 Viññāṇa-sota: a rare expression which seems to equate with bhavanga, the (mainly) commentarial term for the ‘life-continuum’ (Ñāṇamoli). See BDic and EB under Bhavanga. In this case both worldings (puthujjana: n.16) and ‘learners’ (sekha: n.542).

866 Arahants.

867 Puggala-paññatti: also the title of a book of the Abhidhamma, but here the reference is to the different classes of Arahants.

868 Ubhato-bhāga-vimutto: one who has gained liberation by both the jhānas and insight. This is the ‘liberation of heart and through wisdom’ frequently mentioned (e.g. DN 6.13). But only the second part, through wisdom’, is complete and final liberation. See n.355.

869 Paññā-vimutto: one who has gained liberation through insight alone, without, or without necessarily having gone through the jhānas.

870 Kāya-sakkhī. For the somewhat scholastic (and doubtless late) definitions of this and the rest, see BDic under Ariya-Puggala (B), or VM 21. Also listed at MN 70.

871 Diṭṭhi-ppatto.

872 Saddhā-vimutto.

873 Dhammānusārī.

874 Saddhānusārī.

875 As RD remarks, it is most unusual to find these called padhānas or efforts.

876 These are detailed at AN 4.162.

877 Vebhūtiyaṃ.

878 Sārambhajaṃ jayāpekkho: angrily keen on victory.

879 As at DN 1.1.20.

880 Reading jhāyī with DA.

881 Gatimā.

882 Dhitimā.

883 Mutimā.

884 Paccattam yoniso manasikārā.

885 As a Non-Returner: cf. n.374.

886 As DN 1.30ff.

887 As DN 1.2.2ff.

888 Beyond all calculation.

889 Atta-bhāva: cf. n.220.

890 Sa-upadhika.

891 Paṭikkūla.

892 Note the stress on ‘human’: the Buddha was still thought of as a man, in some sense. This contrasts with later developments in the Mahāyāna schools.

893 The two extremes to be avoided according to the Buddha’s first sermon.

894 In this life.

895 Abhicetasikānaṃ: glossed as ‘transcending thoughts of the sense-sphere’ - not of course ‘transcendental’ in the sense of supramundane.

896 Cf. DN 19.14.

897 Sallekhatā: ‘austerity’...

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