

The Buddha's Words

A. Direct Knowledge of the Three Characteristics

Monks, physical form is impermanent. Whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*; whatever is *dukkha* is nonself. Whatever is nonself should be seen as it truly is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.'¹ [The same for feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness.]

Monks, physical form is impermanent ... painful (*dukkha*) ... and nonself. So too, the causes for the arising of physical form are impermanent ... painful ... and nonself. As physical form has originated from causes that are impermanent ... painful ... and nonself, how could it be permanent, pleasurable or self?² [The same for feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness.]

But Friend, a learned, noble disciple, who has seen the noble ones and is skilled and well-trained in their teaching, who has seen the worthy ones and is skilled and well-trained in their teaching, does not regard physical form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form. He does not regard feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. He understands as it truly is impermanent form as 'impermanent form' ... impermanent consciousness as 'impermanent consciousness.' He understands as it truly is stressful (*dukkha*) form as 'stressful form' ... stressful consciousness as 'stressful consciousness.' He understands as it truly is selfless form as 'selfless form' ... selfless consciousness as 'selfless consciousness.' He understands as it truly is conditioned form as 'conditioned form' ... conditioned consciousness as 'conditioned consciousness.' He understands as it truly is murderous form as 'murderous form' ... murderous consciousness as 'murderous consciousness.' He does not assume, grasp or determine form as 'my self.' He does not assume feeling ... perception ... volitional formations ... consciousness; he does not

¹ E.g., S. III. 22.

² S. III. 23-24.

grasp or determine it as 'my self.' Not grasped or attached to, these five aggregates of clinging lead to his long-lasting welfare and happiness.³

How, householder, is one afflicted in body and afflicted in mind? Here, an untaught ordinary person, who has not seen the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their teaching ... regards physical form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness as self, regards self as possessing form ... regards form in self ... regards self in form ... regards self in consciousness. He lives obsessed by the notions: 'I am form,' 'my form,' 'I am feeling,' 'my feeling,' 'I am perception,' 'my perception,' 'I am volitional formations,' 'my volitional formations,' 'I am consciousness,' 'my consciousness.' [78/2] As he lives obsessed by these notions, that form ... consciousness of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness, there arises in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

And how, householder, is one afflicted in body but not afflicted in mind? Here, the instructed noble disciple ... does not regard physical form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness as self, regard self as possessing form ... regard form in self ... regard self in form ... regard self in consciousness. He does not live obsessed by the notions: 'I am form,' 'my form,' 'I am feeling,' 'my feeling,' 'I am perception,' 'my perception,' 'I am volitional formations,' 'my volitional formations,' 'I am consciousness,' 'my consciousness.' As he lives unobsessed by these notions, that form ... consciousness of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness, there do not arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.⁴

How, monks, is there non-agitation through non-clinging? Here, an instructed noble disciple ... does not regard physical form as self, self as possessing form, self in form, or form in self. That form of his changes and alters. Despite the change and alteration of form, his consciousness is not preoccupied with this physical change. No agitation and constellation of mental states (*dhamma-samuppāda*) arising from preoccupation with physical change remain overpowering his mind. Because his mind is not overpowered,

³ S. III 114-15; a verse by Sāriputta; an abbreviated translation. The section, *does not regard physical form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form*, is encapsulated in the Visuddhimagga's definition: *Na attā* (not self), *na attano* (not of self), *na attani* (not in self), *na attavatī* (not possessing self); see Vism. 578. The Visuddhimagga uses numerous explanations for perceiving selflessness, for example by regarding physical form as not a being, a spirit, a person, a youth, a woman, a man, a self or of self, us or ours, or belonging to anyone (Vism. 653-6).

⁴ S. III. 3-5; a verse by Sāriputta; an abbreviated translation.

he is not frightened, distressed or anxious, and through non-clinging he does not become agitated.⁵ [The same for feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness.]

Monks, when one has understood the impermanence, alteration, fading away and cessation of physical form, and when one sees as it truly is with correct wisdom thus: 'Form, both past and present, is impermanent, *dukkha* and subject to change,' then one abandons sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. By abandoning sorrow ... despair, one is not agitated. Unagitated one dwells happily. A monk who dwells happily is said to be quenched in that respect (*tadaṅga-nibbuta*).⁶ [The same for feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness.] [78/3]

An untaught ordinary person reflects unwisely (*ayoniso-manasikāra*) thus: 'In the far-reaching past did I exist? Did I not exist? What was I? How was I? Having been what, what did I become? In the far-reaching future will I exist? Will I not exist? What will I be? How will I be? Having been what, what will I become?' Or else he doubts about the present thus: 'Do I exist or do I not exist? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?'

When he reflects unwisely in this way, one of the six views arises in him. There arises the view (belief) as true and real: 'I have a self,' 'I do not have a self,' 'I perceive the self by way of the self,' 'I perceive nonself by way of the self,' 'I perceive the self by way of nonself.' Or else he has some such view as this: 'It is this self of mine that directs, feels and experiences here and there the fruits of good and bad actions; it is permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure like this forever.' Monks, this speculative view is called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the disturbance of views, the wriggling of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair; he is not freed from suffering, I say.

Monks, a well-taught noble disciple ... understands what things are fit for reflection and what things are unfit for reflection. He does not reflect on those things unfit for reflection, and he reflects on those things fit for reflection.

What are the things unfit for reflection that he does not reflect on? They are the things such that when he reflects on them, the unarisen taints of

⁵ S. III. 17-18.

⁶ S. III. 43.

sensual lust, becoming, and ignorance arise in him, and arisen taints increase. These are the things unfit for reflection that a noble disciple does not reflect on.

And what are the things fit for reflection that a noble disciple reflects on? They are the things such that when he reflects on them, the unarisen taints of sensual lust, becoming and ignorance do not arise, and arisen taints are abandoned. These are the things fit for reflection that he reflects on. By not reflecting on things unfit for reflection and by reflecting on things fit for reflection, unarisen taints do not arise in him and arisen taints are abandoned.

That noble disciple reflects wisely (*yoniso-manasikāra*) thus: ‘This is suffering ... this is the cause of suffering ... this is the cessation of suffering ... this is the way to the cessation of suffering.’ When he reflects wisely in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: Personality-view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), and adherence to rules and observances (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*).⁷

B. Practical Benefits of the Three Characteristics

The Ephemeral Nature of Life & the Value of Time [78/4]

Form is like a lump of foam,
Feeling like a water bubble;
Perception is like a mirage,
Volitions like a plantain trunk,
And consciousness like an illusion,
So explained the Kinsman of the Sun.*

*The Buddha.

However one may consider (these five aggregates),
And carefully investigate,
They are but void and empty
When one discerns them thoroughly.

With reference to this body
The One of Broad Wisdom* has taught

⁷ M. I. 7-9; a similar but slightly more detailed passage, especially concerning the six views, is found at Vbh. 382.

The abandonment of three things.**

*Ibid.

**Author: *Lobha, dosa & moha, or taṇhā, māna & diṭṭhi.*

Behold the body thrown aside;

When vitality, heat and consciousness

Depart from this physical body,

Then it lies there cast away:

A senseless thing, mere food for others.

Such is this continuum (of life),

This illusion, beguiler of fools.

These five aggregates are known as a murderer;

Here no substance can be found.

A monk with energy aroused

Should look upon the aggregates thus,

Whether by day or by night,

Comprehending, ever mindful.

He should discard all the fetters

And make a refuge for himself;

Let him fare as with head ablaze,

Aiming for the imperishable state.⁸

Monks, this lifespan of human beings is short; one must pass on to the future life. You should reflect wisely, do good, and live a pure life (*brahmacariya*). One born cannot avoid death; one who lives long lives a hundred years or a fraction more.

⁸ S. III. 142-43. The imperishable state: Nibbāna.

Short is the life span of human beings,
The good man should disdain it.
You should live like one with head aflame:
No one can avoid Death's arrival.

Days and nights pass by;
Life is brought to a halt.
The life of mortals is exhausted
Like the water of small streams.⁹

Life in this world is unpredictable and uncertain.
Life here is difficult, short and bound up with suffering.
There are no means to help those born to avoid death.
Even for one reaching old age, death prevails; such is the nature of living creatures.

As ripe fruit is in constant danger of falling, so too living beings are in constant danger of death.

As clay pots made by the potter end up shattered, so it is with the life of mortals.

The young and the old, the foolish and the wise, all are trapped by death, all have death as their end.

When they are overcome by death, going from here to the next world, even a father cannot save his son, or a family its relatives.

Look: while relatives are watching, tearful and wailing, humans are carried off one by one, like cattle being led to slaughter.

The world is smitten by death and old age;
The wise do not grieve, knowing the nature of the world.

⁹ Nd 1. 44, 119-20; some verses at D. II. 246; S. I. 108-9; Thag. 20.

You cannot know a person's path, neither its origin nor its destination.

Not seeing these ends, to grieve for him is futile.

If a deluded person should gain any good by lament and self-torment, a wise person would act so too. [78/5]

Grief does not lead to peace of mind.

On the contrary, it leads to more misery and harm.

Tormenting himself, a mourner grows thin and pale.

He cannot thereby aid the departed; lamentation is of no avail.

Without abandoning grief a person suffers further anguish;

Mourning the departed makes him a slave to sorrow.

Look at people set to depart in conformity with their actions;

All beings are terrified when trapped by Death.

What people expect is always different from what actually happens; such is the nature of separation.

See the way of the world: a person may live for a hundred years or more,

But in the end he is parted from his relatives, and he too forsakes life here.

Having listened to the Worthy Ones, dispel your grief.

Seeing someone who has passed away say: 'I cannot bring him back again.'

A wise, skilled and learned person eliminates sorrow as soon as it arises,

Like dousing a fire, or the wind blowing away a tuft of cotton.

A person searching for happiness should allay bereavement, pining, and distress; he should pull out this piercing arrow.

Having pulled out the arrow he is free and gains peace of mind.

He passes beyond all grief, sorrowless and quenched.¹⁰

¹⁰ Sn. 112-114; some verses are repeated at J. IV. 127; Nd 1. 120-21.

Once conceived in the womb at day or night, human beings go onwards without return.

Despite abundant vigour, their battles against ageing and death are futile;

Ageing and death overrun all beings; for this reason I resolve to practice the Dhamma.

Kings may defeat a fearsome fourfold army [of elephants, horses, chariots and infantry], but they are unable to defeat the Lord of Death....

Surrounded by a fourfold army, kings may escape an enemy's clutches, but they are unable to escape from Death....

With elephants, horses, chariots, and infantry a hero may assail and destroy an enemy, but he is unable to destroy Death....

People can propitiate furious demons, spirits and ghosts, but they are unable to placate Death....

A criminal, felon or rogue may still receive the king's clemency, but Death will never show mercy.... [78/6]

Not royalty or nobility, not the rich, the powerful or the strong; Death pities no one.

For this reason I resolve to practice the Dhamma....

Indeed righteousness protects the righteous; Truth when well-observed brings the reward of joy.

Those who observe the Truth to a woeful state do not go.

For righteousness and unrighteousness have not equal ends; Unrighteousness leads to hell; righteousness leads to a happy abode.¹¹

¹¹ J. IV. 494-96; a selection of verses are translated.

Just as mountains of solid rock,
Massive, reaching to the sky,
Might draw together from all sides,
Crushing all in the four quarters—
So ageing and death come
Overwhelming living beings.
Kings, brahmans, peasants, servants,
Outcastes and scavengers:
Ageing and death spare none along the way,
Crushing everything.

No battlefield exists there for elephants,
For chariots and infantry.
One cannot defeat them by incantations
Or bribe them with wealth.

Therefore let a wise person, out of regard for his own welfare,
Establish faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha.

When one conducts oneself righteously with body, speech and mind, one
is praised here in the present life, and after death one rejoices in heaven.¹²

The world is smitten by Death and besieged by old age; the world is
pierced by the arrow of craving, constantly seething with desire.

The world is mauled by Death and engulfed by old age; it is defenceless
and relentlessly beaten like a thief receiving punishment.

Death, disease and old age pursue us like three huge fires; no power exists
to withstand them, no speed to run away.

Do not let the days pass in vain—accomplish something, great or little.

¹² S. I. 102.

With the passing of each day and night, life's opportunities dwindle.

Your last moment approaches: whether walking, standing, sitting or lying, there is no time for you to be negligent.¹³

I see your young sons crying 'Mommy, Daddy'; they are adorable and hard to come by.

Alas, even before reaching old age they succumb to death.

I see your young daughters, maidens lovely to behold; but their life ends like an uprooted tender bamboo.

Truly both men and women though of youthful age can die; who is assured of life, saying, 'I am still young?'

The days and nights pass by; life's duration constantly shrinks, like the time remaining for a school of fish in an evaporating pond.

What reassurance is youth?

The world is smitten by Death and besieged by old age; the days do not pass in vain....

Just as thread is used up by weavers, so too is the life of human beings.

Just as a brimming river does not return to the heights, so too human beings do not return to youth.

Just as a swollen river sweeps away the trees along its banks, so too old age and death sweep away all living beings.... [78/7]

Just as ripe fruit is in constant danger of falling, so too living beings are in constant danger of death.

In the morning we see many people; by evening some are no longer in sight.

¹³ Thag. verses 447-52 (of Sirimaṇḍa Thera).

In the evening we see many people; by morning some are no longer in sight.

We should hasten to make effort today; who knows if we shall die tomorrow?

For there is no postponing Death and his hordes.¹⁴

My son discarded his body as a snake casts off old skin; no use for his body, he passed away....

From another world he came unsummoned; departing this world I gave not my leave.

As he came so he went; what good is there in grieving his departure?

If I keen my body will waste away; what benefit is there in this?

My friends and relatives would anguish even more....

As children cry in vain to grasp the moon above, so people idly mourn the loss of those they love.

Those dead and cremated feel not their relatives' lament.

Therefore, I do not grieve; he fares the way he had to tread.¹⁵

Rather than mourn the deceased we should mourn for ourselves, who are constantly under Death's dominion.

As people stand, sit, lie or walk, life's constituents are not remiss; our years wear away in each blinking of the eye.

Alas, as our lives expire so, we must face separation.

¹⁴ J. VI. 25-28; a selection of verses are translated.

¹⁵ J. III. 164-66.

We should have pity on those beings remaining rather than mourn for those who have passed away.¹⁶

Monks, there are these five states not obtainable by ascetic, brahman, god, Māra or Brahmā, nor by anyone in the world. What five? The fulfilment of these requests: ‘May what is subject to ageing not age,’ ‘may what is subject to sickness not sicken,’ ‘may the mortal not die,’ ‘may the transient not end,’ and ‘may the unstable not be destroyed.’

For an untaught ordinary person, something subject to ageing ages, something subject to sickness sickens, something mortal dies, something transient ends, and something unstable is destroyed. (When this happens) that ordinary person ... does not reflect thus: ‘Not to me only ... (does this happen), but as long as beings come and go, arise and pass away, to all, that which is subject to ageing ages ... that which is unstable is destroyed. [78/8] When that which is subject to ageing ages ... that which is unstable is destroyed, if I grieve, pine, lament, beat my breast, wail and anguish, food would have no appeal, the body would languish, affairs would be neglected, enemies would rejoice, while friends would be distraught’... (When those conditions come about) he grieves, pines, laments and wails. This person is called an untaught ordinary person; pierced by the poisoned dart of sorrow, he torments himself.

To the learned, noble disciple also, that which is prone to ageing ages ... that which is unstable is destroyed. (When this happens) that noble disciple ... reflects thus: ‘Not to me only ... (does this happen), but as long as beings come and go, arise and pass away, to all, that which is subject to ageing ages ... that which is unstable is destroyed. When that which is subject to ageing ages ... that which is unstable is destroyed, if I grieve, pine, lament, beat my breast, wail and anguish, food would have no appeal, the body would languish, affairs would be neglected, enemies would rejoice, while friends would be distraught’... (When those conditions come about) he does not grieve, pine, lament or wail. This person is called a learned, noble disciple; drawn out is the poisoned dart of sorrow with which the untaught ordinary person torments himself. This noble disciple, having extinguished the fires of anguish, is sorrowless, dart-free and quenched.

Neither grief nor lamentation offers any gain;

And enemies rejoice to see our grief and pain.

But the sage, skilled in discrimination,

¹⁶ J. III. 95.

Does not tremble in the face of misfortune.
Seeing the sage's face unchanged and as before,
Rather his enemies are pained.
Wherever and however one gains the good,
By discourse, consultation, or well-worded speech,
By gifts or by customs rightly kept,
Make effort here with these means.
And if one knows that a desired end is out of reach,
Both for oneself and for others,
One should not grieve, but rather halt
And with firm resolve inquire:
'How shall I now proceed.'¹⁷

Dying we go alone; born we arrive alone; associations amongst beings are mere encounters.

Therefore a sage, erudite, perceiving both this world and the next, and fully comprehending Truth, is not anguished even by the severest woe.

'I will bestow honour and wealth to the worthy, and support spouse, relatives and fellow citizens';

This is the duty of a wise person.¹⁸

'Here I will live in the rainy season, here in the winter and the summer':
unaware of danger, so muses the fool. [78/9]

Preoccupied with children and livestock, attached to possessions, Death carries him away as a great flood sweeps away a slumbering village.

¹⁷ A. III. 54-56, 60-62; the final verses are also found at J. III. 204.

¹⁸ J. IV. 127.

When one is overcome by Death, neither children, nor parents, nor friends can offer protection; family provides no refuge.

Realizing the significance of this, let the wise and virtuous person swiftly clear the path leading to Nibbāna.¹⁹

Short indeed is this life; a person dies within a hundred years, and even if one exceeds that one surely perishes from old age.

People grieve for things they attach to as 'mine,' but no cherished possession lasts forever.

A person seeing this inevitable separation should live the homeless life.

Whatever one conceives of as 'mine' one must relinquish at death.

Knowing this let a wise person devoted to the Buddha shy away from possessiveness.

Just as a waking person does not see what he met in a dream,

Likewise one does not meet loved ones when they are dead and gone.

One sees and hears of specific people, but when they have passed away one is left only reciting their names.

A person greedy for possessions cannot renounce grief, lamentation and stinginess.

Hence the sage discerning true safety abandons guarded possessions and wanders forth.

The wise declare that he who escapes the cycle of births* is a suitable companion for a monk cultivating seclusion and dwelling in solitude**.

*Author: an arahant.

**Author: A monk who is still in training: a *sekha* or a virtuous unenlightened person (*puṭhujjana-kalyāṇaka*).

Free from attachment, a sage creates no objects of love or loathing.

¹⁹ Dh. verses 286-89.

Sorrow and selfishness do not stain the sage, as water does not stain a lotus leaf.

Just as water does not adhere to a lotus leaf, as a lotus is not tainted by water, a sage does not cling to what is seen, heard or perceived.

A wise person does not give undue import to what is seen, heard or perceived, nor does he wish for purity by other means.*

He is neither impassioned** nor disaffected***.²⁰

*Author: E.g., other than the Eightfold Path or the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

**Author: Like a misguided person.

***Author: Like a *sekha* or a virtuous unenlightened person.

At times wealth parts from its owner; at other times, a person departs from his wealth.

See here, you pursuer of pleasure: mortals do not live forever.

Therefore, I do not grieve whilst others are grieving.

The full moon rises and then wanes; the sun illumines the earth and sets.

I see through the worldly vicissitudes; therefore, I do not grieve whilst others are grieving.²¹ [78/10]

Pleasure and pain, fame and disrepute,

Gain and loss, praise and blame:

For human beings these things are transient,

Inconstant and bound to change.

²⁰ Sn. 158-160.

²¹ J. III. 154; Nd 1. 124.

One mindful and wise discerns them well,
Observant of their alterations.

Pleasant things do not stir his mind
And those unpleasant do not annoy.
All partiality and enmity is dispelled,
Eliminated and abolished.

Aware now of the stainless, griefless state,
He fully knows, having gone beyond.²²

The physical form of mortals decays,
Their name and ancestry do not decay.²³

Time all beings devours, and consumes itself as well.²⁴

Life undergoes destruction night and day.²⁵

Time flies by, the days swiftly pass; the stages of life successively end.

Seeing clearly this danger in death, a seeker of peace should release the
world's bait.²⁶

²² A. IV. 157.

²³ S. I. 43.

²⁴ J. II. 260.

²⁵ S. I. 38, 43.

²⁶ S. I. 63.

Nowhere have I committed any evil;
Therefore, I fear not impending death.²⁷

Firmly grounded in the Dhamma,
One need not fear the other world.²⁸

Now, Ānanda ... at that time I was King Mahāsudassana. Those eighty-four thousand cities of which Kusāvātī was the chief were mine, those eighty-four thousand palaces of which the Truth-Palace was the chief were mine ... those eighty-four thousand carriages adorned with gold ornaments, gold banners and spread with gold nets of which Vejayanta was the chief were mine.... And of those eighty-four thousand cities I dwelt in just one, Kusāvātī; of those eighty-four thousand palaces I dwelt in just one, the Truth-Palace ... and of those eighty-four thousand carriages I rode in only one, Vejayanta.... See, Ānanda, how all those conditions are past; they have vanished and changed. Thus, Ānanda, conditioned states are impermanent; they are unstable and can bring us no comfort. This alone is enough for us to grow weary of conditioned states, to detach from them, and to be liberated from them....

‘Indeed, all conditioned things are impermanent, prone to arise and pass away. Having arisen, they cease; their coming to rest is truest bliss.’²⁹
[78/11]

My city is Kapilavatthu; my father is King Suddhodana; my mother who bore me is called Māyādevī. I was a householder for twenty-nine years; I had three magnificent palaces: Sucanda, Kokanuda and Koñca, with eighty-four thousand beautifully adorned royal concubines. My wife’s name is Yasodharā and my son’s name is Rāhula. Having seen the four signs, I left the household life behind; for six years I strove and undertook austerities. I proclaimed the Wheel of Dhamma in the deer-park of Isipatana at Bārāṇasī. I am the

²⁷ J. VI. 312.

²⁸ S. I. 43.

²⁹ D. II. 196-99.

enlightened Buddha named Gotama, the refuge for all beings.... My life-span in this era is a mere one hundred years. Despite living so briefly, I have aided many people in crossing beyond suffering, and have set up the Torch of Righteousness to awaken future generations. Soon, I along with my disciples will attain Parinibbāna*, like a fire is extinguished for lack of fuel. This body possessed of superior qualities, graced with the thirty-two characteristics and peerless splendour, along with the Perfections, the Ten Powers, and the six-hued aura illuminating as the sun the ten directions, all this will completely disappear. Indeed, all conditioned things are without essence, they are empty.³⁰

*Final Nibbāna; final release from rebirth.

The young and the old, the foolish and the wise, the wealthy and the poor, all are destined for death.

As a potter's vessels, both small and large, both fired and unfired, end up shattered, so too the lives of all beings end in death.

Ripe I am in years. Only a little of my life remains.

Now I depart from you; I have made myself my own refuge.

Monks, be vigilant, mindful and of pure virtue; compose your thoughts, and guard your mind.

In this Doctrine and Discipline, a person who abides diligently escapes the round of rebirth and makes an end of misery.³¹

Nowadays, O monks, speaking truthfully one should say: 'Short is the life of human beings, limited and brief; it is fraught with pain and tribulation. Reflect wisely, do good, and lead the sublime life (*brahmacariya*); for none who is born is immortal.' Today one who lives long lives for a hundred years or a little more. And when living for a hundred years, it is just for three hundred seasons.... When living for three hundred seasons, it is just for twelve hundred months.... When living for twelve hundred months, it is just for twenty-four hundred fortnights.... And when living for twenty-four hundred fortnights, it

³⁰ Bv. 97-8.

³¹ D. II. 120-1.

is just for 36,000 days.... And when living for 36,000 days, a person eats just 72,000 meals: 24,000 meals in winter, 24,000 in summer and 24,000 in the rains. And this includes the drinking of mother's milk and the times without food. These are the times without food: when resentful, troubled, or ill, when observing a fast, and when not finding anything to eat. [78/12] Thus, O monks, I have reckoned the life of a centenarian: the limit of his lifespan, the number of seasons, of years, months and fortnights, of days and nights, of his meals and foodless times. Whatever should be done by a compassionate teacher, who out of goodwill seeks the welfare of his disciples, that I have done for you. These are the roots of trees, O monks, these are empty huts. Meditate, monks, do not be negligent, lest you regret it later. This is my instruction to you.³²

Monks, considering personal well-being, you should accomplish it with care. Considering others' well-being, you should accomplish it with care. Considering the well-being of both, you should accomplish it with care.³³

- Developing a Sense of Urgency & Preparing for the Future

Heedfulness is the path to the deathless, heedlessness is the path to death. The heedful do not die; the heedless are as if already dead.... An earnest, attentive person obtains abundant bliss.³⁴

Therefore, with the remainder of your lives,
Carefully attend to your duties.³⁵

One who has gone forth should reflect repeatedly so: 'The days and nights are relentlessly passing, how am I spending my time?'³⁶

Do not let the opportunity pass you by....

³² A. IV. 138-40.

³³ S. II. 29; A. IV. 134-5 (quoted previously).

³⁴ Dh. verses 21 & 27.

³⁵ Sn. 131.

³⁶ A. V. 88.

With perseverance and knowledge remove the piercing arrow.³⁷

You should promptly do the deed you know leads to your own well-being.³⁸

The lazy, lethargic slacker who, although still young and strong,
Does not devote himself to timely tasks and wallows in heedless fantasies
does not find the path to wisdom.³⁹

A person of little learning grows old like an ox;
His muscles develop but his wisdom does not.⁴⁰

They who have not led the pure life, who in youth have not acquired wealth,
Sit dejected like old herons at a pond void of fish. [78/13]

They who have not led the pure life, who in youth have not acquired wealth,
Lie bemoaning the past like spent, wasted arrows.⁴¹

All profit is founded on two things:
Obtaining the unacquired and protecting the acquired.⁴²

Whatsoever families, Monks, attain great wealth and last a long time,
all of them do so because of these four reasons or one or other of them,
namely, they seek for what is lost, repair the worn, consume in moderation,
and put in authority a virtuous woman or man.⁴³

Heedfulness is the path to the deathless, heedlessness is the path to death.
The heedful do not die; the heedless are as if already dead.

³⁷ Sn. 58.

³⁸ S. I. 57.

³⁹ Dh. verse 280.

⁴⁰ Dh. verse 152.

⁴¹ Dh. verses 155-6.

⁴² J. V. 116. The two aspects of heedfulness are establishment and protection.

⁴³ A. II. 249-50.

Indulgence leads to heedlessness, heedlessness to degeneracy, and
degeneracy to calamity.
You with the responsibility to rule the nation, do not be heedless!
Many reckless rulers have lost both their good fortune and their state.
Likewise, reckless householders lose their homes, and reckless homeless
ones their renunciant life.
When a nation's ruler throws caution to the wind, the nation's wealth is
utterly destroyed; such is a king's misfortune.
Carelessness is the enemy of Truth.
Through a ruler's excessive negligence, thieves destroy a rich, prosperous
country;
Descendants, gold and treasure are all lost; once plundered, a country's
wealth is no more.
Despite being king, when all wealth is lost, friends and relatives do not
respect your judgement;
Your dependants—mahouts, knights, charioteers, and foot-soldiers
—do not respect your judgement.
The glory of a witless, misguided leader wanes, like a worn-out snake-skin.
But a diligent, industrious leader, who manages affairs well and in a timely
fashion, grows in riches, as a bull enhances the fortunes of his herd.
Therefore, O King, journey and inspect the countryside, and having
completed your inspection perform your royal duties.⁴⁴

Let a wise person in hope stand fast and not be discouraged.
Myself, I see clearly the fulfilment of all my desires.⁴⁵

I have realized, Monks, (the value of) two things: Not to be content with
good states of mind so far achieved, and to be unremitting in the struggle for
the goal.... [78/14] Through diligence have I won enlightenment, through
diligence have I won the unsurpassed security from bondage.⁴⁶

Do not rest content merely by keeping precepts and observances,
nor by great learning; nor by deep concentration,
Nor by a secluded life; nor even by thinking: 'I enjoy the bliss of renunciation
not experienced by an ordinary person.'

⁴⁴ J. V. 99-100; also in part at J. V. 112-13.

⁴⁵ E.g.: J. I. 267; J. IV. 269; J. VI. 43.

⁴⁶ A. I. 50.

O Monks, you should not rest content until reaching the utter destruction of the taints.⁴⁷

Carry out your responsibilities in preparation for the future;
Let not those tasks oppress you when they no longer can be postponed.⁴⁸

Fear that which ought to be feared; protect yourself from potential danger.
A wise person inspects this world and the next considering future danger.⁴⁹

Monks, recognizing these five future dangers (i.e., the possibility of old age, illness, famine, social unrest, and a schism in the *saṅgha*), you should be earnest, ardent and resolute to attain the unattained, master the unmastered, and realize the unrealized.⁵⁰

Monks, these five future dangers (i.e., there will be monks untrained in body, virtue, mind, and wisdom, who will act as preceptors for higher ordination, act as mentors, recite discourses on the Abhidhamma and Catechism, who will not listen attentively to the Buddha's sermons, and who will be elders living laxly and luxuriously), which have not yet arisen, will arise in the future. Be aware of these dangers; being aware, endeavour to prevent them.⁵¹

Monks, these five future dangers (i.e., there will be monks who long for fine robes, rich food, and pleasant lodgings and will seek these by violating the discipline; there will be monks who overly associate with nuns and female novices, and who will overly associate with lay stewards and male novices), which have not yet arisen, will arise in the future. Be aware of these dangers; being aware, endeavour to prevent them.⁵²

⁴⁷ Dh. verses 271-72. The commentaries define the bliss of renunciation, *nekkhamma-sukha*, as the happiness of a non-returner (*anāgāmi*).

⁴⁸ J. IV. 166.

⁴⁹ J. III. 35, 399.

⁵⁰ A. III. 102-5.

⁵¹ A. III. 105-8.

⁵² A. III. 108-10.

Here Sāriputta, the Lords Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa were diligent in teaching the Dhamma in detail to their disciples, and they had many discourses in prose, in prose and verse ... and catechetical discourses. They prescribed the training rules for their disciples, and laid down the Pāṭimokkha*. When these Buddhas, these Blessed Ones, and their awakened disciples passed away, disciples of later generations of various names, families and clans went forth and preserved the teaching for a very long time. [78/15] It is as if various flowers, loose on a plank of wood, well tied together by a thread, are not scattered and dispersed by a gust of wind. This is because they are well tied together by the thread.... It is for this reason that the teaching of the Lords Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa lasted long.⁵³

*The monastic code of discipline.

And then the Venerable Sāriputta addressed the monks and said: ‘Friends, this Dhamma has been well-proclaimed and well-imparted by our Lord the Perfectly Enlightened One; it leads to salvation and is conducive to peace. All of us should therefore convene and recite this teaching without disagreement, so that this dispensation (*brahmacariya*) may be enduring and established for a long time, thus to be for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of gods and humans.’⁵⁴

Then the Venerable Kassapa the Great addressed the monks, saying: ‘Come your reverences, let us recite the Dhamma and Discipline before what is not Dhamma shines out and the Dhamma is eclipsed, before what is not Discipline shines out and Discipline is eclipsed, before those who speak what is not Dhamma become strong and those who speak Dhamma weaken, before those who speak what is not Discipline become strong and those who speak Discipline weaken.’⁵⁵

Ānanda, as long as the Vajjians hold regular and frequent assemblies ... as long as the Vajjians meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they may be expected to prosper and not decline....

⁵³ Vin. III. 8.

⁵⁴ D. III. 210-11.

⁵⁵ Vin. II. 283-4.

Monks, as long as the monks hold regular and frequent assemblies ... as long as they meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they may be expected to prosper and not decline....

Monks, as long as the monks continue with faith, with modesty, with fear of wrongdoing, with much learning (*bahussuta*), with energetic resolve, with established mindfulness, and with wisdom, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ D. II. 73-79. For spiritual development the Buddha urged his disciples to reflect that all things are impermanent and subject to decay; this passage, however, instructs that careful attendance to one's (proper) duties results exclusively in prosperity, not decline. One should study these two injunctions well for a correct understanding and to avoid misguided Dhamma practice. Furthermore, one should be aware that heedfulness for self-improvement and self-development, which is a personal matter, must go hand in hand with heedfulness in respect to social responsibility.