

Dvedhāvitakka Sutta

MN 19 *Discerning and Dividing Thoughts in Two*
Translated by Ānanda
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This I have heard,

*One time, the Awakened One was living in Jeta's grove,
At Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery
There, the Awakened One addressed the bhikkhus saying:*

*"Monks"
"Bhadante" the monks replied.*

The Awakened One said this:

[Discernment of Thoughts]

*Before my complete Awakening monks,
While I was a bodhisatta,
Not yet a fully awakened, I reflected:*

"Let me meditate, discerning and dividing my thoughts in two."¹

[Unwholesome Thoughts]

*From then on monks, I gathered on one side:
Thoughts of outward desire,²
Thoughts of anger,³
Thoughts of harm.⁴*

[Wholesome Thoughts]

*And I gathered on the other side:
Thoughts of contentment,⁵
Thoughts of non-anger,⁶
Thoughts of harmlessness.⁷*

¹ *"Yannūnāhaṃ dvidhā katvā dvidhā katvā vitakke vihareyyan."*

² *Kāmaavitakko: Constantly wanting, things, outside oneself.*

³ *Byāpādavitakko: Aversion: "I hate this, I don't like that." Impatience.*

⁴ *Vihimsāvitakko: Taking a step further and attacking, taking mental action, retaliating. Restlessness.*

⁵ *Nekkhammavitakko: The opposite of outward desire. Freedom, contentment, letting go. Also generosity.*

⁶ *Abyāpādavitakko: Non-anger: Love, compassion, joy, calm awareness.*

⁷ *Avihimsāvitakko: Non-violence: Close to non-anger. Helping others. Calm.*

[Discerning Unwholesome States]⁸

[Discerning Outward Desire]

Then, while I was meditating,
Attentive, intent and resolute,⁹
There arose thoughts of outward desires [in my mind].¹⁰

Then I reflected:

This is troublesome,¹¹
This is troublesome to others,
This is troublesome to both.

These [thoughts] impede conscious discernment;¹²
They come with tension in the mind
And they lead away from Peace.

[Letting go of Outward Desires]

As soon as I realized: "This is troublesome." They faded away.
As soon as I realized: "This is troublesome to others." They faded away.
As soon as I realized: "This is troublesome to both." They faded away.

As soon as I realized: "These [thoughts] impede conscious discernment;
They come with tension in the mind
And they lead away from Peace." They faded away.¹³

So I kept on letting go thoughts of outward desires as they arose,
Kept on releasing them and bringing them to an end.¹⁴

⁸ Dis-tractions.

⁹ *evaṃ appamattassa ātāpino pahitattassa viharato*

¹⁰ He was distracted by outward desires.

¹¹ *Attabyābādhāya: Distractions are the trouble here. A distracted mind is in no state to be good for others also.*

¹² *'Paññānirodhiko viḥātapaḅbhiko anibbānasaṃvattaniko'*

¹³ This is the direct application of the four awakened understandings in practice. Seeing that unwholesome states bring trouble to oneself and to others, a wise person abandons them.

¹⁴ *So kho ahaṃ, bhikkhave, uppannuppannaṃ kāmavitakkaṃ pajahameva vinodameva byantameva naṃ akāsiṃ.*

[Discerning Anger]

*Then, while I was meditating,
Attentive, intent and resolute
There arose thoughts of anger [in my mind].*

Then I reflected:

*This is troublesome,
This is troublesome to others,
This is troublesome to both.*

*These [thoughts] impede conscious discernment;
They come with tension in the mind
And they lead away from Peace.*

[Letting go of Anger]

*As soon as I realized: "This is troublesome." They faded away.
As soon as I realized: "This is troublesome to others." They faded away.
As soon as I realized: "This is troublesome to both." They faded away.*

*As soon as I realized: "These [thoughts] impede conscious discernment;
They come with tension in the mind
And they lead away from Peace." They faded away.*

*So I kept on letting go thoughts of anger as they arose,
Kept on releasing them and bringing them to an end.*

[Discerning Harm]¹⁵

*Then, while I was meditating,
Attentive, intent and resolute
There arose thoughts of violence [in my mind].¹⁶*

Then I reflected:

*This is troublesome,
This is troublesome to others,
This is troublesome to both.*

These [thoughts] impede conscious discernment;

¹⁵ For our direct purpose in meditation practice, this can be translated as restlessness, and it's opposite would be calm instead of harmlessness,

¹⁶ For example: "I could have told him to his face, I should have told him to his face, next time I see him, I will tell it to his face"

*They come with tension in the mind
And they lead away from Peace.*

[Letting go of Harm]

*As soon as I realized: "This is troublesome." They faded away.
As soon as I realized: "This is troublesome to others." They faded away.
As soon as I realized: "This is troublesome to both." They faded away.*

*As soon as I realized: "These [thoughts] impede conscious discernment;
They come with tension in the mind
And they lead away from Peace." They faded away.*

*So I kept on letting go thoughts of anger as they arose,
Kept on releasing them and bringing them to an end.*

[Unwholesome Inclination of the Mind]

*Whatever one frequently thinks about and reflects upon,
Over and over, this becomes the inclination of his mind.¹⁷*

*If a [person] frequently thinks and dwell in thoughts of outward desires,¹⁸
[That person] has left the thoughts of contentment,
To cultivate thoughts of outward desires,
Their mind is bent upon outward desires.*

*If a [person] frequently thinks and dwells in thoughts of anger,
[That person] has left thoughts of non-anger,
To cultivate thoughts of anger,
Their mind is bent upon anger.*

*If a [person] frequently thinks and dwells in thoughts of harm,
[That person] has left thoughts of harmlessness,
To cultivate thoughts of harm,
Their mind is bent upon harm.*

[Simile of the Cowherd]

*Just as in the last month of the monsoon season,
In late fall, when the crops are abundant,
A cowherd would have to protect his cows.¹⁹*

¹⁷ *Yaññadeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhu bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti, tathā tathā nati hoti cetaso.*

¹⁸ *Kāmaṅvitakkañce, bhikkhu bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti, pahāsi nekkhammaṅvitakkaṃ, kāmaṅvitakkaṃ bahulamakāsi, tassa taṃ kāmaṅvitakkāya cittaṃ namati.*

¹⁹ *gopālako gāvo rakkheyya.*

To do so, he would have to poke and push,
Pull and block his cows [in line],
This way and that way, with a stick.²⁰

Why?

Because he sees, that, as the leader of these cows,
He could be punished, imprisoned, fined or blamed.
[For letting them graze unconsciously at everything].²¹

In the same way monks,
I saw danger, degradation and defilement
in unwholesome mental states²²

And in wholesome mental states,
I saw freedom, benefit²³ and the natural clarity.²⁴

[Discerning Wholesome States]²⁵

[Discerning Contentment]

Then, while I was meditating,
Attentive, intent and resolute
There arose a thought of contentment [in my mind].

Then I reflected:

This does not bring me trouble,
It does not bring trouble to others,
It does not bring trouble to both.

These [thoughts] are for the growth of conscious discernment,
They bring no tension in the mind,
And they lead to Peace.²⁶

²⁰ So tā gāvo tato tato daṇḍena ākoṭeyya paṭikoṭeyya sannirundheyya sannivāreyya.

²¹ When the mind is unwholesome, it constantly needs to be kept in check because there is no attention. The mind is blown away by the winds of carelessness.

²² addasaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ ādīnavaṃ okāraṃ saṅkilesaṃ,

²³ Upliftment

²⁴ kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ nekkhamme ānisaṃsaṃ voddānapakkhaṃ.

²⁵ Cohesive states, tractions.

²⁶ paññāvuddhiko avighātapakkhiko nibbānasaṃvattaniko'.

[Cultivating Contentment]

I reflected:

If I were to think about and dwell in these thoughts at night,
I see nothing to fear that could arise from this.

if I were to think about and dwell in these thoughts during the day,
I see nothing to fear that could arise from this.

If I were to think about and dwell in these thoughts day and night
I see nothing to fear that could arise from this.

[Going Beyond Thoughts of Contentment]

I reflected: "If I were to think and reflect constantly,
Before long, my body would become exhausted.
With an exhausted body, the mind is unsettled.
An unsettled mind is far from collected harmony."²⁷

I then calmed my mind and gathered it on itself.
I unified it and brought it to peaceful harmony.²⁸

Why?

So that my mind be undistracted.²⁹

[Thoughts of Non-anger]

Then, while I was meditating,
Attentive, intent and resolute
There arose a thought of non-anger.

Then I reflected:

'This does not bring me trouble,
It does not bring trouble to others,
It does not bring trouble to both.

These [thoughts] are for the growth of conscious discernment,
They bring no tension in the mind,
And they lead to Peace.

²⁷ Kāye kilante cittaṃ ūhaññeyya. Ūhate citte ārā cittaṃ samādhimhāti.

²⁸ ajjhattameva cittaṃ saññhapemi sannisādemi ekodiṃ karomi samādahāmi.

²⁹ 'Mā me cittaṃ ūhaññī' ti.

[Cultivating Non-Anger]

I reflected:

*If I were to think about and dwell in these thoughts at night,
I see nothing to fear that could arise from this.*

*if I were to think about and dwell in these thoughts during the day,
I see nothing to fear that could arise from this.*

*If I were to think about and dwell in these thoughts day and night
I see nothing to fear that could arise from this.*

[Going Beyond Thoughts of Non-Anger]

*I reflected: "If I were to think and reflect constantly,
Before long, my body would become exhausted.
With an exhausted body, the mind is unsettled.
An unsettled mind is far from collected mental harmony."*

*I then calmed my mind and gathered it on itself.
I unified it and brought it to peaceful harmony.*

Why?

So that my mind be undistracted.

[Thoughts of Harmlessness]

*Then, while I was meditating,
Attentive, intent and resolute
There arose a thought of harmlessness.*

Then I reflected:

*'This does not bring me trouble,
It does not bring trouble to others,
It does not bring trouble to both.*

*These [thoughts] are for the growth of conscious discernment,
They bring no tension in the mind,
And they lead to Peace.*

[Cultivating Harmlessness]

I reflected:

*If I were to think about and dwell in these thoughts at night,
I see nothing to fear that could arise from this.*

*if I were to think about and dwell in these thoughts during the day,
I see nothing to fear that could arise from this.*

*If I were to think about and dwell in these thoughts day and night,
I see nothing to fear that could arise from this.*

[Going Beyond Thoughts of Harmlessness]

*Thinking: "If I were to think and reflect constantly,
Before long, my body would become exhausted.
With an exhausted body, the mind is unsettled.
An unsettled mind is far from collected mental harmony."*

*I then calmed my mind and gathered it on itself.
I unified it and brought it to peaceful harmony.*

Why?

So that my mind be undistracted

[Wholesome Inclination of the Mind]

*Whatever one frequently thinks about and reflects upon,
Over and over, this becomes the inclination of one's mind.*

*If a [person] frequently thinks and dwells in thoughts of contentment,
[That person] has left the thoughts of outward desires,
To cultivate thoughts of contentment,
Their mind is bent upon contentment.*

*If a [person] frequently thinks and dwells in thoughts of non-anger,
[That person] has left thoughts of anger,
To cultivate thoughts of non-anger,
Their mind is bent upon non-anger.*

*If a [person] frequently thinks and dwells in thoughts of harmlessness,
[That person] has left thoughts of harm,
To cultivate thoughts of harmlessness,
Their mind is bent upon harmlessness.*

[Simile of the Cowherd]

*Just as in the last month of the summer season
When all the crops have been harvested in the villages,*

*A cowherd would keep an eye on his cows,
At the root of a tree, in the open,
Only needing to be aware:*

“There are the cows”³⁰

*In the same way monks,
I only needed to be aware:*

“There are [wholesome] mental states.”³¹

[Natural Samādhi]

*Unrelenting, uncurbed my effort was,
Unconfused presence of mind came to be,³²
My body became calm and free of tension,
My mind became collected and harmonious.³³*

[The Jhānas]

(First Jhāna)

*Letting go of all outward desires,
And letting go of unwholesome mental states,
Still attended by thinking and imagining,
With blissful happiness born of letting go.
I understood and abided in the first level of meditation.*

(Second Jhāna)

*With the calming of thinking and reflection,
With inner tranquilization,
My mind became unified,
Without thinking nor reflection,
With the blissful happiness born of samādhi,
I understood and abided in the second level of meditation.*

³⁰ *satikaraṇīyameva hoti: ‘etā gāvo’ ti.*

³¹ *satikaraṇīyameva ahosi: ‘ete dhammā’ ti.*

³² *upaṭṭhitā sati: presence of mind*

³³ *Āraddhaṃ kho pana me, vīriyaṃ ahosi asallīnaṃ, upaṭṭhitā sati asammuṭṭhā, passaddho kāyo asāraddho, samāhitaṃ cittaṃ ekaggaṃ.*

(Third Jhāna)

*With the calming of excited joy,
I abided in mental steadiness,
Present and fully aware,
Experiencing happiness within his body,
A state which the awakened ones describe as:
“Steady presence of mind:
This is a pleasant abiding.”
I understood and abided in the third level of meditation.*

(Fourth Jhāna)

*Leaving behind happiness and unhappiness.
With the settling of mental gladness and affliction,
With neither pain nor pleasure,
Purified by unmoving presence,
I understood and abided in the fourth level of meditation.*

[The Three Knowledges]

[1. Recollection of Past Lives]

*With this composed and collected mind,
Wholly cleansed and purified,
Clear and open, rid of imperfections,
Having become pliant and malleable,
Straight and unwavering,*

*I directed and inclined it to
Knowing and recollecting past lives.*

I then remembered countless previous lives, like this:

*One birth, two births, three births, four births, five births;
Ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births
a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births,
Countless aeons of expansion, countless aeons of contraction,
Countless aeons of expansion and contraction [of the universe].*

*[Seeing] In that life,
this was my name, this was my ancestry,
this was my appearance, this was my food,
this was how I experienced pleasure and pain,
and this is how I grew old;*

passing away from there, I appeared elsewhere.

*In this other place,
this was my name, this was my ancestry,
this was my appearance, this was my food,
this was how I experienced pleasure and pain,
this is how I grew old;
Passing away from there... I appeared here.*

*In this way, I recalled my countless past lives,
with their particular context and characteristics.*

*This is the first understanding
which I realized in the first part of the night.*

*Blindness was driven out and clear understanding arose
Darkness was driven out and light arose,³⁴
Just as happens for one who meditates,
Attentive, intent and resolute.*

[2. Passing Away and Rebirth of Beings]

*With this composed and collected mind,
Wholly cleansed and purified,
Clear and open, rid of imperfections,
Having become pliant and malleable,
Straight and unwavering,*

*I directed and inclined it to
Knowing the passing away and rebirth of beings*

*With the clarity of the cosmic sight
which goes beyond the human state,
I saw beings passing away and reappearing,
Vile and excellent,
Well-proportioned and disproportioned,
happy and miserable,*

I saw that beings fare on according to their actions.

*Clearly, I saw, living beings who were
unrighteous in their physical actions,
unrighteous in their verbal actions,
unrighteous in their mental actions,*

³⁴ *avijjā vihatā vijjā uppannā; tamo vihato āloko uppanno;*

*Who were disrespectful to the awakened sages,
Holding on to unwise opinions,
and taking action based upon unwise opinions.*

*When they separated from their bodies, after death,
The reappeared in the realms of the fallen,
in realms of misery,
in the planes of ruin,
the planes of destruction.*

*Clearly, I saw, living beings who were
righteous in their physical actions,
righteous in their verbal actions,
righteous in their mental actions,*

*Who held the awakened sages in esteem,
Endowed with wise understanding
and took action based upon wise understanding,*

*When they separated from their bodies, after death,
They reappeared in a realm of bliss, in the celestial abodes.*

*With the clarity of the cosmic sight
which goes beyond the human state,
I saw beings passing away and reappearing,
Vile and excellent,
Well-proportioned and disproportioned,
happy and miserable,*

I saw that beings fare on according to their actions

*This is the second understanding
which I realized on the middle part of the night,*

*Blindness was driven out and clear understanding arose.
Darkness was driven out and light arose.
Just as happens for one who meditates,
Attentive, intent and resolute.*

[3. Calming of the Mental Movements]

*With this composed and collected mind,
Wholly cleansed and purified,
Clear and open, rid of imperfections,
Having become pliant and malleable,
Straight and unwavering,*

*I directed and inclined my mind
To the complete calming of the mental movements*

I understood [mental movements] as they really are:

*“This is tension.”
“This is the increase of the tension.”
“This is the release from the tension.”
“This is how to release the tension*

I understood [mental movements] as they really are:

*“These are the mental movements.”
“This is the increase of the mental movements.”
“This is the release from the mental movement.”
“This is how to release the mental movements.”*

[Release]

Continually observing and understanding in this way;

*My mind was released,
From the inclination for clinging outwardly,
From the inclination to projecting in the future,
And from the inclination to negligence.*

In that release, I knew:

“This is Release.”

I directly knew:

*[Unwholesome states] have been overcome,³⁵
Lived is the spiritual life,
Done, is what should be done,
There is no more conceit here.*

*This is the third understanding
which I realized on the last part of the night,*

*Blindness was driven out and clear understanding arose
Darkness was driven out and light arose,
Just as happens in one who meditates,
Attentive, intent and resolute.*

[Simile of the Deer Herd]

[The Wicked Man]

*Just as if there was, in a remote forest,
a vast and extensive marsh, on low grounds,
where would live and forage a great deer colony.*

*Then some man would come,
intent on their ruin,
intent on their harm,
intent on capturing them.*

*He would cover up the safe and free path to be traveled with joy
And he would open a deceptive path,
set down a groomed male decoy
and bring up a domestic female lure.³⁶*

*Because of this, after some time,
the great deer colony would be brought to ruin and decline.*

[The Kind Man]

*Then some man would appear,
intent on their happiness,
intent on their welfare,
intent on their liberation.*

³⁵ I have replaced "Rebirth or "birth" here by the more practical "unwholesome states." For the sake of adapting these instructions to be more accessible to a broader audience. "Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā" ti abbhaññāsi."

³⁶ odaheyya okacaraṃ, ṭhapeyya okacārikaṃ

*He would clear up and reveal the safe and free path to be traveled with joy
And he would cover up the deceptive path,
Release the male decoy and
Remove the female lure.*

*Because of this, after some time,
the great deer colony would be brought to growth,
prosperity and abundance.*

This story I just told you monks, is to teach a lesson.

Here is the meaning:

- (1) The vast and extensive marsh, on low grounds;
This is a designation for outward desires,*
- (2) The great deer colony;
This is a designation for all living beings.*
- (3) The man intent on their ruin, harm and capture;
This is a designation for Death³⁷ and Wickedness.*
- (4) The deceptive path is a designation for the Unwise eight-spoked path:*

*Unwise Understanding
Unwise Thoughts
Unwise Speech
Unwise Behavior
Unwise Living
Unwise Practice
Unwise Awareness
Unwise Meditation*

- (5) The male decoy;
This is a designation for the happiness of craving.³⁸*
- (6) The female lure;
This is a designation for lack of conscious discernment.³⁹*
- (7) The man intent on their happiness, welfare, and liberation;
This is a designation for The Truth-Finder,
truly worthy and perfectly all-awakened.*
- (8) The safe and free path to be traveled with joy;*

³⁷ *Māra Pāpimato: Māra, the Wicked.*

³⁸ *Nandīrāgassetam*

³⁹ *Avijjāyetam*

This is a designation for the Eight-spoked path of the Awakened.⁴⁰

*Wise Understanding
Wise Thoughts
Wise Speech
Wise Actions
Wise Living
Wise Practice
Wise Awareness (Attention)
Wise Meditation*

*Monks,
I have re-opened the safe and free path to be traveled with joy,
And I have revealed and closed the deceptive path
Released the male decoy
And removed the female lure.*

[The Teacher's Instruction]

*Monks,
What should be done by a teacher for his students,
Holding their best interest at heart,
Out of loving compassion,
That, I have done for you.*

*There are these roots of trees monks,
There are these empty huts;*

*Meditate monks!
Do not be neglectful.
Lest you become remorseful when the time has passed.*

This is my advice to you.

This is what the Awakened One said.

*With an uplifted mind,
the monks delighted in the Awakened One's words.*

⁴⁰ Ariya