

Gāvīupamā Sutta

AN IX 35 Analogy of the Cow
Translated by Ānanda
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[The Foolish Cow]

"*J*ust as if a mountain cow

Who was careless,
Inexperienced,
Not well versed in pastures,
And unskilled,

was roaming about treacherous high mountain grounds.¹

She would think:

"Perhaps I could go somewhere I have never been before,
Eat some grass I have never eaten,
And drink some water I have never drunk."²

Then, without having firmly set down her front hoofs first,
She would begin lifting her rear hoofs.³

In this way,

She would never make it where she has never gone before,
Let alone eat grass she has never eaten,
And drink water she has never drunk.⁴

And even if she eventually made it there, [...] ⁵
She could never make it back safely to where she came from.

Why is that?

Because she is a
Careless,

¹ "Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, gāvī pabbateyyā bālā abyattā akhettaññū akusalā visame pabbate carituṃ.

² Tassā evamassa 'yannūnāhaṃ agatapubbañceva disaṃ gaccheyyaṃ, akhāditapubbāni ca tiṇāni khādeyyaṃ, apītapubbāni ca pānīyāni piveyyan'ti.

³ Sā purimaṃ pādaṃ na suppatiṭṭhitaṃ patiṭṭhāpetvā pacchimaṃ pādaṃ uddhareyya.

⁴ Sā na ceva agatapubbaṃ disaṃ gaccheyya, na ca akhāditapubbāni tiṇāni khādeyya, na ca apītapubbāni pānīyāni piveyya;

⁵ yasmiṃ cassā padese ṭhitāya evamassa

Inexperienced,
Not well versed in pastures,
Unskilled mountain cow;

Roaming about treacherous high mountain grounds.

[The Foolish Meditator]

[1. First Jhāna]

Similarly monks,
A meditator⁶ who is
Careless,
Inexperienced,
Not well versed in pastures,⁷
And unskilled;
[Might want to practice:]

Disengaged from the outward desire,
And detached from unwholesome mental states,
Still attended by thinking and reflection,
With the blissful happiness born of letting go,
[And might try to] understand and abide in the first level of meditation.

But that meditator

- (1) Does not indulge in, nor enjoy⁸ the characteristics [of this state],⁹
- (1) Does not develop them,
- (2) Does not practice them frequently¹⁰
- (3) Does not settle into them until they become stable.¹¹

[2. Second Jhāna]

Then, that meditator would think:

⁶ Purposeful use of the term 'meditator' instead of 'monk' here for rendering the discourse in a more universal way, to a broader audience. The Pāḷi here is 'Bhikkhu.' This is always good to remember also, that the discourse was delivered to monks.

⁷ Khettaññū: Monk's pastures are Jhāna. The wholesome pastures of the mind.

⁸ Āsevati [ā + sev] to frequent, visit; to practise, pursue, indulge, enjoy.

⁹ Nimitta (nt.) [cp. Sk. nimitta, to mā, although etym. uncertain] 1. sign, omen, portent, prognostication. — 2. outward appearance, mark, characteristic, attribute, phenomenon (opp. essence). — 3. mark, aim: in nimittaṃ karoti to pick out the aim, to mark out. — 5. ground, reason, condition, in nimittena (instr.) and nimittaṃ (acc.) as adv.=by means of, on account of.

¹⁰ so taṃ nimittaṃ na āsevati na bhāveti na bahulīkaroti na svādhiṭṭhitaṃ adhiṭṭhāti.

¹¹ Na svādhiṭṭhitaṃ adhiṭṭhāti. Bhante Bhikkhu Bodhi: "...does not focus on it well." Bhante Sujato "They don't ensure it is properly stabilized." Bhante Thāṇissaro Bhikkhu: "or establish himself firmly in it." F.L. Woodward, M.A. and E.M. Hare: "Nor fix the sign thereof so that it is well fixed;" **Adhiṭṭhāti** (adhiṭṭhahati) [Sk. adhiṭṭhāti, adhi + sthā] 1. To stand on (ger. °āya); fig. to insist on. — 2. to concentrate or fix one's attention on (c. acc.), to direct one's thoughts to, to make up one's mind, to wish. — 3. to undertake, practice, perform, look after, to celebrate.

*'Perhaps I could,
With the calming of thinking and reflection,
With inner tranquilization,
My mind becoming unified,
Without thinking and reflection,
With the blissful happiness born of mental collectedness,
Understand and abide in the second level of meditation.'*

But that meditator would not be able to [enter the second jhāna]¹²

[3. First Jhāna]

Then that meditator would think:

*'Perhaps I could,
Disengaged from the outward desire,
And detached from unwholesome mental states,
Still attended by thinking and reflection,
With the blissful happiness born of letting go,
Understand and abide in the first level of meditation.'*

But that meditator would not be able to [enter the first jhāna]¹³

*Monks, this is called
A meditator who has gotten lost in both respects,
Who has fallen away in both regards.*

*Just as the careless,
Inexperienced,
Not well versed in pastures,
And unskilled mountain cow,*

Roaming about treacherous high mountain grounds.¹⁴

[The Wise Cow]

*Now monks,
Suppose there was a wise,
Experienced,
Well versed in pastures,
And skilled mountain cow,*

¹² So na sakkoti vitakkavicārānaṃ vūpasamā ... pe ... dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharituṃ.

¹³ So na sakkoti vīvicceva kāmehi ... pe ... paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharituṃ.

¹⁴ Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, 'bhikkhu ubhato bhaṭṭho ubhato parihīno, seyyathāpi sā gāvī pabbateyyā bālā abyattā akhettaññū akusalā visame pabbate carituṃ.

Roaming about treacherous high mountain grounds.¹⁵

She would think:

'Perhaps I could go somewhere I have never been before,
Eat some grass I have never eaten before,
And drink some water I have never drunk before.'

Then, having firmly set down her front hoofs first,
She would begin lifting her rear hoofs.

In this way,
She would make it where she has never gone before,
Eat grass she has never eaten before,
And drink water she has never drunk before.

And she eventually made it there, [...]
She would make it back safely to where she came from.

Why?

Because she is a
Wise,
Experienced,
Well versed in pastures,
And skilled mountain cow,

Roaming about treacherous high mountain grounds.

[The Wise Meditator]

[1. First Jhāna]

In the same way monks,
There might be a meditator
Who is wise,
Experienced,
Well versed in pastures,
And skilled [in being]

Disengaged from the outward desire,
And detached from unwholesome mental states,
Still attended by thinking and reflection,
With the blissful happiness born of letting go,
And would understand and abide in the first level of meditation.

¹⁵ *Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, gāvī pabbateyyā paṇḍitā byattā khettaññū kusalā visame pabbate carituṃ.*

That meditator would

- (2) Indulge in, and enjoy the characteristics [of this state],
- (3) Develop them,
- (4) Practice them frequently,
- (5) And settle into them until they become stable.

[2. Second Jhāna]

Then one thinks:

'Perhaps I could,
With the calming of thinking and reflection,
With inner tranquilization,
His mind becoming unified,
Without thinking and reflection,
With the blissful happiness born of mental collectedness,
Understand and abide in the second level of meditation.

Without forcing or pushing the mind
To enter the second jhāna,¹⁶

But rather,
By the calming of thinking and reflection,
With inner tranquilization,
His mind becoming unified,
Without thinking and reflection,
With the blissful happiness born of mental collectedness,
One understands and abides in the second level of meditation.¹⁷

That meditator would

- (1) Indulge and enjoy the characteristics [of this state],
- (2) Develop them,
- (3) Practice them frequently,
- (4) And settle into them until they become stable.

[3. Third Jhāna]

Then one thinks:

'Perhaps I could,
With the calming of [coarser] joy,
Abiding in mental steadiness,

¹⁶ So *dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ anabhihiṃsamāno*: *Anabhihiṃsamāno*: Doubtlessly a difficult word to translate and it is hard to trace its etymology. *Abhihiṃsati* [*abhi* + *hiṃsati* fr. *hr̥ṣ*] 1. (trs.) to gladden, please, satisfy (*abhihaṭṭhum*); — 2. (intr.) to find delight in (c. acc.), to enjoy (PED). *Abhihiṃsamāno*: mfn. hurting (Concise). *Bhante Sujato*: "Without charging at the second absorption;" *Bhante Ṭhāṇissaro Bhikhu*: "Without jumping at the second jhana;" *Bhante Bhikkhu Bodhi*: "Not injuring the second jhāna," F.L. Woodward, M.A. and E.M. Hare: "And without confounding the second musing;"

¹⁷ So *dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ anabhihiṃsamāno vitakkavicārānaṃ vūpasamā ... dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati*.

*Present and fully aware,
Experiencing happiness within his body
That state, which the righteous ones describe as such:
“Steady presence of mind:
This is a pleasant abiding,”
Understand and abide in the third level of meditation.*

*Without forcing or pushing the mind
To enter the third jhāna,*

*But rather,
By the calming of [coarser] joy,
Abiding in mental steadiness,
Present and fully aware,
Experiencing happiness within his body
That state, which the righteous ones describe as such:
“Steady presence of mind:
This is a pleasant abiding.”
One understands and abides in the third level of meditation.¹⁸*

That meditator would

- (1) Indulge in and enjoy the characteristics [of this state],*
- (2) Develop them,*
- (3) Practice them frequently,*
- (4) And settle into them until they become stable*

[4. Fourth Jhāna]

Then one thinks:

*‘Perhaps I could,
Unattached to blissful feelings,
Unstirred by unpleasant feelings
With the earlier settling of excitement and disturbances,
Balanced and steady,
Purified by unmoving presence,
Understand and abide in the fourth level of meditation.’*

*Without forcing or pushing the mind
to enter the fourth jhāna,*

*But rather,
[By being] unattached to blissful feelings,
Unstirred by unpleasant feelings
With the earlier settling of excitement and disturbances,
Balanced in regards to all sensations,
Purified by unmoving presence,*

¹⁸ So *tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ anabhihiṃsamāno pītiyā ca virāgā ... tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

*One understands and abides in the fourth level of meditation.*¹⁹

That meditator would

- (1) Indulge in and enjoy the characteristics [of this state],*
- (2) Develop them,*
- (3) Practice them frequently,*
- (4) And settle into them until they become stable.*

[5. Plane of Endless Spaciousness]

Then one thinks:

*'Perhaps I could,
Having gone beyond all perception of form,
With the awareness of sensory impact fading away,
Unattentive to plurality,
Aware of Endless Spaciousness
Understand and abide in the plane of endless spaciousness.'*

*Without forcing or pushing the mind
to enter the plane of Endless Spaciousness,*

*'But rather,
By the going beyond of all perception of form,
With the awareness of sensory impact fading away,
Inattentive to plurality,
Aware of Endless Spaciousness
One understands and abides in the plane of endless spaciousness.'*²⁰

That meditator would

- (1) Indulge in and enjoy the characteristics [of this state],*
- (2) Develop them,*
- (3) Practice them frequently,*
- (4) And settle into them until they become stable.*

[6. Plane of Endless Consciousness]

Then one thinks:

*'Perhaps I could,
Having gone entirely beyond the plane of endless space,
Aware of Endless Consciousness'
Understand and abide in the plane of Endless Consciousness.'*

*Without forcing or pushing the mind
to enter the plane of Endless Consciousness,*

¹⁹ So *catutthaṃ jhānaṃ anabhihiṃsamāno sukhasa ca pahānā ... pe ... catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

²⁰ So *ākāsānañcāyatanaṃ anabhihiṃsamāno sabbaso rūpasāññānaṃ samatikkamā ... pe ... ākāsānañcāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

*But rather,
By the going beyond the plane of Endless Space,
Aware of Endless Consciousness'
One understands and abides in the plane of Endless Consciousness.²¹*

That meditator would

- (1) Indulge in and enjoy the characteristics [of this state],*
- (2) Develop them,*
- (3) Practice them frequently,*
- (4) And settle into them until they become stable.*

[7. Plane of Bare Awareness]

Then one thinks:

*Perhaps I could,
Having entirely gone beyond the plane of Endless Consciousness,
Aware of nothing [in particular]
Understand and abide in the plane of Bare Awareness.*

*Without forcing or pushing the mind
to enter the plane of Bare Awareness,*

*But rather,
By the going beyond of the plane of Endless Consciousness,
Aware of nothing [in particular]
One understands and abides in the plane of Bare Awareness.²²*

That meditator

- (1) Indulge in and enjoy the characteristics [of this state]*
- (2) Develop them,*
- (3) Practice them frequently,*
- (4) And settle into them until they become stable.*

[8. The Limit of Awareness]

Then one thinks:

*'Perhaps I could,
Having entirely gone beyond the plane of Bare Awareness,
Understand and abide in the plane between awareness and its release.*

*Without forcing or pushing the mind
to enter the plane between awareness and its release,*

²¹ So *viññāṇañcāyatanaṃ anabhihiṃsamāno sabbaso ākāśañcāyatanaṃ samatikkamma 'anantaṃ viññāṇan'ti viññāṇañcāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

²² So *ākāśañcāyatanaṃ anabhihiṃsamāno sabbaso viññāṇañcāyatanaṃ samatikkamma 'natthi kiñcī' ti ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

But rather,
By the going beyond of the plane of Bare Awareness,
One understands and abides in the plane between awareness and its release.²³

That meditator would

- (1) Indulge in and enjoys the characteristics [of this state],
- (2) Develop them,
- (3) Practice them frequently,
- (4) And settle into them until they become stable.

[9. The Release from Perceptual Awareness]

Then one thinks:

'Perhaps I could,
Going entirely beyond the plane between awareness and its limit,
Understand and abide in the Release from experiential awareness.

Without forcing or pushing the mind
to enter the Release from Perceptual Awareness,

But rather,
By the going beyond of the plane between awareness and its limit,
One understands and abides in the Release from perceptual awareness.²⁴

[Limitless Mind]

Monks,

Because that meditator experiences²⁵ these stages of meditation²⁶
And is mentally elevated by them,

One's mind becomes pliant and wieldy.²⁷

With such a compliant and wieldy mind
One is well trained in measureless Samādhi.²⁸

²³ So *nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ anabhihiṃsamāno sabbaso ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ samatikkamma nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

²⁴ So *saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ anabhihiṃsamāno sabbaso nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ samatikkamma saññāvedayitanirodhaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

²⁵ *Vuṭṭhahati & vuṭṭhāti* [the sandhi form of *uṭṭhahati* (q. v.), with euphonic *v*, which however appears in BSk. as *vyut*^o (i. e. *vi+ud*^o);] — 1. to rise, arise; to be produced. — 2. to rise out of (abl.), to emerge from, to come back

²⁶ *Samāpatti*: In Buddhism nowadays, for many historical reasons, it has become almost normal to call the levels of meditation 'attainments.' Following a fairly usual trend to turn many aspects of the teaching to the utmost ultimate version of its meaning. *Samāpatti* also simply mean a 'stage' or stage of meditation. *Samāpatti* (f.) [fr. *sam+ā+pad*] attainment; a stage of meditation

²⁷ *Yato kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu taṃ tadeva samāpattiṃ samāpajjatipi vuṭṭhātīpi, tassa mudu cittaṃ hoti kammaññaṃ.*

²⁸ *Mudunā kammañña cittena appamāṇo samādhi hoti subhāvīto.*

*One well trained in measureless Samādhi,²⁹
Can direct and incline ones mind
To whatever state knowable by direct experience*

One is able to witness with one's own eyes anything in that place.³⁰

[Countless Mental Abilities]

If one wishes, one thinks.³¹

What if I were to realize countless mental abilities?

- (1) *Having been one, one becomes many;
Having been many, one becomes one.*
- (2) *One appears and disappears,
Goes through walls,
Ramparts,
And mountains,
Without touching them
Like through space;*
- (3) *One comes in and out of the earth,
Just as in water;*
- (4) *One walks on water without breaking its surface,
Just as on land;*
- (5) *One flies about, cross-legged, through the air
Just as the birds fly;*
- (6) *One seizes and rubs with one's hand
The sun and the moon,
So mighty and majestic as they are;*
- (7) *And one masters this very body as far as the Brahmīc planes.*

One is able to witness with one's own eyes anything in that place.³²

[Cosmic Clairaudience]

I one wishes, one think:

²⁹ Another very valuable perspective on what the Buddha meant as measureless Samādhi.

³⁰ So appamāṇena samādhinā subhāvitena yassa yassa abhiññāsacchikaraṇīyassa dhammassa cittaṃ abhininnāmeti abhiññāsacchikiriyaṃ tatra tatreva sakkhibhaddatāṃ pāpuṇāti sati sati āyatane.

³¹ So sace ākaṅkhati

³² tatra tatreva sakkhibhaddatāṃ pāpuṇāti sati sati āyatane.

*'What if I were, with cosmic Clairaudience,
Which is bright and surpasses the human plane,
Hear both sounds of the celestial planes and the human one,
Whether far away or near.'*

If one wishes, one thinks:

*What if I were to discern and understand in one's mind,
The mind of other beings and persons?*

One understands when mind is desiring:

Mind is desiring.

When mind is free of desire, one understands:

Mind is free desire.

When mind is angry, one understands:

Mind is angry.

When mind is free from anger, one understands:

Mind is free of anger.

When mind is deluded, one understands:

Mind is deluded.

When mind is undeluded, one understands:

Mind is undeluded.

When mind is constricted, one understands:

Mind is constricted.

When mind is scattered, one understands:

Mind is scattered."

When mind is expansive, one understands:

Mind is expansive.'

When mind is unexpansive, one understands:

Mind is unexpansive.

When mind has more to do, one understands:

Mind has more to do.

When mind has no more to do, one understands:

Mind has no more to do.

When the mind is harmonious, one understands:

Mind is harmonious.

When mind is disharmonious, one understands:

Mind is disharmonious.'

When mind is Liberated, one understands:

'Mind is liberated.'

*When the mind is not liberated, one understands:
'Mind is not liberated.'*

One is able to witness with one's own eyes anything in that place.

[Knowing of Past Lives]

If one wishes, one thinks:

*'What if I were to remember 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.*

One is able to witness with one's own eyes anything in that place.

[Cosmic Sight]

If one wishes, one thinks:

*'What if I were,
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,*

*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

One is able to witness with one's own eyes anything in that place.

[Knowing of Ending of the Distractions]

I one wishes, one thinks:

*'What if I were,
With the stilling of the distractions,
Understand and abide in the undistracted
Liberation of the heart,
Liberation by discernment,*

*Realizing it for myself here and now.'*³³

And one would be able to witness with one's own eyes anything in that place.

³³ *'āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja vihareyyan'ti,*

