

Sabbāsava Sutta

MN 2 All the Distractions

Translated by Ānanda

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Thus have I heard,

Once the Awakened One was living at Sāvātthi
In Jeta's grove, at Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery.
At that time, the Awakened One addressed the monks saying:

"Monks"

"Bhadante" the monks replied.

The Awakened One said this:

"Monks, I will teach you the complete mastery of all distractions.¹
Listen carefully and apply your mind to what I will say."

"Yes Bhante" the monks replied.

The Awakened One said:

[The Buddha]

"The calming of the mental distractions²
is for one who is conscious and observant
Not for one who is not conscious and not watchful."³

By being conscious and observant of what
does the end of the distractions [come to be]?

- (1) When there is wise attention and
- (2) When there is unwise attention.⁴

¹ *Sabbāsavaṣaṇṇavarapariyāyaṃ vo, bhikkhave, desessāmi.*

² *Āsavā: The mental movements, conditioned mental inclinations.*

³ *"Jānato ahaṃ, bhikkhave, passato āsavānaṃ khayāṃ vadāmi, no ajānato no apassato.*

⁴ *Yoniso ca manasikāraṃ, ayoniso ca manasikāraṃ. Profound statement on the necessity of discernment.*

Being unwise with one's attention:

*New distractions come to be;
And old distractions increase.⁵*

Being wise with one's attention:

*New distractions do not come to be;
And old distractions are given up.*

Monks,

- (1) There are distractions that should be given up by discernment.⁶*
- (2) There are distractions that should be given up by self-mastery,*
- (3) There are distractions that should be given up by reflection,*
- (4) There are distractions that should be given up by endurance,*
- (5) There are distractions that should be given up by avoiding,*
- (6) There are distractions that should be given up by release.*
- (7) There are distractions that should be given up by development.⁷*

[1. Given up by Discernment]

How are distractions given up by discernment?

[Unwise Meditator]

Here, a person does not learn the Dhamma of the awakened people,⁸

*Does not visit the awakened people,
Does not know nor practices the Dhamma of the awakened people,
Does not visit the people of Truth,
Does not know nor practices in the Dhamma of the people of Truth.*

[That person is] not likely to understand:

- (1) What things are proper for attention,*
- (2) And what things are improper for attention.⁹*

[Therefore,] Unknowingly,

[...]

*One attends to things improper for attention,
And one does not attend to things proper for attention.*

⁵ *Ayoniso manasikaroto anuppannā ceva āsavā uppajjanti, uppannā ca āsavā pavaḍḍhanti;*

⁶ *Atthi, bhikkhave, āsavā dassanā pahātabbā.*

⁷ *1- Dassanā; 2- Saṅgavarā; 3- Paṭisevanā; 4- Adhivāsanā; 5- Parivajjanā; 6- Vinodanā; 7- Bhāvanā*

⁸ *Ariya is here translated as 'Awakened'. The Dhamma of Awakened people. Dhamma here as 'Teaching' or 'Way'.*

⁹ *manasikaraṇīye dhamme nappajānāti, amanasikaraṇīye dhamme nappajānāti.*

[Attending to Improper Things]

How does one attend to things improper for attention?

One attends to the things which make

- (1) New distractions of outward desires arise:
And old distractions of outward desires grow.¹⁰*
- (2) New distractions of becoming arise,
And old distractions of becoming grow.¹¹*
- (3) New distractions from blindness arise,
And old distractions from blindness grow.¹²*

In this way, one attends to things improper for attention.

[Not attending to Proper Things]

How does one not attend to things proper for attention?

One does not attend to the things which make

- (1) New distractions of outward desires not to arise,
And old distractions of outward desires to fade away;*
- (2) New distractions of becoming not to arise,
And old distractions of becoming to fade away;*
- (3) New distractions from carelessness not to arise,
And old distractions from carelessness to fade away.*

In this way,

*One does not attend to things proper for attention,
One attends to things improper for attention.*

And not attending to things proper for attention

*New distractions arise
And old distractions multiply.¹³*

[Attending to Blind Beliefs]

Then, one unwisely attends in this way:

¹⁰ *Kāmāsavo: Constantly wanting all kinds of things outside, discontent, having no steady awareness.*

¹¹ *Bhavāsavo: This is the planning mind, projecting in the future.*

¹² *Avijjāsavo: Carelessness. The ego-trip, me, myself and I. Not knowing what is for one's own benefit and others' benefit. Not seeing the awakened understanding.*

¹³ *Pavaddhanti*

[Past]

*Did I exist for a long time?
Did I not exist for a long time?
Why did I exist all this time?
For what reason did I exist in the past?
Having become what, how have I existed in the past?*

[Future]

*Will I exist in the future?
Will I not exist in the future?
How will I exist in the future?
For what reason will I exist in the future?
Having become what, how will I exist in the future?*

[Present]

*And one is perplexed regarding one's own present self:
Am I?
Am I not?
Why am I?
What am I?
Where has this 'being' come from?
Where will it go?*

[Belief Arises]

*To one who attends unwisely,
Six views or some similar opinion take hold:*

*The belief: "There is a Self for me" arises as undeniable truth.¹⁴
The belief: "There isn't a Self for me"¹⁵ arises as undeniable truth.
The belief: "Self is the witness of Self" arises as undeniable truth.
The belief: "No Self is witness of no Self" arises as undeniable truth.
The belief: "No Self is witness of Self" arises as undeniable truth.*

Or else the belief:

*"I am this self who speaks and feels,
Who is continually experiencing the result of good and bad actions;
And thus my self is permanent,*

¹⁴ 'Atthi me attā'ti vā assa saccato thetato diṭṭhi uppajjati;

¹⁵ natthi me attā. More speculative views, even about 'non-self'! In all cases, these are simply more opinions and concepts which do not lead to liberation of mind.

*Steady, eternal, of unchanging nature
And it will stand continually in eternity.*¹⁶

*Monks, I say, that this is,
Running after dogma,¹⁷
Thickening the dogma,
A wilderness of dogma,
The distortion of dogma,
A flutter of dogma,
The shackles of dogma.*¹⁸

*Bonded by the shackles of blind beliefs monks,
That person is not liberated from rebirth,
Aging, death, sorrow, depression,
Difficulties, anxiety and uneasiness.*¹⁹

*I say that person is not liberated from trouble.*²⁰

[Wise Meditator]

*Here, a wise meditator learns the Dhamma of the awakened people,
Visits the awakened people,
Understands and practices
the Dhamma of the awakened people,
Visits people of truth,
Understands and practices
the Dhamma from people of truth.*

That person is likely to understand:

- (1) What things are proper for attention,*
- (2) And what things are improper for attention.*

*[Therefore,] Knowingly...
One attends to things proper for attention,
And does not attend to things improper for attention.*

¹⁶ *Quite the ego trip.*

¹⁷ *Ditthi here is translated as dogma but could be translated as the classic 'Views'. Other good perspectives are to read it as 'opinions' or 'blind beliefs.'*

¹⁸ *Diṭṭhigataṃ, diṭṭhigahaṇaṃ, diṭṭhikantāraṃ, diṭṭhivīsūkhaṃ, diṭṭhivipphanditaṃ, diṭṭhisamyojanaṃ.*

¹⁹ *na parimuccati jātiyā jarāya maraṇena sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi;*

²⁰ *'na parimuccati dukkhasmā*

[Not Attending to Improper Things]

How does one not attend to things improper for attention?

One does not attend to the things which make

- (1) New outwards desires arise:
And old outward desires grow.*
- (2) New distractions of becoming arise,
And old distractions of becoming grow.*
- (3) New distractions of blindness arise,
And old distractions of blindness grow.*

In this way, one does not attend to things improper for attention.

[Attending to Proper Things]

How does one attend to things proper for attention?

One attends to the things which make:

- (1) New outward desires to not arise
And old outward desires to fade away;²¹*
- (2) New distractions of becoming to not arise,
And old distractions of becoming to fade away;²²*
- (3) New distractions from carelessness to not arise,
And old distractions of carelessness to fade away.²³*

This is how one attend to the things proper for attention.

*Thus, not attending to things improper for attention,
And attending to things proper for attention.*

*New distractions do not come to be
And old distractions fade away.*

²¹ *Letting go of distractions, relaxing the tension, bringing up a smile, and attending to the feeling of Boundless Love, Boundless compassion, Boundless joy, Boundless calm, attending on the body as body with an uplifted mind, on sensations as sensations, on mind as mind, on mental activity as mental activity, with a happy, uplifted, liberated and collected mind.*

²² *See footnote 20.*

²³ *See footnote 20.*

[Wise Understanding]

One wisely attends to things knowing: "This is tension,"²⁴

One wisely attends to things knowing: "This is the increase tension,"

One wisely attends to things knowing: "This is the release from tension,"

One wisely attends to things knowing: "This is the way to release the tension."

Attending in such a wise way, three fetters fade away:

- (1) Belief in a personal self,
- (2) Doubt²⁵
- (3) Adherence to [blind] practices and observances.²⁶

This is how distractions are given up by discernment.

[2. Given up by Self-Mastery]

How are distractions given up by self-mastery?

[The Seeing Faculty]

- (1) Reflecting wisely, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the seeing faculty.²⁷

Because if one were to practice,
Unguarded by the mastery of the seeing faculty,
This would bring up tension
and overwhelming distractions [in one's mind].²⁸

Therefore, one practices,
guarded by the mastery of the seeing faculty.

In this way tension and overwhelming distractions do not manifest.

[The Hearing Faculty]

- (2) Reflecting wisely, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the hearing faculty.

²⁴ So 'idaṃ dukkhaṇ'ti yoniso manasi karoti.

²⁵ About the Teaching

²⁶ Sakkāyadiṭṭhi, vicikicchā, sīlabbataparāmāso.

²⁷ Not holding to any contact, feeling or opinion, concept, judgements and thought about the seeing faculty. Letting go and relaxing constantly, remain with a wholesome vehicle of awareness.

²⁸ Uppajjeyyumuṃ āsavā vighātapariḷhā. Being the 'masters' of our minds, not the victims.

*Because if one were to practice,
Unguarded by the mastery of the hearing faculty,
This would bring up tension
and overwhelming distractions*

*Therefore, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the hearing faculty.*

In this way tension and overwhelming distractions do not manifest.

[The Smelling Faculty]

- (3) *Reflecting wisely, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the smelling faculty.*

*Because if one were to practice,
Unguarded by the mastery of the smelling faculty,
This would bring up tension
and overwhelming distractions [in one's mind].*

*Therefore, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the smelling faculty.*

In this way, tension and overwhelming distractions do not manifest.

[The Tasting Faculty]

- (4) *Reflecting wisely, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the tasting faculty.*

*Because if one were to practice,
Unguarded by the mastery of the tasting faculty,
This would bring up tension
and overwhelming distractions [in one's mind].*

*Therefore, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the tasting faculty.*

In this way tension and overwhelming distractions do not manifest.

[The Touching Faculty]

- (5) *Reflecting wisely, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the touching faculty.*

*Because if one were to practice,
Unguarded by the mastery of the touching faculty,
This would bring up tension
and overwhelming distractions [in one's mind].*

*Therefore, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the touching faculty.*

In this way tension and overwhelming distractions do not manifest.

[The Thinking Faculty]

- (6) *Reflecting wisely, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the thinking faculty.*

*Because if one were to practice,
Unguarded by the mastery of the thinking faculty,
This would bring up tension
and overwhelming distractions [in one's mind],*

*Therefore, one practices,
Guarded by the mastery of the thinking faculty.*

In this way tension and overwhelming distractions do not manifest.

*In this way, when one practices, unguarded by self-mastery:
Tension and overwhelming distractions²⁹ come to be;*

*But when one practices, guarded by self-mastery:
Tension and overwhelming distractions do not come to be.³⁰*

This is how distractions are given up by self-mastery.

²⁹ *Disturbances of mind.*

³⁰ *Yañhissa, bhikkhave, saṃvaram asaṃvutassa viharato uppajjeyyumuñ āsavā vighātapariḷāhā, saṃvaram saṃvutassa viharato evaṃsa te āsavā vighātapariḷāhā na honti.*

[3. Given up by Reflection]

How are distractions given up by reflection?

(1) *While wearing robes, one reflects wisely:*

*This is only to protect [this body] from cold,
To protect from heat,
To protect from flies, mosquitos, wind, sun, insects and lurking animals,
This is only for covering the private parts.*

(2) *While eating almsfood, one reflects wisely:*

*This is not for playing around,
Not for intoxication,
Not for looking pretty,
Not for personal pride,
This is only for sustaining and maintaining the body,
For allaying discomfort,
For the love of the spiritual life.*

*In this way,
I will appease any overwhelming feelings (of hunger)
And will not create new feelings (of overeating),
I this way, I will become blameless and live at ease.*

(3) *While living in some residence, one reflects wisely:*

*This is only to shelter from the cold,
To shelter from the heat,
To protect from flies, mosquitos, wind, sun, insects and lurking animals,
This is only to ease the disturbances of the seasons
And for the purpose of meditation.*

(4) *While using medicine for illnesses and medical assistance or treatments, one reflects wisely:*

*This is only to relief any arisen hurtful, oppressive feelings
[In service] of the highest kindness of heart.*

In this way, when one is unreflective:

Tension and overwhelming distractions come to be;

But when one is reflective:

Tension and overwhelming distractions do not come to be. ³¹

³¹ *appaṭisevato uppajjeyyuntī āsavā vighāta pariḷāhā, paṭisevato evaṃsa te āsavā vighātapariḷāhā na honti.*

This is how distractions are given up by reflection.

[4. Given up by Endurance]

How are distractions given up by endurance?³²

*Reflecting wisely, one patiently bears with
Heat and cold,
Hunger and thirst,
Flies, mosquitos, wind, sun, insects and lurking animals,
Ways of speech that are hurtful and unwelcomed
And experienced bodily feelings that are
Painful
Sharp,
Burning,
Severe,
Disagreeable,
Repulsive &
Life threatening.*

One is forbearing in nature.

*In this way, when one is not forbearing:
Tension and overwhelming distractions would come to be;*

*But when one is forbearing:
Tension and overwhelming distractions do not come to be.*

This is how distractions are given up by endurance.

[5. Given up by Avoiding]

How are distractions given up by avoiding?³³

*Reflecting wisely, just as someone would avoid:
A mad elephant,
A mad horse
A mad bull,*

³² *adhivāsanā*

³³ *Parivajjeti [pari+vajjeti, Caus. of vrj] to shun, avoid, keep away from*

*A mad dog,
A snake,
A stump,
A thorny bush,
A hole,
A steep cliff,
A cesspool,
A sewage spill.*

Similarly, [one avoids]

*An unsuitable seat
An unsuitable location,
Associating with those people bent on harm,
[and any action] wise brothers and sisters in the spiritual life
would recognize as harmful behavior.³⁴*

Therefore, reflecting wisely, one avoids

*Unsuitable seats,
Unsuitable locations,
And people bent on harm.*

*In this way, when one does not avoid:
Tension and overwhelming distractions come to be;
But when one avoids:
Tension and overwhelming distractions do not come be.³⁵*

This is how distractions are given up by avoiding.

[6. Given up by Release]

How are distractions given by release?³⁶

Reflecting wisely,

*(1) When a thought of outward distraction comes up,
One does not continue along with it,
One abandons it, releases it, lets it go,
One undoes it and brings it to an end.³⁷*

³⁴ *Yathārūpe anāsane nisinnaṃ, yathārūpe agocare carantaṃ, yathārūpe pāpake mitte bhajantaṃ viññū sabrahmacārī pāpakesu thānesu okappeyyuṃ,*

³⁵ *aparivajjayato uppajjeyyuṃ āsavā vighātapariḷāhā, parivajjayato evaṃsa te āsavā vighātapariḷāhā na honti.*

³⁶ *Vinodanā*

³⁷ *Uppannaṃ kāmavitakkaṃ nādhivāseti pajahati vinodeti byantikaroti anabhāvaṃ gameti.*

(2) *When a thought of anger comes up,
One does not continue along with it,
One abandons it, releases it, lets it go,
One undoes it and brings it to an end.*

(3) *When a thought of harm comes up,
One does not continue along with it,
One abandons it, releases it, lets it go,
One undoes it and brings it to an end.*

(4) *One after the other,
When harmful and unwholesome states come up,
One does not continue along with them,
One abandons them, releases them, lets them go,
One undoes them and brings them to an end.*

*In this way,
When one does not release:
Tension and overwhelming distractions come to be;*

*But when one releases:
Tension and overwhelming distractions do not come to be.³⁸*

This is how distractions are given up by release.

[7. Given up by Development]

How are distractions given up by development?³⁹

Reflecting wisely:

(1) *One develops the support for awakening of Awareness,⁴⁰
Which is caused by letting go, not holding,
Releasing and relaxing.⁴¹*

(2) *One develops the support for awakening of discerning states,
Which is caused by letting go, not holding,
Releasing and relaxing.*

³⁸ *avinodayato uppajjeyyumuṃ āsavā vighātapariḷāhā, vinodayato evaṃsa te āsavā vighātapariḷāhā na honti.*

³⁹ *Mental development, meditation.*

⁴⁰ *paṭisaṅkhā yoniso satisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti*

⁴¹ *vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṇi;*

- (3) *One develops the support for awakening of inspiration,
Which is caused by letting go, not holding,
Releasing and relaxing.*
- (4) *One develops the support for awakening of joy,
Which is caused by letting go, not holding,
Releasing and relaxing.*
- (5) *One develops the support for awakening of calm,
Which is caused by letting go, not holding,
Releasing and relaxing.*
- (6) *One develops the support for awakening of collected mental harmony,
Which is caused by letting go, not holding,
Releasing and relaxing.*
- (7) *One develops the support for awakening of Steadiness of mind,
Which is caused by letting go, not holding,
Releasing and relaxing.*

*In this way,
When one does not develop [the mind]:
Tension and overwhelming distractions come to be;*

*But when one develops [the mind]:
Tension and overwhelming distractions do not come to be.⁴²*

This is how distractions are given up by development.

[Conclusion]

*Monks, when one
Has given up the distractions to be given up by discernment;
Has given up the distractions to be given up by self-mastery;
Has given up the distractions to be given up by reflection;
Has given up the distractions to be given up by endurance;
Has given up the distractions to be given up by avoiding;
Has given up the distractions to be given up by release;
Has given up the distractions to be given up by development;*

⁴² *abhāvayato uppajjeyyumuñ āsavā vighātapaniḷāhā, bhāvayato evaṃsa te āsavā vighātapaniḷāhā na honti.*

*One is called
A monk who is lives,
Protected by the mastery of all distractions;*

*Who has cut away tension,
Flung of the shackles,
Perfectly gone beyond arrogance,
Who has made an end of trouble.*

*This is what the Awakened One said.
Glad at heart, the monks rejoiced in the Awakened One's words.*

