

THE DISCOURSE ABOUT THE  
NOBLE SEARCH

MN 26, TRANSLATED BY  
ĀNANDAJOTI BHIKKHU



**The Discourse about the Noble Search**  
**(Ariyapariyesanasuttam MN 26)**

translated by

**Ānandajoti Bhikkhu**

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## Table of Contents

### Introduction

### **The Discourse about the Noble Search**

1. Gathering at Rammaka's Hermitage
2. The Two Searches
3. The Decision to Search for Awakening
4. The Meeting with Āḷāra Kālāma
5. The Meeting with Uddaka Rāmaputta
6. The Awakening
7. The Story about Brahmā's Request
8. Deciding Who to Teach
9. The Abstainer Upaka
10. The Meeting at Isipatana
11. The Group-of-Five Monks attain Nibbāna
12. The Five Strands of Sense Pleasure

## Introduction

The discourse is set in the hermitage of the brāhmaṇa Rammaka, who is otherwise unknown, as there appears to be no further information about him in the commentaries, and although they gather at the hermitage, Rammaka himself doesn't appear in the discourse, and nor do any of his disciples (if he had any).

The monks tell Ven. Ānanda that it is a long time since they heard a discourse from the Buddha face to face, an interesting biographical detail in itself, as it shows that the Buddha was not always teaching, but must have taken time off on occasion, and maybe it indicates that the Buddha was in his later years at this time.

The chief interest in the discourse is in the Buddha's discussion of his motivation when going forth, and his autobiographical recollections of his life as a Bodhisatta and his search for, and eventual attainment of, Awakening,<sup>1</sup> and his decision to give his liberating teaching.

Although in later times a fairly detailed biography was developed, in the early texts there is a lack of reliable material about the Buddha's life, probably because the life as such was not considered as important as the teaching. Occasionally, though, in his encounters with others, the Buddha did refer to his own practice before his Awakening, and his life shortly thereafter.

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion here is in very realistic terms, which stands in contrast to the mythologising of other discourses which mention the time he was still a Bodhisatta, like the Discourse on the Wonderful and Marvellous, MN 123.

There are four places where this occurs in the Middle Length Discourses (Majjhimanikāya),<sup>2</sup> and when they are taken together they build up quite a good picture of the Buddha's reasons for the renunciation, his going-forth, and the various people he met, the practices he undertook and his decision to teach.

In the discourse the Buddha talks about the two searches or quests, the one for what is subject – like he himself is – to birth, old-age, sickness, death, grief and defilements, which is characterised as an ignoble search; and the other a quest for what is not subject to these faults, which is the noble search for Nibbāna.

In this search the Buddha sought out various people, meeting with a great meditation Master, Āḷāra Kālāma, and later with Uddaka Rāmaputta. After studying with Āḷāra and Uddaka to the highest levels they had attained, the Bodhisatta was still dissatisfied, as the practice didn't lead out of saṃsāra, but only to its highest levels. He therefore abandoned them and after travelling to Uruvelā he eventually attained Awakening.

The Buddha, as he then was, after an intercession by the Brahma Sahampati, decided to teach. He first thought of Āḷāra and Uddaka, but then he understood that they had recently deceased, so he sought out his earlier companions, the group-of-five monks and they too soon attained Awakening.

The discourse closes with a supplementary teaching on the dangers inherent in the five strands of sense pleasure, and how Māra has

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<sup>2</sup> The discourses are the one here, the Noble Search (MN 26), and the discourses to Saccaka (MN 36), Prince Bodhi (MN 85) and Saṅgārava (MN 100).

control over anyone subject to them; and the freedom to be obtained by attaining states where Māra's range doesn't reach.

Although the Buddha relates at some length this period of his life some of the people and events that are found in the developed traditional biography are missing here: there is no mention of the four signs, though the Buddha does discuss what made him go forth; a crucial section dealing with the Bodhisatta's austerities is omitted; the ploughing festival is not mentioned (though there is mention of the Buddha's Father), nor is Sujāta (though the rice and milk is mentioned), nor the struggle with Māra.<sup>3</sup>

Also omitted from this story are Canonical recollections: the meetings with the Grumbling Brahmin, the protection offered by Mucilinda, and the meeting with his first two lay disciples, Tapussa and Bhallika;<sup>4</sup> and neither the teaching of the Discourse that Set the Dhamma Wheel Rolling, or the Characteristic of Non-Self that led to the group-of-five monks attainment of Arahatsip are included, although the circumstances surrounding these teachings are found.

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A couple of things need to be discussed here, as they show that a close reading of the texts often turns up things that are unexpected. The first is when the Bodhisatta decides to go forth, in part the Buddha recalls:

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<sup>3</sup> This doesn't mean they didn't happen, they might simply have not been considered relevant in these contexts.

<sup>4</sup> See the Great Chapter, elsewhere on this website for these stories, and the teachings mentioned next.

Then ... while still a youth ... though my Mother and Father didn't like it, and were crying with tearful faces ... I went forth from the home to the homeless life.

The problem here is that, according to another discourse,<sup>5</sup> and tradition in general, the Bodhisatta's Mother had already passed away seven days after the birth, so she can hardly be weeping at his renunciation now.

Relationship terms in Pāḷi, and indeed in all Indian languages, are very precise, and the compound, which is common, cannot be loosely interpreted to mean his foster Mother or Aunt, so it is not easy to reconcile what is found here with the established traditions, and the two recollections, both attributed to the Buddha, are irreconcilable as they stand.

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A second problem concerns the widely accepted tradition that the Buddha had two teachers, Āḷāra and Uddaka, whom he visited and learned from before beginning his ascetic practices and eventually realising Awakening for himself.

The main source for this tradition is this very discourse and its parallels, and the Buddha's recollections as contained herein. However, the Buddha makes a very clear distinction between these two, and he only refers to Āḷāra as his teacher, saying:

Thus my teacher Āḷāra Kālāma, monks, placed me, the pupil, as equal, and on the very same position as himself, and worshipped me with the highest worship.

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<sup>5</sup> Udāna, 5-2: Appāyukasuttam, The Discourse about the One Short-Lived.

Here he specifically refers to Āḷāra as his teacher, *ācariya*, and also states that he was the pupil, *antevāsī*.

In the parallel passage with Uddaka, however, he says something very different:

Thus my friend in the spiritual life, Uddaka Rāmaputta, monks, placed me in the teacher's position, and worshipped me with the highest worship.

He doesn't refer to Uddaka as his teacher, but as a friend in the spiritual life (*sabrahmacārī*) and Uddaka doesn't place him on the same footing, but as the teacher above himself.

The reason for this is that Uddaka was not the teacher of the group: that had been someone named Rāma,<sup>6</sup> who is always referred to in the past tense and as absent, presumably because he was no longer living.

Compare the following passages in the Pāḷi. The first concerning Āḷāra, where the Bodhisatta is asking about Āḷāra's personal attainment:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As he is called Rāmaputta, this was perhaps his Father, in the spiritual sense at least. The difference between the two has been discussed in MLD, n. 303; Analayo, A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya, p. 177; and especially in Wynne, How old is the Suttapiṭaka? p. 22ff. None of these authors, however, draw the necessary conclusion that the Buddha had only one, not two, teachers.

<sup>7</sup> The text is very complex grammatically in these sections, and MLD is more of a paraphrase than a translation.

In what way, friend Kālāma, do you declare: I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it?

The parallel passage with Uddaka, however, has him asking not about his own, but about Rāma's attainment:

In what way, friend, did Rāma declare: I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it?

At a later point Āḷāra says:

Thus I declare I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it.

as opposed to:

Thus Rāma declared he had deep knowledge of this Dhamma himself, having directly experienced and attained it.

From this we conclude that according to the early tradition at least the Buddha only accepted Āḷāra as his teacher, and Rāma, though he had higher attainments than Āḷāra, had already passed away when the Bodhisatta came into contact with his group, and he never met him or took him, or his son, as his teacher.

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu  
May 2014

# The Discourse about the Noble Search

(Ariyapariyesanasuttam, MN 26)<sup>8</sup>

## [1. Gathering at Rammaka's Hermitage]

Thus I have heard:

at one time the Fortunate One was dwelling near Sāvattthī at Anāthapiṇḍika's grounds in Jeta's Wood. Then the Fortunate One, having dressed in the morning time, after picking up his bowl and robe, was entering Sāvattthī for alms.

Then many monks approached venerable Ānanda, and after approaching, they said this to venerable Ānanda: "It has been a long time, friend Ānanda, since we heard talk about the Dhamma face to face with the Fortunate One.

It would be good, friend Ānanda, if we were to get to listen to talk about the Dhamma face to face with the Fortunate One."

"Then, venerables, please approach the brāhmaṇa Rammaka's hermitage, it would be well if you get to listen to talk about the Dhamma face to face with the Fortunate One."

"Yes, venerable," those monks replied to venerable Ānanda.

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<sup>8</sup> An alternative title is *Pāsārāsisuttam, the Discourse about the Mass of Snares*, all the other discourses in this Section are indeed named after the simile they contain.

## The Noble Search - 10

Then the Fortunate One, after walking for alms in Sāvattḥī, and returning from the alms-round after the meal, addressed venerable Ānanda, saying: “Come Ānanda, let us approach the Eastern Monastery and Migāra’s mother’s mansion to spend the day.”

“Very well, reverend Sir,” venerable Ānanda replied to the Fortunate One.

Then the Fortunate One, together with venerable Ānanda, approached the Eastern Monastery and Migāra’s mother’s mansion to spend the day.

Then the Fortunate One, having risen from seclusion in the evening time, addressed venerable Ānanda, saying: “Come, Ānanda, let us approach the Eastern tank to bathe our limbs.”

“Very well, reverend Sir,” venerable Ānanda replied to the Fortunate One.

Then the Fortunate One, together with venerable Ānanda, approached the Eastern tank to bathe his limbs.

After bathing and withdrawing his limbs from the Eastern tank, he stood in one robe drying his limbs.

Then venerable Ānanda said this to the Fortunate One: “This brāhmaṇa Rammaka’s hermitage is not far, reverend Sir. The brāhmaṇa Rammaka’s hermitage is delightful, reverend Sir, the brāhmaṇa Rammaka’s hermitage is pleasing, reverend Sir, it would be good, reverend Sir, if the Fortunate One would approach the brāhmaṇa Rammaka’s hermitage, taking compassion on us.”

## The Noble Search - 11

The Fortunate One consented by maintaining silence.

Then the Fortunate One approached the brāhmaṇa Rammaka's hermitage. Then at that time a great many monks were assembled in the brāhmaṇa Rammaka's hermitage to hear talk on the Dhamma. Then the Fortunate One stood outside the doorway waiting for the end of the conversation.

Then, understanding that the conversation had finished, after coughing, he knocked the latch. Those monks opened the door for the Fortunate One.

Then the Fortunate One, having entered the brāhmaṇa Rammaka's hermitage, sat down on the prepared seat. While sitting, the Fortunate One addressed the monks, saying: "What is the talk about, monks, amongst those who have assembled together at present? And what is the talk amongst you that was left unfinished?"

"The talk about Dhamma, reverend Sir, was in reference to the Fortunate One, and then the Fortunate One arrived."

"It is good, monks, this is certainly suitable, monks, for you sons of good family, who through faith have gone forth from the home to homelessness, you should assemble to talk about Dhamma. When you have assembled together, monks, there are two things that you ought to do: talk about the Dhamma, or maintain noble silence.

## [2. The Two Searches]

There are these two searches, monks: a noble search, and an ignoble search.

And what, monks, is an ignoble search?

Here, monks, someone, being himself subject to birth, seeks out what is subject to birth, being himself subject to old-age, seeks out what is subject to old-age, being himself subject to sickness, seeks out what is subject to sickness, being himself subject to death, seeks out what is subject to death, being himself subject to grief, seeks out what is subject to grief, being himself subject to defilements, seeks out what is subject to defilements.

And what do you say, monks, is subject to birth?

Wife and children, monks, are subject to birth,  
female and male servants are subject to birth,  
goats and sheep are subject to birth,  
chickens and pigs are subject to birth,  
elephants, cows, horses and mares are subject to birth,  
gold and silver are subject to birth,<sup>9</sup>  
these, monks, are the bases of what is subject to birth.

Herein, tied, infatuated, and indulging in this, being himself subject to birth, he seeks out what is subject to birth,

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<sup>9</sup> *Jāti* here has the meaning of *origination*. In Pāli it carries both meanings.

## The Noble Search - 13

And what do you say, monks, is subject to old-age?

Wife and children, monks, are subject to old-age,  
female and male servants are subject to old-age,  
goats and sheep are subject to old-age,  
chickens and pigs are subject to old-age,  
elephants, cows, horses and mares are subject to old-age,  
gold and silver are subject to old-age,<sup>10</sup>  
these, monks, are the bases of what is subject to old-age.

Herein, tied, infatuated, and indulging in this, being himself subject to old-age, he seeks out what is subject to old-age,

And what do you say, monks, is subject to sickness?

Wife and children, monks, are subject to sickness,  
female and male servants are subject to sickness,  
goats and sheep are subject to sickness,  
chickens and pigs are subject to sickness,  
elephants, cows, horses and mares are subject to sickness,  
these, monks, are the bases of what is subject to sickness.

Herein, tied, infatuated, and indulging in this, being himself subject to sickness, he seeks out what is subject to sickness,

And what do you say, monks, is subject to death?

Wife and children, monks, are subject to death,  
female and male servants are subject to death,  
goats and sheep are subject to death,  
chickens and pigs are subject to death,

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<sup>10</sup> *Jarā* here has the meaning of *decay*. In Pāli it carries both meanings.

## The Noble Search - 14

elephants, cows, horses and mares are subject to death,  
these, monks, are the bases of what is subject to death.

Herein, tied, infatuated, and indulging in this, being himself subject  
to death, he seeks out what is subject to death,

And what do you say, monks, is subject to grief?

Wife and children, monks, are subject to grief,  
female and male servants are subject to grief,  
goats and sheep are subject to grief,  
chickens and pigs are subject to grief,  
elephants, cows, horses and mares are subject to grief,  
these, monks, are the bases of what is subject to grief.

Herein, tied, infatuated, and indulging in this, being himself subject  
to grief, he seeks out what is subject to grief,

And what do you say, monks, is subject to defilements?

Wife and children, monks, are subject to defilements,  
female and male servants are subject to defilements,  
goats and sheep are subject to defilements,  
chickens and pigs are subject to defilements,  
elephants, cows, horses and mares are subject to defilements,  
gold and silver are subject to defilements,  
these, monks, are the bases of what is subject to defilements.

Herein, tied, infatuated, and indulging in this, being himself subject  
to defilements, he seeks out what is subject to defilements.

This, monks, is an ignoble search.

## The Noble Search - 15

And what, monks, is a noble search?

Here, monks, someone, being himself subject to birth, after understanding the danger in being subject to birth, seeks out the birthless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being himself subject to old-age, after understanding the danger in being subject to old-age, seeks out the ageless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being himself subject to disease, after understanding the danger in being subject to disease, seeks out the sickless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being himself subject to death, after understanding the danger in being subject to death, seeks out the deathless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being himself subject to grief, after understanding the danger in being subject to grief, seeks out the griefless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being himself subject to defilements, after understanding the danger in being subject to defilements, seeks out the undefiled, supreme, secure Nibbāna.

This, monks, is a noble search.

### [3. The Decision to Search for Awakening]

I also, monks, before the Awakening, while still an unawakened Bodhisatta, being myself subject to birth, sought out what was subject to birth, being myself subject to old-age, sought out what was subject to old-age, being myself subject to sickness, sought out what was subject to sickness, being myself subject to death, sought out what was subject to death, being myself subject to grief, sought out what was subject to grief, being myself subject to defilements, sought out what was subject to defilements.

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘Why, being myself subject to birth, do I seek out what is subject to birth, being myself subject to old-age, do I seek out what is subject to old-age, being myself subject to disease, do I seek out what is subject to disease, being myself subject to death, do I seek out what is subject to death, being myself subject to grief, do I seek out what is subject to grief, being myself subject to defilements, do I seek out what is subject to defilements?’

What if I, being myself subject to birth, after understanding the danger in being subject to birth, were to seek out the birthless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being myself subject to old-age, after understanding the danger in being subject to old-age, were to seek out the ageless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being myself subject to disease, after understanding the danger in being subject to disease, were to seek out the sickless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

## The Noble Search - 17

being myself subject to death, after understanding the danger in being subject to death, were to seek out the deathless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being myself subject to grief, after understanding the danger in being subject to grief, were to seek out the griefless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being myself subject to defilements, after understanding the danger in being subject to defilements, were to seek out the undefiled, supreme, secure Nibbāna?"

#### [4. The Meeting with Āḷāra Kālāma]

Then at another time, monks, while still a youth, having beautiful black hair, endowed with auspicious youthfulness, in the prime of life, though my Mother<sup>11</sup> and Father didn't like it, and were crying with tearful faces, after shaving off my hair and beard, and donning brown garments, I went forth from the home to the homeless life.

When I had gone forth thus, searching for what was wholesome, the unsurpassed, noble and peaceful state, I approached Āḷāra Kālāma, and after approaching, I said this to Āḷāra Kālāma:

“I desire, friend Kālāma, to lead the spiritual life in this Dhamma and Discipline.”<sup>12</sup>

When this was said, monks, Āḷāra Kālāma said this to me:

“Live here, venerable, this Dhamma is such that a wise man in no long time, having deep knowledge himself of what comes from his own teacher, can live, having directly experienced and attained it.”

Then, monks, in no long time I had soon mastered that Dhamma.

Then, monks, after a little time, merely through beating my lips, merely through repeating the prattling, I spoke knowingly about that teaching and confidently about that teaching, claiming: ‘I know, I see.’ Both I and others also.

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<sup>11</sup> This remark is discussed in the Introduction.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting the *Dhammavinaya* may have been a general term for any ascetic's teachings regarding conduct and theory, before being adopted by the Buddha himself for his own teaching on these subjects.

Then this occurred to me, monks:

‘Āḷāra Kālāma did not declare: “Through mere faith in this Dhamma alone, I have deep knowledge of it myself, I live, having directly experienced and attained it,” for sure Āḷāra Kālāma lives knowing and seeing this Dhamma.’

Then, monks, I approached Āḷāra Kālāma, and after approaching, I said this to Āḷāra Kālāma: “In what way, friend Kālāma, do you declare: I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it?”

When this was said, monks, Āḷāra Kālāma declared the Sphere of Nothingness.<sup>13</sup>

Then, monks, this occurred to me:

‘There is not faith for Āḷāra Kālāma alone, for me also there is faith, there is not energy for Āḷāra Kālāma alone, for me also there is energy, there is not mindfulness for Āḷāra Kālāma alone, for me also there is mindfulness, there is not concentration for Āḷāra Kālāma alone, for me also there is concentration, there is not wisdom for Āḷāra Kālāma alone, for me also there is wisdom.’

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<sup>13</sup> The penultimate level in the thirty-one Realms of Existence.

## The Noble Search - 20

What if, in regard to the Dhamma that Āḷāra Kālāma declares: “I have deep knowledge of it myself, I live, having directly experienced and attained it,” I were to strive to realise that Dhamma?”

Then, monks, in no long time, soon having deep knowledge of that Dhamma myself, I lived, having directly experienced and attained it.

Then, monks, I approached Āḷāra Kālāma, and after approaching, I said this to Āḷāra Kālāma: “Is it in this way, friend Kālāma, that you declare: I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it?”

“In this way, friend, I do declare: I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it.”

“In this way I also, friend, say: I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, I live, having directly experienced and attained it.”

“It is a gain for us, friend, it is a great gain for us, friend, that we see such a venerable with us in the spiritual life. Thus I declare I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it, and you have deep knowledge of this Dhamma yourself, and live, having directly experienced and attained it.<sup>14</sup>

You have deep knowledge of this Dhamma yourself, and live, having directly experienced and attained it, and I declare I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it.

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<sup>14</sup> Notice a contrast is set up here, between Āḷāra’s declaring (*pavedemi*) he has the attainment, as though it was unverified, and the Bodhisatta living (*viharasi*) with the attainment.

## The Noble Search - 21

Thus the Dhamma I know is the Dhamma you know, the Dhamma you know is the Dhamma I know. Thus as I am, so are you, as you are, so am I. Come now, friend, the two of us will look after this group.”

“Thus my teacher Āḷāra Kālāma, monks, placed me, the pupil, as equal, and in the very same position as himself, and worshipped me with the highest worship.

Then, monks, this occurred to me:

‘This Dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to deep knowledge, to Complete Awakening, to Nibbāna, but only as far as rebirth in the Sphere of Nothingness.’

Then, monks, having not found satisfaction in that Dhamma, I was therefore disgusted with that Dhamma and went away.

### [5. The Meeting with Uddaka Rāmaputta]

Then, monks, still searching for what was wholesome, the unsurpassed, noble and peaceful state, I approached Uddaka Rāmaputta, and after approaching, I said this to Uddaka Rāmaputta:

“I desire, friend, to lead the spiritual life in this Dhamma and Discipline.”

When this was said, monks, Uddaka Rāmaputta said this to me:

“Live here, venerable, this Dhamma is such that a wise man in no long time, having deep knowledge himself of what comes from his own teacher, can live, having directly experienced and attained it.”

Then in no long time, monks, soon I had mastered that Dhamma.

Then, monks, after a little time I indeed, merely through beating my lips, merely through repeating the prattling, spoke knowingly about that teaching and confidently about that teaching, claiming: ‘I know, I see.’ Both I and others also.

Then, monks, this occurred to me:

‘Rāma did not declare: “Through mere faith in this Dhamma alone, having knowledge of it myself, I live, having directly experienced and attained it,” for sure Rāma lived knowing and seeing this Dhamma.’

Then, monks, I approached Uddaka Rāmaputta, and after approaching, I said this to Uddaka Rāmaputta:

## The Noble Search - 23

“In what way, friend, did Rāma declare: I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it?”

When this was said, monks, Uddaka Rāmaputta, declared the Sphere of Neither-Perception-nor-Non-Perception.<sup>15</sup>

Then, monks, this occurred to me:

“There was not faith for Rāma alone, for me also there is faith, there was not energy for Rāma alone, for me also there is energy, there was not mindfulness for Rāma alone, for me also there is mindfulness, there was not concentration for Rāma alone, for me also there is concentration, there was not wisdom for Rāma alone, for me also there is wisdom.

What if, in regard to the Dhamma that Rāma declared: I have deep knowledge of it myself, I live, having directly experienced and attained it, I were to strive to realise that Dhamma?”

Then, monks, in no long time, soon having deep knowledge of that Dhamma myself, I lived, having directly experienced and attained it.

Then, monks, I approached Uddaka Rāmaputta, and after approaching, I said this to Uddaka Rāmaputta:

“Is it in this way, friend, that Rāma declared: I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, having directly experienced and attained it?”

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<sup>15</sup> The very highest level in the thirty-one Realms of Existence. The way this is stated is odd in that we might have expected Uddaka to have declared this for Rāma, but the way it is written it appears he declares it for himself.

“In this way, friend, Rāma did declare he had deep knowledge of this Dhamma himself, having directly experienced and attained it.”

“In this way, friend, I also say: I have deep knowledge of this Dhamma myself, I live, having directly experienced and attained it.”

“It is a gain for us, friend, it is a great gain for us, friend, that we see such a venerable with us in the spiritual life. Thus Rāma declared he had deep knowledge of this Dhamma himself, having directly experienced and attained it, and you have deep knowledge of this Dhamma yourself, you live, having directly experienced and attained it.

And that Dhamma you have deep knowledge of yourself, you live, having directly experienced and attained it, that Rāma declared he had deep knowledge of that Dhamma himself, having directly experienced and attained it.

Thus the Dhamma Rāma knew is the Dhamma you know, the Dhamma you know is the Dhamma Rāma knew. Thus as Rāma was, so are you, as you are, so was Rāma. Come now, friend, you will look after this group.”

Thus my friend in the spiritual life, Uddaka Rāmaputta, monks, placed me in the teacher’s position, and worshipped me with the highest worship.

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘This Dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, or to dispassion, or to cessation, or to peace, or to deep knowledge, or to Complete Awakening, or to Nibbāna, but only as far as rebirth in the Sphere of Neither-Perception-nor-Non-Perception.’

## The Noble Search - 25

Then, monks, having not found satisfaction in that Dhamma, I was therefore disgusted with that Dhamma and went away.

## [6. The Awakening]

Then, monks, still searching for what was wholesome, the unsurpassed, noble and peaceful state, while walking gradually on walking tour I entered Magadha, and arrived at the Army town at Uruvelā.

There I saw a delightful piece of land, and a pleasing jungle thicket, with a clear river flowing and lovely banks, and nearby a village suitable for collecting alms.

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘Delightful is this piece of land, with its pleasing jungle thicket, and a clear river flowing and lovely banks, and it is near a village suitable for collecting alms.

I thought: ‘This is surely enough for the striving of a son of a good family who is seeking to strive.’ Then, monks, I sat down right there, thinking: ‘This is enough for striving.’

Then, monks, being myself subject to birth, after understanding the danger in being subject to birth, while seeking the birthless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, I attained the birthless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being myself subject to old-age, after understanding the danger in being subject to old-age, while seeking the ageless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, I attained the ageless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being myself subject to sickness, after understanding the danger in being subject to sickness, while seeking the sickless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, I attained the sickless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

## The Noble Search - 27

being myself subject to death, after understanding the danger in being subject to death, while seeking the deathless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, I attained the deathless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being myself subject to grief, after understanding the danger in being subject to grief, while seeking the griefless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, I attained the griefless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being myself subject to defilements, after understanding the danger in being subject to defilements, while seeking the undefiled, supreme, secure Nibbāna, I attained the undefiled, supreme, secure Nibbāna.

To me knowledge and insight arose:

Sure is my liberation of mind,  
this is my last birth,  
now there is no continuation of existence.

## [7. The Story about Brahmā's Request]

Then, monks, this occurred to me: 'This Dhamma I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful, excellent, beyond the sphere of logic, profound, understandable only by the wise.

But this generation delights in desire, is devoted to desire, gladdened by desire, and for this generation delighting in desire, devoted to desire, gladdened by desire, this thing is hard to see, that is to say: conditionality and conditional origination.

This thing also is hard to see, that is to say:

the tranquilising of all processes, the letting go of all bases for cleaving, the end of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna.

But if I were to teach the Dhamma and others did not understand me that would be tiring for me, that would be troublesome to me.'

Further, monks, these truly wonderful verses occurred to me, that were unheard of in the past:

'Now is it suitable for me to explain  
what was attained with difficulty?  
For those overcome by passion and hatred  
this Dhamma is not easily understood.  
Going against the stream,  
it is profound, deep, hard to see, subtle.  
Those delighting in passion,  
obstructed by darkness, will not see it.'

## The Noble Search - 29

Such was my reflection, monks, and my mind inclined to inaction, not to teaching the Dhamma.

Then, monks, to Brahmā Sahampati, knowing with his mind the reflection in my mind, this thought occurred: ‘The world is surely going to destruction, the world is surely going to complete destruction, wherever the Realised One, the Worthy One, the Perfect Sambuddha’s mind inclines to inaction, not to teaching the Dhamma.’

Then, monks, Brahmā Sahampati, just as a strong man might stretch out a bent arm, or bend in an outstretched arm, so did he vanish from the Brahmā world and appear in front of me.

Then, monks, Brahmā Sahampati, after arranging his upper robe on one shoulder, and raising his hands in respectful salutation, said this to me:

“Let the Fortunate One preach the Dhamma, reverend Sir, let the Happy One preach the Dhamma, there are beings with little dust on the eyes who are perishing through not hearing the Dhamma, there will be those who understand the Dhamma.”

Brahmā Sahampati, monks, said this, and after saying this he said something more:

“Formerly there appeared amongst the Magadhans  
an impure Dhamma, invented by those still stained,  
open the door to the Deathless,  
let them hear the Dhamma understood by the Pure One.

As one who is standing on a rock on the top of a mountain  
can see the people on all sides,

## The Noble Search - 30

in the same way, One of Great Wisdom, having ascended  
the Palace made from Dhamma, Visionary One,  
look down on the people overcome by grief,  
One Free of Grief, on those overcome by birth and old-age.  
Caravan-Leader, Debtless One, travel through the world.  
Rise up, O Hero, Victorious in Battle.

Let the Fortunate One teach the Dhamma, there will be those who understand.”

Then, monks, having understood Brahmā’s request, out of kindness I looked at beings around the world with my Buddha-eye.

While looking around the world, monks, with my Buddha-eye, I saw beings having little dust on the eyes, having great dust on the eyes, having sharp faculties, having undeveloped faculties, having good conditions, having poor conditions, easy to instruct, hard to instruct, and only some who dwelt seeing danger in what is blameworthy and in the next world.

Just as with water-lilies or lotuses or white lotuses some of those water-lilies or lotuses or white lotuses, born in the water, flourishing in the water, not rising above water, are nourished from inside the depths, some of those water-lilies or lotuses or white lotuses, born in the water, flourishing in the water, surrounded by water, stand level with the water, some of those water-lilies or lotuses or white lotuses, born in the water, flourishing in the water, stand above the water, and are untouched by the water.

Even so while looking around the world, monks, with my Buddha-eye, I saw beings having little dust on the eyes, having great dust on the eyes, having sharp faculties, having undeveloped faculties, having good conditions, having poor conditions, easy to instruct,

## The Noble Search - 31

hard to instruct, and only some who dwelt seeing danger in what is blameworthy and in the next world.

Then, monks, I recited this verse to Brahmā Sahampati:

“Open for you are the doors to the Deathless,  
whoever has ears let them release their faith.  
Perceiving trouble, Brahmā, I did not speak amongst humans,  
about what was hard-learned, the excellent Dhamma!”

Then, monks, Brahmā Sahampati, thinking: ‘I have obtained consent for the Fortunate One to teach the Dhamma,’ after worshipping and circumambulating me, vanished right there.

## [8. Deciding Who to Teach]

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘To whom should I first teach the Dhamma? Who will be able to understand the Dhamma quickly?’

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘This Āḷāra Kālāma is wise, learned, intelligent, for a long time he has been one with little dust on his eyes. Now what if I first teach the Dhamma to Āḷāra Kālāma? He will be able to understand the Dhamma quickly.’

Then a god, monks, having approached, said this to me: ‘Āḷāra Kālāma died seven days ago, reverend Sir,’ and to me knowledge and insight arose: ‘Āḷāra Kālāma died seven days ago.’

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘Āḷāra Kālāma had great understanding, if he had heard this Dhamma he would have understood it quickly.’

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘To whom should I first teach the Dhamma? Who will be able to understand the Dhamma quickly?’

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘This Uddaka Rāmaputta is wise, learned, intelligent, for a long time he has been one with little dust on his eyes. Now, what if I first teach the Dhamma to Uddaka Rāmaputta? He will be able to understand the Dhamma quickly.’

Then, monks, a god having approached, said this to me: ‘Uddaka Rāmaputta died yesterday evening, reverend Sir,’ and to me knowledge and insight arose: ‘Uddaka Rāmaputta died yesterday evening.’

### The Noble Search - 33

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘Uddaka Rāmaputta had great understanding, if he had heard this Dhamma he would have understood it quickly.’

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘To whom should I first teach the Dhamma? Who will be able to understand the Dhamma quickly?’

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘The group-of-five monks were very helpful to me, they attended on me when I was striving resolutely. Now, what if I first teach the Dhamma to the group-of-five monks?’

Then, monks, this occurred to me: ‘Where are the group-of-five monks dwelling right now?’

I saw with the divine eye, monks, which is purified and surpasses that of normal men, that the group-of-five monks were dwelling near Bārāṇasī, in the Deer Park at Isipatana.

## [9. The Abstainer Upaka]

Then, monks, having dwelt for as long as I liked I left on walking tour for Bārāṇasī. The Abstainer Upaka saw me, monks, going along the highway between the Bodhi tree and Gayā, and after seeing me, he said this to me:

“Your faculties, friend, are very clear, purified is your skin and bright, on account of whom, friend, did you go forth, or who is your teacher, or what Dhamma do you prefer?”

When this was said, monks, I addressed the Abstainer Upaka with verses:

“All-Conquering, All-Wise am I,  
undefiled in regard to all things,  
having given up everything,  
liberated through the destruction of craving,  
having deep knowledge myself,  
who should I point to (as Teacher)?

There is no Teacher for me, no one like me is found,  
there is no person equal to me in the world with its gods.  
I am a Worthy One in the world, I am the Unsurpassed Teacher,  
I am the One Perfect Sambuddha, cool and passionless.

I go to Kāsī’s city to set the Dhamma-Wheel rolling,  
I will beat the drum of the Deathless in a world that is blind.”

“It is as if you declare, friend, you are a Worthy One, an Infinite Victor!”

## The Noble Search - 35

“There are surely Victors like me,  
who have attained the destruction of the pollutants.  
I have been victorious over all wicked things,  
therefore, Upaka, I am a Victor.”

When this was said, monks, the Abstainer Upaka, after saying: “It may be so, friend,” shaking his head, and taking the wrong path, went away.

## [10. The Meeting at Isipatana]

Then, monks, while I was walking gradually on walking tour, I approached Bārāṇasī, Isipatana, the Deer Park, and the group-of-five monks.

The group-of-five monks, monks, saw me coming from afar, and after seeing me, they resolved among themselves:

“This Ascetic Gotama who is coming, friends, is given to luxury, forsaking the striving he has gone back to luxury. He should certainly not be worshipped or stood up for, nor should his bowl and robe be taken, however, we can prepare a seat, if he wishes he will sit down.”

As I approached, monks, the group-of-five monks were unable to continue with their own agreement, and after coming out to meet me, some took my bowl and robe, some prepared the seat, some placed the water for washing the feet.

Then they addressed me by name and with the word ‘friend’. When this was said, monks, I said this to the group-of-five monks:

“Do not address the Fortunate One, monks, by name and by the word ‘friend’, the Realised One is a Worthy One, monks, a Perfect Sambuddha. Lend an ear, monks, I will instruct you about the attainment of the Deathless, I will teach the Dhamma, and following the path as it has been preached, after no long time in regard to that good for which young men of good family rightly go forth from the home to the homeless life, that unsurpassed conclusion to the spiritual life, you will dwell having known, experienced, and attained it yourselves in this very life.”

## The Noble Search - 37

When this was said, the group-of-five monks said this to me:

“But you, friend Gotama, by that ascetic lifestyle, that practice, that difficult way of living, did not attain states beyond ordinary human beings, a distinction of what is truly noble knowledge and insight. So how can you now, given to luxury, forsaking the striving, gone back to luxury, attain states beyond ordinary human beings, a distinction of what is truly noble knowledge and insight?”

When this was said, monks, I said this to the group-of-five monks:

“The Realised One, monks, is not given to luxury, is not forsaking the striving, and has not gone back to luxury, the Realised One, monks, is a Worthy One, a Perfect Sambuddha. Lend an ear, monks, I will instruct you about the attainment of the Deathless, I will teach the Dhamma, and following the path as it has been preached, after no long time in regard to that good for which young men of good family rightly go forth from the home to the homeless life, that unsurpassed conclusion to the spiritual life, you will dwell having known, experienced, and attained it yourselves in this very life.”

For a second time the group-of-five monks said this to me:

“But you, friend Gotama, by that ascetic lifestyle, that practice, that difficult way of living, did not attain states beyond ordinary human beings, a distinction of what is truly noble knowledge and insight. So how can you now, given to luxury, forsaking the striving, gone back to luxury, attain a state beyond ordinary human beings, a distinction of what is truly noble knowledge and insight?”

## The Noble Search - 38

For a second time, monks, I said this to the group-of-five monks:

“The Realised One, monks, is not given to luxury, is not forsaking the striving, and has not gone back to luxury, the Realised One, monks, is a Worthy One, a Perfect Sambuddha. Lend an ear, monks, I will instruct you about the attainment of the Deathless, I will teach the Dhamma, and following the path as it has been preached, after no long time in regard to that good for which young men of good family rightly go forth from the home to the homeless life, that unsurpassed conclusion to the spiritual life, you will dwell having known, experienced, and attained it yourselves in this very life.”

For a third time the group-of-five monks said this to me:

“But you, friend Gotama, by that ascetic lifestyle, that practice, that difficult way of living, did not attain states beyond ordinary human beings, a distinction of what is truly noble knowledge and insight. So how can you now, given to luxury, forsaking the striving, gone back to luxury, attain states beyond ordinary human beings, a distinction of what is truly noble knowledge and insight?”

When this was said, monks, I said this to the group-of-five monks:

“Are you aware, monks, of my having spoken to you like this before?”

“Certainly not, reverend Sir.”

“The Realised One, monks, is a Worthy One, a Perfect Sambuddha. Lend an ear, monks, I will instruct you about the attainment of the Deathless, I will teach the Dhamma, and following the path as it has been preached, after no long time in regard to that good for which young men of good family rightly go forth from the home to the

## The Noble Search - 39

homeless life, that unsurpassed conclusion to the spiritual life, you will dwell having known, experienced, and attained it yourselves in this very life,” and I was able, monks, to persuade the group-of-five monks.

Then, monks, I advised two monks and three monks wandered for alms, and the group of six monks subsisted on whatever, after walking for alms-food, the three monks brought them.

Then, monks, I advised three monks and two monks wandered for alms, and the group of six monks subsisted on whatever, after walking for alms-food, the two monks brought them.

**[11. The Group-of-Five Monks attain Nibbāna]**

Then, monks, the group-of-five monks, while being advised by me, while being instructed, being themselves subject to birth, after understanding the danger in being subject to birth, while seeking the birthless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, attained the birthless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,<sup>16</sup>

being themselves subject to old-age, after understanding the danger in being subject to old-age, while seeking the ageless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, attained the ageless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being themselves subject to sickness, after understanding the danger in being subject to sickness, while seeking the sickless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, attained the sickless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being themselves subject to death, after understanding the danger in being subject to death, while seeking the deathless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, attained the deathless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being themselves subject to grief, after understanding the danger in being subject to grief, while seeking the griefless, supreme, secure Nibbāna, attained the griefless, supreme, secure Nibbāna,

being themselves subject to defilements, after understanding the danger in being subject to defilements, while seeking the undefiled, supreme, secure Nibbāna, attained the undefiled, supreme, secure Nibbāna.

To them knowledge and insight arose:

Sure is my liberation of mind,<sup>17</sup>  
this is my last birth,  
now there is no continuation of existence.

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<sup>16</sup> This was at the conclusion of what is now known as the second discourse of the Buddha, the Anattalakkhaṇasutta, which is not recorded here.

<sup>17</sup> BJT and RTE both read *Akuppā no vimutti*, meaning *sure is our liberation of mind*, but that certainty arises in regard to one's own attainment, and not another's, so I prefer the reading adopted here.

## [12. The Five Strands of Sense Pleasure]

There are these five strands, monks, of sense pleasure.

Which five?

Forms cognizable by the eye, which are wanted, lovely, pleasant, likeable, sensual, enticing, sounds cognizable by the ear, which are wanted, lovely, pleasant, likeable, sensual, enticing, smells cognizable by the nose, which are wanted, lovely, pleasant, likeable, sensual, enticing, tastes cognizable by the tongue, which are wanted, lovely, pleasant, likeable, sensual, enticing, tangibles cognizable by the body, which are wanted, lovely, pleasant, likeable, sensual, enticing, these, monks, are the five strands of sense pleasure.

Whichever ascetics or brāhmaṇas, monks, are tied, infatuated, and indulging in these five strands of sense pleasure, who use them not seeing the danger in them, not knowing the escape from them, of them this should be known:

‘They have fallen upon misfortune, they have fallen upon destruction, the Wicked One can do whatever he likes with them.’

Just as, monks, if there were a wild deer lying bound in a snare, about him you could know:

‘He has fallen upon misfortune, he has fallen upon destruction, the hunter can do whatever he likes with him, and when the hunter comes he cannot depart as he desires.’

Just so, monks, whichever ascetics or brāhmaṇas are tied, infatuated, and indulging in these five strands of sense pleasure, who use them

## The Noble Search - 43

not seeing the danger in them, not knowing the escape from them, of them this should be known:

‘They have fallen upon misfortune, they have fallen upon destruction, the Wicked One can do whatever he likes with them.’

And, monks, whichever ascetics or brāhmaṇas are not tied, not infatuated, and do not indulge in these five strands of sense pleasure, who use them seeing the danger in them, knowing the escape from them, of them this should be known:

‘They have not fallen upon misfortune, they have not fallen upon destruction, the Wicked One cannot do whatever he likes with them.’

Just as, monks, if there were a wild deer not lying bound in a snare, about him you could know:

‘He has not fallen upon misfortune, he has not fallen upon destruction, the hunter cannot do whatever he likes with him, and when the hunter comes he can depart as he desires.’

Just so, monks, whichever ascetics or brāhmaṇas are not tied, not infatuated, and do not indulge in these five strands of sense pleasure, who use them seeing the danger in them, knowing the escape from them, of them this should be known:

‘They have not fallen upon misfortune, they have not fallen upon destruction, the Wicked One cannot do whatever he likes with them.’

Just as, monks, if there were a wild deer wandering in a forest wilderness, he goes confidently, he stands confidently, he sits confidently, he lies down confidently.

## The Noble Search - 44

What is the reason for that?

He is not, monks, within the range of a hunter.

Just so, monks, a monk quite secluded from sense desires, secluded from unwholesome things, having thinking, reflection, and the happiness and rapture born of seclusion, dwells having attained the first absorption.

It is said of this monk, monks, he has made Māra blind and footless, he has destroyed Māra's eye, the Wicked One wanders without seeing him.

Furthermore, monks, a monk, with the ending of thinking and reflection, with internal clarity, and one-pointedness of mind, being without thinking, without reflection, having the happiness and rapture born of concentration, dwells having attained the second absorption.

It is said of this monk, monks, he has made Māra blind and footless, he has destroyed Māra's eye, the Wicked One wanders without seeing him.

Furthermore, monks, a monk, with the fading away of rapture dwells equanimous, mindful, clearly knowing, experiencing happiness through the body, about which the Noble Ones declare: "He lives pleasantly, mindful, and equanimous," thus he dwells having attained the third absorption.

It is said of this monk, monks, he has made Māra blind and footless, he has destroyed Māra's eye, the Wicked One wanders without seeing him.

## The Noble Search - 45

Furthermore, monks, a monk, having given up pleasure, given up pain, and with the previous disappearance of mental well-being and sorrow, without pain, without pleasure, and with complete purity of mindfulness owing to equanimity, dwells having attained the fourth absorption.

It is said of this monk, monks, he has made Māra blind and footless, he has destroyed Māra's eye, the Wicked One wanders without seeing him.

Furthermore, monks, a monk, having completely transcended perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, not attending to perceptions of variety, understanding: 'This is endless space', abides in the sphere of endless space.

It is said of this monk, monks, he has made Māra blind and footless, he has destroyed Māra's eye, the Wicked One wanders without seeing him.

Furthermore, monks, a monk, having completely transcended the sphere of endless space, understanding: 'This is endless consciousness,' abides in the sphere of endless consciousness.

It is said of this monk, monks, he has made Māra blind and footless, he has destroyed Māra's eye, the Wicked One wanders without seeing him.

Furthermore, monks, a monk, having completely transcended the sphere of endless consciousness, understanding: 'This is nothing,' abides in the sphere of nothingness.

## The Noble Search - 46

It is said of this monk, monks, he has made Māra blind and footless, he has destroyed Māra's eye, the Wicked One wanders without seeing him.

Furthermore, monks, a monk, having completely transcended the sphere of nothingness, abides in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

It is said of this monk, monks, he has made Māra blind and footless, he has destroyed Māra's eye, the Wicked One wanders without seeing him.

Furthermore, monks, a monk, having completely transcended the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, abides in the cessation of perception and feeling, and having seen with wisdom, his pollutants are totally destroyed.

It is said of this monk, monks, he has made Māra blind and footless, he has destroyed Māra's eye, the Wicked One wanders without seeing him.

He has crossed over the world, he goes confidently, he stands confidently, he sits confidently, he lies down confidently.

What is the reason for that?

He is not within the range, monks, of the Wicked One.

## The Noble Search - 47

The Fortunate One said this,

and those monks were uplifted and greatly rejoiced in what was said by the Fortunate One.

*The Discourse about the Noble Search is Finished*