

Bhaya-bherava Sutta

: fear & Terror

**Buddhafield Festival 2012 –
Study with Mahabodhi**

Thursday

The Bhayabherava Sutra and the Buddha's invention of skillfulness

Friday

The Niramisa Sutra and the bliss of liberation

Saturday

The Satipatthana Sutta and the three marks of conditioned existence

MN 4 PTS: [Mi 16](#)

translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

© 1998–2011

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Savatthi at Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery. Then Janussonin the brahman went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "Master Gotama, the sons of good families who have gone forth from the home life into homelessness out of conviction in Master Gotama: is Master Gotama their leader? Is Master Gotama their helper? Is Master Gotama their inspirer? Do they take Master Gotama as their example?"

"Yes, brahman, so it is. The sons of good families who have gone forth from the home life into homelessness out of conviction in me: I am their leader. I am their helper. I am their inspirer. They take me as their example."

"But, Master Gotama, it's not easy to endure isolated forest or wilderness dwellings. It's not easy to maintain seclusion, not easy to enjoy being alone. The forests, as it were, plunder the mind of a monk who has not attained concentration."

"Yes, brahman, so it is. It's not easy to endure isolated forest or wilderness dwellings. It's not easy to maintain seclusion, not easy to enjoy being alone. The forests, as it were, plunder the mind of a monk who has not attained concentration. Before my Awakening, when I was still an unawakened Bodhisatta, the thought occurred to me as well: 'It's not easy to maintain seclusion, not easy to enjoy being alone. The forests, as it were, plunder the mind of a monk who has not attained concentration.'

"The thought occurred to me: 'When priests or contemplatives who are unpurified in their bodily activities resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings, it's the fault of their unpurified bodily activities that they give rise to unskillful fear & terror. But it's not

the case that I am unpurified in my bodily activities when I resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings. I am purified in my bodily activities. I am one of those noble ones who are purified in their bodily activities when they resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings.' Seeing in myself this purity of bodily activities, I felt even more undaunted about staying in the wilderness.

"The thought occurred to me: 'When priests or contemplatives who are unpurified in their verbal activities... unpurified in their mental activities... unpurified in their livelihood resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings, it's the fault of their unpurified livelihood that they give rise to unskillful fear & terror. But it's not the case that I am unpurified in my livelihood when I resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings. I am purified in my livelihood. I am one of those noble ones who are purified in their livelihood when they resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings.' Seeing in myself this purity of livelihood, I felt even more undaunted about staying in the wilderness.

"The thought occurred to me: 'When priests or contemplatives who are covetous & fiercely passionate for sensual pleasures... I am not covetous...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who have minds of ill will, with destructive attitudes... I have a mind of good will...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who are overcome by sloth & drowsiness... I am devoid of sloth & drowsiness...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who are restless & with an unstill mind... I have a still mind...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who are uncertain & doubting... I have gone beyond uncertainty...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who are given to praising themselves & disparaging others... I do not praise myself or disparage others...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who tend toward panic & dread... I have gone beyond horripilation...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who are desirous of gains, offerings, & fame... I have few wants...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who are lazy & lacking in persistence... My persistence is aroused...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who are muddled in their mindfulness & unalert... I have mindfulness established...!...

"...'When priests or contemplatives who are unconcentrated, with straying minds... I am consummate in concentration...!...

"The thought occurred to me: 'When priests or contemplatives who are drooling idiots, resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings, it's the fault of their drooling idiocy that they give rise to unskillful fear & terror. But it's not the case that I am a drooling idiot, when I resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings. I am consummate in discernment. I am one of those noble ones who are consummate in discernment when they resort to isolated forest or wilderness dwellings.' Seeing in myself this consummate discernment, I felt even more undaunted about staying in the wilderness.

"The thought occurred to me: 'What if — on recognized, designated nights such as the eighth, fourteenth, & fifteenth of the lunar fortnight — I were to stay in the sort of places that are awe-inspiring and make your hair stand on end, such as park-shrines, forest-shrines, & tree-shrines? Perhaps I would get to see that fear & terror.' So at a later time — on recognized, designated nights such as the eighth, fourteenth, & fifteenth of the lunar fortnight — I stayed in the sort of places that are awe-inspiring and make your hair stand on end, such as park-shrines, forest-shrines, & tree-shrines. And while I was staying there a wild animal would come, or a bird would make a twig fall, or wind would rustle the fallen leaves. The thought would occur to me: 'Is this that fear & terror coming?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'Why do I just keep waiting for fear? What if I were to subdue fear & terror in whatever state they come?' So when fear & terror came while I was walking back & forth, I would not stand or sit or lie down. I would keep walking back & forth until I had subdued that fear & terror. When fear & terror came while I was standing, I would not walk or sit or lie down. I would keep standing until I had subdued that fear & terror. When fear & terror came while I was sitting, I would not lie

down or stand up or walk. I would keep sitting until I had subdued that fear & terror. When fear & terror came while I was lying down, I would not sit up or stand or walk. I would keep lying down until I had subdued that fear & terror.

"There are some priests & contemplatives, brahman, who have the perception of 'day' when it is night, and of 'night' when it is day. This, I tell you, is their being in a dwelling of delusion. As for me, I have the perception of 'day' when it is day, and of 'night' when it is night. If anyone, when speaking rightly, were to say, 'A being not subject to delusion has appeared in the world for the benefit & happiness of many, out of sympathy for the world, for the welfare, benefit, & happiness of human & divine beings,' he would rightly be speaking of me.

"Unflagging persistence was aroused in me, and unmuddled mindfulness established. My body was calm & unaroused, my mind concentrated & single. **Quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful mental qualities,** I entered & remained in the first *jhana*: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, I entered & remained in the second *jhana*: rapture & pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance. With the fading of rapture I remained in equanimity, mindful & alert, and physically sensitive of pleasure. I entered & remained in the third *jhana*, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' With the abandoning of pleasure & pain — as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress — I entered & remained in the fourth *jhana*: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.

"When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the *knowledge of recollecting my past lives*. I recollected my manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two... five, ten... fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction & expansion: 'There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.' Thus I remembered my manifold past lives in their modes & details.

"This was the first knowledge I attained in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose — as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute.

"When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the *knowledge of the passing away & reappearance of beings*. I saw — by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human — beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: 'These beings — who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech & mind, who reviled noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views — with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But these beings — who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views — with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.' Thus — by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human — I saw beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma.

"This was the second knowledge I attained in the second watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose — as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute.

"When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the *knowledge of the ending of the mental fermentations*. I discerned, as it had come to be, that 'This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress... These are fermentations... This is the origination of fermentations... This is the cessation of fermentations... This is the way leading to the cessation of fermentations.' My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the fermentation of sensuality, released from the fermentation of becoming, released from the fermentation of ignorance. With release, there was the

knowledge, 'Released.' I discerned that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'

"This was the third knowledge I attained in the third watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose — as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute.

"Now, brahman, if the thought should occur to you, 'Perhaps Gotama the contemplative is even today not free of passion, not free of aversion, not free of delusion, which is why he resorts to isolated forest & wilderness dwellings,' it should not be seen in that way. It's through seeing two compelling reasons that I resort to isolated forest & wilderness dwellings: seeing a pleasant abiding for myself in the present, and feeling sympathy for future generations."

"How truly future generations have been shown sympathy by Master Gotama in the manner of one who is worthy & rightly self-awakened! Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama — through many lines of reasoning — made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha of monks. May Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life."