

SN22:90 Channa

Background

Channa was the Bodhisatta's charioteer, who led him out of the palace on the night of his great renunciation. Channa received ordination as a bhikkhu but, because of his former close relationship with the Buddha, he became proud and domineering, and spoke harshly to the other bhikkhus.

Ānanda refers to this as his “barrenness” (*cetokhila*), translated as mental blockages (DN), wilderness in the heart (MN), mental barrenness (AN). Ajahn Brahm says “a stump, a stumbling block, an obstacle – you’re stumped.” There are five types of barrenness: “one is doubtful, uncertain, undecided, and unconfident about the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, and training (*sikkhā*), and thus his mind does not incline to ardour, devotion, perseverance, and striving.”; and Channa's problem seems to have been the fifth:

“one is angry and displeased with his companions in the holy life, resentful and callous towards them” - MN16

“one is irritated by his fellow monks, displeased with them, aggressive toward them, ill disposed toward them” - AN 10:14, 9:71

Bhikkhu Vibhanga - Sanghādisesa 12:

Venerable Channa was behaving improperly. The bhikkhus would tell him, “Don’t do that; it’s not allowable,” and he would reply:

“Who are you to admonish me? I should admonish you! The Buddha is mine, the Dhamma is mine; the Dhamma was attained by the young Master because of me.”

Bhikkhu Vibhanga - Pācittiya 12:

Venerable Channa misbehaved. Then when he was examined about an offence at a meeting of the Saṅgha, he spoke evasively: “Who has committed an offence? What offence has been committed? An offence has been committed about what? How has an offence been committed? Who are you talking about? What are you talking about?”

Then, when Venerable Channa was again being examined about an offence at a meeting of the Saṅgha, he thought, “By speaking evasively I will commit an offence,” and he instead harassed the Saṅgha by remaining silent.

Bhikkhu Vibhanga - Pācittiya 71:

Venerable Channa indulged in bad habits. Bhikkhus said: “Friend Channa, do not do that, it is not allowable.” He said:

“Friends, I will not train myself in this rule of training until I have inquired about it of another bhikkhu, experienced, expert in discipline.”

DN16: Mahāparinibbānasutta Sutta

“Ānanda, after my passing away, the *brahmadaṇḍa* is to be imposed on the bhikkhu Channa.”
(literally, the rod of Brahma)

“But what is the *brahmadaṇḍa*, venerable Sir?”

"The bhikkhu Channa, Ānanda, may say whatever he wishes, but he is not to be spoken to, or advised, or instructed by the bhikkhus."

When Channa realized he was being ostracized by the Sangha, he was shaken by a sense of urgency — saṃvega. It is at this point that the sutta opens.

SN22:90 Channa (SN22 Khandhas)

On one occasion a number of bhikkhus were dwelling at Benares in the Deer Park at Isipatana. Then, in the evening, the Venerable Channa emerged from seclusion and went from dwelling to dwelling saying to the elder bhikkhus: "Let the elder venerable ones exhort me, let them instruct me, let them give me a Dhamma talk in such a way that I might see the Dhamma."

When this was said, the elder bhikkhus said to the Venerable Channa:

"Friend Channa, bodies and material stuff are impermanent, feeling tone is impermanent, perception is impermanent, will and other mental activities are impermanent, consciousness is impermanent.

"Bodies and material stuff are not self, feeling tone is not self, perception is not self, will and other mental activities are not self, consciousness is not self.

"All conditioned things are impermanent; everything is not self."

Then the Venerable Channa thought: "Yeah, yeah ... I know all that:

'The body is impermanent, feeling tone is impermanent, perception is impermanent, will is impermanent, consciousness is impermanent.

'The body is not self, feeling tone is not self, perception is not self, will is not self, consciousness is not self.

'All conditioned things are impermanent; everything is not self.'

"But my mind does not leap joyfully toward the stilling of all activities, abandoning everything that has been acquired, the destruction of wanting, everything fading away and ceasing, Nibbāna; nor does my mind acquire confidence, settle down, and resolve on it.

Instead, agitation and grasping arise, and my mind turns back, thinking: 'But who is my self?'

But that does not happen to one who sees the Dhamma. So who can teach me the Dhamma in such a way that I can **see** the Dhamma?"

Then it occurred to the Venerable Channa: "The Venerable Ānanda was praised by the Buddha, and is esteemed by his wise companions in the holy life. He is capable of teaching me the Dhamma in such a way that I might see the Dhamma. Since I have so much trust in the Venerable Ānanda, let me approach him where he is dwelling, at Kosambi in Ghosita's Park."

Then the Venerable Channa set his lodging in order, took his bowl and robe, and went to Ghosita's Park in Kosambi, where he approached the Venerable Ānanda and exchanged greetings with him. When they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, he sat down to one side and told the Venerable Ānanda everything that had happened, adding:

"Let the Venerable Ānanda exhort me, let him instruct me, let him give me a Dhamma talk in such a way that I might see the Dhamma."

The Venerable Ānanda said: “Even by this much I am pleased with the Venerable Channa. Perhaps the Venerable Channa has opened himself up and broken through his barrenness. Listen, friend Channa, you are capable of understanding the Dhamma.”

Then at once a lofty rapture and gladness arose in the Venerable Channa as he thought: “It seems that I **am** capable of understanding the Dhamma.”

The Venerable Ānanda then said: “In the presence of the Buddha I have heard this, friend Channa; in his presence I learned this exhortation he spoke to the bhikkhu Kaccanagotta:

SN12:15 Kaccanagotta (SN 12 Causation)

“This world, Kaccana, for the most part depends upon a duality — upon the notion that things have a permanent essence, or the notion that nothing exists.

But for one who sees the origin of things as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of nonexistence.

And for one who sees the cessation of things as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of permanent essence.

“This world, Kaccana, is for the most part shackled by engagement, clinging, and adherence. But one with right view does not become engaged and cling, does not adhere to mental standpoints and underlying tendencies, does not take a stand about ‘my self.’

One has no perplexity or doubt that what arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing.

One’s knowledge about this is independent of others.

It is in this way, Kaccana, that there is right view.

“This is one extreme, Kaccana: ‘Things have a permanent essence’.

This is the other extreme: ‘Nothing exists’.

Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Buddha teaches the Dhamma by the middle:

SN12:1 Dependent Origination

“With delusion as condition, kamma making comes to be;

with kamma making as condition, consciousness comes to be;

with consciousness as condition, mind-and-body comes to be;

with mind-and-body as condition, the six sense faculties come to be;

with the 6 sense faculties as condition, sensory experience comes to be;

with sensory experience as condition, feeling tone comes to be;

with feeling tone as condition, wanting comes to be;

with wanting as condition, fuel for existence comes to be;

with fuel for existence as condition, renewal of existence comes to be;

with renewal of existence as condition, rebirth comes to be;

with rebirth as condition, old age and death, sorrow, complaining, pain, unhappiness, and distress come to be.

Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

This is called dependent origination.

Dependent Cessation

“But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of delusion, comes cessation of kamma making;

with the cessation of kamma making, consciousness eventually ceases [at parinibbāna];

with the cessation of consciousness, mind-and-body ceases;

with the cessation of mind-and-body, the six sense faculties cease;

with the cessation of the six sense faculties, sensory experience ceases;

with the cessation of sensory experience, feeling tone ceases;

with the cessation of feeling tone, wanting ceases;

with the cessation of wanting, fuel for existence ceases;

with the cessation of fuel for existence, renewal of existence ceases;

with the cessation of renewal of existence, rebirth ceases;

with the cessation of rebirth, old age and death, sorrow, complaining, pain, unhappiness, and distress cease.

Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.”

--Conclusion of Channa Sutta

The Venerable Channa said: “So it is, friend Ānanda, for those venerable ones who have such compassionate and benevolent brothers in the holy life to exhort and instruct them. And now that I have heard this Dhamma teaching from the Venerable Ānanda, I have made the breakthrough to the Dhamma.”

Theragāthā 1:69 Channa

Hearing the sweet Dhamma taught by the master,
Who understands all, and whose knowledge excels,
Who’s skilled in the road to safety from the yoke,
I’ve entered the path to realise the ending of death.