

The Arahant and the Four Truths in Early Buddhist Discourse

by Bhikkhu Anālayo

lecture 9

MĀ 31 – Discourse on an Analysis of the Noble Truths (Parallel to the *Saccavibhaṅga-sutta* MN 141/ MN III 248)

"What, venerable friends, is the noble truth of *dukkha*? Birth is *dukkha*, old age is *dukkha*, disease is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, association with what is disliked is *dukkha*, separation from what is loved is *dukkha*, being unable to get what one wishes is *dukkha*; in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are *dukkha*.

"Venerable friends, [when] it is said, "birth is *dukkha*", on what basis is this said? Venerable friends, "birth" is when living beings, in their various forms, experience birth, when they are born, when they are brought into existence, when they are formed, when the five aggregates come into being, and when the vital faculties develop – this is called birth.

[this is followed by long passage detailing the affliction experienced through birth, which is without a counterpart in MN 141, same pattern continues below]

"Venerable friends, [when] it is said, "old age is *dukkha*", on what basis is this said? Venerable friends, "old age" is when living beings in their various forms become senile, with hoary hair, lost teeth, deteriorating health, hunched body, unsteady step, overweight body, shortness of breath, reliance on a walking cane, shrinking flesh, sagging skin, wrinkles like pock-marks, failing sense faculties, and unsightly complexion. This is called old age."

"Venerable friends, [when] it is said, "disease is *dukkha*", on what basis is this said? Venerable friends, "disease" refers to headache, sore eyes, earache, sore nose, pain in the face, sore lips, toothache, pain in the tongue, pain in the palate, sore throat, panting, coughing, vomiting, hoarseness, epilepsy, swelling, hypersalivation, bloody phlegm, fever, emaciation, hemorrhoids, and diarrhea. When these and the various other symptoms of disease arise, they do so in dependence on contact. They do not arise independently of the mind, [though] they manifest in the body. Such is disease.

"Venerable friends, [when] it is said, "death is *dukkha*", on what basis is this said? Venerable friends, "death" is when sentient beings, in their various forms, come to the end of life and [succumb to] impermanence; when they die, disappear, break up, and are extinguished; when their life-span is ended, destroyed; when their vital force shuts down. This is called death.

"Venerable friends, [when] it is said, "association with what is disliked is *dukkha*", on what basis is this said? Venerable friends, with regard to "association with what is disliked", living beings truly have six internal sense-bases; and when, by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind, they sense an unliked object and find themselves together with it, in company with it, associated with it, conjoined with it, then they experience *dukkha*. It is the same with the external sense objects, and also with [the resulting] contact, feeling, perception, volition, and craving.

"Venerable friends, living beings truly consist of the six elements; and when, by way of the earth element, water [element], fire [element], air [element], space [element], or consciousness element, they encounter an unliked object and find themselves together with it, in company with it, associated with it, conjoined with it, then they experience *dukkha*. This is called association with what is disliked.

Venerable friends, [when] it is said, "separation from what is loved is *dukkha*", on what basis is this said? Venerable friends, with regard to "separation from what is loved", living beings truly have six internal

sense-bases; and when, by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind, they sense a loved object and find themselves separated from it, not connected with it, divided from it, not associated with it, not conjoined with it, then they experience *dukkha*.

"It is the same with the external sense objects, and also with [the resulting] contact, feeling, perception, volition, and craving.

"Venerable friends, living beings truly consist of the six elements; and when, by way of the earth element, water [element], fire [element], air [element], space [element], or consciousness element, they encounter a loved object and find themselves separated from it, not connected with it, divided from it, not associated with it, not conjoined with it, then they experience *dukkha*. This is called separation from what is loved.

"Venerable friends, [when] it is said, 'being unable to get what one wishes is *dukkha*,' on what basis is this said? Venerable friends, living beings, who are subject to birth, who are not free from birth, wish not to be subject to birth— but this truly cannot be achieved by [mere] wishing. [Living beings, who are subject to] old age, ... death, ... sorrow and lamentation, who are not free from sorrow and lamentation, wish not to be subject to sorrow and lamentation— but this too cannot be achieved by [mere] wishing.

"Venerable friends, living beings who are actually experiencing pain, which is unpleasant and disagreeable, think: 'I am experiencing pain, which is unpleasant and disagreeable. I wish this would change and become agreeable!' – but this too cannot be achieved by [mere] wishing.

"Venerable friends, living beings, who are actually experiencing pleasure, which is agreeable, think: 'I am experiencing pleasure, which is agreeable. I wish this could last forever, remain, and not be subject to change!' – but this too cannot be achieved by [mere] wishing. [same for intentions and perceptions that are agreeable or disagreeable]

"Venerable friends, [when] it is said, 'in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are *dukkha*,' on what basis is this said? There are the material form aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling [aggregate affected by clinging], the perception [aggregate affected by clinging], the formations [aggregate affected by clinging], and the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. Venerable friends, [when] it is said, 'in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are *dukkha*,' it is said on this basis.

"Venerable friends, the noble truth of *dukkha* was so in the past, the noble truth of *dukkha* will be so in the future, and is so in the present. It is genuinely true, not false; it does not depart from the way things are; it is not distorted; it is genuinely true, exact, and valid; it is truth that accords with the way things are. It is what the noble ones are endowed with, what the noble ones know, what the noble ones see, what the noble ones comprehend, what the noble ones attain, what the noble ones fully awaken to. For these reasons it is called the "noble" truth of *dukkha*.

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Sāriputta's exposition in EĀ 27.1

"What is the truth of *dukkha*? That is to say, birth is *dukkha*, old age is *dukkha*, disease is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, dejection, sorrow and vexation are *dukkha*, associating with what is disliked is *dukkha*, being dissociated from what is liked is *dukkha*, not obtaining what is searched for is *dukkha*, in short, the five aggregates of clinging are *dukkha* - this is called the truth of *dukkha*.

"What is the truth of the arising of *dukkha*? That is to say, it is the fetter of craving.

"What is the truth of cessation? That is to say, the truth of cessation is the final and remainderless cessation of the fetter of craving and

Thus "what the Buddha said was that

- pain should be known,
- its origin given up,
- its cessation realised,
- and the path to its cessation practised."

SN 56.28 at SN V 435: *tathāgato ariyo, tasmā ariyasaccānī ti vuc-*
canti

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MĀ 31

"What, venerable friends, is the noble truth of the arising of *dukkha* due to the arising of craving? Living beings truly have craving associated with the six internal sense-bases, with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. When there is craving, affection, defilement, and attachment associated with these, that is called arising.

"Venerable friends, a learned noble disciple knows: 'Thus I understand this teaching, thus I see it, thus I comprehend it, thus I contemplate it, thus I realize it.' This is what is called the noble truth of the arising of *dukkha* [due to] the arising of craving.

"How does he (the noble disciple) know it thus? If there is craving for one's wife, children, male and female servants, messengers, retainers, fields, houses, shops, income, and wealth; if, when working on behalf of them, there is craving, affection, defilement, and attachment, then this is called arising. [This is how] he knows this noble truth of the arising of *dukkha* [due to] the arising of craving.

"It is the same with the external sense objects, and again with the [associated] contact, feeling, perception, volition, and craving.

"Venerable friends, living beings truly have craving for the six elements, for the earth element, the water [element], the fire [element], the air [element], the space [element], and the consciousness element. When there is craving, affection, defilement, and attachment associated with these, that is called the arising [of *dukkha*] ...

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MN 141

"What, friends, is the noble truth of the origin of *dukkha*? It is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being. This is called the noble truth of the origin of *dukkha*."

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MĀ 31 and MN 141 agree in formulating the truth of cessation by describing the cessation of craving in a way that corresponds to their description of its arising

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MĀ 31

"What, venerable friends, is the noble truth of the path [leading to] the cessation [of *dukkha*]. It is this: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

"What, venerable friends, is right view? When the noble disciple is mindful of *dukkha* as *dukkha*, ... of its arising as its arising, ... of its cessation as its cessation, and mindful of the path as the path; or when he contemplates his former actions; or when he trains to be mindful of all formations; or when he sees the danger in all formations; or when he sees the tranquility and calm of Nirvana; or

when he, free from attachment, mindfully contemplates the mind as liberated – whatever therein is investigation, comprehensive investigation, successive investigation, investigation of phenomena, examination, comprehensive examination, observation, knowledge, and realization – that is called right view."

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MN 141

"What, friends, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

"What, friends, is right view? Knowledge of *dukkha*, knowledge of the origin of *dukkha*, knowledge of the cessation of *dukkha*, and knowledge of the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha* - this is called right view."

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MĀ 31

"What, venerable friends, is right intention? When the noble disciple is mindful of *dukkha* as *dukkha* ... – whatever therein is mental thought, comprehensive thought, appropriate thought, thinking of what should be thought of, aspiring to what should be aspired to – this is called right intention."

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MN 141

"What, friends, is right intention? Intention of renunciation, intention of non-ill will, and intention of non-cruelty - this is called right intention."

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MĀ 31

"What, venerable friends, is right speech? When the noble disciple is mindful of *dukkha* as *dukkha*, ... – then whatever therein, in addition to the four kinds of good verbal conduct [abstention from lying etc.], constitutes abstaining and abandoning of every other kind of evil verbal conduct, not practicing it, not doing it, not condoning it, not associating with it – this is called right speech."

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MN 141

"What, friends, is right speech? Abstaining from false speech, abstaining from malicious speech, abstaining from harsh speech, and abstaining from idle chatter - this is called right speech."

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MĀ 31

"What, venerable friends, is right action? When the noble disciple is mindful of *dukkha* as *dukkha*, ... – whatever therein, in addition to the three kinds of good bodily conduct [abstention from killing etc.] constitutes abstaining and abandoning of every other kind of evil bodily conduct, not practicing it, not doing it, not condoning it, not associating with it – this is called right action."

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MN 141

"What, friends, is right action? Abstaining from killing living beings, abstaining from taking what is not given, and abstaining from misconduct in sensual pleasures - this is called right action."

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MĀ 31

"What, venerable friends, is right livelihood? When the noble disciple is mindful of *dukkha* as *dukkha*, ... – whatever therein is not seeking [to make a livelihood] by inappropriate means, nor out of excessive desire and dissatisfaction, nor by the various forms of wrong livelihood, [such as] performing tricks or incantations, but instead seeking robes in ways that are in accordance with the Dharma, not contrary to the Dharma, seeking food, beds, and seats in ways that are in accordance with the Dharma, not contrary to the Dharma – this is called right livelihood."

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MN 141

"What, friends, is right livelihood? Here a noble disciple, having abandoned wrong livelihood, earns his living by right livelihood - this is called right livelihood."

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MĀ 31

"What, venerable friends, is right effort? When the noble disciple is mindful of *dukkha* as *dukkha*, ... – whatever therein is vigor, effort, unified diligent striving, power in progressing, focused application without remission, without decline, to rightly master the mind – this is called right effort."

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MN 141

"What, friends, is right effort? Here a bhikkhu awakens zeal for the non-arising of unarisen evil unwholesome states, and he makes effort, arouses energy, exerts his mind, and strives. He awakens zeal for the abandoning of arisen evil unwholesome states ... He awakens zeal for the arising of unarisen wholesome states ... He awakens zeal for the continuance, non-disappearance, strengthening, increase, and fulfilment by development of arisen wholesome states ... This is called right effort."

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MĀ 31

"What, venerable friends, is right mindfulness? When the noble disciple is mindful of *dukkha* as *dukkha*, ... – whatever therein is the mind's concordance with mindfulness, its turning away from non-mindfulness, its being comprehensively mindful, recollecting and again recollecting, the mind's being straight, non-forgetfulness of what the mind is responding to – this is called right mindfulness."

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MN 141

"What, friends, is right mindfulness? Here a monk abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings ... mental states as mental states ... dhar-mas as dharmas ... This is called right mindfulness."

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MĀ 31

"What, venerable friends, is right concentration? When the noble disciple is mindful of *dukkha* as *dukkha* ... – whatever therein is the mind's stability, its being established in the absorptions, established accordingly, being unwavering and not scattered, being focused, stilled, and rightly concentrated – this is called right concentration."

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MN 141

"What, friends, is right concentration? Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk enters upon and abides in the first absorption ...
he enters upon and abides in the second absorption ...
he enters upon and abides in the third absorption ...
he enters upon and abides in the fourth absorption ...
This is called right concentration.

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MĀ 31

"The Buddha has clearly comprehended all things;
He has seen the countless wholesome and meritorious qualities,
The truths of *dukkha*, its arising, its cessation, and the path;
Skillfully revealing and explaining them."

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main points:

- there is *dukkha*,
- craving is the condition that can be changed,
- the cessation of craving is freedom,
- the practice combines bodily restraint with mental cultivation

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MĀ 32 – Discourse on Wonderful and Marvelous Qualities
 (Parallel to the *Acchhariya-abbhūta-sutta* MN 123/ MN III 118)

At that time, in the late afternoon, the venerable Ānanda rose from sitting in meditation and approached the Buddha. After paying respect with his head at the Buddha's feet, he stood to one side and said:

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MN 128

Buddha joins monks and then asks Ānanda to discourse on the Buddha's marvelous qualities

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MĀ 32

1) "Blessed One, I have heard that at the time of Kassapa Buddha the Blessed One made his initial vow [to follow] the path [of becoming] a Buddha and practiced the holy life."

"That at the time of Kassapa Buddha the Blessed One made his initial vow [to follow] the path [of becoming] a Buddha and practiced the holy life, this I remember as an extraordinary quality of the Blessed One.

2) "I have heard that the Blessed One, having at the time of Kassapa Buddha made his initial vow [to follow] the path [of becoming] a Buddha and practiced the holy life, was reborn in the Tusita heaven."

"That ... I remember ..."

3) "I have heard that the Blessed One, having at the time of Kassapa Buddha made his initial vow [to follow] the path [of becoming] a

Buddha and, having practiced the holy life, was reborn in the Tusita heaven.

"The Blessed One surpassed all those who had previously been born in the Tusita heaven in three respects, namely in divine length of life, divine complexion, and divine glory.

"For this reason, the Tusita gods were delighted and rejoiced, exclaiming: 'This young god is most wonderful, most remarkable. He possesses great supernormal power, great and mighty virtue, great merit, great and mighty power.' ...

"That ... I remember ..."

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pattern of qualities in MĀ 32:

1, 1+2, 1+2+3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24

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MN 123

1) "I heard and learned this, venerable sir, from the Blessed One's own lips: 'Mindful and fully aware, Ānanda, the Bodhisatta appeared in the Tusita heaven.' That mindful and fully aware the Bodhisatta appeared in the Tusita heaven - this I remember as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Blessed One."

2) "... 'Mindful and fully aware the Bodhisatta remained in the Tusita heaven.'..."

3) "... 'For the whole of his life-span the Bodhisatta remained in the Tusita heaven.'..."

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MĀ 32

4) "I have heard that at the end of his lifespan in the Tusita heaven, when the Blessed One mindfully descended into his mother's womb, at that moment all of heaven and earth trembled

"a great light illuminated the world, including even remote and dark places, unobstructed, completely shining on places that are not illuminated by the moon or the sun, even though these possess great supernormal power, great and mighty virtue, great merit, great and mighty power;

" because of this wonderful light, each and every sentient being came to know this: 'A remarkable being will be born! A remarkable being will be born!'"

5) "... while in his mother's womb, the Blessed One remained mindfully [lying] on his right side."

6) "... the Blessed One dwelt in his mother's womb peacefully and at ease."

7) "... while in his mother's womb, the Blessed One was covered in such a way that he was not defiled by blood or semen or other impurities."

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MN 123

4) "... 'Mindful and fully aware the Bodhisatta passed away from the Tusita heaven and descended into his mother's womb.' ..."

5) "... 'When the Bodhisatta passed away from the Tusita heaven and descended into his mother's womb, then a great immeasurable light

surpassing the splendour of the gods appeared in the world with its gods, its Maras, and its Brahmas, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, with its princes and its people.

"And even in those abysmal world interspaces of vacancy, gloom, and utter darkness, where the moon and the sun, mighty and powerful as they are, cannot make their light prevail - there too a great immeasurable light surpassing the splendour of the gods appeared.

"And the beings born there perceived each other by that light: "So other beings, indeed, have appeared here." And this ten-thousandfold world system shook and quaked and trembled, and there too a great immeasurable light surpassing the splendour of the gods appeared. This too I remember ..."

6) "... 'When the Bodhisatta had descended into his mother's womb, four young deities came to guard him at the four quarters so that no humans or non-humans or anyone at all could harm the Bodhisatta or his mother.'..."

7) "... 'When the Bodhisatta had descended into his mother's womb, she became intrinsically virtuous, refraining from killing living beings, from taking what is not given, from misconduct in sensual pleasures, from false speech, and from wines, liquors, and intoxicants, which are the basis of negligence...."

8) " ... 'When the Bodhisatta had descended into his mother's womb, no sensual thought arose in her concerning men, and she was inaccessible to any man having a lustful mind.' ..."

9) "... 'When the Bodhisatta had descended into his mother's womb, she obtained the five cords of sensual pleasure, and furnished and endowed with them, she enjoyed herself with them ..."

10) "... 'When the Bodhisatta had descended into his mother's womb, no kind of affliction arose in her; she was blissful and free from bodily fatigue.

"She saw the Bodhisatta within her womb with all his limbs, lacking no faculty. Suppose a blue, yellow, red, white, or brown thread were strung through a fine beryl gem of purest water, eight-faceted, well cut, and a man with good sight were to take it in his hand and review it thus:

“This is a fine beryl gem of purest water, eight-faceted, well cut, and through it is strung a blue, yellow, red, white, or brown thread”; so too when the Bodhisatta had descended into his mother's womb ... she saw the Bodhisatta within her womb with all his limbs, lacking no faculty.'..."

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MĀ 32

8) "I have heard that when the Blessed One mindfully came out from his mother's womb, at that moment all of heaven and earth trembled

"a great light illuminated the world, including even remote and dark places, unobstructed, completely shining on places that are not illuminated by the moon or the sun, even though these possess great supernatural power, great and mighty virtue, great merit, great and mighty power;

"because of this wonderful light, each and every sentient being came to know this: 'A remarkable being has been born! A remarkable being has been born!'"

9) "... the Blessed One came out from his mother's womb peacefully and at ease."

10) "... when he came out from his mother's womb, the Blessed One was covered in such a way that he was not defiled by blood or semen or other impurities."

11) "... when the Blessed One was just born, four gods, holding extremely fine pieces of cloth, stood before his mother and delighted her by exclaiming: 'This prince is most wonderful, most remarkable. He possesses great supernormal power, great and mighty virtue, great merit, great and mighty power'."

12) "...when he was just born, the Blessed One immediately took seven steps and, without fear, trepidation, or apprehension, looked in all directions."

13) "... when the Blessed One was just born, there appeared before his mother a large pond brim-full of water, with which she was able to cleanse herself."

14) "... when the Blessed One was just born, two streams of water, one cool and one warm, poured down from the sky to bathe the Blessed One's body."

15) "... when the Blessed One was just born, gods were drumming heavenly music in the sky and scattering over the Blessed One heavenly blue lotus blossoms, red lotus blossoms, scarlet lotus blossoms, white lotus blossoms, blossoms from the heavenly coral tree, and fine sandalwood incense."

[MĀ 32 continues with several marvels that took place during the Buddha's life time, all of which are without a counterpart in MN 123]

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11) "... 'Seven days after the birth of the Bodhisatta, his mother died and reappeared in the Tusita heaven...'"

12) "... 'Other women give birth after carrying the child in the womb for nine or ten months, but not so the Bodhisatta's mother. The Bodhisatta's mother gave birth after carrying him in her womb for exactly ten months.'..."

13) "... 'Other women give birth seated or lying down, but not so the Bodhisatta's mother. The Bodhisatta's mother gave birth to him standing up.'..."

14) "... 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, first gods received him, then human beings.'..."

15) "... 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, he did not touch the earth. The four young gods received him and set him before his mother saying: "Rejoice, queen, a son of great power has been born to you." ...'"

16) "... 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, he came forth unsullied, unsmear'd by water or humours or blood or any kind of impurity, clean, and unsullied. Suppose there were a gem placed on Kasi cloth, then the gem would not smear the cloth or the cloth the gem. Why is that? Because of the purity of both. So too when the Bodhisatta came forth ... clean and unsullied.' ..."

17) "... 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, two jets of water appeared to pour from the sky, one cool and one warm, for bathing the Bodhisatta and his mother.' ..."

18) "... 'As soon as the Bodhisatta was born, he stood firmly with his feet on the ground; then he took seven steps north, and with a white parasol held over him, he surveyed each quarter and uttered the words of the Leader of the Herd: "I am the highest in the world; I am the best in the world; I am the foremost in the world. This is my last birth; now there is no renewal of being for me.'..."

19) "... 'When the Bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, then a great immeasurable light surpassing the splendour of the gods appeared in the world ... and this ten-thousandfold world system shook and quaked and trembled ...'"

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MĀ 32

Then, the Blessed One said: "Ānanda, remember furthermore this extraordinary quality of the Tathāgata.

"Ānanda, the Tathāgata is aware of feelings as they arise, remain, and pass away, being aware of them continuously, without a moment of being unaware of them.

"Ānanda, the Tathāgata is aware of thoughts ... of perceptions as they arise, remain, and pass away, being aware of them continuously, without a moment of being unaware of them.

"Therefore, Ānanda, remember furthermore this extraordinary quality of the Tathāgata."

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MN 123

"That being so, Ānanda, remember this too as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Tathāgata: Here, Ānanda, for the Tathāgata feelings are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; perceptions are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear; thoughts are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear.

"Remember this too, Ānanda, as a wonderful and marvellous quality of the Tathāgata."

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main points:

- importance of providing inspiration
- superior to this is awareness of impermanence