



# Obsessions Sutra

by Mu Soeng

Inspired by *Anusaya Sutta*, AN 7.11

and *Sallatha Sutta*, SN 36.6

“Friends, the habitat of the conditioned mind is like a beehive. The bees are buzzing around in a dark cave-like colony where each bee makes its nest to store food and its eggs and larvae. They all share the common purpose of making honey. The beehive of the conditioned human mind is also buzzing around with seven kinds of obsessions that cross-pollinate with each other and whose purpose is to burrow deeply into the channels of greed, hatred, and delusion.

“What are these seven obsessions? It is the obsession with sensual gratification (*kāma-rāgānusaya*), with resistance (*paṭighānusaya*), with views (*diṭṭhānusaya*), with uncertainty (*vicikicchānusaya*), with conceit (*mānānusaya*), with passion for becoming (*bhava-rāgānusaya*), and with ignorance (*avijjānusaya*). These are the seven obsessions.

“Friends, an obsession is an underlying or latent tendency (*anusaya*). This tendency compels the conditioned mind to keep returning to whatever it is obsessed with. In the working of an obsession, the attentional processing in the conditioned mind lies down over and over again with the object of obsession to keep it close and not let go.

“What does it mean that the attention lies down with the object of obsession? It is a rumination that fosters repetitive thinking about the same thought. Friends, the characteristic of

such repetitive thinking is to take delight in the thought of what is pleasant and not let go of those thoughts because they bring sensory delight to one's conditioned mind. But these thoughts also turn sad and dark when one repetitively thinks about having to deal with the loss of what's pleasant and delightful to oneself. One becomes fearful in such scenarios; rumination becomes an obsession in the other direction.

“Friends, you see the attachment of little children to their little toys. When they go to bed at night, these little children clutch their toys and insist that they stay with them even when they sleep. In human beings, an obsession works the same way: wanting to hold on to what they are obsessed with and continue to ruminate on the object of their obsession.

“Friends, whatever one stays obsessed with, that's what one is measured by. Whatever one is measured by, that's how one is classified. Whatever one is classified by, that's how one is defined. Whatever one is defined by, that's what one is in the grip of. Whatever one is in the grip of, that's what one cannot let go. Whatever one cannot let go, that's what is the source and origin of sorrow and lamentation for that person.

“A child clutching their favorite toy while sleeping at night is called childish by the adults and measured as such. A *puthujanna*, an uninstructed person, is defined by the wise as such, as someone not willing or able to let go of the object of their obsession through their ignorance.

“Friends, when the attention lies down with the object of obsession, it is embedded in the passion for acquisition and possession. This passion is what the attention lies down with. The conditioned mind takes pleasure and delights in a form, a feeling, a perception, fabrication, or ideation. Sensing pleasure and delight, they feel as if joined with it. When the feeling of as-if-joined-with-it is there, they feel an identification with it: this is me; I am it. This identification means the lying down of the identifier with the identified. The identification with whatever form, feeling, perception, fabrication, or ideation one takes pleasure and delight in is perceived as the source of happiness.

“Friends, when one takes pleasure and delight in a form, one seeks to keep it close to oneself, seeks possession of it, develops a passion for it, and becomes obsessed with not letting it go. If one stays obsessed with form, one is measured by form. . . classified by form. . . defined. . . in the grip of. . . cannot let go.

“If one stays obsessed with pleasure and delight in feeling. . .

“If one stays obsessed with pleasure and delight in perception. . .

“If one stays obsessed with pleasure and delight in fabrications. . .

“If one stays obsessed with pleasure and delight in consciousness. . .

“This is the obsession of sensual gratification. It is the mind’s fascination with planning sensual pleasures. But it may be that the planning mind is more attached to fantasies about sensual pleasures than to the actual experience of pleasure. Why is it so? The fantasies convert themselves into a feeling as if it is happening inside the body. This is how mental pleasure turns into a tactile sensation.

“Friends, it is the case that pleasure and pain have their common origin as tactile sensations. One is welcome, the other is not welcome. What is welcome is accepted with delight. What is not welcome is met with resistance. But it is also the case that one develops a habit of considering a fantasy of sensual pleasure as the only escape from pain. Its behavioral consequence is to be pulled forward by pleasure and to be pushed back by pain. When one is pulled forward, its characteristics are eagerness and seeking reward. When one is pushed back, its characteristics are resistance and digging in. Both create their own kind of obsession grooves within the conditioned mind.

“What is the obsession of resistance, you may ask? Just as if someone were shot with an arrow and, right afterward, were shot with another one, so that they would feel the pains of two arrows. In the same way, when touched with a feeling

of pain, the uninstructed person sorrows, grieves, laments, and becomes distraught. So, they feel two pains, physical and mental. As they are touched by a painful feeling, they are resistant to it. They want it to go away. Any resistance-obsession regarding that painful feeling obsesses them. Touched by that painful feeling, they delight in sensuality, in a negative way. Why is that? Because the tactile sensations of both pleasure and pain are experienced as mental symptoms as well as physical ones.

“Friends, the uninstructed person claims ownership of the inventory of their mental storage, whether pleasurable or painful, as ‘me and mine’: ‘These feelings are mine; these emotions are mine; these thoughts are mine.’ They do not discern any escape from painful feelings aside from securing nullifying alternate sensual pleasure. They remain ignorant of the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from two wounds from two arrows, the physical and the mental. This ignorance leads to an obsession with securing nullifying alternate sensual pleasure. They are joined, I tell you, with pain resistance-obsession.

“Friends, in their obsession, they feel an identification with it: this is my pain; I am in pain. They do not understand that the identification amplifies their physical pain many times over in their own mind. Thus, their obsession is with the amplification within the conditioned mind.

“Friends, you must understand that identification with sensual pleasure or sensory pain are both aspects of the same obsession. Both are amplified within the conditioned mind so that the actual experience of pleasure and the actual experience of pain is much smaller than their amplification.

“In the same way, friends, the uninstructed person sorrows, grieves, laments, and becomes distraught when they are obsessed with views, with uncertainty, with conceit, with the passion for becoming in their ignorance that all these obsessions are happening only in their conditioned mind through identification: this is me; I am it.

“Friends, a noble disciple of the Tathāgata does not amplify. They remain equanimous in the midst of the arising of sensual pleasure or a painful feeling. Without amplification, they do not claim ownership of what’s arising from conditioning processes. They do not give in to sorrow and lamentation, to stress and distress. They distinguish between the physical and the mental, and do not allow the mental to become ascendant. They renounce the amplification of the mental. This is the ending of their sorrow and lamentation.

“Friends, sensing a feeling of pleasure, a noble disciple senses themselves disjoined from it. Sensing a feeling of pain, they sense it disjoined from them. Sensing a feeling of neither-pleasure-nor-pain, they sense it disjoined from them. This is how a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones is disjoined from birth, aging, and death, from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, and despairs.

“Friends, this disjoining is not a denial but a delinking between the physical and the mental. This is making the wise distinction between the physical sensation and its amplification in the mind. This is making the wise distinction between remaining equanimous in the face of phenomena as it is unfolding and obsession with it through amplification in the conditioned mind.

“Friends, an obsession is a conglomerate of the underlying tendencies in the conditioned mind for wanting, privileging, holding [on to X], and attaching [to X]. It is in this sense of the self-created matrix that the Tathāgata uses the term obsession.

“Friends, the Tathāgata speaks of the obsession of views, the obsession of uncertainty, the obsession of conceit, the obsession of passion for becoming, and the obsession of ignorance in the same way he speaks of the obsession of sensual passion and the obsession of resistance.

“Friends, the obsessions with views, uncertainty, conceit, becoming, and ignorance start as mental itches but create their own obsession-grooves in the conditioned mind just as the sensations of pleasure and pain create their own

tactile sensations. What starts as a mental itch turns into a physical symptom. They then feed into the underlying tendencies in the conditioned mind for wanting, privileging, holding, and attachments. These, in turn, become obsessions.

“Friends, with this understanding of one’s own conditioned mind, if one doesn’t stay obsessed with form, one is not measured by form. . . not classified by form. . . defined. . . in the grip of. . . let go. Letting go of the obsession with form is the ending of sorrow and lamentation for that person.

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with feeling. . .

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with perception. . .

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with fabrications. . .

“If one doesn’t stay obsessed with consciousness. . .

“Friends, with this training in not staying obsessed with anything, a noble disciple of the Tathāgata stays equanimous while letting go of all ruminations as soon as they arise. They do not cling to mental itches when they arise. They nip the evil in the bud. When a person is not obsessed with anything, that’s not what one is measured by. Whatever one isn’t measured by, that’s not how one is classified. Whatever one is not classified by, that’s not how one is defined. Whatever one is not defined by, that’s not what one is in the grip of. Whatever one is not in the grip of, that’s what one can let go. Whatever one can let go, that’s what is the ending of sorrow and lamentation for that person.

“Friends, with the ending of sorrow and lamentation, the noble disciple dwells alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, and resolute. They cultivate compassion for their passion for possession, acquisition, identification, and obsession with pleasure, pain, views, uncertainty, conceit, becoming, and ignorance. They cultivate disenchantment for any object of possession, acquisition, identification, and obsession. They cultivate psychological homelessness for phenomena coming into their field of perception and cognition.

“This is their liberation: liberation from an obsession with seeking possession and acquisition. This liberating dispassion is the difference, this the distinction, this the

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distinguishing factor between the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones and the uninstructed person. They can protect their minds from obsessions. Desirable things don't charm their mind, undesirable ones bring no resistance. Their acceptance and rejection are scattered, gone to their end, and do not exist. Knowing the dustless, sorrowless state, they discern rightly, have gone over to beyond becoming.”