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Beyond Joy and Sorrow

Samyutta Nikaya 2:2.8

Kakuddha:	nandasi samanā ti	Are you delighted, wanderer?
Buddha:	kiṃ laddhā āvuso-ti	What is it, friend, that I've received?
Kakuddha:	tena hi samaṇa socasī ti	Are you grieving, then, wanderer?
Buddha:	kiṃ jiyittha āvuso ti	What is it, friend, that I have lost?
Kakuddha:	tena hi samaṇa n-eva nandasi na ca socasī ti	Is it, then, wanderer, that you're Neither delighted nor grieving?
Buddha:	evam āvuso ti	Friend—it is just so.
Kakuddha:	kacci tvam anigho bhikkhu atho nandī na vijjati kacci tam ekam āsīnaṃ aratī nābhikīratī ti	I hope that you don't tremble, monk, Since no delight is to be found. I hope that you can sit alone, Without being consumed by regret.
Buddha:	anigho ve ahaṃ yakkha atho nandī nābhikīratīti atho mam ekam āsīnaṃ aratī nābhikīratī ti	Indeed I do not tremble, sprite, Since I'm consumed with no delight. And so it is I sit alone, Without being consumed by regret.
Kakuddha:	kathaṃ tvam anigho bhikkhu kathaṃ nandī va vijjati kathaṃ tam ekam āsīnaṃ aratī nābhikīratī ti	How is it you don't tremble, monk, How is it no delight is found? How is it that you sit alone, Without being consumed by regret?
Buddha:	aghajātassa ve nandī nandījātassa ve aghaṃ anandī anigho bhikkhu evaṃ jānāhi āvuso ti	Delight only follows distress; Distress only follows delight. Neither delighted nor distressed, Friend—this his how to know a monk.
Kakuddha:	cirassaṃ vata passāmi brāhmaṇaṃ parinibbutaṃ anandim anighaṃ bhikkhuṃ tiṇṇaṃ loke visattikaṃ ti	At long last I see a brahmin Whose fires are fully quenched; a monk, Neither delighted nor distressed, Who's traversed the world's attachments

These bantering verses, exchanged between the Buddha and Kakuddha, the “son of a deva” or a forest sprite, are replete with subtlety, word play and double meaning. Notice the matching structure of the verses, a very common device of early Buddhist poetry. The fourth stanza mirrors the third, line by line, and the theme is echoed again in the fifth stanza. The Buddha follows the poetic lead of the sprite, but reverses the meaning of his words. ☸ Kakuddha assumes delight (*nandī*) to be

the requisite of happiness, while the Buddha identifies the same delight as the cause of unhappiness. This is because delight refers not to pleasant feeling but to an intentional response—the savoring of pleasant feeling, which is doomed to pass away and be replaced by distress (*agha*). The Buddha instead describes a state of equanimity, beyond joy and sorrow, that allows for the full experience of pleasure and pain without the attachment and resistance that normally accompanies them. ☸ The deepest possible state of well-being ensues when the fires of both delighting in and being distressed by experience are quenched. The word for this is *nibbuta*, another form of the word *nirvana*. —A. Olendzki