

1.10B ☸ TEXT <i>Numerical Discourses 4.28</i>	1.10B ☸ PALI <i>Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.28</i>
<p>A person is content with any clothing... with any food one may get... with any lodging place... speaks in praise of such contentment, and does not try to obtain these things in improper or unsuitable ways.</p> <p>Not getting these things, one does not worry, and getting them, one makes use of them without being greedy, obsessed, or infatuated, observing such potential dangers, and wisely aware of how to escape them.</p> <p>A person is fond of abandoning (unhealthy states), and is pleased to abandon (unhealthy states); and moreover, a person is fond of developing (healthy states), and is pleased to develop (healthy states).</p> <p>Nor is one conceited about any of this, and one does not disparage others.</p> <p>Any person who is skillful in this, diligent, fully aware, and ever mindful, is said to be standing in an ancient, primal, noble lineage.</p>	<p><i>idha bhikkhu santuṭṭho hoti itarītarena cīvarena... itarītarena piṇḍapātena... itarītarena senāsanena ... itarītaracīvarasantuṭṭhiyā ca vaṇṇavādī, na ca cīvarahetu anesanaṃ appatirūpaṃ āpajjati.</i></p> <p><i>aladdhā ca cīvaraṃ na paritassati, laddhā ca cīvaraṃ agadhito amucchito anajjhosanno ādinavadassāvī nissaraṇapañño paribhuñjati.</i></p> <p><i>tāya ca pana itarītaracīvarasantuṭṭhiyā nevattānukkaṃseti, no paraṃ vambheti... puna caparaṃ bhikkhu bhāvanārāmo hoti bhāvanārato, pahānārāmo hoti pahānarato.</i></p> <p><i>tāya ca pana...nevattānukkaṃseti, no paraṃ vambheti.</i></p> <p><i>yo hi tattha dakkho analaso sampajāno patissato, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhu porāṇe aggaññe ariyavaṃse ṭhito.</i></p>

1.10B ❖ COMMENT
<p>A. We are used to thinking of contentment as having to do with certain factors in the external world being lined up a certain way. For example, we are content if we get the right things (the right job, relationship, car, affection, respect, etc.), and are discontent if we do not. In Buddhist thought, however, contentment is a mental state. It is an emotion or state of mind that may or may not be present in any given moment. Whether it manifests or not may be influenced by certain external circumstances, but is not fully determined by them.</p> <p>B. The demonstration of this point is the observation that sometimes people can have everything one might hope for materially and even emotionally, and yet still be haunted by profound experiences of discontent. Similarly, a person can be in tremendously challenging circumstances,</p>

with little or nothing one associates with comfort and success, and yet may still at times feel a deep sense of contentment.

C. According to this view, then, contentment becomes a skill that can be learned. In any given situation, one has the option of focusing attention on what is lacking, and thus cultivating discontent, or of focusing attention on what one can appreciate or be grateful for, and thereby cultivating contentment. Perhaps this has something to do with the old practice of ‘counting one’s blessings’.

D. All this is not to say, of course, that one should practice contentment to the extremes of overlooking injustice, allowing oneself to be exploited, or otherwise supplanting basic expressions of good sense and wise understanding. The point is simply that accentuating the positive and deliberately cultivating contentment can be a skillful way to access the experience of happiness and well-being, even in challenging circumstances.

#### 1.10B ♦ LANGUAGE

A. In the original text these three requisites of food, clothing, and shelter are reiterated individually, but here the repetition has been condensed by referring to them collectively as ‘these things’.

B. There is no way to break the word *santuṭṭho* (content) down further since the root around which it is formed (*√ tuṣ*) is primary and not derived from something else. We can say that the prefix ‘*saṃ-*’, which adds a sense of completeness, deepens the meaning to the point we might even want to translate it as ‘fully content’, but this might be an unnecessary flourish since the word ‘contentment’ is already quite complete on its own.

C. The wonderfully alliterative phrase ‘*itarītara-*’ and ‘*itarītarena*’ is made by doubling the word ‘*itara*’ which means ‘another’ (as in the related English words ‘iterate’ and ‘iteration’). By putting two together, you get ‘of one sort or another’. Admittedly the rendering here as ‘any’ is rather bland compared with the original, which should better say something like one is content with ‘one sort of clothing or another’, with ‘one kind of food or another’, etc., but this gets rather bulky.

D. What is translated here as ‘one does not worry’ (*na paritassati*) also carries a sense of yearning or longing for something. So we might just as well say, ‘one does not long for the things one does not get’, or, ‘one does not worry about the fact that one is not getting something’.

#### 1.10B ★ INVESTIGATION

A. What does contentment feel like? What are its physical aspects, and what are its mental aspects? When you feel contentment, see if you can isolate and identify what exactly that is. Perhaps it is a sort of inner relaxing of tension, a soft and pleasant feeling tone, a calm state of mind that is, for the moment at least, not looking beyond the horizon for the next thing.

B. What does discontent or the lack of contentment feel like? See if you can identify the phenomenological symptoms of discontent. Now compare the two experiences—what contentment and what discontent feel like—and see if you can identify the specific mechanisms of mind and body that are operative in both cases. It is almost like feeling what it is like to move a particular muscle in your body that does one specific thing, like lifting your little finger. But in this case you are investigating the workings of a particular system in your mind and brain.

C. In the middle of this text is an important message, that when content one is naturally fond of abandoning what is unhealthy and of developing what is healthy (more on these two words next week, in MODULE 1.11). See for yourself if this is true. When you find yourself in moments of contentment, are you inclined to be greedy, hateful, or confused? Or are you more likely to be generous, friendly, and clear-headed? What is suggested here is that contentment is a pivot point for living with integrity, that we act out in unhealthy and unskillful ways because of discontent, and that cultivating the skill of being content, regardless of our outer circumstances, is a helpful tool for orienting our minds and our actions toward happiness and well-being.

#### 1.10B ✪ PRACTICE

A. The next time you find yourself experiencing discontent, see if you can identify specifically what it is that you feel you want or need that you are not getting. Now see if you can, as an intentional exercise, let go of that want or need; see if you can manifest contentment in this moment, even if you are not getting what you want.

B. Examine this phrase, ‘without being greedy, obsessed, or infatuated’, in your own experience. These are the adversaries of contentment, the factors that stir up the mind, amplify its yearnings, and prevent it from experiencing peace. Notice how mental tranquility is the antidote to these factors. Try as a practice to cultivate mental tranquility in the midst of turmoil. Even when in a situation fraught with potential discontent, see if you can relax inwardly in such a way that you are participating in what is happening, but are not ‘hooked in’ to it. A sense of inner peacefulness does not depend entirely on the silence of the meditation hall, and can be accessed at any time by taking a step toward contentment in the moment.

C. How well the Buddha understands human nature! The final challenge here is to learn this skill of contentment without getting conceited about it and without disparaging others who are unable or unwilling to practice contentment. The contentment, in other words, is not to take the form of smugness or self-satisfaction—perhaps this is a ‘near enemy’ of contentment. One stands in ‘an ancient and noble lineage’ when one is able to feel content modestly, without this healthy state serving as a gateway to another unhealthy state.