Gratification, Danger, and Escape

Rebecca Bradshaw · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2010) · 56:04

Tonight's talk is titled "The Gratification, The Danger, and The Escape."

Tonight we're going to have a little bit more sutra study. As many of you know, the Buddha gave many discourses during his teaching career, and after he died, they were preserved by an oral tradition for about 500 years until they were written down. Because they were preserved in an oral tradition, they're often very repetitious—it's a way that one can be assured the teachings will be remembered. I'm going to read some sutra to you and abbreviate a little bit, because we're not quite as used to lots of repetition in this age. There are actually several short sutras that I will read, linked sutras, and then explain them in more detail.

To set the stage: The Buddha has sometimes been called a scientist of the mind. He taught in great detail about how the mind works, about the nature of this mind-body-heart process, the nature of reality. He actually only said a couple of really important things, such as "everything changes," but then played out the full implications of these basic laws about the nature of reality.

The Buddha talked a lot about what can be known as conditioned reality—this world as we know it, this world as we can directly perceive it. He broke down conditioned reality in a number of different ways. One way you've already heard: the five aggregates—the body or form, feelings, perceptions, volitional formations, and consciousness. That's one way we can describe this mind-body process in this world.

In the sutra that I'm going to read and talk about, he broke down reality into the six sense bases and the sense objects. This is another way that we can describe and understand reality.

In a short sutra called "The All":

At Savatthi: "Bhikkhus, I will teach you the all. Listen to that. And what, bhikkhus, is the all? The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, the body and tactile objects, the mind and mental phenomena. This is called the all. If anyone, bhikkhus, should speak thus: 'Having rejected this all, I shall make known another all,' that would be a mere empty boast on his part. If he were questioned, he would not be able to reply, and further he would meet with vexation. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, that would not be within his domain."

So the all, the whole of reality: the eye and forms, the nose and smells, the body and tactile sensations, the mind and mind objects—mind objects including thoughts, emotions, mind states, consciousness, factors of mind, perception. That's the totality of our experience. And the Buddha said you can't find anything else.

The short sutras that I'm going to read describe how we can relate to this experience of life, the experience of the sense bases and the sense objects. How do we relate to and understand these experiences in a way that leads to peace rather than suffering?

At Savatthi again. Often in the sutras, they start by saying where the discourse took place.

"Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisattva, not yet fully enlightened, it occurred to me: What is the gratification? What is the danger? What is the escape in the case of the eye? What is the gratification? What is the danger? What is the escape in the case of the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind?

Then it occurred to me: The pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on the eye—this is the gratification in the eye. That the eye is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change—this is the danger in the eye. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the eye—this is the escape from the eye.

The pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mind—this is the gratification in the six sense bases. That the six sense bases are impermanent, suffering, and subject to change—that is the danger in the sense bases. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the sense bases—this is the escape from the sense bases.

So long, bhikkhus, as I did not know as they really are the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of the six sense bases, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world. But when I directly knew all of this as it really is, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world."

I was thinking today that maybe this is an auspicious talk for the Uposatha Day, because as I explained in the question period this morning, we take the three extra precepts as a practice of renunciation of sense pleasures or sense comforts in order to highlight our relationship to them, in order to develop understanding of our dependence on them for our happiness—and to see that there might be another way, there might be an escape, as the Buddha said.

So the question again in this sutra is: How do we relate to our experience, our lives, through the senses in a way that leads to understanding and freedom?

Let's take the three parts: the gratification, the danger, and the escape.

Gratification. The joy and pleasure that arise in dependence on the eye—this is the gratification in the eye. Here he's talking about the six sense bases and, by extrapolation, the six sense objects.

So the eye and form, the nose and smell, and so on through all the sense doors.

In Buddhist psychology, we understand a moment of experience as having three parts. There's the sense base—eye, nose, ear, tongue, body, mind. There's the sense object—form, smell, sensations, thoughts. And

there's the consciousness, the sense consciousness. These three come together, they ignite, and we have a moment of experience. So there's the eye, there's a form, there's seeing consciousness—that's a moment of experience. And the gratification, he said, is when that moment of experience provides pleasure.

So basically, the Buddha is saying that sense contact can sometimes be pleasurable, which is not big news to most of you. And because of this, our senses provide us some sense of gratification. There's a kind of happiness that we get from pleasant sense experience, and we all know this. We might see the beautiful fall leaves and there's a sense of happiness or gratification from that. Or we drink a warm cup of tea on a cool afternoon, or eat a delicious lunch. This kind of gratification or happiness is readily available if we pay attention. Many moments of our day we can experience this kind of happiness if we're available, if we're present to the beauty in this world.

Meditation even helps us access this kind of happiness as we train ourselves to be more present. We actually connect through our senses, and as we connect more and more moments of mindfulness, we're actually present for this kind of pleasure. Many of you may have noticed that as our minds settle, our senses become more subtle. We can appreciate, for example, the taste of a mouthful of rice from beginning to end as a changing experience, rather than just the single taste of rice. Or the many layered smells in the fall air, especially when it's damp.

It can be useful to access this level of pleasure when our practice has a lot of dukkha in it. It's a way of bringing balance to the mind. The commentaries even prescribe very pleasant circumstances for folks suffering from a lot of aversion—it almost seems extreme. The commentaries talk about how folks with a lot of aversion should have satin sheets and flowers in their rooms and handsome servants. It goes on and on. The idea is not to get caught in it—obviously, we'll talk about that later—but to bring balance to the mind when there's a lot of suffering. We need some balance. It energizes us, it soothes us, so that we can keep going. That's why it's prescribed.

So our senses become more refined on retreat, and we can access this happiness more easily. Some of you may even find that your senses have become a bit too refined, that sounds may be louder than one wishes, for example.

The Buddha did recognize that yes, sense experiences can bring us some kind of happiness. There's some joy, some comfort, some gratification. Raised as a prince, he knew about this in the extreme. He said that he had different palaces for different seasons with all the sense pleasures that a person could want. For many folks, this is the conventional understanding of happiness—this level of happiness.

But the Buddha saw that it doesn't solve the problem of human existence and human happiness. We need to look deeper than this. We can't just leave the subject right here.

In another part of the suttas that I didn't read, the Buddha said: "Bhikkhus, I set out seeking the gratification in the eye, the ear, the sixth sense bases. Whatever gratification there is in the sixth sense

bases, that I have discovered. I have clearly seen with wisdom how far the gratification in the sixth sense bases extends."

So with this, we start to get some sense that there's a limit to this kind of happiness. There is some gratification in sense pleasures, but it only extends so far. He said, "I have seen how far this gratification extends."

And he goes on to explain where the problem lies. He says: "Bhikkhus, if there were no gratification in the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mind, beings would not become enamored with them. But because there is gratification in the eyes and the other sense bases, beings become enamored with them."

So this is the problem. Because there is this pleasantness and gratification, we become enamored and attached. You could say we fall in love with sense pleasures. I find it interesting that he chose the word "enamored," or at least that's how it was translated by a very well-respected scholar. Because there's gratification, we become enamored.

So "enamored" has a little bit of a mindless sense to it, a kind of sense of getting lost in it. When we're enamored or in love or infatuated, there's some blindness there. We see the good, but we ignore the faults. When we're first in love with somebody, everything seems perfect. We don't see any faults. We don't even want to hear about faults. If you've ever tried to talk to somebody who's in love and enamored, they don't want to hear about faults and limitations. They don't want anybody to burst the bubble. This is what being enamored does to us.

This blindness about sense pleasures seems to me particularly encouraged by Western—and maybe even particularly American—society, where we worship sense gratification. Ajahn Sumedho said, "I was brought up in America, the land of freedom. It promises the right to be happy, but what it really offers is the right to be attached to everything." America encourages you to try to be as happy as you can by getting things.

Patrick Ophuls, in a delightful book called *Buddha Takes No Prisoners*, said that our society is like frenetically rearranging the deck chairs on the SS Samsara, trying to make ourselves happy through acquisition. I get a certain amount of entertainment from the media and how they play on this—it's kind of the anti-dharma, you could call it. One of my favorites recently is from Honda Corporation. The tagline is "Something New to Crave." We get this all the time. The most recent one I only discovered a few days ago. I'm not going to tell you which sense pleasure it was because I don't want to get you thinking about it, but the tagline was "The Simple Joy of Obsession."

I hadn't thought about it that way. At first I heard it and thought it was funny. And then I actually felt disturbed. I thought, this is what we're being taught over and over again. But then it occurred to me: if we have to be so convinced over and over again, maybe it means the seeds of wisdom aren't too deeply buried. If we have to be continually trained by the media this way, perhaps the seeds of wisdom are there

just waiting to sprout.

We're definitely conditioned by our economic system to seek gratification in sense pleasures. But it's also deeply internally conditioned—habits of the psyche, of the mind—to seek this gratification. So perhaps we find that we want to stay infatuated with sense pleasures, like the person in love who doesn't want to hear about their beloved's faults. Perhaps you don't want to hear the rest of this discourse. But when we tell the infatuated person about the danger, they might avoid some pain and suffering if they would just listen. So let us continue with the Buddha's discourse and see what he would like to warn us about.

Another way we can think about this investigation into the dangers of the six sense bases is that it's about developing a mature love for this world. When we are enamored or infatuated with the sense pleasures of the world, we're not completely in touch with reality. A mature love must see the beauty and also see the limitations in what is loved. A mature love sees and accepts things as they are. This is a stronger and more enduring love than blind infatuation. So as we look at the limitations of the gratifications of things of this world, perhaps our love of life as we experience it can become more mature. Perhaps we can be realistic in what we expect from sense pleasures.

The next part of the sutta addresses this question: What is the danger of the six sense bases? We've talked about the gratification. What is the danger? What is the limitation that the Buddha saw? "That the eye is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change—this is the danger in the eye. That the ear, nose, body, and mind sense bases are impermanent, suffering, and subject to change—this is the danger."

One of the basic truths of life and one of the core teachings of the Buddha that we've been exploring is this truth of impermanence, or *anicca*—the changing nature of reality. All that we can experience through the senses is constantly changing. Life is a flowing river, and you can't stop the stream.

This constant flow of change is described beautifully in a book called *Zen Seeds: Reflections of a Female Priest*, written by a lovely Japanese nun named Shundo Oyama. In a chapter called "Hearing the Voice of the Valley Stream," she writes: "The water of the valley stream is always flowing. It races on and on, not pausing for even an instant. Its sound, to me, is the sound of time."

The sound of time glistens on the riverbed of the universe. Though theirs is a much slower flow, stones, trees, houses, and towns are flowing too. Human beings and all things that have life flow. Thought and culture too flow. That all these appear to be unchanging is an illusion. When we listen subconsciously to the sound of flowing water, does it not seem to create a rhythm? Yet not a single drop of water passes over the same rock twice. And the murmur of water rushing over a rock is constantly changing. Sameness is but an illusion of the human ears, eyes, and mind. Water that has once flowed along a riverbed can never retrace its course. Human life is no different. It is only our mundane eyes and minds that see yesterday as being the same as today. Enlightened eyes and minds should recognize that each moment has a form different than any other moment.

So what can we hold on to? We've been seeing this hopefully in our practice over and over again—this truth of change, constant change. We only have to be with our minds for one meditation period to see it. Ajahn Chah said, "All I have learned in the forty years that I have been a monk, I can sum up in one sentence: all that arises passes away. This I know." Forty years of practice: all that arises passes away. The truth of change.

It's our most basic delusion as human beings to hide from this truth. When we look, it's obvious—it's pretty obvious—but we need to see this truth very deeply if we're going to have peace of mind, if we're going to live in harmony with the way things are, if we're going to love this world with wisdom. We must see it happen moment after moment.

The Zen Roshi Uchiyama Roshi described practice as active participation in loss. How do we deal with living in a world of constant change, constant loss? It takes a lot of strength to explore this. The rewards, however, are great. The Buddha said that seeing this is the way to freedom of heart and mind. In the Dhammapada, he says, "Everything changes, nothing stays the same. Having gained this awareness, one is freed from suffering. This is the way of purification. All conditioned things are subject to change. Having fully learned this insight, one is freed from suffering. This is the way to liberation."

As long as we don't deeply understand this truth of impermanence, we're going to continue to believe that we can find the gratification that we're looking for through sense pleasures. We'll expend our life energy pursuing sense pleasures. We'll take our refuge in trying to control life and get caught in attachment to sense pleasures. So our attempts to control the world, to experience sense pleasures continually, bring some gratification, but this fails as an ultimate strategy for happiness and peace because everything changes. You can't stop the flow of the river of change. You can't make pleasantness stay.

I remember my first retreat here, that first long retreat—the three-month course—and I remember many mornings spending time looking forward to lunch, one of the main sense pleasures on retreat. I would look forward to the gratification that lunch was going to bring. And I'd be eating my lunch, and somewhere about two-thirds through the meal, I'd realize that it was going to end. Every time I'd finish lunch, I'd sit there and go, "It's done. It's gone." I was on the eight precepts, so I'm thinking, "Wow, that's it for the day." And it was a cycle—the energy I would expend in the morning thinking about lunch, looking forward to lunch. I would eat lunch. It would be all over, and there would be this letdown. That's it. It's gone. It wasn't going to be satisfying. But I did it day after day. The habits of conditioning are pretty deep. I don't think I do that on retreat anymore. I've made some progress.

So happiness through sense pleasures—gratification of sense pleasures—can provide us some comfort and solace, but they're not an ultimate refuge for us.

One of my favorite poets is Pablo Neruda from Chile. He expresses the poignancy of this in a short poem: "We, the mortals, touch the metals, the winds, the ocean shores, the stones, knowing that they will go on, inert or burning."

And I was discovering, naming all these things, it was my destiny to love and say goodbye. What I love about this poem is that there's an obvious connection—there's a connection and a love, and then an understanding that we have to say goodbye over and over. That's the kind of world that we live in.

So in his typical scientific manner, the Buddha has set up the problem very clearly. The danger is that we become attached to sense pleasures because of the gratification that they bring, but they are impermanent, not reliable, always changing—and so we suffer if we try to hold on. There's this very restless search.

I remember one time when I was teaching in Upper Burma, the Shan Hills area I've mentioned, and one student raised her hand with a very simple question. She said, "Where can we rest?" Such poignancy in that question. If we're looking for satisfaction in this world through sense pleasures in a changing world, we're not going to be able to rest. We're going to be restless. Where can we rest?

So the Buddha goes on to talk about resolving this problem: "The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the eye—this is the escape from the eye. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for the ear, for the nose, the body, the mind—this is the escape from the six sense bases."

I think it's interesting that he's chosen the word "escape." Escape implies that we're caught, that we're confined somewhere and that we become free—that we're in a confined place and we leave it. Sometimes craving has been described as shackles in the heart. There's that sense of being imprisoned. Craving binds the heart, clenches it like a fist. We're shackled and imprisoned by our craving.

The Buddha talked a lot about craving, as you know, in many different forms. The kind that he talked about in this sutta is the craving for sense pleasures—there are other kinds that you'll probably hear about later. He says the way out of our predicament is by abandoning desire or craving or attachment for the sense bases, sense objects, sense pleasures.

Now it's interesting—we hear that word "abandon" and we often immediately think "get rid of." Somehow we put that interpretation on it. But he doesn't say that we have to get rid of the sense bases or the sense pleasures. He doesn't even say that we shouldn't enjoy the experience of the senses. The sense pleasures themselves are not the problem. But where we do need to look and work is with the desire and attachment to sense pleasures.

So how do we abandon desire and attachment to sense pleasures? The rest of the sutta gives some hints: "So long as I did not know directly as they really are the gratification, the danger, and the escape of these six sense bases, I did not claim to have awakened. But when I knew directly all this as it really is, then I claimed to have awakened."

To know directly means to experience for ourselves. So we experience for ourselves how we respond to the experiences through the sense doors. We pay attention to sense objects and how we relate to them. It's not to have somebody explain it to us, but to see for ourselves, to see directly, to know directly in our own

experience. That's why we meditate.

And so we have the tool of mindfulness to help us in this investigation. What is our direct experience of the senses? How do they change? How do we experience their arising and passing away? Can we experience this constant flow of change? Can we be with our direct experience of desire when it arises? How does desire feel in the body? How does it feel in the mind? How substantial is it? What happens when we turn mindfulness to it? This is knowing the gratification and danger and escape in our own experience directly.

We should never underestimate the power of sense desire. A number of years ago, I was teaching in the Northwest, and the place where I taught, sometimes the staff liked to make a pan of brownies—and they had the absolute best brownies in the world. To me, they must be somewhat comparable to heroin or something like that, though I've never done it, so I don't know. Really, really good brownies. And so one day I had a brownie, and I had a little cabin, so I took a second one back to my cabin for the next day.

And somewhere along the line, it didn't make it to the next day. I ate the brownie. Sense desire, wanting gratification of the senses. It particularly hit me as I was paying attention. I was stunned. I thought, "Actually, I've been bested by a brownie."

So I decided we needed to do that one over again. The next day, I took a brownie back with the express intent of paying attention to what happened, trying to learn and to be mindful. I had this brownie, and I would watch the desire arise—a big wave of desire, thinking about the brownie and the chocolate. And then I would turn my attention to the desire itself.

This is what we have to do, because if we keep our focus on the sense object, that just keeps feeding the desire. But turning the attention to the desire itself, I would notice the desire arise, and then it would fade. It would dissipate. And then it would arise again, and then dissipate again.

That day I did not eat the brownie, and I felt good about that. There was this experience of freedom—that I could watch the desire rise, watch the desire pass away, without having to believe it. That was a taste of freedom.

What I didn't do, which is also interesting, is that first day when I ate the second brownie, I didn't decide I was a bad person. I didn't get upset. I got curious. And so I repeated the experiment the next day from a place of curiosity and a wholesome desire for freedom.

This is how I'm suggesting we get interested in desire—not from a place of "I have to somehow dominate this" or "I'm a bad person if I can't," but from curiosity and a wholesome desire for freedom. We grow in wisdom as we go through these experiences.

I'm sure you've had some chances here. A retreat is actually an excellent opportunity because we don't have many ways to escape from our wanting mind. So we have to sit down and look at it. Charlotte Joko

Beck, one of my favorite Zen teachers, said that retreat is controlled suffering. Or Thomas Merton, the famous mystic, said, "Those who are drawn to solitude don't suffer less, but suffer more effectively." So I hope you're suffering effectively. I'm sure most of you are suffering—I just hope it's effective.

With mindfulness, we see things as they are. We become interested in our conditioning. We become interested in this whole cycle of gratification, danger, and escape. We start to actually see through desire. Don't underestimate the simple power of observing it, of seeing that we don't have to obey it or even believe it, seeing that it comes and goes on its own due to conditions. In this way, we develop wisdom.

Again, in this part of the sutta, the Buddha said "the abandonment of desire and lust." Abandon means to set aside. It doesn't mean to get angry about desire or craving, doesn't mean to make it bad or to reject it, but to simply learn to let it be, learn how not to get caught in it.

Charlotte Joko Beck says, "We never lose an attachment by saying it has to go. Only as we gain awareness of its true nature does it quietly and imperceptibly wither away. Like a sand castle with waves rolling over it, it just smooths out and finally—where is it? What was it?"

One teacher friend of mine described mindfulness of desire as like poking holes into a piece of fabric. If you have a piece of fabric, you can't see through it. But if you poke enough holes in the fabric, you can see through it. Every moment of mindfulness into desire or craving or attachment pokes a hole into the fabric, and we start to eventually be able to see through it. It becomes less opaque, more transparent, loses its power over us. We can become lighter with the wanting mind.

I'll read a little story from Sharon's book, *A Heart as Wide as the World*:

"We all like pleasant experiences and are fortunate to enjoy them. But if we become lost in attachment, then enjoyment inevitably turns to clinging, and then we suffer. At a Buddhist-Christian conference I attended at Gethsemane Monastery in Kentucky, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was speaking about a tour of the monastery he had been given earlier that day."

He began by saying that he was quite impressed that the monastery was able to support itself through the manufacture of cheeses and fruitcakes. Then, in the midst of this formal presentation with television cameras rolling, the Dalai Lama said, "I was presented with a piece of the homemade cheese, which was very good, but really I wanted some cake." He laughed uproariously and repeated, "It was so unfortunate. Really, I was hoping someone would offer me some cake, but no one did."

His childlike candor was wonderful, with nothing manipulative about it. Clearly, he could be quite happy without a piece of fruitcake. And some part of his state of happiness was the very ability to laugh at his desire for cake, as well as being able to speak about it unabashedly before dignitaries of two religions and a television audience.

So we can learn some lightness around craving, wanting, and the mind. We don't have to take it too

seriously. When mindfulness is strong, sometimes the very noticing of the contraction of desire cuts through it, and we return to spaciousness. We become interested if there is this contraction of wanting in the mind and repeatedly point awareness at this contraction—the light of awareness setting up the conditions for freedom.

So much of practice is simply this: Is there clinging in the heart and mind?

Tonight, earlier, I walked outside when the sun was setting. It was very beautiful, and I wanted to enjoy it. I was born with an aversive nature, so I make sure that I enjoy things to balance my own mind. So I was watching the sunset, and then I got curious about what was really happening. There was this sunset, and there was the seeing of it, and there was some slight tension in the mind. I realized that I wasn't actually enjoying the sunset—I was *trying* to enjoy the sunset, which is very different. There was that attachment of wanting something, wanting to enjoy the sunset. Noticing that, it released, and what remained was the experience of just enjoying the sunset.

We can get interested in this way. When there's a pleasurable experience, is there tension in the mind? Is there that contraction of wanting or attachment in any way? What happens when we become aware of it? Sometimes there's a release. Not always, but sometimes. And what's the mind like free of attachment, free of clinging, even while enjoying? This too we can explore.

So we have not rejected this world with its sense pleasures, but we don't expect them to satisfy us. We practice abandoning the contraction of heart and mind in desire that limits our spaciousness. And we have to learn this over and over again.

Charlotte Joko Beck said, "Practice has to be a process of endless disappointment. We have to see that everything we demand, and even get, eventually disappoints us. This discovery is our teacher."

Now, I could see how some of you might find that depressing. But I don't—otherwise I wouldn't share it with you. This endless disappointment is that playing through of the lunch scenario over and over again in order to really understand that everything changes, and to really understand that letting go is the way to freedom.

Trungpa Rinpoche says, "Disappointment is a good sign of basic intelligence. It cannot be compared to anything else. It is so sharp, precise, obvious, and direct. If we can open, then we suddenly begin to see that our expectations are irrelevant compared with the reality of the situations we are facing."

So positive disappointment, perhaps we can call it—playing it through over and over again, stubbornly, but learning as we go. Every moment of non-clinging is a moment of freedom.

In the Shorter Discourse on the Destruction of Craving, the Buddha teaches a deva, a heavenly being, who wants to know how, in brief, a bhikkhu is liberated. It's always endearing in the suttas when somebody says, "Come on, tell me the short version, the fast version—how, in brief, is a bhikkhu liberated?" In this

case, I'll take the liberty to call a bhikkhu all of us here, temporary renunciates on retreat.

The bhikkhu becomes learned that anything is not suitable to settle in. He becomes learned, learning all things thoroughly and accurately, recognizing all things. When a bhikkhu abides seeing that nothing is worth adhering to, he directly knows everything. Whatever feeling he feels—whether pleasant or painful, or neither unpleasant nor pleasant—he abides contemplating impermanence in these feelings. Contemplating thus, he does not cling to anything in this world. When he does not cling, he is not agitated.

When he is not agitated, he personally attains nibbana.

So in our investigation, we come back to this world of the senses, the world as we experience it. And we explore how we relate to the world of the senses and the pleasure that it provides. Our love for this world matures as we learn to accept inevitable change, as we understand the limitations of sense pleasures. We learn that we can experience life like this—like an open palm rather than a tight and clenching fist. We develop the open heart and mind that's connected with the poignant truth of this fleeting world. We have tastes of a mind that's free of the shackles of craving. We know directly, as they really are, the gratification, the danger, and the escape in the case of this world of the senses.

I'd like to end with a Cold Mountain poem from Han Shan, the Chinese hermit poet, that describes this free mind. In the poem he talks about "the six doors," and the six doors are the six sense bases.

I love this first stanza. There's so much spaciousness in it:

Cold Mountain is a house without beams or walls.
The six doors left and right are open.
The hall is blue sky.
The rooms are all vacant and vague.
The east wall beats on the west wall—
At the center, nothing.

Borrowers don't bother me.
In the cold, I build a little fire.
When I'm hungry, I boil up some greens.
I've got no use for the farmer with his big barn and pasture—
He just sets up a prison for himself.
Once he's in, he can't get out.

Think it over.
You know it might happen to you.

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