

**MAJJHIMA NIKĀYA**

Sutta 122

**A Great Spell of  
Emptiness**

Translated from the Pāli by  
Michael M. Olds



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### **Buddha Dust**

**Bits and scraps, crumbs, fine**

**Particles that drift down to**

**Walkers of The Walk.**

**Then: Thanks for that, Far-Seer!**

**Great 'Getter-of-the-Get'n!**



**May all beings be well and happy**

**May I act with friendliness in thought, word, and deed**

**towards all living beings**

**in whatsoever of the ten directions they may abide**

**whether far or near**

**May I sympathize with their pains and sorrows**

**Empathize with their situations**

**and be at all times objectively detached.**

**Majjhima Nikāya  
3. Upari Paṇṇāsa  
3. Suññata Vagga**

**Sutta 122**

**Mahā Suññata Suttaṃ**

# **A Great Spell of Emptiness**

**Translated from the Pali  
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Michael M. Olds**



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*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa*

In the name of The Lucky Man,  
Aristocrat, Consummately Self-Awakened One

For my Mother and Father,  
in gratitude for giving me this life.

To My Teachers  
in the order encountered  
H.C. Warren, Buddhism in Translations,  
The Pali Text Society translators  
T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, F.L. Woodward,  
E.M. Hare, I.B. Horner,  
and all those too little sung heros  
that came before  
and laid the foundations of today's Dhamma resources.  
Ven. Jinamurti  
Ven. Mew Fung Chen  
Ven. M. Puṇṇaji  
Carlos Castaneda

**I HEAR TELL:**

**Once upon a time Bhagava,  
Sakkaland revisiting,  
Kapilavatthu town,  
Nigrodha's Woods.**

**There Bhagava, having arisen earlier,  
having attended to bowl and robes,  
went into Kapilavathu on his begging rounds.**

**Having gone on his begging rounds in Kapilavatthu,  
having returned,  
having eaten,  
he then went to the Sakkyan Kalakhemaka's residence  
to spend the afternoon.**

**Now at this time in the Sakkyan Kalakhemaka's residence  
there was a large group of bedrolls and sitting mats in evidence.**

**Seeing the large group of bedrolls and sitting mats in evidence  
in the Sakkyan Kalakhemaka's residence  
it occurred to Bhagava:**

**'There is a large group of bedrolls and sitting mats in evidence  
in the Sakkyan Kalakhemaka's residence,  
I wonder if a large group of bhikkhus resides here?'**

**Now at this time the Ancient, Ānanda,  
together with a large group of bhikkhus  
was making robe-cloth  
at the Sakkyan Ghataya's residence.**

**Then, emerging from his reflections at even-tide,  
The Lucky Man went to the Sakkyan Ghataya's residence  
and there sat down on a prepared seat.**

**So seated The Lucky man said this to the Ancient Ānanda:**

**'There is a large group of bedrolls and sitting mats in evidence  
in the Sakkyan Kalakhemaka's residence,  
is a large group of bhikkhus residing there?'**

**There is a large group of bedrolls and sitting mats in evidence  
in the Sakkyan Kalakhemaka's residence.**

**There is a large group of bhikkhus residing there.**

**Robe-cloth making time, bhante, has rolled around again.**

**It is not brilliant, Ānanda,**

for a beggar to resort to association,  
to resort to taking pleasure from association,  
to be intent on the pleasure of resorting with associates,  
to resort to gatherings,  
to resort to taking pleasure from gatherings,  
to enjoy gatherings.

For a beggar, Ānanda,  
who resorts to association,  
who resorts to taking pleasure from association,  
who is intent on the pleasure of resorting with associates,  
who resorts to gatherings,  
who resorts to taking pleasure from gatherings,  
who enjoys gatherings  
that such a one  
should get pleasure from renunciation,  
get pleasure from solitude,  
get pleasure from calm,  
get pleasure from self-awakening,  
that such a one  
should enjoy the pleasure of progress without trouble,  
without aggravation —  
such a thing is not to be seen.

But, Ānanda, for a beggar,  
who lives alone,  
secluded from associations  
that such a one  
should get pleasure from renunciation,  
get pleasure from solitude,  
get pleasure from calm,  
get pleasure from self-awakening,  
that such a one  
should enjoy the pleasure of progress without trouble,  
without aggravation —  
such a thing is to be seen.

For a beggar, Ānanda,  
who resorts to association,  
who resorts to taking pleasure from association,  
who is intent on the pleasure of resorting with associates,  
who resorts to gatherings,  
who resorts to taking pleasure from gatherings,  
who enjoys gatherings

to enter into and reside in  
either the time-bound and happy,  
or the non-time-bound and unshakable hearts release —  
such a thing is not to be seen.

But, Ānanda, for a beggar,  
who lives alone,  
secluded from associations  
to enter into and reside in  
either the time-bound and happy,  
or the non-time-bound and unshakable hearts release —  
such a thing is to be seen.

§

I do not, Ānanda, behold one material thing  
the devotion to which,  
the obsession with which  
because of the vicissitudes befalling material things,  
does not produce grief and lamentation,  
pain and misery,  
and despair.

This, however, Ānanda,  
is a habit awakened to  
by the Getter of the Getting:  
through not studying any identifying marks whatsoever,  
the entering into  
and making a habitat of  
inward emptiness.

And if, Ānanda,  
while the Getter of the Getting  
is inhabiting this habitat  
there come beggars,  
female beggars,  
laymen and laywomen,  
kings and the ministers of kings,  
scholars and the students of other schools,  
— then, Ānanda, The Getter of the Getting,  
with heart inclined to separation,  
tending towards separation,  
bent on separation,  
firm in seclusion,

devoted to renunciation,  
bringing to an end all things standing for corruption,  
speaks exclusively about such  
as has to do with disengagement.

Therefore, Ānanda, if a beggar should resolve:

'Let me enter into  
and make a habitat of  
inward emptiness.'

Then Ānanda, a beggar needs to set up,  
settle down  
compose  
and focus the heart  
on the internal.

And how, Ānanda, does a beggar set up,  
settle down,  
compose  
and focus the heart on the internal?

Here, Ānanda, a beggar,  
separated from pleasures of the senses  
separated from gross involvements  
with the internal dialog,  
with rambling thoughts  
with the interest,  
enjoyment,  
and sense of ease  
that come with solitude,  
enters into the first burning  
and makes a habitat of that.

Separated from the internal dialog  
and meandering thoughts,  
with impassivity  
and having become whole-heartedly single-minded,  
bringing the attention to the interest,  
enjoyment,  
and sense of ease  
that come with serenity,  
without internal dialog  
without meandering thoughts,  
he enters the second burning  
and makes a habitat of that.



**Separated from interest and enjoyment,  
with impassivity,  
detachment,  
and clear consciousness  
bringing the attention to the pleasure  
that comes with that sense of ease  
the Aristocrats describe as:**

**'Detached,  
minding,  
he's got the sweet life!'**

**he enters The Third Burning  
and makes a habitat of that.**

**Letting go of pain  
letting go of pleasure  
letting go of their antedent  
mental pleasures and miseries,  
without pain  
without pleasure  
clearly conscious,  
detached,  
mindful of the  
bright  
shiny  
clean-clear-through  
radiance  
of  
detachment**

**he enters The Fourth Burning  
and makes a habitat-a-that.**

**This is how, Ānanda,  
a beggar sets up,  
settles down,  
composes  
and focuses the heart  
on the internal.**

**Then he studiously examines  
the internal emptiness.**

**While he studiously examines the internal emptiness  
his heart does not leap up,  
is not made peaceful,**

**is not made steady,  
is not released.**

**This being so, Ānanda,  
a beggar is cognizant thus:**

**'While I studiously examined  
the internal emptiness  
my heart did not leap up,  
was not made peaceful,  
was not made steady,  
was not released.'**

**In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.**

**Then he studiously examines  
the external emptiness.<sup>[4]</sup>**

**While he studiously examines  
the external emptiness  
his heart does not leap up,  
is not made peaceful,  
is not made steady,  
is not released.**

**This being so, Ānanda,  
a beggar is cognizant thus:**

**'While I studiously examined  
the external emptiness  
my heart did not leap up,  
was not made peaceful,  
was not made steady,  
was not released.'**

**In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.**

**Then he studiously examines  
the internal-external emptiness.**

**While he studiously examines the internal-external emptiness  
his heart does not leap up,  
is not made peaceful,  
is not made steady,  
is not released.**

**This being so, Ānanda,  
a beggar is cognizant thus:**

**'While I studiously examined the internal-external emptiness  
my heart did not leap up,  
was not made peaceful,  
was not made steady,  
was not released.'**

**In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.**

**Then he studiously examines unshakability.**

**While he studiously examines unshakability  
his heart does not leap up,  
is not made peaceful,  
is not made steady,  
is not released.**

**This being so, Ānanda,  
a beggar is cognizant thus:**

**While I studiously examined unshakability  
my heart did not leap up,  
was not made peaceful,  
was not made steady,  
was not released.'**

**In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.**

**Then, Ānanda, that beggar needs to set up, settle down  
compose  
and focus the heart  
on the first sign of serenity  
concerning the internal.**

**Then he studiously examines  
the internal emptiness.**

**While he studiously examines the internal emptiness  
his heart leaps up,  
is made peaceful,  
is made steady,  
is released.**

**This being so, Ānanda,  
a beggar is cognizant thus:**

**'While I studiously examine the internal emptiness  
my heart leaps up,  
is made peaceful,**

is made steady,  
is released.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

Then he studiously examines  
the external emptiness.

While he studiously examines the external emptiness  
his heart leaps up,  
is made peaceful,  
is made steady,  
is released.

This being so, Ānanda,  
a beggar is cognizant thus:

While I studiously examine the external emptiness  
my heart leaps up,  
is made peaceful,  
is made steady,  
is released.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

Then he studiously examines the internal-external emptiness.

While he studiously examines the internal-external emptiness  
his heart leaps up,  
is made peaceful,  
is made steady,  
is released.

This being so, Ānanda,  
a beggar is cognizant thus:

'While I studiously examine the internal-external emptiness  
my heart leaps up,  
is made peaceful,  
is made steady,  
is released.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

Then he studiously examines unshakability.

While he studiously examines unshakability  
his heart leaps up,  
is made peaceful,

is made steady,  
is released.

This being so, Ānanda,  
a beggar is cognizant thus:

'While I studiously examine unshakability  
my heart leaps up,  
is made peaceful,  
is made steady,  
is released.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

When, Ānanda, a beggar  
inhabiting this habitat  
sets his heart on walking,  
he thinks:

'While walking  
let me not be corrupted  
by bad,  
unskillful states  
of wishing and discontent.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

When, Ānanda, a beggar  
inhabiting this habitat  
sets his heart on standing,  
he thinks:

'While standing  
let me not be corrupted  
by bad,  
unskillful states  
of wishing and discontent.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

When, Ānanda, a beggar  
inhabiting this habitat  
sets his heart on sitting,  
he thinks:

'While sitting  
let me not be corrupted

by bad,  
unskillful states  
of wishing and discontent.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

When, Ānanda, a beggar  
inhabiting this habitat  
sets his heart on reclining,  
he thinks:

'While reclining  
let me not be corrupted  
by bad,  
unskillful states  
of wishing and discontent.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

When, Ānanda, a beggar  
inhabiting this habitat  
sets his heart on discourse,  
he thinks:

'While discoursing,  
let me not talk such talk  
as is low,  
rustic,  
plebian,  
unaristocratic,  
not conducive  
to complete turning away from,  
to detachment,  
stopping,  
calm,  
super-knowledge,  
self-awakening,  
Nibbāna;  
that is to say:  
talk of  
kings and ministers of state,  
robbers and thieves,  
the horrors of war and battle;  
talk of food, drink, clothes, beds, garlands and perfumes;

talk of cities, towns, villages,  
relationships, men and women,  
heroes and villains;  
gossip at the corner,  
over the back fence,  
or at the well  
talk of those alive  
or of those who are departed;  
talk comparing differences between this and that;  
speculative talk about creation,  
existence or non-existence —

Let me not talk talk like this.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

But, that talk  
which is lofty,  
a help to opening up the mind  
and which conduces  
to complete turning away from,  
to detachment,  
stopping,  
calm,  
super-knowledge,  
self awakening  
Nibbāna;  
that is to say:  
talk about wanting little,  
talk about contentment,  
talk about impassivity,  
talk about living in solitude,  
talk about putting forth energy,  
talk about ethical conduct,  
talk about serenity,  
talk about wisdom,  
talk about freedom,  
talk about the knowledge and vision of freedom,  
he thinks:

'Let me talk talk like this.'

In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.

**When, Ānanda, a beggar  
inhabiting this habitat  
sets his heart on thinking,  
he thinks:**

**'While thinking,  
let me not think such thoughts  
as are low,  
rustic,  
plebian,  
unaristocratic,  
not conducive to  
complete turning away from,  
detachment,  
stopping,  
calm,  
super-knowledge,  
self-awakening,  
Nibbāna;  
that is to say:  
thoughts of lust,  
thoughts of anger,  
thoughts of harming —  
let me not think such thoughts as these.'**

**In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.**

**But, Ānanda, such thoughts  
as are aristocratic,  
setting down the way out,  
setting down for the doer thereof  
the consummate destruction of pain,  
suchas:  
thinking about renunciation,  
thinking about non-violence,  
he thinks:**

**'Let me think such thoughts as these.'**

**In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.**



**Five, Ānanda,  
are the strands of sense-pleasure.**

**What five?**

**Forms perceptible by the eye,  
wished for,  
enjoyed,  
charming,  
forms that are loved,  
connected with sense-pleasures,  
making for lust;**

**Forms perceptible by the ear,  
wished for,  
enjoyed,  
charming,  
forms that are loved,  
connected with sense-pleasures,  
making for lust;**

**Forms perceptible by the nose,  
wished for,  
enjoyed,  
charming,  
forms that are loved,  
connected with sense-pleasures,  
making for lust;**

**Forms perceptible by the tongue,  
wished for,  
enjoyed, charming,  
forms that are loved,  
connected with sense-pleasures,  
making for lust;**

**Forms perceptible by the body,  
wished for,  
enjoyed,  
charming,  
forms that are loved,  
connected with sense-pleasures,  
making for lust.**

**These, Ānanda, are  
the five strands of sense-pleasure**

**In this case**

**a beggar should review his state of mind  
in this way:**

**'Does there currently arise to mind  
in one way or another  
such as has to do with  
the five strands of sense-pleasure?'**

**If, Ānanda, when a beggar reviews thus  
he knows:**

**'There does currently arise to mind  
in one way or another  
such as has to do with  
the five strands of sense-pleasure.'**

**Such being the case, Ānanda,  
a beggar knows:**

**'Desire and lust for  
the five strands of sense pleasures  
have not been let go by me.'**

**In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.**

**If, Ānanda, when a beggar reviews thus  
he knows:**

**'There does not currently arise to mind  
in one way or another  
such as has to do with  
the five strands of sense-pleasure.'**

**Such being the case, Ānanda,  
a beggar knows:**

**'Desire and lust for  
the five strands of sense pleasures  
has been let go by me.'**

**In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.**

§

**Five, Ānanda, are  
the bound-up stockpiles  
concerning which a beggar  
should live attentive**

**to their comings and goings:**

**'This is material form,  
this is the arising of material form,  
this is the going of material form.**

**This is sense-experience,  
this is the arising of sense-experience,  
this is the going of sense-experience.**

**This is perception,  
this is the arising of perception,  
this is the going of perception.**

**This is own-making,  
this is the arising of own-making,  
this is the going of own-making.**

**This is consciousness,  
this is the arising of consciousness,  
this is the going of consciousness.**

**When he so lives  
attentive to the comings and goings  
of these five bound-up stockpiles,  
any pride of ownership  
coming from the five bound-up stockpiles  
is let go.**

**This being so, Ānanda,  
a beggar knows it thus:**

**'In me  
the pride of ownership  
for the five bound-up stockpiles  
has been let go.'**

**In this way  
he makes himself conscious of the matter.**

**These things, Ānanda  
have only to do with what is skilled,  
Aristocratic,  
other-worldly,  
beyond the scope of The Bad Guy.**

§

**What do you think, Ānanda?**

**What advantage  
does the student of the Aristocrats see  
that he should follow a Teacher  
even though being repeatedly nudged?"**

**"For us, bhante,  
the Dhamma is rooted in the Lucky Man,  
channeled by the Bhagava,  
depends on the Lightning-bearer.**

**It would be good, bhante,  
if the point of this  
were to occur to Bhagava  
to explain.**

**The Bhagava saying it,  
the beggars will bear it in mind."**

**"It is not, Ānanda,  
for the sake of hearing suttas,  
verses,  
expositions,  
that the student of the Aristocrats  
should follow a Teacher.**

**How come?**

**There is many a long day, Ānanda,  
for such things to be heard,  
retained,  
talked over,  
collected,  
analyzed in mind;  
for their theses to be well-penetrated.**

**But, Ānanda,  
talk about minding your own business,  
leading to the unobstructed heart,  
utter indifference,  
and dispassion,  
a help to ending,  
settling down,  
self-awakening,  
Nibbāna,  
suchas:  
talk about having few wishes,  
talk about contentment,**

**talk about seclusion,  
talk about withdrawal,  
talk about rousing up energy,  
talk about ethics,  
talk about serenity,  
talk about wisdom,  
talk about freedom,  
talk about knowing and seeing freedom —  
it is for the sake of such talk as this, Ānanda,  
that the student of the Aristocrats  
sees that he should follow a Teacher  
even though being repeatedly nudged.**

**§**

**There is that, Ānanda,  
which is annoyance suffered by teachers;  
there is that,  
which is annoyance suffered by students;  
there is that,  
which is annoyance suffered  
by those living the best of lives.**

**And how, Ānanda,  
is there annoyance suffered by teachers?**

**Here Ānanda, a teacher resorts  
to sleeping and sitting alone,  
secluded,  
in some park,  
at the root of some tree,  
in the mountains,  
in a cave,  
on the edge of a cliff,  
in the charnal grounds,  
in the forest wilderness,  
in the open air,  
on a pile of straw.**

**Living secluded in this way,  
brahmins and householders,  
inhabitants of town and countryside  
come round to visit.**

**Then, brahmins and householders,  
inhabitants of town and countryside,  
coming round to visit,  
he gets rigid,  
filled with hankering,  
exhibits greed,  
and returns to luxury.**

**This, Ānanda,  
is what is called  
'annoyance suffered by teachers.'**

**A teacher thus annoyed  
is harassed by bad unskillful things,  
connected with slime,  
leading to rebirth  
fearful,  
with painful result in future  
birth, aging, and death.**

**This is how, Ānanda,  
there is annoyance to be had by teachers.**

**And how, Ānanda,  
is there annoyance to be had by students?**

**In this case, Ānanda,  
the teacher's student,  
imagining he is cultivating aloofness,  
resorts to sleeping and sitting alone,  
secluded,  
in some park,  
at the root of some tree,  
in the mountains,  
in a cave,  
on the edge of a cliff,  
in the charnal grounds,  
in the forest wilderness,  
in the open air,  
on a pile of straw.**

**Living secluded in this way,  
brahmins and householders,  
inhabitants of town and countryside  
come round to visit.**

**Then, brahmins and householders,**

inhabitants of town and countryside,  
coming round to visit,  
he gets rigid,  
filled with hankering,  
exhibits greed,  
and returns to luxury.

This, Ānanda,  
is what is called  
'annoyance to be had by students.'

A student thus annoyed  
is harassed by bad unskillful things,  
connected with slime,  
leading to rebirth,  
fearful,  
with painful result in future  
birth, aging, and death.

This is how, Ānanda,  
there is annoyance to be had by students.

And how, Ānanda,  
is there annoyance to be had  
by those living the best of lives?

Here Ānanda,  
a Getter-of-the-Getting appears in the world,  
Aristocrat,  
Number One Self-Awakened One,  
with fully developed vision,  
the welcome one,  
seer of the world,  
incomparable dhamma-trainer of men,  
teacher of gods and men,  
a Buddha,  
the Lucky Man.

He resorts to sleeping and sitting alone,  
secluded,  
in some park,  
at the root of some tree,  
in the mountains,  
in a cave,  
on the edge of a cliff,  
in the charnal grounds,

**in the forest wilderness,  
in the open air,  
on a pile of straw.**

**Living secluded in this way,  
brahmins and householders,  
inhabitants of town and countryside  
come round to visit.**

**Then, brahmins and householders,  
inhabitants of town and countryside,  
coming round to visit,  
he does not get rigid,  
is not filled with hankering,  
does not exhibit greed  
or return to luxury,  
but, Ānanda, this teacher's student,  
imagining he is cultivating aloofness,  
resorts to sleeping and sitting alone,  
secluded,  
in some park,  
at the root of some tree,  
in the mountains,  
in a cave,  
on the edge of a cliff,  
in the charnal grounds,  
in the forest wilderness,  
in the open air,  
on a pile of straw.**

**Living secluded in this way,  
brahmins and householders  
inhabitants of town and countryside  
come round to visit.**

**Then, brahmins and householders,  
inhabitants of town and countryside,  
coming round to visit,  
he gets rigid,  
filled with hankering,  
exhibits greed,  
and returns to luxury.**

**This, Ānanda,  
is what is called  
'annoyance suffered**



by those leading the best of lives.'

One living the best of lives  
thus annoyed  
is harassed by bad unskillful things,  
connected with slime,  
leading to rebirth,  
fearful,  
with painful result in future  
birth, aging, and death.

This is how, Ānanda,  
there is annoyance suffered  
by those living the best of lives.

But in this case, Ānanda,  
that annoyance  
of the liver of the best of lives  
results in even more pain,  
results in even more bitterness  
than that annoyance of the teacher,  
that annoyance of the student,  
and further it leads to ruin.

Therefore, Ānanda,  
act towards me with friendliness,  
not hostility,  
and that will be  
for your wellbeing and happiness  
on many a long night.

How then does a student  
act towards his teacher  
with hostility,  
not friendliness?

Here, Ānanda,  
the teacher teaches dhamma  
pointing out the beneficial  
out of kindness of heart,  
saying:

'This is for your benefit,  
this is for your well-being.'

But these students  
do not want to learn,  
do not listen,

**do not apply themselves,  
do not prepare their hearts for omniscience.**

**They veer off,  
turning away  
from the teachers instruction.**

**This is the way, Ānanda,  
students behave towards their teacher  
with hostility  
not friendliness.**

**And how then does a student  
act towards his teacher  
with friendliness  
not hostility?**

**Here, Ānanda,  
the teacher teaches dhamma  
pointing out the beneficial  
out of kindness of heart,  
saying:**

**'This is for your benefit,  
this is for your well-being.'**

**These students want to learn,  
do listen,  
do apply themselves,  
do prepare their hearts for omniscience.**

**They do not veer off,  
do not turn away  
from the teachers instruction.**

**This is the way, Ānanda,  
students behave towards their teacher  
with friendliness  
not hostility.**

**Therefore, Ānanda,  
behave towards me  
with friendliness  
not hostility.**

**This will be for your benefit  
and well-being  
on many a long night.**

**[27] [pts] [ntbb] Not for me, Ānanda,**

**is the over-protection of the potter  
for the unfired vessel.**

**I will speak to you, Ānanda,  
constantly correcting,  
constantly correcting.**

**I will speak to you, Ānanda,  
constantly nudging,  
constantly nudging.**

**The essence will stand.**

**This is what Bhagava said.**

**"Delightful!" said the Ancient Ānanda,  
uplifted in mind  
by what the Lucky Man said.**