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Pubba Sambodha Sutta 1 (Ajjhatta)

The Discourse on “Before the Self-awakening” 1 (on the internal senses) | S 35.13/4:6-8

Theme: The sense-faculties can never satisfy us completely

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1 Self-perception and other-perception

The Saṃyutta Commentary¹ says that the “internality” of the sense-faculties should be understood as arising from the strength of lustful desire for them. Human beings regard the six internal sense-bases like the interior of a house, the six external sense-bases like the house’s vicinity. Just as human lustful desire is stronger towards the house interior, not letting in any stranger, even so is the human attitude to the six internal bases. However, human lustful desire for the vicinity of the house is not as strong, and humans do not prevent others from walking by, so it is in relation to the external sense-bases.² Here, in terms of spiritual practice, we can take the internal senses to actually refer to the physical senses themselves. This refers to two kinds of perception, that is, our perception of our own self, and our perception of others.

Self-perception here refers to the “internal” workings of one’s sense-faculties, that is, one’s physical and mental reactivity³ motivated by one’s “latent tendencies to ‘I’-making, ‘mine’-making and conceit” (*ahaṇi, kāra, mamaṇi, kāra, mānānusaya*).⁴ These threefold “grasping” (*gāha*) are the main factors behind conception, that is, the arising of narrative thoughts (M 1), and mental proliferation (that is, the persistence and addiction to such thoughts, M 18). It is important to note that such experiences are not “beliefs,” but are direct reactions to reality.⁵ The uninstructed worldling, as a rule, has no control over such tendencies and reactivity. Here, we simply become the result of our habits.

The Khemaka Sutta (S 22.89)⁶ says that even a saint (that is, a *sekha*, a saint, short of an arhat) still has such self-notions, but he does not identify with them, that is, he does not regard any or all of the five aggregates (form, feelings, perception, formations, and consciousness) or anything outside it as the self. As such, the learner (*sekha*) has better control of himself, while the arhat has full control of himself.

The perception of others is reflected in how we deal with our sense-perceptions, or how we evaluate and reacts to external stimuli.⁷ If we take self-perception as how we views ourselves, other-perception is how we view others and the world, or better, how we create our own world or virtual reality. The two—self and other—are not separate perceptions but always work together: it is much easier to talk about the workings of the mind using this sense-based dichotomy (that is, as a skillful means). This reactivity to sense-experiences is clearly expounded in **the Salla’tthena Sutta** (S 36.6),⁸ where the ordinary person is said to suffer both physically and mentally when confronted with pain:

7 “Monks, when the uninstructed ordinary person is touched by a painful feeling, he sorrows, grieves, laments, beats his breast, becomes confused. So he feels two feelings: the bodily and the mental.

¹ SA 2:356.

² On the external senses, see **Pubbe Sambodha S 2 (Bahiddhā)** (S 35.14) = SD 14.10 Intro.

³ I use **reactivity** in a negative sense to refer to the unwitting reactions that our latent tendencies or “old habits” forced upon us. There are two opp terms to this: “responsivity” (one’s being responsive to a situation in a wholesome sense) and “spontaneity” of the saints (that goodness is their natural quality).

⁴ M 22.15, 72.15, 112.11 20; S 2:75, 3:236, 4:41; A 1:132, 133.

⁵ See Bodhi, 1980:8-11; Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. See SD 3.13 Intro (4).

⁶ S 22.89/3:126-132 = SD 14.12.

⁷ See **Pubbe Sambodha S 2 (Bahiddhā)** (S 35.14) = SD 14.10.

⁸ See **Salla’tthena S** (S 36.6) = SD 5.5.

8.1 Monks, it is just as if they were to wound a person with *a dart* [arrow],⁹ and then they were to wound him with *a second dart*. As such, monks, that person would feel the sensation of two darts.

Even so, monks, when the uninstructed ordinary person is touched by a painful feeling, he sorrows, grieves, laments, beats his breast, becomes confused. So he feels two feelings: the bodily and the mental.

8.2 And being touched by that painful feeling, he shows aversion towards it. When he shows aversion towards the painful feeling, **the latent tendency of aversion** (*paṭighānusaya*) towards painful feeling lies latent in him.

8 When touched by a painful feeling, *he delights in sensual pleasure*.

Why is that so?

Because, monks, the uninstructed ordinary person knows no other escape than through sensual pleasure.¹⁰

8d And when he delights in sensual pleasure, **the latent tendency of lust** (*rāgānusaya*) towards pleasant feeling lies latent in him.¹¹

8e He does not understand according to reality *the arising, the passing away, the gratification, the danger and the escape* with regards to feelings.¹²

Not understanding these things according to reality, **the latent tendency of ignorance** (*avijjā'anusaya*) towards neutral feeling lies latent in him.¹³

8f If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels that it is *yoked* to him. If he feels a painful feeling, he feels that it is *yoked* to him. **[209]** If he feels a neutral feeling, he feels that it is *yoked* to him.

This, monks, is called an uninstructed ordinary person who is yoked to birth, death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair—he is one who is yoked to suffering, I say!¹⁴

The arhat, on the other hand, only notices the physical impact of such pains and difficulties, but his mind is invariably undisturbed by them.

2 The Addhā Sutta & the Samiddhi Sutta

The Addhā Sutta (It 63) and **the Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20)¹⁵ give a very important insight into the nature of the aggregates. These two suttas record the Buddha's explanation of the aggregates in a most profound way, relating them to how we think and its result:

⁹ Comy: The second wound (*anugata, vedham*) would be just a finger's breadth or two-fingers' breadth away from the first one. For the one wounded, as such, would feel; the subsequent worse than the first. (SA 3:76).

¹⁰ Comy: The escape is mental concentration, the path and the fruit, but he does not know this, knowing only sensual pleasure. (SA 3:77).

¹¹ On the nature of sexuality, see **Saññoga S** (A 7.48) = SD 8.7.

¹² Cf **Cūḷa Sīhanāda S** (M 11.7/1:65), where the Comy says the arising (*samudaya*) the views of being (*bhava, diṭṭhi*) and non-being (*vibhava, diṭṭhi*) are due to any of these eight conditions (*attha-t, thāna*): the five aggregates, ignorance, contact, perception, thought, unskilful consideration, evil friends and the voice of another [Pm 1:138]. Their disappearance (*atthaṅgama*) is the path of stream-entry which eradicates all wrong views. Their gratification (*assāda*) may be understood as the satisfaction of psychological need that they provide; their danger (*ādīnava*) is the continual bondage that they entail; the escape (*nissaraṇa*) from them is Nirvana (MA 2:11). See also **Chachakka S** (M 148) where the latent tendencies are explained in connection with each of the 6 senses (M 148.28-33/3:285).

¹³ The most important characteristic of neutral feelings to note is their impermanent nature (It 47). This is because a neutral feeling appears to be the most stable of the three types of feeling. When they are noted as impermanent, it will lead to the arising of wisdom, thereby countering the latent tendency of ignorance. See **Sall'atthana S** (S 36.6) = SD 5.5 §3n. See Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*, 2003:171.

¹⁴ **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38) concludes with an interesting, broader explanation of how an unawakened person delights all kinds of feelings—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—“he delights in that feeling, welcomes it, and remains clinging to it.” It also describes a Buddha responds to these feelings (M 38.30-41/1:266-271). See **Sall'atthana S** (S 36.6) = SD 5.5 Intro. See also **Cūḷa, vedalla S** (M 44.25-28/1:303 f).

¹⁵ In this sutta, the stanzas (S 46-47) are addressed to an unnamed yaksha.

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| 1 | <i>Akkheyya,saññino sattā
akkheyyasmim patiṭṭhitā
akkheyyam apariññāya
yogam āyanti maccuno.</i> | Beings who perceive what can be expressed
are stuck in what can be expressed.
Not having fully understood what can be expressed,
They go ¹⁶ under the yoke of death. (S 46) |
| 2 | <i>akkheyyañ ca pariññāya
akkhātaram na maññati
tam hi tassa na hotī ti
yena nam vajiā na tassa atthi.</i> | But having fully understood what can be expressed,
one does not think in terms of “one that expresses.” ¹⁷
For, there is no “that” (<i>tam</i>) ¹⁸ for him,
that by which anything could be said of him. (S 47)
(S 46 f/1.20/1:11) |
| 3 | <i>phuṭṭho vimokkho manasā
santi,padam anuttaram</i> | When the mind is touched by liberation,
there is the peerless state of peace. |
| 4 | <i>sa ve akkheyya,sampanno
santo santi,pade rato
saṅkhāya sevī dhammaṭṭho
saṅkham nopeti vedagū ti</i> | Indeed, he is accomplished in what can be expressed;
at peace, delighting in the state of peace;
standing in truth, he makes use of reckoning (<i>saṅkha</i>);
(but) one accomplished in true knowledge cannot be
reckoned. (It 63/53 f) |

The Commentaries on the Addhā Sutta and the Samiddhi Sutta give basically the same glosses of their common key terms and otherwise complement each other:

“**What can be expressed**” (*akkheyyam*) are the five aggregates (that is, “the objective sphere of linguistic reference (*not* the terms of expression themselves”).)¹⁹

“**Beings who perceive what can be expressed**” (*akkheyya,saññino sattā*): When ordinary beings perceive the five aggregates, their perceptions are affected by the ideas of permanence, pleasure and self, elsewhere called “perversions” or “distortions” (*vipallāsa*, A 2:52).²⁰ ItA adds that this refers to those who perceive the five aggregates as percepts by way of “I,” “mine,” “deva,” “human,” “woman,” “man,” etc; that is, they perceive the five aggregates as a being, person, etc. These perverted perceptions then bring about defilements, as a result of which beings “**are stuck in what can be expressed**” (*akkheyyasmim patiṭṭhitā*): They “are stuck” [are established] in the five aggregates in eight ways: by way of lust, hate, delusion, views, latent tendencies, conceit, and restlessness. (SA 1:44; ItA 2:31 f; paraphrased & summarized)

The participle *patiṭṭhitā* (here idiomatically translated as “stuck”) is usually rendered as “is established.” The present form, *patiṭṭhāti* or *patiṭṭhahati*, “it is established (loc),” that is to become “attached” mainly on account of craving and other defilements. A number of suttas²¹ show that consciousness

¹⁶ “They go,” *āyanti*, pres 3 pl of *āyāti*, meaning (1) “he comes, arrives, approach, reach, attain, return” (V 1:30; D 3:19; S 1:43); sometimes contextually = *gacchati*, “he goes” (SnA 2:480,16 ad Sn 669; *gacchāma*, SnA 2:463,7 ad Sn 116). The imp often means “goes” rather than “comes,” eg imp 1 pl *āyāma*, “come, let us go!” (V 3:10; D 16 §1.13/2:81, §1.15/2:81, §1.19/2:84, §2.1/2:90, §2.5/2:91, §4.5/2:123 (x4), §4.13/2:126, §4.38/2:134, §5.1/2:137). (2) “he gets into, passes into, falls into, meets with, becomes” (*kodho vo vasam ~ātu*, S 1:140,1*; *ākāsam indriyāni saṅkamati ~anti*, S 3:207,4). In fact, CPD gives S 1:11,23 (v46) here as an example of (2). Bodhi takes this literally: “They come under the yoke of Death” (S:B 99). I have rendered it idiomatically.

¹⁷ All these lines up to 2b here (ie lines 1+2ab+3+4) are identical with the It 3.2.4 quote here. See **Khandha S** (S 22.48) = SD 17.1.

¹⁸ The special term for this is “not-that-ness” (*atam,mayatā*): see **Atammayatā** = SD 19.13.

¹⁹ Parenthetical n by **Bodhi** (S:B 354 n35). See also *Vism:Ñ 598 n4* (= *Vism 17.24/522*).

²⁰ A 4.49 (A 2:52).

²¹ See **Cetanā S 1** (S 12.38/2:65 f) = SD 7.6a, **Cetanā S 2** (S 12.39/2:66) = SD 7.6b, **Cetanā S 3** (S 12.40/2:66 f) = SD 7.6c, **Atthi,rāga S** (S 12.64/2:101-104), **Upāya S** (S 22.53/3:53), **Bija S** (S 22.54/3:54 f).

(*viññāṇa*), when driven by craving, is “established” or “finds support,” but when craving is removed from it, it becomes “unestablished or “unsupported.” As such, the arhat is often said to pass away “with consciousness unestablished” (*appatiṭṭhitena viññāṇena...parinibbuto*).²² All these senses are found in the Buddha’s verses here.

3 Charisma and conceit

In **the Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20), when the yaksha asks for a detailed teaching, the Buddha says, amongst other things, this stanza:

<p>48 <i>Samo vivesī atha vā nihīno yo maññati so vivadetha tena tīsu vidhāsu avikampamāno samo vivesī ti na tassa hoti</i></p>	<p>“Equal,” or “superior,” or “inferior,”²³ those who think thus would then quarrel. Being unshaken by²⁴ <u>the three discriminations</u>,²⁵ there is for him neither “equal” nor “superior.” (S 48/1.20/1:12 = Sn 842)²⁶</p>
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The three discriminations (*tayo vidhā*) are the three modes of conceit (*māna*):²⁷

<p><i>seyyo ’ham asmi, māna</i> <i>sadiso ’ham asmi, māna</i> <i>hīno ’ham asmi, māna</i></p>	<p>the conceit, “I am better” the conceit, “I am equal” the conceit, “I am worse”</p>	<p>superiority conceit, equality conceit, inferiority conceit.</p>
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These three discriminations are listed in such suttas as **the Soṇa Sutta 1** (S 22.49),²⁸ **the Vidhā Sutta 1** (S 45.162),²⁹ and **the Vidhā Sutta 2** (S 46.41).³⁰ **The Niddesa** and **the Vibhaṅga** go on to list all the possible manifestations of these discriminations or conceits (*māna*), totalling nine of them (the ninefold conceit, *nava, vidhā māna*), in so far as each discrimination is shown by one who is considers himself as better, or as equal, or as worse than others, thus:

<p>1. Being <u>superior</u> to others, one thinks, 2. Being superior to others, one thinks, 3. Being superior to others, one thinks, 4. Being <u>equal</u> to others, one thinks, 5. Being equal to others, one thinks, 6. Being equal to others, one thinks, 7. Being <u>inferior</u> to others, one thinks, 8. Being inferior to others, one thinks, 9. Being inferior to others, one thinks,</p>	<p>“I am better.” “I am equal.” “I am worse.” “I am better.” “I am equal.” “I am worse.” “I am better.” “I am equal.” “I am worse.”</p>	<p>(Nm 80; Nc 226; Vbh 389 f)</p>
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Bodhi, in his note to **the Samiddhi Sutta** (S 48)³¹ on these ninefold conceit, says: “At Vbh 389-90 it is shown that these three [the conceit, ‘I am better,’ ‘I am equal,’ and ‘I am worse’] become ninefold in so

²² See **Godikha S** (S 4.23/1:122,12-13).

²³ Or, “same, better, worse.”

²⁴ Lit “in” (the three modes) (as in Sn:N 1992) but unidiomatic and self-contradicting: if one is in any of the three “modes,” one is being discriminatory. Here rendered idiomatically.

²⁵ Listed at **Soṇa S 1** (S 22.49/3:48 f), (**Magga**) **Vidhā S** (S 45.162/5:56), (**Bojjhaṅga**) **Vidhā S** (S 46.41/5:98).

²⁶ Cf D 3:216; S 3:48 f, 80, 127, 5:56, 98; Tha 1076; Nm 195; Vbh 367.

²⁷ The psychological term, “complex,” albeit somewhat modernist, is a possible alternative tr. For a detailed study on *māna*, see **Me: The problems of conceit** = SD 19.2a (3).

²⁸ S 22.49/3:48 f.

²⁹ S 45.162/5:56.

³⁰ S 46.41/5:98.

³¹ S 48/1.20/1:12.

far as each triad may be entertained by one who is truly better, truly equal, or truly worse.³² The underscored remark here poses a dilemma or catch-22: if we were “truly” better or even “truly” equal, we would not measure ourselves against others. If we were to do so, then we would not *really* be “better” or even “equal.”

These ninefold conceits reflect social realities (including in Buddhist circles) where people are measured by their social status (eg coming from a powerful family or in a position of power), economic level (the number of rooms we have in our apartment), academic titles (eg Ven Dr), and so on.³³ The point here is that, on the Dharma level, these threefold or ninefold conceit do not really exist: they are merely how the worldly person measures himself against others.

The Rūpa Sutta (A 4.65) and **the Puggala Paññatti** (Pug 53 f), in one of the world’s earliest study of the Buddhist conception of **charisma**, give us a very good idea of how **conceit** works, that is, through the four personal sources or “measures” (pamānā), or how one “measures” (attributes charisma to) another and becomes satisfied or “inspired” (*pasanna*) with the person. There are, says the suttas, four kinds of persons:

- (1) One who measures by appearance (*rūpa*) and is inspired by it.
- (2) One who measures by voice (*ghosa*) and is inspired by it.
- (3) One who measures by external holiness or outward austerity (*lūkha*) and is inspired by it.
- (4) One who measures by the truth (*dhamma*) and is inspired by it.

(A 4.65/2.71 = SD 3.14.7; Pug 53 f)³⁴

The one who measures not and is “unshaken by the three discriminations” (*tīsu vidhāsu avikampamāno*) is the arhat, who has completely destroyed the fetter of conceit.³⁵ The conclusion of **the Upāya Sutta** (S 22.53) typically reflects the spiritual progress and attainment of such a saint as follows:

*Tad apatiṭṭhitam viññāṇam avirūḷham anabhisankhacca ca³⁶ vimuttam.
Vimuttattā ṭhitam ṭhitattā santusitam santusitattā na paritassati.
Aparitassam paccattañ-ñeva parinibbāyati.
Khīṇā jāti vusitam brahma, cariyam kataṃ karaṇīyam nāparam itthattāyāti pajānāti ti*

When that consciousness is unestablished, not growing, not generating [not constructing], it is liberated.

By being liberated, it is steady; by being steady, it is content; by being content, it trembles not [is not agitated].

Free from trembling, one truly attains nirvana for oneself.

He understands: ‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is no more of this state of being.’ (S 22.53/3:53 f)

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³² S:B 355 n37, underscore added.

³³ On the Dharma context of these painful realities, see **Me: The nature of conceit** = SD 19.2a.

³⁴ See **The teacher of the teaching?** = SD 3.14(7). Cf A 2:70; Pug 7; Tha 469-472; DhA 3:113 f; SnA 242; PugA 229 f.

³⁵ **The 10 fetters** are: self-identity view (*sakkāya, dīṭṭhi*), persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), repulsion (*paṭigha*), greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), **conceit** (*māna*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). See **Alaggadūpamā S** (M 22.30-36/1:139 f) = SD 3.13.

³⁶ *Anabhisankhacca*, so Be Ce Se; PTS v1 *anabhisankhāraṇ ca*

The First Discourse on “Before the Self-awakening” (the internal senses)

S 35.13/4:6-8

1 At Sāvattḥī.

2 “Bhikshus, before my self-awakening, [7] when I was still a Bodhisattva, it occurred to me:

‘Now what is gratification regarding <u>the eye</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>the ear</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>the nose</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>the tongue</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>the body</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>the mind</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?

3 Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:

3.1 ‘Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure³⁷ that depends on **the eye**,
that is the gratification regarding the eye.

3.2 That the eye is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding the eye.

3.3 The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding the eye.

4.1 Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure that depends on **the ear**,
that is the gratification regarding the ear.

4.2 That the ear is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding the ear.

4.3 The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding the ear.

5.1 Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure that depends on **the nose**,
that is the gratification regarding the nose.

5.2 That the nose is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding the nose.

5.3 The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding the nose.

6.1 Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure that depends on **the tongue**,
that is the gratification regarding the tongue.

6.2 That the tongue is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding the tongue.

6.3 The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding the tongue.

7.1 Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure that depends on **the body**,
that is the gratification regarding the body.

7.2 That the body is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding the body.

7.3 The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding the body.

³⁷ “Physical comfort and mental pleasure,” *sukham somanassam*, lit “happiness and pleasure,” alt tr, “physical joy and mental joy.”

- 8.1** Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure³⁸ that depends on **the mind**,
that is the gratification regarding the mind.
- 8.2** That the mind is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding the mind.
- 8.3** The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding the mind.

9 Bhikshus, I went in search of gratification in the world. Whatever gratification there is the world, that gratification I have found.

Bhikshus, to whatever extent there is gratification in the world, that gratification I have clearly seen by wisdom.

Bhikshus, I went in search of danger in the world. Whatever danger there is the world, that danger I have found.

Bhikshus, to whatever extent there is danger in the world, that danger I have clearly seen by wisdom.

Bhikshus, I went in search for an escape from the world. Whatever escape there is the world, that escape I have found.

Bhikshus, to whatever extent there is an escape in the world, that escape I have clearly seen by wisdom.

10 Bhikshus, so long as I did not directly know, as they really are, the world's *gratification as gratification*, and *the danger as danger*, and *the escape as escape*, for that long I did not claim that I had awakened to the supreme full self-awakening in this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

But, bhikshus, when I directly knew, as they really are, thus—the world's gratification as gratification, and the danger as danger, and the escape as escape—then I claim that I have awakened to the supreme full self-awakening in this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

11 The knowledge and vision arose in me:

“Unshakable is my liberation of mind—this is my last birth. There is now no more rebirth!”

— evaṃ —

051119; 061107; 070626; 081223; 090804; 121016; 130106

³⁸ “Physical comfort and mental pleasure,” *sukham somanassam*, lit “happiness and pleasure,” alt tr, “physical joy and mental joy.”