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Raho,gata Sutta

The Discourse on Being Alone | S 36.11/4:216-218

PTS: **Raho,gataka Sutta** The Discourse on the One Who is Alone

Theme: Dhyana and feeling

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1 Sutta structure

The Raho,gata Sutta (S 36.11), as the title suggests, opens with a certain unnamed monk spending solitary retreat in a remote spot (*raho,gata paṭisallāna*)¹ reflecting on the Buddha’s teaching on feeling (*vedanā*) [§11]. He knows about the three feelings, but does not understand the Buddha’s statement on “Whatever is felt is included in suffering” (*yaṃ kiñci vedayitam taṃ dukkhasmin ti*) [§§2-3].

When he approaches the Buddha for clarification, the Buddha praises him for his understanding, and goes on to elaborate on the statement. The Buddha’s explanation is divided into four main parts, which takes up the rest of the sutta.

2 Impermanence.

2.1 “WHATEVER IS FELT IS INCLUDED IN SUFFERING.” In part one, the Buddha explains in six ways the meaning of “whatever is felt is included in suffering,” all directly linked with aspects of impermanence. From the terminology, we can surmise that “impermanence” (*aniccatā*) is the key term, encompassing the other five aspects of it, all of which characterize feeling.

How is feeling included in suffering? The answer is connected with the famous question, “Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [painful] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?”² found in such well known discourses as **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59).³ And the answer is obvious: it is *dukkha* (unsatisfactory, suffering). Something which is impermanent, by that very nature, is also never really satisfying, bringing on suffering.⁴

The Saṃyutta explains that the impermanence of formations (*saṅkhāra*) is itself the impermanence of feeling, and this impermanence is *death*. There is no suffering worse than death; with this in mind, it is said, “Whatever is felt is included in suffering.” (SA 3:78). The Commentary’s explanation, however, is not very persuasive. *That all feeling is suffering* is simply because they are impermanent, and as such cannot provide any stable or lasting happiness.

This key saying—“whatever is felt is included in suffering”—is quoted elsewhere. In **the Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 136) the monk Samiddhi seems to have misinterpreted it to mean that all feeling are felt as suffering, which is clearly false; and the monk Udāyī, too, misunderstands it. The Buddha then clarifies the teaching at some length.⁵ In **the Kaḷāra Sutta** (S 12.32), Sāriputta is questioned by the Buddha about the former’s attainment of final knowledge (awakening), and this statement forms a part of Sāriputta’s answer.⁶

¹ Those who speak to the Buddha on emerging from their solitary retreats incl: Māluṅkyā,putta in **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63.3/1:427); Udāyī in **Laṭukikôpama S** (M 66.6/1:448); Pasenadi Kosala in **(Pasenadi) Piya S** (S 3.4/1:71, qu in Nett 174), in **Atta Rakkhita S** (S 3.5/1:72), in **Appaka S** (S 3.6/1:73), & in **(Kalyāṇa.mitta) Appamāda S** (S 3.18/1:87); a certain monk in **Raho,gata S** (S 36.11/4:216); the monk Uttiya in **Uttiya S** (S 45.30/5:22); Sāriputta in **Sakkacca S** (A 7.66.2/4:121), in **Pār 1** (V 3:7,21); Vaṅgīsa in **(Nigrodha,kappa) Vaṅgīsa S** (Sn 2.12/-60,2); Dabba Malla,putta in **Culla,vagga** (V 2:74,30) & **Saṅgh 8** (V 3:158,7), Seniya Bimbisāra in **Mahā,vagga** (V 1:101,8). By those other than the Buddha, such as the layman Soṇa Kuṭṭikaṇṇa to Mahā Kaccāna in **Soṇa S** (U 5.-6/57,7, 58,8, 58,17); the monk Soṇa to Mahā Kaccāna in **Vinaya** (V 1:195,9).

² *Taṃ panāniccam dukkham vā taṃ sukham vā ti.*

³ S 22.59.12-16/3:67 f = SD 1.2.

⁴ See MA 2:224,21-27 (Comy on Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S, M 28.7/1:185,30 = SD 6.16).

⁵ M 136.6/3:208,27 = SD 4.16.

⁶ S 12.32/2:53,20-21.

2.2 FORMATIONS. A note on *saṅkhāra* in this context: here, it has its widest sense, encompassing all conditioned things (*saṅkhata, dhammā*). This includes the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness),⁷ not just the fourth, as shown, for example, in **the Channa Sutta** (S 22.-90).⁸ In other words, it refers to all the universe, but not to nirvana, which is unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*). A conditioned phenomenon produces other conditioned phenomena in conjunction with consciousness (*viññāna*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and form (*rūpa*).⁹

Coming back to our discussion on impermanence. The Majjhima Commentary on the Mahā Hatthī, -padōpama Sutta (M 28) explains *aniccatā* as the keyword, and the other expressions are aspects of it,¹⁰ that is, to say,

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------|--|
| • formations | being subject to destruction | (<i>khaya, dhammatā</i>), |
| • formations | being subject to passing away | (<i>vaya, dhammatā</i>), |
| • formations | being subject to fading away | (<i>virāga, dhammatā</i>), |
| • formations | being subject to ceasing | (<i>nirodha, dhammatā</i>), |
| • formations | being subject to change | (<i>vipariṇāma, dhammatā</i>). [§4b] |

2.3 SYNONYMS OF IMPERMANENCE. The Mahā Hatthī, padōpama Sutta (M 28), in its description of the four elements (earth, water, fire and wind), however, characterizes each of them as being subject to destruction, passing away, ceasing and change,¹¹ but omits “subject to fading away” (*virāga, dhammatā*). Its Commentary explains nothing new or helpful on each of these terms. **The Vibhaṅga**, in its description of the 77 bases of knowledge (*satta, sattati ṇāṇa vatthu*), lists four of them as “the knowledge that, on account of birth,” there is our being subject to destruction, to passing away, fading away, and ceasing (omitting the last, “being subject to change”).

From all this, my deduction is that the above list of four expressions are *synonyms* of impermanence. Although they may also be seen as *aspects* of impermanence—especially the “ceasing” phase—we can apply any of these expressions to describe impermanence just as well. Every *thing*¹² is impermanent, going to destruction, passing away, fading away, ceasing, changing. Even as it arises it ceases; even when a state or situation seems to be stable, there is a subtle process of change.

2.4 ASPECTS OF IMPERMANENCE.

2.4.1 Three sub-moments? In the **Rahogata Sutta** (S 36.11), a list of five synonyms is given to impermanence (*aniccatā*) [1.2]. However, elsewhere, we have teachings where impermanence is seen as conditioned phases of arising (*uppāda*), falling away (*vaya*), and alteration in presence (*thitassa aññathatta*). **The (Aññathatta) Ānanda Sutta 1** (S 22.37), for example, quotes Ānanda as saying this of the five aggregates, in answer to a question by the Buddha, thus, “...with form, an arising is discerned, a passing away, a change in that which persists in discerned,” and the same is said of the other four aggregates, that is, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.¹³

After the Buddha’s time, however, the Abhidhamma and Commentarial traditions began to take this teaching in a literal sense as the three instants or sub-moments of a mind-moment (*citta-k, khaṇa*) or dharma (a physical moment). According to the Commentaries, in a moment of lightning-flash, there are billions of mind-moments. Despite being such a infinitesimal moment, such a moment itself consists of three sub-moments of arising (*uppāda*), persistence (*thiti*), and passing away (*bhaṅga*).¹⁴

⁷ On the 5 aggregates, see **Dve Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47 f) = SD 17.1a.

⁸ S 22.90/3:132 f; see also S 3:87.

⁹ See **Khandha 4, Saṅkhāra** = SD 17.6 esp (5).

¹⁰ *Iti sabbehi pi imehi padehi anicca, lakkhaṇam eva vuttam* (MA 2:224).

¹¹ M 28.7/1:185 = SD 6.16.

¹² Note that there is a significant difference btw “every thing” (*sabbe saṅkhārā*) and “everything” (*sabbe dhammā*): see **Dhamma, niyāma S** (A 3.134/1:285) = SD 26.8. See also **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15) = SD 7.1, where *sabba* is used as “the all.”

¹³ S 22.37/3:37 f) = SD 33.11

¹⁴ MA 4:88; ItA 2:30; J 1:392; DhA 7. For a modern expl, see Abhs:BRS 4.6

Ancient teachers, such as Ānanda of Kalasa,pura (author of a *mūla,tīkā* or primary subcommentary on the Abhidhamma Piṭaka), rejected the notion of the sub-moment of persistence or presence in the mind-moment, citing such texts as **the Citta Yamaka**, which speaks only of the moments of arising and passing away of consciousness, *without mention of a persistent moment*.¹⁵

Anuruddha (author of **the Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha**) and the leading Commentators, however, rejected Ānanda’s position. They regarded the sub-moment of persistence as a stage during which the dharma “stands facing its own dissolution” (*bhaṅgābhimukh’āvattā*).¹⁶ As such, the well-known Burmese exegete, **Ledi Sayadaw** (1846-1923) regards the moment of persistence as the midpoint between arising and passing away (*udaya,vaya*), just as when a stone is thrown up into the air stays a moment midair, as it were, before coming down. However, he also says that the moment of persistence or presence can be taken as the entire duration of a dharma from the first point of its arising to the end of its passing away.¹⁷

2.4.2 Arising and passing away. We have already mentioned that in **the Saṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (A 3.47), these three aspects of impermanence—arising (*uppāda*), falling away (*vaya*), and alteration of presence (*thitassa aññathatta*)—are called the “conditioned characteristics of the conditioned” (*saṅkhatassa saṅkhata,lakkhaṇāni*) [1.4.1]. A couple of significant points should be noted here.

Firstly, note the sequence of the terms: *uppāda*, then *vaya*, and finally followed by *thitassa aññathatta*, that is, arising, then passing away, and finally alteration of presence. The Abhidhamma and Commentaries hold that even in an infinitesimal moment, there are three sub-moments of arising (*uppāda*), persistence (*thiti*), and passing away (*bhaṅga*) [1.4.1]. They have rearranged the sutta sequence of “*uppāda—vaya—thitassa aññathatta*” to “*uppāda—thiti—bhaṅga*”.

This is clearly an innovation not supported by the suttas. Such an idea can be useful when explaining an Abhidhamma concept, but we need to respect the sutta teachings by taking them as they are. It is important that this distinction be noted and applied when we are teaching early Buddhism.

The second important point to note is the purpose of the sutta teachings, at least, in the case of **the Saṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (A 3.47). Its purpose, clearly, is to *reflect on the nature of impermanence*. Here, I think, **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10) provides an important clue. Look closely at this well known “insight refrain”¹⁸ from the Sutta, where after a meditation practice has been described, the meditator is reminded, thus:

So he dwells

- (1) observing *the body in the body* internally,¹⁹
- (2) or, observing the body in the body externally,
- (3) or, observing the body in the body both internally and externally;
- (4) or, he dwells observing states that arise in the body,
- (5) or, he dwells observing states that pass away in the body,
- (6) or, he dwells observing states that arise and pass away in the body.

(M 10.5/1:56 etc) = SD 13.3

Notice the three underscored phrases (4-6) and how they collate nicely with the three aspects of impermanence given in such discourses as **the Saṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (A 3.47) mentioned above, thus:

¹⁵ Yam:CS 2:289-327.

¹⁶ Abhs:VRI 130; SAṬ:VRI 1:67, 2:218; AAT:VRI 2:114; VismṬ:VRI 1:324; Ledi Sayadaw Gantha Saṅgaha (Be) 151.

¹⁷ See S:B 1054 n50 & Abhs:BRS 156 f (Guide to §6)..

¹⁸ This “insight” (*vipassanā*) refrain is repeated 15 more times in **Satipaṭṭhāna S**. It is very likely to be added in post-Buddha times. This refrain is also called “the basic *satipaṭṭhāna* formula” and “the expanded *satipaṭṭhāna* formula” by R Gethin; “the *satipaṭṭhāna* refrain” by Analayo, and “the auxiliary formula” by Sujato. On its possible lateness, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10) = SD 13.3 Intro (1b, 3.0). If this refrain is a late interpolation, it only shows that before the Tipiṭaka was closed, the wise elders kept to the sutta teaching of the two-aspect quality of impermanence, rather than the three-instant moment notion.

¹⁹ The same is said of “feelings in feelings,” “the mind in the mind,” and “dharma in the dharmas.”

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (M 10)

- | | | |
|---|---|------------------------|
| • states that arise in the body | — | arising |
| • states that pass away in the body | — | passing |
| • states that arise and pass away in the body | — | alteration in presence |

Saṅkhata Lakkhana Sutta (A 3.47)

It is also meaningful to repeat the quote from **the (Aññathatta) Ānanda Sutta 1** (S 22.37) where Ānanda declares of the five aggregates, thus, “...with form, an arising is discerned, a passing away, a change in that which persists in discerned,” and the same is said of feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.²⁰ [1.4.1]. Here again we see “arising” and “passing away” discerned separately, and then the two are discerned as presence, just as in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta above.

In other words, in our mindfulness practice, especially in meditation, we could either observe how things arise within our body or minds, and in external events, *or* how they pass away, *or* we could observe them in a full sequence of rising and falling. Here again, let me reiterate that the suttas here are not formulating a time sequence or how long a mind-moment lasts, but simply instructing us how to practise observing impermanence.²¹

3 Anupubba, vihāra

3.1 MASTERING THE BODY BEFORE THE MIND. The early suttas often indicate that the state of our body can significantly affect our spiritual development. It is stated in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), for example, that the Bodhisattva can only attain dhyana after he has given up self-mortification and nurse himself back to health by taking some solid food.²² Similarly, in **the Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Sutta** (M 85), the Buddha declares that health and a good digestion are among the qualities that expedite our progress towards awakening.²³

Furthermore, important meditation discourses such as **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), instructs how proper observation of the body and its processes brings about mindfulness (*sati*), before going into the deeper aspects of meditation. In other words, we need to harmoniously take the body as our meditation object before we can deal with capricious mental states.

On the other hand, the suttas clearly describe how the attainment of dhyana has marked effects on the body. **The Sāmañña, phala Sutta** (D 2), for example, shows how each of the first three dhyanas, as it were, “permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with zest and happiness...etc”²⁴ Buddhaghosa, in his **Visuddhi, magga**, explains how the meditator’s physical body emerging from dhyana still enjoys the profound bliss that the mental body has previously felt.²⁵ Physical and mental states, the worldly and the spiritual, as such, are constantly interacting: they are not always separate, but are interdependent—at least for the meditator.

3.2 THE 9 SUCCESSIVE STAGES OF DEEP MEDITATION.

3.2.1 Observing impermanence in meditation. The Raho, gata Sutta is spiritually dramatic in that it not only instructs us how to observe impermanence as a basic practice [§4], but introduces “the progressive cessation of formations” (*anupubba, saṅkhāra nirodha*), notes the Commentary, to show that “I [the Buddha] do not describe only the cessation of feelings, but also the cessation of these states (the 4 dhyanas, the 4 attainments and cessation)” (SA 3:78).

²⁰ S 22.37/3:37 f) = SD 33.11

²¹ In breath meditation, some teachers teach the observation of the “three parts” of a breath—the beginning, the middle and the end—which seems to be similar the three-instant notion of the mind-moment, but that is all it is, only a similarity. This is a skillful means used by meditation teachers to help the meditator to watch “the whole body of breath” in a focussed manner. See **Āṇāpāna, sati S** (M 118.18/3:82) = SD 7.13.

²² M 36.33-34/1:247 = SD 49.4 or SD 1.12.

²³ M 85.58/2:95 = SD 55.2.

²⁴ D 2.77-82/1:73-75 = SD 8.10.

²⁵ Vism 4.173/163.

Paraphrased, the Buddha is saying that he not only teaches impermanence in the general sense, but also of spiritual states, namely, the four dhyanas (*jhāna*), the four attainments (*samāpatti*), and the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*). These are loosely known as the “nine dhyanas,” but properly they are called the nine “progressive abodes” (*anupubba, vihāra*)²⁶ because we have to attain them and emerge from them in proper sequence.

3.2.2 The nine progressive abodes. The nine progressive abodes (*anupubba vihāra*) are, namely,²⁷

- the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa jhāna*),
- the 4 formless attainments (*arūpa samāpatti*),
- the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*).

They are profound states of meditative progression, culminating in the cessation of perception and feeling, attainable only by non-returners or arhats. As such, they can be said to be the meditative stages to non-return and arhathood. As they are nine profound meditative states, they are sometimes loosely called “the 9 dhyanas.”

On a deeper level, by attaining the cessation of the first eight of these nine abodes, we go on to awaken to true reality. They are also called “the 9 successive cessations” (*anupubba, nirodha*).²⁸ **The (Anupubba) Vihāra Sutta 2** calls them “the successive attainments” (*anupubba, samāpatti*) (A 9.33/4:410-414).

3.2.3 The Anupubba Nirodha Sutta (A 9.31). The section below on “the progressive cessation of formations” (*anupubba, saṅkhāra nirodha*) is found as a discourse in itself, entitled fittingly as **the Anupubba Nirodha Sutta** (A 9.31). Since it is very short, it is reproduced here in full:

SD 33.6 (3.2.3)

Anupubba Nirodha Sutta

The Discourse on the Progressive Cessations

Traditional: A 9.1.3.11 = Aṅguttara 9, Navaka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 3, Sattāvāsa Vagga 11

A 9.31/4:409 = D 33.3.2(6)/3:266

Theme: The 4 dhyanas, the 4 attainments and cessation

Bhikshu, there are these **nine progressive cessations**. What are the nine?

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) For one who has attained the first dhyana, | <u>there is cessation of sensual perception</u> . ²⁹ |
| (2) For one who has attained the second dhyana, | there is cessation of initial application and sustained application. |
| (3) For one who has attained the third dhyana, | there is cessation of zest. |
| (4) For one who has attained the fourth dhyana, | there is cessation of in-and-out-breath [breathing]. |
| (5) For one who has attained the base of infinite space, | there is cessation of the perception of form. |
| (6) For one who has attained the base of infinite consciousness, | there is cessation of the base of infinite space. |
| (7) For one who has attained the base of nothingness, | there is cessation of the base of infinite consciousness. |
| (8) For one who has attained the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, | there is cessation of the base of nothingness. |

²⁶ D 2:156, 3:265, 290 (cf 2:156); A 4:410, 414; S 2:216, 222; U 78; Pm 1.5, 2.30; Miln 176. The arhat freed both ways (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*), attained through direct experience and full mastery of the 8 liberations (*vimokkha*) or the “9 dhyanas.”²⁶ This kind of saint is fully accomplished in meditation. See M 1:160, 174, 204, 209; A 2:183.

²⁷ **D 33.3.2(5)/3:265, 34.2.2(1)/3:290; A 9.33/4:410-414, 9.36/4:422-426; see Tevijja S (D 13) @ SD 1.8 Intro (2.2) (3) n.**

²⁸ D 33.3.2(6)/3:266, 290; A 9.31/ 4:409, 456; Pm 1.35.

²⁹ Be Ee Ce *kāma, saññā niruddhā hoti; Se āmisa, saññā niruddhā hoti.*

(9) For one who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling, there is cessation of perception and feeling.

These, bhikkhus, are the nine progressive cessations. — evaṃ —

Note that the Anupubba Nirodha Sutta says that the first-dhyana-attainer has abandoned “sensual perception” (*kāma,saññā*): this is the reading found in all the Pali manuscripts (Burmese, PTS, and Sinhala), except the Siamese which instead reads “worldly perceptions” (*āmissa,saññā*). Although the Siamese is unique, it has the same sense as *kāma,saññā*, found in all the other readings. The point is the same: the first dhyana is attained only when we are no more distracted by the body, that is, the physical sense-faculties, by forms, sounds, smells, touches, and tastes: these are the “worldly” experiences that do not trouble the dhyana-attainer in any way. This is the same as overcoming the five mental hindrances,³⁰ which, after all, operate through the five senses.

3.2.4 Comparative note. Now we come to another interesting difference, that is, between **the Anupubba Nirodha Sutta** (A 9.31) (above) and **the Raho,gata Sutta** (S 36.11):

Anupubba Nirodha Sutta:

“For one who has attained the first dhyana, there is cessation of sensual perception (or the worldly),”

Raho,gata Sutta:

“For one who has attained the first dhyana, there is cessation of speech (*vācā niruddhā hoti*)” [§5(1)].

How significant is this difference in reading? In terms of actual meditation experience, they refer to *the same thing*. In the first dhyana, there is neither sensual desire nor speech. However, this dhyana is not called “the noble silence” (which is the *second* dhyana) because there is still a subtle hint of mental “talk” when the mind applies itself to the meditation object and sustains this focus.³¹

The Saṃyutta Commentary on **the Kolita Sutta** (S 21.1) says that the second dhyana is called “noble silence” (*ariya tuñhī,bhāva*)³² because, this is where initial application and sustained application (*vitakka,-vicāra*) stops, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur (SA 2:233). In other words, the language centre in the brain shuts down when we are in a very mentally concentrated state.

In **the Kāma,bhū Sutta 2** (S 41.6), initial application and sustained application (and their non-meditative forms, thinking and pondering) are called “verbal formation” (*vacī,sañkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech.³³ However, the Commentary adds that when the Buddha says, “Either speak on the Dharma or keep noble silence” (eg in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta**),³⁴ even attention to a meditation object can be considered noble silence (SA 2:233). Anyway, this noble silence begins in the second dhyana but encompasses all the other higher meditative abodes.

3.3 FEELINGS ARE IMPERMANENT. The description of the “progressive cessation of formations” (*anupubba sañkhāra nirodha*) passage [§5] states that the impermanence of formations (*sañkhāra*) includes the impermanence of feelings. This understanding is important even on a basic level of meditation experience and mindfulness practice. All conditioned things are impermanent, especially our feelings, that is, our reaction to sense-experiences as being pleasant, painful or neutral.

Our “normal” reaction to something we perceive as pleasant is to desire it and more of it—this reinforces *lust* in us. What we perceive as unpleasant, we try to push away or deny—this reinforces our *hate*. What we are unfamiliar with, we ignore it—this reinforces our *ignorance*. The Buddha’s instruction here is that we regard all such experiences as being impermanent.³⁵ **The Paṭisambhidā,magga** sums this up as “latent tendencies” (*anusaya*), thus:

³⁰ Nm 26 f, 140, 157, 341; UA 163, 231, 328, 396; DhA 3:129; see **Meghiya S** (A 9.3; U 4.1) @ SD 34.2 (3.3). On the 5 mental hindrances, see **Nīvaraṇa** = SD 32.1.

³¹ See **Vitakka,vicāra** = SD 33.4.

³² S 21.1/2:273 f = SD 24.20; AA 4:71; qu at ThaA 3:162.

³³ S 41.6/4:294.

³⁴ See **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26.4/1:161,32-33) = SD 1.11.

³⁵ Further, see **Nimitta and anuvyañjana** = SD 19.14.

That which in the world is pleasant and likable, there the tendency to sensual lust of beings lies latent.

That which in the world is unpleasant and unlikable, there the tendency to aversion of beings lies latent.

Thus in these two states, ignorance continuously occurs, and so too conceit, wrong view and doubt.

This is the latent tendency of beings.³⁶

(Pm §587/123; Vbh §816/341)³⁷

When we habitually regard all our experiences—whether we see them as pleasant, painful or neutral—as being *impermanent*, either out of faith or through wisdom—we are making an effort in not feeding the latent tendencies. We can do this *out of faith*, that is, we can safely surmise that everything that exists is impermanent. Or, we could examine this more deeply with *wisdom*, such as searching the suttas, questioning teachers, and reflecting on it. In fact, **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1) guarantees that if we keep up such a practice of perceiving impermanence, we will surely attain streamwinning in this life itself.³⁸

3.4 THE ENDING OF FORMATIONS. The Raho,gata Sutta Commentary tells us that the Buddha has given us this teaching not only to describe the cessation of feelings, but also the *cessation (nirodha)* of even spiritual states [§5], that is, the four dhyanas, the four attainments and the cessation of perception and feeling (SA 3:78). Furthermore, the Sutta also describes the *stilling (vūpasama)* [§6] and the *tranquillization (passaddhi)* [§7] of the formations. And these additional instructions are “spoken for the sake of those who are disposed to awakening” (*bujjhānakānam ajjhāsayena vuttā*) (SA 3:79).

In other words, these teachings lead up to arhathood itself. This is obvious from the fact that the all three passages [§§5-7] mention the cessation of perception and feelings, accessible only to non-returns and arhats, and the fact that each passage closes with the sentence: “For a monk whose influxes are destroyed, there is the ceasing of lust, of hate, of delusion,” which describes an arhat.

On account of these closing statements on arhathood, it can be safely concluded that these three sets are not three sets of stages, but rather that the words *nirodha*, *vūpasama* and *passaddhi* are here used as synonyms. The nine kinds of cessations (*nirodha*), the nine kinds of stilling (*vūpasama*), and the five kinds of tranquillization (*passaddhi*) all refer to the same process—the impermanence and ending of formations.

The last set of progressive abodes—by way of tranquillization (*passaddhi*)—comprises only five stages, that is, omitting the four formless attainments.

3.5 CESSATION OF PERCEPTION AND FEELING. “Cessation” (*nirodha*), or more fully, “the cessation of perception and feeling” (*saññā,vedayita nirodha*) is an anomalous spiritual state—there is nothing else like it (except for nirvana, that is). The state is fully described in **the Visuddhi,magga** as a combination of deep meditative calm and insight where all mental states temporarily shut down.³⁹ Furthermore, it is “devoid of even subtle feeling and cognition, due to turning away from even the very refined peace of the fourth formless level” (Harvey 1993:10 digital ed).

Here, it is said, heart-beat and breathing stop (M 1:301 f), but a residual metabolism keeps the body alive for up to seven days (Vism 23.42/707). Only an arhat or a non-returner can experience this cessation.⁴⁰ On emerging from cessation, they experience the fruit of their respective attainments (Vism 708). “It is thus one possible route to experiencing Nibbāna.” (Harvey 1993:10 digital ed).

³⁶ *Yam loke piya,rūpaṃ sāta,rūpaṃ, ettha sattānaṃ kāma,rāgānusayo* [rāgānusayo, Vbh] *anuseti. Yam loke ap-piya,rūpaṃ asāta,rūpaṃ ettha sattānaṃ paṭighānusayo anuseti. Iti imesu dvīsu dhammesu avijjā'nupatitā, tad-ekattho māno ca diṭṭhi ca vicikicchā ca daṭṭhabbā. Ayaṃ sattānaṃ anusayo.*

³⁷ See **Anusaya** = SD 31.3; also **D 33.2.3(12)/3:254; M 18.8/1:109 f; S 45.175/5:60; A 7.11+12/4:9.**

³⁸ S 25.1/3:225 = SD 16.7.

³⁹ Vism 23.16-52/702-709.

⁴⁰ A 3:194; 23.18/Vism 702, 23.49/708.

While a dead person has neither vitality nor heat, and their sense-organs are “broken up,” a person in cessation still has vitality and heat, and his sense-organs are “purified.”⁴¹ According to Buddhaghosa, cessation is “the non-occurrence of the mind (*citta*) and mental states as a result of their progressive cessation” (Vism 23.18/702). Such a person is, as such, “mindless” (Vism 23.43/707). Even the subconscious “life-continuum” (*bhavaṅga*), present in dreamless sleep, is absent here. Such a person is effectively only body without any mental states whatsoever.⁴² In modern terms, “deep hibernation” or “suspended animation,” might give some idea of this state of cessation.

A few scholars have discussed the philosophical problems related to how the meditator emerges from cessation.⁴³ Furthermore, **Peter Harvey** has elsewhere argued that there are indications in the Pali suttas (though not later Pali materials) that the early Buddhists regarded consciousness (*viññāna*) as being able to “break free” of the network of interactions.⁴⁴ Indeed, the suttas often see personality as a vortex of interaction not between *nāma* (including consciousness) and *rūpa* (form), but between consciousness and *nāma, rūpa*.⁴⁵ By turning away from all objects, seen as ephemeral and worthless, consciousness can become objectless. “It” would then not be a limited, conditioned process, but the unconditioned, that is, nirvana. Unlike the situation of cessation, this would not be the complete absence of consciousness, but the timeless experience of a “consciousness” which has transcended itself by dropping all objects.

Such a notion may describe the awakened consciousness of a Buddha or arhat while still living, but if this is applied to them *posthumously*, it moves close to the brahminical idea of a universal soul. The point is that it is impossible to define or understand the state of an awakened mind—unless we have ourselves attained it.

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The Discourse on Solitude

S 36.11/4:216-218

A certain monk’s question

2 Then a monk approached the Blessed One. Then, having saluted the Blessed One, he sat down at one side.

3 Sitting thus at one side, the monk said this:

“Here, bhante, while I was alone in solitary meditation, this reflection arose in me:⁴⁶

‘Three feelings have been spoken of by the Blessed One, that is, pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and neutral feeling [neither painful nor pleasant feeling]. These are the three kinds of feeling spoken by the Blessed One.

However, it has been said by the Blessed One, that

‘Whatever is felt is included in suffering’?’” (*yaṃ kiñci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmin ti*)

⁴¹ M 1:296; D 2:334; Vism 23.51/709.

⁴² See further **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43) = SD 30.2 Intro (4) & **Kiṭṭa, giri S** (M 70) = SD 11.1 Intro 5.2(1) (on the one liberated both ways).

⁴³ See eg Paul Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, 1986. On Peter Harvey’s response to Griffiths, see “The mind-body relationship in Pāli Buddhism: A philosophical investigation” in Summary Report, International Association of Buddhist Studies 10th International Conference (ed AWP Guruge), Paris, 1992:30. Also GA Somaratne, “The sutta pericope of ‘the cessation’ and its interpretation” in *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Kelaniya, 2003: 207-228. See **Sappurisa S** (M 113) = SD 23.7 Intro (2).

⁴⁴ Harvey, 1989:27, 88-91; 1990:58, 61-68.

⁴⁵ **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14.2.18-19/2:32) = SD 49.8, **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 15.21-22/63 f) = SD 5.17; **Haliddakāni S 1** (S 22.3/3:9 f) = SD 10.12.

⁴⁶ *Idha mayham, bhante, raho, gatassa paṭisallīnassa evaṃ cetaso parivattakko udapādi*. This is stock: see Intro (1).

But in what connection has it been said by the Blessed One that
‘Whatever is felt is included in suffering’?’

(1) All feeling is included in suffering

4a “Good, good, bhikshu! These three feelings, bhikshus, have been spoken of by me, that is, *pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and neutral feeling*.

These three feels have been spoken of by me.

4b But I also said this:

‘Whatever is felt is included in suffering.’⁴⁷

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|--|-----------------------------|
| (10) This has been said by me with reference to
<i>the impermanence of formations,</i> | <i>aniccatā,</i> |
| that whatever is felt is included in suffering. | |
| (11) This has been said by me with reference to formations
<i>being subject to destruction,</i> | <i>khaya,dhammatā,</i> |
| that whatever is felt is included in suffering. | |
| (12) This has been said by me with reference to formations
<i>being subject to passing away,</i> | <i>vaya,dhammatā,</i> |
| that whatever is felt is included in suffering. | |
| (13) This has been said by me with reference to formations
<i>being subject to fading away, [217]</i> | <i>virāga,dhammatā,</i> |
| that whatever is felt is included in suffering. | |
| (14) This has been said by me with reference to formations
<i>being subject to ceasing,</i> | <i>nirodha,dhammatā,</i> |
| that whatever is felt is included in suffering. | |
| (15) This has been said by me with reference to formations
<i>being subject to change,</i> | <i>vipariṇāma,dhammatā,</i> |
| that whatever is felt is included in suffering. | |

(2) The progressive cessation of formations

5 Now, bhikshu, **the progressive cessation of formations** have also pointed out by me.⁴⁸

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) For one who has attained the first dhyana, | there is cessation of speech. ⁴⁹ |
| (2) For one who has attained the second dhyana, | there is cessation of initial application and
sustained application. |
| (3) For one who has attained the third dhyana, | there is cessation of zest. |
| (4) For one who has attained the fourth dhyana, | there is cessation of in-and-out-breath [breath-
ing]. |
| (5) For one who has attained the base of infinite
space, | there is cessation of the perception of form. |
| (6) For one who has attained the base of infinite
consciousness, | there is cessation of the base of infinite space. |

⁴⁷ Comy: The impermanence of formations is itself the impermanence of feeling, and this impermanence is death. There is no suffering worse than death; with this in mind, it is said, ‘Whatever is felt is included in suffering.’” (SA 3:78). On this rather narrow interpretation, see Intro (1.1). On this Sutta key saying, see **Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 136.6/3:208,27) & **Kalāra S** (S 12.32/2:53,20-21): see also Intro (2).

⁴⁸ *Atha kho pana, bhikkhu, mayā anupubba,saṅkhārānaṃ nirodho akkhāto.* Of “the progressive cessation of formations” (*anupubba,saṅkhāra nirodha*), says Comy, has been introduced to show that “I do not describe only the cessation of feelings, but also the cessation of these states (the 4 dhyanas, the 4 attainments and cessation)” (SA 3:78). See Intro (3).

⁴⁹ *Vācā niruddhā hoti;* cf **Anupubba Nirodha S** (A 9.3) which reads *kāma,saññā niruddhā hoti*, “there is cessation of sensual perception (A 9.31(1)/4:409) = SD 33.6(3).

- (7) For one who has attained the base of nothingness, there is cessation of the base of infinite consciousness.
- (8) For one who has attained the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, there is cessation of the base of nothingness.
- (9) For one who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling, there is *ending* of perception and feeling.⁵⁰
- For a monk whose influxes are destroyed, there is the ceasing of lust, of hate, of delusion.

(3) The progressive stilling of formations

- 6** Now, bhikshus, **the progressive stilling of formations**⁵¹ have also pointed out by me.⁵²
- (1) For one who has attained the first dhyana, there is the stilling of speech.
- (2) For one who has attained the second dhyana, there is the stilling of initial application and sustained application.
- (3) For one who has attained the third dhyana, there is the stilling of zest.
- (4) For one who has attained the fourth dhyana, there is the stilling of in-and-out-breath [breathing].
- (5) For one who has attained the base of infinite space, there is the stilling of the perception of form
- (6) For one who has attained the base of infinite consciousness, there is the stilling of the base of infinite space.
- (7) For one who has attained the base of nothingness, there is the stilling of the base of infinite consciousness.
- (8) For one who has attained the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, there is the stilling of the base of nothingness.
- (9) For one who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling, there is the *stilling* of perception and feeling.⁵³
- For a monk whose influxes are destroyed, there is the stilling of lust, of hate, of delusion.`

(4) The six kinds of tranquillization

- 7** Bhikshus, there are **these six tranquillizations**.⁵⁴
- (1) For one who has attained the first dhyana, there is the tranquillizing of speech.
- (2) For one who has attained the second dhyana, there is the tranquillizing of initial application and sustained application.
- (3) For one who has attained the third dhyana, there is the tranquillizing of zest.
- (4) For one who has attained the fourth dhyana, there is the tranquillizing of in-and-out-breath [breathing]. **[218]**
- (5) For one who has attained the cessation of perception and feeling, there is the *tranquillizing* of perception and feeling.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *Saññā,vedayita, nirodham samāpannassa saññā ca vedanā ca niruddhā honti.*

⁵¹ *Anupubba,saṅkhāra vūpasanta.* Comy says that this discourse on the “stilling” (*vūpasama*) (and the next section) are given for the benefit of those who are inclined to awakening (*bujjhānakānam ajjhāsayena vuttā*) (SA 3:79).

⁵² *Atha kho pana, bhikkhu, mayā anupubba,saṅkhārānam vūpasantā akkhāto.* See Intro (1).

⁵³ *Saññā,vedayita, nirodham samāpannassa saññā ca vedanā ca vūpasantā honti.*

⁵⁴ *Cha passaddhī.* Comy says that this discourse on the “tranquillization” (*passaddhi*) (and the previous section) are given for the benefit of those who are inclined to awakening (*bujjhānakānam ajjhāsayena vuttā*) (SA 3:79). See Intro (1). This set of 6 tranquillizations are listed in **Ānanda S 1** (S 36.15/4:119 f) = **Sambahula Bhikkhu S 1** (S 36.17/4:222).

⁵⁵ *Saññā,vedayita, nirodham samāpannassa saññā ca vedanā ca paṭippassaddho honti.*

For a monk whose influxes are destroyed, there is the tranquillizing of lust, the tranquillizing of hate, the tranquillizing of delusion.`

— evaṃ —

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