

# 10

## (Nānā,karaṇa) Mettā Sutta 2

Dutiya (Nānā,karaṇa) Mettā Sutta | A 4.126

The Second Discourse on (the Diversity of) Lovingkindness

Theme: Cultivating the divine abodes to attain non-return

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010

### 1 Suddh'āvāsa

**The (Nānā,karaṇa) Mettā Sutta** (A 4.126) shows how the proper cultivation of the four divine abodes (lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity) results in rebirth in **the Pure Abodes** (*suddh'āvāsa*), that is, as non-returners. The Pure Abodes are the highest of the form world (*rūpa dhātu*), inhabited exclusively by non-returners, who live there in bliss of *the fourth dhyana* to finish off the remnants of their karma before gaining nirvana. As such, this sphere is unique in being the only one that is supramundane (*lok'uttara*). The state of cessation of perception and feeling is also supramundane, but it is, strictly speaking, only a sphere (*āyatana*), that is, a meditative state, not a realm of existence.

**The Suddh'āvāsa devas** are of five kinds with very long life-spans lasting aeons. They are reborn in these five realms of the Pure Abodes, according to the predominance of their spiritual faculty, thus:

<i>akaniṭṭha</i>	The supreme [peerless]	16,000 aeons	wisdom faculty
<i>sudassī</i>	The clear-visioned	8,000 aeons	concentration faculty
<i>sudassa</i>	The clear-beauty	4,000 aeons	mindfulness faculty
<i>atappa</i>	The serene [untroubled]	2,000 aeons	effort faculty
<i>aviha</i>	The durable [non-declining]	1,000 aeons	faith faculty

(V 3:4 = D 3:51, 111 = It 99; D 1:14; A 2:142)<sup>1</sup>

**The (Bojjhaṅga) Sīla Sutta** (S 46.3) mentions two other kinds of non-returners who are *not* reborn in Suddh'āvāsa, that is, those attain non-return “early in this very life” (in our world), and those who attain non-return at the moment of death.<sup>2</sup> [2]

### 2 Non-return

**2.1 DEFINITION OF NON-RETURNER. A non-returner** (*anāgāmī*) is so called because he (or she) is a saint who has overcome all those mental fetters<sup>3</sup> that bind us to the sense-world, so that he “spontaneously arises” (is reborn) in the Pure Abodes, and is no more reborn (that is, does not return) to this world. **The Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta** (M 52) explains:

Here, houselord, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a monk attains to and dwells in **the first dhyana** that is accompanied by initial application and sustained application, with zest and joy born of solitude.

<sup>1</sup> See also D 3:237; M 3:103; Vbh 425; Pug 42-46.

For a cosmological map, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11) = SD 1.7 Appendix; for world cycle, see **Aggañña S** (D 27) = SD 2.19.

<sup>2</sup> S 46.3.13/5:69 f. For full sutta, see **(Bojjhaṅga) Sīla S** (S 46.3/5:69) = SD 10.15. See also **(Nānā,karaṇa) Puggala S** (A 4.124/2:128) = SD 23.8b.

<sup>3</sup> These are called “the lower fetters” (*orāma,bhāgiya saṃyojana*), ie the first 5 of **the 10 fetters**, which are: (1) personality view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b,bata,-parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 10.13/5:17; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). **The higher fetters** (*ud-dham,bhāgiya saṃyojana*) are (6-10), and so called because they bind us to rebirth in the form or formless realms. They are called “fetters” (*saṃyojana*) because they shackle one to the samsaric world of negative habits and suffering.

He considers and understands thus: “This first dhyana is conditioned and volitionally formed.<sup>4</sup> *Whatever is conditioned and volitionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.*”

If he is steady in that, he reaches the destruction of the influxes.<sup>5</sup> If he does not reach the destruction of influxes because of the desire in dharmas [states], the delight in dharmas,<sup>6</sup> then with the destruction of the five lower fetters, he becomes one who would reappear spontaneously (in the Pure Abodes) and there attain final nirvana without ever returning from that world.

(M 52.4/1:351) = SD 41.2<sup>7</sup>

Here the context is *the first dhyana*, but the Sutta then follows up with each of the other spheres—the remaining three form dhyanas and the first three formless attainments—that is, right to *the sphere of nothingness* (*ākāṅkhaññ'āyatana*). After attaining each or any of these spheres and mastering it, the meditator examines it to be impermanent. If he is successful in doing this, he becomes an arhat; but if he still has some attachment to any of the meditative states (*dhamma*), he becomes a non-returner.

**2.2 FIVE KINDS OF NON-RETURNERS.** A list of five kinds of non-returners is given in **the (Bojjhaṅga) Sīla Sutta** (S 46.3). The Sutta says that when we properly cultivate the seven awakening-factors,<sup>8</sup> we can expect one of two wholesome results:

- (1) we attain final knowledge early in this very life, or
- (2) if not, then we attain final knowledge at the time of death,

or we become one of these five kinds of non-returners, thus:

(3) If one does not attain final knowledge early in this very life or at the time of death, then with the utter destruction of the five lower fetters,<sup>9</sup> one becomes an attainer of nirvana in the intermediate state (*antarā,parinibbāyī*) [D 3:237].

(4) If one does not attain final knowledge early in this very life, or at the time of death, or in the interval, then with the utter destruction of the five lower fetters, one becomes an attainer of nirvana upon landing (*upahacca,parinibbāyī*) [D 3:237].

(5) If one does not attain final knowledge early in this very life, or at the time of death, or in the interval, or upon landing,

<sup>4</sup> *Abhisankhatam abhisañcetaṅgāni*. These two terms are stock indicating a conditioned state in which volition (*cetanā*) is the most important conditioning factor.

<sup>5</sup> The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (i.e. either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as “taints” (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of three influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

<sup>6</sup> “Desire...delight in dharmas” (*dhamma,rāga dhamma,nandī*), as at **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** (M 52.4/1:350), where Comy explains that these 2 terms refer to the desire and lust (*chanda-rāga*), here meaning simply “attachment,” with respect to calm and insight. If one is able to let go of all attachment to calm and insight, one becomes an arhat. If one cannot discard them then one becomes a non-returner and is reborn in the Pure Abodes (MA 3:14). *Dhamma* here clearly does not mean “teaching” or “Teaching,” but meditative states; as such, it is best rendered as “dharma.”

<sup>7</sup> See **Bhāvanā** = SD 15.1 (10.3), “Applying insight to dhyana.”

<sup>8</sup> “Awakening-factors,” *sambojjhaṅga*: mindfulness, dharma-investigation, effort, zest, tranquillity, concentration, equanimity. See **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118) = SD 7.13 §29-40nn.

<sup>9</sup> **The 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*) are: (1) Personality view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*).

then with the utter destruction of the five lower fetters, one becomes an attainer of nirvana without exertion (*asaṅkhāra, parinibbāyī*) [D 3:237].<sup>10</sup>

(6) If one does not attain final knowledge early in this very life, or at the time of death, or in the interval, or upon landing,

then with the utter destruction of the five lower fetters, one becomes an attainer of nirvana with exertion (*sa, saṅkhāra, parinibbāyī*) [D 3:237].<sup>11</sup>

(7) If one does not attain final knowledge early in this very life, or at the time of death, or in the interval, or upon landing, or with exertion,

then with the utter destruction of the five lower fetters, one becomes one bound upstream, heading towards the Akaniṭṭha realm (*uddhamsoto Akaniṭṭha.gāmi*) [D 3:237].

(S 46.3.13/5:69 f)<sup>12</sup>

The (Bojjhaṅga) Sīla Sutta (S 46.3) discusses these five types of non-returners in the same order as the list in **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33), listing them after those who become arhats “at the time of dying.”<sup>13</sup> This order clearly implies that a decreasing rate of spiritual attainment. “This would certainly make it likely,” concludes Peter Harvey, “that *the first*<sup>14</sup> of the five types of non-returners attains *nibbāna* “in between” death and rebirth.”<sup>15</sup> The next three of the non-returners (nos 4-6 above) is seen as one who comes to attain nirvana sometime between halfway in his life-span there and his death. The fifth kind of non-returner is reborn in each of the five Pure Abodes until he attains nirvana in the highest abode. (Pug 17)

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## The Second Discourse on (the Diversity of) Lovingkindness

A 4.126

1 Bhikshus, there are these four persons to be found in the world. What are the four?

### Lovingkindness and the Suddh’āvāsa devas

1.2 (1) Here, bhikshus, a certain person,

with a heart of **lovingkindness**, dwells suffusing one quarter;

so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;

thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself,

he dwells suffusing all the world with lovingkindness

<sup>10</sup> *Asaṅkhāra, parinibbāyī* (D 3:237). BDict: “*Asaṅkhārika-citta*, an Abhidhamma term signifying a ‘state of consciousness arisen spontaneously, ie without previous deliberations, preparation, or prompting by others; hence: ‘un-prepared, unprompted.’ This term and its counterpart (*sasaṅkhārika* [see foll n]), probably go back to a similar distinction in the Suttas [A 4.171; ‘Path’ 184]. See Table I; examples in Vism 14.84 f.” (normalized)

<sup>11</sup> *Sa, saṅkhāra, parinibbāyī* (D 3:237). BDict: “*Sasaṅkhārika-citta* (in Dhs: *sasaṅkhārena*): a prepared, or prompted, state of consciousness, arisen after prior deliberation (eg weighing of motives) or induced by others (command, advice, persuasion)—see Table I.; exemplified in Vism 14.84 f.” (normalized).

<sup>12</sup> S 46.3/5:69 f. For full sutta, see **(Bojjhaṅga) Sīla S** (S 46.3/5:69) = SD 10.15. For a list of suttas mentioning the 5 kinds of non-returners, see **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17 (4.4).

<sup>13</sup> D 33.1.9/3:237.

<sup>14</sup> That is, no (3) in the above list.

<sup>15</sup> P Harvey, *Selfless Mind*, Richmond, UK, 1955:100.

that is vast, grown great [exalted],<sup>16</sup> immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.<sup>17</sup>

1.3 INSIGHT REFRAIN. Whatever states that are therein, by way of form, of feeling, of perception, of formations, of consciousness,<sup>18</sup>

he regards them as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumour, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien [as being other], as breaking up, as empty, as not self.<sup>19</sup>

1.4 NON-RETURN. After death, when the body breaks up, he is reborn in companionship with the gods of the Pure Abodes [Suddh'āvāsa devas].

This rebirth, bhikshus, is not shared with the worldling.<sup>20</sup>

## Compassion and the Suddh'āvāsa devas

2 (2) Further, bhikshus, here, a certain person,  
with a heart of **compassion**, he dwells suffusing one quarter,  
so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;  
thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself,  
he dwells suffusing all the world with compassion  
that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

2.2 INSIGHT REFRAIN. Whatever states that are therein, by way of form, of feeling, of perception, of formations, of consciousness,

he regards them as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumour, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien [as being other], as breaking up, as empty, as not self.

2.3 NON-RETURN. After death, when the body breaks up, he is reborn in companionship with the gods of the Pure Abodes [Suddh'āvāsa devas].

This rebirth, bhikshus, is not shared with the worldling.

## Gladness and the Suddh'āvāsa devas

3 (3) Further, bhikshus, here, a certain person,  
with a heart of **gladness**, he dwells suffusing one quarter,  
so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;  
thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself,  
he dwells suffusing all the world with gladness  
that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

3.2 INSIGHT REFRAIN. Whatever states that are therein, by way of form, of feeling, of perception, of formations, of consciousness,

he regards them as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumour, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien [as being other], as breaking up, as empty, as not self.

<sup>16</sup> The mind “grown great” (*maha-g,gatā*) or exalted perception refers to the mind in dhyana, ie in the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*). See **Catuttha Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.4), SD 24.14 (4).

<sup>17</sup> The recurrence of these last two phrases—“without hate, without ill will”—attests to the fact that lovingkindness is the basis for all the other three abodes, ie, they are actually a refinement of lovingkindness applied on deeper and broader levels.

<sup>18</sup> These are the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*): see SD 17.

<sup>19</sup> “Impermanent...not self,” *aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇdato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato suññato anattato*: as at M 1:435, 500; A 4:422 f; cf A 2:128; Miln 418. Comy says that the marks of suffering are sixfold (*dukkhato rogato gaṇdato sallato aghato ābādhato*), the impermanent twofold (*aniccato palokato*), the not-self threefold (*parato suññato anattato*) (MA 3:146). This refrain (and the rest) shows the attainment of calm (*samatha*), leading to the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*), or “insight preceded by calm” (*samatha,pubbaṅgamā vipassanā*), ie, on emerging from dhyana, one contemplates on it as an object of insight, reflecting it as having arisen through conditions, esp volition: see **Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 649-16/1:435-437) = SD 21.10; see also **Aṭṭhaka,nagara S** (M 52.4/1:350) = SD 41.2, where Comy says that this is *samatha,pubbaṅgamā vipassanā*; see **(Yuganaddha) Paṭipadā S** (A 4.170/2:157) = SD 41.5. See Intro (3.2).

<sup>20</sup> *Ayam, bhikkhave, upapatti asādhāraṇā puthujjanehi.*

3.3 NON-RETURN. After death, when the body breaks up, he is reborn in companionship with the gods of the Pure Abodes [Suddh'āvāsa devas].

This rebirth, bhikshus, is not shared with the worldling.

### Equanimity and the Suddh'āvāsa devas

4 (4) Furthermore, bhikshus, here, a certain person,  
 a heart of **equanimity**, he dwells suffusing one quarter,  
 so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;  
 thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself,  
 he dwells suffusing all the world with equanimity  
 that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

4.2 INSIGHT REFRAIN. Whatever states that are therein, by way of form, of feeling, of perception, of formations, of consciousness,

he regards them as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, as a tumour, as a barb, as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien [as being other], as breaking up, as empty, as not self.

4.3 NON-RETURN. After death, when the body breaks up, he is reborn in companionship with the gods of the Pure Abodes [Suddh'āvāsa devas].

This rebirth, bhikshus, is not shared with the worldling.

These, bhikshus, are the four kinds of individuals existing in the world.

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