Introduction

1 The (Anicca) Khandha Sutta (S 25.10)—dealing with the impermanence of the 5 aggregates—is the last of a series of 10 closely parallel suttas, forming the Okkanti Vagga (the Chapter on the Descent), that is, chapter 25 of the Saṁyutta. All these suttas mention two types of individuals who enter into “the certainty of rightness” (sammatta, niyāma), that is, the transcendent noble eightfold path, or the path of streamwinning (sotāpatti, magga).

These 10 suttas give the best definition (albeit a brief one) of the truth-follower and the faith-follower that we have in the Pali Canon. The difference between the two is that of their dominant spiritual faculty (indriya). The one who has strong faith, who resolves (adhimuccati) on the impermanence of the factors listed in the ten suttas, is a faith-follower (saddhā’nusārī). The one who focusses on wisdom, who gains understanding of the impermanence of the same factors, is a truth-follower (dhammānusārī).

2 Both the faith-follower and the truth-follower are declared as being certain of not passing away in this life without having realized the fruit of streamwinning. In either case, when the follower knows and sees for himself the reality of impermanence, he becomes a streamwinner. As such, the Okkanti Vagga does not distinguish the character of the two as streamwinners.

3 The Kīṭāgiri Sutta (M 70), however, states that the streamwinner who is strong in faith, on attaining fruition, is called “liberated by faith” (saddhā,vimutta), while the one cultivated in wisdom is said to be “view-attained” (diṭṭhi-p, patta), that is, has gained right view (although he has yet to fully realize the nature of non-self, which is the domain of the arhat). The Sutta mentions a third class—the “body-witness” (kāya,sakkhi)—that is, those who can meditate to reach the formless attainments. The body-witness, however, is not a separate class but a genus, that is, it applies generically (pariyāyena) to all the saints who experience the formless attainments leading, in due course, to arhathood.
The (Impermanent) Aggregates Discourse

The 5 aggregates are impermanent

1. Bhikshus, form is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise;
2. feeling is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise;
3. perception is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise;
4. formations are impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise;
5. consciousness is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise;

The faith-follower

4. Bhikshus, one who has faith thus, who firmly believes these truths [is convinced of these truths], is called a faith-follower.

9. He is descending into the certainty of rightness [the fixed course to rightness], descending into the plane of true individuals; he has gone beyond the plane of the worldlings.

The truth-follower

5. Bhikshus, one who accepts these truths after pondering over them with some wisdom thus, is called a truth-follower.

He is descending into the certainty of rightness [the fixed course to rightness], descending into the plane of true individuals; he has gone beyond the plane of the worldlings.

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He is incapable of doing any intentional deed by which he might be reborn in hell, or in the animal birth, or in the ghost realm. He is incapable of dying without having attained the fruit of streamwinning.

The streamwinner

6 One who knows and sees these truths thus is called a streamwinner, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of liberation, bound for awakening.

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15 Avinīpāta, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of vinīpāta, “the world of suffering”, another name for the 4 woeful courses (duggati) or the 4 lower worlds (apāya) (Vism 13.92 t). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (pañca,gati) (D 3:234=33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (niraya), the animal birth (tirachāna,yoni), the departed [ghost] realm (pitti,visaya), the human world (manussa) and the heavenly world (deva). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (asura,kāya) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (sugati). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika & Bodhi (tr), Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, 1999:14-19.

16 Yo bhikkhave ime dhamme evaṁ jānāti evaṁ passati ayaṁ vuccati sotāpanno avinīpāta,dhammo niyato sambodhi,parāyano ti. “This statement makes it clear how the stream-enterer [streamwinner] differs from those on the way to streamwinning. The faith-follower accepts the teachings on trust (with a limited degree of understanding), the Dhamma-follower through investigation; but the stream-enterer has known and seen the teachings directly. I read Se: evam jānāti evam passati.” (S:B 1099 n270)