

# 19

## (Dasaka) Sāriputta Sutta

The (Tens) Discourse on Sāriputta | A 10.7

Theme: Sāriputta's experience of samadhi

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2017, 2018

### 1 Summary and highlights

**1.1 SUMMARY.** The **(Dasaka) Sāriputta Sutta** (A 10.7) records the elder Ānanda's questioning the elder Sāriputta about a meditator in thought-free samadhi (that is, dhyana) is still "**percipient**" [§1.2]. Sāriputta replies that it is possible [§2]. When Ānanda asks how this is possible [§3], Sāriputta replies that this is the case for one who has attained nirvana [§4-5].

**1.2 SIGNIFICANCE.** The teaching of **the (Dasaka) Sāriputta Sutta** (A 10.7) repeats that of **the (Dasaka) Samādhi Sutta** (A 10.6) [SD 53.18] from §§1.2-5, that is, right to the end of the latter. However, Sāriputta goes on to relate his own dhyanic experience [§6], explaining how he is percipient despite being in dhyana [§§8-9].

**NOTE:** If this is your first time reading this, it is helpful to right away go to **SD 53.18** (3) and be familiar with the "Related suttas," and see how this Sutta is related to the other 4 in this set of suttas.

### 2 How to study this Sutta

**2.1 The introductory notes** for this Sutta (A 10.7) are the same as those for **the (Dasaka) Samādhi Sutta** (A 10.6) [SD 93.18 (2)], which should be read or reviewed with this Sutta—**the (Dasaka) Sāriputta Sutta** (A 10.7), which only differs from A 10.6 in its introduction [§1] and Sāriputta's testimony [§§6-9].

### 3 Sāriputta's testimony

**3.1 ĀNANDA QUESTIONS SĀRIPUTTA.** **The (Dasaka) Sāriputta Sutta** (A 10.7) [3.1] is of special interest because it is a record of Sāriputta's personal testimony of dhyanic experience. The Sutta opens with Ānanda asking Sāriputta about a meditator who, while not perceiving any meditative states can still be **percipient**. When Sāriputta answers yes, Ānanda further asks Sāriputta, "But how was the venerable Sāriputta percipient at that time?" Sāriputta explains, *from his own experience*, with additional information not found in the Buddha's answer.

#### **3.2 SĀRIPUTTA'S EXPLANATION**

**3.2.1 The (Dasaka) Sāriputta Sutta** closes with this passage:

[Ānanda:]

**7** "But how was the venerable Sāriputta **percipient** at that time [during dhyana]?"

[Sāriputta:]

**8** "Avuso, as soon as one perception falls away, another arises, thus: 'The cessation of existence is nirvana! The cessation of existence is nirvana!'

9 Avuso, just as with the fire of burning twigs, as soon as a tongue of flame falls away another arises,<sup>1</sup>

even so, avuso, as soon as one perception falls away, another arises.<sup>2</sup>

Just at that time, I was *percipient*, thus: ‘The cessation of existence is nirvana!’<sup>3</sup>

(A 10.7,7-9/5:9 f), SD 53.19

**3.2.2** In contemporary terms, what §8 is saying is that the mental process of perception is “seeing” the rise and fall of the mind-moments like the on’s and off’s (1’s and 0’s) of digital bits. This occurs as what, in Abhidhamma, is called a “pure mind-door perceptual process” or “bare-mind cognitive process” (*suddha mano.dvāra,vīthi*).<sup>4</sup> The mind works all by itself without any distraction from the 5 sense-doors.<sup>5</sup>

### **3.2.3 Bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ**

**3.2.3.1** The Commentary explains the **perception** process, thus: “By review knowledge, it is said that this attainment was accompanied by mind, thus: ‘On that occasion, avuso, I was percipient with the perception of fruition-attainment.’” (AA 5:2 f). Such a perception is present in the dhyanas and formless attainments but not in the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*).

“**Fruition attainment**” (*phala.samāpatti*) is a meditative state in which a noble disciple enters into supramundane dhyana with nirvana as the object. The meditator experiences the bliss of nirvana here. The quality of experience depends on the level of sainthood of the noble disciple [2.2.2.1].

**3.2.3.2** What does the phrase, “**The cessation of existence is nirvana!**” (*bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ*) mean? The Commentary explains that this is the perception that comes with the arhat’s attainment of cessation (*phala,samāpatti*) [2.2.2.1], when he reviews his attainment. Joyfully, he reflects that all karma, rebirth and suffering have come to a total end for him.

Traditionally, the arhat’s review knowledge is stated in these words. Here again, we must understand that this is a statement after the fact—for our benefit. His **review knowledge** occurs as follows: “He directly knew: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what is to be done, there is no more of this state of being.’”<sup>6</sup>

**3.2.3.3** Although this sentence seems to suggest some kind of thought, it is not so. It is what we may call an “affective” state: pure feeling, a direct experience. It is like when we are looking at a glorious sunset, and we are really absorbed in all its glory: we just “feel” its glorious joy. However, after the event, we may report it to others, “Oh yes, what a beautiful sunset!”

Or, when we have reached the end of a long journey, and we are really joyful to be home. On seeing our home and entering it, we are simply elated. Then, we tell our family: “It’s really good to be home!” That elation, at its most powerful level, is thought-free; it is pure joy.

— — —

<sup>1</sup> *Seyyathā’pi āvuso sakalika’ggissa jhāyamānassa aññā’va acci uppajjati, aññā’va acci nirujjhati.*

<sup>2</sup> *Evam eva kho me āvuso bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ ti aññā’va saññā uppajjati, aññā’va saññā nirujjhati.*

<sup>3</sup> *Bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ ti saññā ca panāham āvuso tasmim samaye ahoṣin’ti.*

<sup>4</sup> SD 19.14 (4). The worldly 6-stage perceptual process, on the other hand, results in thinking (*vitakka*) and mental proliferation (*papañca*): SD 17.3 (1.4).

<sup>5</sup> On the 5-door cognitive process, see SD 19.14 (2).

<sup>6</sup> See **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203) n, SD 7.14.

## (Dasaka) Sāriputta Sutta

### The (Tens) Discourse on Sāriputta

A 10.7

1 (At Sāvattḥī.)

Then, the venerable Ānanda approached the venerable Sāriputta, saluted him and sat down at one side. Sitting at one side, the venerable Ānanda said to the venerable **Sāriputta**:

1.2 “**Can it be**,<sup>7</sup> avuso Sāriputta, that a monk<sup>8</sup> attain samadhi in such a manner that:<sup>9</sup>

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (1) he would not perceive <u>earth</u> as [in] earth;  | <i>n’eva paṭhaviyaṃ paṭhavi,saññī assa</i> <sup>10</sup>                 |
| (2) he would not perceive <u>water</u> as water;   | <i>na āpasmim āpo,saññī assa</i>   |
| (3) he would not perceive <u>fire</u> as fire;   | <i>na tejasmim tejo,saññī assa</i>                                       |
| (4) he would not perceive <u>wind</u> as wind;   | <i>na vāyasmim vāyo,saññī assa</i>                                       |
| (5) he would not perceive <u>the base of infinite space</u> as the base of infinite space; [9]   | <i>na ākāśānañc’āyatane ākāśānañc’āyatana’saññī assa</i>                 |
| (6) he would not perceive <u>the base of infinite consciousness</u> as the base of infinite consciousness;                               | <i>na viññāṇañc’āyatane viññāṇañc’āyatana,saññī assa</i>                 |
| (7) he would not perceive <u>the base of nothingness</u> as the base of nothingness;   | <i>na ākiñcaññ’āyatane ākiñcaññ’āyatana,saññī assa</i>                   |
| (8) he would not perceive <u>the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception</u> as the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; | <i>na n’eva,saññā,nāsaññāyatane n’eva,saññā,nāsaññāyatana,saññī assa</i> |
| (9) he would not perceive <u>this world</u> as this world;   | <i>na idha loke idha loka,saññī assa</i>                                 |
| (10) he would not perceive <u>other worlds</u> as other worlds;  | <i>na para,loke para,loka,saññī assa</i>                                 |
| —and yet he would still be <b>percipient?</b> ”  | <i>saññī ca pana assāti</i>  |

### Sāriputta’s reply

2 “It can be, Ānanda, that a monk attains samadhi in such a manner that:

- (1) he would not perceive earth as [in] earth;
- (2) he would not perceive water as water;
- (3) he would not perceive fire as fire;
- (4) he would not perceive wind as wind;
- (5) he would not perceive the base of infinite space as the base of infinite space;
- (6) he would not perceive the base of infinite consciousness as the base of infinite consciousness;

<sup>7</sup> “Can it be (that),” *siyā*: see n on *siyā* ... *assa* below.

<sup>8</sup> Here, “a monk” (*bhikkhu*) refers to any meditator: see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3A) n, SD 13.3.

<sup>9</sup> *Siyā nu kho bhante bhikkhuno tathā,rūpo samādhi,paṭilābho yathā.*

<sup>10</sup> On the Pali form “Can it be ... (that) he would,” *siyā* ... *assa*, see Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 1963, 1974:86 f.

- (7) he would not perceive the base of nothingness as the base of nothingness;  
 (8) he would not perceive the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception;  
 (9) he would not perceive this world as this world;  
 (10) he would not perceive other worlds as other worlds;  
 —and yet he would still be **percipient**.”

### Ānanda’s 2<sup>nd</sup> question (to Sāriputta)

**3** “But **how**, avuso Sāriputta, **can it be said** that a monk attains samadhi in such a manner that:<sup>11</sup>

- (1) he would not perceive earth as earth;  
 (2) he would not perceive water as water;  
 (3) he would not perceive fire as fire;  
 (4) he would not perceive wind as wind;  
 (5) he would not perceive the base of the infinity of space as the base of the infinity of space;  
 (6) he would not perceive the base of infinite consciousness as the base of infinite consciousness;  
 (7) he would not perceive the base of nothingness as the base of nothingness;  
 (8) he would not perceive the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception;  
 (9) he would not perceive this world as this world;  
 (10) he would not perceive other worlds as other worlds;  
 —and yet he would still be percipient?”

### Sāriputta’s answer

**4** “Here, Ānanda, a monk<sup>12</sup> is one who perceives thus:<sup>13</sup>

‘This is peaceful [real], this is sublime,<sup>14</sup> that is, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, **nirvana**.’<sup>15</sup>

**5** This is how, Ānanda, it can be that a monk attain samadhi in such a manner that:

- (1) he would not perceive earth as earth;  
 (2) he would not perceive water as water;  
 (3) he would not perceive fire as fire;  
 (4) he would not perceive wind as wind;  
 (5) he would not perceive the base of infinite space as the base of infinite space;  
 (6) he would not perceive the base of infinite consciousness as the base of infinite consciousness;

<sup>11</sup> *Yathā,katham̐ pana bhante siyā bhikkhuno tathā,rūpo samādhi,paṭilābho, yathā ...*

<sup>12</sup> See §1.2 n on “a monk.”

<sup>13</sup> *Idh’ānanda bhikkhu evaṃ saññī hoti*. For an explanation of the foll passage, see SD 53.18 (2.2.2).

<sup>14</sup> *Santaṃ ... paṇitaṃ*, as at **M 102**,17/2:235, **106**,6/2:263; A 5:110. For the whole formula, see foll n.

<sup>15</sup> *Etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇitaṃ yad idaṃ sabba,saṅkhāra,samatho sabbūpadhi,paṭinissaggo taṅha-k,khayo virāgo nirodho nibbānan ti*. Here, *saṅkhārā* is pl, reflecting the unawakened state; but is sg (*saṅkhāro*) when it describes an arhat’s mind: see **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,13-15/1:301) + SD 40a.9 (2.4). For this stock as ref to *nirvana*: **M 64**,9.3/1:-436,34 (SD 21.10); **A 3.32**/1:133,1, **9.36**/4:423,3+21, 424,18, 425,11 pe, 426,4 pe, **10.6**/5:8,8, **10.60**/5:110,23, 111,1, **11.7**/5:319,15, **11.8**/5:320,21, **11.9**/5:322,15, **11.19**/5:354,9, **11.20**/5:355,27, **11.21**/5:357,1, **11.22**/5:358,14; **Nm** 2:424; **Miln** 325. Not ref to nirvana: **M 102**/2:230,18, 231,17, 235,18+20+23 (all pe), 236×2, 237: all to *diṭṭhi* and *kappa*, **106**/2:263,18 (*ākiñcaññāyatana*), 264,11 (*n’eva,saññā.nāsaññāyatana*), **M 152**/3:299,12+24+33 (all *upekhā*), 300,3+6+ 9+12+ 15+19+2 (all *upekhā*); It **49**/2.2.12/44; **Pm** 1:159.

- (7) he would not perceive the base of nothingness as the base of nothingness;  
 (8) he would not perceive the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception;  
 (9) he would not perceive this world as this world;  
 (10) he would not perceive other worlds as other worlds;  
 —and yet he would still be **percipient**.

### Sāriputta's meditative experience

6 Once, avuso Ānanda, I was dwelling right here in Blind Men's Forest<sup>16</sup> outside Sāvattḥī. Therein, I attained such samadhi that:

- (1) I was not percipient of earth as earth;  
 (2) I was not percipient of water as water;  
 (3) I was not percipient of fire as fire;  
 (4) I was not percipient of wind as wind;  
 (5) I was not percipient of the base of infinite space as the base of infinite space;  
 (6) I was not percipient of the base of infinite consciousness as the base of infinite consciousness;  
 (7) he would not perceive the base of nothingness as the base of nothingness;  
 (8) I was not percipient of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception as the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception;  
 (9) I was not percipient of this world as this world;  
 (10) I was not percipient of other worlds as other worlds;  
 —and yet I was still **percipient**.”

7 "But how was the venerable Sāriputta *percipient* at that time?"

8 "Avuso, as soon as one perception falls away, another arises, thus: 'The cessation of existence is nirvana! The cessation of existence is nirvana!'.<sup>17</sup>

9 Avuso, just as with the fire of burning twigs, as soon as a tongue of flame falls away another arises,<sup>18</sup>

even so, avuso, as soon as one perception falls away, another arises.<sup>19</sup> [10]

Just at that time, I was percipient, thus: 'The cessation of existence is nirvana!'"<sup>20</sup>

— evaṃ —

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<sup>16</sup> SD 28.13 (3).

<sup>17</sup> *Bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ, bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ'ti kho me āvuso aññā'va saññā uppajjati, aññā'va saññā nirujjhati.* Comy explains *bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ* thus: "By review knowledge, it is said that this attainment was accompanied by mind, thus: On that occasion, avuso, I was percipient with the perception of fruition attainment." (AA 5:2 f). Such a perception is present in the dhyanas and formless attainments but not in the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*). See SD 53.18 (2.2.3)

<sup>18</sup> *Seyyathā'pi āvuso sakalika'ggissa jhāyamānassa aññā'va acci uppajjati, aññā'va acci nirujjhati.*

<sup>19</sup> *Evam eva kho me āvuso bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ'ti aññā'va saññā uppajjati, aññā'va saññā nirujjhati.*

<sup>20</sup> *Bhava,nirodho nibbānaṃ'ti saññā ca panāhaṃ āvuso tasmim̐ samaye ahoṣin'ti.*