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Saññā Manasikāra Sutta 3

The 3rd Discourse on Attending to Perception | A 11.9 [A:B 11.8]

Theme: A meditator in thought-free samadhi is still “attentive”

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Summary and highlights

1.1 SUMMARY. The Saññā Manasikāra Suttas 3 (A 11.9) record the elder Ānanda’s questioning the Buddha about a meditator in thought-free samadhi (that is, dhyana) is still “**attentive**.” [§1.2]. The Buddha replies that it is possible [§2]. When Ānanda asks how this is possible [§3], the Buddha replies that the noble disciple in dhyana is able to “perceive” nirvana, that is, enjoy its bliss [§§4-5].

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 The Saññā Manasikāra Sutta 3 (A 11.8) is the 5th and last in the set of 5 suttas where Ānanda questions the Buddha and Sāriputta about the nature of the mind during dhyana—which is what *samādhi* refers to in this Sutta and the related ones. This Sutta is unique in the set of 5 Suttas—where all of them use the verb “perceive”; only A 11.9 uses “attend to” [§1.2]. Another unique feature of the Sutta is that it mentions the 10 sense-bases [§1.2], which are not mentioned in any of the other 4 Suttas.

1.2.2 The 10 sense-bases

1.2.2.1 While the **Saññā Manasikāra Suttas 1 + 2** (A 11.7 + 11.8) form a “mirrored sutta,” the **Saññā Manasikāra Sutta 3** (A 11.9) forms a stand-alone sutta dealing with the same topic, except that the latter has an extra set of the 10 sense-bases in Ānanda’s question [§1.2], and also that it uses the phrase “would not attend” instead of “would not perceive,” as in the other 4 suttas.

1.2.2.2 From the suttas—and from personal experience of dhyana meditation—we know that the 5 physical senses (*pañc’indriya*) (the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) “shut down.” All knowing and thinking as we know it in the world ceases. Hence, it is said, one “would not attend” (*na manasi kareyya*) [1.2]. However, the mind is still “**attentive**” to one “state,” that is, the experience of nirvana as being “peaceful and sublime.” [§4]

1.3 The introductory notes for the Saññā Manasikāra Sutta 3 (A 11.9) are the same as those of the **(Dasaka) Samādhi Sutta** (A 10.6) (2), which should be read or reviewed with this Sutta (A 11.9).

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

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Saññā Manasikāra Sutta 3

The 3rd Discourse on Attending to Perception

A 11.9

Ānanda's 1st question (to the Buddha)

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

1.2 “**Can it be**,¹ bhante, that a monk² attain samadhi in such a manner that:³

(1) he would not attend to <u>the eye</u> ; ⁴	<i>na cakkhuṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(2) he would not attend to <u>form</u> ;	<i>na rūpaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(3) he would not attend to <u>the ear</u> ;	<i>na sotaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(4) he would not attend to <u>sound</u> ;	<i>na saddaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(5) he would not attend to <u>the nose</u> ;	<i>na ghānaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(6) he would not attend to <u>smell</u> ;	<i>na gandhaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(7) he would not attend to <u>the tongue</u> ;	<i>na jivhaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(8) he would not attend to <u>taste</u> ;	<i>na rasaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(9) he would not attend to <u>the body</u> ;	<i>na kāyaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(10) he would not attend to <u>touch</u> [feeling];	<i>na phoṭṭhabbaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(11) he would not attend to <u>earth</u> ;	<i>na paṭhaviṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(12) he would not attend to <u>water</u> ;	<i>na āpaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(13) he would not attend to <u>fire</u> ;	<i>na tejaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(14) he would not attend to <u>wind</u> ;	<i>na vāyaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(15) he would not attend to <u>the base of infinite space</u> ;	<i>na ākāśānañc'āyatanaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(16) he would not attend to <u>the base of infinite consciousness</u> ;	<i>na viññāṇaṃc'āyatanaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(17) he would not attend to <u>the base of nothingness</u> ;	<i>na ākiñcaññ'āyatanaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(18) he would not attend to <u>the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception</u> ;	<i>na n'eva,saññā,nâsaññâyatanaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(19) he would not attend to <u>this world</u> ;	<i>na idha lokaṃ manasi kareyya</i>
(20) he would not attend to <u>other worlds</u> ;	<i>na paralokaṃ manasi kareyya</i>

¹ *Siyā nu kho bhante bhikkhuno tathā,rūpo samādhi,paṭilābho, yathā ...* . “Can it be (that),” *siyā*: see n ad loc in **Saññā Manasikāra S 1** (A 11/7), SD 53.20a.

² Here, “a monk” (*bhikkhu*) refers to any meditator: see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3A) n, SD 13.3.

³ *Siyā nu kho bhante bhikkhuno tathā,rūpo samādhi,paṭilābho yathā.*

⁴ On the inclusion of (1)-(10)—the 5 sense-faculties and their respective 5 sense-objects, ie the 10 sense-bases (*āyatana*)—see (1.2.2).

(21) and so, too, he would not attend to whatever that is seen, heard, sensed, known, attained [encountered], sought after, examined by the mind⁵;
—and yet he would still be **attentive?**⁶

The Buddha's reply

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

- (1) he would not attend to *the eye*;
 - (2) he would not attend to *form*;
 - (3) he would not attend to *the ear*;
 - (4) he would not attend to *sound*;
 - (5) he would not attend to *the nose*;
 - (6) he would not attend to *smell*;
 - (7) he would not attend to *the tongue*;
 - (8) he would not attend to *taste*;
 - (9) he would not attend to *the body*;
 - (10) he would not attend to *touch* [feeling];⁷
 - (11) he would not attend to *earth*;
 - (12) he would not attend to *water*;
 - (13) he would not attend to *fire*; [322]
 - (14) he would not attend to *wind*;
 - (15) he would not attend to *the base of infinite space*;
 - (16) he would not attend to *the base of infinite consciousness*;
 - (17) he would not attend to *the base of nothingness*;
 - (18) he would not attend to *the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception*;
 - (19) he would not attend to *this world*;
 - (20) he would not attend to *other worlds*;
 - (21) and so, too, regarding whatever that is seen, heard, sensed, known, attained [encountered], sought after, examined by the mind;
- and yet he would still be **attentive.**”

⁵ *Yam p'idaṃ diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattaṃ pariyesitaṃ anuvicariṭaṃ manasā tam pi na manasi kareyya.* On this phrase, see **Saññā Manasikāra S** (A 11.7,1.2(11)), SD 53.20. On the phrase, “what is seen ... examined by the mind” (*diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattaṃ pariyesitaṃ anuvicariṭaṃ manasā*), see SD 3.13 (5.2). On *diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ*, see **Diṭṭha suta muta viññāta**, SD 53.5.

⁶ *Manasi ca pana kareyyāti*

⁷ Note that there is *no* attending to “thought” or “knowing” mentioned following this. This confirms the absence of these activities during dhyana: see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2).

Ānanda's 2nd question (to the Buddha)

3 “But **how**, bhante, **can it be said** that a monk attains samadhi in such a manner that:⁸

- (1) he would not attend to the eye;
- (2) he would not attend to form;
- (3) he would not attend to the ear;
- (4) he would not attend to sound;
- (5) he would not attend to the nose;
- (6) he would not attend to smell;
- (7) he would not attend to tonque;
- (8) he would not attend to taste;
- (9) he would not attend to the body;
- (10) he would not attend to touch;

- (11) he would not attend to earth;
- (12) he would not attend to water;
- (13) he would not attend to fire;
- (14) he would not attend to wind;

- (15) he would not attend to the base of infinite space;
- (16) he would not attend to the base of infinite consciousness;
- (17) he would not attend to the base of nothingness;
- (18) he would not attend to the base of neither perception-nor-non-perception;

- (19) he would not attend to this world;
- (20) he would not attend to other worlds;

- (21) and so, too, regarding whatever that is seen, heard, sensed, known, attained [encountered], sought after, examined by the mind;

—and yet he would still be **attentive**?”

The Buddha's answer

4 “Here, Ānanda, a monk⁹ is one who perceives thus:¹⁰

‘This is peaceful [real], this is sublime,¹¹ that is, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, **nirvana**.’¹²

⁸ *Yathā,kathaṃ pana bhante siyā bhikkhuno tathā,rūpo samādhi,paṭilābho, yathā ...*

⁹ See §1.2 n on “a monk.”

¹⁰ *Idh'ānanda bhikkhu evaṃ saññī hoti.*

¹¹ *Santaṃ ... paṇītaṃ*, as at **M 102**,17/2:235, **106**,6/2:263; A 5:110. For the whole formula, see foll n.

¹² *Etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇītaṃ yad idaṃ sabba,saṅkhāra,samatho sabbūpadhi,paṭinissaggo taṇha-k,khayo virāgo nirodho nibbānan ti.* Here, *saṅkhāra* 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**

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

- (1) he would not attend to the eye;
- (2) he would not attend to form;
- (3) he would not attend to the ear;
- (4) he would not attend to sound;
- (5) he would not attend to the nose;
- (6) he would not attend to smell;
- (7) he would not attend to the tongue;
- (8) he would not attend to taste;
- (9) he would not attend to the body;
- (10) he would not attend to touch;

- (11) he would not attend to earth;
- (12) he would not attend to water;
- (13) he would not attend to fire;
- (14) he would not attend to wind;

- (15) he would not attend to the base of infinite space;
- (16) he would not attend to the base of infinite consciousness;
- (17) he would not attend to the base of nothingness;
- (18) he would not attend to the base of neither perception-nor-non-perception;

- (19) he would not attend to this world;
- (20) he would not attend to other worlds;

- (21) and so, too, regarding whatever that is seen, heard, sensed, known, attained [encountered], sought after, examined by the mind;

—and yet he would still be **attentive**.”

— evaṃ —

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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.