

5

(Brahmā) Tissa Sutta

The Discourse on (Brahma) Tissa • **A 7.53** [A:Be 7.56]

Be **Tissa Brahmā Sutta** The Tissa Brahmā Discourse or **(Sattaka) Tissa Sutta** The (Sevens) Tissa Sutta

Theme: The knowledge of the gods is limited

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2019

Note on numbering. The suttas' internal numbers do *not* follow the PTS ed, and is meant to facilitate teaching and learning the suttas. The smaller numbers in (angle brackets>) refer to the 1st occurrence of the passage. They not only show recurrence, but also may highlight new developments.

1 Sutta summaries and highlights

1.1 SUMMARIES AND BACKGROUNDS

1.1.1 Overviews

1.1.1.1 This chapter (SD 54.5) contains the translations of 2 related suttas on the devas' knowledge of the stages of the path in others, especially the monastics. Here is a short list of the 2 Suttas stating where the Buddha is located, and their references:

				<u>Notes</u>
(Brahmā) Tissa Sutta	A 7.53	Mount Vulture Peak	SD 54.5	[1.1.2; 1.2.1]
(Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta	A 6.34	Jeta,vana	SD 54.5(4)	[1.1.3; 1.2.2]

1.1.1.2 Both Suttas relate a conversation between Moggallāna and brahma Tissa, in his previous life a monk and pupil of the elder (AA 4:40,9). The conversation centres on the stages of the path and on awakening. While **A 7.53** is about the various ways we can attain the path (the 7 kinds of persons) [1.2.1], **A 6.34** is about streamwinning of the brahmas themselves [1.2.2]. Here is **a list** of the 2 Suttas:

		<u>Moggallāna as Tissa about:</u>		
(Brahmā) Tissa Sutta	A 7.53	devas knowing the attainments by others	SD 54.5	[1.2.1]
(Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta	A 6.34	brahmas attaining streamwinning	SD 54.5(4)	[1.2.2]

1.1.2 Background of A 7.53

1.1.2.1 The Sutta Commentary to **the (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta** (A 7.53) explains the phrase, “well freed without any substrate remaining” (*anupādisesa suvimutta*) [§2.3] as referring to the 500 nuns of Mahā,-pajāpatī's following, who have been liberated without leaving any residue of clinging (*upādāna,sesam aṭṭhapetvā*) (AA 4:40,1). This means that these nuns have all gained the path. [1.1.2.3]

1.1.2.2 These 500 nuns were erstwhile partners or wives¹ of the 500 monks, that is, 250 Sakya youths and 250 Koliya youths. According to the Commentary on **the Mahā,samaya Sutta** (D 20), when the Buddha resolved the Rohinī conflict (the impending battle over the dwindling waters of the Rohinī) between

¹ The word here is *pāda,paricārikā*, on which see SD 54.8 ().???

the Sakyas and the Koliyas, they, out of gratitude for their lives, each clan instructed 250 of their youths to renounce as monks.²

The erstwhile wives of these 500 monks were, of course, at a loss to be widowed, as it were, so suddenly. Around that time, too, Mahā,pājāpatī Gotamī (the Buddha's foster-mother), following her husband Suddhodana's death, had approached the Buddha to be ordained as a nun but her request was initially rejected. It was at this point that the 500 women approached Mahā,pājāpatī, informing her of their wish to become nuns, too.³

1.1.2.3 The 500 nuns gained the path when they have listened to the teaching of **the Nandak'ovāda Sutta** (M 146)⁴ by the arhat Nandaka.⁵ By "gained the path," is meant that "even the least advanced of those 500 nuns is a streamwinner ... " (M 146,27), SD 66.12. The Commentary adds that *all* of them, even the one with least spiritual quality attain streamwinning, while the others attain what they have aspired to, whether it is to become once-returners, non-returners or arhats (MA 5,10-19).

1.1.3 Background of A 6.34

1.1.3.1 Probably, the events of **the (Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta** (A 6.34) follows soon after those of **the (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta** (A 7.53) [1.2.3]. In **A 7.53**, after 2 deities tell the Buddha of the path-attainments of the 500 nuns—some are "freed" and others are "well freed without any substrate remaining" [§2]. In simple terms, we may understand the 2 terms as referring to the stage of the path that the nuns have attained, as follows:

- (1) "**freed**" (*vimutta*) [§2.2] refers to streamwinning, once-returning and non-returning;
- (2) "**well freed without any substrate remaining**" (*anupādi,sesa suvimutta*) [§2.3] refers to arhathood [1.1.4].

In category (1), the streamwinners, the once-returners and the non-returners are generically known as "**learners**" (*sekha*), since they are truly learning and understanding the 4 noble truths through the path-training (*sikkha*), that is, the 3 trainings.⁶ They still need to attain arhathood, and will do so in no time, certainly within 7 lives.⁷

Category (2), the arhats, are said to be "**non-learners**" (*asekha*), in the sense of "adept" or "graduate," those who have completed the path and are accomplished in fully understanding the 4 noble truths;⁸ hence, they are awakened and freed from suffering.⁹

These 2 basic categories, of course, well describe the attainments of the 500 nuns [1.1.2.3]. It should also be noted that the "500 nuns" here are led by **Mahā,pājāpatī Gotamī**; hence, she is also included in the "500," at least here, in reference to their path-attainments.

² See SD 53.4 (3.3).

³ See SD 53.4 (2.3.2; 2.3.3.3).

⁴ J 2:392,12-16. For **Nandak'ovāda S** (M 146), see SD 66.12.

⁵ Nandaka was, in his previous life, a king and the 500 nuns were his concubines. To prevent mind-readers from misconstruing his teaching the 500 nuns as a sign of his continuing attachment to them, he initially refuses to instruct them although it is his turn to do so. The Buddha, however, has faith in him, and instructs him to perform his duty, which he does, and the nuns benefit greatly. (MA 5,6-20)

⁶ On the 3 trainings (*sikkha-t,taya*) in moral virtue, concentration and wisdom, see **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.-10c; **Sīla samādhī paññā**, SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).

⁷ On "the 7 lives" (*satta-k,khattu,parama*), see SD 10.16 (11.4.3).

⁸ On the full mastery of the 4 noble truths, see SD 1.1 (5+6).

⁹ On the arhat, see SD 10.16 (14).

A 7.2.1.3	Āṅuttara Nikāya 7, Sattaka Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 1, Avyākata Vagga 3
A 6.1.4.4	Āṅuttara Nikāya 6, Chakka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 4, Devatā Vagga 4

1.1.3.2 From the suttas and Commentaries, we know that **the order of nuns** (*bhikkhuṇī,saṅgha*), beginning with Mahā,pajāpatī and the 500 nuns, was formed in the 6th year, which is well within the 1st 20-25 years of the Buddha’s ministry—this is known as “**the 1st period**.”¹⁰ This early period is significant in that the Buddha mainly teaches those who are ready for awakening, and numerous of those who meet the Buddha, even for the first time, easily understand the Dharma and become arhats in great numbers, or at least the learners’ path [1.1.3.1].

Another interesting and important feature of the 1st period is that the Buddha’s teachings are, as a rule, simple and specific, often specially tailored for the audience, even the individual listener. The 1st period teachings rarely use technical terms (tt); in other words, the expressions used—such as *anupādi,sesa* [1.1.4]—are used in their basic senses, not in the more fixed developed or technical or the “2nd period,” or post-Buddha times.¹¹

1.1.4 The meaning of *anupādi,sesa*

1.1.4.1 At the opening of **the (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta** (A 7.53), the second deity tells the Buddha that some of the 500 nuns are “**well freed without any substrate remaining**” (*anupādi,sesa suvimutta*) [§2.3]. In other occurrences of the term, it has the technical sense of “remainderless (*anupādi,sesa*)” nirvana-element, such as in the phrase, “pass(ed) away into the remainderless nirvana-element,” found in the following late canonical texts:

- ***anupādi,sesāya nibbana,dhātuyā parinibbāyati*** (present tense)—

Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta	D 16/2:108,33 f, 136,5, ¹² 135,13	SD 9
Pāsādika Sutta	D 29/3:135,13	SD 40a.6
Cunda Sutta	U 8.5/85,10 = D 16/2:136,5	(SD 9)
(Tathāgata) Loka Sutta	It 4.13/121,21	SD 15.7(2)
- ***anupādi,sesāya nibbana,dhātuyā parinibbuto*** (present perfect tense)—

Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta	D 16/2:140,28, 141,7	SD 9
Samvejanīya Sutta	A 4.118/2:120,32 = D 16/2:140,28	(SD 9)
Bhūmi,cāla Sutta	A 8.70/4:313,20 = D 16/2:108,33 f	(SD 9)
- ***anupādi,sesāya nibbana,dhātuyā parinibbāyanti*** (plural)—

Pahārāda Sutta	A 8.19/4:202,26	SD 45.18
(Udāna) Uposatha Sutta	U 5.5/55,32 = V 2:239,27	SD 59.2b+2c

1.1.4.2 From the context of **A 7.53**—the 2 deities reporting the spiritual attainments of the 500 nuns [§2]—and further from the account of these nuns [1.1.2.3], it is clear that ***anupādi,sesa*** here means that they have removed all defilements without any residue, not that they have attained the nirvana-element without residue (*anupādisesa,nibbāna,dhātu*), which is a technical term for death of an arhat.

Since these nuns continue to live out their life-span, it is clear that the term *anupādi,sesa* simply refers to those nuns who have attained **arthood**. In this case, the key element in the phrase, ***upādi***, simply refers to the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*), that is, *the form, feeling, perception, formation and*

¹⁰ See the “2 periods”: SD 1.1 (2.2); SD 40a.1 (1.3).

¹¹ Another important feature of the 1st period or “early” usage of Dharma word and terms are that they tend to be polysemic. They can have a number of senses, a few or all of which can apply simultaneously according to the context. On polysemy, see SD 1.1 (4.4.5); SD 10.16 (1.3.1-1.3.2; 2.2); SD 54.3b (2.1.1.4).

¹² Quoted at Miln 175,16.

consciousness of these nuns (who have become arhats) are now free from clinging or attachment (*anupādi*)¹³

This understanding is also confirmed by the Commentary which explains *anupādi,sesa* as meaning thus: “having discarded (literally “having not put in place”) any trace of clinging, they are freed by the 5 kinds of freedom¹⁴” (*anupādi,sesāti upādāna,sesaṃ atthapetvā pañcahi vimuttīhi anavasesā hi pi vimuttā*, AA 4:40,4). In other words, the aggregates that comprise the arhat, allowing him to live the rest of his lifespan, are merely “functional” aggregates that do not entail any new karma.

1.2 STRUCTURES AND CONTENTS

1.2.0 The structures of both Suttas are about the same, differing only in content. It is likely that the events of **A 7.53** occurred first, followed by those of **A 6.34**, thus: [1.2.3]

1.2.1 The (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta (A 7.53) [SD 53.5]

1.2.1.1 The (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta opens with two devas visiting the Buddha: the first declares that “these nuns” are “freed” (*vimutta*), while the second states, that they are “well freed without any substrate remaining” [§2]. Both are referring to the arhathood of the 500 nuns following Mahā, pajāpatī [1.1.2.3]. The 500 nuns gained the path¹⁵ when they listened to the teaching of **Nandak’ovāda S** (M 146) [1.1.2.2].

Moggallāna then visits Brahmā Tissa to ask him which devas have such knowledge of others’ path-attainment or awakening [§10]. Tissa replies that only those brahma-devas “who are not contented” with their brahma-state—meaning those who are inclined to Dharma or who have attained the path, have such knowledge.

1.2.1.2 This means that they must have attained some level of the path which allows them to know the levels of their equals or those of lower levels of sainthood. **The (Saṅgaha) Bala Sutta** (A 9.5) calls this the compatibility (*samān’attatā*) amongst the saints.¹⁶ Clearly, Tissa himself is himself at least a learner (a saint short of being an arhat) [1.1.3.1], or even an arhat, to have such knowledge [§11].

When Moggallāna further questions Tissa adds that these brahmas only know 6 kinds of saints [§§11-16; 2.1]. Later, when Moggallāna reports back to the Buddha, he explains to Moggallāna that Tissa has missed out the 7th kind of saint, that is, “the one who dwells in the signless” (*animitta, vihārī*) [§19]. On being further asked by Moggallāna, the Buddha explains what this is [§§20-23].

1.2.1.3 It is probable that the events of the (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta occur before those of **the (Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta** (A 6.34). The reasons for this will be stated below at the end of the section [1.2.3].

¹³ On *upādi* meaning clinging or attachment, see Sadd 849,2; MA 4:55,7; PmA 323,20. See CPD: *upādi*.

¹⁴ The 5 kinds of freedom (*vimutti*) are freedom (1) by displacement (*tad-aṅga, vimutti*), by the attaining of insight (*vipassanā*); (2) by suppression (*vikkhambhana, vimutti*), by the attaining of mental calm (*samatha*); (3) by cutting off (*samuccheda, vimutti*), by attaining the path (one of the stages of sainthood); (4) by stilling (*paṭippassaddhi, vimutti*), at the moment of fruition (of sainthood, esp arhathood); (5) by escape (*nissaraṇa, vimuttīti*), the attaining of nirvana (DA 2:426; MA 4:168; SA 3:209; UA 32; J 2:35): see SD 13.1 (4.2.3.3).

¹⁵ “Gained the path,” ie, attained some stage of the path, esp becoming at least streamwinners, or even once-returners, non-returners or arhats.

¹⁶ See **(Saṅgaha) Bala S** (A 9.5,6(4)), SD 2.21.

1.2.2 The (Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta (A 6.34) [SD 53.5(4)]

1.2.2.1 The (Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta opens with Moggallāna wondering whether the devas know themselves to be streamwinners [§1]. He asks Brahma Tissa [§5], who replies that those devas of the 6 sense-world heavens with faith in the 3 jewels and excellent noble virtue [§9 etc]—who are themselves *streamwinners*—know that they are streamwinners [§6-11]. On further questioning by Moggallāna, Tissa gives the same reply regarding the devas of the other sense-world heavens [§§12-40].

1.2.2.2 Note that, while in the (Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta (A 6.34), Moggallāna asks Tissa about which brahma-devas know themselves to be streamwinners, in **the (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta** (A 7.53) [1.1.2.1], he asks Tissa about which of the brahma-devas know others to have attained some kind of path-realization, Tissa replies that only those brahmas who “are not contented” (*asantuṭṭha*) with *their life-span, beauty, happiness, fame and lordship* [§11.3] are able to know what kind of path attainment others have reached.

1.2.3 Sutta sequence

1.2.3.1 It is probable that the events of **the (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta** (A 7.53) precede those of **the (Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta** (A 6.34). In that case, the narrative sequence of Moggallāna’s two meetings and dialogues with brahma Tissa begins with the 2 deities reporting to the Buddha the news of the spiritual attainments of the 500 nuns [A 7.53,2].

[A 7.53] Then, Moggallāna visits Tissa to ask him about which devas are able to know the spiritual attainments of others. Tissa replies that only brahmas who do not delight in their brahma-state have this ability. However, Tissa lists only the attainments of 6 kinds of noble persons, and the Buddha mentions the 7th, that is, the dweller in the signless [3].

[A 6.34] On another occasion, Moggallāna again visits Tissa, this time, to ask him which brahmas know they have attained streamwinning. Tissa answers that only the brahmas who are streamwinners are able to do so [1.2.1.2].

1.2.3.2 The sequence involving Moggallāna’s 2 visits to brahma Tissa clearly begins with the 2 deities visiting the Buddha [1.2.3.1]. This prompts Moggallāna to investigate the knowledge of the devas regarding others’ attainments. Naturally, he consults a brahma he knows well enough, that is, Tissa, who, in his previous human life was Moggallāna’s pupil, and so is still one (as the Commentary affirms, AA 4:40,9) [A 7.53,5 n]. [1.2.4]

1.2.4 Why Moggallāna asks Tissa about streamwinning

1.2.4.1 Why does Moggallāna ask Tissa about streamwinning in the (Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta (A 6.34)? This is, in fact, the reason for Moggallāna making the 2nd visit to Tissa in **A 6.34**. Now, earlier on, in **the (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta** (A 7,53), Tissa, in his answer to Moggallāna’s question gives only 6 of the 7 persons: the one freed both ways, the wisdom-freed, the body-witness, the view-attainer, the faith-freed and the truth-follower.

1.2.4.2 When Moggallāna reports back to the Buddha, he tells Moggallāna that Tissa has omitted **the 7th person**, that is, the “dweller in the signless” (*animitta*). The Commentary explains the “dweller in the signless” as the “faith-follower” (*saddhā’nusārī*), a practitioner with strong faculty of faith who will become a streamwinner in this life itself. Below, we will examine the significance of this teaching, that is, what this 7th person is. [3.1]

2 The 7 kinds of persons

2.1 THE STANDARD SET OF 7 PERSONS

2.1.1 The standard list of 7 persons

The **Kīṭā, giri Sutta** (M 70) gives this standard list of the 7 persons or individuals, that is, according to how they have attained or approached the path of awakening, from the highest to the lowest, thus:

1. The one freed both ways [dual-freed]	<i>ubhato, bhāga, vimutta</i>	
2. The wisdom-freed	<i>paññā, vimutta</i>	
3. The body-witness	<i>kāya, sakkhī</i>	
4. The view-attainer	<i>diṭṭhi-p, patta</i>	
5. The faith-freed	<i>saddhā, vimutto</i>	
6. The truth-follower	<i>dhammānusārī</i>	
7. The faith-follower	<i>saddhā'nusārī</i>	SD 11.1 (5.2)

A definition of each of the 7 persons follows.

2.1.2 Definitions of the 7 persons

This section only briefly describes each of the 7 persons. For further details, see SD 11.1 (5.2).

2.1.2.1 The one freed both ways or dual-freed (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*) is one who has attained and mastered the 1st dhyana, based on which he further masters the higher form dhyanas or any of the 4 formless attainments. Having stayed in a dhyana or attainment, he emerges from it and reflects on its impermanence, thus cultivating and strengthening his wisdom. He does this until he attains the path ending in arhathood, which he gains with all its psychic powers and liberation.

“**Both ways**” (*ubhato, bhāga*) refers to being freed in both body and mind. “**Bodily freed**” means that since he has attained all the dhyanas, he is able to taste meditative or pure mental bliss (hence, he has no attraction whatsoever for physical or worldly pleasure). It also means he is able to work psychic wonders since he is no more limited by his physical body or worldliness.

“**Mentally freed**” means that all his mental fetters [2.1.2.8 n] are broken: he will naturally keep all the precepts and rules (because he is truly and fully happy); he has no physical or worldly desire at all since his mind is fully freed; he has no superhuman or divine desires because his mind is fully freed; he will neither create new karma nor have any rebirth since he has fully purified his mind of the unconscious or latent tendencies.

2.1.2.2 The wisdom-freed (*paññā, vimutta*) is one who has at best mastered only the 1st dhyana; otherwise, he keeps himself constantly mindful, especially of impermanence. Although he is unable to attain any higher dhyana nor any of the formless attainments, he keeps his mind focused on seeing into the impermanence in all things, and so cultivates the wisdom that first brings him streamwinning; hence, he reaches the path of awakening that, in due course, leads to arhathood.

The wisdom-freed is also liberated “both ways” in the sense that he has no more physical or worldly desires, and his mind is purified of all unconscious tendencies. However, he does not have any superhuman powers since he has not attained the 4th dhyana. The liberating wisdom of all arhats are the

A 7.2.1.3 Aṅguttara Nikāya 7, Sattaka Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 1, Avyākata Vagga 3
A 6.1.4.4 Aṅguttara Nikāya 6, Chakka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 4, Devatā Vagga 4

same as that of the Buddha—they all fully understand the true nature of the 4 noble truths. Their only difference lies in how they each explain the truths and how well they do it (for our benefit).

2.1.2.3 The body-witness (*kāya,sakkhī*), like the “freed both ways” [2.1.2.1], attains at least the 1st dhyana and may master even all the form dhyanas, and perhaps the formless attainments, too. However, lacking insight wisdom, only some of his defilements are destroyed. Hence, he attains only the lower paths (streamwinning, once-returning or non-returning) but not arhathood.

2.1.2.4 The view-attainer (*ditṭhi-p,patta*) may or may not attain even the 1st dhyana, but keeps himself constantly mindful of reality, especially of impermanence, which brings him insight wisdom, and cultivates right view. Hence, he attains only either streamwinning or once-returning.

2.1.2.5 The faith-freed (*saddhā,vimutta*), like the “view-attainer” [2.1.2.4], may or may not attain even the 1st dhyana, but keeps himself constantly mindful of reality, especially of impermanence, which brings him insight wisdom; hence, he cultivates right view. Like the “body-witness” and the “view-attainer,” only *some* of his defilements are destroyed through his *faculty of faith*. Hence, he attains only either streamwinning or once-returning.

2.1.2.6 The truth-follower (*dhammānusārī*) does *not* attain any dhyana but cultivating the faculty of wisdom, such as investigating mental states and the Dharma, thus keeps himself constantly mindful of reality, especially of impermanence, which brings him insight wisdom or right view. He has not destroyed any of his defilements but with the perception of impermanence attains streamwinning in this life itself.

2.1.2.7 The faith-follower (*saddhā'nusārī*), like the “truth-follower” [2.1.2.6], does *not* attain any dhyana but cultivating the faculty of faith, accepts the Dharma and keeps himself constantly mindful of reality, especially of impermanence, which brings him insight wisdom or right view. He has not destroyed any of his defilements but with the perception of impermanence attains streamwinning in this life itself.

2.1.2.8 Of these 7 persons, only the first two are arhats [2.1.2.1+2.1.2.2], who have no more residue of defilements [§§12-13]: they have gained awakening and are no more reborn. The other five, however, being learners (*sekha*) [§§14-16, §22], have residues of defilements, that is, they still have to break free from **the 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*)¹⁷ or from their “residues,” that is, the unbroken fetters.¹⁸

3 The dweller in the signless (*animitta,vihārī*)

3.1 THE 7TH PERSON

3.1.1 What is the 7th person? (A 7.53)

3.1.1.1 In the (**Brahmā**) **Tissa Sutta** (A 7.53), Tissa lists to Moggallāna only the first 6 of the 7 persons [2.1.2]. He mentions the freed both ways [§12], the wisdom-freed [§13], the body-witness [§14], the

¹⁷ The 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identity-view (*sakkāya,ditṭhi*); (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*); (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*); (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*); (5) aversion (*paṭigha*); (6) lust for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*); (7) lust for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*); (8) conceit (*māna*); (9) restlessness (*ud-dhacca*); and (10) ignorance (*avijjā*): **Kīṭā, giri S** (M 70) + SD 11.1 (5.1.4).

¹⁸ For a diagram of the 10 fetters and sainthood, see SD 49.14 Table 2. For details, see SD 10.16 (1.6.6-1.68).

view-attainer [§15], the faith-freed [§16] and the truth-follower [§17]. But Tissa omits the 7th and last person: the “signless dweller” (*animitta, vihārī*) [3.1.2, 3.2].

3.1.1.2 After Moggallāna reports back to the Buddha, he points out to Moggallāna that Tissa has not mentioned the 7th person. However, instead of mentioning the faith-follower as the 7th person, the Buddha states that he is the “dweller in the signless” or “signless dweller” (*animitta, vihārī*) [§22] or meditator of “**the signless mental concentration**” (*animitta ceto, samādhi*) [§24]. This seems to be the only place in the suttas where these 2 related terms are found.

3.1.2 The faith-follower

3.1.2.1 In the standard set of the 7 persons or types of noble individuals (those who are on the path of awakening), the 7th person is **the faith-follower** (*saddhā’anusārīn*). In this Sutta, however, the 7th person is given by the Buddha as **the “signless dweller”** (*animitta, vihārī*) [3.1.1.2]. This is an interesting situation. It is possible here that the Buddha uses a broad term for the 7th person, which later is narrowed down to specifically refer to one who has taken the first step on the path, that is, the faith-follower.

3.1.2.2 The Commentary, in fact, says just that—the Buddha is actually describing **the faith-follower** as one who practices strong insight (*balava, vipassaka, vasena*). It explains that “all signs” (*sabba, nimitta*) are the (false) signs of permanence and so forth, and that the “**signless mental concentration**” (*animitta ceto, samadhi*) is the concentration of strong insight (*balava, vipassana, samādhi*) (AA 4:40,16+19). What does all this mean?¹⁹ [3.2]

3.2 MEANING OF “DWELLER IN THE SIGNLESS”

3.2.1 Sign and characteristic. Our first apprehension of a sense-object is called a **sign** (*nimitta*). It is the generic appearance of an object (such as a bright light or a flashy colour), in contrast to its secondary characteristics (*anuvyañjana*), the details that we then examine, so that we are absorbed into the object and lose contact with true reality.

Our advertence or attention to the generic sign and secondary characteristics of an object brings on a recognition or perception (*saññā*) of that object. This, then, leads to seeing a pleasant characteristic, to which we *cling* with lust, or to seeing something repulsive, which we *reject* with hate. Either way, such a reaction leads to suffering.²⁰

3.2.2 Signlessness

3.2.2.1 Seeing signlessness, then, is crucial in the process of sensory restraint (*indriya, saṁvara*), a process in which one does not actively react to the generic signs of an object (that is, treating it in terms of the effect it has on oneself). Instead we seek to halt the perceptual process at the level of simple recognition.

3.2.2.2 By not seizing on these signs, perception is maintained at a pure level prior to an object’s conceptualization and the resulting proliferation of concepts (*papañca*) throughout the full range of sensory experience. As the frequent refrain in the suttas states, “In the seen, there is only the seen,” and not the superimpositions (*samāropana*) created by the intrusion of ego (*attā*) into the perceptual process.

¹⁹ For a scholarly overview on the signless meditation, see Harvey, “Signless meditation in Pāli Buddhism,” 1986.

²⁰ For a more detailed analysis of the perceptual process, see **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18,16) + nn SD 6.14.

3.2.2.3 Mastery of this technique of sensory restraint provides access to the signless gate to deliverance. Signlessness is produced through insight into impermanence (*anicca*) and serves as the counter-agent (*paṭipakkha*) to attachments to anything experienced through the senses, once the meditator has abandoned all such attachments to the senses, he is then able to advert toward nirvana, which ipso facto has no sensory signs of its own by which it can be recognized.²¹

3.2.3 Difficult passages. When faced with a difficult passage or **exegetical problem** (a challenge in explaining a difficult passage), a careful study of the texts and commentaries, and some Dharma reflection will, as a rule, help us resolve it. Occasionally, scholars, for some reason, may not be able to do so. A scholar may wonder, for example, if it is possible that the Commentary, in equating the *animitta, vihārī* with the *saddhā'nusārī* [3.1.2.2], is “trying to rationalize a textual discrepancy, which might be indicative of a different understanding of the 7th noble person.”²²

When we accept that the great arhats, teachers and commentators who teach or work with these suttas have both faith and wisdom, we must consider that it is us who lack these twin faculties, which can be developed further by the careful reflection of such challenging passages. When we lose ourself in the texts and teachings, and let them speak for themselves, we are likely to hear their responses in the silence of our being. This is called “**sutta reflection**,” which is a vital part of sutta translation and teaching.

3.2.4 The only mention of *animitta, vihārī* in Aṅguttara

3.2.4.1 In the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the term *animitta, vihārī* [§19] and its description [§21-23] occur here only in **the (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta**. This is probably because the Aṅguttara tends to focus on layman teachings on keeping clear of wrong views, cultivating moral virtue and some basic teachings in mindfulness. This does not mean that meditation is not necessary for the laity, but rather that such teachings are commonly found in the Saṃyutta and the Majjhima. The Aṅguttara teachings, in other words, mainly lays the groundwork for further development in the Saṃyutta and the Majjhima teachings.

3.2.4.2 What should be the highlight here is that the term *animitta* and its various applications are found both in the early suttas and in later canonical texts, which we shall briefly examine below [3.3.0]. We have already noted that it is possible that *animitta, vihārī* is used by the Buddha as a broad term for the 7th person, which later is narrowed down to specifically refer to one who has taken the first step on the path, that is, the faith-follower [3.1.2.1]. When the term is seen as being too broad, the Buddha stopped using it, and starts using the term *saddhā'nusārī* in due course.

3.2.4.3 While **the Vinaya** does record occasions when the Buddha changes his mind about some rules, and then revises them, we do not see any such situation in the Dhamma teachings. There are, for example, those who might doubt the Buddha's awakening, or view that he made up his teachings as he went along.²³

In **the Dharma teachings**, we see similar developments where new terms arise. Unlike the Vinaya rules, where a new rule automatically supersedes the old one, in the Dharma teachings, the old terms remain valid in their own context, while new terms evolve with new senses to clarify new contexts.

Doubt, then, is a sign of our own lack of understanding of an important text or context. It invites us to deepen and widen our sutta search, mental focus and insight to uncover and resolve what we have missed and to remove any mental blocks for clearer vision.

²¹ Pm 1:65,15 (PmA 1:272,30); Nett 25,15; ThaA 1:30,9; ApA 286,17.

²² See A:N 1783 n1542.

²³ See eg SD 3.15 (2); SD 37.14 (4.2).

3.3 OCCURRENCES ON ANIMITTA IN THE SUTTAS

3.3.0 *Animitta* and its usages

3.3.0.1 The term *animitta* is examined in some detail in the notes of the **Animitta Ceto,samādhi Pañha Sutta** (S 40.9).²⁴ Here, we will briefly examine how *animitta* starts off being used in simple non-technical ways during the early years of the ministry. In due course, it became more specialized and technical, used in connection with profound meditative states and spiritual attainments.

Animitta is the opposite of *nimitta*, “a sign,” which refers to the various sense-objects, such as forms and so on. Usually a sign refers to any mental object that can distract us away into the worldly currents so that we lose the mindfulness that we need to stay above the unwholesome roots of lust, hate and delusion. [3.4.1.2]

3.3.0.2 In its “**early (non-technical) usages**,” *animitta* is found mainly in the Saṃyutta. The term is used mainly to describe how the mind manages itself, especially in meditation and mindfulness, to calm itself by abandoning unwholesome states or giving up wrong views.

In the “**later (canonical) technical usages**,” the usages are mostly found in the Majjhima with its long suttas, using technical terms. As a technical term, it is placed after the 8th dhyana (the last of the formless attainments, suggesting that it is different from the normal *samatha* meditation; hence, it is connected with the attaining of cessation of feeling and perception; and so on.

In the suttas, for example, the “**signless concentration of mind**” (*animitta ceto,samādhi*) refers to a profound state of meditation that can be experienced by an unawakened person in deep meditation (not necessarily a dhyana) to have some idea of what any of the 3 abidings (*vihāra*) [3.3.3.2] or even the cessation of perception and feeling [3.4.2.1] are like.²⁵

3.3.0.3 Here is a brief survey of some suttas, first the early ones, followed by the later ones, to give us an idea of how *animitta* and related terms evolved during the time of the Buddha and soon after.

• EARLY (NON-TECHNICAL) USAGES

(Brahmā) Tissa Sutta	A 7.53/4:78 f	<i>animitta,vihārī</i> [§19]; <i>animitta ceto,samādhi</i> [§21-23]	SD 54.5
Animitta Ceto,sam- ādhi Pañha Sutta	S 40.9/4:268 f	<i>animitta</i> being connected with cessation	SD 24.19 ²⁶
Sa,nimitta Sutta	A 2.75/1:82	<i>nimitta</i> as mental signs; unwholesome states	SD 24.19(4.1) [3.3.1]
Piṇḍolya Sutta	S 22.80/3:93	<i>animitta samādhi</i> for uprooting wrong view	SD 28.9a [3.3.2]
Go,datta Sutta	S 41.7/4:297	<i>animitta ceto,vimutti</i> ; the “sign-makers”	SD 60.4 [3.3.2.3]
Suññata Samādhi S	S 43.4/4:360	<i>animitta,samādhi</i> leads to the unconditioned	SD 55.8(4) [3.3.3]

• LATER (CANONICAL) TECHNICAL USAGES

Mahā Vedalla Sutta	M 43/1:296-298	<i>animitta ceto,vimutti</i> and other <i>vimuttis</i> ²⁷	SD 30.2 [3.4.1]
Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta	M 44/1:302	<i>animitta phassa</i> ; cessation	SD 40a.9 [3.4.2]
Cūḷa Suññatā Sutta	M 121/3:107 f	<i>animitta samādhi</i> as prelude to cessation	SD 11.3 [3.4.3]

²⁴ See SD 24.19 (2-4).

²⁵ On the cessation of perception and feeling in the context of dhyana meditation, see SD 50.12 (2.3.2.4).

²⁶ See SD 24.19 for more details on *animitta* and related usages.

²⁷ On lust, hate and delusion as “sign-makers” (*nimitta,karaṇa*) [3.3.2.3], as in **Go,datta S** (S 41.7/4:297), SD 60.4.

A 7.2.1.3	Āṅuttara Nikāya 7, Sattaka Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 1, Avyākata Vagga 3
A 6.1.4.4	Āṅuttara Nikāya 6, Chakka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 4, Devatā Vagga 4
Mahā Suññata Sutta	M 122/3:109-118 non-attention to all signs; <i>suññata, vihāra</i> SD 11.4 [3.4.4]
Kevaḍḍha Sutta	D 11/1:223 <i>animitta</i> as “without attribute” (<i>anidassana</i>) SD 1.7 [3.4.5]
Mahā, parinibbāna S	D 16/2:101 <i>animitta ceto, samādhi</i> for overcoming pain SD 9 [3.4.6]

EARLY (NON-TECHNICAL) USAGES OF ANIMITTA

3.3.1 Sa, nimitta Sutta (A 2.75): *nimitta* as mental signs; unwholesome states

3.3.1.1 The Sa, nimitta Sutta (A 2.75) is a very brief but informative statement on *nimitta* as “**mental sign**” or simply “sign” that succinctly says:

Bhikkhus, bad unwholesome states arise in connection with **mental signs**,²⁸ not without them.²⁹
Thus, with the letting go of mental signs themselves, those bad unwholesome states will not exist.³⁰
(A 2.75/2.8.1/1:82), SD 24.19(4.1)

The Sutta Commentary glosses *sa, nimitta* as “with a reason” (*sa, kāraṇā*, AA 2153), that is, with the proper conditions. They are what can be called “functional synonyms,” words that are not actually semantically synonymous (words with the same dictionary sense) but they signify or refer to the same function. In this case, they are the conditions for the arising of “bad unwholesome states,” those actions that are morally negative in a karmic sense: they can bring unwholesome karmic fruits exponentially.³¹

3.3.1.2 The Sa, nimitta Vagga, the “with a sign” chapter” (A 2.1.8), has a total of 10 short “suttas” or statements with the identical template as **A 2.75** [3.3.1.1], each with a different term as functional synonyms for *nimitta*, as follows:

	<u>Pali term</u>	<u>literal meaning</u>
A 2.75 Sa, nimitta Sutta	<i>nimitta</i>	sign
A 2.76 Sa, nidāna Sutta	<i>nidāna</i>	origin
A 2.77 Sa, hetuka Sutta	<i>hetu</i>	cause
A 2.78 Sa, saṅkhāra Sutta	<i>saṅkhāra</i>	formation, will
A 2.79 Sa, p, paccaya Sutta	<i>paccaya</i>	support
A 2.80 Sa, rūpa Sutta	<i>rūpa</i>	form
A 2.81 Sa, vedanā Sutta	<i>vedanā</i>	feeling
A 2.82 Sa, saññā Sutta	<i>saññā</i>	perception
A 2.83 Sa, viññāṇa Sutta	<i>viññāṇa</i>	consciousness
A 2.84 Saṅkhat’ārammaṇa Sutta	<i>saṅkhata ārammaṇa</i>	conditioned base

²⁸ Comy glosses **sa, nimitta** as “with a reason” (*sa, kāraṇā*, AA 2153), ie, with the proper conditions.

²⁹ *Sa, nimittā bhikkhave uppajjanti pāpakā akusalā dhammā no animittā.*

³⁰ *Tass’eva nimittassa pahānā evaṃ te pāpakā akusalā dhammā na hontīti.* For the other 9 suttas in **Sa, nimitta Vagga**, see SD 83.12.

³¹ The fruits of karma do not always arise “one to one” (eg, “eye for an eye”), but depend on the presence of the bad karma. For example, we allow anger to arise over some act of another. This anger, as long as it is preset, is likely to make us react in an angry or negative way, reinforcing that bad karma. This is how our latent tendencies (*anusaya*) accumulate and control us. See **Karma**, SD 18.1.

It is clear from the 10 suttas here, that all these Pali terms refer to the same function, that is, “bad unwholesome states arise in connection with *< them >*, not without them” [3.3.1.1]. We can replace “them” in the *<angle brackets>* with any of the 10 Pali terms, and those sentences will all have the same sense: bad unwholesome states arise in connection with signs, origins, causes, formations, supports, forms, feelings, perceptions, consciousnesses, or conditioned bases, and not without them. This is a good example of the non-technicality of the early Buddhist texts.

3.3.2 Pindolya Sutta (S 22.80): *animitta samādhi* for uprooting wrong view

3.3.2.1 The Piṇḍolya Sutta (S 22.80), the discourse on alms-collecting, applies the term “signless samadhi” (*animitta samādhi*) in this key passage:

20 Bhikshus, there are these 3 unwholesome thoughts:³²

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) thought of sense-pleasures, | <i>kāma, vitakka</i> |
| (2) thought of ill will, and | <i>vyāpāda, vitakka</i> |
| (3) thought of violence. | <i>vihimsā, vitakka</i> |

And how do these 3 unwholesome thoughts cease without remainder?

When one dwells with the mind well established in the 4 focuses of mindfulness or when one dwells having cultivated **signless samadhi**.³³

21 For, bhikshus, this *signless samadhi*, whenever cultivated, is well worth it. Bhikshus, when the signless is well developed, there is great fruit, great benefit. (S 22.80)³⁴

Clearly, this passage instructs us to overcome the unwholesomeness of our actions at their roots, that is, to remove **wrong thoughts** or intentions (*micchā, saṅkappa*), stated here as the thoughts of sense-pleasures, of ill will and of violence (S 22,89,20).

3.3.2.2 Usually, when we speak of **intention** (*cetanā*), we are referring to the motivational roots (*mūla*) of action (mind, speech and body). The roots of unwholesome actions are the 3 unwholesome roots: greed (*dosa*), hate (*lobha*) and delusion (*moha*).³⁵ In the 3 kinds of wrong thoughts [3.3.2.1], the thought of pleasures is rooted in *greed*, while the other two thoughts (of ill will and of violence) are rooted in hate. The 3rd motivational root, *delusion*, underlies all three. For, all unwholesome acts have *delusion* amongst their roots.

3.3.2.3 For this reason, in **the Go,datta Sutta** (S 41.7), for example, lust, hate and delusion (the 3 unwholesome roots) are said to be **the “makers of signs”** (*nimitta, karaṇa*).³⁶ They—any of them—as it were, mark a person as lustful, hating or deluded.³⁷ Only when we compare ourself—or rather, our “self”—with what we perceive as being outside of ourself, that is the working of lust, hate or delusion.

³² These 3 are “wrong thought” (*micchā, diṭṭhi*), the opp of “right thought” (*sammā, diṭṭhi*): the thought of renunciation (*nekkhamma, saṅkappa*), the thought of non-malice (*avyāpāda, saṅkappa*), and the thought of harmlessness (*avihimsā, saṅkappa*): see **Sacca, vibhaṅga S** (M 141.25/3:251), SD 11.11.

³³ Comy: “The signless samadhi” (*animitta samādhi*), is insight concentration (*vipassanā samādhi*); so called because it removes the signs of permanence, etc (SA 2:302; MA 4:153). See **Animitta Ceto, samādhi Pañha S** (S 40.9/-4:268 f), SD 24.19 (2).

³⁴ S 22.80,20-21/3:93 (SD 28.9a).

³⁵ On the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala, mūla*), see **Mūla S** (A 3.69), SD 18.2.

³⁶ S 41.7/4:297 (SD 60.4); on *animitta ceto, vimutti*, see **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43,26-37), SD 49.5a.

³⁷ *Sañjānana, nimittarū karonto viya uppajjati, tasmā nimitta, karaṇo’ti vutto* (SA 3:99,20).

Lust (*rāga*) is a sense of lack that draws us to run after the “signs of beauty” (what seems pleasant, good or self-affirming). **Hate** (*dosa*) is a sense of want that pushes away, even destroy, at the “sign of the repulsive” (what we see as being unpleasant, bad or foul). **Delusion** (*moha*) is the blindness that prevents us from seeing the true nature of what is pleasant and unpleasant—the fruits of our own mental constructions and biases—so that we are stuck in a rut of trying to fulfill wants without knowing what we really need.

The “**signs**” (*nimitta*), then, are our mental projections that see beauty or ugliness into the world. Lust creates the “sign of beauty” (*subha, nimitta*) in our mind; hate, the “sign of the repulsive” (*paṭigha, -nimitta*); and delusion, the signs of permanence, pleasure and self.

Such projections come from our past conditionings reacting to present conditions of which we do not truly understand. We are running after phantoms of our own creation prodded on by the unconscious tendencies.³⁸

When we do not attend to any of the signs naturally and for a good, sustained period, we attain “the signless concentration of mind” (*animitta ceto, samādhi*).³⁹

3.3.2.4 How does the **signless samadhi** overcome our thoughts of sense-pleasures, of ill will or of violence? [3.3.2.1]. The *signless samadhi*—mental focus arising from letting go of all “signs”—arises from contemplating on impermanence, especially the perception of impermanence (*anicca, saññā*).⁴⁰ As our seeing of impermanence becomes more natural and stronger, we begin to understand what “signs of permanence” are.

Simply, the signs of permanence are our own wrong viewing of our experiences: we unconsciously see them as being *permanent*. We avoid accepting the reality of impermanence. As we begin to let go of the signs of permanence, we attain greater inner calm and clarity. This inspires gladness (*pamujja*) in us, which develops into zest (*pīti*), which then settles as tranquility (*passaddhi*). This helps our mind get into samadhi (*samādhi*).⁴¹

The mind in samadhi gives us the stillness (like when the waters of a lake is really calm and clear), we see impermanence or suffering for what it really is. When we truly see through the signs of permanence, the false self-constructed veneer of worldliness in our experiences, deep insight arises in us. When this is done habitually, we will attain streamwinning in this life itself, if not, certainly with the last breath.⁴²

3.3.3 Suññata Samādhi Sutta (S 43.4): *animitta, samādhi* leads to the unconditioned

3.3.3.1 The key passage of the Suññata Samādhi Sutta mentions 3 kinds of samadhi that are the “path to the unconditioned,” that is, the way to nirvana. The “way” here is, of course, the path (*magga*), beginning with streamwinning, which we should at least aspire for in this life itself.⁴³ Here is the key passage.⁴⁴

And what, bhikkhus, is the path leading to the unconditioned?⁴⁵

The emptiness samadhi, the signless samadhi, the undirected samadhi⁴⁶—

³⁸ On the unconscious tendencies, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

³⁹ See SD 24.19 (3).

⁴⁰ Such as that taught in **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

⁴¹ On this vital pre-meditative sequence of states, see, eg, **Pamada Vihārī S** (S 35.97,4), SD 47.6.

⁴² See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

⁴³ On how to aspire for streamwinning in this life, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

⁴⁴ For the full version, see **Suññata Samādhi S** (S 43.4), SD 55.8(4).

⁴⁵ *Katamo ca bhikkhave asaṅkhata, gāmi, maggo.*

This, bhikshus, is called the path leading to the unconditioned.⁴⁷ (S 43.4/4:360), SD 55.8(4)

If we are familiar with the suttas, and when we have kept up our Dharma practice, it is likely we would at once conclude that these 3 kinds of samadhi “leading to the unconditioned” can only be those related to the 3 characteristics: non-self, impermanence and suffering. We will now discuss how this is correct and true.

3.3.3.2 The Saṃyutta Commentary to the Sutta gives no explanation of *suññata samādhi*, *animitta samādhi* or *appaṇihita samādhi*. The 3 samadhis are mentioned as a set, without any explanation, in **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33).⁴⁸ However, its commentary gives us some useful definitions in terms of the 3 abidings (*vihāra*) connected with the 3 kinds of insight knowledge (*vipassana ñāṇa*).

The Dīgha Commentary explains that one who, having attained advanced insight, contemplates things as non-self, acquires **the emptiness samadhi** on arriving at the path and fruit (because he has seen things as empty of self); one who contemplates things as impermanent acquires **the signless samadhi** (because he has seen through *the signs of permanence*) [3.3.2.3]; one who contemplates things as suffering gains **the undirected samadhi** (because he is risen above seeing things as *suffering*). (DA 3:1003 f)

The arhat naturally dwell in any of these 3 kinds of samadhis, which are, in their case, called **the 3 kinds of insight knowledge** (*vipassanā ñāṇa*), that is, the emptiness abiding (*suññata vihāra*), the signless abiding (*animitta vihāra*) and the undirected [desireless] abiding (*appaṇihita vihāra*). These are described, in similar tone as above, in **the Paṭisambhidā, magga Commentary**.⁴⁹

3.3.3.3 Insight wisdom reaches a high point when it settles down in any of **the 3 contemplations**, that is, that of impermanence, of suffering or of non-self.⁵⁰ As a rule, for the right contemplation to take up depends on the predominance, strength or inclination of our spiritual faculty (*indriya*)—that is, our faith, concentration or wisdom.⁵¹

If we are **faith**-inclined, we should contemplate on *impermanence*; if **concentration**-inclined, we should contemplate on *suffering*; and if **wisdom**-inclined, we should contemplate on *non-self*. When we are spiritually strengthened by any of these three faculties through the appropriate contemplation, it brings about our entry (*mukha*) into mental freedom (*vimokkha*), that is, at least streamwinning.⁵²

3.3.3.4 Buddhaghosa, in his **Visuddhi, magga**, further discusses the 3 samadhis by quoting this passage on **the "threefold doors to freedom"** (*ti, vidha, vimokkha, mukha*)⁵³ from **the Paṭisambhidā, magga**:

Now there are these 3 doors [entrances] to freedom leading out of the world, namely:

- (1) to the considering of all formations as limited and defined, and to the mind's aspiring to **the signless element** (*animitta dhātu*);⁵⁴

⁴⁶ *Suññato samādhi animitto* samādhi appaṇihito samādhi*. *All MSS *animitto*; Ee *avimitto* (wr).

⁴⁷ *Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave asaṅkhata, gāmi, maggo*.

⁴⁸ D 1,10.51/3:219,21-22.

⁴⁹ On how the arhats dwell in such a practice as *suññata, vihāra, animitta, vihāra* and *appaṇihita, vihāra* (PmA 1:270), see SD 11.3 (8.4).

⁵⁰ The scholastic tradition describes this stage as incl the 7 contemplations (*sattānupassanā*, Vism 20.4/607) and the 18 principal insights (*mahā, vipassanā*) [SD 15.1 (10.2)] (Prm 844). Prm = Paramattha, mañjūsā (Visuddhimagga Aṭṭhakathā = Mahā Ṭīkā): Vism chs 1-17 Sinh Vidyodaya ed; chs 17-23 Burmese ed (as used in Vism:Ñ).

⁵¹ All these 3, of course, entails effort and mindfulness, and as a set, they are known as the 5 faculties (*pañc'indriya*). See **Pañc'indriya**, SD 10.4; SD 3.6 (3); SD 54.3h (3.1).

⁵² Prm 844; cf Pm 3:48 f.

⁵³ Vism 21.66-73/657-59.

⁵⁴ Here, “element” (*dhatu*) refers to the mental object of that meditation; otherwise, it is also called “samadhi” (*samādhi*), which refers to both the practice and the attainment of mental focus.

A 7.2.1.3 Aṅguttara Nikāya 7, Sattaka Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 1, Avyākata Vagga 3
 A 6.1.4.4 Aṅguttara Nikāya 6, Chakka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 4, Devatā Vagga 4

- (2) to the stirring up of the mind into all formations, and to the mind’s aspiring to **the undirected [desireless] element** (*appaṇihita dhātu*);
 (3) to the considering of all states as other, and to the mind’s aspiring to **the emptiness element** (*suññata dhātu*).
 These are the 3 gateways to liberation leading out of the world.⁵⁵ (Pm 2:48)⁵⁶

(1) What is “**the signless element**”? It refers to the true state of things as being “signless.” When we contemplate on impermanence, we learn to see what is in and around us as **formations** (*saṅkhāra*), mind-made events and “things” that always rise and fall. Hence, they are limited by this flux, this rising and falling: even when we see only its starting, we know it will end; even when we see only its ending, we know it had a start earlier on. It is called “signless” because it is the opposite for “the formed” (*saṅkhata*), limited by the signs of rising and falling.

(2) What is “**the undirected element**”? It refers to the true state of things as being desireless. The mind is freed from desire because it is not drawn to things seen as painful, bringing on suffering. (DA 3:1003 f).

When we contemplate suffering, we learn to see that suffering is mind-made, arising from a perceived sense of lack, from which our desires come. It’s like our seeing that we seem hollow, and trying to fill it up with something (things, wealth, pleasure, power, holiness). We are “directed,” prodded on like cattle, to the slaughter-house of desires that end with suffering. The mind at its best is “undirected,” truly and joyfully calm and bright.

(3) What is “**the emptiness element**”? It refers to the true state of things as being “empty” or “void,” in the sense of not having any essence or “thingness.” Even what we call the “self” is merely a conventional term, a convenient word, we use to refer to our ever-changing body and mind that does not even have a name, except for what we have given it. Non-self underlies all states.⁵⁷

3.3.3.5 In summary, then, we can connect elements of these teachings in the following ways:

<u>concentration</u> (<i>samādhi</i>) ⁵⁸		<u>opposite</u>	<u>characteristic</u> ⁵⁹	<u>faculty</u> ⁶⁰
the signless samadhi	<i>animitta samādhi</i>	formations	impermanence	faith
the undirected samadhi	<i>appaṇihita samādhi</i>	desire	suffering	concentration
the emptiness samadhi	<i>suññata samādhi</i> ⁶¹	self	non-self	wisdom

Table 3.3.3.5. The samadhis and related elements

⁵⁵ *Tīṇi kho paṇ’imāni vimokkha, mukhāni loka, niyyānāya saṁvattanti. Sabba, saṅkhāre pariccheda, parivaṭṭumato [Se pariccheda, parivaṭṭumato] samanupassanatāya, animittāya ca dhātuyā citta, sampakkhandanatāya; sabba, -saṅkhāresu mano, samuttejanatāya, appaṇihitāya ca dhātuyā citta, sampakkhandanatāya; sabba, dhamme parato samanupassanatāya, suññatāya ca dhātuyā citta, sampakkhandanatāya – imāni tīṇi vimokkha, mukhāni loka, niyyānāya saṁvattanti.*

⁵⁶ Pm 2:48 f :: Pm:Ñ 5.54/250; see also Pm 2:67-71 :: Pm:Ñ 5.92-103/266-269. See also Prm 845 :: Vism:Ñ 767 n32.

⁵⁷ On this important statement, see **Dhamma Niyāma S** (A 3.134) SD 26.8.

⁵⁸ These 3 samadhis are listed as a set in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,1.10(50)/3:219,21 f); **Suññata Samādhi S** (S 43.4/4:360), SD 55.8(4); and **Rāga S** (A 3.163/1:299). See SD 11.3 (8.3).

⁵⁹ DA 3:1003 f; DhsA 223; PmA 1:234.

⁶⁰ DhsA 223.

⁶¹ On the signless concentration of mind (*amitta ceto, samādhi*), see SD 24.19 (2). Cf the “signless freedom of mind” (*animitta ceto, vimutti*): SD 24.19 (3).

The “**opposite**” refers to what is fully understood: each of its terms—formations, etc—is a shorthand for the 4 noble truths. The “**characteristic**” is the Dharma (teaching and truth) attained. When we awaken as an arhat, the “**faculty**,” that is, our spiritual faculty or spiritual strength, becomes a “power” (*bala*); it is fully developed and constant.⁶²

• Thus far, we have discussed some early usages of the term “sign” (*nimitta*) [3.3.0.2]. Now, we will examine some suttas and passages on *animitta* as a **technical term**, from later canonical texts [3.4.1-3.4.6].

LATER (TECHNICAL) USAGES OF ANIMITTA

3.4 THE SIGNLESS AS A TECHNICAL TERM

3.4.1 The Mahā Vedalla Sutta (M 43): *animitta ceto, vimutti* and other *vimutti*s⁶³

3.4.1.1 According to the **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43), the **signless freedom of mind** (*animittā ceto, vimutti*)⁶⁴ is attained by “the non-attention to all signs” (that is, disregarding all mental objects) and “the attention to the signless element” (M 43,27+34). As technical terms, the “signless element” (*animitta dhātu*) is **nirvana** (MA 2:355).

In fact, the Sutta lists a set of 4 freedoms (*vimutti*), thus:

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) the immeasurable freedom of mind, | <i>appamāṇā ceto, vimutti</i> | |
| (2) the freedom of mind through nothingness, | <i>ākāṅkhaṇā ceto, vimutti</i> | |
| (3) the freedom of mind through emptiness, | <i>suññatā ceto, vimutti</i> | |
| (4) the signless freedom of mind. ⁶⁵ | <i>animittā ceto, vimutti</i> | (M 43,26-37/1:296-298) |

These 4 freedoms of mind are synonymous in that they all, like the “signless element,” refer to the fruit-
ion attainment of arhathood. The Commentary says that all these terms are names for nirvana (MA 2:354 f). Their differences lie only in the method that each entails. [3.3.3.5]

3.4.1.2 The **3 unwholesome roots**, greed, hate and delusion, are “**makers of signs**” (*nimitta, karaṇa*) in the sense that they make our mind project ideas of *beauty, pleasure and self* when none exists. Those of us caught up with craving and ignorance (hate is inherent in craving), falsely perceive what are really impermanent, suffering, non-self and impure as being *permanent, pleasurable, self and beautiful*. There is, in reality, neither truth nor beauty in such false perceptions. Truth and beauty only arise when we are able to directly see true reality with an open mind of acceptance and clarity.

3.4.1.3 Simply, this means that the meditator has attained such a mental level that he is not distracted or controlled by any sense-object or thought but is naturally disposed to goodness. Such a being is an arhat: one who has uprooted the conditions for suffering, karma and rebirth. He has awakened just like

⁶² See the 5 powers: *Pañca bala*, SD 10.5.

⁶³ Note that this is “freedom of mind” (*ceto, vimutti*), not samadhis: see SD 11.3 (5.3). On lust, hate and delusion as “sign-makers” (*nimitta, karaṇa*) [3.3.2.3], as in **Go, datta S** (S 41.7/4:297), SD 60.4.

⁶⁴ On the signless freedom of mind (*amitta ceto, vimutti*), see SD 24.19 (3).

⁶⁵ On this important term used non-technically in the early suttas, see SD 54.5 (3.3).

A 7.2.1.3

Aṅguttara Nikāya 7, Sattaka Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 1, Avyākata Vagga 3

A 6.1.4.4

Aṅguttara Nikāya 6, Chakka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 4, Devatā Vagga 4

the Buddha (although the Buddha's wisdom is supreme) but he does not need to become a Buddha himself.⁶⁶ (M 43/1:296-298), SD 30.2

3.4.2 The Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta (M 44): *animitta samādhi*; cessation

3.4.2.1 In the **Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44), we see a more technical and scholastic usage of *animitta*—it is used in connection with a state called “the cessation of feeling and perception” (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*) or simply, cessation. It is a deep meditative state attained only by arhats and non-returners. Effectively, it is no different from the death-state, except that, as a rule, at the end of 7 days (or earlier), the meditator, as it were, returns to life.

On emerging from cessation, the meditator experiences the fruit of his attainment (Vism 708), that is, there arises the fruition of non-returning (*anāgāmi, phala*) in the non-returner, and the fruition of arhathood (*arahatta, phala*) in the arhat (PmA 1:41, 321). As such, it is our experience of nirvanic bliss in this world itself.⁶⁷

3.4.2.2 According to the Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta, the first state of consciousness to arise on emerging from cessation is threefold, that is, **the emptiness, the signless and the undirected** (M 44,20.2), all called “contact” (*phassa*) to denote *the arising of consciousness*. These conscious moments are so called because the mental object is nirvana, and these 3 names are simply those of the contact associated with fruition. (M 44,20.2/1:302), SD 40a.9⁶⁸

3.4.3 The Cūḷa Suññata Sutta (M 121): *animitta samādhi* as prelude to cessation

3.4.3.1 The **Cūḷa Suññata Sutta** (M 121) gives the clearest explanation of the connection between the signless concentration of mind (*animitta ceto, samādhi*) and arhathood.⁶⁹ In its first part (§§1-5), the Sutta describes various methods for attaining mental “oneness” (*ekatta*). Then, the 4 formless attainments are described (§§6-9), culminating in “the signless concentration of mind” (*animitta ceto, samādhi*) which then manifests as the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*) (described in fact but not named) (§§10-11), resulting in arhathood (§12).

3.4.3.2 The “**signless**” concentration of mind is simply a focused mind free from any apprehension of mental objects that distracts the mind with lust, hate or delusion.⁷⁰ On a simple level, a signless concentration frees our mind from being entangled with any mental object, temporarily freeing our mind from the 3 unwholesome roots [3.3.2.2], so that our mind is calm and clear enough to catch a glimpse of true reality. Such a glimpse empowers us to sufficiently dismantle our self-identity view, attachment to ritual and vows, and doubt (the 3 fetters)⁷¹ to attain streamwinning.

In the **Cūḷa Suññata Sutta**, the signless concentration works at the highest level of mental cultivation: that of attaining full awakening, arhathood itself. The tool is the same, but now it is in the hands of

⁶⁶ It is important to stress this last point, as later Buddhist theologians and sectarians tend to claim that arhats still need to become Buddhas.

⁶⁷ On the cessation of perception and feeling, see **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43,25/1:296) & SD 30.2 (4).

⁶⁸ For further details, see SD 40a.9 (2.5.3).

⁶⁹ M 121,4-10/3:107 f (SD 11.3). On the “signless” (*animitta*), see SD 11.3 (8).

⁷⁰ How this happens is described in the “triad of experience” or perceptual process: see **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18,-16) + nn SD 6.14.

⁷¹ On the 3 fetters, see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

one more experienced than ever before. Like colours in the expert hand of a master artist or sounds at the finger-tips of a music maestro, we see beauty of the highest calibre.

3.4.4 The Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 122): non-attention to all signs; *suññata, vihāra*

The Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 122) records the Buddha’s application of the “signless” (*animitta*) to his own practice, that is, “by not attending to any meditation sign” (M 122,6), which would otherwise, on account of change and alteration bring “sorrow, lamentation, (physical) pain, (mental) displeasure, and despair in one who lusts for it and delights in it” (M 122,5).⁷²

In practical terms, by not naturally attending to any of the signs for a good, sustained period, we attain “the signless concentration of mind” (*animitta ceto, samādhi*).⁷³ In the (Brahmā) Tissa Sutta (A 7.53), such a person, thought-free and happily focused is said to be “one who dwells in the signless” (*animitta, vihārī*) [§20].

The key difference is that while the Mahā Suññata Sutta describes an arhat’s routine practice, the (Brahmā) Tissa describes one who is still unawakened practising to attain the path of awakening, that is, at least streamwinning.

3.4.5 The Kevaddha Sutta (D 11): *animitta* as “without attribute” (*anidassana*)

3.4.5.1 The Kevaddha Sutta (D 11) uses an important synonym of *animitta*—*anidassana* (literally, “invisible”), “without attribute” (also translatable as “non-manifesting”)—to describe nirvana, thus:

The consciousness **without attribute** [non-manifesting], without end, radiant all around⁷⁴—

It is there that earth, water, fire, air find no footing;
here long and short, small and great, fair and foul;
Here name and form are totally stopped:
with consciousness’ cessation this stops here.⁷⁵

(D 11,85/1:223), SD 1.7

Here, we see the idea of “signless” or “without attribute” applied neither to the mental state we work to calm and clear (as in the early suttas) nor to dhyanic states (in the later canonical texts), but as a description of nirvana itself. This is one of the most defining, hence technical, usages of *animitta* and its related forms.

3.4.5.2 The (Arahatta) Bāhiya Sutta (U 1.10) records an inspired utterance (*udāna*) by the Buddha on the parinirvana of the layman arhat, Bāhiya Dāru, cīriya, thus:

27	Where neither water nor earth,	nor fire nor wind finds a footing,
	there, nor stars shine,	nor the sun blazes,
	there, the moon glows not,	nor is there darkness

⁷² For the full Sutta, see M 122/3:101-112 (SD 11.4).

⁷³ See SD 24.19 (3).

⁷⁴ For details, see SD 19.3 (1.3.6.3) + nn.

⁷⁵ The Buddha makes a similar statement by way of an Udāna (inspired utterance) on the parinirvana of Bāhiya Dāru, cīriya: “Where water, earth, fire and air find no footing, | There neither brightness burns nor sun shines | There neither moon gleams nor darkness reigns. | When a sage, a brahmin, through wisdom has known this by himself | Then he is freed from form and formless, from joy and pain.” (U 9). A similar verse is found at S 1.69/1:15, and a similar teaching is given by Mahā Cunda to Channa S 35.87,11/4:59. On this verse (D 11.85) see D:W 557 n242 & Mahā Parinibbāna S, SD 9 (9.8).

choice of enjoying the “emptiness dwelling” (*suññata vihāra*) and the “undirected abiding” (*appaṇihita vihāra*), the 3 of which are mentioned in the Paṭisambhidā, magga Commentary (PmA 1:270).⁸⁴

The Buddha and the arhats are able to naturally enjoy these profound meditative states because they can easily contemplate on impermanence, the “signless element” (*animitta dhātu*), or the “undirected element” (*appaṇihita dhātu*), or the “emptiness element” (*suññata dhātu*) [3.3.3.4]. In other words, they can easily get into any of the 3 abidings. These are also the highest possible manifestation of the “signless” samadhis attainable with ease only by the Buddha and the arhats.

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4 The (Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta (A 6.34)

SD 54.5(4)

(Tissa) Moggallāna Sutta

The Moggallāna Discourse (on Tissa) • A 6.34
(Chakka) Moggallāna Sutta The (Sixes) Moggallāna Discourse
Theme: The knowledge of the gods is limited
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 (1)⁸⁵ At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Anātha, piṇḍika’s park monastery in Jeta’s forest outside Sāvathī.

1.2 Now, while the venerable Mahā Moggallāna was in solitary retreat, the following thought arose in him:

“Which of the devas have such knowledge:

‘A streamwinner am I,⁸⁶ no longer bound for the lower world,⁸⁷ sure of crossing over to self-awakening!’?”⁸⁸ [332]

2 Now, at that time, a monk named Tissa who had passed away not long ago and was reborn in a certain brahma-world. There, he was also known as “Brahma Tissa of great power, great might.”

3 (2) Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, just as a strong man would stretch his flexed arm or would flex his stretched arm, disappeared from Mount Vulture’s Peak and appeared in that brahma-world.

4 Brahma Tissa saw the venerable Mahā Moggallāna coming in the distance, and said to him:

⁸⁴ See SD 11.3 (8.4).

⁸⁵ These running numbers within (angle brackets) are those of the PTS Pali ed.

⁸⁶ “A streamwinner am I,” Be *sotāpannā nāma*; Ee Ke Se *sotāpannāmhā*; Ce *sotāpannāmhā*.

⁸⁷ *Avinipāta*, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of *vinipāta*, “the world of ruin/suffering,” another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*), esp as *niraya*, *tiracchāna*, *pettivisaya*, *asura-kāyā* (KhPā 189,12 = DA 2:496,11 (on D 2:55,27) = SA 2:97,5 (on S 2:92,16); Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 courses (*pañca, gati*) (D 33,2.1(4)/3:234; A 9.68/4:459) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal birth (*tiracchāna, yoni*), the ghost realm (*petti-* or *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 A:ÑB 1999:14-19. See **Pañca, gati S** (A 9.68/4:459), SD 2.20. See also a late work, **Pañca, gati, dīpana**, ed L Feer (JPTS 1884:152 ff); tr Feer, *Annales du Musée Guimet* 5, 1883:514-528: sv Naraka, kaṇḍa, Tiracchāna~, Peta~, Manussa~, Deva~.

⁸⁸ *Katamesānaṃ devānaṃ evaṃ ñāṇaṃ hoti sotāpannāmhā avinipāta, dhammā niyatā sambodhi, parāyaṇā’ti*. On streamwinning, see eg **Sikkhā S 1** (A 3.85,2), SD 3.3(2).

“Please come, master Moggallāna;⁸⁹ welcome, master Moggallāna! It’s been a long time since the venerable Moggallāna has found the occasion to come here.⁹⁰ Master Moggallāna, please take a seat: here’s one prepared.”

The venerable Mahā Moggallāna sat down on the prepared seat.

5 Having saluted the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, Brahma Tissa sat down at one side. Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna said to him:

“Which of the devas, Tissa, have such knowledge:

‘A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world,⁹¹ sure of crossing over to self-awakening!’?”

(1) THE DEVAS OF THE 4 GREAT KINGS (*cātu, mahā.rājika*)

6 “Master Moggallāna, the devas of **the 4 great kings** have such knowledge:

‘A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!’”

7 “Tissa, do all the devas of the 4 great kings have such knowledge:

‘A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!’?”

8 “No, master Moggallāna, not all the devas of the 4 great kings have such knowledge:

‘A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!’

9 Master Moggallāna, those devas of the 4 great kings who are⁹²

not accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,

not accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,

not accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,

not accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—

they do not have such [333] knowledge:

‘A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!’

10 But, master Moggallāna, those devas of the 4 great kings who are

accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,

accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,

accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,

accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—

they do have such knowledge:

‘A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!’”

11 “Now, Tissa, is it only the devas of the 4 great kings who have such knowledge:

‘A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!’?”

⁸⁹ “Master Moggallāna, *mārisa moggallāna*: see S 1.1,4 n (SD 54.2a).

⁹⁰ “Please come, ... to come here,” *ehi kho mārisa moggallāna, svāgataṃ mārisa moggallāna, cirassaṃ kho mārisa Moggallāna imaṃ pariyāyaṃ akāsi yad idaṃ idh’āgamanāya*, as in **Brahma Nimantanika S** (M 49), Baka Brahmā says: *ehi kho marisā, sāgataṃ marisā, cirassaṃ kho marisā imaṃ pariyāyaṃ akāsi yadidaṃ idh’āgamanāya*. Cf the usage of a more polite (but affected) form in **Udumbarikā Sīha, nāda S** (D 25,7), SD 1.4.

⁹¹ *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 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (*pañca, gati*) (D 33,2.1(4)/3:234; A 9.68) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal birth (*tirachāna, yoni*), the 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. See **Pañca, gati S** (A 9.68/4:459), SD 2.20.

⁹² These are the limbs of a streamwinner (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*): see **(Tad-ah’) Uposatha S** (A 3.70,4-7), SD 4.18, & **Pañca Vera Bhaya S 1** (S 12.41,10-14), SD 3.3(4.2). This means that those devas are also streamwinners.

11.2 Or, do the devas of the 33, too, have such knowledge:
'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

(2) THE DEVAS OF THE 33 (*tāva, tiṃsa*)

12 "Master Moggallāna, the devas of **the 33**, too, have such knowledge:
'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

13 "Tissa, do all the devas of the 33 have such knowledge:
'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

14 "No, master Moggallāna, not all the devas of the 33 have such knowledge:
'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

15 Master Moggallāna, those devas of the 33 who are
not accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
not accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,
not accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,
not accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—
they do not have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

16 But, master Moggallāna, those devas of the 33 who are
accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,
accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,
accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—
they do have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

17 "Now, Tissa, is it only the devas of the 33 who have such knowledge:
'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

17.2 Or, do the devas of Yāma, too, have such knowledge:
'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

(3) THE YĀMA DEVAS (*yāma*)

18 "Master Moggallāna, the devas of **Yāma**, too, have such knowledge:
'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

19 "Tissa, do all the devas of Yāma have such knowledge:
'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

20 "No, master Moggallāna, not all the devas of Yāma have such knowledge:
'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

21 Master Moggallāna, those devas of Yāma who are
not accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
not accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,
not accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,
not accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—
they do not have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

22 But, master Moggallāna, those devas of Yāma who are
accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,

accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,
accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—

they do have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

23 "Now, Tissa, is it only the devas of Yāma who have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'?"

23.2 Or, do the devas of Tusita, too, have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'?"

(4) THE CONTENTED DEVAS (*tusita*)

24 "Master Moggallāna, the devas of **Tusita**, too, have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

25 "Tissa, do all the devas of Tusita have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'?"

26 "No, master Moggallāna, not all the devas of Tusita have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'

27 Master Moggallāna, those devas of Tusita who are

not accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
not accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,
not accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,
not accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—

they do not have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'

28 But, master Moggallāna, those devas of Tusita who are

accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,
accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,
accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—

they do have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

29 "Now, Tissa, is it only the devas of Tusita who have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'?"

29.2 Or, do the devas of Nimmāna,ratī, too, have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'?"

(5) THE DEVAS WHO DELIGHT IN CREATING (*nimmāna,ratī*)

30 "Master Moggallāna, the devas of **Nimmāna,ratī**, too, have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'"

31 "Tissa, do all the devas of Nimmāna,ratī have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'?"

32 "No, master Moggallāna, not all the devas of Nimmāna,ratī have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'

33 Master Moggallāna, those devas of Nimmāna,ratī who are

not accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
not accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,
not accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,

not accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—
they do not have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'

34 But, master Moggallāna, those devas of Nimmāna, ratī who are
accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,
accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,
accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—

they do have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'

35 “Now, Tissa, is it only the devas of Nimmāna, ratī who have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!?'”

35.2 Or, do the devas of Para, nimitta, vasavattī, too, have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!?'”

(6) THE DEVAS WHO LORD OVER OTHERS' CREATIONS (*para, nimitta, vasavattī*)

36 “Master Moggallāna, the devas of Para, nimitta, vasavattī, too, have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'”

37 “Tissa, do all the devas of Para, nimitta, vasavattī have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!?'”

38 “No, master Moggallāna, not all the devas of Para, nimitta, vasavattī have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'”

39 Master Moggallāna, those devas of Para, nimitta, vasavattī who are
not accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
not accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,
not accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,
not accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—

they do not have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'

40 But, master Moggallāna, those devas of Para, nimitta, vasavattī who are
accomplished with wise faith in the Buddha,
accomplished with wise faith in the Dharma,
accomplished with wise faith in the sangha,
accomplished with moral virtue dear to the noble ones—

they do have such knowledge:

'A streamwinner am I, no longer bound for the lower world, sure of crossing over to self-awakening!'”

41 (3) Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, having delighted and rejoiced in the words of brahma Tissa, [334] just as a strong man would stretch his flexed arm or would flex his stretched arm, disappeared from the brahma world and appeared on Mount Vulture's Peak, just like that.

— evaṃ —

(Brahmā) Tissa Sutta

The Discourse on (Brahma) Tissa

A 7.53

1 <1>⁹³ Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was staying on Mount Vulture Peak⁹⁴ outside Rājagaha.⁹⁵

The liberated nuns

2 Then, when the night was far spent, **two deities** of exceeding beauty, having lit up the whole of Mount Vulture's **[74]** Peak, approached the Blessed One, saluted him and stood at one side.

2.2 As they stood on one side, one deity said to the Blessed One:

"These nuns,⁹⁶ bhante, are freed [liberated]!"⁹⁷

2.3 The other deity then said to the Blessed One:

"These nuns, bhante, are well freed without any substrate remaining!"⁹⁸

2.4 This is what the deities said; the Blessed One agreed.⁹⁹

2.5 Then, the deities, knowing that the Blessed One has agreed, saluted him, going rightwise around him, disappeared right there.¹⁰⁰

3 Then, when the night had passed, the Blessed One addressed the monks:

"Last night, bhikshus, *when the night was far spent, two deities of exceeding beauty, having lit up the whole of Vulture Peak, approached me, saluted and stood at one side.*

3.2 *Standing on one side, one deity said to me:*

"*These nuns, bhante, are freed!*"

3.3 *The other deity then said to me:*

"*These nuns, bhante, are well freed without any substrate remaining!*"

3.4 *This is what the deities said.*

3.5 *Having saluted me, going rightwise around me, disappeared right there.*

Brahmā Tissa

4 <2> Now, at that time, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna was sitting not far from the Blessed One. Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna said:

⁹³ These running numbers within (angle brackets) are those of the PTS Pali ed.

⁹⁴ "Mount Vulture Peak," *gijjha, kūṭa pabbata*, so called because on its peak is a rock that looks like a vulture's head. See **Chann'ovāda S** (M 144,2) n, SD 11.12.

⁹⁵ **Rāja, gaha** (Skt *raja, grha*, "royal house"), the capital of Magadha and one of the 6 main cities of India (D 2:147). It has been identified as modern Rajgir in the Nalanda district of Bihar about 21 km (13 miles) SW of Bihar-Sarif. Its southern flank is protected by 5 hills: Vebhāra (Vaibhāra), Vepulla (Vaipulya), Isigili (Rṣi, giri), Paṇḍava (Pāṇḍava) and Gijjha, kūṭa (Gṛdhra, kūṭa) [see prec n].

⁹⁶ Comy: These are the 500 nuns who are the retinue (*parivāra*) of Mahā, pajāpatī (AA 4:4-, 1 f).

⁹⁷ *Etā bhante bhikkhuniyo vimuttā'ti.*

⁹⁸ *Etā bhante bhikkhuniyo anupādi, sesā suvimuttā'ti.*

⁹⁹ *Idam avocum tā devatā, samanunño satthā ahoṣi.*

¹⁰⁰ *Atha kho tā devatā samanunño satthā'ti bhagavantam abhivādetvā padakkhiṇam katvā tatth'ev'antaradhā-yimsu.*

“Which are the deities who have such knowledge of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such?”¹⁰¹

5 Now, at that time, a monk named **Tissa**¹⁰² had passed away not long ago and was reborn in a certain brahma-world. There, he was also known as “Brahma Tissa of great power, great might.”¹⁰³

6 Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, just as a strong man would stretch his flexed arm or would flex his stretched arm, disappeared from Mount Vulture’s Peak and appeared in that brahma-world.

Moggallāna in the brahma-world

7 Brahma Tissa saw the venerable Mahā Moggallāna coming in the distance, [76] and said to him: “Please come, master Moggallāna; welcome, master Moggallāna! It’s been a long time since the venerable Moggallāna has found the occasion to come here.¹⁰⁴ Master Moggallāna, please take a seat: here’s one prepared.”

The venerable Mahā Moggallāna sat down on the prepared seat.

8 Having saluted the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, Brahma Tissa sat down at one side. Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna said to him:

8.2 “Which are the deities, Tissa, who have such knowledge of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such?”

9 “Master Moggallāna, the devas of the Brahma host have such knowledge of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such.”

The brahmas who know not

10 “Tissa, do all the devas of the Brahma host have such knowledge of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such?”

11 (3) “No, master Moggallāna, not all the devas of the Brahma host have such knowledge of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such.

11.2 Those devas of the brahma host, master Moggallāna, who are contented with a brahma’s life-span,
with a brahma’s beauty,
with a brahma’s happiness,
with a brahma’s fame,
with a brahma’s lordship—

they do not understand, according to reality, the escape that is higher than this.¹⁰⁵

they do not have such knowledge of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such.

¹⁰¹ *Katamesānaṃ kho devānaṃ evaṃ ñāṇaṃ hoti sa-upādisese vā ‘sa-upādiseso’ti, anupādisese vā ‘anupādiseso’ti*

¹⁰² Tissa, in his previous human birth, was Moggallāna’s pupil, and is now his brahma-student (*saddhi, vihārika-brahmā*) (AA 4:40,9).

¹⁰³ *Tisso brahma mah’iddhiko mahā’nubhāvo.*

¹⁰⁴ “Please come, ... to come here,” *ehi kho mārisa moggallāna, svāgataṃ mārisa moggallāna, cirassaṃ kho mārisa moggallāna imaṃ pariyāyaṃ akāsi yad idaṃ idh’āgamanāya*, as in **Brahma Nimantanika S** (M 49), spoken by brahma Baka. Cf the usage of a more polite (but affected) form (spoken by the wanderer Nigrodha) in **Udumbarikā Sīha, nāda S** (D 25,7), SD 1.4.

¹⁰⁵ *Te uttari nissaraṇaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ na-p, pajānanti.* This means that they are merely brahmas but have not attained any level of the path [1.2.1.1].

11.3 But, master Moggallāna, those devas of the brahma host who are not contented
with a brahma's life-span,
with a brahma's beauty,
with a brahma's happiness,
with a brahma's fame,
with a brahma's lordship—

they do understand, according to reality, the escape that is higher than this: **[77]**

they have such knowledge of 'one with substrate remaining' as such, and 'one without substrate remaining' as such.

The brahmas and the 6 kinds of persons¹⁰⁶

(1) THE ONE FREED BOTH WAYS (*ubhato,bhāga,vimutta*)¹⁰⁷

12 ⟨4⟩ Here, master Moggallāna, a monk is **freed both ways** [dual-freed]; these devas know him, thus:
'This venerable one is one freed both ways.

As long as his body remains, devas and humans will see him.¹⁰⁸

With the body's breaking up, devas and humans will not see him.¹⁰⁹—

Such, master Moggallāna, is the knowledge of these devas of 'one with substrate remaining' as such, and 'one without substrate remaining' as such.

(2) THE WISDOM-FREED (*paññā,vimutta*)

13 ⟨5⟩ Here, master Moggallāna, a monk is **wisdom-freed**; these devas know him, thus:
'This venerable one is wisdom-freed.

As long as his body remains, devas and humans will see him.

With the body's breaking up, devas and humans will not see him.'— [§12]

Such, master Moggallāna, is the knowledge of these devas of 'one with substrate remaining' as such, and 'one without substrate remaining' as such.

(3) THE BODY-WITNESS (*kāya,sakkhī*)

14 ⟨6⟩ Here, master Moggallāna, when a monk is **a body-witness**; the devas know thus:
'This venerable one is a body-witness.'

When the venerable one makes use of suitable resting places, and associates with spiritual friends, and balances his spiritual faculties,¹¹⁰

he may, by realizing for himself, through direct knowledge here and now attain and dwell in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into the homeless life.'—

Such, master Moggallāna, is the knowledge of these devas of 'one with substrate remaining' as such, and 'one without substrate remaining' as such.

¹⁰⁶ For parallel defs of these 7 individuals (*satta puggala*), see **Kīṭā,giri S** (M 70,14) + SD 11.1 (5.2).

¹⁰⁷ For a list of occurrences of the "both-ways freed" (*ubhato,bhāga,vimutta*) arhathood, see SD 49.5a (App).

¹⁰⁸ *Yāvassa kāyo ṭhassati, tāva naṃ dakkhanti deva,manussā.*

¹⁰⁹ *Kāyassa bhedaṃ na naṃ dakkhanti deva,manussā'ti.*

¹¹⁰ These are the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc'indriya*): faith (*saddh'indriya*), effort (*viriy'indriya*), mindfulness (*sat'indriya*), concentration (*samādh'indriya*) and wisdom (*paññ'indriya*): **Pañc'indriya**, SD 10.4; SD 3.6 (3); SD 54.3h (3.1).

(4) THE VIEW-ATTAINER (*diṭṭhi-p, patta*)

15 ⟨7⟩ Here, master Moggallāna, when a monk is a **view-attainer**; the devas know thus:
‘This venerable one is a view-attainer.

When the venerable one makes use of suitable resting places, and associates with spiritual friends, and balances his spiritual faculties,

he may, by realizing for himself, through direct knowledge here and now attain and dwell in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into the homeless life.’— [§14]

Such, master Moggallāna, is the knowledge of these devas of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such.

(5) THE FAITH-FREED (*saddhā-vimutta*)

16 Here, master Moggallāna, when a monk is **one faith-freed**; the devas know thus:
‘This venerable one is one faith-freed.

Here, bhikshus, a certain person, not having touched with the body, dwells not in those freedoms that are peaceful and formless, transcending forms,

but only some of his mental influxes are destroyed through his having seen them with wisdom, and his faith is planted, rooted and established in the Tathagata.¹¹¹

Such, master Moggallāna, is the knowledge of these devas of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such.

(6) THE TRUTH-FOLLOWER (*dhammānusārī*)

17 Here, master Moggallāna, when a monk is a **truth-follower**; the devas know thus:
‘This venerable one [78] is a truth-follower.

Here, bhikshus, a certain person, not having touched with the body, dwells not in those freedoms that are peaceful and formless, transcending forms,

but only some of his mental influxes are destroyed through his having seen them with wisdom, and his faith is planted, rooted and established in the Tathagata.’ [§16]

Such, master Moggallāna, is the knowledge of these devas of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such.

Moggallāna reports to the Buddha

18 ⟨8⟩ Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, having delighted and rejoiced in the words of brahma Tissa, *just as a strong man would stretch his flexed arm or would flex his stretched arm*, disappeared from the brahma world and appeared on Mount Vulture’s Peak, just like that.

19 Then, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side. Seated thus, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna related to the Blessed One his conversation with brahma Tissa just as it had happened.

¹¹¹ *Tathāgate c’assa saddhā niviṭṭhā hoti mūla, jātā patiṭṭhitā*. See (2.1.2.5) above.

The Buddha's response: the 7th person

20 “However, Moggallāna, brahma Tissa did not teach you the 7th person, **the one who dwells in the signless** (*animitta, vihārī*).”

21 “This is the time, bhante! This is the time, sugata [welcome one]! The Blessed One should teach regarding the 7th person. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks would remember it.”

21.2 In that case, Moggallāna, listen! Pay close attention, I will speak.”

“Yes, bhante!” replied Mahā Moggallāna.

The one who dwells in the signless

22 The Blessed One said this:

22.2 (9) “Here, Moggallāna, a monk, not attending to any of the mental signs, enters and dwells in **the signless mental concentration** (*animitta ceto, samādhi*).¹¹²

23 The devas know him thus:

‘This venerable, *not attending to any of the mental signs, enters and dwells in **the signless mental concentration***.

Perhaps, *this venerable one, making use of suitable resting places, associating with spiritual friends, and harmonizing his spiritual faculties,*

he would, by realizing for himself, through direct knowledge here and now [79] attain and dwell in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into the homeless life. [§14]

24 Such, Moggallāna, is the knowledge of these devas of ‘one with substrate remaining’ as such, and ‘one without substrate remaining’ as such.”

— evaṃ —

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¹¹² *Idha moggallāna bhikkhu sabba, nimittānaṃ amanasikārā animittaṃ ceto, samādhim upasampajja viharati.*
See (3).