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(Cha-ḷ-indriya) Sambuddha Sutta

The (6-faculty) Discourse on the Self-awakened | S 48.28

Ce **Buddha Sutta** The Discourse on the Awakened

Theme: The Buddha has fully mastered the 6 sense-faculties

Translated by Piya Tan ©2020

1 Introduction

1.1 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.1.1 Sutta summary

The **(Cha-ḷ-indriya) Sambuddha Sutta** (S 48.28), the (6-faculty) discourse on the self-awakened, the Buddha states that he fully understands the nature of the 6 sense-faculties, that is, the 5 physical senses and the mind. The sutta is located in the most *miscellaneous* chapter (*vagga*) of the Indriya Sāmyutta.¹

1.1.2 “Before the awakening”

1.1.2.1 We often come across suttas where the Buddha declares that he has never taught any teaching without first having fully awakened to true reality. He declares this in at least one of two ways: by way of the *yāva kivañ ca* formula or the *pubb’eva me sambodhā* formula. In the former, there is the phrase: “so long, ... , as I did not directly know according to true reality ... [this truth] ... I did not claim to have awakened to the supreme perfect awakening in this world” [1.1.2.2]. In the latter, he declares, “before my self-awakening, when I was still a bodhisattva” [1.1.2.3].

Both these formulas are found, for example, in these suttas:

Dvedhā, vitakka Sutta	M 19/1:114	SD 61.1	the duality of thoughts
Mahā Saccaka Sutta	M 36/1:240	SD 49.4	spiritual cultivation of mind and body
(Majjhima) Saṅgārava Sutta	M 100/2:211	SD 10.9	do gods exist?
(Anuruddha) Upakkilesa Sutta	M 128/3:157	SD 5.18	spiritual friendship and mental growth
Mahā Sakya, muni Gotama Sutta	S 12.10/2:10	SD 14.3	how the Buddha awakens
Kāma, guṇa Sutta	S 35.117/4:97	SD 88.6	overcoming the 6 sensual pleasures
(Dhātu) Pubbe Sambodha Sutta	S 14.31/2:170 f ²	SD 29.17	the 4 elements
Pubb’eva Sambodha Sutta 1	S 35.13/4:6	SD 14.9	the 6 sense-faculties
Pubb’eva Sambodha Sutta 2	S 35.14/4:8	SD 14.10	the 6 sense-objects
(Vedanā) Pubba Sutta	S 36.24/4:233	SD 110.2	the nature of feelings
(Iddhi, pāda) Pubba Sutta	S 51.11/5:263		the bases of spiritual power
Magga Sutta	S 51.21/5:281		spiritual power and superknowledge
(Tika) Pubb’eva Sambodha Sutta	A 3.101a/1:258 f	SD 14.6a	the world is unsatisfactory

1.1.2.2 Using the 1st phrase—the *yāva kivañ ca* formula—the Buddha declares that “so long, ... , as I did not directly know according to true reality ... [this truth] ... I did not claim to have awakened to the supreme perfect awakening in this world.”³ In other words, the Buddha is saying that when he has not

¹ On **Cha-ḷ-indriya Vagga**, the chapter on the 6 sense-bases, see SD 56.14 (2).

² S 14.31,2+10/2:170 (SD 29.17).

³ *Yāva kivañ cāham ... na abbhaññāsīm n’eva tāvāham ... loke ... anuttaram sammā, sambodhim abhisambuddho’ti*

directly seen the whole of true reality, he does not declare himself to be the Buddha. Simply, this means that he is not a *false* teacher, but an authentic self-realized shower of the way of awakening.

We see the occasion for **the *yāva kīvañ ca* formula** in these suttas:

Assāda Sutta 1	S 22.26/3:27 f		understanding the 5 aggregates
Assāda Sutta 2	S 22.27/3:29 f		understanding the 5 aggregates
Assāda Sutta 3	S 22.28/3:30 f		understanding the 5 aggregates
(Indriya) Punabbhava Sutta	S 48.21/5:203 f	SD 56.14	the Buddha mastered the 5 faculties
(Cha-ḷ-indriya) Sambuddha Sutta	S 48.28/5:205 f	SD 56.17	the Buddha mastered the 6 faculties

1.1.2.3 Using the 2nd phrase—the *pubb’eva me sambodhā* formula—the Buddha declares that “**before my self-awakening**, when I was still a bodhisattva,”⁴ he does not directly know the truth of reality. Having directly known it, he becomes the Buddha. In other words, he has attained that true state of awakening, nirvana, from directly realizing the whole of true reality. What he knows and teaches are about true reality, and it will bring us the same awakening and freedom as that he has himself awakened to. [1.1.2.1]

1.2 MASTERING THE 6 FACULTIES

In the Indriya Saṃyutta (S 48), **the (Cha-ḷ-indriya) Sambuddha Sutta** (S 48.28) is almost unique because it is a teaching about the Buddha himself. The only other parallel to it is **the (Indriya) Punabbhava Sutta** (S 48.21), SD 56.14. While in the former (**S 48.28**), the paradigm is the 6 sense-bases, in the latter (**S 48.21**), it is the 5 spiritual faculties.

Both these suttas apply **the *samudaya pentad***, that is, “the arising and ceasing, the gratification, the danger and the escape” regarding *the respective sets mentioned*. While in **S 48.28**, the Buddha points out his mastery of the 6 sense faculties—that is, the 6 internal sense-bases and their external sense-objects—in **S 48.21**, he declares his mastery of the 5 spiritual faculties. While the former is about his *physical* or *worldly* being, the latter is about his *mental* or *spiritual* being. Together they attest to the Buddha’s complete mastery of his being as a whole, that is, as one fully awakened and liberated.

1.3 UNDERSTANDING THE “ALL”

1.3.1 The Sabba Sutta (S 35.23)

To appreciate the profound significance of what has just been stated—the Buddha’s mastery of his being as a whole—we only need to look at another short but very instructive **Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23). In essence, the Sutta records the Buddha as declaring that “**all**” (*sabba*) that there is nothing more than our 6 *internal* sense-faculties and their *external* sense-objects. It is impossible that there is anything else beyond this.⁵

This remarkable statement of universal truth is the foundation of the early Buddhist theory of knowledge, a **Dharma-based epistemology**. Basically, it means that our only *means* of knowledge is our 6 internal sense-bases—the eye-faculty, the ear-faculty, nose-faculty, tongue-faculty, body-faculty and mind-faculty. And *what* we can know, our *sources* of knowledge, are the 6 external sense-bases—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts.⁶

⁴ *Pubbe me ... sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattass’eva sato.*

⁵ S 35.23/4:15 (SD 7.1).

⁶ Note that, for the sake of convenience, the word, “*thoughts*,” has been used in a very broad sense to refer to what the mind *is*, what it *does*, what *happens* to it, and what it *holds*.

Early Buddhism does not reject the reality of things “out there”—like the chair we are sitting in, or the computer or phone we are looking at, or the building we are living in now, or the world and beings around us—but they are not as real as the “names” (*nāma*), the “thoughts” or mind-objects that we conceive and project onto the **forms** (*rūpa*) in the external world.⁷

In other words, we *create, recreate, live, die, return again* within the rut of our own virtual reality. This is our self-built prison closed in by walls of *ignorance* with bars of *views* in the windows of *greed*, and bolts of *hate* in the doors of *delusion*. Yet, we don’t really know or see all this—we think our prison is a really big and beautiful place because there are many of us inside it with so many things to distract us. Yet, this is **all** there is.

1.3.2 The totality formula

1.3.2.1 A more elaborate version of the “all” statement is the “**totality**” pericope or formula that describes the nature and extent of the 5 aggregates: form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.⁸ Each of these aggregates has the same nature—they are impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self⁹—whether it is of “**the past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near**” (*atītānagata, paccupannaṃ ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā hīnaṃ vā pañitaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā*).¹⁰ They should be “seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not myself.’”¹¹

1.3.2.2 The totality formula is explained in detail in **the Vibhaṅga**, which actually opens with this explanation (Vbh 1-13). A brief explanation is given in the Visuddhimagga,¹² and in the Abhidhamm’attha-saṅgaha.¹³ Here is a *summary* of the explanations of the component terms of the formula:

“**past**” (*atīta*): the 4 elements (earth, water, fire, wind) and related qualities¹⁴ that form our physical being, and our memories, habits, perception and karma;

“**future**” (*anāgata*): the 4 elements and related qualities that have not yet arisen and will arise in us;

“**present**” (*paccuppanna*): the 4 elements and related qualities that are born, present with us now.

“**internal**” (*ajjhatta*): physical sense-organs; the 4 elements comprising our body;

“**external**” (*bahiddhā*): physical sense-objects, including other beings;

“**gross**” (*oḷārika*): that which impinges (the physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire);

“**subtle**” (*sukhuma*): that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water);¹⁵

⁷ For there see Analayo, “The 5 fingers of name,” 2020.

⁸ On the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.

⁹ On the 3 characteristics of the 5 aggregates, see **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,12-16), SD 1.2.

¹⁰ See **(Dve) Khandha S** (S 22.48) + SD 17.1a (3); **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,17-21), SD 1.2.

¹¹ *N’etaṃ mama, n’eso ’ham asmi, na mēso attā ti*. A brief version, “There can be no considering that (element) as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’” (*ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā*) is found in **Mahā Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28/1:184-191 §§6.2-7, 11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22). This is opp of “the 3 graspings” (*ti, vidha gāha*) formula: *etaṃ mama, eso ’ham asmi, eso me attā ti* [§§12-16]. In **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,12-16/3:68), this formula is applied to the 5 aggregates & in **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/3:94-99), SD 6.1, to the 4 primary elements. See **S 22.59,12** n (SD 1.2). See also **(Dhātu) Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f). See **Pārileyya S**, SD 6.1 (5). See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995a:32 f. On non-identification, see **Atam, mayatā**, SD 19.13.

¹² Vism 14.73/450 f.

¹³ Abhs 6.7 :: Abhs:BRS 245 f.

¹⁴ On the 4 elements, see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 11,8-11, with §12 on “space”), SD 3.11.

“**inferior**” (*hīna*): unpleasant and undesirable sense-experiences [sense-world existence];
 “**superior**” (*paṇīta*): pleasant and desirable sense-experiences [form & formless existences];
 “**far**” (*dūre*): subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”), objects in distant places or beyond our world;
 “**near**” (*santike*): gross objects (“easy to penetrate”), objects within our reach or world.

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(Cha-ḷ-indriya) Sambuddha Sutta

The (6-faculty) Discourse on the Self-awakened

S 48.28

2 “Bhikshus, there are these **6 faculties**. What are the six?”

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) The eye faculty; | <i>cakkhu’ndriya</i> |
| (2) the ear faculty; | <i>sot’indriya</i> |
| (3) the nose faculty; | <i>ghān’indriya</i> |
| (4) the tongue faculty; | <i>jivh’indriya</i> |
| (5) the body faculty; | <i>kāy’indriya</i> |
| (6) the mind faculty. | <i>man’indriya</i> [206] |

THE SAMUDAYA PENTAD

3 So long, bhikkhus, as I did not directly know, as it really is,
the arising and the ceasing, the gratification, the danger and the escape
 regarding these 6 faculties,

I did not claim to have awakened to the supreme perfect awakening
 in this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its
 devas and humans.

4 But, bhikkhus, when I directly knew these 6 faculties, as it really is,
 only then, bhikkhus, I claimed to have awakened to the supreme perfect awakening
*in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its
 devas and humans.*

5 And the knowledge and vision arose in me:

‘**Unshakable is my freedom of mind.** This is my last birth. Now there is no more rebirth (for me)!’¹⁵

— catutthaṃ —

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¹⁵ See Dhs §585/126,31-127,7 for the derived forms (*upādā,rūpa* or *upādāya,rūpa*): femininity (*itth’indriya*); masculinity (*puris’indriya*); physical base of the mind (*hadaya,vatthu*); bodily intimation (*kāya,viññatti*), verbal intimation (*vacī,viññatti*); physical life (*rūpa,jīvitā*); the space element (*ākāsa,dhātu*), physical agility (*rupassa lahutā*), physical elasticity (*rūpassa mudutā*), physical adaptability (*rūpassa kammaññatā*), physical growth (*rūpassa upacaya*); physical continuity (*rūpassa santati*); decay (*jarā*), impermanence (*aniccatā*) and food (*āhāra*). On the derived forms, see **Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56,7), SD 3.7.

¹⁶ This closing is identical to that of (**Indriya) Punabbhava S** (S 48.21), SD 56.14, which deals with the 5 spiritual faculties.