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Cūḷa Suññata Sutta

The Lesser Discourse on Emptiness | M 121

Theme: The realization of impermanence in the highest meditation

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005, 2023

1 The Sutta title

1.1 Title translation

1.1.1 Although the **Cūḷa Suññata Sutta** (M 121) is slightly shorter it is located just before the **slightly longer Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 122). One reason for this is probably because M 121 deals with meditation, especially the 4 formless dhyanas (which is not so common in the Pali canon). M 122, on the other hand, deals with “emptiness” in connection with **renunciation** and spiritual friendship.

1.1.2 The Pāli for the noun “emptiness” or “voidness” is **suññatā**, but in the title it is given as *suññata*,¹ which, if taken as an adjective, should be rendered as “the empty” or “the void,” or if taken as a noun with a shortened (weakened) final vowel within a compound, then it should be rendered as “emptiness.” Hence, *cūḷa, suññata, sutta*, could be translated as “the lesser discourse on the empty” or “the lesser discourse on emptiness.”

This latter form, however, is apparently commonly found in other sutta titles, for example,

Metta Sutta	(Sn 1.8 = Kh no 9),	“the lovingkindness discourse,”
Ratana Sutta	(Sn 13/2.1 = Kh no 6),	“the discourse on the jewels.”

While *suññata* and *metta* (note the short final vowels) are adjectives, translatable as “empty” and “friendly” respectively, it is difficult to translate *ratana* as an adjective: at best perhaps one could render it as “jewelled,” as in “the jewelled discourse” for Ratana Sutta, or simply, “the jewel discourse.”

1.2 Versions of the Sutta

Both **Rod Bucknell** (in his Pali & Chinese Āgama concordance, 2004) and **Analayo** (in his *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*)² say that the Cūḷa Suññatā Sutta is found in the Taishō Tripiṭaka as **MĀ 190 (T1.736c-738a)**. While Bucknell cites its Tibetan parallel as **P956 (P38.278)** in the Kanjur,³ Analayo cites it as the **mdo chen pos tong pa nyid ces bya ba** in the Derge Kanjur as **Kj:De 71.250a-253b**.⁴ The Tibetan version is entitled **Śūnyatā Mahā, sūtra** (The Great Discourse on Emptiness).⁵ [9]

2 Sutta theme and summary

2.1 MAIN THEME

In gradual stages, the Cūḷa Suññatā Sutta shows how the “abiding in emptiness” (*suññatā, vihāra*) refers to the fruition attainment of emptiness (*suññata, phala, samāpatti*),⁶ the fruition attainment of

¹ See PED at <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/pali/> under: [suññata](#) & [suññatā](#).

² Draft, 2005.

³ Beijing ed, Ōtani reprint, Tokyo, 1956. *Kanjur* means “Buddha Word” (in Tib tr).

⁴ This latter cited by Peter Skilling 1994:146-186. M 121 and MĀ 190 have been compared by Choong 1999: 66-76. All three versions of this sutta have been studied by Schmithausen 1981:232-239 and Skilling 1997:335-363. Skilling 1997:14, 338 says that the Tibetan version comes from the Madhyama Āgama of the Mūla, sarvāstivāda.

⁵ For a Tib-Pāli critical comparison, see **Skilling** 1994:146-181. See **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122), SD 11.4(1).

⁶ Also spelt *suññatā, phala, samāpatti*, but less frequently.

arhathood that is attained by focusing on the perception of nirvana as being empty. The main idea of this Sutta is that of the application of insight (“impermanence”) to the attainment of the signless concentration of mind and thereby winning spiritual liberation.

2.2 SUTTA SUMMARY

The Cūḷa Suññata Sutta opens with Ānanda’s recalling the Buddha’s own “**abiding in emptiness**” (*suññatā, vihāra*) and he questions the Buddha about it [§§3 f]. The Buddha goes on to elaborate the “truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into **emptiness**” [§§5-45]. Firstly, the practitioner should begin to “cultivate oneness” by avoiding the perception of village and of people, that is, not to look at society in terms of the defilements of liking and disliking. Instead, one should first focus on the “oneness dependent on the community of monks,” and then turn to the perception of **a forest**, that is, to mindfully observe nature [§6-12].

The practice becomes more focused into the perception of **earth** [§§13-18], that is, one of the meditations on the elements,⁷ which contains the sutta’s only simile (that of the bull’s hide). The mindfulness practice then goes on to the perceptions of each of the 4 formless attainments [§§19-35].

The Sutta climaxes with the teaching on **the signless concentration of mind** [§§36-39], leading to **arhathood** [§§40-45]. The Buddha closes by declaring that the “truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness” is **a universal practice** of all true spiritual seekers, and exhorts Ānanda (and all practitioners) to abide in that same emptiness [§46 f].

3 Is the Pali Canon incomplete?

3.1 Ānanda is recorded in **§3 f** as correctly recalling the Buddha’s constant abiding in emptiness, and that the Buddha endorses his statement. However, it is interesting that this earlier statement has not been recorded elsewhere in the Pali Canon. Peter Skilling notes that **Vasubandhu**⁸ “in a section of his *Vyākhyā-yukti*, devoted to a spirited defence of the Mahāyāna” cited this silence “to demonstrate that the sūtra collection of the Śrāvakas is not complete: that it does not record every teaching of the Buddha.”⁹ **Analyo**, in his *Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*, gives this response:

Yet if on the earlier occasion the Buddha had given further explanation or a full exposition of the matter, Ānanda would not have needed to inquire about the matter again on the present occasion. This suggests that the Buddha made only the short statement quoted in the present discourse, a statement that due to its brevity does not suffice for being recorded as a discourse. In view of this it would not seem surprising that this brief statement has not been recorded elsewhere, all the more since by being mentioned in the introductory section of the present discourse it was preserved for posterity, together with a detailed exposition. In fact, taken on its own this statement does not seem to be particularly remarkable, as in M 151 at M 3:294,4 and V 2:304,12 other monks similarly declare that they often dwell in emptiness.

(2005, M 3:104 n ad loc)

⁷ There are 4 basic meditations on the elements (earth, water, fire, wind): see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62,8-11/1:421-423), SD 3.11, & **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,14-17/3:244), SD 4.17.

⁸ Born prob in late 4th cent BCE, NW India; half-brother of Asaṅga. He started off with Sarvāstivāda, but dissatisfied with it, on account of his philosophical interests, turned to Mahāyāna and became one of the most influential founders of the Yogācāra school.

⁹ Skilling 1997:346.

3.2 Early pre-sectarian Buddhism, that is, the direct teachings of the Buddha and his first arhats, is pragmatically soteriological (nirvana-oriented). It is concerned only with declaring “just suffering and the ending of suffering” (*dukkhañ c’eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodham*) (M 22; S 22.86).¹⁰ After the Buddha’s passing, however, Buddhism generally went into stages and episodes of philosophical and sociocultural developments within and outside India, and this development is still going on today, especially in the West and westernized societies.

3.3 In one of the most radical departures from an oral tradition of the direct experience of the inner silence, post-Buddha Buddhism became more and more book-based: from the way of the spirit, it grew into a religion of the letter, especially in Sri Lanka and in philosophical Mahāyāna, and today prominently exemplified in academic Buddhism. As a forest of letters, Buddhist scripture (like any religion’s scripture) is subject to explorations, interpretations and developments in the business of professional knowledge. In the process, many trees are cut down, and the deforestation is spreading alarmingly, the results of which are clearly evident, for example, in any internet Buddhist chat sites. Much of Buddhism today has become free-market cults and businesses, where everyone is an expert. However, our mind’s forest remains untamed, still teeming with wild beasts and other dangers.

3.4 Buddhism of the spirit is always complete, just as silence is always present in the most beautiful piece of music, and pure light in every colour. No amount of mastery of the texts will bring awakening, though it may help to point seekers in the right direction. But the map is never the territory. The journey to inner silence must be taken after the maps have been studied, and along the way the maps may still help, but the humble and ancient natives are always the best guides; for, they have walked the uncharted paths and have themselves heard the silence.

Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife
Their sobre wishes never learn’d to stray;
Along the cool sequester’d vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

(Thomas Gray, 1716-1771, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*)

4 Pakkhandati

4.1 The word “**plunges**” (*pakkhandati*) occurs 9 times in the Cūḷa Sūññata Sutta [§§8, 13, 14, 19, 23, 28, 32, 36, 40], and literally means “he leaps forward,” meaning “enters into, descends.” It is here rendered as “he plunges.” The Commentaries give various glosses: *otarati* (goes down into) (MA 4:151), *okkhanditvā pakkhanditvā* (descending into, entering) (MA 1:238; Vism 636). It is often used figuratively: “rejoices in, finds pleasure or satisfaction in, he takes to.”

The word is found in the stock passage: *cittam pakkhandati pasīdati santiṭṭhati adhimuccati*, “His mind plunges into (that perception of a forest), brightens up, steadies and frees itself.” [§8].¹¹ Here the underscored phrase is progressively replaced by the perceptions of earth, of each of the four formless attainments, and finally of the signless concentration of mind. This stock passage refers to a leap of faith in a person as result of spiritual experience (Miln 36).

¹⁰ M 22,38/1:140 (SD 3.13); S 22.86/3:119 = 44.2/4:384 (SD 21.13); cf S 12.15/2:17.

¹¹ M 3:104; cf M 1:186; Miln 326.

4.2 In the Mahā Hatthi, padōpama Sutta (M 28), SD 6.16, it is said, “And his mind plunges into that very object that is that element [earth], brightens with faith, becomes steady, and is resolute” (M 28,8/1:186). On *tassa dhāt’ārammaṇam eva cittaṃ pakkhandati* (underscored), Bodhi notes:

This sentence can be construed in two alternative ways, depending on how the compound *dhātārammaṇam* is understood. Nyanaponika Thera takes it as the object of the verb *pakkhandati*, and he understands *dhātu* here as “an impersonal element in general” capable of including sound, contact, feeling, etc. Thus he translates, “And his mind enters into that very object [taking it just as an impersonal] element.” [Ñāṇamoli] reads the compound as an adjunct qualifying *citta*, and supplies the object of the verb in parenthesis. The Majjhima Commentary (MA) seems to support the former reading; Majjhima Commentary Ṭīkā explicitly identifies *dhātu* as the earth element, thus supporting the latter reading. MA explains the phrase “acquires resolution” [*adhimuccati*, “is resolute”] to mean that the meditator contemplates the situation by way of elements and thus has neither attachment nor aversion concerning it.

(M:ÑB 1221 n334; emphases added)¹²

4.3 The (Khandha) Channa Sutta (S 22.90), SD 56.5, mentions how the monk Channa, having accepted that the aggregates (*khandhā*) are impermanent and not self (omitting “suffering”), and that all formations (*sabbe saṅkhārā*) are impermanent and not self, finds that still his mind “does not plunge into the stilling of all the formations” and so “does not brighten with faith, nor does he steady his mind, nor is he resolute” (S 22.90/ 3:133). The monks, fearing Channa’s quarrelsome nature, have earlier on refrained from mentioning the characteristic of “suffering” (*dukkha*) of the aggregates so as not to offend him¹³ (SA 2:318).

5 Abiding in emptiness

5.1 The key term in the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta is “**abiding in emptiness**” (*suññatā, vihāra*), of which the Buddha declares, “As before, Ānanda, so do I now often abide in emptiness” [§4.2]. Basically, this abiding is a profound mental focus on one of the 3 characteristics (*lakkhana*)—impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and not-self (*anattā*):

The contemplation on impermanence	Cūḷa Suññata Sutta	(M 121/3:104-109)
The contemplation, on suffering (or unsatisfactoriness)	Mahā Suññata Sutta	(M 122,5/3:111)
The contemplation, on not-self	Mahā Suññata Sutta	(M 122,17/3:115)

In gradual stages, the Sutta shows how the “abiding in emptiness” (*suññatā, vihāra*) refers to the fruition attainment of emptiness (*suññata, phala, samāpatti*), the fruition attainment of arhathood that is attained by focusing on the empty aspect of nirvana.

5.2 In the Piṇḍapāta Pārisuddhi Sutta (M 151), SD 69.1, the Buddha declares that the abiding in emptiness is also known as “the abiding of a great person” (*mahā, purisa vihāra*) (M 151,2/3:294), because the buddhas, pratyeka buddhas and the Tathagata’s great disciples constantly abide in it (MA 5:106).

¹² On *pakkhandati* and nirvana, see MA 2:299.

¹³ See S:B 1084 n180.

5.3 FREEDOM OF MIND

5.3.1 In the **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43), SD 30.2, the term “emptiness” (*suññatā*) forms one of 4 synonyms for spiritual liberation or awakening, namely,

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) the immeasurable freedom of mind, | <i>appamāṇā ceto, vimutti</i> | |
| (2) the freedom of mind through nothingness, | <i>ākiñcaññā ceto, vimutti</i> | |
| (3) the freedom of mind through emptiness, | <i>suññatā ceto, vimutti</i> | |
| (4) the signless freedom of mind. ¹⁴ | <i>animittā ceto, vimutti</i> | (M 43,26-37/1:296-298) |

Note here that the common term is not *samādhī* but **vimutti**, “freedom,” which refers to the mind being freed from the defilements; in other words, it refers to awakening itself.

5.3.2 As technical terms, the “**signless element**” (*animitta dhātu*) is nirvana, and these 4 freedoms of mind are synonymous [5.3.1] in that they all refer to the fruition 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 used to remove the defilements.¹⁵

5.4 The Kathāvatthu Commentary says that there are 2 kinds of emptiness:

- (1) that of a being (*satta, suññatā*);
- (2) that of formations (*saṅkhāra, suññatā*). (KvuA 63)

A being is empty or void in the sense that it is comprised of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness), all of which are characterized as impermanent, suffering and not self. The emptiness of formations refers to nirvana itself.¹⁶

6 The formless attainments

6.1 The practice section of the Cūḷa Sūññata Sutta begins with “oneness” (*ekatta*), that is, concentration, arising from down-to-earth perception methods progressing into the more profound perception of the formless attainments (*arūpa, samāpatti*), namely:

- | | |
|---|------------|
| (1) The oneness dependent on the perception of the community of monks | [§6] |
| (2) The oneness dependent on the perception of a forest | [§§7-12] |
| (3) The oneness dependent on the perception of earth | [§§13-18] |
| (4) The oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of infinite space | [§19-22] |
| (5) The oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness | [§§23-27] |
| (6) The oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of nothingness | [§§28-31] |
| (7) The oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of
neither-perception-nor-non-perception | [§§32-35]. |

¹⁴ On this important term used non-technically in the early suttas, see SD 54.5 (3.3).

¹⁵ See SD 54.5 (3.3.3.5).

¹⁶ See Kvu:SR 142 n4; Dhs:RD §344 & header n.

6.2 The Animitta Ceto,samādhī Pañha Sutta (S 40.9) similarly records Moggallāna’s progression through the 4 formless attainments culminating in his attainment of *the signless concentration of the mind*,¹⁷ going through the same stages as those described in the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta.

6.3 On the other hand, the insight practice described in **the Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta** (M 52, SD 41.2) and **the Mahā Māluṅkya Sutta** (M 64, SD 21.10) do not mention the 4th formless attainment in a series of meditative states that includes the other 3 formless attainments.¹⁸ The Subcommentary on the Aṭṭhaka,-nāgara Sutta explains that the 4th formless attainment is too subtle an experience for the insight contemplation described in these discourses (MĀṬ:Be 2:9). Analayo notes in his *Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikāya*:

The same could well apply to the present context, as the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta is also concerned with insight contemplation. Whereas in the set of discourses concerned with Moggallāna’s meditation development the emphasis was on attaining each immaterial sphere as part of his development of concentrative mastery, in the Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta, in the Mahāmāluṅkya Sutta and in the Cūḷasuññata Sutta the point at stake is not the attainment of the immaterial spheres as such, but their use for the purpose of insight. Hence the Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta, in the Mahāmāluṅkya Sutta would support the Chinese version of the Cūḷasuññata Sutta, which do not include the fourth immaterial attainment in their exposition. (Analayo, 2005 ad M 3:107; emphasis added)

However, what is of special interest here is that the signless concentration is placed after these 8 states, which leads Bodhi to conclude that “its placement after the eighth formless attainment suggests it is a *samādhī* qualitatively different from those attained in *samatha* meditation” (S:B 1440 n280).

7 “Emptiness” (suññatā)

7.1 All the 3 versions of the Sutta describe how through mental focus, one cultivates a unitary type of perception (*saññā paṭicca manasikaroti ekattam*) that regards the present experience as devoid of the breaking up [disturbances] (*darathā*)¹⁹ connected with the previous stage, so that only that unitary perception remains, relying on which (*saññā paṭicca ekattam*), one goes on to the next successively more refined state, so that “whatever breaking up there were...they are no more here” (*ye assu darathā ... te ’dha na santi*) [§4(1) etc].

The agreement of the 3 versions of the Sutta is remarkable in showing the notion of emptiness (suññatā) in early Buddhism. Of this, **Analayo** makes a very important note:

The agreement between the Pāli, Chinese and Tibetan versions of the Cūḷasuññatā Sutta on this basic procedure for developing a genuine and undistorted approach to emptiness is worth noting, as it throws into relief the implications of “emptiness” in early Buddhism.²⁰ The present passage shows “emptiness” to be a qualification, not an abstract state. That is, from an early

¹⁷ S 40.9/4:269 @ SD 24.19. Analayo notes that while the preceding stages of Moggallāna’s practice in S 40.1-8 do not seem to have Chinese counterparts, his attainment of signlessness is also recorded in the parallel to S 40.9 at SĀ 503 = T2.132b18 (2005 ad M 3:107 n).

¹⁸ M 52/1:352 & M 64/1:437. **Analayo** notes that the Chinese Āgama parallels to M 52 (MĀ 217 = T1.802b27 & T92 = T1.916c8), differ in as much as they do include the 4th formless attainment in their treatment, whereas the parallel to M 62 (MĀ 205 = T1.780a17) agrees with the Pali version in taking its treatment only up to the 3rd formless attainment (2005 ad M 3:107 n).

¹⁹ For def of *daratha*, see §4 n on “breaking up.”

²⁰ On the importance of this passage in Mahāyāna thought, see Skilling 1997:350-351.

Buddhist perspective to qualify something as “empty” means simply that it is “devoid of” something else.

The same applies in relation of selfhood, when personal experience is seen to be “empty” of a self and of what belongs to a self. All aspects of personal experience are impermanent and therefore “empty” of anything permanent. In contrast, self-notions are based on the assumption of permanency. Close interpretation then shows personal experience to be “empty of” such a permanent self. (2005 ad M 3:104; emphasis added)

7.2 In this connection, **Peter Skilling** noted an unfortunate error in I B Horner’s translation of this sutta, that is,

the unwarranted description of emptiness as a concept: “abiding in (the concept of) emptiness.” The sūtra shows that emptiness is here an exercise in deliberate awareness of what is absent and what is present: an attainment, an experience, gained by progressive refinement of mind, leading direct experience of liberation, here called the unsurpassed emptiness. This is clear not only from the two Sūnyatā Sūtras [M 121, 122], but also from the Piṇḍapāta, pārisuddhi-sutta (M 151). (1997:347; citation normalized)

8 “The signless” (*animitta*)

8.1 Concentration and freedom of mind

8.1.1 According to the Pali Cūḷa Sūññata Sutta, the practitioner, keeping up his meditation on emptiness, gains the formless attainment, and then “attends to the oneness dependent on the signless concentration of mind” [§36]. Other discourses, such as **the Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43), show that the purpose in cultivating the signless meditation is not to attend to any sign (*nimitta*) so that “**freedom of mind**” (*ceto, vimutti*) is attained:²¹

“Friend, how many conditions are there for the attainment of the signless freedom of mind?”

“Friend, there are two conditions for the attainment of the signless freedom of mind: non-attention to all signs and attention to the signless element. These are the two conditions for the attainment of the signless freedom of mind.” (M 43,28/1:296), SD 30.2

8.1.2 The Majjhima Commentary here says that “the signless freedom of mind” (*animitta ceto, vimutti*) is the attainment of fruition. The “signs” are objects such as forms, etc; the “signless element” is nirvana, in which all signs of conditioned things are absent (MA 2:352). Hence, **Analayo** explains:

A “sign” in such contexts refers to those aspects, marks and characteristics by which one recognizes phenomena. According to the Pāli discourses, to meditate in signlessness can bring about the removal of lust, anger and delusion and thereby lead to the unconditioned. These passages make it clear why signless concentration of the mind comes as the climax of the gradual development of emptiness described in the three versions of the Cūḷasuññata Sutta. (2005 ad M 3:107)

²¹ On the various defs of *nimitta*, see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss**, SD 13.1 (3.1.4).

The **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) and the **Go,datta Sutta** (S 41.7) go on to state that the “unshakable freedom of mind” (*akuppa ceto,vimutti*) is the highest of all signless freedoms of mind.²²

8.2 Both the **Mahā Vedalla Sutta** (M 43) and the **Go,datta Sutta** (S 41.7) also declare that “lust is a sign-maker, hatred is a sign-maker, delusion is a sign-maker” (*rāgo kho nimitta,karaṇo, doso nimitta,karaṇo, moho nimitta,karaṇo, id*).²³

The Commentaries (by Buddhaghosa) on both these suttas give an identical explanation of “sign-maker” (*nimitta,karaṇa*), that lust, hatred and delusion mark as lustful, as hating or as deluded.²⁴

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.²⁵

8.3 THE 3 SAMADHIS

8.3.1 The **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33), the **Suññata Samādhi Sutta** (S 43.4) and the **Rāga Sutta** (A 3.163) briefly mention these 3 kinds of samadhi:²⁶

the emptiness samadhi,	<i>suññata samādhi</i>
the signless samadhi, and	<i>animitta samādhi</i>
the undirected samadhi.	<i>appaṇihita samādhi</i>

8.3.2 The **Rāga Sutta** merely states that these three samadhis overcome lust, hate and delusion (that is, the 3 unwholesome roots). None of the other suttas or their Commentaries gives any explanation of these terms, except for the Dīgha Commentary, which says that:

one who, at the stage of advanced insight, contemplates things as *not-self*, attains to the emptiness samadhi on arriving at the path and fruition (because he has seen things as empty of self);

one who contemplates things as *impermanent*, attains to the signless samadhi (because he has seen penetrated the sign of permanence);

one who contemplates things as *suffering [unsatisfactory]*, attains to the undirected samadhi (because he is not drawn to things that are painful). (DA 3:1003 f)

8.3.3 The **Visuddhi,magga** calls these 3 samadhis, “the 3 entrances to liberation” (*tīṇi vimokkha,mukhāni*).²⁷ It may also be said here that for one who has attained full awakening (that is, become an arhat),

²² M 43,37/1:298 = S 41.7/4:297. The Comys say that there are 13 signless freedoms of mind: the 4 formless attainments (because the sign of form is absent in them); the 4 paths and 4 fruitions (because the defilements, the “makers of signs” are absent from them; and nirvana (MA 2:355 = SA 3:99).

²³ See prec n.

²⁴ MA 2:354 f = SA 3:99.

²⁵ See SD 54.5 (3.3.2.3).

²⁶ D 33,1.10(51)/3:119; S 43.4/4:360; A 3.163/1:299. For a general survey of these 3 kinds of samadhi, see SD 54.5 (). For a scholarly study, see Harvey 1986.

²⁷ See Vism 21.66-73/657-659.

his undirected samadhi is so called because he does not need to direct his mind away from any object or towards mental focus; for he is always effortlessly clearly comprehending and mindful.²⁸

8.4 All arhats, by nature, dwell in these 3 kinds of insight knowledge (*vipassanā ñāṇa*): the emptiness abiding (*suññata vihāra*), the signless abiding (*animitta vihāra*) and the undirected [desireless] abiding (*appaṇihita vihāra*). **The Paṭisambhidā Commentary** (ch 9: Knowledge of equanimity regarding formations, *saṅkhār’upekkhā,ñāṇa*) describes the nature of the arhat’s mental state in terms of insight knowledge thus:

With regard to “the abiding in emptiness, etc,” by the arhats who wish to abide in insight, without fruition-attainment,

(1) having seen danger in clinging to oneself (*attābhinivesa*), they are inclined to **the “abiding in emptiness”** [“empty abiding”] (*suññata vihāra*, that is, in the voidness of self): they see the fall (*vaya*) (of conditioned dharmas) by equanimity regarding formations under the aspect of the “abiding in emptiness”;

(2) having seen danger in the characteristics of conditioned realities (*saṅkhāra,nimitta*), they are inclined to **the “signless abiding”** (*animitta vihāra*): they see the fall (of conditioned dharmas) by equanimity regarding formations under the aspect of the “signless abiding”; and

(3) having seen danger in the steadfastness of clinging (*tanhā,panidhi*), they are inclined to **the “undirected abiding”** (*appaṇihita vihāra*): they see the fall (of conditioned dharmas) by equanimity regarding formations under the aspect of the “undirected abiding.” (PmA 1:270)

9 Related suttas

9.1 The Cūḷa Sūññata Sutta is placed just before **the Mahā Sūññata Sutta** (M 122) in the Majjhima Nikāya because they are closely related. While the former relates to the Buddha’s own abiding (in terms of arhathood), the latter details the Buddha’s instruction on how to abide in emptiness (going through all the four stages of sainthood) (M 122/3:109-118).

9.2 The Piṇḍapāta Pārisuddhi Sutta (M 151) opens with the Buddha’s asking Sāriputta what abiding he practises such that his faculties are clear and the complexion pure and bright. Sāriputta replies that he constantly abides in emptiness (M 151,1/3:294), here referring to the arhat’s fruition attainment of emptiness (MA 5:106). The Buddha then declares that this abiding of emptiness is also known as “the abiding of a great person” (*mahā,purisa vihāra*) (M 151,2/3:294), so called because the buddhas, pratyeka buddhas and the Tathagata’s great disciples constantly abide in it (MA 5:106).

9.3 The Vinaya records a warm conversation between the elders Revata and the 120-rains **Sabba,kāmī**²⁹ just before the convening of the Council of 700 at Vesālī. The elder Sabba,kāmī says that even before his monkhood, while still a householder, he abided in emptiness, and as such had developed it into fullness as a monk. Revata refers to this abiding as “the abiding of a great person” (*mahā,purisa vihāra*) (V 2:304).

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²⁸ For details, see SD 54.5 (3.3.3.4).

²⁹ “Sabba,kāmī,” said to be the oldest monk on earth then. He is probably the **Sabba,kāma** of the Thera,gāthā (Tha 453-458): see Tha:RD 226 n1 & VA 1:34. His took a vow to purify the teaching of some future Buddha during the time of Padumuttara Buddha (ThaA 2:190).

Cūḷa Sūññata Sutta

The Lesser Discourse on Emptiness

M 121

1 [104] Thus have I heard.

Abiding in emptiness

1.2 At one time the Blessed One was staying in the mansion of Migāra’s mother in the Pubb’ārāma [the Eastern Monastery] near Sāvattḥī.

2 Then, when it was evening, **the venerable Ānanda** rose from his retreat, went to the Blessed One, and, after saluting the Blessed One, sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, the venerable Ānanda said this to the Blessed One:

3 “Bhante, once the Blessed One was living amongst the Sakyas. There is this Sakya town called **Nagaraka**. There, Bhante, I heard and learned this from the Blessed One himself [face to face],³⁰ thus:

4 ‘Even now, Ānanda, I am one who is much devoted to **abiding in emptiness**.’³¹

Have I heard this correctly, grasped [learned] this correctly, attended to this correctly, remembered this correctly?’³²

4.2 “Certainly, Ānanda, you have heard it correctly, grasped it correctly, attended to it correctly, remembered it correctly:

As before, Ānanda, so do I now often abide in emptiness.

(1) The perception of a forest

5 [4]³³ Ānanda, just as **this mansion of Migāra’s mother** is empty of elephants, cattle, horses and mares,

empty of gold and silver,

empty of the gathering of women and men,

6 and there is only this **non-emptiness**, namely, the oneness [unity]³⁴ dependent on the community of monks,³⁵

7 so, too, a monk—

not attending to the perception of a village,

not attending to the perception of people —

attends to the oneness dependent on **the perception of a forest**.³⁶

³⁰ *Bhagavato sammukhā*, lit “from the Blessed One’s own mouth.”

³¹ *Suññatā, vihārenāhaṃ Ānanda etarahi bahulaṃ viharāmi ti*. Cf V 2:304; M 3:294. See Kvu:SR 142 n4; Dhs:RD 91 n2. On Vasubandhu’s polemics based on this passage, see Intro (3) above.

³² *Kacci me taṃ bhante sussutaṃ suggahitaṃ sumanasikataṃ sūpadhāritaṃ ti*. On this episode, see (3).

³³ Henceforth, PTS numbering is with [square brackets].

³⁴ “Oneness” (*ekatta*) = *eka, bhāva* (MA 4:151); one-pointedness of mind (*ek’agg’attā*) (CPD), which makes it syn with *samādhi*.

³⁵ It is important to note here that spiritual practice begins with noticing the “oneness dependent on the community of monks.”

³⁶ Or, “perception of forest” or “forest perception.” Comy: He attends to the perception of a forest dependent on the single forest itself, thinking: “This is a forest, this is a tree, this is a mountain, this is a grove.” (MA 4:151). Cf **Nagita S** (A 6.42), where Nagita the forest-dweller declares: “I will attend to the oneness that is the perception of a

8 His mind plunges³⁷ into that perception of a forest, brightens up, steadies and frees itself.³⁸

9 He understands thus:

‘Whatever **breaking up** [disturbance]³⁹ there might be on account of the perception of a village, there are none here;

whatever breaking up there might be on account of the perception of people, there are none here.

10 There is only this much breaking up [disturbance],⁴⁰ namely, *the oneness* dependent on **the perception of a forest**.⁴¹

11 He understands thus:

‘This field of perception⁴² is empty of *the perception of a village*.’

11.2 He understands thus:

‘This field of perception is empty of *the perception of people*.

12 There is only this non-emptiness, namely, *the oneness* dependent on **the perception of a forest**.’

Thus he regards⁴³ what is *not* there as empty,

but as to what *remains* there, he understands [105] what that is, thus: ‘There is this.’⁴⁴

Thus, Ānanda, this is his truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness.⁴⁵

forest (*arañña,saññaṃ yeva manasikarissati ekattaṃ*, A 6.42/3:343). In **Thera,gāthā**, the elder **Usabha** similarly declares that he is “one who perceives the forest” (*arañña,saññaṃ*, Tha 110).

³⁷ “Plunges,” *pakkhandati*, “leaps forward.” Comy glosses: *otarati* (goes down into) (MA 4:151), *okkhanditvā pakkhanditvā* (descending into, entering) (MA 1:238; Vism 636). Usu fig: “rejoices in, finds pleasure or satisfaction in, he takes to.” See Intro (4).

³⁸ *Tassa arañña,saññāya cittaṃ pakkhandati pasīdati santiṭṭhati adhimuccati*. On the underscored, see M 1:186; S 3:133; cf Miln 326; A 2:165, 3:245, 4:442; It 43. Here the final *adhimuccati* (Be Ce Se & Comy) is preferable to PTS *vimuccati* (it is freed). This applies throughout the Sutta. See Intro (4).

³⁹ “Breaking up,” **darathā** (lit, being hot or inflamed; distress; restlessness, unease, discomfort, troubles, anxiety, care, exhaustion; syn *pariḷāha* (fever) (SnA 1:24); cf PmA 3:560). Der from **dara** for which Bohtlingk 1885:70 sv *dara* gives “*bersten, sprengen, zerreißen*” [burst, blow, tear apart]; SED 470 sv *dara*, “cleaving, breaking.” This older poly-semantic sense, incl the figurative, contrasts with the preceding “unitary” or “oneness” of mind, “which are developed by overcoming any *daratha* related to the perceptions that are to be left behind” (Analayo 2011:684 n5). **Peter Skilling** discusses *daratha* at length, and tr it as “discomfort” or “pain” (1997:352-355), esp since it can be either physical or mental, as attested by the Comy: *pavatta,darathā vā kilesa,darathā vā*, “breaking up due to ‘goings-on,’ events [“existence,” Skilling], or disturbances due to defilements” (MA 4:151). As will be evident, *both* senses apply in this Sutta depending on the context.

⁴⁰ We see here that while the Sutta uses *daratha* metaphorically (with its old sense), Comys reads *daratha* literally as its later sense of “disturbance, etc.”

⁴¹ Comy & Sub-Comy (Tīkā): The disturbance (*daratha*) of defilements, that of attraction and repulsion—that arises through perception of people are not present here. However, there is still the trouble or disturbance caused by gross states due to lack of the necessary calm (MA 1:151; MAṬ:Be 2:322). [§43 n]

⁴² “Field of perception,” *saññā,gataṃ*. Here I follow M:ÑB’s tr throughout. The term appears in **Vatthūpama S** (M 7): *atthi idaṃ atthi hīnaṃ atthi paṇītaṃ atthi imassa saññā,gatassa uttariṃ nissaraṇaṃ ti pajānati*, “He knows thus: ‘There is this, there is the inferior, there is the superior, and beyond there is an escape from this (whole) field of perception.’” (M 7,17/1:39). Comy here explains that this section shows the non-returner’s practice of insight meditation aimed at arhathood. The phrase “**there is this**” refers to the truth of suffering; “the inferior,” to the arising of suffering; “the superior,” to the truth of the path; and “the escape from this whole field of perception,” is nirvana, the ending of suffering (MA 1:176).

⁴³ “Regards,” *samanupassati*.

⁴⁴ *Iti yaṃ hi kho tattha na hoti, tena taṃ suññaṃ samanupassati, yaṃ pana tattha avasiṭṭhaṃ hoti, taṃ santaṃ idaṃ atthi ti pajānāti*. Comy to **Vatthūpama S** (M 7,17/1:39) says that the phrase “**there is this**” (*idaṃ atthi ti*) refers to the truth of suffering (MA 1:176): see above §4 n (“Field of perception”).

(2) The perception of earth

13 [5] Furthermore, Ānanda, a monk—
not attending to the perception of people,
not attending to the perception of a forest—
 then attends to the oneness dependent on **the perception of earth.**⁴⁶
 His mind plunges into that perception of earth, *brightens up, steadies, frees itself.*⁴⁷

SIMILE OF THE BULL'S HIDE

14 Just as a **bull's hide** becomes free from crinkles when fully stretched with a hundred stakes,⁴⁸
 even so, Ānanda, a monk—
neither attending to any of the high [dry areas] and the low [swampy areas]⁴⁹ of this earth,
nor to rivers that are difficult to ford, nor to sharp stumps and thorns, nor to rugged mountains⁵⁰—
 attends to the oneness dependent on **the perception of earth.**
 His mind plunges into that **perception of earth**, *brightens up, steadies, frees itself.*

15 He understands thus:
 ‘Whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of people*, there are none here;
 whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of a forest*, there are none here.
16 There is only this much breaking up, namely, the oneness dependent on **the perception of earth.**’

17 He understands thus:
 ‘This field of perception is empty of *the perception of people.*’
17.2 He understands thus:
 ‘This field of perception is empty of *the perception of a forest.*’

18 There is only this non-emptiness, namely, *the oneness* dependent on **the perception of earth.**’
 Thus he regards what is *not* there as empty,
 but as to what *remains* there, he knows what that is, thus: ‘There is this.’
 Thus, Ānanda, this is his *truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness.*

⁴⁵ *Evam pi'ssa esā ānanda yathā, bhuccā avipallatthā parisuddhā suññatāvakkanti bhavati.* This is a refrain in the Sutta. PTS has *wr suññatā vakkanti ti* throughout.

⁴⁶ *Paṭhavī, saññaṃ paṭicca manasikaroti ekattaṃ.* Comy: He abandons the perception of a forest and attends to the perception of earth because one cannot achieve any distinction in meditation through the perception of a forest, neither access concentration nor full absorption. However, earth can be used as a preliminary object for *kasīna*, based upon which one produces dhyana, develops insight and attains arhathood (MA 4:153).

⁴⁷ In **Shorter Discourse on Emptiness** (MĀ 190), has this passage here: 若見此地平正如掌。觀望處好。當數念彼。 *ruò jiàn cǐdì píng zhèngrú zhǎng, guānwàng chù hǎo, dāng shuò niàn bǐ*, “If [instead] he sees this earth as level and flat like the palm of a hand, then his manner of looking at it is beneficial and should be frequently attended to.” (MĀ 190 @ T1.736c27-28, tr Analayo, *Madhyama-āgama Studies*, Taipei, 2012:328 + 326 n2).

⁴⁸ *Seyyathāpi ... āsabha, cammaṃ* [Be Ce Se; Ee usabha-] *saṅku, satena suvihataṃ vigata, vasikaṃ*; see J 6:112; Vism 153.

⁴⁹ “The high” (*ukkūla*) is the elevated dry areas; “the low” (*vikūla*) is low-lying areas, such as swamps. Amplifications based on MA 4:153.

⁵⁰ “The high and the low ... rugged mountains,” Ce Ee Se *ukkūla, vikūlaṃ* [Be *ukkūlavikkūlaṃ*] *nadī, viduggaṃ khāṇu, kaṇṭakā, dhāraṃ pabbata, visamaṃ*, where *-dhāraṃ* has *vl ṭhānaṃ* (Be). As at A 1:35 (where, however, for *-dhāraṃ* read *-dhānaṃ*, PTS).

(3) The perception of sphere of infinite space

19 [6] Furthermore, Ānanda, a monk—
not attending to *the perception of a forest*,
not attending to *the perception of earth*—

then attends to the oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of infinite space.⁵¹

His mind plunges into that perception of the sphere of infinite space,
brightens up, steadies and frees itself.

20 He understands thus:

‘Whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of a forest*, there are none here;
whatever breaking up there [106] might be on account of *the perception of earth*, there are none here.

There is only this much breaking up, namely,
the oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of infinite space.’

21 He understands thus:

‘This field of perception is empty of *the perception of a forest*.’

21.2 He understands thus:

‘This field of perception is empty of *the perception of earth*.

22 There is only this **non-emptiness**, namely,
the oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of infinite space.’

Thus he regards what is *not* there as empty,

but as to what *remains* there, he knows what that is, thus: ‘There is this.’

Thus, Ānanda, this is his *truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness*.

(4) The sphere of infinite consciousness

23 [7] Furthermore, Ānanda, a monk—
not attending to *the perception of earth*,
not attending to *the perception of the sphere of infinite space*—

then attends to the oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness.

His mind plunges into that perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness,
brightens up, steadies and frees itself.

24 He understands thus:

‘Whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of earth*, there are none here;
whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of the sphere of infinite space*,
there are none here.

25 There is only this much breaking up, namely,
the oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness.’

26 He understands thus:

‘This field of perception is empty of *the perception of earth*.’

26.2 He understands thus:

‘This field of perception is empty of *the perception of the sphere of infinite space*.

⁵¹ Comy: Having used the perception of earth to attain the 4 dhyanas, he extends the earth-kasiṇa and then removes the kasiṇa-sign to attain the base of infinite space. See Vism 10.6-7.

27 There is only this non-emptiness, namely,
the oneness dependent on **the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness.**'

Thus he regards what is *not* there as empty,

but as to what *remains* there, he knows what that is, thus: 'There is this.'

Thus, Ānanda, this is his *truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness*.

(5) The sphere of nothingness

28 [8] Furthermore, Ānanda, a monk—
not attending to the perception of the sphere of infinite space,
not attending to the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness—
 then attends to the oneness dependent on **the perception of the sphere of nothingness.**

His mind plunges into that perception of the sphere of nothingness,
 brightens up, steadies and frees itself.

29 He understands thus:

'Whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of the sphere of infinite space*,
 there are none here;

whatever breaking up there might be dependent on *the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness*, there are none here.

29.2 There is only this much breaking up, namely,
the oneness dependent on **the perception of the sphere of nothingness.**'

30 He understands thus:

'This field of perception is empty of the perception of *the sphere of infinite space*.'

30.2 He understands thus:

'This field of perception is empty [107] of the perception of *the sphere of infinite consciousness*.

31 There is only this non-emptiness, namely,
the oneness dependent on **the perception of the sphere of nothingness.**'

Thus he regards what is *not* there as empty,

but as to what *remains* there, he knows what that is, thus: 'There is this.'

Thus, Ānanda, this is his *truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness*.

(6) The sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception⁵²

32 [9] Furthermore, Ānanda, a monk—
not attending to the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness,
not attending to the perception of the sphere of nothingness—
 then attends to **the oneness** dependent on **the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.**

His mind plunges into that perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception,
 brightens up, steadies and frees itself.

33 He understands thus:

'Whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness*, there are none here;

⁵² On the question of the placing of this attainment here, see **Aṭṭhaka, nāgara S** (M 52) @ SD 41.1 (3.1.2).

whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of the sphere of nothingness*, there are none here.

There is only this much breaking up, namely, the oneness dependent on **the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.**'

34 He understands thus:

'This field of perception is empty of *the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness.*'

34.2 He understands thus:

'This field of perception is empty of *the perception of the sphere of nothingness.*

35 There is only this **non-emptiness**, namely, *the oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.*'

Thus he regards what is *not* there as empty,

but as to what *remains* there, he knows what that is, thus: 'There is this.'

Thus, Ānanda, this is his *truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness.*

(7) The signless concentration of mind

36 [10] Furthermore, Ānanda, a monk—
not attending to the perception of the sphere of nothingness,
not attending to the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception—
then attends to **the oneness dependent on the signless concentration of mind.**⁵³

His mind plunges into that signless concentration of mind, brightens up, steadies and frees itself.

37 He understands thus:

'Whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of the sphere of nothingness*, there are none here;

whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception*, there are none here.

There is only this much breaking up, namely, that connected with the body with its 6 sense-bases, [108] conditioned by life.⁵⁴

38 He understands thus:

'This field of perception is empty of *the perception of the sphere of nothingness.*'

38.2 He understands thus:

'This field of perception is empty of *the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.*

39 He understands thus:

There is only this **non-emptiness**, namely,

that connected with the body with its 6 sense-bases, conditioned by life.'

Thus, he regards what is *not* there as empty,

but as to what *remains* there, he knows what that is, thus: 'There is this.'

Thus, Ānanda, this is his *truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness.*

⁵³ "The signless concentration of mind," *animittarū ceto, samādhim*. Comy explains this as the concentration of mind in insight (*vipassanā, citta, samādhi*), which, as it is without a permanent sign, is called "signless" (*animitta*), so called because it is devoid of the signs of permanence, etc. (MA 4:153)

⁵⁴ *Yad-idaṃ imam eva kāyaraṃ paṭicca saḷāyatanikaṃ jīvita, paccayā.*

(8) Arhathood through the signless concentration of mind

40 [11] Furthermore, Ānanda, a monk—
not attending to the perception of the sphere of nothingness,
not attending to the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception—
 then attends to *the oneness dependent on the signless concentration of mind.*
 His mind plunges into that **signless concentration of mind**,⁵⁵ brightens up, steadies and frees itself.

41 He understands thus:
 ‘This *signless concentration of mind* is (mentally) constructed, intentionally formed.⁵⁶
 What is constructed, intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.’⁵⁷

DESTRUCTION OF THE 3 INFLUXES⁵⁸

42 When he understands thus and sees thus,
 his mind is free from the influx of **sense-desire**,
 his mind is free from the influx of **being**, and
 his mind is free from the influx of **ignorance**.
 When it is free, there comes the knowledge: ‘Free (*vimuttam*)!’
 He understands thus:
 ‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done.
 There is no more of this state of being.’

⁵⁵ Comy says that *animitta* (signless) is mentioned again to show “the counter-insight of insight” (*vipassanāya pativipassanam*), ie, the principle of insight is applied to the act of consciousness functioning as insight; based on this, one attains arhathood (MA 4:154). On the signless concentration of mind, see **Animitta Ceto, samādhī Pañha S** (S 40.9), SD 24.19 (2).

⁵⁶ “(Mentally) constructed, intentionally formed (*abhisankhataṃ abhisāñcetaṃ*): the term **abhisāñcetaṃ** (*abhi + sañ + cetayita*), “raised into consciousness, thought out, intended, planned” (PED), is pp of *abhisāñcetaṃ* (caus of *abhi+sañ + √cit*, “to perceive, know, appear”), “to think out, to plan” (CPD, DPL), of *abhisāñcetaṃ* (*abhi + sañ + ceteti*), “to raise into consciousness, think out, devise, plan” (PED). Here, on a dhyana context, only the passive sense “raised into consciousness” applies, because thinking and knowing as we understand them do not arise during dhyana: see **The Buddha discovered dhyana @ SD 33.1b** (6.2).

⁵⁷ *Yaṃ kho pana kiñci abhisankhataṃ abhisāñcetaṃ, tad aniccaṃ nirodha, dhamman ti*. This characteristic applies to all the 4 dhyanas so as to switch to insight (*vipassanā*) practice. In **Aṭṭhaka, nāgara S** (M 52,4/1:350 f) = **Dasama S** (A 11.17/5:343), SD 41.2, this statement is applied to all the meditative states (dhyana, the divine abodes, the first 3 formless attainments). Cf **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,22/3:244), SD 4.17.

⁵⁸ The term *āsava*, “mental influxes, or mental fluxes” (lit, “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, bad (influence), or simply left untr. The list of **3 influxes** (without that of views) [§99.3] is older and occurs more frequently [SD 30.3 (1.3.2)]; **D 2,99.1 n** (SD 8.10); **D 33,1.10(20)/3:216**; **M 2,99.3** (SD 8.10), **9,70/1:55** (SD 11.14), **M 11,9 n** (SD 7.13), **121,12/3:108** (SD 11.3); **S 38.8/4:256** (SD 75.-22(8)), **45.163/5:56**; **A 3.58,5/1:165** (SD 94.5), **A 3.59,4/1:167** (SD 80.16), **A 6.63,9/3:414** (SD 6.11). The Abhidhamma list incl “views,” which is virtually syn with the ignorance [SD 11.14 (9.1)], along with craving for sense-pleasures, and craving for existence found at the start of the dependent arising formula. The 4 kinds of āsava are those of (1) sense-desire (*kāma-āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava-āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭhā-āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjā-āsava*) (D 16,2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). The 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The destruction of these āsavas is equivalent to arhathood. See SD 56.4 (3.8.1.1); BDict āsava.

43 [12] He understands thus:

‘Whatever breaking up [disturbance] there might be on account of *the influx of sense-desire*, there are none here.
 Whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the influx of being*, there are none here.
 Whatever breaking up there might be on account of *the influx of ignorance*, there are none here.

There is only this much **breaking up**, namely, *that connected with the 6 sense-bases dependent on this body and conditioned by life.*⁵⁹

44 He understands thus: ‘This field of perception is empty of *the influx of sense-desire*.
 He understands thus: This field of perception is empty of *the influx of being*.
 He understands thus: This field of perception is empty of *the influx of ignorance*.

45 He understands thus:

There is only this **non-emptiness**, namely,
*that connected with the 6 sense-bases dependent on this body and conditioned by life.*⁶⁰

Thus he regards what is *not* there as empty,

but as to what *remains* there, he knows what that is, thus: ‘There is this.’

Thus, Ānanda, this is his *truly real*, **[109] undistorted, utterly pure descent into supreme and unsurpassed**⁶¹ **emptiness**.

(9) Universality of abiding in emptiness

46 [13] Ānanda, whatever recluses and brahmin⁶²
 in **the past** who *attained to and abided in the pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness*,
 they all attained and abided in this same *utterly pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness*.

46.2 Ānanda, whatever recluses and brahmin
 in **the future** who *will attain and abide in the pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness*,
 they all will attain and abide in this same *utterly pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness*.

46.3 Ānanda, whatever recluses and brahmin
 in **the present** who *attain to and abide in the pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness*,
 they all attain and abide in this same *utterly pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness*.

⁵⁹ While in the case of the worldling, *daratha* as “disturbances” arise from defilements (as attraction and repulsion) [§10 n]; in the case of the arhats the *daratha* is simply “breaking up” of the aggregates.

⁶⁰ This is a rare insight into how arhathood is attained “with remains” (*sopādi,sesa*), ie, with life continuing by way of the 5 aggregates (of *non-clinging*): **Sa,upādi,sesa S** (A 9.12), SD 3.3(3).

⁶¹ “Supreme and unsurpassed,” *paramānuttaram*, has been added, which Comy says refers to the “freedom from defilement” (*nirupakkilesam*) and the “supremely free, all-perfect” (*uttara,virahita sabba,settḥam*) state, ie, the arhat’s fruition attainment of voidness (MA 4:154).

⁶² Comy notes that while “recluses and brahmins” usually refers to outsiders, that sometimes also includes Buddhist monks, here it refers only to the Buddhas and his disciples (MA 4:153). This statement, Analayo points out, is supported by the fact that **Cūḷa Sīha,nāda S** (M 11/1:66) and its Chinese parallels (**MĀ 190** = T1.591a10 & **EĀ 27.2** = T2.644a16), which say that recluses and brahmins outside the Teaching do not really understand the problem posed by clinging to a self-view. As such, he concludes, “one would not expect M 121 to propose that these same heterodox recluses and Brahmins were able to dwell in supreme emptiness” (2011 ad M 3:109 & n21), much less “able to realize emptiness” (op cit 2005: id).

47 Therefore, Ānanda, you should train yourself thus:
 ‘We will attain to and abide in utterly pure, supreme, unsurpassed emptiness.’

That is what the Blessed One said. Satisfied, the venerable Ānanda rejoiced in the Blessed One’s word.

— evaṃ —

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