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(Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta

The (Detailed) Discourse on the 7 Perceptions | **A 7.46** = Be 7.49
 or, **Dutiya Saññā Sutta** = **Saññā Sutta 2**, The Second Discourse on the Perceptions
 Theme: 7 meditation methods leading to the deathfree
 Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

0 Introduction

0.1 Here in the (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta, the term **saññā**, usually translated as “perception” (as one of the 5 aggregates), is used in a different sense, that is, meaning a “theme,”¹ “idea,”² or “perceptual object.” The Visuddhi,magga Commentary, Paramattha Mañjūsā (by Dhammapāla), says that perception exercises may be used as preliminary work for calmness (*samatha*) or for access concentration.³ The (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta, however, states that

These 7 perceptions, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed, are of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree. [§1]

0.2 The 7 perceptions of the (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta [§2] are as follows, along with a text that explains or elaborates on each of them:

<u>Perception (saññā)</u>	<u>Pali term</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
(1) The perception of foulness = the 32 parts of the body	<i>asubha,saññā</i>	A 10.60.5/5:109; Vism 8.44-47
(2) The perception of death (usually called mindfulness of death)	<i>maraṇa,saññā</i> = <i>maraṇānussati</i>	A 6.19/3:304-8; Vism 8.1-41
(3) The perception of loathsomeness in food	<i>āhāre paṭikkūla,saññā</i>	Vism 11.1-26
(4) The perception of not delighting in all the world	<i>sabba,loke anabhirata,saññā</i>	A 10.60.11/5:111
(5) The perception of impermanence	<i>anicca,saññā</i> ⁴	S 22.12-21, 102
(6) The perception of suffering in the impermanent	<i>anicce dukkha,saññā</i>	A 7.49/4:51 f
(7) The perception of non-self in the suffering	<i>dukkhe anatta,saññā</i>	A 7.49/4:53

Chapter 8 (on cessation, *mirodha vagga*) of the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta gives the same list of these 7 recollections (including “the 5 perceptions ripening in liberation,” *pañca vimutti,paripācaniyā saññā*, with the following 3 different meditations),⁵ making a set of 10 perceptions, that is to say, including:⁶

¹ Nyanaponika & Bodhi 1999:303 VII n1.

² BDict: *saññā* (3).

³ VismṬ 334 f. On access concentration, see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (Diag 8.1); also **Nimitta**, SD 19.7 (3).

⁴ Cf **Saṅgīti S** (D 33), where these last 3 form the first 3 of “the 5 perceptions ripening in liberation” (*pañca vimutti,-paripācaniyā saññā*), viz, the perceptions (1) of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), (2) of the suffering in the impermanent (*anicce dukkha,saññā*), (3) of non-self in suffering (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*), (4) of abandoning (*pahāna,saññā*), and (5) of dispassion (*virāga,saññā*) (D 33,2.1(26)/3:243).

⁵ S 46.67-76/5:132 f.

⁶ On these 3, see **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60,7-9/5:109 f), SD 19.16.

(8) The perception of abandonment	<i>pahāna,saññā</i>	A 10.60.8/5:110
(9) The perception of dispassion	<i>virāga,saññā</i> ⁷	A 10.60.9/5:110
(10) The perception of cessation	<i>nirodha,saññā</i>	A 10.60.10/5:110 f

0.3 It should be noted, however, that various sets of perceptions are found in the early texts, especially the Aṅguttara, for example:

The 5 perceptions	(Pañca) Saññā Sutta 1 (A 5.61); (Pañca) Saññā Sutta 2 (A 5.62 f); D 33,2.1(26).
The 6 perceptions	(Vijjā,bhāgiya) Saññā Sutta (A 6.35), (Rāgassa Abhiññā) Saññā Sutta (A 6.123).
The 7 perceptions	(Aparihāniya,dhamma) Saññā Sutta (A 7.25), (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta (A 7.46); cf D 16,1.10; A 5.61.
The 10 perceptions	(Dasa) Saññā Sutta (A 10.57), Giri-m-ānanda Sutta (A 10.60).

1 The perception of foulness (*asubha,saññā*)

In the suttas, such as **the Kāya,gatā,sati Sutta** (M 119)⁸ and **the Giri-m-ānanda Sutta** (A 10.60),⁹ the perception of foulness (*asubha,saññā*) refers to the contemplation of the 32 parts of the body.¹⁰ In the Commentaries and the Visuddhi,magga, the term *asubha,nimitta* (the sign of foulness), however, refers to one or other of the 10 foul objects, that is, bodily remains in one of the 10 stages of bodily decomposition.¹¹

2 The perception of death (*maraṇa,saññā*)

In this exercise, one reminds oneself that death is inevitable and eventually imminent. Its purpose is to instill zealous effort in one's spiritual practice. The practitioner reflects on the shortness, uncertainty and fragility of life, and on the numerous ways in which death can occur, for example, due to a snake bite, an accident, an illness, or an assault.¹² The perception of death (*maraṇa,saññā*) is fully described by way of practice in a number of suttas in the Aṅguttara:

- Maraṇa-s,sati Sutta 1 (A 8.73/4:316-319),
- Maraṇa-s,sati Sutta 2 (A 8.74/4:320-322),
- Maraṇa-s,sati Sutta 3 (A 6.19/3:303-306), and
- Maraṇa-s,sati Sutta 4 (A 6.20/3:306-308).

It is usually known as the mindfulness of death (*maraṇānussati*) in the Commentaries.¹³

3 The perception of loathsomeness in food (*āhāre paṭikkūla,saññā*)

3.1 Various ancient texts, such as **the Putta,maṁsa Sutta** (S 12.63),¹⁴ speak of four kinds of "food" or "nutriments" (*āhāra*).¹⁵

⁷ **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60) discusses *virāga,saññā* and *nirodha,saññā* as discursive contemplations on nirvana (A 10.60.9-10/5:110 f), but elsewhere *virāgānupassanā* and *nirodhānupassanā* are treated as advanced contemplations on insight (eg Pm 2:67; Vism 20.90/629).

⁸ M 119,7/3:90 (SD 12.21).

⁹ A 10.60,6/5:107 (SD 19.16).

¹⁰ On practice details, see **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119), SD 12.21 (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*). On *asubha,saññā*, see Vism 6/178-196 (the 10 stages of bodily decomposition).

¹¹ Vism 6.1-11/178 f. See **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22,7-10/2:295-297 = M 10,14-31/1:58 f), SD 13.

¹² Maraṇa-s,sati S 3 (A 6.19/3:303-306).

¹³ Vism 8.1-41/229-239.

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|----------------------------|--|
| 1. solid food | <i>kabaliṅkārahāra,</i> |
| 2. contact (sense-stimuli) | <i>phass'āhāra,</i> |
| 3. volition | <i>mano,sañcetan'āhāra,</i> |
| 4. consciousness | <i>viññāṇ'āhāra.</i> (D 3:228; M 1:48, 1:261; S 2:13, 48, 98-105; Vbh 401) |

The Commentaries say these forms of “food” (*āhāra*) are so called because they nourish (*aharanti*) their own effects. Although there are other conditions for beings, these four alone are called “food” because they serve as *special conditions* for the personal life-continuity (*ajjhattika,santatiyā visesa,paccayattā*).¹⁶ Edible food (*kabaliṅkārahāra*) is a special condition for the physical body of those beings who subsist on edible food. In the mental body, contact (*phass'āhāra*) is the special condition for feeling, mental volition (*mano,sañcetanāhāra*) for consciousness, and consciousness (*viññāṇ'āhāra*) for name-and-form.¹⁷

3.2 However, the perception of loathsomeness in food is a specialized exercise that deals with only the first kind of food, that is, solid or edible food. **The Visuddhi,magga** has a detailed explanation of this exercise, summarized thus:

One who wishes to cultivate the perception of loathsomeness in food should learn the meditation subject and see that he has no uncertainty about even a single word of what he has learned. Then he should go into solitude and review the loathsomeness in ten ways regarding the solid food, that is, what is eaten, chewed and tasted in this manner, that is to say, as to going, seeking, using, secreting, receptacle, the uncooked (undigested), the cooked (digested), fruit, outflow, and smearing. (Vism 11.5/341)

3.3 Here are the key points and summary of the ten aspects of the perception of loathsomeness in food as given by Buddhaghosa:

1. Going (*gamanato*), that is, one has to look for food. In the case of the renunciant, “he has to leave the ascetics’ forest, uncrowded, blissfully secluded, endowed with shade and water, clean, cool and delightful; he has to forsake the noble one’s delight in solitude, and must set out for the village to find food, just as a jackal for the charnel ground” (Vism 11.6-10).¹⁸

2. Seeking (*pariyesanato*), that is, the renunciant has to wander “like a destitute man” (*kapaṇa,manussena viya*), bowl in hand, bearing the changes in the seasons, and not always receiving almsfood, sometimes even berated, ignored or even chased away. (Vism 11.11-13)

3. Using (*paribhogato*), that is, the good appearance of the food disappears once it is chewed up in the mouth, becoming “like a dog’s meal in a dog’s trough,” becoming a nauseating mass, which one swallows simply because it is out of sight. (Vism 11.14-16)

4. Secreting (*āsayato*), that is, swallowed food becomes mixed with secretion, such as bile, phlegm, pus and blood, and the taste becomes unpleasant accordingly. (Vism 11.17)

¹⁴ S 12.63/2:98-100 (SD 20.6).

¹⁵ Cf (**Nīvaraṇa Bojhaṅga**) **Āhāra S** (S 46.51/5:102-107), SD 7.15, where it is used in a more psychological sense.

¹⁶ MA 1:209; SA 2:26; DhsA 153.

¹⁷ MA 1:207 ff; SA 2:22-27; KhA 75 ff; see also Vism 11.1-3/341. In **Āhāra S** (S 46.61/5:102-107) & **Abhisāṅga Ss** (S 55.31-33/5:391-392) *āhāra* is used in a broader sense of “special condition” without reference to the four kinds of food. See also S:B 731 n19 (These 4 kinds of nutriments have craving as their source.)

¹⁸ Such instructions are for monastic practice, but a lay person may adapt them for his own exercise. On the jackal simile, cf Cha Pāṇā S (S 35.247/4:198-201), SD 19.15.

5. Receptacle (*nidhānato*), that is, the belly is a receptacle like “a cesspit unwashed” since day one. (Vism 11.18)

6. The undigested (*aparipakkato*), that is, the half-digested food remains for a time in the belly, “smothered by a layer of phlegm, covered with froth and bubbles produced by digestion through being fermented by metabolic heat.” (Vism 11.19)

7. The digested (*paripakkato*), that is, when the food is fully digested it gives off froth and bubbles, turning into dung, like brown clay squeezed in a tube, and into urine filling the bladder. (Vism 11.20)

8. Fruit (*phalato*), that is, what the food does to the eater: it brings forth “various dead things” (*nānā, kuṇapa*), such as head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin; but when improperly digested [or, uncooked], may bring on various kinds of ailments and diseases. (Vism 11.21)

9. Outflow (*nissandato*), that is, when swallowed, the food enters by one door, after which it flows out through many, for example, as “eye-dung from the eye, ear-dung from the ear” [Sn 197]; furthermore, we may eat in company, but the flow in due course flows out as dung, which we excrete alone. (Vism 11.22-23)

10. Smearing (*sammakkhanato*), that is, when one eats, one soils one’s hands, lips, tongue and palate, and even after washing them, the smell often lingers on; and digested food turns into tartar smearing the teeth, and turns into spittle, phlegm, and so on, into eye-dung, ear-dung, snot, urine, dung, and so on, respectively soiling the eyes, the ears, the nose, and the lower passages, and these soiled doors are never thoroughly clean even though we often wash them everyday. (Vism 11.24-26)

4 The perception of not delighting in all the world (*sabba,loke anabhirata,saññā*)

4.1 The (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta here defines the perception of not delighting in all the world as follows:

Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of not delighting in all the world, his mind shrinks away from worldly thoughts, turns away from them, rolls back from them. He is not drawn to them. Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him. [10a]

The definition of “worldly thoughts” (*loka,citta*) is found in **the Giri-m-ānanda Sutta** (A 10.60) description of this same perception, thus:

Here, Ānanda, abandoning any engagement and clinging to the world due to mental stand-points, adherences [mindsets] and latent tendencies, he refrains from them, being one with no clinging.

This, Ānanda, is called the perception of not delighting in the world.

(A 10.60,11/5:111), SD 19.16

4.2 The Giri-m-ānanda Sutta (A 10.60) is about the healing effect of the perceptions on the sick. When the monk Giri-m-ānanda falls ill, the Buddha instructs Ānanda to teach him this set of ten perceptions, thus:

Ānanda, if you approach the monk Giri-m-ānanda and speak to him regarding the 10 perceptions, it is possible that the monk Giri-m-ānanda, having heard the 10 perceptions, his illness will subside immediately. What are the ten?

- (1) The perception of impermanence;
- (2) The perception of non-self;
- (3) The perception of foulness;
- (4) The perception of danger;

- (5) The perception of abandoning;
- (6) The perception of fading away (of lust) [of dispassion];
- (7) The perception of cessation;
- (8) The perception of not delighting in all the world;
- (9) The perception of the impermanence of all formations; and
- (10) The mindfulness of the breath. (A 10.60,2.2-3/5:109), SD 19.16

4.3 In the (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta, the perception of not delighting in all the world is listed fourth, coming just after the perception of loathsomeness of food, and just before the perception of impermanence [Intro]. The perception of impermanence, however, heads **the Giri-m-ānanda Sutta** list, and the perception of not delighting in all the world comes after the perception of cessation (of suffering). Apparently here, Giri-m-ānanda is already an arya (saint of the path), and these perceptions are used merely for mental reflection to heal himself of his sickness.

In fact, the Sutta simply reports that he recovers from his sickness, with no mention of any spiritual attainment. **The (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta** set of perceptions, however, are spiritual exercises that can lead to nirvana itself. Hence the different sequencing of the perceptions in the two suttas.

5 The perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*)¹⁹

5.1 Besides the (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta, the early suttas, especially the Khandha Saṃyutta (S 22), contain a number of suttas dealing with impermanence that can be used as perception exercises:

Aṭṭānagata,paccuppanna Anicca Sutta	S 22.9/3:19
Anicca Sutta	S 22.12/3:21
Yad Anicca Sutta	S 22.15/3:22
(Anicca) Hetu Sutta	S 22.18/3:23
Anicca Saññā Sutta	S 22.102/3:155-157 @ SD 12.12
Anicca Sutta	A 6.98/3:441 f @ SD 12.13
(Ānisaṃsa) Anicca Saññā Sutta	A 6.102/3:443
Cetiya Sutta	D 16,3.1-10/2:102 = S 51.10/5:258-263 = A 8.70/4:308-313 = U 6.1/62-64

5.2 The Giri-m-ānanda Sutta (A 10.60) describes the perception of impermanence in terms of the 5 aggregates, thus:

And what, Ānanda, is the perception of impermanence?

Here, Ānanda, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place,²⁰ reflects²¹ thus:

¹⁹ Cf Saṅgīti S (D 33), where these last 3 form the first 3 of “the 5 perceptions ripening in liberation” (*pañca vimutti,paripācaniyā saññā*), viz, the perceptions (1) of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), (2) of the suffering in the impermanent (*anicce dukkha,saññā*), (3) of the lack of self in the suffering (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*), (4) of abandoning (*pahāna,saññā*), and (5) of dispassion (*virāga,saññā*) (D 33.2.1(26)/3:243).

²⁰ “Empty place,” (*suññāgāra*), also incl “empty house.” This stock phrase of 3 places conducive to meditation are at D 2:29; M 1:56, 297, 398, 425, 2:263, 3:82, 89, 4:297; S 5:311, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 323, 329, 336; A 1:147, 148, 149, 3:92, 100, 4:437, 5:109, 110, 111; Pm 1:175, 2:36. In **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2), SD 8.10, probably an older account, the following instruction is given: “Possessing this aggregate of noble moral virtue and this aggregate of noble sense-restraint and this aggregate of noble mindfulness and clear knowledge and this aggregate of noble contentment, he seeks out a secluded dwelling: a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw” (*so iminā ca ariyena sīla-k,khandhena*

Form	is impermanent;
Feeling	is impermanent;
Perception	is impermanent;
Formations	are impermanent;
Consciousness	is impermanent.

Thus he dwells contemplating impermanence in these 5 aggregates of clinging.

This, Ānanda, is called the perception of impermanence. (A 10.60,4/5:109), SD 19.16

5.3 The (Ānisaṃsa) Anicca Saññā Sutta (A 6.10) lists the following 6 advantages of contemplating on impermanence:

1. All formations will appear transient to me (*sabba,saṅkhārā ca me anavaṭṭhito khāyissanti*).
2. My mind will not delight in all the world [or in the world of the all] (*sabba,loke ca me mano nābhiramissati*).
3. My mind will rise above all the world (*sabba,lokā ca me mano vuṭṭhahissati*).
4. My mind will tend towards nirvana (*nibbāṇa,poṇaṇ ca me mānasam bhavissati*).
5. The mental fetters will be broken by me (*saṃyojanā ca me pahānaṃ gacchanti*).
6. And I shall attain to supreme recluseship (*paramena ca sāmāñña samannāgato bhavissāmīti*). (A 6.102/3:443)

5.4 The vitality and benefit of the perception of impermanence are graphically stated in **the Velama Sutta** (A 9.20):

And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts, and even if he were to cultivate a heart of lovingkindness for just as long as it takes to tug at the cow's teat (to milk it), greater would be the fruit if he were to cultivate the perception of impermanence for even the moment of a finger-snap! (A 9.20,5.2/4:395 f), SD 16.6

6 The perception of suffering in the impermanent (*anicce dukkha,saññā*)

The (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta defines the perception of suffering in the impermanent in this way:

Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of suffering in the impermanent, a keen sense of danger is set up in him regarding lethargy [inaction], laziness, languor,²² heedlessness, non-devotion and inattention, as if towards a murderer brandishing a sword.²³ [14a]

samannāgato iminā ca ariyena indriya,saṃvarena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena sati,sampajaññaena samannāgato imāya ca ariyāya santuḥhitāya samannāgato vivittaṃ senāsanam bhajati, araññaṃ rukkha,mūlam pabbataṃ kandaraṃ giri,guhaṃ susānaṃ vana,patthaṃ abbhokāsam palāla,puñjaṃ, D 2,67/1:71): this stock passage also at **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2), SD 8.10.67. The oldest reference to an ideal meditation spot is in **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26) and **Saṅgārava S** (M 100): "still in search of the wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I walked by stages through Magadha until eventually I arrived at Senāni,gama near Uruvelā. There I saw an agreeable spot, a delightful grove with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearby a village for alms resort. I sat down there thinking: 'This is conducive for spiritual striving.'" (M 26,17/1:167 = 100,13/2:212).

²¹ "(He) reflects," *paṭisañcikkhati*, "he thinks over, discriminates, considers, reflects"; see [8] below.

²² "Languor," *vissatṭhi*, vi *visatṭhi*, pp of *vissajjati*, "he gives up" (lit & fig). See text §14a n.

²³ For Pali, see text §14a n

The Khandha Saṃyutta contains a number of suttas dealing with suffering which can be used as perception exercises:

Atītānagata,paccuppanna Dukkha Sutta	(S 22.10/3:19 f)
Anicca Sutta	(S 22.13/3:21)
Yaṃ Dukkhaṃ Sutta	(S 22.16/3:22)
(Dukkha) Hetu Sutta	(S 22.19/3:23)

7 The perception of a lack of self in the suffering (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*)

The Giri-m-ānanda Sutta (A 10.60) describes the perception of impermanence in terms of the 12 sense-bases, that is, the 6 internal senses and their respective external sense-bases, thus:

And what, Ānanda, is the perception of non-self?

Here, Ānanda, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty house, reflects thus:

The eye is	not the self;	forms are	not the self;
The ear is	not the self;	sounds are	not the self;
The nose is	not the self;	smells are	not the self;
The tongue is	not the self;	tastes are	not the self;
The body is	not the self;	touches are	not the self;
The mind is	not the self;	mind-objects are	not the self.

Thus he dwells contemplating **non-self** in these 6 internal sense-bases.

[And their respective external sense-objects are not the self, too.]

This, Ānanda, is called the perception of non-self. (A 10.60,5/5:109), SD 19.16

The Khandha Saṃyutta contains a number of suttas dealing with non-self which can be used as perception exercises:

Atītānagata,paccuppanna Anatta Sutta	(S 22.11/3:20)
Anatta Sutta	(S 22.14/3:21)
Yad Anatta Sutta	(S 22.17/3:22)
(Anatta) Hetu Sutta	(S 22.20/3:23)

8 Method of practice

8.1 The (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta opens with a listing of the seven perceptions, and then each of them is briefly explained. All the seven perception passages share the same structure:

Paragraph 1	The cultivation of the perception brings great benefit, leading even to nirvana.
Paragraph 2	The benefit or efficacy of the perception is stated.
Paragraph 3	The fire parable.
Paragraph 4	A true practitioner knows when the perception is not fully developed yet.
Paragraph 5	A true practitioner knows when the perception is fully developed.

The fire parable (paragraph 3), however, is found only in the first 5 perceptions and not in the last two.

8.2 PERCEIVING IMPERMANENCE

8.2.1 How the perception is to be practiced is given in **the Giri-m-ānandaSutta** (A 10.60) in the instruction regarding the perception of impermanence of the 5 aggregates, thus:

And what, Ānanda, is the perception of impermanence?

Here, Ānanda, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty house, reflects (*paṭisañcikkhati*) thus:

Form ... feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness is impermanent.

(A 10.60,4/5:109), SD 19.16

8.2.2 The operative word here is ***paṭisañcikkhati***,²⁴ “he reflects,” or “he thinks over, discriminates, considers.” The term *paṭisañcikkhati* is resolved as *paṭi + sam + cikkhati*, which can be further analyzed as follows:

paṭi-, a prefix, which by itself usually has the sense of “back, against, opposing to.”

sam-, a prefix, here meaning “self” in the reflexive sense; it also as a sense of consolidating. When the two prefixes, *paṭi + sam* are juxtaposed, as ***paṭisam-***, this compound prefix has a reflexive sense (doing to oneself). It becomes *paṭisañ-* before the palatal *c* of *cikkhati*.

cikkhati (v) “he tells (again and again),” is the frequentive of √*कृया*, “to tell” [Dhātu, pāṭha: *cikkha vacane*].

8.2.3 As such, the verb *paṭisañcikkhati* can be explained as “constantly telling oneself (mentally guiding),” a mental directing. In modern psychological terms, we can divide this “mental directing” into 3 levels:

1. “Prompting” (or initial minding), that is, giving self-instructions as and when necessary.
2. “Sub-verbalizing” (or undirected minding): as participants become more skilled in minding, they will dispense with any labelling or mental noting. These first two stages are traditionally known as “preliminary work” (*parikamma*).
3. “Limining” or liminal minding, refers to self-programming one’s mind, when the mind is able to go on autopilot as directed, reaching access concentration, poised for full absorption. This third stage is actually not a separate one, but the result of the previous two.

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²⁴ V 1:5; D 1:63; M 1:267, 499, 3:33; S 1:137; A 1:205; Pug 25; Vism 283. Cf *paṭisañkhati*, “he thinks over, considers”; BHS *pratisañcīkṣati* (Mvst 2:314).

(Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta

The (Detailed) Discourse on the Seven Perceptions

A 7.46

Preamble

1 These 7 perceptions, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed, are of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.²⁵

What are the seven?

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| 2 (1) The perception of foulness, | <i>asubha,saññā</i> |
| (2) the perception of death, | <i>maraṇa,saññā</i> |
| (3) the perception of loathsomeness in food, | <i>āhāre paṭikkūla,saññā</i> |
| (4) the perception of not delighting in all the world, | <i>sabba,loke anabhirata,saññā</i> |
| (5) the perception of impermanence, | <i>anicca,saññā</i> |
| (6) the perception of suffering in the impermanent, | <i>anicce dukkha,saññā</i> |
| (7) the perception of a lack of self in the suffering. | <i>dukkhe anatta,saññā</i> |

1 The perception of foulness (*asubha,saññā*)

3 **The perception of foulness**, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree. Thus it is said; for what reason is this said?

4 Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of foulness, his mind shrinks away from sexual intercourse, [47] turns away from it, rolls back from it.²⁶ He is not drawn to it.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.²⁷

4.2 THE FIRE PARABLE. Bhikshus, just as a **cock's feather or a strip of sinew** that is thrown into the fire, shrinks away from it, turns away from it, rolls back from it; it is not drawn to it—

even so it is with the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of foulness, his mind shrinks away from sexual intercourse, turns away from it, rolls back from it. He is not drawn to it.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

²⁵ “The deathfree” (*amata*) here refers to nirvana, and these recollections, properly done, lead to liberation. *Amata* is better tr as “the deathfree” rather than “the deathless,” which implies some kind of existence, a conditioned state.

²⁶ This is the *result* of the perception of foulness; for the actual practice, see eg **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60,6/-5:109), SD 19.16.

²⁷ *Asubha,saññā,paricitenā bhikkhave bhikkhuno cetasā bahulaṃ viharato methuna,dhamma,samāpattiyā cittaṃ paṭilīyati paṭikuṭati paṭivattati na sampasāriyati, upekhā vā pāṭikkūlyatā vā saṅghāti*. Here “loathsomeness” (*pāṭikkūlyatā*) refers to a feeling close to or leading to “revulsion” (*nibbidā*), in terms of specific objects, such as food. The pervading mood here is not a negative one, but a careful mind in the sense of a burnt child dreading the fire, or being once bitten twice shy. The stress on celibacy here suggests that the goal is arhathood. For an alternative, albeit lower goal, one should at least work towards streamwinning: see (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7.

4.3 However, bhikshus, if the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of foulness, his mind is directed to sexual intercourse, or if non-loathsomeness is not established towards it—then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

‘I have *not* cultivated the perception of foulness. I have not attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have not gained the fruit of cultivation.’²⁸

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

4.4 Bhikshus, if the monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of foulness, his mind shrinks away from sexual intercourse, turns away from it, rolls back from it. He is not drawn to it.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him²⁹—then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

‘I *have* cultivated the perception of foulness. I have attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have gained the fruit of cultivation.’

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

The perception of foulness, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

Thus it is said; it is for this reason that this is said.

2 The perception of death (*marana,saññā*)

5 The perception of death, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed [48] is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree. Thus it is said; for what reason is this said?

6 Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of death, his mind shrinks away from the love of life [life-fixation],³⁰ turns away from it, rolls back from it. He is not drawn to it.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

6.2 THE FIRE PARABLE. Bhikshus, just as *a cock’s feather or a strip of sinew* is thrown into the fire, shrinks away from it, turns away from it, rolls back from it; it is not drawn to it—

even so it is with the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of death: his mind shrinks away from the love of life, turns away from it, rolls back from it. He is not drawn to it.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

6.3 However, bhikshus, if the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of death, his mind is directed to the love of life, or if non-loathsomeness is not established towards it—then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

‘I have not cultivated the perception of death. I have not attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have not gained the fruit of cultivation.’

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

²⁸ *Abhāvitā me asubha,saññā, n’atthi me pubbenāparaṃ viseso, appattaṃ me bhāvanā,phalan ti.*

²⁹ *Upekhā vā pāṭikkūlatā vā saññhāti:* this is the refrain that recurs in meditation 1-5.

³⁰ “The love of life,” *jīvita,nikanti*. This refers to the third of the 3 “intoxications” (*mada*), ie, to health (*ārogya,-mada*), to youth (*yobbana,mada*), and to life (*jīvita,mada*) (D 3:220; A 1:146). The meaning here is that one should neither love nor hate life, and one similarly should neither love nor hate death, too. One is reminded of Sāriputta’s **Thera,gāthā**: “I delight not in death; I delight not in life. I shall lay down this body fully knowing and mindful” (Tha 1002).

6.4 Bhikshus, if the monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of death, his mind shrinks away from the love of life, turns away from it, rolls back from it. He is not drawn to it.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him—then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

‘I have cultivated the perception of death. I have attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have gained the fruit of cultivation.’

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

The perception of death, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed [49] is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree. Thus it is said; it is for this reason that this is said.

3 The perception of loathsomeness in food (*āhāre paṭikkūla,saññā*)

7 The perception of loathsomeness in food, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree. Thus it is said; for what reason is this said?

8 Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of loathsomeness in food, his mind shrinks away from craving for taste, turns away from it, rolls back from it. He is not drawn to it.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

8.2 THE FIRE PARABLE. Bhikshus, just as *a cock’s feather or a strip of sinew* that is thrown into the fire, shrinks away from it, turns away from it, rolls back from it; it is not drawn to it—

even so it is with the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of loathsomeness in food: his mind shrinks away from craving for taste, turns away from it, rolls back from it. He is not drawn to it.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

8.3 However, bhikshus, if the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of loathsomeness in food, his mind is directed to craving for taste, or if non-loathsomeness is not established towards it—

then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

‘I have not cultivated the perception of loathsomeness in food. I have not attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have not gained the fruit of cultivation.’

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

8.4 Bhikshus, if the monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of loathsomeness in food, his mind shrinks away from craving for taste, turns away from it, rolls back from it. He is not drawn to it.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him—then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

‘I have cultivated the perception of loathsomeness in food. I have attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have gained the fruit of cultivation.’

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

The perception of loathsomeness in food, [50] bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

Thus it is said; it is for this reason that this is said.

4 The perception of not delighting in all the world (*sabba,loke anabhirata,saññā*)³¹

9 The perception of not delighting³² in all the world, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree. Thus it is said; for what reason is this said?³³

10 Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of not delighting in all the world, his mind shrinks away from worldly thoughts,³⁴ turns away from them, rolls back from them. He is not drawn to them. Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

10.2 THE FIRE PARABLE. Bhikshus, just as *a cock's feather or a strip of sinew* is thrown into the fire, shrinks away from it, turns away from it, rolls back from it; it is not drawn to it—

even so it is with the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of not delighting in all the world: his mind shrinks away from worldly thoughts, turns away from them, rolls back from them. He is not drawn to them.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

10.3 However, bhikshus, if the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of not delighting in all the world, his mind is directed to worldly thoughts, or if non-loathsomeness is not established towards them—

then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

'I have not cultivated the perception of not delighting in all the world. I have not attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have not gained the fruit of cultivation.'

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

10.4 Bhikshus, if the monk [51] continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of not delighting in all the world, his mind shrinks away from worldly thoughts, turns away from them, rolls back from them. He is not drawn to them.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him—

then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

'I have cultivated the perception of not delighting in all the world. I have attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have gained the fruit of cultivation.'

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

The perception of not delighting in all the world, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

Thus it is said; it is for this reason that this is said.

³¹ Cf the perception of impermanence in all formations (*sabba,saṅkhāresu anicca,saññā*) (**Giri-m-ānanda S**, A 10.60,12/5:111), SD 19.16 & n.

³² "Not delighting in," *anābhirata*, alt tr "the lack of delight in," which is syn with *nibbidā*, "disenchantment, disillusionment, revulsion."

³³ See **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60,11/5:111), SD 19.16, where it is succinctly defined.

³⁴ "Worldly thoughts" (*loka,citta*). **The Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60) says: "Here, Ānanda, abandoning any engagement and clinging to the world due to mental standpoints, adherences [mindsets] and latent tendencies, he refrains from them, being one with no clinging." (A 10.60,9/5:111), SD 19.16.

5 The perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*)

11 The perception of impermanence, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

Thus it is said; for what reason is this said?

12 Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of impermanence, his mind shrinks away from gain, honour and praise,³⁵ turns away from them, rolls back from them. He is not drawn to them.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

12.2 THE FIRE PARABLE. Bhikshus, just as *a cock's feather or a strip of sinew* that is thrown into the fire, shrinks away from it, turns away from it, rolls back from it; it is not drawn to it—

so it is with the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of impermanence: his mind shrinks away from gain, honour and praise, turns away from them, rolls back from them. He is not drawn to them.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him.

12.3 However, bhikshus, if the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of impermanence, his mind is directed to gain, honour and praise, or if non-loathsomeness is not established towards them—then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

'I have not cultivated the perception of impermanence. I have not attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have not gained the fruit of cultivation.'

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

12.4 Bhikshus, if the monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of impermanence, his mind shrinks away from gain, honour and praise, [52] turns away from them, rolls back from them. He is not drawn to them.

Either equanimity or loathsomeness is established in him—

then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

'I have cultivated the perception of impermanence. I have attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have gained the fruit of cultivation.'

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

The perception of impermanence, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

Thus it is said; it is for this reason that this is said.

6 The perception of suffering in the impermanent (*anicce dukkha,saññā*)

13 The perception of suffering in the impermanent, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

Thus it is said; for what reason is this said?

³⁵ *Lābha,sakkāra,siloka*. These are 3 of the unwholesome “winds,” of which there are 8 (*aṭṭha loka,dhamma*), viz: gain and loss (*lābha alābha*), fame and obscurity (*yasa ayasa*), praise and blame (*pasamsā nindā*), and happiness and sorrow (*sukha dukkha*) (A 4:157). They are called worldly conditions or vicissitudes because the world (society) revolves around them, and because they are impermanent, one conditioning the other and vacillating between them.

14 Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of suffering in the impermanent, a keen sense of danger is set up in him regarding lethargy [inaction], laziness, languor,³⁶ heedlessness, non-devotion and inattention, as if towards a murderer brandishing a sword.³⁷

14.2 However, bhikshus, if the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of suffering in the impermanent, but a keen sense of danger is not set up in him regarding lethargy, laziness, languor, heedlessness, non-devotion and inattention, as if towards a murderer brandishing a sword—

then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

‘I have not cultivated the perception of suffering in the impermanent. I have not attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have not gained the fruit of cultivation.’

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

14.3 Bhikshus, if the monk who continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of suffering in the impermanent, a keen sense of danger is set up in him regarding lethargy, laziness, languor, heedlessness, non-devotion and inattention, as if towards a murderer brandishing a sword—

then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

‘I have cultivated the perception of suffering in the impermanent. I have attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have gained the fruit of cultivation.’

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

The perception of suffering in the impermanent, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed [53] is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

Thus it is said; it is for this reason that this is said.

7 The perception of a lack of self in the suffering (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*)

15 The perception of a lack of self in the suffering, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed, is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

Thus it is said; for what reason is this said?

16 Bhikshus, when a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of a lack of self in the suffering, his mental activity [mentation] is devoid of I-making, mine-making, and conceit regarding this conscious body and all external signs. It has transcended discrimination. It is peaceful and well liberated.³⁸

16.2 However, bhikshus, if a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of a lack of self in the suffering, his mental activity [mentation] is not devoid of I-making, mine-making, and conceit regarding this conscious body and all external signs; it has not transcended discrimination; it is neither peaceful nor well liberated—

³⁶ “Languor,” *vissatṭhi*, vl *visatṭhi*, pp of *vissajjati*, “he gives up” (lit & fig). It may be allusive to sensual indulgence, as *sukka,visatṭhi* means “emission of semen, ejaculation” (V 2:38, 3:112). “Languor” means “a pleasant feeling being relaxed and not having any energy or interest in anything” (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner’s Eng Dict).

³⁷ *Anicce dukkha,saññā,paricitenā bhikkhave bhikkhuno cetasā bahulaṃ viharato ālasse kosajje vissatṭhiye pamāde ananuyoge appaccavekkhanāya tippā bhaya,saññā paccupatthitā hoti, seyyathā pi ukkhittāsike vadhake.*

³⁸ *Dukkhe anatta,saññā,paricitenā bhikkhave bhikkhuno cetasā bahulaṃ viharato imasmim ca saviññānake kāye bahiddhā ca sabba,nimittesu ahaṃ,kāra,mamaṃ,kāra,mānāpagataṃ manasaṃ hoti, vidhā,samatikkantaṃ santaṃ suvimuttaṃ.*

then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

'I have not cultivated the perception of suffering in the impermanent. I have not attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have not gained the fruit of cultivation.'

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

16.3 Bhikshus, if a monk continuously abides with a mind accustomed to [attending to] the perception of a lack of self in the suffering, his mental activity [mentation] is devoid of I-making, mine-making, and conceit regarding this conscious body and all external signs; it has transcended discrimination; it is peaceful and well liberated—

then, bhikshus, this should be known by that monk:

'I have cultivated the perception of suffering in the impermanent. I have attained to the successive stages of distinction. I have gained the fruit of cultivation.'

Thus he clearly knows the situation.

The perception of a lack of self in the suffering, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed is of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

Thus it is said; it is for this reason that this is said.

These 7 perceptions, bhikshus, when cultivated and continuously developed, are of great fruit, of great benefit, grounded in the deathfree, ending up in the deathfree.

— evaṃ —

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