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Assutava Sutta 1

The First Discourse on the Untutored | S 12.61

Theme: Impermanence of the mind, dependent arising and *nibbidā*

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2006, 2024

1 Sutta structure

There are 2 Assutava Suttas¹ (S 12.61+62), and both deal with revulsion towards the body and dependent arising. The two Suttas are identical up to §7, that is, just before the similes of the monkey and of night and day. Then, the two Suttas diverge: although both Suttas speak of dependent arising, the first Assutava Sutta treats it by way of *the traditional formula*, while the second Assutava Sutta more specifically presents the dependent arising and dependent ending of feelings.

The Commentary gives a helpful explanation of **the sequence of the discourse**. First, the monks are excessively obsessed with physical form; as such, the Buddha speaks *as if* it were improper to grasp form because its growth and decay are apparent, but *not* improper to take the body as self [§§2-5].

Then, in the passage beginning with “It would be better...to take this body as the self” [§6], the Buddha speaks *as if* it were proper to grasp the body but improper to grasp the mind because it is ever changing [§§7-8]. This special teaching is, in other words, **a skillful means** (*upāya*), especially for those who are attached to the idea of the physical body.²

In the dependent arising passages [§§9-11], the Buddha speaks for the purpose of removing their obsession with both body and mind. (SA 2:98 f)

2 *Citta, mano* and *viññāṇa*

2.1 In the Assutava Sutta 1, the Buddha speaks of “‘thought’ or ‘mind [mentation],’ or ‘consciousness’” (*cittam iti pi mano iti pi viññāṇam iti pi*) [§4] as if they are synonyms.³ The Saṃyutta Commentary, in fact, says that all these are here names for the mind-base (*man’āyatana*) (SA 2:98). Where the general sense of “mind” is intended (as here in the Assutavā Sutta 1), we see that the 3 terms are used interchangeably in the Suttas.⁴ However, although these 3 terms have the same meaning, as noted by **Bodhi**,

in the Nikāyas they are generally used in distinct contexts. As a rough generalization, ***viññāṇa*** signifies the particularizing awareness through which a sense faculty (as in the standard sixfold division of *viññāṇa* into eye-consciousness, etc) as well as the underlying stream of consciousness, which sustains personal continuity through a single life and thread together successive lives (emphasized at S 12.38-40).⁵ ***Mano*** serves as the third door of action (along with body and speech) and as the sixth internal sense base (along with the five physical sense bases); as the mind base it coordinates the data of the other five senses and also cognizes mental phenomena (*dhammā*), its own special class of objects. ***Citta*** signifies mind as the centre of personal experience, as the subject of thought, volition and emotion. It is the *citta* that needs to be understood, trained, and liberated. (S:B 769 n154)⁶

¹ S 12.61/2:94 f & 12.62/95-97 = SD 20.2+3.

² On skillful means in Dharma, see ***Upāya, skillful means***, SD 30.8.

³ Cf ***Brahmajāla S*** (D 1): *Yam...idam vuccati cittan ti va mano ti va viññāṇan ti va* (D 1,49/1:21,21).

⁴ Eg D 1:21; S 2:94 f

⁵ On the 2 kinds of consciousnesses, see ***Cetanā S 1-3*** (S 12.38-40/2:65-67), SD 7.6a+b+c.

⁶ For a detailed discussion, see Hamilton 1996a: ch 5 & also ***Viññāṇa***, SD 17.8a(12).

2.2 Bh Bodhi uses “mentality” for *mano*.⁷ Here, however, I am influenced by the Buddhist Dictionary definition of *citta*, where *adhicitta* = “higher mentality.” Moreover, as Bodhi himself has noted: “**Mano** serves as the 3rd door of action (along with body and speech)⁸ and as the 6th internal sense base (along with the 5 physical sense-bases); as the mind-base, it coordinates the data of the other 5 senses and also cognizes mental phenomena (*dhammā*), its own special class of objects.”⁹

2.3 As such, “mind” or “mentation” (a function) is clearly better translations of *mano* than “mentality” (more of a state). This is just a bit of pedantry probably limited to this passage. Furthermore, the well-known word “thought” translates *citta* here. Elsewhere, it is best (as Bodhi himself admits) to translate both *citta* and *mano* as “mind,” as most translators now do, too. The point is to be aware of the proper context; and in many cases these terms overlap.

2.4 Here are the rules of thumb for the translations of *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa*, by using their verbs as mnemonics. The verb for *citta* is *cinteti* or, less commonly, *ceteti*, “he thinks or intends”;¹⁰ hence, *citta* is best translated as “thought.” **Mano**, perhaps due to its being natural or abstract *mental* process seems to have no verb. There are 2 close verbs—*maneti* and *manteti*—which are not directly related to *mano* but function as derived forms. *Māneti*, a causative of √MAN, “to think,” means “to honour, revere, think highly (of).”¹¹ *Manteti*, amongst others, means “to consider, think over.”¹² As such, we are left, as it were, with “mind” as the most suitable translation here. **Viññāṇa** is clearly a psychological term, as indicated by its verb, *vijānāti*, “to cognize, have discriminative knowledge, be aware of, ascertain,” and technically describes the working of consciousness. However, in the early suttas, it often simply means “to know.”¹³

Here is the mnemonic table:

<i>citta</i>	thought,
<i>mano</i>	the mind,
<i>viññāṇa</i>	consciousness.

3 The mind always wants an object

The Assutava Sutta 1 contains 2 simple but important similes: that of the monkey in the forest and of night and day:

⁷ S:B 595 & 769 n154.

⁸ Hence, we could speak of the karmic triad of “body, speech and mind,” where “mind” is *mano*.

⁹ S:B 769 n154.

¹⁰ Sn 834; Pv 2.9.7; S 12.38/2:65,15 as *ceteti pakappeti anuseti*, “he intends, plans, tends to.” It has many forms and derivations: see PED: *cinteti*; DP: *cinteti*.

¹¹ D 16,5.3.b/2:138,20 *māneti*, “he honours” in *māneti pūjeti apaciyati paramāya pūjāya*, “he honours (the Tathagata), respects him, reveres him, worships him with the supreme worship”; PvA 54,29 aor *mānesum*, “he held in high esteem,” in *sakkariṃsu garu, kariṃsu ~ pūjesum*, “honoured, show respect, held in high esteem, venerated.

¹² A 3.67/1:199,15 as pot *mantaye* “should discuss, seek counsel”; Miln 91,24 ind *manteti*, “he consults, deliberates”; Miln 91,12 as grd *mantayitabba*, “to be discussed (with)”; Miln 91,22 inf *mantayitu, kāma*, “desirous to consult.”

¹³ Sn 93 f, 763; Dh 64, 65; Nm 442. Further see SID: *citta mano viññāṇa*.

Just as a monkey, bhikshus, roaming through the forest and mountain-side, takes hold of one branch, letting that go, then grabs another,¹⁴ even so, bhikshus, that which is called ‘thought,’ or ‘mind,’ or ‘consciousness,’ arises as one and ceases as another, like night and day. [§8]

The monkey here represents *the mind*, the branches *mind-objects*, and the grasping *attention*.

This monkey simile is probably one of the sources for the popular saying that the mind is often “as restless as a monkey,” which may well be true. However, as **Bodhi** reminds us, “It should be noted that neither the sutta nor the commentary interprets the monkey simile here as saying that the untrained mind is as restless as a monkey; the point, rather, is that the mind is always dependent on an object.” (S:B 771 n157).¹⁵

The figurative expression, “**like night and day**,”¹⁶ points to the fact that the untrained mind tends to grasp at one thought after another, and so mentally proliferates with countless thoughts.¹⁷ As the Sutta puts it, the mind “**arises as one and ceases as another**.”¹⁸ The Commentary interprets this almost literally, saying that the meaning here is that the mind that arises and ceases during the day is other than the mind that arises and ceases during the night.

Be that as it may, the statement, however, should not be taken to mean that one thing arises and something different ceases. As the Commentary further notes: “Night and day” alludes to continuity, which is a continuity of lesser duration than that of the body (SA 2:99). Here the imagery should not be overstretched, for the meaning here is simply that the thought-moments are discrete.¹⁹

4 The 3 graspings

4.1 The Assutava Sutta 1 says that the untutored worldling may be able to regard the body with disgust as its change and decay are clearly apparent, but *not* so in the case of the mind [§5]. He clings to **the mind**, thinking, “This is mine (*etam mama*); this I am (*eso’ham asmi*); this is my self (*eso me attā*)” [§5]. The Saṃyutta Commentary calls them **the 3 graspings** (*gāha*) and explains them in terms of *craving, conceit and views* (SA 2:98):

The self is <u>owned</u> (<i>mamāyita</i>) by our being swallowed up by	craving:	“this is mine”;
it is <u>held on to</u> (<i>ajjhosita</i>) by our being blinded by	conceit:	“this I am”;
it is <u>grasped</u> (<i>parāmaṭṭha</i>) by our being overwhelmed by	views:	“this is my self.”
“This is mine”	(<i>etam mama</i>)	is the grasp of <u>craving</u> (<i>taṇhā, gāha</i>);
“This I am”	(<i>eso’ham asmi</i>)	is the grasp of <u>conceit</u> (<i>māna, gāha</i>); and
“This is my self”	(<i>eso me attā</i>)	is the grasp of <u>views</u> (<i>diṭṭhi, gāha</i>).

¹⁴ Comy (SA 2:100) explains the monkey simile in detail by way of presenting the post-Buddha theory of moments, which explains the nature of mind and matter as time-bound, ie as momentary events. On the momentariness of the mind, see “The conscious process,” SD 17.8b(5) & **Nimitta & anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14. On the momentariness of matter, see **Matter and moments**, SD 17.2b.

¹⁵ However, cf Tha 1111c—“the trembling mind is like a monkey”—where the simile clearly applies to a distracted mind: see **Tāla, puṭa Tha** (Tha 1111c), SD 20.9.

¹⁶ *Rattiyā ca divasassa ca*, lit “in the night and in the day,” a genitive in the locative sense, ie, “during the night and during the day.”

¹⁷ See **Nimitta & anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14.

¹⁸ *Aññadeva uppajjati, aññam nirujjhati*.

¹⁹ See S:B 770 n157.

4.2 “The grasp of craving” here includes the 108 thoughts of craving, as listed in **the (Catukka) Taṇhā Sutta** (A 4.199), thus:

Thus are the 18 thought-courses²⁰ rooted in craving, dependent on what is *internal*, and the 18 thought-courses²¹ rooted in craving, dependent on what is *external*.

These are called the 36 thought-courses rooted in craving.

Thus, monks, with the 36 thought-courses regarding *the past*, 36 thought-courses rooted in craving regarding *the future*, and 36 thought-courses rooted in craving regarding *the present*, there are **the 108 thought-courses rooted in craving**.

This, monks, is the sticky net that traps, cast wide into the river; by which this world is over-spread and covered up like tousled thread of muñja [tall reed] and balbaja [coarse grass], tangled into knots; that does not go beyond the evil destination, the lower realm, the place of misery, or samsara. (A 4.199,4-6/2:212,31-213,2), SD 16.2

4.3 Further, the Suttas often mention how an untutored ordinary person tends to regard the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness) in terms of **the 4 kinds of self-identity view** (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), thus:²²

	comparison	self-views (M 1,3/1:1), SD 11.8
(1) <i>⟨the aggregate⟩</i> as <u>the self</u> ,	a lamp’s flame and its colour;	“I am <i>this body</i> ”;
(2) self as <u>possessing</u> <i>⟨the aggregate⟩</i> ,	the shadow of a tree;	“This is <i>my body</i> ”;
(3) <i>⟨the aggregate⟩</i> as <u>in the self</u> ,	the fragrance in a flower;	“My self and body are separate”;
(4) the self as <u>in</u> <i>⟨the aggregate⟩</i> ;	a jewel in a casket.	“My self is in my body,”

The “**self-view**” column lists the ways the untutored worldling conceives the self. [SD 8.9 (4.3)].

When this is applied to each of the 5 aggregates in turn, we have **the 20 wrong views** of the untutored worldling.²³ Both the Suttas and the Abhidhamma define self-identity view as comprising these 20 wrong views.²⁴

The noble disciple, on the other hand, simply reflects on the aggregates, thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self” (S 3:18 f; cf 3:16).

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²⁰ These 18 thoughts comprise all the 1st person grammatical moods possible over the 3 periods of time in terms of one’s 6 sense-based thought-courses rooted in craving towards **oneself** (“internally”) in terms of *the past, the future and the present* (see foll).

²¹ These 18 thoughts comprise all the 1st person grammatical moods possible over the 3 periods of time in terms of one’s 6 sense-based thought-courses rooted in craving towards other or some external state, in terms of the past, the future and the present.

²² See **Bhadd’eka, ratta S** (M 131), SD 8.9 (4).

²³ M 131,4/3:188, M 138,20/3:227 f; S 22.1/3:3, S 22.7/16, S 22.81/96.

²⁴ M 44,7-8/1:300, M 109.10/3:17 f; S 22.82/3:102; Dhs 182. See Gethin 1985:44 f. On views, conceit and craving, see foll essays: “**I**”: **the nature of identity**, SD 19.1, “**Me**”: **the nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a, & “**Mine**”: **the nature of craving**, SD 19.3.

Assutava Sutta 1

The First Discourse on the Untutored

S 12.61

[94]

1 Thus have I heard.

We tend to “own” our minds

At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika’s Park in Jeta’s Grove near Sāvattthī.

THE BODY

2 “Bhikshus, **the untutored worldling**²⁵ might be revulsed towards this body made of *the 4 great elements*, or he might be dispassionate towards it, or he might be freed from it.

3 What is the reason for this?

Because, bhikshus, growth or decay [increase or decrease]²⁶ is seen in **this body** made of the 4 great elements,²⁷ as it is seen being taken up or being cast aside.

Therefore, the untutored worldling might be revulsed towards this body made of the 4 great elements, or he might be dispassionate towards it, or he might be freed from it.

THE MIND

4 But, bhikshus, as regards to what is called ‘**thought**,²⁸ or ‘**mind** [mentation],²⁹ or ‘**consciousness**,³⁰—the untutored worldling is unable to be revulsed towards it, unable to be dispassionate towards it, unable to be freed from it.

5 What is the reason for this?

Because, bhikshus, for a long time, it has been held, cherished, and grasped by him, thus:

‘*This is mine; this I am; this is my self.*’³¹

Therefore, the untutored worldling is unable to be revulsed towards it, unable to be dispassionate towards it, unable to be freed from it.

The nature of the mind

6 It would be better, bhikshus, for the untutored worldling to take **this body**, made of the 4 great elements—rather than the mind—as *the self*.

²⁵ *Assutava puthujjana*. The untutored worldling is one who lacks learning, questioning and discerning of the aggregates of existence. He may either be a crowd-follower or a highly opinionated narcissist guided by self-identity. One who is willing and able to seek and understanding Dharma is called “instructed noble disciple” (*sutava ariya, sāvaka*) [§9]. the On *puthujjana*, etc, see “I”: **The nature of identity**, SD 19.1 (7.1).

²⁶ *Ācayo pi apacayo pi*, lit “building up [accumulating] and lessening.” See **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,6.2), SD 49.4.

²⁷ The 4 great elements (*mahā, bhūta*): see **Rūpa**, SD 17.2a.

²⁸ *Citta*, and the foll 2, *mano* and *viññāṇa* are all synonyms here. See Intro (2).

²⁹ *Mano*, see prec n.

³⁰ On these 3 terms, see **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8(12).

³¹ These are the 3 graspings (*gāha*): see Intro (4).

7 What is the reason for this?

Because this body, made of the 4 great elements, is seen standing for one year, two years, three years, for four, five, or ten years, for twenty, thirty, forty or fifty years, for a hundred years, [95] or is seen standing for even longer.³²

PARABLES: NIGHT AND DAY & THE MONKEY

7.2 But that which is called ‘**thought,**’ or ‘**mind,**’ or ‘**consciousness,**’ arises as one thing and ceases as another, like night and day.³³

8 Just as a monkey, bhikshus, roaming through the forest and mountain-side, takes hold of one branch,³⁴ letting that go, then grabs another,

even so, bhikshus, that which is called ‘**thought,**’ or ‘**mind,**’ or ‘**consciousness,**’ arises as one and ceases as another, like night and day.³⁵

Revulsion through dependent arising

9 As such, bhikshus, **the instructed noble disciple**, closely and wisely attends to dependent arising itself, thus:³⁶

<i>Imasmim sati,</i>	<i>idam hoti;</i>	‘When this is,	that is;
<i>imass’uppādā,</i>	<i>idam uppajjati.</i>	with the arising of this,	that arises.
<i>Imasmim asati</i>	<i>idam na hoti;</i>	When this is not,	that is not;
<i>imassa nirodhā</i>	<i>idam nirujjhati.</i>	with the ending of this,	that ends.

9.2

Avijjā,paccayā saṅkhārā
saṅkhārā,paccayā viññāṇaṃ
viññāṇa,paccayā nāma,rūpaṃ
nāma,rūpa,paccayā sa’āyatanaṃ

That is to say,
with ignorance as condition, there are volitional activities;³⁷
with volitional activities as condition, there is consciousness;
with consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form;
with name-and-form as condition, there are the 6 sense-bases;

³² *Dissatāyaṃ bhikkhave cātummahā,bhūtiko kāyaṃ ekam pi vassaṃ tiṭṭhamāno, dve pi vassani tiṭṭhamāno, tīṇi pi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno ...* (the text repeats a full sentence for each number, but is here abridged in the scribal tradition). Comy here introduces the post-Buddha theory of moments (*khaṇika,vāda*)—that formations right there even as they arise—and so asks why the Buddha says that the body “stands [endures].” In autoanswer, it says that the body endures just like the light of a lamp burns through the night “by way of a connected continuity” (*paveṇi,sambandha,vasena*), even though the flame ceases right where it burns without crossing over to the next part of the wick. (SA 2:99)

³³ *Rattiyā ca divasassa ca*. See Intro (3).

³⁴ The monkey simile. See Intro (3).

³⁵ “**Like night and day,**” *rattiyā ca divasassa ca*, lit “in the night and in the day,” a genitive in the locative sense, ie, during the night and during the day. See Intro (3).

³⁶ The foll is the well known “specific conditionality” (*idap,paccayatā*) formula, ie, the dependent arising formula in brief. The full formula follows. See **Dependent arising, SD 5.16 (2)**.

³⁷ Comy: When it is said, “With ignorance as condition, there are volitional formation,” the meaning should be understood thus: “It is ignorance and it is a condition; hence ‘ignorance-as-condition’ (*avijjā ca sā pacayā cā ti avijjā,paccayā*). Through that ignorance-as-condition, volitional formation come to be (*tasmā avijjā,paccayā saṅkhārā sambhavanti*)” (SA 2:9 f). **Bodhi**: “This explanation suggests that the verb *sambhavanti*, which in the text occurs only at the end of the whole formula, should be connected to each proposition, thus establishing that each conditioned state arises through its condition. The twelve terms of the formula are treated analytically in [**Vibhaṅga S**].” (S:B 725 n1)

*sa'āyatana, paccayā phassa
phassa, paccayā vedanā
vedanā, paccayā taṇhā
taṇhā, paccayā upādānaṃ
upādāna, paccayā bhava
bhava, paccayā jāti
jāti, paccayā jarā, maraṇaṃ
soka, parideva, dukkha,-
domanass'upāyasā sambhavanti
evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-
khandhassa **samudayo** hoti*

with the 6 sense-bases as condition, there is contact;
with contact as condition, there is feeling;
with feeling as condition, there is craving;³⁸
with craving as condition, there is clinging;
with clinging as condition, there is existence;
with existence as condition, there is birth;
with birth as condition, there arise decay-and-death,
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,
mental pain and despair.
—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

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*avijjāya tveva asesa, virāga, nirodhā
saṅkhāra, nirodho
saṅkhāra, nirodhā viññāṇa, nirodho
viññāṇa, nirodhā nāma, rūpa, nirodho
nāma, rūpa, nirodhā sa'āyatana, nirodho
sa'āyatana, nirodhā phassa, nirodho
phassa, nirodhā vedanā, nirodho
vedanā, nirodhā taṇhā, nirodho
taṇhā, nirodhā upādāna, nirodho
upādāna, nirodhā bhava, nirodho
bhava, nirodhā jāti, nirodho
jāti, nirodhā jarā, maraṇaṃ
soka, parideva, dukkha,-
domanass'upāyasā nirujjhanti
evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k,-
khandhassa **nirodho** hoti*

But with the utter fading away and ending of ignorance,
volitional activities end;
with the ending of volitional activities, consciousness ends;
with the ending of consciousness, name-and-form ends;
with the ending of name-and-form, the 6 sense-bases end;
with the ending of the 6 sense-bases, contact ends;
with the ending of contact, feeling ends;
with the ending of feeling, craving ends;
with the ending of craving, clinging ends;
with the ending of clinging, existence ends;
with the ending of existence, birth ends;
with the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death;
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,
mental pain and despair.
—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.'

Revulsion, dispassion, freedom**11** Seeing thus, bhikshus, the instructed noble disciple

is revulsed towards	<u>form</u> ;
he is revulsed towards	<u>feeling</u> , too;
he is revulsed towards	<u>perception</u> , too;
he is revulsed towards	<u>formations</u> , too;
he is revulsed towards	<u>consciousness</u> , too.

11.2 Through revulsion, he becomes dispassionate.
Through dispassion, his mind is freed.
When it is freed, there arises the knowledge: 'Freed!'³⁹

³⁸ In (**Samuday'atthaṅgama**) **Loka S** (S 12.44), the dependent arising is shown to be broken here when "with the remainderless fading away and ending of that same craving comes cessation of clinging ... " the rest of the chain breaks accordingly leading to the ending of "this whole mass of suffering." (S 12.44/2:71-73)

³⁹ *Vimuttismim vimuttam iti ñāṇaṃ hoti*, or "When freed, there is the knowledge, it (the mind) is freed." Note that the self is not addressed here.

He understands:

‘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.’”

— evaṃ —

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