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Pubba Sambodha Sutta 2 (Bahiddhā)

The Second Discourse on “Before the Self-awakening”

(the external senses) | S 35.14/4:8

Theme: The sense-objects can never satisfy us completely

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

Introduction

The structure of this Sutta is exactly the same as that of **the (Ajjhatta) Pubbe Sambodha Sutta** (S 4.13),¹ except that while the latter refers to the six internal senses, here it refers to the six external senses. The Saṃyutta Commentary² says that the “internality” of the sense-faculties should be understood as arising from the strength of lustful desire for them. Human beings regard the six internal sense-bases like the interior of a house, the six external sense-bases like the house’s vicinity. Just as human lustful desire is stronger towards the house interior, not letting in any stranger, even so is the human attitude to the six internal bases. However, human lustful desire for the vicinity of the house is not as strong, and humans do not prevent others from walking by, so it is in relation to the external sense-bases.

Both the (Ajjhatta) Pubbe Sambodha Sutta (S 4.13) and the (Bahiddhā) Pubbe Sambodha Sutta should be studied with the **Nibbedhika Pariyāya Sutta** (A 6.63),³ which says:

3b There are these **five cords of sensual pleasures** (*kāma, guṇa*):

Forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Sounds cognizable by the ear that are...delightful;

Smells cognizable by the nose that are...delightful;

Tastes cognizable by the tongue that are...delightful;

Touches cognizable by the body that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful.

—Monks, these are not sensual objects (*kāma*), but in the Noble Discipline, they are called “cords of sensual desire” (*kāma, guṇa*).⁴

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:

There is no sensuality in what is beautiful (*citra*) in the world.

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:

What is beautiful in the world remains as they are.

So here the wise remove the desire for them.⁵ (A 6.63.3/3:411)

An almost identical verse (without line c) is found in **the Na Santi Sutta** (S 1.34/1:22).

The Indriya Bhāvanā Sutta (M 152) similarly teaches the mastery over one’s sense-faculties rather than removing the sense-objects (which have the natural right to be where they are). When the brahmin student Uttara tells the Buddha that his teacher, Pārāsariya’s method of developing the faculties is by way of not seeing forms with the eyes, and not listening to sounds with the ear, the Buddha replies:

¹ SD 14.9.

² SA 2:356.

³ A 6.63/3:410-416 = SD 6.11.

⁴ *Api ca kho bhikkhave n’ete kāmā, kāma, guṇā nam’ete ariyassa vinaye vuccanti*. This is an enigmatic statement whose meaning is clarified in the verse that follows. See foll n.

⁵ This verse, which explains the previous prose sentence, “plays upon the double meaning of *kāma*, emphasizes that purification is to be achieved by mastering the defilement of sensuality, not by fleeing [from] sensually enticing objects.” (A:ÑB 1999:302 n34)

In that case, Uttara, a blind and a deaf man would have developed faculties, according to what the brahmin Pārāsariya says! For a blind man does not see forms with the eye, and a deaf man does not hear sounds with the ear. (M 152.2/3:298)

What is meant here is that the world (physical, living and human), and even one's own sense-faculties, are "neutral," that is, they are neither good nor evil, but one's thinking makes them so. The most effective way to change and better the world, therefore, is to change oneself.

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The Second Discourse on “Before the Self-awakening” (the external senses)

S 35.14/4:8

1 At Sāvattḥī.

The external senses

2 “Bhikshus, before my self-awakening, [7] when I was still a bodhisattva, it occurred to me:

‘Now what is gratification regarding <u>form</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>sound</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>smell</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>taste</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>touch</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?
Now what is gratification regarding <u>mind-object</u> ?’	What is its danger?	What is the escape (from it)?

3 Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:

3a ‘Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure⁶ that depends on **form**,
that is the gratification regarding form.

3b That the eye is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding form.

3c The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding form.

4a Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure that depends on **sound**,
that is the gratification for sound.

4b That the eye is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding sound.

4c The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding sound.

5a Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure that depends on **smell**,
that is the gratification regarding smell.

5b That the eye is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding smell.

5c The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding smell.

6a Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure that depends on **taste**,
that is the gratification regarding taste.

6b That the tongue is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding taste.

6c The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding taste.

7a Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure that depends on **touch**,
that is the gratification regarding touch.

7b That the body is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,

⁶ “Physical comfort and mental pleasure,” *sukham somanassam*, lit “happiness and pleasure,” alt tr, “physical joy and mental joy.”

that is the danger regarding touch.

7c The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding touch.

8a Whatever physical comfort and mental pleasure⁷ that depends on **mind-object**,
that is the gratification regarding mind-object.

8b That the mind is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change,
that is the danger regarding mind-object.

8c The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust,
that is the escape regarding mind-object.

The Buddha's awakening

9 Bhikshus, I went in search of gratification in the world. Whatever gratification there is in the world, that gratification I have found.

Bhikshus, to whatever extent there is gratification in the world, that gratification I have clearly seen by wisdom.

Bhikshus, I went in search of danger in the world. Whatever danger there is in the world, that danger I have found.

Bhikshus, to whatever extent there is danger in the world, that danger I have clearly seen by wisdom.

Bhikshus, I went in search for an escape from the world. Whatever escape there is in the world, that escape I have found.

Bhikshus, to whatever extent there is an escape in the world, that escape I have clearly seen by wisdom.

10 Bhikshus, so long as I did not directly know, as they really are,
the world's gratification as gratification,
and the danger as danger,
and the escape as escape,

for that long I did not claim that I had awakened to the supreme full self-awakening in this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

But, bhikshus, when I directly knew, as they really are, thus—

the world's gratification as gratification,
and the danger as danger,
and the escape as escape—

only then I claimed that I had awakened to the supreme full self-awakening in this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

11 The knowledge and vision arose in me:

“Unshakable is my liberation of mind—this is my last birth. There is now no more rebirth!”

— evaṃ —

051119; 060121; 081223; 090804; 120924

⁷ “Physical comfort and mental pleasure,” *sukham somanassam*, lit “happiness and pleasure,” alt tr, “physical joy and mental joy.”