

Dīghāvu Sutta

The Discourse to Dīgh'āvu

[Streamwinning and the 6 things conducive to true knowledge]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 55.3/5:344-347)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2007

1 The 6 things conducive to true knowledge

1.1 DĪGH'ĀVU. The Dīgh'āvu Sutta records how the Buddha counsels the dying Dīgh'āvu, a streamwinner, advising him not to worry about his father, the householder Jotika. The Buddha teaches him how to cultivate **the four limbs of streamwinning**, that is, aspiring towards faith in the Three Jewels and supreme moral virtue [§§6-7]. When Dīgh'āvu declares that he is accomplished in them, the Buddha goes on to teach him **the six things conducive to true knowledge** (*cha vijjā, bhāgiyā dhammā*)¹ [1.2]. Dīgh'āvu later passes away and arises spontaneously in the Suddh'āvāsa as a non-returner.² The Suttas do not seem to say anything more about Dīgh'āvu.

1.2 THE SIX THINGS CONDUCTIVE TO TRUE KNOWLEDGE are listed in the following discourse:

Vijjā, bhāgiya Dhamma Sutta

The Discourse on the Things Conducive to True Knowledge

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 6.35/3:334)

1 Bhikshus, there are these six things conducive to true knowledge [these six things that partake of knowledge]. What are the six?

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) the perception of impermanence | (<i>anicca, saññā</i>), ³ |
| (2) the perception of suffering in what is impermanent | (<i>anicce dukkha, saññā</i>), |
| (3) the perception of not-self in what is suffering | (<i>dukkhe anatta, saññā</i>), |
| (4) the perception of abandonment [letting go of defilements] | (<i>pahāna, saññā</i>), |
| (5) the perception of fading away [dispassion] | (<i>virāga, saññā</i>), |
| (6) the perception of cessation (of suffering) | (<i>nirodha, saññā</i>). |

These, bhikshus, are the six things conducive to true knowledge.

— evaṃ —

These six things conducive to true knowledge are also listed as short separate suttas in **the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta** (S 46).⁴

The teaching of **the Vijjā, bhāgiya Dhamma Sutta** (A 6.35) elaborates on how the perception of impermanence (*anicca, saññā*) should be done, that is, *contemplating the impermanence in all formations, perceiving suffering in impermanence, perceiving not-self in suffering, perceiving the abandoning of defilements, perceiving the fading away of lust, and perceiving the cessation of suffering*. **The Okkantī**

¹ Or more literally, “the six things that partake of knowledge.”

² S 55.3/5:344-347.

³ Given below [§8] as “contemplating impermanence in all formations” (*sabba, saṅkhāresu aniccānupassī*).

⁴ S 46.71-76/5:132 f, where they are part of **10 perceptions**, viz, the perceptions of (1) foulness (*asubha, saññā*), (2) death (*maraṇa, sati*), (3) repulsiveness of food (*āhāre paṭikkūla, saññā*), (4) non-delight (*sabba, loke anabhirata, saññā*), (5) impermanence (*anicca, saññā*), (6) suffering (*dukkha, saññā*), (7) not-self (*anatta, saññā*), (8) abandonment (*pahāna, saññā*), (9) dispassion (*virāga, saññā*), and (10) cessation (*nirodha, saññā*). The last 6 forms the things conducive to true knowledge (*vijjā, bhāgiya dhamma*). See S:B 1914 n119. A unique set of 10 perceptions (ending with the breath meditation) is found in **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60/5:108-112) = SD 19.16 Intro (3.4).

Saṃyutta (S 25) gives ten ways of practising “the perception of impermanent,” that is, in connection with *the six sense-faculties, the six sense-objects, the six sense-consciousnesses, the six sense-contacts, the six feelings, the six perceptions, the six volitions, the six cravings and the six elements*.⁵

It should be noted that the first nine perceptions all have to do with aspects of our personal being, that is, the senses, sense-objects and various types of sense-experiences. Even the last set—that of the six elements—have to do with the nature or composition of our body, that is, we consist of *earth, water, fire, wind and consciousness*, which are all impermanent, shifting all the time.⁶ The point is that we should observe and contemplate on the impermanence that pervades our being and daily life.

1.3 THE 6 PERCEPTIONS. In the **Dīgh'āvu Sutta**, the perception of impermanence is stated as “contemplating impermanence in all formations” (*sabba,saṅkhāresu aniccānupassī*) [§8]. This first perception is simply called:

(1) **The perception of impermanence** is explained in a practical manner in **the Anicca,saññā Sutta** (S 22.102), and is stated as efficacious the basis for the uprooting all desire and “I am” conceit. It is also briefly explained in **the Giri-m-ānanda Sutta** (A 10.60).⁷

(2) **The perception of suffering in what is impermanent** (*anicce dukkha,saññā*) is said in **the (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta** (S 7.46) as being conducive to overcoming indolence and to exerting oneself.⁸ In place of this perception, **the Giri-m-ānanda Sutta** (A 10.60) seems to have the perception of danger (*ādīnava,saññā*), where we reflect on the death from illness and other agencies, and other physical disadvantages.⁹

(3) **The perception of not-self in what is suffering** (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*) is briefly stated in **the Giri-m-ānanda Sutta** (A 10.60).¹⁰ **The (Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta** (S 7.46) says that this perception is of “great fruit and great benefit for immersing and culminating in nirvana” (*amat'ogadhā amata,pariyosāna*).¹¹

(4) **The perception of abandonment [letting go of defilements]** (*pahāna,saññā*) is defined in **the Giri-m-ānanda Sutta** (A 10.60) as a reflection leading to the removal of defiled thoughts.¹²

(5) **The perception of fading away [dispassion]** (*virāga,saññā*) and

(6) **the perception of cessation (of suffering)** (*nirodha,saññā*) are defined in **the Giri-m-ānanda Sutta** (A 10.60) as discursive contemplations on nirvana.¹³ Elsewhere, in later works, however, *virāgānupassanā* (the contemplation of fading away) and *nirodhānupassana* (the contemplation of cessation) are treated as advanced contemplations of insight.¹⁴

2 Extreme counselling in the Suttas

While the term “bedside counseling” refers to spiritual admonition to the sick, “extreme counselling” specifically refers to the spiritual counseling and guidance for the seriously ill and the dying. Often the two types of counselling overlap, and in fact have little difference. We find *brief accounts* of extreme counselling in the following discourses:

⁵ For the sutta names, etc, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225) = SD 16.7. The perception of impermanence is briefly def in **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60.5/5:109) = SD 19.16.

⁶ On the 4 elements (*dhātu*), see **Mahā Hatthi, padopama S** (M 28/1:184-191) = SD 6.26 & Intro (3) & **Rūpa** = SD 17.2a.

⁷ A 10.60.4/5:109 = SD 19.16.

⁸ S 7.46/4:46-53 = SD 15.4.

⁹ A 10.60.7/5:109 f = SD 19.16.

¹⁰ A 10.60.5/5:109 = SD 19.16.

¹¹ S 7.46/4:53 = SD 15.4.

¹² A 10.60.9/5:110 = SD 19.16.

¹³ A 10.60.10/5:110 f = SD 19.16.

¹⁴ Eg Pm 2:67; Vism 20.90/629.

Anātha,piṇḍika Sutta 1	the 4 limbs of streamwinning	by Ānanda	(S 55.26) ¹⁵
Anātha,piṇḍika Sutta 2	the 10 limbs of streamwinning	by Sāriputta	(S 55.27) ¹⁶
Dīgh'āvu Sutta	the 4 limbs of streamwinning & the 6 things conducive to <i>vijjā</i>	the Buddha	(S 55.3) ¹⁷

Longer accounts of extreme counselling are recorded in the following discourses:

Dhānañjāni Sutta	letting go of the sense-world	Sāriputta	(M 97) ¹⁸
Anātha,piṇḍik'ovāda Sutta	letting go of the senses, etc	Sāriputta	(M 143) ¹⁹
Chann'ovāda Sutta	not-self nature of the aggregates emotional independence	Sāriputta & Mahā Cunda	(M 144) ²⁰
(Gilāna) Phagguṇa Sutta	Dharma reflection	the Buddha	(A 6.56) ²¹

These latter discourses also describe the illness of the brahmin Dhānañjāni, of the householder Anātha,piṇḍika, and of the monk Phagguṇa, respectively, in some detail.²²

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¹⁵ S 55.26/5:380-385 = SD 23.2a. This is most likely a case of bedside counselling.

¹⁶ S 55.27/5:385-387 = SD 23.2b.

¹⁷ S 55.3/5:344-347 = SD 23.16.

¹⁸ M 97.29/2:193 = SD 4.9.

¹⁹ M 143.4/3:259 = SD 23.9.

²⁰ 144.5/3:264 = SD 11.12.

²¹ A 6.56/3:379 = SD 23.4.

²² For other famous deathbed accounts, such as those of the Buddha and of Citta, see SD 23.9 Intro (1).

The Discourse to Dīgh'āvu

(S 55.3/5:344-347)

1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the squirrels' feeding ground in the Bamboo Grove near Rāja,gaha.

Dīgh'āvu is sick

2 Now at that time the layman Dīgh'āvu was sick, in pain, and seriously sick.

3 Then the householder Dīgh'āvu addressed his father, the householder Jotika, thus:

“Come, gaha,pati, please approach the Blessed One, and, in my name, pay homage to him with your head at his feet, saying:

‘Bhante, the householder Dīgh'āvu is sick, in pain, and seriously sick. He pays homage to the Blessed One at his feet.’

And says thus:

‘It is good, bhante, if the Blessed One, out of compassion, visits the householder Dīgh'āvu in his house.’”

“Yes, son (*tāta*),”²³ the householder Jotika answered the layman Dīgh'āvu in assent, and approached the Blessed One. Having approached the Blessed One, he saluted him, and sat down at one side.

4 Seated thus at one side, the householder Jotika said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, the householder Dīgh'āvu is sick, in pain, and seriously sick. He pays homage to the Blessed One at his feet.

And he says thus:

‘It is good, bhante, if the Blessed One, out of compassion, visits the householder Dīgh'āvu in his house.’”

The Blessed One consented by his silence.

The Buddha visits Dīgh'āvu

5 Then early in the morning, the Blessed One, having dressed himself, taking robe and bowl, approached the householder Dīgh'āvu's house. [345] Then, he sat on the prepared seat.

Seated²⁴ thus, the Blessed One addressed the householder Dīgh'āvu thus:

“How are you, householder? I hope you are bearing up, and getting better. I hope that your painful feelings are abating, that their abating is evident, not their rising.”²⁵

“I cannot bear it, bhante;²⁶ I am not getting better; my painful feelings are not abating, but rising; their rising is evident, not their abating.”

²³ *Tāta*, lit “father,” but more often, “respected, dear,” cognate of “daddy,” an onomatopoeic vocative of respect, or of endearment, or a friendly mode of address, use of one or more persons (pl *tāta*), superior, inferior or equal, younger or older. To a father (Thī 423, 424 + *ammā*; J 3:54, 4:281; DhA 2:48, 3:196; PvA 41); the king Dalha,nemi to his eldest son (D 3:59); Rāhula,māta to Rāhula (DhA 1:116); mother to son (DhA 1:45; PvA 73); to younger brother (DhA 1:6, 67); to a minister (J 1:179; PvA 74); king Pasenadi to brahmin student, Sudassana (S 1:81); a teacher to disciple (D 1:88, *tāta Ambaṭṭha*); a teacher to disciples (Dh 3:446); Sakka to Pañcasikha, a gandharva devaputra (D 2:264); Māra's daughters to Māra (DhA 3:196). See §9 below.

²⁴ *Nisajja*; elsewhere usu *nissinno*.

²⁵ *Kacci te āvuso gaha,pati khamanīyaṃ kacci yāpanīyaṃ kacci dukkhā vedanā paṭikkamanti no abhikkhamanti, patikkamo sānam paññāyati no abhikkamo ti*, lit “Householder, perhaps you are bearing it, perhaps you can keep going; that your painful feelings are abating, not rising; that their abating is evident, not their rising.” This is stock. The underscored phrase lit tr “perhaps you are fit to keep going.” I have rendered this as “How are you?” and place it at the head of the sentence for the sake of acceptable English.

²⁶ A lengthier version of this stock passage occurs in **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97.29/2:193,1) = SD 4.9, **Anātha,piṇḍi-k'ovāda S** (M 143.4/3:259,8), **Chann'ovāda S** (M 144.5/3:264) = SD 11.12 and **Phaggunā S** (A 6.56/3:379,25), to

The uninstructed worldling fears death

6 THE FOUR LIMBS OF STREAMWINNING. Therefore, Dīgh'āvu, you should here train yourself thus:

(1) 'I will be accomplished in wise faith in the Buddha [the awakened one], thus:

'Such is the Blessed One:

he is an arhat,
fully self-awakened,
accomplished in wisdom and conduct,
well-farer,
knower of worlds,
peerless guide of tamable people,
teacher of gods and humans,
awakened,
blessed.'

(2) I will be accomplished in wise faith in the Dharma [the true teaching], thus:

'Well-taught is the Blessed One's Dharma,
visible here and now,
immediate [having nothing to do with time],
inviting one to come and see,
accessible,
to be personally known by the wise.'

(3) I will be accomplished in wise faith in the Sangha [the community of saints of the path], thus:

'The Blessed One's community of disciples	keeps to the good way [well-practised];
the Blessed One's community of disciples	keeps to the straight way;
the Blessed One's community of disciples	keeps to the true way;
the Blessed One's community of disciples	keeps to the proper way.

These are the four pairs of persons, the eight individuals.²⁷

this Blessed One's community of disciples is

worthy of offerings,²⁸
worthy of hospitality,
worthy of gifts,²⁹
worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,
an incomparable field of merit for the world.'

(4) I will be accomplished in the moral virtue, beloved of the noble ones, that are unbroken, untorn [consistent], unmixed [not altering the rules], spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration.³⁰

Thus, Dīgh'āvu, you should train yourself."

describe the illness of the brahmin Dhānañjāni, of the householder Anātha,piṇḍika, and of the monk Phagguna, respectively.

²⁷ On who "These four pairs of persons..." are, see **Aṭṭha,puṅgala S 1** (A 4:292 = D 33.3.1(3)/3:255). See also SD 15.5(3): Saṅghānusmṛti & Saṅghānussati.

²⁸ *Āhuneyyo*. That is, worthy of receiving sacrifices or offerings. The Skt cognate *āhavanīya* refers to that which was offered as an oblation as in *āhuneyy'aggī*, one of the 3 brahminical sacrificial fires (the one in the east).

²⁹ *Dakkhiṇeyyo*. Specifically refers to offerings made for the benefit of the departed by way of dedication of merits to them.

³⁰ "Moral virtues unbroken,...giving rise to concentration," *sīlāni akhaṇḍāni acchiddāni asabalāni akammāsāni bhujissāni viññūpasatṭhāni aparāmaṭṭhāni samādhi, samvattanakāni* (D 2:80, 3:245; M 1:322, 2:251; S 5:408; A 3:134, 3:289, 290; Pm 1:44; Nett 56). These are said to be "virtues dear to the noble ones," *ariya,kantāni sīlāni* (S 5:364, 382, 386, 396, 408; A 3:36). The virtues of the noble one are explained at Vism 221 f. SA says that the noble ones do not violate the five precepts; hence, these virtues are dear to them (SA 2:74). See UA 268.

Dīgh'āvu affirms his faith

7a “Bhante, regarding these **four limbs of streamwinning** that have been taught by the Blessed One, these dharmas exist in me, and I live committed to these dharmas. For, bhante,³¹

(1) I am accomplished in wise faith in the Buddha, thus:

‘Such is the Blessed One:
he is an arhat,
fully self-awakened,
accomplished in wisdom and conduct,
well-farer,
knower of worlds,
peerless guide of tamable people,
teacher of gods and humans,
awakened,
blessed.’

(2) I am accomplished in wise faith in the Dharma, thus:

‘Well-taught is the Blessed One’s Dharma,
visible here and now,
immediate [having nothing to do with time],
inviting one to come and see,
accessible,
to be personally known by the wise.’

(3) I am accomplished in wise faith in the Sangha, thus:

‘The Blessed One’s community of disciples	keeps to the good way;
the Blessed One’s community of disciples	keeps to the straight way;
the Blessed One’s community of disciples	keeps to the true way;
the Blessed One’s community of disciples	keeps to the proper way.

These are the four pairs of persons, the eight individuals.³²

this Blessed One’s community of disciples is

worthy of offerings,³³
worthy of hospitality,
worthy of gifts,³⁴
worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,
an incomparable field of merit for the world.’

(4) I am accomplished in the moral virtue, beloved of the noble ones, that are unbroken, untorn [consistent], unmixed [not altering the rules], spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration.³⁵

7b “Therefore, Dīgh'āvu, having established yourself in these four limbs of the streamwinner, you should further cultivate **the six things conducive to true knowledge** (*cha vijjā, bhāgiya dhamma*).

³¹ Dīgh'āvu is here declaring that he is a streamwinner.

³² On who “These four pairs of persons...” are, see **Aṭṭha, puggala S 1** (A 4:292 = D 33.3.1(3)/3:255). See also SD 15.5(3): Saṅghānummṛti & Saṅghānussati.

³³ *Āhuneyyo*. That is, worthy of receiving sacrifices or offerings. The Skt cognate *āhavanīya* refers to that which was offered as an oblation as in *āhuneyy'aggī*, one of the 3 brahminical sacrificial fires (the one in the east).

³⁴ *Dakkhiṇeyyo*. Specifically refers to offerings made for the benefit of the departed by way of dedication of merits to them.

³⁵ This is restated in **Anātha, piṇḍika S 1** (S 55.27) in different words: “Bhante, in regard to the training rules for the proper conduct of the laity, proclaimed by the Blessed One, I do not see any of them that has been broken by me.” (*Yāni c'imāni bhante bhagatavā gīhi, sāmīcīkāni sikkhā, padāni desitāni nāhaṃ tesam kiñci attain khaṇḍham samanupassāmi*) (S 55.27.9/5:387) = SD 23.3b.

- 8a** THE SIX THINGS CONDUCTIVE TO TRUE KNOWLEDGE.³⁶ Here, Dīgh'āvu, dwell
- (1) contemplating impermanence in all formations (*sabba,saṅkhāresu aniccānupassī*);³⁷
 - (2) perceiving suffering in what is impermanent (*anicce dukkha,saññī*);
 - (3) perceiving not-self in what is suffering (*dukkhe anatta,saññī*);
 - (4) perceiving abandonment [letting go of defilements] (*pahāna,saññī*);
 - (5) perceiving fading away [dispassion] (*virāga,saññī*);
 - (6) perceiving cessation (of suffering) (*nirodha,saññī*).

Thus, Dīgh'āvu, you should train yourself.

8b “Bhante, regarding these **six things conducive to true knowledge** that have been taught by the Blessed One, these dharmas exist in me, and I live committed to these dharmas. For, bhante, I dwell

- (1) contemplating impermanence in all formations;
- (2) perceiving suffering in what is impermanent;
- (3) perceiving not-self in what is suffering;
- (4) perceiving abandonment [letting go of defilements];
- (5) perceiving fading away [dispassion];
- (6) perceiving cessation (of suffering).

9 But, bhante, it occurred to me thus:

‘After my passing, may this householder Jotika not suffer distress!’” [346]

“Dear³⁸ Dīgh'āvu, think not so. Come now, dear Dīgh'āvu, the Blessed One speaks to you: pay close attention to it.”

10 Then the Blessed One, having admonished the layman Dīgh'āvu in this manner,³⁹ rose from his seat and departed.

11 Then the layman Dīgh'āvu, not long after the Blessed One had left, passed away.

12 Then some monks approached the Blessed One, saluted him and then sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, the monks said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, that layman Dīgh'āvu, whom the Blessed One admonished with a brief admonition, has passed away. What is his destination, what is his future state?”⁴⁰

“Bhikkhus, the layman Dīgh'āvu is wise. He practised the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, and did not trouble me on account of the Dharma.

13 Bhikkhus, with the utter destruction of the five lower fetters, Dīgh'āvu has become one spontaneously born, due to attain nirvana therein without returning from that world.”⁴¹

— evaṃ —

080326; 080513; 080911

³⁶ See Intro (1).

³⁷ Only (1) here is listed as *–anupassī*, but while the rest as *–saññī*, but they are practically identical in practice. See **Vijjā,bhāgiya Dhamma S** (A 6.35/3:334): Intro (1.2).

³⁸ *Tāta*: see §3 above n.

³⁹ For a sample of instruction given here, see eg (**Mahānāma**) **Gilayāna S** (S 55.54), where Mahānāma is admonished by the Buddha to let go of thinking of all worldly thoughts (S 55.54/5:408-410) = SD 4.10.

⁴⁰ *Tassa kā gati ko abhisamparāyo ti?*

⁴¹ *Dīgh'āvu bhikkhave upāsako pañcannaṃ orambhagiyānaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ parikkhayā opapātiko hoti tattha parinibbāyī anāvattidhammo tasmā lokā ti*. That is, he attains non-return (*anāgāmi*).