

15

Sūda Sutta

The Discourse on the Cook | S 47.8

Theme: Meditation practice is like good cooking

Translated by Piya Tan ©2009

1 Sutta summary

The Sūda Sutta (S 47.8) is a short discourse on the proper practice of the focuses of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*). The Buddha insightfully uses the parable of the bad and good cooks to show this. The discourse is divided into two equal sections: the first is on *the parable of the bad cook* [§§3-7], and the second, on *the parable of the good cook* [§§8-11].

In both sections, a list of *eight kinds of tastes* are given [2]. **The bad cook** neither takes note of his master's meal preference nor prepares the meals according to his master's preference [§§3-4], and so goes unrewarded [§5]. Similarly, the unskilled meditator does not know how to grasp the meditation sign in his practice of the four focuses of mindfulness [§§6-7].

The good cook, on the other hand, notes his master's meal preference, and prepares the meals according to his master's preference [§8], and is rewarded [§9]. The skilled meditator similarly knows how to grasp the meditation sign in his practice of the four focuses of mindfulness, and so lives happily even here and now [§§10-11].

2 Tastes

2.1 THE 8 KINDS OF TASTES. **The Sūda Sutta** (S 47.8) mentions these eight kinds of tastes [§§3, 8a] and their examples:

		<u>tastes like</u>
(1) <i>ambila</i>	sour, astringent	buttermilk (<i>takkambali</i> , DhsA 320)
(2) <i>tittaka</i>	bitter	neem leaves (<i>nimbi,paṇṇa</i> , DhsA 320)
(3) <i>kaṭuka</i>	spicy hot	ginger, black pepper (<i>siṅgivera,marica</i> , DhsA 320)
(4) <i>madhura</i> ¹	sweet	honey (ThaA 3:22)
(5) <i>khārika</i>	sharp, acrid	egg-plant sprout (<i>vātiṅgaṇa,kaḷīra</i> , DhsA 320)
(6) <i>akhārika</i>	mild, not sharp	[Commentary probably has “acrid” (<i>lambila</i>) here] ²
(7) <i>loṇika</i>	salty	sea-salt (<i>sammudika,loṇa</i> , DhsA 320)
(8) <i>aloṇaka</i>	bland, unsalted	[Commentary probably has “astringent” (<i>kasāva</i>) here] ³ (S 47.8/5:149-152), SD 28.15

This list of 8 tastes is also given in **the Khajjanīya Sutta** (S 22.79) and elsewhere, especially the Abhidhamma and the Commentaries.⁴ Often these other lists give a different sequence of tastes, and include a number of other tastes.

The Sūda Sutta list, however, is unique in that the first four tastes are each listed as a compound with the modifier **agga** (“predominant, foremost”),⁵ which the Commentary glosses as “a part of” (*koṭṭhāsa*, SA 2:301). So far, both F L Woodward (Pali Text Society) (S:W) and Bhikkhu Bodhi (S:B) have left

¹ Given as *madhuka* at **Khajjanīya S** (S 22.79/3:87).

² In place of this and the last, *aloṇaka*, Comy has “acrid” (*lambila*), such as jujube (*Zizyphus jujuba*), emblic myrobalan (*Phyllanthus emblica*), wood-apple (*Feronia elephantum*), *sālava* [?] (*badarāmalaka,kapiṭṭha,sālavādi*), and “astringent” (*kasāva*), such as yellow myrobalan (*hariṭṭaka*) (DhsA 320). For botanical names, see DPL (Childers).

³ See n for *akhārika* above.

⁴ S 22.79/3:87; also at Nm 1:240 (with other tastes); Nc 236 (with other tastes); Dhs 629-632/142 f & DhsA 320; Vbh 72; SA 2:292; Vism 4.122/150 f (qu **Sūda S**, S 47.8); Nmā 2:343; DhA 320 (with other tastes); DhsA 320; Abh 148 (Abhidhāna-p,padīpikā).

⁵ That is, as *ambil'aggehi pi, tittak'aggehi pi, kaṭuk'aggehi pi, madhur'aggehi pi, khārikehi pi, akhārikehi pi, loṇikehi pi, aloṇikehi pi* [§3].

agga untranslated, while Bhikkhu Thanissaro renders it as “mainly sour, mainly bitter, mainly peppery, mainly sweet.”⁶

2.2 TASTE AND CONSCIOUSNESS. The Khajjanīya Sutta (S 22.79) uses the 8 kinds of tastes in an interesting way in connection with defining the five aggregates. While it defines perception (*saññā*) in terms of *smell*, it defines consciousness (*viññāṇa*) in terms of *taste*, as follows:

And what, bhikshus, is called **perception** (*saññā*)?

It perceives, bhikshus, therefore it is called perception.

(*Sañjānātī ti kho bhikkhave tasmā saññā ti vuccati*).⁷

And what does it perceive?

COLOURS. It perceives blue, it perceives yellow, it perceives red, it perceives white.

It perceives, bhikshus, therefore it is called perception.

And what, bhikshus, is called **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*)?

It cognizes (*vijānāti*), bhikshus, therefore it is called consciousness.⁸

And what does it cognize?

TASTES. It cognizes sour, it cognizes bitter, it cognizes spicy hot, it cognizes sweet, it cognizes sharp, it cognizes mild [not sharp], it cognizes salty, it cognizes bland [unsalted].

It cognizes, bhikshus, therefore it is called consciousness. (S 22.79,7+9/3:87), SD 17.9

We can see here that the explanation of *consciousness* is very similar to that of *perception*, the difference being only in the type of sense-objects they cognize. The Saṃyutta Commentary explains that this difference in sense-object highlights a difference in their cognitive functions. *Perception* is analysed by way of *the eye-door* because it is evident in apprehending the appearance (*ākāra*) and shape (*saṅḥāna*) of the object. *Consciousness*, on the other hand, is analysed by way of *the tongue-door* because it can apprehend an object’s distinct qualities (*paccatta, bheda*) even when there is neither appearance nor shape (SA 2:293).

Here we see both *saññā* and *viññāṇa* defined in discriminative terms. **Sue Hamilton** helpfully points out that although the definition of *viññāṇa* here encroaches on that of *saññā*, we should understand that *saññā* does the actual discrimination of the 5 sensory objects, identifying, say, a taste, more precisely (that is, what sort of taste),⁹ while *viññāṇa* “is the awareness by which we experience every stage of the cognitive process, including the process of discriminating” (*Identity and Experience*, 1996a: 92, 55). The two, in other words, perform different functions. *Viññāṇa* is a bare or fundamental “conscious of” (or awareness of) sense-objects, while *saññā* apprehends the distinctive qualities of sense-objects. Consciousness *cognizes*; perception *recognizes*.

— — —

⁶ <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn47/sn47.008.than.html>. Thanissaro’s tr, although rather free, missing out on some of the finer points of Pali, is nevertheless a useful read for those new to the suttas.

⁷ On *saññā*, see SD 17.5. See S:B 1072 n114.

⁸ *Vijānātī ti kho bhikkhave tasmā viññāṇan ti vuccanti*. On consciousness, see *Viññāṇa*, SD 17.8a.

⁹ The following 13 tastes are mentioned in the texts: astringent (*kasāva*) and sweet (*madhura*), salty (*lavana, loṇika*) and bland (*aloṇika*), sour (*lambila, ambila*), acrid or pungent (*kaṭuka*), sharp or alkaline (*khārika*) and mild (*akhārika*), tasty or pleasant (*sādu*), and tasteless or unpleasant (*asādu*), bitter (*tittaka, tittika*, also in *~ālābu*, M 1:80, 315), cold (*sīta*) and hot (*uṇha*): 12 of them (excl *aloṇika*) are mentioned at Nm 240; Nc 236. The rest occur separately or in pairs at S 3:87, 5:140 f, J 3:145, DhA 1:344, Dhs 629, DhsA 320, Miln 56, 63.

The Discourse on the Cook

S 47.8

- 1 At Sāvattḥī.
- 2 There the Blessed One said this:

THE BAD COOK

3 “Bhikshus, suppose a foolish, incapable, and unskillful cook were to present a rajah or a royal minister with various kinds of curries [dishes]¹⁰—

predominantly sour	(<i>ambil’agga</i>),
predominantly bitter	(<i>tittak’agga</i>),
predominantly spicy hot	(<i>kaṭuk’agga</i>),
predominantly sweet	(<i>madhur’agga</i>),
sharp	(<i>khārika</i>),
mild [not sharp]	(<i>akhārika</i>),
salty	(<i>loṇika</i>), and
bland [unsalted]	(<i>aloṇika</i>). ¹¹ [150]

4 That foolish, incapable, and unskillful cook does not grasp [note] any sign of his own master’s preference, thus,¹²

4.2 ‘Today, this curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for that one; or, he took much of this one; or, he spoke in praise of that one.

Or, today, the *predominantly sour* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the predominantly sour one; or, he took much of the predominantly sour one; or, he spoke in praise of the predominantly sour one.

Or, today, the *predominantly bitter* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the predominantly bitter one; or, he took much of the predominantly bitter one; or, he spoke in praise of the predominantly bitter one.

Or, today, the *predominantly spicy hot* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the predominantly spicy hot one; or, he took much of the one; or, he spoke in praise of the predominantly spicy hot one.

Or, today, the *predominantly sweet* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the predominantly sweet one; or, he took much of the predominantly sweet one; or, he spoke in praise of the predominantly sweet one.

Or, today, the *sharp* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the sharp one; or, he took much of the sharp one; or, he spoke in praise of the sharp one.

Or, today, the *mild* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the mild one; or, he took much of the mild one; or, he spoke in praise of the mild one.

Or, today, the *salty* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the salty one; or, he took much of the salty one; or, he spoke in praise of the salty one.

Or, today, the *bland [unsalted]* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the bland one; or, he took much of the bland one; or, he spoke in praise of the bland one.’

¹⁰ *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave bālo avyatto akusalo sūdo rājānaṃ vā rāja, mahāmattāṃ vā nāna-c, cayehi sūpehi pac-cupaṭṭhito assa.* Comy glosses *nānaccayehi* as “various portions, in various manner (diverse)” (*nānā, cayehi nānā, vidhehi*), resolving it as *nānā + cayehi*, not as *accayehi* (SA 3:201): *caya* means “heap, pile, accumulation.”

¹¹ *Ambil’aggehi pi, tittak’aggehi pi, kaṭuk’aggehi pi, madhur’aggehi pi, khārikehi pi, akhārikehi pi, loṇikehi pi, aloṇikehi pi.* On the 8 kinds of taste, see Intro (1).

¹² *Sa kho so, bhikkhave, bālo avyatto akusalo sūdo sakassa bhattu nimittāṃ na uggaṇḥātī. Se bhattā; Be Ee bhat-tassa* (“the husband”), but *bhattu* is gen of *bhattar*, “supporter, master.” Of course, it is possible here, too, that the cook might be the wife of a *bhattā*.

5 Bhikshus, that foolish, incapable, and unskillful cook gets neither clothing [shelter], nor wage, nor gift [bonus].¹³

What is the reason for this?

Because that foolish, incapable, and unskillful cook does *not* grasp [note] any sign of his own master's preference.

6 THE UNSKILLFUL MONK. Even so, bhikshus,

(1) here some foolish, incapable, and unskillful monk, dwells exertive, clearly aware, mindful, observing [watching] the body in the body,¹⁴ removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.¹⁵

While he dwells observing the body in the body; his mind does not concentrate; his mental impurities¹⁶ are not abandoned; he does *not* grasp the sign.¹⁷

6.2 (2) He dwells exertive, clearly aware, mindful, observing [watching] feelings in the feelings, removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.¹⁸

While he dwells observing the feelings in the feelings, his mind does not concentrate; his mental impurities are not abandoned; he does *not* grasp the sign.

6.3 (3) He dwells exertive, clearly aware, mindful, observing [watching] the mind in the mind, removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.¹⁹

While he dwells observing the mind in the mind, his mind does not concentrate; his mental impurities are not abandoned; he does *not* grasp the sign.

6.4 (4) He dwells exertive, clearly aware, mindful, observing [watching] dharmas in the dharmas [phenomena in the phenomena], removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.²⁰

While he dwells observing dharmas in the dharmas, his mind does not concentrate; his mental impurities are not abandoned; he does *not* grasp the sign.

7 Bhikshus, that foolish, incapable, and unskillful monk does not obtain any pleasant dwellings [abidings] in this life itself; he attains [151] neither mindfulness nor full awareness.²¹

What is the reason for this?

Because, bhikshus, that foolish, incapable, and unskillful monk *does not grasp the sign of his own mind*.

¹³ *Sa kho so, bhikkhave, bālo avyatto akusalo sūdo na c'eva lābhī hoti acchādanassa, na lābhī vetanassa, na lābhī abhīhārānaṃ.* Here *acchādana* has 2 senses: (1) covering, protective, shelter; (2) clothes, mantle, cloak; and both senses can apply here, as at Tha 698.

¹⁴ "Observing the body in the body" (*kāye kāyānupassī*). He properly and mindfully does any of the body-based meditations: see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3-33/1:56-59) + SD 13.3 (3.4).

¹⁵ For details of this passage, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3-31/1:56-59), SD 13.3.

¹⁶ *ie the 5 hindrances (pañca, nīvaraṇa)* (SA 3:210), viz: (1) sensual lust (*kāma-c, chanda*), (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*), (3) restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca, kukkuccha*), (4) sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*), and (5) doubt (*vicikicchā*): see **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55 @ SD 3.12). Cf **Mahā Assa, pura S** (M 39.13/1:274); see also **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.13); **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.36) on how to deal with the hindrances in one's meditation; **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.68/1:71), SD 8.10.

¹⁷ *Tathā hi so, bhikkhave, bālo avyatto akusalo bhikkhu sakassa cittassa nimittam na uggaṇhāti.* Comy: He does now know whether his meditation-subject has attained to conformity (*anuloma*) or change-of-lineage (*gotra, bhū*). He is not able to grasp his own mental sign (SA 2:301). The 3 tts refer to the final moments of sense-sphere consciousness before one attains either dhyana or the supramundane path and fruit. Here, prob the former is meant. (S:D 1919 n135). Similar to the phrase *cittassa nimittam (na) uggaṇhāti* here is *cittassa nimittam gahessati* (S 35.241/-4:179; A 6.68/3:423), where Comy glosses "mental sign" as "a mental sign of samadhi or insight, the mode of concentration of insight" (*cittassa nimittan ti samādhi, vipassanā, cittassa nimittam, samādhi, vipassan'ākāraṃ*, AA 3:410). See **Nimitta**, SD 19.7.

¹⁸ For details of this passage, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,32-33/1:59), SD 13.3.

¹⁹ For details of this passage, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,34-35/1:59 f), SD 13.3.

²⁰ For details of this passage, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,36-37/1:60), SD 13.3.

²¹ *Sa kho so, bhikkhave, bālo avyatto akusalo bhikkhu na ceva lābhī hoti diṭṭh'eva dhamme sukha, vihārānaṃ, na lābhī sati, sampajaññaṃ.*

THE GOOD COOK²²

8 Bhikshus, suppose a wise, capable, and skillful cook were to present a rajah or a royal minister with various kinds of curries [dishes]— predominantly sour, predominantly bitter, predominantly spicy hot, predominantly sweet, sharp, mild, salty, and bland [unsalted].

That wise, capable, and skillful cook grasps [notes] the signs of his own master's preference, thus,²³

8.2 'Today, this curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for that one; or, he took much of this one; or, he spoke in praise of that one.

Or, today, the *predominantly sour* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the predominantly sour one; or, he took much of the predominantly sour one; or, he spoke in praise of the predominantly sour one.

Or, today, the *predominantly bitter* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the predominantly bitter one; or, he took much of the predominantly bitter one; or, he spoke in praise of the predominantly bitter one.

Or, today, the *predominantly spicy hot* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the predominantly spicy hot one; or, he took much of the predominantly spicy hot one; or, he spoke in praise of the predominantly spicy hot one.

Or, today, the *predominantly sweet* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the predominantly sweet one; or, he took much of the predominantly sweet one; or, he spoke in praise of the predominantly sweet one.

Or, today, the *sharp* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the sharp one; or, he took much of the sharp one; or, he spoke in praise of the sharp one.

Or, today, the *mild* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the mild one; or, he took much of the mild one; or, he spoke in praise of the mild one.

Or, today, the *salty* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the salty one; or, he took much of the salty one; or, he spoke in praise of the salty one.

Or, today, the *bland [unsalted]* curry pleased my master; or, he reached out for the bland one; or, he took much of the bland one; or, he spoke in praise of the bland one.'

9 Bhikshus, that wise, capable, and skillful cook gets clothing [shelter], wages, gifts [bonuses].

What is the reason for this?

Because that wise, capable, and skillful cook *grasps* [notes] the signs of his own master's preference.

10 THE SKILLFUL MONK. Even so, bhikshus,

(1) here some wise, capable, and skillful monk, dwells exertive, clearly aware, mindful, observing [watching] the body in the body,²⁴ removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.²⁵

While he dwells observing the body in the body; [152] his mind concentrates, his mental impurities are abandoned, [152] and he *grasps* the sign.

(2) He dwells exertive, clearly aware, mindful, observing [watching] feelings in the feelings, removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.²⁶

While he dwells observing the feelings in the feelings, his mind concentrates, his mental impurities are abandoned, and he *grasps* the sign.

(3) He dwells exertive, clearly aware, mindful, observing [watching] the mind in the mind, removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.²⁷

²² This whole section qu at Vism 4.122/150 f.

²³ *Sa kho so, bhikkhave, paṇḍito vyatto kusalo sūdo sakassa bhattu nimittam uggaṇhāti.*

²⁴ "Observing the body in the body" (*kāye kāyānupassī*). He properly and mindfully does any of the body-based meditations: see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3-33/1:56-59) + SD 13.3 (3.4).

²⁵ For details of this passage, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3-31/1:56-59), SD 13.3.

²⁶ For details of this passage, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,32-33/1:59), SD 13.3.

²⁷ For details of this passage, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,34-35/1:59 f), SD 13.3.

While he dwells observing the mind in the mind, his mind concentrates, his mental impurities are abandoned, and he *grasps* the sign.

(4) He dwells exertive, clearly aware, mindful, observing [watching] dharmas in the dharmas [phenomena in the phenomena], removing covetousness and displeasure in the world.²⁸

While he dwells observing dharmas in the dharmas, his mind concentrates, his mental impurities are abandoned, and he *grasps* the sign.

11 Bhikshus, that wise, capable, and skillful monk obtains a pleasant dwelling [abiding] in this very life itself, and he gains mindfulness and clear awareness.²⁹

What is the reason for this?

Because, bhikshus, that wise, capable, and skillful monk *grasps the sign of his own mind*.³⁰

— evaṃ —

090408 090623 090802 100306 110426 121223 140225

²⁸ For details of this passage, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,6-37/1:60), SD 13.3.

²⁹ *Sa kho so, bhikkhave, paṇḍito vyatto kusalo bhikkhu lābhī c'eva hoti diṭṭh'eva dhamme sukha, vihārānaṃ, lābhī hoti sati, sampajaññaṃ.*

³⁰ Comy says that in this Sutta, *satipaṭṭhāna* is treated as insight of the preliminary stage (*pubba, bhāga, vipassanā*) (SA 3:201).