

(Āhāra) Taṇhā Sutta

The Discourse on (the Food for) Craving

A 10.62/5:116-119

Theme: Conditions giving rise to craving and to liberation

Translated by Piya Tan ©2008

1 Key Sutta teachings

The (Āhāra) Avijjā Sutta (A 10.61) and the (Āhāra) Taṇhā Sutta (A 10.62) are identical except that the former centres around *ignorance* (*avijjā*) while the latter centres around *craving for existence* (*bhava, taṇhā*).¹ Both these discourses deal with dependent arising—the former, with that of *ignorance*, while the latter, with that of *the craving for existence*—and the dependent arising of liberation: the former treats this directly, the latter indirectly. While the (Āhāra) Avijjā Sutta takes *ignorance* in its general sense, that is, as the first link of dependent arising, describing how it is itself conditioned, the (Āhāra) Taṇhā Sutta takes *the craving for existence* as its point of departure.

While the better known 12-link formula begins with *ignorance* (*avijjā*), the (Āhāra) Taṇhā Sutta shows that although this craving for existence (*bhava, taṇhā*), or more simply, craving, is without beginning, it is itself *conditioned*. In other words, craving is here treated as the *last* link in the dependent arising formula [S2(10)]. In its closing half, the Sutta shows how the process is reversed, describing the dependent arising of liberation [S4].

The (Āhāra) Taṇhā Sutta explains *craving* in practically the same way as the (Āhāra) Avijjā Sutta does for *ignorance*. This teaching unequivocally shows that *craving* is not any kind of metaphysical first cause, nor is it an uncaused cause.²

Both craving and ignorance may be very powerful root conditions for samsaric existence, but they are themselves “fed” by other conditions—they are conditioned phenomena—and as such can be “starved.” When the supporting conditions for ignorance and craving can be removed, liberation ensues. Otherwise, liberation is impossible.³

Another interesting point to note is that the (Āhāra) Taṇhā Sutta actually builds on the (Āhāra) Avijjā Sutta, that is, after opening with the statement that “the first point of the craving of existence is not to be discerned,” adds the sentence on “craving for existence” in these three places, thus:

§1(2) The craving for existence is fed by ignorance.

§2(9) “When ignorance predominates, then craving for existence predominates.”

§3b(9) “When ignorance predominates, then craving for existence predominates.”

As such, it is beneficial to first study the (Āhāra) Avijjā Sutta (A 10.61) followed by the (Āhāra) Taṇhā Sutta (A 10.62).

2 *Bhava, taṇhā*

While the first noble truth defines the nature of suffering (its true nature should be understood), the second noble truth gives the conditions for the arising of suffering, namely, craving (*taṇhā*) (which should be abandoned). The Suttas generally describe craving as being of three kinds: sensual craving (*kāma, taṇhā*), craving for existence (*bhava, taṇhā*), and craving for non-existence (*vibhava, taṇhā*).⁴

The first, sensual craving, arises on account of any of the six senses (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind), resulting in altogether six kinds of craving according to each sense-object. These are known as

¹ A 10.61/3:113-116 = SD 31.10 & A 10.62/3:116-119 = SD 21.11

² For a discussion of each of the factors listed, see (Āhāra) Avijjā S (A 10.61) = SD 31.10 Intro (2+3).

³ See Vism 17.36-39/525.

the six “craving groups” (*taṇhā,kāya*), comprising craving for forms (*rūpa,taṇhā*), craving for sounds (*sadda,taṇhā*), craving for smells (*gandha,taṇhā*), craving for tastes (*rasa,taṇhā*), craving for touch (*phoṭṭhabba,taṇhā*), and craving for thoughts (*dhamma,taṇhā*).⁵

Craving for existence could be for form existence or formless existence (that is, to be reborn in a form dhyana or a formless dhyana, or to experiences these states), resulting in craving for form (*rūpa,taṇhā*) and form formless existence (*arūpa,taṇhā*), which **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) lists together with craving for cessation (*nirodha,taṇhā*).⁶

In other words, craving may be directed not only to sense-pleasures, but also to various forms of existence. **The (Āhāra) Taṇhā Sutta** (A 10.62) points out that a first beginning of craving for existence, (*bhava,taṇhā*) cannot be discerned.⁷ Craving for existence, in other words, has been with us since time immemorial. However, according to the same discourse, craving for existence is itself conditioned, and that condition is none other than ignorance (*avijjā*).

The total ending of craving without remainder (*taṇhāya asesa,virāga,nirodho*), its giving up and relinquishment (*cāga paṭinissagga*), defines the third noble truth, which points out that with the ending of craving, there is the ending of suffering.

The arhats, who have become free from craving (*vīta,taṇhā*) have removed the darts of existence (*bhava,salla*, Dh 351). Those who have no craving in regard to any of the five aggregates (*vigata,taṇhā*) are beyond any form of agitation when these aggregates change and become otherwise.⁸ They are also beyond any speculative views on the destiny of an awakened one after death.⁹ In fact, for those who are freed through the destruction of craving (*taṇha-k,khaya,vimutti*), all view-points have been uprooted (*diṭṭhi-t,ṭhānā samūhata*).¹⁰

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⁴ See **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S** (S 56.11.5-6/5:421) = SD 1.1.

⁵ See **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.2(2)/3:244).

⁶ D 33.1.10(17-18)/3:216.

⁷ A 10.62.1/5:116 = SD 31.11.

⁸ (**Pacchā,bhūmaka,gāmikā**) **Deva,daha S** (S 22.2/3:8) = SD 46.2.

⁹ **Sāriputta Koṭṭhita S 3** (S 44.5/4:387).

¹⁰ It 48. On the craving for existence as a latent tendency, see **Anusaya** = SD 31.3 (6).

The Discourse on (the Food for) Craving

A 10.62/5:116-119

Craving for existence is without beginning, but conditioned

1 “Bhikshus, the first point of *the craving for existence* is not to be discerned,¹¹ of which it can be said, ‘Before that, there was no craving for existence; after that, it arose.’

(1) But, bhikshus, even though it is said so, it is discerned that craving for existence has a specific condition.¹²

Craving for existence, too, bhikshus, has its food, I say, it is not without its food.

(2) And what is the food for the craving for existence?

Ignorance (*avijjā*), should be the answer.

Ignorance, bhikshus, has its food, I say, it is not without its food.

(3) And what is the food for ignorance?

The five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*),¹³ should be the answer.

The five hindrances, bhikshus, have their food, I say, they are not without their food.

(4) And what is the food for the five hindrances?

The three wrong conducts (*ti duccharita*),¹⁴ should be the answer.

The three wrong conducts, bhikshus, have their food, I say, they are not without their food.

(5) And what is the food for the three wrong conducts?

Lack of sense-restraint (*indriya, asaṁvara*), should be the answer.

The lack of sense-restraint, bhikshus, is their food, I say, they are not without their food.

(6) And what is the food for the lack of sense-restraint?

The lack of mindfulness and full awareness (*asata, sampajañña*), should be the answer.

The lack of mindfulness and full awareness, bhikshus, are its food, I say, it is not without its food.

(7) And what is the food for the lack of mindfulness and full awareness?

Unwise attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*), should be the answer.

Unwise attention, bhikshus, is their food, I say, they are not without their food.

(8) `And what is the food for unwise attention?

Lack of faith (*assaddhiya*),¹⁵ should be the answer.

Lack of faith, bhikshus, is its food, I say, it is not without its food.

(9) And what is the food for the lack of faith?

Listening to what is not the true Dharma (*asaddhamma-s, savana*), should be the answer.

Listening to what is not the true Dharma, bhikshus, is its food, I say, it is not without its food.

(10) And what is the food for listening to what is not the true Dharma?

Associating with false individuals (*asappurisa, saṁseva*), should be the answer.

Dependent arising of craving for existence

2 (1) In the same way, bhikshus, when associating with false individuals predominates, then listening to what is not the true Dharma predominates.

¹¹ *Purimā bhikkhave koṭi na paññāyati bhava, taṇhāya*. Cf Gaddula Baddha S 1 (S 22.9) & Gaddula Baddha S 2 (S 22.100), which open with these words: “Without a beginning or an ending, bhikshus, is this samsara [cycle of lives and deaths]. A first point can’t be discerned of beings roaming and wandering on, hindered by ignorance, fettered by craving” (*Anamataggo yaṁ bhikkhave saṁsāro. Pubbā koṭi na paññāyati avijjā, nīvaraṇānaṁ sattānaṁ taṇhā, saṁyojanānaṁ sandhāvataṁ saṁsaratam*) (S 22.9.3/3:149) = SD 28.7a = (S 22.100.3/3:151) = SD 28.7b.

¹² *Idap, paccayā avijjā ti*. See **Mahā Taṇhā, saṅkhaya S** (M 38.9/1:259) = SD 7.10 & **Dependent Arising** = SD 5.16 (2)+(6).

¹³ See **(Āhāra) Avijjā S** (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.8).

¹⁴ See **(Āhāra) Avijjā S** (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.7).

¹⁵ See **(Āhāra) Avijjā S** (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.3).

- (2) When listening to what is not the true Dharma predominates, then a lack of faith predominates.
- (3) When a lack of faith predominates, then unwise attention predominates.
- (4) When unwise attention predominates, then a lack of mindfulness and full awareness predominates.
- (5) When a lack of mindfulness and full awareness predominates, then a lack of sense-restraint predominates.
- (6) When a lack of sense-restraint predominates, then the three wrong conducts predominate.
- (7) When the three wrong conducts predominate, then the five hindrances predominate.
- (8) When the five hindrances predominate, then ignorance predominates.
- (9) When ignorance predominates, then craving for existence predominates.
- (10) In this way there is food for that craving for existence, and in this way it is predominant.

The water-flow parable (negative)

3a Bhikshus, just as when the rains fall heavily on the mountain-tops, the waters flowing down along the slopes, fill the mountain clefts, gullies and streams.

When the mountain clefts, gullies and streams are full, they fill the ponds. When the ponds are full, they fill the lakes.

When the lakes are full, they fill the rivulets. When the rivulets are full, they fill the rivers. When the rivers are full, they fill the great ocean.¹⁶

In this way there is food for that great ocean, and in this way it is filled to the brim [predominant].

Even so, there is food for that craving for existence, and in this way it is predominant.

3b (1) Even so, bhikshus, when associating with false individuals predominates, then listening to what is not the true Dharma predominates.

- (2) When listening to what is not the true Dharma predominates, [118] then a lack of faith predominates.
- (3) When a lack of faith predominates, then unwise attention predominates.
- (4) When unwise attention predominates, then a lack of mindfulness and full awareness predominates.
- (5) When a lack of mindfulness and full awareness predominates, then a lack of sense-restraint predominates.
- (6) When a lack of sense-restraint predominates, then the three wrong conducts predominate.
- (7) When the three wrong conducts predominate, then the five hindrances predominate.
- (8) When the five hindrances predominate, then ignorance predominates.
- (9) When ignorance predominates, then craving for existence predominates.
- (10) In this way there is food for that craving for existence, and in this way it is predominant.

Liberation is conditioned

4 Liberation by true knowledge, too, bhikshus, is with food, I say, not without its food.

(1) And what is the food for the liberation by true knowledge?

The seven awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*),¹⁷ should be the answer.

The seven awakening-factors, too, bhikshus, are with food, I say, not without food.

(2) And what is the food for the seven awakening-factors?

The four focusses of mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhāna*),¹⁸ should be the answer.

The four focusses of mindfulness, too, bhikshus, are with food, I say, not without food.

(3) And what is the food for the four focusses of mindfulness?

¹⁶ The rain imagery in this section is stock: **Upanisā S** (S 12.23.27/2:31), **Vassa S** (S 55.38.2/5:396); **Parisā S** (A 3.93.5/1:243), **Dutiya Kāla S** (A 4.147.2/2:140), (**Āhāra**) **Avijjā S** (A 10.61.3/5:114, 10.61.6/3:115 f), (**Āhāra**) **Taṇhā** (A 10.62.3/3:117, 10.62.6/3:119).

¹⁷ See (**Āhāra**) **Avijjā S** (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.9).

¹⁸ See (**Āhāra**) **Avijjā S** (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.8).

The three good actions (*ti sucarita*),¹⁹ should be the answer.

The three good actions, too, bhikshus, are with food, I say, not without food.

(4) And what is the food for the three good actions?

Sense-restraint (*indriya, samvara*),²⁰ should be the answer.

Sense-restraint, too, bhikshus, is with food, I say, not without food.

(5) And what is the food for the three good actions?

Mindfulness and full awareness (*sati sampajañña*),²¹ should be the answer.

Mindfulness and full awareness, too, bhikshus, are with food, I say, not without food.

(6) And what is the food for mindfulness and full awareness?

Wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*),²² should be the answer.

Wise attention, too, bhikshus, is with food, I say, not without food.

(7) And what is the food for wise attention?

Faith (*saddhā*)²³ should be the answer.

Faith, too, bhikshus, is with food, I say, not without food.

(8) And what is the food for faith?

Listening to the true Dharma (*saddhamma-s, savana*)²⁴ should be the answer.

Listening to the true Dharma, too, bhikshus, is with food, I say, not without food.

(9) And what is the food for listening to the true Dharma?

Associating with true individuals²⁵ (*sappurisa, samseva*)²⁶ should be the answer.

Dependent arising of liberation

5 (1) In the same way, bhikshus, when associating with true individuals predominates, then listening to the true Dharma predominates.

(2) When listening to the Dharma predominates, then faith predominates.

(3) When faith predominates, then wise attention predominates.

(4) When wise attention predominates, then mindfulness and full awareness predominate.

(5) When mindfulness and full awareness predominate, then sense-restraint predominates.

(6) When sense-restraint predominates, then the three good conducts predominate.

(7) When the three good conducts predominate, then the four focusses of mindfulness predominate.

(8) When the four focusses of mindfulness predominate, then the seven awakening-factors [119] predominate.

(9) When the seven awakening-factors predominate, then liberation by true knowledge is fulfilled [predominates].

In this way there is food for that liberation by true knowledge, and in this way it is fulfilled [predominant].

The water-flow parable (positive)

6a Bhikshus, just as when the rains fall heavily on the mountain-tops, the waters flowing down along the slopes, fill the mountain clefts, gullies and streams.

When the mountain clefts, gullies and streams are full, they fill the ponds. When the ponds are full, they fill the lakes.

¹⁹ See (Āhāra) Avijjā S (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.7).

²⁰ See (Āhāra) Avijjā S (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.6).

²¹ See (Āhāra) Avijjā S (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.5).

²² See (Āhāra) Avijjā S (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.4).

²³ See (Āhāra) Avijjā S (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.3).

²⁴ See (Āhāra) Avijjā S (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.2).

²⁵ On true individuals, see Udakūpama S (A 7.15) = SD 28.6 Intro (1.2.4.2+3).

²⁶ See (Āhāra) Avijjā S (A 10.61) @ SD 31.10 Intro (2.1).

When the lakes are full, they fill the rivulets. When the rivulets are full, they fill the rivers. When the rivers are full, they fill the great ocean.

In this way there is food for that great ocean, and in this way it is filled to the brim [predominant].
Even so, there is food for that liberation by true knowledge, and in this way it is predominant.

Dependent arising of liberation

6b (1) In the same way, bhikshus, when associating with true individuals predominates, then listening to the true Dharma predominates.

(2) When listening to the Dharma predominates, then faith predominates.

(3) When faith predominates, then wise attention predominates.

(4) When wise attention predominates, then mindfulness and full awareness predominate.

(5) When mindfulness and full awareness predominate, then sense-restraint predominates.

(6) When sense-restraint predominates, then the three good conducts predominate.

(7) When the three good conducts predominate, then the four focusses of mindfulness predominate.

(8) When the four focusses of mindfulness predominate, then the seven awakening-factors predominate.

(9) When the seven awakening-factors predominate, then liberation by true knowledge is fulfilled [predominates].

In this way there is food for that liberation by true knowledge, and in this way it is fulfilled [predominant].

— evaṃ —

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