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(Aññathatta) Ānanda Sutta 1

Paṭhama (Aññathatta) Ānanda Sutta 1 | S 22.37/3:37 f
The First Discourse to Ānanda (on the Becoming Other)

Theme: The aspects of impermanence

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010

1 The 2 (Aññathatta) Ānanda Suttas

1.1 SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE. There are two Saṃyutta discourses entitled (Aññathatta) Ānanda Sutta: **the (Aññathatta) Ānanda Sutta 1** (S 22.37) and **the (Aññathatta) Ānanda Sutta 2** (S 22.38).¹ Both treat the subject of impermanence, or more specifically, “rising, falling and becoming-other of what persists” (*uppāda vaya ṭhitassa aññathatta*), also rendered as “rising, falling and alteration of presence.”

The difference between the two discourses is simply that while **the (Aññathatta) Ānanda Sutta 1** (S 22.37)² is about the rising and falling of the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness) in the present moment,³ **the (Aññathatta) Ānanda Sutta 2** (S 22.38) affirms this reality of the aggregates throughout the three periods of time (the past, the present and the future).⁴

1.2 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THINGS. The “rising, falling and becoming-other of what persists” (*uppāda vaya ṭhitassa aññathatta*) is an elaboration of *the first* of the three “general” characteristics (*sāmañña lakkaṇa*) of impermanence, suffering and non-self,⁵ that is, impermanence (*aniccatā*). As such, it can be called the “specific” characteristics of impermanence, that is, all phenomena are arising, or falling away, or go in a cycle of rising and falling.

The specific characteristics of impermanence is the most basic teaching we need to know and constantly reflect on as a personal practice, whether we meditate or not. This kind of reflection is the very basis of the spiritual path, beginning with streamwinning, as elaborated in such discourses as **the (Anicca) Cakkhu** (S 25.1), a short but remarkable discourse on impermanence, where the Buddha explains simply but explicitly *how the perception of impermanence works*, thus:

Bhikshus,

<u>the eye</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming other.
<u>The ear</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming other.
<u>The nose</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming other.
<u>The tongue</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming other.
<u>The body</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming other.
<u>The mind</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming other. (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7

This practice can be done as a practice in *faith*, or as an investigative and intellectual practice, leading to *wisdom*. Either way, the Buddha declares, we are guaranteed of streamwinning in this life itself—if not, certainly at the moment of dying.⁶

1.3 THE CONDITIONED AND THE UNCONDITIONED. The specific characteristics of impermanence describe the nature of all conditioned (*saṅkhata*) existence: they all rise and fall away. Only the unconditioned (*asankhata*), namely, nirvana, is free of such characteristics. As such, nirvana is also free from the characteristics of suffering and of non-self.⁷

¹ Respectively S 22.37/3:37 f @ SD 33.11 & S 22.38/3:38-40 @ SD 33.12.

² S 22.37/3:37 f @ SD 33.11.

³ On the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*), see SD 17.

⁴ S 22.38/3:38-40 @ SD 33.12.

⁵ That is, *aniccatā*, *dukkhatā* and *anattatā*: S 4.1; A 1:286; Dh 277-279; cf VbhA 49 f. On Dh 277-279, see **Dhamma,niyāma S** (A 3.134) @ SD 26.8 (1).

⁶ S 25.1/3:225 @ SD 16.7. The other 9 suttas of the same **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25) gives various perceptions of impermanence, but with the same guarantee of streamwinning.

⁷ Some scholars and scholastics erroneously say that “nirvana is non-self,” but the truth is that nirvana is *neither* self nor non-self: it is beyond any predication or attribution. The famous statement, *sabbe dhammā anattā* (Dh 279)

There are two short but essential discourses on the significance of the specific characteristics of impermanence, that is, **the Saṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (A 3.47a) and **the Asaṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (A 3.47b), which is treated as a single discourse in the Pali Text Society (PTS) edition of the Tipiṭaka, and which we shall call **the Saṅkhatāsaṅkhata Sutta** (A 3.47).⁸ Since both are very short discourses and relevant to our discussion here, they are given in full below:

SD 33.11(1.3)a**Saṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta**

The Discourse on the Marks of the Conditioned | A 3.47a/1:152

Traditional: A 3.1.5.7 = Aṅguttara 3, Tika Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Pannāsaka 5, Cūlavagga 7

Theme: Conditioned existence is characterized by impermanence.

There are, bhikshus, these 3 conditioning characteristics of the conditioned.⁹ What are the three?

Arising is discerned;

uppādo paññāyati

passing away is discerned;

vayo paññāyati

a becoming-other of its presence is discerned.

ṭhitassa aññathattam paññāyati

These, bhikshus, are the 3 conditioning characteristics of the conditioned.

SD 33.11(1.3)b**Asaṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta**

The Discourse on the Marks of the Unconditioned | A 3.47b/1:152

Traditional: A 3.1.5.8 = Aṅguttara 3, Tika Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Pannāsaka 5, Cūlavagga 8

Theme: Nirvana is without characteristics

There are, bhikshus, 3 three unconditioning characteristics of the unconditioned.¹⁰ What are the three?

Arising is *not* discerned;

na uppādo paññāyati

passing away is *not* discerned;

na vayo paññāyati

a becoming-other of its presence is *not* discerned.

na ṭhitassa aññathattam paññāyati

These, bhikshus, are the 3 unconditioning characteristics of the unconditioned.

— evaṃ —

The language of Asaṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta (A 3.47b) should not be misconstrued. The “characteristics” (*lakkhaṇa*) here is probably the same word as that used in the Saṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta, where it refers to something we can actually see or experience. None of the “characteristics” of the unconditioned, that is, nirvana, can really be discerned: nirvana is simply indefinable. This is called *apophatic* language, a negative language used here to express in conventional language what otherwise is inexpressible.¹¹

means “all dharmas (phenomena *and* the principles behind their conditionality) are non-self.” See esp **Dhamma,niyāma S** (A 3.134) @ SD 26.8 (2.2).

⁸ A 3.47/1:152.

⁹ “The conditioned characteristics of the conditioned,” *saṅkhatassa saṅkhata, lakkhaṇa*.

¹⁰ “The unconditioned characteristics of the unconditioned,” *asaṅkhatassa asaṅkhata, lakkhaṇa*.

¹¹ For a discussion on such as language, see **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16 eg (10). On these 2 Suttas’ significance, see SD 17.2b (1.1.2).

2 Uppāda vaya thitassa aññathatta

2.1 ARISING AND PASSING AWAY. The **Saṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (A 3.47a) speaks of 3 aspects of impermanence—arising (*uppāda*), falling away (*vaya*), and becoming-other of presence (*thitassa aññathatta*). These are the “conditioning characteristics of the conditioned” (*saṅkhatassa saṅkhata, lakkhaṇāni*) [1.3]. A couple of significant points should be noted here.

Firstly, note the sequence of the terms: *uppāda*, then *vaya*, and finally followed by *thitassa aññathatta*, that is, arising, then passing away, and finally becoming-other of presence. These are *not* three “mind-moments” or “event-moments,” or sub-moments of a mind-moment or event-moment.¹² The reality is that there are only two aspects of a moment or an event, that is, *arising* and *falling*, beginning and ending, and these are interdependent.

What is meant by “**arising**” (*uppāda*) here? The best example is when we see a plant sprouting, a flower-bud opening, or a baby born. It seems as if this will be forever. But we need to reflect, too, that the plant or tree will fall and the flower will rot sooner or later. We were babies once, now we are growing; we have changed so much. Then our bodies’ shelf-life will reach its end, and we die. Then we are reborn, and so on.

What is meant by “**falling away**” (*vaya*) here? We see this at home in a broken appliance, a very old book we love that is falling apart. When we meet old friends after some time, or see someone very ill, we notice how much they have changed or aged. We see how a flower fades, a tree falls, a pet dies, someone we love passes away. The pain is greater when we compare how fresh and alive these things were; how well and active, these beings and loved ones were. But when we accept the reality of impermanence, the pain is significantly less, or even none at all.

What about “**the becoming-other of what persists**” or “the altering of presence”? This is to see the rising and falling away closely together, usually in the same thing or being or person. The easiest way to see this reality is in our breathing: we inspire and expire, we breathe in and breathe out. We just cannot stop breathing for long, or we will die. The reality of this is even more evident when we watch our breath when we are running, or swimming, or in some dangerous situation.

Another way of seeing this rising and falling away is when we recall some past events: how we make friends, and lose friends; how we gain things, then lose them; how we are praised, and then blamed; how we are happy, and how that happiness is lost; how our pets grow, and then die; how we live with our loved ones, and then they pass on.

2.2 REFLECTING ON IMPERMANENCE. One good way of reflecting on rise and fall is in the nature of feelings, our own and those of others. Feelings of pain, pleasure and boredom come and go, intensify and diminish; as when we experience them (like obtaining something we have wished for), the feeling does not seem too great after all.

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (M 10), in its “satipatthana refrain,” describes how feeling should be contemplated on, thus:

So he dwells

- (1) observing *feelings in the feelings* internally,
- (2) or, observing feelings in the feelings externally,
- (3) or, observing feelings in the feelings both internally and externally;
- (4) or, he dwells observing states that arise in the feelings,
- (5) or, he dwells observing states that pass away in the feelings,
- (6) or, he dwells observing states that arise and pass away in the feelings.

(M 10,32/1:59) = SD 13.3

Notice the three underscored phrases (4-6) and how they collate nicely with the three aspects of impermanence given in such discourses as **the Saṅkhata Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (A 3.47) mentioned above, thus:

¹² Such an idea is common in the Abhidhamma and commentarial tradition, but is not supported by any sutta: see **Raho, gata S** (S 36.11/4:216-218) @ SD 33.6.

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (M 10)

- states that arise in the feelings — arising
- states that pass away in the feelings — passing
- states that arise and pass away in the feelings — becoming-other in presence

Saṅkhata Lakkhana Sutta (A 3.47a)

Here again we see “arising” and “passing away” discerned separately, and then the two are discerned as presence, just as in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta above.¹³

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The First Discourse to Ānanda (on the Becoming Other)

S 22.37/3:37 f

1 Originating in Sāvattihī.

The Buddha’s question

2 Then the venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, the venerable Ānanda sat down at one side.

3 Sitting thus at one side, the Blessed One said this to the venerable Ānanda:

“If, Ānanda, you were asked thus:

‘What, avuso Ānanda, are those things of which an arising is discerned, a passing away is discerned, a becoming-other in their presence is discerned?’¹⁴

When you were asked thus, Ānanda, how would your answer?” [38]

Ānanda’s answer

4 “Bhante, if I were asked thus:

‘What, avuso Ānanda, are those things of which an arising is discerned, a passing away is discerned, a becoming-other in their presence is discerned?’

When asked thus, bhante, I would answer thus:

5 ‘It is of form that

an arising is discerned,	<i>uppādo paññāyati</i>
a passing away is discerned,	<i>vayo paññāyati</i>
a becoming-other in its presence is discerned.	<i>ñhitassa aññathattam</i>

paññāyati

It is of feeling that

an arising is discerned,
a passing away is discerned,
a becoming-other in its presence is discerned.

It is of perception that

an arising is discerned,
a passing away is discerned,
a becoming-other in its presence is discerned.

¹³ Further see **Raho,gata S** (S 36.11), SD 33.6 (2.4) (Aspects of impermanence).

¹⁴ *Katam’esam, avuso ānanda, dhammānam uppādo paññāyati, vayo paññāyati, ñhitassa* [so Be; Ee Ke Se *ñhitā-nam*] *aññathattam paññāyati’ti?*

It is of formations that
 an arising is discerned,
 a passing away is discerned,
 a becoming-other in their presence is discerned.

It is of consciousness that
 an arising is discerned,
 a passing away is discerned,
 a becoming-other in its presence is discerned.

Of these things, avuso, an arising is discerned, a passing away is discerned, a becoming-other in their presence is discerned.’

When asked thus, bhante, I would answer thus.”

The Buddha’s endorsement

6 “Excellent! Excellent, Ānanda!

It is of form that
 an arising is discerned,
 a passing away is discerned,
 a becoming-other in its presence is discerned.

It is of feeling that
 an arising is discerned,
 a passing away is discerned,
 a becoming-other in its presence is discerned.

It is of perception that
 an arising is discerned,
 a passing away is discerned,
 a becoming-other in its presence is discerned.

It is of formations that
 an arising is discerned,
 a passing away is discerned,
 a becoming-other in their presence is discerned.

It is of consciousness that
 an arising is discerned,
 a passing away is discerned,
 a becoming-other in its presence is discerned.

Of these things, Ānanda, is an arising is discerned, a passing away is discerned, a becoming-other in their presence is discerned.

When asked thus, Ānanda, you should answer thus.”

— evam —

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