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(Anicca) Khandha Sutta

The (Impermanent) Aggregates Discourse | S 25.10/3:227 f
 Theme: The impermanence of the 5 aggregates and streamwinning
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2013

Introduction

1 The (Anicca) Khandha Sutta (S 25.10)—dealing with the impermanence of the 5 aggregates—is the last of a series of 10 closely parallel suttas, forming **the Okkanti Vagga** (the Chapter on the Descent), that is, chapter 25 of the Sāmyutta. All these suttas mention two types of individuals who enter into “the certainty of rightness” (*sammatta,niyāma*), that is, the transcendent noble eightfold path, or the path of streamwinning (*sotāpatti,magga*).¹

These 10 suttas give the best definition (albeit a brief one) of the truth-follower and the faith-follower that we have in the Pali Canon.² The difference between the two is that of their dominant spiritual faculty (*indriya*). The one who has strong faith, who resolves (*adhimuccati*) on the impermanence of the factors listed in the ten suttas, is a faith-follower (*saddhā’nusārī*). The one who focusses on wisdom, who gains understanding of the impermanence of the same factors, is a truth-follower (*dhammānusārī*).

2 Both the faith-follower and the truth-follower are declared as being certain of not passing away in this life without having realized the fruit of streamwinning. In either case, when the follower knows and sees for himself the reality of impermanence, he becomes a streamwinner. As such, the Okkanti Vagga does not distinguish the character of the two as streamwinners.

3 The Kīṭā,giṇi Sutta (M 70), however, states that the streamwinner who is strong in faith, on attaining fruition, is called “liberated by faith” (*saddhā,vimutta*), while the one cultivated in wisdom is said to be “view-attained” (*diṭṭhi-p,patta*), that is, has gained right view (although he has yet to fully realize the nature of non-self, which is the domain of the arhat). The Sutta mentions a third class—the “body-witness” (*kāya,sakkhī*)—that is, those who can meditate to reach the formless attainments.³ The body-witness, however, is not a separate class but a *genus*, that is, it applies generically (*pariyāyena*)⁴ to all the saints who experience the formless attainments leading, in due course, to arhathood.⁵

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¹ S 25/3:225-228. The other 9 discourses of **Okkanti Vagga** (the Chapter on the Descent), ie, ch 25 of the Sāmyutta Nikāya [SD 16.7 (1.1.3)], all make a distinction between 2 types of individuals—the faith follower (*saddhā’nusārī*) [SD 16.7 (1.2)] and the truth-follower (*dhammānusārī*) [SD 16.7 (1.3)]—who enter into “the certainty of rightness” (*sammatta,niyāma*), ie, the transcendent noble eightfold path, or the path of streamwinning (*sotāpatti,-magga*) [SD 16.7 (1.4)].

² See R Gethin. *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:126-138.

³ M 70.17-21/1:478 f = SD 11.1.

⁴ See Gethin 2001:135 f & **Pariyāya Nippariyāya**, SD 30.16.

⁵ The *kāya,sakkhī* is def at M 70.17/1:478 = SD 11.1.

The (Impermanent) Aggregates Discourse

S 25.10/3:227 f

- 1 At Sāvatti.
- 2 There the Blessed One said:

The 5 aggregates are impermanent

- 3 “Bhikshus,

<u>form</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise; ⁶
<u>feeling</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise;
<u>perception</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise;
<u>formations</u>	are impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise;
<u>consciousness</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise;

The faith-follower

4 ⁷Bhikshus, one who has faith thus, who firmly believes these truths [is convinced of these truths], is called **a faith-follower**.

⁸He is descending⁹ into the certainty of rightness [the fixed course to rightness],¹⁰ descending into the plane of true individuals;¹¹ he has gone beyond the plane of the worldlings.¹²

He is incapable of doing any intentional deed by which he might be reborn in hell, or in the animal birth, or in the ghost realm. He is incapable of dying without having attained the fruit of streamwinning.¹³

The truth-follower

5 Bhikshus, one who accepts these truths after pondering over them with some wisdom thus,¹⁴ is called **a truth-follower**.

He is descending into the certainty of rightness [the fixed course to rightness], descending into the plane of true individuals; he has gone beyond the plane of the worldlings.

⁶ *Aniccaṃ vipariṇāmiṃ aññathā, bhāvī.*

⁷ *Yo bhikkhave ime dhamme evaṃ saddahati adhimuccati, ayaṃ vuccati saddhā'nusāri okkanto sammatta, niyāmaṃ sappurisa, bhūmiṃ okkanto vītivatto puthujjana, bhūmiṃ.* The operative verbs here are *saddahati* (“he has faith (in)”) and *adhimuccati* (“he resolves, adheres to, is sure of”). I have rendered *adhimuccati* here as “(he) firmly believes...”. On the streamwinner’s faith, see **Entering the stream** = SD 3.3(5).

⁸ *Okkanto sammatta, niyāmaṃ sappurisa, bhūmiṃ okkanto vīti, vatto puthujjana, bhūmiṃ.* On how this should be tr, see Intro (1.6.3).

⁹ *Okkanto.* The proper tr of this word seems to elude previous translators: see Intro (1.6.3).

¹⁰ *Sammatta, niyāmaṃ.* See Intro (1.5).

¹¹ “True individuals,” *sappurisa*, also “superior persons,” “virtuous person,” “ideal person”; often syn with “noble disciple,” *ariya, sāvaka*, but here clearly includes those, although not yet on the path, but is assured of it, viz the faith-follower and the truth-follower. The qualities of the *sappurisa* are given in **Sappurisa S** (M 113/3:37-45) = SD 29.6; see also **D 33.2.2(6)/3:252**, **34.1.8(7)/ 3:283**; **M 110.14-24/3:23 f**; **A 7.64/4:113**, **8.38/4:144**.

¹² “Worldling,” *puthujjano*, ie “born of the crowd”; more fully called “untutored worldling,” one unskilled (*akovidā*), ie, lacks theoretical knowledge of the Dharma, and is undisciplined (*avinīta*), and also lacks practical training in the Dharma. He is not a “seer of the noble ones” (*ariya, dassavī*), ie, of the Buddha and the noble disciples (the saints), because he lacks the wisdom-eye that discerns the truth they have seen. “Noble ones” (*ariya*) and “true individuals” (*sappurisa*) are synonymous. See also MA 1:20-25; SA 2:98-101, 2:251 f; AA 1:61-63; Nc 75-78; Pm 2:-445-449; DhsA 348-354.

¹³ *Abhabbo taṃ kammaṃ kātuṃ yaṃ kammaṃ katvā nirayaṃ vā tiracchāna, yoniṃ vā petti, visayaṃ vā uppajjeyya. Abhabbo ca tāva kālaṃ kātuṃ yāva na sotāpatti, phalaṃ sacchikaroti.* This is the Sutta’s key statement and clearly refers to what, after the Buddha’s time, is referred to as a “lesser streamwinner” (*culla, sotāpanna, cullaka, sotāpanna*). See **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3(6).

¹⁴ *Yassa kho bhikkhave ime dhammā evaṃ paññāya mattaso nijjhānari khamanti.*

He is incapable of doing any intentional deed by which he might be reborn in hell, or in the animal birth, or in the ghost realm. He is incapable of dying without having attained the fruit of streamwinning.

The streamwinner

6 One who knows and sees these truths thus is called a **streamwinner**, no longer bound for the lower world,¹⁵ sure of liberation, bound for awakening.¹⁶

— evaṃ —

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¹⁵ *Avinīpāta*, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of *vinīpāta*, “the world of suffering”, another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggatī*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (*pañca, gati*) (D 3:234=33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal birth (*tirachāna, yoni*), the departed [ghost] realm (*pitti, visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura, kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (*sugati*). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika & Bodhi (tr), *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 1999:14-19.

¹⁶ *Yo bhikkhave ime dhamme evaṃ jānāti evaṃ passati ayaṃ vuccati sotāpanno avinīpāta, dhammo niyato sambodhi, parāyano ti*. “This statement makes it clear how the stream-enterer [streamwinner] differs from those on the way to streamwinning. The faith-follower accepts the teachings on trust (with a limited degree of understanding), the Dhamma-follower through investigation; but the stream-enterer has *known and seen* the teachings directly. I read Se: *evaṃ jānāti evaṃ passati*.” (S:B 1099 n270)