

30

(Navaka) Kāya,sakkhī Sutta

The Discourse on the Body-witness | A 9.43

Theme: The saint who gains the formless attainments

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1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 Sutta summary

The **(Navaka) Kāya,sakkhī Sutta** (A 9.51) is a sutta in the Pañcāla Vagga (A 9) of the Aṅguttara dealing with arhathood.¹ It lists the 9 progressive stages of cessation (*anupubba nirodha*), that is, the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa jhāna*), the 4 formless attainments (*arūpa samāpatti*) and the attainment of cessation (*nirodha samāpatti*). They are also similarly listed in the **Anupubba Nirodha Sutta** (A 9.31).²

1.2 Sutta theme

1.2.1 In each of the first 8 stages [§§3-10], the dhyana experience is said to be “the body-witness in a provisional manner (*pariyāyena*),” that is, in a relative way of speaking. This means that at each level we experience a kind of temporary “nirvana,” that is, as the extinction or disappearance of certain dhyana-factors,³ and the cooling or suspension of certain defilements, that is, the 5 mental hindrances⁴ and the 4 influxes.⁵

None of these stages is nirvana itself, but gives us a progressively better idea of what nirvana is like, relatively speaking. This is the closest experience of nirvana we can have *here and now*, in this life itself, before we actually attain arhathood.

1.2.2 Only the 9th and last stage—that of the cessation of perception and feeling [§11]—refers to the non-returner’s and the arhat’s experience of nirvana here and now. While the non-returner returns to his “learner” (*sekha*) state on emerging from cessation, the arhat remains an arhat even after emerging from it.

Hence, such an experience of nirvana is described “in a non-provisional way” (*nippariyāyena*), that is, in the ultimate sense or Dharma way of speaking. On the other hand, “provisional” (*pariyāyena*), in simple terms, refers to the stages of progress leading to nirvana *here and now*, our conception of nirvana as an experience here and now.⁶

¹ For the full list, see SD 50.25 (2.1).

² A 9.31/4:409 (SD 33.6(3.2.3)): see SD 33.6 (3.2.2).

³ On dhyana-factors (*jhān’āṅga*), see **Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.1), SD 24.11 (4.3); SD 8.4 (6).

⁴ The 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*)—sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt—prevent us from attaining dhyana. See **Nīvaraṇā**, SD 32.1

⁵ The 4 influxes (*āsava*) are those of sensual desire, of existence, of views and of ignorance: see **Ogha Pañha S** (S 38.11) SD 30.3 (1). An older set has only 3 influxes, ie, omitting the influx of views, which underlies all three: see SD 30.1 (1.3.2).

⁶ On nirvana as an experience, one of the 4 dimensions of the nirvana as a concept. see SD 50.1 (4). Further on *pariyāyena* and *nippariyāyena*, see SD 50.25 (1.4).

2 The body-witness

2.1 TYPES OF BODY-WITNESS

2.1.1 Definitions

2.1.1.1 The body-witness (*kaya,sakkhī*; Skt *kaya,sakṣī*) is a noble learner (*sekha*), who, upon attaining the 8 dhyanas (the 4 form dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments), or the 8 liberations (*vimokkha*),⁷ destroys some of the influxes (*āsava*)⁸ [2.1.2.1]. He is one who first “personally” (*kāya*) “witnesses” (*sakkhī*), that is, gains the dhyanas and attainments, and then attains cessation (*nirodha*), that is, an experience of nirvana here and now.⁹ Such an individual is said to be one whose dominant faculty is that of concentration (*samādh’indriya*).¹⁰

2.1.1.2 In the **(Navaka) Kāya,sakkhī Sutta** (A 9.43), a body-witness is said to be one who, having “personally touched” (*kayena phassitvā*, “having touched with the body”) the 1st dhyana, dwells in that meditation-base to that extent. The same is said of all the other 8 bases.

However, in the case of the 9th and last one—that of cessation—“his mental influxes are fully destroyed”—that is, he is **an arhat**, one who has attained nirvana. It should be understood that this statement refers only to an arhat, but not a non-returner. The non-returner only experiences nirvana here and now as “cessation,” a conditioned and temporary state.

2.1.2 The 2 kinds of body-witness

2.1.2.1 One of the oldest mentions of the body-witness is probably in the set of 7 noble individuals found in the suttas and Sanskrit sources.¹¹ Here is the list given in **the (Sattaka) Puggala Sutta** (A 7.14):

SD 50.30(2.1.2)

(Sattaka) Puggala Sutta

The (Sevens) Discourse on the Individuals • A 7.14/4:10 f
Theme: The 7 kinds of noble saints

- 1 Bhikshus, these 7 kinds of persons are
worthy of offerings,
worthy of hospitality,
worthy of gifts,
worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,
a supreme field of merit for the world.

āhuneyyā
pāhuneyyā
dakkhiṇeyyā
añjalī,karaṇīyā
anuttaraṃ puñña-k,khattaṃ lokassa

⁷ The 8 liberations (*aṭṭha vimokkha*) refer to the attainment of mental freedom through dhyana in various ways: see SD 5.17 (10); SD 49.5b (3).

⁸ The 4 influxes (*āsava*) are those of sensual desire, of existence, of views and of ignorance: see **Ogha Pañha S** (S 38.11) SD 30.3 (1). An older set has only 3 influxes, ie, omitting the influx of views, which underlies all three: see SD 30.1 (1.3.2).

⁹ DA 3:889 f; MA 2:52; Vism 566.

¹⁰ MA 2:52; Vism 566. The 5 spiritual faculties (*indriya*) are those of faith (*saddh’indriya*), energy/effort (*viriy’indriya*), mindfulness (*sat’indriya*), concentration (*samādh’indriya*), and wisdom (*paññ’indriya*): see **Pañc’indriya**, SD 10.4; also SD 3.6 (3).

¹¹ On the body-witness (*kaya,sakkhī*), see also **Kīṭā,giri S** (M 70,14+17/1:477 f), SD 11.1; Pug 1.32/14 f; Vism 21.74+77/659 f; Abhidhammattha Samuccaya: Abhsm 88. Abhidharma,kośa gives its own list of 7 aryas (Abhk 6.63ac; cf 6.64cd).

2 What are the seven?

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) The one free both ways. | <i>ubhato.bhāga,vimutta</i> |
| (2) The one freed by wisdom. | <i>paññā,vimutta</i> |
| (3) The body-witness. | <i>kaya,sakkhī</i> |
| (4) The view-attainer. | <i>diṭṭhi-p,patta</i> |
| (5) The faith-freed. | <i>saddhā,vimutta</i> |
| (6) The truth follower. | <i>dhammānusārī</i> |
| (7) The faith follower. | <i>saddhā'nusārī</i> |

3 These, bhikshus, are the 7 kinds of persons who are *worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms, a supreme field of merit for the world.*

— evaṃ —

2.1.2.2 The suttas mention 2 kinds of body-witness. **Firstly**, there is the body-witness to one or more¹² of *the first 7* of the 9 individuals with attainments (*samāpatti*), that is, the 4 form dhyanas and the first 3 formless attainments. They are body-witnesses to the extent of their respective attainments.¹³

2.1.2.3 The **second** kind of body-witness has gone beyond these 7 attainments and are body-witnesses to the 4th formless dhyana and the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā,vedayita,nirodha*). This is the body-witness in the full sense of the word, as listed in **the (Navaka) Kāya,sakkhī Sutta** (A 9.43).¹⁴ This clearly refers to only the non-returned.

2.1.2.4 **The Sumaṅgala,vilāsinī** (the Dīgha Commentary) mentions **3 kinds** of body-witness, that is, those who realize one or other of the first 3 supermundane fruitions—namely, the streamwinner, the once-returned and the non-returned—after attaining the dhyanas. (DA 3:889 f)

2.2 LATER SOURCES

2.2.1 A few Sanskrit sources mention the “body-witness.” **The Abhidharma,samuccaya** (a Sanskrit work attributed to Asaṅga, 4th century CE) states that the body-witness (*kāya,sākṣī*) is a learner (*śaikṣa*) who has attained the 8 liberations (Abhsm 86, 88).

2.2.2 Vasubandhu, in his **Abhidharma.koṣa** (4th or 5th century), states that the body-witness is a non-returned (*anāgāmi*) who attains the cessation of perception and feeling (*saṃjñā,vedayita,nirodha*). (Abhk 6.43cd, 185)

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¹² The dhyanas are attained cumulatively, with the 1st dhyana for the 2nd, and the 2nd for the 3rd, and so on.

¹³ **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28,8/3:105), SD 14.14; **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,2.3(11)/3:254); **Kīṭā,giri S** (M 70,14+17/1:477 f), SD 11.1; **(Sattaka) Puggala S** (A 7.14/4:10); Abhk 6.63ac.

¹⁴ Also AA 4:206. The body-witness is also found in a list of 10 noble individuals (A 5:23) and a list of 12 (Peṭk 42; Nett 190). Abhidharma,samuccaya gives another list of 27 aryas (Abhsm 86).

The Discourse on the Body-witness

A 9.30

- 1 (Originating in Kosambī.)¹⁵
 2 “Body-witness. Body-witness (*kaya,sakkhī*),’ avuso,¹⁶ it is said.
 How, avuso, has the Blessed One spoken of **the body-witness**?”¹⁷

THE OPENING: THE 9 PROGRESSIVE ABODES¹⁸

The 4 dhyanas

(1) THE 1ST DHYANA

- 3 Here, avuso, a monk,¹⁹
quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states,
 attains and dwells in the **1st dhyana**,
 accompanied by initial application and sustained application,
 and with zest and happiness born of solitude.²⁰
 3.2 He dwells, having touched that base²¹ with the body, as far as it is attained.²²
 3.3 To that extent, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the body-witness** in a provisional [relative] manner.²³

(2) THE 2ND DHYANA

- 4 And, furthermore, [452] avuso, a monk,
with the stilling of initial application and sustained application,
 by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind,
 attains and dwells in **the 2nd dhyana**,
 free from initial application and sustained application,²⁴
 with zest and happiness born of concentration.²⁵

¹⁵ Ce. On Kosambī, see SD 6.1 (1-2).

¹⁶ Presumably, Ānanda is addressing the monk Udāyī—Kāl’udāyī, says Comy (AA 4:205)—in Ghosit’ārāma, outside Kosambī, far west of the “middle country” (*majjhima,desa*), ie, the central Gangetic plain. Since they address one another as *āvuso* (“Friend, brother”), this sutta—and the others of this **Pañcāla Vagga** [2.1]—record events while the Buddha is still living. The Buddha’s absence may be explained by the fact that he is away on solitary retreat for the rains of the 10th year of the ministry (BA 3): see SD 6.1 (2+6). **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) records the Buddha, in his last days, as instructing that senior monks should address juniors by name or as *āvuso*, while junior monks should address seniors as *bhante* (“sir”) or *āyasmā* (“venerable”) (D 16, 6.2), SD 9.

¹⁷ On the “body-witness” (*kaya,sakkhī*), see (2).

¹⁸ See SD 50.25 (1.3.2.2).

¹⁹ “A monk” (*bhikkhu*) in such contexts always refers to a meditator (**Satipaṭṭhāna S**, M 10,3A n, SD 13.3), or to the practitioner (SD 4.9 (5.3); SD 13.1 (3.1.1)).

²⁰ “Born of solitude,” *viveka,ja*; ie it is the result of abandoning the hindrances: on the 3 kinds of solitude, see **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (1.5). On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhi*) here, see **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5.

²¹ “That base” (*tad-āyatanam*), ie, the meditation state.

²² *Yathā yathā ca tad-āyatanam tathā tathā nam kāyena phassitvā viharati.*

²³ *Ettāvatā’pi kho āvuso sandiṭṭhiko dhammo vutto bhagavatā pariyāyena.* “In a provisional manner,” *pariyāyena*, ie, in a restricted sense, “in a sense”: SD 50.25 (1.4.2-1.4.4); cf *nippariyāyena*: SD (1.4.5).

²⁴ On “initial application and sustained application” (*vitakka,vicāra*), see **Vitakka,vicāra**, SD 33.4; SD 8.4 (5.1.2).

4.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body, as far as it is attained.

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the body-witness** in a provisional [relative] manner.

(3) THE 3RD DHYANA

5 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
with the fading away of zest, he dwells equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing,
and experiences happiness with the body.

He attains and dwells in **the 3rd dhyana**,

of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’

He permeates and pervades, floods and fills this very body with the happiness
free from zest.

5.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body, as far as it is attained.

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the body-witness** in a provisional [relative] manner.

(4) THE 4TH DHYANA

6 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
with the abandoning of joy and pain—

and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure—

attains and dwells in **the 4th dhyana**,

that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.

6.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body, as far as it is attained.

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the body-witness** in a provisional [relative] manner.

The 4 attainments

(5) THE SPHERE OF INFINITE SPACE

7 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
having completely transcended perceptions of form,

with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance,
through non-attention to perceptions of diversity,

contemplating, “Infinite space,” attains and dwells in **the sphere of infinite space**.²⁶

7.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body, as far as it is attained.

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the body-witness** in a provisional [relative] manner.

²⁵ The 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya, tuṅhī, bhāva*) because within its initial application and sustained application (thinking and discursion, *vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur. (S 2:273); cf S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, saikhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate). See **Dutiya Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.2/4:263 f), SD 24.12.

²⁶ *Sabbaso rūpa, saññānaṃ samatikkamā paṭigha, saññānaṃ atthaṅgamā nānatta, saññānaṃ amanasikārā ananto ākāso ti ākāsañcāyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati.*

(6) THE SPHERE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

8 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
having completely transcended the sphere of infinite space,

contemplating, “Infinite consciousness,”
attains and dwells in **the sphere of infinite consciousness**.²⁷

8.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body, as far as it is attained.

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the body-witness** in a provisional [relative] manner.

(7) THE SPHERE OF NOTHINGNESS

9 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
having completely transcended the sphere of infinite consciousness,

contemplating, “There is nothing,”
attains and **[451] dwells in the sphere of nothingness**.²⁸

9.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body, as far as it is attained.

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the body-witness** in a provisional [relative] manner.

(8) THE SPHERE OF NEITHER-PERCEPTION-NOR-NON-PERCEPTION

10 And furthermore, avuso, a monk,
having completely transcended the sphere of nothingness,

contemplating, “This is peaceful; this is sublime,”
attains to **the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception**.²⁹

10.2 He dwells, having touched that base with the body, as far as it is attained.

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of **the body-witness** in a provisional [relative] manner.

The cessation of perception and feeling

11 (9) Furthermore, avuso, a monk,
having completely transcended the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception,
attains and dwells in **the cessation of perception and feeling**,

11.2 and having seen it with wisdom, his mental influxes are fully destroyed.³⁰

11.3 He dwells, having touched that base with the body, as far as it is attained.

To that extent, too, avuso, the Blessed One has spoken of the body-witness **in a non-provisional manner**.³¹

— evaṃ —

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²⁷ *Sabbaso ākāsaṇaṅc’āyatanam samatikkama anantam viññāṇan ti viññāṇaṅcāyatanam upasampajja viharati.*

²⁸ *Sabbaso viññāṇaṅc’āyatanam samatikkamma n’atthi kiñcī ti ākiñcaññ’āyatanam upasampajja viharati.*

²⁹ *Sabbaso ākiñcaññāyatanam samatikkama santam etam paṇītam etan ti n’eva,saññā,nāsaññ’āyatanam upasampajja viharati.*

³⁰ *Paññāya c’assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti.* This statement applies only to the arhat, but not a non-returner (2.1.1.2).

³¹ “In a non-provisional manner,” *nippariyāyena*, ie, in the ultimate sense: see SD 50.25 (1.4.5).