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(Iti) Indriya Sutta

The (Iti,vuttaka) Discourse on the Faculties | It 3.2.3

Theme: The 3 faculties of final knowledge

Translated by Piya Tan ©2016

1 Sutta significance

1.1 THE (ITI) INDRIYA SUTTA (It 3.2.3)

The (Iti) Indriya Sutta lists the 3 faculties (indriya) of final knowledge (aññā), a term for the attaining of sainthood from streamwinning right up to the fruition of arhathood (that is, full-fledged arhathood). At the end of **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), for example, when Koṇḍañña attains streamwinning through understanding the Buddha’s teaching of the 4 noble truths, it is declared by the Buddha that he is now known as Aññā Koṇḍañña, “Koṇḍañña with the final knowledge” or, more simply, “Koṇḍañña who knows.”¹

1.2 For a closely related sutta, which deals with the same topic, see **the Aññ’indriya Sutta** (S 48.23).²

2 The (Tika) Sekkha Sutta (A 3.84)

2.0 The first two verses [54+5] of the (Iti) Indriya Sutta (It 3.2.3) recur here in **the (Tika) Sekkha Sutta**. This is a short sutta, and is here translated in full:

SD 50.5(2)

(Tika) Sekkha Sutta

The (Threes) Discourse on the Learner • A 3.84/1:231

Traditional: A 3.2.4.5 = Āṅguttara 3, Tika Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 4, Samaṇa Vagga 5

Theme: The qualities of a learner

- 1 Then, a certain monk approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and then sat down at one side. Sitting at one side, the monk said:
- 2 “Bhante, ‘A learner! A learner!’ it is said. In what way is one a learner?”
- 3 “He trains himself, bhikshu, therefore, he is called a learner.
- 4 And in what does he train?
He trains in the higher moral virtue, he trains in the higher mind, he trains in higher wisdom.
He trains, bhikshu, therefore, he is called a learner [trainee].”

The learner verses

5 *Sekhassa sikkhamānassa
Uju,maggānusārino
khayasmim̐ paṭhamam̐ ñāṇam̐
tato aññā anantarā.*

To the learner who is training,
following the straight path:
first, there is the knowledge regarding destruction;
then, immediately, there is final knowledge.

¹ See S 56.11,20 (SD 1.1).

² S 48.23 (SD 42.19(1.5)).

6 *Tato aññā vimuttassa
ñāṇaṃ ve hoti tādino
akuppā me vimuttīti
bhava,samyojana-k,khayā*

After that, for one liberated by final knowledge,
such a one, indeed, there is the knowledge,
“Unshakeable is my liberation!”
by way of the destruction of the fetter of existence.

— evaṃ —

2.1 VERSE 5

2.1.1 “First, there is the knowledge regarding destruction”

First, there arises the knowledge of the path, called the “knowledge of destruction” because it is the knowledge associated with the path. It is called “destruction” because it destroys the defilements. (AA 2:348)

2.1.2 “Then, immediately, there is final knowledge”

2.1.2.1 Right after the knowledge of the fourth path (arhathood) has arisen, there arises the fruit of arhathood. (AA 2:348). This is full-fledged arhathood.

2.1.2.2 This verse is quoted in the Iti,vuttaka Commentary (ItA 1:115). There, the noble path (*ariya,-maggā*)—that is, the noble eightfold path—is said to be the destruction of the influxes (*āsava-k,khaya*). In this connection, says the Commentary, **the Cūḷa Assa,pura Sutta** (M 40) says: “Through the destruction of the influxes, he is a recluse” (*āsavānaṃ khayā samaṇo hotīti*).³

2.1.2.3 The Majjhima Commentary to the Sutta then adds: “Because he has stilled (*samīta*) all defilements, he is a recluse in the highest sense (*param’attha,samaṇa*).”⁴ (MA 2:326). This is the spiritual definition of a monastic as an awakened recluse, the one constituting the noble sangha.⁵

2.1.3 Mental influxes

2.1.3.1 The Iti,vuttaka Commentary (ItA 1:115) then quotes **the Dhammapada**, where it is said:

*Para,vajjānupassissa
niccaṃ ujjhāna,saññino
āsavā tassa vaḍḍhanti
ārā so āsava-k,khayā*

Who sees others’ faults,
ever disposed to fault-finding—
his influxes grow:
he is far from the destruction of the influxes. (Dh 253)

This advice is directed especially to those who are cultivating their minds in their quest for awakening. The training of mental cultivation only works when we are fully focused on letting go of all sense-objects so that we can fully focus on the mind. For this reason, we should not be attending to the deeds and misdeeds of others, especially when we are in training.

2.1.3.2 The influxes (*āsava*) are these 4 mental defilements, that is, the influxes of sensual desire (*kām’āsava*), of existence (*bhav’āsava*), of views (*ditth’āsava*), of ignorance (*avijjāsava*). They take hold of our mind, holding it and fermenting in it, then flooding and polluting our lives, preventing us from freeing ourselves from the world, keeping us in it. The older set has only 3 influxes, with “views” underpinning all of them.

³ M 40,14/1:284 (SD 41.8).

⁴ *Āsavānaṃ khayā samaṇo hotīti sabba,kilesānaṃ samitattā paramattha,samaṇo hotīti* (MA 2:326).

⁵ On the “noble sangha” (*ariya,sangha*) comprising “noble individuals” (*ariya,puggala*), see SD 10.16 (11).

2.1.3.3 Sensual desire (*kām'asava*) is a mental influx that floods us through the 5 physical senses and our mind, taking hold of the moment, when we have to serve its whims for a long time to come. It is a polluting flood that overwhelms us so that we are unable to see the moment. Only when we see this reality are we really able to free ourselves from it. Sensual desire is harmful because it feeds itself and chains us to its sense-objects, so that we are lost to whatever are wholesome and nurturing to our spiritual growth.

2.1.3.4 Existence (*bhava*) may be understood traditionally as the fact that attachment to sensual desires will bring us the kind of subhuman existence the desire entails even here and now, and then in the hereafter. The point is that we become what we cling to.

“Existence” also refers to our drive to *have* or quest to *be*. The drive to have is our collecting instinct driven by our measuring qualities and people as things to be acquired and owned. We covet what we see as empowering others; so, we think (falsely) that we could be empowered by such fetishes, too.

The quest to be is the desire to become a force or flood that overwhelms others, even own them so that we become, as it were, bigger than we really are. Both these insidious attitudes are rooted in an egoistic self-view.

2.1.3.5 Views (*diṭṭhi*) are how we see the world and create our own virtual reality. We rarely see the world as it is, but through the coloured and distorting lenses of our views, directing our attention to only those parts that interest us, and then recognizing or reinterpreting our experience as a composite of memory patches from our past and biases.

On account of not seeing true reality, we, sooner or later, find ourselves robbed of gratification, and react unwholesomely to our feelings, trying to maximize and collect the pleasant or trying to reject and at least minimize the unpleasant. We are simply conditioned to run after what we view as pleasant and to push away what we view as unpleasant. We delude ourselves with the accomplishment, even security, of staying within this samsaric loop. Our craving (the root of sensual desire) masquerades as our security, pandered to it in our ignorance.

2.1.3.6 Ignorance (*avijjā*) is our inability or unwillingness to wholesomely see and accept true reality even when we are painfully confronted or aesthetically surprised by it. We think we know enough, but this knowledge limits further knowing and seeing. In short, lacking wisdom, we are limited by our knowledge. Only wisdom empowers us with the ability to use knowledge for self-understanding and liberation.

Ignorance by itself only blinds us, keeping us in the dark and often incapacitating us, preventing us from giving any helpful response. However, it is craving that lures and spurs ignorance into blindly acting (or not acting) through words, body and mind, and to face the consequences of these actions. Ignorance and craving—the roots of our suffering—work together, with *lame* craving riding on the back of *blind* ignorance, guiding it wherever it fancies.

2.2 VERSE 6

2.2.1 “For one liberated by final knowledge”

2.2.1.1 This line, according to the Commentary, means: “For the liberated, there is the liberation of the fruit of arhathood” (AA 2:348), that is, the full understanding and experience of **the 4 noble truths**. Once we become streamwinners, or even as aspirants to streamwinning, we are able to see the true, as well as subtle, nature of suffering. The world may be appearances (that’s what we project onto it), but it is what lies below these appearances that bait and bully us into acting in ways that perpetuate our sufferings. With final knowledge we are able to see through the virtual reality into true reality.

2.2.1.2 As long as we neither understand nor accept that craving is at *the root of suffering*, we will look for all the wrong explanations and rationalizations for suffering. Science and medicine may be able to describe or explain the nature of suffering, even cure certain aspects, and delay others, but the suf-

fering of the mind—rooted in greed, hate and delusion—will always haunt us as long as we are unawakened.

With our worldly knowledge, we may study the nature of suffering, or even analyze what we see as the causes or occasions of suffering. We may gaze deep into the nature of suffering, but *we only see suffering staring back at us*. So long as we are rooted in spiritual ignorance, we will not be able to exorcise all the demons of suffering, or even tame any of them.

2.2.1.3 The first two noble truths—suffering and its arising (through craving)—clearly describe the true **meaning** of life. We can take “meaning” here as referring to the value of life. When we understand that life is nothing but “suffering” (*dukkha*) because life is impermanent, unsatisfactory and that we have no real control over it (it has no abiding essence), we see the *value* of such an understanding.

The full meaning of life is formulated in the teaching on **dependent arising** (*paṭicca,samuppāda*), which is rooted in ignorance, and through ignorance, we create our own virtual reality that invariably ends in suffering.⁶ Dependent arising comprises these two noble truths, which, by means of conditionality (causes and effects), define the true meaning of life.

When we reflect deeper, we will see that because life is impermanent, it is precious to us: we *value* life. This is, in fact, the basis for **moral virtue**: it is founded on *the value and respect for life* because it is so fragile. Yet, it is precious because it is our only means of getting out of suffering, of awakening to true reality.

2.2.1.4 The third noble truth here (following the practice model)⁷ is the path leading to the end of suffering, that is, **the noble eightfold path**, constituting the 3 trainings of moral virtue, mental concentration and wisdom.⁸ Having clearly understood the nature and arising of *suffering*, we are ready to work towards its *ending*, or rather, to take the path to the ending of suffering. We must now apply our understanding through action, to tame and refine our body and speech so that they do not distract our mental cultivation. Then, we calm and clear our mind to direct it towards seeing true reality, which brings us the insight wisdom to free us from the grasp of ignorance and craving.

2.2.1.5 Total freedom from ignorance and craving—more fully, *the destruction of the 3 karmic roots of greed, hate and delusion*—is called nirvana, the fourth and last of the noble truths (according to the practice model) [2.2.1.4]. Nirvana is neither a place nor a state. It is just a word we use to refer to the end of all suffering with the destruction of greed, hate and delusion.

It is like the extinguishing of fire or the quenching of thirst. That fire or the thirst does not go anywhere; neither of them arises any more (as long as we are quenched). Nirvana, however, is the final quenching; it needs to be done only once.⁹

2.2.1.6 The last two noble truths deal with the path to the ending of suffering, and the total ending of suffering itself, that is nirvana. While the first two truths deal with *the meaning of life*, these last two deal with the purpose of life. Based on our understanding of the meaning of life through dependent arising, we can now reverse the cycle, or break any of the vital links in the chain, and bring out the **dependent ending** (**paṭicca,nirodha*) of suffering with the uprooting of ignorance and craving.¹⁰

⁶ For a simplified description of how dependent arising works, see SD 50.4 (1.1.1). For a detailed explanation, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16.

⁷ The traditional sequence of the 4 noble truths is 1-2-3-4, that is (1) suffering, (2) arising, (3) ending, and (4) the path—this is the teaching model. The practice model—as listed here—is given as 1-2-4-3: see, eg, **Mahā Saḷ-āyatanika S** (M 149,11 etc) + SD 41.9 (2.4).

⁸ See **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

⁹ For a discussion on nirvana (*nibbāna*), see SD 50.1 intro esp (2).

¹⁰ On dependent ending, see SD **Upanisā S** (S 12.23), SD 6.12; **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (18+19.3.2).

2.2.2 “Indeed, there is the knowledge”

2.2.2.1 This is the arhat’s review knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇa, ñāṇa*) (AA 2:348), that is, a retrospective understanding.¹¹ In the Abhidhamma tradition, this is the “recollected mental image obtained in concentration, or to any inner experience just passed, as for instance, a dhyana (*jhāna*), or a supramundane path, or fruition of the path, etc.”¹² so that we are now a “noble individual” (*ariya, puggala*).

2.2.2.2 The suttas are less technical on this: we remind ourself to keep to our practice, instead of anticipating and measuring its progress. If we need to ask whether we have progressed or not, the likely answer is that *we have not!* True practitioners only diligently and joyfully practise, and keep on doing this.¹³ Even the Buddha and the arhats, after they have awakened, keep up their practice of keeping the precepts, meditating and reflecting with wisdom—it is the natural and joyful thing to do.

As we live our lives diligently in the Dharma, in due course, we are able to joyfully notice that we have never faltered in the smallest challenge to our moral virtue, or mental concentration, or wisdom. We live confidently in the fact that we have always, without exception, lived the Dharma in the spirit and the letter. This is sufficient for us to rejoice that we have attained the supreme goal of the historical Buddha’s teaching.

3 Key terms in the Sutta

3.1 THE FACULTY, “I SHALL KNOW THE FINAL KNOWLEDGE NOT YET KNOWN”

The Saṃyutta Commentary explains the first of the 3 faculties, “**the faculty, ‘I shall know the final knowledge not yet known’**,” as the faculty arising at the moment of the path of streamwinning for one who is practising with the aspiration, “I will know the Dharma I have not known before in beginningless samsara” (SA 3:237). The function of this faculty is the abandoning of the 3 fetters (of the self-identity view, doubt and attachment to rituals and vows), resulting in the attaining of streamwinning.¹⁴

This is the very first step—a clear and true vision—into the noble eightfold path when one becomes a true “learner” (*sekha*), and an individual of the noble sangha (*ariya, saṅgha*). Those who have not yet attained this stage, even when they are good worldlings (*kalyāṇa puthujjana*), are called “outsiders” (*bāhira* or *bāhiraka*), since they have not yet attained the noble path.¹⁵

3.2 THE FACULTY OF FINAL KNOWLEDGE

The Iti,vuttaka Commentary gives two senses of the second faculty “**the faculty of final knowledge.**” The first is the knowledge of the first path (that of streamwinning), entailing a full realization of the 4 noble truths (ItA 2:29). The interpretation takes *aññā* as meaning “final knowledge,” the knowledge of full awakening. While the first faculty is only a vision of the path, this second faculty is the true knowledge of it, that is, the fruition of the path.

The second meaning takes *aññā* as meaning “other” or “the others,” that is, the other noble individuals. This is the term for the knowledge which arises on the 6 occasions from the fruit of streamwinning onwards (up to the fruition of arhatness). This is understood as those established in the *fruit* of streamwinning, the paths and fruits of the once-returner and the non-returner, and the arhat-path.¹⁶

¹¹ SD 10.16 (1.2.1.6).

¹² *Buddhist Dictionary*, quoting Vism 22, esp sections 19-20/676.

¹³ See esp (**Ekā, dasaka**) **Cetanā’karaṇīya S** (A 11.2), SD 33.3b.

¹⁴ VbhA 127 f; quoted at Vism 491,11.

¹⁵ On the “outsider” (*bāhira*), see **Cūḷa Hatthi, padôpama S** (M 27,25.4) n + SD 40a.5 (1.1.2); **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 142,5(11)) + nn, SD 1.9; SD 47.1 (1.1.2); on *bāhiraka*, see SD 10.16 (1.2.3.2).

¹⁶ See Abhidhamm’āvatāra Nava,ṭikā 2:372 (CSCD).

3.3 THE FACULTY OF THE ONE ACCOMPLISHED IN FINAL KNOWLEDGE

“The faculty of one accomplished in final knowledge” arises in terms of whatever is fully known at the fruition of arhathood, entailing a full realization of the 4 noble truths brought to its conclusion (that is, the attaining of nirvana). (SA 3:237)¹⁷

3.4 THE FACULTIES AND SAINTHOOD

In schematic form, **the 3 faculties** are related to the 8 stages of the path, thus:

		<u>the faculties</u>
(1) path of streamwinning	<i>sotapatti, magga</i>	— the faculty, “I shall know the final knowledge not yet known” (<i>anaññātañ ñassāmīt’indriya</i>)
(2) the fruition of streamwinning	<i>sotāpatti, phala</i>	} the faculty of final knowledge (<i>aññ’indriya</i>)
(3) the path of once-return	<i>sakadāgāmī, magga</i>	
(4) the fruition of once-return	<i>sakadāgāmī, phala</i>	
(5) the path of non-return	<i>anāgāmī, magga</i>	
(6) the fruition of non-return	<i>anāgāmī, phala</i>	
(7) the path of arhathood	<i>arahatta, magga</i>	— the faculty of the one accomplished in final knowledge (<i>aññāta-v-indriya</i>)
(8) the fruition of arhathood	<i>arahatta, phala</i>	

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The (Iti, vuttaka) Discourse on the Faculties

It 3.2.3

1 This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, spoken by the Arhat, thus have I heard:¹⁸

2 Bhikshus, there are these 3 faculties. What are the three?

(1) The faculty, “I shall know the final knowledge not yet known.”	<i>anaññātañ ñassāmīt’indriya</i>
(2) The faculty of final knowledge.	<i>aññ’indriya</i>
(3) The faculty of one accomplished in final knowledge.	<i>aññāta-v-indriya</i>

These, bhikshus, are the 3 faculties.

3 The Blessed One spoke on this matter. In this connection, he said this:¹⁹

4 <i>Sekhassa sikkhamānassa</i> <i>Uju, maggānusārino</i> <i>khayasmim paṭhamam ñāṇam</i> <i>tato aññā anantarā.</i>	To the learner who is training, following the straight path: first, there is the knowledge regarding destruction; then, immediately, there is final knowledge.
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¹⁷ See It 53,3 (ItA 2:29) = S 5:204,19 (SA) ≈ D 3:219,9 (DA): for other refs, see CPD sv an-aññāta. Further see Pm 1:115,26-116,3 = 2:30,1-12; I 118,13.

¹⁸ This is said to be spoken by the laywoman **Khujj’uttarā**: see SD 16.14 (1).

¹⁹ Verses 4*-5* recur at **(Tika) Sekkha S** (A 3.84/1:231) [A:B 3.85], SD 50.5(2).

- 5 *Tato aññā vimuttassa
ñāṇaṃ ve hoti tādino
akuppā me vimuttīti
bhava,samyojana-k,khayā* After that, for one liberated by final knowledge,
such a one, indeed, there is the knowledge,
“Unshakeable is my liberation!”
by way of the destruction of the fetter of existence.
- 6 *Sa ve²⁰ indriya,sampanno
santo santipade rato
dhāreti antimarṃ dehaṃ
jetvā māraṃ savāhinin’ti.* That one, indeed, accomplished in faculties,
peaceful, delighting in the place of peace,
bears his last body,
having defeated Māra along with his host.
- 7 This matter, too, was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.

— evaṃ —

[For **Bibliography**, see the end of SD 50]

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²⁰ Ce Se sace.