

15

(Tika) Āneñja Sutta

The (Threes) Discourse on the Imperturbable | A 3.114 [A:Be 3.116]

Theme: Even the high gods can still fall into the suffering states

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2016, 2020

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUMMARY

The **(Tika) Āneñja Sutta** (A 3.114) states that even those brahmas who have attained the “unshakable state” (*āneñja*), that is, any of the 4 formless bases, if they are not learners (*sekha*), they will surely fall into the subhuman states when their good karma is exhausted.

1.2 Related suttas

The following suttas dealing with the same topic of beings born in the heavens, unless they are path-learners (*sekha*), will, when their karma is exhausted, fall into the suffering states.

(Tika) Āneñja Sutta (A 3.114/1:267 f), SD 57.15

Even brahmas reborn in the 1st 3 formless-dhyana bases fall into the suffering states when their karma is exhausted.

(Nānā, karaṇa) Puggala Sutta 1 (A 4.123/2:126-128), SD 23.8a

Even brahmas reborn in the 4 form-dhyana bases fall into the suffering states when their karma is exhausted.

(Nānā, karaṇa) Mettā Sutta 1 (A 4.125/2:128 f), SD 33.9

Even brahmas of the 4 form-dhyana bases, including the Ābhassara, the Subha, kiṇḥa and the Veha-p-phala will, in due course, fall into the suffering states when their karma is exhausted.

2 Sutta Commentary

2.1 Here, we will look at some explanations from the Commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*) [2.2] and the Subcommentary (*tīkā*) [2.3] on **the (Nānā, karaṇa) Puggala Sutta 1** (A 4.123), SD 23.8a, which closely apply to the teachings of **the (Tika) Āneñja Sutta** (A 3.11).

2.2 “WHEN THERE IS FUTURE DESTINY AND REBIRTH” (*yad idaṃ gatiyā uppattiyā sati*)

This means that the noble disciple who is a learner does not descend (*anotarivā*) into a lower rebirth but attains final nirvana in the same form-sphere existence, or in the 2nd, or 3rd form realm, or higher. Worldlings go to one or other of the hells. This is what is meant by the disparity (between the destinies of the learners and worldlings). (AA 3:124,22-25)

[The same applies, mutatis mutandis, to those reborn in formless-sphere existence. (AA 3:125,15 f)]

2.3 THE SUBCOMMENTARY

2.3.1 The Subcommentary (*tīkā*, AAT, Burmese edition) to the teachings of **A 4.123**. It says that noble disciples are reborn in the formless world when the Buddha speaks of the lifespans of humans and devas,

he does not specify their duration in the 4 suffering states (*āpāya*) and the earth-bound devas [Cātum,-mahā,rājika and Tāva,timsa].¹

Why does he not do so? Because in hell, karma alone determines (the lifespan): one suffers there until one's karma is exhausted. The same is true of the other suffering states. Karma also determines the life-span for the earth-bound devas. For, some arising there remain there only for a week, some for two weeks, but some for an aeon. (AAT:Be 2:329,23-28)

2.3.2 Among humans, some **laypeople** become streamwinners and attain the fruit of once-returning, the fruit of non-returning, even arhathood. Of these, streamwinners and so on may remain so (as layman streamwinner, once-returned or non-returned) their whole lives. Arhats, however, either attain final nirvana or renounce.

Why? Because **arhathood** has excellent spiritual qualities but the laity has weaker qualities (*hīna,-liṅga*, such as lack of moral virtue, etc). These weak qualities cannot support the arhat's excellent virtues; hence, they either pass away into final nirvana or go forth. (AAT:Be 2:329,29-330,4)

2.3.3 But when **earth-bound devas** attain arhathood they remain so their entire lives. **Streamwinners** and **once-returners** among the 6 classes of sense-sphere devas remain so their entire lives. For, a **non-returner** will go to a form-sphere existence, and **arhats** will attain final nirvana. Why? Because there is no chance that they will regress.

2.3.4 In the form and formless worlds, they all remain so for their whole lifespans. Streamwinners and once-returners reborn in the form world do not return to this world, but attain final nirvana there. They are called "**dhyana non-returners**" (*jhāna,anāgāmi*). (AAT 2:330,4-9)

2.3.5 Now, what determines the rebirth for those who have gained **the 8 attainments** (*aṭṭha samāpat-ti*)?² It is determined by the dhyana in which they are proficient: they are reborn on account of what they are (mentally) proficient in.

If they are proficient in all (these attainments), what determines it then? The attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; for, then, they are for certain reborn in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. (AAT:Be 2:330,10-13)

2.3.6 For noble disciples reborn among **the 9 brahma-worlds**, rebirth may occur right there (the realm they are in) or in a higher one, but not in a lower one. Worldlings, however, may be reborn in the same realm, in a higher one, or *in a lower one*. (AAT:Be 2:330,13-15)

2.3.7 Noble disciples in **the 5 pure abodes** and **the 4 formless worlds** may be reborn in the same plane or in a higher one. A non-returner reborn in a 1st-dhyana world purifies the 9 brahma-worlds and attains final nirvana while dwelling at the peak (in any of the 5 pure abodes).

These 3 deva worlds are called the 'best states of existence' (*seṭṭha,bhava*): the realms of abundant fruit (*veha-p,phala*), Akaniṭṭha, and the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.³ Non-returners reborn in these 3 states go neither higher nor lower, but attain final nirvana right there." (AAT:Be 2:330,-16-21)

¹ On these earth-bound devas, see SD 57.10 (1.4.2.1); SD 54.3a (3.5.1).

² The 8 attainments: the 4 form dhyanas and the 4 formless dhyanas; see (**Anupubba**) **Vihāra S 1** (A 9.32), SD 95.1; SD 8.4 (12.3).

³ On the location of these realms, see SD 57.10 (Appendix).

— — —

(Tika) Aneñja Sutta

The (Threes) Discourse on the Imperturbable

A 3.114

1 “Bhikshus, there are these 3 kinds of persons found in the world.
What are the three?

2 (1) Here, bhikshus, a certain person here, transcending perceptions of forms,
with the passing away of perceptions of sensory impingement,
with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, (perceiving:) ‘**Space is infinite,**’
enters and dwells in **the base of the infinity of space.**

3 He relishes it, longs for it, and finds joy in it.⁴
He remains there, intent upon it, dwells much in it, without falling from it.
When he dies, he is reborn in the company of *the devas of the base of the infinity of space.*

4 Bhikshus, the lifespan of the devas of *the base of the infinity of space* is **20,000 aeons.**
The worldling remains there all his life, and when he has completed the entire lifespan of those devas,
he goes to hell, to the animal realm, or to the preta realm.⁵

5 But **the Blessed One’s disciple** remains there all his life, and when he has completed the full life-
span of those devas, he attains final nirvana in that very same state of existence.

6 This, bhikshus, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the instructed noble dis-
ciple and the uninstructed worldling, that is, when there is future destiny and rebirth.⁶

7 (2) Again, bhikshus, a certain person here, by transcending the base of the infinity of space,
(perceiving:) ‘**Consciousness is infinite,**’
enters and dwells in **the base of the infinity of consciousness.**

8 He relishes it, longs for it, and finds joy in it.
He remains there, intent upon it, dwells much in it, without falling from it.
When he dies, he is reborn in the company of *the devas of the base of the infinity of consciousness.*

9 Bhikshus, the lifespan of the devas of *the base of the infinity of consciousness* is **40,000 eons.**
The worldling remains there all his life, and when he has completed the entire lifespan of those devas,
he goes to hell, to the animal realm, or to the preta realm.

⁴ *So tad assādeti tan nikāmeti tena ca vittim āpajjati.* This sentence occurs in: **(Tika) Āneñja S (A 3.114/1:267,7+22, 268,5) SD 57.5; (Nānā,karaṇa) Puggala S 1 (A 4.123/2:126,20, 127,4), SD 23.8a; (Nānā,karaṇa) Mettā S 1 (A 4.125/- 2:129,5) SD 33.9; Methuna S (A 7.47/4:54,17) related to sexual pleasures, SD 21.9.**

⁵ Abhidhamma views that a worldling, falling from the formless world may be reborn in the same world, or arise as a deva, or as an intelligent human being. Lower rebirths do not immediately follow the fall (*cuti*) from the formless world, but come in later rebirths, as it were, in a devolving process. See Abhs:BRS 226 f (5.40).

⁶ Ce Ee Se *yadidaṃ gatiyā upapattiyā sati* throughout; only Be omits *sati* in all the 3 occurrences of the sentence. It is, however, found in the parallels at **Nānā,karaṇa Puggala S 1 (A 4.123), SD 23.8a, and Mettā S 1 (A 4.125), SD 33.9.** This omission does not affect the sense of the passage since *sati* here can be an “inherent verb,” which is understood to apply even when omitted.

10 But **the Blessed One's disciple** remains there all his life, and when he has completed the full lifespan of those devas, he attains final nirvana in that very same state of existence.

11 This, bhikshus, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference [268] between the instructed noble disciple and the uninstructed worldling, that is, when there is future destiny and rebirth.

12 (3) Again, bhikshus, a certain person here, transcending the base of the infinity of consciousness, (perceiving:) **'There is nothing,'** enters and dwells in **the base of nothingness**.

13 He relishes it, longs for it, and finds joy in it. He remains there, intent upon it, dwells much in it, without falling from it.

When he dies, he is reborn in the company of *the devas of the base of nothingness*.

14 Bhikshus, the lifespan of the devas of *the base of nothingness* is **60,000 eons**. The worldling remains there all his life, and when he has completed the entire lifespan of those devas, *he goes to hell, the animal realm or the preta realm*.

15 But **the Blessed One's disciple** remains there all his life, and when he has completed the full lifespan of those devas, he attains final nirvana in that very same state of existence.

16 This, bhikshus, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the instructed noble disciple and the uninstructed worldling, that is, when there is future destiny and rebirth.

17 These, bhikshus, are the 3 kinds of persons found in the world."

— evaṃ —

201031 201102 210508