

# 20a

## (Navaka) Samiddhi Sutta

The (Nines) Discourse on Samiddhi | A 9.14

Theme: The nature of all things (Sāriputta)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2018, 2020

### 1 Summary and significance

#### 1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The **(Navaka) Samiddhi Sutta** (A 9.14) records Sāriputta's 9 questions that he asks the monk Samiddhi regarding a psychology of "intentions and thoughts" (*saṅkappa vitakka*), who answers them correctly, winning Sāriputta's endorsement, praise, and advice (SD 57.20a).

#### 1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

**1.2.1 The 9 questions** of the (Navaka) Samiddhi Sutta are divided into **4 parts** (summarized), thus:

##### A. EXPERIENCING THE "ALL" (*SABBA*) [1.2.2.1]

- |   |                      |                  |
|---|----------------------|------------------|
| (1) on what <b>basis</b> do <u>intentions and thoughts</u> arise in a person? | <u>name-and-form</u> | <i>nāma,rūpa</i> |
| (2) where do they become <b>diversified</b> ?                                 | <u>the elements</u>  | <i>dhātu</i>     |
| (3) in what do they <b>arise</b> ?  | <u>contact</u>       | <i>phassa</i>    |
| (4) in what do they <b>converge</b> ?   | <u>feeling</u>       | <i>vedanā</i>    |

##### B. LIMBS OF THE PATH (*MAGG'AṄGA*) [1.2.2.2]

- |                                      |                      |                |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| (5) by what are they <b>led</b> ?    | <u>concentration</u> | <i>samādhi</i> |
| (6) what <b>lords</b> over them?     | <u>mindfulness</u>   | <i>sati</i>    |
| (7) what is <b>superior</b> to them? | <u>wisdom</u>        | <i>paññā</i>   |

##### C. THE FRUITION (*PHALA*) [1.2.2.3]

- |  |                |                 |
|--|----------------|-----------------|
| (8) what is their <b>essence</b> [core]? | <u>freedom</u> | <i>viumutti</i> |
|--|----------------|-----------------|

##### D. THE GOAL (AWAKENING) (*NIBBĀNA*) [1.2.2.4]

- |  |                      |              |
|--|----------------------|--------------|
| (9) in what is their <b>firm footing</b> ? | <u>the deathfree</u> | <i>amata</i> |
|--|----------------------|--------------|

#### 1.2.2 Commentary (summarized)<sup>1</sup>

**1.2.2.1** The (Navaka) Samiddhi Sutta asks the 2<sup>nd</sup> question—*Where do intentions and thoughts (saṅkappa,vitakkā) become diversified?* [§2(2)]—and gives a unique answer: in **the elements** (*dhātu*), that is, the earth, water, fire and wind. Our thoughts and intentions take different forms and directions in terms of what we are, that is, the 4 elements, earth, water, fire and wind, and how we view each of these.

**The earth element** refers to the solid aspects of our body, by which we often physically judge a person's attractiveness. **The water element** is the liquid part of our body, that is, vital bodily fluids such as blood, lymph and semen, and also sweat, urine, pus, and other bodily fluids issuing from our body; we are mostly disgusted with these, or do not find them attractive. **The fire element** basically refers to our bodily heat and metabolism, but is essentially the decaying process of our body.

Finally, **the wind element** is any kind of gaseousness and bodily movement, especially peristalsis, and includes our breath, which is vital for our meditation practice. How we regard such bodily processes have karmic potential depending whether we do so wholesomely (as being impermanent, etc) or otherwise.

<sup>1</sup> For fuller commentaries on the various answers to the 3 sets of questions, see SD 57.20b (1.3).

Now, in the 1<sup>st</sup> question's answer [§2(1)], "name" (*nāma*) refers to the mind, or specifically, to "intentions and thoughts" here, and "form" (*rūpa*) to any or all of the 4 elements. Questions 1-4 deal with "experiencing the all (that is, the mind and its faculties)," that is, when the mind is confronted with experiencing these various processes of the elements as form (*rūpa*), it explodes into "mental proliferation" (*papañca*),<sup>2</sup> that is, all kinds of thoughts and emotions. This is simply another way of talking about "name-and-form," as in Sāriputta's 1<sup>st</sup> question.<sup>3</sup>

**1.2.2.2** The 2<sup>nd</sup> series of the 9 questions—nos. 5-7—refers to the path-training, or specifically, the trainings in concentration and in wisdom. Let us take a look at the short form of "the all" (*sabba*).<sup>4</sup> According to the answers to these questions, the mind is "led" (that is, shaped) by **concentration** (*samādhi*) and "lorded over" (that is, restrained or controlled) by **mindfulness** (*sati*). **Wisdom** is "superior" (it makes us a better person by our learning from experience so that we free ourselves from our mental defilements (greed, hate, delusion) and wholesomely rise above the current state of imperfection.

**1.2.2.3** The only question in the 3<sup>rd</sup> section—"the fruition" on the path—is to "the essence" or core (*sāra*) of thought (that is, the mind), which refers to the purpose of *mental cultivation*, that is, to free itself, that is, the **freedom** of the spirit. This is the basis for the answer to the 9<sup>th</sup> and last question here. [1.2.2.4]

**1.2.2.4** The last part of the 9 questions, too, has only one question, that is, about what the "firm footing" is for the mind. The answer is "**the death-free**" (*amata*), which is a name for nirvana, that is, full freedom from the cycle of lives and deaths. The mind has a *firm footing* here in the sense that it will not fall away on account of defilements that drag it down into a subhuman state. In fact, this refers to the attaining of the path, especially nirvana in this life, that is, the nirvana with remainder (that are the 5 aggregates—this is the living arhat.

## 1.3 RELATED SUTTAS AND TEACHINGS

### 1.3.1 Related suttas<sup>5</sup>

**1.3.1.1 The Kiṃ Mūlaka Sutta** (A 8.83) is a catechism of 8 questions of the sectarian wanderers on a general **philosophy** of "all things" (SD 32.10). The wanderers have no clear answers to any of these important questions. They tend at best to philosophically speculate on them, but even then, they have no clear teaching on the true purpose or final goal in their practice or goal in life.<sup>6</sup>

**1.3.1.2 The (Navaka) Samiddhi Sutta** (A 9.14) is Sāriputta's catechism of 9 questions on a **psychology** of "intentions and thoughts" (*saṅkappa, vitakka*) (SD 57.20a). Sāriputta is asking Samiddhi on the nature of thoughts, especially intentions, that is, karmic motives behind all our actions, which are rooted in greed, hate or delusion; and how they are finally overcome in this life itself.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (2); SD 57.1 (2.4.2.3).

<sup>3</sup> Cf the answer to the wanderer's 2<sup>nd</sup> question: SD 32.10 (1.3.1.2).

<sup>4</sup> On *sabba*, see SD 57.20b (1.2.1).

<sup>5</sup> For a summary, see SD 32.10 (1.3.0).

<sup>6</sup> For further details on A 8.83, see SD 32.10 (1.3.1 + SD 32.10).

<sup>7</sup> For further details on A 9.14, see SD 32.10 (1.3.2).

**1.3.1.3 The Bhagavā Mūlaka Sutta** (A 10.58) is the Buddha’s catechism of 10 questions centering on an **ontology** of “all things” (*sabbe dhammā*), which is also a comprehensive catechism on early Buddhist **teleology** (spiritual purpose and goal) and **soteriology** (salvation, that is, awakening), summarized by the Buddha himself (SD 57.20b).

While the wanderers speculate on the nature of being (ontology), the Buddha identifies desire (*chanda*) in the form of craving (*taṇhā*) as the root of “all things,” that is, how, through our sense-experiences, we conjure up virtual realities through name-and-form. Through attending (*manasikāra*) to “the elements,” the manifestations of *form*, we proliferate (*papañceti*) our thoughts in countless ways.

**1.3.1.4** In the answers to the questions of all the 3 suttas—**A 8.83**, **A 9.14** and **A 10.58**—we can then explain **the psychology** of concentration, mindfulness and wisdom as the “limbs of the path,” that is, the training in concentration (*samādhi, sikkhā*) and in wisdom (*paññā, sikkha*) [§2(5-7)].

Both **A 9.14** and **A 10.58** mention the fruit of these trainings as the attaining of the freedom (*vimutti*) that is nirvana in this life itself (with the 5 aggregates remaining).

Finally, **A 10.58**, in its answer to the 10<sup>th</sup> question—the “deathless” (*amata*)—refers to final nirvana, which is beyond life and death; hence, “deathfree.”<sup>8</sup>

### **1.3.2 Related teachings**

For a comparative study of the teachings of the 3 Suttas mentioned—A 8.83, A 9.14 and A 10.58—see the table at **SD 57.20b** (1.3).

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## (Navaka) Samiddhi Sutta The (Nines) Discourse on Samiddhi

A 9.14

Originating in Sāvatti.

**1** Then, the venerable Samiddhi approached the venerable Sāriputta. Having saluted the venerable Sāriputta, he sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, the venerable Sāriputta said this to the venerable Samiddhi:<sup>9</sup>

### **2 THE 9 QUESTIONS**

A. EXPERIENCING THE “ALL”<sup>10</sup>

(1) “On what **basis**, Samiddhi, do intentions and thoughts<sup>11</sup> arise in a person?”

*Kim ārammaṇā purisassa  
saṅkappa, vitakkā uppajjanti*

<sup>8</sup> For further details on A 10.58, see SD 32.10 (1.3.3) + SD 57.20b.

<sup>9</sup> Comy: Samiddhi is Sāriputta’s pupil (AA 4:175,21). In (**Aṭṭhaka**) **Mūlaka S** (A 8.83), the Buddha asks a similar set of questions (SD 32.10).

<sup>10</sup> On “the all” (*sabba*), see **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

- “On the basis of name-and-form,<sup>12</sup> bhante.”
- (2) “Now, Samiddhi, where do they become **diversified**?”  
“In connection with the elements, bhante.”
- (3) “Now, Samiddhi, in what do they **arise**?”  
“They arise in contact, bhante.”
- (4) “Now, Samiddhi, in what do they **converge**?”  
“They converge in feeling, bhante.”

*Nāma,rūpa**Te pana kva nānattarṃ gacchanti**Dhātu**Te pana kim samudayāti**Phassa**Te pana kim samosaraṇāti**Vedanā*

## B. LIMBS OF THE PATH

- (5) “Now, Samiddhi, by what are they **led**?”  
“They are led by concentration, bhante.”
- (6) “Now, Samiddhi, what **lords** over them?”  
“They are lorded over by mindfulness, bhante.”
- (7) “Now, Samiddhi, what is **superior** to them?”  
“Wisdom is superior to them, bhante.”

*Te pana kim pamukhāti**Samādhi**Te pana kim ādhipateyyāti**Sati**Te pana kim'uttarāti**Paññā*

## C. THE FRUITION

- (8) “Now, Samiddhi, what is their **essence** [core]?”<sup>13</sup>  
“Freedom<sup>14</sup> is their essence,<sup>15</sup> bhante.”

*Te pana kim sārāti**Vimutti*

## D. THE GOAL (AWAKENING)

- (9) “Now, Samiddhi, in what is their **firm footing**?”<sup>16</sup>  
“The firm footing is in the deathfree (*amat'ogadha*).”<sup>17</sup>

*Te pana kim ogadhāti**Amata*

## 3 REFRAIN

- (1) “Samiddhi, when you were asked:  
‘On what **basis**, Samiddhi, do intentions and thoughts arise in a person?’ you said:  
‘On the basis of name-and-form, bhante.’
- (2) Samiddhi, *when you were asked*:  
‘Now, Samiddhi, where do they become **diversified**?’ *you said*:  
‘In connection with the elements, bhante.’
- (3) Samiddhi, *when you were asked*:

<sup>11</sup> Comy: “Intentions and thoughts are thoughts that *are* intentions” (*saṅkappa,vitakkāti saṅkappa,bhūtā vitakkā*, AA 4:175,24). This is so because the 2 words are synonymous and often used interchangeably in the suttas (such as a limb of the noble eightfold path).

<sup>12</sup> *Nāma,rūp'ārammaṇā*. Comy: “With name-and-form as condition (*nāma,rūpa,paccayā*). By this, he shows that the 4 formless aggregates and form dependent on the primary elements are the conditions (*paccaya*) for thoughts” (AA 4:176,1 f).

<sup>13</sup> Comy: “When they have attained the fruition of freedom, they have attained the essence, too” (*phala,vimuttim patvā sāra-p,pattā honti*, AA 4:176,15 f).

<sup>14</sup> Here, “freedom” (*vimutti*) refers to the path-fruitions—streamwinning, once-returning and non-returning—just short of arhatness, represented by the next term, “firm footing.”

<sup>15</sup> On “liberation is their essence,” see SD 32.10 (4).

<sup>16</sup> *Ogadha* has 2 important senses: (1) firm footing (in water, esp in a ford), firm ground, a ford (U 70,21\*); (2) plunged into; immersed (usu regarding *nibbana*), esp in *amat'ogadha* (S 5:41,4, 54,28; Sn 635; Dh 411; Tha 168): CPD sv amatogadha. Both senses apply here.

<sup>17</sup> Or, “the firm footing is the deathfree [nirvana].” Comy explains *amat'ogadhā* with ref to the idea that the path and the fruition take nirvana as their object. “Having found a foothold in the deathfree nirvana as the object, they are established therein” (*ārammaṇa,vasena amatarṃ nibbānarṃ ogāhitvā tattha patiṭṭhitā*, AA 4:176,16 f).

- ‘Now, Samiddhi, from what do they **arise**?’ *you said:*  
‘They arise in contact, bhante.’
- (4) Samiddhi, *when you were asked:*  
‘Now, Samiddhi, in what do they **converge**?’ *you said:*  
‘They converge in feeling, bhante.’
- (5) Samiddhi, *when you were asked:*  
‘Now, Samiddhi, by what are they **led**?’ *you said:*  
‘They are led by concentration, bhante.’
- (6) Samiddhi, *when you were asked:*  
‘Now, Samiddhi, what **lords** over them?’ *you said:*  
‘They are lorded over by mindfulness, bhante.’
- (7) Samiddhi, *when you were asked:*  
‘Now, Samiddhi, what is **superior** to them?’ *you said:*  
‘Wisdom is superior to them, bhante.’
- (8) Samiddhi, *when you were asked:*  
‘Now, Samiddhi, what is their **essence** [core]?’ *you said:*  
‘Freedom is the essence, bhante.’
- (9) Samiddhi, *when you were asked:*  
‘Now, Samiddhi, in what is their **firm footing**?’ *you said:*  
‘The firm footing is in the deathfree.’

4 Sadhu! Sadhu! Samiddhi! When you were asked these questions you answered them well. But do not become conceited<sup>18</sup> on that account! [Don’t think too much about it!]<sup>19</sup>”

— evaṃ —

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<sup>18</sup> *Tena ca mā maññ’īti*. Sāriputta gives this advice because Samiddhi has not yet awakened as an arhat, one who has overcome conceit (*māna*) (Sn 382, 806, 813, 855; J 3:530).

<sup>19</sup> Or, don’t be too sure about it. Again, this advice is given because Samiddhi has not yet attained the state of full understanding; hence, his understanding is still theoretical, which can bring about conceit. For this other sense of *maññ’īti*, see Sn 840 (= *jānāti*, to know, Nm 192), 1049, 1142; Nc 491 *jānāti*; DhA 1:29.