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(Catukka) Cara Sutta

Ce **Caranta Sutta** The (Fours) Discourse on Walking | **A 4.11** = It 110/4.11/115-118 (SD 57.35)

Theme: Being spiritually diligent in every posture

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2021

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 The (Catukka) Cara Sutta (A 4.11) is a short teaching on the practice of **right intention** (*sammā saṅkappa*)—overcoming thoughts of sensuality, of ill will and of violence—in all of our 4 postures: walking, standing, sitting and lying down. This relates to right thought, the 2nd of the 8 limbs of the noble eight-fold path.

1.2 The same teaching recurs almost verbatim in **the (Iti) Cara Sutta** (It 110). The key difference is that It 110 has the traditional tag-lines that characterize every Iti,vuttaka sutta.

Both the Suttas close with the same set of verses of 14 lines—2 quatrains and a sextet—giving a full summary of the same teaching. These verses are all in the popular sloka: a verse, usually a quatrain with lines of 8 syllables each.

2 Right intention

2.1 SAMMĀ SAṅKAPPA

2.1.1 Sammā

In practical terms, *sammā* means “right, full, perfect”: in the sense of reflecting true reality or concurring to it.¹ **Right view** (*sammā, ditṭhi*), according to **the Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 141), refers to a full understanding of the 4 noble truths.²

The 1st noble truth, that of suffering, and the 2nd truth, truth of its arising, constitute the meaning of life. Life is impermanent; hence, it is unsatisfactory, suffering. When we understand this and accept this truth, we are only touched by physical suffering but not *mental* suffering.³

The 3rd noble truth, that of the ending of suffering, is nirvana; and the 4th noble truth is the path that leads to nirvana. Having understood the meaning of life, we now embark on the right purpose of life, that is, work towards the path of awakening, and to finally awaken, and be free of suffering. This is called **right knowledge** and **right freedom**, which completes our spiritual journey with the attaining of arhathood.⁴

2.1.2 Saṅkappa

2.1.2.1 Saṅkappa is polysemic (it has a number of meanings that can apply at the same time), reflecting on the difficulty of putting thought into **language**. Pali polysemy allows the flexibility and overlapping of senses in the words we use to describe the nature and functions of the mind which occur with a number of right conditions.

¹ On *sammā*, see SD 10.16 (1.1.1.3).

² See SD 10.16 (1.8.1.2).

³ See **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6), SD 5.5.

⁴ On right knowledge and right freedom, see SD 10.16 (9+10).

2.1.2.2 For example, when we see our existence in terms of **the 5 aggregates**, that is, as comprising body and mind, we see our body as **form** (*rūpa*)—either as comprising the 4 elements (earth, water, fire and wind), or the 5 physical senses (the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body)—and feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*saṅkhārā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*): these 4 formless aggregates are the functions and activities of our **mind**.

2.1.2.3 Feeling, for example, cannot arise by itself, but with the meeting of a sense-faculty, its sense-object and its sense-consciousness (this is our **consciousness** functioning). When these 3 meet, there is sense-contact: there is seeing, and so on. Yet, we don't just *see*, we **perceive** an object, we *recognize* it from past experience. Then, we think [2.2] about it, whether we *like* it, *dislike* it, or we simply *ignore* it: these are karmic **formations**. This is the beginning process of what we call "experience."⁵

2.2 VITAKKA

2.2.1 Vitakka as "thinking"

2.2.1.1 Vitakka in our daily life refers to "thinking" in a broad sense. This is the mental activity when we sense—see, hear, smell, taste or touch—something. We tend to *think* about it. Even more often, the mind, too, *thinks* up its own ideas, projects its own realities: they are called **views** (*ditṭhi*), which literally means, "what is seen (in our mind)." We usually say here that we are "conceiving" an idea: we have *created* a notion—this is part of the aggregate of **formations** (*saṅkhārā*).

2.2.1.2 The reality, as we well know, is that we don't just "think": we think and we think. The 2nd "think" refers to when we go on working with the "initial" thought that has arisen—like when we first notice an interesting object displayed on the shelf in a shopping mall. We then "look again," and keep thinking about it: "What is this? This must be good? Shall I buy it? How much is it? Is it worth it?" and so on. This is called "**pondering**" (*vicāra*), a sustained thinking activity.

2.2.1.3 Psychologically, what keeps us **thinking**, what causes or feeds our thinking activity? The simple answer is **craving** (*taṇhā*), which is itself rooted in ignorance.⁶ In other words, ignorance initiates our thinking, which is then fed by **greed** (*lobha*), or swayed by **hate** (*dosa*), or coloured by **delusion**. Thus, when we see something we *like*, we are fed by greed or lust; when we *dislike* it, we are swayed by hate; when we *neither* like nor dislike it, we have been numbed by ignorance (that is *delusion* on a deeper unconscious level).⁷

2.2.2 Vitakka, papañca, saṅkappa

2.2.2.1 We have noted the meaning of *vitakka* as "thinking," and its related word, *vicāra*, "pondering." Functioning together, we have the dvandva, **vitakka, vicāra**, "thinking and pondering," referring to a sustained activity of thinking that arises in our daily lives [2.2.1.3]. This is the kind of mental process that we go through as we engage with the world on a *generally manageable level*, even as a positive communication or engagement, so to speak.

⁵ For details on how these aggregates work together, see **SD 57.25 (3)** A psychology of feeling: an overview.

⁶ On how craving and ignorance work together, see SD 57.19a (1.2.2.3).

⁷ On the usage of *vitakka* in meditation, as "initial application," and *vicāra* as "sustained application," see **Vitakka, vicāra**, SD 33.4.

2.2.2.2 On a deeper, often pathological level, we tend to project much more of our **unconscious** conditionings onto our physical sensings—what we see, hear, smell, taste and touch—under the main influence of the way we think. How we think is projected *onto* our world of senses: the “**all**” (*sabba*) that is our virtually real existence: the world that we create and live in—this is more real to us than the world outside.⁸

2.2.2.3 In the **(Catukka) Koṭṭhita Sutta** (A 4.174), Sāriputta defines this virtual world of our 6 senses, as follows (on account of craving, views and conceit):

“So far as the range of **the 6 bases for contact** extends, that far extends the range of proliferation.⁹
So far as the range of **proliferation** extends, that far extends the range of the 6 bases for contact.”

(A 4.174/2:162 f), SD 57.36

“**The bases of contact**” (*phass’āyatana*) refers to the mental roots of our sense-experiences and our thoughts: they constitute our virtual world, which is more real to us than the world outside. Our virtual world extends as far as the reach of our senses, spatially or mentally. Our world is totally thought-created: it is created by, with and for our thought. This is called **mental proliferation** (*papañca*). [2.2.2.4]

2.2.2.4 Psychologically, *vitakka* and *sañkappa* are synonyms: they both share the sense, “thinking, thought.”¹⁰ The Abhidhamma tells us that there are 3 kinds of minds or consciousness: the wholesome (*kusala*), the unwholesome (*akusala*) and the neutral (*avyākata*).¹¹ The arhats have neutral karma, only function action, and suffer no new karmic fruits. We, so long as we are unawakened, are caught in the karmic duality of the wholesome and unwholesome (*kusalākusala*), binding us to samsara.

As a rule, all our thoughts, whether we are conscious of them or not, are either unwholesome or wholesome, mostly the former. Our unconscious conditioning, called **the latent tendencies** (*anusaya*)—basically, lust, revulsion and ignorance—work as greed, hate and delusion on the preconscious level to control our actions, proliferating our life with karmic formations (*sañkhārā*), that create and sustain our world, and feed (programme) our unconscious.

This means that heaven and hell are as real as we imagine or believe them to be, and our sufferings are self-inflicted, too. Nothing is more real than this, and yet nothing is more false—we are caught in this massive delusion. It is called samsara (*saṃsāra*).

2.2.2.5 Etymologically, *vitakka* is derived from *vi-* (a prefix denoting intensity) + *takka*, “thinking, reasoning, sophistry, doubt.” Hence, it means “thinking, wondering.” The (Catukka) Cara Sutta records the Buddha as instructing us (through the monks) to be well mindful *in all our actions*. We are specifically instructed to let go of negative thoughts. The recurrent word here is “**thought**” (*vitakka*), that is, sensual thoughts (*kāma, vitakka*), thoughts of ill will (*vyāpāda, vitakka*) and violent thoughts (*vihimsa, vitakka*). These are called “wrong thoughts or intentions,” and should be diligently avoided.

These thoughts are not only unwholesome (they bring suffering to us and others), and are self-feeding (they feed on our attachment to the self-idea), and grow prolifically, exponentially, crowding our minds and lives with notions of lust, ill will and violence. This is how we lost our humanity and fall into the subhuman states even here and now in this very human body.

⁸ See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

⁹ *Tavatā papañcassa gati*. Comy: “The range of proliferation, in terms of craving, views and conceit, extends as far as the range of the 6 bases” (*Yattkā channaṃ phass’āyatanānaṃ gati, tattakā va taṇhā, diṭṭhi, māna, pabhedassa papañcassa gati*, AA 3:151,3-5).

¹⁰ D 3:215; A 4:385; Dhs 7.

¹¹ See Dhs 1.

2.2.2.6 Saṅkappa comes from *saṁ-* (a prefix denoting togetherness, oneness) + *kappa*, “creating, contriving,” giving the literal sense of “directing one’s mind towards a single contrived purpose,” that is, intending, intention, of which the usual technical term is *cetanā*. Such a mind, in whatever posture or activity, “**is to be without zeal, without moral fear, constantly and ever lazy, low in effort.**” We do not progress personally, mentally or spiritually. The reason for this is that we are in a very unwholesome state of mind: as we think so we are.

2.3 POSTURES AND KARMA

2.3.1 THE 4 POSTURES

As humans, we inhabit the sense-world, meaning that we are mostly dependent on our senses and are defined by them. We have a body (the 5 elements, the 5 senses) and a mind [2.1.2.2]. While we are alive, our body assumes one of **the 4 postures** (*iriyā, patha*): walking, standing, sitting or lying down, as stated in the (Catukka) Cara Sutta below. Our body is *conscious*, making it a “**conscious body**” (*sa, viññāṇaka, kāya*). This means that our mind acts through the body and also by itself.¹²

2.3.2 TERMS FOR CONSCIOUSNESS

2.3.2.1 However, **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*) is a very complex early Buddhist term and refers to a wide range of mental states. Basically and practically, we can speak of it as being conscious, preconscious, unconscious and subconscious. All these states have been karma-created, fed by karma and continue to create karma: this is how we continue to exist in samsara. Only the liberated saint, the arhat (including the Buddha) is free from creating new karma that keeps us in samsara.

2.3.2.2 Our consciousness,¹³ then, exists on a **conscious** level as our mind (*mano*), working through our sense-based actions (seeing, etc) and through the mind as thinking.¹⁴ It is **preconscious**, as our private intentions (*cetanā*) just before we act, colouring it karmically.¹⁵ It is mostly **unconscious**, “stored away,” as it were, as latent tendencies (*anusaya*), over countless lives and aeons.¹⁶ When we die, the consciousness that remains and continues is called **the subconscious** or rebirth consciousness (*gandhabba; bhav’āṅga*).¹⁷

2.3.2.3 Notice that **karma** (*kamma*) works on us through consciousness, on a conscious level (through our 6 senses), a preconscious level (just before we act), an unconscious level (even when we are *not* acting), and a subconscious level (preparing us for more lives and suffering). Karma, then, is not always conscious; we can also act non-consciously, habitually, when we are not even aware of it.

A simple example is that of a hunter who is an expert in hunting and killing animals for sport, and so enjoys it. He is so used to killing that often he does not even think about it: he simply kills. In this case, even when he is *not* hunting, he is still creating karma, that is, when we think about it and when we speak about it. This is an example of **habitual karma**.¹⁸

¹² On the conscious body, see SD 17.8a (12.3); SD 56.1 (4.3.2.2) n.

¹³ On the 4 terms that follow, see SD 17.8b (1.1.2).

¹⁴ For details on consciousness, see **Viññāṇa**, SD 17.8a.

¹⁵ On the preconscious, see SD 17.8b esp (1.1.2; 2.2); SD 7.10 (3.3).

¹⁶ See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b.

¹⁷ On the subconscious, see SD 3.13 (5.3.2.3); SD 9 (9.10.5.2); SD 17.8a (6.1.2); SD 17.8b (3 + 5.1). On *bhav’āṅga*, see **The radiant mind**, SD 8.3; SD 36.1 (4.4.1). On *gandhabba* (gandharva), see SD 7.10 (3).

¹⁸ On how such bad karma arises in a ritual or social event, see (**Sattaka**) **Aggi S** (A 7.44/4:41-46), SD 3.16.

2.3.2.4 For this reason, we need to aspire to **streamwinning** right now. By aspiring to streamwinning, we think about streamwinning, we talk about it, we act on it by trying our best to keep to the precepts and cultivate moral virtue, and even when we do break a precept, we learn from it and correct ourself. We cultivate the mind by reflecting on impermanence. We are joyfully inclined to learn the Dharma of the suttas, and cultivate wisdom for a direct seeing into true reality and be free from suffering. With aspiration to streamwinning, every wholesome action we do brings us closer to the path. Even when we sometimes err, we quickly learn from our errors and get back on track heading for the path.

2.3.3 MINDFULNESS AND THE BASES OF CONTACT

2.3.3.1 According to **the (Catukka) Cara Sutta** (A 4.11), whether we are walking, standing, sitting or lying down, when any sensual thought, or a thought of ill will, or a thought of violence arises, and we *tolerate it, do not abandon it, nor dispel it, nor make an end of it, nor bring it to non-existence*, then, we are said to be “without zeal, without moral fear, constantly and ever lazy, low in effort.” In simple terms, we are unmindful.

According to the same Sutta (A 4.11), a wholesomely mindful person is one who “**does not tolerate it, but abandons it, dispels it, makes an end of it, brings it to non-existence.**” Such a person “*is said to be zealous, filled with moral fear, constantly and ever energetic and resolute.*” This person is said to be a true practitioner of the Buddha Dharma who will not only reach the path of awakening, but also attain “the highest awakening,” that is arhathood [§6].

2.3.3.2 The nature of **experience**, how we learn from it, and be free from it is explained in some detail in **the (Tika) Tittth’āyatana Sutta** (A 3.61).¹⁹ Whatever that exists all arise from **the 6 elements** (*cha dhātu*): the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the wind element, the space element and the consciousness element. The first 4 are the “great” or primary elements (*mahā, bhūta*) or aspects of matter (basically, solidity or resistance, fluidity or coherence, heat or decay, and gas or motion).²⁰ What contains them is called “space” (*ākāsa*). Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) or the mind is what experiences these physical elements.

How we experience these elements is described as **the “6 bases of contact,”** that is, our sense-stimuli: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling (tactile) and thinking. In simple terms, these are our “experiences.” Simply, this is how each of our sense-faculties (“the senses”) “knows” or cognizes its own sense-object, how we feel about this, and our reactions, or how we should respond to it in Buddhist training.²¹

2.3.3.3 The 6 bases of contact (*phass’āyatana*) are also mentioned in other suttas. **The (Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta** (A 5.30) teaches us that whatever arise through the 6 bases of contact are our “experiences.” Every one of them should be reflected as being impermanent as they arise, stay a moment, pass away.

The 6 bases of contact are briefly defined in **the Dhātu Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 140) as the bases of eye-contact, of ear-contact, of nose-contact, of tongue-contact, of body-contact, and of mind-contact, that is, the 6 kinds of sense-contacts.²² **Contact** (*phassa*), it should be understood, comprise the sense-faculty, its sense-object, its sense-consciousness: the meeting of these 3 is called sense-contact, thus:

¹⁹ For details, see **A 3.61/1:176** (SD 6.8). See also **(Catukka) Yoga S** (A 4.10/2:11 f), SD 105.1; **(Catukka) Koṭṭhita S** (A 4.17a/2:161), SD 57.36; **Nāgita S** (A 5.30,15/3:32) + SD 55.12a (3.4.4); **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29/5:64), SD 16.15.

²⁰ On the 4 elements, see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 11,8-11, with §12 on “space”), SD 3.11.

²¹ For a useful “experience” diagram, see SD 57.25 (Table 1.1.2).

²² M 140,7 (SD 4.17).

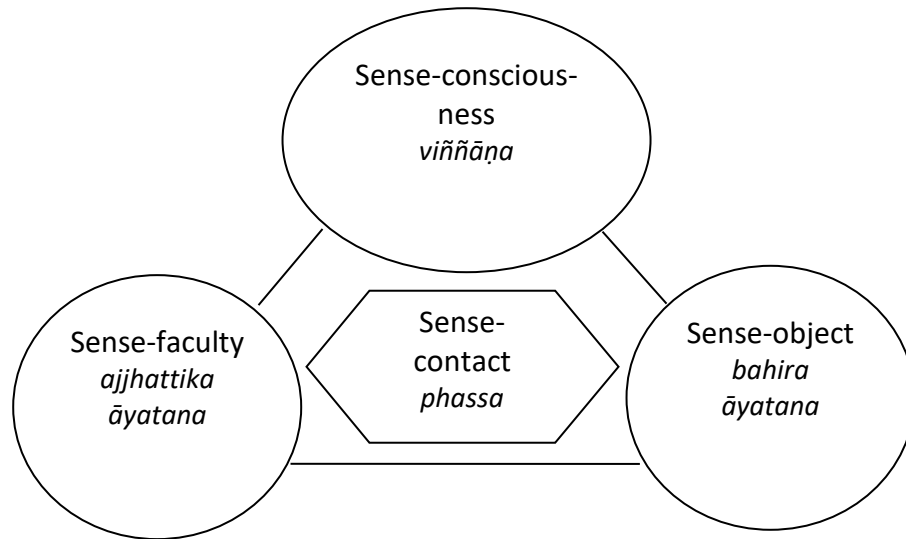


Table 2.3.3. The bases of contact. The triangle of sense-experience. For the sequence following “sense-contact” (feeling etc), see Table 1.2.2 (SD 57.25).

The Pañca-t, taya Sutta (M 102,25.1) more fully defines the “6 bases of contact” as the bases or sources on which all mental processes depend, that is, the 5 physical senses or faculties (*pañc’indriya*) and consciousness, which form the 6 internal bases (*ajjh’āyatana* or *ajjhatic’āyatana*), and the 6 external objects (*bāhir’āyatana* or *bāhiddh’āyatana*).²³ These are also called the 12 sense-bases (*dvāds’āyatana*).²⁴

The (Catukka) Koṭṭhita Sutta (A 4.17a) mentions **the 6 bases of contact** (*phass’āyatana*) in connection with awakening, that is, how an arhat (like the Buddha) experiences things. Since **consciousness** as we know it in an unawakened person does not exist in the arhat, there is no way we can describe such an “experience,” that is, to say whether it *is, is not, both is and is not, or neither is nor is not*. This is the nature of the awakened experience.²⁵

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²³ SD 40a.12 (3.12.2).

²⁴ On the 12 sense-bases, see **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1; **Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga S** (M 137,4+5), SD 29.5; SD 26.1 (3.2); SD 56.11 (2.1.2).

²⁵ A 4.17a/2:161 f (SD 57.36); also **(Catukka) Ānanda S** (A 4.17b/2:162), SD 57.37.

(Catukka) Cara Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse on Walking

A 4.11

1 THE UNMINDFUL MONK

(1) “Bhikshus, if a sensual thought, a thought of ill will, or a thought of violence²⁶ arises in a monk while **walking**,²⁷ and he tolerates it, does not abandon it, nor dispel it, nor make an end of it, nor bring it to non-existence;²⁸ then, bhikshus, that monk,²⁹ is said to be without zeal, without moral fear, constantly and ever lazy, low in effort, while walking.

(2) *If, bhikshus, a sensual thought, a thought of ill will, or a thought of violence arises in a monk while **standing**, and he tolerates it, does not abandon it, nor dispel it, nor make an end of it, nor bring it to non-existence; then, bhikshus, that monk, is said to be without zeal, without moral fear, constantly and ever lazy, low in effort, while standing.*

(3) *If, bhikshus, a sensual thought, a thought of ill will, or a thought of violence arises in a monk while **sitting**, and he tolerates it, does not abandon it, nor dispel it, nor make an end of it, nor bring it to non-existence; then, bhikshus, that monk, is said to be without zeal, without moral fear, constantly and ever lazy, low in effort, while sitting.*

(4) *If, bhikshus, a sensual thought, a thought of ill will, or a thought of violence arises in a monk while **lying down**, and he tolerates it, does not abandon it, nor dispel it, nor make an end of it, nor bring it to non-existence; then, bhikshus, that monk, is said to be without zeal, without moral fear, constantly and ever lazy, low in effort, while lying down.*

2 THE ARHAT

(1) But, bhikshus, if a sensual thought, a thought of ill will, or a thought of violence arises in a monk while **walking**, and he does *not* tolerate it, but abandons it, dispels it, makes an end of it, brings it to non-existence;³⁰ then, bhikshus, that monk,³¹ is said to be zealous, filled with moral fear, constantly and ever energetic and resolute, while walking.

²⁶ The 3 are components of wrong thought (*micchā,saṅkappa*) [1.1].

²⁷ *Carato ce pi bhikkhave bhikkhuno uppajjati kāma,vitakko vā vyāpāda,vitakko vā vihiṃsa,vitakko vā.*

²⁸ *Tañ ca [Ee It 110 ce, SD 57.35] bhikkhu adhivāseti na-p,pajahati na vinodeti na vyanti,karoti na anabhavaṃ gameti.*

²⁹ This + foll line: *Caram pi* bhikkhave bhikkhu evam,bhūto anātāpī anottāpī satataṃ samitaṃ kusito hīna,viriyo'ti vuccati.* *Only Ee *carañ ce pi*; *ce* should be omitted.

³⁰ *Tañ ca bhikkhu nādhivāseti pajahati vinodeti vyanti,karoti anābhavaṃ gameti.*

³¹ This + foll line: *Caram pi bhikkhave bhikkhu evam,bhūto ātāpī ottāpī satataṃ samitaṃ āradha,viriyo pahit'atto'i vuccati.*

(2) *If, bhikshus, a sensual thought, a thought of ill will, or a thought of violence arises in a monk while **standing**, and*

he does not tolerate it, but abandons it, dispels it, makes an end of it, brings it to non-existence;

then, bhikshus, that monk,

is said to be zealous, filled with moral fear, constantly and ever energetic and resolute, while standing.

(3) *If, bhikshus, a sensual thought, a thought of ill will, or a thought of violence arises in a monk while **sitting**, and*

he does not tolerate it, but abandons it, dispels it, makes an end of it, brings it to non-existence;

then, bhikshus, that monk,

is said to be zealous, filled with moral fear, constantly and ever energetic and resolute, while sitting.

(4) *If, bhikshus, a sensual thought, a thought of ill will, or a thought of violence arises in a monk while **lying down**, and*

he does not tolerate it, but abandons it, dispels it, makes an end of it, [14] brings it to non-existence;

then, bhikshus, that monk,

is said to be zealous, filled with moral fear, constantly and ever energetic and resolute, while lying down.

CLOSING VERSES

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|--|---|
| <p>3 <i>Caram̐ vā yadi vā tiṭṭham̐
nisinno udā vā sayam̐
yo vitakkaṃ vitakketi
pāpakaṃ geha,nissitam̐</i></p> | <p>Whether walking or standing,
sitting or lying down,
one who thinks bad thoughts
connected with the household life,</p> |
| <p>4 <i>kummagga,paṭipanno³² so
moha,neyyesu mucchito
abhabbo tādiso bhikkhu
phuṭṭhum̐ sambodhim uttamam̐</i></p> | <p>following the wrong path, he is
infatuated, led by delusion—
such a monk is unable to reach
the highest awakening.</p> |
| <p>5 <i>Yo caram̐ vā tiṭṭham̐ vā³³
nissinno udā vā sayam̐
vitakkaṃ samayitvāna
vitakkūpasame³⁴ rato
bhabbo so tādiso bhikkhu
phuṭṭhum̐ sambodhim uttamam̐</i></p> | <p>But one walking or standing,
sitting or lying down,
having calmed his thoughts,
delights in the stilling of thought—
such a monk is able to reach
the highest awakening.</p> |

paṭhamam

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³² Be *kummagga-p,paṭipanni*; Ce Ee Se so; It 110,6 *kummaggaṃ paṭipanno*.

³³ All MSS so; It 110,7 *yo caram̐ vā'tha tiṭṭham̐ vā*.

³⁴ It 110 *vitakkōpasame*, SD 57.35.