

37

(Catukka) Ānanda Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse on Ānanda | **A 4.174b** (A:Be 4.174)
Ee treats this sutta as a continuation of A 4.174a/2:161-162,3

Theme: The ending of the bases for contact is nirvana

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2021

1 Summary and significance**1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY**

1.1.1 The (Catukka) Ānanda Sutta (A 4.174b) records a brief dialogue between the elder Mahā Koṭṭhita and the elder Ānanda, who questions the former regarding the 6 bases for contact (*cha phass'āyatana*)¹: whether with their “remainderless fading away and ending” (*asesa, virāga, nirodha*) there is:

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|---|---------------------------------------|
| (1) anything else, | <i>att'aññāṃ kiñci</i> |
| (2) nothing else, | <i>n'atth'aññāṃ kiñci</i> |
| (3) both anything else and nothing else, | <i>atthi ca n'att'aññāṃ kiñci</i> |
| (4) neither anything else nor nothing else. | <i>n'ev'atthi no atth'aññāṃ kiñci</i> |

1.1.2 Koṭṭhita rejects all these 4 questions by Ānanda as being “wrongly put”: “Do not say so, avuso” (*mā h'evaṃ āvuso*).² The reason is that so long as there is any sense-base (the meeting of sense-faculty, sense-object and sense-consciousness), there is sense-contact, that is, the experience of sensing. Where there is sensing, there is thinking, which brings on mental proliferation (*papañca*). This is samsaric existence.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.1 The PTS Pali edition (Ee) of the (Catukka) Ānanda Sutta (A 4.174b) treats it as a continuation of the preceding **(Catukka) Mahā Koṭṭhita Sutta** (A 4.174a), taking the two as a single sutta (**A 4.174**). The Pali manuscripts of Sri Lanka (Ce), Myanmar (Be) and Thailand (Se) take them as 2 separate suttas: **A 4.174a** and **A 4.174b**.

There are at least 2 possible explanations for this interesting situation in the European version of the Sutta and the fact that the 2 Suttas repeat the same form with different actors. The 1st explanation, the simplest, is that the 2 texts are indeed contiguous, that the events of **A 4.174a** lead straight into those of **A 4.174b**. Immediately after the dialogue between Sāriputta and Mahā Koṭṭhita (the questioner), there follows **A 4.174b**, when Ānanda becomes the questioner, with Koṭṭhita (who knows the answers) as the teacher.

This is not surprising at all, since the tetrad of points (*catu koṭi*) is well known in the suttas. It is the stock formula for the posthumous state of a sentient being (*tathāgata*), that is, he either is, is not, both or neither. There is no “5th” alternative, that is, it refers to the “unconditioned,” nirvana, which is without predicate.³

¹ On the 6 bases of contact, see SD 57.34 (2.3.4).

² This is the 4th and last of the proper ways of answering a question, ie, (1) by a categorical answer, (2) by an analytical answer, (3) by a counter-question, or (4) putting aside the question (as being wrongly put): **Kathā, vatthu S** (A 3.67,2.3) + SD 46.11 (2.2).

³ See **(Aggi) Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72,16) + SD 6.15 (3.1).

1.2.2 The 2nd possibility is that **A 4.174a** has concluded, and at some later time, Ānanda, perhaps hearing of Sāriputta’s teaching to Koṭṭhita, wishing to know it, asks the very same questions to Koṭṭhita, who is familiar with the answers. It does not really matter, then, whether the two events are treated as contiguous or as separate events. They are the same teachings with the noble monks playing different roles for the benefit of our understanding of a profound teaching.

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(Catukka) Ānanda Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse on Ānanda

A 4.174b [For footnotes, see A 4.174a]

1 Then, the venerable **Ānanda** approached the venerable Maha Koṭṭhita, and exchanged greetings with him. When they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, he sat down to one side and asked the venerable Mahā Koṭṭhita:

(1) “Avuso [Friend], with the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, is there anything else?”

“Do not speak so, avuso.”

(2) “Avuso, *with the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, is there, then, nothing else?*”

“Do not speak so, avuso.”

(3) “Avuso, *with the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, is there, then, both something else and nothing else?*”

“Do not speak so, avuso.”

(4) “Avuso, *with the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, is there, then, neither something else nor nothing else?*”

“Do not speak so, avuso.”

2 “Avuso, when you are asked:

‘*With the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, is there something else?*’ you say: ‘*Do not say so, avuso.*’

And, avuso, when you are asked:

‘*With the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, is there, then, nothing else?*’ you say: ‘*Do not say so, avuso.*’

And, avuso, when you are asked:

‘*With the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, is there, then, both something else and nothing else?*’ you say: ‘*Do not say so, avuso.*’

And, avuso, when you are asked:

‘*With the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, is there, then, neither something else nor nothing else?*’ you say: ‘*Do not say so, avuso.*’

In what way, avuso, should the meaning of this statement be understood?”

3 (1) If one says, “Avuso, with the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, there is something else,’ one proliferates that which is not to be proliferated.

(2) If one says: ‘Avuso, with the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, there is nothing else,’ one proliferates that which is not to be proliferated.

(3) If one says: ‘Avuso, with the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, there is both something else and nothing else,’ one proliferates that which is not to be proliferated.

(4) If one says: ‘Avuso, with the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact, there is neither something else nor nothing else,’ one proliferates that which is not to be proliferated.

Avuso, so far as the range of the 6 bases for contact extends, that far extends the range of proliferation.

So far as the range of proliferation extends, that far extends **[163]** the range of the 6 bases for contact.

With the remainderless fading away and ending of the 6 bases for contact there is **the ending of proliferation**, the stilling of proliferation.”

— catuttham —

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