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## Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta

The Discourse to the Aṭṭhaka,nagara Man | **M 52**  
= **Dasama Sutta** The Discourse to Dasama | **A 11.17/5:342-347**<sup>1</sup> [A:B 11.16]

Theme: 11 ways to awakening

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2013

### 1 A comparative evaluation

**1.1 SUTTA VERSIONS.** The Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta, “the discourse to an Aṭṭhaka,nagara<sup>2</sup> man,” gives a list of 11 ways (in terms of meditation) to nirvana or “the death-free” (*amata*) (that is, free of the duality of death and birth). The 11 ways to nirvana are presented as “doors,” which are opened, as it were, by regarding each of these 11 bases of meditation as being “(mentally) constructed [mind-made], intentionally formed.”<sup>3</sup> What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending” [eg §4.3]:

- 1-4 The 4 form dhyanas [§§4-7]
- 5-8 The 4 divine abodes: lovingkindness, compassion, gladness, equanimity [§§8-11]
- 9-11 The first 3 formless dhyanas: the bases of infinite space, of infinite consciousness, and of nothingness [§§12-15] [1.3.1]

This Sutta is also found in the Book of Elevens (Ekā,dasaka Nipāta) in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, where it is called **the Dasama Sutta** (A 11.17), and has two Chinese parallels, one in the Madhyama Āgama (MĀ 217), and the other an individual translation (T92).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aṅguttara refs are *italicized*.

<sup>2</sup> Aṭṭhaka,nagara (note the short first *a* in *-nagara*) is mentioned only on the Sutta’s comys, which explains that the word, Aṭṭhaka,nāgara refers to “one who lives in Aṭṭhaka,nagara,” **aṭṭhaka,nāgaro**’ti aṭṭhaka,nagara,vāsī, MA 3:13; AA 5:84), but found nowhere else.

<sup>3</sup> *Idam pi kho paṭhamam jhānam abhisankhataṃ abhisañcetaṃ*. The phrase “(mentally) constructed [mind-made], intentionally formed” (*abhisankhataṃ abhisañcetaṃ*) here shows that a dhyana is a conditioned state primarily conditioned by intention (*cetanā*) (MA 3:13). The term **abhisañcetaṃ** (*abhi + saṃ + cetayita*), “raised into consciousness, thought out, intended, planned” (PED), is pp of *abhisañcetaṃ* (*caus of abhi+saṃ + √CIT*, “to perceive, know, appear”), “to think out, to plan” (CPD, DPL), of *abhisanceteti* (*abhi + saṃ + ceteti*), “to raise into consciousness, think out, devise, plan” (PED). Here, on a dhyana context, only the passive sense “raised into consciousness” applies, because thinking and knowing as we understand them do not arise during dhyana: see **The Buddha discovered dhyana @ SD 33.1b (6.2)**.

<sup>4</sup> The parallels to M 52 are A 11.17/5:342-347, MĀ 217 @ T1.802a-c, and T92 @ T1.916a-917a. All these 4 versions concur in locating the discourse at Pāṭali,putta. The Taisho ed says that T92 was tr by An Shigao 安世高 *Ān shì gāo*. Zürcher, however, does not include this tr amongst the works that can with certainty be attr to An Shigao (1991: 297). M 52 and MĀ 217 agree on the title Aṭṭhaka,nāgara 八城 *bā chéng*, while T92 @ T1.916a17 has the title “discourse spoken by the Buddha to the houselord Ten-limbs, a man from Aṭṭhaka,nagara,” 佛說十支居士八城人經 *fó shuō shízhī jūshì bāchéng rén jīng*. At MĀ 217 the protagonist is called 第十 *dishí*, which corresponds to Dasama of M 52, but T92 has 十支 *shízhī*, which in Pali would be Das’añga (Analayo 2011:309 n3). Ee and Se do not give any title for A 11.17, but refer it at A:Ee 5:358,31 and A:Se 5:390,19 in their respective chapter scholia (*uddāna*) as Dasama. At A:Be 3:542,25, it is titled Aṭṭhaka,nāgara,sutta and the scholium at A:Be 3:556,3 refers to it as Aṭṭhako (a mnemonic). Ce gives two titles: A:Ce 6:646,1 introduces the discourse as Aṭṭhaka,nāgara,sutta, but the scholium at A:Ce 6:674,31 refers to it as Dasamo. On MĀ 217, see THICH MINH CHAU 1964:101. For a comparative study, see Analayo 2011:309-313.

## 1.2 SUTTA OPENING

**1.2.1 Dasama seeks Ānanda.** The Sutta opens by saying that the houselord **Dasama**, who is in Pāṭali,putta on some business, visits a monk to find out where Ānanda is staying. The introductory narrative in the two Chinese versions offers additional details, explaining that the houselord Dasama, having concluded some business at great profit, approaches a group of monks. They teach him the Dharma in various ways, and he rejoices in it.<sup>5</sup> Dasama then asks them for Ānanda's whereabouts.

**1.2.2 No mention of the Buddha.** As a rule, a sutta, even when spoken by a disciple, begins by saying where the Buddha is staying at that time. There is no such mention at all in the Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta, from which we can deduce that the Buddha has passed away. Both the Chinese parallels, in fact, state that the Buddha has recently attained parinirvana.

## 1.3 ĀNANDA'S ANSWER TO DASAMA'S QUESTION

### 1.3.1 The 11 spheres of perception

**1.3.1.1** The 4 versions agree that the houselord Dasama asks Ānanda if there is *one* way, taught by the Buddha, that leads to the destruction of the mental influxes (arhathood). Ānanda replies by stating that there are actually 11 ways by which awakening can be gained through cultivating insight based on any of the 4 dhyanas [§§4-7], the 4 divine abodes [§§8-11], or the first 3 formless attainments [§§12-14].

**1.3.1.2** However, while the Pali Sutta mentions only the first 3 formless attainments, the Chinese versions include here the fourth, the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception<sup>6</sup> [3]. As will be noted below [3.1.2], this is unwarranted, because this base is too subtle for any meditative contemplation, and can only be experienced in itself, or by way of reflecting on emptiness [3.1.2.2].

**1.3.1.3** The 4 form dhyanas and the 4 formless dhyanas as a set form the “8 attainments” (*aṭṭha-samāpatti*). When a 9<sup>th</sup> attainment—that of the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vedayita, nirodha*)—is added this set, it is called **the 9 “progressive abodes”** (*anupubba, vihāra*). The 9<sup>th</sup> attainment can only be attained by the Buddha or an arhat. The 9 progressive abodes are mentioned in **the (Anupubba) Vihāra Suttas 1+2** (A 9.32+33).<sup>7</sup>

**1.3.2 Difference in cultivation of insight.** The Pali and Chinese versions differ also in their description on how to cultivate insight in terms of the various levels of concentration. According to the Majjhima Nikāya and Aṅguttara Nikāya Sutta, *each attainment should be reflected on as being conditioned and impermanent* [2]. The Madhyama Āgama version, on the other hand, speaks of *reflecting a dharma in the dharmas*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> MĀ 217 @ T1.802a20 and T92 @ T1.916a29 report that the houselord is so delighted at these teachings that he is speechless for a while, after which he asks for Ananda.

<sup>6</sup> MĀ 217 @ T1.802b27 and T92 @ T1.916c8.

<sup>7</sup> A 9.32+33/4:410-414 @ SD 95.1+2.

<sup>8</sup> MĀ 217 @ T1.802b9: 觀法如法 *guān fǎ rú fǎ*. See also T92 @ T1.916b18, which appears to imply the same. The injunction to contemplate “a dharma in the dharmas” occurs in **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10), where one of its implications is to contemplate arising and passing away (M 10/1:60,30) + SD 13.3. To cultivate insight into the impermanent nature of deep concentration experiences would indeed be a powerful method to cultivate revulsion (*nibbidā*) towards such experiences. A problem with applying this to MĀ 217, however, is that the Madhyama Āgama parallel to

## 2 Cultivating insight based on calm

### 2.1 CULTIVATING INSIGHT

**2.1.1** We have already noted that the Pali and Chinese versions differ in their description of how to cultivate insight in terms of the various levels of calm or dhyana [1.3.1]. Both **the Aṭṭhaka, nāgara Sutta** (M 52) and **the Dasama Sutta** (A 11.17)—which are identical—state that each attainment should be reflected on thus:

Even this (dhyana | divine abode | formless attainment) is (mentally) constructed, intentionally formed. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.” [§4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 7.3, 8.3, 9.3, 10.3, 11.3, 12.3, 13.3, 14.3]<sup>9</sup>

**2.1.2** This reflection is applied to all the states or stages of mental concentration (“calm,” *samatha*) so as to switch to “insight” (*vipassanā*). Here, this approach is applied to all the 11 levels of meditative concentration (the 4 dhyanas, the 4 divine abodes, the 3 formless attainments) so they become “ways to the death-free.” This refrain is on the attainment of calm (*samatha*) leading to the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*).

**2.1.3** Technically, this approach is known as “**insight preceded by calm**” (*samatha, pubbaṅgamā vipassanā*), that is, on emerging from a dhyana, a divine abode, or a formless attainment (one of the 11 concentration states), we contemplate on it as an object of insight, reflecting that it has arisen through conditions, especially volition [§4.3 etc].<sup>10</sup> This is said to fruit in either arhathood or non-returning [§4.5 etc].

**2.2 FRUITS OF THE PRACTICE.** The Pali and Chinese versions state that these respective approaches to insight can lead to arhathood or to non-returning. When describing the lesser of these two alternatives, the Aṭṭhaka, nāgara Sutta and the Dasama Sutta state that the attainment of non-returning arises on account of the practitioner’s “desire in the dharmas” (*dhamma, raga*) [§4.5 etc], that is, some level of subtle attachment to his meditative states.<sup>11</sup>

It should be noted here that the “desire in the dharmas” is *not* instrumental in assuring at least non-returning. The Commentary explains *dhamma, raga* as referring to an attachment to our meditative experiences, that as such prevents the attainment of full awakening (MA 3:146,28). These two—arhathood and non-returning—are, in a way, *stages or levels* of sainthood.<sup>12</sup> In other words, while for arhathood all the 10 fetters are destroyed, for the non-returned only the first 5 (the lower fetters) have been overcome.<sup>13</sup>

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Satipaṭṭhāna S (MĀ 98 @ T1.584a14) does not mention contemplation of arising and passing away in its description of contemplating a dharma in the dharmas.

<sup>9</sup> M 52/1:350,13 etc = A 2.17/5:343,22 etc; see also Hamilton 1996: 195 f, 2000:195 f.

<sup>10</sup> See **(Yuganaddha) Paṭipadā S** (A 4.170/2:157), SD 41.5. Cf **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121), where this reflection is applied instead to “this signless mental concentration, too” (*ayam pi kho animitto ceto, samādhī*), in ref to arhathood (M 121,11/3:108), SD 11.3. Cf also **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,22/3:244), SD 4.17. For a similar dhyana, but in connection with the 5 aggregates, see **Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 64,9/1:435,33-35), SD 21.10.

<sup>11</sup> Further see SD 41.4 (2.2) Two possible fruits.

<sup>12</sup> See Harvey 2003:319, who here notes that *dhamma, raga* as “spiritual desire may be what holds a person back from the highest attainment,” whereas Webster sees *dhamma, raga* as part of what “ultimately leads to nibbana” (2005:102).

<sup>13</sup> **The 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6)

The expression “desire in the dharmas” also occurs in the Madhyama Āgama version.<sup>14</sup> The Madhyama Āgama version and the individual translation, however, takes *dharmā,rāga* almost literally to mean “desire for the Dharma.”<sup>15</sup> The individual Chinese translation relates such a desire to the cultivating of the Dharma (the teaching) and to having reverence for it.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the expressions “desire in the dharmas,” or “craving for the Dharma/dharmas,” or “lust for the Dharma/dharmas,” seems to have positive connotations in the present context.<sup>17</sup>

**2.3 DASAMA’S GRATITUDE.** The Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta and its Chinese parallels record that the houselord **Dasama** is delighted that Ānanda has shown 11 (or according to the Chinese versions, 12) [2.2] ways to liberation on being asked to point out just a single *one*.<sup>18</sup> By way of illustration, he compares this to a man who is able to escape from a burning house through any of its 11 (or 12) doors.

The 4 versions agree that the houselord Dasama expresses his gratitude by inviting the community of monks for a sumptuous meal the next day and by building a lodging for Ānanda [§16]. The Chinese versions note that Ānanda hands the building over to the sangha of the four quarters.<sup>19</sup>

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greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (or remorse) (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*). See **Kiṭṭa,giri S** (M 70) @ SD 11.1 (5.1); (**Sekha**) **Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3(2); also S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377.

<sup>14</sup> MĀ 217 @ T1.802b11: 欲法 yù fǎ.

<sup>15</sup> MĀ 217 @ T1.802b11 and T 92 @ T1.916b21: 愛法 ài fǎ; see also **Abhidharma,kośa Vyākhyā** in Wogihara 1971: 273,25, which in a similar context reads *tenaiva dharma-c,chandena tenaiva dharma,snehena tenaiva dharmā,premna tayaiva dharmābhiratāya*.

<sup>16</sup> T92 @ T1.916b21: 彼自愛法, 彼自習法, 彼自敬法 bǐzì àifǎ, bǐzì xífǎ, bǐzì jìng fǎ; see also the otherwise unrelated discourse SĀ 866 @ T2.219c21, where “desire for the Dharma” occurs together with recollecting the Dharma and delighting in it as the qualities by which we are reborn in the Brahmā world, 即以此欲法, 念法, 樂法功德, 生大梵天中 jí yǐcǐ yùfǎ, niànfǎ, lèfǎ gōngdé, shēng dàifàntiān zhōng.

<sup>17</sup> Although the word *rāga* (desire, lust) may literally evoke negative connotations, even the word *taṇhā* (craving) occurs in (**Taṇhā**) **Bhikkhuṇī S** (A 4.159/2:145,34 @ SD 10.14) and its parallel, SĀ 564 @ T 2:148b20) with positive connotations. Both assert that based on *craving*, craving should be overcome, *taṇhaṃ nissaya taṇhaṃ pahatabbāti*, 依愛斷愛 yī ai duàn ài, followed by explaining the first instance of craving to represent the wish to attain freedom. In a similar way, (**Kosambī**) **Unnābha S** (S 51.15/5:272,16 @ SD 10.10) indicates that *chanda* (desire), can be used in a positive way, a wholesome desire. Its parallel, SĀ 561 @ T 2:147a19, makes the same point in slightly different ways, indicating that craving should be overcome by desire, 依於欲而斷愛 yī yú yù ér duàn ài. Such instances highlight that in the early discourses, words are rarely used as technical terms as is often the norm in later texts. By the time of the Abhidharma and the Commentaries, technical terms are more well defined, and terms such as “lust” and “craving” tend to be used *only* with a negative meaning. In the sutta, however, such terms are not restricted to the meanings given to them in later works and at times their usage may even seem to contradict with the definitions found in the Abhidharma and the Commentaries.

<sup>18</sup> While according to M 52/1:353,3, M:Ce 2:26,4, and M:Se 2:22,19, the houselord Dasama is able to “hear” “11 doors to the death-free,” *savanāya*, according to M:Be 2:15,25, he is able to “develop” them, *bhāvanāya*. Again, while in A 11.17/5:346,32 and A:Be 3:546,7, he is able to “pursue” these 11 doors, *sevanāya*, in A:Ce 6:654,5 and A:Se 5:376,20 he is able to “hear” them, *savanāya*. MĀ 217 @ T1.802c9 describes that the houselord is able to “attain a safe emerging,” 得安隱出 dé ān yǐn chū (Analayo’s tr, based on another occurrence of the expression 安隱出 ān yǐn chū in MĀ 206 @ T1.781b14, where it forms the counterpart to *sotthinā abhinibbhijjiturū* in its parallel, M 16/1:104,10), in dependence on these doors to the death-free, while T92 @ T1.916c20 proclaims that “relying on each of these doors to the death-free, each will lead out,” 依各甘露門, 各當出之 yī gè gānlùmén, gè dāng chū zhī. (Analayo 2011:312 n15)

<sup>19</sup> MĀ 217 @ T1.802c24 and T 92 @ T1.916c29.

### 3 The 3 attainments

#### **3.1 THE SPHERES OF PERCEPTION IN THE SUTTAS**

**3.1.1 The 3 formless spheres.** The Pali Subcommentary explains that Ānanda does not mention the attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception because it is too subtle an attainment for any cultivation of insight.<sup>20</sup> The vestiges of mental formations in this attainment are too subtle for any meditator to perceive, what more to reflect on. In other words, it is such a refined spiritual state that there is no way to be conscious of it, except for us to be within the attainment itself. Unlike the other attainments or dhyanas, from which we could emerge to reflect on it, the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is so subtle that once we are out of it, there is no way of reviewing it at all.

The same 7-stage sequence is found in **the Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (M 64), where the meditations stop at the attainment of nothingness, and after the attaining of each of these deep concentrations, it is used as a basis for the cultivation of insight.<sup>21</sup> The same pattern is again seen in the description of rebirths in their corresponding realms (*āyatana*), such as that described in **the (Tika) Āneñja Sutta** (A 3.114), which describes how a noble disciple, on being reborn in any of the formless realms, will attain final nirvana there, but there is no mention of the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.<sup>22</sup>

Again, insight contemplations described in **the Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta** (M 52) and **the Mahā Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (M 64), too, do *not* mention the 4<sup>th</sup> formless attainment in the stages of meditative states that include the other three formless attainments,<sup>23</sup> clearly because the nature of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is such that it is unsuitable for the cultivation of insight as described in these suttas. [3.2]

#### **3.1.2 The 4 formless spheres**

**3.1.2.1 A “SPHERICAL” INTRUSION?** The same principle may well apply to **the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta** (M 121), which is also concerned with the cultivation of insight based on deep concentration.<sup>24</sup> In fact, notes **An-alyo**, the Sutta’s similarity of sequence between several steps of the gradual entry into emptiness (*suññatā*) and the standard exposition of the formless attainments found elsewhere could easily have been responsible for an intrusion, perhaps quite unintentionally, of the 4<sup>th</sup> formless attainment into **the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta** during the transmission of the Sutta.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *N’eva,sañña,na,saññāyatana,dhammānaṃ saṅkhārā,vasesa,sukhuma,bhāva-p,pattatāya tattha sāvakānaṃ dukkaraṇ’ti*, MApT:Be 2:9.

<sup>21</sup> M 64,15.2/1:436,28 @ SD 21.10 and its parallel MĀ 205 @ T1.780a16

<sup>22</sup> A 3.114/1:267 f), SD 74.15.

<sup>23</sup> M 52/1:352,33 and M 64/1:437,6. The parallels to M 52, MĀ 217 @ T1.802b27 and T92 @ T1.916c8 however differ by way of *including* the 4<sup>th</sup> formless attainment in their treatment of the meditation stages. Maithrimurthi 1999: 97 n136 thinks that such a ref to the 4<sup>th</sup> formless attainment was probably added “mechanically,” ie, by way of conforming to the complete set of four formless attainments. The Chin parallel to M 64, MĀ 205 @ T1.780a17, agrees with the Pali version on listing the stages only up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> formless attainment. The same sequence also applies to the corresponding realms of rebirth, since A 3.114/1:267,1-268,19 describes how a noble disciple, on being reborn in any of these 3 formless realms, will attain final nirvana there, a presentation that also does not include the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

<sup>24</sup> M 121/3:104-109 @ SD 11.3.

<sup>25</sup> Hinüber 1996/1997: 31 explains that “pieces of texts known by heart may intrude into almost any context once there is a corresponding key word.”

On the other hand, surmises **Analayo**, it is less probable that a reference to the 4<sup>th</sup> formless attainment would have been accidentally lost in the Chinese and Tibetan versions, and it would be even more difficult to think of a reason for its intentional omission. In sum, concludes Analayo, “it seems probable that neither-perception-nor-non-perception should not be included as a step in the gradual approach to emptiness.” (2012a:337 f)

**3.1.2.2 REFLECTING ON EMPTINESS WITH 4<sup>TH</sup> FORMLESS ATTAINMENT.** The presence of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception in the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness, that is, a perception of nirvana as being “empty” (*suñña*), in **the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta** (M 121) [3.1.2.1], is neither a transmission error (an accidental addition) nor a later interpolation (for the sake of completing a set of attainments). This sphere attainment is integral to the teaching on the progressive attainments [1.3.1.3] resulting from the perception of nirvana as “empty,” leading up to awakening itself.<sup>26</sup>

It has already been elaborated that the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception can only be experienced in itself. Once we have emerged from it, we would be unable to “think” of it in any way so as to reflect on its impermanence [3.2]. Whatever is described in the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta of this attainment is *by inference*, and not a direct description of it. The passage on the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is as follows:<sup>27</sup>

**1** [The meditator] then attends to **the oneness dependent on the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception**.

**2** His mind plunges into that perception ... , brightens up, steadies and frees itself.

**3** He understands thus:

‘Whatever disturbances there might be on account of the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness ... on account of the perception of the sphere of nothingness, there are none here;

**4** There is only this much **disturbance**, namely, the oneness dependent on the perception of *the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception*.’

**5** He understands thus:

‘This field of perception is empty of the perception of the sphere of infinite consciousness. This field of perception is empty of the perception of the sphere of nothingness.

**6** There is only this **non-emptiness**, namely, the oneness dependent on the perception of *the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception*.’

**7** Thus, he regards what is *not* there as empty, but as to what *remains* there, he knows what that is, thus: ‘There is this.’

**8** Thus, Ānanda, this is his *truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness*.

(M 121,9/3:107, abridged & numbered), SD 11.3

**Line 1** describes how the meditator, after emerging from the previous two attainments—those of the sphere of infinite consciousness and the sphere of nothingness—goes on to find samadhi in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. **Line 2** describes his mind in the same words as for all the 8 stages of this meditation [see n above]. **Lines 3+4** refers to his meditation-object (the sphere that is the basis for his samadhi), which however is still not perfect (not bringing about awakening). In other words, as evident from **line 6**, this sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is not really “empty” (like

<sup>26</sup> M 121/3:104-109 (SD 11.3).

<sup>27</sup> This is the 6<sup>th</sup> of 8 stages, thus: (1) the perception of a forest, (2) the perceptions of earth, (3) the perceptions of the sphere of infinite space, (4) the perceptions of the sphere of infinite consciousness, (5) the perceptions of the sphere of nothingness, (6) *the perceptions of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception*, (7) the signless concentration of mind, and (8) arhathood (M 121/3:104-109), SD 11.3.



nirvana), and so regarded as “this” (*idam*) [line 7], which can be mistaken for the self.<sup>28</sup> Line 8 is a refrain that closes every stage of the meditation series. Hence, it is contextual, meaning that it only refers to the level of emptiness attained at that level, but only the eighth refrain, referring to the last meditation, is “supreme and unsurpassed” because it brings about arhathood.<sup>29</sup>

The point of this comment is that even here the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is not reflected on with insight. As mentioned below, this is because of its profound subtlety [3.2]. It is significant that while here, in **the Aṭṭhaka, nāgara Sutta**, the insight refrain—“What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending” (*yam kho pana kiñci abhisankhatam abhisāñcetaṅgataṃ, tad aniccaṃ nirodha, dhamman ti*)—is applied to all the 11 meditations [§4.3 etc], in **the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta**, it is applied only to the 8<sup>th</sup> and last meditation, that is, the signless concentration of mind (*animitta ceto, samādhi*).<sup>30</sup> The insight refrain there is not applied to the perception of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

### 3.2 THE SPHERES OF PERCEPTION: A COMPARATIVE NOTE

**3.2.1 Perception as means of insight.** While the Aṭṭhaka, nāgara Sutta and Dasama Sutta mention only the first 3 formless attainments, their Chinese versions include here the fourth, the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.<sup>31</sup> As **Maithrimurthi** notes, this reference to the fourth formless attainment was probably added “mechanically,” that is, by way of conforming to a complete set of 4 formless attainments (1999:97 n136).

Furthermore, **the (Āsava-k, khaya) Jhāna Sutta** (A 9.36) says, “As far as there is attainment of perception (*saññā, samāpatti*), that far there is penetration into direct knowledge.”<sup>32</sup> Here, “penetration into direct knowledge (*aññā, paṭivedha*) refers to arhathood, which can only be attained through insight, which, in turn works only when clear perception (*saññā*) (here meaning “consciousness,” *citta*) is present. **The Satta Dhātu Sutta** (S 14) similarly uses the term *saññā, samāpatti* only with attainments up to the sphere of nothingness.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.2.2 Perception and awakening

**3.2.2.1** This important statement refers to how the meditation-objects for the cultivation of insight are confined to “the perception attainments” (*saññā, samāpatti*), that is, the spheres of perception or meditative concentrations where perception is still possible, in line with the above commentarial explan-

<sup>28</sup> When “this” is identified with the self, it is called “that” (*tam*). On rejecting “thatness,” see **Atammayatā**, SD 19.13.

<sup>29</sup> M 121,11+12/3:108 f (SD 11.3).

<sup>30</sup> M 121,11/3:108 (SD 11.3).

<sup>31</sup> MĀ 217 @ T1.802b27 and T92 @ T1.916c8 [1.1].

<sup>32</sup> *Yāvatā saññā, samāpatti, tāvatā aññā, paṭivedha*, A 9.36/4:426,9 (SD 33.8). For a parallel, see a sutta quotation in **Abhidharma Samuccaya**, Pradhan 1950:69,15, already noted by Schmithausen 1981:224 and Ruegg 1989:200.

<sup>33</sup> S 14:11/2:151,111 (SD 74.14). Schmithausen points to similar statements found in **Abhidharma, samuccaya** in Pradhan 1950:69,15: *yāvad eva samjñā, samāpattiḥ & tāvad aññā, pravedha iti* and T1602 @ T31.576c11: 唯依有想 三摩鉢底領解通達 *wéi yī yǒu xiǎng sānmóbōdǐ líng jiě tōngdá* (1981:224 nn86+87 and 229 n106); see also Ruegg 1989:200. **Yogācāra, bhūmi** (T1579 @ T30.859a13) explains that, unlike the attainment of nothingness, the attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception *cannot* be used as a path for the destruction of the influxes, 非想非非想處, 無漏道 *fēi xiǎng fēi fēi xiǎng chù, wú lòu dào* (cf T1550 @ T38.823b18), but from the perspective of cultivating insight can only be used for cultivating revulsion towards the sphere of nothingness. Cf discussion in **the Dharma, skandha**, which describes the cultivation of insight based on dhyanas and on the first 3 formless attainments, up to the sphere of nothingness (T1537 @ T36.494a22).

ation [3.1]. The attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is not listed here because it is not a suitable object for the cultivation of insight.

That the attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception is not a suitable object for the cultivation of insight becomes clear when we understand what *saññā* means here. It is not our normal sense-perception, that is, our reacting to sense-experiences, but it is pure mental processes that occur in meditation. Hence, *saññā* here refers to mere “mind-consciousness” (*mano, viññāṇa*), mental processes, in the case of the unawakened.

**3.2.2.2 Mind-consciousness** (*mano, viññāṇa*), as such, is a broad term for all our mental processes, including both wholesome and unwholesome states. In deep meditation, however, only wholesome (*kusala*) or beautiful (*subha*)<sup>34</sup> states occur, but in the unawakened, when such mental states cease, the mental hindrances (or at least a few of them) return in due course. Since an arhat’s mind is free from such vicissitudes or uncertainties, it is best described as pure “thought” (*citta*).<sup>35</sup>

When we are in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, our mind is so refined that it cannot be said to be either conscious or not. In simple terms, no thinking or knowing occurs in such a state, and it is such a profoundly subtle and blissful state, that on emerging from it, there is no way we can fix our non-meditating mind on it, much less to reflect on it as being impermanent, etc (except, of course, in an intellectual or theoretical manner).

**3.2.2.3** Is the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, then, “useless” for the purpose of mental cultivation and self-awakening? The fact remains that this base is too subtle for any kind of perception or mentation. However, it can be reflected on *after the fact*. On emerging from it, a skilled meditator may, if he chooses, go on to contemplate it as being “mind-made” and so on [eg §14.3].

In fact, we do see the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception listed as the 8<sup>th</sup> stage in the list of the 8 “liberations” (*vimokkha*), as found in **the Vimokkha Sutta** (A 8.66), and in the 9 “progressive abodes” (*anupubba, vihāra*), as found in **the (Anupubba) Vihāra Suttas 1+2** (A 9.32+33).<sup>36</sup> Note that the base is listed towards the end, suggesting that we need to master the earlier stages in order to master it. The arhats, however, have no difficulty at all with such a meditation.

**3.2.3 The 4<sup>th</sup> formless attainment and awakening.** The *Cūḷa Suññata Sutta* (M 121) is remarkable in describing how the reflection on nirvana as being “empty” (*suñña*) can lead to awakening [3.1.2.2]. We might ask why can’t we reflect on the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception in the same way, so that we attain nirvana? The simple answer is that there is *some trace of consciousness there*, albeit a very subtle one. Nirvana, on the other hand, is empty of consciousness and all attributes (which is as far as language goes when we talk about a state beyond words).

Another question we might ask in this connection is why such a great meditator like Rāma (Uddaka’s father)<sup>37</sup> was unable to gain awakening even after attaining the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception? The first answer has already been given above, that is, despite its subtlety, this state still has some subtle vestiges of consciousness. Secondly, Rāma practised a meditation that is based on the

<sup>34</sup> Here *subha* refers to a mental state that is free from the 4 perversions (*vipallāsa*) of perception (*saññā*~), of thought (*citta*~), and of view (*diṭṭhi*~): see **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52), SD 16.11. Cf DA 3:754; MA 1:239; SnA 1:156; ThīA 79 (*ayoniso, manasikāra*); PmA 2:436 (*eso me attā*), 3:696; VbhA 215.

<sup>35</sup> On *citta*, *mano* and *viññāṇa* as synonyms for “mind,” see SD 20.2 (2). On the arhat’s mind & *citta, saṅkharo*, see **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44/1:299-305) @ SD 40a.9 (2.4.3).

<sup>36</sup> **Vimokkha S** (A 8.66/4:306), SD 95.11, and **(Anupubba) Vihāra S 1+2** (A 9.32+33/4:410-414), SD 95.1+2.

<sup>37</sup> See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,16/1:165 f), SD 1.11.



notion of an eternal soul (*atta*; Skt *ātman*). With such a view, it is difficult to effectively reflect on impermanence, much less see the fruit of such a reflection.

### 3.3 KEEPING FOCUSED ON MEDITATION

**3.3.1** Meditation scholars and Buddhist philosophers rely almost solely on the texts, early and late, primary and secondary, and their own reasoning to form or explain their views on meditation. Understandably, the more serious of such scholars and philosophers would take up some personal meditation practice. One such scholar, who tried to blend scholarship with personal practice is **H Gunaratana**, who thinks that, in the case of the attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, “the mental contents... are so extremely refined and subtle that even the purest mindfulness and concentration cannot explore them,” hence, it “cannot be used as a basis for insight” (2007:65).<sup>38</sup>

**3.3.2** Historically, it is likely that as post-Buddha Buddhism evolved in India and spread beyond, it was in due course assimilated into the local culture, or influenced by local religions and ideas, or used as an ideological tool, especially in the urban areas—a common development in the histories of all organized religions.<sup>39</sup>

As a result, meditation as taught and practised in the Buddha’s time was lost or superseded by more innovative or “improved” or “more powerful” methods (such as deity visualization),<sup>40</sup> or psycholinguistic exercises (such as Zen koans),<sup>41</sup> or novel rituals (such as pietist recitations),<sup>42</sup> or philosophies of meditation (such as the Prajñā, pāramitā literature).<sup>43</sup>

These methods, where they are well taught and do work, are at best parameditational devices, which are useful when they inspire and prepare us to go into deeper meditation. Or, they may be skillfully used to overcome, or prevent, mental hindrances from arising during our main meditation practice. Meditation is not about itself, but merely a tool, a path, to mental cultivation to help us clear our mind of views and calm our hearts of defilements, so that we are closer to self-awakening.

**3.3.3** As the early texts were superseded or replaced by new texts (especially those of the Mahayana) and new (and, in our own time, modernist) Buddhist ideas and methods, the early Indian teachings and practices are effectively forgotten, sidelined, or at best treated as theories of an outdated and foreign tradition, an inferior way (*hīna, yāna*).<sup>44</sup> Alongside all this, we have different groups and individuals using Buddhism (and religion in general) for as sectarian dogma, a “professional” tool, or a leisure pursuit.

On the other hand, if these methods are not taken as ends in themselves, but as rafts for mind-training and meditation to cross the waters of biases and views, they would serve as Dharma-doors to

<sup>38</sup> Gunaratana is of the view that thinking and knowing do occur *during* dhyana: see **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2).

<sup>39</sup> See eg **Myth in Buddhism @ SD 36.1 (1.8)**.

<sup>40</sup> See eg Paul Harrison, “Commemoration and identification in *Buddhānusmṛti*,” 1992 & “Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṁmukhāvasthitā-samādhi-sūtra,” 1978; also McMahan 1998:10 (digital).

<sup>41</sup> See eg **How Buddhism became Chinese @ SD 40b (5.1.3)**: The koan.

<sup>42</sup> See eg **How Buddhism became Chinese @ SD 40b (3.4.4)**: How to meet the Buddha.

<sup>43</sup> Eg **Samādhi, rāja Sūtra**, notes Florin Deleanu, gives hundreds of long impressive names for *samādhi*, none of which are really meditative states, but are names related to deep philosophical states (2000:73): see **Mahā Sudasana S**, SD 36.12 (6.4.4). See also **Myth in Buddhism @ SD 36.1 (1.8.1)**: The Mahāyāna myth.

<sup>44</sup> **Schmithausen** (1981), eg, points out that a discourse quotation in **Abhidharma, kośa Vyākhyā** (Wogihara 1971b:275,25), however, does include the attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception among states that can be used for cultivating insight (1981:224 n87); **SĀ 870 @ T2.220b7**, too, applies an insight contemplation that is based on an aggregate-analysis to all 4 formless attainments.

the higher mind. We should not merely stand at these doors, or worse, crowd around them, blocking them. We should open the door, and enter the open space of the death-free.

**3.3.4** Nowadays, the early Buddhist texts—the wellspring from which all Buddhist streams and rivers spring forth—are easily and freely available. These sources that are well edited and better translated with a growing body of living commentaries, so that it would be to our great advantage to master such texts to understand and practise the Buddha’s teachings, especially those on the mind and meditation, for the sake of self-awakening.

The best sources of our mastery of the finer practical points of such daily mindfulness and deep meditation would, of course, be the accomplished meditators themselves. It would be of immeasurable practical advantage to be able to learn from such teachers of the early Buddhism who practised and presented a harmonious balance of samatha and vipassana, tempered by compassion and wisdom. In that way, we would not only preserve the Dharma within our meditation-bodies, through personal experience, but do so for the sake of our own awakening here and now.

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## Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Sutta

### The Discourse on the Aṭṭhaka,nāgara Man

M 52 = The Discourse to Dasama A 11.17/5:342-347

Thus have I heard:

#### Dasama seeks Ānanda

**1** At one time, the venerable Ānanda was staying in the village of Beluva [Beluva Gāmaka]<sup>45</sup> near Vesālī.

**2** At that time, the houselord<sup>46</sup> Dasama<sup>47</sup> of Aṭṭhaka,nagara,<sup>48</sup> had arrived in Pāṭali,putta<sup>49</sup> on some business.

<sup>45</sup> So Be Ce; Ke Se *veḷuva,gāmaka*. Also called Veḷuva,gāmaka (cf DA 2:546). Comy says that **Beluva** (vilva tree) was on the slope at the foot of a hill south of Vesālī (MA 3:12; cf DA 2:546). The vilva or bilva (Aegle marmelos), also known as Bengal quince, stone apple or wood apple, is native to India but found throughout south and SE Asia, and also the Philippines. It is a hardy mid-sized, slender, aromatic, armed, gum-bearing tree growing up to 18 m tall. Its fruit is large and hard. See **Daddabha J** (J 322).

<sup>46</sup> A *gaha,pati* (houselord) was an owner of land employed in agriculture, or in charge of an agricultural enterprise. He was either a kshatriya or a brahmin (but never a shudra).

<sup>47</sup> *Dasama* means “the tenth,” on account of his clan and class, and in terms of family wealth, he was graded as being no 10 in position (**Dasamo**’ti so hi jāti,gotta,vasena c’eva sāra-p,patta,kula,gaṇanāya ca dasame ṭhāne gaṇi-yati, tenassa dasamo tv-eva nāmarṃ jātarṃ, MA 3:13 = AA 5:84).

<sup>48</sup> *Aṭṭhaka,nāgara*, which Comys gloss as “resident of Aṭṭhaka,nagara” (*aṭṭhaka,nāgara,vāsī*) (MA 3:13 = AA 5:84). D K Barua suggests that Aṭṭhaka,nagara was probably “a village called Hathagaon on the Bagmati river” (1971:351).

<sup>49</sup> **Pāṭali,putta** (modern Patna), called Pāṭali,gāma in the Buddha’s time (eg **Mahā,parinibbāna S**, D 16,1.19/2:84 @ SD 9), later fortress-capital of ancient Magadha, located on the Ganges, SW of Vesālī; 100 km (62 miles) from Rājagaha. See D 16,1.19 n (SD 9). See **Laymen saints** @ SD 8.6 (8.3).

Then the houselord Dasama of Aṭṭhaka,nagara, went to Kukkuṭa’s park<sup>50</sup> and approached a certain monk. Having approached him, he saluted him and sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, the houselord Dasama of Aṭṭhaka,nagara, said this to the monk:

“Where, bhante, is the venerable Ānanda now residing? I wish to see the venerable Ānanda.”

“The venerable Ānanda, houselord, is residing outside the village of Beluva.”

**3** Then the houselord Dasama of Aṭṭhaka,nagara, having finished his business in Pāṭalī,putta, went to Beluva Gāmaka, outside Vesālī, and approached the venerable Ānanda. Having approached him, he saluted him and sat down at one side. [A 5:343]

## Dasama questions Ānanda

3.2 Sitting thus at one side, the houselord Dasama of Aṭṭhaka,nagara, said this to the venerable Ānanda:

3.3 “Bhante Ānanda, **is there any one thing [one teaching]** that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened, by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained?”<sup>51</sup>

3.4 “There is, houselord, that one thing [one teaching] *that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened, [350]*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*”

3.5 “What, bhante Ānanda, is that one thing [one teaching] *that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained?*”

## THE 4 DHYANAS

### (1) The 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana

**4** “Here, houselord, a monk, quite secluded from sense-desires, secluded from unwholesome mental states, enters and dwells in **the first dhyana**,

accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of seclusion.<sup>52</sup>

4.2 He considers thus:<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> The park was built by the seth Kukkuṭa (“Cock”) (MA 3.13 = AA 5:84). A *seṭṭhī* (seth) was a merchant, financier or banker: see **Laymen saints** @ SD 8.6 (8.3).

<sup>51</sup> *Atthi nu kho bhante ānanda tena bhagavatā jānatā passatā arahatā sammāsambuddhena eka,dhammo akkhāto yattha bhikkhuno appamattassa ātāpino pahitattassa viharato avimuttam vā* [Ce Ee; Be *avimuttam c’eva*; Se *avimuttam c’eva*] *cittam vimuccati, aparikkhīṇā vā* [Ce; Be *aparikkhīṇā ca*; Se *aparikkhīṇā vā*] *āsavaṃ parikkhayaṃ gacchanti ananuppattam vā* [Ce Ee; Be *ananuppattam va*; Se *ananuppattam ca*] *anuttaram yogo-k,khemam anupāpuṇātīti*. This is a ref to arhathood.

<sup>52</sup> The underscored terms in this and the prec lines are the 5 dhyana-factors: see SD 8.4 (6). “Seclusion” (*viveka*) here is “mental seclusion” (*citta,viveka*) [SD 20.4 (4.2)], ie, the overcoming of all the 5 hindrances (*pañca,vīvaraṇa*) [SD 32]. For a more detailed description of dhyanas (*jhāna*), with similes, see **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,75-82/1:73-76), SD 8.10.

4.3 ‘Even this first dhyana is (mentally) constructed [mind-made], intentionally formed.<sup>54</sup> What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.<sup>55</sup>

4.4 If he is steady therein, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.

4.5 If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas [meditative states],<sup>56</sup>

then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (in the Pure Abodes), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.<sup>57</sup>

4.6 This, householder, is that one thing [one teaching] *that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind, attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*<sup>58</sup> [A 5:344]

## (2) The 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana

5 Furthermore, householder, the monk,  
with the stilling of initial application and sustained application,  
by gaining inner stillness and oneness of mind,  
enters and remains in **the second dhyana**,  
free from initial application and sustained application,  
accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration.<sup>59</sup>

5.2 He considers thus:

<sup>53</sup> In every one of these 11 occasions [§§4.2, 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, 8.2, 9.2, 10.2, 11.2, 12.2, 13.2, 14.2], the “consideration” or reflection is done after emerging from the dhyana: see SD 41.1 (2.2.2.2).

<sup>54</sup> *Idam pi kho paṭhamam jhānam abhisankhataṃ abhisañcetaṃ*. The phrase “(mentally) constructed [mind-made], intentionally formed” (*abhisankhataṃ abhisañcetaṃ*) here shows that a dhyana is a conditioned state primarily conditioned by intention (*cetanā*) (MA 3:13). The term ***abhisañcetaṃ*** (*abhi + saṃ + cetayita*), “raised into consciousness, thought out, intended, planned” (PED), is pp of *abhisañcetaṃ* (*caus of abhi+saṃ + √CIT*, “to perceive, know, appear”), “to think out, to plan” (CPD, DPL), of *abhisanceteti* (*abhi + saṃ + ceteti*), “to raise into consciousness, think out, devise, plan” (PED). Here, on a dhyana context, only the passive sense “raised into consciousness” applies, because thinking and knowing as we understand them do not arise during dhyana: see **The Buddha discovered dhyana @ SD 33.1b (6.2)**.

<sup>55</sup> *Yam kho pana kiñci abhisankhataṃ abhisañcetaṃ, tad aniccaṃ nirodha, dhamman ti*. For the Āgama (Chin) version, see Analayo 2011:166. See Intro (2.1).

<sup>56</sup> “Desire ... delight in dharmas” (*dhama, rāga dhama, nandī*), where Comys explain that these 2 terms refer to the desire and lust (*chanda, rāga*), here meaning simply “attachment,” with respect to calm and insight (*samatha, vipassanā*). If we are able to let go of all attachment to calm and insight, we become arhats. If we are unable to discard them then we become non-returners and are reborn in the pure abodes (MA 3:14; AA 5:85). *Dhamma* here clearly does not mean “the Teaching” or “a teaching,” but meditative state; as such, it is best rendered simply as “dharma.” Also at (**Āsava-k, khaya**) **Jhāna S** (A 9.36/4:422-426), SD 33.8.

<sup>57</sup> On the non-returner (*anāgāmi*), see SD 21.10 (3).

<sup>58</sup> In **Mahā Māluṅkyā, putta S** (M 64), in place of this para, we have: “This, Ānanda, is the path, the way, to the abandoning of the 5 lower fetters.” (M 64,9/1:435,33-35), SD 21.10.

<sup>59</sup> The 3 underscored terms are the dhyana-factors [§4 n]. The 2<sup>nd</sup> dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya, tuṇhī, bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (*vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur (S 2:273); cf S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, sarī-khāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate). See **Jhāna Pañha S 2** (S 40.2/4:263 f), SD 24.12.

5.3 ‘Even this second dhyana is *(mentally) constructed, intentionally formed*. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.

5.4 *If he is steady therein*, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.

5.5 *If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,*

*then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (in the Pure Abodes), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.*

5.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] [351] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*

### (3) The 3<sup>rd</sup> dhyana

6 Furthermore, houselord, the monk,  
with *the fading away of zest*, dwells equanimous, mindful and fully aware,  
experiences happiness with the body,  
enters and dwells in **the third dhyana**,  
of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’

6.2 He considers thus:

6.3 ‘Even this third dhyana is *(mentally) constructed, intentionally formed*. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.

6.4 *If he is steady therein*, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.

6.5 *If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,*

*then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (in the Pure Abodes), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.*

6.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*

### (4) The 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana

7 Furthermore, houselord, the monk,  
with *the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain*,<sup>60</sup>  
and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure,  
attains and dwells in **the fourth dhyana**  
that is neither painful nor pleasant,  
and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> “Joy ... pain,” *sukha ... dukkha*: this refers to *physical* feelings. The next phrase—“pleasure and displeasure,” *domanassa ... somanassa*—refers to *mental* feelings, transcended earlier. Mental feelings must be overcome first so that the mind is not distracted by itself, as it were. Then, all the other feelings (arising from the physical sense-contacts) are transcended. On the significance of this, see **Sall’atthena S** (S 36.6/4:207-210), SD 5.5.

<sup>61</sup> Here, **Vibhaṅga** gives 3 factors of the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana—equanimity (*upekhā*), mindfulness (*sati*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek’aggatā*)—according to the Sutta analysis (Vbh 261), and 2 factors—equanimity and one-pointed-

7.2 He considers thus:

7.3 ‘Even this fourth dhyana is (*mentally constructed, intentionally formed*). What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.

7.4 *If he is steady therein*, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.

7.5 *If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,*

*then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters*, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (*in the Pure Abodes*), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.

7.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*

## THE 4 DIVINE ABODES<sup>62</sup>

### (5) Mental freedom by lovingkindness

8 “Further, houselord, a monk,<sup>63</sup>  
with a heart full of lovingkindness,<sup>64</sup> dwells suffusing one quarter;  
so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;  
thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself,  
he dwells suffusing all the world with lovingkindness  
that is vast, grown great [exalted],<sup>65</sup> immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.<sup>66</sup>

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ness of the mind—according to the Abhidhamma analysis (Vbh 164; Vism 4.183/165). See also **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.83/1:75), SD 8.10 & **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (5.4).

<sup>62</sup> This whole section on the 4 divine abodes is stock: **Cakka,vatti Sīha.nāda S** (D 26,31/3:78), SD 36.10, says that it is “the wealth for a monk (*bhikkhuno bhogasmim*).” **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,1.11(6)/3:223, calls it “the immeasurables” (*appamañña*). **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43,31/1:297), SD 35.1, (**Ceto,vimutti**) **Anuruddha S** (M 127,4-7/3:146 f), SD 54.10 & **Go,datta S** (S 41.7,5/4:296), SD 60.4, call it “the immeasurable freedom of mind” (*appamañña ceto,vimutti*). According to **Aṭṭhaka,nāgara S** (M 52,8-11/1:351 f) = **Dasama Gaha,pati S** (A 11.17/5:344), SD 41.2, if one stabilizes these states, reflecting on its impermanence, etc, one attains arhathood; if not, one attains non-returning. (**Majjhima**) **Jīvaka S** (M 55,6/1:369), SD 43.4, presents the Buddha as Brahmā. **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97,32-33/2:195), SD 4.9, and (**Brahma,vihāra**) **Subha S** (M 99,24-27/2:207 f), SD 38.6, call it the path to companionship with Brahmā (communion with God). (**Saṅgha**) **Uposatha S** (A 4.190,4/2:184), SD 15.10b, concerns one “attained to Godliness,” *brahma-p,patta*. **Pm** 5.20/2:39 calls it “freedom that is focussed on only the beautiful,” *subhan t’eva adhimutto hoti ti vimokkho*); **Vbh** 13/272-276 (*sutta,niddesa*), 276-282 (*abhidhamma,niddesa*), 282-284 (comy). For details on the 4 divine abodes, see SD 38.5; for a table of refs, see SD 38.5 (2.1.3.2).

<sup>63</sup> “Monk” (*bhikkhu*) here refers to any meditator. Even a lay person, properly meditating, attains the state of monkhood (*bhikkhu,bhāva*): **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3A) +n, SD 13.3; SD 13.1 (3.1.1.5); SD 16.7 (1.1.1.2). For similes, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13,76-79/1:251), SD 1.8; see also: **D** 2:185, 250, 3:49, 78, 223; **M** 1:38, 283, 297, 335×2, 351, 369, 2:76, 77, 78, 81, 195, 207, 3:146; **S** 4:296, 322, 351, 352×2, 5:115, 116, 117, 118; **A** 1:183, 192, 2:172, 175, 184, 3:225, 4:390, 5:299, 343, 344.

<sup>64</sup> For similes, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13,76-79/1:251), SD 1.8; see also: **D** 2:185, 250, 3:49, 78, 223; **M** 1:38, 283, 297, 335×2, 351, 369, 2:76, 77, 78, 81, 195, 207, 3:146; **S** 4:296, 322, 351, 352×2, 5:115, 116, 117, 118; **A** 1:183, 192, 2:172, 175, 184, 3:225, 4:390, 5:299, 343, 344.

<sup>65</sup> The mind “grown great” (*maha-g,gatā*) or exalted perception refers to the mind in dhyana, ie in the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*). See **Catuttha Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.4), SD 24.14 (4).



8.2 He considers thus:

8.3 ‘Even **this mental freedom by lovingkindness**<sup>67</sup> is (mentally) constructed [mind-made], intentionally formed. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.

8.4 *If he is steady therein*, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.

8.5 *If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,*

*then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters*, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (*in the Pure Abodes*), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.

8.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One [A 5:345] who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened, [351]*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*

## (6) Mental freedom by compassion

9 “Further, houselord, a monk,

with a heart full of compassion,<sup>68</sup> dwells suffusing one quarter;

so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;

thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself,

he dwells suffusing all the world with compassion

that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

9.2 He considers thus:

9.3 ‘Even **this mental freedom by compassion**<sup>69</sup> is *(mentally) constructed, intentionally formed*.

What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.

9.4 *If he is steady therein*, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.

9.5 *If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,*

*then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters*, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (*in the Pure Abodes*), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.

9.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*

## (7) Mental freedom by gladness

10 “Further, houselord, a monk,

with a heart of gladness,<sup>70</sup> dwells suffusing one quarter;

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<sup>66</sup> The recurrence of these last two phrases—“without hate, without ill will”—attests to the fact that lovingkindness is the basis for all the other three abodes, ie, they are actually a refinement of lovingkindness applied on deeper and broader levels.

<sup>67</sup> “Mental freedom by lovingkindness,” *mettā,ceto.vimutti*: see **Brahma,vihāra**, SD 38.5 (8.3). *Ceto,vimutti* is sometimes tr as “freedom by concentration,” ie through destruction of the mental hindrances, and is often contrasted with *paññā,vimutti*, “freedom through wisdom (or insight).” The differences between the 2 types of freedom are given in **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 2:70 f) and **Kiṭṭā,giri S** (M 1:477 f).

<sup>68</sup> *Karuṇā,sahagatena cetasā*. See **Brahma,vihāra**, SD 38.5 (4).

<sup>69</sup> “Mental freedom by compassion,” *karuṇā,ceto.vimutti*. See **Brahma,vihāra**, SD 38.5 (4).

so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;  
 thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself,  
 he dwells suffusing all the world with gladness  
 that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

10.2 He considers thus:

10.3 'Even **this mental freedom by gladness**<sup>71</sup> is *(mentally) constructed, intentionally formed*. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.

10.4 *If he is steady therein*, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.

10.5 *If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,*

*then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (in the Pure Abodes), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.*

10.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*

## (8) Mental freedom by equanimity

11 "Further, houselord, a monk,

with a heart of equanimity,<sup>72</sup> dwells suffusing one quarter;

so, too, the second; so, too, the third; so, too, the fourth;

thus above, below, across, everywhere, and to everyone as well as to himself,

he dwells suffusing all the world with equanimity

that is vast, grown great [exalted], immeasurable, without hate, without ill-will.

11.2 He considers thus:

11.3 'Even **this mental freedom by equanimity**<sup>73</sup> is *(mentally) constructed, intentionally formed*. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, [352] subject to ending.

11.4 *If he is steady therein, he attains* the destruction of the mental influxes.

11.5 *If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,*

*then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (in the Pure Abodes), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.*

11.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*

## THE 3 FORMLESS ATTAINMENTS

## (9) The base of infinite space

12 Furthermore, houselord, a monk,

<sup>70</sup> *Muditā, sahatatena cetasā*. See **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5 (5).

<sup>71</sup> "Mental freedom by gladness," *muditā, ceto.vimutti*. See **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5 (4).

<sup>72</sup> *Upekkhā, sahatatā cetasā*. See **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5 (6).

<sup>73</sup> "Mental freedom by equanimity," *upekkhā, ceto.vimutti*. See **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5 (6).

by completely transcending the perceptions of form,

with the disappearance the perceptions of sense-reaction,<sup>74</sup>

with non-attention to perceptions of diversity,

aware that “Space is infinite,” attains and dwells in **the base of infinite space.**<sup>75</sup>

12.2 He considers thus:

12.3 ‘Even this **attainment of the base of infinite space**<sup>76</sup> is (mentally) constructed, intentionally formed. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.

12.4 *If he is steady therein,* he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.

12.5 *If he does not [A 5:346] attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,*

*then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (in the Pure Abodes), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.*

12.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*

## (10) The base of infinite consciousness

**13** Furthermore, houselord, a monk,

by completely transcending the base of infinite space,

aware that “Consciousness is infinite,” attains and dwells in **the base of infinite consciousness.**<sup>77</sup>

13.2 He considers thus:

13.3 ‘Even this **the attainment of the base of infinite consciousness**<sup>78</sup> is (mentally) constructed, intentionally formed. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.

13.4 *If he is steady therein, he attains* the destruction of the mental influxes.

13.5 *If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas,*

*then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (in the Pure Abodes), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.*

13.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*

<sup>74</sup> “Perceptions of sense-reaction,” *paññā, saññā*, also “sensory impact” (M:ÑB 267), “resistance-perception, reflex-perception” (BDict), said to be absent in the formless dhyanas. This is one of those terms that are only used contextually. See Vibh 245, §262; Vism 10.12-16.

<sup>75</sup> *Puna ca param gaha, pati bhikkhu sabbaso rūpa, saññānam samatikkamā paññā, saññānam atthaṅgamā nā-natta, saññānam amanasikārā ananto ākāso ti ākāsānañc’āyatanaṃ upasampajja viharati. Lok’āyatika Brāhmaṇā S* (A 9.38), the 4 dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments are similarly listed, but they are each said to be “still world-bound” (*loka, pariyāpanna*). Transcending all the 8 states, the arhat attains to the “cessation of perception and feeling” (A 9.38/4:428-432), SD 35.2. See **Ākāsānañc’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.5/4:266), SD 24.15.

<sup>76</sup> “Attainment of the sphere of infinite space,” *ākāsānañc’āyatana, samāpatti*: see **Ākāsānañc’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.5/4:266), SD 24.15.

<sup>77</sup> See **Viññānañc’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.6/4:266 f), SD 24.16.

<sup>78</sup> “Attainment of the sphere of infinite consciousness,” *viññānañc’āyatana, samāpatti*: see **Viññānañc’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.6/4:266 f), SD 24.16.

## (11) The base of nothingness

**14** Furthermore, houselord, a monk,  
by completely transcending the base of infinite consciousness,  
aware that “There is nothing,” attains and dwells in **the base of nothingness**.<sup>79</sup>

14.2 He considers thus:

14.3 ‘Even this **attainment of the base of nothingness**<sup>80</sup> is (mentally) constructed, intentionally formed. What is constructed and intentionally formed is impermanent, subject to ending.

14.4 *If he is steady therein*, he attains the destruction of the mental influxes.

14.5 *If he does not attain the destruction of the mental influxes because of that desire in dharmas, that delight in dharmas, then with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters*, he becomes one with spontaneous birth (in the Pure Abodes), and there attains final nirvana, not subject to returning from that world.

14.6 *This, too, houselord, is that one thing [one teaching] that has been pointed out by the Blessed One who knows and sees, worthy, fully self-awakened,*

*by which, if a monk were to dwell diligent, ardent, resolute, he would liberate his unliberated mind or attain to the supreme security from bondage that had not yet been attained.*”<sup>81</sup>

## Dasama’s exultation: The 11 doors

**15** When this was said, the houselord Dasama of Aṭṭhaka, nagara said this to the venerable Ānanda:

“Bhante Ānanda, it is as if a man looking for *one* entrance to **hidden treasure** were to find **[353] 11 entrances to hidden treasure!**

15.2 Even so, bhante, while seeking *one* door to **the death-free**, I have come to hear<sup>82</sup> all at once **11 doors**<sup>83</sup> to the death-free!<sup>84</sup>

15.3 Bhante, it is as if a man has **a house with 11 doors**, [A 5:347] and when there were a fire in that house, bhante, *he can flee to safety by any of these 11 doors*;

15.4 even so, bhante, I can flee to safety by any of these 11 doors to the death-free!

15.5 Bhante, outside sectarians are known to seek the teacher’s fee for teaching.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>79</sup> See **Ākiñcaññ’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.7/4:267 f), SD 24.17.

<sup>80</sup> “Attainment of the sphere of nothingness,” *ākiñcaññāyatana, samāpatti*: see **Ākiñcaññ’āyatana Pañha S** (S 40.7/4:267 f), SD 24.17.

<sup>81</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> formless attainment, that of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n’eva, saññā, nāsaññāyatana*), is omitted here prob because it is too subtle for its constituent factors to be used as meditation-objects. However, for a case of this attainment being used as a basis for insight (by Sāriputta), in similar manner as here, see **Anupada S** (M 111,17-18/2:28), SD 56.4. Elsewhere, see neither-perception-nor-non-perception listed as the 8<sup>th</sup> stage in list of the 8 “liberations” (*vimokkha*) (**Vimokkha S**, A 8.66/4:306), SD 95.11, and the 9 “progressive abodes” (*anupubba, -vihāra*) (**(Anupubba) Vihāra S 1+2**, A 9.32 + 33/4:410-414 @ SD 95.1+2).

<sup>82</sup> *Savanāya*; but Ee has *sevanāya*, “to associate with,” **Dasama S** (A 11.17/5:346,34), SD 41.2.

<sup>83</sup> These 11 “doors” to the death-free, listed by numbered brackets here, are the 4 form dhyanas, the 4 divine abodes and the first 3 formless attainments. These are mental or meditative bases for cultivating insight leading to arhathood.

<sup>84</sup> *Seyyathā’pi bhante ānanda puriso ekaṃ nidhi, mukhaṃ gavesanto sakid-eva ekādasa nidhi, mukhāni adhigaccheyya, evam eva kho ahaṃ bhante ekaṃ amata, dvāraṃ gavesanto sakid-eva ekādasa amata, dvārāni alatthaṃ savanāya* [Ee Se; Ce *savaṇāya*; Be *bhāvanāya*, “to cultivate, to bring into being”].

<sup>85</sup> “Teacher’s fee for teaching,” *ācariyassa ācariya, dhana*: M 52,15.5/1:353,8 = A 11.17/5:347,5; **Mahā Sāla S** (S 7.14/1:177,9); **Doṇa Brāhmaṇa S** (A 5.192/3:224-229×10), SD 36.14.

15.6 Now, why don't I myself make an offering to the venerable Ānanda?

### Dasama builds a lodging for Ānanda

**16** Then, the houselord Dasama of Aṭṭhaka,nagara, having assembled the community of monks in Pāṭali,putta and Vesālī, served them with his own hands, excellent food, both hard and soft, and satisfied them.

16.2 To each of these monks individually, he presented a pair of personal cloths,<sup>86</sup> and to the venerable Ānanda he presented the triple robe.<sup>87</sup>

16.3 And for the venerable Ānanda, he built a residence<sup>88</sup> worth 500 (coins).<sup>89</sup>

— evaṃ —

## Bibliography

See SD 41.bib (end of volume)

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<sup>86</sup> *Ekam-ekañ ca bhikkhuṃ pacceka,dussa,yugena acchādesi.*

<sup>87</sup> "Triple robe" (*ti,cīvara*), viz: the upper robe (*saṅghāṭi*), the outer robe (*uttara,saṅga*) and the undergarment (*antara,vāsaka*): V 3:195, 230-233; M 32,7/1:214, 113/3:40-42; A 1.20.1/1:38 (A:B 1.381). See **How robes are recycled**, SD 37.14; also C S Upasak, *Dictionary of Early Buddhist Monastic Terms*, Varanasi, 1975:88-91.

<sup>88</sup> Comys say this is a leaf-hut (*paṇṇa,sālā*) (MA 3:16 = AA 5:87). The value referred to here was prob the *kahāpana* (Skt *kārṣāpaṇa*), coins of silver or of copper: see **Money and monastics** @ SD 4.19 (1).

<sup>89</sup> These units of money were prob silver coins, called *kahapana*: see **Money and monastics**, SD 4.19 (1).