

SD 62.8

(Aṭṭhaka) Nanda Sutta

The (Eights) Discourse on Nanda

A 8.9

Theme: The wise directly experience Dharma

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2024

1 Sutta summary and introduction

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND RELATED SUTTAS

1.1.1 The (Aṭṭhaka) Nanda Sutta (A 8.9) describes the arhat Nanda’s mastery of sense-restraint. The Sutta is a brief description of the elder Nanda, who was a sensual man, “strongly prone to lust” (*tibba,-rāga*), before becoming an arhat; but as an arhat he was one with senses well-guarded, moderate in food, intent on wakefulness, and mindful and clearly aware.

1.1.2 Sutta significance

The most significant passage in **the (Aṭṭhaka) Nanda Sutta** (A 8.9) is this one describing Nanda’s mindfulness and clear awareness, thus:

Here, bhikshus,

Nanda knows feelings as they arise, as they remain **present**, as they disappear;

he knows perceptions as they arise, as they remain **present**, as they disappear;

he knows thoughts as they arise, as they remain **present**, as they disappear.

That, bhikshus, is Nanda's mindfulness and clear awareness.

[§5]

What is of significant interest here is the recognition of *an interim period*—that of presence or duration—in the early Buddhist conception of impermanence, which differs from the doctrine of momentariness that arose in later traditions.¹ According to this later doctrine, any phenomenon will disappear immediately upon arising.²

1.1.3 Related suttas

The (Aṭṭhaka) Nanda Sutta (A 8.9) describes the arhat Nanda’s mental state. There are other suttas where the Buddha describes the mental state of other monks, and also of the Buddha’s own mental state.

In **the (Saṅgha) Uposatha Sutta** (A 4.190), the Buddha describes the mental state of the saints in general:

“Bhikshus, there are monks in this community of monks who dwell having attained the deva-state ... the brahma-state ... the imperturbable ... the noble state.”³ “The deva-state” refers to being reborn in

¹ A von **Rospatt**, *The Buddhist doctrine of momentariness: a survey of the origins and early phase of this doctrine up to Vasubandhu*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995. Y **Karunadasa**, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma*, HK, 2010: 234-261 (ch 17).

² See SD 62.10a (3.3.6.3).

³ *Santi bhikkhave bhikkhu imasmim bhikkum,saṅghe deva-p,pattā viharanti, santi bhikkhave bhikkhu imasmim bhikkhu,saṅghe brahma-p,pattā viharanti, santi ... ānejjā-p,pattā viharanti, santi ... ariya-p,pattā viharanti* (A 4.190-/2:184), SD 15.10b.

the sense-world heavens; “the brahma-state” to the form heavens; “the imperturbable” to the formless heavens; and “the noble state” to the path, that is, as streamwinners, as once-returners, as nonreturners and as arhats.

In the **Venāga,pura Sutta** (A 3.63), the Buddha describes his own mental state but omits mention of the 4 formless attainments (*ānejjā-p, patta*).⁴

1.2 SUTTA INTRODUCTION

1.2.1 Nanda, the Buddha’s half-brother

1.2.1.1 Nanda (“joyful”) was the son of Sakya chieftain **Suddhodana** and **Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī** (sister of Mahā Māyā, the Buddha’s mother); hence, he is the Buddha’s half-brother. Nanda was only a few days younger than the Buddha, and Pajāpatī handed him over to a wet nurse so that Pajāpatī could raise Siddhattha (the bodhisattva) as her own son when Mahā Māyā died.⁵

1.2.1.2 The (Aṭṭhaka) Nanda Sutta (A 8.9) first describes Nanda as he was known as a layman: “a clansman, ... strong, ... graceful, ... strongly prone to lust” [§1.1]. He was a young man of the world.

Nanda was a **clansman** (*kula,putta*, “son of family”) since he was well born into the Sakya nobility (*rāja*). He was the Buddha’s half-brother (having the same father by a different mother). The Dhammapada Commentary however refers to him as “maternal cousin” (*mātuccha,putta*, literally, “the son of his mother’s sister”).

He was **strong** (*balava*), coming from the warrior class (*khattiya*; anglicized as kshatriya); hence, he was well trained in the martial arts.

He was **graceful** (*pāsādika*), meaning that he was beautiful both physically and in deportment. Extremely handsome, he was also known as Sundara Nanda (“handsome Nanda”) and was said to have been vain about his looks. [2.2]

He was described as being **strongly prone to lust** (*tibba,rāga*)—he had strong sensual desires—especially due to the circumstances at the time of the Buddha’s first visit to Kapila,vatthu, the Sakya capital. [2.1]

On Nanda’s spiritual qualities, see (2.3).

1.2.1.3 After listing Nanda’s worldly qualities, the Buddha states how Nanda is able to happily live a full and pure spiritual life by (1) guarding his senses, (2) being moderate in food, (3) being intent in wakefulness, and (4) being mindful and clearly aware [§1.2]. These qualities allow Nanda to directly see the Dharma here and now. [2.3]

2 The arhat Nanda

2.1 THE LAYMAN NANDA’S ATTRACTION TO WOMEN

2.1.1 Nanda and Janapada,kalyānī

2.1.1.1 During the Buddha’s 1st visit to Kapila,vatthu, on the 3rd day, he visited Nanda when he was to be married to the beautiful Janapada Kalyānī, “beauty of the land” (also called Sundarī Nandā). Hav-

⁴ SD 21.1. For a comparison of the teachings of the two suttas, see (**Catukka** or **Saṅgha**) **Uposatha S** (A 4.190), SD 15.10b (1.1.2).

⁵ S 2:281; U 2; AA 1:315. Nanda’s verses are Tha 157 f.

ing wished Nanda well, the Buddha handed him his almsbowl to carry back to the monastery. This poignant bowl-carrying scene of Nanda standing between the departing Buddha and his beckoning bride-to-be is often depicted in Buddhist art.⁶

2.1.1.2 Once Nanda arrived at the monastery with the almsbowl, the Buddha asked Nanda whether he wanted to renounce. Out of respect for his elder brother, the Buddha, he reluctantly agreed. But he still longed for his fiancée and soon fell ill from his lovesickness, loneliness and depression, drawing pictures of her on rocks, displaying strange behaviours, such as those in **the (Bhikkhu) Nanda Sutta** (S 21.8). [2.1.2]

2.1.2 Perspectives in beauty and lust

2.1.2.1 Knowing Nanda’s mind, the Buddha then flew with him to Tāvātimsa (the heaven of the 33). En route, they saw a singed female monkey clinging to a tree-stump after a forest fire. When they arrived in the heaven, the Buddha showed Nanda celestial maidens (*accharā*; anglicized as “apsara” which is also Sanskrit) entertaining the devas. Entranced with them, Nanda confessed that, compared to the celestial maidens, the beauty of his bride-to-be Janapada Kaḷyāṇī was like that of the singed monkey!

Then the Buddha promised him one of these celestial maidens as his consort in his next lifetime if he would only practice the religious life earnestly.⁷ Nanda enthusiastically agreed. Upon returning to Jeta-vana, the monks joked about him being a “hireling” (becoming a monk for some gain). Ānanda criticized him for his base motivation for remaining a monk.

2.1.2.2 Feeling great shame at his lust, Nanda resolved to overcome this weakness, practised assiduously, and in due course became an arhat. After his awakening, Nanda came to the Buddha to inform him of his attainment and to release the Buddha from his promise of celestial maidens.⁸

It was because of his great will to control his passions that Nanda was declared foremost in self-control or sense-restraint. Due to his previous attachment to women, however, it is said that even after he became an arhat, Nanda would stare at the beautiful women who attended the Buddha’s teaching sessions. Such old habits are, however, non-karmic reflexes in the case of arhats.⁹

The story of Nanda appears in a number of versions, including the Indian philosopher-poet Aśva-ghoṣa’s Sanskrit poem, **Saundarananda** (c 2nd century CE).

2.1.2.3 As a monk and **an arhat**, he is one who is *constantly sense-restrained, moderate in eating, intent on wakefulness, and mindful and clearly aware*. On account of these excellent qualities, the Buddha declares Nanda to be the foremost of monks who have sense-restraint [self-control] (*indriyeguṭṭa, dvārānaṃ*, A 1.230/1:25).

2.1.3 (Bhikkhu) Nanda Sutta (S 21.8), SD 91.6

2.1.3.1 The (Bhikkhu) Nanda Sutta (S 21.8) records a very curious story about the monk Nanda when he was still an unawakened monk, probably just before his awakening. It is said that at Sāvattihī,

⁶ Such as on the Amaravatī stupa: L Bachhofer, *Early Indian Sculpture* 2, 1929 pl 128.

⁷ In early Buddhist literature, this is a famous case of the Buddha’s humour.

⁸ For details, see **(Arahatta) Nanda S** (U 3.2/21-24), SD 43.7.

⁹ On such reflexes, sometimes termed *vāsana*: SD 60.3 (3).

he once put on a well-pressed and well-ironed robe, painted his eyes with collyrium (*añjana*),¹⁰ took a glazed bowl and approached the Buddha. He saluted the Buddha and sat down at one side.

The Commentary explains, or tries to explain, this strange incident, why the elder behaves in this oddly flamboyant way. Apparently, he wants to find out what the Buddha thought about his conduct, thinking,

“If the Teacher says, ‘My younger brother is beautiful like this,’ then I’ll conduct myself in this way all my life. But if he points out a fault here, I’ll give this up, wear the rag-robe, and dwell in a remote lodging.” (SA 2:293,14-18)

The Buddha then chided him, saying that it is improper for a clansman who has renounced the world out of faith to dress like this, look like this, and carry a glazed bowl. “What is proper for you is to be a forest dweller, an almsfood eater, a rag-robe wearer, and that you dwell indifferent to sensual pleasures, ... depending on the “scraps of strangers.”¹¹

Sometime later, Nanda becomes *a forest dweller, an almsfood eater, a rag-robe wearer, and dwells indifferent to sensual pleasure.*¹²

While the general drift of the commentarial explanation clearly fits the Nanda story, his actions, as they are, are clearly out of character for a monk.¹³ There is something more than his appearance—something of deep psychological significance that has been missed by the Commentary. This is what we will now go into.

2.1.3.2 We can interpret this as an ego-defence mechanism of encapsulation¹⁴ in the Nanda story illustrating both Nanda’s **mental frustration** and his resorting to **humour**; Nanda, as it were, decides to pull the Buddha’s, his elder brother’s leg. We see here a very worldly and yet very human side of Nanda. Such incidents vitally present us the emotionally exuberant trait in young Indian individuals often highlighted in modern Hindi movies.

Nanda’s conduct is a far cry from the way sectarian Mahāyānists tend to demean their arhats as dull ascetics on the one extreme, and the ostentatious divinity or hyperhumanity¹⁵ of their Bodhisattvas and Zen masters on the other extreme. Some may see such extremes and histrionics to be the sales pitch of desperate casuistry in a competitive theology and religious market. Yet humour in religion is, as a rule, human and healing.

2.1.3.3 The next question is: Where do we fit **the (Bhikkhu) Nanda Sutta** (S 21.8) account? What is recounted in the Sutta probably occurs in the midst of the account of **the (Arahatta) Nanda Sutta** (U 22),

¹⁰ *Añjana* refers both to “smearing, anointing: (D 1:12,9; M 1:511,16) as well as the ointment, collyrium, esp for the eyes; used for the sake of beautifying (D 1:7,20 (Comy) Thī 411 *añjanim*). As a cure for eye-disease, 5 kinds are allowed (V 1:203,13); also DhA 2:25,14* = MA 3:649,1*.

¹¹ “Dependent on the scraps of strangers” (*aññāt’uñchena yāpentam*), mentioned in the closing verses of the Sutta. Comy: Scraps gained by one seeking delicious, well-seasoned food at the houses of wealthy and powerful people are called “scraps of the well known (*ñāt’uñcha*).” The mixed food gotten by standing at the doors of houses is called “scraps of strangers” (or “unknown scraps”). (SA 2:239,19-21).

¹² S 21.8/2:291 (SD 91.6).

¹³ Here, we have another case of Buddhist humour [2.1.2.1], this time regarding Nanda before his attaining arhat-hood.

¹⁴ APA Dict of Psychology, 2nd ed: “The process of separating or keeping separate, particularly the ability of some people experiencing delusions to maintain high levels of functioning and prevent their delusions from pervading everyday behavior and cognitive states (hence called encapsulated delusions).”

¹⁵ “Hyperhumanity” is a neologism meaning “ostentatious pretence at being human or humane.”

that is, following Nanda feeling “troubled, ashamed, disgusted”¹⁶ (his feeling of *samvega*)¹⁷ at being called ‘hiring’ and ‘one who is bought’” (U 22,21).¹⁸ He then approaches the Buddha in an uncharacteristically dramatic manner—in a well pressed robe, with painted eyes, bearing a glazed bowl with a troubled, desperate, yet hopeful mind. It is as if he is grandly admitting that he has made such a fool of himself!

We will now go into the psychological significance of Nanda’s odd behaviour. [2.1.3.4]

2.1.3.4 The Commentary is helpful here in stating that **the (Bhikkhu) Nanda Sutta** (S 21.8) relates how Nanda does this “after he has returned from the deva-world, having seen the apsaras and so on (*accharādayo*)” (SA 2:239,26 f). Nanda’s strange conduct—wearing a well-pressed robe, painting his eyes and using a glazed bowl (a luxurious item for renunciants)—are probably symptoms or signs of frustration with his failure to enjoy women and sensual pleasures, as he was wont to as a layman. Moreover, he had just borne some teasing from fellow monks and chiding from Ānanda, too [2.1.2.1].

Then there is the glazed bowl (*acchaṃ pattam*), which the Commentary says is “a brightly coloured clay bowl” (*vippasanna,vaṇṇaṃ mattikā,pattam*, SA 2:239,19). The Pali word *accha* lexically means “clear; pellucid; transparent; clean, pure”; none of these senses seem to fit well with the context here. “Glazed” is a derived sense from what these senses (except for “transparent”) connote. If we take it as “transparent,” it would have been made of glass.¹⁹

Nanda’s frustrations drove him, as it were, to seek the Buddha his elder brother’s sympathy and guidance—notice Nanda describing himself as “this younger brother” (*me ayam kanittha,bhātiko*) in the Commentary [2.2.2.2]. Nanda, has, as it were, reverted to his pre-monastic days. In modern terms, Nanda has resorted to a defence mechanism of **regression**.²⁰

However, this can only be part of our modern understanding of an ancient monastic psychology. There is also an underlying sense of **humour**. It is as if Nanda knows the Buddha is right, and wants an elder brother he loves and respects (and who loves and respects him, too), to guide. In fact, the Commentator was aware of this and said so [2.2.2.2].

2.2 NANDA THE FOREST MONK

2.2.1 (Bhikkhu) Nanda Sutta (S 21.8), SD 91.6

2.2.1.1 As already mentioned, the layman Nanda was very vain about his personal beauty. He was only 4 fingers’ breadth²¹ shorter than the Buddha. Probably out of pride that the Buddha was his half-brother, the Vinaya relates that he once wore a robe made according to the dimensions of the Buddha’s

¹⁶ “Being troubled, ashamed, disgusted,” *aṭṭiyamāno harāyamāno jigucchamāno*. This statement significantly shows that Nanda is conscientious (has moral shame and moral fear) and is contrite. The stock *aṭṭiyāmi harāyāmi jigucchāmi* is found in **Vuṭṭha S** (A 9.11,4/4:377, spoken by a certain monk). The form *aṭṭiyāmi harāyāmi* is found in **Vijayā S** (S 5.4/530*/1:31), **Khemā Thī** (Thī 140), and **Khalātya Pv** (Pv 1.10.2/8). For fuller analyses of these terms, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,5/1:213), SD 1.7 n & **Nibbidā**, SD 20.1 (2.3).

¹⁷ On *samvega*, see SD 1.11 (3); SD 9 (7.6).

¹⁸ See SD 43.7 (2.3.3.2).

¹⁹ The earliest evidence of glass has been found at Hastinapur (modern Meerut) in the Indus Valley, around 1000 BCE. They are mainly of soda-lime-silicate composition with traces of phosphates and potassium, and some iron giving it the colour. [[Story of glass in India](#)] 12 Nov 2024. If it was a glass bowl, it would certainly be a luxurious item.

²⁰ On regression as an ego-defence, see SD 7.9 (24.10 (2)).

²¹ *Catur-aṅgulomaka*, ie, less than 3 inches: Comy explains as “less than 4 fingers’ breadth” (*catūhi aṅgulehi ūna-ka-p,pamāṇo*, VA 885).

robe (*sugata, cīvara-p, pamāṇa*). Discovering this, the Buddha chided him for his presumptiveness (Pāc 92 = V 4:173), that is, of trying to look like someone he was not.

This probably means that the Buddha was, as a rule, offered a robe of a larger dimension than the usual one worn by other monks. This would then mean more cloth used for such a *sugata* robe (a technical term for such a robe). Or, that the Buddha's robe was of a better quality than an ordinary robe worn by a monastic. Either way, it meant that Nanda would be setting a precedent for other monastics to wear such a robe, using more and better cloth—which would then be a strain on the lay supporters. [2.2.1.3]

2.2.1.2 The Buddha's robes, says the Vinaya, should be 9 spans (*vidatthi*) long and 6 spans wide. A "span" (or "handspan") is defined as the length between the tips of the thumb and the little finger extended, which measures 25 cm (10 inches) in Thai monastic Buddhism.²² However, the robe dimension in the Buddha's time was probably much smaller than what we often see on Buddhist monks today.

2.2.1.3 There is apparently no good reason to believe that the Buddha's robe (*cīvara*) was larger in proportion than those worn by other monks in the sangha. **The Cīvara Sutta** (S 16.11), for example, tells us that the Buddha exchanged robes with Mahā Kassapa for the latter's rag-robes.²³ Of course, there is a possibility that they were both larger in size (as kshatriyas) than the average monk at that time.

Then there is the incident recorded in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) where Pukkusa gave 2 sets of robes, one for the Buddha and the other for Ānanda. The gift was a spontaneous one, and was thus probably average in size. Then, again, the cloth could be cut up and sewn into larger robes—unless the robes were ready to wear. Anyway, even then, it is likely Pukkusa's robes were of the same size; there is no reason to believe that they were of different sizes.²⁴

2.2.2 Nanda as a forest monk

2.2.2.1 Nanda, as we know, renounced the world in the 2nd year of the Buddha's ministry, during the Buddha's first visit to Kapila, vatthu. During these early years of the 1st period,²⁵ the monks were mostly eremites or wandering monks. However, if we accept the accounts of the donations of the Bamboo Grove by king Bimbi, sāra and other such monastic parks, we can assume that there were also settled monks in such parks. They were forested parks with widely scattered monastic cells and an assembly area, as a rule, without any built-up complexes of buildings that we often see today.²⁶

²² Ñāṇamoli, *A Pali-English Glossary of Buddhist Technical Terms*, (ed Bh Bodhi), Kandy, 1994:141. In **Thai** Buddhism, a "handspan" or Thai, *kheup*, is 25 cm or 10 ins (*Vinayamukha* 1 (Thai 1916) Eng 1969:235 f; *Vinayamukha* 2 (1921) 1973:13-18. A smaller robe would measure 4.5 by 5.5 cubits (6' 11" by 8' 3"). The monastic robes (V 1:94,8 = 2:272,11; 5:175,2, 1287,29) today (from my monk informants) are as follows: A **Thai forest tradition** *cīvara* (*saṅghāṭi* and *uttarā,saṅga*) is 2.14 x 3.55 m (7' x 11'7"): links below. A **Burmese** *cīvara* is 2 x 2.55 m (6'5"-6'10" x 8'1"-8'5"); an inner robe (waist cloth) (Thai, *sabong*; Malay *sarong*) (*antara,vāsaka*) is 1.0-2.6 m (3'8"-3'11" x 8'3"-8'7"). A **Sri Lankan** *cīvara* is 2.05 x 2.74 m (5'9" x 9'). These are the basic Burmese *cīvara* sizes; they are available in 3 sizes: medium, large and double-large. For a modern forest monastic robes **sewing guide** (2024): <https://ticivara.github.io/en/pdf>; robe size and pattern: <https://ticivara.github.io/en/civara-pattern>, [[Dyeing manual](#) 2019] [[Tools](#)]14 Nov 2024.

²³ S 16.11/2:217-222 (SD 77.5).

²⁴ See Rhys Davids & Oldenberg (trs), *Vinaya Texts* 1:54 f n3.

²⁵ On the 2 periods of the Buddha's ministry, see SD 40a.1 (1.3).

²⁶ This section is from SD 43.7 (1.4.2).

2.2.2.2 For Nanda, dressed in *well-pressed robes, with eyes lined with coryllium, and having a glazed bowl*, then, approaching the Buddha is apparently Nanda’s way of taking leave, as it were, to go into solitary retreat (despite what the Commentary says) [2.1.3.1]. Since most of the Buddha’s monastic community live in forested park-monasteries (*ārāma*), Nanda does not need to go far into some remote forest, but can live a solitary life of meditation some distance away from the monastic community so that he is undistracted in his practice.

In due course, Nanda “dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute, in no long time at all, right here and now, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge, attained and dwelled in the supreme goal of the holy life”²⁷ In a soteriological sense, this is Nanda’s direct seeing of the unconditioned Dharma (nirvana).

2.3 PERSONALLY EXPERIENCING THE DHARMA

2.3.0 In the experiential or practical sense, Nanda lives the full and pure spiritual life, directly seeing the Dharma (true reality) by keeping to the following practices:

(1) guarding the doors of the sense-faculties,	<i>indriyesu gutta, dvāro</i>	[2.3.1]
(2) observing moderation in eating,	<i>bhojane mattaññū</i>	[2.3.2]
(3) intentness on wakefulness, and	<i>jāgariyaṃ anuyutto</i>	[2.3.3]
(4) keeping mindfulness and clear awareness	<i>sati, sampajaññaena samannāgato</i>	[2.3.4]

2.3.1 Nanda guards the doors of the sense-faculties (*indriyesu gutta, dvāro*)

2.3.1.1 Whichever direction Nanda turns to look, or whatever he sees, he is mindful and clearly aware that no feelings of longing or dejection, of liking or disliking, arises in him. This means that he experiences a sense-object as being impermanent, rising one moment, falling the next, with nothing to grasp at. This is to truly live, well aware of the reality of the present, free from the past, free from the future. There is only the eternal now, as it were. This is the arhat’s mental process.

2.3.1.2 For us, the unawakened, we should practise what the Buddha teaches us in **the (Saḷ-āyatana) Upavāṇa Sutta** (S 35.70), thus:

“When I see a form, I will note when there is *lust* arising with it. Or there is hatred in me on account of it. I will do just that and stop right there. To that extent, I have let go of the mental hindrance of sensual desire, and see the Dharma as being “seen by oneself [directly visible], immediate, inviting one to come and see, leading onward, to be personally known by the wise.”²⁸

Similarly, when I hear a sound, I will note when there is *lust* or *hatred* arising on account of it

Similarly, when I smell a smell, I will note when there is *lust* or *hatred* arising on account of it

Similarly, when I taste a taste, I will note when there is *lust* or *hatred* arising on account of it

Similarly, when I feel a touch, I will note when there is *lust* or *hatred* arising on account of it

Similarly, when I think a thought, I will note when there is *lust* or *hatred* arising on account of it. I will do just that and stop right there. To that extent, I have let go of the mental hindrance of sensual desire, and seen the Dharma as being “seen by oneself [directly visible], immediate, inviting one to come and see, leading onward, to be personally known by the wise.

I have, thus far, practised the Dharma here and now.”

²⁷ U 22,21/23 (SD 43.7).

²⁸ S 35.70/4:41-43 (SD 62.7).

2.3.1.3 Should someone tell us: “That’s difficult, I would rather just enjoy the sight, sound, smell, taste, touch or thought that comes to me.” Our joyful and peaceful answer should be: “You are free to choose. Just do what you feel is right with courage and a smile.” [§2]

2.3.2 Nanda observes moderation in eating (bhojane mattaññū)

2.3.2.1 As an arhat, Nanda takes his meals merely to be free from the feeling of hunger, to be healthy and capable of fully living the holy life. He is not selective in the kind of food he takes, mixing together whatever almsfood he receives, and eating it, sustaining himself on “scraps of strangers” (*aññāt-uñchena yāpentam*), that is, not knowing from whom he will get almsfood, how much or how little, and what kind of food. Thus he only “eats to live” for the benefit of the giver, the teaching and posterity, that is, we in the present who love and practise the Buddha Dharma. [§3]

2.3.2.2 As lay Buddhists, we are more likely to choose our food and take food more times in a day than a Vinaya-minded monastic does. Out of respect for the body (which is part of our moral discipline), we will make every effort to eat healthily and moderately, that is, knowing when to stop eating—wisely, just before we feel full. It is not always easy to know this, but it is easier when we eat *mindfully*, chewing each morsel well, happily and in peace.

2.3.2.3 This does not mean that we should try to eat at the deeply mindful pace of a disciplined renunciant (although we may if we are inclined to). There are times for a hearty meal, eating for the happiness of our good friends and companions, and to celebrate an auspicious occasion. If the situation compels us to show that we are “enjoying” our food—such as during a raucous traditional Chinese dinner—we may do what it takes to please the host or respect the occasion, to do this *mindfully*, and to reflect on the event, what we learn about it after that and be better prepared the next time.

2.3.3 Nanda is intent on wakefulness (jāgariyam anuyutto)

2.3.3.1 NANDA’S 4 POSTURES AND THE 3 WATCHES

The arhat Nanda keeps himself mindfully wakeful (alert) in the day while walking and while sitting; he keeps his mind free from any unwholesome thoughts. Or he sits in meditation, fully enjoying it. These are the 4 human postures—standing, walking, sitting, and reclining. Should he feel physically tired—as often mentioned in the case of the aging Buddha—he would *lie down* mindfully to rest, be free of his tiredness and then get up to continue with his meditative practice.²⁹

Nanda spends **the 1st watch** of the night (6.00-10.00 pm), gently exercising himself with walking meditation. When he feels tired, he would stand mindfully for a break. If necessary, he will sit mindfully to rest. [§4]

²⁹ On when the Buddha needs to lie down to rest due to tiredness, see: (1) the Buddha’s back aches at Nandaka’s lengthy discourse: **Nandaka S** (A 9.4,2), SD 73.4; (2) the Buddha’s back aches and he asks Moggallāna to continue the teaching: **Avassuta Pariyāya S** (S 35.202,8), SD 60.6; (3) the Buddha has a fever: **Gilāna S 3** (S 46.16), SD 43.13; (4) the 80-yr-old Buddha, suffering from dysentery, wishes to lie down between the sal-trees: **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 9,5.1.2 f), SD 9. See also **Gilāna S 1** (S 46.14), SD 43.11 on Mahā Kassapa’s illness; **Gilāna S 2** (S 46.15), SD 43.12.

During **the middle watch** (10.00 pm-2.00 am), Nanda lies down in the lion posture (on his right side), mindful that he will rise some 4 hours later (at the start of the last watch).³⁰ Then he spends **the last watch** (2.00-6.00 am) doing his walking meditation, with sittings in between when he needs to rest.

2.3.3.2 THE 5 PERIODS OF THE BUDDHA'S DAY

The arhat Nanda's day was thus divided into **4 periods**—the day and the 3 watches. In the case of **the Buddha's day**, the Commentaries describe it as being divided into the "5 periods," that is, the forenoon, the afternoon, the first watch, the middle watch and the last watch.

In **the forenoon**, at the early hours of dawn, the Buddha attends to his bodily needs and toilet. Then he sits down in solitary meditation or retreat (*paṭisallāna*), after which he goes on his almsround and then has his meal (DA 1:45).

In **the afternoon**, after his day's only meal, he surveys the mental dispositions of his audience and delivers a discourse, advising them on the Dharma and its practice, and establishes them in the refuges and the precepts. During the 3rd part of the afternoon, towards evening, the people dwelling nearby, who have given alms in the morning, having dressed and groomed themselves, and bringing perfumes, garlands and other offerings, assemble in the monastery. The Buddha sits on his special seat in the assembly hall and teaches the Dharma in a way fitting to the occasion and audience. After his afternoon activities, the Buddha returns to his cell to spend a period of solitary retreat or rest.

The 1st watch of the night (*paṭhama-* or *purima,yāma*) is exclusively reserved for the instruction of sangha members who have arrived from various directions to attend to the Buddha. Some ask questions, some inquire about points of Dharma, some request for meditation subjects.

After sangha members have dispersed, during **the middle watch** (*majjhima,yāma*), celestial beings approach the Buddha to consult him.

The last watch (*pacchima,yāma*) is divided into 3 sessions (DA 147). Because his body aches from sitting for long periods since early morning, the Buddha spends the first portion of the last watch mindfully pacing up and down (*caṅkamana*) to dispel the discomfort. During the 2nd part of the last watch (that is, around 3 to 5 am), the Buddha enters the fragrant cell and mindfully sleeps, experiencing nirvanic or dhyanic bliss. In other words, the Buddha sleeps only about 2 hours daily.

Finally, during the 3rd part of the last watch, just before dawn, he rises (around 5.00-6.00 am), takes a seat and rouses in himself the attainment of great compassion (*mahā,kaṛuṇā samāpatti*). Cultivating thoughts of lovingkindness towards all beings, he surveys the world with his Buddha-eye and seeks out those who have observed their duties (such as giving alms and keeping to the precepts in the presence of past Buddhas) and whom he can assist spiritually.³¹

2.3.3.3 A good Dharma practitioner, monastic or lay, follows the examples of the arhats and other path saints mentioned in the suttas in living an orderly life that helps them to cultivate inner peace, intellectual creativity and spiritual insight. This is the kind of life that allows us to enjoy the best of spiritual teachings, world literature and technical knowledge that are beneficial to us, to others and the environment.

Basically, this means we live a life of proper meals, healthy physical routine and wholesome social interbeing. We try our best to avoid negative people, or we inspire them to be positive and proactive.

³⁰ This short sleeping period is that of the arhats. During the meditation retreats of our own time, when strict rules apply, the retreatants prob sleep between 10 pm to 3-4 am. Moreover, they are allowed to rest, even nap, in between if they need to.

³¹ On the 5 periods of the Buddha's day: D 16,4.38 n (SD 9); SD 25.3 (4.1); SD 32.13 (1.1).

We support ourselves with jobs that keep to the spirit of right livelihood.³² With the wealth that we generate we support ourselves to lead full Dharma-spirited lives of sutta study, warm fellowship and good health, cultivating the mind and working to gain the path of freedom in this life itself.

2.3.4 Nanda possesses mindfulness and clear awareness (*sati,sampajañña*na samannāgato)

2.3.4.1 Fourth and lastly, the Buddha praises the arhat Nanda for his **mindfulness and clear awareness**. This means that he is adept in keeping his mind focused in the present moment, neither lost in the dead past nor imagining the non-existent future. He is clearly aware of what is going on here and now, that is, as the Sutta tells us, by way of feelings (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saññā*) and thoughts (*vitakka*).

He notes how a **feeling** arises, persists and then disappears. Since an arhat has uprooted all his unwholesome roots of *greed, hatred and delusion*, this feeling is likely to be a happy one, such as the Buddha looks at a certain place and smiling, recalling an ancient incident of Dharma significance, upon which he may give a discourse.³³

Nanda's **perceptions**, like those of any arhat, are wholesome, rooted in Dharma as true reality both as taught by the Buddha and from his own personal observation and wisdom. Whatever memory arises in an arhat, he perceives it in a wholesome way of learning and teaching, neither liking nor disliking it. He notices how such perception arises, persists and then passes away just as it has arisen.

Nanda's **thoughts** are the thoughts of a liberated being, an arhat. His **wisdom** sees how the Dharma is connected to all beings, especially those whom he engages with, so that he inspires them to be better people or to act wholesomely despite their personal difficulties. For an arhat, with great wisdom comes **great compassion**.

2.3.4.2 An arhat's thoughts, words and actions are invariably rooted in **lovingkindness**, accepting others as they are. He is naturally moved by **compassion** to bring the suffering and the ignorant to a more liberated level of being, even to awakening itself. When he sees such beings, he shows **joy** in appreciation of their goodness and success. Yet, in facing the world and its uncertainties, he remains at peace with **equanimity**, knowing that beings fare according to their karma.

One of the most beautiful qualities of an arhat is that of **noble silence**. In itself, this radiant silence exudes from his own inner peace and joy of nirvana. Seeing an arhat (or a truly good person or some really happy wholesome thought), fills us with joy greater than that of watching a beautiful sunset or any worldly experience. It is seeing the reality and nowness of the highest good that is humanly possible, that makes us more than human, even here and now.

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³² See **Right livelihood**, SD 37.8.

³³ Examples of this includes: (1) while in Mithilā, the Buddha smiled when he arrived at the site of Makhadeva's palace; when asked about his smiling, he relates the story of the world monarch Makhādeva: **Makhā,deva S** (M 83/2:75-83), SD 60.8; (2) in a large sal-grove in Kosala, the Buddha smiles at a certain place; when asked he relates the story of Gavesī and the past Buddha Kassapa: **Gāvesi S** (A 5.180/3:214-218), SD 47.16; (3) at Kusināra, the Buddha relates its significance as the capital of the ancient king Sudassana (D 16,5.17 f): **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17), SD 36.12.

(Aṭṭhaka) Nanda Sutta The (Eights) Discourse on Nanda

A 8.9

1 “Bhikshus, one speaking rightly would say of **Nanda**

(1) that, bhikshus, he is a clansman,	<i>kula,putto ti</i>
(2) that, bhikshus, he is strong,	<i>balavā ti</i>
(3) that, bhikshus, he is graceful, and	<i>pāsādiko ti</i>
(4) that, bhikshus, he was strongly prone to lust. ³⁴	<i>tibba,rāgo ti</i>

1.2 How else, bhikshus, could Nanda lead the full and pure spiritual life unless

(5) he guards the doors of the sense-faculties,	<i>indriyesu gutta,dvāro</i>
(6) observes moderation in eating,	<i>bhojane mattaññū</i>
(7) is intent on wakefulness, and	<i>jāgariyaṃ anuyutto</i>
(8) possesses mindfulness and clear awareness?	<i>sati,sampajaññaena samannāgato</i>

2 (5) Bhikshus, this is how Nanda **guards the doors of the sense faculties**: [167]

If, bhikshus, Nanda needs to look to the east,

he does so after he has fully considered the matter and is clearly aware thus:

“When I look to the east,
bad unwholesome states of longing and dejection will not flow in upon me.”

If, bhikshus, Nanda needs to look to the west,

he does so after he has fully considered the matter and is clearly aware thus:

“When I look to the west,
bad unwholesome states of longing and dejection will not flow in upon me.”

If, bhikshus, Nanda needs to look to the north,

he does so after he has fully considered the matter and is clearly aware thus:

“When I look to the north,
bad unwholesome states of longing and dejection will not flow in upon me.”

If, bhikshus, Nanda needs to look to the south,

he does so after he has fully considered the matter and is clearly aware thus:

“When I look to the south,
bad unwholesome states of longing and dejection will not flow in upon me.”

If, bhikshus, Nanda needs to look up (at the zenith),

he does so after he has fully considered the matter and is clearly aware thus:

“When I look up,
bad unwholesome states of longing and dejection will not flow in upon me.”

³⁴ *Tibba,rāgo ti bhikkhave nandaṃ sammā,vadamāno vadeyya*. This was before he gained arhathood. Note that the rule of contextuality applies here even with the *past tense* used here. It seems to say even one with so much lust is able to practise and be free of it gain awakening.

If, bhikshus, Nanda needs to look down (at the nadir),
he does so after he has fully considered the matter and is clearly aware thus:
“When I look down,
bad unwholesome states of longing and dejection will not flow in upon me.”

If, bhikshus, Nanda needs to survey the intermediate directions,
he does so after he has fully considered the matter and is clearly aware thus:
“When I look to the intermediate directions,
bad unwholesome states of longing and dejection will not flow in upon me.”

That is how, bhikshus, Nanda guards the doors of the sense faculties.

3 (6) This, bhikshus, is how Nanda practises **moderation in eating**:

Here,³⁵ bhikshus, wisely reflecting, Nanda **eats food**,³⁶
 not for amusement,³⁷ not for intoxication, not for fattening, not for beautifying,
 but only for keeping this body going and enduring, for ending hunger pangs,³⁸
 for the sake of supporting the holy life,³⁹ considering,
*“Thus I shall get rid of an old feeling,⁴⁰ and not let a new feeling arise,
 and, in this way, I will be blameless, and live at ease.”⁴¹*
 That is how Nanda practises moderation in eating.

4 (7) This, bhikshus, is how Nanda is **intent on wakefulness: [168]**

During the day, while walking back and forth, and sitting,
 Nanda purifies his mind of obstructive qualities.
 In the first watch of the night, *while walking back and forth and sitting,*
he purifies his mind of obstructive qualities.⁴²
 In the middle watch of the night,
 he lies down on the right side in the lion's posture, with one foot placed above the other,
 mindful and clearly aware, after noting in his mind the idea of rising.
 In the last watch of the night, after rising, while walking back and forth and sitting,
 he purifies his mind of obstructive qualities.
 That, bhikshus, is how Nanda is intent on wakefulness.

³⁵ There are 4 such mindful reflections: on reflective uses of the 4 supports, viz: (1) the robe, (2) almsfood, (3) lodging, and (4) medicines: **Sabbāsava S** (M 2,13-15)+n SD 30.3; on reflective food-taking, see M 2,14.

³⁶ “Eats food,” *āhāraṃ āhāreti*; in the stock formula, this is “uses [takes] almsfood” (*piṇḍapātāṃ patisevati*): M 2,14 (SD 30.3).

³⁷ This stock: M 1:355; A 2:40, 145; Dhs 1346; Pug 21; Vbh 249.

³⁸ Vism 1.92/32.

³⁹ Buddhaghosa distinguishes 2 kinds of holy life (*brahma, cariya*): the teaching (*sāsana*) as a whole, and the holy life of the path (*magga brahma, cariya*), ie, sainthood (Vism 1.92/32).

⁴⁰ The “old feeling” is that of hunger, the “new feeling” refers to not over-eating.

⁴¹ “Live at ease” (*phāsu, vihāra*) refers to bodily ease or comfort, free from pain and distraction, so that we could direct our mind to meditation.

⁴² As an arhat, one awakened, Nanda has no thoughts of greed, hatred, delusion or fear, but “obstructions” here refers to any thoughts of liking something or of sleepiness. Sāriputta, eg, realizing he had a fondness for meal cakes (*piṭṭha, khajjaka*), and that devotees were enthusiastic to give them to him, vowed never to take them again (J 1:310).

5 (8) This, bhikshus, is Nanda's **mindfulness and clear awareness**:

Here, bhikshus,⁴³

Nanda knows feelings as they arise, as they remain present, as they disappear;
 he knows perceptions as they arise, as they remain present, as they disappear;
 he knows thoughts as they arise, as they remain present, as they disappear.⁴⁴

That, bhikshus, is Nanda's mindfulness and clear awareness.

6 How else, bhikshus, could Nanda lead the complete and pure spiritual life unless he guards the doors of the sense faculties, observes moderation in eating, is intent on wakefulness, and possesses mindfulness and clear awareness?"

—evaṃ—

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⁴³ On the significance of this teaching in rejecting the later doctrine of momentariness, see SD 62.10a (3.3.6.3).

⁴⁴ At A 4.41, this is called the cultivation of concentration that leads to mindfulness and clear awareness.