

## An immeasurable mind

Excerpt from *SD 60.6 Avassuta Pariyāya Sutta (S 35.202)*<sup>1</sup>, An arhat is a master of his senses and mind by TAN Beng Sin (Piya Tan) © 2023.

**2.1.2.1** The opposite of a “narrow mind” is an **immeasurable mind** (*appamāṇa citta*; adj *appamāṇa cetaso*). **The Avassuta Pariyāya Sutta** describes one “with an immeasurable mind” as one who is neither caught up with a pleasing sense-experience nor repelled by an unpleasant experience. Such a one “dwells having set up mindfulness of the body” (*upaṭṭhita, kāya, sati ca viharati*) [§15].

“Immeasurable” often describes a mind that is free from *conceit (māna)*, that is, a measuring of others in a selfish way; it is a mind that accepts others and things as they are and going from there, especially by way of the divine abodes [2.1.2.3]. When a divine abode is attained to the level of dhyana, we are said to have attained an “immeasurable [boundless] liberation of mind” (*appamāṇa ceto, vimutti*). In **the Avassuta Pariyāya Sutta**, the term “immeasurable liberation of mind” has a broader sense than just the divine abodes: it refers to a mind that is *joyfully free from thoughts*. [2.2.1.2]

**2.1.2.2** This passage recurs as the conclusion of **the Mahā Taṇhā, saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38) explained by the Buddha in the context of dependent arising for each of the 6 sense-objects, thus:

[On experiencing a sense-object, he neither lusts after it if it is pleasurable nor dislikes it if it is unpleasurable.]

He dwells with **mindfulness of the body established and with an immeasurable mind**,<sup>2</sup> and he understands it, as it really is, the freedom of mind and the freedom by wisdom wherein those bad, unwholesome states cease without remainder.

Having thus abandoned liking and disliking, whatever feeling he feels— whether pleasant or painful or neutral—

he delights not in that feeling, does not welcome it, and does not remain holding on to it.<sup>3</sup>

As he does not do so, delight in feelings does not arise and remain in him.

With the non-arising of this delight, clinging ends [does not arise];

with the ending of clinging, existence ends;

with the ending of existence, birth ends;

with the ending of birth: decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair end.

—Such is the ending [non-arising] of this whole mass of suffering.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/60.6-Avassuta-Pariyaya-S-s35.202-piya.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Comy: An immeasurable mind (*appamāṇa, cetaso*) is a supramundane mind, that is to say, one has gained the path (MA 2:311). This passage recurs in **Avassuta Pariyāya S** (S 35.202, 15 *passim*) + SD 60.6 (2.1.2). Cf *aparitto mah’attā appamāṇa, vihārī* (A 1:249).

<sup>3</sup> Bodhi: “This statement reveals that the chain of dependent origination is broken at the link between feeling and craving. Feeling arises necessarily because the body acquired through past craving is subject to the maturation of past kamma. However, if one does not delight in feeling, craving will not have the opportunity to arise and set off reactions of like and dislike that provide further fuel for the round, and thus the round will come to an end.” (M:ÑB 1234 n141)

Both the **Avassuta Pariyāya Sutta** and the **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** passages here refer to the attainment of arhathood. Thus, the “immeasurable mind” refers to the attainment of the path (attaining at least streamwinning). The idea is that Dharma training, especially that of a renunciant, is to attain arhathood.

**2.1.2.3** The proper cultivation of **the 4 divine abodes** (*brahma, vihāra*)—*lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity* [2.1.1.6]—is also called “the immeasurables” (*appamāṇa*) because our wholesome emotions are now directed to *all* beings. We understand that our minds are not merely body-based, much less *self-centred*: our minds are all interconnected and affected by one another over time (the past, present and future).

In other words, living beings are all **extended minds**—human, divine, animal, asura, preta and hell-being—that affect one another. In fact, we also shift amongst these states depending on our karma so long as we are unawakened. Bad karma can drag us down to subhuman states (as suffering humans, animals, asuras, pretas or hell-beings); good karma can raise us to happier human or divine levels. However, as unawakened beings, all these states are impermanent and flow into one another, shaping and influencing one another.

In a sense, the whole of **samsara** (*samsāra*)—living beings—keeps on evolving and devolving as different states so long as we keep creating new karma, which works with “good” and “bad.” Bad deeds bring bad fruits, good deeds bring good fruits. But the problem with good is that it keeps us in samsara, which means that we are still capable and liable to creating bad karma, since our **unconscious defilements** (*anusaya*)—like karmic genes—are always with us.

Only by being fully awakened do we uproot all unconscious tendencies, so that we are always **mindful** (*sati*) and **aware** (*sampajañña*): we know what is going on before us, we remember how actions (karma) work, and we are able “to avoid all bad, cultivate good and purify the mind” (Dh 183) and “guard the arisen wholesome state” (A 4.13): this tetrad is called **the 4 right strivings** (*sammā padhāna*).<sup>4</sup>

With these 4 right strivings, we are not only mindful and aware, but we are able to free our minds from defilements (greed, hatred and delusion) and have truly immeasurable minds: we become **arhats** (like the Buddha). We are then free from these *narrow* samsaric shifts, the existential paradigm. The awakened mind enjoys the immeasurable space of awakening that is beyond time and space.

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<sup>4</sup> A 4.13/2:15 (SD 51.21).