

Aññâdhikaraṇa Sutta¹

The Discourse on the Question of Final Knowledge

[Mere book learning does not lead to liberation]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 10.86/5:161-164)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2005

(1) Introduction

The Aññâdhikaraṇa Sutta warns how arrogance (*adhimāna*) causes one to take one's learning and opinion as the final truth, misleading one to even declare that one is an arhat, that is, awakened to reality (like the Buddha). It is interesting that the sutta gives "arrogance" as the starting point of a whole list of factors contributing to one's failing in the Teaching, so that in the end one is unable to grow spiritually. In this sense, this is a prophetic sutta, warning of dangers to the Teaching. Understandably, the Burmese (CSCD) name this text as **the Adhimāna Sutta**.

This claim to awakening could be due to a mistaken notion or as a deliberate move to mislead others. However, the Buddha or his disciple, "a meditator skilled in the attainments, skilled in reading another's mind, skilled in the understanding the ways of another's mind" [2b], is able to discern the mental state and motives of such person, that is, one under the power of the five mental hindrances, and their more palpable manifestations [2e].

It is interesting to see the relationship of the five mental hindrances with the five wrong ways mentioned here:

The mental hindrances

1. Covetousness
2. Ill will
3. Sloth and torpor
4. Restless (and worry)
5. Doubt

The distracting activities

6. Delighting (addiction) to work
7. Pleasure in talking
8. Pleasure in sleeping
9. Pleasure in company (socializing)
10. Being unmindful

Any of these ten hindrances "weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata" [2e]. One with any of these ten states would not be able to grow in the Teaching [3].

(2) Academic learning versus direct experience

In the two **Dhamma, vihārī Suttas** (A 5.73-74), the Buddha speaks of the "one who lives by the Dharma" (*dhamma, vihārī*). There are those who master the Dharma through study (*pariyāpunāti*), who teach (*deseti*) the Dharma, who recite (*sajjhāyam karoti*) the Dharma, and who think, examine and turn the Dharma over in his mind (*anuvitakketi anivicāreti manasānupekhati*), but do not cultivate their mind in calm and wisdom. **Sujato** sounds this cautionary note:²

I must admit I do find it of concern when I see meditation systems whose goal is to experientially realize the elements of "ultimate truth" as elaborated by commentarial theorists. To anyone approaching the matter with a rudimentary understanding of the history of philosophy it is obvious that the Abhidhamma/commentarial systems are theoretical constructs developed in a scholastic environment, far removed from the Buddha in time and spirit.

Unfortunately, the Buddhist education in these countries is so narrow that the monks do not, in fact, have this rudimentary understanding, and interpret academic speculations as experiential truth. It is doubtful whether the authors of these scholastic tractates ever thought of using them for

¹ Called **Adhimāna S**, "The Discourse on Arrogance," in CSCD.

² See "The Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas" = SD 13.1(3.9b & 12).

meditation. But thousands of devoted followers do, and invest vast effort into making the theory real. (Sujato 2004b:218)

“One who lives by the Dharma,” on the other hand, “does not pass the day (merely) in the study of the Dharma: he does not neglect seclusion, and applies himself to mental calm internally.”³ Furthermore, “here a monk masters the Dharma through study...; moreover, he knows its meaning with wisdom.”⁴ The juxtaposition of the two suttas—and their identical title—shows their close relationship. In fact, while the first sutta is about mental calm, the other is about insight wisdom, that is, the twin aspects of Buddhist meditation.⁵ Academic scholars who are non-practitioners, no matter how erudite their studies and researches, can only at best explain the “letter” (*vyañjana*) of the Dharma; its meaning (*attha*) can only be understood through personal experience of mental calm and insight through meditation, mindfulness and faith. **Analayo** similarly makes a sobering note here:

The inability of a purely theoretical approach to result in awakening is a recurrent theme in the discourses.⁶ To spend one’s time intellectually considering the *Dhamma* and thereby neglecting actual practice clearly meets with the Buddha’s disapproval. According to him, one who acts thus cannot be considered a practitioner of the *Dhamma*, but merely as someone caught up in thinking.⁷ (2003:114)

³ *So tāya dhamma,pariyattiyā na divasaṃ atināmeti, na riñcati paṭisallānam, anuyuñjati ajjhataṃ ceto,-samathaṃ* (A 5.73/3:86 f).

⁴ *Idha bhikkhu dhammaṃ pariyāpuṇāti...uttariṇ c’assa paññāya atthaṃ pajānāti* (A 5.74/3:88 f).

⁵ In the modern “Vipassanā” tradition, this would be called “calm” (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) respectively. Cf A:ÑB §103 & p298 n24.

⁶ At S 1:136 [**Āyacana S**, see §3.9a above = SD 12.2], the Buddha described his realization as beyond the reach of mere theoretical inquiry. Cf also Dh 19, 20, 258, 259, which emphasize that what really matters is the practice of the *Dhamma*. At A 5:162 [**Aññādhikaraṇa S**, A 10.86 = SD 12.15], excessive emphasis on a theoretical understanding of the *Dhamma* even led some monks to mistakenly claim realization. Cf also WS Karunaratne 1988a:83. (Analayo’s fn)

⁷ A 3:87 [**Dhamma,vihārī S 1**, A 5.73]. The same description, however, comes up at A 3:178 [**Saddhamma Sammosa S 2**, A 5.156] in a recommendation to reflect on the *Dhamma*, demonstrating that the Buddha did not categorically reject such theoretical inquiry, but that his criticism was directed against neglect of the practice. [Analayo’s fn]

(3) The Discourse on The Question of Final Knowledge⁸ (abridged)

1 At one time the venerable Mahā Kassapa was staying in the Squirrels' Feeding-ground in the Bamboo Forest near Rājagaha. He addressed the monks, thus:

2a "Here, monks, a monk declares his final knowledge thus:

'I know thus: "**Destroyed are the mental cankers, lived is the holy life, done is what has to be done, laid down is the burden, there is no more of this state.**"'

2b The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, a meditator skilled in the attainments, able to read another's mind, closely examines him.

Thus on being closely examined, he comes to a desert, to a jungle, to a distress, to **the wrong way**, to ruin, to loss and misfortune.⁹

2c The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple considers:

'Now why does this venerable one declare that he is an arhat?'

Then the Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, reads his mind and knows:

'Indeed, seized by **arrogance**, this venerable one, taking his arrogance to be the truth, regards the unattained as attained, regarding the undone as done, regards the unrealized as realized. Through arrogance, he declares that he is an arhat.'

2d The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, then considers:

'Now on what account does this venerable one declare that he is an arhat?'

The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, reading his mind, knows:

'Indeed, this venerable one is **deeply learned** regarding what they (others) profess to be the Dharma, understanding it as an opinion. Therefore, seized by arrogance, this venerable regards the unrealized as realized. Through arrogance, he declares that he is an arhat.

2e The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, reading his mind, knows:

(1-5) 'Indeed, this venerable one dwells in the grasp of [the five hindrances:] covetousness, filled with ill will, filled with sloth and torpor, restless, filled with doubt—which indeed weakens the Buddha's Teaching.

(6-10) Indeed, this venerable one is yoked to delighting in work, in talking, in sleep, in company; and he is unmindful in his duties, so that even what little he has realized, he gives them up halfway—which indeed weakens the Buddha's Teaching.

3 Indeed, friends, this monk, without giving up **these ten things**, would not be able to grow in the Buddha's Teaching.

Indeed, friends, this monk, giving up these ten things, would be able to grow in the Buddha's Teaching.

How to use a sutta

This sutta, like many others in the Sutta Discovery series, has been translated with the repetition cycles (*peyyāla*) given in full. In this way, the sutta teaching is given in full, without the mind filling in too much of its own details in the perceived gaps. One should study a sutta not merely to *know* it, but to learn to "let go" of the self (or more correctly, the notion of a self). To this effect, the sutta should be mindfully read, or listened to, and reflected upon, again and again, like taking a regular dose of medicine. The roots of realization are growing even as you do so, and before you know it, it flowers and bears fruit!

⁸ A 10.86/5:161-164.

⁹ *Samanuyūñjīyamāno samanugāhiyamāno samanubhāsiyamāno iriṇaṃ āpajjati, vijinaṃ āpajjati, anayaṃ āpajjatim, vyasanaṃ āpajjati, anayavyasanaṃ āpajjati.*

The Discourse on The Question of Final Knowledge (A 10.86/5:161-164)

[161]

1 At one time the venerable Mahā Kassapa was staying in the Squirrels' Feeding-ground in the Bamboo Forest near Rājagaha.

Then the venerable [162] Mahā Kassapa addressed the monks, "Friends! Monks!"¹⁰

"Friend!" the monks replied to Mahā Kassapa in assent.

The venerable Mahā Kassapa said this:

Arrogant claim to arhathood

2a "Here, monks, a monk declares his final knowledge¹¹ thus:

"I know thus: "Destroyed are the mental cankers,¹² lived is the holy life, done is what has to be done, laid down is the burden, there is no more of this state."¹³

2b The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, a meditator skilled in the attainments,¹⁴ skilled in reading another's mind, skilled in the understanding the ways of another's mind,¹⁵ closely examines, questions and converses with him.

¹⁰ "Friends! Monks!" *āvuso bhikkhavo*, vl *āvuso bhikkhave*, alt tr "Brother monks!" "Friends!" (*āvuso*) addresses the monks equal in "rains" with the speaker; "Monks!" addresses the junior monks. If rendered "Brother monks!" the audience would comprise monks more or less equal in rains with Mahā Kassapa. *Avuso* is derived from **āvusso* < **āyuṣmas* (cf Whitney, *A Sanskrit Grammar*, London, 3rd ed 1896 §454). See **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.6.2) = SD 9; also CPD: *āvuso*.

¹¹ "Final knowledge," *añña*, ie knowledge leading to spiritual liberation; "(the arriving of) thorough knowledge, esp the perfect insight of a Buddhist saint, ie Arhatship" (CPD); also "highest knowledge" (BDict).

¹² "Mental cankers," *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit "cankers") comes from *ā-savati*, meaning "flows towards" (ie either "into" or "out" towards the observer). It has been variously tr as influxes, taints ("deadly taints," RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 kinds of *āsava*: the cankers of (1) sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as "floods" (*oghā*) and "yokes" (*yogā*). The list of 3 cankers (omitting the canker of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these cankers is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

¹³ *Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahma, cariyāṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāyā ti pajānāti*. This is the pericope for describing the attainment of arhathood; see M 118.9/3:80.

¹⁴ "Skilled in the attainments," *samāpatti, kusalo*, possible alt tr "skilled in the wholesome," but not supported by Sutta or Comy. See foll n.

¹⁵ "A meditator...another's mind," *jhāyī samāpatti, kusalo para, citta, kusalo para, citta, pariyāya, kusalo*. *Jhāyī samāpatti, kusalo*, lit "dhyanas-attainer, skilled in the attainments," where *jhāna* refers simply to "meditation" and *samāpatti*, "dhyana attainment." Aṅguttara Comy: "*jhāyī samāpatti, kusalo* means skill in the attaining of dhyanas and the meditation attainments" (*jhāyī samāpatti, kusalo 'ti jhānehi ca sampanno samāpattiyaṃ ca cheko* (AA 5:55); *samāpatti, kusalatā* means "having found agreeable food and weather, he has skill in attaining the attainments" (*samāpatti, kusalatā 'ti āhāra, sappāyaṃ utu, sappāyaṃ pariggaṇhitvā samāpatti, samāpajane chekatā* (AA 2:161; cf 2:350, 3:354). Dīgha Comy: "*samāpatti, kusalatā* means there is the attainment with applied thought and sustained thought; the attainment free of applied thought, with only sustained thought; the attainment free from both applied thought and sustained thought" *samāpatti, kusalatā 'ti atthi savitakka, savicāra samāpatti, atthi avitakka, vicāra, -mattā samāpatti, atthi avitakka, avicāra samāpatti* (DA 3:979). Dhamma, saṅgaṇī Comy: "the state of skill in the attainments is (called) *samāpatti, kusalatā*, that is, a designation for what is known as the definition of mental focus" (*samāpattisu kusala, bhāvo samāpatti, kusalatā, samāpatīnaṃ appanā, paricchedo, paññāyetaṃ adhivacanaṃ* (DhsA 52). See also Pm 1:231, 233; VbhA 3:354.

Thus on being closely examined, questioned and conversed with, he comes to a desert, to a jungle, to distress, to the wrong way, to ruin, to loss and misfortune.¹⁶

2c The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, a meditator skilled in the attainments, skilled in reading another's mind, having thus grasped another's mind with his own,¹⁷ considers:

'Now why¹⁸ does this venerable one declare thus: "I know thus: 'Destroyed are the mental cankers, lived is the holy life, done is what has to be done, laid down is the burden, there is no more of this state'"?'

Then the Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, a meditator skilled in the attainments, skilled in reading another's mind, having thus grasped another's mind with his own, knows:

'Indeed, seized by **arrogance**,¹⁹ this venerable one, taking his arrogance to be the truth, regards the unattained as attained, regards the undone as done, regards the unrealized as realized. Through arrogance he declares thus:

"I know thus: 'Destroyed are the mental cankers, lived is the holy life, done is what has to be done, laid down is the burden, there is no more of this state'".'

Arrogance through learning

2d The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, a meditator skilled in the attainments, skilled in reading another's mind, having thus grasped another's mind with his own, considers:

'Now on account of what²⁰ does this venerable one declare thus:

"I know thus: 'Destroyed [163] are the mental cankers, lived is the holy life, done is what has to be done, laid down is the burden, there is no more of this state'"?'

The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, a meditator skilled in the attainments, skilled in reading another's mind, having thus grasped another's mind with his own, knows:

'Indeed, this venerable one is deeply learned, an expert in learning, one who has accumulated learning²¹ in regards to what they (others) profess to be the Dharma,²² good in its beginning, good in its middle, good in its end, endowed with meaning and phrasing [in the spirit and the letter], and the holy life that is entirely complete and pure.

It is this Dharma that he has heard much of, borne in mind through speech, grasped it after turning it over in the mind, well understood them (merely) as an opinion.²³

Therefore, seized by arrogance, this venerable one, taking his arrogance to be the truth, regards the unattained as attained, regarding the undone as done, regards the unrealized as realized. Through arrogance, he declares thus:

"I know thus: Destroyed are the mental cankers, lived is the holy life, done is what has to be done, laid down is the burden, there is no more of this state".'

The 10 hindrances

2e The Tathagata or the Tathagata's disciple, a meditator skilled in the attainments, skilled in reading another's mind, having thus grasped another's mind with his own,²⁴ knows:

¹⁶ *Samanuyuññijyamāno samanugāhiyamāno samanubhāsiyamāno iriṇaṃ āpajjati, vijjinaṃ āpajjati, anayaṃ āpajjatim, vyaśanaṃ āpajjati, anayavyaśanaṃ āpajjati.*

¹⁷ "Having thus grasped another's mind with his own," *evaṃ cetasā ceto paricca manasikaroti.*

¹⁸ *Kin nu kho.*

¹⁹ "Seized by arrogance,; *adhimāniko*, from *adhi* (over, super) + *māna* (conceit).

²⁰ *Kin nu kho...nissaya.*

²¹ "Deeply learned, etc," *bahu-s,suto...suta,dhara suta,sannicayo.*

²² "In regards to what they profess to be the Dharma," *ye te dhammā...tathā,rūpassa dhammā...abhivadanti.*

²³ *Tathā,rūpassa dhammā bahu-s,sutā dhatā vacasā paricitā manasānupekkhitā dīṭṭhiyā suppaṭividdhā.* Free tr: "It is this Dharma that he is deeply learned in, memorized through reciting [reading], understood after turning it over in their minds, well understood it as an opinion."

²⁴ "Having thus grasped another's mind with his own," *evaṃ cetasā ceto paricca manasikaroti.*

(1) ‘Indeed, this venerable one is covetous (*abhijjhālu*); he dwells in the grasp of covetousness.²⁵ Now the grasp of covetousness indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline [this Dharma and Vinaya] proclaimed by the Tathagata.²⁶

(2) Indeed, this venerable one is one with ill will (*vyāpādo*); he dwells in the grasp of ill will.²⁷ Now the grasp of ill will indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.

(3) Indeed, this venerable one is one with sloth and torpor (*thīna,middho*); he dwells in the grasp of sloth and torpor.²⁸ Now the grasp of sloth and torpor indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.

(4) Indeed, this venerable one is restless (*uddhato*); he dwells in the grasp of restlessness.²⁹ Now the grasp of restlessness indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.

(5) Indeed, this venerable one is doubt-ridden (*vicikicchō*); he dwells in the grasp of doubt.³⁰ Now the grasp of doubt indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.

(6) Indeed, this venerable one finds delight in work [in being busy] (*kamma,rato*),³¹ delighting in work, yoked to delighting in work. [164] The yoke of delighting in work indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.

(7) Indeed, this venerable one finds pleasure in talking (*bhass’ārāmo*), delighting in talking, yoked to delighting in talking. The yoke of delighting in talking indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.

(8) Indeed, this venerable one finds pleasure in sleeping (*nidd’ārāmo*), delighting in sleep, yoked to delighting in sleep. The yoke of delighting in sleep indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.

(9) Indeed, this venerable one finds pleasure in company [in socializing] (*saṅgaṇik’ārāmo*), delighting in company, yoked to delighting in company.³² The yoke of delighting in company indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.

(10) Indeed, moreover, this venerable one is unmindful [forgetful] (*muṭṭha-s,sati*)³³ in that which should to be further done. Even the trifling special states he has attained, too, are given up midway.³⁴ Giving up midway indeed weakens this Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.³⁵

3 Indeed, friends, this monk, without giving up **these ten things**, would not be able to attain to growth, progress and abundance in this Teaching and Discipline.

Indeed, friends, this monk, giving up these ten things, would be able to attain to growth, progress and abundance in this Dharma and Vinaya.

—evaṃ—

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²⁵ “In the grasp of covetousness,” *abhijjhā,pariyuṭṭhitena*..

²⁶ *Abhijjhā,pariyuṭṭhānaṃ kho pana Tathāgata-p,pavedite dhamma,vinaye pariḥānaṃ etaṃ*, lit “Indeed, the grasp of covetousness is the weakening of this Dharma and Vinaya declared by the Tathagata.”

²⁷ “In the grasp of ill will,” *vyāpāda,pariyuṭṭhitena*.

²⁸ “In the grasp of sloth and torpor,” *thīna,middha,pariyuṭṭhitena*.

²⁹ “In the grasp of restlessness,” *uddhacca,pariyuṭṭhitena*.

³⁰ “In the grasp of doubt,” *vicikicchā,pariyuṭṭhitena*.

³¹ “Work,” *karma*, ie being busy with all sorts of activities (manual and worldlt), addiction to work, as opposed to spiritual work, ie mental cultivation (DA 528 ad D 2:78). See D 2:78 = A 4:22 ≠ 3:293 ≠ 5:163 ≠ It 71 (ItA 2:67).

³² “Delighting in company,” *saṅgaṇikā,rato*. This refers to socializing, conversing, outing and liaising with others, especially the laity, and includes sexual misconduct and other conduct inappropriate of a monastic.

³³ “Unmindful,” *muṭṭha-s,sati*, lit “of confused mindfulness.”

³⁴ *Ora,mattakena vīsesādhigamena antarā,vosānaṃ āpanno*.

³⁵ This whole para: *Muṭṭha-s,sati kho paṇāyaṃ āyasmā uttari,karaṇīye ora,mattakena vīsesādhigamena antarā,vosānaṃ āpanno, antarā,vosāna,gamaṇaṃ kho pana Tathāgata-p,pavedite dhamma,vinaye pariḥānaṃ etaṃ*.