

Ānuttariya Sutta 2

The Second Discourse on the Unsurpassables

[Six supreme qualities that conduce to awakening]

(Aṅguttara 6.30/3:325-329)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

Introduction

Ānuttariya from *na* (not) + *uttariya* (to be bettered), often wrongly spelt as *anuttariya*, is both a noun, meaning “pre-eminence, supremacy, superiority, excellency; highest ideal, greatest good,” and an adjective, meaning “excellent, incomparable” (CPD). In **the Sampasādanīya Sutta** (D 28), *ānuttariya* refers to the sixteen unsurpassables¹ or virtues of the Buddha listed by Sāriputta. While it is clear that these sixteen unsurpassables refer to the virtues of the Buddha, the six unsurpassables here in the Ānuttariya Sutta 2 refer to factors that conduce to personal development as the basis for awakening.

The Saṅgīti Sutta (D 33)² and three suttas in **the Aṅguttara** (A 6.8, 6.30 and 6.121) mention this set of six unsurpassables (*cha ānuttariyāni*),³ namely,

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| (1) unsurpassable vision | (<i>dassan’ānuttariya</i>), |
| (2) unsurpassable listening | (<i>savan’ānuttariya</i>), |
| (3) unsurpassable gain | (<i>lābh’ānuttariya</i>), |
| (4) unsurpassable training | (<i>sikkhānuttariya</i>), |
| (5) unsurpassable service | (<i>pāricariy’ānuttariya</i>), and |
| (6) unsurpassable recollection | (<i>anussat’ānuttariya</i>). |

The Ānuttariya Sutta 1 (A 6.8) merely lists the above six factors without comment.⁴ **The (Rāga) Ānuttariya Sutta** (A 6.121) similarly lists the same factors, only mentioning that the purpose of the six unsurpassables is for the overcoming of lust (*rāga*).⁵ **The Ānuttariya Sutta 2** (A 6.30), that is, the present sutta, discusses each of the six unsurpassables in some detail.

In **the Eka,puṅgala Vagga** (A 1.13.6), the six unsurpassables are said to manifest with the arising of the Buddha:

Bhikshus, the manifestation of one person is the manifestation of great vision, of great light, of great radiance, of the six unsurpassables. There is the realization of the four analytical knowledges,⁶ the penetration of the various elements, of the diversity of the elements.⁷ There is the realization of the fruition of knowledge and liberation, the realization of stream-winning, of once-return, of non-return, and arhathood.⁸

Who is that one person? It is the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one.

(A 1.13.6/1:22)

¹ D 28/3:99-116 = SD 10.14. See Introd 4.1 for a set of six unsurpassables.

² D 33.2.2(18)/3:250.

³ *Ānuttariya* is often wrongly spelt as *anuttariya*. See CPD & DP, sv.

⁴ A 6.8/3:284, see SD 10.14 Introd 4.2a.

⁵ A 6.121/3:451 f = SD 10.14 Introd 4.2b.

⁶ *Paṭisambhidā*, analytical knowledge or mental discrimination, ie (1) discrimination of meanings (*attha, paṭi-sambhidā*); (2) discrimination of ideas (*dhamma, paṭisambhidā*); (3) discrimination of language (*nirutti, paṭisambhidā*); and (4) discrimination of wit (*paṭibhāna, paṭisambhidā*) (A 2:160; Pm 1:119; Vbh 294).

⁷ “Elements” (*dhātu*) here refers to esp the 18 elements: the 6 sense faculties, the 6 sense objects and the 6 sense consciousnesses: **Bahu, dhātuka S** (M 115/3:61-67); **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140/3:237-247) = SD 4.17; **Dhātu Saṁyutta** (S 14/2:140-177); **Satta-ṭṭhāna S** (S 22.57/3:61-65); Vbh 87; Vism 484; Abhs:SR 183 f = Abhs:BRS 287 = Abhs:WG 278).

⁸ On the 4 types of saints, see **Kiṭṭāgiri S** (M 70/1:473-481) = SD 11.1.

The Commentary goes on to give **Ānanda** as an example of one having the six unsurpassables and benefiting from them in connection with the Buddha (AA 1:117 f).

Three supremacies are listed in **the Cūḷa Saccaka Sutta** (M 35) as special qualities of an arhat, namely,

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| (1) in the supremacy of vision | (<i>dassan'ānuttariya</i>), |
| (2) in the supremacy of practice | (<i>paṭipadānuttariya</i>), and |
| (3) in the supremacy of liberation | (<i>vimutt'ānuttariya</i>). (M 35.26b/1:235) = SD 26.5 |

Except for the first, the other two supremacies of the arhat do not seem to have any counterpart in the six supremacies mentioned here. However, it is possible to interpret the remaining five supremacies of the practitioner here as being an elaboration of the “supremacy of practice” (*paṭipadānuttariya*).

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The Second Discourse on the Unsurpassables

(A 6.30/3:325-329)

1 Bhikshus, there are these six unsurpassables. What are the six?

2a They are:

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| (1) the unsurpassable vision | (<i>dassan'ānuttariya</i>), |
| (2) the unsurpassable listening | (<i>savan'ānuttariya</i>), |
| (3) the unsurpassable gain | (<i>lābh'ānuttariya</i>), |
| (4) the unsurpassable training | (<i>sikkhānuttariya</i>), |
| (5) the unsurpassable service | (<i>pāricariy'ānuttariya</i>), and |
| (6) the unsurpassable recollection | (<i>anussat'ānuttariya</i>). |

2b (1) SEEING THE BUDDHA OR THE SAINTS. And what, bhikshus, is **the unsurpassable vision [seeing]** (*dassan'ānuttariya*)?

3 Here, bhikshus, one goes to see the elephant treasure,⁹ the horse treasure, the gem treasure, or one goes to see this and that,¹⁰ or one goes to see a recluse or a brahmin of wrong view and wrong practice.

Bhikshus, is this vision [seeing]?

This is not it, I say, it is not so;¹¹ for that vision, bhikshus, is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not associated with the spiritual goal,¹² and brings about no revulsion, no fading away (of lust),¹³ no ending (of suffering),¹⁴ no stilling (of defilements),¹⁵ no direct knowledge (of the four noble truths),¹⁶ no self-awakening,¹⁷ no **[326]** nirvana.¹⁸

⁹ These first 3 treasures are the insignia of the king. **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17) mentions the 7 treasures of a world ruler (*cakka,vatti*) with details, as follows: the wheel treasure (*cakka, ratana*), the elephant treasure (*hatthi, ratana*), the horse treasure (*assa, ratana*), the gem treasure (*maṇi, ratana*), the woman treasure (*itthi, ratana*), the householder treasure (*gahapati, ratana*), or treasurer, the advisor treasure (*pariṇāyaka, ratana*) (D 17/2:169-199; also at D 1:89; Sn p106; DA 1:250; J 4:232). In the 7 spiritual treasures, see S 2:217, 3:83; Miln 336; PvA 66.

¹⁰ “This and that,” *uccāvacam*, ie “high and low, great and small; mixed, various” (DP).

¹¹ *N'etaṃ natthī ti vadāmi*.

¹² “Low, ... not associated with the spiritual goal,” *hīnaṃ gamanṃ pothujjanikaṃ anariyaṃ anatta, samhitani*. This phrase famously qualifies “the indulgence in sense-pleasures” (*kāma, sukh'allikānuyoga*) (S 56.11.3/5:420 = SD 1.1). The meaning here is that those qualities regarded as “surpassable” conduce to the attachment to sense-pleasures and hinders one’s spiritual progress.

¹³ *virāga* also “fading away of lust” or “dispassion” (see §21).

¹⁴ *Nirodha* (see §21).

But, bhikshus, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded [devoted],¹⁹ full of faith,²⁰ goes to see the Tathagata, or the Tathagata’s disciple—that, bhikshus, is *the unsurpassable vision for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of physical and mental pain,*²¹ *for gaining the right way,*²² *for realizing nirvana.*²³ That is to say, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded [devoted], full of faith, goes to see the Tathagata, or the Tathagata’s disciple.

This, bhikshus, is called the unsurpassable vision.

Such is the unsurpassable vision.

(2) LISTENING TO THE BUDDHA OR THE SAINTS. And what is **the unsurpassable listening** (*savan’-ānuttariya*)?

4 Here, bhikshus, one goes to listen to the sound of drums, the sound of the vīna, the sound of singing, or one goes to listen to this and that, or one goes to listen to the Dharma of a recluse or of a brahmin of wrong view and wrong practice.

Bhikshus, is this listening?

This is not it, I say, it is not so; for that listening, bhikshus, is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not associated with the spiritual goal, and brings about no revulsion, no fading away (of lust), no ending (of suffering), no stilling (of defilements), no direct knowledge (of the four noble truths), no self-awakening, no nirvana.

But, bhikshus, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, goes to listen to the Dharma of the Tathagata, or of the Tathagata’s disciple—that, bhikshus, is the unsurpassable listening for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of physical and mental pain, for gaining the right way, for realizing nirvana. That is to say, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, goes to listen to the Dharma of the Tathagata, or of the Tathagata’s disciple.

This, bhikshus, is called the unsurpassable listening.

Such is the unsurpassable vision and unsurpassable listening.

(3) FAITH IN THE BUDDHA OR THE SAINTS. And what is **the unsurpassable gain** (*lābh’ānuttariya*)?

5 Here, bhikshus, one gains a son [child], or a wife [woman in the house], or wealth, or one gains this and that, or [327] one gains faith in a recluse or a brahmin of wrong view and wrong practice.

Bhikshus, is this gain?

This is not it, I say, it is not so; for that gain, bhikshus, is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not associated with the spiritual goal, and brings about no revulsion, no fading away (of lust), no ending (of suffering), no stilling (of defilements), no direct knowledge (of the four noble truths), no self-awakening, no nirvana.

¹⁵ Internal Comy: of lust, etc, *rāgādīnam* (MA 1:104; AA 3:360); of the defilements, *kilesānam* (SA 3:22, 297; AA 2:19; UA 227); of the rounds, *vaṭṭassa* (Nm 2:304; PmA 1:217). See n on “nirvana” here.

¹⁶ MA; SA.

¹⁷ MA 1:104 says that awakening is the way (*sambodho ti maggo*).

¹⁸ “Brings no revulsion...no nirvana,” *na nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya samvattati*, also at D 1:188 = SD 7.14. MA explains: “brings no revulsion at the cycle rounds (*samsāra, vatta*), etc” for the rest of the negative statements (MA 2:378, 670). For *upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati*, see V 1:10 = D 3:130 = M 1:15 = 3:113 = S 2:223 = 4:331 = 5:421.

¹⁹ “Single-minded,” *ekanta, gato*, lit “gone to a single end.”

²⁰ “Full of faith,” *abhippasanno*, also “well-disposed,” from *abhi + pasīdati* (he has faith in, is inspired by).

²¹ *Dukkha, domanassa*, sometimes tr as “pain and sadness.” See Walshe 1996 (D:W 589 n627). For a broader sense of *domanassa*, see §3 n on *abhijjhā, domanassa*.

²² “For gaining the right way,” *ñāyassa adhiḅgamāya*. See Introd (3.3) above.

²³ *Sattānam visuddhiyā soka, paridevānam samatikkamāya dukkha, domanassānam atthaḅgamāya ñāyassa adhiḅgamāya nibbānassa sachikiriyāya*. This is also said of satipatthana in **Satipatṭhāna Ss** (D 22.1b/2:290; M 10.2/1:55) = SD 13.

But, bhikshus, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, gains²⁴ (greater) faith in the Tathagata, or in the Tathagata's disciple—that, bhikshus, is the unsurpassable gain for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of physical and mental pain, for gaining the right way, for realizing nirvana. That is to say, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, gains (greater) faith in the Tathagata, or in the Tathagata's disciple.

This, bhikshus, is called the unsurpassable gain.

Such is the unsurpassable vision, unsurpassable listening and unsurpassable gain.

(4) SPIRITUAL TRAINING. And what is **the unsurpassable training** (*sikkhānuttariya*)?

6 Here, bhikshus, one trains regarding elephants, or in horsemanship, or in the chariot [chariotry], or in archery, or in swordsmanship, or one trains in this and that, or one trains following a recluse or a brahmin of wrong view and wrong practice.

Bhikshus, is this training?

This is not it, I say, it is not so; for that training, bhikshus, is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not associated with the spiritual goal, and brings about no revulsion, no fading away (of lust), no ending (of suffering), no stilling (of defilements), no direct knowledge (of the four noble truths), no self-awakening, no nirvana.

But, bhikshus, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, trains in the Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata, or trains oneself in the higher moral virtue, or trains oneself in the higher mind, one trains oneself in the higher wisdom—that, bhikshus, is the unsurpassable training for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of physical and mental pain, for gaining the right way, for realizing nirvana. [328] That is to say, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, trains in the Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata, or trains oneself in the higher moral virtue, or trains oneself in the higher mind, one trains oneself in the higher wisdom.

This, bhikshus, is called the unsurpassable training.

Such is the unsurpassable vision, unsurpassable listening, unsurpassable gain, and unsurpassable training.

(5) SERVING THE BUDDHA OR THE SAINTS. And what is **the unsurpassable service** (*pāricariy'-ānuttariya*)?

7 Here, bhikshus, one serves a kshatriya [a noble], or a brahmin [a priest], or a householder, or one serves this and that person, or one serves a recluse or a brahmin of wrong view and wrong practice.

Bhikshus, is this service?

This is not it, I say, it is not so; for that service, bhikshus, is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not associated with the spiritual goal, and brings about no revulsion, no fading away (of lust), no ending (of suffering), no stilling (of defilements), no direct knowledge (of the four noble truths), no self-awakening, no nirvana.

But, bhikshus, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, serves the Tathagata, or the Tathagata's disciple—that, bhikshus, is the unsurpassable service for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of physical and mental pain, for gaining the right way, for realizing nirvana. That is to say, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, serves the Tathagata, or the Tathagata's disciple.

This, bhikshus, is called the unsurpassable service.

Such is the unsurpassable vision, unsurpassable listening, unsurpassable gain, unsurpassable training, and unsurpassable service.

²⁴ “Gains,” *paṭilabhati*.

(6) RECOLLECTING THE BUDDHA OR THE SAINTS. And what is **the unsurpassable recollection** (*anussat'ānuttariya*)?

8 Here, bhikshus, one recollects the gain of a son [child], or of a wife [woman in the house], or of wealth, or of gaining this and that, or [327] one recollects a recluse or a brahmin of wrong view and wrong practice.

Bhikshus, is this recollection?

This is not it, I say, it is not so; for that recollection, bhikshus, is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not associated with the spiritual goal, and brings about no revulsion, no fading away (of lust), no ending (of suffering), no stilling (of defilements), no direct knowledge (of the four noble truths), no self-awakening, no nirvana.

But, bhikshus, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, recollects the Tathagata, or the Tathagata's disciple—that, bhikshus, is the unsurpassable recollection for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of physical and mental pain, for gaining the right way, for realizing nirvana. That is to say, when one, set in faith, set in love, single-minded, full of faith, recollects the Tathagata, or the Tathagata's disciple.

This, bhikshus, is called the unsurpassable recollection.

These, bhikshus, are the six unsurpassables.

Those who have found noble vision, and the supreme listening,
 Who have found the unsurpassable gain, who delight in the supreme training,
 Who is established in service, who cultivates recollection—
 They are connected to solitude, secure, bound for the deathless,
 Rejoicing in heedfulness, prudent, restrained by moral virtue,
 They shall in time know where suffering ends.²⁵

— evaṃ —

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²⁵ *Te ve kālena paccanti (vñ paccanti), yatha dukkhaṃ nirujhatī ti.* The tr here is conjectural.