

Sambād'okāsa Sutta

The Discourse on the Opening in the Closed

[How to awaken as a lay follower]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 6.26/3:314-317)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2006

Introduction: The six recollections

Six well known meditation, or more specifically, recollections (*anussati*), are the streamwinner's lifelong practice (*nissaya, vihāra*)¹, that is to say,

- (1) the recollection of the Buddha, *buddhānussati*,
- (2) the recollection of the Dharma, *dhammānussati*,
- (3) the recollection of the Sangha, *saṅghānussati*,
- (4) the recollection of moral virtue, *sīlānussati*,
- (5) the recollection of the charity, *cāgānussati*,
- (6) the recollection of the devas. *devatānussati*.

Buddhaghosa, in his magnum opus, **the Visuddhi, magga**, explains these six recollections in great detail. The importance of the six recollections are attested by the fact that Buddhaghosa presents a whole sizeable chapter in his **Visuddhi, magga** (ch 7) on them.² According to him, however, these six recollections succeed only in the noble disciples (*imā ca cha anussatiyo ariya, sāvakanāṃ yeva ijjhanti*), because the virtues of the Three Jewels are evident (*pākaṭa*) to them.³ Since the noble disciples (beginning with the stream-winner) have wise faith, they would naturally reap the richest fruit of these practices.

This does not mean, however, that the practice is fruitless for the ordinary worldling. In fact, these six recollections easily work with those who are faith-inclined,⁴ for whom these practices would form an important basis for more advanced spiritual exercises. These recollections are also the basis for awakening even as a householder or lay-person. Here, in **the Sambād'okāsa Sutta**, Mahā Kaccāna makes an inspired declaration on the benefit of the six recollections, thus:

It is wonderful, friends! It is marvellous, friends! How the realization of 'the open' [an opening] (okāsa) in the closed [the crowded] (sambādha)⁵ has been discovered by the Blessed One...

Acchariyaṃ āvuso abbhutaṃ āvuso yāvañ c'idaṃ tena Bhagavatā... sambādhe okāsādhigamo anubuddho (A 6.26/3:314 f)

The Sambād'okāsa Sutta is very close to **the (Agata,phala) Mahānāma Sutta** (A 6.10).⁶ Here, the teacher is Mahā Kaccāna addressing the monks. In the (Agata,phala) Mahānāma Sutta, the teacher is the Buddha himself, addressing the layman Mahānāma.

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¹ See eg (Agata,phala) Mahānāma S (A 6.10/3:284-288) = SD 15.3; see also AA 3:337 f.

² 43 pp in Nāṇamoli's tr: Vism 7/197-228.

³ Vism 7.121/226.

⁴ See **Bhāvanā** = SD 15.1, esp 8.1, Diag 2.

⁵ That is, the lay or household life.

⁶ A 6.10/3:284-288 = SD 15.3.

The Discourse on the Opening in the Closed

(A 6.26/3:314-317)

1 Then, the venerable Mahā Kaccāna addressed the monks:

“Avuso! Bhikshus!”

“Avuso!” the monks replied the venerable Kaccāna in assent.

The venerable Mahā Kaccāna said this:

2 “It is wonderful, avuso! It is marvellous, avuso! How the realization of ‘the open’ (*okāsa*) in the closed [the household life] (*sambādha*) has been discovered by the Blessed One, who knows, who sees, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, for the purification of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of physical and mental pain,⁷ for gaining the right way,⁸ for realizing nirvana, that is to say, the six bases⁹ of recollection (*cha anussati-t, thānāni*).

What are the six?

3 (1) FAITH¹⁰ IN THE BUDDHA.¹¹ Here, avuso, a noble disciple recollects the Tathagata, thus:

‘The Blessed One is such: he is¹²

arhat,
fully self-awakened one,
accomplished in wisdom and conduct,
well-farer,
knower of worlds,
peerless guide of persons to be tamed,¹³
teacher of gods and humans,

⁷ *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*.

⁸ “For gaining the right way,” *nāyassa adhiḡamāya*. See Introd (3.3) above.

⁹ Or, station.

¹⁰ This is the stream-winner’s “wise faith” (*avecca-p, pasāda*). This is a syntactical cpd with *avecca* (Sky *avetya*) absolutive of **aveti*, “he undergoes, knows, experiences.” [On syntactical cpds, see KR Norman, 1991a:3.] There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlaka, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati, saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320, 8, 401, 23). “Wise faith” is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). **Gethin** speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): “Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith in its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody... the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary.” (Gethin 2001:207; my emphases). The stream-winner’s faith is defined in **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 47) as “his faith is strong, supported by reasons, rooted in vision” (*ākāra, vatī saddhā dassana, mūlikā dalhā*, M 47.16/ 1:320).

¹¹ §§3-6 here form the factors of a stream-winner (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*). See eg **Pañca, bhera, baya S** (S 12.41/2:68-70) = SD 3.3.4(2); also D 33.1.11(14)/3:227.

The Buddha recollection here in §3 is also at (**Upāsaka, sampadā**) **Mahānāma S** (S 55.37/5:395) = SD 6.2. Commented on at *Vism* 7.1-67/197-213. See SD 15.7b.

¹² Here begins the nine virtues of the Buddha (*navāraha, guṇa*) (M 1:37; A 3:285).

¹³ **Purisa, damma sārathī**. Here *-damma* (adj) is grd, meaning “to be tamed or restrained,” often spoken of a young bullock (M 1:225, *bala, gāvā damma, gāvā*, “the strong cattle and cattle to be tamed,” ie bulls and young steers); also of other animals: *assa, damma, sārathī*, a horse trainer (A 2:112); It 80. In *purisa, damma sārathī*, fig (“the trainer of the human steer”) of unconverted persons, likened to a refractory bullocks; D 1:62 (wr *-dhamma*) = 2:93 = 3:5; M 2:38; A 2:112; Vv 17.13; cf VvA 86.

awakened,
blessed.'

Avuso, when the noble disciple recollects the Tathagata thus, his mind, at that time, is not [315] obsessed by delusion.

At that time, his mind, having become straight,¹⁴ he gives up attachment (to sense-objects) (*gedha*); he is freed from it; he rises above it.

'Attachment,' avuso, is a name for the five cords of sense-desire.

Avuso, this noble disciple always dwells with a sky-like mind, extensive, great, boundless, without anger, without affliction.

Here, avuso, some beings, having made this their mental support [mind-object], become pure by nature [become subject to purification].¹⁵

4 (2) FAITH IN THE DHARMA. Furthermore, avuso, the noble disciple recollects the Dharma, thus: 'Well-taught¹⁶ is the True Teaching [the Dharma] of the Blessed One,

visible here and now,
immediate [timeless],
inviting one to come and see,
accessible,
to be personally known by the wise.'

Avuso, when the noble disciple recollects the Dharma thus, his mind, at that time, is not obsessed by lust, not obsessed by hate, not obsessed by delusion.

At that time, his mind, having become straight, he gives up attachment (to sense-objects) (*gedha*), he is freed from it, he rises above it.

'Attachment,' avuso, is a name for the five cords of sense-desire.

Avuso, this noble disciple always dwells with a sky-like mind, extensive, great, boundless, without anger, without affliction.

Here, avuso, some beings, having made this their mind-object, become pure by nature [become subject to purification].

5 (3) FAITH IN THE SANGHA. Furthermore, avuso, the noble disciple recollects the Sangha, thus:

'The Blessed One's community of disciples	keeps to the good way;
the Blessed One's community of disciples	keeps to the straight way;
the Blessed One's community of disciples	keeps to the true way;
the Blessed One's community of disciples	keeps to the proper way.

These are the four pairs of persons, the eight individuals.¹⁷

this Blessed One's community of disciples is
worthy of offerings,¹⁸
worthy of hospitality,
worthy of gifts,¹⁹
worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms,
an incomparable field of merit for the world.'

¹⁴ "Having become straight," *uju, gatam*, ie plainly, directly focussed on the object (AA 3:337).

¹⁵ *Idam pi kho āvuso ārammaṇaṃ karitvā evam idh'ekacce sattā visuddhi, dhammā bhavanti*. Comy is silent on *visuddhi, dhammā*, translatable also as "pure states." Nāṇamoli: "Some beings gain purity here by making this [recol-lection] their prop" (Vism:Ñ 7.122/245). The Skt version of this passage is at SĀ 550: see SD 13.1 Introf (5c.2).

¹⁶ The 6 virtues of the Dharma, commented on at Vism 7.68-88/213-218. See **Dhammānussati** = SD 15.9.

¹⁷ On who "These four pairs of persons..." are, see **Aṭṭha, puggala S 1** (A 4:292 = D 33.3.1(3)/3:255). See also SD 15.5(3): Saṅghānussati & Saṅghānussati.

¹⁸ *Āhuneyyo*. That is, worthy of receiving sacrifices or offerings. The Skt cognate *āhavanīya* refers to that which was offered as an oblation as in *āhuneyy'aggī*, one of the 3 brahminical sacrificial fires (the one in the east).

¹⁹ *Dakkhiṇeyyo*. Specifically refers to offerings made for the benefit of the departed by way of dedication of merits to them.

Avuso, when the noble disciple recollects the Sangha thus, his mind, at that time, is not obsessed by lust, not obsessed by hate, not obsessed by delusion.

At that time, his mind, having become straight, he gives up attachment (to sense-objects) (*gedha*), he is freed from it, he rises above it.

‘Attachment,’ avuso, is a name for the five cords of sense-desire.

Avuso, this noble disciple always dwells with a sky-like mind, extensive, great, boundless, without anger, without affliction.

Here, avuso, some beings, [316] having made this their mental support [mind-object], become pure by nature [become subject to purification].

Other practices of the streamwinner

6 (4) RECOLLECTION OF MORAL VIRTUE.²⁰ Furthermore, avuso, the noble disciple possesses virtues dear to the noble ones,²¹ unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration.²²

Avuso, when the noble disciple recollects his own moral virtue thus, his mind, at that time, is not obsessed by lust, not obsessed by hate, not obsessed by delusion. At that time, his mind, having become straight,²³ he gives up attachment (to sense-objects) (*gedha*), he is freed from it, he rises above it.

‘Attachment,’ avuso, is a name for the five cords of sense-desire.

Avuso, this noble disciple always dwells with a sky-like mind, extensive, great, boundless, without anger, without affliction.

Here, avuso, some beings, having made this their mental support [mind-object], become pure by nature [become subject to purification].

7 (5) RECOLLECTION OF CHARITY.²⁴ Furthermore, avuso, the noble disciple recollects his own charity, thus:

‘Truly it is a gain for me, a true gain for me, that amongst people obsessed by the stain of stinginess, I dwell at home with a heart free from the stain of stinginess, devoted to charity, open-handed, delighting in giving, devoted to alms-giving, delighting to have a share in giving.’²⁵

Avuso, when the noble disciple recollects charity thus, his mind is not obsessed by lust, not obsessed by hate, not obsessed by delusion.

At that time, his mind, having become straight, he gives up attachment (to sense-objects) (*gedha*), he is freed from it, he rises above it.

‘Attachment,’ avuso, is a name for the five cords of sense-desire.

Avuso, this noble disciple always dwells with a sky-like mind, extensive, great, boundless, without anger, without affliction.

Here, avuso, some beings, having made this their mental support [mind-object], become pure by nature [become subject to purification].

8 (6) RECOLLECTION OF THE DEVAS.²⁶ Furthermore, avuso, the noble disciple cultivates the recollection of the devas.

²⁰ Commented on at Vism 7.101-106/221 f. See SD 15.11.

²¹ “Virtues dear to the noble ones,” *ariya,kantāni sīlāni*. The virtues of the noble one are explained at Vism 221 f. SA says that the noble ones do not violate the five precepts; hence, these virtues are dear to them (SA 2:74).

²² “Unbroken,...giving rise to concentration,” *akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi bhujissehi viññū-pasatthehi aparāmaṭṭhehi samādhi,samvattanakehi*. See UA 268. For details, see Vism 1.143 ff/51-58.

²³ “Having become straight,” *uju,gatam*, ie plainly, directly focussed on the object (AA 3:337).

²⁴ Commented on at Vism 7.107-114/223-224, esp §§111-113. See SD 15.12.

²⁵ This passage also in **Nakula,māta S** (A 8.48/4:268 f). At **Dīgha,jānu S** (A 8.54.14/4:284) serves as the def for “the accomplishment in charity” (*cāga,sampadā*). Commented upon at Vism 7.101-106.

²⁶ §7 as at (**Tadah’**)**Upsatha S** (A 3.70/1:205-215) = SD 4.18. It is important to understand that this recollection is not to seek rebirth in any of the deva worlds, but a reflection on the dhyanic states that are far superior to the heavenly bliss of such states (which are after all still mundane and impermanent). For comy, see Vism 7.115-118/225 f. See SD 15.13.

Here, avuso, the noble disciple recollects the devas, thus:

‘There are the devas of the heaven of the Four Great Kings (*cātum,mahā,rājikā*);
there are the devas of the heaven of Tāvātimsa [the Heaven of the 33 Devas];
there are the devas of the heaven of Yāma;
there are the devas of the heaven of Tusita [the Contented];
there are the devas of the heaven of Nimmāṇa,raṭī [who delight in creating];
there are the devas of the heaven of Para,nimmita,vasavattī [who lord over the creation of others],²⁷
there are the devas of the heaven of Brahma’s Hosts;²⁸
(and) there are the devas beyond these.²⁹

THE FIVEFOLD GROWTH.³⁰

(1) The faith that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of faith is [317] found in me, too.

(2) The moral virtue that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of moral virtue is found in me, too.

(3) The learning³¹ that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of learning is found in me, too.

(4) The charity that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of charity is found in me, too.

(5) The wisdom that those devas are endowed with because of which, when they pass away from this world, they are reborn there, that kind of wisdom is found in me, too.’

Avuso, when the noble disciple recollects his own faith, and moral virtue, and learning, and charity, and wisdom, and those of the devas thus, his mind, at that time, is not obsessed by lust, not obsessed by hate, not obsessed by delusion.

At that time, his mind, having become straight, he gives up attachment (to sense-objects) (*gedha*), he is freed from it, he rises above it.

‘Attachment,’ avuso, is a name for the five cords of sense-desire.

Avuso, this noble disciple always dwells with a sky-like mind, extensive, great, boundless, without anger, without affliction.

Here, avuso, some beings, having made this their mental support [mind-object], become pure by nature [become subject to purification].”

“It is wonderful, avuso! It is marvellous, avuso! How the realization of ‘the open’ in the closed [the household life] has been discovered by the Blessed One, who knows, who sees, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, 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, the six bases of recollection.” — evaṃ — 060209; 060913; 081225; 091112

²⁷ **Māra** the evil one is said to reside in this heaven, lording over a part of it (MA 1:33 f). The ruler of this realm here is called Vasa,vattī (D 1:219; A 4:243). Māra, too, is called Vasa,vattī because “Māra is the lord with great power over the 6 sense-worlds” (*māro mahānubhāvo cha,kāmāvar’issaro vasavattī*, MA 2:201). Māra is also called Pajā,patī, “the lord of creation,” because he lords over this “generation” (*pajā*) of living beings (M 1.9/1:2; MA ad loc).

²⁸ “Brahma’s hosts,” *brahma,kāyikā*. See n on this section’s header.

²⁹ “Beyond this,” *tad’uttarim*, lit “higher than these.” The “devas beyond these” are those of the form world and the formless world.

³⁰ “Fivefold growth,” ie the fivefold noble growth (*ariya,vuḍḍhi*, A 3:80); cf the 5 virtues conducive to growth (*vuḍḍhi,dhamma*, A 5.246/2:245): see & **Entering the Stream** = SD 3.3(1) etc & (**Tadah’**) **Uposatha S** (A 3.70.8b/1:210) = SD 4.18; **Sambadh’okāsa S** (A 6.26.8/3:316) = SD 15.7a; **Pañca Vaḍḍhi S 1** (A 5.63/3:80); **Pañca Vaḍḍhi S 2** (A 5.64/3:80).

³¹ “Spiritual learning,” *suta*, lit “listening,” ie “one who has heard much Dharma,” cognate with today’s “well-read, learned”, but in spiritual matters.