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Ti,kaṇḍaki Sutta

The Discourse at Three-thorn Grove | A 5.144

Theme: Dealing with thoughts of the attractive and of the repulsive

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003; rev 2010

1 Introduction¹

1.1 The main teaching of the Tikaṇḍaki Sutta—the 5 perceptions (*pañca saññā*)—is an important set of meditation strategies, especially of the saints, mentioned in all the Five Collections (*pañca nikāya*), namely:

Sampasādanīya Sutta ²	D 28,18/3:112 f	SD 14.14.
Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta ³	M 152,11-16/3:301 f	SD 17.13.
Metta,sahagata Sutta ⁴	S 46.54/5:120	SD 10.11.
Rahogata Sutta 1	S 52.1/5:295	SD 12.17.
Padīpōpama Sutta	S 54.8/5:317 f	SD 62.2
Tikaṇḍaki Sutta	A 5.144/3:169 f	SD 2.12.
Paṭisambhidā,magga	Pm 2:212 f (<i>Iddhi,kathā</i>)	SD 27.5a (4.5.6).
Visuddhi,magga	Vism 12.36-38/381 f	

1.2 In the **Sampasādanīya Sutta** (D 28), Sāriputta calls these practices “psychic powers that are influx-free, acquisition-free, noble” (*iddhi anāsavā anupadhikā ariyā*), referring to the nature of the arhat’s mind.⁵ **The Paṭisambhidā,magga** calls it “the noble power” or “the power of the noble ones” (*ariy’iddhi*).⁶ It is a kind of subtle “magic of transformation” by which the habitual emotional attitudes can be changed at will or replaced by equanimity. In its perfection, this practice “is only produced in noble ones (*ariya*) who have reached mind-mastery” (Vism 12.36-38/381 f).

1.3 **The Aṅguttara Commentary**, however, emphasizes that those of lesser attainments as well can and should practise it, if they are experienced in insight meditation and have keen intelligence. Insight meditation is helpful in this respect as it teaches us to distinguish between the facts of experience and the emotive (or other) reactions to them. With keen intelligence one can become aware of the possibility of preventing any such reactions.

1.4 The word “unrepulsive” in the sutta may refer to persons, things, situations or mental states that are either attractive or indifferent. **The Paṭisambhidā,magga** explains the 5 modes of perception thus:⁷

In the case of an agreeable object (eg as sensually attractive person), one either pervades it with the thought of foulness or regards it as impermanent.

¹ Based partly on notes by Nyanaponika & Bodhi, *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 1999:298 nn26-27.

² It calls them “the power of the noble ones” (*ariy’iddhi*), or, more fully, “powers that are influx-free, free from acquisition, noble” (*iddhi anāsavā anupadhikā ariyā*); and these powers are declared by Sāriputta (in praise of the Buddha) to be “unsurpassable” (*anuttariya*) by others. (D 28.18/3:112 f), SD 14.14.

³ The Sutta calls the arhat a “noble one with cultivated faculties” (*ariya bhāvit’indriya*), where *bhāvit’indriya* refers to the mastery of these 5 perceptions.

⁴ Also called **Halidda,vasana S.**

⁵ D 28,18/3:112 f (SD 10.12).

⁶ Pm 2:212 f. See **Miracles**, SD 27.5a (456) for text.

⁷ Here arranged according to the Aṅguttara listing. Cf **Metta,sahagata S** (S 46.54,12/5:119) & SD 10.11(5). See §2 & n.

In the case of a disagreeable object (eg a hostile person), one either pervades it with loving-kindness or regards it as physical elements.⁸

One pervades both agreeable and disagreeable objects with the thought of foulness or regards them as impermanent; thus one perceives both as repulsive.

One pervades both disagreeable and agreeable objects with lovingkindness or regards them as physical elements; thus one perceives both as unrepulsive.

Avoiding both disagreeable and agreeable objects, having seen a form with the eyes, heard a sound with the ears, smelt smells with the nose, tasted tastes with the tongue, sensed a touch with the body, cognized a mind-object with the mind, one is neither glad nor sad, but abides in equanimity towards that, mindful and clearly aware. (Pm 22.26/2:212 f; Vism 12.36/381 f; SA 3:171 f)

Perception	Method	Reflection
(1) Lust-arousing object: see it as <i>repulsive</i>	Perception of foulness, or of impermanence	“May I <u>not lust</u> for a <i>pleasant</i> object”
(2) Hate-arousing object: see it as <i>unrepulsive</i>	Lovingkindness, or see the body as being comprised of the 4 elements	“May I <u>not hate</u> an <i>unpleasant</i> object”
(3) An object arousing both lust and hate: see it as <i>repulsive</i>	Perception of foulness, or of impermanence	“May I <u>not lust</u> for something <i>pleasant</i> nor <u>hate</u> something <i>unpleasant</i> ”
(4) An object arousing both hate and lust: see it as <i>unrepulsive</i>	Lovingkindness, or the 4 elements	“May I <u>not hate</u> something <i>unpleasant</i> nor <u>lust</u> for something <i>pleasant</i> ”
(5) Seeing an object as arousing <i>neither lust nor hate</i>	Equanimity (avoiding lust, hate and delusion)	“May I <u>not lust</u> for the <i>pleasant</i> , <u>nor hate</u> something <i>unpleasant</i> , <u>nor ignore</u> something <i>neutral</i> ” ⁹

Table 4. The 5 perceptions simplified

1.5 SUMMARY. Essentially, the arhat would first simply note whether the sense-object is

- (1) lust-arousing, eg a sensual object (which would arouse lust in an unawakened mind), or
- (2) hate-arousing, eg a hostile person (who would arouse hate in an unawakened mind), or
- (3) arousing both lust and hate (which would arouse mixed feelings in an unawakened mind), or
- (4) arousing neither lust nor hate (which would bore or tire an unawakened person).

In the case of (1) the arhat would see it as being “repulsive” (*paṭikūla*) and either go into the perception of foulness or of impermanence.

In the case of (2), he would see it as “unrepulsive” (*appaṭikūla*), and cultivate lovingkindness or reflect on the body as being composed of the 4 elements (earth, water, fire, wind).

⁸ “Elements,” *dhātu*. The analysis of the elements (*dhātu, vavattāna*), the last of the 40 traditional meditation methods, is described in great detail at Vism 11.27-119/347-371. The method of given in brief in **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22,6/2:294 f) and **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,12/1:57 f), and in detail in **Mahā Hatthi, padūpamā S** (M 28,6-28/1:185-191), **Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62,8-17/1:421-425) and **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,13-18/3:240-243).

⁹ See **Cūla Vedalla S** (M 44,24-25/1:303), SD 40a.9; **Pahāna S** (S 36.34/4:205 f), SD 31.3; **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (3).

In the case of (3), he *could* (he could choose to) see the object as being “repulsive,” and either go into the perception of foulness or of impermanence, as in (1).

Or, again, in the case of (4), he *could* (he could choose to) see the object as being “unrepulsive,” and either cultivate lovingkindness or reflect on the body as being composed of the 4 elements, as in (1).

In the case of (5), the arhat cultivates equanimity, that is, neither showing lust towards something pleasant, nor showing hate toward something unpleasant, not ignoring something neutral (that is, both pleasant and unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant).

1.6 Suttas like **the Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta** (M 152)¹⁰ show that the arhats have fully mastered these five contemplations. They are also mentioned in **the Metta Saha,gata Sutta** (S 46.54).¹¹ However, as found in the Tikaṇḍaki Sutta, they are taught to unawakened monks for overcoming the three unwholesome roots. The Aṅguttara Commentary says that the last item (5) is “the six-factored equanimity (*cha-l-āṅg’upekkhā*), similar to, though not identical with, that possessed by the arhats.” (AA 3:290)

For a thoughtful commentary on the Sutta, see Nyanaponika 1998:72-77.

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[169] **1** Once the Blessed One was staying in the Tikaṇḍaki,vana [Three-thorn Grove] near Sāketa. There the Blessed One addressed the monks:

“Bhikshus!”

“Bhante!” the monks replied in assent to the Blessed One.

The 5 perceptions

The Blessed One said this:¹²

- 2** (1) “It is good, bhikshus, that one were to dwell from time to time perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive (*appaṭikūle paṭikkūla,saññī vihareyya*).
- (2) It is good that one were to dwell from time to time perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive (*paṭikūle appaṭikkūla,saññī vihareyya*).
- (3) It is good that one were to dwell from time to time perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive and in the repulsive (*appaṭikūle ca paṭikkūle ca paṭikkūla,saññī vihareyya*).
- (4) It is good that one were to dwell from time to time perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive and in the unrepulsive (*paṭikūle ca appaṭikkūle ca appaṭikkūla,saññī vihareyya*).
- (5) it is good, bhikshus, if one were, from time to time, rejecting both the unrepulsive and the repulsive, dwell in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware,

¹⁰ M 152.11-16/3:301.

¹¹ S 46.54/5:115-121 = SD 10.11.

¹² The Pm arrangement and Vism that follows it is: 2, 1, 4, 3, 5. The 5 perceptions also occur in **Metta,sahagata S** (S 46.54.12/5:119), SD 10.11.

(*appaṭikūlaṅ ca paṭikkūlaṅ ca tad ubhayaṃ abhinivajjetvā upekkhako vihareyya sati sampajāno*).

Perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive

(1) And, bhikshus, for what purpose,¹³ should a monk dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive?

3 Thinking, ‘**May no lust arise in me towards objects that arouse *lust***’—for this purpose, bhikshus, should a monk dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive.

[*In the case of an agreeable object (eg a sensually attractive person), he either pervades it with the thought of foulness or regards it as impermanent.*]¹⁴

Perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive

(2) And, bhikshus, for what purpose, should a monk dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive?

4 Thinking, ‘**May no hate arise in me towards objects that arouse *hate***’—for this purpose, bhikshus, should a monk dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive.

[*In the case of a disagreeable object (eg a hostile person), he either pervades it with lovingkindness or regards it as physical elements.*]¹⁵

Perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive and in the repulsive

(3) And, bhikshus, for what purpose, should a monk dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive as well as in the repulsive?

5 Thinking, ‘**May no lust arise in me towards objects that arouse *lust*, and may no hate arise in me towards objects that arouse *hate***’—for this purpose, bhikshus, should a monk dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive as well as in the repulsive.

[*He pervades both agreeable and disagreeable objects with the thought of foulness or regards them as impermanent; thus he perceives both as repulsive.*]

Perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive and in the unrepulsive

(4) And, bhikshus, for what purpose, should a monk dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive as well as in the unrepulsive?

6 Thinking, ‘**May no hate arise in me towards objects that arouse *hate*, and may no lust arise in me towards objects that arouse *lust***’—for this purpose, bhikshus, should a monk dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive as well as in the unrepulsive.

[*He pervades both disagreeable and agreeable objects with lovingkindness or regards them as physical elements; thus he perceives both as unrepulsive.*]

Dwelling in equanimity

¹³ “For what purpose,” *attha,vasam*, “on what account, for what reason.” *Attha,vasa Vagga* is the title of A 2.17/1:98-100, & V 5:223,4-23 (in the Parivāra).

¹⁴ These amplified notes here and in the following 4 sections are from **Paṭisambhidā, magga** (see Intro).

¹⁵ For an example of this method, see Vism 306/9.38: “What am I angry with: his head hair, body hair ... ?”

(5) And, bhikshus, for what purpose, should a monk, rejecting both the unrepulsive and the repulsive, dwell in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware?

7 Thinking, ‘**In any situation, anywhere and in any way, may no lust ever arise in me towards objects that arouse *lust*, nor hate towards objects that arouse *hate*, nor delusion towards objects liable to arouse *delusion***’—for this purpose, bhikshus, should a monk, rejecting both the repulsive and the unrepulsive, dwell equanimous, mindful and clearly aware.

[*He regards form as only form, sound as only sound, smell as only smell, taste as only taste, touch as only touch, thought as only thought, he is neither glad nor sad, but abides in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware.*]

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Bibliography

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