

Study Guide for *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*

Texts 1 – 11, pp. 33-40

by Stephen Seiberling

1. No Other Form (AN 1:1-10), p. 33

Considering the text

In what way does the text say that the [attractive] qualities of another may affect the observer?

In a number of suttas the Buddha describes the five cords of sensuality (*kāmāguṇā*). For example, see AN 6:63 ([Thanissaro](#); or NDB text 131, pp, 170-75) and MN 13 ([Thanissaro](#)). In what ways are the five aspects of a person that can obsess the mind, and the five cords of sensuality similar?

In our text the statements about how aspects of another person can obsess the mind are presented simply as observations by the Buddha about things that he knows. Why do you think the Buddha made these observations? Why might he have chosen to do it in this way?

Questions for reflection

Have you found that the attractive features of a person of the opposite sex (or same sex, depending on orientation) can persist in obsessing your mind? If so, how does it manifest for you in your feelings, in your thoughts, and in your actions?

How has your experience of attraction to other people changed over time? What seems to have contributed to these changes? Has your understanding or practice of Buddhist teaching influenced those changes? If so, in what ways?

Suggestions for practice

Notice your experience of attraction to another person sometime when it is occurring. Maintaining mindfulness in the experience, notice how the experience plays out in your feelings, thoughts, speech or actions.

Do you discern particular conditioning in yourself, long held feelings, stories about yourself and your needs, or other conditions in the mind that shape your experience of desire for another. Does maintaining mindfulness in the experience change how it unfolds in some way? How so?

2. Abandoning the Hindrances (AN 1:11-20), pp. 34-35

Considering the text

As you read the text, note the specific cause identified for each hindrance arising and becoming strong. Similarly, note the most important factor identified for each hindrance not arising or being abandoned. In which cases does proper attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) play a role? In what ways?

Questions for reflection

Consider each of the five hindrances in turn. Do any of them seem particularly active in influencing your mind or behavior?

Consider the causes identified in the text for the arising and strengthening of the hindrance, or hindrances, that most influence you. How does that cause play out in your experience? Also consider the most

important factor identified for that hindrance not arising or being abandoned. How do you think cultivating that factor would affect your experience of that hindrance, or of your experience in other ways? Are there particular steps you would like to take to strengthen the causes for the non-arising and abandonment of that hindrance?

Read the explanation of proper attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) in note 10, p. 277 in NDB. What would it be like to bring such an awareness to your experiences throughout the day? How do you think it would influence your mind with respect to the five hindrances?

Suggestion for practice

When attempting to practice meditation on some occasion notice any obstacles that arise in the mind? If any are prominent or especially distracting, allow yourself to use the sitting time to observe and investigate the mental obstacles. How do they manifest in the mind or body? Can you discern how conditions or choices in your life may be giving rise to or sustaining aspects of the mental obstacle? Explore what you can learn from this contemplation. (This kind of practice can serve as a valuable tool for strengthening the conditions that support meditation.)

3. The Mind - I (AN 1:21-30 & 31-40; selected), p. 35

Considering the text

Here are some definitions of the English word “intractable”:

A. *adj.* Not tractable.

1. Of persons and animals: Not to be guided; not manageable or docile; uncontrollable;
2. Of things: Not to be manipulated, wrought, or brought into any desired condition; not easily treated or dealt with; resisting treatment or effort. (“intractable, adj. and n.”. OED Online. September 2012. Oxford University Press. 8 Oct., 2012 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/98586?redirectedFrom=intractable>>.)

The Pāli word here translated as “developed” (*bhāvitam*) is a form of the word *bhāvanā*. Here is a definition of *bhāvanā*:

Producing, dwelling on something, putting one’s thoughts to, application, developing by means of thought or meditation, cultivation by mind, culture. (“Bhāvanā”, PED)

How do you think the terms “tamed, guarded, protected and controlled” should be understood in the context of this sutta? Can you think of other sutta passages where they are used?

Questions for reflection

In your experience, in what ways is a mind that is not developed (as is done in Buddhist ethical and meditative training) not tractable, or a cause of suffering? In what ways is such a developed mind tractable, and a cause of happiness?

In your experience, in what ways is a mind that is “untamed, unguarded, unprotected and uncontrolled,” a source of harm? In what ways is a mind that is “tamed, guarded, protected and controlled,” a source of benefit?

4. The Mind - II (AN 1:48, 51, 52), p. 36

Considering the text

The Buddha has been described as a master at giving metaphors to illustrate his teachings. Why might he have chosen to not give one when describing how quickly the mind changes?

The two lines in AN describing the mind as “luminous” (*Pabhassaram*) have been cited by some as a basis for claiming that the Buddha taught a concept of “original nature” or “Buddha nature.” Earlier commentators expressed other interpretations. How do you understand the meaning of the passage as it appears here? See the explanations for this expression given by Bhikkhu Bodhi (NDB, n. 13, p.278) or Thanissaro Bhikkhu ([note 1](#)).

What does the text say results because the uninstructed person does not understand how the mind “is luminous, but defiled by adventitious defilements”? What results when the instructed noble disciple understands that the mind “is luminous, and it is freed from adventitious defilements”?

Questions for reflection

If the mind is “luminous”, i.e., able to shed light on or illuminate objects of awareness, how is that helpful for a practitioner? Can you identify anything in your experience that corresponds to the luminous quality of the mind? What would be the consequences for Buddhist practice if the mind did not have the capacity to illuminate things?

5. Loving-kindness (AN 1:53-55), p. 36

Considering the text

What do you think this sutta means by the phrase, “produces a thought of loving-kindness, develops it, gives attention to it”? While the text makes it clear that this particular experience is brief, what does it seem to be saying about the depth of the loving-kindness (*mettā*) developed?

Questions for reflection

Does contemplating this text affect your desire to cultivate loving-kindness? How so?

Suggestions for practice

Practice the cultivation of *mettā* on a regular basis. You may wish to include this as part of your sitting meditation practice, and/or simply incline the mind toward *mettā* at various times during the day.

6. Mind Is the Forerunner (AN 1:56-59), p. 36

Considering the text

This text describes “mind as the forerunner” (*manopubbaṅgamā*) of whatever states are unwholesome or wholesome. In what sense do you think the word mind (*mano*) is being used here? (See NDB, n. 15, p. 278, for an explanation.)

How do you understand the meaning of the word translated here as “wholesome” (*kusala*)? (See NDB, n. 15, p. 278, and [BV glossary](#).)

What do you think is meant by the terms “negligence” (*pamāda*) and “diligence” (*appamāda*) in this text? (See NDB, n. 16, p. 278, and [ATI glossary](#).)

Questions for reflection

In your experience how do intentions, or particular qualities of mind, serve as the forerunner for wholesome and unwholesome states in yourself? Do you observe this in others?

Suggestion for practice

Choose a day to focus awareness on the presence of intentions in your mind on a moment-to-moment basis? Notice the quality of the intentions when you perceive them, and any feelings or thoughts that accompany them. See if you can discern how some intentions give rise to unwholesome states and others give rise to wholesome states.

7. The Highest Gain (AN 1:76-81), p. 37

Considering the text

What type of wisdom (*pañña*) do you think is meant in this text? (For possible meanings see [BV glossary](#), and [BD](#).)

In the text the Buddha juxtaposes loss or gain of relatives, wealth and fame, with loss or gain of wisdom, indicating that the former are insignificant compared to the latter. Why do you think he made this contrast? How might the audience being addressed (monks) have influenced the way the teaching is expressed?

Questions for reflection

What feelings do you have when you think about possibility of loss or gain of relatives, or of wealth, or fame? Can you think of a form of loss or gain that would make these seem insignificant to you? If so, what would it be?

Suggestion for practice

Try doing the practice given in the text, cultivating the intention described by repeating the phrase, “I will grow in the increase of wisdom” on daily basis.

8. One Person (AN 1:170, 174, 175-86), p. 37

Considering the text

For an explanation of the meaning of the word *Tathāgatha*, see NDB, n. 17, p. 278. Also, see NDB, n. 18, p. 278 for explanations of various terms in last part of this text, as well as AN 6:30 (NDB text 120, pp. 156-58).

To our ears these passages may sound like boasting. If the Buddha himself made these statements, why might he have done so?

Questions for reflection

Try describing for yourself the Buddha and his spiritual accomplishments. What do you know about his life and what he did? (You may also wish to consider what sources inform your understanding, and to what extent they seem reliable.)

What feelings arise for you when you consider the Buddha and his spiritual accomplishments? Are there qualities of the Buddha or his accomplishments inspire you?

Suggestions for practice

Take the time to study reliable accounts of the Buddha's life. (One that I've found valuable is Ñāṇamoli, [The Life of the Buddha: According to the Pali Canon](#).) Try to develop a clear understanding of the story of the Buddha's life, the choices he made, his struggles, spiritual realizations, and contributions to others.

Take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha on a daily basis. When you do so, or at other times during the day, try to recollect the Buddha's qualities or accomplishments that inspire you.

9. Impossible (AN 1:268-70), pp. 37-38

Considering the text

See NDB, notes 19 & 20, p. 278 for an explanation of the expressions, “a person possessed of right view” (*diṭṭhi-sampanna*), “formations” (*saṅkhārā*), and “anything” (*dhammā*) as used in this text.

The suttas use the term translated here as “happiness” (*sukha*) in more than one sense. For example, see AN 2:60 (NDB text 17, p. 44), and AN 4:62 (NDB text 68, pp. 99-100). What do you think is meant by happiness in the current text?

The essence of the teaching on impermanence, not-self, and the five aggregates can be found in “The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic”, SN 22:59 ([Mendis](#); ITBW text IX,4,(1)(c), pp. 341-42).

Questions for reflection

Are there ways that you view conditioned phenomena as permanent? In what ways do you see conditioned phenomena as sources of happiness? Are there aspects of your body, feelings, thoughts, etc. that you identify with as your self? How has your perception of this changed over time?

Suggestions for practice

While meditating examine any of the five aggregates—body, feelings, perceptions, volitional formations, or consciousness—over some time. Consider whether any of these aspects of your “self” are permanent or impermanent. Notice how they arise, remain for some time, and then cease.

Periodically, when observing some aspect of your self, or that of another person or an object, bring to mind the Buddha's teachings on seeing conditioned phenomena with wisdom by reciting the phrase, “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” Notice what effect this has on the mind.

10. Few Are Those Beings (AN 1:334-47; selected), p. 38

Considering the text

Note the initial metaphor about the landscape of India in which delightful, hospitable places are few, while rough, inhospitable places are many.

As you read the text take in the various categories of conditions that apply to few beings vs. many, e.g., few are reborn among human beings, while those reborn in other realms are many.

Questions for reflection

If you have traveled across, or flown over, large areas of North America (or some other continent), compare how that landscape fits the description in the sutta of the landscape in India.

In your experience do these categories differentiating those that are few and those who are many, reflect what you observe? Why do you think the Buddha would have stated these observations?

Suggestion for practice

Try practicing the training suggested in the sutta: “We will obtain the taste of the goal, the taste of the Dhamma, the taste of liberation.”

11. Mindfulness Directed to the Body (AN 1:575-627; selected), p. 38-40

Considering the text

What is meant by the practice of “mindfulness directed to the body” (*kāyagatā-sati*) in this text? (See NDB, n. 24, p. 279, for an explanation.)

What does the text say mindfulness directed to the body leads to, etc.?

What does the text say that those who do not practice mindfulness directed to the body do not partake of, are lost to, fail to reach, etc.? How do you understand the meaning of the term “the Deathless” (*amata*)? (A brief explanation can be found in NDB, Intro. II, p. 19.)

Questions for reflection

If you have practiced mindfulness directed to the body when you meditate, what has the experience been like for you? Has it lead to any of the benefits described in this text?

Suggestions for practice

Try practicing mindfulness directed to the body while meditating. One approach is described in the first four meditation instructions given in the Ānāpānasati Sutta (MN 118: [Thanissaro](#)) and also the section on the body in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10: [Thanissaro](#)).

Abbreviations and References:

- AN Aṅguttara Nikāya (Numerical Discourses).
- ATI *Access to Insight: Readings in Theravāda Buddhism* <<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/>>.
- BD Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, 4th rev. ed. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980. Online version: <http://www.palikanon.com/english/wtb/dic_idx.html>.
- BV *Buddha Vacana: The words of the Buddha* <<http://www.buddha-vacana.org/inden.html>>.
- ITBW Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. and ed., *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005.
- MN Majjhima Nikāya (Middle Length Discourses).
- NDB Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. and ed., *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1999.
- OED *Oxford English Dictionary*
- PED Rhys Davids, T. W. and William Stede, eds., *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*. Chipstead: Pali Text Society, 1921–5. Online version: <<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/pali/>>.
- SN Saṃyutta Nikāya (Connected Discourses).