

Tikaṇḍaki Sutta
The Discourse at Three-thorn Grove
 The repulsive and the unrepulsive
(Aṅguttara Nikāya 5.144)

Translated & amplified by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction¹

This teaching is mentioned in brief in the Haliddavasana Mettā (or Mitta) Sutta (S 5:120/46.54) and the Sampasādanīya Sutta (D 3:112 f/28.18), and in the latter, it is called a “spiritual power that is taintless, not acquisitive, noble” (*ayaṃ iddhi anāsavā anupadhikā ariyā*). The Paṭisambhidā,magga calls it “the noble magic” or “the power of the noble ones” (*ariy’iddhi*). 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 381 f/12.36-38). But Aṅguttara Commentary 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 withholding any such reactions.

The word “unrepulsive” in the sutta may refer to persons or things that are either attractive or indifferent. The Paṭisambhidā,magga explains the five modes of perception thus:²

- (1) 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.
- (2) In the case of a disagreeable object (eg a hostile person), one either pervades it with lovingkindness or regards it as physical elements.³
- (3) One pervades both agreeable and disagreeable objects with the thought of foulness or regards them as impermanent; thus one perceives both as repulsive.
- (4) One pervades both disagreeable and agreeable objects with lovingkindness or regards them as physical elements; thus one perceives both as unrepulsive.
- (5) 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, felt touch with the body, cognized a mind-object with the mind, one is neither glad nor sad, but abides in equanimity, mindful and fully aware.

(Pm 2:212 f/22.26; Vism 381 f/12.36)

These fivefold contemplation is ascribed to the Arhant as a power perfectly under his control, as in the Indriya,bhāvanā Sutta (M 152.11-16/3:301). However, as found in the Tikaṇḍaki Sutta, it is taught to unenlightened monks as a way to overcome the three unwholesome roots. The Aṅguttara Commentary says that this last item (5) is “the six-factored equanimity, similar to, though not identical with, that possessed by the Arhants”.

For a thoughtful commentary, see Nyanaponika, *The Roots of Good and Evil*, Wheel 251/253, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1998:73-78.

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

² Here arranged according to the Aṅguttara listing. See n3.

³ “Elements”, *dhātu*. The Analysis of the Elements (*dhātu,vavatthāna*), the last of the 40 traditional meditation methods, is described in great detail Vism 347-371/11.27-119. The method of given in brief in Mahā Sati-paṭṭhāna S (D 2:294 f/22.6) and Satipaṭṭhāna S (M 1:57 f/10.12), and in detail in Mahā Hatthi,padūpamā S (M 1:185-191/28.6-28), Rāhul’ovāda S (M 1:421-425/62.8-17) and Dhātuvibhaṅga S (M 3:240-243/140.13-18).

The Discourse at Three-thorn Grove

[169] 1 Once the Blessed One was staying in the Tikaṇḍaki Grove near Sāketa. There the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Monks!”

“Venerable sir!” the monks replied.

The Blessed One said this:

2 “Monks,

(1) it is good to dwell from time to time perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive (*appaṭikkūle paṭikkūla,saññī vihareyya*);

(2) it is good to dwell from time to time perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive (*paṭikkūle appaṭikkūla,saññī vihareyya*);

(3) it is good to dwell from time to time perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive as well as in the repulsive (*appaṭikkūle ca paṭikkūle ca paṭikkūla,saññī vihareyya*);

(4) it is good to dwell from time to time perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive as well as in the unrepulsive (*paṭikkūle ca appaṭikkūle ca appaṭikkūla,saññī vihareyya*);

(5) it is good to reject both the unrepulsive and the repulsive and to dwell in equanimity, mindful and fully aware (*appaṭikkūlañ ca paṭikkūlañ ca tad ubhayaṃ abhinivajjetvā upekkhako viherayya*).⁴

(1) And how should a monk dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive?

3 [He should do so with the thought:] ‘**May no lust arise in me towards objects that arouse lust.**’ [*In the case of an agreeable object (eg as sensually attractive person), he either pervades it with the thought of foulness or regards it as impermanent.*]⁵

On account of this force of purpose he should dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive.

(2) And how should a monk dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive?

4 [He should do so with the thought:] ‘**May no hate arise in me towards objects that arouse hate.**’ [*In the case of a disagreeable object (eg a hostile person), he either pervades it with lovingkindness or regards it as physical elements.*]⁶

On account of this force of purpose he should dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive.

(3) And how should a monk dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive as well as in the repulsive?

5 [He should do so with the thought:] ‘**May no lust arise in me towards objects that arouse lust, and may no hate arise in me towards objects that arouse hate.**’ [*He pervades both agreeable and disagreeable objects with the thought of foulness or regards them as impermanent; thus he perceives both as repulsive.*]

On account of this force of purpose he should dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive as well as in the repulsive;

(4) And how should a monk dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive as well as in the unrepulsive?

6 [He should do so with the thought:] ‘**May no hate arise in me towards objects that arouse hate, and may no lust arise in me towards objects that arouse lust.**’ [*He pervades both dis-*

⁴ The Pm arrangement and Vism that follows it is: 2, 1, 4, 3, 5.

⁵ These amplified notes here and in the following 4 sections are from the Paṭisambhidā,magga (see Introd).

⁶ For an example of this method, see Vism 306/9.38: “What am I angry with: his head hair, body hair...?”.

agreeable and agreeable objects with lovingkindness or regards them as physical elements; thus he perceives both as unrepulsive.]

On account of this force of purpose he should dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive as well as in the unrepulsive.

(5) And how should a monk dwell rejecting both the repulsive and the unrepulsive and dwell in equanimity, mindful and fully aware?

7 [He should do so with the thought:] ‘**In any situation, anywhere and in any way, may lust never arise in me towards objects that arouse lust, nor hate towards objects that arouse hate, nor delusion towards objects liable to arouse delusion.**’ [*He regards form as only form, sound as only sound, smell as only smell, a taste as only taste, touch as only touch, thought as only thought, he is neither glad nor sad, but abides in equanimity, mindful and fully aware*].

On account of this force of purpose one should dwell rejecting both the repulsive and the unrepulsive and dwell in equanimity, mindful and fully aware.

— evaṃ —

The efficacy of lovingkindness

Accharā Sutta

The Discourse on the Finger-snap (Aṅguttara Nikāya 1.6.3-5)

Monks, if even for just the moment of a finger-snap a monk associates with (*āsevati*)... cultivates (*bhāveti*)... pays attention (*manasikaroti*) to a thought of lovingkindness, he is called a monk. His meditation is not in vain. He acts in accordance with the Master’s teaching. He follows his advice. He does not eat the country’s alms in vain.⁷ How much more so if he were to often cultivate it!

(A 1:10 f)

— — —

Okkhā Sutta⁸

The Discourse on the Rice-pots (Saṃyutta Nikāya 20.4/2:264)

1 Staying at Sāvattḥī.

2 “Monks, if one were to give a hundred pots (of food) in the morning; if one were to give a hundred pots at midday; if one were to give a hundred pots in the evening; but if one were to cultivate a mind of lovingkindness even for the moment it takes to milk a cow by a pull at the udder-teat⁹ in the morning...or, at midday...or, in the evening—this would be more fruitful than giving the pots (of food).¹⁰”

3 Therefore, monks, you should train yourselves thus: ‘We will cultivate the liberation of mind by lovingkindness, often cultivate it, make a habit of it, make it our basic practice, keep it constant, build it up, fully undertake it.’”

[v1.41 030711]

⁷ Comy say that there are 4 ways in which a monks use his alms: (1) an immoral monk uses them (undeservedly) like a thief; (2) a virtuous worldling who does not reflect on them is like a debtor; (3) a trainee (*sekhā*, ie one of the 7 Saints, short of the Arhant-become) uses them as an inheritance; (4) the Arhant uses them as a proper owner.

⁸ PTS has *ukkā* (wr).

⁹ “To milk a cow by a pull at the udder-teat,” *gadduhana,matta* = *goduhana,matta*; or *gandha,ūhana,matta*, “a mere sniff of scent”, ie the time taken to get an aroma of a pellet of incense between the fingers (SA 2:224).

¹⁰ When compared to insight cultivation, cf Velāma S (A 9.20/4:395 f).