AN 3.30 — AN 3:30 Upside Down | Avakujja Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

Upside Down

Avakujja Sutta (AN 3:30)

“Monks, there are these three types of persons to be found existing in the world. Which three? The person of upside down discernment, the person of lap discernment, and the person of wide-open discernment.

“And which is the person of upside-down discernment? There is the case where a person, having gone to a monastery, often listens to the Dhamma in the presence of the monks. The monks teach him the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. They expound the holy life both in its particulars & in its meaning, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure. He, while sitting in that seat, doesn’t attend to the

beginning of that talk, doesn't attend to the middle, doesn't attend to the end. Having gotten up from that seat, he doesn't attend to the beginning of that talk, doesn't attend to the middle, doesn't attend to the end. Just as when a pot is turned upside down, water poured there runs off and doesn't stay; in the same way, there is the case where a person, having gone to a monastery, often listens to the Dhamma in the presence of the monks. The monks teach him the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. They expound the holy life both in its particulars & in its meaning, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure. He, while sitting in that seat, doesn't attend to the beginning of that talk, doesn't attend to the middle, doesn't attend to the end. Having gotten up from that seat, he doesn't attend to the beginning of that talk, doesn't attend to the middle, doesn't attend to the end. This is called a person of upside down discernment.

"And which is the person of lap discernment? There is the case where a person, having gone to a monastery, often listens to the Dhamma in the presence of the monks. The monks teach him the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. They expound the holy life both in its particulars & in its meaning, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure. He, while sitting in that seat, attends to the beginning of that talk, attends to the middle, attends to the end. But having gotten up from that seat, he doesn't attend to the beginning of that talk, doesn't attend to the middle, doesn't attend to the end. Just as when a person has various foods strewn over his lap—sesame seeds, husked rice, cakes, & jujubes—and when getting up, his mindfulness lapsed, he would scatter them; in the same way, there is the case where a person, having gone to a monastery, often listens to the Dhamma in the presence of the monks. The monks teach him the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. They expound the holy life both in its particulars & in its meaning, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure. He, while sitting in that seat, attends to the beginning of that talk, attends to the middle, attends to the end. But having gotten up from that seat, he doesn't attend to the beginning of that talk, doesn't attend to the middle, doesn't attend to the end. This is called a person of lap discernment.

"And which is the person of wide open discernment? There is the case where a person, having gone to a monastery, often listens to the Dhamma in the presence of the monks. The monks teach him the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. They expound the holy life both in its particulars & in its meaning, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure. He, while sitting in that seat, attends to the beginning of that talk, attends to the middle, attends to the end. And having gotten up from that seat, attends to the beginning of that talk, attends to the middle, attends to the end. Just as when a pot is set right side up, water poured there stays and doesn't run off; in the same way, there is the case where a person, having gone to a monastery, often listens to the Dhamma in the presence of the monks. The monks teach him the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. They expound the holy life both in its particulars & in its meaning, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure. He, while sitting in that seat, attends to the beginning of that talk, attends to the middle, attends to the end. And having gotten up from that seat, attends to the beginning of that talk, attends to the middle, attends to the end. This is called a person of wide open discernment."

A man of upside down discernment—
stupid, injudicious,
even if he often goes in the presence of the monks,
can't grasp anything
like the beginning, middle, or end of a talk,
for discernment isn't found in him.

A man of lap discernment
is said to be better than that one.
If he often goes in the presence of the monks,
while sitting in that seat, grasps the words
of the beginning, middle, & end of the talk,
but getting up, he doesn't discern anything like that,
for he forgets what he had grasped.

But a man of wide open discernment
is said to be better than those ones.
If he often goes in the presence of the monks,
while sitting in that seat, he grasps the words
of the beginning, middle, & end of the talk.
He remembers—the person of undivided mind,
with the best of resolves.
Practicing the Dhamma in line with the Dhamma,
he'll put an end
to suffering & stress.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 95; AN 5:151; AN 5:202; AN 6:86–88