AN 5.96 — AN 5:96 One Who Retains What He Has Heard | Sutadhara Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

One Who Retains What He Has Heard

Sutadhara Sutta (AN 5:96)

"Endowed with five qualities, a monk pursuing mindfulness of breathing will in no long time penetrate the Unprovoked (release).1 Which five?

"He is a person who imposes only a little (on others): one of few duties & projects, easy to support, easily contented with the requisites of life.

"He is a person who eats only a little food, committed to not indulging his stomach.

“He is a person of only a little sloth, committed to wakefulness.

“He is a person of much learning, who has retained what he heard, has stored what he has heard. Whatever teachings are admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end, that—in their meaning & expression—proclaim the holy life that is entirely complete & pure: those he has listened to often, retained, discussed, accumulated, examined with his mind, and well-penetrated in terms of his views.

“He reflects on the mind as it is released.2

“Endowed with these five qualities, a monk pursuing mindfulness of breathing will in no long time penetrate the Unprovoked.”

Note

1. Akuppa. This term is sometimes translated as “unshakable,” but it literally means, “unprovoked.” The reference is apparently to the theory of dhātu, or properties underlying physical or psychological events in nature. The physical properties according to this theory are four: earth (solidity), liquid, heat, and wind (motion). Three of them—liquid, heat, & wind—are potentially active. When they are aggravated, agitated, or provoked—the Pali term here, pakuppati, is used also on the psychological level, where it means angered or upset—they act as the underlying cause for natural activity. When the provocation ends, the corresponding activity subsides.

“Now there comes a time, friends, when the external liquid property is provoked, and at that time the external earth property vanishes…

“There comes a time, friends, when the external liquid property is provoked and washes away village, town, city, district, & country. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean drops down one hundred leagues, two hundred… three hundred… four hundred… five hundred… six hundred… seven hundred leagues. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean stands seven palm-trees deep, six… five… four… three… two palm-trees deep, one palm-tree deep. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean stands seven fathoms deep, six… five… four… three… two fathoms deep, one fathom deep. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean stands half a fathom deep, hip-deep, knee-deep, ankle deep. There comes a time when the water in the great ocean is not even the depth of the first joint of a finger…

“There comes a time, friends, when the external fire property is provoked and consumes village, town, city, district, & country; and then, coming to the edge of a green district, the edge of a road, the edge of a rocky district, to the water’s edge, or to a lush, well-watered area, goes out from lack of sustenance. There comes a time when people try to make fire using a wing-bone & tendon parings…

“There comes a time, friends, when the external wind property is provoked and blows away village, town, city, district, & country. There comes a time when, in the last month of

the hot season, people try to start a breeze with a fan or bellows, and even the grass at the fringe of a thatch roof doesn't stir." —MN 28

A similar theory attributes the irruption of mental states to the provocation of the properties of sensuality, form, or formlessness.

"In dependence on the property of sensuality there occurs the perception of sensuality. In dependence on the perception of sensuality there occurs the resolve for sensuality… the desire for sensuality… the fever for sensuality… the quest for sensuality. Searching for sensuality, monks, an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person conducts himself wrongly through three means: through body, through speech, & through mind." —SN 14:12

Even unbinding is described as a property (Iti 44). However, there is a crucial difference in how unbinding is attained, in that the unbinding property is not provoked. Any events that depend on the provocation of a property are inherently unstable and inconstant, subject to change when the provocation ends. But because true release is not caused by the provocation of anything, it is not subject to change.

2. When the mind is released from hindrances as it enters concentration, when it is released from the factors of lower levels of concentration as it enters higher levels of concentration, and when it is released from the fetters on reaching awakening.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 29–30; AN 4:245; AN 9:34; Khp 9