AN 9.37 — AN 9:37 With Ānanda | Ānanda Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

With Ānanda

Ānanda Sutta (AN 9:37)

On one occasion Ven. Ānanda was staying near Kosambī at Ghosita’s monastery. There he addressed the monks, “Friend monks!”

“Yes, friend,” the monks responded to him.

Ven. Ānanda said, “It’s amazing, friends, it’s astounding, how the Blessed One who knows & sees, the worthy one, rightly self-awakened, has attained & awakened to an opening [in a confining place]1 for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right

method, & for the realization of unbinding, where the eye will be, and those forms, and yet one will not be sensitive to that dimension; where the ear will be, and those sounds… where the nose will be, and those aromas… where the tongue will be, and those flavors… where the body will be, and those tactile sensations, and yet one will not be sensitive to that dimension."

When this was said, Ven. Udāyin said to Ven. Ānanda, "Is one percipient when not sensitive to that dimension, my friend, or unpercipient?"

[Ven. Ānanda:] "One is percipient when not sensitive to that dimension, my friend, not unpercipient."

[Ven. Udāyin:] "When not sensitive to that dimension, my friend, one is percipient of what?"

[Ven. Ānanda:] "There is the case where, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity, (perceiving,) 'Infinite space,' one enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. Percipient in this way, one is not sensitive to that dimension [i.e, the dimensions of the five physical senses].

"And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) 'Infinite consciousness,' one enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. Percipient in this way, too, one is not sensitive to that dimension.

"And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) 'There is nothing,' one enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. Percipient in this way, too, one is not sensitive to that dimension.

"Once, friend, when I was staying near Sāketa at the Game Refuge in the Black Forest, the nun Jaṭila Bhāgikā went to where I was staying, and on arrival—having bowed to me—stood to one side. As she was standing there, she said to me: 'The concentration whereby—neither pressed down nor forced back, nor with fabrication kept blocked or suppressed—still as a result of release, contented as a result of standing still, and as a result of contentment one is not agitated: This concentration is said by the Blessed One to be the fruit of what?'

"I said to her, 'Sister, the concentration whereby—neither pressed down nor forced back, nor kept in place by the fabrications of forceful restraint—still as a result of release, contented as a result of standing still, and as a result of contentment one is not agitated: This concentration is said by the Blessed One to be the fruit of gnosis [arahantship].' Percipient in this way, too, one is not sensitive to that dimension."23

Notes

1. The phrase in brackets, translating the Pali word sambādhe, is found in the Burmese and Sri Lankan editions of the Canon, but not in the Thai. The phrase, "an opening in a confining place," is found in AN 9:42 in all the major editions, where "confining place" is explained as the five strings of sensuality.

2. The Commentary, which is committed to the position that the external senses fall silent in all the concentration attainments, including the four jhānas, tries to explain the absence of those jhānas in Ven. Ānanda's list by saying that the object of those jhānas—the internal mental image on which they are focused—counts as a "form" and so, to avoid confusion with the forms that are the objects of the eye, Ven. Ānanda chose to exclude those jhānas from his list. This explanation, however, ignores the fact that Ven. Ānanda explicitly assigns "those forms" to the eye—as he assigns "those sounds" to the ear, and so on—so if he had meant to include the four jhānas in his list, he could have done so without causing confusion.

MN 43 notes that the first three formless states listed here are those that can be known through the eye of discernment when one's intellect-consciousness is purified and divorced from the five external sense faculties. Because the fourth jhāna can also be known through the eye of discernment, and because it is described as purified in many contexts, the fact that it is not listed in MN 43 indicates that consciousness is not divorced from the external sense faculties in that jhāna—or any of the lower ones.

Thus it is more likely that Ven. Ānanda excluded the four jhānas from his list here because the meditator can still be sensitive to the five external senses when in those jhānas. For more on this point, see AN 9:38, note 2, and AN 10:72, note 3.

3. The concentration that is the fruit of gnosis is apparently equivalent to the concentration of unmediated knowing, mentioned in Sn 2:1, and the liberation of immediacy, mentioned in Thig 5:8.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 11; MN 1; MN 138; MN 152; AN 4:24; AN 10:6—7; AN 11:10