Snp 4.4 — Suddhatthaka Sutta: Pure

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

"I see the pure, the supreme, free from disease. It's in connection with what's seen that a person's purity is."[1] Understanding thus, having known the "supreme," & remaining focused on purity, one falls back on that knowledge. If it's in connection with what is seen that a person's purity is, or if stress is abandoned in connection with knowledge, then a person with acquisitions is purified in connection with something else,[2] for his view betrays that in the way he asserts it. No brahman[3] says purity comes in connection with anything else. Unsmeared with regard to what's seen, heard, sensed, precepts or practices, merit or evil, not creating anything here, he's let go of what he had embraced.[4] Abandoning what's first, they depend on what's next.[5] Following distraction, they don't cross over attachment. They embrace & reject — like a monkey releasing a branch to seize at another[6] — a person undertaking practices on his own, goes high & low, latched onto perception. But having clearly known through vedas,[7] having encountered the Dhamma, one of profound discernment doesn't go high & low. He's enemy-free[8] with regard to all things seen, heard, or sensed. By whom, with what,[9] should he be pigeonholed here in the world? — one who has seen in this way, who goes around open.[10] They don't conjure, don't yearn, don't proclaim "utter purity." Untying the tied-up knot of grasping, they don't form a desire for any thing at all in the world. The brahman gone beyond territories,[11] has nothing that — on knowing or seeing — he's grasped. Unimpassionate

for passion, not impassioned for dis-,[12] he has nothing here that he's grasped as supreme.

Notes

1.

An ancient Indian belief, dating back to the Vedas, was that the sight of certain things or beings was believed to purify. Thus "in connection with what's seen" here means both that purity is brought about by means of seeing such a sight, and that one's purity is measured in terms of having such a sight. This belief survives today in the practice of darshan.

2.

In other words, if purity were simply a matter of seeing or knowing something, a person could be pure in this sense and yet still have acquisitions (= defilements), which would not be true purity.

3.

"Brahman" in the Buddhist sense, i.e., a person born in any caste who has become an arahant.

4.

Lines such as this may have been the source of the confusion in the different recensions of the Canon — and in Nd.I — as to whether the poems in this vagga are concerned with letting go of views that have been embraced (atta) or of self (attaa). The compound here, attañjaho, read on its own, could be read either as "he's let go of what has been embraced" or "he's let go of self." However, the following image of a monkey seizing and releasing branches as it moves from tree to tree reinforces the interpretation that the first interpretation is the correct one.

5.

Nd.I: Leaving one teacher and going to another; leaving one teaching and going to another. This phrase may also refer to the mind's tendency to leave one craving to go to another.

6.

"Like a monkey releasing a branch to seize at another" — an interesting example of a whole phrase that functions as a "lamp," i.e., modifying both the phrase before it and the phrase after it.

7.

Vedas — Just as the word "brahman" is used in a Buddhist sense above, here the word veda is given a Buddhist sense. According to the Commentary, in this context it means the knowledge accompanying four transcendent paths: the paths to stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship.

8.

Nd.I: The enemies here are the armies of Mara — all unskillful mental qualities. For a detailed inventory of the armies of Mara, see Sn 3.2.

9.

By whom, with what — two meanings of the one Pali word, kena.

10.

Nd.I: "Open" means having a mind not covered or concealed by craving, defilement, or ignorance. This image is used in Ud 5.5. It is in contrast to the image discussed in note 1 to Sn 4.2. An alternative meaning here might be having one's eyes open.

11.

Nd.I: "Territories" = the ten fetters (samyojana) and seven obsessions (anusaya).

12.

Nd.I: "Passion" = sensuality; "dispassion" = the jhana states that bring about dispassion for sensuality.

See also: MN 24.