

Venerable Ānanda and His Insight Meditation (*Vipassanā*)



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ABSTRACT

There were eighty great disciples of the Buddha. Among them who were conferred one or two titles (*etadagga*), Venerable Ānanda was uniquely conferred totally five titles. Also, among those who were attendants to the Buddha, he was an excellent attendant to the Buddha due to his past wishes. This present paper aims to study the practice that underlines insight meditation of Venerable Ānanda in the Tipiṭak and explore his meditative method which he attained *sotapattiphala* till *arahatphala*. The finding shows that he served his life for the Buddhist religion throughout his whole life. He led in reciting Suttanta Piṭaka at the First Buddhist Council. Through meditation, he could escape from the circle of birth and help people with insight meditation and answer their questions and doubts on meditation. Venerable Ānanda has been a remarkable monk until now. His role was still crucial for lasting the teachings of the Buddha (*sāssana*).

Keywords: Ānanda, Insight Meditation and Attendant

1. Introduction

Venerable Ānanda was undoubtedly the one who occupied a unique position in many respects among the entire of the Buddha's great disciples in the Blessed One's retinue. Born on the same day in the same caste of his Master Siddhattha Sakyamuni. Venerable Ānanda was a great attendant who was beholder the five unique qualities.¹ Besides, he was bestowed as the treasurer of his master's whole teachings and finally was preserving and contributing all short of his Master's words to the world.

Venerable Ānanda attained *sotāpattiphala*, the fruit of stream-entry, during his first rains retreat. He took his final liberation, arahantship, only after the Buddha passed away and just before the First Buddhist Council began. For attaining *sotāpattiphala*, the insight meditation that he contemplated was that there is "I am" not without possessiveness and so on, instructed by Venerable Puṇṇa.(A-a I p.308) Amazingly, for attaining arahantship, keeping balance concentration and effort in his practicing *kāyagatāsati* meditation, he attained arahantship in the gap that his feet were free from floor and his head did not touch pillow.

Accordingly, this paper is an attempt to show how venerable Ānanda fulfilled his aptitude to become a monk with great qualities in his life. Also, to know his practice of insight meditation is rather excellent for he proved that insight meditation can help overcome many problems occurring in his duties, and assist him be peaceful in mind whatever he faces. Only practicing insight meditation can get rid of the miseries of old age, sickness and death and the attainment of *nibbāna*.

2. His Life

According to tradition, Venerable Ānanda came to the world of human being, just as the Buddha did, from the Tusita heaven, (A-a I 292) and was born on the same day as the Buddha in the same caste, the *khattiya* or the warrior of the royal family of the Sakyans. There were seven persons born into the human world on the same day of the Buddha's great birth: Rahulamātā, Ānanda, Channa, Kāḷudāyī, Kaḍaka horse, Mahābodhi tree and Four Gold pots. (Bv-a 276) His father was king Amitodana, the younger brother of King

¹Five unique qualities refer to 1) Wide learning, 2) Retentive memory, 3) Good behaviour and quick wit, 4) Resolute, and 5) Ministering care. -Piyadassi Mahathera, **The Spectrum of Buddhism**, (Taiwan: Buddha Educational Foundation, 1996), p. 61.

Suddhodana, the Buddha's father. Thus, the Buddha and Venerable Ānanda were cousins growing up together in the beautiful city of Kapilavatthu.

When the prince Ānanda was thirty-seven years old,² he joined the Buddhist Order along with his fellow princes namely Bhaddiya, Anuruddha, Bhagu, Kimila, Devadatta and Upāli as well as with many other Sakyan nobles clan (*khattiya*). (Vin V p.255) Venerable Belaṭṭhasāsa (Vin II p.763) was his Preceptor introducing him the monk's discipline and guided him to be a diligent pupil.

3. Becoming the Buddha's Attendant

The term "attendant" is actually not comprehensive enough. There is hardly an English word, which can do full justice to his position. (Hecker 1980, 13) After Venerable Ānanda had joined the Order, when the Buddha became fifty-five years of age, the privilege of being the Blessed One's great attendant had passed on him. There were many of Bhikkhus such as Nāgasamāla, Nāgita, Upavāna, Sunakkhatta, Cunda Sāmanera, Sāgata and Megiya who had attended to the Buddha. But they did not manage to content the Blessed One in proper way. Thus, one day the Buddha summoned the monks at assembly and declared:

“In my twenty years as leader of the Saṅgha, I have had many different attendants, but still found no one has really fulfilled their obligation sufficiently, and from time to time some of their stubbornness has become obvious. Now I am fifty-five years old and it is necessary for me to have a trustworthy and reliable attendant.”
(Nyanaponika & Hecker 2003, 139)

As soon as the Buddha announced this words all the noble disciples were surprising. They willingly offered their services to the Buddha. But the Blessed One did not accept their offers as he like to give this chance to Venerable Ānanda. Then Venerable Sāriputtara and many of his great disciples asked Venerable Ānanda to take this responsibility as it is rare gain.

²The Buddha attained his enlightenment at the age of 35 and spent his time 1 year at the Gaya. Thereafter, at the age of 37, He went to his home town and met Ānanda. Thus, it has to be said that Venerable Ānanda entered into the Buddhist Order at the age of 37.

When he was asked why he did not offer his services to the Buddha like the others, he replied that the Buddha knew best who was suitable to be his attendant. Of course as he had so much confidence in the Buddha, he did not express his own wishes even though he would have liked to be the Buddha's attendant. Eventually, the Buddha announced that Venerable Ānanda would be the only one who can be valid the great pleasure to him and be the best his attendant. In fact, while he heard of the Buddha's preference, Venerable Ānanda would have been so delighted, but instead he asked for eight favours (*vara*).³

The reason why venerable Ānanda asked for eight favours is that if he did not possess the first four rights (*vara*),⁴ people could have said that he had accepted the post just for the purpose of beholding such material gains that he would enjoy. Also if he did not express the other four conditions, it could rightly be said that he fulfilled the duties of his post without being mindful of his own advancement of the noble path.

The Buddha granted him these reasonable requests, which were quite fit in accordance with the Dhamma. Since then Venerable Ānanda was the constant companion (*pacchāsamana*) and great attendant (*aggupatthaka*) of the Buddha for twenty-five years. In those twenty-five years of service, he continued with the same ceaseless striving for purification as in the first eighteen years of his monk-hood. He has no complains of the hard work, nor has he conceit on being the great attendant. He just realized where he should be in and even said to himself on one day as follows:

³The eight favours (*vara*) are 1) The Buddha should never pass a gift of robes on to him, 2) never give him any alms food which the Buddha himself had received, 3) never the dwelling place to him, 4) never add him in any personal invitations. 5) if he was invited to a meal, he would rightly transfer that invitation to the Buddha. 6) If a person who has come from the distant areas is willingly to see the Buddha, he should rightly get the privilege to lead them to the Buddha. 7) If he had any doubts of inquiries about the Dhammas, he asked for the right to have them cleared up any time in the Buddha's present. 8) If the Buddha have a discourse during his absence, he asked for the privilege to have it repeated to him privately. -Ñāṇaponika Thera & Hellmuth Hecker, **Great Disciple of the Buddha**, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2003), p. 139.

⁴The four favour here are the first four favours starting one to fourth mentioned in footnote 3.

Through the full twenty-five years; that I have been in higher training, no sensual perception has arisen in me; See the excellence of the Dhamma, Through the full twenty-five years, that I have been in higher training, no perception of hate has arisen in me; See the excellence of the Dhamma, Through the full twenty-five years; that I have attended the Blessed One, with loving-kindness in mind, word and action: just come along with him. (Nyanaponika & Hecker 2003, 141)

4. His Five Titles (*etadagga*)

According to the tradition, there are about eighty disciples who was conferred the Title (*etadagga*) during the Buddha's life time. (A I 25) Among them Ven. Ānanda was one who received five Titles namely:

1. *Bahussutānaṃ* = Wide learning
2. *Satimantānaṃ* = Retentive memory
3. *Gatimantānaṃ* = Good behaviour and quick wit
4. *Dhīmantānaṃ* = Resolute
5. *Upaṭṭhakānaṃ* = Ministering care. (Piyadassi 1996, 61)

The reason why he was conferred to those five titles is that he was the one who had a privilege of learning all short of the teaching of the Buddha during his dispensation over 45 years and reached the point of the treasure of the norm (*dhammabhandhāgārika*). Thus the Buddha himself honoured Venerable Ānanda and declared; *etadaggaṃ, mama sāvakānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ bahussutānaṃ ānando* (A I 25): among those who learn the Dhamma, O Bhikkhus, I declared that Ānanda is the best. (A I p. 24)

As he was the one who excellently had the retentive memory of remembering the Dhamma, the Buddha was to declare; *etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvakānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ satimantānaṃ yadidaṃ Anando* (A I 25): among those who memorized the Dhamma, O Bhikkhus, I declared that Ānanda is the best. (A I p. 24)

As he could repeat discourses of the Buddha flawlessly up to sixty thousand words, without leaving out a single syllable, the Buddha therefore declared; “*etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvakānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ Gaṭtimantānaṃ yadidaṃ ānando* (A I 25): among those who were to say a quick wit proprietor on learning the Dhamma, O Bhikkhus, I declared that Ānanda is the best. (A I p. 24)

As he was the one who had extraordinarily being resolute, the Buddha therefore declared; “*etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvakaṇaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ dhītimantānaṃ yadidaṃ ānando* (A I 26): among those who had being resolute, O Bhikkhus, I declared that Ānanda is the best. (A I p. 24)

As he was the one who attended to the Buddha in proper way, the Buddha declared; “*etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvakaṇaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ upaṭṭhakānaṃ yadidaṃ ānando* (A I 26): among those who attended to the awakened one, O Bhikkhus, I declared that Ānanda is the best. (A I p. 24)

In compare with other leading disciples who normally excelled in only one category or in the case of two, however, Venerable Ānanda thus the unique distinction of the five qualities amongst the disciples who were declared by the Buddha himself as the most excellent personalities.

The retirement of his life After the cremation of the Blessed One, Venerable Ānanda seems very much mourned and felt so lonely that he himself expressed his situation as follows:

My companion has passed away, the master, too, is gone. There is no friendship now that equals this: Mindfulness directed to the body. The old ones now have passed away, the new ones do not please me much, Today I meditate all alone like a bird gone to its nest.” (Nyanaponika & Hecker 2003, 179)

After all, he saw only one duty for him to attain total liberation as prophesied to him by the Buddha himself. Thus he followed the advice suggested by Venerable Mahākassapa, went to live in the forest in the province of Kosala, which was near the Mallas and the Sakyans. But when it became known to the people, he was inundated with visitors who were mourning of death of the Buddha, Venerable Sāriputta, Venerable Moggallāna, and of their beloved King Pasenadi. All four had died within the year. Day and night, in the village and in the forest, Venerable Ānanda had to console these mourned people and was never alone.

In the meantime, the First Buddhist Council was to be held and headed by Venerable Mahākassapa as to strengthen the Dhamma and the Vinaya. This was to take place in Rājagaha under the protection of King Ajātasattu. Five hundred monks were to participate, among whom Venerable Ānanda was the only one who was not an arahant. Without Venerable Ānanda, the council was not seem to be perfected because he recognized most of the discourses of the Buddha. Thus his attainment of *arahantship* is became the subject that was so important to both himself and the first council.

5. Vipassanā

Vipassanā or insight meditation is the central and most distinctive feature of the Buddhist path to *nibbāna*, that is, to the cessation of suffering and escape from rebirth. The term of *vipassanā* is defined as follow:

Vipassanā: inward vision, insight, intuition, introspection

Vipassanā-kammaṭṭhāna: exercise for intuition

Vipassanā-ñāṇa: ability or method of attaining insight

Vipassanā-dhura: obligation of introspection.

(Rhys Davids & Stede 1997, 627)

Vipassanā is a simple technique which depends on direct experience and observation based on the contemplation of impermanence (*aniccānupassanā*), misery (*dukkhānupassanā*), impersonality (*anattānupassanā*), which will be put into consideration in the next items. One can attentively and strenuously contemplate upon one of these natural aspects until he is capable of clearly seeing and realizing the truths as they really are in everything in the universe. *Vipassanā* is also comprised of experiential observation of the mind and matter (*nāma* and *rūpa*). Besides, it is the study of cause and effect. It is essential that one be able to make a proper differentiation between *paramattha* (ultimate realities) and *paññatti* (concepts, ideas,); otherwise one will unknowingly fall into the trap of meditation on *paññatti*. (Kyaw Min 1979, 95)

In Saṅkhattadhammasutt, Saḷāyatana Vagga pāli, the Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One: “Well for me, lord, if the exalted one would teach me a teaching in brief, hearing which teaching from the exalted one I might dwell solitary, remote, earnest, ardent and aspiring.” (S IV p.29-32) In this discourse, The Buddha teaches Ānanda to practice insight meditation by concerning contemplation of six doors: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

Contemplation of eye door

Eye, object, eye consciousness, eye contact, pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling owing to eye contact is impermanent, woe, now what is impermanent, woeful, by nature changeable, it is not fitting to regard that as “This is mine. This am I. This is my self. By contemplating so, one who is a noble person get wearied of eye, object, eye consciousness, eye contact, pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, neither pleasant feeling nor unpleasant feeling.” Thus

having no such things, he grasps not at anything at all in the world. Being free from grasping he is not trouble. Being untroubled, he is himself by himself set free. Thus he realizes destroyed is rebirth. Lived is the righteous life. Done is the task. For life in these conditions there is no hereafter. (S IV p.29)

Just in the same way the rests of contemplation of ear door, nose door, tongue door, body door and mind door.

6. Insight Meditation Attainment of Stream-Enterer (*sotāpanna*)

During his first rains retreat he was able to attain *sotapattiphala*, the fruit of stream-entry after listening to the Dhamma conducted by Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta. (A-a I 308). Venerable Ānanda was always well contented with his life as a monk and also understood the blessings of renunciation, followed the path to liberation. Venerable Puṇṇa instructed him in this way:

It is with possessiveness, friend Ānanda, that there is “I am,” not without possessiveness. And through possessiveness of what is there “I am,” not without possessiveness? Through possessiveness of form there is “I am,” not without possessiveness. Through possessiveness of feeling... perception... fabrications... Through possessiveness of consciousness there is “I am,” not without possessiveness. (S III p.89)

For a better understanding of this, Venerable Puṇṇa had given a fitting analogy: “Just as if a young woman or a man youthful, fond of adornment, contemplating the image of her face in a mirror, pure and bright, or in a bowl of clear water, would look with possessiveness, not without possessiveness.” (S III p.89)

Further instructions are that the form is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: “This is mine. This is my self.” So, is the feeling, the perception, fabrication and consciousness. Venerable Ānanda thought about this analogy again and again and ever more deeply until he penetrated the suffering, impermanence and no-self aspects of the five aggregates, and no longer relied upon them as his support. He then began to reap the benefits of monkhood, beginning with the fruit of stream-entry.

7. Insight Meditation Attainment of Arahantship

Venerable Ānanda, thinking “tomorrow is assembly. Now It is not suitable in me that I, being only a learner, should go the assembly,” and having passed much of that night in mindfulness as to body, when the night was nearly spent thinking: “I will lie down,” he inclined his body, but before his head had touched the mattress and while his feet were free from the ground in that interval his mind was freed from the cankers with no residuum for rebirth remaining. (Vin V pp.396-6)

Mahāsi sayādaw expounds that the venerable Ānanda was practicing the whole night the form of *vipassanā* meditation known as “contemplation of body” or *kāyagatasati*, noting his steps, right and left, raising, pushing forward and dropping of the feet; noting, event by event, the mental desire to walk and the physical movements involved in walking. Although this went on until it was nearly dawn, he had not yet attained *arahantship*. Realising that he had practised walking meditation to excess and that, in order to balance concentration and effort, he should practise meditation in the lying posture for a while, he entered his room. He sat on the bed and then lay down. While doing so and noting, ‘lying, lying’, he attained *arahantship* in an instant. (Pesala 1997, 38)

Mahāsi Sayādaw further explains that Venerable Ānanda was only a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*) before he lay down. From the stage of a stream-enterer he reached the stages of a once-returner (*sakadāgāmī*), a non-returner (*anāgāmī*) and an *arahant* (the final stage of the path). Reaching these three successive stages of the higher path took only a moment. Such attainment of *arahantship* can come at any moment and need not take long. (Pesala 1997, 38)

The day the Council began. A place had been kept for him. Ānanda appeared through the air through supernatural power and sat down at his place. When Venerable Anuruddha and Venerable Kassapa became aware that Venerable Ānanda had become an arahant, they expressed their brotherly joy with him and opened the Council, which took place during the rains retreat. (Hecker 1980, 51)

During the Council, Venerable Mahākassapa took the place of auspices and raised questions regarding on monastic discipline (Vinaya) to Venerable Upāli. The next item on the agenda which was the doctrine was by Venerable Ānanda himself. After the recitation of the Dhamma and the Vinaya, Venerable Ānanda mentioned those matters that the Buddha had left as a legacy with him to settle. He told the assembly that the Buddha had allowed the minor and lesser rules (*Khuddānukhuddaka Sikkhāpada*) to be abolished. But the

senior monks could not agree what was meant by “the minor and lesser rules.” Thereupon Venerable Mahākassapa spoke up:

The lay people would say that the monks had become slothful after the death of the Master, if now they abolished rules. Since it was not known which rules were meant, it would be best not to abolish any of them. In that case one would be sure not to act against the Master’s wishes. (Hecker 1980, 52)

Subsequent to the *Parinibbāna* of the Buddha, Venerable Mahākassapa had taken over the guidance of the Order. Everyone turned to him for his decisions on all questions regarding the Order. In this way he became the Chief Elder of the Saṅgha.

After Venerable Ānanda had already been a monk for over forty years, he survived the Buddha by another forty years. And after having been the personal attendant of the Buddha for twenty-five years, he became the foremost of the Arahants for a similar length of time.

When he was 120 years old, he knew that his end was approaching. He went from Rājagaha to Vesālī just as his Master had done. When the king of Magadha and the princes of Vesālī heard that Venerable Ānanda would soon attain final *nibbāna*, they hurried to him from both directions to bid him farewell. In order to make justice to both sides, Venerable Ānanda chose a way to die, in keeping with his gentle nature, by raising himself into the air above the Rohini River through his supernormal powers. Then, he let his body be consumed by the fire element. The relics were divided and stūpas erected fairly by the both sides between Magadha and Vesālī.

8. His Contribution to Communities due to Insight Meditation

Venerable Ānanda’s contribution to communities is the Dhammas which he was asked by laymen and monks and also when he himself was doubt. His Dhammas contribution is useful for those who are practicing insight meditation. There are more on Ānanda’s contribution Dhammas. Examples here are just a few as follows:

1) The Householder Tapussa asked: “Bhante Ānanda, we laymen enjoy sensual pleasure, delight in sensual pleasure, take delight in sensual pleasure, and rejoice in sensual pleasure, renunciation seems like a precipice to us.” (A IV p. 294) Venerable Ānanda was asked to solve this problem in Dhamma way.

2) Venerable Udāyī said this to the Venerable Ānanda: “Is it, friend Ānanda, while one is actually percipient or while one is non-percipient that one does not experience that base?” (A IV p.286)

“Here, friend, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of forms, with the passing away of perceptions of sensory impingement, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, space is infinite a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the base of the infinity of space. When one is thus percipient one does not experience that base.

3) How many subjects of recollection are there, Ānanda? (A III p.227)

There are, Bhante, five subjects of recollection. Here, Bhante, secluded from sensual pleasure, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first *jhāna*, second *jhāna*, and so on, the venerable Ānanda explains about the subjects of recollection from first to five in this discourse (*sutta*) also these five lead to a happy dwelling in this very life, lead to obtaining knowledge and vision, lead to abandoning sensual lust, lead to the uprooting of the conceit ‘I am’ and lead to the penetration of numerous elements.

4) Lord, is there any one state which, if cultivated and made much of, brings four states to completion? Do four states, if cultivated and made much of, complete seven states? Do seven states, if cultivated and made much of, completed two states? Intent concentration on in breathing and out breathing, Ānanda, is the one state which can complete for all mentioned above. (S V pp.291-2)

5) Lord, what are the feelings? What is the arising of feeling, what is the ceasing of feelings, what the way leading to the ceasing of feelings? what is the satisfaction, the misery, of feeling, what is the refuge from feeling? (S V p.148) The Venerable Ānanda asks to the Buddha these above feelings.

In the Ānanda’s contribution of Dhammas (the Buddha’s teaching) to communities, these dhammas shown by various discourses are crucial for those who are in dark on Dhamma. Venerable Ānanda helps them until they satisfy with Dhammas which they do not know. In those discourses, sometimes he himself answers the questions. Sometimes, having asked to the Buddha, he helps the questioners to have a clear understanding of Dhammas.

9. Conclusion

Venerable Ānanda is a person who has fulfilled the great perfection (*pāramī*) through his innumerable lifelong for one thousand kappa, he served to obtain such distinctions such as: wide learning, retentive memory, good behaviour and quick wit, resolute and ministering care to the Buddha. These was the only one of its kind position that rarely be seen in the history of mankind. Practicing meditation is not any other else but to contemplate on form, feeling, perception, fabrication and consciousness. Accordance with the Buddha's teaching, one can gradually develop insight knowledge contemplating the nature related to six doors, six senses, six consciousness, six contacts, and six feelings. One who practices insight meditation must contemplate such meditation objects in order to attain liberation and to reach final goal called as *nibbāna*. Venerable Ānanda answered on meditative doubts that he knew and asked the Buddha for that he does not know. He was a dutiful monk for both *sāsana* and his life as he could escape from the circle of birth through insight meditation and help people as well.

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