

3

Āditta (Pariyāya) Sutta

The Discourse on the Exposition on Burning [The Fire Sermon] | S 35.28/4:19 f = V 1:34 f
Theme: Everything is burning with greed, hate, and delusion

1 Introduction

1.1 THE THIRD DISCOURSE. This is said to be the third discourse of the Buddha, given after the conversion of the matted hair ascetics, the brothers Uruvelā Kassapa (500 disciples), Nadī Kassapa (250 disciples) and Gayā Kassapa (250 disciples). At the end of the discourse, all the ascetics present attained arhathood.¹ It is said to be delivered on a flat rock (*piṭṭhi, pāsāna*).

The first discourse, **the Dhamma, cakka-p, pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11),² is a statement of the Buddha's discovery of "suffering and its ending," and what is merely mentioned, "in short, the five aggregates of clinging³ are suffering," is elaborated in the second discourse, **the Anatta, lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59),⁴ where the five aggregates are given in detail. Here, in the third discourse, the Āditta, pariyaṇa Sutta (S 35.28), the focus shifts to the "all," that is, the six sense-bases, a teaching specifically given in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23).⁵

The discourse had a special meaning for the matted-hair ascetics because they were fire-worshippers⁶ who kept their ritual fires permanently burning. After a long encounter with them, the Buddha persuades them to give up their *agni, hotra* (Pali *aggi, hutta*), that is, the worship of Agni (Pali *aggi*), the Vedic god of fire.⁷

In allegorical terms, this discourse describes the nature of the human experience of reality, that is, the six sense-organs, the six sense-objects, the six sense-consciousnesses, the six sense-contacts, and the three feelings that arise in their connection.

1.2 THE FIRE SIMILE in the Āditta, pariyaṇa Sutta, fire refers to the three unwholesome roots (greed, hate, delusion) [4-8]. Fire is a common imagery in the suttas. Elsewhere, it is variously used in the positive as well as in the negative senses. These same three fires are listed in **the Saṅgīti Sutta**⁸ and are the subject of a poem in **the Aggi Sutta** (It 3.5.4/92). In **the (Uggata, sarīra) Aggi Sutta** (A 4.44),⁹ reminiscent of **the Kūṭadanta Sutta** (D 5), the Buddha, for the benefit of the brahmin Uggata, sarīra, presents the imagery in a positive sense as the three fires to be tended (*aggi pāricariyā*).¹⁰

The Sigāl'ovāda Sutta (D 31) expands these three fires to be tended into the six directions of social relationships and reciprocal responsibilities.¹¹ In the **(Khandha) Āditta Sutta**,¹² which appears to be an abridged version of the Āditta, pariyaṇa Sutta, the aggregates are said to be on fire (see below). **Bodhi** thinks:

Perhaps the present [(Khandha) Āditta Sutta] was composed by simply replacing the sense bases with the aggregates, and was then compressed so that it would not "steal the show" from the more famous sutta, popularly known as the Fire Sermon, regarded by the Pāli tradition as the third formal discourse of the Buddha's ministry. (S:B 1067 n94)

¹ V 1:34 f; J 1:82 4:180.

² See SD 1.1.

³ *Pañc'upadāna-k, khandha*, namely, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47; Vbh 1): see SD 17. What is briefly mentioned here is elaborated in the second discourse, **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59) = SD 1.2 (2003).

⁴ See SD 1.2.

⁵ See SD 7.1.

⁶ A detailed account of these ascetics is found in **Vinaya** (V 1:24-34) and also in Ñāṇamoli's *Life of the Buddha*, 1992:54-60 64-69.

⁷ V 1:36 = J 6:220; S 1:167; Dh 392; Tha 341; J 5:205, 207.

⁸ D 33.1.10(32)/3:217.

⁹ A 4.44/4:41-46.

¹⁰ A 4.44.12-13; D 33.1.10 (33)/3:217.

¹¹ D 31.27/3:189 f = SD 4.1 (27) For further discussion, see **(Uggata, sarīra) Aggi S** (A 4.44) = SD 3.16 Intro.

¹² S 22.61/3:71 = SD 17.10.

The Irish poet, TS Eliot, employed the fire allegory of the Āditta,pariyāya Sutta and immortalized it in “The Waste Land” (1922, part 3, especially the note on line 308).¹³

2 Buddhist psychology

In the Anatta,lakkhaṇa Sutta, we see the Buddha introducing what we today call “Buddhist psychology,” or, as **Sujato** puts it:

The Buddha is now inventing psychology, setting forth his basic analysis of cognitive processes. Here, we see, for the first time, a specifically psychological treatment of time. Feeling is said to “arise dependent on contact,” whereas previously, arising and ceasing was exclusively the arising and ceasing of rebirth. The most striking features of the discourse, however, is not on technical definition and abstract analysis, but on a stirring, constantly repeated warning: “All is burning ... With what is it burning? With the fires of greed, anger, and delusion...” This famous triad is obviously just a more detailed analysis of “that craving that generates rebirth,” introduced here to correlate with the triad of feeling. “...With the fires of birth, decay & death...” So the reason the eye, etc, are burning is because attachment to our sensory experience gives rise to defilement which generate rebirth.

Thus the Fire Sermon, drawing on a suggestion latent in the “impermanence” of the second sermon, shows the connection between the experience of time in the psychological present moment and the eschatological [ultimate goal] framework which was the original motivation for spiritual practice. This relationship is explored in many ways in the suttas, and all the suttas’ psychological teachings should be seen in this light. The Buddha’s innovation was not to shift the focus of religious concern from eschatology to psychology, but to “demetaphysicalize” [remove the emphasis on metaphysics from] eschatology, explaining rebirth in rational, empirical terms as being no different in principle from the psychological processes observable in the present moment. So seeing the suttas by standing “behind” them looking forward we see a very different scenario than if we stand in the 21st Century looking back. (Sujata, TMA:5 f, digital ed)

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The Discourse on the Exposition on Burning (The Fire Sermon)

S 35.28/4:19-20 = V 1:34 f

[19]

- 1 At one time, the Blessed One stayed at Gayā,sīsā [Gayā Head] with a thousand monks.
- 2 There the Blessed One addressed the monks:

The all

“Bhikshus, all¹⁴ is burning (*sabbam ādittam*). And what, bhikshus, is the all that is burning?”

- 3 (i) **The eye**, bhikshus, is burning,
forms are burning,

¹³ <http://eliotswasteland.tripod.com/>. See Gombrich, “Recovering the Message of the Buddha.” In (edd) David Seyfort Ruegg & Lambert Schmithausen, *Earliest Buddhism and Madhyamaka*, Leiden: EJ Brill, 1990. Repr in *The Buddhist Forum* vol 1 seminar papers 1987-88, ed Tadeusz Skorupski, London: Univ of London (SOAS), 1990:16.

¹⁴ *Sabba*. See **Sabba S** (S 35.23) = SD 7.1 the first sutta in the same chapter of the same title.

eye-consciousness is burning,
eye-contact is burning, and

whatever *feeling* arising with eye-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neutral [neither painful nor pleasant]—that too is burning.¹⁵

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of *greed*, with the fire of *hate*, with the fire of *delusion*;

burning with *birth, decay and death*; with *grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair*,

I say!

4 (ii) **The ear**, bhikshus, is burning,
sounds are burning,

ear-consciousness is burning,
ear-contact is burning, and

whatever *feeling* arising with ear-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neutral—that too is burning.

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of *greed*, with the fire of *hate*, with the fire of *delusion*;

burning with *birth, decay and death*; with *grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair*, I

say!

5 (iii) **The nose**, bhikshus, is burning,
smells are burning,

nose-consciousness is burning,
nose-contact is burning, and

whatever *feeling* arising with nose-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neutral—that too is burning.

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of *greed*, with the fire of *hate*, with the fire of *delusion*;

burning with *birth, decay and death*; with *grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair*, I

say!

6 (iv) **The tongue**, bhikshus, is burning,
tastes are burning,

tongue-consciousness is burning, [20]
tongue-contact is burning, and

whatever *feeling* arising with tongue-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neutral—that too is burning.

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of *greed*, with the fire of *hate*, with the fire of *delusion*;

burning with *birth, decay and death*; with *grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair*, I

say!

7 (v) **The body**, bhikshus, is burning,
touch is burning,

body-consciousness is burning,
body-contact is burning, and

whatever *feeling* arises with body-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neutral—that too is burning.

¹⁵ *Yam p`idam cakkhu,samphassa,paccayā uppajjati vedayitam sukham vā dukkham vā adukkham-asukham vā tam pi ādittam.* In this key para, reflecting the others that follow, each deal with the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*). The key factors are the sense-organ (*ajjhata*), the sense-object (*bahiddha*), the sense-consciousness (*viññāna*), the sense-contact (response to stimuli) (*phassa*) and the relevant feelings (*vedanā*). The imagery of “burning” (*āditta*) also refers to “mental proliferation” (*papañca*), as explained by Mahā Kaccāna in **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18.16/1:-111 f) = SD 6.14.

Burning with what?
Burning with the fire of *greed*, with the fire of *hate*, with the fire of *delusion*;
burning with birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair, I
say!

8 (vi) **The mind**, bhikshus, is burning,
thoughts are burning,
mind-consciousness is burning,
mind-contact is burning, and
whatever *feeling* arises with mind-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or
neutral—that too is burning.

Burning with what?
Burning with the fire of *greed*, with the fire of *hate*, with the fire of *delusion*;
burning with birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair, I
say!

Revulsion

9a Seeing thus, bhikshus, the learned noble disciple
is revulsed¹⁶ at the eye,
with forms,
with eye-consciousness,
with eye-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with eye-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.

He is revulsed at the ear,
with sounds,
with ear-consciousness,
with ear-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with ear-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.

He is revulsed at the nose,
with smells,
with nose-consciousness,
with nose-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with nose-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.

He is revulsed at the tongue,
with tastes,
with tongue-consciousness,
with tongue-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with tongue-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.

He is revulsed at the body,
with touch,
with body-consciousness,
with body-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with body-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.

He is revulsed at the mind,

¹⁶ “Revulsed at,” *nibbindati* (sg *nibbidati*): on the meaning and translation, see *Nibbidā* = SD 20.1 esp (2.1)

with thoughts,
 with mind-consciousness,
 with mind-contact,
 with whatever feeling arising with mind-contact as condition—
 whether pleasant or painful or neutral.

Liberation

9b Through revulsion, he becomes dispassionate.
 Through dispassion, his mind is liberated.
 When it is liberated, there arises the knowledge: ‘Liberated am I!’
 He understands: ‘Destroyed is birth. The holy life has been lived. What needs to be done has been done. There is no more of this state of being.’”

Arhathood

10 The Blessed One said this. The monks joyfully approved of the Blessed One’s word.
11 And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of the thousand monks were, through non-clinging, liberated from the defilements.

— evaṃ —

Bibliography

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