

(Vaṅgīsa) Ānanda Sutta

The Discourse by Ānanda (to Vaṅgīsa)

[How to overcome lust]
(Saṃyutta Nikāya 8.4/1:188)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

Introduction

1.1 ORIGINS. Vaṅgīsa came from a brahmin family and was proficient in the Vedas. He won fame as a skull-tapper: by tapping his finger-nails on skulls, he was able to tell where the skull's owner had been reborn. For three years, he made much money in this way. Then, despite his colleagues' protests, he went to see the Buddha. (According to **the Apadāna**, he saw Sāriputta first and learnt from him about the Buddha.)¹ The Buddha gave him an arhat's skull and Vaṅgīsa could make nothing of it. He decided to join the order to learn its secret.²

1.2 VAṄGĪSA BECOMES A MONK. Vaṅgīsa was ordained by **Nigrodha,kappa**³ (who lived at Aggālava Cetiya)⁴ and, meditating on the thirty two parts of the body,⁵ he won arhathood. He then visited the Buddha again and praised him in various verses, full of similes and metaphors. This brought him reputation as a poet (*kāvya,citta*⁶ or *kāveyya,matta*⁷). Later, the Buddha declared him as the foremost among those foremost in ready wit (*patibhānavantānam*).⁸ His resolve to attain to this position was made in Padumuttara Buddha's time.⁹ **The Apadāna** says that he was called Vaṅgīsa, both because he was born in Vaṅga and also because he was a master of the spoken word (*vacana*),¹⁰ that is, he is *vāgīsa*.¹¹

1.3 RELATED TEXTS. The Saṃyutta Nikāya devotes one whole section to Vaṅgīsa—the **Vaṅgīsa Thera Saṃyutta**¹²—recounting various incidents in his life and his poems on these occasions. **The Milindapañha** also has a poem attributed to Vaṅgīsa in praise of the Buddha (Miln 390). **The Thera-**

¹ Ap 541.28-36/2:497 f.

² DhA 26.38/4:226-228. A Skt parallel from E Turkestan is found in AFR Hoernle, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1916:709 ff (5th fragment). Cf DhA 26.30b/4:189-192.

³ His name was **Kappa**, and was called **Nigrodha** because he awakened under a banyan tree (SnA 1:346). Saṃyutta Comy says he was so called also because he dwelled under a banyan tree (SA 1:268).

⁴ S 1:185. **Aggālava Cetiya**, the term Aggālava comes from *agga* [(1) foremost, chief, best; (2) a house, perhaps related to *agāra*, but only as ifc, eg *uposath'agga*] + *ālavi*, *ālava(ka)*]. It is possible that *aggālava* = Skt: *agny-ālaya* (abode of fire) or *agny-agāra* (fire-house) (cf SED 6d). If this was the case, then there would probably have been a fire shrine there (like the one belonging to Uruvela Kassapa, V 1:24).

Occurrences: *ālaviya agge cetiyē* V 2:172 3:145 4:34 (quoted SnA 3); Sn p59, S 1:185, A 4:216 218; *aggālave* only, id, Sn 343 = Tha 1263; *ālavi nissāya aggālave cetiyē*, J 1:160 2:282 3:78 351, DhA 3:299; *aggālava-cetiya* (n), DhA 3:170 (wr for *-ve cetiyē?*); *aggālava-vihāra*, SnA 345, SA 1:267, DhA 3:171).

The Aggālava Shrine was the chief shrine of Ālavī (SnA 314) that was originally dedicated to the worship of yakshas and nāgas but later was converted into a vihāra and retained its old name (SnA 344 f = SA 1:268 ad S 1:185). The Buddha resided here a number of times in the course of his ministry.

The Jātaka Comy remarks that many lay-women and nuns flocked to the Shrine by day to listen to the Buddha, but none of them were there when He taught in the evenings (J 1:160). It was during one such evening that the monks slept in the Dharma hall together with the unordained and the monks were seen in various indecorous postures. This prompted the Buddha to introduce a special rule (V 4:16; J 1:161)

⁵ See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.10/1:57) = SD 13.3; **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119.7/3:90) = SD 12.21 & Intro (5).

⁶ Ap 541.39/2:498.

⁷ S 8.12/1:196 = v753; Tha 1252/112. See also SA 1:176, 286; ThaA 3:198.

⁸ A 1:24.

⁹ SA 1:285 f.; DhA iv.226f.; ThaA 3:180 f; ApA 528 f; Dīpv 4.4.

¹⁰ Ap 541.27/2:497.

¹¹ Ap 541.10/496; Comy explains *vāgīsa* = *vādīsa*, “skilled with speech” (ApA 530).

¹² S 8.1-12/1:185-196.

gāthā contains numerous verses spoken by him on various occasions (Tha 1209-1279; most of them repeated at S 1:183 ff):

Tha 1209-1212	The Nikkhanta Sutta (S 8.1): on his attempts to suppress desires on seeing gaily dressed women. ¹³
Tha 1212-1218	The Anabhirati Sutta (S 8.2) or Arati Sutta: self-admonitions against his dissatisfaction (<i>anabhirati</i>) with his teacher Nigrodha,kappa. ¹⁴
Tha 1219-1222	The Pesalā Atimaññanā Sutta (S 8.3): self-admonitions against conceit because of his facility of speech. ¹⁵
Tha 1223-1226	The (Vaṅḡisa) Ānanda Sutta (S 8.4): when (before awakening) his mind burned with lust he seeks Ananda's admonition. ¹⁶
Tha 1227-1230	The Subhāsita Sutta (S 8.5 = Sn 3.3/p79/451-454): in praise of sermons preached by the Buddha. ¹⁷
Tha 1231-1233	The Sāriputta Sutta (S 8.6): on his meeting Sāriputta. ¹⁸
Tha 1234-1237	The Pāvāraṇā Sutta (S 8.7): a discourse given at a Pāvāraṇā ceremony. ¹⁹
Tha 1238-1245	The Paro,sahassa Sutta (S 8.8): his praise of the Buddha and on nirvana. ²⁰
Tha 1246-1248	Koṇḍanna Sutta (S 8.9): in praise of his colleague, Añña Koṇḍañña. ²¹
Tha 1249-1251	Moggallāna Sutta (S 8.10): In praise of his colleague, Moggallāna. ²²
Tha 1252	Gaggarā Sutta (S 8.11): Describes the Buddha as he sits surrounded by the monks on the banks of the Gaggarā at Campā. ²³
Tha 1253-1262	The (Kāveyya,matta) Vaṅḡisa Sutta (S 8.12): recalling his meeting with the Buddha and a canticle to him. ²⁴
Tha 1263-1278	The (Kappa,nigrodha) Vaṅḡisa Sutta (Sn 343-358). ²⁵ A long poem addressed to the Buddha, questioning him on the destiny of Nigrodha,kappa (Vaṅḡisa's teacher). The Commentary (ThaA 3:198 f) says that when Nigrodha,kappa died

¹³ S 8.1/1:185 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1209-1211).

¹⁴ S 8.2/1:186 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1212-1218). **Nigrodha,kappa** was a residential solitarian (*vihāra,garuka*)—he placed importance (*garuka*) on keeping to his cell—as soon as he returned from his alms-round, he would enter his cell and not emerge until evening or the next day. This disaffected Vaṅḡisa, but he quelled through self-admonition (S 1:186; SA 1:169 f). He also had doubts about Nigrodha,kappa's awakening as he had seen him sleeping with his arms moving about involuntarily (*hattha,kukkucca*). Generally this was unbecoming of an arhat, but in his case it was an old habit (of no new karmic consequence). (ThaA 3:198)

¹⁵ S 8.3/1:187 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1219-1222).

¹⁶ S 8.4/1:188 (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1223-1226) = this sutta.

¹⁷ S 8.5/1:188 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1227-1230). After Tha 1224, ThaA & Ce insert: *Saṅkhāre parato passa, dukkhato mā ca attano | nibbāpehi mahā,rāgam, mā ḍayhittha punappunam* = “See formations as alien [other], As suffering and not as self. | Put out the great fire that is lust, burn not again and again” (Tha 1224B). Comy is silent about this verse, but it is included at S 1:188, with *ḍayhittho* for *ḍayhittha*. The idea, however, is expressed at Tha 1160 f, attr to Moggallāna.

¹⁸ S 8.6/1:189 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1231-1233).

¹⁹ S 8.7/1:190-192 (with a long prose intro, missing from Tha 1234-1237).

²⁰ S 8.8/1:192 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1238-1245). Comy says that Tha 1242-1245 are uttered by Vaṅḡisa when invited by the Buddha to give an example of his unpremeditated verse style. “We might then suppose that all four verses are in the same metre, but Alsdorf (App 2:238) while identifying Tha 1243-1245 as old Āryā makes no mention of Tha 1242. There seems to be no reason for doubting that Tha 1242 is old Āryā, too, although rather corrupt.” (Tha:N 294 n1242-45)

²¹ S 8.9/1:193 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1245-1248).

²² S 8.10/1:194 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1249-1251).

²³ S 8.11/1:195 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1252).

²⁴ S 8.12/1:196 has a prose intro not found in Tha 1253-1262. Their readings however do not entirely agree.

²⁵ Sn 2.12/p59-62 = vv343-358 has a prose intro not found in Tha 1263-1278. While Tha 1270 has the reading *sanikam* (“graceful”), Sn 350 has *saṇim*. See Tha:N 298 n1270.

Vaṅḡsa was absent and wished to be assured by the Buddha that his teacher had reached nirvana.²⁶ The poem is actually a eulogy of the Buddha.
Tha 1279 His homage to the Buddha as the deva of devas (*deva,deva*).

1.4 OCCASION FOR THIS SUTTA. According to Commentary to **the (Vaṅḡsa) Ānanda Sutta**, once when the venerable Ānanda was invited to the royal palace to teach the Dharma in the maharajah's harem (*anto,nivesana*), he brought along the newly ordained Vaṅḡsa as his companion. When Vaṅḡsa saw the beautifully attired women in their fineries, he took them as a sign of beauty (*subha,nimitta*),²⁷ so that his mind became filled with lust, but at the first chance, he expressed his distress to Ānanda, whose admonition is the occasion for this sutta. (SA 1:271)

The Visuddhi,magga quotes Vaṅḡsa's verses, albeit in a different sequence, and says that he was overcome with lust when, soon after his ordination, while on his alms-round, he saw a woman.²⁸ A Sanskrit version of the same story, along with the verses, is found in the Chinese **Saṃyukta Āgama**.²⁹ Buddhaghosa's Visuddhi,magga account is probably based on a very ancient source preserved in the Sanskrit tradition.

It will be seen below (right hand concordance citations), that verses of the (Vaṅḡsa) Ānanda Sutta are found in the Vaṅḡsa Thera.gāthā. Apparently, these verses are older since they arose in connection with teachings given by Ānanda to Vaṅḡsa, and the verses of the Thera.gāthā later collected and arranged according to the elders' names. Interestingly here, only the first verse (S 721 = Tha 1223) is spoken by Vaṅḡsa, and the rest (S 722-726 = Tha 1224-1226) are spoken by Ānanda but are included in Vaṅḡsa's Thera.gāthā. This is understandable as they are personal instructions given to him.

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²⁶ See ThaA 3:198; SnA 346.

²⁷ *Subha,nimitta*, see SD 19.15.

²⁸ Vism 1.103/38.

²⁹ Fumio ENOMOTO, *A Comprehensive Study of the Chinese Saṃyukyāgama; Part I: Saṃgītinipāta*. Kyoto: Kacho Junior College, 1994:44 f.

The Discourse by Ānanda (to Vaṅgīsa) (S 8.4/1:188)

1 At one time, the venerable Ānanda was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika’s Park in Jeta’s Forest at Sāvattihī.

2 Then in the morning, the venerable Ānanda, taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvattihī for alms, with the venerable Vaṅgīsa as attendant monk.³⁰

3 Now at that time, dissatisfaction has arisen in the venerable Vaṅgīsa. Sensual lust had corrupted his mind.³¹

4 Then the venerable Vaṅgīsa addressed the venerable Ānanda in verse:

<p>4a I am burning with sensual lust, My mind is fully afire! Please tell me how to put it out,³² O Gotama, out of compassion!³³</p>	<p><i>Kāma,rāgena ḍayhāmi Cittam me pariḍayhati. sādhu nibbāpanam brūhi anukampāya Gotamā ti</i></p>	721 = Tha 1223
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[The venerable Ānanda:]³⁴

<p>5 Through perverting perception,³⁵ Your mind is utterly afire. Turn away from the sign Of beauty that arouses lust!”³⁶</p>	<p><i>Saññāya vipariyesā cittan te pariḍayhati nimittam parivajjehi subham rāgūpasamhitam</i></p>	722 = Tha 1224A
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<p>5a See formations as alien [other],³⁷ As suffering, and not as self. Put out the great fire (that is lust): Burn not again and again.</p>	<p><i>Saṅkhāre parato passa dukkhato mā ca attato nibbāpehi mahārāgam mā ḍayhittho puna-p.punam</i></p>	723 = Tha 1224B ³⁸
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³⁰ “Attendant monk,” *pacchā,samaṇa*, lit “rear recluse.” Skt *paśca-c,chrmaṇa*, opp *purahśramaṇa* (Avadś 2:67, 150; Divy 154, 330, 494), a junior monk (or wanderer) who walks behind a senior usu on alms-round. Often used in ref to a personal attendant, such as one of the Buddha: Ānanda (V 1:46, 3:10, 4:78; PvA 38, 93); Nāga,samāla (U 90); see also J 4:123; Miln 15 (Nāgasena). Traditionally any junior monk would walk behind the senior.

³¹ *Tena kho pana samayena āyasmato Vaṅgīsassa anabhirati uppannā hoti, rāgo cittam anuddhamseti*. On the reason for this, see above, Intro 1.4.

³² “Put it out,” *nibbāpanam*, like *nibbāpehi* at v723c [5a], is clearly a pun alluding to the extinguishing of a fire and to awakening.

³³ Vaṅgīsa addresses Ānanda by his *gotra* because the latter is of the Gotama clan (like the Buddha), and also out of respect, he does not address Ānanda by his personal name.

³⁴ Note that although these are Ānanda’s verses, they are included in Vaṅgīsa’s Thera.gāthā.

³⁵ “Perverting perception” here refers to *saññā vipallāsa*, ie perceiving permanence, pleasure, selfhood and beauty in what are actually impermanent, suffering, not self and foul: see **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52) = SD 16.11 & Intro.

³⁶ This line = Tha 1224Bd = Sn 340b.

³⁷ On the perception of not self (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*), see (**Satta**) **Saññā S** (A 7.46.15-16/4:53) = SD 15.4.

³⁸ After Tha 1224, ThaA & Ce insert: *Saṅkhāre parato passa, dukkhato mā ca attano | nibbāpehi mahā,rāgam, mā ḍayhittha punappunam* = “See formations as alien [other], As suffering and not as self. | Put out the great fire that is lust, burn not again and again” (Tha 1224B). Comy is silent about this verse, but it is here included at S 1:188, with *ḍayhittho* for *ḍayhittha*. Cf in Moggallāna’s Thera.gāthā which has the same idea: *Sukhumam paṭivij-jhanti vālaggam usunā yathā | ye pañca khandhe passanti parato no ca attato || ye ca passanti saṅkhāre parato no ca attato | paccabyādhiṃsu nipuṇam vālaggam usunā yathā* = They pierce the tip of a fine hair with an arrow, as it

5b	Cultivate the mind on foulness, ³⁹ One-pointed, well-focussed; Keep your mindfulness on the body, ⁴⁰ Let revulsion ⁴¹ abound. ⁴²	<i>Asubhāya cittaṃ bhāvehi ek'aggam̐ susamāhitam̐ sati kāyagatā ty-atthu nibbidā bahulo bhava</i>	<406>	724 = Tha 1225
5c	And cultivate the signless, ⁴³ Discard the tendency to conceit. ⁴⁴ Then, by breaking through conceit, You will fare in peace.	<i>animittaṃ ca bhāvehi mānānusayam ujjaḥ tato mānābhisamayā upasanto carissatī ti</i>		725 = Tha 1226

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were, | those who see the five aggregates as other [alien], and not as self. || They who see formations other [alien], and not as self, | have pierced the tip of a fine hair with an arrow, as it were. || (**Tha 1160 f**).

³⁹ The perception of foulness (*asubha saññā*): as the contemplation of the 31 parts of the body is found in **Sati-paṭṭhāna S** (M 10.10 f/1:57) and (**Iddhi,pada**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20.9/5:278); as the cemetery contemplations (5 stages) are in 5 consecutive suttas in the section ending with breath meditation in **the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta S** (46.57-61/5:129-131), and the better known 9 charnel-ground contemplations are found in **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.14-31/1:58 f) = SD 13.4.3.

⁴⁰ See **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119/3:88-99) = SD 12.21.

⁴¹ On *nibbidā*, see SD 20.1.

⁴² In **Rāhula S** (Sn 2.11) the first 2 lines of this stanza (ie excluding S 724cd = Tha 1225ab) and the next stanza (S 725 = Tha 1226) close the Buddha's advice to Rāhula: Sn 341b-342.

⁴³ "The signless" (*animitta*), says Comy, is insight (*vipassanā*), so called because it of its removing (*ugghāṭitatā*) the signs of permanence, etc (SA 1:272). See **Nimitta** = SD 19.15.

⁴⁴ "Conceit," *māna*, see "**Me: the problem of conceit**" = SD 19.2.