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Gaṇḍa Sutta

The Discourse on the Boil | A 9.15

Theme: The nine bodily openings

Translated by Piya Tan ©2009

Introduction

1.1 A well known meditation passage from **the Mahā Māluṅkya,putta Sutta** (M 64) on the body runs thus:

[This body is form made up of the four primary elements,¹ born from mother and father, built up on rice and porridge, subject to impermanence, rubbing, pressing, breaking up, and crumbling. And this consciousness of mine is supported here and bound up here.²

It should be regarded as impermanent, as suffering [unsatisfactory], as a disease, as a boil, as a dart,³ as a calamity, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as void, as non-self.⁴

One who regards the body thus would abandon desire for the body, love for the body, and dependence on the body. (M 64,9/1:435)

We also often see the triad of “a disease, a boil, a dart” (*roga gaṇḍa salla*) which the Saṃyutta Commentary glosses as follows: “a disease” by way of illness; “a boil,” because it hurts within; “a dart,” it cuts.⁵ One of the epithets used for the body is “boil (or swelling)” (*gaṇḍa*), which is the title the discourse here.

1.2 **The Gaṇḍa Sutta** (A 9.15) envisions the body as “a boil...with nine natural openings.” A more elaborate allusion to this imagery is found in **the Vijaya Sutta**, also known as **the Kāya,vicchandaniya Sutta** (The Discourse for Disillusionment Towards the Body, Sn 1.11), where it is stated:

196 *Siṅghāṇikāya kheḷassa
sedassa medassa ca
lohitassa lasikāya
Pittassa ca vasāya ca*

Nasal mucus, saliva,
sweat and lymph,
blood, fluid of the joints.
bile and fat.

197 *Ath’assa navahi sotehi
asūci savati sabbadā
akkhīmhā akkhi.gūthako
kaṇṇamhā kaṇṇa.gūthako*

And from the nine openings,
impurities ever flow:
eye secretion from the eyes;
wax from the ears,

198 *Siṅghāṇikā ca nāsāto
Mukhena vamat’ekadā
pittaṃ semhañ ca*

And mucus from the nose;
through the mouth ever pukes
bile and phlegm;

¹ The 4 great (or primary) elements: earth (*mahā,bhūtā*), water, fire, wind: see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62.8-11/1:421-423), SD 3.11; also D 1:214 Vism 11.27 Abhs 154.

² *Ayaṃ...kāyo rūpī cātum,mahā,bhūtiko mātā,pettika,sambhavo odana,kummāsūpacayo anicc’ucchādana,parimaddana,bhedana,viddhamāsa,dhammo: D 2.85/1:76 (×2) = M 109.9/2:17; M 23.4/1:144, 74.9/500; S 35.105/4:83 = A 9.15.2/4:386; S 55.21/5:369 f; Nigrodha,miga J 12/1:146. Cf Divy 180: śatana.patana,vikiraṇa, vidhvamsanā,dharmatā. See **Dīgha,nakha S** (M 74.9/1:500), SD 16.1 tr & nn. This statement means that consciousness here (in a physical being) is dependent on the physical body.*

³ In **Māgandiya S** (M 75), the Buddha refers to the 5 aggregates as “diseases, boils, darts,” and with the understanding of the Dharma these “diseases, boils, darts” cease (M 75.25/1:612). Cf **Pañcattaya S** (M 102), where perception is regarded as “a dart, etc” (M 102.9/2:231). Listed as diseases at A 10.60.7/5:109 f. In Comys, “conceiving” (*maññanā*) are regarded as “a disease, a boil, a dart” (DA 2:425; MA 4:167; SnA 431, 553 = Nm 280).

⁴ This para—*aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato suññato anattato samanupassato*—as in **Mahā Māluṅkya,putta S** (M 64,9/1:435). See also n at head of this section.

⁵ *Sāva ābāadhan’aṭṭhena rogo, anto dussan’aṭṭhena gaṇḍo, nikantan’aṭṭhena sallam* (SA 2:380).

kāyamhā seda,jallikā

from the body, sweat and dirt.

Sn 11.1 @ SD 3.8 (6); see also Tha 1152

The Gaṇḍa Sutta speak of the “nine natural openings (*nava abhedana,mukha*),” which its native gloss explains as “not made by cutting in any manner” (*na kenaci bhinditvā katāni*, AA 4:176). The Commentaries refer to them as the “nine channels” (*nava sota*), which are listed as: “the two slits (*chidda*) that are the eyes, the two ear channels, the two nostrils, the mouth, the rectum and the urethra.”⁶

1.3 This analysis is part of the meditation on the body, or the cultivation of foulness of the body (*asubha,bhāvanā*),⁷ which helps to cut down the impact of lustful thoughts and tendencies. “Foulness of the body,” *asubha bhāvana* (cultivation of foulness).

Elsewhere (eg A 60.6/5:109) it is called “perception of foulness” (*asubha,saññā*). In the **Āhāra Sutta** (S 46.51) it is called the “sign of the foul” (*asubha,nimitta*),⁸ which the Commentary says is one or other of the 10 foul objects, that is, a corpse in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f).

However, in the Suttas,⁹ *asubha,saññā* (perception of foulness) or simply *asubha* (the foul or *asucī* (the impurities) refers to the observing of the 31 parts of the body, of which the Commentaries list 32 parts, adding “brain (in the head,”¹⁰ calling them “mindfulness of the body” (*kāya,gata sati*).

The 31 parts of the body are also listed in the **Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja Sutta** (S 35.127.6/4:110-113). A slightly different list on the body meditation is given in the **Vijaya Suttas** (also called Kāya,vicchandani-ka S) (Sn no 11/193-206) where it is said, “And the hollow of its [the body’s] head | Is filled with the brain” (Sn 199).

In the **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62), *asubha bhāvanā* may refer either to (1) the 9 or 10 stages of bodily decomposition (or the charnel ground meditations), or to (2) the meditation on the 31 parts of the body, some of which have been defined in terms of the 4 elements.¹¹ From canonical usage, it is more likely to refer to the latter.

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⁶ *Ubho,akkhi-c.chidda,kañña-c.chidda,nāsa-c.chidda,mukha,vacca.magga,passāva.maggehi* (SnA 248; ThaA 2:117, 3:167; Vism 6.89/195).

⁷ “*asubha,saññā* (perception of foulness) or simply *asubha* (the foul or *asucī* (the impurities) refers to the observing of the 31 parts of the body, of which the Comys list 32 parts, adding “brain (in the head” (Kh 3, Pm 1:6 f, Vism 8.42-144/236-266 & KhA 60), calling them *kāya,gata sati* (mindfulness of the body). The 31 parts of the body are also listed at **Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja S** (S 35.127.6/4:110-113). A slightly different list on the body meditation is given in **Vijaya S** (also called Kāya,vicchandani-ka S) (Sn 193-206/no 11) where it is said, “And the hollow of its [the body’s] head | Is filled with the brain” (Sn 199). Here in Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S, *asubha bhāvanā* may either refer to the stages of bodily decomposition (or the charnel ground meditations), or to the meditation on the 31 parts of the body, some of which have earlier on been defined in terms of the 4 elements [§§8-11]. From canonical usage, it is more likely to refer to the latter.

⁸ S 46.51,15/5:105 @ SD 7.15.

⁹ Eg **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S**, D 22.5/2:293 @ SD 13; **Ānāpāna,sati S**, M 10.10/1:57 @ SD 13 @ SD 7.13; **Giri-m-ānanda S**, A 10.60/5:109 @ SD 15.15.

¹⁰ Kh 3, Pm 1:6 f, Vism 8.42-144/236-266 & KhA 60.

¹¹ M 62.8-11/1:464 f @ SD 3.11.

The Discourse on the Boil

A 9.15

1 Bhikshus, suppose a boil has grown for many years, with its nine open wounds, nine natural [un-cut] openings.¹²

Whatever that would ooze from there would only be impurities;
only stench would ooze out;
only disgust would ooze out.

Whatever that would pass out would only be impurities;
only stench would pass out;
only disgust would pass out.

2 “A boil,” bhikshus, this is a term for the body, made up of the four elements, born from mother and father, built up on rice and porridge, subject to impermanence, rubbing, pressing, breaking up, and crumbling;¹³

Whatever that would ooze from there would only be impurities;
only stench would ooze out;
only disgust would ooze out.

Whatever that would pass out would only be impurities;
only stench would pass out;
only disgust would pass out.

— evaṃ —

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¹² *Nava abhedana, mukhānīm*. “Not made by cutting in any manner” (*na kenaci bhinditvā katāni*, AA 4:176). See Intro above.

¹³ D 2; M 23, 109; S 35.105; A 9.15, 55.21; J 12.