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Sexuality

A Buddhist perspective
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1 What is “sexuality”?

1.1 SEXUALITY AS A PHYSICAL PROCESS. Sexuality in its broadest sense would cover the use of the body for procreation, or to obtain physical pleasure either with a body, human or otherwise, animate or inanimate. Strictly speaking, a sexual act is *physical*, and the mental aspect (especially enjoyment) is secondary. Early Buddhism, however, in its teachings on the three doors of action—the body, speech and the mind¹—recognizes that speech and mind do play motivational and supportive roles in promoting or sustaining sexuality. [2.3]

The Amba,laṭṭhika Rāhul’ovāda Sutta (M 61), for example, speaks of the purity of “the three doors of action”—of body, speech and mind—by way of “the examination of one’s conscience” or self-review (*paccavekkhana*) (M 61.18).² In the case of wrong acts of body or of speech, they should be confessed to virtuous elders (M 61.9-14); in the case of wrong mental acts (ie thoughts) one should reject them with disgust (M 61.15-17).

The Amba,laṭṭhika Rāhul’ovāda Sutta further gives a set of criteria—another “threefold purity”—whereby we determines our actions. If an action would harm ourself, or harm others, or harm both, such an action should not be done. Here “both” is not redundant, but also refers to “society” at large, or in today’s lingo, “the environment.” In other words, whatever we do, *it should not in any way harm ourself, others or the environment.*

1.2 HOW SEXUALITY ARISES. In the **Aggañña Sutta** (D 27) account of the re-evolution of the world, the beings who are reborn on earth, on gaining physical bodies, begin to see their external differences. This is how the sutta describes the *mythical* origin of sexuality amongst humans:

And, Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāradvāja), those beings continued for a very long time feeding on this rice as their food and nourishment. And, Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāradvāja), as they did so, their bodies became coarser still and among themselves they noticed even greater differences in their looks. Then the female developed female organs,³ and the male developed male organs. And the women became excessively preoccupied with the men, and the men with the women. Owing to this excessive preoccupation with each other, lust was aroused, and their bodies burned [with passion]. Because of this burning, *they indulged in sexual activity.* (D 27,16,2/3:88)

The ideas contained in the underscored sentence are elaborated in **the Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48), where the Buddha explains, in a *psychological* manner, how sexuality arises. **The Saññoga Sutta** is a most remarkably insightful text whose statement on sexuality is unparalleled in any other religious texts. The Buddha, in defining how sexuality arises, explains that understanding this, we are able to be free from its “bondage.”

2 WOMANLINESS. A woman considers her own womanly faculty,⁴ her own womanly ways,⁵ her womanly looks,⁶ her womanly pride,⁷ her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments.⁸ She is aroused by this and delights in it.⁹

¹ See (**Uggata,sarīra**) **Aggi S** (A 4.44/4:41-46), SD 3.16.

² See SD 3.10.

³ DA: That is, those who were women in previous lives. Conversely, the others were men in their past lives.

⁴ “Own womanly faculty,” *ajjhataṃ itth’indriyaṃ*, lit “internal womanly sense-organ”. Here referring to the physical features that make one a woman, that is, “womanliness”. The term “femininity” usually refers to the psychological aspect of a woman, related to Jung’s notions of *anima* and *animus*.

⁵ “womanly ways,” *itthi,kutta*, eg seductiveness, coquetry, and wiles (AA 4:32). Many of such terms in this sentence and their cognates below are in the Pali singular, which however need to be rendered idiomatically into the English plural.

Thus aroused, she considers another¹⁰ in terms of a man's faculty,¹¹ his manly ways, his manly looks,¹² his manly pride,¹³ his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. She is aroused by this and delights in it.

Thus aroused, she desires external union,¹⁴ and she desires the (physical) pleasure and (mental) joy arising on account of such a union. Monks, attached to¹⁵ her womanliness, she enters into union with men.

In this way, monks, a woman does not rise above her womanliness.

3 MANLINESS. A man considers his own manly faculty,¹⁶ his manly ways, his manly looks, his manly pride, his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. He is aroused by this and delights in it.

Thus aroused, he contemplates another in terms of a woman's faculty, her womanly ways, her womanly looks, her womanly pride, her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments. He is aroused by this and delights in it.

Thus aroused, he desires external union,¹⁷ and he desires the pleasure and joy arising on account of such a union. Monks, attached to his manliness, he enters into union with women.

In this way, monks, a man does not rise above his manliness. (A 7.48.2-3/4:57), SD 8.7

Only when we do not define ourselves as sexual beings, that we break free from its bondage, by becoming true individuals.¹⁸

1.3 THE POWER OF SEXUALITY. The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* opens with a short chapter of the very short discourses (or statements) on how the opposite sexes obsess one another, thus:

1.2 “No other *form*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the form* of a woman.

A woman's form, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind.

2 No other *sound*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the sound* of a woman.

A woman's sound, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind.

3 No other *smell*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the smell* of a woman.

A woman's smell, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind.

⁶ “Womanly looks,” *itth'ākappa*, ie her physical looks and how she is dressed (AA 4:32).

⁷ “Womanly pride,” *itthi,vidha*, ie her pride and conceit (AA 4:32).

⁸ “Womanly adornments,” *itth'alaṅkāra*. “adorning the head, the neck, the hands, the feet, the hips (*kaṭi*)” (*sīsū-pago gīvūpago hatthūpago pādūpago kaṭūpago*, V 4:340)

⁹ “She is aroused by this ...” Here I have rendered *tattha* in the English singular, since such an unskillful person would attend to the features mentioned. In the cognate sentences below [4-5] *tattha* is rendered in the English plural, ie referring to the various physical features, to which the skillful person remains unattracted.

¹⁰ “Another,” *bahiddhā*, lit “outside (of herself)”.

¹¹ “Manly faculty,” *puris'indriya*, lit “manly sense-organ”. Here referring to the physical features that make one a man, that is, “manliness.” The term “masculinity” usually refers to the psychological aspect of a man. Note here in the sutta that the reference is “in terms of a man's faculty,” and not “in another man.” This is very significant as this reflects the fact that those sexually attracted to others, consciously or unconsciously, may look for such features that excite them in either sex.

¹² “Manly looks,” *puris'ākappa*, ie his physical looks and how he is dressed.

¹³ “Manly pride,” *purisa,vidha*, ie his pride and conceit.

¹⁴ “She desires external union,” *bahiddhā samyogam ākankhati*. Notice here neither man nor woman is mentioned.

¹⁵ “Attached to,” *sattā* (V 1:185; D 2:246; Nc 23, 34; Dh 342; J 1:376).

¹⁶ “His own manly faculty,” *ajjhataṃ puris'indriyaṃ*, lit “internal manly sense-organ.”

¹⁷ “She desires external union,” *bahiddhā samyogam ākankhati*. Notice here neither man nor woman is mentioned.

¹⁸ On true individuals, see below (5.1) n.

4 No other *taste*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the taste* of a woman.

A woman's taste, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind.

5 No other *touch*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the touch* of a woman.

A woman's touch, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind. (A 1.1-5/1:1 f), SD 66.1

The same is then said of how a man obsesses a woman on account of the five physical senses.¹⁹

These passages are not saying that sexuality is bad, but that sexual attraction is a powerful one. They are simply warning celibates (such as monastics and those observing the celibacy rule) and couples, committed to one another, to be wary of the attractions of sexuality [6].

On a darker note, **the Mātā Puttā Sutta** (A 3.55) similar sexual attraction may arise between a mother and her son (or between a parent and a child). The conditions for such a dysfunctional relationship arises from mutual attraction or dependence, and the power of sexuality on account of the five senses,²⁰ as stated in the Rūp'ādi Vagga above.

Such passages as these have sometimes been misconstrued as misogyny by certain scholars, or worse, as condoning homosexuality [7]. Often such a sexist misconstrual is the result of the scholar's using mistranslations of texts, as noted by **Peter Harvey**,

It is unfortunate that the Pali Text Society translation of [A 3:55 at A:H 3:56] (above) wrongly says that a woman "*will stop to ensnare the heart of a man*" instead of that she, through her sight, etc, "*persists in overpowering a man's mind,*" because of *his* attachment to the female form. Sponberg (1992:20 f), Schuster Barnes (1987: 257 n1) and Paul (1979: 54 n14) all use this incorrect translation. (Harvey 2000:379)

The necessity of checking a Sutta passage against the original Pali is vitally important when we are citing them in such significant matters. Translations of a generation ago should be used with care. Or better, learn some Pali enough to have a good nose for a proper translation.

1.4 SEX IS TIME-CONSUMING. In **the (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20), the Buddha somewhat humorously declares that sex and sensuality are "time-consuming" (*kālika*)²¹ [1.3.3]. The meaning is that sexual activity is motivated by lust that fetters us to the samsaric cycle. Again, it should be noted that Buddhism does not say that sex is bad or evil. Rather, the Buddha declares that sex and sensuality demands much of our time in significant ways

On an everyday level, sexuality entails personal, emotional and social commitments. If the sexual act is only on a bodily level, then it is not very meaningful, or simply reflects a physical need or lack. Meaningful sex must be attended by a positive emotional state in oneself and towards the partner, as it needs to be an expression of mutual love and commitment. The possibility of procreating a new life or lives behooves us to be committed partners to be able to raise our offspring in a wholesome manner and as responsible members.

On a higher level, the meaning is that sexual activity is motivated by lust that fetters us to the samsaric cycle. In **the Sambahula Sutta** (S 4.21), when Māra (in the form of a venerable brahmin) offers a cryptic advice to a group of young monks insinuating them to enjoy their youth before taking up the spiritual life, they reply in identical words as Samiddhi's, as recorded in **the (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20), thus:

I [We] have *not* abandoned what is visible right here, avuso, to run after what takes time. I [We] have abandoned what takes time, avuso, to run after what is visible right here.

¹⁹ A 1.6-10/1:2 @ SD 66.1.

²⁰ A 3.55/3:67-69 @ SD 66.2.

²¹ S 4.21/1:117 f = S 1.20.5/1:9 @ SD 21.4.

For, avuso, the Blessed One has declared that sense-pleasures are time-consuming, full of suffering, full of despair, and great is the danger therein, while this Dharma is *visible right here, immediate, inviting us to come and see, accessible, to be personally known by the wise*.

(S 4.21/1:117 f) = (S 1.20.5/1:9), SD 21.4

The point of this teaching is that the body can be freed from the bonds from sexual and sensual bonds in this life itself: through the Dharma, we are capable of awakening in this life itself. As lay practitioners, we can, through the consistent *perception of impermanence*,²² attain streamwinning, or as renunciants, we can work towards non-return or arhathood.

1.5 THE BODY IS NEUTRAL. In the patriarchal society of ancient India, as in patriarchal society today, it is understandable that *women* seem to receive the brunt of blame for the weaknesses of men. In a more sexually equitable society of today, the situation becomes more complicated with women's equality, gender preferences, pederasty, and so on. The point remains that it is not just women's bodies are desirable, or that men's bodies are more attractive, but that *any* physical form might be desirable to someone with the inclination for it.

Just as a man is attracted to the *appearance* of a woman's body, a woman, too, is attracted to the *appearance* of a man's body. Or, a person can be attracted to the appearance of another body of the same sex. We are simply projecting fantasy-influenced image upon a conscious object made up of the four elements, looking only at those features that attract, and ignoring what are not desirable.

The body and the world are neutral, so to speak; it what we think and project that decides our sexuality. **The Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) Sutta** (A 6.63) makes this remarkable statement:

3.2 There are these **5 cords of sensual pleasures** (*kāma,guṇa*):

Forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Sounds cognizable by the ear that are, desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Smells cognizable by the nose that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Tastes cognizable by the tongue that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Touches cognizable by the body that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful.

—**Bhikshus, these are not sensual objects (*kāma*), but in the noble discipline, they are called 'cords of sensual desire' (*kāma,guṇa*).**²³

The thought of passion is a person's sensuality:
there is no sensuality in what is beautiful (*citra*) in the world.

The thought of passion is a person's sensuality:
the wonders²⁴ in the world remain just as they are.
So here the wise remove the desire for them.²⁵

(A 6.63,3/3:410 f), SD 6.11

²² See **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

²³ *Api ca kho bhikkhave n'ete kāmā, kāma,guṇā nam'ete ariyassa vinaye vuccanti*. This is an enigmatic statement whose meaning is clarified in the verse that follows. On *kāma,guṇa*, see **Kāma-c, chanda**, SD 32.2 (2.3). See foll n.

²⁴ "Beautiful," *citra*, has a broad range of meanings: **1** (mfn) (i) bright, bright-coloured, decorated, many-coloured; extraordinary, wonderful; (ii) variegated, speckled; (iii) various, different, manifold. **2** (n) a kind of bird (the speckled cuckoo?). **3** (n) (i) something brilliant or diverse or extraordinary; (ii) a painting, a picture. See DP for details.

²⁵ This verse, which explains the previous prose sentence, "plays upon the double meaning of *kāma*, emphasizes that purification is to be achieved by mastering the defilement of sensuality, not by fleeing [from] sensually enticing objects." (A:ÑB 1999:302 n34). An almost identical verse (without line c) is found in **the Na Santi Sutta** (S 1.34). See also **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3 (1.2).

1.6 MORE PLEASURABLE THAN SEX

1.6.1 Sensual pleasure are insatiating

1.6.1.1 Teachers of dhyana meditation often swear by the maxim that “dhyana is better than sex.” That is to say, the bliss of meditation is so refined and profound—something the gross body could not possibly experience—that there is no worldly pleasure to equal it. This quip reflects, on a more profound level, our often wrong attitude towards the body. **The Māgandiya Sutta** (M 75) is a comprehensive statement of the early Buddhist view of pleasure.²⁶

1.6.1.2 The Buddha’s first discourse to the monks, **the Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), opens with a key statement on the human body: both sensual indulgence and bodily mortification should be avoided: the body should neither be spoiled nor deprived.²⁷ The body needs to be sufficiently healthy to fully support a healthy mind, especially in the process of mental cultivation.

1.6.1.3 “Sensual indulgence” here refers to the unmitigated pursuit of sense-pleasures (*kāma,sukha*), which covers any kind of abandonment to bodily pleasure or physical sense-stimulation, including sexuality. Such a pleasure-based predisposition is said to be “low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable].” (id).

1.6.1.4 The main problem with sexuality—the raw pleasures of the body—is that they are never fully satisfactory: if they are, we would have had enough of it and never want it again! And when we are unable to obtain the pleasure that we lust for, we are capable of various unwholesome acts. It is as such understandable why some of us are inextricably drawn to sense-pleasure, especially sexuality. We are addicted to sex when we do not know any greater pleasure.²⁸

1.6.2 A pleasure beyond the body

1.6.2.1 The meditator chooses a different path, one that brings a more sublime bliss, one that transcends the body. In **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), the Buddha explains,

I thought thus, “Why do I fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states?” I thought thus, “**I do not fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states!**”²⁹ (M 36,32/1:246 f), SD 1.17

With that thought he turns to the middle way of the breath meditation as attains liberation and nirvana. In **the Laṭukikôpama Sutta** (M 66), for example, the Buddha goes further, and declares:

Udāyī, the joy and pleasure that arise from these 5 cords of sense-pleasure are called sense-pleasure that is a vile pleasure, a vulgar pleasure, an ignoble pleasure, not to be engaged in, not to be cultivated, not to be developed—I say of this happiness that *it is to be feared*. (M 66,19/1:454), SD 28.11³⁰

Immediately after that, the Buddha says that, on the other hand, there *are* pleasures that are *not* to be feared. These are the pleasure of deep meditation, that is, of the four form dhyanas,³¹ and of each and every one of them, the Buddha declares,

This is called the joy of renunciation, the joy of solitude, the joy of peace, the joy of self-awakening, to be engaged in, to be cultivated, to be developed—I say of this happiness that *it is not to be feared*. (M 66,21/1:454), SD 28.11

²⁶ M 75/1:501-513 (SD 31.5).

²⁷ S 56.11.3/5:421 (SD 1.1).

²⁸ For a detailed study, see **Māgandiya S** (M 75/1:501-513), SD 31.5.

²⁹ On the two kinds of pleasures—sensual pleasure and the pleasure of enlightenment—see **Araṇa,vibhaṅga S** (M 139.9/3:233), SD 7.8. On the experience of bliss by the awakened mind, see **(Kosambī) Uṇṇābha S** (S 51.15), SD 10.10.

³⁰ A similar statement is made in **Bahu,vedanīya S** (M 59,7-10/1:398 f), SD 30.4.

³¹ See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,77-84/1:73-76), SD 8.10

1.6.2.2 The Commentary explains dhyana as “the joy of renunciation” (*nekkhamma, sukha*) because it turns us away from sense-pleasures (*kāmato nikkhanta, sukha*); as “the joy of solitude” (*paviveka, sukha*) because it is the bliss of being away from the group and from defilements; as “the joy of peace” (*upasama, sukha*) because it is the bliss for the sake of stilling lust, etc; and as “the joy of self-awakening” (*sambodha, sukha*) because it is the bliss for the sake of bringing about the path to awakening (MA 3:171).³²

Yet, adds the Buddha, even such higher pleasures *should be transcended*, so that we enjoy the bliss of the formless dhyanas, and the cessation of feeling and perception. This last meditative state is that of full liberation, enjoyed only by the Buddha and the arhats.

2 Monasticism should be above sexuality

2.1 NO SEX PLEASE, WE'RE MONASTICS. The purpose of the Buddhist monastic life is to provide aspirants with the ideal conditions for spiritual development so that they can awaken in this life itself. The monastic life is also a full-time spiritual alternative to the lay or household life, often described as being liberated from crowdedness and enjoying spaciousness. In this connection, **the Sambādh'okāsa Sutta** (A 6.26), records Mahā Kaccāna exulting thus: “It is marvellous how the attainment of ‘the open’ (*okāsa*) in the closed [stifling, *sambādha*] has been discovered by the Blessed One....”³³

The Buddha, in compassionately declaring his awakening to the world, gives us the opportunity of an alternative liberating lifestyle, that of a spiritual path:

Furthermore, here a Tathagata appears in the world, an arhat, fully self-awakened one. He teaches the Dharma good in its beginning, good in its middle, good in its end, both in the spirit and in the letter. He proclaims the holy life that is entirely complete and pure.

A householder or householder's son, hearing the Dharma, gains faith in the Tathagata and reflects:

‘The household life is stifling, a dusty path.’³⁴ The life of renunciation is like the open air. It is not easy living in a house to practise the holy life completely, in all its purity, like a polished conch-shell. What if I were to shave off my hair and beard, put on the saffron robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?’

(D 2,40-41/1:62 f, 11,9-10/1:213; M 100,9/2:211; S 16.11,14/2:219; A 10.99,5/5:204)

Of special significance is the phrase “the household life is stifling, a dusty path” (*sambādho gharāvāso rajā, patho*). There is here a wordplay on *sambādha*, “crowded, stifling, narrow, full of hindrances,” which also refers to the sexual organ, male or female.³⁵ The point here is that in the spiritual life, all our energies are directed to mental cultivation for the sake of spiritual awakening in this life itself.³⁶

2.2 TRAINING RULES AND DECORUM. Renunciation entails at least two basic aspects, that is, the socioeconomic and the emotional [2.3]. Socioeconomically, the renunciant gives up family ties or dependence. It should be noted here that the renunciant does not so much give up his family, as he goes beyond his biological family and extends, by way of unconditional acceptance, to regard others as part of his spiritual family.

As a renunciant, he trains himself, as stated in **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2), thus:

³² These 4 joys (*sukha*) also occurs as **Yasa S** (A 8.86/4:341-342). See also **Saḷāyatana S** (M 137.16/3:220), SD 29.5; **Pañcak'aṅga S** (S 36.12-15/4:225 f), SD 30.1.

³³ A 6.26/3:314 f @ SD 15.6.

³⁴ *Sambādho gharāvāso rajā, patho*. There is a wordplay on *sambādha*, “crowded, stifling, narrow, full of hindrances,” which also refers to the sexual organ, male (V 1:216, 2:134) or female (V 4:259; Sn 609; J 1:61, 4:260). *Rajā, patha*, “a dusty path,” here refers to “the dust of passion,” and to “the path of returning” (*āgamana, patha*), ie rebirth (DA 1:180,17 = MA 2:179,20; UA 237,27).

³⁵ Allusion to the male organ (V 1:216, 2:134), to the female organ (V 4:259; Sn 609; J 1:61, 4:260).

³⁶ See **Sambādh'okāsa S** (A 6.26/3:214-317) @ SD 5.16 (2.3.3).

Then, after some time, he abandons all his wealth and relatives, shaves off his hair and beard, puts on the saffron robes, and goes forth from the household life into homelessness.

(1) When he has thus gone forth, he lives restrained by the rules of the monastic code [Pāṭi-mokkha], possessed of proper conduct and resort.

(2) Having taken up the rules of training, he trains himself in them, *seeing danger in the slightest faults*.

(3) He comes to be accomplished in wholesome bodily and verbal deeds, his livelihood is purified, and he is possessed of moral virtue.

(4) He guards the sense-doors, is accomplished in mindfulness and clear comprehension, and (4) is content.³⁷ (D 2,41-42/1:62 f), SD 8.10

The Pāṭimokkha comprises 227 rules that govern almost every aspect of the monks' daily life so that his mind conduces to spiritual training, especially meditation. The term "resort" (*go,cara*), literally means "a cow's habitual path or pasture." In the technical canonical sense, this refers to places that are regarded as suitable for collecting almsfood (V 2:208).

Here, however, we can take it more broadly to refer to the two aspects of the renunciant's life. In the *socioeconomic* sense, the monastic should avoid places and situations that are not conducive to spiritual training, and in the *emotional* sense (that is, karmically significant conduct), he should avoid resorting to practices and livelihood that are not conducive to this spiritual life.

In a technical sense, "non-resort" (*agocara*) refers to places that are unsuitable for renunciants (whether for alms or otherwise).³⁸ In the Commentaries, *go,cara* usually refers to places suitable for meditation (Vism 127). We can also take *go,cara* here in a psychological sense of *ārammaṇa*, that is, sense-objects. In other words, one "possessed of proper conduct and resort" can also include the meaning "accomplished in proper conduct of body and of mind."³⁹ This means that a monastic would not indulge in any activity, such as watching movies or TV, reading materials, using the computer, or even conversations or communications, which are capable of arousing sexual feelings or are inappropriate to his training.

The very first rule of the Pāṭimokkha says that a monk should not have sex of any kind, thus:

Whatever monk, who has undertaken the training and the life of a monk, having neither renounced the training nor declared his weakness,⁴⁰ should engage in sexual intercourse, even with an animal, he is defeated, not in communion, (Pār 1 = V 3:23,33-36)

The nuns' Pāṭimokkha have three such Pārājika rules, the first of which is, *mutatis mutandis*, identical with the monk's Pārājika 1 (BhPār 1 = V 3:23,33-36)

Whatever nun, filled with desire, should consent to rubbing or rubbing up against or taking hold of or pressing against, below the collar-bone, above the circle of the knee, of a male person who is filled with desire, she too becomes defeated, not in communion, on account of being one who touches above the circle of the knee. (BhPār 5 = V 4:213,34-38)

Whatever nun, filled with desire, for the sake of following what is not really the rule, should consent to the holding of the hand by a male person who is filled with desire, or should consent to the holding of the edge of (her) outer robe (*saṅghāṭi*), or should stand, or should talk, or should go to a rendezvous, or should consent to a man's approaching (her), or should enter a covered

³⁷ On this section, cf **Cha-ḷ-ābhijāti S** (A 6.57): "While living thus as a renunciant, having abandoned the five hindrances, the mental impurities that weaken wisdom, his mind well established in the four focusses of mindfulness, having cultivated the seven awakening-factors according to reality, he is reborn in nirvana..." (A 6.57.7+10/-3386+387), SD 23.10.

³⁸ D 1:63 = It 118; M 1:33; S 5:187; It 96; Cf Dh 22.

³⁹ See **Anubaddha Bhikkhu S** (S 47.3), SD 24.6a (2.3).

⁴⁰ *Dubbalyam*, ie, declared his intention of leaving the order due to inability to keep the precept.

place, or should dispose the body for such a purpose, she too becomes defeated, not in communion, on account of being a doer of eight things. (BhPār 8 = V 4:220,33-221,4)

These are the main rules for monastics regarding sexuality, but there are other rules dealing with the abstention from any sexual or lust-related activity. A breach of Pārājika 1 means that the offender falls immediately and automatically from his monkhood,⁴¹ and unlike in other lesser offences, there are no provisions for such offender's rehabilitation.⁴²

When a monastic breaks the Pārājika rule against incelibacy, it is not just a legal breach of the monastic code, but it is also a grossly (*garuka*) unwholesome karma, as attested by such discourses as **the Aggik,khandhūpama Sutta** (A 7.68), thus:

But, bhikkhus, if one who is immoral, bad by nature, whose conduct is filthy and doubtful, underhand in deeds, claiming to be a recluse when not one, claiming to live the holy life when he does not, inwardly rotten, impure by nature,

were to embrace a kshatriya woman or a brahminee or a householder's woman with young, tender hands and feet, and sit or lie down close to her,

that, bhikkhus, would be bring him harm and suffering for a long time, and with the body's breaking up, after death, he would be reborn a plane of misery, a bad destination, a lower realm.⁴³

(A 7.68.7/4:129), SD 52.12

2.3 BONDS OF SEXUALITY. Although Buddhism views sexuality as a physical act, it also understands that our motivation or our mental state towards the act decides its true nature. In **the Methuna Sutta** (S 7.47), the Buddha admonishes those keeping to the holy life (observing celibacy for personal development)—especially monastics and those who have taken up the celibacy rule—to abstain from these seven “bonds of sexuality” (*methuna,samyoga*):

- (1) enjoying physical contact;
- (2) socializing (especially for the sake of entertainment);⁴⁴
- (3) lusting after the physical form;
- (4) distracted by pleasurable sounds;
- (5) delighting in frivolities with others;
- (6) approving of others indulging in physical pleasures; and
- (7) living the holy life for the sake of going to heaven. (A 7.47/4:54-56), SD 21.9

⁴¹ See Wijayaratna 1990: 89-108.

⁴² Further on moral virtue for monastics, see **Anubaddha Bhikkhu S** (A 47.3), SD 24.6a (2.3).

⁴³ *Yañ ca kho so, bhikkhave, dussīlo pāpa,dhammo asuci,saṅkassara,samācāro. paṭicchanna,kammanto assamaṇo samana,paṭiñño abrahmacāri brahmacāri,paṭiñño antopūti avassuto, kasambu,jāto khattiya,kaññam vā brāhmaṇa,-kaññam vā gahapati,kaññam vā mudu,taluna,hattha,pādam āliṅgetvā upaniṣḍati vā upanipajjati vā, tañ hi tassa, bhikkhave, hoti dīgha,rattam ahitāya dukkhāya kāyassa bheda param marañā apāyāṃ duggatim vinipātāṃ nirayāṃ upapajjati.* (A 7.68.7/4:129), SD 52.12.

⁴⁴ Elsewhere, the word *saṃsaṭṭha* is used in this context. This is a clear allusion to the character of the forest eremite, a wandering forest monk. The expression, “(he) lives socializing” (*saṃsaṭṭhā viharissanti*) occurs at **Anā-gata,bhaya S 4** (A 5.80.5+6/3:109), SD 1.10(3.4). **Vinaya** eg disapproves of the nun Thulla,nandā “living and socializing [in close proximity]” with unwholesome lay companions (Saṅgh 9 = V 4:239); Thulla,nandā's female probationer Caṇḍa,kālī “socializing with householders and householders' sons” (*saṃsaṭṭhā viharati gahapatināpi gahapati,-puttena pi*, V 4:293); the female probationer Caṇḍa,kālī who lived “in close proximity with men and youths” (*purisa,saṃsaṭṭha kumāraka,saṃsaṭṭha*) who were violent (V 4:333); monks should carry out an act of censure (*tajjanīya,kamma*) against monastics living “in the company of householders” (*gihi,saṃsaṭṭha*, Cv 1.4.1 = V 2:4). VA says that they were “mixed up” (*missī,bhūtā*) with the world: in terms of *the body*, they were pounding and cooking for householders, perfuming and adoring themselves, using garlands and chains; in terms of *speech*, they were acting as go-between, running errands (VA 915). Comy mentions 5 kinds of socializing (*saṃsagga*): through hearing, seeing, conversing, eating with, and bodily contact (MA 2:143). For an example of a monk who is above such socializing, ie Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta, see **Ratha,vinīta S** (M 24,2/1:145 f), SD 28.3.

The reason for his advice is simple enough: such acts easily lead on to the sexual acts; or they easily distract us from personal development and the holy life.

The Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 122) warns that even forest-dwelling monks may not be immune to the powers of pleasure and sexuality:

Ānanda, there is the teacher's undoing;⁴⁵ ... , there is the pupil's undoing; ... , there is the brahmachari's⁴⁶ undoing.

And what, Ānanda, is **the teacher's undoing**?

Here, Ānanda, some teacher⁴⁷ resorts to a secluded lodging: the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, [116] a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw.⁴⁸ While he lives thus secluded, brahmin householders from the market towns and the country visit him, and as a result, he becomes infatuated, harbours desires,⁴⁹ gives in to greed, and reverts to luxury.

This, Ānanda, is called a teacher who is undone. He is one struck down by bad unwholesome states that defile, that bring rebirth, that invite trouble, that ripen in suffering, that lead to further [future] birth, decay and death.⁵⁰ (M 122,21-24/3:116 f), SD 11.4

The same is said of the unmindful pupil, and the unmindful brahmachari.

2.4 RENOUNCING SEXUALITY. The Alagaddûpama Sutta (M 22) opens with a renegade monk, Ariṭṭha, who rationalizes that “If some of the sensual pleasures are permissible to lay-followers who are streamwinners, etc, why is an exception made regarding form, voice, touch, etc, of women?” or of men, for that matter! The Commentary states that Ariṭṭha goes so far as to charge the Buddha of exaggerating the importance of the first grave offence (*pārājikā*), that of sexual intercourse, claiming that this urgency is like trying to “chain the ocean.” (MA 2:103).

Ariṭṭha (an erstwhile vulture killer), according to the Commentary, is a learned exponent of the Dharma, but less learned in the Vinaya, he holds the view that sexual indulgence is not an “obstruction” or hindrance to spiritual development, that one can enjoy sex without sexual desire or feelings! The Buddha then summons Ariṭṭha, and having ascertained that he holds those wrong views, chides him for doing so, by declaring

Indeed, bhikshus, it is impossible that one can indulge in sensual pleasures without sensual desires, without perception of sensual desire, without thought of sensual desire!⁵¹

⁴⁵ “Undoing,” *upaddavo*, may also be rendered as “disaster, calamity” (M:ÑB 1335 n1157).

⁴⁶ “Brahmachari,” *brahma, cāri*, ie one who has taken up the rule of celibacy. The anglicized word is found in English dictionaries like Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary. The Eng “batchelor” is derived from *brahma, cāri*, as in “Batchelor of Arts,” which goes back to the times when western education was monastery-based.

⁴⁷ Comy: An outside teacher (*titthiyā*) (MA 4:165).

⁴⁸ The more common list is shorter, but probably later: “to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty place”: see **Anāpāna, sati S** (M 118,17), SD 7.13 n.

⁴⁹ “He becomes infatuated, harbours desires,” *mucchati kāmayati* (PTS), but Se & Comy (MA 4:165) read *muccham nikāmayati*. MA 4:165: “He longs for and sets going the craving for infatuation” (*mucchana, taṇham pattheti pavatteti*), ie falling in love, one of the senses of *kāmeti* or *kāmayati* (M 2:40).

⁵⁰ The phrase “bad unwholesome states ... decay and death” recurs in **Mahā Assa, pura S** (M 39,22-29/1:280).

⁵¹ *Aññatr'eva kāmehi aññatra kāma, saññāya aññatra kāma, vitakkehi kāme paṭisevissatā 'ti n'etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati*, I B Horner: “... this situation does not occur when one could follow sense-pleasures apart from sense-pleasures themselves, apart from perceptions of sense-pleasures, apart from thoughts of sense-pleasures” (M:H 1:171). Here “sensual pleasures” (*kāma*) refers to the sensual objects (*vatthu, kāma*) or sense-experiences, and “sensual desires” refers to “sensuality as mental defilement” (*kilesa, kāma*), the subjective aspect of the sense-process. Comy explains “sensual pleasures” as “sexual intercourse.” MAT adds that this includes other physical acts expressive of sensual desire such as hugging and stroking. The Sandaka S (M 76.51) say that an arhat “is incapable of transgression in five cases:

(M 22,9/1:133), SD 3.13

An important reason why monastics shave off their hair is as a gesture and reminder of *renouncing worldliness and sexuality*. In the animal kingdom, follicular growth (such as the lion's mane) is a sign of masculinity to attract suitable mates. Conversely, women who display attractive hair-do are like to attract a greater range of would-be mates. Interestingly, we do see today some young (and not so young) Theravāda monks who keep their head unshaven for such a duration so that and thick with hair so that they look like laymen. The Vinaya rule says: "Monks, long hair should not be worn. Whoever should wear it long, there is an offence of wrong-doing (*dukkāṭa*). I allow it to be of two months' growth or two fingers' breadth." (Cv 5.2.2 = V 2:106). Could this be a tacit or unconscious mark of sexuality?

2.5 MONASTICS AND SEXUALITY TODAY. We do not shed our sexual views and attachments as soon as we don the monastic robes. We have stories in the early Buddhist texts of monastics struggling with their sexuality. **The (Taṇhā) Bhikkhuṇī Sutta** (A 4.159), for example, relates how Ānanda exhorts a love-struck nun to overcome her lust for him by sublimating it into spiritual practice.⁵² In **the Vaṅgīsa Ānanda Sutta** (S 8.4): Ānanda counsels the monk Vaṅgīsa when he confesses being troubled by sexual thoughts.⁵³ [3.4]

We do not shed our sexual views and attachments as soon as we don the monastic robes. Indeed, in some cases, our sexuality might become more sophisticated and aggravated, if we do not renounce our ego under the competent and compassionate tutelage (*nissaya*) of a qualified teacher. Some of the worst religious scandals have occurred with some of our best known gurus.⁵⁴ From the list of high-profile scandals here, only one case of a Theravadin monk scandal is mentioned, but most other cases remain unpublished because the offending monks would usually disrobe.

The message of the Alagaddūpama Sutta is just as relevant today as it was in the Buddha's time. As Buddhism spreads to the west and the westernized areas of Asia and elsewhere, monastic members—especially the scholar monks—lacking in spirituality, easily and famously fall prey to domesticating⁵⁵ and laicizing themselves to the ways of secular society. Such a broad hint is clear from **Paul David Numrich's** book, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples*, where he reports:

(1) A monk whose taints are destroyed is incapable of depriving a living being of life; (2) He is incapable of taking what is not given, that is, of stealing; (3) He is incapable of indulging in sexual intercourse; (4) He is incapable of knowingly speaking falsehood; (5) He is incapable of enjoying sensual pleasures by storing them up as he did formerly in lay life." [MA]. He is incapable of storing food provisions and other pleasurable goods and subsequently enjoying them.] In **Pāsādika S** (D 29.26/3:133), four other things that an arhat cannot do are mentioned: he cannot take a wrong course of action because of desire, hatred, fear or delusion. See M:ÑB 2001:1208 n252.

⁵² A 4.159/2:144-146 (SD 10.14).

⁵³ S 8.4/1:188 (SD 16.12).

⁵⁴ Amongst the most notorious are: **Eido Shimano Roshi**, 1960s-2000s, US: see http://www.thezensite.com/Zen-Essays/CriticalZen/Aitken_Shimano_Letters.html; **Richard Baker Roshi**, 1970s, USA: <http://www.darkzen.org/Articles/Shoes.pdf>; **Chogyam Trungpa Tulku**, USA, in the 1980s: see Katy Butler, "Encountering the shadow in Buddhist America," in *Common Boundary*, May-June 1990:14-22 & in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed Jeremiah Abrams & Connie Zweig, Los Angeles: J P Tarcher, 1991:137-147; **Sangharakshita** (David P Lingwood), 1990s, UK: see **How Buddhism became Chinese** SD 40b (4.3.3.10); **Yantra Amaro**, 1990s: William Branigin. [The Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1994/03/21/) 21 Mar 1994, Tim McGirk, *The Independent*, London, 16 Jan 1996); http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19960116/ai_n9637069, see **Wanderers of today**, SD 24.6b (1.2.1); **Michael Roach**, 2000s to date: <http://shine.yahoo.com/channel/sex/couple-vows-theyll-never-be-more-than-15-feet-apart-171974/>; **Shih Chih-hao**, Taiwan, 2000-2007: <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2007-07/28/2003371572>; **Shih Mingyi**, Singapore, 2008-2009: see **Skillful Means**, SD 30.8 (8.1).

⁵⁵ Here, "**domesticating**" applies to a monastic's adjusting of his or her behaviour so as to be more acceptable or to win the favour of the laity for religious or economic reasons. For more technical usages, see Ivan Strenski, "On generalized exchange and the domestication of the Sangha," *Man* ns 18,3 Sep 1983: 163-177 & Todd T Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal*, Albany, NY, 2000:4.

He [Ven Dr Havanpola Ratanasara of Dharma Vijaya, a Sinhalese mission, in Los Angeles] thinks monks will inevitably begin to shake hands and keep casual company with women as part of their normal pastoral relationships in America. But, he notes, the celibacy issue remains a stickler in the development of a native Theravada *bhikkhu-sangha* in America, for Americans generally seem to view sex as a human necessity, like food and water. Yet celibacy is the most dramatic symbol of the “set apart” character in the Theravada tradition. (Numrich 1996:50)⁵⁶

When a monastic gives a higher priority to religious title, academic qualification, or social engagement⁵⁷ than to the Vinaya and Dharma practice, they are said to be “domesticated,” that is, of a mind and conduct more akin to those of the laity than of a true renunciant. A domesticated monastic is more likely to be caught up in sensual pleasures and sexuality.⁵⁸

2.6 MONKS NEED TO KEEP AWAY FROM WOMEN. Those who become monks freely take upon themselves the rule of celibacy so that they can focus their minds and energies on spiritual training, if possible, awaken in this life itself. Understandably, the Buddha frequently admonishes the monks to keep a social distance from women and to be mindful of them.

In the **Kul’upaka Sutta 2** (A 5.226), the Buddha speaks of five dangers that would befall a monk who frequents a house, namely,

- (1) He often sees women.
- (2) From seeing them, companionship (*samsagga*) arises.
- (3) From companionship, intimacy (*vissāsa*) arises.
- (4) From intimacy, infatuation (*otāra*) arises.
- (5) And when the mind is infatuated (*otiṇṇa, citta*), it may be expected that he will not delight in the celibate life, or he will commit some foul offence or other, or he will give up the training and return to the low life. (A 5.226/3:259), SD 66.8⁵⁹

One of the Buddha’s last instructions, given to Ānanda, is about how monks should maintain a healthy social distance from women:

“Bhante, how are we to conduct ourselves towards women?”

“By not looking at them, Ānanda.”

“But if we see them, bhante, how should we behave?”

“By not speaking to them, Ānanda.”

“But if they speak to us, bhante, how should we behave towards them?”

“Then, Ānanda, establish mindfulness!”⁶⁰ (D 16,5.9/2:141), SD 9

3 Dealing with sexuality

3.1 AN ETHICAL APPROACH

3.1.1 Psychological ethics. Some academics regard sexuality as being socially constructed,⁶¹ for example, society or dominant groups in society define what is acceptable or unacceptable sexuality, or

⁵⁶ See also Prebish 2003:60-68.

⁵⁷ Here, “social engagement” is used, not in the positive Buddhist activist sense, but in the negative sense of monastics hobnobbing with the laity or being involved with social work and neglecting personal practice, such as meditation, silent solitary retreats, etc. See **Skillful means**, SD 30.8 (8.1).

⁵⁸ On the likely devastating consequences of Dr Ratanasara’s vision of Theravada monks being closer to women, please see **Monastic, sex and marriage**, SD 66.12.

⁵⁹ See Wijayaratna 1990: 98.

⁶⁰ On a more positive note regarding women, see (**Piṇḍola**) **Bhāradvāja S** (S 35.127 = 4:110 f), SD 27.6a. On position of women in early Buddhism, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004: 9.5-6 & **Dakkhiṇa Vibh-aṅga S** (M 142/3:253-257), SD 1.9.

⁶¹ Eg Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* vol 1 “The will to knowledge” [French 1976] 1998, vol 2 “The use of pleasure” 1992, vol 3 “The care of self” [1984] 1990.

accepts new categories of sexuality (such as homosexuality). As interesting as such approaches may be, Buddhism sees sexuality mostly in an ethical and psychological manner. It sees sexuality *ethically*, by way of how it can be a wholesome part of our social lives; and *psychologically*, how sexuality can be a wholesome part of the lay person's life or be sublimated into the spiritual life for renunciants.

3.1.1 Moral ethics. Age-appropriate responses are *an ethical conduct* conducive to a healthy social relationship and personal development, but taming our sexual urges into interpersonal respect. **The Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja Sutta** (S 35.127) contains an interesting teaching by the Buddha on age-appropriate relationship. The discourse records the rajah Udena visiting the forest monk Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja, and the following conversation occurs:

3 Seated thus at one side, the rajah Udena said this to the venerable Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja:

“How now, master Bhāra,dvāja, what is the cause, what is the reason, that these young monks, black-haired youths, endowed and blessed with youth, in the prime of life, who have still not fully enjoyed sense-pleasures,⁶² live the holy life in its fullness and purity all their lives and keep doing so?”

4 “Maharajah, this was said by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one,

‘Come now, monks,

towards those old enough to be your mother, mentally regard them as your mother;

towards those old enough to be your sister, mentally regard them as your sister;

towards those young enough to be your daughter, mentally regard them as your daughter.’

(Udena then rebuts:)

5 “But, master Bhāra,dvāja, wanton is the mind. Sometimes,

lustful mental states do arise towards those old enough to be our mothers;

lustful mental states do arise towards those old enough to be our sisters, too;

lustful mental states do arise towards those young enough to be our daughters, too.

(And he asks for another reason for the spiritual discipline of the young monks.)

(S 35.127,3-5/4:110 f), SD 27.6a (2.4)

3.2 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH. Piṇḍola then answers that the Buddha teaches the recollection of the 32 body-parts, that is, *a psychological practice*. We are made up of various body-parts, inter-related but impermanent and decaying all the time. We should not fall in love with only a part of a person, but with his whole being. In other words, we need to know the person well enough to be able to accept him or her, “warts and all,” so to speak. To see a person only as a sexual being is not to take that person as he or she really is: in other words, we only desires the body but lack respect for the person.⁶³

6 “Maharajah, this was said by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one,

‘Come now, bhikshus, review this very body, wrapped in skin and full of various impurities, from the soles of the feet upwards and from the crown of the head downwards, thus:⁶⁴

“In this body there are⁶⁵

⁶² *anikīlitāvino* (pl, S 1:117,25 = 118,14 = 4:110,27 = 111,4), from *na-nikīlitāvi(n)* (mf) [cf vl S I 9,6: *a-nikkīl°*], “who has not finished playing,” ie one who has not yet enjoyed (sensual pleasures) in full; S 1:9,6 (*pathamena vayasā ~ī kamesu*); *kāmesu akīlita-kīlo abhuttāvī akatakāmakīlo*, SA [so E° C°; S° °kāmākāro] = 10,20.

⁶³ See **The Body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a & **The Person in Buddhism**, SD 29.6b.

⁶⁴ In the Suttas, this practice is called *asubha,saññā* (perception of foulness). The term *asubha,nimitta* (the sign of foulness) in Comys, refers to one or other of the 10 foul objects, ie bodily remains in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f). On details of practice, see **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119), SD 12.21 Intro (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

⁶⁵ In this meditation of parts of the body, groups (1)-(4) constitute the earth element (**Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S**, M 62.8/1:421 f); groups (5)-(6) constitute the water element (ib M 62.9/1:422). The same sutta describes the fire element as *that by which one is warmed, ages, and burns, and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed and tasted*

- (1) head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin;⁶⁶
- (2) flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys;⁶⁷
- (3) heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs),⁶⁸ spleen, lungs;⁶⁹
- (4) large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents,⁷⁰ faeces[, brain];⁷¹
- (5) bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat;⁷²
- (6) tears, grease, saliva, snot, oil of the joints,⁷³ urine.””””⁷⁴

7 “That is easy, master Bhāradvāja, for those monks who are developed in body,⁷⁵ developed in moral conduct, developed in mind, developed in wisdom, but it is difficult for those who are undeveloped in body,⁷⁶ undeveloped in moral conduct, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in wisdom.

But master Bhāradvāja, for those monks who are undeveloped in body, undeveloped in moral conduct, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in wisdom, this is difficult.

Sometimes, though one thinks: “I will regard the body as foul,” one still pays attention to the foul as if it were beautiful.

Is there, master Bhāradvāja, another cause, master Bhāradvāja, that these young monks... live the holy life in its fullness and purity all their lives and keep doing so?”

(S 35.127,6-7/4:111 f), SD 27.6a (2.4)

3.3 THE SPIRITUAL APPROACH. Piṇḍola then answers that the Buddha teaches the practice of sense-restraint, that is, *a spiritual exercise* that should be constantly done. The sense-doors should be guarded thus: “Having seen a form with the eye, do not grasp its signs and features.”⁷⁷ Similarly, too, when having heard a sound, or having smelt a smell, or having tasted a taste, or having felt a touch, or having, or having cognized a mental state—do not grasp at the signs and features.⁷⁸ The rajah Udena then confesses that this is very well true as he has himself experienced in this way

gets completely digested, or whatever else that is liquid, liquefied and clung to internally and individually [belonging to oneself] (M 62.10/1:422); and the wind element as *up-going winds [burping], down-going winds, winds in the belly [flatulence], winds that course through the limbs, in-breath and out-breath*, or whatever else that is air, airy and clung to internally and individually [belonging to oneself] (M 62.11/1:422 f).

⁶⁶ *Kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco*. The meditation on these five parts “with skin as the fifth” or “skin pentad” (*taca-pañcake kamma-ṭ,thāna*) (Vism 242=8.50) forms the basic spiritual practice first taught to monks at the end of an ordination.

⁶⁷ *Maṃsaṃ nahāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhi,miñjā vakkam*.

⁶⁸ “Membranes,” alt tr “pleura,” *kilomaka*, ie a pair of membranous sacs surrounding the lungs.

⁶⁹ *Hadayaṃ yakanam kilomakam pihakam papphasam*.

⁷⁰ *Udariyam*, lit “that which is in the *udara* (stomach),” sometimes tr as “gorge” (Vism:Ñ 8.120/-122/258 f); technically, this includes chyme (food half-digested by gastric juices, expelled into the duodenum).

⁷¹ *Antam anta,gunṇam udariyam karisam*. See M 3:90; KhpA 38. Later traditions add the 32nd part—*matthake mattha,luṅgam* (lit “the brain in the head”) (Kh 3, Pm 1:6 f; Vism 8.42-144/239-266): the “brain” is not listed at S 4:111). Although “brain” is usually listed last, Comys list it as no 20, after “faeces” (KhA 60; Vism 8.126/260) in the set headed by “large intestines” since they have similar or related appearances. For a fascinating discussion on how ancient ascetics obtain such knowledge of the human anatomy, see Zysk 1998:34-37.

⁷² *Pittam semham pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo*.

⁷³ *Lasikā*, ie synovial fluid.

⁷⁴ *Assu vasā kheḷo siṅghāṇikā lasikā muttam*. Here there are a total of 31 parts of the body. See here (4)n.

⁷⁵ “Developed in body” (*bhāvita,kāya*) means developed in the “body” of the 5 sense-doors (*bhāvita,pañca,dvārika,kāya*), ie, having sense-restraint: see n on “undeveloped in body,” below here.

⁷⁶ “Undeveloped in body” (*abhāvita,kāya*) means undeveloped in the “body” of the five sense-doors (*abhāvita,pañca,dvārika,kāya*), ie, lacking in sense-restraint. (SA 2:395)

⁷⁷ For details, see **Nimitta and Anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14.

⁷⁸ S 35.127,8/4:112 @ SD 27.6a (2.4)

10 I, too, master Bhāra,dvāja, when I enter the harem with unguarded body, unguarded speech, unguarded mind, with the senses unguarded, on that occasion, too, master Bhāra,dvāja, states of lust fiercely assail me.

But, master Bhāra,dvāja, when I enter the harem with guarded body, guarded speech, guarded mind, with the senses guarded, on that occasion, too, master Bhāra,dvāja, states of lust do not assail me.
(S 35.127,9-10/4:112 f), SD 27.6a (2.4)

The principle behind these teachings is that of perception (*saññā*). We tend to project our past experiences onto our present sense-impressions, looking for signs of pleasant past memories, avoiding signs of past pains, and ignoring what does not make sense to us (since we do not have any past impression of them). As such, we are not really living in the present, but constantly running after the past. In Buddhist mind-training, we re-align our minds to the present moment, where it should happily be.

3.4 TRUE-HEARTED FRIENDSHIP. The **Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31) deals in some detail with the qualities of a false friend and a true friend. For our purposes here, it is sufficient to say that a false friend seems to agree with everything we think or do, wrongly or rightly, but does not really care about us. A true-hearted friend (*suhada,mitta*), on the other hand, is wisely and compassionately concerned that we avoid unwholesome acts (with negative karmic consequences), that we cultivate moral virtue (keep to the five precepts) and enjoy true happiness.⁷⁹

The (Taṇhā) Bhikkhuṇī Sutta (A 4.159) relates how Ānanda exhorts a love-struck nun to overcome her lust for him in these 4 ways:

- (1) This body has arisen through food. Yet, based on food, food can be abandoned.⁸⁰
- (2) This body has arisen through craving. Yet, based on craving, craving can be abandoned.
- (3) This body has arisen through conceit. Yet, based on conceit, conceit can be abandoned.
- (4) This body has arisen through the sexual act; and regarding the sexual act, the Blessed One has advised the destruction of that bridge.⁸¹ (A 4.159/2:144-146), SD 10.14.

3.5 SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP. In the **(Vaṅgīsa) Ānanda Sutta** (S 8.4): Ānanda counsels the monk Vaṅgīsa when he confesses to being troubled by sexual thoughts. The admonitions are in verses and also recorded in the Thera,gāthā:

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

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|--|-----------------|
| 4.2 | I am burning with sensual lust,
Please tell me how to put it out, | My mind is fully afire!
O Gotama, out of compassion! | 721 = Tha 1223 |
| [The venerable Ānanda:] | | | |
| 5 | Through perverting perception, ⁸²
Turn away from the sign | Your mind is utterly afire.
Of beauty that arouses lust!” ⁸³ | 722 = Tha 1224A |
| 5.2 | See formations as alien [other], ⁸⁴
Put out the great fire (that is lust): | As suffering, and not as self.
Burn not again and again. | 723 = Tha 1224B |

⁷⁹ D 31.15-26/3:185-188 @ SD 4.1.

⁸⁰ On food (*āhāra*), see **Āhāra S** (S 46.51), SD 7.15.

⁸¹ “The destruction of that bridge,” *setu,ghāta*. (Lit “the destruction of the bridge.” I have rendered it here by sense.) Evidently, this is a metaphor that a monastic should uproot all sexual desire. “The point of Ānanda’s discourse is that even food, craving and conceit, which are normally factors of bondage, can be skillfully employed to attain arahantship; but with sexuality there is absolutely no skillful way it can be used for the goal of the holy life.” (A:ÑB 294 n60)

⁸² “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.

⁸³ This line = Tha 1224Bd = Sn 340b.

⁸⁴ On the perception of not self (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*), see **(Satta) Saññā S** (A 7.46.15-16/4:53), SD 15.4.

- 5.3** Cultivate the mind on foulness,⁸⁵ One-pointed, well-focussed;
Keep your mindfulness on the body,⁸⁶ Let revulsion⁸⁷ abound.⁸⁸ 724 = Tha 1225
- 5.4** And cultivate the signless,⁸⁹ Discard the tendency to conceit.⁹⁰
Then, by breaking through conceit, You will fare in peace. 725 = Tha 1226
(S 8.4/1:188), SD 16.12

Since Ānanda competently advises Vaṅṅīsa on meditation, too, he is more than a true-hearted friend. He is a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇa mitta*).⁹¹ The special quality of a spiritual friend is that he is willing and able to mentor us in proper meditation. The greats of spiritual friends is, of course, the Buddha. In **the Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 122), the Buddha declares the nature of spiritual friendship, thus:

26 And how, Ānanda, do **disciples conduct themselves towards the teacher with friendliness, without hostility?**

Here, Ānanda, the teacher teaches the Dharma out of compassion for the disciples, seeking their welfare, caring for them, saying:

‘This is for your welfare. This is for your happiness.’

His disciples wish to listen, they give an attentive ear, they establish their mind in wisdom [direct knowledge]. They neither err nor turn away from the Teacher’s teaching.

This, Ānanda, is how the disciples conduct themselves towards the teacher with friendliness, without hostility.

26.2 Therefore, **[118]** Ānanda, conduct yourselves with friendliness [lovingkindness]⁹² towards me, not with hostility. This will be for your welfare and happiness for a long time.

27 Ānanda, I shall not treat you as a potter treats raw damp clay.⁹³ Restraining you again and again,⁹⁴ I will admonish you, cleansing you again and again.⁹⁵ The core will remain standing.”⁹⁶

⁸⁵ 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.

⁸⁶ See **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119/3:88-99), SD 12.21.

⁸⁷ On *nibbidā*, see SD 20.1.

⁸⁸ 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.

⁸⁹ “The signless” (*animitta*), says Comy, is insight (*vipassanā*), so called because it of its removing (*ugghāṭittā*) the signs of permanence, etc (SA 1:272). See **Nimitta**, SD 19.15.

⁹⁰ “Conceit,” *māna*, see **“Me: the problem of conceitn”** SD 19.2.

⁹¹ See **Spiritual friendship**, SD 8.1.

⁹² “With friendliness,” *mittavatāya*.

⁹³ “As a potter treats raw, damp clay, *yathā kumbha,kāro āmake āmaka,matte*. Comy glosses *āmake* as *apakkhe*, and *āmaka,matte ti āmake nātisukkhe bhājane*, “an unbaked vessel, not quite dry. The potter gently takes these vessels in both hands, saying, “Do not break,” but I will not proceed with you as the potter does.” (MA 4:166). IB Horner notes: “I do not see the full force of this simile... But I believe it means that whereas the potter gives, and can give, his vessels one chance only, the Teacher is undefeated by any initial failure there may be, and proceeds undeterred with the expectation of final success on the part of his pupil” (M:H 3:162 n1).

⁹⁴ “Restraining you again and again,” *niggayha niggayha*. Comy: “Having exhorted once, I will not be silent. Constantly reproving (*niggahetvā niggahetvā*) again and again, I will exhort, I will instruct” (MA 4:166). Cf *niggayha,vādī* (Dh 76), qu at DhA 2:108.

⁹⁵ “Cleansing you again and again,” *pavayha pavayha* (M 1:442, 444, 3:18 = DhA 2:108), ger of *pavāhati*, “(1) to cause to be carried away, to remove; freq with ref to water: to wash away cleanse (M 1:39; S 1:79, 183, 2:88; Tha 751). (2) to pull out, draw out (D 1:77, better read as *pabāhati*)” (PED abridged). Comy explains that the Buddha removes one’s faults (*dosa*), “as a potter, having removed (*pavāhetvā*, v1 *pajahitvā*) the cracked and broken vessels [Se *bhinna,chinna,bhājanāni*] from among those that have been baked, takes the well baked ones, tapping (ie test-

(M 122,26-27/3:117 f), SD 11.4

Often our inclination towards sexual desire may be a sense of loneliness, crying out for acceptance by others, a need of friendship. In this case, the spiritual friend and his teachings are the best way of heal ourselves of such sense of lack.

On the other hand, if we are married or if we in a committed partnership, we should cultivate true-hearted friendship so that the marriage or friendship does not only revolve around sexuality, but is healthily broad-based. Such a partnership forms a wholesome support for a happy family life, people-helping and social work. Our joy of love and commitment to each other and to the Dharma will inspire other couples to similar Dharma-inspired lives.⁹⁷

4 The laity and sexuality

4.1 HEALTHY HUMAN SEXUALITY

4.1.1 “Human sexuality” is a broad area of attitudes and behaviour that include the following elements: sex, gender, sexuality, sexualization, sexual intimacy, and sexual identity.⁹⁸ It is useful to have some understanding of these terms so that we are informed in dealing with ourselves and with related issues and problems.

Sex is the condition of being a male or a female in the *physical* sense of the word. It refers only to the *body* of a person, but not to his or her behaviour. We are born male or female not because of bad karma, but as the result of genetics.

Gender refers to a range of characteristics that defines our beings a male or a female or a related category. It is a culturally constructed role or social expectation of a person. This is often the identity that such a person naturally accepts, is forced to accept, or is perceived to have.

Sexuality refers to those aspects of gender identity that relates to sex (our physically be male or female). These include sexual desires, sexual behaviours and sexual orientations. We need to understand human sexuality, so we can learn to protect ourselves from exploitation, harm and disease. Sexuality is frequently secret and emotional, so that many of us have some difficulty talking about it.

Sexualization is using sex or sexuality to manipulate or control other people. It is manifested through such behaviour as flirting, seducing, withholding sex to punish a partner, or using sex to obtain money or favours. Where the intention here is unwholesome, it is a breach of the third precept.

Sexual intimacy is the ability and need to be emotionally close to another person and have that closeness returned. Mutual intimacy is what makes personal relationships fulfilling and healthy. While *sensuality* is about physical closeness, *sexual intimacy* also focusses on deeper emotions, and help strengthen the bonds between two people.

Sexual identity is our understanding and acceptance of who we are sexually. This includes the sense of being male or female (sexual orientation). Sexual identity can be seen as comprising three interlinked factors, that is, gender identity, gender role and sexual orientation.

ing) them again and again. So too I having repeatedly removed (faults from you), will again and again exhort and instruct you.” (MA 4:166).

⁹⁶ *Yo sāro so thassati*. Comy: “While being exhorted thus by me, those who have reached the pith (*sāra*) of the ways and the paths will persist. The mundane virtues [aforementioned teachings] are also intended as a criterion of spiritual essence.” (MA 4:167). *Sāra* means: (1) the heartwood or pith of a tree; (2) essence (essential truth). IB Horner: “It is no doubt meant that this will persist and endure (like well baked vessels) when all the mistakes and errors that dog as learner’s path have been cleared away and removed (like the cracked and broken vessels from among those that have been well baked)” (M:H 3:162 n4). In **Gandhāra J** (J 406), the potter imagery is again used to show the Buddha’s role as a teacher. Skilling 1997:393 n97 points to a recurrence of this same imagery in the **Saṅgha, bheda, vastu** (Gnoli 1978a:78,19) is used in the same way.

⁹⁷ Further see **Love**, SD 38.4 (or read it after finishing this essay).

⁹⁸ See Andy V Byers (ed), *Mzake ndi mzake: Sourcebook for HIV and AIDS Peer Group Education*, Malawi: GTZ Basic Education Programme, 2009: Activity 3.4: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/67722331/HIV-and-AIDS-Sourcebook-for-Teachers-Andy-V-Byers>

4.1.2 The most important concept to understand here is the last: sexual identity. Firstly, there is no such thing as a fixed *gender identity* because it is a mental attitude. We need to cultivate and harmonize both our masculine qualities and our feminine qualities. Masculine qualities include physical strength, determination, courage and wisdom. Feminine qualities include gentleness, resilience, forgiveness and compassion.⁹⁹

Secondly, we can healthily accept or *gender role* or mould our *sexual identity* through regularly cultivation of lovingkindness, by reminding ourselves, “I accept myself just as I am. I’m completely OK,” and so on. Breath meditation and some understanding of the Dharma (especially through sutta study with an experienced compassionate teacher or a wholesome group) helps us to train in better self-control, especially with regards to sexual feelings (lustful thoughts).¹⁰⁰

Thirdly, sexuality is a mental state, and the mind can change or “orientate” ourselves so that our *self-perception* matures as we mentally develop. Everyone changes; we can change, and we should accept such changes if they are positive. A very vital activity for us is to do here is the meditation that leads to feelings of profound bliss, and to engage in joyful and self-fulfilling activities either alone or in a group. We are not merely our sex: **the Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48) says that we can be much more than being mere sexual entities—we can rise above our sexuality, and be more than merely our maleness or femaleness.¹⁰¹

4.2 THE 3RD PRECEPT. All Buddhists are at least bound by the 5 precepts (*pañca,sīla*)¹⁰²—that is, abstaining from killing, from taking the not given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from taking intoxicants and addictives—which constitutes *natural morality*. That is to say, these precepts are rooted in the *universal values* of life, happiness, freedom, truth and wisdom. It is the 3rd precept that concerns us here.

The Veḷu,dvāreyya Sutta applies *the golden rule* to explain the rationale behind the third precept:

8 Furthermore, houselords, a noble disciple reflects thus:

‘If someone were to have sex with my wives,¹⁰³ that would not be desirable nor agreeable to me. Now, if I were to have sex with the wives of another, that would not be desirable nor agreeable to him, too.

What is undesirable and disagreeable to me is undesirable and disagreeable to others, too. How can I inflict upon another what is undesirable and disagreeable to me?’

Having reflected thus, he himself abstains from sexual misconduct, exhorts others to abstain from sexual misconduct, and speaks in praise of abstaining from sexual misconduct.

Thus, his bodily conduct is purified in three respects. (S 55.7/5:354), SD 1.5

This passage exhorts us to “decentralize” sexuality in our lives, and to put it into proper social perspective. If our lives is strongly sex-centred, then we are very likely to live a predatory life of pleasure-hunting. We turn into asuras who measure others as sex-objects in terms of how much pleasure they can give us, and our lives would centre around getting the next sexual fix: we have become sex addicts.

Sexual misconduct, in fact, refers to more than just adultery. Technically, *kāmesu micchācāra* means “misuse of sensual pleasures.” Here, “(in) sensual pleasures” (*kāmesu*) refers specifically to objects of sense-pleasure. “Misconduct” refers to any transgression through any of the “doors” or bodily orifices. In broad terms, it refers to any violation of the person of another, that is, non-consensual or illicit intercourse. Those who are not to be violated can be summarized as follows:

- (1) minors (children and those below the age of consent);
- (2) children and youths protected by the state;
- (2) those betrothed to another (committed to another or engaged to be married);

⁹⁹ For a Jungian analysis of anima and animus, see **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a (1.2).

¹⁰⁰ See eg **Kāma-c, chanda**, SD 32.2 & **Spiritual friendship**, SD 34.1.

¹⁰¹ A 7.48/4:57-59 (SD 8.7).

¹⁰² See **Silānussati**, SD 15.11 (2.2).

¹⁰³ *me dāresu*, lit. “with my womenfolk.” For def, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,8/1:286 + 12/1:287 f), SD 5.7.

- (3) those who are married (ie extramarital sex);
- (4) those bound by vows (such as monastics and celibates);
- (5) those who do not give their consent.

There are four constituents of misconduct in sensual pleasures:

- (1) a forbidden person (any of the five mentioned above);
- (2) the mind to enjoy;
- (3) the effort to engage; and
- (4) consent to the union of sexual organs.¹⁰⁴

Traditionally, sexual misconduct is said to have occurred when one has a bad intention and violate a “forbidden” partner or victim: refraining from this is an expression of the “respect for another’s *person*.” The essence of the precept against sexual misconduct, however, is that of “respect for another.” In other words, even when one’s spouse or lover declines to have intercourse, the husband has to respect that refusal, and of course, vice versa. Otherwise, it amounts to breaking the third precept.¹⁰⁵ In other words, no one should be regarded as a sexual object: we are more than being mere sexual beings. [1.2]

4.3 SEX AND MARRIAGE. Sexuality is the door to samsara: humans and other beings are born into the world through a sexual act. An *irresponsible* sexual act (such as rape, incest, etc) is likely to bring on great disadvantages and sufferings onto the child. A *responsible* sexual act, accompanied by love, commitment and the ability to support a family economically and emotionally is the foundation of a healthy society.

Responsibility is less about how is to blame when something goes wrong, but more of a *responding* in a wholesome manner to needs, difficulties and weaknesses of those we love or those to whom we are “responsible.” In short, marriage or commitment to loved ones is vital for individual, social and spiritual progress.

The Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta (M 73) speaks of lay disciples, dressed in white, enjoying sense-pleasures (*gihī odāta,vasano kāma,bhogī*),¹⁰⁶ who are *streamwinners* [5.1]. This means that sex need not be a hindrance to the spiritual life *if* we are in control of ourselves in a wholesome manner. Sexuality within the context of marriage or a committed loving relationship between suitable partners is not only ethically acceptable, but can be an effective deterrence against unhealthy sex and negative emotions.¹⁰⁷

In Buddhism, however, marriage is a social convention, not a sacrament. If marriages are made in heaven, they would remain happy for life. The Buddhist texts, however, provide important guidelines for marriage and family life, and key teachings are found in **the Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31).

30 (3) In five ways, young houselord, **the wife** as the direction at the back [the west], should be ministered to by the husband, thus:

- (a) By treating her with respect.
- (b) By not showing her discourtesy.
- (c) By not being unfaithful to her.
- (d) By handing over authority to her.
- (e) By providing her with adornments.

The wife, young houselord, as the direction at the back [the west], having been ministered thus by the husband shows him her compassion in these five ways:

- (f) She manages her work very well.
- (g) She is hospitable to those around her [such as servants and husband’s relatives].
- (h) She is not unfaithful to him.

¹⁰⁴ Comy adds that if the unwilling victim gives “consent” (*adhivāsana*) during the course of union, the victim would then break the precept, too (MA 1:199).

¹⁰⁵ On def of the first 4 precepts, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41/1:285-290), SD 5.7 (2). On the 5th precept, see Sn 398 f; **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31,8/3:182 f), SD 4.1.

¹⁰⁶ M 73,10/1:491 (SD 27.4). On the laity & sensual pleasure, see **Ruṇṇa S** (A 3.103) @ SD 37.3 (1.2.1).

¹⁰⁷ See Harvey 2000: 71-74.

- (i) She looks after the household stores [and property].¹⁰⁸
 (j) She is skillful and diligent in all her duties.

In these five ways, young householder, the wife, as the direction at the back [the west], having been ministered thus by the husband, shows him her compassion.

Thus the direction at the back [the west] is covered by him and made safe and secure.

(D 31,30/3:190), SD 4.1

Other early Buddhist texts on marriage and family life include the following:

(Piyā) Mallikā Sutta	As you love yourself, love others, too	S 3.8/1:75	SD 38.7
(Uggata,sarīra) Aggi Sutta	Parents, family man, and religion	A 4.44/2:44	SD 3.16
Saṁvāsa Sutta 1	Types of marriages	A 4.53/2:57-59	SD 66.6
Saṁvāsa Sutta 2	The ideal couple	A 4.54/2:59-61	SD 64.11
Sama,jīvi Sutta	The compatible couple	A 4.55/2:61 f	SD 5.1
Kula Sutta	The successful family life	A 4.255/2:249	SD 37.10
Ṭhāna Putta Sutta	Advantages of having a son	A 5.39/3:43 f	SD 4.1
Nakula,mātā Sutta	The 8 duties of a wife of great merit	A 8.48/4:268 f	SD 5.3
Bhariyā Sutta	Seven kinds of wives	A 7.59/4:91-94	SD 38.13

5 The saints and sexuality

5.1 LAYMEN STREAMWINNERS. In the **Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 73), Vacchagotta asks the Buddha whether there are laymen streamwinners, who are family people enjoying pleasure of the senses, in the Buddhist community:

“Other than master Gotama; other than the monks; other than the nuns; other than the laymen, householders dressed in white, brahmacharis [celibates], is there any one layman, a disciple of master Gotama, a householder, dressed in white, enjoying sense-pleasures,¹⁰⁹

who is a doer of the Teaching,

follower of instructions,

crossed beyond doubt,

become free of uncertainties,

gained fearless confidence,

and independent of others, dwells in the Teaching?”

(M 73,10/1:491), SD 27.4

The Buddha answers that such saint disciples number “not in the hundreds, but far more.” And the same answer is given by the Buddha when Vacchagotta asks about the presence of female lay streamwinners.

The most essential basis for streamwinning, the very first confirmed stage of awakening, is that of building right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*). This *preliminary right view* arises with the abandoning of **the first three fetters**, namely, (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), and (3) attachment to vows and rituals (*sīla-b,bata parāmāsa*).¹¹⁰ When we have overcome these three fetters, we are called streamwinners, or if we consistently work in this Dharma-inspired direction, we are known as “true individuals” (*sappurisa*).¹¹¹

5.2 LAYMEN ONCE-RETURNERS. In the **Cūḷa Dukka-k,khandha Sutta** (M 14), we are told that Mahānāma,¹¹² despite being a once-returner,¹¹³ complains to the Buddha that he still has defiled mental

¹⁰⁸ Including goods brought back by her husband.

¹⁰⁹ “A householder ... enjoying sense-pleasures,” *gihī odāta,vasano kāma,bhogī*.

¹¹⁰ See **Sarakāni S 1** (S 55.24.8.2/5:376), SD 3.6 n: The 5 lower fetters.

¹¹¹ See **Udakūpama S** (A 7.15), SD 28.6 (1.2.4.2+3).

¹¹² He was Sukk’odana’s son, and brother of the monks Anuruddha and Ānanda. As such, he is Suddh’odana’s nephew and the Buddha’s cousin. See Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, 1972:80 f.

states, especially lustful thoughts, despite understanding the nature of the three unwholesome roots. From the discourse, we also learn that Mahānāma has not attained any dhyana. The Buddha explains the significance of this fact:

Mahānāma, even if a noble disciple has clearly seen as it really is, with right wisdom, that sense-desires bring little solace [gratification], but much suffering, much despair, more danger here,¹¹⁴ so long, as he does not gain zest and joy that are apart from sense-pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or something more peaceful than that, he would not be able to be unaffected by sense-pleasures.¹¹⁵

But, Mahānāma, when a noble disciple has clearly seen as it really is with right wisdom that sense-pleasures bring little solace, but much suffering, much despair, more danger here, and he gains zest and joy that are apart from sense-pleasures, from unwholesome states, or something more peaceful than that,¹¹⁶ then he would be able to be unaffected by sense-desires.

(M 14,4/1:91), SD 4.7

Two significant points arise from the Buddha's statement here. The first is that so long as we have not experienced dhyanic bliss, we will consider sexual pleasure to be very pleasant and desirable. The second point is that even a once-returned, what more a streamwinner, who has not attained dhyana, too, would be drawn to sexual pleasure. But there is a great difference here. While the worldly person is likely to lack self-control in such pleasures, and easily break the third precept (against sexual misconduct), the streamwinner and the once-returned would never deliberately break any of the precepts, even if he were a layman.

6 Celibacy

6.1 LAYMEN NON-RETURNERS. Non-returners are rare amongst laymen¹¹⁷ because they often indulge in some level of sensuality and sexuality. A non-returned, on the other hand, has destroyed all the five lower fetters, namely, self-identity view, spiritual doubt, attachment to rituals and vows, sensual lust and aversion.¹¹⁸ In short, a non-returned has overcome all sense-desires.¹¹⁹

The Mahā Vaccha, gotta Sutta (M 73) mentions lay followers who are celibate (*brahma, carī*) and those who are “enjoying sense-pleasures” (*kāma, bhogī*). In the former case, they are all non-returners,

¹¹³ See M 14.2-5/1:91 (SD 4.7).

¹¹⁴ See V 4:134.

¹¹⁵ This is one of the passages that Bhikkhu Bodhi quotes as “instances of stream-enterers who are not attainers of Jhānas” (2001:51 f).

¹¹⁶ “Something more peaceful than that,” *tato santatarām*. Comy explains that while zest and joy (*pīti, sukha*) pertain to the first 2 dhyanas, “something higher” is connected with the 3rd and 4th dhyanas (MA 2:63). On *jhāna*, see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.75-82/1:73-76).

¹¹⁷ **Dīghāvu S** (S 55.3) records the Buddha counselling the dying Dīghāvu, a stream-winner, advising him not to worry about his father, Jotika the householder. Dīghāvu, later dies and is reborn in the Suddhāvāsa as a non-returned (S 55.3/5:344-347).

¹¹⁸ **The 10 fetters** (*dasā saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (or remorse) (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*kāma, rāga*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*ud-dhambhāgiya*). The abandonment of the lower 5 fetters makes one a non-returned (*opapātika* or *anāgāmī*) (see **Ānāpānasati S**, M 118.10 = 7.13). This verse technically refers to the non-returned, but here is spoken of an arhat, one who has broken all 10 fetters: see **Laṭukikopama S** (M 66,17/1:454), SD 28.11.

¹¹⁹ See **Ānāpānasati S**, M 118,10 (SD 7.13). Non-returners are reborn in the Pure Abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*), ie, the 5 highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa, loka*) inhabited only by them and where they live out their karma to attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha (“Non-declining”), Ātappa (“Unworried”), Sudassā (“Clearly Visible”), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned”) and Akanīṭṭhā (“Highest”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

while the latter are either streamwinners [5.1] or once-returners [5.2]. The Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta records Vaccha,gotta asking the Buddha about laymen non-returners, thus,

“Other than master Gotama; other than the monks; other than the nuns, is there any one layman, a disciple of master Gotama, a householder, dressed in white, a brahmachari [a celibate], who,

having exterminated the five lower fetters,¹²⁰
 who spontaneously arises (in the Pure Abodes),¹²¹ therein attains nirvana,
 and of a nature not to return from that world?”¹²²

“Not just one, Vaccha, nor a hundred, nor two hundred, nor three hundred, nor four hundred, nor five hundred, but far more laymen, who are my disciples, householders, dressed in white, brahmacharis [celibates], who,

having exterminated the five lower fetters,
 spontaneously arise (in the Pure Abodes), therein attain nirvana,
 and of a nature not to return from that world.” (M 73,9/1:490 f), SD 27.4

Understandably, the non-returners are celibate because they have destroyed all the five lower fetters,¹²³ including sensual lust, while once-returners have destroyed only the first three fetters and weakened greed, hate and delusion [5.2], and the streamwinners only destroyed the first three fetters [5.1].

As such, in early Buddhism, celibacy is not a reaction against sexuality, taking it to be bad and so on, but rather, understanding its productive and fettering powers, the practitioner periodically abstains from such an indulgence so that his energies are undistracted and fully directed to spiritual training. The body, as it were, is in full service of the spirit, so that we are capable of rising beyond even the heavens.¹²⁴

6.2 CELIBACY IS THE TASTE OF THE DIVINE IN THE HUMAN. The key difference between a lay person and a monastic is that the latter is celibate, that is, the total abstinence from sexuality. Since a monastic has renounced the world, he would have not set up a biological family, which in turn is the result of sexuality. Sexuality is the most selfish of human acts. Our minds can be so directed to it, and be directed by it, that we are significantly weakened in the broader human enterprises.

Sexuality is the very root of the biological family. Sexuality is also at the very root of feudalism and the class system of the Buddha’s time. We are born in a class: a brahmin is born a brahmin, a kshatriya a kshatriya, a vaishya a vaishya, a shudra a shudra, and an outcaste an outcaste. However, any members of such classes joins the Buddhist order, he is no more a class member, but a renunciant. He has transcended the biological sex-based family and become part of *a universal and spiritual family*. A monastic’s celibacy authenticates this membership.

While sexuality entails strong attachments and channels time, energy and resources to itself, celibacy focusses our commitment to spiritual development and universal fellowship. Without family responsibili-

¹²⁰ The lower fetters: see n above.

¹²¹ The Pure Abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*) are the 5 highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa,loka*) inhabited only by non-returners who assume their last birth to and attain nirvana as arhats (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). The 5 pure abodes, ie their inhabitants and respective lifespans, are: These worlds are Āviha (“Non-declining,” 1000 MK), Atappa (“Unworried,” 2000 MK), Sudassā (“Clearly Visible,” 4000 MK), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned,” 8000 MK) and Akaniṭṭhā (“Highest,” 16000 MK) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). MK = *Mahā Kappa*.that is, a full cycle of a world-period or cycle of the universe (V 3:4 = D 3:51, 111 = It 99; D 1:14; A 2:142). For celestial map, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11/1:211-223), SD 1.7; for world cycle, see **Aggañña S** (D 27/3:80-97), SD 2.19.

¹²² “Householder...from that world,” *atthi pana bhoto gotamassa ek’upāsako’pi sāvako gihī odāta,vasano brahma,cārī yo pañcannaṃ oram,bhāgiyānaṃ samyojanānaṃ parikkhayā opapātiko tatha parinibbāyī anāvatti,dhammo tasmā lokā’ti*. This question is about the non-returner, which even a layman may attain. However, such laymen will remain naturally celibate because they have destroyed the fetter of sense-desire. Note here that no lay disciples are mentioned as attaining arhathood: see **Laymen saints**, SD 8.6(13).

¹²³ The 5 lower fetters, see n above on the 10 fetters (*dasa samyojana*).

¹²⁴ See Harvey 2000: 89 f.

ties, we have more time for the spiritual life: to know Dharma, realize Dharma, teach Dharma.¹²⁵ Celibacy, in transcending attachment to the physical body, allows us to focus fully on spiritual development, so that we taste the divine life right here in this world.

For this reason, the early Buddhists refer to celibacy as *brahma, cariya*, “the divine life,” “the perfect conduct,” or even “the way of Brahmā.” Furthermore, in **the Dhammika Sutta** (Sn 2.14), the Buddha exhorts us:

Let the wise avoid a life of incelibacy like a burning pit of embers.
But those incapable of celibacy, should not transgress another’s wife.¹²⁶ (Sn 396)

6.2 LIVING LIKE ARHATS. Those who have a good level of self-control could, if they wish, voluntarily lead lives that are sex-free, that is, live as *celibates*. Such a practice can be done periodically or on a more sustained basis. In the former case, where lay followers observe the celibacy (*brahma, cariya*) rule, usually as part of the eight precepts (*aṭṭh’añga, sīla*), is defined in **the (Tad-ah’) Uposatha Sutta** (A 3.70) as follows,

“As long as they live, the arhats, giving up incelibacy, live a celibate life; dwelling far (from bad), abstaining from coupling, the way of the world.

Today I, too, for this night and this day, giving up incelibacy, live a celibate life; dwelling far (from fad), abstaining from coupling, the way of the world.

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.”

(A 3.70,11/1:211), SD 4.18

The rule of celibacy (along with the other seven of the eight precepts) is observed by the lay follower for the duration of the *uposatha*, that is, the full moon and new moon days, but may also include the seventh or eighth day in between, that is, a weekly affair. The observance usually begins at sun-down of the preceding day and ends at sun-down of the *uposatha* itself.

7 Homosexuality and deviant sexuality

7.1 DEVIANT SEXUALITY. The remarkable but late **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda Sutta** (D 26) contains an interesting prophecy:

And among the generation whose life-span is five hundred years, three things increased: abnormal lust, rampant greed and deviant conduct, and in consequence people’s life-span decreased, their beauty decreased, and as a result, the children of those whose life-span has been 500 years live, some for 250 years, some for only 200 years. (D 26,17/3:70), SD 36.10

According to the Dīgha Commentary on the Sutta, “**unnatural or abnormal lust**” (*adhamma, rāga*) here refers to incest, that is, “lust between mother and mother’s sister and father’s sister and maternal uncle’s wife and other such improper situations” (*mātā mātucchā pitucchā mātulanī ti ādike ayutta-ṭṭhāne rāgo*); “**rampant greed**” (*visama, lobha*) refers to excessive greed (or neurotic desire) by way of consuming things (*paribhoga, yutesu pi ṭhānesu atibalava, lobho*, in other words, excessive materialism and consumerism); and “**deviant conduct**” (*micchā, dhamma*) refer to sexuality “between men and men, women with women.” (DA 3:853). In short, crowded living conditions (such as heavily urbanized cities) are likely to conduce to cases of incest, consumerism, and homosexuality. It should, however, be noted that these commentarial notions are not found in the Canon, or at least not so distinctly expressed.

Taken in their proper perspectives, these statements on sexuality refer to their abnormal (*adhamma*) manifestation, that is, *going against the third precept*, which basically is about respect for personal free-

¹²⁵ See Wijayaratna 1990: 89-108; Harvey 2000: 89 f.

¹²⁶ Cf: “Who go to women dear as life to others... wane like the moon in the dark half” (**Sigāl’ovāda S**, D 33.14-15*/3:184), SD 4.1.

dom, for another's body and for family and society. The fact that the third precept is against "sexual misconduct" (*kāmesu micchācāra*) conversely means that there is such a thing as "proper sexual conduct," and entails a positive counterpart, the value of contentment, that is, being committed to our partner and the cultivation of lovingkindness and spiritual friendship—or, if one chooses, to live a celibate life (*brahma, cariya*) whether short-term, long-term or life-long [6].

7.2 HOMOSEXUALITY. The early Buddhist texts do mention sexual acts between members of the same sex,¹²⁷ but there is no category called *homosexuality*, as we know it today. Although there is no mention of clear reference to homosexuality in the four Nikāyas (the Dīgha, the Majjhima, the Saṃyutta and the Aṅguttara),¹²⁸ we do have references to homosexual acts in **the Vinaya**. The best known case is that of two young novices who committed "a defiling deed" (*dūsesum*) with one another. On account of this case, the Buddha introduced the rule that no monk should be attended by two novices.¹²⁹

The Saññoga Sutta (A 7.48) gives some insight into the psychological nature of homosexuality [1.2]. The search for satisfaction through a partner (of whatever sex) is related to one's conscious or unconscious identification with the characteristics or behaviour of one's own perceived sex (be it male or female). The word "sexuality," as such, refers not to one's physical features but to one's *self-love*.

A **woman** (in a physical sense), fixated on her own sexuality, compares herself with another's sexuality, and similarly fixates on the other's sexuality through unwise consideration (*ayoniso manasikāra*), that is, being not aware of or rejecting (repressing) the fleeting, unsatisfactory and insubstantial nature of the experience. A **man** similarly fixates on his own sexuality, compares himself with another's sexuality falls into the same condition.¹³⁰ [1.2]

In both cases—the woman or the man—when the person sexually fixates on another person's sexuality, the former may often enough project onto the latter both female and male sexuality. In other words, this is a case of gender-fused fixation. This is evident, for example, in any homosexual relationship, especially of a sustained nature, where one partner invariably plays a "male" role and the other a "female" role. The relationship fails when one partner fails in this "half-role": the relationship then is incomplete.

In other words, in the case of a man who loves himself in a fixated manner, that is, narcissistically, he would as such love his body, that is, its physical features. In other words, unwittingly, *he has taken on the mind of a woman*, which then goes on to seek another man for sexual satisfaction. Understandably, such a relationship as a rule does not work because of *one's self-love*.

As in any "normal" personal relationship, the homosexual couple will only be happy together when this partnership rises above merely satisfying sexual desire towards wholesome higher goals (especially aesthetic or spiritual ones)—in other words, when they go beyond treating one another as mere objects of sexuality (which also applies to a heterosexual relationship), but regard one another as true individuals capable of personal development and spiritual liberation.

On a more general level, any search for union externally implies that one is still caught up in the limitations of one's own gender identity,¹³¹ as **Analayo** notes,

This shows that the affective investment inherent in identifying with one's gender role and behaviour forms an important link in the arising of sensual desire. In contrast, *arahants*, who have eradicated even the subtlest trace of identification, are unable to engage in sexual intercourse.¹³²

¹²⁷ Masturbation is prohibited for monks (Saṅghādisesa 1 = V 3:109), for nuns (Pācittiya 3 & 4 = V 4:259-261, Pāc 93 = V 4:342). Homosexuality is prohibited for monks (Pāc 31, 32, 90, 91, 93 = V 4: 287 f, 341-344). See Wijayaratna 1990: 95 f.

¹²⁸ See Jones 1979: 79 f.

¹²⁹ The 2 novices were Kaṇḍaka and Mahaka, pupils of the loose monk Upananda. Pāc 70 records that the novice Kaṇḍaka is expelled for holding the view that sexuality is not a stumbling-block to the monastic celibate training (V 4:138-140). A similar case is that of the renegade monk Aritṭha (Pāc 68 = V 4:133-136): see also **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22/1:130-142), SD 3.13

¹³⁰ A 7.48/4:57-59 @ SD 8.7.

¹³¹ On individuation, see SD 8.7 Intro (4).

(2003:194)

7.3 SUBLIMATING SEXUAL ATTRACTION. **The Vakkali Thera Vatthu** (DhA 25.11) is a simple moving story about how young man, who upon seeing the Buddha, at once falls in love with his body, and joins the order so that he can gaze on the Buddha's physical beauty. The Buddha, it is said, know all along what is going on in Vakkali's mind.

At the approach of the rains retreat, the Buddha announces to Vakkali that he cannot follow the Buddha, and Vakkali is devastated. He misses the Buddha so much, that he contemplates suicide. At just the right moment, when he is about to kill himself, the Buddha appear before him in a radiant forms, and exhorts him:

Full of joy and faith in the Buddha's Teaching, the monk
Will reach the place of peace, the happiness of the stilling of the formations. (Dh 381)

Having pronounced this Stanza, the Teacher stretched forth his hand to the elder Vakkali and said,

Come, Vakkali! Fear not, look at the Tathāgata!
I will lift you up like (one lifting) an elephant sunk in the mire.
Come, Vakkali! Fear not, look at the Tathāgata!
I will free you just as the (eclipsed) sun is freed from Rāhu's maw.
Come, Vakkali! Fear not! Look at the Tathāgata!
I will free you just as the (eclipsed) moon is freed from Rāhu's maw.

Vakkali, dramatically inspired, goes into deep meditation, and attains arhathood. He is declared by the Buddha to the foremost of the monks who have great faith. (DhA 25.11/4:118 f).

This moving story shows the Buddha's great compassion is accepting people as they are, and inspiring them to higher levels of spirituality. Where cunning and shady gurus would exploit the weaknesses and dedication of their pupils, or misguide them into greater difficulties, the Buddha and the Dharma are capable of sublimating anyone who is intent on personal development, even to win liberation itself.¹³³

8 Sex-change

8.1 SEXUAL STEREOTYPES. Does our sex change through our various rebirths? Theoretically speaking, our sex depends very much on our karma (the meaning here will be evident soon). However, it is likely that our sex many not change over many lives. None of the stories of **the Vimāna Vatthu**—hagiographical accounts of those who are reborn as heavenly beings on account of their good deeds—make any reference to sex-change. The sex of the key actors remains the same through their different lives, as far as the accounts of the Vimāna Vatthu, anyway.

Vimāna Vatthu 1-15 and 44 are stories about women, most of whom are said to be female deities (*devī*) in their next lives. The rest of the stories are about men who become gods (*devatā*). In Vv 53, for example a brahmin is reborn as a good, while in Vv 51, a male frog is said to be reborn as a male deity.

The Peta,vatthu—pious accounts of those reborn as ghosts or shades on account of their unwholesome deeds—similarly mention no sex-change. **The Ubbarī Peta Vatthu** (Pv 2.13) is the story of a queen of the rajah Brahma,datta who is said to be reborn for 86,000 lives.¹³⁴ [8.2]

The Buddha's past lives are sometimes mentioned in the discourses, such as **the Kūta,danta Sutta** (D 5),¹³⁵ **the Mahā Govinda Sutta** (D 19),¹³⁶ and **the Ghaṭikāra Sutta** (M 81).¹³⁷ In all the 547 **Jātaka**

¹³² Eg at D 3:133. The eradication of sensual desire has already taken place at the level of non-return. (Anālayo's fn)

¹³³ See Harvey 2000: 419-434.

¹³⁴ See Harvey 1995: 68.

¹³⁵ As a brahmin purohita (D 5,10-21/1:134-143), SD 22.8.

¹³⁶ As Mahā Govinda, the great steward (D 19,29-61/2:230-251), SD 63.4.

stories of the Buddha's past lives, whether he is a human, divine, or subhuman births, he is always depicted as a male character.¹³⁸

There is one rare account of the Bodhisattva reborn as a woman in the very distant past. According to the **Jina,kāla,māli** (written by Ratana,paññā, a 16th century monk in Siam), the Bodhisattva, in the distant past before the Buddha Dīpaṅkara, is *the step-sister* of a Buddha named **Purāṇa Dīpaṅkara** ("Earlier Dīpaṅkara"). It is said that she makes a gift of mustard oil to a renowned elder monk named **Pacchima Dīpaṅkara** ("Later Dīpaṅkara").

8.2 NEGATIVE SEX-CHANGE. We often tend to become the desired object that we are preoccupied with. **The Story of the Elder Soreyya** (DhA 3.9) relates how Soreyya, a seth's son,¹³⁹ living in a city of the same name, upon seeing the elder Mahā Kaccāyana's golden complexion, thinks lustfully, "O how great it would be for my wife to have the golden hue of his body!" At once, it is said, he turns into a woman! Out of shame, *she* runs away, following a caravan to faraway Takka,silā. Caravan travellers, seeing her, proposes that she marries Sāvattī seth's son who is unmarried. She does so and bears him two sons.

One day, a close friend of hers, another seth's son, on a visit to Takka,silā, meets her. Upon hearing her story, he chides her for having had such a lustful thought towards an awakened monk, and advises her to seek Mahā Kaccāyana's forgiveness. She accordingly returns to Soreyya, and meeting Mahā Kaccāyana, seeks his forgiveness, and at once reverts into a man. Having learned his lesson, and deeply moved by religious feeling, he renounces the world, and in due course becomes an arhat.¹⁴⁰

The next story, **the Isi,dāsī Therī,gāthā** (Thī 400-447), is a canonical one, about the nun Isi,dāsī. In her last life (during our Buddha's time), Isi,dāsī is a beautiful woman, daughter of a wealthy merchant of Ujjenī. Her first marriage is to another merchant's son. Although she loves and serves him well, he still hates her. The same thing happens in the second marriage, and also the third (to a young ascetic). In the end, she becomes a nun, and cultivating herself well, she awakens with full powers, and is able to recall her past lives.

Eight lives ago, she was a man, that is, a rich and handsome young goldsmith who seduced the wives of others. After that, he was born in hell; then he is reborn as a castrated monkey; then a gelded sheep; and then as an ox. Three more times as an animal, and after that as a hermaphrodite. And in her last birth, she is reborn as Isi,dāsī.

The Isi,dāsī story should not be misunderstood as that it is our bad karma to be born as a woman or a hermaphrodite. The moral of the story is that we are victims of our own habitual tendencies, which will follow us in some form, life after life. As we think, so we act; as we thus act, so we reap the fruits. The point is very clear: we should take care what we desire for because ultimately we become what we desire, virtually or really.¹⁴¹

8.3 POSITIVE SEX-CHANGES

8.3.1 According to **the Saṅkhār'upapatti Sutta** (M 120), we can choose our own rebirth if we are accomplished in the fivefold "noble growth" (*ariya,vaḍḍhi*), that is, faith, moral virtue, spiritual learning, charity, and wisdom. The discourse closes with the statement that the best of all is not to be reborn at all.¹⁴²

8.3.2 The Sakka Pañha Sutta (D 21) has a story of a Sakya girl, Gopikā, who had great faith in the Three Jewels, and was deeply virtuous. Letting go of her womanly mind (*itthi,citta virajetvā*), she culti-

¹³⁷ As the brahmin student, Jotipāla, during the time of Kassapa, the Buddha just before our own (M 81,6-23/2:46-54), SD 49.3.

¹³⁸ For a list of births, see J F Jones 1979:15-19.

¹³⁹ A seth (*setthī*) was a financial entrepreneur who funded large businesses.

¹⁴⁰ **Soreyya-t,thera Vatthu**, DhA 3.9

¹⁴¹ For the full story, see **Why some marriages fail**, SD 3.8 (I). See also **Miracles**, SD 27.5a (6.2.1.4).

¹⁴² M 120/3:99-103), SD 3.4.

vated that of a man, and was reborn in Tāva,tiṃsa heaven as the devaputra Gopaka, which was a higher rebirth than the three monks she had known who were reborn as lowly gandharvas (divine minstrels).¹⁴³

8.3.3 The Ubbarī Peta Vatthu (Pv 2.13) is the story of a woman who chooses to be reborn in the brahma-world. It is said that she was a queen of the rajah Brahma,datta for 86,000 lives.¹⁴⁴ She is also told that

You were a woman, a man, too, and born in an animal's womb, too.
The limit of the distant past is thus not to be seen.¹⁴⁵ (Pv 2.13.12)

Realizing that she has gone through so many births, she wearies and decides to change her fortune. She renounces the world, and the closing verse of her story says:

Having cultivated a heart of lovingkindness for the sake of rebirth in the brahma-world,
having abandoned a woman's mind, she was reborn in the brahma-world.
(Pv 2.13.19/33)

It should be noted here that her abandoning “a woman's mind” simply means that she has transcended her sexuality.¹⁴⁶ The brahma-world is populated by beings of a dhyanic nature; in other words, they are *without form* and as such are *sexless* (Vbh 418).

8.3.4 The Jātaka has an account of a brahma who is reborn as a woman on earth. This is **the Culla-bodhi Jātaka** (J 443), whose tale is summarized in **the Ananusociya Jātaka** (J 328). It is said that once our Bodhisattva is reborn in a brahmin family of Benares. When he reaches of age, his parents suggest that he marries. He has no desire to do so, declaring that upon his parents' death, he wishes to become an ascetic.

When his parents insist, he has a golden image of a beautiful woman made, and says that he would only marry one who looks like it. Now at that time, a brahma has been reborn as a beautiful woman of Kāsi, named Sammilla, bhāsini, whose features are just like those of the golden image. So the Bodhisattva has to marry her, but she too has a similar spiritual disposition, and they live together as celibates. At the deaths of his parents, they both become ascetics.¹⁴⁷

9 Sexuality: a spiritual perspective

9.1 MONK OR PRIEST?

9.1.1 By definition a monastic (that is, a monk or a nun) is “single,” and as such celibate: he or she has nothing to do with sexuality. If a cleric is not celibate (such as in the Japanese Buddhisms), then it is incorrect to address him or her as monastic, but perhaps as a priest or some proper term.

In Japan, in 1872, the Meiji government promulgated a law that simply stated: “From now on Buddhist clerics shall be free to eat meat, marry, grow their hair, and so on.”¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, there will be no penalty if they wear ordinary clothing when not engaged in religious activities.”¹⁴⁹ Known informally as the *nikujiki saitai* 肉食禁止 (“meat-eating and marriage”) law, it was introduced to incapacitate or at least

¹⁴³ D 21.1.11/2:271 f @ SD 70.6.

¹⁴⁴ See Harvey 1995: 68.

¹⁴⁵ This alludes to S 2:178 = S 3:149 = 151, also 5:226.

¹⁴⁶ That she decides to rise above her sexuality (being a woman) is not that it is bad karma to be one, but that the Brahma-world is populated by dhyanic beings, constantly enjoying the bliss of dhyana, and are formless, so that they are sexless. See **Saññoga S** (A 7.48), where it is stated that a person should rise above being merely a sexual being in order to spiritually progress (A 7.48,2-3/4:57), SD 8.7 [1.2].

¹⁴⁷ J 328/3:92-97; J 443/4:22-27. This story is identical to that of Mahā Kassapa and Bhaddā Kapilāni (sThīA 68; Ap 2:583; AA 1:176) before their own renunciation. Cf the story of Anittha, gandha, kumāra who similarly declares that he would only marry a woman who resembles the golden figure he possessed (DhA 3:281 f). See Jones 1979: 85 f.

¹⁴⁸ Robinson & Johnson 1982: 181

¹⁴⁹ Date, 1930: 621 (qu in Jaffe 2002, see foll).

weaken Buddhism as a political and social force in Japan. This decriminalizing measure triggered a century-long debate in the Japanese Buddhist world, as clerical leaders and rank-and-file clerics strove to interpret and react to their new legal context.¹⁵⁰

This distinction is important as those who are celibate and direct their mind and energies properly to the spiritual; training will be able to taste the fruits of mental stillness and clarity, of compassion and wisdom. This is because such practitioners has to some level experienced or understood at least one of the four noble truths, that is, suffering, its arising, its ending, and the way leading to the ending of suffering.

9.1.2 Furthermore, if a monastic, who has taken monastic vows of celibacy, and who don the marks of monasticism in some form, were to be in celibacy, he at once transgresses the monastic code and is automatically a monastic. Anyway kind of sexuality entails some level of attachment to sensuality (*kām'-upadāna*) and to sense-pleasures (*kāma, taṇhā*). Sensual desire (*kāma-c, chanda*) is the first of the 5 mental hindrances,¹⁵¹ which must be eradicated if we are to progress spiritually.

However, sexuality need not be a hindrance to spiritual growth if we properly enjoy it within the context of marriage and committed partnership. The early Buddhist texts speak of streamwinners who are “enjoyers of sense-pleasures’ (*kāma, bhogī*) [4.2, 6.1]. If sexuality is the spice of lay life, it should be used sparingly and in the right way, so that our lives taste of spiritual freedom.

9.2 OVERCOMING THE THREE INTOXICATIONS

9.2.1 The Mada Sutta (A 3.39) says that monastics who are intoxicated with youth (*yobbana, mada*), with health (*ārogya, mada*) or with life (*jīvita, mada*) are as such led on to be reborn in suffering states, and that such intoxicated monks would “give up the training and return to the low life.”¹⁵² The reason for this is clear: intoxication with youth, with health or with life is a fixation with the body, a self-identity-view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*). [5.1]

9.2.2 When we are body-bound, fettered to only *physical* reality, we become blind to *spiritual* reality, that is, the cultivation of our potential for goodness and liberation. In this sense, devotion to sense-pleasures is not connected with the goal; it is unprofitable in the spiritual sense.

We should also be wary of monastics who use money, and are socially engaged with the world.¹⁵³ They often (mis)use social work and religion missions for collecting wealth, power, pleasure and sexuality. The renunciants, by definition, have given up economic security, and live dependent on the laity for their worldly necessities of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. If they are spiritually engaged, they should not have any problem in attracting these necessities.

9.2.3 Furthermore, there is a pleasure that is even more sublime than any kind of sex, that is, the transpersonal joy of dhyana, or profound meditation concentration [1.6]. People who are fixated to sexuality and sensual pleasures clearly have not tasted a pleasure higher than sense-pleasures, and as such are not as spiritually developed as those whose dhyanic bliss guide their lives in mental calm and clarity.

9.2.4 Buddhism and sex

9.2.4.1 In conclusion, three points should be made clear here. First, Buddhism is *not* against sex, but gives an analysis of the psychological process through which sexuality or the desire for sex arises. As **the Nibbedhika Pariyāya Sutta** (A 6.63) reminds us:

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:
There is no sensuality in what is beautiful (*citra*) in the world.
The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:
What is beautiful in the world remains as they are.

¹⁵⁰ See Richard Jaffe, *Neither Monastic Nor Layman: Clerical marriage in modern Japanese Buddhism*, Princeton, 2001: 4, see <http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s7171.html> & <http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUN-KEN/publications/jjrs/pdf/512.pdf>. See also **Skillful means**, SD 30.8 (8.3.3).

¹⁵¹ On the 5 hindrances, see **Pañca nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1

¹⁵² A 3.39/1:146 f @ SD 59.8.

¹⁵³ See eg **Three Roots Inc**, SD 31.12 (3.4.4).

So here the wise remove the desire for them.¹⁵⁴ (A 6.63,3/3:411) = 6.11¹⁵⁵ [1.5]

External sense-objects are neither good nor bad, but how we view them makes them so. If our senses are bad, then it would be better if we were blind, deaf, mute and incapacitated!¹⁵⁶

9.2.4.2 Secondly, the best way to train our faculties is *not* to think in terms of like and dislike, but to be fully aware, when the world of the senses impinges upon us.¹⁵⁷ This teaching is summarized in this well known pericope, that is, the Buddha's teaching to such disciples as Bāhiya Dārucīriya (U 8) and Mālunkya,putta (S 35.95):

In what is seen, there will only be the seen.
 In what is heard, there will only be the heard.
 In what is sense, there will only be the sensed [smelt, tasted, touched].
 In what is known, there will only be the known [cognized]. (U 8; S 35.95.13/4:73)

9.2.4.3 The third point is the most important, and is clearly evident from **the Saññoga Sutta**, namely, that self-love is the basis for sexuality [1.2]. We see here how a woman delights in her own physical attributes and is then aroused by and desires for another "in terms a man's faculty" seeking union, that is, the appropriation of what she considers lacking in herself. A man who delights in his own physical attributes is similarly aroused and desires for another "in terms a woman's faculty" seeking union, that is, the appropriation of what he considers lacking in himself.

In Mallikā's words, "There is no one dearer than oneself" (S 3.8).¹⁵⁸ If we learn to be less and less selfish or self-centred, our sexuality will be sublimated into spiritual bliss.

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¹⁵⁴ This verse, which explains the previous prose sentence, "plays upon the double meaning of *kāma*, emphasizes that purification is to be achieved by mastering the defilement of sensuality, not by fleeing [from] sensually enticing objects." (A:ÑB 1999:302 n34)

¹⁵⁵ An almost identical verse (without line c) is found in **the Na Santi Sutta** (S 1.34/1:22).

¹⁵⁶ **Indriya, bhāvanā S** (M 152) similarly teaches the mastery over one's sense-faculties rather than removing the sense-objects. (M 152.2/3:298 @ SD 17.13)

¹⁵⁷ M 152.11-16/3:301.

¹⁵⁸ S 3.8/1:75 @ SD 38.7. See Lily de Silva 1978:126 f. On self-love, further see **Love**, SD 38.4 (3.2+3.3). On individuation, see also **Saññoga S** (A 7.48), SD 8.7 (4).

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