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Vīmaṃsaka Sutta

The Discourse on the Investigator | M 47

Theme: Even the Buddha should be investigated

Translated by Piya Tan ©2008, 2010

1 Introduction

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY & HIGHLIGHTS. The **Kesa,puttiya Sutta** (A 3.65) is often cited as the locus classicus for the early Buddhist spirit of *free inquiry*. Its real concern, however, is with the valid sources of knowledge, and the proper way of attaining *direct knowledge* of true reality. The true locus classicus for free inquiry in early Buddhism is, properly, **the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta** (M 47), which is remarkable for its intrepidity in advocating *open investigation* and personal verification of perhaps the most sacred of living religious systems, that of the teacher himself, traditionally regarded as one who holds an authority that should never be questioned.¹

The Vīmaṃsaka Sutta is about the *vīmaṃsaka*, the “investigator” or one who is inquisitive,² but who lacks the power of mind-reading, should make a thorough examination of the Buddha’s claim to being a fully self-awakened teacher [§§1-2]. The key statement or sutta thesis reads thus:

The Tathagata, bhikkhus, should be examined (*samannesanā kātabbā*) [2.3] by a monk, an investigator, who does not know³ how to read another’s mind,⁴ so that he knows whether the Blessed One is fully self-awakened or not.

Vīmaṃsakena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā parassa ceto,pariyāyam ajānantena tathāgate samannesanā kātabbā “sammā,sambuddho vā no vā” iti viññāṇāyā ti. [§2]

The significance of this teaching is a radical and universal one, because if the Buddha himself (or the early reciters themselves) recommend that the Buddha himself should be examined in terms of personal development and purity of body and mind, *this examination must surely apply to other teachers, too.*⁵

The monks in the audience request the Buddha to elaborate [§3]. The Buddha then instructs that the investigator should visually observe and carefully listen whether the Buddha’s actions or speech is defiled (*saṅkiliṭṭha*) in any way [§4], or whether they are of a “mixed” (*vītimissā*) nature, that is, inconsistent [§5]. The investigator should note whether the Buddha’s conduct is purified (cleansed) (*vodāta*) or not [§6], or whether his purity is long-standing (*dīgha,ratta*) or fleeting (*ittara*) [§7].

At this point, the investigator switches from addressing “the Tathagata” to “this venerable one” (*ayam āyasmā*), and this pronoun is used in the rest of the questions section here [4.1]. Is he negatively affected by fame and charisma? [§8] Is he morally restrained (or live the holy life) out of some kind of fear (such as those arising from religious dogma and theistic beliefs), or that he is totally lust-free, that is, spiritually liberated? [§9]

¹ See Analayo 2010:7. Jayatilleke, commenting on **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 76) says that “doubt about the claims of the Tathāgata is not condemned, but in fact plays a central role in the process of inquiry which is considered to be essential prior to and for the generation of belief (or faith)” (1963:392). This is a classic example of belief or faith through personal verification.

² In **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 4), we find the term *vīmaṃsaka*, which I have tr as “investigator.” Elsewhere, esp in **Sandaka S** (M 76), we have *vīmaṃsī* (used in ref to a non-Buddhist speculator), which I have tr as “inquirer” (in the rationalist context): see M 76/1:513-524 @ SD 35.7 (3.1.3).

³ Be Ce *ajānantena*; only Ee has *ājānantena* (“with the knowing, or knowing”) clearly wr. The context clearly requires the negative *ajānantena* (*na*, “not” + *jānāti*, “he knows,” as neg participle), since the monk who is unable to direct know the Buddha’s mind that he is fully awakened must infer this from external means, such as his bodily and verbal conduct. See M:ÑB 1244 n482.

⁴ “How to read another’s mind, *parassa ceto,pariyāyam*, also “the range of another’s mind.” Here, Comy glosses *pariyāya* as “turn, track (n)” (*vāra*) and “range, limit” (*pariccheda*) (MA 2:378).

⁵ In this connection, it is useful to read **The teacher or the teaching?** SD 3.14.

The investigator then questions the Buddha himself [§10], who confirms his observations in a positive way [§§11-13]. As a result, the investigator gains wise faith⁶ not only in the Buddha, but in the Three Jewels [§14]. If others were to ask him about his faith in the Dharma and the sangha, he answers that he has himself heard the Dharma from the Buddha, who is fully self-awakened [§15].

His faith has arisen from seeing the truth for himself, rooted in vision (*dassana, mūlika*). As such, it is unshakable, even by Māra or Brahmā or anyone else. The monks rejoice in this discourse [§16].

1.2 ĀGAMA PARALLEL AND A FEW PROBLEMS.

1.2.1 Close parallels. There is a Chinese version of the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta in the Madhyama Āgama,⁷ which has been translated into English by Analayo (2010). While the Pali M 47 records the venue as Jeta's Grove near Sāvattihī, the Chinese translation, MĀ 186, gives it as Kammāsa, damma in the Kuru country.⁸ Both the Pali sutta and its Chinese parallel begin with the Buddha instructing that a monk who has no mind-reading power should examine the Buddha by way of observing his bodily action and speech to ascertain if they are defiled, mixed, or pure, and whether he has attained them permanently (for a long time), showing them consistently, or only temporarily.

For the rest of the discourse, both the versions generally agree, except for two points. When the Pali sutta says that the Buddha is famous, his fame does not harm him [§8], the Chinese version simply says that the Buddha's practice of meditation is not motivated by the desire for fame or gain [§8n]. Secondly, while the Pali sutta states that the Buddha does not identify with his moral virtue [§13], the Chinese version omits this statement.

1.2.2 *Dīgha, rattam samāpanno ... ittara. samāpanno.* In section 7 of the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta, the investigating monk asks:

‘Has this venerable one attained to this wholesome state for a long time, or has he attained it for a short while [temporarily]?’⁹ [§7]

The Āgama version reads 為長夜行此法，為暫行？ *wéi cháng yè xíng cǐ fǎ, wéi zàn xíng*,¹⁰ which closely reflects the Pali, *dīgha, rattam samāpanno ayam-āyasmā imam kusalam dhammam, udāhu ittara, samāpannō ti?* and the translation here.

Bodhi here, however, renders it as “Has this venerable one attained this wholesome state over a long time or did he attain it recently?” which is curious, as Analayo has noted, that it is “not how long ago the Buddha had attained [it], but whether he was practising *consistently* or only *temporarily*” (Analayo 2003: 192; emphases added).¹¹

⁶ On *faith*, see SD 10.7(1).

⁷ MĀ 186 = T1.731a-732a, which has the similar title “in search of understanding,” 求解 *qiújiě*. P Skilling, *Mahā-sūtra 2*, Oxford: PTS, 1997:341 notes a ref to a version of the present discourse in an *uddāna* preserved in Samatha, -deva's comy on the Abhidharmakośa at D mngon pa ju 235b4 or Q tu 269a5, reading *rjes [su] 'brang [ba]*, which would correspond to *anveṣanā*, and thus result in the discourse on “investigating.” See Analayo 2006:192.

⁸ On Kammāsa, damma, see SD 13.1 (1.3). On Kuru country, see SD 13.1 (1.2).

⁹ *Dīgha, rattam samāpanno ayam-āyasmā imam kusalam dhammam, udāhu ittara, samāpannō ti?* “A short while,” *ittara* (adj), sometimes misspelt as *itara*: (1) (Ved Skt *itvara*, “going, moving” going along, (fig) passing), “fleeting, temporary, brief,” as meant here; opp “for a long time” (*dīgha, ratta*); (2) “limited, unreliable,” A 3:165 ~ *pema*; Miln 93 *ittaratā*; (3) (BHS *itvara*, small, inferior, eg ~ *dāna*, Divy 317) “low birth” (~ *jacca*, M 2:47; A 2:34; Sn 757. See PED, CPD, DPL, BHSD sv. Comy explains as “since a very long time (Be Se *aticira, kālato*; Ee *cira, kālato*), or attained yesterday (*hiyyo*)” (MA 2:382), which however seems to miss the context, as even if one were awakened yesterday or today itself, that awakening is no different from being awakened decades ago. In fact, the Chinese version (based on a Prakrit text) reflects the Pali better: see Intro (1.2).

¹⁰ MĀ 186 = T1.731b19.

¹¹ See further Analayo 2006:192 n141, an important n where he says that in the Chin tr of this passage, 為長夜行此法，為暫行 *wéi cháng yè xíng cǐ fǎ, wéi zàn xíng* (MĀ 186 = T1.731b19), the use of 行 *xíng* does not seem to be just a free tr of an equivalent to the *samāpanna* found in the Pali, since other occurrences of the vb *samāpajjati* or its past part *samāpanna* in Majjhima have their counterparts in 入 *rù* or 得 *dé* in their MĀ parallels: cf M 43/1:296,12: *samāpanno* and MĀ 210 = T1.789a11: 入; M 50/1:333,24: *samāpannam* and MĀ 131 = T1.620c22: 入; M 79/2:37,-

Furthermore, in **the Dahara Sutta** (S 3.1), the Buddha tells the rajah Pasenadi, who is doubtful about the Buddha's awakening due to his youth, that the attainment of a monk, even a young one, should not be doubted, especially if he is perfect in virtue (S 3.1). This discourse is also found in both the Chinese versions of the Saṃyukta Āgama and a Sanskrit fragment.¹²

1.2.3 Tathāgata ... ayam āyasmā. In the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta [§§4-7], that is, from M 1:318,3 up till M 1:318,26, the monk refers to the Buddha as *tathāgata*, but from M 1:318,27 onwards, refers to him as “this venerable one,” *ayam āyasmā*. The Chinese MĀ 186 is more consistent here, since the monk is recorded throughout as referring to the Buddha as “this venerable one,” 彼尊者 *bǐ zūnzhě*¹³ (Analayo 2003: 192 n139).

This interesting change in pronominal (pronoun) reference is interesting and significant. The pronoun phrase, *ayam āyasmā*, is also found in a similar investigative context regarding a forest monk, as recorded in **the Gulissāni Sutta** (M 69), but not in the reflexive sense as used by the Buddha in the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta. The form *ayam āyasmā* is common,¹⁴ but is never used in the reflexive sense as mentioned.

The impression we get from this development in the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta is that these investigations should be done not only regarding the Teacher, that is, the Buddha, but also in regard to other monastics, especially teachers or trainers. This surmise is clearly valid as the Buddha has attained parinirvana, and hence the discourse would be useful if it also refers to living teachers. [4.1]

2 Key and related words

2.1 VĪMAṂSĀ AND RELATED WORDS. The word *vīmaṃsaka* is both an adjective (“inquisitive, investigative”) and an agent noun or nomen agents (“an investigator”). There is also the rarer agent noun form, *vīmaṃsī*,¹⁵ which the Commentaries gloss as “wise” (*paṇḍito* etc).¹⁶ Both come from the stem *vīmaṃsā* (f) [see below], whose verb is *vīmaṃsati*,¹⁷ “he considers, examines, think over, finds out.”¹⁸

It has at least two abstract nouns: the first is *vīmaṃsana* (“investigation, investigating, texting, finding out”),¹⁹ and the second, the more important term, is *vīmaṃsā*, which is the fourth of the 4 bases of spirit-

26: *samāpajjati* and MĀ 208 = T1.786a16: 得; M 106/2:262,15: *samāpajjati* and MĀ 75 = T1.542b22: 得; M 136/3:207,14: *samāpanno* and MĀ 171 = T1.706b22: 入. This suggests that the orig on which the tr of MĀ 186 was based had a different verb at this point of its exposition. (Analayo however does not say what this vb is or might be.) Hirakawa 1997: 1043, however, lists a broad range of possible equivalents to 行, which does, however, not comprise *samāpad*; cf also Zacchetti 2005a: 245 n27, 322 n29 and 339 n75 on the use of 行 by Dharmarakṣa.

¹² S 3.1/1:69 @ SD 42.11; SĀ 1226 = T 2.335a2; SĀ2 53 = T2.391c17; Saṅghabhedavastu, ed Gnoli, *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu* pt 1, 1977:182,17. See Analayo 2006:193.

¹³ Note: 彼 *bǐ* means “that, the other; he, him,” in contrast to 此 *cǐ*, “this.”

¹⁴ M 69/1:469-473 @ SD 73.8 (the whole sutta); also in **Kīṭa, giri S** (M 70/1:479 f); **Caṅkī S** (M 2:172 f); **Pañcataya S** (M 102.24/2:237) (where the Buddha, *tathāgata*, refers to a “this venerable one,” *ayam āyasmā*); **Ṭhāna S** (A 4.192/2:287) @ SD 14.12 (the whole sutta); **Āghāta Paṭivīnaya S 1** (A 5.161/3:185); **Āghāta Paṭivīnaya S 2** (A 5.162/3:189); **Nāgita S** (A 6.42/3:343); **Soṇa (Koḷivīsa) S** (A 6.55/3:376 f); **(Brahmā) Tissa S** (A 7.53/4:77 f); **Paññā S** (A 8.2/4:153-155); **(Nāgita) Yasa S** (A 8.86/4:344); **Nandaka S** (A 9.4/4:362); **Kāya S** (A 10.23/5:40 f); **Mahā Cunda S** (A 10.24/5:41-45); **Vyākaraṇa S** (A 10.84/5:156 f); **Kaṭṭhī S** (A 10.85/5:158-161); **Adhimāna S** (A 10.86/5:162-164); Nm 1:238; Pm 2:19; V 1:183 f (on Soṇa's going-forth).

¹⁵ Sn 877; Nm 283; DA 1:106.

¹⁶ Nm 1:283,23; SnA 554,2-3.

¹⁷ Ved *mīmāṃsate*, desid of √MAN, to think, “to wish to think,” where *m* become *v* through dissimilation. Dissimilation is a linguistic process by which one of two similar sounds in a word becomes less like the other, eg the Old French *marbre* dissimilated into the English *marble*, and the Latin *peregrīnus* became the English *pilgrim* with the first *r* of the Latin word dissimilated into *l*. Cf Geiger, *Pali Grammar*, rev ed, 2000:46.4.

¹⁸ Sn 215, 405; J 1:128, 147, 6:334; Miln 143.

¹⁹ V 3:79; J 3:55; PvA 153.

ual power (*iddhi,pāda*), namely, will (*chanda*), effort (*virīya*), the mind (*citta*) and investigation (*vīmaṃsā*).²⁰

Will is the enthusiasm, a wholesome desire, we show towards personal or mental development. This then translates into physical and mental effort to cultivate the mind, that is, to train it to become calm and clear, so that it grows in wisdom. Investigation (*vīmaṃsā*) is wisdom in its mode of investigating into the reasons for progress or decline in meditation.²¹

There are two more important forms related to *vīmaṃsā*, both the prefix *pari~* (denoting completion or fulfillment, “all around”), that is, the verb, *parivīmaṃsati*, “he thinks over, considers thoroughly, examines, searches,”²² and the noun, *parivīmaṃsā* (f), “full inquiry, thorough examination or search.”²³

2.2 VĪMAṂSAKA. As already noted [2.1], the word *vīmaṃsaka* is both an adjective (“inquisitive, investigative”) and an agent noun or nomen agens (“an investigator”). The Commentary explains that there are three kinds of investigators (*vīmaṃsaka*), that is, (1) an investigator of meanings (*attha,vīmaṃsaka*), (2) an investigator of formations (*saṅkhāra,vīmaṃsaka*), and (3) an investigator of the teacher (*satthu,-vīmaṃsaka*). It cites the following references as examples for them:

- (1) An investigator of meanings (*attha,vīmaṃsaka*), as in **the (Vīmaṃsaka) Deva,daha Sutta** (S 22.2):

“For the wise, avuso, are people who investigate [who are inquisitive]” (*paṇḍitā hi āvuso manussā vīmaṃsakā*) (S 22.2/3:6), SD 35.6..

This is the most general sense of the word, referring to our being inquisitive, especially an eagerness to learn.

- (2) An investigator of formations (*saṅkhāra,vīmaṃsaka*), as in **the Bahu,dhātuka Sutta** (M 115):

“Ānanda, when a monk is skilled in the elements, skilled in the sense-bases, skilled in dependent arising, and skilled in the possible and the impossible—to that extent, Ānanda, a monk is called wise, an investigator.” (*Yato kho ānanda bhikkhu dhātu,kusalo ca hoti āyatana,kusalo ca hoti, paṭicca,samuppāda,kusalo ca hoti, ṭhānāṭṭhāna,kusalo ca hoti, ettāvatā kho ānanda, paṇḍito bhikkhu vīmaṃsako ti alaṃ vacanāya*) (M 115.3/3:62), SD 29.1a.

Here the investigation is focussed more on the teachings regarding the nature of our being, our conditioned reality.

- (3) An investigator of the Teacher (*satthu,vīmaṃsaka*), as here in **the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta** (M 35.6).

(MA 2:378)

From such an analysis [2.1-2], we can safely say that the word “investigator” (*vīmaṃsaka*) is not only a wise person (*paṇḍita*) but also a meditator. For, the purpose of such an investigation of the teacher is not an intellectual one or merely to ascertain the Buddha’s or a teacher’s “status,” but that we are being taught or guided by a morally virtuous, spiritually competent and patiently compassionate teacher who is able to inspire us to walk the path to awakening.

2.3 SAMANNESANĀ AND RELATED WORDS. Let us look at the key statement that reads:

The Tathagata, bhikshus, should be examined (*samannesanā kātabbā*)²⁴ by a monk, an investigator ...

²⁰ Refs to *iddhi,pāda* D 3:71n (*samādhi~*), 222; S 5:280; A 1:39, 297, 3:37, 346, 5:24, 90, 338; Pm 1:19, 2:123; Kvu 508; Dhs 269; Vbh 219 (*samādhi~*), 222, 227; TikaP 2; Nett 16 (*~samādhi*), 42; DA 1:106; SnA 349. See also **Cattāro Iddhi,pāda** @ SD 10.3 (1.1); **Cakka,vatti Siha,nāda S** (D 26.28/3:77), SD 36.10; **Mahā Sakul’udāyī S** (M 77,17/2:11) @ SD 49.5; **Chanda Samādhi Sutta** (S 51.13/5:268 f) @ SD 10.3(3.2); **Iddhi,pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20/5:276-281) @ SD 28.14.

²¹ See SD 10.3 (1.2).

²² S 2:80 f; It 42 = Sn 972 (cf Nm 508); DA 1:134; DhA 4:117 (*attānam*).

²³ M 3:85; S 3:331, 5:68; SnA 173.

²⁴ The key word, *samannesanā* (“inquiring, examining, investigating”) has its verb as *samannesati* or *samanvesati* (“he seeks, looks for, searches, examines, investigates”), which comes from *sam* (“together”) + *anvesati* (ie, *anu*

Vīmaṃsakena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā ... tathāgate samānnesanā kātabbā. [§2]

We see here the phrase “should make an investigation” (*samānnesanā kātabbā*) [§2] (rather an awkward construction) and the simpler “should be examined” (*samaṇesitabba*) [§4] acting as the verbs for the agent noun, “investigator” (*vīmaṃsaka*). A more appropriate (and simpler) word here would be *vīmaṃsati* or *parivīmaṃsati* [2.1]. It hints of a process of *psychologization*²⁵ of the teachings, that is, towards an Abhidhamma trend [4].

Having said that, we should note that the key word, *samānnesanā* (“inquiring, examining, investigating”)²⁶ is an important one. Its verb is *samānnesati* or *samaṇvesati* (“he seeks, looks for, searches, examines, investigates”), which comes from *saṃ* (“together”) + *anvesati* (ie, *anu*, “along, following, after”²⁷ + *esati*, “he seeks,” from √IS, to seek, desire),²⁸ meaning “he seeks after or repeatedly or consistently.”²⁹

From all this, we gather that *samānnesanā* means a thorough (*anu-*) inner (*saṃ-*) inquiry (*esanā*) regarding a state, object or person before oneself. On the other hand, a near-synonym, *pariyesanā* or *pariyesana* (*pari*, denoting completion or fulfillment, “all around” + *y*, sandhi infix, + *esanā*, “search, quest”),³⁰ and its verb *pariyesati* (BHS *pariyeṣate*), “he investigates,”³¹ denotes a sustained outer search, that is, noticing what is lacking in ourselves, we seek “outside,” as it were (eg, from other teachers or methods) for answers or liberation.

3 The investigative seeker

3.1 THE INVESTIGATOR’S FAITH. The Vīmaṃsaka Sutta closes with the declaration of *the unshakable faith* of the disciple who investigates the moral virtue of the Buddha,

Bhikshus, whose faith in the Tathagata is certain, well rooted, established, in these ways, these sentences, these words—

this, bhikshus, is called faith with a good cause, rooted in vision, firm. It is immovable [invincible] by any recluse or brahmin, or deva [god] or Māra or Brahmā [God] or by anyone in the world. [§16]

The Commentary on **the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta** (M 47) states that such an investigative disciple would attain to streamwinning (MA 2:389). Two possible reasons for this are that the Sutta describes this disciple’s faith as being “rooted in vision” (*dassana, mūlika*), and secondly, that he is faith-rooted [§16].

Similarly, in **the Uṇṇābha Sutta** (S 48.42), the commentator is not comfortable with the likelihood of *a layman attaining non-return* (despite the Sutta’s allusion to this effect). In the case of the Vīmaṃsaka

+ *esati*, “he seeks after or repeatedly”). The abstract n *samānnesanā* is also the key word of **Caṅkī S** (M 95.20/-2:173) + SD 21.15 (1.3.2).

²⁵ Psychologization here is the process and system of investigating or explaining mental states in systematic sets (such as locating the mind “base” as in the physical heart) and measured categories (such as the numbering of thought-moments). Character profiling is also done in terms of individuals (as in the “personality types”) rather than behavioural tendencies, as often laid out in the early texts. Psychologized methods may be helpful in modern counselling, but the early sutta’s methodology is simpler (less theoretical) and more *problem-orientated* rather than *person-oriented*.

²⁶ BHS *samaṇveṣanā*, “search” (Mvyut 7278).

²⁷ The prefix *anu-* as the 2nd part of a prefix-cpd is found only here, as *sam+anu-* (PED, sv *anu*¹).

²⁸ Geiger, *A Pāli Grammar*, rev ed, 2000 §54.5.

²⁹ The abstract n *samānnesanā* is also the key word of **Caṅkī S** (M 95), where it is mentioned in detail (M 95.20/-2:173) + SD 21.15 (1.3.2). On *samānnesanā*, see Pematatana 2004: §2.2.1 (56-67).

³⁰ (*~nā*, f) D 2:58, 61, 280 twofold, *sevitaḥḥa* (worthy of accepting) and *sevitaḥḥa* (not to be associated with), 3:289; M 1:161 twofold, *ariya* (noble) and *anariya* (ignoble); A 1:68 (*kāma~*), 93, 2:247 (id); S 1:143, 2:144, 171, 3:29, 4:8 f *assāda* (gratification) and *ādīnava* (danger, disadvantage); (*~na*, nt) Nm 262; DhA 1:76, 3:256.

³¹ D 1:223; S 1:177, 181, 4:62; A 2:23, 25, 247; Sn 482; Nm 262; Nc 427; J 1:3, 138; Miln 109, 313; DhA 3:163; PvA 31. For other forms, see PED: *pariyesati*.

Sutta (M 47), however, the attainment of the disciple (in this case, a monk), the commentator surmises, must be streamwinning (MA 2:389).

3.2 HOW DO WE PROPERLY INVESTIGATE A TEACHER? The Vīmaṅsaka Sutta (M 47) exhorts us to investigate the moral and spiritual worth of our teachers so that we would truly benefit from *spiritual friendship*³² with them. Far from being summary judges of people, we are exhorted to mindfully and compassionately examine their conduct and moral virtue over a period of time. We should check out the following:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| (1) Do we see or hear of “defiled states” in that teacher? | [§4] |
| (2) Do we see or hear of “mixed states” (inconsistencies) in that teacher? | [§5] |
| (3) Do we see or hear of “purified states” in that teacher, or not? | [§6] |
| (4) Is his wholesome attainment (spiritual quality) sustained or only temporary? | [§7] |
| (5) Has fame and honour negatively affected him? | [§8] |
| (6) Is his conduct motivated by fear or by having overcome lust? | [§9] |
| (7) Is his good conduct consistent whether he is with others or in solitude? | [§10] |
| (8) He should confirm all this with the Buddha (or the teacher) himself. | [§11] |

Since we do not have mind-reading powers, our investigations need to be based on personal observation and the testimonies of others [§4]. This investigation is done with “the eye and the ear,” that is, by way of what is *seen* or visually evident of the teacher’s conduct, and what is *heard* or from his teachings and the way he speaks. Details on how to do this are found in such texts as **the Jaṭṭa Sutta** (S 3.11) and **the Ṭhāna Sutta** (A 4.192).³³ **The Rūpa Sutta** (A 4.65) warns us against “measuring” a teacher by way of charisma (that is, by his looks, voice or austerity), but to gauge him in terms of the Dharma.³⁴

The Kesa,puttiya Sutta (A 3.65), however, reminds us of the inadequacies of *sense-based* sources of knowing, and of knowledge based on *logic and intellectual efforts*. In other words, to some extent we need to reserve any kind of judgement, but keep on observing patterns of behaviour of the teacher (or anyone, for that matter), until we are very certain of them. Furthermore, how we come to this certainty and how we respond to it depend very much on our own level of wisdom, compassion and practice.

Clearly, if a teacher is consistently immoral or unwise, we should avoid him. However, the situation is never an easy one, as we tend to measure others by way of our own conditionings and biases: in short, we tend to be attracted to teachers who are a reflection of ourselves or fulfill our lack. As such, some proper understanding of the Dharma (especially the suttas) and the Vinaya are vital here. Our grasp of the Dharma and Vinaya should guide our investigations with some wisdom and faith.

Moreover, we need to keep up cultivating our own moral virtue, and our mindfulness and meditation practices, so that we have a calm and clear mind in our investigations. With such a mind, we can also be better prepared to ask useful questions of the teachers, and to better understand their teachings and conduct. Above all, *our own practice* will in due course become *our own true teacher*, that is, the Dharma becomes our one true refuge.³⁵

3.3 HOW DO WE KNOW A TEACHER IS AWAKENED? An important result of a successful investigation of a Dharma teacher is that it inspires *wise faith* in the investigator [§14]. Colin Edwards takes this arising of firm faith in the Dharma as “standing in contrast,” that is, incongruent, even opposed, to the idea that early Buddhism advocates freedom of thought (2008:235). However, it is clear from the sutta that such faith conduces to the attaining of streamwinning, as affirmed by the Buddha who calls it “faith with a good cause, rooted in vision.”³⁶

³² See **Spiritual friendship: A textual study**, SD 34.1.

³³ Respectively, S 3.11/1:78 f (= U 6.2/65 f), SD 14.11 & A 4.192/2:187-190 @ SD 14.12.

³⁴ A 4.65/2:71; Pug 4.22/7 (*māṭikā*); explained in Pug 4.22/53 f; PugA 229 f; cfA 2:70; SnA 242; DhA 3:113 f. See **The teacher or the teaching**, SD 3.14(7). On the relationship of *measures* (*pamāṇa*) to *conceit* (*māna*), see **Pubba Sambodha S 1** (S 35.13), SD 14.9 (3) & **Me: The problems of conceit**, SD 19.2a (3.5).

³⁵ See **Garava S** (S 6.2/1:138-140), SD 12.3; **Uruvelā S 1** (A 4.21/2:20 f).

³⁶ *Ākāra, vatī saddhā dassana, mūlikā dalhā*, see §16n.

Analayo explains that the “wise faith” passage [§14] points to the inner certitude that comes with the attainment of streamwinning. He quotes a phrase from a related passage in **the Kosambiya Sutta** (M 48), which says that we could “through direct knowledge, come to a certainty [conclusion] about a teaching” (*abhiññāya idh’ekaccaṃ dhammaṃ, dhamme niṭṭhaṃ gacchati*, M 48,14/1:319 f). The commentary on it says, “on account of direct knowledge in some Dharma-realization, he comes to a certainty in realizing the Dharma in a Dharma teaching by way of that direct knowledge” (*ekaccaṃ paṭivedha,dhammaṃ abhiññāya tena abhiññātena paṭivedha,dhammena desanā,dhamme niṭṭhaṃ gacchati* (MA 2:388,9). Its subcommentary (*ṭīkā*) explains *paṭivedha,dhammaṃ abhiññāya* as “having understood with the wisdom of the path” (*magga,paññāya jānitvā*).³⁷ All this is possible, says Analayo,

as a stream-enterer would know for certain that the one who taught him or her must also be awakened (and by implication that the teachings received must have the potential of leading to awakening). This certainly does not contradict the principle of freedom of thought evident in the remainder of the discourse’s recommendation to freely query the teacher’s claim to being awakened, but is only the final product arrived at through a process of free inquiry, which has resulted in confidence in the one whose teachings have led the stream-enterer to realization. (2010:13 n20)

Just as some might set a thief to catch a thief, on the positive side, it takes a wise person to see the wisdom in another. We must say that only when we have attained at least to the level of a streamwinner that we can be truly certain of another’s spiritual attainment, at least of streamwinning itself.³⁸ A streamwinner is like a thirsty person who has reached a well and is able to see the water in it, but he lacks the means to draw water. He would also probably see others too, like him, at the well, and it is a matter of time that they are all quenched and rested.³⁹

3.4 PERSONAL VERIFICATION

3.4.1 On a somewhat technical level, it can be said that the Vīmaṅsaka Sutta (M 47) is about personal verification of religious truth, leading to *spiritual liberation*. When we have fully investigated the teacher as laid out in the Sutta, understandably a certain level of faith (*saddhā*) would arise in us. This faith should then move us to practise the teachings for ourselves.

However, we only attain the full fruit of this faith when we have personally verified for ourselves the teachings’ efficacy. The best way that the Dharma is verified is undeniably by our attaining to the path, especially arhathood. When this spiritual distinction is attained, that faith blossoms into liberating insight, or at least insight wisdom, in the case of the “learner” (*sekha*) saints (that is, the streamwinners, the once-returns, the non-returns, and the arhat-to-be). In the case of at least two great disciples, one a monk and the other a layman, we see a paradoxical turn of language when this transformation has been attained.

3.4.2 **The Pubba Koṭṭhaka Sutta** (S 48.44) is a simple but important discourse about how Sāriputta, *on account of his wisdom* realizes the liberating truth for himself, and declares: “I am one, bhante, for whom this is known, seen, understood, realized, touched by *wisdom*—I have no uncertainty, no doubt, about” the 5 faculties (that is, those of faith, of effort, of mindfulness, of concentration, of wisdom).⁴⁰ Through this realization, he *also gains wise faith* in the teacher (the Buddha, and also the 3 jewels as a whole). The word “**touched**” (*phusitaṃ*) here refers to Sāriputta’s *personal verification* of the truth of the teaching.

3.4.3 Another classic example of personal verification (and a humorous one, too) is that of Citta the householder, as recorded in **the Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta** (S 41.8). When Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta asks

³⁷ MAṬ:Be 2:303.

³⁸ See **Saṅgaha Bala S** (A 9.5), where a saint of the same type is able to be compatibly impartial to one another, ie, clearly know that the other’s mind is free from the biases of greed, hate, delusion and fear. Of course, it goes without saying that a saint of a higher attainment is able to unilaterally know this of any other saint of a lower level (A 9.5.4/4:364), SD 2.21.

³⁹ This parable is my own, slightly modified from the one given in **(Musīla Narada) Kosambī S** (S 12.68), which actually refers to a non-returner (S 12.68/2:115-118), SD 70.11. See the well-looking parable in SD 30.3(2.1.1).

⁴⁰ S 48.44/5:220-222 @ SD 10.7.

Citta about a point of meditation, Citta replies, “In this matter, bhante, I do not go by faith in the Blessed One” Nāta,putta misconstrues this, thinking that Citta actually has *no* faith in the Buddha, and proudly declares his misconception before his assembly! Citta then explains that he knows this for a fact by personal verification so that he does not *need* to have faith in the Buddha to know this!⁴¹

3.4.4 In fact, a person who awakens on account of personal verification is highly acclaimed as “the supreme person” (*uttama, purisa*), in what is perhaps the most cryptic of the Dhammapada verses (Dh 97), *cryptic*, that is, to those who lack understanding in the importance of personal verification in Buddhist training. Dh 97 declares that “the faithless one” (*asaddha*) is “the supreme person,” or that “the supreme person is *without* faith”!⁴² The negative statement here does not have the ordinary sense, but is a wordplay meaning that it is *not through faith*, but through wisdom, that he has attained that state. Technically, this kind of statement is said to be an **apophasis**, that is, the use of *negative language* to express a transcendental truth or reality, such as awakening or nirvana.⁴³

3.4.5 An apophatic statement sees nirvana as ineffable and attempts to describe it in terms of what it is *not*. **Apophasis** refers to the *transcendence* of nirvana in this context, as opposed, loosely speaking, to **cataphasis**, referring to *immanence* of consciousness.⁴⁴ It is important to note that “immanent” here refers to “this” world of the senses and virtual realities, while “transcendence” refers to the supramundane state that is ineffable that we can only be “touched” by personal experience.⁴⁵

Since such a realization of the truth is not an external investment (such as the certification of Zen enlightenment) or cognitive faith through grace (as in word-based God-centred religions and Pure Land Buddhism), but *an internal or personal experience and realization*, this experience-based faith is real and unshakeable.

3.4.6 The student’s investigation has been summarized by **Analayo** thus:

- (1) “comprehensive range of investigation of the teacher,”
- (2) “put the teaching to the test,”
- (3) “the investigation has yielded an initial degree of confidence (*saddhā*),” and
- (4) “personal verification of their efficacy.”

And he concludes:

The thorough testing advocated in these four steps clearly shows that in early Buddhist thought the principle of free inquiry was invested with remarkable importance. In sum, in early Buddhist thought—in the way this is reflected in the discourses preserved in the Pāli *Nikāyas* and the Chinese *Āgamas*—the scope of free inquiry is such that the teacher and founder of the tradition himself can become an object of rather searching type of scrutiny and examination by a prospective disciple. (Analayo 2010:18)

4 Is the Vīmaṃsaka Sutta late?

4.1 CHANGE OF REFERENCE. From the Sutta’s opening up till §6 (M 1:318,22), the monk (as narrated by the Buddha) refers to the Buddha as “Tathagata,” but from §7 (M 1:318,25) onwards, refers to him as “this venerable one,” *ayam āyasmā* [1.2.3]. The Chinese **MĀ 186** is more consistent in this respect, since there the monk throughout refers to the Buddha as “this venerable one,” 彼尊者 *bǐ zūnzhě* (Analayo 2006: 192 n139).

This switch in the person addressed—from “Tathagata” to “this venerable one”—is very significant, as it suggests that these investigations should be done with other monastics, too. Of course, it is also possible that §§6-7 could have been interpolated. Any such interpolation, however, would still work in the

⁴¹ S 41.8/4:298-300 @ SD 40a.7.

⁴² See **Dh 97: The two levels of religious language**, SD 10.6; cf Dh 383.

⁴³ See **Notion of *diṭṭhi***, SD 40a.1 (6.3).

⁴⁴ See Johansson 1969 (on nirvana and western psychology), esp ch 11 (34-43); D’Amato 2008.

⁴⁵ **Dh 97: The two levels of religious language**, SD 10.6.

same way, reinforcing the main purpose of the Sutta's thesis (as found in its older sections):⁴⁶ the teacher should be an authentic one.

4.2 WORDS LOST AND RARE.

4.2.1 *Samāpanna*. Another significant point is apparent from a comparative study of the sutta. **Ana-layo**, in his Nikāya-Agama study, refers to this passage:

‘Has this venerable one attained to this wholesome state for a long time, or has he attained it for a short while [temporarily]?’ [§7]

and points out that its Chinese translation reads: 為長夜行此法, 為暫行 *wéi cháng yè xíng cǐ fǎ, wéi zàn xíng* (MĀ 186 = T1.731b19). Here, he says that the use of 行 *xíng* does not seem to be just a free translation of an equivalent to the Pali *samāpanna*, since other occurrences of the verb *samāpajjati* or its participle *samāpanna* in Majjhima have their counterparts in 入 *rù* or 得 *dé* in their MĀ parallels.⁴⁷ This suggests, he concludes, that the original on which the translation of MĀ 186 was based at this point of its exposition.⁴⁸ However, from the present texts, it is impossible to say what this Pali word should have been.

4.2.2 Large urbanized communities. This point of vocabulary does not in itself suggest that the sutta is late, except perhaps the possibility of a transmission error. The point, however, remains that there is here a concern of authenticating the Buddha or a teacher. This may suggest that the text was compiled at a time when the monastic community was large, settled and widespread, so that the Buddha was not always present in the far-flung monastic communities.

This is broadly hinted at with such allusions as to the teacher's "gaining fame" and becoming charismatic [§8], and to the monks "dwelling in a community, or is dwelling alone, while some there are well-behaved or some are ill-behaved" [§10]. This is further supported by the earlier remark that the Buddha "had gained his attainment" (*samāpanna*) for a time long since (*dīgha, ratta*) [§7].

All this probably point to a period after the first twenty years of his ministry, when there were "more training-rules but fewer monks established in final knowledge [become arhats]," as stated in **the Sad-dhamma Paṭirūpaka Sutta** (S 16.13).⁴⁹ As the Buddhist monastic communities became larger, more widespread and more urbanized (that is more settled), they needed to be better organized, and this is part of efforts to systematize such burgeoning communities with a set of criteria for authenticating teachers.

4.2.3 *Vinodāta*. In §6, we see the word *vinodāta*, "purified or cleansed," or more fully, *vodātā dhammā*, "purified states," describing the Buddha's conduct. The word *vodāta* (from *vi-*, intensifier, + *odāta*, "clean, white") is rare, and in the suttas, it seems to be found only here in the Vīmaṅsaka Sutta, and in metric form as in the Sutta Nipāta, as *avīvadātā* (Sn 784) and *vīvadātā* (Sn 881), but is common in the Commentaries.⁵⁰

The usual words for "pure" would be *suddha*, "pure, clean, perfect,"⁵¹ or *parisuddha*, "thoroughly pure, clean, perfect."⁵² Their respective opposites are *asuddha*, "impure, unclean"⁵³ and *aparisuddha*, "ut-

⁴⁶ It is possible that the sutta started off with an ancient core, but new materials were added to it, that is, before the canon was closed.

⁴⁷ **Analayo** 2006:192 n141. Cf M 43/1:296,12: *samāpanno* and MĀ 210 = T1.789a11: 入 *rù*; M 50/1:333,24: *samāpannam* and MĀ 131 = T1.620c22: 入; M 79/2:37,26: *samāpajjati* and MĀ 208 = T1.786a16: 得 *dé*; M 106/2:262,-15: *samāpajjati* and MĀ 75 = T1.542b22 : 得; M 136/3:207,14: *samāpanno* and MĀ 171 = T1.706b22: 入.

⁴⁸ Hirakawa 1997: 1043 lists a broad range of possible equivalents to 行 *xíng*, which does, however, not comprise *samāpad*; cf also Zacchetti 2005a: 245 n27, 322 n29 and 339 n75 on the use of 行 by Dharmarakṣa.

⁴⁹ S 16.13/2:222: see SD 1.10(5.3).

⁵⁰ It is found in a number of comys (MA 2:381; SnA 2:555 ×2; NmA 2:361). However, it is common as cpds in the canonical comy, Mahā Niddesa: ~*dassana* (Nm 1:96, 2:289, 327), ~*dassī* (Nm 1:96), ~ *paññā* (Nm 2:289), ~ *magga* (Nm 2:300, 324), ~*vāda* (Nm 2:327).

⁵¹ (Ethical & psychological) M 1:39; Dh 125, 412; Sn 90.

⁵² V 2:237; M 1:26, 3:11; S 2: 199, 3:235, 5:301, 354; A 3:125, 4:120 f; J 1:265; Pug 28

⁵³ V 1:5 = M 1:168; V 3:166; S 1:79; Nm 448.

terly unclean, impure.⁵⁴ Another common pair of words related to purity of states and persons are *asaṅkiliṭṭha*, “undefiled, untarnished”⁵⁵ and *saṅkiliṭṭha*, “defiled, tarnished.”⁵⁶ Their noun, *kilesa*, “defilement,” is very common.⁵⁷

Such forms as *vodāta* suggest that at least that particular sentence or section is late. If such late forms are found throughout the sutta, then it is very likely to be a late text. Much of the key words of the Vīmaṅsaka Sutta, some of which we have examined here, suggests that it is likely to be a late text.

4.3 PSYCHOLOGIZING TREND?

4.3.1 Viññānāya. A final point observed that suggests lateness is that there is a hint towards *psychologization*, that is, towards an Abhidhamma trend. This is clearly suggested by the Abhidhamma form, *viññānāya* (“so that he knows”) [§2], literally, “for the sake of knowing ... ,” which the Commentary glosses so, as *vijānan’atthāya* (MA 2:378). This is probably one of the rare places in the suttas where *viññāna* is used in this late sense, “knowing,” rather than the usual sense of “consciousness.”

The word in the same late sense appears as *dhamma,viññāna* (Tha 1020), translated as “expert in the Dharma” by K R Norman.⁵⁸ The Thera, gāthā commentary glosses: “What is referred to as *dhamma,viññāna* is Dharma-knowledge” (*dhamma,viññāna,saṅkhataṃ dhamma,ñānaṃ*, ThaA 3:118). This is clearly a post-canonical usage of *viññāna*.

In fact, in post-canonical works (and non-Buddhist literature), *viññāna* can have the sense of “(practical or applied) knowledge (as opposed to *jñāna* (Skt), theoretical knowledge),” a sense attested by Monier Williams (Sanskrit-English Dictionary: *vijñāna*) and Edgerton (Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary, id).

Then there is the verbal phrase, “should make an investigation” (*samannesanā kātabba*) [§2] (rather an awkward construction), as there is also the simpler verb form, “should be examined” (*samanesitabba*) [§4], both referring to the action of the agent noun, “investigator” (*vīmaṅsaka*). In fact, the more appropriate and simpler verbs here (with practically the same sense as these two) would be *vīmaṅsati* or *parivīmaṅsati* [2.1].

4.3.2 Bhayūparata abhayūparata. Another famous pair of late terms found in the Vīmaṅsaka Sutta are found here in this description of the Buddha:

This venerable one is restrained *not* on account of fear [*free* from fear]; this venerable one is not restrained on account of fear.⁵⁹

Abhayūparato ayam-āyasmā, nāyam-āyasmā bhayūparato. [§9-10]

The two terms are *bhayūparata* and *abhayūparata*. The compound *bhayūparata* comes from *bhaya* (“fear, danger”) and *uparata* (“abstaining”). The adjective *uparata* (past participle of *uparamati*, “he becomes quiet; he dies”) has the following ranges of senses: “quiet, calm, abstaining; ceased, stopped, dead.” But in *bhayūparata* and *abhayūparata*, it means “abstaining (from evil), restrained (in faculties).”⁶⁰

⁵⁴ V 2:236; M 1:17.

⁵⁵ A 2:248, 3:124, 126; Dh 1153. ~*citta* (said of persons) D 1:247; M 1:25; A 1:192 f.

⁵⁶ D 1:247; M 1:163, 318 f, 2:258; S 2:271; A 3:124, 5:169; Dh 244; J 2:418; Pv 4.1.23.

⁵⁷ An afflicting, defiling passion, esp lust: V 3:92; S 5:24 = A 5:232, 253 = Dh 88; A 2:6; Sn 348; Tha 67; Nm 386; J 1:305.

⁵⁸ See also Tha:N 266 n1030.

⁵⁹ Comy: The worldling has 4 fears or dangers (*bhaya*), ie, those of defilements (*kilesa, bhaya*), of the samsaric cycle (*vaṭṭa, bhaya*), of suffering states (*duggati, bhaya*), and of criticism (*upavāda, bhaya*); and the learner (*sekha*) only 3, ie excluding the fear of suffering states; but there is not a single fear for those influxes are destroyed (the arhats). The learners, as such, practise restraint out of fear, while the arhats practise without any fear. (MA 2:385; PugA 184).

⁶⁰ “Restrained,” *uparata* (pp of *uparamati*), (1) (here) having ceased, desisting from (V 1:245 *rattūparata*, “abstaining from food at night” = *ratti, bhojanato uparata*, DA 1:77; D 1:5; M 1:319; Sn 914); (2) ceased, extinguished died (Miln 96, 97, 307).

Apparently, this pair of words is found only in two places in the Pali canon, that is, here in the Vīmaṅsaka Sutta, and in the Puggala Paññatti, an Abhidhamma work. **The Puggala Paññatti** explains these two terms as follows:

The seven learners and the morally virtuous worldling are *restrained on account of fear*. The arhat [worthy one] is restrained *without fear*.

Satta sekhā bhayūparatā ye ca puthujjanā sīlavanto. Arahā abhayūparato. (Pug 1.11-12/13)

Since this pair of terms is found only in the Vīmaṅsaka Sutta, and with other supporting evidence that it is a late sutta, it is very likely that the terms have been taken from **the Puggala Paññatti**. The importance of these two terms is evinced by the fact that it is found in the Abhidhamma Mātikā or matrix, a summary list of key mental states, that is, the key ideas of the Abhidhamma.⁶¹

4.4 CONCLUSION. When we say that a sutta is “late,” we do not necessarily mean that it is in any way less authentic, or even spurious. This is certainly not the case with the Vīmaṅsaka Sutta, where the purpose of the discourse is very clear: *we need to carefully check out or authenticate a teacher, monastic or lay*. If there is a need for such an authentication, it is obvious that there were or are false or incompetent teachers around. This is likely to occur when the sangha has grown large, become more settled and urbanized. The monasteries then would be prosperous and more “socially engaged” (in the sense to having to service large lay followings).

This is a time when there would be teachers who are purely “academic” in their Dharma learning (often reflected in the “venerable doctors” of our own times), but lacking in moral virtue, meditative depth and spiritual authenticity.⁶² Or they appear “professional” (in the modern monetary sense), with merely an impressive veneer of titles, dressing, and add-ons clouded by an air or aura of control, superiority, and social distance.

There are a large number of discourses, prophetic in tone, warning of the dangers of monastics in large, settled, urbanized monasteries engaged in worldly pursuits and goaded on by material priorities. Such an urgency can be sensed in this remark by the Buddha to Mahā Kassapa, as recorded in **the Ovāda Sutta 3** (S 16.8), thus:

Now, it is the monk who is well known and famous, one who gains robes, almsfood, lodgings and medical requisites, that the elder monks invite to a seat, saying: “Come, bhikshu. What is this monk’s name? This is an excellent monk. This monk is keen on the company of his brothers in the holy life. Come, bhikshu, here’s a seat, sit down.” Then, the newly ordained monks will also strive to emulate him, and that leads to their harm and suffering for a long time.

S 6.18/2:208-210 @ SD 1.10⁶³

The Anāgata Bhaya Sutta 3 (A 5.79), probably reflecting a historical situation in early Buddhist times, lists the following shortcomings of such false teachers and monastics, thus:

- (1) They *ordain* others but are unable to give them higher training, and such a lineage continues.
- (2) *The training and tutelage* they give are ineffective, and these continue in the lineage.
- (3) *They lecture on the Dharma* without any understanding, falling into “dark dharmas.”
- (4) *They neglect the Buddha Word* and promote secular learning [S 2:266 f].
- (5) They are *luxurious*, lax, backsliders, not valuing solitude (they enjoy socializing).

A 5.79/3:105-108 @ SD 1.10(3.3); cf S 2:266 f.

In fact, such monastics are practically no different from the laity as they accept and use money, and indulge in sensual pleasures. One main difference is perhaps that they have more money than an average lay devotee, and enjoy *better* physical benefits, leisure and indulgences, such as owning the latest and very

⁶¹ See the VRI CD under Abhidhammamātikāpāḷi, VRI 263, Be 344.

⁶² See eg (**Dhamma.yogī Jhāyī**) **Mahā Cunda S** (A 6.46/3:355 f), SD 4.6; also L S Cousins 2009.

⁶³ See also **Sugata Vinaya S** (A 4.160/2:147-149), SD 1.10(3.5).

sophisticated electronic devices, watches and handphones, enjoying past-times (like playing cricket, or badminton, or swimming) and are often inappropriately close with the laity.⁶⁴

Discourses such as the Vīmaṃsa Sutta, even though they are late texts, are valuable in reminding us to carefully re-assess in whom we place our faith and vision, whether in a person or in the Dharma.⁶⁵ They remind us that we should avoid false gurus: for, if we patronize them, we are only adding to the sure demise of the Dharma.⁶⁶ Much as we listen to others, the bottom line is that we have to make a Dharma-island of ourselves as expressly exhorted by the Buddha in his first and last teachings.⁶⁷

The Discourse on the Investigator

M 47

1 Thus have I heard.

The investigative monk

At one time, the Blessed One was residing in Anātha,piṇḍika’s monastery-park in Jeta’s grove near Sāvattihī.

Then the Blessed One addressed the monks:

“Bhikkhus!”

“Bhante,” the monks replied to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said this:

2 **“The Tathagata, bhikkhus, should be examined⁶⁸ by a monk, an investigator [one who is inquisitive],⁶⁹ who does not know⁷⁰ how to read another’s mind,⁷¹ so that he knows⁷² whether the Blessed One is fully self-awakened or not.”⁷³**

⁶⁴ See **Money and monastics**, SD 4.19.

⁶⁵ See further **The teacher or the teaching**, SD 3.14.

⁶⁶ See **Dharma-ending age**, SD 1.10.

⁶⁷ **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16/2:101 = 3:58, 77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164), SD 9; **Gāraḇa S** (S 6.2/1:138-140), SD 12.3.

⁶⁸ “Should be examined,” *samannesanā kātabbā*. The key word, *samannesanā* (“inquiring, examining, investigating”) has its verb as *samannesati* or *samanvesati* (“he seeks, looks for, searches, examines, investigates”), which comes from *sam* (“together”) + *anvesati* (ie, *anu* + *esati*, “he seeks after or repeatedly”). The abstract n *samannesanā* is also the key word of **Caṅkī S** (M 95.20/2:173) + SD 21.15 (1.3.2). See Intro (2.3).

⁶⁹ Comy says there are 3 kinds of investigators. Here an “investigator of the Teacher” is meant: see Intro (2.1).

⁷⁰ Be Ce *ajānantena*; only Ee has *ājānantena* (“with the knowing, or knowing”) clearly wr. The context clearly requires the negative *ajānantena* (a, “not” + *jānāti*, “he knows,” as neg participle), since the monk who is unable to directly know the Buddha’s mind that he is fully awakened must infer this from external means, such as his bodily and verbal conduct. See M:ÑB 1244 n482.

⁷¹ “How to read another’s mind, *parassa ceto,pariyāyam*, also “the range of another’s mind.” Here, Comy glosses *pariyāya* as “turn, track (n)” (*vāra*) and “range, limit” (*pariccheda*) (MA 2:378).

⁷² *Viññāṇāya*, lit “for the sake of knowing ...,” which Comy glosses so, as *vijānan’athāya* (MA 2:378). See Intro (4.3.1).

⁷³ *Vīmaṃsakena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā parassa ceto,pariyāyam ajānantena tathāgate samannesanā kātabbā* “*sammā,sambuddho vā no vā*” *iti viññāṇāyā ti*. From the context, it appears that either this is a question (alt tr: “How, bhikkhus, should the Tathagata be examined by a monk, an investigator, who does not know how to read another’s mind, so that he knows whether the Blessed One is fully self-awakened or not?”) or this statement is followed by a long statement eliciting a response from the audience (hence the monks’ request for teaching, §3). On *ajānantena*, see separate n above. The key word, *samannesanā* (“inquiring, examining, investigating”) has its verb as *samannesati* or *samanvesati* (“he seeks, looks for, searches, examines, investigates”), which comes from *sam* (“to-

3 “Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, has the Blessed One as refuge. It would be good indeed if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks would remember it.”⁷⁴

“Then, listen, bhikshus, pay close attention to it, [318] I will speak.”

“Yes, bhante!” the monks replied to the Blessed One in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

How to investigate the Buddha

4 (1) “The Tathagata, bhikshus, should be examined⁷⁵ in two ways [regarding two states],⁷⁶ by a monk who is an investigator [who is inquisitive], who does not know how to read another’s mind, that is, states cognizable by the eye or by the ear,⁷⁷ thus:

‘**Are defiled states cognizable by the eye or by the ear found in the Tathagata or not?**’

4.2 When investigating this, he comes to know thus,

‘Defiled states cognizable by the eye or by the ear are *not* found in the Tathagata.’

5 (2) From investigating him, he knows thus,

‘Defiled states cognizable by the eye or by the ear are not found in the Tathagata.’

He investigates him further:

‘**Are there mixed states⁷⁸ cognizable by the eye or by the ear found in the Tathagata or not?**’

5.2 While investigating him thus, he knows that

‘Mixed states cognizable by the eye or by the ear are *not* found in the Tathagata.’

6 (3) From investigating him, he knows thus,

‘Mixed states cognizable by the eye or by the ear are not found in the Tathagata,’

he investigates him further:

‘**Are there purified [cleansed] states⁷⁹ cognizable by the eye or by the ear found in the Tathagata or not?**’

6.2 While investigating him thus, he knows that

‘Purified states cognizable by the eye or by the ear *are* found in the Tathagata.’

7 (4) From investigating him, he knows thus,

‘Purified states cognizable by the eye or by the ear are found in the Tathagata.’

7.2 He investigates him further:

‘**Has this venerable one⁸⁰ attained⁸¹ to this wholesome state for a long time, or has he attained it for a short while [temporarily]?⁸²**’

gether”) + *anvesati* (ie, *anu* + *esati*, “he seeks after or repeatedly”). The abstract n *samannesanā* is also the key word of **Caṅkī S** (M 95,20/2:173) + SD 21.15 (1.3.2).

⁷⁴ *Bhagavam, mūlakā no bhante dhammā, bhagavam nettikā, bhagavam paṭisaraṇā. Sādhu vata bhante bhagavatañ-ñ’eva paṭibhātu etassa bhāsītassa attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressantī ti.* This is stock (M 1:309 f, 317, 465, 3:115; S 2:80 f; A 1:199, 4:158, 351, 5:355).

⁷⁵ “Should be examined,” *samannesitabbo*. See Intro (2.3).

⁷⁶ *Dve dhammesu*, lit “in two things.”

⁷⁷ *Cakkhu, sota, viññeyyā dhammā*. Comy: Here “states cognizable by the eye” refers to the Teacher’s bodily conduct (*kāyiko samācāro*), and states “cognizable by the ear” are the Teacher’s “verbal conduct” (*vācasiko samācāro*). From noticing ripples and bubbles on the water surface, we can know that there is fish below; even so, when we can know that one’s defile actions such as killing and false speech, that his mind is defiled, too. (MA 2:380)

⁷⁸ “Mixed states,” *vītimissā dhammā*, Comy explains this as referring to conduct that is “sometimes dark (bad), sometimes white (good)” (*kāle kaṇhā kāle sukkā*) (MA 2:381). This refers to one who is in the task of purifying his conduct, sometimes does so, sometimes does not (MAṬ:Be 2:299). Comy (MA 2:381 f) qu **Arakkheyya S** (A 7.55), which states that the Buddha is purified in his bodily, verbal and mental conduct, and livelihood (A 7.55/4:82-84).

⁷⁹ “Purified [cleansed] states,” *vodātā dhammā*. See Intro (4.2.3).

⁸⁰ *Ayam-āyasmā*, “this venerable one.” See Intro (4.1).

7.3 While investigating him thus, he knows that

‘This venerable one has attained to this wholesome state for *a long time*. This venerable one has not attained it for a short while.’

8 (5) From investigating him, he knows thus,

‘This venerable one has attained to this wholesome state for a long time. This venerable one has not attained it for a short while.’

He investigates him further:

‘Has this venerable one attained renown, a monk who has won fame, so that certain disadvantages are found in him here?’⁸³

8.2 Bhikkhus, certain disadvantages are *not* found in a monk as long as he has not attained to renown, not won fame.⁸⁴ But, bhikkhus, when a monk has attained to renown, won fame, there are found certain disadvantages in him.⁸⁵

8.3 While investigating him thus, he knows that

‘This venerable one has attained renown, a monk who has won fame, but no disadvantages are found in him.’

9 (6) From investigating him, he knows thus,

‘This venerable one has attained renown, [319] a monk who has won fame, but no disadvantages are found in him.’

9.2 He investigates him further:

‘Is this venerable one restrained⁸⁶ not on account of fear, or is he restrained on account of fear?’⁸⁷ Does he abstain sense-pleasures on account of being *lust-free* through having destroyed it?’⁸⁸

9.3 While investigating him thus, he knows that

⁸¹ Bodhi has “Has this venerable one attained this wholesome state over a long time or did he attain it recently?” is curious, as Analayo has noted that it is “not be how long ago the Buddha had attained [it], whether he was practising consistently or only temporarily” (Analayo 2006:192). See Intro (1.2.2) & (4.2.1).

⁸² *Dīgha, rattarāṇi samāpanno ayam-āyasmā imaṃ kusalaṃ dhammaṃ, udāhu ittara, samāpannō ti?* “A short while,” *ittara* (adj), sometimes misspelt as *itara*: (1) (Ved Skt *itvara*, “going, moving” going along, (fig) passing), “fleeing, temporary, brief,” as meant here; opp “for a long time” (*dīgha, ratta*); (2) “limited, unreliable,” A 3:165 ~*pema*; Miln 93 *ittaratā*; (3) (BHS *itvara*, small, inferior, eg ~ *dāna*, Divy 317) “low birth” (~*jacca*, M 2:47; A 2:34; Sn 757. See PED, CPD, DPL, BHSD sv. Comy explains as “since a very long time (Be Se *aticira, kālato*; Ee *cira, kālato*), or attained yesterday (*hiyyo*)” (MA 2:382), which however seems to miss the context, as even if one were awakened yesterday or today itself, that awakening is no different from being awakened decades ago. In fact, the Chinese version (based on a Prakrit text) reflects the Pali better: see Intro (1.2.2).

⁸³ *Ñatt’ajjhāpanno ayam-āyasmā bhikkhu yasa-p, patta, saṃvījjantassa idh’ekacce ādīnavā ti?* Comy says that the advantages or dangers (*ādīnava*) here are “such as conceit and arrogance” (*mānātimānādayo*) (MA 2:384). The Chinese version merely says that the Buddha’s practice of meditation is not motivated by the desire for fame or gain: 不為名譽, 不為利義, 入此禪 *bù wèi míngyù, bù wèi lì yì, rù cǐ chán*. (MĀ 186 = T1.731b22). (Here 義 *yì* is Skt *artha*, “meaning, purpose.”) See “Me”: The danger of conceit, SD 19.2a.

⁸⁴ Comy notes that a monk who has not become well known or attracted a large following faces no such dangers, but live very peacefully like a streamwinner or a once-returner; but who can know whether he is a noble saint or not? (MA 2:384).

⁸⁵ Comy notes that when a monk has become famous or gained a following, he would, like a fierce cow, with sharp horns, hurting others in the herd, or a leopard devouring a herd of deer, hurt other monks by not showing them respect or fellowship, wandering about as if treading on the ground with his forefoot (or toes) (MA 2:384). This is also an allusion to the monk being attributed with charisma: see **The teacher or the teaching?**, SD 3.14. The closing phrase, “wandering about ... etc.,” is prob a figure for going about in a haughty manner (MAT:Be 2:301). Buddhaghosa notes that “one with a hating temperament walks as if he were digging with his forefoot, puts his foot down quickly, lifts it up quickly, dragging his feet (Vism 3.88/105; SnA 544).

⁸⁶ “Restrained,” *uparata* (pp of *uparamati*): see Intro (4.3.2).

⁸⁷ On the 4 kinds of fear, see Intro (4.3.2).

⁸⁸ *Abhayūparato ayam-āyasmā, nāyam-āyasmā bhayūparato, vīta, rāgattā kāme na sevati khayā rāgassā ti?*

‘This venerable one is restrained *not* on account of fear [*free* from fear]; this venerable one is not restrained on account of fear. He abstains from sense-pleasures on account of being lust-free through having destroyed it.’⁸⁹

Learning from the Buddha himself

10 And if, bhikshus, another monk were to ask thus:

‘But what are the venerable one’s reasons, what are the evidence, that he speaks thus:

“This venerable one is restrained *not* on account of fear [*free* from fear]; this venerable one is not restrained on account of fear. He abstains from sense-pleasures on account of being lust-free through having destroyed it”?

10.2 Bhikshus, the monk answers rightly should he answer thus:

‘Now whether this venerable one is dwelling in a community, or is dwelling alone,⁹⁰ while some there are well-behaved or some are ill-behaved therein,

or some there teach a group⁹¹ where some here are engaged in worldly things, or some are untainted by worldly things,

this venerable one does not despise any of them on that account.⁹²

10.3 For I have heard this from the Blessed One himself, I have learned this before the Blessed One himself [from the Blessed One’s own lips] thus:

‘I am restrained *not* on account of fear [*free* from fear]; this venerable one is not restrained on account of fear. I abstain from sense-pleasures on account of being lust-free through having destroyed it.’

The Buddha confirms the investigation

11 (1) Bhikshus, the Tathagata should indeed be further questioned about that, thus:

‘Are there *defiled* states cognizable through the eye or through the ear to be found in the Tathagata, or not?’

The Tathagata, bhikshus, answering rightly, would answer thus,⁹³

‘No defiled state whatever cognizable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata.’

12 (2) ‘Are there *mixed* states cognizable through the eye or through the ear to be found in the Tathagata, or not?’

⁸⁹ On this above section, see Intro (3.2).

⁹⁰ Although many of the early monks led solitary lives, Comy here cites examples where the Buddha does so for only limited periods, eg “Bhikshus, I wish to go into solitude for half a month” (*icchāṃ ahaṃ bhikkhave addha, māsam paṭisallīyitum*, S 54.9/5:320); “I am going into a three-month solitude” (*Te, māsam paṭisallīyitum*, S 5:325); and a solitary rains residence in Pārileyyaka forest (S 22.81/3:95). (MA 2:386)

⁹¹ Comy: The opposite to those who teach a group (that is, those who live away from groups), though not mentioned, should be understood, too (MA 2:387).

⁹² Comy points to the Buddha’s impartiality (*tādi, bhāva*) towards living beings, not unjustly praising some and disparaging others, ie, he is “the sage (*muni*) who treats all alike, as regards the killer Devadatta, the robber Aṅguli, māla, Dhana, pālaka (the fierce elephant), and (his own son) Rāhula” (*vadhakassa deva, dattassa corass’ aṅgulimāli-no | dhana, pālake rāhule ca sabbesaṃ samako muniti*) (MA 2:387; DhA 1:146; cf Miln 410). See **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139, 6-8/3:231-233), SD 7.8. **Analayo** notes that the passage in MĀ 186 = T1.731c1 is somewhat cryptic: “if [some] are well-gone, if the well-gone [ones] are taught, or the leaders, because of [attachment to] material things one can see [the true nature of] that venerable one, I don’t know myself,” 彼賢者, 我不知知若有善逝, 若為善逝所化, 為宗主, 因食可見 *bǐ xiánzhě, wǒ bù zì zhī ruò yǒu shàn shì, ruò wéi shàn shì suǒ huà, wéi zōngzhǔ, yīn shí kě jiàn*. The mentioning of those who are “well-gone,” corresponds to *sugata* at M 1:319,13; the “teaching,” 化, and the “leaders,” 宗主, could correspond to “those who teach a group,” *gaṇaṃ anusasanti* at M 1:319,13, and “material things,” 食, correspond to *āmisā* at M 1:319,14 (cf eg in MĀ 98 = T1.583c28, where 食 corresponds to *s’āmisā* in M 10/1:59,16). Finally, the ref to “not knowing,” 不知, could be due to the translator mistaking *ava-√jñā* “to despise,” at M 1:319,15, for *a-√jñā*, “to not know.” “Hence, concludes Analayo, it seems that the main points of the Pali version of the present passage can be discerned in the Chinese translation.” (2006: 193 n145)

⁹³ As noted in Comy, the Tathagata would never speak falsely (*micchā*), but always rightly (*sammā*) (MA 2:387).

The Tathagatha, bhikshus, answering rightly, would answer thus,

‘No mixed state whatever cognizable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata.’

13 (3) ‘Are there *purified* [cleansed] states cognizable through the eye or through the ear to be found in the Tathagata, or not?’

The Tathagatha, bhikshus, answering rightly, would answer thus,

‘Purified states cognizable through the eye or through the ear are found in the Tathagata.

This path, this pasture [resort] am I,⁹⁴ but I am no part of it [I do not identify with them].⁹⁵

Wise faith in the Teacher

14 Bhikshus, a disciple should approach the Teacher who speaks thus for the sake of hearing the Dharma. The Teacher teaches him the Dharma, ever higher, ever more sublime, with its dark and bright counterparts.⁹⁶

14.2 Bhikshus, as the Teacher, through direct knowledge, thus teaches to the monk the Dharma, ever higher, ever subtler, with its dark and bright counterparts, of a certain teaching here in the Dharma, **[320]** the monk is convinced of the teachings.⁹⁷ He is radiant with faith in the Teacher,⁹⁸ thus:

*sammāsambuddho bhagavā
svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo
suppaṭipanno saṅgho*

‘The Blessed One is fully self-awakened,
well-taught is the Blessed One’s teaching,
the holy community keeps to the good way.’⁹⁹

15 If, bhikshus, others were to ask that monk thus:

‘But what are the venerable one’s reasons, what are his evidence, that the venerable one speaks thus:

“The Blessed One is fully self-awakened, well taught is the Blessed One’s teaching, the sangha is practising the right way”?’

15.2 That monk, bhikshus, answering rightly, would answer thus:

⁹⁴ Be *Etam patho ’ham-asmi, etam gocaro*. Ee & Comy interprets this meaning, “This is my path, my pasture” (*esa mayham patho esa gocaroti attho*), ie, he is utterly pure in regard to moral virtue of right livelihood (*ājīv’atṭhamaka sīla*)* (MA 2:387). Comy adds that there is *etāpātho (eta + āpātha)*, “that range,” ie, referring to his knowledge (*ñāna*) (MA 2:387). **Ājīv’atṭhamaka sīla*, lit “moral virtue with (right) livelihood as the eighth,” ie, the threefold bodily purity (*kāya,sucarita*) (abstaining from killing, stealing and inebriety) and keeping to the fourfold right speech (*vacī,sucarita*) (speech that is truthful, unifying, pleasant and useful): see **Mahā Saḷāyatanika S** (M 149,10/-3:289), SD 41.9.

⁹⁵ *No ca tena tammayō ti*, lit “And not ‘made of it’ by that.” Cf “Bhikshu, one is reckoned by whatever lies latent in one. | One is not reckoned by what does not lie latent in one.” (*Yam kho bhikkhu anuseti, tena saṅkham gacchati; | yam nānuseti, na tena saṅkham gacchatī ti*, S 22.35/3:35 @ SD 31.4); also the explanation of *na tena* (“not by that”) at (**Jhāna**) **Bāhiya S** (U 1.10.17/8), SD 33.7. Comy explains: “On account of utter purity of moral virtue, I am not ‘made of that’ (*tam,maya*), with no craving for that (*na sa,tanho*). On account of utter purity of moral virtue, I am without any craving (*nittanho*)” (MA 2:387). See **Atammayatā**, SD 19.13.

⁹⁶ *Tassa satthā dhammam deseti uttar’uttarim paṇīta,paṇītam kaṇha,sukka,sappaṭibhāgam*. Comy explains *sappaṭibhāga* as “with (their) fruits or results” (MA 2:388.4).

⁹⁷ *Yathā yathā kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno satthā dhammam deseti uttar’uttarim paṇīta,paṇītam kaṇha,sukka,sappaṭibhāgam tathā tathā so tasmim dhamme abhiññāya idh’ekaccam dhammam dhammesu niṭṭham gacchati*. The Tikā explains that when the Dharma, both mundane and supramundane, has been taught by the Teacher, having himself penetrated the path, fruition and nirvana, the monk rejoices with faith (*pasanna*) in the preliminary Dharma teachings that are the limbs of awakening (*bodhi,pakkhiya dhamma*) (MAṬ:Be 2:303). “Is convinced of the teachings,” *dhammesu niṭṭham gacchati*. See M:ÑB 1245 n489.

⁹⁸ “Radiant with faith in the Teacher,” *sathari pasīdati*: see SD 10.16 (11.3.2.2).

⁹⁹ MĀ 186 only mentions 淨信世尊, 彼世尊正盡覺也, *jìng xìn shìzūn, bǐ shìzūn zhèng jìn jué yě* “pure faith in the Blessed One, ‘The Blessed One is rightly and fully self-awakened’” (T1.26.731c21(03)). See Intro (4.1) on how do we know a teacher is awakened. For a study on the qualities of the Three Jewels, see **Dhajagga S** (S 11.3/1:218-220), SD 15.5.

‘Here, avuso, I went up to the Blessed One to hear the Dharma. The Blessed One taught me the Dharma, ever higher, ever more sublime, with its dark and bright counterparts.

15.3 As the Teacher teaches the Dharma in this way, ever higher, even subtler, with its dark and bright counterparts, I, through direct knowledge, found fulfillment in that Dharma.

15.4 So I have faith in the Blessed One, thus:

“The Blessed One is fully self-awakened, well taught is the Blessed One’s teaching, the holy community keeps to the good way.”

16 Bhikkhus, whose faith in the Tathagata is certain, well rooted, established, in these ways, these sentences, these words.”¹⁰⁰

—This, bhikkhus, is called faith with a good cause, rooted in vision, firm.¹⁰¹ It is immovable [invincible] by any recluse or brahmin, or deva [god] or Māra or Brahmā [God] or by anyone in the world.¹⁰²

16.2 Thus indeed, bhikkhus, is the Dharma investigation in the Tathagata. And thus, too, is the Tathagata well investigated in accordance with the Dharma.

The Blessed One said this. The monks joyfully approved of the Blessed One’s word.

— evaṃ —

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¹⁰⁰ *Yassa kassaci, bhikkhave, imehi ākārehi imehi padehi imehi vyañjanehi tathāgate saddhā niviṭṭhā hoti mūla, jātā patiṭṭhitā*. “Through these ways” (*imehi ākārehi*), ie on account of such investigations on the Teacher (MA 2:388). “In these ways, these phrases, these words” (*imehi ākārehi imehi padehi imehi vyañjanehi*) is stock: see **Ma-dhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18.20/1:114), SD 6.14.

¹⁰¹ *Ākāra, vaṭī saddhā dassana, mūlikā dalhā*, which is apparently found only here in the suttas. While the Pali here has “faith with a good cause, rooted in vision” (*ākāra, vaṭī saddhā dassana, mūlikā*), the Chinese version puts it as “faith rooted in vision, indestructible and united with knowledge,” 信見本, 不壞, 智相應 *xìn jiàn běn, bú huài, zhì xiāngyīng* (MĀ 186 = T1.732a5; Analayo’s tr). On account of the monk’s being “rooted in vision” (*dassana, mūlika*), Comy says that his attainment is that of the path of streamwinning, as it is also based on faith, and a streamwinner’s faith is one that even Māra is unable to shake (MA 2:388). The Comy on **Uṇṇābha S** (S 48.42) makes a similar remark regarding the brahmin’s attainment (the Pali here however suggests that he has attained non-return): see S 48.42/5:219, SD 29.3.

¹⁰² This whole section, slightly abridged, in **Uṇṇābha S** (S 48.42), describes the brahmin Uṇṇābha, who is said to have attained non-return (though its Comy says it is streamwinning) (S 48.42/5:219), SD 29.3.

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