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(Arahatta) Acelaka Kassapa Sutta¹

or (Arahatta) Acela Kassapa Sutta

The Discourse on Acela(ka) Kassapa (on his arhathood) | S 41.9

Theme: Citta the householder as a non-returner & the naked ascetic Kassapa as an arhat

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1 Acelaka Kassapa

1.1 We know of at least 4 naked ascetics with the name **Acela(ka) Kassapa**. Here is a list of the four of them—listed as Acela(ka) Kassapa 1, Acela(ka) Kassapa 2, Acela(ka) Kassapa 3, and Acela(ka) Kassapa 4—and the relevant Suttas with a brief mention of the teachings they each received. A more detailed analysis is given elsewhere.²

Teachings are given to ascetics named “Acela(ka) Kassapa” in the following Suttas:³

(1) Kassapa Sīha,nāda Sutta ⁴	disadvantages of self-mortification	D 8	SD 73.12
(2) Bakkula Sutta	full spiritual satisfaction and self-reliance	M 124	SD 3.15
(3) (Pabbajjā) Acelaka Kassapa Sutta	nature of karma and conditionality	S 12.17	SD 18.5
(4) (Arahatta) Acelaka Kassapa Sutta	the 4 dhyanas and non-return	S 41.9	SD 45.14

Acela Kassapa, the interlocutor of **the (Arahatta) Acelaka Kassapa** (S 41.9) is probably Acela(ka) Kassapa 4.⁵

1.2 Acelaka Kassapa 4, the interlocutor of **the (Arahatta) Acelaka Kassapa** (S 41.9), is an old friend of Citta the householder since their layman days, that is, some 30 years before [§§1-3]. Even after being a naked ascetic for that long, he confesses that he has not attained any spiritual state [§§4-6]. Citta, on the other hand, has become adept in all the 4 form dhyanas and is a non-returner [§§7-8]. Kassapa is impressed and asks to go forth. Citta brings him to the elder monks to admit him [§§9-10]. In due course, he becomes an arhat [§§11-12].

2 Citta the householder

2.1 STREAMWINNER. **Citta the householder** (Citta gaha,pati) is from Macchika,saṇḍa where he is a seth householder (*seṭṭhī,gaha.pati*).⁶ On listening to the elder Mahānāma’s detailed analysis of the 6 sense-bases (*saḷ,āyatana,vibhatti*), Citta becomes a streamwinner.⁷

2.2 ONCE-RETURNER. Sāriputta and Moggallāna, hearing of Citta’s spiritual attainment, visit him. When Citta requests for Dharma teaching, Sāriputta, being tired from his journey, gives only a short teaching. Hearing it, Citta becomes a once-returner. (DhA 2:74)

2.3 NON-RETURNER. On another occasion, Sāriputta and Moggallāna again visit Citta, who after listening to Sariputta, becomes a non-returner.⁸ We also know this from the (Arahatta) Acelaka Kassapa Sutta, where he declares to Acela(ka) Kassapa 4, “There is no fetter by which Citta the householder could be bound by which he would return to this world.”⁹ [§8]

¹ For another **Acelaka Kassapa S** (S 12.17), SD 18.5.

² See SD 18.5 (1.2).

³ On these 4 naked ascetics named “Acela(ka) Kassapa,” see SD 18.5 (S 12.17).

⁴ Also called **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (D 8), SD 73.12.

⁵ On the possibility of 4 naked ascetics bearing this same name, see SD 18.5 (1.2).

⁶ A *gaha,pati* (householder) was an owner of land employed in agriculture, or in charge of an agricultural enterprise. He was either a kshatriya or a brahmin (but never a shudra). A *seṭṭhī* (seth) was a merchant, financier or banker. One who was both house-owner and seth was known as a *seṭṭhī,gaha.pati* (seth householder), as in the case of Citta. The three terms, *gaha,pati*, *seṭṭhī* and *seṭṭhī,gaha.pati* were not synonyms. See Chakravarti, 1987:65-94 (ch 3).

⁷ AA 1:387; DhA 2:74 ad Dh 303.

⁸ AA 1:387; DhA 2:74.

⁹ On **Citta and Kassapa**, see SD 8.5 (8.1). On Citta’s accomplishments, see SD 40a.7 (1); see also SD 8.6 (8.3) & SD 16.16 (1).

3 Key terms

3.1 ACELA & ACELAKA. In the Pali Suttas, the term *Acela* or *acelaka* (sometimes *aceḷa/ka*), meaning “unclothed (ie naked) ascetic,”¹⁰ refers to a number of groups of ascetics, such as Kassapa or Acelaka Kassapa [1.1].¹¹ It is a generic term for those ascetics who, mainly due to the notion of total renunciation, choose not to own anything at all, not even to have any clothing. Most of such naked ascetics are also wanderers (*paribbājaka*).¹²

The term *acela* is often applied to the Ājīvikas, who were as such itinerant naked ascetics.¹³ Both the early Jains (nirgranthas) and Buddhists regarded the Ājīvakas as their rivals, given to extreme self-mortification, and they ridiculed their cult of nudity and unclean habits.¹⁴

3.2 UTTARI, MANUSSA, DHAMMA

3.2.1 Definitions

3.2.1.1 The term occurs in **the suttas** to refer to any higher meditative attainments or stages of sainthood or realization.¹⁵ The singular *koci*, “any, whatever” [§5] and *eva, rūpaṃ*, “such like, tantamount to” [§5] indicates that *uttari, manussa, dhamma* is used as an ablative adjective-noun linked to *alam-ariya, nāṇa.dassana, visesa*. In other words, here and elsewhere in the suttas, it is used as a singular compound.

The highest of ordinary human virtues are the 5 precepts, the 10 precepts, the 10 wholesome courses of actions (*kusala.kamma, patha*). The 5 precepts (*pañca, sīla*) are the embodiment of natural morality,¹⁶ and apply to all humans (whether Buddhists or not), the 8 precepts (*aṭṭha, sīla*) include conventional precepts that we can voluntarily undertake on precept days (*uposatha*),¹⁷ during meditation retreats, or any time we feel appropriate for it. The 10 precepts (*dasa, sīla*) are undertaken by monastic novices.¹⁸

The 10 courses of wholesome karma (*kusala kamma, patha*)—3 of the body, 4 of speech; 3 of the mind—constitute the totality of our karmic being. These are explained in such texts as **the Sammā Diṭṭhi Sutta** (M 9)¹⁹ and **the Sāleyyaka Sutta** (M 41).²⁰

3.2.1.2 In the Commentaries, the virtues of the saints, called “the superhuman states,” include the dhyanas (*jhāna*), the superknowledges (*abhiññā*), and the paths (*magga*) and fruits (*phala*).²¹ **The Commentary** to the (Arahatta) Acelaka Kassapa Sutta, for example, explains that the 10 courses of wholesome karma (*kusala kamma, patha*) (3 of body, 4 of speech; 3 of mind) constitute the good person’s conduct.

Beyond and higher than this (*tato manussa, dhammato uttari*) is regarded as “**super(human)**” (*uttari*).²² The phrase “**the distinctive knowledge and vision of the noble ones**” (*alam-ariya, nāṇa.dassa-*

¹⁰ Cf *ājīvika* who were also naked ascetics: see **Cha-ḷ-ā bhijāti S** (A 6.57) @ SD 23.5 (1.1) n.

¹¹ On the problem of his identity, see SD 3.15 (1.2).

¹² On *paribbājaka*, see SD 38.6 (2.1.7).

¹³ See A L Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas*, London, 1951; DPPN: Ājīvakā; also Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:143-145 (see index) & PS Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, (1970) 2001:61 f.

¹⁴ See SD 18.5 (1.1.2).

¹⁵ Comys often refers to this as “distinction” (*visesa*), more fully, “progressively higher distinction” (*uḷāraṃ pubbenāparaṃ visesaṃ*), ie, the 4 stages of sainthood: see eg **Anāpāna, sati S** (M 118, 2/3:78), SD 7.13 & n. On laymen non-returners, once-returners and streamwinners, see **Laymen saints**, SD 8.6 (12).

¹⁶ On **the 5 precepts**: def & golden rule, see **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:352-356), SD 1.5. See also **Sīlānuvāsati**, SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 21.6 (1.2); SD 37.8 (2.2). On natural morality (*pakati, sīla*) and conventional morality (*sammuti, sīla*), see SD 37.8 (2.1).

¹⁷ On **the 8 precepts**, see (**Tad-ah**)**uposatha S** (A 3.70, 9-16), SD 4.18; **Vitthat’uposatha S** (A 8.42), SD 89.11.

¹⁸ On **the 10 precepts**, see Khp 2/2; Comy KhpA 22-37. For trs, see Khp:Ñ 1 f & Comy 1-36. See SD 45.16 (0.3).

¹⁹ M 9, 6/1:47 @ SD 11.14.

²⁰ M 41, 12-14/1:288 @ SD 5.7.

²¹ DA 2:388, 3:817; MA 2:21; AA 1:3:412.

²² *Uttari manussa, dhammo’ti manussa, dhammo nāma dasa, kusala, kamma, pathā, tato manussa, dhammato uttari.*

na, visesa) means that special knowledge and vision capable of bringing about the state of a noble one²³ (SA 3:100).

3.2.1.3 In the **Vinaya**, however, the Old Commentary to the fourth Pārājika (a monastic falsely claiming to superhuman attainments) seems to take the phrase (V 3:91,18-19, 4:24) as two separate but synonymous terms, that is, *uttari, manussa, dhamma* as “the state of further-men,” and *alam-ariya, ñāṇa. -dassana, visesa* as “sufficient as knowledge and vision of the noble ones.”²⁴

Like the Commentaries [3.2.1.2], the Vinaya defines *uttari, manussa, dhamma* as comprising dhyana, liberation, samadhi, attainment, knowledge and vision, path-cultivation, realization of fruition, abandoning of defilements, the mind’s freedom from the hindrances, and delighting in an empty place.²⁵ From this comprehensive definition, it is clear that a monastic should not in any way even imply himself of having attained any special state, or even of his liking for it! The idea here is to prevent the laity from attributing such powers to the monastic and idolize him instead of actually exerting himself in his own practice.

3.2.2 Related suttas

3.2.2.1 In the **(Anuruddha) Upakkilesa Sutta** (M 128), the Buddha asks Anuruddha about his progress in meditation, and whether he has attained any “superhuman states.”²⁶ Here, the expression “superhuman states” refers to higher degrees of spiritual knowledge characteristic of the saints, that is, the attainment of dhyanas and their ensuing insights.

3.2.2.2 We find a more mundane usage of the term by the monk Sunakkhatta in the **Mahā Sīha, nāda Sutta** (M 12). When the Buddha refuses to perform a miraculous feat on the request of the monk Sunakkhatta (an erstwhile wanderer), he charges that the Buddha lacks any superhuman state.²⁷ The Sutta’s Commentary here says that it means specifically the supramundane path that Sunakkhatta is denying the Buddha.²⁸ In other words, Sunakkhatta’s view is that having miraculous powers is the proof of one’s attainment of spiritual states, such as awakening.

3.3 DHAMMASSA SVĀKKHĀTATĀ

3.3.1 This exclamation appears twice in the Sutta: the first is by Citta, expressing his surprise at Acelaka Kassapa’s failure to attain any superhuman state after 30 years of practice [§6]; the second is Acelaka Kassapa’s own surprise at Citta, as a householder, mastering all the form dhyanas [§9]. From both these contexts, it is clear that the phrase evokes surprise.

Listening to a teaching by Mahānāma (one of the first 5 monks), Citta becomes a streamwinner. Then listening to Sāriputta’s teachings, on the first occasion he gains once-return, and on another occasion, non-return.²⁹ In fact, in the **(Arahatta) Acelaka Kassapa Sutta**, Citta declares his own non-return to the naked ascetic Kassapa, “There is no fetter by which Citta the householder could be bound by which he would return to this world.” [§8]

3.3.2 The phrase is used by prince Bodhi in the **Bodhi Rāja, kumāra Sutta** (M 85), where we find its fullest expression of *aho buddho, aho dhammo, aho dhammassa svākkhātātā*, “O the Buddha! O the Dharma! O that the Dharma is well taught!”³⁰ Here, it is obvious that it is an inspired utterance (*udāna*), and it is in the **(Arahatta) Acelaka Kassapa Sutta** on both occasions [§§6+9].

The Sutta commentary explains that the last phrase (“That the Dharma is well taught”) refers to the fact that even through personal practice of meditation, we will be able to attain arhathood (MA 3:327).

²³ *Alam-ariya, ñāṇa. dassana, viseso*’ti ariya, bhāvaṃ kātuṃ samatthatāya alam-ariyo ’ti saṅkhāto ñāṇa. dassana, -viseso.

²⁴ V 3:91,18+19+30 & 92,32.

²⁵ *Jhānaṃ vimokkhaṃ samāpatti samāpatti ñāṇa, dassanaṃ magga, bhāvanā phala, sacchikiriyā kilesa, pahānaṃ vinīvaraṇatā cittassa suññāgāre abhirati* (V 3:91,30 & 92,32).

²⁶ M 128,15/3:157 @ SD 5.18.

²⁷ M 12,2/168 f @ SD 49.1.

²⁸ MA 2:21,16-28,14.

²⁹ AA 1:387; DhA 2:74. See SD 8.6 (8.3).

³⁰ M 85/2:95, SD 55.2.

The Vinaya Commentary explains the phrase as referring to the various virtues of the Dharma as stated in the recollection of the Dharma.³¹

Since Citta is a non-returner (who has no more craving or sensual lust) [§8.3], his inspired utterance here in response to the naked ascetic Kassapa’s confession of failure to attain any spiritual state after 30 years is clearly a sense of joy in the Dharma. He is not rejoicing in Kassapa’s failure but simply acknowledging that this is the case “outside” of the Dharma-Vinaya, and also that now is the opportunity for Kassapa to take a new and right direction in his spiritual life. This transformation follows almost immediately that [§§7-9].

Kassapa is, in turn, impressed by Citta’s attainment (who *is* a non-returner), and so mirrors Citta’s *udana*, not in regret, but as a joyful relief that he finally finds what he is looking for, and in only an instant, as it were, that is, hearing that his own old friend is awakened. So he is inspired to go forth on account of Citta’s example. Interestingly, he actually requests for admission from Citta, a layman (but who, as a non-returner, is a member of the noble sangha) [§9.2]. Citta introduces him to some elder monks who ordain him, and in due course, Kassapa becomes an arhat in this life itself [§12]. Well taught indeed is the Dharma!

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The Discourse on Acelaka Kassapa (on his arhathood)

S 41.9

Acelaka Kassapa meets Citta

2 At that time, the naked ascetic Kassapa had arrived in Macchika,saṇḍa. He was, when he was still a layman, an old companion of the houselord Citta.

3 The houselord Citta heard thus,

“It’s said that the naked ascetic Kassapa has arrived in Macchika,saṇḍa. He is, even when he was still a layman, an old companion of mine.”

3.2 Citta the houselord then approached the naked ascetic Kassapa, and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, Citta the houselord sat down at one side.

4 Sitting thus at one side, Citta the houselord said this to the naked ascetic Kassapa:

“How long, bhante, have you gone forth?”

“I’ve gone forth some 30 years, houselord.”³²

Acelaka Kassapa’s non-attainment

5 “During those 30 years, bhante, have you attained, dwelling in comfort, any superhuman state³³ tantamount to the distinctive knowledge and vision of the noble ones?”³⁴

“During those 30 years, houselord, I’ve not attained, dwelling in comfort, any superhuman state tantamount to the distinctive knowledge and vision of the noble ones, except for nakedness and a shaven head and hair-plucking.”³⁵

³¹ *Sudhammataṃ uju-p,paṭipannat’ādi,bhedam* (VA 2:651).

³² *Tiṃsa,mattāni kho me gaha,pati vassāni pabbajitassāti.*

³³ On the superhuman state (*uttari,manussa,dhamma*), see (3.2).

³⁴ *Imehi pana te bhante tiṃsa,mattehi vassehi atthi koci uttari,manussa,dhammo** [Be Ce *uttari,manussa,dhammā*] *ariya,ñāṇa,dassana,viseso adhigato phāsu,vihāro*. Because of the sg *koci*, the reading *uttari,manussa,dhammo* is preferred.

³⁵ *Imehi kho me gaha,pati tiṃsa,mattehi vassehi pabbajitassa n’atthi koci uttari manussa,dhammā alam ariya.-ñāṇa,dassana,viseso adhigato phāsu,vihāro aññatra naggeyyā ca muṇḍeyyā ca pāvaḷa,nipphoṭanāya cāti*. Comy

6 When this was said, the houselord Citta said this to the recluse Kassapa:

“Strange indeed, sir! A wonder indeed, sir! That the Dharma is so well taught!³⁶

Just to think that *after 30 years*, [301] there is no attaining, dwelling in comfort, any superhuman state tantamount to the distinctive knowledge and vision of the noble ones, except for nakedness and a shaven head and hair-plucking!”

Citta as a layman dhyana-attainer

7 “But, houselord, how about you. how long have you taken up lay discipleship?”

“Bhante, it has been 30 years, too, for me, of taking up lay discipleship.”

8 “During those 30 years, houselord, have you attained, dwelling in comfort, any superhuman state tantamount to the distinctive knowledge and vision of the noble ones?”

8.2 “How should I not, bhante? [Even as a householder, bhante.]³⁷

(1) For, bhante, to whatever extent I wish,

quite secluded from sense-desires, secluded from unwholesome mental states,

enter and dwell in **the first dhyana**,

accompanied by initial application and sustained application,

accompanied by zest and happiness, born of seclusion.³⁸

(2) For, bhante, to whatever extent I wish,

with the stilling of initial application and sustained application,

by gaining inner stillness and oneness of mind,

enter and dwell in **the second dhyana**,

free from initial application and sustained application,

accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration.³⁹

(3) For, bhante, to whatever extent I wish,

with the fading away of zest, dwells equanimous, mindful and fully aware,

experience happiness with the body,

enter and dwell in **the third dhyana**,

of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’

(4) For, bhante, to whatever extent I wish,

with the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain,⁴⁰

and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure,

attain and dwell in **the fourth dhyana**

says that *pāvaḷa, nipphoṭana* (which occurs only here; Se *vāḷa, nipphoṭana*, where *vāḷa* = “hair, tail-brush”) refers to a bunch of peacock feathers used for beating away dust and grit from the ground where one sits (SA 3:101). PED however def it as “plucking out the hair.” PED is prob right, and which also fits the context here well. The usu term here is “plucking of hair and beard” (*kesa, massu, locana*): see eg **Kandaraka S** (M 51,8) n, SD 32.9. Ritual hair-plucking—called *kesh-lochan* or simply *loch*—is done by Jain monastics twice or at least once a year: see http://www.jainworld.com/societies/jain_monks_nuns.asp; for picture of hair-plucking: <http://tarunkranti.50webs.com/keshlochan.html>.

³⁶ *Acchariyam vata bho, abbhutam vata bho, dhammassa svākkhātātā*. See (3.2.2).

³⁷ *Ce Ee kim hi no siyā bhante; Be Se gihino pi siyā bhante*.

³⁸ For more details on *dhyanas* (*jhāna*), with similes, see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,75-82/1:73-76 @ SD 8.10).

³⁹ The 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya, tuṅhī, bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (*vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur (S 2:273); cf S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate). See **Jhāna Pañha S 2** (S 40.2/4:263 f), SD 24.12.

⁴⁰ “Joy...pain,” *sukha...dukkha*: this refers to physical feelings. The next phrase—“pleasure and displeasure,” *domanassa...somanassa*—refers to mental feelings, transcended earlier. Mental feelings must be overcome first so that the mind is not distracted by itself, as it were. Then, all the other feelings (arising from the physical sense-contacts) are transcended. On the significance of this, see **Sall’atthena S** (S 36.6/4:207-210), SD 5.5.

that is neither painful nor pleasant,
and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.⁴¹

Citta's non-return

8.3 If I, bhante, were to pass away before the Blessed One, it would not be surprising that he would say this of me,

‘There is no fetter by which Citta the houselord is fettered that would bring him back to this world.’⁴²

Acelaka Kassapa wishes to go forth

9 When this was said, the naked ascetic said this to Citta the houselord:

“Strange indeed, sir! A wonder indeed, sir! *That the Dharma is so well taught!*

Just to think that after 30 years, you have attained, dwelling in comfort, a superhuman state tantamount to the distinctive knowledge and vision of the noble ones!

9.2 May I, houselord, receive [302] going-forth in this Dharma-Vinaya, may I receive the ordination!”

10 Then, the houselord Citta took the naked ascetic Kassapa to the elder monks and said this to them:

“This, bhante, is Acelaka Kassapa, an old companion of mine when we were laymen.

May the elders ordain this person. I will gladly provide his requisites of robe, bowl, lodging, and medicine and support for the sick.”⁴³

Acelaka Kassapa's arhathood

11 THE FULL ARHATHOOD PERICOPE⁴⁴

Then, the venerable Kassapa, received the going-forth in this Dharma-Vinaya, he received the ordination.

And not long after his ordination, dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute,

in no long time at all, right here and now, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge, attained and dwelled in the supreme goal of the holy life,

for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

11.2 THE ARHAT'S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE. He directly knew:

“Birth is destroyed,	<i>khīṇa,jāti</i>
the holy life has been lived,	<i>vusitam brahma,cariyam</i>
done what is to be done,	<i>kataṃ karaṇīyam</i>
there is no more of this state of being.” ⁴⁵	<i>nāparam itthattāyāti</i>

12 And the venerable Kassapa became one of the arhats.

— evaṃ — 140403 140407 141027 140321a 151027

⁴¹ Here, **Vibhaṅga** gives 3 factors of the 4th dhyana—**equanimity** (*upekhā*), **mindfulness** (*sati*) and **one-pointedness of mind** (*cittassa ek'aggatā*)—according to the Sutta analysis (Vbh 261), and 2 factors—equanimity and one-pointedness of the mind—according to the Abhidhamma analysis (Vbh 164; Vism 4.183/165). See also **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.83/1:75), SD 8.10 & **Dhyana**, SD 8.4 (5.4).

⁴² *N'atthi taṃ saṃyojanam, yena saṃyojanena saṃyutto citto gaha,pati puna imam lokam āgaccheyyāti*. This means that Citta is a **non-returner**, one who has broken the **5 lower fetters** (orambhāgiya saṃyojana), ie, (1) self-identity view, (2) doubt, (3) clinging to rituals and vows; (4) sensual craving, (5) ill will; (6) craving for form existence, (7) craving for formless existence, (8) conceit, (9) restlessness, (10) ignorance: see (**Sekha**) **Uddesa S** (A 4.-85), SD 3.3(2); **Oram,bhāgiya S** (S 45.179), SD 98.11; SD 11.1 (5.1). This is also spoken by Ugga the householder of Hatthi,gāmaka, (**Hatthi,gāmaka**) **Ugga S** (A 8.22,12), SD 45.15; also declared by Ugga the householder of Vesālī, (**Vesālīka**) **Ugga S** (A 8.21,12), SD 70.3, but in different words.

⁴³ *Imam therā pabbājentu upasampādentu, aham assa ussukkam karissāmi cīvara,piṇḍapāta,senāsana,gilāna-p,paccaya,bhesajja,parikkhārānan'ti*.

⁴⁴ For details, see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2+56.3), SD 7.14.

⁴⁵ On this para and the next (the attainment of arhathood), see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203) n, SD 7.14.