

10

Sambuddha Sutta

The Discourse on the Self-awakened | S 22.58
 or **Sammā,sambuddha Sutta**, the Discourse on the Fully Self-awakened One
 Theme: The difference between the Buddha and the arhat
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2015

1 The nature of the Buddha

1.1 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.1.1 Sutta summary

1.1.1.1 This is a short but very significant sutta attesting to the fact that both the Buddha and the arhats awaken to the same Dharma. Both the Buddha and the arhats are said to awaken “on account of revulsion towards (the 5 aggregates), through dispassion [letting go], through cessation (of suffering)” [§§3.2, 4.2 etc].

Like the Buddha, the arhat, too, is “freed through wisdom” (*paññā,vimutta*). Clearly here, the term *paññā,vimutta* is not a technical term to be contrasted with the term, *ubhato.bhāga,vimuta*, “one freed both ways,” said of an arhat, as in **the Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 73).¹

1.1.1.2 As such, there is no difference between the awakening of the Buddha and those of the arhats (whether monastic or lay). The only difference between them is that the Buddha is the discoverer of the path to awakening—hence, he is the first fully awakened being to arise amongst us—while the arhats, since they awaken through this teaching, are followers after the Buddha. In either case, there is nothing more to cultivate in terms of awakening, since their journey has been completed and nirvana has been reached. [§§11-12]

1.1.2 The *uppādetā* pericope

1.1.2.1 The *uppādetā* pericope with the Pali and its translation, runs thus:

Tathāgato bhikkhave araham sammā,sambuddho anuppannassa maggassa uppādetā, asañjātassa maggassa sañjānetā anakkhātassa maggassa akkhātā magga-ñ,ñū magga,vidū magga,kovido.

Magganugā ca bhikkhave etarahi sāvakā viharanti, pacchā,samannāgatā.

The Tathagata, bhikshus, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, is one who gives rise to the unarisen path, who causes the unborn path to be born, who shows the path yet to be shown. He is the knower of the path, who understands the path, an expert regarding the path.

And, bhikshus, **his disciples** now dwell as followers of that path, accomplishing it afterwards.

[§§11-12]

1.1.2.2 The *uppādetā* pericope is found, in full or in part, in the following texts:²

Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta	M 108/3:8,12	the full pericope	SD 33.5
Pavāraṇā Sutta	S 8.7/1:191,3	the full pericope	SD 80.1
Sambuddha Sutta	S 22.56/3:68,16 (SA 2:278,5)	the full pericope	SD 49.10
Nāgara Sutta	S 12.65,33/2:107	alluded to	SD 14.2
Milinda,pañha	Miln 217,10+219,11	in brief	
Paṭisambhidā	Pm 2:194,19	the full pericope	
Apadāna	Ap 24.5/570,5* (see following)	summarized	
Therīgāthā Commentary	ThīA 91,22* (verse = Ap 24.5)	summarized	

¹ M 73,7/1:477 f; see S:B 2 n210.

² M 108/3:8,12 = S 9.7/1:191,3 ≈ 22.56/3:68,16 (SA 2:278,5) = Pm 2:194,19 = Miln 217,10-219,11 ≈ Ap 570,5 ≈ ThīA 91,33*.

1.1.3 Paññā, vimutta

1.1.3.1 In the more systematized teachings of the later suttas—such as **the Kīṭa, giri Sutta** (M 70) and **the Puggala Paññatti** (Pug 1,30-31)³—arhats are classified into two kinds: (1) the one freed both ways (*ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*) and (2) the wisdom-freed (*paññā, vimutta*). The key difference between the two is that while the “one free both ways” is able to attain the superknowledges (*abhiññā*) [2.2.3] and the formless dhyana (*āruppa*),⁴ but the wisdom-freed does not.

In the early suttas, those spiritually ready who mindfully hear the Dharma, as a rule, directly from the Buddha himself, and those who after doing so, go into solitary meditation, all awaken as “wisdom-freed” arhats. As a rule, such arhats have mastered at least the 4 form dhyanas, and may or may not be accomplished in the formless attainments.

There are, of course, many amongst the early arhats who do attain the formless attainments. However, it is only later on, when the teaching became more systematized, that those “wisdom-freed” arhats who are also accomplished in the formless attainments came to be called “liberated both ways,” that is, they are freed from their *defilements* as well as mentally liberated from *form*, that is, they are able to attain the formless dhyanas. This latter “liberation” is a kind of meditative bonus, such as presented in **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D 15),⁵ a text probably from the second period of the Buddha’s ministry.⁶

1.1.3.2 **The (Arahatta) Susīma Sutta** (S 12.70) records an important account where a group of arhats, when questioned, answer that they have neither super powers nor accomplishment in formless attainments. They declare that they are “freed by wisdom” (*paññā, vimutto*, §25), and who have neither psychic power nor accomplishment in the formless attainments.

1.1.3.3 The same term, *paññā, vimutta*, is used in **the Sambuddha Sutta** [§3.2]. It should clearly be understood as referring to any arhat disciple—monastic or lay—and not exclusively as the *paññā, vimutta* is a later technical term, contrasted with the “one freed both ways,” *ubhato.bhāga, vimutta*, found in later suttas with more systematized doctrines [1.1.3.1]. The usage of the term *paññā, vimutta* in such a non-technical sense suggests that the Sambuddha Sutta is a very early text, that is, one belonging to the first period of the Buddha’s ministry.⁷

1.2 ONE AND SAME AWAKENING

1.2.1 Teacher and follower. The Sambuddha Sutta opens with the Buddha stating that both **the fully self-awakened buddha** (*sammā, sambuddha*) and “**one freed by wisdom**” (*paññā, vimutta*) (here, a general reference to all arhats), are awakened in the same manner, that is,

on account of **revulsion** towards ⟨form, ... feeling, ... perception, ... formations, ... consciousness⟩
through dispassion [letting go],
through cessation (of suffering),
that one is liberated [freed] through non-clinging,

This is the well known **revulsion pericope** applied to the 5 aggregates. Both the Buddha and the arhats awaken to the same awakening (*bodhi*). In simple terms, we can say that awakening is the realization of non-self and seeing true reality leading to freedom from mental suffering.

1.2.2 Self-effort. Hence, it is wrong and meaningless to say that the Buddha is “more realized” or “more awakened” than the arhats are, or that the Buddha is more free from suffering than the arhats are. There is neither distinction nor hierarchy of awakening here. There is also no “conferring” or certifying of awakening or enlightenment by the Buddha or any “enlightened” master. We can and must each purify or awaken by ourself.

³ M 70,15-16/1:477 f (SD 11.1) and Pug 1,30-31/14 + PugA 190 f.

⁴ On the formless states (*āruppa*), see **Paṭhama Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.1) @ SD 24.11 (5).

⁵ D 15,36/2:71 (SD 5.17).

⁶ On the 2 periods of the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 40a.1 (1.3).

⁷ **(Arahatta) Susīma S** (S 12.70), SD 16.8. See **Notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1 (1.3).

*Attanā'va⁸ katam pāpam
 attanā saṅkilissati
 atanā akatam pāpam
 attanā'va visujjhati
 suddhī asuddhī paccatam
 nāñño aññam⁹ visodhaye.*

By oneself is a bad deed done,
 by oneself is one defiled.
 By oneself is bad not done,
 by oneself is one purified.
 Purity or impurity depends on oneself.
 No one purifies another. (Dh 165)¹⁰

1.2.3 Extinguished fire

1.2.3.1 In the famous fire parable in the (Aggi) Vaccha,gotta Sutta (M 72), the Buddha declares that when a fire is extinguished, it goes nowhere. The conditions for fire are no more there to cause the fire. All fires extinguish in the same way, that is, when the conditions are not there, there is no fire. A fire that has been properly extinguished does not need to be extinguished again.¹¹

Both the fully self-awakened buddha and the one freed by wisdom are fully awakened, and do not need to awaken any more. Once we have awakened from our sleep, we are fresh and free of dreams. Once a fire is extinguished, there is no more burning: there is only coolness.

1.2.3.2 The historical Buddha passes away—his body has reached its time—and he does not return nor need to. The Buddha teaches change; he, too, is subject to change—he passes away. His passing only proves his teaching to be true and good. The Dharma he has taught remains behind for us, so that we, following it, can also awaken in the same way.

As monastics, we practise the Dharma for awakening in this life itself. As the laity—those who live “enjoying sensual pleasures” (*kāma,bhogī*)¹²—we can still walk the noble path in this life itself as stream-winners,¹³ by habitually practising the perception of impermanence, and being diligent in mindfulness.¹⁴

The significance of the perception of impermanence is explained in the 10 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25), like **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1).¹⁵ The Buddha’s exhortation that we should continue diligently in mindfulness as given in **the (Sotāpanna) Nandiya Sutta** (S 55.40).¹⁶

1.2.3.3 There are later teachings—especially those in the Mahāyāna—that claim arhats still need to awaken as buddhas. This is a seriously wrong view, one that needs to be unequivocally rejected. There are also later teachings that a Buddha or Bodhisattva can “postpone” his awakened, or his final nirvana, indefinitely. This is also a wrong view that has no foundation in any of the early Buddhist texts or commentaries.

Fire may return when the conditions are present again. However, the Buddha and the arhats are free of all the conditions that would otherwise bring the unawakened back to this world. The arhats do not “return” from the unconditioned state. There is nothing that can bring them back, or do they need to come back.

1.3 THE BUDDHA AS THE UNIQUE BEING

1.3.1 The first amongst equals

1.3.1.1 The phrase “**his disciples** now dwell as followers of that path, accomplishing it afterwards” [1.1.2] has two significances. The first is that the only soteriological difference (in terms of awakening) between the Buddha and the arhat is simply that of timing: the Buddha awakens first, and the arhats, following the teaching, awaken after him. In other words, the Buddha is only the first amongst equals (*primus inter pares*).

⁸ So Ce Ee Se; Be *attanā'hi*.

⁹ So Be Ee Se; Ce *nāññam aññō*.

¹⁰ For grammatical nn, see Dh:N 104 n165.

¹¹ M 72,19/1:487 + SD 6.15 (4).

¹² On *kāma,bhogī*, see **Mahā Vaccha,gotta S** (M 73,10/1:491), SD 27.4.

¹³ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

¹⁴ See **(Sotāpanna) Nandiya S** (S 55.40), SD 47.1.

¹⁵ S 25.1/3:225 (SD 16.7).

¹⁶ S 55.40/5:397-399 (SD 47.1).

1.3.1.2 **The (Aṭṭhaka) Verañja Sutta** (A 8.11), which is also found at the start of the Pārājika section (Sutta Vibhaṅga) of the Vinaya, records the Buddha as giving this beautiful hatchling parable, declaring his uniqueness in the world:

“Suppose, brahmin, there were a hen with eight, ten or twelve eggs that she had properly brooded, properly warmed, properly hatched. Should the first of these chicks pierce its shell with the tip of its claw or beak, and safely hatch, be called the eldest or the youngest?”

“It should be called the eldest, master Gotama. For, master Gotama, it is the eldest of them.”

“So, too, brahmin, in a generation fallen into ignorance, become like an egg, enclosed in a shell, I have pierced the egg-shell of ignorance.¹⁷

Unique am I in the world, attained the unsurpassed full awakening. So am I the eldest, the best in the world.¹⁸ (A 8.11/4:176) = Pār 1.1 (V 3:3 f), SD 96.12¹⁹

For those who think that the Buddha was being presumptuous, even arrogant, to declare of himself in such an apparently grand tone—“Unique am I in the world” (*eko ’va loke*)—it should be noted that the Buddha *is*, after all, the fully awakened one (unlike us at this moment); thus, he is only speaking the truth, and this clear gentle tone of an awakened teacher should be well heard and heeded.

1.3.2 The one and only Buddha

1.3.2.1 The uniqueness of the Buddha in this universe is often highlighted in the suttas:

- The foremost of the two-legged ... is the Tathagata (*dipadānaṃ aggo...tathāgato*, A 1.13.5/1:22)
- The Buddha is the best of the two-legged (*buddhaṃ ... dipad’uttamaṃ*, Sn 83; *sambuddhaṃ dipad’uttamaṃ*, 995, 998; SnA 2:160,22-23)²⁰
- The best of the two-legged is the one with the eye (*setṭho ... dipadānañ ca cakkhumā*, Dh 273d)
- Other unique qualities of the Buddha **Eka Puggala Vagga** (A 1.13/1:22 f)

1.3.2.2 The Buddha’s uniqueness in this universe is further unequivocally confirmed in **the Bahudhātuka Sutta** (M 115), which describes the one with right view (that is, the true follower or disciple), thus:

He understands that it is impossible, there is no chance, that two worthy fully self awakened ones would simultaneously arise in the same world system—this is not possible.²¹

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, **only one worthy fully self-awakened one would arise in one world system**—this is possible.²² (M 115,14/3:66), SD 29.1a

1.3.2.3 The reason behind this statement is very simple: once the direct open way to freedom is known, there is no more need for finding any other way to it. We only need to take this path, and we will be free. Once we have discovered fire, we need not discover it again. Once we have invented the wheel, we need not invent it again. We use such inventions for our comfort and benefit, and work towards greater things, especially self-understanding and self-awakening.

¹⁷ *Evam eva kho ahaṃ brāhmaṇa avijjā,gatāya pajāya aṇḍa,bhūtāya pariyaṇaddhāya avijj’āṇḍa,kosaṃ padāle-tvā.*

¹⁸ *Eko ’va loke anuttaraṃ sammā,sambuddho abhisambuddho, svāhaṃ brāhmaṇa jeṭṭho setṭho lokassa.*

¹⁹ Cf the parable of the hatchlings illustrating the progress and breakthrough of the disciples in **Sekha S** (M 53,-19.2), SD 21.14; **Ceto,khila S** (M 16,27/1:104 f), SD 32/14; **Vāsi,jaṭa S** (S 22.101,14-17/3:153) = (**Nāvā**) **Bhāvanā S** (A 7.67), SD 15.2.

²⁰ See Sn:N 164 n83.

²¹ As in **Mahā Govinda S** (D 19.13/2:224). **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28.19/3:114), **Bahudhātuka S** (M 115,14/3:65), **Aṭṭhāna Vagga** (A 1.15.10/1:27 f), Vbh 335. Comy says that the arising of another Buddha is impossible from the time the Bodhisattva takes his final conception until his dispensation (*sāsana*) has completely disappeared (MA 4:113). For a discussion, see Miln 236-239.

²² *Thānañ ca kho etaṃ vijjati, yaṃ ekissā loka,dhātuyā eko arahaṃ sammā,sambuddho uppajjeyya, thānaṃ etaṃ vijjatti pajānāti.*

1.3.3 Nāgasena's arguments

1.3.3.1 In the **Milinda,pañha** (c 100 CE),²³ king Milinda asks the monk Nāgasena why could there not be two buddhas in a single world-system (*loka,dhātu*), whose “radiance” (*obhāsa*) would doubly benefit the world. Nāgasena replies that the world is unable to support the glory of two such beings: it would quake and disintegrate! Nāgasena then gives a total of 4 analogies to support his statement. (Miln 6.2)

(1) It is like a boat that is able to just support only one well-built strong man. But when another such man were to get into the boat, it will simply sink.

(2) It is like a man who has eaten more than enough food “to fill up to his throat” (*yāva kaṅṭham abhipūrayitvā*) and he is “as rigid as a stick” (*anonamīta.danḍa.jāto*). If he were to take as much as another mouthful he would just die.

(3) Similarly, there can also be “the overburdening of the Dharma” (*atidhamma,bhārena*)—such as the immense volume of teachings produced—like overburdening a cart, so that it collapses.

(4) It is a dangerous conflict between two powerful ministers, with huge factions taking sides. Nāgasena closes by reiterating the sutta teachings on the uniqueness of the Buddha, such as, that he is “the foremost” (*agga*), “the eldest” (*jeṭṭha*), “the best” (*seṭṭha*), “without an equal” (*asama*), “unrivalled” (*appaṭipuggala*) and so on.²⁴ (Miln 236-239)

1.4 THE GREATEST HISTORICAL EVENT

1.4.1 The *sāsana* pericope

1.4.1.1 When a Buddha arises in the world, it is always for universal good, especially the awakening of true individuals, the saints of the path.²⁵ The well known *sāsana* (“teaching”) pericope describes the arising of the Buddha in our universe as follows:

... there arises in the world the Tathagata [the Buddha thus come], an arhat, fully self-awakened one, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, well-farer [Sugata], knower of worlds, unexcelled trainer of tamable persons, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.

Having realized by his own direct knowledge, this world with its gods, its Maras [tempters] and its Brahmas [high gods], this generation, with its recluses and brahmins, its rulers²⁶ and people, he makes it known to others.

He teaches the Dharma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end,²⁷ endowed with meaning and phrasing. He proclaims the holy life that is entirely complete and pure.²⁸

(D 2,40/1:62), SD 8.10

²³ **Milinda,pañha** (Miln) purports to be a dialogue between the monk Nāgasena and the Bactrian-Greek king Menandros (P *milinda*) (2nd cent BCE). Miln, however, is an ahistorical text (like almost all of Mahāyāna literature). It refers, eg, to the 6 heretical teachers, who were contemporaries of the Buddha (Miln 4,15-5,21). Although the Greek king Menandros is the purported questioner, “there is no traceable Greek influence on form or content of the purely Indic dialogue, derived from Upaniṣadic traditions” (Hinuber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*, 1996:83). In fact, its Chin tr (4th cent) is simply 那先比丘經 *nāxiān bīqiū jīng*, *Nāgasena,bhikṣu,sutra. It was composed in northern India in Skt or Pkt and later tr into Pali. See P Demièville, “Les versions chinoises du Milindapañha,” BEFEO 24, 1924:1-264.

²⁴ On the first 3 epithets, see D 2:15. On *asama*, see A 1:22; cf *asamasama* (AA 1:116; BA 42, 188 (where the buddhas of the past and the future are said to be “unequaled”). On *appaṭipuggala*, see A 1:22, and that he alone is able to say, “I am the Buddha” (AA 1:116).

²⁵ On these 4 kinds of saints—the streamwinner, the once-returned, the non-returned, and the arhat—see **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,42-47), SD 3.13; **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,9-12), SD 7.13; **Samaṇa-m-acala S 1** (A 4.87), SD 20.13 + **S 2** (A 4.88), SD 20.14.

²⁶ *Deva*, here in the sense of “gods by convention” (*sammati,deva*), ie, kings or rulers. The other 2 types of *deva* are “gods by rebirth” (*upapatti,deva*) and “gods by purification” (*visuddhi,deva*), ie the Buddhas, pratyeka-buddhas and arhats. (Nc 307, KhpA 123). See §2 & n where the voc “your majesty” is *deva*.

²⁷ “Good in the middle ... in the end,” means that the Buddha’s teaching comprises the 3 trainings—in moral virtue, in mental cultivation, and in wisdom—all of which are wholesome. The teaching is also good in the sense of being valid and efficacious at all times: the past, the present and the future.

1.4.1.2 The first paragraph states that the Buddha is the most highly evolved of beings, that is, the first to awaken in his own epoch—the most spiritually significant being, transcending the worldly and the divine. The second paragraph is about the Buddha formulating his awakening experience as the Dharma, the path to awakening. The third paragraph speaks of the efficacy and goodness of the Dharma.²⁹

1.4.2 Difficulty of the Buddha's appearance

1.4.2.1 Although the appearance of the Buddha in our universe is the most auspicious event in our lives, he does not appear in every human epoch. Our time is a buddha-epoch (*buddha-kāla*). In fact, ours is an auspicious world-period (*bhadda,kappa*),³⁰ with four past buddhas—Vipassī, Koṇāgamana, Kaku-sandha and Kassapa—and the present buddha Gotama, and the future buddha, Metteyya.³¹ Notice again here that in each epoch, there is only one buddha.³² There are certain aeons of our universe when there are no buddhas.³³

1.4.2.2 Although a buddha does not appear amongst humans in every civilized age, or his teachings are easily forgotten in a capricious world, it cannot properly be said that his appearance is “rare” (*dullabha*). Hence, it is not exactly right to translate *kiccho buddhānaṃ uppādo* (Dh 182d) as “Rare is the appearance of the buddhas.” The Dhammapada Commentary, however, actually glosses *kiccha* as “rare” (DhA 3:235), which, of course, may be taken as a connotation, rather than a denotation.

The word *kiccha* in this Dhammapada line denotes “difficulty” in reference to the nature of attaining buddhahood. The Commentary explains:

The appearance of a buddha is very difficult to come by. It is extremely rare because the resolve to become a buddha succeeds only after great effort and because the arising of one with such a resolve, too, is rare, even in many thousands of aeons.³⁴ (DhA 3:235)

Hence, it is said: “Difficult is the appearance of the buddhas” (*kiccho buddhānaṃ uppādo*, Dh 182d)

1.5 OTHER BUDDHAS

1.5.1 A “lesser” universe. The (Ānanda) Abhibū Sutta (A 3.80) and **the Kosala Sutta 1** (A 10.20) describes a “lesser” (*cūḷanika*) thousandfold world-system or universe as follows:

Bhikshus, as far as the sun and the moon revolve, illuminating the quarters with their light, there extends **the thousandfold world-system.**

(A 3.80), SD 54.1 & (A 10.29,2/5:59 f), SD 16.15³⁵

With reasonable imagination, we should understand this kind of “lesser” or “minor” (*cūḷanika*) universe extending as far as its light can be seen or detected (as we today are able to see celestial bodies and remote space phenomena many light-years away). Within such a universe, covering astronomically vast

²⁸ This para (D 2,40), SD 8.10, is part of the renunciation pericope: for refs, see (Ānanda) **Subha S** (D 10,1.7) n, SD 40a.13. See foll n.

²⁹ On this *sāsana* pericope, further see SD 40a.1 (8.1.2). On the buddha as the ideal of human awakening, see SD 49.8b (10.1.1).

³⁰ *Kappa* refers to the world-cycle, world-period or aeon (*kappa*; Skt *kalpa*) is, technically, a full cycle of the universe, which comprises 4 stages, viz, (1) the collapsing universe, (2) the collapsed universe (“big crunch”), (3) the expanding universe (“big bang”), and (4) the expanded steady-state universe. Life evolves and exists during the 4th stage. When humans have fully evolved biologically and socially, the buddha arises amongst them. The “auspicious aeon” refers to this 4th stage of cosmic stability. On the world-cycle, see **Kappa S** (A 4.156), SD 2.19 (2.1).

³¹ On these buddhas, see SD 1.10 (2.1) Dharma-ending age; SD 36.2 (3) names & qualities; SD 49.8 (2).

³² On the number of buddhas in an aeon, see SD 36.2 (3.1).

³³ On the world-cycles and buddhas, see SD 49.8b (15.2.2).

³⁴ *Mahantena vāyāmena abhinīhārassa samijjhanato samiddhābhinihārassa ca anekehi pi kappa,koṭi,sahasseehi dullabh’uppādato buddhānaṃ uppādo’pi kiccho yeva, ativiya dullabho’ti.* (DhA 3:325)

³⁵ See also SD 10.9 (8.2.3) & SD 2.19 (9.5).

distances, the Suttas continue, there are a “thousand” (astronomically numerous) suns, moons, galaxies, inhabited realms, and gods (or alien races).

1.5.2 The question now arises whether there are other buddhas in the distant universes (as far as we understand a universe). The answer should be a categorical “no.” The reasons are clear and simple. Firstly, there is no mention in the suttas or any other works related to the early Buddhism. Secondly, from the teachings on the “unique Buddha” [1.3], it is clear that there can be only one Buddha in each universe (called a “Buddha-field,” *buddha,khetta*), which is here defined [1.5.1]. Hence, it is wrong view to make such claims as that there are “cosmic Buddhas” or “cosmic Bodhisattvas” who comes into our universe “from other universes.”

2 Both the Buddha and the arhats are awakened

2.1 THE HISTORICAL BUDDHA

The Buddha was born a human, awakened through self-effort, and passed away into nirvana: the Buddha’s death shows that his teaching of impermanence is true and liberating. The arhats, those who have fully realized the Buddha’s teachings, have no need of further awakening or “enlightenment.” This is the theme of **the Sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58): both the Buddha and the arhats are awakening in the very same way. Soteriologically, the only difference between the Buddha and the arhat is that the Buddha has discovered the way of awakening, while the disciples are his awakened followers.

2.2 THE BUDDHA’S KNOWLEDGE

2.2.1 Same awakening knowledge. There is no difference between the Buddha’s awakening knowledge (*aññā*) and that of the arhats. The only significant differences between the Buddha and the arhats are in terms of their wisdom outside of awakening knowledge. The Buddha’s knowledge, in other words, is unlimited, while that of the arhats is limited to their awakening knowledge plus those of their super-knowledges.³⁶ [2.2.3]

2.2.2 The range of the Buddha’s knowledge

2.2.2.1 The Simsapā Sutta (S 56.31) is the locus classicus for the teaching in the range of the Buddha’s knowledge. While the Buddha and the monks are in a simsapa (or resam) forest, the Buddha holds up a handful of leaves to show the monks that the awakening knowledge taught by the Buddha for our benefit is like the leaves in his hand. However, the knowledge that he has as a buddha is boundless like the leaves on the forest trees.³⁷

2.2.2.2 What the Buddha has taught for our sake—the liberating knowledge that is the 4 noble truths—which are as few as the leaves in his hands—is sufficient for us, if we fully understand them, to awaken to nirvana. The Buddha has not taught us many other things that he knows about because they are “not connected with the goal, not connected with the fundamentals of the holy life, and do not lead to revulsion, to letting go, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.”³⁸

2.2.3 The superknowledges

2.2.3.1 The *abhiññā* pericope—listing the arhat’s superknowledges—found throughout the Nikāyas, as a rule, gives either a set of 3 knowledges or a set of 6 knowledges. The longer set of super powers, called “the 6 superknowledges” (*cha-ḷ-abhiññā*), comprise the following:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| (1) multifarious psychic power | <i>iddhi,vidhā</i> or <i>iddhi,vidha</i> |
| (2) the divine ear | <i>dibba,sota</i> |
| (3) mind-reading | <i>paracitta,vijānanā</i> |
| (4) recollection of past lives | <i>pubbe,nivāsānussati,ñāṇa</i> |

³⁶ On the Buddha’s omniscience, see **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90), SD 10.8 (2); **Sandaka S** (M 76,21+52), SD 35.7; SD 36.2 (5.1.1.2). On the Buddha’s knowledge of the future, see **Pāsādika S** (D 29), S 40a.6 & SD 36.2 (5.10.3).

³⁷ S 56.31,3 (SD 21.7).

³⁸ On this *nibbidā* formula, see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(5) the divine eye, or
the knowledge of death and rebirth, or
knowledge of how beings fare according to their karma</p> <p>(6) the knowledge of the destruction of the influxes</p> | <p><i>dibba,cakkhu</i>
<i>cut'upapāta ñāṇa</i>
<i>yathā,kammūpaga ñāṇa</i>
<i>āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa</i></p> |
|--|--|

They are called “superknowledge” (*abhiñña*)—especially the first five knowledges—because they can only be attained through the higher states of deep meditation, that is, the 4th dhyana. The 6th knowledge—that of arhathood itself—is attained when all the defilements have been destroyed. The first five knowledges, however, are mundane, while only the sixth is supermundane (that is, it has to do with awakening).³⁹

2.2.3.2 The older set of superpowers, often called the “**3 knowledges**” (*te,vijjā*), comprises the following:

- (4) recollection of past lives;
- (5) the divine eye, or the knowledge of death and rebirth, or knowledge of how beings fare according to their karma; and
- (6) the knowledge of the destruction of the influxes.

The last three powers are an ancient set known as the “3 knowledges” of an arhat, as found in the title of **the Te,vijja Sutta** (D 13).⁴⁰

2.3 HARD TRUTHS ABOUT THE BUDDHA

2.3.0 The Buddha arises in the world to discover the true meaning and purpose of life. The meaning of life is simply that everything is impermanent. The purpose of life then is to understand this impermanence, so that we do not suffer on that account, but can be liberated. The way out of suffering by way of understanding the nature of impermanence is clearly laid out in such texts as **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1).⁴¹

The Buddha teaches only about suffering and its ending—as he declares in **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86). We need to discover what this truth of suffering and its arising is, and we need to work for the path to the ending of suffering and to attain that path.⁴² These are the basic hard truths—those of practising the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma—that we must work with in this life itself. To do this, we have to know what the other hard truths of Buddhism—the Dharma’s externality—are.

2.3.1 One of the key early Buddhist teachings is that the Buddha clearly discourages and forbids any kind of worship, even worshipping the Buddha. To worship the Buddha is to relegate him to the status and role of a God, still stuck in samsara, this impermanent world of life and death. It is like saying that “cabbages and kings”⁴³ exist on the sub-atomic level of matter. The following **3 hard truths** remind us that the true purpose of the Buddha’s teaching is to realize true Dharma and awaken to nirvana.

2.3.2 The first hard truth is from **the Brahma,jāla Sutta** (D 1), where the Buddha declares that just as when a stalk of mangoes has been cut, all its mangoes go with it, so too, “After the breaking up of the body and exhaustion of the life-faculty, gods and humans do not see him [the Tathagata].”⁴⁴

³⁹ For details on these 6 superknowledges, see SD 27.5a (5).

⁴⁰ On **the 3 knowledges**, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13) @ SD 1.8 (2.2.2); **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,17-19), SD 49.1 (3.3); 2.24; **Cūḷa Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 27,23-25), SD 40.5.

⁴¹ S 25.1 (SD 16.7).

⁴² S 22.86,21.2 (SD 21.13).

⁴³ This allusion is from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1871). It is also used by O Henry in his novel, *Cabbages and Kings* (1904) about a fictitious Central America “banana republic” (a term he coined) called Anchuria. Its plot contains famous elements in the poem: “shoes and ships and sealing wax, cabbages and kings.” Here, it is used to refer to an “odd miscellany.”

⁴⁴ D 1,147/1:46 (SD 25.2).

In other words, after the Buddha's passing away, there is no way of seeing the Buddha—clearly not through idol-worship or through calling upon his name or those of other Buddhas. The only way to realize the Buddha's teaching is to “**see the Dharma.**”

2.3.3 “Seeing the Dharma” means experiencing the teaching directly through our own practice, not through rituals or vows or faith in others. This teaching of “seeing the Dharma” is given in **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87), where the Buddha exhorts the monk Vakkali, thus: “Enough, Vakkali! What is there to see of this foul body? **One who sees the Dharma sees me; one who sees me, sees the Dharma.** In seeing the Dharma, Vakkali, one sees me, and in seeing me, one sees the Dharma.”⁴⁵ This is not a worldly vision of what is worldly, but a Dharma-inspired vision of awakening.

2.3.4 The third hard truth about Buddhism is that the Buddha, just before passing away, declares that the “**supreme worship**” is not to worship him (or any arhat or being or deity), but to practise the Dharma “in accordance with the Dharma” so that we self-awaken.⁴⁶ We should practise right action and right mindfulness.⁴⁷

2.4 KEEPING TO THE BUDDHA DHARMA

2.4.1 Keeping to the Buddha's teaching

These clear declarations on the nature of the Buddha himself should be well heard and heeded. Their message and spirit are vital for a proper understanding of the Buddha's teaching. When we fail to respect and remember such clear and fundamental exhortations, we are likely to stray from the path and face the bitter fruits of our delusion and hubris.

Sadly, the Buddha's statement on his uniqueness is lost on Buddhist theologians who came after the Buddha's time. Unable to accept the Buddha's death⁴⁸ and not properly attending to his practice in accordance with the Dharma, they have brazenly rejected his fundamental teachings and flooded their world with numerous cosmic Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and, in the process, have burdened themselves with grand philosophies and empty statements, wildly feeding the ready delusions of others.⁴⁹

2.4.2 Walking the right path

No matter how we have gone down the wrong path, it is never too late to turn back. No matter how long we have been with the wrong crowd, we can still get out of it and be ourself. No matter how lost we are, we must keep moving, stepping carefully. We are in real trouble when we imagine we have found what we are looking for—then we stop looking for that goal.

Buddhism can be a winding dangerous desert path going in circles. The Dharma is a straight safe path heading for the ancient city. And someone has found the way—the Buddha. To follow him, we must stay on the path, and take the journey ourself—so we can and must.⁵⁰

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⁴⁵ S 22.87/3:120 (SD 8.8).

⁴⁶ See [Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta](#) (D 16) §§5.1-3 @ SD 9. See also Reflection, “[The supreme worship](#),” R378, 2015.

⁴⁷ I'm not advocating any kind of iconoclasm here. Just as we can and should meaningfully reflect before a Buddha image, it is helpful to understand the significance of the Bodhi tree: For [the origin of venerating the Bodhi tree](#), see the Introduction to [Kaliṅga,bodhi Jātaka](#) (J 479/4:228-230).

⁴⁸ On [the significance of the Buddha's death](#), see SD 49.8b (1.0.5.2 (12))+(12.3.1.1)+(17.2.2.4).

⁴⁹ See, eg, “State or statement? Samādhi in some early Mahāyāna Sūtras,” *Eastern Buddhist* 34,2 2002:51-90. <http://docslide.us/documents/state-or-statement-samadhi-in-some-early-mahayana-sutras.html>.

⁵⁰ See [Nāgara S](#) (S 12.65), [SD 14.2](#)

The Discourse on the Self-awakened

S 22.58

- 1 Originating in Sāvattḥī.
- 2 There (the Blessed One) said:

Awakening through penetrating the aggregates

- 3 (1) “The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **form**,
through dispassion [letting go],
through cessation (of suffering),
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one fully self-awakened**.⁵¹
- 3.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, liberated by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards form,
through dispassion [letting go],
through cessation (of suffering),
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one freed by wisdom**.⁵²
- 4 (2) The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **feeling**,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one fully self-awakened**.
- 4.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, liberated by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards feeling,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one freed by wisdom**.
- 5 (3) The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **perception**,
through dispassion, through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one fully self-awakened**.
- 5.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, liberated by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards perception,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one freed by wisdom**.
- 6 (4) The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **formations**,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one fully self-awakened**.
- 6.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, freed by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards formations,
through dispassion,
through cessation,

⁵¹ *Tathāgato bhikkhave araham sammā,sambuddho rūpassa nibbidā virāgā nirodhā anupādā vimutto sammā,sambuddhoti vuccati.*

⁵² *Bhikkhu pi bhikkhave paññā,vimutto rūpassa nibbidā virāgā nirodhā anupādā vimutto paññā,vimutto 'ti vuccati.*
On the term *paññā,vimutta* here, see (1.1.3).

- is liberated through non-clinging,* is called one *freed by wisdom*.
- 7 (5) The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **consciousness**,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called *one fully self-awakened*.
- 7.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, liberated by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards consciousness,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called one *freed by wisdom*.

The Buddha's question

8 Bhikshus, what then, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, and the wisdom-freed monk?"⁵³

9 "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 bhikshus would remember it."⁵⁴

10 "Then listen, bhikshus, pay close attention to it, I will speak."
"Yes, bhante!" the bhikshus replied in assent to the Blessed One.

The Buddha and the arhat

11 The Blessed One said this:⁵⁵

"**The Tathagata**, bhikshus, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one,

is one who gives rise to the unarisen path,
who causes the unborn path to be born,
who shows the path yet to be shown.
He is the knower of the path,
who understands the path,
an expert regarding the path.⁵⁶

*anuppannassa maggassa uppādetā
asañjātassa maggassa sañjānetā
anakkhātassa maggassa akkhātā
magg'aññū
maggā,vidū
maggā,kovido*

And, bhikshus, **his disciples** now dwell as

followers of that path, accomplishing it afterwards.⁵⁷

maggānugā ... pacchā,samannāgatā

12 This, bhikshus, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, and the wisdom-freed monk."

⁵³ *Tatra kho bhikkhave ko viseso, ko adhippayāso* [Be; Ce *adhippāyo*; Be:Ka Ee Ke Se *adhippāyaso*], *kiṃ nānā, -karaṇaṃ tathāgatassa arahato sammā,sambuddhassa paññā,vimuttena bhikkhunā 'ti*.

⁵⁴ *Bhagavaṃ mūlakā no bhante dhammā bhagavaṃ nettikā bhagavaṃ paṭisaraṇā. Sādhu vata bhante Bhagavan-taṃ yeva paṭibhātu etassa bhāsitaṃ attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressanī ti*, which is stock: **Mahā Dhamma,samādāna S** (M 46,2/1:309 f), **Vimaṃsaka S** (M 47.,3/1:317), **Naḷakapāna S** (M 68,8/1:465), **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122,19/3:115), SD 11.4; S 8.5-11/1:188-196, **Bālena Paṇḍita S** (S 12.19/2:24), SD 21.1, **Parivīmaṃsanā S** (S 12.51/2:81), SD 11.5, **Candūpama S** (S 16.3/2:199), **Sammāsambuddha S** (S 22.58/3:66), **Sall'atthana S** (S 36.6/4:208), SD 5.5, **Ānanda S 2** (S 36.16/4:221); A 3.68/1:199, A 8.6/4:158, A 8.83/4:338, A 9.1/4:351, A 10.58/-5:106, A 11.20/5:355. See S:B 404 n227.

⁵⁵ This *uppādetā* pericope is at M 3:8,12 = S 1:191,3 ≈ 3:68,16 (SA 2:278,5) = Pm 2:194,19 ≈ Miln 217,10+ 219,11 ≈ Ap 570,5 ≈ ThīA 91,33*. See (1.1.2).

⁵⁶ The whole para: *Tathāgato bhikkhave araham sammā,sambuddho anuppannassa maggassa uppādetā, asañjātassa maggassa sañjānetā* [Ke Se; Be *sañjanetā*], *anakkhātassa maggassa akkhātā, magga-ñ,ñū magga,vidū magga,-kovido*.

⁵⁷ *Maggānugā ca bhikkhave etarahi sāvaka viharanti, pacchā,samannāgatā*.

— evaṃ —

[**Bibliography**, see end of SD 49c]

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