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Muni Sutta

The Discourse on the Silent Sage | Sn 1.12 (Sn 207-221)

Theme: The nature of true sagehood

Translated by Piya Tan ©2016

1 The silent sage (*muni*)**1.1 THE MUNI AS IDEAL**

1.1.1 The Muni Sutta (Sn 1.12) describes the characteristics of the silent sage (*muni*), the earliest ideal of renunciation in historical Buddhism. The same ideal is also the theme of **the Uruga Sutta** (Sn 1.1),¹ **the Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 1.3)² and **the Nālaka Gāthā** (or Moneyya Sutta) (Sn 3.11).³ On account of their *muni* theme, these texts can be considered as the “*muni* suttas.”

1.1.2 It should also be noted that the qualities of the *muni* are often mentioned in a number of suttas of **the Aṭṭhaka Vagga** (Sn ch 4), such as **the Jarā Sutta** (Sn 4.6), **the Tissa Metteyya Sutta** (Sn 4.7) and **the (Aṭṭhaka Vagga) Māgandiya Sutta** (Sn 4.9).⁴ Insofar as they highlight the *muni*, they can be generically known as a “*muni* sutta.” [2.1.3]

1.1.3 Natural adaptation

1.1.3.1 In the Sabhiya Sutta (Sn 3.6), the Buddha explains to the wanderer Sabhiya that an awakened being—the ideal of the Buddha Dharma—can be known by any name that reflects the highest state of spiritual liberation, the first of those mentioned is the *bhikkhu* or “monk” (Sn 513 f) and the *muni* or “sage” (Sn 527, 541, 545). Besides, the Buddha mentions a wide range of other terms used in other systems and well known to others that he freely applies—by way of “natural adaptation”⁵—to a fully awakened being or arhat (*arahata*) (Sn p102,15).

1.1.3.2 Such terms for the early Buddhist ideal include *danta* (“tamed,” Sn 516), *brahmā* (“perfected,” Sn 519), *samaṇa* (“recluse,” Sn 520), *nhātaka* (“washed (inwardly), baptised,” Sn 521), *nāga* (“naga,” Sn 522), *khetta,jina* (BHS *kṣetra-jñā*,⁶ “field-knower,” Sn 524),⁷ *kusala* (“skilful,” Sn 525), *paṇḍita* (“learned,” Sn 526), *vedagū* (“Veda-attained,” knowledge master, Sn 529), *ājāniya* (“thoroughbred,” Sn 532), *sottiya* (“master of the heard (sacred tradition),” Sn 534), *ariya* (“noble,” Sn 535), *caraṇava* (“good in conduct,” Sn 536), *buddha* (“awakened,” of the Buddha, Sn 545), and so on.⁸

¹ **Uruga S** (Sn 1.1/1-17*/p1-3).

² **Khagga,visāṇa S** (Sn 1.3/35-75*/p6-12), SD 109.3.

³ **Nālaka Gāthā** (Moneyya S) (699-723*/136-139), SD 49.18—ie, **Nālaka S** (Sn 3.11/679-723*) without its *vattu, gāthā*.

⁴ **Jarā S** (Sn 4.6/804-813/p158-160), SD 109.5; **Tissa Metteyya S** (Sn 4.7/814-823*/p160 f), SD 109.6; **(Aṭṭhaka Vagga) Māgandiya S** (Sn 4.9/835-847*/p163-166), SD 84.1.

⁵ On the Buddha’s use of natural adaptation, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

⁶ A similar construction is found in *magga,jina* [1.3.1.2]. On the development of *-jñā* to *-jina*, see Sn:N 238 n372 & 270 n523.

⁷ As *khetta,jina*, the Buddha or arhat is one who the “fields,” a syn for the world (*loka*) “with its gods,” and also his ability to gauge the readiness of beings to benefit from Dharma teaching: see the parable of the 3 fields (**Khetta Desanā S** (S 42.7/4:315 f), SD 12.1 (3.2).

⁸ **Sabhiya S** (Sn 3.6/91-102), SD 77.8.

1.1.3.3 Conspicuous by its absence is the term *arahata*, “worthy,” an arhat, but this is mentioned in the stock passage of Sabhiya’s awakening at the end of the Sutta (Sn p102,15). We, then, effectively see all such terms as being used by the Buddha to refer to the arhat. Words do not really matter when the highest liberation has been attained. What’s in a name—liberation by any name, tastes just as free.

1.2 MUNI AND BHIKKHU

1.2.1 The Muni Sutta parallels **the Uruga Sutta** (Sn 1.1) in many ways. While the Muni Sutta extols the silent sage or *muni*, the Uruga Sutta defines the ideal monk or *bhikkhu*. In the early Buddhist texts, there is no difference between the two: both describe the solitary itinerant mendicant of the first period.⁹

1.2.2 Earliest monasticism

1.2.2.1 However, although technically, the Buddha is the first *bhikkhu*—and, as such, is the “first amongst equals” in terms of those who are fully awakened, the arhats—there are occasions when *muni* is applied to the Buddha (eg Sn 545), when he is famously referred to *sakya,muni*, the sage of the Sakyas.¹⁰ The most famous image of the *muni* is that of the Buddha sitting alone in meditation under the Bodhi tree, especially during the first 7 weeks after the great awakening.

1.2.2.2 The first 5 monks who became arhats with the teaching of **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59) must have been silent sages (*muni*), too. Hence, we can understand Assaji’s reluctance to say anything even in terms of teaching the wanderer Sāriputta.¹¹ A probable reason for Assaji’s initial silence is motivated by the *muni* spirit that pervades these early monks at that time.

It is only when Sāriputta insists that Assaji teaches him some Dharma, that Assaji utters the famous “conditionality pericope” beginning, “Whatever states that arise from causes, | their causes the Tathagata has told” (*ye dhammā hetu-p,pabhavā | tesam hetum tathāgato ahu*). Hearing this, Sāriputta becomes a streamwinner, as does Mogallāna later when he, too, hears the same two lines.

1.2.3 Evolving monasticism

1.2.3.1 Based on internal evidence (the sutta accounts), we may surmise that even up to the time of the great commission—the sending of the first 60 monks into the world (V 1:23)¹²—the early monks all live as “silent sages.” Again, for this very reason, it can be surmised that we do not have any records of teachings given by the more senior monks of this first period [1.2.1]—certainly no teachings by any member of the group of the 5 monks, or any of the matted-hair Kassapa brothers or their disciples, or even Yasa and his 54 friends.

1.2.3.2 We may even say that almost no teachings were given, or none were recorded. All these monks were admitted after they have attained arhathood or at least streamwinning. The Buddha himself simply utters the words *ehi,bhikkhu* (Come, bhikshu!) or their variation depending on the number of can-

⁹ The “first period” of the Buddha’s ministry refers particularly to the first 10 years, but may extend to the first 20 years. The “second period” refers to the remaining years, ie, the last 20-25 years of the Buddha’s ministry. See SD 1.1 (2.2) & 40a.1 (1.3).

¹⁰ **Sakka Pañha S** (D 2:274*), where he is also called “Buddha.” Elsewhere, however, he is referred to as such mostly in the later works and the Comys, eg, V 1:310; Khp 6.4b = Sn 225b (Ratana S); Vv 881b (Chatta Mānavaka Vv) = VvA 230; Pv 698*/82 (= PvA 249); Bv 26.9*/97; Ap 1.515*(qu at ThaA 2:101); Nc:Be 207; DA 1:60* = MA 1:46* = AA 1:104* = UA 154* = ItA 1:118* = 138* = BA 15 = NmA 1:178 = PmA 1:207; KhpA 180 ; SnA 2:408. For defs of Sakya,muni, see SnA 1:278, VvA 231; UA 154* = ItA 1:138.

¹¹ Mv 1.13.5+10 @ V 1:40,28*+41,35* (VA 5:975) = Ap 1.146/1:25 (ApA 231) = Petk 10 = ThaA 3:95. See SD 42.8 (1.2).

¹² Mv 1.11.1 (V 1:20 f) = (**Māra**) **Pāsa S 2**, S 4.5/1:105 f; Mvst 3:415 f; see SD 11.2 (6).

didates to be admitted.¹³ They are the *de facto* monk-renunciants: the fact that they have attained the path naturally makes them “noble,” that is, saints who have a natural community with one another. Here, “community” (*saṃvāsa*) a natural spiritual bond amongst these saints, who have naturally internalized moral virtue, and liberated by wisdom. They form **the noble community** (*ariya,saṅgha*).

1.2.3.3 Early Buddhist monastic tradition records that 7-year-old Rāhula is admitted by Sāriputta by “the ordination by refuge-going.”¹⁴ We have no canonical record of the Buddha’s visit to Kapilavattu. We are told by the Jātaka Nidāna,kathā that the Buddha’s first visit there was during the first year of the ministry (J 87-93). However, there seems to be no record of Rāhula having attained any level of sainthood at the time of his admission into the order.

This visit by the Buddha to Kapilavattu so early in his ministry is problematic. It is possible that the suttas are so focused on seeing the Buddha and his community leading the lives of solitary silent sages, and omit all records of his visit to Kapilavattu at this stage. Perhaps his visit to Kapilavattu was made much later during the first period. [1.2.1]

1.2.3.4 Two other unique methods of ordination are mentioned, that is, by the acceptance of admonition (for Mahā Kassapa, who attained arhathood later)¹⁵ and by question-answering (for the 7-year-old arhat, Sopāka).¹⁶ It is likely that while Mahā Kassapa attained at least streamwinning, which qualifies him for the special mode of admission, Sopāka, as an arhat, is a de facto monk, a member of the noble sangha, even as a young novice.

1.2.3.5 The point here is that although the spirit of silent sagehood continued with the more senior monks (those who joined the noble sangha before the great commission), the later monks who are unawakened still needed to undergo the 3 trainings.¹⁷ Such monks, in fact, began to dominate the later sangha once the monks are allowed to perform their own formal ordination, that is, ordaining unawakened candidates by the “act of a motion with 3 proclamations” (*ñatti,catuttha,kamma*).¹⁸

Since these monks still need their training, they will generally have to live with the community of their teachers and other training monks. With this, Buddhist monasticism became more organized for the “monks” (*bhikkhu*), those who generally do not follow the “silent sage” tradition.

This is not to say that the *muni* tradition has ended, but rather, it is continued by the more mature monastics who are trained and ready for the solitary forest life, living as the traditional silent sages. We know, for example, that Mahā Kassapa lived mostly in this manner until after the Buddha’s passing away.

1.2.3.6 Another important factor in the institutionalization of monastic Buddhism—become more settled communities not too far from cities, towns or villages on which they vitally depend—is the existence of the order of nuns (*bhikkhunī,saṅgha*).¹⁹ As women were very vulnerable in the patriarchal society in which the Buddha lived (as it often still is in India even today), they have to be given special provisions for their safety.²⁰ Hence, they are not allowed to live alone in the forest, or anywhere else, for that matter. Thus, they set up their own communities which are not too far away from a monastic community.

¹³ See SD 45.16 (1).

¹⁴ See SD 45.16 (2.2).

¹⁵ See SD 45.16 (2.3).

¹⁶ See SD 45.16 (2.4).

¹⁷ On the 3 trainings (*sikkhā-t,taya*), see **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c; **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).

¹⁸ See SD 45.16 (3).

¹⁹ On the foundation of the *bhikkhunī* sangha and related issues, see SD 1.9.

²⁰ On the rape of the Buddha’s right-hand nun, Uppala,vaṇṇā, see **Uppala,vaṇṇa-t,therī Vatthu** (DhA 5.10/2:48-52). On how the nun Subhā has to fend off the advances of her past admirer, see **Subhā Thī** (Thī 366-399), SD 20.7.

1.2.4 Differences

1.2.4.1 The *muni* and the *bhikkhu* are synonymous in the early Buddhist texts insofar as they reflect and practise the way of the solitary itinerant mendicant: the lone wandering monk whose special quality is spiritual silence (*moneyya*). It helps, right from the start, to remember that *bhikkhu* is the broader term, referring to any adult Buddhist renunciant, while *muni* is the narrower, referring to a renunciant who is accomplished in the specific practice of spiritual aloneness and silence—as famously described in **the Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 1.3/35-75) [1.1.1].

In other words, we may go forth or ordain as a *bhikkhu*, but not as a *muni*—only our spiritual practice and its accomplishment bring sagehood. However, a *bhikkhu* and all renunciants are encouraged and expected to emulate the *muni*, even if he is unable to attain the goal in this life itself.

1.2.4.2 On account of the special spiritual state of the *muni* or silent sage, he is attributed a wide range of spiritual attributes that reflect his special qualities. He is, for example called the *mahēsi* (*mahā isi*), “great seer.” *Isi* is a popular Indian term for a lone forest ascetic renowned for his wisdom. The Buddha, as a *muni*, is referred to at least 11 times as *mahesi* in the Sutta Nipāta.²¹ *Mahesi*, the great seer, in other words, is a synonym for *muni*, the silent sage.

Such fluidity of terms reminds us that sagehood (indeed all Dharma-centred states)—at least as envisioned by the historical Buddha—is a spiritual state, not a religious *status* or title. It is the result and fruit of spiritual effort and experience that transforms us from being worldly to become spiritual beings. We dispel our defilements and celebrate noble virtues that are good for us and benefit others, even the world.

1.2.4.3 In later times, however, such special terms are watered down, exploited and plagiarized by worldly gurus and charlatans to legitimize their doctrines and practices, and to attract charisma to entrench their social positions and attract wealth, pleasure and comfort. They are like schoolboys who, not having done their homework, copy others’ works and put their names to it, or like bullies who prey on the gullible and vulnerable who are keen to learn and love but are blinded by their light and lost in their shadows.

1.2.5 Practice and developments

1.2.5.1 The *muni* is historically a unique early Buddhist ideal, reflecting the Buddha’s own lifestyle, especially during the first period of his ministry. Even after Buddhism—a term that freely refers to the Buddha’s life, teachings and related developments—became popular and monasticism more institutionalized, the Buddha and the arhats, even as they engaged with the world, constantly and consistently maintain an interiority of the *muni*.

1.2.5.2 In **the Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 122), the Buddha’s inclination towards the practice of “silent sagehood” (*moneyya*) is described as “abiding in emptiness” (*suññatā, vihāra*), thus:

However, Ānanda, there is this abode awakened to by the Tathagata [Thus Come],²² namely, that having attained and abiding in emptiness internally [in the inner emptiness]²³ by not attending to any meditation sign.²⁴

²¹ Sn 82a, 176d, 177d, 208c, 481a, 646a, 1054a, 1057a, 1061b, 1067a, 1083a.

²² Comy: The Buddha begins with this passage to prevent any criticism that while he enjoins his disciples to live in solitude, he himself is often surrounded by a large retinue. “Emptiness” here refers to the fruition attainment of emptiness. **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121) opens with a mention of the Buddha’s own “abiding in emptiness” (*suññatā, vihāra*) (M 121,3/3:104), and where this section is elaborated.

6.2 Now, Ānanda, if while the Tathagata is abiding in this manner, he is visited by monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, kings, the kings' chief ministers, other religious teachers, the disciples of other religious teachers,

then, Ānanda, with a mind bent on solitude, leaning towards solitude, inclining towards solitude, mentally aloof (from distractions), delighting in letting-go of sense delights, and totally done with things that are the bases for mental influxes,²⁵

he is one who only speaks in connection with rousing them in the wholesome (and then dismissing them).

7 Therefore, Ānanda, if a monk were to wish: 'May I attain and abide in emptiness within [the inner emptiness],' then, Ānanda, he should steady his mind internally, quiet it down, make it one-pointed, concentrate it.²⁶ (M 122,6.2), SD 11.4

The Buddha then goes on to describe all the 4 dhyanas in full. This is followed by a series of definitions on each of the 4 stages of sainthood in the ascending sequence, ending with arhathood. The Sutta closes with the Buddha advising on the difficulties of spiritual training and our finding the right teacher.

1.2.5.3 A beautiful example of how a disciple practises "silent sagehood" can be seen in the case of the monk Anuruddha, as recorded in **the (Anuruddha) Mahā, vitakka Sutta** (A 8.30). During his solitary retreat, these 7 thoughts arise to Anuruddha:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) This Dharma is for one of few wishes, | not for one with many wishes. |
| (2) This Dharma is for the contented, | not for the discontented. |
| (3) This Dharma is for one in solitude [for the reclusive], | not for one who delights in socializing. |
| (4) This Dharma is for one who puts forth effort [the energetic], | not for the indolent [the lazy]. |
| (5) This Dharma is for one who establishes mindfulness, | not for one of confused mind. |
| (6) This Dharma is for one in samadhi [mental concentration], | not for one without samadhi. |
| (7) This Dharma is for the wise, | not for the foolish." |

(A 8.30,1.3), SD 19.5

The Buddha then appears to Anuruddha and teaches him the 8th thought, that is,

- (8) This Dharma is for one

who rejoices in **the non-proliferation of the mind,**
who delights in the non-proliferation of the mind,
not for one who rejoices in mental proliferation,
*who delights in mental proliferation.*²⁷

(A 8.30,3), SD 19.5

This set of "thoughts" became famously known as the "8 thoughts of the great man" (*aṭṭha mahā-purisa vitakka*). This set of teachings define the nature of "silent sagehood" (*moneyya*). The 8th and last thought is the benefit of sagehood, that is, a mind that is fully free of thoughts and full of spacious joy.

²³ "Abiding in emptiness internally" (*ajjhataṃ suññatāṃ...vihāritum*), ie, he is as if alone, though sitting in the midst of company (MA 4:159). Cf M 122,9.1 + SD 11.4 (2).

²⁴ The Buddha alludes to this in **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,45.3), SD 49.4.

²⁵ The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsava*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kāma'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava'āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjā'sava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as "floods" (*ogha*) and "yokes" (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is prob older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsava*s is equivalent to arhathood. See M 122,6.2 n (SD 11.4) & BDict: *āsava*.

²⁶ This latter sentence is very similar to the one in **Dvedhā, vitakka S** (M 19,10/1:116) & A 2:94.

²⁷ *Nippapañc'ārāmassāyam dhammo nippapañca, ratino, nāyam dhammo papañc'ārāmassa papañca, ratino ti.*

1.2.5.4 Even in suttas that recount the Buddha giving teachings or transmitting the Dharma to others, we are often told that he spends at least twice a day—the pre-dawn hours and the twilight hours—in solitary retreat (*paṭisallāna*). Often, during such a solitude, some Dharma musing may occur to him, or some new helpful practice for the benefit of the monastic community and lay assembly. The same practice is also recorded of other disciples, including the laity.²⁸

The Buddha’s call for monastics to live the *muni* spirit can be found in such discourses as **the (Duka) Paṭisallāna Sutta** (It 45).²⁹ In **the (Khandha) Paṭisallāna Sutta** (S 22.6), the Buddha advises us to “make an effort to devote ourselves to solitude” (*paṭisallāne bhikkhave yogam āpajjatha*), the benefit of which is that we would understand true reality.³⁰

1.2.5.5 On various occasions, the Buddha’s disciples would take leave of the Buddha, asking him for a “teaching in brief” (*saṅkhitta, dhamma*), including meditation instructions. Then, they go into **solitary retreat to attain arhathood**, after which they return to report to the Buddha.³¹ Even after becoming arhats, they would continue to practise solitude twice daily [1.2.5.4].

An example of a disciple’s solitary retreat reflecting the spirit of the “silent sage” or *muni* is that of Sāriputta, as recorded in **the Viveka,ja Sutta** (S 28.1).³² Here, the arhat Sāriputta admonishes the streamwinner Ānanda on the nature and benefits of spiritual solitude—this is, of course, what is known as “sagehood” (*moneyya*) in the early years of the ministry. These important suttas should be examined in some detail for our own practice and benefit according to our capability, whether we are monastic or lay, for a vision of inner stillness, even awakening itself.

1.2.5.6 The Cātumā Sutta (M 67) records an interesting occasion when the Buddha actually sternly dismisses a group of new monks who are uncharacteristically noisy. Only after the intercession of the Sakyas of Cātumā and of Mahā Brahmā himself, does the Buddha recall the monks, and he then admonishes them with the famous parables of the 4 dangers. Here again, we see the Buddha acting to impress on these new monks the significance of practising some level of “silent sagehood” (*moneyya*).³³

1.2.5.7 In a historical sense, the Buddha’s practice of silent sagehood (*moneyya*) is an emulation, or even a continuation, of the ancient “**seer**” (*isi*; Skt *ṛṣi*), that is, a forest anchorite who is a sage who has attained special powers, especially of insight.³⁴ The key difference is that the Buddha teaches non-self (*anattā*) and is fully awakened, unlike the seers before him. The Buddha also introduces the training for sagehood amongst his disciples, so that it can be taken up either as a solitary practice or in a communal monastic setting.

The Buddha’s tradition of sagehood, in due course, influenced even the Brahmanical tradition, and was closely associated with its *yoga* (“spiritual discipline”) ideal. As in the Buddhist tradition, the Brah-

²⁸ The solitary musings of king Pasenadi of Kosala, eg, are recorded in **(Pasenadi) Piya S** (S 3.4), SD 38.8 (on wholesome love); **Atta Rakkhita S** (S 3.5), SD 38.9 (on protecting the 3 doors). Other such musings recorded in **Kosala Saṃyutta** (S 3.6, 3.18). On Seniya Bimbisāra’s solitude, see **Mahā,vagga** (V 1:101,8).

²⁹ **(Duka) Paṭisallāna S** (It 45) + SD 41.4 (1).

³⁰ *Paṭisallāno bhikkhave bhikkhu yathā bhūtam pajānāti*, S 22.6/3:15 (SD 48.12).

³¹ Case of monks going into solitude and returning as arhats: **Māluṅkyā,putta**, **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63,3) SD 5.8; **Dabba Malla,putta**, **Culla,vagga** (V 2:74,30), **Saṅghādisesa 8** (V 3:158,7); **Udāyī**, **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66,6) SD 28.11; **Sāriputta**, **Sakkacca S** (A 7.66,2), **Pār 1** (V 3:7,21); **Vaṅgīsa**, **Nigrodha,kappa S** (Sn 2.12); a certain monk, **Raho,gataka S** (S 36.11) SD 33.5.

³² **Viveka,ja S** (S 28.1), SD 33.3a.

³³ **Cātumā S** (M 67), SD 34.7.

³⁴ D 1:96; S 1:33, 35, 65, 128, 191, 192, 226 f, 236, 2:280; A 2:24, 51; V 4:15 = 22; It 123; Sn 284, 458, 979, 689, 691, 1008, 1025, 1043, 1044, 1116, 1126, Nc 149 (where *isi* is broadly used to encompass any kind of renunciants who are ascetics (*tāpasa*): *isi,pabbajjam pabbajitā ājīvika nigaṇṭhā jaṭilā tāpasā*, ie, the Ājīvikas, the Jains, and the matted-hair ascetics); Dh 281; J 1:17 (of the Buddha: *isayo n’atthi me samā*, “of seers, there is none like me”); J 5:140, 266, 267 (*isi gotamo*, “the seer Gotama”); Pv 2.6.14.

manical *yoga*, too, saw the *muni* ideal as a “middle way,” that is, the abstaining of extremes, between self-mortification and worldly pleasures. This ideal was current even in pre-Asokan times, and is echoed in the anti-Buddhist Bhagavad-gītā, where the very same term *muni* is used.³⁵ [1.3.2.1 n]

1.2.5.8 The subtlety of such inspirational theistic works was amongst the reasons for the success of the brahmins, and later the Hindus, in reclaiming their social dominance over the Buddhist tradition in India, just as the Lotus Sutra, in neo-theistic polemics, works to subtly undermine the authority of early Buddhism in our own times.

The best way that we can counter such dark inroads is to live the *muni* tradition as taught by the Buddha, and to keep it well alive to inspire others to see its value. The basic idea here is to understand and experience the truth and beauty of self-effort through moral virtue, mental cultivation, wisdom, and self-liberation as the bases for a Dharma-spirited community.

1.3 TERMS RELATED TO THE *MUNI*

1.3.1 *Tādī*

1.3.1.1 One of the hallmarks of the early Buddhist texts is their non-technical usages of terms and simple words for profound qualities and states. One such term is *tādī* (mfn and m), which has two key senses:

- (1) such a person, a person like that referring to someone previously described (similar to Latin, *ecce homo*, “behold the man”);³⁶
- (2) (cf BHS *tādr(n)*, *tāyin*; Amg *tāi*),³⁷ (one) who is like that, just so; the same; (one) who is unaffected, immoveable (usually defined so in the Commentaries, eg SnA 2:163,13, where he is said to be unshaken by any of the 8 worldly conditions³⁸; DhA 2:182,3-4, where he is free from woeful states and samsara, and is happy).³⁹

While (1) refers to the “deictic person,” the one pointed out (a demonstrative adjective),⁴⁰ (2) refers to the state of such a person.

1.3.1.2 In the *Nālaka Sutta* (Sn 3.11), the Bodhisattva is described to equanimously accept his alms-food, whether it is good or bad: “In either case, he is simply just so” (*ubhayen’eva so tādī*, Sn 712c).⁴¹ The Commentary glosses “just so” (*tādī*) as “remaining unchanged” (*nibbikāro hutvā*, SnA 2:16 f). Its abstract noun is *tādī, bhava* [1.3.1.3]. *Tādī* is used here simply to reflect the Bodhisattva’s equanimity. Since he is still unawakened, we can only say that he is emulating (perhaps unwittingly but naturally) the way of the *muni*.

Clearly here, in both cases—as a noun and an adjective—*tādī* also has the sense of “impartiality,” that is, the action of wisdom and compassion working together for the benefit of others.⁴² In an important way, its sense overlaps with that of *tathāgata*.⁴³

³⁵ See, eg, Bhagavad-gītā 2-6, esp 2.56, 2.69, 5.6, 28, 6.3.

³⁶ V 4:54,17*; M 2:144,22*; Dh 95b; Sn 86; Vv 21.2; Tha 282, 1173. It is interesting to note what in Latin take two words (*ecce homo*), in Pali it takes only one, *tādī*, to refer to the Buddha or an arhat

³⁷ See Lüders, *Beobachtungen*, 1954: §108; De Jong 1974:69 n8; Tha:N 131 n41 & 271 n1077.

³⁸ The 8 worldly conditions (*loka, dhamma*) are: gain and loss, fame and obscurity, blame and praise, joy and pain: see **Loka, dhamma S 1+2** (A 8.5+6), SD 42.2+3.

³⁹ V 1:185,7*; D 2:266,13*; A 2:25,21 f; Sn 712; Tha 974; Thī 249.

⁴⁰ On *deixis*, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deixis>.

⁴¹ Sn 3.11 (712c), SD 49.18.

⁴² See M 47,10.2 n (SD 35.6); SD 15.7 (2.2.2).

⁴³ See SD 15.7 (2). On *tādīno* (gen sg), see **Sabba Kamma Jaha S** (U 3.1.12/21) + SD 39.3 (1.4.2).

1.3.1.3 Let us look at some usages of *tādī* in its spiritual sense.

The Cunda Sutta (Sn 1.5) declares that “the buddhas call such a one a path-knower”⁴⁴ (*tādim magga-jinam vadanti buddhā*), that is, one “Who has crossed over doubt, barbless, | who delights in nirvana, free of greed, | a leader of the world with its devas” (Sn 86).⁴⁵

The Param’atthaka Sutta (Sn 4.5) speaks of the *bhikkhu* as “Such a one has gone beyond, he returns not” or “He has gone beyond such that he returns not” or “Such a one is he: gone beyond, he returns not” (*pāraṅgato na pacceti tādī*, Sn 803d).

In **the Sāriputta Sutta** (Sn 4.16), the Buddha is called “unattached” (*asita*) and “just so” (*tādim*) (Sn 957a), while in **the Muni Sutta** (Sn 1.12), he is said “such” (*tādim*, Sn 219b) in the sense of being “unattached, influx-free” (*asitam anāsavam*, Sn 219c).⁴⁶

As we have noted in **the Sabhiya Sutta** (Sn 3.6), those who are “such” (*tādī*), one fully awakened, can be referred to in many ways. He is “perfected” (*brahmā*, Sn 519), a “field-knower” (*khetta,jina*, Sn 524), a “knowledge master” (*veda,gū*, Sn 529) and a “tradition master” (*sottiya*, Sn 534) [1.1.32].

1.3.1.4 Buddhaghosa explains that the 5 element-like meditations [§§13-17]—the meditation on the 4 elements and on space—are given to Rāhula in **the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62), so that he would train himself in impartiality (*tādī,bhāva*) or “suchness.”⁴⁷

In **the Vuttha Vass’āvāsa Sutta** (A 9.11)—where the 4-element impartiality practices recur—Sāriputta gives a lion-roar by way of telling the Buddha that he dwells with his mind like these 4 primary elements in this manner, but adding his own similes to each of them.⁴⁸ Although the term, *tādī*, is not used here, we see its sense being applied here in Sāriputta’s case.

1.3.2 Terms with -atta

1.3.2.0 Here, we will briefly look at only three compounds: *yat’atta* (Sn 216b), *saññat’atta* (Sn 216a) and *thit’atta* (Sn 215a) in connection with the *muni* or sage in the Muni Sutta. However, elsewhere, on account of their limited range (only restraining the senses and perhaps the mind, too), these terms can also apply to any well disciplined monastic, whether they are saints or not. Such a scenario suggests the potential that awaits them—that of attaining sagehood.

1.3.2.1 In Pali, the word *attā* can mean either (1) “self” (in linguistic or grammatical senses) or (2) “soul” (in metaphysical or religious senses). While the former sense is common in the suttas, the latter is unequivocally rejected by the Buddha, and is only mentioned in terms of rejecting the notion, such as in the well known term *anatta*, “non-self.” The former sense—*attā* as “self”—is often used as a reflexive pronoun in the suttas, either by itself or as part of a compound.⁴⁹

The difference between the two senses of the same word, *attā*, is highlighted in **the Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja Sutta** (Sn 3.4), where the Buddha declares of the true practitioner: “He contemplates not the self as Self.”⁵⁰ The “self” (with the initial lower-case) is our mind, or the conventional or reflexive self; the “Self” (with the initial capital) refers to the imagined abiding entity, eternal essence or universal Soul—

⁴⁴ “The path-knower,” *magga,jina*, lit, “path conqueror.” In Nm 446,21 (ad Sn 995) the Buddha is referred to as *netā* (“leader,” lit, one who leads out), and in 446,25 he is called *magga-ññu*, “who knows the way.” Hence, it is likely that *-jina* here was originally *-jñā*. A similar construction is found in *khetta,jina* [1.1.3.2]. See Sn:N 182 n84.

⁴⁵ *Yo tiṇṇa,kathankatho visallo | nibbānābhirato anānuguddho | lokassa sa,devakassa netā | tadim magga,jinam vadant buddhā* (Sn 86). The last has been mentioned first.

⁴⁶ Sn 4.16 (955-975*); Sn 1.12 (SD 49.20).

⁴⁷ M 62,13-17 (SD 3.11); see also Vism 1.10/5, 7.71/214. On *tādī*, see SD 49.20 (1.3.1).

⁴⁸ A 9.11/4:374 f (SD 28.2a); see also Dh 81.

⁴⁹ For a list of such usages, see SD 26.9 (2.1.1).

⁵⁰ *Yo attanā attānam nānupassati* (Sn 477a), SD 22.2. The former “self” is a conventional mode of address (a linguistic or grammatical sense), while the latter is a metaphysical notion (that of an unchanging entity). Comy: He does not regard the 5 aggregates as the “self” (ie as an abiding entity) (SnA 410). See SD 49.20 (1.3.2.1).

which does not exist. The reason for this is very simple: whatever exists must exist in change—existence is itself change. That which does not change, does not exist, or is simply a manner of speech, a word-play.⁵¹

1.3.2.2 In the Muni Sutta (Sn 1.12), the *muni* is said to be “self-restrained” (*yat’atta*) toward others whether they are young or middle-aged [216b]. In other words, the *muni* is never to commit any bad with anyone who is likely to do so. It is assumed here that the old and mature are wise enough not to even consider not to commit bad deeds, or that the *muni* would not even consider taking advantage of the elderly in doing bad—hence, they are not even mentioned.

The term “self-restrained” (*yat’atta*) (Sn 490b) is found in **the Māgha Sutta** (Sn 3.5), where it applies to monastics in general, who may be neither arhats nor non-returners. Those who are not yet non-returners have yet to master their senses fully, even the once-returners and the streamwinners. It can be even more difficult for an unawakened monastic to be full self-restrained. Since they are not naturally self-restrained, they are said to be only “self-restrained” (*yat’atta*) but their minds are not naturally fully restrained through the destruction of some or all of their defilements.

The closing verse of **the Nālaka Sutta** (Sn 3.11) begins with the line, “For, he, knowing, is self-restrained” (*yo ca jānaṃ saṃyat’atto*, Sn 723a). The Pali Text Society edition of Sutta Nipāta has the reading *yat’atto* (“self-restrained”) instead of *saṃyat’atto* (“mentally well-restrained”). “He” (*yo*) here is the *muni*, the silent sage. The *muni* has full custody of his senses. This is especially natural for the *muni* because he is a good meditator, a dhyana-attainer, one who is able to free himself from all his physical senses and the mind, and to enjoy full mental and spiritual bliss.

1.3.2.3 The compound *saññat’atta*, “well self-restrained” or “mentally well-restrained,” is actually the same as *saṃyat’atta*, differing only in spelling. The Muni Sutta describes the *muni* as one “who, well-restrained, does no bad” [Sn 216a]. Understandably, “bad” (*pāpa*) refers to all the karmic deeds of body, speech and mind. The *muni* is in full control of himself.

The Brāhmaṇa, dhammika Sutta (Sn 2.7), the term *saññat’atta* is applied to the ancient brahmin seers (*isi*)—they are said to be “well-restrained ascetics” (*saññat’attā tapassino*) (Sn 284b). The application of the term here is interesting. Clearly, even when these ancient pre-Buddhist seers can be “well-restrained. However, they are still capable of practising moral virtue, so that being well-restrained ascetics, they are the closest we can envision of such moral virtue outside of Buddhism.

Furthermore, the Buddha wants to impress on society, especially the brahmins, that he is not teaching anything new, but merely reminding them that their brahminical ancestors were very serious spiritual practitioners—unlike the materialistic, superstitious and sycophantic priests that they have become. The Buddha, of course, has more to offer than merely moral virtue—he offers self-liberating wisdom.

1.3.2.4 The phrase *ṭhit’atta*, “whose mind is steadfast,” is found in **Sn 215a**: “Whose mind is steadfast, indeed, straight as a shuttle” (*yo ve ṭhit’atto tasaraṃ va ujjū*). This is said of a *muni* because he has a naturally steady mind through his awakening, and, because it is free from all defilements, he is able to easily keep mindfulness and to direct his mind into dhyana.

The simile of the shuttle is also found in **the Sundarika Bhāra, dvāja** (Sn 3.4), along with the term *susaññat’atta*.⁵² In the Sutta, the Buddha states that amongst the qualities of one who is worthy of alms offerings is one “with the self well-restrained, straight as a shuttle” (*susaññat’attā tasaraṃ va ujjū*) (Sn 464b). These are, of course, the qualities of a *muni*. “With self well-restrained” refers to his moral virtue of body and speech—the “self” (*attā*) is his mind, the naturally wholesome motivation for such restraint. It is not merely an effort of external self-control, as in the case of the unawakened.⁵³

⁵¹ The Bhagavad-gītā (“the Lord’s Songs”) is a 700-verse Skt work composed around 200 BCE that characteristically anti-Buddhist. It makes just the opposite stand regarding the self, ie, seeing the Self by the Self (2.20).

⁵² Resolved as *su*, “well” (intensifier) + *saṃ* (infix suggesting “focus”) + *yata*, “restrained” + *atta*, “self, mind.”

⁵³ Sn 3.4 = 464d (SD 22.2).

The phrase, “straight as a shuttle” (*tasaram va uju*) [Sn 215a; 3.2 ad loc],⁵⁴ not only further endorses the *muni*’s moral virtue, but alludes to his “straight mind” (*uju, citta*), that is, he rejoices in having been able to abandon all crookedness (*vaṅka*) (that is, distraction or pollution) of body, speech and mind” (SnA 1:265). Another well known simile for the well-directed and focused mind is that of a fletcher straightening an arrow (Dh 33).

1.3.2.5 Other occurrences of the phrase “whose mind is steadfast” (*thit’atta*) can be found in the following places:

Kimsila Sutta (Sn 2.9)	Sn 328d
Sammā,paribbājaniya Sutta (Sn 2.13)	Sn 359b, 370c
Sundarika Bhāra,dvāja Sutta (Sn 3.4)	Sn 477c [1.3.2.1]
Sabhiya Sutta (Sn 3.6)	Sn 519b

1.3.3 Asita

1.3.3.1 The *muni* is often said to be *asita*. The term **asita** (mfn)⁵⁵ is resolved as *a* or *na* (negative prefix) + *sita* (Skt *śrita*, “clinging to” & Skt *sita*, “bound, fettered”). Hence, it means “unattached” (synonymous with *anissita*, “independent”) or “unfettered” (synonymous *abaddha*, “untied”). This is a common epithet of buddhas and arhats, as we can see from the different contexts given below.

1.3.3.2 Here are the key occurrences of the term *asita*, all of which apply to the *muni*, whether he is the Buddha or an awakened monastic:

- *asito tādi pavuccate sa brahmā*, “such a one, unattached: he is called ‘perfected’” (Sn 519d).
- *abbūḷha, sallo asito*, “the barb drawn out, unattached” (Sn 593a), SD 97.10.
- *idh’eva santo asito careyyam*, “right here I would wander, at peace, unattached” (Sn 1065d).⁵⁶
- *nirāmagandho asito*, “free from the raw and rank [*amagandha*], unattached” (Sn 251d ≈ 717c), SD 4.24.
- *so gavam, pati asito anejo*, “That (monk) Gavampati is unattached, unshakable” (Tha 38b).⁵⁷
- *caranti loke asitā | n’atthi tesam pita-p, piyam*, “(Those who) ... live unfettered in the world; | nothing is pleasant or unpleasant for them” (Tha 671c).⁵⁸
- *samma-p, p-adhānā māra, dheyyābhibhuno ... te asitā, ... te tusitā, ... te anejā, ... te sukhitā*, “Those who have strived rightly overpower Māra’s realm ... they are unattached ... they are contented ... they are unshakable ... they are happy ... ” (A 4.13),⁵⁹ SD 51.15.
- *asitaṃ sabba, lokassa ... sabba-p, pahāyinaṃ*, “the one unfettered to all the world ... the one abandoning the all” (It 3.5.8),⁶⁰ which the Commentary explains as “unfettered everywhere ... in all the world of beings” (*katthaci anissitaṃ ... sabbasmiṃ satta, loke*, ItA 2:131), SD 89.17.
- *tādim, taṃ china, ganthaṃ asitaṃ*, “such a one, whose knots are cut, unattached” (Sn 219c), SD 49.20.
- *taṃ passatha bandha, pamuṅca(na), karaṃ | asitaṃ*, “See him, who brings release from bondage, | unfettered ... ” (S 8.8⁶¹ = Tha 1242),⁶² SD 68.12.
- *taṃ buddhaṃ asitaṃ tādim*, “that Buddha is such a one, unattached” (Sn 957a).

⁵⁴ The shuttle (*tasara*) is mentioned at Sn 215a, 464d, 497; DhA 1:424, 3:172. See Morris, *Journal of the Pali Text Soc* 1886:160.

⁵⁵ See CPD: ³asita.

⁵⁶ **Dhotaka Māṇava Pucchā** (Sn 5.6/1065d).

⁵⁷ **Gavampati Tha** (Tha 38b).

⁵⁸ **Go, datta Tha** (Tha 671c).

⁵⁹ **(Catukka) Padhāna S** (A 4.13/2:15, 28*-30*).

⁶⁰ **Kalyāṇa, sīla S** (It 3.5.8/97, 21*).

⁶¹ S 8.8/1:193, 15*.

⁶² See Sn:N 294 n1242.

- *asitassa appanīhitassa*,⁶³ “(of the Buddha) unattached (to goodness), goal-free”⁶⁴ (M 56,29(8)), SD 27.1.
- *katvāna vākyam asitassa tādino*, “doing the word of such a one, the unattached” (A 5.34),⁶⁵ SD 45.2.

1.3.3.3 In all these quotes from the suttas, we will notice that the *bhikkhu* is hardly mentioned: the epithet *asita* is, however, clearly that of the Buddha or an arhat *bhikkhu*. It should be understood that the term *asita*, first and foremost, applies to one who is awakened [1.2.4.1]. It should, however, be understood that although the term *bhikkhu* specifically refers to a “monk” or “bhikshu” (an anglicization of *bhikkhu*),⁶⁶ in the context of the silent sage, it can also refer to anyone who is awakened in the Dharma, including nuns, novices and lay saints who live as sages, or who have some qualities of the sage or some sage-like qualities.

Under special circumstances, the term *asita* may also apply to non-arhat saints. It is helpful here for us to understand a deeper, non-institutional, that is, a spiritual sense of the term *bhikkhu*. In this broader sense, the term *bhikkhu* includes both the awakened and the unawakened. Hence, terms like *asita* and the others discussed in this section may apply *especially* to the awakened *bhikkhu*. However, despite this special application, we can imagine exceptional cases where any such qualities may apply to a *bhikkhu* who is a saint but not yet an arhat, or even to an ordinary *bhikkhu* whose practice is exceptional. In the latter case, the term is applied to those *moments* of spiritual attainment and quality.

2 The Muni Sutta’s 3 “groups”

2.0 Jayawickrama, in his “Analysis of the Sutta-nipāta” (1948), divided the verses of **the Muni Sutta** into 3 groups in terms of their poetic qualities and didactic function, thus:

Group 1	Sn 207-210	Introduction
Group 2	Sn 211-219	The Buddha as <i>muni</i>
Group 3	Sn 220-221	The <i>bhikkhu</i> as <i>muni</i>

We shall now examine each Group in turn.

2.1 GROUP 1 [Sn 207-210]

2.1.1 The four opening verses [Sn 207-210] form a poem of their own, forming a preamble or introduction to Group 2, the longest of the three. These verses have no refrain like the Group 2 verses, but the word *muni* is highlighted in every verse.

The very first verse [Sn 207] introduces both the Group as well as the whole poem. It presents the key rationale for renunciation and sagehood, that is, the crowdedness of worldly life and the spaciousness of the spiritual renunciation.

2.1.2 It is noteworthy that all the Group 1 verses are in anuṣṭubh śloka—like the verses of the Dhammapada—while the rest of the poem is in triṣṭubh.⁶⁷ Unlike the *vatthu, gāthā* of **the Nālaka Sutta** (Sn 3.11), **the Pārāyana** and **the Sela Sutta** (M 92)⁶⁸—which are clearly later than the texts they introduce, the

⁶³ So VAṬ [Be Ce] ad VAṬ 1:251,6 for Ee *appahīnassa*. Comy glosses *asitassa* as *abaddhassa*, “of the untied”, MA 3:98,17. See A F R Hoernle, *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature in Eastern Turkestan*, Oxford, 1916: 30,25*.

⁶⁴ M 56,29(8)/1:386,25*.

⁶⁵ A 5.34/3:40,25*.

⁶⁶ In a teaching context, the term *bhikkhu* has an even broader reference, encompassing anyone who is listening to the teaching, or to those of us who aspire to practise the teaching or is actually practising it. See SD 4.9 (5.3).

⁶⁷ The *śloka* (P *siloka*) is a quatrain with each line of 8 syllables: see SD 49.13 (2.2). The *anuṣṭubh* (P *anuṭṭhubha*) is a class of poetic metre: see SD 49.13 (2.2) & SD 49.19 (1.1.2). On the *triṣṭubh* (P *tuṭṭhubha*), see Warder, *Pali Prosody*, 1967 ch 8.

⁶⁸ See SD 49.18 (1.2).

Group 1 verses are, like the rest of the Muni Sutta, very old and have certainly been in existence by the time of the Milinda,pañha (0-5th century CE), which quotes the Sutta Nipāta and Sn 207, the very first verse in the Muni Sutta.⁶⁹

2.1.3 From the commentarial explanation of these four opening verses (SnA 258), we can see them as reflecting on the 4 noble truths. The first verse [Sn 207] reflects our understanding and experience of the 1st truth, that of suffering and its pervasive nature. The second verse [Sn 208] shows how we go on to understand the 2nd truth—the arising of suffering—through craving, which needs to be uprooted.

The 3rd verse [Sn 209] records how we walk the path: first, by “considering the field” (moral virtue by way of keeping the precepts, and bodily and verbal restraint), “crushed the seed” (mental cultivation to expose the seeds or roots of suffering, and so remove them), and “nor sprinkle moisture upon it” (wisdom, which permanently ends all our unwholesome habits so that we do not fall back into the rut of suffering).

Finally, the 4th verse celebrates our attaining of nirvana, when we are “rid of greed, greed-free ... gone to the far shore” [Sn 210].

2.2 GROUP 2 [Sn 211-219]

2.2.1 The nine verses of Sn 211-219 form the body of the Muni Sutta, the Sutta proper, that is, Group 2. All the verses of Group 2 have the same refrain: “**him, indeed, the wise know as a sage**” (*taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti*). All the verses are quatrains, except for Sn 213, which has seven lines (*pāda*). As we have noted, three lines [Sn 213cde] have probably been interpolated, as the quatrain Sn 213abfg sounds naturally cohesive [3.2 ad loc].

2.2.2 The qualities of the silent sage (*muni*) and sagehood (*moneyya*) are well brought out by the teaching and refrain of all the nine verses. These qualities are further highlighted by similes at Sn 213cde, 214a and 215a—all of which refer to his “steadfast” and “straight” mind.

2.2.3 According to Buddhaghosa, the compiler of the Sutta Nipāta Commentary, the 11 verses beginning with Sn 211 up to the end of the Sutta (that is, including the verse of Group 3) are uttered by the Buddha on various occasions. They have been compiled here into a composite yet cohesive sutta. The origins of these verses are as follows:

Sn 211: spoken by the Buddha to the naked wanderer Upaka, on the road between Bodh,gayā and Benares. Upaka, however, is unconvinced, and wanders into a forest and marries a hunter’s daughter. Later, he returns to the Buddha, joins the sangha and becomes a non-returner. (SnA 258-261)⁷⁰

Sn 212: spoken in connection with Revata Khadira,vaniya, whom the Buddha declares to be an arhat-sage. (SnA 261 f)⁷¹

Sn 213: spoken to Suddhodana at Kapila,vatthu. The Buddha is himself the buddha-sage. (SnA 262 f)

Sn 214: spoken by the Buddha after Ciñcā Māṇavikā’s attempt to malign him. (SnA 263-265)

Sn 215: taught in Sāvathī to a seth’s daughter inspired by the straightness of the movement of a weaver’s shuttle. (SnA 265 f)

⁶⁹ Milinda,pañha quotes **Sn 207** as the topic of a dilemma (*pañha*)—how is it that the Buddha speaks of solitude (Sn 207) and also speaks of building dwelling-places for the wise (V 2:147; J1:93; cf S 1:100)—and then quoted three more times (Miln 211-213).

⁷⁰ The story is also found in **Upak’ājivaka Vatthu** (DhA 24.9/4:72 ad Dh 353), tr DhA:B 3:235.

⁷¹ Cf **Khadira,vaniya Revata-t,thera Vatthu** (DhA 7.9/2:186-188 ad Dh 98), tr DhA:B 2:208-216, & **Revata-t,thera Vatthu** (DhA 26.29/4:186 f ad Dh 412), tr DhA:B 3:303.

- Sn 216:** taught to a weaver's wise 7-year-old daughter of Āḷavī who correctly answers the Buddha's questions; at the end of the teaching she attains streamwinning (SnA 266-270).⁷²
- Sn 217:** spoken at Sāvaththī to Pañc'agga,dayaka Brāhmaṇa, the brahmin who makes the 5 kinds of first-fruit gifts; the brahminee attains streamwinning, then the brahmin, too.⁷³ (SnA 270-272)
- Sn 218:** spoken to the monks at Sāvaththī, announcing the arhathood of a monk who had vacillated 4 times between home and homelessness. (SnA 272 f)
- Sn 219:** spoken at Kapila,vatthu to the monks on the occasion of Nanda's attaining of arhathood.⁷⁴ (SnA 273-275)
- Sn 220:** spoken to the monks on the occasion of the arhathood of a monk who is befriended by a hunter in a frontier village in Kosala. When monks reported this to the Buddha, he reminds them how the two live very dissimilar life-styles. (SnA 275 f)
- Sn 221:** spoken at Kapila,vatthu on the occasion when the Sakyas argue that a streamwinner, even if he is a layman, should be honoured by another, even if he is a monk, who attains it after him [3.3 ad loc]. (SnA 276 f)

Although we may accept Buddhaghosa's statement that these verses have been spoken on different occasions, their natural flow of ideas suggests otherwise. On the other hand, these verses are well known and popular. It is possible that the Buddha first utters in the sequence that forms the Muni Sutta, and then repeats them on various occasions as he sees fitting.

2.3 GROUP 3 [Sn 220-221]

2.3.1 The last two verses of the Sutta form their own Group. They do not have any refrain. Their theme is the difference between the *muni* and the householder. The very idea of such a comparison betrays the lateness of the two concluding verses.

2.3.2 Perhaps they were added by the sutta recensionist not only to conclude the Muni Sutta, but also as the conclusion to the whole chapter (*vagga*), since this is the last sutta of the Uruga Vagga. It is also possible that these closing verses were added before the Sutta or the Vagga was added to the Sutta Nipāta itself.

3 Sutta commentary

3.1 GROUP 1: INTRODUCTION

[Read the overview of Group 1 verses, see (2.1) before going into this section.]

Sn 207. Its theme—the crowdedness of the world and the spaciousness of renunciation—is common to all the “*muni* suttas” [1.1.1]. A discourse related to crowded and space in the spiritual life is **the Sambodh'okāsa Sutta** (A 6.26).⁷⁵

207a. There are 3 kinds of intimacy (*santhava*): those of craving, of views and of friendship. Here, the intimacy that are craving and views in intended (SnA 1:255). On account of craving, we seek to “have” things; on account of views, we seek to “be” something.⁷⁶

⁷² See **Pesakāra,dhītā Vatthu** (DhA 13.7/3:170-176 ad Dh 174), which, however, differs. Tr DhA:B 3:14-18. Referred to at Miln 350,13.

⁷³ Cf **Pañc'agga,dayaka,brāhmaṇa Vatthu** (DhA 25.6/4:98-101 ad Dh 367), which says that at the end of the teaching, both the brahmin and his wife attained non-returning. Tr DhA:B 3:252 f.

⁷⁴ Cf **Nanda-t,thera Vatthu** (DhA 1.9/1:115-125 ad Dh 13-14). How Nanda becomes a monk: as at J 1:85-92. Nanda and the celestial nymphs, as at U 3.2/21-24; parallel at J 182/2:92-94. For other refs, see DhA:B 1:217 n1.

⁷⁵ A 6.26/3:314-317 (SD 15.6).

The third verse of the **Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 1.3) echoes the same theme of intimacy as craving and views, warning us in “seeing this danger in intimacy” (*etaṃ bhayaṃ santhave pekkhamāno*, Sn 37-cd).⁷⁷ Similarly, in the **Māgandiya Sutta** (Sn 4.9), a line in its tenth verse says, “He fosters no intimacies in the village” (*game akubbaṃ muni santhavāni*, Sn 844b).

We see the same theme in a set of similar **Dhammapada** verses (Dh 212-216) from the chapter on the pleasant (*piya,vagga*), where **Dh 212** says, “From the pleasant comes sorrow, | from the pleasant comes fear” (*piyato jāyati soko | piyato jāyati bhayaṃ*, Dh 212). The same framework is used in the other four verses, except for the key-words, which changes accordingly thus:

“from love ... ” (*pemato*, **Dh 213**),

“from lust ... ” (*ratiyā*, **Dh 214**),

“from sensual pleasures ... ” (*kāmato*, **Dh 215**), and

“from craving ... ” (*taṇhāya*, **Dh 216**).

The theme is found even in the **Jātakas**, meant for the edification of the non-renunciants. For example, in the **Uddālaka Jātaka** (J 487), the Bodhisattva says, “Suffering and fear are born in sensual pleasures” (*kāmesu dukkhañ ca bhayañ ca jātam*, J 4:312).

All these sentiments intimately reflect the drift of Sn 207.

207b plays on the word *niketa*, which literally means “house” (eg Dh 91; glossed as “abode,” DhA 2:170); figuratively, it means “company, association, socializing”; its opposite is *aniketa* [207c below]. *Niketa* is polysemic, and both its senses apply here.⁷⁸

207c. The word *aniketa* mean “to be free of any company, association, socializing,” especially in the phrase, *aniketa,sārī*, famously found in the (**Aṭṭhaka Vagga**) **Māgandiya Sutta** (Sn 844), quoted in the **Haliddakāni Sutta 1** (S 22.3), and explained in the Mahā Niddesa.⁷⁹ The Haliddakāni Sutta 1 (S 22.3) states: “Through the mental proliferating and bondage of wandering about in the dwelling of the sign of forms, one is called ‘one who wanders about frequenting a home’.”⁸⁰

By “house” (*niketa*) [Sn 207b] is meant the different kinds of sense-objects. Therein “arises dust” (*jāyate rajo*) refers to the dust of greed, hate and delusion (the 3 unwholesome roots).⁸¹

The meaning is not only that dangers arise from intimacy, but that the desirable object (the “house”) is itself the “home of defilements” (that is, the desire for it generates defilements). Since we have been unrestrained and overstepped the boundary (of moral restraint), “**from a house arises dust**” [Sn 207b]. As a result, we are mentally defiled, and will face ruin and loss.

Alternatively, **207ab** may be understood thus: “See, bhikshus, how from intimacy danger has arisen for that hollow man,⁸² and from a house arises dust” for all worldlings.”⁸³ (SnA 1:255)

Sn 208. This verse introduces the well-known Buddhist imagery of uprooting some undesirable plant (such as some weed). Having done so, we would not replant it nor allow it to grow again. This parable is

⁷⁶ On these two, see respectively **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3 & **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1.

⁷⁷ Sn 37cd/p6 (SD 109.3).

⁷⁸ On **polysemy**, see **Nālaka S** (Sn 3.11), SD 49.18 (comy 722 n).

⁷⁹ *Aniketa,sārī*, “wandering homeless; not living in company; not socializing” for the sake of a spiritual quest: see **Māgandiya S** (Sn 844, qu at S 22.3/3:9*+13* = Nm 200*), SD 84.1; **Haliddakāni S 1** (S 22.3/3:10 = SnA 255), SD 10.12; Sn 970 :: Nm 494.

⁸⁰ *Rūpa,nimitta,niketa,visāra,vinibandhā kho gahapati niketa,sārīti vuccati*. For comy, see **Haliddakāni S 1** (S 22.3,15/3:10,21), SD 10.12.

⁸¹ On the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala,mūla*), see **Mūla S** (A 3.69) SD 18.2; SD 4.14 (1.5); SD 50.20 (3.1.3).

⁸² A “**hollow man**” (*mogha,purisa*) is someone who clings to a wrong view, or holds a right view without understanding it, and so misusing it bring suffering and sorrow to himself and to others. See **Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda S** (D 25,24.2), SD 1.4; **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,6), SD 3.13.

⁸³ “**Worldlings**” (*puthujjana*) are those who have not taken even the first step on the noble eightfold path, incl those who are “good worldlings” (*kalyāna puthujjana*) who keep to the 5 precepts and are morally upright. Others who do not keep to even the 5 precepts are “blind worldlings” (*andha puthujjana*). See **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1 (7.1) Who is a “Buddhist”?; SD 5.4 (3).

that of not backsliding into any old bad habits. Technically, it refers to the first two right efforts; that of not doing any bad not done before (not growing any weeds) and guarding against the recurrence of any such bad habit (ensuring that the weeds do not grow again).

Sn 208c: “He is said to be one living alone as a sage” or “He is said to be living as one of the sages” (*tam āhu ekam muninam carantam*) echoes powerfully of the spirit of **the Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 1.3), which is also one of the “*muni* suttas.” Glossing on “**one**” (*ekam*), the Commentary says: “He is ‘one’ on account of being free of defilements all at once, or ‘one’ in the sense of being perfected.”⁸⁴ This means that *muninam* can be understood as either the accusative singular (as *munim*, “the sage”), or the genitive plural (*munīsu*) with *ekam*, “a wandering one of the sages.”⁸⁵ (SnA 1:256)

208d. “**The state of peace**” (*santi,pada*) is nirvana, the absolute peace. There are **3 kinds of peace**: conventional peace (*sammuti,santi*), peace by displacement (*tad-aṅga,santi*) and absolute peace (*accanta,-santi*) (SnA 1:257). (1) Conventional peace is that of the 62 wrong views,⁸⁶ that is, the satisfaction of being convinced with an opinion. (2) Peace by displacement is that arising from insight (*vipassanā*) that temporarily removes defilements. (3) Absolute peace is that of nirvana, since it is ultimate peace, in the sense of freedom from birth, death and suffering.

Sn 209ab. The weed parable is developed further here. We should know our field (*vattthu*). The Commentary says here that when we are attached to the world, we invite all kinds of defilements to arise from “the aggregates, the bases and the elements” (*khandh’āyatana,dhātu*) (SnA 257). Technically, these are, respectively, the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness), the 6 sense-bases (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind), and the 4 elements (earth, water, fire and wind).⁸⁷

However, for a more unified parable, we can take the commentarial phrase to refer to the 6 sense-faculties (*saḷ-āyatana* or *ajjhatt’āyatana*), their respective external sense-objects (*bāhiddh’āyatana*) and their sense-consciousnesses (*viññāṇa*)—which are collectively called the 18 elements (*dhātu*).⁸⁸ This is our “field” (*vattthu*) or “world” (*loka*)—the “all” (*sabba*)⁸⁹—that we tend to create and bear the burden of that creation.

The Commentary takes the “**seed**” in the phrase “crushed the seed” as referring to “formation-consciousness” (*abhisankhāra,viññāṇa*), which needs to be “destroyed, killed” (*himsitvā vadhitvā*). The Dīgha Commentary explains *abhisankhāra,viññāṇa* as “the final consciousness” (*viññāṇan’ti carimaka,-viññāṇam pi abhisankhāram pi*, DA 393,31). This is our final thought-process that decides the kind of rebirth that we would take.⁹⁰

Formation-consciousness is like a seed because it gives rise to new set of aggregates, our renewed being, a new cycle of life. Hence, this refers to rebirth-consciousness or rebirth itself, which should not be fed with “moisture” (*sineha*), a wordplay as it also means “affection,” an allusion to lust. In others, when lust or craving is overcome, that is, we self-awaken, there is the end of rebirth and suffering.

209c. The sage “**sees the end of birth and death**” means that he has attained nirvana, which is beyond time and space.

209d. The Commentary explains this line technically that the sage, by cultivating the 4 truths, abandoning the 9 classes of unwholesome thoughts, attains the nirvana-element with remains (that is, the nirvana of the defilements, *kilesa,nibbāna*, but with the 5 aggregates remaining).⁹¹ Then, he works for the

⁸⁴ *Ekanta,nikkilesatāya ekam seṭṭha-tṭhena vā ekam; muninan’ti munim munisu vā ekam* (SnA 2:256,29).

⁸⁵ See Sn:N 207 n208.

⁸⁶ See **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1), SD 25.2; see SD 25.1 (5).

⁸⁷ On the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*), see SD 17. On the 6 sense-bases (*saḷ-āyatana*), see **Sal-āyatana Vibh-aṅga S** (M 137), SD 29.5. On the 4 primary elements (*mahā,bhūta*), see SD 17.

⁸⁸ On the internal and external sense-bases (*āyatana*), see SD 13.1 (3.7.7). On the 18 elements (*dhātu*), see **Bahu,-dhātuka S** (M 115,4) SD 29.1a.

⁸⁹ On “the all” (*sabba*). See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

⁹⁰ See Vism 17.200 f/561.

⁹¹ *Sa,upādi,sesa nibbāna,dhatu*. On the 2 kinds of nirvana, see **Nibbāna,dhatu S** (It 2.2.7), SD 50.13; SD 45.18 (2.5).

good of the world, until the ending of his final consciousness, when he attains the nirvana without remains (that is, the nirvana of the aggregates, *khandha, nibbāna*), when he cannot be regarded as either a deva or a human.⁹² (SnA 1:257)

Such technicality reflects the scholasticism of the times rather than the sutta teachings. If we keep to the sutta spirit, it would be more correct to say that the sage (that is, the arhat) has gone beyond the limits or range of the thought-process (*atakkâvacara*).⁹³ On passing away, even the sage's consciousness cannot be found any more.⁹⁴ Such a sage, who has passed away into nirvana, is said to be "beyond the range of thought" (*atakkâvacara*).

Sn 210. This verse speaks of the nature of liberating wisdom. Firstly, we understand "all the roosting places" of consciousness, that is, the 3 worlds, the sense world, the form world and the formless world. We "delight not in any of them," wishing and working for no rebirth in any of them. To be free of rebirth, we need to be "free of greed," that is, of the desire-to-be, the craving existence, which is simply craving (*taṇhā*) itself.

This is a troubling sense of lack cast upon us by our ignorance (*avijjā*) of true reality, so that we keep measuring and comparing ourselves with what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think, with those of others, or we create our own phantoms dragged from our past, or dreams of the future that never come.

To let go of *craving* means neither to run back to the dead past nor to claw our way into the unborn future. We can only watch the present moment as it arises and passes away. We are free of *ignorance* when we begin to understand that even the present moment is changing, and we can never grasp it: we can only enjoy the moment by letting it go.

3.2 GROUP 2: THE BUDDHA AS MUNI

[Read the overview of Group 2 verses, see (2.2) before going into this section.]

Sn 211. This verse plays on the word "all" (*sabba*), a simple word with a profound sense in early Buddhism. In the suttas—such as **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23)—the word refers to the "18 elements," that is, our 6 sense-faculties, their respective sense-objects, and their sense-consciousnesses. These comprise our world—the constructed world (*saṅkhāra, loka*)—the only world that we know and in which we are encapsulated. There is no meaningful world or existence beyond this.⁹⁵

The Muni Sutta commentary goes to great length to recount the story of the Buddha's meeting with the naked ascetic Upaka, as the Buddha, just after his awakening, journeys on the road to the deer park at Isī,patana to meet the group of 5 monks, as recorded in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26). When questioned by the Upaka regarding the Buddha's spiritual state, the Buddha gives the famous answer:

<i>Sabbābhibhū sabba, vidū'ham asmi sabbesu dhammesu anūpalitto sabbāñ, jaho taṇha-k, khaye vimutto sayam abhiññāya kam uddiseyyam</i>	All have I overcome, all do I know, from all am I detached, all have I renounced, through the stopping of craving, I am freed, having understood all by myself, whom shall I call teacher? (M 26,25.4), SD 1.11
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The first three lines above are almost identical with Sn 211abc, with only one word different in line 1. Essentially what the Buddha is saying is that he has fully understood and mastered all his senses. Hence,

⁹² This

⁹³ Or that awakening is "unattainable through discursive thought": see (Musila Narada) **Kosambī S** (S 12.68), SD 70.11; **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14.3.1.2), SD 49.8; SD 35.4a (comy §3.1 (5) 5); SD 33.1b (6.2.2).

⁹⁴ See the famous case of the monk Godhika: **Godhika S** (S 4.23) SD 80.1. On the "unestablished consciousness" (*appatitṭha viññāna*), see SD 17.8a (11.3).

⁹⁵ **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

he is no more a prisoner of his own creation; he has broken through the virtual reality of the senses to be awakened to true reality, and so is fully liberated.

What the Buddha says to Upaka is echoed in the Muni Sutta. Here again, we see the spirit of sage-hood pervading the Buddha's words—he is simply and joyfully declaring that the awakening is a most personal experience. Just as we are born alone into this world to become a member of a crowded tribe, so, too, we must awaken alone as a true individual enjoying the spacious bliss of nirvana. [2.2.3 ad loc]

While Upaka is the first human to whom the Buddha declares his awakening, he is unable to see its significance. He does not even believe that the Buddha is the sage, the Buddha-sage (*buddha,muni*). However, whether he believes or not, the wise know him as a sage (*saddahatu vā mā vā, dhīrā pana taṃ munim vedayantīti*). (SnA 1:260)

Sn 212. In this verse, the *muni* is presented as a traditional **arhat**. According to the Commentary, the Buddha utters this verse in connection with the arhat **Khadira,vaniya Revata**, the foremost amongst monks who are forest-dwellers (A 2:24). [2.2.3 ad loc]

The **arhat** is “endowed with moral virtue and habits” (*sīla,vatūpapaṇṇam*). In the case of an unawakened worldling, **sīla,vata** becomes *sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*, “attachment to rituals and vows,” one of the 3 fetters (the first being *sakkāya,ditṭhi*, “self-identity view” and the third, *vicikicchā*, “doubt”).

The arhat as a *muni* is also good in meditation and has wisdom. Finally, having destroyed all craving, he is free from all mental defilements and duly liberated. The arhat, then, has completed the 3 trainings, and is a non-learner or adept (*asekha*). Such is an “arhat-sage” (*khīṇ'āsava,muni*) whose influxes are destroyed.⁹⁶ (SnA 1:262)

Sn 213. This is the odd verse out: while all the other verses have 4 lines each, only this verse has 7 lines. Sn 213a powerfully echoes the spirit of **the Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 1.3), which also describes the lone sage. This verse is spoken by the Buddha to his own father, Suddhodana, reminding him of the life of a renunciant, a lone silent sage, that the Buddha now leads. [2.2.3 ad loc]

Sn 213cde do not seem to be a natural part of the verse. They seem to have been interpolated right after line b to explain “unshaking” (*avedhamānam*). Furthermore, without lines cde, the resulting quatrain stands perfectly natural as:

*Ekam carantaṃ munim appamattaṃ
nindā,pasaṃsāsu vedhamānaṃ
netāram aññesam anañña,neyyaṃ
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti*

The sage wandering alone, heedful;
unshaking before blame and praise,
a leader of others, not to be led by others—
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.

The three interpolated lines (Sn 213cde) closely parallel Sn 71abc of **the Khagga,visāṇa Sutta** (Sn 1.3), of which the whole verse runs thus:

*Sīho va saddesu asantasanto
vāto va jālamhi asajjamāno
padumaṃ va toyena alippamāno
eko care khagga,visāṇa,kappo*

like a lion untrembling before sounds,
like the wind not caught in a net,
like a lotus unsoiled by the waters—
one should wander alone like a rhinoceros. (Sn 71)

We can see that the three lines are identical in sense (line c is the same line as Sn 213e)—they translate here in the same way as Sn 213cde in the Muni Sutta—differing only grammatically. It is clear, then, that at some point the sutta redactors added Sn 71 abc here to after Sn 213b to clarify it. Sn 213 as a quatrain is probably not an interpolation, but an original verse of the Muni Sutta from the start.

⁹⁶ “Whose influxes are destroyed,” *khīṇ'āsava*, as a synonym for the arhat. There are the 4 influxes (*āsava*), those of (1)

Sn 214. The Commentary on Sn 214a notes a figurative usage of *ogahana*, referring to “a bathing-place for humans” (*ogahane manussānaṃ nahāna, titthe*, SnA 265,1). *Ogahana* usually means “oppression”; hence, we see a wordplay here: although the sage is oppressed (*ogahana*) by others, he should be unmoved just like a bathing-post (*ogahana*).

214b: The Commentary explains this line, thus: “**Speak in extreme terms**’ means, at the topmost, on account of whatever matter that sectarians or others earlier have praised or, at the lowest, have dispraised.”⁹⁷

This verse is spoken by the Buddha after Ciñcā Māṇavikā’s attempt to publicly malign him [2.2.3 ad loc].

Sn 215. This verse highlights the *muni*’s moral and mental qualities. The simile in Sn 215a—“Whose mind is steadfast, indeed, straight as a shuttle” (*yo ve thit’atto tasaram va ujjū*)—as already noted [1.3.2.4], is a well known one. Mentally wholesome, the *muni* at once knows the difference between bad and good, and rises above them, so that he is free from karma. His mind is not only focused, but also wholesome, and is able to straightaway focus on the meditation object to attain dhyana.

This verse is spoken by the Buddha to a seth’s daughter who is inspired by the straightness of the movement of a weaver’s shuttle. [2.2.3 ad loc]

Sn 216. Socially, the *muni* is restrained towards everyone, showing kindness to all. The emphasis here is that the *muni* is above anger and violence.

This verse is spoken by the Buddha to the wise 7-year-old daughter of a weaver of Āḷavī who correctly answers the Buddha’s questions (SnA 266-270) [2.2.3 ad loc].

Sn 217. The *muni* lives a simple life, dependent on the alms-meals from others. Hence, he does not selectively eat the food that he gets, and equanimously eats it.

This verse, highlighting a sage’s contentment, is spoken by the Buddha to the brahmin who makes the 5 kinds of first-fruit gifts (SnA 270-272) [2.2.3 ad loc].

Sn 218. This verse highlights the *muni*’s life of total celibacy, even when he is a young renunciant (like the Buddha in his early years). He also abstains from whatever that makes intoxicates him or makes him heedless. He is able to free himself from sensual pleasures because of his ability to attain deep meditation and dhyana.

This verse is spoken to the monks, announcing the arhathood of a monk who vacillates four times between home-life and renunciation (SnA 272 f) [2.2.3 ad loc].

Sn 219. According to **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33), the 4 knots (*gantha*) [Sn 219c] are the “body-knot” (*kaya, gantha*) of covetousness (*abhijjhā*), ill will (*vyāpāda*), attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, -parāmāsa*), and adherence to the view, “This (alone) is the truth” or, simply, dogmatic adherence (*idaṃ, -saccābhivivesa*).⁹⁸ They are so called because they knot up the body and mind together (Vism 22.54). *Kāya* here refers to the “mental group” (*nāma, kāya*).

This verse is spoken by the Buddha to the monks on the occasion of Nanda’s attaining of arhathood (SnA 273-275) [2.2.3 ad loc].

⁹⁷ *Yasmim vatthusmim pare titthiyā vā aññe vā vaṇṇa, vasena uparimam vā avaṇṇa, vasena heṭṭhimam va vācam pariyantam vadanti* (SnA 2:265,6 f). PED, BHSD & SED all def *pariyanta* as “limit, end, restriction.” SED also notes its sense as “extending in all directions.” SED, however, def *pariyantikā* as “loss of all good qualities, depravity.” On *pariyanta*, cf Sn 576, p106,17, 577; see also Sn:N 389 n964.

⁹⁸ D 33,1.11(34)/3:230,18.

3.3 GROUP 3: THE *BHIKKHU* AS *MUNI*

[Read the overview of Group 3 verses, see (2.3) before going into this section.]

Sn 220. This verse simply states the distinction between the busy and unrestrained layman and the good and compassionate *muni*. While the layman is essentially acquisitive, the *muni* is selfless (*amama*).

The word *amama* [Sn 220b], is defined by the Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD) as “without property of egotism, hence, unselfish, free from passion” (its opposite is *sa-mama*). The Commentary adds: “without craving, views or possessiveness regarding wife and children” (*putta,daresu taṅha,ditṭhi,mamatta,-virahito*, SnA 2:276,21).⁹⁹

Sn 221. The Commentary on the Sutta’s last verse is spoken by the Buddha in answer to a discussion among the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu whether a streamwinner (and by inference all saints) should show respect to one another by way of seniority. The Commentary reports the Buddha as explaining a point of protocol: “This situation is different here: it is the sign [form] that is the basis for veneration” (*aññā eva hi ayaṃ jāti, pūjaneyya,vatthu liṅgaṃ*, SnA 1:277,3).

The “sign” (*liṅga*) here is the monastic robe. The Commentary quotes the Buddha as saying that even if a layman is a non-returner, he should show respect to even a novice who has gone forth that very day. Further, to highlight **the urgency of the holy life**—the purpose of renunciation—the Buddha declares the great distinction of a monk who becomes a streamwinner even after a layman, that is, one who attains the path before the monk.

The graceful but slow blue-necked peacock—the crested one (*sikhī*)—represents the busy and worldly layman. He is burdened by crowded worldliness, and is thus slowed down spiritually. It looks beautiful in flight, but can hardly go far, definitely not a yojana.¹⁰⁰ The goose—especially the golden goose (*suvanṇa haṃsa*)—on the other hand, looks plain but is able to fly fast and far greater distances than the peacock.

These parables show that while the layman, even as a learner (*sekha*), such as a streamwinner, is not match for a diligent renunciant who is a streamwinner, even if he attains the state after the layman. The layman’s insight is sluggish when he is entangled with family, sense-pleasures and worldliness. A renunciant’s insight, one the other hand, is sharp when he is free from such entanglements.

The Buddha is reminding us of the spiritual beauty and power of “**a sage in seclusion meditating in the forest**” (Sn 221d). A monastic who is a learner-sage (*sekha,muni*) is secluded in body and mind. The renunciant sage in the forest is constantly engaged in “meditating centred on the characteristics and on the object” (*lakkhaṇ’ārammaṇūpanijjhāna*).

This commentarial term can be resolved thus. “Characteristic-centred meditation” (*lakkhaṇūpanijjhāna*) is a term for insight practice (*vipassana bhāvanā*), which focuses on the 3 characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self. “Object-centred meditation” (*ārammaṇūpanijjhāna*) is calmness meditation (*samatha bhāvanā*) in which one keeps the attention on a single object. On account of quick progress in such as meditation, the renunciant is not only able to become a learner-sage, but can also quickly attain awakening as an arhat-sage.

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⁹⁹ Also at Sn 469, 777; Tha 1092; U 29,4*, 32,16*; Pv 541.

¹⁰⁰ A yojana (*yojana*), as distance, is about 11.25 km (7 mi): see SD 4.17 (1.2.2).

The Discourse on the Silent Sage

Sn 1.12

[For notes on these verses, see Sutta Commentary [3] under the Sn verse numbers, eg Sn 207 or simply 207.]

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 <i>Santhavāto bhayaṃ jātaṃ
niketā jāyate rajo
aniketam asanthavaṃ
etaṃ ve muni,dassanaṃ</i></p> | <p>From intimacy comes fear,¹⁰¹
from a house arises dust.¹⁰²
The house-free, intimacy-free¹⁰³—
this is indeed the sage’s vision.¹⁰⁴</p> <p style="text-align: right;">207</p> |
| <p>2 <i>Yo jātam ucchijja na ropayeyya
jāyantam assa¹⁰⁵ nānuppavecche¹⁰⁶
tam āhu ekam¹⁰⁷ muninaṃ carantaṃ
addakkhi so santi,padaṃ mahesi</i></p> | <p>Whoever has uprooted the arisen would neither
plant what can grow nor water it.
He is said to be one living alone as a sage:¹⁰⁸
the great seer who has seen the state of peace.¹¹⁰</p> <p style="text-align: right;">208¹⁰⁹</p> |
| [36] | |
| <p>3 <i>Saṅkhāya vatthūni pamāya¹¹¹ bījaṃ
sineham assa nānuppavecche
sa ve muni¹¹² jāti,khay’anta,dassī

takkaṃ pahāya na upeti saṅkham¹¹⁴</i></p> | <p>Having considered the field, crushed the seed,
he would not sprinkle moisture upon it.
He is indeed a sage, who sees the end of birth
and death,¹¹³
who has given up thought: he cannot be reckoned.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">209</p> |
| <p>4. <i>Aññāya sabbāni nivesanāni
anikāmayam aññataram pi tesam
sa ve muni vīta,gedho agiddho

nāyūhatī pāragato hi hoti</i></p> | <p>Knowing all the roosting places,
he delights not in any of them:
he is indeed a sage who is rid of greed, greed-
free:¹¹⁵
he strives not; for, he has gone to the far shore.¹¹⁶</p> <p style="text-align: right;">210</p> |
| <p>5 <i>Sabbābhibhuṃ sabba,viduṃ sumedham
sabbesu dhammesu anūpalittam</i></p> | <p>¹¹⁷He has overcome the all, knows the all, truly wise,
unattached to all the states,</p> |

¹⁰¹ On this line, cf Dh 212-2156; Sn 935; J 4:312.

¹⁰² The “dust” (*rajo*) is that of greed, hate and delusion (SnA 1:255).

¹⁰³ Alt tr: “To be house-free [renounce] is to be intimacy-free” []. On this line, cf J 6:61.

¹⁰⁴ On this verse, cf Miln 211, 212, 385.

¹⁰⁵ On *jāyantam assa*, see Ee 35 n12 (Sn 208a), where it says that this seems to be an old error (*-nt-* may represent *-tt-* or *-nn-*), but suggests no correct reading.

¹⁰⁶ Ee Se Comy so; Be *anuppavacche*; Ce *anuppaveccha*. For *anuppavecchati* < *anu-pra-yacchati* with palatalization of *-a-* > *-e-* after *-y-* (which is then replaced with the glide *-v-*) see Sn:N 148 n3.

¹⁰⁷ On “one” (*ekam*), see (3.1) ad loc.

¹⁰⁸ Alt tr: “He is said to be living as one of the sages.” See prec n. See (3.1) ad Sn 208c.

¹⁰⁹ On Sn 208-209, see R Morris, “Notes and queries,” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 1885:29-76.

¹¹⁰ On the 3 kinds of peace, see (3.1) ad loc.

¹¹¹ Be Ee Se so: *pamāya* (*pa + mī + tvā*); Be:Ka Ce *pahāya*; Be vl *samāya* (*sa + mī + tvā = samāya*).

¹¹² *Muni* is metri causa (lengthened on account of the verse’s metre).

¹¹³ On this line, cf S 5:168, 186; It 41; J 3:434.

¹¹⁴ The phrase *upeti saṅkham*, cf Sn 749d, 911a, 1074b.

¹¹⁵ Cf It 92.

¹¹⁶ Cf S 1:48.

¹¹⁷ On Sn 211a, cf Sn 177. On Sn 211abc, cf V 1:8; M 1:171; S 2:284; Dh 353.

- sabb 'añjahaṃ taṅha-k,khaye vimuttaṃ*
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muniṃ vedayanti **211** giving up the all, liberated through destroying craving:¹¹⁸
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.
- 6** *Paññā,balaṃ sīla,vatūpapannaṃ*
samāhitaṃ jhāna,rataṃ satīmaṃ
saṅgā pamuttaṃ akhilaṃ¹²¹ anāsavaṃ
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti **212** Whose power is wisdom, endowed with moral virtue and habits,¹¹⁹
focused, delighting in meditation, mindful,¹²⁰
freed from attachment, free of mental barrenness, influx-free:
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.
- 7** *Ekam carantaṃ munim appamattaṃ*
nindā,pasamsāsu avedhamānaṃ
sīhaṃ va saddesu asanta,santaṃ
vātaṃ va jālamhi asajjamānaṃ
padumaṃ va¹²⁴ toyena alippamānaṃ¹²⁵
netāraṃ aññesaṃ anañña,neyyaṃ
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti **213¹²⁷** The sage wandering alone, heedful;
unshaking before blame and praise,¹²²
like a lion untrembling before sounds,¹²³
like the wind not caught in a net,
like a lotus unsoiled by the waters:¹²⁶
a leader of others, not to be led by others—
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.
- 8** *Yo ogahaṇe¹²⁸ thambho-r-ivābhijāyati¹²⁹*
yasmim pare vācā,pariyantaṃ¹³⁰ vadanti
taṃ vīta,rāgaṃ susamāhit'indriyaṃ
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti **214** Who is like a bathing-post in a bathing-place
when others speak to him in extreme terms,¹³¹
him, the lust-freed, whose faculties are well
focused¹³²—
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.
- 9** *Yo ve thit'atto tasaraṃ va ujju¹³³*
jigucchati kammehi pāpakehi
vīmaṃsamāno visamaṃ samañ ca
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti **215** Whose mind is steadfast, indeed, straight as a
shuttle,¹³⁴
who is disgusted with bad deeds,
discerning the uneven and the even—
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.

¹¹⁸ Cf A 1:236, 2:42; It 32.

¹¹⁹ Cf It 80; Tha 12.

¹²⁰ Cf S 1:53; It 40; Tha 12; J 5:150.

¹²¹ On *akhila*, cf Sn 477, 540, 1059, 1147; for details, see **Ceto,khila S** (M 16), SD 32.14.

¹²² Dh 81.

¹²³ On Sn 212b, cf S 1:53; It 40; Tha 12; J 5:150. On Sn 212cde, see Sn 71 [3.2 ad loc].

¹²⁴ Be *paddhaṃ va*; Ce Ee Se so.

¹²⁵ Be Ce Ee so; Be:Ka Se *alimpamānaṃ*.

¹²⁶ Ap 547.12.

¹²⁷ **Sn 213** has 7 lines (*pāda*). See (3.2) ad loc.

¹²⁸ **Sn 214a**. Be so; Ee Se *ogahane*. See (3.2) ad loc.

¹²⁹ Here *abhijāyati* means “to behave, to be”: *abhijāyati = bhavati* in *yo ogahane thambo-r-iva bhavattī* (SnA 265,10). On the sandhi marker *-r-* in *thambo-r-iva*, see Sn:N 159 n29.

¹³⁰ **Sn 214b**. Be Ee Se so; Be:Ka *vācaṃ pariyantaṃ*. On the possibility that *vācā-* can be omitted, see SnA 208 n214. See (3.2) ad loc.

¹³¹ Cf Thī 354.

¹³² Cf Sn 465, 498; Tha 56, 972; Thī 56.

¹³³ Be so; Ce *ujjuṃ*; Ee Se *ujjuṃ*; Comy *uju*. On *ujju*, see Geiger, *Pali Grammar*, 1994 §12 (3).

¹³⁴ Cf Sn 464; ThaA 1:7.

- 10 *Yo saññat'atto na karoti pāpaṃ
daharo ca majjhimo ca muni¹³⁵ yat'atto*
*arosa,neyyo na so roseti¹³⁶ kañci
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti* 216 Who, well self-restrained, does no bad,
a sage, self-restrained towards the young
and the middle-aged,
who is neither led by anger nor angers anyone—
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.
- 11 *Yad aggato majjhato sesato vā*
*piṇḍaṃ labhetha para,dattūpajīvī
nālaṃ thutuṃ nōpi nipacca,vādī
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti* 217 Who lives on what is given by others would
receive food-scrap**s** *b*
from the top, the middle or the remains, *a*
deigns neither to praise nor to speak lowly of it—
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.¹³⁷
- 12 *Muniṃ carantaṃ virataṃ methunasmā
yo yobbane nōpanibajjhate kvaci
mada-p,pamādā virataṃ vippamuttaṃ
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti* 218 The sage fares along abstaining from coupling,
even in youth is not entangled anywhere,
abstaining from drunkenness and heedlessness,
fully freed—
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.
- 13 *Aññāya lokam param'attha,dassim
ogham samuddam atitariya tādim
taṃ chinna,ganthaṃ asitaṃ anāsavaṃ
taṃ vāpi dhīrā muni vedayanti* 219 Knowing the world, who sees the highest goal,
having crossed over the floods, the ocean, such a
one,
one whose knots¹³⁸ are cut, unattached, influx-
free¹³⁹—
him, indeed, the wise know as a sage.
- 14 *Asamā ubho dūra,vihāra,vuttino
gihī¹⁴⁰ dāra,posī amamo¹⁴¹ ca subbato
para,pāṇa,rodhāya¹⁴² gihī asaññato
niccaṃ munī rakkhati pāṇine¹⁴³ yato* 220 The two, with far different dwellings and lives,
are different—
the householder supporting wife and the selfless
one with good habits.
The householder is unrestrained in destroying
other lives;
the sage, restrained, always protects living beings.
- 15 *Sikhī yathā nīla,gīvo¹⁴⁴ vihaṇ,gamo
haṃsassa nōpeti javam kudācanam* 220 Just as a blue-necked peacock flying through
the sky¹⁴⁵
at no time gains the pace of a swan—

¹³⁵ Be *daharo majjhimo ca muni*; Ee Ce Ke Se so.

¹³⁶ Se omits *so*.

¹³⁷ On Sn 217, cf DhA 4:99.

¹³⁸ **Sn 219c.** On *idam,saccābhinivesa*, see D 3:230,19; S 45.174/5:59,26; Vbh 374,22-375,3; Nm 1:246,28; Dhs 1135,1139 (DhsA 377,7); Abhds 32,11. See S:B 1898 n47. See (3.2) ad loc.

¹³⁹ Cf (**Devatā**) **Samiddhi S** (S 1.20,21/1:12,23 esp S 49c*), SD 21.4.

¹⁴⁰ Be Se so; Ce Ee *gihī*.

¹⁴¹ **Sn 220b.** See (3.2) ad loc.

¹⁴² *Pāṇa,rodha* here “stopping the life of beings,” Sn 220; J 2:450.

¹⁴³ **Sn 220d.** *Pāṇine* is the masc acc pl of a noun in *-in* stem; cf *-mānīne* (Sn 282 = Miln 414,2*), *-gamīne* (Sn 587), *-vāsīne* (Sn 682), *-dassāvīne* (M 1:169,22), *māla,dhārīne* (J 6:543,17*). See Geiger, *Pali Grammar*, 1994:§95.22 & Thī:N 83 n101.

¹⁴⁴ Be Ee so; Se *nīla,gīvo*.

¹⁴⁵ Tha 22, 1116.

*evaṃ gihī nānukaroti bhikkhuno
munino vivittassa vanamhi jhāyatōti*

221

even so, a householder will never match a monk,
a sage in seclusion meditating in the forest.¹⁴⁶

— evaṃ —

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

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¹⁴⁶ Sn 165.