1 Sutta summary and highlights

1.1 The (Tika) Bhaya Sutta (A 3.62) is essentially about the nature of “separation” or losing what is dearest and most vital to us on a worldly level (due to fire, floods and social unrest) and on the spiritual level (due to decay, disease and death). On a worldly level, we can and will lose whatever we cherish as being dearest to us—for a child his mother, for a mother her child. On a spiritual level, the separation or loss is more real and final.

1.2 On a worldly level, the mother and child—representing what are dearest and most vital to us: love and support—may be separated from one another, or one losing the other, on account of some natural disaster, due to fire or to water (and today we may include: due to earth and to wind), and to human factors, especially inhumane violence and social unrest (and we may include religious violence and migration tragedies).

1.3 By way of summary, we can list the dangers stated in the (Tika) Bhaya Sutta as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldly dangers that separate beings</th>
<th>Spiritual dangers that separate beings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[$§1+4$] a great fire</td>
<td>[$§7.2$] decay (ageing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[$§2+5$] a great downpour and floods</td>
<td>[$§7.3$] disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[$§3+6$] social unrest</td>
<td>[$§7.4$] death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While worldly dangers of fire, floods and social unrest may or may not separate us from our family or significant others, spiritual realities of decay, disease and death truly and finally separate us from our familiar world for good, as it were. And when we are reborn in a new situation, the same process recurs all over again.

2 Related suttas and teachings

2.1 The Satta Suriya Sutta (A 7.63), SD 47.8

The Satta Suriya Sutta (A 7.63) gives a very dramatic description of widespread conflagration by way of the 7 stages of the sun’s devolution, as follows:

The 1st sun there is no rain; all plant life burn up and ceases to be.
The 2nd sun all streams and lakes dry up.
The 3rd sun all the great rivers dry up.
The 4th sun all the great lakes dry up.
The 5th sun the great oceans become puddles.
The 6th sun Sineru (the huge mountain ranges) or the axis mundi (galactic centre) blazes up.
The 7th sun the mountains and the world all blaze up.

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The fire, stated as the 1\textsuperscript{st} worldly danger in the (Tika) Bhaya Sutta [§§1+4], is an echo of the cosmic conflagration of the Satta Suriya Sutta. The worldly danger—which we imagine to be totally disastrous—in fact, appears mild when compared to the spiritual dangers which simply uproot us from everything we know and love, as it were.

2.2 Significance

2.2.1 Destruction by fire. According to the Commentaries, our universe will end in any of 3 ways, that is, by the elements of fire, or water, or wind.\footnote{AA 3:134 (given in brief, but quotes Vism for details): Vism 13.29-44/414-417. On the various realms, see chart at SD 1.7 (Appendix). See SD 2.19 (9.4.2) The end of days.} The above description of a cosmic conflagration reminds us of the universe ending by fire or the heat element. This is not exactly a scientific statement but rather a metaphor to remind us of the possibility of the end of days, that everything, including this very universe is subject to change and destruction.

Although the great fire described in the (Tika) Bhaya Sutta [§1] is not a cosmic conflagration—perhaps some kind of forest fire which is quite common today in parts of the world—it seems to echo the cosmic fire that ends the world. Indeed, for many, such a great fire can end the kind of life we are familiar with, bringing us great losses, much of which is irreparable.

2.2.2 Destruction by water. Similarly, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} danger—that of water—described in the (Tika) Bhaya Sutta [§2], reminds us of the cosmic dissolution that brings about the end of the universe. Although the Sutta seems to describe a great flood, it hints at the cosmic destruction by the water element. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} danger mentioned in the Sutta, then, is a kind of microcosmic experience of what can happen on a cosmic scale, ending everything in this physical universe.

2.2.3 None can help us here. However, even greater than the dangers of the fire or the water that afflict such widespread and tragic losses and destruction, are the 3 dangers that radically—in a fundamental manner—not only separate mother and child, taking away all that we cherish and love, even our life itself in a total and final manner. These are the 3 dangers of ageing, of sickness and of death [§7]. We have to face these ourself, no one else can prevent this nor take our place in this.

We must and will age—just as everyone else will. No one can age for another.

We must and will fall ill—our body will fall sick, our mind is certainly sick in some way.\footnote{Of the 2 kinds of sickness—those of the body and the mind—see Sall'atthena S (S 36.6), SD 5.5.} No one else can fall sick for us. We may heal some sickness but new ones will afflict us. We may prevent some physical illness but mental illness of some kind will surely afflict us.

In the end, we must die, as will others, too. No one else can die for us. We may speak metaphorically or poetically of some heroes sacrificing their lives for us, but, ultimately, this body must and will itself disintegrate. Just as we are born alone, we must face death ourself, too. [2.3]

2.3 The Samayāsama Sutta (A 5.54), SD 51.15

What is briefly expressed in the Samayāsama Sutta (A 5.54) as one of the 5 occasions when it is inconducive for spiritual cultivation is elaborated in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} worldly danger of the (Tika) Bhaya Sutta (A 3.62)—that of “inroads [raids] by savage tribes” [§3]. The Samayāsama Sutta lists this, briefly, as the 4\textsuperscript{th} “wrong time for striving” (asamayā padhānāya) to be that of the fear or danger (bhaya), as follows:
Furthermore, bhikshus, there is the fear [the danger] of inroads [raids] by savage tribes, and people, mounted on their carts, flee from the country.

This, bhikshus, is the 4th wrong time for striving. (A 5.54.5/3:66), SD 51.15

The (Tika) Bhaya Sutta develops this idea by adding that “therein, a mother finds not her child and a child finds not his mother” (tattha mātā pi puttaṁ na patilabhati putto pi mātaram na patilabhāti) [§3.2]. The Samayāsamaya Sutta statement becomes the background for the 3rd worldly danger where we can be separated from our loved ones and those vital to our life.

2.4 The provisional and the ultimate

2.4.1 The (Tika) Bhaya Sutta is divided into two parts: the first or opening section [§§1-6] prepares us for the key teaching in the second and closing section [§§7-10]. The opening section tells us—again in two parts—of how natural disasters or man-made conditions can separate us from our loved ones and our source of life-support. In the first opening part, it says that such disasters incur great and irreparable losses upon us; the second opening part says that sometimes such disasters may not afflict us so badly.

2.4.2 In this opening section, the Buddha is speaking provisionally—in a conventional and limited way—of the nature of losses and suffering. “Having shown in a provisional way (pariyāyato) the dangers that separate mother and child,” notes the Commentary, “he now shows in a non-provisional way (nippariyāyena) the dangers that separate mother and son.” (AA 2:285). The closing section speaks of such losses and suffering in the spiritual or ultimate sense. Decay, disease and death are always there: they are inherent in us though we do not notice their effects upon us (including our significant others) in such a dramatic manner as do natural or man-made disasters. Yet, the effects of decay, disease and death are more total and insidious.

2.4.3 Yet, we can and must, by our own effort, overcome these inherent “dangers” and “disasters.” In closing the Sutta, the Buddha reminds us that we can only remove the dangers of decay, disease and death by walking the noble path. Only then, we overcome the dangers of remaining in the world and from the sufferings of separation in the world—that is, by truly renouncing the world through attaining nirvana.

By this, the Buddha is not saying whether the world is good or bad—separation and suffering are the inherent nature of the world. What is conditioned must change and break up. Those who have attained nirvana, or even walking the path of awakening, are able to bring great happiness to others by helping them understand and accept the world as it really is. In that way, we can all live happily as we prepare to approach and walk the path of awakening ourself.
(Tika) Bhaya Sutta
The (Threes) Discourse on Dangers
A 3.62

Separation
[178]

1 Bhikshus, the uninstructed ordinary person speaks of these 3 dangers [fears] that separate mother and child. What are the three?

(1) There comes a time, bhikshus, where there arises a great fire.

  1.2 When the great fire has arisen, bhikshus, it burns up villages, it burns up market-towns, it burns up cities.

  1.3 When the villages are burning, when the market-towns are burning, when the cities are burning, therein, a mother finds not her child and a child finds not his mother.

This, bhikshus, is the first danger that separates mother and child that the uninstructed ordinary person speaks of.

2 (2) Furthermore, bhikshus, there comes a time when a great rain-cloud arises.

  2.2 When the great rain-cloud has arisen, bhikshus, a mighty flowing flood occurs.

  2.3 When the villages are washed away, market-towns are washed away, cities are washed away, therein, a mother finds not her child and a child finds not his mother.

This, bhikshus, is the second danger that separates mother and child that the uninstructed ordinary person speaks of.

3 (3) Furthermore, bhikshus, there comes a time when there is the danger of raids by savage tribesmen, and people, mounted on their carts, flee the country.

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Comy says that there is here no possibility of mutual protection (parittātum samattha,bhāvena n’atthi ettha mātā, puttantī a,mātā,puttikāni, AA 2:284). I have rendered putta as “child” rather than “son” for a broader context eg, aputtaka, “childless” (“barren of offspring,” suta,vañjo, MA 3:322,5; cf DA 1:318 = MA 2:390,23); aputtakām sā-pateyyam, “property that is escheat (heirless)” (V 3:18,6; S 1:89,33, 91,29; J 3:299,11; DHA 4:77,1-7).

4 Hoti so bhikkhave samayo yanī mahā,aggi,daño vuṭṭhāti. Throughout: Be Ce Se -aggi,daño; Ee -aggi,daño.

5 Mahā,aggi,dahe kho pana bhikkhave vuṭṭhite tena gāmā pi dayhanti nīgamā pi dayhanti nagarā pi dayhanti.

6 Tattha mātā pi puttaṁ na paṭilabhāti putta pi mātaraṁ na paṭilabhāti. Comy explains na paṭilabhāti as “not getting to see (not able to meet)” (passitum na labhāti) one another (AA 2:284).


8 Mahā,meghe kho pana bhikkhave vuṭṭhite mahā,udaka,vāhako sañjāyati. It is understood that a great down-pour will ensue.

9 “Are washed away,” vuyhanti: it has the senses of both submerging these places and sweeping them away.

10 This report prob alludes to conflicts between the Aryans and the authochthonous pre-Aryan tribesmen, the dasa or dasyu. See R S Sharma, Ancient India: A textbook for Class Xi, Madras, 1971: 46; E J Rapson (ed), The Cambridge History of India 1 Ancient India, Cambridge, 1922:82-86. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dasa.
3.2 Now, bhikshus, when there is the danger of raids by savage tribesmen, and people, mounted on their carts, flee the country, 

therein, a mother finds not her child and a child finds not his mother.

This, bhikshus, is the third danger that separates mother and child that the uninstructed ordinary person speaks of.

These, bhikshus, are the 3 dangers that separate mother and child that the uninstructed ordinary people speak of.

Possible separation

4 Bhikshus, the uninstructed ordinary person speaks of these 3 dangers [fears] when mother and child may remain together, and the dangers when mother and child may be separated. What are the three?

(1) There comes a time, bhikshus, where there arises a great fire.

4.2 When the great fire has arisen, bhikshus, it burns up villages, it burns up market-towns, it burns up cities.

4.3 When the villages are burning, when the market-towns are burning, when the cities are burning, sometimes the mother finds the child, [179] sometimes the child finds the mother.

This, bhikshus, is the first danger when mother and child may remain together, and when mother and child may be separated that the uninstructed ordinary person speaks of.

5(2) Furthermore, bhikshus, there comes a time when a great rain-cloud arises.

5.2 When the great rain-cloud has arisen, bhikshus, a mighty flowing flood occurs. When the mighty flowing flood has occurred, villages are washed away, market-towns are washed away, cities are washed away.

5.3 When the villages are washed away, market-towns are washed away, cities are washed away, mother and child at times remain together, or mother and child at times are separated.

This, bhikshus, is the second danger mother and child may remain together, and mother and child may be separated that the uninstructed ordinary person speaks of.

6 (3) Furthermore, bhikshus, there comes a time when there is the danger of raids by savage tribes, and people, mounted on their carts, flee the country.

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11 Puna ca paraṁ bhikkhave hoti so samayo yaṁ bhayaṁ hoti atavi, saṅkhepo cakka, saṁrūjhā janapadā pariyaṁ-yanti. Be:Ph(ayre) atṭavisāṅkopo; Ce AA:Ee atavi, saṅkopo; Ke atavi, saṅkopo; A A 3:66. Comy explains atavi as referring to the thieves dwelling therein “(atavi c’ettha atavi, vāsino cora veditabba)” (AA 2:284)

12 Tāni kho pan'īmāni bhikkhave tīni sa,mātā,puttikāni [yeva] bhayāni a,mātā,puttikāni yeva bhayāṇīti assutavā putthujano bhāsatī. In this context, we should tr sa,mātā,puttika as “together-mother-and-child,” i.e., “mother with child,” not “with-mother-and-child.” Lit, “Anuntutored worldling speaks of these 3 mother-with-child dangers, (and) yet even (yeva ... yeva) of ‘mother-without-child dangers’.” The 3 dangers, clearly, are the great fire, the flood, and the social unrest. Since these initially separate mother and child, we can call them “dangers that separate mother and child.” However, in some cases, mother and child do not get separated despite the dangers. The emphasis is on the separation and the possibility of total separation—this is highlighted at the end of the Sutta. [57]

13 Gāmesu pi dayhamāṇesu nīgamesu pi dayhamāṇesu nagaresu pi dayhamāṇesu hoti so samayo yaṁ kadāci karahaci mātā pi puttham paṭilabhati putto pi mātaram paṭilabhati.

14 PTS has no numbering here. Para numbering from hereon differs from PTS.
6.2 Now, bhikshus, when there is the danger of raids by savage tribes, and people, mounted on their carts, flee the country, *mother and child at times remain together, or mother and child at times are separated.*

This, bhikshus, is the third danger *when mother and child may remain together, and when mother and child may be separated* that the uninstructed ordinary person speaks of.

These, bhikshus, are the 3 dangers *when mother and child may remain together, and when mother and child may be separated* that the uninstructed ordinary people speak of.

**Real separation**

7 Bhikshus, there are *these 3 dangers that separate mother and child.*¹⁵ What are the three? The danger of decay [old age]. The danger of disease. The danger of death.¹⁶

7.2 (1) Bhikshus, when a child is *growing old*, a mother will not get her wish, thus:
“Let me age. Let my child not age!”

Bhikshus, when a mother is ageing, a child will not get his wish, thus:
“Let me age. Let my mother not age!”

7.3 (2) Bhikshus, when a child is *ill*, a mother will not get her wish, thus:
“Let me fall ill. Let my child not be ill!”

Bhikshus, when a mother is ill, a child will not get his wish, thus:
“Let me fall ill. Let my mother not be ill!”

7.4 (3) Bhikshus, when a child is *dying*, a mother will not get her wish, thus:
“Let me die. Let my child not die!”

Bhikshus, when a mother is dying, a child will not get his wish, thus:
“Let me die. Let my mother not die!”

These, bhikshus, are the 3 dangers that separate mother and child. [180]

**Freedom from the 3 dangers**

8 Bhikshus, there is a path, a way, to *the abandoning, the overcoming*, of these 3 dangers²⁰ when mother and child may remain together, and the 3 dangers when mother and child may be separated.²¹

And what, bhikshus, is the path, the way, to *the abandoning, the overcoming*, of these 3 dangers when mother and child may remain together and the 3 dangers when mother and child may be separated?

¹⁵ *Tīni sa,mātā,puttikāni yeva bhāyāni amātā,puttikāni bhayānīti assutavā puthujjano bhāsati.*

¹⁶ *Comy: Having shown the dangers that separate mother and child in a provisional way (pariyāyato), he now shows the dangers that separate mother and child in a non-provisional way (nippariyāyato). (AA 2:285). Comy qu Vibhaṅga which lists the 3 kinds of dangers (bhaya) as those of birth (jāti,bhaya), decay (jarā,bhaya) and death (maraṇa,bhaya) (Vbh 920/367,9).*

¹⁷ *Ahaṁ jīrāmi mā me putto jīrīti.*

¹⁸ *Ahaṁ vyādhiyyāmi mā me putto vyādhiyyīti. Be Se vyādhiyi; Ce vyādhīyi; Ce:T(urnour) vyādhiyyati; Ee vyādhīyyi.*

¹⁹ *Ahaṁ miyyāmi mā me putto miyyīti. Be Se miyyi; Ce:T miyyati; Ce Ee miyyi.*

²⁰ *The 3 dangers are those of decay, disease and death,*

²¹ *Atthi bhikkhave maggo attthi patipadā imesañ ca tiṇṇam sa,mātā,puttikānam bhayānam imesañ ca tiṇṇam a,mātā,puttikānaṁ bhayānaṁ pahānāya samatikkamāya saṁvattanti.*
9 It is this very noble eightfold path, that is to say:
right view, right intention,
right speech, right action, right livelihood,
right effort, right mindfulness, right samadhi.

10 This, bhikshus, is the path, the way, to the abandoning, the overcoming, of these 3 dangers when mother and child may remain together and the 3 dangers when mother and child may be separated.

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