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Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 2

Dutiya Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta

The First Discourse on the Wonderful and Marvellous | A 4.128

Dutiya Tathāgata Acchariya Sutta The Second Tathagata Discourse on the Wonderful

Theme: The Buddha teaches how to overcome attachment, conceit, non-stillness and ignorance

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Overview

1.1 The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 2 (A 4.128) is the second of a series of 4 suttas in **the Bhava Vagga** (the chapter on existence) in the Book of Threes (Tika Nipāta) of the Aṅguttara Nikāya. The 4 suttas are as follows:¹

Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 1	A 4.127/2:130 f	SD 52.2a	the Buddha's 4 key life-events and radiance
Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 2	A 4.128/2:131 f	SD 52.2b	attachment, conceit, non-stillness, ignorance
Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 3	A 4.129/2:132	SD 52.2c	Ānanda's fourfold charisma
Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 4	A 4.130/2:133	SD 52.2d	Ānanda's charisma is like that of a world-monarch's.

1.2 SUTTA TEACHINGS

1.2.1 The Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 2 (A 4.128) lists a set of teachings on 4 key mental defilements that profoundly trouble us and hinder our spiritual progress. The world is caught up with **attachment** (*ālaya*) [§2], **conceit** (*māna*) [§3], **restlessness** (*anupasama*) [§4] and **ignorance** [§5]. However, when the Buddha teaches on non-attachment, non-conceit, stillness and right knowledge, the wise eagerly listen and are liberated.

1.2.2 The key teachings of **the Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 2** concern the 4 key defilements—attachment, conceit, restlessness and ignorance—and overcoming them. Technically, these teachings are a shorthand for an important teaching known as the 5 higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya saṃyojana*), given, for example, in **the Uddham,bhāgiya Sutta** (S 45.180).² These defilements, their opposites and the higher mental fetters are collated in a table below [1.3.1].

1.2.3 The 10 mental fetters: an overview

1.2.3.1 In terms of spiritual practice, however, we can relate these 4 mental defilements to the whole set of **the 10 mental fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*) [Fig 1.2.3]. However, before that, let us familiarize ourself with the 10 mental fetters themselves.

1.2.3.2 The 5 lower fetters (*oram.bhagiya saṃyojana*) [§2] are so called because they hold us back in the sense-world. *The sense-world* comprises realms where sensual pleasures constantly demand our full attention so that we are more focused on our bodily parts, needs and wants than cultivating the mind. As a result, we are constantly distracted from mental development and really enjoying life by living in the present.

¹ See SD 52.2 (4.1).

² S 45/180/5:61 f (SD 50.12).

1.2.3.3 The 5 higher fetters (*uddham, bhāgiya saṃyojana*) [§2] are so called because they hold us back in the transphysical worlds of form (*rūpa, loka*) and of formlessness (*arūpa, loka*). Although the streamwinner and the once-returned have overcome the 3 lower fetters, this gives them only some freedom from worldly distraction. The once-returned still needs to undergo one more life before attaining nirvana. The streamwinner will be reborn in the human world or the heavens up 7 times but no more.³

Although the non-returned and the arhat-to-be are neither attracted to sensual pleasures nor distracted by physical worldliness, the 5 higher fetters still limit them from full awakening. They are said to be “higher” (*uddham, bhāgiya*) fetters because they hold back even the non-returned to the higher worlds: they are still reborn in the pure abodes, the highest of the form world.

1.2.3.4 Technically, when the 1st 3 fetters are broken, we become **streamwinners** (*sotāpanna*), which means that we will attain arhathood in 7 lives at the most. However, with a little more mental training, we may be able to *weaken* the 3 unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion to become **once-returned** (*sa, kadāgāmi*), which means that we finish off the effects of our karma in one more life to attain arhathood.

With the breaking of all the 5 lower fetters, we become **non-returned** (*anāgāmi*), who are reborn in the pure abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*) and are not reborn in this world any more, and finish off our karma in the pure abodes to attain arhathood. When we have broken all the 10 fetters, we become **arhats** (*arahata*).

Here is a diagrammatic representation of the 10 fetters and sainthood:

The 5 lower fetters (*oram, bhāgiya saṃyojana*) [SD 50.11]

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| (1) <u>self-identity view</u> | <i>sakkāya, ditthi</i> |
| (2) <u>spiritual doubt</u> | <i>vicikicchā</i> |
| (3) <u>attachment to rituals and vows</u> | <i>śīla-b. bata, parāmāsa</i> |
| (4) sensual lust | <i>kāma, rāga</i> |
| (5) repulsion | <i>paṭigha⁴</i> |

The 3 fetters (underscored), overcome by the streamwinner and the once-returned (lust, hate and delusion are weakened).

The 5 lower fetters, overcome by the non-returned.

The 5 higher fetters (*uddham, bhāgiya saṃyojana*) [SD 50.12]

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| (6) lust for form existence | <i>rūpa, rāga</i> |
| (7) lust for formless existence | <i>arūpa, rāga</i> |
| (8) conceit | <i>māna</i> |
| (9) restlessness | <i>uddhacca</i> |
| (10) ignorance | <i>avijjā</i> |

The 5 higher fetters, overcome by the arhat.

Table 1.2.3.4 The 10 fetters and sainthood

1.3 THE MENTAL DEFILEMENTS AND THE MENTAL FETTERS

1.3.1 The 5 higher fetters. The Sutta specifically mentions **these 4 key mental defilements** that infest the world and their 4 positive opposites taught by the Buddha for our liberation. We can relate these to the 5 higher fetters, thus:

³ For details on “the fetters and arhathood,” see SD 50.12 (2).

⁴ In some places, *paṭigha* is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*).

<u>mental defilement</u>	<u>wholesome quality</u>	<u>the higher mental fetters</u> ⁵
(1) attachment (<i>ālaya</i>)	non-attachment (<i>anālaya</i>)	{ (6) lust for form-existence (7) lust for formless existence (8) conceit (9) restlessness (10) ignorance
(2) conceit (<i>māna</i>)	removal of conceit (<i>māna, vinaya</i>)	
(3) restlessness (<i>anupasama</i>)	stillness (<i>upasama</i>)	
(4) ignorance (<i>avijjā</i>)	true knowledge (<i>aññā</i>)	

Fig 1.3.1. The 5 higher fetters**1.3.2 Fetters and defilements**

Specifically, we can take the 4 mental defilements to encompass the 5 higher mental fetters, as represented in **Figure 1.3.1**. More broadly, however, we should take the defilement “**attachment**” (*ālaya*) as a blanket term for all the lower fetters (*oram, bhāgiya saṃyojana*) [1.2.3.4]. As a higher fetter (*uddham, bhāgiya saṃyojana*), it encompasses fetters (6)+(7). This arrangement is reflected in the following diagram:

<u>The 5 lower fetters</u> (<i>oram, bhāgiya saṃyojana</i>) [SD 50.11]	<u>The 4 defilements</u> (A 4.128)
(1) <u>self-identity view</u> <i>sakkāya, ditthi</i>	{ (1) Attachment (<i>ālaya</i>) (2) conceit (<i>māna</i>) (3) non-stillness (restlessness, <i>anupasama</i>) (4) ignorance (<i>avijjā</i>)
(2) <u>spiritual doubt</u> <i>vicikicchā</i>	
(3) <u>attachment to rituals and vows</u> <i>sīla-b. bata, parāmāsa</i>	
(4) sensual lust <i>kāma, rāga</i>	
(5) repulsion <i>paṭigha</i> ⁶	
<u>The 5 higher fetters</u> (<i>uddham, bhāgiya saṃyojana</i>) [SD 50.12]	
(6) lust for form existence <i>rūpa, rāga</i>	
(7) lust for formless existence <i>arūpa, rāga</i>	
(8) conceit <i>māna</i>	
(9) restlessness <i>uddhacca</i>	
(10) ignorance <i>avijjā</i>	

Table 1.3.2 The 10 fetters and the 4 defilements**1.3.3 Significance**

At first blush, **the Acchariya, abhuta Sutta 2** seems to address monastics to give up all their attachments, conceit, non-stillness and ignorance, that is, to attain arhathood in this life itself. This, of course, may well be the case.

However, if we pause to reflect that the Buddha’s teachings are for all, then we at once can see a wider application of this teaching, as shown in **Figure 1.3.2**. The Sutta, then, exhorts us to work with the 10 mental defilements that hinder our spiritual development.

Since we are still unawakened, we have to start by overcoming at least the first **3 fetters**—self-identity view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows. To help this process, it is wise to practise

⁵ See **Uddham, bhāgiya S** (S 45.180), SD 50.12.

⁶ In some places, *paṭigha* is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*).

the perception of impermanence, as taught in the **(Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1) and the other 9 suttas in the same **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25).⁷ We are then assured of at least streamwinning in this life itself.

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Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta 2

The Second Discourse on the Wonderful and Marvellous

A 4.128

1 Bhikshus, with the appearance of the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened, there also appears 4 wonderful and marvellous things. What are the four?

(1) Non-attachment

2 Bhikshus, people enjoy **attachment** (*ālaya*);⁸ they delight in attachment; they together rejoice in attachment.⁹

2.2 But when the Tathagata is teaching the Dharma about non-attachment,¹⁰ they wish to listen, they lend their ear, they set up their minds on true knowledge.¹¹

2.3 This, bhikshus, is the first wonderful and marvellous characteristic that occurs when the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened, arises.¹²

(2) Non-conceit

3 Bhikshus, people enjoy **conceit** (*māna*);¹³ they delight in conceit; they together rejoice in conceit.¹⁴

⁷ S 25.1/3:225 (SD 16.7) & S 25/3:225-228.

⁸ Basically *ālaya* means (1) lit, abode, seat, rest-place, resort, haven, repository; (2) fig, liking, inclination, attachment, fondness, partiality: see CPD. Comy explains **ālaya** as meaning referring specifically to the 5 objects of sense-pleasures (of the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) (*pañca kāma,guṇa*), and broadly to cyclic life (*vaṭṭa*) (AA 2:128). According to **Sabba S** (S 35.24), they are both the same thing, ie, the “all” (*sabba*) (SD 7.1). Here, it should be understood as specifically referring to the 6th + 7th mental fetters (respectively, attachment to form-existence and to formless existence), and broadly to the 5 lower mental fetters [1.3 + Fig 1.2.3.4].

⁹ *Ālaya,rāmā bhikkhave pajā ālaya, ratā ālaya, samuditā* (vl *sammuditā* throughout).

¹⁰ Non-attachment, *anālaya* = *a* + *ālaya*. Comy: This is the noble Dharma as opposed to attachment, ie, the ending of the samsaric rounds. (AA 2:128)

¹¹ *Sā tathāgatena anālaye dhamme desiyamāne sussūyati sotaṃ odahati aññā cittaṃ upaṭṭhāpeti.*

¹² *Tathāgatassa bhikkhave arahato sammā, sambuddhassa pātubhāvā ayaṃ paṭhamo acchariyo abbhuto dhammo pātubhavati.*

¹³ Conceit (*māna*) is a perception of self and others as disconnected duality of objects, resulting in measuring our self against others that invariably incites a sense of lack, and then a desire for acquiring what we lack. (**Māna**) **Soṇa Sutta** (S 22.49) speaks of the 3 psychological complexes, that “I am better (than),” “I am equal (just as good as),” and “I am worse (than).” (S 22.49), SD 31.13; see also **Māna S** (S 4.15), SD 61,10.

¹⁴ *Ālaya,rāmā bhikkhave pajā ālaya, ratā ālaya, samuditā* (vl *sammuditā* throughout).

3.2 But when the Tathagata is teaching the Dharma for the removal of conceit,¹⁵ they wish to listen, they lend their ear, they set up their minds on true knowledge.¹⁶

3.3 This, bhikshus, is the second wonderful and marvellous characteristic that occurs when the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened, arises.

(3) Stillness

4 Bhikshus, people enjoy **non-stillness** [restlessness] (*anupasama*);¹⁷ they delight in non-stillness; they together rejoice in non-stillness.

4.2 But when the Tathagata is teaching the Dharma that leads to peace,¹⁸ they wish to listen, they lend their ear, they set up their minds on true knowledge.¹⁹

4.3 This, bhikshus, is the third wonderful and marvellous characteristic that occurs when the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened, arises.

(4) True knowledge

5 Bhikshus, people are fallen into **ignorance** (*avijjā, gatā*)²⁰; they are all shelled up in the egg of ignorance [all shrouded in darkness].²¹

5.2 But when the Tathagata is teaching the Dharma for the removal of ignorance,²² they wish to listen, they lend their ear, they set up their minds on true knowledge.

5.3 This, bhikshus, is the fourth wonderful and marvellous characteristic that occurs when the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened, arises.

6 Bhikshus, with the appearance of the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened, there appear these 4 wonderful and marvellous things.

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¹⁵ “The removal of conceit” (*māna, vinaya*) can be effected by meditations that arouse joy within oneself and reflecting on non-self (*anattā*). The best “inner joy” meditation is the cultivation of lovingkindness,¹⁵ especially when practised in connection with the breath meditation. See SD 50.12 (2.4.4.5).

¹⁶ *Sā tathāgatena māna, vinaye dhamme desiyamāne sussūyati sotam odahati aññā cittaṃ upaṭṭhāpeti.*

¹⁷ *Anupasama, na + upasana* (“stillness, peace”). Non-stillness or restlessness (*anupasama*) as a defilement refers to mental unease which may be either positive or negative. This is, in fact, identical to the 9th mental fetter, restlessness (*uddhacca*). Those who are not yet arhats often, on account of their compassion, feel “Dharma restlessness” (*dhamma’uddhacca*) for those who are suffering or are not benefitting from the Dharma: see SD 41.5 (5); SD 32.7 (2.1.4, 2.2.3); SD 41.4 (2.2.1).

¹⁸ *Upasama* (*upa + sama*) means “calm, inner peace; allaying.” If we understand *anupasama* as the fetter of restlessness, then its antidote is the practice of equanimity (*upekkhā*), ie, by cultivating the 4 divine abodes, esp the 4th abode, ie, *upekkhā* (see **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5), or attaining the 4th dhyana (see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4). On *upasama* as the foundation of arhathood, see **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,28), SD 4.17.

¹⁹ *Sā tathāgatena opasamike* [vl *upasamike*] *dhamme sussūyati sotam odahati aññā cittaṃ upaṭṭhāpeti.*

²⁰ *Avijjā, gata* lit means “gone to (ie, fallen into) ignorance.” Technically, *avijjā*, “ignorance,” is the lack of understanding of the 4 noble truths: see SD 50.12 (2.4.5).

²¹ *Avijjā, gatā bhikkhave pajā aṇḍa, bhūtā* [Ee *andha, bhūtā*] *pariyonaddhā*. Where Be Ce Se Comy read *aṇḍa, bhūtā*, “become like an egg,” Ee has *andha, bhūtā*, “become blind.” From popular usage, the former is preferred. Cf V 2:3,38: “Amongst the people fallen into ignorance, all shelled up in the egg of ignorance, having pierced through the shell of the egg that is ignorance ...” (*Avijjā, gatāya pajāya aṇḍa, bhūtāya pariyonaddhāya avijj’ aṇḍa, kosam padāletvā*) = A 4:176,16; VA 1:138,23; also AA 3:253,1.

²² Comy: The “removal of ignorance” (*avijjā, vinaya*) is called arhathood (*arhathood*) (AA 3:128).