

10

Sambuddha Sutta

The Discourse on the Self-awakened | S 22.58

or **Sammā,sambuddha Sutta**, the Discourse on the Fully Self-awakened One

Theme: The difference between the Buddha and the arhat

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2015

1 The nature of the Buddha

1.1 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.1.1 Sutta summary

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

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

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

1.1.2 The uppādetā pericope

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

*Tathāgato bhikkhave araham sammā,sam-
buddho anuppannassa maggassa uppādetā,
asañjātassa maggassa sañjānetā anakkhātassa
maggassa akkhātā magga-ñ,ñū magga,vidū
maggā,kovido.*

*Maggānugā ca bhikkhave etarahi sāvakā
viharanti, pacchā,samannāgatā.*

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

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

[§§11-12]

¹ M 73,7/1:477 f; see S:B 2 n210.

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

Go,pāka Moggallāna Sutta	M 108,5/3:8,12	the full pericope	SD 33.5
Pavāraṇā Sutta	S 8.7/1:191,3	the full pericope	SD 49.11
Sambuddha Sutta	S 22.56/3:68,16 (SA 2:278,5)	the full pericope	SD 49.10
Nāgara Sutta	S 12.65,33/2:107	alluded to	SD 14.2
Milinda,pañha	Miln 217,10+219,11	in brief	
Paṭisambhidā	Pm 2:194,19	the full pericope	
Apadāna	Ap 24.5/570,5* (see following)	summarized	
Therīgāthā Commentary	ThīA 91,22* (verse = Ap 24.5)	summarized	

1.1.3 Paññā,vimutta

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

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

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

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

1.1.3.3 The same term, *paññā,vimutta*, is used in **the Sambuddha Sutta** [§3.2]. It should clearly be understood as referring to any arhat disciple—monastic or lay—and not exclusively as the *paññā,vimutta* is a later technical term, contrasted with the “one freed both ways,” *ubhato.bhāga,vimutta*, found in later suttas with more systematized doctrines [1.1.3.1]. The usage of the term *paññā,vimutta* in such a

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

³ M 70,15-16/1:477 f (SD 11.1) and Pug 1,30-314/14 + PugA 190 f.

⁴ On the formless states (*āruppa*), see **Jhāna Pañha S 1** (S 40.1) @ SD 24.11 (5).

⁵ D 15,36/2:71 (SD 5.17).

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

non-technical sense suggests that the Sambuddha Sutta is a very early text, that is, one belonging to the first period of the Buddha's ministry.⁷

1.2 ONE AND SAME AWAKENING

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

on account of **revulsion** towards ⟨form, ... feeling, ... perception, ... formations, ... consciousness⟩
through dispassion [letting go],

through cessation (of suffering),
that one is liberated [freed] through non-clinging,

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

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

This is merely a ritualization or secularization of enlightenment that is based on power or authority without anything to do with awakening to true reality or spiritual liberation as taught by the historical Buddha.

There is only one way to awaken to true reality: we can and must each purify or awaken by ourself.

*Attanā'va⁸ kataṃ pāpaṃ
attanā saṅkilissati
atanā akataṃ pāpaṃ
attanā'va visujjhati
suddhī asuddhī paccataṃ
nāñño aññaṃ⁹ visodhaye.*

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

1.2.3 Extinguished fire

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

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

⁸ So Ce Ee Se; Be *attanā'hi*.

⁹ So Be Ee Se; Ce *nāññam añño*.

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

¹¹ M 72,19/1:487 + SD 6.15 (4).

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 THE BUDDHA AS THE UNIQUE BEING

1.3.1 The first amongst equals

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁵ S 25.1/3:225 (SD 16.7).

¹⁶ S 55.40/5:397-399 (SD 47.1).

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

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

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

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

1.3.2 The one and only Buddha

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

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

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

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

And he understands that it is possible, there is the chance, **only one worthy fully self-awakened one would arise in one world system**—this is possible.²²

(M 115,14/3:66), SD 29.1a

1.3.2.3 The reason behind this statement is very simple: once the direct open way to freedom is known, there is no more need for finding any other way to it. We only need to take this path, and we will be free. Once we have discovered fire, we need not discover it again. Once we have invented the wheel,

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

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

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

²⁰ See Sn:N 164 n83.

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

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

we need not invent it again. We use such inventions for our comfort and benefit, and work towards greater things, especially self-understanding and self-awakening.

1.3.3 Nāgasena's arguments

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

1.3.3.2 Nāgasena then gives a total of 4 analogies to support his statement. (Miln 6.2)

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

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

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

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

1.4 THE GREATEST HISTORICAL EVENT

1.4.1 The sāsaṇa pericope

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

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

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

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

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

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

He teaches the Dharma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end,²⁷ endowed with meaning and phrasing. He proclaims the holy life that is entirely complete and pure.²⁸
(D 2,40/1:62), SD 8.10

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

1.4.2 Difficulty of the Buddha’s appearance

1.4.2.1 Although the appearance of the Buddha in our universe is the most auspicious event in our lives, he does not appear in every human epoch. Our time is a buddha-epoch (*buddha-kāla*). In fact, ours is an auspicious world-period (*bhadda,kappa*),³⁰ with four past buddhas—Vipassī, Koṇāgamana, Kakusan-dha and Kassapa—and the present buddha Gotama, and the future buddha, Metteyya.³¹ Note again that in each epoch or “buddha-period” (*buddha,kāla*), there is only one buddha.³² Our present aeon or world-cycle has 5 buddhas, but only one in each successive epochs.³³ However, there are certain aeons of our universe when there are no buddhas.³⁴

1.4.2.2 Although a buddha does not appear amongst humans in every civilized age, or his teachings are easily forgotten in a capricious world, it cannot properly be said that his appearance is “rare” (*dul-labha*). Hence, it is not exactly right to translate *kiccho buddhānam uppādo* (Dh 182d) as “Rare is the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³³ On the buddhas of our current aeon, see SD 36.2 (3.1.2).

³⁴ On the world-cycles and buddhas, see SD 49.8b (15.2.2).

appearance of the buddhas.” The Dhammapada Commentary, however, actually glosses *kiccha* as “rare” (DhA 3:235), which, of course, may be taken as a connotation, rather than a denotation.

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

The appearance of a buddha is very difficult to come by. It is extremely rare because the resolve to become a buddha succeeds only after great effort and because the arising of one with such a resolve, too, is rare, even in many thousands of aeons.³⁵ (DhA 3:235)

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

1.5 OTHER BUDDHAS

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

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

(A 3.80), SD 54.1 & (A 10.29,2/5:59 f), SD 16.15³⁶

With reasonable imagination, we should understand this kind of “lesser” or “minor” (*cūḷanika*) universe extending as far as its light can be seen or detected (as we today are able to see celestial bodies and remote space phenomena many light-years away). Within such a universe, covering astronomically vast distances, the Suttas continue, there are a “thousand” (astronomically numerous) suns, moons, galaxies, inhabited realms, and gods (or alien races).

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

2 The Buddha and the arhat

2.1 THE HISTORICAL BUDDHA

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

³⁵ *Mahantena vāyāmena abhinīhārassa samijjanato samiddhābhinihārassa ca anekehi pi kappa,koṭi,sahassehi dullabh’uppādato buddhānaṃ uppādo’pi kiccho yeva, ativiya dullabho’ti.* (DhA 3:325)

³⁶ See also SD 10.9 (8.2.3) & SD 2.19 (9.5).

2.2 THE BUDDHA'S KNOWLEDGE

2.2.1 Same awakening knowledge

2.2.1.1 According to **the (Koṭi,gāma) Arahanta Sutta** (S 56.24), all buddhas awaken on account of the 4 noble truths (SD 53.27). In this Sutta, the buddhas are referred to simply as “arhats” (*arahantā*), just like any other arhat. However, in the Sambuddha Sutta (S 22.58), **the buddha** is said to the first arhat to arise in the world [1.3.1], the one who discovers the 4 noble truths and teaches them in various ways to others, and those who fully awaken are his awakened followers, **the arhats** [§11]. Hence, the arhats are also called “the 4-truth buddhas” (*catu,sacca buddha*).³⁷

2.2.1.2 There is no difference between the Buddha’s awakening knowledge (*aññā*) and that of the arhats. The only significant differences between the Buddha and the arhats are in terms of their wisdom outside of awakening knowledge. The Buddha’s knowledge, in other words, is unlimited, while that of the arhats is limited to their awakening knowledge plus those of their superknowledges.³⁸ [2.2.3]

2.2.2 The range of the Buddha’s knowledge

2.2.2.1 The Simsapā Sutta (S 56.31) is the locus classicus for the teaching in the range of the Buddha’s knowledge. While the Buddha and the monks are in a simsapa (or resam) forest, the Buddha holds up a handful of leaves to show the monks that the awakening knowledge taught by the Buddha for our benefit is like the leaves in his hand. However, the knowledge that he has as a buddha is boundless like the leaves on the forest trees.³⁹

2.2.2.2 What the Buddha has taught for our sake—the liberating knowledge that is the 4 noble truths—which are as few as the leaves in his hands—is sufficient for us, if we fully understand them, to awaken to nirvana. The Buddha has not taught us many other things that he knows about because they are “not connected with the goal, not connected with the fundamentals of the holy life, and do not lead to revulsion, to letting go, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.”⁴⁰

2.2.3 The superknowledges

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

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| (1) multifarious psychic power | <i>iddhi,vidhā</i> or <i>iddhi,vidha</i> |
| (2) the divine ear | <i>dibba,sota</i> |
| (3) mind-reading | <i>paracitta,vijānanā</i> |
| (4) recollection of past lives | <i>pubbe,nivāsānussati,ñāṇa</i> |
| (5) the divine eye, or | <i>dibba,cakkhu</i> |

³⁷ MA 3:436; AA 2:265, 352, 3:91; DhA 4:232; ItA 2:37; SnA 1:374, 2:470; ThaA 3:142, 179; ThīA 142; PmA 3:578. See SD 36.2 (2.2.3).

³⁸ On the Buddha’s omniscience, see **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90), SD 10.8 (2); **Sandaka S** (M 76,21+52), SD 35.7; SD 36.2 (5.1.1.2). On the Buddha’s knowledge of the future, see **Pāsādika S** (D 29), S 40a.6 & SD 36.2 (5.10.3).

³⁹ S 56.31,3 (SD 21.7).

⁴⁰ On this *nibbidā* formula, see **Nibbidā**, SD 20.1.

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

They are called “superknowledge” (*abhiññā*)—especially the first five knowledges—because they can only be attained through the higher states of deep meditation, that is, the 4th dhyana. The 6th knowledge—that of arhathood itself—is attained when all the defilements have been destroyed. The first five knowledges, however, are mundane, while only the sixth is supermundane (that is, it has to do with awakening).⁴¹

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

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

The last three powers are an ancient set known as the “3 knowledges” of an arhat, as found in the title of **the Te,vijja Sutta** (D 13).⁴²

2.3 HARD TRUTHS ABOUT THE BUDDHA

2.3.0 The Buddha arises in the world to discover the true meaning and purpose of life. The meaning of life is simply that everything is impermanent. The purpose of life then is to understand this impermanence, so that we do not suffer on that account, but can be liberated. The way out of suffering by way of understanding the nature of impermanence is clearly laid out in such texts as **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1).⁴³

The Buddha teaches only about suffering and its ending—as he declares in **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86). We need to discover what this truth of suffering and its arising is, and we need to work for the path to the ending of suffering and to attain that path.⁴⁴ These are the basic hard truths—those of practicing the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma—that we must work with in this life itself. To do this, we have to know what the other hard truths of Buddhism—the Dharma’s externality—are.

2.3.1 One of the key early Buddhist teachings is that the Buddha clearly discourages and forbids any kind of worship, even worshipping the Buddha. To worship the Buddha is to relegate him to the status and role of a God, still stuck in samsara, this impermanent world of life and death. It is like saying that “cabbages and kings”⁴⁵ exist on the sub-atomic level of matter. The following **3 hard truths** remind us that the true purpose of the Buddha’s teaching is to realize true Dharma and awaken to nirvana.

⁴¹ For details on these 6 superknowledges, see SD 27.5a (5).

⁴² On the 3 knowledges, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13) @ SD 1.8 (2.2.2); **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,17-19), SD 49.1 (3.3); 2.24; **Cūḷa Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 27,23-25), SD 40.5.

⁴³ S 25.1 (SD 16.7).

⁴⁴ S 22.86,21.2 (SD 21.13).

⁴⁵ This allusion is from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1871). It is also used by O Henry in his novel, *Cabbages and Kings* (1904) about a fictitious Central America “banana republic” (a term he coined) called Anchuria. Its plot contains famous elements in the poem: “shoes and ships and sealing wax, cabbages and kings.” Here, it is used to refer to an “odd miscellany.”

2.3.2 The first hard truth is from **the Brahma, jāla Sutta** (D 1), where the Buddha declares that just as when a stalk of mangoes has been cut, all its mangoes go with it, so too, “After the breaking up of the body and exhaustion of the life-faculty, gods and humans do not see him [the Tathagata].”⁴⁶

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

2.3.3 “**Seeing the Dharma**” means experiencing the teaching directly through our own practice, not through rituals or vows or faith in others. This teaching of “seeing the Dharma” is given in **the Vakkali Sutta** (S 22.87), where the Buddha exhorts the monk Vakkali, thus: “Enough, Vakkali! What is there to see of this foul body? **One who sees the Dharma sees me; one who sees me, sees the Dharma.** In seeing the Dharma, Vakkali, one sees me, and in seeing me, one sees the Dharma.”⁴⁷ This is not a worldly vision of what is worldly, but a Dharma-inspired vision of awakening.

2.3.4 The third hard truth about Buddhism is that the Buddha, just before passing away, declares that the “**supreme worship**” is not to worship him (or any arhat or being or deity), but to practise the Dharma “in accordance with the Dharma” so that we self-awaken.⁴⁸ We should practise right action and right mindfulness.⁴⁹

2.4 KEEPING TO THE BUDDHA DHARMA

2.4.1 Keeping to the Buddha’s teaching

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

Sadly, the Buddha’s statement on his uniqueness is lost on Buddhist theologians who came after the Buddha’s time. Unable to accept the Buddha’s death⁵⁰ and not properly attending to his practice in accordance with the Dharma, they have brazenly rejected his fundamental teachings and flooded their world with numerous cosmic Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and, in the process, have burdened themselves with grand philosophies and empty statements, wildly feeding the ready delusions of others.⁵¹

2.4.2 Walking the right path

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

⁴⁶ D 1,147/1:46 (SD 25.2).

⁴⁷ S 22.87/3:120 (SD 8.8).

⁴⁸ See [Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta](#) (D 16) §§5.1-3 @ SD 9. See also Reflection, “[The supreme worship](#),” R378, 2015.

⁴⁹ I’m not advocating any kind of iconoclasm here. Just as we can and should meaningfully reflect before a Buddha image, it is helpful to understand the significance of the Bodhi tree: For [the origin of venerating the Bodhi tree](#), see the Introduction to [Kaliṅga, bodhi Jātaka](#) (J 479/4:228-230).

⁵⁰ On [the significance of the Buddha’s death](#), see SD 49.8b (1.0.5.2 (12))+(12.3.1.1)+(17.2.2.4).

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

found what we are looking for—then we stop looking for that goal.

Buddhism can be a winding dangerous desert path going in circles. The Dharma is a straight safe path heading for the ancient city. And someone has found the way—the Buddha. To follow him, we must stay on the path, and take the journey ourself—so we can and must.⁵²

2.5 CHALLENGES TO BUDDHISM IN OUR TIMES

2.5.1 Tolerance vs respect

2.5.1.1 Our misunderstanding and malpractice of tolerance and silence have cost us dearly—especially when we mistake **tolerance** for respect (*gāravatā*). Tolerance means allowing something alien to us into our lives. This is especially unhelpful, even deleterious, when we allow what is not-Dharma, or a distraction into our lives as practising Buddhists. We will then not see the real fruits of the Dharma.

“Tolerance” as a modern value is a helpful and beneficial social grace. But we must understand how to practise it as committed Buddhists. For the moment, let us translate *tolerance* as **khanti**, which also means “patience.” It’s good to be patient with other religions in a multireligious, multiracial society. However, such a tolerance should not compromise the truth and goodness of the Buddha Dharma, or more simply “Buddhism.”

When Buddhism is misrepresented or misquoted, and we—as Buddhists—allow that, then it is no more tolerance—it is *licence*, an excessive freedom that will hurt, even destroy, us. Tolerance, in short, must be tempered by respect.

2.5.1.2 The Aparihāna Suttas 1 and 2 (A 6.32+33) tell us that the following 6 conditions conduces to non-decline, that is, our social, personal and spiritual progress, namely, **respect for**:⁵³

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| (1) the teacher, | <i>satthu, gāravatā</i> |
| (2) the Dharma, | <i>dhamma, gāravatā</i> |
| (3) the sangha, | <i>saṅgha, gāravatā</i> |
| (4) the training, | <i>sikkhā, gāravatā</i> |
| (5) heedfulness, | <i>appamāda, gāravatā</i> |
| (6) hospitality. | <i>paṭisanthāra gāravatā</i> |

The first three objects of respects are, of course, to the 3 jewels, the highest ideals in our life.⁵⁴ The 4th respect is to our spiritual training—moral virtue, mental cultivation and the development of wisdom.⁵⁵ The 5th respect is that for heedfulness, which refers to habitual wise attention to our body, speech and mind, and how we interact with others and the environment. In simple terms, this is the constant perception of impermanence in all our experiences.

For our purposes here, the 6th respect—that of hospitality—refers to respect for others, which includes religious tolerance as a social reality. This is essentially the acceptance of a non-Buddhist—but not *unbuddhist*—presence. With such a presence, we interact with “hospitality” (*paṭisanthāra*), which is essentially respect for the guest.⁵⁶

⁵² See **Nāgara S** (S 12.65), [SD 14.2](#)

⁵³ **Aparihāna S 1+2** (A 6.32-33) SD 72.9; SD 32.11 (1.1); [SD 37.11 \(1-7\)](#); SD 47.14 (1.4).

⁵⁴ See SD 45.11 (3); **Gāra S** (S 6.2) SD 12.3.

⁵⁵ On the 3 trainings, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

⁵⁶ For details, see **Love**, SD 38.4 (5).

2.5.1.3 Respect (*gāravata*) can be functionally defined as “accepting someone or something as they are.” When we are in the presences of members of other faiths, we accept them as being non-Buddhists, and do so in the spirit of hospitality (*paṭisanthāra*) [2.5.1.2] and the Buddha’s teaching on “the 7 points of interfaith dialogue” as given in **the Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 25).⁵⁷ Essentially, this means that in any interfaith dialogue our common platform comprises the following basic principles:

- (1) there are unwholesome qualities or realities that need to be identified and avoided,⁵⁸
- (2) by our own faith and insight, we need find wholesome solutions or alternatives to (1);⁵⁹
- (3) to find some common or non-objectional means of mental cultivation⁶⁰ and social engagement.⁶¹

2.5.1.4 Tolerance tempered by respect allows us to keep to the right priorities as practising Buddhists. **The Ādhipateyya Sutta** (A 3.40) teaches us 3 kinds of priorities, that is:

- | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| (3) self-priority; | <i>attādhipateyya</i> | |
| (2) the world; and | <i>lok’ādhipateyya</i> | |
| (1) the Dharma. | <i>dhamm’ādhipateyya</i> | (A 3.40), SD 27.3 |

The numbering of the 3 priorities reflects personal **spiritual practice** with the sequence is 3, 2, 1, since *self* comes first in the cultivation of the mind and heart.⁶² When interacting with **the world**, we need to put the Dharma *first*, since we must be spiritually guided by the 5 intrinsic values, that is, those of life, happiness,⁶³ freedom, truth and mind.⁶⁴

“**The world**” refers to humanity, the inhabited world and its supports, straddling between self and Dharma, embraced by both. When dealing with the world, when interacting with others, living in the world, there are must *both self-dignity and a higher purpose in life*. Yet, if our refuge is in the 3 jewels, then, they all sit adorning the one crown that ennoble us, that is the crown of the Dharma, the one true refuge.⁶⁵ Hence, in interfaith dialogue, the Dharma must always be held high above the world, shining its light brightening everything with peace, clarity and joy.

2.5.2 Dharma as awakening

2.5.2.1 In the field of faith, there are **2 kinds of tolerance** that we have addressed [2.5.1.1]:

- (1) the outer tolerance, that of other faiths, and
- (2) the inner tolerance, that of our Buddhist differences.

⁵⁷ D 25,23 + (SD 1.4 (2)).

⁵⁸ On the def of 10 unwholesome courses of action (*akusala kamma,patha*): **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,7-10) SD 5.7; **Sañcetanika S** (A 10.206,1-7) SD 3.9.

⁵⁹ On the wholesome living, see the 5 precepts: **Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7) SD 1.5 (2); **Silānussati**, SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 21.6 (1.2); SD 37.8 (2.2). On the 5 values (*pañca,dhamma*): SD 1.5 (2.7+8).

⁶⁰ In terms of interfaith dialogues, the most helpful meditations are the 4 divine abodes: **Brahma,vihxara**, SD 38.5.

⁶¹ A helpful guide on Buddhist social engagement is **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31), SD 4.1.

⁶² That is, thinking and feeling, truth and beauty. For a specific practice—that of the perception of impermanence—see **(Aniucca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

⁶³ “Happiness” refers to the basic supports for existence (food, clothing, health and housing); hence, also called the value of “property” or “having” (in which case the 1st value will be that of “being”).

⁶⁴ On the 5 values (*pañca,dhamma*): SD 1.5 (2.7+8).

⁶⁵ See **Gārava S** (S 6.2), SD 12.3; **The one true refuge**, SD 3.1.

In significant ways, **outer tolerance** is more palpable and clear-cut: the difference between Buddhist and non-Buddhist is clear enough. Less obvious, even more confusing, is **inner tolerance**—the interactions and exchanges amongst Buddhists of different faiths. Indeed, it is often easier to be tolerant of other faiths than to tolerate other Buddhists who do not share the same basic teachings as we do. It is a curious fact that Buddhists generally tolerate other religions better than they do their own Buddhists from different sects.

2.5.2.2 The common fear is the outward mobility of the faithful to other camps—this can seriously deprive a Buddhist tribe of its pool of labour, funds, influence and public face, Amongst the more faith-based tribes, the fear of their defining faith being contaminated by outside Buddhist beliefs is often greater than threats from other religions (even perceived threat from outside tend to galvanize Buddhist tribes together despite their ideological or ethnic differences).

On the other hand, world-wise Buddhist tribes (including temples and centres) do not mind accepting revisions into their Buddhist dogmas than to risk losing their worldly support. Unsurprisingly, then, we see images of Guanyin and Mahā Brahma in local Theravada temples—they are magnets for generous devotees. In fact, we see a slow but steady brahminization and Mahayanization⁶⁶ of world-wise Theravada temples and centres who fear a lack of merits for their wellbeing in the world.

2.5.2.3 The stricter Theravada communities, especially those following or faithful to the forest tradition, or those inspired to keep to the practice of “early Buddhism” or a “quest for the historical Buddha” tend to inner tolerance as a serious threat. They see the secularization of the Theravada and the rising influence of Mahayana as encroaching on the Buddha Dharma, slowly but surely pushing the forest kutis nearer the cliff’s edge and over into the samsaric abyss. In fact, the ideology of the Dharma-ending age is specifically to forestall such end of days for the Buddha’s teachings.

Or practitioners who are able to understand the nature of the early Buddhist texts and how they work to prepare us for the path of awakening, certain basic truths of the suttas must never be compromised. Otherwise, what we know as Buddha Dharma will gradually have its ancient parts removed and replaced by modern ones so that it ends up as **the Dasāraha drum called Summoner**,⁶⁷ or the legendary ship of Theseus.⁶⁸

2.5.2.4 Perhaps a better metaphor for the Dharma is a **pristine temperate forest** whose climate is just right living and practising the Dharma. Its flora is beautiful and nutritious; its fauna rare and friendly; its sunny air and cleat water are invigorating. Deep in the heart of this wild pristine forest is the ancient city of Nirvana. It is this forest that we need to preserve at all costs against the inroads of broad new highways, their great vehicles and massive noisy crowds.

Here are 3 vital teachings for preserving this Dharma forest.

⁶⁶ By “brahminization” is basically meant monastics turning into priests, hierarchical landlords and money-based ministry. By “Mahayanization” is the growing acceptance of more liberal “compassion-based” social work and a tacit disregard for the Vinaya (like taking regular evening meals, to cite a very light example).

⁶⁷ On the parable of the drum Summoner, see **Āṇi S** (S 20.7), SD 11.13.

⁶⁸ On Theseu’s paradox, see SD 26.9 (1.6.1.1).

2.6 PRESERVING THE DHARMA FOREST

2.6.1 We do *not* need to become Buddhas

2.6.1.1 Those who do not understand the significance of the Buddha’s death and have no love for the Dharma think that it had died with the Buddha; or, that, without the Buddha, it is more difficult, even impossible, to attain the ancient ideals of sainthood—they wrongly placed the teacher above the teaching.⁶⁹

Like religions that cannot accept the death of their founder or saviour,⁷⁰ they create ideologies of primordial or eternal Buddha (thus turning the basic teaching of the 3 characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self on its head).

2.6.1.2 The early texts clearly state that the Buddha and the arhats awaken in the same way—except that the Buddha is the first to arise: the Buddha is simple *primus inter pares* (the first amongst equals) [1.3.1]. Later Buddhist teachers and thinkers—perhaps finding difficult to accept that the Buddha was dead—introduced a revisionist idea of a God-like Buddha with Brahman-like immanent essence—effectively a Buddhist Godhead. Such a Buddha, when he appears in our world is regarded as the Supreme Being.

Rather than encouraging us to merely emulate such a Being—like the Buddha emulating the arhats, and we emulating the arhats⁷¹—these Buddhist theologians taught that we can become such Buddhas, and the arhats are inferior and false shadows cast by the Buddha in the light of the Dharma, *kaya*.

2.6.1.3 None of such teachings is ever found in the early Buddhist texts. These are unequivocally false views of later thinkers and teachers shaped by the challenges of their own times. False teachings can only breed more false views, which in turn breed doubt. After introducing a **docetic** view of the Buddha⁷²—that all “historical” Buddhas are merely projections (as phantom-bodies or “holograms”) of the eternal Buddha as the Dharma-kāya—they wrote that we must meet these living Buddhas, make a Buddha vow, meet more Buddhas, practise various kinds of “perfections” (*pāramitā*), and so on.

All this is against one of the most basic tenets of the Buddha, that is, one of the first 3 fetters⁷³ that prevent awakening—the attachment to rituals and vows. Clearly, the later Buddhist theologians had to “downgrade,” even reject, early Buddhism—it simply does not support their imaginative wrong views. Such views actually not only prevent awakening, but being false views, their karmic fruit of teaching or believing them is either the animal world (herd-like blind faith) or the suffering states (inciting hate against the Buddha, the arhats and their teachings).

The arising of **the historical buddhas** is the great spiritual event in our history—*happy is the arising of buddhas; happy is the teaching of the true Dharma; happy is the harmony of the noble sangha; happy is practice of those going the same path* (Dh 194). Clearly, the suttas never teach that we must become buddhas—we cannot choose or claim to become buddhas. We should not choose to become a person or being; we can only choose the path of awakening and liberation. We must work to remove such views—ultimately, all views—so that we can gain the same awakening as the Buddha himself.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ See **The teacher or the teaching?** SD 3.14.

⁷⁰ On psychological denial of the Buddha’s death, see SD 40b.3 (3.1).

⁷¹ See the “8-limbed observance” in **Tad’uposatha S** (A 3.70,9-16), SD 4.18.

⁷² On this “docetic” view of Buddhahood, see SD 51.18 (2.3.1.3).

⁷³ The 3 fetters are (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*) and (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*). When we overcome these fetters, we attain streamwinning: SD 3.3 (5).

⁷⁴ Further see SD 51.18 (2.3.1.3).

2.6.2 The Dharma is for letting go of views

2.6.2.1 The early Buddhist suttas are mostly quite simple instructions on how to live happily now, and, if we are diligent enough, to awaken in this life itself. They are like a computer programme instructing us how to meditate properly. But they cannot be fully understood as words alone—no scholars, even the best, have awakened by studying the texts alone. With meditation—as our mind becomes calmer and clearer—we begin to understand the simple suttas on a higher and more profound level. It goes back and forth—study and meditation—until we reach the path of awakening.

2.6.2.2 After the Buddha’s passing, philosophers began writing prolix and abstruse texts philosophizing these teachings that are meant for practice. Instead of actually meditating, they merely coined grandiose names for samadhi states⁷⁵--pontificating *statements* of non-existent *states*—like “fiats” in some scholastic or theological works of the God-believers. A key problem with views is that they create doubts in us; and doubts, in turn, create more views. They feed on each other like the proverbial uroboros. The way out is to simply stop biting: let go of the views through understanding and inner peace.⁷⁶

2.6.3 The true purpose of sangha is renunciation

2.6.3.1 The third big problem we have to deal with today is **the secularizing tendency and worldliness** of Buddhist monastics and priests. An increasing number of monastics today see Buddhism more as an academic qualification to seek employment as resident monks in wealthy organizations, or turn to academic qualification as a career.

If we consider becoming a monastic as a kind of career choice, then we are identifying with a self-image of prestige and wealthy. Instead of seeking the spiritual security of inner peace and the liberation of awakening, we have taken a wrong turn and heading for a self-image of false worldly security. Only the cloth we wear (if we do wear them all the time) represents renunciation, but all that it covers is worldliness

2.6.3.2 In **the Arakheyya Sutta** (A 7.55), the Buddha declares that there are 4 things that he does not have to hide: his bodily deed, his speech, his thoughts and his livelihood—they are all pure by nature.⁷⁷ A monastic livelihood is about living a celibate, money-free life on renunciation, working for awakening in this life itself.

Becoming a monastic, then, is not about joining a career club, but declaring our determination to **renounce the world**, and diligently head for the path of awakening in this life itself. As monastics, we have the best conditions—if we follow the Dharma-Vinaya—for self-awakening here and now. In fact, when we ordain as monastics, this is just the pledge we make: to do otherwise is to renege on this pledge. We not only delude ourself and mislead others—there are grave consequences for such falsity and back-sliding.⁷⁸

2.6.3.3 The suttas us an alternative for **the laity** to work for renunciation without having to become monastics. This is through meditation—of course, monastics should meditate, too; they are truly “renun-

⁷⁵ Andrew Skilton, “State or statement? Samādhi in some early Mahāyāna Sūtras,” [Eastern Buddhist](#) 34,2 2002: 51-90.

⁷⁶ On breaking the fetter of doubt, see SD 40a.8 (4).

⁷⁷ A 7.55 (SD 51.25).

⁷⁸ See SD 3.12 (1.2); SD 50.41 (1.2.1.2).

ciants.” In meditation, the “world” refers to our senses (the “all”):⁷⁹ as we shut down the sense-doors to fully focus on our mind, we “renounce the world” in the true sense of the word. And if we do this well enough and often enough—declares the Buddha⁸⁰—we will surely reach the path of awakening in this life itself.⁸¹

2.7 The Dāmalī Sutta (S 2.5)

We appropriately close the introduction to this vital Sutta with **the Dāmalī Sutta** (S 2.5), where the Buddha declares to the deva Dāmalī that the arhat “has reached the far shore that is nirvana [§5g], so that “he strains not (himself)” any more [§6d]—he has attained arhathood just like the Buddha himself.

SD 49.10(2.7)

Dāmalī Sutta

The Discourse to Dāmalī • S 2.5/1:47 f

Traditional: S 1.2.1.5 = Saṃyutta Nikāya 1, Sagāthā Vagga 2, Devaputta Saṃyutta 1, Paṭhama Vagga 5
Theme: The arhat need not exert himself any more

- 1 At Sāvattḥī.
 - 2 Then, when the night was far spent, the devaputra Dāmalī, of exceeding beauty, illuminating the whole of Jeta’s grove, approached the Blessed One.
 - 3 Having approached he stood at one side, he uttered this verse before the Blessed One:
- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>4 <i>Karaṇīyam etam⁸² brāhmaṇena
padhānam akilāsunā⁸³
kāmaṇaṃ vipphānena
na ten’āsimsate bhavan’ti</i> 262</p> | <p>Here, this should be done by the brahmin:
striving without tiring,
so that by the abandoning of sensual pleasures,
he yearns not for existence.</p> |
| <p>5 <i>N’atthi kiccaṃ brāhmaṇassa
dāmalīti bhagavā
kata,kicca hi brāhmaṇo
yāva na gādham labhati [48] nadīsu
āyūhati⁸⁴ sabba,gattehi jantu
gādhañ ca⁸⁵ laddhāna thale thito so⁸⁶
n’āyūhati pāragato hi so’ti⁸⁷</i> 263</p> | <p>There is no more task for the brahmin;
(Dāmalī, said the Blessed One,)
for, the brahmin is one whose task is done.
When he has not found a footing in the river,
he strains with all his limbs.
Gaining a foothold, he stands on dry land:
he strains not, for he has reached the far shore.</p> |
| <p>6 <i>es-upamā dāmalī brāhmaṇassa
khīṇ’āsavassa nipakassa jhāyino</i></p> | <p>This is the parable of the brahman, O Dāmalī,
whose influxes are destroyed, the prudent meditator.</p> |

⁷⁹ See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

⁸⁰ See (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7, or any of the other 9 suttas of **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25).

⁸¹ See **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

⁸² Only Ee *ettha*.

⁸³ Only Be *padhānam akilāsunā*

⁸⁴ This verb is rare in Pali: S 263df/1:48,1*+3*, 264d/1:48,7*; Sn 210. See CPD: āyūhati & S:B 1:342 n2.

⁸⁵ Only Ee *gādham ca*.

⁸⁶ Ony Be *thito yo*.

⁸⁷ Only Ke Se *hotīti*.

*pappuyya jāti, maraṇassa antam
n'āyūhati pāragato hi so'ti*⁸⁸

264 Having attained the end of birth and death,
having reached the far shore, he is one who strains not.

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Sambuddha Sutta

The Discourse on the Self-awakened

S 22.58

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

Awakening through penetrating the aggregates

3 (1) “The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **form**,
through dispassion [letting go],
through cessation (of suffering),
is liberated through non-clinging,
*rūpassa nibbidā
virāgā
nirodhā
anupādā vimutto*
is called **one fully self-awakened**.⁸⁹”

3.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, liberated by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards form,
through dispassion [letting go],
through cessation (of suffering),
is liberated through non-clinging, is called one **freed by wisdom**.⁹⁰

4 (2) The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **feeling**,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one fully self-awakened**.

4.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, liberated by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards feeling,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called one **freed by wisdom**.

⁸⁸ Only Ke Se hotīti.

⁸⁹ *Tathāgato bhikkhave araham sammā, sambuddho rūpassa nibbidā virāgā nirodhā anupādā vimutto sammā, sambuddhoti vuccati.*

⁹⁰ *Bhikkhu pi bhikkhave paññā, vimutto rūpassa nibbidā virāgā nirodhā anupādā vimutto paññā, vimutto'ti vuccati.* On the term *paññā, vimutta* here, see (1.1.3).

5 (3) The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **perception**,
through dispassion, through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one fully self-awakened**.

5.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, liberated by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards perception,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called one **freed by wisdom**.

6 (4) The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **formations**,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one fully self-awakened**.

6.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, freed by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards formations,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called one **freed by wisdom**.

7 (5) The Tathagata, bhikshus, an arhat, fully self-awakened,
on account of revulsion towards **consciousness**,
through dispassion,
through cessation, [66]
is liberated through non-clinging, is called **one fully self-awakened**.

7.2 A monk, too, bhikshus, liberated by wisdom,
on account of revulsion towards consciousness,
through dispassion,
through cessation,
is liberated through non-clinging, is called one **freed by wisdom**.

The Buddha's question

8 Bhikshus, what then, is the distinction, the disparity, **the difference** between the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, and the wisdom-freed monk?⁹¹

9 "Bhante, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, has the Blessed One as refuge.⁹² It would be good indeed, bhante, if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the bhikshus would remember it."⁹³

⁹¹ *Tatra kho bhikkhave ko viseso, ko adhippayāso* [Be; Ce *adhippāyo*; Be:Ka Ee Ke Se *adhippāyaso*], *kiṃ nānā,-karaṇaṃ tathāgatassa arahato sammā,sambuddhassa paññā,vimuttana bhikkhunā'ti*.

⁹² "Has the Blessed One as refuge," *bhagavaṃ ... dhammā paṭisaraṇā*. This means that 2 things: (1) that the Buddha discovers, proclaims and protects the Dharma, and (2) that the Buddha himself takes the Dharma as his refuge. Hence, even with the Buddha's passing, the Dharma still exists (as it always does) but is still available to us when we follow the Buddha's teaching as preserved in the suttas.

⁹³ *Bhagavaṃ mūlakā no bhante dhammā bhagavaṃ nettikā bhagavaṃ paṭisaraṇā. Sādhu vata bhante Bhagavantaṃ yeva paṭibhātu etassa bhāsitaṃ attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressanī'ti*, which is stock: **Mahā**

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

The Buddha and the arhat

11 The Blessed One said this:⁹⁴

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

is one who gives rise to the unarisen path,

who causes the unborn path to be born,

who shows the path yet to be shown.

He is the knower of the path,

who understands the path,

an expert regarding the path.⁹⁵

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

followers of that path, accomplishing it afterwards [after him].⁹⁶

anuppannassa maggassa uppādetā

asañjātassa maggassa sañjānetā

anakkhātassa maggassa akkhātā

magg’aññū

magga,vidū

magga,kovido

maggānugā ... pacchā,samannāgatā

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

— evaṃ —

[Bibliography, see end of SD 49c]

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⁹⁴ This *uppādetā* pericope is at **Go,pāka Moggallāna S** (M 108,5/3:8,12), SD 33.5 = **Pavāraṇā S** (S 8.7/1:191,3), SD 49.11 ≈ **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58,11/3:66,16, SD 49.10: SA 2:278,5) = Pm 2:194,19 ≈ Miln 217,10+ 219,11 ≈ Ap 570,5 ≈ ThīA 91,33*. See (1.1.2).

⁹⁵ The whole para: *Tathāgato bhikkhave araham sammā,sambuddho anuppannassa maggassa uppādetā, asañjātassa maggassa sañjānetā* [Ke Se; Be sañjanetā], *anakkhātassa maggassa akkhātā, magga-ññū magga,vidū magga,kovido*.

⁹⁶ *Maggānugā ca bhikkhave etarahi sāvakā viharanti, pacchā,samannāgatā*.