

SD 62.10f

(Chakka) Assāda Sutta

The (Sixes) Discourse on Gratification | A 6.112

Theme: How we can be fully free from suffering

Translated by Piya Tan ©2024

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The **(Chakka) Assāda Sutta** (A 6.112) lists the 3 wrong states and their opposites. The 3 wrong states are those self-centred, that is *the view of gratification, of the self and of violence*. Their opposites are those that are reality-affirming, that are rooted in *impermanence, nonself and right view*, all of which should be cultivated.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.2.0 Commentary on the (Chakka) Assāda Sutta (A 6.112)

1.2.0.0 The Aṅguttara Commentary gives technical glosses of the key terms of the Sutta, as follows:

Assāda, diṭṭhi (gratification view) is the eternalist view (*sassata, diṭṭhi*). [2]

Attānudiṭṭhi (*self-view*) refers to the wrong views connected with the 20 objects (*attānaṃ anugatā vīsati, vatthukā sakkāya, diṭṭhi*). [3]

Micchā, diṭṭhi (*wrong view*) refers to the 62 wrong views (*dvā, saṭṭhi, vidhā diṭṭhi*). [4]

Sammā, diṭṭhi is the right view of the path (*magga, samma, diṭṭhi*), where, for example, denial of karma is a wrong view (*n’atthi dinnan ti ādikā vā micchā, diṭṭhi*), and knowledge of the ownership of karma is right view (*kammasa, kata, ñāṇaṃ sammā, diṭṭhi*). [5] (AA 3:415,16-20)

1.2.0.1 The gratification view (*assāda, diṭṭhi*) as eternalist view means that (1) there is some kind of permanent, abiding entity (such as an eternal soul or eternal heaven) that exists beyond this changing world; (2) there is some way we can or should work to gain such an eternal state, such as the belief in an eternal God or universal soul.

The **eternalist belief** in a Creator-God is perhaps the most political form of religious views. It is historically associated with priest-kings whose power legitimation can range from the claim that they are the living God or god, or the claim that they are “the chosen” or “the anointed” by some divine power to represent that divinity on earth.

This ideology is deeply rooted in human evolution, going back to prehistoric times when men were seen as protectors, providers and propagators of family, tribe and society. Basically, this power is **patri-archal**, based on brute strength, military power and the charisma of usually a single male power-figure, such as a king or emperor. Such a person defines or authorizes the nature of God or the gods. Such theology invariably is used for social control and the justification of all actions by the earthly power-figure. God-centred systems place God or some power-figure above even humanity or society. Earthly life is thus regarded as merely a preparation for some heavenly life or eternal life hereafter.

A **life-centred system**, on the other hand, places life as having the naturally greatest value and priority. In place of an external authority (which can easily be manipulated by kings, prophets, priests and preachers), a life-centred society is value-oriented (by life, happiness, freedom, truth and wisdom). A **value-centred society** is upheld by *moral living* that promotes the good of the many through personal accountability of action. Such a society is rooted in wisdom (empirical acceptance of true reality) and compassion (an unconditional acceptance of others). It is a good society.

1.2.0.2 Self-view (*attānudiṭṭhi*) is the belief, a superstition, that there is “something” fixed or abiding that we *have* or *must have*, usually in the form of an immortal soul. Such an idea is augmented by a Creator-idea and related ideas. Humans are thus regarded merely as “creatures” of the Creator, whom they should worship, adore, and so on.

Such a belief may further define how far such a God “ordains” our bodies and minds; that we have *no* free will since everything is created and willed by God. As humans evolved, theologians struggled with a revision of their God-idea allowing some kind of free will, that we are to *choose* between God and the world (embodied as some demon, like the Devil). But the Christian Bible says that “the wisdom of this world is folly with God.”¹ Yet we must choose God; wouldn’t such a choice surely be foolish! Much of theology involves finding ways of reconciling contradictions and absurdities by way of theodicy (why an almighty all-loving God allows suffering), apologetics (defending their failures), and of course casuistry.²

Early Buddhism rejects unequivocally any idea of an abiding soul (*attā*; Skt *attā*, *ātman*). The term *atta* is used either in a simple reflexive sense (*attāhi attāno nātho*, “one is one’s own master,” Dh 160) or to refer to **the mind**.³ What may be mistaken by some as an abiding soul is the mind’s continuity (*santāna*) by way of memory (*sati*). But then, memory is mostly our own construction of what we think was the past.⁴

1.2.0.3 Wrong view (*micchā, diṭṭhi*), according to the Commentary [1.2.0.0] refers to the 62 wrong views, as famously laid out in **the Brahma, jāla Sutta** (D 1).⁵ This set of 62 views is divided into 2 large sections: speculations about the past (18 grounds) [A]⁶ and speculations about the future (44 grounds) [B].⁷ Section A (speculations about the past) is, except for the last standpoint (grounds 17-18), presented in sets of four. But this is not the famous tetralemma (*catu,koṭi*, Skt *catuṣ,koṭi*, the 4 points) of ancient Indian logic, which is actually used in Section B (speculations about the future) where applicable.

Section A, speculations about **the past**; 5 standpoints or subsets of views (*diṭṭhi-t, thāna*), namely:

I eternalism	views 1-4	§§30-37	4 views	[4.1]
II partial eternalism	5-8	§§38-52	4 views	[4.2]
III extensionism	9-12	§§53-60	4 views	[4.3]
IV endless hedging	13-16	§§61-66	4 views	[4.4]
V fortuitous arising	17-18	§§67-70.	2 views	[4.5]

Section B, speculations about **the future**, 3 standpoints or subsets of views, namely,

VI immortality (afterlife or survival)				[4.6]
(1) conscious survival	19-34	§§75-77	16 views	
(2) non-conscious survival	35-42	§§78-80	8 views	
(3) neither conscious nor non-conscious survival	43-50	§§81-83	8 views	
VII annihilationism	51-57	§§84-92	7 views	[4.7]
VIII supreme nirvana here and now	58-62	§§93-99.	5 views	[4.8]

¹ 1 Corinthians 3.19 (Oxford).

² Casuistry (also called sophistry, Jesuitry, foolery) “destroys, by distinctions and exceptions, all morality, and effaces the essential difference between right and wrong, good and evil” (Henry St John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, “Letters on the spirit of patriotism ... 1752,” 170, Royal Collection Trust. Qu in OED)

³ As the mind, SD 26.9 (1.6.2, 2.1.2); as words, SD 26.9 (2.1).

⁴ For further reading, see **Anatta, lakkhana S** (S 22.59, 3-11), SD 1.2; **Is there a soul?** SD 2.16; **Self and selves** SD 26.9.

⁵ D 1/1:1-46 (SD 25).

⁶ D 1, 28-73/1:12-30 (SD 25).

⁷ D 1, 74-104/1:30-39.

2 Gratification view and its roots

Here is an alternative Dharma-spirited interpretation of the Sutta.

2.1 DEALING WITH GRATIFICATION

2.1.1 The quality that **the (Chakka) Assāda Sutta** refers to as *assāda* is the gratification of sense-pleasure—this is directly related to greed (*lobha*). When there is greed, there is also its dark counterpart, hatred (*dosa*). Just as when we lust for something, we hate whatever that hinders us from getting our object of desire.

2.1.2 Lust makes something out of nothing

Lust deludes us into believing that we can *have* whatever we desire. When we lust after *something*, we view it as **some thing**, that is, an object that can be *seen, heard, smelt, tasted, felt or thought* —and that it is always that way; it does not change. What we are running after is not that “thing” (there is none); we are running after the idea that there is *some thing*, just like the idea of an immortal soul, or eternal God, and so on.

One modern way of understanding this problem is encapsulated by Voltaire’s quote: “If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.” Voltaire’s point seems to be that “if God did not exist, you would need some way to explain the perceived order, beauty, goodness and so on of the universe. The only plausible explanation for such perceptions would be something identical to some God-idea. Once we have invented such an idea, we naturally end up inventing some kind of God to explain it.

Lust, in short, inevitably ends in the God-idea.⁸

2.2 OVERCOMING GRATIFICATION

2.2.1 The 5 cords of sensual pleasures

2.2.1.1 The *Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha S* (M 14) explains the gratification of sense-desires as arising with the meeting of 3 conditions: (1) the sense-faculties, (2) the sense-object, and (3) the feeling of lust. This is a sense-stimulus rooted in *lust*. For example, the Sutta says:

Visual forms cognizable by **the eye**

that are *wished for*, desirable, agreeable and pleasing,
connected with sensual pleasure, arousing lust.

The same applies to the other 4 physical sense-faculties (the ear, nose, tongue and body). Thus, “the (physical) joy and (mental) pleasure⁹ arise on account of these 5 cords of sensual pleasure. This is the gratification with regard to sense-desires.”¹⁰

2.2.1.2 The *Assāda Sutta* (A 3.101) then explains the significance of **the *assāda triad***, that is, the danger, gratification and escape in relation to sense-pleasures arising from *the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body*.¹¹ The 3 terms—*assāda*, *ādinava* and *nissaraṇa*—often appear as a set in the texts—forming what

⁸ SD 62.10c (1.2.2.6).

⁹ “(Physical) joy and (mental) pleasure,” *sukha, somanassa*.

¹⁰ M 14,6/1:92 (SD 4.7).

¹¹ A 3.101 + SD 14.6a (2); SD 47.4 (1.3.3); SD 56.19 (2).

we may call **the *assāda* (gratification) triad** (after the 1st component) or **the *nissaraṇa* (“escape”) formula** (after the last component).¹² The Commentaries relate them to the 4 noble truths thus:

danger (<i>ādīnava</i>)	refers to	the truth of suffering;
gratification (<i>assāda</i>)	refers to	the truth of the arising of suffering, that is, craving; and
escape (<i>nissaraṇa</i>)	refers to	(the path and) the ending of suffering, nirvana.

(DA 2:512; MA 2:11)

By **danger** is meant that the senses, by nature, are “self-seeking.” They are self-replicating by way of insatiably seeking and accumulating whatever one desires, pushing away what one hates, and ignoring what one is ignorant of or uncertain about. This is suffering.

Gratification means “an act of enjoying,” that is, enjoying the senses, or rather what we make of it. There is an irony here: When one is “gratified” with a sense-experience, one may enjoy it for a moment, but then one wants more of it—because one has not really fully enjoyed the experience. One feels that there is something more. So one keeps wanting ever more of it, or seeks it in a variety of other ways. This is craving, the arising of suffering.

Escape means that one sees this addictive or cyclic tendency of sense-experiences for what it is. One sees it as being impermanent: it can only be felt or enjoyed in the moment. One sees it thus, that it can never fully satisfy one, and so one must let it go. One realizes that one has made “something” out of these empty experiences. Hence, “letting go” here means that one sees and accepts this emptiness of the sense-experience as it is, and moves on. One has then *escaped* the stranglehold of the senses and is mentally free, seeing merely the rise and fall of things.

3 The roots of self-view

3.1 THE 20 KINDS OF SELF-VIEWS

3.1.2 *Attānudiṭṭhi*, “self-view,” refers to the wrong views connected with the 20 objects (*attānaṃ anu-gatā vīsati, vatthukā sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), giving a total of *20 kinds of self-views*. How do we get these 20 kinds of self-views?

There are the 4 kinds of self-identity views directed to each of the 5 aggregates, thus:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) an aggregate | as the self; |
| (2) the self | as possessing an aggregate; |
| (3) an aggregate | as in the self; |
| (4) the self | as in an aggregate. |

3.1.2 The 5 aggregates are those of *form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*. Hence, altogether we have a total of 20 self-identity views, as follows:¹³

- | | | |
|---------|--|--|
| (1-5) | the self is identical with <i>form</i> ... | when <i>the body</i> dies, the self dies, too; |
| (6-10) | the self possesses <i>form</i> ... | the self is separate (disembodied) from <i>the body</i> ; |
| (11-15) | <i>form</i> ... is in the self | the self is independent but has <i>the body</i> as host; and |
| (16-20) | the self is in <i>form</i> ... | <i>the body</i> is the “owner” of the self (animistic soul). |

¹² See SD 14.6 (2).

¹³ SD 2.16 (15.2.1.1 f, 15.2, 15.4.2).

3.2 WHY IS SELF-VIEW HARMFUL?

3.2.1 “Self” as the root of all views

3.2.1.1 The Pārileyya Sutta (S 22.81) advises us against identifying with any of our aggregates—whether it is our body, feeling, perception, formations or consciousness—that is, against any of the 20 kinds of self-view connected with the aggregates¹⁴ [3.1]. When we identify with **form**, that is the body as the self—that self (or soul) and the body are the same—then we will think that when the body dies, the “soul” perishes with it. This is called **annihilationism** (*uccheda, diṭṭhi*) and is the basis of materialism.

3.2.1.2 As for the other 4 mind-based aggregates—feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—when they are identified as one’s “self,” they are then wrongly viewed as being “eternal.” This is because we may be able to see them as being reborn in a new life; the stream of consciousness flows into a new existence giving the impression of an endless life. Hence, identifying with any of the 4 mind-based aggregates is the basis for **an eternalist view** (*sassata, diṭṭhi*).

This is the basis for such beliefs as those in an abiding soul, an eternal God-idea and so on. These are the bases for power-based systems of the privileged few that exploit the masses, prevent wholesome social growth and destroy humanity. God-centred religion with its demonic beliefs often aggravates mental ill-health and induces the mentally ill to live their delusions in religious terms.¹⁵

3.2.2 Overcoming self-view

3.2.2.1 How then do we overcome any tendency towards self-view? Self-view is a uroboros or ouroboros; it feeds itself; I am that I am. Then, we are caught in the grammar of Self. Since *I am*, I was and I will be; this means that I am eternal. This is like a person who has great wealth, and thinks: *I have this and that, therefore I am*.

What we **have** can only be what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think. They are all conditioned and impermanent; we can neither own them nor can we hold them back. Once they are arisen and subsided, they are but memories. But then memories are not those events—they are all dead and gone—we look darkly into our memories and see fantasies and phantoms.

The risk we take in allowing our **memories** to shape us is that we may not grow beyond what we make of them. We are making *something* of our own fantasy and phantoms. This is what will haunt us, maim and madden us, and prevent good from arising in us. This is living in the past; dead to the present.

3.2.2.2 Nonself or letting go of self-view means that we accept the grammar of self in its proper perspective. “**I was**” is in the past; it is dead and gone; we should let it *be*. “**I will be**” is in the future; it will never come; we should let it *be*. Only **the present** is with us, here and now; it is but a thought, a moment. Only by accepting the present do we understand the past and the future. So we **exist**; it means that our past has shaped us, what we are now, and what we will be for the foreseeable future. There is nothing fixed here; no abiding self, all is change.

Time shapes us, we exist; when we understand how time shapes us, we understand time. We can then put time to good use, to our advantage. Then, we **live**. To truly live, we must live wisely. To live wisely is to be wisely attentive in speech and deed; we are what we say and do. Right speech, right action and right livelihood bring right mindfulness; we see our body as impermanent, our feelings as

¹⁴ S 22.81,12-30 + SD 6.1 (4); SD 40a.8 (3.3); SD 55.17 (3.1.3.5).

¹⁵ On psychotic disorders in religious history, see SD 60.1f (5.4.7).

suffering, our mind as nonself and reality as true. This brings us right concentration, the calm and clarity of mind with which we directly see into true reality and gain timeless, deathfree freedom from suffering.

4 The roots of wrong view

4.1 (I) THE ETERNALIST VIEW (*sassata, vāda*) [grounds 1-4, §§30-37]

4.1.1 The first set of grounds (1-4) listed in the Brahmajāla Sutta are those regarding speculating about the past (*pubb’anta, kappa*) by way of “the eternalist view.” This wrong view regards “the self and the world are eternal,” that is, holding the view that:

the self and the world are eternal, barren, steadfast as a mountain peak, as a pillar firmly fixed, and though these beings roam and wander in samsara, pass away and re-arise, yet they (the self and the world) exist just like eternity itself. (D 1,32/1:14)¹⁶

4.1.2 Such a wrong view, says the Brahmajāla Sutta, may arise through anamnesis or recollection of past lives in any of the 4 following ways:¹⁷

- | | |
|--|----------|
| (1) based on one’s recollecting of up to 100,000 past lives; | [D 1,31] |
| (2) based on one’s recollecting of up to 10 aeons (<i>kappa</i>) or world cycles | [D 1,32] |
| (3) based on one’s recollecting of up to 40 aeons or world cycles; | [D 1,33] |
| (4) based on reasoning (<i>takka</i>). | [D 1,34] |

For further details, see SD 25.1 (5.2, 5.10 Table).

4.2 (II) THE PARTIAL-ETERNALIST VIEW (*ekacca, sassata, vāda*) [grounds 5-8, §§38-52]

4.2.1 The second set of grounds (5-8) listed in the Brahmajāla Sutta are those speculating about the past based on “the partial-eternalist view.” This wrong view regards that “the self and the world are both eternal and not eternal,” based on the speculation that some beings (like Brahmā or Creator) are eternal and some (like the speculator himself) are not [§§38-51]. Or, if he is a reasoner or logician (*takkī*) or one who relies on reasoning alone (that is, who thinks along a rationalist dualism), he may think thus (wrong view 8):¹⁸

That which is called “eye,” or “ear,” or “nose,” or “tongue,” or “body”—that self is impermanent, unstable, not eternal, subject to change. But that which is called “mind,” or “mentality,” or “consciousness”—that self is permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change, and it will remain the same just like eternity itself. (D 1,49/1:21), SD 25.2¹⁹

¹⁶ *Sassato attā ca loko ca vañjho kūṭa’ttṭho esika-t, tṭhāyi-t, tṭhito, te ca sattā sandhāvanti saṃsaranti cavanti upapajjanti, atthi tv-eva sassata, samarā.*

¹⁷ The first 3 of these 4 grounds for eternalist views are mentioned by Sāriputta in **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28,15/-3:108-111). Cf **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,92/1:80), SD 8.10, which conflates (1) & (2) here.

¹⁸ Grounds 5-7 due to partial-eternalism are respectively as follows: (5) theism; (6) the polytheism of beings who were gods corrupted by play; (7) polytheism of beings who were gods corrupted by mind.

¹⁹ *Yaṃ kho idaṃ vuccati cakkhun ti pi sotān ti pi ghāṇān ti pi jivhā ti pi kāyo ti pi ayaṃ attā anicco addhuvo asassato vipariṇāma, dhammo. Yaṃ ca kho idaṃ vuccati cittān ti vā māno ti vā viññāṇān ti vā ayaṃ attā nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāma, dhammo sassata, samarā that’eva tṭhassatī ti.*

4.2.2 Here is a summary of the 4 kinds of **partial-eternalist view**:

- (5) “God (*brahmā*) is eternal; we are created by him; we are impermanent.”
- (6) “Some gods (*deva*), undefiled by play, are eternal; we are impermanent.”
- (7) “Some gods, undefiled by mind (ie, not covetous) are eternal; we are impermanent.”
- (8) By way of rational inquiry, one claims that the body is impermanent, but the mind is not.

4.3 (III) THE EXTENSIONIST VIEW (*antânanta, vāda*) [grounds 9-12 §§53-60]

4.3.1 The first 3 grounds here are those of meditators who have reached a certain level of mental concentration (recalling so many births), but not beyond, perceiving only up to that level, thus holding these respective views:

- (9) that the world is finite; [D 1,54]
- (10) that the world is infinite; [D 1,55]
- (11) that the world is finite in a vertical direction but infinite across;²⁰ [D 1,56]
- (12) that the world is neither finite nor infinite. [D 1,57]

4.3.2 View 12 (the 4th wrong view here) is based on reasoning:

Here, monks, some recluse or brahmin is a rationalist [logician, *takkī*], an inquirer (*vīmaṃsī*). He declares his view, shaped by reason, deduced from his investigations, following his own mental genius, thus:

“The world is neither finite nor infinite.

Those recluses and brahmins who declare it to be infinite and bounded speak falsely.

Those who declare it to be infinite and boundless speak falsely.

Those who declare it to be both finite and infinite speak falsely.

The world is neither finite nor infinite.” (D 1,57/1:23 f), SD 25.2²¹

4.4 (IV) THE ENDLESS HEDGERS (*amarā, vikkhepika*) [grounds 13-16, §§61-66]

4.4.1 A **hedger** does not really know what is wholesome or unwholesome. He fears that if he expresses any opinion, desire, lust, hate or aversion might arise.

They are of 4 kinds:

4.4.1.1 (13) **The 1st kind of hedger** fears that his views would thus be **false**, which would vex him, becoming an obstacle [eg, embarrass him]: so he fears falsehood. He resorts to “eel-wriggling” (answers evasively):

“I do not take it in this way. I do not take it in that way. I do not take it in any other way. I do not take it as not so. I do not take it as not not so.”

²⁰ That the ancient Indians did *not* mention an inverse belief that the world is “infinitely vertical” was prob because, as in the cosmologies of the times, the world was conceived as “flat” (like a disc), ie, the horizon marking the end of the known world. Such a view, like the others, are ancient pre-scientific speculations.

²¹ *Idha bhikkhave ekacco samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā takkī hoti vīmaṃsī. So takka, pariyāhataṃ vīmaṃsā’nucaritaṃ sayam, paṭibhānaṃ evam āha: n’evāyaṃ loko antavā na panānanto. Ye te samaṇa, brāhmaṇā evam āhaṃsu: antavā na panānanto. Ye te samaṇa, brāhmaṇā evam āhaṃsu: antavā yaṃ loko parivaṭumo ti tesam musā. Ye pi te samaṇa, brāhmaṇā evam āhaṃsu: ananto yaṃ loko apariyanto to tesam pi musā. Ye pi te samaṇa, brāhmaṇā evam āhaṃsu: antavā ca yaṃ loko ananto cāti tesam pi musā. N’evāyaṃ loko antavā na panānanto ti.*

4.4.1.2 (14) The 2nd kind of hedger fears that his views would thus be **clinging** [attachment], which would vex him, becoming an obstacle: so he fears clinging. He resorts to “eel-wriggling”:

“I do not take it in this way. I do not take it in that way. I do not take it in any other way. I do not take it as not so. I do not take it as not not so.”

4.4.2 (15) The 3rd kind of hedger fears that if he expresses any opinion, he may be questioned, and might be unable to answer, which would become an obstacle to him. So he fears debate; when asked about any of the 16 theses [D 25,65], he avoids answering by resorting to “eel-wriggling” ... (as above).

4.4.3 (16) The 4th kind of hedger is simply dull and ignorant. When questioned on any of the 16 theses [D 35,65], he simply resorts to “eel-wriggling” ... (as above).

4.5 (V) DOCTRINES OF FORTUITOUS ARISING (*adhicca,samuppanna,vāda*) [grounds 17-18, §§67-70]

Those who hold the view of **fortuitous arising** (*adhicca,samuppanikā*) think that the self and the world have arisen by chance. They are said to be of 2 main types:

(17) those who base their notion on conclusions drawn from their dhyanic meditation, and [D 1,68]

(18) those who base their notion on reasoning. [D 1,69]

(1) The 1st view is said to be that of a **non-conscious being** (*asañña,satta*), reborn here, who is able to recall only his last birth, and none before that. Hence, he concludes that the self and the world have arisen by chance.

(2) A rationalist comes up with a view through reasoning, having investigated it through mental inquiry, by way of his own intelligence. He concludes that the self and the world have arisen by chance.

In modern philosophical terms, such views can be called **indeterminism**.

Further see SD 25.1 (5.6).

4.6 (VI) IMMORTALITY [See SD 25.1 (5.7) VI]

This subset of 3 standpoints deals with views regarding **after-death survival**, namely, conscious survival, non-conscious survival and neither conscious nor non-conscious survival, and their various grounds. In simple terms, these are 3 grounds for beliefs in life after death.

4.6.1 (19-34) DOCTRINES OF CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL (*saññī,vāda*) [D 1,75-77]

The advocates of this standpoint of conscious survival proclaim that the self or soul survives death, is intact, conscious and is of 16 varieties, depending on their physical form, size, consciousness, and happiness while still alive.

4.6.2 (35-42) DOCTRINES OF NON-CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL (*asaññī,vāda*) [D 1,78-80]

The advocates of this standpoint of non-conscious survival proclaim that the self or soul survives death, is intact, non-conscious and is of 16 varieties, or of 8 varieties, depending on their physical form and size while still alive.

4.6.3 (43-50) DOCTRINES OF NEITHER CONSCIOUS NOR NON-CONSCIOUS SURVIVAL (*n’eva,saññī,nāsaññī,vāda*) [D 1,81-83]

The advocates of this standpoint of neither-conscious-nor-non-conscious survival proclaim that the self or soul survives death, is intact, neither conscious nor non-conscious and is also of 8 varieties, depending on their physical form and size while still alive.

4.7 (VII) DOCTRINES OF ANNIHILATIONISM (*uccheda, vāda*) [grounds 51-57, D 1,84-92]

There are 7 standpoints here.

The first (51) is that of the materialist for whom there is only this physical body that totally perishes at death. In other words, he does not believe in life after death.

The other 6 standpoints (52-57) all comprise belief in some sort of soul that is transhuman, that is, of the sense-world, the form world, or the formless world. It is this soul that utterly perishes at death (along with the body).

See SD 25.1 (5.8).

4.8 (VIII) DOCTRINES OF SUPREME NIRVANA HERE AND NOW (*diṭṭha, dhamma, nibbāna, vāda*) [grounds 58-62, D 1,93-99]

The Commentary says that **nirvana** here refers to the 5 kinds of “supreme nirvana here and now” (*parama, diṭṭha, dhamma, nibbāna*) as listed in **the Brahma, jāla Sutta** [§§93-99], that is, nirvana identified with the total enjoyment of sense-pleasures, or with pleasure of **the 4 dhyanas**. Craving causes one to enjoy this state or to lust after it. Conceit causes one to pride oneself as having attained it. View makes one conceive of this illusory nirvana to be permanent, pleasurable and as being of an abiding nature. (MA 1:38).

In modern terms, this is the “instant nirvana” syndrome where salvation, as it were, comes from some agency or event outside of ourself.

See SD 25.1 (5.9).

5 Right view (*sammā, diṭṭhi*)**5.1 RIGHT VIEW THAT BRINGS US TO THE PATH****5.1.1 Wrong views**

5.1.1.1 Before we examine “right view,” let us first know what **wrong views** are. A well-known **wrong view pericope** defines wrong views as follows:²²

- (1) There is nothing given,²³ nothing sacrificed, nothing offered.
- (2) There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions.
- (3) There is no this world,²⁴ no next world.²⁵
- (4) There is no mother, no father,²⁶ no spontaneously born beings.²⁷

²² SD 40a.1 (5.1.2); **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,22-24), SD 8.10.

²³ “There is nothing given,” *n’atthi dinnam*. MA 2:332 = DA 165 says that this means there is no fruit of (or no value in) giving. Cf D 1:55; M 1:401, 515; S 3:206.

²⁴ “There is no this world,” *n’atthi ayam loko*, lit “this world does not exist, the next world does not exist.” On the problem of associating these two differing views to Ajita Kesambala, see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,22-24/1:55 f), SD 8. See Jayatilleke 1963:79 f, 91 f).

²⁵ “There is no this world, there is no next world.” Comys explain that “(a) ‘there is no this world’ means that when one is established in the next world, this world does not exist; (b) ‘there is no next world’ means that when one is established in this world, the next world does not exist.” (MA 2:332 = DA 1:165). Deeds done in such a deterministic system would not carry over into the afterlife, even if this view concedes to a hereafter.

²⁶ “There is no father, no mother.” Comys explain “there is no fruit of good or of bad behaviour (towards them)” (MA 2:332=DA 1:165).

²⁷ *Opapātika*, said of the rebirth of a nonreturner, but here also refers to all divine and hell beings. See **Mahāli S** (D 1:27 156).

- (5) There are no recluses or brahmins who, living rightly and practising rightly, having directly known and realized for themselves this world and the hereafter, proclaim them.

(D 2 = M 41 = 76 = 117)²⁸

The Vibhaṅga and later literature further break down the 5 wrong views into a set of 10 separate points, thus highlighting the significance of each of them. This is known as the “**10-ground wrong views**” (*dasa,vatthuka mucchā,diṭṭhi*), listed as follows:

- 1 (1) There is nothing given.
- (2) There is nothing sacrificed.
- (3) There is nothing offered.
- 2 (4) There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions.
- 3 (5) There is no this world.
- (6) There is no next world.
- 4 (7) There is no mother.
- (8) There is no father.
- (9) There are no spontaneously born beings.
- 5 (10) There are no recluses or brahmins who, living rightly and practising rightly, having directly known and realized for themselves this world and the hereafter, proclaim them.

(Vbh 392,3-10)²⁹

5.1.1.2 The rationale behind each of these **5 wrong views** is, briefly, as follows:

(1) The 1st wrong view is that against the very bedrock of wholesome friendship and society. **Giving** or charity is a basic human quality, an unconditional gesture, of acceptance of others so that fellowship, social harmony and progress are possible. Giving is not merely a sharing of funds and material things but of time or skills to others (such as listening, counselling, teaching or healing others), that is, giving others a sense of security, fearlessness and joy.

(2) The 2nd wrong view is the rejection of **karma**, that our actions have no consequences, that we are not accountable for our actions. Basically, karma is a self-adjusting moral propensity or process in which our actions, whether conscious or unconscious, have various kinds of effects, good and bad, upon others. We must thus carefully consider our actions to bring maximum benefit to both self, others and the environment. Most significantly, our karma is what shapes our being, psychologically and socially.

(3) The 3rd wrong view is a rejection of “this world,” that is, life, humanity, moral goodness and society. At worst, this is a kind of **amoral anomie** or **radical anarchism**. “No next world” means a rejection of any kind of afterlife. So it is a kind of materialist anomie or anarchism. Basically, this may mean “I can do what I like.” In such a situation, it is impossible for there to be any kind of workable society. We will basically be like animals in a lawless savage world.

(4) The 4th wrong view is clearly a rejection of **the family** and familial relationships. The family is traditionally rooted in having common parents and predecessors; this is the biological family. It includes a denial of parenthood (fatherhood, motherhood and guardianship); this amounts to rejecting one’s most basic human link, that we are born of other humans. Although, *economically*, the family defines owner-

²⁸ **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,23/1:55), SD 8.10; **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,10/1:287), SD 5.7; **Sandaka S** (M 76,7.2/1:515), SD 35.7; **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117,5/3:71 f), SD 6.10. The wrong views here are refuted in **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60,5-12/-1:401-404), SD 35.5.

²⁹ See SD 55.9 (2.2.2.2(85)).

ship, transmission and preservation of property and privileges, its more vital role is that of humanizing us from the moment of our birth.

On a deeper level, *denial of parenthood* means rejection of our broader links with other humans, going back to generations of ancestors. When we add karma and rebirth into this equation, then we can say that the human race is also **a single human family** in a spiritual sense. This is because in our countless rebirths, we have been somehow related to one another in every conceivable human relationship: fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and so on. Hence, to deny parenthood is to deny our *humanity*.

The last point of the 4th wrong view can be interpreted in any of 2 ways. In the first case, a secular one, “**spontaneously born**” (*opapātika*) refers to **celestial beings**, those who are not born biologically like humans but arise in a parthenogenetic (asexual), or simply, non-human, manner. This then may be viewed the rejection of the belief in celestial beings or aliens. This implies that the human race is the only intelligent, or most intelligent, form of life known to exist; that there are no (known) intelligent aliens besides humans beyond our solar system.³⁰

Traditionally, the term *opapātika* refers to the nonreturner. This wrong view is the rejection of the existence or possibility of **nonreturning**. Nonreturners are path saints³¹ who have broken all the fetters that hold us back in the sense-world, and who will be reborn in the pure abodes³² never to return to sense-world existence again. Broadly, this implies the rejection of the path, awakening and nirvana.

(5) The 5th wrong view seems to be the rejection of **religion** in its positive sense, the possibility that religion can be any good for anyone. Buddhists generally will only reject religion that is defined as a belief system based on some kind of external agency for salvation, especially propped by eternalist dogmas, especially the God-view.

The wrong view here is that basically **good and bad** are relative, and thus lack personal or social significance. It is wrong in the sense of rejecting the need for humans to gain wisdom and liberation through spiritual questing and training. Broadly, it is the rejection that any good can come from people who seek goodness or humanity in religion. Strictly speaking, it means that **awakening** is impossible; that there is no attaining of the path, that is, we are stuck with our defilements and evil ways without any clue of redemption or possibility of spiritual awakening and liberation.³³

5.1.2 Wagering on right view

5.1.2.1 The Apanṇaka Sutta (M 60) records **right view** as that of understanding and accepting the following views, that is, in contrast to the 5 wrong views [5.1.1.1 f]:

- (1) There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed.
- (2) There is fruit and result of good and bad actions [karma].
- (3) There is this world, the next world.
- (4) There are mother and father, spontaneously born beings.

³⁰ There is no good reason, based on the Pali canon, to categorically say that there are no aliens. However, we have yet no clear knowledge of what kind of beings actually exist beyond the known universe. On the likelihood of beings in other parts of the universe, or in other universes, see SD 54.2 (4.1.4.3); SD 57.10 (1.3.3.2 passim).

³¹ On the 4 path saints (*ariya*)—the streamwinner, the once-returner, the nonreturner and the arhat—see **(Catukka) Samaṇa S** (A 4.239), SD 49.14; **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22,42-47), SD 3.13; **Ānâpâna,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.

³² On the “pure abodes” (*suddh’āvāsa*), see SD 10.16 (13.1.6); SD 23.14 (Table 3).

³³ For an early text on the rejection of these wrong views, see **Apanṇaka S** (M 60,6), SD 35.5; SD 40a.1 (5.1.3); SD 48.1 (2.1.1).

- (5) There are brahmins and recluses who, living rightly and practising rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves.

(M 60,6), SD 35.5

These 5 points of **right view** are neither religious beliefs nor confessional tenets. They may be described as “universal and natural truth” based on reality. In other words, we are to investigate their meaning and significance, understand them, and only then accept them as real truths; neither as dogmas nor as beliefs.

5.1.2.2 The Apanṇaka Sutta (M 60) should be studied with the 4 self-assurances (*assāsa*) or “wagers” of **the Kesa,puttiya Sutta** (A 3.65). There are at least 2 important aspects of the Buddha’s “**sure teaching**” (*apaṇṇaka dhamma*), that is,

- (1) it avoids moral pitfalls and dangers, and
- (2) it gives assurance of liberation and awakening.

According to **the Apanṇaka Sutta** (M 60), in accepting the 5 aspects of right view, one avoids the 3 unwholesome states, thus:

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-----------|
| (1) In <u>rejecting</u> that there is <u>no karma</u> , one has | <u>wrong view.</u> | |
| In <u>accepting</u> that there <u>is karma</u> , one holds | right view. | |
| (2) In <u>intending</u> (thinking) that there is <u>no karma</u> , one has | <u>wrong intention.</u> | |
| In <u>intending</u> that there <u>is karma</u> , one has | right intention. | |
| (3) In <u>declaring</u> that there is <u>no karma</u> , one speaks | <u>wrong speech.</u> | |
| (4) In <u>declaring</u> that there <u>is karma</u> , one speaks | right speech. | (SD 35.5) |

Furthermore, **the 4 self-assurances** are as follows:

- | | |
|--|--|
| (1) Suppose there is rebirth, and karma is true, | I will have a good, happy rebirth. |
| (2) Suppose neither rebirth nor karma is true, | still I will live happily here and now. |
| (3) Suppose bad karma visits the bad, | I am without bad: how can I be touched by bad karma? |
| (4) Suppose bad karma does not have any effect, | I am purified either way. ³⁴ |

(A 3.65,17) + SD 35.4a (4 + 7.2)

The Apanṇaka Sutta calls these points of right view “the sure teaching” (*apaṇṇaka dhamma*), which is basically this:

It is better to accept that cessation of being is possible; in other words, samsara, as experience, and birth and death, can be ended, provided we live with non-lust and non-clinging. If there is no cessation of being, we will be reborn in one of the formless realms. If there is cessation, then we will be able to attain nirvana. [A 3.65,34.2]

5.2 RIGHT VIEW AS THE TRUTHS

5.2.1 The (Magga) Vibhaṅga Sutta (S 45.8) defines right view as the 4 noble truths, thus:

That which, bhikshus, is
the knowledge [understanding] that is suffering;³⁵

³⁴ Meaning, I have done no bad; I have done (or tried doing) only good. (A 3.65,17), SD 35.4a.

³⁵ *Dukkhe ñāṇam*.

the knowledge that is
 the knowledge that is
 the knowledge that is
 This, bhikshus, is called right view.

the arising of suffering;³⁶
 the ending of suffering;³⁷
 the path leading to the ending of suffering.³⁸
 (S 45.8,4), SD 14.5

5.2.2 The 4 truths are a description of true reality, thus:

5.2.2.1 The 1st noble truth is the reality of **suffering** (*dukkha*); it is a universal natural truth that is significant in 2 key ways.

The first is the truth of **the physical universe**; it is basically chaos, which contrasts with order. Thus out of the chaos of the universe, there evolve systems of stars and heavenly bodies. Despite the chaos, there are processes that are orderly that support life, such as the sun giving off heat, light and gravity so that life is possible. Yet all such processes are caught in time; they will one day end. In fact, even now, all universal processes are working towards the universe's ending, only to rise again.

The 2nd truth is that of **our existential being**; since we exist, we are caught in a universal suffering—that of the 5 aggregates. Since our form (*rūpa*) arises from the earth, water, fire and wind that is the universe, it is subject to the same chaos as the external universe: “Form is *dukkha*” (*rūpaṃ dukkhaṃ*).³⁹

Since the mind—comprising feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—works with the body, the mind too is subject to the same chaos. The mind changes, becomes other, passes away; it is impermanent; it is *dukkha*.

5.2.2.2 The 2nd noble truth is the reality that is **the arising of suffering**. In the physical universe, *dukkha* rises from lack, which arises from space. Where there is space, matter arises to fill it. Filled with matter, the heavens assume form. Galaxies arise and revolve, filled with star systems. The stars give light. With light, worlds arise that revolve with their own gravity. Thus life evolves in seas of change.

As human life evolves, it is caught in this perpetual change. Change means *dukkha*; becoming pain, becoming pleasure, becoming other, growing. We learn through our sensing of pain and pleasure; our desire to overcome pain and maximize pleasure is the basis of all learning. As we deepen in our learning, in our growing wisdom, we begin to understand the need for freeing ourselves from both pain and pleasure, thus freeing ourselves from *dukkha*.

Our minds work to maintain **homeostasis**. We are happy and wise when we are able to regulate our “internal environment,” that is, maintaining a constant state of calm and clarity relative to the external environment. We call this mental cultivation, that is, mindfulness or meditation. In a sense, this is how we return our bodies (the physical elements) to the universe, and free our minds, which, in a sense, also return to the universe, as it were, when we awaken to true reality and mental freedom.

5.2.2.3 The 3rd noble truth is the reality that is **the ending of suffering**. Our understanding of the 3rd noble truth may begin with an examination of how the physical universe naturally tends towards a relatively stable equilibrium between interdependent elements—basically matter, gravity, heat (and light)

³⁶ *Dukkha,samudaye ñāṇaṃ.*

³⁷ *Dukkha,nirodhe ñāṇaṃ.*

³⁸ *Dukkha,nirodha,gāminiyā paṭipadāya ñāṇaṃ.*

³⁹ S 3:56, 70, 114, 115.

and motion—such as our living body is maintained by **homoeostasis**. For convenience, we may speak of the universe’s self-stabilizing tendency as **cosmoeostasis** (or cosmostasis).⁴⁰

Theoretically speaking, the universe that we see is one that is in cosmoeostasis. It will always be the same universe in the sense that its physical reality has neither definable beginning nor ending. We can imagine a kind of being “inside” the universe, but not any “outside.” Hence, there is really neither inside nor outside of the universe. As such, the universe can only be understood by our mind, whose consciousness evolves with the universe itself through our senses experiencing **the 5 elements**: earth, water, fire, wind and space. The 6th element is consciousness.⁴¹

5.2.2.4 The 4th noble truth is the reality that is **the path to the ending (or stilling) of suffering**. We can imagine this as describing a “**cosmoeostatic**” universe. It is in a kind of natural state of “nirvana,” in a physical sense.⁴² Yet, this is what the Buddha describes as *samsāra*, a universe of cycles of unstable *dukkha* seeking its own stilling. In this sense, this nirvana is samsara; samsara is this nirvana.

Hence, the suttas describe our universe as going through 4 stages of cosmic evolution: expansion, expanded state, contraction, contracted (or collapsed) state—as described in **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27).⁴³ This basic cycle repeats itself with neither beginning nor ending. In a sense, we are the tiny universe that arises, grows, changes, decays and dies; this is our life-cycle. Whether we are *growing, decaying or dying*, we can learn, know and accept this universal process and so be free of it forever. This is our nirvana, the 3rd noble truth (of the teaching model).

When we neither see this natural tendency for the universe to seek stability, nor that we are part of this cosmoeostatic universe, then we try to work against this stabilizing and stilling tendency by seeking to fill the lack and vacuum we see by our own desires, dislikes and delusion. In understanding how the universe, the macrocosmos, works, we can also see how we, the microcosmos, works. Thus when we are at peace with ourselves, we are at peace with the universe.

— — —

⁴⁰ From the Greek, *cosmos*, “the universe,” + *oeostasis*, “standing,” giving the sense, “universal stability.” Cosmoeostasis is pronounced “kos-mio-sta-sis.”

⁴¹ On the 6 consciousnesses, see **(Rāhula) Dhātu S 1** (S 18.9), SD 3.11(6.3).

⁴² We should not however confuse this interesting parallel as referring to nirvana (*nibbāna*)—the 3rd noble truth—that is taught by the Buddha.

⁴³ D 27/3:80-97 (SD 2.19).

(Chakka) Assāda Sutta

The (Sixes) Discourse on Gratification

A 6.112

1 (Originating in Sāvatthi.)

(sāvatthī, nidanaṃ)

2 There are, bhikshus, these 3 states.

tayo’me bhikkhave dhammā

What are the three?

katame tayo

(1) **View of gratification;**

assāda, diṭṭhi

(2) **self-view;**

attā’nudiṭṭhi

(3) **wrong view.**

micchā, diṭṭhi

These, bhikshus, are the 3 states.

ime kho bhikkhave tayo dhammā

3 These are the 3 states, bhikshus, to be abandoned.

imesaṃ kho bhikkhave tiṇṇaṃ

dhammānaṃ pahānāya

4 Three (other) states are to be cultivated.

tayo dhammā bhāvetabbā

What are the three?

katame tayo

(1) For the abandoning of the view of gratification
perception of **impermanence** should be cultivated.

assāda, diṭṭhiyā pahānāya

(2) For the abandoning of self-view
perception of **nonself** should be cultivated.

anicca, saññā bhāvetabbo

(3) For the abandoning of wrong view
right view should be cultivated.

attā’nudiṭṭhiyā pahānāya

anatta, saññā bhāvetabbo

micchā, diṭṭhiyā pahānāya

sammā, diṭṭhi bhāvetabbo

5 These, bhikshus, are the 3 states to be abandoned.

imesaṃ kho bhikkhave tiṇṇaṃ

dhammānaṃ pahānāya

These are the 3 states to be cultivated.

ime tayo dhammā bhāvetabbā ti.

—evaṃ—

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