

SD 63.6

Khemā Therī Sutta

The Discourse by the Elder Nun Khemā | S 44.1

Theme: The 4 undeclared after-death states of an awakened being

Translated and annotated by Piya Tan ©2009; 2025

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

1.1.1 Khemā Therī Sutta (S 44.1) relates the story of the nun Khemā, during her Dharma walk, while staying at Torāṇa, vatthu, between Sāvattṥī and Sāketa. King Pasenadi of Kosala and his entourage happen to spend a night there. Hearing of her presence, he goes to see her and questions her on the after-death state of a liberated being (*tathāgata*) by way of the 4 propositions.

Khemā answers each of Pasenadi’s questions by stating that “the Blessed One has not declared it” [§§7-11]. When Pasenadi asks why these questions are undeclared (*avyākata*), Khemā answers with 2 parables: the immeasurability of the Ganges sand [§13], and the immeasurability of ocean waters [§14].

Similarly, the buddha-state is unfathomable like the great ocean in terms of the 5 aggregates—*form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*. Pasenadi rejoices in her answers.

1.1.2 Pasenadi then visits **the Buddha** and asks him the same questions, to which the Buddha gives the very same answers and parables as Khemā has done [1.2].

1.2 SUTTA STRUCTURE

The teachings of Khemā and of the Buddha coincide fully. The only difference is in Pasenadi’s dialogue with the Buddha, where Pasenadi delights in the fact that the “meaning and phrasing” of both the teachings given by the Buddha and by Khemā fully coincide, thus:

	Khemā	<u>the Buddha</u>
the 4 undeclared points	§§7-10	§§22-25
reason for the 4 undeclared points	§11	§26
parable of the Ganges sand: the 4 undeclared points	§§12 f	§§27-28
parable of the ocean waters: the awakened one’s state	§14	§29
the Buddha is immeasurable in terms of the 5 aggregates	§§15-19	§§30-34
(meaning and phrasing of teacher and disciple agree in the “foremost point”) ¹	§§35-36.1	
Pasenadi is delighted and departs	§20	§§36.3 f

2 The term *tathāgata*

2.1 TATHĀGATA AND THE BUDDHA’S SELF-REFERENCE

2.1.1 Buddha and buddhas

While **the Buddha** (or, fully, *sammā, sambuddha*, “the one awakened to full self-understanding”) is a unique being in our universe—the first to be awakened (*buddha*) in our human history—he is *not* unique

¹ This point relates to the conclusion of both dialogues.

as a type of individual, that is, an awakened one (*buddha*). So long as there is **suffering** in the world, there is a buddha to liberate beings from suffering in his own era. In other words, besides the Buddha of our epoch, there were buddhas in *the past*, and there will be buddhas in *the future*.

This is not to say that there will be a buddha in every human era; there will be certain eras—certain epochs in a stable inhabited universe—when there will be no buddhas at all. However, in our world-cycle, we are fortunate to have **7 buddhas** throughout its stable duration; that is, *6 buddhas of the past* (1. Vipassī, 2. Sikhī, 3. Vessabhū, 4. Kakusandha, 5. Konāgamana, and 6. Kassapa);² our present buddha, Gotama; and the future buddha, Metteyya (the last in this cycle).³

2.1.2 “Thus come,” “thus gone”

All these buddhas realize the same 4 noble truths and teach the same Dharma of true reality. They each also refer to themselves as *tathāgata*,⁴ meaning “**one thus come**” (*tathā āgata*), as the natural process of human awakening, and meaning, “**thus gone**,” as the living truth of impermanence itself. In an important sense, the Buddha lives as the teacher, and becomes the teaching (*dhmma*) by the truth and reality of nonself. And as *the teaching* of truth and reality, he is still with us so long as we know, understand and accept the Dharma.⁵

Etymologically, the term *tathāgata* is derived thus:

adverb *tathā*, “thus,” “in this way”; *anaññatha*, “not otherwise” + past participle *gata*, “gone.”

In this way, we get the English translation, “**thus gone**,” that is, one who has attained true reality and time-free liberation (nirvana): one who has gone to nirvana. This etymology of *tathāgata* is similar to that of another well-known epithet of the Buddha, *sugata*, “well gone” (*su + gata*). Similarly, we can also resolve the compound *sugata* as *su + āgata*, giving the sense of “the welcome one”; such a unique being of wisdom and compassion is always welcome in our world and our lives.⁶

2.1.3 *Tadī*

An important related synonym is the canonical adjective, *tadī* (mfn) meaning:

- (1) “such a person, a person like that (referring to someone previously described)”;⁷
- (2) “(one) who is like that, just so; the same; (one) who is unaffected, immovable (which is usually the meaning in the Commentaries); (possibly) like that buddha.”⁸

² SD 36.2 (5.9).

³ SD 52.1 (9.1.1.2). On past buddhas, see SD 36.2.

⁴ SD 15.7 (2).

⁵ K R Norman, “Pali lexicographical studies VIII, Seven Pali etymologies—Tathāgata,” JPTS 15 1990: comments that “if ... we assume that *-gata* is used in the same way as in *sugata* and *duggata*, then we can see that it [*tathagata*] means ‘(one who is) in that sort of (= very good) way.’” (154) (*Collected Papers* 4 1993:163).

⁶ R C Chalmers, “Tathāgata,” *J of the Royal Asiatic Soc* 1898:103-115, further suggests that *tathagata* derives from “the adjective *tathā* and *āgata*, and means ‘one who has come at the real truth’” (113).

⁷ V 4:54,17* (*soka na bhavanti tādino*; VA 801,28: *tadisassa khīṇāsava munino*); M 2:144,22* (*pahīna,jāti,marāṇo brahma,cariyassa kevalī pāragū sabba,dhammānaṃ buddho tādī pavuccati*, Be so; Ce, Ee, Se -i); Dh 94 (*yass’ indriyāni samathaṃ gataṃ ... devā pi tassa pihayanti tādino*); It 39,6* (*te ... khaye ratā pahaṃsu te sabba,bhavāni tādino*); Sn 86 (*yo tiṇṇa,kathaṃ,katho ... tādīm magga,jinaṃ vadanti buddhā*); 488 (*dadaṃ paresaṃ idha anna,panaṃ ārādhaye dakkhiṇeyyehi tādī*). Further see DP: *tādī(n)*.

⁸ V 1:185,7* (*iṭṭhā dhammā aniṭṭhā ca na pavedhenti tādino*); D 2:266,13* (*yaṃ me atthi kataṃ puññaṃ arahan-tesu tādīsu*); A 2:25,21 f (*iti kho bhikkhave tathāgato dīgha,suta,muta,viññatabbesu dhammesu tādī yeva tādī, tam-*

V Trenckner, in his 1888 edition of **the Alagaddūpama Sutta** (M 22,38)⁹ notes that the term *tathāgata* in *this* Majjhima passage “retains the original sense of ‘such a one’; cf [Sn] 123-24, and the other significations of *tathāgata* may have proceeded from texts like these” (1888:542,11 f).

2.1.4 *Tathāgata* outside of Buddhism

From the sutta usage of the term *tathāgata*, especially in the well-known “undeclared” tetrad (*avyākata*), we must conclude that *tathāgata* was in common use in ancient India. In fact, a similar Ardha-Magadhī term, ***tahāgaya***, occurs in the Jain scriptures, which refers to a liberated one.¹⁰ The Sanskrit expression *tathāgata* occurs also in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata.¹¹

The non-Buddhist usage of the term *tathāgata* can be seen in the suttas in a set of 4 ways of predicated the destiny of a *tathāgata* (an awakened being) after death. This fourfold predication, or tetralemma, concerned with the destiny of a *tathāgata* after death, appears to have been a topic of considerable interest among ancient Indian recluses and wanderers. The problem it proposes is whether a *tathāgata* exists after death, or does not exist, or both, or neither. Since the Buddha consistently refused to take up any of these 4 positions, the formulation of the tetralemma on the *tathāgata* must have stemmed from non-Buddhist circles.

2.2 THE BUDDHA’S SELF-REFERENCE: AHAM ETC

While it is well known that the Buddha often referred to himself as *tathagata* [2.4.1], he also often speaks using the conventional **first person** “I” (*aham*)¹² on, for example, the following occasions:

2.2.1 *Vāsetṭha Sutta* (M 98 = Sn 3.9), SD 37.1

*Tesaṃ vo aham vyakkhissam
(vāsetṭhā ti bhagavā)¹³
anupubbarṃ yathā, tathaṃ
jāti, vibhaṅgaṃ pāṇānaṃ
aññaṃ-añña hi jātiyo*

I shall explain to you regarding these,
(Vāsetṭha, said the Blessed One,)
in proper sequence, as they truly are,
regarding the species of living beings:
for, varied indeed are they. (M 98,8.1 = Sn 600), SD 37.1

hā ca pana tādīmha añño tādī uttaritaro vā paṇītataro vā n' atthi ti vadāmi ti, Be so; Ce *tamhā ca pana tādī tamhā*; Ee *tādī se yeva tādī tamhā ca pana tamhā añño tādī* uttaritaro ...; Se *tādiso'va tādī tamhā ca pana tādīmha añño tādī* ...; Sn 712 (*alattam yad idam sādhu nālattham kusalam iti ubhayan' eva so tādī*, Be, Ce so; Ee, Se *kusalam iti*); 803 (*na brāhmaṇo sīla, vatena neyyo paraṅgato na pacceṭi tādī*; Tha 974 (*bhikkhū ca bhikkhuṇiyo ca duṭṭha, cittā anādarā tādīnaṃ metta, cittānaṃ niggaṇhissanti 'nagate*): Thī 249 (*upehi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ dhammaṃ saṅghaṃ ca tādīnaṃ*). Further see DP: tādī(n).

⁹ M 22,38/1:140 (SD 3.13).

¹⁰ E J Thomas, “Tathāgata and Tahāgaya,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 8 1936:781-788, quotes the Jain text, *Sūyagada* 1.15.20: *tahāgaya appaḍinnā cakkhū logass' anuttarā*, which he translated as “the tathagata who are free from undertakings, eyes of the world, supreme” (782). *Sūyagada* is the Sūtra-kṛtāṅga, the 2nd of the 12 Aṅgas (limbs) of the Śvetāmbara Jain canon compiled in the 2nd Jain Council at Vallabhi (5th cent CE).

¹¹ E W Hopkins, “Buddha as Tathāgata,” *American J of Philology* 32 191:205-209 (207) notes several instances where *tathāgata* means “in such a state or condition,” at times even referring to the condition of someone who is dead. He quotes from *Rāmāyaṇa* (R 5,13.28): *rāmaṃ tathāgataṃ dṣṭvā*, “if he sees Rāma dead,” and the Mahābhārata (MBh 1,125.14): *yatra rājā tathāgatāḥ*, “where the king (lay) dead.” Endo, *Buddha in Theravāda Buddhism*, Dehiwala, 2002:363 n7, following Nakamura, indicates that “the term *tathāgata* is employed in the Mahābhārata 12,146.26 to mean “to have achieved a superb or wonderful state.”

¹² SD 15.7 (2).

¹³ This line is hypermetrical (does not fit the rhythm) and is prob added by *saṅgīti, kārā* (council reciters): similar insertions at Sn 18-29, 33 f (see Norman Sn:N 154 n18-29).

*Na cāhaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ brūmi¹⁴
 yonijaṃ matti,sambhavaṃ
 bho,vādi nāma so hoti
 sa ce hoti sa,kiñcano
 akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ
 tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ.¹⁹*

Nor do I call him a brahmin
 because he is born so from a womb.¹⁵
 He is but a “sir”-caller by name¹⁶
 if he has possessions.¹⁷
 He who has nothing, without grasping,¹⁸
 him I call a brahmin.

Sn 620 = Dh 396

The last line reprises in Dh 396-410, 412-423 and in M 98,11.

2.2.2 Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta (M 26), SD 1.11

“Bhikshus, as far as mere lip-reciting and rehearsal of his teaching went, I spoke with the word of knowing and the word of an elder, and I claimed, ‘I know and see,’ and there were others who did likewise.”

*So kho ahaṃ bhikkhave tāvataken’eva oṭṭha,pahata,mattena lapita,lāpana,mattena
 ñāṇa,vādaṇ ca vadāmi theravādaṇ ca. Jānāmi, passāmi ti ca paṭijānāmi ahaṃ c’eva aññe ca).*

(M 26,15.3), SD 1.11

2.2.3 Aṅgulimāla Sutta (M 86), SD 5.11

“I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla! You stop, too!” (*ṭhito ahaṃ Aṅgulimāla, tvam tiṭṭhā ti*). (M 86,5.3)

2.2.4 Cātumā Sutta (M 67), SD 34.7

Sadhu, sadhu, Moggallāna! For, either I, Moggallāna, “will/shall lead” [would take care of] (*parihareyyaṃ*) the sangha of monks, or Sāriputta and Moggallāna would.

*Sādhū sādhū, moggallāna. Ahaṃ vā hi, moggallāna, bhikkhu,saṅghaṃ parihareyyaṃ sāri-
 putta,moggallānā vā ti.* (M 67,13/1:459), SD 34.7

2.2.5 Tevijja Vaccha,gotta Sutta (M 71), SD 53.3

For, Vaccha, whenever I wish I recollect the manifold past existences, that is to say,²⁰
 one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ... many aeons (M 71,7), SD 53.3

¹⁴ Whole verse = Dh 396; cf DhA 4:158-233 ad Dh 396-423.

¹⁵ Here, alluding to “pure descent” (*saṃsuddha,gahaṇika*, MA 2:436 = SnA 466; D 1:113; DA 1:281; M 2:165; MA 2:417).

¹⁶ A *bho,vādi*, say Comys, is one who goes about saying “Sir, sir” in greeting (SnA 467,1-2; DhA 4:158,18-19), ie, “one who merely knows proper etiquette in greeting others, one who addresses other respectfully” (Dh:C&P 400). See Sn:N2 287 620 & Dh:N 158 n396.

¹⁷ Comy ad Sn 645b: *Kiñcana* means “something, a formation through grasping on account of craving in those conditions of his (ie in the past, future and present)” (*kiñcanan ti yass’etesu ṭhānesu tanhā,gaha,saṅkhāraṃ kiñca-
 naṃ* (SnA 470,11).

¹⁸ As at Sn 645c (qv).

¹⁹ **Sn 620-647**, in line d, *br-* in *brāhmaṇo* does not make position: see Sn 599d n. **Sn 620-629**, cf the Jain texts: Uttarādhyayana Sūtra (Jacobi 1895; Charpentier 1922) 25.19-29, 33 f; Sūyagaḍaṃga 1.2.2.15.

²⁰ *Ahaṃ hi vaccha yāvad eva ākaṅkhāmi aneka,vihitaṃ pubbe,nivāsaṃ anussarāmi.*

2.2.6 Lobha Sutta (It 1), SD 67.26

Greed,²¹ bhikkhus, is the one thing you must abandon. I will (then) be your guarantor for nonreturning.

Eka, dhammaṃ bhikkhave pajahatha, ahaṃ vo pāṭibhogo anāgāmitāya. (It 1,3), SD 67.26

2.2.7 (Majjhima) Jīvaka Sutta (M 55), SD 43.4

There are three occasions, Jīvaka, when meat should not be taken, I say, that is, when it is seen, heard, or suspected (that it has been specially prepared for oneself).

Tihi kho ahaṃ jīvaka thānehi maṃsaṃ aparibhogan'ti vadāmi diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ parisankitaṃ.
(M 55,5), SD 43.4

2.2.8 Udumbarika Sīha, nāda Sutta (D 25), SD 1.4

Let an intelligent person, honest, trustworthy, upright, come to me, and I will instruct (him) (*ahaṃ anusāsāmi*), I will teach Dharma (*dhammaṃ desemi*). If he then practises what he is taught to attain for himself here and now, that supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family go forth from the household life into the homeless state, it will take him 7 years.
(D 25,22.2), SD 21.4

2.2.9 (Arahatta) Nanda Sutta (U 3.2/23,6), SD 43.7

Rejoice, Nanda! Rejoice, Nanda! I guarantee that you will obtain 500 dove-footed celestial nymphs!

Abhirāma nanda, abhirāma nanda. Ahaṃ te pāṭibhogo pañcannaṃ accharā, satānaṃ paṭilābhāya kakuṭṭha, pādānaṃ ti.
(U 3.2/23,6), SD 43.7

2.2.10 Aggi Vaccha, gotta Sutta (M 72), SD 6.15

In the **Aggi Vaccha, gotta Sutta** (M 72), the Buddha addresses himself in 2 ways: by way of the first-person pronoun “I” and as “tathagata.” Further, *tathagata* is also used in 2 ways: as meaning “a liberated being” and the Buddha’s self-referent.

The Buddha uses the first-person pronoun “I” (*ahaṃ*) at the start of the meeting [M 72,2-13, 18].²² As his teaching deepens, the Buddha refers to himself using the 3rd-person pronoun and generic term “*tathāgata*” as “a liberated being” [§§14(7-10)]. In the last line of M 72,14, he uses *tathagata* as a self-referent or 1st-person pronoun; we may well give this last pronoun an initial capital T.²³

²¹ “Greed” here is a shorthand for the lower fetters, ie, the 1st 5 of the 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*): (1) personal-ity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, raga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*). On the 10 fetters, see SD 57.27 (1.1.2.2).

²² The first person pronoun “I” is *ahaṃ* in Pali, and is used here. It is also an *inherent* first-person pronoun, ie, it is inherent in the verbs the Buddha uses, such as in §15 last line, “I say” (*vadāmi*). We also find *Tathāgata* in the same sentence.

²³ This para is also at SD 6.15 (3.2.2).

2.3 USAGES OF THE TERM *TATHĀGATA*

2.3.1 *Tathāgata* as “being” (*satta*)

2.3.1.1 The Pali commentaries, as a rule, use the term *tathāgata* in the context of the undeclared tetralemma to refer to *satta*, a being, or to an arhat.²⁴ The gloss *satta*, a “being,” has led some scholars to surmise that the tetralemma on the *tathāgata* is about living beings in general.²⁵ This may be so in certain contexts²⁶ but it is not always the case.²⁷

2.3.1.2 On the other hand, as regards the (Khandha) *Anurādha Sutta* (S 22.86),²⁸ its Commentary explains *tathāgata* there as “your teacher” (that is, the Buddha), but (wrongly) regarded him as a “being” (*taṁ tathāgato ti tumhākaṁ satthā tathāgato taṁ sattarṇ tathāgataṁ* (SA 2:312). The Sutta relates the elder Anurādha encountering some outside wanderers who used a string of synonyms when formulating the tetralemma, describing the *tathāgata* as the “highest person” (*uttama, purisa*), the “supreme person” (*parama, purisa*) and the one who has “achieved the supreme” (*parama, pattipatto*). These synonyms indicate that, from their perspective, the term *tathāgata* refers to one who had reached liberation and was not used as a reference for beings in general.

2.3.1.3 In the suttas, too, *tathagata* in the tetralemma clearly refers to one who has reached liberation; not with living beings in general.²⁹ Both the early Buddhists and the outside wanderers used *tathāgata* in the tetralemma in this same manner. This is clearly understandable since the Buddha declared, “Empty of recluses are other, outside doctrines.”³⁰ There are no liberated individuals outside of the noble eightfold path.³¹ Hence the commentarial gloss is intended to highlight that those who posed the tetralemma did so by mistaking a *tathāgata* to be some kind of substantial abiding being.³²

2.3.2 Why the tetralemma is “set aside”

2.3.2.1 The reason for the Buddha’s setting aside the tetralemma has a close bearing on the early Buddhist understanding of the term *tathāgata* and therefore deserves closer inspection. The precise implications of the early Buddhist usage of the term *tathāgata* were apparently not always clear to the

²⁴ Comys: *satto tathāgato ti adhippeto* (SA 1:118,1); *tathāgato ti satto, arahā ti eke* (NmA 193,24).

²⁵ Cf T Endo, *Buddha in Theravāda Buddhism*, 2002:197-199; M Walleser, “Zur Herkunft des Wortes Tathāgata,” *Taisho Daigaku Gakuho*, Tokyo, 1930: 21-30 (23-33).

²⁶ *Tathāgata* means “a sentient being” (*satta*) in the foll contexts: *Brahma, jāla S* (D 1,2.27) ≈ *Cūḷa Māluṅkyā, putta S* (M 63,2) + SD 5.8 (3), *Aggi Vaccha, gotta S* (M 72,9-14) ≈ *Khemā S* (S 44.1), SD 63.6, *Yamaka S* (S 22.85), SD 21.12, *Nānā Titthiyā S 1* (U 6.4), SD 40a.14.

²⁷ On usages of *tathagata*: SD 15.7 (2.3).

²⁸ S 22.86,4 (SD 21.13).

²⁹ Chalmers, “Tathāgata,” JRAS 1898:103-115 clarifies that the commentarial gloss does not affirm that “all creatures are Tathāgatas. Rather the position is that the Tathāgata is regarded, for the time being, from the general point of view of a creature” (109 n1).

³⁰ *Suññā para-p, pavādā samaṇehi aññe* (D 16,5.27.3), SD 9. Comy says that “other sects” are the proponents of the 62 views, who lack the 12 kinds of ascetics, viz, the 4 who have attained the fruits (*phal’atṭhaka, samaṇa*), the 4 who have attained the path (*maggaṭṭhaka, samaṇa*), and the 4 working on insight (*āradḍha, vipassaka samaṇa*) to attain the respective paths (AA 3:214). This sentence forms part of a longer lion-roar (*sīha, nāda*) at *Cūḷa Sīha, nāda S* (M 11,2.2), SD 49.2 & (*Catukka*) *Samaṇa S* (A 4.239/2:238,9), SD 49.14. The latter elaborates on the 4 kinds of recluses.

³¹ *Mahā, parinibbāna S* (D 16,5.27.2), SD 9.

³² See *Aggi Vaccha, gotta S* (M 72), SD 6.15 (3.2); after-death speculation: *Avyākata S* (A 7.5) + SD 40a.11 (2).

Buddhist monastics themselves, since when **Anurādha**—as recorded in **the (Khandha) Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86)—was questioned by outside wanderers regarding the tetralemma on the *tathāgata* after death, proposed that there was another way—a 5th one—of making a statement on this matter.”³³

The outside wanderers took Anurādha to be a fool, since the tetralemma exhausts the possible ways of predication according to ancient Indian logic, so that a 5th proposition is simply impossible. Anurādha reported what had happened to the Buddha, who, in a series of questions and answers, led Anurādha to the realization that even here and now a *tathāgata* cannot be identified as *any* of the 5 aggregates, or as being *in* them, or as *apart* from them, though he evidently was not without form, feeling, perception, formation and consciousness.

2.3.2.2 Since here and now a *tathāgata* cannot be found in truth and reality,³⁴ the Buddha concludes, how could any predication about his future destiny be made? This reply by the Buddha clarifies why he did not take up any of the 4 positions proposed by the tetralemma. It also gives some indications on the implications of the term *tathāgata* from the Buddhist perspective.

2.3.3 The tetralemma and personality-view

2.3.3.1 As the Buddha explains in **the (Avyākata) Moggallāna Sutta** (S 44.7), only those who take any of the 6 senses to be “I,” “me” or “mine” will take up any of the 4 propositions on the destiny of a *tathāgata*.³⁵ However, as stated in **the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 72), since a *tathāgata* cannot be fathomed by way of any of the 5 aggregates, it is simply impossible to make predications about him in line with the tetralemma.³⁶

2.3.3.2 The Isi,datta Sutta 2 (S 41.3) states that the tetralemma on the *tathāgata* is merely an expression of personality view (*sakkāya,ditṭhi*).³⁷ Such personality view underpins the 4 propositions on the destiny of the *tathāgata* as it stands behind all other speculative views.³⁸ Hence, for one who has realized the falsity of personality view, any such views or proposals are simply meaningless.

2.3.4 Tathāgata and arhat

2.3.4.1 The Yamaka Sutta (S 22.85) records the early Buddhist usage of the term *tathagata* as referring to the arhat, one who has destroyed the mental influxes.³⁹ The elder **Yamaka** wrongly declares that one who has destroyed the influxes (*khīṇāsava*) will be “annihilated” at death. Sāriputta takes him to task for this wrong statement, and with the help of a series of questions and answers leads Yamaka to

³³ S 22.86/3:116-119 = 44.3/4:380-384 (SD 21.13).

³⁴ S 22.86/3:118: *ettha ca te anurādha diṭṭh’eva,dhamme saccato thetato tathāgato anupalabbhiyamāno*.

³⁵ S 44.7/4:393 (SD 53.14).

³⁶ M 72/1:487 (SD 6.15).

³⁷ P Harvey, “The nature of the Tathāgata,” ed P Denwood, *Buddhist Studies: Ancient and Modern*, London, 1983: 35-52 concludes: “views on a Tathāgata after death ... are set aside because they contain misapprehension as to what a Tathāgata is (he is taken as an *attā* related to the *khandhas*)” (48).

³⁸ S 41.3/4:287 (SD 65.11).

³⁹ Mental influxes (*āsava*) are the root defilements that prevent one from attaining the path of awakening, or from progressing on it. The early texts list these **3 influxes**: 1. sensual lust (*kām’āsava*), 2. existence (*bhav’āsava*), and 3. ignorance (*avijjāsava*); **D** 2,99.1 n (SD 8.10); **M** 11,9 n (SD 7.13); SD 30.3 (1.3.2); SD 56.4 (3.8). A later sutta list, such as in **Cūḷa Gopālaka S** (M 34,6) n (SD 61.3), inserts the influx of views (*diṭṭh’āsava*) between 2 and 3: SD 9 (10.4.2.2) n; SD 70.18 (2.4.1) n. On influxes and fetters (*samyojana*), see SD 30.3 (1.3.3).

the same conclusion that the Buddha shows to Anurādha [2.3.2], namely, that a *tathāgata* here and now cannot be found in truth and reality.⁴⁰

2.3.4.2 Thus, in the Yamaka Sutta, the term *tathāgata* is synonymous with *khīṇāsavo bhikkhu*, “a monk with influxes destroyed.” This usage of the term *tathagata*, as such, parallels its usage by outside wanderers, as seen in the Anurādha Sutta [2.3.1]; it shows that the term *tathāgata* refers to a liberated person, from the perspectives both of early Buddhists and of outside wanderers.

2.4 TATHĀGATA IN THE KHEMĀ THERĪ SUTTA AND RELATED SUTTAS

2.4.1 *Tathāgata* applies to both the Buddha and arhats

2.4.1.1 As evident from a number of suttas, the term *tathāgata* refers to **arhats** in general, that is, those whose minds are totally free⁴¹ and who are forever beyond the 5 hindrances.⁴² **The Sundarika Bhāra, dvāja Sutta** (Sn 3.4), for example, records the Buddha as explaining why a *tathāgata* is worthy of offerings. This description of the *tathagata* refers to all arhats, including the Buddha, who is the 1st arhat (Sn 467-477).

2.4.1.2 Similarly, where the term *tathāgata* in the suttas refers specifically to **the Buddha**, it highlights qualities that all arhats have in common with him. Such descriptions indicate that a *tathāgata* is endowed with *purity of body, speech and mind*, so that there is no need for him to hide any of his activities.⁴³ Elsewhere the suttas highlight that *tathāgatas* never speak what is untrue, as stated in **the Piya, jātika Sutta** (M 87).⁴⁴

2.4.2 Two significant usages

Having surveyed the meanings of *tathagata* as used in northern India in the Buddha’s time, we can now examine its usage in **the Khemā Therī Sutta**. There are 2 significant usages of the term *tathāgata* in the Sutta:

- (1) *tathagata* in the context of the tetralemma (as used by king Pasenadi), and [2.4.2]
- (2) *tathagata* as used by the Buddha to refer to himself. [2.4.3]

In the suttas, ***tathagata*** in the tetralemma clearly refers to one who has reached liberation; *not* with living beings in general.⁴⁵ Both the early Buddhists and the outside wanderers used *tathāgata* in the tetralemma in this same manner in terms of the 4 well known propositions. [2.3.4.1]

⁴⁰ S 22.85/3:111 (SD 21.12).

⁴¹ M 22,38/1:140: Trenckner notes that the term *tathagata* in this passage “retains the original sense of ‘such a one,’ cf [Sn] 123-24, and the other significations of *tathagata* may have proceeded from texts like these” (1993: 542,11 f).

⁴² **Kaṅkheyya S** (S 54.12/5:327), SD 77.7. The 5 hindrances (*pañca nivarāṇa*) are 1. sensual desire (*kama-c, chanda*), 2. ill will (*vyāpāda*), 3. sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*), 4. restlessness and worry (*uddhacca, kukkuccha*), 5. doubt (*vicikicchā*): **Nīvaraṇa** (SD 32.1); (**Nīvaraṇa**) **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55), SD 3.12.

⁴³ D 33,1.10,30/3:217.

⁴⁴ M 87/2:108 (SD 84.11).

⁴⁵ Chalmers, “Tathāgata,” JRAS 1898:103-115 clarifies that the commentarial gloss does not affirm that “all creatures are Tathāgatas. Rather the position is that the Tathāgata is regarded, for the time being, from the general point of view of a creature” (109 n1).

2.4.3 King Pasenadi's questions

King Pasenadi asks both the nun Khemā [§§7-10] and the Buddha [§§22-25] the very same questions in terms of **the tetralemma**⁴⁶—whether the *tathagata* (the liberated saint) arises after death, or does not, both or neither—which is the correct view? Thus:

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) the tathāgata exists after death | <i>hoti tathāgato param, maraṇā.</i> |
| (2) the tathāgata does not exist after death | <i>hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato param, maraṇā.</i> |
| (3) the tathāgata both exists and not exist after death | <i>hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato param, maraṇā.</i> |
| (4) the tathāgata neither exists nor not exist after death | <i>n'eva hoti na na hoti tathāgato param, maraṇā.</i> |

In these 4 propositions, the term **tathāgata** means “the liberated saint” in general. An academic answer to this kind of question would be: it depends on the teacher, the sect or the religion. Each will have his own view, which can at best be only a belief or a speculative view. In other words, it has to be a dogma that believers must accept with neither question nor understanding.

2.4.4 Why the Buddha rejects the tetralemma

The Buddha rejects all the 4 propositions as being untenable; they can be neither proven right nor proven wrong. More importantly, they are purely speculative and irrelevant to the spiritual life, since awakening is something time-free; hence, nothing can really be said or thought about the *tathāgata* in real terms—just like a fire that has gone out.

Significantly, both the nun Khemā and the Buddha—being arhats—give the very same answers and very same parables in answer to king Pasenadi's questions on the tetralemma, so it must be said that the **tathāgata** as a liberated saint, that is, an arhat, cannot be described in terms of any of the propositions. Specifically, the awakened state of the arhat, including that of buddhahood, cannot be described.

2.4.5 Descriptions of the Buddha

2.4.5.1 The tetralemma is each set aside (*ṭhapanīya*) since, even here and now, the *tathagata*—the arhat and the Buddha—are beyond description. The 5 aggregates—*form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*—by which beings are described have been abandoned by the *tathagata*. But then we have numerous teachings—such as the Buddha's 6 superknowledges,⁴⁷ 9 virtues,⁴⁸ 10 powers,⁴⁹ 32 bodily marks⁵⁰ and so on—which do *describe* the Buddha.

To resolve this apparent contradiction, we should see it in the context of **the 2 kinds of nirvana**: the “nirvana with remains” (*sa, upādi, sesa nibbāna*) and the “nirvana without remains” (*anupādi, sesa nibbāna*). At the moment of awakening, the Buddha attains the “first kind of nirvana,” that is, the one “**with remains** (*upādi*),”⁵¹ which refer to the remnants of the 5 aggregates by which the Buddha remains in this world to teach Dharma and benefit us.

In other words, from the moment of awakening, the Buddha and the arhats cease to create any new aggregates. Specifically, this refers to the formations aggregate (*saṅkhārā*), which does not create *new*

⁴⁶ A **tetralemma** is a set of 4 alternative of possible truths; pl tetralemmata. Cf dilemma, two possible truths.

⁴⁷ The Buddha's 6 superknowledges (*cha-ḷ-abhiññā*): **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,89-99) SD 8.10; **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,55-66), SD 1.7; SD 27.5a (5).

⁴⁸ The Buddha's 9 virtues (*navāraha guṇa*): **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7 (3).

⁴⁹ The Buddha's 10 powers (*dasa bala*): **Mahā Sīha, nāda S** (M 12,9-21) + SD 49.1 (3.5); SD 61.26 (2.3).

⁵⁰ The 32 marks of the great man (*mahā, purisa lakkhaṇa*): **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30) SD 36.9 esp (3+4).

⁵¹ On **upādi**, substrate(s) (of life), birth-basis, “trace(s) (of clinging)”: **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 22,22), SD 13.2.

karma, but merely supports the Buddha (or the arhat) for the rest of his natural life. It is by this aggregate that the Buddha—with his special powers—is able to manipulate his “life-formation” (*āyu, saṅkhāra*) to a certain extent to keep his life going to its fullest duration naturally possible.⁵²

2.4.5.2 Upon passing away, the Buddha or an arhat abandons all the 5 aggregates. As stated in **the Khemā Therī Sutta** (S 44.1), the *tathagata* is liberated from reckoning in terms of *form, feeling, perception, formations or consciousness*. Even while he lives, the Buddha is unfathomable like the great ocean. Upon passing away, he is said to have attained the “remainderless nirvana-element” (*anupādi, sesa nibbana, dhātu*).⁵³ Hence, none of these propositions of the tetralemma applies to the posthumous state of the Buddha or an arhat:

“The tathagata exists after death”	does not apply;	
“The tathagata does not exist after death”	does not apply;	
“The tathagata both exists and does not exist after death”	does not apply;	
“The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death”	does not apply.	(§§14-19, 29-34)

2.4.5.3 On the other hand, **an unawakened being**, including path saints who are not yet arhats, still have the 5 aggregates, especially formations (*saṅkhāra*) which perpetuate old karma as latent tendencies (*anusaya*) and generate new ones (*abhisāṅkhāra*), rooted in *greed, hatred and delusion*. Even the streamwinner, the once-returner and the non-returner have “traces” of the aggregates, as illustrated in the parable of the man shot with a poisoned dart, as given in **the Sunakkhatta Sutta** (M 105).⁵⁴

3 The nun Khemā

3.1 The nun Khemā was an arhat, the Buddha’s **chief right-hand nun** (the left-hand nun was Uppala, *vaṇṇā*); thus chief of the Buddha’s women disciples. She was born into the ruling family at Sāgala (also called Sākala) in the Madda country.⁵⁵ Her complexion was of the colour of gold. She became the chief consort of king Bimbisāra of Magadha.

3.2 Infatuated with her own beauty, Khemā would not visit the Buddha who was at **Veḷuvana**, lest he should speak disparagingly of her beauty. The king had poets sing the glories of Veḷuvana and persuaded Khemā to go there. When she finally met the Buddha, he conjured up what we would today call a holographic sequence of a nymph-like woman, more beautiful than she was, who stood facing him. The apparition passed gradually from youth to adulthood to maturity to extreme old age, and then collapsing in the swoon of death.

This epiphany filled Khemā with dismay. Understanding the vanity of beauty and lust, say the commentaries, she attained arhathood there and then. With Bimbisāra’s consent, she joined the sangha.⁵⁶ According to **the Apadāna**, after hearing a Dharma verse from the Buddha on this occasion, she attained streamwinning.⁵⁷ Upon going forth, she attained arhathood.⁵⁸ — — —

⁵² See **Kappāvasesa** (SD 60.13). See DEB *saṅkhāra* (1) (3.3).

⁵³ SD 45.18 (2.5).

⁵⁴ M 105,19 (SD 63.3).

⁵⁵ Sāgala—Σάγγαλα (*Saṅgala*) in Greek—is prob modern Sialkot in the Punjab, Pakistan, west of North India. It was destroyed by Alexander in 326 BCE as a warning to other nearby cities that resisted his advance. It was later rebuilt and ruled by Menander (r c155-130 BCE), under whom the city prospered as a major centre for trade and Buddhism. (J Hazel, *Who’s Who in the Greek World*, 2013:155).

⁵⁶ A 1:25; B 26.19; SA 3:113,4-7; ThīA 126-136; J 1:15,16.

⁵⁷ Ap 72 @ ThīA 134 = ApThī 17.18,73/2:549.

⁵⁸ Ap 86 @ ThīA 135 = ApThī 17.18,86/2:550.

Khemā Therī Sutta

The Discourse by the Elder Nun Khemā

S 44.1

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Jeta's grove, in Anātha,piṇḍika's park, outside Sāvatthī.

The nun Khemā at Torana,vatthu

2 Now, at that time, the nun **Khemā**,⁵⁹ while wandering on a Dharma walk in Kosala, had taken up residence in **Toraṇa,vatthu**, between Sāvatthī and Sāketa.

3 Then, king Pasenadi of Kosala, while travelling from Sāketa to Sāvatthī, took up residence for a night in Toraṇa,vatthu, between Sāvatthī and Sāketa.

Pasenadi visits the nun Khemā

4 Then king Pasenadi of Kosala addressed a man, thus:

"Go, good man, and find out whether there is any ascetic or brahmin in Toraṇa,vatthu whom I could visit [attend to]⁶⁰ today."

4.2 "Yes, sire," the man replied, but though he traversed the whole of Torana,vatthu he did not see any ascetic or brahmin there whom king Pasenadi could visit.

5 The man then saw **the nun Khemā** residing in Toraṇa,vatthu.

So he approached king Pasenadi and said to him:

"Sire, there is no ascetic or brahmin in Toraṇa,vatthu whom your majesty could visit.

But sire there is the nun named Khemā, a disciple of the Blessed One, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one.

A good report concerning the venerable lady has spread about thus: **[375]**

'She is wise, competent, intelligent, learned, a rich speaker, of good ready wit.'⁶¹

Let your majesty visit her."

Pasenadi asks about a being's posthumous state

6 Then **king Pasenadi of Kosala** approached the nun Khemā, saluted her, sat down to one side.

7 Seated at one side, king Pasenadi of Kosala said this to **the nun Khemā**:

⁵⁹ The nun **Khemā** is the foremost of nuns with great wisdom (*etad-aggam mahā,paññānam*. A 1:25,19), and in **Eka,dhītu S** (S 17.24/2:236) is extolled as a model for the other nuns. For her elder's verses, see Thī 139-144 (Comy ThīA:P 164-176); see also A 1:88, 2:164, 4:347; S 2:236. For a biography, see Nyanaponika & Hecker, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, 1997:263-269.

⁶⁰ "Could visit [attend to]," *payirupāseyya* (*pari + r + upāsati* (*upa + vās*, to sit)).

⁶¹ *Paṇḍitā viyattā medhāvinī bahu-s,sutā citta,kathā kalyāṇa,paṭibhānā ti*. The first 4 terms (pl): D 2:40; M 2:144; V 2:98. **Mahā Kaccāna** is described as (m) *paṇḍito viyatto medhāvī bahu-s,suto citta,kathā kalyāṇa,paṭibhāno* in **Ma-dhura S** (M 84,2/2:83); and **Nārada** of Kukkuṭ'ārāma at Pāṭaliputta: **Nārada S** (A 5.50/3:58); Nm 1:147,18 f, 153,8 f. Cf stock passage on an expert in Dharma, Vinaya and Matrix: V 2:8,29, 55,12=36=37, 58,13 + 14 + 19, 298, 299,16 f, 300,12, 301,30. The first 3 qualities are part of a Vinaya description of diligent monks: *bahussutā āgatāgamā dhamma,dharā vinaya,dharā mātikā,dharā paṇḍitā viyattā medhāvino lajjino kukkucakā sikkhākāmā* (V 2:97).

7.2 “How is it, ayya [venerable lady],
does the tathāgata⁶² exist after death?”⁶³

hoti tathāgato param, maraṇā

“Maharajah, the Blessed One has not declared this:
‘The tathagata exists after death.’”

8 “Then, ayya,
does the tathāgata not exist after death?”

na hoti tathāgato param, maraṇā

“Maharajah, the Blessed One has not declared this either:
‘The tathagata does not exist after death.’”

9 “How is it then, ayya,
does the tathāgata both exist and not exist after death?”

hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato param, maraṇā

“Maharajah, the Blessed One has not declared this:
‘The tathagata both exists and not exist after death.’”

10 “Then, ayya,
does the tathāgata neither exist nor not exist after death?”

n’eva na na hoti tathāgato param, maraṇā

“Maharajah, the Blessed One has not declared this either:
‘The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death.’”

Reason for the 4 undeclared points

11 “How now, ayya?

When asked, ‘How is it, ayya, does the tathāgata exist after death?’

you say:

‘Maharajah, the Blessed One has not declared this.’

And when asked, ‘Then, ayya, does the tathāgata not exist after death?’

you say:

‘Maharajah, the Blessed One has not declared this.’

And when asked, ‘Then, ayya, does the tathāgata both exist and not exist after death?’

you say:

‘Maharajah, the Blessed One has not declared this.’

And when asked, ‘Then, ayya, does the tathāgata neither exist nor not exist after death?’

you say:

‘Maharajah, the Blessed One has not declared this.’

⁶² Here, *tathāgata* has the sense of “a sentient being,” as attested in **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1,2.27/1:27,24 f; DA 118.1) ≠ **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63,2/1:426,14; MA 3:141,23), **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72,9-14/1:484-486; MA 3:199,2) ≠ **Khemā S** (S 44.1/4:376,26 f; SA 3:113,18); **Yamaka S** (S 22.85/3:111,14+112,6; SA 2:311,1), **Nānā Tīthiyā S 1** (U 6.4/67,14; UA 340,6 (Ce Ee) 340; UA:Be *satto*; UA:Se *sattā*) ≠ Nm 64,20 (NmA 1:193,24). Cf **Anurādha S** (S 22.86,4/-3:116), SD 21.13, where Comy explains *tathāgata* there as “your teacher” (ie, the Buddha), but regarding him as a “being” (*taṃ tathāgato ti tumhākaṃ satthā tathāgato taṃ sattarū tathāgatarū* (SA 2:312). See also SD 5.8 (3) & SD 6.15 (3.2).

⁶³ This tetrad of speculative views (*diṭṭhi,gatāni*): **Param Maraṇa S** (S 16.12), **S 24.15-18**, **Vaccha,gotta Saṃy S** (S 33.1-55). As the last 4 of a set of 10 known as *avyākata*, “the unexplained” or questions “set aside” (*ṭhapanīya*) by the Buddha: **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9), SD 7.14, **Pāsādikā S** (D 29), **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63), **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72), SD 6.15, **Vacchagotta Saṃyutta** (S 3:257 ff); **Abyākata Saṃyutta** (S 4:374-403); **U 66**, etc. See Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:242 ff, 473 ff.

What now, [376] ayya, is **the cause, the reason why this has not been declared by the Blessed One?**"

Parable of the Ganges sand: the 4 undeclared points

12 "Well then, maharajah, I will question you about this same matter. Answer as you see fit.

13 What do you think, maharajah? Do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician⁶⁴ who can count **the grains of sand in the river Ganges** thus:

'There are so many grains of sand,' or 'There are so many hundreds of grains of sand,' or 'There are so many thousands of grains of sand,' or 'There are so many hundreds of thousands of grains of sand'?"

"No, ayya."

Parable of the ocean waters: The Blessed One's state

[The elder Khemā:]

14 "Then, maharajah, do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician who can measure **the water in the great ocean** thus:

'There are so many gallons⁶⁵ of water,' or

'There are so many hundreds of gallons of water,' or

'There are so many thousands of gallons of water,' or

'There are so many hundreds of thousands of gallons of water'?"

"No, ayya. Why is that? Because the great ocean is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom."

The Buddha is immeasurable in terms of the 5 aggregates

15 "Even so,⁶⁶ maharajah, that **form**, by which one describing the tathagata might describe him,⁶⁷ has been abandoned by the tathagata,

⁶⁴ *Gaṇaka, muddika, saṅkhāyaka*. First 2 at D 1:51, 59 (SA 1:57). Comys gloss: 1. one skilled in counting in an unbroken series (*acchiddaka, gaṇanāya kusalo*), 2. one skilled in calculating with the fingers (*aṅguli, muddāya gaṇanāya kusalo*), 3. a reckoner of total sums (*piṇḍa, gaṇanāya kusalo*), such as the number of leaves on a tree (SA 3:113, 12-14; DA 95,21; cf SA 1:46). Comy on U 3:9: 2. Counting by hand-gestures, 3. The craft of counting in lump sums by way of adding, subtracting and so on, so that by looking at a tree one can estimate its amount of leaves. These skills are reckoned among the professional arts (*sippāni*) (UA 205,8-12).

⁶⁵ *Ālḥaka*. A fluid and dry measure, V 3:62,3, Ap 20,30; S 4:376,13 = 5:400,9 = A 2:55,20 = 3:52,17 (read *ālḥaka* with vl and Se) (SA 3:113,15 °-*gaṇanāya appameyyo* ≠ ib 290,3) ≠ DhsA 11,11 ≠ VvA 155,13. 16 pasata = 4 pattha = ālḥaka = ¼ doṇa = 1/16 māṇika = 1/64 khāri, 20 khāri = 1 vāha. SA 1:218,28 = AA 5:62,1 = SnA 476,25; cf VA 702,22 f at V 3:243,27 *aḍḍh'ālḥaka*.

⁶⁶ This reply is the same as the Buddha's reply to Vacchagotta (**Aggi Vaccha, gotta S**, M 72/1:487 f), SD 61.5. The term *tathāgata* broadly refers to a being or a self, but here is an arhat misconceived as one.

⁶⁷ Comy: "**The form by which one might describe the tathagata**" as a being (*satta, saṅkhātāṃ tathāgataṃ*)—as tall or short, dark or light, etc—has been abandoned by the all-knowing tathagata through the abandoning of its arising. He is "**liberated from reckoning in terms of form**" (*rupa, saṅkhāya vimutto*), ie, because there will be no arising of **form** in the future for him; even the statement, "He will be such and such" through his physical form and mental qualities, loses its validity; thus, he is liberated even from description by way of **form**. He is **deep** (*gambhīra*) through **the depth of his inclination** (*ajjhāsaya, gambhīratā*) and through **the depth of his qualities** (*gūṇa, gambhīratā*). As to the description that might be used regarding the all-knowing tathagata with such deep qualities, considering him as *a being*, when one sees the non-existence [invalidity] of this description [SAPṬ: "a being" (*satta, paññattiyā*)] owing to the nonexistence [SAPṬ: "of the 5 aggregates" (*khandha, pañcakassa abhāvena*)], then the statement "The tathagata—considered as a being—exists after death" does not apply [is invalid]. (SA 3:113,17-30; SAPṬ:Be 2:389)

cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated
so that it [that form] is no more subject to future arising.

15.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **form**,⁶⁸
he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

'The tathagata exists after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata does not exist after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata both exists and not exist after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death'	does not apply.

16 That **feeling** by which one describing the tathagata might describe him [377]
has been abandoned by the tathagata,
cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated
so that it [that feeling] is no more subject to future arising.

16.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **feeling**;
he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

'The tathagata exists after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata does not exist after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata both exists and not exist after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death'	does not apply.

17 That **perception** by which one describing the tathagata might describe him
has been abandoned by the tathagata,
cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated
so that it [that perception] is no more subject to future arising.

17.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **perception**;
he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

'The tathagata exists after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata does not exist after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata both exists and not exist after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death'	does not apply.

18 Those **formations** by which one describing the tathagata might describe him
have been abandoned by the tathagata,
cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated
so that they [those formations] are no more subject to future arising.

18.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **formations**;
he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

'The tathagata exists after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata does not exist after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata both exists and not exist after death'	does not apply;
'The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death'	does not apply.

19 That **consciousness** by which one describing the tathagata might describe him
has been abandoned by the tathagata,
cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated
so that it [that consciousness] is no more subject to future arising.

⁶⁸ See prec n.

19.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **consciousness**;
he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

<i>'The tathagata exists after death'</i>	<i>does not apply;</i>
<i>'The tathagata does not exist after death'</i>	<i>does not apply;</i>
<i>'The tathagata both exists and not exist after death'</i>	<i>does not apply;</i>
<i>'The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death'</i>	<i>does not apply.</i>

20 Then king Pasenadi of Kosala, having delighted and rejoiced in the nun Khemā's statement, rose from his seat, saluted her, and keeping her on his right, departed.

Pasenadi visits the Buddha

21 Then, on another occasion, king Pasenadi of Kosala approached **the Blessed One**. Having approached, he saluted the Blessed One, sat down to one side.

22 Seated as one side, king Pasenadi of Kosala said this to the Blessed One:

"How is it, bhante, **does the tathagata exist after death?**" [378]

"Maharajah, I have not declared this:

'The tathagata exists after death.'"

23 "Then, bhante, **does the tathagata not exist after death?**

"Maharajah, I have not declared this either:

'The tathagata does not exist after death.'"

24 "How is it then, bhante, **does the tathagata both exist and not exist after death?**"

"Maharajah, I have not declared this either:

'The tathagata both exists and does not exist after death.'"

25 "Then, bhante, **does the tathagata neither exist nor not exist after death?**"

"Maharajah, I have not declared this either:

'The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death.'"

The Buddha's explanation for the 4 undeclared points

26 "How now, bhante?

When asked, 'How is it, bhante, does the tathagata exist after death?'

you say:

'Maharajah, I have not declared this.'

And when asked, 'Then, bhante, does the tathagata not exist after death?'

you say:

'Maharajah, I have not declared this.'

And when asked, 'Then, bhante, does the tathagata both exist and not exist after death?'

you say:

'Maharajah, I have not declared this.'

And when asked, 'Then, bhante, does the tathagata neither exist nor not exist after death?'

you say:

'Maharajah, I have not declared this.'

What now, bhante, is **the cause, the reason why this has not been declared by the Blessed One?**"

The parable of the Ganges sand [§13]

27 “Well then, maharajah, I will question you about this same matter. Answer as you see fit.

28 What do you think, maharajah?

Do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician who can count **the grains of sand in the river Ganges** thus:

‘There are so many grains of sand,’ or ‘There are so many hundreds of grains of sand,’ or ‘There are so many thousands of grains of sand,’ or ‘There are so many hundreds of thousands of grains of sand’?”

“No, bhante.”

The parable of the ocean waters [§14]

29 “Then, maharajah, do you have an accountant or calculator or mathematician who can measure **the water in the great ocean** thus:

‘There are so many gallons of water,’ or

‘There are so many hundreds of gallons of water,’ or

‘There are so many thousands of gallons of water,’ or

‘There are so many hundreds of thousands of gallons of water’?”

“No, bhante. Why is that? Because the great ocean is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom.”

The Buddha is immeasurable in terms of the 5 aggregates [§§15-19]

30 “Even so, maharajah, that **form**, by which one describing the tathagata might describe him, has been abandoned by the tathagata,

cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated

so that it is no more subject to [379] future arising.

30.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **form**;

he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

‘The tathagata exists after death’ does not apply;

‘The tathagata does not exist after death’ does not apply;

‘The tathagata both exists and not exist after death’ does not apply;

‘The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death’ does not apply.

31 That **feeling** by which one describing the tathagata might describe him has been abandoned by the tathagata,

cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated

so that it is no more subject to future arising.

31.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **feeling**;

he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

‘The tathagata exists after death’ does not apply;

‘The tathagata does not exist after death’ does not apply;

‘The tathagata both exists and not exist after death’ does not apply;

‘The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death’ does not apply.

32 That **perception** by which one describing the tathagata might describe him has been abandoned by the tathagata,

cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated

so that it is no more subject to future arising.

32.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **perception**;

he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

'The tathagata exists after death' *does not apply;*

'The tathagata does not exist after death' *does not apply;*

'The tathagata both exists and not exist after death' *does not apply;*

'The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death' *does not apply.*

33 Those **formations** by which one describing the tathagata might describe him
have been abandoned by the tathagata,

cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated

so that they are no more subject to future arising.

33.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **formations**;

he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

'The tathagata exists after death' *does not apply;*

'The tathagata does not exist after death' *does not apply;*

'The tathagata both exists and not exist after death' *does not apply;*

'The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death' *does not apply.*

34 That **consciousness** by which one describing the tathagata might describe him
has been abandoned by the tathagata,

cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated

so that it is no more subject to future arising.

34.2 The tathagata, maharajah, is liberated from reckoning in terms of **consciousness**;

he is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the great ocean.

'The tathagata exists after death' *does not apply;*

'The tathagata does not exist after death' *does not apply;*

'The tathagata both exists and not exist after death' *does not apply;*

'The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after death' *does not apply.*

35 "It is wonderful, bhante! It is amazing, bhante!

How the meaning and the phrasing of both teacher and disciple coincide and agree with each other and do not diverge, that is, in regard to the foremost matter.⁶⁹

Universality of the true Dharma

36 On one occasion, bhante, I approached **the nun Khemā** and asked her about this matter.

The noble lady [ayyā] explained this matter to me in exactly the same terms and phrases that the Blessed One used.

36.2 *It is wonderful, bhante! It is amazing, bhante!*

⁶⁹ *Yatra hi nāma satthu c'eva* [Ee Se; Be Ce satthuno] *sāvikāya ca atthena attho vyañjanena vyañjanam saṃsan-*
dissati samessati na viḥāyissati [Ce Se; Be Ee virodhayissati] *yad idam agga, padasmim*. Comy glosses *na viruddham*
padam (Ce: *viruddha, saddam*) *bhavissati*, "There is no contradictory term" (SA 3:114,2 f). [On *bhavissati* here: SD
36.13 (6.1).] SA glosses *agga, padasmim* simply as "in the teaching" (*desanāya*, SA 3:114,3). In **Saṃñā S** (A 11.7/-
5:320,32), *agga, padasmim* occurs as meaning nirvana (*nibbāne*, AA 5:79).

How the meaning and the phrasing of both teacher and disciple coincide and agree with each other and do not diverge, that is, in regard to the foremost matter.

36.3 Now, bhante, we must go. We are busy and have much to do.”

“Then, maharajah, you may go at your own convenience.”

37 Then King Pasenadi of Kosala, having delighted and rejoiced in the Blessed One’s statement, **[380]** rose from his seat, paid homage to him, and departed, keeping him on his right.

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