

The 11 epithets of the art

Source: **Sīla Sampanna Sutta**, An arhat as embodiment of moral virtue; the 6-stage discipleship; the arhat's powers, SD 59.13 (It 104).¹

2.5 THE 11 EPITHETS OF THE ARHAT [§5]

The Sīla Sampanna Sutta declares that these **arhats**, as awakened teachers, are “of such nature” (*eva, rūpa*) that they are called thus [§5], (explained both by the traditional Commentaries and modern commentary):

2.5 (1) teachers (*sattharo*)

These monks who are “teachers” (*satthā*) are those monks who, having attained virtues mentioned, such as the destruction of all defilements, instruct others by way of encouraging beings in gaining good for themselves here and now.² They are here held up as examples for us.

Following the examples of these arhats, we should at least be diligent in our own wholesome commitment to the Dharma and our practice, and then teach it to others by our own example, thus reminding them that even they, too, as unawakened lay followers are capable of such practice, and need to commit themselves to it for their own sakes.

2.5 (2) caravan leaders [trainers of others] (*sattha, vāhā*)

The “caravan leaders” are awakened teachers who, by the Buddha Dharma, guide us out of the wilderness of birth and so on.³ This epithet reminds us of the Buddha as the trainer of those who can and need to be trained, who would otherwise sink down into their unwholesome ways again.

Seeing the truth and beauty of the Dharma, practising it, we, too, can inspire others to see likewise, and, by their own efforts and vision, head for the path of moral virtue in this life itself.

2.5 (3) conflict-forsakers [abiders in peaceful solitude] (*raṇaṇ, jahā*)

The “conflict forsakers” are those arhat teachers who have given up conflict by way of lust and so on, who show us how to do the same.⁴ In **the Araṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 139), for example, the Buddha teaches on such conflicts (*araṇa*) and how to overcome them.⁵

We learn from our own experience of the unwholesomeness of conflict situations, how they can be resolved and avoided. Using such experiences, in the spirit of the Dharma, such as the teachings of M 139, we educate and inspire others to learn and happily live conflict-free.

2.5 (4) darkness-dispellers (*tamo, nudā*)

The arhats are “darkness-dispellers” in that they have dispelled the darkness of ignorance, and they now instruct us on how to do this for ourselves.⁶ Following the Buddha, they teach us the 4 noble truths as a learning and problem-solving tools. We are taught to recognize **ignorance** as suffering; ignorance makes us compare ourselves with others, thinking that they have worthwhile things or more things: we feel we lack in those things, and so we **crave** for them. This is how suffering arises.

Next, we learn how to **cut down**, even cut off, this craving, by simplifying and beautifying our bodily actions and speech, so that we are happy, and we make others happy, too. This is the kind of

¹ <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/59.13-Sila-Sampanna-S-it104.pdf>

² *Ye yathā, vutta, guṇa, samannāgamena eva, rūpā edisā bhinna, sabba, kilesā bhikkhu, te diṭṭha, dhammikādhi, hitesu sattānaṃ niyojana, vasena anusāsanto satthāro ti.* (ItA 2:155,6-9)

³ *Jāti, kantārādi, nittharaṇato sattha, vāhā ti.* (ItA 2:155,9 f)

⁴ *Rāgādi, raṇānaṃ jahanato jahāpanato ca ranaṇjahā ti.* (ItA 2:155,10 f)

⁵ M 139/3:230-236 (SD 7.8).

⁶ *Avijjā, tamassa vinodanato vinodāpanato ca tamonudā ti.* (ItA 2:155,11 f)

ambience that allows our **minds** to settle in peace and grow in wisdom, leading us to the path of freedom.

2.5 (5) light-makers (*āloka,karā*)

The arhat teachers are “light-makers” on account of their bringing into being the light that is **wisdom**, the radiance that is wisdom, the lamp that is wisdom for their own lives and those of others, that is, in the continuity (*santana*) of our own consciousness (so that we are free from suffering even here and now).⁷

Wisdom (*paññā*) may arise from analysing facts and knowledge, but it fully comes from our own experience of good and bad, wholesome and unwholesome, and knowing how and which to choose. It is a direct understanding of causes and effects, revealing the true nature of reality. Seeing this, we see the nature of self, craving, hate and delusion. The more we renounce these, the closer we approach the path of freedom in this life itself.

2.5 (6) radiance-makers (*obhāsa,karā*)

The arhat teachers bring to us the radiance of the inner light.⁸ This is the mental calm and clarity with which we know, shape and free our mind. This is the kind of light that shows us how our senses (the body) define and limit our knowledge and growth. When we shine this light inwards to examine our own mind, we learn to free it from its hindrances [2.2.5.1].

Even when our mind is limited by our senses, we can still rise above such limitations through mindfulness (*sati*) and full knowing (*sampajañña*). Such mindfulness helps us overcome selfishness that feeds narcissism and self-identity view, doubt and superstition. When we overcome these **3 fetters**, we attain streamwinning [2.3.6.5]. When we further free our mind from the limits of the senses, and attain dhyana, we will then be able to attain non-returning, even arhathood.⁹

2.5 (7) lamp-makers (*pajjota,karā*)

The lamp is a popular sutta simile for wisdom and Dharma practice to gain that wisdom of seeing directly into true reality. The words *pajjota*, *dīpa*, *padīpa*, *ujjota* (not listed in It 104 or its Commentary), all mean “lamp.” Hence, they each have the sense of the light that is the Dharma, that helps us to truly see ourselves as we really are, and to free our mind from greed, hate and delusion.¹⁰

However, the Pali word **dīpa** is polysemous: it has more than one sense, and does *not* always mean “lamp.” This is especially so in the famous phrase in the Buddha’s last advice—*atta,dīpā viharatha*—which is sometimes misinterpreted and mistranslated as “lamp.” The context here, is that of self-reliance through mental cultivation, especially satipatthana.¹¹

The simile of an **island** fits the meditation context better: when we meditate, we become “an island” unto ourself in the sense of letting go of the physical senses (the world), so that we can fully cultivate the mind. When the mind is well cultivated, the flood waters of the hindrances and defilements are, at least temporarily, drained away and we see the other islands as *mountains*!

Even more convincing is evidence from the usage of its Sanskrit form, **dvīpa**,¹² in the phrase, *āmta,dvīpa ... viharatha* (Mvst 1:334), in the Mahāvastu. This sentence can only be translated one way: “Be an island unto yourself.” Hence, in this case, *dīpa* means “island,” not *lamp*, although we can

⁷ *Sa,para,santānesu paññā.āloka,paññā.obhāsa,paññā.pajjotānaṃ karaṇena nibbattanena ālokādi,kārā ti.* (ItA 2:155,12 f); *Anandha,kāra,karo* (Nc:Be 83; Nc:Ee 92).

⁸ *Obhāsa,karā ti obhāsa,jotiṃ karotī ti obhāso,kāro* (Nc:Be 83; Nc:Ee 92).

⁹ See **Samatha & vipassana**, SD 41.1 (2.2.2.4); **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (13); **Samadhi**, SD 33.1a (2.2-2.5); **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5 (9).

¹⁰ *Pajjota,karā ti.* Synonyms: *Dīpa,sadisaraṃ ālokaṃ karotī ti dīpaṇ,karo* (lamp-maker). *Padīpa,sadisaraṃ ālokaṃ karotī ti padīpa,karo* (light-maker). *Ujjota,karo ti patāpa,karo* (torch-maker) (Nc:Be 83; Nc:Ee 92)

¹¹ See eg **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,26), SD 9; esp SD 3.1 (3.3).

¹² Etymologically, *dvīpa* (and *dīpa*) derive from *dvi*, “two,” + *ap*, “water,” meaning “water on both sides (all around),” “an island” (Paṇinī 5.4.74, 4.3.97; SED sv).

append this latter sense by way of augmenting it to our explanation of the benefits of good meditation practice.

2.5 (8) torch-bearers (*ukkā,dhārā*)

The arhats are “torch-bearers,” in the sense of bringing into our lives the torch and the light that is spiritual knowledge (*ñāṇa*); because of holding up for us the radiance of the true teaching.¹³ This imagery of light (the Buddha’s teaching) and seeing (our self-reliance) is highlighted in the refuge-going pericope where it says: “Just as if, bhante, one ... were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes can see forms.”¹⁴

2.5 (9) light-givers (*pabhaṇ,karā*)

The *Cūḷa Niddesa* explains “light-givers” with the term *teja*, which refers to both light and also fire, that is, the heat that burns away the bad and the unwholesome. Its sense overlaps with that of *anubhāva*, power in all its secular and spiritual forms.¹⁵ In an act of truth, we may say, for example, “by the power of the Buddha, the Dharma, the sangha” (*buddhānubhāvena dhammānubhāvena saṅghānubhāvena*) may such and such a good or true state happens or shows itself.¹⁶

2.5 (10) noble ones (*ariyā*)

In the Pali canon, the term *ariya*, “noble,” refers to the 4 kinds of saints (the streamwinners, the once-returners, the non-returners and the arhats, including the Buddha). He also refers to their teachings, especially the noble eightfold path, which is the only way to attain this nobility (*ariyatta*), that is, through awakening. This popular term is specifically used by the Buddha to counter and negate the exploitative brahminical notion that social purity or superiority comes with birth, and that the brahmins are of the highest class. The Buddha declares that nobility (both spiritual purity and social dignity) comes from neither birth nor rituals, but from our own wholesome actions. We become the good and the bad that we do.

The compiler of the Iti,vuttaka Commentary, *Dhammapāla*, gives these 5 explanations (quasi-etymologies) for *ariya*, “the noble.”¹⁷ The arhats are noble:

- (1) on account of their remoteness (or aloofness) from defilements
- (2) on account of being free from posturing in any kind of misfortune
- (3) on account of their postures inviting good fortune
- (4) on account of their being approachable by the world, with its devas,
- (5) on account of their supreme attainment as those with eye, by way of the wisdom-eye and the Dharma-eye [2.5(11)]

2.5 (11) seeing ones [one with the eyes] (*cakkhumanto*)

(1) We have noted above [2.5(10)4] that the **arhats** are those with the wisdom-eye (*paññā,cakkhu*) and the Dharma-eye (*dhamma,cakkhu*) as their supreme attainments.¹⁸ In sutta terms, we may understand the **arhat’s wisdom-eye** as his states of *freedom* (what makes one an arhat), and personal practice and habits; and the **Dharma-eye** is his natural understanding of the

¹³ *Tathā ñāṇ’ukkā,ñāṇa-p,pabhā,dhamm’ukkā,dhamma-p,pabhānaṃ dhāraṇena karaṇena ca ukkā,dhārā ti pi pabhaṇkarā ti pi* (ItA 2:155,14 f)

¹⁴ See eg *Kesaputtiya S* (A 3.65,18), SD 35.4a(2).

¹⁵ *Cūḷa Niddesa: pabhaṇkaro ti tejaṃ,karo* (radiance-maker) (Nc:Be 83; Nc 92). See prec n. (ItA 2:155,15)

¹⁶ On the act of truth (*sacca,kiriya*), see 39.2 (2).

¹⁷ *Ārakattā kilesehi, anaye ‘na iriyanato, aye ca iriyanato paresaṃ ca tathā,bhāve hetu,bhāvato sa,devakena lokena araṇīyato ariyā ti*. (ItA 2:155,16-18)

¹⁸ *Paññā.cakkhu,dhamma.cakkhūnaṃ sātisaṃ,paṭilābhena cakkhumanto ti*. (ItA 2:155,18 f). Comys, however, do not elaborate on these 2 powers, but we can deduce them from the sutta teachings, see seen in (6) below.

Buddha's teachings on true reality as a whole. We will first examine how the idea of "the eye" evolved in terms of spiritual powers, and then close, in subsection (6) here, with a listing of the 10 arhat-powers, which is an elaboration of these 2 "eyes" of the arhat.

The oldest usage of **the "eye"** (*cakkhu*) is probably the one applied to the Buddha's awakening and teaching. This eye imagery, of course, started with "**the eye**" (*cakkhu*) mentioned, for example, in the 1st discourse, **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), where it is said of each of the 4 noble truths:

"This is the noble truth ... bhikshus, regarding what was unheard before, there arose in me vision [the eye], there arose knowledge, there arose wisdom, there arose insight, there arose light" (*idaṃ ... ariya,saccaṃ ti me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhum udapādi ñāṇaṃ udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi*). (S 56.11,9/5:422), SD 1.1

Cakkhu is used here in the figurative sense to mean "**vision**," the sight of the inner eye, insight, a direct vision into true reality; the Buddha's reference to his own awakening.

(2) Based on the idea of the Buddha's awakening is the "eye"¹⁹ into true reality, it is then natural to speak of the Buddha himself as "**the one with the eye**" (*cakkhumā*), "the seeing one, the one with vision," and so on. The imagery of the eye and of sight is very significant in terms of self-awakening. The Bodhisattva, in his 1st 3 sights, sees for himself *decay, disease, death*, and, in his 4th sight, the happy renunciant.²⁰

Then, the Buddha, through his own meditation, gains awakening, when he sees for himself, with his "**wisdom eye**" of meditation, the true nature of *suffering, its arising, its ending and the way to its ending*, as we have just noted. This is his liberating spiritual vision, which we, too, can and must, see for ourself.

(3) In due course, as the nature of the Buddha's awakening becomes more clearly described and better defined in the suttas, various aspects of his wisdom is highlighted in the teachings and narratives. Two of his well known inherent powers (the first canonical; the latter, late canonical)—which gives him the epithet of "**the one with the buddha-eye**" (*buddha,cakkhunā*)—are the following:²¹

- (1) the knowledge of one's diversity in the faculties (*indriya,paro,pariyatta,ñāṇa*), that is, his acumen for reading the level of spiritual maturity or readiness by way of the predominant faculties (*indriya*)²² with which a person is able to grow spiritually or attain the path;²³
- (2) the knowledge of one's intentions and dispositions (*āsayānusaya,ñāṇa*), that is, the good that one is capable of, and the negative tendencies that one is likely to fall for.²⁴

(4) In due course, these 2 buddha-knowledges,²⁵ known as **the buddha-eye** (*buddha,cakkhu*), came to be called his **omniscience** (*sabba-ññūtā,ñāṇa*, "the all-knowing knowledge").²⁶ The buddha

¹⁹ On "the eye," as *cakkhu* and *akkhi*, etc, see SD 53.3 (2.2.2).

²⁰ On the Bodhisattva's 4 visions (*catu pubba,nimitta*) or 4 sights (*catu nimitta*), see **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,2.1-2.14) + SD 49.8b (1.0.4.4 f).

²¹ **Buddha,cakkhunā** ti *indriya,paro,pariyatta,ñāṇena ca āsayānusaya,ñāṇena ca*. (DA 2:467; MA 2:179; SA 1:200; NmA 2:383)

²² These are the 5 faculties: faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom; **Pañc'indriya** (SD 10.4).

²³ M 1:70,14 = S 5:305,6 = A 5:34,14+16 = Pm 2:175,20 = Vbh 318,6; MA 2:30,2-8 etc. CPD: *indriya-paropariyatta*. DP: *indriya-pariya*.

²⁴ Ap 28,25, ApA 234,36; Pm 1:133,4+26, 2:158,8; MA 3:13,9.

²⁵ This attribution of omniscience to the Buddha was prob spurred by influence of the Jains, who claim that their founder, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta (Mahāvīra) [SD 27.1 (2.1.2)] is literally omniscient: SD 10.8 (2); SD 53.3 (2).

²⁶ **Buddha,cakkhunā** ti *indriya,paro,pariyatta,ñāṇena ca āsayānusaya,ñāṇena ca*. *Imesaṃ hi dvinnarṃ ñāṇānaṃ "buddha,cakkhū ti nāmarṃ, sabb'aññūta-ñ,ñāṇassa "samanta,cakkhū ti; tiṇṇarṃ magga,ñāṇānaṃ*

eye (*buddha,cakkhu*) is a name for the knowledge of the degrees of maturity in the faculties of omniscience (or the “knowledge of omniscience”), which is called the universal eye (*samanta,cakkhu*) (S 559d*).²⁷ The knowledge of the 3 lower paths (streamwinning etc) is also called **the Dharma eye** or “Dharma vision” (*dhmma,cakkhu*). Together with the divine eye or clairvoyance (*dibba,-cakkhu*) (S 6.5 + 12.70) and the physical eye (*maṃsa,cakkhu*), these make up **the “5 eyes”** of the Buddha.²⁸

(5) Finally, we have the attribution of **the 10 powers** (*dasa,bala*) to the Buddha, which are essentially, a systematization of the various powers attributed to him in the earlier suttas. **The Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12),²⁹ for example, calls them **the 10 tathagata-powers** (*tathāgata,bala*), which are paraphrased as the following knowledges:³⁰

- (1) the understanding of the possible (*ṭhāna*) and the impossible (*aṭṭhāna*);³¹
- (2) the results of karma undertaken, past, present and future, according to their causes and possibilities;
- (3) the ways leading to all (karmic) destinies (such as subhuman states or happy states);
- (4) the various elements and worlds (the 5 aggregates and the nature of existence);
- (5) the various dispositions of beings (the nature of personal inclinations);
- (6) the spiritual faculties,³² here and beyond, of other beings, other individuals;
- (7) the defilement, the cleansing, and the emergence regarding the attainments, the liberations, the samadhis and the dhyanas;
- (8) he recollects his manifold past lives;
- (9) by his divine eye, he knows the progress of beings according to their karma;
- (10) by his own direct knowledge he has destroyed all his mental influxes³³ (that is, awakened as an arhat).

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“*dhmma,cakkhū ti. Appa,raj,akkhe ti,ādīsū yesaṃ vutta,nayen’eva paññā,cakkhumhi rāg’ādi,rajaṃ appaṃ, te appa,raj’akkhā.* (DA 2:467; MA 2:179; SA 1:200; Nma 2:383)

²⁷ See **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90/2:125-133), SD 10.8 (2), & **Sandaka S** (M 76), SD 35.7.

²⁸ Nm 354-360; Nc 235; SA 1:200. Comy: *Buddha,cakkhu, dhmma,cakkhu, dibba,cakkhu, paññā,cakkhu, samanta,cakkhūti pañcahi cakkhūhi cakkhumatā*, (ItA 1:167; cf SA 2:354; BA 33). Also: *Bhāvatthato pana duvidhaṃ cakkhu: maṃsa,cakkhu ca paññā,cakkhu ca. Tesu buddha,cakkhu, samanta,cakkhu, ñāṇa,cakkhu, dibba,cakkhu, dhmma,cakkhu pañca,vidhaṃ paññā,cakkhu* (ItA 1:99; PmA 1:77); DhsA 305). Also: **Miracles**, SD 27.5a (5.5.1); SD 50.20 comy 14-15 (2).

²⁹ M 12/1:69-73 (SD 49.1): the 10 powers in §§9-21, the 4 intrepidities in §§22-28.

³⁰ For a more detailed study of these powers, see M 12,9-21 + nn (SD 49.1).

³¹ See **Bahu,dhātuka S** (M 115,12-17), SD 29.1a; see also Vbh 400; Dhs 1337. Comy, however, explains it in the Abhidhamma sense, as the knowledge of the correlations btw causes and their results (MA 2:28). See also **Ṭhāna S** (S 52.15/5:304); **(Chakka) Sīha,nāda S** (A 6.64/3:417+419+420); **(Dasaka) Sīha,nāda S** (A 10.21/5:33); **Adhivuttipada S** (A 10.22/5:37); It 123*; Ap 2:460; Pm 2:174, 175, 176.

³² That is, how beings fare according to their 5 faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

³³ The mental influxes (*āsava*) are those of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava’āsava*), (3) ignorance (*avijjā’āsava*) (D 33,1.10(20)/3:216; M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The better known but later set of 4 influxes incl wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), as no. 3 (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937).