

Saññoga Sutta

The Discourse on Bondage | A 7.48/4:57-59

Theme: On sexuality and disengagement

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

1 Origin of sexuality

In the **Aggañña Sutta** (D 27) account of the re-evolution of the world, the beings who are reborn on earth, on gaining physical bodies, begin to see their external differences. This is how the Sutta describes the origin of sexuality amongst humans:

16b And, Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāradvāja), those beings continued for a very long time feeding on this rice as their food and nourishment. And, Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāradvāja), as they did so, their bodies became coarser still and among themselves they noticed even greater differences in their looks. Then the female developed female organs,¹ and the male developed male organs. And the women became excessively preoccupied with the men, and the men with the women. Owing to this excessive preoccupation with each other, lust was aroused, and their bodies burned [with passion]. Because of this burning, *they indulged in sexual activity.* (D 27.16/3:88)

The ideas contained in the underscored sentence are elaborated in the Saññoga Sutta here, where the Buddha explains how sexual feelings arise. This Sutta should be studied with the story of **Vakkali** (on homosexuality),² and the following suttas:

- **Alaggadūpama Sutta** (M 22),³ where Ariṭṭha wrongly thinks that it is all right for monastics to indulge in sex since some of the sensual pleasures are permissible to lay-followers, even those who are stream-winners. The Buddha's reply is very clear:
“Indeed bhikshus, it is impossible that one can indulge in sensual pleasures without sensual desires, without the perception of sensual desire, without the thought of sensual desire!” (M 22.9/1:133)
- **(Taṇhā) Bhikkhuṇī Sutta** (A 4.159), where Ānanda exhorts a love-struck nun how to overcome her lust by sublimating it.⁴
- **Vaṅgīsa Ānanda Sutta** (S 8.4): Ānanda counsels the monk Vaṅgīsa when he confesses being troubled by sexual thoughts.⁵
- **Subhā Therīgāthā** (Thī 366-399 = SD 20.7): A rogue youth tries to seduce the nun Subhā, but she successfully rejects and instructs him. Subhā is a classic example of one who “has risen above her womanliness” [§2.4].

2 Abnormal sexuality

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that although this sutta discusses what in modern lingo is called “heterosexuality,” the analysis here should be understood as referring to human sexuality as a whole, that is, including homosexuality and any form of sexual desire. The remarkable **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda Sutta** (D 26), for example, makes this prophecy:

And among the generation whose life-span is five hundred years, three things increased:
abnormal lust, uncontrolled greed and deviant practices, and in consequence people's life-span

¹ DA: That is, those who were women in previous lives. Conversely, the others were men in their past lives.

² See **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:119-124) = SD 8.8; see also foll (2).

³ M 22/1:130-142) = SD 3.13.

⁴ A 4.159/2:144-146 = SD 10.14. Ānanda explains how the body arises through food, through craving, through the sexual act, and that the last is the “bridge” to rebirth.

⁵ S 8.4/1:188 = SD 16.12. Ānanda admonishes Vaṅgīsa to “disown” the lustful perceptions by letting go of the lustful sign (*nimitta*), by not “owning” it (by regarding it as “other”), as suffering and not self. Ānanda also mentions the mindfulness of the body and letting go of conceit (not measuring ourselves against others).

decreased, their beauty decreased, and as a result, the children of those whose life-span has been five hundred years live, some for two hundred and fifty years, some for only two hundred years.

(D 26.17/3:70) = SD 36.10

According to the Dīgha Commentary, here “**abnormal lust**” (*adhamma, rāga*) refers to incest, that is, “lust between mother and mother’s sister and father’s sister and maternal uncle’s wife and other such improper situations” (*mātā mātucchā pitucchā mātulanī ti ādike ayutta-ṭ, thāne rāgo*); “**neurotic desire**” (*visama, lobha*) refers to excessive greed by way of consuming things (*paribhoga, yuttesu pi thānesu atibalava, lobho*, in other words, excessive materialism and consumerism); and “**deviant practices**” (*micchā, dhamma*) refer to sexuality “between men and men, women with women.” (DA 3:853). In short, crowded living conditions (such as heavily urbanized cities) are likely to conduce to cases of incest, consumerism, and homosexuality. It should, however, be noted that these commentarial notions are not found in the Canon, or at least not so distinctly expressed.

Taken in their proper perspectives, these statements on sexuality refer to their abnormal (*adhamma*) manifestation, that is, going against the third precept, which basically is about respect for the freedom, for the person of another and for family and society. The fact that the third precept is against “sexual misconduct” (*kāmesu micchācāra*) conversely means that there is “proper sexual conduct,” or the positive precept of contentment, that is, being committed to one’s partner and the cultivation of lovingkindness and spiritual friendship—or, if one chooses, a celibate life (*brahma, cariya*) whether short-term, long-term or life-long.

3 A Buddhist notion of homosexuality

This sutta gives some insight into the psychological nature of homosexuality. The search for satisfaction through a partner (of whatever sex) is related to one’s conscious or unconscious identification with the characteristics or behaviour of one’s own perceived sex (be it male or female). The word “sexuality,” as such, refers not to one’s physical features but to one’s *self-love*.

A **woman** (in a physical sense), fixated on her own sexuality, compares herself with another’s sexuality, and similarly fixates on the other’s sexuality through unwise consideration (*ayoniso manasikāra*), that is, being not aware of or rejecting (repressing) the fleeting, unsatisfactory and insubstantial nature of the experience. A **man** similarly fixates on his own sexuality, compares himself with another’s sexuality falls into the same condition.

In both cases—the woman or the man—when the person sexually fixates on another person’s sexuality, the former may often enough project onto the latter both female and male sexuality. In other words, this is a case of **gender-fused fixation**. This is evident, for example, in any homosexual relationship, especially of a sustained nature, where one partner invariably plays a “male” role and the other a “female” role. The relationship fails when one partner fails in this “half-role”: the relationship then is incomplete.

In other words, in the case of a man who loves himself in a fixated manner, that is, narcissistically, he would as such love his body, that is, its physical features. In other words, unwittingly, he has taken on the mind of a woman, which then goes on to seek another man for sexual satisfaction. Understandably, such a relationship as a rule does not work because of one’s self-love.

As in any “normal” personal relationship, the homosexual couple will only be happy together when this partnership rises above merely satisfying sexual desire towards wholesome higher goals (especially aesthetic or spiritual ones)—in other words, when they go beyond treating one another as mere objects of sexuality (which also applies to a heterosexual relationship), but regard one another as true individuals capable of personal development and spiritual liberation.

On a more general level, any search for union externally implies that one is still caught up in the limitations of one’s own gender identity, as **Analayo** notes,

This shows that the affective investment inherent in identifying with one’s gender role and behaviour forms an important link in the arising of sensual desire. In contrast, *arahants*, who have eradicated even the subtlest trace of identification, are unable to engage in sexual intercourse.⁶
(2003:194)

4 Individuation

Some concepts of **Carl Gustav Jung** (1875-1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology,⁷ may be helpful in explaining the teachings of the Saññoga Sutta in contemporary language. According to Jung, the anima (Latin, meaning both “soul” and “mind”), refers to the feminine inner personality, as present in the unconscious of the male. It can be identified as all of the unconscious feminine psychological qualities that a male possesses. The anima is usually an aggregate of a man’s mother but may also incorporate aspects of sisters, aunts, and female teachers.⁸ The animus, on the other hand, is the male analogue of anima, that is, a set of unconscious *masculine* qualities and potentials. The shadow is whatever that is in our minds that are unconscious, repressed, undeveloped and denied.⁹ The shadow is an archetype,¹⁰ and is present in everyone.

The unindividuated man—through *anima projection*—identifies with what he regards as symbolically masculine. He develops these potentialities and to some extent integrates their unconscious influences into his conscious personality. However, he does not recognize qualities that are symbolically feminine as part of his own personality, and instead projects them onto women. He may project his anima—unconscious female psychological qualities—onto those women with whom he is emotionally involved, either positive or negative manner. *Infatuation* (“love at first sight”) and *compulsive possessiveness* are the signs of anima projection.

Since the unindividuated man has not consciously developed any of his symbolically feminine qualities (eg feeling, relationship, and sensitivity), his personality is likely to fall into “anima possession,” so that his emotions and behavior are acted out in a regressive (childish or immature) manner that are apparent to others but not to him.

The unindividuated woman—through *animus projection*—identifies with those personal qualities that are symbolically feminine. She develops these potentialities and to some extent integrates their unconscious influences into her conscious personality. However, she does not recognize qualities that are symbolically masculine as part of her own personality, but instead projects them onto men. She may project her animus—unconscious male qualities and potentials—onto those men with whom she is emot-

⁶ Eg D 3:133. The eradication of sensual desire has already taken place at the level of non-return. (Anālayo’s fn)

⁷ Jung’s special approach to understanding the mind is through exploring the world of dreams, art, mythology, philosophy and religion. He freely reinterpreted eastern religions (incl Buddhism) to explain and support his theories. Among his notable contributions are the concepts of the psychological archetype, the collective unconscious, and his theory of synchronicity.

⁸ In a film interview, Jung was not clear if the anima/animus archetype was totally unconscious, calling it “a little bit conscious and unconscious.” In the interview, he gave an example of a man who falls head over heels in love, then later in life regrets his blind choice as he finds that he has married his own anima—the unconscious idea of the feminine in his mind, rather than the woman herself.

⁹ In Jungian psychology, **the shadow** is a part of the unconscious mind that is mysterious and often disagreeable to the conscious mind, but which is also relatively close to the conscious mind. It may partly be our link to our animal nature, which is superseded during early childhood by the conscious mind. Then it goes on to hold thoughts that are repressed by the conscious mind. According to Jung, the shadow is instinctive and irrational, but not necessarily bad, even when it appears so. It can be both ruthless in conflict and empathetic in friendship. It is important as a source of hunches, for understanding of one’s own more inexplicable actions and attitudes (and of others’ reactions), and for learning how to accept and integrate the more problematic or troubling aspects of our personality.

¹⁰ An **archetype** is a generic, idealized model of a person, object, or concept, from which similar instances are derived, copied, patterned, or emulated. Archetypes found in literature are generally called *stereotypes* (a personality type repeatedly observed, esp an oversimplification), but in a strict sense, an archetype is like a “father” figure or a “mother” figure. In psychology, an archetype is a model of a person, personality, or behavior.

ionally involved, either in a positive or negative manner. *Infatuation* (“love at first sight”) and *compulsive possessiveness* are the signs of anima projection.

Similarly, since the unindividuated woman has not consciously developed any of her symbolically masculine qualities, such as positive feelings, relatedness with others, his personality is likely to fall into “animus possession,” so that she appears opinionated, argumentative, or domineering to others, but she does not notice it herself.

By **individuation** (in Jungian terms) is meant the harmonizing of our anima (for a man) or our animus (for a woman), coming to terms with our *shadow*, and so realizing our *self*.¹¹ We can overcome or avoid the anima/animus possession and remove projections by integrating the contrasexual archetype into our consciousness, so that we develop wholesome qualities beyond only those symbolic of our sexes. The individuated man is able to tap the depths of feeling, relationship and sensitivity, while the individuated woman is erudite, self-reliant, emotionally independent.¹²

5 Nature of sexuality

Three points should be made clear here. First, that this is not a discourse against sex, but merely an analysis of the psychological process through which sexuality or the desire for sex arises. This is clearly stated in the **Nibbedhika Pariyāya Sutta** (A 6.63), with which the Saññoḡa Sutta should be studied:

3b There are these five cords of sensual pleasures (*kāma,guṇa*):

Forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Sounds cognizable by the ear that are...delightful;

Smells cognizable by the nose that are...delightful;

Tastes cognizable by the tongue that are...delightful;

Touches cognizable by the body that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful.

—**Bhikshus, these are not sensual objects (*kāma*), but in the noble discipline, they are called “cords of sensual desire” (*kāma,guṇa*).**¹³

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:

There is no sensuality in what is beautiful (*citra*) in the world.

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:

What is beautiful in the world remains as they are.

So here the wise remove the desire for them.¹⁴ (A 6.63.3/3:411) = SD 6.11

An almost identical verse (without line c) is found in **the Na Santi Sutta** (S 1.34/1:22). **The Indriya Bhāvanā Sutta** (M 152) similarly teaches the mastery over one’s sense-faculties rather than removing the

¹¹ **Eric Pettifor:** “An individuated individual is one in whom the unconscious and conscious are harmonized, and ego is decentralized (prerequisite and consequence). This is achieved by getting in touch with the unconscious, without allowing the ego to be overwhelmed by it. Ego has an explicit value. Functions which exist below the threshold of consciousness need to be brought above that threshold, repressed shadow contents need to be acknowledged, and the major archetypes of the collective unconscious (shadow, anima/animus, self) need to be discovered and related to, so that their influence can be consciously mediated, their concerns addressed, since they are quasi-autonomous subpersonalities in their own right. Individuation is a life long process which is never really finished, though minimum prerequisites are achievable.” (Eric Pettifor, “Becoming whole: Applied Psychoses,” in *Analytical Psychology and Zen Buddhism*. 1995): http://pandc.ca/?cat=carl_jung&page=becoming_whole.

¹² See **Emotional independence** = SD 40a.8.

¹³ *Api ca kho bhikkhave n’ete kāmā, kāma,guṇā nam’ete ariyassa vinaye vuccanti*. This is an enigmatic statement whose meaning is clarified in the verse that follows. See foll n.

¹⁴ This verse, which explains the previous prose sentence, “plays upon the double meaning of *kāma*, emphasizes that purification is to be achieved by mastering the defilement of sensuality, not by fleeing [from] sensually enticing objects.” (A:ÑB 1999:302 n34)

sense-objects (which have the natural right to be where they are). When the brahmin student Uttara tells the Buddha that his teacher, Pārāsariya’s method of developing the faculties is by way of not seeing forms with the eyes, and not listening to sounds with the ear, the Buddha replies:

In that case, Uttara, a blind and a deaf man would have developed faculties, according to what the brahmin Pārāsariya says! For a blind man does not see forms with the eye, and a deaf man does not hear sounds with the ear. (M 152.2/3:298 = SD 17.13)

Secondly, the best way to train our faculties is not to think in terms of like and dislike, but to be fully aware, when the world of the senses impinges upon us.¹⁵ This teaching is summarized in this well known pericope, that is, the Buddha’s teaching to such disciples as Bāhiya Dārucīriya (U 8) and Māluṅkyaputta (S 35.95):

In what is seen, there will only be the seen.
 In what is heard, there will only be the heard.
 In what is sense, there will only be the sensed [smelt, tasted, touched].
 In what is known, there will only be the known [cognized]. (U 8; S 35.95.13/4:73)

The third point is the most important, and is clearly evident from the Saññoga Sutta, namely, that self-love is the basis for sexuality. We see here how a woman delights in her own physical attributes and is then aroused by and desires for another “in terms a man’s faculty” seeking union, that is, the appropriation of what she considers lacking in herself. A man who delights in his own physical attributes is similarly aroused and desires for another “in terms a woman’s faculty” seeking union, that is, the appropriation of what he considers lacking in himself. In Mallikā’s words, “There is no one dearer than oneself” (*n’atthi koc’añño attanā piyataro*, S 1:75).¹⁶

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The Discourse on Bondage

A 7.48/4:57-59

[57]

1 Bhikshus, I will teach you a Dharma exposition on bondage and freedom from bondage. Listen to it, bhikshus, pay close attention, I will speak.

And what, bhikshus, is the exposition on bondage and freedom from bondage.

BONDAGE

Womanliness

2.1 A woman considers her own womanly faculty,¹⁷ her own womanly ways,¹⁸ her womanly looks,¹⁹ her womanly pride,²⁰ her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments.²¹ She is aroused by this and delights in it.²²

¹⁵ M 152.11-16/3:301.

¹⁶ See Lily de Silva 1978:126 f.

¹⁷ “Own womanly faculty,” *ajjhataṃ itth’indriyam*, lit “internal womanly sense-organ”. Here referring to the physical features that make one a woman, that is, “womanliness”. The term “femininity” usually refers to the psychological aspect of a woman, related to Jung’s notions of *anima* and *animus*.

¹⁸ “womanly ways,” *itthi,kutta*, eg seductiveness, coquetry, and wiles (AA 4:32). Many of such terms in this sentence and their cognates below are in the Pali singular, which however need to be rendered idiomatically into the English plural.

2.2 Thus aroused, she considers another²³ in terms of a man's faculty,²⁴ his manly ways, his manly looks,²⁵ his manly pride,²⁶ his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. She is aroused by this and delights in it.

2.3 Thus aroused, she desires external union,²⁷ and she desires the (physical) pleasure and (mental) joy arising on account of such a union. Bhikshus, attached to²⁸ her womanliness, she enters into union with men.

2.4 In this way, bhikshus, a woman does not rise above her womanliness.

Manliness

3.1 A man considers his own manly faculty,²⁹ his manly ways, his manly looks, his manly pride, his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. He is aroused by this and delights in it.

3.2 Thus aroused, he contemplates another in terms of a woman's faculty, her womanly ways, her womanly looks, her womanly pride, her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments. He is aroused by this and delights in it.

3.3 Thus aroused, he desires external union,³⁰ and he desires the pleasure and joy arising on account of such a union. Bhikshus, attached to his manliness, he enters into union with women. [58]

3.4 In this way, bhikshus, a man does not rise above his manliness.

FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE

3.5 And what, bhikshus, is freedom from bondage?

Rising above womanliness

4.1 A woman does *not* think about herself by way of her womanly faculty, her womanly ways, her womanly looks, her womanly pride, her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments. She is not aroused by them³¹ and delights not in them.

4.2 Thus unaroused, she does not contemplate another in terms of a man's faculty, his manly ways, his manly looks, his manly pride, his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. She is unaroused by them and delights not in them.

¹⁹ "womanly looks," *itth'ākappa*, ie her physical looks and how she is dressed (AA 4:32).

²⁰ "womanly pride," *itthi,vidha*, ie her pride and conceit (AA 4:32).

²¹ "womanly adornments," *itth'alaṅkāra*. "adorning the head, the neck, the hands, the feet, the hips (*kaṭṭi*)" (*sīsū-pago gīvūpago hatthūpago pādūpago kaṭṭupago*, V 4:340)

²² "She is aroused by this..." Here I have rendered *tattha* in the English singular, since such an unskillful person would attend to the features mentioned. In the cognate sentences below [4-5] *tattha* is rendered in the English plural, ie referring to the various physical features, to which the skillful person remains unattracted.

²³ "Another," *bahiddhā*, lit "outside (of herself)".

²⁴ "Manly faculty," *puris'indriya*, lit "manly sense-organ". Here referring to the physical features that make one a man, that is, "manliness." The term "masculinity" usually refers to the psychological aspect of a man. Note here in the sutta that the reference is "in terms of a man's faculty," and not "in another man." This is very significant as this reflects the fact that those sexually attracted to others, consciously or unconsciously, may look for such features that excite them in either sex.

²⁵ "Manly looks," *puris'ākappa*, ie his physical looks and how he is dressed.

²⁶ "Manly pride," *purisa,vidha*, ie his pride and conceit.

²⁷ "She desires external union," *bahiddhā saṃyogaṃ ākaṅkhati*. Notice here neither man nor woman is mentioned.

²⁸ "Attached to," *sattā* (V 1:185; D 2:246; Nc 23, 34; Dh 342; J 1:376).

²⁹ "His own manly faculty," *ajjhataṃ puris'indriyaṃ*, lit "internal manly sense-organ."

³⁰ "She desires external union," *bahiddhā saṃyogaṃ ākaṅkhati*. Notice here neither man nor woman is mentioned.

³¹ "She is unaroused by them..." Here I have rendered *tattha* in the English plural, since such a skillful person would not attend to any of the features mentioned. In the cognate sentences above [2-3] *tattha* is rendered as "this," ie referring to the attachment to the "pleasure and joy" attending to their preoccupation with sexuality.

4.3 Thus unaroused, she does not desire external union (with a man), and she does not desire the pleasure and joy arising on account of such a union. Bhikshus, detached from³² her womanliness, she does not enter into union with men.

4.4 In this way, bhikshus, a woman rises above her womanliness.

Rising above manliness

5.1 A man does *not* think about himself in terms of his own manly faculty, his manly ways, his manly looks, his manly pride, his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. He is not aroused by them and delights not in them.

5.2 Thus unaroused, he does not contemplate another in terms of a woman's faculty, her womanly ways, her womanly looks, her womanly pride, her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments. He is unaroused by them and delights not in them.

5.3 Thus unaroused, he does not desire external union (with a woman), and he does not desire the pleasure and joy arising on account of such a union. Bhikshus, detached from his manliness, he does not enter into union with women.

5.4 In this way, [59] bhikshus, a man rises above his manliness.

5.5 This, bhikshus, is freedom from bondage.

5.6 This, bhikshus, is the exposition on bondage and freedom from bondage.³³

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³² “detached to,” *asattā*. Cf “attached to” (*sattā*) in the cognate sentences above [§§2.3, 3.3].

³³ Further see **Sexuality: A Buddhist perspective** = SD 31.7.