

Acchariya Sutta 2

Dutiya Acchariya Sutta (Tathāgata)

The Second Discourse on Marvels (the Tathagata)

A 4.128/2:131 f

Theme: Four marvels associated with the Buddha's arising

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1 Key teachings

The Acchariya Sutta 2 (A 4.128) is a brief statement on four benefits attending the Buddha's presence. It is a teaching on the Buddha's miracle of instruction, where it is said that after listening to the Buddha's teaching,

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| (1) those attached to the world | let go of their worldly attachments (<i>ālaya</i>); |
| (2) the conceited | let go of their conceit (<i>māna</i>); |
| (3) the unpeaceful | turn to peace (<i>opasamika</i>); |
| (4) those with ignorance | destroy their ignorance (<i>avijjā</i>). (A 4.128/2:131 f) |

The general idea is that when the Buddha's teaching is available, we would be more willing and able to work towards bettering ourselves. The Buddha acts as a sort of spiritual role model.

These four qualities are probably an ancient formulation of what later evolved into the four "floods" (*ogha*) or "yokes" (*yoga*), a set that is found both in the Nikāyas and the Abhidhamma (where they are called the four "influxes," *āsava*),¹ namely,

- (1) the influx of sense-desire (*kām'āsava*),
- (2) the influx of (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'āsava*),
- (3) the influx of views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), and
- (4) the influx of ignorance (*avijj'āsava*)

(D 16.1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937)

An even older list is perhaps the set of three influxes—of sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), of existence (*bhav'āsava*), and of ignorance (*avijj'āsava*)²—which are essentially the same as the 3 graspings (*ti, gaha*) of craving (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*) and views (*diṭṭh*), on account of which arise, respectively, the notions "this is mine," "this I am," and "this is my self".³

When these four negative qualities are removed from us, we become arhats, fully awakened beings like the Buddha. Technically, any one of these four are a synecdoche for the set of four, each of them simply emphasizing the aspect of our personality that is hindering our breakthrough into awakening. "Attachment" refers to clinging to what are desirable within ourselves, fearing to lose them; "conceit" refers to measuring others in terms of those qualities and looking up to those whom we perceive as having more of such qualities; being "unpeaceful" is the feeling of restless discontent despite our "having" qualities we see as desirable; and "ignorance" is the root situation that keeps us in such a cycle, reinforcing it.

We will now briefly examine each of the four negative qualities and their remedies.

¹ On the influxes, see **Sabbāsava S** (M 2/1:6-12) = SD 30.3 (1.3); see also BDict: āsava.

² D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63.

³ See **Vatthūpama S** (M 7.18/1:38) = SD 28.12.

2 Ālaya

In the Suttas, the term *ālaya* is mostly used in a psychological sense, meaning “attachment,” but in the Commentaries it is more commonly used in its literal and physical sense, as an “abode,”⁴ which is the sense more commonly used in post-Buddha Indian Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. There is also some significant overlapping, for example, between the early Buddhist and Yogācāra usages of the term *ālaya*.⁵ The Yogācāra terms *āśraya, parāvṛtti* and *bīja, parāvṛtti*, for example, are practically identical in sense to the Pali terms *ālaya, samugghāta*, the “uprooting of *ālaya*,”⁶ and *khīna, bīja*, one whose “seeds of defilement are destroyed,”⁷ this latter a common epithet of the arhat.⁸

The Saṃyutta Commentary explains *ālaya* objectively as “the five cords of sense-pleasure” (*pañca kāma, guṇa*),⁹ called “attachment” (*ālaya*), because it is to these pleasurable sense-objects that they adhere to again and again;¹⁰ and subjectively, as the 108 mental examinations drive by craving (*taṇhā, vicarita*),¹¹ since it is these thoughts that adhere to their objects.¹² (SA ***)

The 108 mental examinations comprise all the possible in which our minds look for what is seen as desirable in ourselves (internal aggregates) and in others, and such thoughts in terms of the past, the future and the present. Such quests and investigations are rooted in a sense of lack, an inner emptiness that thirsts to be filled.

True detachment (*anālaya*; called *viveka* in dhyana pericopes) is the letting go of attachment to worldly things, that is, worldly pleasures. This can only effectively happen when we have tasted a pleasure that is greater than worldly pleasure. This can happen, for example, with the attainment of the first dhyana, as stated in this well known pericope, as found in the Tevijja Sutta (D 13):

Quite detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental states, he enters and remains in the first dhyana, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of detachment [ie samādhi]. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the zest and happiness born of detachment (*viveka, ja*).

(D 13.75/1:73) = SD 1.8

3 Conceit

Outside of a Dharma-centered community, people tend to live in crowds and tribe, guided and goaded by group instincts. Such group instincts can range from innocuous, even frivolous, “fashions” (clothing, electronic gadgets, etc) to violent mutually destructive mass murders and wars. On a tribal level, one community measures itself against another in terms of differences, and excludes those who are perceived as being different.

On a personal basis, it is even more complicated, as we measure others in terms of desirable qualities, and looking up to those whom we perceive as having more of such qualities; feeling superior to those who are perceived to lack such qualities; or regarding as “equals” those we perceive to be as good as we are.

⁴ See **The Unconscious** = SD 17.8b (4.3).

⁵ See esp **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 26.19/1:167) = SD 1.11; **Āyācana S** (S 6.1.3/1:136) = SD 12.2. In Mahāyāna, saṅgraha, Asaṅga qu a Śrāvaka, yāna text, identified by Lamotte (Mahāys:L 26) as Acchariya S 2 (A 4.128.1/-2:131) = SD 31.6 Intro.

⁶ A 2:34,25 = 3:35,30 = It 88,5 (≠ V 3:20,4 = 111,29 ≠ J 5:483,7). See CPD sv for more refs.

⁷ Sn 235.

⁸ See further **The Unconscious** = SD 17.8b (4.3).

⁹ “Five cords of sense-desire” (*pañca kāma, guṇa*): see **Mahā Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 13.7/1:85) = SD 6.9; **Vammika S** (M 29.46/1:114) = SD 28.13; **Bahu, vedanīya S** (M 59.6/1:398) = SD 30.4; see also M 1:92, 454.

¹⁰ See **Āyācana S** (S 6.12.3/1:136) = SD 12.2.

¹¹ See (**Vicarita**) **Taṇhā S** (A 4.199.1b/2:211-213) = SD 16.2.

¹² See also **Anusaya** = SD 31.3 (2), The latent tendency of sensual lust.

This measuring of self against others arise from clinging to the notion of duality, that is, there is an “I” and “other” beyond the mere conventional usage of the words. In colloquial terms, this is the “judgemental” mentality, or the “this is my personality” attitude, that is, we measure ourselves against others following these three discriminations,¹³ along with their psychological cognates:

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| (1) “I am better than...” | (<i>seyyo’ham asmī ti</i>) | superiority complex; |
| (2) “I am equal with [the same as]...” | (<i>sadiso’ham asmī ti</i>) | equality complex; and |
| (3) “I am inferior to...” | (<i>hīno’ham asmī ti</i>) | inferiority complex. |

In the **(Māna) Soṇa Sutta** (S 22.49), the Buddha declares that recluses and brahmins who fail to see the impermanence, unsatisfactory and changing nature of the five aggregates, on the basis of form, feeling, perception, formations or consciousness compare themselves as being better than, or equal to, or inferior to one another.¹⁴ When we understand that the aggregates are ever-changing, and our perceptions are mind-made, we let go of all conceit.

4 Lack of stillness

Being “unpeaceful” refers to the feeling of restless discontent on two counts: firstly, not getting what we desire; and secondly, despite having found what we desire, we still nurse as sense of dissatisfaction. The point is that nothing external can really satisfy us; so we are caught up in an endless loop of the snake painfully biting its own tail.

Such a constant lack of inner stillness is deeply rooted in our wrong view of existence (*bhava*). The word *bhava* is usually translated as “existence,” as in “the desire for existence” (*bhava, taṇhā*), especially that rooted in *eternalism*, that there such a thing as “eternal life”; or in the desire for non-existence” (*vibhava, taṇhā*), a belief rooted in *annihilationism*. Those who believe in “eternal life” usually also believe in a tribal God idea, that is, only those who believe in *their* definition of God would have eternal life. Annihilationism, on the other hand, is basically the view that this is our only life, a belief that has a number of ethical problems (such as that our actions have no moral consequences).¹⁵ *Bhava*, however, can also be translated as “becoming,” in the sense of desiring to *become* this or that, an over-ambitiousness, instead of working for true happiness. In simple terms, this is an unbridled desire for self-promotion. **The Sabb’āsava Sutta** (M 2) gives us a good idea of how, on account of wrong attention, wrong views reinforce our latent tendency for existence by way of the “sixteen doubts,” relating to our personal state, such as what was I in the past, what will I be, or what am I right now?¹⁶

The Sabb’āsava Sutta goes on to say that to give up these sixteen doubts, we should avoid wrong attention (not to pay attention to unwholesome states), and should practise wise attention. This is best done in reflecting on the four noble truths. In doing so, we would be able to break the first three fetters, namely, those of the self-identity view, spiritual doubt, and attachment to rituals and vows, which makes us streamwinners.¹⁷

In Greek mythology, the evil king Sisyphus, whose insatiable power for life and power leads him to cheat even the gods, is punished by the gods to push a huge boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll down again, and to repeat the task for eternity. The French author, Albert Camus, in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), sees Sisyphus as personifying the absurdity of human life, but concludes, “one must

¹³ The 3 conceits are also called “the three discriminations” (*tayo vidhā*): see **Samiddhi S** (S 1.20/1:12) = SD 21.4. The 3 are listed at: D 33.1.10(23)/3:216; S 22.49/3:48 (×4), 35.108/4:88 (×5), 45.162.5:56, 46.41/5:98; A 4.185/2:176 f (×2); Tha 1079; Nm 1:80 (×4), 107, 194, 195, 196, 244, 251, 2:350, 413, 426 (×3), 443.

¹⁴ S 22.49/3:48 = SD 31.13. See also **Anusaya** = SD 31.3 (3), The latent tendency of conceit.

¹⁵ See **Anusaya** = SD 31.3 (6.2). See also **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65) = SD Intro (5.2)/

¹⁶ For the full list of the “16 doubts,” see **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2.7 f/1:8) = SD 30.3, **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38.23/1:265) & **Paccaya S** (S 12.20/2:26 f). In **Paccaya S** (S 12.20), it is said that one who sees dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*) with right wisdom would not speculate in these ways (S 12.20.18-20/2:26 f). See **Bhadd’eka, ratta S** (M 131) = SD 8.9 Intro (3).

¹⁷ M 2.11/1:9 = SD 30.3.

imagine Sisyphus happy” as “The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart.” Like Sisyphus, we seem to enjoy the situations we are repeatedly caught up in, even though we are not really happy with them, or they are not beneficial for us. When the Buddha arises in the world with his teachings, we are more easily awakened to the true reality of such situations.¹⁸

5 Ignorance

There are two aspects of ignorance:

- (1) *lack of knowledge* of true reality (eg as defined in the four noble truths); and
- (2) *mistaking false knowledge* for true knowledge, that is, a misunderstanding of the four noble truths.

Ignorance (*avijjā*) is often defined as the lack of understanding of the four noble truths,¹⁹ which is the most basic condition for samsaric existence. At its very root, is the lack of understanding and acceptance of the *impermanence* of all existence. Since things are impermanent, they can never give us full satisfaction. But this suffering (or lack of satisfaction) is not the result of those things in themselves, but arises from our *craving* for them.

Ignorance, or more specifically spiritual ignorance, is often defined as the lack of understanding of the four noble truths,²⁰ which is the most basic condition for samsaric existence. Ignorance, as such, is the root condition that keeps us in a cyclic life. We are caught in a habitual rut of thinking, speaking and doing things in a fixed way that brings little, if any, good, much less the best, in us.²¹

The second kind of ignorance is better known as “delusion” (*moha*). This distinction is useful because ignorance, as a latent tendency, embodies both a sort of a blindness or not knowing the four truths, or a kind of blurred or distorted vision of them. It is this second form of ignorance, as *delusion (moha)*, that is active on a pre-conscious level, which moves us to break any of the precepts or commit an unwholesome act.²²

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¹⁸ See *Yodh’ājīva S* (S 42.3) = SD 23.3 Intro. See also *Anusaya* = SD 31.3 (6), The latent tendency of the lust for existence.

¹⁹ (*Paṭicca,samuppāda*) *Vibhaṅga S* (S 12.2/2:4) = SD 5.15; Vbh 135. See also (*Pubbaṅgamā*) *Avijjā S* (S 45.1/5:1); (*Āhāra*) *Avijjā S* (A 10.61/5:116) = SD 31.10]. Cf def of *right view* as the understanding of the 4 noble truths: *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S* (D 22.21/2:311 f) = SD 13.2; *Sacca Vibhaṅga S* (M 141.24/3:251) = SD 11.11. Cf *Mahā Cattārisaka S* (M 117/3:71-78) = SD 6.10;

²⁰ (*Paṭicca,samuppāda*) *Vibhaṅga S* (S 12.2/2:4) = SD 5.15; Vbh 135. See also (*Pubbaṅgamā*) *Avijjā S* (S 45.1/5:1); (*Āhāra*) *Avijjā S* (A 10.61/5:116) = SD 31.10]. Cf def of *right view* as the understanding of the 4 noble truths: *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S* (D 22.21/2:311 f) = SD 13.2; *Sacca Vibhaṅga S* (M 141.24/3:251) = SD 11.11. Cf *Mahā Cattārisaka S* (M 117/3:71-78) = SD 6.10;

²¹ See *Anusaya* = SD 31.3 (1.4).

²² See also *Anusaya* = SD 31.3 (7), The latent tendency of ignorance.

The Second Discourse on Marvels (the Tathagata)

A 4.128/2:131 f

1a Bhikshus, with the arising of the Tathagata, the arhat [worthy], the fully self-awakened one, four marvellous and wonderful things occur.

What are the four?

1b (1) People find joy in attachment (*ālaya*), delight in attachment, rejoice in attachment.

But when the Dharma of non-attachment (*anālaya*) is taught by the Tathagata, people wish to listen to it, lend ear to it, apply their minds to it for the sake of true knowledge.

Bhikshus, with the arising of the Tathagata, the arhat [worthy], the fully self-awakened one, this is the first marvellous and wonderful thing that occurs.²³

2 (2) People find joy in conceit (*māna*), delight in conceit, rejoice in conceit. [132]

But when the Dharma of removal of conceit (*māna vinaya*) is taught by the Tathagata, people wish to listen to it, lend ear to it, apply their minds to it for the sake of true knowledge.

Bhikshus, with the arising of the Tathagata, the arhat [worthy], the fully self-awakened one, this is the second marvellous and wonderful thing that occurs.²⁴

3 (3) People find joy in restlessness (*anupāsama*), delight in restlessness, rejoice in restlessness.

But when the Dharma of stillness (*opasamika*) is taught by the Tathagata, people wish to listen to it, lend ear to it, apply their minds to it for the sake of true knowledge.

Bhikshus, with the arising of the Tathagata, the arhat [worthy], the fully self-awakened one, this is the first marvellous and wonderful thing that occurs.²⁵

4 (4) People live in ignorance (*avijjā*), overwhelmed by ignorance.

But when the Dharma of removal of ignorance (*avijjā vinaya*) is taught by the Tathagata, people wish to listen to it, lend ear to it, apply their minds to it for the sake of true knowledge.

Bhikshus, with the arising of the Tathagata, the arhat [worthy], the fully self-awakened one, this is the second marvellous and wonderful thing that occurs.²⁶

5 Bhikshus, with the arising of the Tathagata, the arhat [worthy], the fully self-awakened one, these four marvellous and wonderful things occur.

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²³ See Intro (2).

²⁴ See Intro (3).

²⁵ See Intro (4).

²⁶ See Intro (5).