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(Pāda) Doṇa Sutta

The Doṇa Discourse (on the Footprint) | A 4.36/2:37 f

Theme: The Buddha is the only one of a kind

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1 Versions of the SuttaScholars have identified five versions of the (Pāda) Doṇa Sutta, that is,

(1) Pali	(Pāda) Doṇa Sutta	A 4.36/2:37 f;
(2) Chinese	輪相經 <i>lúnxiàng jīng</i> ¹	SĀ 101 = T2.99.28a20-28b18; ²
(3) Chinese	輪相經 <i>lúnxiàng jīng</i> ³	SĀ2 267 = T2.100.467a26-b24;
(4) Chinese	(sutra untitled) ⁴	EĀ 38.3 = T2.125.717c18-718a12; ⁵
(5) Gāndhārī	* Dhoṇa Sutra ⁶	[Allon 2001:130-223 (ch 8)].

There is no known Sanskrit or Tibetan version. Although the text is well known today as the “Doṇa Sutta,”⁷ the sutta’s colophon (*uddāna*) lists it as the mnemonic *loke* (“in the world”), which comes from the phrase *jāto loke samvaddho* at its close (A 3:39,1 f); hence, it should technically be called the Loka Sutta (A 2:44,15). The colophons of the Burmese and Siamese editions, however, give *doṇo* as a variant reading.⁸

The untitled Chinese version, EĀ 38.3 is unique in mentioning that Doṇa (simply referred to as 彼梵志 *póluómén*, “the brahmin”), after listening to the Buddha’s instructions on the five aggregates and the six internal faculties and six external sense-objects, and practising the teaching, in due course, “attained the pure Dharma-eye” (得法眼淨 *dé fǎ yǎnjìng*) that is, streamwinning (T2.125.718a12). This account may refer to another Doṇa, or is based on a lost text, or is perhaps an erroneous translation.⁹

There is another discourse, a much longer one, bearing the same name, that is, **the Doṇa Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (A 5.192), where the Buddha explains to Doṇa the different kinds of brahmins.¹⁰ Very likely, he is the same Doṇa, as in A 4.36, but there is no certainty about this (Allon 1999:132).¹¹ [2]

2 The brahmin Dona

2.1 DROṆA DHŪMRASA, GOTRA BRĀHMAṆA. In the Sanskrit texts, especially the Mahā, parinirvāṇa Sūtra, there is a brahmin referred to as **Droṇa Dhūmrasa, gotra**. Apparently, the word **Droṇa** is probably the name of his village, **Droṇa, grāmaka**, which could be another name for Ukkaṭṭhā [3.1]. From **the Divyāvadāna**, there is a hint that his personal name could be Puṣkara, sāra [3.1]. However, all this is conjectural at this point of our studies.

His clan name is **Dhūmrasa, gotra**.¹² The front element, *dhūmra* means “incense, smokey,” derived from *dhūma*, “smoke, fume” (SED: dhūma, dhūmra). This sense is reflected in his name given in the

¹ 輪相經 *lúnxiàng jīng* is *Cakra, lakṣaṇa Sūtra. Doṇa is referred to as 豆磨種姓婆羅門 *dòumó zhǒngxìng póluómén* (Dòumó of the brahmin class).

² Attr Gunabhadra (fl CE 435-468).

³ Doṇa is referred to as 煙姓婆羅門 *yān xìng póluómén* (the brahmin with the surname Yān).

⁴ 一梵志 *yī fànzhì* (a certain brahmin).

⁵ Tr Dharmanandin (CE 384-384), rev Gautama Saṅghadeva (CE 397-398). See also Mayeda 1985:102; Waldschmidt 1980:137 n4, 169 n168.

⁶ The Gāndhārī MS gives no title. This title is given by Mark Allon, 2001:131, foll MS which refers to the brahmin as *dhoṇa bramaṇa*, the only attestation to this name in a Gāndhārī to date. This Gāndhārī version was first identified by Richard Salomon (1999: 24, 48).

⁷ As in Be Ce Ee & Comys: AA 3:75 (*doṇa, sutta vaṇṇanā*); AAT:Be 2:291. Be & Ce gave the title Doṇa Sutta to A 4.36 and Doṇa Brāhmaṇa Sutta to A 5.191, which I have followed: see Allon 2001:131.

⁸ See Cuevas & Stone 2001: §§1.2, 10.1.2

⁹ Cf **Doṇa Brāhmaṇa S** (A 5.192/3:223-230) = SD 36.14.

¹⁰ A 5.192/3:223-230 = SD 36.14.

¹¹ See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dona_Sutta.

Chinese Āgamas (see above). As such, his Sanskrit name, Droṇa Dhūmrāsa, gotra, would mean something like “the one of the Dhūmrāsa clan from the village of Droṇa.”

In other words, *drona* (P *doṇa*) here is not a personal name, but a toponym, a place-name. In fact, *doṇa* (Skt *drona*) both means, “a wooden pail, vat, trough; usually as measure of capacity” (PED), and is also the name of various brahmins and mountains (PED, SED). [3.1]

2.2 DOṆA 1 (THE FOOTPRINT READER). If we are to accept the commentarial accounts, there are at least two brahmins named Doṇa related in the suttas. Doṇa 1, as recorded in **the (Pāda) Doṇa Sutta** (A 4.36) meets the Buddha on the highroad between Ukkatṭhā and Setavyā [5]. He is a cook and foot-print reader who sees the Buddha’s foot-prints, follows them, and sees him seated in blissful meditation at the foot of a tree. Deeply inspired, Doṇa asks the Buddha about his identity, and the Buddha, in reply, explains to him *the nature of buddhahood*.¹³

The Commentary says that the brahmin Doṇa is well acquainted with the three Vedas. Early one morning, after teaching the arts to his 500 brahmin youths, he rises to take a rest. Dressing himself in a garment worth 100 pieces of money, and putting on clothing valued at 500 pieces over a shoulder, having donned the sacrificial cord, and wearing bright red sandals, with a following of 500 brahmin youths, he takes to the road.¹⁴

The Buddha’s journey to Setavyā is undertaken for the purpose of meeting him (AA 3:376). At the end of the Buddha’s discourse, Doṇa becomes a non-returner, and out of his exultation, comes a poem of twelve thousand words praising the Buddha. This poem is known **the Doṇa, gajjita**, “Doṇa’s thunder,” his lion-roar (DA 2:607).

Doṇa, it is said, is held in very high esteem as a teacher, and, at some time or other, practically all the chiefs of Jambu, dīpa (ancient India) have sat at his feet. As such, he is able to dissuade them from quarrelling or warring over the Buddha’s relics. On the occasion of the relic distribution, he stands on a hill and recites the Doṇa, gajjita.¹⁵ At first, his voice cannot be heard on account of the uproar, but, as they recognize his voice, their attention increasingly focusses on him.¹⁶ (DA 2:607 f)

2.3 DOṆA 2 (THE RELIC DISTRIBUTOR). Dhammapāla, in his **Param’attha, dīpanī I**, the Udāna Commentary, gives these three reasons why the Buddha decides to pass away at Kusināra, that is to say,

- (1) It would be the occasion for the teaching of the Mahā Sudassana Sutta (D 17), where “I shall be able to teach on what I have accomplished in the human world of men to just like that experienced in the deva world, hearing which the masses would see it as something wholesome to be practised.” (D 16.5.17-18/2:146)
- (2) The wanderer Subhadda would approach the Buddha and question him, go for refuge and go forth to become an arhat. (D 16.5.24-28/2:150 f)
- (3) If he were to attain parinirvana elsewhere, there would be bloodshed over the relic distribution, but at Kusināra, **the brahmin Doṇa** would prevent this by dividing up the relics. (D 16.6.25/2:166) (UA 402)

The Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) and various Commentaries say that after the Buddha’s cremation, the brahmin Doṇa is present at the relic-distributions.¹⁷ In fact, it is on account of his timely and skillful intervention that conflict, even bloodshed, is prevented amongst the relic claimants, who include powerful kings. Doṇa exhorts them on the impropriety of conflict over anything connected with the Bud-

¹² Mahā, parinirvāṇa Sūtra §§51.2, 6, 7, 17, 23 (Waldschmidt 1950-51); Waldschmidt 1944-48: 321-324 (discussion); 1947:447-451; Tib Dulba xiv 235 leaf 5 line 3.

¹³ A 4.36/2:37 f = SD 36.13.

¹⁴ AA 2:505 f, 3:77.

¹⁵ **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16) only preserves a verse by him (D 16.6.25b/2:166), but this is certainly not the Doṇa, gajjita, which remains to be discovered or identified.

¹⁶ See **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16.6.25/2:166) = SD 9.

¹⁷ On the Buddha’s relic distribution, see **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16) @ SD 9 (7j).

dha, who teaches peace. The claimants then ask Dona to distribute the relics fairly. He divides them into eight portions, one of which is given to each of the eight claimants present. Since nothing is left, he himself requests for the vessel (*kumbha*) used for collecting and dividing the relics, and over it he builds a tumulus or stupa, celebrating a feast in its honour.¹⁸

Commentarial legend has it that at the relic-distribution, Dona, it is said, seizing the opportunity, hides the right eye-tooth of the Buddha in his turban, but Shakra seeing this, and thinking that Doṇa is incapable of showing suitable honour to the relic, secretly removes it and enshrines it in the Cūlā,mani Cetiya in Tāvatiṃsa (DA 2:609). A 14th-century hagiographical work, **the Dhātu,vaṃsa**, elaborates this alleged relic-pilfering by saying that Doṇa hides the second eye-tooth between his toes, and the third inside his clothing. The second is subsequently stolen by the Nāga king, Jaya,sena, who enshrines it in his realm, and the third is taken by a Gāndhāra native who enshrines it there. (Dhātv 18 f).¹⁹

2.4 ONE AND SAME DOṆA. For purposes of discussion, let us assume that Doṇa 1 refers to the footprint reader of A 4.36 [2.2] as well as Doṇa 2 the relic distributor of D 16 [2.3]. Now, according to Buddha,ghosa, **Doṇa 1** [2.2], as a result of the Buddha's instructions, becomes a non-returner, that is, one who has effectively overcome all lust, including, of course, the desire for relics. After all, if a streamwinner would never consciously break any of the five precepts, how would a non-returner even think of stealing any relic?

The hagiographical accounts describe **Doṇa 2** [2.3] as doing just that. He is first said to hide the Buddha's right eye-tooth in his turban (DA 2:609). Later legends (eg Dhātv 18 f) extend his thefts to two more teeth, hiding one in between his toes (not a respectful place for such a sacred object) and the other in his clothing. If we accept these pious legends, then we must take Doṇa 2 as being capable of breaking a basic precept, and as such he is certainly not the non-returner, Doṇa 1.

A simpler solution—affirming that there is only one and the same Doṇa—would be to discount the pious legends as simply efforts in legitimizing sacred objects—here the Buddha's relics—turning them into totems and fetishes. They are regarded either as having inherent magical powers, or they come to be regarded as some sort of palladium conferring power upon its possessor. Such externalization of power is alien to Buddhist spirituality, if we take moral virtue (*sīla*), mental cultivation (*samādhi*) and insight wisdom (*paññā*) as the bedrock of Buddhist training.²⁰ Moreover, *no* pilfering of relics by Doṇa (or anyone) is recorded in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta**, and in the light of **the (Pāda) Doṇa Sutta** and its Commentary, saying that Doṇa ends up as a non-returner—we can happily leave it at that, and make no bones of it.

2.4 BRAHMIN MĀGANDIYA'S WIFE. The Commentaries tell us of another footprint reader, that is, *the wife of the brahmin Māgandiya*, whose daughter Māgandiyā falls in love with the Buddha and wishes to marry him. The brahmin Māgandiya's wife, skilled in reading footprints, noticing the Buddha's footprint, declares:

*Rattassa hi ukkuṭikaṃ padaṃ bhava
duṭṭhassa hoti anukaddhitam²² padaṃ
mūlhassa hoti sahasānupīlitam²³*

The step of the lustful will be on his toes.²¹
The step of the wicked is dragged along.
For the deluded, his step is abrupt.

¹⁸ D 16.6-25-28/2:166-168; B 28.4; UA 402. This is the 9th of the 10 said to have been built over the Buddha-relics and related objects, as recorded in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.6.25/2:166) = SD 9.

¹⁹ See Jina,kāla,mālī,pakaraṇa 52-56 (tr Jayawickrama, *The Sheaf of Garlands of the Epochs of the Conqueror*, PTS, 1968:71-78); Pe Maung Tin, "The Shwe Dagon Pagods," *Journal of the Burma Research Soc* 24 1934:33 f; K Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism*, Cambridge, 199:123, 1327. On the significance of such stories, see also K Trainor, "When is a theft not a theft? Relic theft and the cult of the Buddha's relics in Sri Lanka," *Numen* 39 1992:1-26 & J S Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, Princeton, 2004:236-238.

²⁰ On the 3 trainings, see *Sīla samādhi paññā* = SD 21.6

²¹ Ie, he walks somewhat tip-toed so that the arch does not touch the ground. Ñāṇamoli tr this as "The step of one of greedy nature, will be springy," where "springy" (*ukkuṭika*) is glossed here by *asamphuiṭṭha,majjham* (not touching in the middle), VismṬ 106 (Vism:Ñ 106). Cf Vism 3.88, where this is said of a lustful personality (*rāga,carita*) (Vism 3.88/104,28).

²² Be *avakaddhitam*.

vivatta-c, chaddassa idam̐ idisam̐ padam̐ Of one with passions' veil drawn away is this kind of step.
(AA 1:436 = SnA 544 = DhA 3:195 = Vism 3.88/105)

The brahmin, however, scolds his wife of “seeing a crocodile in a drop of water,” and approaches the Buddha with the proposal. The Buddha rejects it and relates the story of how Māra’s daughters have tried to tempt him, but utterly failed. The Buddha reiterates that he has no need of a woman, and would not touch one even with his toe.²⁴

3 Ukkatthā and Setavyā

3.1 UKKATTHĀ. Ukkatthā and Setavyā are towns (today we would call them large villages) in Kosala country (D 2:316), near the Himālaya, and not far away from one another. **Ukkatthā** was given as a brahmadeya or fief by Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, to the brahmin **Pokkhara, sātī**. It is well populated and has much grassland, woodland and corn.²⁵

The Icchā,naṅgala forest is in the neighbourhood, and **the Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 1:87) records how when the Buddha is staying in the forest, Pokkharasātī first sends his pupil **Ambaṭṭha** and then goes himself to visit the Buddha. There was a road connecting Ukkatthā with Setavyā (A 2:37), and with Vesālī (J 3:259). **The brahmin youth Chaṭṭha** travels from Setavyā to Ukkatthā to learn under Pokkharasātī.²⁶ Ukkatthā is also the residence of the monk Aṅganika Bhāradvāja²⁷ (ThaA 2:83).²⁸

The Śārdūla,kaṇṇāvadāna in **the Divyāvadāna** has an interesting line: *puṣkarasārī nāma brāhmaṇa utkaṭam̐ [vl utkūṭam̐] nāma droṇa, mukham̐ paribhukte*, “a brahmin named Puṣkara, sārī (or Puṣkara, sāra), dwelling in the port-town of Utkāṭa” (Divy 319.10).²⁹ BHSD defines *droṇa, mukha* as “a city near a port.” As *mukha* can mean “mouth, entrance,” we can assume that it means a “river mouth.” Perhaps a better translation here would be “a river-mouth town,” if Utkāṭa was a riverine town on the Himalaya foothills, where the rivers were likely to be smaller. Although there is a possibility that Droṇa could have come from this Utkāṭa, we have yet to find textual evidence for this. It is clearly only a coincidence that the words *utkaṭa* and *droṇa* appear together here. [2.1]

3.2 SETAVYĀ. Setavyā was a town or large village in Kosala country (D 2:316), near Ukkatthā [4.1]. **The (Pāda) Doṇa Sutta** (A 4.36) records a conversation between the Buddha and the brahmin Doṇa beside the high-road between Ukkatthā and Setavyā. It is also on the road taken by Bāvarī’s disciples (Sn 1012), from Sāvattthī to Rāja, gaha, and is the first rest-stop outside Sāvattthī on the road to Rāja, gaha. Beyond it are Kapila, vatthu, Kusi, nārā and Pāvā.

To the north of Setavyā is a simsapa forest, where Kumāra Kassapa lives, and where he gives the teachings of **the Pāyāsi Sutta** (D 23) to prince Pāyāsi, who has a brahmadeya there.³⁰ Setavyā is also the birthplace of the elders Eka, dhamma, savaniya (Tha 67) and Mahā, kāla (Tha 151 f). The latter’s brothers, Cūla, kāla and Majjhima, kāla also live there (DhA 1:55).

The Anguttara Commentary says that **Kassapa Buddha** was born in Setavyā (AA 3:75), but both the Buddha, vaṁsa and its Commentary say that he was born in Benares (B 25.33; BA 217). The Buddha, -vamsa Commentary (BA 223) further records that Kassapa died in the Set’ārāma in Setavyā, but adds that Setavyā was a city in Kāsī.

²³ VRI 1:116 errs in switching the characteristics of the two around: *Duṭṭhassa hoti sahasānupīlitam̐ | Mūlḥassa hoti avakaḍḍhitam̐ padam̐*.

²⁴ This story is well known in comys (AA 1:436; DhA 14.1/3:193-195; SnA 2:542-544; cf Divy (Vaidya) 447-448, where the name is given as Mākandika and he is called a parivrājaka).

²⁵ D 1:87, 106, 2:50; M 1:1, 326; DA.1:245.

²⁶ VvA 229; cf AA 3:75.

²⁷ Author of Tha 219-221.

²⁸ For more details on Ukkatthā, see **Brahma Nimantanika S** (M 49) = SD 11.7 (3).

²⁹ See BHSD svv utkaṭa, droṇamukha & paribhukta.

³⁰ Pāyāsi is actually a *rājañña*, in an “unconsecrated rajah” (*anabhisittaka, rājā*, DA 3:808): D 23/2:316-357 = SD 39.4.

4 The four types of beings

4.1 THE BUDDHA IS NEITHER HUMAN NOR WILL HE BE REBORN AS ONE. The brahmin Doṇa mentions only four states of being, one of which he thought would be a category to which the Buddha belongs. The Buddha however declares that he belongs to *none* of them. Although the Buddha still has a **human** body, his mind might be said to be *transhuman*, that is, beyond the human. His wisdom and powers transcend those of a human. Most importantly, he is awakened, that is, free from the delusion that shackles us to rebirth.

4.2 THE BUDDHA IS NOT A GOD NOR WILL HE BE REBORN AS ONE. To say the Buddha is a deva or god, even God, is to downgrade him back into the samsaric world of ignorance and craving, of high and low births, all of which he has transcended. For, even to *be* the highest God means to *exist*, and to exist means to be under the power of impermanence. The Buddha has transcended both existence and non-existence: he has attained nirvana, which is death-free and timeless.

4.3 THE BUDDHA IS NEITHER A GANDHARVA NOR WILL HE BE REBORN AS ONE. The gandharva or celestial minstrel (P *gandhabba*; Skt *gandharva*), in Buddhist mythology, is associated with music, singing and dancing. The best known amongst them is Pañca, sikhā, mentioned in **the Sakka Pañha Sutta** (D 21), where they are said to have a fondness for sense-pleasures (D 2:265-269). In **the Gandhabba Sutta** (S 31.1), the Buddha describes them as being dryads or arboreal deities, earth-bound deities living on the fragrant parts on trees and plants (roots, heartwood, softwood, leaves, flowers, fruits, sap and scent).³¹

The feminine of the gandharvas are the nymphs or apsaras (P *accharā*; Skt *apsara*), the best known of whom is Suriya, vaccaṣā or Bhaddā, the beloved of Pañca, sikhā (D 2:265-269). The gandharvas and the apsaras, as exemplified by this couple, are said to be romantically inclined beings. They are said to be long-lived, beautiful and very happy (S 31.2).³²

4.4 THE BUDDHA IS NEITHER A YAKSHA NOR WILL HE BE REBORN AS ONE. The **yaksha** (P *yakkha*; Skt *yakṣa*) belongs to a class of Indian nature spirits generally benevolent towards human beings (such as depicted in **the Ātānāṭiya Sutta**, D 3:203, 204). They are among the earliest of deities to be depicted in religious art where they usually appear as colossal in size, slightly pot-bellied but taut with physical energy. Their female counterpart, the *yakkhī* (Skt *yakṣī*) or *yakkhiṇī* (Skt *yakṣiṇī*), often appear as nude or semi-nude fertility figures decked in jewelry.

In later Buddhist literature, they were downgraded or devolved to become fierce red-eyed ogres of both sexes who ate flesh and blood, and devoured corpses and even human beings. Māra is sometimes referred to in the Pali texts as a yaksha.³³ **The Mahāvastu** calls him the “great yaksha” (Mvst 2:260, 261).

4.5 DOṆA’S FOUR CATEGORIES OF EXISTENCE?

4.5.0 Doṇa’s cosmology. It is interesting that Doṇa should list *only these four types of beings*, that is, deva, gandharva, yaksha, and human. Neither text nor Commentary furnish any details or reason for this. Looking at the four names more broadly, we could venture to say that they represent four main categories of beings, at least in Doṇa’s cosmological understanding.³⁴

4.5.1 Deva. In such an existential typology, “**deva**” represents any divine realm, that is, rebirth in the heavens (*sagga*). On a popular level, this category probably refers only to the sense-world heavens (that

³¹ S 31.1.4/3:250 = SD 86.5. The Sutta says eg *mūla, gandhe adhvattā*, etc, which all translators render as “dwelling in fragrant roots” (eg S:B 1025). The same word applies to all the other plant-parts, incl the last, *gandha, gandhe adhvattā*, “dwelling in fragrant scents” (ed). Such translations do not really make sense. *Adhvattā* is surely related to *adhivāsa*, “perfuming,” meaning that the gandharvas subsist on plant fragrances. On *adhivāsa*, see DPL, CPD, DP & SED.

³² (**Gandhabba**) **Sucarita S** (S 31.2/3:250) = SD 86.6 (qv).

³³ Eg M 1:338, S 2:122, Sn 449; cf V 1:21 f. **T O Ling** has made a comprehensive comparison between Māra and the yaksha: *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil: A study of Theravāda Buddhism*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1962: 45.

³⁴ For other attempts at classifying states of being, see **Karaṇīya Metta S** (Sn 8/143-152/25 f = Khp 9/8 f) & SD 38.3 (5). See also Sn 75, 307, 333 f, 611 f; Dh 85, 188, 197 f, 321; Nm 97 (as *gati*), 340, 484 (*manussa, phassa* of Sn 964); Vism 312; VbhA 455 (various clans); DhA 1:364.

is, omitting the form world and formless world).³⁵ However, as a brahmin, Doṇa might also be aware of the conception of the suprasensual heavens, but we have no information of his meditative skills or attainments. If he is Doṇa 1, said to have attained non-return, then he would have been a dhyana-attainer, too. All this is of course conjectural.

4.5.2 Gandharva (*gandhabba*) as a category here, could represent the intermediate state or being (*antarā,bhava*).³⁶ It is closely related to other terms, such as *sambhavesī*,³⁷ a being seeking birth (or existence) mentioned, for example, in **the Karaṇiya Metta Sutta** (Khp 9 = Sn 8.1),³⁷ and *mano,maya* (“a mind-made being”) as found, for example, in **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2).³⁸ Such an idea is well attested in the Pali suttas.³⁹

4.5.3 Yaksha (*yakkha*; Skt *yakṣa*)⁴⁰ is defined by the Sanskrit-English Dictionary (SED) as “a living supernatural being, spiritual apparition, ghost, spirit.” In the Pali suttas, *yakkha* usually refers to fierce ogres, such as Ālavaka.⁴¹ However, here we can take it as a synecdoche for earth-bound non-humans, especially asuras, spirits, demons and similar beings of supernatural powers.

Significantly missing from this list are the better known categories of animals, pretas and hell-beings.⁴² These states do not feature here probably because it is Doṇa’s view that the Buddha, as a highly evolved spiritual person, would be reborn in a superhuman state. We can, of course, complete Doṇa’s typology by adding “subhuman planes” as the fifth category here.⁴³

4.5.4 Human (*manussa*) here of course refers to the existential plane that is most conducive for spiritual cultivation. Cosmologically, this realm refers only to human “persons,” that is, in terms of *bodies*.⁴⁴ Technically, however, it is often said that “humans are so called because of the prominence of the mind” (*manassa ussannatāya manussā*).⁴⁵ We can interpret this as meaning that we are *really* human or *fully* human—that is, *human* in both body and mind—when we use our minds well.

In other words, we may be *born* human, but we do not always *act* human or *stay mentally* human. When we are drowned in greed, hate, delusion or fear, so that our human values and judgement fail, then we have fallen in a subhuman state.⁴⁶ Our basic human task, then, is to at least remain so, if not to evolve mentally and spiritually into a higher being, and this is best done by keeping to the five precepts.⁴⁷

5 Is the Buddha a person?

The (Pāda) Dona Sutta (A 4.36) deals, in poetic terms, with the nature of the awakened saint in a brief but dramatic dialogue. The discourse opens with the brahmin Doṇa, noticing the Buddha’s footprint, and is at once captivated by it. He follows the footprints and meets the Buddha [§2.2]. When he questions

³⁵ See SD 1.7 (Table 1.7).

³⁶ See **Is rebirth immediate?** = SD 2.17 (3+8).

³⁷ Sn 147c = Khp 9.5c = SD 38.3 (5.6).

³⁸ D 2.87/1:76 = SD 8.10 & n.

³⁹ See **Is rebirth immediate?** = SD 2.17 esp (7).

⁴⁰ M 1:386; Sn 478, 875. *Yakkha*, Skt *yakṣa*, Vedic Skt “quick ray of light,” from √YAKṢ, to move quickly, press on. It is possible to tr it as “a restless one”; cf the converse relationship of English “spirit” to “sprightly,” ie brisk, stirring; and cf Walter Scott’s “restless sprite” (Lanman, *Sanskrit Reader* 1884:221e). Comys derive the popular etym from √YAJ, to sacrifice: a being to whom a sacrifice (of expiation and propiation) is given (VvA 224, 333). See PED: *yakkha*.

⁴¹ On *yaksha* suttas, see **Yakkha Saṃyutta** (S 10.1-12/1:206-215).

⁴² This refers to the early conception of the “five realms” and the later “six realms”: See **(Pañca) Gati S** (A 9.68/-4:459) = SD 2.20. In later Buddhism, these 6 realms are graphically depicted on the Tibetan Wheel of Life. See **The body in Buddhism** = SD 29.6a (4.1.4).

⁴³ See **Buddha as myth** = SD 36.2 (5.11): *yaksha*.

⁴⁴ First read **The body in Buddhism** = SD 29.6a, then **The person in Buddhism** = SD 29.2b.

⁴⁵ KhpA 123 = SnA 1:300 = VvA 18, 19 = VbhA 454.

⁴⁶ See **Love** = SD 38.4 (4.4.1), **(Alabbhanīya) Ṭhāna Sutta** (A 5.48) = SD 42.1 & Piya Tan, “We are not born human,” 2011 (RB44).

⁴⁷ See **Love** = SD 38.4 (4.4).

the Buddha as to whether he is *a deva, a gandharva, a yaksha, or a human*, the Buddha denies that he is or will be any of these categories of being. He declares that he is a unique being, *sui generis*, a buddha.

The Buddha explains that all those mental influxes (*āsava*)—sense-desires, existence and ignorance—that bring about and feed the states of a deva, a gandharva, a yaksha, or a human, have been totally uprooted in him. In other words, he has attained nirvana, and will no more be reborn. However, for the moment, he remains *in* the world, but is not *of* the world—like a lotus, standing in the water, but is undefiled by it [§4].

An individual totally free of clinging is not really a person; he is a *non-person*. Although he is still a “forensic person”⁴⁸ in the eyes of the world, in the conventional sense, he is no more subject to the vagaries of life. His body remains what it is, made up of the four elements, still affected by past karma under certain conditions, but his mind is fully liberated, that is, untouched by any karma. In **the Alagaddūpama Sutta** (M 22), the arhat, like the Buddha, is described as a “non-person,” thus,

Bhikshus, when the gods with Indra, with Brahmā, with Pajāpati, seek a monk thus liberated in mind,⁴⁹ they do not find⁵⁰ anything of which to say that “This is the support of the thus-gone one’s consciousness.”⁵¹

Why is that? One thus gone,⁵² I say, is untraceable even here and now.⁵³

(M 22.36/1:140) = SD 3.13⁵⁴

6 *Bhavissati* and its uses

Here *bhavissati* expresses both the future tense as well as perplexity, surprise, wonder, hope, anticipation, and expectation, often eliciting some kind of deduction.⁵⁵ We have this example from **the Anātha-piṇḍik’ovāda Sutta** (M 143):

⁴⁸ The Merriam-Webster 3rd New International Dictionary defines *forensic* (adj) as: (1) belonging to courts of judicature or to public discussion and debate; (2) used in legal proceedings or in public discussions. *Forensics* (n) is the art or study of argumentative discourse.

⁴⁹ “Thus liberated in mind,” *evaṃ.vimutta,cittam*. Norman: “It is possible that there is something of a word-play in the word *evaṃvimuttacitta*. We translated *vimutta-citta* as ‘one whose mind is released,’ but it might also be interpreted as ‘one whose consciousness (ie the element leading to re-birth) is released (from *samsāra*),’ and who, therefore, cannot be reborn.” (1991a:6)

⁵⁰ *anvesaṃ nādhigacchanti*. This sentence is put into the mouth of Māra, trying to look for the monk Godhika, who at the moment of suicide had attained arhathood. There the Buddha declares that Godhika “has passed utterly away with consciousness no longer established (in rebirth)” (*apatiṭṭhena viññāṇena parinibbuto*) (S 1:268).

⁵¹ **K R Norman** makes a useful note: “It is noteworthy that the Buddha here uses the word *tathāgata* in connection with a bhikkhu ‘whose mind is released in this way’ (*evaṃvimuttacitta*). It is clear that *tathāgata* is being used here in something much nearer its original literal meaning, and we ought rather to translate [this] passage [within quotes]: ‘This is what the consciousness of one who has gone that way [or who has gone to such a state] is dependent upon.’ The use of the word in this way would explain why the commentators thought it appropriate to apply it to *attā*, as was mentioned above [Norman 1991a:2]. I would suggest that the specific usage of the word *tathāgata* to mean ‘Buddha’ [cf Buddhaghosa’s defs of *tathāgata*, DA 59-68; SA 2:287,25-32, 1:66,21-22] arose from this more general usage, just as the word *sugata* which originally must have had the general sense “one who has fared well,” just as it does in the Sanskrit [SED, sv *sugata*], is also used specifically of the Buddha. It is interesting that when the word *tathāgata* is used in a question directed to the Buddha, which he refuses to answer, the commentaries still do not take *tathāgata* in the sense of the Buddha, but explain it as *satta* ‘being’ [DA 1:118,1; SA 2:201,5, 2:311,1-3, 3:312,29-30].” (1991a:6). See n above on “thus liberated in mind”; also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyāputta S** (M 63) = SD 5.8 Intro (3).

⁵² “One thus gone” (*tathāgata*), usually applied to the Buddha, but here applies also to the arhat. Comy gives two alternative explanations: (1) Even while alive the arhat is untraceable as a being or individual (ie as an abiding self) because ultimately there is no “being.” (2) The arhat is untraceable here and now because it is impossible for the gods, etc, to find the support for the insight-mind, path-mind or fruition-mind (*vipassanā,citta magga,citta phala,-citta*); since the object is nirvana, his mind cannot be known by the worldling. See Nyanaponika 1974:47 n37; KR Norman 1991a esp 5 f.

⁵³ *Diṭṭhe vāhaṃ bhikkhave dhamme tathāgataṃ ananuvejjo ti vadāmi*. See Norman 1991a:253 f.

⁵⁴ See further **The person in Buddhism** = SD 29.6b.

“Surely, bhante, that devaputra must be Anātha,piṇḍika himself! Bhante, Anātha,piṇḍika the houselord had great faith in the venerable Sāriputta.”

So hi nūna so bhante anāthapiṇḍiko deva,putto bhavissati, anāthapiṇḍiko bhante gaha,pati āyasmante sāriputte abhippasanno ahoṣi ti. (M 143.20/3:263) = SD 23.9

The Daru-k,khandha Sutta (S 35.241) has this future-tense phrase expressing hope and anticipation: “if you are [be] not rotten internally” or “if you are not to rot inwardly” (*na anto,pūti bhavissati*).⁵⁶

Another well known example of this sentence structure is found in **the Samudda Vāṇijja Jātaka** (J 466), where a group of fugitives (erstwhile carpenters from Benares), scouting the island they have landed on, meet with a strange inhabitant, thus:

Sounds like a human voice we hear. Let us find out what it is [We will know it]. Following the voice, they saw the man, “Must be a yaksha!” they thought, shaking with fear, and they readied an arrow.

Manussa,saddo viya suyayati, jānissāma nan ti saddānusārena gantvā taṃ purisaṃ disvā “yakkho bhavissatīti bhīta,tasitā sare sannahimsu. (J 466/4:160)

In **the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9), the Buddha points out to the wanderer Poṭṭhapāda the falsity of such a view as that “consciousness must be one thing, the self another” (*aññāva saññā bhavissati añño attā*).⁵⁷

The Vinaya provides us with at least four examples, namely:

“Now this must be no mean [ordinary] thing, that these people are carefully making repairs” (*Na kho idaṃ orakaṃ bhavissati, yatha-y-ime manussā sakkaccaṃ bhattaṃ karonti*) (Cv 6.5.1 = V 2:159).

“Now this must be no mean thing, that the houselord is bestowing so much gold coins!” (*Na kho idaṃ orakaṃ bhavissati, yathāyaṃ gahapati tāva bahum hiraññaṃ pariccajatīti*) (Cv 6.5.1 = V 2:159).

“Now this must be no mean thing, that the Blessed One has it announced in Rājagaha with regards to Deva,datta.” (*Na kho idaṃ orakaṃ bhavissati, yathā bhagavā deva,dattaṃ rāja,gahe pakāsāpetīti*) (Cv 7.3.3 = V 2:190).

“Now this must be no mean thing, that these people are carefully preparing a meal. What now if I too were to prepare a meal.” (*Na kho idaṃ orakaṃ bhavissati, yatha-y-ime manussā sakkaccaṃ bhattaṃ karonti; yan nūnāham pi bhattaṃ kareyyan ’ti*) (Pāc 33 = V 4:75).

Here, the future tense is used to expresses perplexity, surprise and wonder in the sense of what must be or must not be, of what can be or cannot be, eg *kim ev’idaṃ bhavissati*, “What can this be?” or *na vata imāni manussa,bhūtassa padāni bhavissanti*, “These cannot be the footprints of a human being!” [§1].⁵⁸ Another such example is found in this Dhammapada verse:

<i>Na muṇḍakena samaṇo abbato alikaṃ bhaṇaṃ icchā,lobha,samāpanno samaṇo kiṃ bhavissati</i>	Not by a bald head is one a recluse, not keeping to vows, speaking falsehood, filled with desire and greed, how can one <u>be</u> a recluse?	(Dh 264)
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Perhaps one of the best examples of the future tense expressing expectation is found in this famous line:

⁵⁵ See A K Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 2nd ed 1974:55.

⁵⁶ S 35.241.3/4:179 = SD 28.5.

⁵⁷ D 9.21/1:186,5 = SD 7.14.

⁵⁸ See Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 2nd ed 1974:55.

whatever deed I do,⁵⁹ good or evil,
I will be its heir.”⁶⁰

*yaṃ kamman̄ karissāmi kalyānaṃ vā pāpakaṃ vā,
tassa dāyādo bhavissāmi ti.*

(M 3:203 = A 3:72 f = 186 = 5:88, 288)

In the **Pada Doṇa Sutta**, the Buddha, by his answer, is declaring to Doṇa that since he (the Buddha) has overcome all those conditions that would bring one back as a deva, a gandharva, a yaksha, or a human—meaning that he would not be reborn—there is *no* class of beings, persons or species to which he belongs: he is Buddha, sui generis.⁶¹ Section 2c below poses an interesting problem because there *bhavissati* and *bhavissāmi* can be rightly taken both as the future tense and as expressing perplexity. However, from the Buddha’s answer in the future tense, too. Here, I think, we need to understand his answer as encompassing both the present (he is sui generis) and the future (the Buddha is not reborn). This clearly makes good sense of the Sutta.

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The Doṇa Discourse (on the Footprint)

A 4.36/2:37 f

Doṇa follows the Buddha’s footprints

1 At one time the Blessed One was going along a high-road between Ukkatṭhā and Setavyā.⁶²

The brahmin Doṇa, too, was going along the high-road between Ukkatṭhā and Setavyā. Now the brahmin Doṇa saw the Blessed One’s footprints, with the thousand-spoked wheels, all rimmed and hubbed, perfect in every way.⁶³ When he saw them, it occurred to him:

“Wonderful indeed, sir! Marvellous indeed, sir! These surely would not be the footprints made by a human!”⁶⁴ [37]

2.1 Then the Blessed One came down from the high-road and sat down under a certain tree. Having crossed his legs, keeping his body upright, he established mindfulness before him.

2.2 Then the brahmin Doṇa, following the Blessed One’s foot-prints, saw the Blessed One sitting, with legs crossed, under a certain tree, pleasant (to behold), inspiring faith, of peaceful faculties, of calm mind, having attained to supreme restraint and mental stillness, tamed, composed, with senses subdued, a naga [noble elephant].⁶⁵

Doṇa’s question

2.3 Seeing the Blessed One, he approached him, and said this:

⁵⁹ *Yaṃ kamman̄ karissāmi*, lit “whatever karma I will do.”

⁶⁰ This whole section at M 3:203 = A 3:72 f = 186 = 5:88, 288.

⁶¹ **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22) says that even the gods would not be able to trace the arhat’s consciousness, since it is without any support, and is untraceable (*ananuvejja*) (M 22.36/1:140) = SD 3.13. See also **The person in Buddhism** = SD 29.6b (5.2).

⁶² Ukkatṭhā and Setavyā: see Intro (3).

⁶³ “The thousand-spoked wheels,...with all their features” (*cakkāni saḥassārāni sa, nemikāni sanābhikāni sabb’ā-kāra, paripūrāni*). This description of the Buddha’s sole (*pāda*, or specifically, *pāda, tāla*) refers to the second of the 32 marks of a “great man” (*mahā, purisa lakkhaṇa*): see **Lakkhaṇa S** (D 30/3:142-179) = SD 36.9 esp (4.1).

⁶⁴ *Na vat’imāni manussa, bhūtassa padāni bhavissanti ti.*

⁶⁵ “Pleasant (to behold)...” to the end, *pāsādikaṃ pasādanīyaṃ sant’indriyaṃ santa, mānasam uttama, damatha, samatham anuppattam dantaṃ guttam samyat’indriyaṃ nāgam. Nāga*, here used in a fig sense, meaning “heroic saint,” usu ref to an arhat (M 1:151, 386; S 2:277, 3:83; Dh 320; Sn 29, 53, 166, 421, 518; U 4.4.8/40, “two nagas”); of the Buddha (A 2:37; Sn 522, 845, 1058, 1101; Miln 346).

*Devo no⁶⁶ bhavaṃ bhavissatīti⁶⁷
Gandhabbo no bhavaṃ bhavissatīti
Yakkho no bhavaṃ bhavissatīti.
Manusso no bhavaṃ bhavissatīti.*

*Na kho ahaṃ, brāhmaṇa, devo bhavissāmīti.
Na kho ahaṃ, brāhmaṇa, gandhabbo bhavissāmīti.
Na kho ahaṃ, brāhmaṇa, yakkho bhavissāmīti.
Na kho ahaṃ, brāhmaṇa, manusso bhavissāmīti.*

The Buddha cannot be categorized

“You, master, must be a deva, aren’t you?”	[“Will our master become a deva?”]
“No, brahmin, I’m <i>not</i> a deva.”	[“No, brahmin, I won’t become a deva.”]
“You, master, must be a gandharva, aren’t you?”	[“Will our master become a gandharva?”]
“No, brahmin, I’m <i>not</i> a gandharva.” ⁶⁸	[“No, brahmin, I won’t become a gandharva.”]
“You, master, must be a yaksha, aren’t you?”	[“Will our master become a yaksha?”]
“No, brahmin, I’m <i>not</i> a yaksha.” ⁶⁹	[“No, brahmin, I won’t become a yaksha.”]
“You, master, must be a human, aren’t you?”	[“Will our master become a human?”]
“No, brahmin, I’m <i>not</i> a human.”	[“No, brahmin, I won’t become a human.”]

2.3 “When asked, ‘You, master, must be a deva, aren’t you?’—

you say, ‘No, brahmin, I’m not a deva.’

When asked, ‘You, master, must be a gandharva, aren’t you?’—

you say, ‘No, brahmin, I’m not a gandharva.’

When asked, ‘You, master, must be a yaksha, aren’t you?’—

you say, ‘No, brahmin, I’m not a yaksha.’

When asked, ‘You, master, must be a human, aren’t you?’—

you say, ‘No, brahmin, I’m not a human.’

2.4 Who, then, sir, are you?⁷⁰

Influxes destroyed

3.1 Brahmin, those influxes⁷¹ by which, when not abandoned, one would become a deva, those influxes have been abandoned by me, cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them, so that they are not subject to further growth.

Brahmin, those influxes by which, when not abandoned, one would become a gandharva [divine minstrel or intermediate being],

those influxes have been abandoned by me,

cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them,

⁶⁶ Indecl, affirm & emphatic part = *nu* (cf PED: *na*¹): “indeed, then, now” (Sn 457, 875, 1077; J 5:343 *api no = api nu*, 435 = *nipāta, mattam* 437).

⁶⁷ This 3 sg fut is a polite form, and also shows that the questioner is asking about the destiny or rebirth of the Buddha,

⁶⁸ Gandharva, a celestial minstrel: see Intro (4.3).

⁶⁹ Yaksha, a nature spirit: see Intro (4.4).

⁷⁰ *Atha kho ko carahi bhavaṃ bhavissatīti*. PED: *carahi* (adv) [Skt *tarhi*; with change t → c due to analogy with *~ci* (*~cid*) in combination with *interr*] “then, therefore, now,” esp after *interr* pron: *ko carahi jānāti*, “who then knows?” (Sn 990); *kathaṃ carahi jānemu*, “how then shall we know?” (Sn 999); *kiṃ carahi*, “who then?” (A 5:194). See also V 1:36, 2:292; Sn 988; J 3:312; Miln 25; DA 1:289. For more details, see DP sv.

⁷¹ “**Mental influxes**,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards or inwards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously tr as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untr. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsavas*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kāmaśsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhavaśsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭhāśsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāśsava*) (D 16.1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91; Pm 1.442, 561; Dhs §§1096-1100; Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) or “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

so that they are not subject to further growth.

Brahmin, those influxes by which, when not abandoned, one would become a yaksha [nature spirit], those influxes have been abandoned by me,

cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them,

so that they are not subject to further growth.

Brahmin, those influxes by which, when not abandoned, one would become a human, those influxes have been abandoned by me,

cut them off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them,

so that they are not subject to further growth.

The Buddha is one of a kind

3.2 Brahmin, just as a blue lotus, or a red-white lotus, or a white lotus, is born in the water, growing in the water, rises above the water, stands [39] undefiled by it—

even so, brahmin, I am born in the world, grow in the world, but I dwell having overcome the world, undefiled by the world.

Therefore, brahmin, remember me as *the Buddha*.”

4 *Yena devûpapaty-assa
gandhabbo vā vihaṅgamo,
yakkhattaṃ yena gaccheyyāṃ
manussattañ ca abbaje,
te mayhaṃ āsavā khīṇā
viddhastā vinaḷī, katā.*

That by which one is born as a deva,
a gandharva who moves through the air,
by which one were to attain a yaksha state,
or were to come to the human state—
these influxes have been ended by me,
demolished, exterminated.

*Puṇḍarīkaṃ yathā vaggu
toyena n'upalippati
n'upalippāmi lokena
tasmā buddho'smi brāhmaṇā ti.*

Just like a beautiful lotus,
undefiled by the water,
undefiled by the world am I,
therefore, brahmin, am I buddha.

— evaṃ —

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