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Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 1

Paṭhama Nānā Titthiyā Sutta The First Discourse on the Various Sectarrians | U 6.4

Theme: The blind men and the elephant

Translated by Piya Tan ©2006, 2013

1 Textual highlights**1.1 THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT**

1.1.1 Roots of the parable. This parable, the highlight of the Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 1 is a patently Buddhist teaching tool, but could well be an ancient pre-Buddhist Indian story. Even the Jains have their own version of the parable, which they use to illustrate one of their fundamental doctrines, that of “the many-sidedness of things” (*anekānta, vāda*).¹ This comprises the Jain principles of pluralism and multiplicity of viewpoints, the notion that truth and reality are perceived differently from diverse points of view, and that no single point of view is the complete truth.² As such, the parable differs in its import in the two systems.

1.1.2 Royal jest. One of the best known and most complete versions of this parable is clearly the one found in the Udāna. Its commentary says that an ancient unknown king of Sāvathī, “playful by nature” (*keḷi, sīla*), one day, looking at his royal mount, thought that it would be auspicious (*bhaddaka*) for everyone to behold such a magnificent animal, and that it would be a great loss for the blind, who should at least feel what an elephant was like (UA 341 f).

Knowing well that the blind cannot see, this sporting king, on account of the king’s “playful nature” (*keḷi, sīlattā*), fool each of the assembled blind men into believing that the part of an elephant they have touched is the whole elephant. As a result of their respective beliefs (which are not false in themselves), they violently dispute with one another over who is right. This pseudo-philosophical circus amused both the king and the assembled court (UA 342).

1.1.3 The Udāna version. On a more serious note, the Udāna commentary explains **the parable of the blind man and the elephant** as follows:

“In the very same way (*evam eva kho*) [§30], the Buddha applies the parable, giving the following meaning: ‘Bhikshus, just as those blind from birth, eye-less, seeing only a single limb (*ek’āṅga.dassino*), fail to see the rest of the elephant, on account of perceiving only a part of the elephant after “seeing” it but not understanding, started quarrelling with one another, getting into a dispute. In the same way, these outside sectarians take one of the aggregates to be their self-identity, that is, form, feeling, and so on, through seeing themselves by way of how they have viewed the self. On account of their imagining, falling into such states as eternalism and so on, they tend to quarrel with one another, claiming, ‘Only this is true, all else false,’ even though they know not what is beneficial and what is not, what is true and what is not. As such, they are blind, the counterpart of those born blind, eyeless.”³ (UA 342 f)

¹ This doctrine is pivotal in the survival and growth of Jainism, esp against onslaughts from Buddhists, Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, Muslims and Christians throughout its history. See Hermann Jacobi, *The Sūtrakṛitanga*, Oxford, 1895 Intro. The Buddhist logician, **Dharma, kīrti** (c7th cent) [SD 36.15 (3.2)], in his Pramāṇa, varttika, kārikā, criticized *ekānta, vāda* thus: “Without differentiation, all things have both natures. Then, if somebody is implored to eat curd, then why not eat the camel?” (§182). Cf V Pandya, “Refutation of Jaina Darśana by Śāṅkarācārya,” in (ed) N K Singh, *Ency of Jainism*, 2001:5209-5210.

² Two of the many refs to this parable are found in *Tattvārthaslokavātika* (116, p806) of Vidyānandi (9th cent) and *Syādvādamanjari* of Ācārya Mallisena (13th cent). See also Paul Dundas, “Beyond Anekāntavāda: A Jain approach to religious tolerance,” in (ed) Tara Sethia, *Ahimsā, Anekānta and Jainism*, 2004:123-136 & John Koller, “Why is Anekāntavāda important?” in op cit 2004:400-407.

³ *Evam eva khoti upamā, saṃsandanaṃ. Tassattho – bhikkhave, yathā te jacc’andhā acakkhukā ek’āṅga, dassino anavasesato hatthim’apassitvā attanā diṭṭhāvayava, mattam* [Be ce Se; Ee –āvaya-] *hatthi, saññāya itarehi diṭṭham ananujānantā aññam-aññam vivādam āpannā kalahaṃ akamsu, evam eva ime añña, titthiyā sakkāyassa eka, desam rūpa, vedan’ādim attano diṭṭhi, dassanena yathā, diṭṭham* “attā’ti maññamānā tassa sassat’ādi, bhāvam āropetvā

1.2 LAUGHING AT OUR VIEWS

1.2.1 Views blind us. The Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 1 graphically describes such a predicament, invoking the parable of the blind and the elephant, as follows:

28 Thus, bhikshus, they struck one another with their fists, saying,
‘The elephant is like this, the elephant is not like that! The elephant is not like this, the elephant is like that!’

29 On account of this, bhikshus, the king was delighted. [§§28-29]

1.2.2 Views make fools of us. In the parable of the blind men and the elephant [3.1], the blind men, on account of their respective partial experiences of the elephant taking it to be the elephant itself, violently quarrel, exchanging blows with one another, over their differences and over who is right. The king and his court were delighted and amused [§29] (DA 342).

1.2.3 A view is partial truth at best. On the surface, we could say that the king had assembled the blind men and the elephant simply for his own amusement. This could well be the case, if we accept the Sutta’s commentary. Then the moral is perhaps that if we see only a partial truth and take it for the whole truth, those who know better would laugh at us, on account of our ignorance and foolishness.

1.3 OUR VIEWS ARE ROOTED IN THE PAST

1.3.1 Laughing at views. On a deeper level, however, we could take the amusement and laughter [1.2] as a self-aware assessment: we must learn to laugh at our partial knowledges and partialities, accepting the fact that these are not the whole truth, or even useful truths. Laughter here means that we are not taking these views seriously, as it would be doubly foolish to do so.

1.3.2 Viewing reality. Firstly, we can only have an opinion of the past: it is gone; even if we have some means of “re-living” it, it is not that past event. Secondly, a view, even true, is simply only *one* aspect, “an action of looking at” something; there are many views of reality. If we are unawakened, all such views must be partial truths, and as such, this is a good reason for being tolerant to the view of others.

However right a view might be, it is only a partial truth. As such, all partials truths are partly right, even useful each in their own way. Ultimately, however, they all fall short of the full truth, because the past is a construction; it is constructed of our views of the past. We only have memories of them, but these are mental constructions and reconstructions, often “false memories.”⁴

What is false is not real, the only reality is the present. Even then this truth is only a moment, and a rapidly moving one, moving at the speed of thought. So each moment is a “point” of truth, so to speak. We need to collect our points for a full and clear picture of reality, the whole truth. To do this, we need to begin by being able to fully and wisely attend to the present.

1.4 SEEING THE PRESENT

1.4.1 Present reality. The opposite of this—of directly and truly seeing the present moment—is to “believe,” which is to close our eyes and simply *think* or helplessly *pray* for what we want to happen. But what is “out there” is something else. What complicates things is that we have constructed an inner reality, and to us, as we know from religions that are belief-systems, such inner *constructed* realities can appear more real than the outer *true* reality.

For this reason, such faith-based systems must rely on belief, especially unquestioning faith. This is because they have no way of really authenticating their views except through the use of deception or force, or they are simply using religion for some other worldly agenda.

“*idam eva saccam mogham aññan ’ti abhinivisitvā aññam-aññam vivadanti, yathā, bhūtam pana atthānattham dhammādhammañ ca na jānantī. Tasmā andhā acakkhukā jacc ’andha, paṭibhāgāti.* (UA 342 f)

⁴ This term here is used in a non-technical way. However, it is useful to understand the more technical “**false memory syndrome**” (FMS), which describes a condition that affects a person’s identity and conduct by way of memories that are factually untrue but are strongly believed. Mathematician Peter J Freyd invented the term, which the [False Memory Syndrome Foundation](http://www.falsememorysyndrome.org/) (FMSF) subsequently popularized. See P R McHugh, *Try to remember: Psychiatry's clash over meaning, memory and mind*, NY: Dana Press. 2008:55, 66 f.

1.4.2 Liberating truth. The path to liberating truth begins when our inner vision wholesomely reflects or coincides with outer reality. We begin to understand outer or physical reality can only be experienced as mental facts, nothing more. And we need nothing more.

As long as our mental experiences are directly in touch with the outer reality, we are in “right view” mode. From here, we begin to understand how we perceive reality, both outer and inner. We are on the way to self-knowledge and full awakening.

2 Philosophical highlights

2.1 THE 10 QUESTIONS

2.1.1 Three related suttas. There are three Nānā Titthiyā Suttas—the **Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 1** (U 6.4/66-69), the **Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 2** (U 6.5/69 f) and the **Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 3** (U 6.6/70 f)⁵—that deal with various speculative questions. The parable of the blind men and the elephant is found only in the first sutta (U 6.4). Of the three, the latter two Nānā Titthiyā Suttas—that is, the **Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 2 (U 6.5)** and the **Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 3 (U 6.6)**—contain the same materials on the 10 undetermined questions (*avyākata pañha*).⁶

2.1.2 Comparative table

2.1.2.1 Here is a table collating the different list of speculative views mentioned in the three suttas:

Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 1 (U 6.4), SD 40a.14

The 10 theses⁷

The world:

- 1 (1a) is eternal
- 2 (1b) is not eternal
- 3 (2a) is finite
- 4 (2b) is infinite

The self and the body:

- 5 (3a) are the same
- 6 (3b) are different

The tathagata (being):

- 7 (4a) exists after death
- 8 (4b) does not exist after death
- 9 (4c) both exists and not exist after death
- 10 (4d) neither exists nor not exist after death

Nānā Titthiyā Suttas 2+3 (U 6.5+6), SD 97.2+3

The 16 theses⁸

The self and the world:

- 1 (1a) are eternal
- 2 (1b) are not eternal
- 3 (1c) are both
- 4 (1d) are neither

The self and the world:

- 5 (2a) are self-created
- 6 (2b) are other-created
- 7 (2c) both
- 8 (2d) neither: fortuitously arisen

The self and the world, happiness and suffering:

- 9 (3a) are eternal
- 10 (3b) are not eternal
- 11 (3c) are both
- 12 (3d) are neither
- 13 (4a) are self-created
- 14 (4b) are other-created
- 15 (4c) are both
- 16 (4d) are neither: fortuitously arisen

⁵ U 6.4-6/66-71.

⁶ See **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10. See also Jayatilleke 1963:154 f (§599).

⁷ These **10 speculative views** are also those listed in **Avyākata S** (A 7.54/4:67-70) (PTS A 7.51), SD 40a.11. For details, see SD 40a.10 (5+6).

⁸ U 6.5+6/69-71 = SD 97.2+3. These **16 speculative views** are listed in **Pāsādika S** (D 20) where they are said to be views regarding the finite past (D 20.34/3:137 f), SD 40a.6. On thesis sets (2-4), cf **Timbaruka S** (S 12.18/2:22 f), SD 97.1 & **Abhabba-t,thāna S 4** (A 6.95/3:440), SD 97.6. See Jayatilleke 1963:253-262. A different set of 16 theses are found in **Pañca-t,yaya S** (M 102) as “speculations about the past (M 102.14/2:233), SD 40a.12.

2.1.2.2 Each of the three Suttas have a different closing verse of uplift (*udāna*). They, however, all share the same theme: the speculative questions have been left unanswered because they are unrelated, even uncondusive, to spiritual cultivation.

2.1.2.3 Furthermore, other religious teachers have, at best, only a partial vision of reality. The Buddha, on the other hand and by definition, has a total and direct vision of reality.⁹

2.1.3 Other related suttas

2.1.3.1 The 10 questions are fully listed and discussed in a number of other discourses, such as **the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 72) and **the Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (M 63). The questions are technically known as “extreme views” (*anta-g,gāhikā diṭṭhi* or *-gāhaka-*)¹⁰ or, more fully, the “10 grounds for extreme views” (*dasa,vatthukā anta-g,gāhikā diṭṭhi*).¹¹

2.1.3.2 A famous passage from **the Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (M 63) says:

2 Now, while the venerable Māluṅkyā,putta was alone in meditation, this thought¹² arose in his mind:

“These speculative views¹³ have been left undeclared [unanswered] by the Blessed One, set aside¹⁴ and rejected by him, namely:

The world (cosmological speculations)

(1a) The world is eternal,	<i>sassato loko</i>
(1b) The world is not eternal,	<i>asassato loko</i>
(2a) The world is finite,	<i>antavā loko</i>
(2b) The world is infinite,	<i>anantavā loko</i>

The self (or soul) (ontological speculations)

(3a) The self is the same as the body,	<i>taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ</i>
(3b) The self and the body are separate,	<i>aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ</i>

A tathāgata¹⁵ (metaphysical speculations)

(4a) A tathāgata [a sentient being, ¹⁶ “thus come”] exists after death,	<i>hoti tathāgato param,marañā</i>
(4b) A tathāgata does not exist after death,	<i>na hoti tathāgato param,marañā</i>
(4c) A tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death,	<i>hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato param,marañā</i>

⁹ Cf Jayatilleke 1963:379 (§646).

¹⁰ *-gāhaka* is also spelt *-gāhika* (esp in Subcomys): V 1:172; M 1:426; S 4:392; A 5:193; Pm 1:139, 151-155; Vbh 392; SA 3:137; NmA 1:243 f; PmA 2:453; VbhA 496. See SD 6.15 (2).

¹¹ Nm 1:113; Nc:Be 235; Vbh 349.

¹² *Parivittakka*.

¹³ *Diṭṭhi,gatāni*. These 10 theses are better known as *avyākata*, “the unexplained” or questions “set aside” (*thapanīya*) by the Buddha. They are listed in a number of suttas: **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9), SD 7.14, **Pāsādikā S** (D 29), **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63), **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72), SD 6.15, **Vacchagotta Saṃyutta** (S 3:257 ff); **Avyākata Saṃyutta** (S 4:374-403); etc. See K N Jayatilleke 1963:242 ff, 473 ff. See U 66. In **Milinda,pañha**, the double-horned question is used skillfully by way of Buddhist apologetics. See also Jayatilleke 1963:226-228, 334 f, 350-352. See also **Abhaya Rāja,kumāra S**, SD 7.12 Intro.

¹⁴ *Thapitāni* can also been “proved or demonstrated,” that is, “by other schools” (see Jayatilleke 1963:242).

¹⁵ See Intro (3).

¹⁶ Here, *tathāgata* has the sense of “a sentient being” (*satta*), as attested by these texts and their comys: **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1.2.27/1:27,24 f; DA 118.1) ≠ **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63.2/1:426,14; MA 3:141,23), **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72.9-14/1:484-486; MA 3:199,2) ≠ **Khemā S** (S 44.1/4:376,26 f; SA 3:113,18); **Yamaka S** (S 22.85/-3:111,14+112,6; SA 2:311,1), **Avyākata S** (A 7.5/4:67-70) & SD 40a.11 (2)m **Nānā Titthiyā S 1** (U 6.4/67,14; UA 340,6 (Ce Ee) 340; UA:Be *satto*; UA:Se *sattā*) ≠ Nm 64,20 (NmA 1:193,24). Cf **Anurādha S** (S 22.86.4/3:116), SD 21.13, where Comy explains *tathāgata* there as “your teacher” (ie the Buddha), but regarding him as a “being” (*taṃ tathāgato’ti tumhākaṃ satthā tathāgato taṃ sattaṃ tathāgatam* (SA 2:312). See also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63) @ SD 5.8 (3) & **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72) @ SD 6.15 (3.2). See SD 6.15 (3).

(4d) A tathāgata neither exists nor
not exist after death,

*n'eva hoti na na hoti tathāgato param, maraṇā*¹⁷
M 63/1:426 + SD 6.15 (2)¹⁸

2.2 AREAS OF SPECULATION

2.2.1 Wrong questions. Interesting as these ten questions may be, they are said to be “questions wrongly put” (*no kallo pañho*),¹⁹ the wrong questions, those that mislead us and confuse the issues. As such, they have no bearing on spiritual cultivation as taught by the Buddha.²⁰ Of course, they could be useful for academic discussions, and they might keep philosophy and its scholars relevant—which is fine, but Buddhist training has a far different purpose, that of spiritual awakening.

2.2.2 Liberation. Liberation, teaches the Buddha, comes from understanding what the self (that is, the body and the mind) really is. If philosophical discussion helps in understanding the Buddha’s teaching, it is useful to that extent. There are no final answers to any such questions and no end to such speculations—it is simply and literally anyone’s guess! If we indulge in such exercises we must be prepared to be like the blind men and the elephant: we can only at best know a part of the answer, but ultimately we still do not know the whole truth.

2.2.3 Speculations

2.2.3.1 **The first 4 view** are cosmological speculations, regarding the nature of the physical universe. Views **1ab** are those of the world the universe in *time*: theoretically, view 1a is that of the eternalist, and view 1b that of the annihilationists. However, an eternalist, such as a God-believer, might regard the world not eternal, but believe his God and his God-created soul as being eternal.

2.2.3.2 Views **2ab** are those of the world or universe as *space*, whether it is a finite or limited universe, or an infinite or boundless universe. Even when science seems to give us an ever clearer understanding or perception of the physical universe, each new theory builds on old ones, often debunking them. In an important sense, through science, we seem to know more and more about less and less.

2.2.3.3 **Views 3ab** concerns the nature of the body and a purported abiding self or soul. This pair of view is an abbreviated version of a tetralemma of bases for the self-identity view.²¹

2.2.3.4 **The last 4 views** are speculation on the nature of a being (*tathāgata*) after death, based on the tetralemma or four alternatives of exist, does not exist, both or neither.²² **The Pāsādika Sutta** (D 29) lists these tetralemma and states why the Buddha rejects them.²³

¹⁷ This tetralemma is found in many places in the Canon: see **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10 (6).

¹⁸ M 72,2-12/1:484 f & SD 6.15 (2). For details, see **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10: see esp Table 5.1: The 10 theses and the 62 grounds.

¹⁹ See **Moliya Phaggunā S** (S 12.12/2:13 f), **Avijjā S 1** (S 12.35/2:60-62). Cf U 66. Also **The Buddha’s silence**, SD 44.1. **Readings**: (1) Jayatilleke 1963:226-228, 242 ff, 334 f, 350-352, 473 ff; (2) Collins 1982:131-138 (§4.2); (3) Harvey 1995: 83-88 (*avyākata* questions), 239-245 (on propositions 7-10 on the tathāgata); (4) Gethin 1998:66-68 (on **Cūḷa Māluṅkyāputta S**, M 63). See also: (1) Intro to **Mahāli S** (D 6) in D:RD 1:186-190; (2) **Abhaya Rājākumāra S** (M 58) @ SD 7.12 Intro.

²⁰ Eg **Pāsādika S** (D 29,30+31/3:135 f), SD 40a.6; **Cūḷa Māluṅkyāputta S** (M 63,2/1:426), SD 5.8. See Jayatilleke 1963:288 f.

²¹ **Paṭisambhidāmagga** illustrates the 4 basic modes of the self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*) in connection with each of the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*) in this manner. One, eg, might wrongly regard form (etc) as self in the way that the flame of a burning oil-lamp is identical to the colour of the flame. Or one might wrongly regard self as possessing form (etc) just as a tree possesses a shadow. Or one might wrongly regard form (etc) as in self as the scent is in the flower. Or one might wrongly regard self as in form (etc), as a jewel is in a casket (Pm 2.50, 74, 77, 90/1:144 f).

²² This tetralemma is found in many places in the Canon. In **Param, maraṇā S** (S 16.12/2:222 f) the Buddha mentions it to Mahā Kassapa; in **Anurādha S** (S 22.86/3:116-119). The tetralemma is mentioned by lemma in 4 suttas in Saṃyutta (S 24.15-18/3:215 f). The **Avyākata Saṃyutta** contains some suttas dealing with it (S 44.2-8/4:381-397): see S:B 1080 n165. For a philosophical discussion, see K N Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963: 350 & Kügler 2003:100 f. For an analysis of the 10 points in terms of the tetralemma, see **Cūḷa Māluṅkyāputta S** (M 63) @ SD 5.8 (2) & **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10.

3 Psychological highlights

3.1 PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE PARABLE

3.1.1 Our views are always outdated

3.1.1.1 In my teachings and writings, when I use the term “psychology” and related ones in a Buddhist context, they are a shorthand for “mental training,” especially meditation and related areas.²⁴ A serious hindrance to mental cultivation and clarity is “wrong thought” (*micchā,saṅkappa*).²⁵ It is often said, “We are what we *think*,” but a more correct assessment would be “We are what we *have* thought.”²⁶ Our past experiences tend to condition how we “see” our present and the future. Very few of us live in the present, and even when we do, it is rarely a sustain experience.

3.1.1.2 If the way we view ourselves and everything else is *conditioned* by our past, we tend to mostly look for the familiar, especially what is “pleasurable” (therefore, attractive) and by that same token, we regard what hinders this pleasure or differs from it as being “unpleasant,” and so should be rejected. Our “views,” since they are rooted in the past, are, as such, outdated ways of looking at things. If we are profoundly biased by our past, we are unlikely to live, much less enjoy, the present moment. We are dead to the present, we lack *presence*—which can really be tragic and devastating to ourselves and to others.

3.1.1.3 The past, however, is only a part of our lives, which, if lived well, is really “omnipresent,” forever in the present. If we are to habitually look to our past, then we would blind and fool ourselves by taking what are foregone “parts” for the *whole* of our lives. This is an important reason why we often have conflicting views of the more vital things in our lives, especially its meaning and purpose.²⁷

The present is telling us to change and better ourselves, but our past, as it were, wants us to be frozen in our comfort zone, so that we remain stunted as perpetual children, and often as quarrelsome ones, too, when we “see” past-biased differences in others. Our minds rooted in the past are caught in a loop, our hearts in a rut. When we clearly and calmly see the present, we also wisely understand the past, and is free from it to be our true selves and awaken to true reality.

3.1.2 The mind’s shadow

3.1.2.1 In Jungian psychology,²⁸ **the shadow** is a part of the unconscious mind that is mysterious and often disagreeable to the conscious mind. Yet, it is relatively close to the conscious mind. This affinity may partly be due to our link to our animal evolution, which is superseded during early childhood by our humanization process,²⁹ especially our reflexive consciousness. The subhuman aspects of our actions and thoughts are then repressed by the conscious mind.³⁰

According to Jung, the shadow is instinctive and non-rational, even irrational, but not necessarily bad, even when it might appear to be so. It can be both ruthless in conflict and empathetic in friendship. It is important as a source of hunches, for understanding of our 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.³¹

The shadow plays a vital role in shaping and influencing how we think and act. In this sense, it is rooted in our past (our latent tendencies)³² and moulded by present conditioning (our biases).³³ It darkens

²³ D 29.30+31/3:135 f = SD 40a.6. On “The 10 questions: a philosophical overview,” see SD 40a.10 (5).

²⁴ On “psychology” and “psychological” in Buddhist contexts, see SD 17.8b (1) Conscious, unconscious and involuntary; SD 31.9 (2) Proper use of words and terms.

²⁵ See **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117/3:72), SD 6.10.

²⁶ See **Unconscious views**, SD 31.9 (1).

²⁷ On the meaning and purpose of life, see **Memes**, SD 26.3 (5.1.1) & “What’s the question? That’s the answer!” (R265 Simple Joys 97).

²⁸ This refers to the works and ideas of Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1876-1961), founder of analytical psychology; see <http://www.cgjungpage.org/>.

²⁹ On our humanization process, see **Love**, SD 38.4 (4).

³⁰ See **Unconscious views**, SD 31.9 & **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

³¹ On Jungian analysis, see also SD 19.2a (1.2); also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadow_\(psychology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shadow_(psychology)).

³² See **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

our view, cutting down clarity, so that we only catch glimpses of jigsaw pieces of reality, plucked out of their context, taking on lives of their own, ghosting in the shadows that are our virtual world.

3.1.3 The value of stories and fairy tales. Underlying a good story or fairy tale’s delightful appeal to children there often is a dark insight into how the human mind works. After all, fairy tales are rooted in some kind of social issues or universal values that have moulded our hearts and how we view others, even the world.

One of the hallmarks of human nature is that we are capable of recalling and relating to actions or events that we see as being vital in holding our family and society together, or as warning us of their dangers to our humanity, dangers and disasters that lurk behind how we see others and the world. This knowledge prevents us from being traumatized by such dangers and disasters when they do occur to us. If we have been raised on healthy fairy tales, we would then be inspired, or at least conditioned, with a sense of security and comfort that good always triumphs in the end.³⁴

3.1.4 The emperor’s new clothes

3.1.4.1 “The Emperor’s New Clothes” (Danish, *Kejserens nye Klæder*) is a short fairy tale by Danish fairy-tale writer and poet Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) about two weavers who dupe a vain and witless emperor into believing that his new suit of royal robes is actually invisible to those who are stupid, inept, or unfit for their positions. When the emperor proudly parades himself before his subjects in his “new clothes,” everyone praises them, except for a child, who cries out, “But he isn’t wearing anything at all!”³⁵

Here, we can see the emperor as our own vain self-centredness (a quality, not a stereotype), seeking other’s attention and approval, and gallivanting around after frivolous pursuits. The two swindling weavers are our own ignorance and craving: without a direct knowledge of true reality we seek meaning and happiness in external things. The fawning courtiers and subjects are those who are “nice” people who do not really care about us.

3.1.4.2 This is the mark of a false friend, says **the Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31), the “sweet-talker” (*anuppiya, bhānī*), who “approves of [our] doing wrong; approves of [our] doing right.”³⁶ The reality is that he only has his own self-interest at heart, and actually harms us and others in the end. On the other hand, we should, with tact and vision, reach out to such people so that they are see beyond such follies, become surer of themselves, and relate to others in authentic ways. Whether they deserve such help or not is not the point: this is what compassion is about.

3.1.4.3 The young boy is like the child Siddhattha, born into this world—as the archetypal true friend—to point out the true nature of the “new clothes” we keep buying, wearing and showing off, but which, in our denseness, only reveal our nakedness. Opaque to true reality, we stand naked before the knowing, and before others who exploit us. The child in the fairy tale is a reminder that we need to return to a child-like ability and willingness to see the simple truths that are before us, before the walls of words and weight of thoughts hide them from us and hinder our wisdom. Let us be reminded of this beautiful truth whenever we see a child in old clothes, of the nature of true spiritual friendship.

³³ On the 4 biases (*agati*), see V 1:339; **Sigāl’ovāda s** (D 31,5/3:182), SD 4.1; **Saṅgīti S** (D 22,1.11(19)/3:228, *agata, gamana*); **Agati S 1** (A 4.17/2:18. Cf **Saṅgha Bala S** (A 9.5,7-9/4:364 f), SD 2.21; Vism 22.55/683, 22.69/-685.

³⁴ See eg 40a.8 (5.3.2), on the Rapunzel atory; see also **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1.

³⁵ Andersen’s tale (in *Fairy Tales Told for Children, Third Collection*, 1837) is based on a story from *Libro de los ejempllos* (or *El Conde Lucanor*), “The Tales of Count Lucanor” (1335, Exemplo 32), a medieval Spanish collection of 51 cautionary tales with various sources, such as Aesop, Indian fables, Persian folktales, and Jewish and Arabic literature, by Juan Manuel, prince of Villena (1282-1348). Andersen learned of the tale in a German tr, “So ist der Lauf der Welt” (“That’s the way of the world”) (Elias Bredsdorff, *Hans Christian Andersen: The Story of His Life and Work, 1805-75*, London, 1975:312 f). In the Spanish tale, a king is duped by weavers who claim to make a suit of clothes invisible to any man not the son of his presumed father; whereas Andersen redirected the focus on courtly vanity and intellectual pride instead of adulterous paternity (Jackie Wullschlager, *Hans Christian Andersen: The Life of a Storyteller*, Chicago, 2000:176). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emperor%27s_New_Clothes.

³⁶ D 31,18/3:186 @ SD 4.1.

3.1.5 An elephant in the room

3.1.5.1 This is an English metaphor³⁷ for an obvious truth that is either being ignored or left unaddressed. This metaphor also applies to an obvious problem or risk that no one wants or dares to address. It is based on the idea that an elephant in a room would be impossible to overlook. As such, those in the room who pretend that the elephant is not there, either have chosen to avoid dealing with the looming issue or are unable to deal with it.

3.1.5.2 A vital test for practising Buddhism as a living religion is how we, as a Buddhist community, group, or even as individuals, solve or, at least, act on a real problem hindering Buddhist social and spiritual progress in our midst. Most Buddhist groups (especially those of ethnic Buddhists) tend to ritualize Buddhism, seeing it merely as a calendar of “activities” and “meetings,” and fulfilling our “roles and duties.”

Such activities and meetings lose their way into unrelated issues of a merely “professional” or worldly perspective, often comparing ourselves to other dominant religions, with almost no sense of the Buddhist spirit. Instead, we should be working towards viable visions and actions of self-improvement in a Dharma-moved and sutta-based spirit.

3.1.5.3 These imperial “new clothes” are our academic titles, professional qualifications, wealth and social status, which we deem as qualifying us to speak for Buddhism. Yet, despite such clothings and disguises, no matter how “new” or elegant, we still stand naked, unwitting, even unashamed and oblivious before the Dharma.

The problem is that even if an observant child were to point out our nakedness, we would cleverly retort or trivialize with a witty joke, or keep up a conniving silence: after all he’s only a child, what does he know? And then in our nakedness, we catch a terrible chill in due course, which might just prove fatal, or perhaps at least disillusioning, for us.

3.1.5.4 The truthful and innocent child in the fairy tale of the Emperor’s New Clothes represents our unconditioned self or our higher mind that is capable of seeing true reality. This is our wholesome nature that sees both good and bad, is able to distinguish them, and choose the right one. This happens naturally, unless we have been swept off our feet by some external flood of greed, hate, delusion or fear.

Young children, as is well known, naturally love animals. This reflects our natural love and respect for life and to be in harmony with others and our environment. A truly happy child, in other words, is close to the Dharma, only perhaps he is still unable to articulate this goodness, but naturally lives this goodness until complicated by adult sentiments and power religions.

3.1.5.5 So we need to be humbly and comfortably dressed in the Dharma, and return the elephant in the room to his natural habitat. Buddhism is neither a business nor a building; it is not about how much or how many we have, much less comparing ourselves with others and other religions. What we have to do is to cultivate inner peace and outer harmony. The best way to do this is to know the Buddha, study the Dharma, and live the Sangha spirit.

3.1.6 Polite fiction

3.1.6.1 When we do not know the Dharma well enough, or is not moved by it, or worse, we reject it, we are likely to be motivated by **fear**, that is, a fear of failure, a fear of being rejected by others, a fear of offending the rich and the powerful, a fear of those we perceive as being better than us, a fear of fear itself. Of course, as good people and better leaders, we try not to show our fear to others, perhaps fearing that they might feel the fear, too.

3.1.6.2 Often enough, we have become part of a Buddhist group not because we want to grow as individuals (we might not even be aware of such a need), but that it promotes our social status, or even provides us with some kind of economic gain. Or Buddhism is just one of many shiny buttons on our coat of many colours. We prosper on the fiction that everything is or will be all right. No one has any problem, not in our community, anyway, we think. Moreover, we self-righteously claim that it is not polite to openly talk about our problems or those of others. Ours then is a life of polite fictions, of counterfeit truths.

³⁷ On metaphorical language, see **Dh 97: The two levels of religious language**, SD 10.6.

3.1.6.3 A **polite fiction** is a social situation where all involved are aware of a painful truth, but pretend to believe in some alternate virtual reality, a counterfeit truth, to avoid conflict or embarrassment. Polite fictions are closely related to euphemism, in which an idea or an event viewed as impolite, disagreeable, or offensive is replaced by a pleasant or less offensive expression understood by both speaker and listener to mean the same thing. Academically, “polite fiction” has been observed way back to at least 1953.³⁸

3.1.6.4 A common example of polite fiction is when a couple has just had a bad argument, after which the man absents himself from a prearranged social gathering. When asked about his absence, she gives the excuse that he is “not well” or was detained by a more pressing matter. There is nothing seriously immoral or problematic about such a reaction. What is conveyed here may be called a **“Chinese truth,”** as it is commonly practised in a community that fears loss of face and values social harmony by avoiding open embarrassment or conflict.

3.1.6.5 Another example would be that of a man who goes out drinking, but tells his family that he is merely going for an evening stroll. Even though everyone in the family knows he will be going to the bar, and will come home drunk, they all pretend that he has actually gone out for a walk, and pretend not to notice his drunkenness when he returns. Psychologically, this is also known as *co-dependence*.³⁹ This is a painful case of being false friends to one another.

3.1.6.6 A polite fiction then is usually a form of psychological defence mechanism of denial.⁴⁰ It can be very mild, such as when it is meant to fool insignificant observers, such as outsiders or children judged too young to be told the truth. Such a truth may then become “an elephant in the room” (albeit a small baby elephant), so that no matter how obvious it is, those most affected pretend to themselves and to others that it is not so. This quaint human weakness is often used as part of a humour motif in literature and drama, where one party tries to maintain a polite fiction while another tries to expose it.⁴¹

3.1.6.7 In real life, however, polite fiction is hiding the truth from others, and even from ourselves, so that we might actually accept the problem as being non-existent, until it is too late. We need to see that the truth that a polite fiction tries to hide is often *a symptom of a bigger problem or recurring pattern of problems*. As such, we need to see it in its broader context. A polite fiction tries to hide the proverbial elephant with our whole body with limbs outstretched, but the rest of the elephant is clearly in public view.⁴² We need to return the elephant to its natural habitat.

4 Other highlights

4.1 RELIGION AS LITERATURE

4.1.1 Religious scripture, even religion itself, can be viewed as literature, especially by those who enjoy reading them, even if they do not claim to be its followers. Even for a true follower, studying Buddhism as literature has some vital benefits. Firstly, Buddhist scripture *is* literature. It began as a living oral tradition but evolved into literary records of the Buddha’s teachings. Like any good literature, Buddhist scripture uses stories, parables, figures, mythology and literary conventions to present the Dharma. If we understand such mechanics of literature, we will see a fuller living picture of the Buddha’s teachings.

4.1.2 Secondly, Buddhist literature, like many good literature, uses *language*, the word, what is spoken and speakable, to present feelings, emotions and subtleties of significant events that would otherwise elude our scrutiny. The teachings are formulated using various literary and mnemonic devices to help us remember them better and to relive them. In bringing such a range of human experiences skillfully to the

³⁸ Tom Burns, “Friends, enemies and the polite fiction,” *American Sociological Review* 18, Dec 1953:654-662.

³⁹ On dependence, see SD 24.10b (2.4).

⁴⁰ On defence mechanism, SD 24.10b (2).

⁴¹ Amongst those who employ polite fiction in their works are the French playwright and actor Molière (1622-1673) in “Tartuffe” (1664), and the Irish poet, author, and playwright, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) in “The Importance of Being Earnest” (1895).

⁴² See also Piya Tan, “New clothes and nakedness,” R267, 2012.

level of the ordinary people, we are all, too, instructed and enriched by them, endowing us with a clear vision of the meaning and purpose of the good life.

4.1.3 Thirdly, and most importantly, sutta literature addresses the individual. As we immerse ourselves in Dharma teachings and tales, we see a rich range of characters—fools, villains, talking animals, superhuman beings, great humans, virtuous individuals, awakened saints and the Buddha himself—to identify with and emulate. We are able to envision how the bad have to ultimately face the bitter fruits of their badness, how the lost turn to the light by their own efforts or by a helping hand, and how the good enjoy full liberation through their own goodness.

4.1.4 Buddhist literature—by way of prose, poems and parables—teaches us how to rise above the mind-body and the world, to attain profound inner **bliss**, and so enjoy the beauty of the Dharma.⁴³ Using this bliss and letting go of that beauty, we go on to see the liberating truth, the light that transcends even the most divine of beauty. In short, Buddhism as literature is about enjoying beauty and seeing truth in the highest sense of the words.⁴⁴

4.2 A MODERN POEM

4.2.1 We have already mentioned Buddhism as *literature* [4.1], and now we can add that Buddhism also influences literature, in this case, poetry. Elsewhere, we have noted the influence of **the Āditta (Pariyāya) Sutta** (S 35.28)⁴⁵ or “the fire sermon” on the Irish poet, T S Eliot’s “The Waste Land” (1922).⁴⁶ The American John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887), introduced the parable to the US audience through his poem, “The Blind Man and the Elephant” (1872), probably based on the Jain version, since he mentions only 6 blind men, rather than the 9, the Buddhist version.⁴⁷

4.2.2 The poem begins:⁴⁸

It was six men of Indostan
Who went to see the Elephant
That each by observation

To learning much inclined,
(Though all of them were blind),
Might satisfy his mind.

The poem concludes:

And so these men of Indostan
Each in his own opinion
Though each was partly in the right

Disputed loud and long,
Exceeding stiff and strong,
And all were in the wrong!



Blind men examining an elephant

(Ukiyo-e print illustration by Hanabusa Itchō, 1888).

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. CALL NUMBER:

Illus. in H67 [Asian RR]. Reproduction No: LC-USZC4-8725.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3g08725>

⁴³ See Reflection, “Not by food alone, but by joy, too,” R197 110706 in *Simple Joys* 3, 2011: ch 11.

⁴⁴ On beauty and truth in Buddhist spirituality, further see SD 37.8 (6.1.2.7) & SD 40a.1 (8.1.2).

⁴⁵ S 35.28/4:19 f = Mv 1.21 @ V 1:34 f = SD 1.3.

⁴⁶ See <http://eliotswasteland.tripod.com/> & SD 1.3 (1.2).

⁴⁷ For the full poem, see Martin Gardner (1 Sep 1995). *Famous Poems from Bygone Days*. Courier Dover Publications. 1995:124.

⁴⁸ http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_poems_of_John_Godfrey_Saxe/The_Blind_Men_and_the_Elephant.

Moral:

So oft in theologic wars,	The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance	Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant	Not one of them has seen! ⁴⁹

4.2.3 On a simple level, the moral of the story is that there may be some truth to anyone’s opinion. Since people tend to express their views, that is, how they see things or how something appears to them, sometimes we might share the same perspective, sometimes not. Or, there are reasons for people holding on to a view, and it would be instructive when we understand that reason or reasoning. In doubtful cases, it helps to give others and ourselves the benefit of the doubt. This way, we show understanding tolerance, or, at least, we do not get into an “elephant” argument with those who think or believe differently from us.

4.3 THE ELEPHANT PARABLE AND SCIENCE

4.3.1 The parable of the blind men and the elephant has also influenced some level of the more technical disciplines. It is seen as a metaphor in many such disciplines, where it refers to thinking “outside of the box” or when our ideas seem to deviate from the mainstream or traditional ones.

4.3.2 In **biology**, the way the blind men cling to their respective views of parts of an elephant as being the whole elephant is a good analogy for the polyclonal B cell response.⁵⁰ Each clone or antibody recognizes different parts of a single, larger antigen, like each blind man feels one part of the elephant.

4.3.3 In **physics**, for example, it has been seen as an analogy for wave-particle duality, which postulates that all *matter* (as electrons) exhibit both *wave* and *particle* properties. As a central concept of quantum mechanics, this duality addresses the inability of classical concepts like “particle” and “wave” to fully describe the behavior of quantum-scale objects.

In standard quantum mechanics, this paradox is seen as a fundamental property of the universe, while alternative interpretations explain the duality as an emergent, second-order consequence of various limitations of the observer.

This treatment focuses on explaining the behavior from the perspective of the widely used “Copenhagen interpretation,”⁵¹ in which wave-particle duality is one aspect of the concept of “complementarity,”⁵² that a phenomenon can be viewed in one way or in another, but not both simultaneously.⁵³

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⁴⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_men_and_an_elephant.

⁵⁰ See eg Michael M Lederman & Leonid Margolis, “The lymph node in HIV pathogenesis,” *Seminars in Immunology* 20,3 June 2008:187-195. See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polyclonal_B_cell_response.

⁵¹ One of the earliest and most commonly taught interpretation of quantum mechanics, it holds that quantum mechanics does not give us any description of an objective reality but deals only with probabilities of observing, or measuring, various aspects of energy quanta, entities which fit neither the classical idea of particles nor the classical idea of waves. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copenhagen_interpretation.

⁵² A fundamental principle of quantum mechanics (introduced by Niels Bohrm 1927), closely related with the “Copenhagen interpretation.” It holds that objects governed by quantum mechanics, when measured, give results that depend inherently upon the type of measuring device used, and must necessarily be described in classical mechanical terms. Further, a full description of a particular type of phenomenon can only be achieved through measurements made in each of the various possible bases—which are thus complementary. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complementarity_\(physics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complementarity_(physics)).

⁵³ See eg David Bohm, *Quantum Theory*, 1951:26. See also <http://www.wave-particle-duality.com/>; http://theory.uwinnipeg.ca/mod_tech/node154.html; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wave%E2%80%93particle_duality.

The First Discourse on the Various Sectarians

U 6.4

1 Thus have I heard.

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

2 Now at that time, there were a number of recluses, brahmins, and sectarian wanderers of various outlook,⁵⁴ living around Sāvattḥī, holding various views, of various persuasions, of various inclinations [preferences],

relying for their support by way of these various views.⁵⁵

The 10 theses (*ditthi,gata*)⁵⁶

THE WORLD

(1a) There were some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The world is *eternal*:
only this is true, all else false.”⁵⁷

(1b) There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The world is *not* eternal:
only this is true, all else false.”⁵⁸

(2a) There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The world is *finite*:
only this is true, all else false.”⁵⁹

(2b) There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The world is *infinite*:
only this is true, all else false.”⁶⁰

THE SOUL OR SELF

(3a) There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The soul and the body are *identical*:
only this is true, all else false.”⁶¹

⁵⁴ “Recluses, brahmins, and sectarian wanderers of various outlook,” *nānā,titthiya,samaṇa,brāhmaṇa,paribbājaka*. The “sectarian wanderers” (*nānā,titthiya*) were a special class of ancient Indian mendicants (including women wanderers) who held various beliefs, who were often great debaters, and wandered around India from pre-Buddhist times: see SD 25.1 (1) & SID: *samaṇa,brāhmaṇa,paribbājaka*. Dhammapāla explains *titthiya* as being derived from *tittha*, “ford, river-crossing,” meaning it is here that they cross over (*taranti*) samsara to enter nirvana; but here it refers to those with various outlooks or dogmas (*tittha*) (UA 338). Buddhaghosa says that they are renunciants who hold on to one or other of the 62 views (see **Brahma,jāla S**, D 1 = SD 25) (MA 2:7,23), and that they are unable to overcome the 5 mental hindrance or cultivate the 4 divine abodes (SA 3:171,16).

⁵⁵ §2: *Tena kho pana samayena sambahulā nānā,titthiya,samaṇa,brāhmaṇa,paribbājakā sāvattḥiyam paṭivasanti nānā,ditthikā nānā,khantikā nānā,rucikā nānā,ditthi,nissaya,nissitā*. **Dhamma,pāla** apparently equates “holding various views” (*nānā,ditthikā*), “(being) of various persuasions” (*nānā,khantikā*), and “(being) of various inclinations” (*nānā,rucikā*), as being respectively the result and activity of “the 3 perversions” (*vipallāsa*), ie, those of views (*ditthi,vipallāsa*), of thought (*citta,vipallāsa*), and of perception (*saññā,vipallāsa*) (UA 338). On the 3 perversions, see **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52), SD 16.11.

⁵⁶ These 10 theses (*ditthi,gata*) are better known as the 10 unanswered or undetermined questions (*avyākata,pañha*). For a scriptural overview, see Intro (1) & SD 40a.10 (6). See also Intro (2+3).

⁵⁷ *Sassato loko, idam eva saccam mogham aññan'ti*.

⁵⁸ *Asassato loko idam eva saccam mogham aññan'ti*.

⁵⁹ *Antavā loko idam eva saccam mogham aññan'ti*.

⁶⁰ *Anantavā loko idam eva saccam mogham aññan'ti*.

⁶¹ *Tam jivam tam sariram, idam eva saccam mogham aññan'ti*.

(3b) There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The soul and the body are *different*: only this is true, all else false.”⁶²

THE TATHAGATA⁶³

(4a) There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The tathagata *exists* after death: only this is true, all else false.”⁶⁴

(4b) There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The tathagata does *not* exist after death: only this is true, all else false.”⁶⁵

(4c) There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The tathagata *both* exists and does not exist after death: only this is true, all else false.”⁶⁶

(4d) There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,

“The tathagata *neither* exists nor not exist after death: only this is true, all else false.”⁶⁷

3 They dwelled quarrelling, arguing, given to disputing, attacking one another with verbal knives [the weapon of words],⁶⁸ saying:

“This is the truth [the Dharma], that is not the truth! This is not the truth, that is the truth!”⁶⁹

The monks tell the Buddha about the speculators

4 Now a number of monks, having dressed themselves and taking bowl and robe early in the forenoon, entered Sāvattthī for almsfood.

5 Having walked in Sāvattthī on their alms-round and finished their meal, they then approached the Blessed One, having saluted the Blessed One, they sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, the monks said this to the Blessed One:

6 “Here, bhante, a number of recluses, brahmins and wanderers of other sects living around Sāvattthī, holding views, of various persuasions, of various inclinations [preferences], relying for their support by way of these various views.

7 THE 10 THESES [WRONG VIEWS]

(1a) *There are some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

‘The world’⁷⁰ is eternal:

⁶² *Aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ, idam eva saccaṃ mogham aññaṃ ’ti.*

⁶³ In passages dealing with speculative views, *tathāgata* has a general sense of “being” (*satta*) [1: M 72 qu], or contextually, in a more technical sense of anyone liberated, *not* necessarily only a buddha or arhat: see SD 40a.10 (4). Comy (UA 349, PTS) here however glosses it as “self” (*atta*), which is possible but narrower than *satta*. The better reading is likely to be *satta*, as found in the Be Comy (also MA 3:141 ad M 1:426 on the same list of views). For a canonical def of *tathāgata*, see **Pāsādika S** (D 29.28 f/3:135 f); also Toshiichi ENDO 1997:195-206 (ch V). On the ineffability of the *tathāgata*, see Harvey 1995:235-245.

⁶⁴ *Hoti tathāgato paraṃ maraṇā, idam eva saccaṃ mogham aññaṃ ’ti.*

⁶⁵ *Na hoti tathāgato paraṃ maraṇā, idam eva saccaṃ mogham aññaṃ ’ti.*

⁶⁶ *Hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato paraṃ maraṇā, idam eva saccaṃ mogham aññaṃ ’ti.*

⁶⁷ *N’eva hoti na na hoti tathāgato paraṃ maraṇā, idam eva saccaṃ mogham aññaṃ ’ti.*

⁶⁸ *Te bhaṇḍana,jātā kalaha,jātā vivād’āpannā aññaṃ-aññaṃ mukha,sattīhi vitu,dantā viharanti.* On “verbal knives” (*mukha,satti*), as at A 2.43/1:70.

⁶⁹ *Ediso dhammo, n’ediso dhammo; n’ediso dhammo, ediso dhammo ’ti.*

⁷⁰ Comy says that here “world” (*loka*) means “self” (*atta*) (UA 339), but this is a philosophical analysis at best. The self-view is possibly one of the views found here, but its main drift is “world” as “space” (*okāsa*) [**Rohitassa S**

(1b) *There are also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

only this is true, all else false.’

*‘The world is not eternal:
only this is true, all else false.’*

(2a) *There are also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

*‘The world is finite:
only this is true, all else false.’*

(2b) *There are also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

*‘The world is infinite:
only this is true, all else false.’*

(3a) *There are also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

*‘The soul and the body are identical:
only this is true, all else false.’*

(3b) *There were also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

*‘The soul and the body are different:
only this is true, all else false.’*

(4a) *There are also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

*‘The tathagata [The saint] exists after death:
only this is true, all else false.’*

(4b) *There are also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

*‘The tathagata does not exist after death:
only this is true, all else false.’*

(4c) *There are also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

*‘The tathagata both exists and does not exist
after death:
only this is true, all else false.’*

(4d) *There are also some recluses and brahmins who held this doctrine, this view,*

*‘The tathagata neither exists nor not exist after
death:
only this is true, all else false.’”*

The Buddha disapproves of the speculators

8 “The wanderers of other sects, bhikshus, are blind, eyeless [lacking vision]: they know neither the beneficial nor the unbeneficial, neither the truth nor untruth.⁷¹

9 Not knowing what is beneficial [the meaning], not knowing what is unbeneficial [the false meaning], not knowing what is the truth, not knowing what is false,

they dwell quarrelling, arguing, given to disputing, attacking one another with verbal knives [the weapon of words], saying:

‘This is the truth [the Dharma], that is not the truth! This is not the truth, that is the truth!’”

Those blind from birth (a Jātaka parable)

10 Once upon a time, bhikshus, there was a certain king [rajah]⁷² in this very Sāvattihī. Then, bhikshus, the king summoned a certain man, saying:

(S 2.26), SD 7.2 (1), the 3 worlds]. Dhammapāla’s gloss here cannot apply to views 2ab, which clearly refers to the physical universe.

⁷¹ *Añña,tiithiyā bhikkhave paribbājakā andhā acakkhukā, atthaṃ na jānanti, anattaṃ na jānanti, dhammaṃ na jānanti, adhammaṃ na jānanti.*

⁷² Comy says that the king (an ancient unknown rajah), “playful by nature” (*keḷi,sīla*), one day, looking at his royal mount, thought that it would be auspicious (*bhaddaka*) for everyone to behold such a magnificent animal, and that it would be a great loss for the blind, who should at least feel what an elephant was like (UA 341 f). See Intro (1).

11 ‘Come now,⁷³ my good man, assemble together all those in Sāvattḥī who have been blind from birth!’⁷⁴

‘Yes, your majesty,’ the man answered to the king in assent, and he gathered together all those in Sāvattḥī who had been blind from birth.

12 Then he approached the king and said:

‘Your majesty, all those in Sāvattḥī who are blind from birth have been assembled.’

13 ‘I say,⁷⁵ show⁷⁶ an elephant to the blind men then.’⁷⁷

‘Yes, your majesty,’ the man answered to the king in assent, and he showed the blind men an elephant.

The blind men “sees” the elephant

14 (1) Some of the blind were shown the elephant’s head and told: ‘You, who are born blind,⁷⁸ this is an elephant.’

head, *sīsa* (Skt *śīrṣa*)

(2) Some of the blind were shown the elephant’s ear and told: ‘You, who are born blind, this is an elephant.’

ear, *kaṇṇa* (Skt *kaṛṇa*)

(3) Some of the blind were shown the elephant’s tusk and told: ‘You, who are born blind, this is an elephant.’

tusk, *danta* (Skt *danta*)

(4) Some of the blind were shown the elephant’s trunk and told: ‘You, who are born blind, this is an elephant.’

trunk, *soṇḍa* (Skt *śauṇḍa*)

(5) Some of the blind were shown the elephant’s body and told: ‘You, who are born blind, this is an elephant.’

body, *kāya* (Skt *kāya*)

(6) Some of the blind were shown the elephant’s foot and told: ‘You, who are born blind, this is an elephant.’

foot, *pāda* (Skt *pāda*)

(7) Some of the blind were shown the elephant’s thigh and told: ‘You, who are born blind, this is an elephant.’

thigh, *satthi* (Skt *sakthi*)

(8) Some of the blind were shown the elephant’s tail and told: ‘You, who are born blind, this is an elephant.’

tail, *naṅguṭṭha* (Skt *lāṅgula*, *laṅgūla*)

(9) Some of the blind were shown the elephant’s tail-tuft and told: ‘You, who are born blind, this is an elephant.’

tail-tuft, *vāladhi* (Skt *vāladhi*)

Then, bhikshus, the man, having shown the elephant to the men blind from birth, approached the king, and said this to him:

15 ‘Your majesty, the men blind from birth have “seen”⁷⁹ the elephant. Please do as you wish now.’⁸⁰

⁷³ “Come now,” *ambho* (BHS, Amg *hambho*, also in late Pali), an exclamatory particle used, usu with inferiors or familiars, often foll by a voc (as here): *tvaṃ ambho purisa*. Uses: (1) as a vigorous effort to attract attention, “Look here! I say! Come now!”; (2) expresses reproach or anger or objection: “Ho! Hey!”

⁷⁴ *Ehi tvaṃ, ambho purisa, yāvatakā sāvatthiyā jaccandhā te sabbe ekajjhaṃ sannipātehitī*. “Blind from birth” or “born blind,” *jacc’andha* (Skt *jātyandha*) = *jāti*, “birth” + *andha*, “blind” (where *-ti* + *a-* → *-tya-* → *cca*), or from *jātiyā andha* (UA 342): D 2:328,3; U 68,8 f; J 1:45,1*, 4:192,9*; Vbh 412,40; Vism 596,25. This gives the name of the U chapter.

⁷⁵ “Come now,” *bhaṇe* (med of *bhaṇati*, “to speak, tell”), lit “I say!” meaning something like “to be sure,” “look here”; a familiar term of address often used by a king to a subject. Comy says that this is a disrespectful form of address, one “reflecting disregard” (*bhaṇe’ti abahumān’ālāpo*, UA 342).

⁷⁶ Here, “show” (*dassehi*, 3 sg imp) is fig, meaning that the blind men were led to feel or experience an elephant for themselves, so that each having felt some part of an elephant would know “an elephant,” ie, the whole elephant. So the well-trained docile elephant was “made to sit” (*sayāpetvā*) for the convenience of the blind men. (UA 342)

⁷⁷ *Tena hi, bhaṇe, jaccandhānam hatthim dassēhīti*.

⁷⁸ *Jacc-andha* [§11 for etym]. The blind men were addressed as “you, who are born blind” (*jacc’andhā*, 2 pl imp) throughout for dramatic effect.

⁷⁹ *Diṭṭha* here also has the sense of “has understood.” There is a dramatic irony here, even some wry humour, as the men, blind from birth, regard seeing and touching as the same thing (UA 342). The wordplay is obvious: we are where dealing with the subject of “views,” which can mean the way that the blind or ignorant try to see things.

The blind men's views of the elephant

16 Then, bhikshus, the king approached the men blind from birth, and said:

‘O you who are born blind, have you “seen” the elephant?’

‘Yes, your majesty, we have *seen* the elephant!’

‘Speak then, you who are born blind, what is the elephant like?’

17 THE BLIND MEN AND THEIR VIEWS

(1) Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown said thus: ‘The elephant, your majesty, is like ⁸¹	<i>the elephant's head, a water-pot!</i>	<i>kumbha</i>
(2) Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown said thus: ‘The elephant, your majesty, is like	<i>the elephant's ear, a winnowing-tray!</i> ⁸²	<i>suppa</i>
(3) Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown said thus: ‘The elephant, your majesty, is like	<i>the elephant's tusk, a wooden stake!</i> ⁸³	<i>khīla</i>
(4) Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown said thus: ‘The elephant, your majesty, is like	<i>the elephant's trunk, a plough-beam!</i>	<i>naṅgal'īsa</i>
(5) Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown said thus: ‘The elephant, your majesty, is like	<i>the elephant's body, a store-house!</i> ⁸⁴	<i>koṭṭha</i>
(6) Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown said thus: ‘The elephant, your majesty, is like	<i>the elephant's foot, a mortar!</i>	<i>udukkhala</i>
(7) Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown said thus: ‘The elephant, your majesty, is like	<i>the elephant's thigh,</i> ⁸⁵ <i>a pillar!</i>	<i>thūṇā</i>
(8) Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown said thus: ‘The elephant, your majesty, is like	<i>the elephant's tail, a pestle!</i>	<i>musala</i>
(9) Bhikshus, those men blind from birth who were shown said thus: ‘The elephant, your majesty, is like	<i>the elephant's tail-tuft, a broom [a besom]!</i>	<i>sammajjani</i>

18 Thus, bhikshus, they struck one another with their fists, saying,

‘The elephant is like this, the elephant is not like that! The elephant is not like this, the elephant is like that!’

19 On account of this, bhikshus, the king was amused.⁸⁶

The blind can only have “views”

20 In the very same way,⁸⁷ bhikshus, the wanderers of other sects, blind, eyeless [lacking vision], strike one another with their fists.

21 They know not what is beneficial [the meaning]; they know not what is unbeneficial [the false meaning]. They know not what is the truth [the Dharma]; they know not what is false [not-Dharma].

22 Not knowing what is beneficial, not knowing what is unbeneficial, not knowing what is the truth, not knowing what is false,

⁸⁰ *Yassadāni kālam maññasīti.*

⁸¹ “Is like,” *edisō* (Skt *idrśa*; BHS (mostly Mvst) *edrśa*; P also *īdisa*).

⁸² Skt *śūrpa* “(also written *sūrpa*) a winnowing basket or fan (ie a kind of wicker receptacle which, when shaken about, serves as a fan for winnowing corn)” (SED).

⁸³ Following Be Ce Se & Comy; Ee has *phāla*, which means “ploughshare.”

⁸⁴ *Koṭṭha* can mean “a store-room or granary” (S 1:236 = Thī 283; J 2:135, 168, 3:17, 4:280), or “belly, stomach, abdomen” (M 1:332; Miln 265).

⁸⁵ Ee *piṭṭhi* (“back”); Be Ce Se *satthi* (“thigh”), vl *saṭṭhi*.

⁸⁶ Comy says that on account of the king’s “playful nature” (*keḷi,sīlattā*), the blind men made fools of themselves by mistaking a part of an elephant for its whole, and violently disputing over it—amusing both him and the assembled court (UA 342). See Intro (1.2).

⁸⁷ “In the very same way,” *evam eva kho*, which begins the Buddha’s explanation of the simile: see Intro (1.1) above.

they dwell quarrelling, arguing, stuck in disputing, attacking one another with the weapon of words, saying:

‘This is the truth [the Dharma], that is not the truth! This is the not truth, that is the truth!’”

The Buddha’s utterance

23 Then, the Blessed One, knowing the significance, on the occasion, uttered this udana [inspired utterance]:⁸⁸

<i>Imesu kira sajjanti</i>	Attached to these hearsay, ⁸⁹
<i>eke samaṇa, brāhmaṇā</i>	some recluses and brahmins
<i>viggayha nam vivadanti</i>	quarrel divisively over them, ⁹⁰
<i>janā ek’aṅga, dassino</i>	these people who see only one side of things!

— evaṃ —

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[For a fuller Bibliography, see that of SD 6.15 or SD 40a.10]

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⁸⁸ *Atha kho bhagavā etam atthaṃ viditvā tāyaṃ velāyaṃ imaṃ udānaṃ udānesi.*

⁸⁹ *On kira* (more fully, *iti, kira*) as “hearsay,” see **Kesa, puttīya S** (A 3.65/1:188-193) & SD 35.4a (3a(3)).

⁹⁰ *Nam*, here rendered as pl to reflect the first line.