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## Alabbhanīya Ṭhāna Sutta

The Discourse on Unattainable States | A 5.48

Theme: 5 kinds of reality that we must all face

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2006, 2013

### 1 Introduction

**1.1 UNABRIDGED TRANSLATION.** The Alabbhanīya Ṭhāna Sutta (A 5.48) is a short but important “practice” sutta centred around aspects of impermanence and death. All other available translations, including that by Bodhi (2012), are abridged. This translation gives all the abridgements (*peyyāla*) in full to facilitate meditative reading and listening.

**1.2 FULL NUMBERING.** The Pali Text Society (PTS) edition of the Sutta is unevenly numbered so that it is not very helpful for referencing. Bodhi’s translation too does not have any internal numbering. As such, I have used my own numbering for easy referencing especially for sutta study.

#### 1.3 RELATED TEXTS

**1.3.1 Chinese version.** This Sutta has a near parallel in a Chinese translation, that is, Ekottara Āgama 34.6.<sup>1</sup> It locates the Sutta teaching in Anātha,piṇḍika’s park in Jeta’s grove at Sāvattihī (舍衛國祇樹給孤獨園 *Shè wèi guó qí shù jǐ gū dú yuán*), but no location is mentioned in the Pali.

The set of 5 unattainables is the same in both texts. The Ekōttara Āgama however adds that “whether the Tathagata arises in the world or not, the Dharma world remains as it is” (若如來出世, 若如來不出, 此法界恒住如故 *ruò rúlái chūshì, ruò rúlái bù chū, cǐ fǎjiè héng zhù rú gù*) (T697a19-20)<sup>2</sup> and that we should resort to skillful means (*upāya*) to practise the 5 spiritual powers (當求方便, 修行五根 *dāng qiú fāngbiàn, xiū-xíng wǔ gēn*) for attaining the 4 paths of sainthood (T697a22-28).<sup>3</sup>

**1.3.2 The (Mallikā Kāla,kata) Kosala Sutta**<sup>4</sup> closely parallels the Alabbhanīya Sutta in their teachings. In fact, the difference between the two texts is mainly grammatical: the former is in the singular while the latter is in the plural. The (Mallikā Kāla,kata) Kosala Sutta is addressed to the rajah Pasenadi, and so is presented in the singular, while the Alabbhanīya Sutta is addressed to some monks, and so is in the plural. Another difference, a minor one, is that while in the former the 5 unattainables [A 5.48,7] are given as simple statements, those in the latter [§2] are given as quotes.

### 2 Sutta teaching

#### 2.1 DOUBLE CYCLE

##### 2.1.1 The summary

2.1.1.1 The Alabbhanīya Sutta has a simple “double cycle” structure. It opens with the thesis, summary or syllabus of teachings [§§1+2], that to live, whether on earth or in the heavens, or anywhere in the universe, is to inevitably experience these 5 realities or “5 D’s,” namely, decay, disease, death, destruction and defeat (or failure).

2.1.1.2 The teachings are then given in 2 cycles: the negative, on the untutored worldling [§§3-32], and the positive, on the wise noble disciple [§§33-68]. Here is a summary of the full cycle of teachings:

For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings (*atha kho yāvatā sattānaṃ āgati gati cuti upapatti*) [§5 etc]—

<b>for all these beings:</b>				<b>negative</b>	<b>positive</b>
(1) what is subject to decay	( <i>jarā,dhammam</i> )	decays	( <i>jīrati</i> )	§3	§33
(2) what is subject to disease	( <i>vyadhi,dhammam</i> )	falls sick	( <i>vyādhīyati</i> )	§9	§40

<sup>1</sup> EĀ 34.6 (T2.697).

<sup>2</sup> See **Dhamma Niyāma S** (A 3.134), SD 26.8.

<sup>3</sup> On the 5 powers (*pañca bala*), see **Pañca bala**, SD 10.5. On the 4 paths of sainthood (*ariya,magga*), see SD 10.16 (1.2.1).

<sup>4</sup> A 5.49/3:57 (SD 42.14).

(3) what is subject to death	( <i>maraṇa, dhammanī</i> )	dies	( <i>mīyati</i> )	§15	§47
(4) what is subject to destruction	( <i>khaya, dhammanī</i> )	is destroyed	( <i>khīyati</i> )	§21	§54
(5) what is subject to failure	( <i>nassana, dhammanī</i> )	fails	( <i>nassati</i> )	§27	§61

2.1.1.3 What does these 5 realities mean? They are here explained to help us in our reflection of such realities within ourselves or affecting us.

**Decay** (*jarā*) refers to aging and the effects of time upon us, others and various things. Although decay seems to be momentary, these moments start from the moment we are born. When we are “young,” we see decay as puberty, adolescence, youth and so on. When we are old, we see it as weakness, senility, decrepitude, and loss of mental powers.<sup>5</sup>

**Disease** (*vyādhi*) refers to ill health, both physically and mentally. Physically, we can be afflicted with all kinds of sickness, some due not pathogens or a bad environment. We might be sick, and not even know it, so that its impact can be sudden and devastating. Even if we may be physically healthy, some vital organ may suddenly cease to function. Healthy or not, as long as we are unawakened, we are suffer from some kind of mental illness (selfishness, sociopathy, schizophrenia, etc) or incapacity (such as fear, anxiety, etc) or negative emotion (lust, anger, delusion, etc).<sup>6</sup>

**Death** (*maraṇa*) is, of course, the end of life, our own, and those of others, loved or unloved. Although here the main reflection is on oneself, the fear or thought of the loss a loved one or of those on whom we vitally depend, can be deeply troubling. In many ways, this is actually a mindfulness on death (*maraṇa, sati*). One benefit of such as reflection is that we learn to value the here and now, become more aware of our true priorities, and to respect and love those who have been truly good to us, and those who need our respect and love. Such meditations must always be done with lovingkindness.<sup>7</sup>

**Destruction** (*khaya*) refers to the destruction or *loss* of mostly physical things or states—what we *have*—internally, such as the loss of physical attractiveness (such as muscular bulk) or physical beauty (such as our complexion), the wear and tear of things (such as loss of bone density); and externally, the diminishing of wealth, grain, and food, the run-out date of the usefulness or usability of a gadget or appliance or even a person, and actual *destruction*, that is, when something is destroyed, so that it is no more available.<sup>8</sup>

**Failure** (*nassana*) is the destruction or loss of non-physical things—what we *are*—such as happiness, love, friendship, fame, reputation, honour, respect, and success, or their inavailability, or their ineffectiveness when they are needed, or our inability to attain any of them. This also includes when others forget or reject us, despite the love or kindness we have shown them, or the efforts we have made for their benefit. This is best exemplified in the teaching of the 8 worldly conditions (*loka, dhamma*).<sup>9</sup>

2.1.1.4 The Sutta then closes with a well known set of verses, **the labbhanīya t̥hāna gāthā**, “the verses on attainable states” [2.2.1].

**2.1.2 The negative cycle [§§3-32].** The Sutta’s negative cycle applies these 5 realities to the “untutored worldling” (*assutavata puthujjana*), that is, anyone who is unawakened and does not know or does not accept the Dharma [§§3-32]. Such a person is “untutored” in the sense that he does not really understand the true nature of life, usually by attributing his life and its vicissitudes to external agencies, to luck, and so on.<sup>10</sup> More specifically, their sufferings arise from not understanding the 4 noble truths or rejecting them.

As such, when any of these 5 natural predicaments occurs, he suffers as a result [eg §5]. It is interesting here that the Sutta reminds us how others would perceive our misfortunes: our enemies would rejoice [eg §6], our friends would be saddened [eg §8]. This point is repeated in the closing verses, clarifying it

<sup>5</sup> See eg (**Rāja**) **Jarā Maraṇa S** (S 3.3), Sd 42.12.

<sup>6</sup> See **Dve Rogā S** (A 4.157), SD 42.16; **Nakula, pitā S** (S 22.1), SD 5.4(5).

<sup>7</sup> See **Visākhā (Natta) S** (U 8.8), SD 48.4, or sutta in SD 48: see esp the essay, **Death: An early Buddhist perspective** (SD 48.2).

<sup>8</sup> On Amba, pālī’s reflection on her loss of physical beauty, see Thī 151-270 at **Amba, pālī** (SD 66.14).

<sup>9</sup> See **Loka, dhamma S 1+2** (A 8.5), SD 42.2 + (A 8.6), SD 42.3.

<sup>10</sup> A streamwinner is said not to behave in such a way: see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8 esp (5).

[§70]. Two significant points should be noted here: (1) the true meaning of friendship, and (2) we should not depend on others' approval for our happiness.

**2.1.3 The positive cycle [§§33-67].** The Sutta's positive cycle applies these 5 realities to the "instructed noble disciple" (*sutavata ariya, sāvaka*). This term refers to all those who truly understand the inevitability of the 5 vicissitudes of life mentioned in the Sutta [2.1.1.2]. This broadly includes the "good worldlings" (who make every effort to keep to the 5 precepts), the saints of the path, and the arhats.

On account of their accepting or understanding the 4 noble truths, these true individuals (*sappurisa*) and noble saints' lives are unaffected by the vicissitudes of life. They understand that everything in this world is subject to change, including happiness and sorrow. As such, they are habitually happy and at peace with themselves.

**2.1.4 Reflecting on the 5 vicissitudes.** If we are inclined to do only a short reflection, then this is the section—the positive cycle [§§33-67]—that we should read and reflect on. If we reflect on the negative cycle [§§3-32], then we should conclude with the positive one.

We can also reflect thematically. We can on a theme as the situation dictates, or a theme that we are drawn to. For example, we can reflect on decay, both in its negative and its positive aspects [§§3 + 33], and so on. These pairs are listed above [2.1.1.2].

## 2.2 THE CLOSING VERSES [§§69-72]

**2.2.1 Labbhanīya Thāna Gāthā.** The name of this set of verses, which I have given, means "Verses on obtainable states." The verses recur in the following (**Mallikā Kāla,kata Kosala Sutta** (A 5.49) and **the Taca Sāra Jātaka** (J 368)).<sup>11</sup> These verses are especially important because they are not so much a re-statement of the prose teachings, but probably an ancient teaching<sup>12</sup> that is explained by the Sutta prose by way of practising in terms of the perception of impermanence.<sup>13</sup>

Here we will briefly examine each verse, especially in relation to other sutta verses and teachings. For the Pali and its notes, see the text below [§§69-72].

### 2.2.2 Positive attitude towards suffering [§69].

**69** Neither by grieving nor by lamenting, does he gain any benefit here, not even a little.<sup>14</sup>  
Knowing him to be grieving and suffering, enemies become delighted.

2.2.2.1 This is a teaching on positive and true **emotions**. The positive emotions are lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity. Lovingkindness (*mettā*) should especially be cultivated whenever we can so that we purge ourselves of any negative emotions, even if temporarily, and strengthen ourselves with inner strength to attend to the task at hand [§69].

Compassion is lovingkindness in action when the occasion arises. It is motivated by the wish for the well being of others in an unconditional manner. In other words, it is kindness shown even to those who do not deserve it.

Gladness is lovingkindness directed to those who are more happy and fortunate than we are, those who have become successful or enjoying a windfall, or well ahead of us on the spiritual path. It is rejoicing in the goodness of others. Rejoicing in the happiness and goodness of others, we too are glad.

Equanimity is the lovingkindness that accept things as they are. Often despite our best intentions and efforts, things do not turn out well. No matter how well or wide we spread the Dharma, there will always be those who would not listen or who fail to benefit for it. It is a reflection of the power of our karma, that each of us have to face. In time, however, good karma would arise to help beings, but till then, we have done what we can, and we should be in no way disheartened, thinking that we have failed. We have planted the Dharma seeds; now we must leave them to grow by themselves.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Respectively, A 5.49/3:62 @ SD 42.14 & J 368/4:204. Further see SD 3.13 (4.3): texts related to **Alagaddūpa-ma S** (M 22).

<sup>12</sup> They recur in the Chin ver of Sn: see M Anesaki, "Sutta-nipāta in Chinese," *Journal of the PTS*, 1906-07:51.

<sup>13</sup> On the perception of impermanence, see (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

<sup>14</sup> Cf Bodhi's remark on this at A:B 1728 n1039 where he apparently misread the Ce reading.

<sup>15</sup> On the 4 positive emotions, see **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5.

2.2.2.2 A related verse is found in **the Tiro,kuḍḍa Sutta** (Khp 7.11 = Pv 1.5,11), in the context of dealing with bereavement, which goes thus:

Neither tears nor sorrow	nor any mourning whatever—
they help not the departed—	the (departed) relatives remain the same.

(Khp 7.11/6 = Pv 1.5,11/4), SD 2.7

2.2.2.3 Here again, **lovingkindness** is called for since it benefits the dying, the “dead” (those in the intermediate state) and those who have been reborn, that is to say, “all beings,” including ourselves. This Tiro,kuḍḍa Sutta verse, however, refers specifically to our proper attitude towards the recently deceased, especially those who have been reborn as pretas, that is, a class of disparate beings who suffer from addictive conduct and are tormented by their past (such as being caught up in a rut of particularly painful cyclic bad karma).<sup>16</sup>

2.2.2.4 The basic idea is that cultivating **lovingkindness** is the most effective way of dealing with both the living and “the dead.” Unconditional acceptance of the living empowers us to touch others with our positive emotions so that we interact in positive ways. According to early Buddhism, there are really no “dead” people, except for the pretas or “departed” and the intermediate beings. Otherwise, those who die are reborn in due course as humans, devas, animals, asuras, or hell-beings. Although all such beings progress or regress, prosper or suffer, according to their karma, our lovingkindness can inspire, even empower, them to master their own karma and so walk the path to awakening.

<b>90</b> But he who is wise, facing misfortunes,	is unshaken, knowing how to analyze himself.
His enemies are afflicted,	seeing his face of old untroubled.

2.2.2.5 Like Khp 7,11 [2.2.2.2], this verse [§69], too, deals with failure and misfortune, in the face of which we should remain undaunted, that is, to maintain equanimity, even on a simple worldly level. An effective way of doing this is to meditate on the breath for inner calm and clarity, so that we can “analyze ourselves,” meaning, to face our problems squarely and define the real issues, not making them more than they really are, and be prepared to face all consequence of our actions. That way, we do not prolong them, but learn from them.

2.2.2.6 The constant cultivation of lovingkindness, especially towards those who have harmed us or wish us harm, is a very effective way of dealing with big problems and bad karma. In this way, we do not return hate for hate, but arm ourselves with an aura of positive emotion so that we are still capable of enjoying the happiness of those who truly care for us or the goodness in others.

2.2.2.7 According to discourses such as **the Saṅkha(dhama) Sutta** (S 42.8) and **the Brahma,vihāra Sutta** (A 10.208), if we properly cultivate lovingkindness, we would be able to contain, even prevent, the effects of bad karma so that they do not follow us into future lives.<sup>17</sup> In other words, if we unconditionally accept ourselves and have a mentally wholesome attitude towards others, even those negative towards us, we would be able to master our own karma so that our problems are properly solved even in this life itself. Through constant lovingkindness, we would somehow prosper here and now, without incurring new bad karma.

### 2.2.3 Proactive attitude [§71]

2.2.3.1 This verse [§71] is problematic if we take it simply on the word level. Line a, *jappena mantena subhāsitenā*, literally translates “If by chanting mantras [If by chants and mantras], by words well spoken ...” This is, in fact, how the Commentaries interpret this line.<sup>18</sup> However, this would clearly go against the grain of the early Buddhist teachings.

Some professional scholars might tell us that we should accept such a “reality,” as they reflect what “really happened” in Indian Buddhism. Buddhists who are more concerned with worldly happiness, suc-

<sup>16</sup> See **Tiro,kuḍḍa S** (Khp 7/Pv 1.5) @ SD 2.7 (3+4).

<sup>17</sup> Respectively, S 42.8/4:322, SD 57.9 & A 10.208/5:299, SD 2.10.

<sup>18</sup> AA 3:225; J 3:205,17. See tr text below [§91] for the comy passages.

cess and power, too, would probably agree with such scholars, especially since they *are* scholars. Indeed, this is what we might call “scholars’ Buddhism.”

However, more discerning scholars will also tell us that we should carefully examine the context of such statements, and how such teachings reflect **the drift of the Dharma** as taught by the Buddha. Anyway, as Buddhist students ourselves, we need to think for ourselves, too. We need to understand what the Dharma really means to us, as we have understood the Dharma, and practised and experienced it.

After all, professional scholars are known to change their minds, or be proven wrong by other scholars, or by new research. Professional scholars do not *define* living Buddhism; but we, as practising Buddhists, do. Most scholars see Buddhism merely as a field of an impersonal but professionally profitable field of study—but we *profess* Buddhism, we need to profess Buddhism, in the spiritual sense of the word. This means that we declare our faith in the 3 jewels and work to attain awakening—at least stream-winning—in this life itself.<sup>19</sup> Of course, professional scholars may profess Buddhism, too.

2.2.3.2 **The Caṇḍāla Sutta** (A 5.175) defines a true lay follower—called a “jewel layman” (*upāsaka, ratana*), a “lotus layman” (*upāsaka, paduma*), or a “white-lotus layman” (*upāsaka, puṇḍarīka*)—as follows:

- (1) He has faith (*saddho*).
- (2) He is morally virtuous (*sīlava*).
- (3) He does not believe in rituals to invoke luck (*akotuhala, maṅgaliko*).
- (4) He relies on karma, not on luck (*kammaṃ pacceti no maṅgalariṃ*).
- (5) He does not seek the gift-worthy outside the teaching but gives his priority here (in the teaching) (*na ito bahiddhā dakkhiṇeyyaṃ gavesati idha ca pubba, kāraṃ karoti*).

(A 5.175/3:206), SD 45.12<sup>20</sup>

2.2.3.3 Now let us look at the verse from **the Labbhanīya Tḥāna Gāthā**:

**71** If by speech, wise thought, well-spoken words, by regular giving,<sup>21</sup> or tradition,<sup>22</sup>  
by which he will gain his goal, let him exert himself through such means.

In this first verse line, “speech, wise thought, well-spoken words,” respectively refer to wholesome, wise and pleasant speech respectively. This line is a classic example of early Buddhist wordplay on popular words raised to a more spiritual level.

2.2.3.4 On the other hand, as evident in line b, the Buddha is not against our being charitable (giving) or keeping to wholesome family or social traditions, “by which (we) will gain (our) goal” [line c]. That is to say, if our charity and observances promote our wellbeing, social harmony, even worldly success, we should by all means pursue them.<sup>23</sup>

2.2.3.5 However, if we keep to the suttas, we know that “goal” (*attha*), also means “purpose,” especially that of the 3 trainings and of walking the path to awakening.<sup>24</sup> In other words, our engagement with the world should in no way hinder our spiritual progress towards awakening. As for the renunciant, since he has renounced “the world,” he should disengage himself from it even more completely.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

<sup>20</sup> For a similar list, see **Parihāna S** (A 7.27/4:25), also called Hani S, and (**Upāsaka**) **Parābhava S** (A 5.176/-4:26). See SD 12.14 (2) and also **Kiñci Saṅkhāra S** (A 6.93), SD 12.14.

<sup>21</sup> Comy: “By regular giving and for the thousands” (*satassa vā saḥassassa vā dānena*, AA 1:255).

<sup>22</sup> Such as by way of keeping to a family tradition (AA 1:255): see eg **Dāna Maha-p,phala S** (A 7.49,5/4:61), SD 2.3. On types of donors, see (**Aṭṭha**) **Dāna S 1+2** (A 8.31 f) @ SD 6.6 (2).

<sup>23</sup> All this however, should be understood in the spirit of the teachings of such suttas as **Dāna Maha-p,phala S** (A 7.49,5/4:61), SD 2.3.

<sup>24</sup> On the spiritual sense of attha, see (**Agata,phala**) **Mahā,nāma S** (A 6.10) @ SD 15.3 (4). See also **Neyy’attha Nīt’attha S** (A 2.3.5-6/1:60), SD 2.6b.

<sup>25</sup> On the renunciant’s disengagement from the world, see **Aggi-k,khandhōpama S** (A 7.68/4:128-135), SD 52.-12.



### 2.2.4 Dealing with failure [§72]

2.2.4.1 In most worldly systems, especially in educational and management circles, we are, as a rule, taught how to excel in our studies and succeed in our work. We are almost never taught how to face failure. Some are motivated by such sayings as “Failure is not in my dictionary.” Such an attitude only makes the pain of failure more real and more painful. The reason is simple: we are thinking in terms of the absolute duality of success and failure.

Whatever we do in life may or may not have a purpose. There is no purpose in our waking up in the morning or feeling tired, or worrying or being happy, or falling sick or being healthy: they occur or do not occur when the conditions are right. Of course, we often plan some actions, like studying hard to do well in an exam, or looking for a good or suitable job, or seeking a proper life-partner, or even writing something like this. Again here it is not a question of success or failure, but of conditions that allow us to do something to our satisfaction.

2.2.4.2 In other words, success and failure are really subjective, depending very much on how we view life or what we want at the moment. When we change our minds, our views of success and failure change accordingly. Furthermore, we are also influenced by others in how we look at success and failure. The same conditions apply to others, too. So there are no real good reasons to take others as our absolute measure of success or failure.

2.2.4.3 This, of course, does not mean that success and failure are not real, that is, they do have some kind of effect on us, especially where what we do would affect our happiness and that of others. The wisdom here is to see success and failure for what they really are: to define them, to understand the conditions behind them, to envision an accomplished state, and work towards that goal. (This is in fact an application of “the 4 noble truths” teaching model.)

2.2.4.4 A shorthand version of what we have said here is found in this truly instructive verse:

72 If he should know, “Not to be attained is this goal by me nor through anyone else,”  
then, ungrrieving, he would bear it thus: “What shall I do now with resolve?”<sup>26</sup>

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## The Discourse on Unattainable States

A 5.48<sup>27</sup>

1 [1] Bhikshus, there are these 5 states unattainable by a recluse, or a brahmin, or a deva, or Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone in the world.

2 What are the five?

(1) [2] “May what is subject to decay not decay!” *jarā, dhammaṃ mā jīrīti*

This is a state unattainable by a recluse, or a brahmin,  
or a deva, or Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone in the world.

(2) “May what is subject to disease not fall sick!” *vyādhi, dhammaṃ mā vyādhīyīti*<sup>28</sup>

This is a state unattainable by a recluse, or a brahmin,  
or a deva, or Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone in the world.

(3) “May what is subject to death not die!” *maraṇa, dhammaṃ mā mīyīti*

<sup>26</sup> Lit, “What firm action do I take now?”

<sup>27</sup> PTS numbers given in [italics] within parentheses.

<sup>28</sup> Be reads *by-* for *vy-* throughout.

- This is a state *unattainable* by a recluse, or a brahmin,  
or a deva, or Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone in the world.
- (4) “May what is subject to destruction not be destroyed!” *khaya,dhammaṃ mā khīyīti*  
This is a state *unattainable* by a recluse, or a brahmin,  
or a deva, or Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone in the world.
- (5) “May what is subject to failure not fail!”<sup>29</sup> *nassana,dhammaṃ mā nassīti*  
This is a state *unattainable* by a recluse, or a brahmin,  
or a deva, or Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone in the world.

## THE UNTUTORED WORLDLING

### (1) Decay: Not reflecting on it, we suffer

3 [3] Bhikshus, for an untutored worldling, what is subject to decay decays [grows old].<sup>30</sup>  
When what is subject to *decay* does decay, he does not reflect thus:<sup>31</sup>

“I’m not the only one who,<sup>32</sup> subject to *decay*, decays.”<sup>33</sup>

4 For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising [rebirth] of beings,<sup>34</sup>  
for all these beings what is subject to *decay* decays.<sup>35</sup>

5 **And when what is subject to *decay* decays,**

if I were to<sup>36</sup> sorrow, be stressed, mourn, beat my breast,<sup>37</sup> or lament,<sup>38</sup>

I would only fall into confusion.

I would have no appetite for food, too.<sup>39</sup>

My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.<sup>40</sup>

I would not be able to get any work done, too.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Nassana*, lit “loss, destruction.” The tr “failure,” connoted in *nassana*, relates better to our society today.

<sup>30</sup> *Assutavato bhikkhave puthujjanassa jarā,dhammaṃ jīrati*.

<sup>31</sup> *So jarā,dhamme jīṇṇe na iti paṭisañcikkhati*.

<sup>32</sup> “I’m not the only one...who,” *na kho mayh’ev’ekassa* [So Be Ee Se; Ce *mayham ev’ekassa*].

<sup>33</sup> *So jarā,dhamme jīṇṇe na iti paṭisañcikkhati: na kho mayh’ev’ekassa jarā,dhammaṃ jīrati*. See prec n.

<sup>34</sup> *Atha kho yāvataṃ sattānaṃ āgati gati cuti upapatti*. Here, “coming and going” (*āgati gati*) refers to karmic activities of the unawakened, while “dying and arising” (*cuti upapatti*) refer to samsaric processes of repeatedly moving from birth to birth. See **Cetanā S 3** (S 12.40) & Comy for full doctrinal context of “Where there is coming and going (*āgati,gati*), there is dying (here) and arising (there). Where there is dying and arising (*cutūpapāto*), there comes to be further births, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair” (S 12.40,3/2:67), SD 7.6c

<sup>35</sup> *Sabbesaṃ sattānaṃ jarā,dhammaṃ jīrati*.

<sup>36</sup> This phrase + foll line, “if I were to...I would only,” *ahañ c’eva kho pana...* The phrase *ceva* here can read either as *ca eva*, “and only,” or as *ce eva*, “if only.”

<sup>37</sup> “Beat my breast,” *ura-t,tālīm*, Se *ura-t,tālī*, lit “beating the breast, breast-beating,” from *uras* + *namul* abs of √TAD, “to beat”; cf Skt *udara,tāḍam*; see Warder, *Pāli Metre*, 1967:80.

<sup>38</sup> This & next line: *soceyyaṃ kilameyyaṃ parideveyyaṃ, ura-t,tālīm* [Se *ura-t,tālī*] *kandeyyaṃ | sammohaṃ āpapajeyya*. This is stock, occurring 20 times in this Sutta [§§6, 9, 14, 17, 22, 25, 39, 34, 38, 42, 46, 49, 55, 58, 64, 68, 73, 76, 82, 86] + **Nārada S** (A 5.60/3:60×2, 61×2); with *na*, Nm 2:428 ×2 (with *na parāmaseyya*, “were not to be attached to (it)” after *na kilameyya*). More common in pres ind as *socati* etc (sg): **M** 1:86×2, 92×2, 136×2, 137×2, 239 ×2, **3**:165, 171, 285×2, 286×2; **S** 4:206×2, 208×2, 209×2; **A** 2:174×4, 175×3, 176, 188, 189, **3**:54, 55×2, 56, 60, 61×32, 416, **4**:293, 294, 295×2, 325, 326, 327×2; (pl) *socanti* etc: Nm 1:38, 48, 122; Miln 11; *socato socāpayato* etc: M 1:56; S 3:208. Cf (caus) *socayato socāpayato kilamato kilamāpayato*, “when one inflicts sorrow, cause others to inflict sorrow, causes oppression, causes others to inflict oppression”: M 76,10/1:516 = S 24.6/3:208.

<sup>39</sup> *Bhattam pi me na-c.chādeyya*, lit, “My food would not be appetizing.” Comy glosses *na-c.chādeyya* as “would not enjoy [would not indulge in]” (*na ruceyya*, AA 3:254).

<sup>40</sup> *Kāye’pi dubbaññiyāṃ okkameyya*, Said to be 1 of the 5 signs of a deva’s impending demise: **Pañca Pubba,ni-mitta S** (It 83/17,16), SD 23.8a(1.2).

<sup>41</sup> *Kammantā’pi na-p,pavatteyyuṃ* [So Be Ee Se; Ke *kammanto’pi na-p,pavatteyya*].

6 My enemies would rejoice.  
My friends would be saddened.”

7 **So, when what is subject to decay decays,**  
he sorrows, feels stressed, laments, beats his breast, weeps, falls into confusion.

8 This, bhikshus, is called an untutored worldling, pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow,<sup>42</sup> who only torments himself.<sup>43</sup>

## (2) Disease: Not reflecting on it, we suffer

9 [4] Furthermore, bhikshus, for an untutored worldling, [55] what is subject to disease falls sick.<sup>44</sup>  
When what is subject to *disease* does fall sick, he does not reflect thus:<sup>45</sup>

“**I’m not the only one who, subject to disease, falls sick.**

10 *For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings,*  
for all these beings what is subject to *disease* falls sick.

11 **And when what is subject to disease falls sick,**  
*if I were to sorrow, be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament,*  
*I would only fall into confusion.*

*I would have no appetite for food, too.*  
*My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.*  
*I would not be able to get any work done, too.*

12 *My enemies would rejoice.*  
*My friends would be saddened.”*

13 **So, when what is subject to disease falls sick,**  
*he sorrows, feels stressed, mourns, beats his breast, laments, falls into confusion.*

14 *This, bhikshus, is called an untutored worldling, pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow, who only torments himself.*

## (3) Death: Not reflecting on it, we suffer

15 Furthermore, bhikshus, for an untutored worldling, what is subject to death dies.<sup>46</sup>  
When what is subject to *death* does die, he does not reflect thus:

“**I’m not the only one who, subject to death, dies.**<sup>47</sup>

16 *For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings,*  
for all these beings what is subject to *death* dies.

17 **And when what is subject to death dies,**  
*if I were to sorrow, be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament,*  
*I would only fall into confusion.*

*I would have no appetite for food, too.*  
*My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.*  
*I would not be able to get any work done, too.*

18 *My enemies would rejoice.*  
*My friends would be saddened.”*

19 **So, when what is subject to death dies,**  
*he sorrows, feels stressed, mourns, beats his breast, laments, falls into confusion.*

20 *This, bhikshus, is called an untutored worldling, pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow, who only torments himself.*

<sup>42</sup> *Savīṣeṇa soka,sallena:* alluded to in **Sunakkhatta S** (M 105,18/2:256,27), SD 94.3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave, assutavā puthujjano viddho saviseṇa soka,sallena attānaṃ yeva paritāpeti.*

<sup>44</sup> *Puna ca paraṃ bhikkhave assutavato puthujjanassa vyādhi,dhammaṃ vyādhīyati.*

<sup>45</sup> *So vyādhi,dhamme vyādhite na iti paṭisañcikkhati.*

<sup>46</sup> *Puna ca paraṃ bhikkhave assutavato puthujjanassa maraṇa,dhammaṃ mīyati*

<sup>47</sup> *Na kho mayham ev’ekassa maraṇa,dhammaṃ mīyati.*



**(4) Destruction: Not reflecting on it, we suffer**

21 Furthermore, bhikshus, for an untutored worldling, what is subject to destruction is destroyed.<sup>48</sup>

When what is subject to *destruction* is destroyed, he does not reflect thus:

**“I’m not the only one who, subject to *destruction*, is destroyed.”**<sup>49</sup>

22 *For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings,*  
for all these beings what is subject to *destruction* is destroyed.

**23 And when what is subject to *destruction* is destroyed,**

*if I were to sorrow, be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament,*

*I would only fall into confusion.*

*I would have no appetite for food, too.*

*My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.*

*I would not be able to get any work done, too.*

24 *My enemies would rejoice.*

*My friends would be saddened.”*

**25 So, when what is subject to *destruction* is destroyed,**

*he sorrows, feels stressed, mourns, beats his breast, laments, falls into confusion.*

26 *This, bhikshus, is called an untutored worldling, pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow, who only torments himself.*

**(5) Failure: Not reflecting on it, we suffer**

27 Furthermore, bhikshus, for an untutored worldling, what is subject to failure fails.<sup>50</sup>

When what is subject to *failure* does fail, he does not reflect thus:

**“I’m not the only one who, subject to *failure*, fails.**

28 *For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings,*  
for all these beings what is subject to *failure* fails.

**29 And when what is subject to *failure* fails,**

*if I were to sorrow, be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament,*

*I would only fall into confusion.*

*I would have no appetite for food, too.*

*My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.*

*I would not be able to get any work done, too.*

30 *My enemies would rejoice.*

*My friends would be saddened.”*

**31 So, when what is subject to *failure* fails,**

*he sorrows, feels stressed, mourns, beats his breast, laments, falls into confusion.*

32 *This, bhikshus, is called an untutored worldling, pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow, who only torments himself.*

**THE WISE NOBLE DISCIPLE****(1) Decay: Reflecting on it, we suffer not**

33 [5] And, bhikshus, for a noble disciple, too, what is subject to decay decays [grows old].<sup>51</sup>

When what is subject to *decay* does decay, he reflects thus.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Puna ca param bhikkhave assutavato puthujjanassa khaya,dhammam khīyati.*

<sup>49</sup> *Na kho mayham evakassa nassana,dhammam nassati.* Here, “destroyed” refers to our feelings at a loss or the negative impact of the loss.

<sup>50</sup> *Puna ca param bhikkhave assutavato puthujjanassa nassana,dhammam nassati.* *Nassana*, lit “loss, destruction.” The tr “failure,” which is connoted in *nassana* relates better to our society today.

<sup>51</sup> *Sutavato ca kho bhikkhave ariya,sāvakassa jarā,dhammam jīrati.*

**“I’m not the only one who, subject to *decay*, decays.**

**34** For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings, for all these beings what is subject to *decay* decays.

**35 And when what is subject to *decay* decays,**

if I were to sorrow, *be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament,*

I would only fall into confusion.

I would have no appetite for food, too.

My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.

I would not be able to get any work done, too.

**36** My enemies would rejoice.

My friends would be saddened.”

**37 So, when what is subject to *decay* decays,**

he sorrows not, feels stressed not, mourns not, beats not his breast, laments not, falls not into confusion.<sup>53</sup>

**38** This, bhikshus, is called a noble disciple, not pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow,<sup>54</sup> like the untutored worldling who only torments himself.<sup>55</sup>

**39** The noble disciple is sorrowless, the dart drawn out,<sup>56</sup> attains nirvana himself.<sup>57</sup>

## (2) Disease: Reflecting on it, we suffer not

**40** [6] Furthermore, bhikshus, for a noble disciple, too, what is subject to disease falls sick.<sup>58</sup>

When what is subject to *disease* does fall sick, he reflects thus:<sup>59</sup>

**“I’m not the only one who, subject to *disease*, falls sick.**

**41** For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings, for all these beings what is subject to *disease* falls sick.

**42 And when what is subject to *disease* falls sick,**

if I were to sorrow, *be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament,*

I would only fall into confusion.

I would have no appetite for food, too.

My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.

I would not be able to get any work done, too.

**43** My enemies would rejoice.

My friends would be saddened.”

**44 So, when what is subject to *disease* falls sick,**

<sup>52</sup> *So jarā, dhamme jññe iti paṭisañcikkhati.*

<sup>53</sup> *So jarā, dhamme jññe na socati, na kilamati, na paridevati, na ura-t, tālīm kandati, na sammohaṃ āpajjati.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ayam vuccati bhikkhave ariya, sāvako abbaḥi [So Ce Comy; Be Ee Se abbuhi] savisaṃ soka, sallam.*

<sup>55</sup> *Yena viddho assutavā puthujjano attānaṃ yeva paritāpeti.*

<sup>56</sup> *Visalla:* cf M 105,18/2:256; Tha 404; Sn 939. See [§10] n above.

<sup>57</sup> *Asoko visallo ariya, sāvako attānaṃ yeva parinibbāpeti.* This sentence, like the classic “sorrowless, stainless, secure” (*asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ*, A 3:354 = Khp 3 = Sn 271 = Pv 24 = Tha 227 = 263 ] Thī 361) clearly refers to the final goal of awakening. *Asoka*, “sorrowless,” means one is free of mental suffering, *visalla*, “dart pulled out,” free of physical suffering: this is descriptive of an arhat, esp with the verb *parinibbāpeti* (also tr as “he quenches himself”). **Parinibbāpeti** = *pari* + *nibbāpeti* (Skt *nirvārayati*) reflexive causative of *nirvati*, “make cool by blowing” (eg RV 10.16.13); adjs *nibbuta*, *parinibbuta*. PED: *nibbuta* for etym. The verb here denotes totality and self-effort, and often appears as a phrase with *sameti* = *sammati* (become still) and *dameti* (become tame, mastered, conquered): cf *damathaṃ samathaṃ ca* (UA 87). The former clearly refers to *samatha*, mental calmness, and the latter, *vipassanā*, insight wisdom, both contributing to awakening, as in such phrases as: (pl) *damenti...samenti...parinibbāpentī*, D 26/3:6,113 = A 5.41/3:46,2; (fut) *damesatti vinessatti* [“will be disciplined”] *parinibbapessati* (M 8/1:45,7); *attānaṃ dameti...attānaṃ sameti...attānaṃ parinibbāpeti* (A 4.61/2:68,15). For explanation, see D 25/3:54,27-55,2; M 1:235,30-35. See PED: *parinibbāpetar*.

<sup>58</sup> *Puna ca param bhikkhave sutavato ariya, sāvakassa vyādhi, dhammaṃ vyādhīyati.*

<sup>59</sup> *So vyādhi, dhamme vyādhite na iti paṭisañcikkhati.*

*he sorrows not, feels stressed not, mourns not, beats not his breast, laments not, falls not into confusion.*

**45** *This, bhikshus, is called a noble disciple, not pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow, like the untutored worldling who only torments himself.*

**46** *The noble disciple is sorrowless, the dart drawn out, attains nirvana himself.*

### **(3) Death: Reflecting on it, we suffer not**

**47** Furthermore, bhikshus, for a noble disciple, too, what is subject to death dies.<sup>60</sup>

When what is subject to *death* does die, he reflects thus:

**“I’m not the only one who, subject to *death*, dies.**

**48** *For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings, for all these beings what is subject to *death* dies.*

**49 And when what is subject to *death* dies,**

*if I were to sorrow, be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament,*

*I would only fall into confusion.*

*I would have no appetite for food, too.*

*My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.*

*I would not be able to get any work done, too.*

**50** *My enemies would rejoice.*

*My friends would be saddened.”*

**51 So, when what is subject to *death* dies,**

*he sorrows not, feels stressed not, mourns not, beats not his breast, laments not, falls not into confusion.*

**52** *This, bhikshus, is called a noble disciple, not pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow, like the untutored worldling who only torments himself.*

**53** *The noble disciple is sorrowless, the dart drawn out, attains nirvana himself.*

### **(4) Destruction: Reflecting on it, we suffer not**

**54** Furthermore, bhikshus, for a noble disciple, too, what is subject to destruction is destroyed.<sup>61</sup>

When what is subject to *destruction* is destroyed, he reflects thus:

**“I’m not the only one who, subject to *destruction*, is destroyed.”<sup>62</sup>**

**55** *For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings, for all these beings what is subject to *destruction* is destroyed.*

**56 And when what is subject to *destruction* is destroyed,**

*if I were to sorrow, be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament,*

*I would only fall into confusion.*

*I would have no appetite for food, too.*

*My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.*

*I would not be able to get any work done, too.*

**57** *My enemies would rejoice.*

*My friends would be saddened.”*

**58 So, when what is subject to *destruction* is destroyed,**

*he sorrows not, feels stressed not, mourns not, beats not his breast, laments not, falls not into confusion.*

**59** *This, bhikshus, is called a noble disciple, not pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow, like the untutored worldling who only torments himself.*

**60** *The noble disciple is sorrowless, the dart drawn out, attains nirvana himself.*

<sup>60</sup> *Puna ca param bhikkhave sutavato ariya,sāvakassa maraṇa,dhammam mīyati.*

<sup>61</sup> *Puna ca param bhikkhave sutavato ariya,sāvakassa khaya,dhammam khīyati.*

<sup>62</sup> On the meaning of “destroyed” here, see §21.

**(5) Failure: Reflecting on it, we suffer not**

**61** Furthermore, bhikshus, for a noble disciple, too, what is subject to failure fails.<sup>63</sup>

When what is subject to *failure* does fail, he reflects thus:

**“I’m not the only one who, subject to *failure* fails.**

**62** *For as long as there are the coming and going, dying and arising of beings,*  
for all these beings what is subject to *failure* fails.

**63** **And when what is subject to *failure* fails, [56]**

*if I were to sorrow, be stressed, mourn, beat my breast, or lament,*

*I would only fall into confusion.*

*I would have no appetite for food, too.*

*My body would discolour [turn ugly], too.*

*I would not be able to get any work done, too.*

**64** *My enemies would rejoice.*

*My friends would be saddened.”*

**65** **So, when what is subject to *failure* fails,**

*he sorrows not, feels stressed not, mourns not, beats not his breast, laments not, falls not into confusion.*

**66** *This, bhikshus, is called a noble disciple, not pierced by the venomous dart of sorrow,*  
*like the untutored worldling who only torments himself.*

**67** *The noble disciple is sorrowless, the dart drawn out, attains nirvana himself.*

**68** These, bhikshus, are the 5 states unattainable by a recluse, or a brahmin, or a deva, or Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone in the world.

**Labbhanīya Ṭhāna Gāthā<sup>64</sup>**

**69** *Na socanāya na paridevanāya  
attho idha labbhati<sup>65</sup> api appako pi,  
socantam enaṃ dukkhitāṃ viditvā  
paccatthikā attamanā bhavanti.*

Neither by grieving nor by weeping,  
does he gain any benefit here, not even a little.<sup>66</sup>  
Knowing him to be grieving and suffering,  
enemies become delighted.

**70** *Yato ca kho paṇḍito āpadāsu  
na vedhati atta,vinicchayaññū,  
paccatthikāssa dukkhitā bhavanti  
disvā mukhaṃ avikāraṃ purāṇaṃ.*

But he who is wise, when facing misfortunes,  
is unshaken, knowing how to analyze himself.  
His enemies are afflicted,  
seeing his face of old untroubled [unaffected].

**71** *Jappena mantena<sup>67</sup> subhāsitena  
anuppadānena paveniyā ca,*

If by good speech, wise thought, well-spoken words,  
by regular giving,<sup>68</sup> or tradition,<sup>69</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Puna ca param bhikkhave sutavato ariya,sāvakassa nassana,dhammaṃ nassati.*

<sup>64</sup> These verses, whose name (meaning, “Verses on obtainable states”) I have given, recur in the subsequent (**Mal-likā Kāla,kata**) **Kosala S** (A 5.49/3:62), SD 42.14, & **Taca Sāra J** (J 368/3:204) [2.2].

<sup>65</sup> So Se; Be Ee *attho’dha labbhā; Ce attho alabbho api appako pi*, “he gains no benefit, (not) even a little,” which is awkward.

<sup>66</sup> Cf Bodhi’s remark on this at A:B 1728 n1039 where he apparently misread the Ce reading.

<sup>67</sup> J reads *japena*. AA explains **jappā** as “beautiful speech ... merely by the great efficacy (this) to work” (*vaṇṇa,-bhaṇanena ... mahānubhāva,matta,parivattanena*, AA 3:255). JA gives a late worldly gloss: “By the uttering of mantras, by learning mantras [grasping wisdom] (*manta*) with the help of the wise (*manta,parijapanena ... panditehi saddhiṃ manta,gahaṇena*, J 3:205,17). The whole line has to do with wholesome, wise and pleasant speech respectively. To render this line such as “By the muttering of mantras and good words” is clearly against the early Buddhist spirit. This line is a classic example of early Buddhist wordplay on popular words raised to a more spiritual level.

<sup>68</sup> Comy: “By regular giving and for the thousands” (*satassa vā saḥassassa vā dānena*, AA 1:255).

<sup>69</sup> Such as by way of keeping to a family tradition (AA 1:255): see eg **Dāna Maha-p,phala S** (A 7.49,5/4:61), SD 2.3. On types of donors, see (**Aṭṭha**) **Dāna S 1+2** (A 8.31 f) @ SD 6.6 (2).

*yathā yathā yattha<sup>70</sup> labhetha atthaṃ  
tathā tathā tattha parakkameyya.*

by which he would gain his goal,  
he should exert himself through such means.

**72** *Sace pajāneyya alabbhaneyyo<sup>71</sup>  
mayā ca<sup>72</sup> aññena vā esa attho  
asocamāno adhvāsāyeyya  
kammaṃ dalhaṃ kin'ti karomi'dānīti.*

If he should know, “Not to be attained  
is this goal by me nor through anyone else,”  
then, ungrieving, he would bear it thus:  
“What shall firm action I take now?”<sup>73</sup> [57]

— evaṃ —

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<sup>70</sup> Ke *yathā yattha yattha*.

<sup>71</sup> At J 368, this line reads *Yato ca jāneyya alabbhaneyyo*, “And if he were to know that it is not to be attained.”

<sup>72</sup> So Ce; Be *māyāva*; Ee Ke Se *mayā vā*.

<sup>73</sup> Lit, “What firm action do I take now?”