

# 16

## (Dve) Roga Sutta

The Discourse on (the Two Kinds of) Diseases | A 4.157/2:142 f  
 Also **Pabbajitassa Roga Sutta** The Discourse on the Diseases of a Renunciant  
 Theme: We should be both physically and mentally happy  
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2013

### 1 Body and mind

**1.1 TWO KINDS OF SUFFERING. The Sall’atthena Sutta** (S 36.6), speaks of the two kinds of pain—physical and mental—and how to deal with them. When an untutored ordinary person feels pain, he suffers twice. Firstly, his body feels the pain, and then he react unhappily to this, so that his mind suffers, too.

When he feels a painful feeling, he “sorrows, grieves, laments, beats his breast, becomes confused,” and so he suffers twice: physically and mentally. As a result, the latent tendency of *aversion* is reinforced. When he feels a pleasant feeling, he delights in it, and so the latent tendency of *lust* is reinforced. And when he feels a neutral feeling, he does not know it, and so the latent tendency of *ignorance* is reinforced in him.

Unable to free himself of these sufferings, both the bodily and the mental, he turns to sensual pleasure (sex, drunkenness, quarrels, violence, etc) as a means of escape, “because, bhikshus, the untutored ordinary person knows no other escape than through sensual pleasure.” And so his suffering grows.<sup>1</sup>

#### **1.2 ELEMENTS OF THE BODY**

**1.2.1 The elements, internal and external.** We consist of body and mind.<sup>2</sup> The body is made up **the 4 primary elements**: earth, water, fire and wind.<sup>3</sup> Earth is the solid aspects of our body, such as head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin.<sup>4</sup> Water is the fluid aspects, which form most of our body, that is, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat;<sup>5</sup> tears, skin-grease [tallow], saliva, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.<sup>6</sup> Fire is the temperature (heat and cold), digestive process and decay of the body.<sup>7</sup> And wind includes our breath, gases or “winds” in the body, persistalsis and any kind of bodily movement.<sup>8</sup>

**1.2.2 Balancing the elements.** These 4 internal elements—earth, water, fire and wind—that constitute our body are the same as the *external* 4 elements all around us, including “space,” the fifth element.<sup>9</sup> Both kinds of elements are impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise; in other words, they are unstable. When any of the external elements predominate, that is, there is some kind of external unbalance, some kind of natural disaster would strike.

Unbalance in the earth element appears in the form of sinkholes, deserts and earthquakes. Unbalance in the water element is seen as torrential rains and floods. Fire in nature destroys vast stretches of greenery and life, and also property. The wind in nature can either cause windstorms, dust-storms and sandstorms, or cause air pollution if the atmosphere is stagnant.

In a very meaningful set of reflections, the Buddha teaches us to be mindful of how we are intimately interconnected with nature as our “full ecology,” that is, as healthy living space and wholesome mental

<sup>1</sup> S 36.6.8c/4:208 = SD 5.5. Comy: The escape is mental concentration, the path and the fruit, but he does not know this, knowing only sensual pleasure (SA 3:77). See also *Vedanā*, SD 17.3 (7.3).

<sup>2</sup> See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (2.2.3 & Fig).

<sup>3</sup> On the 4 elements or “5 elements” (incl space), see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 61,8-12/1:421-423) & SD 3.11 (4) for refs.

<sup>4</sup> These form the “skin pentad” (*taca, pañcaka*): see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 61,8/1:421), SD 3.11.

<sup>5</sup> These 6 items form the “fat sestet” (*meda, chakka*): see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 61,9/1:421), SD 3.11.

<sup>6</sup> These 6 form the “urine sestad” (*mutta, chakka*): see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 61,9/1:421), SD 3.11.

<sup>7</sup> See **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 61,10/1:421), SD 3.11.

<sup>8</sup> See **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 61,11/1:421), SD 3.11. On how winds cause pains, see **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97.28-29/2:193), SD 4.9. For a summary Table, see **Rūpa**, SD 17.2a (Table 6).

<sup>9</sup> On the 5 elements, see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 61,8-12/1:421-423), SD 3.11.

being.<sup>10</sup> We are first taught to identify the element in various parts of our own body (the internal element). Then we consider that such internal elements are the same as their external state, that is, “The earth element inside me and the earth all around me is the same earth element.”

Both the internal elements and the external elements are impermanent. They are both simply “element,” and that should be seen, according to reality, with right wisdom thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” This point is vital: although we “identity” the elements, *we* do not identify with any of them: “I am *not* that.”<sup>11</sup>

**1.3 CONSTITUENTS OF THE MIND.** What we generally understand as “the mind” is made up of feeling, perception, volition, contact and attention (*vedanā, saññā, cetanā, phassa, manasikāra*, S 12.2).<sup>12</sup> In other words, our mind is an interactive complex of how we feel (liking and disliking), how we are moved to do things (whether through desire, dislike or delusion or through charity, love or wisdom), how we see the world (how we respond to our sense-experiences) and our ability to hold on to the present moment (or letting our imagination have the better of us),

We—that is, our minds—communicate with the external world, with people and situations, through our speech and actions, and behind these lurk our thoughts. If we are unmindful, then we would fail to see the true reality of these external realities, and so form wrong ideas about them. Our world, then is a false one, which would only give us a false sense of truth, beauty and security. We are not really able to enjoy our lives because we fail to see the truth, and we are open to more troubles. Hence, discourses like **the Attāna Rakkhita Sutta** (S 3.5) remind us that it is better to guard ourself *internally*, that is, to guard our own body and mind.<sup>13</sup>

## 2 Bodily dis-ease and ease

### **2.1 BODILY PAINS AND ILLNESSES**

**2.1.1 Typology.** Similarly, if our bodily elements are unbalanced, we do not feel well, or might even be serious ill, ending in death. **The Sīvaka Sutta** (S 36.21) mentions the following 8 causes and conditions for pains and illnesses, namely:

- (1) bile disorder (preponderance of the internal earth element);
- (2) phlegm disorder (preponderance of the internal water element);
- (3) wind disorder (preponderance of the internal wind element);
- (4) a combination of the three;
- (5) weather changes (temperature, humidity, etc, preponderance of the fire element);
- (6) improper care (including lack of hygiene);
- (7) assaults or trauma caused by external agencies; and
- (8) karmic fruition. (S 36.21/4:230 f), SD 5.6

**2.1.2 Karma as habit.** Karma is not a dogmatic system of rewards and punishments, as our karmic acts would not fruit unless the conditions are right. Furthermore, karma is not fate or determinism,<sup>14</sup> as we are capable of nurturing ourselves and changing, even preventing, the effects of our past karma.<sup>15</sup> If our lives have been predetermined, or everything is willed by some divine being, then we are powerless to

<sup>10</sup> On the 5-element reflections, see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 61,8-12/1:421-423) & SD 3.11 (4) for refs. See also **Rūpa**, SD 17.2a (11) Meditating on the elements.

<sup>11</sup> On “not-that-ness,” see **Atammayatā**. SD 19.13.

<sup>12</sup> S 12.2,11/2:3 (on name-and-form) = SD 5.15.

<sup>13</sup> S 3.5/1:72 f = SD 38.9.

<sup>14</sup> Fate-rooted belief entails resorting to luck, magic, rituals and some kind of external way of changing our lives, when the real roots of our problems are within, ie, in our minds: see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8 (5) Attachment to rituals and vows.

<sup>15</sup> On how lovingkindness can prevent negative karma, see **Karaja,kāya Brahma,jāla S** (A 10.208) @ SD 2.10 (2) & **Love**, SD 38.4 (6.3).

change ourselves, and there is no need of ethics or religion, since whatever we do is already predetermined, or we are only acting out a divine will.

Karma, on the other hand, is our habitual life. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny. The principle is something like this: whenever we deliberately act (whether by thought, word or deed), we are likely to act this way again. For example, if we were to be angry, we are likely to be angry again, especially when similar conditions were to arise.

Our habit of getting angry then becomes easier: it has become a character. And if this goes on, without any conscious effort to change ourselves for the better, then we would, in due course, face the dire consequences of such a character. Our destiny or rebirth would be a state that is characterized by constant anger, violence and so on.<sup>16</sup>

**2.1.3 Perception of danger.** In the *Giri-m-ānanda Sutta* (A 10.60), the Buddha teaches Ānanda the perception of danger (*ādīnava, saññā*), thus:

Here, Ānanda, a monk who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place, reflects thus:

Of much suffering is this body, with many dangers! Various kinds of illnesses arise in the body, such as<sup>17</sup>

eye ailment, hearing ailment, nose ailment, tongue ailment, body ailment,  
head ailment, ear ailment, mouth ailment, teeth problem, cough,  
cold, heat [burning], fever, stomach ailment, faintness [swooning], diarrhoea, colic, cholera,  
leprosy, abscess [boils], eczema, tuberculosis, epilepsy,<sup>18</sup>  
ringworm,<sup>19</sup> itch, scabs, pustules,<sup>20</sup> scabies, jaundice,<sup>21</sup> diabetes, piles, boil, fistula,  
<sup>22</sup>bile disorder,<sup>23</sup> phlegm disorder,<sup>24</sup> wind disorder,<sup>25</sup> a combination of them, a change in the  
temperature, improper self-care,<sup>26</sup> ailments due to assault [trauma upon oneself caused by  
outside agencies],<sup>27</sup> ailment due to the results of one's karma,

<sup>16</sup> See eg **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8 (Appendix) Identifying personality problems.

<sup>17</sup> This section contains one of the oldest references of medicine in Indian social history. See SD 19.16 (2).

<sup>18</sup> Those with these 5 diseases are barred from joining the order (V 1:70-73, 93, 2:271, 4:8; VA 995 f; see also Nm 1:17, 47, 2:304; Nc 166).

<sup>19</sup> *Daddu*, Skt *dadru*, *dardru*, *dadrula*, *dardura* (*dardara*), *dardula*, *dradula*, a skin disease, probably a kind of leprosy or ringworm.

<sup>20</sup> *Rakhasā*, *rakhasā*, *nakhasā*. Comy say that this is “an ailment at the place scratched by the nails (*nakha*)” (AA 5:43; NmA 1:61).

<sup>21</sup> *Lohita*, *pitta*, lit “bile in the blood.” “Jaundice” is conjectured by FL Woodward, A:W 5:75.

<sup>22</sup> While the first 4 ailments are internal, the rest are external, except for karmic results, which are both. The first 4 of these ailments—the 3 peccant (illness-bringing) humours and their combination—are central to Āyurveda medical aetiology. The first 3 humours (Skt *doṣa*) are the *tri,doṣa* of Āyurvedic medicine. They also form a prominent aspect of the Mahāyāna medicinal philosophy and healing (Zysk 1998 ch 4). These 8 ailments are mentioned in **Sivaka S** (S 36.21 = SD 5.6), **Samāṇa-m-acala S 1** (A 4.87.5/2:87), and **(Samāṇa) Sukhumāla S** (A 5.104/3:131). In the last sutta, one who is disease-free is said to be one free from these 8 causes (cf Nm 370). In **Milinda,pañha** (Miln 134 f), Nāgasena discusses the 8 causes of suffering in the context of the Buddha's lack of moral vice. All this attests to the early history of this aetiology.

<sup>23</sup> Symptoms of bile disorders (*bhagandalā*) include nervousness and excitement suggesting that one has emotional and neurotic problems.

<sup>24</sup> Symptoms of phlegm disorders (*pitta,samuṭṭhānā ābādhā*) include sluggishness and apathy suggesting that one has depression.

<sup>25</sup> Symptoms of wind disorders (*vāta,samuṭṭhānā ābādhā*) include hiccup, stitch (brief sharp pain running through the body) and stomach-ache. Also at **Sivaka S** (S 36.31.6/4:230) = SD 5.6.

<sup>26</sup> Causes of *visama,parihārajā ābādhā* include sitting or standing too long, and being bitten by a snake.

<sup>27</sup> *Opammikā ābādhā*. It is also translated as “assault” or “external agency,” but the Pali forms *upakkama*, *opakkama*, *opakkamika*, and the Sanskrit *upakrama* (from *upa-* and √KRAM, to stride) have the primary meaning of “attacking suddenly.” As such, Zysk thinks “it therefore could be equivalent to the *āgantū*, or external, category of

cold, heat, hunger, thirst, voiding, urinating.  
Thus he dwells contemplating the dangers in this body. (A 10.60,7/5:110), SD 19.16

This is a form of perception of impermanence whose purpose is to motivate ourselves to assert ourselves in our meditation practice before such illness overcomes and weakens us.

**2.1.3 The Buddha's illnesses.** Even the Buddha, on account of his having a physical body, that body suffers various pains and sickness, such as the following:

- he suffers from back-aches A 9.4/4:359 SD 73.4
- he has a fever S 46.16/5:81 SD 43.13<sup>28</sup>
- his foot is hurt by a fling rock splinter Miln 1:136
- he suffers from dysentery during his last days D 16,2.23/2:99 +4.20/2:126 SD 9

Regarding the Buddha's back-ache, the Saṃyutta Commentary explains it as arising from non-karmic causes. that is, present conditions:

Why did it [his back] pain him? The Blessed One, who had devoted himself to the great exertion for six years [as an ascetic], had a great deal of bodily suffering. Later on, when he was very old, he had back trouble. That [backache] had no karmic cause (*akaraṇa*). (SA 3:52)

### 2.1.4 Dealing with pain

2.1.4.1 We have already noted that we experience two kinds of feelings [1.1], the bodily and the mental. Bodily pain means that some physical parts (earth, water, fire or wind elements) [1.2.1] is going through change right here and now. Some solid, fluid, heat or moving aspects of our body has shifted in its element, one aspect has been taken over by another. In scientific terms, we would say, some cells are being destroyed or some body parts are malfunctioning.

2.1.4.2 **The (Anicca) Vedanā Sutta** (S 25.5) gives a very simple teaching regarding feelings: all we need to do is to regard any kind of feeling, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, arising from any of the sense-doors, as being “impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.” If this is done on a regular basis, whether with wise faith or with wisdom, the Buddha guarantees that we will be able to attain streamwinning in this life itself, if not certainly at the moment of dying.<sup>29</sup>

2.1.4.3 **The Nakula,piṭā Sutta** (S 22.1) teaches us a step further, bringing us to the reflection of non-self. Firstly, the Sutta declares how both the body (*kāya*) and the mind (*citta*) can be sick (*atura*), that is, when we regard the aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness) in term of a self.<sup>30</sup> However, even the body is sick, we can restrict the pain only to the body without affecting the mind, by not regarding any of the aggregates in terms of a self. In this way, even though our body is sick, our mind is not sick.<sup>31</sup>

## 3 Mental dis-ease and ease

**The Vibhaṅga Commentary** states that: “The ordinary person is like one mad” (*ummattako viya hi puthujjano*) because he, without considering, ‘Is this right or wrong?’ on account of some kind of cling-

disease causation in Indian medicine. According to the āyurvedic medical tradition, *āgantū* causes are generally violent and traumatic and involve injury to the body” [Caraka Saṃhita Sūtrasthāna 20.3; Suśruta Saṃhita Sūtrasthāna 1.24 f] (Zysk 1998:30). This suffering may arise from being arrested for crime, being attacked by robbers, accidents, etc; the Buddha's foot being hurt by a piece of rock due to Devadatta's attempted assassination.

<sup>28</sup> **Gilāna S 3** (S 46.16/5:81), SD 43.13. See also **Gilāna S 1** (S 46.14/5:79 f), SD 43.11 (Mahā Kassapa's illness), **Gilāna S 2** (S 46.15/5:80), SD 43.12.

<sup>29</sup> S 25.5/3:227 = SD 17.3(4.5.1). For details, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

<sup>30</sup> On how to reflect on the 5 aggregates, see **(Anicca) Siha S** (S 22.78) @ SD 42.10 (2).

<sup>31</sup> S 22.1/3:1-5 = SD 5.4.

ing, creates some kind of karma out of desire for some kind of existence”<sup>32</sup> (VbhA 186). In short, the untutored ordinary person is mad because *he acts out of greed, hate and delusion*.

According to **the Sall’atthēna Sutta** (S 36.6), while the untutored ordinary person, ignorant of the true nature of feelings, suffers twice [1.1], the wise noble disciple understands the true nature of feelings. When he feels a painful feelings, he shows no aversion to it, because he knows an escape beyond sensual pleasures, that is, through mental bliss. When he feels a sensual pleasure, he does not delight in it, because he understands, according to reality, the arising, the passing away, the gratification, the danger and the escape with regards to feelings. And when he feels a neutral feeling, he understands it according to reality, because ignorance does not lie latent in him.<sup>33</sup>

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## The Discourse on (the Two Kinds of) Diseases

A 4.157/2:142 f

### Physical health, mental health

- 1 Bhikshus, there are these two kinds of diseases [illnesses]. What are the two? [143]
- 2 Disease of the body and disease of the mind.<sup>34</sup>
- 3 Bhikshus, there are to be seen beings who can claim to be **physically healthy** [disease-free of body] for a year,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for 2 years,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for 3 years,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for 4 years,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for 5 years,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for 10 years,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for 20 years,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for 30 years,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for 40 years,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for 50 years,  
 who can claim to be physically healthy for a 100 years.
- 4 But, bhikshus, not easy it is to find those beings in this world who can claim to be mentally healthy for even a moment except for those (arhats) whose mental influxes are destroyed.<sup>35</sup>

### The 4 diseases of a renunciant

- 5 Bhikshus, there are these four diseases of the renunciants. What are the four?
- 6 (1) Here, bhikshus, a monk has great desire, distress, and discontent<sup>36</sup> with any kind of robe, almsfood, lodging or support for the sick and medicinal supply.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *So idaṃ yuttaṃ idaṃ ayuttan ti avicāretvā yassa kassaci upādānassa vasena yaṃ kiñci bhavaṃ patthetvā yaṃ kiñci kammaṃ karoti yeva* (VbhA 186).

<sup>33</sup> S 36.6,9-10/4:209 = SD 5.5.

<sup>34</sup> *Kāyiko ca rogo cetasiko ca rogo*.

<sup>35</sup> *Te bhikkhave sattā sudullabhā\* lokasmim, ye cetasikena rogena muhuttam pi ārogyaṃ paṭijānanti aññatra khīṇ’āsavehi*. \*So Be; Ce E Ke Se dullabhā.

<sup>36</sup> He is discontent with the 4 supports by way of the 3 kinds of contentment (AA 1:77-80). Comy ad **Santuṭṭhita S** (A 1.65/1:12) gives these 3 kinds of contentment (*santosa*): (1) contentment regarding what we gain (*yathā, lābha, santosa*), ie, whatever kind of robe, etc, we obtain; (2) contentment regarding our strength (*yathā, bala, santosa*), ie from what we obtain, selecting only from what conduces to our health; (3) contentment in regards to what is appropriate (*yathā, sāruppa, santosa*), ie keeping what we basically need, and giving away the rest (AA 1:78 f). For the 12

7 (2) On account of his great desire, distress, and discontent with any kind of robe, almsfood, lodging or support for the sick and medicinal supply,

he has bad wishes, desire for gaining recognition, and gaining wealth, honour and praises.<sup>38</sup>

8 (3) He rouses, strives, exerts himself in gaining recognition, and gaining wealth, honour and praises.

9 (4) With cunning he approaches families, with cunning he sits down, with cunning he teaches the Dharma, with cunning he holds back his excreting and urinating.<sup>39</sup>

10 Bhikshus, these are the four diseases of the renunciants.

### Spiritual training

11 Therefore, bhikshus, you should train yourselves thus:

12 “We will not harbour great desire, distress, or discontent with any kind of robe, almsfood, lodging or support for the sick and medicinal supply;

13 nor will we harbour bad wishes, desires for gaining recognition, and gaining wealth, honour and praises;

14 nor will we rouse, strive, exert ourselves in gaining recognition, and gaining wealth, honour and praises.

15 We will endure the touch of cold, heat, hunger, thirst, gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping things.

16 We will endure abusive and offensive manners of speech.

17 We shall patiently endure painful feelings that arise in our bodies, sharp, piercing, racking, unpleasant, disagreeable, taxing on our breaths [sapping our life itself].”<sup>40</sup>

18 Thus, bhikshus, should you train yourselves.

— evaṃ —

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kinds of contentment (these 3 × 4 supports, DA 1:204-207), see Bodhi, *The Discourse on the Fruits of Recluseship*, 1989: 134-138, repr 2008:130-134.

<sup>37</sup> *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu mah’iccho hoti vighātavā asantuṭṭho itarītara, cīvara, piṇḍapāta, senāsana, gilāna-p, pac-caya, bhesajja, parikkhārena.*

<sup>38</sup> *Pāpikam iccham paṇidahati anavañña-p. paṭilābhāya lābha, sakkāra, siloka-p. paṭilābhāya.*

<sup>39</sup> *So saṅkhāya kulāni upasaṅkamati, saṅkhāya nisīdati, saṅkhāya dhammam bhāsati, saṅkhāya uccāra, passavaṃ sandhāreti.* Comy says that he is calculative (*saṅkhāya*) by way of making pretensions (“thus they would know me,” *iti maṃ ete jānissantīti*) before families (for the sake gains, etc) (AA 3:135). “He holds back” answering nature’s call clearly because he is absorbed in worldly intercourse, as he does not want to miss any opportunity for gains, etc, even at the cost of his own health and wellbeing.

<sup>40</sup> *Uppannānam sārīrikānam vedanānam dukkhānam tibbānam kharānam kaṭukānam asātānam amanāpānam pāṇa, harānam adhivāsaka, jātikā bhavissāmāti.*