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(Tika) Moneyya Sutta

The (Threes) Discourse on Sagehood | A 3.120 [A:B 1.122]

Theme: The nature of spiritual silence

Translated by Piya Tan ©2016

1 Sutta significance

1.1 DEFINITION OF SAGEHOOD

1.1.1 Silence of the body

1.1.1.0 This is a succinct sutta on the nature of sagehood (*moneyya*) or silent sagehood as experienced in early Buddhism. **The (Tika) Moneyya Sutta** (A 3.120) simply defines sagehood in terms of the “silencing” or inner stilling of the 3 doors of karmic action, that is, the body [§3], speech [§4] and mind [§5].

1.1.1.1 The silencing of the body is by way of moral restraint by way of respecting life, the happiness of others, and the body itself. These are, in fact, the first 3 of the 5 universal precepts (*pañca, sīla*),¹ with the 3rd precept as the abstinence from incelibacy, that is, from any kind of sexual behaviour. [§3; 1.1.2]

1.1.1.2 The rule against **incelibacy** [§3(3)] means that we freely, willfully and diligently undertake the training from abstaining any kind of sex, whether personally (such as masturbation) or with another (any kind of sexual intercourse). Socially, this practice is based on the respect for freedom, that is, accepting “no” to any kind of sexual contact; hence, it is the respect for the *person* himself (the physical body).²

1.1.1.3 The rule against incelibacy is highlighted because silent sagehood refers especially to the ideal spiritual goal and state of a monastic renunciant, that is, to attain the inner silence or stillness of body, speech and mind—to be fully awakened. It is not that sexuality (which is the opposite of celibacy) is bad or evil, but that sexuality is “time-consuming”³ in many ways—it entails relationship with the body (a physical state), with another (a partnership), with many others (a family) and with society (social duties and activities)—this is the “crowdedness” of the worldly life. In short, it is the antithesis of renunciation—this is the “**spiritual space**” conducive for personal freedom and awakening.⁴

1.1.1.4 Sagehood, the path of inner silence, begins with the renunciation of the body. This is what keeping the precepts and restraining our senses prepare us for. This helps us let go of the body—meaning not having to process any of physical sense-experiences or thoughts—to fully focus on the mind. This preparation of the body for meditation is often described in the suttas.

Having found a suitable “secluded dwelling” for meditation—a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a gully [gorge], a hillside cave, a cemetery, a remote forest [jungle grove], the open air, a heap of straw—we should sit down comfortably, crossing our legs, keeping our body erect, and establish mindfulness before us.⁵

1.1.2 Silence of speech

1.1.2.1 The second kind of sagehood is that of speech—this is, of course, right speech: the abstention from lying, from divisive speech, from harsh speech and from frivolous talk [§4]. These kinds of speech are not wholesome because they pollute our mind, and they also reflect a polluted mind.⁶

1.1.2.2 The best silence in terms of sagehood is, of course, not speaking at all, especially when we are not ready to do so or we have no good reason to speak at all. In the Nālaka Sutta (Sn 3.11), we are reminded by the Buddha, “noisily go the little streams, | silently flow the great ocean” (Sn 720cd) and “like a half-filled pot is the fool, | like a full lake is the wise” (Sn 721cd).

¹ For a discussion on the rationale and the “values” for such a practice, see SD 1.5 (2).

² On right action, see SD 10.16 (4). On celibacy, see SD 31.7 (6).

³ On sexuality being “time-consuming,” see (**Devatā Samiddhi S** (S 1.20,5.2) SD 21.4.

⁴ On spirituality as space, see SD 11.4 (1.3).

⁵ This is from a stock passage: see eg **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,67), SD 8.10, where see for further refs.

⁶ On right speech, see SD 10.16 (3).

1.1.2.3 One of the reasons that a sage dwells in a secluded or remote place is to avoid any speech, especially unnecessary speech, which—along with bodily silence—help the sage (here meaning the one practicing for sagehood) to attain the most important of three kinds of silence: the silence of the mind.

1.1.3 Silence of the mind

1.1.3.1 The Moneyya Sutta defines “mental sagehood” on its highest level—the attaining of arhathood. It should be noted that this is best fruit of mental sagehood because it is the spiritual liberation of awakening or nirvana itself. The basis for such a liberation—on a slightly lower level of mental sagehood, so to speak—is the attaining of a truly silent mind that is profoundly blissful. Such a mind is totally free of all mental hindrances [2.1.3.1], that is, the attaining of dhyana.⁷

Through the attaining of dhyana—the mind free of all thoughts—the meditator is empowered with a profound sense of mental clarity. The mind is simply looking at itself, as it were. Then, on emerging from such a state—with our cognitive (or “knowing”) consciousness working again, we direct our mind to examine how such a state arises and how this understanding help us fully understand the nature of true reality, that is, what is virtual reality, how it arises, what is true reality, how it is so. In simple terms, this is our full understanding of the 4 noble truths.⁸

1.1.3.2 This famous passage in the Sutta defining arhathood is called “the arhathood *vimutti* pericope.” There are at least two other famous stock passages that define arhathood,⁹ but this own mentions “the mental liberation and liberation by wisdom that is influx-free” (*anāsavaṃ ceto, vimuttiṃ paññā, vimuttiṃ*).

2 The nature of sagehood

2.1 THE EXPERIENCE OF SAGEHOOD

2.1.1 Beauty and truth

2.1.1.1 Silent sagehood (*moneyya*) defines the most profound spiritual awakening experience of the historical Buddha. On a very simple worldly level, this is like we are listening to the most beautiful music most beautifully played, and we are fully absorbed in it with not a care in the world. We feel so happy and free that we do not feel or need to do anything else.

As a sage, we are simply happy. Although the beautiful music is the condition for our being happy, it is not the reason for our happiness. Our happiness arises from our feeling the beautiful music, directly experiencing it, and letting go of everything else. In an important way, we are always naturally looking for this kind of experience—often, however, we do not really know exactly what it is until we have experienced it.

2.1.1.2 This can be said to be our natural unstoppable quest for **beauty**—in early Buddhism, what is good (*kalyāṇa*) is also beautiful (*sobha*)—on the highest level of our experience, goodness and beauty are the same thing. We need to see and understand this **truth** for us to really and fully understand what this actually means. This beauty is real (we actually are able to *sense* it) and it is also true (even when we do not “sense” it, we still *feels* its joy, light and power—this is awakening on a very simple level.

2.1.1.3 The awakening knowledge is liberating, to say the least. It frees us from all wrong views—indeed, from all views—since we are able to see true reality, things as they really are and not what our senses present them to be or what they appear to be. What liberates us also bring us profound **joy**, the ability to directly experience this true reality: it is not a separate reality—we are this true reality.

2.1.1.4 Another way of putting it is that the mind is finally and fully free from the 6 senses that limits and fetters it. The mind is free from itself, too, or rather, it is free from the phantom that there is an abiding self or soul aside from what it really is. It just *is*, and what *is* must constantly change: it’s like the even

⁷ On dhyana, see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4..

⁸ On the 4 noble truths (*catu ariya, sacca*), see SD 1.1 (4.0). For details, see **Sacca Vibhaṅga S** (M 141), SD 11.1

⁹ The best known arhathood pericopes are (1) the longer arhathood pericope: for refs, see SD 47.1 (3.2.2.3) n; (2) the shorter or *paṭicaya* arhathood pericope, see SD 47.1 (3.2.2.3) and (3) the *vimutti* arhathood pericope, see (**Ca-tukka**) **Samaṇa S** (A 4.239,5.2) n, SD 49.14.

flow of images, construct with light, colours and shapes, that make a movies meaningful and enjoyable. Everything is moving and changing: whatever exists must change. To exist is to change.

2.1.1.5 Yet, all this existing and changing are “all” occurring in the eternal now. There is not past (it is gone), there will be no future (it never comes). It is also *now*. This is the stillness aspect of this beautiful truth and truthful beauty. The peace of the eternal moment. It is as if the “now” is a chink in the solid wall that the senses have constructed. When our mind is fully still and sharply clear, we can peer through this chink and see the eternal now on the other side.

Or, better, this is a vision *into* our own mind. Free from all the senses, we are now able to truly look deep into our mind and really see it in all its truth and beauty. It’s like we know have had a glimpse of the most beautiful person in the world, and we have fallen in love with that person. Then, we are able to look at that wonderful person in the eye, and that person smiles disarmingly back at us. We have been truly seized by the moment—or, better, we are liberated with love and joy that we do not have to seek anything any more. We are simply happy just the way we are—we are living our sagehood.

2.1.1.6 **Sagehood** (*moneyya*), then, is the early Buddhist ideal of self-reliance [2.1.2], self-effort (meditation) [2.1.3], and self-fulfilment (emotional independence)[2.1.4]. We shall now examine each of these themes, in turn, by reflecting on various inspiring verses, especially those from the Dhammapada.

2.1.2 Spiritual aloneness and self-reliance

2.1.2.1 Early Buddhism is full of delightful references to trees, forests, and nature. The silent sage or *muni* is silent just as nature herself is silent so that its creatures, the earth and the skies are able to speak and sound in meaningful and purposeful ways. We have to be really silent if we are to listen to all beautiful voices of the forest.

This means that the *muni* is ever at peace and harmonious with the forest. We may even go to the extent of saying that it is the forest that nurtures the *muni*. There are no urban *munis*—the crowd and cacophony are the antithesis of the *muni*, the silent sage. But the crowd needs the silence of the sage if it is to evolve beyond crowdedness.

2.1.2.2 **The Dhammapada** preserves many verses that capture the essence of the significant role that the forest plays in a *muni*’s life. We will now briefly examine some of these verses and see how they speak for themselves in terms of joyful aloneness of silent sagehood:

*Ramañīyāni araññāni
yattha na ramati jano
vita,rāgā ramissanti
na te kāma,gavesino*

Dh 99

Delightful are the forests
where people delight not.
The passion-free will delight therein,
those who seek no sensual pleasure.

*Paviveka,rasam pītvā
rasam upasamassa ca
niddaro hoti nippāpo
dhamma,pīti,rasam pibam*

Dh 205

Having sipped the taste of solitude
and tasted the taste of stillness.
he is free from pain, free from bad,
sipping the joyful taste of Dharma.¹⁰

*Ek’āsanam eka,seyyam
eko caram atandito
eko damayam attānam
van’ante ramito siyā*

Dh 305

Who sits alone, who rests alone,
who lives alone, not indolent,
who alone tames himself,
would be delighted in the forest.¹¹

*Ekassa caritam seyyo
n’atthi bale sahāyatā*

Better it is to live alone.
there is no friendship with the foolish.

¹⁰ For nn, see Dh:N 113 n205.

¹¹ For nn, see Dh:N 135 n305.

*eko care na ca pāpāni kayirā
appossukko mātaṅg'araññ'eva nāgo*¹² **Dh 330** Let one live alone and do no bad,
care-free like the elephant Mātaṅga in his forest.¹³

2.1.3 Meditation as the path

2.1.3.1 Clearly, then, by **self-effort** is meant meditation and the direct seeing into true reality, the vision that is liberating. This is, in fact, the key practice of a silent sage: meditation. Deep meditation is the basis for the sage's wise silence (*moneyya*). It is not a silence that deafens, where we do not hear anything at all. Rather it is the silence, an emptiness, that hears the "all," whatever the senses are able to present to us. The sage understands all this, and so is free from them. It's like we have been living in the forest and nature, and become so acquainted with them that we understand their every sound and sign, and we know just what to do or not with them.

The sage's silence or sagacious stillness is not a deafening soundlessness. It is the silence from which all sound arise and have meaning, and are used with wholesome purpose. It works as the media for conveying truth to those who are ready for it. This silence is the canvas on which the beauty of the senses—forms, painting, structures, shapes, poetry, songs, music, eloquence, fragrance, comfort, healing, and, above all, happiness—are painted and come to full life for us.

Sagehood is the essence of the spiritual life—a living experience of the constant vibrance of truth and beauty. While the unawakened toil, often in great pain and deprivation, to create or seek such truth and beauty, the sage experiences their living essence with every waking moment. This gives us a good idea of the Buddha's constant joy as a fully self-awakened being: for, he is the great sage himself.

2.1.3.2 **The Dhammapada** has many verses that highlight meditation as the essence of the path to sagehood. Here are some inspirations:

<i>Jhāya bhikkhu mā ca pamādo mā te kāma,guṇe bhamassu cittaṃ mā loha,guḷaṃ gilī pamatto mā kandī dukkhaṃ idan'ti dayhamāno</i>	Dh 371	Meditate, monk, be not heedless! Let not your mind spin with the cords of pleasure. Be not heedless and swallow a ball of lead. As you are burning, cry not, "This is suffering!"
<i>Attānaṃ ce piyaṃ jaññā rakkheyya naṃ surakkhitaṃ tiṇṇaṃ aññataraṃ yāmaṃ paṭijageyya paṇḍito</i>	Dh 157	If one knows oneself to be dear, one should well protect oneself For every one of the three watches, the wise should keep vigil.
<i>Mā pamādam anuyuñjetha mā kāma,rati,santhavaṃ appamatto hi jhāyanto pappoti vipulaṃ sukhaṃ</i>	Dh 27	Indulge not in heedlessness, be not intimate with lust and delight. The one diligent in meditating reaps abundant joy.
<i>Asso yathā bhadro kasā,niviṭṭho ātāpino saṃvegino bhavātha saddhāya sīlena ca vīriyena ca samādhinā dhamma,vinicchayena ca sampanna,vijjā,caraṇā patissatā pahassatha dukkhaṃ idaṃ anappakaṃ</i>	Dh 144	Like a well bred horse touched by the whip, make your effort with urgency! By faith, moral virtue, effort, mental concentration and scrutinising dharmas, mindful, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, be rid of this suffering that is not small.

¹² Cf Sn 45-46, 54 (on an elephant that wanders off alone from its herd).

¹³ *Mataṅga* is an elephant, annoyed by other elephants in the herd, wanders alone in the forest (MA 4:206; DhA 3:31; J 3:489; VA 5:1152). On "Mātaṅga forest," cf **Upāli (Gaha,pati) S** (M 56,14), SD 27.1. For nn, see Dh:N 142 n330.

<p><i>Yogā ve jāyati bhūri āyogā bhūri,saṅkhāya etaṃ dvedhā pathaṃ nātvā` bhavāya vibhavāya ca tath'attānaṃ niveseyya yathā bhūri pavaḍḍhati</i></p>	<p>Dh 282</p>	<p>Wisdom indeed is born from meditation, through non-meditation, wisdom is lost. Having known these two paths of progress and regress, let one so conduct oneself so that wisdom grows.</p>	
<p><i>Suppabuddhaṃ pabujjhanti sadā gotama,sāvaka yesaṃ diva ca rato ca bhāvanāya rato mano</i></p>	<p>Dh 301</p>	<p>The Gotama's disciples are always well awakened when they awaken; whose mind, day and night, delight in meditation.</p>	<p><i>b a dc</i></p>
<p>2.1.3.3 In the Buddha's society, the brahmins regard themselves as the highest class. They concocted some grand religious story to show how they arose from the mouth of Primordial Man,¹⁴ the warrior class from his arms, the merchant class from his thighs, and the artisans from his feet; and, then, there are those who were not "God-born" at all—they were the outcastes!</p> <p>The Buddha declares that we may be born into a class, but our goodness or badness, our wisdom and place in society, are defined by our actions and occupations. We are born neither brahmin nor non-brahmin; we are not defined by birth, but by our own acts (body, speech and mind).¹⁵</p> <p>2.1.3.4 Similarly, a renunciant is not one merely by external looks and rituals, but by his moral conduct, and above all, by his mental cultivation. It is his wholesome meditation that defines him as a renunciant. In this sense, he is truly a "brahmin," a spiritual person in the Buddhist sense—it also one of the epithets of the silent sage:¹⁶</p>			
<p><i>Jhāyīm virajam āsīnam kata,kicco anāsavaṃ uttam'aṭṭham anuppattam tam aham brūmi brāhmaṇam</i></p>	<p>Dh 386</p>	<p>Sitting in meditation, free from stains, done what is to be done, influx-free, attained to the highest goal— him I call a brahmin.</p>	
<p><i>Asaṃsaṭṭham gahaṭṭhehi anāgārehi cūbhayaṃ anoka,sāriṃ appicchaṃ tam aham brūmi brāhmaṇam</i></p>	<p>Dh 404 = Sn 629</p>	<p>Mingling with neither householders nor the houseless, not taking a house as refuge, few in wishes— him I call a brahmin.</p>	<p><i>ba ab</i></p>

2.1.4 Emotional independence

2.1.4.1 In practical terms, the most widely effective manner by which anyone enters the path and progresses on the path is through **meditation**, or more exactly, through mental concentration (*samādhi*). This is a mental state when our mind, at least temporarily clears itself of all the mental hindrances—sensual desires, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and guilt, and doubt¹⁷—so that it is able to focus on itself, and in due course, even free itself from its own reflexives bliss, to just bliss, that is, dhyana.

This is the kind of **bliss** that energizes us, the meditators, so that we are consistently dedicated to the Dharma life and work, and we easily engage with others in a spiritual way.¹⁸ This is also the joy that naturally pervades our being so that we are not dependent on the approval of others, but become emotion-

¹⁴ See Rg.veda 10.90 (Puruṣa Śūkta); DAT 3:46. See **Ambaṭṭha S** (M 93,5.2 n), SD 40a.2.

¹⁵ See Sn 650; also **Vāseṭṭha S** (M 98 = Sn 3.9) esp §§8-13 (SD 37.1).

¹⁶ See the closing of **Dhammapada**, ch 26, on the Brahmin (*brāhmaṇa,vagga*, Dh 383-423).

¹⁷ For details on these 5 mental hindrances (*pañca,nīvaraṇa*), see **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1.

¹⁸ See Reflection, "Joy as food," R197 2011: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/R197-Joy-as-food-110713-156.pdf>.

ally independent in a wholesome manner. This is the kind of spiritual independence we will feel even at the stage of streamwinning.

2.1.4.2 Spiritual bliss can arise from the understanding that we can and must help ourself in personal development and spiritual growth. Although spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇa, mittata*) is well known as a catalyst in our moral life and mental cultivation, it should be understood that that is what it really is—a catalyst. In other words, spiritual friendship is more than just an appreciation of our being: it is a reminder of our potential for self-awakening.¹⁹

A spiritual friend—a friend of our mind and heart—tutors us to think and feel the Dharma. We have six strong horses—our 5 physical senses and the mind as sources of our knowledge—and their tamer, the heart (the mind of direct experience) that tames them. This is what is meant by self-mastery in sagehood:

*Attā hi attano nātho
attā hi attano gati
tasmā saññamay'attānam
assam bhadram'va vāñijo*

Dh 380

One is one's own master,
one is one's own destiny:
therefore, restrain the self
as a merchant his fine steed.

In **Dh 380**, line b is especially interesting, as it plays on the polysemy (multiple meanings) of *gati*, which can mean “guide,” “journey,” “world,” “destiny,” or “future life.” So, as we read such lines, it helps profoundly to bear in mind these different senses. Let their senses appear in our open mind, enriching our wisdom, and we joyfully grow in the spaciousness of words that free words.

2.1.4.3 **Pali polysemy** is a great reminder that words are merely tools of learning, and that we should not be ruttet in the notion that a word must have only a single fixed sense when its multi-senses actually help us understand the teaching better and more fully. Conversely, this does not mean that we can inject any sense we like into a word: it simply means that the words are already pregnant with a range of rich senses, and it is our wisdom and experience that tease them out in accordance with the context.²⁰

2.1.4.4 Even the Buddha, despite his great wisdom, compassion and powers, reminds us that he is only a teacher, a shower of the way—we must walk the way ourself. This is not a shortcoming of the Buddha in any way. Rather, it is the nature of personal growth and self-awakening. No matter how much we learn from others, we must live the process of change ourself: the horse can only be brought to water. It is in this spirit that the Buddha declares:

*Tumhehi kiccaṃ ātappam
akkhatāro tathāgato
paṭipannā pamokkhanti
jhāyino māra, bandhanā*

Dh 276

By you yourself must the effort be made:
the Tathagata only shows the way.
By your practice, meditative, *cd*
meditative, you are freed from Māra's bonds. *dc*

2.2 THE ONE WHO EXPERIENCES SAGEHOOD

2.2.1 Religious emancipation

2.2.1.1 In the Buddha's times, there were two main movements or streams of religious thought and action: they are those of **the brahmins** (*brāhmaṇa*) who tried to maintain their priest-led class system of dogmas, social duties and ritual purity, and **the recluses** (*samaṇa*; Skt *śramaṇa*). The recluse movement—the best known voice being that of the Buddha—unequivocally spoke against the brahmanical systems to emancipate society from their religious slavery.

The brahmins claim that they are able to communicate directly with God, and so are empowered to cleanse others of their “sins” (this theistic term helps to clearly bring out an almost identical religious elitism and triumphalism found in the God-religions of our own times). The Buddha rejects all such notions, declaring that we are pure or impure depending our own karma (our past), and by the same token,

¹⁹ On spiritual friendship, see **Spiritual friendship** (SD 34.1).

²⁰ “Pali polysemy” means that a Pali word often has many senses, or that a number of Pali words have the same sense or are used in the same sense. On the nature of Pali polysemy, see SD 1.1 (4.4.5); SD 10.16 (1.3.1-1.3.2).

only we can purify ourselves by our wholesome lives (the present). Indeed, since we are doers of our own deeds, who else can we turn to, but to help ourselves (Dh 160).

2.2.1.2 In other word, we must have the religious will to live moral lives—this begins by simply knowing and accepting that we *can* do so. True recluship starts with our willing to work at overcoming the bad acts of body, speech and mind:

<i>Yo ca sameti pāpāni āṇuṃ thulāni sabbaso samit'attā hi pāpānaṃ samaṇo'ti pavuccati</i>	Dh 265	Who stills all bad both small and big. Because he calms the bad he is called “recluse.”	<i>ba</i>
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We see here an etymological play at work. The Pali word for “recluse,” *samaṇa*, is shown to be derived from *sameti*, amongst whose senses are those of “to know.”²¹ Here, however, we have both the senses, “to know” as well as “to appease, still,” that is, to remove them from having affecting us or from ever rising again in us. There is a clear hint of uprooting them from the depths of our minds through meditation [2.1.3]. It is meditation that gives us the most effective tool against badness—that tool is wisdom, knowing how to wholesomely apply our understanding of life and reality to gain awakening.

2.2.2 Bhikkhu and therā

2.2.2.1 In the suttas, the term *samaṇa*, although commonly applied by non-Buddhists to the Buddha, is rarely applied to the monks themselves. The early Buddhist monks are commonly referred in the suttas to as *bhikkhu*, which means those who rely of alms (*bhikkhā*). More than that, the monks are those who practise the Buddha Dharma and are its exemplars.

2.2.2.2 It should also be noted that *bhikkhu* is often understood, according to their proper contexts, as a sort of synecdoche representing all those are listening to the Dharma or who are practicing it. Hence, when we read a sutta or Dharma teaching, we should connect with it for the benefit of our spiritual guidance and progress.²²

<i>Hattha,saññato pāda,saññato vācāya saññato saññat'uttamo ajjhatta,rato samāhito eko santusito tam ahu bhikkhum</i>	Dh 362	Restrained in hand, restrained in foot, restrained in speech, restrained at the top, delighting in being inwardly stilled, alone, contented—he is called a monk.
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<i>Dhamm'āramo dhamma,rato dhammaṃ anuvicintayaṃ dhammaṃ anussaraṃ bhikkhu saddhammā na parihāyati</i>	Dh 364	Whose pleasure park is the Dharma, whose delight is the Dharma, who reflects on the Dharma, a monk who recollects the Dharma— falls not away from the true Dharma.
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2.2.2.3 A monk who has spent 10 rains (*vassa*), that is, 10 monastic years old, is said to be an elder (*therā*) (Dh 260 f). Senior nuns are known as *therī*. Again here, the Buddha reminds the monastics not to measure time, but to use it wisely to cultivate themselves.

<i>Na tena thero hoti yen'assa palitaṃ siro paripakko vayo tassa mogha,jiṇṇo'ti vuccati</i>	Dh 260	He is not an elder merely because his head is grey. He has reached a ripe old age but is said to “empty and decayed.”
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²¹ See, eg, S 1:186; A 2:6; Sn 361, 793; Nm 284.

²² On the broader sense of *bhikkhu* in the suttas, see SD 4.9 (5.3).

2.2.2.4 We are constantly reminded in the teachings to keep ourselves healthy in both body and mind. A healthy body serves to sustain our efforts in cultivating a healthy mind. If we only stay healthy without mental cultivation, then—like an ox—our body grows, but not out wisdom (Dh 152),

*Yamhi saccañ ca dhammo ca
ahimsā saññāmo damo
sa ve vanta,malo dhīro
thero iti pavuccati*

Dh 261

In whom there truth and teaching, too,
non-violent, restrained, tamed:
he, indeed, who has purged his stains, wise—
he is called an elder.

2.2.3 The wise man

2.2.3.1 In early Buddhism, a **wise man** (*paṇḍita*), a person of wisdom—today, the word is used to mean a “scholar”—is not defined by what he knows. For, what we know are all sense-based, hence, limiting us to the sense-world. The truly wise experience suprasensual knowledge—the bliss and clarity of the mind liberated from the limits of the physical senses—to directly taste the truth and beauty of true reality.

2.2.3.2 Such an awakening brings us wisdom by freeing us from our worldliness—our sense-bound reactivity in the form of lust, hate and delusion. The truly wise is, of course, the sage, who has attained the security of nirvana:

*Na tena paṇḍito hoti
yāvātā bahu bhāsati
khemī averī abhayo
paṇḍito 'ti pavussati*

Dh 258

One is not learned
merely because one speaks much.
One who is secure, hate-free, fearless,
is truly called “learned.”

2.2.4 The Dharma expert

2.2.4.1 The sage (*muni*) knows the Dharma, not merely in theory, but from personal experience. In this sense, the *muni* is a Dharma expert (*dhamma,dhara*). Even though the *muni* is a Dharma expert—he rarely shows his expertise or is seen to show it—he may not have great skills in teaching, unless he is an arhat with all the 4 analytic skills (*paṭisambhidā*).²³ As such, the unawakened who hear him are likely to fancy that they are better Buddhist experts than the humble *muni*.

2.2.4.2 The Buddha gives us this beautiful Dhammapada verse to set the *muni*'s record straight:

*Na tāvatā dhamma,dharo
yāvātā bahu bhāsati
yo ca appam pi sutvāna
dhammaṃ kāyena passati
sa ve dhammadharo hoti
yo dhammaṃ na-p,pamajjati*

Dh 259

One is not Dharma expert
merely because one speaks much.
Who hearing even a little,
see the Dharma with personal experience—
he is indeed a Dharma-expert,
who is not heedless in the Dharma.

2.3 WHEN IS ONE A SAGE?

2.3.1 Not by silence alone

2.3.1.1 Interestingly, silence—although characteristic of the *muni*—is not, by itself, his defining quality. There are a wide range of silence—from that of ignorance to that of emotional negativity, and then there is the “noble silence”²⁴ and the Buddha’s famous silence.²⁵ The noble silence refers to the peace of the 2nd dhyana, while the Buddha’s silence most often refers to his rejection of speculation and philosophizing that would detract our emotional well-being and distract us from the spiritual life.

²³ The 4 analytic skills are those of (1) meanings (*attha,paṭisambhidā*), (2) causes and conditions (*dhamma,paṭisambhidā*), (3) language (*nirutti,paṭisambhidā*) and ready wit (*paṭibhāna,paṭisambhidā*): SD 28.4 (4); SD 41.6 (2.2).

²⁴ The noble silence (*ariya tuṅhī,bhāva*) is the peace of the 2nd dhyana: SD 8.4 (5.1.3).

²⁵ On the Buddha’s silence, see **Silence and the Buddha**, SD 44.1.

2.3.1.2 The sage's silence has both these qualities—we must remember that the Buddha is himself the very first sage amongst equals. The sagely or sagacious silence—from all that we have discussed here—clearly refers to the awakened state of the *muni* himself. We can also see aspect of the sage's silence in those who are true practitioners, aspiring to awakening in this life, too.

*Na monena muni hoti
mūḷha,rūpo aviddasu
yo ca tulaṃ'va paggayha
varam ādāya paṇḍito*

Dh 268²⁶

Not by silence is one a sage,
one who is confused, ignorant.
Like one holding a balance,
he embraces what is noble,

*Pāpāni parivajjeti
sa munī tena so munī
yo munāti ubho loke
munī tena pavuccati*

Dh 269

he shuns the bad—
as such, that sage is indeed a sage,
who is wise about both in the world—
therefore, he is called a sage.

2.3.2 Not quarrelling with the world

2.3.2.1 In another ancient discourse, **the Param'aṭṭhaka Sutta** (Sn 4.5), we again see the theme of non-violence (*ahimsā*), where it is applied more broadly: the sage does not quarrel with the world. The Buddha himself famously declares in **the Puppha Sutta** (S 22.94):

“I do not quarrel with the world, bhikshus, but the world quarrels with me. One who speaks Dharma does not quarrel with anyone in the world. Of that to which the wise men of the world do not assent, I, too, say that it is not so. Of that to which the wise men of the world assent, I too say that it is so.”
(S 22.94/3:138), SD 72.5.²⁷

The significance of this statement is that whenever the Buddha teaches, he will adjust his teachings to fit the audience and occasion. In other words, the Dharma can be taught and understood in a very versatile manner, even through the scriptures of other systems. We have a significant number of suttas that record such applications of skilful means (*upaya*) by the Buddha.²⁸ In this sense, the Buddha does not quarrel with the world. It is as if the Buddha is saying: Throw us any challenge and we will somehow adjust and adapt our teachings to benefit others.

On the other hand, the world—the unawakened and the mentally undeveloped—may not be able to understand, even fear, some of the Buddha's teachings. Even the gods are said to tremble at the Buddha's teaching of impermanence, for fear of their losing their divine state.²⁹ Others who are used to a materialistic way of life may have difficulty understanding or accepting the Buddha's teachings of karma, rebirth or non-self. For such difficulties, the Buddha advises us to apply the skilful means of the progressive teachings.³⁰

2.3.2.2 Another ancient collection of Dharma teachings can be found in **the Aṭṭhaka,vagga** (ch 4 of the Sutta Nipāta). **The Pasūra Sutta** (Sn 4.8) is filled with the Buddha's warnings against entering into religious speculations and debates, which brings out the worst in all parties:

²⁶ Dh 268 f are the closing verses of **Guh'aṭṭhaka Sutta Niddesa** (Nm 1:57 f), SD 49.22(1.2).

²⁷ “Here the Buddha emphasizes that he does not reject all ontological propositions, but only those that transcend the bounds of possible experience” (S:B 1085 n185). See also Gethin 2001:261.

²⁸ On brahmanical terms adapted in the suttas, see SD 12.1 (6). On language as skilful means, see SD 12.1 (7). That lying is not used by the Buddha as a skilful means, see SD 30.8 (5.3) & SD 10.16 (3.4.2.1). For an overview, see *Upāya, Skilful means*, SD 30.8.

²⁹ See **(Anicca) Sīha S** (S 22.78,8), SD 42.10.

³⁰ On the progressive teaching (*anupubbī,kathā*), see **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,3.15) SD 49.8a. On its stock passage: SD 49.8b (7.3 esp 7.3.2). See also SD 21.6 esp (1); SD 46.1 (4.1); SD 30.8 (3.4.2): skilful means of speech.

*Te vāda,kāmā parisam vigayha
bālaṃ dahanti mithu aññam-aññam
vadenti te aññasitā kathojjam
pasamsa,kāmā kusalā vadānā*

Sn 825

Having entered the assembly, desiring debate,
they mutually regard one another as fools.
Dependent on others, they start a dispute,
claiming to be experts, desirous of praise.

A similar message from the Buddha—that of not getting into contentious arguments about religion—is found in **the Param’atthaka Sutta** (Sn 4.5 = Sn 796-803) [2.3.3.1] and **the Jarā Sutta** (Sn 4.6 = Sn 804-834). In all such Suttas, there is the warning against falling in speculative and violent language—which is essentially wrong speech. This would naturally be avoided by the *muni*, who is the fully awakened silent sage. Such misuse of language should also be avoided by those who aspire to attain sagehood.

2.3.3 Non-violence

2.3.3.1 The time of the Buddha (6th-5th century BCE) was a time of the beginning of Indian empire-building which culminated in Asoka (c268-c232 BCE)³¹—in other words, there were occasional battles and political strife which affected the common masses much more than the apolitical monastics of the day. In views of such human violence, understandably, the Buddha places the precept against killing first [§3(1)] and often speaks against violence (*hiṃsā*), and advocating non-violence (*ahiṃsā*).

Non-violence is a key characteristic of a “noble” person generally, and of the saint specifically, as stated here in the Dhammapada:

*Na tena ariyo hoti
yena pāṇāni hiṃsati
ahiṃsā sabba,pānānaṃ
ariyo’ti pavuccati*

Dh 270

One is not noble
when one harms a living being.
The one who is non-violent towards all beings—
he is called “noble.”

2.3.3.2 One of the oldest records we have of the Buddha’s teachings is **the Pārāyana** (Sn 5), the last chapter of the Sutta Nipāta. The 8th sutta in this final chapter is **the Nanda Māṇava Pucchā** (Sn 1077 f), one of the 16 brahmin youths, students of Bāvārī, who have come to question the Buddha. Nanda’s question is interesting as it relates directly to the nature of the *muni*.

*Santi loke munayo (icc’āyasmā nando)
janā vadanti ta-y-idaṃ katham su*

ñāṇūpapannaṃ no mumim vadanti

udāhu ve jīvitēnūpapannaṃ

Sn 1077

(The venerable Nanda): “People say *ba*
there are sages in the world. How do they
say this? *ab*
Do they say that one endowed with
knowledge is a sage,
or, is one accomplished in it by a certain way
of life?”

*Na diṭṭhiyā na sutiyā na ñāṇena
munīdha nanda kusalā vadanti
visenikatvā anighā nirāsā*

caranti ye te munayo’ti brūmi

Sn 1078

“Not by view or learning or knowledge
Nanda, the experts do call a sage here.
Who wander without conflict, without
affliction, without desire— *dc*
him I call a sage.

³¹ See the case of king Bimbisāra: SD 49.19 (5.7.4.2).

The (Threes) Discourse on Sagehood

A 3.120

1 Bhikshus, there are these 3 kinds of sagehood.
What are the three?

2 Bodily sagehood, verbal sagehood, mental sagehood.³²

3 (1) And what, bhikshus, is bodily sagehood [sagehood of the body]?

RIGHT ACTION

Here, bhikshus, a monk

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. is one who abstains from harming life; | <i>pāṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti</i> |
| 2. is one who abstains from taking the not-given; | <i>adinnādānā paṭivirato hoti</i> |
| 3. is one who abstains from incelibacy. | <i>abrahmacariyā paṭivirato hoti</i> |

This, bhikshus, is called bodily sagehood.

4 (2) And what, bhikshus, is verbal sagehood [sagehood of speech]?

RIGHT SPEECH

Here, bhikshus, a monk

- | | |
|---|---|
| 4. is one who abstains from false speech; | <i>musāvādā paṭivirato hoti</i> |
| 5. is one who abstains from malicious speech; | <i>pisuṇāya vācāya paṭivirato hoti</i> |
| 6. is one who abstains from harsh speech; | <i>pharusāya vācāya paṭivirato hoti</i> |
| 7. is one who abstains from frivolous talk. | <i>samphappalāpā paṭivirato hoti</i> |

This, bhikshus, is called verbal sagehood.

5 (3) An what, bhikshus, is mental sagehood [sagehood of the mind]?

THE *VIMUTTI* ARHATHOOD PERICOPE

Here, bhikshus, a monk,

having destroyed the mental influxes,³³

having realized for himself by direct knowledge, here and now,

attains and dwells in the mental liberation and liberation by wisdom that is influx-free.³⁴

This, bhikshus, is called mental sagehood.

6 These, bhikshus, are the 3 kinds of sagehood.

³² *Kāya, moneyyaṃ vacī, moneyyaṃ mano, moneyyaṃ.*

³³ The oldest list is prob a set of 3 influxes—of sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), of existence (*bhav'āsava*), and of ignorance (*avijj'āsava*), as in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,1.10(20)/3:216,9), **Sammā,diṭṭhi S** (M 9,70/1:55,10), **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121,11/3:108,18), **Āsava S** (S 38.8/4:256,4 = 45.163/5:56,15 = 47.50/189,29), **Ti,kaṇṇa S** (A 3.58/1:165,16), **(Te,vijja) Jāpusoṇi S** (A 3.59.4/1:167,22), **Nibbedhika Pariyāya S** (A 6.63/3:414,11); **Vbh 914/384,13**. The Nikāyas, Abhidhamma and Comys give a list of 4 influxes: (1) sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijj'āsava*).³³ These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*): **V 3:5,27 f**; **D 16,1.12/2:81,26 = 84,5 & passim**, **33,1.11(31)/3:230,10 f**; **MA 1:62,6 f** (ad M 1:6, 22, quoting S 4:256,4; SA 2:65,1 f); **AA 2:355** (ad A 1:241,24), 3:79,1 (ad A 2:38,28), 3:321,24 (ad A 3:245,15), 3:395,20 (ad A 3:388,1); **ThaA 1:202,23, 214,26**; **Vbh 373,34 f**; **Dhs 1:448**; **Kvu 515,2**; **Abhs 32,6**; **Mohv 97,8**; **Vism 7.59/211,1, 22.56/683,34**.

³⁴ *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ ceto, vimuttiṃ paññā, vimuttiṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati.* This is the “*vimutti* arhathood” pericope: **Mahā Sīha, nāda S** (M 12,19/1:71), SD 49.1; **Cūḷa Assa, pura S** (M 40,14/1:284), SD 41.8; **Phāsi, vihara S** (A 5.94/3:119), **(Aṭṭhaka) Saddhā 2 S** (A 8.72/4:316), **Santa Vimokkha S** (A 10.9/5:12), **(Dasaka) Sīha, nāda S** (A 10.21/5:36), SD 81.2; **Adhivutti, pada S** (A 10.22/5:38); Pm 2:176; Pug 3.1/27. See also **(Catukka) Samaṇa S** (A 4.239,4,2), SD 49.14.

- 7 *Kāya,muniṃ vacī,muniṃ
ceto,muniṃ anāsavaṃ
muniṃ³⁵ moneyya,sampannaṃ
āhu sabba-p,pahāyinan'ti³⁷* The sage of the body, the sage of speech,
the sage of the mind that is influx-free:
the sage who is accomplished in sagehood³⁶—
he is said to have let go of the all.

— evaṃ —

[For **Bibliography**, see the end of SD 49c]

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³⁵ Be Ce Se so; Ee *suciṃ*. At **(Iti) Moneyya S** (It 3.2.8,3) the reading is *mano,muniṃ*, which translates identically as here (SD 49.22).

³⁶ Alt reading & tr: *suciṃ moneyya,sampannaṃ*, “the pure who is accomplished in sagehood.”

³⁷ Cf **(Iti) Moneyya S** (It 3.2.8), where the line reads: “He is said to be washed clean of badness” *āhu ninhāta,-pāpakam* (SD 49.22). See NmA 1:177; cf AA 2:265, 372; ItA 2:37.