

14

(Dasaka) Abhabba Sutta

The (Tens) Discourse on Incapability | A 10.100
Theme: The 10 hindrances to attaining arhathood
Translated by Piya Tan ©2017

1 Sutta significance

1.1 SUMMARY NOTES

1.1.1 The (Dasaka) Abhabba Sutta (A 10.100) is a very brief text listing 10 mental impurities (*upakkilesa*) to be overcome before we can attain arhathood. The first 9 impurities are the theme of **the (Navaka) Abhabba Sutta** (A 9.62) in the same context—they must be uprooted before we can attain arhathood [2]. The (Dasaka) Abhabba Sutta expands on the (Navaka) Abhabba Sutta.

1.1.2 Even a quick glance of the list of 10 impurities of **A 10.100** [Table 1.3.2.1] shows that, while the first 3 impurities look familiar (as the precursor of the 3 unwholesome roots), the other impurities seem to be put together randomly. Actually, they are non-technical terms, reflecting the kind of impurities that need to be urgently addressed according to early Buddhism—probably during the first period of the Buddha’s ministry.¹

1.2 RELATED SUTTAS

Like **the (Dasaka) Abhabba Sutta** (A 10.100), **the (Dhamma,vinaya) Gotamī Sutta** (A 8.53), too, has a set of criteria for “quality control” leading to arhathood. The (Dhamma,vinaya) Gotamī Sutta gives a different list of 8 unwholesome qualities (which are really little different from the mental impurities), that is, (1) lust (*rāga*), (2) bondage (*saṃyoga*), (3) piling up (*ācaya*), (4) great desire (*mah’icchā*), (5) discontent (*asantuṭṭhi*), (6) socializing (*saṅgaṇika*), (7) indolence (*kosajja*), and (8) being a difficult burden (*dubhara*)—and their wholesome opposites.² Clearly, this is a special list of wrong practices that monastics are strongly advised to carefully avoid—this is, after all, for the training of the nun Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī.

1.3 MENTAL IMPURITIES

1.3.1 Monads and dyads

1.3.1.1 The qualities mentioned in the suttas we are examining here may be called “impurities” (*upakkilesa*) or “mental impurities” (*cittassa upakkilesa*). The term ***upakkilesa*** is used in the Canon in these 3 senses, and a fourth is found in the Visuddhi,magga, thus:

- (1) weaknesses in our meditation, as in **Upakkilesa Sutta** (M 128);³
- (2) mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) (sensual lust, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, doubt: SD 32), as in **the Nīvaraṇā Sutta** (S 46.37) and **the Patta,kamma Sutta** (A 4.61);⁴

¹ On the 2 periods of the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 1.1 (2.2) & SD 40a.1 (1.3).

² A 8.53,2/4:280 f (SD 46.15)

³ M 128,27+30/3:160-162 (SD 5.18).

⁴ S 46.37/5:94 f (SD 84.6); A 4.61,8/2:67 (SD 37.12).

- (3) lesser defilements or aspects of the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala, mūla*), as in **the Vatthūpama Sutta** (M 7);⁵
 (4) (a later sense) “impurity of insight” (*vipassan’upakkilesa*), as in **the Visuddhi, magga**.⁶

1.3.1.2 The unwholesome qualities listed in the (Dasaka) Abhabba Sutta are what may be called “mental impurities” (*cittassa upakkilesa*) or simply, “impurities.” Most of these impurities are defined in **the Vibhaṅga**⁷—where, in the first section of analysis or explanation (*niddesa*), they are called “monads” or “ones” (*ekaka*). These are followed, in the next section, by an explanation of the same impurities listed in pairs—as “dyads” or “twos” (*duka*). [1.3.2.4]

The dyads of impurities are given, for example, in the list of 16 impurities in **the Dhamma, dāyāda Sutta** (M 3),⁸ **the Vatthūpama Sutta** (M 7,3) [1.3.2.3] and **the Cūḷa Assapura Sutta** (M 40,3). These impurities are listed and explained in **the Vibhaṅga** (the second book of the Abhidhamma)—one of the oldest books (perhaps, the oldest) of the Abhidhamma⁹—which gives us some idea of the age of the lists of impurities. [1.1.2]

1.3.1.3 This same list of **16 impurities** appears in 8 pairs (dyads, *duka*) of impurities in **the Dhamma, dāyāda Sutta** (M 3).¹⁰ The Sutta commentary discusses these 16 mental impurities (MA 1:168-170).¹¹ A shorter list of 12 “faults of a recluse” (*samaṇa, dosa*) is found in **the Cūḷa Assa, pura Sutta** (M 40), along with a comparative listing.¹²

1.3.2 Comparative analysis of the lists of impurities

1.3.2.1 Similar lists of related mental impurities (*upakkilesa*) are found in the following suttas:

(Navaka) Abhabba Sutta	A 9.62	9 impurities	SD 50.14(2)	
(Dasaka) Abhabba Sutta	A 10.100	10 impurities	SD 50.14	Table 1.3.2.3
Cūḷa Assa, pura Sutta	M 40,3	12 impurities	SD 41.8 (2.1.1)	Table 2.1.1
Vatthūpama Sutta	M 7,3	16 impurities	SD 28.12	

STUDY METHOD. If this is the first time you are studying the topic of mental impurities, it helps to be familiar with these four suttas. Note that [Table 1.3.2.3] the set of 9 impurities of **A 9.62** are identical with the first 9 impurities of **A 10.100**. These are also listed in **the Vatthūpama Sutta** (M 7,3) and **the Cūḷa Assa, pura Sutta** (M 40,3), both of which have an almost identical set of 12 impurities.

Begin by studying, or at least skimming, through **the (Navaka) Abhabba Sutta** (A 9.62), followed by the other three suttas. Make a special effort to study the two helpful Tables in **the (Dasaka) Abhabba Sutta** (A 10.100) and **the Cūḷa Assapura Sutta** (M 40,3). Finally, look at how the list grew to become a total of 16 impurities in **the Vatthūpama Sutta** (M 7,3)—impurities 1-10 are identical, only 10+11 are different.

⁵ M 7,3-5/1:36 f (SD 28.12).

⁶ Vism 20.105/633.

⁷ Vbh 845-846/350, 891-894/357

⁸ M 3,8-15 (SD 2.18), esp Table 3.5.

⁹ The Abhidhamma is not mentioned in the 1st Council (Rājagaha, held 3 months after the Buddha’s passing), but was certainly in existence by the 3rd Council (Pāṭalīputta, c 350 or 250 BCE).

¹⁰ M 3,8-15/1:15 f + SD 2.18 (3) & Table 3.

¹¹ For a summary, see M:ÑB 1179 n87.

¹² M 40,3+5/1:1:281 f (SD 41.8): for a comparison of lists of impurities, see Table 2.1.1.

1.3.2.2 The Table below [1.3.2.3] compares the lists of impurities in 3 texts: the Vatthûpama Sutta (M 7), the (Dasaka) Abhabba Sutta (A 10.100) and the (Navaka) Abhabba Sutta (A 9.62). Note that the lists of impurities in the two Abhabba Suttas are identical, except that **A 10.100** (note the “10” in the title) has a total of 10 mental impurities, while **A 9.62** (note the number “9” of the title) has only 9 impurities. The **M 7** list is clearly an expansion of a shorter older list, which is also the source for A 9.62 and A 10.100.

Vatthûpama Sutta (M 7) (M 7,3 @ SD 28.12)		A 10.100 (SD 50.14)		A 9.62 (SD 50.14(2))
(1) covetousness + rampant greed	<i>abhijjhā,visama.lobha</i> ¹³	=	lust	<i>rāga</i> * 1
(2) ill will	<i>vyāpāda</i>	=	hate	<i>dosa</i> * 2
(3) anger	<i>kodha</i>		delusion	<i>moha</i> 3
(4) grudge [resentment]	<i>upanāha</i> ¹⁴		anger	<i>kodha</i> 4
(5) scorn [contempt]	<i>makkhā</i> ¹⁵		grudge	<i>upanāha</i> 5
(6) spite [malice]	<i>paḷāsa</i>		scorn	<i>makkha</i> 6
(7) jealousy [envy]	<i>issā</i>		spite	<i>paḷāsa</i> 7
(8) miserliness [stinginess]	<i>macchhariya</i>		jealousy	<i>issā</i> 8
(9) deceit	<i>māyā</i>		miserliness	<i>macchhariya</i> 9
(10) fraud [hypocrisy]	<i>sāṭheyya</i> ¹⁶		conceit	<i>māna</i> Nil
(11) callousness [stubbornness]	<i>thambha</i> ¹⁷			
(12) impetuosity [rivalry]	<i>sārambha</i> ¹⁸			
(13) conceit	<i>māna</i>			
(14) arrogance	<i>atimāna</i>			
(15) mental intoxication [pride]	<i>mada</i>			
(16) heedlessness [negligence]	<i>pamāda</i>			

Table 1.3.2.3 Comparative table of mental impurities

¹³ Comy to **Vatthûpama S** (M 7) defs *abhijjhā* as desire-or-lust (*chanda,rāga*) for our own possessions, while *visama,lobha* is desire-or-lust for those of others. DA defs *visama,lobha* as excessive greed (or neurotic desire) by way of consuming things (*paribhoga,yuttetu pi ṭhānesu atibalava,lobho*), in other words, excessive materialism and consumerism (DA 3:853): see SD 31.7 (7.1). Our sutta comy discussed other distinctions, but concludes that, since all greed is disharmonious (*visama*), the two terms should be understood as synonyms (MA 1:169). However, when *abhijjhā* is used by itself or in the dvandva, *abhijjhā,domanassa*, it is usually rendered as “covetousness and displeasure” (eg M 10,3/1:56) & SD 13.1 (4.2). I think *abhijjhā,visama,lobha* is synonymous with *chanda,rāga*, so that, likewise, the former (*abhijjhā*) refers to the desire for an unacquired object, while the latter (*visama,lobha*) is the attachment to the acquired object (Abhidharma,kośa Vyākhyā): see **Kāma-c,chanda**, SD 32.2 (2.1).

¹⁴ *Upanāha*, “grudge, resentment” ie, continuous and worsening anger (Vbh 891/357). It arises after we are repeatedly angry at someone or something (MA 1:169).

¹⁵ *Makkha* (from √MRKṢ, “to smear”), derogatory action (Vbh 892/357), or devaluation of benefits others place on us (MA 1:169), often coupled with *paḷāsa*: M 1:15; A 1:95, 100, 299, 4:148, 456, 5:39, 156, 209, 310, 361; It 3; Sn 56, 437, 631, 1132; Dh 150, 407; J 5:141; Vbh 357, 380, 389; Pug 18, 22.

¹⁶ *Sāṭheyya*, “fraud,” ie, hypocrisy, pretence, pretentiousness (Vbh 894/358).

¹⁷ *Thambha*. See **Arahatta S** (S 6.76/3:429), where Comys explain *thambha* as inflexibility, “like bellows full of air” (MA 1:170), or “a state of callousness by way of anger and conceit” (*kodha,mānehi thaddha,bhāvaṃ*) (AA 3:411). It is actually a form of **conceit** (*māna*).

¹⁸ *Sārambha*. “impetuosity” (Sn 328c); the drive to outdo others (MA 1:170); “the habit of drawing out conflicting action” (*paccanika,sātatā,saṅkhāto*, SnA 334); in other words, “competitiveness, one-upmanship.” See **Paccanika S** (S 7.16/1:178), SD 50.37.

1.3.2.3 It is difficult to determine the relative ages of these lists. A rule of thumb is that a **short list or teaching tends to be older than a longer one**. However, it is also possible—in this case, for example—that a shorter list is an abridgement of a longer but less systematic older list. Note, too, that the 3rd impurity of **A 10.100** and **A 9.62**—delusion (*moha*)—is missing from the **M 7** and the **M 40** lists [1.3.2.1].

It is possible that one development (there must be other developed models, too) is that, over time, the longer list became more compact or shorter, until we have the first 3 impurities of the Abhabba Suttas—the familiar triad of **unwholesome roots** of lust (*rāga*), hate (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*)—becoming a convenient shorthand for all the impurities.

For a schematic summary of our discussion of the impurities thus far, see **Table 1.3.2.3**.

1.3.2.4 The first two impurities (in **A 10.100** and **A 9.62**)—“lust” (*raga* or *lobha*) and “hate” (*dosa*) (both marked with an asterisk *)—are identical to the first two impurities in **the Dhamma,dāyāda Sutta** (M 3) list of 16 impurities, but where (as we have already noted) they are listed as a dvandva (twin compound): *lobha,dosa*, “lust and hate,” that is, as dyads (*duka*)¹⁹ [1.3.1.2].

Some of the impurities—*kodha*, *upanāhī* (a form of *upanāha*) and *pāpa,makkhī* (“bad and scornful” or “badly denigrating”)—are listed in **the Vasala Sutta** (Sn 116a). *Kodha* and *lobha,macchariya* are mentioned in **the Tuvaṭṭaka Sutta** (Sn 929) in the Aṭṭhaka Vagga, one of the earliest collections of the early Buddhist texts.

2 (Navaka) Abhabba Sutta (A 9.62)

SD 50.14(2)

(Navaka) Abhabba Sutta

The (Nines) Discourse on Incapability • **A 9.62/4:456**

Traditional: A 9.2.1.11 = Aṅguttara Nikāya 9, Navaka Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 1, Khema Vg 11

Theme: The 9 hindrances to attaining arhathood

The 9 incapacities

- 1 *Nava bhikkhave dhamme appahāya abhabbo arahattaṃ sacchikātum.*
Katame nava?
- 2 *Rāgaṃ dosaṃ moham kodham upanāham makkham paḷāsam issam macchariyam –*
- 3 *ime kho, bhikkhave, nava dhamme appahāya abhabbo arahattaṃ sacchikātum.*

- 1 Bhikshus, without abandoning these **9 states**, one is incapable of attaining arhathood.
What are the nine?
- 2 **Lust, hate, delusion, anger, grudge, scorn, spite, envy, stinginess.**
- 3 Bhikshus, without abandoning these 9 states, one is incapable of attaining arhathood.

The 9 capabilities

- 4 *Nava, bhikkhave, dhamme pahāya bhabbo arahattaṃ sacchikātum.*
Katame nava?
- 5 *Rāgaṃ dosaṃ moham kodham upanāham makkham paḷāsam issam macchariyam –*

- 4 Bhikshus, having abandoned these **9 states**, one is capable of attaining arhathood.
What are the nine?
- 5 *Lust, hate delusion, anger, grudge, scorn, spite, envy, stinginess.*

¹⁹ M 3,8 (SD 2.18) esp (3.5)

6 *ime kho, bhikkhave, nava dhamme pahāya bhabbo arahattaṃ sacchikātuṃ'ti*

6 Bhikshus, having abandoned these 9 states, one is capable of attaining arhathood.

— evaṃ —

The (Tens) Discourse on Incapability

A 10.100

1 Bhikshus, without having abandoned these **10 qualities**, one is *incapable* of attaining arhathood. What are the ten?

Lust, hate, delusion, anger, grudge,²⁰ scorn,²¹ spite, envy, stinginess, conceit.²²

rāga dosa moha kodha upanāha makkha paḷāsa issa macchariya māna

These, bhikshus, are the 10 qualities, without abandoning which, one is incapable of attaining arhathood.

2 Bhikshus, having abandoned these **10 qualities**, one is *capable* of attaining arhathood.

What are the ten?

Lust, hate, delusion, anger, grudge, scorn, spite, envy, stinginess, conceit.

These, bhikshus, are the 10 qualities, having abandoned which, one is capable of attaining arhathood. [210]

— evaṃ —

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²⁰ *Upanāha*, “grudge, resentment”: see def at Table 1.3.2.3.

²¹ *Makkha*, “scorn”: see def at Table 1.3.2.3.

²² See Table 1.3.2.3.