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Atam, mayatā

Not making anything of that: An introductory study of an ancient term
 Theme: Non-identification, deconstruction and non-duality
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“The hand takes the shape of what it grasps.” [4.1]

1 The context of the 3 characteristics

1.1 The Buddha’s teachings always begin with, or, is based on, the obvious and the known, especially with the universal fact of impermanence: all things of this world are impermanent (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*). This seminal teaching is recorded in the second discourse of the Buddha, **the Anatta, lakkhana Sutta** (S 22.59), thus:

(A) “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is ⟨**form | feeling | perception | formations | consciousness**⟩ permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”¹

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self.’?”²

“No, bhante.” ...

(B) “Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of ⟨**form | feeling | perception | formations | consciousness**⟩ whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near³—all ⟨**forms | feelings | perceptions | formations | consciousnesses**⟩ should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

“This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.”⁴ (S 22.59/3:66-68 = V 1:33 f), SD 1.2

¹ *dukkham vā sukham vā*, lit “suffering or happiness?”

² The notion “This is mine” arises through craving (*taṇhā*); the notion “This I am” arises through conceit (*māna*): the notion “This is my self” arises through views (*diṭṭhi*). See foll: “**I**: **The nature of identity**, SD 19.1; “**Me**”: **The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a; “**Mine**”: **The nature of craving**, SD 19.3. See also Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995: 32 f. See n below under “This is not mine ...”

³ See S 22.48/3:47. This classification of the 5 aggregates is explained in detail in **Vibhaṅga** and briefly in the *Vissuddhi, magga*: “**internal**” = physical sense-organs (or in oneself); “**external**” = physical sense-objects (in other people, things, etc); “**gross**” = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “**subtle**” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “**inferior**” = unpleasant and unacceptable sense-experiences [sense-world existence]; “**superior**” = pleasant and acceptable sense-experiences [form & formless existences]; “**far**” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “**near**” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41).

⁴ “This is not mine ... etc,” *n’etaṃ mama, n’eso’ham asmi, na mēso attā ‘ti*. This threefold formula is the contrary of “the 3 graspings” (*ti, vidha gāha*), that is, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) (MA 2:111, 225): here applied to the 5 aggregates [17-21]. A brief version, “There can be no considering that (element) as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’” (*ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā*) is found in **Mahā Hatthi, padopama S** (M 28/1:184-191 §§6b-7, 11b-12, 16b-17, 21.2-22). These 3 considerations represent respectively the 3 kinds of mental proliferation

The above teaching centres around the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*)⁵ and the 3 characteristics (*ti,lak-khaṇa*), that is, all conditioned things (*sabbe saṅkhārā*) are impermanent, and they are unsatisfactory (*dukkha*); all things (*sabbe dhammā*) are non-self (*anattā*), that is, there is no “essence” or any kind of permanent entity behind any person or thing.⁶

1.2 Passage (A) is the 3-characteristic formula, and is paraphrased thus: All worldly existence is conditioned, a network of causes and effects, and, as such, they are *impermanent*. What is impermanent, is *unsatisfactory*, and as such, we have no control over them: there is no abiding entity whatsoever, everything is *non-self*. What does this mean? A simple story will clarify this point.

A nervous young student once went to his teacher and complained that he is constantly fearful.

“Show me your fear so that I can examine it.”

“I do not have it right now.”

“When do you have it?”

“It comes as and when it likes.”

“Then, surely, it is not your true nature!”

1.3 Passage (B), using the totality formula, declares than *all* kinds of existence bear the 3 characteristics —all things of this world are impermanent and unsatisfactory, all *things* are non-self (Dh 277-279). This implies that since we have no control over the aggregates, over existence in general, they have no abiding entity, that is, no self or soul.⁷

2 Atam,mayatā in the Suttas

2.1 SUTTA USAGE. Despite the prime importance of the term *atam,mayatā* and its various forms, they appear only in a very limited number of Sutta references, but in key texts, such as:

(Majjhima) Sappurisa Sutta	M 113/3:42-45:	<i>atam,mayatā</i> 6×; <i>atam,mayatam</i> 6×	SD 23.7
Saḷ-āyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta	M 137/3:220:	<i>atam,mayaṃ</i> 2×	SD 29.5
Ādhipateyya Sutta	A 3.40/1:150:	<i>atam,mayo</i>	SD 27.3
Atam,maya Sutta	A 6.104/3:444:	<i>atam,mayo</i>	SD 19.13(2.4)
Mahā,niddesa	Nm 189:	<i>atam,mayatā</i> 2×	

The antonym *tam,maya* is also found in the Suttas.⁸

2.2 BEYOND EQUANIMITY. In the **Sappurisa Sutta** (M 113), the Buddha defines “the true individual” or spiritually evolved person (*sappurisa*) [7.6] as one who avoids indulging in the 8 dhyanas⁹ but transcends

(*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*) and of conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f). In **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,12-16/3:68), the formula is applied to the 5 aggregates & in **Parileyya S** (S 22.81/3:94-99) to the 4 primary elements. See also **Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f). See **Pārileyya S**, SD 6.16 (5).

⁵ See **Dve Khandha S** (S 22.48), SD 17.1a.

⁶ Dh 277-279. See **Saṅkhāra**, SD 17.6(6.1).

⁷ See **Dhamma Niyāma S** (A 3.134), SD 26.8.

⁸ Eg M 47.13/1:319 @ SD 35.6; Sn 846b; Nm 204 (6×).

⁹ Ie, the 4 form dhyanas (*jhāna*) and the 4 formless attainments (*samāpatti*): see **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

them through *atam,mayatā*. Thus, there is liberation from the mental cankers,¹⁰ which is arhathood. Here, the Buddha is reminding us that final liberation cannot be found in the temporary peace and bliss of the dhyanas, much less in any conditioned state or thing. *Atam,mayatā* transcends even the most sublime of unawakened states. No other state, no matter how sublime or spiritual, except *atam,mayatā*, can bring us liberation.

The Sappurisa Sutta further advises the practitioner to go beyond the yearning for liberation by cultivating the joy of insight contemplation. In due course, the practice leads to equanimity (*upekkhā*). Equanimity is the highest of the seven awakening factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*). When the seven factors are developed successfully, they lead to the penetration of the object on which they are focused. Penetration, or direct spiritual experience, means awakening to and deeply realizing the true nature of things.

Yet, the Sappurisa Sutta tells us that *atam,mayatā* takes the practitioner beyond even *upekkhā*. The Buddha is saying that even *upekkhā* is a state that can be clung to, thus hindering liberation. *Atam,mayatā* frees *upekkhā*, as well as the other six factors and any wholesome *dhamma* that aids liberation, from clinging. Even in relation to such attainments, “the Blessed One has spoken of non-identification (*atam,-mayatā*), as in whatever way one may conceive (the attainment), it turns out to be otherwise.”¹¹ This is because the mind of *atam,mayatā* is neither constructed by nor rests in any state of mind, all of which are impermanent, undependable, oppressive, uncontrollable, and unknowable, that is, void of self.¹²

2.3 LETTING GO FOR THE BETTER. In the *Salāyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta* (M 137), the Buddha describes spiritual growth effected by the letting go of a developed state for a progressively higher one. Thus, we give up the pleasure and pain associated with worldliness by relying on the pleasure, pain and equanimity associated with renunciation. We then give up multi-faceted equanimity (*nanattā,upekkhā*) by relying on one-pointed equanimity (*eka-g,gatā,upekkhā*). Finally, we give up one-pointed equanimity by relying on *atam,mayatā*. In this way, it is said, “Therein, by depending on this, he abandons that” (*tatra idaṃ nissāya idaṃ pajahathā ti*).¹³

The *Salāyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta* explains *nanattā,upekkhā* as “equanimity toward forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mind-objects,” which refers to the four form dhyanas (*rūpa,jhāna*). *Ekaggatā,upekkhā* is explained as “equanimity dependent upon the four formless dhyanas (*arūpa,jhāna*).” In simple terms, this refers to how the 3 worlds—the sense-world (*kāma,loka*), the form world (*rūpa,loka*), and formless world (*arūpa,loka*)—are transcended in spiritual training.

The ordinary worldling (*puthujjana*) clings to sense-experiences due to craving for sense-pleasures. We are freed from sensuality (*kāma*) by relying on pure form (*rūpa*), that is, by way of form dhyana. Pure form is abandoned by relying on the formless dhyanas. Finally, even these exalted states of consciousness are transcended through *atam,mayatā*.¹⁴

¹⁰ “Mental influxes,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati*, meaning “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously tr as influxes, taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 kinds of *āsava*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjā’sava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these influxes is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

¹¹ *Atam,mayatā vutta bhagavatā, yena yena hi maññanti tato taṃ hoti aññatha* (M 113/3:42,28).

¹² M 113.21/3:42 f @ SD 29.6.

¹³ M 137.20/3:220 f.

¹⁴ M 137.29/3:220 @ SD 29.5.

2.4 ATAM,MAYA SUTTA. Let us now look at the **Atam,maya Sutta** (A 6.104), which is a very short text and is here given in full:

SD 19.13(2.4)

Atam,maya Sutta

The Discourse on “the One Who Is Not that” | **A 6.104/3:444**

Theme: Six advantages of the perception of non-self

1 Bhikshus, seeing six advantages, a monk should find it sufficient to establish the perception of non-self in all things without exception. What are the six?

- | | |
|--|---|
| 2 (1) I shall be no part of all the world. | <i>Sabba,loke ca atam,mayo.</i> |
| (2) I-making will vanish in me. | <i>Ahaṃ,kārā ca me uparujjhissanti.</i> |
| (3) Mine-making will vanish from me. | <i>Mamaṃ,kārā ca me uparujjhissanti.</i> |
| (4) I shall be accomplished in uncommon knowledge. | <i>Asādhāranena ca ñāṇena samannāgato bhavissāmi.</i> |
| (5) I shall well understand causes | <i>Hetu ca me sudiṭṭho bhavissati</i> |
| (6) And the states arisen from causes. | <i>Hetu,samuppannā ca dhammā.</i> |

Bhikshus, seeing these six advantages, a monk should find it sufficient to establish the perception of non-self in all things without exception.

— evam —

2.5 THE ĀDHIPATEYYA SUTTA. Finally, we will look at the **Ādhipateyya Sutta** (A 3.40/1:150), or more exactly, at its closing verse:

Who subdues Mara, overcomes death, Who strives, touches the end of births: That one is wise, a knower of worlds, A sage who has nothing to do with all states.	<i>Pasayha Māraṃ abhibhuyya antakaṃ so ca phusī jāti-k,khayaṃ padhānavā sa tādiso loka,vidū sumedho sabbesu dhammesu atam,mayo munī ti</i> (A 3.40/1:150)
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3 Definition of *atam,mayatā*

3.1 TRADITIONAL DEFINITION

3.1.1 The term *atam,mayatā* is resolved as *na* (“no, not”) + *taṃ* (“that”) + *maya* (“made of”) + *tā* (“-ness,” making it an abstract noun), and so literally means “not made of that.” In early Buddhism, *atam,mayatā* refers to the ultimate conception of true reality. Thus, *atam,mayatā* may be translated as “the state of neither being made of nor making that (any thought, idea or external condition).” In fact, the term has various levels of meaning and a variety of subtle senses.

3.1.2 The Majjhima Commentary on the Sappurisa Sutta (M 113) glosses *atam,mayatā* as “the absence of craving” (*ni-t,tanhatā*, MA 4:99). Conversely, the Commentary on the Saḷāyatana Vibhaṅga Sutta (M 137), following MA 4:99 glosses *tam,mayatā* as craving (*tanhā*), but adds that *atam,mayatā* is the insight leading to the ascent (up the path) on account of the exhaustion of that craving (MA 5:27).¹⁵ Elsewhere,

¹⁵ *Atam,mayatan’ti ettha tam,mayatā nāma tanhā, tassa pariyādānato vuṭṭhāna,gaminī,vipassanā atam,mayatā ti* (MA 5:27).

the Commentaries generally explain ***tam,maya*** (adj) as that which is connected with craving, view and conceit,¹⁶ and ***tam,mayatā*** (n) as “craving.”¹⁷ It is craving that drives us to view duality of self and other, so that we perceive (view) the alienation and difference as a lack within ourself. This craving causes us to measure others by way of conceit (*māna*) and ego-construction,¹⁸ so that we fail to see our own true potential for spiritual liberation.

3.1.3 Although the Udāna Commentary on the Loka Sutta (U 3.10/32,30) does not mention it, the explanation there effectively applies to *atam,mayatā*: that is, in whatever way worldly people conceive of the five aggregates—as self, or as belonging to self, etc—the thing conceived turns out to be other than what is attributed to it.¹⁹ It is non-self, not belonging to self, not “I,” and not “mine” (UA 209 f).²⁰ For good reasons, therefore, the Commentaries take *atam,mayatā* as the absence of craving, views and conceit, the three most common and difficult of defilements.

3.1.4 There is another interesting aspect of *atam,mayatā*: it is closely connected with *nibbidā*. The Majjhima Commentary on the Alaggadūpama Sutta (M 22), in glossing *nibbidā* (“revulsion, disenchantment”) as “the insight leading to the ascent (to the path)” (*vuṭṭhāna,gaminī,vipassanā*), says that amongst its synonyms is “the exhaustion of *tam,mayatā*” (*tam,mayatā,pariyādānan ti*)” (MA 2:114). Hence, understandably, too, *nibbidā* and *atam,mayatā* mean the same thing. Indeed, we can easily see that the explanation of *atam,mayatā* perfectly describes *nibbidā*, too.²¹

3.2 CONTEMPORARY COMMENTS

3.2.1 In recent times, only a handful of practitioners (but no scholars) have pointed out and discussed the central significance of *atam,mayatā*. Apparently only a few teachers have actually done so, that is, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu²² of Thailand, Bhikkhu K Nananda of Sri Lanka,²³ and Ajahn Amaro of the US.²⁴

As Buddhadasa is apparently the most prominent advocate of the teaching of *atam,mayatā*, we shall discuss his ideas more fully later [4]. Suffice it here to say that his translator, **Bhikkhu Santikaro** (1993) notes that the meaning of *atam,mayatā* becomes clearer if we recognize that ***maya*** is a synonym for *saṅkhāra* (formation, condition, compound, concoction). *Atam,mayatā*, as such, is “unconcoctability,” a state of mind independent of the objects and conditions of experience. The mind that is fully conscious

¹⁶ As *taṇhā* (MA 2:387); as *taṇhā,ditṭhi*, “craving and view” (AA 3:415, SnA 2:547; NmA 2:312); as *taṇhā,ditṭhi, -māna*, “craving, view, and conceit” (NmA 1:90).

¹⁷ *Taṇhā* (MA 4:99, 5:27; AA 3:415; SnA 547).

¹⁸ The notion “This is mine” arises through craving (*taṇhā*); the notion “This I am” arises through conceit (*māna*); the notion “This is my self arises through views (*ditṭhi*). See foil: “**I**”: the nature of identity, SD 19.1; “**Me**”: the nature of conceit, SD 19.2a; “**Mine**”: the nature of craving, SD 19.3.

¹⁹ Cf **Sappurisa S**: “the Blessed One has spoken of non-identification (*atam,mayatā*), as in whatever way one may conceive (about the attainment), it turns out to be otherwise” (*atam,mayatā vutta bhagavatā, yena yena hi mananti tato tam hoti aññatha*, M 113/3:42,28).

²⁰ Cf SA 2:364 ad S 4:23 = 67.

²¹ See *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1.

²² Ordained as Phra Ngūam Indapañño (1906-1993).

²³ Bhikkhu Katukurunde Ñāṇananda (b 1940) currently resides in the Pothgulgala Aranyaya, Pahankanuwa Hermitage, Kandedgera, Devalagama, Sri Lanka.

²⁴ Aj Amaro (Jeremy Horner, b 1956) is (with Aj Pasanno) co-abbot of Abhayagiri Monastery, in Redwood Valley, California, USA. Amaro is from England and is a cousin of Isaline Blew Horner (1896-1981) of the Pali Text Society, London, who served as its Hon Secretary (1942-1959), and President & Hon Treasurer (1959-1981).

and aware is not affected by defilements arising from the roots of greed, hate, and delusion. Thus, the concept is close in meaning to *visāṅkhāra* (free of conditions), an epithet of nirvana.

3.2.2 In the pioneering translations of the Pali Text Society, scholars did not discuss *atam,mayatā*. For example, I B Horner, in her **Majjhima** translations, following the Commentaries [4.1], merely renders it as “lack of desire” (M:H 3:92, 269), without further comment.²⁵ E M Hare, in his translation of the **Saṃyutta**, is more engaging, rendering *sabba,loke ca attamayo bhavissāmi* as “Then in any world I shall become no part of it” (A:H 3:309),²⁶ and in his footnote here explains *atam,mayo* as “not made of that.” F L Woodward, in his translation of the **Aṅguttara**, however, is unclear, mainly because he is uncertain of the reading, but gives some helpful references in his footnote (A:W 1:133 n4). These are academic scholars who lacked Dharma practice, so that they tend to miss the spirit of the word.

3.2.3 More recently, **Bhs Bodhi and Nāṇamoli** (in their **Majjhima Nikaya** translation)²⁷ render *atam,mayatā* as “non-identification,” approaching from the *subject* side of experience. Others have translated it as “non-fashioning” or “unconcoctability,” highlighting its *object* side. “Either way,” notes **Ajahn Amaro**, “it refers primarily to the quality of awareness prior to, or without, a subject/object duality” (2003:47).

3.2.4 Further insight concerning *atam,mayatā* comes from the great living master **Bh K Nāṇananda**, who, in Sermon 14 of his “Nibbana sermons,” explains that “*tam,maya ...* is derived from *tad maya*, literally ‘made of that’ or ‘of that stuff.’” Hence, *atam,mayatā* highlights how, as a result of clinging, we “practically becomes one” with the object, due to the thought “I am [the] one who has attained” it. In contrast, “the arahant is called *atam,mayo* in the sense that he does not identify himself with anything,” he is no longer “made of that.”²⁸ The phrase “in whatever way they conceive it” (*yena yena hi maññanti*) in the **Sappurisa Sutta**²⁹ recurs elsewhere,³⁰ such as **the Sutta Nipāta**:

<i>Yena yena hi maññanti</i>	In whatever way they conceive [think],	
<i>tato nam hoti aññatha</i>	it turns out to be otherwise;	
<i>etadiso vinā,bhavo</i>	such is the difference:	
<i>passa lokassa pariyāya</i>	look at the way of the world!	(Sn 588)

3.2.5 According to **Analayo**, in these three instances, the phrase seems stand for the worldling’s mistaken ideas about the nature of reality, in particular in **U 3.10** and **Sn 757**, for the delusion of a self, and, in **Sn 588**, for the illusion of permanence.³¹ These are of course the effects of *tam,maya* on the unawakened mind.

4 Atam,mayatā as a characteristic of true reality

4.1 THE 3 HIGHER CHARACTERISTICS

4.1.1 From the usages in the Suttas as seen above [2], we can see that *atam,mayatā* is a characteristic of higher spiritual reality. In this connection, **Aj Amaro**, in his book, *Small Boat, Great Mountain*, mentions a

²⁵ Ie, of M 113.21/3:42 & M 137.20/3:220 respectively.

²⁶ Ie, of A 6.104.2/3:444 [3].

²⁷ *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 2nd ed 2001:1322 nl064.

²⁸ Nāṇananda 2005:316 f.

²⁹ *Atam,mayatā vuttā bhagavatā, yena yena hi maññanti tato tarn hoti aññatha* (M 113/3:42,28).

³⁰ U 3.10/32,30; Sn 757.

³¹ *Comparative Study of the Majjhima Nikaya* (MS) 2005: n ad M 3:42.

more refined or higher level of the three characteristics, that is, *suññatā*, *tathatā* and *atam,mayatā*. **Suññatā** means “emptiness,” but not in the ordinary sense of absence of a thing, but of deeper lack of essence or abiding entity. Or, as Amaro himself puts it: “The term derives from saying ‘no’ to the phenomenal world: ‘I’m not going to believe in this. This is not entirely real.’” (2003:46 f)

4.1.2 Tathatā means “suchness.” It is very similar to *suññatā* but derives from saying “yes” to the universe. There is really nothing to hold on to, yet there is something going on. The quality of suchness is like the reflection of ultimate reality. It is a mirage that reflects something real out there; only this case, the reality is *not* out there, but it is in our minds. *Suññatā* and *tathatā*—emptiness and suchness—are the two sides of reality that we experience in sense-based daily lives.

4.1.3 The third higher characteristic is ***atam,mayatā***, the origins of which seem to lie in an ancient Indian theory of sense perception, in which the grasping hand serves as the main metaphor: *the hand takes the shape of what it grasps*. The process of vision is explained as the eye sending out some kind of rays that then take the shape of what we see and come back with it. Similarly with thought: mental energy conforms to its object (such as a thought) and then returns to the subject. This idea is encapsulated in the term *tam,mayatā*, “consisting of that,”³² that is, the mental energy of the experiencer is physically shaped with the thing experienced. In modern terms, this may be said to be a *representational* view of perception.

4.1.4 The early Buddhist theory of perception, on the other hand, is *constructional*. We cognize sense-data through the sense-faculties, which are then perceived or recognized by checking them, as it were, against a memory bank of past experiences, so that we can make sense of it, form ideas and motivation for various actions. In other words, we do not really see even a representation of the external world, but construct our own private reality and live with that.

4.2 SEEING RIGHTLY

4.2.1 In simple terms, we can say that an understanding of *atam,mayatā* corrects our inner vision to see things as they really are. Otherwise, we are constantly pushed ahead or pulled back by the idea, “What is that?” meaning that something else out there is more interesting or more real than what is in here. One way that we can use this on a practical level is with a technique **Ajahn Sumedho**³³ has often suggested.³⁴ Thinking the mind is in the body, we say, “my mind” [pointing at the head] or “my mind” [pointing at the chest]. “It’s all in my mind.” Actually it is the other way around.

The point Sumedho is trying to make is this. The mind is *not* in the body, but it is that *the body is in our mind!* Even when we are *in* a body, “our” body, we are not really there if we do not have a conception of “body.” We can only truly know our body by constantly being mindful of it; then we begin to know what it really is.

What do we know about our body? We can see it. We can hear it. We can smell it. We can touch it.

But, where does seeing occur? In the mind.

Where does hearing occur? In the mind.

Where does smelling occur? In the mind.

³² Resolved as *tam* (“that”) + *maya* (“made of”) + *tā* (“-ness,” making it an abstract noun), lit “made of that.”

³³ Ajahn Sumedho (Robert Jackman) (b 1934) is abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Centre (UK) (www.amaravati.org) and seniormost Western disciple of the late Thai forest meditation master Ajahn Chah Subhaddo (1918-1992). See www.buddhanet.net/masters/sumedho.htm, www.forestsangha.org and www.abm.ndirect.co.uk/fsn/.

³⁴ This episode is an abridged excerpt from Amaro 2003:47-49.

Where does tasting occur?	In the mind.
Where do we feel touch?	In the mind.

4.2.2 When we think or know of the body, we do so through the agency of our minds. We have never known anything about our body except through our mind. So our entire life, from the very first day, everything we have ever known about our body and the world has happened in our mind. So, where is our body?

It does not mean that there is no physical world, but all that we can meaningfully say is that *our experience of the body and of the world happens within our minds.*

It does not happen anywhere else. It is all happening here, and in this here-ness, that the world's externality and separateness cease. When we realize that the whole world is in this body of ours,³⁵ its thingness, its thatness, its otherness, stop. We are better able to see its true nature.

This shift of vision is a simple but useful meditation tool we can use any time. It is very useful because it leads us on to see the true reality of the matter. As it were, it turns our world inside out, so that we are able to see that this body is indeed just a set of perceptions, and everything is seen in proper perspective. *It is all happening right here in our minds.*

4.3 BEYOND DUALITY

4.3.1 Having said that, we are now ready for *atam,mayatā* to take us a step further. At first, *atam,mayatā* makes us realize that there is really no “that,” only “this.” Then, as we get used to this new level of reality, we soon realize that even the “this” is meaningless, that is, we begin to see the duality of subject and object, or the notions of self and other, as essentially meaningless.

In reality, *atam,mayatā* creates neither an objective observed “thing” known nor a subjective “observer” knowing it. There is neither a *representation* (“thatness”) of reality nor a *construction* (“thisness”) of reality: there is just *true reality*. It is the abandoning of the conceiving of “thatness” and “thisness,” of the observer and the observed, of subject and object, of duality. Hence, *non-identification* refers to the subjective aspect and *non-fabrication* to the objective. True reality transcends both.

4.3.2 *Atam,mayatā* is the realization that, in reality, there cannot be anything other than ultimate reality. There is *neither this nor that*. In completely letting go of *this* and *that*, the whole relative subject-object world, even at its subtlest level, dissolves away. Transcending both these extremes of perception, *atam,mayatā* refers neither to a state where the mind does not “go out” to the object and occupy it, nor to a fabricated virtual reality relative to the object. The roots of duality have been pulled out. All we see is *a spacious wholeness*: this realization is *true wisdom* and seeing wholeness is *true compassion*.

4.3.3 With this kind of understanding, we will find that a cryptic passage in **the Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (S 35.95) becomes clearer, as it is illustrative of *atam,mayatā*:

³⁶“When, Māluṅkyā,putta, regarding what is seen, heard, sensed and cognized by you,

³⁵ Cf **Rohitassa S**: “Friend, in this very fathom-long body, endowed with perception and with mind, that I make known the world, the arising of the world, the ending of the world, and the way leading to the ending of the world” (S 2.26/1:62), SD 7.2: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/7.2-Rohitassa-S-s2.26-piya1.pdf>

³⁶ This teaching is also given to the ascetic **Bāhiya Dārucīriya (Bāhiya S, U 1.10/8)**. According to SA, in the form base, ie in what is seen by eye-consciousness, “there is only consciousness,” that is, as eye-consciousness is not affected by lust, hatred or delusion in relation to form that has come into range, so the *javana* will be just a mere eye-consciousness by being empty of lust, etc. So, too, for the heard and the sensed. The “cognized” is the object

do occur. Of the three variations, *atam,mayatā* is the most common, since etymologically and contextually, this is clearly the best reading.

5.2 COLLOQUIAL TRANSLATION

5.2.1 Bhikkhu Santikaro (1993), who has translated many of Buddhadasa’s works, says that Buddhadasa, in his first talk (1970s) about *atam,mayatā*, interspersed literal interpretations of the term with the spicy, crude street language:

กูไม่เอา กับ มึง อีกต่อไป โว้ย! “*Ku mai ao kab mng iik tor pai woi!*”⁴¹

which can be freely and colloquially rendered as “I won’t have anything to do with you ever again!” or “I ain’t gonna mess with you no more!” These are words used by drunks, rowdies, and angry hawkers, rather than highly respected religious. The pronouns *ku* (“I”)⁴² and *mng* (“you”) are considered to be low-class and coarse, although they were once proper and polite. Buddhadasa has repeatedly used *ku* to point at the egoistic mind (the self-concept and selfishness) and its baseness.⁴³

5.2.2 The advantage of the colloquial idiom is its facility in fully bringing across the intended sense and urgency. The class-consciousness, political correctness and scholasticism of “cultured” Buddhists tend to skew them into taking the teaching for granted, partly due to ceremonious repetitions, partly due to a superficial interest. If words sugarcoat and hide the life-changing truth, then, the colloquial idiom is more potent in engaging us with the realities of life so that we can work on them directly and immediately. Call the spade a spade, and we get the work done properly and completely.

5.3 THE LAST WORD ON BUDDHISM⁴⁴

5.3.1 Why does Buddhadasa call *atam,mayatā* the “last word on Buddhism”? In his teachings, he puts *atam,mayatā* at the transition point between *dharmma-ṭ,ṭhiti,ñāṇa* (the knowledge of the stability of the Dharma of fixity of phenomena) and the *nibbāna,ñāṇa* (the insight regarding the realization of nirvana). This teaching is, in fact, found in **the Susīma Sutta** (S 12.70), where the Buddha tells the monk Susīma,

Whether or not you understand, Susīma, first comes the knowledge of the stability of the Dharma [the fixity of phenomena], then the knowledge of nirvana.

(S 12.70,32.1/2:124), SD 16.6

5.3.2 The Saṃyutta Commentary explains that the purpose of the teaching here is to show the arising of liberating knowledge even without concentration. This is the meaning: “Susīma, the path and fruit are not the result of concentration (*samādhī,nissanda*), nor the benefit of concentration (*samādhī,anisarṃsa*), nor the outcome of concentration (*samādhī,nippatti*). They are the result of insight (*vipassanā*), the benefit of insight, the outcome of insight. Therefore, whether you understand or not, first comes knowledge of the reality of thing, then the knowledge of nirvana.” (SA 2:127).⁴⁵

⁴¹ The standard Thai form would sound something like: ฉันไม่ยุ่งเกี่ยวกับคุณอีกต่อไปแล้ว.

⁴² Cf Malay 1st person pronoun, *aku*.

⁴³ Santikaro 1993:1 f.

⁴⁴ This section is based on Santikaro 1993:3.

⁴⁵ For further discussion, see **Susīma S** (S 12.70.32a/2:124), SD 16.6; also **Samatha & Vipassana**, SD 41.1.

5.3.3 The term *dharmā-t,ṭhiti,ñāṇa* usually refers to the 3 characteristics (*ti,lakkhaṇa*) of existence—impermanence (*aniccatā*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkhatā*), and non-self (*anattatā*)—which is in fact, the basis for the Buddha’s teaching given to Susīma.⁴⁶ It is the basis on which the teaching is elaborated in terms of the 5 aggregates⁴⁷ and dependent arising.⁴⁸

Buddhadasa connects the Susīma teaching to what he calls “the nine eyes,” playing on the suffixes -tā of these 9 knowledges: *taa* is also the Thai word for “eye” (ตา). **The 9 knowledges (*ñāṇa*)** or “eyes” (Thai, *taa*) are as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| (1) <i>aniccatā</i> | = impermanence; |
| (2) <i>dukkhatā</i> | = unsatisfactoriness; |
| (3) <i>anattatā</i> | = non-selfhood; |
| (4) <i>dharmatṭhitatā</i> | = true nature [stability] of reality; |
| (5) <i>dharmā,niyamatā</i> | = fixity of phenomena; |
| (6) <i>idap,paccayatā</i> | = conditionality or interdependence; |
| (7) <i>suññatā</i> | = voidness; |
| (8) <i>tathatā</i> | = suchness; and |
| (9) <i>atam,mayatā</i> | = non-identification and unconcoctability. |

5.3.4 The realization of these facts regarding the true nature of reality leads to **the fruits of liberation**, that is, the following insight knowledges (*ñāṇa*):

- *nibbidā* = revulsion or disenchantment;
- *virāga* = fading away of lust;
- *nirodha* = ending of *dukkha*;
- *vimutti* = release or liberation;
- *visuddhi* = purification; and
- *nibbāna* = coolness (extinction of suffering).

5.3.5 The first list of insights [5.3.3] describes an active and progressive penetration into the reality of conditioned states (this world). The later list describes the results of that realization. The insight of *atam,mayatā* is the realization that there is no conditioned thing, no object, nor state that can be relied upon. Contrary to the way we have learned to “see” things, they are really powerless over us. They have no power to make us sad or happy, suffering or safe, stuck in samsara or free from death, or whatever else we might or might not desire. As such, we realize we are neither created by anyone or anything, nor creating anyone or anything. Realizing this, we are naturally liberated.

6 *Atam,mayatā* in practice

6.1 ATAM,MAYATĀ IN THE BUDDHA’S LIFE.⁴⁹ Although technically the term *atam,mayatā* best describes the state of the arhat, we can, with proper understanding, apply it in our daily lives. *Atam,mayatā* is not something we create or gain, but refers to the level of realization of true reality so that we become more and more spiritually independent. The life of the Buddha from the time of his decision to become a fully self-awakened Buddha to the moment of attaining Buddhahood itself is a series of deepening

⁴⁶ See S 12.70.32b-43a/2:124 f (SD 16.6).

⁴⁷ See S 12.70/32-43a/2:124 f (SD 16.6).

⁴⁸ This section is inspired by Santikaro 1991:1 f.

⁴⁹ See S 12.70,32.2-43.1/2:124 f @ SD 16.6.

realizations of *atam,mayatā*. We shall here however reflect only on the *atam,mayatā* experiences of the historical Buddha, in his very last life.

6.1.1 The ploughing festival. Even as a young boy of 7, disgusted at seeing suffering in nature, especially at how small animals are unearthed and hurt by the breaking up of the earth during **the ploughing festival**, the Bodhisattva turns away from the excitement of the festivity and, attending to his breath, looks within until he attains the first dhyana. In refusing to have anything to do with joy at the cost of the suffering of other beings, small as they may be, the Bodhisattva looks within and gains a higher level of blissful reality.⁵⁰ In turning away from worldly joy and pain, the child Siddhattha attains spiritual bliss.⁵¹

6.1.2 The 4 sights. There is no account in the early texts of Siddhattha’s 4 sights, which is a dramatization of teachings regarding the 3 intoxications (*mada*), the theme, for example, of **the Sukhumāla Sutta** (A 3.38).⁵² In the Sutta, the Buddha autobiographically describes how, reflecting that all beings are subject to *decay, disease and death*—that he too is not free from them—his intoxication (*mada*) with them vanish, thus:

- reflecting on *decay*, his intoxication with *youth* vanished;
- reflecting on *disease*, his intoxication with *health* vanished;
- reflecting on *death*, his intoxication with *life* vanished.

This is where a form of *atam,mayatā*, called **samvega** or a sense of religious urgency, arises in the Bodhisattva, so that he describes himself fleeing from worldly life like a man “whose turban is on fire,”⁵³ seeking the answers for these evils.⁵⁴ The great renunciation is a grand display of *atam,mayatā*, of the decision to have nothing to do with the world, leaving the world behind him in the prime of his youth, right before his grieving parents.⁵⁵

6.1.3 The 2 teachers. A number of suttas relate how the Bodhisattva visits the famous ascetic Ālāra Kālāma, and Uddaka Rāma,putta, the son of the famous ascetic Rāma. From the former, the Bodhisattva learns to meditate up to the formless attainment of the base of nothingness (*ākincaññ’āyatana*), where the meditator transcends all sense-objects and mind-objects, and there is nothing, as it were, neither body nor mind.

From the latter, he learns a stage higher, that of the formless attainment of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*n’eva,saññā,nāsaññāyatana*), where the consciousness is so subtle that it cannot be said to exist or not exist. So diligent and successful is the Bodhisattva in his spiritual task,

⁵⁰ J 1:57 f; see PiyaTan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004: 1.13(b).

⁵¹ The canonical teaching behind this story is in **Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 14,5/1:92), SD 4.7. See also Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004: 2.2.

⁵² A 3.38/1:145 f (SD 36.5).

⁵³ *Sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāyāti* (lit, “all things are not worthy of adhering to”) (**Dasaka**) **Sa,citta S** (A 7.58,11.2) + SD 4.11 (5). “All things” here refer to the 5 aggregates, the 12 sense-bases and the 18 elements, all of which are not fit to be clung to. These factors have to do with insight (*vipassanā*) (AA 4:43). This is part of “the brief advice on liberation through the destruction of craving”: **Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 37,2-3/1:251), SD 54.8; **Avijjā Pahāna S 2** (A 35.80,6/4:88,11-15), SD 16.9. See SD 4.11 (6); SD 52.1 (7.1.3.1).

⁵⁴ On *samvega*, see SD 9 (7.6).

⁵⁵ **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26,14/1:164), SD 1.11; **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,16/1:240), SD 49.4; **Bodhi Rāja,kumāra S** (M 85,10/2:93), RD 55.2; (**Deva**) **Saṅgāra S** (M 100,9/2:212), SD 10.9.

that the two saintly ascetics are simply impressed, and each of them in turn invites him to head their congregations.⁵⁶

But when the Bodhisattva is told that there is no further level that either of these ascetics could train him in, and knowing that he has not found the answer to ending suffering, he respectfully declines their offers. To walk away from the highest meditative bliss of his time, and “from the fame and spoils of big-time gurudom,”⁵⁷ requires *atam, mayatā*.

6.1.4 Self-mortification

6.1.4.1 The Bodhisattva then turned to the most extreme ascetic practices of the day, to self-mortification. According to the Jātaka Commentary, he spends six long years practising various kinds of self-mortification, many of them bringing upon himself unspeakable pain until there comes a point when he simply collapses from sheer exhaustion and is on the brink of death.⁵⁸

It is at this point, that the Bodhisattva realizes that neither the devotion to sense-pleasures nor the practice of self-mortification can bring him any spiritual liberation. The answer clearly lies beyond these two extremes, and so he turns away from them by way of *atam, mayatā*. In doing so, he recalls the first dhyana he blissfully enjoyed as a child during the ploughing festival, and is now certain the answer lies in the breath meditation that he used then.⁵⁹ **The Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36) explains further:

Then following on that memory,⁶⁰ I realized, ‘That is the path to awakening!’

I thought thus, ‘Why do I fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states?’ I thought thus, ‘I do not fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states!’⁶¹ (M 36,31-32/1:246 f), SD 1.12

6.1.4.2 A similar sentiment is recorded in **the Laṭukikōpama Sutta** (M 66), reminding us not to fear the bliss of dhyana, for

This is called the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of stillness, the bliss of self-awakening—it should be pursued, cultivated, developed. This pleasure should not be feared, I say!” (M 66,21/1:454), SD 28.11

Thus, turning away from sensual pleasures and from self-mortification, he turns to “Dharma-inspired pleasure.”⁶² In due course, the Bodhisattva becomes the Buddha.

6.1.5 Māra. At this crucial point, Māra the evil one, is still vigilantly watching the Bodhisattva, hoping that he would give up his quest.⁶³ Māra is the metaphorical and mythical opposite of *atam, mayatā*, in that he tries his best to prevent us from turning away from the world and from his sway. Buddhist mythology recounts how Māra appears before Siddhattha at the city gate as he leaves Kapila, vatthu during

⁵⁶ **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,15-17/1:164-166), SD 1.11.

⁵⁷ Santikaro 1991:1.

⁵⁸ J 1:67; **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,17-30:242-246 @ SD 1.12; **Mahā Sīha, nāda S** (M 12,44-63/1:77-83), SD 1.13.

⁵⁹ **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,3-44/1:246-249, SD 1.12.

⁶⁰ That is, regarding the mindfulness of the in-and-out-breaths (MA 2:291).

⁶¹ On the two kinds of pleasures—sensual pleasure and the pleasure of awakening—see **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 1:39.9/3:233). On the pleasure experienced by the awakened mind, see **Uṇṇābha S** (S 51.15), SD 10.11.

⁶² See **Deva, dāha S** (M 101,16/2:224), SD 18.4.

⁶³ (**Sutta Nipāta**) **Padhāna S** (Sn 427 f, 447 f), SD 51.11.

the great renunciation, offering him the “wheel treasure” (a mighty empire),⁶⁴ but the Bodhisattva turns him down.

When persuasive offers failed, Māra makes a final ditch to distract the Bodhisattva meditating under the Bodhi tree, attacking him with natural disasters, deadly missiles, blinding darkness and demonic army. The Bodhisattva still stands his ground, or rather remains seated in deep meditation. Despite the most fearsome threats from life’s darkest forces, the Bodhisattva refuses to return to the world: his *atam,mayatā* remains strong as ever. (J 1:72 f)

But Māra is relentless, and continues to pursue even the Awakened One, the Buddha, himself. **The Satta,vassa Sutta** (S 4.24) tells us that during the fifth week after the Awakening, Māra again appears to the Buddha and, this time, invites him to pass away since he has already attained his goal. Māra fails yet again, admitting that he is like a legless crab.⁶⁵

In Buddhist mythology, Māra, is regarded as death personified. However, since the awakened ones are beyond life and death in the ultimate sense, Māra is unable to see them, as it were. In short, Māra is the antithesis of the Buddha.

6.1.6 Māra’s daughters. Māra, despite admitting his failure in destroying the Buddha, continues his efforts against him. **The Māra,dhītā Sutta** (M 4.25)⁶⁶ describes how Māra sends his three seductively beautiful daughters—Taṇhā (Craving), Aratī (Discontent) and Rāga (Lust)—to tempt the newly awakened Buddha. From the names we clearly know them to be the personifications of those qualities, here highlighting the point that the Buddha is beyond any temptation.

The Sutta says that Mara’s daughters, having approached the Buddha, suggestively proposes: “We serve at your feet, O ascetic!” The Buddha pays no attention.

Then the daughters discuss amongst themselves: “Men’s taste are diverse. Suppose we each manifest ourselves in the form of a hundred young women.”

Six times Mara’s daughters appear before the Buddha, each time in the form of a hundred women before the Buddha.

The first time, as a hundred young maidens, they approach and make the same proposal again. The Buddha again disregards them. Again they meet and discuss a new strategy.

The second time, they appear as a hundred young women who have not yet given birth. Again they fail.

The third time, they appear as a hundred women who have given birth once...

The fourth time, they appear as a hundred women who have given birth twice...

The fifth time, they appear as a hundred women of middle age...

The sixth and final time, they appear as a hundred old women, proposing to the Buddha: “We serve at your feet, O ascetic!” The Buddha pays no attention to them each time.

Since the direct approach does not work, they then decide on a subtler approach. This time, each of Mara’s daughters questions the Buddha with a challenging question, but the Buddha answers each with his characteristic wisdom.⁶⁷

Here again we see no matter how Mara’s daughters try to seduce or distract the Buddha, he simply has nothing to do with them. This is classic *atam,mayatā*.

⁶⁴ The wheel imagery apparently refers to the circle of the horizon, alluding to territorial and worldly power.

⁶⁵ S 4.24/1:122-124 (SD 36.8).

⁶⁶ S 4.25/1:124-127 (SD 36.9).

⁶⁷ This set of questions and their answers is known as **Kumari,pañha**, “the maidens’ questions.” In **Kālī S**, Mahā Kaccāna gives a corny on it, where he mentions various kasina meditation methods, saying that the Buddha has here successfully used the “consciousness device” (*viññāṇa kasiṇa*) (A 10.26/5:46), SD 36.10.

6.1.7 The great awakening

6.1.7.1 The greatest expression of *atam,mayatā* of all is of course that of the Buddha under the bodhi tree on the first Vesak (April-May) dawn in 588 BCE (or according to modern scholars, 531 BCE),⁶⁸ the Bodhisattva, then only 35 years old, attained full self-awakening (*sammā sambodhi*). Seated under the sacred pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*, thenceforth known as the bodhi tree) at Buddha,gaya, he develops various superknowledges (*abhiññā*),⁶⁹ the most important of which is the destruction of the defilements (*āsava*) causing rebirth and suffering.

6.1.7.2 It was during the first watch of the night (6.00-10.00 pm) that the Bodhisattva develops the first true knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the recollection of past lives.⁷⁰ In the middle watch (10.00 pm-2.00 am), he develops the second true knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the arising and passing away of beings⁷¹ which enables him to see the cycles of death and rebirth of other beings faring according to their karma. And, in the last watch of the night (2.00-6.00 am), he develops the third true knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the destruction of passions. Understanding the nature of things as they truly are, he finally attains full self-awakening and nirvana.

6.1.7.3 Among the first words of the Buddha, spoken after his awakening, are those found in these famous **verses of uplift** (*udāna,gāthā*):⁷²

<i>Aneka,jāti,samsāram sandhāvissarṃ anibbisarṃ gaha,kāraṃ gavesanto dukkhā jāti punappunam</i>	Through many a birth in this cycle of lives, I've wandered, seeking but never finding the house-builder. Coming to birth again and again is suffering.
<i>Gaha,karaka diṭṭho'si puna geharṃ na kāhasi sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā gaha,kūṭarṃ visaṅkhitarṃ visaṅkhāra,gatam cittam taṇhānam khayam ajjhagā</i>	O house-builder, you are seen! You shall not build a house again! All your rafters are broken a and your ridgepole shattered! My mind has reached the unconditioned! Craving's end has been attained! (Dh 153-154)⁷³

This verse is very interesting and important. First of all, it confirms the doctrine of rebirth. Secondly, it denies the Creator-idea. Thirdly, the fact of suffering is realized to be universal. All these are verified through personal experience.

The second part of the verse gives the first summary of the Buddha's teaching. First, there is the affirmation of his supreme discovery: "O house-builder, you are seen!" The term "**house-builder**" (*gaha,-*

⁶⁸ Scholars generally accept the Buddha's dates as 566-486 BCE: see Gethin 1988:14.

⁶⁹ On the *abhiññā*, see eg **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,85-100/2:76-85), SD 8.10; **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,31-44/1:246-249), SD 1.12.

⁷⁰ *Pubbe,nivāsānussati,ñāṇa*, ie the knowledge of recollecting his own past lives, or retrocognition: see **Ariya,-pariyesanā S** (D 2.93/1:81 f), SD 8.10; see also D 3:281; A 3:280.

⁷¹ *Cut'ūpapāta,ñāṇa* or *dibba,cakkhu* ("divine eye"), ie, the knowledge of the death and rebirth of beings according to their karma: see **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (D 2.95/1:82 f), SD 8.10; see also D 3:281; A 3:280.

⁷² The famous set of verses is found at Dh 153 f; Tha 183 f; J 1:756; BA 8; qu by VA 17, DA 16, KhpA 12, DhsA 18; and alluded to at UA 208. See V:H 4 Intro vii for further refs.

⁷³ BA 289,23 f. The famous set of verses is found at Dh 153 f; Tha 183 f; J 1:756; BA 8; qu by VA 17, DA 16, KhpA 12, DhsA 18; and alluded to at UA 208. See V:H 4 Intro vii for further refs. Comys state that these verses are the Buddha's first words (DhA 3:127 f). See SD 19.13 (6.1.7).

kāra) has two meanings: the Commentaries interpret it as “craving,” but it can also be taken as the Creator (*issara, nimmāṇa*) idea.

The word “house” (*geha*) refers physically to this world itself, and spiritually to the cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). The “rafters” (*phāsuka*) are the passions that make one cling on to this world. The “ridge-pole” (*gaha, kūṭa*) is ignorance, the cause of karma.

Finally, the Buddha announces his full self-awakening with the words “My mind has reached the unconditioned! Craving’s end has been attained!” **The unconditioned** (*visaṅkhāra*) is a synonym for nirvana.

6.1.7.4 In the Vinaya, the Buddha compares his awakening to a chick breaking out of its egg:

“Brahmin, it is like a hen with 8 or 10 or 12 eggs on which she sat properly, properly warmed, properly hatched. Now, that chick which, having first of all pierced through the shell with the point of the claw on its foot, or with its beak, having emerged, to be called the eldest or the youngest?”

“He is to be called the eldest, master Gotama, for he is the eldest of them.”

“Even so I, brahmin—having pierced through the shell of ignorance for the sake of beings moving in ignorance, egg-born, covered over—am unique in the world, awakened with the unsurpassed full awakening, I, brahmin, am alone the world’s eldest and highest.”

(V 3:3 f; cf D 2:15)

Here the egg or egg-shell represents ignorance, and the breaking out of the shell is our awakening to true reality. Once we have broken out of the egg of ignorance, surely, we have nothing more to do with its shell: we no more identify with the world—this is *atam, mayatā*.

6.2 THE STAGES OF PRACTICE⁷⁴

6.2.1 One of the great spiritual teachers of our time who has highlighted the central importance of *atam, mayatā* in the Buddhist spiritual training was **Buddhadasa**. In 1988-1989, he gave talks on *atam, mayatā*, applying it in three ways. The first approach was simple, almost crude, where he applied *atam, mayatā* to the practical problems of ordinary people with the colloquially dramatic “You aren’t gonna mess with me no more!” or “I ain’t gonna mess around with you no more!” [5.2].

He suggested that we may bring this powerful thought to mind in order to “divorce” from the things we ought to divorce from, such as superstitions, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, dishonesty, immorality, and so on. When tempted to indulge in such harmful things, we might recite “Atam, mayatā!” as a mantra until the temptation passes. This method can also be used to divorce ourselves from emotional states like greed, lust, anger, hatred, fear, worry, excitement, envy, boredom, laziness, and stupidity—“I’ve had enough of you forever!”

6.2.2 While the first use of *atam, mayatā* is to extricate us from our mistakes, the second application is preventive. It is a way of understanding the true reality of conditioned states. When insight progressively deepens through the nine “eyes” [5.3], then we realize that there is nothing deserving of being fabricated, affected, manipulated, concocted or spiced up by us. By cultivating this understanding, we may liberate ourselves from ignorance, from attachments, from conflicts, and from suffering.

6.2.3 The third and highest application of *atam, mayatā* is to signify our mind that is totally free, independent, liberated. Buddhadasa prefers to describe this state as being “above and beyond positive or

⁷⁴ This section is based on Santikaro 1993:4.

negative.” Human beings instinctually feel and perceive all experience as either positive or negative. This leads to evaluating and judging such experiences, which then induces us into liking and disliking them, which in turn breeds craving, attachment, and selfishness.

Thus *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) arises. The mind that has gone beyond positive and negative cannot be pulled into the conditioned arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*) of *dukkha*; for, it has gone through the conditioned ending of *dukkha*. Thus, *atam,mayatā*, in its best sense, describes the state of the arhat, the perfected, fully liberated being.

7 Practical aspects of *atam,mayatā*

7.1 DEPENDENCE. The essence of *atam,mayatā* is independence, in every wholesome sense of the word, especially emotional and spiritual independence. The opposite of independence is, of course, dependence, at the extreme end of which is *addiction*. There are various **types of dependence**:

- physical dependence being physically immature (eg, infants, children, the incapacitated);
- economic dependence due to our inability to support ourselves in terms of material needs;
- intellectual dependence when we are unable to think clearly and confidently for ourselves;
- social dependence when we blindly follow those we admire or view as better than us;
- substance dependence when we are unable to stop consuming something material;
- psychological dependence when we are caught up in obsessive or compulsive habits;
- emotional dependence when we look for happiness or approval outside of ourselves.

These are not stages of dependence, for they overlap one another. At times, one kind of dependence dominates; at other times, another dominates. But all of them are actively lurking, ready to spring forth at the slightest stimulation, and continually growing whenever the conditions are right. Let us examine some of them in greater detail.

7.2 INTELLECTUAL INDEPENDENCE

7.2.1 “Intellectual dependence” is the inability to think clearly and confidently for ourselves, but relying on the commands, persuasions, views and words of others, especially when we see them as better than we are. Or, we live by the books, powered by titles, status and wealth. Only the word moves us, nothing more. We are like hollow reeds blown around by the wind in whichever direction it wishes, and when they dry up, they are broken and blown away. Our mind, we have to use it or lose it.

7.2.2 We begin our lives as children, creating fantasies and living them, fabricating monsters and battling them, feeling safe in the shadows of parents. For some, who grow old without growing up, these fantasies, monsters and battles become more real: imaginary monsters become real enemies in those who are different or those we hate; wooden guns become real guns; mock battles become real wars; feigned death becomes real suicide bombings; virtual killings become real mass killings. We remain virtual children, but the power, the weapons, the destruction, and the pains are real. We have never learned the ways of true adults.

7.2.3 In times of difficulties, we seek quick and easy answers—and many are given by quacks, the religious and the professionals. The living word of liberation, the Suttas and the teachings of the wise, are treated like newspapers, to be quickly read or heard, day after day, and then cast away as yesterday’s news or as food wrappers. But these liberating teachings are like ancient music, to be listened to again

and again, so that we are familiar with them, then we begin to enjoy them, and become mentally liberated by them.

7.2.4 To truly benefit from the Buddha’s ancient wisdom we should experience them on 3 successive levels: the word, the joy and the light. We begin by listening to the word of the Teaching, and for some time we might only have the Teaching *as word at best*: some words are meaningful, and some not. But as we go on listening, often to the same Suttas and same teachings, it is like exploring a sprawling beautiful garden in the bright sunlight: we discover more and more plants, flowers, creatures and pathways. The more we listen, the more different words begin to fit together into meaningful wholes.

7.2.5 The next stage is that of *reflection*. After every listening, we should joyfully reflect on what we have heard. This is like having a bright light in our hands in a huge beautiful mansion in total darkness. The light shows our way around revealing doors and passages to spacious rooms, rich libraries and great treasures. We begin to connect the word of the teaching to the world of the living. Things begin to make better sense. Our lives become more meaningful and purposeful.

7.2.6 In the third and final stage, we begin to live our lives in terms of this new wisdom. We discover more inner stillness and clarity, especially through *mental cultivation*, that is, mindfulness practice or meditation. As our minds become more calm and clear, we begin to realize that the words and our thoughts point to something higher, to self-liberation itself. We discover that all that truth, joy and liberation are, after all, within our own minds. This is like when dawn triumphantly breaks into the dark mansion and in the light, we can see everything in it, and live in it prosperously and peacefully. We have seen the light. We are intellectually independent.

7.3 SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

7.3.1 To be *socially dependent* is to blindly follow those we admire or those we regard as better or more “powerful” than we are. Our lives are ruled by the *measuring* of ourselves against others, by how much things and people are worth. With this other-defined mind, we think, “The more, the better,” or “The other is better.” In fact, the situation is much more complicated than this: we are caught in the rut of **conceit** (*māna*),⁷⁵ of the power mode. We measure ourselves against others in the following 3 discriminations, along with their psychological cognates:⁷⁶

(1) “I am better than ... ”	(<i>seyyo’ham asmî ti</i>)	superiority complex;
(2) “I am equal with [the same as] ... ”	(<i>sadiso’ham asmî ti</i>)	equality complex; and
(3) “I am inferior to ... ”	(<i>hīno’ham asmî ti</i>)	inferiority complex.

7.3.2 Superiority complex, or the conceit that “I am better than others,” is just as incapacitating as inferiority complex. We are blinkered by the self-centred notion that there is nothing to learn about others, indeed, that there is nothing more to learn, that we have known everything. Superiority complex is rooted in the unconscious sense of lack or of powerlessness in relation to others or it could be brought upon us by others (such as a demanding parent or severe sibling rivalry).

⁷⁵ For a longer discussion, see “**Me**”: **the nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a.

⁷⁶ The 3 conceits are also called “the 3 discriminations” (*tayo vidhā*): see **Samiddhi S** (S 1.20/1:12), SD 21.4. The 3 are listed at: D 33,1.10(23)/3:216; S 22.49/3:48 (x4), 35.108/4:88 (x5), 45.162,5:56, 46.41/5:98; A 4.185/2:176 f (x2); Tha 1079; Nm 1:80 (x4), 107, 194, 195, 196, 244, 251, 2:350, 413, 426 (x3), 443.

7.3.3 An inferiority complex, according to psychology and psychoanalysis, is a *feeling, imagined or real, that one is inferior to another or others in some way*. It is often a subconscious state that the afflicted individual tends to overcompensate, resulting either in spectacular achievement or extreme antisocial behavior, or both. Unlike a normal (conscious) feeling of inferiority, which can act as an incentive for achievement, an inferiority complex is an advanced state of discouragement, often resulting in a retreat from difficulties and resorting to psychological defence mechanisms.⁷⁷

7.3.4 A person afflicted with **equality conceit** will habitually think that “I am as good as you are,” especially when he *unconsciously* thinks that the other person is actually better than he is. This is a draining habit: it takes away our willingness and ability to learn to better ourselves. So we sink down deeper into a sense of self-satisfied complacency. Here I shall discuss only (what I regard as) the most destructive form of the equality conceit, or a self-satisfied complacency, that is, narcissism.

7.3.5 Extreme self-centredness

7.3.5.1 Narcissism is one of the most extreme manifestations of self-centredness or selfishness, which is itself rooted in the notion of an abiding self or soul. This leads to an over-identification with our physical and mental being, that is, self-identity (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*). Interestingly, the notion of self-identity arises because we look for meaning of life or spiritual answers in terms of *power*, especially in some higher power or supreme being, or simply power as self-affirming mechanism.

7.3.5.2 Characteristically, narcissism is usually a unconscious tendency, masked by a higher sense of meaning and purpose in life. Usually, because it is self-affirming, we actually enjoy it or even see it as a sacred calling, especially when we command a willing crowd that believes in us.⁷⁸

7.3.6 In Buddhist psychological terms, social dependence is *power-driven*, that is, rooted in lust. **The Mūla Sutta** (A 3.69) explains the implications of the power-mode state in these words:

⟨Greed | hate | delusion⟩ is unwholesome, bhikkhus.⁷⁹ Whatever ⟨the greedy...the hating ...the deluded⟩ constructs⁸⁰ through the body, through speech, through the mind, that, too, is unwholesome.

The ⟨greedy | the hating | the deluded⟩ person—his mind overcome and consumed (by greed | by hate | by delusion)—wrongly inflicts suffering on another by killing, or by holding [binding and confining], or by incurring losses, or by blaming, or by banishing, thinking, “I’m powerful! This is for the sake of power!”⁸¹—that, too, is unwholesome.⁸²

Thus, these many evil, unwholesome states,
born of ⟨greed | hate | delusion⟩,
caused by ⟨greed | hate | delusion⟩, arising from ⟨greed | hate | delusion⟩,
conditioned by ⟨greed | hate | delusion⟩, are born. (A 3.69/1:201-205), SD 18.2

⁷⁷ I have here consciously combined the usage of the terms of individual psychology and of psychoanalysis. See **Khalaṅka S** (A 8.14), SD 7.9.

⁷⁸ Further on narcissism, see SD 19.2a(4).

⁷⁹ *Yad api bhikkhave lobho tad api akusalaṃ*, lit “bhikkhus, whichever is greed, that is unwholesome.”

⁸⁰ *Abhisankharoti*.

⁸¹ *Balav’amhi bala’ttho iti*.

⁸² *Yad api luddho lobhena abhibhūto pariyādinna, citto parassa asatā dukkham upadahati vadhena vā bandhena jājanīyā vā garahāya vā pabbājanāya vā balav’amhi bala’ttho iti pi tad api akusalaṃ*.

Not only is social dependence a power-driven impulse, it also drives us to place our locus of control *outside* of ourselves, especially in some powerful figure, a higher power or a supreme being. In reality, the “outer” reality is merely what we ourselves project onto the outside world, and the “inner” reality is what we ourselves construct in our own minds. When we understand this and look within our mental stillness, we no more see this duality. This is *atam,mayatā*.

7.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL INDEPENDENCE

7.4.1 The only tool we have to run our daily lives or to work for personal liberation is our *mind*. Yet we use only a small fraction of the mind, resigning ourselves to personal habits and cyclic activities—and we complain life is meaningless! The more crowded and busy a society is the more we see these painful cycles. But even without the crowd, the mind can be crowded and clouded up.

The crowded mind often becomes *obsessive*, caught up in recurring thoughts, images and impulses, but they are unwanted and unneeded. Common obsessions are of contamination with impurities, germs, dirt, or insects, or of having harmed oneself or others, or of losing control of aggressive urges, or of intrusive sexual thoughts. They are inner rumblings of lust, ill will and delusion.

7.4.2 Such mental obsessions often lead to *compulsive* acts, those that we are compelled to repeatedly perform in an effort to make the obsessions go away. Common examples of obsessive compulsions are hand-washing, repeating phrases, checking locks, doors and windows, touching, hoarding, and praying. The causes of such actions are deeply rooted as the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), which are reinforced and fuelled by the obsessive mind.⁸³

7.4.3 The obsessive compulsive mind⁸⁴ is fragmented into at least three parts: the strong judgemental or thinking mind (superego), the wildly defiled mind or doing mind (id), and the weak moderating or knowing mind (ego).⁸⁵ **Asaṅga** (4th century), the best known of the Yogācāra teachers of India, in his work, **the Abhidharma,samuccaya**, speaks of a functionally tripartite mind. He takes the early Buddhist conception of *vijñāna* (consciousness) as the rudimentary reaction of the sense-organs to sense-stimuli.

This is, in fact, the outermost or most superficial layer of the *vijñāna,skandha* (the consciousness aggregate, that which is often falsely identified as our ego). **Manas** (mentality) involves the aspects of mentating, thinking, reasoning, ideating, etc (approximating the superego). **Citta** (mind), here also called *ālaya,vijñāna*,⁸⁶ is the deepest and subtlest layer of the consciousness aggregate, containing all past impressions, and all good and evil potentials (approximating the id).⁸⁷

7.4.4 Childhood conditioning, whether religious or non-religious, is an important factor contributing to obsessive and compulsive habits. The situation is worsened by teachings rooted in fear and punishment. Just before or during adolescence, we often would form a contract, as it were, with our conscience, resolving to sacrifice or suffer for a “holy cause” in exchange for the reward of success and happiness in this life and the hereafter. In short, many, if not most, of our problems as adults have their roots in negative childhood and religious conditionings.

⁸³ On *anusaya*, see SD 31.3.

⁸⁴ I have freely used this term, without reference to its usage in western psychotherapy, to express the teachings here in modern English.

⁸⁵ I do not claim any synonymity of these Freudian terms, which I use for the sake of convenience, on the word level, for the reader familiar with them.

⁸⁶ As at Saṃdhi,nirmocana Sūtra, ed & tr Lamotte, Paris 1935:55, 185.

⁸⁷ See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b.

In such a scenario, any failure, setback or unhappiness is often perceived as a sign of insufficient sacrifice or suffering. This is when we might resort to *ritualistic habits* (especially prayers), hoping things would change, or somehow punish ourselves to earn the favours. Occasions of success or happiness are often perceived as signs of *divine favour*. Then obsessive thoughts and compulsive rituals become a show of gratitude or provide reassurances. Either way, the obsessive-compulsive person is often ridden with anxiety and guilt-feeling. These are however only symptoms of deeper underlying issues. Only when the issues are resolved, do these symptoms disappear.

7.5 SUBSTANCE INDEPENDENCE

7.5.1 Substance abuse (or substance abuse) can be physical or psychological, usually both. Substance abuse can cover a wide range of addiction, physical and psychological. We could be addicted to drugs (both illegal and prescribed drugs), to habits (smoking, drinking, shopping, watching TV, playing computer games), to sex (sex addiction, pornography, etc), to religiosity (eg guru worship). When we *reify* something, we become *dependent* on it.

7.5.2 Drug addiction often takes the form of repeated and excessive use of a chemical or substance, characterized by the compulsion to ingest, inject or inhale any number of chemical for their cognitive, affective or behavioural effect. The purpose is to produce pleasure or escape from reality, despite its destructive effects. If we are addicts we will be so caught up with our dependence that we are willing to suffer legal and health consequences rather than forgo our addiction. The addiction has taken over our lives, disrupting our relationships, daily functioning, and peace of mind.

Using a drug to numb unpleasant feelings, to relax, or to satisfy cravings are examples of psychological addiction. On the other hand, physical dependence refers to the physiological effects of drug use. Physical addiction is characterized by *tolerance*—the need for increasingly larger doses in order to achieve the initial effect—and *withdrawal* symptoms when the user stops.⁸⁸

7.5.3 The mechanism of such addictive behaviours is quite simple: *they temporarily uplift us by a spurt of endorphin, the mental joy juice*. But why are we so dramatically dependent on the endorphin flow? It is likely that we have been brought up in an “endorphin-deficient” environment, or caught in the rut of a guilt-ridden and demon-infested religious lifestyle, or chained to a repetitively dull and stressful working life, or suffocated by the notion of failure of sorts (economic, relationship, health, etc).

Why is the addict hooked to his addiction? The Sutta answer is a radical one: *the addict does not know any other pleasure*. **The Sallaṭṭhena Sutta** (S 36.6) explains this in terms of the latent tendencies (*anusayā*)⁸⁹ The Sutta begins by explaining that *an uninstructed worldling, when experiencing pain, would suffer twice over: physical suffering and mental suffering*. The reason for this is explained thus:

(1) And being touched by that painful feeling, he shows aversion towards it. When he shows aversion towards the painful feeling, **the latent tendency of aversion** (*paṭighānusaya*) towards painful feeling lies latent in him.

When touched by a painful feeling, he delights in sensual pleasure. Why is that so?

Because, bhikshus, the uninstructed ordinary person knows no other escape than through sensual pleasure.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ See eg http://www.helpguide.org/mental/drug_substance_abuse_addiction_signs_effects_treatment.htm.

⁸⁹ On latent tendencies, see SD 6.14 (5) & SD 17.4(7.3).

⁹⁰ Corny: The escape is mental concentration, the path and the fruit, but he does not know this, knowing only sensual pleasure. (SA 3:77).

(2) And when he delights in sensual pleasure, **the latent tendency of lust** (*rāgānusaya*) towards pleasant feeling lies latent in him.

(3) He does not understand according to reality the arising, the passing away, the gratification, the danger and the escape with regards to feelings.⁹¹

Not understanding these things according to reality, **the latent tendency of ignorance** (*avijjā'nusaya*) towards neutral feeling lies latent in him.⁹²

(4) If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels that it is yoked to him. If he feels a painful feeling, he feels that it is yoked to him. If he feels a neutral feeling, he feels that it is yoked to him.

This, bhikkhus, is called *an uninstructed ordinary person*, one yoked to birth, death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair—he is one who is yoked to suffering, I say!⁹³
(S 36.6,8/4:208 f), SD 5.5

*Matta,sukha,pariccagā
passe ce vipulaṃ sukhaṃ
caje mattā sukhaṃ dhīro
sampassaṃ vipulaṃ sukhaṃ*

One should give up a lesser happiness
if one sees a greater happiness.
Let the wise let go of the lesser happiness,
for the sake of a greater happiness. (Dh 290)⁹⁴

7.6 EMOTIONAL INDEPENDENCE

7.6.1 To be *emotionally independent* means that you do not need to seek happiness outside of oneself, nor need the approval of others in what you consider wholesome or right. The emotionally independent person is *a true individual*, but he is not an *individualist*. Let us examine some differences between the individual and the individualist:

7.6.2 The true individual. The true individual is emotionally independent in the sense that he easily relates to others, as he is able to put himself in their place with a positive mental attitude (empathy): *he has lovingkindness*. His words are reflected in his actions, and his actions his words; as such, he is able to help and benefit others whether they deserve it or not: *he is compassionate*. He delights in the company of his betters and is an eager learner, always appreciative of the good in others: *he is altruistically joyful*. Even when his best efforts fail or do not bring the desired effects, he understands that there are situations beyond his power or influence, and looks on with a still mind: *he is equanimous*. These are, in fact, the qualities of a good leader.

⁹¹ Cf **Cūḷa Sīhanāda S** (M 11,7/1:65), SD 49.2, where the Corny says the arising (*samudaya*) the views of being (*bhava,ditṭhi*) and non-being (*vibhava,ditṭhi*) are due to any of these eight conditions (*aṭṭha-ṭ,ṭhāna*) the 5 aggregates, ignorance, contact, perception, thought, unskilful consideration, evil friends and the voice of another [Pm 1:138]. Their disappearance (*aṭṭhaṅgama*) is the path of stream-entry which eradicates all wrong views. Their gratification (*assāda*) may be understood as the satisfaction of psychological need that they provide; their danger (*ādīnava*) is the continual bondage that they entail; the escape (*nissaraṇa*) from them is nirvana (MA 2:11). See also **Cha,chakka S** (M 148) where the latent tendencies are explained in connection with each of the 6 senses (M 148,28-33/3:285), SD 26.6.

⁹² The most important characteristic of neutral feelings to note is their impermanent nature (It 47). This is because a neutral feeling appears to be the most stable of the three types of feeling. When they are noted as impermanent, it will lead to the arising of wisdom, thereby countering the latent tendency of ignorance. See §3n. See Analayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*, 2003:171.

⁹³ **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S** (M 38) concludes with an interesting, broader explanation of how an unawakened person delights all kinds of feelings—whether pleasant, painful or neutral—“he delights in that feeling, welcomes it, and remains clinging to it.” It also describes a Buddha responds to these feelings (M 38,30-41/1:266-271), SD 7.10. See Intro above & also **Cūḷa,vedalla S** (M 44,25-28/1:303 f), SD 40a.9.

⁹⁴ Cf SD 20.1(4).

7.6.3 Truly loving someone. *Atammayatā* should also be applied to love. To truly love someone, we have to be emotionally independent of that person. It is true that often we *are* biologically connected to others (as spouses, parents, siblings or relatives), or we *desire* to be biologically connected to others (as spouses, partners or lovers). This is *biological* or “*animal*” love, one that drives us unwittingly to perpetuate ourselves and the species: it is not really evil in itself, but it keeps us in a rut.

True love begins when we are able to happily accept the weaknesses, failures and differences of others, so that they may grow towards their best potential. This is “*human*” love, one that allows us to accept others as they are.

<u>The individual</u>	<u>The individualist</u>
1 Self-understanding. Tries to live by understanding himself: thinks and feels in a harmonious manner.	1 Lives in <u>the rut of his own conditions and prejudices</u> ; as such, he rarely thinks in the positive sense of the word.
2 Responsivity. Recognizes his ego sense when it arises: cooperative, responsive, willing to learn or change.	2 Has <u>an over-sized ego</u> : uncooperative, unable to take criticisms, unwilling to learn because of his self-importance.
3 Vision. Inspired by a healthy vision of himself: self-reliant and confident. He thinks <i>of</i> others and the community.	3 Seeks to always come off <u>better than others</u> ; preys on other’s weaknesses. He is drawn to <u>the crowd</u> .
4 Balance. Conscious conformity: he is rational and mindful regarding how a group acts and “feels.”	4 <u>Unconscious conformity</u> : he shares the same wants, fears and attitudes as the crowd, and craves for others’ approval.
5 Freedom. A truly <i>free</i> thinker: his thoughts are the expressions of his positive feelings, harmonizing self and others.	5 Not a free thinker at all: not free because <u>he depends on conventions</u> to be different. To him, to be different is to stand out and above the crowd.

Table 7.6 The individual and the individualist.

7.6.4 The greatest love. The greatest love we can give another is *not* our life—this is merely a one-time sacrifice—but to live and to give them *life*, which is more difficult but more sustaining. Of what use is a dead parent to a living child? There is greater love than this, that we *live* for the sake of another, no matter what the odds. The greatness of such a gift of life is its wholesome quality whereby we can realize our true worldly and spiritual potential. The bottom line is that this true love allows others to enjoy our true and wholesome liberated selves. This is *spiritual love*, one that truly frees us, not merely rhetorically.

7.6.5 True love is to be able to let go. To truly love is to be able to wholesomely *let go* of what we love (be it a human or any being). This is not to abandon those we love, but rather to give them space to live, grow and reach their true wholesome potential. Often enough, we love an *idea* of a person or being, rather than truly understanding them. We have created an image of a person, a pet, a thing, or even God, but the reality is that such an idea merely reflects our *emotional need* rather than love; it is, in fact, an infatuation.

If we truly love God (in a spiritual sense, that is), we should be able to *let go* of God, empty ourselves of the *notion* of God (or god, gods, etc), and find him (or them) in the godliness within us. *We have to live*

*godly lives.*⁹⁵ This way, we are no more separate from God or the gods or the “four-faced Buddha”⁹⁶ (whom, after all, we have neither seen nor known): it is no more I and Thou, it is beyond I and thou—but a truly boundless love, an unconditional acceptance, clearly reflected in our thoughts, words and actions here and now, and not in the hereafter.

What *was* merely a notion of goodness becomes what *is* truly good. We are less likely to abuse the name of goodness or justify our actions in the name of some “higher authority.” We are now personally responsible for our own actions.

7.6.6 Loving to the end. If we truly love someone, we should be able to let go of that person, *even in death*. If we have truly loved and served well that person or being, then there would be no regrets, remorse, guilt-feeling or grief at the loss of that loved one. Just as we rejoice at the arrival of a loved one, we should joyfully send off that loved one when the time comes. For, we shall meet again, and more happily each time, in this way. Love others while they live, and do not mock their passing with meaningless things and strange noises, or a show of grief, and then only to fight over the spoils. For what we do to others here is likely to be done unto us in our own time.

If we truly love ourselves, then we should be able to let go of the self, even in death. Those who fear death are those who vainly wish this frail body to be lasting. But from the moment we are born, the countdown begins, and we go through the stages of decay.⁹⁷ We may call our early years the tender decade, the playful decade, the beautiful decade, the strong decade, the wise decade, or other sweet names, but we all decay all the same.

7.6.7 Our bodies each have a shelf life, and whatever labels are stuck onto us, we should always be true to ourselves. We must give ourselves the space to grow, and to grow, we must *let go* of our notions regarding the past, the present and the future.

If we do not let go of the past,	we are already dead;
if we do not let go of the future,	we are not born yet;
if we do not let go of the present,	we will never advance on the path to liberation. ⁹⁸

7.7 ATAM, MAYATĀ AS SAYING “NO!”⁹⁹

7.7.1 On the lighter side, Buddhist spiritual training can be said to be threefold: learning to say “no,” learning to say “yes,” and learning to be silent. This refers to moral training, to mental cultivation and to insight wisdom, respectively. In *moral training*, we learn to say *no* to various unwholesome actions. In *mental cultivation*, we train in joy to support our meditation.¹⁰⁰ And in *insight wisdom*, we discover the nature of true reality that is beyond words.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ The almost colloquial language here is to help the non-Buddhist envision the nature of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*).

⁹⁶ The “four-faced Buddha” is a recent local incarnation of the Thai Buddhist-Brahmanical conception of Mahā Brahmā (or Brahmā Sahampati, to be specific). See Piyasilo, “Lesson of the Four-faced ‘Buddha,’” Dharma for the Millions no 15, 1989 (free booklet).

⁹⁷ This is Buddhaghosa’s “10 stages of human aging”: see SD 17.12 Intro.

⁹⁸ On emotional independence and the true individual, see also SD 18.11 (1.6).

⁹⁹ This section is inspired by Santikaro 1991:1.

¹⁰⁰ See *Bhāvanā*, SD 15.1.

¹⁰¹ See *Dhammapada 97*, SD 10.6.

7.7.2 We might rightly say that Buddhist living begins by learning to say “no,” that is, no to harming life, no to taking the not-given, no to sexual misconduct, no to falsehood, and no to drinks and drunkenness.¹⁰² For the sake of mental cultivation and inner peace, we must be courageous to say “No!” to the close-minded evangelists who try to force their unwholesome views upon us. Use *atam,mayatā*: have nothing to do with them!¹⁰³

Although *atammayatā* is required at the spiritual heights, it is also found in children. For example, many of us once sucked our thumbs. Then one day we looked at the red, swollen, shriveled thing we had been sticking in our mouths and lost all desire to suck on it again. The feeling that took the thumb out of our mouths for good is *atammayatā*. (However, if the feeling didn’t go deep enough, we eventually replaced the thumb with other things, like cigarettes.) All of us can remember times when we have seen something clearly for once and for all, thus ending a stupid involvement with that thing. Perhaps involvement continued—who cut off their thumbs? —but without the old stupidity and attachment. All bad habits can be dropped with *atammayatā*.
(Santikaro 1991:2)

7.7.3 *Atam,mayatā* means neither *constructing* false realities nor *becoming* ourselves constructed by self or others. Rising above both these extremes, we see only true reality, directly and clearly experiencing it, without depending on others, independent of words or ideas. Then we are truly awakened and free.

7.7.4 The “insight refrain”¹⁰⁴ of the **Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas** (D 22; M 10) has this important statement on the benefit of a practitioner of satipatthana: “he dwells independent, not clinging to anything in this world.”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, one who has truly seen the Dharma—“who has seen the truth,¹⁰⁶ won the truth, knew the truth, plunged into the truth, crossed over doubt, abandoned uncertainty, who has gained self-confidence in the Teacher’s Teaching,”¹⁰⁷—is said to be “independent of others.”¹⁰⁸

7.7.6 Spiritual liberation centres on right view, and this is explained in the **Kaccana,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), as follows:

¹⁰² For a longer discussion, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41/1:285-290), SD 5.7 esp (2).

¹⁰³ For an example of religious dialogue, see eg **Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda S** (D 25), SD 1.4.

¹⁰⁴ Also called “satipatthana refrain,” it is a stock passage following every set of meditation instruction. See SD 13.1(5A.I) & Analayo 2003:92-116 (ch5).

¹⁰⁵ D 22.2-21/2:292-313 (SD 13.2); M 10.4-45/1:56-62 (SD 13.3).

¹⁰⁶ “The truth” (*dhmma*) here refers to the 4 noble truths. Having seen the truth for himself, he cuts off the fetter of doubt and now has “the noble and liberating view that accordingly leads the practitioner to the complete destruction of suffering” (*ya’yam diṭṭhi ariyā niyyānikā niyyāti tak,karassa sammā,dukkha-k,khayāya*, **Kosambiya S**, M 48,7/1:322), SD 64.1.

¹⁰⁷ *Diṭṭha,dhammo patta,dhammo vidita,dhammo pariyogaḷha,dhammo tiṇṇa,vicikiccho vigata,katham,katho vesārajja-p,patto ... satthu,sāsane*. As at Mv 7.10/V 1:16 = **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3,2.21-22/1:110 @ SD 21.3); **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5,30a/l:148 @ SD 22.8); **Cūḷa Saccaka S** (M 35,24/1:234 fx2 @ SD 40.5); **Upāli S** (M 56,18/1:380 @ SD 27.1); **Mahā Vaccha,gotta S** (M 73,10/1:491 @ SD 27.4); **Dīgha,nakha S** (M 74,15/1:501 @ SD 16.1); **Brahmāyu S** (M 91,-36/2:145 @ SD 36.7); **Sīha S** (A 8.12,10/4:186); **Ugga S 1** (A 8.21,6/4:210); **Ugga S 2** (A 8.22,6/4:213); **Kuṭṭhi S** (U 5.3/49). See foll n.

¹⁰⁸ *Apara-p,paccayo*, which fills the ellipsis in the prec quote. This shows that person has become a learner (*sekha*) (one of the first 3 paths), ie at least a stream-winner. See **Kaccāna,gotta S** n on “independent of others,” below.

“...this person (with right view) does not engage in, cling to, incline towards that fixation and clinging, the latent tendency of mindset and inclination—he does not take a stand (that anything is) ‘my self.’¹⁰⁹

He has neither uncertainty nor doubt that what arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing.¹¹⁰ His knowledge about this is *independent of others.*¹¹¹

It is in this way, Kaccāna, that there is right view. (S 12.15,6.2/2:16 f), SD 6.13

The phrase “independent of others” (*apara-p, paccayā*) is of central importance. It refers to the nature of the streamwinner. From streamwinning onwards, the noble disciple sees the truth of the Dharma by himself, and as such is emotionally and spiritually independent of others [7.6]. He has attained *atam, mayatā*.

When we understand the Dharma, it empowers us to say “No!” to what is addictive, dangerous, evil, and foolish. The Dharma especially shows us how to say “No!” to suffering and its causes. There is one term in the Buddha’s Teaching that says “No!” best of all, that is: *atam, mayatā*.

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¹⁰⁹ “But this... ‘My self’,” *taṃ cāyam upāy’upādānam cetaso adhiṭṭhānam abhinivesānusayam na upeti na upādiyati nādhitthāti “attā me” ti*. Comy: Craving and views are called “**mental standpoint**” (*cetaso adhiṭṭhāna*) because they are the foundation for the (unwholesome) mind, and “the latent tendency of inclination [mindset],” or even “**inclination [mindset] and latent tendency**” (*abhinivesānusaya*) because they stay on in the mind and lie latent there (SA 2:33). This is a difficult sentence, and I am guided by the Sutta spirit than the letter. See S:B 736 n32. Cf **Haliddakani S 1** (S 22.3.9/3:10), SD 10.12.

¹¹⁰ Comy: Suffering (*dukkha*) here refers to the 5 aggregates of clinging. What the noble disciple sees, when he reflects on his own existence, is not a self or a substantially existent person but only the arising and passing away of causal conditions (*paccay’uppanna, nirodha*) (of dependent arising) (SA 2:33). Cf **Selā’s** verses (S 548-551/1:134) & **Vajirā’s** verses (S 553-55/1:135).

¹¹¹ “Independent of others,” *apara-p, paccayā*. From streamwinning onwards, the noble disciple sees the truth of the Dharma by himself, and as such is not dependent on anyone else, not even the Buddha, for his insight into the Dharma. However, he may still approach the Buddha or an enlightened teacher for instructions and guidance in meditation until he attains liberation.

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