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Dit̥ṭhi,gata Sutta

The Discourse on Views | It 49

Theme: The unawakened are hindered by views of being and non-being

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2017, 2020

1 Summary and significance

1.1 SUMMARY

The **Dit̥ṭhi,gata Sutta** (It 49) says that the unawakened react to the 2 extreme views of *being* and *non-being* in 3 different ways. Those who delight in **being** or existence “*hold back*” [2.2.1] or reject the idea of non-being. Those who delight in **non-being** or non-existence “*go too far*” [2.2.2] or over-react with fear, shame or aversion towards the idea of being. Only those “**with the eye**” [2.2.3], that is, the arhats (including the Buddha) truly *understand* being and non-being as they really are, and utterly reject both the views, turning to the middle way of awakening.

1.2 BEING AND NON-BEING

1.2.1 The Kaccāna,gotta Sutta (S 12.15), SD 6.13

1.2.1.1 The Kaccāna,gotta Sutta (S 12.15) famously records the Buddha as declaring:

“This world, Kaccāna, mostly¹ depends upon a duality: upon (the notion of) **existence** and (the notion of) **non-existence**.²” (S 12.15,4/2:17,8 f), SD 6.13

The world, says the Buddha, generally thinks in terms of **the duality** of whether something exists or does not exist, being and non-being, is or is not. An unawakened person, no matter how wise, tends to view things (about self, others, the world, life and death) in “black and white,” true or false, computer-like “on-off” manner. We think that this is a reasonable “logical” way of looking at things (that is, without the possibility of some “middle way” of the reality of things).

This dualistic world-view is historically said to be “Aristotelian,” after the Greek philosopher, **Aristotle** (385-322 BCE), who is often looked upon as the father of Western **logic**, or, more precisely, binary logic. **Binary logic** is based on the idea that everything is either A or not-A. It is the **logic** we must use when we take a true-or-false (“objective”) test. It is also the kind of logic that modern mathematics and computers are based on.³

1.2.1.2 Then, in **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), the Buddha explains the nature of this “duality”:

“But for one who sees **the arising**⁴ of the world⁵ as it really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of non-existence regarding the world.

¹ “Mostly,” *yebhuyyena*, here refers to the ordinary being, except for the noble saints (*ariya,puggala*) who hold on to the extreme notions of either something exists (*atthitā*) (eternalism, *sassata*) or does not exist (*natthitā*) (annihilationism, *uccheda*) (SA 2:32). See (2.2).

² Here, in rendering *atthitā* as “the notion of existence” and *n’atthitā* as “the notion of non-existence,” I have followed Bodhi, but they can also function as abstract nouns. See (2.1).

³ On Aristotle’s logic: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-logic/>.

⁴ On the meaning of “world” (*loka*), see **Rohitassa S** (S 2.26) @ SD 7.2 (1).

And for one who sees **the ending of the world** as it really is with right wisdom, there is no notion of existence regarding the world.” (S 12.15,5/2:17,10-13), SD 6.13

These 2 sentences refer to the 2 extremes rejected by the Buddha, as he teaches in **the Lok’āyatika Sutta** (S 12.48),⁶ along with 2 more wrong views: that *all is unity* and that *all is plurality*. The Commentary, following the Sutta, explains further in terms of dependent arising, that “**the arising of the world**” [2.1.2] is ‘the direct conditionality’ (*anuloma paccay’ākāra*) [§8.1], “**the ending of the world**” is ‘the reverse conditionality’ (*paṭiloma paccay’ākāra*) [8.2].

In reflecting on the direct-order dependent arising, (seeing the rise of phenomena) we do not fall into the notion of annihilationism [2.2.2.2]; reflecting on the reverse dependent origination, (seeing the ending of phenomena) we do not fall into the notion of eternalism [2.2.1] (SA 2:33). Here, **the world** refers to that of formations (*saṅkhārā*) [1.2.1.3].

1.2.1.3 Further, in **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), the Buddha explains how we cling to either of such a duality, thus:

This world, Kaccāna, is mostly bound by fixation [attachment], clinging and inclination.⁷

But this person (with right view) does not engage in, cling to, incline towards that fixation and clinging, the latent tendency that is mindset and inclination—he does not take a stand (that anything is) ‘my self’.⁸

He has neither uncertainty nor doubt that what arises is only suffering arising, what ceases is only suffering ceasing.⁹ His knowledge about this is independent of others.¹⁰

Even to that extent, Kaccāna, there is right view. (S 12.15,6/2:17,14-20), SD 6.13

The Commentary explains that each of the 3—fixation (*upāya*), clinging (*upādāna*), inclination [mindset] (*abhinivesa*)—arises by way of craving (*taṇhā*) and views (*diṭṭhi*), for it is through these that one fixates to, clings to, inclines to the phenomena of the 3 spheres as “I” and “mine.” (SA 2:33). These 3 words appear to be synonyms or near-synonyms of “latent tendencies,” but they seem to be listed in the descending order of subtlety (fixation, clinging, inclination [mindset]).

⁵ On the tr of the terms *samudaya* and *nirodha* see Intro (3).

⁶ S 12.48/2:77 (SD 17.15).

⁷ “Bound ... adherence,” PTS *upāy’upādānābhinivesa,vinibandha*, but preferred reading is Be Ce *upāy’upādānābhinivesa,vinibaddha* = *upāya* (attachment, fixation) + *upādāna* (clinging) + *abhinivesa* (inclination, mindset, adherence) + *vinibaddha* (bound, shackled) [alt reading *vinibandha*, bondage]. See S:B 736 n31.

⁸ “But this ... ‘My self’,” *tañ cāyaṃ upāy’upādānaṃ cetaso adhiṭṭhānaṃ abhinivesānusayaṃ na upeti na upādiyati nādhīṭṭhati “attā me’ti*. Comy: Craving and views are called “mental standpoint” (*cetaso adhiṭṭhana*) because they are the foundation for the (unwholesome) mind, and “the latent tendency of mindset (and inclination),” or perhaps “the latent tendency that is mindset and inclination” (*abhinivesānusaya*) because they stay 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 **Hālidakāni S 1** (S 22.3,9/3:10), SD 10.12.

⁹ 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), SD 102.12, & **Vajirā’s** verses (S 553-555*/1:135), SD 102.13.

¹⁰ “Independent of others,” *apara-p,paccayā*. From streamwinning on, 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 awakened teacher for instructions and guidance in meditation until he attains liberation himself.

The world as “formations” (*saṅkhāra, loka*) is explained in **the Loka Sutta** (S 12.44). The Buddha explains the “world” as arising and cessation in terms of the 6 sense-bases. The “world” (that is, suffering in all its forms) arises through **contact** (*phassa*)—arises through the meeting of any of the 6 sense-faculties, its sense-object and the relevant sense-consciousness. The world ceases through the “remainderless fading away and cessation” of craving.¹¹

1.2.1.4 Finally, in **the Kaccāna, gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), the Buddha reminds us of the 2 extreme views which are to be avoided, thus:

“Everything is [All exists] (*sabbam atthi*),¹² Kaccāna, this is one [first] extreme.¹³

Everything is not [all does not exist] (*sabbam n’atthi*),’ this is the other [second] extreme.¹⁴

Without resorting to either of these extremes, the Tathāgata teaches **the teaching by the middle.**”
(S 12.15, 7+8/2:17, 21-24), SD 6.13

The 2 key terms of **the Kaccāna, gotta Sutta** are the abstract nouns **atthitā** (“is-ness”) and **n’atthitā** (“not-is-ness”), which have here been rendered respectively as “existence” and “non-existence” [1.2.1.1]. They are derived from the verbs *atthi* (it is, exists) and *n’atthi* (it is not, does not exist) respectively.

The 2 key terms of **the Diṭṭhi, gata Sutta** (It 49), on the other hand, however, are **bhava** (“being”) and **abhava** (“non-being”)—they appear as the dvandva, *bhavābhava* [§8b]. The Sutta also uses the word **vibhava** for “non-being” [§4]. We also see the word **bhūta**, “what is” (past participle of *bhavati*, to be), as a near-synonym of *bhava* [§§5, 7+8], and which is very common. [1.2.1.5]

Its opposite, **abhūta**, “what is not,” however, is not found here, but appears in the preceding sutta, **the Āpāyika Sutta** (It 48). There, it is found in the phrase *abhūta, vādī*, “one who speaks what is untrue.”¹⁵ While *abhūta* in the Diṭṭhi, gata Sutta has a broad existential sense, it has a narrow ethical sense in the Āpāyika Sutta, where it simply means “a lie.”

1.2.1.5 **Bhūta**, as used in the suttas is clearly a non-technical word, with the following senses (from the broader to the narrower senses; not an exhaustive list):

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|---|---|
| (1) “to be, what is real, reality” | V 2:189,27; D 1:230,26; M 3:236,25;
S 5:447,24; Sn 397 |
| (2) “become, being, being like” | V 2:284,24; M 1:6,12; Sn 147 |
| (3) “beings” (in general; the animal kingdom, <i>sattā</i>) | V 2:238,15 f; D 2:157,3*; M 1:390,1 |
| (4) “that which is so, true”: <i>bhūta, vādī</i> , <i>abhūta, vādī</i> [1.2.1.4] | D 3:175; M 1:180; Dh 306; It 48 |
| (5) “that which exists” (physical existence in general) | V 4:25 |
| (6) “nature, the world” | M 1:2 |
| (7) “to be, is (so)” (animate nature as principle: the 5 aggregates) | M 1:260 |
| (8) “the real” (inanimate nature as principle: the 4 elements) | S 3:101 |
| (9) “ghost” (<i>amanussa</i>) | D 2:57,9; Sn 222 |
| (10) “vegetation” (trees and so on, <i>rukkh’ādayo</i>): <i>bhūta, gāma</i> | V 4:34 |
| (11) a simple “predicative” where <i>bhūta</i> means <i>khīṇ’āsava</i> , an arhat | J 2:260 |

¹¹ S 12.44/2:73 f (SD 7.5).

¹² On the 2 “notions” in this sentence, see SD 6.13 (2).

¹³ *Sabbam atthīti kho kaccāyana ayam eko anto.*

¹⁴ *Sabbam natthīti ayam dutiyo anto.*

¹⁵ It 48,6/42,18 (SD 69.4).

Both *bhūta* and *bhava* come from the same root √BHŪ, “to be.” As a rule of thumb, it helps to see *bhūta* as “being,” a noun, in its broadest sense, and *bhava* as “existence”: they both function in a very similar way as the English words, but often enough both these words overlap with the sense of “existence,” as in the verses of the Diṭṭhigata Sutta [§§7+8].

1.2.1.6 *Bhūta*, “being” (from the root √BHŪ, “to be”) functions very much like a “verb-to-be” as in English. There are 2 more such “verbs-to-be” in Pali: these are formed from the roots **VAS** (*atthi*, “is”) and **VHU** (*hoti*, “is”), both of which have the radical sense of “to be,” just like BHŪ, “to be.” Although *hoti* is derived from its own root, it is regarded as an abbreviated form of *bhavati*.¹⁶

Atthi only occurs in the present and preterite (simple past) forms. What is missing is supplied by *bhavati* and *hoti*.¹⁷ The abstract noun of *atthi* is **atthitā**, the abstract notion of *being*, while **bhava** is the more palpable individual *existence* in any of the 3 realms (sense sphere, form sphere and formless sphere). When we use “being” for *bhava*, we should remember the English usage is much broader with a philosophical purview, whereas *bhava* has a more concrete existential sense as noted.¹⁸

The grammar of these 3 Pali verbs-to-be—*atthi*, *bhavati* and *hoti*—seem rather complicated. However, it is simpler than their Sanskrit forms. In fact, the verbs-to-be in English (am, is, are, was, were) is less systematic than the paradigms of the Pali verbs-to-be. Think of these Pali verbs the way we have learned the English one, and we should at least be able to get by.

Moreover, when we make a careful note each time of the occurrences and senses of the Pali verbs according to their contexts, we should be able to better understand the teaching they point to—which is our real purpose in studying the Buddha Dhamma.

1.3 “SOME” (EKACCE)

1.3.1 We see the adjective “some” (*ekacce*) used 4 times in the Diṭṭhigata Sutta, twice in the thesis sentence, and in the first 2 of the 3 kinds of people, thus:

§2 “some devas and humans hold back, some go too far”;

§3 “some hold back”;

§4 “some go too far.”

The Sutta defines the 3rd person as one of “those who with the eye” who “sees what is as what is,” and doing so, he “practises for revulsion, for fading away, for cessation of what is” [§5]. The last phrase is the well known ***nibbidā pericope***,¹⁹ which refers to arhathood.²⁰

1.3.2 The wisdom eye (*paññā, cakkhu*)

1.3.2.1 The Commentary explains how “those with the eye see” (***evaṃ cakkumanto passanti***) [2.2.3] as those with the “wisdom eye” (*paññā, cakkhu*), but usually (technically), this refers to the “divine eye” (*dibba, cakkhu*), that is, the knowledge of past lives (*pubbe, nivāsa*).²¹ However, the commentator, Dham-

¹⁶ On *hoti*, see PED: *bhavati*.

¹⁷ See CPD: *atthi*; Oberlies, *Pali Grammar*, 2019: §61 (pp339-343)

¹⁸ See SD 6.13 (2).

¹⁹ On the *nibbidā pericope*, see ***Nibbidā***, SD 20.1.

²⁰ An adverb related to “some” (*ekacce*) is “mostly” (*yebhuyyena*): SD 2.19 (2.5).

²¹ Eg 1:183.

mapāla, explains it as referring to understanding the 4 noble truths (ItA 1:180,8-10), which fits the Sutta context better.²²

1.3.2.2 From all this, we thus know that “**some**” (*ekacce*) refers to those who have not yet attained the path, at least as streamwinners. This is clear from Dhammapāla’s commentary, where he explains “the eye” (*cakkhu*) here as “the eye of the wisdom of the path” (*magga,paññā,cakkhunā*, ItA 1:180,9). Hence, to reach the path, we must understand the nature of views regarding being and non-being, avoid them, and keep to “the teaching by the middle” (*majjhena dhamma*), that is, **the middle way** (*majjhima paṭipadā*), which, according to **the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), is dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*).²³ [2.1.2.1]

2 Some key ideas

2.1 Samudaya and nirodha

2.1.1 “Ceasing” (nirodha)

2.1.1.1 In the Diṭṭhi,gata Sutta, the Buddha states that “the Dharma is being taught for the ceasing of being (*bhava,nirodha*)” [§3]. This statement refers to the 3rd noble truth: the “cessation” (or ending) of suffering (*nirodha ariya,sacca*), that is, nirvana. In other words, our purpose as practitioners is to understand the nature of true reality—that nothing in this world is satisfactory: they are all **unsatisfactory** (*dukkha*).

2.1.1.2 We need to understand the Dharma meaning of “**cessation**” (*nirodha*) here. Often, when we speak of something “ceasing,” we often assume that it has a beginning or origin. This is as if the origin is one thing and the ceasing is another. If that is the case, then, we are thinking in some kind of absolute terms: that the *origin* is something in itself and the *cessation* is another thing in itself. Logically, then, even when suffering has ended, the “origin” is still there. This is a case of thinking in terms of absolute “selfhood” (*attā*) of origin and cessation.

2.1.1.3 Now the dependent arising formula states: “with the cessation of ignorance, volitional formations end” (*avijjāya ... nirodha saṅkhāra,nirodho*). We may say: “with the cessation of ignorance, volitional formations end,” but it does *not* mean that the “cessation of ignorance” *causes* or leads to the “cessation of volitional formations.” Logically, when ignorance has ended, it is no more; it cannot cause anything! This is the 1st point we must carefully note.

The 2nd point is that both ignorance and volitional formations are really the *same* thing in the sense that they are both merely aspects of the reality before us. They are *how* we see reality and *speak* about it. They are *not* two separate things in the sense that they have no “essence” (*sabhāva*) or “self” (*attā*). It simply means that “when there is no ignorance, or no arising of ignorance, or when there is no longer any problem with ignorance, there are no volitional formations, volitional formations do not arise, or there is no longer any problem from volitional formations.”

2.1.1.4 It does not mean that ignorance already arisen must end, before the volitional formations which have already arisen can end. The same principle applies to the other links: it is vital to carefully reflect on this subtle relationship (*paccaya*) between one link and the next, thus:

²² This explanation is also supported by Buddhaghosa: SA 2:354,18.

²³ S 12.15,8/2:17), SD 6.13.

when ignorance ceases ,	volitional formations cease;
when volitional formations cease,	consciousness ceases;
when consciousness ceases,	name-and-form ceases;
when name-and-form ceases,	the 6 sense-bases cease;
when the 6 sense-bases cease,	contact ceases;
when contact ceases,	feeling ceases;
when feeling ceases;	craving ceases
when craving ceases,	clinging ceases;
when clinging ceases,	existence ceases;
when existence ceases,	birth ceases;
when birth ceases,	decay-and-death ceases,

along with sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.
Such is the **cessation** of this whole mass of suffering.

2.1.1.5 *Nirodha* as causal cessation (in a cause-effect relationship) is when it is used in reference to the natural way of things, that is, the conditioned nature of true reality. In this sense, it is a synonym for “breaking up” (*bhaṅga*), “impermanence” (*anicca*), “waning away” (*khaya*) or “passing away” (*vaya*). For example, it is said in **the (Vedanā) Anicca Sutta** (S 36.9):

“Bhikkhus, these 3 kinds of feelings are impermanent, compounded, dependently arisen, subject to waning away,²⁴ subject to passing away, subject to fading away, subject to cessation.”
imaṃ kho bhikkhave tisso vedanā aniccā saṅkhatā paṭicca,samuppannā khaya,dhammā vaya,dhammā virāga,dhammā nirodha,dhamma.
(S 36.9/4:214), SD 57.24

All the links of dependent arising have the same nature. Here, the meaning is that all conditioned things (*saṅkhārā*), having arisen, must inevitably decay and pass away following what conditions them. There is no need, as it were, to make any more effort to stop them since they cease by themselves.

2.1.1.6 Although the language for “cessation” (*nirodha*), that is the 3rd noble truth or the dependent ending cycle, sounds like a natural process, its emphasis is on practical reality. In fact, it is translated in 2 ways in the Visuddhimagga. The first gives the etymology of *nirodha* as *ni-* (without) + *rodha* (prison, confine[s], obstacle, wall, impediment), thus rendering the meaning as “without impediment,” “free from confinement.” This is explained as “free of impediments, that is, the confinement that is samsara.” The 2nd definition links *nirodha* to *anuppāda*, meaning “not arising.” Further, “*nirodha* here does not mean *bhaṅga*, breaking up and dissolution.”²⁵

Hence, it is neither entirely wrong to render *nirodha* as “cessation,” nor is it an entirely accurate translation. This is a problem of English that does not have a word that reflects this subtle yet vital spiritual process. We are then left with “cessation” or “ending,” or some synonym. In this sense, when we study the suttas and Dhamma, we must learn to think and feel in Pali, as it were; or at least, we should not adamantly and cavalierly impose English or non-Buddhist categories and nuances into the Pali passages.²⁶

²⁴ *Khaya* has 2 senses: (1) passing, wasting or wearing away, diminution [as here] (A 4:146 f = 5:359; Dh 645 = 738 = 872; Sn 598 (the new moon); VvA 52 (passing away of the night); but mostly in (2) ending, destruction, as in *āsava-k,khaya*, “the destruction of the (mental) influxes” (in an arhat) (D 3:78, 108, 132 = A 1:107 = 221 = It 100, 103 f. See PED: khaya.

²⁵ Vism 16.18/495.

²⁶ See SD 6.13 (3).

2.1.2 “Arising” (*samudaya*)

2.1.2.1 Once we have understood the nature of **the cessation** (or ending) (*nirodha*) of suffering, it is not difficult to understand the nature of **the arising** (*samudaya*) of suffering—for, the two processes are the same in principle. Simply, the arising of suffering is represented by the cycle of **dependent arising** (*paṭicca,samuppāda*), paraphrased thus:

when ignorance arises ,	volitional formations arise;
when volitional formations arise,	consciousness arises;
when consciousness arises,	name-and-form arises;
when name-and-form arises,	the 6 sense-bases arise;
when the 6 sense-bases arise,	contact arises;
when contact arises,	feeling arises;
when feeling arises;	craving arises
when craving arises,	clinging arises;
when clinging arises,	existence arises;
when existence arises,	birth arises;
when birth arises,	decay-and-death arises,

along with sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

Such is the **arising** of this whole mass of suffering.

2.1.2.2 We need to understand the Dharma meaning of “**arising**” (*samudaya*) here. Often, when we speak of something “arising,” we often assume that it has a cause or origin. It is as if the origin is one thing and the ceasing is another. If that were the case, then we are thinking in some kind of absolute term: that the *origin* is something in itself and the *cessation* is another thing in itself. Logically, then, even when suffering has ended, the “origin” is still there. This is a case of thinking in terms of absolute “self-hood” (*attā*) of origin and cessation.

Saying “when ignorance arises, volitional formations arise” is the same as saying “when ignorance **is**, volitional formations **are**.” Or even more simply, we can say: “when there is ignorance, there is suffering.” In other words, both ignorance and suffering are aspects of the same reality.

When we elaborate this point, we can say: When we are ignorant of true reality, we see what is impermanent as permanent, what is suffering as pleasurable, what is non-self as self—these are **volitional formations** (*saṅkhārā*). This is a beautiful way of illustrating the saying “the Dharma is one” or “the Dharma is one in taste.”²⁷ When we understand this, then, we have at least a sense of freedom. For, that *one* taste of the Dharma is “the taste of freedom.”²⁸

2.1.2.3 Both the arising and the ceasing of suffering occur according to “**specific conditionality**” (*idap,paccayatā*), the principle that underlies dependent arising and dependent ending, thus,

<i>imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti</i>	when this is, that is;
<i>imass’uppādā idaṃ uppajjati</i>	with the arising of this, that arises.
<i>imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti</i>	when this is not, that is not;
<i>imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati</i>	with the ending of this, that ends. ²⁹ (S 12.21/2:28)

²⁷ *Rasa,vasena eka,vidham* (DA 1:15 f; VA 1:16) [SD 15.9 (1.1.2)].

²⁸ **Pahārāda S** (A 8.19,16) + SD 45.18 (2.6).

²⁹ “With the ending of this, that ends” or better “with the non-arising of this, that does not arise.”

The 1st 2 lines define the principle behind dependent arising, and the last 2 lines the principle behind dependent ending. The 1st 2 lines describe **the meaning of life**, as defined in the 1st 2 noble truths, those of suffering and its arising. The last 2 lines describe **the purpose of life**, as defined in the last 2 noble truths, those of the path and the ending of suffering.³⁰

Note that the truth-sequence is arranged as 1-2-4-3—suffering, its arising, the path, and ending of suffering. This is the “practice sequence,” an ancient model found in **the Mahā Saḷ-āyatanika Sutta** (M 149). First, we examine and understand the meaning of life; then, we work to reach the path (by attaining at least streamwinning), keeping in mind the goal of the ending of suffering (nirvana).³¹

2.2 The 2 extreme views

2.2.1 “Some hold back” [§2]

2.2.1.1 Those who “hold back” (*oliyanti*) refers to those delighting in existence or “being” (*bhūta*), who do not like hearing about non-existence or “non-being” (*abhūta* or *abhāva*) [§7]. They have no faith in such teachings; their minds focus not to examine or understand such a teaching; and they reject, that is, “hold back” such an idea.

They strongly crave for **being** and so incline towards **the eternalist view** (*sassata, diṭṭhi*), which upholds an idea of a “self” (*attā*) existing eternally in some form, and continuing to do so even after death [2.2.1.2]. Thus, they “hold back” any idea otherwise, and hold back their approach towards the path and entry into nirvana, the cessation of being.

2.2.1.2 Those who “hold back” against the idea of “**the ceasing of being**” (*bhava, nirodha*) do so because they believe that their body is *impermanent* (mortal) but their “self” or “soul” (*attā*) is *eternal* (immortal). Then, they attribute the origin of this eternal soul to an external agency like the idea of a Creator God or some kind of divine essence. Such ideas are rooted in the view of **eternalism**. [2.2.1]

2.2.1.3 The Commentary explains why “**some hold back**” (*oliyanti eke*) [§3 is because of eternalism, that is, “having the inclination for holding back” (*oliyanābhinivesa, bhūtena*) from existences on account of their belief that “the self and the world are eternal.” (SA 1:177,31 f). However, it is clear from the present context, there is a wordplay on *oliyati* based on its 2 roots: √LĪ (1), to cling, and √LĪ (2), to be unsteady. Hence, on account of their eternalist view, beings “cling to” the notion of being, and “recede, recoil” from the notion of non-being.³²

In fact, **the Param’attha, mañjūsā**, the Commentary on the Visuddhi, magga (Vism Mahā, ṭīkā) explains the present context thus: “In recoiling from the cessation of existence, as one taking delight in existence owing to the conviction that the self is eternal, one holds on to that very same existence.”³³

2.2.1.4 “Some devas and humans hold back” (*avaliyanti*, an alternate form of *oliyanti*), that is, they hold on to (*alliyanti*) or cringe (in fear or disgust) (*saṅkocaṃ āpajjanti*), on account of their eternalist

³⁰ **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (6).

³¹ **Mahā Saḷ-āyatanika S** (M 149,11 etc) + SD 41.9 (2.4) ↑SD 53.26 (2).

³² On these 2 roots: Whitney, *The Roots, Verb-forms and Primary Derivatives ...*, 1885:148 f; cf CPD: o-l[i/i]yati.

³³ *Oliyati nāmāti sassato attā’ti abhinivesena bhavābhirato hutvā bhava, nirodhato saṅkocanaṃ āpajjanto bhava yeva nīliyati nāma* (VismMhṬ:Be 2:363). See foll.

view (at the notion of non-existences, especially the opposite of loss of the kind of life they are enjoying). Hence, they do not escape from that existence.³⁴

Caught in **an eternalist view**, we think or hope that we have some kind of abiding essence (like the self or soul) or that can attain some kind of eternal state (like some kind of heaven, paradise or universal essence). It is an eternalist view when we imagine the Buddha is some kind of Being who is “always there,” who has never arisen, never decays, never dies (like a God-idea). Or, to imagine that by merely reciting some mantric words (like a Buddha’s name) we will be reborn in some abiding Western Paradise, and so on. Such teachings are rooted in the eternalist view (*sassata, diṭṭhi*), and are, as such, wrong views.

2.2.2 Those who “go too far” [§3]

2.2.2.1 Those who “go too far” (*atidhāvanti*), or “run away with themselves,” that is, over-react, are “pained, ashamed, disgusted” over existence by the idea of “**being**” (*bhāva*). The reason for this is that they are caught up with the idea that their body is the same as their self or soul: *they identify with their own physical body*. In modern lingo, they are called “**materialists**,” that is, those who view that when the body dies, the self or soul (however one conceives it) also ceases to be. Hence, they crave for “non-being” (*abhava*), which they think will end all their sufferings.

2.2.2.2 Hence, the materialists view this life as the one and only that we have, beyond which there is nothing. This extreme view is called **annihilationism** (*uccheda, diṭṭhi*). Based on such an idea, we are then also likely to believe that there is no karma, neither good nor bad, and that morality is all in our own mind. Our actions only have physical consequences, but no *moral* significance. Such an idea encourages us to “seize the moment,” in the sense of doing what we like without consideration for others; we tend to be self-centred.

2.2.3 Those who see [§4]

2.2.3.1 “Those who see” (*cakkhumā*) have the wisdom eye (*paññā, cakkhu*) [1.3.2]; they understand that both the craving for being in the form of some eternal after-life (the eternalist view) [2.2.1] and those who crave for non-existence (the annihilationist view) [2.2.2] fall into the rut or trap of thinking in non-evolutionary or “static” terms, that is, there is an abiding self that continues forever (eternalism), or that lasts only for a period and ends with death (annihilationism).

2.2.3.2 In either case, there is an idea of some kind of external abiding self or immortal soul. Early Buddhism rejects this view. There is no abiding self or soul of any kind: only the mind arises and falls away, depending on conditions (greed, hate and delusion).

“Those who see,” that is, the arhats (including the Buddha) do not think in terms of a “self” that **exists** or does **not** exist—of being and non-being [1.2]—but understand that only conditions arise and fall away, as famously stated in this “impermanence verse”:

³⁴ *Bhavesu oliyanābhinivesa, bhūtena sassata, bhāvena ekacce devā manussā ca avaliyanti, alliyanti, saṅkocam āpajjanti, na tato nissaranti* (ItA I 177,32-178,2, qu Pm 1:159,6+11 (-antīti saṅkucanti, PmA 460,24) = Vism 594,18 (-ī). For details, see CPD: o-[ī/i]yyati.

*Aniccā vata saṅkhārā
uppāda,vaya,dhammino
uppajjitvā nirujjhanti
tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho'ti*

Impermanent, alas, are (all) formations³⁵!
It is their nature to rise and fall;
Having arisen, they pass away—
Happy it is when they are stilled! [2.1.2.3]

— — —

Diṭṭhi,gata Sutta

The Discourse on Views

It 49

1 This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, heard by me spoken by the Arhat.³⁶

2 extreme views

2 “Bhikshus, blocked³⁷ by **2 kinds of views**,³⁸ some³⁹ devas and humans hold back, some go too far, but those with the eye see.⁴⁰

3 And how, bhikshus, do some **hold back**?⁴¹
Bhikshus, when the Dharma is being taught for the ceasing of being [existence]⁴²
to those devas and humans who love **being** [existence], delight in being, rejoice in being,⁴³
their mind does *not* leap into it, is *not* inspired with faith, does *not* become settled, is *not* con-
vinced.⁴⁴

This, bhikshus, is how some hold back.⁴⁵

4 And how, bhikshus, do some **go too far**?⁴⁶

³⁵ “Formations” (*saṅkhārā*), ie, whatever that are conditioned (*saṅkhata*), “formed,” arising as cause and effect, existing in time and space; hence, conditioned by them. Simply, this means that whatever exists, must do so in time and space; hence, it must be impermanent.

³⁶ *Vuttam h’etaṃ bhagavata, vuttam arahatā’ti me sutam*. This is said to be spoken by the laywoman **Khujj’uttarā**: see SD 57.2 (1.2.2.3); SD 16.14 (1).

³⁷ “Blocked” (*pariyuṭṭhitā*). Comy: overcome (by) (*abhibhūta*), or impeded (by) (*palibuddha*) (SA 1:177,23-25).

³⁸ Comy explains that **diṭṭhi,gata** (lit, “one gone with views”) (pl *diṭṭhi,gatāni*) simply means “a view.” The suffix -*gata* is pleonastic (“redundant,” where the same sense is repeated, such as “a free gift”). This noun-form is also found in *gūtha,gata* (excrement) and *mutta,gata* (urine) (SA 1:177,19-22); see also MA 1:71; DhsA 247. A synonym is *diṭṭhi-ṭ,ṭhāna*, “viewpoint, speculation” (details at DA 107; Bodhi, *The All-embracing Net of Views*, 1992:121).

³⁹ On the meaning of “some” (*ekacce*) here, see [1.3.2.2].

⁴⁰ *Dvīhi bhikkhave diṭṭhi,gatehi pariyuṭṭhitā deva,manussā oliyanti [vl oliyanti] eke atidhāvanti eke cakkhumanto ca passanti*.

⁴¹ Be *olīyanti*; Ce *olīyanti*; Ee Se *olīyanti*. Vl *avalīyanti*. Pres 3 sg *olīyati* (*ava*, “down” + vlī, to be unsteady), “hangs down, sinks down, cowers; hangs back; falls behind” (DP) [CPD]; M 3:261,17; U 72,2; It 43,14 f; Vism 594,16. [2.2.1]

⁴² *Bhikkhave ... tesaṃ bhava,nirodhāya dhamme desiyamāne*. On *nirodha*, “ceasing,” see [2.1.1].

⁴³ *Bhav’āramā bhikkhave deva,manussā bhava,ratā bhava,sammuditā*.

⁴⁴ *Tesaṃ bhava,nirodhāya dhamme desiyamāne cittaṃ na pakkhandati na pasīdati na santiṭṭhati nādhimuccati*.

⁴⁵ “Some hold back” (*olīyanti eke*) because of eternalism: [2.2.1],

Bhikshus, some are pained, ashamed, disgusted⁴⁷ by that very same being.⁴⁸

They delight in non-being, thus:⁴⁹

‘Sirs, it seems, that when, with the final break-up of the body, this self is cut off, annihilated, is no more after death—that is peaceful, that is sublime, that is true.’⁵⁰

This, bhikshus, is how some go too far.

5 And how, bhikshus, do **those with the eye see**?⁵¹

Here, bhikshus, a monk sees what is as what is.⁵²

and upon *seeing what is as what is*, he practises for revulsion, for fading away, for cessation of what is.⁵³

This, bhikshus, is how those with the eye see.

The verses on becoming and non-becoming

6 The Blessed One said this matter [meaning]⁵⁴; therein [of that matter] he says this:⁵⁵

7 *Ye*⁵⁶ *bhūtaṃ bhūtato disva*
bhūtassa ca atikkamaṃ
*yathā, bhūte vimuccanti*⁵⁷
bhava, taṇhā, parikkhayā

Those who have seen what is as what is,
who have transcended what is [existence],
are liberated in true reality
by the complete destruction of craving for existence [becoming].

8 *Sa ve bhūta, pariññā*⁵⁸
vita, taṇho bhavābhava
bhūtassa vibhavā bhikkhu
nāgacchati punabbhavan’ti

When a monk has fully understood what is [existence],
free of craving from existence and non-existence,
who has gained the non-becoming of existence—
he comes not to again-becoming [to rebirth].

⁴⁶ *Atidhāvanti*: *ati-* (beyond, past) + *dhāvanti* (pl 3 of *dhāvati*, to run), to run past, transgress, deviate, go too far. [2.2.2.2].

⁴⁷ “(Some are) pained, ashamed, disgusted,” *uṭṭiyamānā harāyamānā jigucchamānā*. Pres 1 sg, **atṭiyāmi harāyāmi jigucchāmi**, “I am pained, ashamed, disgusted,” see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,5+7), SD 1.7(3.1.1); 3rd sg *atṭiyati arāyati jigucchati*, “he is pained, ashamed, disgusted,” **Nibbidā** SD 20.1 (2.3), SD 54.14 (2); disapproval, see **Piṇḍola Bhāra, dvāja**, SD 27.6a.

⁴⁸ *Bhaven’eva kho pan’eke uṭṭiyamānā harāyamānā jigucchamānā*.

⁴⁹ *Vibhavaṃ abhinandati*.

⁵⁰ *Yato kira bho ayam atto* [only Ee *attho*] *kāyassa bheda param-maraṇā ucchijjati vinassati na hoti param-maraṇā, etaṃ santam etaṃ pañitam etaṃ yāthāvan’ti* [Ee Se so; only Be Ce *yathāvaṃ*].

⁵¹ On “those with the eye see,” see [1.3.2].

⁵² *Idha bhikkhu bhūtaṃ bhūtato passata*.

⁵³ *Bhūtaṃ bhūtato disvā bhūtassa nibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya paṭipanno hoti*.

⁵⁴ *Attha* is polysemic: we can take “matter” as referring to the preceding, and “meaning” as given in the foll.

⁵⁵ *Etam attham bhagavā avoca, tatth’etaṃ iti vuccati*. This may be seen thus: the former phrase refers to the teaching in meaning (*attha*) (true reality), reflecting the 1st 2 noble truths; the latter is its purpose (*attha*).

⁵⁶ The reading *ye ... vimuccanti* here follows Be Ce. Se has *yo ... vimuccanti*, with vl of *yo* supporting *ye*. Ee suggests the reading *yo ... vimuccati* instead of *ye ... vimuccanti* (which is wrong). Comy: *ye ... vimuccanti* (ItA 1:180,11 +17).

⁵⁷ Pm read *yathā, bhūte adhimuccanti*, “they are convinced with what is.” Comy glosses *vimuccanti* with *adhimuccanti* (ItA 180,17 f).

⁵⁸ So Pm 1:159,25; Ee *sace bhūta, pariñño so*; Pm 1:159

9 This matter, too, was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.

— evaṃ —

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