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## Visārada Sutta

The Discourse on the Morally Courageous | **A 10.204** [Be A 10.215]

Theme: In a woman, lack of moral courage is unwholesome; moral courage is wholesome

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2020

After Buddha was dead, people showed his shadow for centuries afterwards in a cave,—  
an immense frightful shadow. God is dead: but as the human race is constituted,  
there will perhaps be caves for millenniums yet, in which people will show his shadow.—

And we—we have still to overcome his shadow!

(Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1881, 1883-1885; tr W Kaufmann, 1974: §108)

### 1 Introduction

**1.1 The Visārada Sutta** (A 10.204), the discourse on the morally courageous, is a short text on the 10 courses of karma (*kamma, patha*), on female followers (*upāsikā*) who **lack moral courage** (*avisārada*) [2.4].

**1.2 The Visārada Sutta** (A 10.204) is identical to both the 2 **Niraya, sagga Suttas 1 & 2** (A 10.200 + 201), SD 57.29 + 30, except that while A 10.200 + 201 refer generally to “a certain person” (*ekacco*), **A 10.203** refers specifically to female followers “who have moral courage” [2]. The main difficulty here is the reading for the 3<sup>rd</sup> precept—against sexual misconduct—whose passage should be in the feminine gender [§1(3)].

### **1.3 RELATED SUTTAS<sup>1</sup>**

**1.3.1 Visārada Sutta** (A 10.204/5:288), SD 57.33 (detailed notes)

A lay woman follower lacking moral courage will habitually commit the 10 unwholesome courses of karma, but not so for one with moral courage.

**1.3.2 Nakula Sutta** (A 6.16/3:297 f), SD 5.2

The female disciple Nakula, mātā’s streamwinning and intrepidity.

**1.3.3 Mahā Sīha, nāda Sutta** (M 12,22-28/1:71 f) + SD 49.1 (3.6)

The Buddha’s **4 intrepidities** (*catu vesārajja*) or moral courage are explained in some detail.

**1.3.4 (Catukka) Vesārajja Sutta** (A 4.8/2:8), SD 51.19 (2)

Details of the Buddha’s 4 intrepidities. This is the fullest definition of his moral courage.

**1.3.5 Sārajja Sutta** (A 5.101), SD 28.9a (3)

On the 5 conditions for moral courage: faith, moral virtue, deep learning, energy and wisdom. [2.1.1.1]

**1.3.6 Sarabha Sutta** (A 3.64,26-28/1:186), SD 51.23

The Buddha mentions 3 of his intrepidities to the wanderers.

<sup>1</sup> For a list of related suttas with more details, see SD 51.19 (3). The intrepidities are also mentioned at: Pm 2:194; Nc 466; DA 1:278; KhpA 104; VvA 213; J 2:27; DhA 1:86.

**1.3.7 Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 3,2.22/1:110), SD 21.3

The brahmin Pokkhara,sāti’s streamwinning, refuge-going and intrepidity.

**1.3.8 Upāli (Gaha,pati) Sutta** (M 56,18/1:380), SD 27.1

The houselord Upāli’s streamwinning and intrepidity.

**1.3.9 Arakheyye Sutta** (A 7.58/4:83), SD 51.25

The Buddha on the 4 things he does not have to hide, and the 3 things about which he is irreproachable. The latter comprises 3 of his intrepidities.

**1.3.10 (Vesālika) Ugga Sutta** (A 8.21/4:210), SD 70.3

Ugga’s streamwinning and intrepidity.

**1.3.11 (Hatthi,gāmaka) Ugga Sutta** (A 8.22/4:213), SD 45.15

The layman non-returner Ugga’s intrepidity.

**1.3.12 Cara Sutta** (A 4.11/2:13), SD 57.34, = (It 110/115-118), SD 57.35

Although *vesāraja* is not mentioned in these Suttas, the diligence of the monk described therein, who asserts himself spiritually in all the 4 postures, is a good example of moral courage. This Sutta contrasts, in terms of teaching, with **the Visārada Sutta** (A 10.204), where a lay woman follower, lacking moral courage, is habitually immoral. [1.3.1]

**1.3.13 Piṇḍolya Sutta** (S 22.80/3:91-94), SD 28.9a (3.2)

A study of *sāraja* and its socio-religious significance.

## 2 Moral courage

### 2.1 VISĀRADĀ

#### 2.1.1 “Morally courageous”

**2.1.1.1** To be “morally courageous” (*visāradā*) or “self-confident,” is to be strengthened and moved by intrepidity or resolute courage (*vesāraja*),<sup>2</sup> that is, strength of character on account of *faith, moral virtue, learning, energy and wisdom*.<sup>3</sup> According to **the Sāraja Sutta** (A 5.101), these are “the 5 states that evoke intrepidity in a learner” (*pañca sekha, vesāraja, karaṇa, dhamma*) or simply, “the 5 states inspiring moral courage” (*vesāraja, karaṇa dhamma*).<sup>4</sup>

Although these qualities are specifically those of a **learner** [2.1.1.2], we, who are yet unawakened, can and should cultivate them. **The 5 states that evoke intrepidity in a learner** are as follows

(1) faith,	<i>saddhā</i>	
(2) moral virtue,	<i>sīla</i>	
(3) wide learning,	<i>bahu, sacca</i>	
(4) energy and	<i>viriy’ārambha</i>	
(5) wisdom.	<i>paññā</i>	(A 5.101), SD 28.9a(3)

<sup>2</sup> On *vesāraja*, see SD 28.9a (3).

<sup>3</sup> **Sāraja S** (A 5.101/3:127), SD 28.9a(3).

<sup>4</sup> A 5.101/3:127, SD 28.9a(3).

**2.1.1.2** To be “**intrepid**” means to be undaunted, untroubled by challenges, intimidation, even by negative fear itself, especially in terms of spiritual training; hence, it is also called “**moral courage**.” The Sutta tells us that this is the natural quality of a **learner** (*sekha*), that is, a streamwinner, or any other saint of the path. The “**non-learner**” (*asekha*) or adept refers to the arhat, who, on account of his awakening, has nothing more to learn about the 4 noble truths, which have been fully understood by him. These noble saints are fearless in keeping to the 3 trainings and promoting the 3 jewels.

The streamwinner, the once-returned, the non-returned and the arhat each have their respectively higher sense of moral courage, on account of their spiritual realization. They have unshakable wise faith in the 3 jewels; impeccable moral virtue; they are ready and quick to learn the Dharma; they are fired with energy on account of their Dharma joy in their practice, and in sharing their wisdom, all of which greatly benefit others.<sup>5</sup>

### **2.1.2 Moral courage in a lay person**

**2.1.2.1** Although “moral courage” is the natural quality of a learner (on account of their spiritual attainment) [2.1.1.2], we, as unawakened practitioners, can and should cultivate it, too. To be **morally courageous**, we should cultivate *faith, moral virtue, learning, energy and wisdom* [2.1.1.1].

Our commitment to the Buddha and Dharma practice arises from our joy in seeing the truth and beauty of the teaching, which inspires **faith**. Through our **faith**, that is characterized by joy, we are moved by lovingkindness and compassion to cultivate **moral virtue**. To better understand and cultivate moral virtue, and to inspire others to live the Dharma-life, we deepen our **learning**, that is, a mastery of the Dharma through the suttas and by our own cultivation of mindfulness and meditation.

Such practice further inspires joy in us which generates **energy** to know Dharma (for bettering oneself) and make Dharma known (for bettering others). As we learn the Dharma, our **wisdom** grows; as we teach what we have learned, we become more aware of where we need to deepen and strengthen our wisdom. As we learn, we teach; as we teach, we learn.<sup>6</sup>

**2.1.2.2** According to **the (Catukka) Sobhana Sutta** (A 4.7), being morally courageous—having all the above qualities [2.1.2.1], even as unawakened lay practitioners—what more as morally courageous monastics and as noble saints—we will be truly “beautiful” people. The sangha, says the Sutta, is “**beautified**” (*sobheta*) by those who are *competent, disciplined, morally courageous, and deeply learned Dharma-bearers who practise the Dharma in accordance to the Dharma*.

To be “**competent**” (*vyattā*) means that we are mature in wisdom, accomplished in the 3 trainings (in moral virtue, mental concentration and wisdom).<sup>7</sup> To be “**morally courageous**” (*visārada*) is to be moved by *faith, moral virtue, learning, energy and wisdom* [2.1.1.1]. To be “**deeply learned**” (*bahu-s, sutta*) is to well understand the Dharma of the suttas both in theory and in practice.<sup>8</sup>

A “**Dharma-bearer**” (*dhamma, dhara*) is a monk, a nun, a layman or a laywoman who has a good memory of the Buddha Dharma and is capable of teaching it for the benefit of the community of monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, and anyone who is willing or able to learn the Dharma. In other words, he is a kind of “Dharma expert.”

<sup>5</sup> On *visārada*, see SD 51.19 (1.1.2).

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller lay-out of spiritual growth, see various sets of “steps of discipleship”: 8 steps, **(Aṭṭhaka) Puṇṇiya S** (A 8.82), SD 57.22; 10 steps, **(Dasaka) Puṇṇiya S** (A 10.83), SD 57.23; 12 steps, **Caṅkī S** (M 95,20), SD 21.15; **Kīṭā, giri S** (M 70,23), SD 11.1.

<sup>7</sup> On the 3 trainings, see **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c; **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).

<sup>8</sup> Note that Abhidhamma is not mentioned here, because it was a post-Buddha scholastic development: **Dhamma and Abhidhamma**, SD 26.1. Knowledge of the Vinaya is implied, esp for monastics.

This is not a title or status, but a description of the state of true spiritual accomplishment in compassion, wisdom and freedom of mind. Although this state refers to that of a “learner” (a noble saint of the path) [2.1.1.2] or the arhat, it can, under the right conditions, refer to a monastic or a lay practitioner who has these qualities.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2 Vesārajja

### 2.2.1 Moral courage as wisdom

We have already noted how **moral courage** characterizes the noble disciple, that is, the “**learner**” (*sekha*), which means that these qualities, are naturally found in a “**non-learner**” (*asekha*) or adept, that is, an arhat [2.1.1.2]. Moral courage is wholesome self-confidence that arises from wisdom, a proper understanding of true reality and the Buddha’s awakening.

In other words, it is a kind of **wisdom** or liberating knowledge, freeing us from doubt or unbelief, from immorality, from ignorance and delusion, from indolence and inaction, and from stupidity and fearfulness [2.3].

Hence, it is also called **vesārajja, ñāṇa**, “the knowledge [wisdom] that is moral courage.”<sup>10</sup> Our courage is rooted in the confidence that once we are on the path of awakening, we are assured of reaching nirvana —this is our nascent wisdom. We are so joyful about this that we would like to inform others, indeed, the world, that they can and should overcome their suffering—this is our compassion.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.2.2 The Buddha’s 4 intrepidities

**2.2.2.1** Here is a brief commentary on the Buddha’s **4 intrepidities** (*vesārajja*) or “knowledge of intrepidity” (*vesārajja, ñāṇa*), that is, the liberating wisdom that defines the Buddha as the fully self-awakened one. In this connection, the Buddha rightly asserts himself as being characterized by these basic truths and claims, that no one will ever be able to prove otherwise; that is to say:<sup>12</sup>

- (1) “While you claim to be **fully awakened**, you are not fully awakened about these things.”
- (2) “While you claim to **have destroyed the mental influxes**, you have not (really) destroyed them.”
- (3) “These things you call **obstructions** are unable to obstruct (the spiritual progress of) one who engages in them.”
- (4) “When he teaches the Dharma to someone for the sake of **the spiritual goal**, when he works on it, it would not lead him to **the complete ending of suffering**.”

The first 3 are listed in **the Sarabha Sutta** (A 3.64), while all the 4 are given in **the (Catukka) Vesārajja Sutta** (A 4.8) and **the Mahā Sīha, nāda Sutta** (M 12).<sup>13</sup> [1.3]

**2.2.2.2** Broadly, we can say that these **4 intrepidities of the Buddha** define the nature of buddha-hood as taught in early Buddhism. This list of qualities defines *what* the Buddha, the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 3 jewels, really is. This is clearly the basic purpose of this teaching set; hence, they also define what “historical” or early Buddhism is, at least, for those who follow his teaching and practise it for attaining the path of awakening.

<sup>9</sup> **Sobhana S** (A 4.7) + SD 51.17 (1.1.2.4).

<sup>10</sup> SD 28.9a (3).

<sup>11</sup> On *vesārajja*, see also SD 51.19 (1.1.2).

<sup>12</sup> For details, see **(Catukka) Vesārajja S** (A 4.8) + SD 51.19 (2).

<sup>13</sup> **A 3.64**, 26-38 (SD 51.23); **A 4.8** + SD 51.19 (2); **M 12**, 22-28/1:71 f (SD 49.1 (3.6)). For details, see SD 51.19 (1.2; 2).

**(1) The 1<sup>st</sup> intrepidity** is the Buddha’s claim that he is “fully self-awakened” (*sammā,sambuddha*). By his own effort, he went in quest of awakening, and discovering it himself, awakening as the Buddha. He is the first and only Buddha there is in this universe during his dispensation (*sāsana*). He is like a parent who has worked for the family legacy, the Buddha Dharma (the 2<sup>nd</sup> jewel), and his worthy family members (the noble sangha, the 3<sup>rd</sup> jewel) are heirs to it. In this way, the teaching has been handed down right to our own time for our benefit.<sup>14</sup>

**(2) The 2<sup>nd</sup> intrepidity** of the Buddha is that he has destroyed all those defilements that fetter us to samsara (*samsāra*), the cycle of rebirths and redeaths, entailing suffering. These mental defilements are traditionally called “**influxes**” (*āsava*), that is, those of:<sup>15</sup>

(1) sense-desire,	<i>kām’āsava</i>
(2) (desire for eternal) existence, and	<i>bhav’āsava</i>
(3) ignorance.	<i>avijjāsava</i>

The better known but later set of **4 influxes** includes views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), as no. 3.<sup>16</sup> This triad is an elaboration of **ignorance**, the fundamental root of suffering, which arouses craving, especially through the physical senses, on which we depend to fuel our existence; hence, it is called **sense-desire**.

Even with mental development—without understanding the true nature of the mind—we are driven to imagine transcorporeal **existence** in the form world and the formless world as being eternal and desirable. All notions manifest themselves as **views**, which serve only to perpetuate themselves, so that we remain stuck in the flows and floods of these influxes that constitute samsara itself. All this has been overcome by the Buddha, and following him, by the arhats who emulate him: their awakening is the same with the Buddha merely as “the first amongst equals.”<sup>17</sup>

**(3) The 3<sup>rd</sup> intrepidity**, in simple terms, is to counter and prevent the wrong view that these very same influxes—sense-desire, existence, views and ignorance—are not “obstructions” (*antarāyikā dhammā*) to our reaching the path and progressing on it. For example, it is a wrong view to imagine that **sensual pleasures** do not hinder awakening since those who enjoy them (with proper restraints and wisdom), are still able to become streamwinners and once-returners.<sup>18</sup>

Essentially, the influx that is “**existence**” refers to the view or belief that to exist, to live, is the true essence of life, that it thus has some kind of abiding essence or “soul,” Brahman, God, etc. The influx that is **ignorance** refers to not fully and rightly understanding the 4 noble truths: basically, this is the rejection that suffering is the most basic meaning of life; that life’s meaning is found in an eternalist view or an annihilationist view.<sup>19</sup>

**(4) The 4<sup>th</sup> intrepidity** is the Buddha’s guarantee of awakening, of the certainty of entering the path of awakening in this life itself, to begin with, when we properly follow his instructions. The key hindrances to this attainment are the “3 fetters” of *self-identity view, doubt and attachment to rituals and vows*.

When we identify with our “self,” whether physically (our body) or mentally (our mind), we will not see the true impermanent nature of our existence: we will be caught up with the desire for sensual pleas-

<sup>14</sup> On the Buddha’s 1<sup>st</sup> intrepidity, see SD 51.19 (2.1).

<sup>15</sup> D 33,1.10(20)/3:216; M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63.

<sup>16</sup> D 16,2.4; Pm 1.442, 561; Dhs §§1096-1100; Vbh §937.

<sup>17</sup> See **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58). SD 49.10.

<sup>18</sup> This wrong view is the theme of **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22) + SD 3.13 (1).

<sup>19</sup> On these 2 extreme views, see **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,3) + SD 1.1 (3.1).

ures. When we **doubt** that we can, by our own effort, aspire to *streamwinning*, we are likely to fall into the unconscious view that “everything ends” with our death: this is the annihilationist view.

On the other hand, when we resort to seeking some kind of external source of succour and salvation, we will fall into some kind of **attachment to rituals and vows**, such as prayer or devotion rooted in the eternalist view, that we would be rewarded with some kind of eternal life in some paradise, heaven or universal essence or immanence. When we reject these 3 fetters, and reflect on impermanence, aspiring to streamwinning, we are guaranteed to attain it in this life itself.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.3 AVISĀRADA

### 2.3.0 Fearfulness

The opposite of *vesārajja*, “moral courage,” is *sārajja*, “fearfulness,”<sup>21</sup> moral timidity, moral cowardice.” It is characterized by these 5 qualities that are just the *opposite* of those of *moral courage* [2.1.1.1], that is:

(1) <b>lack of faith,</b>	<i>assadha</i>	[2.3.1]
(2) <b>immorality,</b>	<i>dussīla</i>	[2.3.2]
(3) <b>lack of learning,</b>	<i>appa,suta</i>	[2.3.3]
(4) <b>laziness, and</b>	<i>kusīta</i>	[2.3.4]
(5) <b>lack of wisdom.</b>	<i>duppañña</i>	[2.3.5]

These negative qualities, those of one who is fearful or *reluctant* (especially in doing good), as listed in **the Sārajja Sutta** (A 5.101)<sup>22</sup> [1.3.5]. We shall, in turn, reflect on each of these 5 negative qualities and how they can be corrected.

### 2.3.1 (1) How faith helps

**2.3.1.1 Faith** is the wholesome power of joyful connection with another, with our compassionate desire (*chanda*), a wholesome curiosity, to know and to learn from others, accepting them just as they are—with lovingkindness. On the positive side, this is famously illustrated by the wanderer **Sāriputta** upon first meeting his teacher, the arhat Assaji.<sup>23</sup> In those who are spiritually right and ready, such wholesome faith may arise, for example, just by hearing the name “Buddha,” as in the case of **Anātha,-piṇḍika**.<sup>24</sup>

When we realize, or even suspect, that we lack such good karma, we should at once **aspire** to meet a good teacher or find the true teaching, by constantly determining, “May I meet a good and true teacher! May I find the true teaching and understand it!” At the same time, we should work at what we have aspired for: we should strive in quest of an authentic transmission of the Buddha’s teaching as recorded in the suttas. Our faith is strengthened by emulating the good qualities of exemplary teachers and practitioners, both monastic and lay.

**2.3.1.2** When we lack such wholesome faith, we may easily fall for **populist and false teachers**, and be blindly led and leached by the delusions and intoxications of a crowd cult, and face its certain fruits of dire losses and sufferings. Since we are unfamiliar with the Buddha’s teachings, we are more likely to fall

<sup>20</sup> See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

<sup>21</sup> I have reserved “moral fear” for *ottappa* (which is wholesome): **Moral shame and moral fear**, SD 2.5.

<sup>22</sup> A 5.101, SD 28.9a(3).

<sup>23</sup> On Sāriputta’s 1<sup>st</sup> meeting with Assaji: SD 42.8 (1.2); SD 51.5 (5.2.3.10).

<sup>24</sup> **Buddhōti Sudatta S** (S 10.8/1:210-212), SD 87.10.

for **false teachings**, and face losses and suffer scandals. We may not even know what is really happening since we are shrouded in blind faith.

In due course, we realize that we have **aged** with the years but not in wisdom: we begin to feel the onset of fearfulness and hopelessness. Our desperation only worsens the situation as age, decay and loneliness descend upon us. It is then very much more difficult to learn and change with our untrained faculties deteriorating.

<i>Appa-s, sutāyaṃ puriso</i>	A person of little learning
<i>balivaddo’va jīrati</i>	ages like an ox.
<i>maṃsāni tassa vaḍḍhanti</i>	His bulk [flesh] grows,
<i>paññā yassa na vaḍḍhanti</i>	but not his wit [his wisdom grows not].

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Hence, we should seek the Dharma (*ehi, passika*), here and now (*sandiṭṭhika*), so that we are led on (*opānāyika*) to the right path.

The cultivation of wholesome faith, then, is a spiritual investment for our graceful aging, so that we mature in joy and wisdom. We begin to understand and accept the true nature of **impermanence**, and see it as a helpful reflection for the growth of faith and wisdom in the Buddha’s teaching, which brings us closer to the path of awakening. [2.2.2.2(4)]

### **2.3.2 (2) Immoral habits**

**2.3.2.1** How does a **lack of moral courage** (*sārajjā*) lead to immoral habits? Firstly, “lack of moral courage” is spoken of here as moral omission, of *not* doing what should be done: such as *not* keeping to a precept *nor* discharging our task (“What others don’t know won’t hurt me”). Secondly, it is an unwholesome shyness or shame, a moral *timidity*, of not taking up Dharma training (“Oh, suttas are not for me; I’m not clever; they are so difficult!”).

Thirdly, it is a negative fear or fearfulness, which is the same as “immoral fear,” that is, fear or reluctance in doing good. Yet we are motivated and moved by fear in the wrong direction. We are likely to follow a teacher or a teaching out of *fear* of authority or from a desire for the approval of others; or we are superstitious (depending on some external source of succour or safety). On account of this, we act ritually out of fear of the disapproval of others, of death or of the descent into hell. This is, effectively, an “animal” (*tiracchāna*) reactivity.<sup>25</sup>

(1) The notion that “**What others don’t know won’t hurt me**” is seriously misguided. **The Ādhipateyya Sutta** (A 3.40) records the Buddha as declaring that there is no secret of any evil that we do. The devas and the Buddha know of our living foolishly and falsely in the world—we ourselves know it, too!<sup>26</sup> Moreover, karma is self-inflicted, whether there are witnesses or not.<sup>27</sup> Karma works with our intentions, whether we are conscious of them or not.<sup>28</sup>

(2) The negative habit of dismissing, “**Oh, suttas are so difficult!** etc,” is insidiously unhelpful. Ignorance is no excuse. It is a blindness, a bane, that is only cured by learning and diligence. Even suffering can be a valuable lesson to us when we examine what it really is, how it has arisen, how it ends, and act on it.

<sup>25</sup> Traditionally, such as in the “morality” section of the 1<sup>st</sup> 13 suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya, *tiracchāna* refers to the “animal” arts based on greed and superstition, but just as well applies to fear-based trades and actions.

<sup>26</sup> A 3.40/1:147-150), SD 27.3; Tha 497; SD 18.7 (9.6.3).

<sup>27</sup> On karma being self-inflicted, see (**Majjhima**) **Deva, dūta S** (M 130,4.5 passim), SD 2.23.

<sup>28</sup> On karma working whether we are conscious of it or not, see **The unconscious**, SD 51.20 (2.2.2).

Learning the Dharma is to understand the nature of ignorance and suffering, and how we free ourselves from both.

(3) When we are moved by **fearfulness**, we are likely to feel vulnerable on account of the habit of measuring ourselves against others, such as others being “better (cleverer, richer, more powerful, etc)” than we are. When this measuring—“better than,” “inferior to,” “as good as”—is directed to those whom we should be respecting or learning from (which actually applies to practically anyone), it is known as **arrogance** (*māna*). It means then that we are hollow beings, hoping to be filled by others.

In the case of (1), when we are fooled by the notion that “What others don’t know won’t hurt me,” we lack moral accountability. In the case of (2), when we quip, “Oh, suttas are so difficult,” and so on, it is both intellectual laziness and lack of moral drive. For, learning brings wisdom that shows us how to properly distinguish between good and bad (morality), right and wrong (ethics), and do what is good and right with wholesome intentions.

In the case of (3): fearfulness is unwholesome because we are then looking outwardly, not only through lack of moral accountability and moral drive, but for the approval of the powerful, the dominant, even the bad and the wrong, when they are the majority or the dominant: this is to blindly follow the crowd. Fear crowds our life and empties us of good and right, which prevents our personal and spiritual growth.

**2.3.2.2 The Visāra Sutta** (A 10.204) warns us that when we **lack moral courage**, we are more likely to live **an immoral life**: we are caught in the 10 courses of bad karma. When we are intellectually lazy to learn what is good and right, when we lack moral accountability and drive, when we are guided and moved by fearfulness, we are likely to kill, show violence; to steal, cheat, plagiarize and pirate; to commit sexual misconduct and act irresponsibly towards others; to lie and not hold back wholesome truth; to speak divisively, harshly and frivolously; to be covetous, harbour ill will, and hold wrong views. These are the course of bad karma leading us surely to the subhuman states, and keeping us there for a long time to come.

### **2.3.3 (3) Lack and limit of learning**

**2.3.3.1 The lack of learning** in connection with fearfulness should be examined and understood in at least 3 ways: the moral, the mental and the spiritual (that is, in terms of body, mind and spirit). **A lack of moral learning** will make us immoral and irresponsible [2.3.2].

**Mental or intellectual learning** here refers to keeping our mind open by way of *learning* about ourselves by *knowing* others. Besides cultivating a warm personality and some social skills, we should also have an interest in any kind of learning that helps us better understand what life really is, how we think, how we function as a society, the meaning and purpose of life, living a productive life, and enjoying true happiness.

**2.3.3.2** Many of us discover Buddhism or learn something about it only as a mature adult. By then, we are already conditioned by some **secular learning or occupation** that significantly defines us. As such, our previous learning and profession often colour, even limit our understanding of Buddhism. As scientists, we reject outright what we see as “unscientific” in Buddhism; as medical doctors, we may examine Buddhism like a patient, looking for some healthy aspects that go with our medical mind; as psychologists, we are likely to select those aspects of Buddhism that we can use to put together some of our ideas for a new therapy or we can add on as selling points to our current ideas and methods.



It is often interesting and beneficial to read, say, a scientist's feedback on the Aggañña Sutta (D 27); a doctor's views on the “actual” cause of the Buddha's death; a psychodynamic study of the Khaluṅka Sutta (A 8.14); a sociologist's explanation of demythologization in the Sigālo'vāda Sutta (D 31); or a lawyer's judgements on the Vinaya. Even in themselves, these are serious, yet interesting, studies.

**2.3.3.3** Ironically, but with due credit to these dedicated scholars, these works were necessarily limited by knowledge, the professional knowledge of these experts; that is, insofar as they were only curious and inspired by how early Buddhism, or aspects of it, exemplified or challenged their specialist understanding, not out of the desire or quest for *awakening*. They only see Buddhism as another impressive button on their status coat of many colours. Buddhism is merely a Cinderella in their odd family of ugly sisters. This, of course, need not be so.

We are not against **professional Buddhists**, even when they put their profession (their job) first. It is clearly improper and unhelpful to think that just because we have a profession, because we are wealthy, because we are qualified and titled, that we are entitled to already know Buddhism without really studying and practising it for some good time. In other words, despite our profession, indeed, *because* of our profession, we must *profess* Buddhism.

For, when we are **sutta specialists** and practising Buddhists, we often find that such studies help us envision in broader perspective the Buddha and his teachings, so that we are able to present them in a more interesting and engaging way to the world. Buddhism is **a living religion**, on account of our faith, understanding and living it. Indeed, these specialists' works even help us better understand the dynamism, if not the spirituality, of the Buddha and his Dharma in clearer historical and human relevance and perspective.

**2.3.3.4** We have today easy access to **the Buddhist scriptures** as never before. For those of us who are keen to know **what the Buddha actually taught** and the Buddha as **a historical teacher**, we have, besides the oldest Buddhist texts available today—the Pali suttas (and the Vinaya)—excellent **translations** of these valuable texts and a great wealth of academic studies on practically every useful aspect of early Buddhism, the records of the historical Buddha.

A deep and broad understanding of **philosophy** (as an academic discipline) helps us analyze and understand the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 3 trainings:<sup>29</sup> that of moral virtue (*sīla*); that is, as **moral philosophy**. Modern philosophy gives us an excellent practical grounding, for example, in understanding why morality is important, and why the 5 precepts are rooted in “natural morality,” and why they are arranged in the traditional sequence, and so on.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, it helps to keep in mind that this is only a social aspect of the Buddhist training, that of refining and disciplining our *body and speech*, what we are, how we communicate, how we live together. **Morality**, says Nietzsche, is “the herd instinct in the individual.”<sup>31</sup> For that herd to become society, we must make peace and work with others: this is what Buddhist morality is about, but Buddhism is much more than this; it teaches us to rise above the crowd, to become individuals. Socialization, then, must lead to individuation.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88) SD 24.10c.

<sup>30</sup> See **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6 (1).

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1881, 1883-1885, tr W Kaufman, 1974: §116.

<sup>32</sup> On individuation as the attaining of streamwinning, see SD 8.7 (4).

**2.3.3.5** The 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 3 trainings is that of the mind: mental cultivation. Basically, psychology, in Buddhist terms, is about rising out and above the crowd, becoming a true individual.<sup>33</sup> This, in worldly terms, is the task of **psychology**, the study and healing of the mind, of behaviour, and of relationships. In a number of ways, early Buddhism is remarkably ahead of modern psychology not only in the terminology for the mind, and the description of how it works, case histories of awakened disciples, and so on,<sup>34</sup> but also has the perfect tool for knowing, training and healing *the mind*, that is **meditation**.

During recent decades, Psychology,<sup>35</sup> an adolescent modern discipline has been having illicit affairs with an aged and mature Wisdom. By their intimate morganatic liaisons, Psychology has sired numerous love-children with royal acronyms (CBT, MBSR, MBCT, DBT, ACT) and princely names (Breathwork, Vivation, Transformational Breath, Holotropic Breath work, Clarity Breathwork, Rebirthing). Now that these lovechildren are grown up and working, the marriage has very much broken down, and Psychology, in many cases, has divorced itself from Buddhism with the “talak”: “I’m not Buddhist.”

**2.3.3.6** Despite their financial successes with sessions, lectures, courses and franchises, not all such “Lovechild” Psychologies worked, or only worked while its creator lived. The persistent pathology of Psychology has historically been that it imagines itself to be a self-contained inbreeding discipline, an objective amoral system. This is very different from **Buddhist psychology**, where, as mind-training, it is merely the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 3 trainings. In other words, it must be rooted in the training in moral virtue.

Moral training, working hand-in-hand with mental training, equips us with the personal, social and mental skills for not only reading and healing human behaviour, but, more so, as a method of **self-profiling, self-training and self-liberation**. In other words, Buddhist psychology works best as a self-regulating, self-educating method, a self-healing path, deeply rooted in *moral conduct*, and both morality and psychology working together, leading us on to the attaining of spiritual wisdom and liberation.

**2.3.3.7** Buddhism—**early Buddhism** to be specific— is one religion amongst at least 6 other world faiths or organized religions, that is, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Chinese religions. Everyone of them started during the Axial Age (8<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE),<sup>36</sup> and have followers worldwide. They were less concerned with local gods or priestly worship, but with how we fit with the cosmos, and how we transcend this world: in short, with **wisdom** that frees us from our limitations. This precisely describes early Buddhism. [2.3.5]

## **2.3.4 (4) Laziness**

**2.3.4.1 Wisdom** is the human quest for self-knowledge, an understanding of our place in the cosmos, and transcending our limitations to be better beings, and attaining awakening. All this clearly entails the curiosity and courage to seek the good, the real and the true. This quest means that we are capable of **learning**, which often begins with knowing what we experience in the world, and being able to relate to it. It is an on-going relationship between *self and other* that teaches us that there is no “self” without the “other.”

This “self-other” awareness is known as “**consciousness**” or the mind. It characterizes us as humans, that is, as a species, *Homo sapiens*, the man who is wise. We have the capacity for wisdom, for self-knowing and self-transcendence. This self-other dichotomy is only a means of knowing, like how our eye as a

<sup>33</sup> Secular psychology also includes “social psychology,” the behaviour of those *in a crowd* and *as a crowd*; but this aspect is already covered in early Buddhism, in the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 3 trainings (in moral virtue).

<sup>34</sup> See **Meditation and consciousness**, SD 17.8c.

<sup>35</sup> By “Psychology” here, I mean mostly Western Psychology and their offshoots.

<sup>36</sup> On the Axial Age, see SD 25.1 (1.1).

faculty (hence, the singular form) “sees” visual forms. This is an *interactivity*, not a static entity, neither a self nor a soul.

To live is to **experience** the faculty interacting with its object, with which the consciousness of seeing or sight arises, as happens, too, with the other senses and the mind. Experience is impermanent; to experience is to exist; to exist is to be impermanent. We *are* impermanence itself, we change. For, to exist is to change; existence *is* change. To understand and accept this is the beginning of **true wisdom**.

**2.3.4.2** Man who is not wise is *not* human yet: *Homo* but not yet *sapiens*. Only after having cultivated wisdom, is he **human**. Man is born by karmic attraction to his parents, but he can and must himself make the effort to be *human*, and by his humanity he may cultivate his divinity through lovingkindness, compassion, joy and equanimity (the 4 divine abodes, *brahma, vihāra*).<sup>37</sup> At any point of our humanity or our divinity, seeing impermanence, suffering or nonself, we free ourselves from both humanity and divinity to attain the unconditioned, nirvana.

*Attā hi attano nātho  
ko hi nātho paro siyā  
attanā’va sudantena  
nātham labhati dullabham*

The self is its own lord [refuge and saviour].  
For, truly, who else could a lord be?  
With a self [mind] that is well-tamed,  
one finds a lord difficult to find. (Dh 160)

**2.3.4.3** When we are unable to seek wisdom, it means that we are blinded by **ignorance**. We must then seek the Dharma or be touched by it to heal our blindness, and then courageously go forth toward the path. When we are unwilling to seek wisdom, it means that we are lamed by **laziness**. Our body is then attracted to other bodies, and our speech is often false, harsh, divisive and frivolous. This is **moral laziness**, the opposite of moral courage and a hindrance to cultivating it.

**Moral laziness** breeds **mental laziness**, the inability or unwillingness to be wholesomely mindful; hence, we do not cultivate the mind. An uncultivated mind is rarely human, and is often that of *an animal, a preta, a hellbeing*. Such a mind be lodged in a human body but it is not human. With the end of the human body, **the subhuman mind** continues mind in a new body but it remains to be the mind of an animal, a preta, a hell-being. This is the fruit of **spiritual laziness**: we did not aspire for streamwinning in this life itself. We have missed that opening for awakening, and have fallen back into the samsaric crowd, swept away and drowning in its floods.<sup>38</sup>

## **2.3.5 (5) Lack of wisdom**

**2.3.5.1 Wisdom** (*paññā*) is basically right view—an understanding of the 4 noble truths—together with a kind joyful heart. To be wise entails both self-understanding and its attending joy. For, self-understanding is the liberating knowledge that we are impermanent (*anicca*) (changing all the time): we are new each moment, each and every day, like the day itself with the movement of the sun across the sky.

We understand that suffering (*dukkha*) only arises when we do not see this impermanence, or seeing this reality, we reject it. This discord arises from the rejection of reality, not from the reality itself. There’s nothing we *can* do, nothing we *need* to do, about **impermanence**, but to live it just as it is: this is life. When we seek or hope for some kind of *permanence*, even in nirvana, then we are dependent on an idea: we are then looking *outside* of ourselves where there is only unsatisfactoriness.

<sup>37</sup> On the 4 divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), see **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5.

<sup>38</sup> On the rarity of human birth, see **Pañca, gati Peyyāla Vg** (S 56.102-131), SD 57.28; **Appa, mattaka Peyyāla Vg** (A 1.19), SD 57.8.

Looking within, we see wisdom; this looking, this vision, is itself *wisdom*. It is independent of what ever happens in or around us—with our sense-faculties or their objects: the all (*sabba*). Hence, we are also independent of the approval or disapproval of others, we are free of the crowd; we are **emotionally independent**. We do not need the love, much less the lust, of others, since we are, with wisdom, self-sufficient: we have more than enough self, as it were; this self is the mind.

Yet, this emotional independence is an all-embracing, overpowering joy that characterizes the **compassion** that is the active side of the wisdom of truly seeing *impermanence, suffering and non-self* in others: how they *lack* this very wisdom to appreciate and enjoy the truth of such reality. Hence, we wish, as it were, that they knew better so that they are not suffering. It compels us to reach out to them with wisdom and with moral courage.

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## Visāra Sutta

### The Discourse on the Morally Courageous

A 10.204

#### The 10 courses of unwholesome karma

- 1 Bhikshus, possessing 10 qualities, a laywoman follower dwells at home **without moral courage**.<sup>39</sup> What are the ten?

#### UNWHOLESOME BODILY KARMA

(1) Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one **who destroys living beings**, cruel, bloody-handed, given to cruelty and violence, merciless to all living beings.

(2) She is one who takes **the not-given**:

in a village or in a forest, she takes by way of theft, the possessions of others that are of service to them.

(3) She is one who commits **sexual misconduct**:<sup>40</sup>

falling into such a conduct with those under the care of their mother, under the care of their father, [under the care of their parents,] under the care of their brother, under the care of their sister, under the care of a relative, protected by dharma, one with a husband, one protected by law, even with one adorned with a string of garlands (in betrothal to another).

#### UNWHOLESOME VERBAL KARMA

(4) She is one who speaks **falsehood**.

When questioned as a witness before a council, before a congregation, in the midst of relatives, in the midst of a guild [a company], in the midst of the royal court [a court of law] and questioned thus: ‘Come now, woman, tell us what you know!’

<sup>39</sup> *Dasahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgatā upāsikā avisāradā agāraṃ ajjhāvasati*. On “without moral courage,” *avisarādā* (fem), see (2.4).

<sup>40</sup> *Kāmesu micchā,cāriṇī* (fem) [also §2(3)]. The other key nouns are also fem: *pāṇātipātini*, *adinn’ādāyini*, *musā,-vadinī*, etc.

Not knowing, she says she knows, or knowing, she says she knows not;  
 having not seen, she says she saw, or having seen, she says she did not see—  
 consciously lying thus for her own sake, for the sake of others, or for some small material gain.

(5) She is one who **speaks divisively**.

What she has heard here (from others), she repeats it there (to others) to divide them;  
 what she has heard there, she repeats it here to divide them—  
 thus she divides the united, who encourages the divided (to remain so) [rejoicing in division];  
 being pleased at discord, enjoying discord, delighting in discord, saying words conducive to discord.

(6) She is one who **speaks harshly**.

She utters words that are rough, hard, hurting to others, offensive to others, connected with anger,  
 inconducive to mental concentration.

(7) She is one who **chatters frivolously** [utters idle talk].

She speaks at the wrong time, speaks what is untrue, speaks what is unbeneficial,  
 speaks what is not the Dharma, what is not the Vinaya;  
 she speaks words not worth treasuring,  
 spoken out of time, poorly reasoned,  
 undefined [rambling], unconnected with the goal.<sup>41</sup>

#### UNWHOLESOME MENTAL KARMA

(8) She is one who is **covetous**.

She covets the possessions of others that are of service to them, thinking,  
 ‘Oh, may what belongs to others become mine!’

(9) She is one with a mind of **ill will** and intentions of hate thus:

‘May these beings be slain, slaughtered, cut off, destroyed, or annihilated!’

(10) She is one with **wrong views**, with distorted vision, thinking thus:

‘There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed.

There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions.

There is no this world, there is no next world;

there is no mother, no father;

there are no spontaneously born beings.

There are no recluses or brahmins who, living rightly and practising rightly, having directly  
 known and realized for themselves this world and the hereafter, proclaim them.’

Bhikshus, a laywoman follower, possessing these 10 qualities dwells at home **without moral courage**.

#### The 10 courses of wholesome karma

**2** Bhikshus, a laywoman follower, possessing 10 qualities, lives at home **with moral courage**.<sup>42</sup>

What are the ten?

<sup>41</sup> “Unconnected with the goal,” ie, unrelated to the goal of cultivating moral virtue, of mental cultivation, of wisdom, and of liberation.

<sup>42</sup> On “with moral courage,” *visāradā*, see (2.1).

## WHOLESOME BODILY KARMA

(1) Here, bhikshus, a certain person,  
*having given up killing living beings, refrains from harming living beings,*  
 lays down rod and sword,  
 conscientious, merciful, dwells beneficial and compassionate to all living beings.

(2) *Having given up taking the not-given, she refrains from taking what is not given.*  
 She does not steal the wealth and property of others in the village or in the forest.

(3) *Having given up sexual misconduct, she refrains from sexual misconduct:*<sup>43</sup>  
 not falling into such a conduct with those under the care of their mother, under the care of their father,  
 [under the care of their parents,] under the care of their brother, under the care of their sister,  
 under the care of relatives, [protected by dharma,] one with a husband, a protected woman,  
 not even with one adorned with a string of garlands [in betrothal to another].

## WHOLESOME VERBAL KARMA

(4) *Having given up speaking falsehood, refrains from speaking falsehood—*  
 when questioned as a witness before a council, before a congregation, in the midst of relatives, in  
 the midst of a guild [or company], in the midst of the royal court [a court of law]  
 and questioned thus: ‘Come now, woman, tell us what you know!’  
 Not knowing, she says she knows not, or knowing, she says she knows;  
 having not seen, she says she did not see, or having seen, she says she saw—  
 not consciously telling a lie thus for her own sake, for the sake of others, or (even) for some  
 small material gain.

(5) *Having given up divisive speech, she refrains from divisive speech—*  
 what she has heard here (from others), she does not repeat it there (to others) to divide them;  
 what she has heard there, she does not repeat it here to divide them—  
 thus she is one who unites the disunited,  
 or who discourages the divided (from remaining so) [not rejoicing in division];  
 she is pleased at concord, enjoying concord, delighting in concord, saying words conducive to concord.

(6) *Having given up harsh speech, she refrains from harsh speech—*  
 she utters words that are blameless, pleasant to the ear, touching the heart,  
 urbane, loved by the masses, pleasant to the masses.

(7) *Having given up frivolous talk, she refrains from frivolous talk—*  
 she speaks at the right time, speaks what is true, speaks what is beneficial,  
 speaks what is the Dharma, what is the Vinaya;  
 she speaks words worth treasuring, spoken in time,  
 well-reasoned, well-defined [not rambling], connected with the goal.

## WHOLESOME MENTAL KARMA

(8) **She is not covetous—**  
 she covets not the possessions of others that are of service to them, thinking,  
 ‘Oh, may what belongs to others become mine!’

<sup>43</sup> *Kāmesu micchā, cāriṇī hoti*, with fem nouns [§1(3)].

(9) **She is one without a malevolent mind**, *a mind without wicked thoughts*, thinking, ‘May these beings be free from hate! May they be free from suffering! May they be free from woe [trouble]! May they continue to be happy!’

(10) **She is one has right view**, *without distorted vision*, thinking thus:  
 ‘There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed.  
 There is fruit and result of good or bad actions.  
 There is this world, there is the next world.  
 There is mother, there is father.  
 There are beings that are reborn.  
 There are recluses and brahmins who, living rightly and practising rightly,  
 having directly known and realized for themselves this world and the hereafter, proclaim them.’

Bhikshus, a laywoman follower, possessing 10 qualities, dwells at home **with moral courage**.<sup>44</sup>

— pañcamāṃ —

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<sup>44</sup> *Dasahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgatā upāsikā avisāradā agāraṃ ajjhāvasati.*