

12

(Catukka) Ṭhāna Sutta

The (Fours) Discourse on Conditions | **A 4.192**
 or, **(Catu) Ṭhāna Sutta** The Discourse on the 4 Conditions
 Theme: How to truly know a person's character
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2006

1. Introduction

1.1 The Satta Jaṭilā Sutta (S 3.11) recounts how Pasenadi the king of Kosdala claims that a group of passing recluses are “arhats.” If he does this *unconsciously* of his real motive, it would be a classic case of what in psychology is called “projection,”¹ that is, what quality we lack but desire (in his case as a rajah, *religious* power) we “project” it (see it) in others. However, if Pasenadi were to *consciously* remark that they are arhats (but, in reality, they are not), then, he is clearly lying. In fact, he does this merely to see the Buddha's reaction (UA 331).²

1.2 In religions where status, wealth and worldliness take precedence, it is common to see how religious shoppers and followers measure and grade religious teachers. Often the quest is not for self-awakening but for seeking approval for our own views, status and personality. A monastic or teacher that we approve of is then canonized as a “saint” or an “arhat.” Without really working on our personal development, we unwittingly continue to live in the shadows, the dark self-centred view, that we have *owned* a “saint.”

But all is not lost: we can still find worthy teachers, as **Nina van Gorkom** notes:

How can we find out who is an ariyan? There is no way to know who is an ariyan, unless we have become enlightened ourselves. It cannot be known from someone's outward appearance whether he is an ariyan or not. People who are very amiable and peaceful are not necessarily ariyans. However, we can take our refuge in the ariyan Sangha even if we do not personally know any ariyans. We can think of their virtues, no matter whether they are in this plane of existence or in other planes. The ariyans prove that there is a way to the end of defilements. We should know what the condition is for the end of defilements: the cultivation of wisdom. The monks, nuns, men and women layfollowers who were ariyans in the Buddha's time proved that what the Buddha taught can be realized in daily life. The Buddha did not teach abstract ideas, he taught reality. Should those who want to realize the truth not walk the same Path they walked, even if they still have a long way to go?
 (Nina van Gorkom, 1977:76)³

1.3 The Satta Jaṭila Sutta (S 3.11) makes a brief but important statement on how to analyse or judge another's spiritual state. Rajah Pasenadi, seeing some ascetics passing by, comments that they are all arhats. The Buddha replies (summarized):

The character of another can only be truly known thus:

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) through <u>living with another</u> , | one knows his moral virtue (<i>sīla</i>); |
| (2) through <u>dealing with another</u> , | one knows his honesty (<i>soceyya</i>); |
| (3) through <u>adversities</u> , | one knows his fortitude [emotional strength] (<i>thāma</i>); |
| (4) through <u>discussing with another</u> , | one knows his wisdom (<i>paññā</i>). |

¹ This is one of the many psychological ego-defences or psychological defence mechanisms.

² See **Jaṭilā S** (S 3.11), SD 14.11 (2).

³ *Buddhism in Daily Life*, digital ed, free download: <http://www.dhammadownload.com/outlook8.html>.

That is, only through careful observation over time by one who is attentive and wise.

(S 3.11/1:78 f = U 6.2/65 f), detailed in **(Catukka) Ṭhāna Sutta**, A 4.192 (SD 14.12)

This brief exposition is elaborated here in **the (Catukka) Ṭhāna Sutta**.⁴

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(Catukka) Ṭhāna Sutta The (Fours) Discourse on Conditions

A 4.192

The 4 ways of truly knowing a person

1 Bhikshus, from these **4 conditions**⁵ 4 (other) conditions can be known.⁶
What are these four?⁷

(1) Bhikshus, it is through living together with another,⁸ that his **moral virtue** (*sīla*) is to be known,
and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
by the wise,⁹ not a dullard.

(2) Bhikshus, it is through dealing with another,¹⁰ that his **honesty** (*soceyya*) is to be known,
and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
by the wise, not a dullard.

(3) Bhikshus, it is through adversities,¹¹ that another's **fortitude** [emotional strength] (*thāma*) is to be known,

⁴ See also **Right livelihood**, SD 37.8 (6.3.3).

⁵ *Ṭhāna* (from *vsthā*, to stand), “standing, stopping, halting; place, spot, situation; station, state, condition; place, post, office, appointment; rank, dignity; point, matter, subject, topic, proposition, thesis, thing; basis, source, origin, cause, reason” (DPL).

⁶ *Cattār'imāni bhikkhave ṭhānāni catuhi ṭhānehi veditabbāni*.

⁷ This fourfold exposition is found in **Satta Jaṭila S** (S 1:78 f = U 65 f) without further comment but are here elaborated. See SD 14.11.

⁸ *Saṃvāsa*, living together, co-residence (V 1:97, 2:237, 3:28; A 2:57 f, 187, 3:164, 4:172; J 1:236, 4:317; Sn 283, 290, 335; Dh 207 [SD 24.6b (5.4)], 302); intimacy (J 2:39); cohabitation, intercourse, sexual relationship (D 1:97; J 1:134, 2:108).

⁹ *Paññavatā* here, apparently, refers to the true individual (*sappurisa*): **Dhammaññū S** (A 7.64), SD 30.10 (3.1).

¹⁰ *Samvohāra*, transaction, business, traffic (V 3:239; S 1:78 = A 2:187; A 3:77). The proper word for “business” as commercial dealings is *vohāra*: see §3 n.

¹¹ *Āpadā*, misfortune, distress, accident, danger (V 2:138, 3:43; A 2:68 = 4:3:45; J 5:341; Tha 371).

and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
 by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
 by the wise, not a dullard.

(4) Bhikshus, it is through **discussing with another**,¹² that his **wisdom** (*paññā*) is to be known,
 and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
 by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
 by the wise, not a dullard.

Through living with a person, his virtue is known

2 (1) ‘Bhikshus, it is through **living together with someone**, that his moral virtue is to be known,
 and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
 by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
 by the wise, not a dullard.’

This, too, is said. In what connection is this said?

(2A) THE UNVIRTUOUS

2.2 Here, bhikshus, a person, living with another, knows thus:

‘For a long time indeed this venerable one¹³ is one¹⁴

whose deed is tattered [uncompleted],
 whose deed is rent [faulty],
 whose deed is mottled [defective],
 whose deed is blotchy [irregular],
 whose deed is inconsistent,
 who is inconsistent in moral virtue.

khaṇḍa, kārī
chidda, kārī
sabala, kārī
kammāsa, kārī
na santata, kārī
na santata, vutti sīlesu

This venerable one is **immoral**, this venerable one is not morally virtuous.’

¹² *Sācakchā*, conversation, talking over, discussing (D 1:103, 2:109; M 1:72; S 1:79; A 2:140, 187 f, 3:81; Sn 266; J 4:414).

¹³ “Venerable one,” *āyasmato*. It is possible that the Buddha is referring to monastics here. Although this vocative appears to address only monastics, there are other occasions when terms like *āyasmato* and *bhante* are used for lay people. See **Dhānañjāni S** (M 97), SD 4.9 (5).

¹⁴ In **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16), the 5th of the 6 conditions for conciliation is given as: “Monks, so long as monks would dwell compatibly accomplished in **the moral virtue** with the moral precepts unbroken, untorn [consistent], unmixed [not altering the rules], spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration,¹⁴ and so too they dwell with their companions in the holy life, both openly and in private, then, monks, growth for the monks is to be expected, not their decline.” (D 16, 1.11/2:80), SD 9. The underscored phrase reads **akhaṇḍāni acchiddāni asabalāni akammāsāni** (often referring to moral virtue), and is here an example of a usage antonymous to the passage of *Ṭhāna S* above. On this phrase, which means “unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless,” DA (speaking of the 7 groups of monastic offences, V 5:91) explains that when one commits the first or the last of them, one is said to be “**tattered**” (*khaṇḍa*), like one whose robe is torn all around at the edges; if one commits one of the middle offences, one is “**rent**” [holed] (*chidda*) like one whose robe that is rent [with a hole] in its middle; if one commits 2 or 3 successive offences, one’s conduct is “**mottled**” (*sabala*), like a cow with red or black pigments, with a different colour rising upon its back or belly; or, if one transgresses now and then, one’s conduct is said to be “**blotchy**” (*kammāsa*), like a cow with coloured spots here and there. (DA 2:536)

(2B) THE MORALLY VIRTUOUS

2.3 But here, bhikshus, a person, living with another, knows thus:

‘For a long time indeed this venerable one is one	
whose deed is untattered [he completes his task],	<i>akkhaṇḍa, kārī</i>
whose deed is not rent [faultless],	<i>achidda, kārī</i>
whose deed is unmottled [without defect],	<i>asabala, kārī</i>
whose deed is not blotchy [regular], [188]	<i>akammāsa, kārī</i>
whose deed is consistent,	<i>santata, kārī</i>
who is consistent in moral virtue.	<i>santata, vutti sīlesu</i>

This venerable one is **morally virtuous**, this venerable one is not immoral.

2.4 Bhikshus, it is through living together (with someone), that his moral virtue is to be known, and even that is after a long time, not after a short time; by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive; by the wise, not a dullard.’
This, too, is said. It is in this connection that this is said.

Through dealing with a person, his honesty is known

3 (2) ‘Bhikshus, it is **through dealing**¹⁵ **with another**, that his honesty is to be known, and even that is after a long time, not after a short time; by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive; by the wise, not a dullard.’
 This, too, is said. In what connection is this said?

(3A) THE DISHONEST

3.2 Here, bhikshus, a person, through dealing with another, knows thus: ‘Indeed, this venerable one behaves in a certain way towards one. He behaves in a different way towards two; yet again differently with three; yet again differently with many. His earlier conduct differs from his later conduct.’¹⁶
 This venerable one is **impure [not transparent] in his conduct**. This venerable one is not of pure conduct.’

(3B) THE HONEST

3.3 But here, bhikshus, a person, through dealing with another, knows thus: ‘Indeed, this venerable one behaves in a certain way towards one. He behaves in the same way towards two; so too with three; so too with many. His earlier conduct differs not from his later conduct.’
 This venerable one is **pure [transparent] in his conduct**. This venerable one is not of impure conduct.’

¹⁵ “By dealing,” *saṃvoharena*, ie through transactions (in business, etc) and working together (in a project, etc) (V 3:239; A 2:187 = S 1:78; A 3:77; SnA 471). A syn is *vohara* (M 2:360; Sn 614; J 1:495, 2:133, 202, 5:471; PvA 111, 278). Comys qu a well known stanza from **Vāseṭṭha S**: “Whoever amongst man makes a living by trade (*vohāra*) | know him thus, Vāseṭṭha: he is a merchant, not a brahmin [priest]” (M 98/2:196 = Sn 614/119), qv for similar stanzas. See **Jaṭila S** (S 3.11), SD 14.11 Intro.

¹⁶ Apparently, he behaves one way in a private exchange, when he says one thing; but he behaves in a different way when in a group, when he says something quite different. In either case, he could be harbouring an ulterior motive.

3.4 ‘Bhikshus, it is through dealing with another, that his honesty is to be known,
and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
by the wise, not a dullard.’

This, too, is said. It is in this connection that this is said.

Through adversities, a person’s fortitude is known

4 (3) ‘Bhikshus, it is **through adversities**, that one’s fortitude [emotional strength] is to be known,
and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
by the wise, not a dullard.’

This, too, is said. In what connection is this said?¹⁷

(4A) THE WEAK

4.2 Here, bhikshus, a certain person, *when touched by the loss of relatives, or by the loss of wealth, or by the loss through illness, does not reflect thus*:

‘Such is the nature of life, such is the state of being a person [obtaining personhood].¹⁸

These 8 worldly conditions keep the world turning; the world turns on these 8 worldly conditions, namely:

gain and loss,	<i>lābho ca alābho ca</i>
fame and ill-fame,	<i>yaso ca ayaso ca</i>
praise and blame,	<i>nindā ca pasamsā ca</i>
joy and pain.	<i>sukhañ ca dukkhañ ca</i>

4.3 When touched by the loss of relatives, or by the loss of wealth, or by the loss through illness, he is grieved and distressed, laments and beats his breast, and falls into confusion.

(4B) THE STRONG

4.4 But here, bhikshus, a certain person, *when touched by the loss of relatives, or by the loss of wealth, or by the loss through illness, reflects thus*:

‘Such is the nature of life, such is the state of being a person.

These 8 conditions turn with¹⁹ the world, and the world turns with these 8 worldly conditions, namely:²⁰

*gain and loss,
fame and ill-fame,
praise and blame,
joy and pain.’*

¹⁷ This whole passage is similar in teaching as **Loka,dhamma S 2** (A 8.6/157-160), SD 42.3.

¹⁸ “The obtaining of personhood” (*atta.bhāva,paṭilābhe*), lit “by the receiving of a self-state.” Comy elsewhere glosses it as “obtaining of a physical body” (*sarīra,paṭilābho*) (AA 3:277). Cf NcA 13. It might be added here that *atta,bhāva* may also refer to personality or image in general, one that one assumes or comes as a result of one’s work and association with others, etc.

¹⁹ “Turn with,” **anuparivattanti**, 3 pres pl of *anu* (“after, following, keeping on”) + *pari* (“all around”) + *vattati* (“it turns”), from √VRT, to turn; the overall sense is that of “turning” or a repetitive, cyclic rut, applied figuratively here, “to move or turn after, to follow in moving, to keep on moving”: D 1:240,26; M 2:232,24, 3:72,27; S 3:150,9+18; A 2:188,32 = 4:156,29 = 157,3+18 (*aṭṭha,loka,dhammā lokarūpā* ~); Miln 204,8, 253,10.

²⁰ On these 8 worldly conditions, see **Loka,dhamma S 1** (A 8.5/4:156,29-157,2), SD 42.2 = **Loka,dhamma S 2** (A 8.6/157,18-22), SD 42.3, where the passages are almost identical.

4.5 *When touched by the loss of relatives, or by the loss of wealth, or by loss through illness, [189] he is neither grieved nor distressed, neither laments nor beats his breast, and does not fall into confusion.*

‘Bhikshus, it is through adversities, that one’s fortitude [emotional strength] is to be known,
and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
by the wise, not a dullard.’

This, too, is said. It is in this connection that this is said.

Through discussion, a person’s wisdom is known

5 (4) ‘Bhikshus, it is **through discussing** with another, that his *wisdom* is to be known,
and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
by the wise, not a dullard.’

This, too, is said. In what connection is this said?

(5A) THE FOOLISH

5.2 Here, bhikshus, through discussing with another, one knows thus:

‘From this venerable one’s²¹
approach to this problem [manner of examining this question] (*ummagga*),²²
defining this problem [formulating of this question] (*abhinīhāro*), and
discussion of this problem [question] (*pañha,samudācāro*),

this venerable one is unwise, this venerable one is not wise.

5.3 What is the reason for this?

This venerable one does not utter words

that are profound, calming, sublime, beyond thinking [inaccessible through thought],²³
subtle, intelligible to the wise.²⁴

²¹ The foll 3 terms seem to overlap as near-synonyms, or even synonymous: (1) *Yathā kho imassa āyasmato ummaggo*, (2) *yathā ca abhinīhāro*, (3) *yathā ca pañha,samudācāro, duppañño ayaṃ āyasmā nāyaṃ āyasmā paññavā*. Comy explains the key words thus: (1) **ummagga** as *pañh’ummaggo* (“approach to a question”), and T̥kā explains it as *pañhā,gavesana*, lit, “question-quest,” ie, examining a question or problem, that it refers to knowing how to examine the desired goal (*ñātuṃ icchitassa atthassa vīmaṃsanān ti attho*) (AAT:Be 2:383) [see below, on *ummagga*]; (2) **abhinīhāra** (CPD: initiative, intent): *pañhābhisaṅkharāṇa,vasena cittassa abhinīhāro*, “the mind’s application into the formulating of a question,” ie how one defines a problem; (3) **pañha,samudācāra** = *pañhā,pucchana* (“the asking of a question”), which means asking the right question, or understanding the nature of the problem (AA 3:172). **Ummagga** (sometimes *ummaṅga*) has 2 or 3 meanings: (1) rise, emergence; discernment, invention (tr “penetration,” “approach”): A:W 2:184 n5; (2) lit “off-track” (cf *uppatha*), a wrong way, a devious road; (of an idea) excess, extreme (V 1:8 = M 1:171 = 3:5; S 4:195; A 4:191); (3a) a tunnel (DhA 1:252, 2:37; J 1:187, 6:444); (3b) a subterranean aqueduct, underground watercourse (MA 3:221; Dīpv 22.11; Mahv 35.98). A 4th specific meaning is possible: that of a fish’s underwater movement (as in the above tr). See CPD: *ummagga* & *ummaṅga* for full refs.

²² Apparently, here *ummagga* refers to the “underlying or hidden” aspects of the problem that need to be clarified or uprised to clarity (ie, “approach to a question (or problem)”). See n on *ummujjamānā* below (under the parable of the small fish).

²³ *Atakkāvacara* (a + *takka* + *avacara*), ie, beyond intellectual knowledge, accessible only through direct experience, ineffable: V 1:4,35 (cf Mvst 3:314,2) = D 2:36,3 = 37,24; D 1:13,20; M 1:167,32 = S 1:136,10 ≈ M 1:487,7 ≈ 2:172,31; A 2:189,15; It 2.2.6/37; UA 391. See **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,3.1.2), SD 49.8. Also (**Musila Narada**) **Kosambī S** (S 12.68/2:115-118), SD 70.11 & **The Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (6.2.2).

And when this venerable one speaks of the Dharma,
he is unable to say, teach, proclaim, establish, reveal, analyse, clarify²⁵ its meaning,
briefly or in detail.

This venerable one is unwise, this venerable one is not wise.

PARABLE OF THE SMALL FISH

5.4 Just as if, bhikshus, a man with eyes, standing on the bank of a pool of water, were to see a small fish emerging [moving underwater] (*ummujjamāna*),²⁶ he would think:

‘From the emergence [underwater movement] (*ummagga*)²⁷ of this fish, from the size of the ripple it makes, from its speed, this is a small fish, this is not a big fish’²⁸—

5.5 in the same way, bhikshus, through discussing with another, one knows thus:

‘From this venerable one’s²⁹

approach to a problem [manner of examining a problem],
defining the problem [formulating of the question], and
discussion of the question,

this venerable one is unwise, this venerable one is not wise.

5.6 What is the reason for this?

This venerable one does not utter words

that are profound, calming, sublime, beyond thinking [in-accessible through reasoning],
subtle, intelligible to the wise.

And when this venerable one speaks of the Dharma,

he is unable to say, teach, proclaim, establish, reveal, analyse, clarify its meaning,
briefly or in detail.

This venerable one is unwise, this venerable one is not wise.

(5B) THE WISE

6 Here, bhikshus, through discussing with another, one knows thus:

²⁴ *Tathā hi ayam āyasmā na c’eva gambhīraṃ attha, padaṃ udāharati santaṃ paṇītaṃ atakkāvacaraṃ nipuṇaṃ paṇḍita, vedanīyaṃ*: see V 1:4 = D 2:36 = 37 = M 1:167 = S 1:136.

²⁵ “To say, ... clarify,” *ācikkhituṃ desetuṃ paññāpetuṃ vivarituṃ vibhajituṃ uttānikātuṃ*: Comys say that although these are syns, they differentiate their usages thus: as an indication (*uddesa*) they “say” (*ācikkhanti*); as a description (*niddesa*) they “teach” (*desenti*); as a restatement (*paṭiniddesa*) they “proclaim” (*paññāpenti*); by laying down the meaning in one way or other they “establish” (*paṭṭhapenti*); when showing the reason for a certain meaning they “reveal” (*vivaranti*); when showing the classification of a detail they “analyse” (*vibhajanti*); in order to do away with what is inverted or profound, or when creating a basis for their audience’s knowledge, they “clarify” (*uttāni, karonti*); and in abolishing the audience’s ignorance and blindness in all these ways, they “make known [declare]” (*pakāsentī*) (VbhA 371; briefly at SA 2:40). On the ability to “instruct, inspire, rouse and gladden” one’s audience, see SD 6.1 & SD 11.4 (4).

²⁶ The imagery here, I think, means that the observer is able to allow for water reflection and refraction in clear water, and judging from the water movements in murky water, so that he is able to size the fish correctly. The key word *ummujjamānā* is also used in a **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1) imagery, illustrating how even if one who is view-driven “emerges” (*ummujjamānaṃ*)—ie whether he is reborn in a suffering state or in a happy one—is still caught in the net of views (D 1,146/1:45), SD 25.2.

²⁷ vl *ummaṅga*.

²⁸ *Yathā kho imassa macchassa ummaggo yathā ca ūmi, ghāto yathā ca vegāyitattaṃ paritto ayaṃ maccho nāyaṃ macho mahanto ti*.

²⁹ See §5(4)a.

‘From this venerable one’s
 approach to a problem [manner of examining a problem],
 defining the problem [formulating of the question], and
 discussion of the question,
 this venerable one is wise, this venerable one is not unwise.

6.2 What is the reason for this?

This venerable one utters words
 that are profound, calming, sublime, beyond thinking [inaccessible to thought],
 subtle, intelligible to the wise.

And when this venerable one speaks of the Dharma,
 he is able to say, teach, proclaim, establish, reveal, analyse, clarify its meaning,
 briefly or in detail.

This venerable one is wise, this venerable one is not unwise.

PARABLE OF THE BIG FISH

6.3 Just as if, bhikshus, a man with eyes, standing on the bank of a pool of water, were to see a big fish emerging [moving underwater], he would think:

‘From the emergence [underwater movement] of this fish, from the size of the ripple it makes, from its speed, this is a big fish, this is not a small fish’—

6.4 in the same way, bhikshus, through discussing with another, one knows thus:

‘From this venerable one’s³⁰
 approach to a problem [manner of examining a problem],
 defining the problem [formulating of the question], and
 discussion of the question,

this venerable one is wise, this venerable one is not unwise.

6.4 What is the reason for this?

*This venerable one utters words
 that are profound, calming, sublime, beyond thinking [inaccessible to thought],
 subtle, intelligible to the wise.*

*And when this venerable one speaks of the Dharma,
 he is able to say, teach, proclaim, establish, reveal, analyse, clarify its meaning,
 briefly or in detail.*

This venerable one is wise, this venerable one is not unwise.

6.5 ‘Bhikshus, it is through discussing (with another), that his wisdom is to be known,
 and even that is after a long time, not after a short time;
 by one who is attentive, not by one inattentive;
 by the wise, not a dullard.’

This, too, is said. It is in this connection that this is said.

Bhikshus, from these 4 conditions 4 (other) conditions can be known.

— evaṃ —

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³⁰ See §5(4)a.