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Partial Precepts?

Buddhism: academic study and text-based practice
A brief study by Piya Tan ©2014, 2021

1.0 Abstract & Introduction

1.0.1 This paper was inspired by my reading of **Giulio Agostini's** "Partial upāsakas" (2003)¹ [5.1.1]. This is not a rebuttal of any of his points, since his paper is quite exhaustive and informative in scope. However, it does make me wonder why the idea of keeping "partial precepts" even existed in later Buddhism, and whether early Buddhism teaches such a practice. To this end, this paper is roughly divided into 3 parts:

Part 1 [1] records musings on the challenges of being a scholar and a practitioner of early Buddhism. These are mostly random reminiscences of my own days with academia, especially with the University of California at Berkeley (Agostini from the University of Milan did his graduate studies there), of the many scholars I have met when we were younger.²

It is meant to be read as a light humorous piece, partly Rabelaisian, partly Voltairesque, and what is left of me, as a grand quixotic prelude to the matter at hand. The best part of humour is a good laugh at reality; but I close on a serious note, with my own understanding of early Buddhism.

Part 2 [2] discusses the term *aparipūri* (unfulfilled, incomplete, partial) and its related forms, as used in the later texts and in the early Buddhist texts (EBTs), with a brief survey of how such terms are used in the Pali suttas.³

Part 3 [3-5] discusses the absence of any notion of "partial precepts" in the EBTs. Highlighted are the key teachings related to precepts and moral virtue in early Buddhism [3]; next, we see if we can apply our observations and conclusions to a few key suttas relating to apparent non-fulfilment of the precepts [4]; and, finally, the conclusion [5].

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1.0.2 This paper follows **the Harvard Referencing System** (2019). For other conventions and bibliography, please refer to the comprehensive **Sutta Discovery Guide** (SD Guide), found in <http://dharmafarer.org>, or by messaging the author at our Telegram Sutta Channel, t.me/suttasangha.

SD is a full-time sutta project by Piya Tan and his wife since 2002 to translate the Pali suttas with modern commentaries, preserving key elements of the early Buddhist oral tradition, and teaching them to encourage their study and practice.

¹ G Agostini, "Partial *upāsakas*," in Richard Gombrich & Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (eds), *Buddhist Studies*, Papers of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference, Helsinki, 13-18 July 2003, vol 8. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008:1-34. He has also translated the *Upāsaka, jan'ālaṅkāra*, *The Ornament of Lay Followers* (PTS, 2015).

² My grateful thanks to Dr Agostini, too, for his US Berkeley thesis on *Indian Views of the Buddha Laity*, 1994, 2002.

³ I use "suttas" in the sense of "early Buddhist texts," which include early aspects or interpretation of the Vinaya and Abhidhamma. Broadly, the term "(Pali) Nikāya texts" may be used for the same purpose.

1 The background

1.1 STUDYING BUDDHISM

1.1.1 Scholars and shamans

1.1.1.1 Like the sculptor Pygmalion creating the beautiful statue of Galataea,⁴ good **scholars** often create the Buddhism they study. While Pygmalion falls in love with Galataea, scholars, ironically, must disown their creations so that they are seen as distant and worthy Gods to hold on to their heavenly stations amongst other Gods and their Heavens.

Often, too, these creative scholars play various roles, as in some classic fairy tale. Some seem to be like the wicked Queen with her magic mirror in her lonely palace; others like Snow White, who faces her wrath and charms. Then, there are the 7 dwarfs who preserve her living body in some forest sarcophagus, until one day some noble young prince comes along to give a charming, studious caress to awaken her. They may or may not end in wedded bliss, living happily after. More often, they set with the sinking sun, lonely in their twilight homes or weeding gardens for the remains of their day.

1.1.1.2 The same can be said, but less elegantly, for latter-day Buddhist teachers and theologians who are unable to accept the Buddha's gold standards of moral virtue and mental training. They are **shamans**,⁵ who, through the magic of words, work to resurrect the dead Buddha, as it were, and immortalize him, thus creating Buddhas in their own image.

They edit the Buddha, his story and teachings, and invent new fiction and dogmas about him and his teachings. They transform his tomb into a magnificent mausoleum of memes of stately structures lined with statues and shrines, engraved marble and embossed steles, declaring how they have improved the old dead doctrines of the Enlightened One. New Buddhas, new Paradises, new Samadhis, new Meditations, new Mantras, new Buddhism: new Lamps for the old ones.

1.1.2 We change what we observe

1.1.2.1 There is, in physics, the famous **observer effect**, that is, the disturbance of an observed system by the act of observation. This is often the result of instruments used in the observation that, by necessity, in some way, alter the state of what they measure. A common example is checking the pressure in a car tyre. We need to let out some of the air from the tyre, thus changing the pressure.

Similarly, it is not possible to see any object without light hitting on it, and causing it to reflect that light. This is how we see objects: by *reflected* light. While its effects on observation are often negligible, the object still undergoes a subtle but significant change. This effect can be seen in many domains of physics, but usually become insignificant by using different instruments or observation techniques.

A remarkably unusual version of the observer effect occurs in **quantum physics** that is best demonstrated by **the double-slit experiment**. Physicists have found that the observation of quantum phenomena can actually change the measured results of their experiment. Despite the "observer effect" in the double-slit experiment being caused by the presence of an electronic detector, some think that the experiment's results suggest that a conscious mind can directly affect reality.⁶

⁴ On Pygmalion and Galataea, see SD 17.6 (3.1.3.6); SD 51.18 (2.3.1.5); SD 56.1 (4.3.1.3).

⁵ A traditional medicine-man or priest-doctor, perhaps related to his counterpart, the witch-doctor, amongst the North American Indian. It is possible that word used in northern Asia (Mongolian, Tungusian, Russian), comes, through Chin 沙門 *shāmén*, from Sanskrit *śramaṇa* (P *samaṇa*), "Buddhist recluse, monk."

⁶ Eg E J Squires, *The Mystery of the Quantum World*, CRC Press, 1994.

Not all scientists agree on this. Interestingly, some scientists even think that the need for the “observer” to be conscious is not supported by scientific research. According to early Buddhism, we cannot really measure experience; hence, this view need not detain us here.⁷ Those with training in physics, especially quantum physics, and practice, perhaps, an interest, in “quantum Dharma” (Buddhism as experienced and taught by the Buddha and the arhats), may further expertly elucidate this conundrum for our benefit.⁸

1.1.2.2 Steven Collins makes this instructive observation, which should be read in its entirety:

In the first place, and thinking about the issue with reference to Buddhist modes of expression, while it is true that there is—in principle, as one too easily says—a mode of analysis which can dispense with reference to persons (that is, obviously, the Secondary theory analysis in terms of ultimate truth, ultimately real Existents), such a reductionist discourse cannot serve the social, legal or behavioral purposes of the non-reductionist discourses which it can, in principle, replace.

This is not simply because certain practical ends are not well achieved by Secondary theory language: such as, for example, trying to book a “table” at a restaurant using the language of micro-physics to describe it. I think that consideration of this kind of case could show, eventually, that—to use Ian Hackett’s terms in a way he might not condone—there is no absolute distinction to be made between representing the world and intervening in it.

It is a philosophical fiction (albeit perhaps a necessary and fruitful one) to think that there could be an activity of *describing* the world, leave alone one of describing it *completely*, which would have no effect in it. But more significantly for my present purpose, if narrative is as basic a cognitive process as the logical operations of systematic thought, and if narratives predominantly—perhaps always—require continuous and coherent characters, then we clearly cannot describe the world completely without referring to persons.

This is perhaps one of the reasons why, although Buddhism accords evaluative precedence to its ultimate truth, enunciated in this text in the Debate section, it sees the conventional level of the Exhortation-Narrative section not as falsity (though truth and falsity are possible within it), but as a different kind of truth. (1997: 479 paragraphs and underscore added)

1.1.2.3 It is sufficient for us to understand that **the “observer effect” in scholarship**, where the scholar, as a rule, examines merely the word of the Buddha’s teaching (for example). Even when discussing an experiential topic such as meditation, the scholar depends on reports (at least 2nd hand information) of such experiences, often without ever experiencing it himself.

Even when the scholar actually “meditates,” by way of becoming a temporary monk, or going through retreats, or holding experimental sessions of Buddhists meditating, or doing Buddhist meditation, it all still boils down to what the scientists are looking for, and how they observe and analyze such persons, their experiences and their data.

Notice how scholars within the same generation often come up with different views of Buddhism, whether in part or as a whole, or even reject or rebut one another’s views. Over the generations, we would

⁷ P A M Dirac, *The Principles of Quantum Mechanics*. 4th ed. Oxford University Press, 1967:3. E B Dent, “The observation, inquiry, and measurement challenges surfaced by complexity theory,” in K A Richardson (ed), *Managing the Complex: Philosophy, theory and practice*, 2004; repr SSRN Electronic Journal, 2013: <http://faculty.uncfsu.edu/edent/Observation.pdf>.

⁸ Some basic reading on quantum physics incl the foll: W **Heisenberg**, *Physics and Philosophy*, 1958:137; J S **Bell**, “Quantum mechanics for cosmologists,” in (eds) Isham, Penrose & Sciama, *Quantum Gravity 2: A second Oxford symposium*, OUP, 1981:611; **Bell**, *Speakable and Unsayable in Quantum Mechanics*, CUP, 2004:1970. On the nature of quantum physics, see further: [Quantum of solace: even physicists are still scratching their heads.](#)

have quite an interesting range of views about Buddhism, indeed different Buddhisms. We must then echo an old Tibetan saying, *mutatis mutandis*, **every scholar his Buddhism**.

1.1.2.4 Western scholarship in Buddhist studies, especially in **Indian Buddhism**,⁹ began in earnest in the 19th century, during the Victorian period, as part of the colonizers' efforts to understand the ways of the locals—by “going native,” as it were—to have a better handle on governing and civilizing us, as was the original purpose of the imperial discipline of anthropology.

At first, little was known to **western scholars** about the age and historicity of the small amount of Buddhist literature available, and practically without any western translations of Buddhist texts then. Naturally, some western scholars doubted the historical worth of their sources on Buddhism. Yet, there was a persistent historical puzzle, like some Rosetta stone, that piqued the scholar's curiosity, a seed, surely, that would yield a profitable harvest in the academic field.

A pioneer French scholar, Emile Senart, in his “*Essai sur la légende du Buddha*” (1873, 2nd ed 1882), even claimed that the Buddha was a myth. Accounts of the Buddha's life were interpreted as transformations of pre-Buddhist myths of a solar god.¹⁰ Although he did not deny the possible existence of reliable historical sources on the Buddha, his approach effectively downplayed such concerns. The Dutch scholar, Hendrick Kern, soon after him, went on to completely deny the existence of the historical Buddha.¹¹

British scholars were more sympathetic, even enthusiastic, about early Buddhism. The British scholar, Thomas William Rhys Davids, in his *Buddhism, being a sketch of the life and teachings of Gautama the Buddha* (1877), defended the historicity of the Buddha as presented in the then unpublished **Pali texts**.¹² Rhys Davids founded the **Pali Text Society** (London) in 1881 “to foster and promote the study of Pāli texts.” The study of early Buddhism then began to grow in earnest.

1.1.2.5 However, in recent times, especially in the US, extreme skepticism towards Indian Buddhism similar to that of Senart and Kern resurfaced, such as in the works of Gregory Schopen (1997:3). This innovative trend rested mainly on the curiously narrow assumption “that we cannot know anything about early Buddhism because all the manuscripts are late” Alexander Wynne rightly rejects such a notion: “[it] is vacuous, and made, I assume, by those who had not studied the textual material thoroughly.” (Wynne, 2005:66).

We thus see an interesting pattern in the academic study of Buddhism, reflecting the nature of sectarian religion and academic bias, even bad scholarship and bad translations. There were ethnic camps, an almost fashionable trend to rebut one another, in the name of scholarship, of course. One is tempted to imagine this to be like some duel between the evil stepmother versus the good fairy godmother. Cinderella meantime remains happily in her scullery awaiting the arrival of Prince Charming to free her from samsara.

1.1.3 The nature of fad and bias

1.1.3.1 Scholars, by training, even by necessity (insofar as they are not Buddhist, or have no direct Buddhist experience), tend to show a bias for facts: they try to be true to their findings, what they have observed, what they know, what they can verify, what they believe to be acceptable. Scholars, using the tools of their discipline—hypotheses, theories, researches, argumentations, debates, publications, lectures—construct a virtual reality of what they have observed and what interests them.

⁹ On this section, see SD 52.1 (1.0.1.2).

¹⁰ See eg de Jong 1974:76 f.

¹¹ H Kern, 1881 = vol 1; de Jong, 1974:79-81 (1975:24-28).

¹² T W Rhys Davids, 1877:15-17; 1899 (D:RD 1):ix-xvi; 1903:163-175. For his views on Senart, 1877:190-193. Hermann Oldenberg (1881) also rejected Senart's solar theory (de Jong, 1974:81 = 1975:28 f).

When that field is **Buddhism**, the scholar's reasoning and imagination construct a Buddhism that only makes sense to those trained in his or her field: Buddhology, philology, Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist history, anthropology or sociology of Buddhism, Buddhist art, Buddhist psychology, Buddhist literature. Squints (non-scholars) would surely be dazzled by such scholarly luminance, or admire the academic heroism from afar, often posting or approving some approving cliches on social media, or preaching their preferences to captive followers and credulous friends.

Such virtual realities, however, usually fade away as a new generation of scholars directs its attention to new theories and visions of Buddhism—if it still receives enough enrolment and funding. This is our lot, we who squint at books, live by the books, get published as books, perhaps canonized in books.

Often, there is some **paradigm shift**, from cutting-edge research that is theory-based to one that is data-based, then back to theory, and so on. We may even have something academically significant and exciting, such as Thomas Kuhn's ideas in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Perhaps, we may be courageous enough, as Karl Popper suggests in *Conjectures and Refutations*, to try to *refute* our own theories and views rather than to merely prove or confirm them (1962:36, ch 11).

1.1.3.2 This is, in fact, just what the **Dharma practitioner** tries to do, or should try to do: not to rely on *theory, text or tradition* (data) alone, but to seek true reality (empiricism). We have the Buddha's teachings in Pali, handed down to us from some 2500 years ago (or at least 2000 years ago). Can we refute the 4 noble truths? Or seek flaws in the teachings of the 5 aggregates or of dependent arising? The point is that we have to really understand, or at least try to understand, what the Buddha has understood. Then, we work to refute the views we have been holding against what the Buddha actually means or points to in his teachings.

By training, a serious Buddhist practitioner respects and loves the suttas and moral virtue; his main tools are mindfulness and meditation; his purpose, insight wisdom into the true reality of things. We thus begin with a **deep bias for reality**: we work to see *impermanence* in all things, even in our breath. We try to see in our *breath*—in our mindfulness, meditation, reflections, reviews, visions—a reality that underpins all things. This cannot be measured; hence, it is non-scientific; but it is just as real. We may even see both confirming one another.¹³ This is the nature of our quest in studying **early Buddhism**.

This is natural and wholesome *bias*, that is, a propensity for seeing and feeling what really arises and passes away within oneself, and observing this same reality outside, too. Far from measuring such an experience, we, the practitioner, in fact, work to “break the bonds” of our delusion and ignorance so that we will directly experience an ever widening vision of true reality.

A true scholar is unbiased to facts; a truth-seeker is biased to reality. For the latter, his vision is more likely to overlap with life itself than for the former.

Scholars create virtual worlds of what they observe; seekers dismantle worlds for true reality.

1.1.3.3 The scholar works with ideas and theories, trying to prove or debunk them, in keeping with academic rigour, that is, the **virtual reality** that is academia, along with its current trends and scholarly standards. **Dharma study**, on the other hand, begins with examining the theoretical teachings, which are then put to the test by personal practice until we reach some personal level of realization or direct understanding of **true reality**.

While **the scholar** tends to observe and measure things out there, such as why people behave in certain ways, or think in certain ways, **the practitioner** watches himself, looking at himself, within himself, *how* he acts and feels, *why* he acts and feels. The scholar, using his own mind, shaped and conditioned by academic training and personal inclinations, tries to see those outside things through the same lenses, all tinted and shaped by the same academic standards.

¹³ On the natural and mutual affinity between religion and science, see SD 59.7 (3.2.4).

A good scholar is a **Visionary**, who observes, imagines and constructs such a convincing virtual reality of Buddhism, one that is neither better nor worse than the true reality that is Buddhism itself (depending on where we look). At its best, this academic reality of Buddhism allows other scholars and students to work and wield their thinking and imagination, putting to test all the classes, texts, theories, views and visions in their academic life.

This is the fascinating Middle Earth that is academia, where few even vaguely recall the glories of Senart, Burnouf, Fausboll, Oldenberg, Frauwallner; or perhaps a very private, limited, Shangri-la on some lost horizon haunted by Govinda, Suzuki, Sangharakshita, to whom Buddhism is nothing but them! Many other scholars have been forgotten, and more are destined to be forgotten. However, we all remember the Buddha.

1.1.3.4 The question now is: Do scholars create bad karma when they try to debunk the Buddha or when they are simply wrong? I'm happy to announce that scholars are, as a rule, immune to karma on account of their **academic licence**. So long as a scholar works, teaches and writes in a disciplined and magnanimous manner, his academic excellence keeps him. Yet, scholars often take bold stands, even when they may not always be right—not just misquoting a sutta or inaccurately presenting some Dharma—but taking a stand that not all Buddhists would take, certainly not countenance.

In the last half of the 20th century, for example, scholarly honesty and academic excellence, with the help of remarkably revealing primary sources—such as the discovery of ancient Buddhist texts in the Mogao caves¹⁴ in 1908¹⁵—have given scholars a much clearer and truer picture of Chan/Zen Buddhism than what we have known till then, including the rhetoric of D T Suzuki, Heinrich Dumoulin, and others.¹⁶

Anyone who is able to read a paper such as this one, would be amazed at the clarity and veracity of the contemporary scholarly works on these texts. We better know now that much of later Chan (and Zen) was based on religious politicking, worldliness and human weakness, especially during the Song dynasty (960-1279).¹⁷ Despite these revelations, Chan and Zen Buddhism still thrive today. The virtual reality of academia only works for academics; the Chan/Zen virtual reality continues to work for the Channists and Zennists.

1.1.3.5 Scholars, understandably, are not always right: often enough they do make mistakes, even in the eyes of their peers. Senart and Kern, amongst others, believed that the Buddha was a solar myth. Furthermore, many psychologists in recent times famously held squinted views of Mindfulness, shaping it in their own professional image and needs, which were least of all neither renunciation nor awakening.

In fact, in the business of **psychology**, it is often clever labelling with some right-sounding psychologese that sells Mindfulness therapy, like Cinderella's missing glass slipper, or her magical gown, or her pumpkin coach. These artifacts will always fascinate others; and fascination is often healing with some tour guidance. The point is that there is always something worthwhile for us to learn from what the mind scientists do with what the mind does.¹⁸

Self-defeating sarcasm aside, we must admit that **psychological interest in Buddhism**, especially the meditation teachings and methods of early Buddhism, has whetted and honed its practitioners with a contemporary terminology and wider perspective with which to see how an ancient wisdom is now even more relevant than ever before. Indeed, when modern psychological ideas and ideals are appropriately applied to

¹⁴ Also called the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, a system of 500 temples, 25 km (16 mi) SE of the centre of Dunhuang, an oasis on the Silk Road in Gansu province. China. A cache of valuable texts was dug out in 1908 of the so called "Library Cave" which was walled up in the 11th century.

¹⁵ See SD 40b.5 (5.2.5.1) passim.

¹⁶ Among the great scholarship in this are those of John McRae, *Seeing Through Zen* (2003) [SD 40b.5 (5.5.3)]; Wendy Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission* (2007); and Bernard Fauré's works.

¹⁷ See eg **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b.5 Transmission outside the scriptures.

¹⁸ See eg F Didonna (ed), *Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness*, 2009, 536p.

early Buddhism—with its own rich terminology, theories, case studies, methods and ideals—it may, with benefits, be better understood in the language of modern science.¹⁹

The ancient oral tradition of early Buddhism makes better sense to the modern audience and educated individual, especially those who are not specialists in a spiritual path that is over two and half millennia old. Personally, I see such a **melding** of ancient wisdom and modern science as the patient metamorphosis of a **civil faith** of a future society, free from religion, from hunger, from our old savage ways—a future worth imagining.

1.1.3.6 The point remains then: we are often less moved by truth than we are by **beliefs and needs**, the hunger games of the mind, and the driving thirst of the heart. *The delusion we hold and cherish in our minds is more real than what we can know or feel outside, even with the best of academic excellence.*

- We are emotionally lost when we have nothing to identify with: we want something bigger than we are; the “sangha” as **tribe** gives us a sense of security.
- The face and fear of death dictates us to seek a sense of **permanence** and promise: we see this in **rituals and vows**.
- Conditioned by a desperate need for the approval of others, we simply fear even the very idea of self-reliance: we **doubt** our self-mage. We depend on others to accept and certify our existence, so that we have some **status** in the tribe.

Unlike the scholar, the Buddhist **follower** needs something to follow: we need identity, routine and the tribe. This is the **karma** that the Buddhist followers must bear. Since we see the Buddha as a person, and he dies, we are left with no refuge. We see the self as refuge all right, but this “self” is not the mind: it is an image it has created, a God in our own image, *that* is our refuge. We are so caught up with the tribe that we fail to see our own inherent impermanence. We have become *the group*: a small self as a spark of the bigger Self (like the Brahminical notion). We have rejected the Buddha for the Word of the Teacher, Guru, Master, Patriarch: we play with words. We call this the Big Doubt, the Mother of Doubts, and forget what real learning is about.

While a good scholar well **knows** that his learning is a virtual reality, we, as Buddhists, often *create* or accept this virtual reality for ourselves and *view* it as the final true reality: we do not even know this; even if we know this, we dare not accept it. Surely, the karma of such delusion is as big as, if not bigger than, this virtual reality we have imagined! **The delusion** within us is more real than all the reality outside of us.²⁰

1.1.3.7 The true practitioner, on the other hand, is an **Artist**—a poet, a writer, a singer, a dancer, a painter, a musician, a composer, a sculptor, a visionary—he examines the truth of things, understanding them, *connects with them, connects them, lives them*. He writes poems, tells stories, sings songs, dances, paints pictures, creates and plays music, crafts sculptures, imagines. He is at his best when he only sees what he is working with, not as self and other, but as truth and beauty wedded together, bringing forth the joy of learning as **art** in real life, but with a vision of better and greater things to come. He is an Artist.

The meditator, learned in the suttas, inspired by the Dharma, frees himself from the shell of self to become the breath he takes in and renounces, the love he feels and shows. This oneness floods him with a joyful radiance and clarity that light up the dark corridors and blind corners of his life until he fully sees his true self, and awakens to true reality, just like the Buddha.²¹

¹⁹ See **Buddhism as a method of self-healing**, SD 43.1 (9.1).

²⁰ Reading this, a friend, Vera Ries says: “A picture comes to mind: we are like a child watching the toy blocks in our hands in close-up against the world surrounding us in the background.” (6 Sep 2021)

²¹ See esp **Pāvaraṇā S** (S 8.7), SD 49.11; **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), 49.10.

1.1.3.8 Most Buddhists are gratified, even jubilant, at the fact that there are “**Buddhist**” scholars, especially *western* Buddhist scholars. It is, of course, naïve, even if it is a happy conclusion that all scholars of Buddhism are “Buddhist,” or that all psychologists who conscript Buddhist mindfulness in their professional work are “Buddhist.” The reality is that they are *first and foremost* professionals in the sense that they should know their work well (enough) and feel deserving of lucrative wages in doing so.

Unsurprisingly, we even have Christians (mostly Catholic or Anglican) who are specialists in Buddhist studies, especially outside of early Buddhism as an academic subject.²² Very often, those teaching early Buddhism are very likely to be practitioners, too.²³ Since 2000, especially with the publishing of *Buddhist Theology* (2020), an anthology of “confessions of faith” by Buddhist scholars, edited by Roger Jackson and John Makransky, were more than willing to declare that they were “Buddhist scholars.”

Ideally, then, there should be a harmonious blending of the two disciplines: the scholarly and the spiritual (in practice). Such a scholar may still measure Buddhism following academic discipline, and earn his scholarship, but he teaches with a commitment to the teaching and truth, so that others (his students and readers) not only learn Buddhism, but also learn to live Buddhism. Surely, a true scholar is **changed by what he observes**: for, how can one see beauty but not feel *joy*, see truth but not see *love*.

A **true scholar**, then, is refined in his acts of body and speech, brightened in his mind, lightened in his heart by the joy of learning, like the learner on the path of awakening. Blessed are we who see both the letter and the spirit of Dharma, the truth and beauty of the Buddha’s wisdom, our legacy that awaits within, to be unlocked by the key of timelessness.

1.1.4 Buddhism and Buddhisms

1.1.4.1 The word “**Buddhism**” often means different things to different Buddhists, and means something else to the outsider, the non-Buddhist observer. Basically, when a Buddhist says “Buddhism,” he usually means HIS Buddhism, the sect or tradition *he* follows, or the kind of Buddhism *his* temple practises. Outsiders or observers tend to use or see the same word as a blanket term for ALL kinds of Buddhisms.

While it is true that, as a rule, all Buddhists who accept **Sakyamuni** as their historical teacher or as the founder of Buddhism who is relevant today as ever before, would accept other Buddhist sects and traditions as “Buddhism,” this is mostly true as a kind of professional or religious courtesy: crudely put, it’s good for business. This seems to work very well as far as worldly matters go: conferences, opening ceremonies, invitations meals, common festivals, fund-raising affairs, and so on.

1.1.4.2 However, once Buddhists start discussing Buddhism, they are more likely to loudly disagree with one another than a similar dulcet discussion within other religious groups. It will take a dedicated essay or even a book to discuss this “intra-Buddhist divergence of views.” However, it is sufficient here to say that, characteristically, a Buddhist, especially a lay Buddhist, is free to follow a buffet selection of teachings and teachers from different sects, traditions and practices.

Unlike a Christian, who would swear by only one “confession”—Catholic, Lutheran, Pentacostal or some prosperity Gospel sect, a modern Buddhist is likely to select a shopping-bag of teachings, traditions, teachers,

²² There is the notorious case of Paul Williams (b 1950), a Univ of Bristol, UK, professor, a Mahāyāna specialist and Buddhist for 20 years, but converted or reverted to Catholicism, a professed lay member of the Dominican Order: <https://whyimcatholic.com/index.php/conversion-stories/buddhist-converts/65-buddhist-convert-paul-williams>. For a Buddhist response, see KONG Choy Fah, “An unexpected Mis-presentation of Buddhism from Paul Williams,” unpublished, Singapore, 2014, rev 2021: [download](#) or <https://independent.academia.edu/ChoyFahKONG>.

²³ This is especially true in the British field of Buddhist studies, which has produced some of the best scholars of early Buddhism today, such as the L S Cousins (1942-2015). The greatest Pali philologist of our times. K R Norman (1925-2020), however, although dedicated to Buddhist philology, was, by his own humble admission, not a Buddhist.

even Theosophy, to fit and form their own identity-kit of passions and proclivities, based on their personal conditionings and perceptions of the Buddha, Buddhism and the clergy. Savvy Buddhist preachers are mindful to present their teaching to richly fill these Buddhist consumers' shopping-bags with just the right products, discounts and free gifts; sweet-talk and small-talk on those products; and throw in some light remarks or tale for a good laugh.

Such a Buddhism needs to be relevant to the times; it must entertain its consumers' needs and biases, attract sponsors and patrons, if it is to survive. The most popular preachers, the celebrity teachers, are those who can be all things to all (wo)men, who are each a Buddhism unto himself or herself. Yet, this is a Buddhism of the crowd, held together by the karma of charisma of both teacher and follower, of affluence and influence, of buildings, titles, status, Paypal and memes.²⁴

1.1.4.3 The Buddhism we are likely to encounter, say, in Malaysia or Singapore, or in any major city in the world, is likely to be **race-based**,²⁵ that is, some kind of **ethnic Buddhism**: Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Sinhala, Thai, Burmese or Cambodian. As a rule, in such ethnic Buddhisms (notice the plural), **race and culture** come first: Buddhism is conscripted into their service. Members who are able to chant Pali texts like the monks, or worship relics, or "transfer" mega-merits to others, are upheld as the Temple elite. This is the Buddhism of sophisticated mental colonization and foreign aids.²⁶

Hence, we may end up learning the native language, or at least use their ethnic terms and mode of dress. Japanese Buddhism, especially in the form of Zen, appeals to many westerners because of its intellectual inclination, psychological wordplay and exotic ritualism. It is perhaps unique that the western Zen temples are basically **franchises** from Japan.

It also gives Zennists a sense of freedom in the latitude with which they use traditional Buddhist terms like "monks," "nuns" and "sangha," which they apply to a married clergy who are lay practitioners. The ethnic Shin (Pure Land) Buddhists even have their own organization, the "Buddhist Churches of America." This is, of course, a part of their effort to be as American as possible, especially after the painful and embarrassing difficulties they faced as an ethnic community when the US was at war with Japan.

1.1.4.4 Despite the diverse forms of **Buddhisms** (we can now see the meaningfulness of this plural form)—indeed, because of this diversity—each Buddhist sect, each Buddhism, has its own language, liturgy, sacred rituals, calendar and personalities. But they **do not have a common scripture** the way the Muslims have their Quran, or the Christians their Bible. Many of these Buddhist communities even have their own Buddha as "patron saint," not Sakyamuni, but Amitabha Buddha, Guanyin, Kṣitigarbha or some Bodhisattva as the principal altar on their shrine.²⁷

1.1.4.5 Even more remarkably, rarely do ethnic Buddhists seem to see *as primary* the ancient **Pali suttas** that are the oldest authentic records we have of the historical Buddha's teachings. For many of them, they either have never heard of them or regard them as too difficult for any "common lay person" to read. This idea is further encouraged, even initiated, by busy and business-minded clergy, from whom we often hear such remarks:

²⁴ See **Memes**, SD 26.3.

²⁵ I'm more inclined to use "culture-based" or "civilization-based," but "race" seems to reflect this situation as it is.

²⁶ This is descriptive of Buddhism in Malaysia and Singapore. For an interesting study of modern Sinhala Buddhism in this connection, see H L Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, 1999.

²⁷ For a well-received recent study, see Jack CHIA, *Monks in Motion: Buddhism and modernity across the South China Sea*, 2020.

“The sutras (or suttas) are too difficult for any of us, especially lay Buddhists, to read. As lay Buddhists, we should diligently perform the rituals and recite Amitabha’s name, and listen to the master’s (*shifu*) teachings.”

Oddly, too, even amongst the Theravāda Buddhists themselves, there is rarely emphasis on the suttas as sacred scripture. Some Buddhists even pride themselves in *not* having such a scriptural tradition. One of the reasons for this seems to be that they have been taught so by some modernist or “Protestant” priests from Sri Lanka. In other words, instead of the reliance on scripture, they are encouraged, even instructed, to rely on **the teacher**, who would define and dispense the kind of Buddhism they should know, practise and patronize.

The laity is also discouraged from meditation for the similar reasons, and also because those who meditate would not be able to serve or entertain the monks and dedicate themselves to the daily running of the temple or centre, organizing its fund-raising projects, running the temple shops (selling books and religious items), and so on.

On the bright side, when a lay follower who is able to read, is introduced to **the Pali suttas**—at least in our experience with the suttas in the SD (Sutta Discovery) series—the feedback is that they are surprised at how easy the suttas actually are, as well as remarkably interesting and instructive (especially without the abridgements and lack of paragraphing, as in the commercial translations).

1.2 HOW BUDDHISTS SEE BUDDHISM

1.2.1 Seeing the sense and making sense

1.2.1.1 Even amongst Buddhist practitioners, **the letter** (or word) (*vyañjana*) of the Dharma (the teaching) must at the simplest level be determined whether it is implicit, whose sense “needs to be drawn out” (*neyy’attha*), or it is explicit, whose sense “has been drawn out” (*nīṭ’atṭha*), so that it has a definite sense.²⁸ In the former case, the terms of reference or vocabulary are “worldly, cultural” (*lokiya*) or “conventional” (*sammuti* or *sammati*), while in the latter, the terms refer to specific teachings or realities in the “ultimate” sense (*param’attha*).

An **implicit** teaching or statement is, by definition, *conventional*, expressed in a theoretical way or refers to specific ideas, such as “beings” (man, woman, deva, animal, house, etc), the names of people (Gotama, Vessantara, Ānanda, etc), stories and literary language: these are provisional (*pariyāya*) teachings. We must thus make sense of what these are, and properly explain or interpret them.

1.2.1.2 Strictly speaking, in the academic field, there is only the **interpretative** (*neyy’attha*). What we, as Buddhist practitioners, regard as “definite” or “ultimate” does not, as a rule, exist for the academic scholar. They may, of course, speak of **the ultimate** as a Buddhist *category*, but they do not need to accept it to be “true reality.” In the case of a Buddhist practitioner, it is both true and real. It is a correct statement and we accept it as truly existing and making sense for us, even when we have not realized it.

The last phrase is vitally significant: it means that so long as we are unawakened or have not reached the path, our understanding and acceptance of an ultimate truth is still only theoretical, like that of an academic scholar. The key difference is, perhaps, that both we (the practitioner) and the scholar can heartily accept, even with faith, the veracity of such a teaching. In this case, the scholar is (to that extent) a Buddhist, too.

1.2.1.3 Often enough, we have teachings given in **the spirit** (*attha*), that is, giving or referring to the meaning, that is, the teaching itself, such as the 5 precepts, the 6 sense-bases, the 5 aggregates, dependent arising, and so on. In such a case, the meaning or sense is clear from the context. Such teachings are said to

²⁸ See **Neyy’attha Nīṭ’attha Sutta S** (A 2.3.5+6), SD 2.6b; SD 47.20 (1.3); SD 89.10 (1).

have a “non-provisional” or “absolute” sense (*nippariyāya*). In this case, with proper learning, practice and understanding (*pariyatti, paṭipatti, paṭivedha*), we will, in due course, be able to see directly the sense of the teaching.

1.2.2 Status and state

1.2.2.1 Although the title of this essay is a question—**Partial precepts?**—which concerns lay practice, there is a related growing social reality, notoriously well known in Tibetan Buddhism, Zen and Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism generally, especially in urban institutions. This is practically a total disregard, even rejection, of the Vinaya.

In the case of the Chinese Mahāyāna, the laity are often unequivocally warned against reading the Vinaya. There is official silence by their elite who apparently see no obligation to explain themselves to anyone, especially the laity. Silence is often the best conspiracy. This is perhaps rooted in the nature of underlying Confucianist notion of hierarchy and elitism: respect those in power and serve them with unquestioning loyalty.

Clearly, the most probable reason for the necessary ignorance of the Vinaya by the laity, at least their silence on such matters, is because *it is not good for business*, literally. Most of the urban Mahāyāna clergy are involved in some kind of business, making a business of Buddhism, owning property, and a range of other worldly pursuits of the affluent.²⁹ Many monastics also have salaried jobs as lecturers, living in their own houses, oblivious of the Vinaya, living like laymen.³⁰

1.2.2.2 Sadly, the Mahāyāna laity have been so conditioned to respect and serve their Mahāyāna masters and clergy that their conduct may be said to be *cultish*, characterized by unquestioning faith, pious service and patronage. Such attitudes are so ingrained in the followers that this elitism acts as an effective social filter, attracting only the gullible, obsequious, tractable crowd.

The better educated individuals, those used to questioning almost anything, and getting helpful, at least honest, answers, are likely to turn to the more socially engaged western or westernized religions, especially Catholicism and Christianity, or stay religion-free.³¹ In fact, many urban Buddhists, even their leaders, often look up to such western faiths as models of success and worldly engagement.

There is also a curious growing fad amongst the affluent Buddhists and some urban monastics and their supporters to celebrate Christmas with more merriness than for Vesak itself.³² These are **the Christmas Buddhists**. There still lingers a simplistic racist notion that all whites are Christian, and that they are more successful and influential than most locals. Being a Christian is thus seen as a status, symbolic of progress, success, power, influence, wealth, whatever that props us up as being a part of society’s upper crust.

Once, a white Canadian scholar friend, who visited me in Malaysia, was taking a stroll in the neighbourhood. A local Chinese boy, noticing him, approached him with an approving smile, and announced, “I’m a Christian!” After a moment of flabbergast, my Canadian friend could only reply, “I’m a Buddhist!”³³

²⁹ See eg **The Three Roots Inc**, SD 31.12 (3.4.4): The Mingyi scandal.

³⁰ See **Money and monastics**, SD 4.19-23.

³¹ Christian evangelizing campaigns that targeted races or religions were common in recent decades. At the time of writing, there is almost no visible aggressive evangelizing efforts by any Christian group, mainly because of the devastating Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, Malaysia and Singapore, remain deeply rooted in the colonial legacy of the British and Christianity, and the phenomenal success of the local mission schools, with its twin diet of successful schooling and indoctrination of Christianity for the more affluent classes seeking the promises of a blessed future.

³² See SD 7.9 (3.5.3.5) n; Piya Tan, “A truly Buddhist Christmas?” *Revisioning Buddhism*, 101217, 2010: <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/RB31-Truly-Buddhist-Christmas-1012291.pdf>.

³³ See also SD 19.2a (2.3.3).

1.3 PRECEPTS: NATURAL AND CONVENTIONAL MORALITY

1.3.1 The 5 precepts

1.3.1.1 Before we can have any fruitful or meaningful discussion on the practice of “partial precepts,” we need to understand the nature of the precepts, especially their vital difference from the training rules of the Vinaya. Here are some salient points we must consider in this significant matter:

- (1) The 5 precepts [1.3.1.2] are rooted in **natural morality** [1.3.2]
- (2) Everyone, lay or monastic, Buddhist or not, bears the karmic consequences when they break any precept. [1.3.3]
- (3) The undertaking of the precept is an effort in reminding oneself not to break any of the precepts. [2]
- (4) Keeping the precepts is the most basic foundation of the 1st of the 3 trainings. [3]

1.3.1.2 The 5 precepts (*pañca,sīla*) or 5 training rules (*pañca,sikkhāpada*) are textually laid out as follows:³⁴

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) <i>pāṇātipātā</i> | <i>veramaṇī sikkhā,paḍaṃ samādiyāmi</i> |
| (2) <i>adinn’ādānā</i> | <i>veramaṇī sikkhā,paḍaṃ samādiyāmi</i> |
| (3) <i>kāmesu micchā,cārā</i> | <i>veramaṇī sikkhā,paḍaṃ samādiyāmi</i> |
| (4) <i>musāvādā</i> | <i>veramaṇī sikkhāpaḍaṃ samādiyāmi</i> |
| (5) <i>surā,meraya,smajja,pamāda-ṭ,ṭhānā</i> | <i>veramaṇī sikkhā,paḍaṃ samādiyāmi</i> |

and translated as follows:

- (1) I undertake the training rule to abstain from killing living beings [from taking life].
- (2) I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking the not-given.
- (3) I undertake the training rule to abstain from sexual misconduct.
- (4) I undertake the training rule to abstain from false speech.
- (5) I undertake the training rule to abstain from liquor, brews, intoxicants, the bases for heedlessness.

1.3.2 Natural morality

1.3.2.1 Although the term “**natural morality**” (*pakati sīla*) does not appear in the Pali canon, the idea clearly refers to the fact that a karmic or intentional action bears its own fruits (note that “intentional action” is singular, and “fruits” is plural).³⁵ It refers to the “natural justice” of karma and its fruition. Karma, as **natural morality** is how the nature of conscious existence, the universal true reality characterizing and underpinning all life, human and non-human; as below, so above and beyond this world.³⁶

³⁴ See SD 59.5 (5).

³⁵ The fruits of a karmic act ripen whenever the conditions are right [SD 18.1 (6)], and their effects are relative to the doer’s moral level [**Loṇa,phala S** (A 3.99), SD 3.5]. We become our karma; we *are* our karma, until and unless we are awakened as an arhat (like the Buddha). See also SD 59.5 (2.0.3).

³⁶ On natural morality (*pakati,sīla*) and conventional morality (*sammuti,sīla*), see SD 30.8 (8.4.2.2); SD 37.8 (2); SD 40a.1 (13.2). On prescribed morality (*paññatti sīla*), see SD 56.1 (4.2.1.4).

1.3.2.2 The Pali Commentaries often speak of “natural morality” (*pakaṭṭi, sīla*)³⁷ and “conventional morality” (*paññatti, sīla* or *paññatti, sīla*).³⁸ Natural morality is the morality of the 5 precepts [1.3.1], or more broadly, of the 10 courses of actions (*kamma, patha*).³⁹ Occasionally, the first 4 precepts appear without the 5th (abstaining from intoxicants) (eg M 114).⁴⁰ These 4 precepts are also those of “natural morality,” and are also found in other religions of the Buddha’s time, such as in their practice of “restraint” (*yama*) (Yoga Sūtra 2:29) and the *anuvrata* of the Jains.⁴¹

1.3.3 Conventional morality

1.3.3.1 Conventional morality (*paññatti sīla*), on the other hand, are rules, conduct and their consequences introduced by an individual (such as a teacher), a group (a religious tribe) or an institution (the government) that applies to others who follow that individual, or are members of a tribe or a community, or who live in a country. A Buddhist example is that of the monastic community, whose members have freely undertaken to observe such rules as promulgated by the Buddha and the early sangha, and which defines their legitimacy and authenticity as practitioners of the Dharma.

1.3.3.2 In the case of **the Vinaya**, although much of its rules are conventional morality, we have vowed to observe them, and others respect us, understanding that we are doing just this. Hence, to set them aside because they are “inconvenient,” “outdated” or simply because we want our way, is a dark misdeed rooted in a pernicious wrong view. We then are wearing the monastic robes under false pretences, especially when the laity shows us respect and supports us. This entails heavy bad karmic consequences.

The monastic almsbowl is noticeably missing from many such “modernist” monastics who have tacitly rejected the Vinaya and yet pretend to be renunciants. An informed Buddhist will at once notice that they are rarely clean-shaven, often well-fed or obese, overdressed, and socially engaged. When they do have the bowl, it becomes merely a fetish to evoke an aura of mystique to generate charisma, or as a container for attracting donations—which is clearly against the Vinaya.⁴²

They often have salaried jobs and live in houses, eating whenever they like, and enjoying more pleasures that most laity do. Yet, they do not even keep the precepts that the laity follow. The Buddha has often warned against such deleterious conduct by monastics.⁴³ Will there come a time when they will take off their robes altogether, and have families?⁴⁴ Otherwise, their appearances and pretences only deceptively serve as a meme⁴⁵ or disguise for hollow religiosity and Tartuffism.⁴⁶ [3.1.2.3]

³⁷ Often glossed as “inherent morality” (*sabhāva, sīla*): DA 2:435, 4:180; PmA 1:219; ItA 104; Vism 1:41; cf **Mahā-padāna S** (D 14) & **Acchariya, abbhūta S** (M 123), where the Bodhisattva’s mother, while bearing him, is “morally virtuous by nature” (*pakatiyā sīlavatī*), followed by 5 precepts (D 14, 18/2:12 f; M 123, 9/3:120). On the 5 universal values, see SD 37.8 (5.1.2).

³⁸ AA 3:410, 733.

³⁹ “What is called ‘talk on moral virtue’ should be spoken of in terms of the courses of action or in terms of what is to be enacted or to be designated” (*sīla, kathā ca nām’esā kamma, patha, vasena vā paññatti, vasena vā kathetabbā hoti*, AA 3:733). On the courses of action (*kamma, patha*), see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41.7-14/1:286-288), SD 5.7.

⁴⁰ M 114, 5/3:47 (SD 39.8). See also **Sālhā S** (S 3.66, 3 passim), SD 43.6; SD 59.5 (2.5.1.3); SD 47.3b (2.1).

⁴¹ Jaini 1979:170-178. On “natural morality,” also called basic morality or universal morality, see Kellenberger 2001:32-34.

⁴² See **Money and monastics**, SD 4.19-23.

⁴³ See **Dharma-ending age**, SD 1.10.

⁴⁴ Such monastics are called “yellownecks” (*kāsāva, kaṅṭha*): **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 142, 8), SD 1.9; **Dh 307a**, SD 19.1(6.3); SD 49.3a(2.1.3), SD 28.9b.

⁴⁵ See **Meme**, SD 26.3.

⁴⁶ On Tartuffism, see SD 7.9 (4.4.3.2).

1.3.3.3 As we have noted, **the 5 precepts** are the expressions of natural morality [1.3.2]. Profoundly significant, too, is the fact that the Pātimokkha, and the Vinaya as a whole, are rooted in the 5 precepts. They are the fundamental bases for Buddhist training in moral virtue and mental cultivation. Hence, the 5 precepts are just as binding on monastics as they are on the laity. Logically, when a monastic is unable to keep even the 5 precepts, how will he be able to keep to the Vinaya rules?

Furthermore, since the 5 precepts are based on natural morality, they are, then, basically, a formulation of **universal morality**. After all, anyone who kills, for whatever reason, or breaks any of the 5 precepts, does so clearly out of *greed, hate or delusion* (the 3 unwholesome roots).⁴⁷ In other words, these are unwholesome karmic acts.

Karma is not limited to Buddhists and believers: they are like the air we breathe in. When we habitually break any precept, it is like we are dragged and drowning in one of the 5 currents of a powerful rushing flood. In due course, we will sink into the floods and drown. In short, then, everyone, lay or monastic, Buddhist or not, bears the karmic consequences when they break any precept.

1.3.3.4 My point in mentioning this peculiar diversity and individualism in modern Buddhism is to highlight an intellectual habit of scholars who tend to present their ideas or theses as if Buddhism were a monolithic or universal system, with common belief, attitude or practice; or that Buddhism, as a whole, is syn-chronic, unified, even *one and the same* during the time or duration of their survey.

Even within each of the 3 major “schools” of Buddhism—the Theravāda, the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna—there are diachronic (across time) developments, and there are regional variations, such as in **East Asian Buddhism**. Although the mainstream Buddhisms of Korea, Japan and Vietnam are rooted in Chinese Buddhism, they are each significantly unique in their beliefs and practices.⁴⁸

1.3.3.5 Furthermore, even though **Theravada** (the “southern” schools of Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Khmer and Laos), officially share the same Pali canon, and are linked by ordination lineages, there are significant differences in their teachings and practices, even denominations (*nikāya*). Ironically, although they all follow Buddhism, it is what actually divides them!

Yet, the Buddha, in his life and teachings, regularly worked with such differences and divisions. We see in **early Buddhism** how the Buddha reaches out to individuals and groups in accordance with their level of intellectual and spiritual capacity. To the neophyte, for example, he teaches using stories and familiar daily examples and figures; to the more spiritually ready, he speaks in parables, even intentional language⁴⁹ that seem to profoundly touch them, awakening them to true reality and freedom.

Even though early Buddhism is historically now our “classic past,” its teachings and traditions form the **canon**, indeed, the Ur-canon, the living common roots of all later Buddhisms. In other words, there is a meaningful unity of the early Buddhist texts, teachings and practices, so that we can, for example, usefully trace how the teachings of **the 3 unwholesome roots** (*ti akusala mūla*) evolved into **the 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*),⁵⁰ or the evolution of the different methods of monastic ordination (*pabbajja, upasampadā*).⁵¹

However, when it comes to post-Buddha or extraneous teachings such as those of the Tathāgatarbha (“Buddha-nature”) or of “partial precepts,” we may at best show some early canonical teaching from which such later ideas arose, or perhaps how such a late idea arose in revisionary reaction against a sutta teaching. Of course, we are then no more discussing Buddhism, much less early Buddhism, but **Buddhist theology**. This

⁴⁷ On the 3 unwholesome roots, see SD 59.5 (2.0.3.1).

⁴⁸ See **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b.

⁴⁹ See eg **Dh 97**, SD 10.6; SD 26.11 (6.5).

⁵⁰ See SD 55.17 (2) + Table 2a.

⁵¹ See **Pabbajjā A very short history**, SD 45.16.

would, of course, be of greater interest and profit to the academic scholar than to the Dharma-spirited practitioner.

2 “Partial precepts”

2.1 WHO KEEPS “PARTIAL PRECEPTS”?

2.1.1 Aparipūrī in the Sanskrit traditions

2.1.1.1 The key term in academic scholars’ discussions on “**partial precepts**” seems to be the tatsama⁵² *aparipūrī*, “incomplete” (*a*, a negating particle, + *paripūrī*, “completely full”), but it also has the senses of “unfulfilled, unaccomplished.” In the suttas, as we shall see [2.2], the expression is never used in the sense of “partial precepts” followed by lay followers, making them “partial upāsakas.” This was a post-Buddha innovation, apparently, a revisionist attempt at making their Buddhism more practical and more attractive to the laity. Understandably, such a revision probably arose in an urban or urbanized Buddhism dependent on the crowd for patronage and competing for social dominance.⁵³

2.1.1.2 Giulio Agostini has written an instructive paper on “Partial *Upāsakas*?” (2003), quoting many interesting sources, both the Pali, the Chinese (Āgamās) and the Sanskrit. In fact, it was after reading his paper, about a decade back, that I was moved to write this essay. I have summarized his main ideas, but focused on showing how the term *aparipūrī* and its positive counterpart *paripūrī* are used in Pali suttas.

According to Agostini, only the Sanskrit **Dharmaskandha** [2.1.1.3] mentions 5 types of lay followers (*upāsaka*), “adding the *aparipūrṇakārin* to the 4 mentioned in the other sources” [but see Mppś; 2.1.1.6]. Then, he gives a long note on the sources (2003:15 n30). In other words, post-canonical sources knew a version of **the Mahānāma Sūtra** attested in the Chinese **Dharmaskandha**, not in the Sanskrit. These texts, it seemed, had to solve a problem of classification: How do the 5 precepts correspond to the 4 *upāsaka* types? (2003:15). Agostini goes on to discuss this question.

2.1.1.3 The following are **the 4 kinds of lay followers** (*upasāka*) 鄔波索迦 *wūbōsuōjiā*, mentioned in **the Dharmaskandha Śāstra** 阿毗達磨法蘊足論 *āpidámó fǎyùnzú lùn* (T26.1537.454a15-18),⁵⁴ briefly referred to by Agostini [2.1.1.2], as follows:

- (1) 能学一分 *néng xué yī fēn*, able to train in **1 precept**, *ekadeśakārin* (abstaining from killing);
- (2) 能学少分 *néng xué shǎo fēn*, able to train in **few precepts**, *pradeśakārin* (abstaining from killing and stealing);
- (3) 能学多分 *néng xué duō fēn*, able to train in **many precepts** (ie, 3-4 precepts),⁵⁵ *yadbhūyaskārin* (abstaining from killing, from stealing and from sexual misconduct);
- (4) 能学满分 *néng xué mǎnfēn*, able to train in **full** (5) precepts, *paripūrṇakārin* (abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants): this is the true *upāsaka*, 鄔波索迦 *wūbōsuōjiā*.

⁵² Tatsama refers to a Pali word that is identical to Skt. See BHSD: *paripūrī*.

⁵³ A fascinating study of such religious competition and spiritual materialism can be seen in Chin Buddhism, esp in the Song dynasty: **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b esp (5.3-5.5).

⁵⁴ **Dharmaskandha**, which some scholars date as early as 300 BCE, is one of the 2 oldest works (along with Saṅgīti-paryāya) in the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, and, in contents, analogous to Vibhaṅga of the Pali Abhidhamma. Today we only have the Chin tr, 法蘊足論 *fǎ yùn zú lùn*, tr by Xuanzang’s team in 659 CE.

⁵⁵ However, the Chin text here only mentions 3 precepts.

According to Agostini, “My impression is that the fourfold classification is earlier [amongst the Sanskrit teachings], and that it developed to determine how many types of *aparipūri* or *aparipūra upāsakas* (the only incomplete category mentioned in the *āgama/nikāyas*)⁵⁶ there might be. In other words, originally the *ekadeśa-*, *pradeśa-*, and *yadbhūyaskārin* were all meant as ***aparipūrṇakārin***; for this reason, this term does not occur in the fourfold classification.”⁵⁷ (2003 id)

To confirm this impression, adds Agostini, one may notice that such an understanding of the term *aparipūrṇakārin* informs a passage from **the Saṃyuktābhidharmahṛdaya**:⁵⁸

“Why is there no *upāsaka* whose *saṃvara* [restraint] is incomplete (*aparipūrṇa*)? ... If there isn’t, why did [the Buddha]⁵⁹ mention the *ekadeśakārin* and the other [3 incomplete] *upāsakas*?”⁶⁰

Later, the Sanskrit *Dharmaskandha* came up with a neater classification, turning the *aparipūrṇakārin* into a separate category. (Agostini 2003:15 f)

2.1.1.4 Vasubandhu, in his **Abhidharma,kośa** (Abhk),⁶¹ too, mentions only 4 kinds of lay followers [2.1.1.4]: “the 1-precept keeper” (*eka,deśa,kārin*), “the 2-precept keeper” (*pradeśa,kārin*), “the 3-4-precept keeper” (*yad,bhūyas,kārin*), and the “complete-precept keeper” (*paripurṇa,kārin*).⁶² He discusses the question: If they are all *upāsakas*, why are there prescribed 4 kinds of them?

Paramārtha’s Abhk translation is not helpful. It only says: “Keeping 1, *ekadeśa*; keeping 2, *pradeśa*; keeping 3, *yadbhūyaḥ*; keeping 4, *paripurṇa*,” 一持一處。二持少處。三持多處。四持具處 *yī chí yī chù. èr chí shǎo chù. sān chí duō chǔ. sì chí jù chù.*⁶³ We have to make out the meanings or usages of the Sanskrit terms for ourselves.

Vasubandhu, for his part, does not explain how the 5 precepts are distributed. Paramārtha seems to be unsure about the matter. In short, the whole affair of “partial precepts” is not a certain teaching in the Sanskrit tradition. One reason for such divergent views and situations is that these Sanskrit texts may not have had access to other, older, related texts (such as the Mppś) [2.1.1.6], and are working on their own.

2.1.1.5 Xuánzàng (600/602-664), fortunately, is much more helpful. In his Abhk translation (T29.1558), Xuanzang explains that the “partial-precept” observers are not those who observe only 1 precept, or 2, and so on: “If it were otherwise, the *upāsaka* of 1 precept would be called ‘undertaker of 1 rule’ The question is to know whether there are any *upāsakas* not endowed with the discipline in all the 5 parts, but who are engaged

⁵⁶ This is Agostini’s view. The Nikāyā uses neither *aparipūra* nor *aparipuṇṇa* (not even in their positive sense) in this Skt manner.

⁵⁷ Agostini 2003:15 n30 (continued): The entire passage (T25.1509.158c22-29) is tr by Lamotte, *La Traité* (Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra: Mppś 821) [2.1.1.6]. In his *History of Indian Buddhism*, Lamotte refers only to this classification (1958: 77).

⁵⁸ **Saṃyuktābhidharma,hṛdaya** 雜阿毘曇心論 *zá āpítán xīn lùn*, “connected teachings on the heart of Abhidharma,” the last of a series of treatises summarizing Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma of Bactria and Gandhāra; based on Dharmasreṣṭhin’s Abhidharma,hṛdaya, and incl material adapted from Abhidharma,mahā,vibhāṣā; extant only in Chin tr Saṅghavarman (434 CE): Princeton DB sv.

⁵⁹ Ie, attributed to the Buddha; there is no such attr in the Pali sources.

⁶⁰ 何故無不具足律儀優婆塞…若無者何故說一行等優婆塞 *hé gù wú bù jù zú lǜ yí yōu pó sāi ... ruò wú zhě hé gù shuō yī xíng děng yōu pó sāi* (T28.1552.951b11-12.14; see 951c4-9).

⁶¹ **Abhidharmakośa** [SD 57.10 (1.4.2.2) n] 阿毘達磨俱舍釋論 *āpídámó jùshě shìlùn* by Vasubandhu 婆藪盤豆 *pó sǒu pán dòu* (in 1) or 世親 *Shiqīn* (in 2); trs: (1) *no title* (T29.1559 = K953) Paramārtha 真諦 *zhēndì*, 565-568 CE; (2) 阿毘達磨俱舍論 *āpídámó jùshě lùn*, Abhidharmakośa,bhāṣya (T29.1558 = K955), Xuanzang 玄奘 *xuán zàng*, 653-654 CE. Abhidharma.kośa,bhāṣya Vyākhyā, edd P Pradhan 1967; S Shastri 1973.

⁶² Abhk 4.41 :: Abhk:Pr 2:395-601.

⁶³ Paramārtha, T29.1559.233a15-16.

in only observing 1, 2, 3 or 4 precepts. No, according to the Vaibhāṣikas: the *eka, deśa, kārin* is an *upāsaka* who violates 4 of the rules he has undertaken.” And so on.⁶⁴

2.1.1.6 In fact, early in the history of Chinese Buddhism, even before Xuanzang [2.1.1.5], we do have mention of the 5 kinds of lay followers. This is found in Nāgārjuna’s **Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra** (Mppś; 2nd century CE) (translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva, 402-406). The relevant passages (T25.1509.158c22-29) are given here with their English translations, as follows:⁶⁵

是五戒有五種受。名五種優婆塞。	<i>Shì wǔjiè yǒu wǔ zhǒng shòu. Míng wǔ zhǒng yōu pó sāi.</i>
一者一分行優婆塞。	<i>Yī zhě yī fēnxíng yōu pó sāi.</i>
二者少分行優婆塞。	<i>Èr zhě shǎo fēnxíng yōu pó sāi.</i>
三者多分行優婆塞。	<i>Sān zhě duōfēnxíng yōu pó sāi.</i>
四者滿行優婆塞。	<i>Sì zhě mǎn xíng yōu pó sāi.</i>
五者斷姪優婆塞。	<i>Wǔ zhě duàn yín yōu pó sāi.</i>
一分行者。於五戒中受一戒。	<i>Yī fēnxíng zhě. Yú wǔjiè zhōng shòu yī jiè.</i>
不能受持四戒。	<i>Bùnéng shòu chí sì jiè.</i>
少分行者。若受二戒若受三戒。	<i>Shǎo fēn xíng zhě. Ruò shòu èr jiè ruò shòu sān jiè.</i>
多分行者。受四戒。	<i>Duōfēn xíng zhě. Shòu sì jiè.</i>
滿行者。盡持五戒。	<i>Mǎn xíng zhě. Jìn chí wǔjiè.</i>
斷姪者。受五戒已師前更作自誓言。	<i>Duàn yín zhě. Shòu wǔjiè yǐ shī qián gèng zuò zì shìyán.</i>
我於自婦不復行姪。是名五戒。	<i>Wǒ yú zì fù bù fù xíng yín. Shì míng wǔjiè.</i>

“There are 5 ways of undertaking (the 5 precepts), namely, the **5 kinds of upāsakas**:
 firstly, an upāsaka keeping one precept;
 secondly, an upāsaka keeping a few precepts;
 thirdly, an upāsaka keeping more precepts;
 fourthly, an upāsaka keeping the full precepts;
 fifthly, an upāsaka abstaining from sexual misconduct;

one-precept practitioner, keeps one precept out of the 5, unable to keep 4 precepts;
 few-precept practitioner, able to keep to 2 or 3 precepts;
 more-precept practitioner, keeps to 4 precepts;
 full practitioner, keeps to all the 5 precepts;
 one who is celibate, having accepted the 5 precepts, further vows before the teacher,
 ‘I no longer commit adultery against my wife.’ These are the 5 precepts.”⁶⁶

Reading both the Chinese and its English translation, we can easily notice that the passage does not at all say that these upasakas each keep only a certain number of precepts to the exclusion of the rest, but that it refers to their ability to keep only that particular one or those mentioned, and breaking the others. Read thus, this does not contradict the early Buddhist texts. Mppś is merely elaborating on the extent to which these upasakas are able to keep to the precepts.

⁶⁴ Xuanzang 玄奘 T29.1558.76a1-b11. See Abhidharmakośa (Pradhan 1975:215 f = Shastri 1973 2:625-627). See Abhk:Pr 2:721 n124.

⁶⁵ See Agostini 2003:15 n30.

⁶⁶ Mppś (821) also adds the *samucchinna, raga* (Mppś 2:821, 4:1923), ie, the *upāsaka* who abstains from all sexual activities, “also mentioned in **Gavesī S** (A 5.180)” [4] [but there is no such mention]. Mppś was also tr Xuanzang, 660-663; French tr Lamotte 1944-80. See Agostini 2003:15 n30.

2.1.1.7 One last point we will consider here is the Abhidharma,kośa record of a debate over the Sanskrit version of the Pali *pāṇ'upeta*, “for life,” found in the phrase: *upāsakaṃ maṃ bhagavā dhāretu ajja-t-agge pāṇ'upetaṃ saraṇaṃ gataṃ*, “May the Blessed One remember me as a layman who has gone to him for refuge from this day forth for life.”⁶⁷ Clearly, in this context, *pāṇ'upeta*, a Pali idiom, can only serve as an adverb of time, meaning, “for life.”⁶⁸

We see this refuge formula in the Abhidharmakośa: *yāvajjīvaṃ prāṇāpetam śaraṇagatam abhiprasannam iti*, “From today, for the rest of my life, [consider me as an Upāsaka], risking my life (*prāṇopeta*), having taken refuge, believing perfectly (*abhiprasanna*).”⁶⁹ In his accompanying note, Pruden adds: “Such is indeed the meaning of the expression *prāṇopeta* = *srong daṅ bsño ba* = ‘risking one’s life’ = ‘giving up, abandoning one’s life’ (Hsüan-tsang). We see in note 112.iii [sic], that this is the interpretation of Buddhaghosa.”⁷⁰ (Abhk:Pr 722 n126)

According to **the Abhidharma,kośa** (Abhk), the Sanskrit *prāṇāpetā* does not occur in the Mahānāma Sūtra, at least in the view of the Sautrāntika (Abhk 4.31c(i)). A note in Pruden’s translation of the Abhk says: “*Pāṇupetaṃ* [sic] can be explained by *prāṇebhyo’petam*, *prāṇair apetaṃ*, *prāṇatipātādibhyo’petam*. This last version “freed from killing, etc,” justifies the Vaibhāsika doctrine. To say “‘Know that I am an Upāsaka free from killing’ is to undertake abstaining from killing.” (Abhk:Pr 722 n127).

Although Monier Williams defines *prāṇopeta*, “living, alive” (SED), very much as a synonym of the Pali *pāṇupeta*, the Sanskrit usages mentioned in Abhk do not reflect this usage of the early Buddhist texts. They are either a later misunderstanding or a sectarian divergence or innovation from the early usage. Even then, it is clearly too narrow to fit into the context of the well known refuge-going formula.

2.2 APARIPŪRI IN THE PALI TRADITION

2.2.1 Aparipūri refers only to the moral virtue aggregate

2.2.1.1 Throughout the Pali canon, the records of the Buddha’s teaching constituting early Buddhism, there is no mention of the practice of “partial precepts,” that is, **aparipūra,sīla* or **aparipūri,sīla*. This was a notion only found in post-Buddha sectarian Buddhisms, as we have noted above [2.1]. However, we often see the occurrence of *aparipūra* in various grammatical forms in connection with “**the moral virtue aggregate**” (*sīla-k,khandha*). We shall here examine some such occurrences in the Vinaya and the suttas.

2.2.1.2 In one rare occurrence, we see *aparipūra* referring to *sīla*, in the closing verses of **Cullavagga 8**, where it is said: “Not fulfilling one’s duties, one does not fulfill moral virtue ... when one’s duties are fulfilled, one fulfills moral virtue” (*vattaṃ aparipūranto na sīlaṃ paripūrayi ... yaṃ vattaṃ paripūranto sīlam pi paripūrayati*, V 2:235.75h+80b).

Clearly here, the context is *not* the 5 precepts, since the Cullavagga deals with monastic matters. Moreover, these 2 related sentences speak of monastic duties (*vatta*), which include one’s keeping to the monastic precepts. The 2 sentences broadly refer to the monastic training in moral virtue (*adhisīla,sikkhā*), that is, the

⁶⁷ On refuge-going (*saraṇa,gamana*), see SD 45.11 (3).

⁶⁸ *Pāṇ'upeta*: (lit) “possessed of breath, alive” (V 1:4,25 ≈ D 1:85,15 (DA 236,10) = S 1:173,23); (fig) life-long, for life (Miln 111,13). Apparently, only the literal sense, meaning “as long as we are alive” (*pāṇ'upetaṃ*).

⁶⁹ Abhk:GRET 215.21 f; Abhk:Pr 600; Pruden’s translation.

⁷⁰ Buddhaghosa, in his comys on *pāṇupeta*, says: *Ahañ hi sace pi me tikhīṇena asinā sīsaṃ chindeyya, n’eva buddhaṃ ‘na buddho’ti vā, dhammaṃ ‘na dhammo’ti vā, saṅghaṃ ‘na saṅgho’ti vā vadeyyan’ti*, “Even if one were to cleave my head with a sharp sword, I would not say, ‘there is no Buddha,’ there *is* Buddha; nor would I say, ‘there is no Dharma,’ there *is* Dharma; nor would I say, there is no sangha,’ there *is* sangha.” (DA 1:236,13; MA 1:137,7; AA 2:115,3; VA 1:173,-19). The meaning here is that one faithful would not give up the 3 jewels even at the cost of one’s own life.

morality aggregate (*sīla-k,khandha*). This is, as a rule, the context in which we see *aparipūri* or *paripūri* or both occurring elsewhere.

2.2.1.3 The (Ānanda) Subha Sutta (D 10) is a record of the elder Ānanda’s teaching on the 3 trainings—in *moral virtue, mental concentration and insight wisdom*⁷¹—to the brahmin youth Subha. Ānanda explains to Subha that, for a practitioner, having trained in the aggregate of moral virtue, “there is still something to be done,” meaning that he has to further strive for awakening itself. Subha, however, is already deeply impressed with the teaching of moral virtue thus far, and declares:

“Wonderful it is, master Ānanda! This aggregate of noble moral virtue is **fully complete, not incomplete**. And, master Ānanda, I do not see such a fully complete noble aggregate [207] of moral virtue in the recluses and brahmins outside of this community.”⁷²

The context here clearly refers to the “aggregate of morality” (*sīla-k,khandha*), that is, the practice of moral virtue and its presence amongst the monastics. There is not even a hint of any partial precepts here.

2.2.1.4 The Gāraṇa Sutta (S 6.2) and **the Uruveḷā Sutta 1** (A 4.21) are closely parallel (almost identical). They record the Buddha’s call to put the teaching above the teacher, that the Dharma should be above everything else in this world. At the Sutta opening, the Buddha declares:

“For the fulfilment (*paripūriyā*) of any unfulfilled (*aparipūnnassa*) **aggregate of moral virtue** (*sīla-k,khandha*) of mine, may I, honouring, respecting, dwell dependent on another recluse or brahmin. ...

I do not see any ascetic or brahmin more accomplished (*paripuṇṇa*) in **moral virtue** than myself, whom I might, honouring, respecting, dwell dependent on.”

After making the same considerations for the aggregates of concentration, of wisdom, of freedom, and of the knowledge and vision of freedom—that is, *the whole of the spiritual training*—despite the fact that the Buddha himself excels in all these, the Buddha nevertheless concludes:

“Let me, then, honour, respect, and dwell in dependence only on **this very Dharma** to which I have fully awakened.”⁷³

Here we see the genitive forms—*paripūriyā* and *paripuṇṇassa*—and their negative forms being used in reference to the aggregates of the 3 trainings and their fruits, that is, awakening and the knowledge and vision of it. There is no hint of the 5 precepts here at all, as in the other cases, too.

2.2.1.5 Now we will look at some occurrences of *paripūra* and *aparipūra* in their various grammatical forms in **the Aṅguttara** to show that none of them refers to the practice of “partial precepts.” As a rule, such expressions, as a rule, refer to the morality aggregate, the training in moral virtue.

(1) **The (Tika) Sevitaḅba Sutta** (A 3.216) describes a person who is worthy of being associated with, followed and served with honour and respect. Such a person is said to be better than (*adhika*) us in the sense that he has **fulfilled** the aggregate of moral virtue, and the other aspects of the path as stated in **the**

⁷¹ On the 3 trainings (*ti,sikkhā* or *sikkha-t,taya*): **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88), SD 24.10c; **Sīla samādhī paññā** SD 21.6; SD 1.11 (5).

⁷² *Acchariyaṃ bho ānanda, abbhutaṃ bho ānanda, so cāyaṃ bho ānanda ariyo sīla-k,khandho paripuṇṇo no aparipuṇṇo. Evaṃ paripuṇṇaṃ vāhaṃ bho ānanda ariyaṃ sīla-k,khandhaṃ ito bahidhā aññesu samaṇa,brāhmaṇesu na samanupassāmi.* (D 10,1.32/1:206 f), SD 40a.13.

⁷³ S 6.2/1:139 (SD 12.3); A 4.21/2:20 f), SD 55.3.

Gāraṇa Sutta (S 6.2) [2.2.1.4]. “I will myself work to fulfill (*paripurissāmi*) the aggregate of moral virtue that I have not yet fulfilled (*aparipūram*).”⁷⁴

(2) **The Sāmūgiya or Sāpūgiya Sutta** (A 4.194) is a teaching by Ānanda to some young Koliyas from the town of Sāmūga (or Sāpūga) on an abridged version of the 5-step path [2.2.1.4], that is, on **the 4 limbs of striving for purity** (*parisuddhi, padhāniy’āṅga*), that is, the limbs of striving for purity of moral conduct, of mind, of view, of freedom. Here, as in the preceding sutta, we see the usage of both *paripūra* and *aparipūra*, and verbal forms in connection with moral virtue as a whole, not just the 5 precepts.

He properly and diligently determines, thus:

“In just this way I will **fulfill** purity of moral conduct that I have **not yet fulfilled** or assist with wisdom in various ways the purity of moral conduct that **I have fulfilled**.”⁷⁵

Here again, we only see the word *paripūra*, etc, used in connection with the aggregate of moral virtue, in monastic training, without any hint of the 5 precepts or keeping of “partial precepts.”

(3) **The (Pañcaka) Agāraṇa Sutta 1** (A 5.21)⁷⁶ is a short text on the disciple’s progress up to mental concentration (*samādhi*), the means of attaining the path and progressing on it. The key verbs of this Sutta are **aparipūretvā**, “without fulfilling,” and its positive opposite, **paripūretva**, “having fulfilled.” Without fulfilling the basic morality of the practice of proper common conduct (*abhisamācārika dhamma*),⁷⁷ there is no fulfilling of the practice of a learner (*sekha*), without which one will not fulfill the 4 basic precepts, without which there is no fulfilling of right view, without which there is no fulfilling of right concentration; hence, no awakening.

However, with the fulfillment of *proper common conduct*, all the other limbs of training are fulfilled *pari passu* (one helping the next). In the end, one fulfills right concentration to gain insight into true reality and reach the path.⁷⁸ Clearly, no “partial precepts” will work here in any way.

2.2.1.6 The Sīla Sampanna Sutta (It 4.1.5) declares that arhats, those accomplished in the path, in terms of moral virtue, concentration, wisdom, freedom, and the knowledge and vision of freedom [preceding sutta], are often effective teachers who point out the true teaching with joy and clarity for our benefit. The word for “**accomplished**” here is *sampanna*, which is synonymous with *paripūri*.

The Sutta also records the Buddha as declaring that those who are unfulfilled (*aparipūra*) in these 5 limbs of the path, when they associate with these arhats (or their teachings) will be able to fulfil them.⁷⁹ The word *aparipūra* here, too, does not refer to the 5 precepts in terms of “partial precepts” at all.

2.2.1.7 In the 3rd part of **Sutta 13** of the Triads of Persons (*tayo puggala*), the question is asked:

“What sort of person, having been honoured, respected, should then be associated with, followed, waited upon?”⁸⁰ He is one who is better than (*adhika*) us in moral virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), wisdom (*paññā*).

⁷⁴ A 3.26/1:125.

⁷⁵ *Iti eva, rūpiṃ sīla, parisuddhiṃ aparipūriṃ vā paripūressāmi, paripūriṃ va tattha tattha paññāya anuggahessāmīti* (A 4.194/2:195), SD 56.6.

⁷⁶ See SD 55.8 (3.1.2.3 n) on Aṅguttara suttas with *gāraṇa*.

⁷⁷ Also called *abhisamācārika sīla*, ie, minor precepts dealing with proper monastic conduct, esp interpersonal aspects: SD 55.8 (3.3.2).

⁷⁸ A 5.21/3:15 (SD 74.20).

⁷⁹ It 4.1.5/104/107 (SD 59.13).

⁸⁰ *Katame ca puggalo sakkatvā garu, katvā sevitabbo bhajitabbo payirupāsitabbo.*

What is the reason for this? Because when one is unfulfilled (*aparipūra*) in these 5 limbs of the path, by such actions, the 5 limbs of the path will be fulfilled. (Pug 35 f).

This teaching is identical with that of **the (Tika) Sevītabba Sutta** (A 3.216) [2.2.1.5 (1)]. It is about the fulfilment of the limbs of the path, and has nothing to do with any practice of “partial precepts.”

2.2.1.8 The word *aparipūra, kāri* is often mentioned in the Sanskrit texts on “partial precepts” [2.1]. We see this compound in **the Bhaddāli Sutta** (M 67) in reference to a monastic “who does not fulfil the training” (*sikkhāya aparipūra, kāri*).⁸¹ It also appears in **the Sarakāni Sutta** (S 55.4), which we shall examine separately [4.1]. Also, in **the Gavesī Sutta** (A 5.180), which we will examine below [4.3], too. The compound occurs in many other places in the same context, that is, as a rule, in terms of monastic training.⁸² Hence, we leave this as it is.

2.2.2 Precepts: Keep them or break them

Moral virtue (*sīla*), as we have seen, is the 1st of the 3 trainings and, along with mental concentration (*samādhi*) and insight wisdom (*paññā*), form the foundation for progress on the path of awakening. “Moral virtue” refers to the **state** of being joyfully and progressively refined in our bodily and verbal actions. Whereas, the keeping of “partial precepts” [2], at best, refers to some kind of ritual **status** [1.2.2], an incomplete act which cannot be said to constitute moral virtue, since it is neither complete nor progressively heading for the path.

The state or condition of “**moral virtue**” (*sīla*) arises as the karmic fruits of natural morality (*pakati sīla*) [1.3.2], whose precepts we have properly observed. This morality (the act and state of being existentially refined in body and speech) consists of properly observing a necessary minimum of the 5 precepts [1.3.1], that is, as a whole, cultivating restraint (*saṃvara*) *against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication*.

When this latter is cultivated, we call the effort and its result, “**moral conduct**” (*sīla*). The word *sīla*, then, is polysemous, a word with different senses or nuances, some or all of which may apply at the same time. We have to understand and refine the nature of our body and speech through moral and ethical development before we can effectively cultivate our mind for understanding the Buddha’s awakening and gaining it ourselves.

3 The 3 doors

3.1 MORAL VIRTUE IS ABOUT KARMA

3.1.1 The karma of precepts

3.1.1.1 To live is to act; we act as humans, and try to do so humanely, which not only makes us *better* people, but contributes to the making of a good society. We act with our *body*; communicate through our *speech*; and think, feel and deliberate through our *mind*. These are **the 3 doors** of karmic action,⁸³ which constitute our waking consciousness as unawakened beings.⁸⁴

⁸¹ M 67,4.2/1:437 (SD 56.2).

⁸² A list containing “aparipūrikār*” (a wildcard search) will yield a long list from the suttas Vinaya and commentaries. Many of them occur in the suttas listed in this section in the same context.

⁸³ SD 29.6a (1.1).

⁸⁴ On the different types of consciousnesses, cognitive and existential, see SD 59.7 (2.3.17).

By “**karmic**” is meant that however we *act*, whatever we *do*, it will inevitably be bad or good, and rarely neutral. Our actions through the 3 doors, according to early Buddhism, are *bad* when they are rooted in greed, hate or delusion; *good* when they are rooted in non-greed (charity), non-hate (lovingkindness) or non-delusion (wisdom). So long as we are unawakened, we are the playthings of karma, the uroboros⁸⁵ of existence.

3.1.1.2 Although our **mind** works in tandem with our physical senses—what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch—the mind as *intention* works on its own, as it were, and guides or colours all such deeds, whether they are *conscious or unconscious*. Hence, **karma** is also created—meaning we are accountable for our actions—even when we act unconsciously.⁸⁶ In fact, we often do, acting by habit, *unconscious* acts, which define our person and personality.⁸⁷

3.1.2 Moral conduct as the basis for mental cultivation

3.1.2.1 We have thus far spoken of the precepts as constituting moral virtue, which defines a **moral person**, the “good worldling” (*kalyāṇa puthujjana*),⁸⁸ a wholesome individual, a healthy living cell that forms the tissues, muscles, organs of a functioning body, the good society. Hence, moral conduct is, in important and wholesome ways, about others. We need to behave well, moved by kindness, to be a productive and happy member of a wholesome society. This is **the “external” dimension of moral virtue**.

3.1.2.2 What is **the “internal” dimension of moral virtue**? This is moral virtue that works as the basis for our mental training (*samādhī sikkhā*). This is our moral learning process, our humanization, that refines the engaging existential mind, *mano* [3.1.2.3], into the observant, wisely proactive, cognitive *citta*, the good learning mind [3.1.3.3].

The Dhammapada verses 1-2 both say:

“The mind precedes all mental states” (*mano, pubbaṅgamā dhammā*). When the mind (*mano*) is defiled (with greed, hate, delusion), then, whatever we do or say is likewise *defiled*, darkened with karmic fruits of suffering. On the other hand, when the mind is undefiled (with non-greed, non-hate, non-delusion), then, our deeds and speech, too, are *undefiled*, blessed with karmic fruits of happiness. (Dh 1+2)⁸⁹

3.1.2.3 For our present purposes, we can say that moral training as the basis for mental cultivation (*samādhī, sikkhā*), is more than merely *not* breaking the 5 precepts [3.2.1.2]. In abstaining from these 5 naturally immoral acts, we are, in effect, working to free **the mind** (*mano*) from its immoral or defiled bent [3.1.2.2]. Here, *mano* is habitually dark, fed from the unconscious depths of the latent tendencies of *lust, aversion and ignorance* [3.1.1.2].

Mano or *manas* (Skt *manah*, derived from √MAN, to think) is the mind that thinks (*maññeti*), imagines (*maññati*), measures (*mānēti*), constructs (*māpeti*), projects (*nimmināti*); above all, it minds (*manasi, karoti*). Usually, such an untrained mind “minds unwisely” (*ayoniso manasi, karoti*, literally, “does *not* mind down to the roots”), as described by the preceding verbs. This is the mind that kills, steals, misconducts itself sexually, lies, gets intoxicated, and so on.

This is the laity’s mind who thinks (falsely) that if he does not undertake any precept, he is free from its karmic fruits, even when he does break them. This, too, is the mind of the false monastic, a Tartuffe, who

⁸⁵ See SD 23.3 (1); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.3).

⁸⁶ See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b.

⁸⁷ See **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a.

⁸⁸ SD 56.13a (7.1.1.2).

⁸⁹ **Dh 1-2**: SD 8.3(3); SD 17.3(6.3); SD 17.8a(4.5); SD 18.1(3.2); SD 57.10 (3.1.3.3).

lives off the laity, who rejects the Vinaya, who sees the Dharma not as wholesome states to be learned and mastered, but as **status** to wear and wallow in. He is a hollow person (*mogha, purisa*)⁹⁰ [1.3.3.2] creeping and crawling around⁹¹ with an “arrogant overestimation” [undue confidence] (*adhimānena*) of himself, like someone who claims arhathood when he has not even reached the path at all.⁹²

3.1.3 Moral conduct as the basis for Buddhist training

3.1.3.1 On the whole, **Buddhist training**, following early Buddhism, comprises the disciplining, refining and freeing our body, speech and mind. The training of the body begins with disciplining it to refrain from *kill- ing, stealing and sexual misconduct*. As we understand more deeply, more broadly, the universal values of life, happiness and freedom,⁹³ we further refine our bodily habits and perception of the body. [Table 2.2.2]

3.1.3.2 The universal values of life, happiness and freedom [3.1.3.1] are only real and beneficial when we understand and accept the value of truth, which is basically, a social ethic or contract based on the axiom: *as we say, so we do; as we do, so we say*. Our words and actions work in tandem, reflecting their mutual and universal nature, that is, the **reality** of *being in constant flux, never satisfying us completely, bereft of any true essence*.

To this end, our **speech**, when it reflects *truth and reality*, is the means of human communication and learning. In practical terms, speech should not only be truthful, but also unifying in social terms, pleasant in aesthetic terms, beneficial in ethical and economic terms, *without harming oneself, others or the environment*.⁹⁴ These, in fact, constitute **right speech**,⁹⁵ a fundamental limb, that of moral training, the very foundation of the 3 trainings, that is the noble eightfold path.⁹⁶

3.1.3.3 The early Buddhist figure of **the path** entails a journey, that is, a personal effort, since spiritual progress occurs only with proper self-reliance (*atta, saraṇa*).⁹⁷ Here, *atta* is neither some theological soul nor an existential self, but simply a *conventional* reference to the whole of the body-mind complex *to be known, to be trained, to be freed* by our undertaking the 3 trainings [3.1.4].

We have learned that our *bodily and verbal acts* are both rooted in the mind, which decides and defines their moral tone [3.1.1], and that our *moral conduct*, for its part, builds, refines and frees the mind. These are the 2 hands of the moral traveller on the eightfold path: that of **calmness** and **insight**, each washing the other clean, so that we progress *pari passu*, one helping the other, up the path.

The precepts have to be kept whole and wholesome for the sake of a *whole* and *wholesome mind*. Thus fulfilling (*paripūṇṇa*) the precepts, we focus on and cultivate a *less worldly* but *steadier* mind (***mano***), so that, in time, it brightens up as a radiant mind (***citta***).⁹⁸ Surely, then, we need to keep **all the 5 precepts**.⁹⁹ Clearly,

⁹⁰ See **Udumbarikā Sīha, nāda S** (D 25,24.2), SD 1.4; **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,6), SD 3.13.

⁹¹ An imagery from **Samsappaniya S** (A 10.205), SD 39.7.

⁹² See SD 59.7 (2.2.2.1).

⁹³ On these universal values, see SD 1.5 (2.7+2.8); SD 51.11 (2.2.3.4); SD 54.2e (2.3.2.5).

⁹⁴ These are the “3 points of utter purity” (*ti,koṭi parisuddhi*) of actions or moral conduct: **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7) + SD 1.5 (3).

⁹⁵ See SD 10.16 (3).

⁹⁶ On the noble eightfold path, see SD 10.16.

⁹⁷ See **The one true refuge**, SD 3.1 (3.2); SD 27.3 (3.1.1).

⁹⁸ On *mano, citta, viññāṇa*, as synonyms, see SD 56.4 (3.4.2.5). On their different roles: SD 17.8a (12), esp (12.5.4) summary.

⁹⁹ See SD 29.6a (1.3.3). On the 10 courses of wholesome karma (*kusala kamma, patha*), see SD 29.6a (1.3.2).

there can be neither weakness nor lapse by way of any “partial precepts”: moral virtue must be *whole and wholesome*, for further progress up the path.

3.1.3.4 We have in this section, in fact, given a summary of **the 5 precepts**¹⁰⁰ that form the practical moral code for human evolution. We are *only* born with a human body, and through our parents’ love, contact and nearness, we *mentally and emotionally* become **human**, that is, we imbibe the values of *life, happiness, freedom, truth and mindfulness* [3.1.3.2], or, at least, learn to respect them (take them for what they really are).

The 5 precepts, as the basic moral code for **mental evolution** keeps us *human*, so that we do not fall, even in this life itself, into any subhuman states of *beast-like, demon-like or hellish bent*.¹⁰¹ Since our lives are mind-based [3.1.2], such subhuman states are as real as we imagine them, and just a thought away. When we fail to control our own mind, these states will then control us. We become our what we are, what we do: we become our karma, our karma become us.

From this interconnected and unified nature of moral conduct, we can see that the 5 precepts work as an organic and holistic whole, benefitting self and society. Undertaking (*samādiyāmi*) the 5 precepts is simply a human way of reminding ourselves not to fall away from these basic standards of humanity. Clearly then, these precepts are not meant to be observed partially, since we may break any of them even *unconsciously*—so long as we act with greed, hate or delusion—we are accountable for our actions and must ourselves bear their karmic fruits [3.1.1.2].

3.1.4 Moral conduct is the basis for path attainment

3.1.4.1 In keeping the precepts, we cultivate moral virtue, which in turn is the basis for mental concentration, that is, the cultivation of the mind, the one called **mano** [3.1.2], that is, the kind of mind that needs to be **trained, tamed and freed**:

from merely thinking,	<i>to feel deeply</i>
from measuring,	<i>to spread positive emotion boundlessly</i>
from constructing,	<i>to deconstruct its self-imagined virtual reality</i>
from projecting itself outwards,	<i>to look within and see itself, as in a mirror lucidly.</i>

Above all, it has to “wisely mind” (*yoniso manasi, karoti*), to see conditioned things as they really are, as being *impermanent, unsatisfactory, nonself*.

3.1.4.2 When this mind (*mano*) habitually sees impermanence in ourself and all our experiences—as taught in all the 10 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25)¹⁰²—it sheds its defiled and defiling selfness, transforming itself into **citta**. It now sees things as *impermanent*, notices *suffering*, even appreciates *nonself* in the all,¹⁰³ that is, rising above the falseness of the whole constructed world we have created and lived in. This is a beautiful (*sobhana*) mind, richly creative (*citra*) of truth and beauty; a heart of boundless *love, ruth, joy, peace*¹⁰⁴—the essence of **Buddhist aesthetics**.¹⁰⁵ Such a person will surely reach the path as a streamwinner even in this life itself, if not, surely at the moment of passing away.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ On why the 5 precepts? See SD 29.6a (1.3.3).

¹⁰¹ SD 48.1 (5.2.4).

¹⁰² See eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

¹⁰³ On the all (*sabba*), see **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

¹⁰⁴ In almost colloquial terms, these are the 4 divine abodes (*mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā*): **Tevijja S** (D 13,76-79), SD 1.8; SD 51.14 (3.2.2.3); also **Brahma, vihāra**, SD 38.5. On the significance of “ruth” here, see SD 38.5 (2.3.2.1; SD 48 (5.2.1.3).

¹⁰⁵ On Buddhist aesthetics, SD 40a.1 (8.1.2). On truth and beauty, SD 40a.4 (8.2); SD 50.16 (1.1.1.4).

3.2 MORALITY, NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE

3.2.1 Moral omission

3.2.1.1 Here, we will briefly examine one of the essential details of moral action, as wholesome deeds of our body, speech and mind. Technically, the precepts themselves, when cultivated (*bhāveti*), are called *sikkhā,pada*, “steps of training,” that is, the act of **omission** (*vāritta*)¹⁰⁷ (keeping the 5 precepts), and of **commission** (*cāritta*) (respecting the 5 universal values)¹⁰⁸ [3.2.1.1]. *Bhāveti*, “made to arise,” is the causative form of *bhavati*, “to cultivate,” and are practically synonymous. However, there is a vital significance in using the verb *bhāveti* for the cultivation of moral virtue.

3.2.1.2 In early Buddhism, moral virtue begins with the good and right in the not doing (*veramani*), in restraint (*saṃvara*), in keeping with the 5 precepts. “**Not doing**” refers to the external expression of our moral being; “**restraint**” is the state of our inner moral being, keeping our fickle senses away from sense-objects rooted in greed, hate or delusion. In *not* killing, *not* stealing, *not* misconducting oneself sexually, we morally restrain our **body**.

In *not* lying, *not* slandering, *not* speaking harshly, *not* chattering frivolously, we cultivate right speech, wholesome communication. This is the vehicle of the Dharma as **word**, as sound: we should be worthily and wholly communicating the Buddha Dharma to others. We *resound* with Dharma because we *have* it, we *live* it, we *are* it.

3.2.1.3 The Buddhist training of the path begins with the cultivation of moral virtue, which begins with *not doing*, with **non-action**—not killing, not stealing and so on—because it is easier *not* to do something than to make an effort to do it. To do something (to act bodily or to speak rightly), we need to make the appropriate mental effort, the wholesome intention, followed through by the appropriate deed. In not doing, we only need to have **the mind**, the heart, for it.

Hence, **the apophatic language**¹⁰⁹ of negative morality with wholesome effect: the moral virtue of omission (*vāritta sīla*). This is also a hint of greater things to come. Training in moral virtue is the start of the path-journey, in bright thunderous silence of the body and speech, ending in the radiant stilling of the mind in sky-like peace, in **nirvana** (*nibbāna*), of which we cannot speak.

We cannot really speak of nirvana because it only arises, as it were, when we have fully renounced body and speech; when we are free from our senses and the mind, from the body that takes time, from speech that needs space. The mind projects both as our virtual reality. **Nirvana** transcends *time and space*; this means that it is beyond language.

Of that which we cannot speak, we must be silent. Perhaps, we may only express it through our own awakened being and presence, that we are *with* this world, but not *of* it. In this sense, the teaching is “against the current” (*paṭisotā,gāmī*).¹¹⁰ this is the essence of renunciation (*nekkhamma*).¹¹¹ This is, simply put, **the Assaji effect**.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ See eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

¹⁰⁷ This is related to a near-synonym, *virati* (fem) (“abstinence”) and to *veramaṇī* (from *viramaṇa*) (“abstaining from”). *Vāritta,sīla* is also called *saṃvara,sīla*, “the morality of restraint” (VvA 37).

¹⁰⁸ On *cāritta,sīla*: CA 311. Both *vāritta,sīla* and *cāritta,sīla* are mentioned in ThaA 3:20; SnA 1:331 f; CA 309, all beings need to cultivate or practise both.

¹⁰⁹ On apophasis, see SD 40a.1 (6.3).

¹¹⁰ On against the stream, see SD 29.6a (1.5.2); SD 34.5 (3.1).

¹¹¹ On true renunciation, see **Danta,bhūmi S** (M 125), SD 46.3; SD 46.15 (2.7.1.4); SD 66.13 (1).

¹¹² On the Assaji effect, see SD 58.1 (1.2.2.2).

3.2.2 Moral commission

3.2.2.1 Moral virtue is neither a status that we attain through a ritual, nor a conferment or certification by another, no matter how holy or powerful. Moral virtue arises through moral conduct, that is to say: by our living a morally disciplined life, we create the right conditions for moral virtue to arise. We are transformed by moral goodness. These wholesome conditions work as follows:

we mind 5 things; we do 5 things; we do not do 5 things, thus:

Cultivating lovingkindness ,	we respect <u>life</u> ;	we refrain from <i>killing</i> .
Cultivating (joyful) generosity ,	we rejoice in others' <u>happiness</u> ;	we refrain from <i>stealing</i> .
Cultivating contentment ,	we respect the <u>freedom</u> of others;	we refrain from <i>sexual misconduct</i> .
Cultivating truthfulness ,	we <u>communicate wholesomely</u> ;	we refrain from <i>lying</i> .
Cultivating mindfulness ,	we cultivate mindfulness and clear knowing;	we refrain from <i>intoxicants</i> .

All these **15 conditions** for moral virtue are summarized here, thus:

	precept <i>vāritta sīla</i>	practice (virtue) <i>cāritta sīla</i>	value (goal of precept & practice) <i>(pañca dhamma)</i>
1	not killing	lovingkindness	life (including health and productivity)
2	not stealing	generosity	happiness (including property)
3	no sexual misconduct	contentment	freedom (including respect)
4	not lying	truthfulness	truth (beneficial communication)
5	no intoxicants	mindfulness ¹¹³	inner calm (up to samadhi)

Table 2.2.2. Precept, practice, value¹¹⁴

3.2.3 The 5 precepts as essential morality

3.2.3.1 From our discussion thus far [especially in 2.2], we can see how our undertaking of the 5 precepts, as described in the Pali suttas, and practised, as a rule, amongst those who look up to the historical Buddha's teaching, is an effort in reminding us **not to break any of the precepts**. It is vital to understand why this is so. The precepts are neither rules nor rituals, but steps of training (*sikkhā, pada*), both for the laity and the monastic. In the case of **the monastics**, these basic precepts have been laid out in greater detail and design, so that, when they respectfully and diligently follow them, they will be able to quickly progress into the next level of spiritual training, that of mental concentration (*samādhi sikkhā*).

3.2.3.2 With the mastering of the mind, especially through the attaining of **dhyana** (*jhāna*), we, lay or monastic, will be able to free ourselves from the limitations of our physical senses, and tap the full powers of the mind. Emerging from such mental concentration, we will have the *calm and clarity* to expedite our vision of true reality of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and nonself. In this way, we, lay or monastic, will be able to reach the path of awakening in this life itself, at least as streamwinners, if not as arhats.

¹¹³ More fully, this is "mindfulness and clear knowing" (*sati, sampajañña*): SD 13.1 (3.6.3).

¹¹⁴ This Table is almost identical with Table 6.3 (SD 19.11). Further on *vāritta sīla* and *cāritta sīla*, see SD 37.8 (2.2) incl suttas. For details on values, see SD 37.8 (2.3; 5.1.2).

3.2.3.3 Considering the profound significance of **moral training**, the question of keeping “partial precepts” does not at all arise in the early Buddhist texts. When, for whatever reason, we are unwilling or unable to accept the key teachings of the Buddha, especially those of self-reliance and impermanence, then, *we will miss the whole forest for the trees*. When we stop with our knowledge and views, they hinder us from growing.

The trees (our views and ignorance) prevent us from seeing the fresh verdant forest of peace and plenty, even though it is right before us. If there is one key hindrance for later Buddhist theologians from truly appreciating the historical Buddha’s teachings, it is probably because they were neither able to see nor to accept **the Buddha’s death** as the final authentication of his teaching of the universal reality of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and nonself.¹¹⁵

Hence, they desperately saw the need to revise the teachings to deflect their religious despair for a new theology of Buddhas and for philosophies of Buddhisms: they only raise questions that glorify doubts. This is the dark forest, the dense jungle, they have wandered into and lost themselves in fascination, like deer caught in the blinding lights of oncoming traffic.

Hence, they need to clear the forest, cut down the jungle, but not the trees, especially the Bodhi tree (Dh 283).¹¹⁶ There is no path out of this jungle; they must only move on and out of it. Only then they will see the path to the ancient city.

4 Sutta teachings on moral virtue

4.0 Before closing this survey, we will look at a few suttas where terms like *aparipūra* are used, or where there seems to be incomplete or unfulfilled keeping of the precepts. In none of these suttas do we see any reference to the practice of undertaking “partial precepts,” or any idea to suggest that such a practice is either desirable or necessary.

4.1 SARAKĀṆĪ SUTTAS 1 (S 55.24, SD 3.6) + 2 (S 55.25, SD 77.8)

4.1.1 Drunkards don’t become streamwinners

First of all, we should be clear that there is no teaching by the Buddha—least of all, either **the Sarakāṇi Sutta 1** (S 55.24) or **the Sarakāṇi Sutta 2** (S 55.25)—that says or suggests that a drunkard can become a streamwinner. Sarakāṇi may have been a drunkard *before* his attainment, but both these Suttas say that he dies a reformed practitioner.

In other words, at some point late in his life, he stopped drinking, and takes the 5th precept with commitment. From the tone of the Suttas, it is also likely that he is more mindful, perhaps doing some kind of meditation, to help him keep the precepts [4.1.2].

4.1.2 The reformed drinker

While **the Sarakāṇi Sutta 1** (S 55.24) says that the erstwhile drinker Sarakāṇi “has kept to the training (in moral virtue, concentration and wisdom) at the time of his death” (§13.2), **the Sarakāṇi Sutta 2** (S 55.25) says that he “fulfilled the training at the time of his death” (§14). This probably means that he becomes a true practitioner in his last days as well as that his last thought is wholesome.¹¹⁷

The point remains that the 2 Sarakāṇi Suttas are not about a drunkard becoming a streamwinner, but rather that Sarakāṇi gives up his drinking habit and keeps the precepts, especially that against drinking. With

¹¹⁵ On the Buddha’s death, see SD 10.16 (1.3.2.1, 11.5.2.8); SD 27.6b (4.1.1).

¹¹⁶ See SD 15.10b (2.3.4).

¹¹⁷ On the last thought before dying, see SD 58.2 (1.1.2.3).

the help of some basic practice in mindfulness or meditation, he is able to calm and clear his mind so that he is able to attain streamwinning at the time of dying.¹¹⁸

4.2 THE 3 KINDS OF PERSONS WORTHY OF ASSOCIATION

4.2.1 The same teachings

Both the **(Tika) Sevitabba Sutta** (A 3.26),¹¹⁹ and the **Puggala Sevitabba Sutta** (Pug 3.13)¹²⁰—the former is found in the Aṅguttara, the latter in the Puggala Paññatti of the Abhidhamma—list the 3 kinds of persons in terms of worthiness of association, as follows:

The (Tika) Sevitabba Sutta (A 3.26), the (threes) discourse on those to be associated with, records the Buddha as instructing on the 3 kinds of persons in terms of **association** (*sevana*), thus:

- (1) one unworthy to be associated with, followed, served;
- (2) one worthy to be associated with, followed, served;
- (3) one worthy to be associated with, followed, served with honour and respect.

4.2.2 Benefit of associating with the 3rd individual

4.2.2.1 Both suttas list the same triad of persons in almost identical words, except that the latter is slightly shorter. Of interest to us here is the 3rd individual: the one worthy to be associated with, followed, served with honour and respect (*puggalo sakkatvā garuṇ, katvā sevitabbo bhajitabbo paṭirupāsītabbo*).

If an individual is not yet *spiritually superior* (*adhika*) to many others in terms of the 3 trainings (moral conduct, concentration and wisdom), he would aspire thus: “I will fulfill the moral aggregate of moral conduct that I have not yet fulfilled, or (further) assist with wisdom in various ways the aggregate of moral conduct that I have *fulfilled*.” (*Iti aparipūraṃ vā sīla-k, khandhaṃ paripūrissāmi paripūraṃ vā sīla-k, khandhaṃ tattha tattha paññāya anuggahessāmi*). The same is said of the other two path trainings, that of concentration and of wisdom. This is the benefit of associating with a morally “superior” individual.

4.2.2.2 We do *not* see in either Sutta here [4.1.2] the term *aparipūra* or its positive opposite *paripūra*, and the verb, *paripūrissāmi*, relating to any “partial precepts.” Instead, they speak of **the 3 trainings** in moral virtue, concentration and wisdom, that is, the whole of the path training. This is *not* about the 5 precepts, but *more* than that: it is about keeping them fully and properly. With the appropriate mindfulness, this practice leads to the path, that is, streamwinning [3.1.4.2], in this life itself.

4.3 GAVESĪ SUTTA (A 5.180/3:214-218), SD 47.16

4.3.1 A story of the past

4.3.1.1 The Gavesī Sutta (A 5.180) is a story of the past—in the time of the Buddha Kassapa¹²¹—told by the Buddha about a lay follower (*upāsaka*), Gavesī, who inspires 500 of his friends to become lay followers, too. By his own good example, Gavesī inspires them to progressively dedicate themselves to a more Dharma-centred life to the point of them reaching the goal of the path itself, arhathood.

¹¹⁸ See SD 3.6 (1).

¹¹⁹ A 3.26/1:125-126 (SD 99.17a).

¹²⁰ Pug 3.13/35 (SD 99.17b).

¹²¹ Kassapa Buddha arose just before our Buddha Gotama, ie, the 3rd of the 5 buddhas of this world-period (viz, Kaku-sanda, Koṇagamana, Kassapa, Gotama, and the future buddha Metteyya): SD 36.2 (3.1.2.1); SD 49.8b (2).

4.3.1.2 The account begins with Gavesī who was a lay follower, but he “did not fulfill moral virtue” (*sīlesu aparipūra, kārī*, that is, did not keep the 5 precepts). Inspired by his example, his followers, too, became lay followers, but did not fulfill moral virtue.

Gavesī, realizing that he was just like the rest of his followers, decided to “do something more” (*hand-âharṃ atirekāya*): he **fulfilled moral virtue** (*sīlesu paripūri*). His 500 followers, too, followed suit; that is, they all kept the 5 precepts.

Gavesī, inspired by the action of his 500 friends, went further: he undertook **the precept to abstain from incelibacy** (*abrahma, cariyā veramaṇī*). The 500 followers, then, too, undertook the precept on celibacy to become brahmacharis.

Gavesī then went on to undertake the precept in abstaining from food outside of forbidden hours, and became a **single-meal taker** (*eka, bhattika*). His 500 followers, too, followed his example, and became single-meal takers.

Finally, Gavesī went forth as a monk, went into solitary retreat (for meditation), and in due course became an **arhat**. His 500 followers, inspired by his noble example, also renounced the world, became monks and went into solitary retreat. In due course, they all became arhats, too.

At the end of the lesson, the Buddha declares to Ānanda that he (we) should train, thus:

“We shall strive ever higher, in the ever subtler, to realize the unsurpassed liberation.” (*uttar’uttari paṇī-t’apaṇītaṃ vāyamamānā anuttaraṃ vimuttiṃ sacchikarissāmāti*)¹²²

4.3.2 “Progressive emulation”

4.3.2.1 This beautiful story is about lay followers who start just as they are. At first, they only go for refuge. Then, they go on to learn about moral virtue, and keep the 5 precepts. At the right time, they observe the celibacy precept (upgrading the 3rd precept of abstaining from sexual misconduct to that of abstaining from incelibacy).

In the case of the remarkable layman Gavesī and his 500 followers, they went on to add the precept of taking only a single daily meal (like a good monastic). Now they were ready for renunciation, and did renounce. They all went into solitary retreat and became arhats.

4.3.2.2 This is an inspiring story of commitment to the teaching and its practice by way of “**progressive emulation**,” that is, the 500 lay followers emulate the example of their leader in “doing something more” [4.3.1.2]. This means that they went on cultivating their practice, upgrading themselves in their moral conduct, from the 5 precepts, adding those of celibacy and moderation in food, leading to their renunciation, culminating in their awakening as **arhats**.

Far from keeping any “partial precepts” as “partial upāsakas,” they actually committed themselves deeper into moral training to fulfill moral virtue. Although they started off with only the going for refuge (implicit from the sutta narrative), they went on to undertake all the 5 precepts, upgrading their moral conduct so that they became renunciants and attained arhathood in that life itself.

4.4 THE MAHĀNĀMA SUTTAS (PALI)

4.4.0 The Mahānāma Sutta (A 8.25), a key sutta on the *upāsaka* (including the female *upāsikā*), makes no allusion to any “partial precept” [5.1.1.2]. In fact, **Mahānāma** is an exemplary layman who diligently keeps to the precepts and cultivates moral virtue, as attested by at least these 5 suttas to his name:

¹²² A 5.180/3:214-218 (SD 47.16).

4.4.1 (Upāsaka,sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta	or (Sotāpatti) Mahānāma Sutta	S 55.37	SD 6.2
4.4.2 (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 1		S 55.21	SD 23.1a
4.4.3 (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 2		S 55.22	SD 23.1b
4.4.4 (Chakka) Mahānāma Sutta	or (Agata,phala) Mahānāma Sutta	A 6.10	SD 15.3
4.4.5 (Aṭṭhaka) Mahānāma Sutta	or (Upāsaka) Mahānāma Sutta	A 8.25	SD 6.3

4.4.1 (Upāsaka,sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta (S 55.37/5:395), SD 6.2

The (Upāsaka,sampadā) Mahānāma or (Sotāpatti) Mahānāma Sutta is a brief definition of a true lay follower (*upāsaka*) by the Buddha, elaborated in the (Aṭṭhaka) Mahānāma Sutta (A 8.25) [4.4.5]. An *upāsaka* is one who is accomplished in moral virtue, in faith, in charity and in wisdom, thus:

The accomplishment in moral virtue	(<i>sīla,sampadā</i>)	is	the proper keeping of <u>the 5 precepts</u> .
The accomplishment in faith	(<i>saddhā,sampadā</i>)	is	faith in <u>the Buddha’s awakening</u> .
The accomplishment in charity	(<i>cāga,sampadā</i>)	is	that of <u>joyful giving</u> .
The accomplishment in wisdom	(<i>paññā,sampadā</i>)	is	that directed to <u>impermanence</u> , watching the rising and falling of all things.

4.4.2 (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 1 (S 55.21/5:369-371), SD 23.1a

The (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 1 (A 55.21) calls the set of 5 qualities defining an *upāsaka* [4.4.1] “the five-fold noble growth” (*ariya,vaḍḍhi*). One of these 5 qualities is that he will not die in vain, but will surely attain the path at least as a streamwinner.

4.4.3 (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 2 (S 55.22/5:371), SD 23.1b

In the (Gati) Mahānāma Sutta 2 (A 55.22), the Buddha assures Mahānāma, his death will not be in vain [4.4.2] since he has the 4 limbs of a streamwinner, that is, wise faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the sangha, and he is accomplished in moral virtue.

4.4.4 (Chakka) Mahānāma Sutta (A 6.10/3:284-288), SD 15.3

The (Chakka) Mahānāma Sutta (A 6.10) gives details of the spiritual qualities and blessings of a noble disciple who **is a streamwinner**, as one having these 4 limbs of a streamwinner, that is:

When he recollects the Buddha, the Dharma, the noble sangha, his moral virtue,
“his mind is straight,”

meaning that he joyfully understands what the Dharma is about, that is its **goal**;

he joyfully understands Dharma as the **truth** of the teaching;

on this account, his mind is **glad**;

from that gladness, arises **zest**;

on account of the zest, his body is **tranquil**;

the tranquil body is **happy**;

with happiness or joy, there is **concentration**.

attha
dhamma
pāmojja
pīti
passaddhi
sukha
samādhī

He is assured of a happy rebirth, even heavenly rebirth,

when he recollects on the deities.

On account of his **fivefold noble growth** (*ariya,vaḍḍhi*)—faith, moral virtue, learning, charity and wisdom—his mind will never be possessed by greed, hate or delusion. Hence, even when he does fall from any heavenly state, he will never fall into any subhuman state, but at least attain a happy human birth.

4.4.5 (Aṭṭhaka) Mahānāma Sutta (A 8.25/4:220-222), SD 6.3

The (Aṭṭhaka) Mahānāma Sutta (A 8.25) gives a more detailed definition of an upāsaka than **S 55.37** [4.4.1]. Not only has he gone for refuge in the 3 jewels. He also:

- (1) has faith,
 - (2) has moral virtue,
 - (3) shows generosity,
 - (4) desires to see good monastics;
 - (5) desires to hear the Dharma;
 - (6) remembers the Dharma;
 - (7) investigates the Dharma that he remembers;
 - (8) understands the Dharma and its meaning, and practises accordingly;
- and, in each case, he inspires that same quality in another.

5 Conclusion: Why keeping partial precepts is unskillful

5.1 “PARTIAL PRECEPTS” NOT TAUGHT BY THE BUDDHA

5.1.1 Agostini’s paper on “Partial *upāsakas*” (2003)

5.1.1.1 Giulio Agostini (a specialist in Sanskrit and lay Buddhism), in his paper, “Partial *upāsakas*” (2003), gives an instructive and insightful survey of “how many precepts, if any, must *upāsakas* ... take?” (2003:1). First, he discusses “evidence in the *Āgamas/Nikāyas*” (2-10), where he lists suttas that describe or suggest existence of *upāsakas* whose “morality was not complete (*aparipūra, kārī*).” I have noted above [4] that none of the Pali suttas uses this term or related ones in the sense of “partial *upāsakas*” (4).

5.1.1.2 Agostini then mentions “6 occurrences” of the **Mahānāma Sūtra** in Chinese translations. The first 3 are what he called the “short recensions,” that is, from the Chinese Saṃyukt’āgama (“T99” and “T100”), and the Pali “S 5.394-395,” that is, (the **(Upāsaka, sampadā) Mahānāma Sutta** (S 55.37) [4.4.1], faith (*śraddhā*), charity (*tyāga*) and wisdom (*prajñā*); only T99 adds learning (*śruta*) following *śīla*. (Table 1).¹²³

Then, he refers to the “long recensions” (9), that is, “SĀ T99,” “IV 220-222,” and the one in the Dharmaskandha [2.1.1.2]. “IV 220-222” is the Pali **Mahānāma Sutta** (A 8.25) [4.4.5]. This is followed by a comparative table of the 8 qualities of a true *upāsaka*,¹²⁴ showing their remarkable close parallel (2003: Table 2). Since there is no allusion to any “partial” morality here, I will leave it at that.

5.1.1.3 Agostini continues his discussion on “partial *upāsakas*,” turning to “evidence in the Vinayas” (10 f). He quotes “V 3:189” (Aniyata 1.2.1, in the Old Commentary)¹²⁵ on the refuge formula, and remarks: “The precepts are not mentioned, but this does not mean that such an *upāsaka* would not be expected to observe them.” (10). Then, he brings up other such parallels on **refuge-going** (*saraṇa, gamana*) in the Vinayas of the Mahīśāsaka, the Sarvāstivādin, the Mūlasarvāstivādin, the Dharmaguptaka and the Mahāsaṅghika.

In the case of the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (T1428),¹²⁶ Agostini helpfully notes that it mentions “the 5 precepts, which suggests that according to this school all *upāsakas* had to take all the precepts,” and that this is

¹²³ These Skt terms are, in Pali, respectively: *saraṇa, śīla, saddhā, cāga, paññā*, and *suta*.

¹²⁴ The 8 qualities are those of: (1) faith, (2) moral virtue, (3) charity, (4) visits monks, (5) listens to the Dharma, (6) remembers it, (7) investigates it, (8) practises “according to *dharma* and *anudharma*” [sic]. See **A 8.25** (SD 6.3).

¹²⁵ The “Old Commentary” is actually a word-comy (*pada, bhājanīya*), attached to (Vinaya) Sutta Vibhaṅga: SD 59.5 (2.1.2).

¹²⁶ 四分律 *sì fēn lǜ* (T1428.22.601b11 f): 信樂優婆私者。信佛法僧歸依佛法僧。不殺生，不盜，不邪淫，不妄語，不飲酒。 *xìn lè yōu-pósāi zhě, xìn fó fǎ sēng, guīyī fó fǎ sēng, bù shā shēng, bù dào, bù xié yín, bù wàng yǔ, bù yǐn jiǔ* “The *upāsaka* with

further supported by **the Vinaya,māṭṛka**¹²⁷ (possibly a Dharmaguptaka text)¹²⁸ and **the Dīrgh'āgama**¹²⁹ (Chinese translation, “most probably a Dharmaguptaka text”) (11).

It is only with the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya, that there is the statement: “An *upāsaka* accepts the 3 refuges, and then progressively follows a single precept, some precepts, most precepts, and all the precepts. (A person who follows) this *dharma* is called an *upāsaka*.”¹³⁰ The Mahāsaṅghika was an early pre-Mahāyāna school with key ideas that diverge from those in the Pali texts, and, as such, was closer to the Mahāyāna in teachings, and probably influenced by such ideas.¹³¹

5.1.1.4 The next 2 sections of Agostini’s “Partial *upāsakas*” article compares “evidence in **canonical Abhidharma**” (11-16) and “**the debate in the Śāstras**” (16-18), that is, the Sanskrit Abhidharma texts. This shall be discussed together since they are of the same genre. In Table 3 (14) of his article he compares the Sanskrit Dharma,skandha, the Chinese Dharmaskandha, Yaśomitra’s Mahāvibhāṣā and the Chinese Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra (Mppś), how each treats the various kinds of lay disciples. He notes that only the 1st text, in **Sanskrit Dharmaskandha**, gives all the 5 kinds of *upāsakas*: the 1-precept keeper, the few precept keeper, the many precept keeper, the 4-precept keeper (the *aparipūrṇa,kārin*), and the full 5-precept keeper. All the Chinese texts however list only the 4 kinds of *upāsakas* [2.1.1.3].

Interesting as this development may be in post-canonical Buddhism, the point remains that none of this affects our unequivocal conclusion that there is no mention of the “partial-precept-keeping” lay follower in the Pali canon.

5.1.1.5 Agostini goes on to discuss “**other non-Theravādin evidence**” (18-23), that “do not refer to any debate,[but] which perhaps was going on only among the Sarvāstivādins.” They simply state their opinions which most often agree with “the Gandhāra masters.” Apparently, the Sarvāstivādins also performed “ordinations” for the precept-keepers; in other words, it became a ritualized affair.

Only the Vinayamāṭṛka [5.1.1.3] agrees with “the Kashmir masters,” that is, “an *upāsaka* does not stop at the 3 refuges, but further adds the 5 precepts. Henceforth he gets to be called *upāsaka*.”¹³² In fact, by this time (the Abhidharma period and later), we could see, amongst the sectarian Buddhists, “*upāsakas* either take no precepts or take all of them” (19). Or, according to the Gāndhārika and the Sautrantika (an early pre-Mahāyāna school), some even took only 1 precept.¹³³

joyful faith, has faith in the Buddha, Dharma and sangha, takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and sangha, abstains from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, intoxicants.”

¹²⁷ See S Clarke, “Vinaya Māṭṛkā: Mother of the monastic codes, or just another set of lists,” 2004.

¹²⁸ Or, 薩婆多部毘尼摩得勒伽 Sarvāstivāda Vinayamāṭṛka (T1141.23); BEB: Vinayas (*Sàpóduōbù píní módelēijīā*).

¹²⁹ On Dīrgh'āgama (DĀ), see SD 58.1 (5.4.5.4; 6.2.4.1).

¹³⁰ 優婆塞者三歸一分行少分行多分行滿分行隨順行。此法是名優婆塞。yōupósāi zhě sānguī yīfēn xíng shǎofēnxíng duōfēn xíng mǎnfēnxíng suíshùnxíng. cǐfǎ shì míng yōupósāi (T1425.22.306a19 f). Tr Hirakawa (1995:21a). “He thought that this passage even made room for *upāsakas* who only take the refuges, but the text does not go that far” (Agostini’s n24).

¹³¹ Skt *mahāsāṅghika* (the great assembly), one of the major mainstream (ie non-Mahāyāna) schools of Indian Buddhism. It arose from the dispute over monastic rules with the Sthavira,nikāya (“the elders assembly,” ancestor of the modern Theravāda), about a century after the Buddha’s death, during the 2nd council (Vesālī). Although its key doctrines, such as those regarding the Buddha(s) and Bodhisattva(s), often diverge from the former, there is no consensus that it is the ancestor to modern Mahāyāna (by which it might in fact be influenced). See Oxford DB sv; Princeton DB, sv; Routledge EB 484 f.

¹³² 優婆塞者。不止在三歸。更加五戒。始得名為優婆塞也。yōupósāi zhě, bù zhǐ zài sānguī, gèngjiā wǔ jiè, shǐ dé míng wéi yōupósāi yě (T1463.24.802b4 f) [Agostini 2003:n38].

¹³³ T374.12.0568b11: 我即為說若有善男子善女人。諸根完具受 *Wǒ jí wèi shuō ruò yǒu shàn nánzǐ shàn nǚrén. Zhū gēn wán jù shòu* (In other words, I say, if there are good men and good women, with complete faculties, undertake), **b12**: 三歸依。是則名為優婆塞也。釋摩男言。世尊。Sān guīyī. Shì zé míng wéi yōu pó sāi yě. Shì mó nán yán. Shìzūn (the 3 re-

5.1.1.6 The Tibetan scholar and teacher, founder of the Gelug (Dge lugs) sect, Tsong kha pa (1357-1419), in his brief treatise, *Essence of the Ocean of Vinaya*, mentions 6 types of precept ordinations: “Avoiding killing, stealing ... are the lay vows for men and women. Observing one, some, most, or all of these, together with pure conduct and the Refuge vows, are the 6 types of lay ordinations.”¹³⁴ (22).

In the late 19th century, a well known Tibetan Vinaya expert, Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (1813-1899), in his Vinaya treatise, listed various types of *upāsakas*.¹³⁵ Peter Harvey notes that, in contemporary Tibetan practice, “all the precepts are recited in a precept-giving ceremony, but lay people privately commit themselves only to those that they feel capable of following ... ”¹³⁶ (22 f). In other words, there is the practice of “partial precepts” amongst Tibetan Buddhists.

5.1.1.7 Holmes Welch, in his study of Chinese Buddhism, 1900-1950, noted that Chinese lay Buddhists, then, used to take partial vows as certified ritual practice: the “minor ordination” (少分戒 *shāofēn jiè*) [*pra-deśāsīla*] for those who kept 1 or 2 precepts; the “major ordination” (多分戒 *duōfēn jiè*) [*yadbhūyahśīla*]; the “plenary ordination” (滿戒 *mǎn jiè*) [*paripūrṇasīla*].¹³⁷ [2.1.1.6]. Like the Tibetans, Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhists, too, practise keeping “partial precepts.”

5.1.1.8 In contemporary Indonesia, **the Buddhayāna**, a syncretistic sect apparently differentiates 3 kinds of devotees: the 3-refuge (*tisaraṇa*) devotees (not called *upāsakas*); the “weak followers” (*bāla upāsaka*) who take only 3 precepts (not to kill, not to steal, not to lie), but do *not* keep those abstaining from sexual misconduct and from intoxication; and *upāsakas* who take all 5 precepts. This, too, is clearly a ritualized practice since they each wear different robes during their puja.¹³⁸

5.1.2 Theravāda post-canonical texts

5.1.2.0 The last section in Agostini’s paper—**evidence in Theravāda post-canonical texts**—has some especially interesting materials, helpful to our understanding of precept-keeping following early Buddhism. In this section, I discuss, with some appropriate elaboration, the following precept-related matters:

- | | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------|---|
| [5.1.2.1 f] | the commentarial story of Cakkaṇa, | <u>the act of truth</u> ; |
| [5.1.2.3] | the Paṭisambhidā, magga, on | <u>the levels of moral purification</u> ; and |
| [5.1.2.4] | the Vibhaṅga, on | <u>a psychology of the moral mind</u> . |

fuges, they are called *upasākas*. The sakya Mahānāma says, “World honoured one, **b13**: 云何名爲一分優婆塞。我言。摩男。若受三歸 *Yún hé míng wèi yī fēn yōu pó sāi. Wǒ yán. Mó nán. Ruò shòu sān guī* (what does it mean by a one-precept *upa-sāka*?” “Mahānāma, I say that if one undertakes the 3 refuges), **b14**: 及受一戒。是名一分優婆塞也。 *Jí shòu yī jiè. Shì míng yī fēn yōu pó sāi yě* (and undertakes 1 precept, one is called one-precept *upasāka*.” This quote is an interpolation: it is unattested in the Pali suttas. See Agostini n42.

¹³⁴ Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (*‘Dul ba’l rgya mtsho śnying po*), tr in Mullin & Ragbay, *Lama Mipam’s Commentary to Nagarjuna’s Stanzas for a Novice Monk together with Tsong Khapa’s Essence of the Ocean of Vinaya*, 1978:53.

¹³⁵ Koñ-sprul Blo-gros-mtha’-yas, *Buddhist Ethics. Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé*, tr & ed International Translation Committee (founded by the V V Kalu Rinpoche), 1998:93.

¹³⁶ P Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 2000:82-84 esp 83.

¹³⁷ Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900-1950*, 1967:361 f.

¹³⁸ Agostini, based on a survey by a well-educated and reliable informant, Hudaya Kandahjaya: *Precepts and Upāsaka Status: Indian Views of the Buddhist Laity*. Unpubl PhD thesis, Univ of California, Berkeley, 2002:29 f. On the Buddhayāna sect, see H Bechert. “The Buddhayāna of Indonesia: a syncretistic form of Theravāda.” *JPTS* 9, 1981:10-21. Also Jack CHIA, *Monks in Motion*, 2020:133-141.

5.1.2.1 The Commentaries contain a short story about a Sinhala boy, **Cakkaṇa** (or Cakkana), whose mother was seriously ill. The doctor advised that she should take fresh hare meat (*alla,sasa,mamsa*). On being instructed by his elder brother, Cakkaṇa went into the field and chased after a hare.

The hare scampered off into the bushes and was caught in some creepers, making the sound, “Kiri! Kiri!” Going after the sound, Cakkaṇa caught it. He thought, “I shall make medicine for my mother.” Then, it occurred to him: “It is improper that for the sake of my mother’s life, I should take another.” He set it free, saying, “Go into the forest and enjoy grass and water with the other hares!”

Back home, his brother asked: “Dear, did you catch a hare?” He told him what happened, and his brother scolded him. Then, he went before his mother and stood there, making this act of truth (*sacca,kiriya*):¹³⁹ “Since I was born, I do not recall ever having intentionally deprived a living being of life!”¹⁴⁰ His mother recovered instantly.¹⁴¹ [5.1.2.2]

5.1.2.2 The Cakkaṇa story [5.1.2.1] is not only interesting, but it is embedded in a few Commentaries on the precept against killing (in connection with the 10 wholesome courses of karmic action, *kusala kamma,patha*).¹⁴² This is explained from a psychological viewpoint “that abstinence which is associated with moral consciousness is threefold,” thus:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| (1) abstaining when the opportunity obtains; | <i>sampatti,virati</i> |
| (2) abstaining because of observance; | <i>samādāna,virati</i> |
| (3) abstaining on account of eradication (of defilements). | <i>samuccheda,virati</i> |

(1) “Abstaining when the opportunity obtains” (*sampatti,virati*) refers to not breaking the precept when the opportunity (to kill, steal, etc) arises, even when we have not undertaken the precept, that is, we keep the precept both in the spirit and in the letter. Our action or non-action¹⁴³ is then *not* rooted in greed, hate or delusion.

The Cakkaṇa story illustrates the 1st kind of abstinence (*virati*): the boy had the opportunity to kill, but he did not kill. Although Cakkaṇa did not formally undertake the precepts (*asamadinna,sikkhāpadānam*) (that is, recite the 5-precept formula), he abstained from killing, and benefitted from his good intention (*kusala cetanā*). There are at least 2 important points to note here.

(1.1) The 1st point is that it is our **intention** (*cetanā*), *not* the ritual of reciting the formal undertaking of precepts that decides the morality of our action, and whether we create bad karmic fruits for ourself or not. Whether we undertake the precepts or not, it is the breaking of any of them that entails bad karmic fruit.

Clearly, the story illustrates that **killing** (or any of the other 9 wrong courses of karmic action, that is, 2. *stealing*, 3. *sexual misconduct*, 4. *false speech*, 5. *malicious speech*, 6. *harsh speech*, 7. *frivolous chatter*, 8. *covetousness*, 9. *ill will*, 10. *wrong views*)¹⁴⁴ is karmically unwholesome karma with bad karmic fruits—whether we are keeping the precepts or not: this is a vitally significant point to remember.

¹³⁹ On the act of truth (*sacca.kiriya*), see SD 39.2 (2).

¹⁴⁰ *Yato’ham jātiyā nābhijānāmi sañcicca paṇāṃ jīvitā voropetā*. Cf the 1st verse that the Buddha teaches Aṅguli,māla for the woman having labour difficulties: **Aṅguli,māla S** (M 86,15.1), SD 5.11.

¹⁴¹ MA 1:203,21-204,9; SA 2:150,1-17; DhsA 103,3-21.

¹⁴² MA 1:203,18-205,25; SA 2:149,27-151,35; DhsA 102,33-104,29. For Cakkaṇa’s story, see prec n.

¹⁴³ Non-action, such as letting someone die, esp when we could have prevented it, and feeling gratified about it, is clearly bad karma.

¹⁴⁴ On the 10 unwholesome courses of karma (*akusala kamma,patha*), see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,7-10), SD 5.7; **Sañcetanika S** (A 10.206,1-7), SD 3.9. On the 10 wholesome courses of karma (*kusala kamma,patha*), see **Mahā Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 136,8), SD 4.16.

(1.2) The 2nd point is that the undertaking (*samādāna*) of the precepts is always to our advantage, so long as we keep the precepts. When we *do* break any precept, it is not because we have taken it, but simply because of our inability to continue with the abstinence, or our failure to deal effectively with those conditions that led to the transgression. We should not blame the vehicle when we fail to get to our destination, but rather that we boarded the wrong one, or got down at the wrong stop, or we simply lost our way. We need to get on the right vehicle and be on the right track again.

(2) “Abstaining because of observance” (*samādāna, virati*). This is the practice of one who has undertaken the precepts (any of the 5 precepts), both during and after the duration of undertaking, without breaking it, even under the pain of death. This is exemplified by the case of the *upāsaka* dwelling on Mount Uttara, vaḍḍhamāna. After undertaking the precepts before the elder Piṅgala Buddha, rakkhita, dwelling in the Ambariya monastery, he went about ploughing his field.

His ox was lost, and he went into the mountain to look for it. There, a great serpent seized him. “I will cut off its head with my sharp axe!” he thought. Then, he reflected: “It is improper that I, who have taken the precepts from my spiritually cultivated teacher, should break them. At the third time, he thought: “I will sacrifice my life but not the precepts!” He threw away the sharp axe with its handle which was on his shoulder into the jungle. The great serpent at once released him.¹⁴⁵

(3) “Abstaining on account of eradication” (*samuccheda, virati*). This refers to the noble path, which once arisen, the thought, “We will kill a living being,” will never arise in a noble saint.¹⁴⁶ In other words, an arhat will never even think of breaking any of the 5 precepts, much less actually break any of them.

5.1.2.3 The Paṭisambhidā, magga (the 12th book of the Khuddaka Nikāya)¹⁴⁷ discusses moral virtue in terms of 5 applications or kinds of “(utter) purification” (*parisuddhi*), as the basis for wisdom (*paññā ... sīla, -maya*), whose passages are translated, paraphrased or discussed below. Interestingly, it refers to various forms of “**partial keeping**” of the precepts as being of “limited purification,” but it does so in terms of *quality*, not quantity, thus [see (1)].¹⁴⁸

How is the wisdom that is the restraint after the listening (learning) that is morality-based understanding?¹⁴⁹ [After properly understanding moral virtue, how do we understand rightly the nature of restraint?]

The 5 kinds of moral virtue (*pañca sīlāni*) are as follows:

- | | |
|--|--|
| (1) moral virtue limited in purification; | <i>pariyanta, parisuddhi, sīla</i> |
| (2) moral virtue unlimited in purification; | <i>apariyanta, parisuddhi, sīla</i> |
| (3) moral virtue that is perfectly fulfilled; | <i>paripuṇṇa, parisuddhi, sīla</i> |
| (4) moral virtue that is fulfilled without attachment; | <i>aparāmaṭṭha, parisuddhi, sīla</i> |
| (5) moral virtue that is fulfilled by stilling [tranquillity]. | <i>paṭipassaddhi, parisuddhi, sīla</i> |

(1) “Moral virtue limited in purification” (*pariyanta, parisuddhi, sīla*) is that of the unordained (*anupā-sampannaṃ*), that is, *the laity*, those who do not have to keep to the Pātimokkha and the Vinaya (Pm 1:42,-

¹⁴⁵ MA 1:204,9-22; SA 2:150,18-31; DhsA 103,22-35.

¹⁴⁶ MA 1:204,23-29; SA 2:151,1-3; DhsA 104,1-3.

¹⁴⁷ Agostini only very briefly mentions the morality explained by Pm (24), which is here elaborated on accordingly.

¹⁴⁸ This whole passage on the “5 kinds of moral virtue” is quoted and explained in Vism 1.131-141/46-51, parts of which parallel Pm 1:204 f.

¹⁴⁹ *Katharṃ sutvāna sarivare paññā sīla, maye ñāṇaṃ?* [A paraphrase is given within square brackets.] Pm 1:42,20 f.

22-24). This is a wholesome morality in terms of the 5 precepts when they are properly understood and kept by the laity [5.1.2.2(1)]; but unwholesome, when misunderstood, wrongly practised or partially kept.

The latter, unwholesome kind of morality, that is “**limited in purification**,” is then defined as being limited by gain (*lābha*), by fame (*yasa*), by relatives (*ñātī*), by limbs (*aṅga*), and by life (*jīvita*). Then, with any of these as reason (*hetu*), as condition (*paccaya*), as cause (*kāraṇa*), one breaks a precept; hence, one’s moral conduct is limited, one’s moral virtue is hindered, by that.¹⁵⁰

Such a morality is **limited** because we are willing or compelled to break any precept for the sake of gain or because of our wealth; for the sake of becoming famous or for status; for the benefit of relatives, or on their account; when we are threatened with physical harm; when our life itself is threatened.

This morality (when not properly understood or practised) is limited because the precepts are:

“torn, rent, mottled, blotchy,¹⁵¹

not liberating, not commended by the wise, causing attachment, not conducive to samadhi,¹⁵²

not a basis for non-remorse, not a basis for gladness, not a basis for zest, not a basis for tranquility,

not a basis for happiness [bliss], not a basis for concentration [samadhi],¹⁵³

not a basis for knowledge and seeing,¹⁵⁴

they do not lead to utter revulsion, to dispassion [fading of greed], to cessation (of suffering), to

peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.¹⁵⁵

Such a morality is limited.”¹⁵⁶

(2) “Moral virtue unlimited in purification” (*apariyanta, parisuddhi, sīla*) is that of the ordained (*upa-sampannam*),¹⁵⁷ that is, *the monastics*, those who have taken the vows of renunciation, keep to all the rules of the Vinaya for the sake of finding “escape” (*nissaraṇa*) from samsara. It is said to be “unlimited” because the freedom it brings is not merely limited to happiness here and now, or by the attaining of the path in this life itself, but by the attaining of arhathood and nirvana themselves.

¹⁵⁰ *Atthi sīlaṃ pariyantaṃ, atthi sīlaṃ apariyantaṃ. Tattha katamaṃ taṃ sīlaṃ pariyantaṃ? Atthi sīlaṃ lābha, pariyantaṃ, atthi sīlaṃ yasa, pariyantaṃ, atthi sīlaṃ ñātī, pariyantaṃ, atthi sīlaṃ aṅga, pariyantaṃ, atthi sīlaṃ jīvita, pariyantaṃ. Katamaṃ taṃ sīlaṃ lābha, pariyantaṃ? Idh’ekacco lābha, hetu lābha, paccayā lābha, kāraṇā yathā, samādinnaṃ sikkhāpadaṃ vītikkamati. idaṃ taṃ sīlaṃ lābha, pariyantaṃ. (Pm 1:43,5-13)*

¹⁵¹ *Khaṇḍāni chiddāni sabalāni kammāsāni (Catukka) Thāna S (A 4.192,2.2), SD 14.12. Opp of this + next phrase: “torn ... samadhi” (akhaṇḍāni ... aparamatṭhāni samādhi, samvattanikāni): Kosambiya S (48,6/1:322), SD 64.1.*

¹⁵² *Na bhujissāni na viññu-p, pasatthāni parāmatṭhāni asamādhi, samvattanikāni. Cf opp: yāni tāni sīlāni akhaṇḍāni ... bhujissāni viññuppasatthāni aparāmatṭhāni samādhi, samvattanikāni: (Chakka) Dhammā Sāranīyā S 1 (A 6.11/3:288), SD 55.15.*

¹⁵³ *Na avipphaṣāra, vatthukāni na pāmojja, vatthukāni na pīti, vatthukāni na passaddhi, vatthukāni na sukha, vatthukāni na samādhi, vatthukāni. For a positive version of this phrase—avipphaṣāro ... samādhi, vatthukāni ... nibbidā virāgo (etc), see (Dasaka) Kim Atthiya S (A 10.1/5:1 f), SD 89.19; (Ekāasaka) Kim Atthiya S (A 11.1/5:311 f), SD 89.20*. Both suttas start off by showing “what is the purpose of” (*kim atthiyā*) moral virtue, and ending up with that of awakening itself.*

¹⁵⁴ *Na yathā, bhūta, ñāṇa, dassana, vatthukāni. This phrase in a similar context as above occurs in Upanisā S (S 12.23/-2:31), SD 6.12.*

¹⁵⁵ This is opp of the nibbidā formula: *na ekanta, nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya samvattanti. See Nibbidā, SD 20.1.*

¹⁵⁶ *Eva, rūpāni sīlāni khaṇḍāni chiddāni sabalāni kammāsāni na bhujissāni na viññuppasatthāni parāmatṭhāni asamādhi, samvattanikāni na avipphaṣāra, vatthukāni na pāmojja, vatthukāni na pīti, vatthukāni na passaddhi, vatthukāni na sukha, vatthukāni na samādhi, vatthukāni na yathā, bhūta, ñāṇa, dassana, vatthukāni na ekanta, nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya samvattanti, idaṃ taṃ sīlaṃ pariyantaṃ. (Pm 1:43,29-37)*

¹⁵⁷ Pm 1:42,25-27.

Then, there is moral conduct that is said to be “limited or motivated by gain or by fame, because of relatives, not kept when one’s limb is discomforted or when one’s life seems threatened.” The Buddha’s clear warnings of the dangers to monastics regarding “gain, honour and praise” (*lābha, sakkāra, siloka*) are found in the 43 suttas of **the Lābha, sakkāra Saṃyutta** (S 17/2:225-244) and **the Nāga Sutta** (S 20.9).¹⁵⁸

Conversely, those monastics who do not keep to the Vinaya, despite wearing the robes and calling themselves *bhikkhu, bhikkhunī* and so on, are uncategorized. In other words, they are not even in the lowest of these categories—that of the “limited purification” in moral virtue—simply because they are not even lay followers at all!

(3) “Moral virtue that is perfectly fulfilled” (*paripuṇṇa, parisuddhi, sīla*) is that of the “good worldling” (*puṭhujjana, kalyāṇaka*),¹⁵⁹ who, regardless of body and life, having let go of (attachment to) life, devoted to wholesome states, are fulfilling (the path) ending in the learners’ state¹⁶⁰ [see following].

(4) “Moral virtue that is fulfilled without attachment”¹⁶¹ (*aparāmaṭṭha, parisuddhi, sīla*) is that of the streamwinner-to-be, the streamwinner-become, the once-returner-to-be, the once-returner-become, the non-returner-to-be, the non-returner-become and the arhat-to-be.¹⁶² These are the 7 noble individuals: they are called “**learners**” (*sekha*), through truly learning the real nature of the 4 noble truths. With the arhat-become (the full-fledged awakened saint), that is, the non-learner or adept (*asekha*), they are “the 4 pairs of persons, the 8 individuals” (*cattāri purisa, yugāni, aṭṭha, purisa, puggalā*).¹⁶³

(5) “Moral virtue that is fulfilled by stilling [tranquillity]” (*paṭipassaddhi, parisuddhi, sīla*) is that of the arhats, the pratyeka buddhas (fully self-awakened buddhas who do not establish the teaching), and the fully self-awakened buddhas themselves.¹⁶⁴

5.1.2.4 The Vibhaṅga, the 2nd book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, has a section on “an analysis of the precepts” (*sikkhāpada vibhaṅga*, Vbh ch 14). In keeping with the character of Abhidhamma, the Vibhaṅga describes *each* of the 5 precepts in practically the same terms, thus:

“At the time when, in one abstaining from killing beings, wholesome consciousness characteristic of the plane¹⁶⁵ arises, accompanied by mental pleasure, associated with knowledge,”¹⁶⁶ one is said to be abstaining from killing. This describes the mind of one in the sense-realm (*kāmāvacara*), including the human world, who abstains from killing as having:

¹⁵⁸ S 20.9/2:268-270 (SD 69.12).

¹⁵⁹ Usu *kalyāna, puṭhujjana*, a comy term (DA 1:59; MA 1:40; UA 369; ItA 1:61; SnA 2:502; PmA 1:266).

¹⁶⁰ Pm 1:42,28-31. *Katamaṃ paripuṇṇa, pārisuddhi, sīlaṃ? Puṭhujjana, kalyāṇakānaṃ kusala, dhamme yuttānaṃ sekkha, pariyaṇte paripūra, kāriṇaṃ kāye ca jīvite ca anapekkhānaṃ pariccatta, jīvitānaṃ, idaṃ paripuṇṇa, pārisuddhi, sīlaṃ.*

¹⁶¹ *Aparamaṭṭha* here means they have each, at their respective levels, uprooted the various **fetters** (*saṃyojana*) to attain streamwinning, once-returning, non-returning, and preparing to attain arhathood. It is the neg of *paramaṭṭha*. pp of *parāmasati*, “to touch, hold on to, deal with, take up, to be attached or fall a victim to” (V 2:47, 195, 209; D 1:17; M 1:257; S 3:110; J 4:38). On the etym of *parāmāsa*, see Vism 1.35/14, 22.58/684. On the 10 fetters, see SD 10.16 (1.6.6-8); SD 11.1 (5.1.4); SD 3.3 (2); SD 56.1 (4.4). On fetters and sainthood: SD 40a.1 (15.4.4) n; SD 49.14 Table 2.

¹⁶² Pm 1:42,32 f.

¹⁶³ See **Aṭṭha Puggala S 2** (A 8.60), SD 15.10a(1.5).

¹⁶⁴ Pm 1:43,1-4.

¹⁶⁵ “The plane” (*avacara*) refers to the 3 worlds: the sense-world (*kāmāvacara*), the form world (*rūpāvacara*) and the formless realm (*arūpāvacara*). See SD 57.10 (4.1, 6).

¹⁶⁶ *Yasmiṃ samaya kāmāvacaraṃ kusalaṃ cittaṃ uppannaṃ hoti somanassa, sahaḡataṃ ṇāṇa, sampayuttaṃ, pāṇ-ātipātā viramantassa ...* (Vbh 285,8-3)

- (1) “**a wholesome consciousness**” (*kusala citta*), meaning a mind that is free from any negative intention of the desire to kill, that is, one is without greed or hate, but with charity or lovingkindness;
- (2) “**mental pleasure**” (*somanassa*): we feel joyful, happy, at this act; and
- (3) “**knowledge**” (*ñāṇa*): we clearly know this as happening; there is non-delusion regarding these moments when we are clearly aware that we are not killing.

The same description applies to each and every one of the other 4 precepts, as the occasion arises. One’s mind is wholesome, without any intention to steal, to commit sexual misconduct, to lie, to drink or get drunk; one feels joyful about this; and one knows one is not committing any breach of that precept. Our wholesome mind also knows, when an intention to break any precept arises, we give it up at once, thus cultivating moral virtue.

5.2 CLOSING WORDS

5.2.1 Agostini was moved to write his paper because—as he admits in his opening statement—“little scholarly interest has been paid to an ancient Buddhist controversy: how many precepts, if any, must *upāsakas* ... take?”

(1). His paper mostly focuses on the Sanskrit revisionist concept of “partial precepts,” which gives us some insight into the difficulties they must have faced in trying to adapt Buddhism to their situations and needs.

Understandably, he does not say that there are actually “partial *upāsakas*” or the practice of “incomplete precepts” in early Buddhism. Although he quotes many related and key Pali sources, most of his discussion is based on non-Pali sources. He discusses their views in question in a useful comparative manner, showing how the texts from various traditions agree or diverge in various related teachings, going from the earliest sources to the latest ones, as highlighted and outlined above. [2.1, 5.1]

5.2.2 This paper works on the premise that there are no “partial precepts” in early Buddhism (hence the question mark in the title). It focuses on what—based on my biased understanding—is the early Buddhist teaching of **the full and fulfilled moral life** as the basis of the training that is the foundation of the path, and leading on to awakening itself, even in this life itself, that is, the attainment of streamwinning.

Although I try to keep to the rigours of scholarly research, I write as a devoted practitioner, taking Buddhism as a first-hand experience of what I believe and practise: **early Buddhism**. I have no issue with the existence of the historical Buddha, nor with the testament of the early Buddhist teachings. I am privileged with so much expert and excellent scholarly studies of early Buddhism and its later developments.

My own investigative tools are my own attempts at understanding and keeping the trainings in moral virtue, priming my body and speech for the cultivation of a calm and clear mind, so that I can directly see true reality as declared by the Buddha himself. In this sense, I am a Buddhist scholar and professional. This latter word is used in the old sense of *professing* the teachings. Hence, I approach the subject with this commitment, to bring out what is true and beautiful in early Buddhism.

5.2.3 In my investigations and writings, I am guided by the idea of early Buddhism as the truth and beauty of true reality. For any insight into this natural truth and beauty, we need to be devoted and disciplined in its study and practice. The rule is very clear: we can only modify or adjust those texts that are **implicit** (*neyy’āttha*), the teachings, stories, figures, and sentences which are reflective of the Buddha’s time, even of this world (mundane aspects), but we should never change the teachings that are **explicit** (*nīt’āttha*), whose senses have been drawn out, that is, the expressions of true reality, and the teachings and practices related to them.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ On teachings that are implicit and that are explicit, see **Neyy’āttha Nīt’attha S** (A 2.3.5+6), SD 2.6b.

Basically, this refers to the 3 trainings in *moral virtue* (beginning with the 5 precepts), in *concentration* and *insight wisdom*,¹⁶⁸ and also the 3 jewels,¹⁶⁹ that is, *the fully self-awakened buddha*, the first to arise in our epoch or “dispensation” (*sāsana*) in this world period,¹⁷⁰ his *teachings* (as already mentioned),¹⁷¹ and *the noble ones of the path*, especially the arhats, those who have attained nirvana following the Buddha.¹⁷² When we change even an iota of such explicit teachings, we, by that very act, become outsiders¹⁷³ to the Buddha Dharma.

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[For other references, see SD Guide, <http://dharmafarer.org>]

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¹⁶⁸ On the 3 trainings, see *Sīla samādhi paññā*, SD 21.6.

¹⁶⁹ On the 3 jewels, see SD 47.1 (3.2.2.1); SD 51.8 (1.3.3.1).

¹⁷⁰ See *Pavāraṇā S* (S 8.7), SD 49.11.

¹⁷¹ See *Gāraṇa S* (S 6.2), SD 12.3.

¹⁷² See *Sambuddha S* (S 22.58), SD 49.10.

¹⁷³ On “outsiders,” *bāhira* (M 27,25.4 n + SD 40a.5 (1.1.2); M 142,5(11) nn, SD 1.9; SD 47.1 (1.1.2)), or *bāhiraka* (SD 10.16 (1.2.3.2), SD 51.17 (3.4.2.3)).

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