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## Alagaddûpama Sutta

The Discourse on the Water-snake Parable | M 22  
or **Alagadda Sutta**, the Water-snake Discourse (MA 2:102,19)

Theme: The best way to master the Buddha's teaching  
Translated with notes by Piya Tan ©2003

### 1 Obstructions and liberation

#### 1.0 ABSTRACT AND OVERVIEWS

**1.0.1 The Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22) is given by the Buddha in response to the monk Ariṭṭha's wrong view that sensual pleasures (including sex) are not an "obstruction" to the holy life [§§1-4; 3.1]. The Buddha starts by quoting 10 parables wherein he emphasizes the disadvantages and dangers of sensual pleasures [§§5-9].

The Buddha then declares the true purpose of the Dharma, with the parable of the water-snake [§§10-12], and that the Dharma is a method to be applied, highlighting this point with the parable of the raft [§§13-14].

Then, the Buddha points out the 6 grounds for self-view, which bring about anxiety (*paritassana*) [§§15-21]. This is followed by a teaching on non-self, where the Buddha introduces the doctrine of the 5 aggregates (*pañca-khandha*) [§§22-29], understanding which brings us to arhathood [§§30-36].

The Buddha next declares that he only teaches "**suffering and the ending of suffering**," and that he should not be misrepresented [§§37-39]. Then, comes the statement that the 5 aggregates are "not yours" and so should be "given up" [§40], illustrating this with the Jetavana parable [§41]. The Sutta closes with the mention of the 6 kinds of saints [§§42-47].

Further details on strategy for study should be perused in the Sutta summary section [2].

**1.0.2** The Sutta is especially significant in highlighting **the Buddha's didactic genius** in showing how he applies "skillful means" to his teaching, by claiming that his teachings are motivated by the pragmatic concern of helping his disciples attain liberation. Beginning with ethics as the basis for spiritual training [§§3-4], the Buddha declares the inseparable link between sensual pleasure and sensual desire [§§5-9].

The parables of the water-snake and of the raft highlight philosophical aspects, that is, the meaning and purpose of studying and practising the Dharma [§§10-14]. With this understanding, we are better prepared to see the psychology of our subjective experiences by way of the 5 aggregates [§§15-41], which forms the bulk of the Sutta teaching, culminating in its spiritual benefits [§§42-47]. [3]

**1.0.3 The Alagaddûpama Sutta** is not only a document that shows the Buddha's rejection of the notion of an abiding self [4], but, more significantly, opens for us a window into how the historical Buddha formulates his teachings and presents them for the benefit of his audiences and posterity (that is, for *our* benefit). This Sutta is a testimony of the Buddha's genius in using skillful means for developing a dialectic response against the Upanisads—an apologetic rebuttal of the Upaniṣadic notion of an abiding self, and a defence of the early Buddhist teaching of **non-self**. All this testifies to the full awakening of a historical teacher we know as the Buddha. [5]

#### 1.1 ARIṬṬHA'S OFFENCE

The person who occasioned the Buddha to give this teaching might as well be a contemporary cult guru who preaches **sexual licence**. Ariṭṭha (formerly a vulture killer), the detractor in the Sutta, according to the Commentary, is a learned exponent of the Dharma and is quite familiar with the "obstructions" to

spiritual development. However, being less learned in the Vinaya, he holds the view that sexual indulgence is not a hindrance to spiritual development (that one can enjoy sex without sexual desire or feelings!).

In fact, according to the sutta Commentary, Ariṭṭha comes up with this clever argument: “If some of the sensual pleasures are permissible to lay-followers who are streamwinners or once-returners or non-returners, why is an exception made regarding form, voice, smell, or touch, of women?” (or of men, for that matter)! The Commentary states that Ariṭṭha goes so far as to charge the Buddha with exaggerating the importance of the first grave offence (*pārājikā*), that of sexual intercourse, claiming that this urgency is like trying to “chain the ocean.” (MA 2:103) [3.1]

## 1.2 PĀCITTIYA

The **Vinaya** records Ariṭṭha holding the view that “what are called stumbling-blocks (*antarāyikā dhammā*) by the Blessed One are not stumbling-blocks” [§2] (more specifically that sexuality is not a hindrance to the monastic life). On account of this, the Buddha declares that anyone holding such a view commits the offence of expiation (*pācittiya*), which entails that the offender should give up (*paṭinissajjeyya*) his offence.<sup>1</sup> An offence of *expiation* means that the offender has committed an immoral act which has to be “pacified” (*samatha*) in one of these three ways:

- (1) being settled in terms of the Vinaya (*sammukha, vinaya*), ie by legal analysis and deliberation;
- (2) by admitting the offence before the Sangha or a monk (*paṭiññata, karaṇa*); or
- (3) by “covering up with grass” (*tiṇa, vatthāraka*), ie a mutual settlement between the disputing parties (or “burying the hatchet”). (V 2:92 f)

## 1.3 MONASTICS TODAY AND STUMBLING-BLOCKS

**1.3.1** The Alagaddûpama Sutta should be studied with **the Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48),<sup>2</sup> where the Buddha explains how sexual feelings arise. When we are preoccupied with our physical being and brood over our differences from others, we are likely to arouse sexual feelings within ourselves. What we think is missing from ourselves, we tend to seek externally or in another, imagining that we are “united” with the missing object, thus appropriating or becoming it, as it were. In reality, all this is but a most self-centred or narcissistic enterprise of filling imagined gaps in our emotional life with imagined solutions. As **Lily de Silva** astutely notes, “[w]ith this explanation it becomes quite clear that self-love plays a basic role in sensuality.” (1978:126 f)

### 1.3.2 Worldly monks

**1.3.2.1** The message of the Alagaddûpama Sutta is just as relevant today as it was in the Buddha’s time. As Buddhism spreads to the west and the westernized areas of Asia and elsewhere, monastic members—especially the scholar monks—lacking in spirituality, easily and famously fall prey to domesticating and laicizing themselves in the ways of secular society. Such a broad hint is clear from **Paul David Numrich’s** book, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples*, where he reports:

<sup>1</sup> Pāc 68 = V 4:133-136. The novice Kaṇḍaka, a pupil of the loose monk Upananda is expelled for holding such a view (Pāc 70 = V 4:138-140).

<sup>2</sup> A 7.48/4:57-59 (SD 8.7).

He [Ven Dr Ratanasara of Dharma Vijaya, a Sinhalese mission, in Los Angeles] thinks monks will inevitably begin to shake hands and keep casual company with women as part of their normal pastoral relationships in America. But, he notes, the celibacy issue remains a stickler in the development of a native Theravada *bhikkhu-sangha* in America, for Americans generally seem to view sex as a human necessity, like food and water. Yet celibacy is the most dramatic symbol of the “set apart” character in the Theravada tradition. (Numrich 1996:50)<sup>3</sup>

**1.3.2.2** At the time of this writing (early 2019), we have a case in the US, where a Sinhala missionary priest (we cannot call him a “monk” for obvious reasons) publicly posted a photo of him hugging a woman, and holding a sign “Free Hugs.” Clearly this priest is either ignorant of the Theravada Vinaya or chooses to ignore it.

The point is that if one has taken the vows to observe celibacy and avoid any kind of sexual contact, especially with women, but then reneged on those vows, then, one is clearly dishonest, and, in traditional terms, a “thief” (*cora*) in the teaching. When we try to straddle two different systems here, we will fall in between: it is neither fish nor fowl. As **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22) warns us, we are handling a venomous snake by its tail, and will surely be fatally bitten. [§10]

**1.3.3 S J Tambiah**, in *Buddhism Betrayed?*, writes about of the best known Sinhala scholar priests of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Walpola Rahula, with the same broad hint of secularizing tendencies amongst scholar monks:

[I]n the 1950s, when he [W Rahula] conducted his research in Paris in association with Professor Demiéville, he devised a distinctive clothing of trousers and cap to withstand the cold and sometimes relaxed the rule regarding meals, thereby again demonstrating that he would not allow conventional rules to obstruct the pursuit of more worthwhile and serious goals. (1992:24)

**1.3.4** Speaking of freelance, even cavalier, adjustments of monastic rules, we might add here the peculiar habit amongst some young (and not so young) Theravāda monks who keep their heads unshaven and thick with hair so that they look like laymen. The Vinaya rule says: “Monks, long hair should not be worn. Whoever should wear it long, there is an offence of wrong-doing (*dukkata*). I allow it to be of two months’ growth or two fingers’ breadth long” (Cv 5.2.2 = V 2:106). Could this be that there is a tacit acquiescence to the abrogation of the “lesser and minor rules” despite the ruling of the Rājagaha Council? In which case, could such monks regard themselves as part of the Theravāda monastic community?

## 1.4 OVERCOMING THE STUMBLING-BLOCKS

**1.4.1** In 2000, **Sandra Bell** wrote a heart-warming and inspiring essay summarizing the rooting of Buddhism in the West. Her article, entitled “Being creative with tradition: Rooting Theravāda Buddhism in Britain” appears as the very first one in the *Journal of Global Buddhism*, and contains this account of how the forest monks have succeeded where the scholar monks and others have failed:

Ajahn Maha Bōwa [sic] had visited Hampstead [Vihāra] in 1974 and expressed doubts that meditating monks could be successfully transposed to “a country where people were ignorant of the monks’ discipline and the relationship between *Sangha* and laity.”<sup>4</sup> Three years later Ajahn Chah was less daunted, perhaps because he had already established a hermitage monastery for his Western disciples close to his own Wat Pah Pong, near the village of Bung Wai.

<sup>3</sup> See also Prebish 2003:60-68.

<sup>4</sup> Tambiah 1984:137. [Bell’s ref does not concur.]

From this perspective, it may have seemed just one more step to return some of them to found a branch monastery in Europe or America. Ajahn Chah had successfully established a number of branch monasteries in Ubon Province in Northeast Thailand, and his own disciples had also started their own teaching centers.<sup>5</sup>

Tambiah views Ajahn Chah’s “extraordinary ‘institution building’” as an aspect of the duality inherent in the forest tradition, whereby the ascetic monk becomes an organizer and founder of monasteries. This happens because “dedication to the meditation path necessarily involves the teaching of the hard-won wisdom to others.”<sup>6</sup>

Having never before left Thailand, Ajahn Chah was unfamiliar with an environment where Buddhists formed such a small proportion of the population as to be scarcely noticeable. His strategy was to remain undeterred by the fact that English people as a whole knew nothing about making *dāna* to monks and to set out to tutor those few lay people who claimed to be Theravadins.

Ajahn Chah insisted that he and the other monks go out on an alms-round each day in order to maintain an association with the discipline and continuities of monastic life. Displaying the composed comportment prescribed for monks and carrying their alms bowls, they walked a fixed route around the streets of Hampstead and across the open heath.

Predictably, they would return having received nothing but curious stares, but the practice enabled the newcomers to assert their status as mendicant monks among the lay followers whose interest was rekindled by the flurry of fresh activity at the *vihāra*. The ritual of the alms-round acted as a powerful lesson in the significance of mendicancy for maintaining the equilibrium between monks and lay people, some of whom began to turn up with gifts of food at the time that the monks set out from the *vihāra*. (2000:13; emphasis added)

Today, after Ajahn Chah’s death, numerous forest monasteries and meditation centres have been set up in many countries (often several in each) on almost every continent. The hallmark of their success is that they are true to their word as practitioners, totally abstaining from sex, no TV, limited use of social media, not driving their own cars, no evening meals, not handling money and no socializing with the laity.<sup>7</sup> In other words, they basically keep to the traditional Pāṭimokkha (monastic code)—yet, their popularity is rapidly growing.

**1.4.2** Ratanasara’s sentiments about sexuality and “casual company with women as part of their normal pastoral relationships in America” starkly contrast against the fact that “Ajahn Chah insisted that he and the other monks go out on an alms-round each day in order to maintain an association with the discipline and continuities of monastic life.” The success of a true Buddhist mission lies in the missionary’s giving priority to spiritual development, his own and that of his audience. The purpose of monastic training is not to change the rules, but to follow them and cultivate our spirituality.

It should be clarified, however, that the Buddha’s rejection of sexuality as part of the monastic life does not apply to lay followers under the 5 precepts, of which the 3<sup>rd</sup> precept applies. For lay followers this rule entails mutual *respect*, both for the individual as well as for others, and maintaining a healthy social relationship. “The gradual progress towards it [detachment from desires], however, was left to

<sup>5</sup> Tambiah 1984:137 [ref corrected].

<sup>6</sup> Tambiah 1984:137 [ref corrected].

<sup>7</sup> In 2009, the elders of Wat Pa Nanachat (the international forest monastery)—the main monastery of the Ajahn Chah lineage excommunicated one of their own monks, Brahmavarṃso (Peter Betts) of Wat Bodhinyana, Perth, for not keeping to the Vinaya, esp his relaxed socializing with the laity, incl the admission of women into the order: see SD 1.9 (7-10). Such a stand shows that the forest sangha is very serious about their monastics strictly keeping to the Vinaya.

the degree of insight and self-control possessed and developed by the individual lay follower.” (Nyana-ponika 1974:3)

### 1.5 CHINESE PARALLELS

The Chinese parallel is **MĀ 200** (T1.763b-766b), entitled 阿梨吒經 *Ā lí zhā jīng*, the Discourse on Ariṭṭha. MĀ 200 agrees with M 22 and the two partial parallels from the Ekottarika Āgama in locating the discourse in Jeta’s Grove outside Sāvathī. Sylvain Lévi notes that the Sarvâstivāda Vinaya (T1435 @ T23.-174b21), refers to the present discourse as 阿羅伽度波摩 *Ā luó jiā dù bō mó*, a transcription of the same text, that is, the Discourse on the Simile of the Snake,” 蛇譬經, *Shé pì jīng* (1915:421).

Thus, the Sarvâstivāda Vinaya agrees with M 22 on the Pali title of the discourse, but differing from MĀ 200 in this respect. A reference to the present discourse in the \*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-(upadeśa)śāstra (T1509 @ T25.63c7), speaks of 筏喻經 *Fá yù jīng*, the Discourse on the Simile of the Raft,” reconstructed by Lamotte (1944:64) as Kolôpama,sūtra, “The Parable of the Raft Sutra.”<sup>8</sup>

THICH Minh Chau has done a brief comparative study of MĀ 200<sup>9</sup> with the Pali version. Analayo has done a more detailed instructive comparative study of both, discusses the difficulties found in the Chinese translation (2011:148-158).

## 2 Sutta summary

**2.1** As pointed out by Damien Keown, the Alagaddûpama Sutta comprises 4 main sections:<sup>10</sup>

- |              |  |                     |
|--------------|--|---------------------|
| (1) §§1-10:  | The monk Ariṭṭha holds a serious wrong view; | (M 1:130-134,22)    |
| (2) §11:     | The parable of the water-snake;              | (M 1:134,23-29)     |
| (3) §§12-14: | The parable of the raft; and                 | (M 1:134,30-135,26) |
| (4) §§15-47: | The Buddha’s admonitions.                    | (M 1:135,27-142,8)  |

**2.2** The first part of this Sutta [**§1-6**] is found in two places in **the Vinaya**: the announcement in the Culla Vagga of **the act of suspension** (*ukkhepaniya,kamma*) on **Ariṭṭha** for refusing to give up his false view<sup>11</sup> and, in the Sutta Vibhaṅga, of his commission of an offence entailing expiation (*pācittiya*) in refusing to do so after repeated admonitions.<sup>12</sup>

Apparently, Ariṭṭha is not the only one who holds such a wrong view. The novice **Kaṇḍaka**, too, holds the same wrong view, and is expelled from the order (V 4:138 f). The Vinaya Commentary (VA 4: 874), declares that Ariṭṭha, the novice Kaṇḍaka and the Vajji,puttakas are “enemies of the teaching.”<sup>13</sup> It is likely that the Ariṭṭha incident is the earliest of these incidents, since the Vinaya highlights it and the Alagaddûpama Sutta records the Buddha instructing us on the Ariṭṭha case in detail, and the other two are only briefly mentioned as cases of wrong view.

**2.3** In **§6** we find 10 parables of **the disadvantages of sensual pleasures**. After the Buddha has rebuked Ariṭṭha [§7], these 10 parables are repeated in §8 when the Buddha addresses the monks. A key statement [§9] on the monastic view of sexuality is that there can be no sexual act without sexual desire. One

<sup>8</sup> Cf variant title given in the \*Mahāvibhāṣā (T1545 @ T37.503b20): 筏喻法門 *Fá yù fǎ mén*, “Dharma exposition on the Simile of the Raft.”

<sup>9</sup> THICH Minh Chau 1964:22, 114-115, 147-148, 195-196 and 201.

<sup>10</sup> Keown 1992:96.

<sup>11</sup> Cv 1.32.1-2 (V 2:25 f).

<sup>12</sup> Pāc 68.1 (V 4:133-135).

<sup>13</sup> See Cv 12 (V 2:294 ff).

is said to be “bound by delight and lust” (*nandī,rāga,sahagatā*) because one loses one’s freedom of body, speech and mind to them. Such a person’s deeds, words and thoughts will be coloured or biased by lust and sexuality.

The title parable—the **parable of the water-snake**—appears in §10 which also mentions the 9-limbed teachings. In **§11**, the Buddha admonishes us on the proper study of the Dharma, warning us (or anyone else) not to misrepresent him (§12).

In **the parable of the raft** [§13]—which is the key parable here—the Buddha goes on to show the serious error that lies in wrongly grasping that which one has learnt, that is, the dangers of misconceiving and misinterpreting the teaching<sup>14</sup> [§14]. [3.1.4]

**2.4** The following **§§15-17, on the 6 grounds for self-view**, deal with how a disciple should regard the 6 senses so that they do not become sources for anxiety through their being the “**grounds for views.**” §§18-21 further discuss internal (sensuous and mental) and external (physical and social) sources of anxiety. This important passage preserves the Buddha’s rejection of the Upanishadic view of the eternal soul.<sup>15</sup>

The teachings of impermanence and non-self are then applied to the 6 senses [§§22-29]. Using more parables, the Buddha goes on to list the nature of the arhat [§§30-36].

**2.5** Despite the Buddhist openness to inquiry (as characterized by **the Kesa,puttiyā Sutta**, A 3.65),<sup>16</sup> and the Buddha’s admonishing the monks to be equanimous towards both praise and blame by outsiders towards the teaching [§§38 f], he is very firm against any misconception (M 63), misrepresentation (M 38) and misuse of the teaching (M 3; V 2:110 f) [§§37-39].

**2.6** “**Let go of what is not yours!**” admonishes the Buddha in regards to the 6 types of sense-experiences [§40]. He illustrates this with a delightfully unique **Jeta,vana parable** [§41; 4.1.3].

**2.7** In closing, the Buddha declares that his teaching is “**free from patchwork,**” that is, it is transparent [§42]. Then, he mentions the different types of saints and spiritually developed “true individuals”<sup>17</sup> found in his teaching [§§43-47].

### 3 The Sutta structure and critique

#### **3.1 ARIṬṬHA’S WRONG VIEW** [1.1]

##### **3.1.1 Sutta structure**

**3.1.1.1** Damien Keown, in his *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, thinks that the Sutta “probably consists of sections which were originally separate and subsequently placed together by the compilers of the Canon on the basis of their thematic unity” (1992:96). In part (1) [§§1-10], the story of Ariṭṭha is also found in two places in the Vinaya, with additional details regarding the penalty inflicted on him for his refusal to renounce his wrong views.

Keown thinks that “it is possible that the story was imported into the Vinaya from the Majjhima” (1992:97). At **V 2:25-27**, Ariṭṭha is subjected to the formal act of suspension (*ukkhepanīya,kamma*), while

<sup>14</sup> See Gombrich 1996:23-25/

<sup>15</sup> See **Taṅhā Jālinī S** (A 4.199), SD 31.15 (3) & Gombrich 1996: 38-42.

<sup>16</sup> See SD 35.4.

<sup>17</sup> “True individuals” (*sappurisa*): see discussion at **Sappurisa S** (M 113), SD 23.7 (3.1).



at **V 4:133-136**, his misconduct is given as the origin of **Pācittiya 68**. From the internal evidence of the texts as we have them, it is difficult to say which of these three stories is the original one.

**3.1.1.2** However, from his comparison of the Ariṭṭha case in the Alagaddûpama Sutta with the Sāti case in **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38),<sup>18</sup> Keown proposes that:

The Sāti story does not seem to occur in the Vinaya,<sup>19</sup> so it cannot have been borrowed from that source. If the Sāti story was not borrowed, then perhaps neither was the Ariṭṭha story, and hence the Majjhima version of the Ariṭṭha story may well be the original. (Keown 1992:104)

**3.1.1.3** Furthermore, as evident from the Commentary,<sup>20</sup> where **Buddhaghosa** remarks on how the Buddha uses parables in the suttas, it is clear that he regards the Alagaddûpama Sutta as an integral whole:

When using a parable, the Blessed One sometimes sets out the parable first, and then explains the meaning. At other times, he explains the meaning and then gives the parable. Sometimes he teaches, enveloping (*parivāretvā*) the parable with meaning. For example ... of all the suttas, there is the Alagaddûpama Sutta, where he says,

“Here, bhikshus, some clansmen learn the Dharma—suttas, etc ... Suppose a man needs a water-snake (*alagadda*) [M 22,11/1:134] ... ,” he taught enveloping the parable with meaning.  
(MA 1:165 f)

As such, we can see that Buddhaghosa takes part (2) of the Sutta as the core parable, and the other parts as giving its meaning. Thus, Buddhaghosa clearly sees the Alagaddûpama Sutta through the parable of the water-snake, as addressing the dangers of wrongly grasping the dharmas (truths and teachings).<sup>21</sup>

**3.1.1.4** It is very interesting that the Alagaddûpama Sutta (M 22) makes *no* mention of **Pārājika 1** (the “defeat” rule against monastics indulging in sexual intercourse). Since Ariṭṭha is clearly holding the view that sexual intercourse is not a stumbling-block to the holy life, that a monastic may indulge in sex (which is stressed by the Sutta as a very serious wrong view), we would have expected Pārājika 1 to be invoked, or at least mentioned amongst the teachings related to the dangers of sexuality to the holy life.

We must then conclude that Pārājika 1 has not yet been promulgated at this time. Furthermore, since Ariṭṭha is recorded as only holding such a view and there is no mention of his actually having indulged in it, **Pācittiya 68**—which is only an expiatory rule against holding such a wrong view—it is therefore introduced as a direct outcome of Ariṭṭha’s wrong view. Moreover, if Ariṭṭha were to have indulged in sex (before the introduction of Pārājika 1), he would have been the “first-doer” (*ādi,kammika*), not Sudinna, as recorded in the Vinaya.

Hence, we must conclude that the events of the Alagaddûpama Sutta occur before those of the Sudinna story before the institution of Pārājika 1. Moreover, while the case-history of Pārājika 1 is purely a Vinaya teaching, the Alagaddûpama Sutta is clearly about the nature of the Dharma as teaching and method. However, the latter provides the spiritual context for the former.

<sup>18</sup> **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya S** (M 38,14/1:260 f), SD 7.10.

<sup>19</sup> It should also be noted that the Vinaya accounts are generally later than those of the suttas and often draw from the suttas themselves.

<sup>20</sup> At the start of Comy (MA 2:165 f) on **Vatthûpama S** (M 7,1/1:36,11), SD 28.12.

<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, Buddhaghosa remarks that in Alagaddûpama S, the explanation of false views comes first (perhaps—suggests Keown (1996:242 n24)—meaning our part 4), followed by the explanation of the threefold circle of emptiness (part 4) (MA 1:176,3-4).

While the Pārājika 1 story stresses the letting go of sexuality, the Sutta stresses letting go of the Dharma itself before we can progress to self-awakening. Hence, it is very clear why the Buddha declares that, having understood **the parable of the raft** [§13], “you should abandon even the dharmas, how much more so that which are not-dharmas” (*dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag’eva adhammā*) [§14]: in simple terms, we should abandon even right views, what more of wrong views.<sup>22</sup>

### **3.1.2 The nature of the holy life**

**3.1.2.1** Returning to the Sutta: in **Part 1**, we see that Ariṭṭha stubbornly clings to his wrong view that sexuality is not a stumbling block to a monk’s spiritual development [§2]. Apparently, he is confused by the notion that since laymen could enjoy sense-pleasures, yet still become streamwinners, then “why is an exception made regarding form, voice, touch, etc, of women?” (MA 2:103) [§1].

**3.1.2.2** However, a fundamental error in Ariṭṭha’s view here arises from the fact that a monastic has freely taken up the training to live a celibate life and eschew sensual pleasures. Hence, to indulge in any kind of sexuality at once negates his monkhood.

The lay follower, on the other hand, may still live a life of sensuality and sexuality, within the constraints of the 5 precepts, and yet, with diligent practice, still attain streamwinning, or even once-returning. However, on account of the distraction that the sensual life demands, the lay practitioner needs to restrain from all forms of sensual indulgence, if he were to attain dhyana, which is the basis for the attaining of non-returning and arhathood.<sup>23</sup>

**3.1.2.3** Despite protests from his fellow monks, and, later, the admonition of the Buddha that one simply cannot enjoy sensual pleasure without sensual desire [§9], Ariṭṭha still refuses to renounce his wrong view. Indeed, he seems to have become “the canonical archetype of pig-headedness” (Keown 1992:97); for, when Buddhaghosa elsewhere discusses the meaning of the term “reluctant to renounce” (*duppaṭinissagī*) in regard to wrong views, he cites Ariṭṭha as an example (DA 3:839).

**3.1.3** In **Part 2** of the Sutta, the parable of the water-snake [§10] is introduced to point out the dangers of not studying the Dharma for the right purpose, but “only for the sake of criticizing others and for winning debates” [§10]. We clearly see here the Buddha’s warning against the misuse of scripture, which is compared to the danger of wrongly grasping (*dugahītattā*) a water-snake: one who does so would be bitten and “suffer death or deadly pain” [§10].

We see this theme of the danger of clinging to wrong views in both parts (1-2) of the Sutta. In the first part, Ariṭṭha, motivated by lust, stubbornly holds on to a distorted view of the teaching. The Buddha clearly points out the error of his view: “But this monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit. For, this will lead to his harm and suffering for a long time”<sup>24</sup> [§8].

**3.1.4** According to Keown, **Part 3**—the parable of the raft [§§13-14]—like the first two parts, is “concerned essentially with illustrating the danger of a wrong grasp or misappropriation of good things rather than advocating their transcendence” (1992:99).<sup>25</sup> The Buddha sums up the parable as follows: “Even so I

<sup>22</sup> Further, see SD 40a.16 (2.2.4.4).

<sup>23</sup> On the necessity of dhyana for attaining arhathood, see SD 8.5 (2) & SD 15.1 (13).

<sup>24</sup> *Atha ca panāyari Ariṭṭho bhikkhu gaddhabādhi, pubbo attanā duggahītena amhe c’eva abbhācikkhati. Attānañ ca khaṇati. Bahuñ ca apuññaṃ pasavati. Tam hi tassa mogha, purisassa bhavissati dīgha, rattarā ahitāya dukkhāya*

<sup>25</sup> For an in-depth study of the problem of transcendence, see **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (6).



have shown you that the Dharma is comparable to a raft, which is for crossing over (the waters to the far shore), not for the purpose of grasping” [§13]. As Keown notes:

The word “grasping” (*gahaṇa*) echoes the “wrong grasp” (*duggahīta*) of the teaching by Ariṭṭha, and also the “wrong grasp of the scriptures” [*duggahitattā dhammānaṃ*] by the foolish men who master them for the wrong purpose. The Buddha is saying that he has taught *dhamma* in the Parable of the Raft so that people will realize that his teachings are to be used for the purpose he intended, namely, reaching salvation, and not for anything else. It is a warning to the brethren not to pervert the teachings as a means to gratifying their personal desires, be it for carnal pleasure as in Ariṭṭha’s case, or “reproaching and gossiping” in the case of the foolish men. (1992:99)

Keown goes on to suggest that the title of the “Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake” is highly appropriate for the first three sections. The common warning is that to grasp the teaching in the wrong way is like grasping a water-snake in a wrong way, bringing upon oneself death or deadly pains, that is, spiritual failure.<sup>26</sup>

**3.1.5** Although the Sutta only mentions Ariṭṭha’s “wrong grasp” that would bring “harm and suffering for a long time to come” [§10], the Commentary gives an interesting detail. Although the Buddha describes Ariṭṭha as *mogha, purisa* (literally, “empty person,” “hollow man”),<sup>27</sup> he seeks comfort in the fact that the Buddha also rebukes Upasena Vaṅganta,putta with the same expression, but the latter goes on to realize direct knowledge (*abhiññā*), becoming an arhat (V 1:59).

The Buddha however removes Ariṭṭha’s lingering hope by likening his spiritual condition to that of a broken, withered leaf (*mutta, paṇḍu, palāsa*), a state of non-growth (*avirūhi, bhāva*) (MA 2:104). This leaves Ariṭṭha crestfallen, sitting “silent, dismayed, his shoulders drooping, hanging his head, glum, and at a loss for an answer” [§7].

### 3.2 BUDDHAGHOSA’S EXPLANATION

**3.2.1** Let us now examine what the Buddha probably means by the Sutta’s key sentence: ***Dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag’eva adhammā***, translated here as “... you should abandon even dharmas, how much more what are not dharmas!” [§14]. Scholars like John Ross Carter have pointed out the polysemy of the term *dhamma*,<sup>28</sup> which we shall now examine.

**3.2.2** However, there are some pointers here, such as the grammatical number and the context of the term. *Dhammā* in this sentence is plural, and as such is unlikely to refer to the Buddha’s teaching as a whole (which is singular). “Consequently, it is unlikely to imply that the wholesale transcendence of religious practice is envisaged at a certain stage of the Path.” (Keown 1992:101).

Following Keown, let us provisionally render ***dhammā*** as “good things” and ***adhammā*** as “bad things.” Buddhaghosa, in his Commentary, interprets the reference to going beyond “good things” more specifically as a warning regarding the danger of being attached to meditative experience:

<sup>26</sup> For a comparison with the famous ladder metaphor of Sextus Empiricus and of Wittgenstein, see Ganeri 2007: 50.

<sup>27</sup> See §6 n on “hollow man.”

<sup>28</sup> Carter 1976a, 1976b, 1978.

**21** “You must let go of even good things ...” Here “**good things**” (*dhammā*) means calm and insight (*samatha, vipassanā*). The Blessed One says that desire-or-lust (*chanda, rāga*) is to be abandoned by both (*pi*) calm and insight. How does he do this with regards to calm?

“Thus indeed, Udāyi, do I speak of the abandoning of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Do you, Udāyi, see any fetter (*saṃyojana*),<sup>29</sup> tiny or great, whose abandonment I do not speak of?” [M 66,34/1:456]. Here, desire-or-lust is to be abandoned through calm.

“Bhikshus, no matter how pure, how clear, this view may be, if you do *not* stick to it, do *not* prize it, are *not* acquisitive about it, do *not* treat it as a possession...” [M 38,14/1:260 f]. Here, desire-or-lust is to be abandoned through insight.

But here, in reference to abandoning *both*, he says, “You should abandon even the dharmas, how much more so that which are not dharmas!”

**22** This is the gist: “Bhikshus, speak of the abandoning of desire-or-lust even in such things that are profoundly calm (*santa, paṇītesu*).<sup>30</sup> How much more then in respect to this wickedness, vulgarity, baseness, crudeness, that which requires ablution, wherein this foolish one, Ariṭṭha, perceiving no fault, says: “There is no obstruction in having desire-or-lust in the 5 cords of sense-pleasure.”<sup>31</sup>

“Do not, like Ariṭṭha, throw mud or rubbish on my teaching!” Thus the Blessed One rebuked Ariṭṭha with this admonition. (MA 2:109)<sup>32</sup>

**3.2.3** In Buddhaghosa’s first citation—that of **the Laṭukikôpama Sutta** (M 66)—the “abandoning” refers to the letting go of the various dhyanic attainments as one has fully attained them, stage by stage.<sup>33</sup> Here, it is meditation attainments that one should not be attached to, but taken as stages in the pilgrim’s progress.

A few scholars have disagreed with Buddhaghosa’s interpretation here. Richard Gombrich, for example, thinks that Buddhaghosa, interpreting of **dhammā** in terms of “prescribed behaviour or condition, ... therefore drags in types of meditation, which are mentioned nowhere in the text and are completely alien to the context” (1996:25 n27).

Although Buddhaghosa belonged to or was reflecting the scholastic tradition of the Mahāvihāra of Anuradhapura in mediaeval Sri Lanka, we can take him as reinterpreting the Sutta according to the prevalent Buddhist view of meditation (as *samatha* and *vipassanā*). Such a free interpretation of canonical texts is common with Dharma teachers, as part of a living Dharma transmission, even today. However, in textual criticism,<sup>34</sup> a “closer reading” is often desirable, at least for the academicians.

**3.2.4** Once again we have a deceptively simple term (*dhammā*) whose context is very clear. If we take **dhamma** here, without any Abhidhamma technicality, as simply meaning “a state that is occurring, a present mental event,” then the Buddha’s import is very clear. He is advising us to be mindful of the nature of mental states and sense-experiences as they arise. These are difficult enough to observe, what more those states that do *not* exist (**adhamma**) but are imagined or projected by the mind. Such project-

<sup>29</sup> On fetters (*saṃyojana*), see text §34 n.

<sup>30</sup> “Profoundly calm” (*santa, paṇītesu*), Masefield has “the calm state of this (peace) ... most choice” (UA:M 643). We could more freely take *santa, paṇīta* as a dvandva here to mean “the tranquil and the exquisite,” referring to *samatha* and *vipassanā* respectively, which fits the context here. See PED: *paṇīta*.

<sup>31</sup> *Pañcasu kāma, guṇesu chanda, rāgaṃ nālarā antarāyāyā ti vadati*. This sentence is found only in Comy.

<sup>32</sup> Keown inadvertently cites this as “MA 1:209.”

<sup>33</sup> See M 66,26-34/1:455 f (SD 28.11).

<sup>34</sup> Also called “lower criticism,” ie, the attempt to reconstruct the original text as far as determinable, involving the reconstructing of the transmission history and assessment of the relative value of manuscripts. “Higher criticism” deals with matters such as historical background, authorship, nature and date of composition, etc.

ions should not be attended to, as they are false. In short, the Buddha is here referring to “mental proliferation” (*papañca*).<sup>35</sup>

**3.2.5** Buddhaghosa’s second citation is especially significant because it is a canonical text, namely, **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38), where the parable is mentioned by name. He quotes the passage on how the Buddha, after explaining how consciousness arises interdependently and how a being depends on “food,” admonishes thus:

“Bhikshus, no matter how pure, how clear, this view may be, if you stick to it, prize it, be acquisitive about it,<sup>36</sup> treat it as a possession,<sup>37</sup> would you then understand that the Dharma has been taught **as being comparable to a raft**<sup>38</sup> that is for crossing over [the waters to the far shore], not for grasping?”

“No, bhante.”

“Bhikshus, no matter how pure, how clear, this view may be, if you do *not* stick to it, do *not* prize it, are *not* acquisitive about it, do *not* treat it as a possession, would you then understand that the Dharma has been taught as being comparable to a raft, which is for crossing over [the waters to the far shore], not for the purpose of grasping?”

“Yes, bhante.”

(M 38,14/1:261 f)

The context here is that of interdependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*), that is, *a doctrine*. It is thus clear that the meaning of the parable of the raft is

that one should not become slavishly attached to a view *even when that view is true*. One should understand the true nature of consciousness but not become fixated on it *qua* philosophical theory. It must be put to its proper use as part of the Path and within the context of the rest of Buddhist teachings.

(Keown 1992:103)

### 3.3 DHARMA AND DHARMAS

**3.3.1** Gombrich, in his interestingly exploratory *How Buddhism Began* (1996), has done a useful critical study of **the 2 famous parables** of the Alagaddûpama Sutta.<sup>39</sup> He begins by pointing out the problem of “scholastic literalism” (his expression):

Texts have been interpreted with too much attention to the precise words used and not enough to the speaker’s intention, the spirit of the text. In particular I see in some doctrinal developments what I call scholastic literalism, which is a tendency to take the words and phrases of earlier texts (maybe the Buddha’s own words) in such a way as to read in distinctions which it was never intended to make.

(Gombrich 1996:21 f)

Gombrich goes on to say that the Buddha is himself aware of the dangers (or disadvantages) of “putting words first” (*pada,parama*), that is, the last of the four types of unawakened learners. From **the**

<sup>35</sup> On *papañca*, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14(2).

<sup>36</sup> “Be acquisitive about it,” *dhanāyati* (denom of *dhana*, “treasure”) lit “make a treasure of it,” he desires (like money), wishes for, strives after. Also read as *vanāyati*, he hankers after.

<sup>37</sup> This verse up to here qu in Comy to **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22) (MA 22,21/2:109).

<sup>38</sup> “Being comparable to a raft,” *kullûpamam*. The whole phrase can be alt tr as “would you then understand the Dharma as taught in the parable of the raft ... ?” See **Bodhi**: “This is said to show the bhikkhus that they should not cling even to the right view of insight meditation” (M:ÑB 1233 n406).

<sup>39</sup> Gombrich 1996:21-26.

**Ugghaṭitaññū Sutta** (A 4.143), we know that “the word learner” is one, who though he hears much, recites much, remembers much and speaks much, is still unable to see the nature of true reality.

— — —

### SD 3.13(3.3)

## Ugghaṭitaññū Sutta

The Discourse on the Quick Learner

Traditional: A 4.3.4.3 = Aṅuttara Nikāya 4, Catukka Nipāta, 3 Tatiya Paṇṇāsaka 4, Puggala Vagga 3

PTS: A 4.133/2:135 ≈ Pug 4.5/41

Theme: The 4 types of unawakened learners

Bhikshus, there are **these 4 individuals** to be found in the world. What are the four?<sup>40</sup>

(1) A quick learner (*ugghaṭitaññū*)

[an individual who penetrates the Dharma<sup>41</sup> *the moment it is spoken*].<sup>42</sup>

(2) A diffuse learner (*vipacitaññū*)

[an individual who penetrates the Dharma that is spoken in brief, when its meaning is *being analysed in detail*].<sup>43</sup>

(3) One who is tractable (*neyya*)

[an individual who in *stages* realizes the Dharma through recitation, questioning, wise attention and by associating with, serving and waiting upon spiritual friends].<sup>44</sup>

(4) A word learner (*pada, parama*)

[an individual who, though listening much, reciting much, remembers much, speaking much, penetrates not the Dharma, mastering at best some teachings on a *word level*].<sup>45</sup>

These 4 individuals, bhikshus, are to be found in the world.

— evaṃ —

### 3.3.2 Dhamma and dhammā

**3.3.2.1** After pointing out that “... Buddhism provides the best tools for its exegesis,” (22) Gombrich goes on to discuss ***dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag’eva adhammā*** (“you should abandon even the dharmas, how much more so that which are not dharmas!”) [§14], that is, the meaning of *dhammā* (plural) here. Just before making this key statement, the Buddha refers to the Dharma in the singular, thus:

<sup>40</sup> A 2:135; with explanations from Pug 4.5/41; Nett 7, 125; AA 3:131.

<sup>41</sup> *Dhammābhisamaya*, ie, penetrating into or gaining knowledge of the 4 truths (PugA 223; BA 127), which refers to the attainment of any of the paths to sainthood. Where streamwinning is meant, we see the term *dhamma, cak-khu, paṭilābha* (attaining of the Dharma-eye). See S:B 526.

<sup>42</sup> *Yassa puggalassa saha udāhaṭa, velāya dhammābhisamayo hoti* (Pug 4.5/41).

<sup>43</sup> *Yassa puggalassa saṅkhittena bhāsitassa vitthārena atthe vibhajiyamāne dhammābhisamayo hoti* (Pug 4.5/41).

<sup>44</sup> *Yassa puggalassa uddesato paripucchato yoniso manasikaroto kalyāṇa, mitte sevato bhajato payirupāsato evaṃ anupubbena dhammābhisamayo hoti* (Pug 4.5/41).

<sup>45</sup> *Yassa puggalassa bahum pi suṇato bahum pi bhaṇato bahum pi dhārayato bahum pi vācayato, na tāya jātiyā dhammābhisamayo hoti* (Pug 4.5/41).

Even so I have shown you that the Dharma (*dhamma*) is comparable to a raft, which is for crossing over (the waters to the far shore), not for the purpose of grasping. [§13]

Of this usage, Gombrich explains:

... the Buddha refers to his teaching sometimes as *dhamma* in the singular and sometimes as *dhammā* in the plural, just as we in English can talk of his teaching or his teachings without any change in meaning. Similarly, the raft parable happens to begin with *dhamma* in the singular—"I shall teach you that my teaching is like a raft"—and to end with *dhammā* in the plural; but to imagine that there is a change of reference is sheer scholastic literalism. (Gombrich 1996:24)

**3.3.2.2** In a practical way, Gombrich—and as we shall see below, Bodhi, too [3.3.2.3]—may well be right—that there is no change in reference to what the Buddha means by *dhamma* (sg) and *dhammā* (pl) in the Sutta's key quote [§14]. In an important sense, both the singular *dhamma* and its plural form can both refer to the same thing, that is, the teaching(s). However, it is not a mere accident that the two different forms are listed one after the other. It is, in fact, clear why *dhammā*, "dharma" (rather than the singular *dhamma*) is used in the key reference of the parable.

The Sutta Commentary (MA 2:100) takes *dhammā* (pl) here to mean "calm and insight" (*samatha, vipassanā*)—that is, as "wholesome states"—citing **the Laṭṭikôpama Sutta** (M 66) as an example of the teaching of the abandonment of attachment to calm,<sup>46</sup> and **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38), as one of the abandonment of attachment to insight.<sup>47</sup>

For meditation practitioners, this is an important note. It means that we should not practise meditation purely for the pleasant dhyana states: we attain these states only for the sake of a calm and clear mind that welcomes **insight**. With a mastery of insight, we use it to inspire **calm** and clarity. Calm and insight work together to lift us above mental distractions and hindrances—just as a bird, free of all burden, flies with both its wings, above the ground, high into the sky. (**Dh 372**)<sup>48</sup>

**3.3.2.3** As such, it is wrong for Bodhi to insist that "*dhamma* here signifies not good states themselves, but the teachings, the correct attitude to which was delineated just above in the parable of the snake." (M:ÑB 1209 n255). This is where Buddhaghosa's explanation in his **Commentary** is perfectly proper and helpful.

To be fair, Bodhi is only wrong in insisting that *dhamma* here refers only to "the teaching(s)". Hence, we can concede that, at least—like Gombrich [3.3.2.2]—he is partially right, as the practitioner has to let go of the "teachings," too. But what does this mean? It certainly cannot mean that the arhat is "beyond good and bad," that is, above morality,<sup>49</sup> as suggested by I B Horner (1950:1) and Dharmasiri (1986:183).<sup>50</sup>

**3.3.2.4** The most significant import of **the parable of the water-snake** is that we must have a right grasp of the teaching, that is, we should not merely see it as factual learning, or accumulating it, or for the sake of worldly benefit—which would be like holding the venomous snake by its tail, and so be fatally stung. Instead, we should see the Dharma, with our good *spiritual* grasp of it, as a learning that progressively frees learning—just as we firmly and safely holds the venomous snake by its neck.

<sup>46</sup> M 66,26-33/1:455 (SD 28.11).

<sup>47</sup> M 38,14/1:260 f (SD 7.10).

<sup>48</sup> See SD 41.4 (1.4.2).

<sup>49</sup> See **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7.

<sup>50</sup> For a detailed study, see Keown 1992:92-102. See also Gombrich 1996:22-25.

As long as we are unawakened, all our understanding of the Dharma, no matter how noble, are still views (*diṭṭhi*). They are only different ways of *viewing* reality, but we have not fully and directly understood the 4 noble truths, the principles of true reality. As our understanding of the Dharma grows, we progressively let go of our *wrong* views, and go on to straighten our *right* views.

During meditation, for example, we have to let go even of right views, so that our mind is fully free to be just itself, enjoying a bright inner space. This is when we fully and truly know the mind. Then, our understanding and experience of **impermanence** deepen and widen—we understand, for example, that all our views are conditioned and impermanent—and so we need to change and grow by shedding them, like a snake shedding its old skin.<sup>51</sup> Then, we are on the way to awakening in this life itself.<sup>52</sup>

**3.3.3** The point is clear: the Buddha rebukes Ariṭṭha for taking the teaching only in a certain sense and clinging on to it. He is repudiating Ariṭṭha’s misinterpretation of his words, for grasping the letter at the cost of the spirit. The point here is *not* that the content of his teaching is to be abandoned once one has awakened, but that the teaching is “pragmatic, a means to an end, and that one should not cling to a particular formulation he used—let alone something he never said at all.” (Gombrich 1996:24).

Gombrich, in *How Buddhism Began* (1996), then, points out that *dhammā* (plural) can also mean the objects of thought (he calls them *noeta*), making this important observation:

Lifting the last words out of context, Mahāyāna texts claimed that the Buddha prescribed the abandonment of all objects of thought; and by the same token that he also recommended the abandonment of opposite, non-objects of thought—whatever they might be. Thus the raft parable became a charter for paradox and irrationality. (Gombrich 1996:25)

### **3.3.4 Mahāyāna innovations**

**3.3.4.1** As an example of “whatever they might be” (alluding to the Mahāyāna philosophers’ revision of the Buddha’s words and the like), Gombrich quotes the following excerpt from **the Diamond Sutra** as an example:

[6] *The Lord*: ... Nor does there take place in these Bodhi-beings [Bodhisattvas], these great beings, a perception of a dharma, and likewise [there is] no perception of a no-dharma. Nor Subhūti, does a perception or no-perception take place in them. And why? If, Subhūti, in these Bodhi-beings, these great beings, a perception of a dharma could take place, that would be with them a seizing on a self, seizing on a being, seizing on a soul, seizing on a person.

And why? Because the Bodhi-being, the great being, should not seize upon a dharma or a no-dharma. Therefore this saying has been taught by the Tathagata with a hidden meaning, “By those who know the discourse on dharma like unto a raft, dharmas should be forsaken, much more so no-dharmas.”

**7** *The Lord*: What do you think, Subhūti, *is* there any dharma which has been fully known by the Tathagata as “the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment,” or is there any dharma which has been demonstrated by the Tathagata?

*Subhūti*: No, as I understand the Lord’s teaching, there is not any dharma which has been fully known by the Tathagata as “the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment,” and there is no dharma which has been demonstrated by the Tathagata. And why? This dharma which has been

<sup>51</sup> This figure of the snake sloughing is from **Uraga S** (Sn 1.1), SD 101.3.

<sup>52</sup> On how to practise the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7. On overcoming of views, see **The notion of diṭṭhi**, SD 40a.1.



fully known or demonstrated by the Tathagata—it is not to be seized, it is not to be talked about, it is neither dharma nor no-dharma. And why? Because an Absolute [*asaṃskṛta*] exalts the Holy Persons. [Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, tr Conze, 1957, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 1974:69 f; Skt pp31-33]<sup>53</sup>  
(Gombrich, 1996:25 f, n29; emphasis added)

**3.3.4.2 The Diamond Sutra** is a work of the Wisdom Period of early Mahāyāna, a golden age in Mahāyāna philosophy, whose textual nucleus began appearing from 100 BCE to 100 CE. The Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra (c300-500), the best known of the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñā, pāramitā*) sutras, belong to the later Wisdom Period, just before the rise of Tantric Buddhism (600-1200) and the general disappearance of Buddhism from India.

The Perfection of Wisdom centres upon **two radical innovations**:

- firstly, it advocates the Bodhisattva ideal as the highest form of religious life (contra the arhat ideal of early Buddhism); and
- secondly, the “wisdom” (*prajñā*) it teaches is that of the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and non-production of phenomena (*dharmā*) (contra the more “substantial,” albeit impermanent, nature of being that is taught earlier by the historical Buddha).

**3.3.4.3** The tone of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras are profoundly *philosophical*, often with a subtle power of their own, but outgrowing the pragmatic instructive mind-centred spirituality of early Buddhism. The Wisdom period was a time of a book religion, as all these sutras were in written (later printed) form (as against the early oral teachings). It is essentially a cult of the written word that worships and celebrates the entrancing beauty and awe of the script and sound of this-worldly emptiness and cosmic Bodhisattvas. It sees itself as transcending (even superior to) the seemingly tedious path of inner stillness beyond language and concept, ending in streamwinning or in nirvana.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.4 CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

**3.4.1 Migrant Buddhism** reached a new level of perfection of its own in China, and Chinese Buddhism became one of the sources and standards for East Asia Buddhism.<sup>55</sup> The enduring influence of Chinese Buddhism emanates not only from its religiosity and monasticism, but more so from the semantic power and profundity of the Chinese character. Chinese language comprises pictures and symbols that make up characters, some of which are simple, while others are compound. The simple characters are combined to create compounds. Concrete objects are easily represented by such characters, but abstract ideas, such as evil, wisdom, consciousness and mind, or foreign names (such as Gautama), are not always adequately represented.

**3.4.2** Many difficulties attended **the translating of Buddhist sutras** from Indic languages into Chinese. There are 2 main problems:

- (1) The two **languages** come from completely different language stocks. Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali and other Indic languages belong to the Indo-Aryan family, while the Chinese language is from the Sino-Tibetan family. The Indic languages are alphabetic, while Chinese is monosyllabic. Linguistically, Chinese is an analytic, isolating or root language, that is, one in which the words are invariable, and syntactic

<sup>53</sup> For a Mahāyāna interpretation, see Harrison, 2006:144 n42.

<sup>54</sup> See **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11.

<sup>55</sup> See Piya Tan, *History of Buddhism: A brief strategic study*, 2005 chs 6-9.

relationships are shown by word order. Indic languages, on the other hand, are synthetic, fusional or inflecting (also inflected or inflectional).

- (2) There is a vast difference between Chinese and Indian **cultures and philosophies**. Not only did translators discover it was nearly impossible to find synonyms or near-synonyms, or equivalent concepts for the scriptures in the Chinese language, but they also found a very basic difference between the ways of thinking and of expressing thoughts in the two languages.

**3.4.3 China's history** profoundly influenced Buddhism. In China, although the state generally failed to regulate the Sangha (unlike, for example, in Japan), because such efforts were tempered by geographical, cultural and political contingencies. Chinese monks, however, irrespective of their ordination lineage, were unified by their adherence to a more or less common monastic code, a common mode of dress, a common stock of liturgical and ritual knowledge, and so on. As such, Chinese monks could easily wander from monastery to monastery in search of new teachers and teachings. Such peregrinations were the norm that contributed to the consolidation of the Chinese Sangha across the empire.<sup>56</sup>

Such a centralizing of Chinese society and its pragmatism easily lead the Chinese mind to turn away from the *ekāyāna*, the “one-going” mind-training of the eightfold path,<sup>57</sup> and direct its genius to the *eka, yāna*, “the one vehicle” of cosmic Buddhism. In such a scenario, both *dhammā* and *adhammā* are transcended, albeit mostly philosophically.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.5 THE PROBLEM OF TRANSCENDENCE

**3.5.1** Keown makes an important rebuttal of the modern wrong view of “**transcendence**,”<sup>59</sup> arising from a misinterpretation of the parable of the raft, by such scholars who claim that the arhat “is above good and evil” (I B Horner 1950:1) and that he has “transcended ordinary morality” (G Dharmasiri 1986: 183). Keown draws his evidence from the Commentary:

First, when commenting on the parable of the raft [§§12-14], Buddhaghosa specifically links the moral of the parable to the story of Ariṭṭha, occurring in part (1), mentioning him by name.<sup>60</sup> Secondly, Keown notes,

The Commentary makes no reference whatsoever in any shape or form to the interpretation of the parable as suggested by Horner. There is no mention of transcendence, no word of “going beyond good and evil” and no suggestion at all that the *dhamma* or any part of it is to be left behind at any stage of the Path. If the parable indeed had this extraordinary and momentous meaning surely it would not be passed over without a word? (Keown 1992:100)

**3.5.2** We have seen that the context of **the parable of the raft** is that of interdependent arising [3.2]. It is clear that the Buddha does not claim that he or any of the arhats are “beyond good and evil” in the

<sup>56</sup> Robert H Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*. A Kuroda Institute Book. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002:9.

<sup>57</sup> On *ekāyāna, magga*, see **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss**, SD 13.1 (3.2).

<sup>58</sup> On difficulties in the tr of the Chin parallels, see Analayo 2011:145-158.

<sup>59</sup> **Transcendence** is a belief in some kind of higher power or existence, usu of God, but is also applicable of Buddhism where its adherents see the Buddha as a transcendent being. The belief is that such a being is outside or beyond (an idea common in Mahāyāna). Such views are of course speculative, and as such a serious hindrance to awakening, which arises from letting go of views.

<sup>60</sup> Buddhaghosa makes two additional references (MA 2:110, 113) to Ariṭṭha in relation to part (4) of the Sutta [ad §§15, 26], but this does not directly concern the argument here.

sense that they are above all rules and laws, religious or secular—as otherwise proposed by scholars like Horner and Dharmasiri—but that all views, even of the Dharma, are *not to be clung to*, and that they are all to be transcended.<sup>61</sup>

Buddhaghosa again makes this very clear in his commentary on **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38) passage here:

[M 38,14/1:260,32] ... Here “**view**” (*diṭṭhi*) means right view through insight. It is perfectly “**pure**” (*parisuddha*) by seeing the nature of things (*sabhāva*), “**clear**” (*pariyodāta*) by seeing conditionality. “**If you stick to it**” (*allīyetha*) means “if you dwell clinging with views tainted by craving.” “**(If you) prize it**” (*kelāyetha*) means “if you dwell cherishing, sporting, with views tainted with craving.” ... “**For crossing over, not for grasping**” (*nittharanatthāya no gahaṇ’atthāya*) means “the Dharma taught by me in the parable of the raft is for crossing over the 4 floods [ie, the *āsava*: sense-desire, existence, views, ignorance], not for grasping: shouldn’t you realize this?” (MA 2:307 f)

This commentary is especially relevant to the understanding of the parable of the raft, as the story of Sāti in the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya Sutta parallels that of Ariṭṭha here, the main difference being the point of wrong view: while Ariṭṭha holds that sensual pleasure is not an obstacle to the monastic spiritual life, Sāti views that it is the “same consciousness” (that is, some sort of soul) continues into the next life.<sup>62</sup>

**3.5.3** Hence, it is clear, from both the text and the commentary, that **the parable of the raft** addresses the problem of attachment and fixation to dharmas (*dhammā*)—meaning both doctrinal or philosophical notions and meditative states, no matter how sublime—must be abandoned for progressively higher truths and states, until we destroy our defilements and stop creating new karma, so that we are really “beyond good and evil.”<sup>63</sup>

To sum up: the theme of the Discourse of the Parable of the Water Snake and of the Raft Parable is not transcendence but a warning that even good things can be misused. The teachings are good but Ariṭṭha distorts them. The scriptures are good but some people twist them to their own ends. The raft is good but becomes a handicap of misuse by being carried around. Calming and insight meditation are good but can be a hindrance if an attachment for them is allowed to develop. From a Buddhist perspective, those who do not follow the Way have little hope of salvation. The Parable of the Water Snake warns that even those who *do* follow the Way can find themselves, if they are not careful, in a spiritual dead-end. (Keown 1992:105)

In short, it can be said that the Sutta centres upon the idea of not misrepresenting the Buddha’s teaching. This misrepresentation here is the affirmation or approval of sense-gratification and of self-view. Both of these—sense-gratification and self-view—are clearly obstructions to spiritual development since they spring from craving and ignorance respectively. Above all, the Buddha advises us to keep moving on—neither to stop nor give up—until the final goal is reached.

<sup>61</sup> An arhat who has transcended all views, and destroyed all his defilements, is said to have “abandoned both good and bad” (*puñña,pāpa,pahīna*, Dh 39; cf Sn 520; S 1:97; Vv 58; Pv 19; Ap 488), ie, he is no more under the power of karma and rebirth, except for the incidental fruiting of past karma under the right conditions, which the arhat easily tolerates and lets pass. See **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (9).

<sup>62</sup> **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya S** (M 38,14/1:260 f), SD 7.10.

<sup>63</sup> See Keown 1992:103. For a detailed discussion, see **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7.

## 4 Refuting the Upaniṣadic self-views

### 4.1 THE 6 GROUNDS FOR VIEWS

**4.1.1** The Alagaddūpama Sutta is a good example of the Buddha’s masterful attempt to refute the doctrine of *ātman* (Skt *attā*), the concept of an eternal self or cosmic soul. More precisely, as demonstrated by **K R Norman**, the Sutta contains a deliberate refutation of Yajñavalkya’s teaching in the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad.<sup>64</sup> In this connection, two Sutta passages are relevant.

The first is the section on **the 6 grounds for views** [§15], and the second is the “Let go of what is not yours!” passage [§40]. In the section on the 6 ground for views [§15], the Buddha declares these 6 wrong views, namely, that

an ignorant ordinary person ... regards:

(1) form ... (2) feeling ... (3) perception ... (4) formations ... (5) what is seen, heard, sensed, known ... and (6) “The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same; I will endure as long as eternity” ... ,  
thus, “This is mine; this I am; this is my self.” (M 22,15/1:135)

**4.1.2 K R Norman**, in his paper, “A note on Attā in the Alagaddūpamā Sutta” (1981), points out that:

The idea the world and the *ātman* (=brahman) are the same is found in the Upanishads, and it is possible to find actual verbal echoes of the Upanishads in this passage, eg, *eṣa ma ātmā* (Chān[dogya] Up[anishad] 3.14.3-4) and *yathākratur asmim loke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ pretya bhavati sa kraturṁ kurvīta ... etam itaḥ pretyābhisambhavitāsmī ti* (ibid 3.14.1 and 4).

In contrast to this false view the Buddha states that someone who is cognizant with the *ariyadham[m]a* looks at *rūpa*, etc. with the thought: *na etaṁ mama n’eso ‘haṁ asmi, na m’eso attā*.<sup>65</sup> “This is not mine, I am not that, that is not my *attā*.” Consequently he is not anxious about something which does not exist. (Norman 1981:20)<sup>66</sup>

**4.1.3** The Buddha then rephrases this statement in terms of the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*), and exhorts his disciples, “**Let go of what is not yours!**” [§40]. To close his admonition that the aggregates are not their *attā*, that is, a final refutation of the view that the external world, the aggregates and the *attā* are the same, he deftly points to the “the grass, sticks, branches and leaves in this Jetavana” in the famous Jetavana parable [§41].

The meaning of **the Jetavana parable** is that we lose nothing by letting go of our attachment to the aggregates (that is, the body and mind): indeed, we have more to gain, namely, liberation. Norman adds:

We are now in a position to assess the basis of the Buddha’s refutation. The doctrine that the world and the *attā* are the same (*so loko so attā*) also affirms the oneness of the individual *attā* and the world-*attā*. The phrase *eso ‘haṁ asmi* “I am that” is the *tat tvam asi* “That thou art” of the Upaniṣad[s] looked at from the point of view of the first person instead of the second person. Since *loka =attā*, then the Buddha’s argument is:

<sup>64</sup> See K R Norman, “A note on Attā in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*,” 1981:19-29.

<sup>65</sup> See Norman 1981:29 n5 on a wrong reading in V 1:14, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Norman thinks that “E J Thomas is too cautious when he states, ‘There may be here some reference to upaniṣadic doctrine, though it is still not the identity of self and Brahmā’ (*History of Buddhist Thought*, London, 1933: 103).”

“If there is a world-*attā*, then there is something belonging to the world-*attā* in me. If there is something belonging to the world-*attā* in me, i.e. if there is a world-*attā*, then I (and all other things) would have *attā* which is part of the world-*attā*, and I would have all the “things” that go to make up the world-*attā*. Form (*rūpa*), etc., would be “mine.” If, however, each individual *attā* were part of the world-*attā*, then each painful sensation felt by one part of the world-*attā* would be felt by every part of the world-*attā*, i.e. when wood is burned the *attā* in us would feel the pain suffered by the *attā* in it. We do not feel any such pain because there is no world-*attā*.”  
(Norman 1981:23)

**4.1.4** In other words, nowhere in his teachings, does the Buddha ever mention the “world-soul” or universal Self.<sup>67</sup> We find an interesting parallel in the Jain texts where the Sūyagaḍaṃga 1.1.1, too, refutes the world-soul (Norman 1981:24 f). The similarity of the Jain and Buddhist arguments, Norman concludes, “makes it clear that the Buddha in the [Alagaddûpamā Sutta] is not merely refuting the individual *ātman*, but also the concept of the world-*ātman*.” (Norman 1981:25)

**4.1.5** The Alagaddûpama Sutta closes with a description of the way in which the mental fetters are destroyed leading to sainthood. Even for those who fail to walk the path, the Buddha makes this remarkable declaration at the close of the Sutta:

“In the teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, those who have just a bit of faith in me and just a bit of love for me, are all bound for heaven.”<sup>68</sup>  
(M 22,47/1:142), SD 3.13

Even with just a bit of **positive emotion**, especially faith and love, we will be able to keep to the Dharma. The Buddha, in other words, provides the chance of liberation for everyone.<sup>69</sup>

## 4.2 “LET GO OF WHAT IS NOT YOURS!”

### 4.2.1 Refuting the Upaniṣads

**4.2.1.1** The second Alagaddûpama Sutta passage which, according to **K R Norman**,<sup>70</sup> is a deliberate refutation of Yajñavalkya’s teaching in the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, is the “Let go of what is not yours!” passage, thus:

Therefore, bhikshus, let go of [give up] what is not yours. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

What is it that is not yours?

Form is not yours. Feeling ... Perception ... Formations ... Consciousness is not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time. [§40]

<sup>67</sup> R. Gombrich, in review of Bhattacharya, *L’Ātman-Brahman dan le Bouddhisme Ancien*, in *Archives Internationales d’Histoire des Sciences*, 1978:128 f. (Quoted by Norman 1981:24)

<sup>68</sup> “Those who have a bit of faith in me, a bit of love for me,” *yesaṃ mayi saddhā, mattarāṃ pema, mattarāṃ*. This phrase is found in Alagaddûpama S (M 22,47/1:143), **Bhaddāli S** (M 65.27/1:444) & **Kiṭṭā, giri S** (M 70.21/1:479), SD 12.1. Cf **Sarakāni Ss** (S 55.24-25/4:375-380). Comy explains that this refers to the insight practitioners (*vipassaka puggalā*) who have not attained any supramundane state, not gaining even streamwinning, they are reborn in a heaven. On the other hand, we can take this passage as it is, that is, anyone who has “a bit of faith, a bit of love” in the Buddha is reborn in a heaven. See M:ÑB 2001:1212 n274.

<sup>69</sup> On the Sutta closing, see also **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7(7.3).

<sup>70</sup> See K R Norman, “A note on Attā in the *Alagaddûpama Sutta*,” 1981:19-29.

**4.2.1.2** Norman shows that, in the light of the passage on the 6 grounds for wrong views, this passage on “Let go of what is not yours!” must be understood as a satirical allusion to the identification of the world and the self. This identification, constituting the most famous doctrine of the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka and the Chāndogya Upaniṣads, was the culmination of *the theory of the equivalence* between macrocosm and microcosm, between the universe and man. As Gombrich summarizes the point:

the need for multiple, partial equivalence was short-circuited by identifying the soul/essence of the individual and of the world. The Buddha in a sense kept the equivalence, or at least parallelism, for he argued against a single essence at either level and so made macrocosm and microcosm equally devoid of soul/essence. (Gombrich 1990:15)

#### **4.2.2 Yājñavalkya**

**4.2.2.1** A comparison of the following Sutta passages with their Upaniṣad counterparts, especially those of **the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka** (BĀU), show how closely related they are, especially where “there seem to be verbal echoes of Yājñavalkya, here summarized by **Gombrich** (a student of Norman):

**The sixth wrong view** in [the ground for wrong view] passage is that after death I shall be *nicco, dhuvo, etc.* Compare:

Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.23: *eṣa nityo mahimā brāhmaṇasya* [This is the eternal greatness of Brahman] (the brāhmaṇa here being one who has realized identity with *brahman*);

[Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad] 4.4.20: *aja ātmā mahān dhruvaḥ* [Unknown is the self, great, constant]. The third point of the *tilakkhaṇas, dukkha*, is not mentioned here, but is of course opposed to *ānanda*, as at:

Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.9.28: *vijñānam ānandaṁ brahma* [Brahman is bliss and absolute knowledge] and

[Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad] 4.3.33: *athaiṣa eva parama ānandaḥ, eṣa brahmalokaḥ* [This is indeed supreme bliss, this Brahma World].

It remains only to remind readers of the most important and closest parallel of all.

**The fifth wrong view** is to identify with what has been *ditṭhaṁ sutam mutam*<sup>71</sup> *viññataṁ*.

What exactly is that? The answer is:

Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.5.6: *ātmani khalv are dṛṣṭe śrute mate vijñāte idaṁ sarvaṁ vidita* [When, indeed, the self is seen, heard, sensed, known, all this is understood.]

So here is the form of the microcosm-macrocosm equivalence to which the Buddha is alluding; and we can further see that his fifth wrong view is Yājñavalkya’s realization of that identity in life, and his **sixth view** the making real that identity at death. But, says the Buddha, this is something that does not exist (*asat*). (Gombrich 1990:15; reparagraphed & Skt tr Piya Tan)

**4.2.2.2 Gombrich**, in his article on “*Kamma* as a reaction to Brahminism” (1996), summarizes the above in these words:

The Buddha does not often use ontological language at all. The most explicit passage in which he denies the *existence* of the *ātman* is in the Alagaddūpama Sutta. Perhaps the most famous of all Upaniṣadic dicta is *tat tvam asi* (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6, 8, 7, etc), “Thou art that”—identifying the individual self/essence with the world self/essence. The transposition of this statement into

<sup>71</sup> Gombrich here has *mate* (not found in Pali in this context): probably contaminated by proximity of the Skt *mate* below. See text, §15(5) n. See *Ditṭh suta muta viññāta*, SD 53.5.



the first person—"I am this"—in Pali gives us *eso 'ham asmi*, and this is said in several texts to be false. To be precise, the full false statement is *etam mama, eso'ham asmi, eso me attā*: "This is mine, I am this, this is my self/essence." (Gombrich 1996:38)

**4.2.3** Although this set of three clauses is often mentioned as wrong views, it is in the Alagaddûpama Sutta that it is most clearly explained [§§15-29],<sup>72</sup> "and in terms of other obvious verbal echoes of surviving Upaniṣadic passages."<sup>73</sup> In essence, the passage denies that one's self is the same as the world, or that one will become the "world-self" at death. The Buddha declares that people worry about something that is non-existent externally (*bahiddhā asati*) and non-existent internally (*ajjhataṃ asati*). According to **Gombrich**, "he is referring respectively to the soul/essence of the world and of the individual."<sup>74</sup>

**4.3 RELATED TEXTS.** **Nyanaponika Thera's** translation, *The Discourse on the Snake Parable* (1974), has a useful introduction and detailed notes. A helpful current translation is found in *The Middle Length Discourses*.<sup>75</sup> I B Horner's translation in *The Middle Length Sayings*, although dated and inaccurate, has some useful technical footnotes.

The Alagaddûpama Sutta should be studied with the story of **Vakkali** (on homosexuality),<sup>76</sup> and the following suttas:

**Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48),<sup>77</sup>  
**(Taṇhā) Bhikkhuṇī Sutta** (A 4.159)<sup>78</sup>

The Buddha explains how sexual feelings arise.

A short instructive sutta of psychological interest, as it is one of the earliest mention of "sublimation," that is, channelling one's unacceptable impulses (eg lust and conceit) in acceptable ways.<sup>79</sup>

**Sāliya Jātaka** (J 367) +  
**Taca,sāra Jātaka** (J 368)

A poor village healer tries to trick the Bodhisattva into being bitten by a snake in a hollow tree-trunk. The Bodhisattva carefully feels his way, seizes the snake by its neck, and flings it at the healer, who is then stung. (J 367/3:202 f + J 368/3:204-206, the 2 stories are contiguous)

<sup>72</sup> At M 22,15-29/1:135-139. Gombrich (1996:38 n10): Tuvia Gelblum has shown that virtually all the same set of three clauses, adapted to meet the exigencies of the *āryā* metre, is found as *kārikā* 64 of the Sāmkhyā Kārikā. In that context they refer to realizing that the *puruṣa* (spirit) neither is nor possesses any of the evolutes of *prakṛti* (nature). (Gelblum, "Sāmkhya and Sartre," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 1 1970:75-82, see pp78-80)

<sup>73</sup> Gombrich notes that "these echoes are not mentioned by the commentators and seem not to have been noticed before modern times. They are mentioned in Hermann Oldenberg 1923:258." (1996:39 n11). Both K R Norman (1981) and his student, R Gombrich (1990) have recently made such analyses.

<sup>74</sup> Gombrich's teacher, K R Norman holds the same view (1981:23). Gombrich refers to two other suttas in this connection: **Taṇhā Jālinī S** (A 4.199/2:211-213), SD 31.15, & **Yamaka S** (S 22.85/3:144), SD 26.14.

<sup>75</sup> Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, rev ed 2001:224 ff.

<sup>76</sup> See **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:119-124), SD 8.8.

<sup>77</sup> A 7.48/4:57-59 (SD 8.7).

<sup>78</sup> A 4.159/2:144-146 (SD 10.14).

<sup>79</sup> Sublimation is an unconscious defence mechanism: see **Khaluṅka S** (A 8.14), SD 7.9; also SD 24.10b (2).

## 5 The Buddha's skillful means and the 5 aggregates

### 5.1 ENIGMATIC STATEMENT

#### 5.1.1 Eternalism

**5.1.1.1** Here, we will examine how the Buddha uses his **skillful means** (*upāya*)<sup>80</sup> to counter the key wrong view of his day, that is, the notion of an eternal self or soul (*atta*) and personal identity (*sakkāya*, *diṭṭhi*), and how, in the process, apparently, he formulates the teaching of the 5 aggregates (*pañca-khandha*). **Alexander Wynne** (2010) has instructively shown how this constitutes perhaps the oldest records we have of “traditions about the Buddha’s teaching that did not conform to the later myth” (195) and “suggests the possibility that the *Alagaddûpama Sutta* was composed before the later myth emerged, during a time when the origin and purpose of early Buddhist doctrine was understood differently” (199 f).

**5.1.1.2** The *Alagaddûpama Sutta* contains one of the most enigmatic statements in the whole of the Pali canon. This statement on **the 6 grounds for wrong views** (*cha diṭṭhi-t,thāna*) [5.1.2], that is, **§15**, which reads in full as follows:

#### The 6 grounds for wrong views pericope

Here, bhikshus, an ignorant ordinary person, who has no regard for noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma, who has no regard for the true individuals<sup>81</sup> and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma,

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) regards <u>form</u> thus,   | ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’ <sup>82</sup> |
| (2) He regards <u>feeling</u> thus,   | ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’               |
| (3) He regards <u>perception</u> thus,  | ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’               |
| (4) He regards <u>formations</u> thus,  | ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’               |
| (5) He regards what is <b>seen, heard, sensed, and known</b> [5.2.1.2], <b>found, sought after, mentally pursued</b> [5.2.3], thus,   | ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’               |
| (6) And this ground for views, namely, ‘ <u>The world is the self</u> ; after death I <sup>83</sup> will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same; <sup>84</sup> I will endure as long as eternity’—this, too, he regards thus, ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’ [§15] |   |

**5.1.1.3** Philosophically, the “6 grounds for wrong views pericope” are rooted in **the eternalist view** prevalent in the Buddha’s time. Here, the personal identity view itself becomes an object of craving, conceit and false view of the self. Nyanaponika is of the opinion that this view expresses the identity of the self with the universe (1962:33 n19). Bodhi, however, thinks that this view is purely hypothetical “as the Pali is ambiguous and could just as well be pointing to a fundamental dualism of self and world along the

<sup>80</sup> See *Upāya*, SD 30.8.

<sup>81</sup> “True individuals” (*sappurisā*). For def, see *Sappurisa S* (M 113), SD 23.7 (3).

<sup>82</sup> These are the threefold grasping (*ti,vidha gāha*): see §15 ad loc.

<sup>83</sup> “After death I will be,” *so pecca bhavissāmi*. Comy *so* = *so aham*.

<sup>84</sup> “Eternally the same” (*sassati,sama*), a term from the Bṛhad Aranyaka Upaniṣad 5.10 (*sāsvatīh samāh*) (Nyanaponika 1974:42 n21).

lines of Sāṃkhya philosophy with its distinction between changeable Nature (*prakṛti*) and changeless Spirit (*puruṣa*).<sup>85</sup>

**5.1.1.4** This full formula [5.1.1.2(5)]—as in **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** [§15] (where they are said to be the grounds for wrong views, *diṭṭhi-ṭ, ṭhāna*)—is found in all the first 18 suttas, under the subheading, “The chapter on streamwinning” (*sotāpatti vagga*), of **the Diṭṭhi Saṃyutta** (S 24), “the connected teachings on views.”<sup>86</sup> In every sutta, the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness) and the sense-objects (as “what is seen, heard, sensed, known, found, sought after, mentally pursued”) are called the “6 grounds” (*cha ṭhāna*), that is, the grounds for views—as similarly stated in §15 of the Alagaddûpama Sutta. They are all to be seen, as they really are, as being impermanent, which leads, in due course, to the attaining of streamwinning.

The full formula recurs in **the Anāthapiṇḍik’ovāda Sutta** (M 143), where Sāriputta instructs the gravely ill Anātha,piṇḍika, thus, “I will not cling to what is seen, heard, sensed, known, attained [encountered], sought after, examined by the mind, and my *consciousness* will not be dependent on that.”<sup>87</sup> Unlike the teachings of **the Sotāpatti Vagga** of the Diṭṭhi Saṃyutta—which instructs us to regard all our body, mental activities and sense-objects as *impermanent*—Sāriputta exhorts Anāthapiṇḍika to let go of them. It is said that Anāthapiṇḍika dies a streamwinner, and is reborn as a Tusita deva.<sup>88</sup> So here we have two ways of regarding our body, mental activities and sense-objects—that is, as being impermanent or simply letting them go—which result in the attaining of streamwinning.

### **5.1.2 The 6 grounds for wrong views**

**5.1.2.1** The Sutta Commentary says that this section is taught to prevent further misrepresentation of the Dharma, that is, the introduction of a **self-view** into the teaching. These grounds for views (*diṭṭhi-ṭ, ṭhāna*) are wrong views in themselves as grounds for more elaborate wrong views, namely, the objects (*ārammaṇa*) of views (that is, the 5 aggregates) and the conditions (*paccaya*) for views (that is, ignorance, mental perversion, false ideas, etc). (MA 2:110)

**5.1.2.2** The term, *diṭṭhi-ṭ, ṭhāna*, “ground for views,” also appears in **the Brahma, jāla Sutta** (D 1) and its Commentary. The Commentaries say that these grounds may arise through ignorance, sense-impression (*phassa*), perceptions, thoughts, unskillful attention, bad company, the word of others, etc.<sup>89</sup> These 7 headed by the 5 aggregates are given as “the 8 grounds for views” in **the Paṭisambhidā, magga** (Pm 2.3/2:139).

<sup>85</sup> M:ÑB 2001:1210 n259. See *kārikā* 64 of Īśvara,krṣṇa’s Sāṃkhya-kārikā (“Verses on Sāṃkhya,” c 2nd cent). See Gombrich 1996:38 f.

<sup>86</sup> S 24.1-19/3:202-216. In the chapter, the *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* pericope is fully elaborated only in the first of the 18 suttas and elided in the abridgement (*peyyāla*): it should be understood in full. See **Karota S** (S 24.6), SD 23.10; **(Sotāpatti) Hetu S** (S 24.7), SD 23.6.

<sup>87</sup> M 143,14 (SD 23.9).

<sup>88</sup> M 143,16.2 (SD 23.9). According to **(Sotāpatti) Anātha,piṇḍika S 2** (S 55.27), Anātha,piṇḍika dies a streamwinner (S 55.27/5:385-387), SD 23.2b.

<sup>89</sup> See **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1), SD 25.3 (36.1).

## 5.2 THE 5<sup>TH</sup> WRONG VIEW AND THE 5<sup>TH</sup> AGGREGATE

### 5.2.1 The 5<sup>th</sup> aggregate surrogated

**5.2.1.1 The 6 grounds of wrong views pericope** refers to 6 ways in which personal identity can be misunderstood. The first four of these views are based on the first four of the 5 aggregates: an ignorant person sees form, feeling, perception or formations, or all of them, as constituting his true identity or self: “This (aggregate) is mine, I am this, this is my self.”<sup>90</sup> In this context, we may expect the object of the 5<sup>th</sup> wrong view to be “consciousness,” as in the familiar 5 aggregates. The Buddha, instead, puts together well known phrase from other teachings, as: “**what is seen, heard, sensed, known, found, sought after, mentally pursued**”<sup>91</sup> [§15].

**5.2.1.2** The first half of the 6 grounds of wrong views pericope—“**what is seen, heard, sensed, known**” (*diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ*)—is well known. They are, in fact, an abbreviated reference to all our sense-objects. According to the Saṃyutta Commentary,

<u>the seen</u> ( <i>diṭṭha</i> )	is the visible-form base ( <i>rūp’āyatana</i> );
<u>the heard</u> ( <i>suta</i> )	is the sound base ( <i>sadd’āyatana</i> );
<u>the sensed</u> ( <i>muta</i> )	is the objects of the three physical bases of the nose-object (smell), the tongue-object (taste) and the body-object (touch) [5.2.2.2]; and
<u>the known</u> ( <i>viññāta</i> )	is the thought-base ( <i>dharm’āyatana</i> ) and the remaining <u>6 internal sense-bases</u> ( <i>ajjhātika āyatana</i> ), the other seven bases (that is, the 6 internal senses—the eye-base, etc—and the mind-object base) [5.2.2], which, thus refers to the rudimentary knowledge that arises through the 6 senses.

The phrase “**found, sought after, mentally pursued**” (*pattaṃ pariyesitaṃ anuvaritaṃ manasā*) simply elaborates “the known” (*viññātaṃ*) [5.2.1.4; 5.2.3]. (SA 2:338)

**5.2.1.3** Even then, the phrase, “what is seen, heard, sensed, known” does not replace consciousness in the set of the 5 aggregates, especially with the additional closing phrase, “found, sought after, mentally pursued.” As the set of the 5 aggregates is fundamentally important to early Buddhism, it is unlikely that Pali redactors or reciters would have simply replaced “consciousness” with phrases taken from external sources.

In fact, the Chinese Sarvāstivādin parallel includes a virtually identical list of 6 views,<sup>92</sup> a fact which suggests that at least this pericope was found in the pre-Aśoka antecedent of the text.<sup>93</sup> Wynne concludes, “We must assume, then, that this peculiarity is very old.” (2010:200).

<sup>90</sup> The Pali *attā* (Skt *ātman*), is usu tr as “self.” Although sometimes tr as “soul”—as it may well, in a restricted way, refer to the Upaniṣad contexts—it is a loaded and broad term today. Hence, Gombrich (1996:15) and Williams (2000:56) object to this tr. The Oxford English Dictionary’s (OED) defs of soul include “the principle of life; the principle of thought and action in man; the seat of the emotions.” However, the same objection can be made against the term “self,” which the OED defines as not only what a person “really and intrinsically is (in contradistinction to what is adventitious)” but also the “ego” and “a permanent subject of successive and varying states of consciousness.” Wynne thinks that “Although only the first of these definitions corresponds to the use of the word *attan* [P *attā*] in this teaching, and conflation of the different definitions is possible, the term ‘self’ is still best suited to translate *attan* in the Alagaddūpama Sutta ...” (2010:200 n41). On non-self, see **Self and selves**, SD 26.2 esp (2).

<sup>91</sup> *Diṭṭhaṃ suttaṃ mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattaṃ pariyesitāna anuvaritaṃ manasā*. This full formula occurs at M 22,15 (SD 3.13); M 143,14 (SD 23.9); S 24.1-19/3:202-216; A 4.23/2;23 f = It 112,2/122 (SD 15.7(2.1.2)).

<sup>92</sup> Although 阿梨吒經 *Ā lí zhā jīng*, MĀ 200 (T1.26 @ T765c5-c18) makes a similar point, it differs in a number of other ways, incl mentioning only the noble disciple, without mentioning the case of the untutored worldling. See Analayo 2011:153

**5.2.1.4** The word *viññāta* in the phrase *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* is difficult to render into English. If we take *muta* as a collective term for “the three physical object-bases, that is, those of the nose-object, tongue-object and body-object” [5.2.1.2], then, clearly, the whole phrase is a shorthand for the 6 sense-bases, that is, the seen, heard, smelt-tasted-touched and thought. This may well be the case in the early Buddhist context.

However, in the broader Upaniṣad context—unfamiliar with the Buddha usage—it is more appropriate to render *viññāta* (Skt *viññāta*) as the “known,” that is, as the basic faculty or activity of the mind. It is the mind that knows or senses through the 6 sense-faculties, which includes the mind itself. In early Buddhism, the mind is able to know itself. *Viññāta*, then, refers to our *making sense* (however that may work out to be) of the other experiences and of the mind itself.<sup>94</sup>

**5.2.1.5 “Knowledge,”** then, is simply a construction or projection from what the mind “feels”<sup>95</sup> regarding what it sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches and thinks. Here, “thinks” refers to a particular activity of the mind—note that this list refers to the respective activity of each of the 6 senses. (Of course, it should be understood *here* that each of the physical senses can and does only occur in conjunction with the mind.)

However, when the mental activity involves evaluating any of the data from the 5 physical-sense activities, then, we should use the term “**know,**” since these senses are now the sources of knowledge. This is only a rudimentary form of what modern philosophy calls “knowledge by acquaintance,” which is a direct cognitive relation between subject and object, between agent and action. To have *knowledge by acquaintance*, according to Russell,<sup>96</sup> occurs when the subject has an immediate or unmediated awareness of some propositional truth.<sup>97</sup>

Descriptive knowledge, on the other hand, is propositional knowledge that is inferential, mediated, or indirect. This is knowledge of the world that can be represented as consciously known, factual knowledge. Gilbert Ryle often refers to this as “knowing that ...”<sup>98</sup> It is also called *factual knowledge*. This is what is ancient Greek philosophy probably meant by the term *epistēmê* (“knowledge”), in contrast to *technê* (“art or craft”), which is approximately equivalent to “procedural knowledge” or practical knowledge.<sup>99</sup>

Procedural knowledge, the knowledge of “knowing how ...,” is operational or practical, such as writing something, operating a machine, or playing a musical instrument. Unlike descriptive knowledge, procedural knowledge lies outside of our deliberative consciousness. In early Buddhist terms, we may say this is on the level of the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), which includes *moral* tones of our actions, that is, the emotions (lust, anger, delusion and fear and their various forms).

<sup>93</sup> THICH Minh Chau (1991:114 f). On the possible corrupt reading in the Chin parallel, see Wynne (2010:212 n80). On the significance of parallel passages in the texts of different Buddhist sects, see Wynne (2005:42-45).

<sup>94</sup> See eg **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,34/1:59), SD 13.3.

<sup>95</sup> “Feels,” *paṭisaṃvedeti*, which is a pregnant verb encompassing all the senses of “experiencing”: see SD 17.3 (1.2.2).

<sup>96</sup> Bertrand Russell, “On denoting,” *Mind* 14, 1905:479 f, 492 f; “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11, 1910:108-128; *The Problems of Philosophy*, 1912 (ed. John Perry. Oxford Univ Press, 1997), ch 5.

<sup>97</sup> For an overview, see <http://www.iep.utm.edu/knowacq/>.

<sup>98</sup> Gilbert Ryle, “Knowing how and knowing that,” Presidential Address, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* ns, 46, 1945-1946:1-16. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4544405>. *The Concept of Mind*, Univ of Chicago Press, 1949 ch 2. Full: [https://archive.org/stream/conceptofmind032022mbp/conceptofmind032022mbp\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/conceptofmind032022mbp/conceptofmind032022mbp_djvu.txt).

<sup>99</sup> See “Knowledge how,” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-how/>.

Hence, it is the kind of “knowledge”<sup>100</sup> that underpins complex actions and often is “unconscious,”<sup>101</sup> typically resistant to conscious manipulation, or even evaluation.<sup>102</sup> In other words, we are not really aware of *why* we are performing such an action, that is, we are unaware of the conditions or triggers that compel us to act so.

**5.2.1.6** With such an understanding, we can fit *viññāta*, at least provisionally, in the category of “knowledge by description” or factual knowledge. On a very simple level, it is merely sense-data. As such, to translate *viññāta* as what is “cognized” is to give it too broad a sense. The suttas often speak of how what is “known” (*viññāta*) is then thought about in complex ways,<sup>103</sup> or is grasped at and clung to.<sup>104</sup> Clearly, translating *viññāta* as “the known” reflects its actual process, especially as the basis for other cognitive processes.

This sense of *viññāta* conveniently applies to the Buddhist context, too, regarding the unawakened mind. For convenience, we can and should use the translation “known,” rather than “cognized” (as it is often translated), for *viññāta* in the Buddhist context.

**5.2.1.7** Moreover, the term “**cognition**” is a western psychological term meaning “the mental activities involved in acquiring and processing information; an item of knowledge of belief.”<sup>105</sup> Its verb, to “**cognize**,” covers a wide range of mental activities, including thinking, conceiving, reasoning, imagining, and intending.<sup>106</sup> Along with affect and conation, cognition is one of the three traditionally identified components of the mind, according to western psychology.<sup>107</sup>

Hence, it is too technical to be used as a translation of the term *viññāta*, “the known,” or its verb *vijānāti*, “to know.” As the early Buddhist terms are non-technical, it is best to render these respectively and simply as “the known” and “to know,” in only a rudimentary sense, that is, in terms of (*vi-*) any of the 6 senses, that is, a basic level of “conscious sensing.” It is only “cognitive” in this narrow sense.

**5.2.1.8** Although there are other Pali words for “**to know**,” such as *jānāti* (to know as a mental experience), the context will bear out their sense of cognitive experience. Here, “the seen, heard, sensed, known” are simply the most fundamental level of cognitive experience, which are the bases for mental activities leading to self-identity, and to a pathological self-image.<sup>108</sup>

On a practical level, then, simply translating *viññāta* as “the known” also prevents us from reading too much into it, such as the polysemic “cognize” would. Here, the mind merely knows its own mental objects. Each of the other senses, through the mind, “knows” their respective sense-objects. At this stage, no thinking, conceiving, reasoning, imagining, or intending occurs. Such more specific activities are denoted respectively by such verbs as *cinteti* (to think), *maññati* (to conceive), *takketi* (to reason), *kappeti* (to imagine), *papañceti* (to mentally proliferate) and *saṅkappeti* (to intend).

<sup>100</sup> It is a form of “knowledge” in the sense that it comes from the past, ie, past conditioning.

<sup>101</sup> On the terms “conscious, preconscious, subconscious, and unconscious” as understood in early Buddhism, see SD 17.8a (6.1).

<sup>102</sup> See *Anusaya*, SD 31.3 & **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b.

<sup>103</sup> See “mental proliferation” (*papañca*): **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (2).

<sup>104</sup> See **Nimitta and anuyañjana**, SD 19.14.

<sup>105</sup> A M Colman, *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*, 2002: cognition.

<sup>106</sup> A S Reber, *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1985: cognition & cognize.

<sup>107</sup> *APA College Dictionary of Psychology*, Washington, DC, 2009, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 2015: cognition.

<sup>108</sup> See “**I**”: **The nature of identity**, SD 19.1.



### 5.2.2 The seen, heard, sensed, known

**5.2.2.1** The phrase, “**what is seen, heard, sensed, known**” (*ditthā,suta,muta,viññāta*),<sup>109</sup> is part of an early or original version of the well known Alagaddûpama Sutta, rather than being a later emendation or interpolation. An explanation of this existential quartet is found in **the (Arahatta) Māluṅkyā-putta Sutta** (S 35.95), which famously describes the nature of Māluṅkyā,putta’s awakening.<sup>110</sup> [5.2.1.2]

**The Mūla,pariyāya Sutta** (M 1) regards phenomena comprising personal identity as objects of perception classified into four categories, that is, those of the seen, the heard, the sensed and the known. Here, “the seen” and “the heard” form the first two of the 6 sense-experiences, while “the sensed” (*muta*) refers to the objects that is smell, taste and touch. The “known” is the data of introspection, abstract thought and imagination.<sup>111</sup>

The objects of perception are “conceived” when they are known in terms of “This is mine,” “I am this” and “This is my self,” or in other ways that generate craving, conceit and views, which, in turn, fuel such conceivings.<sup>112</sup> Here, we are given a clear hint how, we first “know” things through our sense-experience (the seen, heard, sensed, known); then, having *known* visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts, we go on to “own” them—to identify with them, see them as our self, as “I,” “me,” and “mine.”

And so **self-identity** arises, followed by suffering, and more self-identity. Our urgent task is to “disown” all these grounds of self-identity views as soon as they arise; otherwise, we should do it whenever we recall them, that is, after the fact. Similarly, we must also “disown the pain,” that is, to see suffering simply as it is, as being *impermanent* and *without essence*, and so we let it go by not identifying it in any way as “I,” “me,” or “mine.”<sup>113</sup>

**5.2.2.2** The “sensed” (*muta*) is a collective term for the 3 kinds of sense-objects that appear to be basically “tactile” data, where the sense-molecules *directly* or *physically* “touch” their respective sense-faculties. The smell molecules stimulate the sense-faculty of smell in the nose. The taste molecules stimulate the sense-faculty of taste, that is, the taste-buds on the tongue. And the sense of touch arises when a physical object impacts the body, that is, the nerve-cells, directly.

However, such a distinction merely reflects the way that this triad is understood in the Upaniṣads [5.2.2.4]. We do not see such a distinction being used in any sutta teaching, other than merely appearing as a triad in the formula, *ditṭha suta muta viññāta*. In short, it is simply a pericope that is well known in the Buddha’s time, and which he uses by way of “natural adaptation” [5.2.2.5], for the benefit of clarifying the Dharma to his Indian audience.<sup>114</sup>

**5.2.2.3** The stock phrase, “**what is seen, heard, sensed, known, found, sought after, mentally pursued**” is also peculiar because it does not seem to continue the Buddha’s analysis of the various aspects of experience that an ignorant person may misconceive. All its contents seem to be assumed by the four-fold list that precedes it. Hence, “what is seen, heard, known, found, sought after, mentally pursued” logically encompasses feeling, perception, and formations—that is, our fully conscious experience. [5.3.3.5]

<sup>109</sup> This stock phrase is found at **D 33**,1.11(43)/3:232 = **A 4.250**/2:246 (see also **A 4.247-249**; cf **A 8.68**/4:307; also **A 8.67**); **M 1**,15-29/1:3 (SD 11.8), **112**,3/3:29 f; **S 35.95**,12/4:73 (SD 5.9); **U 10**,16/8 (SD 33.7).

<sup>110</sup> S 35.95/4:72-75 (SD 5.9).

<sup>111</sup> M 1,19-22/1:3 (SD 11.8).

<sup>112</sup> See *Ditṭha suta muta viññāta*, SD 53.5.

<sup>113</sup> For close studies on “I” (identity), “me” (conceit) and “mine” (craving), see SD 19.1, 19.2a and 19.3.

<sup>114</sup> On the “sensed” (*muta*), see SD 53.5 (1.1.3; 5).

**5.2.2.4** It seems, then, concludes Wynne, that this peculiar pericope is just as superfluous as the 5<sup>th</sup> aggregate of “consciousness.” So, why is it mentioned? The only plausible answer to this question, as scholars have noted [4.2.2], is that the pericope paraphrases Yājñavalkya’s teaching in the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.5.6, that when the self, soul or *ātman* (P *attā*) is “seen, heard, thought, known (*dr̥ṣṭe śrute mate vijñāte*)—note the third term—then, the whole world is understood.”<sup>115</sup> Since the first four items of this list match the first four items of the Buddhist pericope, a close relationship between the two texts is hard to deny. But did the Buddhist text draw on the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, or vice versa?

**5.2.2.5** Although at least one scholar doubts that the notion of a Buddhist allusion to the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, that it is “far from certain,”<sup>116</sup> the Alagaddūpama Sutta argues against a significant number of Upaniṣad teachings in a cogent manner. The sixth view that the Buddha objects to—“The world is the self ... ,” for example, is clearly an allusion to the early Upaniṣadic notion of a macrocosmic *ātman*, a cosmic self or soul. This surely shows that the Buddhist text drew upon Upaniṣadic ideas rather than vice versa. (Wynne 2010:201). As a skillful means, this is what we may call a “**natural adaptation**.”<sup>117</sup>

When we understand how the Buddha adapts an Upaniṣadic teaching, we can then see his purpose in rejecting them as wrong views. The pericope, “what is seen, heard, sensed, known,” in fact, goes on to point out that an ignorant person may mistakenly identify with such a self or soul, that is, the Upaniṣadic *ātman*.

By natural adaptation, the Buddha introduces this teaching, found in a number of references from the early Upaniṣads, and includes them in an analysis of the various ways of misunderstanding human experience. For those familiar with the Upaniṣadic text—that is, the Buddha’s intended audience—this point would be very clear: no aspect of our experience, not even the experience of the Upaniṣadic *ātman*, should be regarded as our self or identity (*attā*).

**5.2.2.6** The reason for the Buddha’s unequivocal rejection of this Upaniṣadic notion of an abiding self or universal soul is simply because it is false. If we accept the Upaniṣadic *ātman* or its view in any form, we are simply trying to freeze reality.<sup>118</sup> When we see the impermanence in everything, we begin to free ourselves by seeing directly into true reality, and to smile at it, for being free of its guiles.

There is nothing real or true that can be eternal or abiding. Whatever exists must do so in **time and space**. Ontologically, time is change itself, the process of rise and fall of things, or rather, of states and events. And space is the relationship or placement of states or matter (earth, water, fire, and wind),<sup>119</sup> that is, the physical aspects of our experience. It is our **consciousness** that creates the reality of our experiences, whether we are aware of this reality or not.

When we are aware of the reality of these experiences, we are likely to experience or notice them in terms of change (time). Then, we feel how the present is never really *there*, but a momentary intrusion of the past that at once disappears into the future, as it were. When we directly see this change as movement, we feel space in which change occurs. But both space and time are really the same, the difference lies only in our experience of space and time and how we perceive them.

<sup>115</sup> BĀU 4.5.6: *ātmani khalv are dr̥ṣṭe śrute mate vijñāte idaṃ sarvaṃ viditaṃ*. The similarity between this passage and the Buddhist pericope has been pointed out by Jayatilleke (1963:60 f), Bhattacharya (1980), Gombrich (1990:15) and Fuller (2005:31 f). For a brahminical explanation, see Bhattacharya 1980:12-14.

<sup>116</sup> Bronkhorst 2007:238 n38.

<sup>117</sup> On natural adaptation, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

<sup>118</sup> Such highly imaginative self-views easily pull us down into the rut and ruse of the verbosity and hyperbole, the hot air that fills the notorious guru’s balloon so that he seems big and able to rise so high—but for the prick of reality’s needle. Whatever cannot be explained rationally is often the guru’s magic wand, and we are wise to keep a safe distance from it.

<sup>119</sup> On the 4 primary elements, see **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 62,13-17), SD 3.11; SD 1.7 (2).

This is a relative form of **space**, that is, the experience of the movement of **time**. We can speak of absolute time when all means of knowing this change—as sight, sound, smell, taste or touch, or as form, feeling, perception, or even consciousness—stop or seem to stop working. In meditation language, this is called “**dhyana**” (P *jhāna*). When all consciousness of this subtle experience stops, never to find any more footing ... then nirvana is said to have arisen.

When we understand the world and reality in this manner, there is no place whatsoever for any conception of anything eternal or abiding, a self or soul, such as the Upaniṣadic *ātman*. The relative space that we experience between the momentariness to which time is reduced, acts as the continuity which seems to give us a sense of “identity”—but, it is that deceptive eternity in a poetic moment, but which is really a mere sense of cyclic familiarity when we act in the world.

This understanding of reality gives true **meaning** to our experience. When we understand this *meaning*—the nature of reality and its conditionality—we go on to understand our **purpose** in the world, in life, that is, to accept the limitations of our physical being, rise above them through our mental being, and so attain that state beyond both space and time, *where there is neither here nor there nor in-between; neither coming nor going; where there is no earth, no water, no fire, no wind; where there is the unborn, unbecome, uncreated, unconditioned, the death-free*—nirvana.<sup>120</sup>

### 5.2.3 “Found, sought after, mentally pursued”

**5.2.3.1** Now we will examine the addendum to or second half of the *diṭṭha suta muta viññāta* pericope, that is, the phrase, “**found, sought after, mentally pursued**” (*pattam pariyesitam anuvaritarā manasā*). The Saṃyutta Commentary says that this phrase is simply an elaboration of “the known” (*viññāta*) [5.2.1.2].

Let us now ask, “If the ‘seen, heard, thought, known’ [5.2.2] refers directly to BĀU 4.5.6 [4.2.2.1], why does the Buddha need to mention it?” The explanation for this is a simple one. In the suttas, the verb *anuvicarati* often refers to the practice of meditation.<sup>121</sup>

From **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26), we know that the verb *pariyesati* has the sense of seeking the wholesome, the spiritual quest. It seems that this Pali stock phrase refers to the wrong view that the Upaniṣadic *ātman*—an eternal soul or abiding entity—may be realized through meditation, as clearly suggested at BĀU 4.4.23<sup>122</sup>—that the spiritual goal is attained through meditation. Based on this idea, the Buddha *naturally adapts* the Upaniṣadic pericope to show that identifying oneself with the *ātman*, through meditative realization or otherwise, is clearly misconceived.

**5.2.3.2** As noted above, the reading of the 5<sup>th</sup> view as an allusion to an Upaniṣadic formula is supported by the 6<sup>th</sup> and final wrong view, in which personal identity is imagined in this way: “The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same; I will endure as long as eternity” [§15(6)]. This seems to recall at least two other Upaniṣadic statements, as has been pointed out by Norman,<sup>123</sup> and is clearly a reference to the Upaniṣadic doctrine of a “world self” or “cosmic soul,”

<sup>120</sup> See (**Arahatta**) **Māluṅkyāputta S** (S 35.95,13), SD 5.9.

<sup>121</sup> PED, DP sv *anuvicarati*, *anuvicāra*.

<sup>122</sup> BĀU 4.4.23: *tasmād evarā vic chānto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvātmany evātmānaṃ paśyati, sarvam ātmānaṃ paśyati*. “Therefore, the one with this understanding becomes calm, tamed, restrained, patient and concentrated; he sees the self in his very self, he sees everything as the self.”

<sup>123</sup> Norman (1981: 20) comments “it is possible to find actual verbal echoes of the Upaniṣads in this passage” and refers to the Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.14.3–4 (*eṣa ma ātmā*), 3.14.1 and 3.14.4 (*yathākratur asmiml loke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ. pretya bhavati sa kraturṃ kurvīta ... etam itaḥ pretyābhisambhavitāsmi*). Other similarities have been noted by Gombrich (1990:15).

The Buddha thus extends his analysis of wrong view to point out the error of identifying with the Upaniṣadic *ātman* (perhaps imagined through meditation), and with this *ātman* understood as a macro-cosmic essence. Norman has also noted that the way the Buddha articulates personal identity in this teaching (“This is mine, I am this, this my self”) is a first person reformulation of the “You are that” (*tat tvam asi*)—that we are nothing but the *ātman*—of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad.<sup>124</sup> This is a, Upanishadic view incompatible with early Buddhism.

All this shows that the Buddha’s aim in the teaching against the 6 wrong views is quite specific: by pointing out ways in which an ignorant person may misconstrue experience [§§1-14], the Buddha is mostly concerned with Upaniṣadic notions of personal identity. He highlights these false notions and then, applying the 3 universal characteristics [§§26-27], rejects them outright [§§15-41].

### 5.3 THE NATURE OF THE 5 AGGREGATES

#### 5.3.1 The sequence of the 5 aggregates

**5.3.1.1** Wynne’s paper (2010) is a piece of brilliant prize-winning documented research and deductive reasoning, and I fully agree with most of his arguments and explanations. However, I am not fully convinced by two key but radical ideas that he has proposed. In fact, they are at best conjectural and speculative, but the value of his paper is still unaffected, even if his two key ideas are rejected.

The first proposal of Wynne’s with which I disagree is his rejection of the fact that the Buddha did not realize or discover “the entire Dharma at his awakening,” which I will address in the rest of this section. The second proposal of his that I think is unconvincing or merely speculative is that the Buddha had come up with the idea of the 5 aggregates in their traditional sequence only “by chance,” while working out an elaborate response to the case of Ariṭṭha [5.3.2]. Otherwise, Wynne’s paper is instructive in helping us reflect on the Buddha’s key teachings.

**5.3.1.2** Both my objections to Wynne’s proposals are given in this passage (underscored), where he says:

If we accept that the order of the five aggregates is unusual, and suspect it would be better explained as a product of the Buddha’s skill in means, we have a perfect solution in the form of the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*. This skill in means text thus appears to contain something quite unexpected: contrary to the tradition that the Buddha discovered the entire Dharma at his awakening, it suggests that at least one important doctrine was formulated by the Buddha in the process of teaching. The Buddha seems to have chanced upon a useful fivefold analysis of conditioned experience as part of an elaborate response to the case of Ariṭṭha. (2010:206)

The key points to which I object have been highlighted above. Here, I will explain why Wynne’s first proposal is purely speculative and unnecessary. Wynne, in fact, thinks that the Buddha’s formulation of the 5 aggregates, as we have them, (1) “looks like an *ad hoc* teaching” that has been put together purely for the didactic purpose of “replacing an elliptical and empirically useless Upaniṣadic reference (‘what is seen etc’), (2) with the direct and empirically useful one (‘consciousness’)” (2010:206). I do not object to the second part of this argument, but I think the connection is merely coincidental, or that the Buddha knew exactly what he was doing when he taught the doctrine of the 5 aggregates.

<sup>124</sup> Norman (1981: 23). More recently Brereton (1986)—followed by Olivelle (1998: 561)—has pointed out that *tat tvam asi* should be translated ‘that is how you are’, although this makes no difference to Norman’s argument.

**5.3.1.3** Wynne says that the Buddha, on account of his systematic argumentation against the Upaniṣadic teachings on the *ātman* ended up listing consciousness as the *fifth* and last aggregate. Wynne adds that it would be more appropriate for consciousness to be “listed as *second* rather than the 5<sup>th</sup> aggregate” (id), thus: Form (*rūpa*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), and formations (*saṅkhārā*). And that, after *formations*, should come “what is seen, etc,” “given the Upaniṣadic context as noted by Norman” (2010:204).

Wynne’s argument essentially based upon the proposal that the Buddha had formulated the 5 aggregates *specifically* to debunk the notion of the Upaniṣadic *ātman* (2010:204 f), and also that “the first four items describe different aspects in the process of consciousness” (198). Again, these points are, in themselves, not wrong, but merely incidental. I will show that the sequence of the 5 aggregates, *as we have them*, is perfectly natural in terms of meditation practice, at least.<sup>125</sup> [5.3.2]

**5.3.1.4** The first reason for the natural sequence of the 5 aggregates is simply that this is the way that they have been given, even in the very “first discourse,” **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), where it is only briefly mentioned, but is elaborated in “the second discourse,” **the Anatta Lak-khaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59).<sup>126</sup> Even if these two important texts, *as we have them*, were compiled decades later, long after the event that they report, they clearly reflect the earliest teachings, which may or may not have teachings specifically refuting Upaniṣadic teachings.

The early arhats—certainly the first 60 arhats<sup>127</sup>—have resolved any such doctrinal issues when they renounce to join the Buddha. However, such issue are more likely to arise with later followers, who join the order when it has become better known,<sup>128</sup> especially during the 2<sup>nd</sup> period.<sup>129</sup>

### **5.3.2 The aggregates of clinging**

**5.3.2.1** As such, the 5 aggregates—or, technically, “the 5 aggregates of clinging” (*pañc’upādāna-k,-khandha*)<sup>130</sup>—are the ultimate referents of the 1<sup>st</sup> noble truth, that is, suffering, as pointed out in **the (Ariya,sacca) Khandha Sutta** (S 56.13).<sup>131</sup> Since all the noble truths revolve around suffering, understanding the 5 aggregates is essential for understanding the 4 noble truths as a whole.

The point is that the Buddha would *not* have put together “ad hoc” such a vital formula, merely to refute the Upaniṣadic *ātman*, as suggested by Wynne (2010).<sup>132</sup> It was a teaching that was formulated and taught by the Buddha from the very beginning, from the very first time that he started teaching the Dharma. [5.3.1.4]

**5.3.2.2** “**Consciousness**” (*viññāṇa*) is not only a polysemic early Buddhist term, but also a very complex concept in Buddhist teachings. In simple terms, consciousness is what we generally refer to as “the mind,” and its function is that of “sensing” or knowing sensations, that is, *sense-experiences*, or the

<sup>125</sup> My aim here is only to show that the sequence of the 5 aggregates, being both natural and practical, as we have them, is just the way that the Buddha has formulated them, right from the start. It would be interesting for those academically inclined to discuss the difficulties found in Wynne’s other arguments in his remarkably interesting paper.

<sup>126</sup> S 56.11,5 (SD 1.1); S 22.59 (SD 1.2).

<sup>127</sup> On the first 60 arhats, see SD 11.2, esp SD 11.2(11).

<sup>128</sup> Such inter-religious conflicts are recorded, eg, in **Te,vijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8.

<sup>129</sup> On the 2 periods in the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 40a.1 (1.3).

<sup>130</sup> See SD 17.1a (2).

<sup>131</sup> S 56.13/5:425 f.

<sup>132</sup> For the significance of the 5 aggregates, see SD 17.1a (3.1).

events occurring at the 6 sense-doors (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind).<sup>133</sup> As such, although consciousness encompasses a number of other related senses (such as conceiving, imagining, intending, etc), here it refers to only a fundamental sense of knowing on a “sense-door” level. This “knowing” then becomes the basis or ground for other mental activities, especially those that bring about self-identity, as we have already noted [5.2.2.1].

**5.3.2.3** Two senses of “consciousness” are especially important, that is, “cognitive consciousness” and “existential consciousness.” **Cognitive consciousness** is a useful modern term referring to the workings of the 6 sense-faculties,<sup>134</sup> that is, our synchronic experiences<sup>135</sup>—while **existential consciousness** refers to “rebirth consciousness” and to the second function of dependent arising,<sup>136</sup> which centres upon *taṇhā* (craving) and *upādāna* (clinging or fuel): it shows the true nature underlying what we call an “individual,” that is reborn, going through various lives (our diachronic experiences), and it shows this by stating that *consciousness* arises conditioned by ignorance (*avijjā*) and formations (*saṅkhārā*).<sup>137</sup> Traditionally, then, this is the rebirth-consciousness.<sup>138</sup> In modern terms, this is **the subconscious**.<sup>139</sup>

### **5.3.3 Form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness**

**5.3.3.1** The 5-aggregate formula lists them in their order of complexity. It begins with the fact that we can at once know that we all have a body or **form** (*rūpa*), made up of the dynamic flux of the 4 elements (*mahā, bhūta*), earth, water, fire, and wind, and functioning through the 6 sense-faculties of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

**5.3.3.2** Since we have a conscious body (*sa, viññāṇaka kāya*),<sup>140</sup> we naturally feel, that is, we respond *affectively* to our sense-experiences. We tend to *accept feelings* (*vedanā*) that we see as being pleasant, *reject* those we see as being unpleasant, and *ignore* what is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Our feelings, then, are a direct experience that follows the moment we have been conscious at the level of any of our sense-faculties.

**5.3.3.3** These feelings, we have noted, are, in simple terms, our reaction to our **perception** (*saññā*), or recognition, of pleasure, pain, or their absence. Here, we should remind ourselves that the 5 aggregates do *not* function sequentially but interdependently, a body-mind dynamic, working at the speed of mental processes. However, we can, as it were, freeze a frame of such a dynamic process (like a diagram of an atom or molecule) so that we have good theoretical grasp of it.

**5.3.3.4 Formations** (*saṅkhārā*) refers to the way we morally react to such a perception, whether with any of the 3 unwholesome roots (greed, hate, delusion) or without them. If we are motivated by any of the unwholesome roots, then, our action is unwholesome (*akusala*); if we are moved by the wholesome

<sup>133</sup> See SD 17.8a (1).

<sup>134</sup> On cognitive consciousness, see SD 17.8a (6.1.1).

<sup>135</sup> The origin and passing away of the aggregates are explained in **Paṭisallāna S** (S 22.6/3:15) by way of diachronic conditionality, and in **Upādāna Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56/3:58-61), SD 3.7, & **Satta-ṭṭhāna S** (S 22.57/3:61-65) by way of synchronic conditionality. [“Diachronic” here “across time,” ie over many, usu 3, lives; “synchronic means within one life-time itself.]

<sup>136</sup> On how the 5 aggregates are related to dependent arising, see SD 18.1a (1.2.6).

<sup>137</sup> On existential consciousness, see SD 17.8a (6.1.2).

<sup>138</sup> *Paṭisandhi, citta*; also *gandhabba* [12.1.3.3]. See **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17 (3+8).

<sup>139</sup> See also **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (3) & (5.1).

<sup>140</sup> On the conscious body, see SD 17.8a (12.3).



roots of charity, lovingkindness, or wisdom, then, it is wholesome (*kusala*). In short, this is how we create or feed our karma.

**5.3.3.5** The 5<sup>th</sup> aggregate, that is, “consciousness,” serves as the stage for all these functions of the other four aggregates. Since consciousness underlies all our waking actions, it makes sense to place it last, as it is the most mental and most complex of all the aggregates. Since all the 5 aggregates function together as a dynamic process, they are actually a cross-section of our subjective conscious experiences. In a sense, it does not really matter how we arrange these aggregates, but the traditional listing facilitates the most coherent way of explaining and understanding this complex process.

## 5.4 THE NATURE OF THE BUDDHA’S AWAKENING

### 5.4.1 The Buddha’s gradual awakening

**5.4.1.1** My next objection to Wynne’s view of the Buddha is a more serious one, as it questions the Buddha’s awakening. Wynne, in the opening abstract to his learned article, states his thesis as follows:

This article argues that the Alagaddûpama Sutta, an important early Buddhist text, portrays the Buddha in the process of formulating his thoughts. If so, it contradicts the myth that the Buddha awakened to the entire Buddhist Dharma on one occasion, and should be dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> BCE. Such an antiquity, and peculiar didactic structure suggests that the text contains authentic teachings of the Buddha. (2010:191; emphasis added)

It is important to note here that Wynne is questioning neither the authenticity nor the antiquity of the Dharma. He is merely asserting that the Buddha did not gain full awakening [5.4.2.4] under the Bodhi tree on Vesak night—or that, even if he had fully awakened, *he did not acquire “all” knowledge regarding the Dharma*—in the sense of realizing all that there is to know regarding whatever he has taught. Before the Buddha gave the teachings recorded in **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22), for example, he had to go through “the process of formulating his thoughts” (191). Based on the early teachings, we will see that Wynne is simply wrong here.

**5.4.1.2** According to **the Simsapā Sutta** (S 56.31), the Buddha teaches only what is necessary for our spiritual progress and liberation. But what the Buddha knows is very much more than that. Once, in a forest, the Buddha gathered up a handful of leaves, and declared to the monks (to us) that we need to know and practise only that much teachings (as the handful of leaves compared to all the leaves in the forest). But the Buddha’s knowledge is vast like the leaves in the whole forest!

That “handful” of teachings is the 4 noble truths, which serves as a synecdoche for the whole of the Buddha Dharma. The level at which we understand the 4 noble truths presages the level of awakening we may attain. When we really begin to understand these truths in terms of impermanence, we will attain streamwinning; when we fully understand them in terms of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self,<sup>141</sup> we gain arhathood, final liberation.<sup>142</sup>

In other words, there is **the “knowledge that holds”**—which scholars pursue and profit by—and there is **the “knowledge that frees”**—which the Buddha teaches and we need to practise. The word “holds” here refers to being reasonable and persuasive, but scholars are famously known to change their

<sup>141</sup> *Atam, mayatā*, SD 19.13 (1).

<sup>142</sup> On these 3 universal characteristics (*ti, lakkhaṇa*), see S 56.31 (SD 21.7). On all dharmas as “non-self” (*sabbe dhammā anattā*), see **Dhamma Niyāma S** (A 3.134), SD 26.8.

views, which makes them interesting to study and learn from. The horizon of academic learning, however, is never reached—there is always something new to learn, something new to postulate, and then we retire, celebrated perhaps by a festschrift, and probably be debunked by the next generation of scholars. This is academic progress, where (as the Chinese say) green comes from indigo, the old is bettered (if not battered) by the new.<sup>143</sup>

However, when a scholar deeply loves his work and respects what he works on (here, of course, I mean Buddhism), then, we have much to learn and benefit from his works and knowing him as a person, too. After all, **education** is the process of bringing out the best in us. If what we know, changes us for the better, or brings changes for the better, we have been well educated. When what a scholar examines and learns also transform him into a spiritually better and wiser person, then, he can be a good Dharma teacher, too. This is a truly wholesome merging of worlds—the academic and the spiritual—the ideal for most of us who love learning and practising the Dharma.

**5.4.1.3** On the other hand, we could be lost in learning, that take this loop of facts and figures, talks and tacks, a talking head without a heart. Knowledge and facts have become currency, things to collect and measure others by. If we go to Facebook or any social media, we are likely to see a forest of information and jungle of ignorance. We, both the home-bound and the home-left alike, are blissfully lost, feeding ourselves on the digital ginger-bread house, showing what we think we know, seeking “likes” and “loves,” engaging with the world, looking for images of ourselves by the rays of light piercing through chinks in a closed window. Yet, if we are wise and compassionate, even such situations can be lakes of lotuses: there are those who will rise into the light and see the Dharma. But we must be willing to learn.<sup>144</sup>

**5.4.1.4** **The knowledge that frees us** is our understanding that the conditions and reasons for us being caught up in networking and chats—we need to warmly extend our humanity to real beings in due course. But first, we must bravely look within and listen to the resonant voice of silence shining from our own hearts. We begin by accepting ourselves as we are, and start growing spiritually. We then see our failures simply as unopened doors into the growing inner space, the gardens of our minds. Then, pruning, weeding and caring for these gardens, we enjoy beauty, peace, and health. We then welcome others—real people and living beings—into our spacious and lush gardens.

**5.4.1.5** The Buddha is traditionally said to be **omniscient**, but in what way is he so?<sup>145</sup> **The Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23) is a brief but precise discourse that provides us with very helpful clues. The Buddha declares that the “all” (*sabba*) or “everything” there was, is, or will be, comprises our 6 sense-faculties (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) and their respective sense-objects. It is impossible to speak of anything other than these: our 6 senses are the only sources of knowledge, and the 6 sense-objects are all that we can know, and need to know.<sup>146</sup>

Once we understand this, it makes good sense to speak of the Buddha as being “omniscient,” in the sense that he knows “all” or “everything,” any of it at a time, whenever he wants to, as defined in the Sabba Sutta. But such a knowledge is not only limited to the Buddha. We, too, can cultivate such an understanding. In fact, the purpose of Buddhist training is to understand this teaching and then apply it to our daily lives. That way, we have started our journey to awakening in this life itself.

<sup>143</sup> Further on this see SD 47.16 (2.8).

<sup>144</sup> That is, live by the 3 trainings (*ti, sikkhā*) of moral virtue, mental cultivation and insight wisdom (D 16,2.28; also 3:58, 77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164).

<sup>145</sup> On the Buddha’s omniscience, see **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90): SD 10.8 (2) & **Sandaka S** (M 76,21+52): SD 35.7 (3.2); SD 36.2 (5.1.1.2).

<sup>146</sup> S 35.23 (SD 7.1).

**5.4.1.6** This also shows that the Buddha knows about the all (**Sabba Sutta**, S 35.23, SD 7.1), right from the moment of his awakening. After all, once we have awakened, we see all in the light within us, and this is the kind of awakening from which we never fall again into the sleep of ignorance and craving. The Buddha is like a great composer and performer who can at once read music and play it perfectly and beautifully. He may also improvise great music whenever he wishes or needs to.

If we understand this **parable of the musician**, then we understand that the Buddha is fully self-awakened, and teaches the Dharma with natural spontaneity, any time he wants to or needs to. He does not even need to think about what to say, but the Dharma flows naturally, beautifully and instructively from him—just as a great musician does not *think* about the music he is playing, but fully feels the truth and beauty freely flowing from him, showering and flooding us with joy and good. We only need to lend our ear, be fully attentive; then, to truly enjoy the music of the Dharma.

**5.4.1.7** The most significant teaching of the early Buddhist texts that finally rebuts Wynne’s view that the Buddha has to *think before teaching or answering questions*, comes from **the Abhaya Rāja-kumāra Sutta** (M 58), which deals with just this kind of controversy. At the end of the Sutta, prince Abhaya asks the Buddha:

“Bhante, when learned kshatriyas, learned brahmins, learned householders and learned recluses, after preparing a question, then go to the Blessed One and ask it, is there already in the Blessed One’s mind the thought:

‘If they come to me and ask me thus, I shall answer thus’? Or does that answer occur to the Tathagata spontaneously?”<sup>147</sup> (M 58,9), SD 7.12

As prince Abhaya is skilled in chariots and the parts of a chariot, the Buddha asks him these questions and follows up with a fuller explanation of the nature of his own awakening:

“What do you think, my prince? When people come to you and ask: ‘What is the name of this part of the chariot?’ is there already in your mind the thought: ‘If they come to me and ask me thus, I shall answer thus’? Or does the answer occur to you spontaneously?”

“Bhante, I am well known as a charioteer, skilled in the parts of a chariot. All the parts of a chariot are well known to me. That answer would occur to me spontaneously.”

“Even so, my prince, when learned kshatriyas, learned brahmins, learned householders and learned recluses, after preparing a question, then approach the Tathagata and ask it, the answer occurs to the Tathagata spontaneously.

Why is that? **The Dharma-element**<sup>148</sup> has been fully penetrated by the Tathagata, through such a full penetration, the answer occurs to the Tathagata spontaneously.”<sup>149</sup>

(M 58,10-11), SD 7.12

<sup>147</sup> “Spontaneously,” *ṭhānaso*, here means both “on the spot” (*ṭhān’uppattika*) and “at that moment” (*taṃ khaṇ-arā*) (MA 3:113). PED: “without an interval or a cause (of change), at once, immediately, spontaneously, impromptu.”

<sup>148</sup> “The Dharma-element,” *dhamma,dhātu*, also tr as “element of Dharma,” “element of things” (M:B), “causal cosmic order” (Jayatilleke 1963:448 f): see **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,1.13,4), SD 49.8a; **Kalāra S** (S 12.32/2:56), SD 83.6. Comy gives 2 glosses: (1) the nature of Dharma (*dhamma,sabhāva*); (2) the Buddha’s knowledge that is omniscience (*sabb’aññutā,ñāṇa*) (MA 3:113). In a disciple, this refers to seeing conditionality without any obscuration (*paccay’-ākārassa vivaṭa,bhāva,dassana,samattharā sāvaka,pāramī,ñāṇarā*, SA 2:66). However, *dhamma,dhātu* here “should not be confused with the same term used to signify the element of mind-objects among the 18 elements [eg S 14.1-10], nor does it bear the meaning of an all-embracing cosmic principle that the term acquires in Mahāyāna Buddhism.” (M:ÑB 1261 n614). See also Nett 64 f, Vism 486 f, where *dhamma,dhātu* seems to be used in the sense of a mental state as an irreducible element (M:H 2:64 n1). Cf Dhs 67, 69; Vbh 72, 87, 89.

<sup>149</sup> On how the Buddha knows, see SD 49.8b (4.3.2).

### **5.4.2 The Buddha's full awakening**

**5.4.2.1** After proposing the notion that the Buddha had to “process his thoughts” before teaching [5.4.1.1], Wynne then presents his understanding of **the parable of the raft** as follows:

[In] the simile of the raft, ... the Buddha explains that his teachings are pragmatic and useful only in so far as they lead to the religious goal (the cessation of suffering), just as a raft is constructed only for the sake of crossing over a river. The Buddha underlines this point by stating that just as it would be incorrect for a person who has crossed a river by raft to carry it around on his head afterwards, so, too, would it be incorrect to grasp on to the Buddha's teaching after achieving its purpose. (2010:199)

Immediately after saying this, Wynne continues:

This explanation does not fit easily with the later myth of the Buddha's revelation: far from suggesting that Buddhist doctrine is abandoned after the religious goal has been attained, this myth states that the doctrine is only realised in all its glory when a person achieves the highest religious goal possible by becoming a Buddha. (id)

**5.4.2.2** Wynne surmises that the notion of the Buddha's **full awakening** (a term of convenience in the present context)—means (according to Wynne) that all his Buddha-knowledge did not arise when he was awakened, but that he had to process a situation and formulate his teachings *ad hoc* in that connection. The notion of the “full awakening,” according to Wynne, is a “later myth of the Buddha's revelation.” (2010:199).

His basic argument is that since the Alagaddûpama Sutta records the Buddha as formulating his teachings (the 5 aggregates, etc)—that is, well before the myth of his “full awakening”—the Sutta must be old, and that his teaching on the 5 aggregates is an “authentic example of the Buddha's skill in means.” (191). The reasoning is speculative at best, but the conclusion is reflective of the sutta teachings.

**5.4.2.3** I have no issue with Wynne's conclusions—that the Alagaddûpama Sutta must be old and that the Buddha's teaching on the 5 aggregates is an “authentic example of his skill in means” [5.4.1.2]. However, I have serious difficulties with his reasoning for that conclusion—that the Buddha did not awaken to full knowledge, that there was no “full awakening.” This is definitely *not* the Buddha of the suttas, but a “scholar's Buddha,” to begin with.

**5.4.2.4 The Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12)—a discourse dealing with the Buddha's special qualities that defines him—the Buddha himself is recorded as declaring, in simple terms, that no one can truly say of the Buddha:

- (1) that he is not fully awakened;
- (2) that he has not destroyed (all) his mental influxes;<sup>150</sup>
- (3) that obstructions to the spiritual life are not obstructions; and
- (4) that when he has taught the Dharma to us, if we make an effort, we would not fully end suffering.

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<sup>150</sup> These influxes (*āsava*) are what keep us caught up in sense-desires (*kāma'āsava*), desire for eternal existence (*bhava'āsava*), views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), and ignorance (*āviññāsa*): see SD 4.25 (5).

In positive terms, the Buddha's **4 intrepidities** (*catu vesārajja*),<sup>151</sup> as they are called, are that he is surely fully awakened; that he has destroyed all his mental influxes, and that if we follow his true teaching, we will surely fully end suffering. "Intrepidity" here has two vital implications for us as practitioners. It means that these are 4 qualities that we can be confident in, regarding our spiritual life, and to effect these qualities within ourselves, we must show moral courage in upholding and practising them.<sup>152</sup>

The key point here is that the Buddha himself declares his own full self-awakening (*sammā,sambodhi*). The Buddha's awakening (*bodhi*) is not merely an intellectual or "intuitive" (in scholarly lingo) acumen, but a natural and spontaneous (that is, immediate) insight into people, beings and things, into states and events, into true reality, so that the Buddha is able to answer questions or teach with confidence and truth. If the listener or audience properly practices such teachings, they would surely attain spiritual liberation in due course.

**5.4.2.5** There are a number of suttas that contain **the *sammā,sambuddha* pericope**, that definitively speaks of the Buddha as follows:

For, **the Blessed One** is the one who shows the unarisen path, who brings forth the path not yet brought forth, who points out the path that is not yet pointed out, the path-finder, the path-knower, the path-expert. But **his disciples** even now dwell as accomplished followers after him."  
(M 108,5.3), SD 33.5<sup>153</sup>

Besides **the Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta** (M 108), this important pericope (stock passage) is also found in **the Pavāraṇā Sutta** (S 8.7), **the Sammā,sambuddha Sutta** (S 22.58), and elsewhere.<sup>154</sup> This pericope shows that the Buddha himself discovers the path of awakening—that is, he fully awakens to liberation and its wisdom—and teaches that wisdom to his disciples. In this way, the Dharma or teaching has come down to us, even now, so that, practising it properly, we are able to attain that very same awakening.

**5.4.2.6** The references given here [5] are the internal evidence—proofs from the suttas themselves, the early teachings—showing that the Buddha:

- (1) is fully awakened to the liberation from suffering, complete with its wisdom or understanding, and
- (2) is able to naturally and spontaneously answer questions on the Dharma or teach it efficaciously.

Academic postulations and argumentations may be valuable when they help us to better understand the Buddha and his teaching. However, where they are highly speculative or doubtful, we need to go back to the suttas and reflect on the Dharma for a better understanding of it. Awakening arises not from listening to the scholars, but from understanding the suttas and seeing true reality for ourselves.

<sup>151</sup> M 12,22-28/1:71 f (SD 49.1): for refs see §22 n.

<sup>152</sup> On moral courage (*vesarajja*), see SD 28.9a (3).

<sup>153</sup> §5.3+6.3: *So hi, brāhmaṇa, bhagavā anuppannassa maggassa uppādetā, asaṅjātassa maggassa saṅjanetā, anakkhātassa maggassa akkhātā, magga-ññū, magga,vidū, magga,kovido. Maggānugā ca pana etarahi sāvakā viharanti pacchā samannāgatā ti*, M 3:8,12 = S 1:191,1 ≈ 3:66,16 (SA 2:278,5) = S 3:66,15 = Miln 217,10-219,11 = Pm 2:194,19 ≈ Ap 570,5 = ThīA 91,33\*. This para [§5.3] is the sammā,sambuddha pericope. Comy, however, is silent on **pacchā samannāgata**, but Comy on S 22.58 explains it as: "they follow after him (*sam-anugatā*, from *sam-anugacchatī*), the Blessed One, who has gone before them" (*paṭhama,gatassa bhagavato pacchā samanugatā*, SA 1:277): see M:H 350 n1. For further details, see SD 33.5 ad loc.

<sup>154</sup> **Pavāraṇā S** (S 8.7/1:191), SD 49.11; **Sammā,sambuddha S** (S 22.58/3:65 f), SD 63.11. Comys on these 2 suttas explain the passage in both places, reflecting on their significance.

**5.4.2.7** If religion and spirituality use speculative and imaginative language, then, we should direct our best thought and imagination to the quest of self-effort, especially the human endeavour, for which we can be fully accountable, instead of seeking such answers in external agencies and realities. What safer and better way for us to see ourselves than in terms of **spiritual evolution**.

In this path of spiritual evolution, there surely must be the one who is the most evolved, the one who is farthest ahead of everyone else, on earth or beyond. And if the teachings of that most highly evolved being are available to us, we should, by all means, examine and practise them, so that we, too, will evolve on that same path of awakening. In fact, the Buddha *is the most highly evolved of all beings* in this epoch of our world-cycle, in this cosmic period when we exist. This is clearly stated in **the (Agga) Tathāgata Sutta** (S 45.139).<sup>155</sup>

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## Alagaddûpama Sutta The Discourse on the Water-snake Parable

M 22

**1 [130]** Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anāthapiṇḍika’s park in Jeta’s grove, near Sāvathī.

### 1

#### Arittha’s bad wrong view

**2** Now at that time, a bad view<sup>156</sup> arose in a monk named **Arittha**, formerly of the vulture killers:

“Thus I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called ‘obstructions’<sup>157</sup> by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.”<sup>158</sup>

<sup>155</sup> S 45.139 (SD 49.17).

<sup>156</sup> “Bad view” (*pāpa, diṭṭhi.gata*), or “bad wrong view,” or “evil view” without its theistic connotations; “bad” (*pāpa*) because it brings karmic fruits of sorrow and suffering; “wrong view” (*diṭṭhi*) because it does not lead to happiness and awakening; *diṭṭhi.gata*, “recourse to views, field of views”: **Diṭṭhi.gata S** (It 49) mentions 2 kinds: (1) those who hear the teaching for the cessation of becoming, do not delight in it; (2) despite present suffering, after death the self is annihilated (It 49/43), SD 77.13; **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2) mentions 6 kinds of self-views: (1) “A self exists for me.” (2) “No self exists for me,” (3) “I perceive a self with a self,” (4) “I perceive non-self with a self,” (5) “I perceive a self with non-self,” and (6) a self that feels karma, but is eternal (M 2,8/1:8), SD 30.3.

<sup>157</sup> “Things called ‘obstructions’” (*antarāyikā dhammā*) or “obstructive states” (V 1:94 = 2:272; M 1:130,8); often in the stock: “dreadful are gain, honour, praise, bitter, vile, obstructive to attaining the supreme safety from the yoke” (*dāruṇo lābha, sakkāra, siloko kaṭuko pharuso ~o anuttarassa yoga-k, khemassa adhigamāya*, S 17.1/2:226,3 = *antarāya, karo*, SA 2:205; cf **Mātā,putta S** (A 5.55/3:68,11) on the danger of incest. For suttas warning monastics against the dangers of worldliness, such as wealth and fame, see esp the 43 suttas of **Lābha Sakkāra Saṃy** (S 17.1-43/2:225-243) and **Nāga S** (S 20.9/2:268-270), SD 69.12. “Danger” here means the real possibility of falling from monkhood, ie, defeat (*pārājika*).



3 Now, **several monks** heard, “It is said that such a bad view had arisen in the monk named Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, thus:

*‘Thus I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called “obstructions” by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.’*”

3.2 Then, these monks approached the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, and asked him, “Avuso Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, is it true that such a harmful view has arisen in you, thus:

*‘Thus I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called “obstructions” by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.’?*” [§2]

3.3 “Yes, indeed,<sup>159</sup> avuso, so I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called obstructions by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.”<sup>160</sup>

3.4 Then, those monks, desiring to detach him from that harmful view, questioned, pressed and parleyed with him, thus:

“Avuso Ariṭṭha, do not say so! Do not misrepresent the Blessed One: it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would not speak thus.

For, in many ways, avuso Ariṭṭha, has the Blessed One stated how obstructive states are obstructive, and how they are able to obstruct one who indulges in them.<sup>161</sup>

### The monks on the 10 parables [§§3.5, 4.5, 6.2, 8.2, 8,4]

3.5 The Blessed One has stated how **sensual pleasures** provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>158</sup> *Tathâham bhagavatā dhammā desitaṃ ājānāmi, yathā ye’me antarāyikā dhammā antarāyikā vuttā bhagavatā, te paṭisevato nālaṃ antarāyāyāti.* In making this statement, Ariṭṭha directly contradicts the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Buddha’s 4 intrepidities (*vesārajjā*). Because of the Buddha’s awakening, no one can justly charge that: (1) he is not fully awakened, (2) he has not fully destroyed his defilements, (3) those obstructions to the spiritual life declared by the Buddha are not obstructions, (4) the Dharma properly practised does not lead to the goal declared by the Buddha (M 12.25). The novice Kaṇṭhaka holds a similar wrong view (Pāc 70 = V 4:138-140): see **Mahaka Pāṭihāriya S** (S 41.4), SD 27.2 (1.1).

<sup>159</sup> “Yes. Indeed,” *evam byā kho* (or *evam vyā*). *Viya* becomes monosyllabic *vyā*, often labialized as *byā*, when immediately prec *evam* and foll *kho*, *viya*. *Byā* is an intensive particle, “just so, certainly, indeed” (PED): M 1:130,16, 256,24; S 3:110,4 (vl B); V 2:25,23, 26,7+17, 4:134,11+32 = DA 1:27,3 f, 135,4. See Sadd 626,18-21; also M Scheller, *Das mittellindische Enklitikum* se ZvS 81, 1967:19 f n4; Oberlies PG 2019:195 n10.

<sup>160</sup> *Evaṃ byā [Be Se vyā] kho ahaṃ āvuso bhagavatā dhammā desitaṃ ājānāmi, yathā ye’me antarāyikā dhammā antarāyikā vuttā bhagavatā, te paṭisevato nālaṃ antarāyāyāti.*

<sup>161</sup> *Aneka,pariyāyena h’āvuso ariṭṭha antarāyikā dhammā vuttā bhagavatā, alaṅ ca pana te paṭisevato antarāyāya.*

<sup>162</sup> **The 10 parables** = V 2:25 = A 3:97 = J 5:210 = Thī 487-91; the first 7 parables are explained in detail in **Potaliya S** (M 54,15-21/1:364-368), SD 43.8. All of them are explained in Comy. For details, see Nyanaponika 1974 n2. References:

(1) the skeleton (*aṭṭhi,kaṅkala*), a fleshless, blood-smeared bone cannot satisfy the hunger of a starving dog (cf S 2:185 = It 17).

(2) the piece of meat (*maṃsa,pesī*), for which birds of prey fight, unyielding, often meeting death or deadly pain due to their beaks and claws (cf M 1:145; “shared by many” VA 870 = MA 2:103; Vism 341; Miln 280).

(3) the grass torch (*tip’ukka*), carried against the wind severely burns the carrier (cf S 2:152).

(4) the pit of burning coals (*aṅgāra,kāsū*), over which a man is dragged by others, then thrown into the flame and consumed by it (cf D 3:283; S 4:188; A 4:234, 5:175; Sn 396; J 1:231, 2:313, 4:118; Vism 124).

(5) the dream (*supinaka*) of a beautiful landscape disappears when one awakes (cf Shakespeare’s *Sonnet* 129).

(6) the borrowed goods (*yācitaka*), on which one foolishly prides oneself but are taken away by the owners.

- (1) With the parable of **the skeleton** [the bare bones],  
the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.
- (2) With the parable of **the piece of meat**,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (3) With the parable of **the grass torch**,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (4) With the parable of **the fiery coal pit**,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (5) With the parable of **the dream**,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (6) With the parable of **borrowed goods**,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (7) With the parable of **a fruit-laden tree**,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (8) With the parable of **the butcher's knife and block**,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (9) With the parable of **the sword stake**,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (10) With the parable of **the snake's head**,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them."*

3.6 Yet although the monks questioned, pressed and parleyed with him thus, the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, still obstinately held on to the harmful view and continued to insist upon it, thus:

*'Thus I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called 'obstructions' by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.'* [§2]

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(7) the fruit-laden tree [or fruits on a tree] (*rukkha,phala*): one desiring fruits, unable to climb, axes it down, hurting the one already in it.

(8) the butcher's knife and block [or executioner's block] (*asi,sūnā*): sense-desires cut off our spiritual development (cf M 1:144).

(9) the sword stake (*satti,sūla*), sense-desires are, in reality, painfully piercing, causing wounds and wounding again (S 1:128 = Thī 58 = 141; Vism 341).

(10) the snake's head, sense-desires are a grave risk for our welfare, present and future (Cf Sn 768).

## The monks report to the Buddha

4 Since the monks were unable to detach Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, [131] from that bad view, the monks approached **the Blessed One**. After saluting him, they sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, the monks said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante,<sup>163</sup> such a bad view has arisen in the monk named Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, thus:

*‘Thus I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called “obstructions” by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.’ [§2]*

4.2 Then, bhante, when we heard that such a bad view had arisen in the monk named Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, thus:

*‘Thus I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called “obstructions” by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.’ [§2]*

Then, bhante, we approached the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers. Having approached the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, we said this to him:

‘Avuso Ariṭṭha, is it true that such a harmful view has arisen in you?’

4.3 When this was said, bhante, the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, said this to us:

*‘Yes, indeed, avuso, so I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called “obstructions” by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.’ [§3.3]*

4.4 Then, bhante, we, desiring to detach Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, from that harmful view, questioned, pressed and parleyed with him, thus:

*‘Avuso Ariṭṭha, do not say so! Do not misrepresent the Blessed One: it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would not speak thus.*

*For, in many ways, avuso, has the Blessed One stated how obstructive states are obstructive, and how they are able to obstruct one who indulges in them.*

4.5 *The Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

## Refrain 1: The 10 parables (the monks)

- (1) With the parable of the skeleton,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (2) With the parable of the piece of meat,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (3) With the parable of the grass torch,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (4) With the parable of the fiery coal pit,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (5) With the parable of the dream,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

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<sup>163</sup> This report ends at §4.6.

- (6) With the parable of borrowed goods,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (7) With the parable of the fruit-laden tree,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (8) With the parable of the butcher's knife and block,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (9) With the parable of the sword stake,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (10) With the parable of the snake's head,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.'*

### The Buddha summons Ariṭṭha

4.6 Although we questioned, pressed and parleyed with him thus, the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, still obstinately held on to the harmful view and continued to insist upon it, thus:

*'Yes, indeed, avuso, so I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called "obstructions" by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.'* [§3.3]

Bhante, since we could not detach the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, from this harmful view, we have reported this matter to the Blessed One."

5 Then, the Blessed One addressed a certain monk thus:

"Come, bhikshu, tell the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, in my name, thus:

"The Teacher calls you, avuso Ariṭṭha.'" [132]

"Yes, bhante," he replied, and approached the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers. Then, he said: "The Teacher calls you, avuso Ariṭṭha."

"Yes, avuso," the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, replied in assent to the monk, and he went to the Blessed One. After saluting him, Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, sat down at one side.

5.2 The Blessed One then asked him:

"Ariṭṭha, is it true that the following bad view has arisen in you:

*'Thus I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called obstructive states by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them?'*" [§2]

"Yes, indeed, bhante, so I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called obstructive states by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.'" [§3.3]

6 "O hollow man,<sup>164</sup> to whom have you ever known me teach the Dharma in that way? O hollow man, have I not spoken in many ways regarding obstructive states and how they obstruct those who indulge in them?"

<sup>164</sup> *Mogha, purisa*, lit "empty person." Usual as "misguided one." However, while *mogha* evokes more deeply a spiritual lack, "misguided" connotes more of psychosocial errancy. I'm influenced by T S Eliot's "Hollow Men" (1925) (where "empty men" is also mentioned) which fully brings out the meaning here but lacks emotional connection for those unfamiliar with the poem: <http://allpoetry.com/The-Hollow-Men>. On *mogha, purisa* as a syn of *asappurisa*, see **Sappurisa S** (M 113) @ SD 23.7 (3.2).

6.2 I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.

### Refrain 2: The 10 parables (the Buddha)

- (1) With the parable of the skeleton,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (2) With the parable of the piece of meat,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (3) With the parable of the grass torch,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (4) With the parable of the fiery coal pit,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (5) With the parable of the dream,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (6) With the parable of borrowed goods,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (7) With the parable of fruit-laden tree,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (8) With the parable of the butcher's knife and block,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (9) With the parable of the sword stake,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (10) With the parable of the snake's head,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

6.3 But you, O hollow man, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp, and you have injured yourself, and stored up much demerit. For, this will lead to your harm and suffering for a long time.”<sup>165</sup>

### No sensual pleasure without sensual desire

7 Then, the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus, what do you think? Has this monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, **kindled even a spark of wisdom in this Dharma and Vinaya** [the teaching and discipline]?”<sup>166</sup>

<sup>165</sup> This episode thus far is found in two places in the Vinaya: the commission of an offence entailing expiation (*pācittiya*) in refusing to do so after repeated admonitions (V 4:133 f) and the announcement of the act of suspension (*ukkhepaniya, kamma*) on Ariṭṭha for refusing to give up his false view (V 2:25).

“How can this be, bhante? No, bhante.”

7.2 When this was said, the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, sat silent, dismayed, his shoulders drooping, hanging his head, glum, unable to speak [at a loss for words].<sup>167</sup>

Then, the Blessed One, knowing that Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, sat silent, dismayed, his shoulders drooping, hanging his head, glum, unable to speak, said to Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers:

“O hollow man, **you will be recognized by your own bad [evil] view.**  
I will question the monks on this matter.”

8 Then, the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“**Do you, [133] bhikshus, understand the Dharma taught by me** as this monk, Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, does when he misrepresents me by his wrong grasp, and injures himself and stores up much demerit?”

“No, bhante. For, in many ways the Blessed One has stated how those things called ‘obstructions’ are obstructions, and how they are able to obstruct one who indulges in them.

The Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.

### Refrain 3: The 10-parable refrain (the monks)

8.2 (1) With the parable of the skeleton,

*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

(2) With the parable of the piece of meat,

*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

(3) With the parable of the grass torch,

*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

(4) With the parable of the fiery coal pit,

*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

(5) With the parable of the dream,

*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

(6) With the parable of borrowed goods,

*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,*

<sup>166</sup> A similar context for this stock phrase is the Buddha’s rebuke of Sāti (**Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya S**, M 38,6/1:258). Comy remarks that this phrase refers to “one who has not cultivated the ‘warmth of understanding’ (*ñāṇ’usmā*) that can mature the ‘seed of wisdom’ (*paññā,bijā*, MAT) for winning the paths and fruits.” (MA 2:104)

<sup>167</sup> *Tuṇhī,bhūtaṃ maṅku,bhūtaṃ patta-k,khandhaṃ adho,mukhaṃ pajjhāyantaṃ appaṭibhānaṃ veditvā*, D 3:53,-26 = M 1:132,34 = 234,4 = 258,31 = 2:154,27 = 3:298,23 ≈ A 3:57,13 (*dukkhīṃ dummanaṃ patta-k,khandhaṃ +*). **Tuṇhī,bhūto +**, M 1:132,30 (= Comy: *kiñci paṭibhānaṃ apassanto chinna,paṭibhāṇo*, lit “not seeing any wit, wit uprooted,” ie, at one’s wit’s ends, at a loss) = 234,2 (= Comy: *uttaraṃ apassanto*, “not seeing a refutation [not knowing how to answer]”) = 258,29 = 2:154,25 = 3:187,18 = 208,22 = M 3:298,21 = S 1:124,12 = A 1:186,29 ≈ A 3:57,11 (*dukkhī dummano patta-k,khandho +*) ≈ D 3:53,22 (instead of final *viditvā*, has *nisīdi*, “he sat”). **3 pl nisidim̐su tuṇhī,-bhūtā +**, V 3:162,4 = 2:78,24 ≈ D 3:57,13 = A 5:188,18. See **Satta Vassa S** (S 4.24,13 n), SD 36.5.



*much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

- (7) With the parable of fruit-laden tree,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (8) With the parable of the butcher's knife and block,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (9) With the parable of the sword stake,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them;*
- (10) With the parable of the snake's head,  
*the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them."*

### Sensual pleasures have little gratification

8.3 "Good, bhikshus, good! It is good that **you understand the Dharma taught by me thus.**<sup>168</sup> For, in many ways I have spoken on obstructive states and how they obstruct those who indulge in them.

8.4 I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,<sup>169</sup>  
*much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

### Refrain 4: The 10-parable refrain (the Buddha)

- (1) With the parable of the skeleton,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (2) With the parable of the piece of meat,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (3) With the parable of the grass torch,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (4) With the parable of the fiery coal pit,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (5) With the parable of the dream,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (6) With the parable of borrowed goods,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,*

<sup>168</sup> Comy notes that by questioning the other monks, the Buddha wants to clarify the Sangha's view and to leave no doubt in Ariṭṭha that through his mindset, he had alienated himself from the Sangha (MA 2:105). Compatibility of view (*diṭṭhi,sāmaññatā*) is the last of the 6 qualities constituting the virtues for the spiritual community (*sāraṇīya,dhamma*, D 3:245, A 3:288 f), the first 5 being: showing lovingkindness in deed, in speech, and in thought; communal sharing, and compatibility of moral virtue. However, despite Ariṭṭha's alienation, no disciplinary measure is put upon him. Instead, the Buddha actually clarifies the situation before the assembly in Ariṭṭha's presence which apparently would benefit him in due course.

<sup>169</sup> Cf Dh 186; F 2:313, 4:118; Vism 124.

- much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (7) With the parable of fruit-laden tree,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (8) With the parable of the butcher's knife and block,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (9) With the parable of the sword stake,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*
- (10) With the parable of the snake's head,  
*I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,  
much suffering and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.*

8.5 But this monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, *misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit. For, this will lead to this hollow man's harm and suffering for a long time.*

9 Indeed, bhikshus, it is impossible that one can indulge in sensual pleasures without sensual desires, without perception of sensual desire, without thought of sensual desire!<sup>170</sup>

## 2

### The parable of the water-snake

10 “Here, bhikshus, some misguided people learn the Dharma<sup>171</sup>—the discourses, the stanzas, the expositions, the verses, the inspired utterances, the sayings, the birth stories, the marvels and the answers to questions [*sutta, geyyā, veyyākaraṇa, gāthā, udāna, iti, vuttaka, jātaka, abbhuta, dhamma* and

<sup>170</sup> *Aññat'eva kāmehi aññatra kāma, saññāya aññatra kāma, vitakkehi kāme paṭisevissatāti n'etaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati*, B Horner: “This situation does not occur when one could follow sense-pleasures apart from sense-pleasures themselves, apart from perceptions of sense-pleasures, apart from thoughts of sense-pleasures” (M:H 1:171). “Sensual pleasures” (*kāma*) refers to the sensual objects (*vatthu, kāma*) or sense-experiences, and “sensual desires” refers to “sensuality as mental defilement” (*kilesa, kāma*), the subjective aspect of the sense-process. Comy explains “sensual pleasures” as “sexual intercourse.” MAṬ adds that this includes other physical acts expressive of sensual desire such as hugging and stroking. **Sandaka S** (M 76.51) says that an arhat “is incapable of transgression in 5 cases: (1) a monk whose influxes are destroyed is incapable of depriving a living being of life; (2) he is incapable of taking what is not given, that is, of stealing; (3) he is incapable of indulging in sexual intercourse; (4) he is incapable of knowingly speaking falsehood; (5) he is incapable of enjoying sensual pleasures by storing them up as he did formerly in lay life.” [MA. He is incapable of storing food provisions and other pleasurable goods and subsequently enjoying them.] In **Pāsādika S** (D 29.26/3:133), 4 other things that an arhat cannot do are mentioned: he cannot take a wrong course of action because of desire, hatred, fear or delusion. See M:ÑB 2001:1208 n252.

<sup>171</sup> Comy says that there are 3 ways of learning the Dharma: (1) like that of the water-snake parable (the wrong grasp), ie for fame and gain (in which case it “would be better for one to sleep and not study at all”; (2) for crossing over (as in the raft parable), ie fulfilling the moral conduct, the concentration, the wisdom, and the paths and fruit-ions that are the subject of one's study; (3) like a steward (or, treasurer, store-keeper), ie by one who has given up the defilements, developed the path and realized the fruition, leaving nothing unpenetrated, nothing unrelinquished, nothing undeveloped, nothing unrealized (in reference to the noble truths); such is the keeper of the scriptures, the guardian of the tradition, the preserver of the lineage. The first student is the unawakened worldling; the second, the 7 noble persons (*ariya, puggala*) who are “learners” (*sekha*); the third, the non-learner (*asekha*), the adept, the arhat. An unawakened worldling, however, may be a student of the first or the second kind.

*vedalla*]<sup>172</sup>—but having learnt the Dharma, they do not wisely examine the (true) purpose [the meaning]<sup>173</sup> of those teachings.

10.2 Without examining **the (true) meaning [purpose]** of those teachings with wisdom, they are not convinced of it [they fail to see its wisdom].<sup>174</sup>

10.3 Instead, they learn the Dharma only for the benefit of finding faults (with others) and for freeing themselves in a debate [of combatting criticism],<sup>175</sup>

and they do not enjoy the good for the sake of which one learns the Dharma.

Those teachings, wrongly grasped by them, bring them harm and suffering for a long time to come.<sup>176</sup>

Why is that? Because, bhikshus, of **the wrong grasp of those teachings**.<sup>177</sup>

#### THE WATER-SNAKE WRONGLY GRASPED

10.4 Suppose **a man who needs a water-snake**,<sup>178</sup> looking for a water-snake, wandering in search of a water-snake, sees a large water-snake and grasps its coils or its tail.

It would turn back and bite his hand or his arm or one of his limbs, **[134]**

and because of that he would suffer death or deadly pain.

Why is that? Because, bhikshus, of the wrong grasp of the water-snake.

10.5 So, too, here some misguided person learns the Dharma—discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, inspired utterances, sayings, birth stories, marvels, and answers to questions— but having learnt the Dharma,

they do not wisely examine the (true) meaning [purpose] of those teachings.

10.6 Without examining the (true) purpose [the meaning] of those teachings with wisdom, they are not convinced of it [they fail to see its wisdom].

<sup>172</sup> These 9 are collectively called *nav'āṅga satthu sāsana*, the Teacher's 9-limbed teaching (V 3:8, M 1:133, A 3:86). This is a pre-canonical listing of the teachings. Not all the canonical texts as we have them today are likely to fit perfectly into these 9 categories, but the general principles apply. See SD 58.1 (5.4.2).

<sup>173</sup> That is, the attainment of the paths and their fruits.

<sup>174</sup> *Tesaṃ te dhammā paññāya atthaṃ anupaparikkhataṃ na nijjhānaṃ khamanti*. Bodhi: "Not examining the meaning of those teachings with wisdom, they do not gain a reflective acceptance of them." "They are not convinced of its wisdom," *na nijjhānaṃ khamanti*, ie "they see no wisdom in it." They are not convinced because of their failure to understand that the purpose of moral conduct is to attain concentration, the purpose of concentration, the attaining of insight, etc. (MAṬ qu by Nyanaponika 1974:35 n10). Here *nijjhāna* (Skt *nidhyāna*) means wisdom or understanding. This phrase, preceded by "having wisely examined the purpose [and/or meaning]" appears in **Kīṭā, giri S** (M 70,20), SD 11.1, and **Caṅkī S** (M 95,27), SD 21.15. On *nijjhānaṃ khamanti*, cf *nijjhāna*, khanti: see **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65), SD 35.4 Comy 3a. Cf "One for whom these teachings are accepted thus after being pondered to a sufficient degree with wisdom is called a Dhamma-follower" (S 25.1 & S:B 1099 n169).

<sup>175</sup> *Te upārambh'ānisamsā c'eva dhammaṃ pariyāpuṇanti iti, vāda-p, pamokkh'ānisamsā ca*. Similarly spoken by the wanderer Kuṇḍaliya, **Kuṇḍaliya S** (S 46.4,3/5:73), SD 35.3. Comy: They master the Dharma for the benefit of pointing out errors in their opponents' theses, and on rescuing their own theses when their opponents point out their errors (MA 2:106 f). For similar situations, see **Hālidikāni S 1** (S 22.3,24/3:12), SD 10.12 & **Viggāhika Kathā S** (S 56.9,2/5:419), SD 65.13.

<sup>176</sup> Comy explains that this passage aims at showing the fault in merely gaining intellectual knowledge of the Dharma (as in Ariṭṭha's case). The "good for the sake of which one learns the Dharma" is the paths and fruits. (MA 2:106). See SD 58.1 (5.4.2.0).

<sup>177</sup> *Duggahitattā bhikkhave dhammānaṃ*.

<sup>178</sup> *Seyyathā'pi bhikkhave puriso alagadd'atthiko*. "Water-snake," *alagadda* (m & mfn), "a kind of snake"; only in late Skt, *alagarda*, "water-snake" (PED); "a watersnake (the black variety of the Cobra de capello, Amara, kośa 1:8.5) (CPD); "water-snake" (DP). SED: *ala* (the sting in the tail of a scorpion (or a bee) + *garda* (m), a water-serpent (the black variety of Cobra de capello, Coluber nāga; ~*gardā* (f), a large poisonous leech.

Instead, they learn the Dharma only for the sake of criticizing others and for winning debates, and they do not enjoy the good for the sake of which one learns the Dharma.

Those teachings, wrongly grasped by them, bring them harm and suffering for a long time to come. Why is that? Because, bhikshus, of the wrong grasp of the teachings.

### Purpose of learning the Dharma

**11** Here, bhikshus, some clansmen learn **the Dharma**—*discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, inspired utterances, sayings, birth stories, marvels and answers to questions*— [10.1]

and, having learnt the Dharma,

they examine **the (true) meaning [purpose] of those teachings with wisdom**.

Having examined the (true) purpose [the meaning] of those teachings with wisdom, they are convinced of it [they see its wisdom].

They do *not* learn the Dharma for the sake of criticizing others, nor for winning debates, and they enjoy the good for the sake of which one learns the Dharma.

Those teachings, properly grasped by them, bring them welfare and happiness for a long time to come.

Why is that? Because of **the right grasp of the teachings**.

THE WATER-SNAKE RIGHTLY GRASPED

11.2 Suppose a man who needs a water-snake,

looking for a water-snake, wandering in search of a water-snake, sees a large water-snake and catches it rightly with a cleft stick, and having done so, grasps it rightly by its neck.

Then, although the snake might coil around his hand or his arm or one of his limbs, still he would not suffer death or deadly pain.<sup>179</sup>

Why is that? Because of the right grasp of the water-snake.

**12** Therefore, bhikshus, when you understand the meaning of my word, remember it accordingly, and when you do not understand the meaning of my word, then you should question and counter-question either me or the learned monks about it.

## 3

### The parable of the raft

**13** Bhikshus, I will show you **how the Dharma is comparable to a raft**, that is for crossing over [the waters for the far shore], not for the purpose of grasping.

Listen and pay close attention, I will speak.”

“Yes, bhante,” the monks replied in assent to the Blessed One.

13.2 The Blessed One said this:

“Bhikshus, suppose a man in the course of his journey saw a great stretch of water, whose **near shore** is dangerous and fearful, and whose **far shore** is safe and free from fear, but there is no ferry or bridge for going across to the far shore. [135]

<sup>179</sup> Cf Buddhaghosa’s parable of the fisherman and the watersnake: catching in his hand a watersnake and recognizing it so, at once casts it as far away as possible and scrambles on to dry land for safety (Vism 21.49/652), SD 20.1 (6.2.1.3).

Then, he thinks:

‘There is **this great stretch of water**, whose near shore is dangerous and fearful and whose far shore is safe and free from danger,  
but there is neither ferry nor bridge for going across to the far shore.

13.3 What now if I were to collect grass, wood, branches and leaves,  
and bind them together into a **raft**, and supported by the raft,  
and exerting effort with my hands and feet, I go safely across to the far shore.’

And, then, the man collects grass, wood, branches and leaves, and binds them together into a raft, and supported by the raft,  
**exerts himself using his hands and feet, goes safely across to the far shore.**<sup>180</sup>

13.4 Then, when he has gone across and arrived on the far shore, he might think thus:  
‘This raft has been very helpful to me, since supported by it,  
and exerting effort with my hands and feet, I went safely across to the far shore.  
Suppose I were to *hoist it on my head or bear it on my shoulder, and then go wherever I want.*’

13.5 Now, bhikshus, what do you think? By doing so, would that man be doing what should be done with the raft?”

“No, bhante.”

13.6 “By doing what, would that man be doing what should be done with the raft?  
Here, bhikshus, when that man has gone across and arrived on **the far shore**, he might think thus:

‘This raft has been very helpful to me, since, supported by it and using my hands and feet, I went safely across to the far shore.

Suppose I were to haul it onto dry land or set it adrift in the water, and go wherever I wish.’

13.7 Now, bhikshus, by doing so, that man is *doing what should be done with that raft.*

13.8 Even so I have shown you that **the Dharma** is comparable to a raft, which is *for crossing over* (the waters to the far shore), not for the purpose of grasping.

**14** Bhikshus, having understood the parable of the raft, **you should abandon even the dharmas, how much more so that which are not dharmas!**<sup>181</sup>

## 4

### The 6 grounds for views

**15** Bhikshus, there are these **6 grounds for views.**<sup>182</sup> What are the six?

Here, bhikshus, **an ignorant ordinary person**, who has no regard for noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma, who has no regard for the true individuals<sup>183</sup> and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma,<sup>184</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Cf a similar parable at **Asīvisôpama S** (S 35.238,8/4:174), SD 28.1. See also SD 52.11 (1.2.2.2).

<sup>181</sup> *Dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag’eva adhammā*. For comy, see (3.3), esp (3.3.2).

<sup>182</sup> *Cha diṭṭhi-ṭ,ṭhāna*. See (4).

<sup>183</sup> “True individuals” (*sappurisā*). For def, see **Sappurisa S** (M 113), SD 23.7 (3).

<sup>184</sup> On this verse, see (5.1.1.2).

- (1) regards form thus, 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self.'<sup>185</sup>  
 (2) He regards feeling thus, 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self.'  
 (3) He regards perception thus, 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self.'  
 (4) He regards formations thus, 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self.'  
 (5) He regards<sup>186</sup> what is seen, heard, sensed, known,<sup>187</sup>  
*found, sought after, mentally pursued*,<sup>188</sup> thus, 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self.'  
 (6) And this ground for views, namely,  
 'The world is the self;<sup>189</sup> after death,  
<sup>190</sup> will be permanent, everlasting, eternal,  
 unchanging [136] in nature, eternally the same;<sup>191</sup>  
 I will endure as long as eternity<sup>192</sup> —  
 this, too, he regards thus, 'This is mine; this I am; this is my self.'<sup>193</sup>

**16** Bhikshus, a well-taught noble disciple, who has regard for noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma, who has regard for true individuals and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma

- (1) regards form thus: 'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.'  
 (2) He regards feeling thus: 'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.'  
 (3) He regards perception thus: 'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.'  
 (4) He regards formations thus: 'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.'  
 (5) He regards what is seen, heard, sensed, known,  
*found, sought after, mentally pursued*, thus: 'This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.'  
 And this ground for views, namely,  
 'The world is the self; after death  
 I will be permanent, ever-lasting, eternal,  
 unchanging in nature, eternally the same;

<sup>185</sup> This threefold grasping (*ti, vidha gāha*) comprises (1) "This is mine" (*etam mama*) (arises through craving, *taṅhā, gāha*), (2) "This I am" (*eso'ham asmi*) (arises through conceit, *māna, gāha*), and (3) "This is my self" (*eso me attā*) (arises through views, *diṭṭhi, gāha*) (see **Anattā, lakkhaṇa S**, S 3:68). These three are also known as "latent tendencies to 'I'-making, 'mine'-making and conceit" (*ahaṅ, kāra, mamaṅ, kāra, mānānusaya*) (M 22,15, 72,15, 112,11 20, S 2:75, 3:236, 4:41, A 1:132, 133). These threefold graspings are the main factors behind conceptual thinking (M 1) and mental proliferation (M 18). In short, such experiences are not "beliefs" but direct reactions to reality. See Bodhi, 1980:8-11; Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. See (4) esp 4.2.

<sup>186</sup> "What is seen ... pursued" (*diṭṭhaṃ sutam mutaṃ viññātaṃ pattam pariesitaṃ anuvicarataṃ manasā*): see (5.2).

<sup>187</sup> *Diṭṭha, suta, muta, viññāta*. For details, see (5.2.2).

<sup>188</sup> Comy: "found," ie whether sought after or not; "sought after," ie whether finding them or not; "mentally pursued" (or pondered), resorted to by consciousness, ie whether found or not without being sought after. (MA 2:110). See (5.2.3.1).

<sup>189</sup> "The world is the self, ..." (*so loko so attā*). This alludes to the early pantheistic theory that "the karma of he who reveres the soul as the world does not perish and out of this soul he creates whatever he likes (after death)" (*sa ya ātmānam eva lokam upaste na hasya karma ksyate asmadd hy eva atmano yad yat kamayate tat tat srjate*, Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.15). Such notions are unequivocally rejected by the Buddha. In other suttas, the form, *so attā so loko*, "the self is the world," also occurs: see SD 1.1 (4.0.2.6) n.

<sup>190</sup> "After death I will be," *so pecca bhavissāmi*. Comy *so = so aham*.

<sup>191</sup> "Eternally the same" (*sassati, sama*), a term from the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 5.10 (*sāsvatīh samāh*) (Nyānaponika 1974:42 n21).

<sup>192</sup> See (5.2.3.2).

<sup>193</sup> This is a classic eternalist view, see (5.1.1.3).



I will endure as long as *eternity*—  
this, too, he regards thus:

*‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’*

17 Regarding them thus, he is not anxious [agitated] regarding what is **non-existent**.<sup>194</sup>

### Anxiety over the externally non-existent

18 When this was said, a certain monk asked the Blessed One:

“Bhante, can there be anxiety over what is non-existent externally?”<sup>195</sup>

“There can be, bhikshu,” the Blessed One said.

18.2 “Here, bhikshu, someone *thinks* thus:

‘Alas, I had it! Alas, I have it no longer! Alas, may I have it! Alas, I cannot have it!’

Then, he sorrows, grieves and laments, he weeps beating his breast and becomes distraught. That is how there is anxiety over what is *non-existent externally*.”

19 “Bhante, can there be no anxiety over what is non-existent externally?”

“There can be, bhikshu,” the Blessed One said.

19.2 “Here, bhikshu, someone does *not* think thus:

‘Alas, I had it! Alas, I have it no longer! Alas, may I have it! Alas, I cannot have it!’

Then, he does not sorrow, grieve, nor lament, he does not weep beating his breast nor become distraught.

That is how there is no anxiety over what is **non-existent externally**.”

### Anxiety over the internally non-existent

20 “Bhante, can there be anxiety over what is non-existent internally?”<sup>196</sup>

“There can be, bhikshu,” the Blessed One said.

20.2 “Here, bhikshu, a monk has *the view*:

*‘The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same, I will endure as long as eternity.’*

20.3 He hears the Tathāgata or the Tathāgata’s disciple teaching the Dharma for the elimination of all fixations<sup>197</sup> to grounds for views, mindsets, obsessions, inclination and latent tendencies,<sup>198</sup>

<sup>194</sup> “Not anxious [agitated] over what is non-existent” (*asati na paritassati*). Comy says that the noun **paritassanā** has two connotations: fear (*bhaya*) and craving (*taṇhā*). As such, an alt tr can be “neither fear nor craving over what is non-existent.” Anxiety over what is non-existent externally (§18) refers to the worldling’s despair over losing or not getting possessions. The eternalist is anxious about what is non-existent internally (§20) when he misinterprets the Buddha’s teaching on nirvana as annihilationism. Comy to Brahmajāla S (D 1) has a long discourse on the n *paritassana*, noting 4 kinds of **tassanā**: on account of fear (*tāsa, tassanā*), of craving (*taṇhā, tassanā*), of views (*ditṭhi, tassanā*) and of knowledge (*ñāṇa, tassanā*)(DA 1:111): SD 25.3 (41). The term recurs in **Uddesa Vibhaṅga S** (M 138,-20), **Upādā Paritassanā Ss 1+2** (S 22.7+8/3:15-19), SD 97.10+11; **Upāya S** (S 22.53); **Udāna S** (S 22.55). (**Khandha Samādhi S** (S 22.5) mentions *tāsa* (anxiety). See **Taṇhā Jālīnī S** (A 4.199), SD 26.12 (3).

<sup>195</sup> “Anxiety over what is externally non-existent,” *bahiddhā asati paritassanā*. Comy: “External property” property refers to animate things, such as wife and child, friends, etc, and to inanimate things, such as the monastic requisites (*parikkhāra*) (of the 3 robes, a bowl, a razor, a needle and thread, a girdle, and a water strainer, V 2:267; DA 1:206 f = J 1:65; cf J 4:342) (MA 2:111). However, according to Gombrich, this refers to the non-existent “self” as perceived by the Vedic brahmins: see (4.2). Cf Steinkellner 2004.

<sup>196</sup> *Ajjhattam asatiparitassanā*. According to Gombrich, this refers to the non-existent “self” (a self as perceived by the Vedic brahmins): [4.2].

<sup>197</sup> *-adhiṭṭhāna-* see foll n.

<sup>198</sup> *Diṭṭhi-ṭ, ṭhān’ādhiṭṭhāna, pariyuṭṭhāna’bhinivesā’nusaya*.

for the stilling of all formations,

for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the destruction of craving,

for the fading away (of lust),<sup>199</sup> for the ending (of suffering),<sup>200</sup> for nirvana.

20.4 He thinks thus: **[137]** ‘So I will be annihilated! So I will perish! So I will be no more!’

Then, he sorrows, grieves and laments, he weeps beating his breast and become distraught.

That is how there is anxiety regarding what is *non-existent internally*.”

**21** “Bhante, can there be **no anxiety** over what is *non-existent internally*?”

“There can be, bhikshu,” the Blessed One said.

21.2 “Here, bhikshu, a monk does *not* have the view:

‘*The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same, I will endure as long as eternity.*’

21.3 He hears the Tathāgata or the Tathāgata’s disciple teaching the Dharma for the elimination of all fixation to grounds for views, mindsets, obsessions, inclination and latent tendencies,

for the stilling of all formations, for the relinquishing of all attachments,

for fading away (of lust), for the ending (of suffering), for nirvana.

21.4 He does *not* think thus: ‘So I will be annihilated! So I will perish! So I will be no more!’

Then, he does not sorrow, grieve nor lament, he does not weep beating his breast nor become distraught.

That is how there is no anxiety regarding what is *non-existent internally*.”<sup>201</sup>

## Non-self

**22** “Bhikshus, you may well take hold of that is permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, that would endure eternally the same just like that.<sup>202</sup>

But do you see any such possession, bhikshus, *that is permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, that would endure eternally the same just like that?*”

“No, bhante.”

“Good, bhikshus. I, too, do not see any possession that is permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same, that would endure as long as eternity.

**23** Bhikshus, you may well cling to the self-doctrine<sup>203</sup> that would not cause sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair to arise in one who clings to it.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>199</sup> *Virāga* also “fading away of lust” or “dispassion” (see §21).

<sup>200</sup> *Nirodha* (see §21).

<sup>201</sup> Comy says that this section deals with a fourfold emptiness (*catu,koṭikā suññatā*), ie absence of self and mine, referring to one who, at the destruction of his own aggregates (ie personality), (1) feels anxiety, (2) feels none; and to one who, at the destruction of external property, (3) feels anxiety, (4) feels none. For another fourfold emptiness see Vism 762 f & S 22.5 (where *tāsa*, “anxiety,” is mentioned).

<sup>202</sup> Linked to §18.

<sup>203</sup> “You may well cling to a doctrine of the self,” (*atta,vād’upādānam upadiyetha*). For an alt tr (using “assumption” for *upādāna*), see Nyanaponika 1974:43 n27. On the difficulty of translating *atta,vād’upādānam upadiyetha*, see M:ÑB 2001:1197 n176. Clinging to a self-doctrine (*atta,vād’upādāna*) is one of the 4 clingings, the first 3 being: (1) clinging to sensual pleasure (*kām’upādāna*), (2) clinging to views (*diṭṭh’upādāna*), and (3) clinging to mere rules and rites (*sīla-b, bat’upādāna*) (D 3:230, M 1:66, Vbh 375). 20 kinds of self-views (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*) are listed at Dhs 1214-17. See BDict: *upādāna*.

<sup>204</sup> Linked to §20.

But do you see any such self-doctrine, bhikshus, *that would not cause sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair to arise in one who clings to it?*"

"No, bhante."

"Good, bhikshus. I, too, do not see any doctrine of self that would not arouse sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair in one who clings to it.

**24** Bhikshus, you may well rely on that support of **vie ws**<sup>205</sup> that would not cause sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair to arise in one who relies on it.

But do you, bhikshus, see any such *support of views that would not cause sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair to arise in one who relies on it?*"

"No, bhante."

"Good, bhikshus. I, too, do not see any support of views **[138]** that would not arouse sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair in one who relies on it.<sup>206</sup>

**25** Bhikshus, if there were **a self**, would there be for me what belongs to my self?"<sup>207</sup>

"Yes, bhante."

"Or, if there were what belongs to a self, would there be my self?"

"Yes, bhante."

25.2 "And, bhikshus, since in truth and in reality,<sup>208</sup> one can find neither self nor what belongs to a self, then, this ground for views—

*'The world is the self: after death, I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same, I will endure eternally the same just like that'—*

would it not be an entirely and completely foolish teaching?"

"What else could it be, bhante. It would be, bhante, an entirely and completely foolish teaching?"<sup>209</sup>

## The universal characteristics of the 5 aggregates

**26** (1) "Bhikshus, what do you think?

Is **form** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?"

"Painful, bhante."

<sup>205</sup> "Support of views," *diṭṭhi, nissaya*. Comy says these are the 62 wrong views (or bases for wrong views) listed in **Brahmajāla S** (D 1), that emerge from personality-view, and including Ariṭṭha's bad view (§2). DA on Mahā Satī'paṭṭhāna S (D 2:292) and MA on Satipaṭṭhāna S (M 1:56) (both identical passages) mention 2 kinds of supports, viz, craving as support (*taṇhā, nissaya*) and views as support (*diṭṭhi, nissaya*).

<sup>206</sup> Comy: In this section, a threefold emptiness is shown, ie referring to external possessions, self-doctrine and views as support.

<sup>207</sup> "What belongs to a self" (*attaniya*) applies to any of the 5 aggregates as well as external objects (all of which have no self). "This passage shows the mutual dependence, and thus equal untenability, of the twin notions "I" and "mine" (Nyanaponika 1974:44 n30; M:ÑB 2001:1211 n264).

<sup>208</sup> Cf §36. "In truth and in reality," *saccato thetato*, alt tr "as true and real"; as at **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22,25/-1:138; cf 22,36/1:140); **Yamaka S** (S 22.85.34/3:112); **Anurādha S** (S 22.86.21/3:118 = S 44.2.21/4:384); **Titth'āyātana S** (A 3.61.2-4/1:174 f x3); Vbh 376 f (x4), 382 (x6); Pug 3.17/38 (x12); Kvu 67 f (x13). Vbh:T tr *staccato thetato* as "firmly as truth" (Vbh:T 487)..

<sup>209</sup> Comy: Here, a twofold emptiness is shown, ie, that of the self (*atta*) and that of the property of a self (*attaniya*). The 2 supplementary statements in this section suggest that the concepts of "I" and "mine": are inseparably linked, like the philosophical terms, substance ("fire") and attribute ("hotness"). See Nyanaponika 1974:44 n30.

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

‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self’?”

“No, bhante.”

(2) “Bhikshus, what do you think?

Is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?”

“Painful, bhante.”

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

‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self’?”

“No, bhante.”

(3) “Bhikshus, what do you think?

Is **perception** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?”

“Painful, bhante.”

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

‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self’?”

“No, bhante.”

(4) “Bhikshus, what do you think? Are **formations** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?”

“Painful, bhante.”

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

‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self’?”

“No, bhante.”

(5) “Bhikshus, what do you think? Is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?”

“Painful, bhante.”

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

‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self’?”

“No, bhante.”<sup>210</sup>

## The totality of the 5 aggregates

**27** Therefore, bhikshus,  
any kind of **form** whatsoever—

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<sup>210</sup> Norman on this and the foll section: “It is important to note that this answer can only be given by those who know, in advance, that the term *attā* is by definition *nicca* [permanent] and *sukha* [pleasant], and therefore anything which is *anicca* and *dukkha* cannot be *attā*. This gives us a clear indication of the type of *attā* that is being discussed. It is the Upanishadic idea of an *ātman* which is *nitya* and *sukha*, and this is in complete agreement with the fact ... that some of the phraseology of the non-Buddhist view which is being rejected has Upanishadic echoes.” (1981:22)

whether past, future or present, internal or external, [139]

gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near<sup>211</sup>—

all **forms** should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:  
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is **not my self**.’<sup>212</sup>

Any kind of **feeling** whatsoever—

*whether past, future or present, internal or external,*

*gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—*

all **feelings** should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:  
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is **not my self**.’

Any kind of **perception** whatsoever—

*whether past, future or present, internal or external,*

*gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—*

all **perceptions** should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:  
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is **not my self**.’

Any kind of **formations** whatsoever—

*whether past, future or present, internal or external,*

*gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—*

all **formations** should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:  
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is **not my self**.’

Any kind of **consciousness** whatsoever—

*whether past, future or present, internal or external,*

*gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—*

all **consciousness** should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:  
‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is **not my self**.’

**28** Seeing thus, bhikshus, an instructed noble disciple is

revulsed at	form,
revulsed at	feeling,
revulsed at	perception,
revulsed at	formations,
revulsed <sup>213</sup> at	consciousness.

<sup>211</sup> See **(Dve) Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47), SD 17.1. This “totality formula” classification of the aggregates (see pre n) is explained in detail in **Vibhaṅga** and briefly in **Visuddhi, magga**: “internal” = physical sense-organs; “external” = physical sense-objects; “gross” = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “subtle” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “far” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “near” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41). See Gethin 1986:40 f; Karunadasa 1967:38f; Boisvert 1995:43-48. Regarding the terms “internal” (*ajjhatta*) and “external” (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have two applications: (1) the aggregates (*khandhā*) composing a particular “person” are “internal” to them and anything else is “external”; (2) the sense-organs are “internal” and their objects—which may include aspects of the person’s own body or mind, which are “internal” in the first sense—are “external.” Boisvert (1995: 43, 47), however, overlooks these applications.

<sup>212</sup> See **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,12), SD 1.2.

THE SHORTER NIBBIDĀ CYCLE<sup>214</sup>

29 Feeling revulsed, lust fades away.<sup>215</sup>

Through the fading away of lust, he is freed.<sup>216</sup>

When he is freed, there comes the knowledge: ‘It (the mind) is freed.’<sup>217</sup>

*nibbindaṃ virajjati*

*virāgā vimuccati*

*vimuttasmiṃ vimuttaṃ*

29.2 He knows: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what is to be done, there is no more of this state of being.’

The arhat<sup>218</sup>

30 Bhikshus, this monk<sup>219</sup>

is said to be

one who has lifted the cross-bar;

*ukkhita, paligha*

so, too, is he

one who has filled in the moat;

*saṅkiṇṇa, parikha*

so, too, is he

one who has dug out the pillar;

*abbūlhesika*

so, too, is he

one who has unbolted the door;

*niraggaḷa*

so, too, is he

the noble one whose banner is lowered;

*ariya panna, dhaja*<sup>220</sup>

<sup>213</sup> “He is revulsed at” (*nibbindati*). Comy: He is dissatisfied, disgusted, feels revolted towards. This disillusionment marks the culmination of insight, just before the attainment of the supramundane path (MA 2:114; Vism 21.43-44/650 f). “His lust fades away” (*virajjati*) marks the attainment of the supramundane path (*magga*), when the fetters are finally eliminated. “It (the mind) is freed” (*vimuttaṃ*) refers to the attainment of the supramundane fruition (*phala*). The arhat’s subsequent reviewing knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇa, ñāṇa*) is shown by the phrase “there comes the knowledge” and “he understands: ‘Birth is destroyed ...’,” in the following paragraph. The choice of translating *nibbindati* as “is revulsed” is deliberate, as it reflects the overwhelming feeling of *samvega* that characterizes seeing the true nature of suffering: we do not merely feel “disillusioned, disenchanted” (or similar refined words) when we are burnt by fire, pained by loss, or cheated by ignorance—we are simply revulsed at them! There is no hint of hate or ill feeling in this spiritual response of revulsion (*nibbidā*): we are blissfully filled with equanimous wisdom—*blissful* at the fact that we are no longer victims of craving, ignorance or karma.

<sup>214</sup> On the *nibbidā pericope*, see SD 20.1 esp (2.2.2).

<sup>215</sup> Or, “Feeling revulsed, he is dispassionate.” Comy: “Feeling revulsed, lust fades away,” here, “lust fades away” (*virāga*) is the path (*magga*) (MA 2:115,19).

<sup>216</sup> Or, “Through dispassion, he is freed.” Here, he is freed by the path through dispassion (*ettha virāgena maggena vimuccati*, MA 2:115,20).

<sup>217</sup> This line refers to a statement of “review” (*idha paccavekkhaṇa lathitā*, MA 2:115,21).

<sup>218</sup> This section reappears as the 2 **Ceto, vimutti Ss** (A 3:84 f = 5.71-72). Comy: “There are two cities: one is a city of brigands, the other a city of peace. Now to a great warrior of the city of peace (ie a meditator), the following thought occurs: ‘As long as this city of brigands (the self-delusion) exists, we will never be free from danger.’ So he dons his armour (of virtue) and goes to the city of brigands. With his sword (of wisdom), he breaks the gate-pillar (of craving) together with the door-wings (panels), he removes the bolt (of ignorance), fills in the moat (of *sam-sāra*), and lowers the (enemy’s) flag (of self-conceit). Such a saint (a noble one) has put down for good the burden of the 5 aggregates (*khandha*), of *kamma*-producing volitions (*kammābhisaṅkhāra*) and of the defilements (*kilesa*), has fully liberated himself from the rounds of existence.” (Nyanaponika 1974:46 n35; with minor corrections)

<sup>219</sup> In **Ceto, vimutti S 1** (A 5.71/3:83 = M 1:139), such a monk is said to be both mind-freed (*ceto, vimutti*; M 1:296-298) and wisdom-freed (*paññā, vimutti*). See **Ākaṅkheyya S** (M 6,19/1:35 f), where Comy says that in the terms “freedom through mind” and “freedom through wisdom,” “mind” and “wisdom” respectively signify the concentration and the wisdom associated with the fruit of arhathood. Concentration is called “freedom through mind” (*ceto, vimutti*) because it is the mind freed from lust; wisdom is called “freedom through wisdom” because it is freed from ignorance. The former is normally the result of calm (*samatha*), the latter the result of insight; but when coupled and described as “taintless” (*anāsava*), they jointly result from the destruction of the influxes by the supramundane path of arhathood (MA 1:164, M:ÑB n83).



so, too, is he	one who has put down the burden;	<i>panna, bhāra</i>
so, too, is he	unfettered.	<i>visam̐yutta</i>

**31** And how, bhikshus, is the monk **one who has lifted the cross-bar?**<sup>221</sup>  
 Here, bhikshus, the monk has abandoned ignorance,  
 cut it off at the root, made a palm stump of it, done away with it,  
 so that it is no longer subject to future arising.  
 That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has lifted the cross-bar.

**32** And how, bhikshus, is the monk **one who has filled in the moat?**  
 Here, bhikshus, the monk has abandoned the rounds of birth  
 that bring rebirth, cut it off at the root, made a stump of the palm, made an end of it,  
 so that it is no longer subject to future arising.  
 That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has filled in the moat.

**33** And how, bhikshus, is the monk **one who has dug out the pillar?**  
 Here, bhikshus, the monk abandoned craving,  
 cut it off at the root, made a palm stump of it, done away with it,  
 so that it is no longer subject to future arising.  
 That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has broken the pillar.

**34** And how, bhikshus, is the monk **one who has unbolted the door?**  
 Here, bhikshus, the monk has abandoned the 5 lower fetters,<sup>222</sup>  
 cut it off at the root, made a palm stump of it, done away with it,  
 so that it is no longer subject to future arising.  
 That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has unbolted the door.

**35** And how, bhikshus, is the noble one  
**who has taken down the flag, has put down the burden,<sup>223</sup> is unfettered?**  
 Here, bhikshus, the monk has abandoned the conceit ‘I am’,<sup>224</sup>  
 cut it off at the root, [140] made a palm stump of it, done away with it,  
 so that it is no longer subject to future arising.  
 That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has taken down the flag, has put down the burden,  
 unfettered.

<sup>220</sup> *Panna, dhaja*, “whose banner is lowered,” ie, whose fight is over, who is magnanimous in victory: cf **Upāli S** (M 56,29\*/1:386), SD 27.1; also **Ceto, vimutti, phala S 1+2** (A 5.71+72/3:84+85).

<sup>221</sup> *Ukkhitta, paligho*. See Dh 398 = Sn 622: see **Vāseṭṭha S** (M 98,29/2:196), SD 37.1.

<sup>222</sup> **The 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) clinging to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no. 4 (*kāma, rāga*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham, bhāgiya*). The abandonment of the lower 5 fetters makes one a non-returner (*opapātika* or *anāgāmi*) (see **Ānāpānasati S**, M 118,-10 (SD 7.13). This verse technically refers to the non-returner, but here is spoken of an arhat, one who has broken all 10 fetters: see **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66,17/1:454), SD 28.11.

<sup>223</sup> On the burden and its bearer, see **Bhāra S** (S 22,22/3:25), SD 17.14.

<sup>224</sup> “‘I am’ conceit” (*asmi, māna*), “ego-conceit,” may range from the coarsest pride, to self-assertion, to a subtle feeling of one’s distinctiveness or superiority that persists, as the 8<sup>th</sup> fetter, until the attainment of arhatood. (BDict)

**36** Bhikshus, when the gods with Indra, with Brahmā, with Pajāpati, seek a monk thus freed in mind,<sup>225</sup> they do not find<sup>226</sup> anything of which to say that:

‘This is the support of the thus-gone one’s consciousness’.<sup>227</sup>

Why is that? One thus gone,<sup>228</sup> I say, is **untraceable even here and now**.<sup>229</sup>

## 7

### Misrepresenting the Tathāgata

**37** Saying thus, bhikshus, teaching thus, I have been baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly accused by some recluses and brahmins thus,

‘The recluse Gotama is one who leads astray.<sup>230</sup> He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing individual.’<sup>231</sup>

37.2 As this is what I am not, as this is what I do not say, these good recluses and brahmins have baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly accused thus,

‘*The recluse Gotama is one who leads astray. He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing individual.*’

<sup>225</sup> “Thus freed in mind,” *evam.vimutta,cittam*. Norman: “It is possible that there is something of a word-play in the word *evamvimuttacitta*. We translated *vimutta-citta* as ‘one whose mind is released,’ but it might also be interpreted as ‘one whose consciousness (ie the element leading to rebirth) is released (from *samsāra*),’ and who, therefore, cannot be reborn.” (1991a:6)

<sup>226</sup> *Anvesam nādhigacchanti*. This sentence is put into the mouth of Māra, trying to look for the monk Godhika, who at the moment of suicide had attained arhathood. There the Buddha declares that Godhika “has passed utterly away with consciousness no longer established (in rebirth)” (*apatitthena viññāṇena parinibbuto*) (S 1:268).

<sup>227</sup> **K R Norman** makes a useful note: “It is noteworthy that the Buddha here uses the word tathāgata in connection with a bhikkhu ‘whose mind is released in this way’ (*evamvimuttacitta*). It is clear that tathāgata is being used here in something much nearer its original literal meaning, and we ought rather to translate [this] passage [within quotes]: ‘This is what the consciousness of one who has gone that way [or who has gone to such a state] is dependent upon.’ The use of the word in this way would explain why the commentators thought it appropriate to apply it to *attā*, as was mentioned above [Norman 1991a:2]. I would suggest that the specific usage of the word tathāgata to mean ‘Buddha’ [cf Buddhaghosa’s defs of *tathāgata*, DA 59-68; SA 2:287,25-32, 1:66,21-22] arose from this more general usage, just as the word *sugata* which originally must have had the general sense ‘one who has fared well,’ just as it does in the Sanskrit [SED, sv *sugata*], is also used specifically of the Buddha. It is interesting that when the word tathāgata is used in a question directed to the Buddha, which he refuses to answer, the commentaries still do not take tathāgata in the sense of the Buddha, but explain it as *satta* ‘being’ [DA 1:118,1; SA 2:201,5, 2:311,1-3, 3:312,29-30].” (1991a:6). See n above on “thus freed in mind”; also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63), SD 5.8 (3).

<sup>228</sup> “One thus gone” (*tathāgata*), usually applied to the Buddha, but here applies also to the arhat. Comy gives two alternative explanations: (1) Even while alive the arhat is untraceable as a being or individual (ie as an abiding self) because ultimately there is no “being.” (2) The arhat is untraceable here and now because it is impossible for the gods, etc, to find the support for the insight-mind, path-mind or fruition-mind (*vipassanā,citta magga,citta phala,citta*); since the object is nirvana, his mind cannot be known by the worldling. See Nyanaponika 1974:47 n37; K R Norman 1991a esp 5 f.

<sup>229</sup> *Diṭṭhe vāham bhikkhave dhamme tathāgatarā ananuvejjo ti vadāmi*. See Norman 1991a:253 f.

<sup>230</sup> “One who leads astray” (*venayika*), alt “one who leads away,” and which Comy glosses as *satta,vināsaka*, “destroyer of (the individuality of) a being.” (MA 2:118). Here *venayika* is used derogatorily by outsiders against the Buddha; but cf **Upāli S** (M 56,29\*/1:386 @ SD 27.1 v3) where it is complimentary, meaning “one who leads away (from badness,” ie who disciplines another (*sattānarā vinayaka*, MA 3:97)).

<sup>231</sup> This refers to §20 where the eternalist misconstrues the Buddha’s teaching on nirvana as the annihilation of an existing being that is the self.

**38** Before,<sup>232</sup> bhikshus, and now, too, **I only declare suffering and the ending of suffering.**<sup>233</sup> If others **abuse**, revile, scold and harass the Tathāgata for that,<sup>234</sup>

the Tathāgata on that account feels no annoyance, bitterness nor dejection of the heart.

If others **honour**, respect, revere and venerate the Tathāgata for that,

the Tathāgata on that account feels no delight, joy nor elation of the heart.

**38.2** If others **honour**, respect, revere and venerate the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account thinks thus:

‘It is towards **this** [mind-body of 5 aggregates]<sup>235</sup> that was earlier fully comprehended that they perform such acts.’<sup>236</sup>

**39** Therefore, bhikshus, if others **abuse**, revile, scold and harass you, too, for that, on that account **you should feel no annoyance**, bitterness nor dejection of the heart.

If others **honour**, respect, revere and venerate you for that,

on that account you should feel no delight, joy nor elation of the heart.

**39.2** If others **honour**, respect, revere and venerate you for that, on that account you should think thus:

‘It is towards **this** [mind-body of 5 aggregates] that was earlier fully comprehended that they perform such acts.’

### Not yours<sup>237</sup>

**40** Therefore, here, bhikshus, **let go of what is not yours.**<sup>238</sup> When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

<sup>232</sup> Comy: From the time under the great Bodhi tree (that is, from the time of the great awakening itself). (MA 2:118,11)

<sup>233</sup> *Pubbe cāham bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhañ c’eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodham.* This important statement, also made to Anurādha (**Anurādha S**, S 22.86/3:119), refers back to §37. Here the Buddha in effect declares that a living being has no self but is a mere aggregate of factors, material and mental events, connected by a process that is inherently *dukkha*, and that nirvana, the ending of *dukkha*, is not the annihilation of being but the termination of that very same *dukkha* process. This statement should be read in conjunction with **Kaccāna, gotta S** (S 12.15/2:17 = 22.90/3:134 f), SD 6.13, where the Buddha says that one with right view, who has discarded all the doctrines of a self, sees that whatever arises is only *dukkha* arising, and whatever ceases is only *dukkha* ceasing. (See M:ÑB 2001: 1211 n267). Cf **Mahā Hatthi, padopama S** (M 28,8/1:185 f), SD 6.16.

<sup>234</sup> “For that,” ie, the teaching of the 4 noble truths. (MA 2:118)

<sup>235</sup> *Pañca-k, khandha*, ie, without the clinging (*upādāna*) (MA 2:118; see V 1:13 f). Here we must imagine the Buddha pointing at himself.

<sup>236</sup> *Yaṃ kho idaṃ pubbe pariññataṃ tattha me eva, rūpā kārā kariyanti.* In simpler terms, they honour only the Buddha’s awakening.

<sup>237</sup> *Na tumhākaṃ.* This section [§40] forms a sutta of its own—(**Kāya Na Tumha S** (S 12.37/2:64 f). The following 2 sections [§§40-41]—text and parable—form, in practically identical words, 4 suttas of similar names: the 2 (**Khandha Na Tumha Ss** (S 22.33+34/3:33 f), but in the 2 (**Dhātu Na Tumha Ss** (S 35.101+102/4:81 f) its theme is the 18 elements (6 internal sense-organs, 6 external sense-fields, 6 sense-consciousnesses). In all these 5 suttas, the word *dīgha, rattam* is omitted in the closing stock phrase. The related statement spoken by the Buddha of Moggallāna, “Nothing is worth clinging to” (*sabbe dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāyā*) is found in **Pacalā S** (A 7.58,11), SD 4.11.

<sup>238</sup> *Tasmā-t-īha bhikkhave yaṃ na tumhākaṃ taṃ pajahatha.* Comy: It is the *attachment* or desire (*chanda, rāga*) to the 5 aggregates, not the aggregates in themselves, that should be given up: they “cannot be torn apart or pulled out.” I have rendered *yaṃ* as “what” (which has a general sense) rather than as “whatever” which connotes that there are certain things that we do “own,” which would go against the teaching of *anattā*.

What, bhikshus, is it that is **not yours**?

**Form**, bhikshus, is not yours.

When you have given it up,

**Feeling**, bhikshus, is not yours. [141]

When you have given it up,

**Perception**, bhikshus, is not yours.

When you have given it up,

**Formations**, bhikshus, are not yours.

When you have given it up,

**Consciousness**, bhikshus, is not yours.

When you have given it up,

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.<sup>239</sup>

### The Jetavana parable<sup>240</sup>

**41** Bhikshus, what do you think?

If people carried off **the grass, sticks, branches and leaves in this Jetavana**, or burned them, did what they liked with them, would you think:

‘People are carrying us off or burning us or doing what they like with us?’”

“No, bhante.”

41.2 “Why not?”

“Because, bhante, that is neither our self nor the property of our self.”

“So, too, bhikshus, **let go of what is not yours**. When you have given it up, it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

41.3 What, bhikshus, is it that is **not yours**?

**Form**, bhikshus, is not yours.

When you have given it up,

**Feeling**, bhikshus, is not yours.

When you have given it up,

**Perception**, bhikshus, is not yours.

When you have given it up,

**Formations**, bhikshus, are not yours.

When you have given it up,

**Consciousness**, bhikshus, is not yours.

When you have given it up,

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Let it go!

it will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

## 8

### The Dharma and its fruit<sup>241</sup>

**42** Bhikshus, **the teaching**, well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear,<sup>242</sup> free from patchwork.<sup>243</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Comy: Only an aggregate (form, etc) is the basis for the wrong concept of a self, since apart from them there is nothing else to crave for. (MA 2:119)

<sup>240</sup> On the significance of this delightful parable, see (2).

<sup>241</sup> Here, the descriptions of the 4 saints in §§42-45 are almost identical to those of **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118.9-12).

<sup>242</sup> “Plain, open, clear,” *uttāno vivaṭo pakāsito*.

<sup>243</sup> “Free from patchwork,” *chinna, piloṭika*, that is, unlike a patched-up piece of cloth. Comy: a cloth patched up with stitches and knots that are similar to hypocrisy and other deceptions. Subcomy: Substituting assumed attitudes

In the teaching, well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork,  
there is no (more) round of existence for those bhikshus who are **arhats** with influxes destroyed,  
who have lived the holy life, done what is to be done, laid down the burden,

reached their own goal,<sup>244</sup> destroyed the fetters of being,  
and are completely freed through final knowledge.

**43** Bhikshus, the teaching, well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork.  
In the teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork,  
those monks who, with the destruction of the 5 lower fetters,<sup>245</sup>  
are all spontaneously reborn (in the pure abodes),<sup>246</sup> and there attain final nirvana,  
**without ever returning** from that world.

**44** Bhikshus, the teaching, well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork.  
In the teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork,  
are those monks who, with the destruction of the 3 fetters,<sup>247</sup>  
and with the diminishing of lust, hate and delusion, who are **once-returners,**  
all of them<sup>248</sup> returning only once to this world to make an end of suffering.

**45** Bhikshus, the teaching, well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork.  
In the teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork,  
are those monks who, with the destruction of the 3 fetters, who are all **streamwinners,**  
no longer bound for the lower world,<sup>249</sup> sure of [142] going over to self-awakening.

**46** Bhikshus, the teaching well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork.  
In the teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork  
are those monks who are **truth-followers** and **faith-followers,** all bound for awakening.<sup>250</sup>

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and postures for non-existing practice of meditation and insight. Here the analogy—that of a piece of new cloth free of patches or stitches—refers to the inner consistency of the teaching.

<sup>244</sup> *Sadattthā*, may be resolved two ways: (1) *sa-d-attthā*, “one’s own goal,” (2) *sant + attthā*, “the sublime goal,” “the ideal” (DA 3:86; SA 2:49). Most Comys follow the 2<sup>nd</sup> interpretation. See Dh:N 169 n166 & Rau 1959. [L S Cousins](#).

<sup>245</sup> The 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*). See §34 n.

<sup>246</sup> *Opapātika*, that is, reborn in the pure abodes (*suddh’āvāsa*), the 5 highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa-loka*) where only non-returners assume their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are *Āviha* (“Non-declining”), *Ātappa* (“Unworried”), *Sudassā* (“Clearly Visible”), *Sudassī* (“Clear-visioned”) and *Akañiṭṭhā* (“Highest”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

<sup>247</sup> The (first) 3 fetters: see §43 n.

<sup>248</sup> “All of them,” *sabbe te*, omitted in **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118).

<sup>249</sup> *Avinīpāta*, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of *vinīpāta*, “the world of suffering,” another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (*pañca,gati*) (D 33,2.1/3:234; A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tirachāna,yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti,visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura,kāya*) as the 4<sup>th</sup> woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (*su-gati*).

<sup>250</sup> *Dhammānusārino saddhā’nusārino sabbe te sambodhi,parāyanā*. These are 2 classes of individuals on the path of streamwinning. The truth-followers or Dharma-followers (*dhammānusārī*) are disciples in whom the faculty of wisdom (*paññ’indriya*) is predominant and who develop the noble path with wisdom in the lead; their main practice is the contemplation of non-self; when they attain the fruit they are called “right-view attainer” or “vision attainer”

**47** Bhikshus, *the teaching well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork. In the teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, are those monks who have just a bit of faith, just a bit of love for me, all bound for heaven.*<sup>251</sup>  
The Blessed One said this. Satisfied, the monks rejoiced<sup>252</sup> in the Blessed One's word.

— evaṃ —

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(*ditṭhi-p, patta*). The faith-followers (*saddhā'nusārī*) are disciples in whom the faculty of faith (*saddh'indriya*) is predominant and who develop the noble path with faith in the lead; their main practice is the perception of impermanence; when they attain the fruit they are called "faith-freed" (*saddhā, vimutta*). (M 70,20, 21; Pug 15/1:35-36, Vism 21.75). The elders of old (*porāṇaka therā*) call such spiritually developed person a "lesser streamwinner" (*cūla, sotāpanna*) or "maturing streamwinner" (*bāla, sotāpanna*) (MA 2:120; cf Vism 605/ 29.27). On the truth-follower and the faith-follower, and the assurance of streamwinning in this life itself, see (Anicca) Cakkhu S (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

<sup>251</sup> "Those who have just bit of faith, just a bit of love for me," *yesaṃ mayi saddhā, mattaṃ pema, mattaṃ*. This is not a new category, but is a key quality of the faith-follower [SD 16.7 (1.3)]. The phrase occurs in Alagaddūpama S (M 22,47/1:143), Bhaddāli S (M 65,27/1:444) and Kīṭā, giri S (M 70,21/1:479), SD 12.1. Cf Sarakāni Ss (S 55.24-25/-4:375-380), where they are said not to be reborn in any subhuman state. Comy explains that this refers to the insight practitioners (*vipassaka puggalā*) who have not attained any supramundane state, not gaining even streamwinning, but they are reborn in heaven. To have "a bit of faith, a bit of love" in the Buddha is to show habitual positive emotion (lovingkindness), which is conducive to rebirth in heaven. Significantly, early Buddhism offers all the good that theistic religion seem to offer, but the Dhamma has much more to offer in terms of salvation: to rise even above and beyond heaven itself, to nirvana. See M:ÑB 2001:1212 n274.

<sup>252</sup> "Joyfully approved," *attamanā abhinandam*.