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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 (parittassana) [§§15-21]. This is followed by a teaching on non-self, where the Buddha introduces the doctrine of the 5 aggregates (pañca-k, 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 Upanisadic 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.1 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 message of the Alagaddūpama 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:

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1 Pāc 68 = V 4:133-136. The novice Kandaka, a pupil of the loose monk Upananda is expelled for holding such a view (Pāc 70 = V 4:138-140).
2 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)

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 20th 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.” Four 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.

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3 See also Prebish 2003:60-68.
4 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.  

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.”

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. 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 missioner’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 3rd 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

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5 Tambiah 1984:137 [ref corrected].
6 Tambiah 1984:137 [ref corrected].
7 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, Brahmavamso (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 lì zhà 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 Sāvatthī. Sylvain Lévi notes that the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya (T1435 @ T23.174b21), refers to the present discourse as 阿羅伽度波摩 Ā luò jià dú bō mò, a transcription of the same text, that is, the Discourse on the Simile of the Snake,” 蛇譬經, Shē pǐ jīng (1915:421).

Thus, the Sarvāstivāda 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)sāstra (T1509 @ T25.63c7), speaks of 根喻經 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.”

THICH Minh Chau has done a brief comparative study of MĀ 2008 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:10

(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 view11 and, in the Sutta Vibhaṅga, of his commission of an offence entailing expiation (pācittiya) in refusing to do so after repeated admonitions.12

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.”13 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

8 Cf variant title given in the *Mahāvibhāṣa (T1545 @ T37.503b20): 答喻法門 Fó yù fǎ mén, “Dharma exposition on the Simile of the Raft.”
11 Cv 1.32.1-2 (V 2:25 f).
12 Pāc 68.1 (V 4:133-135).
13 See Cv 12 (V 2:294 ff).
is said to be “bound by delight and lust” (nandi, 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 teaching14 [§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.15

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),16 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”17 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 (ukkhepaniya, kamma), while

14 See Gombrich 1996:23-25/
16 See SD 35.4.
17 “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), Keown proposes that:

The Sāti story does not seem to occur in the Vinaya, 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, 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 dhammas (truths and teachings).

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 or 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.

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18 Mahā Taṇhā, saṅkhaya S (M 38,14/1:260 f), SD 7.10.
19 It should also be noted that the Vinaya accounts are generally later than those of the suttas and often draw from the suttas themselves.
20 At the start of Comy (MA 2:165 f) on Vatthûpama S (M 7,1/1:36,11), SD 28.12.
21 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-awareness. 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.22

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.23

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 Buddhagaha 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 (dugahitattā) 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”24 [§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).25 The Buddha sums up the parable as follows: “Even so I

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22 Further, see SD 40a.16 (2.2.4.4).
23 On the necessity of dhyana for attaining arhathood, see SD 8.5 (2) & SD 15.1 (13).
24 Attho ca panḍyam Ariṭṭho bhikkhu gaddhabādhi, pubbo attanā duggahitena amhe c’eva abbhācikkhati. Attānañ ca khoñāti. Bahūñ ca apuññañ pasavati. Tam hi tassa mogha, purisassa bhavissati digha, rattañ ahitāya dukkhāya
25 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” (gahana) echoes the “wrong grasp” (duggahita) of the teaching by Ariṭṭha, and also the “wrong grasp of the scriptures” [duggahitattā dharmānami] 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.26

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”),27 he seeks comfort in the fact that the Buddha also rebukes Upasena Vanganta, putta with the same expression, but the latter goes on to realize direct knowledge (abhiñña), 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 (avirūḷhi, 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,28 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:

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26 For a comparison with the famous ladder metaphor of Sextus Empiricus and of Wittgenstein, see Ganeri 2007: 50.
27 See §6 n on “hollow man."
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, Uḍāyi, do I speak of the abandoning of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Do you, Uḍāyi, see any fetter (samyojana),29 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 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 (santo, panītesu).30 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.”31

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

3.2.3 In Buddhaghosa’s first citation—that of the Laṭukikōpama Sutta (M 66)—the “abandoning” refers to the letting go of the various dhyānic attainments as one has fully attained them, stage by stage.33 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,34 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-

29 On fetters (samyojana), see text §34 n.
30 “Profoundly calm” (santo, panītesu), Masefield has “the calm state of this (peace) ... most choice” (UA:M 643). We could more freely take santa, pañīta as a dvandva here to mean “the tranquil and the exquisite,” referring to samatha and vipassanā respectively, which fits the context here. See PED: pañīta.
31 Pañcasu kāma, guṇesu cha, rāgāni nālam antarāyāyā ti v cdāti. This sentence is found only in Comy.
32 Keown inadvertently cites this as “MA 1:209.”
33 See M 66,26-34/1:455 f (SD 28.11).
34 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.

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

3.2.5 Buddaghosa’s second citation is especially significant because it is a canonical text, namely, the Mahā Tañhā, sankhaya 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; would you then understand that the Dharma has been taught as being comparable to a raft 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 Alagaddūpama Sutta. 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

35 On papañca, see Madhupiṇḍika S (M 18), SD 6.14(2).
36 “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.
37 This verse up to here qu in Comy to Alagaddūpama S (M 22) (MA 22,21/2:109).
38 “Being comparable to a raft,” kullūpamaṃ. 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:NB 1233 n406).
Ugghāṭitaṁṇu Sutta (A.4143), 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.

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SD 3.13(3.3)  
Ugghāṭitaṁṇu Sutta
The Discourse on the Quick Learner
Traditional: A 4.3.4.3 = Āṅguttara 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?⁴⁰

(1) A quick learner (ugghāṭitaṁṇu)
   [an individual who penetrates the Dharma⁴¹ the moment it is spoken].⁴²
(2) A diffuse learner (vipacitaṁṇū)
   [an individual who penetrates the Dharma that is spoken in brief, when its meaning is being analysed in detail].⁴³
(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].⁴⁴
(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].⁴⁵

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

— evam —

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 dhar- mas, 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:

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⁴⁰ A 2:135; with explanations from Pug 4.5/41; Nett 7, 125; AA 3:131.
⁴¹ 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,cakkhu,paṭilābha (attaining of the Dharma-eye). See S:B 526.
⁴² Yassa puggalassa saha udāhaṭa,velāya dhammābhisamayo hoti (Pug 4.5/41).
⁴³ Yassa puggalassa sankhittena bhāsitassa vitthārena atthe vibhājiyamāne dhammābhisamayo hoti (Pug 4.5/-41).
⁴⁴ Yassa puggalassa uddesato paripucchato yonisa manasikaroto kalyāṇa,mitte sevato bhajato payirupāsato evam anupubbena dhammābhisamayo hoti (Pug 4.5/41).
⁴⁵ 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, “dhammas” (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 Laṭutikôpama Sutta (M 66) as an example of the teaching of the abandonment of attachment to calm, 46 and the Mahā Tânthâ, sañkhaya Sutta (M 38), as one of the abandonment of attachment to insight. 47

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) 48

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:NB 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, 49 as suggested by I B Horner (1950:1) and Dharmasiri (1986:183). 50

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.

46 M 66,26-33/1:455 (SD 28.11).
47 M 38,14/1:260 f (SD 7.10).
48 See SD 41.4 (1.4.2).
49 See Beyond good and evil, SD 18.7.
50 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. Then, we are on the way to awakening in this life itself.

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

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51 This figure of the snake sloughing is from Uraga S (Sn 1.1), SD 101.3.

52 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 [asaṁskṛta] exalts the Holy Persons. [Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, tr Conze, 1957, 2nd ed 1974:69 f; Skt pp31-33]53 (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 (dharma) (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.54

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.55 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

53 For a Mahāyāna interpretation, see Harrison, 2006:144 n42.
54 See Language and discourse, SD 26.11.
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.56

Such a centralizing of Chinese society and its pragmatism easily lead the Chinese mind to turn away from the ekāyana, the “one-going” mind-training of the eightfold path,57 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.58

3.5 The problem of transcendence

3.5.1 Keown makes an important rebuttal of the modern wrong view of “transcendence,”59 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.60 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

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57 On ekāyana,magga, see Satipaṭṭhāna Ss, SD 13.1 (3.2).
58 On difficulties in the tr of the Chin parallels, see Analayo 2011:145-158.
59 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.
60 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.⁶¹

Buddhaghosa again makes this very clear in his commentary on the Mahā Tāṇhā, 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” (alīyetha) 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” (nīttharanatthāya no gahan'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 Tāṇhā, saṅkhaya 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.⁶²

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.”⁶³

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.

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⁶¹ An arhat who has transcended all views, and destroyed all his defilements, is said to have “abandoned both good and bad” (puñha, 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).

⁶² Mahā Tāṇhā, saṅkhaya S (M 38,14/1:260 f), SD 7.10.

⁶³ 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 Alagaddūpamā 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 Brhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad.

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, eśa ma ātman (Chāṇḍogya Upānishad 3.14.3-4) and yathākratur asmiṁ loke puruṣo bhavati tathetoḥ pretya bhavati sa kratum kurvita ... etam itaḥ pretyābhisambhitāsmi ti (ibid 3.14.1 and 4).

In contrast to this false view the Buddha states that someone who is cognizant with the ariyadham[ma] looks at rūpa, etc. with the thought: na etarī mama n’eso ‘ham asmi, na m’eso attā. “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)

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 ‘ham 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:

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66 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.67 We find an interesting parallel in the Jain texts where the Sūyagaḍāmga 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 [Alagaddūpamā Sutta] is not merely refuting the individual ātman, but also the concept of the world-ātman.” (Norman 1981:25)

4.1.5 The Alagaddūpama 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.”68

(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.69

4.2 “LET GO OF WHAT IS NOT YOURS!”

4.2.1 Refuting the Upaniṣads

4.2.1.1 The second Alagaddūpama Sutta passage which, according to K R Norman,70 is a deliberate refutation of Yajñavalkya’s teaching in the Brhad Āranyaka 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]

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68 “Those who have a bit of faith in me, a bit of love for me,” yesaṁ mayi saddhā, mattaṁ pema, mattaṁ. This phrase is found in Alagaddūpama S (M 22,47/1:143), Bhaddāli S (M 65.27/1:444) & Kiṭāgiri S (M 70.21/1:479), SD 12.1. Cf Sarakāṇi S (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:NB 2001:1212 n274.
69 On the Sutta closing, see also Beyond good and evil, SD 18.7(7.3).

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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 Brhad 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 Brhad 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:

Brhad 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);

[Brahman is bliss and absolute knowledge] and

[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 diṭṭham sutaṁ mutaṁ71 vićñataṁ.

What exactly is that? The answer is:

[Brahma World].

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 Yajñavalkya’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 asī (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

71 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 Diṭṭha sutaṁ mutaṁ vićñata, 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], “and in terms of other obvious verbal echoes of surviving Upaniṣadic passages.” 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 (bahiddhâ asati) and non-existent internally (ajjhattam asati). According to Gombrich, “he is referring respectively to the soul/essence of the world and of the individual.” (1996:39)

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. 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),

Saññoga Sutta (A 7.48), (Taṇhâ) Bhikkhuṇi Sutta (A 4.159) 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.

Sâliya Jâtaka (J 367) + Taca,sâra Jâtaka (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)

72 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 Sāṁkhya Kārikā. In that context they refer to realizing that the puruṣa (spirit) neither is nor possesses any of the evolutes of prakṛti (nature). (Gelblum, “Sāṁkhya and Sartre,” Journal of Indian Philosophy 1 1970:75-82, see pp78-80)

73 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.


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

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

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

79 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)\(^{80}\) to counter the key wrong view of his day, that is, the notion of an eternal self or soul (atta) and personal identity (sakkāya,-dittī), and how, in the process, apparently, he formulates the teaching of the 5 aggregates (pañca-k,-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 Alagaddūpama 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 Alagaddūpama 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-ṭṭhāna) [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\(^{81}\) and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma,

(1) regards form thus, ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’\(^{82}\)
(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 what is seen, heard, sensed, and known [5.2.1.2], found, sought after, mentally pursued [5.2.3], thus, ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’
(6) And this ground for views, namely, ‘The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same;\(^{83}\) I will endure as long as eternity’—this, too, he regards thus, ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’ \(^{[\S15]}\)

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

\(^{80}\) See Upāya, SD 30.8.

\(^{81}\) “True individuals” (sappurisā). For def, see Sappurisa S (M 113), SD 23.7 (3).

\(^{82}\) These are the threefold grasping (ti,vidha gāha): see §15 ad loc.

\(^{83}\) “After death I will be,” so pecca bhavissāmi. Comy so = so ahaṃ.

\(^{84}\) “Eternally the same” (sassati,sama), a term from the Brhad Aranyaka Upaniṣad 5.10 (sāsvatīḥ samāḥ) (Nyanaponika 1974:42 n21).
lines of Sāṁkhya philosophy with its distinction between changeable Nature (prakṛti) and changeless Spirit (purusa).”

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 Saṁyutta (S 24), “the connected teachings on views.” 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” (chaṭhāna), 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 grave-ly 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.” Unlike the teachings of the Sotāpatti Vagga of the Diṭṭhi Saṁyutta—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.

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. These 7 headed by the 5 aggregates are given as “the 8 grounds for views” in the Paṭisambhidā, magga (Pm 2.3/2:139).

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86 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.
87 M 143,14 (SD 23.9).
88 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.
89 See Brahma,jāla S (D 1), SD 25.3 (36.1).
5.2 The 5th Wrong View and the 5th Aggregate

5.2.1 The 5th 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.”90 In this context, we may expect the object of the 5th 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”91 [§15].

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

- the seen (dītho) is the visible-form base (rūpaḥ āyatana);
- the heard (suta) is the sound base (saddhaḥ āyatana);
- the sensed (muta) 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
- the known (viññāta) is the thought-base (dhammaḥ āyatana) and the remaining 6 internal sense-bases (ajjhattaḥ āyatana), 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” (pattatī pariyesatī anuvicaratī manasā) simply elaborates “the known” (viññātam) [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,92 a fact which suggests that at least this pericope was found in the pre-Āsokan antecedent of the text.93 Wynne concludes, “We must assume, then, that this peculiarity is very old.” (2010:200).

90 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).

91 Dīthiṁ sutatī mutatī viññātam pattatī pariyesatī anuvicaratī manasā. This full formula occurs at M 22,15 (SD 3.13); M 143,14 (SD 23.9); S 24.1-9/3:202-216; A 4.23/2/23 f = It 112,2/122 (SD 15.7(2.1.2)).

92 Although 阿梨吒經 ā lì zhà 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

http://dhamrafarer.org
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 Upaniśad context—unfamiliar with the Buddha usage—it is more appropriate to render viññāta (Skt vijñāta) 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.94

5.2.1.5 “Knowledge,” then, is simply a construction or projection from what the mind “feels”95 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,96 occurs when the subject has an immediate or unmediated awareness of some propositional truth.97

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 ....”98 It is also called factual knowledge. This is what is ancient Greek philosophy probably meant by the term epistêmê (“knowledge”), in contrast to technê (“art or craft”), which is approximately equivalent to “procedural knowledge” or practical knowledge.99

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).

94 See eg Satipatthāna S (M 10,34/1:59), SD 13.3.
95 “Feels,” paṭisamvedeti, which is a pregnant verb encompassing all the senses of “experiencing”: see SD 17.3 (1.2.2).
97 For an overview, see http://www.iep.utm.edu/knowacq/.

http://dharmafarer.org
Hence, it is the kind of “knowledge”¹⁰⁰ that underpins complex actions and often is “unconscious,”¹⁰¹ typically resistant to conscious manipulation, or even evaluation.¹⁰² 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,¹⁰³ or is grasped at and clung to.¹⁰⁴ 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.”¹⁰⁵ Its verb, to “cognize,” covers a wide range of mental activities, including thinking, conceiving, reasoning, imagining, and intending.¹⁰⁶ Along with affect and conation, cognition is one of the three traditionally identified components of the mind, according to western psychology.¹⁰⁷

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.¹⁰⁸

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).

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¹⁰⁰ It is a form of “knowledge” in the sense that it comes from the past, ie, past conditioning.
¹⁰¹ On the terms “conscious, preconscious, subconscious, and unconscious” as understood in early Buddhism, see SD 17.8a (6.1).
¹⁰² See Anusaya, SD 31.3 & The unconscious, SD 17.8b.
¹⁰³ See “mental proliferation” (papañca): Madhu,piṇḍika S (M 18), SD 6.14 (2).
¹⁰⁴ See Nimitta and anuyañjana, SD 19.14.
¹⁰⁸ 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, sut, muta, viññāta), is part of an early or original version of the well-known Alagaddūpama 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 Māluṅkya,putta’s awakening. [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. [5.2.2.1]

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. 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.”

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, diṭṭha sutta 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. [5.2.2.6]

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]

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109 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).
110 S 35.95/4:72-75 (SD 5.9).
111 M 1.19-22/1.3 (SD 11.8).
112 See Diṭṭha sutta muta viññāta, SD 53.5.
113 For close studies on “I” (identity), “me” (conceit) and “mine” (craving), see SD 19.1, 19.2a and 19.3.
114 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 5th 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 Brhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.5.6, that when the self, soul or ātman (P: attā) is “seen, heard, thought, known (drṣṭe śrute mate vijñāte)—note the third term—then, the whole world is understood.”115 Since the first four items of this 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 Brhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, or vice versa?

5.2.2.5 Although at least one scholar doubts that the notion of a Buddhist allusion to the Brhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, that it is “far from certain,”116 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.”117 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.118 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),119 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.

115 BĀU 4.5.6: ātmani khālv are drṣṭe śrute mate vijñāte idam sarvam viditam. 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.


117 On natural adaptation, see SD 39.3 (3.3.4).

118 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.

119 On the 4 primary elements, see Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S (M 62,13-17), SD 3.11; SD 1.7 (2).

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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 “dhyāna” (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.120

5.2.3 “Found, sought after, mentally pursued”

5.2.3.1 Now we will examine the addendum to or second half of the dīthā suta muta viññāta pericope, that is, the phrase, “found, sought after, mentally pursued” (pattam pariyesitam anuvicaritam manasā). The Saṁyutta 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.121

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 4.4.23122—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 5th view as an allusion to an Upaniṣadic formula is supported by the 6th 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,123 and is clearly a reference to the Upaniṣadic doctrine of a “world self” or “cosmic soul,”

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120 See (Arahatta) Mālunykyā,putta S (S 35.95,13), SD 5.9.
121 PED, DP sv anuvicarati, anuvicāra.
122 BĀU 4.4.23: tasmād evaṁ vic chānto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvātmany evātmānam paśyati, sarvam ātmānaṁ 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.”
123 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 (esa ma ātmā), 3.14.1 and 3.14.4 (yathākratur asmiṁloke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ, pretya bhavati sa kratum kurvita ... etam itaḥ pretyābhisambhavītāmi). 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 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.124 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.

124 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 5th aggregate” (id), thus: Form (rūpa), consciousness (viññāna), feeling (vedanā), perception (saññā), and formations (sānkham). 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.125 [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,ccakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11), where it is only briefly mentioned, but is elaborated in “the second discourse,” the Anatta Lak-khana Sutta (S 22.59).126 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 arhats127—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,128 especially during the 2nd period.129

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)130—are the ultimate referents of the 1st noble truth, that is, suffering, as pointed out in the (Ariya,sacca) Khandha Sutta (S 56.13).131 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).132 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” (viññāna) 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

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125 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.

126 S 56.11.5 (SD 1.1); S 22.59 (SD 1.2).
127 On the first 60 arhats, see SD 11.2, esp SD 11.2(11).
128 Such inter-religious conflicts are recorded, eg, in Te,vijja S (D 13), SD 1.8.
129 On the 2 periods in the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 40a.1 (1.3).
130 See SD 17.1a (2).
131 S 56.13/5:425 f.
132 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). 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, that is, our synchronic experiences—while existential consciousness refers to “rebirth consciousness” and to the second function of dependent arising, which centres upon tanhā (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). Traditionally, then, this is the rebirth-consciousness. In modern terms, this is the subconscious.139

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,viññānika kāya), 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

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133 See SD 17.8a (1).
134 On cognitive consciousness, see SD 17.8a (6.1.1).
135 The origin and passing away of the aggregates are explained in Paṭissallāna 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-t,thāna S (S 22.57/3:61-65) by way of synchronic conditionality. [“Diachronic” here “across time,” i.e over many, usu 3, lives; “synchronic means within one life-time itself.”]
136 On how the 5 aggregates are related to dependent arising, see SD 18.1a (1.2.6).
137 On existential consciousness, see SD 17.8a (6.1.2).
138 Patissandhi, citta; also gandhabba [12.1.3.3]. See Is rebirth immediate? SD 2.17 (3+8).
139 See also The unconscious, SD 17.8b (3) & (5.1).
140 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 5th 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 4th 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 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 Siṁsapā 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,¹⁴¹ we gain arhathood, final liberation.¹⁴²

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

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¹⁴¹ *Atam,mayatā*, SD 19.13 (1).
¹⁴² On these 3 universal characteristics (*ti,lakkhana*), 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.\footnote{Further on this see SD 47.16 (2.8).}

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.\footnote{That is, live by the 3 trainings (ti,\textit{sikkhā}) of moral virtue, mental cultivation and insight wisdom (D 16,2.28; also 3:58, 77; S 3:42, 5:154, 163, 164).}

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?\footnote{On the Buddha’s omniscience, see Kāṇṭaka-t,\textit{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).} 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” (\textit{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.\footnote{\textit{S} 35.23 (SD 7.1).}

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.
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?”

(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 has been fully penetrated by the Tathagata, through such a full penetration, the answer occurs to the Tathagata spontaneously.”

(M 58,10-11), SD 7.12

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

148 “The Dharma-element,” dhamma,dhātu, also tr as “element of Dharma,” “element of things” (M:B), “causal cosmic order” (Jayatilleke 1963:448 f); see Mahāpadāna 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’āṭītā,ñāṇa) (MA 3:113). In a disciple, this refers to seeing conditionality without any obscuration (paccaay’-ākārassa vivatā,bhāva,dassana,samatthān sāvaka,pārami,ñāṇa, SA 2:666). 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:NB 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.

149 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 Siha,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;\(^{150}\)
(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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\(^{150}\) These influxes (āsava) are what keep us caught up in sense-desires (kām’āsava), desire for eternal existence (bhav’āsava), views (diṭṭh’āsava), and ignorance (āvijjāsava): see SD 4.25 (5).
In positive terms, the Buddha’s **4 intrepidities** (catu vesarājja), 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.

The key point here is that the Buddha himself declares his own full self-awareness (samma, 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 samma, 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

Besides the Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta (M 108), this important pericope (stock passage) is also found in the Pavāraṇa Sutta (§ 8.7), the Samma, sambuddha Sutta (§ 22.58), and elsewhere. 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 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.

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151 M 12.22-28/1:71 f (SD 49.1): for refs see §22 n.

152 On moral courage (vesarajja), see SD 28.9a (3).

153 §5.3+6.3: So hi, brāhmaṇa, bhagavā anuppannassa maggassa uppādetā, asañjātassa maggassa sañjanetā, anakkhātassa maggassa akkhātā, magga-ññū, magga,vidū, magga,kovido. Maggānugā ca pana etarāhi savākā viharanti pacchā samannāgatā ti, M 3:8,12 = S 1:191,1 = 3:66,16 (SA 2:278,5) = S 3:66,15 = Milin 217,10-219,11 = Pm 2:194,19 = Ap 570,5 = ThiA 91,33*. This para [§5.3] is the samma, 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-anugacchati), the Blessed One, who has gone before them” (pathama, gatassa bhagavato pacchā samanugatā, SA 1:277): see M/H 350 n1. For further details, see SD 33.5 ad loc.

154 Pavāraṇa S (§ 8.7/1:191), SD 49.11; Samma, sambuddha S (§ 22.58/3:65 f), SD 63.11. Comys on these 2 suttas explain the passage in both places, reflecting on their significance.

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86 http://dharmafarer.org
5.4.2.7 If religion and spirituality use speculative and imaginative language, then, we should direct our best thought and i
magination 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).155

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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 Sāvatthī.

1

Ariṭṭha’s bad wrong view

2 Now at that time, a bad view156 arose in a monk named Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers:
“Thus I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, that those things called ‘obstructions’157 by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.”158

155 S 45.139 (SD 49.17).
156 “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’ASAVA 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.
157 “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” (dāruno lābha,sakkāra,siloko katuko pharuso = anuttarassa yoga-k,hemassa 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 Sanny (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).

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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.’” [52]

3.3 “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.”

3.4 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. [161]

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. [162]

158 Tathāhaṁ bhagavatā dhammā desitaṁ ājānāmi, yathā ye’me antarāyikā dhammā antarāyikā vuttā bhagavatā, te paṭisevato nālam antarāyāyāti. In making this statement, Ariṭṭha directly contradicts the 3rd of the Buddha’s 4 intrepidities (vesārajja). 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 Kaṇṭaka holds a similar wrong view (Pāc 91 = V 4:138-140): see Mahaka Pāṭihāriya S (S 41.4), SD 27.2 (1.1).

159 “Yes. Indeed,” evam byā kho (or evam vyā), viya becomes monosyllabic vyā, often labilized 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 mittelindische Enkleitikum se ZvS 81, 1967:19 f n4; Oberlies PG 2019:195 n10.

160 Evam byā [Be Se vyā] kho aham āvuso bhagavatā dhammā desitaṁ ājānāmi, yathā ye’me antarāyikā dharmāantarāyikā vuttā bhagavatā, te paṭisevato nālam antarāyāyāti.

161 Aneka, paryāyena hāvuso Ariṭṭha antarāyikā dhammā vuttā bhagavatā, alaṁ ca pana te paṭisevato antarāyāyā ya.

162 The 10 parables = V 2:25 = A 3:97 = J 5:210 = Thi 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 Nyananipona 1974 n2. References:

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

(2) the piece of meat (maṁsa, 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 (tin’ukka), carried against the wind severely burns the carrier (cf S 2:152).

(4) the pit of burning coals (āṅgāra, 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.

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(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] (āsi,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,163 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.

163 This report ends at §4.6.
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.

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.

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.

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.

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,” 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?

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164 Mogha,purisa, lit “empty person.” Usu tr 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.¶165

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]?

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¶165 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].

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, 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,
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. 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, 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,

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

(7) With the parable of the 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, misrepresented 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!  

2

The parable of the water-snake

10 “Here, bhikshus, some misguided people learn the Dharma—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, veyyākarana, gāthā, udāna, iti, vutta, jātaka, abhutta, dhamma and

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170 Aṇṇat’eva kāmehi aṇṇatra kāma, saṅśaya aṇṇatra kāma, vitakkehi kāme paṭisevissatāti n’etaṁ thānarī vijjati, I 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:NB 2001:1208 n252.

171 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 fruits that are the object 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.
— but having learnt the Dharma, they do not wisely examine the (true) purpose [the meaning] 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].

10.3 Instead, they learn the Dharma only for the benefit of finding faults (with others) and for freeing themselves in a debate [of combating criticism], 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 those teachings.

THE WATER-SNAKE WRONGLY GRASPED

10.4 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 grasps its coils or its tail.

It would turn back and bite his hand or his arm or one of his limbs, 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) purpose [the meaning] 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].

172 These 9 are collectively called nav’ān’ga 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).

173 That is, the attainment of the paths and their fruits.

174 Tesānī te dhammā paññāya atthaṁ anupaparikkhatāṁ na niįjhānām 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 niįjhānām 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. (MAT qu by Nyana Nyanponika 1974:35 n10). Here niįjhānā (Skt nidhyānā) means wisdom or understanding. This phrase, preceded by “having wisely examined the purpose [and/or meaning]” appears in Kitā.giri S (M 70,20), SD 11.1, and Cānki S (M 95,27), SD 21.15. On niįjhānām khamanti, cf niįjhānā, khamti: 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).

175 Te upārambhān'ānissād to eva dhammāṁ pariyojanānti iti,vāda-p,parakkhān'ānissād ca. Similarly spoken by the wanderer Kundaliya, Kundaliya 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 Hāliddikāni S 1 (S 22.3,24/3:12), SD 10.12 & Viggāhika Kathā S (S 56.9,2/5:419), SD 65.13.

176 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).

177 Duggahitattā bhikkhave dhammadānām.

178 Seyyathā‘pi bhikkhave puriso alagaddaathiko. “Water-snake,” alagadda (m & mfn), “a kind of snake”; only in late Skt, alagarga, “water-snake” (PES); 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 nāgā; ~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.179 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.

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]

179 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.180 

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!181
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 mine; this I am; this is my self.’

(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 what is seen, heard, sensed, known, found, sought after, mentally pursued, thus, ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

(6) And this ground for views, namely, ‘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—

‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

185 This threefold grasping (ti, vidha gāha) comprises (1) ‘This is mine’ (etam mama) (arises through craving, tanhā, 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 5, S 3:68). These three are also known as ‘latent tendencies to “making,” “mine”-making and conceit’ (ahār, kārā, māmā, kārā, 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.

186 What is seen ... pursued” (diṭṭhaṁ sutam mutam viṁţātaṁ pattam pairesitaṁ anuvicarataṁ manasā): see (5.2).

187 Diṭṭha, suta, muta, viṁţāta. For details, see (5.2.2).

188 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).

189 “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 ātmanam eva lokam upaste na hasya karma kṣiyate asmadd hy eva atmano yad yat kamayate tat tat srjate, Brhad 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.

190 “After death I will be,” so pecca bhavissāmi. Comy so = so aham.

191 “Eternally the same” (sassatī, sama), a term from the Brhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 5.10 (sāsvatī samāḥ) (Nyānaponika 1974:42 n21).

192 See (5.2.3.2).

193 This is a classic eternalist view, see (5.1.1.3).

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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.¹⁹⁴

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?”¹⁹⁵

“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?”¹⁹⁶

“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 fixations¹⁹⁷ to grounds for views, mindsets, obsessions, inclination and latent tendencies,¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ “Not anxious [agitated] over what is non-existent” (asati na paritassati). Comy says that the noun paritassanā has two connotations: fear (bhaya) and craving (tanha). 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 (tasa, tassanā), of craving (tanha, tassanā), of views (diṭṭhi, tassanā) and of knowledge (idha, 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 tasa (anxiety). See Taṇhā Jālinī S (A 4.199), SD 26.12 (3).

²⁰⁰ “Anxiety over what is externally non-existent,” bhidhā 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 = 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.

²⁰¹ Ajjhattam asatiparitassanā. According to Gombrich, this refers to the non-existent “self” (a self as perceived by the Vedic brahmins): [4.2].

²⁰² -adhitthāna- see foll n.

²⁰³ Diṭṭhi-t, thān’ādhiṭṭhāna, pariyutthāna’bhīnivesā’nusaya.
for the stilling of all formations, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the destruction of craving, for the fading away of lust, for the ending of suffering, for nirvana.

20.4 He thinks thus: ‘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.”

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.”

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 that would not cause sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair to arise in one who clings to it.

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199 Virāga also “fading away of lust” or “dispassion” (see §21).
200 Nirodha (see §21).
201 Comy says that this section deals with a fourfold emptiness (catu,koṭi suññatā), i.e. absence of self and mine, referring to one who, at the destruction of his own aggregates (i.e. 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).
202 Linked to §18.
203 “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:_NB 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 (kāma’upādāna), (2) clinging to views (diṭṭha’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.
204 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*205 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.

205 “Support of views,” *diṭṭhi,nissaya.* Comy says these are the 62 wrong views (or bases for wrong views) listed in *Brahma,jāla 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 (*tanha,nissaya*) and views as support (*diṭṭhi,nissaya*).

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

207 “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).

208 Cf §36. “In truth and in reality,” *saccato thetato,* alt tr “as true and real”; as at *Alagaddūpama 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); *Titthīya-tana S* (A 3.61.2-4/1:174 f x3); Vbh 376 f (×4), 382 (× 6); Pug 3.17/38 (×12); Kv 67 f (×13). Vbh:T tr *staccato thētato* as “firmly as truth” (Vbh:T 487).

209 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.

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.”
“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.”

The totality of the 5 aggregates

27 Therefore, bhikshus,
any kind of form whatsoever—

210 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 atta is by definition nicca [permanent] and sukha [pleasant], and therefore anything which is anicca and dukkha cannot be atta. This gives us a clear indication of the type of atta that is being discussed. It is the Upanishadic idea of an atman 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, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near
211—
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.’

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,
revulsed213 at consciousness.

211 See [Dve] Khandha S (S 22.48/3:47), SD 17.1. This “totality formula” classification of the aggregates (see prec 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.
212 See Anatta,lakkhaṇa S (S 22.59,12), SD 1.2.
THE SHORTER NIBBĪḌĀ CYCLE

29 Feeling revulsed, lust fades away.

Through the fading away of lust, he is freed.

When he is freed, there comes the knowledge: ‘It (the mind) is freed.

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

30 Bhikshus, this monk is said to be one who has lifted the cross-bar; so, too, is he one who has filled in the moat; so, too, is he one who has dug out the pillar; so, too, is he one who has unbolted the door; so, too, is he the noble one whose banner is lowered;
31 And how, bhikshu, is the monk **one who has lifted the cross-bar**?\textsuperscript{221}

Here, bhikshu, 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, bhikshu, the monk is one who has lifted the cross-bar.

32 And how, bhikshu, is the monk **one who has filled in the moat**?

Here, bhikshu, 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, bhikshu, the monk is one who has filled in the moat.

33 And how, bhikshu, is the monk **one who has dug out the pillar**?

Here, bhikshu, the monk has 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, bhikshu, the monk is one who has dug out the pillar.

34 And how, bhikshu, is the monk **one who has unbolted the door**?

Here, bhikshu, the monk has abandoned **the 5 lower fetters**\textsuperscript{222} 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, bhikshu, the monk is one who has unbolted the door.

35 And how, bhikshu, is the noble one **who has taken down the flag, has put down the burden**,\textsuperscript{223} **is unfettered**?

Here, bhikshu, the monk has abandoned the conceit ‘I am’,\textsuperscript{224} cut it off at the root, [\textsuperscript{140}] made a palm stump of it, done away with it, so that it is no longer subject to future arising.

That is how, bhikshu, the monk is one who has taken down the flag, has put down the burden, unfettered.

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\textsuperscript{220} Panna, dhāja, “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).

\textsuperscript{221} Ukkhita, pañīgho. See Dh 398 = Sn 622; see Vāseṭṭha S (M 98,29/2:196), SD 37.1.

\textsuperscript{222} The 10 fetters (dāsa samāyojana) are: (1) self-identity view (saṃkāya, 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 (udhacca), (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 Laṭukkāpama S (M 66,17/1:454), SD 28.11.

\textsuperscript{223} On the burden and its bearer, see Bhāra S (S 22,22/3:25), SD 17.14.

\textsuperscript{224} “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 8th fetter, until the attainment of arhathood. (BDict)
36 Bhikshus, when the gods with Indra, with Brahmā, with Pajāpati, seek a monk thus freed in mind, they do not find anything of which to say that:

‘This is the support of the thus-gone one’s consciousness’. 227

Why is that? One thus gone, I say, is untraceable even here and now. 229

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.’ 230 He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing individual.’ 231

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 extermination of an existing individual.’

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225 “Thus freed in mind,” evaṁvimutta,cittam. Norman: “It is possible that there is something of a word-play in the word evaṁvimuttacitta. 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 saṁsāra),’ and who, therefore, cannot be reborn.” (1991a:6)

226 Anvesaṁ 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)” (apatiṭṭhena viññāṇena parinibbuto) (S 1:268).

227 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’ (evaṁvimuttacitta). 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 dependant 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 commentators still do not take tathāgata in the sense of the Buddha, but explain it as sattva ‘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 Cūja Mālunkyā,putta S (M 63), SD 5.8 (3).

228 “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.


230 “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 (sattānām vinayaka, MA 3:97).

231 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.
Before, bhikshus, and now, too, I only declare suffering and the ending of suffering. If others abuse, revile, scold and harass the Tathāgata for that, 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] that was earlier fully comprehended that they perform such acts.’

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

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

232 Comy: From the time under the great Bodhi tree (that is, from the time of the great awakening itself). (MA 2:118,11)
233 pubbe cāhaṁ bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhaṁ 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.
234 “For that,” ie, the teaching of the 4 noble truths. (MA 2:118)
235 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.
236 Yam kho idam pubbe pariññatam tattha me eva, rūpā kārā karīyanti. In simpler terms, they honour only the Buddha’s awakening.
237 Na tumhākaṁ. 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” (sabb e dhammad nālam abhinivesaya) is found in Pacala S (A 7.58,11), SD 4.11.
238 Tasmā tiha bhikkhave yam na tumhākam tam 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 yam 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.
**Perception**, bhikshus, is not yours.
**Formations**, bhikshus, are not yours.
**Consciousness**, bhikshus, is not yours.

Let it go!
It will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

The Jetavana parable

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.
**Perception**, bhikshus, is not yours.
**Formations**, bhikshus, are not yours.
**Consciousness**, bhikshus, is not yours.

Let it go!
It will be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

The Dharma and its fruit

42 Bhikshus, the teaching, well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork.

239 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)

240 On the significance of this delightful parable, see (2).

241 Here, the descriptions of the 4 saints in §§42-45 are almost identical to those of Ānāpānasati S (M 118.9-12).

242 “Plain, open, clear,’ uttāno vivaṭo pakāsitā.

243 “Free from patchwork,” chīna, pilotika, 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.

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In the teaching, well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, there is no (more) round of existence for those bhikhus 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, destroyed the fetters of being, and are completely freed through final knowledge.

43 Bhikhus, 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, are all spontaneously reborn (in the pure abodes), and there attain final nirvana, without ever returning from that world.

44 Bhikhus, 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 3 fetters, and with the diminishing of lust, hate and delusion, who are once-returners, all of them returning only once to this world to make an end of suffering.

45 Bhikhus, 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, sure of [142] going over to self-awakening.

46 Bhikhus, 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.

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.

244 Sadatthă, may be resolved two ways: (1) sa-d-attă, “one’s own goal,” (2) sant + attă, “the sublime goal,” “the ideal” (DA 3:86; SA 2:49). Most Comys follow the 2nd interpretation. See Dh:N 169 n166 & Rau 1959. L S Cousins.

245 The 10 fetters (dosa samiyojana). See §34 n.

246 Opapătika, 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 Āvihā (“Non-declining”), Ātappa (“Unworried”), Sudassă (“Clearly Visible”), Sudassī (“Clear-visioned”) and Akaṇiṭ-thă (“Highest”) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

247 The (first) 3 fetters: see §43 n.

248 “All of them,” sabbe te, omitted in Āñāpānasati 5 (M 118).

249 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 (manusso) and the heavenly world (deva). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (asura,kāya) as the 4th woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (sugati).

250 Dhammadūsārīnā saddhă’nusārīnā sabbe te sambodhi,parāyanā. These are 2 classes of individuals on the path of streamwinning. The truth-followers or Dharma-followers (dhammadūsārī) are disciples in whom the faculty of wisdom (pāññ‘indriya) is predominant and who develop the noble path with wisdom as 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”.

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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.

The Blessed One said this. Satisfied, the monks rejoiced in the Blessed One's word.

— evam —

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