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## Araṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta

The Discourse on the Analysis of Non-conflict | M 139

Theme: There are no problem people, only people with problems

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

1 Introduction

**1.1 SUBHŪTI.** This discourse on harmonious communication is one of the most well-structured suttas in the Canon. It has an introduction [§§1-2], a set of theses [§3], an analysis of each thesis [§§4-12], a summation [§13] and a conclusion [§14], including mention of the exemplar of its teachings, namely, **Subhūti**.

Subhūti, the younger brother of Anāthapiṇḍika, became a monk on the day that Jetavana was presented to the Sangha. The Buddha declared him to be the foremost disciple in two categories: those who live with non-conflict and those who are worthy of gifts (A 1:24; MA 5:31 f). The Sutta Commentary here says that when Subhūti teaches the Dharma, he is not interested in the differences amongst individuals but simply teaches: “This is a wrong course; this is the right course.” (MA 5:31).<sup>1</sup>

**1.2 SUTTA THEME.** The essence of this discourse is very clear: **consider the deed, not the doer**. The principle is more important than the person.<sup>2</sup> It is a good example of how the doctrine of non-self is practised on a simple daily level of interpersonal relationships. In other, a good Dharma teacher is a skillful communicator.

On a more academic level, this is the locus classicus for the Buddhist translation tradition, one that relies more on the spirit of right practice (orthopraxy) than on the weight of dogma (orthodoxy). Such a tradition encourages many Buddhists to attempt their own translation of the Buddhist texts; in short, to read the Pali texts themselves.

**1.3 A REFLECTION.** A contemporary monk, Sujāto,<sup>3</sup> has written an insightful reflection on the Araṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta, and applies it to an important self-examination of recent Buddhist history and society.

This discourse is found in the Theravādin Majjhima Nikāya preserved in Pāli, and also the Sarvāstivādin Madhyāma Āgama preserved in Chinese; it is also one of the mere dozen or so early discourses preserved in Tibetan. In both Majjhimas it is included in a chapter called the Vibhaṅga, vagga. This chapter is of great historical interest because it is the only chapter that contains virtually the same group of ten discourses in both Majjhimas, and also shares the same title. It must therefore be considered one of the key structural elements in the development of the Majjhima, and might possibly be considered as one of the seeds around which the collection crystallized. The Araṇa Vibhaṅga is one of the two discourses in the Vibhaṅga, vagga that explicitly refers back to the Buddha’s first discourse at Benares.<sup>4</sup> Thus in terms of both its place within the structure of the scriptures and also its contents, the Araṇa Vibhaṅga should be regarded as a key teaching, closely grounded on the wellsprings of the Dharma.

(Sujata Bhikkhu 2003:3; diacritics normalized)

<sup>1</sup> For details, see **Subhūti S** (A 11.15), SD 44.1.

<sup>2</sup> See Sujato 2003:4 (digital ed).

<sup>3</sup> Abbot of the Santi Forest Monastery, Bundanoon, NSW, Australia.

<sup>4</sup> “The other is the **Sacca, vibhaṅga S** (M 141/Mā 31/ Ea 27.1). This is the only text in the Theravādin Vibhaṅga, vagga that is not in the existing Sarvāstivādin Vibhaṅga, vagga. However, Roderick Bucknell has argued plausibly (in an unpublished essay) that it did originally belong in this chapter and should be restored.” (Sujato’s fn; diacritics normalized)

## 2 Right speech

**2.1 Sujato**, in his reflections on the Araṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta, explains the apparent abrupt intrusion of the section on right speech [§10] by discussing the universal and the relative aspects of moral conduct.<sup>5</sup>

There are obvious reasons for warning against covert speech—backbiting, slander, gossip, and so on—and against overt harsh language—abuse, yelling, painful, and critical speech. These often come from the wrong place in us, and are potent sources of conflict. Yet human dialogue is complex affair, and sometimes overlooked in Buddhist circles. Sometimes we would prefer to remain silent, to ignore difficult issues, to let them lie unresolved. This attitude is really coming from a place of fear. Some may feel this is justified by the negative manner in which the precept on right speech is framed, that is, “refraining from false speech.” But the Buddha often emphasized the positive side of right speech:

“... One speaks truth, adheres to truth, is trustworthy and reliable, no deceiver of the world ... one who reunites those who are divided, is a promoter of friendships, enjoying harmony, delighting in harmony, rejoicing in harmony, a speaker of words that promote harmony ... speaking words that are gentle, pleasing to the ear, lovable, going to the heart, courteous, desired by and agreeable to many...one speaks at the right time, speaks on what is fact, what is good, on the Dhamma and the Vinaya; at the right time one speaks such words as are worth remembering, reasonable, moderate, and beneficial.” [Cūḷa Hatthi, padôpama Sutta, M 27,13/-1:179 f; MĀ 146 etc.] (Sujato Bhikkhu 2003:7 f; diacritics normalized)

**2.2** As such, right speech is not always no speech. There is an interesting passage in the Mahā, vagga (Mahv 4.12) of the Vinaya, where the Buddha, having inquired after the monks, realizes that although they have lived together “amicably and harmoniously,” they keep silence and do not speak to each other!

Then the Blessed One addressed the monks:

“Indeed, bhikkhus, these foolish men, having spent an uncomfortable time (*aphasu*), claim to have spent a comfortable time amongst equals.

Indeed, bhikkhus, these foolish men, having lived together like cattle (*pasu*), claim to have spent a comfortable amongst equal.

Indeed, bhikkhus, these foolish men, having lived together like goats (*eḷakā*), claim to have spent a comfortable amongst equal.

Indeed, bhikkhus, these foolish men, having lived together like foes (*sapattā*), claim to have spent a comfortable amongst equal.

How, bhikkhus, can these foolish men keep the silence vow (*mūga-b, bata*) of the sectarians [followers of outside teachings]?”<sup>6</sup> (Mv 4.12 @ V 1:159)

**2.3** The Buddha then introduces the allowance regarding the *pavāraṇā*, that is, the invitation that monks who have spent the rains retreat should make to their seniors to be counseled on “what has been seen or heard or suspected” with regards their (the junior monks’) wrongdoing. This practice is still observed

<sup>5</sup> See §10b n below.

<sup>6</sup> *Atha kho bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi: “Aphāsuñ,ñeva, kira’me, bhikkhave, mogha, purisā vuṭṭhā, samānā phāsumhā, vuṭṭhāti paṭijānanti. Pasu, samvāsañ,ñeva kira’me, bhikkhave, mogha, purisā vuṭṭhā samānā phāsumhā vuṭṭhāti paṭijānanti. Eḷaka, samvāsañ,ñeva kira’me, bhikkhave, mogha, purisā vuṭṭhā samānā phāsumhā vuṭṭhāti paṭijānanti. Sapatta, samvāsañ,ñeva kira’me, bhikkhave, mogha, purisā vuṭṭhā samānā phāsumhā vuṭṭhāti paṭijānanti. Kathañ hi nām’ime, bhikkhave, mogha, purisā mūga-b, batarāṃ titthiya, samādānaṃ samādiyissan ti.*

today amongst the Theravādin monastic practitioners, where at on the last day of the rains retreat, the junior monks approach their seniors to mention anything they have done that may have in some way be inappropriate, whether deliberately or inadvertently. “It is essential for us as social animals to speak,” admonishes Sujato, “silence is not an option.” (2003:8 digital ed)<sup>7</sup>

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## Araṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta

### The Discourse on The Analysis of Non-conflict

M 139

#### Preamble

**[230] 1** Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park, in Jeta’s Forest, near Sāvattihī. There the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Bhikshus!”

“Bhante,” the monks replied in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

**2** “Bhikshus, I will teach you **the analysis of non-conflict**.<sup>8</sup> Listen and pay close attention to it: I am going to speak.”

“Yes, bhante,” the monks replied in assent.

The Blessed One said this:

#### Summary

**3 (A)** “You should not pursue **sensual pleasure**: it is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial. And you should not pursue self-mortification: it is painful, ignoble, not beneficial. Without turning to either of these extremes, there is the middle way awakened to by the Tathagata<sup>9</sup> [the One Thus Come], that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, however, eg **Ariya,riyesanā S** (M 26): “When you gather together, bhikshus, you should either discuss the Dharma or keep noble silence” (M 26,4/1:161). From the Vinaya rule mentioned, it is clear that this is not a “rule of silence” for Buddhist monks, but specifically refers to monks in assembly. See **Upakkilesa S** (M 128) where Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila live together under the rule of silence, except “on every fifth day, when they discuss the Dharma” (M 128,14/3:157).

<sup>8</sup> *Araṇa*, non-conflict, also tr as peace, ie the peace that comes from the absence of defilements and the conflict that comes from their presence; opp: *saraṇa*, conflict, disturbance. Comy says that *araṇa* means “free from passion or defilements (*kilesa*)” (MA 5:32; cf AA 1:220, SA 1:101, *nikkilesa*). At Vbh 19 f the aggregate (*khandha*) of feeling is twofold: *saraṇa* and *araṇa*. See BHSD under *araṇa* and *raṇa*.

<sup>9</sup> This is an anglicized form found in English dictionaries, such as Webster’s 3<sup>rd</sup> New International.

<sup>10</sup> See **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,3.2/5:421), SD 1.1, where the statement is simply made in an indicative mood. “Notice how this statement is phrased in terms of a trinity—the 2 extremes and the escape—rather than a simple duality. While it is of course often necessary to speak in terms of dualities—this and not-this—the insistence on dualities as absolute black-and-whites is a potent source of intolerance and conflict, especially in religious

(B) You should know what **praise** is and what **blame** is, and knowing what praise and blame are, you should neither praise nor blame, but teach only Dharma.

(C) You should know how to discern **joy**, and knowing what joy is, you should pursue joy within yourself.

(D) You should **not utter secret speech**; you should **not utter strong words** before another.

(E) You should **speak without hurry**, not hurriedly.

(F) You should not cling to a local [regional] language;<sup>11</sup> you should not reject **standard usage**.<sup>12</sup>

This is a summary of the analysis of non-conflict.

## The middle way

**4** (A) ‘You should not pursue **sensual pleasure**: it is low, vulgar [the way of the village], coarse [worldly], ignoble, not beneficial.<sup>13</sup> And you should not pursue **self-mortification**: it is painful, ignoble, not beneficial.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

**The pursuit of pleasure** of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure<sup>14</sup>—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way.

**[231]** Letting go of the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way.

**The pursuit of self-mortification**—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way.

Letting go of the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way.

So it is in reference to this, that it is said: ‘You should not pursue sensual pleasure: it is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial. And you should not pursue self-mortification: it is painful, ignoble, not beneficial.’

**5** ‘Without turning to either of these extremes, there is **the middle way** awakened to by the One Thus Come, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

It is this very **noble eightfold path**, that is to say:

right view,  
right thought,  
right speech,  
right action,  
right livelihood,  
right effort,  
right mindfulness,  
right concentration.

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dialogue. This kind of language is most characteristic of religions that conceive of the spiritual goal or essence as ‘One,’ and must demonize all else as the threatening ‘Other.’ The most characteristic Buddhist number is not ‘1’ but ‘0,’ a number whose existence and power went unsuspected by all the Western philosophers and whose discovery was facilitated by the Indian philosophical climate permeated by the Buddhist notion of emptiness. While “1” is rigid, unaccommodating, and unyielding, ‘0’ is gentle and embracing.” (Sujato 2003:3 digital ed)

<sup>11</sup> “Local [regional] language,” *jana.pada,nirutti*.

<sup>12</sup> “Standard [Common] usage,” *samañña*.

<sup>13</sup> “Low ... not beneficial,” *hīnaṃ gammaṃ pothujjanikaṃ anariyaṃ anatta,samhitam*.

<sup>14</sup> *Kāma,paṭisandhi,sukhino somanassānuyogo*.

So it is in reference to this, that it is said: ‘Without turning to either of these extremes, there is the middle way awakened to by the Tathagata, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.’<sup>15</sup>

## Teaching only Dharma

6 (B) ‘You should know what **praise** is and what **blame** is, and knowing what praise is and blame is, you should neither praise nor blame, but teach only Dharma.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

7 How, bhikshus, do praise and blame and **the failure to teach only Dharma** come about?

(1) When you say, ‘All those who are bent on the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ you thus blame some.

(2) When you say, ‘All those who have let go of the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—are without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ you thus praise some.

(3) When you say: ‘All those who are bent on the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—[232] are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ you thus blame some.

(4) When you say: ‘All those who have let go of the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—are without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ you thus praise some.

(5) When you say, ‘All those who have not abandoned the fetter of being<sup>16</sup> are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ you blame some.

(6) When you say, ‘All those who have abandoned the fetter of being are without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ you praise some.

This is how, bhikshus, praise and blame, and the failure to teach only Dharma come about.

8 And how, bhikshus, is there neither praise nor blame but **teaching only Dharma**?

(1) When you do *not* say, ‘All those who are bent on the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure...they have followed the wrong way,’ but say instead ‘**The pursuit is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

(3) When you do *not* say, ‘All those who have given up the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure...they have followed the right way,’ but say instead ‘**The letting go is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

(3) When you do *not* say, ‘All those who are bent on the pursuit of self-mortification...they have followed the wrong way,’ but say instead ‘**The pursuit is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: it is the wrong way,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

(4) When you do *not* say, ‘All those who have let go of the pursuit of self-mortification...they have followed the right way,’ but say instead ‘**The letting go is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: it is the right way,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

<sup>15</sup> For a similar statement on this whole §§4+5, see **Rasiya Gāmaṇi S** (S 42.12,4/4:330), SD 91.3.

<sup>16</sup> “Fetter of being,” *bhava,samyojana*, that is *taṇhā*, craving.

(5) When you do *not* say, ‘All those who have not abandoned the fetter of being are full of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: they have followed the wrong way,’ [233] but say instead, ‘**As long as the fetter of being is not abandoned, being too is not abandoned,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

(6) When you do *not* say, ‘All those who have abandoned the fetter of being are without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: they have followed the right way,’ but say instead, ‘**As long as the fetter of being is abandoned, being too is abandoned,**’ then you teach only Dharma.

So it is in this connection that it is said, ‘You should know what praise is and what blame is, and knowing what praise and blame are, you should neither praise nor blame, but teach only Dharma.’

### Pursuing joy within

9 (C) THE 5 CORDS OF SENSE-PLEASURE. ‘You should know how to discern<sup>17</sup> joy,<sup>18</sup> and knowing what joy is, you should pursue joy within yourself.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

Bhikshus, there are these **5 cords of sensual pleasure**.<sup>19</sup> What are the five?

- (1) Forms cognized by *the eye*  
that are desirable, agreeable, pleasurable, lovable,  
connected with sensual desire, arousing lust.
- (2) Sounds cognized by *the ear*  
that are desirable, agreeable, pleasurable, lovable,  
connected with sensual desire, arousing lust.
- (3) Smells cognized by *the nose*  
that are desirable, agreeable, pleasurable, lovable,  
connected with sensual desire, arousing lust.
- (4) Tastes cognized by *the tongue*  
that are desirable, agreeable, pleasurable, lovable,  
connected with sensual desire, arousing lust.
- (5) Touches cognized by *the body*  
that are desirable, agreeable, pleasurable, lovable,  
connected with sensual desire, arousing lust.

Bhikshus, these are the five cords of sensual pleasure.

9.2 DUNG-LIKE PLEASURE. Now the (physical) joy and (mental) pleasure<sup>20</sup> that arise dependent on these 5 cords of sensual pleasure are called **sense-pleasure**<sup>21</sup>—a dung of pleasure,<sup>22</sup> a pleasure of the crowd, an ignoble pleasure. This pleasure should not be pursued; it should not be cultivated; it should not be developed; it should be feared, I say!

<sup>17</sup> *Vinicchaya*, Bodhi has “define”.

<sup>18</sup> *Sukha*, happiness, pleasure, joy, bliss; one of the three feelings (*vedanā*) and may be physical or mental.

<sup>19</sup> *Pañc’ime, brāhmaṇā, kāma,guṇā ariyassa vinaye lokō ti vuccati*. Cf **Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) S** (A 6.63): “Bhikshus, these are not sensual objects (*kāma*), but in the noble discipline, they are called ‘cords of sensual desire’ (*kāma, -guṇa*)” (*api ca kho bhikkhave n’ete kāmā, kāma,guṇā nam’ete ariyassa vinaye vuccanti*) (A 6.63,3/3:410 f), SD 6.11. See also **Sabba S** (S 35.23), where “the all” (*sabba*) is def as the 6 sense-faculties and the 6 sense-objects (S 35.23/4:25), SD 7.1.

<sup>20</sup> *Sukha, somanassa*.

<sup>21</sup> *Kāma, sukha*.

<sup>22</sup> *Mīlha, sukha*. Bodhi has “filthy pleasure”. In the (*Ānanda*) *Bhikkhuṇī S* (A 2:144-146/4.159) when a sick nun who asks for *Ānanda*, he admonishes her on the nature of the body and to destroy the “bridge” that is sexuality.

9.3 THE 4 DHYANAS. Here, bhikshus, *quite secluded [detached] from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states*, he attains and dwells in **the first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, and with zest and joy born of solitude.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, bhikshus, *with the stilling of initial application and sustained application*, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, he attains and dwells in **the second dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, with zest and joy born of concentration.

Furthermore, bhikshus, *with the fading away of zest*, he remains equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and feels joy with the body.

Furthermore, bhikshus, *with the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain*, and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure, attains and dwells in **the fourth dhyana** that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.

This is called **the joy of renunciation**, the joy of seclusion, the joy of peace, the joy of awakening. This joy should be cultivated; it should be developed; it should not be feared. [234]

So it is in reference to this, that it is said, ‘You should know how to discern joy, and knowing what joy is, you should pursue joy within yourself.’<sup>24</sup>

### Secret speech and strong words

**10 (D)** ‘You should not utter secret speech; you should not utter strong words<sup>25</sup> before another.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

Here, bhikshus, when you know **the secret speech**<sup>26</sup> to be false or wrong,<sup>27</sup> not beneficial, you should on no account utter it.

When you know the secret speech to be true or right, but not beneficial, you should on no account utter it.

But when you know the secret speech to be true and right, and beneficial, then you may utter it, knowing the time to do so.

10.2 Here, bhikshus, when you know **the strong words**<sup>28</sup> uttered before another to be false or wrong, not beneficial, you should on no account utter them.

When you know the strong words uttered before another to be true or right, but not beneficial, you should on no account utter them.

<sup>23</sup> Ee abridges the rest of the dhyana passages, but given here in full. For details, see *Sāmañña,phala S* (D 2,77/-1:73), SD 8.10.

<sup>24</sup> “From here the Araṇa,vibhaṅga returns to further discuss right speech. The sequence is unusual; normally the Buddha sticks fairly consistently to a graduated teaching from the simple to the profound, yet here the simple ethical teachings are revisited after the more profound teachings on meditation. Perhaps there has been a confusion in the editing; comparison with the Chinese and Tibetan versions should clarify this point. But there might be another reason for this sequence. All the passages until now have been rephrased explicitly in terms of the middle way that avoids the two extremes. From here on, however, the middle way is not invoked. This variation might have served to justify saving this material for presentation together at the end.” (Sujato 2003:7 digital ed)

<sup>25</sup> *Khīṇa,vāda*. Comy explains *khīṇa* as *ākiṇṇa*, “confused, troubled” and as *kiliṭṭha*, “defiled, soiled” (MA 5:30). It means that one should not say what is detrimental, annoying or improper.

<sup>26</sup> *Raho,vāda*, ie private counsel. Cf the qualities of a true friend, one who is “constant in joy and in sorrow”: He tells you his secrets; he keeps your secrets, *Sigāl’ovāda S* (D 31,23), SD 4.1.

<sup>27</sup> “False, wrong,” Not real, false (*abhūta ataccha*); opp true, right (*bhūta taccha*, both of which overlap in meaning: true, real, right). Bodhi: “false, incorrect” etc.

<sup>28</sup> *Khīṇa* (adj) here means “(of words) strong, rough, hurtful.”

But when you know the strong words uttered before another to be true and right, and beneficial, then you may utter them, knowing the time to do so.

So it is in reference to this, that it is said, ‘You should not utter secret speech; you should not utter strong words before another.’<sup>29</sup>

### Speaking without hurry

**11** (E) ‘You should **speak without hurry**, not hurriedly.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

Here, bhikshus, when you speak hurriedly, the body tires, the mind suffers, the voice suffers and the throat becomes sore. The speech of one who speaks hurriedly is unclear and hard to understand.

Here, bhikshus, when you speak unhurriedly, the body does not tire, the mind does not suffer, the voice does not suffer and the throat is not sore. The speech of one who speaks unhurriedly is clear and easy to understand.<sup>30</sup>

So it is with reference to this, that it is said, ‘You should speak without hurry, not hurriedly.’

### Conventional language

**12** (F) ‘You should not cling to a local language; you should not reject **standard usage**.’ So it is said. In what connection is this said?

How, bhikshus, is there clinging to a local [regional] language and rejection of standard usage?<sup>31</sup>

Here, bhikshus, in different regions, they call a ‘bowl’ *pāti*, **[235]** *patta*, *vittha*, *serāva*, *dhāropa*, *poṇa* or *pisīla*. So whatever they call it in such and such a region, they speak accordingly, firmly adhering (to the words) and insisting, ‘Only this is right; everything else is wrong.’

This is how, bhikshus, there is clinging to a local language and rejection of standard usage.

<sup>29</sup> “Now on a surface level, the Buddha has directly contradicted himself. First, he says not to utter speech that is covert or overtly brash, then he says, well okay, you can utter it sometimes. But on reflection we can see that this is not a contradiction, but a more nuanced approach to right speech, which cannot be captured in a simple phrase. The Buddha is treading a delicate path between the most pressing general moral question of our time. We are emerging from a culture of moral absolutes. On a world scale, the effects of this were made manifest during the colonial era as one particularly arrogant culture attempted to impose its values on the world, with disastrous results. We have come a long way in recognizing the value of all cultures and the contextual appropriateness of the particular ethical prescriptions. But this can lead to what could be called ‘naïve relativism,’ the idea that all moral principles are culturally dependent and hence subjective, and that therefore it is wrong to evaluate or judge anyone else. The Buddha would agree that ethical principles are relative and contextual; but he would point out that the most important ethical principles relate to universal contexts equally appropriate for all people. All people love life and fear death, love happiness and fear pain, and it is here, in our common humanity, that we should seek ethical principles of universal validity. In our current context of right speech, therefore, the Buddha distinguishes between ethical principles that must never be violated and those that must be judged in context. In some cases—speech that is untrue and unbeneficial—we can lay down a black and white rule: never. In other cases, we leave it to the individual to judge according to the complexities, time and place.” (Sujato 2003:7 digital ed)

<sup>30</sup> We can deduce from **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44) that arhats and non-returners speak slowly, too, because only after “thinking and pondering” (*vitakketvā vicāretvā*) do they speak (M 44,15.2/1:301) + SD 40a.9 (2.4.2).

<sup>31</sup> The Vinaya relates an incident where two monks complain to the Buddha that other monks of various origins are distorting the Buddha’s Teaching in using their own dialect (*sakāya niruttīyā*) and propose that the Teaching be transmitted in Vedic verse (*chandaso*). The Buddha refuses and declares: ‘I allow you, bhikshus, to learn the Buddha Word in your own dialect’ (*anujānāmi bhikkhave sakāya niruttīyā buddha, vacanaṃ pariyāpunituṃ*, V 2:139; Geiger, PLL 1968:6 f).

And how, bhikshus, is there *no* clinging to a local language and *no* rejection of standard usage?

Here, bhikshus, in different regions, they call a 'bowl' *pāti, patta, vittha, serāva, dhāropa, poṇa* or *pisīla*. So whatever they call it in such and such a region, without adhering (to the words), one speaks accordingly.

This is how, bhikshus, there is no clinging to a local language and no rejection of standard usage.

So it is with reference to this, that it is said, 'You should not cling to a local language; you should not reject standard usage.'<sup>32</sup>

## Summation

**13** (1) Here, bhikshus, the **pursuit of pleasure** of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it* is the wrong way.

As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, bhikshus, **letting go** of the pursuit of pleasure of one whose happiness is connected to sense-pleasure—low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: *it* is the right way.

As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, bhikshus, the **pursuit of self-mortification**—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it* is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, bhikshus, **letting go** of the pursuit of self-mortification—painful, ignoble, not beneficial—is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: *it* is the right way. **[236]**

As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

Here, bhikshus, without turning to either of these extremes, there is **the middle way** awakened to by the Tathagata, that gives rise to vision, to knowledge, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana—this is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: *it* is the right way.

As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

(2) Here, bhikshus, **praise and blame**, and failure to teach only Dharma, are a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it* is the wrong way.

As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, bhikshus, not praising and not blaming and **teaching only Dharma** is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: *it* is the right way.

As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

(3) Here, bhikshus, **sense-pleasure**—a dung of pleasure, a pleasure of the crowd, an ignoble pleasure—is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it* is the wrong way. As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, bhikshus, the **joy of renunciation**, the joy of seclusion, the joy of peace, the joy of awakening, is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: *it* is the right way.

As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

(4) Here, bhikshus, **secret speech** that is false or wrong, not beneficial is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it* is the wrong way.

As such, this is a state of conflict.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf the Buddha's remark in **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 71): "Aggi, vessana, a monk whose mind is liberated thus, sides with no one and disputes with no one. He uses speech that is spoken and current in the world without being attached to it." (M 71, 13/1:500) + SD 16.1 (4), the Buddha's use of language.

Here, bhikshus, secret speech that is true or right, but not beneficial is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it is the wrong way.*

As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, bhikshus, secret speech that is true and right, and beneficial is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: *it is the right way.*

As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

(4a) Here, bhikshus, **strong words** uttered before another that are false or wrong, not beneficial are a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it is the wrong way.*

As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, bhikshus, strong words uttered before another that are true or right, but not beneficial are a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it is the wrong way.*

As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, bhikshus, strong words uttered before another [237] that are true and right, and beneficial are a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: *it is the right way.*

As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

(5) Here, bhikshus, speech that is **spoken hurriedly** is a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it is the wrong way.*

As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, bhikshus, speech that is **spoken unhurriedly** is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: *it is the right way.*

As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

(6) Here, bhikshus, clinging to a **local language** and rejecting standard usage are a state of suffering, trouble, despair, frenzy: *it is the wrong way.*

As such, this is a state of conflict.

Here, bhikshus, not clinging to a local language and not rejecting **standard usage** is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without frenzy: *it is the right way.*

As such, this is a state of non-conflict.

**14** Therefore, bhikshus, you should train yourself thus: ‘We will know a state of conflict and we will know a state of non-conflict, and knowing these, we will follow the way of non-conflict.’

Now, bhikshus, the houselord’s son, **Subhūti**,<sup>33</sup> is one who has followed the way of non-conflict.”

This is what the Blessed One said. Satisfied, the monks rejoiced in the Blessed One’s word.

— evaṃ —

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<sup>33</sup> On Subhūti, see (1.1).

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