

2

(Devatā) Rohitassa Sutta

The (Devata) Discourse to Rohitassa | S 2.26 ≈ A 4.45
Theme: The world's end cannot be reached by going
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

1 “The world”

1.1 RELATED SUTTAS

1.1.1 There are 3 discourses with the title **Rohitassa Sutta**:

(1) (Devatā) Rohitassa Sutta	S 2.26/1:61 f	SD 7.2	omits the opening found in (2)
(2) (Catukka) Rohitassa Sutta 1	A 4.45/2:47-49	SD 52.8a	with traditional introduction
(3) (Catukka) Rohitassa Sutta 2	A 4.46/2:49 f	SD 52.8b	no introduction; Buddha as narrator

1.1.2 There are a few suttas related to **the Rohitassa Suttas** either by way of applying the parable of the archer or the qualities of an archer, especially the “archer’s qualities” stock—*daḷha, dhammo dhanu-g, -gaho sikkhito kata, hattho kat’upāsano* [§5.2], namely:

• Issattha Sutta	S 3.24,9.2/1:99	SD 44.18	the fearful boys and the brave boys
• Dhanu-g, gahā Sutta	S 20.6,2/2:265 f	SD 52.7	the 4 archers and the superman
• Lok’āyatikā Brāhmaṇa Sutta	A 9.38,4.2/4:430	SD 35.2	4 supermen in quest of the world’s end

1.2 THE WORLD

1.2.1 The 3 worlds

1.2.1.1 In the (Devatā) Rohitassa Sutta (S 2.26), the word “**world**” (**loka**) is used in 2 senses:¹ in the sense of the physical world and the world of formations. Rohitassa asks the Buddha a question on the physical world (*cakkavāḷa loka*, “universe world”), but the Buddha answers him referring to the world of formations. Throughout the Buddhist texts, the word “world” has 3 senses:

(1) <i>saṅkhāra loka</i>	the world of formations,
(2) <i>satta loka</i>	the world of beings,
(3) <i>okāsa loka</i>	the world of space (ie the space-time reality).

(Vism 7.37/204 f; DA 1:173; MA 1:397, 2:200)

1.2.1.2 In modern terms, **the world of formations** is the conditioned world of our senses (the 5 physical senses, the sense-objects, and our experiences arising therefrom, especially in terms of our mental processes). Early Buddhism accepts both our **subjective** sense-experiences as well as the **objective** realities out there. In other words, even when we close our eyes, this page we have been reading is still out “there” so to speak, the space around us still exists.

However, according to the Buddha, we can only know what our senses present to us. In fact, through our senses, we project a subjective reality into the world out there. We don’t just see a person or a thing; we name them; we have memories of them. We recognize them through such memories or

¹ S 2.26/1:61 f (SD 7.2). For a discussion on meaning of *loka*, see S:B 393 n182; also Harvey 1995:78 ff (ch 5).

past conditioning (including learning). Even more than that, we make value-judgements over what we experience. We like them or dislike them depending on whether we have good memories or bad memories of them. If we have no memories or knowledge of something, we tend to ignore it, maybe find out more about it, or simply get bored with it.

1.2.1.3 The point remains that all such experiences are sense-based. Whatever we experience arise through one of our 5 physical senses—the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body—as sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. But these are not mere organs in themselves, but are **sense-faculties**: they function with our **mind** (the 6th sense), and also *within* our minds as ideas, thoughts, or mind-objects (*dhamma*).

Of key significance in this connection is the teaching on “**the all**” (*sabba*), which is a blanket term for these 6 senses and their respective objects, as laid out in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23), thus:

(1) The eye	and	forms,	<i>cakkhuñ c’eva</i>	<i>rūpā ca</i>
(2) the ear	and	sounds,	<i>sotañ ca</i>	<i>saddā ca</i>
(3) the nose	and	smells,	<i>ghānañ ca</i>	<i>gandhā ca</i>
(4) the tongue	and	tastes,	<i>jivhā ca</i>	<i>rasā ca</i>
(5) the body	and	touches,	<i>kāyo ca</i>	<i>phoṭṭhabbā ca</i>
(6) the mind	and	mind-objects. ²	<i>mano ca</i>	<i>dhammā ca</i>

(S 35.23/4:15), SD 7.1

1.2.2 The world of formations is defined in **the Paṭisambhidā, magga** thus: “One world (*eko loko*, or “The world of the one”): all beings are sustained by food.” (Pm 1:122). The world of beings is referred to when it is said, “The world is eternal” or “The world is not eternal” (M 1:426). The world of space is meant in such passages as this from **the Brahma, nimantanika Sutta** (M 49):

As far as the moon and the sun
Shine and light up the quarters
Over a thousand times as many worlds
Does your power hold sway. (M 49,9/1:328)

1.2.3 However, in the stanza that follows this one, the world of beings is referred to:

And there you know the high and the low,
And those with lust and those free from lust,
Existence is one form or another,
The coming and going of beings. (**Brahma, nimantanika Sutta**, M 49,9/1:328)

1.2.4 How the world ends

1.2.4.1 Suffering arises with arising of **the world of formations** (*saṅkhāra, loka*); suffering ends with the ending of the world of formations. **The (Nidāna) Loka Sutta** (S 12.44) explains how the world that is formations arises through the dependent arising of sense-experiences, and ends through **dependent ending**.³ Here is an abridged teaching of the (Nidāna) Loka Sutta, on the creation and the ending of our world as we know it:

² “Mind-objects,” *dhammā*, alt tr “mental phenomena.”

³ S 12.44/2:71-73 (SD 7.5).

1.2.4.2 How the world arises:

... dependent on the eye	and <u>forms</u> ,	<i>eye-consciousness</i>	arises ...
... dependent on the ear	and <u>sounds</u> ,	<i>ear-consciousness</i>	arises ...
... dependent on the nose	and <u>smells</u> ,	<i>nose-consciousness</i>	arises ...
... dependent on the tongue	and <u>tastes</u> ,	<i>tongue-consciousness</i>	arises ...
... dependent on the body	and <u>touches</u> ,	<i>body-consciousness</i>	arises ...
... dependent on the mind	and <u>mind-objects</u> ,	<i>mind-consciousness</i>	arises ...

The meeting of the three is

With contact as condition, there is

with feeling as condition, there is

with craving as condition, there is

with clinging as condition, there is

with existence as condition, there is

with birth as condition there arise

decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

—This, bhikshus, is **the arising of the world**.

contact.⁴

feeling;⁵

craving;

clinging;

existence;

birth;

(S 12.44,3-9), SD 7.5

1.2.4.3 How the world ends:

... dependent on **the eye** and forms, *eye-consciousness* arises ... *and so on*

The meeting of the three is contact.

With contact as condition, there is **feeling**; with feeling as condition, there is craving.

But with the remainderless fading away and ending of that same craving

comes **the ending of clinging**;⁶

with the ending of clinging,

there is the ending of **existence**;

with the ending of existence,

there is the ending of **birth**;

with the ending of birth,

there is the ending of decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair.

Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

—This, bhikshus, is **the ending of the world**.

(S 12.44,10-16), SD 7.5

⁴ *Tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso*. For a discussion on this passage, see Bucknell 1999:318 f f.

⁵ From hereon, **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18.16) continues: “What one feels, one perceives. What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one mentally proliferates. What a person mentally proliferates is the source through which perceptions and notions due to mental proliferation impacts one regarding past, future and present forms cognizable through the eye.” (M 18,16/1:112 f). See SD 6.13. A passage similar to this section (the preceding three sentences) is found in the *Pariññā S* (S 35.60) where, however, the learned noble disciple becomes disillusioned (*nibbindati*) with the contact arising from sense-organ, sense-object and sense-consciousness (also using the sentence, *tinnam saṅgati phasso*), and as such “becomes dispassionate (*virajjati*); through dispassion, he is freed (*vimuccati*); through liberation, he understands, ‘Clinging has been fully understood by me.’” (S 35.60/4:32 f).

⁶ This apparently shows that the dependent arising cycle can be broken here. For a different opinion, see **Dependent arising**, SD 5.12 (18).

The weakest link in the dependent arising of the world lies in **feeling** (*vedanā*). That is, when we see its impermanence, understand its conditioned nature, and accept it to be so. Here again, the practice of the perception of impermanence is the key to breaking this mind-made chain that feeds out ideas of self.⁷

2 The noble truths

2.1 The Sutta closes with the key statement made by the Buddha:

However, avuso, without having reached the world's end, there is no making an end to suffering, I say.

Avuso, in this very fathom-long body, along with its perception and mind, that I make known the world, the arising of the world, the world's end, and the way leading to the world's end. [§9]

The Saṃyutta Commentary glosses these 4 statements in the last sentence as those of the 4 noble truths, that is, “the world” (*loka*) = “the noble truth of suffering” (*dukkha, sacca*) and so on. Thus, the Buddha says: “I do not, avuso, make known these four truths in external things like grass and wood, but right here in this body composed of the four great elements.” (SA 1:117 f). “This pithy utterance of the Buddha,” remarks Bodhi, “which may well be the most profound proposition in the history of human thought,”⁸ is clarified in **the Lok’anta Gamana Sutta**,⁹ which should be read as a commentary on the Rohitassa Sutta.

2.2 In the Lok’anta Gamana Sutta, Ānanda explains that in the noble discipline, “the world” refers to “*That in the world by which one is a perceiver of the world, a conceiver of the world,*” that is, the six sense-bases. **Bodhi** remarks on this important statement:

From Ānanda’s explanation, we can draw out the following implications. The world with which the Buddha’s teaching is principally concerned is “the world of experience,” and even the object world is of interest only to the extent that it serves as the necessary external conditions for experience. The world is identified with the six sense bases because the latter are the necessary internal conditions for experience and thus for the presence of a world. As long as the six sense bases persist, a world will always be spread out before us as the objective range of perception and cognition. Thus one cannot reach the world’s end by travelling [*gamanena*, “going”], for wherever one goes one inevitably brings along the six sense bases, which necessarily disclose a world extended on all sides. Nevertheless, by reversing the direction of the search it is possible to reach the end of the world. For if the world ultimately stems from the six sense bases, then by bringing an end to the sense bases it is possible to arrive at the end of the world.

Now the six sense bases are themselves conditioned, having arisen from a chain of conditions rooted in one’s own ignorance and craving.¹⁰ Thus by removing ignorance and craving the re-arising of the six sense bases can be prevented, and therewith the manifestation of the world is terminated. This end of the world cannot be reached by travelling [or going], but it can be arrived at by cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path. Perfect development of the path brings

⁷ On the significance of feeling in breaking dependent arising, see SD 57.25 esp (3.3.2).

⁸ S:B 393 n182.

⁹ S 35.116/4:93-97.

¹⁰ See (**Nidāna**) **Loka S** (S 12.44/2:73 f = 35.107/4:87), SD 7.5.

about the eradication of ignorance and craving, and with their removal emergence of the six senses, and therewith the reappearance of a world. (Bodhi, S:B 393 n182)

For a lengthy philosophical commentary on this sutta, see Ñāṇananda 1972, 2:70-85.

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(Devatā) Rohitassa Sutta The (Devata) Discourse to Rohitassa

S 2.26 ≈ A 4.45

1 At Sāvattthī.

Rohitassa meets the Buddha

1.2 ¹¹[At one time, the Blessed One was residing in Jeta’s grove in Anātha,piṇḍika’s park near Sāvattthī.]

¹²Then, when the night was well advanced, the devaputra **Rohitassa**¹³—his surpassing beauty lighting up the whole of Jeta’s grove—approached the Blessed One, saluted him and stood at one side.]

2 Standing at one side, the devaputra Rohitassa said this to the Blessed One:

“Is it possible, bhante, **by going, to know or to see or to reach the world’s end**, where one is not born, does not age, does not die, **[A 48]** does not pass away (from heaven), is not reborn?”¹⁴

3 “As to that end of the world, avuso, *where one is not born, does not age, does not die, does not pass away, is not reborn—it cannot be known, seen or reached by going*, I say.”

4 “It’s wonderful, bhante! It’s amazing, bhante! How well this is stated by the Blessed One: ‘*As to that end of the world, avuso, where one is not born, does not age, does not die, does not pass away, is not reborn—it cannot be known, seen or reached by going*, I say.’”

Rohitassa’s astral journey

5 Once in the past, bhante, I was a seer named Rohitassa Bhoja,putta [son of Bhoja], possessed of psychic power, able to travel through the sky [space]. **[S 62]**

5.2 Just as swift as a **strong-bowed**¹⁵ archer, well-practised,¹⁶ trained, tried and true master archer,¹⁷ could easily shoot past the shadow of a palmyra tree¹⁸ with a light arrow, endowed were they with such speed¹⁹—

¹¹This section (§1.2) only in A 4.45,1/2:47 (SD 52.8).

¹²(**Catukka**) **Rohitassa S 2** (A 4.46) starts here and continues with the rest of this Sutta: see SD 52.8.

¹³For an interesting possible identification of Rohitassa, see **Kevaladdha S** (D 11), where the Buddha tells the story of a “certain monk,” with the psychic power of astral travel, and wishing to discover if the end of the physical universe could be reached, astrally speeds through it. (D 11,67-85), SD 1.7.

¹⁴*Yattha nu kho bhante na jāyati na jīyati na miyyati na cavati na uppajjati, sakkā nu kho no bhante gamanena lokassa antaṃ ñatumaṃ vā daṭṭhumaṃ vā pāpuṇitumaṃ vā ti?*

¹⁵“With a strong bow,” *daḷha,dhammo* (lit, “of a strong nature”), which Comy glosses as *daḷha,dhanu* (“with a strong bow”); possessed of a bow of the greatest size (*uttama-p,pamāṇena dhanunā samannāgato*) (SA 1:115). A

6 my *stride* was such, bhante, that it spanned the eastern ocean and the western ocean.
Then, bhante, the wish arose in me, ‘I will reach the world’s end by going.’

7 Although possessing such speed and such a stride, and having a lifespan of a hundred years, living for a hundred years, travelling for a hundred years,
pausing only to eat, drink, to take meals and snacks, to void and pee,
to dispel sleepiness and tiredness—I died along the way without reaching the world’s end.²⁰

8 It is wonderful, bhante! It is amazing, bhante! How well this was stated by the Blessed One:
‘As to that end of the world, avuso,
where one is not born, does not age, does not die, does not pass away, does not arise—
it cannot be known, seen or reached by going, I say.’”

Reaching the world’s end

9 “However, avuso, *without having reached the world’s end*,²¹ *there is no making an end to suffering, I say.*

So, avuso, **in this very fathom-long body**,²² **along with its perception and mind**, I declare:

“strong bow” (*daḷha, dhanu*) takes the strength of 2000 (*dvi, saḥassa, thāmaṃ*); having fit the notch of an arrow with a metal tip of bronze, lead, etc, to the string, drawing the shaft back full length, it is released from the ground (AA 4:200,21-201,2). The plural *daḷha, dhammino* occurs at S 708b/1:185. K R Norman, in his tr (Tha:N) of Tha 1210 proposes that this form must have been borrowed from a dialect where *-nv-* > *-mm-* instead of *-nn-*. SED lists 2 Skt words meaning “having a strong bow,” *ḍṛḍha, dhanvan* and *ḍṛḍha, dhanvin*. See Tha:N 289 n1210. Clearly, their Pali cognates would be *daḷha, dhamma* and *daḷha, dhammī* respectively. See S:B 393 n181 & 411 n264.

¹⁶ **Rohitassa S** adds here “well-practised,” *kata, yoggo* (S 1:62,2 ≈ 99,10) (S 2.26), SD 7.2.

¹⁷ “Archer, trained ... master archer,” *dhanu-g, gaho sikkhito kata, hattho kata, yoggo* kat’upāsano*. *Kata, hattho*, lit, “done with the hand,” handy. [*“Well-practised,” only here: S 1:62,2 ≈ 99,10.] Comy: *dhanuggaho* is an archery teacher; *sikkhito* is one who has trained in archery with such a teacher for 10-12 years; *kata, hattho* is one skilled enough to split a hair-tip even from 1 *usabha* (about 200 ft) [S 56.45,7 n, SD 57.11]; *kat’upāsano* (Comy *kat’upāsāno*) is a seasoned archer who has exhibited his skills in kings’ courts, etc (SA 1:116,29-117,3; AA 3:87,14-20). This master-archer stock phrase recurs in **Dhanu-g, gaha S** (S 20.6,2/2:266), SD 52.8 (qv) & **(Lok’āyatika) Brāhmaṇā S** (A 9.38,4.1/4:428), SD 35.2; cf **Issattha S** (S 3.24,6.2), SD 44.18.

¹⁸ “Palmyra tree,” *tāla*, the fan palm, *Borassus flabelliformis*.

19 §5.2-6: *Tassa mayhaṃ bhante eva, rūpo javo ahosi seyyathā’pi nāma daḷha, dhammo dhanu-g, gaho sikkhito kata, hattho kat’upāsano lahukena asanena appa, kasirena tiriyaṃ tāla-c, chātim atipāteyya, eva, rūpo pada, vīti, hāro ahosi seyyathā’pi nāma puratthimā samuddā pacchimo samuddo*. These lines recur at **(Catukka) Rohitassa S 1** (S 4.45,5.2+6), SD 52.8a; **(Catukka) Rohitassa S 2** (A 4.46,5.2+6), SD 52.8b. The “archer’s qualities” stock is underlined.

²⁰ This is elaborated as a parable in **(Lok’āyatika) Brāhmaṇā S** (A 9.38,4/4:428), SD 35.2.

²¹ By “world” (*loka*) here the Buddha means the “world of formations” (*saṅkhāra, loka*), speaking on the level of “ultimate truth” (*param’attha, sacca*) in response to Rohitassa’s question based in reference to the “physical world” (*okāsa, loka*), ie, on the level of “conventional truth” (*sammuti, sacca*). On the 2 levels of language, see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9) @ SD 7.14 (4).

²² “In this very fathom-long body,” *imasmiñ-ñ-eva vyāma, matte kaḷevare*. The word *kaḷevare* is prob cognate with the English “cadaver.” The expression *vyāma, matta* has a Skt cognate, *vyāma, mātra*, which, according to Śata, patha Brahmaṇa 1.2.5.14 is the measure of the Vedic altar, with a man’s shape. It is not only the counterpart of sacrifice, but also the manifested counterpart of the Creator, Prajā, pati, “and his body is understood as being identical with the cosmos within which all changes take place. If we deny the existence of the Creator, these changes can occur only in a human being.” (Jurewicz 2000:79). Comy glosses these 4 statements as those of the 4 noble truths. Thus the Buddha shows: “I do not, avuso, make known these 4 truths in external things like grass and wood, but right here in this body composed of the 4 great elements.” (SA 1:117 f)

the world,
the arising of the world,
the ending of the world, and
the way leading to the ending of the world.”²³

[A 49]

- 10** *Gamanena na patabbo*
lokass’anto kudācanaṃ
na ca appatvā lok’antaṃ
dukkha atthi pamocanaṃ The world’s end can never be reached
by way of going [through the world],
and yet without reaching the world’s end
there is no release from suffering. 356
- 11** *Tasmā bhava loka, vidū sumedho*
lok’anta, gū vusita, brahmacariyā
lokassa antaṃ samitāvi ñātvā
n’āsimsati lokam imaṃ paraṃ ca Therefore, truly, the world-knower, the wise one,
gone to the world’s end, the holy life fulfilled,
having known the world’s end, he is at peace:
he longs not for this world or the next. 357

— evaṃ —

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²³ *Api khvāhaṃ āvuso imasmiṃ, ñeva vyāma, matte kaḷevare saññimhi samanake lokam ca paññāpemi loka, samu-
dayam ca loka, nirodham ca loka, nirodha, gāminim ca paṭipadan’ti*. See the long n ad loc at S:B 158 n182 (393 f)