

13

(Khandha) Anurādha Sutta

The (Khandha) Discourse to Anurādha | S 22.86

= (Avyākata) Anurādha Sutta The Anurādha Discourse (on the Undeclared) | S 44.2

Theme: The nature of the liberated saint

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Introduction

1 Neither 5th nor 9th alternatives

1.1 The (Khandha) Anurādha Sutta (S 22.86 = S 44.2) deals with the monk Anurādha’s uncertainty regarding the nature of a tathagata (here meaning an arhat) after death. He holds the view that the state of the liberated saint (*tathāgata*),¹ here meaning the arhat, is “apart” from the 4 logical premises of ancient Indian philosophy [§5], thinking that the Buddha would describe him “in some other way” (SA 2:286). In this way, he holds another wrong view, that of reifying an arhat after his death.

1.2 Early Buddhism rejects a “fifth” alternative, meaning that it also excludes the alternative, “not the rest.” The reason for this is important to understand: such a stand would be dependent on the notion of the four alternatives. The fifth alternative then is still a *conditioned* truth. As such, the Buddha finally leads Anurādha to the insight that even while still alive, an arhat cannot be identified with any of the 5 aggregates, or with anything outside of them, what more to say of his posthumous state [§21].

1.3 In fact, not only is there *no fifth* alternative, there is also *no “ninth”* alternative.² This *ninth alternative* is merely a conceptual construct—nothing more—deduced from negating all the four alternatives (which in effect is what the Buddha has done), and laying them out as a set of octads, that is, the 4 alternatives and their respective negations.³ We should not even say that the “ninth” or last alternative is “nirvana.” We would then be predicating what has transcended the 4 propositions, or trying to define a flame that has gone out. We can, of course, talk about it, even try to describe it (in metaphors, etc), but we cannot define anything into existence; the word is not the thing.⁴

2 Explanation of §21

2.1 When Anurādha declares his view to the outside sectarians in answer to their inquiry, they are not impressed and berate him. When Anurādha reports the incident to the Buddha, he gives an insightful answer, reflecting how we should respond to hostility toward the Buddha’s teaching and what the teaching itself is about. The key message is stated at the very end of the Sutta, when the Buddha declares:

“As before, Anurādha, and even so now, **I declare only suffering and the ending of suffering.**” [§21]

¹ On the translation of *tathāgata*, see **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72) @ SD 6.15 (3.2).

² See eg Graham Priest 2010:39 (§4.3).

³ See **Unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10 (6.1).

⁴ See **The notion of *ditṭhi***, SD 40a.1.

2.2 This terse teaching here is elaborated in **the Yamaka Sutta** (S 22.85), which precedes it in the Saṃyutta, thus:

Friends, form is	impermanent;	
what is impermanent is	suffering;	
what is suffering has ended and gone away.		
Feeling is	impermanent;	
what is impermanent is	suffering;	
what is suffering has ended and gone away.		
Perception is	impermanent;	
what is impermanent is	suffering;	
what is suffering has ended and gone away.		
Formations are	impermanent;	
what are impermanent are	suffering;	
what are suffering have ended and gone away.		
Consciousness is	impermanent;	
what is impermanent is	suffering;	
what is suffering has ended and gone away.		(S 22.85,37/3:112)

2.3 Commenting on the Buddha's terse statement above (in bold) [2.1; §21], **Bh Bodhi** says:

This oft-quoted dictum can be interpreted at two levels. At the more superficial level, the Buddha can be read as saying that he does not make any declaration about such metaphysical questions as an afterlife but teaches only a practical path for reaching the end of suffering here and now.

This interpretation, however, does not connect the dictum with the Buddha's previous statement that the Tathāgata is not apprehended in this very life. To make this connection we have to bring in the second interpretation, according to which the "Tathāgata" is a mere term of conventional usage referring to a compound of impermanent formations, which are "suffering" because they contain no permanent essence. It is just these that stand while the Tathāgata lives, and just these that cease with his passing away. The context in which the dictum occurs at [**the Alagaddūpama Sutta**, M 1:140,14-15] also supports this interpretation. (S:B 1080 n165)

2.4 The related **Alagaddūpama Sutta** (M 22) passages are as follows:

37 Saying thus, bhikshus, teaching thus, I have been baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly accused by some ascetics and brahmins thus, "A nihilist⁵ is the ascetic Gotama. He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing individual."⁶

As this is what I am not, as this is what I do not say, these good ascetics and brahmins have baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly accused thus, "A nihilist is the ascetic Gotama. He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing individual."

38 Bhikshus, **before⁷ and now, too, I only declare suffering and the ending of suffering.**⁸

⁵ Nihilist (*venayika*), which Comy glosses as *satta,vināsaka*, "destroyer of (the individuality of) a being."

⁶ This refers back to §20 where the eternalist misconstrues the Buddha's teaching on nirvana as the *annihilation* of an existing being that is the self.

⁷ Comy: That is, from as early as the first discourse given under the Bodhi tree (S 56.11/5:420-424, V 1:10-12).

⁸ *Pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhañ c'eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ.*

S 3.1.2.4.4 Samyutta Nikāya 3, Khandha Vagga 1, Khandha Saṃy 2, Majjhima Paṇṇāsaka 4, Thera Vg 4
S 4.10.1.2 Samyutta Nikāya 4, Saḷāyatana Vagga 10, Avyākata Samyutta 1, Avyākata Vagga 2

If others abuse, revile, scold and harass the Tathāgata for that,⁹ 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.

If others honour, respect, revere and venerate the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account thinks thus: “It is towards this [fivefold aggregate of mind-body]¹⁰ that was earlier fully comprehended that they perform such acts.”¹¹

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

If others honour, respect, revere and venerate you for that, on that account you should feel no delight, joy nor elation of the heart.

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.”
(M 22,37-39/1:140), SD 3.13

2.5 The statement at §21 of the Anurādha Sutta [2] and §38 of the Alagaddūpama Sutta [4]—the “one-teaching” statement—refer back to §37 [2]. 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 studied in conjunction with the **Kaccāna,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15),¹² where the Buddha says that one with right view, who has discarded all the doctrines of self, sees that whatever arises is only *dukkha* arising, and whatever ceases is only *dukkha* ceasing. (See M:ÑB 2001:1211 n267)

3 The (Khandha) Anurādha Sutta on the *tathāgata*

3.1 WHO IS A TATHAGATA?

3.1.1 The wanderers’ view of *tathāgata*

The (Khandha) Anurādha Sutta (S 22.86 = 44.2) opens with the monk Anurādha meeting a group of sectarian wanderers. They tell Anurādha that the post-mortem existence of **a *tathāgata***, “the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest” (*tathāgato uttama, puriso parama, puriso parama, pattipatto*) is proclaimed with reference to one of the 4 alternative positions [§4].

Anurādha responds by saying that the Tathāgata (the Buddha) describes a *tathagata* (an arhat), even in the post-mortem state as being “**apart** from these 4 grounds” [§5], meaning that the arhats (including the Buddha) have transcended all these 4 states or grounds (*cati ṭhāna*).

This reply vexes the wanderers who then revile Anurādha as being a foolish neophyte, who then decides to consult the Buddha. The rest of the Sutta records the Buddha affirming Anurādha’s teaching to the wanderers, with further teachings by the Buddha to clarify why the arhat has transcended the 4 states.

⁹ “For that,” ie, the teaching of the 4 noble truths. (Comy)

¹⁰ *Pañca-k, khandha*, ie, without the clinging (*upādāna*) (MA 2:118; see V 1:13 f).

¹¹ *Yaṃ kho idaṃ pubbe pariññataṃ tattha me eva, rūpā kārā karīyanti*. In simpler terms, they honour only the Buddha’s awakening.

¹² S 12.15/2:17 = 22.90/3:134 f (SD 6.13).

3.1.2 Sutta comments: The Buddha on the 4 postmortem states

3.1.2.1

The view held by some—that if the Buddha does not confirm any of the 4 alternatives proposed by Vaccha, gotta, this would mean that the post-mortem state of a *tathāgata* is such that it cannot be described in terms of any of them—is, in fact, contradicted by direct textual evidence. Of particular importance in this connection is **the (Khandha) Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86).

The Sutta opens with the monk Anurādha meeting some wanderers who inform him of the postmortem state of a *tathāgata*, “the highest person, the supreme person, the attainer of the highest” [§4], that they proclaim with reference to one of the 4 alternative positions [§4]. Anurādha then replies that the postmortem state of a *tathāgata* is such that it *cannot* be described with reference to any of the 4 alternatives, but “apart from these 4 grounds” [§5], without elaborating. The wanderers are annoyed and chide Anurādha and he departs.

3.1.2.2

Anurādha approaches the Buddha regarding the matter, that is, whether he has presented the right position reflecting what the Buddha teaches. The Buddha first reminds him of the nature of the 5 aggregates as being *impermanent, suffering, and nonself* [§§15-17]. Then the Buddha questions (Socratic style) Anurādha whether he regards a *tathāgata* (the Buddha or any arhat) to be [§§18 f]:

- abiding *as form* (such that his body and soul are the same),
- or as abiding *apart* from form (say, as an external soul inhabiting the body),
- or as abiding *in form* (like a soul within the body).

The same cycle of questions is then asked about *feeling, perception, formations* and *consciousness*.

Then, he asks Anurādha whether the *tathagata* is all the 5 aggregates taken together;

Or whether the *tathagata* is without any of these 5 aggregates. [§20]

The natural answers to all these questions are negative.

Here is the clincher (clear conclusion):

When we cannot “apprehend” (define) the *tathagata* (an arhat, including the Buddha) even while they live, how can we ever apprehend any of them after death?

Hence, declares the Buddha, he only teaches one thing” Suffering and its ending. [§21]

3.1.2.3

From the above teaching, it is clear then that it is equally incorrect, improper and untrue to describe the postmortem state of a *tathāgata* in terms of a position *besides* the 4 propositions. Whether the 4 predications “exhausts the universe of discourse,” and whether a fifth position is *not* logically possible, is not relevant at all here.

What is relevant is not the manner of the predication, but the object of the predication, that is, a *tathagata*, a liberated saint. The Buddha’s argument rests not on the inadequacy of the alternative predications, but on their illegitimacy. Hence, the addition of any other method of predication, whether it is logically possible or not, makes no difference. The point is that when the Buddha rejects the alternative position proposed by Anurādha, it is not on the grounds that a fifth position is logically impossible. Rather it is on the grounds that the term *tathāgata* can neither be identified with any of the 5 aggregates, nor can it be distinguished from them, but that in this very life itself a *tathāgata* is not comprehensible with or without reference to the 5 aggregates.

3.1.2.4

In summing up the correct position to Anurādha, the Buddha says that both formerly is as the final answer to the question why any predication on the postmortem state of the liberated saint is not legiti-

S 3.1.2.4.4 Saṃyutta Nikāya 3, Khandha Vagga 1, Khandha Saṃy 2, Majjhima Paṇṇāsaka 4, Thera Vg 4
S 4.10.1.2 Saṃyutta Nikāya 4, Saḷāyatana Vagga 10, Avyākata Saṃyutta 1, Avyākata Vagga 2

mate. From the Dharma perspective, if anything arises it is suffering, and if anything ceases it is also suffering [3.3.3.1]. And it is just suffering and its ending that the Buddha proclaims. Therefore what is extinguished when nirvana is attained is only suffering, not the annihilation of any independently existing self-entity.¹³

3.2 WHO OR WHAT REALLY IS A TATHAGATA?

Here are the key ideas of the Sutta, the summary of which follows:

- | | |
|---|---------|
| (1) Who or what really is a <i>tathagata</i> ? | [3.2] |
| (2) Self-identity view is the root of the notion of the 4 grounds of being. | [3.3.1] |
| (3) An arhat, even postmortem, transcends the 4 grounds of being. | [3.3.2] |
| (4) The Buddha teaches “only suffering and the ending of suffering.” | [3.3.3] |

3.2.1 Fire and fuel of rebirth

3.2.1.1

The Kutūhala Sālā Sutta (S 44.9) (where Vaccha,gotta is the interlocutor) describes how each of the 6 sectarian teachers—Pūrana Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, Sañjaya Balaṭṭhi,putta, Pakudha Kaccāyana and Ajita Kesa,kambala —claiming that their “disciple who is the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest” (*sāvako uttama,puriso parama,puriso parama,pattipatto*) has attained such and such a rebirth (that is, some high divine birth).¹⁴

The implication here is that each of these teachers claims to have some kind of special knowledge to know the rebirths of their followers. Further, it implies that their followers, keeping to their teachings, having attained the “highest good” in their respective teachings, are destined to such high rebirths.

3.2.1.2

When the Buddha is asked about such claims, using **the parable of fire and fuel**, he explains that just as “fire burns with fuel, not without fuel, ... I declare that there is rebirth for one with *fuel* [with clinging],¹⁵ not for one without fuel.” The meaning of this passage is that one who is reborn is still fed by “fuel” (that is, *karma*): that person has not attained supreme freedom of mind.

Furthermore, the Buddha agrees with his interlocutor, Vaccha,gotta, that “when a flame is tossed by the wind and goes a long way, I declare that it is fueled by the wind [the air]. For, Vaccha, at that time, the wind [the air] is the fuel.”¹⁶ This means that such a rebirth (mentioned in the preceding paragraph) is the result of craving. In other words, those “supreme” disciples of the 6 sectarian teachers have not yet attained supreme freedom of mind.

¹³ See also Y Karunadasa, “The Unanswered Questions, Why were they unanswered? A re-examination of the textual data,” *Pacific World*, 3rd Series 9 2007:3-31.

¹⁴ S 44.9,4-9/3:398 f (SD 23.15).

¹⁵ This sentence is essentially the same as Sn 1074: *accī yathā vāta,vegena khitto | attham paleti, na upeti saṅkham* (Sn 1074), “Just as a flame tossed about by the force of the wind ... goes out and no longer counts (as a flame),” (Norman, 1992:120) a teaching the Buddha gives to Upasīva.

¹⁶ S 44.9,12.2-14/3:399 (SD 23.15).

3.2.2 The *tathāgata*

3.2.2.1

The Kutūhala Sāla Sutta (S 44.9) mentions the phrase, “disciple who is the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest” (*sāvako uttama, puriso parama, puriso parama, pattipatto*) [3.2.1.1] to describe the followers of the 6 sectarian teachers. This same phrase “the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest” [3.2.1.1] is found 4 times in **the (Khandha) Anurādhā Sutta** [§4, 5, 10, 11], except with *tathāgato* instead of *sāvako*. In other words, the phrase is now used to describe the arhat (including the Buddha), that is, an arhat is one “thus gone” (*tathā gata*):¹⁷ there’s nothing more we to it: a fire that has gone out.

In Buddhism, then, the phrase refers to an arhat, a term that includes the Buddha.¹⁸ An arhat is one who has attained the supreme state, nirvana, on account of having uprooted all craving, which means that an arhat is not reborn any more. He is fully freed.

3.2.2.2

Now we have a vital clue in the passage on the 4 postmortem states of a *tathagata* (the short list) found respectively in **the (Khandha) Anurādhā Sutta** (S 22.86,10) and in **the Aggi Vaccha, gotta Sutta** (M 72,9-12). **The M 72** passage describes the *tathagata* as “the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest”; this means that the same expression applies to the *tathagata* in **the S 22.86** passage, even though he is not mentioned there.

Although the sectarian wanderers also use the same expression—“the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest”—in the Buddhist usage (in the Suttas mentioned), this expression refers to the arhat (including the Buddha). This is affirmed by the usage of the term “the monk whose mind is freed” (*vimutta, citta bhikkhu*) in **the Vaccha Sutta** (M 72,16-18), a term which also applies to the *tathagata*.

Rule of thumb: While in the last 4 of 10 questions of **M 72** (the long list), *tathagata* means “a living person or abiding being,” in the 4 postmortem states, *tathagata* refers to the one “whose mind is freed,” that is, the arhat. Also note that there is actually a 3rd sense of *tathagata*, as used by the wanderers themselves, that is, *tathagata* as meaning “teacher” (that is, any of the 6 sectarian teachers) [§4]. However, this is merely a curiosity that need not detain us.

3.3 THE BUDDHA’S TEACHING TO ANURĀDHĀ

3.3.1 Avoiding self-views

3.3.1.1

When Anurādhā goes to the Buddha to ask about the 4 postmortem states of a *tathagata*, the Buddha first reminds Anurādhā of the nature of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness) as being *impermanent, suffering, and nonself*. Such being the case, form should, with right wisdom, be regarded thus: “**This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.**” The same applies to each of the other 4 aggregates. [§§15-17]

¹⁷ DA 1:67; MA 1:51; UA 131, 152; ItA 1:118, 136; BA 15; NmA 1:183; NcA 55; PmA 1:212; VbA 397. See SD 15.7 (2.4 (2)). On usages of *tathāgata*, see SD 15.7 (2.3).

¹⁸ This understanding may not work for those who view that an arhat is “inferior” to the Buddha, that the Bodhi-sattva is the “supreme ideal,” and so on.

S 3.1.2.4.4 Samyutta Nikāya 3, Khandha Vagga 1, Khandha Saṃy 2, Majjhima Paṇṇāsaka 4, Thera Vg 4
S 4.10.1.2 Samyutta Nikāya 4, Saḷāyatana Vagga 10, Avyākata Samyutta 1, Avyākata Vagga 2

This passage on the 5 aggregates climaxes with the important line: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” This is how we should see the 5 aggregates; this is *how* the *tathagata* regards the 5 aggregates. It is this clear vision of nonself that makes the *tathagata* what he is: one with a freed mind.

The lesson here is that all views arise from **self-identity view** (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), the very first of the 10 fetters that hinder our progress from reaching the path. The view that there is an abiding self or soul is rooted in the false view of eternalism (*sassata,diṭṭhi*). This leads us on to regard our body as being impermanent but our “self” or “soul” as being *eternal* (created by God; a spark of the cosmic Soul, and so on); and upon dying we arise in an eternal heaven, go back to the Cosmic Soul, and so on.

It is eternalism (*sassata,vādā*) and annihilationism (*uccheda,vādā*) that believe in such a self-entity. While the **eternalists** proclaim the eternal existence of the self-entity, *uccheda,vādā* proclaims its complete annihilation at death. Buddhism does not recognize such an independently existing self-entity either to be annihilated or to be perpetuated into eternity. In this case, believers of eternal life may claim that they will “arise” in their heaven; non-believers will *not* arise there. Some of them will both “arise and not arise” in the sense that they may not arise in heaven, but some kind of purgatory, and then ascend to heaven.

Then, there are **materialists**, the most common type of annihilationists: they believe that when our body dies, our mind (which is our self or soul) will also be exterminated, that is, not arise. Some of them who are more philosophical, may refine or complicate the belief by claiming that we will neither arise nor not arise. These may be interesting beliefs, but they remain just that: beliefs and views.

3.3.1.2

Such views are at best “**private views**” (*pacceka sacca*), especially since they are rooted in self-view: *this is what “I” think, this is “my” body, the most important person is “me”!* **The Pasūra Sutta** (Sn 4.8) famously opens with this verse:

<i>idh’eva suddhi iti vādayanti¹⁹</i>	Here alone is purity! They say.
<i>nāññesu dhammesu visuddhim āhu</i>	There’s no purification in other truths.
<i>yam nissitā tattha subhaṃ vadānā</i>	Saying that good is there in what they depend on,
<i>pacceka,saccesu puthū niviṭṭhā²⁰</i>	many are stuck in their private truths. (Sn 824)

The term “private truths” is another occasion of the Buddha’s subtle humour, illustrated by perhaps one of the best known parables in religious history: that of **the blind men and the elephant** (U 54). These men, born blind, each touches a different part of the elephant and each says, respectively: it’s a water-pot, a winnowing-tray, a wooden peg, a plough-beam, a store-house, a mortar, a pillar, a pestle, and a broom. They each claimed their personal view to be the right one, and came to blows with one another, to the amusement of the king who had assembled them.²¹

This parable, on account of the blind men, each knowing only a part of the whole elephant, has influenced some translators, teachers and scholars to understand *pacceka,sacca* as referring to some kind of “partial truth” or one of “several truths.” However, there is no reference to confirm such an interpretation. On the other hand, we have in **the Cūḷa,Viyūha Suttas** (Sn 4.12) this well know verse:

¹⁹ Be Se so; Ce *vidiyanti*; Ee *vādiyanti*.

²⁰ Past part of *nivisati*, “is intent on, convinced, insists on.”

²¹ **Nānā Titthiyā S 1** (U 54,14-19/6.4/68), SD 40.14.

*Ekaṃ hi saccaṃ na dutīyam atthi
yasmim̐ pajā no vivade pajānaṃ
nānā te²² saccāni sayam̐ thunanti
tasmā na ekaṃ samaṇā vadanti*

There is only one truth; there is no second,
over which the knowing folk would dispute.
Recluses themselves proclaim their own truths;
they speak thus not as one. (Sn 884)

“Only one truth” does not mean that it belongs to a particular system or religion or person. Rather, it means there is thus universal truth which applies to everyone, working on all as one. Such a truth is a natural one—it can be seen by everyone for oneself with an open mind—that is, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and nonself. The third and last characteristic is especially interesting: it is the opposite of “self,” that is, a self-centred view or a view based on some kind of abiding self. This is against the natural “one” truth that is both universal and liberating to know and understand.

3.3.1.3

In the last section on reflecting on **the 5 aggregates**, the Buddha then explains to Anurādha that the *tathagata* is neither found in *any* of the 5 aggregates nor *apart* from the 5 aggregates. Simply, this means that there is no abiding self in any of the aggregates (or all of them taken together) nor in anything *apart* from the aggregates, that is, other than the aggregates.

Thus what the Buddha teaches Anurādha clearly shows that it is equally inadmissible to describe the after-death state of a *tathāgata* in terms of a position besides the 4 propositions. Hence, it does not matter—it is irrelevant—whether the 4 propositions or predications “exhausts the universe of discourse” (or not), or whether a 5th position is not logically possible. The Buddha is not making some theoretical propositions, but simply stating the real state of “one whose mind is freed.”

What is relevant here is not the *manner* of the predication, but the object of the predication, that is, a *tathagata*, that is, a liberated saint. The Buddhist argument rests not on the inadequacy of the alternative predications, but on their illegitimacy. The addition of any other method of predication, whether logically possible or not, makes no difference.

The point is that when the Buddha rejects the alternative position proposed by Anurādha it is not on the grounds that a 5th position is logically impossible. Rather it is on the grounds that the appellation *tathāgata* can neither be identified *with* any of the 5 aggregates, nor can it be distinguished *apart from* them. In this very life itself a *tathāgata* is not comprehensible with or without reference to the 5 aggregates!

3.3.2 Nothing “apart” from the 4 states

3.3.2.1 The wanderers are vexed with Anurādha because his answer basically rejects their beliefs, that the 4 postmortem states are wrong. There is here a humorous irony: Anurādha is actually wrong in saying that the Buddha teaches what is apart (*aññatra*) from the 4 postmortem states of the wanderers. As a point of fact, since the dead sectarian followers have not freed their minds (a fair assumption we must make from the drift of the Sutta), *they are surely reborn*, that is, they will arise again. Anurādha could have acknowledged this. Or, they may each hold their own belief [3.3.1.1].

To claim that the Buddha describes a dead saint as being “apart from these 4 grounds” means that there is possibly a 5th ground (at least). This is, of course, wrong, since the Buddha does not hold this idea at all. Such a view is also self-contradictory since the Buddha states that the 4 states do not apply in the case of the saint with a freed mind.

²² Be Se *nānā te*; Be:Ka *nānāto*;

S 3.1.2.4.4 Samyutta Nikāya 3, Khandha Vagga 1, Khandha Saṃy 2, Majjhima Paṇṇāsaka 4, Thera Vg 4
S 4.10.1.2 Samyutta Nikāya 4, Saḷāyatana Vagga 10, Avyākata Samyutta 1, Avyākata Vagga 2

3.3.2.2

In summing up the correct teachings to Anurādha, the Buddha states that as before and even so now, **“I declare only suffering and suffering’s ending!”** [§21.2]. “Suffering” (*dukkha*) is a synecdoche for the 3 universal characteristics. The Buddha’s teaching, then, is to see the world of formations as it is—subject to *impermanence, suffering and nonself*—seeing and accepting this reality frees us from the limitations of the world. This statement may be taken as the final answer to the question why any predication on the postmortem state of the liberated saint is not legitimate.

3.3.3 The Buddha teaches only suffering and its ending

3.3.3.1

From the Buddhist perspective, if anything arises it is *suffering*, and if anything ceases it is also *suffering*, as stated in **the Vajirā Sutta** (S 555):

*dukkham eva hi sambhoti
dukkham tiṭṭhati veti ca
nāññatra dukkha sambhoti
nāññam dukkha nirujjhatī ti*

Only suffering comes to be,
and suffering remains and falls away.
None other than suffering comes to be,
none other but suffering passes away.

(S 555/5.10/1:135), SD 102.12

It is only suffering and its cessation that the Buddha proclaims. Therefore, what is extinguished when nirvana is won is only suffering. It is not the annihilation of an independently existing self-entity; for there is none. Individual existence is only a mass of suffering (*dukkha, khandha*). “Suffering” refers to the cycle of change, alteration, adapting, evolution, becoming, but the process goes on without end. Life is change; change is suffering; what suffers is nonself. What arises in the end, when all views have been abandoned, and the mind is freed, is **nirvana**.

3.3.3.2

Self-identify view is the root of all views, when we awaken to true reality, we see that self-entity is only a false notion, the ego-illusion and all that it entails and implies. It is in this context that we should understand when the Buddha declares in **the Alaggadūpama Sutta** (M 22):

“I have been baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly accused by some recluses and brahmins thus, ‘The recluse Gotama is one who leads astray. He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing individual.’

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

Before, bhikshus, and now, too, **I declare only suffering and the ending of suffering**.²³

— — —

²³ M 22,38/1:140 (SD 3.13). This should be reflected on in conjunction with **Kaccāna, gotta S** (S 12.15/2:17), SD 6.13. See also **Mahā Hatthi, padopama S** (M 28,8/1:185 f), SD 6.16; (**Khandha**) **Channa S** (S 22.90/3:134 f), SD 56.5.

(Khandha) Anurādha Sutta

The (Khandha) Discourse to Anurādha

S 22.86 = S 44.2

Wanderers rebuke Anurādha

1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the hall of the Gabled House²⁴ in Mahāvana [the Great Wood].

2 On one occasion, the venerable Anurādha was dwelling in a forest hut not far from the Blessed One.

3 Then some wanderers of other sects approached the venerable Anurādha. Having approached the venerable Anurādha, they exchanged greetings with him. When they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, they sat down at one side.

4 Seated thus at one side, the wanderers of other sects said this to the venerable Anurādha:

“Avuso Anurādha, when **the Tathagata**²⁵—the highest person, the supreme person, the attainer of the highest²⁶—is describing that tathagata,²⁷ he describes him in terms of **these 4 grounds**, that is,

a tathagata	exists	after death, or
a tathagata	does not exist	after death, or
a tathagata	both exists and does not exist	after death, or
a tathagata	neither exists nor does not exist	after death.”

5 When this was said, the venerable Anurādha said to those wanderers:

“Avuso, when the Tathagata [the Buddha]—*the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest*—is describing that tathagata (the arhat), he describes him **apart** from these 4 grounds,²⁸ that is,²⁹

²⁴ “The Hall of the Gabled House,” *kūṭāgāra,sālā*. This is a hall in the Great Forest (*Mahāvana*), outside Vesālī. See DPPN: *kūṭāgārasālā*.

²⁵ Comy explains *tathāgata* here as “your teacher” (ie the Buddha), but regarding him as a “being” (*taṃ tathāgato ti tumhākaṃ satthā tathāgato taṃ sattaṃ tathāgataṃ* (SA 2:312). On *tathāgata* as “a sentient being” (*satta*), see related comys: **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,2.27/1:27,24 f; DA 118.1) ≠ **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63,2/1:426,14; MA 3:141,23), **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72,9-14/1:484-486; MA 3:199,2) ≈ **Khemā S** (S 44.1/4:376,26 f; SA 3:113,18); **Yamaka S** (S 22.85/3:111,14+112,6; SA 2:311,1), **Nānā Titthiyā S 1** (U 6.4/67,14; UA 340,6 (Ce Ee) 340; UA:Be *satto*; UA:Se *sattā*) ≠ Nm 64,20 (NmA 1:193,24). Cf **Anurādha S** (S 22.86,4/3:116), SD 21.13, where Comy explains *tathāgata* there as “your teacher” (ie the Buddha), but regarding him as a “being” (*taṃ tathāgato ti tumhākaṃ satthā tathāgato taṃ sattaṃ tathāgataṃ* (SA 2:312). See also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63) @ SD 5.8 (3) & **Aggi Vaccha,-gotta S** (M 72) @ SD 6.15 (3.2). See above Intro (3).

²⁶ *Tathāgato uttama, puriso parama, puriso parama, pattipatto*, also at **Kutūhala,sālā S** (S 44.9/4:398 f @ SD 23.-15), where the same claim is made by outside teachers. For Buddhists, this statement means that the Buddha is not a “being” (*satta*) as we know it, but a type of its own, as it were. In (**Pāda**) **Doṇa S** (A 4.36), the Buddha declares to Doṇa that he (the Buddha) is one of a kind, or is totally new kind of “person” (A 4.36/2:37-39), SD 36.13.

²⁷ Here, the term *tathāgata* means a being, esp one who is regarded as a saint after death: see SD 40a.11 (2).

²⁸ **Aññatra imehi catūhi ṭhānehi**. Comy: It is said that he (Anurādha) thought, “They contradict the teaching, and are hostile to it. The Teacher would not describe (the tathagata) according to what they say. He would describe him in some other way.” (SA 2:286)

²⁹ *Yo so āvuso tathāgato uttama, puriso parama, puriso parama, pattipatto taṃ tathāgato aññatra imehi catūhi ṭhānehi paññāpayamāno paññāpeti*. This whole sentence as at **Yamaka S** (S 22.85,34/3:112,5), SD 21.12.

S 3.1.2.4.4 Saṃyutta Nikāya 3, Khandha Vagga 1, Khandha Saṃy 2, Majjhima Paṇṇāsaka 4, Thera Vg 4
 S 4.10.1.2 Saṃyutta Nikāya 4, Saḷāyatana Vagga 10, Avyākata Saṃyutta 1, Avyākata Vagga 2

<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>exists</i>	<i>after death, or</i>
<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>does not exist</i>	<i>after death, or</i>
<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>both exists and does not exist</i>	<i>after death, or</i>
<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>neither exists nor does not exist</i>	<i>after death."</i>

6 When this was said, those wanderers of other sects said this to the venerable Anurādha:

"This monk must be a newly ordained, not long gone forth; or, if he is an elder, he must be an inexperienced fool!"³⁰

7 Then, the wanderers of other sects, having rebuked the venerable Anurādha with the word 'newly ordained,' and with the word 'fool,' rose from their seats and departed. [117]

8 Then, not long after those wanderers of other sects had left, the venerable Anurādha thought:

"If those were to question me further, how should I answer if I am to explain what has been said by the Blessed One without misrepresenting him with what is contrary to fact, but would explain the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, so that no colleague in the Dharma, following what has been said, would find ground for censure?"³¹

Anurādha approaches the Blessed One

9 Then the venerable Anurādha approached the Blessed One. Having approached the Blessed One and saluted him, he sat down at one side.

10 Seated thus at one side, the venerable Anurādha said this to the Blessed One:

"Here I am, Bhante, dwelling here in a forest hut not far from the Blessed One. Then some wanderers of other sects approached me. Having approached me, we exchanged greetings. When we had concluded our greetings and cordial talk, they sat down at one side.

10.2 Seated thus at one side, the wanderers of other sects said this to me:

'Avuso Anurādha, when the Tathagata—the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest—is describing that tathagata, he describes him in terms of these 4 grounds, that is,

<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>exists</i>	<i>after death, or</i>
<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>does not exist</i>	<i>after death, or</i>
<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>both exists and does not exist</i>	<i>after death, or</i>
<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>neither exists nor does not exist</i>	<i>after death.'</i>

11 When this was said, I said to those wanderers:

'Avuso, when the tathagata—the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest—is describing that tathagata, he describes him apart from these 4 grounds, that is,

<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>exists</i>	<i>after death, or</i>
<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>does not exist</i>	<i>after death, or</i>
<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>both exists and does not exist</i>	<i>after death, or</i>
<i>a tathagata</i>	<i>neither exists nor does not exist</i>	<i>after death.'</i>

³⁰ So *cāyaṃ bhikkhu navo bhavissati acira, pabbajito, thero vā pana bālo avyatto ti*. "Newly ordained" (*bhikkhu nava*, *usu navaka bhikkhu*), ie, a monk of 5 rains or less. An elder (*thera*) is a monk of at least 10 rains.

³¹ *Dhammassa cānudhammaṃ vyākareyyaṃ na ca koci sahadhammiko vādānupāto gārayhaṃ ṭhānaṃ āgaccheyyā ti*. This stock: D 13/1:482, 483; S 2:33, 36, 38 (x2), 41, 3:8, 117, 118 = 4:381×2. Cf *saha, dhammikā vādānupātā garayhā ṭhānā āgacchanti* (A 2:31 ×2, 3:4 ×2). See SD 46.2 (2).

12 When this was said, those wanderers of other sects said this to me:

'This monk must be a newly ordained, not long gone forth; or, if he is an elder, he must be an, inexperienced fool!'

13 Then the wanderers of other sects, having rebuked me with the word 'newly ordained,' and with the word 'fool,' rose from their seats and departed. [118]

14 Then, not long after those wanderers of other sects had left, I thought:

'If those were to question me further, how should I answer if I am to explain what has been said by the Blessed One without misrepresenting him with what is contrary to fact, but would explain the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, so that no colleague in the Dharma, following what has been said, would find ground for censure?'

The 3 characteristics³²

15 "What do you think, Anurādhā, is **form** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"³³

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?"³⁴

"No, bhante."

15.2 "Now, what do you think, Anurādhā, is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?"

"No, bhante."

15.3 "Now, what do you think, Anurādhā, is **perception** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?"

"No, bhante."

15.4 "Now, what do you think, Anurādhā, are **formations** permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?"

"Unsatisfactory, bhante."

"Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?"

"No, bhante."

³² §§15-18 are stock = **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59, 12-22/3: 67 f), SD 1.2.

³³ *Dukkham vā sukham vā*, lit "suffering or happiness?"

³⁴ The notion "This is mine" arises through craving (*taṇhā*); the notion "This I am" arises through conceit (*māna*); the notion "This is my self" arises through views (*ditṭhi*). See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f.

S 3.1.2.4.4 Saṃyutta Nikāya 3, Khandha Vagga 1, Khandha Saṃy 2, Majjhima Paṇṇāsaka 4, Thera Vg 4
S 4.10.1.2 Saṃyutta Nikāya 4, Saḷāyatana Vagga 10, Avyākata Saṃyutta 1, Avyākata Vagga 2

15.5 “Now, what do you think, Anurādha, is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”

“Unsatisfactory, bhante.”

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

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

“No, bhante.”

Universality of non-self

16 “Therefore, Anurādha, any kind of **form** whatsoever, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near³⁵— 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.’³⁶

16.2 Therefore, Anurādha, 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.’

16.3 Therefore, Anurādha, 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.’

16.4 Therefore, Anurādha, 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.’

³⁵ See S 22.48/3:47. This classification of the aggregates is explained in detail in the Vibhaṅga and briefly in the 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); “**inferior**” = unpleasant and unacceptable sense-experiences [sense-world existence]; “**superior**” = pleasant and acceptable sense-experiences [form & formless existences]; “**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).

³⁶ *N’etaṃ mama, n’eso ’ham asmi, na mēso attā ti*. This threefold formula is the contrary of “the 3 grasplings” (*ti, vidha gāha*), that is, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) (MA 2:111, 225): here applied to the 5 aggregates [17-21]. A brief version, “There can be no considering that (element) as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’” (*ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā*) is found in **Mahā Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28/1:184-191 §§6b-7, 11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22). These three considerations represent respectively the 3 kinds of **mental proliferation** (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*) and of conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f). In **Anatta, lakkhāṇa S** (S 22.59, 12-16/3:68), the formula is applied to the 5 aggregates & in **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/3:94-99) to the 4 primary elements. See also **Rāhula S** (A 4.177/2:164 f). See **Pārileyya S**, SD 6.16 (5).

16.5 Therefore, Anurādhā, 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.’

Revulsion & liberation

17 Seeing thus, Anurādhā, the learned noble disciple is
 revulsed [disenchanted] with form,
 revulsed with feeling,
 revulsed with perception,
 revulsed with formations,
 revulsed with consciousness.

17.2 Through revulsion, he becomes dispassionate.
 Through dispassion, his mind is freed.
 When it is freed, there arises the knowledge: ‘Freed!’³⁷

He understands:

‘Destroyed is birth.
 The holy life has been lived.
 What needs to be done has been done.
 There is no more of this state of being.’

The nature of the tathagata

18 What do you think, Anurādhā,
 do you regard a tathagata (*tathāgata*) as form?”
 “No, bhante.”
 “Do you regard a tathagata as feeling?”
 “No, bhante.”
 “Do you regard a tathagata as perception?”
 “No, bhante.”
 “Do you regard a tathagata as formations?”
 “No, bhante.”
 “Do you regard a tathagata as consciousness?”
 “No, bhante.”

19 What do you think, Anurādhā,
 do you regard a tathagata as *in* form?”
 “No, bhante.”
 “Do you regard a tathagata as *apart* from form?”
 “No, bhante.”
 “Do you regard a tathagata as *in* feeling?”
 “No, bhante.”
 “Do you regard a tathagata as *apart* from feeling?”
 “No, bhante.”

³⁷ *Vimuttisīm vimuttam iti ñāṇam hoti*, or “When freed, there is the knowledge, it (the mind) is freed.” Note that the self is not addressed here.

“Do you regard a tathagata as *in* perception?”

“No, bhante.”

“Do you regard a tathagata as *apart* from perception?”

“No, bhante.”

“Do you regard a tathagata as *in* formations?”

“No, bhante.”

“Do you regard a tathagata as *apart* from formations?”

“No, bhante.”

“Do you regard a tathagata as *in* consciousness?”

“No, bhante.”

“Do you regard a tathagata as *apart* from consciousness?”

“No, bhante.”

20 ³⁸“What do you think, Anurādha, do you regard form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness (taken *together*) as a tathagata?”

“No, bhante.”

20.2 “What do you think, Anurādha, do you regard a tathagata as one who is *without* form, *without* feeling, *without* perception, *without* formations, *without* consciousness?”³⁹

“No, bhante.”

The ineffable nature of true reality

21 “But, Anurādha, when a tathagata [a being]⁴⁰ is not being apprehended by you as true and real⁴¹ here in this very life, is it fitting for you to declare:⁴²

‘Avuso, when a tathagata—the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest— is describing that tathagata, he describes him *apart* from these 4 **[119]** grounds, that is,⁴³

a tathagata exists after death, or

a tathagata does not exist after death, or

a tathagata both exists and does not exist after death, or

a tathagata neither exists nor does not exist after death.’?”

“No, bhante.”

21.2 “Good, Anurādha, good! As before, Anurādha, and even so now,

I declare only suffering and the ending of suffering!”⁴⁴

³⁸ *Taṃ kiṃ maññasi anurādha rūpaṃ vedanā saññā saṅkhārā viññāṇaṃ tathāgato ti samanupassasī ti.* This difficult para is omitted from PTS ed. Be placed hiatus dots after each of the aggregate. Ce reads this para just as §18.

³⁹ Here, the negation itself is negated; for, a negated statement is dependent or defined by what it negates. An awakened being is neither dependent nor defined by anything: he is simply immeasurable and beyond reckoning.

⁴⁰ On *tathāgata* as “being” (*satta*), see §4 n.

⁴¹ “As true and real,” *saccato thetato*; 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); **Titth’āyatana S** (A 3.61,2-4/1:174 f ×3); Vbh 376 f (×4), 382 (×6); Pug 3.17/38 (×12); Kvu 67 f (×13). Vbh:T tr *saccato thetato* as “firmly as truth” (Vbh:T 487).

⁴² *Ettha ca te anurādha diṭṭh’ev’dhamme saccato thetato tathāgato anupalabbhiyamāno, kallaṃ nu te taṃ veyyākaraṇaṃ.*

⁴³ *Yo so āvuso tathāgato uttama, puriso parama, puriso parama, pattipatto taṃ tathāgato aññatra imehi catūhi ṭhānehi paññāpayamāno paññāpeti.*

⁴⁴ *Sādhū sādhū anurādha pubbe cāhaṃ anurādha etaraha ca | dukkhañ c’eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhan’ti.* This last remark is explained in **Yamaka S** (S 22.85,37/3:112), SD 21.12. See Intro (2) & SD 53.40 (2.1.1).

— evaṃ —

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