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Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta

The Fire Discourse to Vaccha,gotta | M 72
Theme: Nirvana and the problem of language
Translated by Piya Tan ©2003, 2023

1 The wanderer Vaccha,gotta

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The Sutta opens with the wanderer Vaccha,gotta asking the Buddha about the 10 points, but to every point, the Buddha replies that he does *not* hold such a view [§§1-12]. When Vaccha,gotta asks the Buddha why he has no view at all on any of them [§13], he replies that every one of them is a speculation (*diṭṭhi,gata*) that is

a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views, a fetter of views; attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever; not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering], nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana. [§14]

When asked by Vaccha,gotta what views he holds then, the Buddha replies that he has given up all speculations. All that he has seen is the 5 aggregates, their *arising*, and their *ending* [§15]. When asked where a liberated monk (mentioned earlier by the Buddha) goes to, the Buddha famously declares that *none* of the 4 alternatives—“arises,” “does not arise,” “both arises and does not arise,” and “neither arises nor does not arise”—applies to it [§16].

When Vaccha,gotta has difficulty understanding this [§§17-18], the Buddha consoles him and makes use of two parables. The first is the parable of fire [4]: when a fire goes out, it does not go anywhere [§19], none of the four quarters apply. The second, the parable of the ocean, shows that the state of a tathagata or freed saint is “unfathomable” like the great ocean (at least as an ocean was perceived then), so that none of the 4 alternatives (of truth and being) applies to him [§20].

The third and last parable, that of the great sal tree [§21], is given by Vaccha,gotta himself. It shows that the Buddha’s teaching goes right to the heart of things, like the heartwood of the tree.¹ This is Vaccha,gotta’s lion-roar. Finally convinced by the Buddha’s teaching, and inspired, he goes for refuge [§22].

1.2 RELATED TEXTS

1.2.1 The Thera,gāthā Commentary (ThaA 1:235 f) says that Vaccha,gotta, whose personal name is unknown, comes from a rich brahmin family of the Vaccha (Skt *vatsa*) clan (*vaccha,gotta*). After becoming an expert in brahmanical learning, he fails to find the answer he was seeking, and becomes a wanderer (*paribbājaka*), and later turns to the Buddha’s teaching. One of his earliest, perhaps his first, meeting with the Buddha is recorded in **the (Dāna) Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (A 3.57), when he politely asks the Buddha to clarify on the matter of giving.²

1.2.2 The Majjhima Nikāya contains three Vaccha,gotta Suttas arranged in a chronological order recounting the spiritual development of Vaccha,gotta:

¹ A more elaborate use of this parable is that by the Buddha himself in **Udumbarikā Sīhā,nāda S** (D 25,15-19/-3:48-51), SD 1.4.

² A 3.57/1:160-162 (SD 22.12).

- (1) **(Vaccha,gotta) Ānanda Sutta** (S 44.10/4:401 f), also known as **the Atth'attā Sutta** (S 44.10), when Vaccha,gotta asks the Buddha the 10 questions, the Buddha remains silent. Vaccha,gotta leaves. The Buddha explains his silence to Ānanda. (SD 2.16(5))
- (2) **Tevijja Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 71/1:481-483), the Discourse on the Three Knowledges to Vaccha,-gotta, also called the Cūḷa Vaccha,gotta Sutta (the Lesser Discourse to Vaccha,gotta), where the Buddha denies that he is omniscient (that is, knowing everything all the time) and defines the three-fold knowledge he possesses. (SD 33.3)
- (3) **Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 72/1:483-489), the Fire Discourse to Vaccha,gotta, where the Buddha explains that he has no speculative views and employs the famous “extinguished fire” parable to illustrate that it is possible to go beyond the four logical alternatives (*koṭṭi*); Vaccha,gotta himself, on taking refuge, gives his own version of the tree parable. (SD 6.15)
- (4) **Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 73/1:489-497), the Greater Discourse to Vaccha,gotta, recounts his final conversion, going forth and attainment of arhathood [3.2.3.5]. (SD 27.4)

The Saṃyutta Nikāya contains a whole section—the **Vaccha,gotta Saṃyutta** (S 33)—comprising of 55 short discussions or sutta-cycles of Buddha’s teaching to Vaccha,gotta,³ all dealing with various reasons for one’s subscribing to any of the 10 points.

1.2.3 The Avyākata Saṃyutta (S 44) contains 5 suttas (S 44.7-11) where Vaccha,gottas the interlocutor. In the **(Vaccha,gotta) Moggallāna Sutta** (S 44.7/4:391-395), Vaccha,gotta questions Moggallāna about the 10 points [2-12] and Moggallāna answers in terms of the nonself of the 5 aggregates. In the following **(Avyākata) Vaccha,gotta Sutta**, Vaccha,gotta again asks the Buddha the same question (evidently before the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta) (S 44.8).

This first half of this sutta is evidently identical with the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta. In the second half of the Sutta, Vaccha,gotta approaches Moggallāna with the same question and receives an identical answer. Vaccha,gotta is amazed:

It is wonderful, Master Moggallāna! It is marvellous, Master Moggallāna! How both teacher and disciple agree meaning for meaning, phrase for phrase; they do not diverge, that is, concerning the highest state.⁴

(S 44.8,30/4:397)

Apparently, this Sutta records the events immediately following and connected to those recorded in the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta. In terms of narrative sequence, there are two possibilities: (1) Vaccha,gotta, after questioning Moggallāna and rejoicing in his answer, returns to the Buddha and takes refuge [9-10] (in other words, the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta omits this episode); or (2) after taking refuge in the Buddha [9-10], Vaccha,gotta meets Moggallāna and questions him.

1.2.4 In the Kutūhala,sāla Sutta (S 44.9),⁵ he asks the Buddha regarding rebirth, and in his answer, the Buddha makes the famous statement on the intermediate state:⁶ “Vaccha, when a being has laid down this body, but is not yet reborn into another body, it is fuelled by craving, I say.” In **the Atth'attā Sutta**, also known as the (Vaccha,gotta) Ānanda Sutta (S 44.10/4:401 f), when Vaccha,gotta asks the Buddha the 10 questions, the Buddha remains silent. After Vaccha,gotta leaves, Ānanda asks the Buddha’s the reason

³ S 33/3:257-262.

⁴ *Acchariyaṃ bho Moggallāna abhutaṃ bho Moggallāna, yatrahi nāma satthu ca sāvakassa ca atthena attho vyaññjanehi vyaññjanam samsandissati samessati na vibhāyissati yad idaṃ agga,padasmin ti.*

⁵ S 44.9/4:398-400 (SD 23.15).

⁶ See **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17.

for his silence. This famous Sutta probably recounts Vaccha,gotta’s first meeting with the Buddha. **The Sabhiya Kaccāna Sutta** recounts Vaccha,gotta’s question of Sabhiya Kaccāna (whom he addresses as Mahā Kaccāna) regarding the 10 points.

2 The 10 points: The unanswered questions

2.1 The 10 undeclared (*avyākata*) points or theses, fully known as “the 10 points of grasping that are extreme views” (*dasa vatthukā anta-g,gāhikā diṭṭhi*)⁷ or more briefly, “views that are grasped as extreme” (*anta-g,gāhikā diṭṭhi*),⁸ represent the views of various teachers and teachings known during the Buddha’s time, although their specific authors or origins cannot all be traced.⁹ These 10 questions are said to be “undeclared” or indeterminate (*avyākata*) because they do not have any definite or categorical answer. The undeclared question

is either (a) misleading in form, violating the logic of meaningful syntax and thus rendered meaningless, or (b) it is conceptually impossible for us within a given conceptual framework to assign truth values, true or false, to any answer given to it. (Bharadwaja 1984:305)

These 10 questions are “set aside” (*ṭhapanīya*), ie left unanswered “on pragmatic grounds since belief in any of the possible answers was considered irrelevant and otiose for our purpose” (Jayatilleke 1963: 288, 474). In **the Param,marāṇa Sutta** (S 16.12), Mahā Kassapa declares the reason to Sāriputta for the Buddha’s not entertaining the 10 points as follows:

Because it is unbeneficial, irrelevant to the fundamentals of holy life, and does not lead to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation [to suffering], to inner peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana. Therefore the Blessed One has not declared it. (S 16.12/2:223)

2.2 The parable of the poisoned dart of the Cūḷa Māluṅkya,putta Sutta (M 63), for example, shows that for a wounded person the questions asked should be relevant to the healing of the person (M 1:429), that is to say, we should seek what is relevant and conducive to spiritual development and liberation.¹⁰ The parable of the handful of leaves of the Simsapā Sutta (S 56.31/5:437 f), on the other hand, shows that what the Buddha knows but does not teach is comparable to the leaves on the trees of the *simsapā* forest, while what he teaches (compared to the leaves in his hand) is sufficiently relevant for our spiritual purposes.¹¹

2.3 Jayatilleke closes his remarkable study of the *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (1963) by quoting the great ocean parable and then says:

‘Whereof one can speak of him—that he does not have’ (*yena nam vajju tam tassa n’atthi*, Sn 1076) and hence one has to be silent. In this respect alone it resembles the Positivist’s outlook:

⁷ V 1:172; M 1:426; S 4:392; A 5:193; Pm 1:139, 151-155; Vbh 392; SA 3:137; NmA 1:243 f; PmA 2:453; VbhA 496. For a detailed analysis of the 10 points, see **Māluṅkya,putta S** (M 63), SD 5.8 (2) & **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10.

⁸ Nm 1:113; Nc:Be 235; Vbh 349, 392); also spelt *anta-g,gāhaka,diṭṭhi* (esp in Subcomys).

⁹ For an attempt to identify the schools that proposed these ideas, see Jayatilleke 1963:243-276, also pp 470-476.

¹⁰ See Jayatilleke, 1963:357 f.

¹¹ See Jayatilleke, 1963:469.

‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.’¹² This attitude has, however, to be distinguished from Agnosticism. It was not that there was something that the Buddha did not know, but that what he ‘knew’ in the transcendent sense could not be conveyed in words because of the limitation of language and of empiricism. (Jayatilleke 1963:476; fn omitted)

2.4 The Buddha’s refusal to answer Vaccha,gotta categorically must be understood in the same light as his refusal to give unequivocal answers to the ten undeclared points, that is, the questions are wrongly put and as such unacceptable.

Furthermore, we should note that, while the Buddha may refuse to give a categorical answer when asked whether or not the self exists, he is nevertheless recorded as stating that all those ascetics and brahmins who contemplate the self in various ways in fact contemplate the five aggregates or one of them, and on the basis of this comes to the conclusion, “I exist” [S 3:46 f]. (Gethin 1998:161)

2.5 Of the suttas dealing with the 10 undeclared points, the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta is “the most highly structured, intricate, and complete” (Robinson 1972b:316). Apparently, there is only one group of suttas that share a common topic in their origin stories (*nidāna*), that is, those concerning Vaccha,gotta.¹³ The Chinese Āgamas place **the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 72)¹⁴ and **the Mahā Vaccha,gotta** (M 73)¹⁵ in the Saṃyukta Āgama, together with the other Vatsa,gotra Sūtras, constituting the Vatsa,gotra cycle.¹⁶

The undeclared points are, however, most exhaustively dealt with—by way of the 62 wrong views—in **the Brahma,jāla Sutta** (D 1,1.29-3.31/1:12-39). The 10 points are mentioned in **the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9), **the Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta Sutta** (M 63 *passim*/1:426-437),¹⁷ **the Vaccha,gotta Saṃyutta** (S 33/-3:257-263), and **the Abyākata Saṃyutta** (S 10/4:374-403).

One of the most famous parables or similes related to the 10 points is that of the blind men and the elephant, found in **the Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 1** of the Udāna (U 6.4).¹⁸ The subsequent Udāna text, **the Nānā Titthiyā Sutta 2** (U 6.5/69 f), too, deals with the 10 points. The ten points are listed in part in a number of other places in the Pāli Canon, such as:

Mahāli Sutta	(D 6,16-19/157 f)	SD 53.4,	[only on the self (<i>jīva</i>)], ¹⁹
Poṭṭhapāda Sutta	(D 9,25-30/1:187-190)	SD 7.14, and	
Pāsādikā Sutta	(D 29,30-33/135-138)	SD 40a.6,	[only on the Tathāgata’s state].

A different list of speculative views are given in the **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38).²⁰

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1913, 7:189.

¹³ His Skt name is probably **Vatsa** or **Varṃśa**, rarely Vatsa,gotra (Mvst 3.364.16); Chin 婆蹉種 *pó cuō zhǒng*.

¹⁴ **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72), SA 962 = T 2.245, SA2 196 = T2.444. See SD 6.15 (2-3).

¹⁵ **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 73), SA 964 = T 2.246, SA2 198 = T2.446.

¹⁶ This cycle is examined by Richard H Robinson, “Some methodological approaches to the unexplained points,” 1972b:313-317.

¹⁷ See SD 5.8.

¹⁸ U 6.4/66-69 (SD 10a.14).

¹⁹ Where see T W Rhys Davids’ Intro to his tr (D:RD 1:186 -188).

²⁰ M 38,23/1:264 f (SD 7.10). Further on the 10 points, see **The unanswered questions**, SD 49a.10.

3 The tathagata's state

3.1 THE 4 ALTERNATIVES

3.1.1 When Vaccha,gotta asks the Buddha, by way of a tetralemma or the 4 logical alternatives (*catu,koṭi*; Skt *catuṣ,koṭi*) [§16], he is certain that one of them would apply, that is, to say:²¹

<i>Affirmation:</i>	x exists.
<i>Negation:</i>	x does not exist.
<i>Meta-affirmation:</i>	x both exists and does not exist.
<i>Meta-negation:</i>	x neither exists nor does not exist.

3.1.2 However, Vaccha,gotta is confused when the Buddha rejects all four alternatives, and declares his loss of confidence derived from their earlier discussion [§17]. The Buddha then reassures him by switching to a different level of language—that of imagery—by employing parables of the extinguished fire [§§18 f] and of the great ocean [§20].²²

3.1.3 The parable of the extinguished fire is interesting from a philosophical viewpoint. **K N Jayatilleke**, in his *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, makes the following helpful observation:

The question is grammatically correct in its form and appears to have meaning owing to the logic of “go out.” A categorical and meaningful answer specifying the direction is possible to this question. Now our symbolism or linguistic usage permits us to extend the use of “go out” for such processes as fires or lights, but in such situations we would be committing a category mistake²³ if we assume that the going out takes place in a specific direction. It therefore makes no sense to ask “in which direction has the [extinguished] fire gone?” and thereby asking a nonsensical question, to which no meaningful answer is possible. (Jayatilleke 1963:290)²⁴

3.2 THE TATHĀGATA AND TATHĀGATA

3.2.1 A careful examination of the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta will show that the term *tathāgata* is used in 2 senses: firstly, in the traditional sense of the Buddha's self-reference, especially when he is speaking in terms of the Dharma, and secondly, in a philosophical or existential manner—as a “sentient being”²⁵—

²¹ This tetralemma is found in many other places in the Canon. In **Param,marāṇa S** (S 16.12/2:222 f), the Buddha mentions it to Mahā Kassapa; in (**Khandha**) **Anurādha S** (S 22.86/3:116-119), SD 21.13. The tetralemma are mentioned by lemma in 4 suttas in Saṃyutta (S 24.15-18/3:215 f). **Avyākata Saṃyutta** contains some suttas dealing with it (S 44.2-8/4:381-397): see S:B 1080 n165. For a philosophical discussion, see Kügler 2003:100 f. For a detailed analysis of the tetralemma of the 10 points, see **Māluṅkya,putta S** (M 63), SD 5.8 (2).

²² See Jayatilleke 1963:289-291 for further discussion.

²³ See Gilbert Ryle. “Categories” in *Logic and Language*, ed A G N Flew, 2nd ser 1953:75.

²⁴ Further see **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10 (1+2).

²⁵ Here, **tathāgata** has the sense of “a sentient being” (*satta*), as attested by these text and their comys: D 1:27,-24 f (DA 118,1 *satto tathāgato'ti adhippeto*) ≈ M 1:426,14 (MA 3:141,23 *tathāgato'to satto* = SA 2:201,4 = AA 4:37,2), 487,31 f (MA 3:199,2) ≈ S 4:376,26 f (SA 3:113,18), 11,14 (2:311,1), 112,6; U 67,14 (UA 340,6 (Ce Ee) 340; UA:Be *satto*; UA:Se *sattā*) ≈ Nm 64,20 (NmA 1:193,24). Cf (**Khandha**) **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*

that is, in reference to the post-mortem state of the freed saint *as a being*.²⁶ Of course, we can, if we like, take *tathāgata* in this Sutta as referring to a generic term of “freed saint,” which includes the Buddha (who is also an arhat). However, it is more useful for discussion if we distinguish these 2 senses, even though they are actually quite clear from the contexts.

3.2.2 In the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta, the Buddha addresses himself in 2 ways: by way of the first-person pronoun “I” and as “Tathagata.” He uses the first-person pronoun “I” (*aham*) at the start of the meeting [§§2-13, 18].²⁷ As his teaching deepens, the Buddha refers to himself using the 3rd-person pronoun and generic term “Tathagata” (with initial capital) [§§14 (last line), 15]. Whether the Buddha is referring to himself²⁸ or a “buddha”²⁹ like him in general can be teased out from the context.³⁰ However, the Buddha would use the normal first-person personal pronouns in mundane circumstances, such as instructing Cunda to serve him the last meal,³¹ or referring to his physical state,³² or introducing a Vinaya rule (eg A 3:34-39).

3.2.3 “The monk whose mind is freed” [§§16-18]

3.2.3.1

Now, in the passages concerning the post-mortem state of a freed saint, in terms of the quadrilemma (Skt *catuṣkoṭi*) or the 4 states of existence, we also see the term, “the monk whose mind is freed” (*vimutta,citta bhikkhu*) [§§16, 20]. But **the (Khandha) Anurādha Sutta** (S 44.9), for example, states that other religionists of the Buddha’s time refer to the “freed saint” (also called *tathāgata*) as “the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest.”³³ Clearly then, *vimutta,citta bhikkhu* and the *tathāgata* here refers to the same liberated saint.

tumhākaṃ satthā tathāgato taṃ sattam tathāgataṃ (SA 2:312). See also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63) @ SD 5.8 (3). See Intro (2).

²⁶ Here, *tathāgata* has the sense of “a sentient being” (DP), as attested at D 1:27,24 f (DA 118,1) ≈ M 1:426,14 (MA 3:141,23), 487,31 f (MA 3:199,2) ≈ S 4:376,26 f (SA 3:113,18), 11,14 (2:311,1), 112,6; U 67,14 (UA 340,6 (Ce Ee) 340; UA:Be *satto*; UA:Se *sattā*) ≈ Nm 64,20 (NmA 1:193,24). Cf **(Khandha) 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 “that being” (*taṃ tathāgato ti tumhākaṃ satthā tathāgato taṃ sattam tathāgataṃ* (SA 2:312). See also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63) @ SD 5.8 (3). See Intro (2).

²⁷ The first personal pronoun “I” is *aham* in Pali, and is used here. It is also an *inherent* first-person pronoun, ie it is inherent in the verbs the Buddha uses, such as in §15 last line, “I say” (*vadāmi*). We also find *Tathāgata* in the same sentence.

²⁸ Eg the Buddha warns against misrepresenting him: **Neyy’attha Nī’tattha S**, A 2.3.5-6/1:60 (SD 2.6b).

²⁹ Eg if there were no birth, decay and death in the world, no Tathagata would arise in it: **(Abhabba) Tayo,dhamma S**, A 10.76/5:144 (SD 2.4); also (in def of *sappurisa*): MA 1:21 = SA 2:252; cf Nc 76; PmA 2:446; DhsA 349 (see **Dhammaññū S**, A 7.64 @ SD 30.10 (2.2)).

³⁰ Occasionally *Tathāgata* can refer to *either* the Buddha himself or any Buddha generically, eg “The Tathagata has no ‘guru’s fist’” (D 16,2.25a/2:100), SD 9.

³¹ **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,4.18-19/2:127), SD 9.

³² However, this is not a strict rule, eg in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16), the Buddha uses both forms of self-reference: “Ānanda, I am now old, aged, great in years, my journey done, I have reached the sum of my days, I am turning eighty. Ānanda, just as an old cart is kept going by being held together with straps, even so the Tathagata’s body is kept going by being strapped up.” (D 16,2.25.3/2:100), SD 9.

³³ S 22.86/3:116-119 = S 44.2/3:381-384 (SD 21.13). The pericope, *sāvako uttama,puriso parama,puriso parama,patipatto*, is also found in **Kutūhala,sālā S** (S 44.9/4:398-400, SD 23.15) & def as a freed saint at Nm 1:88. See also **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10.

On the other hand, it also means that the *tathagata* has 2 senses or usages. Depending on the context *tathagata* can mean either “a living being or soul” or “an awakened saint.” This is what we will discuss next.

3.2.3.2

Clearly then it should be noted that there are **2 lists** of unanswered questions found in the suttas. The term ***tathagata*** occurs in both lists but their respective meanings differ in the 2 lists. In the long list (in the set of 10 questions), *tathagata* means “the living being or soul.” But in the short list (that is, its own set of 4 questions), *tathagata* means “the liberated saint.”

The suttas clearly show the distinction between these 2 different lists. In **the long list** the term *tathāgata* always means, as reflected in the Commentaries, “the living being” or the empiric individual understood as a separate self or abiding entity. In **the short list** the term *tathāgata* always means the “liberated saint,” one who has attained nirvana.

However, as the Commentaries note, even in the short list the term *tathāgata* sometimes occurs in the sense of *a living being* as a separate self-entity. This is because those who raise the 4 questions about the post-mortem state of the *tathāgata* do so with the wrong view that there is a separate self or abiding entity corresponding to the term *tathāgata*.³⁴

3.2.3.3

These 2 lists show how the Buddha deals with the posthumous state of an arhat (and the Buddha himself). It forms a section of the 10 unanswered questions [2]. However, as this tetrad stands, the Buddha does, in fact, answer questions about them [§§16 f]. We should thus be aware that there are these 2 sets of question: the “long list” 10 questions and the “short list” of 4 questions: the former remains unanswered, the latter is answered in the right context.

The clearest evidence for these 2 lists of unanswered questions is found here in **the Aggi Vaccha,-gotta Sutta** (M 72,16 f). This Sutta presents *both* lists separately. Vacchagotta raises **the 10 questions of the long list** [§§10-12] in order to know the Buddha’s response to them. Then the Buddha gives his own reasons as to why he leaves these questions unanswered. The fact that Vacchagotta does not raise further questions shows that he is satisfied with the answers given by the Buddha.

Thereafter Vacchagotta raises another **4 questions** [§16]. These concern the post-mortem status of “**the monk whose mind is free**” (*vimutta,citta bhikkhu*): whether he exists after death, or does not exist, or both exists and non-exists, or neither exists nor non-exists. The expression here, “the monk whose mind is free,” obviously mean the *tathāgata* in the sense of the liberated saint (which includes the Tathāgata, the Buddha).

If the term ***tathāgata*** in the long list means the liberated saint, then surely Vacchagotta would not have raised the latter 4 questions. For this would clearly be a repetition. Further, we shall see later in detail, that the Buddha’s response to these 4 questions is quite different from his response to the 10 questions raised by Vacchagotta earlier [§§10-12].³⁵

3.2.3.4

It is very interesting that the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta here, instead of using *tathagata* reads instead ***bhikkhu***, literally, “a monk.” The phrase *vimutta,cutta bhikkhu* is quite common in the Nikāyas. However, in this context, *bhikkhu* has a special significance for Vaccha,gotta.

³⁴ **Khemā Therī S** (S 44.1/4:175), SD 63.6; **Param Maraṇa S** (S 16.12/2:222 f), SD 96.13; S 24.15-18/3:215 f; **Vaccha,gotta Saṃy** (S 33.1-55/3:257-278).

³⁵ See Karunadasa, “The unanswered questions: Why are they unanswered? A re-examination of the textual data.” *Pacific World Journal*, 3,9 2007:10 f.

Although lexically *bhikkhu* is used in the sense of “monk,” a renunciant who lives on alms, who keeps to the Dharma-Vinaya for fear for being reborn (that is, to seek freedom from samsara), it is often used in a broader sense to refer to anyone who listens to the Dharma (such as the vocative form as used in the suttas)—and thus has the same benefits of a diligent Vinaya-keeping monk—one will reach the path and in due course gain awakening.³⁶

The Buddha’s usage of *vimutta,citta bhikkhu* here is therefore highly significant, especially for Vaccha,gotta, who has a special interest in the nature of the 10 questions [1.2.3], and now understands better what the 4 postmortem states of an arhat are really about. It means that by becoming a monk (*bhikkhu*), it will bring one to beyond any reckoning of the 4 states: that *bhikkhu* is “thus gone” (*tathā gata*), never to be caught with another rebirth” he is an arhat.

3.2.3.5

At the close of the Buddha’s teaching in the Sutta, Vaccha,gotta goes for refuge. What happens next with Vaccha,gotta is probably recorded in **the Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 73), which tells us that, he joins the order under the Buddha at Rājagaha. As a wanderer, he must first undergo a probationary period of 4 months to properly adjust himself to a monk’s life.

After 2 weeks, Vaccha,gotta returns to the Buddha and tells him that he has attained all that is to be attained by a non-arhat’s understanding and asks for a further teachings. The Buddha tells him to proceed to the study of calm and insight, so that he will gain the six superknowledges (*cha-/-abhiññā*). Vacchagotta benefits from the lesson and goes on to become an arhat. He thereupon sends news of his attainment to the Buddha through some monks, and the Buddha replies that he has already heard the news from the *devas*.³⁷

3.2.3.6

One last point we must remind ourself regarding the Buddha’s silence on the 10 questions. It is not true to say that the Buddha does not answer *all* the 10 *avyākata* questions. He does, in fact, answer the 4 questions on the posthumous state of an arhat when the question is rightly asked in connection with the training and with awakening, as evident in the Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta [§16].

It is sufficient to say here that non-Buddhists and those with wrong views tend to see a living being (*satta*) as a self-entity or abiding self or soul (*attā*). The Buddha’s statement or rather “silence” on the postmortem state of the tathagata or saint is to totally reject this self-identity view and to show that a freed saint is *not* definable in any manner of language.³⁸ The finger points, but it is not what it points to.

4 On fire

4.1 The Agga Vaccha,gotta Sutta contains this famous fire parable that the Buddha uses to help Vaccha,gotta understand the reality of nirvana despite its ineffability:

19 Now, what do you think, Vaccha: suppose there were a **fire** burning before you, would you know it?”

“Master Gotama, if there were a fire burning before me, I would know it.”

³⁶ On *bhikkhu* as addressing all attending or listening, see SD 4.9 (5.3); SD 13.1 (3.1.1). On the laity attaining *bhikkhu*-state (*bhikkhu,bhāva*) during meditation: **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3A) + n, SD 13.3; SD 13.1 (3.1.1.5); SD 16.7 (1.1.1.2).

³⁷ M 74/1:493-497 (SD 27.4).

³⁸ We may, of course, try to describe, talk about *about* such a saint. See **The unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10.

“Suppose, Vaccha, someone were to ask you: ‘This fire that is burning before you, depending on what does it burn?’ What, Vaccha, would be your answer?”

“Master Gotama, on being asked thus, I would answer: ‘This fire burning before me burns depending on grass and wood.’”

19.2 “Suppose, Vaccha, this fire before you were to go out, would you know it?”

“Master Gotama, if this fire before me were to go out, I would know it.”

19.3 “Now suppose, Vaccha, you were asked, ‘When that fire before you went out in which direction had it gone—to the east, or to the west, or to the north, or to the south?’ How would you answer it?”

“It does not apply, master Gotama! The fire had burned depending on grass and wood. When that fuel is used up and it does not get any more, being without fuel, it would be regarded as quenched.”
(M 72,19/1:487)

This is a classic example of the Buddha’s socratic method of teaching where the inquirer is led from the known (the inquirer’s knowledge) to the unknown (what the inquirer has not yet realized). §19.1 deals with *conditionality*: fire burns dependent of fuel; even so, life proceeds on consciousness (the 6 senses reacting with the external world) fed by craving.³⁹ §19.2 is a statement of *pragmatism*: if you do not know it, you have not attained it. Just as the ignorant person ultimately has to know the truth for himself, even so nirvana has to be personally realized. §19.3 shows that *nirvana*, although a non-state that is indescribable, can be experienced.

4.2 The fire parable here has at least two important significances. Firstly, the word *nibbuta*, “cool or cooled,” that describes one who has attained nirvana also refers to the putting out of a fire.⁴⁰ In his article, “On the problem of Nirvāṇa,” **F Otto Shrader** notes the common ancient Indian belief that “an expiring flame does not really go out, but returns into the primitive, pure, invisible state of fire it had before its appearance as visible fire” (1905-05:167).⁴¹

4.3 Where does the extinguished fire go?⁴² The answer depends on what one thinks that fire is. Neither the Buddha nor Vaccha thinks that it is a kind of oxidizing agent. For them, it is one of the 4 primary elements (*mahā,bhūta*).⁴³ For Vaccha and many of his Vedic contemporaries, it is the god **Agni** (P *aggi*), dwelling in fuel, latent in fire-sticks, sometimes unmanifested, sometimes manifested. This popular notion is clearly expressed in **the Śvetaśvatara Upaniṣad** (almost certainly a post-Buddha work):

13 Just as fire lying latent in its source is not seen, and yet its seed is not destroyed,
It may be lit ever again in its source by a drill, so is the atman, in both states, can grasped by *aum*.

14 By making one’s body the lower fire-stick, and *aum* the upper fire-stick,

³⁹ See **Saññojana S 1** (S 12.53): “Suppose, monks, an oil lamp were burning in dependence of oil and a wick, and the man were not to pour oil into it, or were not to adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, when the former supply of fuel is exhausted, that oil lamp, not being fed with any more fuel, lacking sustenance, would go out. So, too, when one lives contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases” (S 12.53/2:86), SD 105.3.

⁴⁰ “Just as the extinguished flame of a lamp goes into an indefinable state” (*vijjhāta,dīpa,sikhā viya apanṇattika,-bhāvaṃ yāti*, DA 394).

⁴¹ Shrader’s fn: *Vahner yathā yoni-gatasya mūrtir na drśyate n’aiva ca liṅga-nāsaḥ...* = As a form of fire ... is not seen nor its seed destroyed [Norman] (Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 1.13); cf Miln 327 f (where is nirvana stored?). See also Norman 1991:262 f.

⁴² This para is based on R H Robinson 1972b:322.

⁴³ On the *mahā,bhūta*, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 3), SD 1.7 (2).

By working on the friction of meditation, one may see the divine that is hidden.

- 15 Just as oil in sesame seeds, as butter in cream, as water in springs, and as fire in wood,
So is atman [the soul] found in one's self—if one looks for it with truth and austerity.
(Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 1.13-15)⁴⁴

4.4 In other words, when Agni goes out, he then “goes home” (*astam gacchati*),⁴⁵ returns to his abode back into the unmanifested state. In other words, in the Vedic mind, the eternal Fire is there hidden away in his abode, returning to appear again as wood or fuel is made to burn.

To the early Buddhists, however, fire simply arises when the right conditions are there for combustion to occur. In the case of nirvana, all the conditions for existence or non-existence have been eradicated forever. Hence, there is no question of the fire going anywhere, not even “home” (*oka*).⁴⁶ It has simply ceased to exist.⁴⁷

When the Tathāgata dies, he casts off his space-time limitations, and “goes” where there is neither earth, water, fire nor wind, and neither space time nor space.⁴⁸ In his paper on “Death and the Tathāgata,” Norman concludes:

So it is with an individual who has gained *nibbāna*. His state cannot be described any more than the state of a fire that has gone out can be described,⁴⁹ and the question about his future arising is met with the statement that it is not appropriate to speak of him as arising or not arising, or as both, or as neither.⁵⁰ Nothing can be said about a tathagata after death, because if whatever reason or basis there might be for a description of him as embodied, disembodied, etc,

⁴⁴ Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 1.13-15:

13 *Vahner yathā yoni, gatasya mūrtir | na drśyate n'aiva ca liṅga, nāsaḥ |
sa bhūya evendhana, yoni, gr̥hyas | tadvobhayam vai praṇavena dehe ||*

14 *sva, deham araṇim kṛtvā | praṇavam cottarāraṇim |
dhyāna, nirmathanābhāsād | devam paśyen nigūḍhavat ||*

15 *tilēṣu tailam dadhanīva sarpir | āpaḥ srotasū araṇiṣu cāgniḥ |
evam ātmā ātmani gṣhyate'sma | satyenainam tapasa yo'nupśyati ||*

⁴⁵ This verb form does not occur in the Pāli, which however has such forms as: *attha, gata* (disappeared, destroyed, A 4:157 = 160 = Sn 472 = 475); *attha, gama* (disappearance, cessation, annihilation, D 1:37 = M 1:22 = 2:16 = 226; M 1:486, 3:114; S 2:28, 72-74, 175, 4:327); *attha, gamana* (going down, setting (of the sun, etc), J 1:101, 209, 4:61); *atthaṇ, gata* (gone down, set (of the sun), V 1:62, 4:55; J 1:296, 3:36, 6:62; disappeared, ceased, destroyed, Sn 1075; It 58, Dhs 1038; Vbh 195).

⁴⁶ See eg Sn 966 and its comy at Nm 487. The mind is now “homeless” (*anoka*), in the sense that it does not abide or does not need to abide anywhere: it is fully and unconditionally liberated. For technical details, see Sn:N 390 n966.

⁴⁷ Pn *oka* and *anoka*, see SD 23.14 (2.1) & DEB: *oka*.

⁴⁸ See eg **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 13,67.2-85/1:216-223), and R H Robinson 1972b:322.

⁴⁹ **Aggi Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72,19): *Sace pana tam Vaccha evam puccheyya: yo te ayam purato aggo nibbuto co aggi ito katamam disam gato, puratthimam va pacchiram va uttaram va dakkhinam va, evam puttho tvarim Vaccha kinti vyakareyyasi ti. Na upeti bho Gotamo* (M 1:487).

⁵⁰ **Aggi Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72,20): *Evam, vimutta, citto pana bho gotamo bhikkhu kuhim upapajjati ti kho vaccha na upeti ... na upapajjati ti kho vaccha na upeti ... upapajjati ca na ca upapajjati ti kho vaccha na upeti ... n'eva upapajjati na na upapajjati ti kho vaccha na upeti* (M 1:486).

should cease completely, how could he be described?⁵¹ The Buddha was right to insist that the religious life does not depend on answers for such questions. (Norman 1991:8 = 1993:262 f)

5 Did the Buddha “borrow” ideas from the Upaniṣads?

5.1 Modern scholars have three general views regarding early Buddhism and the Upaniṣads: the first is that the Buddha “borrowed” many ideas from the Upaniṣads (and other early traditions) (a notion held mostly by native—understandably Hindu—Indian scholars); the second is that the Buddha was aware of those ideas and simply responded to them; and the third is that the Buddha was simply “ignorant” of the Upaniṣads or ignored them. We shall briefly look at the main points in answer to this problem here.

5.2 The Bṛhad Āraṇyaka, one of the oldest Upaniṣads, the “highest Āraṇyaka,” like the other “forest texts” (*āraṇyaka*), “contains little of the exalted mysticism of the Upaniṣads, being mainly concerned with the same theme as the Brāhmaṇas (commentaries on the Vedas), the cosmic symbolism of the sacrificial ritual.”⁵² The earliest Upaniṣads probably formed part of the Brāhmaṇas, but are distinguished from both by increased philosophical and mystical questioning and by their diminished concern with Vedic deities and sacrificial rites.

The Upaniṣads are, in their own way, concerned with the nature of reality, the most fundamental notion of which is the Brahman (ultimate reality) and the *ātman* (self), a spark of that reality found in every being and whose aim would let it return to or reunify with the Brahman. Such an idea is clearly alien to early Buddhism even though the earliest Upaniṣads were completed before the rise of Buddhism. Early Buddhism rejects the notion of the atman or abiding self or permanent soul.

5.3 It should be noted that the Upaniṣads started as “closed up sessions” between teacher and pupil. It was a very private and privileged tradition. The famous dialogue from **the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka** is a good case in point:⁵³

“Yajñavalkya,” said he, “when this dead person’s speech [voice] goes into fire, the breath into air [wind], the eye into the sun, the mind into the moon, hearing into the quarters, the self into space [ether], the body hairs into the plants, the head hairs into the trees, and the blood and the semen into the water—what then becomes of this person?”

“Ārtabhāga, my friend, take my hand. Only we two shall know of this: neither of us shall make public of this.”

The two went away and discussed the matter. What they said was karma and what they praised was karma, namely, that by good works one becomes good (*puṇya*), by evil works one becomes evil (*pāpa*). Then, Ārtabhāga of the line of Jāratkaru kept silent.

(Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.2.13)

⁵¹ **Sabhiya Kaccāna S** (S 44.11): *Yo ca vaccha hetu yo ca paccayo paññāpanāya rūpī ti vā arūpī ti vā saññī ti vā asaññī ti vā n’eva saññī nāsaññī ti vā, so ca hetu so paccayo sabbena sabbaṃ sabbathā sabbaṃ aparisesaṃ niruj-jhetvā, kena nam paññāpayamāno paññāpeyya rūpī vā ti ... nāsaññī ti vā* (S 4:402).

⁵² A L Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, 1989:38. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa is probably the latest of the important Brāhmaṇas, the last of the long series, and must have been composed in the 7th cent BCE.

⁵³ See **Loṇa,phala S** (A 3.99), SD 3.5 (1).

We have here a good example of the Upaniṣadic tradition of transmitting teachings in “secret” (*rahasyam*).⁵⁴ The Buddha’s declaration that “the Tathāgata has no “teacher’s fist”⁵⁵ in respect of teachings” (D 16,2.25a/2:100), is apparently in connection with such secret transmissions.

5.4 Scholars like **Wendy O’Flaherty**⁵⁶ have suggested that “**karma**” here refers to religious works, especially the Vedic sacrifice. “But,” disagrees Basham,

if this were Yājñavalkya’s intention there would be no point in secrecy, for it was common knowledge that performing sacrifices provided beneficial spiritual results. The idea that every deed bears results in the future, however, must have been a very new one. (Basham 1989:128 n11)

Such academic contentions aside, the point here is that the mechanics of rituals was public knowledge (since the idea was to attract generous devotees), but their dynamics was privileged knowledge of the priests who monopolized the dissemination of such knowledge and the performance of such rituals.

In the brahminical religions during Buddha’s time, *karman* (P *kamma*) generally referred to proper sacrificial rituals performed by the brahmins for their devotees. The Buddha, like many other sramanas or ascetics, secularized the notion of “karma” and applied it to personal accountability in one’s conscious actions. It is also interesting to note that the Pāli Canon, although it often mentions *atta* (Skt *ātman*), does not make any mention of the neuter *Brahman*, the most important concept in the Upaniṣads. The masculine *Brahmā* is found in Pāli, referring to a high heavenly class of being, and *brahma-* as a prefix often appears in the Pāli Canon, for example, *brahma,jāla* (the perfect net, D 1), *brahma,cariya* (the holy life, celibacy),⁵⁷ and *brahma,bhūta* (*Brahmā*-become, perfect being).⁵⁸ None of these usages, however, even hint at any Upaniṣadic idiom.

5.5 A few interesting points should be noted regarding **the Tevijja Sutta** (D 13), where two young brahmins discuss how to have *sahavyatā* (fellowship, companionship, communion) with *Brahmā*, but here the term means *rebirth amongst the host of Brahmā*, not some kind of mystical union. The two brahmin youths are unable to come to an agreement and decide to consult the Buddha, who declares that neither the brahmins nor their ancestors have ever met *Brahmā*. Without such a personal knowledge of *Brahmā*, none of them are qualified to speak about him.⁵⁹ The notion of *Brahman* here is glaringly conspicuous by its absence.

Furthermore, the *Tevijja Sutta* mentions the names of the ancient brahminical (Vedic) “paths” (*patha*, traditions), such as *Adhvaryu*, *Taittirīya*, *Chāndogya* and *Bahvṛcā* (D 13.10),⁶⁰ and of ancient seers such as *Aṣṭaka*, *Vāmaka*, *Vāmadeva*, *Viśvāmitra*, *Jamadagni*, *Aṅgīrasa*, *Bhāradvāja*, *Vāsiṣṭha*, and *Kaśyapa*, *Bhagu*

⁵⁴ The Tibetan tradition of “secret teachings” is probably directly rooted in this ancient Indian tradition but given a Buddhist garb.

⁵⁵ Basically, this means holding back certain teachings, perhaps handing them down only from his deathbed.

⁵⁶ Wendy O’Flaherty, “Karma and rebirth in the Vedas and Purāṇas,” 1980:xiii, 3-37.

⁵⁷ V 1:12, 19; D 1:84; M 1:77; S 1:38; A 1:50; Sn 267, 274; Tha 1027; It 28; Dh 155.

⁵⁸ D 3:84; M 1:111, 3:195, 224; S 4:94; A 5:226; It 57; said of arhats: A 2:206; S 3:83.

⁵⁹ D 13,12-23/1:238-244.

⁶⁰ *Adhvaryu*, *Taittirīya*, *Chāndogya* and *Bahvṛcā* [vl *Brahma,cariyā*]. These are the original Skt forms of the Pali: *Addharyā*, *Tittiriyā*, *Chandokā*, *Chandāvā*, *Brahmacariyā*. According to Rhys Davids, the first three were skilled in liturgy generally and probably referred to those adept in the *Yajur*, *Sāma* and *Ṛg* Vedas respectively, and notes that “If we adopt the other reading [ie *brahma,cariyā*] for the last in the list, then those priests who relied on liturgy, sacrifice or chant would be contrasted with those who had ‘gone forth’ as *religieux*, either as *Tāpasas* or as *Bhikshus*.” (D:RD 1:303 n2)

(D 13.13),⁶¹ from whom the brahmins received their mantras. The early Buddhist texts also mention Udraka Rāmaputra and Araḍa Kālāma with greater reverence⁶² than for the 6 heterodox teachers,⁶³ but nowhere do we see in the early texts the names of well known Upaniṣadic seers and sages.

5.6 THE BUDDHA AS A SKILLFUL TEACHER

5.6.1 The Upaniṣads are sacred texts of the brahmins, the priestly class, but they were merely one amongst many religious groups in the Buddha's days. Most significant is that the Buddha is strongly opposed to the monistic and theistic ideas and sacrificial system of the brahmins. This being the case, it is highly unlikely that the Buddha would take over brahminical notions and practices *as they are*. In many instances, the Buddha gives new meanings to the brahminical terms and practices.⁶⁴

A successful teacher is a good communicator. To communicate his teachings, the Buddha has not only introduced new terms (such as *paṭisambhidā*) but more often used numerous old terms (Buddha, arhat, dharma, karma, nirvana), giving them new senses. In his article, "Theravāda Buddhism and Brahmanical Hinduism: Brahmanical terms in a Buddhist guise" (1991), K R Norman investigates the terminology used by the Buddha to show how he coped with this new vocabulary.⁶⁵

5.6.2 The Buddha, for example, accepts the *devas* as being merely superhuman and does not allow any causal role in the universe.⁶⁶ Various brahminical **myths and fables** are retold, for example, in **the Brahma-jāla Sutta** (D 1), where the Buddha employs a humorous device relating how Brahmā thinks that he has created other beings, and he (the Buddha) makes references to an ancient creation myth found in the Brhad Āraṇyaka. In his comments in **the Aggañña Sutta** (D 27) on the way in which brahmins are born, the Buddha satirizes the Puruṣa-sūkta of the Rigveda.⁶⁷ Norman explains the reason for this skillful means thus:

⁶¹ In Pali, *Aṭṭhaka*, *Vāmaka*, *Vāmadeva*, *Vessāmitta*, *Yamataggi*, *Aṅgira*, *Bhāradvāja*, *Vāsetṭha*, *Kassapa*, *Bhagu*. These names are stock: V 1:245; D 1:104/3.2.8; A 3:224, 229, 4:61; M 2:169/95.13, 2:200/99.9. For identification of these names, see *Vinaya Texts* (tr Rhys Davids & Oldenberg) 2:130 n3 & V:H 4:337 nn5-9.

⁶² The story of the Bodhisattva's first two teachers is found in **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26,15/1:163-168), **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36/1:240; **Saṅgarāva S** (M 100/2:212); **Madhyam'āgama** of the Sarvāstivāda (T26.776b5-777a4; **Vinaya** of the Dharmaguptakas (T1428.780bt-c19); cf J 1:66; DhA 1:85; ApA 71; BA 6; DhsA 34; MahvS 66. See **Ariyapariyesanā S** (M 26), SD 1.11 (15).

⁶³ The 6 heterodox teachers were: (1) Pūraṇa Kāśyapa (P Pūraṇa Kassapa, died ca 503 BCE), an amoralist who was an Ājīvika or naked ascetic; (2) Maskarin Gośāla or Gośālī,putra (P Makkhali Gosāla), a determinist (fatalist), leader of the Ājīvikas; (3) Ajita Keśa,kambala, of the hair-blanket (P Ajita Kesakambala), a materialist; (4) Kakudha Kātyāyana, or Pakudhaka Kātiyāna (P Kakudha Kaccāyana), an atomist; (5) Nirgrantha Jñāti,putra (P Nigaṇṭha Nāta,-putta, the Pāli name for Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, ca. 540-568 BCE?, in the Pāli Canon), the leader of the Jains; (6) Saṃjaya Vairatṭi,putra or Belaṭṭha,putta. (P Sañjaya Belaṭṭha,putta), a skeptic and agnostic. See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,16-39/1:52-59), SD 8.10.

⁶⁴ See eg **(Uggata,sarīra) Aggi S** (A 4.44,4/4:42), SD 3.16.

⁶⁵ Norman deals with the Buddha's usage of brahminical terms in three categories: (1) terms and structures taken over by the Buddha, such as *deva*, and the brahminical myths and fables (see above); (2) terms taken over by the Buddha but used with new senses, such as *aggi. amata*, *jhāna*, etc; (3) terms referred to but rejected, such as *atta* (Skt *ātman*). For a summary, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, ch 4 "The secret of the Buddha's success," 2004.

⁶⁶ On the 3 types of devas (Nc 307; KhA 123) see K R Norman, "Devas and Adhidevas in Buddhism," JPTS 9 1981:154.

⁶⁷ R Gombrich, "Recovering the Buddha's Message" in T Skorupski (ed), *The Buddhist Forum* 1, 1990:13 ff and 14 n25.

Besides the convenience of taking over terms which were already known to this audience, albeit in a different sense, the Buddha possibly had other reasons for acting in this way. In part it may have been due to his desire to show that Brahmanical Hinduism was wrong in its [basic] tenets: a Brahmanical *brāhmaṇa* was *suddhi*, etc. If a teacher takes over his rivals' terms and repeats them often enough in his own meaning, he gives the impression that he is using them in the correct sense, and the original owners are wrong in their usage.

It must be made clear that we cannot prove that the Buddha (or the Buddhists) was the first to make use of these Brahmanical terms in a new sense, since there is a possibility that such a use of some of these terms was also common to other contemporary religions. Some of the terminology of Buddhism is [sic] held in common with **Jainism**, e.g. Buddha, *pratyeka*, *Buddha*, *jina*, *nirvāṇa*, *tathāgata*, *bhāvanā*, *dhuta*, *yoga*, *kevalin*, *āsrava*, *karman*, *gati*, *mokṣa*, *śramaṇa*, *pravrajyā*, *pravrajita*, *tapas*, *ṛṣi*, *tā(din)*, *phāsu(ya)*, and also certain epithets of the Buddha and the Jina. It is possible therefore that the use of Brahmanical terms in a non-Brahmanical sense was taken from the general fund of vocabulary of *śramaṇical* [ie non-brahmanical] religions.

(K R Norman, 1991:199f; emphasis mine)

5.6.3 In other words, as Pratap Chandra (1971) points out, there was a commonwealth of ideas and beliefs from which both early Buddhism and the Upaniṣads drew.

In an age quite unaware of copyright laws, the term “borrowing” is not a suitable choice. Every age has its own commonwealth of ideas. These are the ideas which are held by all irrespective of other differences. Such ideas are accepted and inherited in the same manner as linguistic usages are accepted and inherited. Individual freedom is one such idea in Western culture. No one needs feel obliged to express indebtedness for it to some earlier thinker, simply because it is a common property now. In a similar way, the doctrine of moral retribution was a common property in the day of the Buddha. In any case, it is not held by anyone that the Upaniṣadic seers originated it, though it was first mentioned by them. According to the well known *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* passage, this doctrine was not even known to the Brahmins.

(Pratap Chandra, “Was Buddhism influenced by the Upaniṣads?” 1971:322 f)

5.7 Finally, early Buddhism is not only empirical in its approach (placing emphasis on personal experience), but is profoundly *psychological* in its method and vocabulary, that is to say, its teachings are based on social harmony through moral virtue (*sīla*), which is the basis for healthy mental development (*samādhi*), both of which are essential environments conducive for the realizing of liberating insight (*paññā*).

The Upaniṣads, on the other hand, seldom care about personal experiences, and are essentially *eschatological*, aiming “to discover a suprasensuous, supraphenomenal reality, entirely free of change and the laws of the world, which could be the basis as well as the goal of all becoming and with which we could identify ourselves in some way and thus win liberation from this existence” (Pratap Chandra, 1971:323).⁶⁸

6 Balancing parables

6.1 This Agga Vaccha, gotta Sutta contains 2 important parables that balance each other up. Just as **an extinguished fire** [§18 f] cannot be said to have gone anywhere (in any of the 4 quarters), so too the

⁶⁸ See also **Tevijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8 (2) “Did the Buddha know the Vedas?” On brahminical borrowings from the Buddhists (eg Mahābhārata 1.74.2 and Dh 222), see A Wynne 2007:25 f.

Buddha's awakening cannot be described in terms of the 4 alternatives [§16]. This parable reflects the problem of intellectual language: not everything can be logically explained, especially personal and spiritual experiences.

6.2 On the other hand, the Buddha is said to be “profound, immeasurable, unfathomable as **the great ocean**” [§20]. This parable deals with the non-conceptual side of language. **Bhikkhu Bodhi** succinctly puts it thus:

It seems that at this point in the dialogue, the Buddha resorts to imagery to suggest what concepts cannot convey. The two images—of the extinguished fire and the deep ocean—establish between themselves a dialectical tension, and thus both must be taken into account to avoid falling into one-sided views. The image of the extinguished fire, taken alone, veers in the direction of total extinction, and thus must be balanced by the image of the ocean; the image of the ocean, taken alone, suggests some eternal mode of being, and thus must be balanced by the image of the extinguished fire. Again the truth lies in the middle that transcends untenable extremes. (M:ÑB 1278 n723)

7 Kaccāna,gotta Sutta

7.1 The reason for the problem of the 10 points is that the unawakened mind tends to think in dualistic terms, especially in terms of “existing” (*atthi*) and “not existing” (*n’atthi*), living by a computer-like almost mechanical “on-off” existential computation.

The Kaccāna,gotta Sutta (S 12.15)

At Sāvattī. Then the Venerable Kaccāna,gotta asked the Buddha: “Venerable sir, it is said, ‘Right view, right view’. **In what way, venerable sir, is there right view?**”

“This world, Kaccāna, for the most part depends upon a duality—upon the notion of existence and the notion of non-existence. But for one who sees the origin of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of nonexistence. And for one who sees the cessation of the world as it really is with correct wisdom, there is no notion of existence in regard to the world.”

“‘All exists’: Kaccāna, this is one extreme. ‘All does not exist’: this is the second extreme. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathagata teaches the Dharma by the middle: [the interdependent origination is then declared].

(S 12.15/2:16 f = 22.90/3:134, abridged)

7.2 In chapter 15 of his **Mūla Madhyamika Kārikā**, Nāgārjuna, the master of the “middle way,” alludes to the Kaccāna,gotta Sutta:

*kātyāyanāvāde c’āstī ti nāstī ti cōbhyam |
pratisiddham bhagavatā bhāvābhāva,vibhāvinā || MK 15,7*

In the Admonition to Katyāyana, the Blessed One,
Free from existence and non-existence, refuted both “it is” and “it is not”.

— — —

Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta

The Fire Discourse to Vaccha,gotta

M 72

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying at Anātha,piṇḍika’s Park in Jeta’s Forest near Sāvattḥī.

The 10 points⁶⁹

2 Then the wanderer Vaccha,gotta approached the Blessed One, [484] exchanged greetings with the Blessed One, and then sat down at one side.

Seated thus at one side, the wanderer Vaccha,gotta said this to the Blessed One:⁷⁰

THE WORLD

3 (1) “How is it, master Gotama, does the master Gotama hold this view, that

‘the world is **eternal**

sassato loko

—only this is true, all else is false’?”

“Vaccha, I do *not* have such a view,⁷¹ that ‘the world is eternal—only this is true, all else is false’.”

4 (2) “How is it then, master Gotama, does the master Gotama hold such a view, that

‘the world is **not eternal**

asassato loko

—only this is true, all else is false’?”

“Vaccha, I do not have such a view, that ‘the world is not eternal—only this is true, all else is false’.”

⁶⁹ Technically known as “extreme views’ (*anta-g,gāhikā diṭṭhi* (or *–gāhaka-*), V 1:172; M 1:426; S 4:392; A 5:193; Pm 1:139, 151-155; Vbh 392; SA 3:137; NmA 1:243 f; PmA 2:453; VbhA 496; *dasa,vatthukā* ~ Nm 1:113; Nc:Be 235; Vbh 349, 392); also spelt *anta-g,gāhika,diṭṭhi* (esp in Subcomys). See Intro (2).

⁷⁰ In *Cūḷa Māluṅkya,putta S* (M 63) Māluṅkya,putta asks the Buddha these 10 questions. In reply, the Buddha explains to him the true purpose of the spiritual life and employs the well known parable of the man wounded with a poisoned dart (M 63,4-5/1:428 f), SD 5.8.

⁷¹ “I do not have such a view,” *na kho ahaṃ vaccha evaṃ,diṭṭhi*.

5 (3) “How is it then, master Gotama,
does the master Gotama hold such a view, that

‘the world is finite

antavā loko

—only this is true, all else is false’?”

“Vaccha, I do *not* have such a view, that ‘the world is finite—only this is true, all else is false’.”

6 (4) “How is it then, master Gotama,
does the master Gotama hold such a view, that

‘the world is infinite [not finite]

anantavā loko

—only this is true, all else is false’?”

“Vaccha, I do not have such a view, that

‘the world is infinite—only this is true, all else is false’.”

THE SOUL

7 (5) “How is it then, master Gotama,
does the master Gotama hold such a view, that

‘the soul and the body are the same

*taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ*⁷²

—only this is true, all else is false’?”

“Vaccha, I do *not* have such a view, that

‘the soul and the body are the same—only this is true, all else is false’.”

8 (6) “How is it then, master Gotama,
does the master Gotama hold such a view, that

‘the soul and the body are different

*aññaṃ jīvaṃ aññaṃ sarīraṃ*⁷³

—only this is true, all else is false’?”

“Vaccha, I do *not* have such a view, that

‘the soul and the body are different—only this is true, all else is false’.”

THE TATHAGATA

9 (7) “How is it then, master Gotama,
does the master Gotama hold such a view, that

‘the tathagata [“thus come,” a sentient being⁷⁴] *exists after death*

hoti tathāgato param maraṇā

—only this is true, all else is false’?”

“Vaccha, I do *not* have such a view, that

‘the tathagata exists after death—only this is true, all else is false’.”

10 (8) “How is it then, master Gotama,

⁷² The ancient Indian Materialists believe that the soul and the body are identical, meaning that when the body dies, the soul is destroyed, too. As such, there is no hereafter, and in such a system there is practically no place for moral accountability.

⁷³ This is the eternalist view, incl the Sāṃkhya system, that the soul is an enduring entity independent of the body.

⁷⁴ Here, *tathāgata* has the sense of “a sentient being” (DP), as attested at D 1:27,24 f (DA118.1) ≈ M 1:426,14 (MA 3:141,23), 487,31 f (MA 3:199,2) ≈ S 4:376,26 f (SA 3:113,18), 11,14 (2:311,1), 112,6; U 67,14 (UA 340,6 (Ce Ee) 340; UA:Be *satto*; UA:Se *sattā*) ≈ Nm 64,20 (NmA 1:193,24). Cf (**Khandha**) **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 sattam 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 (3.2).

does the master Gotama hold such a view, that

‘the tathagata **does not exist after death**

—only this is true, all else is false?’”

“Vaccha, I do *not* have such a view, that

‘the tathagata does *not* exist after death—only this is true, all else is false’.”

*hoti tathāgato param marañā*⁷⁵

11 (9) “How is it then, master Gotama,
does the master Gotama hold such a view, that

‘the tathagata **both** exists and does not exist after death

—only this is true, all else is false?’” **[485]**

“Vaccha, I do *not* have such a view, that

‘the tathagata **both** exists and not exist after death—only this is true, all else is false’.”

hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato param marañā

12 (10) “How is it then, master Gotama,
does the master Gotama hold such a view, that

‘the tathagata **neither** exists nor does not exist after death

—only this is true, all else is false?’”

“Vaccha, I do *not* have such a view, that

‘the tathagata **neither** exists nor does not exist after death—only this is true, all else is false’.”

*n’eva hoti na na hoti tathāgato param marañā*⁷⁶

Rejecting of speculative views

13 “How is it, master Gotama, that when master Gotama is asked:
‘Does the master Gotama hold such views:⁷⁷

- (1) that ‘the world is *eternal*—only this is true, all else is false?’
the master Gotama answers, ‘Vaccha, I do not have such a view.’
- (2) that ‘the world is *not eternal*—only this is true, all else is false?’
the master Gotama answers, ‘Vaccha, I do not have such a view.’
- (3) that ‘the world is *finite*—only this is true, all else is false?’
the master Gotama answers, ‘Vaccha, I do not have such a view.’
- (4) that ‘the world is *infinite*—only this is true, all else is false?’
the master Gotama answers, ‘Vaccha, I do not have such a view.’
- (5) that ‘the soul and the body are *the same*—only this is true, all else is false?’
the master Gotama answers, ‘Vaccha, I do not have such a view.’
- (6) that ‘the soul and the body are *different*—only this is true, all else is false?’
the master Gotama answers, ‘Vaccha, I do not have such a view.’
- (7) that ‘the tathagata *exists* after death—only this is true, all else is false?’
the master Gotama answers, ‘Vaccha, I do not have such a view.’
- (8) that ‘the tathagata does *not* exist after death—only this is true, all else is false?’
the master Gotama answers, ‘Vaccha, I do not have such a view.’
- (9) that ‘the tathagata **both** exists and does not exist after death—only this is true, all else is false?’
the master Gotama answers, ‘Vaccha, I do not have such a view.’
- (10) that ‘the tathagata **neither** exists nor does not exist after death—only this is true, all else is false?’

⁷⁵ This effectively means that the self is annihilated after death, which amounts to annihilationism or nihilism.

⁷⁶ This is a kind of skeptical or agnostic view, one that avoids any standpoint, mainly due to ignorance.

⁷⁷ See **Levels of learning**, SD 40a.10.

the master Gotama answers, ‘*Vaccha, I do not have such a view.*’

What danger does the master Gotama see that he does not embrace any of these speculative views?”⁷⁸

The dangers of speculations

THE WORLD

14 (1) “*Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view that ‘the world is eternal,’*

is a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views, a fetter of views; attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;

not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust],⁷⁹ nor to cessation [of suffering],⁸⁰ nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.⁸¹

(2) *Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view, that ‘the world is not eternal,’*

is a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views, a fetter of views; attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;

not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering], nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.

(3) *Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view, that ‘the world is finite,’*

is a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views, a fetter of views; attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;

not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering], nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.

(4) *Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view, that ‘the world is infinite,’*

is a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views, a fetter of views; attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;

not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering], nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.

THE SOUL

(5) *Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view, that ‘the soul and the body are the same,’ is a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views,*

a fetter of views; attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;

not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering], nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.

⁷⁸ “Speculative views,” *diṭṭhi, gatāni*, lit “gone to views,” “views that one goes by.”

⁷⁹ “Fading away,” *virāga* also “dispassion.”

⁸⁰ “Cessation,” *nirodha*, that is, “cessation of suffering.”

⁸¹ An almost identical statement is found in **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2,8/1:8), SD 30.3.

(6) Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view, that ‘the soul and the body are **different**,’
*is a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views,
 a fetter of views; attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;
 not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering],
 nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.*

THE SENTIENT BEING (*tathāgata*) [3.2]

(7) Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view, that
‘the tathagata [a sentient being]⁸² exists after death,’ [486]
*is a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views, a fetter of views;
 attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;
 not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering],
 nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.*

(8) Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view, that
‘the tathagata **does not** exist after death,’
*is a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views, a fetter of views;
 attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;
 not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering],
 nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.*

(9) Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view, that
‘the tathagata **both** exists and does not exist after death,’
*is a wilderness of views, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views, a fetter of views;
 attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;
 not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering],
 nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.*

(10) Vaccha, this holding on to the speculative view, that
‘the tathagata **neither** exists nor not exists after death,’

⁸² See n at §9. From here until §14, *tathāgata* has the sense of “a sentient being” (DP), as attested at D 1:27,24 f (DA118.1) ≈ M 1:426,14 (MA 3:141,23), 487,31 f (MA 3:199,2) ≈ S 4:376,26 f (SA 3:113,18), 11,14 (2:311,1), 112,6; U 67,14 (UA 340,6 (Ce Ee) 340; UA:Be *satto*; UA:Se *sattā*) ≈ Nm 64,20 (NmA 1:193,24). Cf (**Khandha**) **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 sattaraṃ 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). Here, *tathāgata* has the sense of “a sentient being” (DP), as attested at D 1:27,24 f (DA118.1) ≈ M 1:426,14 (MA 3:141,-23), 487,31 f (MA 3:199,2) ≈ S 4:376,26 f (SA 3:113,18), 11,14 (2:311,1), 112,6; U 67,14 (UA 340,6 (Ce Ee) 340; UA:Be *satto*; UA:Se *sattā*) ≈ Nm 64,20 (NmA 1:193,24). On *tathagata*, see (**Khandha**) **Anurādha S** (S 22.86), SD 21.13 (3.1.2).

is **a wilderness of views**, a twisting of views, a wriggling of views, a fetter of views;
 attended by pain, by conflict, by misery, by fever;
 not conducive to revulsion, nor to fading away [of lust], nor to cessation [of suffering],
 nor to inner peace, nor to direct knowledge, nor to self-awakening, nor to nirvana.

Seeing this danger, Vaccha, the Tathagata does not embrace any of these views.”

The Buddha has seen the true nature of things

15 “That being the case, does the master Gotama have any speculative view (at all)?”

“Speculative views, Vaccha, have been dispelled by the Tathagata.⁸³

Vaccha, the Tathagata has seen⁸⁴ thus:

‘This is	<u>form</u> ,	this is the <i>arising</i> of form,	this is the <i>ending</i> of form;
this is	<u>feeling</u> ,	this is the <i>arising</i> of feeling,	this is the <i>ending</i> of feeling;
this is	<u>perception</u> ,	this is the <i>arising</i> of perception,	this is the <i>ending</i> of perception;
these are	<u>formations</u> ,	this is the <i>arising</i> of formations,	this is the <i>ending</i> of formations;
this is	<u>consciousness</u> ,	this is the <i>arising</i> of consciousness,	this is the <i>ending</i> of consciousness.’

Therefore, Vaccha, the Tathagata, with the destruction, the fading away, **the cessation**,
 the letting go, getting rid of all conceivings,⁸⁵ all supposings,⁸⁶
 all I-making, all mine-making and all the latent tendency of conceit,⁸⁷
 the Tathagata is freed through not clinging, I say!⁸⁸

The 4 alternatives: “A monk with a freed mind”

16 “In that case, master Gotama, where

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| (1) does <u>a monk with a freed mind</u> ⁸⁹ | arise (after death)?” | |
| | “‘Arises,’ | Vaccha, does not apply.” ⁹⁰ |
| (2) “Then, master Gotama, | he does not arise?” | |
| | “‘Does not arise,’ | Vaccha, does not apply.” |
| (3) “Then, master Gotama, | he both arises and does not arise?” | |
| | “‘Both arises and does not arise,’ | Vaccha, does not apply.” |

⁸³ Here until the end, “Tathagata” is clearly a reflexive pronoun used by the Buddha. On *tathāgata*. see **Unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10 (6.7).

⁸⁴ “Has seen,” *diṭṭham*, when contrasted with *diṭṭhi,gataṃ* (speculative view) is clearly a word play. Here *diṭṭha* refers to what has been “seen” by the Buddha through direct experience, ie the rise and fall of the 5 aggregates.

⁸⁵ Through craving, views, and conceit (MA 3:198; SA 2:363). The Vibhaṅga gives 9 kinds of conceit, ie the superiority, equality and inferiority conceits as found in one superior, in one equal and in one inferior as they view others (Vbh 390). Cf (**Maññita Samuggaha**) **Sāruppa S** (S 35.30/21-23), **Maññita Samuggaha**) **Sappāya S 1** (S 35.31/4:23 f) and **2** (S 35.32/4:24-26) all of which deal with the uprooting of conceivings.

⁸⁶ “(Of) all supposings,” *sabba,mathitānaṃ*. Comy says this is a syn of *sabba,maññitānaṃ* (“of all conceivings”), the preceding term in the phrase (MA 3:198). *Mathita* has the senses of “churning, agitation.”

⁸⁷ On latent tendencies, see SD 6.14 (5).

⁸⁸ *Tasmā Tathāgato sabba,maññitānaṃ sabba,mathitānaṃ sabba,ahinkāra,mamiṅkāra,mānānusatānaṃ khayā virāga nirodhā cāgā paṭinissaggā anupādā vimutto ti vadāmi.*

⁸⁹ “A monk whose mind is freed” (*vimutta,citto bhikkhu*), ie, an arhat [3.2.3].

⁹⁰ *Na upeti.*

(4) “Then, master Gotama, he **neither** arises nor does not arise?”
 “‘Neither arises nor does not arise,’ Vaccha, does not apply.”

17 “How is it, master Gotama, that when master Gotama is asked,
 ‘And **where**, master Gotama,
 does a monk with such a freed mind arise?’
 he answers that ‘Arises’ does not apply?
 When asked,
 ‘Then, master Gotama, he *does not arise*?’
 he answers that ‘Does not arise’ does not apply?
 When asked,
 ‘Then, master Gotama, he *both arises and does not arise*?’
 he answers that ‘Both arises and does not arise’ does not apply?
 When asked,
 ‘Then, master Gotama, he *neither arises nor does not arise*?’
 he answers that ‘Neither arises **[487]** nor does not arise’ does not apply?”

17.2 Master Gotama, I have fallen into not knowing here, I am confused here, and even that measure of satisfaction [and confidence]⁹¹ I had from our previous conversation, that, too, is lost to me!”

The fire parable

18 “You *should* be not knowing, Vaccha, you *ought* to be confused.
 Deep indeed, Vaccha, is this Dharma, hard to see, hard to understand,
 peaceful, sublime, not won by (mere) reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise—
 it is hard for you to know, being one holding a different view, keeping different priorities,
 having different likes, following a different practice, following a different teaching.⁹²
 18.2 As such, Vaccha, I shall question you in return about this: answer as you please.

19 Now, what do you think, Vaccha: suppose there were a **fire** burning before you, would you know it?”

“Master Gotama, if there were a fire burning before me, I would know it.”

“Suppose, Vaccha, someone were to ask you: ‘This fire that is burning before you, depending on what does it burn?’ What, Vaccha, would be your answer?”

“Master Gotama, on being asked thus, I would answer: ‘This fire burning before me burns depending on grass and wood.’”

19.2 “Suppose, Vaccha, this fire before you were to go out, would you know it?”

“Master Gotama, if this fire before me were to go out, I would know it.”

19.3 “Now suppose, Vaccha, you were asked, ‘When that fire before you went out in which direction has it gone—to the east, or to the west, or to the north, or to the south?’ How would you answer it?”

⁹¹ “Measure of satisfaction [and confidence],” *pasāda, matta*. The term *pasāda* has the senses of faith, confidence, devotion, trust, joy.”

⁹² “Holding a differing view ... following different teachings,” *añña, ditṭhikena añña, khantikena añña, rucikena aññatr’āyogena * aññatr’ācariyakena*. *(All MSS read *aññatra’yogena*; but better reading is *aññatr’āyogena*, foll D 3,39.9, etc.) This is stock: **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,24/1:187 ī2); **Pāṭhika S** (D 24,2.21/3:35 x2); **Aggi Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72,18/1:487); **Udumbarikā Sīha, nāda S** (D 25,7/3:40); **Vekhanassa S** (M 80,14/2:43). On *āyoga*, see **Kakacūpama S** (M 21,8.1/1:124) n, SD 38.1.

“It does not apply, master Gotama!

The fire had burned depending on grass and wood. When that fuel is used up and it does not receive any more fuel, being without fuel, it would surely be reckoned as quenched.”⁹³

The great ocean parable

20 “In the same way, Vaccha,

(1) the tathagata [freed saint] has abandoned the **form** by which one describing him would use. It is cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, done away with so that it is not subject to further growth.

The tathagata, Vaccha, is freed from reckoning in terms of form:

he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable as **the great ocean** so that

‘he arises’	does not apply,	<i>upapajjatīti na upeti</i>
‘he does not arise’	does not apply,	<i>na upapajjatīti na upeti</i> [488]
‘he both arises and does not arise’	does not apply,	<i>upapajjati ca na ca upapajjatīti na upeti</i>
‘he neither arises nor does not arise’	does not apply.	<i>n’eva upapajjati ca na na upapajjatī ti na upeti</i>

(2) The tathagata has abandoned the **feeling** by which one describing him would use. It is cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, done away with so that it is not subject to further growth.

The tathagata, Vaccha, is freed from reckoning in terms of feeling:

he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable as *the great ocean* so that

‘he arises’	does not apply,
‘he does not arise’	does not apply,
‘he both arises and does not arise’	does not apply,
‘he neither arises nor does not arise’	does not apply.

(3) The tathagata has abandoned the **perception** by which one describing him would use. It is cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, done away with so that it is not subject to further growth.

The tathagata, Vaccha, is freed from reckoning in terms of perception:

he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable as *the great ocean* so that

‘he arises’	does not apply,
‘he does not arise’	does not apply,
‘he both arises and does not arise’	does not apply,
‘he neither arises nor does not arise’	does not apply.

⁹³ *Tassa ca pariyādānā aññassa ca anupahārā anāhāro nibbuto t’eva saṅkham gacchatī ti. A modern version of the fire parable could be this: A student asks his teacher, “Where does this fire come from?” The wise teacher puts out the fire, and replies, “Tell me where the fire has gone, and I will tell you where it came from!” The fire parable here is balanced by the following great ocean parable. See Intro (5).*

(4) The tathagata has abandoned the **formations** by which one describing him would use. It is cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, done away with so that it is not subject to further growth.

The tathagata, Vaccha, is freed from reckoning in terms of formations:

he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable as *the great ocean* so that

'he arises'	does not apply,
'he does not arise'	does not apply,
'he both arises and does not arise'	does not apply,
'he neither arises nor does not arise'	does not apply.

(5) The tathagata has abandoned the **consciousness** by which one describing him would use. It is cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, done away with so that it is not subject to further growth.

The tathagata, Vaccha, is freed from reckoning in terms of consciousness:

he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable as *the great ocean* so that

'he arises'	does not apply,
'he does not arise'	does not apply,
'he both arises and does not arise'	does not apply,
'he neither arises nor does not arise'	does not apply." ⁹⁴

The great sal tree parable

21 When this was said the wanderer Vaccha,gotta said this:

"Master Gotama, suppose there were a **great sal tree** not far from a village or market town, and whose branches and leaves⁹⁵ were dissolved by impermanence, which would then dissolve the bark and loose crust,

then dissolve the sapwood, so that in due course, it was bereft of *branches and leaves*, bereft of *bark and loose outer crust*, bereft of *sapwood*, and would be clear of them, standing only as **the pith**;⁹⁶

even so, this discourse of the master Gotama's is *bereft of branches and leaves, bereft of bark and loose crust, bereft of sapwood*, standing only as the pith.

Vaccha,gotta goes for refuge

22 Excellent, master Gotama! Excellent, Master Gotama! Venerable sir, just as if one

were to place upright	what had been overturned, or
were to reveal	what was hidden, or
were to show the way	to one who was lost, or
were to hold up a lamp	in the dark [489] so that those with eyes could see forms,

⁹⁴ The great ocean parable here is balanced by the previous fire parable. See Intro (6).

⁹⁵ On refs to the sal tree, see D 2:134; M:488; A 1:202, 3:43, 214; Dh 162. On the tree parables, see **Udumbārika Sīha,nāda S** (D 25,15-19/4:48-52) + SD 1.4 (1.1).

⁹⁶ "Would be clear of them, standing only as the pith" *suddho assa sāre patitṭhito*, where *suddho assa* lit "would be pure." As at **Anaṅgaṇa S** (M 5,31/1:31 f).

in the same way, the Blessed One has, in numerous ways, made the Dharma clear.

I go to the Blessed Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks.

May the Blessed Gotama remember me as a layman who has gone for refuge from this day forth for life.”

— evaṃ —

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