

**SD 61.24****(Māra) Āyu Sutta 2****The Second (Māra) Discourse on Lifespan****S 4.10**

Theme: Does time fly or turn like a wheel?

Translated by Piya Tan ©2024

**1 Sutta summary and significance****1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY**

**The (Māra) Āyu Sutta 2** is a short reflection by the Buddha on life's brevity, first stated in prose (or rather, prose verse) [§1.3], which is then disrupted by Māra's quip stating just the opposite, that life keeps rolling on like an endlessly turning wheel [1.2]. The Buddha reiterates that life is brief, and that we should live mindfully, knowing death will come. Māra, realizing that the Buddha knows him, disappears there and then.

**1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE**

**1.2.1** Māra's crosstalk disrupting the Buddha's teaching seems to be based on the Upaniṣadic speculative view of Soul abiding in some cosmic "centre," Brahman. Māra alludes to the metaphor of the felly or rim revolving around the fixed hub. This suggests that the various forms of life may change, or even die but are reborn, caught in a cycle, revolving around some immortal "Soul."

This metaphor echoes the Upaniṣads: "This very self (*ātman*) is the lord and king of all beings. As all the spokes are fastened to the hub and the rim of a wheel, so to one's self (*ātman*) are [sic] fastened all beings, all the gods, all the worlds, and all the bodies (*ātman*)."<sup>1</sup> "Lifebreath, undoubtedly, is greater than hope, for all this is fixed to lifebreath, as spokes are fixed to the hub."<sup>2</sup>

**1.2.2** The Buddha unequivocally rejects such speculative views of an immortal Soul or ongoing "life-breath." Such views are purely speculative, a wishful thinking against the true reality that is a brief human lifespan. More importantly, such an eternalist view seriously violates the natural law of **impermanence**, without which there is only meaningless stasis. Life and the world can only exist in change, in an endless cycle of arising and ceasing. This is what "eternity" seems to mean, a loop of births and deaths, rebirths and redeaths.

The Buddha realized that we can, by our own wisdom and effort, break out of this endless loop of suffering. We then rise in a spiral of spiritual evolution, freeing ourselves from burden of materiality and the mentality of views into the deathfree nirvana, beyond time and space.

**2 The Sutta verse S 466****2.1 HERAÑÑAKĀNI THERA, GĀTHĀ**

Verse **S 466** recurs as the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 2 verses of the elder Heraññakāni (**Tha 146**).

<sup>1</sup> Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up 2.5.15; Olivelle (tr), *The Early Upaniṣads*, 1998:73.

<sup>2</sup> Chāndogya Up 7.15.1 (op cit 269).

**2.2 MAHĀ, NIDDESA ON S 464 + 466**

The Mahā Niddesa quotes S 464 and S 466 in its commentary on the Jarā Sutta (Sn 4.6/\*804/158) [SD 61.23 (2.1.2.3)].

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## (Māra) Āyu Sutta 2

The Second (Māra) Discourse on Lifespan  
S 4.10

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the squirrels' feeding ground in the bamboo grove outside Rājagaha.

1.2 There the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus!”

“Bhante,” those monks replied.

1.3 The Blessed One said this:

“Short, bhikshus, is this lifespan of human beings.

One has to go on to the future life.

One should do what is wholesome and live the holy life.

For one who has taken birth there is no avoiding death.

Bhikshus, one who lives long, lives a hundred years or a little longer.”

2 Then Mara the Evil One approached the Blessed One and addressed him in verse: [109]

*nāccayanti aho,rattā  
jīvitam n'uparujjhati<sup>3</sup>  
āyu anupariyāti<sup>4</sup> maccānam  
nemi va ratha,kubbaran ti*

**S 465**

The days and nights do not fly by,  
life does not come to an end.  
The life span of mortals rolls along  
like the chariot's felly around the hub.<sup>5</sup>

[The Blessed One:]<sup>6</sup>

**3** *accayanti aho,rattā  
jīvitam uparujjhati  
āyurm<sup>7</sup> khīyati maccānam  
kunnadīnam va odakan<sup>8</sup> ti*

**S 466**

The days and nights fly by,  
life comes to an end.  
The lifespan of mortals runs out  
like the water in small streams.

4 Then Mara the evil one, thinking,

“The Blessed One knows me, the well gone knows me!”

sad and disheartened, disappeared right there.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Be Se *nūparujjhati*; Ce *nōparujjhati*; Ee *n'uprarujjhati*.

<sup>4</sup> Ce Ee *anupariyāti*; Be Se *anupariyāyati*.

<sup>5</sup> Māra seems to quote a “permanent soul” view of life, such as that speculated in the Upanishads [1.2].

<sup>6</sup> This verse occurs as the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 2 verses of the elder Heraññakāni (Tha 145) [2.1]. Qu with **S 464** (S 4.9) by Mahā, niddesa (Nm 1:44). [2.2]

<sup>7</sup> Be Ce Ee *āyu*; Ee *āyurm*.

<sup>8</sup> Be Se so; Ee *ūdakam*, “water.” It is prob mc here. PED states that *odaka* is found only at J 3:282 (in prose).

<sup>9</sup> *Dukkhi dummano tatth'ev'antaradhāyi*. Ee omits this para. This stock occurs some 32 times in Saṃyutta in connection with Māra [SD 61.9 (3.1.2)].