

**SD 62.14****(Iti) Aggi Sutta****The Iti,vuttaka Discourse on the Fires**

Theme: The 3 unwholesome roots are fires to be extinguished

**It 3.5.4**

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2025

**1 Sutta summary and significance****1.1 SUMMARY****1.1.1 Karmic fires**

**The (Iti) Aggi Sutta** (It 3.5.4) explains the 3 unwholesome roots—*greed, hatred and delusion*—as fires. These fires consume beings, fettering them to subhuman states. In sutta terms, these are karmic fires, the fruition of unwholesome karma. These fires are extinguished by mental cultivation—which ends rebirth—that is, by freeing the mind from the limitations of the physical senses, and so attaining nirvana without residue.

**1.1.2 Karmic fires reach even the heavens**

**The 3 fires** are similarly but very briefly listed in **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33):<sup>1</sup> “The 3 fires: the fire that is lust (*rag’aggi*), the fire that is hatred (*dos’aggi*), the fire that is delusion (*moh’aggi*).” They are explained in its commentary [1.2.2] as reaching out into even the heavens. Beings spend a sort of “karmic holiday” in the heavens, enjoying long periods of bliss and beauty, oblivious of the fires burning right below their realms. Ultimately, the weight of their unawakening will sink them into those fires.

**1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF FIRE****1.2.1 Iti,vuttaka Commentary**

According to the Sutta’s commentary, the unwholesome roots [1.1] are like fire because they consume and torment (*anudahan’aṭṭhena*) beings.<sup>2</sup> These beings are driven to act and live by dominating and appropriating others, by hurting, alienating and destroying others, even their own kind, by blindly being caught in the rut of unwholesome actions and their fruits. (ItA 2:117,16-19)

**1.2.2 Dīgha Commentary**

**1.2.2.1 The Dīgha Commentary** (DA 3:994) on the Saṅgīti Sutta passage [1.1.2] explains “fire” (*aggi*) metaphorically in the same way as the Iti,vuttaka Commentary [1.1.1]. But DA adds significantly that even some gods in the celestial realms are “burned” by the karmic fires of unwholesome karma, such as in the cases of the Mano,padosikā devas [1.2.2.2] and the Khīḍḍa,padosikā devas [1.2.2.3].

Such gods, says **the Brahma,jāla Sutta** (D 1) commentary,<sup>3</sup> are “destroyed” (*vinassanti*) by their own actions. They are “defiled” (*padussanti*) (by karma)—this is the verb for *padosikā*. These names clearly refer to the karmic state of the gods—the gods of the sense-world, to be exact. That is to say, these gods are destroyed by their own unwholesome thoughts [1.2.2.2] or by their divine playfulness [1.2.2.3]. In

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<sup>1</sup> D 33,1.10 (32)/3:217.

<sup>2</sup> DA 3:994,20-33.

<sup>3</sup> DA 1:113,3-11.

short, these gods, like any beings, are destroyed by their own actions by the very fact that they exist and are unawakened.

**1.2.2.2 The *mano,padosikā devā***—“gods defiled by mind”<sup>4</sup>—they are so called because they are tormented by hatred (*dosassa pana anudahanatāya mano,padosikā devā*).<sup>5</sup> When these gods’ minds are defiled, they are “destroyed,” that is, they die.<sup>6</sup> These gods clearly are those of the lowest of the heavens, that is **the Cātum,mahā,rājika**, the heaven of the 4 great kings.<sup>7</sup>

For example, a young god, wishing to join in a festival celebration, set out by chariot with his retinue. Another god, out on a walk, sees the first riding on the chariot ahead of him. Becoming angry (out of envy), he exclaims:

“That wretch! There he goes all puffed up with rapture to bursting point, as if he had never seen a festival before!”

Then the first god turns around and notices that the other god is angry—angry people are easy to notice. Seeing another angry in this manner easily makes one angry, too. He retorts:

“So you’re angry: what business is it of yours? This fortune of mine is won on account of giving, moral virtue and so on, and not on your account!”

Now if one of them becomes angry, but the other does not, the latter prevents the former’s destruction. But when both are angry, the anger of one adds on to the other’s anger, and both will pass away, leaving their harems weeping. This is the nature of things.<sup>8</sup>

**1.2.2.3** The second karmic category of gods are **the *Khiḍḍa,padosikā deva***, “gods defiled by play.”<sup>9</sup> These gods of the sense-world are tormented by delusion.<sup>10</sup> They fall (*cavati*, die) from their state due to their forgetting to take their food. It is said that these gods are so carried away frolicking and reveling in their great beauty and splendour that they become oblivious of whether they have taken their meals or not.

Missing even a single meal causes them to pass away immediately afterwards. Even when they do eat *after* that meal-time, it would not nourish them effectively enough; they would still pass away immediately afterwards.<sup>11</sup> This is because of the power of their karma-generated heat element (*kammaja,teja*) and the delicacy of their physical body (*karaja,kāya*).<sup>12</sup> In human beings, the karma-generated heat element is delicate but the physical body is strong. As such, humans can stay alive for even a week on warm water, clear gruel, and so on.

But in the case of these gods, the heat element is strong, but their body is delicate. They cannot survive if they miss even a single meal. A lotus placed on a hot rock at noon during the hot season would wilt by the evening, and even if one were to pour a hundred jars of water over it, it would still perish. In the same way, even though these devas eat and drink after missing a meal, they cannot survive; they pass away.

<sup>4</sup> D 1,47 (SD 25.3).

<sup>5</sup> DA 3:994,30.

<sup>6</sup> Like the *Khiḍḍa,padosika devas*, mentioned only in 2 other suttas: in a list of gods in **Mahā Samaya S** (D 20/-2:260) & in a passage on the beginning of things in **Pāṭika S** (D 24/3:32 x2, 33).

<sup>7</sup> That is, the lowest of the sense-sphere heavens.

<sup>8</sup> DA 1:114,9-23.

<sup>9</sup> D 1,45 (SD 25.3).

<sup>10</sup> DA 3:30-32.

<sup>11</sup> *Moha,vasena hi tāsam sati,sammoso hoti. Tasmā khiḍḍā,vasena āhāra,kālaṃ ativattitvā kālaṃ,karonti* (DA 3:994,30-33).

<sup>12</sup> VbhA 498.

The Old Commentaries do not say who these gods are. But according to Buddhaghosa, since it is said, “In the case of these gods, their heat element is strong, but their body is delicate,” without any distinction, we can take it as referring to those gods sustained by material food in this manner. There was also the view that only **the Nimmāna,rati gods** (who delight in creating) and **the Para,nimmita,vasavatti gods** (who lord over others’ creations) are meant.<sup>13</sup> (DA 1:113 f)

## 2 Metaphors and similes in Buddhism

### **2.1 DEFINITION AND USES OF METAPHORS AND SIMILES**

#### **2.1.1 Metaphor and simile as psychospiritual tools**

**2.1.1.1** There are at least two helpful ways of talking about ourselves, others and our current state, our being and our becoming:

(1) by way of **metaphors**: by what they are, how they are, and where they are heading, and

(2) by way of **similes** by what they are like, what they can be, and what they must be.

Although this may sound like a literary exercise, my purpose is the application of these terms in personal growth, psychological change and spiritual transformation according to early Buddhism. The application of metaphors and similes in great literature and religious texts remains as instructive and as magical as ever.

I’m using the terms “metaphors” and “similes” in a non-technical manner to reflect change and transformation in our *personality, humanity and individuality* for good and awakening. We thus begin by seeing and accepting what we really **are**; then, what we **can** be and envisioning that; thus, we work and become **true individuals** (*sappurisa*). In a psychospiritual way—by means of mindful vision—we are then able to identify our *unwholesome* roots, transform them into *wholesome* roots, and we then embody and *become* that wholesomeness, thus becoming wise and free.

**2.1.1.2** A **metaphor**, as used here, describes what we are, the way things are, and what they will be. Such a dynamic reflects our human state, one of change, seeing change and desiring change for the better. We are only *born* human with a mirror-like mind that tends to imitate and become what is reflected in it. Here we use the notion of “the 3 roots”—greed, hatred and delusion—with a broader emotional range as mental biases (*agati*), that is, as *greed, hatred, delusion and fear*.

To the ancient Indians, the 4 subhuman states of the asura, animal, preta and hell-being are a **mythology of being**. These ideas of existential states give meaning to the lives of those Indians, which were fraught with lack and pain. Such a meaning still well applies to us even today. Our purpose then is to transcend these unwholesome states by creating good karma. The foundation for such good karma is that of living morally good lives that respect life, property, freedom, truth and the mind (**the values** underlying each of the 5 precepts respectively).

**2.1.1.3** In significant ways, the 4 subhuman states—those of asura, animal, preta and hell-being— can be seen as **metaphors** for the 4 biases in how we think and live our lives here and now. We *become* our biases. The subhuman states each embody one of the 4 biases as our primary negative emotion in these ways, but they are each otherwise driven by *all* the 3 unwholesome roots:

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<sup>13</sup> That is, the gods of the two highest sense-sphere heavens.

	<u>dominated by</u>	<u>characterized by</u>
(1) the asura;	greed;	measuring, exploiting and appropriating;
(2) the hell-being;	hatred;	crowdedness, tribalism and violence;
(3) the preta;	delusion;	quests for wants, especially food, rooted in insatiability;
(4) the animal;	fear;	ignorance, and repetitive and predictable herd instincts.

(1) When we are filled with **greed**, lusting for things, running after them and appropriating them, we *become asuras* right here and now. In their greed, asuras lust for bodies, beings and things to be collected and exploited in terms of numbers, and to be discarded or ignored when this usefulness is gone. Asuras have no appreciation of being whatsoever; they only see or seek “things” by measuring them as “something” that affirms their asura state. They are those who tend to see others as “How much are you worth to me?” “I must get my money’s worth from you no matter what.” “You have no worth except when purposeful to me.” And so on. Thus, they are not only *subhuman*; they are also nonhuman.

(2) Habituated by **hatred** we *become hell-beings*, driven to dominate, to exclude, to discriminate, and then to deprive and destroy those who are different from or disagree with us, regarding them by some unholy name, as “outsiders” or “others.” Hell-beings live in crowds driven by violence, even against their own kind, and die by violence in no time. Their minds of violence imprison and trap them by desires for greater power and greater means of violence and destruction.

(3) **Delusion** dominates the minds of **pretas**, driving them on quests for pleasure and fulfilment. Upon obtaining what they see as desirable, these things simply turn into dirt and muck. Their insatiability enslaves them to a perpetual state of wanting and seeking, especially for food and sustenance. Hence, they tend to be collectors who are never satisfied with what they find. Unable to enjoy anything, they are caught in a Sisyphean quest for seemingly desirable objects.

(4) **Fear** arises due to survival instinct in reaction to any kinds of unfamiliar *sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches*—which characterizes **animals**. Animals’ fear is rooted in utter ignorance of why they have fear. Hence, they tend to keep to repetitive routines, familiar pastures and the safety of the herd. Of all the subhuman states, theirs is probably the most short-lived, subject to being devoured by stronger and more cunning predators, even by the more powerful of their kind. Hence, they are driven to keep to their pack or group, seeking food, finding mates, raising the young, living by tooth and claw, and often dying prematurely.

**2.1.1.4** Clearly, what we have stated above is neither a description of species nor an advocacy of speciesism, but a typology of **existential being**, that is, of “existing” in the 4 subhuman states. These are metaphors for mental states that humans fall into when driven by any of the 4 biases (greed, hatred, delusion and fear), which can be briefly described as follows.

When we are **greedy** or lustful, never satisfied with what we have or what we are, unwilling and unable to restrain ourselves, that is, lacking any respect for self or others, driven only by taking things and having them—we fall into **the asura mind**. We become the asura, measuring others, exploiting them, collecting them, callous towards them; to us might is right, and nothing else matters.

When we are habitually **hateful** and often violent, we may have a human body but our mind is that of **the hell-being**. We have neither respect for life nor restraint in respect for others. While the asura is an adept in the notion of power and may resort to subterfuge, the hell-being is simply naïve and purblind, and who is habitually and reactively violent, lacking any insight or subtlety towards others.

**Deluded** by promises of pleasure and power, endlessly driven by images of what is desirable and consumable—this is **the preta mind**. Such a mind is *deluded* in seeing everything in black and white:

either we like it or dislike it. We seek to appropriate what we like, and reject what we dislike. Yet, upon obtaining anything, we at once see nothing in it. The preta is neither happy nor satisfied with anyone or anything, even with oneself. In modern terms, the preta is a chronic consumer driven by marketing and products; a loyal consumer who is beyond satisfaction.

When we lack understanding or wisdom, and lack the ability or will to learn, we are often shadowed by **fear** towards what is new, different or unfamiliar. Often then we tend to resort to hearsay, habit, superstition or instinct. When we live in fear in this way, we are likely to have **an animal mind**. We are driven by habits and routines, bowing and lowing to the herd for safety and succour. We are then exploited, conned and controlled by the crowd, by strangers after our wealth and resources. Moreover, we are chained to rituals and cycles of seeking food and sustenance. We see bodies as merely objects for loveless mating and pleasure, for routine play and rest; our life being but a preparation for its end.

**2.1.1.5** These subhuman states are not merely people or beings but conditions and states that affect and drive us. As **asuras** we tend to become cynics who “know the price of everything and the value of nothing.”<sup>14</sup> As **pretas** we seem to have everything but enjoy nothing. As **animals** we routinely seek things out of fear and want. As **hell-beings** we simply use force and violence for what we want whether these are beings and things.

In modern society, what we see as “cost of living crisis” is often what we have to pay in terms of our humanity. That crisis is a lessening or loss of our humanity that turns us into subhumans caught in an unhappy crowd of things and a crowdedness of inhuman busyness. The greatest *cost of living crisis* is the forgetting that we are human and being driven by our lower nature.

## **2.1.2 Purpose of similes**

**2.1.2.1** While a metaphor identifies what we are with a certain state (the Buddha is the “lion of man,” *nara,sīha*), a **simile** is a comparison of a state to another highlighting their likeness in good or in bad, such as, like lotuses in a pond given in **the Ariya,pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26):

Some lotuses are born and grow submerged in the water; some lotuses stand level with the water-surface, and some lotuses rise above the water and stand unsoiled by the water. These are respectively like beings *blinded* by dust in their eyes, beings with *little* dust in their eyes (ready to learn Dharma), and beings with *no dust* in their eyes (those on the path).<sup>15</sup>

When we are **blinded** by the dust of greed, hatred, delusion or fear, we will not see charity, love, wisdom or moral courage. When we accept the reality that we *are* blinded by any unwholesome bias, we are *encouraged* (inspire moral courage within oneself) to learn to see ourselves as we really are. Then, we are buddha-like or arhat-like.

**2.1.2.2** For this reason, it is vital that we do not disvalue or take lightly the nature of **buddhahood**. We are *not* Buddha merely by saying it or believing in some dogma or nodding to a wakeless quip; this may be conceit, even delusion. When we are not what we think we really are, we are truly blinded from seeing true reality. There is only one way we can become buddha, that is by aspiring before another buddha and working for that awakening.<sup>16</sup>

However, we can aspire even here and now to be **buddha-like**, which is the same as to be **arhat-like**. We constantly ask ourselves: What would the Buddha do here? What would an arhat do here? Then, we

<sup>14</sup> This is a quote from Oscar Wilde’s Lady Windermere’s Fan (1892), used to describe a cynical person who understands monetary costs but is unable to grasp the intrinsic worth of people, objects, or principles.

<sup>15</sup> M 26,21 (SD 1.11).

<sup>16</sup> See **Aspiration to buddhahood and disciplehood**, SD 62.11.

emulate the Buddha or the arhat, such as keeping the being determined and diligent in keeping the precepts, even observing the uposatha regularly.<sup>17</sup>

As lay practitioners, we should at least keep to **the 5 precepts**, that is, make every effort to:

- (1) respect life, harm none, and offer the joy of emotional security to those who need it;
- (2) respect others' property, and show generosity for the happiness of others;
- (3) respect the freedom of another's person and keep moral restraint with love;
- (4) respect truth by practising right and timely speech (which is true, unifying, pleasant, useful); and
- (5) respect the mind by keeping it intoxication-free, and calm, clear and ready for learning.

We do this mindfully, determined to be a better person, and out of love for others that they may be free from fear, want and harm, so that we can all live our lives as fully as possible.

### **2.1.3 A mind that frees**

**2.1.3.1 Metaphors and similes** are mental tools that help us to see the *goodness* of certain states in ourselves or in others, and to cultivate them further to better ourselves, so that we directly know and see true reality. These tools empower us to see ourselves just as we are here and now, bad or good. Seeing the bad, we abandon it and cultivate the good; seeing the good, we further refine it into what is better to bring us true joy; joyfully and wisely, we cultivate moral virtue. Rejoicing in moral virtue, we calm and clear the mind. With this mirror-like mind we directly see true reality and grow in wisdom and freedom.

When we see ourselves as we really are, as **asuras**, we at once work to cleanse our minds and transmute our *greed and lust* with other-regard and generosity.

When we see ourselves as we really are, as **hell-beings**, we reflect on the pain and ugliness of *hatred*. We should see impermanence in all things. Everything before us changes whether we hate or we love it. When we hate, hate is in us; when we love and show kindness, we accept ourselves fully, too. Why not love, then, so that we can grow in joy and freedom?

When we see ourselves as we really are, as **pretas**, we will realize how deluded we were with *pleasure and power*. We live joyfully and mindfully in the wholesomeness of the present moment. We recall the Buddha's warning of the dangers of "gain, fame, praise" (*lābha, sakkāra, siloka*),<sup>18</sup> and live humbly with self-effacement.<sup>19</sup>

When we see ourselves as we really are, as **animals**, we see how we live in the shadow of *fear*, goaded and nose-led by the crowd of *hearsay, habit, superstition and instinct*. We seek the light of learning with zest. We fear not our lapses and mistakes since we respectfully review them so that our wisdom will grow. Even as we learn, we will teach others timely and compassionately; even as we teach, we will learn.

**2.1.3.2 The human state** is unique and advantageous in the sense that for humans, of all their faculties, the mind is the most prominent:

"They are humans because of the prominence of mind" (*manaso ussannatāya manussā*).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See eg (Tad-ah') Uposatha S (A 3.70), SD 4.18.

<sup>18</sup> M 1:192; S 2:229, 237; A 2:73, 3:343 f, 377; Vbh 352 f. They are a "splinter, precipice" (*papaṭā*), S 2:227.

<sup>19</sup> "Self-effacement" (*sallekha*) refers to diligence in removing any unwholesome state that arises in our mind: Sallekha S (M 8,12/1:42 f), SD 51.8.

<sup>20</sup> MA 2:37; KhpA 123; UA 140,16; ItA 1:128; NcA 69. See SD 62.11 (2.2.1.3).



This especially refers to our awareness that we are our minds, that “as we think so we are” (*mano, maya*), as laid down in the first two verses of **the Dhammapada**, thus:

The mind precedes all mental states; when, with a defiled mind, suffering follows one	the mind is supreme; mind-made are they: one speaks or acts, like a wheel that dogs a draught ox’s foot. <sup>21</sup>	(Dh 1)
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The mind precedes all mental states; when, with a pure mind, happiness follows one	the mind is supreme; mind-made are they: one speaks or acts, like a shadow that leaves not. <sup>22</sup>	(Dh 2) <sup>23</sup>
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This does not mean that the mind is not prominent in other beings. Indeed, the mind works in the same way in any being: “As we think so we are.” Amongst the suffering (subhuman) states, the mind is predominated by suffering due to some kind of lack:

- **asuras** lack *restraint, charity and love*; they are dominated by suffering due to greed and lust;
- **hell-beings** lack *love, compassion and joy*; they are dominated by suffering due to hatred and violence;
- **pretas** lack *giving, contentment and peace*; they are dominated by suffering due to delusion and ignorance.
- **animals** lack *learning, insight and wisdom*; they are dominated by suffering due to fear and darkness.

Due to the prominence of unwholesome mind amongst the subhumans, they are unable to work for spiritual awakening and freedom.

## **2.1.4 The mind that holds**

**2.1.4.1 The celestial beings**, on the other hand, are dominated by their good karmic fruits, enjoying that which distracts them from spending time in spiritual development. **The sense-world devas** are dominated by celestial pleasures so that they usually become unmindful of mental cultivation. When the signs of their death arise, their negative reactions to such signs relegate them to be reborn in some lower states, even amongst the subhumans.<sup>24</sup>

**2.1.4.2 The form-world brahmas** inhabit 16 realms, divided into 4 dhyana-worlds, that is, those of the 1<sup>st</sup>, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyanas. In place of a sense-based body, their form consists of pure radiant light. As conscious beings, they have only 2 senses: sight and hearing.<sup>25</sup> Compared to sense-world beings who depend on the 5 faculties to “sense” things, these brahmas are far more advanced sensually. Not only are they able to better sense what we bodily experience, but they do so with profound pleasure,

<sup>21</sup> *Mano, pubb’āṅgamā dhammā mano, seṭṭhā mano, mayā | manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhasati vā karoti vā | tato naṃ dukkham anveti cakkarāṃ va vahato padaṃ.*

<sup>22</sup> *Mano, pubb’āṅgamā dhammā mano, seṭṭhā mano, mayā | manasā ce pasannena bhasati vā karoti vā | tato naṃ sukham anveti chāyā va anāpayinī.*

<sup>23</sup> For further details, see SD 8.3 (3).

<sup>24</sup> The 5 omens that precede a sense-world deva’s demise are: (1) his garlands wither, (2) his garments become soiled, (3) his armpits exude sweat, (4) his body gives off a foul smell, and (5) he delights not in his celestial seat. On the (*pubba, nimitta*); see **Pañca Pubba, nimitta S** (It 83), SD 23.8a(1.2).

<sup>25</sup> Except in the case of the non-percipient beings (*asañña, satta*) of the 4<sup>th</sup> dhyana, who live in a suspended state of animation for 500 aeons. Once a thought arises in them, they fall from that state and are reborn elsewhere. See SD 23.14 (3.2.6).

if they need or want to, just by putting their minds to it. Without the physical senses, they have no sense-desires, and they have very long lifespans.<sup>26</sup>

**2.1.4.3 The formless-world brahmas** inhabit the highest of the 31 planes of existence. They have or need *only consciousness*, without any physical basis. Each of these 4 realms is successively subtler than the preceding one and longer-lived. They have no need of the physical senses because they constantly enjoy the profound bliss of the formless dhyanas. In other words, they are essentially beings in deep meditation, or those who enjoy the bliss arising from their formless attainment (*arūpa samāpatti*) (these high formless states are technically not called “dhyanas,” *jhana*).<sup>27</sup>

## 2.2 THE HUMAN STATE

### 2.2.1 The minds that we are

**2.2.1.1** For our purposes, we see the metaphors above as describing beings currently caught in the various subhuman states [2.1.1]. When we see such a subhuman state as a *metaphor*, we identify with it, reflecting how we *are losing or have lost our humanity* and have become such a subhuman being. Seeing and accepting our current condition as a vivid reality, we are better willing and able to rise above such an unwholesome state and return to **the human state**, especially by examining and understanding the nature of our own mind.<sup>28</sup> [2.1.2.2]

When we are overcome with greed and lust, we *are asuras*. We want to be buddha-like; we need to cultivate *moral restraint, charity and love*.

When we are burning with hatred and violence, we *are hell-beings*. We want to be buddha-like; we need to cultivate *love, compassion, and joy*.

When we are blinded by delusion and ignorance, we *are pretas*. We want to be buddha-like; we need to cultivate *giving, contentment and peace*.

When we are pursued by fear and darkness, we *are animals*. We want to be buddha-like; we need to cultivate *learning, insight and wisdom*.

**2.2.1.2** Animals, in their natural state, are driven by the negative tendencies in the context of the psychology of the subhuman states. This “subhuman psychology” is about how the mind, despite our body, defines our real existential state. In other words, even humans can be caught in the rut of any of these subhuman states, depending on how humans live and think.

On the other hand, we have suttas and stories about how animals often have better qualities than humans. In **the Kandaraka Sutta** (M 51), for example, the elephant-trainer’s son Pessa, rejoices in the Buddha’s teaching of the 4 satipatthanas, and that he, too, and other lay followers practise it. Pessa declares that it is remarkable that the Buddha knew just how to teach mental cultivation to humans, who are so difficult to train.

As an elephant trainer, Pessa says that, from his own experience, animals, unlike humans, are much easier to train: “**Humans, bhante, are this tangle; and animals, bhante, are this open clearing!**” Humans are often messed up with their views, emotions, devices and cunning; whereas animals are more straightforward, loyal and tamable.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See **Early Buddhist cosmology**, SD 57.10 (6.1.2); see App for the 31 planes. For details on the individual categories of these beings (and others of the 31 planes), see Punnadhammo, *The Buddhist Cosmos*. 2018: ch 3.

<sup>27</sup> See **Early Buddhist cosmology**, SD 57.10 (6.1.3).

<sup>28</sup> See “Man the minder,” SD 57.10 (3.1.2).

<sup>29</sup> **Kandaraka S** (M 51,4.3/1:340), SD 32.9; also SD 62.15 (2.2).



**2.2.1.3** Besides this sutta account, we have a number of **stories of animals**, who, on account of their encounter with the Buddha or the Dharma, are **reborn in heaven**, such as in the following accounts:<sup>30</sup>

**The horse Kaṇṭhaka**, on seeing his master Siddhattha renouncing, realizing that he would not see him again, died of a broken heart. He at once arose as the deva Kaṇṭhaka in Tāva,tiṃsa heaven.<sup>31</sup>

**The bull elephant Pārileyya** attended to the Buddha spending solitary retreat in Pārileyyaka forest during the 10<sup>th</sup> rains. When, at the end of the rains retreat, the Buddha left the forest, the elephant, unable to follow him, died broken-hearted and was reborn in Tāvatiṃsa heaven.<sup>32</sup>

Besides the elephant Parileyya, **a monkey**, too, attended to the Buddha during the 10<sup>th</sup> rains retreat. The monkey offered the Buddha a honeycomb which the Buddha accepted. Joyfully excited, the monkey scampered in the trees, but fell and was impaled on a sharp tree stump. He dies immediately and was reborn in Tāva,tiṃsa heaven. (DhA 1.5b/1:59 f)

**The elephant Erāvana**. Sakra, in his last human life was Māgha, who, with 33 other friends, spent their lives in public works (such as planting trees, digging wells, levelling roads, building rest-houses for travellers and so on). The king of Magadha gave his own elephant to Māgha to help him in his works. When the elephant died, he was reborn in Tāvatiṃsa as Sakra's elephant, Erāvana. (DhA 2.7/1:273 f; SnA 368 f)

**A frog**. While the Buddha was teaching on the shore of the Gaggarā lotus lake at Campā, a frog sitting at the edge of the crowd was fascinated by the Buddha's voice. A cowherd, standing nearby, leaning on his stick, accidentally pierced the frog, killing him instantly. The frog was reborn in Tāvatiṃsa with a 12-*yojana* wide celestial mansion. Learning of his good karma, the young frog-deva (*maṇḍūka deva,putta*) appeared before the Buddha to show him his gratitude.<sup>33</sup> Then, listening to the Dharma, the frog-deva attained streamwinning. (Vv 51/\*852-\*855/17; VvA 216-219; VA 121; Vism 208; SD 36.2 (5.1.1.4))<sup>34</sup>

**Bats**. A Commentarial story tells us that A cluster of 500 bats in a cave were captivated by the resonance of the voices of monks reciting the Abhidhamma texts. Upon dying, the bats were reborn in Tāvatiṃsa heaven. In their last birth, they were reborn as humans in our Buddha's time and became monks. (DhA 14.2/3:222 f; SD 26.1 (7.2))

## **2.2.2 The versatility of humanity**

**2.2.2.0** Our human state or humanity is defined, defended and developed by our living a moral life that abstains from killing, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from lying and from unmindfulness. The human state is thus rooted in **the values of life, labour, love, light and mind**.

**2.2.2.1** **Life** exists in all conscious beings, while existence refers to bodily change and adapting to external change, even with mere sense-consciousness, especially with that of touch. Consciousness involves the ability to learn, to recall and organize that learning so that one can cultivate or choose how to adapt to change, and to deal with challenges and crises, especially with death. Thus, life is of natural

<sup>30</sup> See also Piya Tan, "Animals go to heaven" ([R68a](#), *Simple Joys* 1 2009: 16.1) R152 (11 Mar 2025). On the debate in other religions: <https://thedogpress.com/Funny/All-Dogs-To-Heaven.asp>. (Thanks Matt Jenkins for this link. 20 Sep 2025).

<sup>31</sup> Vv 7.7/81; VvA 311-319; J 1:65,22-29; BA 284,22-30; SD 52.1 (10.4).

<sup>32</sup> V 1:337-357; DhA 1.5/1:58 f; SD 6.1 (3).

<sup>33</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> verse, Vv 852, is often qu in Comys: DA 961,1-3; MA 1:129,25-27, 2:124,24 f; AA 2:375,25-30; KhpA 114,10-14.

<sup>34</sup> The story is retold in **Saddhamma,saṅgaha** (JPTS 1890:80 f). A similar story is found in the Jain texts: W Schubring, *Die Lehre der Jainas*, Berlin, 1935:130. On E J Thomas' n (VvA:H 1974:102 n2).

value since we humans and sentient beings change and grow. Life is especially precious to humans since we use this life-learning to use our minds to transcend our bodily limitations.

**2.2.2.2 Labour.** Unlike the higher gods—especially those of the form world and the formless world—who do not have a physical body, humans do. On account of our human body, we need to keep it moving often enough and in some beneficial ways in order to stay healthy. Technically, we call this wholesome bodily movements “**exercise**.” Even monastics exercise by daily walking, both on almsround, and whenever the body tires from long sitting in Dharma lessons or in meditation.

For beneficial change and growth, all beings with physical bodies—especially humans and animals—must **labour** for food and things they need for their health and happiness. This is the value of *having* that comes from their labour, meaning to work for things we need to support life. Hence, they have the right to *having* health and happiness, which should not be alienated or taken away from them—to do so is stealing, a karmic wrong.

**2.2.2.3 Karma as “work or effort”**—differentiates divine beings, humans and subhumans. Divine beings do not need to make much physical effort on account of the fact that their existence is that of pure minds or highly purified minds (nonetheless they are still unliberated). As a result of various good karma they have done, they have attained this divine mental existence. [2.1.4]

The brahmas of **the formless realms** (the 4 formless dhyanas), for example, are disembodied beings of *pure energy*, who exist in profound formless dhyanas; hence, they are, as a rule, invisible to others. They can, if they wish, assume some physical or palpable form visible to lower beings.<sup>35</sup>

The brahmas of **the form realms** (the 4 form dhyanas) have bodies of *pure light*; hence, they are beautifully radiant beings. These beings (including those of the formless world) have superpowered senses of sight and hearing. They have no need for the senses of *smell, taste or touch* since with their mental powers they can conjure any of these sensings to their liking. The gods of the form world often have great heavenly hosts each lorded over by their own Mahā Brahmā (“high god”), the most powerful amongst their respective hosts.<sup>36</sup>

**The devas** of the sense-world have bodies of highly refined matter with which they are able to exercise much greater powers and dexterity than humans do with their feeble physical frames. Like brahmas of the form-world, devas of the sense-world, too, can assume a physical form visible to humans and other beings.<sup>37</sup>

Yet, despite the feeble frames of their bodies, humans are capable of cultivating their minds to attain great powers for bad as well as for good. In terms of **good**, the human mind is ideal for labouring in quest of awakening by freeing their minds from sense-based defilements and wrong views. Hence, buddhas arise in the human world.<sup>38</sup>

**2.2.2.4 Love (*mettā*)** begins with seeing meaning in one’s life that is bigger than oneself; thus, its purpose is to include more of others so that they too are able to grow in joy and freedom in true fellowship.

Love is the full respect for one’s own body and mind, keeping them healthy. Love is that same respect one shows others for their bodies and minds. Love is a joyful acceptance of “no” just as we rejoice in being embraced by others.

<sup>35</sup> On the formless realms, see SD 62.11 (2.3.17). On the “stations of consciousness” of the form and formless gods, see SD 57.24 (2.2.1).

<sup>36</sup> On the form-world realms, see SD 62.11 (2.3.16).

<sup>37</sup> On the sense-world devas, see SD 62.11 (2.3.14.3).

<sup>38</sup> On the human state as the 1<sup>st</sup> of 8 preconditions for Buddhahood, see SD 62.11 (2.2.1).

Love is the unconditional acceptance of oneself, joyfully able and willing to learn from one's own errors and grow with experience. Love is the unconditional embrace of others, inspiring them to learn from their lapses and grow with such learning.

**2.2.2.5 Light** is the vision of goodness in others, and in their ability to learn and free themselves from the unwholesome by their own effort. Light is the wholesome truth that inspires us with our own effort to do good, be good, give good so that we can free our *humanity* to become divinity even here and now, with *love, ruth*,<sup>39</sup> *joy and peace*.

**2.2.2.6 The mind**, when cultivated wholesomely, makes us human; when our mind is unwholesome, we lose our humanity and fall into subhuman states. We cultivate the human body with moral virtue, seeing others as we see ourselves; we cultivate our mind to free itself beyond our sense-based world, and realize the full reality of the liberated mind, nirvana.

— — —

## (Iti) Aggi Sutta The (Iti,vuttaka) Discourse the Fires

It 3.5.4

1 This was indeed heard by me spoken by the Blessed One, spoken by the Arhat.<sup>40</sup>

2 There are these 3 fires, bhikshus. What are the three?

- |                           |                 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| (1) The fire of lust,     | <i>rāg'aggi</i> |
| (2) the fire of hatred,   | <i>dos'aggo</i> |
| (3) the fire of delusion. | <i>moh'aggi</i> |

These, bhikshus, are the 3 fires.

3 *rāg'aggi dahati macce  
ratte kāmesu mucchite  
dos'aggi pana vyāpanne  
nare pañātipātino*

The fire of lust burns mortals;  
drenched in pleasures they are made foolish.  
The fire of hatred, moreover, burns  
people who kill living beings.

4 *moh'aggi pana sammūlhe  
ariya, dhamme akovide  
ete aggī ajānantā  
sakkāyā, bhiratā pajā*

The fire of delusion burns the muddle-minded,  
those unskilled in the noble teachings.  
These fires (consume) the ignorant  
folks who delight in identifying with their body.

5 *te vuḍḍhayanti nirayaṃ  
tiracchānaṃ ca yoniyo*

They (the ignorant) swell the hells,  
the wombs of beasts,

<sup>39</sup> “*Ruth*” is a good old early Middle English word for “compassion” which should be resurrected. See SD 60.2 (5.4.2.2).

<sup>40</sup> *Vuttam h'etaṃ bhagavata, vuttam arahatā'ti me sutam*. This is said to be spoken by the laywoman **Khujj'utta-rā**: see SD 57.26 (1.2.2.3): see SD 16.14 (1).

- asuraṃ petti,visayaṃ  
amuttā māra,bandhanā* the asuras, and the preta realm—  
they are not freed from Māra's bonds.
- 6 *ye ca rattin,divā yuttā  
sammā,sambuddha,sāsane  
te nibbāpenti rāg'aggiṃ  
niccaṃ asubha,saññino* And they that are devoted night and day  
to the fully self-awakened one's teaching,  
they put out the fire of lust  
by constantly perceiving the body's impurity.
- 7 *dos'aggiṃ pana mettāya  
nibbāpenti nar'uttamā.  
moh'aggiṃ pana paññāya  
yāyaṃ nibbedha,gāminī* The superior person extinguishes b  
hatred's fire with lovingkindness a  
and delusion's fire with wisdom—  
this is how one goes to the path of penetrating truth.
- 8 *te nibbāpetvā nipakā  
rattin,divam atanditā  
asesaṃ parinibbanti  
asesaṃ dukkham accagum* The prudent who untiringly,  
night and day, put out these (fires),  
they win nirvana without residue—  
they fully overcome suffering.
- 9 *ariy'addasā<sup>41</sup> veda,guno  
samma-d-aññāya paṇḍitā  
jāti-k,khayam abhiññāya  
nāgacchanti puna-b,bhavan ti* The knowledge-masters, seeing the noble truths,  
are wise through right knowing,  
by directly knowing the destruction of birth—  
they return not to be born again.
- 10 This matter, too, was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.

— evaṃ —

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<sup>41</sup> *Ariy'addasā*, seeing or knowing the noble truths. Comy: "One is *ariy'addasā* on account of seeing noble ones, such as the Buddha and other noble ones, and (seeing) the 4 noble truths and nirvana that is remote from defilements" (*ariyaṃ nibbānaṃ ariyaṃ catu,saccam eva vā diṭṭhavanto*, ItA 2:119,20-22).