

SD 62.21 (Ānāpāna,sati) Vesālī Sutta

The (Ānāpāna,sati) Discourse at Vesālī | S 54.9

Ce **Asubha Sutta** The Discourse on the Foul, or (Vesālī) Asubha Sutta

Theme: (1) Tell the truth to stop it. (2) The wholesomeness of breath meditation.

Translated by Piya Tan ©2018; 2025

[For bibliographical details, see SD Guide]

Contents

1 Sutta summary, sources and significance

- 1.1 Sutta summary, sources and significance
- 1.2 Sutta sources
 - 1.2.1 The 2 suttas, 6 Vinayas
 - 1.2.2 Buddhist records of the Vesālī story
 - 1.2.3 Sutta significance
 - 1.2.4 On *sattha,hāraka*
 - 1.2.5 Learned studies on the Vesālī monk suicide/murder story

2 Understanding the Vesālī incident (S 54.9)

- 2.1 The body in early Buddhism and Indian ascetic tradition
 - 2.1.1 Disgust towards the physical body
 - 2.1.2 Ascetic practices in the canon
 - Fig 2.1.2.1 Fasting Buddha (Emaciated Buddha)
 - 2.1.3 The 3rd *pārājika* rule (against taking life)
 - 2.1.4 The 1st *pārājika* rule (against sexuality)
- 2.2 Sutta and Vinaya as literature
 - 2.2.1 Vinaya materials in the suttas
 - 2.2.2 Family relations and renunciation
- 2.3 How to read Vinaya stories
 - 2.3.1 Telling the truth to prevent it
 - 2.3.2 Conclusion

(Ānāpāna,sati) Vesālī Sutta

1 Sutta summary, sources and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

At Vesālī, the Buddha teaches some 500 monks on the benefits of meditating on **foulness** (*asubha*), that is, the impurity of the body, and then goes into a fortnight's solitary retreat. The monks, not fully understanding the practice, felt loathing for their bodies and committed suicide in droves. On emerging from his retreat, the Buddha learned of the terrible predicament, and Ānanda invites him to teach a suitable meditation to remedy the situation. The Buddha teaches **the breath meditation**.

1.2 SUTTA SOURCES

1.2.1 The 2 suttas, 6 Vinayas

This remarkable story [1.1] has been preserved in 2 suttas and 6 extant Vinayas, as follows:

(1) Vesālī Sutta	S 54.9/5:320,7-322,13 (SD 62.21)	the Pali version;
(2) Saṃyukta Āgama	SĀ 809 (T99.2.207b21-208a8) ¹	Chinese parallel to Vesālī Sutta ;
(3) Vinaya (Pali)	Pār 3.1 (V 3:68-71)	cf VA 3:393 f <i>asubha,kathā</i> ;
(4) Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya	T1425 (T22.254b21-255a7)	with detailed <i>ānâpâna,sati</i> ;
(5) Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya	T1442 (T23.659c21-660a25) T1443 (T22.923b10-923c4) (Tib) D 3 ca 134a or Q 1032 che 120a7	Vinayavibhaṅga for monks; Vinayavibhaṅga for nuns.
(6) Sarvāstivāda Vinaya	T1435 (T23.7b21-8b9)	
(7) Dharmaguptaka Vinaya	T1428 (T22.575c11-576b19)	
(8) Mahīśāsaka Vinaya	T1421 (T22.7a-7c7)	

1.2.2 Buddhist records of the Vesālī story

While the 2 suttas and the 6 Vinaya versions of the Vesālī monk suicide story have their own narrative twists trying to reconcile the story with a belief in the Buddha's omniscience, along with some variant dramatic elements, their narrative flows all closely agree. The set-up of the story is as follows: The Buddha recommends that the monks practise cultivation of the foul (*asubha*).

All versions record that the Buddha only gives a broad recommendation for the practice of foulness perception without giving any detailed instructions. The monks then each practises on their own, presumably, without the proper balance that would have come with full instructions. As a result, they are so disgusted with their own bodies that they commit suicide, on their own or with assistance. As soon as the Buddha learns of this, he intervenes. He then teaches them the breath meditation which is a very genial meditation.²

¹ For a ref to this sutra in Skt **Vyākhyā,yukti**, see P Skilling, "Vasubandhu and the Vyākhyāyukti Literature," *J of the International Assoc of Buddhist Studies* 23,2 2000:297-350 (344).

² Comys (SA 3:265,22; VA 2:393,22) relate the Buddha's teaching of cultivating *asubha* by way of contemplating body parts. In **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10/1:57,20, SD 13.3) and its parallel MĀ 98 (T1.583b9) such contemplation of one's own body parts comes with a simile of looking at a sack filled with grains; cf Śikṣāsamuccaya (Bendall 1902:210,8), and Arthavinīścayasūtra (Samtani 1971:24,4). This simile is meant to convey an idea of balance and detachment, not of aversion (for details: Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna: the direct path*, 2003:149, & *Perspectives in Satipaṭṭhāna*, 2013b:68. In early Buddhist meditation, contemplating the body as *asubha* comes, as a rule, with other practices that relate to seeing the body objectively, such as keeping focus on body postures, and leading on to the experience of the calm and clarity of dhyana; cf details in Anālayo, "Perspectives on the body in early Buddhism" (in *Buddhist Meditative*

1.2.3 Sutta significance

1.2.3.1 This Sutta seems to be a shocking departure from the usual edifying nature of the Buddha's teaching. For that very reason, it is worthy of special study. The Sutta opens by saying only that the Buddha "gave the monks **a talk on bodily foulness** in many ways; he spoke in praise of the foul (and) spoke in praise of the cultivation of foulness" in reported speech without any direct speech [§2]. There is no mention of the Buddha giving any detailed instructions, or any kind of caveat for such a difficult meditation practice.

1.2.3.2 The Sutta Commentary gives a traditional explanation of the Vesālī monks' suicide/murder story, mostly by way of past karma of the monks involved. Most modern Buddhists and scholars are unlikely to easily accept such an explanation, if they accept it at all. The point remains that such an explanation or rationalization reflected their views of religious asceticism, including religious suicide (*sallekhana*).³

The Saṃyutta Commentary to the Sutta explains why the Buddha gave such a teaching. In the past, it is said, 500 men earned their living together all their lives as game hunters (*miga, -luddhaka*),⁴ happily going into the forest to encircle and trap animals and birds using clods of earth, sticks, nets and so on. They were reborn in hell, but later, through some past good karma ripening, they were reborn as humans and went forth as monks under the Blessed One. However, a part of their original bad karma found the conditions to ripen during this fortnight and to result in their deaths both by suicide and homicide (*att'upakkamena ca par'upakkamena ca jīvit'upacchedāya*).

The Blessed One foresaw this and realized he could do nothing about it. The Buddha spoke of the foul to remove their attachment to the body so that they would lose their fear of death and could thus be reborn in heaven. Therefore, he spoke on the foul in order to help them, without any intention of extolling death. Realizing that such massive karmic fruiting could not be stopped, he went into seclusion. Among those monks, some were worldlings, some streamwinners, some once-returners, some nonreturners, some arhats. The arhats would not take rebirth, the other noble disciples were bound for a happy rebirth, but the worldlings were of uncertain destiny.

(SA 3:266,31-267,39)

As a whole, this commentarial explanation will raise more questions with modern Buddhists and scholars. Bh Bodhi, in his Saṃyutta translation (2000), for example, expresses his doubts; "but the idea of a karmically predetermined suicide seems difficult to reconcile with the conception of a suicide as a volitionally induced act" (S:B 1952 n301).

1.2.4 On *sattha, hāraka*

1.2.4.1 The Pali compound, *sattha, hāraka* [§4] is an important term that is not clearly understood and is often mistranslated. For reasons stated here I have rendered it as "a killing tool [a life-taker]" with an amplified translation (here, an idiomatic rendition, followed by a literal translation). Let us examine

Traditions, ed K-p Chuang, Taipei, 2014d:21-49. In fact, **S 54.9** is itself a teaching in harmonizing one's meditation, where body loathing is remedied by mindfulness of the breath; for details on breath meditation: Anālayo 2003:125-136 & 2013b:227-240.

³ *Sallekhana* is used broadly here. It is a Jain term referring to ritual suicide by starvation: SD 27.1 (2.1.2).

⁴ Also spelt *luddaka*. *Ludda* means "fierce, cruel, terrible; cruel, gruesome." *Luddha* (past part of *lubbhati*) means "greedy, covetous"; n *lobha*.

what we can learn from the texts and the scholars on what they have learned regarding this fascinating term in its proper context.

The Vinaya's **Old Word Commentary** (*pada, bhajana*, "word analysis") glosses *sattha, hārakaṃ* as "a knife, a dagger, an arrow, a cudgel, a stone, a sword, poison, or a rope" (*asim vā sattim vā bheḍim vā lagu-lam vā pāsāṇam vā sattham vā visam vā rajjum vā*, V 3:73,26-28). Thus, we know, for a start, that this is the prescribed meaning of the term in the Vinaya version of the monk murder/suicide story that opens the 3rd "defeat" (*pārājika*) chapter (V 3:68-71).

1.2.4.2 The Punn'ovāda Sutta (M 145) records an interview the elder Punna had with the Buddha before the elder left for his home country, Sunāparanta (today North Mumbai). In a series of questions, the Buddha asked if Punna was ready to face the challenges of this since the people there were known to be very fierce. In the 7th and last question, the Buddha asked Punna what he would do if the people there took his life with knives. Punna calmly replied:

"There have been disciples of the Blessed One, who being repelled and disgusted by the body and by life, have resorted to a killing tool, the knife.⁵ But I have not sought the knife: **it is the knife that sought me!**" (*taṃ me idaṃ अपरिच्छित्तं येवा sattha, hārakaṃ laddham*).⁶ Apparently, Punna was familiar with the Vesālī monk murder/suicide story, and he uses the same term, *sattha, hāraka*.

1.2.4.3 The Pali-English Dictionary (PED, 1922), however, defines *sattha, hāraka* as "an assassin." Bh Bodhi, in his translations—of both **M 145** and **S 54.9**—too, rendered *sattha, hāraka* as "an assailant."⁷ Ṭhānissaro, in his *The Buddhist Monastic Code 1* (2001, 2013: 87), says: "the word *sattha, hāraka* clearly means 'assassin' in other parts of the Canon (see, eg, M 145)."

Analayo however disagrees ("The mass suicide of monks in discourse and Vinaya literature, Oxford, 2014:16 n17): "Yet the significance of the expression in M 145/3:269,12 is not as self-evident as Ṭhānissaro seems to think." Analayo then refers to Richard Gombrich's addendum to Analayo 2014 for further arguments against rendering *sattha, hāraka* as "assailant," "murderer" and so on, but rather literally as a "life-taker" or a "thing that takes away life." [1.2.4.1]

Analayo adds that **T108** (T2.503a6), a Chinese parallel to M 145, seems to follow a similar Indic expression, reading 求刀為食 *qiú dāo wéi shí*,⁸ where the use of 刀 *dāo* shows that the translator understood the phrase to refer to a killing tool, not a killer. See Analayo, *Comparative Study of Majjhima Nikāya*,⁹ where he notes this expression in T108, without going into details of the significance.

Gombrich, in his Addendum to Analayo 2014, gives perhaps a most helpful suggestion and is the most likely reading of *sattha, hāraka*, thus:

"The word occurs in several places, as Anālayo [2014] reports, and it would be tedious to list all the wrong translations of it which have been published. They seem to have been influenced by the fact that there is a word *sattha* (< Sanskrit *śastra*) meaning a cutting weapon, eg, a knife or dagger. This however is not that word, but a homonym of it. Though it is not in the PED, *sattha* can mean, if we interpret it as the p.p.p.¹⁰ of Sanskrit *vśvas*, "[the breath of] life," a synonym of *pāṇa*. *Hāraka* means 'taking away.'" [1.2.5.2]

⁵ *Santi kho bhagavato sāvakā kāyena ca jīvitena ca aṭṭiyamānā jigucchamānā yeva sattha, hārakaṃ pariyesanti.*

⁶ **M 145**,5(7)/3:268 (SD 20.15).

⁷ M:B (1995, 2001, 2008, 4th ed 2009) 1119; S:B (2001) 1773; that is, as "they sought an assailant," and so on.

⁸ Analayo 2011a renders Chin 求刀為食 *qiú dāo wéi shí* as lit, "searching a knife for food," where 食 is *sì* (4th tone), "to feed." It is probable that the Chin translator had difficulty with the term *sattha, hāraka*, as we do even today.

⁹ Analayo, 2011a:830 n50 on M 145.

¹⁰ In Skt, p.p.p. means "past passive participle," a verb form that functions as an adjective, describing something that has undergone an action in the past. PPPs are frequently used in Sanskrit to modify nouns, indicating that the noun has been acted upon or is the result of a past action.

1.2.5 Learned studies on the Vesālī monk suicide/murder story

1.2.5.1 At the time of writing, at least 2 learned papers on the problem of the monk suicide “mystery” of Vesālī have been published:

Mills, Laurence C R [Khantipālo] (1932-2021)

1992 “The case of the murdered monks,” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 16, 1992:71-75.
[Archive] [JPTS1992] 18 May 2025.

Analayo, Bhikkhu (Theodor P Steffens, 1962-)

2014 “The mass suicide of monks in discourse and Vinaya literature.” *Journal of the Oxford Centre of Buddhist Studies* 7, 2014:11-55. [Hamburg] [JOCBS] 18 May 2025.

Both these writers are devoted and learned practising Buddhists. **Mills** (better known as Khantipālo), in his short 4-page paper summarized the monk suicide story, admits that “as a Buddhist I am naturally reluctant to accept this ... piece of improbable fiction,” and hopes that “some later investigator ... may be able to ‘solve’ this mystery.” (1992:74 f)

Indeed, just over 2 decades later, **Analayo** (2014) has responded with an admirable comprehensive comparative study of the monk murder suicide mystery from both the Pali and Āgamas, and the 6 extant Vinayas, giving his own solution to this troubling mystery. This is the solution that I will discuss and present in this study.

1.2.5.2 Gombrich, in addition to his proposed Sanskrit etymology of *sattha, hāraka*, closes with the following conclusion to his *Addendum* to Analayo 2014, thus (paragraphed):

This is not the place to take my own analysis of the story much further, but I shall indicate the direction of my thoughts. I have always admired the dictum of Dr Samuel Johnson, who said, “Sir, I get the Latin from the meaning, not the meaning from the Latin.” In the present case, this means that I start from the observation that the whole story which introduces the third *pārājika* offense with the story of the mass suicide of monks is totally absurd and must owe its form to some misunderstanding—a misunderstanding which I think we can dimly discern.

Why is it absurd? I can easily suggest four reasons.

(1) We know that Roman warriors sometimes committed suicide by getting someone to hold a sword onto which they threw themselves; Japanese warriors (*samurai*) had almost the same custom; but is there any other trace of this custom, or any similar form of assisted suicide, in India?

(2) If that is not enough, does this story not conflict with other major features of what we know of early Buddhism? How come that so spectacular an event is never mentioned outside this immediate context, either in the Buddhist texts or in the polemics of non-Buddhist religious literature? It is as if even the Buddhists themselves did not believe this story.

(3) And well might they not so believe! Buddhists knew that if one killed oneself, one would not escape from corporeal existence but be reborn in another body—but probably in worse circumstances, because one had died by self-inflicted violence.

(4) Finally, as Anālayo points out in his article, the story reflects amazingly badly on the Buddha: not only does it impugn his omniscience, but something far worse: it shows him guilty of the most shocking misjudgment, failing to foresee the effect of his own preaching. Anālayo mentions this, most pointedly in note 118 and the related text in this article, but goes no further than calling it “remarkable”. Yet is any comparable episode to this recorded elsewhere?

None of this is in disagreement with Anālayo's analysis of the function that this story was intended to have. It survives in several versions, and this alone shows that it did serve a purpose in training monastics and setting a limit to permissible asceticism. My intention is merely to dig deeper and suggest how so grotesque and unrealistic a fable came about.

2 Understanding the Vesālī incident (S 54.9)

2.1 THE BODY IN EARLY BUDDHISM AND INDIAN ASCETIC TRADITION

2.1.1 Disgust towards the physical body

2.1.1.1 Any modern Buddhist or scholar would be troubled, or at least perplexed, with the very idea of monks committing suicide or feeling that suicide was appropriate simply because they were disgusted with their bodies on account of meditation on *asubha* (foulness). What is the context that needs to be considered for such an extreme depiction of *asubha* meditation?

Such a context is found amongst the Jains, who regard **religious suicide** (*sallekhaṇa*) by starvation¹¹ as actually conferring sainthood upon those who rid themselves of their bodies in this manner.¹² However, the Jain context is unbuddhist since, according to Buddhism, neither karma nor defilements can be removed in this way; one simply must see true reality and awaken to be free.

Hence, two other possible contexts may be considered here:

(1) Suicide makes sense in the local cultural context. That would explain why a monk who hadn't understood the teachings would react in that way, resorting to suicide. But this does not explain why the teachings were so badly understood.

(2) The story is **a parable** for the local cultural context: there was no really no such incident, but such a narrative would be believable, setting them up for the conclusion of the story which is that suicide is actually inappropriate.

2.1.1.2 Then, there is the ancient Indian ascetic belief that the body is impure and we are to be rid of it; the evidence of this is clear in the common disgust towards a dead decomposing body. In fact, a well known metaphor for youthful vanity is the disgust and fear that young men and women show towards any dirt on their well-groomed body, as observed in **the Vitakka Saṅṭhāna Sutta** (M 20), that is, "just as a woman or a man, a youth or a maiden, well-dressed and fond of ornaments, would feel

¹¹ Eg, P V Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, Poona, 1941 (vol 2,2):924-928 & 1953 (vol 4):604-614; U Thakur, *The History of Suicide in India*, N Delhi, 1963; J Filliozat, "L'abandon de la vie par le sage et les suicides du criminel et du héros dans la tradition Indienne," *Arts Asiatiques* 15 1967:65-88; D C Sircar, "Religious suicide" (ed Sircar, *Studies in the Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India*), Delhi, 1971:206-220; P Olivelle, "Ritual suicide and the rite of renunciation," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 22 1978:19-44; and T Oberlies, "Das Sterben 'lebender Toter' ...," *Acta Orientalia* 67 2006:203-228.

¹² See N Tatia, "On Samlekhanā or suspension of aliment," in (ed) A N Upadhye et al, *Sri Mahavir Jaina Vaidyalaya Golden Jubilee Vol*, Bombay, 1968:63-67, 139-142; T K Tukol, *Sallekhanā is not suicide*, Ahmedabad, 1976; C Caillat, "Fasting unto death according to the Jaina tradition," *Acta Orientalia* 38 1977:43-66; P Bilimoria, "The Jaina ethic of voluntary death," *Bioethics* 6,4 1992:331-355; J Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1993:31-36; S Settari, *Pursuing Death*, Dharwad: Karnatak Univ, 1990; K Skoog, "The morality of Sallekhanā," in (ed) O Quarnstrom, *Janism and Early Buddhism: Essays in honor of Padmanabh S Jaini*, 1 2003:293-304; and J Laidlaw, "A life worth leaving," *Economy and Society* 34,2 2005:178-199. On suicide by Ājīvikas: A L Basham, *History and Doctrine of the Ājīvikas*, London, 1951:63 f, 84-90, 127-131. On the generally negative attitude towards the body in ancient Indian ascetic circles: P Olivelle, "Deconstruction of the body in Indian asceticism," in (edd) Wimbush & Valantasis, *Asceticism*, NY: OUP, 2002:188-210.

troubled, ashamed, disgusted by a snake carcase, a dog carcase, or a human carcase hung around the neck.¹³

But then the foulness imagery in the Sutta is projected onto bad deeds: we should be deeply troubled by the negative effects of bad karma to reject them at once. Just as we avoid a dead body, we should simply reject bad, unwholesome deeds. While it is true that we are disgusted with dead bodies, we do not reject our living body in this way, simply because we are alive and capable of doing good and seeing true reality, bringing us spiritual freedom.

2.1.1.3 The way arhats see their own bodies are best illustrated by **the Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa Sutta** (A 9.11) and its parallels. The Sutta relates that Sāriputta is accused by a certain monk, who says that Sāriputta “has offended me, and without asking my forgiveness, has departed on a peregrination.”¹⁴ On his return, when summoned by the Buddha before an assembly, Sāriputta gives his “lion-roar” regarding his attitude towards his own body.

Sāriputta declares that he sees his body as simply comprised of the 4 elements—*of earth, of water, of fire, of wind*. Just as any of these elements is “not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted” coming into contact with “anything clean or foul,” so too does Sāriputta dwell like an element, “bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.”

Hence, declares Sāriputta, he “would never depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended.” So, too, he dwells with a mind, “bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will”—like a whisk-broom [cleaning rag], like an outcaste [chandala] boy or girl; like a hornless bull (harmless and genial to others).

And he dwells “disgusted with this body of mine”—like a young man or woman, well-cleaned, would be troubled by a carcase hanging around the neck; just as a man might carry around a pot of fat that is full of holes and cracks, oozing and trickling, “even so, I carry around this foul body, full of holes and cracks, oozing and trickling.”¹⁵

The point Sāriputta is making is that he is mindfully detached from his own body, but *filled with positive emotions for it and for others*. Thus, he would never even think of insulting another brother monk in any way. This is also a beautiful account of the spiritual basis for Sāriputta’s great **humility**.¹⁶

The greater purpose of this brief survey is to show that the “**disgust**” (*nibbidā*) for the body is the basis for the practice of bodily foulness (*asubha*). “Disgust” is here an experiential term which emphasizes the lacks and risks we will surely face in our attachment to the body. We should thus be like children burnt by fire and dread it; as adults, we put out that fire for the cool fireless light of nirvana.

2.1.1.4 We have another reference to “this putrid body” in **the Vijayā Sutta** (S 5.4),¹⁷ this time made by a young and beautiful nun, Vijayā, who, from her Sutta verses, is clearly an arhat. Māra appears to

¹³ **M 20**,4.3/1:119 f (SD 1.6). However, monks are depicted as feeling disgusted towards their bodies for this very reason in the Pali Vinaya (V 3:68,16) (the simile is not found in S 54.9); and in Vinayas of Dharmaguptaka, T1428 (T22.575c16); of Mahīśāsaka, T1421 (T22.7a29); and of Sarvāstivāda, T1435 (T23.7b25).

¹⁴ The key Comys gloss *āsajja* with *ghaṭṭetvā* (“having struck”) (DA 1:276; MA 2:281; SA 1:133; AA 4:171). Native Comy adds that a monk, seeing Sāriputta departing with a large retinue, became angry, and thought, “I will stop this departure!” It is said that as Sāriputta was leaving, the corner of his robe brushed the elder (they say the wind blew it aside). On such a trifle the monk trumped up a deliberate offence (AA 4:170). Retold with this detail at (**Sīha,nāda**) **Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 7.6/2:178-181), SD 28.2b.

¹⁵ Similar statements are mentioned in 2 Chin parallels. **MĀ 24** (T26.1.453c13-14): “I frequently contemplate the foul and impure parts of this body with a mental attitude of being embarrassed and ashamed and filled with utter disgust,” 常觀此身臭處不淨，心懷羞慙，極惡穢之 *cháng guān cǐ shēn chòu chù bù jìng, xīn huái xiū cán, jí è huì zhī* and **EĀ 37.6** (T125.2.713b1-2): “I am disgusted with this body,” 厭患此身 *yàn huàn cǐ shēn*.

¹⁶ **A 9.11**/4:377,2 (SD 28.2a).

¹⁷ Chin parallels, SĀ 1204 and SĀ2 220, record no such reference. See foll n.

her and tries to tempt her with sensuality.¹⁸ Recognizing Māra, she declares herself “repelled and revolted by this putrid body.”¹⁹

There are 2 Chinese parallels to her reply to Māra, but they do not have any expression equivalent to “the putrid body.”²⁰ In these parallels, Vijayā expresses her lack of interest in sensual pleasure without bringing up loathing for her own body and without qualifying her body as foul.²¹

This Sutta is significant in highlighting that there are arhats who are detached from the physical body simply because they have overcome sense-desires; thus, they have no need for sensuality (S 529*).

<p><i>iminā pūti, kāyena</i> <i>bhīdanena paḥaṅgaṇā</i> <i>aṭṭiyāmi harāyāmi</i> <i>kāma, taṇhā samūhatā</i></p>	<p>(S 530)</p>	<p>I’m repelled and humiliated by this putrid body, subject to break up, brittle— sensual craving has been uprooted.</p>
---	----------------	---

2.1.2 Ascetic practices in the canon

2.1.2.1 How does the Buddha himself see his own body? There are a number of important suttas that give us clear descriptions or indications of this. We will look at some of these suttas.

Various ascetic practices and a life of total seclusion from human contact, described in **the Mahā Sīha, nāda Sutta** (M 12), apparently reflect past-life experiences as an ascetic.²² The Buddha’s personal

¹⁸ S 5.4/1:131,12 (SD 102.7) indicates that the nun has transcended sensual desire and desire for the form and formless realms, which would imply that she is an arhat. **SĀ 1204** (T99.2.328a11) 寂滅以作證, 安住諸漏盡, *jì miè yǐ zuòzhèng, ānzhù zhū lòu jìn*, “having witnessed nirvana, I peacefully abide in the end of all influxes,” and **SĀ 220** (T100.2.455b21) 我斷一切愛 *wǒ duàn yīqiè ài*, “I cut off all craving”; on **SĀ 1204** see Anālayo, “Defying Māra—Bhikkhunis in the Saṃyukta-āgama,” in (ed) A Collett, *Women in Early Indian Buddhism*, NY: OUP, 2014c: 116-139.

¹⁹ S 5.4/1:131,11: *iminā pūtikāyena ... aṭṭiyāmi* (Be Ce *aṭṭiyāmi*) *harāyāmi*. For a similar remark by nun Khemā, see **Thī 140**.

²⁰ **SĀ 1204** (T2.328a6-a12) and **SĀ 220** (T100.2.455b17-b23).

²¹ The “foul body” theme recurs in **S 22.87/3:120,27**, here used by the Buddha to refer to his own body, but this is not found in the parallels, which also do not have a counterpart to the entire statement that in S 22.87 leads up to the expression. **SĀ 1265** (T99.2.346c1) records a different development in the Buddha’s instruction, and **EĀ 26.10** (T125.2.642c20) does not report any instruction at all. For details, see Anālayo, “Vakkali’s suicide in the Chinese Āgamas,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 28,2 2011d:155-170.

²² **M 12/1:77,28** and its parallel T757 (T17.597a13). The Buddha’s past life ascetic practices are mentioned in the Jātaka Comy (**J 94/1:390,16**), noted by H Hecker, *Wegweiser zu den Lehrreden des Buddha*, Herrnschrot, 1972:54. **M 12/1:77,23** describes these practices simply as the Buddha’s past experience, even from some past life, and **M 12/1:81,36** then turns to his other past-life experiences. As already pointed out by J Dutoit, *Die duṣkaracaryā des Bodhisattva in der buddhistischen Tradition*, Strassburg, 1905:50, and O Freiburger, “Early Buddhism, asceticism, and the politics of the middle way,” in (ed) *Asceticism and its Critics*, 2006:235-258 (238), several of the austerities listed in **M 12** would in fact not fit into the Buddha’s pre-awakening life: his solitary dwelling was such that he fled from any human approach—which would not fit into the traditional account of his keeping company with the 5 monks. His undertaking of ritual bathing thrice daily contradicts the description of years of layers of dust and dirt on his body flaking off. His practice of ritual nakedness contrasts against his donning different ascetic garments. Such a variety of ascetic practices could only occur within long-term asceticism, as reported in the Jātakas, not into the Buddha-to-be’s few years of austerities. Although Bronkhorst notes that “it is hard to see in what other context this part could originally have existed” (*The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1993:22), **J 94** suggests that it could have arisen as an account of the Bodhisattva’s asceticism in some past life, based on which he thus rejected such practices finding them uncondusive to liberation.

acquaintance with asceticism is also reflected in iconography, vividly depicting his emaciated body after prolonged fasting during the last part of his struggle for awakening.²³ [Figure 2.1.2.1]

After some 6 years of intense asceticism, the Bodhisattva realizes it would bring him only pain, death and rebirth, but not freedom or awakening. Earlier on, as a youth destined for power in the ruling class, Siddhattha found that sensual pleasures only distracted him from the realities of *decay, disease and death*. Both extremes—those of attachment to sensual pleasures and of self-mortification—he realized, are to be avoided. The way to deathfree salvation (nirvana) is by taming the body, freeing the mind from the body of senses, so that the mind is freed to gain spiritual awakening beyond time and space.



Figure 2.1.2.1 Fasting Buddha (Emaciated Buddha), Kushan Dynasty, Gandhara (Pakistan), 2nd-3rd century, schist. Lahore Museum, Punjab, Pakistan.

2.1.2.2 The official “first discourse,” **the Dhammacakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), recording teachings given to the group of 5 monks by the Buddha a month after the great awakening, records his declaring the urgency of avoiding the excesses of sensual pleasure and of self-mortification (asceticism): the body is neither to be indulged in for its physical pleasures nor to be mortified by making it undergo deprivation or pain. The proper practice for true freedom is the “**middle way**,” that is, the body of 5 senses should be tamed as a preamble to the taming of the 6th sense, the mind, which is then freed with wisdom that is insight into true reality.

The historical first teachings given to the 5 monks are recorded in the closing of **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (the discourse on the noble quest) (M 26),²⁴ known separately as the Pāsa,rāsi Sutta, (the pile of snares discourse).²⁵ **The Pāsa,rāsi Sutta** theme is that the “5 cords of sensual pleasures” (*pañca kāmā*,-

²³ See also P V Bapat, “The austerities of Gautama Buddha before his enlightenment,” *Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 4.2 1923:139-143 (142), and J Rhi, “Some textual parallels for Gandhāran art: Fasting Buddhas, Lalitavistara, and Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka,” *J of the International Assoc of Buddhist Studies* 29,1 2006:125-153 (127-131), as well as a discussion in K A Behrendt, “Fasting Buddhas, ascetic forest monks, and the rise of the esoteric tradition,” Vienna, 2010:299-327 (301 f).

²⁴ **M 26**/1:160-175 (SD 1.11).

²⁵ **M 26**,31-44/1:173-175 (SD 1.11).

guṇa)—pleasures based on the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—are renounced so that the mind is free like “a forest deer that is unbound lies down on a pile of snares,” free and safe from the hunters.

Significantly, the Pāsa,rāsi Sutta’s key teaching is that of the 9 progressive abodes: the 4 form dhyanas, the 4 formless attainments and the cessation of perception and feeling. This set of 9 is also the theme of **the (Navaka) Tapussa Sutta** (A 9.41) where it is presented as what defines “true renunciation.”²⁶ Hence, even though the meditation on “foulness” (*asubha*) is one of the meditation methods, there are other methods that are not based on foulness. Ultimately, the purpose of renunciation is to experience “true letting go” of the body (by way of the form dhyanas), of form (by the formless attainments), and of the mind itself (by cessation).²⁷

2.1.2.3 The Mahā Sakul’udāyi Sutta (M 77) and its Chinese parallel report that, on being praised for his ascetic qualities, the Buddha clarifies that some of his disciples are considerably more ascetic than he is.²⁸ Having spent 6 pre-awakening years of asceticism—such as breathingless meditation and severe fasting—the Buddha not only fully experienced its effects but, more importantly, its limitations. However, he does not forbid any of his disciples who are bent on certain suitable ascetic practices, difficult as they might be, from practising them.²⁹

2.1.2.4 In the Pali canon, we see acceptable ascetic practices formalized into a set of **13 dhut’aṅgas**. **The Bakkula Sutta** (M 124) records the Buddha as having authorized the following ascetic practices to be taken up on a *voluntary* basis:³⁰

A. Connected with robes

- (1) wearing dust-heap robes (*paṃsukūlik’aṅga*), rejecting the householder’s robes;
- (2) wearing (only) the 3 robes (*te,cīvarik’aṅga*);

B. Connected with almsfood

- (3) taking (only) almsfood (*piṇḍapātik’aṅga*);
- (4) faring house-to-house (collecting almsfood from predetermined houses) (*sapadāna,cārik’aṅga*);
- (5) eating at one sitting (*ek’āsanik’aṅga*);
- (6) eating almsfood from a bowl (*patta,piṇḍik’aṅga*);
- (7) refusing further food (*khalu,pacchā,bhattik’aṅga*);

C. Connected with dwelling

- (8) dwelling in the forest (*araññik’aṅga*);
- (9) dwelling at the foot of a tree (*rukkha,mūlik’aṅga*);
- (10) dwelling in the open (*abbhokāsik’aṅga*);
- (11) dwelling in a cemetery (*sosānik’aṅga*);
- (12) being satisfied with whatever dwelling (*yathā,santhatik’aṅga*);

D. Connected with effort

- (13) sleeping (only) in the sitting posture (*nesajjik’aṅga*) (ie, in a reclining posture at best).

²⁶ A 9.41/4:438-448 (SD 62.16).

²⁷ See SD 62.16 (1.2.2).

²⁸ M 77/2:6,31 (SD 49.5a) and MĀ 207 (T26.1.782c21).

²⁹ M 36/1:243,4 and a Skt fragment parallel in Liu Zhen, *Dhyānāni tapaś ca*, 禅定与苦修 *chándìng yǔ kǔ xiū* (“Dhyana and asceticism”), 上海古籍出版社 (Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House), 2010:71; on the significance of fasting in ancient Indian ascetic traditions, see P Olivelle, “From feast to fast: Food and the Indian ascetic,” in (ed) J Leslie, *Rules and Remedies in Classical Indian Law*, Leiden, 1991:17-36 (23-35).

³⁰ Bakkula S (M 124) & SD 3.15 (2).

Note that these ascetic practices may be described as being simply “austere” but in no way “foul.” We may see the Buddha allows such ascetic practices as meaning that he is willing to tolerate ancient Indian asceticism to some extent. In other words, a monk observes one or more of them *voluntarily*, which means that he may, say, on account of ill health, give up or relax the practice.

Apparently, we do not seem to have on record any monk, any of the elders anyway, who gave up his ascetic practice or even relaxed it. We have, in fact, **the Jīṇa Sutta** (S 16.5), which relates a moving story about the aged **Mahā Kassapa** who visits the Buddha, with this ensuing conversation:

“Kassapa, you are old now, and those worn-out hempen rag-robles must be burdensome for you. Therefore, you, Kassapa, should wear robes offered by householders; accept meals given on invitation; and dwell close by to me.”³¹

“For a long time, bhante,

I have been <u>a forest dweller</u>	and have spoken in praise of forest dwelling;
I have been <u>an almsfood eater</u>	and have spoken in praise of eating almsfood;
I have been <u>a rag-robe wearer</u>	and have spoken in praise of wearing rag robes;
I have been <u>a triple-robe user</u>	and have spoken in praise of using the triple robe;
I have been <u>of few wishes</u>	and have spoken in praise of fewness of wishes;
I have been <u>contented</u>	and have spoken in praise of contentment;
I have been <u>secluded</u>	and have spoken in praise of solitude;
I have been <u>aloof from society</u>	and have spoken in praise of aloofness from society;
I have been <u>assertive</u> and have spoken in praise of assertion.” ³²	

“Considering what benefit, Kassapa, have you long been a forest dweller ... ” *and so on?*

“Considering **2 benefits**, bhante. (1) For myself I see a pleasant dwelling in this very life, and (2) I have compassion for later generations, thinking, ‘May posterity follow my example!’³³

For when they hear, ‘The Buddha’s awakened disciples were for a long time forest dwellers and spoke in praise of forest dwelling ... were assertive and spoke in praise of assertion,’ then they will practise accordingly, and that will be for their welfare and happiness for a long time.”³⁴

(S 16.5/2:202 f), SD 96.10

³¹ Comy: Kassapa’s robes are said to be worn-out (*nibbasana*) because the Blessed One, having worn them, had discarded them [S 16.11/2:221,15-25, SD 77.5]. Clearly, the Buddha is requesting Mahā Kassapa to give up 3 of the ascetic practices: *wearing rag-robles, eating only almsfood, and dwelling in the forest*. The Buddha himself wore robes offered by householders, accepted invitation meals, and sometimes dwelled in pinnacled halls (M 77/2:7 f). Comy says that the Buddha did not really intend to make Kassapa give up his ascetic practices; rather “just as an unbeaten drum does not make a sound unless struck, so such persons do not make their lion-roar unless they are ‘struck.’ Thus he spoke to him in this way intending to make him roar his lion’s roar.” (SA 2:170,26-171,2)

³² This is Mahā Kassapa’s **lion-roar** (*sīha,nāda*). **Mahā Go,siṅga S** (M 32,7/1:214,1-17) records a similar lion-roar by Kassapa on the ideal monk. The first 4 items are ascetic practices; the second 4, virtues cultivated on account of these practices. At **A 1.191/1:23,20** the Buddha declares Mahā Kassapa the foremost of monks who expound the ascetic practices, as also in **Caṅkamana S** (S 14.15/2:155 f), SD 34.6.

³³ Reading with Ce Ke Se: *App’ eva nama pacchimā janatā ditthānugatiṃ āpajjeyya*; Be Ee have the plural *āpajjeyyurū*. Although *ditthānugati* may be resolved as *diṭṭhi*, “view,” + *anugati* (as at S:FW 2:136: “For surely they [posterity] may fall into error.”) Comys are silent. We may better read *ditthānugati* as past part *diṭṭha*, “the seen,” ie, by Kassapa’s example: cf **A 3.27/1:126,19 f, 127,22 f**; **5.79/3:108,5 f**; **5.209/3:251,8**; **6.67/3:422,10+19**. (S:B 1:800 n280; M:B 1174 n57).

³⁴ The list of leading elders at **A 1.14/1:23,18** and EĀ 4.2 (T125.2.557b8-9) regards Mahā Kassapa as foremost of those monks who observe ascetic practices; see also Divyāvadāna (Cowell & Neil, 1886:395,23), and Mahāvastu (Senart, 1882:64,14).

2.1.2.5 While the arhat Mahā Kassapa wants to inspire posterity by his example of living the ascetic life, the unawakened and ambitious zealot, **Deva,datta**, was determined to impose such a strict lifestyle on monastics. It is said that when the Buddha was old, Devadatta (who joined the order during the Buddha's first visit to Kapilavatthu) planned to take over leadership of the sangha.³⁵

When the Buddha rejected his plans, the disappointed Devadatta made a number of attempts to kill the Buddha.³⁶ Having failed in all his attempts to kill the Buddha, Devadatta resorted to subterfuge in an attempt to undermine the Buddha's reputation. Devadatta proposed **5 strict rules** to the Buddha:

"In many ways, bhante, you praise fewness of wishes, contentment, self-effacement, ascetic practices, being inspiring, the fewness of things, and being energetic.

And there are these **5 things** that lead to just that:

It would be good, bhante,

- (1) that the monks dwell all their lives in **the forest**,
and whoever dwelled near an inhabited area would commit an offence;
- (2) that they ate **alms-food** (*piṇḍapāta*) for life,
and whoever accepted an invitation meal would commit an offence;
- (3) that they wore **rag-rob**es for life,
and whoever accepted robe-cloth from a householder would commit an offence;
- (4) that they should dwell at **the foot of a tree** for life,
and whoever took shelter would commit an offence; and
- (5) that they **should not eat fish and meat** (that is, be meatless or vegetarian) for life,
and whoever did take fish or meat would commit an offence." (Cv 7.3.14)

Just as Devadatta had predicted, the Buddha rejected the idea of imposing these practices as rules, but that people had the option of practising any of them or not at all. Accusing the Buddha of being lax, Devadatta managed to win over some 500 monks. Breaking away from the sangha, he formed his own order, but Sāriputta and Moggallāna managed to convince those misled by Devadatta to return to the Buddha's teaching and sangha.³⁷

This narrative is further evidence that the Buddha would not impose any kind of ascetic rules or strict rituals that would not really help sangha members progress spiritually. Spiritual progress depends on proper moral and mental training that will free the mind from greed, hatred and delusion, or weaken these defilements so that wholesome qualities can be developed. If the Buddha is not keen to introduce these 5 strict rules proposed by Devadatta, surely the Buddha would not impose on monastics a very difficult practice, such as the cultivation of the foul.

2.1.3 The 3rd pārājika rule (against taking life)

2.1.3.1 Devadatta had proposed the 5 strict rules to the Buddha for 2 very devious reasons:

- (1) Devadatta was appealing to the ancient and popular Indian notion of the seeming value of ascetic practices, and
- (2) Devadatta knew that the Buddha was against such an idea and would reject his proposal, giving the public impression that the Buddha was a lax and luxurious teacher.

³⁵ **Devadatta: A study from the Pali texts**, SD 61.5a (3).

³⁶ SD 61.5a (4).

³⁷ For detailed comparative studies of the Devadatta narrative, see B Mukherjee, *Die Überlieferung von Devadatta dem Widersacher des Buddha in den kanonischen Schriften*, München, 1966, and A Bareau, "Les agissements de Devadatta selon les chapitres relatifs au schisme dans les divers Vinayapiṭaka," *B de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 78, 1991:87-132. See **Devadatta: A study from the Pali texts**, SD 61.5a; SD 71.4; SD 34.6 (2).

It is against this background of ancient Indian ascetic values that we will now examine the significance of the Vinaya story of the mass suicide/murder of monks and the introduction of the *pārājika* rule against killing. The story helps us appreciate the early Buddhist position in the ancient Indian context of ascetic practices and ideology.

2.1.3.2 The 3rd *pārājika* rule proscribes intentional depriving a human being of life or assisting others in committing suicide, or inciting them to kill themselves or praising suicide. The actual rule and its background story in the Vinaya have an important function in inculcating Buddhist monastic values. This is especially so for a *pārājika* rule, breaking which entails losing one's status of being fully ordained.³⁸ Therefore, *pārājika* rules and their attending stories, as a rule, receive special attention in the training of a monastic.³⁹

Since Buddhism arose from the Indian milieu, Buddhism has to demarcate its monastic identity against ancient Indian asceticism. The story is deliberately given a dramatic presentation since the rule can only be told or heard in the oral tradition of early Buddhism. The dramatized background story is to ensure that newly ordained monks learning the ropes clearly understand when the *pārājika* rule against killing is breached. The vivid details of the story highlight the importance of a harmonious attitude that leads one beyond sensuality without inviting self-destructive tendencies.

2.1.3.3 Aside from the Jain notion of “religious suicide,” we may say that most people would agree in the universal **value of life**, especially human life. The rule against taking any life was thus commonly accepted as part of the universal value of **non-violence** (*ahimsā*). This respect for life thus extends to neither assisting suicide nor encouraging it nor condoning it—these qualities are all reflected in the early Buddhist Dharma and Vinaya. We must thus appreciate the story of the mass suicide/murder of monks in the light of these values and conditions from a Vinaya context.

2.1.4 The 1st *pārājika* rule (against sexuality)

2.1.4.1 The narrative behind the 3rd *pārājika* rule (against killing a human being) warns against excesses in ascetic values, resulting in a loathing of one's own body to the extent of wishing to commit suicide. In essence, the rule narrative is intended to remove desire for the body, *not* the body itself.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the very 1st *pārājika* warns us against propagating the body in the worldly way, that is, a monastic has nothing whatsoever to do with sexual expression and propagation.

³⁸ As **Anālayo** has pointed out (2014:25 n55), the 3rd *pārājika* rule applies to all fully ordained monks, independent of their particular living situation, *pace* M **Kovan**, “Thresholds of transcendence: Buddhist self-immolation and Mahāyānist absolute altruism,” *J of Buddhist Ethics* 20 2013:774-812 (794), who holds that “*pārājika* rules (initiated in and) structured around a communal body are attenuated in solitude.” Kovan 2013:794 n27 bases this suggestion on contrasting individual suicides (like those of Channa and of Vakkali) to the mass suicide of monks. On these 2 monk suicides, see M **Delhey**, “Views on suicide in Buddhism, some remarks,” *Lumbini*, 2006:25-63 & “Vakkali, A new interpretation of his suicide,” *J of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies* 13 2009: 67-107, and **Anālayo**, “Channa's suicide in the Saṃyukta-āgama,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 27,2 2010b:332-400, & “Vakkali's suicide in the Chinese Āgamas,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 28,2 2011i:155-170.

³⁹ This is reflected, eg, in V 1:96,22, which reports that the 4 *pārājikas* should be taught right after full ordination has been received, to ensure that the new monk knows what must be avoided and so preserves his status as a fully ordained monk.

⁴⁰ T-f Kuan, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism, New approaches through psychology and textual analysis of Pali, Chinese and Sanskrit sources*, London, 2008:54 helpfully summarizes the story's lesson, in that the monks “did not realize that such practices are intended to remove desire for the body, not the body itself.”

The background narrative of the 1st *pārājika* (against sexuality), like the narrative behind the 3rd *pārājika* (against murder), is also instructive to our proper appreciation of the mass monk suicide/murder story. This *pārājika* narrative concerns the monk **Sudinna**, who had renounced without giving his ex-wife an heir.

2.1.4.2 Analayo, in his study of the 1st *pārājika*, concludes that this narration sets early Buddhist monasticism in contrast with the brahminical notion of a man's duty to procreate, and at the same time warns against excessive intimacy with one's own family. Sudinna's family kept insisting that he at least leave them with an heir to the family legacy.⁴¹ Since there was yet no rule against monastics engaging in sexuality, Sudinna rationalized that it was all right for him to "merely" have sex with his ex-wife just for the sake of giving her and the family an heir.

In a way, these two background stories—those of the 1st and the 3rd *pārājikas*—can be seen as stressing the need of the early Buddhist monastic community to clearly define itself against worldly brahmins on the one hand and ascetically inclined recluses on the other. The two narratives highlight that these 2 extremes are to be avoided: sensuality and excessive concern with family on the one hand and self-destructive asceticism on the other. They thus reiterate the warning against the two extremes to be avoided, a theme of the Buddha's first discourse. These two Vinaya narratives serve as danger warning signs against the 2 extremes for monastics so that they do not stray from the middle path.

Unlike the depiction of Sudinna's breach of celibacy, the story about the mass suicide/murder of monks is also found in 2 sutras and the 6 Vinaya versions [1.2.1]. Understanding this difference is crucial to the next part of our study, since it gives us significant guidelines for the proper reading of Vinaya literature compared to reading suttas.

2.2 SUTTA AND VINAYA AS LITERATURE

2.2.1 Vinaya materials in the suttas

2.2.1.1 Although the Pali canon is said to be made up of **the Tipiṭaka**—the 3 baskets of teachings—the *baskets of Vinaya, of suttas and of Abhidhamma* are not really discrete collections. In this study we will discover that many materials, and significant ones, too, of Vinaya are found among the suttas, and vice versa. Thus in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, we have the Vinaya story of the mass suicide/murder of monks. We also find Vinaya materials in all of the other 3 Nikāyas.⁴²

The best known example of Vinaya material preserved as a sutta is **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), which is an account of *the Buddha's final journey* during the last few months of his life, *his death and the distribution of his relics after the cremation*. The Sutta is apparently the result of a wholesale importation of what originally was Vinaya narrative.⁴³

The prefix *mahā* in its name suggests that there might have been at one time a *Cūla,parinibbāna Sutta* which lacked many of the later additions. In fact, from the narratives of **the Cullavagga** of the Vinaya, of

⁴¹ Anālayo, "The case of Sudinna: On the function of Vinaya narrative, based on a comparative study of the background narration to the first *pārājika* rule," *J of Buddhist Ethics* 19 2012a:396-438 (421 f).

⁴² See eg R Gethin, "Keeping the Buddha's rules, the view from the Sūtra Piṭaka," in (edd) French & Nathan, *Buddhism and Law, An Introduction*, NY: CUP, 2014:63-77 (64). In discussing early Buddhism, scholars as a rule take the suttas as their starting point and basis since the suttas comprise the only complete set of 4 Nikāyas and Āgamas extant.

⁴³ See, eg, E Frauwallner, *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature*, Rome, 1956:46; A Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, Delhi, 1993:264.

the 1st council held 3 months after the Parinirvana, it seems clear that both narratives (D 16 and Cv) are based upon what was originally one connected narrative.⁴⁴

The Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta in fact records the promulgation of a new type of Vinaya rule—that of *brahma,daṇḍa* (“divine rod,” ie, supreme penalty) or public boycott—against an obstinate monk, Channa (Siddhattha’s charioteer), and the application of this rule is then reported in the Pali Vinaya.⁴⁵ The promulgation of this rule is also found in the sutta parallels to **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta**.⁴⁶

2.2.1.2 The Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta is not the only example of Vinaya text preserved as a sutta [2.2.1.1]. A similar pattern can be seen in **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22), which records the Buddha censuring another obstinate monk, Ariṭṭha, which acts as a complement in the Pali Vinaya’s report of how he should be dealt with.⁴⁷ His obstinate conduct is also discussed in the Madhyama Āgama parallel to the Alagaddûpama Sutta,⁴⁸ as well as in the Dharmaguptaka, Mahāsāṅghika, Mahīśāsaka, Mūlasarvāstivāda, and Sarvāstivāda **Vinayas**.⁴⁹ In this way the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta and the Alagaddûpama Sutta, together with their parallels, point to a close interrelation between sutta and Vinaya literature as a feature common to various schools.

The Alagaddûpama Sutta is not the only case of Vinaya material in the Majjhima. **The Sāma,gāma Sutta** (M 104) offers detailed explanations on how to implement 7 ways of settling litigation (*adhikaraṇa, samatha*) in the monastic community; tradition reckons these 7 to be part of the Pātimokkha.⁵⁰ The 7 ways of settling litigation recur in the parallels to the Sāmagāma Sutta as well as in the *prātimokṣas* of other schools.⁵¹

The Bhaddāli Sutta (M 65) and **the Kīṭā,giri Sutta** (M 70), too, relate accounts of monks who openly refuse to follow a rule set by the Buddha.⁵² In both cases, similar indications can be found in their respective sutta parallels,⁵³ and the story of Bhaddāli’s recalcitrance is also reported in Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya.⁵⁴

2.2.1.3 Besides the Sāma,gāma Sutta (M 104) [2.2.1.2], **the 7 ways of settling litigation** are also listed in **the Adhikaraṇa Samatha Sutta** (A 7.84) in the Aṅguttara.⁵⁵ Further, the Aṅguttara also contains a

⁴⁴ K R Norman, *Pali Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1983:37.

⁴⁵ D 16/2:154,17 (SD 9); V 2:290,9. On Channa’s *brahma,daṇḍa*, see **(Dvi,lakkhaṇa) Channa S** (S 22.90), SD 56.5.

⁴⁶ E Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, vol 2, Berlin, 1951:284,17 + 285,24 (§29.15); DĀ 2 (T1.1.26a19-20a), T5 (T1.168c10-c15), T6 (T1.184b12), T7 (T1.204c4-c6), and EĀ 42.3 (T125.2.751c7-c17).

⁴⁷ M 22/1:130,2 (SD 3.13), reprised at V 2:25,11 + 4:133,33 as the background narration for legal actions to be taken. In his detailed study of the Pali *pātimokkha*, O Hinüber, *Das Patimokhasutta der Theravadin*, 1999a:70 considers the present case as one of several instances where material originated as part of a sutta and then came to be integrated into the Vinaya, noting that there is also evidence for a movement of texts in the opposite direction; see Hinüber’s comments at “Pali Vinaya” [2.2.1.3].

⁴⁸ MĀ 200 (T26.1.763b1).

⁴⁹ Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (T1428 @ T22.682a9), Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya (T1425 @ T22.367a3), Mahīśāsaka Vinaya (T1421 @ T22.56c12), Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya (T1442 @ T23.840b21), cf also N Yamagiwa, *Das Pāṇḍulohitaka-vastu*, Marburg, 2001:86,7 + 87,8 (§6.1); and Sarvāstivāda Vinaya (T1435 @ T23.106a3).

⁵⁰ M 104/2:247,6; Norman & Pruitt, *The Pātimokkha*, Oxford: PTS, 2001:108,5; cf also V 4:207,1.

⁵¹ MĀ 196 (T1.754a21) and T85 (T1.905c4); for a comparative survey of the 7 *adhikaranaśamatha* in the different *prātimokṣas* cf Pachow, *A Comparative Study of the Pratimokṣa*, Santiniketan, 1955:211-213.

⁵² M 65/1:437,24 (SD 56.2); M 70/1:474,1 (SD 11.1).

⁵³ Parallels to M 65: MĀ 194 (T26.1.746b27), EĀ 49.7 (T125.2.800c2). Parallel to M 70: MĀ 195 (T26.1.749c27-750a2).

⁵⁴ T1425 (T22.359b14-15).

⁵⁵ A 7.84/4:144,1. It is found in a chapter of 10 suttas appropriately named **Vinaya Vagga**. Preceding it are 9 suttas (A 7.75-83) on various commendable qualities of a Vinaya expert.

series of 30 suttas, grouped as **the Vinaya Peyyāla** (the Vinaya repetition) elaborating on the reasons for the promulgation of *pātimokkha* rules in general.⁵⁶

In addition, this collection has a whole section on questions and answers on various legal technicalities ranging from the 10 reasons for the promulgation of rules to the topic of schism. This section closely corresponds to a section in the Pali Vinaya.⁵⁷ The exposition on the 10 reasons for the promulgation of rules has a counterpart in a sutra in the Ekottarika Āgama, as well as in the different Vinayas.⁵⁸

Much of these materials reflect problematic issues concerning the monastic community, yet they are nevertheless found in suttas. Clearly, the story of mass suicide/murder of monks is not unique in this respect and there seems to have been no definite or fixed dividing line between Vinaya material and the suttas. The key idea seems to be that we are informed the one by reading it in the light of the other; that the laity is informed of Vinaya matters, and that monastics is familiar with sutta teachings (alongside the Vinaya).

2.2.1.4 In the Pāli **Vinaya** itself, according to the *aniyata* (“undetermined”) rules, a trustworthy female lay-follower can charge a monk with a breach of the rules and such evidence require the sangha to take action.⁵⁹ The *prātimokṣas* of other schools agree in this respect.⁶⁰

Analayo concludes: “This confirms that, in regard to knowledge about breaches of rules and related Vinaya matters, the Buddhist monastic legislators did not operate from the perspective of a clear-cut divide between laity and monastics, nor were their concerns solely dominated by the wish to maintain a good reputation among the laity.” (2014:29)

As regards the story of the mass suicide/murder of monks, the fact that we only have 2 sutta versions may well be due to the vicissitudes of transmission (we have lost other versions), as a result of which we do not have access to sutta collections of those schools of which we have records of only their Vinaya.

2.2.1.5 The (Aṭṭhaka) Gotamī Sutta (A 8.51) is another Aṅguttara sutta with a Vinaya narrative, one regarding the foundation of the nun order.⁶¹ We have not only 2 sutta parallels preserved in Chinese translation,⁶² but also a reference to yet another such sutra version in the Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya.⁶³ This clearly shows that the Mahāsāṅghika sutra collection has record of this event. This further confirms that the textual collections were not based on keeping Vinaya related material separate from suttas meant for public consumption. Instead, these two types of literature are closely interrelated and the story of the mass suicide/murder of monks is a case of a recurrent textual tradition.

⁵⁶ The 30 suttas are Vinaya Peyyāla are **A 2.280-309/1:98,9-100,7**. Be calls it *vinaya peyyāla*, as part 4 of Vagga 15 of Duka Nipāta. Ee counts this as Vagga 17 and names it *Atthavāsa* (“reasons”). Ce takes it as part 2 of Vagga 7. Se does not group it.

⁵⁷ A 10.31-43/5:70,3-79,3. As already noted by Norman, *Pāli Literature*, 1983a:28, this corresponds to V 5:180,1-206,25. In relation to Aṅguttara in general, Hinüber 1996:40 comments that this collection “contains sometimes rather old Vinaya passages ... sometimes old material may be preserved from which the Vinayapiṭaka has been built. In other cases the source of an Aṅguttara paragraph may have been the Vinaya.”

⁵⁸ EĀ 46.1 (T125.2.775c7); the 10 reasons for the promulgation of rules can be found in Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (T1428 @ T22.570c3), Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya (T1425 @ T22.228c22), Mahīśāsaka Vinaya (T1421 @ T22.3b29), Mūla-sarvāstivāda Vinaya (T1442 @ T23.629b21), Sarvāstivāda Vinaya (T1435 @ T23.1c15), and Pali Vinaya (V 3:21,17).

⁵⁹ V 3:187,1.

⁶⁰ For a comparative survey of *aniyata* rules in the different *prātimokṣas*: Pachow, *A Comparative Study of the Prātimokṣa*, 1955:95-97.

⁶¹ **A 8.51/4:274,1** (SD 102.1).

⁶² MĀ 116 (T26.1.605a8) + T60 (T1.856a5); for details: Anālayo, “Mahāpajapati’s going forth in the Madhyama-āgama,” *J of Buddhist Ethics* 18 2011d:268-317.

⁶³ T1425 (T22.471a26) shows that the full story should be supplemented from the sutta version; for another ref to the same sutta see T22.514b4.

2.2.2 Family relations and renunciation

2.2.2.1 While it is true that Vinaya stories, as a rule, are rooted in sutta teachings, not all Vinaya stories can be found in the suttas. Such a well-known example is **the Sudinna narrative** that forms the background to the 1st *pārājika*, the rule against sexual intercourse. Unlike the case of the mass suicide/murder of monks, Sudinna's breach of celibacy to ensure the continuity of his family line is not recorded among the early suttas, but only in different Vinayas.

While it is possible that there were sutta versions (or at least one sutta version) of the Sudinna story, none of them survived. Despite such loss or hiatus, we have enough sutta teachings in the 4 Nikāyas on **family matters and sexuality**. It is not really a matter of giving "priority or privilege" to the suttas, but rather the understanding that both sutta and Vinaya are rooted in the Dharma. Generally speaking, the Vinaya tends to deal with disciplinary and social matters, while the suttas with individual and spiritual matters.

2.2.2.2 We should also understand that **the Vinaya** concerns the renunciant monastics much more exclusively than **the suttas** presenting and preserving Dharma, which is meant for both renunciant and the laity. Even when the sutta teachings are addressed to monastics, they still apply to the laity at least by way of showing how a life rooted in Dharma-Vinaya expedites path-training and enjoying happiness here and now.

It is also true that suttas have considerably less narrative material compared to Vinaya, but it is impossible to find a similar wealth of stories and records in both types of literature as those found only in the Commentaries. Nevertheless, such commentarial narratives must always promote or at least reflect the spirit of the suttas which includes keeping to the spirit of the Vinaya, too.

2.2.2.3 Broadly speaking, the Vinaya concerns monastics specifically and that the laity is to help monastic life a life of renunciation; the suttas, on the other hand, often reach out to the laity. A common ground that links both Vinaya and sutta is **the family**. The Dharma thus reaches out and touches the lives of both monastic and laity. This is ideally done when renunciant and family relate with one another wholesomely. While the renunciant relates with the family with compassion and wisdom; the laity attends to the renunciant with *moral virtue, faith and joy*, that is, in a spiritual manner.

Hence, on a higher level—that of spiritual renunciation, especially on the attaining of the path—it must be said that the renunciant's connection with their erstwhile family is always and only as an individual, *neither* as part of a *group* *nor* as a statistic amongst the worldly.

The Buddhist path is always about singularity: **moral virtue** is seeing oneself *singularly* apart from others by respecting the otherness; **mental training** is about the *singularity* of mind, free from the many-ness of the senses; and **wisdom** is the *singularity* of being free as a true individual liberated by self-awakening. Hence, the path is called the "one-going way" (*ek'āyana*).⁶⁴

2.2.2.4 Let us look at a few suttas that highlight the family and how the renunciant, the saint and the Buddha relate to it. **The Mahāpadāna Sutta** (D 14) presents the importance of family relations in its description of past buddhas. Besides listing the names of the mother and father of each buddha,⁶⁵ it also shows the newly awakened buddha Vipassī as teaching first of all his half-brother, prince Khaṇḍa, who then becomes one of his two chief disciples.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ SD 3.1 (3.4); SD 13.1 (3.2).

⁶⁵ D 14/2:6,31 (SD 49.8).

⁶⁶ D 19/2:249,24 (SD 63.4); on Gotama's family at the time of his renunciation, see J Strong, "A Family Quest: The Buddha, Yaśodharā and Rāhula in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya," in (ed) J Schober, *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, Honolulu, 1997:113-128.

The Mahā, Govinda Sutta (D 19) shows the importance of family relations in a past life of our Buddha, who at that time renounced together with all of his 40 wives.⁶⁷ The Sutta concludes with an evaluation of the practice undertaken by the Bodhisattva at that time. This conclusion is not in any way critical of his going forth together with all of his wives.⁶⁸ Furthermore, in his last life, the Buddha is shown visiting his son Rāhula.⁶⁹ The Buddha is also recorded as going on almsround with his son and meditating together with him.⁷⁰

In the **Aggañña Sutta** (D 27), the monks are implicitly declared to be the offspring of the Buddha, born from his mouth (that is, from the Dharma-teaching). As his spiritual heirs, the monks and nuns are inheritors and propagators of the “foremost knowledge” (*aggañña*).⁷¹ The foremost knowledge is what frees the individual from the samsaric bonds of the biological family to be nurtured by the wider spiritual family that inherits the legacy of freedom.

Although the **Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (D 30) presents the Buddha as a unique being with the 32 bodily marks and so on, there is further the imagery of the monks as being sons of the Buddha.⁷² Indeed, we can see how the Buddha, through his awakening and teaching, nurtures spiritually born heirs to Dharma.

The **Raṭṭhapāla Sutta** (M 82) depicts the monk Raṭṭhapāla wishing to visit his family. The Buddha, knowing that it will be impossible for Raṭṭhapāla, as an arhat, free from worldly desires, to return to lay life, gives his explicit permission.⁷³

2.2.2.5 From this brief but broad overview of sutta passages, we can see that family connections breathe a warm and real connection with **Buddhist renunciants**. Renunciation is not about giving up family or people as humans, but *letting go of negative emotions and evil*, so that good will arise, fruiting in freedom. There is also no compromising any essential aspect of monastic life, especially celibacy. All this love and warmth are understandably the result of having fully completed the gradual training on the path of overcoming lust, hatred and delusion.⁷⁴

Such warm family and human connections are just as well seen in other disciples of the Buddha, too. The Commentaries give us a rich record of affable Dharma-based connections between disciples and their family members.⁷⁵ Such accounts show that such connections do not reflect a rare or uncharacteristic feature of monastic life, but rather a natural warmth of humanity in the awakened, overflowing with love and wisdom. Understandably, this is the natural attitude of those living the true life of renunciation, having tasted the freedom of awakening, at least at some level.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ D 19/2:249,24; on Gotama’s family at the time of his renunciation, see Strong 1997 [above].

⁶⁸ D 19/2:251,12; the only criticism raised is that due to engaging solely in the practice of the *brahma, vihāras* and not practising the noble eightfold path, his going forth did not lead to full awakening.

⁶⁹ M 61/1:414,3 (SD 3.10).

⁷⁰ M 62/1:421,1 (SD 3.11) and M 147/3:278,1 (SD 70.7).

⁷¹ D 27/3:84,21 (SD 2.19).

⁷² D 30/3:162,5 (SD 36.9); for monks and nuns referring to themselves or being referred to as sons and daughters of the Buddha, see, eg, Tha 174, 348, 1237, 1279; Thī 46, 63, 336 (also Tha 295, where the ref is attr to the Buddha’s actual son Rāhula).

⁷³ M 82/2:61,16 (SD 92.5).

⁷⁴ On the traditional description of renunciation as a gradual path, see, eg, **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2/1:63,9), SD 8.10. One leaves behind a large or small group of relatives; cuts off hair and beard; dons the yellow robes; and goes forth from the household into homelessness.

⁷⁵ Sutta comys do not always refer to layers of texts later than Vinaya, which contains material that are originally commentarial in nature, thus can be considerably later than the rules themselves. For a survey of historical layers in Pāli Vinaya, see Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pali Literature*, 1996:20.

⁷⁶ **Hālidakkāni S** (S 22.3/3:10,8), SD 10.12, uses the term *oka* (stressing the mental aspect) instead of *agāra*. For a discussion of different nuances of the notion of leaving the home, see Collins, *Selfless Persons*, Cambridge, 1982: 167-176; see also K K Ashraf, *The Hermit’s Hut*, Honolulu, 2013.

The Cūla Vedalla Sutta (M 44) records of a long discussion between the nun Dhamma,dinnā and the layman Visākha, who according to the Commentary was her former husband.⁷⁷ The discussion is then reported to the Buddha, who praises Dhamma,dinnā for her wisdom, without any censure of her having such a long exchange with her ex-husband.⁷⁸

2.2.2.6 The Nandak’ovāda Sutta (M 146) records an interesting development in the case of the monk Nandaka, who is initially unwilling to take his turn teaching the nuns. The Commentary tells us that the nuns had been his wives in former times.⁷⁹ When informed of this, the Buddha summons Nandaka and simply, warmly, instructs him to teach Dharma to the nuns, which Nandaka promptly does.⁸⁰

Nandaka, as a renunciant, feels no inclination to teach the nuns, especially since they had been intimate in previous lives. The Buddha however had confidence in Nandaka that that was the past, and that Dharma should take priority in the lives of renunciants however they may have been related before. Surely, one should share Dharma with loved ones, especially now that the love has evolved spiritually and promises freedom from suffering.⁸¹

2.2.2.7 The familial and human feeling of a common bond that are even deeper than the biological is the spiritual, one not only shared by renunciants with their erstwhile families, but also with **the Buddha** as the first arhat and their spiritual “father” through whom disciples are free from rebirth. As noted by Erich Frauwallner (1956:71), most Vinayas preserve an explicit stipulation according to which a new monk who joins the monastic community should look on his preceptor as “father,” who in turn looks on him as a “son.”⁸²

The most beautiful statement made in this connection must surely have come from the nun **Mahā,-pajāpatī**, the Buddha’s own foster-mother, who, in **the Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī Therī Apadāna** sings:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>31 O well-farer, I am your mother;
O giver of happiness of the true teaching,</p> | <p>and you, O wise hero, are my father:
O refuge, I was given birth by you, O Gotama!</p> |
| <p>32 O well-farer, your physical body
My Dharma-body, flawless,</p> | <p>was nurtured by me;
was nurtured by you.</p> |
| <p>33 To satisfy a moment’s craving,
But I, drinking the milk of Dharma from you,</p> | <p>you had milk suckled by me.
had peace without end.</p> |

(ApThī 2.17/31-33/2:531)⁸³

⁷⁷ M 44/1:299-305 (SD 40a.9); MA 2:355,30-32.

⁷⁸ M 44/1:304,33 (SD 40a.9).

⁷⁹ MA 5:93,8; for details, see Anālayo, “Attitudes towards nuns—A case study of the Nandakovāda in the light of its parallels,” *J of Buddhist Ethic*, 17 2010a:332-400 (373).

⁸⁰ M 146/3:271,4 (SD 66.12).

⁸¹ Clearly Nandaka’s case arose before the rule was made forbidding monks teaching nuns (V 4:56,13).

⁸² Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (T1428 @ T22.799c4-5), Mahīśāsaka V (T1421 @ T22.110c26-27), Sarvāstivāda V (T1435 @ T23.148b23-24), Pali Vinaya (V 1:45,26); and also a stipulation to this effect in Mūlasarvāstivāda *bhikṣu,karma.-vākya* (“words of monastic act”). See A C **Banerjee**, *Two Buddhist Vinaya Texts in Sanskrit, Prātimokṣa Sūtra and Bhikṣukarmavākya*, Calcutta, 1977:72,16, a passage highlighted by R S **Cohen**, “Kinsmen of the Sun,” *History of Religions* 40,1 2000:1-31 (15). **Cole** (2004:281) adds that the “very effort to leave domesticity was itself domesticized and remade into a Buddhist family.” **Cole**, “Buddhism,” in (ed) Browning et al, *Sex, Marriage, & Family in World Religions*, NY, 2006:301, points out that “the monastic space was regularly organized as something like a patriarchal family that employed the language of fathers and sons to structure discipline, identity, and authority in a way that rendered monastic identity not all that different from those templates constructed within the sphere of the lay family.” This last remark reflects, however, the later and modern development, esp in a secularized Sangha.

⁸³ See SD 46.15 (1.2); SD 10.6 (3.4).

2.3 HOW TO READ VINAYA STORIES

2.3.1 Telling the truth to prevent it

2.3.1.1 The relevance of reading sutta alongside Vinaya for exploring topics like family matters can be seen in another sutta in the Aṅguttara. **The Mātā Putta Sutta** (A 5.55) reports that a mother and her son had both gone forth and were spending the rains retreat together, visiting each other often. Eventually, they engaged in sexual intercourse with each other.⁸⁴ This story not only shows that it was possible for mother and son to go forth together, but also for them to meet regularly and this evidently in rather private circumstances. A problem arises when this leads to sex, aggravated in this case by it being incest.

The incest story clearly shows that sutta literature can contain material that can be compromising. The same holds for the mass suicide/murder story of monks, where a narrative with a considerable potential to be damaging to the Buddha's reputation as a teacher is not confined to the Vinaya.⁸⁵ Here the sutta is as revealing as the Vinaya texts, both reporting that a recommendation given by the Buddha on a meditation topic led to a mass suicide among his disciples.⁸⁶ A case of incest among monastics is similarly problematic.

2.3.1.2 Both stories—of suicide/murder and of incest—could have been restricted to only “in-house” literature or “secret teachings”; that is, if there were a need for a clear dividing line between bowdlerized texts for public adulation and “sensitive” in-house records for religious intelligence. This is clearly not the case in the formation of the Buddhist textual collections, whose priority and purpose are those of identifying evil and good, and of avoiding evil and promoting good.

The clearly complementary nature of sutta and Vinaya materials makes it indispensable that a proper appreciation of individual stories (like the mass suicide/murder of monks) or Indian Buddhist monasticism in general is based on reading Vinaya stories in conjunction with early sutta material just as they are.

In contrast, relying only on Vinaya texts would be like trying to reconstruct the history of a particular country or time-period solely based on criminal records! It does not need much imagination to see the kind of distorted picture that would emerge as a result. Vinaya stories, as a rule, come from what went wrong. Using only such Vinaya texts to reconstruct the history of Indian monasticism would be even

⁸⁴ A 5.55/3:67,24; see discussion in J Silk, *Riven by Lust, Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Hagiography*, Delhi, 2009:126-128.

⁸⁵ It is just remarkable that such a story is recorded in a sutta or the Vinaya. Mills (1992:74) concludes that “it is strange that a story like this, which does no credit to the Buddha, but quite the opposite, was permitted to remain in the Vinaya ... if the story is partly true, it would hardly reflect well on the Buddha, while if the whole story is true he appears in a worse light still.”

⁸⁶ The story of the mass/murder suicide is interesting in relation to Clarke's proposition (2014:17) that “whereas *sūtras* go into lengthy discourses on the value of meditation, for instance, Schopen has shown that Buddhist monastic law codes warn against rigorous engagement in contemplative exercises” [G Schopen, “Art, Beauty, and the Business of Running a Buddhist Monastery in Early Northwest India,” in *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters*, Honolulu, 2004:19-44 (26)]. In the present case the dangers of improper meditation practice are indeed highlighted, but this occurs together with drawing attention to the advantages of proper practice of mindfulness of breathing. Here the dangers and advantages of meditation practice are taken up both in sutta and Vinaya literature. In the case of Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, just to give another example, Hu & Hinüber, “Quotations from Earlier Buddhist Texts in the Pośadhavastu of the Mūlasarvāstivāda School,” *ARIRIAB* 17, 2014:89-94 notes that instructions on examining body-parts occur as part of “a long passage about different matters concerning the meditation” on *aśubha*, in what she considers an attempt “to impart all of the basic knowledge [of] what a monk needs to practice in his daily life in the Saṅgha” (89). Here the purpose is clearly to encourage meditation—precisely the meditation that the mass suicide/murder story shows to be problematic—not to warn against it.

worse than relying only on criminal records, when such records are expected *to be based on actual events*.

Vinaya stories should thus be contextualized. In other words, the Vinaya is neither merely to punish nor to rehabilitate perpetrators. More importantly, it is to prevent wrong-doings. The truth of evil-doing should thus be presented just as it is so that it is unlikely to happen again. Only the truth will prevent the reality that is worse than a lie; only the truth will free us.

We need to tell the truth to prevent the truth.

2.3.1.3 On the other hand, Vinaya narratives about misbehaving monastics side by side with celestial beings, demons, and animals who are able to speak do not invalidate a wrong-doing of human monastics. Such extra-human features only tell us about the views and beliefs held by those responsible for their coming into being. Circumspection surely is needed when such stories are used as a basis for reconstructing the actual situation on the ground.

So, too, Vinaya passages referring to nuns running brothels, for example, need not invariably reflect actual conditions. In view of the general Indian perception of renunciant women as being on a par with prostitutes,⁸⁷ it is thus possible that *the idea* of nuns running brothels could have arisen in an environment antagonistic to Buddhist monastics.⁸⁸ Once having become a popular perception, this could then have motivated the introduction of rules to safeguard reputation, even without it needing to have actually happened.⁸⁹

2.3.1.4 This is of course not to say that it is, in principle, impossible for something badly wrong to have actually happened, but the origin and purpose of such a rule requires evaluation. A vital criterion when evaluating such stories is a principle proposed by Shayne Clarke, according to which *all of the extant Vinayas* need to be consulted. Clarke, however, thinks that “any *vinaya* cannot be accepted as representative of Indian Buddhist monasticisms without first fully examining the other five monastic law codes; we must marshal all available evidence in rereading Indian Buddhist monasticisms.”⁹⁰

Given that references to nuns running brothels do not seem to appear in all Vinayas,⁹¹ the possibility that these references have come into being as the product of imagination has to be seriously taken into consideration. Had this been a real problem during the early stages of Indian Buddhist monasticism, we would expect all of the Vinayas to try to deal with it.

On the other hand, Clarke’s proposal that all Vinayas be consulted to evaluate or validate a wrong-doing is based on the assumption that these Vinayas are rooted in the very same legal cases, legal his-

⁸⁷ Olivelle 2004:499 notes that in Manusmṛti “there are women of certain groups ... who are stereotyped as being sexually promiscuous,” one of them being “female wandering ascetics.” Similarly, a comy on the Manusmṛti, quoted in M Jyväsjärvi, “Parivrājikā and pravrajitā, categories of ascetic women in Dharmaśāstra and Vinaya Commentaries,” *Indologica Taurinensia* 33 2007:73-92 (80), defines females who have become homeless as “women without protectors ... [who,] being lustful women, are disguised in the dress (of ascetics).”

⁸⁸ Clarke’s (2014:35) “suggestion that the occurrence of certain narrative motifs in Sanskrit drama and other Indian literature antagonistic to Buddhism can serve to corroborate that descriptions of misbehaviour in Vinaya narratives are based on historical facts is therefore to my mind not conclusive” (Analayo 2014:40 n121).

⁸⁹ I B Horner, *The Book of Discipline*, 1938, notes that Vinaya narratives “at the time of the final recension, each rule was minutely scrutinised and analysed, and all the deviations from it, of which the recensionists had heard or which they could imagine, were formulated and added ... that these are the outcome, not of events, so much as of lengthy and anxious deliberations. The recensionists had a responsible task. They were legislating for the future.” (V:H 1:xxi)

⁹⁰ S Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*, Honolulu, 2014:166.

⁹¹ Judging from a survey in Clarke 2014:228 n63, the brothel motif is only found in some Vinayas, not all of them.

tories and legal interpretations. Things become more complicated when these different schools do not see their roots in the same way, which after all is often a key condition for their separate existence.

2.3.2 Conclusion

2.3.2.1 Furthermore, each school—especially when it is still extant—needs to examine and evaluate **the social conditions and contributing realities** behind the “crime.” Understanding the story of the mass suicide/murder of monks requires taking into account the ascetic environment within which early Buddhism evolved. The story itself depicts the Buddha’s recommendation being put into action *without* proper instructions. The resultant mass suicide and murder reflect the influence of a prevalent negative attitude towards the body and the tolerance of suicide in ancient Indian ascetic circles.

In the Vinaya teaching context, this story would have evolved in line with its function to demarcate Buddhist monastic identity against wider contemporary ascetic values by showing how things can go wrong without proper instructions and caveats. The presence of the mass suicide/murder story in the suttas shows that problematic narratives were not allocated only to Vinaya texts, making it improbable that Vinaya records offer us the only window available for in-house information on what may have taken place on the ground.

2.3.2.2 Instead, there is a vital need for Vinaya narratives to be read with a clear recognition of their **teaching purposes** and of the fact that they are naturally concerned with what went wrong, instead of merely giving us some “complete” picture of Indian Buddhist monasticism as a whole. They reflect views and opinions held by the story tellers themselves, and how story retellers are responsible for the story’s final shape. The various influences that shape the telling and retelling of such stories, and historical events, are only a part of the story.

— — —

(Ānāpāna,sati) Vesālī Sutta

The (Breath Meditation) Discourse at Vesālī

S 54.9

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was dwelling in the pinnacled hall⁹² in the great wood at **Vesali**.⁹³

The talk on the cultivation of the foul

2 Now at that time, the Blessed One gave the monks **a talk on bodily foulness** in many ways; he spoke in praise of the foul (and) spoke in praise of the cultivation of foulness.⁹⁴

3 Then the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus, I wish to go into seclusion for a fortnight. I should not be approached by anyone except the one who brings me almsfood.”⁹⁵

“Yes, bhante,” those monks replied, and no one approached the Blessed One except the one who brought him almsfood.

4 Then those monks, thinking:

“The Blessed One gave a talk on the foul in many ways, spoke in praise of the foul, spoke in praise of the cultivation of foulness,”

dwelt devoted to the cultivation of foulness in its many aspects and factors.

4.2 Being repelled, humiliated, and disgusted with their bodies, they sought for a killing tool [“a life-taker”].⁹⁶

Then, in one day 10 monks used the knife, or in one day 20 monks used the knife,
or in one day 30 monks used the knife.⁹⁷

⁹² *Kuṭṭhāra,sālā*. See SD 45.2 (2); M 35,1 n; SD 26.5.

⁹³ A more elaborate version of the strange background story to this Sutta is at V 3:68-70. For a summary of Comy version: [S:B 1951 n301]. For a discussion on the story, see L Mills, “The Case of the Murdered Monks,” JPTS 1992: 71-75; **Analayo**, “The mass suicide of monks in discourse and Vinaya literature,” *J of the Oxford Centre of Buddhist Studies* 7, 2014:11-55.

⁹⁴ *Tena kho pana samayena bhagavā bhikkhūnaṃ aneka,pariyāyena asubha,kathaṃ katheti, asubhāya vaṇṇaṃ bhāsati, asubha,bhāvanāya vaṇṇaṃ bhāsati*; ie, he was explaining the meditation on the 31 body-parts (increased to 32 in Comys) and the 9 (or 10) stages of decomposition of a corpse. Chin tr (SĀ 809) follows this with the Buddha speaking in direct speech (T799.2.207b22-24). 爾時,世尊為諸比丘說不淨觀,讚歎不淨觀言:“諸比丘修不淨觀、多修習者,得大果大福利” “At that time, the World Honored One spoke to the bhikshus on the perception of foulness, praised the perception of foulness, saying: ‘Those who practise the perception of foulness, and practise it much, will attain great fruit and great benefit.’” On the 31 body-parts, see **Giri-m-ānanda S** (A 10.60,6), SD 19.16; on the 32 body-parts: **Dva-t,tiṃs’ākāra**, Khp 3; see **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119,7), SD 12.21.

⁹⁵ For a summary of Comy’s account on this [1.2.3.2].

⁹⁶ *Sattha,hāraṇaṃ pariyesanti*. On *sattha,hāraṇa*, see [1.2.4].

⁹⁷ In Vinaya account (Pār 3.1/V 3:68-71) (repeated at SA 3:265-270) they take their own lives, and deprive one another of life, and request the “sham ascetic” Migal’añḍika to kill them (VA 393-400). SA adds that the noble ones neither killed anyone nor enjoined others to kill, nor consented to killing; it was only the worldlings who did so (SA 3:268,20-22).

The diminished monk sangha

5 Then, when that fortnight had passed, the Blessed One emerged from seclusion and addressed the venerable Ānanda:

“Why, Ānanda, does the community of monks seem diminished?”⁹⁸

6 “Bhante, that is because the Blessed One had given a talk on the foul in many ways, had spoken in praise of the foul, [321] had spoken in praise of the cultivation of foulness, and those monks,⁹⁹ thinking:

6.2 ‘The Blessed One gave a talk on the foul in many ways, spoke in praise of the foul, spoke in praise of the cultivation of foulness in its many aspects and factors.’

They dwelt devoted to the cultivation of foulness in its many aspects and factors.

6.3 Being repelled, humiliated, and disgusted with their bodies, they sought for knife to be brought) to them).¹⁰⁰ In one day, 10 monks used the knife, or, in one day, 20 monks used the knife, or, in one day, 30 monks used the knife.

6.4 It would be good, bhante, if the Blessed One would explain another method so that this community of monks may be established in final knowledge.”

The monks assemble

7 “Well then, Ānanda, assemble in the attendance hall all the monks who are living in dependence on Vesālī.”

7.2 “Yes, bhante,” the venerable Ānanda replied, and he assembled in the attendance hall all the monks, as many as there were, who were living in dependence on Vesālī.

7.3 Then he approached the Blessed One and said to him:

“The community of monks has assembled, bhante. Let the Blessed One come at his own convenience.”

8 Then the Blessed One went to the attendance hall, sat down in the appointed seat, and addressed the monks thus:

9 “Bhikkhus, this samadhi by mindfulness of breathing, when cultivated and developed, is peaceful, subtle, delectable,¹⁰¹ and pleasant dwelling.¹⁰²

It disperses and stills right there evil unwholesome states even as they arise.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Comy reports the Buddha making a moving comment: “Earlier, Ānanda, many monks gathered together, teaching, questioning, learning, and the park seemed ablaze like a single torch. But now, after only a fortnight, the sangha is diminished, reduced, thin, scanty, sparse. What is the reason? Where have the monks gone?” (SA 3:268,26-32)

⁹⁹ Be Se omits mentioning the Buddha’s earlier teaching of the cultivation of foulness. Mentioned only in Be Ce.

¹⁰⁰ “They sought a knife to be brought (to them),” *sattham āharanti*.

¹⁰¹ **Asecanako**. Comy on S 10.9, *asecanakam ojavam* (S 843b/1:212,30), seems to derive *asecana* from *siñcati*, “to sprinkle”; viz, *nāssa secanan ti*, “(due to) its unadulterated or unmixed state; nourishing”; *anāsittakam*, “needing no condiment”; *ojavantam*, “ambrosial, of divine taste” (SA 1:316,10; ThīA 61,7). Further as *abbokiṇṇo* (“a constant mix”), *pāṭekko* [*pāṭiyekko*] (“singular”), *āveṇiko* (“unmixed, unique”); another interpretation: *asittako*, *ojavanto*, *sabhāven’eva madhuro ti*, “filled full, ambrosia-like, just like honey by nature” (SA 3:270,6-10). “Ambrosial” echoes Skt def; also an attribute of mindfulness of breathing at S 54.9/5:321,22 + 322,11. However, Brough thinks that it is derived from the root *√sek*, “to satiate,” and renders it as “never causing surfeit” (Gāndhārī Dharmapada, 1962:193 n72). So, too, CPD, sv *asecanaka*, quotes the traditional Skt gloss from Amarakośa: *tr̥pter nāsty anto yasya darśanāt*; “that the sight of which gives endless satisfaction.” In Pali the word is used more in connection with the senses of smell and taste (M 18,22/1:114,11; S 843*/10.9/1:212,30* = Thī 55; A 5.194/3:237,22 + 238,1).

¹⁰² This and the foll line: *ayam pi kho bhikkhave ānâpâna-s,sati,samâdhi bhāvito bahulī,kato santo ceva paṇīto ca asecana-ko ca sukho ca vihāro, uppann’uppanne ca pāpake akusale dhamme thānaso antaradhāpeti vūpasameti*.

¹⁰³ Commented on at Vism 8.146-150/267 f.

Parable: The last month of the hot season

10 Just as, bhikshus, in the last month of the hot season,
 when a cloud of dust and dirt has swirled up,
 a great rain cloud out-of-season disperses and stills it right there even as it arises,¹⁰⁴
 so too *samadhi by mindfulness of breathing, when cultivated and developed, is peaceful and subtle;*
 [322] *a delectable, pleasant dwelling;*
it disperses and stills right there evil unwholesome states even as they arise.

The breath meditation

11 And how, bhikshus, does the *samadhi by mindfulness of breathing,*
which when cultivated and developed, is peaceful and subtle; a delectable, pleasant dwelling;
how does it disperse and still right there evil unwholesome states even as they arise?

12 Here, bhikshus, a monk,¹⁰⁵
 who has gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty abode,¹⁰⁶
 sits down,¹⁰⁷ and having crossed his legs and keeping his body upright,
 establishes mindfulness before him.¹⁰⁸

13 Mindfully¹⁰⁹ indeed he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ The simile is also at S 45.156/5:50 f.

¹⁰⁵ DA on **Mahā Sati’paṭṭhāna S** with the identical context here says that “monk” (bhikkhu) indicates “whoever undertakes that practice ... is here comprised under the term *bhikkhu*.” See Dh 142; also Dh 362, 260-270. Cf **Bhikkhu Vagga** (ch 25) and **Brāhmaṇa Vagga** (ch 26) of Dh.

¹⁰⁶ This stock of 3 places (a forest, *arañña*; the foot of a tree, *rukkha, mūla*; an empty abode, *suññāgāra*) conducive to meditation are at D 2:291; M 1:56, 297, 398, 425, 2:263, 3:82, 89, 4:297; S 5:311, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 323, 329, 336; A 1:147, 148, 149, 3:92, 100, 4:437, 5:109, 110, 111; Pm 1:175, 2:36. **Pavevika S** (A 3.92) mentions 7 places: a forest, the foot of a tree, a cemetery, a forest path [a remote forest], the open air, a heap of straw, a thatched shelter (*araññaṃ rukkha, mūlaṃ susānaṃ vana, panthaṃ* [vi *vana, patthaṃ*] *abbhokāsaṃ palāla, puñjaṃ bhusāgāraṃ*, A 3.92/1:241, SD 44.2). **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2), an ancient account, gives 9 places suitable for meditation, and the spiritual preparation for living in such places, thus: “Possessing this aggregate of noble moral virtue, this aggregate of noble sense-restraint, this aggregate of noble mindfulness and full awareness, and this aggregate of noble contentment, he resorts to a secluded dwelling: a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a gorge, a hillside cave, a cemetery, a remote forest [jungle grove], the open air, a heap of straw” (*so iminā ca ariyena sīla-k, khandhena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena indriya, saṃvarena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena sati, sampajaññaṃ samannāgato imāya ca ariyāya santuṭṭhitāya samannāgato vivittaṃ senāsanaṃ bhajati, araññaṃ rukkha, mūlaṃ pabbataṃ kandaraṃ giri, guhaṃ susānaṃ vana, patthaṃ abbhokāsaṃ palāla, puñjaṃ*, D 2,67/1:71 = SD 8.10; V 2:146; M 3:3; A 2:210. These are def at DA 209-210, VbhA 366 f. The oldest ref to an ideal meditation spot is in **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 26) and **Saṅgārava S** (M 100): “still in search of the wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I walked by stages through Magadha until eventually I arrived at Senānigama near Uruvelā. There I saw an agreeable spot, a delightful grove with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearby a village for alms resort. I sat down there thinking: ‘This is conducive for spiritual striving.’” (M 26,17/1:167 = 100,13/2:212).

¹⁰⁷ On this breath meditation passage, see **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118), SD 7.13.

¹⁰⁸ **Parimukhaṃ**, lit “around the mouth,” here always used idiomatically and as an adverb, meaning “in front”: so U Thittila (Vbh:T 319, 328), Walshe (D:W 1995:335), Soma Thera (1998:42 f digital ed), and Ñānamoli & Bodhi (M:ÑB 2001: 527). On *parimukha*, see SD 7.13 (2.3.3.3). On the 8 supports of meditation, see SD 60.1b (5.7.2).

¹⁰⁹ Ce Se Ke PTS *sato*.

¹¹⁰ *So sato’va assasati sato passasati*. Cf the sentence for the Buddha’s own breath meditation, where *va* or *eva* is omitted, in **Icchā, naṅgala S** (S 54.11,4), SD 44.9.

(A) Contemplating the body¹¹¹

- 14 (1) Breathing *in long*, he understands, 'I breathe in **long** [Long in-breath]';
 or, breathing *out long*, he understands, 'I breathe out long [Long out-breath]'.
 (2) Or, breathing *in short*, he understands, 'I breathe in **short** [Short in-breath]';
 or, breathing *out short*, he understands, 'I breathe out short [Short out-breath]'.
 (3) He trains himself thus: 'Experiencing **the whole body** (of breath), I will breathe *in*';
 he trains himself thus: 'Experiencing the whole body, I will breathe *out*'.
 (4) He trains himself thus: '**Calming the bodily formation**¹¹² (of breath), I will breathe *in*';
 he trains himself thus: 'Calming the bodily formation, I will breathe *out*'.

(B) Contemplating feelings¹¹³

- 15 (5) He trains himself thus: 'Experiencing zest [joy], I will breathe *in*'¹¹⁴
 he trains himself thus: 'Experiencing zest [joy], I will breathe *out*'.
 (6) He trains himself thus: 'Experiencing happiness, I will breathe *in*';
 he trains himself thus: 'Experiencing happiness, I will breathe *out*'.
 (7) He trains himself thus: 'Experiencing the mental formations, I will breathe *in*'¹¹⁵
 he trains himself thus: 'Experiencing the mental formations, I will breathe *out*'.
 (8) He trains himself thus: 'Calming the mental formations, I will breathe *in*';
 he trains himself thus: 'Calming the mental formations, I will breathe *out*'.

(C) Contemplating the mind¹¹⁶

- 16 (9) He trains himself thus: 'Experiencing the mind, I will breathe *in*';
 he trains himself thus: 'Experiencing the mind, I will breathe *out*'.
 (10) He trains himself thus: 'Gladdening the mind, I will breathe *in*';
 he trains himself thus: 'Gladdening the mind, I will breathe *out*'.
 (11) He trains himself thus: 'Concentrating the mind, I will breathe *in*';
 he trains himself thus: 'Concentrating the mind, I will breathe *out*'.
 (12) He trains himself thus: 'Freeing the mind, I will breathe *in*';
 he trains himself thus: 'Freeing the mind, I will breathe *out*'.

(D) Contemplating dhammas¹¹⁷

- 17 (13) He trains himself thus: 'Contemplating **impermanence**, I will breathe *in*'¹¹⁸
 He trains himself thus: 'Contemplating impermanence, I will breathe *out*'¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ On contemplation of the body, see SD 60.1b (5.8.1).

¹¹² Or "activity."

¹¹³ On contemplation of the mind, see SD 60.1b (5.8.3).

¹¹⁴ "Zest," *pīti*, see **M 118**,19(5) n (SD 7.13).

¹¹⁵ Or, "mental functions," *citta,saṅkhāra*, see **M 118**,19(7) n (SD 7.13).

¹¹⁶ On contemplation of the mind, see SD 60.1b (5.8.3).

¹¹⁷ "Dhammas" (*dhammā*) are realities that arise in one's mind. These last 4 aspects relate to the meditator who has just emerged from dhyana. On how to review these realities, see **Ānâpâna,sati S** (M 118), SD 7.13 (4.4.4.0).

¹¹⁸ *Aniccânupassī assasissāmī ti sikkhati*. "Contemplating impermanence," *aniccânupassī*, ie, contemplating the 5 aggregates as impermanent since they undergo rise, fall and change, or momentary dissolution. See SD 7.13 (4.4.4.1).

¹¹⁹ *Aniccânupassī passasissāmī ti sikkhati*. See SD 7.13 (4.4.4.1 f).

- (14) He trains himself thus: ‘Contemplating **fading away** (of lust), I will breathe *in*’¹²⁰
 He trains himself thus: ‘Contemplating fading away (of lust), I will breathe *out*’;¹²¹
 (15) He trains himself thus: ‘Contemplating **cessation** (of suffering), I will breathe *in*’;¹²²
 He trains himself thus: ‘Contemplating cessation (of suffering), I will breathe *out*’;¹²³
 (16) He trains himself thus: ‘Contemplating **letting go**¹²⁴ (of defilements), I will breathe *in*’;¹²⁵
 He trains himself thus: ‘Contemplating letting go (of defilements), I will breathe *out*’.¹²⁶

18 It is in this way, bhikshus,
 that the samadhi by mindfulness of breathing is cultivated and developed
so that it is peaceful and subtle; a delectable, pleasant dwelling;
*it disperses and stills right there evil unwholesome states even as they arise.”*¹²⁷

— evaṃ —

250414 250522 251116

¹²⁰ *Virāgānupassī assasissāmī ti sikkhati*. “Contemplating fading away,” *virāgānupassī*. See SD 7.13 (4.4.4.3).

¹²¹ *Virāgānupassī passasissāmī ti sikkhati*. See SD 7.13 (4.4.4.3)

¹²² *Nirodhānupassī assasissāmī ti sikkhati*. SD 7.13 (4.4.4.4).

¹²³ *Nirodhānupassī passasissāmī ti sikkhati*. SD 7.13 (4.4.4.4).

¹²⁴ “Letting go,” alt tr: “relinquishment.” SĀ 809 (T99.2.208a3) omits the breath-meditation passage: the Buddha is recorded as only saying 謂安那般那念住 *wèi ān nà bān nà niàn zhù*, “that is to say, dwell in *ānāpānasati* [mindfulness of the breath.]” But in SĀ 808 (T99.2.207a20-21), these last 2 steps have “cessation” (滅 *miè*). For tr and comparative study of the corresponding exposition in Mahāsaṅghika and Mūlasarvāstivāda texts, see Analayo, “Mindfulness of breathing in the Saṃyukta-āgama,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 24,2 **2007**:137-150, and *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna*, Cambridge, **2013b**:227-237. At T1425 (T22.254c7-255a5), *ānāpānasati* [mindfulness of the breath] is mentioned in detail.

¹²⁵ *Paṭinissaggānupassī assasissāmī ti sikkhati*. “Contemplating letting go [relinquishment],” *paṭinissaggānupassī*, ie, the giving up (*pariccāga*) or abandoning (*pahāna*) of defilements through insight and the entering into (*pakkhandana*) nirvana by attaining the path. SD 7.13 (4.4.4.5).

¹²⁶ *Paṭinissaggānupassī passasissāmī ti sikkhati*. SD 7.13 (4.4.4.5 f).

¹²⁷ Chin tr SĀ 809 closes by stating 尊者阿難聞佛所說。歡喜奉行 *zūn zhě ānán wén fó suǒshuō. huānxǐ fèngxíng* “the venerable Ānanda, having heard the Buddha, was delighted and joyfully practised (Dharma).” (T99.2.208a7-8).