

SD 63.13a **Early Buddhist Scatology**

The significance of dung and dunginess in spiritual liberation

1 Scatology and spirituality

1.1 WHAT IS SCATOLOGY?

1.1.1 Scatology as humour

The **Encyclopedia of Humor Studies** defines **scatology** as “a biological term for the study of excrement and excretion, but it is also used in folkloristic studies to refer to speech, rituals, narratives, pranks, and songs with or about feces, urine, excretion, and anally produced emissions such as flatulence. It is in this cultural sense that scatology commonly relates to humor. A scatological analysis typically interprets the symbolism and function of feces in these expressions by referring to social and psychological attitudes toward the material. Central to this analysis is the idea that excrement and excretion are taboo subjects related to the body, usually kept private and hence comparable to other risqué topics in humor such as sexuality. In humor studies, different theories have been proposed for what renders this serious, private matter the stuff of laughter and the various ways that perceptions of excrement and excretion fit into cultural systems and worldviews.”¹

1.1.2 Buddhist scatology

We can thus view scatological topics and references in early Buddhism in a humorous way (after all, the topic is listed in an encyclopaedia of humour studies). Since scatological topics are those about excretion and excreta, which are “dirty,” that is, unpleasant and unhygienic, they are regarded as “taboo” in polite society or society in general. When they are actually mentioned whether accidentally or incidentally, they are reacted either with silence or (more often) with laughter. **Laughter** (that is, humour) acts as a buffer against embarrassment and discourtesy. Significantly, this is one of the functions of humour.

However, in early Buddhism, scatological topics—those concerning dung, urine, bodily discharges, the body fouling itself up, and needing to be cleansed—were not always regarded as humorous. Rather, these are subjects for reflecting on as being natural parts of the physical body that are impermanent, changing, decaying, dying and rotting away. There’s nothing humorous here, but something to be reflected on and to be kept clean, decorous and restrained.

1.2 SCATIC SKILLFUL MEANS

1.2.1 Cowdung

The perception of scatological objects and situations varies widely between historical times and between cultures. During the Buddha’s time, for example, the cow was not deemed sacred, a notion that arose centuries later.² **Cow-dung** (digested grass waste) was, however, often used in traditional homes for smearing up the house walls and floors. Sun-dried, it was used as a cheap source of fuel. Traditionally, cow’s urine is fermented and used by forest monks as a medical lotion.³

Cow-dung was used in various ways in ancient India, that is, as fuel, in warfare and in funeral cremations, and was even consumed as a self-mortification practice, as stated in the following suttas:

¹ (Ed) Salvatore Attardo, *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014:666-668.

² A N Bose, *Social Rural Economy of Northern India, 600 BC-200 AD* states that the sacred cow notion was a late idea, current only by 200 AD. See also Auboyer 1965:198.

³ See SD 24.6a (2.3.1.2(2)); SD 54.3c (2.3.1.1); also DEB: urine (one of the 4 supports).

Esukārī Sutta	M 96,12	cow-dung fire	SD 37.9;
Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta	M 38,8.2	cow-dung fire	SD 7.10;
Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta	M 13,13	boiling cow-dung	SD 6.9;
Māra Tajjanīya Sutta	M 50,10	cow-dung fire for a funeral pyre	SD 36.4;
Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda Sutta	D 25,8.4	wanderers consumed cow-dung	SD 1.4; [4.2.1.1]
(Catukka) Attan,tapa Sutta	A 4.198,2.22	ascetics consumed cow-dung	SD 56.7. [4.2.1.1]
Go,maya Sutta	S 22.96	impermanence as a tiny cowdung lump	SD 36.16

1.2.2 The Buddha himself has no qualms handling cow-dung,⁴ and even use it as a skillful means when he teaches. He stresses that birth is a sufficient cause for suffering, that is, birth *must* give rise to suffering. Every being who is born will become old, fall sick and die—each of which is painful in one way or another. In short, there is no perfect happiness to be found in any form of existence. As such, the Buddha declares:

Bhikshus, just as even a small bit of dung smells bad, even so I do not praise even a tiny bit of existence, not even for the length of a finger-snap. (A 1.328/1.18,13/1:34)⁵

1.2.3 The disgusting nature of dung of any kind serves as a very effective trope often used by the Buddha to warn us to refrain from any kind of evil or bad, to be morally ashamed towards it, and to morally fear it. Thus, self-restraint by way of **moral shame** (*hiri*) is a case of giving priority to oneself (*attādhipateyya*) in terms of being able to control oneself. Self-restraint by way of **moral fear** (*ottappa*) is a case of giving priority to society (“the world”) (*lokādhipateyya*), in terms of putting others first, or by way of considering public opinion and the common good.⁶ The difference between *hiri* and *ottappa* is illustrated scatically as follows:

If there were 2 iron balls, one cold but smeared with dung, the other hot and burning, a wise man would grasp neither the cold one because of his loathing for the dung, nor the hot one for fear of getting burnt.

Even so a wise man should avoid bodily and verbal misconduct through moral shame and moral fear. (DhsA 126,34-127,2; DhsA:P 166)⁷

No matter what we eat or drink, how we look or act, in the end we have to excrete it as dung and urine, which we must rid of in a hidden place. We are what we do with our body, speech and mind. When we act without regard for others—what become of them or what they think of us—we are said to be “shameless.” We are then no better than what we have eaten.

No matter who we are or what we have, we still must rid ourself of the waste and rot that accumulate inside us. We are how we regard others and how good or bad that they become on account of that regard. When we act without other-regard, we are likely to lack love. We are then no better than our body, what it really is. What a waste!

⁴ On touching wet cow-dung: SD 59.10 (2.1.2) passim.

⁵ SD 5.16 (19.4.3.1).

⁶ DhsA 129,35-130,7.

⁷ SD 60.1e (9b) (9.8.1.0).

1.2.4 In short, what we do or don't do have their consequences, good or bad; we have to consider them well and make the right choice. Here is a short graphic story about a simple man who saw his error and at once corrected it. To that extent he was wise, especially when the other person was an arhat.

The Pilinda Sutta (U 3.6) recounts how the elder Pilinda habitually addresses others as “outcaste” (*vasala*). When this is reported to the Buddha, he explains that this is because Pilinda had, for 500 lives, been born among “outcaste-caller” (*vasala, vādī*) brahmins. His habit is reflexive, that is, due to an old “karmic trace” (*vāsanā*), free of unwholesome intentions, that is, without greed, hate or delusion (since he is an arhat).⁸ The Commentary continues Pilinda's story:

One day, on entering Rājagaha, Pilinda met a man carrying a bowl of long pepper (*pippalī*).

“What's in your bowl, outcaste?” he asked, and the man, in anger, said, “Rat-dung!”

“So be it,” said Pilinda, and the pepper turned into dung!

Horrified, the man pleaded with the elder to set things back to normal. The elder instructs the man to tell the truth when asked again. This time the man replied: “Peppers, bhante.”

And so they reverted to being peppers.

(AA 1:277 f): SD 60.3 (2.1.2)

This anecdote is not a morally deterministic tale but rather a humorous take on caring about our speech, that it depends on our intention. It is a light-hearted yet profound lesson on the nature of karmic intention, that what is spoken with ill intent or with good intent will have like fruit for us, if not now surely in due time.

1.3 THE NATURE OF “REVULSION”

1.3.1 A common teaching in early Buddhism is that of regarding evil (*pāpa*) and the unwholesome (*akusala*) with **revulsion** or “**disgust**” (*nibbidā*), a rather strong and discomfiting word but with the force of reality. *Nibbidā* describes the evil (which brings pain) and the unwholesome (which prevents us from growing)—these are burdensome and discomfiting states; hence, they are “disgusting.”

We may politely try to sugarcoat it as “disillusionment” or “disenchantment,” but then we are likely to care more about words than their import, and so miss the stark reality and liberating truth, and meet more disillusionments and disenchantments.⁹

The Commentary on **the (Tika) Deva Sutta** (A 3.18) explains the nature of **revulsion** with the triad of terms, “to be pained, ashamed and disgusted” (at evil, etc), thus:

- “**to be pained,**” that is, “to feel afflicted, oppressed” (*aṭṭiyeyāthāti aṭṭā pīlīṭha bhaveyyātha*);
- “**to be ashamed,**” that is, “to feel embarrassed (out of modesty)” (*harāyeyāthāti lajjeyyātha*);
- “**to be disgusted,**” that is, “here, it means to feel a dislike for something unpleasant like dung” (*jiguccheyyāthāti gūṭhe viya tasmim vacane sañjāta, jigucchā bhaveyyātha*).

(AA 2:186,22-24)¹⁰

The feeling here is that of wanting to distance oneself from the source of the “disgust.” When we are “**pained,**” we would wonder, “When will I be rid of this pain?” When we are “**ashamed,**” we wonder, “What would the teacher or other good people think of me here?” When we are “**disgusted,**” it is as if we are seeing something really repulsive and we just want to move away from it.¹¹

⁸ U 3.6; DhA 26.25/4:181 f; AA 1:277.

⁹ See *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1.

¹⁰ SD 54.14 (2.1.2). See also MA 3:129.

¹¹ **A 3.18**/1:115 + SD 54.14 (2); For a more detailed analysis, see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1 (2.3); also SD 1.17 (3).

1.3.2 Of special significance here is the 3rd word, “**disgusted**,” the verb of which is *jigucchati* (Skt *jugut-sati*), meaning to “shun, avoid, loathe, detest, be revulsed at, be disgusted with, be horrified at” an act or a situation that is unpleasant, wrong, dangerous or bad. It is a desiderative or reduplicative¹² of √GUP, “to protect.” The Majjhima Commentary explains *jigucchitabbam* as “one should arouse disgust (in oneself) as if looking at dung” (*gūtham disvā viya jigucchā uppādetabbā*, MA 3:129).¹³ We can’t put it more pleasantly than that if we understand the real situation and what it entails.

The feeling of moral disgust points to a deeper sense and urgent desire of turning away from evil and the unwholesome; that is *nibbidā*, the verb of which is *nibbindati*, resolved as *nis-* (prefix meaning “out, away from”) + *vindati*, “he finds,” from √VID², “to find.” The literal English translation, “he finds out,” hints at some kind of direct knowledge of true reality. Its translation as “revulsed (at),” “repelled (by),” or “disgusted (with),” may appear strong to some, but the Dharma-inspired or awakened mind apparently sees worldly experience just as we would recoil at seeing dung or a rotting body (MA 3:129)!¹⁴

1.4 SCATOLOGICALLY NEW WORDS

1.4.1 How words can help

1.4.1.1 To fully appreciate the early Buddhist suttas, we should ideally know **Pali**. We don’t have to master Pali to be an adept translator, but it truly helps to understand and love the language enough to appreciate it as naturally as we do our own mother tongue or a second language that widens and deepens our outreach and impact. When we have learned Pali well enough and studied Dharma firsthand with Pali suttas via good translations, tempered with meditation that calms and clears our minds, we are then able to directly read the Dharma between the words, whether the Pali or in translation.

Even if we have no skill in translating a sutta, we should at least be familiar with the key and common terms as they arise in our consciousness, being acquainted with them like new found friends that warm up with familiarity. Even more useful, we should diligently note the “Pali sense” or “sutta drift” when we read or hear words, terms, passages and texts on early Buddhism, the way we naturally appreciate the innuendos and subtleties of our first language or mother tongue.

With this insightful vision, we are then likely to better understand not only the literal form (*vyañjana*) of words and ideas, but more importantly **the meaning** (*attha*) or intended import of the teaching. In this clear light of direct Dharma, we may realize that English (or the language we are used to) may not bring out the full or intended sense of the teaching, and that we may need a new word or way of shining that light so that others may better see the Buddha Dharma.

1.4.1.2 This is one of the reasons that **new words and phrases** are created, that is, to name new concepts, convey technical details, or bring insightful discoveries; to describe the social realities of the Buddha’s days or of the sutta context; or to urgently fill a lexical gap when an existing term is inadequate. Sometimes a new word may arise of itself from the sense that we have mentally grasped, or from the need of a new term for creative or stylistic reasons, such as to express irony, to joyfully celebrate the beauty of truth, or share a vision of the truth of beauty.

¹² “Desiderative” = showing wish or desire; “reduplicative” = comprising a repetition.

¹³ SD 54.16 (2.1.2).

¹⁴ SD 20.1 (2.2).

1.4.2 Dictionary meaning of “scatology”

1.4.2.1 The magisterial Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2nd edition) explains **scatology** as derived from Greek *skat* or *skor*, “dung” + -(o)logy, and gives the following definitions:

1. That branch of science which deals with diagnosis by means of the feces (1897).
2. That branch of palaeontology which treats of fossil excrements or coprolites.
3. Filthy literature (1876).

OED’s apprehension with the unpleasant undertones of the word is reflected in its not stating the earliest usage of sense no. 2, by merely stating, “In recent Dicts [Dictionaries].”¹⁵

OED however lists the following entries (other than the abovementioned):

scat ¹⁶	(1950) dung, droppings.
scatologic	of or pertaining to scatology (sense 1).
scatological	of or pertaining to scatology (senses 1 and 3); characterized by a preoccupation with obscenity.
scatomancy	(1569) divination or diagnosis based on the examination of the feces.
scatomanter	(1569) one who practises scatomancy.
scatophage	(In recent Dicts) a scatophagous insect or animal, esp a dung-fly.
scatophagian	(1569) one who feeds on dung.
scatophagous	(1891) feeding upon dung.
scatoscopy	(In recent Dicts) inspection of the feces for the purpose of divination or diagnosis.

1.4.3 “Scatic” and “scatire”

1.4.3.1 The main reason for my listing the various “**scat**”-related words in OED is to show that none of them are really applicable or helpful for our purpose in finding a word or words that relate to or reflect **the unpleasant or repulsive aspects of our body**, such as “dung” as one of the 31 aspects of the body [3.1.1.1] and other didactic usages of the idea in early Buddhism.

Both the words “scatologic” and “scatological” mean “of or pertaining to scatology,” and “scatology” basically refers to the “diagnosis by means of the feces” and so on [1.4.2.1]. This does not apply to the early Buddhist usage as mentioned.

Considering that “**scat**” is the key stem-form here, we may form this useful adjective:

scatic, scatical

“of a disgusting or repulsive state that implies decay, rotting, unpleasantness, or dung-like nature.”

This is much closer to and reflective of the intended Buddhist usage, for example, “a scatic(al) review of the human body,” as will be clearly evident [2].

1.4.3.2 OED says that “**scatire**” is an obsolete form of the verb, “scatter”; it’s no more in use. But it would work well if revived as a neologism, as a portmanteau from “scatology” and “satire”; that is, “a satire based on scatological undertones, or scatic humour.”

¹⁵ For further reading, one may consult <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scatology>. 4 Dec 2025.

¹⁶ OED has some 15 entries on “scat,” but only the 7th entry is related to scatology.

Satire is the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to highlight and criticize a foolish or un-beneficial situation or an unwholesome act. When such satire relates to the body, such as its unpleasant parts and functions, or as decaying or rotting of the body, we may say that this is **scatire**.

Such an example is the story of the lovesick monk who is in love with a beautiful and pious courtesan. The scatire rests on a double irony: first, we have a monk who actually falls in love, and secondly, there is this beautiful courtesan who dies and, after a few days, her body rots. [2]

2 A scatic review of the human body

2.1 THE LOVESICK MONK¹⁷

2.1.1 The Sirimā Vatthu is a poignant commentarial story about the courtesan Sirimā and a lovesick monk.¹⁸ Sirimā was the chief courtesan of Rāja,gaha, the most beautiful in the city. According to the story behind the Dhammapada verse, which begins with “Conquer anger with non-anger” (**Dh 223**), Sirimā insults the daughter of the seth Puṇṇaka, but later apologizes to the Blessed One, listens to the Dharma, and becomes a streamwinner. She then provides daily meals (*nicca,bhatta*) for 8 monks. (SnA 1:244)

Ever since she became streamwinner, Sirimā gave up her life as a courtesan and devoted herself to looking after the sangha. Through meal-tickets, she invited the sangha to send 8 monks daily to her house for a meal-offering. One day, one of the 8 monks returned to his monastery and when asked about the meal, he replied that the food was indescribably good, but Sirimā’s looks were even better.

2.1.2 A certain monk, hearing of Sirimā’s beauty at once fell in love with her even without having met her. Sirimā later fell sick and died, and king Bimbisāra instructed that her body be cremated. The Buddha, hearing of this, however, advised the king that the body should not be cremated but left in the charnel ground and guarded against carrion crows and other animals. After three days, Sirimā’s corpse was swollen and festering with worms, so that it looked like a pot of rice over a hot fire, bubbling over on the surface.

Bimbisāra then decreed, under pain of a fine of eight gold coins, that all adult residents of Rāja,gaha should file past the body, to see Sirimā in her present condition.

2.1.3 The lovesick monk, not knowing of Sirimā’s death and not seeing her for 4 days could not take any food, and the food in his bowl, too, was, by then, crawling with maggots. His friends then told him that the Buddha was going to see Sirimā. At the word “Sirimā,” the monk was excited, emptied his bowl of the remains, rinsed it, and then joined the others to see Sirimā.

When the crowd had gathered, the Buddha instructed rajah Bimbisāra, “Let it be proclaimed with the beating of drums that whoever pays the sum of 1000 coins may have Sirima.” But no man wanted her now, so the price was lowered; but no man wanted her even for free. (DhA 11.2; SnA 1:245)

2.1.4 Then, the Buddha spoke to the monks:

Here, monks, you see a woman who was loved by the world. In this same city, in the past, men would gladly pay a thousand gold coins to enjoy her for just one night. Now, however, no one will have her, even for nothing. This is what the body comes to, perishable and fragile, made attractive only through ornaments, a heap of wounds with 9 openings, held together with 300

¹⁷ See SD 3.8 (5.2).

¹⁸ DhA 11.2/3:104-109 ad Dh 147 (tr DhA:B 2:330-334); SnA 1:244 f; Vv 1.16; SD 3.8 (5.2).

bones, a continuing burden. Only fools attach fancies and illusion to such an impermanent thing.¹⁹ (VvA 77,22-26)

*Passa citta,katam̄ bimbar̄
arukāyaṃ samussitaṃ
āturaṃ bahu.saṅkappaṃ
yassa n'atthi dhuvaṃ ṭhiti*

(Dh 147)

See this painted image,
a heaped up mass of sores.
Diseased, much thought about.
It has nothing stable or lasting.

2.1.5 The streamwinner Sirimā was reborn as a female deva and appeared in celestial glory at her own funeral.²⁰ The elder **Vaṅṅisa**, the foremost poet in the sangha, then asked Sirimā about her karma, and she told her story, as recorded in **the Vimāna,vatthu** (Vv 137-148).²¹

To mark the significance of the occasion, the Buddha gave **the Vijaya Sutta** (Sn 1.11), on revulsion towards the body.²² At the end of the discourse, the lovesick monk was healed and became a streamwinner.²³ After the contemplation of the body, the monk developed insight and became an arhat. (DhA 11.2; SnA 1:245)

2.2 “COME AND SEE”

2.2.1 We can only see what *is* and what is *there*

2.2.1.1 In the reflection of the Dharma (*dhammānussati*), we have a standing invitation by the Buddha to “**come and see**” (*ehi,passika*) the Dharma for ourselves, explained by Buddhaghosa as follows:

“**Inviting one to come and see.**” This Dharma is worthy of an invitation for one to look at, thus, “Come and see this Dharma!” But why is it worthy of this invitation?

Because of it exists and because of it is utterly pure.

For if a man has said that there is money or gold in an empty fist, he cannot say,

“Come and see this!”

Why not? Because it does not exist.

But on the other hand, while dung and urine may well exist, a man, hoping to delight the mind by way of beauty, will not be able say, “Come and see this!” On the contrary, they have to be covered up with grass and leaves. Why? Because of they are impure.

(Vism 7.82/216 f), SD 15.9 (2.4)

2.2.1.2 A well known early Buddhist term is **nonself** (*anattā*), a term understandably not found in other religions or philosophies. The term itself is a simple word, meaning “there is no abiding self.” However, many modern Buddhists, especially those who have been raised with the notion that there is some kind of “soul,” have difficulty understanding or accepting this teaching. **The Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9) records the case of a wanderer who had this difficulty.

Poṭṭhapāda the wanderer was a great admirer of the Buddha and a man of goodwill. Because of Poṭṭhapāda, Citta the young elephant trainer, after joining the sangha 6 times (each time giving up out of

¹⁹ Cf Raṭṭhapāla’s similar reflection on the body in **Raṭṭha,pāla S** (M 82/2:64 f), SD 92.5

²⁰ See Isumi Kaminishi, “Dead beautiful: Visualizing the decay corpse in nine stages as skillful means in Buddhism,” in (edd) R M Brown & D S Hutton, *A Companion to Asian Art and Architecture*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011:513-536

²¹ Vv 16/137*-149*/17 f.

²² SD 3.8(6).

²³ DhA 11.2/3:104 f; VvA 74 ff.

frustration) finally renounces a 7th time and gains arhathood. **The Poṭṭhapāda Sutta** (D 9) records their stories, and relates Poṭṭhapāda’s difficulty understanding or accepting the reality of nonself.

Poṭṭhapāda asks the Buddha about “the peak of consciousness,” that is, the highest level of consciousness. In the course of the Buddha’s explanation, Poṭṭhapāda asks the Buddha whether consciousness is identical with a person’s self, or if they are different. Poṭṭhapāda then wonders whether that self is gross or material, or a mind-made one, or a formless one.

The Buddha explains to Poṭṭhapāda that whatever kind of “self” that does exist is simply consciousness that arises and passes away; there is nothing is abiding.

On Poṭṭhapāda’s holding on to the notion of an “abiding self,” the Commentary pointedly remarks that even if one were to bathe a **village pig** in scented water, anoint it with perfumes, deck it with garlands, and lay it down on a glorious bed, it will not feel happy, it will return straight to the dung-heap for comfort!

Even so, Poṭṭhapāda, despite having been anointed and decked with fine and precise teachings on the 3 characteristics and set down on the glorious bed of cessation, nevertheless returns to the dung-heap of the notion of a self! (DA 2:376).²⁴

Happily in the end, Poṭṭhapāda agrees with the Buddha that the teachings he has received from the Buddha “would turn out to be well grounded” (D 8,45.3), SD 7.14.

2.2.2 Reputation by association

2.2.2.1 We are invited to “come and see” the Buddha Dharma because what we will see is **true reality** or aspects of true reality (by way of metaphors and stories). Implicitly, we are also told that when we have seen the Dharma for ourselves, we would ourselves become embodiments of the Dharma, so that other people would benefit from having *come and seen* us. Hence, it behoves us to be ready to for this example by seeing, too.

2.2.2.2 The Jigucchitabba Sutta (A 3.27)—the discourse on what one should be revulsed at—has the phrase, “even though one does not emulate the example of such a person” (*kiñcāpi bhikkhave eva, rūpassa puggalassa na diṭṭhānugatim āpajjati*), given on two contradicting situations regarding the kind of persons we associate with.

In the first case, when one associates with someone who is “immoral, of bad character, impure, of suspect conduct, secretive in his actions, not a recluse though claiming to be one, not a celibate though claiming to be one, inwardly rotten, corrupt, depraved,”²⁵ even though one does not follow the example of such a person, still one’s reputation is soiled thereby just like **a snake that has crawled through dung**; though it does not bite one, it will still soil one.²⁶

On the other hand, when one associates with someone **morally virtuous**, of good character, even though one does not emulate the example of such a person, one’s reputation is thereby enhanced.²⁷ Moreover, this close association may, over time, habituate one to conduct oneself with moral virtue, since one already has seen its benefit.²⁸

²⁴ Comy on D 9,21 (SD 7.14)

²⁵ *Dussīlo hoti papa,dhammo asuci,saṅkassara,samācaro paṭicchanna,kammanto assamaṇo samaṇa,paṭiñño abrahma,cārī brahmacārī,paṭiñño anti,pūti avassuto kasambu,jāto.*

²⁶ A 3.27/1:126,19 f (SD 72.1).

²⁷ A 3.27/1:127,22 f (SD 72.1).

²⁸ SD 55.3 (2.1.4.1); A 3.27/1:127,22 f (SD 72.1).

2.2.2.3 The Dharma invites us to “come and see” [2.2.1.2], but not everything we see may turn out to be wholesome or desirable. This is especially true when we truly have a good look at the human body, even our own body. **The Sabbâsava Sutta** (M 2), thus instructs a renunciant:

- 1 Wisely reflecting, he uses [takes] **almsfood**:
- 2 not for amusement,²⁹ not for intoxication, not for fattening, not for beautifying,³⁰
- 3 but only for keeping this body going and enduring,
- 4 for ending hunger pangs,³¹ for the sake of supporting the holy life,³²
- 5 considering, “Thus I shall get rid of an old feeling,³³ and not let a new feeling arise,
- 6 and, in this way, I will be blameless, and live at ease.”³⁴ (M 2,14)+n SD 30.3

In other words, the renunciant should take food (1) mindfully; (2) not for the sake of a body that would be physically attractive, looking well built; (3) but for merely sustaining the body, that is, to live; (4) for staying healthy; (5) simply for overcoming the feeling of hunger, (6) so that one lives trouble-free and not troubling anyone.

This practice of monastic moderation and restraint in food has 2 broad purposes: (1) food should keep the monastic healthy; and (2) the monastic should not be a burden to others. Clearly such a monastic would not look well-fed or lazy. The Dhammapada gives us a powerful impression of a monastic who is moderate and restrained in food, thus:

*Paṃsukūla, dharam̐ jantum̐
kisam̐ dhamani, santhatam̐³⁵
ekam̐ vanasmim̐ jhāyantam̐
tam̐ aham̐ brūmi brāhmaṇam̐*

A person in a dust-heap robe,
lean, with veins showing all over,
who meditates alone in the forest—
him, I call a brahmin. (Dh 395), SD 36.14 (3.2)

2.2.3 The body and its predicaments

2.2.3.1 A ground-breaking study, John Powers’ *Bull of a Man: Images of masculinity, sex, and the body in Indian Buddhism* (2009) explores how the Buddha and his monks were depicted as powerful, virile figures, challenging modern views of them as asexual, and revealing the importance of their compelling physical masculine presence in early Buddhism. More generally, the phrase, “bull of a man,” describes a man who is physically powerful, imposing, and masculine, often with connotations of strength, leadership, fortitude, even stubbornness, alluding to the bull (*āsabha*) symbolism in Indian culture where bulls represent virtue, leadership, and power.³⁶

Vanessa Sasson, in her review of Powers’ book, notes:

²⁹ This stock: M 1:355; A 2:40, 145; Dh 1346; Pug 21; Vbh 249.

³⁰ On these 2 aspects, see SD 30.3 (2.3.1.3).

³¹ Vism 1.92/32.

³² Buddhaghosa distinguishes 2 kinds of holy life (*brahma, cariya*): the teaching (*sāsana*) as a whole, and the holy life of the path (*magga brahma, cariya*), ie sainthood (Vism 1.92/32).

³³ The “old feeling” is that of hunger, the “new feeling” refers to not over-eating.

³⁴ “Live at ease” (*phāsu, vihāra*) refers to bodily ease or comfort, free from pain and distraction, so that we could direct our mind to meditation.

³⁵ See M Hara, “A note on the phrase *kṛśo dhamani-sam̐tata*,” *Asiatische Studien* 49,2, 1995:381 f.

³⁶ See John Powers, *Bull of a Man*, Harvard Univ Press, 2009:25-27 (ch 2). Reviewed by Vanessa Sasson, *J of Buddhist Studies* 18, 2011:118

“As Powers has duly demonstrated in this book, the male body in Indian Buddhist history has its own discourse and meaning inscribed upon it; it therefore warrants our attention. The fact that we have failed to notice it all this time obviously says more about Western academic interests, oversights, and concerns, than it does about Indian Buddhist history itself.” (*J of Buddhist Ethics* 18 2011:118)

While it is true that ancient India of the Buddha’s time was patriarchal and male-centred, this was a historical and social reality, not a Buddhist teaching in relation to mental training or awakening. The significance of the Buddha as being the epitome of “masculine perfection” points to a universal ideal for everyone, that is, to cultivate “**a healthy mind in a healthy body.**”

2.2.3.2 The dichotomy of apparently opposing figures plays a vital role in the early Buddhist attitude to the human body. We are reminded (especially as lay followers) of 2 important aspects of Buddhist practice. The first is that of **bodily health**—that “health is the highest gain” (*ārogya, paramā lābhā*, Dh 204).³⁷ This respect for the body and the mind are elaborated as the “5 values” underlying the 5 precepts, that is, abstaining from *killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, falsehood and intoxication*.³⁸ In short, this is the purpose of Buddhist morality or moral training (*sīla, sikkhā*).

Moral virtue also serves to promote healthy social relations and a good society; but even more vital is that moral virtue is the basis for mental cultivation. A healthy body and a safe society are ideal grounds for mental cultivation (*samādhi, sikkhā*). This leads to **spiritual well-being**, which entails weakening and ultimately uprooting the 3 roots of unwholesomeness, that is, *greed, hatred and delusion*.³⁹

A key teaching in **the overcoming of greed, hatred and delusion** is not to identify ourselves with any part of the body, whether its *physical form, feelings, perceptions, formation (intentions) or consciousness*, that is, the 5 aggregates. One effective way of preventing, even overcoming, any identification with the body or being attracted to it is to reflect on its true composition and nature.

2.2.3.3 When we “**identify with the body**” we are basically saying that “This is *my* body!”—we feed our **self-identity view** (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*). This leads to at least 2 unwholesome attitudes: (1) that “I can do what I like with my body!” and (2) that “*My* body (feelings, etc) is hurting ... ” and so on.

(1) Conventionally, we may speak of “**my body**,” which means that I have to take very good care of it in keeping it safe, healthy and wholesome. This is one body amongst many others, and the current wholesome state of this body is due to various other people and situations that take care of our body (such as beauty care, health care and other services). When our body dies, living bodies have to dispose of it. While we live, we have to deal with the limitations and death of other bodies.

(2) It is the nature of the body to feel hurt, to be limited in its abilities, and to decay. Understanding its limitations and weaknesses, we build its strength and abilities: this is called health and active living. When the body feels pain, we respond by healing it, comforting it. Yet, pain may come in many other ways and forms. By understanding that pain comes and goes, we know that it is the body’s nature to *feel*; that way, the mind leaves the feeling at the body level and is not affected by it. It is as if we are hit by only one dart (that of the body), but not a second dart (that of the mind).⁴⁰

2.2.3.4 When we are attracted to the physical body, that is, when **lust** arises and we are distracted from what is good and right, then we are likely to act in negative and harmful ways, including breaking the precepts (we may kill, steal, commit sexual misconduct, lie or get intoxicated). What are we really

³⁷ SD 29.6a (4.2).

³⁸ On the 5 precepts (*pañca, sīla*), see **Dīgha, jānu S** (A 8.54,13), SD 5.10; **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7), SD 1.5 (2); **Sīlā-nussati**, SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 21.6 (1.2); SD 37.8 (2.2).

³⁹ SD 35.6 (5.1.1).

⁴⁰ On the nature of the 2 kinds of pain, see **Dve Roga S** (A 4:157), SD 42.16; **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6), SD 5.5.

attracted to? What is it that we desire to have and to hold? The reality is that we are drawn to and desire a body that is filled **with urine and dung** (Sn 835).⁴¹

Lust (*taṇhā*) is the most difficult of the 3 unwholesome roots [2.2.3.2] to deal with.⁴² Hence, we need to prepare and train ourselves not to be reactive to “beauty signs.” A beauty sign is merely a part of the body that seizes our attention, but after examining other parts of the body—seeing the “whole picture”—our feelings will change; that is, we notice that there are parts which are simply unattractive. Moreover, if and when we do get the part that we desire, it does not, as a rule, turn out well or what we had expected it to be!

One who is attracted or attached to the body or any body should try reflecting on **the body’s true nature**, thus:⁴³

This body is built of bones, plastered with flesh and blood; therein is confined decay and death, conceit and hypocrisy (Dh 150). A home for bugs, worms, pain and diseases. Enveloped in skin with countless pores and 9 openings,⁴⁴ ceaselessly oozing and trickling like open wounds. From the eyes ooze gunk, from the ears wax, from the nostrils snot and dung, from the mouth food, spittle, phlegm, bile and blood, from wounds blood, lymph, and pus, and scabs form.⁴⁵

2.3 PERCEIVED FILTHINESS

2.3.1 An early sex joke

The Aggañña Sutta (D 27) is a satirical account of the evolution of the world, that is, of the rise of life, of humans, of human society and common morality, retold as like in a time-lapse movie setting (to use a modern analogy). Despite its mythical language, the drift of the story is remarkably reflective of modern ideas of cosmology and society.

One of its patently humorous takes is its depiction of the origin of sex in *scatological*⁴⁶ terms:

And, Vāseṭṭhā, those beings continued for a very long time feeding on this rice as their food and nourishment.

And, Vāseṭṭhā, as they continued for a very long time feeding on this rice as their food and nourishment,

the beings’ bodies became coarser still,

and among themselves they noticed even greater differences in their looks. [§14.4]

Then, **the female** developed female organs,⁴⁷ and **the male** developed male organs.

And the women became excessively preoccupied with the men, and the men with the women.⁴⁸

⁴¹ **Māgandiya S** (Sn 4.9), SD 36.6 (1.2).

⁴² On lust as the most difficult of the 3 roots to overcome, see **(Tika) Añña Titthiyā S** (A 3.68), SD 16.4 (1.1).

⁴³ The foll is a special meditative exercise for countering sensual lust. Elsewhere, such as in **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17,1.15), SD 36.12, and **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,39), SD 2.22, there are passages describing the beauty of the body on account of one’s good karma, and that we should keep ourselves healthy by eating healthily, exercising and living moral lives.

⁴⁴ **Sn 197**. The 9 openings (*navahi sotehi*) are the body’s 2 eyes, 2 ear-openings, 2 nostrils, mouth, anus and urethra (*navahi sotehī ti ubho,akkhi-c,chidda,kañṇa-c,chidda,nāsa-c,chidda,mukha,vacca.magga,passāva.maggehi*, SnA 1:248).

⁴⁵ See SD 62.10a (3.1.1.3).

⁴⁶ See [1.4.3.1].

⁴⁷ DA: That is, those who were women in previous lives. Conversely, the others were men in their past lives.

⁴⁸ On this and foll lines, **Saññoga S** (A 7.48), SD 8.7.

Owing to this excessive preoccupation with each other, lust was aroused, and their bodies burned (with passion).

Because of this burning, they indulged in **sexual activity**.⁴⁹ [V 3:23]

But, Vāseṭṭhā, when (other) beings saw them coupling, some threw dust, some threw ashes [dregs],⁵⁰ some threw cow-dung at them, crying,

'Away with (this) filth! Away with (this) filth!⁵¹ How can one being do such a thing to another!

Nowadays, in some districts, when a daughter-in-law [a bride] is led out, some people throw dust, some throw ashes [dregs], some throw cow-dung at her,⁵²

they are merely resorting to the primordial norm of the ancients⁵³ without knowing its meaning.

(D 27,16.3-8/3:88 f), SD 2.19

2.3.2 Double losses

The Piṇḍolya Sutta (S 22.80) graphically relates how a monk *under the power of ill will* (or any of the other mental impurities) neither lives as a true recluse nor, if he gives up his training, does he benefit from the blessings of the household life. His predicament is comparable to **a cremation fire-brand** that is *burnt at both ends* and is *smearred with cow-dung in the middle*.

Such a fire-brand is useless except in the cremation pyre,⁵⁴ described as follows:

19 In this way, bhikshus, this son of family is one who has gone forth, but he is covetous, strongly lusting after sense-pleasures,

with a mind of ill will,

with a mind of corrupted intentions,⁵⁵

muddle-headed, without clear knowing, lacking concentration, scatter-brained,

loose in faculty.⁵⁶

19.2 Bhikshus, just as **a firebrand of a funeral pyre**, lit on both ends, and smearred with dung in the middle, cannot be used as firewood in the village, nor in the forest,⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Note the use of *āpajjati* [§16b]. For a more extensive exposition of this episode and its spiritual solution, see **Saññoga S** (A 7.48/4:57-59), SD 8.7; also A:ÑB 185 f. Cf **Pār 1** (V 3:23,33-36).

⁵⁰ *Seṭṭhi* (n) (D 3:88,30 = 89,5). Not in PED. Comy glosses it as “ashes” (*seṭṭhin ti chārikam*, DA 869,24). According to K R Norman, it is derived < Skt **śiṣṭi* < *śiṣ*, “to remain,” and means “remainder, dregs,” and adds, “We might argue that Buddhaghosa’s gloss is justifiable, as ashes are the remains from a fire, but the usage in New Indo-Aryan [CDIAL 12480: <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/contextualize.pl?p.4.soas.27503>] suggests that it is liquid dregs which are intended. If this is so, then Buddhaghosa was merely guessing the meaning from the context, perhaps with the knowledge of a marriage ceremony where ashes were thrown.” (J of the PTS 18 1993:163 f).

⁵¹ “Away with (this) filth! ... ” (*nassa asuci*). This is reminiscent of the use of *nāseti* as a tt for the expulsion from monkhood (V 1:85 f, 89, 173, 3:33, 40, etc; see V:H 1:xxvii). It is interesting to note that the *Viṣṇu, dharmōttara Pūrāṇa* 3.100.1 mentions that such substances as earth, cow-dung or ash were used for purification. See S Collins, “The Discourse on What is Primary (*Aggañña-sutta*),” *J of Indian Philosophy* 21, 1993a:366 n16.5.

⁵² This is an interesting Buddhist aetiology of the custom of throwing confetti at weddings!

⁵³ “Primordial norm of the ancients” (*porāṇena aggaññaena akkharena*): this phrase first appears at D 27,13.6.

⁵⁴ S 22.80,19/3:93 (SD 28.9a).

⁵⁵ “With a mind of corrupted intentions,” *paduṭṭha, mana, saṅkappo*.

⁵⁶ *Abhijjhālu kāmesu tibba, sārāgo, vyāpanna, citto paduṭṭha, mana, saṅkappo, muṭṭha-s, sati asampajāno asamāhi-to vibbhanta, citto pākat’indriyo*. For a longer list of terms describing a deviant monk, see **Jantu S** (S 2.25/1:61) & its comy: see also S:B 392 n176.

⁵⁷ Comy says that the Buddha uses the funeral-pyre fire-brand parable not referring to immoral monks, but in ref to virtuous persons who are lazy (*alasa*) and as such are destroyed by such faults as covetousness, etc (SA 2:302).

in just the same way, bhikshus, do I speak of this person—
he has abandoned his household wealth, and yet does not fulfill the purpose of asceticism.
(S 22.80,19/3:93), SD 28.9a

3 Bodily impurity

3.1 COMPONENTS OF THE BODY-MIND

3.1.1 The body: its parts and elements

3.1.1.1 This body of ours is of course not composed of merely “urine and dung” [2.2.3.4]; the suttas often speak of 31 body-parts (or 32 in the Commentaries), for our constant contemplation. **The Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62), for example, describes our physical body as comprising the following, based on the 5 elements (earth, water, fire, wind and space).⁵⁸

THE EARTH ELEMENT (1-19)

head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth,	skin ; ⁵⁹	<i>taca,pañcaka,</i>	“the skin 5”
flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow,	kidneys ;	<i>vakka,pañcaka,</i>	“the kidney 5”
heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs), ⁶⁰ spleen,	lungs ;	<i>papphāsa,pañcaka</i>	“the lung 5”
large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents, ⁶¹	dung ,	<i>*karīsa,catukka,</i>	“the dung 4”

THE WATER ELEMENT (20-31)

bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat,	fat ;	<i>meda-c,chakka,</i>	“the fat 5”
tears, skin-grease [tallow], saliva, snot, oil of the joints, ⁶²	urine. [’]	<i>mutta-c,chakka,</i>	“the urine 6” ⁶³

THE FIRE ELEMENT

that by which one is **warmed, ages, burns**, and that by which what is **eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted**,⁶⁴ gets *completely digested*.

THE WIND ELEMENT

up-going **winds**,⁶⁵ down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the chest,⁶⁶
winds that course through the limbs,⁶⁷ in-breath and out-breath,

⁵⁸ Details and the Pali set-names (except for **karīsa,catukka*), see Vism 8.50-55/242.

⁵⁹ The meditation on these 5 parts “with skin as the 5th” or “skin pentad” (*taca,pañcaka kamma-ṭ,ṭhāna*) (Vism 8.50/242) forms the basic spiritual practice first taught to novices on their initiation.

⁶⁰ “**Membranes**,” alt tr “pleura,” *kilomaka*, ie, a pair of membranous sacs surrounding the lungs.

⁶¹ **Udariyañ**, lit “that which is in the *udara* (stomach),” sometimes tr as “gorge” (Vism:Ñ 8.120/-122/258 f); technically, this includes chyme (food half-digested by gastric juices, expelled into the duodenum).

⁶² *Lasikā*, ie synovial fluid.

⁶³ We thus have a total of 31 body-parts. See **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119,7), SD 12.21.

⁶⁴ *Asita,pīta,khāyita,sāyitā*. The 4 modes of consuming food: we *eat* food; *drink* liquid; *chew* solid food, a tooth-stick, betel-nut, chewing gum; *taste* (*lick* or *suck*) sweets, ice-cream. Cf (**Pañcaka**) **Nāgita S** (A 5.30,12), SD 55.12a.

⁶⁵ **Visuddhi,magga**: “winds” are responsible for the various internal motions of the body, viz, “up-going winds” (*uddhañ,gamā vātā*) for vomiting and belching, “down-going winds” (*adho,gamā vātā*) for the expelling of faeces and urine (Vism 350). “Wind” here clearly refers to elemental “motion,” such as peristalsis, not to an *object* moved.

⁶⁶ *Koṭṭha* means “the stomach or abdomen” (PED); and, *kucchi* is “belly.” As such, here I take *koṭṭhasayā* to be cognate with or related to Skt *koṣṭhya* (mfn), meaning “proceeding from the chest, emitted (as a sound) from the centre of the lungs” (SED), which makes clear sense here.

⁶⁷ “Winds that course through the limbs,” *aṅgam-aṅgānusārino vātā*. In reference to this, **Peter Harvey** says, “Note that the ‘motion/air’ element might be related to the modern concept of electrical discharges of the nerves ...

THE SPACE ELEMENT

the ear-canals, the nostrils, the mouth cavity, and that (opening) whereby whatever is *eaten, drunk, taken, and tasted*, is **swallowed**, and here it **collects** [stays], and whereby it is **voided** from below.

(M 62,8-12),⁶⁸ SD 3.11

3.1.1.2 In keeping with our scatic survey of the body-parts in early Buddhist contemplation, we should here especially examine “**the dung 4**” [3.1.1.1], that is, without mention of “the brain.” Of the 31 body-parts in the sutta listing this is an odd-man-out; it has only 4 body-parts, while each of the other sets have 5 parts or 6 parts. Not only does the name “dung 4”—the tetrad ending with dung (**karīsa, catukka*)—seem neither pleasant nor polite, there are at least 2 other reasons for increasing the list from “31 body-parts” to “**32 body-parts**.”

(1) The 1st reason for the early Buddhist compilers to include **the brain** (*mattha, luṅga*) in the list of body-parts for contemplation is probably aesthetic. Perhaps there was a desire to have a more auspicious term than “dung 4” for the name of a set of body-parts for contemplation; “brain 5” seems to sound better.

(2) Numerologically, “31” aspects do not seem auspicious; it is the number of samsaric planes in which the unawakened are caught in suffering; nirvana would sanctify it as the “32nd aspect.”

(3) Then, there was the discovery of the brain in the skull (*mattha, luṅga*); the brain seemed significant enough to be included amongst the body-parts for body-part contemplation.

Hence, “the dung 4” set is replaced with “**the brain 5**.”

3.1.1.3 The earliest occurrence of *mattha, luṅga*, “brain,” in the 32 body-parts (*dva-ṭ, tiṃs’ākāra*, “32 aspects”) is probably in **the Paṭisambhidā, magga** (Pm), the 12th book of the 5th collection, Khuddaka Nikāya.⁶⁹ There, **the brain** is listed right at the very end, after the 31 aspects, that is, after “urine” [3.1.1.1]. This made good sense on a first attempt to add a new item or to expand the list of body-parts to be *aspect no. 32* (Pm 7,7).

By the time of the Commentaries (between 450 and 600 CE)—such as in the Khuddaka, pāṭha Commentary and the Vibhaṅga Commentary—the brain was placed as the 20th aspect of the 32 body-parts, that is, immediately after “dung,” as “**the brain 5**” (*mattha, luṅga, pañcaka*).⁷⁰ This is the list of 32 body-parts that we have today.

3.1.2 The scatic elements

3.1.2.1 The Vuṭṭha Vass’āvāsa Sutta (A 9.11) records an incident regarding the elder Sāriputta who, on “emerging from the rains-retreat” (*vuṭṭh’āvāsa*) was accused by a monk of offending him. The Commentary explains that the monk, seeing the elder departing with a large retinue, became angry and thought, “I will stop this departure!” It is said that when Sāriputta was leaving the Blessed One, the cor-

In that case, the mind would move the body by effecting the electrical modulation of nerve discharges.” (1993:7 digital ed). In contemporary terms, these “winds” clearly refer to the oxyhaemoglobin, ie, the oxygen in the blood, coursing through the body.

⁶⁸ The 5-element composition of the physical body recurs in **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,14-18), SD 4.17.

⁶⁹ Pm is a late scholastic work which borrows long passages from the Vinaya and the suttas, despite its attr to Sāriputta.

⁷⁰ KhpA 41, 59 f; VbhA 225, 249. For a fascinating discussion on how ancient Indian ascetics obtain such knowledge of human anatomy, see Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*, 1998:34-37.

ner of Sāriputta's robe brushed against the elder (they say the wind blew it aside). It was on such a trifle that he trumped up a deliberate offence (AA 4:170).⁷¹

Now not long after the venerable Sāriputta had left, that monk approached the Blessed One and complained thus:

“Bhante, the venerable Sāriputta has offended me, and without asking my forgiveness, has departed on a peregrination.”

3.1.2.2 Sāriputta, summoned before the Buddha, replied that he took no offence in monk's accusation, saying:

Bhante, just as they throw things clean and foul on **the earth** ... on **water** ... into **fire** ... into **wind**—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—**the earth** ... **water** ... **fire** ... **wind** is not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted,⁷² because of that.

Even so, [375] I dwell with the mind like earth, ... like water, ... like fire, ... like wind, bountiful, grown great,⁷³ boundless, hate-free, without ill will.

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari [a certain colleague in the holy life] whom he had offended.

Bhante, just as a **whisk-broom** [cleaning-rag] (*raj'oharāṇa*), sweeps away things, clean and foul—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—**the whisk-broom** is not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted, because of that; ... [and 5 other parables on humility: §7.3].

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended. (A 9.11/4:373-378), SD 28.2a

3.1.2.3 The 4-element metaphor of the Vuṭṭh'āvāsa Sutta [3.1.2.1] is developed into **the 5 element-like meditations** (that is, based on *earth, water, fire, wind and space*) in **the Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta** (M 62) for the cultivation of equanimity in the face of both “agreeable and disagreeable contacts” (*manāpā-manāpā phassā*), thus:

Rāhula, just as they throw things clean, they throw things *foul*, **on the earth**; they throw dung, ... urine, ... spittle, ... pus, ... blood upon it— but the earth is neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted⁷⁴ because of that.⁷⁵

So, too, Rāhula, cultivate **an earth-like meditation**.

—May I be like earth ... *neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted*

Rāhula, just as they wash things clean, they wash things *foul*, **in water**; they wash dung, ... urine, ... spittle, ... pus, ... blood in it— but the water is neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted because of that. [424]

⁷¹ The story is retold with this detail at (**Sīha,nāda**) **Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 7.6/2:178-181 @ SD 28.2b).

⁷² “Is not troubled, ashamed, disgusted,” *aṭṭiyati vā harāyati vā jigucchati vā*. For fuller analyses of these terms, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,5/1:213), SD 1.7 n sv.

⁷³ The mind “grown great” (*maha-g,gattā*) or exalted perception refers to the mind in dhyana, ie in the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*). See **Catuttha Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.4), SD 24.14 (4).

⁷⁴ “Is not pained, humiliated, disgusted,” *aṭṭiyati vā harāyati vā jigucchati vā*. For fuller analyses of these terms, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,5/1:213), SD 1.7 n sv.

⁷⁵ A shorter form of this figure is found in **Doṇa Brāhmaṇa S** (A 5.192,7.7/3:229), SD 36.14.

So, too, Rāhula, cultivate a **water-like meditation**.

—May I be like water ... *neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted*

Rāhula, just as **fire** burns *the clean*, burns *the foul*,

It burns dung, ... urine, ... spittle, ... pus, ... blood—

but the fire is *neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted* because of that.

So, too, Rāhula, cultivate a **fire-like meditation**.

—May I be like fire ... *neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted*

Rāhula, just as **the wind** blows on *the clean*, blows on *the foul*,

it blows on dung, ... urine, ... spittle, ... pus, ... blood—

but the wind is *neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted* because of that.

So, too, Rāhula, cultivate a **wind-like meditation**.

—(May I be like wind ... *neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted*)

Rāhula, just as **space** is not established anywhere—

so, too, Rāhula, cultivate a **space-like meditation**.

—May I be like space ... *neither troubled nor ashamed nor disgusted*

(M 62,13-17/1:423 f, abridged), SD 3.11

One only needs to choose any of these 5 meditations, depending on one's temperament or present need. For each of these element meditations, one thus looks at **earth**, or touches **water**, or feels the heat of **fire**, or gazes into **space** (such as the open sky). Or, one may simply visualize the element naturally. Having mentally captured a clear and durable image of the element, one then cultivates equanimity with the element.

As an easier alternative, one may cultivate **lovingkindness** with the help of these elements.

3.1.2.4 The element-like meditations on the divine abodes (that is, love, compassion, joy and equanimity) [3.1.2.3] are self-empowering. In this adapted practice, we reverse the sequence of the 5 elements, thus, as "*space, wind, fire, water and earth.*"

In the 1st meditation—**the love meditation**—we visualize ourselves as space:

"May I be like **space**, embracing myself as well as others and all beings with **love**.

I accept myself as I am, I forgive myself for the wrongs I have done.

I accept others as they are; I forgive them for their wrong." And so on.

And then we visualize ourselves as air or wind:

"May I be like **air**, giving myself space for love, giving space for others.

May I breathe in *peace* and breathe out *love*.

May the space in between the breaths be *friendship*."

May the breath of my speech, my actions, my thoughts, be like **wind** to blow away lust and hatred, and to cool others with charity, love and wisdom." And so on.

In the 2nd meditation—**the compassion meditation**—we visualize ourselves as **fire**:

"May I be like fire of **compassion** that burns away all my negative thoughts and habits.

With compassion, I forgive myself.

May I be like fire, warm with love and joy, giving warmth to others; may I forgive others.

May I be like fire, giving light to others so that they can see me with love and joy." And so on.

In the 3rd meditation—**the joy meditation**—we visualize ourselves as **water**:

"May I be like **water** cleansing my mind of negative thoughts.

May I habitually think happy thoughts. May I keep smiling inwardly.

May I be like **water** and relate to others at the same happy level,
May I show my appreciation of others in thought, words and actions.” *And so on.*

In the 4th meditation—the equanimity (or peace) meditation—we visualize ourself as **earth**:

“May I be like **earth** that stays firm, calm and supportive in face of any adversity.

May I be like **earth** in giving others the firm support they need, especially in difficult times.

May I be like earth, strong yet humble in difficult situations.” *And so on.*

3.1.2.5 The meditations that we are taught and that we practise (whether guided or on our own), as a rule, work symptomatically,⁷⁶ that is, they overcome present states of negative emotions (such as desire, anger, sadness, and fear) or at best prevent our unwholesome roots (greed, hatred and delusion) from driving our actions, speech and thoughts.

Keeping to the precepts, reflecting on our lapses,⁷⁷ and habitual meditative practice (even for brief moments) help us to frame our minds in the direction of what are spiritually beneficial. Our last breath of life is then likely to be attended by memory of such habitual karma; we would then be reborn into the path as streamwinners.⁷⁸

3.1.3 Purifying the mind

3.1.3.1 So long as we are unawakened, dark roots of lust, hatred and delusion lurk in our unconscious as **latent tendencies** (*anusaya*), that is, as lust, aversion and ignorance.⁷⁹ Hence, despite all our religious faith, practice (including rituals or vows) and meditation, latent tendencies remain in the dark recesses of our lives. Our moral living, mental cultivation and past good karma act as cages and walls against these latent tendencies.

In the following parable, our mind is like a “soiled cloth” and the latent tendencies are like cow-dung. **The Tad āh’uposatha Sutta** (A 3.70) gives the parable of cleaning a soiled piece of cloth, comparing it to purposeful effort, thus:

And how, Visākhā, is a soiled cloth cleansed by purposeful effort?⁸⁰ [209]

By means of **cleaning salt**,⁸¹ by means of **lye**,⁸² by means of **cow-dung**, by means of **purposeful effort**.

This, Visākhā, is how a soiled piece of cloth is cleansed by purposeful effort.

In the same way, Visākhā, is one’s soiled mind cleansed by purposeful effort.

(A 3.70,6.3), SD 4.18

⁷⁶ The “radical cure” for our defilements is of course a consistent morally life with sustained mindfulness or meditation so that the mind will at least be able to uproot the 3 fetters of self-identity view, doubt and attachment to rituals and vows (that is, superstition). See **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

⁷⁷ “Keeping the precepts” means that we are likely to break them when we are unmindful. We should thus regularly examine and reflect on such lapses, their causes and conditions, how they could have been avoided, and resolve to avoid future lapses.

⁷⁸ See eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1,4/3:225), SD 16.7, or any of the other 9 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25).

⁷⁹ **Anusaya**, SD 31.3.

⁸⁰ This analogy recurs in **Khemaka S** (S 22.89/3:131), SD 14.13.

⁸¹ “Cleaning salt,” *ūsa*; I follow Bodhi (S:B 945). PED conjectures as “salt earth.” Comy says “heat (or steam)” (*usuma*) is involved.

⁸² “Lye,” *khāra*, ie an alkali or caustic substance (like soda or potash).

Cow-dung as a cleaning agent should be fresh and come from bulls, or cows that are neither lactating nor pregnant. The clean dried cloth gives a scent of fresh broken earth, like grass after a rain. Yet it is still the characteristic scent of cow-dung that pervades what it cleanses.

3.1.3.2 The Khemaka Sutta (S 22.89) uses the same parable of cleaning, with the lingering odour of cow-dung (like the scent of fresh broken earth, like grass after a rain). This lingering odour is compared to the subtle persistence of **the “I am” conceit** which lingers on even in a nonreturner, that is, one who has overcome *the 5 lower fetters*:⁸³

25 Avuso, it is just like **a piece of cloth**, when it has become soiled and stained, its owners would hand it to a washerman. The washerman would scrub it evenly with cleaning salt, lye or cow-dung, and rinse it in clean water.

26 Even though that cloth would become pure and clean, it would still have a residual smell of the cleaning salt, lye or cow-dung that had not yet dissipated.

The washerman would then return it to the owners. The owners would then put it in a fragrant casket, and the residual smell of cleaning salt, lye or cow-dung that had not yet dissipated would dissipate.⁸⁴

27 Yet, avuso, although a noble disciple has abandoned the 5 lower fetters, yet, in terms of *the 5 aggregates of clinging*, there still lingers in him a residual conceit “I am,” a desire “I am,” a latent tendency “I am” that has not yet been uprooted.

Some time later, he dwells contemplating arising and passing away in the 5 aggregates of clinging:

such is <u>form</u> ,	such its arising,	such its passing away;
such are <u>feelings</u> ,	such their arising,	such their passing away;
such is <u>perception</u> ,	such its arising,	such its passing away;
such are <u>formations</u> ,	such their arising,	such their passing away;
such is <u>consciousness</u> ,	such its arising,	such its passing away.

As he dwells contemplating arising and passing away in the 5 aggregates of clinging, this residual conceit “I am,” this desire “I am,” this latent tendency “I am,” that has not yet been uprooted would be uprooted. (S 22.89), SD 14.12

Just as the odour of cowdung still pervades the object it cleanses, even so, subtle defilements pervade the mind of one not yet fully awakened.

⁸³ The 5 lower fetters are those of (1) self-identity view, (2) spiritual doubt, (3) attachment to rituals and vows, (4) sensual lust, and (5) repulsion. These fetters keep one to rebirth in the sense world: SD 63.12 (3.2.3.5).

⁸⁴ Comy: The worldling’s mental process is like the soiled cloth. The 3 contemplations (of impermanence, of suffering and of not-self) are like the 3 cleansers (cleaning salt, lye and cow-dung). The non-returner’s mental process is like the cloth that has been washed with the 3 cleansers. The defilements to be removed by the path of arhat-hood are like the residual smell of the cleansers. The knowledge of the path of arhat-hood is like the fragrant chest. The destruction of all defilements by the path is like the dissipation of the residual smell of the 3 cleansers from the cloth after it has been placed in the fragrant chest. (SA 2:317)

3.2 LIVING BODIES

3.2.1 The elder “Empty” Potthila

3.2.1.1 The elder Potthila—according to **the Potthila Thera Vatthu** (DhA 20.7)—was a Tipiṭaka expert during the times of the 7 past buddhas,⁸⁵ and taught large numbers of monks. However, he failed to consider ending suffering for himself. Wishing to rouse him to exert himself, the Buddha constantly teasingly referred to him as *Tuccha Potthila*, “empty Potthila.”

Probably around this time, too, the elder Moggallāna uttered 2 verses to Potthila, as recorded in **the Mahā Moggallāna Thera, gāthā** (Tha 1174 f) [3.2.1.2].

Potthila took the hint, and, travelling 120 yojanas,⁸⁶ came to a forest hermitage where 30 monks lived. The leader referred Potthila to a junior monk, who in his turn referred him on, and so on, until at last he had to seek tutelage from a 7-year-old novice who sat doing needlework, but who was an arhat.

Humbled, Potthila asked him for advice. In order to test him, the novice asked him to wade deep into a lake with his expensive robes on. This Potthila willingly did, and the novice, satisfied with his earnestness taught him **the parable of the anthill**. A lizard entered one of the 6 holes of the anthill. Anyone wishing to catch the lizard would close up 5 of the holes and catch it as it emerged from the 6th hole.

So it is with the 6 senses; we should close the 5 doors of the sense-faculties, and concentrate on the mind-door. Understanding the parable, Potthila went into solitary retreat and meditated. The Buddha appeared before Potthila in a ray of light and uttered this verse:

<i>yogā ve jāyati bhūri</i> ⁸⁷	Truly from meditation ⁸⁸ is wisdom born.	
<i>ayogā bhūri, saṅkhayo</i>	Without meditation, wisdom wanes.	
<i>etaṃ dvedhā pathaṃ ñātvā</i>	Knowing these two paths ⁸⁹	
<i>bhavāya vibhavāya ca</i>	of gain and of loss,	
<i>tath’attānaṃ niveseyya</i>	one should so conduct oneself	
<i>yathā bhūri pavaḍḍhati</i>	so that (one’s) wisdom grows.	(Dh 282)

At the end of the verse, Potthila became an arhat. (DhA 20.7/3:417-421).

3.2.1.2 The Moggallāna Thera, gāthā (Tha 1174 f) contains 2 verses that the elder Moggallāna addresses to Potthila:

<i>na so passati saddhammaṃ</i>	One who is occupied with samsara [the journeying-on]	<i>b</i>
<i>samsārena purakkhato</i>	sees not the true Dharma [teaching and truth].	<i>a</i>

⁸⁵ The 7 past buddhas are: Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa and Gotama. The last 4 buddhas arose successively in this world-period. The 5th buddha, Metteyya, is yet to come. See SD 36.2 (3.2); SD 49.8b (2).

⁸⁶ This is the “greater yojana,” an ancient Indian unit of distance, a league (11.25 km or 7 mi = 4 *gāvutas*): **Magha V** (DhA 2.7,50), SD 54.22; **Pahārāda S** (A 8.19,9.1 n), SD 45.18; SD 47.8 (2.4.4.1).

⁸⁷ Comy: *Bhūri* is a name for the wisdom that is wide like the earth itself, ***Bhūri ti paṭhavi, sāmaya vitthatāya pañ-ñāy’etaṃ nāmaṃ*** (DhA 3:421,2 f).

⁸⁸ *Yogā* refers to the various meditation methods taught by the Buddha (DhA 3:421,1 f),

⁸⁹ “Two paths” here refers to “meditation” and “without meditation,” “gain” and “loss”; hence, *bhavāya* and *vibhavāya* are dative of “goal of motion” (Tha:N 130 n282; Geiger & Norman, *A Pali Grammar*, 1994:§77.2). On *dve* and *dvāya*, see Tha:N 155 n384.

<i>acaṅkamaṃ</i> ⁹⁰ <i>jimha, pathaṃ</i> <i>kumaggaṃ anudhāvati</i>	One who follows a crooked path, a bad path that leads one downwards;	(Tha 1174) ⁹¹
<i>kimīva mīlha, sallitto</i> <i>saṅkāre</i> ⁹² <i>adhimucchito</i> <i>pagālho lābha, sakkāre</i> <i>tuccho gacchati poṭṭhilo</i>	like a worm soiled in dung, he clings to rubbish [formations]. Infatuated with gains and honours, empty goes Poṭṭhila. ⁹³	(Tha 1175)

A **scatic metaphor** appears in **Tha 1175b**, that is, *saṅkāre*, “(to) rubbish” (dative plural), following the Burmese and PTS readings; the Sinhalese and Siamese texts give *saṅkhāre*. *Saṅkāre* is clearly the better reading; it puns on *saṅkhāre* and *saṅkāre*. Formations here means “constructed things,” that is, data of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body conjured up by the mind are, as a rule, delusory. The formation that is the body is subject to feeling (pleasure and pain), desire, decay and breaking up. This body that is a store of “urine and dung” [2.2.3.4] is little different from the rubbish (*saṅkāra*) that we dislike and discard. Hence, we need to “void” or “empty” ourselves.

3.2.2 The scatic suffering of animals

3.2.2.1 The Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta (M 129), the discourse on the foolish and the wise, explains the key benefits of living a morally wholesome life, that is, of keeping at least to the 5 precepts, abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, falsehood and intoxication [2.2.3.2]. The Sutta states that “those who formerly delighted in tastes here and did evil [bad] here,” are reborn in **the animal birth**, where they are described as follows:

18 ... There are animals that feed on grass. They eat by cropping fresh grass or dried grass with their teeth ... (like) elephants, horses, cattle, donkeys, goats, deer and so on.

19 Bhikshus, there are animals that feed on dung. They smell dung from a distance and run to it, thinking, ‘We can eat, we can eat!’

Just as *brahmins run to the smell of a sacrifice*, thinking, ‘We can eat here, we can eat here!’
And what animals feed on dung? Cocks, pigs, dogs, foxes and any other such animals.

There are animals

20 that are born, live and die in **the dark** ... (like) beetles, maggots, earthworms and so on;

21 that are born, live and die in **the water** ... (like) fishes, turtles, crocodiles and so on;

22 that are born, live and die in **filth** ... in rotting fish, in rotting flesh, in rotting porridge, in a cesspool, or in a sewer.

Bhikshus, a fool who formerly **delighted in tastes** here and **did evil** here, with the body’s breaking up, after death, reappears in the company of animals that feed on dung;

⁹⁰ Be Se ThaA (text & lemma) *adho, gamaṃ* (pref). Comy: *adho, gamaṃ heṭṭhā, gāmiṃ, māyā, sātṭheyya, anugatat-tā*, “Who goes below, going downward, following illusion and deceit” (ThaA 3:170,15 f), On *purakkhato*, see Tha:N 130 n37.

⁹¹ See SD 34.4.

⁹² Be Ee ThaA:Be *saṅkhāre*, both text and lemma; but Comy: *kilesāsuci, vimissite saṅkāre* (ThaA 3:163,24, 170,19). *Saṅkāre* (pl, “to rubbish”) seems a better reading, and is a pun upon *saṅkhāre* and *saṅkāre*. For puns that disregard the aspirate (here *-kh-*), see Tha:N 218 n639; also 285 n1180.

⁹³ This explains Poṭṭhila’s nick-name, Tuccha Poṭṭhila (see DhA 3:417-421).

... that feed on grass;
 ... that live and die in the dark;
 ... that live and die in the water;
 ... that live and die in filth ... rotting fish, in rotting flesh, in rotting porridge, in a cesspool, or in a sewer.

(M 129,18-23/3:167-169 summarized), SD 2.22

3.2.2.2 We may dismiss this teaching by rationalizing that not all animals suffer in these ways, and that many are very well treated as pets, for example. This, too, may be true, but the point of the teaching is *not* merely that animals suffer, but rather that when we fall into the **animal state**, we will suffer profoundly since we are not used to it and we are unable to benefit from the goodness and skills of our humanity. In the animal state, we simply lose our humanity!

3.2.3 Animal stories

3.2.3.1 In our current situation, as unawakened beings, despite all that we know, perhaps because of what we know, we may neither understand nor believe that such a transformation—humans becoming animals—is possible. Nevertheless, the motif of human-animal transformation or **therianthropy** is well known in folklore, mythology, and modern literature and media. These stories explore ideas of identity, instinct, retribution, transformation and the mind.

In **Greek and Roman mythologies**, the gods transformed humans into animals as a punishment, or disguised themselves as animals for godly or amorous purposes; or humans become animals.

- **Zeus**, king of the gods, turned king Lycaon of Arcadia into a wolf (making him the first werewolf) for his impiety and for serving human flesh to the gods.
- **Artemis** was goddess of the hunt, nature, the wilderness, wild animals, vegetation, transitions, child-birth, childcare, and chastity. She turned the hunter Actaeon into a stag after he spied on her while she was bathing. He was subsequently hunted and killed by his own dogs.
- **Circe** the sorceress of Aea used potions to turn Odysseus' men into pigs in Homer's *The Odyssey*. This transformation was a punishment for their blatant lust and gluttony. Even after the curse was reversed, their "piggishness" only showed outwardly in their human bodies.
- **The Metamorphosis or The Golden Ass** by Apuleius (late 2nd century) is an ancient Roman tale where the protagonist Lucius' curiosity and insatiable desire to work magic accidentally turns him into a donkey but retains his human consciousness throughout his adventures.

In **East Asian mythology**, **Huli jing** 狐狸精 (China) and **Kitsune** (Japan) are nine-tailed fox spirits who are shapeshifters. Traditionally, they are depicted differently: *kitsune* are often portrayed as wise and potentially benevolent, sometimes associated with the Shinto deity Inari. In contrast, *huli jing* are more ambiguous, sometimes portrayed as seductive and malevolent spirits, sometimes as seeking spiritual upliftment.

Among **Algonquian** peoples (including the Ojibwe, Cree, and Naskapi, in the northern US and Canada), there is a story of the Wendigo, a malevolent, cannibalistic spirit or creature, symbolizing insatiable hunger, greed, and winter starvation. Legend says that humans can transform into these emaciated, monstrous beings if they resort to cannibalism. They are often described as towering, gaunt figures with sunken eyes and sharp fangs that may be defeated by fire or by cutting out their frozen heart. This is a cautionary tale discouraging cannibalism, which will make one lose one's humanity.

Inuit traditional belief is rooted in animism where shapeshifting or reincarnation between humans and animals are common since all that exists, humans, animals, and even objects, possess *inua*, the life spirit. In other words, there is a deep, inherent interconnection between humans, animals and objects.

In **Celtic** folklore:

- **Selkies** are creatures found in Scottish and Irish myths, depicted as seals that can shed their skin to take human form on land. The stories are often romantic tragedies involving their skin being stolen by a human lover.
- In Irish mythology, **the Children of Lir**, the stepchildren of Aoife, were cursed and turned into swans for centuries until the spell was broken.

Works of **modern world literature** that depict animal transformation include the following works: Franz Kafka's famous novella, titled ***The Metamorphosis*** (German, *Die Verwandlung*, 1915), opens with the protagonist, salesman Gregor Samsa, waking up to find himself transformed into a giant insect or vermin (*ungeheuren Ungeziefer*), commonly depicted as a cockroach.

K A Applegate's⁹⁴ ***Animorphs*** (1996-2001), a popular modern science fantasy in 54 books (and 10 companion books) for young adults is about a group of teenagers who gain the ability to shapeshift into any animal they touch to fight an alien invasion. The themes of the series are horror, war, imperialism, dehumanization, sanity, morality, innocence, leadership, freedom, family, and growing up.

The Pixar movie, **Turning Red** (2022), is an animated coming-of-age fantasy comedy-drama that portrays a 13-year-old Chinese-Canadian teenager who transforms into a giant red panda whenever she experiences strong emotions.

3.2.3.2 The early Buddhist texts often depict **animals** as suffering, and that to be reborn or become an animal invites various limitations, lacks and sufferings [3.2.2.1]. However, it should be well noted that **the Jātaka stories**, for example, are full of tales of animals who are protagonists of beneficence and wisdom, and that such animals were the past incarnations of the bodhisattva himself and other key actors in the early Buddhist canon. In terms of literary criticism, we may say that where such animal stories are didactic and inspiring they are often used as lessons for the young.⁹⁵

On the other hand, the suttas and Commentaries do highlight special goodness in animals, or that they are capable of showing goodness. **The Kandaraka Sutta** (M 51), for example, relates Pessa the young mahout telling the Buddha that he knows that elephants, despite their tendency to be crafty in their own way, are much more amenable to training than humans are.

"Humans, bhante, are this tangle; and animals, bhante, are this open clearing!" he concludes. The Buddha concurs with Pessa's statement.⁹⁶

The Dhammapada Commentary quotes this passage as a scholium in the moving episode of the pratyeka-buddha and the faithful dog in **the Sāmāvatī Vatthu** (DhA 2.1):

"Animals, they say, are straightforward, not given to deceit; but for humans, the heart thinks one way, the mouth speaks another. Hence, it is said, 'For, humans, bhante, are this tangle; and animals, bhante, are this open clearing'" (DhA 2.1/1:173).

3.2.3.3 Whether we believe in karma and rebirth or not, we should serve ourselves better by being mindful and reviewing our conduct and habits, past and present. We may have a human body, but our

⁹⁴ K A Applegate is the pseudonym of Katherine Applegate and her husband Michael Grant.

⁹⁵ Such lessons should of course be sensible human centred lessons, not tools for manipulating or conditioning young minds. There is always a risk of such stories becoming magical realist Lamarckism, where biological inheritance of acquired characteristics is treated not as a scientific process, but as magical or fantastic events presented as mundane and plausible.

⁹⁶ M 51,4/1:340 (SD 32.9).

mind is still evolving, and even when we think we are “good people,” we may still be capable of unwholesome thoughts, and even unwholesome speech and actions. Unwholesome intentions tend to devolve our minds to subhuman levels.

When such negative qualities become *habitual*, we are likely to devolve into a subhuman state even here and now. We may devolve into **an animal state** when we are merely caught in a routine to hunting and gathering what we need and what we want without any desire to learn, love and live with wisdom and joy. A very dark case of the animal state is when this human body is blindly driven to exploit others sexually; that is, one is drawn to sex out of habit, with neither feeling nor love, merely driven to mate like beasts. One may have a human body, but the mind is one of **an animal**.⁹⁷

4 Dung beetles and other scatophages

4.1 DUNG BEETLE AND DUNG LORD

4.1.1 The dung beetle

4.1.1.1 The Mīlhaka Sutta (S 17.5) records the Buddha warning renunciants of the dire dangers of “gain, honour and praise” (*lābha, sakkāra, siloka*), comparing such a person to **a dung beetle**,⁹⁸ thus:

“Bhikshus, dreadful are gain, honour, and praise, bitter, vile, obstructive to attaining the supreme safety from bondage.

Suppose, bhikshus, there were **a beetle**, a dung-eater, stuffed with dung, full of dung, and in front of her was a large heap of dung.⁹⁹ Because of this she would despise the other beetles, thinking:

‘I’m a dung-eater, stuffed with dung, full of dung, and in front of me was a large heap of dung.’

So too, bhikshus, **a monk** here whose mind is overcome and obsessed by *gain, honour, and praise* dresses in the morning and, taking bowl and robe, enters a village or town for alms.

There he would eat as much as he wants, he would be invited for the next day’s meal, and his almsfood would be plentiful.

When he returns to the monastery, he boasts before a group of monks:

‘I have eaten as much as I want, I have been invited for tomorrow’s meal, and my almsfood is plentiful. I am one who gains robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicinal requisites, but these other monks have little merit and influence, and they do not gain robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicinal requisites.’

Thus, because his mind is overcome and obsessed by *gain, honour, and praise*, he despises the other well-behaved monks. That will lead to the harm and suffering of this empty person for a long time.”
(S 17.5/2:228 f), SD 100.11; see SD 48.9 (6.2.3.1)

4.1.1.2 Here again we should not intellectualize the teachings and argue that dung beetles “enjoy” what they do, and so on. It’s true that dung beetles are born that way, conditioned to do what they do, and they do not understand what they do.

⁹⁷ See SD 63.12 (3.3.2.5). On subhuman tendencies: SD 29.8a (4.1.4); SD 48.1 (5.2.4).

⁹⁸ India has over 450 species of dung beetles from the family Scarabaeidae, such as the large, black *Scarabaeus gangeticus* (found across India and Africa) and *Catharsius granulatus* (often with a horn in males). There are 2 main kinds: “dung rollers” (rolling dung-balls) and “tunnellers” (burying dung for food and breeding).

⁹⁹ *Seyyathā pi bhikkhave mīlhakā gūth’ādi gūtha, purā puññā gūthassa pūrato c’assa mahā gūtha, puñño.*

As **humans**, we observe this phenomenon, and when we see ourself behaving as a dung beetle, which we are *not*, then we have not understood our **humanity** and what it entails. Our humanity entails the ability and drive *to avoid evil, do good and purify the mind*—that is, to transform ourselves and awaken to true freedom.

4.1.2 Māra the scatic overlord

4.1.2.1 There are of course much bigger threats to our **humanity** than dung beetles or the animal state. There is **Māra**, the lord of death, overlord of samsara, master of the unawakened. Although we may imagine or dismiss Māra as a “personification” of evil or samsaric tendencies, Māra is as real as the people and situations we daily encounter. What is even more insidious is that Māra is not really “out there” but **right here in our own minds**, in the way we think, our rationalizing, intellectualizing and overconfidence that we are good and right in doing something or *not* doing something, despite their pious falsity and unwholesome consequences.

Such people and situations encourage us to bow to or be nose-led by our *lust, hatred and delusion* for pleasure and gains here and now. Each person may be a veritable uninhibited “Mr Hyde” lurking in the respectable Dr Jekyll’s mind. We should carefully reflect on the interplay of good and evil; an outwardly good person may have a shockingly evil nature.¹⁰⁰

4.1.2.2 Even when people are able to safely repress their dark nature and tendencies, they are still caught in an existential loop that Māra creates and maintains for them. If we are to mix metaphors, we may say that it is Māra who induces Sisyphus¹⁰¹ to imagine his rock-pushing is actually rewarding and enjoyable, an admirable accomplishment—just as a dung beetle instinctively pushes its dung-ball.¹⁰² We could “imagine” that Sisyphus is compelled to keep pushing his rock out of a deluded drive that it is something or empowering or both.¹⁰³ [4.1.1.1]

The “dung-ball” represents **upadhi**, a Pali term which means “acquisition.” It is the burden we pile up and roll up the mountain that is samsara, or a dung beetle rolling his dung-ball or burying it. If **upadhi** is the burden we build up in life, **upādi** [note spelling] is the fuel or motivation that keeps us going instinctively, uncontrollably—like Sisyphus, we think it is something enjoyable to do!¹⁰⁴

4.1.2.3 To free ourselves from Māra’s grasp and reach, we must understand the true nature of **merit** (*puñña*)—it is only truly beneficial when it brings about conditions conducive for personal growth, mental cultivation and spiritual liberation. This means cultivating moral virtue, clearing the mind and seeking wisdom for self-awakening. All this is the basis for our aspiration to attain streamwinning in this life itself.

¹⁰⁰ On R L Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), see SD 63.13 (3.3.3.2).

¹⁰¹ On the Greek myth of Sisyphus, see SD 23.3 (1); SD 48.3 (1.2.2.2); SD 49.2 (4.3.2.1); SD 50.8 (2.3.2.6); Buddhist adaptation, SD 50.12 (2.4.5.2).

¹⁰² See SD 50.8 (1.2.1.7); SD 53.5 (4.2.3.2).

¹⁰³ A Camus, “The myth of Sisyphus” (French 1942. Eng tr 1955) is talking about our interpretation of Sisyphus not about Sisyphus’ own interpretation of his situation. My point is also about our interpretation of life; we both recognize that it is Sisyphian/samsaric suffering. Thus making the opposite point from Camus, who, however, doesn’t think there is a way out of suffering. As a result, he believes we need to act as if life were enjoyable as a way of overcoming suffering. My point is just the opposite: we can escape suffering; believing that it is enjoyable binds us to suffering.

¹⁰⁴ In post-Buddha monasticism of India, *upadhi* (Skt) also refers to the “material objects” held in common by the monastery, a meaning unknown in Pali. The monastic beadle, provost or “guardian of material objects” was called *upadhi, vārika* (*upadhi, varaka*, Divy 542.21). See SD 53.5 (4.3.2.2). See BHSD: *upadhi-vārika*.

In due course, when we become arhats, we are then truly free from Māra because we are beyond good and bad, “we have given up both merit and demerit” (*puñña,papa,pahīna*).¹⁰⁵

4.2 SCATOPHAGOUS ASCETICS

4.2.1 Cow-dung eaters

4.2.1.1 The suttas tell us that one of the self-mortifying practices of the ascetics of ancient India was that of partaking of cow-dung [1.2.1]. **The Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 25) and **the Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12), for example, record the Buddha as stating that some wanderers (in the former Sutta) and naked ascetics (which included the bodhisattva himself!) (in the latter Sutta) were self-mortifiers who consumed cow-dung, thus:

He is an eater of greens [a vegetarian] or of millet or of wild rice or of hide-parings or of water-lettuce or of rice-bran or of rice-remnants, or of sesamum flour, or of grass, or of **cow-dung**.
(D 25,8.4/3:36), SD 1.4; (M 12,45.2/1:78), SD 49.1

The passage quoted recurs in **the Catukka Attantapa Sutta** (A 4.198), that is, of ascetics partaking of cow-dung, with additional information, thus:

He is an eater of greens [a vegetarian], or of millet, or of wild rice, or of hide-parings, or of water-lettuce, or of rice-bran, or of rice-remnants, or of sesamum flour, or of grass, or of **cow-dung**.
He lives on forest roots and fruits, a windfall-eater [eats only fallen fruits].
(A 4.198,2.2.2), SD 56.7.

The fact that these ancient ascetics partook of cow-dung was not because it was “disgusting” (as we would see it), but rather that it was easily and freely available, and was simply the end-product of well-digested grass. It was filled with bacteria (as we know it today) but none of them harmful to humans—a fact well attested by said ascetics who had consumed cow-dung.

4.2.2 Self-tormentors

4.2.2.1 Clearly the Buddha does not approve of cow-dung consumption even as an ascetic practice, as evident from **the Apaṇṇaka Sutta** (M 60), where he calls such a practitioner a “self-tormentor.”¹⁰⁶ He is described as flouting every social convention, even those of hygiene, and keeping to various strict rules regarding alms-collecting and eating. Furthermore,

He pulls out (his) hair and beard, and is devoted to this practice.
He stands continuously, rejecting seats.
He squats continuously, and is devoted to such a posture.
He uses a matting of thorns, sleeps on the matting of thorns.¹⁰⁷
He dwells devoted to (the ritual of) bathing in water thrice a day, the third one in the evening.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ SD 2.10 (3.2.3.4). Cf *kusalākusala-p,pahīna* (Sn 715c) Sn 3.11, §37, comy on *kiccākicca-p,pahīna* (SD 49.18).

¹⁰⁶ M 60,36.3 (SD 35.5)/1:389 = 391

¹⁰⁷ Here, the Dīgha Nikāya pericope lists 6 additional self-mortifying observations, ie, sleeping on a plank; sleeping on hard stony ground; lying on one side covered in dirt; living in the open; living on dirty food; not drinking cold water: see **Kassapa Sīha,nāda S** (D 8,14/1:167), SD 73.12 & **Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda S** (D 25,8.2/3:42) @ SD 1.4.

¹⁰⁸ Apparently, to wash away his “sins”: cf **(Udaka Suddhika) Saṅgārava S** (S 7.21/1:182 f), SD 79.7.

Thus in these various ways he dwells keeping to the practice of tormenting himself and mortifying the body.

This person ... is called one who torments himself, intent on self-torment.

(M 60,36.4-7/1:412), SD 35.5

Such ascetic practices may look painful, difficult and inimitable in the eyes of others. Such an ascetic is called a “self-tormentor” (*attan,tapa*) because not only are the practices painful and difficult, but they are also bodily harmful and spiritually useless; they bring neither awakening nor wisdom.

4.2.2.2 In the Loma,harṁsa Jātaka (J 94.2), the Buddha relates how in the distant past, as the bodhisattva, he lived a solitary life of self-mortification as a naked ascetic,¹⁰⁹ thus:

Once upon a time, 91 world-cycles ago,¹¹⁰ **the bodhisattva** went forth as an ajivika [naked ascetic] to investigate an outside [false] asceticism (*bāhiraka,tapa*).

(1) He went about naked (*acelaka*) and covered in dirt (*rajo,jallika*), living in solitude [living apart], a lone dweller.¹¹¹ Seeing humans, he fled like a deer.

(2) The food was **the “great filth”** (*mahā,vikati*): he fed on a calf’s cow-dung, and so on.¹¹²

(3) For the sake of diligence, he took up his abode in a dreadful thicket in the jungle.

(4) There, in the snows of winter, he spent the night in the open, away from the sheltering thicket, returning at dawn to the thicket again. By night, he was wet with the driving snows; by day, he was drenched by the droplets from the thicket branches. Thus, day and night, he suffered extreme cold.

In summer, he lived by day in the open, and by night in the forest. Just as by day he was feverishly scorched by the blazing sun, even so, by night, feverishly fanned by the cold winds, so that sweat streamed from his body.¹¹³ ...

Having thus lived the holy life comprising these 4 factors, when the time of dying arrived, he saw a vision of hell (*niraya,nimitta*). Realizing that, “The undertaking of this austerity is worthless!” at that very moment, he cut off his delusion, attained right view, and arose in the deva world. ... ”¹¹⁴

(J 94/1:389-391, abridged), SD 49.1 (2.2)

Hence, the Buddha rejected self-mortification as “painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal (of awakening)” because he had himself, in past lives and in his last life, practised these painful routines himself and found them not helpful, even life-threatening.

4.2.2.3 In the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11), the Buddha speaks of **the 2 extremes**¹¹⁵ which are to be avoided by one seeking awakening and freedom from samsara, thus:

¹⁰⁹ On this section, cf M 12,48-50 (SD 49.1).

¹¹⁰ On the significance of “91 world-cycles or aeons ago,” see SD 53.3 (3.2).

¹¹¹ “Living in solitude, ... ,” *pavivitto ahoṣi eka,vihārī*. On *pavivitta*, see (6 §48). On *eka,vihārī*, see SD 44.6 (3.1).

¹¹² *Mahā,vikati,bhojano ahoṣi, vacchaka,go.may’ādīni paribhuñji*. On “the ‘great filth’,” see M 12,49 n above. Cf “He lived on filth, too, devoted to taking filth as food” (*vekaṭiko pi hoti vikaṭa,bhojanānuyogaṃ anuyutto*, D 8/1:-167,10), SD 73.12. For *~vikati*, M 1:79,19 reads *~vikaṭa*. Elaborated in **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,49) below.

¹¹³ *So yathā divā abbhokāse ātapena pariḷāha-p,patto, tath’eva rattim nivāte vanasaṇḍe pariḷāhaṃ pāpuṇāti, sarī-rā seda,dhārā muccanti*.

¹¹⁴ *Idaṃ vata,samādānaṃ niratthakan’ti ñatvā taṃ,khaṇaṇ,ñeva taṃ laddhim bhinditvā sammā,ditṭhim gahetvā deva,loke nibbatti*.

¹¹⁵ On the 2 extremes, see SD 1.1 (3.1).

- (1) **The devotion to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures**¹¹⁶—it is low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],¹¹⁷ and
 (2) **the devotion to self-mortification**¹¹⁸—it is painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable].
 (S 56.11,3/5:420), SD 1.1

Note that while “the devotion to the enjoyment of **sensual pleasures**” (*kāma,sukh'allikānuyoga*) is described as being “low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]” (*hīno gammo puthujjaniko anariyo anatta,samhito*), “the devotion to **self-mortification**” (*atta,kilamathānuyoga*) is *not* said to be “low, vulgar,” but only “painful, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable]” (*dukkho anariyo anatta,samhito*). Despite being “painful,” self-mortification, with some moral virtue, can still bring about a divine afterlife; but such a goal is still “ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],” because one is still caught up in samsara, unliberated from suffering.¹¹⁹

Giving up these 2 extremes of yogic practice, the bodhisattva turned to **the middle way**, that is, the way of *moral virtue in body, calm and clarity of mind, and liberating wisdom* that leads to awakening, that is, full freedom from suffering and samsara.

It should also be noted that in early Buddhism the notion of “**scatology**” refers not only to whatever is disgusting and wasteful, but unhelpful spiritually, even harmful in the sense of affecting one’s health and one’s ability to gain the spiritual path, much less awakening itself. Self-mortification is thus to be avoided for the simple reason that it is scatic.

5 Scatic ghosts

5.1 SCATOPHAGOUS PRETAS

5.1.1 Suffering by nature

5.1.1.1 While the self-mortifying ascetics voluntarily tolerated extreme discomfort and pains, there is a special class of subhuman beings who *by nature*, that is, on account of their past karma, suffer from unremitting discomfort, pain and filth. These are the **pretas** (*peta*) or “shades,” a term adapted from the Sanskrit *preta*, that is, (according to brahminical teachings) dead relatives who are stuck in a limbo where there are neither human nor divine. With the proper prayers and offerings made to the brahmins, these pretas gain heavenly form.

In the earliest sutta references, *peta* simply refers to “the dead” (*kāla,kata*, “whose time is done”), a generic term for “the departed,” especially relatives, no matter where they were reborn. Hence, these **departed** refer to relatives reborn in the suffering states (hells), as animals, as devas, or elsewhere as humans.¹²⁰ Such stories and others can be found, for example, in **the Peta,vatthu** [5.1.2.1].

5.1.1.2 The term *peta* (Skt *preta*) evolved to refer to wandering spirits without any specific dimensional abode (like the devas) or who are driven to wander about not of their own choice. The suttas

¹¹⁶ *Kāma,sukh'allikānuyoga* (V 1:10,12 = S 4,330,29 = 5:421,4; D 3:113,20; S 5:421; MA 1:104,15; UA 351,23). Comy on **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28,18/3:113,19) glosses *kāma* here as “the objects of sense-pleasure” (*vatthu,kāmesu*, DA 896,27). On *vatthu,kāma* and *kilesa,kāma*, see SD 38.4 (3.1.2); SD 41.4 (2.3.1).

¹¹⁷ “Low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable],” *hīno gammo puthujjaniko anariyo anatta,samhito*. On *gamma* = *gāma,dhamma*, see **Gavesī S** (A 5.180,17) n, SD 47.16. See foll n.

¹¹⁸ *Atta,kilamathānuyoga* (D 3:113,21 (DA 3:109,12); M 3:230,10 (MA 2:384,9); S 4:330,30, 5:421,5 = V 1:10,13).

¹¹⁹ See **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (4.1). On *sukh'allikānuyoga*, see **Pāsādika S** (D 29,23/3:130), SD 40a.6.

¹²⁰ Miln 294, which however omits mention of “humans.”

depict pretas as individual beings, no two having the same recognizable features like humans. In other words, each preta assumes a form reflective of and conditioned by their past karma.

A whole section in the Saṃyutta—the **Lakkhaṇa Saṃyutta**—records Moggallāna’s accounts of his visions of various kinds of suffering pretas that would characterize the Vedic *pitṛ* or *pitaraḥ*.¹²¹

Some of the pretas mentioned therein are:¹²²

- a **skeleton** moving through the air, being stabbed and torn apart by vultures, crows and hawks (previously a cattle butcher);
- a **piece of meat** moving through the air, being stabbed and torn apart by vultures, crows and hawks (previously another cattle butcher);
- a man with **needle-hairs** all over his body, puncturing him all over (previously a slanderer);
- a man with **testicles the size of pots**, chased by vultures, crows and hawks (previously a corrupt magistrate);
- a **dung-eater**, eating dung with both hands (previous had rice-pots filled with dung and offered them to the monks);
- a monk moving through the air with his robes, bowl, waistband and body **flaming** (an erstwhile evil monk).

(S 19.1-21/2:254-262), SD 2.7 (3.3)

In answer to the arhat Lakkhaṇa’s questions, the Buddha confirms their existence, and that the Buddha himself has seen them.

5.1.2 Preta types and preta stories

5.1.2.1 PRETAS AS HUMANS, HELL-BEINGS AND DEVAS

A whole book in the Khuddaka Nikāya—the **Peta, vatthu** or “Preta Stories”—contains longer stories of such pretas, detailing the karma that led to their states. Here the pretas are said to inhabit the “preta range” (*peta, visaya*) (PvA 29). This is not a realm but merely a collective term for the various pretas in whatever forms. Basically, they are said to be “the departed.”

The Commentary, echoing the sutta teachings on pretas, adds that the term *peta* means “those from whom life (*āyu*) has left the consciousness” (*pete ti āyusmā viññāṇato apagate*); “They have done their time (which) means they died (and) are (re)born” (*kāla, kate satī ti mate jāte*) (PvA 63,13 f).¹²³ We thus should understand *āyu* here to mean that their human lifespan has ended, and they now have “preta” consciousness, that of the departed; something like the “living dead” in disembodied form.

¹²¹ S 19.1-21/2:254-262.

¹²² Dante, in his *Inferno*, uses the concept of “mirror punishment”—*contrapasso* or *contrappasso*), from Latin *contra* and *patior*, meaning “to suffer the opposite”—this principle ensures that the punishment fits the crime, acting as a direct reflection, irony, or amplification of the sins committed during life. It is not merely revenge, but the fulfillment of a destiny pursued by the evil-doer. Eg: **The Gluttons** (Circle 3): Having indulged in luxurious, warm food and drink, they now lie in the mud and filthy slush, howling like dogs under cold, heavy rain. **The Greedy, Misers and Spendthrifts** (Circle 4): Those who hoarded or wasted wealth have to drag heavy weights (representing the burden of their material possessions) and collide with one another, symbolizing the futile opposition of their evils. **Soothsayers and Sorcerers** (Circle 8, Bolgia 4): Those who attempted to divine too ahead in life have their heads twisted around, forced to walk backward for eternity, unable to see what is ahead. **Sowers of Discord** (Circle 8, Bolgia 9): Those who break up families, religions, or political systems are physically torn apart by a demon with a sword; they are decapitated, disemboweled, or dismembered, mirroring the schisms they created. [Wiki] 30 Mar 2026.

¹²³ For a sutta def of death, see **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43,25/1:296), SD 30.2.

We can see the broad compass of the term *peta,visaya*, “the range of the pretas,” where the “preta” (here meaning “departed”) is reborn in a heaven, in the human world, or in hell, as related in these stories:

<u>Pv no.</u>		<u>Commentary (English translation)</u> ¹²⁴
17 Maṭṭ(h)a,kuṇḍali Peta,vatthu	Pv 2.5/25 ¹²⁵ = Vv 7.9/123 A sick boy is reborn in Tāvatiṃsa with a celestial mansion.	PvA:BM 99; VvA:M 494; DhA:B 1:159 ¹²⁶
39 Revatī Peta,vatthu	Pv 4.4/85 = Vv 5.2/77 Yakshas ¹²⁷ cast Nandiya’s wife, Revatī, into a crowded hell.	PvA:BM 267; VvA:M 344; DhA:B 3:92
30 Kumāra Peta,vatthu 1	Pv 3.5/55 A human child is rescued from a graveyard.	PvA:BM 204
50 Setṭhi,putta Peta,vatthu	Pv 4.15/93; see J 314 ¹²⁸ Four adulterous sons of a seth are reborn in a hell (<i>niraya</i>).	PvA:BM 290

Even during the commentarial period, we still see the idea of pretas as simply being “the departed” (*peta*), that is, those who fare according to their karma. They are reborn in a sense-world heaven, or in a hell-state, or return to a human state. However, the Peta,vatthu does have stories of pretas who are miserable suffering beings, which we will now turn to.

5.1.2.2 SUFFERING PRETAS

Most of the **Peta,vatthu** (Pv) stories are of miserably suffering beings. Often they are naked, ugly, with emaciated limbs, distended bellies, protruding veins, red-eyes and yellow teeth, with grotesque forms depending on their karma, as in **the Nandā Peta,vatthu** (Pv 16)¹²⁹ and **the Dhana,pāla Peta,vatthu** (Pv 19).¹³⁰ [5.1.2.4]

They roam the earth in hunger and thirst; even the waters of the Ganges were unable to quench their thirst since the water turns into blood, as in **the Uttara,mātu Peta,vatthu** (Pv 22).¹³¹

The preta’s mouth is overpoweringly foul smelling, swarming with flies, as in **the Pañca,putta,khāda-ka Peta,vatthu** (Pv 26*).¹³²

The food that they see around them is nothing but blood, pus, spit and mucus, as in **the Sāriputtassa Mātu Peta,vatthu** (Pv 118 f).¹³³

They devour their own flesh, as in **the Kūṭa,vinicchayika Peta,vatthu** (Pv 500*).¹³⁴

¹²⁴ Comys in English: Vimāna Vatthu Comy (**VvA:M**), tr P Masefield, PTS, 2007; Peta,vatthu Comy (**PvA:BM**), tr U Ba Kyaw & ed P Masefield, PTS, 1980. Only the 1 page of the ref is given; see foll pp where applicable.

¹²⁵ Here given as “story number / page.”

¹²⁶ See also **Maṭṭha,kundali J** (J 440) where the verses recur. The opening story differs for the Comy versions.

¹²⁷ This is a rare story where a human is bodily escorted by yakshas to hell. Following the neyy’attha principle [SD 2.6b], we need to read this as being allegorical, ie, the “yakshas” etc are an embodiment of her own evil karma.

¹²⁸ **Loha,kumbhi J** (J 314/3:43-48), with the frame story of v 1 = **PvA 4.15**: 216,13-217,8, 279,24-280,4, 280,6-282,-14 (Comy on Pv 50). See Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, DhA 2:100 n1.

¹²⁹ Pv 16 = **2.4**/168-185/23. Here given as “story ch.no. / verses / page” (Pv story no.)

¹³⁰ Pv 19 = **2.7**/227-245/27.

¹³¹ Pv 22 = **2.10**,5/39 (Pv 335*). Reference given as **Pv sutta no. (comma) verse / page (verse running no.)** The asterisk * denotes a verse.

¹³² Pv 6 = **1.6**,1/5 (Pv 26*).

¹³³ Pv 14 = **2.2**,3-4/17 (Pv 118* f).

¹³⁴ Pv 34 = **3.9**,3/62 (Pv 500*).

They inhabit any dark corner, or cemetery, as in **the Uttara,mātu Peta,vatthu** (Pv 22), **the Abhijja-māna Peta,vatthu** (Pv 26).¹³⁵

Nothing offered to them directly—even a scrap of food, a drop of water, a piece of cloth or anything at all—can be gotten by them, even when these are given by relatives, as in **the Khallāṭiya Peta,vatthu** (Pv 61*-64*), **the Nandā Peta,vatthu** (Pv 173*), **the Amba,sakkhara Peta,vatthu** (Pv 545*).¹³⁶

They live in cesspits and consume dung; such as **the Gūtha,khādaka Peta,vatthu 1 + 2** (Pv 766*, 774*).¹³⁷

5.1.2.3 MIGHTY PRETAS

As the youngest book in the Pali canon, **the Peta,vatthu** comprises different portions that belong to different periods. One category of preta stories concerns “pretas of great power” (*peta,mah’iddhika*). Some of these pretas are also called “pretas with a mansion” (*vimāna,peta*) from the celestial mansions in which they live.

Understandably, such beautiful celestial mansions (*vimāna*) are replete with great worldly pleasures, but always with some kind of ironic exception. **The Khallāṭiya Pv** (Pv 10),¹³⁸ for example, is a tale of a preti (female preta), dwelling all alone in a golden mansion in midocean. She was extremely beautiful but had one shortcoming; she had only her long and flowing tresses to cover her nakedness.

The Rathakāra Pv (Pv 28)¹³⁹ is about another preti who lived in a splendid mansion with every pleasure but one—the lack of a male companion.

In two stories of the same name—**the Miga,ludda Pv** (Pv 32 f)¹⁴⁰—about two “pretas with mansions” who enjoyed every sense-pleasure during the night, but with daybreak they were overwhelmed with hellish suffering for the rest of the day.

The Kaṇṇa,muṇḍa Pv (Pv 24)¹⁴¹ is the story of an adulterous “preti with a mansion” beside Lake Kaṇṇa,muṇḍa¹⁴² in the Himalayas. She had a golden complexion and enjoyed the finest sense-pleasures, but but lack male company. Every night at midnight, she was devoured by a ferocious crop-eared (*kaṇṇa,muṇḍa*) hell-hound.¹⁴³ The hound then cast the skeleton into the lake, from which she emerged in full splendour to enjoy another day.

The Kūṭa,vinicchayika Pv (Pv 500*)¹⁴⁴ is about a preta who sat in all splendour but then dug into his own back and devoured his own flesh. [5.1.2.2]

There seems to be one factor common to all these stories. They are provided with every sense-pleasures but they all have some shortcomings, which prevent them from enjoying themselves to the fullest

¹³⁵ Pv 22 = 2.10,1/39 (Pv 331*); Pv 26 = 3.1,7-8/47 (Pv 392* f).

¹³⁶ Pv 10 = 1.10,4-7/9 (Pv 61*-64*); Pv 16 = 2.4,6 f/23 (Pv 173* f); Pv 36 = 4.1,30/65 (Pv 545*).

¹³⁷ Pv 43 = 4.8,1/89 (Pv 766*); (Pv 44 = 4.9,1/90 (Pv 774*).

¹³⁸ Pv 10 = 1.10/58-72/9.

¹³⁹ Pv 28 = 3.3/439-445/53.

¹⁴⁰ Pv 32 = 3.7/477-486/59; Pv 33 = 3.8/487-497/60.

¹⁴¹ Pv 24 = 2.12/347-366/41.

¹⁴² The only canonical list of the 7 great lakes is given in **Satta Suriyā S** (A 7.62), thus: Anotattā, Sīha,papātā, Ratha-kāra, Kaṇṇa,muṇḍā, Kuṇālā, Cha-d,dantā, and Mandākini, all located in the Himalayas (A 7.62,16/4:101), SD 47.8. Only as *satta,sarā*: D 1:54,91, M 1:518,4, S 3:212,1; *anotatta,dah’ādayo satta,mahā,sare*, J 2:92. Cf **Comys** on *sarā*: Sāmañña,phala S (D 2/1:63), Sandaka S (M 1:517), Mahā Diṭṭhi S (S 3:211) list these 7 lakes: Kaṇṇa,muṇḍa, Ratha-kāra, Anotatta, Sīha-p,papāta, Tiyaḅgaḷa, Mucalinda and Kuṇāla,dahe (DA 164; MA 3:232; SA 2:344).

¹⁴³ Comy: A black dog the size of a young elephant, fearsome in appearance, with cropped ears, with long, protruding, sharp fangs; its eyes wide open like smouldering acacia embers; its tongue shooting out continuously like lightning flashes; with sharp, cruel claws, and hideous long shaggy fur. It came and devoured her like one with extreme hunger. When it had made a skeleton of her, it carried the skeleton with its fangs, cast it into the lotus pond and then disappeared. (PvA 152,16-23).

¹⁴⁴ Pv 34 = 3.9,3/62 (Pv 500*).

and having to go through extraordinary suffering. Unlike these pretas, the devas enjoy total or unmixed (*ekanta*) pleasures.

Such stories serve as reminders of the duality of pleasure and pain, and of samsaric or cyclic suffering, such as that, in Greek mythology, inflicted upon the Titan Prometheus. He was punished by the gods for bringing fire into the human world. In this Greek myth, however, Prometheus was punished for doing good (in the human sense). The pretas, on the other hand, are suffering for their bad karma.¹⁴⁵

5.1.2.4 From **the Nandā Pv** (Pv 16)¹⁴⁶ and **the Dhana,pāla Pv** (Pv 19)¹⁴⁷ we should understand that the pretas' material needs can be satisfied only by proxy, as it were, that is, by making the offerings to the virtuous, and dedicating the merit to the intended preta or pretas. However, it is clear from the preta stories that not all of them were relieved of their suffering by gifts made by their former relatives and friends. Perhaps to explain this difficulty, the Commentators provided a fourfold division of pretas. The suffering of such pretas who are unable to benefit from the offerings of others is due to their past bad karma by which they are caught in their present conditions.

In fact, the most widespread cultural perception of pretas is found in this later Commentarial typology of **the 4 types of pretas**, that is:

- (1) **Pretas who depend on what is given by others** (*para,dattūpajīvikā petā*). They live near human dwellings and rely on food offerings to others in their name and merits dedicated to them by living relatives. Such offering properly done with lovingkindness helps these pretas to feel joy as a result of which they are reborn in happier states.¹⁴⁸
- (2) **Pretas who are ever hungry and thirsty** (*khuppipāsikā petā*). These beings suffer from persistent and extreme deprivation; they are commonly known as “hungry ghosts.” They are often represented as naked, ugly, with emaciated limbs, distended bellies, protruding veins, red-eyes and yellow teeth, with grotesque forms [5.1.2.2]
- (3) **Pretas who burn with craving** (*nijjhāma,taṇhikā petā*). These pretas are constantly tormented by intense, unquenchable hunger and thirst as a result of their own past habitual insatiable lust.
- (4) **Leaf-thin pretas** (*kāla,kāñjikā*¹⁴⁹ *petā*). **The Mahā Samaya Sutta** (D 20) describes them to be “terribly fearsome” (*mahā,bhimsā*) asuras.¹⁵⁰ By Commentarial times, they were perceived as pretas that are emaciated, with bodies the color of dry leaves, and tiny mouths located in the middle of their heads, preventing them from eating enough to sustain themselves; hence, they are extremely weak.

(KhpA 214; SnA 1:49; ApA 141; VbhA 455; DAṬ 2:94)

5.1.2.5 However, most folk Buddhists do not see these pretas as being of 4 kinds, but rather that these characteristics are all combined into a single—one may say, “generic”—conception of “**hungry ghosts**.” The colloquial phrase is a both popular and appropriate alternative to the technical term *petā* or even its anglicized “preta.”

The term “hungry ghost” highlights their hunger and thirst, their wanderings and sufferings; these painful experiences for their past bad karma have clearly “seem to have rubbed off their angularities, softened their temper, chastened their mind ... One hardly finds them doing ill to others, they are too

¹⁴⁵ SD 1.4 (2.1(7)).

¹⁴⁶ Pv 16 = **2.4**/168-185/23.

¹⁴⁷ Pv 19 = **2.7**/227-245/27.

¹⁴⁸ See esp **Tiro,kudda S** (Pv 5 = **1.5**/14*-25*/3), SD 2.7, Comy SD 48.1 (8.1).

¹⁴⁹ VI *kāla,kañcika*, D 24,6/3:7 (SD 63.4); J 5:187; PvA 272. **Kāla,kañjikā** are prob a hybrid or cross between asura and preta; J 1:389. See Punnadhammo, *The Buddhist Cosmos*, 2023:236.

¹⁵⁰ D 20,12/36*/2:259 + n (SD 54.4).

much pressed down with the burden of their own miseries to think of or to get any opportunity for doing mischief to others.”¹⁵¹

5.2 RESPECTING AND LIBERATING THE PRETAS

5.2.1 Respecting the pretas

5.2.1.1 Ideas and stories about **pretas** were already evolving during the Buddha’s time, such as in his teachings on how to properly respect the departed, and on what became of them. In **the (Dasaka) Jāṇussoni Sutta** (A 10.177), for example, the Buddha addresses the question of whether the departed are able to receive or benefit from offerings for the departed (*saddha*; Skt *śrāddha*).

One living an immoral life on account of which one is reborn as an animal or reborn as a human cannot receive such offerings; nor do devas (who do not need such offerings on account of their happy state). Hell-beings, too, will not be able to benefit from such offerings (on account of their strong bad karma).¹⁵²

A key teaching of **A 10.177** is that it is possible for proper offerings to benefit **the departed** (*petā*). Interestingly, such offerings are not limited to merely “relatives,” but that “friends, companions, relatives or blood relations” (*mittā vā amaccā vā ñātī vā sālohitā vā*) may and should make such offerings.¹⁵³ **The Tirokuḍḍa Sutta** (Pv 5) not only says that the departed can benefit from our offerings, but that they should be done properly, that is, the recipient should be morally worthy of the offering, and the offering should be done with lovingkindness.¹⁵⁴

5.2.1.2 A vitally important point to note here is that **merits** (which is karma) cannot be transferred to others, especially to pretas. The ritual-based teachings of professional priests, misinformed teachers and their pious followers further reinforce the superstition that merits can be “transferred” to these pretas, especially by way of donating money to the priests or paying professional ritualists. Such ideas are what feeds the lucrative undertaking industry for which folk Buddhism is notorious today. Such wrong views should clearly be urgently corrected so that we can properly apply the teachings to vital aspects of social progress, and for the living and the departed.¹⁵⁵ [5.1.3.2]

It is clear from sutta teachings, such as those of **the Tirokuḍḍa Sutta** (Pv 5) and **the (Dasaka) Jāṇussoni Sutta** (A 10.177) [1.4.5], that proper offerings should be prepared by the loved one themselves. They should happily *prepare* the offerings, and with faith *offer* them to worthy recipients (such as virtuous renunciants and the needy), *recalling* the past good of the departed, and joyfully *reflect* on the giving.

In short, these are our duty to the departed (*petā, kicca*),¹⁵⁶ and they should be done with lovingkindness, not as a mere calendar or religious ritual but be **an act of love**. [5.2.2.1]

5.2.2 Psychosocial realities

¹⁵¹ B C Law, *A History of Pali Literature*, vol 1, Delhi, 1932:263, 2nd ed 2000:269.

¹⁵² A 10.177/5:269-273 + SD 2.6a (2).

¹⁵³ A 10.177,6.2. It is important to note here that besides blood relatives, any well-meaning person may dedicate merit to the departed. While the brahmanical *śrāddha* [2] can only be performed by the departed’s son, the Buddha says that merit-dedication is not merely a family affair, ie, he teaches a broader concept of “family” beyond the biological, ie, an existential, or even spiritual, family. See, eg, **Paṭhavī S** (S 15.2/2:179) where in our seemingly endless journey in *saṃsāra*, it is difficult *not* to meet one who has been a relative.

¹⁵⁴ Pv 5 = 1.5/14*-25*/3 (SD 2.7); Comy SD 48.1 (8.1).

¹⁵⁵ SD 2.6a (3).

¹⁵⁶ VA 3:65 = MA 4:38; DhA 1:32; J 2:68, 4:237; CA 21.

5.2.2.1 Culturally, preta stories—especially the anthology of tales that is **the Peta,vatthu**—are for the edification of the laity. The stories remind them of the teachings of karma and rebirth. They are reminded that their **karma** shadows them hereafter as long as they are unawakened; hence, it would be judicious for them to ensure that their thoughts, speech and actions are always wholesome. Our karma follows us into future rebirths; our relatives continue to be relatives, and enemies to be enemies, even in the hereafter, and can thus benefit from our actions; relatives can be happier with us, and enemies become friends.

In fact, preta stories often remind the laity of their “**duty to pretas**” (*peta,kicca*) [5.2.1.2]. This is not ancestor worship as it is meant to encourage the laity to practise giving to benefit others, especially the renunciants, virtuous people, the needy and the helpless. More significantly, such offerings must be attended by right mindfulness, especially *recalling the past good of the departed and showing them lovingkindness*, with monastics as witnesses—in other words, with a wholesome mind of love and gratitude.

When this duty is properly executed, the pretas, moved by lovingkindness, feel joyful. This joyful karma acts as a powerful corrective to the past bad karma of the pretas, who then are freed from their suffering state to be reborn in a happier state. Clearly, in essence, this is the teaching of **the Tiro,kuḍḍa Sutta** (Pv 5) [5.1.2.4].

5.2.2.2 From the majority of the preta stories, it appears that their food usually comprises filth such as dung, urine, pus, blood and vomit—they cannot consume the kind of food that we normally consume. They are sometimes depicted as deformed beings with a leaf-thin frame and a pinhead mouth, a narrow stick-like neck (this is only one of the many forms that pretas assume depending on their past karma). [5.1.2.4]

Although we are often told that the pretas form one of the 5 or 6 realms¹⁵⁷—devas, humans, animals, asuras, pretas and hell-beings—the pretas do not have a distinct “world” of their own; they are found in an environment created by their own past karma. In fact, as a didactic tool, preta stories should remind us that they are not in a world different from ours. Indeed, they are amongst living humans, perhaps not as grotesque as envisioned in the stories, but just as real and horrific in suffering “human” form.

Psychologically, then, pretas may be seen as “**scatic parodies**” of real humans who are caught in their own bad karma of habitual inhuman acts driven by greed, hatred and delusion. Pretas are those drowned in their own lust for plenty, power, and pleasure. They are collectors without the inclination or ability to enjoy what they have. They are so engrossed with the hunt that they become their own helpless prey.

Just as pretas depend on humans showing them love and dedicating merits to them, pretas parodize those who hunger for praise and plaudit from others, especially those who deludedly perceive themselves as bigger or better than they are. They are unable to find meaning or joy in their own existence, but are often dependent on others in every way. In significant ways, pretas are addicted to that “something” they perceive and insatiably strive to acquire or believe in. They are the consummate drug addicts, conmen, cult gurus and their like; their “drug” is that “something” (*kiñcana*) they see or seek, or pretend to have.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ On the 5 realms (*pañca,gati*)—hell-beings, animals, pretas, humans and devas—see **Pañca,gati S** (A 9.68), SD 2.20; **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12,37-41), SD 49.1 = SD 2.24; SD 5.16 (14.3). On the 6 realms—the 5 realms + asuras—see SD 29.6a (4.1.2).

¹⁵⁸ On *kiñcana*,, see **Go,datta S** (S 41.7) + SD 60.4 (1.2.1.4) ↑SD 12.4 (6.3) ↑SD 40a.10 (1.4(2)) ↑SD 50.2 (1.1.3.3).

6 The dung porter

6.1 DUNG PORTER AS METAPHOR

6.1.1 Wrong views are dung-like

6.1.1.1 Buddhist scatology is not about the glory of *filth and dirt*. In Buddhist teachings, the filth and dirt are accepted as they are, that is, they are *filthy and dirty*; hence unpleasant. **Wrong views** are seen as “dung” because they lead to unwholesome thoughts and actions, and prevent personal growth. They should either to be properly discarded, or used appropriately as manure for enriching the soil for plants. In other words, wrong views are discarded so that we go on to cultivate **right views** which go on to promote personal, mental and social growth.

Basically, **wrong views** go against the true nature of things. When we look around at how humans often behave, we will notice that our bad actions—those that put us and others at great disadvantage or even great harm—are actions driven by *greed* or *hatred*, and *delusion*. These are in fact the 3 roots of evil actions. **Greed, hatred and delusion are dung-like**—filthy and unhealthy—and should be discarded.

6.1.1.2 When we carefully look at things happening around us—whether as human behaviour (individual or in a crowd) or as nature (like the environment and the weather) or as natural disasters (fire, floods, and earthquakes), we will notice something common in all of them. All these situations and events have causes (plural) which bring their effects, which in turn become more causes for more effects, and so on; they are *conditioned* situations. In other words, they are all **impermanent**; people, states and things change, they become other, often very different from what we thought.

We too experience various kinds of change—in the people around us, in our society and the world. We may *like* such changes when we enjoy them, or we may *dislike* them when we fear losing something (such as people we care for) or losing something we regard as *pleasant* (like youth, beauty, joy, love and peace). When we look back at our life, we notice that we actually lose almost all these things that we regard as pleasant or valuable.

These changes happen to us as a person, too. We are happy when we gain things, stay healthy, and people appreciate us. Yet, all these come and go; or our ideas of these things change, and we realize we want something more. Then, our health may suffer, or accidents happen; we lose something dear, or weaken in some ability or capacity; or old age catches up, and we realize we are well past our prime. We make ourselves busy so that we do not think about such things. The reason we do not want to think about such things is that they bring us **suffering**; they pain us mentally (and bodily, too).

When we begin to see the habitual patterns of impermanence in ourself, in others and in things around us, and we notice the pain and suffering that they entail, it seems that we have **no control** over any of these things. We may even realize we have *no* control of ourselves: we cannot stop *growing old*, we cannot be totally free from pain and sickness, we certainly cannot escape *death*. Thus we have no real control over ourselves and our lives. All these are the results of impermanence and suffering. This kind of realization shows us aspects of the reality of **nonself**.

6.1.1.3 Impermanence is universal; suffering is universal; nonself is found in our understanding that impermanence and suffering are really beyond our control—we *have no abiding self or entity*. We simply hate this kind of reality; this is a **scatic reality** of life. Our fear of them makes us hate them; in our fear and hate, we lose ourselves in pleasure and distractions. When these do not work, we then seek some escape in religion, especially those that promise eternal life and eternal happiness.

The very idea of “eternal life” and “eternal happiness” are so pleasant and exciting that we may fail to think if such “eternal” states are possible at all, or what it entails if there were really such “eternal” life or happiness.

The fact that we suffer means that we have our limits; *when we know our limits we know ourself*; when we know the self, *we become a better and happier person*. “Eternal life” (if it were possible) may mean that we no more know the limits of our lives: what does this mean? “Eternal happiness” (if it were possible) may mean that we have no more purpose in life. Without meaning and purpose there is no life!

When we understand and accept **death**, it gives meaning to life; when we understand **suffering**, it gives purpose to our life. We seek to understand the causes and conditions for our suffering. When we know these conditions, we can work to end, or at least lessen suffering. To that extent, we have a purposeful life, one that sees joy in self-reliance and a source of joy to others.¹⁵⁹

6.1.2 Parable of the dung-porter

6.1.2.1 Scatic language used by the Buddha did not die with him. The language continued as skillful means even after his parinirvana. **The Pāyāsi Sutta** (D 23), for example, records the elder Kumāra Kassapa using scatic language in his dialogue with prince Pāyāsi, a chieftain (*rājañña*)¹⁶⁰ of Setavyā.¹⁶¹ Such scatic language is never meant to be offensive, but rather as a humorous trope used to lighten the discussion of some difficult topics, in this case, the prince’s wrong views.¹⁶²

The Sutta tells us that Pāyāsi rejects the truths of other worlds (or planes), rebirth and karma, that is, to say:

“There is no other world.

There are no spontaneously born beings.

There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions.” (D 23,5/2:319), SD 39.4

The Sutta also tells us that Pāyāsi actually is convinced by Kumāra Kassapa’s replies from the start. But Pāyāsi “remains obdurate,” feigning to reject the elder’s explanations, playing the devil’s advocate, so that he is able to hear *all* of the elder’s teachings [D 23,30].

Kumāra Kassapa presents a total of 15 parables to support his arguments in answer to Pāyāsi’s views, rebuttals and rejections. Of these, parables the following are **scatic parables**:

(3) the man in the cesspool [6.1.2.2] and (12) the dung porter [6.1.2.3].

6.1.2.2 THE MAN IN THE CESSPOOL [D 23,8 f]

In rejecting the existence of the heavenly world, Pāyāsi argues that he knew morally virtuous colleagues who would as such be reborn in the heavens, but none of them has returned to confirm it, as agreed earlier on. Kumāra Kassapa responds with **the parable of the man in the cesspool**, explaining that the Tāvātimsa devas, finding humans physically repulsive, would unlikely ever come down to earth.

¹⁵⁹ Leo Tolstoy: “If there were no suffering, man would not know his limits, would not know himself.” *War and Peace* (1867), tr Anthony Briggs, 2005:1986 (ch 9). See SD 63.13 (3.3.3.2) (7). See also SD 63.4 (4.1.3.2).

¹⁶⁰ On the term *rājañña*, see SD 39.4 (3.1, 3.2.1).

¹⁶¹ **Setavyā** is a town or large village near Ukkatthā in Kosala: see SD 36.13 (3.2).

¹⁶² Pāyāsi’s wrong views and Kumāra Kassapa’s rebuttal are too many and detailed to be summarized here, see SD 39.4 (2.2).

“Suppose a person were to sink, head and all,¹⁶³ in a cesspool.¹⁶⁴

Then, you [prince Pāyāsi] were to order your men pull the man out and wipe the dung off this person’s body with a piece of bamboo.

Then you had your men to thoroughly shampoo this man’s body thrice with yellow clay.

Then, you tell your men to grease this man up with oil, and wash him well three times with chunam [fragrant soap powder].

Then the men groom his hair and beard, and present this man with very costly garlands, and very costly cosmetics, and very costly clothes.

They you have this man brought up into a mansion, and provide him with the 5 cords of sensual pleasures [7.1.1.3].

What do you think, O prince, of that person, *well washed, ... enjoying the 5 cords of sensual pleasures—would he ever have the desire to be sunk in that cesspool ever again?*”

“Not at all, master Kassapa.”

“What is the reason for this?”

“Impure, master Kassapa, is the cesspool, impure and regarded as impure, and foul smelling as such, and disgusting and regarded with disgust, and repulsive and regarded with repulsion.”

“Even so, O prince, humans are to the devas *impure and regarded as impure, and foul smelling as such, and disgusting and regarded with disgust, and repulsive and regarded with repulsion.*

The smell of a human, O prince, will revulse¹⁶⁵ a deva from a hundred leagues away!”

(D 23,9/2:323, summarized), SD 39.4.

6.1.2.3 THE DUNG PORTER [D 23,24 f]]

Despite Kumāra Kassapa’s numerous illustrative parables rebutting Pāyāsi’s wrong views, Pāyāsi persists in rejecting the elder’s explanations. At one point, Pāyāsi blatantly admits to Kumāra Kassapa that the king of Kosala and other foreign kings know of Pāyāsi’s views; hence, out of self-dignity he must maintain his views!

Kumāra Kassapa then comes up with this hilarious **scatic parable** of the dung porter:

“Once upon a time, O prince, a certain man, a **pig-raiser [swineherd]**, went from his own village to another, where he saw a heap of dry dung that had been discarded.

It occurred to him:

‘That’s a lot of dry dung¹⁶⁶ that had been discarded. What now if I were to bring this dry dung from here as food for my pigs.

He spread out his cloak, and piling up a sufficient amount of dry dung, tied it up in a bundle, and lifted it upon his head, and moved on.

Midway along the road, a great untimely shower fell on him.

¹⁶³ “Head and all, in a cesspool,” *gūtha,kūpe sa,sīsakam*, as at V 3:106,36, 107,1; *sa,sīśaka*, “over the head, head and all” (V 3:106,36, 107,1; D 2:324,5; Sn 80,2). *sa,sīśa*, “together with the head”; *sa,sīśam*, “up to the head” (D 1:76, 246; S 2:259,5; A 3:403,22; J 1:298, 5:274). The more common English idiom would be “up to his neck,” but here the unfortunate person fell *completely* into the cesspool.

¹⁶⁴ *Seyyathā’pi rājañña puriso gūtha,kūpe sa,sīśakam nimuggo assa*. I.e., he were to fall headlong into the cesspool.

¹⁶⁵ Oddly, we have the noun “revulsion,” but no standard dictionary gives its verb, “revulse.” OED has “revulse” (which it says is “obsolete” and “rare”), (transitive) to drag, draw, or pull back; to tear away. (1169, 1673). Webster’s 3rd New International Dictionary, however, has “revulsed.” Also see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1 (2.2.1).

¹⁶⁶ This is prob cow-dung, mostly undigested grass and plant matter evacuated by bovines, which is used even today in India, Yunnan and elsewhere for various purposes, such as fuel. It is known in Brit Eng as “cowpat,” & US as “cow-pie” or “meadow muffin” and dry cow-dung as “cow chips.” See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cow_dung

And the load of dung came flowing and trickling down to his very finger-tips, soiling him with dung.

A man, seeing him, said this to him:

‘Surely, I say, you must be crazy! Surely, you’re out of your mind! How can you carry that load of dung which is flowing and trickling down to your very finger-tips, soiling you with dung!’

‘It’s you here who is surely mad! You’re the one out of your mind! For this is food for my pigs!’¹⁶⁷

Even so, you, O prince, I think, are evidently like **the dung-porter**.

Discard, O prince, this holding on to bad wrong views! Discard, O prince, this holding on to bad wrong views! Bring not harm and pain upon yourself for a long time!”

(D 23,25/2:347 f. summarized) + SD 39.4 (6.1.2)

6.2 THE DUNG PORTER AS REALITY

6.2.1 Loathsomeness of food

6.2.1.1 Buddhist scatology is not so much about what are filthy or decaying out there, but more so about *our own body*. Hence, scatology is an extension of mindfulness of the body and other body-related meditation and reflections. Of special significance to most practitioners, then, even those who are not deep or serious meditators, is **the perception of the loathsomeness of food** (*āhāre paṭikkūla,saññā*). This scatic meditation or perception helps us in not being attached to foods and tastes; indirectly, this meditation helps in the overcoming of lust. It is suitable practice for both renunciant and lay followers.

The perception of the loathsomeness of food comprises 10 aspects that we should keep in mind, thus [the layperson’s reflection, where applicable, is given within square brackets]:

- (1) **Going** (*gamanato*). One has to look for food. In the case of the renunciant, “he has to leave the ascetics’ forest, uncrowded, blissfully secluded, endowed with shade and water, clean, cool and delightful; he has to forsake the noble one’s delight in solitude, and must set out for the village to find food, just as a jackal for the charnel ground.”
[One must earn a living for having regular and proper meals, or depend on others for our meals.]
- (2) **Seeking** (*pariyesanato*). The renunciant has to wander “like a destitute man” (*kapaṇa,manussena viya*), bowl in hand, bearing the changes in the seasons, and not always receiving almsfood, sometimes even berated, ignored or being chased away.
[One may not always be satisfied with one’s food, or not be used to certain kinds of food, or lack sufficient food.]
- (3) **Using** (*paribhogato*). The good appearance of the food disappears once it is chewed up in the mouth, becoming “like a dog’s meal in a dog’s trough,” becoming a nauseating mass, which one swallows simply because it is out of sight.
- (4) **Secreting** (*āsayato*). Swallowed, food is mixed with secretions, such as saliva, bile, phlegm, pus and blood, and the taste becomes unpleasant accordingly.
- (5) **Receptacle** (*nidhānato*). The belly is like an unwashed cesspit since day one.

¹⁶⁷ The point is that the cow-dung is now wet and filthy, and no more useful as fodder for the man’s pigs.

- (6) **Undigested** (*aparipakkato*). The half-digested food remains for a time in the belly, “smothered by a layer of phlegm, covered with froth and bubbles produced by digestion through being fermented by metabolic heat.”
- (7) **The digested** (*paripakkato*). When the food is fully digested it gives off froth and bubbles, turning into dung like brown clay squeezed in a tube, and into urine filling the bladder.
- (8) **Fruition** (*phalato*). This is what the food does to the eater: it brings forth “various dead things” (*nānā, -kuṇapa*), such as head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin; but when improperly digested [or, uncooked], may bring on various kinds of discomfort and illness.
- (9) **Outflow** (*nissandato*).¹⁶⁸ When swallowed, the food enters by one door, after which it flows out through many doors, for example, as “eye-dung from the eye, ear-dung from the ear” [Sn 197]; furthermore, we may eat in company, but the food in due course flows out as dung, which we excrete alone and in secret.
- (10) **Smearing** (*sammakkhanato*). When one eats, one soils one’s hands, lips, tongue and palate, and, even after washing them, the smell often lingers on; and digested food turns into tartar smearing the teeth, and turns into spittle, phlegm, and so on, into eye-dung, ear-dung, snot, urine, dung, and so on, respectively soiling the eyes, the ears, the nose, and the lower passages, and these soiled doors are never thoroughly clean even though we often wash them everyday.

(Vism 11.6-26), SD 62.10d (2.4.2.3)

6.2.1.2 The basic purpose of this perception is to be moderate in eating to prevent drowsiness and laziness, to promote *effort and enthusiasm* in Dharma practice, and to live the spiritual life in simple comfort, as stated in **the Ahāre Paṭikūla Saññā Sutta** (S 46.69).¹⁶⁹

For economic reasons, this practice also helps to cut down wastage of food, and cultivate moderation, simplicity and healthy eating so that even the poor and those of limited resources will be able to make the occasional offering as their act of faith and merit. The renunciants, mindfully moderate in food, enjoy good health and facility in their spiritual practice.

6.2.2 A summary list of perception practices

6.2.2.1 The perception and reflection that we are ourselves each a dung porter is *not* about seeing the body as “disgusting” and loathing it. In meditative language, words are used as the reflecting light of the real situation. Take Sāriputta’s metaphor of the **whisk-broom**, for example, where he says that a whisk-broom:

sweeps away things, clean and foul—things *soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood*—the whisk-broom is not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted, because of that;
even so, I dwell with the mind *like a whisk-broom, bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will*. [7.2.2.2 (1)]

¹⁶⁸ Nissanda also tr as “outcome.” It comes from *ni* (down) + *vSYAD*, “to flow, trickle” (lit, a discharge, dropping; fig, the effects of karma, A 3:32). A dark dung humour (scatology) is evident. On a deeper level, “faeces” (*karīsa*) belongs to the earth element; that by which what is “eaten, drunk, chewed, tasted” is digested belongs to the fire element (M 62,8+9), SD 3.11.

¹⁶⁹ For details on the perception of the loathsomeness of food, see SD 15.4 (3).

Similarly, Sāriputta sees “**this foul body of mine**” just as it is. Naturally, one would be very “**troubled, ashamed and disgusted**” with such a body. But far from hating it, one treats it with profound lovingkindness, “**bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.**” One takes good care of it so that it is kept clean and healthy, so that one can happily keep to one’s spiritual practice and benefit others with one’s teaching and example. One does not hate true reality, but sees it happily (knowing that one is not deluded by it), and then mindfully adjusts one’s life to this realization so that one’s wisdom grows.

6.2.2.2 There are various ways by which we can adjust our minds and lives to such true reality. If, as lay followers, we are not ready to see this body as being “foul,” we should be mindful of its fundamental nature, like everything else, that is, it is impermanent and subject to suffering and, in due course, even see it as nonsel.

The **(Vitthāra) Satta Saññā Sutta** (A 7.46) gives a list of 7 perceptions based on the 3 characteristics and related practices, thus:

<u>Perception (saññā)</u>	<u>Pali term</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
(1) The perception of foulness = the 32 parts of the body	<i>asubha,saññā</i>	A 10.60,5/5:109; Vism 8.44-47
(2) The perception of death (usually called mindfulness of death)	<i>maraṇa,saññā</i> = <i>maraṇānussati</i>	A 6.19/3:304-8; Vism 8.1-41
(3) The perception of loathsomeness in food	<i>āhāre paṭikkūla,saññā</i>	Vism 11.1-26
(4) The perception of not delighting in all the world	<i>sabba,loke anabhirata,saññā</i>	A 10.60.11/5:111
(5) The perception of impermanence	<i>anicca,saññā</i> ¹⁷⁰	S 22.12-21, 102
(6) The perception of suffering in the impermanent	<i>anicce dukkha,saññā</i>	A 7.49/4:51 f
(7) The perception of non-self in the suffering	<i>dukkhe anatta,saññā</i>	A 7.49/4:53 (A 7.46/4:45-53), SD 15.4

(1) The perception of foulness traditionally refers to the contemplation of the 32 body-parts¹⁷¹ [3.1.1]. There are 2 other versions of this practice: 1. the contemplation of the 10 stages of bodily decomposition¹⁷² done, as a rule, by renunciants under the supervision of a meditation master, and 2. reflection on bodily impurity, a simpler meditation suitable for the laity.

The simpler 2nd reflection is basically on the scatic and vulnerable nature of our living body, enveloped in skin with countless pores and 9 openings,¹⁷³ ceaselessly oozing and trickling like open wounds. From the eyes ooze gunk, from the ear wax, from the nostrils snot and dung, from the mouth food, spittle, phlegm, bile and blood, from wounds blood, lymph, and pus, and scabs form, and feces flow from the lower end.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Cf **Saṅgīti S** (D 33), where these last 3 form the first 3 of “the 5 perceptions ripening in liberation” (*pañca vimutti,paripācāniyā saññā*), viz, the perceptions (1) of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), (2) of suffering in the impermanent (*anicce dukkha,saññā*), (3) of nonself in suffering (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*), (4) of abandoning (*pahāna,saññā*), and (5) of dispassion (*virāga,saññā*) (D 33,2.1(26)/3:243).

¹⁷¹ On practice details, see **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119), SD 12.21 (5). See also **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

¹⁷² On *asubha,saññā*, see Vism 6/178-196 (the 10 stages of bodily decomposition).

¹⁷³ **Sn 197**. The 9 openings (*navahi sotehi*) are the body’s 2 eyes, 2 ear-openings, 2 nostrils, mouth, anus and urethra (*navahi sotehī ti ubho,akkhi-c,chidda,kāṇṇa-c,chidda,nāsa-c,chidda,mukha,vacca.magga,passāva.maggehi*, SnA 1:248).

¹⁷⁴ SD 15.4 (0.3) (1); SD 62.10a (3.1.1.3) n.

(2) The perception of death is a reflection on the shortness, uncertainty and fragility of life, and on the numerous ways in which death can occur, for example, from a snake bite, an accident, an illness, or an assault.¹⁷⁵

(3) The perception of the loathsomeness of food has been explained above [6.2.1].

(4) The perception of not delighting in all the world is a mindful determination to let go of all speculating about the world, religious mindsets and views rooted in greed, hatred or delusion, freeing the mind from any clinging. This practice is especially helpful when doing meditation, whether by oneself or in a retreat.¹⁷⁶

(5) The perception of impermanence is easily done by reflecting on how what we see changes, becomes other; or what we hear, or smell, or taste, or touch, and how our thoughts quickly change, how we forget things, and so on. **The (Anicca) Saññā Sutta** (S 25.1) describes the reflection on the impermanence of the 6 senses.¹⁷⁷

(6) The perception of suffering in the impermanent may be reflected thus: time and opportunity are easily lost irretrievably when we are overcome by lethargy [inaction], laziness, languor,¹⁷⁸ heedlessness, non-devotion and inattention. We should act against them as if towards a murderer brandishing a sword.¹⁷⁹

(7) The perception of non-self in suffering is the reflection that when we feel any kind of pain,¹⁸⁰ especially emotional pain, there is *only the pain*; there is no “person” or entity that suffers: there is only “suffering” without any “I,” “me” or “mine.” One’s mind is devoid of I-making, mine-making, and conceit regarding this conscious body and all external signs. It has transcended discrimination. It is peaceful and well liberated. Of the 7 methods, this is probably the most difficult since one should first have some idea of the nature of nonself.¹⁸¹

7 Dung of pleasure and worldliness

7.1 RENOUNCING DUNG AND DUNGINESS¹⁸²

7.1.1 What we should renounce

7.1.1.1 The main thrust behind **the scatic metaphor** is that of letting go and distancing ourselves from whatever that drives us into unwholesome speech and acts, defiles our mind, and prevents us from calm-

¹⁷⁵ **Marāṇa-s, sati S 3** (A 6.19/3:303-306). See SD 15.4 (0.3) (2).

¹⁷⁶ SD 15.4 (0.3) (4).

¹⁷⁷ **S 25.1, 4/3:225** (SD 16.7), or any of the other 9 suttas of the Okkanta Saṃyutta (S 25). See also SD 15.4 (0.3) (5).

¹⁷⁸ “Languor,” *vissaṭṭhi*, vl *visaṭṭhi*, pp of *vissajjati*, “he gives up” (lit & fig). It may allude to sensual indulgence as *sukka, visaṭṭhi*, which means “emission of semen, ejaculation” (V 2:38, 3:112). “Languor” means “a pleasant feeling being relaxed and not having any energy or interest in anything” (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner’s Eng Dict).

¹⁷⁹ SD 15.4 (0.3) (6).

¹⁸⁰ It is wise in understanding that this is not about simply ignoring pain that signals some kind of bodily discomfort due to bad posture or tiredness, or are symptomatic of some health or medical condition that need early attention.

¹⁸¹ SD 15.4 (0.3) (7).

¹⁸² From (adj) **dungy**, “of the nature of dung; abounding in dung” (OED). Shakespeare: “Kingdoms are clay. Our dungy earth alike feeds beast man” (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.1.35 f, 1606, Arden Shakespeare, 9th ed M R Ridley).

ing and clearing our minds. Just as we need to regularly rid ourselves of bodily dirt and waste for our health and cleanliness, we need to *renounce* whatever defiles us bodily and deludes us mentally so that we are spiritually healthy and pure.

When we refrain from any action rooted in *greed, hatred or delusion*, we clear ourself from the immoral dung of body so that we become “bodily cultivated” (*bhāvita,kāya*), that is, morally virtuous. When we mindfully reflect on *impermanence, suffering and nonself*, we steer the mind away from the mental dung that is *delusion and ignorance*, and keep the mind calm and clear; then we are said to be “mentally cultivated” (*bhāvita,citta*), that is, we are spiritually insightful.¹⁸³

7.1.1.2 The key teachings of the suttas—such as of about *impermanence, suffering and nonself*—at first blush, may not seem agreeable to a non-Buddhist observer, that is, one is unable to understand them or one misunderstands them. The Buddha’s famous response to such situations is this well-known reply he gives to the wanderer leader, Nigrodha, in **the Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 25):

[I]t is hard for one, holding a different view, keeping different priority, having a different personal preference [under a different influence], keeping to a different practice, following a different teaching,¹⁸⁴ to understand the doctrine that I teach my disciples. (D 25,7.5/3:40) SD 1,4¹⁸⁵

7.1.1.3 Hence, people who are caught up in sensual pleasures and worldliness may find the Buddha’s humorous take on sensual pleasures in **the Araṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 139) difficult to swallow. After listing the 5 cords of sensual pleasure¹⁸⁶—the pleasures of *seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching*—he states that they all arise conditioned by what we see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Immediately following this, the Buddha then declares:

Now, the (physical) joy and (mental) pleasure¹⁸⁷ that arise dependent on these 5 cords of sensual pleasure are called **sense-pleasure**¹⁸⁸—**a dung of pleasure**,¹⁸⁹ a pleasure of the crowd, an ignoble pleasure. It should not be pursued, should not be cultivated, should not be developed: this pleasure should be feared, I say! (M 139,9.2/3:233),¹⁹⁰ SD 7.8

¹⁸³ On *bhāvita,kāya* and *bhāvita,citta*, see **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja S** (S 35.127,7), SD 27.6a.

¹⁸⁴ “Holding a differing view ... following different teachings,” *añña,ditthikena añña,khantikena añña,rucikena aññatr’āyogena aññatr’ācariyakena*. This is stock: **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,24/1:187 ×2); **Pāṭhika S** (D 24,2.21/3:35 ×2); **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72,18/1:487); **Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda S** (D 25,7/3:40); **Vekhanassa S** (M 80,14/2:43). D:W has “holding different views, being of different inclinations and subject to different influences, following a different teacher,” apparently missing *aññatr’āyogena*.

¹⁸⁵ Cf Soṇa,daṇḍa’s fear that the Buddha might ask him something beyond his ken: **Soṇa,daṇḍa S** (D 4,11/1:119), SD 30.5.

¹⁸⁶ **Guṇa** means “a strand, string” (V 1:182,36; D 2:274,7*; A 3:75,16 ≈ VA 1081,24; MA 2:55,32; BA 43,21; Peṭk 1:56,23); thus, the 5 cords bind one to pleasures. There is also a wordplay where *guṇa* means “a multiple” (Pv 36.9; Miln 106,9; BA 43,21 f), ie, these pleasures multiply themselves; thy have the propensity for attracting more pleasures and distractions.

¹⁸⁷ *Sukha,somanassa*.

¹⁸⁸ *Kāma,sukha*.

¹⁸⁹ On “a dung of pleasure,” *mīḷha,sukha*, see **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66,19/1:454,14), SD 28.11; **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139,9.2/3:233,22, 13(3)/3:236,13), SD 7.8; **(Pañcaka) Nāgita S** (A 5.30,8.4/3:31,13, 11/3:29), SD 55.12a; **(Chakka) Nāgita S** (A 6.42,8.4/3:342,11, 11/3:27), SD 55.12b; **(Aṭṭhaka) Yasa S** (A 8.86,8.4/4:341,21, 11/4:42,11), SD 55.13. See SD 55.12a (3.4.1.3).

¹⁹⁰ Similarly at **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66,19/1:454), SD 28.11.

Since these pleasures arise from our “dung-porting” body [6.2], we can understand why the Buddha uses such a dramatic and scatic metaphor. The Buddha adds that sensual pleasures “should be feared”—because these pleasures are sense-based, they are impermanent and are thus unsatisfactory. We will keep wanting them and so fall into “a state of suffering, trouble, despair, fever; *it is the wrong way*. ... A state of conflict” (M 139,13.3 (1)).

7.1.2 The joy of renunciation

7.1.2.1 The Buddha actually has a much better reason that sensual pleasures should be rejected; that is, there is:

the **joy of renunciation**, the joy of seclusion, the joy of peace, the joy of awakening, [which] is a state without suffering, without trouble, without despair, without fever: *it is the right way*.

As such, this is a **state of non-conflict**. (M 139,13.3/3:235), SD 7.8

What is this **joy of renunciation** that is “not to be feared”? The Buddha answered this in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), when the bodhisattva, realizing the grave danger of continuing his self-mortification, recalls the bliss of his 1st dhyana as a 7-year-old boy meditating under a tree. He realizes that **dhyana** (*jhāna*) is the “pleasure not to be feared,” since it gives the mind that calm for the clarity with which to see directly into true reality.¹⁹¹ Thus he concludes:

‘I fear not the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual desires and unwholesome states!’¹⁹²

7.1.2.2 Thus the bodhisattva turned to **the middle way**, which here specifically refers to the attainment of **dhyana**. Secondly, it means that the body must be respected (for example, it must be fed) and be relied on as the bridge of one’s efforts to gain awakening. The bodhisattva takes his last meal before awakening,¹⁹³ and this is to sustain him for the next 7 weeks of blissful solitary retreat following his awakening.¹⁹⁴ With this joyful calm and clear mind, the bodhisattva is able to finally attain awakening and become the Buddha.

7.2 SIMPLICITY AND HUMILITY

7.2.1 The Buddha warns against clinging to gain, honour and praise

Renunciation means letting go, not just of material things, but also of the non-material, that is, the *idea of gain*, the *clinging to honour*, and the *desire for praise*. A mind running after *gain, honour and praise* will not be able to be really focused or stilled, or that focus and stillness will be easily forgotten and lost, especially in a morally weak or heedless monastic, or one burdened with arrogance and narcissism.

Hence, we hear the Buddha’s unequivocal warning to monastics (which may well apply to the laity, too) stated, for example, in **the Miḷhaka Sutta** (S 17.5):

¹⁹¹ **M 36**,31 f/1:246 f (SD 49.4).

¹⁹² *Na kho ahaṃ tassa sukhasa bhāyāmi, yaṃ taṃ sukhaṃ aññatt’ eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi* (M:Ee 1:247,3; M:Ce 1:584,4 and M:Se 1:458,5: *yantam*, after which Se continues directly with *aññatr’eva*, omitting *sukham*). On the 2 kinds of pleasures—sensual pleasure and the joy of renunciation—see **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66,21 /1:455), SD 28.11; **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139,9.3/3:233), SD 7.8. On pleasure felt by the awakened mind, see **Uṇṇābha S** (S 51.15), SD 10.10.

¹⁹³ On the offering of this last meal before the awakening, see SD 63.13 (1.1.2.1).

¹⁹⁴ On the 7 weeks after the awakening, see SD 26.1 (5); SD 63.1.

Dreadful [Terrible], bhikshus, are *gain, honour, and praise*, bitter, vile, obstructive to attaining the supreme safety from bondage. (S 17.5/2:225-243), SD 100.11¹⁹⁵

In short, we, monastic or lay, should simply distantly smile at fame as a passing friend, and warmly embrace obscurity as a welcome respite. We must also be wary that any unwholesome conduct on our part will attract ill fame, which can seriously hamper our efforts to study and spread the Buddha Dharma, and also discourage and misguide those who know us or hear of us.¹⁹⁶

7.2.2 Sāriputta's humility

7.2.2.1 Renunciation naturally entails the giving up of the “**dung of pleasure**,” that is, the 5 cords of sense-pleasures [7.1.1.3]. One then becomes like any of the 4 elements: *earth, water, fire and wind*. One is said to be indifferent to “dung, urine, spittle, pus and blood”; they remain just as they are.¹⁹⁷

In the **Thera, gāthā**, Sāriputta declares that he is like the first 3 of the 4 elements—that is, earth, water and fire (*paṭhav'āpi, aggi*) [3.1.2.1 f]—in that he is neither attached to nor repulsed by sensory contacts (Tha 1014). In the **Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa Sutta** (A 9.11), Sāriputta gives a lion-roar by way of telling the Buddha that Sāriputta dwells with his mind equanimous like the 4 primary elements, and adding 5 of his own metaphors of humility.¹⁹⁸

7.2.2.2 Sāriputta's 5 metaphors of humility may be summarized as follows:

- (1) ... just as a **whisk-broom** [cleaning-rag] (*raj'oharaṇa*)¹⁹⁹ sweeps away things, clean and foul—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—**the whisk-broom is not troubled, ashamed, or disgusted, because of that**;
even so, I dwell with the mind *like a whisk-broom*, bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will. [6.2.2.1]
- (2) ... just as a **chandala** [outcaste]²⁰⁰ **boy or a chandala girl**, with a vessel in hand,²⁰¹ clad in rags, entering a market-town or a village, *mentally humbling themselves*²⁰² *before entering*;

¹⁹⁵ On how gain, honour and praise can break up the sangha, see **Bhindi S** (S 17.31), SD 46.24.

¹⁹⁶ See SD 48.9 (6.2.3).

¹⁹⁷ See **Mahā Rāhul'ovāsa S** (M 62,13-16/1:423 f), SD 3.11.

¹⁹⁸ A 9.11,4/4:374 f (SD 28.2a). The 5 similes are those of the whisk-broom, the chandala boy, the hornless bull, the youth or maiden, and the leaking pot of fat.

¹⁹⁹ Comy glosses *raj'oharaṇa* with “a cloth [rag] for sweeping away dirt” (*raja, sammajjana, coḷaka*, AA 4:171 at A 4:376). In Jainism, the *rajo'harana* or *raj'opaharaṇa* was a small whisk-broom carried by Jain monks, nuns, and ascetics to brush small insects out of their path or where they will sit. It is likely that Sāriputta is referring to the Jain device. *Raj'oharaṇa* recurs at V 2:291,35 (“rag-cloth”); as verbal-noun, “Removing dirt,” in meditation by Cūḷa Panthaka (AA 1:216 = J 5/1:117 = DhA 2.3/1:245 = ThaA 2:237 = ApA 318 = PmA 3:658 = VA 4:802).

²⁰⁰ A chandala (*caṇḍāla*) is an outcaste, usu classed with the lowest of them, the Pukkusas. The chandalas are said to eat dog-flesh (J 5:450; cf Thī 509), or are corpse-removers (J 3:195).

²⁰¹ **Kaḷopi, hattho, which Comy glosses “a container or bowl in hand”** (*pacchi, hattho ukkhali, hattho vā*, AA 4:171). EM Hare notes that “It seems likely that this is the same kind of receptacle as used by the present-day Rodiyas of Ceylon [Sri Lanka]; this consists of a scuttle fixed to the end of a stick (so that there shall be no contact between giver and receiver). The Sinhalese call this *kolapotta*.” (S:H 4:250 n3). See D:RD 1:227 n3; V Trenckner, *Pali Miscellany*, London, 1879:60.

²⁰² “Mentally humbling himself,” *nīca, cittaṃ yeva upaṭṭhapetvā*.

even so, I dwell with the mind like a chandala boy or a chandala girl, bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.

- (3) ... just as a **hornless bull**, meek, well-tamed, well-trained, roaming from street to street, from cross-roads to crossroads, harms nothing with its feet or horns;

even so, I dwell with the mind like a hornless bull, bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.

- (4) ... just as a man or a woman, a youth or a maiden,²⁰³ **with head washed and well dressed and decked out**, would be *troubled, ashamed and disgusted* with a carcass of a snake, a dog, or a human around

their neck;

even so, I am troubled, ashamed and disgusted with this foul body of mine.

- (5) ... just as a man might carry around a **pot of fat**²⁰⁴ 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.

(A 9.11,4/4:376, summarized), SD 28.2a

7.2.2.3 Note that **Sāriputta**, in his first 3 metaphors above [7.2.2.2] says that he equanimous and humble towards others—like a whisk-broom, like a young outcaste or like a hornless bull—that is, he does not react to any negative situations. Indeed, when Sāriputta is with people outside the monastery, he maintains a mind that is “bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.” He cultivates a profound heart of lovingkindness to everyone. In other words, he is neither distant nor aloof from the people around him. He is joyfully kind and those who see him also feel joyful.

7.3 SCATIC MEDITATION ON REVULSION

7.3.1 “May I never meet with fame”

The **(Pañcaka) Nāgita Sutta** (A 5.30),²⁰⁵ the (fives) discourse to Nāgita, records the narrative behind a teaching given by the Buddha to his personal attendant **Nāgita** in a thick wood outside Icchā,naṅgala, in Kosala, where they are staying with a large community of monks. When the brahmin housemasters of the village hear that the Buddha is staying in the forest nearby, they come in a great crowd with food-offerings. [A 5.30,6]

As they excitedly wait at the forest entrance with their offerings, the Buddha, hearing their din, refuses to see them. He gives this lion-roar: “**May I never meet with fame, Nāgita, nor fame ever meet with me.**” He adds that only those unable to meditate or who lack spiritual joy would be drawn to such offerings—“Let him enjoy for himself that dung of pleasure,²⁰⁶ that sloth of pleasure, those pleasures of gain, honour and praise!” [A 5.30,8].

²⁰³ *Itthī vā puriso vā daharo yuvā*, as at V 2:255, 3:68; **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.92/1:80); **Mahā Sakul’udāyī S** (M 77.19,31/2:19), **Ākañkheyya S** (M 5/1:32), **Vitakka,sañṭhāna S** (M 20/1:119); **Jātaka Nidāna,kathā** (J 1:5).

²⁰⁴ *Meda,kathālika*, “a cooking pot or saucepan for frying fat” (PED). For a detailed reflection, see Vism 6.89/195.

²⁰⁵ A 5.30/3:30-32 (SD 55.12a).

²⁰⁶ On *mīlha,sukha*, see also **Laṭukikôpama S** (M 66,19/1:454,14), SD 28.11; **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139,9.2/3:233,-22, 13(3)/3:236,13), SD 7.8; **(Pañcaka) Nāgita S** (A 5.30,8.4/3:31,13, 11/3:29), SD 55.12a; **(Chakka) Nāgita S** (A 6.42,-8.4/3:342,11, 11/3:27), SD 55.12b; **(Atṭhaka) Yasa S** (A 8.86,8.4/4:341,21, 11/4:42,11), SD 55.13. See [3.4.1.3].

Nāgita then suggests that the Buddha should meet them. After all, he declares, the Buddha is so famous that they would throng to meet him wherever he goes [A 5.30,9], just like heavy mountain showers flowing from the heights down the slopes [A 5.30,10].

The Buddha only repeats his lion-roar, this time for Nāgita's benefit [A 5.30,11].²⁰⁷

The Buddha then gives a set of 5 meditations on revulsion, which closes the Sutta. [SD 55.12a (1.1.2)]

7.3.2 The 5 scatic meditations on revulsion

Of the 3 suttas given to Nāgita—**Pañcaka Nāgita Sutta** (A 5.30); **(Chakka) Nāgita S** (A 6.42); **(Aṭṭhaka) Yasa S** (A 8.86)²⁰⁸—A 5.30 stands alone in its teachings, which are not found in the other 2 suttas. It gives a set of 5 insights into spiritual revulsion (*nibbidā*),²⁰⁹ meaning a clear rejection of any thought of the following:

- | | |
|--|--|
| (1) attachment to food | it all ends up as dung; |
| (2) attachment to people | those dear to us bring us suffering; ²¹⁰ |
| (3) attachment to the body | a “sign of beauty” is a lustful thought but the body is foul; |
| (4) attachment to things (sense-stimuli) | they are all impermanent; hence, cannot be owned; |
| (5) true reality itself (the 5 aggregates) | our body and mind arise and vanish away every moment. ²¹¹ |
- SD 55.12a (1.1.2)

Revulsion (*nibbidā*) is a spiritual vision of the world as it is, leaving it behind where it belongs, and moving ahead towards the path of awakening and freedom.

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²⁰⁷ Up to this point, the sutta narrative of **A 5.30** is the same as those of **A 6.42** (SD 55.12b) and of **A 8.86** (SD 55.-13). The teaching (the set of 5 insights into revulsion) of A 5.30, however, differs completely from that of the other 2 suttas.

²⁰⁸ **(Pañcaka) Nāgita S** (A 5.30), SD 55.12a (4.1.1); **(Chakka) Nāgita S** (A 6.42/3:341-233), SD 55.12b; **(Aṭṭhaka) Yasa S** (A 8.86/4:340-344), SD 55.13.

²⁰⁹ SD 55.12a (3.2.2).

²¹⁰ On this teaching, see **Bhadrika S** (S 42.11,6-13), SD 55.7.

²¹¹ On A 5.30, see also SD 55.12b (1.2.2).