

SD 63.3**Sunakkhatta Sutta**The Discourse on Sunakkhatta | **M 105**

Theme: Self-overestimation and its dangers

Translated and annotated by Piya Tan ©2013, 2025

1 Sutta summary and significance**1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND PARABLES****1.1.1 Summary**

The **Sunakkhatta Sutta** (M 105) records a meeting in Vesāli between the Buddha and Sunakkhatta, a young Licchavī monk [§6]. Sunakkhatta asks the Buddha whether monks who declare their final knowledge before the Buddha do so because they have actually attained it, or from an overestimation of themselves.

The Buddha replies that they are of both kinds. He teaches both kinds of people, except for those who ask questions unrelated to Dharma-training. Those who overestimate themselves do so because they are *intent on material things (the 5 cords of sense-pleasures)* [§7], *wrongly viewing them as being permanent*. Yet there are others who are intent on dhyana meditation; and yet still others who are intent on attaining nirvana.

A Sutta highlight is **the parable of the man wounded by a poisoned dart**, which illustrates the danger of overestimating one's spiritual progress and attainment [1.1.2]. The heart of the Sutta is an important exposition on **imperturbability (aneñja)**, the stilled mind that brings awakening and characterizes it [§§10 f]. The Sutta closes with the Buddha advising Sunakkhatta against being distracted by sense-experiences.

1.1.2 The parables of the man wounded with a poisoned dart

1.1.2.1 To illustrate how those monks overestimate themselves and how those who are properly intent on the path, the Buddha gives the 2 parables of **the man wounded by a poisoned dart**. Together, these parables form the most elaborate version of the parable of the physician and the man wounded with a poisoned dart [1.1.2.2].

In **the 1st version**—alluding to those who overestimate themselves in path attainment [§5]—the physician unknowingly leaves some trace of toxin in the wound after nursing it. Despite the physician leaving instructions regarding diet, keeping the wound clean, and proper precautions and hygiene, the victim neglects them, thinking he is healed. In due course, the wound festers and the victim dies. [§§19-23]

In **the 2nd version**—illustrating those who are properly intent on the path [§5]—the dart-surgeon does a good job of nursing the wound, leaving no trace of toxin at all. The victim carefully follows the physician's instructions regarding *diet, keeping the wound clean, and proper precautions and hygiene*. In due course, the victim is healed and enjoys good health. [§§24-27]

1.1.2.2 A shorter parable of the physician and the man wounded with a poisoned dart occurs in **the Cūla Māluṅka,putta Sutta** (M 63). This parable warns us against being caught up in speculative thoughts and asking questions that are unrelated to Dharma training. These speculations to be avoided are those regarding *whether the universe is eternal or not, whether it is finite or infinite; whether the body and soul are identical or separate; and whether in the afterlife, a being exists, does not exist, both or neither*.¹

¹ **Cūla Māluṅka,putta S** (M 63,5-8) + SD 5.8 (2 + 6); also **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14) @ SD 49.8 (12.4.2.5). The Buddha left speculative views (*ditthi,gatāni*) “unexplained” (*avyākata*) and such questions “set aside” (*thapanīya*). They are

1.2 THE BUDDHA'S WARNING TO SUNAKKHATTA

The **Sunakkhatta Sutta** (M 105) seems to be the earliest canonical record we have of **Sunakkhatta**, who serves as a case of a renunciant following wrong views or a seeker after the wrong ideals. The Buddha's teachings to Sunakkhatta also warns him against the dangers of a renunciant giving up the training. In an ominously premonitory tone, the Buddha warns Sunakkhatta that constant distractions due to sense-experiences will bring about “**death in the discipline of the noble ones**,” that is, when one “commits some defiling offence,” so that “one abandons the training and reverts to the low life” [§22].

2 Suttas related to Sunakkhatta

2.1 SUNAKKHATTA LEAVES THE SANGHA

2.1.1 True enough, after 3 years of monkhood, Sunakkhatta leaves the sangha.² His complaint is that the Buddha has neither shown him any superhuman psychic miracles nor explained to him the “beginning of things.”³ After leaving the sangha, Sunakkhatta goes to one false teacher after another, that is, *the 3 naked ascetics: Kora, khattiya the naked ascetic, Kälāra, maṭṭaka the votary ascetic, and Pāthika the chair-bound charlatan*, as related in **the Pāthika Sutta** (D 24).⁴

2.1.2 **The Mahā Sīha, nāda Sutta** (M 12) relates that while the Buddha is residing in a thick wood (*vana-sanda*) to the west of Vesālī, Sāriputta tells him that Sunakkhatta, who has recently left the sangha, is going about declaring that the Buddha has no deep spiritual knowledge and that his teachings do not lead to the ending of suffering. The Buddha says that Sunakkhatta is not only angry and foolish, but is incapable of seeing the good either of the Buddha or of his teachings.

2.1.3 The Buddha responds by saying that Sunakkhatta is acting out of malice, and does not know the Buddha's true state. The Buddha then speaks of his psychic powers, clairaudience, and mind-reading (M 12,3-8). Further, the Buddha expounds on this list of powers and knowledge that he has:

M 12,9-21	the 10 tathagata powers	<i>tathāgata dasa, bala</i>
M 12,22-28	his 4 kinds of intrepidity	<i>catu vesāraja</i>
M 12,29-30	his knowledge of the 8 assemblies	<i>atṭha parisa</i>
M 12,32-34	the 4 kinds of birth	<i>catu yoni</i>
M 12,35-43	the 5 destinies and nirvana	<i>pañca gati</i>
M 12,44-63	the Bodhisattva's austerities	<i>atta, kilamath'ānuyoga</i>

Nāga, samāla, who is standing behind the Buddha fanning him, then asks for the title of the discourse. The Buddha gives it the name of **Loma, harīsa Pariyāya** (the hair-raising exposition).⁵

listed in: **Poṭṭha, pāda S** (D 9), SD 7.14; **Pāsādikā S** (D 29), SD 40a.6; **Cūla Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63), SD 5.8; **Aggi Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72), SD 6.15; **Vaccha, gotta Saṃyutta** (S 33/3:257-262); and **Avyākata Saṃyutta** (S 44/4:374-403); **U 66/7.6**; SD 7.12 intro. For philosophical discussions, see Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:242-276, 473-476. **Milinda, pañha** skillfully uses the “twin-horned question” by way of Buddhist apologetics: Jayatilleke 1963:226-228, 334 f, 350-352.

² See (**Dīgha**) **Mahāli S** (D 6,5/1:152), SD 53.4.

³ D 24,1.4 f/3:2 f (SD 63.4).

⁴ D 24,1.7-1.18/3:6-12 (SD 63.4).

⁵ M 12/1:68-83 (SD 49.1).

2.2 THE PĀTHIKA SUTTA (D 24), SD 63.4

2.2.1 While the **Sunakkhatta Sutta** (M 105) records the Buddha's teaching the young Licchavī monk, Sunakkhatta, two other relatively long suttas tell us that he left the sangha, and went about defaming the Buddha. We do have a brief mention of Sunakkhatta during the time when he was a monk.

The (Dīgha) **Mahāli Sutta** (D 6) reports the Licchavī Mahāli (nicknamed Otth'aḍḍha, "hare-lipped") telling the Buddha that 3 years after being a monk, Sunakkhatta came to Mahāli, saying that Sunakkhatta was able to see "divine forms" but not hear any divine sounds.⁶ This seems to be the only text we have that tells us about Sunakkhatta as a meditator.

The 2 other suttas—the **Mahā Sīha, nāda Sutta** (M 12) [2.1] and the **Pāthika Sutta** (D 24)—inform us on the ex-monk Sunakkhatta. **M 12** records the Buddha's response to Sunakkhatta's defamation by elaborating on the Buddha's spiritual struggles and attainments. **D 24** is a record of the ex-monk Sunakkhatta's exploits, his rejection of the Buddha and admiration for the 3 naked ascetics [2.2.3].

2.2.2 The **Sunakkhatta Sutta** stands in contrast to the **Pāthika Sutta**. While the Sunakkhatta Sutta presents Sunakkhatta as learning Dharma from the Buddha, the Pāthika Sutta depicts him as a zealot going about Vesālī defaming the Buddha and promoting the 3 naked ascetics whom he deeply admires.

2.2.3 Pāthika Sutta: Teachings to the wanderer Bhaggava

2.2.3.1 The **Pāthika Sutta** (D 24) is a long account of the Buddha's teachings to the wanderer Bhaggava, at the latter's hermitage, about the exploits of Sunakkhatta and the 3 naked ascetics that he admires, that is: Kora, khattiya the dog ascetic, Kālara, maṭṭaka the 7-vow ascetic, and Pāthika,putta who is stuck to his chair, unable to meet the Buddha.

While Bhaggava is the Sutta protagonist (the Buddha addresses the Sutta teachings to him), Sunakkhatta lurks in the background presenting himself as an irredeemable ex-monk who rejects the Buddha because, as Sunakkhatta claims, the Buddha neither shows him "superhuman psychic miracles" nor teaches him about "the beginning of things."

2.2.3.2 The **Pāthika Sutta** is an ancient classic presenting **religious humour** by way of irony in the actions of its key actors: Sunakkhatta, the 3 naked ascetics [2.2.3.2] and the wanderer Bhaggava. An important motif of this Sutta is that of **ritualization** or pathological ritual behaviour which explains the infelicitous conduct of these Sutta actors. The Sutta ends with Bhaggava presenting himself as one with faith in his own teachings as well in that of the Buddha, that is, he is one of **dual belonging**.⁷

2.3 THE SUNAKKHATTA SUTTA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH THE SANSKRIT (ANALAYO)⁸

2.3.1 The Sunakkhatta Sutta and its Sanskrit parallel

2.3.1.1 The German Theravāda monk and early Buddhism specialist, **Bh Analayo** has done a comprehensive comparative study of the suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya with their Chinese parallels. In his

⁶ D 6,5/1:152 (SD 53.4).

⁷ See SD 62.6b (1.2.5.2); SD 63.4 (4.4.4).

⁸ This section is from Analayo, *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya* [2006], Taipei, 2011:610-613 (edited).

study, Analayo notes that in the **Sunakkhatta Sutta** (M 105), however, does not have a parallel in the Chinese Āgamas [but see 2.3.2.3]. Parts of this Sutta have been preserved in Sanskrit fragments.⁹

Although the fragments, as they are, do not suffice for a full comparative study of the Sunakkhatta Sutta, a few points can nevertheless be made. The Sunakkhatta Sutta and its Sanskrit-fragment counterparts describe in similar ways how Sunakkhatta approached the Buddha to find out if the claims made by other monks to have reached full awakening had been true.

2.3.1.2 A minor difference between the two versions is that the **Sanskrit** fragments qualify Sunakkhatta as the Buddha's "attendant."¹⁰ The Sunakkhatta Sutta does not explicitly attribute this role to him. **The Pāli commentaries**, however, record that Sunakkhatta had indeed been one of the Buddha's attendants before Ānanda took on this role.¹¹

Notably, although the Saṃyutta commentary states that the account of Sunakkhatta's role as one of the Buddha's attendants has been handed down in the canonical texts,¹² none of the suttas which feature Sunakkhatta ever mention him explicitly as the Buddha's attendant.¹³

⁹ The fragments are **SHT** [Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden] 1:32 (1965:24 f), SHT 4.32 folios 25-33 (1980:124-128, which incl also the parts already publ in SHT 1.32), SHT 4.165 folios 6-14 (1980:182-189, cf also SHT 7 1995:240), SHT 4.500 folios 3-4 (1980:220-221, cf also SHT 7 1995:255), SHT 9.2578 (2004:239), SHT 10.3274 (2008: 23), and the so far unpubl fragment no. 2378/7 of the Schøyen collection, identified by Klaus Wille (I am indebted to Jens-Uwe Hartmann for kindly providing me with a preliminary draft transliteration of these fragments). SHT 1.32 = SHT 4.32 folio 25, SHT 4.165 folio 6, and SHT 9.2578 correspond to the beginning of the discourse at M 2:252. Schøyen fragment 2378/7 sets in with the simile found at M 2:253,24. SHT 4.32 folios 26-27 and SHT 4.165 folios 7-8, 10, 12a, and 13-14 parallel the description of how, due to a particular interest, someone will listen to talk concerned with the same topic, found at M 2:253-258. SHT 4.32 folio 28, SHT 4.165 folio 12a, SHT 4.500 folio 3, and 10:3274 parallel the simile of the arrow at M 2:256-257. SHT 4.32 folios 29 and 33 and 500 folio 4 parallel the concluding part found at M 2:260 f. In addition to these, according to Hartmann, "Die norturkestanischen Sanskrit-Handschriften der Sammlung Pelliot," 1997:169, the so far unedited fragments vert 26 + 27 of the Pelliot collection parallel M 105, cf also Hartmann, "Contents and Structure of the Dīrghāgama of the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivādins," 2004b: 126 for yet another unpubl Skt fragment parallel to M 105. SHT 1.32V2-3 = SHT 4.32 folio 25V2-3 agree with M 105 on locating the sutta in the gabled hall by Vaiśālī. (Analayo 2011:610 n131, with updates)

¹⁰ SHT 1.32 V 3 = SHT 4.32 folio 25V3: *suna(kṣa)trena lecchaviputtreṇ-opasthāya[kena].*

¹¹ DA 2:418,32, SA 1.258,24, AA 1:292,27, UA 217,15, ThaA 3:111,24; a role also accorded to him in T1463 @ T24.-827c14, noted by Lamotte, "Vajrapāṇi en Inde," Paris, 1966:145, cf also Eimer, "Die Sunakṣatra-Episode im Kommentar zum Be'u Bum Sñon Po," Freiburg, 1987:104 + 110.

¹² SA 1:258,24: *nāga,samālo upavāno sunakkhatto ... ime pana pāliyām āgat'upatthākā.* O Von Hinüber, ""Zur Geschichte des Sprachnamens Pali," Berlin, 1977:243 explains that the expression *pāliyām āgata* refers to a text "handed down in the canon."

¹³ **D 24**/3:6,7 indicates that on one occasion the Buddha went on almsround followed by Sunakkhatta as "a rear-monk" (*pacchā samaṇa*). This merely indicates that a junior monk only follows an elder monk but he is not necessarily the elder's attendant, *upatthāka*. The Chin parallel to D 24, **DĀ 15** (T1.67a18), also reports that Sunakkhatta followed the Buddha on his almsround, 時善宿比丘隨我後行. His closeness with the Buddha as the Buddha's attendant stands in contrast to his later conduct, since Sunakkhatta left the sangha and even publicly proclaimed that the Buddha had not reached any high realization (cf **M 12**/1:68,8). According to **D 24**/3:3,10, he decided to disrobe because the Buddha did not show him any superhuman psychic miracles. **D 6**/1:152,21 reports that Sunakkhatta saw "divine forms" (*dibbāni rūpāni*); but this was not the divine eye (*dibba, cakkhu*), which as a superknowledge (*abhiññā*) is the "knowledge of the passing away and arising of beings" according to their karma (*cutūpapāta,ñāṇa*) [SD 27.5a (5.5)]. All we can say is that Sunakkhatta's visions might have arisen from his meditation, or perhaps some past good karma. We may surmise that Sunakkhatta had some good meditation experiences during his 3 years as a monk, even that he was practising earnestly for a while. See SD 27.5a (5.5.4.4) esp (2)3.

2.3.2 The parables of the poisoned dart

2.3.2.1 Another difference between the Sunakkhatta Sutta and the Sanskrit fragments of its parallel occurs in regard to the interpretation of **the parables of the poisoned dart**, found towards the end of the Sutta.¹⁴ While in the Pāli sutta, the “wound” caused by the arrow represents *the 6 internal sense-bases*,¹⁵ in the Sanskrit version the wound appears to stand for *the physical body*.¹⁶ The difference here is merely a terminological one: “the 6 internal sense-bases” (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) refers to “the body,” or more specifically “the conscious body” (*sa, viññānaka. kāya*).¹⁷ The Sanskrit version, focusing on the dart’s effect, mentions only “the body.”

The Pāli sutta concludes the parables of the poisoned dart by highlighting that one liberated will not be involved with objects of attachment. The corresponding passage in the Sanskrit fragment mentions sensually enticing objects, which could be understood to draw out in more detail the implication of the “objects of attachment” that should better be avoided.¹⁸

2.3.2.2 Another difference is that, while the Pali Sutta takes the name of **Sunakkhatta** as its title, judging from the Sanskrit fragments the title of the Sanskrit text is **Śalya Sūtra**, “the discourse on the dart.”¹⁹ This title thus draws attention to the parables of the poisoned dart, which, in a way, gives the gist of the whole Sutta.

2.3.2.3 The Sunakkhatta Sutta further employs the imagery of a **poisonous snake** to illustrate an arhat’s aloofness from objects of attachment, after which the Sutta ends. The Sanskrit version appears to have had a different conclusion. Although the remains of this conclusion are too fragmentary to allow a

¹⁴ In this simile, Ee and Se read that the physician thinks that he has completely removed the poison even though in reality some of the poison is still left in the wound: *sa, upādisesam anupādiseso ti maññamāno* (**M 105**/2:257,1), and *sa, upādisesam anupādiseso ti jānamāno* (**M:Se** 3:67,14). According to Be and Ce, however, the physician knows that some poison is still left in the wound: *sa, upādisesma sa, upādiseso ti jānamāno* (**M:Be** 3:44,11), and *sa, upādisesam sa, upādiseso ti maññamāno* (**M:Ce** 3:72,35), a reading also favoured by Neumann, *Die Reden des Buddha, Mittlere Sammlung, Aus dem Pali-Kanon übersetzt*, Herrnschrot, 1896/1995:1124 n339, while M:NB 1995/2005:1314 n1003 prefers *anupādiseso*. The Skt fragments support Ee and Se, as SHT 4.500 folio 3V3 reads [sā]va[ś]eṣam nira-[va]/še]ṣam (iti manyamānah); cf also SHT 10.3274V3.

¹⁵ **M 105**/2:260,14: *vāṇo ti ... chann’ etaṁ aijhāttikānāṁ āyatanānāṁ adhivacanāṁ*.

¹⁶ SHT 4.165 folio 13R8: *kāyasy-ādhivacanām*, and R9: (*o*)*danakunmā[s]o*. This brings to mind a standard description of the nature of the human body in the suttas as “made up of rice and broth” (*odana, kummāsūpacaya*) is further represented by similes, thus: an ant-hill (**M 23**/1:144,2); a boil (**S 35.103**/4:83,25; **A 9.15**/4:386,20); a city (**S 35.204**/4:194,26); and a chariot (**S 41.5**/4:292,7). In the present case, the Skt fragment does not indicate with which simile the body should be identified. However, the context suggests an image of a wound; the other similes would not fit such an identification. SHT 4.1980:220 n12 notes another minor difference, as in the Pāli version, the physician instructs his patient to take only suitable food and avoid unsuitable food, to wash the wound, and not to get the wound covered up by pus, etc, thereby taking up the positive and the negative aspect of each task together. In the Skt, the physician first lists the positive actions to be undertaken and then only describes the negative effects that should be avoided.

¹⁷ **Mahā Punṇama S** (**M 109**/3:18 f), **SD 17.11**, (**Rāhula**) **Anusaya S** (**S 18.21**/2:252 x2), (**Tika**) **Ānanda S** (**A 3.32**/1:132 f x4). For refs, **SD 17.8a** (12.3); **SD 56.1** (4.3.2.2) n.

¹⁸ SHT 4.165 folio 14Bc: (*pri*)[*ya*]*rūpāh kāmopasām[h](itā)*, Bd: (*ma*)[*n*]*āpā priyarūpā kāmo[pa]*, and Be: (*sukha*)*l-likānuyoga anuyuktāh*. Comy explains that the **M 105** ref to *upadhi* stands for *kām’upadhi*, “attachment to sensuality” (**MA 4:56,5**). From this viewpoint, the Skt version’s ref to sensual pleasures could be seen as indeed drawing out the implications of the Sutta’s ref to attachment.

¹⁹ Cf discussion in SHT 4.1980:7 of the *uddāna* published in Schlingloff, “Zum Mahagovindasutra,” Berlin, 1961:33.

reconstruction, they could be a recording of the Buddha's instruction in meditation.²⁰ Such an instruction would be a fitting conclusion to an exposition on the dangers of overestimating one's level of attainment, thereby encouraging the monks to undertake the practice required to attain what some of them mistakenly thought to have already accomplished.

3 Imperturability (*āneñja*)

3.1 THE SUNAKKHATTA SUTTA'S KEY TEACHING

3.1.1 The imperturbable and imperturbability

3.1.1.1 The key teaching of the **Sunakkhatta Sutta** is that of the **imperturbable** (*aneñja*) [§§7-18]. The suttas present 'imperturbability' as the *lasting mental stillness gained through the 4th dhyana*.²¹ With this level of deep concentration, called the imperturbable, where all "perturbations or shakiness" (*eja* or *iñja*),²² especially those mental factors (*cetasika*) that characterize lower dhyanas, have been overcome.²³ Besides the stilling of such mental perturbations, with the imperturbability of the 4th dhyana, even the process of breathing ceases (but the meditator is still alive).²⁴

²⁰ Refs to places suitable for meditation can be found in SHT 4.32 folio 33R3: *[mū]lam*, paralleling the "root of a tree," *rukha,mūla*, and in SHT 4.500 folio 4V4: *(giri,gu)[h]ā-palālapu*, paralleling the "mountain cave," *giri,guha*, and the "heap of straw," *palāla,puñja*, mentioned in the standard description of places suitable for meditation in the suttas, eg, in **M 27**2:181,12 (the root of a tree and the mountain cave, together with an empty place, are also included in Jain descriptions of appropriate places for monks: eg, Āyāraṅga 1.8.2.1 (or 1.7.2.1), in Jacobi, *The Āyāraṅga Sutta of the Ćvetambara Jains*, London, 1882:33,8 or Schubring, *Acaraṅga-Sutra, Erster Srutaskandha, Text, Analyse und Glossar*, Nendeln, 1910/1966:34,7: *suññāgāraṁsi vā giriguhaṁsi vā rukkhamūlaṁsi vā*, cf also Bollée, *Mahā-vīra's Words by Walther Schubring*, Ahmedabad, 2004:257 add to n117). SHT 4.32 folio 33R5 and SHT 4.500 folio 4V5 can be combined to yield the concluding sentence (*a)smāka(m anuśā)[sa]na*, similar to the concluding sentence found at the end of an emphatic exhortation to practise meditation: "This is my teaching to you," *ayam vo amhākām anusāsanī ti*, eg, **M 19**1:118,24. Although the sutta listing of places suitable for meditation occurs usually in the context of a teaching on the gradual path, perhaps the Skt version of the present Sutta made use of a similar listing in the context of an injunction to meditate in such places, an injunction which might then have found its conclusion in the Buddha's proclamation that this was his way of teaching.

²¹ Eg D 2/1:76,15 describes the mental condition resulting from the 4th dhyana as "having reached imperturbability," *āneñja,patte* (Be, Ce and Se: *āneñja-p,patte*), a qualification similarly made in parallel versions DĀ 20 (T1.85c7): 無動之地; T22 @ T1.275a13: 堅住不動; and Saṅghabhedavastu (Gnoli 1978:245,15): *āniñjyaprāptam*, with its Tib counterpart, 'dul ba, nga 278b4 or Q ce 256a6: mi g.yo bar gnas pa thob po. Bodhisattvabhūmi (Wogihara 1930: 90,16) sums it up as: *āniñjya-caturtha-dhyāna-vihāraḥ*.

²² The forms are diverse: CPD *aniñja*; DP *āneñja*, *iñja*, *eja*.

²³ **Laṭukikōpama S** (M 66/1:454,28) and its parallel, **MĀ 192** (T1.743b2), regard the initial and sustained applications characteristic of the 1st dhyana, the zest of the 2nd dhyana, and the joy of the 3rd dhyana as "perturbations." These are transcended once the imperturbability of the 4th dhyana is attained.

²⁴ **S 36.11**3:217,8 states that when the 4th dhyana is reached, in- and out-breathing ceases (*assāsa,passāsa niruddhā honti*), which is similarly implied its parallel **SĀ 474** (T2.121b4): 出入息寂滅; cf also **A 10.72**5:135,3, which states that breathing is a "thorn" for the attainment of the 4th dhyana (*catutthassa jhānassa assāsa,passāsa kantako* (Se *kanṭakā*), while Be reads *assāsa,passāso kanṭako*; Ce agrees with Ee). A statement in its parallel **MĀ 84** (T1,-561a9): 入第四禪者以入息出息為刺. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, mindfulness of breathing appears to be esp apt for cultivating imperturbability of body and mind, cf **S 54.7**5:316,12, which states that the mindfulness of breathing leads to the absence of perturbations of body or mind (*n'eva kāyassa iñjitattam vā hoti ... na cittassa iñjitattam vā hoti*). While **S 54.7** simply states that breath meditation leads to imperturbability, its parallel **SĀ 806** (T2207a5) such bodily and mental imperturbability, 身心不動, arises from all the 16 phases of breath meditation. On these 16 phases, see Anālayo, "Mindfulness of Breathing in the *Samyukta-āgama*," *Buddhist Studies Review*

3.1.1.2 The Danta,bhūmi Sutta (M 125, SD 46.3) and its Madhyamāgama parallel contains the parable of taming a wild elephant, depicting the progress of a disciple in the way a wild elephant is trained in unshakability. Such a trained elephant is able to face unflinchingly any battle situation, such as being surrounded by soldiers who shout and brandish weapons.²⁵ The Madhyamāgama version of the Sutta employs this imagery to illustrate the level of imperturbability a disciple reaches through attaining the 4th dhyana.²⁶

3.2 USES AND BENEFITS OF THE IMPERTURBABLE STATE

3.2.1 Dhyana states of the imperturbable

3.2.1.1 The suttas explain that once imperturbability has been reached, the mind is well established in the attainment of the formless spheres; such a mind may go on to cultivate various higher knowledges (*abhiññā*).²⁷ The 4 formless spheres themselves are in fact sometimes regarded as states of imperturbability.²⁸ However, the usage in the suttas is not uniform in this respect, as at times only some of the formless attainments come under this term. Thus, the **Sunakkhatta Sutta** (M 105) distinguishes between one with a keen interest in imperturbability as cultivating the following:

1. <u>Imperturbability</u> (the 4 th dhyana along with the sphere of infinity of spaces + the sphere of infinity of consciousness);	<i>aneñja, ākāsānañc'āyatana</i>	[§10 f]
	<i>viññānañc'āyatana</i>	
2. <u>the sphere of nothingness</u> ; and	<i>ākiñcaññ'āyatana</i>	[§12 f]
3. <u>the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception</u> .	<i>n'eva, saññā, nāsaññāyatana</i>	[§14 f]

3.2.1.2 Here imperturbability must be different from the two higher formless attainments and seems to encompass only the 4th dhyana and the two lower formless dhyanas.²⁹ In fact, the Sutta explicitly states that one who has a keen interest in **the sphere of nothingness** has gone beyond the fetter of *imperturbability*.³⁰

Yet, the **Pañca-t,taya Sutta** (M 102, SD 401.12), in agreement with its Tibetan parallel, qualifies *the sphere of nothingness* as 'imperturbable'.³¹ Evidently, there is some flexibility in the use of this qualifi-

²⁴,2, 2007:137-150; Dhammadhoti, "The Sixteen-mode Mindfulness of Breathing," *J of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka* 6, 2008:251-288.

²⁵ M 125/3:133,17-21 (SD 46.3) and MĀ 198 (T1.758a9-17), tr Anālayo, "The Chinese Version of the *Dantabhūmi-sutta*," BSR 23,1 2006:3-18 (p10).

²⁶ MĀ 198 (T1.758b29-c6).

²⁷ See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,89-99), SD 8.10; **Kevaddha S** (D 11,55-66), SD 1.7; SD 27.5a (5).

²⁸ A 4.190/2:184,29 states that when a monk attains the 4 formless spheres, he is said to "have reached imperturbability" (*āneñja-p,patto*; Be Ce Se *āneñja-p,patto*); cf Dhsk 27,12: *ānimjyāḥ saṃskārā(h) katame, āha: catvāry ārūpyāṇy ānimjyam ity ucyate*, with its Chinese parallel, T1537 (T26.506a23): "what are formations [related to the] imperturbable? They are said to be the 4 formless concentrations," 云何不動行, 謂四無色定; or Vbh 135,21: *tattha katamo āneñjābhisaṅkhāro? kusalā cetanā arūpāvacarā—ayam vuccati āneñjābhisaṅkhāro.*

²⁹ M:NB 1995, 2005:1313 n1000 comments that "since the highest two immaterial attainments are dealt with separately, it seems that in this sutta only the 4th jhana and the lower two immaterial attainments are intended as 'the imperturbable'."

³⁰ M 105/2:255,5: *ākiñcaññ'āyatanañdhimuttassa purisa,puggalassa ye āññāna, samyojane se bhinne; Be: āneñja, samyojane, Ce Se: āneñja, saññōjane.*

³¹ M 102/2:230,2: *ākiñcaññ'āyatanañ ... āññājam*, Be Ce *āneñjam*; Se *aneñjam*; with its Tib parallel in Skilling, *Mahāsūtras* 1 1994:318,3: *ci yang med pa'i skye mched bsgrubs te gnas pa ... mi g.yo ba.*

cation in the suttas.³² In whatever way imperturbability may have been gained through deeper levels of concentration, an arhat has given up all intentions regarding such imperturbability, in that these are still rooted in ignorance.³³

3.2.1.3 Soteriologically (in terms of awakening), the teaching of imperturbability refers to a preamble to awakening, and also characterizes the awakened mind, one that is *still* (undisturbed in any way). In practical terms—by way of the gradual training—the Sutta passages on imperturbability are an important presentation of the stages of **true renunciation** [§§10-17] that is the purpose of the Dharma-spirited life.

3.2.1.4 The stages of meditative attainments show how the focused mind frees itself in stages in this manner:

<u>renouncing (Sutta formula):</u>	<u>one “is intent on”</u>
§10 worldly material things (sense-pleasures);	the imperturbable;
§12 the imperturbable; ³⁴	the base of nothingness;
§14 the base of nothingness;	... neither-perception-nor-non-perception;
§16 ... neither-perception-nor-non-perception;	nirvana.

This is a rare occasion when we see the Buddha explains how an adept meditator masters **the formless dhyanas** in connection with awakening.

3.2.1.5 Let us now see how the above sequence [3.2.1.4] works in our ordinary meditation and on the whole range of the form dhyanas, the 4 formless attainments, and nirvana.

We remain unawakened, caught under the crushing wheel of samsaric suffering because we are still driven by the desire and attachment for “**worldly material things**,” that is, sense-based pleasures and objects, those “something” we imagine and instinctively run after. To free ourselves from samsaric suffering—the daily grind of seeking pleasure and getting pain—we begin by mastering our body, then our mind; and then that the very idea of “our” body and mind is itself empty and void, thus (**the bold print** signifies “the imperturbable”):

by renouncing (cumulative)

- (1) lust, hatred and violence towards the body, ours and others
- (2) all thoughts of the past or the future, seeing present impermanence
- (3) any desire for or attachment to sense-pleasures³⁵
- (4) initial application and sustained application (dhyana-factors)

we attain

- moral purity (the precepts);
- mental concentration;
- the 1st form dhyana;
- the 2nd form dhyana;

³² See also A 3.114/1:267,1, which covers only the first 3 formless attainments (as part of a description of the difference between the rebirth of a worldling and the rebirth of a noble disciple in the realms corresponding to these three). Be however has the title, **Āneñjā S** (discourse on imperturbability), and Ce Se, which do not give a title, refer to imperturbability in their respective colophons (*uddāna*).

³³ S 12.51/2:82,15: *avijjā'virāgā vijj'uppādā ... na ānejābhisañkhāram abhisañkharoti* (Be Ce āneñjābhisañkhārām). The Skt fragment parallel makes the same point but as a question: S 474 folio 9 V2: *avidyā viraktā bhavati vidyā utpannā ... apy-ānijyān-a[pi sa](ṁ)[s](kā)rān-abhi(sam)[sku](ryād-av)[i](dyā)pratyayā? no bhadārta* (Tripāṭhī, *Fünfundzwanzig Sūtras des Nidānasamāyukta*, Berlin, 1962:35): Tripāṭhī 1962:135 emends to *vidyotpannā, abhi-saṁskārān, avidyāpratyayān* and *bhadanta*). The parallel SĀ 292 (T2,83b14) instead speaks of giving up “intentions related to nothingness,” 無所有行.

³⁴ This refers to the 4th dhyana, or the base of the infinity of space, or the base of the infinity of consciousness [3.2.1.1].

³⁵ On dhyana-factors (*jhāna'ṅga*), see SD 8.4 (5+6).

(5) zest (dhyana-factor)	the 3 rd form dhyana;
(6) joy (dhyana-factor)	the 4 th form dhyana;
(7) all perceptions of form + non-attention to perception of diversity	the 1 st formless dhyana; ³⁶
(8) the idea that space is infinite, aware that “consciousness is infinite”	the 2 nd formless dhyana; ³⁷
(9) the idea that consciousness is infinite, aware that “there is nothing”	the 3 rd formless dhyana; ³⁸
(10) the base of nothingness (letting go of the idea of “nothing”)	the 4 th formless dhyana; ³⁹
(11) any idea of “something” that is self or other, or something out there	nirvana.

In simple terms, in our daily life as Buddhists we should be constantly cultivating *charity, love, wisdom and courage*. These qualities empower us to keep to the 5 precepts. With such a “cultivated body” (*bhāvita, kāya*), we are ready to cultivate a mind of lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity. Such divine abodes in turn conduce our mind to free itself from unwholesomeness and become focused, even to attain samadhi or concentration. When this comes naturally, we have a “cultivated mind” (*bhāvita, -citta*). This is the minimum we should practise daily to keep a **healthy mind in a healthy body**.

3.3 AN ARHAT'S IMPERTURBABILITY

3.3.1 Above all, **imperturbability** is also a quality of **an arhat**, and arhathood or full liberation includes the *highest form of imperturbability*. The “**perturbation**” left behind by one when fully liberated is any kind of conceiving based on the notion of an abiding self or substantial “I” at the core of experience.⁴⁰

This notion of “I” is what drives one with *greed, hatred, delusion and fear*. **Greed** seeks “something” out there or in someone else; **hatred** arises when one sees this something as being *other* than what one desires, which disappoints one; **delusion** sees or projects “something” where there is nothing, but one makes a big deal of it. **Fear** is the feeling that this *something* that one “has” or one *wants* to have may be nothing after all so that one feels at a loss.

With **imperturbability** one is able to avoid the extremes of “something” and of “nothing.” The mind that is not shaken by either “something” or “nothing” sees *everything* as mind-made. When we were children, we made toys and things out of nothing; we drew things which were neither here nor there. Yet there was joy and peace in all these things. Joys truly arise when we let go of the ideas of *something* and *nothing*.

The mind that is free is untouched by such “thing”-based ideas; joyful that we now know these things are but shadows of the things we see in the mind’s light. The liberated mind no longer fears the shadows; nor does the light shake the mind; it only brightens the heart so that the mind fully sees everything just as it is.⁴¹

³⁶ See **S 40.5**, SD 24.15 (2).

³⁷ See **S 40.6** (SD 24.16).

³⁸ See **S 40.7** (SD 24.17).

³⁹ See **S 40.8** (SD 24.18).

⁴⁰ **S 35.207**4:202,29 and its parallel **SĀ 1168** (T2.312a9) illustrate such conceiving with examples like: “I shall be,” “I shall not be,” “I shall be form,” “I shall be formless,” “I shall be percipient,” “I shall be non-percipient,” etc; cf also Vbh 390,22. **Sn 1041** notes that an awakened monk is freed from perturbations (*nibbuto bhikkhu, tassa no santi iñjītā*); cf **Sn 750**: “Whatever arises in suffering, all that is conditioned by perturbation; with the ceasing of perturbation, there is no arising of suffering,” *yām kiñci dukkham sambhoti, sabbam iñjita, paccayā; iñjītānam nirodhena, n' atthi dukkhassa sambhavo*; that is to say, all *dukkha* arises from perturbations. **Kvu 615,1** (§22.3) states that an arhat does not necessarily pass away while still in the attainment of imperturbability (of the concentrative type).

⁴¹ **S 4.11**1:109,23 tells us about Māra’s unsuccessful attempt to scare the Buddha, who calmly replies that a one fully awakened would not be perturbed even if Māra were to shake the whole mountain; S2 1:244,9: “neither is there any perturbability for the full liberation of buddhas,” *n'eva sammā, vimuttānam buddhānam atthi iñjītan*. The parallel **SĀ 1088** (T2.285b10) states that Māra is unable to stir even a single hair of a fully awakened buddha, 於佛等

3.3.2 The imperturbability reached with full awakening manifests itself also in regard to input of sense-experiences. An arhat's mind is not perturbed by any sense-experience, just as a column firmly sunk into the ground or a mountain rock will not be shaken by any wind from the 4 quarters.⁴² Nor does any experience of pleasure or pain perturb an arhat.⁴³

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Sunakkhatta Sutta

The Discourse to Sunakkhatta

M 105

[252] 1 Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the hall of the gabled house in the great wood at **Vesālī**.

Monks declaring final knowledge before the Buddha

2 Now at that time, **final knowledge**⁴⁴ was declared by numerous monks⁴⁵ before the Blessed One thus:

“We understand thus:

‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what is to be done, there is no more of this state of being.’”⁴⁶

解脫, 不能動一毛; another parallel, SĀ 27 (T2.382a17), does not speak of “perturbing,” but only of “making [the Buddha’s] hair stand on end”; cf tr in Bingenheimer, “Māra in the Chinese Samyuktāgamas, with a translation of the Māra Samyukta of the Bieyi za ahan jing (T100),” BSR 24,1 2007:46-74 (p61).

⁴² The imagery of a mountain occurs in **A 6.55**/3:378,7 = V 1:184,27; the metaphor of a column in **A 9.26**/4:404,21. The parallel to A 9.26, SĀ 499 (T2.131b16), uses both metaphors to show the freedom of an arhat’s mind from lust, anger and delusion. Among the parallels to A 6.55, the mountain unshaken by winds as a metaphor of mental imperturbability towards sense-experience occurs in MĀ 123 (T1.612c20); SĀ 254 (T2.63a22, also 63b6); T1428 (T22.-844c25; cf also 845a8); Gnoli, *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, Being the 17th and Last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*, pt 2, Rome, 1978:146,6; frag 142 SB 35 in Hoernle, *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature Found in Eastern Turkestan*, Oxford, 1916:169 f and frag 412 folio 21 V6 in Waldschmidt, “Ein Beitrag zur Überlieferung vom Sthavira Śroṇa Koṭivimśā,” in *Mélanges d’Indianisme à la Mémoire de Louis Renou*, Paris, 1968: 773-787 (p781).

⁴³ **U 3.3/27,18**, a verse that uses an imagery of a solid mountain unshaken by winds. The verse has a prose intro describing the Buddha and some monks dwelling in imperturbable concentration. Comy explains that this refers to concentration on the highest fruition (full liberation) (UA 185,18); cf also Mvy 554, where a list of concentrations mentions “the imperturbable” (*aniñjyo nāma samādhiḥ*). The parallel verse in T212 (T4.767c11) employs the imagery of a mountain to show aloofness from suffering.

⁴⁴ “Final knowledge,” *aññā*, an arhat’s awakened mind. Koṇḍañña attains final knowledge: **Dhamma,cakka Pavat-tana S** (S 56.11,20), SD 1.1.

⁴⁵ “By numerous monks,” *sambahulehi bhikkhūhi*.

⁴⁶ *Khīnā jāti, vusitarām brahma,cariyām, kataṁ karaṇyām, nāparām itthattāyā ti pajānāmā ti*. This is the arhat’s review knowledge pericope: Dāru-k,khandha S 1 (S 35/200,15.3) SD 28.5.

3 Sunakkhatta, the young Licchavī⁴⁷ heard thus:

“Final knowledge was declared by numerous monks before the Blessed One thus:

‘We understand thus:

Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what is to be done, there is no more of this state of being.”

Final knowledge: true declaration or one done out of arrogance

3.2 Then, Sunakkhatta, the young Licchavī, went to the Blessed One, saluted him, sat down at one side and said this to the Blessed One:

4 “I have heard, bhante, that some monks have declared final knowledge before the Blessed One. Did they do so rightly or are there certain monks here who declare final knowledge out of arrogance? ”

5 “Sunakkhatta, when those monks declared final knowledge in my presence, there were some monks who declared final knowledge rightly and there were some monks who declared final knowledge out of arrogance.⁴⁸

Therein, when monks declare final knowledge **rightly**, their declaration is *true*.

5.2 But when monks declare final knowledge **out of arrogance**, it (still) occurs to the Tathāgata: ‘I should teach them Dharma.’⁴⁹

Even so, Sunakkhatta, in this case, too, it occurs to the Tathāgata thus:

‘I should teach them Dharma.’

5.3 But some hollow men here formulate various questions, come to the Tathāgata, and ask them.⁵⁰ In that case, Sunakkhatta, [253] it occurs to the Tathāgata:

‘I should teach them Dharma,’ but then it occurs to him (to do) otherwise.”⁵¹ [1.1.2.2]

Sunakkhatta invites the Buddha to teach

6 “This is the time, Blessed One; this is the time, well-gone one, for the Blessed One to teach Dharma. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the monks will remember it.”

“Listen, then, Sunakkhatta, and attend closely to what I say.”

“Yes, bhante,” Sunakkhatta, the young Licchavī, replied to the Blessed One.

⁴⁷ **Sunakkhatta S** (M 105) was given prob just before he joined the sangha. Later on, he was dissatisfied with the Buddha for not showing him superhuman psychic miracles and not teaching him the “beginning of things.” So he left the training, and turned to other cult teachers, as related in **Pāthika S** (D 24): for details, SD 63.3 (2.2).

⁴⁸ *Adhimānenā*, ie, by way of self over-estimation. Comy: They declare this out of arrogance, considering themselves to have attained what they have not attained (MA 1:184,35, 4:51,12-14); also MA 1:185,31; UA 83,13. Cf A 3:430,4; NmA 1:80,10; V 3:91,7 (= *adhigata, mānenā vā*), A 10.55/5:102 ff.

⁴⁹ Comy: To clarify to them their level of attainment. (MA 4:52,1-3)

⁵⁰ *Atha ca pan’idh’ekacce mogha, purisā pañham abhisañkharitvā abhisañkharitvā tathāgatam upasañkamitvā pucchanti.* The noun *pañham* is sg, but the vb *pucchanti* is pl; I have rendered the sentence as plural.

⁵¹ *Dhammarām nesām deseyyan ti tassa pi hoti aññathattan ti.* Comy: Because they are motivated by desire, the Tathāgata teaches them Dharma, which inspires change in true practitioners (so that desire disappears) (MA 4:51 f). Apparently, in cases where the questioner is not interested in Dharma but in topics unrelated to the training or merely for debate, the Buddha would not teach; he would remain silent. On the noble silence (*ariya, tuñhī, bhāva*), see **The Buddha’s silence** (SD 44.1); SD 8.4 (5.1.3).

The 5 cords of sensual pleasure

The Blessed One said this:

7 “There are, Sunakkhatta, **the 5 cords of sensual-pleasure**.⁵²

What are the five?

- (1) **Visual forms** cognizable by the eye
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.⁵³
- (2) **Sounds** cognizable by the ear
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
- (3) **Smells** cognizable by the nose
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
- (4) **Tastes** cognizable by the tongue
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
- (5) **Touches** cognizable by the body
that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.

These, Sunakkhatta, are the 5 cords of sensual-pleasure.⁵⁴

One fully intent on worldly material things

8 “It is possible, Sunakkhatta, that some person here may be intent on worldly material things.⁵⁵

When a person is intent on worldly material things, only talk related to them interests him, and his thinking and pondering are caught in them, and he associates with that kind of person, and he finds satisfaction in that.

8.2 But when there is talk⁵⁶ about **the imperturbable**,⁵⁷ [§10]

he will neither listen to it nor give it ear nor exert his mind to understand it.

He does not associate with that kind of person, and he does not find satisfaction in that.

⁵² The 5 cords of sensual-pleasure (*pañca kāma,guṇa*), so called because they are the objects of the 5 physical senses to which we easily cling. They are both objects of desire as well as the qualities of desire, ie, that which brings pleasure to the senses, or desirable sense-experiences, as listed in the passage here. They are “cords” (*guṇa*) because they bind us to them, and they “multiply” (*guṇa*) themselves as a result, binding us ever tighter to them. *Kāma* is also desire personified, ie, the god of love, sometimes identified with Māra (Tha 3.88; BA 289). It is interesting that here no “mental pleasure” (*somanassa*) is listed. Such mental pleasures generally arise during meditation, esp during concentration; they are regarded as wholesome (non-clinging), and as such are not regarded as *guṇa*, insofar as they provide a lasting sense of satisfaction and inner peace that lead to letting-go. For refs: M 13,7(1) n, (SD 6.9), A 9.42,2 n (SD 33.2).

⁵³ *Cakkhu,viññeyyā rūpā itthā kantā manāpā piya,rūpā kāmūpasamhitā rājanīyā.*

⁵⁴ At **Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha S** (M 13,7/1:85), this whole passage on the 5 cords of sensual-pleasure defines “the gratification (*assāda*) with regards to sense-desires” (SD 6.9). See foll n.

⁵⁵ *Lokāmisādhimutto*. Comy: These are the 5 cords of sensual-pleasure [§7] of the worldly material things in the rounds of existences. (MA 4:52,4 f). Cf Nc sv *tad*; Pm 2:197.

⁵⁶ “When there is talk,” *kathāya kacchamānāya*, lit, “when talk is being talked,” from *kacchamāna*, pass pres part of *katheti* (to talk) [§§8.2, 9.4, 10.2, 12.2, 14.2, 16.2]: **Dukkathā S** (A 5.157/3:181-183) x10; MA 4:211,1. Cf *kacchā*, “fit to be spoken to” (A 1:197,19): CPD ⁵kaccha (mfn & n); DP *kaccha*⁷ (fpp).

⁵⁷ Be Ce Se āneñja (Sadd V); Ee Comy āññañja (Dhātum 78). Skt āñjya. This is a tt for meditative attainments in the 4th dhyana and the 4 formless attainments. Since the first 2 formless attainments—those of infinite space and of infinite consciousness—are considered part of the 4th dhyana, it seems that in this Sutta, “**the imperturbable**” refers only the 4th dhyana and the higher 2 formless attainments. For vv II CPD: āñña; DP: āneñja.

Parable of the village acquaintances

9 Suppose, Sunakkhatta, a man **had left his own village or town**⁵⁸ a long time ago, and he were to see another man who had only recently left that village or town.

He would ask that man whether the people of that village or town were safe, prosperous, and healthy, and that man would tell him whether the people of that village or town were *safe, prosperous, [254] and healthy.*⁵⁹

9.2 What do you think, Sunakkhatta?

Would that first man listen to him, give him ear, and exert his mind to understand?"

"Yes, bhante."

9.3 "Even so, Sunakkhatta,

it is possible that some person here may be intent on worldly material things.

When a person is intent on worldly material things, only talk related to them interests him, and his thinking and pondering are caught in them, and he associates with that kind of person, and he finds satisfaction in that.

9.4 *But when there is talk about the imperturbable,*

he will not listen to it or give it ear or exert his mind to understand it.

He does not associate with that kind of person, and he does not find satisfaction in that.

He should be understood as a person who is intent on worldly material things.

The imperturbable

10 It is possible, Sunakkhatta, that some person here may be intent on the imperturbable.

When a person is intent on the imperturbable, only talk concerning that interests him, and his thinking and pondering are in line with that, and he associates with that kind of person, and he finds satisfaction in that.

10.2 *But when there is talk about worldly material things,*

he will not listen to it or give it ear or exert his mind to understand it.

He does not associate with that kind of person, and he does not find satisfaction in that.

Parable of the yellowed leaf

11 Just as a **yellowed [withered] leaf** that has fallen from its stalk is incapable of becoming green again,⁶⁰

even so, Sunakkhatta, when a person is intent on **the imperturbable** he has shed the fetter of *worldly material things.*

He should be understood as a person detached from the fetter of *worldly material things*, one who is intent on the imperturbable.

⁵⁸ "Town," *nigama*, also "market-town." The hierarchy of settlements is usu *gāma* (village), (market) town (*nigama*) and city (*nagara*), and then country (*janapada*): V 3:184 = 4:93; D 1:7, 3:37; M 1:106, 3:58; S 5:419; A 1:159 f passim; 5:128; Nm 2:368.

⁵⁹ In this parable, the memories or news of the old village or town represents one's past conditions on one's present liking and disliking, greed and hatred, and also delusion.

⁶⁰ In this parable, **the yellowed leaf** represents one's understanding and vision of impermanence which frees one from being attached to worldly material things. At **Mv 1.78.3** (V 1:96), this parable is used for a breach of stealing at **Pār 3.2.3** (3:47), for a violation of the 2nd *pārājika* rule, the one against stealing.

The base of nothingness

12 It is possible, Sunakkhatta, that some person here may be intent on the base of nothingness. When a person is intent on the base of nothingness, only talk concerning that interests him, and his thinking and pondering are in line with that, and he associates with that kind of person, and he finds satisfaction in that. [255]

12.2 But when there is talk about the imperturbable,

he will neither listen to it nor give it ear, nor exert his mind to understand it.

He does not associate with that kind of person, and he does not find satisfaction in that.

Parable of the split stone slab

13 Just as a thick stone that has split in two cannot become whole again,⁶¹ Even so, Sunakkhatta, when a person is intent on the base of nothingness his fetter of the imperturbable has been split.

He should be understood as a person detached from the fetter of the *imperturbable*, one who is intent on the base of nothingness.

The base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception

14 It is possible, Sunakkhatta, that some person here may be intent on **the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception**. When a person is intent on the base of neither-perception-nor non-perception, *only talk concerning that interests him, and his thinking and pondering are in line with that, and he associates with that kind of person, and he finds satisfaction in that.*

14.2 But when there is talk about the base of nothingness is going on,

he will neither listen to it nor give it ear nor exert his mind to understand it.

He does not associate with that kind of person, and he does not find satisfaction in that.

Parable of delicious food

15 Suppose a person has eaten some delicious food and thrown it up.⁶² What do you think, Sunakkhatta? Could that man have any desire to eat that food again?"

"No, bhante. Why is that? Because that food is considered repulsive."

"Even so, Sunakkhatta, when a person is intent on the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, his fetter of the base of nothingness has been rejected.

He should be understood as a person detached from the fetter of the *base of nothingness*, one who is intent on the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

⁶¹ This parable represents one's subtle notion that there is or must be "something" behind everything in this world. There is nothing in what seems to be permanent or eternal anywhere; they are but mind-made notions. When this is understood, the myth of eternalism is destroyed forever. At **Mv 1.78.4** (V 1:97), this parable is used to illustrate a breach of killing.

⁶² Food may look inviting before it is consumed. Once ingested food is thrown up, it is simply disgusting and unhealthy for consumption, or even to look at. At this profoundly deep level of meditation, there is no more interest in whatever exists or does not exist; there is no mind to consider such things.

Nirvana

16 It is possible, Sunakkhatta, that some person here may be fully intent on (attaining) nirvana.⁶³ When a person is fully intent on nirvana, only talk concerning that interests him, and his thinking and pondering are in line with that, and he associates with that kind of person, and he finds satisfaction in that.

16.2 But when there is talk about the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, [256]

he will neither listen to it nor give it ear nor exert his mind to understand it.

He does not associate with that kind of person, and he does not find satisfaction in that.

Parable of the truncated palm tree

17 Just as a palm tree with its top cut off is incapable of growing again,⁶⁴ even so, Sunakkhatta, when a person is fully intent on nirvana, his fetter of the base of neither-perception-nor non-perception has been cut off—cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, done away with so that it is no longer subject to future arising.

17.2 He should be understood as a person

detached from the fetter of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception,

one who is fully intent on nirvana.

Craving and ignorance [§27]

18 It is possible, Sunakkhatta, that some monk here might think thus: ‘Craving has been called a dart [an arrow]⁶⁵ by the recluse [the Blessed One];⁶⁶ the toxic fluid [poison]⁶⁷ of ignorance is spread about by desire, lust, and ill will.

18.2 That dart of craving has been removed from me;

the toxic fluid of ignorance has been expelled.

I am one who is fully intent on nirvana.’

⁶³ “Rightly intent on nirvana,” *sammā,nibbānādhimutto* (§§16.1 x2, 17.1, 17.2, 18.2, 18.3, 21.2, 23.3 x2, 26.2 x3). *Sammā* is here an adverb modifying *adhimutta*. If we read *sammā* as an adj qualifying *nibbāna*, then, we are seeking the “right” nirvana, not some philosophical, academic or false notion. Comy is silent. On false notions of nirvana, see **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,72 + 93-99), SD 25.1 + SD 25.3 (93-99).

⁶⁴ This well known parable means that all defilements have been uprooted for an arhat so that no more karma arises to feed rebirth; one is thus freed and awakened.

⁶⁵ *Salla* is both “dart” and “arrow.” On the “dart of craving,” see S 214*/1:40. A brief parable of the dart surgeon, see (**Majjhima**) **Deva,daha S** (M 101,7/2:216), SD 18.4.

⁶⁶ Comy glosses “the recluse” (*samaṇa*) with “the recluse buddha” (*buddha,samana*, MA 4:55,1).

⁶⁷ “Toxic fluid of ignorance,” *avijjā,visa,dosa*. **Dosa** has 3 meanings: **1a.** (Skt *doṣa*) a fault, defect, deficiency; harm, a detrimental effect (M 5/1:31,36; A 4.183/2:172,26); **1b** (late). a bodily impurity, an excess or malignancy of one of the 3 humours of the body (bile, *pitta*; wind, *vāta*; phlegm, *semha*) (Miln 43,38); **2.** (Skt *dveṣa*) (m & mfn) ill will, hatred, evil intention, anger, hostility (D 1,2.23/1:25,5; M 15,3/1:96,4; S 67*/1:13,22; A 5.144/3:169,28). Further, 1b is late, and 2 overlaps with “ignorance” (*avijjā*) and is an unwholesome root (with *lobha*, greed, and *dosa*, delusion). Hence, we should read it as ²*dosa*, “fault.” [§27 n]

18.3 Since he conceives himself thus, though it is contrary to reality,⁶⁸ he might *pursue* those things that are unwholesome⁶⁹ for one fully intent on *nirvana*.

He might pursue the sight of unwholesome **forms** with the eye;
 he might pursue unwholesome **sounds** with the ear;
 he might pursue unwholesome **smells** with the nose;
 he might pursue unwholesome **tastes** with the tongue;
 he might pursue unwholesome **touches** with the body;
 he might pursue unwholesome **thoughts** with the mind.

When he pursues the sight of unwholesome **forms** with the eye;
 when he pursues unwholesome **sounds** with the ear;
 when he pursues unwholesome **smells** with the nose;
 when he pursues unwholesome **tastes** with the tongue;
 when he pursues unwholesome **touches** with the body;
 when he pursues unwholesome **thoughts** with the mind—**lust** would invade his mind.

With his mind invaded by lust, he would incur death or deadly suffering.

A man wounded with a poisoned dart (1)

19 Suppose, Sunakkhatta, a man were **wounded by a dart thickly smeared with poison**, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a physician who is a dart-surgeon.

The physician who is a dart-surgeon would cut around the wound opening⁷⁰ with a knife,

then he would probe for the dart with a probe, [257]

then he would pull out the dart and would expel the toxic fluid,⁷¹
leaving a trace of it behind.

Thinking that *no* trace was left behind,⁷² he would say:

'Good man, the dart has been pulled out from you;
 the toxic fluid has been expelled with no trace left behind,

⁶⁸ Be *evañmāni assa atathām samānam*. CPD suggests that *atathām samānam* may be an accusative absolute (cf Trenckner, Notes p67 n28; Ed *atthām*). This passage refers back to the problem “arrogance” (*adhimāna*) with which the Sutta begins.

⁶⁹ “Unwholesome,” *asappāya*, which overlaps with *akusala*. However, while *asappāya* tends to characterize a passive reaction and attachment to objects (physical and mental), *akusala* is a more active or volitional process. So long as we bear this subtle difference, the 2 usages of “unwholesome”—or “wholesome” for *sappāya*—will work well in their respective contexts. Words should help us properly engage with ideas, not define or delimit those ideas. Ideas should (help) define the words we use; these are the words that fill dictionaries and enrich our culture.

⁷⁰ “Wound opening,” *vaya, mukha*; it is hereafter rendered simply as “wound.”

⁷¹ “Toxic fluid,” *visa, dosa*,

⁷² Ee says that the physician tells the patient that the wound can still cause him harm: *alañ ca te antarāyāya* (M 105/2:257,4). The other eds say that the physician tells the patient that the wound will not be able to cause him harm: *analañ ca te antarāyāya* (M:Be 3:44,14; M:Ce 3:74,2), and *alañ ca te anantarāyāya* (M:Se 3:67,16). In Ee the patient then reflects that the wound will not harm him: *analañ ca me antarāyāya* (M 105/2:257,13), while in the other eds his reflection is the same as the indication made by the physician. According to SHT 4.500 folio 3V4, however, the physician told the patient that the wound can still cause harm, *alañ te-t(r)-ānta[r](ā)yāya*; cf also SHT 10.3274 V4. According to Skt (SHT 4.500 folio 3R3), the patient in his reflections knew that it was still capable of causing him harm: *niravaśeṣaḥ a[pa](nī)[t](o) viśadoṣa alāñ [me-tr]-ān(ta)rā[y](āyā)*; cf also SHT 10.3274R3. See M:NB 4th ed 2009:1314 n1003. Sadly, M:NB omits all refs to Se throughout. For occurrences of the arrow imagery in Jain texts, cf Caillat, *Les expiations dans le rituel ancien des religieux jaina*, Paris, 1965:107 f.

and it is incapable⁷³ of harming you.

Eat only suitable food; do not eat unsuitable food or else the wound may suppurate.

From time to time wash the wound and from time to time dress the wound,⁷⁴

so that pus and old blood do not cover [cake on] the wound.

Do not walk around in the wind and sun or else dust and dirt⁷⁵ may infect the wound.

Take care of your wound, good man, and see to it that the wound heals.'

20 The man would think:

'The dart has been pulled out from me;

the toxic fluid has been drained with no trace left behind, and it is incapable of harming me.'

He would eat unsuitable food, and the wound would suppurate.

He would neither wash the wound from time to time

nor would he dress the wound from time to time,

and pus and old blood would cover the wound.

He would walk around in the wind and sun, and dust and dirt would infect the wound.

He would not take care of his wound, nor would he see to it that the wound heals.

Then, both because he does what is unwholesome and

because a trace was left behind when the foul toxic fluid was expelled,

the wound would swell,⁷⁶ and with its swelling he would incur death or deadly suffering.

21 Even so, Sunakkhatta, it is possible that some monk here might think thus:

'Craving has been called a dart by the recluse;

the toxic fluid of **ignorance** is spread about by desire, lust, and ill will.

That dart of craving has been removed from me; [258]

the toxic fluid of ignorance has been expelled.

21.2 I am one who is fully intent upon **nirvana**.'

[§§18.3] Since he conceives himself thus, though it is contrary to reality,

he might pursue those things that are unwholesome⁷⁷ for one fully intent on nirvana.

He might pursue the sight of unwholesome forms with the eye;

he might pursue unwholesome sounds with the ear;

he might pursue unwholesome smells with the nose;

he might pursue unwholesome tastes with the tongue;

he might pursue unwholesome touches with the body;

he might pursue unwholesome thoughts with the mind.

When he pursues the sight of unwholesome forms with the eye;

when he pursues unwholesome sounds with the ear;

when he pursues unwholesome smells with the nose;

when he pursues unwholesome tastes with the tongue;

when he pursues unwholesome touches with the body;

⁷³ "Incapable," *analañ ca*, Be Ce Comy (MA 4:55,8), but Ee Se have *alañ ca*

⁷⁴ "Dress the wound," *vañamukham ālimpato*. "Anoint the wound opening," ie, clean, protect and treat with appropriate ointment or material to prevent infection and promote healing.

⁷⁵ *Rajo,sūka*. Comy glosses it with "dust, rice awn and so on" (*rajo ca vihi,suk'ādi ca sūkam*, MA 4:55,10). On *sūka*: S 5:10, 48; A 1:8.

⁷⁶ *Puthuttaram*. Comy explains by "greatness" (*mahanta,bhāvam*, MA 4:55,14).

⁷⁷ "Unwholesome," *asappāya*, which overlaps with *akusala*. [§18.3 n]

when he pursues unwholesome thoughts with the mind—**lust** would invade his mind.
With his mind invaded by lust, he would incur death or deadly suffering.

22 For this, Sunakkhatta, is death in the discipline of the noble ones when one abandons the training and reverts to the low life.

This is suffering, Sunakkhatta, that amounts to death, when one commits some defiling offence.⁷⁸

23 [§18] It is possible, Sunakkhatta, that some monk here might think thus:

‘**Craving** has been called a dart by the recluse;
the toxic fluid of **ignorance** is spread about by desire, lust, and ill will.

23.2 That dart of craving has been removed from me;

the toxic fluid of ignorance has been expelled.

I am one who is fully intent on **nirvana**.’

23.3 Being one who really is fully intent on nirvana,

he would not pursue those things that are unwholesome for one *fully intent on nirvana*.

He would *not* pursue

the sight of unwholesome

forms with the eye,

he would *not* pursue unwholesome

sounds with the ear;

he would *not* pursue unwholesome

smells with the nose;

he would *not* pursue unwholesome

tastes with the tongue;

he would *not* pursue unwholesome

touches with the body;

he would *not* pursue unwholesome

thoughts with the mind.

When he pursues not

the sight of unwholesome

forms with the eye;

when he pursues not unwholesome

sounds with the ear;

when he pursues not unwholesome

smells with the nose;

when he pursues not unwholesome

tastes with the tongue;

when he pursues not unwholesome

touches with the body;

when he pursues not unwholesome

thoughts with the mind—lust** would not invade his mind.**

With his mind not invaded by lust, he would not incur death or deadly suffering. [259]

The man wounded with a poisoned dart (2)

24 Suppose, Sunakkhatta, a man were wounded by a dart thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a physician, a dart surgeon.

The physician who is a dart surgeon would cut around the wound opening with a knife, then he would probe for the dart with a probe, then he would pull out the dart and would expel the toxic fluid leaving no trace of it behind.

Knowing that *no* trace was left behind, he would say:

‘Good man, the dart has been pulled out from you;

⁷⁸ “Defiling” *saṅkiliṭṭha*. Comy glosses “heavy” (MA 4:55,20), ie, with any of 2 kinds of offence, *pārājika* and *saṅghādi,sesa*. *Pārājika* is an offence entailing “defeat,” automatic expulsion from the sangha. An offence bordering on *pārājika* is either *saṅghādi,sesa*, which requires a formal meeting of the sangha and a period of rehabilitation, or the preliminary steps leading to *pārājika*. A learner (*sekha*) has significantly weakened craving and ignorance; hence, such a one would not commit any such offence. The “trace” (*sesa*) here is craving or ignorance. The parable refers to a monastic who wrongly thinks that craving and ignorance have been removed from him or her.

the toxic fluid has been expelled with no trace left behind, and
it is incapable of harming you.

Eat only suitable food; do not eat unsuitable food or else the wound may suppurate.

From time to time wash the wound and

from time to time dress the wound, so that pus and old blood do not cover the wound opening.

Do not walk around in the wind and sun

or else dust and dirt may infect the wound opening.

Take care of your wound, good man, and see to it that the wound heals.'

25 The man would think:

'The dart has been pulled out from me;

the toxic fluid has been expelled with no trace left behind, and

it is incapable of harming me.'

He would eat only suitable food, and the wound would not suppurate.

From time to time he would wash the wound and

from time to time he would dress the wound,

and pus and old blood would not cover the wound.

He would not walk around in the wind and sun,

and dust and dirt would not infect the wound opening.

He would take care of his wound and would see to it that the wound heals.

Then, both because he does what is suitable and because no trace was left behind

when the foul toxic fluid was expelled, the wound would heal,

and because it had healed and was covered with skin,

he would not incur death or deadly suffering.

26 Even so, Sunakkhatta, it is possible that some monk here might think thus:

'**Craving** has been called a dart by the recluse; [260]

the toxic fluid of **ignorance** is spread about by desire, lust, and ill will.

That dart of craving has been pulled out from me;

the toxic fluid of ignorance has been expelled.

I am one who is fully intent on **nirvana**.

26.2 [§23.2] *Being one who really is fully intent on nirvana,*

he would not pursue those things that are unwholesome for one fully intent on nirvana.

He would not pursue

the sight of unwholesome

forms with the eye,

he would not pursue unwholesome

sounds with the ear;

he would not pursue unwholesome

smells with the nose;

he would not pursue unwholesome

tastes with the tongue;

he would not pursue unwholesome

touches with the body;

he would not pursue unwholesome

thoughts with the mind.

When he pursues not the sight of unwholesome forms with the eye;

sounds with the ear;

smells with the nose;

tastes with the tongue;

touches with the body;

*thoughts with the mind—**lust** would not invade his mind.*

With his mind not invaded by lust, he would *not* incur death or deadly suffering.

Meaning of terms

27 Sunakkhatta, I have given this simile in order to convey a meaning. This is the meaning here:

Sunakkhatta, 'wound'	is a term for <u>the 6 internal bases</u> .	<i>vāra</i>
Sunakkhatta, 'toxic fluid' ⁷⁹	is a term for <u>ignorance</u> .	<i>visa,dosa</i> [§18]
Sunakkhatta, 'dart [arrow]'	is a term for <u>craving</u> .	<i>alla</i>
Sunakkhatta, 'probe'	is a term for <u>mindfulness</u> .	<i>esānī</i>
Sunakkhatta, 'knife'	is a term for <u>noble wisdom</u> .	<i>sattha</i>
Sunakkhatta, 'dart-removing surgeon'	is a term for the tathagata, arhat, <u>fully self-awakened one</u> .	<i>bhissaka salla,katta</i>

28 That monk, Sunakkhatta, is indeed one who practises **restraint in the 6 bases of contact**.⁸⁰

Having understood that **acquisition** is the root of suffering,⁸¹ being without acquisition,

liberated in the destruction of the acquisitions,

it is impossible that he would cause his body⁸² to be attached to

or arouse his mind towards any acquisition. [§§29.2, 30.2]

A bronze cup of poison

29 Suppose, Sunakkhatta, there were a **bronze goblet of drink** possessing a good colour, fragrance, and taste, but it was laced with poison.

Then, came along a man who wanted to live, not wishing to die, who loved pleasure and disliked pain.⁸³

What do you think, Sunakkhatta, would that man drink that cup of beverage, knowing:

'If I drink this I will suffer death or deadly suffering'?"

"No, bhante." [261]

29.2 "Even so, Sunakkhatta, that monk is one who practises **restraint in the 6 bases of contact**.

Having understood that acquisition is the root of suffering, being without acquisition,

liberated in the destruction of acquisitions,

⁷⁹ *Visa,dosa*. I have avoided using "humour" for *dosa* [DP 2:444: *dosa*¹ (2)] since it is not found in the suttas; cf *visa,dosa,pavāhano*, "the dispeller of toxic fluids" (Tha 768d), Tha:N: "the remover of the ill-effects of poison." The only occurrence of *dosa* in the canon is in the phrase *dosābhīsanno ... kaya*, "a disturbance [imbalance] of the humours in the (Buddha's) body" (V 1:206,26; DA 1:133; MA 3:45). *Dosa* as "humour(s)": Miln 4328; Vism 103,7. The 3 kinds of humours—bile (*pitta*), wind (*vāta*) and phlegm (*semha*)—without the term "humour," occurs in **Sīvaka S** (S 36,21,4-7), SD 5.6. On how the 3 humours are related to the 4 elements, see SD 60.1a (2.2.2).

⁸⁰ The 6 bases of contact (*cha phassāyatanā*) are the 6 internal bases, viz, eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

⁸¹ "Acquisition is the root of suffering," *upadhi dukkhassa mūlam*. Comy glosses **upadhi** as "acquisition of sensual pleasures" or "acquisition that is sensuality" (*kām'upadhi*, MA 4:56,5); ie, to see sense-experiences as "something" (*kiñcana*) and to collect sensual pleasures as objects. See **Laṭukikopama S** (M 66,17), SD 28.11; SD 28.11 (3.2); SD 53.7 (2.3.1).

⁸² "Cause his body to be attached to," *kāyam upasañharissati*. Comy glosses *upasañharissati* with *allīyapessati*, "cause to be stuck to" (caus of *allīyati*, MA 4:56,7). Comy: The arhat, freed in nirvana, (taking) the destruction of craving as object, would never divert his body or arouse his mind to indulge in the 5 cords of sensual-pleasure. (MA 4:56,6-10)

⁸³ As at M 46,19. Be Ce Se include *rasa,sampanno*, omitted in Ee.

*it is impossible that he would cause his body to be attached to
or arouse his mind towards any acquisition. [§28]*

A venomous snake

30 Suppose, Sunakkhatta, there were a **deadly venomous snake**.

Then, a man came who wanted to live, not to die, who wanted pleasure and disliked pain.

What do you think, Sunakkhatta, would that man

give that deadly venomous snake his hand or his thumb, knowing:

‘If I am bitten by it I will suffer death or deadly suffering?’

“No, bhante.”

30.2 “Even so, Sunakkhatta, that monk is one who practises **restraint in the 6 bases of contact**.

Having understood that acquisition is the root of suffering, being without acquisition,

liberated in the destruction of acquisitions,

it is impossible that he would cause his body to be attached to

or arouse his mind towards any acquisition. [§28]

30.3 The Blessed One said this.

Sunakkhatta, the young Licchavī, satisfied, rejoiced in the Blessed One’s word.

—evam—

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