

## SD 64.6

## Atta,hita Sutta 3

Tatiya Atta,hita Sutta

### The 3rd Discourse on Self-benefit

(Catukka) Atta,hita Sutta 1, the 1<sup>st</sup> (Fours) Discourse on Self-benefit

Ce Atta,hita Sutta, the Discourse on Self-benefit

A 4.98

Theme: 4 kinds of persons in terms of benefit (summary)

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### 1 Sutta summary and related suttas

#### 1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

##### 1.1.1 The 4 types of practitioners

**1.1.1.1 The (Catukka) Atta,hita Sutta 1** (A 4.98)—the 1<sup>st</sup> (Fours) Discourse on Self-benefit—gives a *short basic list* of the 4 types of practitioners, that is, those who practise:

- |                                     |                                                   |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| (1) for only one's own benefit,     | <i>atta,hitāya paṭipanno no para,hitāya</i>       |
| (2) for only the benefit of others, | <i>para,hitāya paṭipanno no atta,hitāya</i>       |
| (3) for the benefit of neither, and | <i>n'ev'atta,hitāya paṭipanno no para,hitāya</i>  |
| (4) for the benefit of both.        | <i>atta,hitāya c'eva paṭipanno para,hitāya ca</i> |

Three of these 4 kinds of practitioners—that is, all except for (3)—keep to the principle of **self-effort** or **self-reliance** [1.1.2]. In the case of (2), the self-reliance is only taught to others. In the case of (4), one does both, that is, practises self-effort and teaches others to do so.

**1.1.1.2 The Chavālāta Sutta** (A 4.95) asserts that the one who practises *neither for one's own good nor for the good of others* is like a funeral firebrand burning at both ends and is smeared with (cow)dung in the middle. The firebrand is useless as wood whether in the village or in the forest.

Better is the person who practises (only) for others' good but not for one's own good.

Even better in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, one who practises for (only) one's own good but not for others' good.

And the best of them is one who practises both for one's own good and for others' good.

(A 4.95/2:95 f), SD 64.5

##### 1.1.2 Self-reliance

**1.1.2.1** Underlying this typology of 4 kinds of practitioners is the Buddha's last instruction—as recorded in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16)—regarding **self-reliance** or self-effort (*atta,saraṇa*), thus:<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, Ānanda, dwell with yourself as an island, with yourself as refuge, with no other refuge—dwell with the Dharma as an island, with the Dharma as refuge, with no other refuge.

(D 16,2.26 = 26,1 + 27; S 22.4, 47.9, 47.13, 47.14)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The one true refuge, SD 3.1 (3.2); SD 27.3 (3.1.1).

“**Self as island**” (*atta, dīpa*), says the Commentary, means that one should “dwell, having made the self [oneself] like an island in the great ocean” (*mahā, samudda, gata, dīpaṃ viya attānaṃ dīpaṃ patitṭhi-taṃ katvā viharatha*, DA 2:548, SA 2:268, 3:204).<sup>3</sup> “Island” here does not imply isolation but rather a safe place above the waters of suffering, flooded with the currents of *greed, hatred, delusion and fear*, that is, *samsara* (the cycle of births and deaths).

When the *samsaric* waters have receded, we see only mountains with a backdrop of a clear blue sky and endless space. This is an imagery of **nirvana** and those who have attained nirvana, that is, the arhats.

**1.1.2.2** When the flood waters have receded, **the arhats** freely wander about for the benefit of the world. Thus in **the Sutta Nipāta Commentary**, *atta, dīpā* in the line “who wander about the world ...” (*ye attā, dīpā vicaranti loke*, Sn 501) of **the Māgha Sutta** (Sn 5.3) is explained as: “by their own virtue, having made the self an island, they wander as those influx-free, they say” (*attano guṇe eva attano dīpaṃ katvā vicarantā khīṇāsavā vuccanti*, SnA 2:416).

**The Dīgha Commentary** further explains “What is meant by ‘self’? It refers to the mundane and supramundane Dharma (*lokiya, lokuttaro dhammo*),<sup>4</sup> that is, the teaching that reaches out into the world, and that acts as a way for beings to cross over from the suffering world to an island and so on. Therefore, the Commentary says next, ‘with the Dharma as an island,’ etc.”<sup>5</sup> The hint of self-reliance is very clear here (unless one only reads the words but not between the lines).

Thus say the Commentaries:

“**‘With no other refuge’**—this is a statement rejecting any other refuge. For indeed, one is not a refuge for another, since one is not purified by the effort of another. And this was said:

‘Oneself is one's own master, who else could be the master?’<sup>6</sup> (Dh 160)

Thus it is said, “**with no other refuge.**”<sup>7</sup>

(DA 3:846; SA 2:268)

When the import is “**drawn out**” (*nīṭ'attha*) from the metaphor, we can and should see that the “island” is an image of safety or security (*khema*) above the 4 floods (sensual desires, existence, views and ignorance).<sup>8</sup> The floods here then refer to mental influxes (*āsava*); with mental cultivation, one rises above the floods. The Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta in fact explains the expression to “dwell with oneself as an island” as referring to the practice of **satipatthana**.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mahā, parinibbāna S (D 16,2.26/2:100), SD 9.1 = Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S (D 26,1/3:58 = 27/3:77), SD 36.10; Atta, dīpa S (S 22.43/3:42), SD 93.8; (Bhagavā) Gilāna S (S 47.9/5:154); (Saripaṭṭhāna) Cunda S (S 47.13/5:163); Ukka, celā S (S 47.14/5:164 f).

<sup>3</sup> Comy to Cakkavatti Sihanāda S (D 26,1/3:58) explains the meaning of *atta, dīpa* as “dwell, having established yourselves as an island, a shelter, a cave [refuge] for crossing over birth (*gati*)” (*attānaṃ dīpaṃ tāṇaṃ leṇaṃ gatiṃ parāyaṇaṃ patitṭhitaṃ katvā viharathā it attho*, DA 2:846).

<sup>4</sup> “Mundane states” (*lokiya, dhammā*) are all those states of consciousness and mental factors arising in an ordinary worldling or in a saint, but are not associated with the supramundane. “Supramundane states” (*lokuttara, dhammā*) are the 4 paths, the 4 fruitions and nirvana.

<sup>5</sup> DA 3:846, 10-12; SA 2:268, 3-5.

<sup>6</sup> For the full verse Dh 160, see SD 64.7 (1.2).

<sup>7</sup> *Anañña, saraṇā ti idaṃ añña, saraṇa, paṭikkhepa, vacanaṃ. Na hi añño aññassa saraṇaṃ hoti, aññassa hi vāyāmena aññassa asujjhanato. Vuttam pi c'etaṃ attā hi attano nātho, ko hi nātho paro siyā ti* [Dh 160]. *Ten'āha anañña, saraṇā ti* (DA 3:846, 13-18 = SA 2:268, 5-11).

<sup>8</sup> These are traditionally known as the 4 influxes (*āsava*): Cūḷa Gopālaka S (M 34,6) n SD 61.3. On the 4 floods (*ogha*), see Ogha Pañha S (S 38.11), SD 30.3(1.4) + (1.4.2).

<sup>9</sup> D 16,2.26, SD 9. This section is based on SD 9 (6.1.1.2).

**1.1.2.3** Essentially this refers to the 4 right efforts (*sammā vāyāma*), that is:

- |                                                                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (1) the effort to <b>prevent</b> the arising of unarisen evil unwholesome states; | <i>saṁvara padhāna</i>     |
| (2) the effort to <b>abandon</b> arisen evil unwholesome states;                  | <i>pahāna padhāna</i>      |
| (3) the effort to <b>cultivate</b> unarisen good wholesome states;                | <i>bhāvanā padhāna</i>     |
| (4) the effort to <b>guard</b> [maintain] the arisen good wholesome states.       | <i>anurakkhaṇa padhāna</i> |

The traditional explanation of these 4 right efforts comprises the following practices:<sup>10</sup>

- (1) **the effort to prevent**  
understanding the nature of the 5 mental hindrances [SD 32.1] and sense-restraint [SD 19.14];
- (2) **the effort to abandon**  
the practice of right intention [SD 10.16 (2)], perception of impermanence [SD 16.7] and of foulness [reflecting on unattractive aspects of a desirable object];
- (3) **the effort to cultivate**  
understanding and practising the 7 awakening factors [SD 10.15];
- (4) **the effort to guard**  
refining the 7 awakening factors; cultivating wise attention [SD 15.1 (5.6.2)] and spiritual friendship [SD 34.1].

**1.1.2.4** In modern terms, we can see “**being an island unto oneself**” (*atta, dīpa*) as “self-reliance” (*atta, vihāra*) in the sense of making self-effort, comprising the 4 right efforts [1.1.2.3]. For the beginner’s practice, it helps to simply take “self-effort” as cultivation of the body (*kāya, bhāvanā*),<sup>11</sup> of the mind (*citta, bhāvanā*), and of wisdom (*paññā, bhāvanā*).<sup>12</sup>

This triad of *kāya, bhāvanā*, *citta, bhāvanā* and *paññā, bhāvanā* is probably an early set remembered by Sāriputta who composed the teachings of **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33). In due course, however, the triad of **the 3 trainings** (*sikkha, tāya*) was used more often until it became better known than the *bhāvana* triad. Even the term, ***bhāvita, kāya*** (cultivated in body)<sup>13</sup> is quite common in the suttas.<sup>14</sup>

The phrase, “cultivated body,<sup>15</sup> cultivated moral conduct, cultivated mind, cultivated wisdom” is found in **the Loṇa, phala Sutta** (A 3.99),<sup>16</sup> where “cultivated body” (*bhāvita, kāya*) means “restrained in

<sup>10</sup> For details on these 4 right efforts, see SD 10.16 (6.3).

<sup>11</sup> D 33,1.10(48)/3:219. D:W renders *kāya, bhāvanā* as “(development) of emotions” taking *kāya* here as “emotional body” without any textual backing; D:RD qu Abhidhamma as explaining *kāya* as “the psycho-physiological mechanism of sense” (D:RD 3:213 n3) which does not apply here.

<sup>12</sup> Comy (DA 1003,18-24) gives an Abhidhamma scholastic treatment of these terms: “*kāya, bhāvanā* means the cultivation of the 5 sense-doors for the destruction of the influxes” (*bhāvanāsu khīṇ’āsavāssa pañca, dvārikā, kayo kāya, bhāvanā nāma*), which is too broad.

<sup>13</sup> This adj of *kāya, bhāvanā* should help us better understand the meaning of *kāya, bhāvanā*. **Culla Niddesa** explains that “The Blessed One is cultivated in body, in moral conduct, in mind, in wisdom” (*bhāvitā, kāyo bhāvitā, sīlo bhāvitā, citto bhāvitā, pañño ti bhagavā*, Nc:Be 26); here clearly *kāya* refers to the body, ie, bodily decorum in all aspects. In a similar context, NettA explains that “*Bhāvita, kāya* refers to the fulfilment of common moral conduct” (*bhāvita, kāyo ti ābhisamācārika, sīlassa pāripūriyā bhāvitakāyo*, NettA:Be 155). In certain contexts, *kāya* can mean “the 5-door body (of sense-faculties),” *pañca, dvārika, kāya* (SA 2:395).

<sup>14</sup> **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36) opens with a discussion about “body cultivation” (*kāya, bhāvanā*) and “mental cultivation” (*citta, bhāvanā*), where both adjectives *bhāvita, kāya* and *bhāvita, citta* are used. The Sutta uses *kāya, bhāvanā* is a broad sense of sense-restraint and self-mortification, eg at M 36,5 f (M 36/1:237-251), SD 49.4.

<sup>15</sup> “Uncultivated body,” *abhāvita, kāyo*. Comy to **Pinḍola Bhāra, dvāja S** (S 35.127/4:111) glosses it as *abhāvita, pañca, dvārika, kāyā*, “uncultivated in the body that is the 5 (sense-)doors,” ie, lacking in sense-restraint (SA 2:395).

<sup>16</sup> *Bhāvita, kayo hoti bhāvita, sīla bhāvita, citta bhāvita, pañño* (A 3.99,2/1:249,31 f), SD 3.5.

the senses,” which is then followed by the phrase, “cultivated (in) moral conduct.” From such usages, we can thus conclude that these terms depend on their contexts. Hence, when *kāya, bhāvanā* is mentioned by itself, especially when followed by *citta, bhāvanā* and *paññā, bhāvanā*, ***kāya, bhāvanā*** has a broader sense that of *sīla, bhāvanā* (the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 3 trainings), which encompasses both “moral conduct” (*sīla*) and “sense-restraint” (*indriya, saṁvara*).

### 1.1.3 Self-reliance as training in body, mind and wisdom

**1.1.3.1** Here we will look at the cultivation of the body (*kāya, bhāvanā*), of the mind (*citta, bhāvanā*) and of wisdom (*paññā, bhāvanā*) in a practical sense for beginners. **The cultivation of the body**, as we have noted, covers 2 aspects: sense-restraint and moral conduct.

**Sense-restraint** (*indriya, saṁvara*) refers to guarding the sense-doors, that is, the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. Whenever we experience a sense-object, we **grasp neither its sign (*nimitta*) nor its detail (*anuvyañjana*)**. Typically, **the sign** is the first feature that arouses our attention. Usually this is a look at some attractive feature of the person’s body, or it could be their voice, smell, touch or taste. We begin with a single feature and then examine with lust other details or **features** which we deem as attractive. These are then remembered and reflected upon.<sup>17</sup>

This important mental strategy is explained in **the (Arahatta) Mālunkya,putta Sutta** (S 35.95), thus:

|                                                                                                                                                         |                    |                    |                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Here, Mālunkya,putta, <sup>18</sup> in things <sup>19</sup> that are to be seen, heard, sensed, <sup>20</sup> known <sup>21</sup> by you: <sup>22</sup> |                    |                    |                                          |
| <b>in the seen</b>                                                                                                                                      | there will only be | <b>the seen;</b>   | <i>diṭṭhe diṭṭha.mattaṃ bhavissati</i>   |
| <b>in the heard</b>                                                                                                                                     | there will only be | <b>the heard;</b>  | <i>sute suta.mattaṃ bhavissati</i>       |
| <b>in the sensed</b>                                                                                                                                    | there will only be | <b>the sensed;</b> | <i>mute muta.mattaṃ bhavissati</i>       |
| <b>in the known</b>                                                                                                                                     | there will only be | <b>the known.</b>  | <i>viññāte viññāta.mattaṃ bhavissati</i> |
| (S 35.95,12/4:73), SD 5.9                                                                                                                               |                    |                    |                                          |

Psychologically, we can call this cognitive strategy as “**objective sensing**,” that is, we acknowledge merely an experience, such as “seeing,” without taking note of what is perceived as attractive or unattractive; the same applies to what we have heard or sensed—smelled, tasted or touched—or a thought arising in the mind, especially one that is negative. However, for deep meditation, we disregard even the whole-some thought or feeling in order to transcend to a higher stage, that is, by letting go of the present mind-object.

<sup>17</sup> *Sāmañña,phala S* (D 2,64), SD 8.10; *Nimitta & anuvyañjana*, SD 19.14.

<sup>18</sup> Reprised as “Bāhiya” at U 1.10, SD 33.7, where this passage recurs, and is called “Bāhiya’s teaching.”

<sup>19</sup> “In things that are to be seen, heard, sensed, known,” *diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññātabbesu dhammesu*.” See foll n.

<sup>20</sup> *Muta*, ie, what is tasted, smelt and touched. See prev n.

<sup>21</sup> On the seen, heard, sensed and known, see D 3,13 (5.2.2); also *Diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*, SD 53.5.

<sup>22</sup> This verse is the crux of the Sutta and *satipaṭṭhāna*. In sutta terms, such experiences are not to be seen as “This is mine” (*etam mama*) (which arises through craving, *taṇhā*), nor as “This I am” (*eso’ham asmi*) (due to conceit, *māna*), nor as “This is my self” (*eso me attā*) (due to wrong view, *diṭṭhi*) (*Anattā Lakkhaṇa S*, S 3:68), SD 1.2. In short, such experiences are not “beliefs” but direct experiences of reality. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door. As long as the experience of sensing is mindfully left at its sense-door and taken for what it really is, that is an experience of “ultimate reality” (*param’attha*). When it has reached the mind-door and has been evaluated, it can potentially become conventional (*paññatti*) reality, that brings one suffering due to greed, hatred or delusion. When such sense-experiences are mindfully left on the reality level, we would, in due course, see the 3 characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. See Mahasi Sayadaw, *A Discourse on Mālunkya-putta Sutta*, tr U Htin Fatt, Rangoon, 1981.

**1.1.3.2 The cultivation of the mind** (*citta, bhāvanā*) basically refers to mindfulness and awareness (*sati, sampajañña*). Mindfulness is the conscious mental directing and repeated directing of attention to the mind-object, say, the breath, and keeping the attention wholly there. *Sati* also translates as “memory”; this means that we make every effort not to forget the mind-object by staying with it and watching it.

When our mind is comfortably focused on the mind-object, like the breath, we then go on to note the in-breath and the out-breath, or watch the rise and fall of the breath. We literally go with the flow of the breath; there is only this “coming in and going out,” or “rising and falling”—this is called awareness (*sampajañña*). We keep on practising this mindfulness and awareness as a natural and smooth process.

In the case of breath meditation, the breath then noticeably slows down with peaceful spaces arising in between the in- and out-breaths. We cultivate this beautiful space by simply letting it go and staying with the radiant blissful peace. When we notice any hint of any thinking or distraction, we gently smile at it, and stay with that peaceful space. As we gently renounce everything else, we then become “one” with the breath, that is, we gain **concentration** (*samādhi*), even dhyana.

In a sense, we do not really know this is concentration; if we do know, it is just “knowing,” and we have to let that thought go. While deep in concentration, we are “helplessly” blissful in an expansive space, as if beyond time and space free of any sense of self. It’s like we are spread thin through the universe. As a neophyte, we probably only make sense of this concentration upon emerging from it, when we review our sitting. The sense of profound blissful calm and clear state can last for hours, even days.

**1.1.3.3 The cultivation of wisdom** (*paññā, bhāvanā*) only truly begins when are able to attain that moment or duration of a profoundly blissful space of calm and clarity, especially in dhyana (*jhāna*).<sup>23</sup> Upon emerging from this dhyanic calm and clarity, we simply joyfully remember that amazing mental liberation, even if only a temporary one. It is important to be fully familiar with this profound state of calm and clarity so that we will be able to attain it again and for a longer duration, even to refine and free it so that we move higher up the path of mental progress.<sup>24</sup>

Once we have joyfully reviewed this state of calm and clarity, we direct the mind to see directly into true reality. It is strategic to start with seeing into impermanence, that is, reflecting on something *impermanent* that we are familiar with, such as the flow of the breath (the rise-and-fall, or the in-and-out). In an important sense, this **insight wisdom** is a conscious concentration on impermanence; yet there is no intellect or thinking involved, it is simply *seeing and feeling* the joy of wisdom as it arises.

There may be a moment of insight into impermanence that is so joyful and or profound that we are *blissfully* lost in deep silence and have no need of any external sense stimulation. It is for this reason that meditators spend some time “winding down” before returning to the samsaric world. A profound experience of insight into impermanence (or suffering or nonself) may leave us initially unable to say anything about it, except perhaps merely alluding to it as being “beautiful,” “amazing,” “rapturous,” and so on.

One of the great benefits of such insight is that one is often able to read the suttas or hear the teachings with such clarity and profundity. The suttas, as it were, speak for themselves. If we are blessed with a good command of language and creative imagination and writing, we may be able to explain the teachings more clearly, more beautifully and engagingly. Of course, whether readers fully understand

<sup>23</sup> See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

<sup>24</sup> On the “**letting go**” pericope in breath meditation, see **M 118**, 27 (SD 7.13). On “**something more to do**” (*uttarim karaṇīyaṃ*): (**Ānanda**) **Subha S** (D 10, 1.31 + passim), SD 40a.13; **Assa, pura S** (M 39, 3.5/1:271), SD 10.13; (**Gaha-pati**) **Potaliya S** (M 54, 14), SD 43.8; **Sevitabbāsevitabba S** (M 114), SD 39.8 (1.1.1.8); SD 51.17 (3.4.2.5). On **progressively higher distinction** (*uḷāraṃ pubbenāparaṃ viśesaṃ*): **Dhamma, cetiya S** (M 89, 12+18), SD 64.10; **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118, 2, 2+6.2), SD 7.13; **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10, 3), SD 24.2.

that clarity, beauty or profundity depends on their meditative experience, too. This joy and clarity arise from being less attached to memories and being freed from any present distraction of the senses and thought. It is an experience of the joy of renunciation.

## 1.2 RELATED SUTTAS

In the next 4 chapters—**SD 64.6-9**—we will look at each of **these 4 suttas** in their natural sequence, that is, in the ascending order of (1) the basic teachings, (2) the practice of moral virtue, (3) the overcoming of the 3 unwholesome roots, and (4) the application of wisdom in the practice. **SD 64.5** has also been included for the sake of completion. (Note the rearrangement of the sutta by their numbers.)

|                                                 |               |                                               |         |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------|
| <b>(Catukka) Atta,hita Sutta 1</b>              | A 4.98/2:97 f | basic list of 4 types of persons;             | SD 64.6 |
| <b>(Catukka) Atta,hita Sutta 2<sup>25</sup></b> | A 4.99/2:98 f | practice of the 5 precepts;                   | SD 64.7 |
| <b>(Catukka) Atta,hita Sutta 3</b>              | A 4.96/2:95 f | restraint towards the 3 unwholesome roots;    | SD 64.8 |
| <b>(Catukka) Atta,hita Sutta 4</b>              | A 4.97/2:96 f | learning and teaching the Dharma.             | SD 64.9 |
| <b>Chavālāta Sutta</b>                          | A 4.95/2:95 f | who benefits both self and others is foremost | SD 64.5 |

## 2 Practice and priorities

### 2.1 THE 3 PRIORITIES<sup>26</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Self as moral priority

**2.1.1.1** Rooted in the teaching of self-reliance [1.1.2 f] is a set of guidelines for moral action, that is, **the 3 priorities** (*ādhīpateyya*), by which we examine the moral quality of an act from 3 different viewpoints: those of *oneself*, of *others*, and of *Dharma* (true reality).

In the 1<sup>st</sup> priority, that is, **self-priority** (*attādhīpateyya*), we examine whether our impending act would result in self-blame or remorse. This seems to suggest the concept of “conscience,” but such a concept is alien to early Buddhism.<sup>27</sup> [2.1.1.3]

Thus, in this first guideline, we take ourselves as the priority. [2.1.2.2]

**2.1.1.2** A characteristic feature of God-religions is some pious device for crowd control, for regulating the congregation and for domesticating the flock. Among the tools of herding and shepherding are the notions of power, glory, “sin” and guilt. Effectively, these are invoking *obedience* and *submission* on the child level, even the animal level (considering the theistic imageries of the shepherd and his flock).

Since these notions are not naturally found in normal healthy human behaviour and emotions, or even needed for a wholesome human relationship, the very ideas of *guilt and sin* are against the natural order of things and wholesome mental health. This means that these ideas or feelings are very likely to be found in the negative emotions that are at the roots of human suffering, self-incurred and imposed onto others. Because of the power-centred ideologies of theistic religions, the human and historical destruction done is, as a rule, on a massive and pernicious scale. [2.1.4]

**2.1.1.3** All that is real (or false) lies in what we perceive or “sense” by way of what we *see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think*. If God or the Flying Spaghetti Monster does exist, it or He can only do so as

<sup>25</sup> Also called **Atta,hita Sikkhāpada S.**

<sup>26</sup> Based on SD 27.3 (2.1).

<sup>27</sup> Loosely used, the word “conscience” may apply here, but technically it is either a theistic concept (related to the God-idea) or psychological (a learned response), both of which are alien to early Buddhism.

one of these sense-experiences or the result of such experiences. Even then, we are the ones who perceive, create or define such an idea. At best we can surmise: There is *no* God; there is only the idea.

Since God is imagined and invisible, religious leaders need to invent, define and propagate Him. So long as followers believe such an idea, they fall under the full control of theologians, the creators of God in their own image. Then we come to the most embarrassing part of the theistic sales pitch: believers are rewarded with Heaven, and unbelievers go to Hell. Nowadays, we almost never hear of any preacher mentioning Hell. Apparently, no preacher today is likely to believe in the kind of Hell that was preached when Christianity was at its apex in Europe.

**2.1.1.4** Understandably, God-based faith needs us to blindly accept the God-idea, to close our eyes in order to see God. Godly love must be enforced with fear so that the believer finds succour in prayer, hope and faith. Any disobedience or unbelief in the tenets of God-belief entails **guilt**, for which the guilty party must seek forgiveness from “God,” that is, from His earthly priests.

**Religious guilt** is a deep-seated feeling of remorse, shame, or fear of divine punishment that arises in the belief that one has violated moral, religious or holy tenets. Such a guilt-ridden person often feels a sense of being “never good enough” or “unworthy,” and which can manifest as chronic anxiety or, in some cases, as a mechanism for repentance and self-reflection.

While guilt may drive believers towards some moral accountability and growth (defined in theological terms), it often becomes unhealthy or “**toxic**” when it turns into constant self-loathing, fear of divine abandonment, or a tool for manipulation, which in fact often happens in faith-centred groups.

God-centred **love**, for some, is merely a reminder that we are but God’s creatures, and we should remember that we have always “fallen short of His glory.” We do not deserve God’s love, but we are given it anyway; and we should be grateful! Hence, we will never be His equal, and unbelievers are even more unequal. God-centred love, then, is just that: it centres on authority—some kind of parental authority that priests wield over their flock; such unequal relationships often lead to protracted and tragic child abuse.<sup>28</sup>

Common occurrences of **religious guilt** are frequently associated with concepts like scrupulosity (religious OCD), the intense, lasting guilt often termed “Catholic guilt” (or simply “God-guilt”), widely recognized as a term describing an often intense, persistent, and sometimes excessive feeling of moral remorse or, in extreme cases, shame, frequently associated with being raised in the Catholic faith.

**2.1.1.5** God-guilt stems from a deeply ingrained sense of sin, responsibility, and the fear of divine judgment, often continuing even after a person has left the faith. This guilt can and must be managed through unconditional love (*mettā*) beginning with oneself, including self-forgiveness. If this seems difficult, one should then calm oneself and clear the mind with **breath meditation**. On emerging from some joyful moments of inner stillness, one then goes on to cultivate lovingkindness towards oneself. This should be done regularly and habitually for proper self-healing.

For a long-term Buddhist healing, one should focus on the early teachings on self-reliance and **the 4 divine abodes**, that is, lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and peace towards oneself.<sup>29</sup>

“I unconditionally accept myself just as I am.”

“I fully forgive myself for what I was. The past is gone; even the present changes.”

“I rejoice in feeling this moment of self-acceptance and self-forgiveness.”

<sup>28</sup> On **child molestation by the Church**: SD 39.1 (7.3.4.2, 7.3.4.4); SD 40a.8 (5.5.4); SD 60.1e (13.13.2 (9) (iii)); SD 64.17 (10).

<sup>29</sup> The foll 4 sentences are suggestions for self-therapy should one feel a sense of guilt. These are the 4 divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), which are the foundations of personal well-being and spirituality. They may be more simply called “love, ruth, joy and peace.” “Ruth” is a lovely Early Middle English word for “compassion,” first recorded in c1175; in Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* 2.349: “If therewith-al in you there is no routhe, Than is it harm ye liven.” (OED)

“I feel the peace that I am this moment. I am at peace and will always be at peace.”

In a more serious case, one may need to consult an experienced therapist.

**2.1.1.6** We can usefully adopt a Dharma-spirited understanding of **conscience**, literally as *saññā*, which is “perception,” in the sense that we *perceive* or mindfully recall how the act or intention behind the act turned out the last time.

- When we rightly reflect or recall how such an act or intention brought wholesome results, we act on it at the right time; that is, we act, speak or think of it.
- When we rightly reflect or recall how such an act or intention brought unwholesome results, we do not act on it; that is, we neither act, speak nor think of it.
- When we are uncertain of the morality of an act, we at least should give it some time before we actually act on it.

## 2.1.2 “The world” as priority

**2.1.2.1** The 2<sup>nd</sup> moral priority is that one given to “**the world**” (*lok’ādhipeyya*), that is, an other-priority, which requires us to examine whether our act will be approved or disapproved by the wise (*viññū*) and will benefit others in general. Here, we would take the wisdom of those in their special fields, and who are morally upright, as our yardstick. We may regard this guideline as “public opinion” and “common good.” This is not to say that the opinion of the crowd or the majority is right; rather, it refers to the opinion of the informed public, that is, those *other* than ourselves, who are well informed on the matter, or educated in it, and are themselves morally upright—that is, the “wise” (*viññū*).

This is the guideline we should adopt when we deal with public issues or when confronted by others’ opinions. Hence, what is morally acceptable is referred to as being “praised by the wise” (*viññū-p, pasatṭha*) and, conversely, what is morally reprehensible is said to be “censured by the wise” (*viññū, garahita*).<sup>30</sup>

**2.1.2.2** Instead of “conscience” (which seems to dominate theistic systems), early Buddhism teaches **moral shame** (*hiri*). Although this Buddhist quality of “shame” was imbibed very early in the various countries of Asia, over time, as those societies had to contend with mainstream traditions and dominant local religions, the notion of shame devolved into an emotion quite alien to the early Buddhist quality of *hiri*.<sup>31</sup>

Among the traditional Chinese (including Buddhists), for example, the notion of “**shame**” has to do more with one’s “**face**” (面子 *miànzi*),<sup>32</sup> rooted in Confucianist concepts of status, and how honour or disgrace (“shame”) can affect it. Hence, one would not accept a gift or help from another simply because one does not want to “lose face” when the giver may be perceived as being richer or in any way better than one is, or simply one does not want to feel indebted to the other. The crowded Chinese society and the modern materialist quest for wealth and power only sharpen the perceived negative effects of the worldly and status-conscious.

In traditional Thai society, *hiri* has evolved into the subtle quality of being เคร่งใจ **kreng jai**, “having a fearful heart” or เห็นใจ **hen jai**, “having a seeing heart”—which refers to a “sense of being considerate.”

<sup>30</sup> Containing both *viññū-p, pasatṭha* and *viññū, garahita*: **Aggañña S** (D 27.5/3:82 f), **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65/1:190 ×2, 191×3, 193, 196×3), **Bhaddiya S** (A 4.194/2:190, 191, 193×2). Containing only *viññū-p, pasatṭha*: **Pañca, vera, bhaya S** (S 12.41/2:70), **Sakka S** (S 40.10/4:272, 279), **Cakka, vatti, rāja S** (S 55.1/5:343); **Puññābhisanda S 2** (A 4.52-/2:57), **Gihi S** (A 5.179/3:213), **Vera S 1** (A 9.27/4:407), **Vera S 2** (A 9.408/4:407).

<sup>31</sup> For further reading, see SD 2.5 Moral shame and moral fear.

<sup>32</sup> On losing face, saving face, see SD 28.9a (3.4).

This is a core Thai cultural concept which refers to a feeling of reluctance to impose, inconvenience, or embarrass others, with a mix of deference and consideration. *Kreng jai* prioritizes group harmony and saving face (of self and others) over direct needs. It involves hesitating to ask favors, avoiding burdening others, and even holding back true feelings to maintain smooth relationships, often leading to polite refusals or indirect communication.

### **2.1.3 Dharma as priority**

**2.1.3.1** The 3<sup>rd</sup> moral guideline with which to examine our acts is the most significant—that of taking **the Dharma as priority** (*dharmā'ādhīpateyya*), that is, whether our premeditated action conforms to the Dharma as the true teaching and true reality. This sort of examination is useful as a moral check so that we refrain from what is unwholesome, and to act on what is wholesome. This is the conduct that keeps us truly *human* and *humane* in the best sense of the words, that of gaining wisdom for ourselves and showing others compassion.

**2.1.3.2** Whether we act inspired by a desire for self-betterment (self-priority) or out of an altruistic motive for the happiness of others (world-priority), we need to be certain that our intention is rooted in an understanding of true reality; that is, we are acting out of Dharma-priority (*dharmā'ādhīpateyya*). This spiritual understanding refers to an appreciation of impermanence and suffering, and, if possible, an understanding of nonself, too.

We should act with *love*, *ruth*, *joy* and *peace* to others because we all have a limited lifespan and what we have and whatever we can have are limited in time. Thus, our greatest gift to others on a most basic level is to present to them whatever will give them useful time for *living, learning and growing spiritually*—this is the gift of **love**; that is, accepting others just as they are. With this love, we then work to give them every opportunity to grow spiritually by learning from their own deeds and being—this is our gift of **ruth** or compassion.

We rejoice at the slightest hint when others whom we care about show signs of learning truth and reality in their own lives and in the world—this is our gift of **joy** in them. Everyone grows or fails, helped or hindered by what they know; only their own understanding of this can really help them grow spiritually. We only can give them **the peace** to grow in wisdom.

### **2.1.4 Religious domination and holy wars**

**2.1.4.1 Religious emotions** often fuel motives or are fed by motives like political dominance, territorial expansion and colonialism, and economic control. Religious wars have historically been conflicts driven or justified by religious differences, often involving struggles for power, territory, religion, and the thirst for *God, glory and gold*. These wars notoriously killed millions and disrupted society for ages.

When a God-centred religion becomes organized or gains a large following and power, it invariably acts as a primary ideological, moral, and financial driver for colonialism and dominance. Religious beliefs, such as in the “One True God,” provide a “divine” justification for territorial expansion, the enslavement and exploitation of indigenous populations, genocide and cultural erasure. Missionaries, supported by colonial powers, worked to convert indigenous peoples, championing colonial conquest as a mission to bring “civilization” and Christianity to “savage” or “heathen” (non-Christian) lands.

#### 2.1.4.2 The most common ways in which religion fueled **colonialism** included:

- **justification for conquest.** During the Age of Discovery, Catholic and Protestant powers (Spain, Portugal, France, Britain) upheld Christianity and its spread as a holy mandate, authorizing exploration and domination over the “New World,” Asia and Africa.<sup>33</sup>
- **“civilizing mission.”** Colonizers used the pretext of Christianizing indigenous populations to justify the destruction of native cultures, religions, and social structures, and to assimilate them in Christian “culture.”
- **cultural imperialism.** Missionary work was often closely linked to colonial administrations, with education and religion used to force European cultural norms, such as in the case of taking children from families to Christianize them. Mission schools continue today to champion a “good education” in an evangelizing atmosphere in previous colonies.
- **ideological superiority.** A prevailing, ethnocentric viewpoint in the Western mindset held that non-Christian religions were inferior and unsophisticated, thus justifying the “white man's burden” to convert them.
- **divide-and-rule.** In regions like South Asia and the Middle East, colonial powers manipulated religious identities and institutionalized divisions to maintain control, leading to long-term sectarian conflicts.
- **control of resources.** Christian missions often project a magnanimous front of loving, caring and accepting others, especially the downtrodden. However, in affluent societies, often the targets of conversion are the children and members of the educated and the affluent and their families. While in the colonial past, the strategy was to control the country's resources, the modern strategy is to convert and influence society's leading members and its politicians.
- **Christianity projected as a promoting wealth.** In Westernized countries of Asia, western technology and business are often used in evangelizing the local society. In China and other Asian countries, for example, being Christian is often associated with being wealthy and modern (that is Westernized). Christmas is today the most celebrated of festivals in Singapore as well as urban Thailand (though it has taken a mostly secular and commercially celebrative slant).

#### 2.1.4.3 The major and significant conflicts rooted in religion are as follows:<sup>34</sup>

- **Reconquista (711–1492):** The centuries-long campaign by Northern Christian powers to reclaim Al-Andalus (southern half of Spain) from Muslim Moors.
- **The Crusades (1095–1272):** A series of Papacy-sanctioned military expeditions to secure control of the Holy Land from Muslim rule, encouraged by promises of religious rewards. The main campaigns were:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Crusade (1095–99): Crusader losses unknown; Seljuk battle deaths, more than 80,000.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Crusade (1147–49): Armies, Crusaders 50,000; Muslims unknown. Very heavy Crusader losses.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Crusade (1189–92): Numbers unknown, but both sides suffered heavy losses.
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Crusade (1202–04): Numbers unknown, but both sides suffered heavy losses.
  - 5<sup>th</sup> Crusade (1217–21): Numbers unknown, but both sides took many prisoners.
  - 6<sup>th</sup> Crusade (1228–29): Unknown.
  - 7<sup>th</sup> Crusade (1248–54): Armies, 15,000+ Crusaders; Muslim numbers unknown. Casualties unknown.
  - 8<sup>th</sup> Crusade (1270): Armies and casualties unknown.
  - 9<sup>th</sup> Crusade (1271–72): Armies and casualties unknown.
 Overall deaths: about 2–6 million deaths, from the then European population of 60–70 million.

<sup>33</sup> On the beginnings of Western colonialism and religious domination, see SD 60.1f (5.5.1).

<sup>34</sup> For refs on [European wars of religion](#). 30 Jan 2026. For details, see Philips & Axelrod, *Encyclopedia of Wars*, 2004; C J Nolan, *The Age of Wars of Religion, 1000–1650*, Greenwood Press, 2006; G Martel, *The Encyclopedia of War*, Blackwell, 2011.

- **Schmalkaldic War (1546-1547):** Fought within the Holy Roman Empire between Lutheran princes and the Catholic forces of Charles V. At the culminating Battle of Mühlberg, the Schmalkaldic League fielded 9,000 men against 13,500 Papal and imperial troops. Schmalkaldic League casualties were very heavy; papal and imperial forces lost only 50 men.
- **Hussite Wars (1419-1436):** Conflicts in Bohemia<sup>35</sup> between reformers (Hussites) and loyalists to the Catholic Church. Armies: Hussites, 25,000; King Sigismund's forces, 50,000. Casualties: Hussite losses at Český-Brod, 18,000 killed; Sigismund's losses often ran to 30 and 50 percent of his forces, well into the tens of thousands.
- **French Wars of Religion (1562-1598):** A series of 8 brutal civil conflicts in France between Catholics and Protestants (Huguenots), featuring events like the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Casualties 1562-63: Military losses were about 4,000 killed on each side; Huguenot civilian losses were about 3,000 killed. 1568-70: Catholics, 1,000 killed or wounded. Huguenots, 8,400 killed or wounded. Overall deaths: 2-4 million deaths from violence, famine, or disease.
- **Eighty Years' War (1566-1648),** Dutch War of Independence: The Dutch Revolt against Spanish Habsburg rule, driven partly by Catholic persecution of Protestants. Armies: Spain, 86,000; Netherlands, 30,000. Casualties: Spain, 70,000; the Netherlands, 30,000.
- **Thirty Years' War (1618-1648):** A devastating conflict between Protestants and Catholics affecting nearly all of Europe, which eventually shifted towards political power struggles. The Imperial army commanded by Wallenstein in North Germany (1628-29) probably approached 200,000 men; Gustavus Adolphus probably directed the operations of 120,000 men (1631-32); France maintained some 130,000 men, at least on paper (1635-36). Total number of men in battle, however, rarely exceeded 20,000 per side and normally numbered 10,000 or less—roughly half of them cavalry. Casualties: Perhaps 500,000 soldiers took part in the war, of whom perhaps 2/3 died in service; in addition, civilian losses amounted to perhaps 4-8 million—20 percent of the total population of the Empire; some German regions lost 60% of their population.
- **Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864):** A massive civil war in Southern China between the Qing dynasty and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, a syncretic form of Christianity whose leaders wanted to conquer China. It is said to be the bloodiest civil war in human history.<sup>36</sup> Deaths: 20-70 million deaths.
- **Sudanese Civil War (2023-present):** Ongoing “war of visions” between a state-driven Islamic identity and a pluralistic, African-rooted one, where successive governments imposed an Arab-Islamic framework, fueling conflict against a predominantly Christian and animist South. As of 5 February 2025 the conflict caused 12 million people to be forcibly displaced, 9 million internally and 3.5 million have fled the country as refugees, making it one of the largest displacement crises in recent history. Beginning 26 October 2025, a genocidal massacre occurred in the city of El Fasher (N Darfur), with 60,000 dead. Other estimates, using satellite information, have been as high as 150,000 dead making this the biggest massacre in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **2.1.5 Secularization of religion**

**2.1.5.1** The history lesson regarding religion is clear. **Religion** is often used by the powerful or crafty for their own agenda, often to coerce or control others. Even a single religious cult Guru can do immeasurable harm to others; imagine when this exploitation and control is magnified by a well organized large-scale system or tradition.

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<sup>35</sup> The westernmost, largest historical region of the Czech Republic, comprising roughly 2/3 of the country and bordered by Germany, Poland, Austria, and the Czech region of Moravia. Historically a powerful kingdom within the Holy Roman Empire and later the Habsburg Monarchy, with its capital, Prague.

<sup>36</sup> E J Perry, “When peasants speak: Sources for the study of Chinese rebellions,” *Modern China* 6,1 1980:72-85.

**Secularization** separates religious leaders and institutions from the state, preventing majority dominance, fostering critical thinking, and allowing diverse, non-religious, or alternative belief systems to co-exist without discrimination. Conversely, religion enjoying such freedom should be wholesome and not cause or fuel any social problems. In short, religion should be secularized, that is, kept out of politics or wielding any kind of power over others, whether directly or indirectly. This rejection of religion would also significantly protect democratic governance, ensure equality, and foster individual freedom, especially in pluralistic societies.

**2.1.5.2** The most potent way of secularizing religion—to remove its sting—is to see and live **the sacred** in a secular, non-religious way. No matter how religion or the sacred is defined we should understand that it has been defined by us, humans, not by some imaginary divine presence in our midst. It is simply a human way of putting a handle on something unknown, perhaps wished or hoped for, or feared and revered—but *human* all the same.

A classical definition of religion or the sacred (where they overlap) is that given by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* as follows:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to **sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden**—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

(Durkheim tr 1912:47, tr 1995:44)<sup>37</sup>

A similar definition of religion is that: “The sacred includes phenomena which are regarded and experienced as extraordinary, transcendent and outside the everyday course of events.”<sup>38</sup>

Further, P M Kavros of Pace University, NY, explains in *The Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* that:

Many definitions of religion have been suggested, but one approach that avoids cultural bias and secular ideologies of human origin has suggested that religion includes: doctrine (a creed of belief), myth (an historical sacred narrative), ethics (moral code of sacred origins), ritual (use of sacred objects/ceremony including the historical sacrifice), experience (devotional, mystical, experiential), and social institutions (educational, social gatherings, social service, pastoral care), all of which are interrelated.

(*Ency of Psychology and Religion*, ed Leeming et al), “Religion,” Springer, 2010:764)

Besides the institutionalized “church-sect” dichotomy of religious systems, scholars have also identified various forms of de-institutionalized or post-institutional forms of popular religions. These forms of religion have been variously described as “invisible religion,”<sup>39</sup> “implicit religion”<sup>40</sup> or “new age religion.”<sup>41</sup> There have also been some researches on modern **cults** rather than mainstream organizations.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Orig in French, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, tr Joseph Swain, 1912, replaced by tr Karen E Fields 1995.

<sup>38</sup> Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 1984, 5<sup>th</sup> ed 2006: sv “sacred.”

<sup>39</sup> T Luckmann, *Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*, London: Macmillan, 1967.

<sup>40</sup> E I Bailey, “The implicit religion of contemporary society: some studies and reflections,” *Social Compass* 37,4 1990:483-497; “Implicit religion,” in P B Clarke (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, Oxford Univ Press, 2009:801-816.

<sup>41</sup> P Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, Cambridge: Blackwell. 1996.

<sup>42</sup> Eg, L L Dawson, *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*, NY: Oxford Univ Press, 2003.

**2.1.5.3** Up to the end of the last millennium, world Chinese minorities are likely to be automatically seen as “Buddhists.” This may still be true in Malaysia, but in Singapore and China the trend is that the modern individual is more likely to be drawn to being a “Christian” in some way. In Malaysia, Buddhism is still a major trend in “the politics of identity” against the rising Islamization of the country. In Singapore, Christianity is a popular choice as a status marker of affluence and convenience—and where Christmas is its main annual festival, and where even Buddhists are known to greet one another with Merry Christmas.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, especially amongst the educated class and informed public today, there is a tendency to refer to one’s religious preference as “**spirituality**.” Individuals “pick and mix” their religious beliefs and practices “in a manner that is perfectly consistent with the fluid subjectivities of modern society.”<sup>44</sup>

**2.1.5.4** Key arguments for secularizing religion and society include the following:

- **preventing conflict.** In pluralistic societies, keeping religion out of government institutions prevents or reduces conflict between different religious groups and individuals.
- **ensuring equality and human rights.** Secularization prevents religious discrimination, ensuring that citizens are treated equally by the law regardless of their personal beliefs or non-religious stance.
- **protecting a human-centred society.** A secular state prevents religious institutions from enforcing laws based on theology, which can lead to restrictive social policies, such as a ban on or disapproval of abortion or LGBTQ+ rights.
- **safeguarding religious freedom.** Separating religion from the state should give individuals the freedom to choose, change, or reject religious beliefs with neither coercion nor subterfuge. *Religious freedom* implies that freedom from religion is just as important.
- **promoting rational discourse.** Secularization should encourage reasoning and scientific methods over dogma, and promote critical thinking, evidence-based decision-making and harmonious socializing.
- **modernizing religion.** When religion is kept out of politics and power it is less likely to be used to dominate others or cause social conflicts. This allows religion to focus on wholesome ethical and moral principles, rather than archaic traditions or political power, making it more relevant and beneficial to contemporary culture.

These rationales and principles for secular governance should not be taken for granted, but should be asserted and reasserted at every opportunity for educating others, including the Buddhists themselves.<sup>45</sup>

## 2.2 FOR THE GOOD OF SELF AND OTHERS

### 2.2.1 The foremost of persons

**2.2.1.1** Early Buddhism (especially the suttas), often depicts the Buddha as a **secular teacher**, that is, one who is self-awakened (*sambuddha*) and who teaches others (*akkhātara*). The emphasis is on self-reliance, which means that Buddhists do not and should not rely on any salvific idea of external agency [2.2.1.4]. Instead, a Buddhist follower should work *to know the mind, tame it and free it*—and thus to awaken to true reality, just as the Buddha has done.

<sup>43</sup> See eg B S Turner, “Religion in a post-secular society,” in 2010:655.

<sup>44</sup> Bryan S Turner, “Introduction. Mapping the sociology of religion,” in (ed) *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, 2010:6.

<sup>45</sup> See L Farrow, “The critical importance of keeping religion out of government,” Singapore: Nanyang Technological Univ, [RSIS Publication](https://www.rsispublication.com/), 2025. 30 Jan 2026.

**2.2.1.2** According to the early Buddhist texts, the Buddha is **the ideal person** (*uttama, purisa*), who is explained as follows:

- “the whole person, who has reached perfection, the ideal man” (*kevalī vusitavā uttama, puriso*, S 3:61,-32), that is, “the excellent man” (*seṭṭha, puriso*, SA 2:277,8).<sup>46</sup>
- “the tathagata, the foremost man, the supreme man, attained to the supreme attainment” (*tathāgato uttama, puriso parama, puriso parama, patti, patto*, S 3:116,13).<sup>47</sup>

These are likely to be big empty words if we do not understand the nature and spirit of **self-reliance** that the Buddha exemplifies and teaches. As a **renunciant**, the bodhisattva himself went forth to seek and see true reality. As **buddha**, Gotama realized true reality, formulated it and taught it so that the world may understand and accept it even today. True reality can only be seen by each of us by ourself. The Buddha only teaches us how to see, but we must experience the seeing for ourself.

The teaching of self-reliance means that when we must understand ourself—what we really are by our own knowing and seeing—then, we also will know and see others for what they really are. With such vision, we will feel boundless **love** (*mettā*) with which we accept others unconditionally. This is an active loving that is willing and able to act when the occasion calls for it; this is called **ruth** or compassion (*karuṇā*). When we have touched others’ lives and they are filled with joy and goodness, we too are filled with **joy** (*muditā*). Seeing and knowing how many have benefitted, we also see that many more remain to be uplifted from their suffering and lack; we look on, remembering them with **peace** and equanimity (*upekkhā*), determined to further our efforts to help them help themselves and to teach more people to help themselves.

**2.2.1.3** Since the Buddha was inspired by self-reliance, awakened through *self-reliance*, and teaches *self-reliance*, he is said to be the “ideal person” (the one who understands the mind and who we should bear in mind). Self-reliance thus means that by truly seeing what we really are, how we feel, and so on, we also truly see others and know better how *they* feel.

This is in fact the basis for wholesome human conduct towards one another; that is to say, **moral conduct** (*sīla*). Hence, we see that the very *first* of **the 3 trainings**—that of moral training (*sīla, sikkhā*)—is about “others.” The practical essence of our moral conduct, **the 5 precepts**, is the most basic training in humanity—to regard others just as we accept ourselves; that is, we are being *human* when:

- we value **life** and do not kill;
- we value the quality of life by not taking what brings **happiness** and growth to others;
- we respect others as persons **free** to say no and live their own wholesome way;
- we value **truth** that helps and heals others, by not falsifying or withholding that reality; and
- we value **the mind** by keeping it calm and clear of intoxicants so that we are well aware of others and the world.

We need to live the moral life not merely for personal purity and true happiness, but because without peace around us we will never be at peace ourselves. Embraced by peace, we can then go on to cultivate a calm and clear mind, the basis for a **divine life**. The precepts that we keep are guided and guarded by a beautiful quality—**love** for *self*, for *others* and for *the world*; that is, boundless love. We can then create a veritable heaven here and now.

<sup>46</sup> = It 97,6 = A 5:16,30.

<sup>47</sup> = 4:380,20; Nc 224,28.

**2.2.1.4** Thus, **self-reliance** [1.1.2] means that because we (our mind) are the maker and moderator of our deeds, only we can make and moderate ourselves. We are but hollow thinking reeds without a self, empty of a soul. By embracing others, by reaching out to them, by learning with them, by being at peace with them, we grow with love (*mettā*) and shine on the lives of others.

- The one who practises **for his own benefit** sees this self-reliance and embraces it.
- The one who practises **for the benefit of others** sees how we can learn by thus accepting others.
- The one who practises **for the benefit of both** understands oneself has acted fully and fruitfully both ways.

Hence, we see that early Buddhism stresses on personal responsibility not in a narrow individualistic way, but in understanding the truth and reality of **self-effort**. One then sees that this effort is true for all and can be realized only with others in one's mind and heart. This is neither a small way nor a great way, not even the one way—there is only “**the one-going**” (*ek'āyana*) to awakening.

**2.2.1.5** Although Buddhism exhorts us to work out our own salvation—just as a sick person must take the medicine and precautions—we should also help and heal others when we have the ability and occasion to do so in terms of working for our own good and for that of others, reflects a tension between egotism and altruism. Instead of making this tension a tug of war, we should instead work with it as a lasting link between two ends, *self and others*.

We thus see that **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33,1) lists these 4 types of persons, thus:

- |                                                               |                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) one who benefits oneself but not others <sup>48</sup>     | <i>atta, hitāya paṭipanno hoti no para, hitāya;</i>       |
| (2) one who benefits others but not oneself <sup>49</sup>     | <i>para, hitāya paṭipanno hoti no atta, hitāya;</i>       |
| (3) one who benefits neither oneself nor others <sup>50</sup> | <i>n'eva atta, hitāya paṭipanno hoti no parahitāya;</i>   |
| (4) one who benefits both oneself and others <sup>51</sup>    | <i>atta, hitāya c'eva paṭipanno hoti para, hitāya ca.</i> |

Clearly the last is the most important of the set of 4 kinds of beneficial effort—that of *benefitting both oneself and others*.

**2.2.1.6** Besides the series of suttas, **A 4.95-99** [1.2] already mentioned as similarly distinguishing the 4 types of persons in the same ascending order of excellence, there is another series of suttas, (**Pañcaka**) **Hita Suttas 1-5** (A 5.17-20), that explains how a monk can practise for his own welfare and for the welfare of others. And yet another sutta, **the Ummagga Sutta** (A 4.186) broadens the altruistic motivation, concluding that a person of great wisdom “when he thinks, he thinks only of his own welfare, the welfare of others, the welfare of both, and the welfare of the whole world” (A 4.186/2:179), SD 95.17.

## 2.2.2 Typology of practitioners

**2.2.2.1** Here is a summary list of suttas that variously treat the 4 types of persons in terms of cultivating personal good and the good of others:

|                        |                     |                                             |         |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------|
| <b>Saṅgīti Sutta</b>   | D 33,1.11(48)/3:233 | basic list of 4 types of persons            |         |
| <b>Chavālāta Sutta</b> | A 4.95/2:95 f       | self-benefit + other-benefit: the firebrand | SD 64.5 |

<sup>48</sup> Such as the monk Vakkali, who is morally virtuous but does not exhort others to be so (DA 3:1025).

<sup>49</sup> Such as Upananda, whose is immoral, but exhorts others to be morally virtuous (DA 3:1025).

<sup>50</sup> Such as Devadatta, who is immoral, and exhorts others in the same way (DA 3:1025).

<sup>51</sup> Such as Mahā Kassapa, who is morally virtuous, and exhorts others to be so, too (DA 3:1025).

|                                       |               |                                                 |         |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------|
| <b>Atta,hita Sutta 1</b>              | A 4.96/2:95 f | restraint towards the 3 unwholesome roots       | SD 64.8 |
| <b>Atta,hita Sutta 2</b>              | A 4.97/2:96 f | learning and teaching the Dharma                | SD 64.9 |
| <b>Atta,hita Sutta 3</b>              | A 4.98/2:97 f | basic list of 4 types of persons                | SD 64.6 |
| <b>Atta,hita Sutta 4<sup>52</sup></b> | A 4.99/2:98 f | practice of the 5 precepts                      | SD 64.7 |
| <b>Hita Sutta 1</b>                   | A 5.17/3:12 f | one has 5 qualities but does not benefit others |         |
| <b>Hita Sutta 2</b>                   | A 5.18/3:13   | one set on other's good but not his own         |         |
| <b>Hita Sutta 3</b>                   | A 5.19/3:13 f | one strives to perfect oneself and others, too  |         |
| <b>Hita Sutta 4</b>                   | A 5.20/3:14   | one has 5 qualities and benefits others, too    |         |

These suttas deal with 4 types of individuals in terms of self-cultivation and other-concern. In the basic list (D 33,11; A 4.98), the 1<sup>st</sup> person strives for his own wellbeing (*atta,hita*) but not for that of others (*para,hita*). The 2<sup>nd</sup> individual is one who strives for the well-being of others but does not strive for his own. The 3<sup>rd</sup> person is one who neither strives for his own well-being nor for that of others. The 4<sup>th</sup> individual is one who strives for both his own well-being and for the well-being of others.

**2.2.2.2** It should be noted that not all the suttas list these 4 kinds of persons in the same sequence. The priority, however, is always given to personal wellbeing. It is important to note here that in all these suttas, “wellbeing” (*hita*) refers to both *moral* wellbeing and *spiritual* liberation (the Dharma), and not merely material or worldly happiness. Two out of the 4 types of persons have personal wellbeing; one has only other-concern; and the last has neither. It is obvious here that the one who has personal well-being and also strives for the wellbeing of others is the best. Further, what unifies these 3 kinds of whole-some persons is that each is characterized by *self-effort and self-benefit*.

— — —

## Atta,hita Sutta 3

### The 3<sup>rd</sup> Discourse on Self-benefit

A 4.98

Bhikkhus, there are these 4 kinds of persons found in the world.

What are the four?

- |                           |                             |                                    |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (1) One who is practising | for his own welfare         | but not for the welfare of others; |
| (2) one who is practising | for the welfare of others   | but not for his own welfare;       |
| (3) one who is practising | neither for his own welfare | nor for the welfare of others; and |
| (4) one who is practising | both for his own welfare    | and for the welfare of others.     |

These are the 4 kinds of persons found existing in the world.

—evam—

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<sup>52</sup> Also called **Atta,hita Sikkhāpada S.**