

SD 64.8

Atta,hita Sutta 1

Paṭhama Atta,hita Sutta

The 1st Discourse on Self-benefit

A 4.96

Ce **Rāga,vinaya Sutta**, The discourse on removal of lust
(Catukka) Atta,hita Sutta 3, the 3rd (Fours) Discourse on Self-benefit

Theme: The removal of the 3 unwholesome roots

Translated and annotated by Piya Tan 2009, ©2026

1 Sutta summary

The Atta,hita Sutta 1 (A 4.96) centres on the teaching of the 3 unwholesome roots—*greed, hatred and delusion*—and how we should deal with them (or not).

There are these 4 kinds of persons:

- (1) one who practises to remove greed, hatred and delusion, but does not encourage others to do so;
- (2) one who encourages others to remove greed, hatred and delusion, but does not do so oneself;
- (3) one who neither practises to remove greed, hatred and delusion nor encourages others to do so; and
- (4) one who both practises to remove greed, hatred and delusion and encourages others to do so, too.

2 The 3 unwholesome roots2.1 THE “ROOTS” OF THE MIND2.1.1 Body and mind

2.1.1.1 Early Buddhist psychology defines a **human being**—or any conscious being, whether non-human or celestial—as comprising mind and body (*nāma,rūpa*). The more palpable of the dichotomy is **the body** (*rūpa*) or form in the sense of material manifestation, that is, of *earth, water, fire and wind*. In modern terms, this is respectively *solid parts* (like hair, nails, teeth and bones), *liquid* (like blood, sweat and urine), *heat* (like body warmth, oxidation, digestion and decay) and *motion* (movement, gases and pressure).¹

According to Buddhist cosmology, beings exist as **the 3 worlds** (*ti,loka*), that is, those with the senses, those with form and those with formlessness. All beings of the sense-world (*kāma,loka*)—humans, sub-humans and nonhumans—and the devas of the non-dhyanic heavens, have **the 5 senses** (those of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch).² Heavenly beings have more refined senses than humans that bring them divine pleasure.³ Some subhumans have more developed senses than humans, but these subhumans suffer more pain as a result.

The higher heavens are those of the form world (*rūpa,loka*) and the formless world (*arūpa,loka*). Their natural inhabitants are called “**brahmas**” on account of their pure non-material being.⁴ **The form brahmas** exist at the 4 levels of form dhyanas, and are characterized by joy and radiance. **The formless brahmas** exist on the 4 formless planes as invisible energy, that is, in the bases of infinite space, of infin-

¹ See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,12/1:57 f), SD 13.3; **Mahā Rāhu’ovāda S** (M 11,8-11, with §12 on “space”), SD 3.11; **Mahā Hatthi,pādōpama S** (M 28,6), SD 6.16.

² The senses of smell, taste and touch overlap in significant ways: SD 53.5 (5.5.3).

³ SD 57.10 (1.2.2.4).

⁴ SD 49.8 (14); def SD 54.18 (2.1.1.1).

ite consciousness, of nothingness, and of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.⁵ Brahmas are, however, understood generically and inclusively as “**devas**” along with the gods of the sense-world. Thus when contrasted with “brahmas,” the term “**devas**” refers to only the gods of the sense-world, that is, Cātum, mahā, rājika, Tāvātimsa, Tusita, Yāma, Nimmāna, ratī, and Para, nimmita, vasavattī.⁶

2.1.1.2 In any conscious being—whether sense-based, form-based or formless—the **mind** (*nāma*) consists of *feeling, perception (memory), formations (karmic activity) and consciousness* of various levels of subtlety. There is an exception, though, that is, the non-conscious beings (*asañña, satta*),⁷ inhabiting the 4th-dhyana realm, who exist in a prolonged state of suspended hibernation, that is, a pause in all life-processes.⁸

In terms of feeling and perception, subhuman beings mostly suffer physical and mental pain on account of their past karma and present inability to create new good karma.⁹ However, due to the nature of karma, to which even the high gods are subject, those gods will, upon exhaustion of their good karma at the end of their extremely long divine lives, nevertheless fall directly into a subhuman state, even the hells.¹⁰

2.1.2 The 3 roots of the 5 aggregates

2.1.2.1 Earlier on, we spoke of our being as comprising body and mind [2.1.1]; the body or *form* consists of the 4 elements [2.1.1.1] and the mind consists of *feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*. This mind-body existence thus comprises *form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*. As a set these are known as **the 5 aggregates** (*pañca-k, khandha*).

Firstly, there is **form** (*rūpa*), that is, our body, which in reality is made up of our 5 physical senses, that is, *the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body*, or in dynamic terms: they are our faculties of *seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling (touches)*. These are the “internal senses” in the sense that they are **mind-based**; the mind works through the senses, sensing the world and making sense of the world.

The “external senses” are the objects of these sense-faculties, or simply **sense-objects** (*dhmma*). These sense objects are material manifestations of the world that we experience as being solid, fluid, heat (and decay), and motion—traditionally called respectively “*earth, water, fire and wind*,” that is, the 4 primary elements (*mahā, bhūta*) or the various states of matter (*rūpa*) that constitute our experience, rooted in the mind or consciousness, the 6th element (the 5th element being space).

2.1.2.2 Now, even as you read this paper, your **5 aggregates** are working in full swing. Firstly, you are looking at the computer screen, or its “hard” or printed copy, or you may be listening to it being

⁵ SD 24.11 (5).

⁶ See SD 1.7 (App) or DEB App.

⁷ Also called “non-percipient beings”: **Brahma, jāla S** (D 1,68), SD 25.2; SD 23.14 (3.2.6); SD 53.23 (2.1.5).

⁸ Location of *asañña, satta* in the 31 planes: DEB App 3; SD 1.7 (table).

⁹ Subhumans, like pretas, depend on lovingkindness directed towards their wellbeing: SD 2.7 (4.2). Animals can directly benefit from our compassion by way of kindness and care, and may be reborn in a sense-world heaven as a result. On animals reborn in heaven, see SD 6.1 (3); R68a; R152.

¹⁰ See **Saṅkhār’upapatti S** (M 120) which states that even the highest divine state is temporary; only attaining arhathood ends rebirth (SD 3.4); **(Tika) Āneñja S** (A 3.114) says that even those in the imperturbable state (formless dhyanas) will fall into subhuman states if they are not path-learners (SD 57.15); **(Catukka) Puggala S 1** (A 4.123): at the end of the aeon they fall into a subhuman state (SD 23.8a); **(Catukka) Mettā S 1** (A 4.125): brahmas of the higher form dhyanas (like Ābhassara, Subha, kiṇha and Vaha-p, phala) will fall into lower realms when their merits are exhausted (SD 33.9); **Pañca Pubba, nimitta S** (It 83/76-78) lists the 5 signs portending the end of celestial life, after which they will fall into a subhuman state (SD 23.8a(1.2)); SD 57.10 (3.1.2.3); SD 57.15 (1.2).

read to you by the computer, by some device or by someone. What you hear or experience is the aggregate of **form** (*rūpa*). You are listening to this writing in the form of *sound*, and your mind is processing it through your eye.¹¹

You are able to read and understand this paper because you have had training in reading English (or some translation of the work), and you have mastered the language well enough, or you have an interest in Buddhism or a related topic. In short, you have a **feeling** (a like or dislike for it). I have mentioned both “like” and “dislike” for at least 2 important reasons.

The first is that you have an interest in Buddhism or some related subject and wish to understand Buddhism better for your own reasons. Or you may be studying Buddhism to analyse it academically or religiously, maybe even to debunk it, in keeping with your own agenda. This aspect of your mental process is called **perception**, which arises mostly from your memories of past experiences and from past conditioning, that now drives you to have an interest in Buddhism.

Even as you are reading through this paper, you are also processing it in various ways, such as those parts that you understand, or agree with or like, or disagree with or dislike, or you may even hear an inner conversation in reaction to what you are reading. When you have let those voices come and go, they are merely perceptions, since you may remember them and may react to them in future.

However, when you actually *act* on them, and *like* or *dislike* what you read, or allow that inner voice to judge what you have read, for whatever reason, that decision or conclusion you make is likely to have karmic consequences. Such karmic activity is simply your own mental or intellectual habits, but in terms of the 5 aggregates, you have created (*abhisankharoti*) **karmic formations**, just as I have myself created such formations in putting together this essay.

In simple practical terms, this is how the 5 aggregates work.

2.1.2.3 Another interesting way of analysing ourselves as cognitive beings is in terms of the teaching on **food** (*āhāra*) or nutriment. According to **the Putta,maṃsa Sutta** (S 12.63), there are 4 kinds of food, that is:¹²

(1) material food,	<i>kabaliṅkārahāra</i>	(bodily nourishment);
(2) contact,	<i>phassāhāra</i>	(sense-experiences);
(3) mental volition, and	<i>saṅkhārahāra</i>	(karma);
(4) consciousness.	<i>viññāṇāhāra</i>	(mental processes).

Every day, a number of times a day, we are likely to be taking some kind of food or fluid as **physical nourishment** (*kabaliṅkārahāra*) (and of course we should add our breath that oxidizes the nourishment) to sustain our physical body. If or when we are (as humans), by some accident, unconscious, we are likely to be fed by carers with some kind of nourishment so that our vital processes are sustained to keep us alive.

However, material food only sustains the body, that is, keeps our sense-faculties—the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body—in working order. Material food is only the physical or most basic way that we feed ourselves so that we keep on living; it is only one of the 4 ways by which we maintain our cognitive being as a whole. To fully live, we further “feed” ourselves in 3 other ways, and we do this *every moment* we are alive or awake.¹³

¹¹ “The eye” is a convenient abstract term that refers not just to the physical eyes, but more so to the whole faculty of seeing and the mental processing of seeing.

¹² S 12.63/2:97-100 + SD 20.6 (2); also SD 55.14 (2).

¹³ Technically, we can say that when we are unconscious, all these 5 kinds of nourishment are suspended, but we may be kept alive by medical means. However, we need not be concerned with this exception here.

Further, so long as we are awake, whether we are aware of it or not, our senses are functioning *every moment*; this is called “**contact as food**” (*phass’āhāra*). However, when we direct our attention to any of the 5 physical senses or rather sensings—*seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or touching* something—it is called perception (*saññā*). During the process of perception, we are likely to “perceive” whichever sense-experience that we attend to by editing or shaping that experience in terms of some memory or habitual tendency.

2.1.2.4 As soon as we *like* or *dislike* a projected sense-perception, we create that virtual reality for ourselves. When we *like* what we perceive, we arouse **greed** and feed the latent tendency of sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*); when we *dislike* what we perceive, we arouse **hatred** and feed the latent tendency of aversion (*paṭigha*). Either way, it means that we will react in that way again, and do so habitually. However, when we ignore such a sense-experience, regarding it as uninteresting or boring, we feed the latent tendency of **ignorance** (*avijjā*).¹⁴

The proper response towards any such sense-experience is to simply see its arising and passing away, and regard it as being “impermanent.” In this way, we are likely to calm and clear the mind so that there is letting go (*nekkhamma*) instead of *greed*; there is lovingkindness (*mettā*) instead of *hatred*; and there is wisdom (*paññā*) instead of *delusion*.

Whether our action is unwholesome (resulting in greed, hatred or delusion) or wholesome (inspiring letting go, lovingkindness or wisdom), there is **mental volition** (*sāṅkhār’āhāra*). We have created karma which feeds our whole being (body and mind) keeping it in samsara, to suffer the surges of pleasure and pain, over and again.

2.1.2.5 Through feeling, perceiving, and karma-forming we feed our **consciousness** (*viññāṇ’āhāra*). We see this feeding of consciousness most dramatically in how an infant grows. Or, we help the infant to grow by feeding it with toys, touches and stimulating its senses; the more the infant sees, hears, smells, tastes (and bites), and touches, the better it is in sensing the world and itself; it is slowly but surely turning into a human person.

This process of **humanization** succeeds on account of parenting by our mother, father or loving humans. Once the child’s senses are complete and mature enough to make practical sense of the world, the child is then socialized by family, friends, schooling, religious conditioning and so on. The point is that we are only **born** human, that is, we have a human body. The **mind** still needs to be humanized, shaped with love and good parenting, socializing, schooling and conditioning.

At this stage, it will certainly be judicious to see whether the humanizing process helps the individual make better sense of the world with an open mind, or see only a projected virtual world that we want that child to be conditioned and limited by. Religion often, by fiat and faith, blinkers and domesticates the child so that it never becomes an adult or a person. It remains a pious and fearful child of some God, a creature of some flock tended by some external, unseen higher power. This child never learns to see the natural awakening and freeing of the mind. We shall be children forever, as it were!

In significant ways, we can see human evolution as a struggle of ourselves as *animals* to become *human*, from being creatures of habit to become *creative beings*. We then see civilization as a process of common human effort to create a productive environment for *humanity*; education as the most effective way of bringing the best out of *the individual*. All these processes are characterized by the human transcending the limits of the body and the self (the senses and the mind) to enjoy the creativity and freedom that **the free mind** can give.

Religion is often used by others to project a bigger Self above and beyond us by building a mountain, a tower, a pyramid, an hierarchy of smaller selves. These little selves are to serve Religion. **Spirituality**, on

¹⁴ On the latent tendencies, see **Sammā Ditṭhi S** (M 9,65-67), SD 11.14; **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (8.2).

the other hand, teaches us to see through religious memes and frees us from the notion of a power-centred Self, so that humanity is freed from God-dependence and is able to transcend its own limits.

To do this we must first understand how our mind works.

2.1.2.6 When we carefully examine how the human cognitive process [2.1.2.3] works, we will notice that deep down driving the process are either the unwholesome roots that are *greed, hatred and delusion*, or the wholesome roots that are *non-greed* (including letting go), *non-hatred and non-delusion*. In an unawakened being, these karmic roots are likely to be the unwholesome ones, attracting and proliferating more unwholesomeness. Greed breeds greed, hatred breeds hatred, delusion breeds delusion; all these feed the latent tendencies of lust, aversion and ignorance. We are thus enslaved by karma.

Our training in keeping with the Buddha's teaching is to avoid the unwholesome roots, cut down the forest of *greed, hatred and delusion*; cultivate the wholesome roots that are *non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion*. In short, we should **avoid evil, do good and purify the mind** (Dh 183).¹⁵

Dharma training for both monastic and laity traditionally begins with the "negative" or apophatic aspects—the cultivation of *non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion*—because we are first and foremost confronted with the unwholesome roots, greed, hatred and delusion, every moment that we are awake and attending to our sense-experiences.¹⁶

2.2 THE ROOTS AND MEMORY

2.2.1 The uses of memory

2.2.1.1 We *sense* the world through our body, that is, *the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body*. We *make sense* of the world through *seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching (feeling)*; that is, the mind processing the sensings of the world of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches. According to early Buddhism, *sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches* are real and out there, but the unawakened do not directly understand any of them as they really are.

Unawakened, we **make sense** or try to make sense of what we *see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think* by identifying each of these experiences with our memory of it. This is verified by the fact that most of us are likely to be alarmed or unsettled by seeing, hearing or experiencing something for which we have no prior knowledge or have no memory of.

Memory is thus *knowledge* of the past; more accurately, it is a reconstruction of past experiences, and it gets revised, distorted and diminished over time, or we simply *forget*.

Let's say we meet someone who looks very much like someone who was (or is) *dear* to us, someone we loved or liked very much. We are thus likely to perceive that person we just met as someone likeable, someone we want to know; and to re-create those remembered experiences and feelings. However, we have no idea of the true nature of that person we just met.

On the other hand, we may meet another person who speaks to us in a certain tone of voice. The voice reminds us of someone we knew but *did not like*, or it reminds us of a nasty quarrel or tragedy we had with a person with that voice. Thus, we tend to perceive that person we just met as someone we dislike or hate. However, we have no idea of the true nature of that person.

¹⁵ SD 56.1 (4.2.1.2); SD 61.5a (5.4.2.6). **Dh 183** is significantly part of the Buddha's "admonitory code" (*ovāda pāṭimokkha*), the practical essence of the Dharma, given to the early arhats (MA 3:209): SD 16.1 (6.1).

¹⁶ On the 3 roots, see SD 35.6 (5.1.1). On how we tend to react in terms of the 5 aggregates, see SD 61.27 (3.2.2).

2.2.1.2 Memory (*sati*)¹⁷ is our mind's ability to encode, store, and retrieve information, that is what we have sensed, felt or thought. Psychologically, these processes form the foundations of our identity, learning, and “making sense” of the world, that is, the ability to understand or direct our present experiences (knowledge) and by retaining past experiences (memory) for future use.

Memory involves **3 main stages**—encoding (converting sense-data), storage (recalling or keeping it), and retrieval (accessing it). Our memory (including knowledge) can be categorized into at least **3 types**, that is *sensory*, *short-term or working*, and *long-term memory*, each with different durations, capacities and clarity [2.2.2].

Encoding is the processing or “translating” of sense-experience into what we can relate to *intellectually* or *emotionally*. “*Intellectually*” means perceiving it as being either pleasant or unpleasant (based on past memory). “*Emotionally*” means reacting to the perceived pleasantness by *liking* it, or to the perceived unpleasantness by *disliking* it.

Storage (or consolidation) means clinging or holding on to the encoded information—driven by the liking or the disliking—over time, from seconds, to years, even over many lives. This information, in the form of sense-experiences and thoughts—remains in our memory or becomes habits that we unconsciously cultivate. We may thus say that all such experiences are stored in our “unconscious” or latent tendencies (*anusaya*).¹⁸

Retrieval simply means accessing stored information when needed or compelled, like recalling a name or a fact. Retrieving a memory may be done deliberately or reflexively. More often, such retrieval occurs instinctively and reactively when we perceive an experience as likeable or desirable, or as unlikeable or undesirable.

2.2.2 Types of memory

We can speak of 3 types of memory: sensory, short-term (or working memory) and long-term.

2.2.2.1 Sensory memory is very brief retention of sensory input, lasting only milliseconds. The term “sensory” refers to any of the physical senses—sight, sound, smell, taste and touch—and includes balance (vestibular), body position (proprioception), and mental processes, that is, how the mind receives, interprets, and responds to this input. Both these physical and mental processes are crucial for daily functioning and health, allowing us to regulate our behaviour and navigate environments.¹⁹

Sensory memory is an important Buddhist psychological term when it is applied to how we perceive an experience. Technically, sensory memory works when the “triangle of experience” occurs, that is, when a *sense-faculty*, *sense-object* and *sense-consciousness* (attention) coincide to result in **sense-contact** (*phassa*). During that cognitive moment, we *feel* the object as *pleasant* or *unpleasant*, and almost immediately we *perceive* it as *likeable* or as *unlikeable*, depending on our memory of a similar or related event. This process is also called “encoding” [2.2.1.2].

On a simpler level, such as in a child, this process arises as “**sensory play**” or sensory stimulation. This sensory play is often used to develop sense-based skills in children. Child play and activities—such as with sand, water, playdough, toys or any object that can be sensed—stimulate the child's senses, fostering cognitive growth, fine motor skills, and emotional regulation.

¹⁷ *Sati* is usually as “mindfulness,” which of course involves memory. For our purposes here, we will take *sati* as referring to our ability to remember or recall things, and the thought of something that we remember. Strictly speaking, *sati* refers to only the ability to remember things, while *anussati* refers to the thought of what we remember.

¹⁸ See *Anusaya*, SD 31.3.

¹⁹ For details of these sense-based and mind-based processes, see SD 60.1e (12.3).

2.2.2.2 Short-term memory is a temporary, limited-capacity cognitive system that holds information for approximately 15 to 30 seconds. It functions as an active “mental workbench,” storing small amounts or “chunks” of data—typically 4 to 7 items—for immediate use before it is either forgotten or transferred to long-term memory.

For example, we may take a short time (around 30 seconds) for an immediate task, such as:

- remembering a phone number;
- remembering a password long enough to type it into a computer;
- following a conversation thread;
- retaining the first part of a sentence to make sense of the end;
- solving a problem.

While the term “**working memory**” is often used interchangeably with short-term memory, the latter refers to the passive, temporary storage of information, whereas **working memory** refers to the cognitive processes that *manipulate and use* that information. Hence, a good working memory is useful in meditation for reflecting on impermanence (or suffering or nonself), which we either fail to notice or quickly forget about. By sustaining the vision of impermanence in working memory, one reinforces it into long-term memory.

2.2.2.3 The following factors can affect or reduce short-term memory:

- (1) **attention.** Lack of focus can prevent information from entering or staying in short-term memory. Clear knowing (*sampajañña*) or analytic mindfulness is a focused mind that examines certain aspects of an object or a state so that one remembers it better. Wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) is the proper attending to the key characteristics of reality, that is, impermanence, suffering and nonself, which we constantly note or reflect on to have a clearer vision of each of them.
- (2) **interference.** Disruptive noise and other sensory distractions often hinder one’s effort in learning or remembering something new. Inputting new information immediately with the effort to remember something may actually prevent that remembering since we have to process new sense-data and thoughts. New information can also displace or distort old information, leading to a quick forgetting or to creating new “memories.”
- (3) **health.** Conditions such as stress, sleep deprivation, poor nutrition, or neurodegenerative diseases (such as Alzheimer’s) can impair short-term memory.
- (4) **age.** Memory capacity can naturally begin to fade starting in the early 20’s. However, with meditation and proper training, one’s memory can be sustained, even improved, even in senior years.
- (5) **intoxication.** We often hear of people, troubled with recent memories that are painful, try to drown themselves into the forgetfulness of an inebriate mind. However, when we are intoxicated (with some drink or drug) or delirious (due to emotional trauma), despite lacking normal consciousness, we are yet emboldened in re-enacting our painful or “forbidden” memories or be driven by some “hidden” moments in our past. Upon regaining our sobre self we simply cannot recall these “Hyde-like”²⁰ manifestations. The point remains that our past, especially its darkness, can, by way of memories (reconstructions of the past), still decisively influence our lives when we lose touch of the present.

A few helpful methods for improving short-term memory include:

- **chunking:** breaking down large pieces of information into smaller, manageable units (eg, breaking a 10-digit phone number into three groups);

²⁰ From R L Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886): SD 63.13 (3.3.3.2 (8)).

- **rehearsal**: repeating or reciting information to oneself;
- **mental exercises**: engaging in puzzles, board or card games, or reading;
- **meditation**: keeping the mind calm and clear so that certain texts or information are better remembered.

2.2.2.4 Short-term memories are transformed into durable long-term memories through a process known as **consolidation** [2.2.1.2, 2.2.2.6], which stabilizes memory traces. These memories are stored in **distributed networks of neurons** rather than in one specific location, requiring structural changes in synapses to hold information. In this way, long-term memory is virtually unlimited in capacity, allowing for the retention of massive amounts of information over decades.

Retrieval of information from memory may be vast, but it can be affected by interference, age, or injury [2.2.2.3], and is prone to one's **biases**, which can reshape or distort one's memory. Hence, memory of texts, information, learning and events may often be revised or "edited" by one's beliefs or biases. Further, one may simply fail to retrieve information, rather than completely lose information. One's ambience and lifestyle may also impact one's ability to store or retrieve long-term memories due to cognitive decline or aging.

2.2.2.5 Long-term memory is the mind's system for storing vast amounts of information, experiences, and skills over extended periods, ranging from minutes to a lifetime. It acts as a nearly permanent, high-capacity repository for knowledge, transitioning information from short-term memory through consolidation [2.2.1.2, 2.2.2.6].

Long-term memory is subdivided into explicit (conscious) memories and implicit (unconscious) habits, and it relies on the neuronal network restructuring to store and retrieve data.

Explicit memory or declarative memory involves conscious recollection of facts, events, and knowledge. This kind of memory may be episodic or semantic. Episodic memory is of specific personal experiences or events. Semantic memory remembers general knowledge, facts, and concepts about the world.

Implicit memory (non-declarative memory) involves unconscious memories, often related to habits and skills. They are of 2 kinds: procedural and emotional. Procedural memory is the knowledge of how to perform tasks, such as riding a bike or driving a car. Emotional conditioning is an unconscious emotional response to stimuli or reaction to a situation.

2.2.2.6 Long-term memory is consolidated in 3 key ways. The 1st way is through rehearsal, such as *the reciting of texts*, individually and communally, in early Buddhism. Repeating information over and over helps move it into long-term storage. The Pali rules of **sandhi** or euphonic combination of letters and sounds further helps in an almost musical way of "chanting" (a kind of singing) the texts, the way we remember songs or lyrics put to music.

Secondly, there is **meaningful association** of information and ideas, connecting these new data to existing knowledge. In other words, one builds on what is already remembered, which enhances memory retention. The Pali texts, being an oral tradition, has their own system of repeating words, phrases and passages (called stock passages), which further helps in memorizing very long suttas and texts.

Thirdly, modern psychology points out that **mental plasticity** or neuroplasticity physically changes brain connections (reorganizing, strengthening or weakening synaptic connections) to allow memory to adapt, consolidate, and change throughout life in response to experience and learning to create new long-term memories that can last for years.

2.2.2.7 Our memory is rooted in our actions, which may be wholesome (free from greed, from hatred, or from delusion) or may be unwholesome (rooted in greed, in hatred or in delusion). Although we are inherently or naturally capable of good, we are overwhelmed by the sense-world which demands

our attention, feeding and assimilating us as mere drones of samsara, simply serving, as it were the “samsaric will.”

Samsara (*saṃsāra*), the cosmic cycle of lives and deaths, rebirths and redeaths, leashes us with craving and drives us with ignorance. Our wisdom is foolishness in the collective mind of samsara, so that our every act as unawakened beings is rooted in greed, hatred and delusion. Samsara then plants these roots as memories of those acts and states, which continue to generate greed, hatred and delusion. We are driven to reactively *lust* for the pleasant, *hate* the unpleasant, *ignore* what we do not understand. This is existential suffering: we are incessantly driven to act like drones, without ever learning. So long as we feed from the collective mind of faith, we seem to be safe in numbers, as part of the unthinking flock, herded by the shepherd. Every moment we move closer to the shambles.²¹

2.3 THE ROOTS OF MEMORY

2.3.1 Greed (*lobha*)

2.3.1.1 The main root or cause of suffering is **ignorance** (*avijjā*), that is, not knowing the true nature of the world and thus neither seeing true reality—*impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and nonself*—nor living in harmony with true reality, and thus acting with *greed, hatred and delusion*. On account of ignorance, we are blindly driven and led on by **craving** (*taṇhā*), a “thirst” for “something” (*kiñcana*) we imagine or hope is out there.

Failing to see and understand impermanence (*anicca*), we imagine or hope for something that is permanent or eternal. This something that is unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) is viewed as being pleasant and satisfactory. Failing to see the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness of all things or existence, we hope or rationalize that there is some kind of essence, something greater than we are, some divine essence or some God-idea.

Whatever exists can only exist in time; it must change, become other, unsatisfactory, without any abiding essence. This principle of existence is called **nonself** (*anattā*). Whether we accept or reject the truth of impermanence, we will undergo suffering. Only in understanding and accepting change, we will understand suffering, its arising, its ending, and so ending suffering. Even just knowing or understanding this is in itself joyful and liberating.

Without understanding impermanence, we fail to see how suffering gives meaning to life. When we see meaning in life, we also have a **purpose** in life, that is, to end suffering. When we have no such understanding or reject this truth, we will be driven to seek that “something” which is *not suffering*, which we imagine to be *pleasurable*, and *eternal*, that is outside of our own “self,” that is, our mind. That seeking for something, for something “other,” is called **craving**.

2.3.1.2 Craving thus turns us into *dependent*, ineffectual and hope-driven beings or creatures of belief in a Creator-God. Ignorance blinds us from seeing and learning that we, too, are *changing, incomplete and without any abiding essence*. Failing to see this continuous process of arising and passing away, of change, of causes and effects, working all around us and within us, we simply fail to learn. We remain stuck in the rut of cyclic life called samsara. We are endlessly driven by the mistaken perception that things are *permanent, pleasurable, and attractive*, when they are, in fact, impermanent, unsatisfactory and void of any abiding essence.

²¹ **The Borg** is a depiction of this sort of hive mind, seen in the science fiction TV series, Star Trek: SD 7.9 (4.5.3.4).

2.3.1.3 Self-identity view

As saṃsāric beings, caught in a maelstrom of causes and effects, lives and deaths, we form **views** (*diṭṭhi*) and are driven by them. The reason for the predominance of views in our daily lives is quite easy to explain: we are constantly bombarded with sense-experiences—*sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts*—every waking moment. We **remember** much of what we *see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think*, so that we are familiar with such experiences.

We remember much of such experiences well enough to even predict what will happen when we perceive the same or similar objects arising in our sense-fields. This is the key reason for our view that we may have an abiding “self” or “soul.” As we become more familiar with such experiences, our view of the existence of such an imagined self becomes more real; we are convinced that there must be an abiding self.

We rationalize “why there is ‘something’ rather than nothing,” but we fail to see that we have ourself imagined or hoped that “something” is out there. This desperate or pious hope for “something” is the result of past conditioning, especially through religious beliefs and experiences. And perhaps from the present fear that we are “nothing” and want to be “something.”

2.3.1.4 In other words, psychologically, we see the conscious body or **form** as the self. Or we take **feelings** (*vedanā*) as the self. Or we take **perception** (or memories) as the self. Or we take our **formations** (or karma) as the self. Or, very commonly, we take our consciousness as the self. This is how our **self-identity view** (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*) arises.

This is the 1st kind of mental fetter (*saṃyojana*) that holds us back in the world of make-believe and suffering. There are 2 other fetters that habitually prevent us from seeing true reality, even from understanding how self-effort, and only self-effort, can free us from our unwholesome habits and from suffering. Since we regard the self as something unchanging and permanent—“I am what I am”—we are also fettered with **doubt** and **attachment to ritual and vows**—both of which we will examine next.

2.3.1.4 Doubt

In early Buddhist psychology, **doubt** (*vicikicchā*) is the 2nd (or sometimes 3rd) of the first 3 mental fetters—which must be broken to gain streamwinning (the very first stage of the path of awakening). Doubt or, more fully, spiritual doubt, arises from a lack of understanding and conviction in the Buddha’s awakening, in committing to the Dharma study or to Dharma practice. It is a paralyzing uncertainty in the ideal, the training and the goal of one’s spiritual progress.

Spiritual doubt as a fetter arises through several processes, especially the following:

- **doubt regarding the 3 jewels** prevents one from seeing the purpose and value of the training (*sikkhā*) in moral conduct or love-based attitude towards self and others, in meditation or in taming and freeing the mind for peace and clarity;
- **unwise attention** (*ayoniso manasikāra*), that is, a lack of insight into the reality of the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness of sense-experiences and the nature of things around one;²²
- **lack of direct insight** due to lack of mindfulness and focus, driving one to habitually perceive one’s experiences in terms of past memories so that one fails to see the rise and fall of the present event, or to frame such states merely in intellectual terms;
- **a bowl of “turbid muddy water” left in the dark.** This is an imagery of one with spiritual doubt; which means that one lacks mindfulness, and, even when the mind is clear, one is unable to direct it to see the true nature of reality.²³

²² On unwise attention, see SD 32.8 (2.2.1).

²³ This imagery of doubt as a mental hindrance is from (*Nīvaraṇā*) *Saṅgārava S* (S 46.55,8/5:124 f), SD 3.12.

- **various doubts about the past and the future.** In the **Sabb'āsava Sutta** (M 2), the Buddha lists 16 doubts that feed this fetter, such as “Was I in the past?”, “Will I be in the future?”, and “Am I?”²⁴

2.3.1.5 The fetter of doubt refers to any kind of uncertainty, and inability or unwillingness to learn. It does not cover healthy doubt, that is, any kind of uncertainty or unknowing that leads one to ask questions, to seek wholesome answers.

The fetter that is doubt has the following characteristics:

- **It is unhealthy doubt.** Unlike healthy doubt, which encourages investigation and inquiry, the fetter of doubt keeps one unwilling to check or test the teachings, so that one ends up neglecting or abandoning the teaching and the practice. Basically, this is the unwillingness to learn; one is blind because one refuses to see with one's own eye and mind.
- **It is related to self-view.** It is often paired with, and fed by, the 1st fetter of “self-identity view,” that is, by seeing one of the 5 aggregates that constitute our being as the self, soul or “controller” of our being. One is thus fixated to one's “old self,” such as that of being a safe child with parental protection.
- **It arises with ignorance.** Doubt is often associated with an underlying lack of wisdom; hence, one relies on one's sense-experiences, on hearsay (including the Internet) on technology (such as artificial intelligence) and religion which feeds one's virtual world rooted in delusion. One tends to be limited by what one knows.

2.3.1.6 Attachment to rituals and vows

The 3rd mental fetter is that of **attachment (or clinging) to rituals and vows** (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*). It is a subtle but pernicious form of clinging to habits and external forms of habitual practice, especially in terms of religion since it chains one to samsaric existence. It represents the mistaken belief that simply performing certain rituals, adhering to strict rules, or taking religious vows is sufficient for purifying oneself, for spiritual attainment or liberation, rather than achieving it through inner wisdom and personal transformation.

Attachment to rituals and vows may be further described in the following ways:

- **It is a deep-seated clinging to looks**, that is, to habitual gestures, donning some impressive religious dress or external displays of faith or piety. Socially, it may be taken as a desire to attract **charisma** or power, that is, a pretense to have special ability or holy state to arouse faith, respect, support, even fear from others. This is a characteristic feature of faith-based religion, one that is focused on an external agency or power instead of self-effort and mental liberation.
- **It is an emotional dependence** due to misguided belief, false view and psychological need of the idea that mechanical, or ritualistic behavior, like bathing in a certain river, having some sacred relic, or observing a strict fast, automatically produces religious purification or security. Psychologically, this is characteristic of **superstition**, that is, the wrong view that our problems, which are mind-made, can be solved or resolved by resorting to *some object or external agency*. We are thus distracted from the proper moral and mental training of the path.
- **It is misguided discipline and moral conduct**, which mistake **rigid, extreme rituals** (like self-mortification) which numb the mind and harm the body, distracting one from the “middle way” to awakening.

²⁴ M 2,7/1:8 (SD 30.3).

- It is an **obsessive compulsive habit**, that is, an emotional clinging to routines or specific ways of doing things, such as rigid schedules, social drinking or socializing, which can become a source of anxiety and suffering.
- It focuses on **external actions and objects** rather than on cultivating self-effort, mindfulness and direct insight into the nature of reality (impermanence, suffering, and nonself). It creates an emotional tension or “tug-of-war” driven by fear and a false sense of security rather than inner peace.

2.3.1.7 Broadly, attachment to rituals and vows is a kind of **clinging** (*upādāna*), of which there are 4 kinds, that is clinging to:²⁵

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 1. sense-pleasure | <i>kāmûpādāna</i> | the basis for clinging to the body; |
| 2. views | <i>diṭṭhûpādāna</i> | the basis for clinging to the mind; |
| 3. vows and rituals | <i>sīla-b, batûpādāna</i> | the basis for clinging to both body and mind; |
| 4. the self-doctrine | <i>atta, vādûpādāna</i> | the basis for clinging to both body and mind. |

Clinging is disadvantageous because we are unduly dependent on others, objects, habits and situations that feed craving and ignorance, the roots of suffering. We are thus prevented from learning, changing and gaining mental and spiritual freedom. Mental freedom refers to a calm and clear mind; spiritual freedom is attaining the path to nirvana when rebirth is ended.

2.3.1.8 Attachment to rituals and vows is a deep-seated clinging which is itself fed by **greed** (*lobha*), which overlaps with craving and ignorance, the twin roots of suffering. These manifest as the 3 influxes (*āsava*) that arise through our senses and the mind, and keeps invading our being to fetter us to samsara, the cycle of suffering, by way of:

- **attachment to sense-pleasures**, that is, craving for and attachment to sensory gratification (bodily or sensory stimulation);
- **attachment to existence**, that is, the desire to be “something” (by way of the 3 fetters) and to attain “higher” rebirths instead of working for personal liberation;
- **ignorance**, that is, the lack of mindfulness and awareness of true reality, to be caught up in eternalist views (eternal heaven, the God idea, “something,” and so on) or in annihilationist views (there is only this body and mind, which “disappears” upon dying, or that “nothing” exists); both types of view fetter us to samsara.

2.3.1.9 “Attachment to rituals and vows” should be distinguished from “rituals and vows” that can have some benefits; that is to say:

- Not all vows (*sīla*) or rituals (*vata*) are bad. Ritualized conduct, like those governing renunciants when “among houses” (or in public), for example, helps renunciants to maintain decorum and mindfulness. Vows or strict observances of rituals like any of the 13 ascetic practices (*dhut’aṅga*) help in cultivating contentment and in meditation and cut down defilements. The issue is not the ritual or vow itself but the *attachment* to it and the belief that it is a way or the *only* way to liberation.
- True moral virtue (*sīla*) is different from “clinging to rituals and vows.” One can and should follow ethical rules of conduct without treating them as magical or purifying acts. What keeps such conduct wholesome is our wholesome intention and understanding their greater purpose in helping us to gain mental concentration.

²⁵ On clinging, see **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 15,6), SD 5.17; **Sammā Diṭṭhi S** (M 9,34), SD 11.14. On clinging to sense-pleasures, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (2); on clinging to views, see **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (5). On clinging to vows and rituals, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3 (5.3); on clinging to self-view, see **Anusaya** SD 31.3 (5.2).

- Proper Buddhist rituals and vows do not in themselves have anything directly to do with awakening. The training-rules of moral conduct—such as the 5 precepts and their 5 values²⁶—for example, are vital guides so that one is well disposed with positive emotions towards self and others, help in one's self-discipline, and help in preparing the mind for deep meditation.

2.3.2 Hatred (*dosa*)

2.3.2.1 Greed (*lobha*) [2.3.1] has a dark twin, that is, **hatred** (*dosa*).²⁷ Where there is greed—a generic term for unwholesome attraction and drive to accumulate pleasure and objects of pleasure—there is also hatred, a generic term for dislike, aversion, repulsion and related negative emotions of rejection against anything that is perceived as preventing, thwarting, or threatening one's enjoying or collecting of sensual pleasures. Both greed and hatred arise because of **delusion** and are sustained by delusion, the misperception of seeing what is impermanent as being permanent, what is unsatisfactory as being satisfying, what is nonself (without any essence) as self or some divine essence, and what is impure as pure.²⁸

Broadly, hatred encompasses mental states of dislike, aversion, resentment, hostility, or anger toward people, circumstances, or feelings. It often occurs as a deep, reactive or reflexive rejection of what is perceived as unpleasant, ugly or uncomfortable ranging from minor irritation to extreme malice, and such an attitude often causes or condones suffering in both self and others, although often the perception is that it is others who are harmed or put at a disadvantage.

2.3.2.2 **Hatred** may manifest itself as the *opposite* of lovingkindness (*mettā*), that is, the intention or desire to harm, remove or destroy something or someone. While the openly violent expression of hatred is clearly negative, hatred is often crafted secretly or subtly so that no one will know the source of that hatred when it takes effect. Hence, it is symbolized by a snake in Buddhist art, such as the snake at the hub of the Tibetan depiction of the wheel of life.²⁹

As we have noted, hatred may arise as any of a wide range of negative emotions. It may occur as the violent rage of hell-beings, the exploitative ill will of asuras, the desperate ferocity of an animal in pain, the dastardly prejudice of a racist person, the sarcastic resentment of a socialite, or the saccharin-sweet disapproval of an imperious preacher.

Of the negative emotions related to hatred, **anger** (*kodha*) is not necessarily always negative. For example, a loving or concerned parent may harshly scold a child who has done something wrong, but the parent would never, in their love, ever wish the child any harm or failure. A compassionate teacher may similarly reprimand a careless or difficult student in the same way out of desire for the betterment of the student.

2.3.2.3 The various forms of hatred may manifest themselves as **wrong action**, by way of violence (including killing, maiming and hurting), stealing (including taking the not given and depriving someone of fair gain or advantage), and personal disrespect (including rape, molestation, humiliation and alienation). Hatred may also occur as **negative speech**, by way of lies (including dishonest or conniving silence), slander, harsh words or frivolous chatter.³⁰ Understandably, hatred arises as unwholesome thoughts or intentions, such as thoughts of taking the not given, of ill will and of violence. All such acts, speech and

²⁶ On the 5 precepts and 5 values (*pañca, sīla pañca, dhamma*), see SD 1.5 (2) & Table 2.8.

²⁷ Skt cognate is *dveṣa*, not *doṣa*, which means "fault."

²⁸ In simple terms, the last phrase means the perception of what is neither good nor true as being good and true.

²⁹ See SD 5.16 (8).

³⁰ See SD 10.16 (3).

thoughts of hatred create and sustain cycles of conflict, loss of lives (including murder and wars) and suffering. The most widespread and disastrous effects of hatred arise from religious hatred and wars.³¹

Essentially, hatred is a toxic mental state that rejects reality, trying to push away what we do not like, rather than accepting it with compassion or equanimity.

2.3.3 Delusion (*moha*)

2.3.3.1 Hatred in the form of anger is the easiest to overcome; very often words of assurance or comfort, or simply changing the subject helps remove anger. Greed, due to it being rooted in a memory or an unconscious desire, is harder to remove. The most difficult root to see, much less uproot, is that of **delusion**, which is very subtle and deep-rooted.

Thus it is said in **the (Tika) Añña Tittiyā Sutta** (A 3.68):

Lust	is a small fault but slow to fade away;	<i>rāgo kho āvuso appa,sāvajjo dandha,virāgī</i>
hate	is a great fault but quick to fade away;	<i>doso mahā,sāvajjo khippa,virāgī</i>
delusion	is a great fault and slow to fade away.	<i>moho mahā,sāvajjo dandha,virāgī</i>
(A 3.68,1.5), SD 16.4 (1.1)		

2.3.3.2 While acts rooted in greed or in hatred often arise preconsciously³² (just before we act or speak) due to delusion, **delusion** itself is more deeply rooted in ignorance (a latent tendency). Hence, it is said in **the (Tika) Mūla Sutta** (A 3.69) that one who has any of the 3 unwholesome roots, especially delusion, is said to be one:

who speaks at <u>the wrong time</u> ,	<i>akāla,vādī</i>
who speaks what is <u>false</u> ,	<i>abhūta,vādī</i>
who speaks what is <u>useless</u> [not connected with the spiritual goal],	<i>anatta,vādī</i>
who speaks <u>against the Dharma</u> [against reality],	<i>adhamma,vādī</i>
who speaks <u>against the Vinaya</u> [against moral discipline],	<i>avinaya,vādī</i>

Such a person [is] called one *who speaks at the wrong time, who speaks what is false, who speaks what is useless, who speaks what is not-Dharma, who speaks against the Vinaya* [because, bhikkhus, this person wrongly inflicts suffering on another by killing, or by holding, or by incurring losses, or by blaming, or by banishing, thinking, “I’m powerful! This is for the sake of power!”

But on being told the truth, he denies it, he does not acknowledge it.

When told a lie, he makes no effort to reject [undo] it by saying, “This is untrue,” or “This is false.” (A 3.69,4)/1:202, SD 18.2

2.3.3.3 In summary then, **delusion**, deeply rooted in the ground of ignorance, works in 3 basic ways:

- **It makes one ignorant of true reality.** One is said to be ignorant in the sense that one lacks understanding of the true nature of reality, that is, impermanence, suffering, and nonself. Or one may have a good understanding of impermanence or suffering, but still cling to self-view.

³¹ See SD 64.6 (2.1.4).

³² In the SD series, “preconscious” usu refers to the intention or volitional stage before the act; see SD 17.8b esp (1.1.2; 2.2), SD 7.10 (3.3).

- **It makes one cling to a concept of “self.”** Delusion creates and feeds the false view of a permanent “self,” eternal Soul or abiding “I” that one regards to be “something”; that drives one to want to possess, control, or enjoy experiences as if they can be collected or are permanent.
- **It gives one mistaken perception.** Delusion makes one recall things in a biased and false way, that is, to see things as *permanent, pleasurable, and abiding*, when they are, in fact, impermanent, unsatisfactory and lacking any abiding essence.

3 Self-effort and helping others

3.1 SELF-EFFORT MEANS KNOWING AND FREEING ONESELF

3.1.1 Self-accountability

3.1.1.1 Early Buddhism is perhaps the only world “religion” that teaches neither reliance on mere faith nor on some external agency for salvation. **Faith** (*saddhā*) is accepted as a good start for religious training but it is like a seed that has to be nurtured with wise faith (*avecca-p, pasāda*) so that one gains the wisdom of self-liberation.³³ **Love** (*pema*), too, serves as a wholesome starting-point for Dharma practice, from which one reflects on impermanence.³⁴

Faith and love here are useful as positive attitudes not towards any external agency, nor even to the Buddha,³⁵ but for the inner cultivation of wisdom within one’s own mind.³⁶ Faith and love serve as the basis for moral development, that is, by the understanding that any bad or good begins with oneself, one’s own intentions. The moral quality of one’s actions (deeds, speech and thoughts) depends on one’s intention behind those actions.

Faith thus means that one is capable of purifying and liberating oneself by one’s own effort in self-knowing. This self-knowledge also entails a joyful acceptance of one’s inner goodness that forms the basis for moral action for the benefit of others by way of respect for *life, property, freedom, truth and the mind (wisdom)*.³⁷

3.1.1.2 The Buddha’s famous declaration on **self-mastery** is recorded in this Dhammapada verse:

*attā hi attano nātho
ko hi nātho paro siyā
attanā’va sudantena
nātham labhati dullabham*

One is one’s own master [refuge and saviour]; [Dh 380a]
for, who else can the master be?
With oneself [the mind] well tamed, indeed,
one gets a saviour difficult to find.

(Dh 160, cf 380)³⁸

First and foremost, it should be understood that by “one” or “self” (*attā*) here is meant one’s own mind, the source of all self-effort—the natural ability to learn and change—the fruit of self-salvation. It points to natural and radical self-reliance and personal responsibility—that is, **self-accountability**—reject-

³³ On faith, see SD 56.2 (3.5.2).

³⁴ **Sarakāṇi S** (S 55.24), SD 3.6; also SD10.5 (1).

³⁵ As a positive emotion, however, love may be directed to the Buddha or a teacher (without any blind devotion) when the feeling moves one to practice effectively. See **Sarakāṇi S** (S 55.24), SD 3.6; SD10.5 (1).

³⁶ On Sāriputta’s comment on faith, see SD 40a.8 (5.6.2), and on Citta Gaha,pati’s faith, see SD 40a.8 (5.6.3).

³⁷ On these 5 values, see SD 1.5 (2.7+2.8); SD 51.11 (2.2.3.4); SD 54.2e (2.3.2.5); SD 63.12 (3.2.2).

³⁸ For other trs of **Dh 160**, cf 380: SD 20.9 (II Mod Comy: Tha 1138) (free tr); SD 26.3 (2.1.2); SD 34.1 (5.2); SD 36.1(3.4.3); SD 38.4 (3.3.3.4); SD 49.2 (2.1.4.2, 3.6.2); SD 64.7 (3.2); SD 57.33 (2.3.4.2). See also SD 60.1e (13.1.1); **Spiritual friendship: A textual study**, SD 34.1 (5.2).

ing any idea that salvation comes from an external deity or saviour [2.1.2.5], or through mere faith in Buddhism or any teaching.

True mastery is in not controlling others but is in self-mastery; that is, by disciplining one's own actions and speech—by knowing, taming and freeing one's own mind—thus, one's feelings and emotions are wholesome and liberating.

3.1.1.3 Self-accountability is further explained by the Buddha in **the Deva,dūta Sutta** (M 130) in this way:

This bad deed was *not* done by your mother or your father,
nor by your brother or your sister,
nor by your friends or companions,
nor by your kinsmen or relatives,
nor by recluses or brahmins,
nor by the gods—

this bad deed was done by you, and you yourself will feel its result.³⁹

(M 130,4.5 passim/3:179 f), SD 2.23

*Attanā'va*⁴⁰ *kataṃ pāpaṃ*
attanā saṅkilissati
attanā akataṃ pāpaṃ
attanā'va visujjhati
suddhī asuddhī paccattaṃ
*nāñño aññaṃ*⁴¹ *visodhaye.*

By oneself is evil done,
by oneself is one defiled.
By oneself is evil not done,
by oneself is one purified.
Purity or impurity depends on oneself.
No one purifies another.

(Dh 165, cf 161)⁴²

In dynamic karmic terms, **the Abhiṇṇa Paccavekkhittabba Tḥāna Sutta** (A 5.57) reminds us to reflect thus:

"I'm the owner of my deeds, the heir to my deeds, the womb of my deeds, the relative of my deeds, my deeds are my refuge; whatever deed I've done, good or bad, I'll be its heir."⁴³

3.1.2 Self-nature, self-salvation

3.1.2.1 Good and evil cannot be transferred

Dh 165 teaches that goodness and merits are *self-created* and cannot be transferred.⁴⁴ The Buddha and the early monastics preserved and transmitted the teachings down to us to this day by way of the suttas through the oral tradition. The term "transmission" or "transference" is used in a *passive* sense to mean that it is only when we mindfully hear and remember the teachings, and practise them accordingly

³⁹ *Tāya v'etaṃ pāpaṃ kammaṃ kataṃ. Tvañ ñeva tassa vipākaṃ paṭsaṃvedissasīti.* See SD 2.23 (3.4.3).

⁴⁰ So Ce Ee Se; Be *attanā hi.*

⁴¹ So Be Ee Se; Ce *nāññaṃ aññaṃ.*

⁴² See SD 36.1 (3.4.1); SD 38.4 (3.3.3.4); SD 49.10 (1.2.2); SD 60.1d (2.1.2.4). For grammatical nn: Dh:N 104 n165.

⁴³ A 5.57,7(5) + 8, SD 5.12.

⁴⁴ A common but serious wrong view upheld by some modernist and worldly priests and professional teachers is that "merits can be transferred." From the teachings of **Tirokuḍḍa S** (Khp 7 = Pv 1.5), SD 2.7 (1), and **(Dasaka) Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.177), SD 2.6a, it is clear that there is no "transference of merit": we can and should only "dedicate" merits to the departed. See SD 60.1d (4.5.1.4).

—"in keeping with the Dharma" (*dhammānudhamma,paṭipatti*)⁴⁵—that are we said to have "realized" true reality.

In an important way, nothing is transferred; the teaching is heard as words; practised in our body, speech and mind. As a result, we realize—make true and real—the Dharma to which the Buddha himself awakened. This realization, too, *frees* us from ignorance and suffering.

3.1.2.2 The Buddha and the path

The Gāraṇa Sutta (S 6.2) records the Buddha as declaring that even he looks up to the Dharma, that the Dharma, the teaching and true reality, are always above the teacher. For without the truth and teaching, there is no teacher.⁴⁶ Thus, even when the teacher dies, the teaching lives on and becomes the teacher—this is possible and real through our **self-effort**.

The Dhammapada story of Sāriputta (**DhA 7.8**) relates **Sāriputta's use of paradoxical language** to illustrate his own self-awakening. The Buddha asked Sāriputta regarding the 5 faculties:⁴⁷

"Do you believe, Sāriputta, that the faculty of faith, when cultivated and developed, leads into the deathfree, has the deathfree as its final goal?" (*saddhasi tvam sārīputta saddh'indriyaṃ bhāvitam bahulīkatarā amat'ogadhamā hoti amata,pariyosānan ti*)

Sāriputta replied:

"Bhante, **I do not go by faith in the Blessed One** in this matter, that 'the faculty of faith ... has the deathfree as its final goal.' Those, bhante, to whom it is unknown, unseen, unperceived, unrealized, unexperienced with wisdom, may go by the faith of others in this matter, 'the faculty of faith ... has the deathfree as its final goal.'"

A congregation of 30 unawakened monks, hearing this, thought that Sāriputta had wrong view. The Buddha then explained to them what he had asked Sāriputta:

"For I asked, 'Do you believe, Sāriputta, that there is anyone who, without cultivating the 5 faculties and without developing calm and insight, is able to realize the path and the fruits?'

He answered, 'There is no one who realizes the paths and the fruits in this way, bhante.'

(I further asked:) 'Do you not believe that there is the ripening of the fruit of what is given or what is done; do you not believe in the virtues of the Buddha, and so on?'

He replied that he did not go by the faith of others in the qualities. The reason was that he had, by himself, not through others, attained dhyana, insight, the path and the fruit. Therefore, he is blameless."

Having said that, he made the connection, and teaching Dharma, uttered this verse:

*Assaddho akataññū ca*⁴⁸
*sandhi-c,chedo*⁴⁹ *ca yo naro*
hatāvakāso vantāso
sa ve uttama,poriso.

Not through faith, but knowing the uncreated,
that man who has broken the connection,
destroyed the opening (for rebirth), given up desire—
he is truly the supreme person.

(DhA 7.8/1:186-188; Dh 97; cf Dh 383), 40a.8 (5.6.2)

3.1.2.3 The Buddha as teacher

Throughout the early Buddhist canonical texts—especially the suttas—the Buddha never claimed to be more than a teacher (*akkhātā*). This is not to say that the Buddha is not "powerful" or "glorious" like

⁴⁵ See **Dhammānudhamma Patipanna S** (It 3.4.7), SD 73.13; (**Sotāpatti-y**) **Aṅga S** (S 55.50), SD 70.1(2); (**Sotāpatti**) **Phala S** (S 55.55,2 (4)) + SD 3.3(4.1) (2(4)).

⁴⁶ S 6.2/2:20 f (SD 12.3).

⁴⁷ This is an abridged tr.

⁴⁸ Lit (from common usage), "Without faith and without gratitude." The tr senses come from a literal wordplay.

⁴⁹ Lit, "breaking the wall" (playful allusion to house-breaking).

some God-figure or God-sent prophet. Rather, it means that **the teaching** is itself efficacious, independent of the teacher, the one who has realized the teaching and serves as its exemplar.

This idea of the teaching being above the teacher is like that of a scientist who discovers some important scientific truth or medical cure. The scientific truth depends neither on the scientist nor on some superhuman agency; it is naturally and universally true and real. Anyone who knows science or properly studies science will be able to understand, even use, that scientific or medical knowledge.

The import of this sentiment is that of *self-effort, self-reliance and self-awakening*, as evident in this Buddha's verse from the Dhammapada:

*Tumhehi kiccam ātappaṃ
akkhātāro tathāgatā
paṭipannā pamokkhanti
jhāyino māra,bandhanā*

You yourself should make the effort:
the tathagatas [buddhas] are teachers—
meditators who practise
are freed from Māra's bonds. (Dh 276)⁵⁰

3.1.2.4 Since we are our own teacher, we need to see our task at self-salvation in an urgent way—the Dharma is to be seen here and now, neither in the hereafter nor in some external agency. If we see salvation as an after-death reward or wait for it to be bestowed by some almighty figure out there, we would have lost the opportunity to know about true reality because our mind is directed to some dogma instead of true reality.

Thus the Buddha reminds us in **the Bhadd'eka, ratta Gāthā** (M 131):

*Ajj'eva kiccam ātappaṃ
ko jaññā maraṇaṃ suve
na hi no saṅgaraṃ tena,
mahā, senena maccunā.*

Work at the task this very day!⁵¹
Who knows, death will come tomorrow?
For, there is no bargaining whatsoever
with death's great horde.

(M 131/3:187), SD 8.9

3.1.2.5 The mind as creator and liberator

Self-reliance puts **the mind** centrestage in our lives. The Dhammapada opens with the statement that the mind is the forerunner of all actions (Dh 1 f). As one thinks, one will act. If one acts with a disciplined, purified mind, happiness follows one "like a shadow that never departs" (Dh 2).

When we ourselves know and live the wholesome, we are in a good position to help others by simply serving as a living exemplar. As explained in **Dhammapada 165**, no one can purify another. Evil is done by oneself, and impurity is caused by oneself; conversely, purification and liberation are achieved by oneself, too [3.1.1.3, 3.1.2.1].

Hence, self-reliance and self-salvation are in no way a call of egoism, that we should only care about the self. In fact, we are more likely to see subtle yet real **egoism** in God-religions, where priority is given to the God-idea; self and others, humans and other beings, should all serve the will of the Almighty and glorify Him—like some ancient Emperor in the dark past of history. God seems to be the Great Self and other creatures are but little selves, mere shadows in God's light.

3.1.2.6 Early Buddhism stresses on life-centred self-reliance. Life comes first and should be respected; this is our reflexive awareness as **humans**. We know good and evil, and so we can understand pain and

⁵⁰ See M 131,3.3n, SD 8.9; SD 26.3 (4.3.4); SD 39.5 (1.3.3 n); SD 45.8 (4.3.1); SD 60.1d (2.1.2.4).

⁵¹ This line and the next are qu at UA 89, DhA 3:430. Cf "You must make the effort! | The tathagatas (only) show the way. | Liberated are meditators who practise, | freed from Māra's bonds" (*tumhehi kiccam ātappaṃ | akkhātāro tathāgatā | paṭipannā pamokkhanti | jhāyino māra,bandhanā*, Dh 276).

suffering. Just as we love life and feel pain, so do other living beings. From this self-knowledge comes a deep connection with other-concern; from wisdom comes compassion.

Paradoxically, this self-reliance leads to the understanding of **nonself** (*anatta*), as one realizes that through mental cultivation, one can free oneself from the views and actions that cause suffering to self and to others. Thus, to know oneself is to know others and all else (*sabba*).

3.1.2.7 The psychological dangers of God-idea

The psychological dangers of **the God-idea** are clear. When we believe in God, an almighty creator or external agency, we have *created* God. What we have created, we will also *destroy* in due course—because of our own human weakness. The God-idea is the most pernicious conception of the self-view, the apotheosis of the self—as seen in the great Ātman in Brahmanism. When we worship the Self, we are likely to see and treat others as “not-self,”⁵² as being different and outside our circle. This only brings on discrimination, as seen in the caste system of the brahmins. Ultimately, God and gods die when we fail to worship them; when we are no more in the image of those God or gods.

Rejecting the self-view, the Buddha points to **self-reliance**. Instead of the self as memory of the past, the Buddha upholds **the mind** as our true self, a self that is always in the making, and transforming itself in the face of learning from our faculties and the world. The Buddha thus gives us a most blessed alternative to God-belief or dependence on any external agency for salvation.

In summary, being our own master means that **we are the creator of our own future** based on our actions (karma), and we have the power to attain awakening through personal effort and mental training. Religion and ignorance enslave the mind; self-effort liberates the mind.

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⁵² The early Buddhist teaching on **not-self** or nonself is that there is only impermanence and unsatisfactoriness in the impermanent; hence, there is no abiding entity in whatever that exists, physical or mental.

Atta,hita Sutta 1

The 1st Discourse on Self-benefit

A 4.96

Bhikshus, 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. |

(1) And how, bhikshus, is a person **practising for his own welfare but not for the welfare of others?**

Here, a certain person practises to remove his own lust, hatred, and delusion but does not encourage others to remove their *lust, hatred, and delusion*.

It is in this way that a person is *practising for his own welfare but not for the welfare of others*.

(2) And how is a person **practising for the welfare of others but not for his own welfare?**

Here, a certain person encourages others to remove their lust, hatred and delusion, but does not practise to remove his own *lust, hatred and delusion*.

It is in this way that a person is *practising for the welfare of others but not for his own welfare*.

(3) And how is a person **practising neither for his own welfare nor for the welfare of others?**

Here, a certain person neither practises to remove his own lust, hatred, and delusion, nor does he encourage others to remove their *lust, hatred, and delusion*.

It is in this way that a person is *practising neither for his own welfare nor for the welfare of others*.

(4) And how is a person **practising both for his own welfare and for the welfare of others?**

Here, a certain person practises to remove his own lust, hatred, and delusion, and he encourages others to remove their *lust, hatred, and delusion*. [97]

It is in this way that a person is *practising both for his own welfare and for the welfare of others*.

These, bhikshus, are the 4 kinds of persons found in the world.

—evaṃ—

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