SD 65.17

Sāḷha Sutta

The Discourse to Sāḷha | **A 4.196**
Theme: The right path is that of moral purification without ascetic abstinence
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1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The Sāḷha Sutta (A 4.196) records the Buddha as declaring that extreme austerities—in the form of ascetic abstinence (or the asceticism of loathsomeness) (*tapo,jigucchā*)[1] [2.1]—is not the path to awakening. The right path comprises moral virtue (the purification of body, speech, mind and of livelihood). This is the proper foundation for right concentration (nonself of the 5 aggregates) and right view (proper understanding of the 4 noble truths), which leads to awakening.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE: THE TETRAD

The reason for **the Sāḷha Sutta** being included in the Book of Fours (*catukka nipāta*) of the Aṅguttara Nikāya is hinted by the Sutta's thesis: "Those recluses and brahmins whose (1) bodily, (2) verbal, and (3) mental conduct are impure, and (4) whose livelihood is impure, are incapable of knowledge and vision of unsurpassed awakening" [§§2.2, 4.2, 4.3, 7.2]. This statement has 4 key items.

An additional reason for the Sutta being included in the Book of Fours is clearly because of the set of 4 qualities of the noble warrior fit to be king, that is, he is (1) able to perform feats or tricks with arrows (*kaṇḍa,cittakāni,* pl) [7.3 n], (2) a long-distance shooter (*dure,pāti*), (3) a sharp-shooter (*akkhaṇa.vedhī*), and (4) one who cleaves a great body [target] (*mahato kāyassa padāletā*). [§7.3] [3]

2 *Tapo,jigucchā* and *sīla-b,bata*

2.1 *TAPO JIGUCCHĀ*

2.1.1 The 2 means of crossing the flood

2.1.1.1 The layman Sāḷha reports to the Buddha that outside sectarians advocate **2 means** for "crossing the flood" [3.1], which are moral purification (*sīla,visuddhi*) and ascetic abstinence (*tapo,jigucchā*). While **moral purification** is the practice of cultivating the moral precepts, right livelihood and proper usage of allowable means of support, *ascetic abstinence* comprises various types of self-mortification (*atta,kila-mathânuyoga* or *dukkara,kiriyā*) rejected by the Buddha in his teaching of the "middle way."

In **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattanā Sutta** (S 56.11) the Buddha states that he has tried **the 2 extremes** of:

1. devotion to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures (*kāma,sukh'allikânuyoga*) and
2. devotion to self-mortification (*atta,kilamathânuyoga*).[2]

[1] PED wrongly defines it as "disgust for asceticism": SD 1.4 (1.3).
[2] **S 56.11**,2-3 + SD 1.1 (3.1); SD 29.6a (4.1).

As young Siddhattha, he spent his youth reveling in the extreme of sensual pleasures in the 3 mansions, as described in various suttas.[3] His precocious insight into the impermanence of life, power and pleasure, made him realize the predicaments of *youth, health and life*, that they will all surely end in *decay, disease and death*. These were graphically depicted in the first 3 of the 4 sights—respectively, *an old man, a sick man, and a dead man*. On seeing the 4th sight—that of *the renunciant*—he decided that he had to renounce the world in quest of freedom from these 3 great evils which constitute suffering.

2.1.1.2 After spending the first year of his renunciation doing meditation with Āḷāra Kālāma and with Uddaka Rāma,putta, he mastered the highest formless dhyanas from them. However, even these advanced meditations did not bring him any answer. The next 6 years he spent doing vigorously extreme yogic practices. This was the bodhisattva's personal experience of **ascetic abstinence** (*tapo jigucchā*), better known as "self-mortification" (*atta,kilamathânuyoga*) or "ascetic practices" (*dukkara,kiriyā*).

The bodhisattva's self-mortification is briefly mentioned in **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36). He started off "with my teeth clenched and my tongue pressed against my palate" to gain "unremitting mindfulness." He found himself only being exhausted by this (M 36,20.5). Then, he practised breathingless [non-breathing] meditation in 4 increasingly difficult levels (M 36,21-25)**.** Finally, over a period, he went on from taking "very little food" to "cutting food entirely."

His body suffered disastrously. He fell on his face when he defecated or urinated [§28.26-30]. People thought he looked black or brown, though some thought he was sallow (M 36,28-30). Realizing that he was no nearer to awakening, he reflected on his efforts, and wondered, "Could there be another path to awakening?"[4]

His discovery of the "middle way" (*majjhima paṭipadā*) is described in **the Ariya Pariyesanā Sutta** (M 26); that is, the formulation and teaching of the noble eightfold path (*ariya aṭṭh'aṅgika magga*) and the 4 noble truths, and his declaration of having attained nirvana and liberation.[5]

2.1.1.3 Thus, when the Buddha, as recorded in **the Sāḷha Sutta** (A 4.196), rejects "ascetic abstinence" (*tapo,jigucchā*) as not able to bring one to liberation or awakening, he is speaking from his own experience and wisdom. On the other hand, the Buddha states that he accepts **purification of moral conduct** (*sīla visuddhi*) as a limb of recluseship (*sāmañ'aṅga*), that is, it is capable of bringing one to the path of awakening.

The term "**limb of recluseship**" is a general term referring to Buddhist moral training, specifically to the famous "**fruits of recluseship**" (*sāmañña,phala*), listed in the first 12 of the Dīgha Nikāya suttas, such as **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2).[6] The "fruits of recluseship" pericope comprises the following:

moral virtue	D 2,43-63,[7]
mental development	D 2,64-86,
the knowledge of supernormal powers	D 2,87-96, and
the development of liberating wisdom	D 2,97-98.[8]

[3] See **Sukhumāla S** (A 3.38), SD 63.7; **Mahā'padāna S** (D 14,1.43), SD 49.8; **(Paribbājaka) Māgandiya S** (M 75,10), SD 31.5.

[4] **M 36**,20-30/1:242-246 (SD 49.4). This account, however, seems to be an abridgement of a longer account given in **Mahā Sīhanāda S** (**M 12**,44-61/1:77-82), SD 49.1. On overcoming fear in solitary ascetic practice: **Bhaya Bherava S** (**M 4**/1:16-24), SD 44.3.

[5] **M 26**,17-19/1:167 f (SD 1.11).

[6] **Sāmañña,phala S** (**D 2**,39-100), SD 8.10; SD 21.6 (2).

[7] On the moralities (*sīla*), see SD 8.10 (3).

[8] See **D 2**,43-98/1:4-83 (SD 8.10); Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:195 f.

2.1.2 The Buddha as one supreme in "ascetic abstinence"

2.1.2.1 In **the Kassapa Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 8), the Buddha declares that of the "noble supreme ascetic abstinence" (*ariyā paramā tapo,jigucchā*) he is supreme.[9] It is in fact a synonym of self-mortification (*attā,-kilamathânuyoga* or *dukkara,kiriyā*). As we have noted, the bodhisattva himself went through 6 years of self-mortification, and knew for himself that it is an unsafe and unbeneficial practice, religious or otherwise. [2.1.1.2]

Furthermore, in **the Udumbarika Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 25), the Buddha instructed the arrogant Nigrodha, leader of a large community of wanderers, on the true nature of ascetic abstinence (*tapo,jugucchā*), which is the Sutta's key teaching.[10] From the drift of the Sutta, it is clear that Nigrodha (and the wanderers) knew about these practices but did not actually practise them—he *wasn't* sure of the goals or benefits of the different phases of ascetic abstinence! Hence, the Buddha did not teach him beyond the practice of the 4 immeasurables (lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity).[11]

In response to Nigrodha's arrogance, the Buddha showed wry humour in actually displaying his mastery of ascetic abstinence, well known in Nigrodha's wanderer teachings, but which he had himself neither benefitted from nor practised. This is also perhaps the reason why Nigrodha rejected the Buddha's invitation to take up spiritual training under him.[12]

2.2 *SĪLA-B,BATA*

2.2.1 Rituals and vows are mental fetters

2.2.1.1 The Buddha rejects self-mortification—which includes "ascetic abstinence" [2.1]—for the simple reason that it does not benefit spiritual practice and is in fact harmful healthwise. On the other hand, moral purification benefits spiritual practice insofar as it is used for cultivating the body (and speech) for the purpose of mental cultivation. However, when moral virtue—the keeping of precepts—is only taken up as a pious externality or ritual expression, it becomes mere "**rituals and vows**" (*sīla-b,bata*); they are actually a spiritual hindrance, a fetter that holds one back in samsara.

2.2.1.2 The Sīla-b,bata Sutta (A 3.78) records the Buddha as asking the venerable Ānanda:

sabbaṃ nu kho, ānanda, sīla-b,bataṁ jīvitaṁ brahma,cariyaṁ upaṭṭhāna,sāraṁ saphalan ti.
"Ānanda, are all … as essence?"

The Pali sentence can be read in 2 ways: with *upaṭṭhāna* as a term parallel to *sāraṁ* or a distributive applying to each of the preceding components. Thus we can read the Pali in either of these 2 ways:

(1) "Is all … celibate spiritual life established on rituals and vows as the essence fruitful?" or
(2) "Do all those … established in rituals and vows have a celibate spiritual life as the essence fruitful?"

Hence, in both **the Sīla-b,bata Sutta** (A 3.78) and **the Gaṇika Sutta** (U 6.8), the phrase *sīla-b,bata* refers generally to an "extreme ritual practice," that is, merely keeping to observances for their own sake. The usual

[9] **D 8**,21/1:174 (SD 73.12).
[10] **D 25**,7.6/3:39 (SD 1.4).
[11] **D 25**,19/3:52 (SD 1.4).
[12] **D 25**,21-24/3:55 f (SD 1.4 (1.0.2.2)).

term for the fetter that needs to be broken to attain streamwinning is stated as ***sīla-b,bata parāmāsa,*** "attachment to rituals and vows," that is, one of the 10 fetters (*saṁyojana*).[13]

2.2.1.3 The Commentaries give the following interpretations. The Aṅguttara Commentary favours the latter [2.2.1.2]. The Udāna Commentary gives both interpretations.

The Aṅguttara Commentary thus glosses the sentence as if it meant **the setting up or establishing** of one's spiritual practice rather than the practice itself to be the essence of spiritual life*:* "Setting it up as the essence, having set it up [with the conviction] that it is excellent, the goal" (*upaṭṭhānena sāram "idaṁ varaṁ idaṁ nitthā ti evaṁ upaṭṭhitaṁ*, AA 2:335,4 f)

The same sequence of terms is at **the Gaṇikā Sutta,** "the discourse on the courtesan" (U 6.8),[14] where it means:

> "A celibate spiritual life established in rituals and vows as the essence"—this is one extreme; those who hold such a doctrine: "There is nothing wrong with sense-desires"—this is the other extreme.
>
> (U 6.8/71,29-31)

The Udāna Commentary allows *both* interpretations: either as a distributive or as one additional type of ascetic practice, by the observance of certain ascetic practices.[15]

The "life or holy life" (for monastics or laity) or the "life of holy living" (for monastics) (*jīvitaṁ brahma,-cariyaṁ*) represent the "extreme of self-mortification." In fact, **the (Tika) Paṭipadā Sutta** (A 3.151,2)[16] describes specific practices where they are called "the burning [painful] practice" (*nijjhāmā paṭipadā*).[17] The Sutta gives the opposite extreme as the view that there is no harm in sensual pleasures, that is the "coarse practice" (*āgāḷhā paṭipadā*).[18] The Buddha's teaching, the "**middle way**" (*majjhimā paṭipadā*), avoids both extremes.[19]

3 The Sutta parables

3.1 WATER AND FLOOD METAPHORS

3.1.1 The flood of inflows[20]

3.1.1.1 The Sāḷha Sutta (A 4.196) employs metaphors of **the flood** (*ogha*) [§§1.2, 2.1, 4.3] and of **crossing a river** [§§5, 6]. A flood, as is well known, is not only dangerous, since it can sweep us away and drown us, it separates us from our destination of safety, and makes the land uninhabitable. A rushing or moving flood is especially dangerous, since it can carry us away, into the open, deep ocean. In early Buddhist literature, the flowing currents of the flood often represent the suffering cycle of samsara in which we can be caught and drowned.

3.1.1.2 The early Buddhist texts often speak of **the mental influxes** (*āsava*), that is, defilements that flow through the 5 senses and the mind, and flood our lives with distraction and suffering. The later canon-

[13] SD 40a.8 (3); SD 51.5 (5.2.4.2-5.2.4.5); SD 56.1 (4.4.1.4).
[14] **U 6.8**/71,29-31.
[15] UA 351,9-17,
[16] A:Be 3:156.
[17] A 3.151,2/1:295,8.
[18] A 3.151,1/1:295,2.
[19] A 3.151,3/1:296,9.
[20] Similar nn are found at SD 30.3 (1.3.3).

ical texts speak of the 4 influxes (*āsava*). Since they flood our being, they are also called "**floods**" (*ogha*); since they yoke us to the world of cyclic suffering, they are also called "**yokes**"; that is, as follows:

	āsava	***ogha***[21]	***yoga***[22]
1. sensual desire	*kām'āsava*	*kām'ogha,*	*kāma,yoga*
2. existence	*bhav'āsava*	*bhav'ogha,*	*bhava,yoga*
3. views	*diṭṭh'āsava*	*diṭṭh'ogha,*	*diṭṭhi,yoga*
4. ignorance	*avijjâsava*	*avijj'ogha,*	*avijjā,yoga*

3.1.1.3 The older suttas, such as **the Sabb'āsava Sutta** (M 2,6.1), mention only **3 influxes**, those of sense-desire, of existence, and of ignorance.[23] It is clear from the Sutta that influx (*āsava*) is simply a more ancient term for "fetter" (*saṁyojana*). The influx of *sense-desire* is eradicated by the path of non-returning, and the influxes of existence and of *ignorance* by that of arhathood. **The 3 influxes** were thus an early set used to explain the attaining of the path of awakening.[24]

However, with a surge of new awakened renunciants, there was a need to explain the attaining of the path in simpler detail. For this purpose, the 3 influxes were expanded into the model of **the 10 fetters** (*dasa saṁyojana*). Hence, both models—the influxes and the fetters—effectively cover the same aspects, their difference is only a matter of how they are explained to the practitioner.

Thus, **the 10 fetters** (*dasa saṁyojana*) can be subsumed under the 3 influxes (*āsava*) as follows:

the 10 fetters (*saṁyojana*)	**the 3 influxes (*āsava*)**
(1) personality view	(1) the influx of sense-desire
(2) spiritual doubt	
(3) attachment to rituals and vows	
(4) sensual lust	
(5) repulsion	
(6) greed for form existence	(2) the influx of existence
(7) greed for formless existence	
(8) conceit	(3) the influx of ignorance
(9) restlessness	
(10) ignorance	

(S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377)[25]

Table 3.1.1.3 The fetters and the influxes[26]

3.1.1.4 The 4th influx, according to the later model, is **the influx of view***,* and would cover *conceit* and *restlessness* (fetters 8 and 9) [Table 3.1.1.3], as both of them arise on account of not fully understanding the

[21] As floods (*ogha*), see **Ogha Pañha S** (S 38.11), SD 30.3(1.4) + (1.4.2); **Cūḷa Gopālaka S** (M 34,6) n, SD 61.3.

[22] As yokes (*yoga*), see **Cūḷa Gopālaka S** (M 34,6) n SD 61.3; SD 9 (10.4.2.2) n; SD 30.3 (1.4.2 n); SD 70.18 (2.4.1 n)

[23] **M 2**,6.1/1:7 (SD 30.3). *Tayo āsavā, kāmâsavo, bhavâsavo, avijjâsavo,* D 3:216,9 ≠ M 1:55,10; MA 1:86,20, 3:41,-25 (on M 1:361,24); A 3:414,11; S 4:256,4 = 5:56,15 = 189,29; Vbh 347,11.

[24] On the 3 influxes: SD 30.3 (1.3.3).

[25] On how the 4 influxes fit into the 10 fetters, see SD 50.12 (2.5.2.2) + Table.

[26] For the Pali terms, see similar Table 2.3.2 (SD 62.1). On *saṁyojana* & *āsava,* see SD 30.3 (1.3.3): 3 influxes; SD 50.-12 (2.5.2.2) + Table.

true nature of the mind and reality, even at this level of the learner who, although being a saint, is still not an arhat yet. Technically, since views arise from ignorance, the influx of view is subsumed under the influx of ignorance, the last of the 10 influxes.[27]

3.1.2 Crossing the waters

3.1.2.1 The Sāḷha Sutta uses 2 important metaphors for "**crossing**" a body of water (a river, a flood, the sea and so on), that is:

§1 "flood-crossing" (*oghassa nittharanaṁ*); and
§5 "a person desiring to cross a river" (*puriso nadiṁ taritu,kāmo*).

In both metaphors—the "crossing" of a flood and of a river—the **crossing** refers to the proper practice that benefits one with eradicating defilements (crossing the waters) [3.1]and gaining liberation (landing on the safe far shore).

The 1st metaphor—the "crossing the flood" (*oghassa nittharaṇa*) [§2.1]—refers to the 2 methods that outside sectarians claim can bring one across the waters of suffering to liberation on the far shore. The 2 methods are those of **moral purification** (*sīla,visuddhi*) [2.1.1.3] and of **ascetic abstinence** (*tapo,jigucchā*) [2.1.2]. While the Buddha accepts moral purification as being capable of bringing one to the path of liberation, he rejects ascetic abstinence as an ineffective and unbeneficial practice that will only harm one.

3.1.2.2 While the metaphors of "**flood**" [3.1.1] and of "crossing the flood" [3.1.2] are well known in the suttas, there is another important meaning of the "flood" metaphor, that is, the path leading to liberation being depicted as "**going against the flow**" (*paṭisota,gāmī*).[28] **The flow** (*sota*) refers to the world—that is, worldly beings—as being driven and fed by the unwholesome roots of *greed, hatred and delusion,* which bring them suffering and cyclic lives.[29]

To "**go against the flow** (or the currents)" means to make "bodily" effort against being driven and drowned by sensual desires, and mental effort to overcome *greed, hatred, delusion and fear*.

Bodily effort refers to:

right action	abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct;	[SD 10.16 (4)]
right speech	abstaining from falsehood, slander, harsh speech and frivolous chatter	[SD 10.16 (3)]
right livelihood	abstaining from immoral and exploitative living.	[SD 10.16 (5)]

Mental effort involves the following:

right effort	the efforts to restrain unarisen bad, to abandon arisen bad, to cultivate unarisen good, to maintain arisen good.	[SD 10.16 (6)]
right mindfulness	observing impermanence in the body, in feelings, in the mind, and in dharmas.	[SD 10.16 (7)]
right concentration	clearing the mind of hindrances and gaining concentration, especially dhyana.	[SD 10.16 (8)]

[27] On the influx of views (*diṭṭh'āsava*) as embodying the 1st 3 fetters (*saṁyojana*), see SD 50.12 (2.5.2.3) & SD 56.13 (1.1.1.5).

[28] A 4.5/2:5; Pug 4.27/8.

[29] SD 29.6a (1.5.2); SD 34.5 (3.1).

These right conducts are the bases for the following:

right intention	a mind to renounce, to love and to be compassionate.	[SD 10.16 (2)]
right view	understanding suffering, its arising (craving), its ending, and the path leading to the ending of suffering.	[SD 10.16 (1.8)]

3.2 MAKING A FUNCTIONAL BOAT

3.2.1 Moral purification

3.2.1.1 The Sāḷha Sutta (A 4.196) opens with the layman Sāḷha the Licchavi asking the Buddha what he thinks of those "recluses and brahmins who proclaim the flood is to be crossed in two ways: by means of purification of moral virtue and by means of ascetic abstinence" [§1.2]. The Buddha replies that **purification of moral virtue** (*sīla,visuddhi*) is a limb of recluseship (*sāmañ'aṅga*), but ascetic abstinence (self-mortification) is not [§2.1].

3.2.1.2 Furthermore, "those recluses and brahmins whose **bodily, verbal, and mental conduct are impure, and whose livelihood is impure**, are incapable of knowledge and vision of unsurpassed awakening" [§2.2]. Without moral purification, one will not gain the path or liberation.

The Buddha then gives the parable of **a man desiring to cross a river** (where there is neither a bridge nor a ferry) [§3]. The man axes down a suitable sal tree, trims away all the branches and leaves, and smoothens it. However, when the man tries to float this bare tree-trunk, it will sink into the water, and the man will meet with disaster. [§3]

3.2.1.3 This parable refers to the person who practises ascetic abstinence. Without **moral purification** one will not be able to progress spiritually. Without moral cultivation of the body, one will not be able to gain mental cultivation to have a mind that is capable of seeing true reality and overcoming one's mental defilements. One is then unable to gain awakening. [§4]

One will sink into the waters of samsara like the man who tries to use the trimmed but bare sal trunk to cross a river. The trunk will not be able to float, but will immediately sink into the water dragging the man down with it. This is the case of one who practises **asceticism of loathsomeness**, and does not practise moral purification; he will not be able to free himself from suffering. [§5]

3.2.3 Crossing over

3.2.3.1 In the case of **the 2nd man**, who is wise and wishes to cross the river, he works to build **a proper boat**. He takes a sharp axe, enters a forest, and sees "a large sal sapling, straight, fresh, without a fruit-bud core." He chops it down at its root, cuts off the top, completely strips off the branches and foliage, trims it with axes, trims it further with hatchets, scrapes it with a scraping tool, polishes it with a stone ball, and then sets out to safely cross the river for the far shore. [§6]

These are the practitioners who abstain from ascetic abstinence, and diligently cultivate **mental purification**. Since their bodily, verbal, and mental behavior are pure, and their livelihood is pure, they are capable of knowledge and vision of unsurpassed awakening. [§4.3]

3.2.3.2 In the parable of the wise man who builds a proper **dugout**, the boat is carefully shaped, both "externally" and "internally" from a solid sal sapling, and with that vessel safely crosses the waters for the far shore [§5]. This refers to the practitioner who *avoids* ascetic abstinence, and "whose bodily, verbal, and

mental conduct are pure, and whose livelihood is pure." He is *capable of knowledge and vision of unsurpassed awakening*. [§6.4]

"**Externally**" (*bahiddhā*) means that he is bodily cultivated (*bhāvita,kāya*); he keeps the precepts, practises right speech, keeps to right livelihood, and has spiritual friendship with his fellows.

"**Internally**" (*anto*) means that he is mentally cultivated (*bhāvita,citta*); he keeps his mind free from the mental hindrances and is able to focus with calm and clarity, so that he prevents or reduces, if not pushes away, mental defilements. [3.3.1.3]

3.2.3.3 This is an early sutta description of **a streamwinner** (*sotāpanna*), the first of the 4 individuals mentioned in the Sutta. He is one who has gained the path of awakening, and will never fall back into wrong ways; even when he inadvertently has a moral lapse he is incapable of hiding it; he will never be reborn in any of the lower planes (of suffering); he will attain awakening within 7 lives at the most.

The later suttas describe a streamwinner as one who has broken **the first 3 fetters**: those of *(1) self-identity view, (2) doubt, and (3) attachment to rituals and vows*. As we have seen, the early suttas mention "rituals and vows" (*sīla-b,bata*), especially by way of ascetic abstinence (*tapo,jigucchā*) as being unsafe for the body and unbeneficial for the mind.[30]

3.3 THE ARCHER METAPHORS

3.3.1 The 4 kinds of accomplished archers

3.3.1.1 The closing half of **the Sāḷha Sutta** contains the Sutta's key teaching where the Buddha speaks of the 4 path-attainers, with a warrior (*yodh'ājīva*) metaphor each for the last 3 [§7]. The Sutta first states thus: "Even though **a warrior** knows many different feats that can be done with arrows,[31] it is only if he possesses 3 qualities that he is "worthy of a king, of service to a king, reckoned a limb of kingship," that is, "He is a long-distance shooter, a sharp-shooter, and one who cleaves a great body [target]." [§7.3][32]

The 4 kinds of path-attainers are as follows:

(1) An archer skilled in arrow tricks (*kaṇḍa,cittaka*). [§7 n]
He does not practise ascetic abstinence but cultivates moral purification [§7.2]. This represents **a streamwinner**.

(2) A long-distance shooter (*dūre,pāti*). [§8]
With right concentration, he rightly reflects on the 3 characteristics and lets go of the 5 aggregates. This represents **a once-returner**.

(3) A sharp-shooter (*akkhaṇa,vedhī*). [§9]
With right view, he truly understands the 4 noble truths. This represents **a nonreturner.**

(4) One who cleaves a great body [target] (*mahato kāyassa padāletā*). [§10]
With right liberation, he cleaves asunder the great mass of ignorance. This represents **an arhat**.

3.3.1.2 The other 3 individuals are all said to be "warriors" (*yodh'ājīva*) [3.3.1.1].

The 1st of the 3 warriors, **the** "**long-distance archer**" (*dūre,pāti*), is one who is able to hit a target from a long distance away. This metaphor refers to one who has good concentration; thus this individual is said to

[30] S 22.109, SD 17.1a(2.3); **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3; SD 52.10a (1.2.2.2-1.2.2.3).
[31] *Seyyathā'pi sāḷha yodh'ājīvo bahūni ce'pi kaṇḍa,cittakāni jānāti.* See tr + nn *ad loc* [§7.3].
[32] *Durepāti ca akkhaṇa,vedhi ca mahato ca kāyassa padāletā.* On archery metaphors, see [3.3].

have **right concentration**. With his focused mind, he reflects on each and every aggregate—*form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness*—"as it really is with right wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'" [§8]

This metaphor refers to the individual on the path who is **a once-returner** (*sakad-āgāmī*).[33] After breaking the 3 fetters (as a streamwinner), he goes on to significantly weaken *greed and hatred* by way of renouncing the idea of self (as evident from the Sutta passage). However, he has yet to uproot the 3 unwholesome roots. He needs to "return" to a last life, usually in the sense-world where he is able to meditate to uproot the rest of his *greed, hatred and delusion* to gain arhathood.

3.3.1.3 The 3rd archer metaphor—that of **the sharp-shooter** (*akkhaṇa,vedhī,* "one who pierces like lightning")—is that of one who is able to hit his target lightning-fast without missing. This metaphor refers to "the noble disciple (who) has **right view** … (and) understands the 4 noble truths [§9] "as they really are."

This 2nd warrior is the 3rd individual is clearly **a nonreturner** (*anāgāmī*); he is one who has broken all the 5 lower fetters (*oram,bhāgiya saṁyojana*)—the 3 fetters [3.3.1.3], along with (4) *sensual lust* and (5) *repulsion*. Since these are fetters that keep one back in the sense-world, the nonreturner will never "return" to be reborn in it. Upon dying here, the nonreturner arises in one of the pure abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*),[34] where he spends the rest of his life meditating in deep dhyana to remove the higher fetters and become an arhat [3.3.1.6].

3.3.1.4 The 4th and last archer metaphor—**the "great body" cleaver** (*mahato kāyassa padāletā*)—refers to the 3rd accomplished warrior who is able to bring down the largest target in battle. This probably refers to the fearsome war-elephant, especially the one ridden by the king himself. When this target is destroyed, it is victory for the warrior. In the metaphor, the arhat is said to be "the noble disciple (who) has **right liberation** … who has cleft asunder the great mass of ignorance."[35]

The concluding phrase, "**the great mass of ignorance**" (*mahantaṁ avijja-k,khandhaṁ*) refers to the remaining "higher fetters" (*uddham,bhāgiya saṁyojana*): (6) *lust for form existence,* (7) *lust for formless existence,* (8) *conceit,* (9) *restlessness, and* (10) *ignorance*. These fetters are so called because they hold us to the higher world, that is, the form- and formless realms (*rūpârūpâvacara*).

3.3.1.5 An interesting (but somewhat tricky) point to note here is that the 5 lower fetters [3.3.1.5] are also called "**internal fetters**" (*ajjhatta saññojana*), since they are rooted in "desire and lust" (*chanda,rāga*); they keep us stuck in the sense-world. These fetters are said to be "internal" (*ajjhatta*) because they are "sense-based"; they arise from desire and attachment to sense-based pleasures.

The 5 higher fetters [3.3.1.6] are called "**external fetters**" (*bahiddhā saññojana*) because they are rooted in attachment to the dhyanas, both form dhyanas and formless dhyanas. These dhyanas and dhyana-worlds are said to be "external" (*bahiddhā*) because they are mental objects. All objects, including mental objects, are said to be "external" because they are "mind-made" (*mano,mayā*). Unlike the sense-world, which are internal sense-experiences, the dhyanic objects are not sense-objects at all; they are trans-sensate (beyond the senses) *mental* objects and experiences.[36]

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[33] SD 10.16 (12.1.2.1).

[34] SD 10.16 (13.1.6); SD 23.14 (Table 3).

[35] Comy explains right concentration as the concentration of the path and fruit. Right view is the vision of the path; the mention of the 4 noble truths points to the 4 paths and 3 fruits. Right liberation is the liberation of the fruit of arhathood. The mass of ignorance is cleft asunder by the path of arhathood, which the disciple has gained before he attains the liberation of the fruit. (AA 3:182,20-183,2). [3.3.1.6]

[36] See **(Duka) Saṁyojana S** (A 2.35), SD 64.12e (1.2); **Ajjhatta Bahiddhā Saññojana S** (A 2.4.5/1:63 f) [A:Be 2.36], SD 80.5; SD 56.13a (7.1.2.2).

Sāḷha Sutta

The Discourse to Sāḷha

A 4.196

MORAL PURIFICATION AND ASCETIC ABSTINENCE

1 At one time, the Blessed One was dwelling in the pinnacled hall in the great wood outside Vesālī.

Then Sāḷha the Licchavi and Abhaya the Licchavi approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and sat down at one side.

1.2 Sitting at one side, **Sāḷha** the Licchavi[37] then said to the Blessed One:

"Bhante, there are some recluses and brahmins who proclaim that there are 2 ways of flood-crossing: by means of purification of moral virtue and by means of ascetic abstinence.[38]

What does the Blessed One say about this?"

2 "I say, Sāḷha, that **purification of moral virtue** is one of the limbs of recluseship.

But those recluses and brahmins who advocate **ascetic abstinence**,[39] who regard ascetic abstinence as the essence, and who adhere to ascetic abstinence, are *incapable of crossing the flood*.[40]

2.2 Also, those recluses and brahmins whose bodily, verbal, and mental conduct are impure, and whose livelihood is impure, are *incapable of knowledge and vision of unsurpassed awakening*.

HOW THE WATERS ARE NOT CROSSED

3 "Suppose, Sāḷha, a man **desiring to cross a river** were to take a sharp axe and enter a forest. There he would see a large sal sapling, straight, fresh, free from any defect.[41]

He would chop it down at its root, cut off the top, completely strip off the branches and foliage,

trim it with axes, trim it further with hatchets, scrape it with a scraping tool,

polish it with a stone ball, and then set out to cross the river.

3.2 What do you think, Sāḷha? Could that man cross the river?"

"No, bhante.

4 What is the reason for that? Because although that sal sapling has been thoroughly prepared externally, **[201]** it has not been purified internally. It can be expected that the sal sapling will sink and the man will meet with calamity and disaster."

4.2 "So too, Sāḷha, those recluses and brahmins who advocate ascetic abstinence, who regard ascetic abstinence as the essence, and who adhere to ascetic abstinence are *incapable of crossing the flood*.

Also, those recluses and brahmins whose bodily, verbal, and mental conduct are impure, and whose livelihood is impure, are *incapable of knowledge and vision of unsurpassed awakening*.

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[37] Nothing is known about Sāḷha and Abhaya, except for this occasion.

[38] For *sīla-b,bata* as a related term, see [2.2].

[39] On the 2 limbs mentioned by Sāḷha, moral purity (*sīla,visuddhi*) and ascetic abstinence (*tapo,jigucchā*), see [2].

[40] The "flood-crossing" (*oghassa nittharaṇa*) is a metaphor for the crossing of samsara or the destruction of defilements. [3.1.2]

[41] *So tattha passeyya mahatiṁ sāla,laṭṭhiṁ ujuṁ navaṁ akukkuccaka,jātaṁ.*

4.3 But, Sāḷha, those recluses and brahmins who do *not* advocate ascetic abstinence, who do not regard ascetic abstinence as the essence, and who do not adhere to ascetic abstinence are *capable of crossing the flood*.

Also, those recluses and brahmins whose bodily, verbal, and mental behavior are pure, and whose livelihood is pure, are *capable of knowledge and vision of unsurpassed awakening*.

How to cross the waters

5 Suppose, Sāḷha, a man **desiring to cross a river** were to take a sharp axe and enter a forest. There he would see a large sal sapling, *straight, fresh, free from any defect*. [§3]

He would chop it down at its root, cut off the top, completely strip off the branches and foliage,
trim it with axes, trim it further with hatchets, scrape it with a scraping tool,
polish it with a stone ball, and make it into a boat.

Then he would equip it with oars and a rudder and set out to cross the river.

6 What do you think, Sāḷha? Could that man cross the river?"

"Yes, bhante.

6.2 What is the reason for that?

Because that sal sapling has been thoroughly prepared externally, well purified internally, made into a boat, and equipped with oars and a rudder.

It can be expected that the sal sapling will not sink and the man will safely reach the other shore."

The 4 qualities that bring one to the path

6.3 **(1)** "So too, Sāḷha, those recluses and brahmins who do *not* advocate ascetic abstinence, who do not regard ascetic abstinence as the essence, and who do not adhere to ascetic abstinence are *capable of crossing the flood*.

6.4 Also, those recluses and brahmins **[202]** whose bodily, verbal, and mental conduct are pure, and whose livelihood is pure, are *capable of knowledge and vision of unsurpassed awakening*.[42]

7 Even though **a warrior** knows many different feats that can be done with arrows,[43] it is only if he possesses 3 qualities that he is worthy of a king, of service to a king, reckoned a limb of kingship.

What are the three?

He is a long-distance shooter, a sharp-shooter, and one who cleaves a great body [target].[44]

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[42] See [3.3.1.2 f].

[43] *Seyyathā'pi sāḷha yodh'ājīvo bahūni ce'pi kaṇḍa,cittakāni jānāti.* Comy: The various clever displays with arrows are those shot to form a long creeper-like line, to look like a long rope (in the air), arranged to form an elevated mansion-like platform, to form a screen or array of arrows, to look like a pond of lotus, or to take the shape of a lotus flower (***kaṇḍa,cittakānī*** *ti saralaṭṭhi,sararajju,sarapāsāda,sarasāṇi,sarapokkharaṇi,sarapadumānī ti anekāni kaṇḍehi kātabba,cittāni,* AA 3:182,14). **Buddha,vaṁsa Comy**: Young Siddhattha was able to let his arrow pierce a piece of *asana*-wood 4 finger-breadths thick; pierce a sheet of iron 8 finger-breadths thick; pierce a plank of fig-wood 12 finger-breadths thick; pierce a wagon of sand; pierce a wagon of sand and a wagon of straw; enter into water as far as 1 cubit (*usabha*); enter the dry ground for a depth of 8 cubits; and shoot into a horse-hair on an egg-plant placed a yojana away, which he did under a storm-cloud in the dark of night! (BA 278,39-279,13); see Vicittasarabhivamsa, *The Great Chronicles of Buddhas,* vol 2 pt 1, 2006:88 f; SD 52.1 (62.3).

[44] *Durepāti ca akkhaṇa,vedhi ca mahato ca kāyassa padāletā.* See [3.3.1.4]. For details, see PED: akkhaṇa.

8 (2) Just as the warrior is ***a long-distance shooter***, so too the noble disciple has **right concentration**.

(1) Whatever kind of **form** there is—
whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—
a noble disciple with right concentration sees all form as it really is with right wisdom thus:
'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

(2) Whatever kind of **feeling** there is—
whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—
a noble disciple with right concentration sees all feeling *as it really is with right wisdom thus:*
'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

(3) Whatever kind of **perception** there is—
whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—
a noble disciple with right concentration sees all perception *as it really is with right wisdom thus:*
'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

(4) Whatever kind of **formations** there are—
whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—
a noble disciple with right concentration sees all formations *as they really are with right wisdom thus:*
'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

(5) Whatever kind of **consciousness** there is—
whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—
a noble disciple with ***right concentration*** sees all consciousness as it really is with right wisdom thus:
'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'[45]

9 (3) Just as the warrior is ***a sharp-shooter***, so too the noble disciple has **right view**. The noble disciple with *right view* understands as it really is:

'This is suffering.'
He understands as it really is: 'This is the arising of suffering.'
He understands as it really is: 'This is the ending of suffering.'
He understands as it really is: 'This is the path leading to the ending of suffering.'[46]

10 (4) Just as the warrior ***cleaves a great body*** [target], so too the noble disciple has **right liberation**. The noble disciple with right liberation has cleft asunder the great mass of ignorance."[47]

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[45] See [3.3.1.4].
[46] See [3.3.1.5].
[47] See Comy at [3.3.1.6] n on "the great mass of ignorance."