SD 65.19

(Dasaka) Niganṭha Sutta

The (Tens) Discourse on the Nirgranthas | **A 10.78**
Theme: The bad qualities of the nirgranthas
Translated by Piya Tan 2017, ©2026

1 Sutta summary and significance

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The (Dasaka) Niganṭha Sutta (A 10.78) lists 10 "bad qualities" of the nirgranthas (early Jain recluses), that they are morally weak, they socialize in unhealthy ways, they lack spiritual strength, and so on.

1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

This Sutta is not a blanket condemnation of the nirgranthas; rather, it is a result of observations from Buddhist encounters with the nirgranthas on various occasions.[1] [3]

2 Buddhist self-criticisms and prophecies

2.1 SUTTAS CRITICAL OF BUDDHISM ITSELF

2.1.1 The Buddha's prophecies

2.1.1.1 In regards to critical analyses, the suttas have even more extensive records of self-criticisms of the negative conduct and wrong practices of the Buddhists themselves, and also warnings of the dangers and effects of negative conduct by Buddhists, especially monastics. Some of these suttas come in the form of prophetic warnings against such negative conduct.

One of the most important prophetic suttas of the Buddha summarizes his concerns into 4 main factors: (1) suttas are misunderstood; (2) monastics are difficult to speak to; (3) suttas are not spoken with respect; and (4) elder monastics become luxurious and do not assert themselves in Dharma practice—as stated in:

Sugata Vinaya Sutta	A 4.160/2:147-149	SD 6.7

2.1.1.2 Early Buddhist prophecies regarding **the decline of the teaching and of the sangha** are found all over the Nikāyas, for example,[2]

Cakka,vatti Sīhanāda Sutta	D 26/3:58-79	SD 36.10
(Kassapa) Ovāda Suttas 1-3	S 16.6-8/2:203-210	SD 88.4+4, 1.10
Saddhamma Paṭirūpaka Sutta	S 16.13/2:223-225	SD 104.10
Āṇi Sutta	S 20.7/2:266 f	SD 11.13
Adhamma Suttas 1 & 2	A 1.10,34-42, 1.11,1-10/1:18-20	SD 104.11-12

[1] See eg N Balbir, "Jain-Buddhist dialogue: Material from the Pāli scriptures," 1997. *J of the Pali Text Society* 26 2000:1-42. [Heidelberg] 20 Aug 2026.

[2] For details on these suttas, see SD 1.10 (3.0). For another list of such suttas, see **(Samudda) Uposatha S** (U 5.5,-6 n), SD 59.2b.

Saddhamma Sammosā Sutta	A 2.2.10/1:58 f	SD 104.13
Kimbila Suttas 1-3	A 5.201, 6.40, 7.56[3], and others	SD 106.12-14

2.1.1.3 The Aṅguttara Nikāya contains an interesting set of 4 suttas all entitled **Anāgata,bhaya Sutta,** discourses of future dangers (A 5.77-80). The first two Suttas are inspirational while the latter two are prophetic:[4]

Anāgata,bhaya Sutta 1	A 5.77/3:100-102	SD 77.15.
Anāgata,bhaya Sutta 2	A 5.78/3:103-105	SD 77.16.
Anāgata,bhaya Sutta 3	A 5.79/3:105-108	SD 77.17; cf S 17.3/2:226 f, 20.7/2:266 f.
Anāgata,bhaya Sutta 4	A 5.80/3:108-110	SD 77.18; cf S 16.1/2:194 f; Miln 401.

2.1.2 Mahā Kassapa and his prophecies

The Buddha, knowing that Sāriputta and Mahā Moggallāna were very old and would predecease him, instructed Mahā Kassapa to advise monastics regarding the Buddhist training and life as recorded in these Suttas:[5]

(Kassapa) Ovāda Sutta 1	S 16.6/S 2:204 f
(Kassapa) Ovāda Sutta 2	S 16.7/S 2:208-210
(Kassapa) Ovāda Sutta 3	S 16.8/2:208-210

2.2 PROPHETIC SUTTAS

2.2.1 Prophecies of monastic decline

2.2.1.1 The term **foremost** (*agga*) usually means "primal," often applied to the beginning of things and the "foremost" knowledge of true reality, as found in the title:

Aggañña Sutta	D 27/3:80-97	SD 2.19.

Although the Sutta is a mythical lesson in the re-arising of the universe, of life and human society, its key ideas deal with how moral conduct is the root of human culture and monastic discipline. It serves as a reflection on the defining and vital aspects of proper human conduct that ultimately bring one the "foremost knowledge" (*aggañ-ña*), that is, true understanding of both the world and of liberation.

2.2.1.2 Moral decline of sangha members or of the Dharma, including its disappearance, are documented at length in such texts as

Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta	D 26/3:58-79	SD 36.10.

The Sutta gives an insight into the early Buddhist view of kingship and governance, especially how moral virtue is closely linked with socioeconomic conditions. Like **the Aggañña Sutta,**[6] this Sutta, too, centres on the theme of how crime arises in society, especially through poverty [2.2.1.1]. Textually, however,

[3] A 5.201/3:247, A 6.40/3:339 f, A 7.56/4:84 [5.2].
[4] For more details, see SD 1.10 (3.1-3.4).
[5] For details, see SD 1.10 (4).
[6] D 27/3:80-97 (SD 2.19).

the Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta, as it were, carries on from where the Aggañña Sutta ends, focusing itself more on a discussion of power, political and spiritual, that is, *the proper role of the ruler*, and, in a somewhat prophetic tone, gives us *a vision of the future of human society*.

2.2.2 The Dharma-ending age

2.2.2.1 As a pragmatic teaching, early Buddhism accepts the fact that, after the Buddha, his teachings are likely to decline, especially when the monastics, who are the moral exemplars of the Dharma, become more worldly and more distracted. As a rule, social change and worldly developments, especially with material progress, tend to make religious teachings become materialistic, too.

Early Buddhism was **an oral tradition**, which meant that Dharma teachings were directly learned from living teachers, and the Dharma was not meant to be for "knowing" facts or mastery or learning, but rather for spiritual practice and personal awakening. With the modern stress on academic and book-learning, Dharma learning has become more like any class-room subject, and even institutionalized as dogmas for status and religious conditioning.[7]

These warnings are against making "something" of Buddhism and serve as reminders that we should respect the Dharma as living experience. This vital teaching is dramatically highlighted in, for example, **the parables** of the water-snake and of the raft given in:

Alagaddûpama Sutta M 22,10/1:133 f SD 3.13; SD 65.6 (2.3.1.4)

2.2.2.2 While we may be impressed with modern science and psychology exploiting the practical value of early Buddhist mind teachings and meditation, this also is a sign of the global secularization of Buddhism, especially its monastic system. In other words, we are surely heading for:

The Dharma-ending age SD 1.10; cf **How Buddhism became Chinese**, SD 40b.

3 Buddhist-Nirgrantha encounters

3.1 INTER-RELIGIOUS RIVALRY

3.1.1 Religious differences

3.1.1.1 The early Buddhist suttas frequently mention **the nirgranthas** (P *nigaṇṭha*, "free from ties")[8] or the Jainas or Jains, as the followers of **Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta**—identified as **Mahāvira (Vardhamāna)**, the 24th Tirthankara (Skt *tīrthaṅkara*; P *tittha,kara,* "ford-maker") of Jainism. These early texts record active religious and philosophical debates and critiques between the two "recluse" (non-brahmin) traditions.

[7] On ways of learning the Dharma, see eg SD 65.13 (2.2).

[8] Comy mentions this etym to the Jains based on their own notion of "knots" (already known in several Upaniṣads), thus: "We do not have knot-like defilement; we are free from obstructive defilement; hence the name *nigaṇṭha*" (*amhākaṁ ganthana,kileso, pali.bujjhana,kileso n'atthi, kilesa.gaṇṭhi,rahitā mayan ti evaṁ vāditāya laddha,-nāma,vasena* ***nigaṇṭho***, MA 2:234,8-10 at M 1:198,12, *nigaṇṭho nāta,putto*). This accords with Jain sources, eg, the *cūṛṇi* on the Sūyagaḍa: *bajjha-abbhantarāo ganthāo ṇiggao niggantho,* found in Skt Comy on the Vyavahāra-sūtra (qu in C Caillat, *Atonements in the Ancient Ritual of the Jaina Monks,* Ahmedabad, 1975:43 n2): *nirgato granthād dravyataḥ suvraṇādi-rūpāt, bhāvato mithyātvādi-lakṣaṇād iti nirgranthaḥ.*

Clearly evident are sectarian rivalries and conversions. As part of the "recluse" (Skt *śramaṇa*; P *samaṇa*) movement, these anti-brahmin exponents, Jain and Buddhist, fiercely competed for followers, lay support, and royal patronage. Blunt polemical suttas like **A 10.78** are specifically taught to steer the Buddhist community, monastic and lay, away from Jain doctrines and practices by framing them as spiritual dead-ends lacking true moral and mental purity.

However, the negative comments about the Nirgranthas as recorded in **the (Dasaka) Nigaṇṭha Sutta** (A 10.78) does not say that *all* Nirgranthas have these negative traits. We should understand these remarks as feedbacks from various encounters that the Buddha and his disciples had had with the Nirgranthas. These texts also reflect both humour and wit during such exchanges [3.1.2].

3.1.1.2 Those who have had the misfortune of being confronted by religious missionaries and preachers, and those who have turned away from such evangelical sects and ways, as a rule, show a consensus that aggressive proselytizing often replaces genuine empathy, quality and respect. Often such religious situations reflect a darker side of human relationships and mental health that one should clearly keep away from.[9]

3.1.2 Buddhist-Nirgrantha encounters

3.1.2.1 Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta (M 14)[10]

The Buddha relates that once at Mount Vulture's Peak, he discoursed with some Jain recluses (including Mahā,nāma and Dīgha,tapassī) regarding sensual pleasure and pain, and whether suffering is entirely due to past karma or present actions. The Jains thought that pleasure or happiness could only be found "through pain," that is, suffering can only be lessened or removed through austerities. The Buddha stated that the happiness he enjoyed that came *without austerities but* as a result of moral living and liberated wisdom was greater than that of even king Bimbisāra himself.

3.1.2.2 Deva,daha Sutta (M 101)[11]

The Buddha criticizes the extreme ascetic practices and deterministic karmic theories held by the Nirganthas, contrasting them with the Buddhist middle way. The Sutta highlights significant differences in their teachings and practices. The Jains, for example, are reported as teaching that bodily karma (*kaya,-daṇḍa*) is the most severe form of unwholesome act, whereas the Buddha teaches that mental intention (*cetanā*) is of primary moral and spiritual significance.

The Buddha criticizes the Jains for their wrong views in 10 ways for implying that one's effort is inefficacious, that pleasure and pain are caused by past (karmic) causes (*pubbe,kata,hetu*); or are caused by a supreme God (*issara,nimmāṇa,hetu*);[12] or are circumstantial [and natural] (*saṅgati,bhāva,hetu*),[13] or are caused by one's class [being reborn in a certain social class] (*abhijāto,hetu*);[14] or are caused by striving here and now (*diṭṭha,dhammûpakkama,hetu*); and so on.

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[9] See C E M Lloyd, "Contending with spiritual reductionism: Demons, shame, and dividualising experiences among Evangelical Christians with mental distress," *J of Religion and Health* 60,4 2021:2702-2727. [JSTOR] 20 Aug 2026.

[10] **M 14**,15-22/1:1:92 f (SD 4.7).

[11] **M 101**/2:214-228 (SD 18.4).

[12] The theist doctrine is criticized by the Buddha in **Titth'āyatana S** (A 3.61,3/1:174), SD 6.8.

[13] This alludes to the doctrine of Makkhali Gosāla, criticized at length in **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60,21-28/1:407-410), SD 35.5. **Cha-ḷ-abhijāti S** (A 6.57/3:383 f) lists the 6 classes according to the antinomian Pūraṇa Kassapa's view: see also **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,19/1:53), SD 8.10. This wrong view is briefly mentioned in **Titth'āyatana S** (A 3.61,4 /1:175), SD 6.8. See also Bodhi, *Discourse on the Fruits of Recluseship*, 1989:73-75.

[14] *Abhijāti,hetu.* This doctrine of Makkhali Gosāla of the 6 classes (*cha-ḷ-ābhijāti*) by colour is mentioned in **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.20/1:53), SD 8.10. For details, see **Cha-ḷ-ābhijāti S** (A 6.57), where it is ascribed to Pūraṇa Kassapa (A 6.57/3:383 @ SD 23.5; DA 1:162); ref to at **Apaṇṇaka S** (M 60,21/1:407) & **Deva,daha S** (M 101,22(4)/2:222).

3.1.2.3 General Sīha (V 1:233 f; A 4:179 f)

General Sīha, a Licchavi notable of Vesāli, was a follower of the Nirgraṇṭhās. When the Buddha visited Vesāli, Sīha wished to see him but Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta dissuaded him, saying that Gotama denied the result of actions and was not worth a visit. However, in the end Sīha, accompanied by 500 chariots, went to the Buddha. Having discovered in conversation with him that the Buddha was falsely accused of teaching wrong doctrines, Sīha declared himself the Buddha's follower. The Buddha accepted his conversion on condition that he would continue to give alms to any Nigaṇṭhā who sought them at his house. This magnanimity made Sīha honour the Buddha even more highly, and he invited him and the monks to a meal on the next day.

3.1.2.4 Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta (M 58)[15]

The Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta (M 58) and **the (Gāmaṇī) Kula Sutta** (S 42.9) both deal with a "double-horned question" (*ubhato,koṭika pañha*)[16] here used by the Nirgranthas against the Buddha. By their very nature, such questions are unanswerable—to answer "yes" or "no" to them is to accept that they are valid.[17] This is like one's answering "yes" or "no" to a question such as "Where does a fire go when it is extinguished?" The question "does not apply," it is "wrongly put" (*na upeti*) (M 72,19/1:487).

In the Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta, the Buddha points out to prince Abhaya that he has asked a "**double-horned question**," immediately exposing the problem and Abhaya is impressed. However, in the (Asi,bandhaka,putta) Kula Sutta, the Buddha goes on to answer the trick question with panache.[18]

3.1.2.5 Upāli Sutta (M 56)[19]

The Upāli Sutta is about the conversion of Upāli, the houselord of Nāḷandā, an erstwhile leading supporter of Nāta,putta and the Jains. The Jain ascetic Dīgha,tapassī visits the Buddha and tells him about the Jain conception of karma. When Nāta,putta hears of this, he allows Upāli the houselord, a leading disciple, to debate with the Buddha, but Upāli is instead converted by the Buddha. When Nāta,putta confronts Upāli, the Jain master Nāta,putta is sadly disappointed to know the truth, and dies a tragic death.

3.1.2.6 Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta (S 41.8)[20]

Citta is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of Dharma-speakers amongst the laymen disciples (A 1:26).[21] The native commentary on the Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta (S 41.8) says that Citta the houselord approaches the nirgantha Nāta,putta, firstly to vindicate the Buddhists from being blamed that they do not show hospitality to anyone else. Citta shows every courtesy when he visits Nāta,putta, and warmly converses with him. Secondly, he approaches the Jains to refute their false views, at which time, says the Commentary, he is already a nonreturner (SA 3:100).

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[15] **M 58**/1:392-396 (SD 7.12).

[16] **M 58**/1:392-396 (SD 7.12) & **S 42.9**/4:322-324 (SD 7.11) respectively. In Indian logic, this is called *ubhayataḥ pāṣa* (see S Bagchi, *Inductive Reasoning: A study of tarka and its role in Indian logic,* Calcutta, 1953:182, 183). Besides the dilemma (*du,pada pañha*), MA also mentions the trilemma (*ti.pada pañha*) and the quadrilemma (*catu-p,pada pañha*) (MA 2:197) but there seems to be no examples of these in the Canon. See Jayatilleke 1963: 226.

[17] In **Milinda,pañha**, the double-horned question is skillfully used by way of Buddhist apologetics. See also Jayatilleke 1963:226-228, 334 f, 350-352.

[18] **S 42.9**/4:322-424 (SD 7.11).

[19] **M 56**/1:371-387 (SD 27.1).

[20] **S 41.8**/4:198-300 (SD 40a.7).

[21] See **Gilāna Dassana S** (S 41.10/4:303 f), SD 16.16 (1). For his biography, see Nyanaponika & Hecker, *Great Disciples of the Buddha,* 1997:365-372.

The Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta Sutta depicts Nāta,putta as rejecting the idea of thought-free dhyanic experience. Citta is clearly aware of this, and tries to point this out to him. In answer to Nāta,putta's question on the possibility of thought-free dhyana, Citta answers: "Here, bhante, I do not go by faith in the Blessed One."

Before Citta can say anything further, Nāta,putta triumphantly declares that Citta "has *no* faith" in the Buddha! Nāta,putta reads too much into Citta's reply, by going on to declare, using two similes, that thought-free dhyanic meditation is impossible. This, in fact, puts Citta in a fix: he has been misquoted! If he were to remain silent, he would be acquiescing to Nāta,putta's false statement (of which Nāta,putta is himself unaware).[22]

The best way to deal with falsehood, especially concerning meditation, is the truth. However, before that Citta has to ensure that Nāta,putta is ready for the truth, even if he is unwilling or unable to accept it just yet. So Citta asks him which is "more sublime" (*paṇīta,tara*), faith or knowledge, and Nāta,putta answers that it is knowledge (*ñāṇa*). Once this is established, Citta makes his lion-roar and defines his experience of the 4 dhyanas.

Nāta,putta is unimpressed; in fact, he is terribly confounded and upset, first at Citta's commitment to the Buddhist life, and, secondly, at his own misjudgement of Citta. Hence his outburst against Citta [S 41.8,9]. It is clear from this that Nāta,putta is not an accomplished meditator and that he has no experience of dhyana at all. At least, this is the Buddhist view of Nāta,putta.

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(Dasaka) Nigaṇṭha Sutta

The (Ten) Discourse on the Nirgranthas

A 10.78

1 Bhikshus, there are these 10 bad qualities of the nirgranthas. What are the 10?

2 (1) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas are without faith.
(2) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas are immoral.
(3) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas are without moral shame.
(4) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas are without moral fear.
(5) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas are devoted to bad persons.
(6) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas extol themselves and disparage others.
(7) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas grasp their own views, cling on to them, give them up with difficulty.
(8) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas are deceivers.
(9) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas have evil desires.
(10) Bhikshus, the nirgranthas hold wrong views.[23]

These, bhikshus, are these 10 bad qualities of the nirgranthas

—evaṁ—

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[22] This is a case where bad karma is still created when a person *unmindfully* makes a false statement. The intention here is rooted in delusion, and perhaps in greed and/or hate, too. See **(Kamma,vāda) Bhūmija S** (S 12.25/2:37-41), SD 31.2.

[23] Ce Ee Se *micchā,diṭṭhikā bhikkhave nigaṇṭhā.* Only Be *papa,mittā bhikkhave nigaṇṭhā ti.*