SD 65.9

The 6 Wrong Views

The 6 bases of wrong views from
the Alagaddûpama Sutta (M 22)

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1 Even dharmas should be relinquished

1.1 EARLY BUDDHISM AS RENUNCIATION

1.1.1 Renunciation (*nekkhamma*)

1.1.1.1 Early Buddhism, whether for monastics or for the laity, can be said to be the idea and practice of **renunciation** (*nekkhamma*). The Buddha story begins with Siddhattha renouncing his luxurious home-life for the homeless yogic routine of meditation and self-mortification. Siddhattha's home-leaving was triggered by his seeing of the 4 sights or signs—those of an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a renunciant.

The first 3 sights represent **the 3** "**great evils**" prevailing in the world—*decay, disease and death*—of which the bodhisattva (the historical Buddha before his awakening) was aware of even when young, as stated in **the (Catukka) Pariyesanā Sutta** (A 4.252) and **the Sukhumāla Sutta** (A 3.38).[1] The 4th sight, that of the renunciant, refers to the solution to the 3 great evils, that of renunciation and awakening.

1.1.1.2 During the 1st year of his renunciation, the bodhisattva spent his time learning meditation by letting go of sense-experiences and their distractions (called "hindrances," *nīvaraṇa*) to renounce mental defilements so that the purified mind gains **dhyana** (*jhāna*), when the mind is temporarily free from mental defilements and gains full focus (*samādhi*).

The first teacher that the bodhisattva practised under was **Āḷāra Kālāma**. However, the highest level of meditation that Āḷāra could teach, and which the bodhisattva fully attained, was that of **the base of nothingness** (*ākiñcañña'āyatana*), the 3rd of the 4 formless dhyanas. This is attained by letting go of the 2nd formless dhyana, that of the perception of boundless consciousness (*viññāṇañc'āyatana*). The base of theperception of nothingness was the 2nd highest level of meditation attainable at that time.[2]

1.1.1.3 The second teacher that the bodhisattva went to was **Uddaka Rāma,putta** (the son of Rāma). Using the deceased Rāma's method, the bodhisattva was able to let go of the perception of nothingness to attain **the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception** (*n'eva,saññā,nâsaññ'āyatana*). This was the highest meditative state attainable by anyone at that time. However, even with that highest level of dhyana, the bodhisattva was unable to gain awakening into true reality.

The bodhisattva then left the second teacher, too, and practised *on his own*. Since the bodhisattva failed to get awakening by renouncing *the mind* (that is, the mental hindrances), he thought he should now try renouncing *the body*, that is, by practising **self-mortification** (*atta,kilamathânuyoga*).[3] He tortured his body systematically and persistently for 6 years.

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[1] **A 4.252**/2:247 f, SD 50.9 (1.1.3, 2.2.3). **A 3.38**/1:145 f (SD 63.7).

[2] On **Āḷāra Kālāma**, see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 16,15.2), SD 1.11.

[3] **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,3), SD 1.1; **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,19-33), SD 1.12 (excerpt) + SD 49.4.

1.1.1.4 At the height of his austerities, his dark emaciated frame simply collapsed in a near-death swoon. He realized that self-mortification not only did not bring awakening but will bring fruitless death instead. He renounced the extreme of self-mortification, just as he had renounced the self-indulgence of his youth. These 2 extremes simply did not bring awakening, but only suffering. Self-mortification was only slightly better when it involved moral conduct; but it still did not bring awakening.

The bodhisattva realized that if neither self-indulgence nor self-mortification brought awakening, there must be **a middle way**, a spiritual path that avoided both these extremes. He then recalled that as a 7-year-old boy, while seated under the jambu tree,[4] at the height of the ploughing festival, he attained the 1st dhyana, which was pleasant yet made his mind profoundly calm and clear.

As he later described this, he thought:

> "Why do I fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual desires and unwholesome states?'
>
> Aggivessana, it occurred to me,
>
> **'I fear not the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual desires and unwholesome states!'"**[5] (M 36,32/1:246 f), SD 49.4

1.1.1.5 With these personal experiences of self-indulgence and of self-mortification, the bodhisattva realized he had to renounce these extreme practices since neither of them had to do with the spiritual path of awakening. As part of his awakening knowledge (*bodhi*), the Buddha also realized that sensual pleasures only bring a moment's pleasure but are actually *impermanent, suffering and nonself*.

It is thus foolish to imagine a heaven with "eternal" pleasures and happiness, when these experiences are real and relative only when contrasted with pain and sadness. Moreover, nothing really exists forever even when we can *name* it, like the word "heaven" or "paradise." Hence, the Buddha rejected the extreme notion of **eternalism** (*sassata,diṭṭhi*).

On the other hand, it is also false to view that our "self or soul" is our body; thus, it seems, if we destroy our body, we will cease to exist, and so, it seems, not to suffer any more. This is a wrong view rooted in the extreme of **annihilationism** (*uccheda,diṭṭhi*). Similarly, it is also false to claim that "all exists" (*sabbam atthi*), which is related to the eternalist view. It is also false to claim that "nothing exists" (*sabbaṁ n'atthi*), which is related to the annihilationist view.

The true reality is that all that exists *arises and falls* by way of cause and effect, that is, by **dependent arising** (*paṭicca samuppāda*) [1.2.2.6]; this is called the middle way. The practice of the middle way entails respecting the body, cultivating the mind, and then attaining total freedom or liberation. This is essentially what the 3 trainings are.

1.1.2 The 3 trainings in renunciation

1.1.2.1 The 3 trainings (*ti,sikkhā*) refer to 3 stages of self-discipline and transformation that one works on to reach the path.[6] First, there is **moral training** (*sīla sikkhā*), comprising of bodily renunciation, that is,

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[4] Jambu. This is not the SE Asian rose-apple, but the "Indian jambu," ie, "jamun" (Syzygium cumini), a tart and sweet purple-black berry native to the Indian subcontinent.

[5] *Na kho ahaṁ tassa sukhassa bhāyāmi, yaṁ taṁ sukhaṁ aññatt' eva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi,* lit, "I fear not the pleasure that is other than the sensual, that is other than the unwholesome." (M:Ee 1:247,3; M:Ce 1: 584,4 and M:Se 1:458,5: *yantaṁ*, after which Se continues directly with *aññatr'eva*, omitting *sukhaṁ*). On the 2 kinds of pleasures—sensual pleasure and the joy of renunciation—see **Laṭukikôpama S** (M 66,21/1:455), SD 28.11; **Araṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 139,9.3/3:233), SD 7.8. On pleasure felt by the awakened mind, see **Uṇṇābha S** (S 51.15/5:271-273), SD 10.10.

[6] See SD 10.16 (1.5.2).

renouncing unwholesome habits in terms of action and of speech. As regards to *right action*, that is, the body, one shows respect for the values *of life, of work, and of freedom*, one thus keeps to the precepts against killing, stealing and sexual misconduct respectively; one then practises lovingkindness, generosity and contentment.

As regards to speech, one shows respect for *truth*, that is, the basis for *right speech*, embodied in the precept against falsehood. In spirit, this precept also includes abstaining from *slander*, from *harsh speech*, and from *frivolous chatter*. Showing respect for *the value of truth*, one practises truthful communication, unifying speech, pleasant speech and beneficial speech. Also included in this moral conduct is the practice of right livelihood, avoiding any kind of work that violates any of the 5 precepts.

On the level of moral training, one keeps the 5th precept, showing respect for *the mind*, that is, by abstaining from taking any kind of intoxicant, whether by way of drinks or of substance. Showing *respect for the mind,* one keeps it calm and clear, ready for mental cultivation.

1.1.2.2 Secondly, there is **concentration training** (*samādhi sikkhā*) or mental cultivation, that is, mental renunciation; through right effort one keeps mindfulness (*sati*) (minding the *body, feelings, thoughts* and *dharmas*)[7] and awareness (*sampajañña*), that is, clearly minding one's current actions.[8] Right effort further helps one let go of the mental hindrances, namely, those of *sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry,* and *doubt*.[9] Once all the hindrances are pushed away, **dhyana** arises.

Thirdly, there is **wisdom training** (*paññā sikkhā*), that is, applying the calm and clear mind to the renunciation of craving and ignorance, by seeing directly into the true reality of *impermanence, suffering* and *nonself*. The liberated mind then renounces attachment to any view and sees things as they are. This clear vision in due course empowers one to renounce delusion and ignorance to attain liberating knowledge.

1.2 The 2 parables of the Alagaddûpama Sutta (M 22)

1.2.1 The parable of the watersnake

1.2.1.1 The Alagaddûpama Sutta (M 22), the discourse on the parable of the watersnake, employs 2 key parables to highlight the proper use of the Dharma, that is, for the sake of personal awakening, and the dangers of wrong use of the Dharma. The 2 parables—those of the eponymic watersnake and of the raft—are given by the Buddha to correct the monk Ariṭṭha's wrong view that sexual pleasures are not an obstacle to spiritual progress and awakening.[10]

1.2.1.2 The parable of the watersnake (*alagaddûpama*) of the Alagaddūpama Sutta (M 22,10-12); is here summarized. Misguided people learn the Dharma (the various suttas and texts) *without examining* their true meaning or purpose (*attha*) for studying them. Thus they fail to see the wisdom of the teachings. Wrongly grasping the teachings, they use them to find fault in others and for the sake of winning debates. This is like the case of a man who does not handle a watersnake properly:

[7] On the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*sati'paṭṭhāna*), see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10) SD 13.3.
[8] SD 60.11 (1.2.2, 2.2).
[9] See ***Nīvaraṇa***, SD 32.1; **(Nīvaraṇa) Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55), SD 3.12.
[10] M 22/1:130-142 (SD 3.13).

Bhikshus, suppose **a man who needs a watersnake**,[11]
looking for a watersnake, wandering in search of a watersnake,
sees a large watersnake and grasps its coils or its tail.
It would turn back and bite his hand or his arm or one of his limbs,
and because of that he would suffer death or deadly pain.

(M 22,10/1:133 f), SD 3.13

On the other hand, one who studies the Dharma knowing its meaning and purpose *rightly*, is like a wise snake-catcher:

Suppose a man who needs **a watersnake**,
looking for a watersnake, wandering in search of a watersnake,
sees a large watersnake and catches it rightly with a cleft stick,
and having done so, grasps it rightly by its neck.
Then, although the snake might coil around his hand or his arm or one of his limbs,
still he would not suffer death or deadly pain.[12]
Why is that? Because of the right grasp of the watersnake.

(M 22,11/1:134f), SD 3.13[13]

1.2.2 The parable of the raft

1.2.2.1 The parable of the raft (*kullûpama*) (M 22,13 f) highlights the true purpose of the Dharma—not as philosophy or religious dogma—but only as a means of personal development and spiritual awakening. The parable and its meaning are here summarized:

A raft is only for crossing over the waters for the far shore, not for the purpose of grasping.
Suppose a man needs to cross a wide stretch of deep waters where there is neither bridge nor ferry.

"What now if I were to collect grass, wood, branches and leaves,
and bind them together into **a raft**, and supported by the raft,
and exerting effort with my hands and feet, I go safely across to the far shore."
Then, the man collects grass, wood, branches and leaves, and
binds them together into a raft, and supported by the raft,
he exerts himself using his hands and feet, and goes safely across to the far shore.[14]
Then, when he has gone across and arrived on the far shore, he might think thus:
"This raft has been very helpful to me, since supported by it,
and exerting effort with my hands and feet, I went safely across to the far shore."

(M 22,13/1:135), SD 3.13

[11] *Seyyathā'pi bhikkhave puriso alagadd'atthiko.* "Watersnake," *alagadda* (m & mfn), "a kind of snake"; only in late Skt, *alagarda,* "watersnake" (PED); "a watersnake (the black variety of the Cobra de capello, Amara,kośa 1:8.5) (CPD); "watersnake" (DP). SED: *ala* (the sting in the tail of a scorpion (or a bee) + *garda* (m), a water-serpent (the black variety of Cobra de capello, Coluber nāga; ~*gardā* (f), a large poisonous leech.

[12] Cf Buddhaghosa's parable of the fisherman and the watersnake: catching in his hand a watersnake and recognizing it so, at once casts it as far away as possible and scrambles on to dry land for safety (Vism 21.49/652), SD 20.1 (6.2.1.3).

[13] On the proper understanding of the nature of language in this connection, see SD 65.6 (2.3.1.4).

[14] Cf a similar parable at **Asīvisôpama S** (S 35.197,8/4:174), SD 28.1. See also SD 52.11 (1.2.2.2).

Having crossed over to the safety of the far shore, he has no more need for the raft. Hence, he would not carry it on his head or his shoulders and continue his journey with that burden. He would simply haul it onto dry land or set it adrift in the water, and continue his journey.

1.2.2.2 From the 2 parables of **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22) above, and other parables [below] we can see that early Buddhism is exceptionally pragmatic. Its core doctrine functions like a medical diagnosis and treatment plan: *identifying the symptom (suffering), the cause (craving), the cure (cessation), and the prescription (the eightfold path).*

Hence, the Buddha declares in **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86):

"Both before and now what I teach is suffering and the ending of suffering"
(*dukkhañ c'eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhan ti*) (S 22.86,21.2/3:119) SD 21.13[15]

The highly pragmatic nature of early Buddhism is clearly evident across a number of distinct areas, such as in the following suttas and teachings: [1.2.2.3-1.2.2.6]

1.2.2.3 The parable of the poisoned dart

In **the Cūḷa Māluṅkya,putta Sutta** (M 63) the Buddha explicitly rejects any dealings with speculative topics, such as the 10 undetermined points (*avyākata vatthu*), which are as follows:[16]

the world in terms of time and space
(1) The world is eternal, or
(2) the world is not eternal;
(3) The world is finite, or
(4) the world is infinite;

the self or soul
(5) The self is the same as the body, or
(6) the self and the body are separate;

the after-death state of a being
(7) A tathāgata exists after death, or
(8) a tathāgata does not exist after death; or
(9) a tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death; or
(10) a tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death'

(M 63,3/1:427 f) + SD 5.8 (2)[17]

He compares a seeker demanding a discussion or answers to these questions to be like a man shot with a poisoned dart who refuses to have it removed until he learns the name, height, and caste of the shooter, the details of the dart, and so on.

The Buddha taught only what is directly useful for bringing happiness here and now, and for attaining spiritual liberation.[18]

[15] See also **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22,38/1/138; cf 22,36/1;140), SD 3.13. Explained in **Yamaka S** (S 22.85,37/3:112), SD 21.12.

[16] **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63,2/1:426) + SD 5.8 (2); SD 40a.10 (5.1 + Table 5.1).

[17] See **Silence and the Buddha**, SD 44.1 (5).

[18] On this parable, see also SD 65.11 (2.2.2).

1.2.2.4 The parable of the "handful of leaves"

The Siṁsapā Sutta (S 56.31) records the Buddha as giving this parable of the "handful of leaves," perhaps the key parable presenting the Buddha as a distinctly pragmatic teacher. The Sutta (here abridged) goes like this:

> At one time, the Blessed One was staying in a simsapa [sesam][19] forest near Kosambī.
>
> Then the Blessed One, having gathered a few simsapa leaves in his hand, addressed the monks:
>
> "What do you think, bhikshus, which is more: these few simsapa leaves gathered in my hand, or those on the simsapa trees above?" **[438]**
>
> "Bhante, few are the simsapa leaves that the Blessed One has gathered in his hand, but there are very much more on the simsapa trees above."
>
> "Even so, bhikshus, **much more have I directly known that has not been taught**.[20]
>
> And why, bhikshus, have I not taught them [pointed them out][21]?
>
> Because, bhikshus, they are not connected with the goal, not connected with the fundamentals of the holy life, and do not lead to revulsion, to letting go, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana.[22]
>
> Therefore, I have not taught them.

The Buddha then declares that he has only taught **the 4 noble truths**: *suffering; the arising of suffering; the ending of suffering; and the path to the ending of suffering*. He has taught these because "they are **connected with *the goal*, connected with *the fundamentals of the holy life*,** and lead to revulsion, to letting go, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana."

(S 56.31/5:427 f), SD 21.7 (1.4).[23]

1.3 WHAT KIND OF TEACHINGS OR TRUTHS ARE TO BE REJECTED?

1.3.1 Blind faith is to be rejected

1.3.1.0 As a key text of early Buddhism, **the Kesa,puttiya Sutta** (A 3.65)—popularly known as the Kālāma Sutta —serves as the Buddha's famous guide to critical thinking and spiritual discernment. It teaches us how to evaluate conflicting claims and religious teachings using our own understanding, ethical common sense, and direct experience.

By way of philosophical analysis, the Sutta can be seen as a cornerstone of early Buddhist **pragmatism** and **ethics** rather than an endorsement of modern Western empiricism or radical skepticism. It provides a framework for validating truth claims through direct, practical application and observable results.

The philosophical breakdown of the Sutta centres on these key distinct themes: [1.3.1.1-1.3.1.4]

1.3.1.1 Rejection of dogmatic authority

The Buddha famously advises the Kālāmas to reject *tradition, authority and blind faith* as the basis for any belief. Philosophically, we can say that the Buddha deconstructs all forms of external "proofs." He advises us against relying on:

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[19] *Siṁsapā;* Skt *śiṁśapā*; Pkt *sīsava, sīsama:* see SD 21.7 (1.4).

[20] *Evam eva kho bhikkhave etad eva bahu,taraṁ yaṁ vo mayā abhiññāya anakkhātaṁ.*

[21] *Anakkhātaṁ,* opp *akkhātaṁ.*

[22] On this formula, see ***Nibbidā***, SD 20.1.

[23] Cf Doug Smith, "Early Buddhist pragmatism: The simile of the handful of leaves," Doug's Dharma, 2021. 4 July 2026.

- **tradition and lineage:** we should reject beliefs and practices handed down through generations;
- **pure reason and speculation:** we should not rely on abstract logic without empirical grounding;
- **authoritative or charismatic gurus:** one should not rely on respect for the speaker, even one's teacher.

1.3.1.2 Pragmatic epistemology (truth as utility)

Rather than telling the Kālāmas exactly *what* is true, the Buddha offers a **pragmatic test for truth**. Philosophical evaluations of the Sutta show that it bridges ethics and epistemology. The core criterion for accepting a teaching is its **practical utility**: Does it lead to long-term welfare, benefit, and happiness?

1.3.1.3 The ethical "guilt-free" wager

A crucial part of the Sutta (often missed by modern interpreters) is the "**4 solaces**." The Buddha provides a philosophical safety net, arguing that even if one disregards the doctrines of rebirth and karma, a life governed by non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion yields an intrinsically happier and more secure existence in the present life.

1.3.1.4 The limits of interpretation

Various monk teachers have warned against reading the Kesa,puttiya Sutta as a carte blanche for "religious anarchy." The Sutta does not suggest that we should reject the Dharma. Instead, it teaches that the internal consistency and ethical fruitfulness of Buddhist teachings must be verified by one's own understanding and direct experience of the teachings' benefits.

(A 3.65/1:188-193), SD 35.4a[24]

1.3.2 The criteria for accepting the truth

1.3.2.0 The Kesa,puttiya Sutta (A 3.65) lists a set of 4 criteria for gauging what is to be accepted as truth and undertaken. First, the Buddha lists **the 10 kinds of doubtworthy knowledge**, that is, those (1) of oral communication (tradition); (2) of received tradition (lineage); (3) of hearsay; (4) of scriptural authority; (5) by pure reason (logic); (6) by inference and deduction; (7) by specious reasoning (personal reasoning); (8) by being convinced by someone; (9) by one's seeming ability (charisma); and (10) even of a well-respected teacher or holy man.[25]

Then, the Buddha defines **the 3 unwholesome roots** (*akusala mūla*) as those of *greed, hatred and delusion*, and states that, it is on account of any of these unwholesome roots that one is driven to break a precept, that is, those against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, falsehood or intoxication.[26]

Conversely, there are **the 3 wholesome roots** (*kusala mūla*), that is, those of *non-greed, non-hatred* and *non-delusion*. When one is not overcome by any unwholesome root, one's mind is not controlled by it, and one does not transgress any of the natural moral precepts.[27] Such a state that is free from the unwholesome roots will be rooted in either non-greed (charity), or non-hatred (lovingkindness), or non-delusion (wisdom).

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[24] S A **Evans**, "Doubting the Kālāma-Sutta," *Buddhist Studies Review* 24,1 2007:91-107. D **Smith**, "Early Buddhist theory of knowledge," Doug's Dharma, 2024. 4 July 2026.

[25] (1) *mā anussavena,* (2) *mā paramparāya,* (3) *mā iti,kirāya,* (4) *mā piṭaka,sampadānena*, (5) *mā takka,heru,gāhena,* (6) *mā naya,hetu,gāhena,* (7) *mā ākāra,parivitakkena,* (8) *mā diṭṭhi,nijjhāna-k,khantiyā,* (9) *mā bhavya,rūpatāya,* and (10) *mā samaṇa no garu*: (A 3.65,3 *passim*), SD 35.4a.

[26] This is an early or abbreviated set of the natural precepts for the laity; the 5th implicit precept—that against taking intoxicants is explained at, eg, **Sigāl'ovāda S** (D 31,7+8) n, SD 4.1; SD 59.5 (2.5). On **the 5 precepts**: **Dīgha,jānu S** (A 8.54,13), SD 5.10**; Veḷu,dvāreyya S** (S 55.7), SD 1.5 (2); ***Sīlânussati***, SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 21.6 (1.2); SD 37.8 (2.2).

[27] **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65) lists the unwholesome roots are in §4-6, and the wholesome roots in §§10-12. The moral refrain follows each of these passages. [See foll].

In **the moral refrain** that follows each of these passages on the 3 roots, the Buddha lists these 4 **criteria** for the moral quality of the *dhamma*, here meaning one's *actions, speech, thoughts*, or conditions that one faces. The points of the moral refrains and their imports are here summarized in this table:

	to be rejected[28]	**to be accepted**[29]	
(1) unwholesome or wholesome?	unwholesome,	wholesome,	[1.3.2.1]
(2) blamable or not blamable?	blamable,	not blamable,	[1.3.2.2-1.3.2.4]
(3) blamed or praised by the wise?	blamed by the wise,	praised by the wise,	[1.3.2.5]
(4) when fully undertaken, they bring:	harm and suffering,	good and happiness.	[1.3.2.6 f]

Table 1.3.2 The 4 criteria for the moral quality of dhammas

Once again, we should remember that the **moral refrains** follow immediately after the listing of the 10 doubtworthy points of the Kesaputtiya Sutta [above]. From the key points of the criteria for the moral qualities that are the ***dhammas*** or dharmas, we must conclude that they do *not* apply to any doctrine or beliefs, but rather to our own **states of mind,** that is, whether they are of a good and moral quality or not; that they are free *from greed, hatred, and delusion*. [1.3.2.0]

We will now briefly examine each of these 4 criteria in relation to Buddhist practice.

1.3.2.1 Unwholesome and wholesome (*kusalā vā akusalā vā*)

Throughout the Kesa,puttiya Sutta (A 3.65), we see that the Buddha uses the terms *akusala and kusala* —translated as "unwholesome" and "wholesome" respectively. In fact, we see, as a rule, these pair of terms being used in almost every important discussion on Buddhist training and truth. The term originally simply meant "skillful"; hence, ***kusala***—as used in the early Buddhist texts—refers to Dharma-spirited efforts in skillfully directing the mind to the attaining of wholesome wisdom to see true reality and gain the path.[30]

On the other hand, pre-Buddhist systems—especially in the brahnminical beliefs and practices—the terms *puñña* ("good, merits") and *pāpa* ("evil, demerits") traditionally referred to the performing of the proper priestly rituals and ancestor worship performed by the brahmins.

Although the Buddha rejects brahminical terms such as *ātman* (Soul) and *brahman* (Cosmic Soul), he assimilated terms like *puñña* and *pāpa*, refining their spiritual senses, and redefining their practical application in Buddhist terms. Thus, performing a "meritorious deed," such as giving and keeping the precepts are said to be *puñña,* "meritorious," while being selfish or hateful is said to be *pāpa,* "bad, evil, demeritorious." Hence, we see such usages of *puñña* and *pāpa* are familiar to the non-Buddhists, those unfamiliar with the Buddha Dharma, and new converts.

For these "merit" or *puñña* Buddhists—mostly the laity—the idea is that **merits** (*puñña*) (good or wholesome performance of Dharma-spirited acts and mental states) will bring happiness here and now, which continue into future good rebirths, even in the heavens. In due course, as the practitioners see the significance of *puñña* and *pāpa,* in their growing understanding of the Dharma, they learn how to skillfully (*kusala*) use merits for attaining the path and awakening, rather than for remaining stuck to the cycle of samsara.[31]

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[28] This is from the moral refrain 1: emphatic rejection (A 3.65,7), SD 35.4a (2).

[29] This is from the moral refrain 2: emphatic affirmation (A 3.65,13), SD 35.4a (2).

[30] On ***puñña*** ("good"), see SD 54.2c (2.1.1), and ***kusala*** "wholesome," SD 54.2c (2.1.2).

[31] On the usage of *puñña* in the Buddhist sense, see, eg, **Ma Puñña Bhāyī S** (It 22), SD 2.11b. On how *mettā* generates merits: **(Puñña) Mettā S** (A 7.58a), SD 2.11a. On ***puññā,kiriya vatthu*** – the 3 grounds for merit-making, bases of

1.3.2.2 Blamable or not blamable (*sâvajjā vā anāvajjā vā*)

The 2nd and 3rd criteria—whether the *dhamma* under evaluation is blamable or not, and, whether or not it is blamed by the wise—seem to contradict the initial statement that we should *not* "go by" any external agency or authority. Indeed, the "spirit of free inquiry" here crumbles, too; since we depend on the affirmation of others.

The notion of "spirit of free inquiry" is a modern idea that implies taking "self" alone as the criterion. However, the early Buddhist spirit of free inquiry is all-embracing; it encompasses the good of self (*ātta,hitāya*),[32] the good of others (*para,hitāya*), and both self *and* others (*ātta,hitāya ca para,hitāya ca*).

Self-good refers to not merely taking care of oneself in terms of self-support (food, clothing, lodging and health) but more so in terms of spiritual training and wisdom. It means that before one can properly help others—that is, for **the good of others**—one should not only have the means to do so, but, more so, one should have the skill and wisdom to do so. When there is self-good and other-good, we should then protect and nurture both society and the environment, too; that is, for **the good of both self and others**.[33]

1.3.2.3 By "**blame**" (*vajja*) here is meant that if our actions, speech or thoughts in some way harm others; we are then to be blamed, we are at fault. What is right and good cannot really be "crowd consensus," since the crowd does not think for itself. Popular opinion, too, often depends on whom we count as giving wise and fair opinions; but often it is biased by race, culture, nationality, religion, or education.

Thus, a beneficial description of "**blame**" would refer to those conditions that "neither benefit self, nor others, nor both self and others" [1.3.2.2]. Conversely, "**praise**" would relate to those conditions that "benefit self, others, and both self and others." It is also noteworthy that the truth and reality of "praise" and "blame" have less to do with *epistemological* interpretation than with ethical and moral concerns, that is, the wholesomeness of our acts, speech and thoughts; how they benefit self, others and both.

1.3.2.4 The ethical interpretation of the Kesa,puttiya Sutta teaching is thus that only natural attitudes and actions are blamed or censured. In as much as ethics is a social concern, consultation with the wise and respected authorities, and also a proper consideration of popular opinion are also appropriate. In ethical social concern, consensus is more likely to arise when there is a practical, evidence-based approach to assessing the real situation and our own conduct, which should include the following:

(1) **We should examine it for ourself:** Investigate whether an action or thought leads to harm or benefit.
(2) **We should consult the wise:** Determine if sensible, wise people generally criticize or praise it.
(3) **We should observe the outcome:** Consider whether it brings about welfare and happiness for ourself and others.

If we evaluate an action or thought and find it blamable, the Buddha instructs that we should abandon it. If we find it praiseworthy, *we should act and abide in it*.

1.3.2.5 Blamed or praised by the wise (*viññu,garahitā vā viññu-p,pasatthā va*)

We have discussed the nature of "blame" and "praise" in this connection to the ethical significance of *dhammas* [1.3.2.0], that is, our states of mind or those states that we arouse in others. When they are free

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meritorious deeds, or bases of good karma—1. giving (*dāna*), 2. moral virtue (*sīla*) and 3. mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*)—see **Puñña,kiriya,vatthu S** (A 8.36), SD 22.17; **(Iti) Puñña,kiriya,vatthu S** (It 60), SD 22.17(2.1); SD 64.12 (3.1.3.1).

[32] On "self-priority," see **Atta,rakkhita S** (S 3.5/1:72 f), SD 38.9; **Atta,hita S 4** (A 4.99/2:97 f), SD 64.7.

[33] See **Chavâlatā S** (A 4,95/2:95 f), SD 64.5.

of greed, hatred and delusion (we may include "free from fear");[34] that they arouse **non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion**, that is, inspired by *lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and peace* (*equanimity*), and even *moral courage*. Any of these wholesome roots then drives us to keep our thoughts, speech and action wholesome.

Thus, it is "**the wise**" (*viññū*) who are more likely to give good and fair counsel. Broadly, we may say that the wise would include exemplary elders and teachers, and, of course, arhats (of whom the Buddha is one himself). In other words, "the wise" are not merely "the authorities," but ideally those who truly know the situation, how to resolve problems, and who are inclined for the good of others. [1.3.2.5]

The wise may, out of wisdom and compassion, criticize or at least disapprove of our mental state of *greed, hatred or delusion*; we are then blameworthy. Or, the wise will praise or approve of our mental state of *non-greed, non-hatred or non-delusion.* In the spirit of the teaching of the 8 worldly conditions (*loka,dhamma*),[35] we take such praise and blame joyfully or equanimously, considering how such feedback can correct our states of mind where they need correction.

1.3.2.6 "Harm and suffering" (*ahitāya dukkhāya*) and "good and happiness" (*hitāya sukhāya*)

The 4th criterion, whether the *dhamma* (state of mind) leads to harm or to good, again reads more naturally as an ethical than as an epistemological statement. As such, this criterion suggests a pragmatic ethic, in the sense of the greatest good for self ("ethical egoism"), of the greatest good for the greatest number ("utilitarianism"), or ideally a harmonious combination of both.

However, as is well known, we do not always see this dynamic actually happening. More often, we see the good suffer and the bad prosper. A common explanation for this is that there is a delayed or deferred fruiting of karma; it may not happen in this life, but in the next life or in some future life. But this future karmic fruiting cannot be tracked, except by one who has the "divine eye" (*dibba,cakkhu*).

Then again, only one with such power will know, or one who is able to read another's mind. In other words, these are matters or doctrine and faith. The important difference in the Buddhist presentation of such special knowledges is that they are *neither* dogmas *nor* seen as the highest good, which is awakening. This means that even a pragmatic ethic yields at best only a partial *empirical* method of inquiry into what is good.

1.3.2.7 The Buddha may perhaps have accepted or assimilated the cultural assumptions of karma and rebirth as recounted in folk-tales and in his own teachings, in which the actors go through many lives creating karma and experiencing the results. If that were the case, then, the method of the Kesaputtiya Sutta would include an implicit appeal to tradition for the determination of the good, in the technical sense. This means that such stories are not meant to be taken as ultimate truths nor as essential for the path of awakening.

These teachings and stories are simply conventional means for reminding the common uninstructed folks that karma is efficacious; even if we may not see its fruit here and now, it will bear fruit in due course. Moreover, what we face now, whether benefits or lacks, are likely the fruits of some past-life karma. The point is that we can—with good *dhammas* or states of mind—change things for the better right here and now.

To conclude, then, we should reiterate that the Kesa,puttiya Sutta method is more naturally understood as ethical than as epistemological. But also, the method of evaluation here, whether ethical or epistemological, does not uphold any modern notion of knowing for oneself through free, open, empirical

[34] Greed, hatred, delusion and fear are the 4 biases (*agati*) or motives (*ṭhāṇa*): **Sigal'ovāda S** (D 31,5), SD 4.1; **Agati S 1** (A 4.17), SD 89.7; **Saṅgaha Bala S** (A 9.5,6.4) n, SD 2.21; SD 31.12 (6.4.1.3); SD 53.5 (2.2.1.1).

[35] **The 8 worldly conditions** (*loka,dhamma*), ie, the 8 winds, are those of gain and loss, fame and obscurity, blame and praise, joy and pain. See **Loka,dhamma S 1+2** (A 8.5+6), SD 42.2+3.

and rational inquiry. Rather, the Sutta encourages a degree of autonomy in thinking through ethical decisions, and it also entails consulting the opinion of bona fide experts, authorities, and tradition, where such sources may help us better appreciate the benefits of good *dhammas,* wholesome states of mind, free from greed, hatred and delusion.

2 Renouncing views

2.1 THE 6 GROUNDS AND 3 GRASPINGS

2.1.1 The 5 grounds for views

2.1.1.1 The universal wrong view or root of wrong views is **self-view** (*attânudiṭṭhi*), that is, seeing a self in some external condition, that is, taking "something"—such as our own body (one of the sense-faculties) or the mind (feeling, perception, formations or consciousness)—as one's object of identity, taken as "I," "me," or "mine."

Thus, when the self-view is applied to the first 4 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, or formations), to the world as self, and to the view, "the world is eternal, and after death, I will endure forever," we have what are known as the 6 grounds for (wrong) views (***diṭṭhi-ṭ,ṭhāna***).[36]

2.1.1.2 The 6 grounds for wrong views (*diṭṭhi-ṭ,ṭhāna*), briefly stated, are:

(1) One regards form as "this is mine; I am this; this is my self."
(2) One regards feeling as "this is mine; I am this; this is my self."
(3) One regards perception as "this is mine; I am this; this is my self."
(4) One regards formations as "this is mine; I am this; this is my self."
(5) One regards the seen, heard, sensed, or known as "this is mine; I am this; this is my self."
(6) One regards *the world* as the self … "after death I will endure for eternity." [M 22,15]

The wise noble disciple regards all these as "This is *not* mine; this I am *not*; this is *not* my self."
(M 22,16/1:135), SD 3.13 [3.1.1.1]

Each of these 6 grounds for views feeds **the 3 graspings**—craving, conceit, and views—by way of the 3 kinds of self-views. We thus have a total of *18 wrong views*.

2.1.2 The 3 graspings

2.1.2.1 The 3 graspings (*ti,gaha* or *ti,vidha gaha*) are those of *craving*, of *conceit* and of *views*. They are the mind's reactive (hence unconscious) habit of identifying with an experience. They are explained as being rooted in **self view** (*attā'nudiṭṭhi*)—the deeply ingrained, deluded belief that there is an inherent, permanent, and independent "I," "me," or "mine" in relation to the 5 aggregates [2.1.1.2].

How self view feeds the 3 graspings can be summarized by this diagram:[37]

	the 3 self-views (*attā'nudiṭṭhi*)		**the 3 graspings (*gaha*)**	
(1)	"This is mine"	*etam mama*	craving	*taṇhā,gaha*
(2)	"This I am"	*eso'ham asmi*	conceit	*māna,gaha*
(3)	"This is my self"	*me attā ti*	views	*diṭṭhi,gaha*

[36] **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22,15), SD 3.13; SD 6.1 (5.2).
[37] **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,17+12 nn), SD 1.2, applied to the 5 aggregates (§17-21); SD 6.1 (5).

The grasping that is craving is rooted by the self view that there is something permanent, such as pleasure or power that the self can *enjoy, have and collect*. Even when one may not act out the craving, one may constantly conceive ideas, views and imaginations (*mañña*) related to seeking "something" permanent, pleasurable or powerful.

The grasping that is conceit is driven by the unconscious habit of measuring oneself against others—the "I am" conceit (*asmi,māna*)—most often as a sense of seeing oneself as being "superior" or "better" than others, or exploiting others that one views as having something that one wants, or rejecting those that one deems as being inferior or useless to oneself. One, as it were, needs to validate oneself by the notion of being superior to others. This self-centred view tends to make one a narcissist.

The grasping that is views or view-based grasping is the clinging to the view of an underlying, abiding Self or Soul that acts as *the owner, controller, or experiencer* of all phenomena. This grasping induces other kinds of self-related views, such as that of a Supreme Being or God that pervades one's life or is the source of one's blessings (wealth, power, luck etc), or that such blessings or their lack could be attributed to some spirits, demons or someone with certain powers.

2.1.2.2 What is the difference between ***sakkāya diṭṭhi*** (self-identity view) and ***attā'nudiṭṭhi*** (self view)? These 2 terms are often used as synonyms for the ego-illusion but they differ in scope and definition.

Self-identity view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*) or simply identity view is the root wrong view, that of identifying with any of the temporary body-mind aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness) as some sort of false notion of permanent "I," "me," or "mine."[38]

Self view (*attā'nudiṭṭhi*), on the other hand, is the specific, habitual or underlying tendencies (*anusaya*) of clinging to the concept of a concrete, soul-like entity (*attā*) regarding any of the aggregates. [2.1.2.1]

Essentially, then, *sakkāya diṭṭhi* is the broad wrong framework of treating any or all of the 5 aggregates as a cohesive or abiding personal identity. On the other hand, *attā'nudiṭṭhi* refers to the specific habit of mentally grasping for an abiding "Soul" or "Self" within that identity.

2.1.2.3 The difference between *sakkāya,diṭṭhi* and *attā'nudiṭṭhi* in terms of practical teachings is even more interesting and important. ***Sakkāya,diṭṭhi*** is listed as the very first of the 10 fetters (*saṃyojana*) that bind beings to cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*). Hence, it is also the first of **the 3 fetters**:

(1) self-identity view,	*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*
(2) spiritual doubt,	*vicikicchā*
(3) attachment to rituals and vows.	*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*

When one eradicates *sakkāya,diṭṭhi,* along with the other 2 fetters—together known as "the 3 fetters" —one attains streamwinning (*sotāpatti*), the first stage of the path of awakening. One then has no more self-identity view, spiritual doubt or superstition.

2.1.2.4 Self view (*attā'nudiṭṭhi*) [2.1.2.1] is so pervasive and persistent that it arises in 4 ways and overwhelms the 5 aggregates in a total of 20 possible ways—

that one's self is identical with any one of the 5 aggregates;
that it is contained in one of them;
that it is independent of them; and
that it is the owner of the aggregate.

[38] **Sakkāya Diṭṭhi S** (S 22.154/3:185), SD 53.12.

Thus the Suttas often state how an untutored ordinary person tends to regard any of the 5 aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, or consciousness) in terms of **the 4 kinds of self-identity view** (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), thus:[39]

	the 5 aggregates	**comparison**	**self views** (M 1,3/1:1), SD 11.8
(1-5)	⟨*the aggregate*⟩ as the self	a lamp's flame and its colour;	"I am *this body*";
(6-10)	self as possessing ⟨*the aggregate*⟩	the shadow of a tree;	"This is *my* body";
(11-15)	⟨*the aggregate*⟩ as in the self	the fragrance in a flower;	"My self and body are separate";
(16-20)	the self as in ⟨*the aggregate*⟩	a jewel in a casket.	"My self is in my body."

The "**self-view**" column lists the ways the untutored worldling conceives the self.[40] Both the suttas and the Abhidhamma define self-identity view as comprising these 20 wrong views.[41] The noble disciple, on the other hand, simply reflects on the aggregates, thus: "**This is not mine**, **this I am not**, **this is not my self**" (S 3:18 f; cf 3:16). However, even after the foundational *sakkāya,diṭṭhi* is removed, subtle forms of self view, known as **the "I am" conceit** (*asmi,māna*), continue to lurk until full awakening (arhathood).

2.1.2.5 As we have noted [2.1.1.2] these graspings (*gaha*) induced by self view are directed at:

- the body: our experiences (what we see, hear, smell, taste or touch),
- feelings: liking and disliking, manifested as craving and hatred respectively,
- perception: memories (that shape how we perceive our experiences), and
- formations: our karma (which we wrongly see as luck, fate or determinism, and so on).[42]

As the mind interacts with the world, it generates these self-views (*sakkāya,ditthi*) in 20 distinct ways, ranging across the 5 aggregates in this manner:

- **"I am this" (*aham asmī*):** a direct identification with the body or the mind (grasping at an entity).
- **"This is mine" (*etam mama*):** seeing thoughts, feelings, or possessions as a personal extension of ourself (grasping at pleasure or self-worth).
- **"This is my self" (*eso me attā*):** the assumption that there is an inner or higher "doer" or "director" pulling the strings (grasping at permanence).

2.1.3 Overcoming self view

2.1.3.1 What are the practical ways we can use to loosen, even be free, from the habit of feeding self view? To loosen grasping at self-view, ideally, there is **the perception of nonself** (*anatta,saññā*). Very simply this perception makes use of the formula that negates self view:

"This is not mine," "I am not this," "This is not my self."

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[39] See **Bhadd'eka,ratta S** (M 131,4/3:188), SD 8.9 (4).

[40] **Uddesa Vibhaṅga S** (M 138,20/3:227 f), SD 33.14; **Nakula,pitā S** (S 22.1/3:3) SD 5.4; **Upādā Paritassanā S** (S 22.7/3:16), SD 97.70; **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/3:96), SD 6.1.

[41] **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,7-8/1:300), SD 40a.9; **Mahā Puṇṇama S** (M 109,10/3:17 f = S 22.82/3:102), SD 17.11; Dhs 182. See S Collins, "Buddhism in recent British philosophy and theology," *Religious Studies* 21,4, 1985:476-493. On views, conceit and craving, see foll essays: **"I": the nature of identity**, SD 19.1, **"Me": the nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a, & **"Mine": the nature of craving,** SD 19.3.

[42] Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is not mentioned because it is present in all the other aggregates, incl the body (ie, the sense-experiences).

When we notice craving arising in our mind, examine *the craving* for what it is, and then reflect on it as "**This is not mine!**"

When conceit (including pride, arrogance, hatred or any negative emotions) arises, recognize it for what it is, and then reflect, "**I am not this!**"

When any negative view or thought (or distraction) arises, see it as it is, and reflect, "**This is not my self!**"

2.1.3.2 The simplest and most common way we can and should use to free ourselves from self view is to mindfully apply **the perception of impermanence** (*anicca,saññā*) towards the body or thoughts as outlined above [2.1.3.1]. When we get used to seeing our body and experiences as *impermanent,* it is easier for us to also see them as being *suffering* or *unsatisfactory.* When we are used to seeing these 2 characteristics of true reality, then it is easier in due course to accept the body and thoughts as "not-I," "not-me," and "not-mine."

These reflections are best done with the calm and clear mind that has just emerged from a good meditative concentration. We should begin with reflecting on impermanence, which is the basis for the other 2 reflections. When we are familiar with impermanence, we then can go on to reflect on suffering. In due course, we can do both these reflections, and then close with a reflection on nonself by reflecting on one of these sentences as necessary, that is, *"This is not mine," "I am not this,"* or *"This is not my self."*

2.1.3.3 There are however occasions when the perceptions of impermanence or of nonself need to be applied or when it may even be the most effective time to do so. This is a **practical, real-time perception of impermanence** of *a physical sensation*, *a troubling thought (like anger),*[43] or *a strong emotion (like sudden frustration).* We may be able to directly observe how the "self" and "grasping" are projected in the present moment by examining such an immediate experience.

When we feel a physical sensation (like pain or tension), or a negative thought, or a strong emotion we can apply this framework:

- **identify the feeling (*vedanā*) behind the state.** First, notice the raw physical feeling, such as a tightness in the chest, simply noting it as "anger" or "pain."
- **observe the perception (*saññā*).** Mindfully watch our mind and spontaneously recognize whatever thought that arises, as it arises.
- **notice the mental formations (*saṅkhārā*).** Observe the immediate mental habit that follows—the urge to push it away (aversion) or grasp it (craving).
- **acknowledge the knowing (*viññāṇa*).** Simply recognize that there is awareness or knowing of these changing states.

These deconstruction exercises help us to realize that whatever we experience isn't a solid, permanent "I." Instead, it is a constantly shifting bundle of processes. When we stop "feeding" this process with the idea of "I," "me," or "mine," the grasping naturally loosens. It is then easier to let go of self view.

[43] Interestingly, *anger* is the easiest of the negative emotions to "neutralize"; apparently, it almost at once disappears when we see it as it is!

3 Renouncing self view

3.1 THE BUDDHA REJECTS THE NOTION OF ĀTMAN

3.1.1 The 6 wrong views

The Alagaddûpama Sutta (M 22) [1.2.1.1] is a good example of the Buddha's unequivocal rejection of the notion of Self or Soul (*attā*; Skt *ātman*). More precisely, as demonstrated by **K R Norman,** the Sutta contains a deliberate refutation of Yajñavalkya's[44] teaching on the Soul (*Ātman*) in the Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad.[45]

In this connection, there are 2 relevant sutta passages. The first is the section on the 6 grounds for (wrong) views (*diṭṭhi-ṭ,ṭhāna*) [2.1.1.2], and the second is the "Let go of what is not yours!" passage [M 22,40]. In the section on the 6 grounds for views [M 22,15], the Buddha declares what these 6 wrong views are; namely, that: [2.1.1.2]

> an ignorant ordinary person … (1) regards form … , (2) feeling … , (3) perception … , (4) formations … , (5) what is seen, heard, sensed, and known … , and (6) "The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same; I will endure as long as eternity"…, thus, "This is mine; this I am; this is my self." (M 22,15/1:135), SD 3.13

3.1.2 "Let go of what is not yours!"

K R Norman, in his paper, "A note on Attā in the Alagaddûpamā Sutta" (1981), points out that

> The idea the world and the *ātman* (= *brahman*) are the same is found in the Upanishads, and it is possible to find actual verbal echoes of the Upanishads in this passage, eg, *eṣa ma ātmā* (Chān[dogya] Up[anishad] 3.14.3-4) and *yathākratur asmiṁ loke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ pretya bhavati sa kratuṁ kurvīta … etam itaḥ pretyābhisambhavitāsmī ti* (ib 3.14.1 and 4).
>
> In contrast to this false view the Buddha states that someone who is cognizant with the *ariyadham[m]a* looks at *rūpa,* etc, with the thought: *na etaṁ mama n'eso 'haṁ asmi, na m'eso attā*:[46] "This is not mine, I am not that, that is not my *attā*." Consequently he is not anxious about something which does not exist. (Norman 1981:20)[47]

The Buddha then rephrases this statement in terms of the 5 aggregates (*khandha*), and exhorts his disciples, "**Let go of what is not yours!**" [M 22,40]. To close his admonition that the aggregates are not their *attā,* that is, in a final refutation of the view that the external world or the aggregates are not their abiding self, the *attā,* he deftly points to the "the grass, sticks, branches and leaves in this Jetavana" in the famous **Jetavana parable** (M 22,41). [3.2]

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[44] Yajñavalkya (8th or 7th cent BCE) of Videha (modern northern Bihar) was a key figure of the early Hindu scriptures. He is the primary philosopher in the Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad; attr author of Yajñavalkya Smṛti (foundational text on Hindu civil and religious law), Yajñavalkya Saṁhita (an early treatise on yoga) and White Yajurveda. He introduced the Hindu concepts of karma, the Soul (*ātman*) and theological non-dualism (*advaita*). J Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion,* London, 2nd ed 1888, 1997.

[45] See K R Norman, "A note on Attā in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*," 1981:19-29.

[46] See Norman 1981:29 n5 on a wrong reading in V 1:14, 19.

[47] Norman thinks that "E J Thomas is too cautious when he states, 'There may be here some reference to upanishadic doctrine, though it is still not the identity of self and Brahmā' (*History of Buddhist Thought,* London, 1933: 103)."

3.1.3 The Jetavana parable

3.1.3.1 The meaning of the Jetavana parable is that we lose nothing by letting go of our attachment to the aggregates (that is, the body and mind)—it's like clearing away debris and dirt from the park—indeed, we have more to gain, namely, liberation.

> We are now in a position to assess the basis of the Buddha's refutation. The doctrine that the world and the *attā* are the same (*so loko so attā*) also affirms the oneness of the individual *attā* and the world-*attā.* The phrase *eso 'ham asmi* "I am that" is the *tat tvam asi* "That thou art" of the Upaniṣad[s] looked at from the point of view of the first person instead of the second person. Since *loka = attā*, then the Buddha's argument is:
>
> "If there is a world-*attā*, then there is something belonging to the world-*attā* in me. If there is something belonging to the world-*attā* in me, ie, if there is a world-*attā,* then I (and all other things) would have *attā* which is part of the world-*attā,* and I would have all the "things" that go to make up the world-*attā.* Form (*rūpa*), etc., would be "mine." If, however, each individual *attā* were part of the world-*attā,* then each painful sensation felt by one part of the world-*attā* would be felt by every part of the world-*attā,* ie, when wood is burned the *attā* in us would feel the pain suffered by the *attā* in it. We do not feel any such pain because there is no world-*attā.*"
>
> (Norman 1981:23)

In other words, nowhere in his teachings, does the Buddha ever mention the "world-soul" or universal Self.[48] We find an interesting parallel in the Jain texts where the Sūyagaḍaṁga 1.1.1, too, refutes the world-soul (Norman 1981:24 f). The similarity of the Jain and Buddhist arguments, Norman concludes, "makes it clear that the Buddha in the [Alagaddûpamā Sutta] is not merely refuting the individual *ātman,* but also the concept of the world-*ātman.*" (Norman 1981:25)

3.1.3.2 The Alagaddûpama Sutta closes with a description of how the fetters are destroyed leading to the type of sainthood this brings. Even for those who fail to walk the path, the Buddha makes this remarkable declaration at the close of the Sutta:

> In the Teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, those who have mere faith in me and mere love for me, are all bound for heaven.[49]
>
> (M 22,47/1:142), SD 3.13

The Buddha, in other words, provides the chance of happiness and liberation for all.[50]

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[48] R. Gombrich, in review of Bhattacharya, *L'Ātman-Brahman dan le Bouddhisme Ancien,* in *Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Sciences,* 1978:128 f. (Quoted by Norman 1981:24)

[49] "Those who have mere faith in me and mere love for me," *yesaṁ mayi saddhā,mattaṁ pema,mattaṁ.* This phrase is found in Alaggadûpama S (M 22,47/1:143), **Bhaddāli S** (M 65,27/1:444) & **Kīṭā,giri S** (M 70,21/1:479) = SD 11.1. Cf **Sarakāni S**s (S 55.24-25/4:375-380). Comy explains that this refers to the insight practitioners (*vipassakā puggalā*) who have not attained any supramundane state, not gaining even streamwinning, they are reborn in a heaven. On the other hand, we can take this passage as is, that is, anyone who has "mere faith, mere love" in the Buddha are reborn in a heaven, without going against the grain of early Buddhism. See M:ÑB 2001:1212 n274.

[50] On the Sutta closing, see also **Beyond Good and Evil,** SD 18.7(7.3).

3.2 REJECTING YAJÑAVALKYA

3.2.1 The second Alagaddûpama Sutta passage which, according to **K R Norman,**[51] is a deliberate refutation of Yajñavalkya's teaching in Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad is the "**Let go of what is not yours!**" passage, thus:

> Therefore, bhikshus, let go of [give up] what is not yours. When you have given it up, it would be for your welfare and happiness for a long time.
>
> What is it that is not yours?
>
> **Form** is not yours. **Feeling** … **Perception** … **Formations** … **Consciousness** is not yours.
>
> Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for your welfare and happiness for a long time.
>
> (M 22,40/1:140 f), SD 3.13

3.2.2 Norman shows that, in the light of the passage on the 6 grounds for wrong views, this passage on "Let go of what is not yours!" must be understood as a satirical allusion to the identification of the world and the self. This identification, constituting the most famous doctrine of the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka and the Chāndogya Upaniṣads, was the culmination of the theory of the equivalence between macrocosm and microcosm, between the universe and man.

Gombrich summarizes the point as follows:

> the need for multiple, partial equivalence was short-circuited by identifying the soul/essence of the individual and of the world. The Buddha in a sense kept the equivalence, or at least parallelism, for he argued against a single essence at either level and so made macrocosm and microcosm equally devoid of soul/essence. (Gombrich 1990:15)

3.3 DEBUNKING THE *ĀTMAN* OF THE BṚHAD ĀRAṆYAKA

3.3.1 A comparison of the following Sutta passages with their Upaniṣad counterparts shows how closely related they are, especially where "there seem to be verbal echoes of Yājñavalkya," here summarized by Gombrich (a student of Norman):

> **The sixth wrong view** in [the grounds for wrong view] passage is that after death I shall be *nicco, dhuvo,* etc. Compare:
>
> Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.23: *eṣa nityo mahimā brāhmaṇasya* [This is the eternal greatness of Brahman] (the brāhmaṇa here being one who has realized identity with *brahman*);
>
> [Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad] 4.4.20: *aja ātmā mahān dhruvaḥ* [Unknown is the self, great, constant]. The third point of the *tilakkhaṇas*, *dukkha*, is not mentioned here, but is of course opposed to *ānanda,* as at:
>
> Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.9.28: *vijñānam ānandaṁ brahma* [Brahman is bliss and absolute knowledge] and
>
> [Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad] 4.3.33: *athaiṣa eva parama ānandaḥ, eṣa brahmalokaḥ* [This is indeed supreme bliss, this Brahma World].
>
> It remains only to remind readers of the most important and closest parallel of all.
>
> **The fifth wrong view** is to identify with what has been *diṭṭhaṁ sutaṁ mutaṁ*[52] *viññataṁ*.
>
> What exactly is that? The answer is:

[51] See K R Norman, "A note on Attā in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*," 1981:19-29.

[52] Gombrich here has *mate* (not found in Pali in this context): probably contaminated by proximity of the Skt *mate* below. See text, §15(5)n. See ***Diṭṭha Suta Muta Viññāta*** = SD 53.5.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.5.6: *ātmani khalv are dṛṣṭe śrute mate vijñāte idaṁ sarvaṁ vidita*
[When, indeed, the self is seen, heard, thought, and known, all this is known.]

So here is the form of the microcosm-macrocosm equivalence to which the Buddha is alluding; and we can further see that his fifth wrong view is Yajñavalkya's realization of that identity in life, and his sixth the making real that identity at death. But, says the Buddha, this is something that does not exist (*asat*).

(Gombrich 1990:15; reparagraphed & Sanskrit tr Piya Tan)

3.3.2 Gombrich, in his article on "*Kamma* as a reaction to Brahminism" (1996), summarizes the above in these words:

> The Buddha does not often use ontological language at all. The most explicit passage in which he denies the *existence* of the *ātman* is in the Alagaddūpama Sutta. Perhaps the most famous of all Upaniṣadic dicta is *tat tvam asi* (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6, 8, 7, etc), "Thou art that"—identifying the individual self/essence with the world self/essence. The transposition of this statement into the first person—"I am this"—in Pali gives us *eso'ham asmi,* and this is said in several texts to be false. To be precise, the full false statement is *etam mama, eso'ham asmi, eso me attā:* "This is mine, I am this, this is my self/essence." (Gombrich 1996:38)

Although this set of three clauses is often mentioned as wrong views, it is in **the Alagaddûpama Sutta** that it is most clearly explained [§§15-29],[53] "and in terms of other obvious verbal echoes of surviving Upaniṣadic passages."[54] In essence, the passage denies that one's self is the same as the world, or that one will become the "world self" at death.

The Buddha declares that people worry about something that is non-existent externally (*bahiddhā asati*) and non-existent internally (*ajjhattaṁ asati*). According to Gombrich, "he is referring respectively to the soul/essence of the world and of the individual." (1996:39)[55]

The rationale for letting go of self view is a naturally simple and simply natural one: there is *neither* Self nor Soul in the first place. We should let go of <u>the idea or view</u> of a Self or Soul!

3.4 PRAGMATICS AND TRUTH

<u>3.4.1 Wrong view and right view</u>

3.4.1.1 Two points support the idea that **views** (*diṭṭhi*) should be understood as knowledge of doctrine (*dhamma*). First, right view and wrong view are concerned respectively with a correct and incorrect grasp of the teachings. It is clear that there can be attachment to the Dharma, and this constitutes wrong view. <u>Wrong view</u> is a wrong grasp of the teachings, <u>right view</u> is a correct grasp of the teachings that leads to an understanding that is free from craving.

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[53] At M 22,15-29/1:135-139. Gombrich (1996:38 n10): Dr Tuvia Gelblum has shown that virtually all the same set of three clauses, adapted to meet the exigencies of the *āryā* metre, is found as *kārikā* 64 of the Sāṁkhyā Kārikā. In that context they refer to realizing that the *puruṣa* (spirit) neither is nor possesses any of the evolutes of *prakṛti* (nature). (Gelblum, "Sāṁkhya and Sartre," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 1 1970:75-82, see pp78-80)

[54] Gombrich notes that "these echoes are not mentioned by the commentators and seem not to have been noticed before modern times. They are mentioned in Hermann Oldenberg 1923:258." (1996:39 n11). Both K R Norman (1981) and his student, R Gombrich (1990), have made such analyses.

[55] Gombrich's teacher, K R Norman holds the same view (1981:23). Gombrich refers to two other suttas in this connection: **Taṇhā Jālinī S** (A 4.199/2:211-213), SD 31.15, & **Yamaka S** (S 22.85/3:144), SD 21.12.

3.4.1.2 To the modern reader, early Buddhism may appear to be "pragmatic" [1.2.2.2], but there are more vital issues that the Buddha is concerned with. **The parable of the raft** [1.2.2] suggests that the teachings should not be grasped, not that the teachings are only of pragmatic value but that the Dharma is both true and of value. The Buddha's teachings should be understood only as value statements but that they are also true.

This is related to the point that wrong view is a craving and greed for Dharma, whether that doctrine is wrong or right. **Right view** is the cessation of craving for Dharma; it is a form of wisdom. This point is clear from the fact that views in general are regarded as a form of greed in the Nikāyas.

3.4.1.3 The notions of ignorance (*avijjā*) and wrong view (or any view) (*diṭṭhi*) are distinguished in the Nikāyas. **Wrong view** is primarily a form of greed, while **ignorance** is primarily the root of delusion. Though their definitions do overlap, it is helpful to understand that views involve a wrong grasp of knowledge, even true knowledge. Most importantly, it can be argued that wrong view is the *grasping* aspect of ignorance, whereas right view is that aspect of wisdom which does not crave, which is free from greed and attachment.

Views are like our knowledge of some distant city that we have never been to. We know a lot *about* the city: names of places, how to get there, various interesting buildings and events of the city, and so on; but we have never *experienced* any of these. **Right view**, on the other hand, is the full familiarity that one who has lived in that city long enough, or even born and lived there all one's life. One knows the city very well and without hesitation; one does not even have to think about details of the city; they just come naturally.

3.4.2 One should not be attached to knowledge

3.4.2.1 The understanding of views as correct and incorrect knowledge of Dharma has far-reaching implications for the 2 understandings of views outlined above [3.4.1.3]. First, the opposite understanding is challenged because there is no opposition between wrong view and right view as respectively incorrect and correct truth claims. Rather, it is an opposition between craving and *the ending* of craving.

3.4.2.2 Second, the rejection of all views is neither possible nor advised, but the abandoning of craving and attachment to views is wise. It is not the validity of "seeing things as they are" which is being rejected, but the greed for that way of apprehending things. The early texts do not reject knowledge, but attachment to knowledge.[56]

3.4.2.3 We can only know what we experience, either through the physical senses or through the mind. Sense-based and mind-based knowledge are all dependent on causes and effects. Knowledge only makes sense when we see and understand the causality behind the knowing.

Thus, rather than relying on creationist or deterministic dogmas, early Buddhism focuses on the practical, observable laws of cause and effect or **dependent arising** (*paṭicca samuppāda*). It maps out exactly how mental states arise in a network of chain reactions, giving us practical leverage to intervene and stop suffering before it fully takes root.[57]

Scholars and therapists have observed that early Buddhist teachings and methods function less like an abstract, dogmatic religion but more like a therapeutic, empirical framework designed to solve the concrete problems of human discontent and suffering, and as a prescription of happily functional daily living.[58]

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[56] See P Fuller, *The Notion of DIṭṭhi,* London, 2005:8.

[57] See **Upanisā S** (S 12.23) SD 6.12; **Dependent arising**, SD 5.16 (18+19.3.2); SD 53.15 (2.1). See also Sirimangalo, "Practical dependent origination," nd. 4 July 2026.

[58] Scholars of the pragmatism of early Buddhism: John J **Holder**, "The early Buddhist theory of truth: A contextualist pragmatic interpretation," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36,4 1996:443-459. Noa **Ronkin**, "From the Bud-

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