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## Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta

The Discourse to Prince Abhaya | M 58

Theme: The Buddha is not caught by trick questions

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003

### 1 Prince Abhaya

**1.1** Prince Abhaya was a son of Bimbisāra, king of Magadha, by Paduma,vatī, a courtesan of Ujjenī (capital of Avantī in the southwest, north of the Vindhya mountains). Abhaya was at first a follower of the nirgrantha Nātaputta, but later took refuge in the Buddha.

**The Vinaya** says that it was Abhaya who discovered the baby Jīvaka Komāra,bhacca lying on a dung-heap left there on the instructions of his mother, the courtesan, Sālāvātī, and Abhaya raised him as his own (V 1:269; AA 1:398 f). The Aṅguttara Commentary, however, says that Abhaya was Jīvaka’s own natural father (AA 1:399).<sup>1</sup>

**1.2** In the **Abhaya Sutta** (S 46.56), prince Abhaya visits the Buddha on Mt Vulture Peak to discuss the views of Pūraṇa Kassapa. The Buddha then teaches him the 7 factors of awakening (S 46.56/5:126-128). When Bimbisāra died, Abhaya was emotionally disturbed and thought of renouncing. On listening to the teaching of **Tāla-c,chigga’ūpamā Sutta** (S 56.47),<sup>2</sup> he became a streamwinner, and later became an arhat (Tha 26; ThaA 1:88).

### 2 The double-horned question

**The Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 58) and **the (Asi,bandhaka,putta) Kula Sutta** (S 42.9) both deal with a “double-horned question” (*ubhato,koṭika pañha*)<sup>3</sup> here used by the Nirgranthas (early Jains) against the Buddha. By their very nature, such questions are unanswerable—to say “yes” or “no” to any of such questions is to accept that they are valid.<sup>4</sup>

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). Gethin, in *The Foundations of Buddhism*, gives a modern example: To answer “‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a question such as ‘Are Martians green?’” one is “drawn into accepting the validity of the question” (1998:68).<sup>5</sup>

In the Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta, the Buddha points out to Prince Abhaya that his is a “**double-horned question**,” immediately exposing the problem and Abhaya is impressed [§6]. However, in the (Asi,bandhaka,putta) Kula Sutta, the Buddha goes on to answer the trick question with panache (S 42.9.9-11/4:324).

<sup>1</sup> See §7, where Abhaya is said to have an infant with him.

<sup>2</sup> S 56.47/5:455 f.

<sup>3</sup> See M 58/1:392-396 (SD 7.12) & S 42.9/4:322-324 (SD 7.11) respectively. In Indian logic, this is called *ubhaya-pāṣa* (see S Bagchi, *Inductive Reasoning: A study of tarka and its role in Indian logic*, Calcutta, 1953: 182, 183). In addition to 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Another modern example is the Christian evangelist’s trick of drawing the unwary into a one-sided indoctrination by asking “What do you think of Christ?” (Matt 22:42). The Buddhist answer is the noble silence. Cf D 25,20/3:53.

### 3 The 6 kinds of statements

**3.1** The heart of the **Abhaya Rāja, kumāra Sutta** is a teaching on right speech. The Buddha gives an almost exhaustive list of “paths of speech” (*vacana, patha*)<sup>6</sup> or speech-types, categorized according to their truth-value, utility (or disutility) and aesthetics (pleasantness or unpleasantness). A statement could be true (*bhūta, taccha*) or false (*abhūta, ataccha*), useful (connected with the goal, *attha, saṃhita*) or useless (not connected with the goal, *anatta, saṃhita*), pleasant (*paesaṃ piyā manāpā*) or unpleasant (*paesaṃ appiyā amanāpā*).

**3.2** These pairs of opposing qualities can be expanded into a comprehensive set of **8 possible propositions**, of which 6 apply to the Sutta, thus:<sup>7</sup>

(1) True	useful	pleasant	[§8.6]	He would assert such a statement at a <u>proper time</u> .
(2) "	"	unpleasant	[§8.3]	He would assert such a statement at a <u>proper time</u> .
(3) "	useless	pleasant	[§8.5]	He would <i>not</i> assert such a statement. <sup>8</sup>
(4) "	"	unpleasant	[§8.2]	He would <i>not</i> assert such a statement.
(5) False	useful	pleasant	[ - ]	[Unlisted = false speech.]
(6) "	"	unpleasant	[ - ]	[Unlisted = harsh speech.]
(7) "	useless	pleasant	[§8.4]	He would <i>not</i> assert such a statement.
(8) "	"	unpleasant	[§8.1]	He would <i>not</i> assert such a statement.

**3.3** Statement 2 [§8.3], however, seems to contradict a statement in the **Subhāsita Sutta** (Sn 3.3), where it is stated “**One should speak only what is pleasant**” (*piya, vācam eva bhāseyya*, Sn 452a). Jayatilleke suggests that “this apparent exception holds good only in the case of the Tathāgata” (1963:352).

However, in the second half of the stanza, *piya* is broadly defined: “**What one speaks without bringing evil to others is pleasant**” (*yaṃ anādāya pāpāni | paesaṃ bhāsate piyaṃ*, Sn 452cd). Hence, it is helpful that we do not take words as merely “dictionary” meaning. We should examine its context and be mindful how it is used.<sup>9</sup>

**3.4** We should carefully note that alternative (5) “false, useful, pleasant” is actually unlisted in the Sutta. This is the kind of expression that characterizes most of the Mahāyāna “skillful means” and parables, especially those of the **Lotus Sutra** (Saddharma, puṇḍarīka Sūtra), a post-Buddha polemical work that was composed to brazenly malign many of the key teachings of early Buddhism.

The Lotus Sutra cleverly deals with the notion of falsehood (developed in its second chapter), claiming, in effect, that it is permissible to be false as a “skillful means” to liberate someone, thus justifying falsehood and contradiction. Needless to say, if we value truth, we should not be fooled or seduced by such by such anti-Buddhist teachings.

The fact that the Lotus Sutra is clearly rooted in a historical contradiction—that it had come from the Buddha himself—shows that it is *not* Buddha Word, and should be rejected as a Buddhist work. The Sutra’s theology (number and timelessness of the Buddhas), parables and disrespect for the arhats, very likely came from the influence of early Christianity<sup>10</sup> upon the Sutra’s writers who intended it as an

<sup>6</sup> *Vacana, patha*; cf **Kakacūpama S** (M 21,11.1/1:126). SD 38.1.

<sup>7</sup> See Jayatilleke 1963:351 f.

<sup>8</sup> In the cases of (3-4, 7-8), each can be either frivolous speech or useless talk (or both).

<sup>9</sup> On the two levels of religious language, see **Dh 97** (SD 10.6).

<sup>10</sup> On the probability of early Christian influence on the composers of the Lotus Sutra, see SD 31.12 (6.1.3).

insidious anti-Buddhist “skillful means.” The teachings of **the Abhaya Rāja.kumāra** (M 58) bears clear testimony against the slanderous language and intentions of the Lotus Sutra.

**3.5** The Buddha clearly rejects **falsehood**. Hence, it should not even be used as an expedient: it will only encourage wrong views, especially about early Buddhism. The Buddha is no sweet-talker, and we do have numerous occasions when he would actually and rightly reprimand foolish monks, who are said to be “empty people” (*mogha, purisa*).<sup>11</sup>

**The Subhāsita Sutta** (Sn 3.3), for example, gives us a very good idea from the early years of the ministry (probably the first 20 years) when only those who have attained the Dharma-eye or become arhats are admitted into the order.<sup>12</sup> When we are not wise enough, without sufficient understanding of the teaching in the suttas, we are likely to devalue, even reject, the Vinaya, or have wrong views, to our own grand detriment. “Grand” here hints at the hubris of those who think that they are wise enough to revise or ignore the Dharma or Vinaya, when they have not even attained streamwinning.

## 4 Connected suttas

**4.1** Since the Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta deals with the nature of questioning and the truth of a teaching, it should be studied with a number of other related suttas. **The (Asi,bandhaka,putta) Kula Sutta** (S 42.9) relates how the nirgranthas (early Jains) try (again) to discredit the Buddha by instructing Asi,bandhaka,putta to ask a double-horned question to trip the Buddha. Unlike in **the Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta** (M 58) where the Buddha points out to Abhaya that he is asking a double-horned question (so foiling the deceit), here the Buddha replies with a complete discourse, which converts Asi,bandhaka,putta.

**4.2** In **the Kāḷaka (or Kāḷak’ārāma) Sutta** (A 4.24), the Buddha declares that he knows and understands whatever is *seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, searched into, pondered over by the mind*, but he is not subject to any of them. It is said that at the end of the discourse, the earth shook as if in witness of his statement. (A 4.24/2:24 ff)

### **4.3 THE 4 WAYS OF ANSWERING QUESTIONS**

**4.3.1 The Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 331) lists the 4 ways of answering a question (*pañhā,vyākaraṇa*), that is repeated in the Aṅguttara Nikāya as **the Pañha Vyākaraṇa Sutta** (A 4.42):

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| (1) There is the question which requires <u>a direct answer</u> | <i>ekaṃsa vyākaraṇīya,</i>     |
| (2) That which requires <u>an explanation</u> (or analysis)     | <i>vibhajja vyākaraṇīya,</i>   |
| (3) That which requires <u>a counter-question</u>               | <i>paṭipucchā vyākaraṇīya,</i> |
| (4) That which is <u>to be rejected</u> (as wrongly put)        | <i>ṭhapanīya.</i>              |

(D 33,1.11(28)/3:229; A 4.42/2:46; also A 1:197, 2:46; Miln 144; cf Watanabe 1983:1.10 ff)

<sup>11</sup> Monks who show any serious psychosocial weakness (esp wrong view and wrong conduct) are reprimanded as *mogha, purisa*, lit “empty person,” usu tr as “misguided one.” See esp **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22.6/1:132), SD 3.13. See **Pāthika S (D 24)**: 3:3 (×3), 4 (×3), 6, 7 (×2), 9 (×2), 10 (×2), 11, 12 (×2), 28 (×2); **Mahā Sīha,nāda S (M 12)**: 1:68, 69; **Alagaddūpama S (M 22)**: 132 (×5), 258 (×5); **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya S (M 38)**: 258 (×2); **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S (M 63)**: 1:428; **Mahā Kamma,vibhaṅga S (M 136)**: 3:208 (×3), 209; **Mīḷhaka S (S 17.5)**: 2:229; **Sīha,nāda S (A 9.11)**: 4:378; **Vinaya: V** 1:32, 58 (×2), 59 (×4), 154 (×3), 193 (×4), 216, 218 (×3), 250 (×3), 301 (×3), 305 (×3), 306 (×6); **2**:7, 18 (×3), 26 (×5), 118, 119 (×2), 165 (×2), 168 (×4), 193. On *mogha, purisa* as a syn of *asappurisa*, see **Sappurisa S** (M 113), SD 23.7 (3.2).

<sup>12</sup> See SD 44.1 (3.5.1.1).

On these 4 ways of answering questions, further see **the Kathā,vatthu Sutta** (A 3.67/1:197-199), SD 46.11

**4.3.2 The Milinda,pañha** (Miln 144 f) provides examples for each of the 4 proper ways of answering questions, thus:

- (1) **There is the question which requires a direct answer**, that is, a categorical reply, or direct affirmation or negation: *Is form ... feeling ... perception ... mental formation ... consciousness impermanent?* (S 3:21 etc.).
- (2) **That which requires an explanation or analysis**, that is, a discriminating reply or analytical reply: *But if form ... feeling ... perception ... mental formation ... consciousness is impermanent ... ?*
- (3) **That which requires a counter-question:**  
*But now, is everything discriminated by the eye?* [untraced quote]  
See **the Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 3) where the Buddha counter-questions Ambaṭṭha who arrogantly questions if the Buddha was a “great man” (*mahā, purisa*).
- (4) **That which is to be rejected (as wrongly put)**, that is, keeping silent in response to the question:

**4.3.3 The 10 undeclared or indeterminate statements** (*avyākata*) or questions set aside (*ṭhapanīya*) by the Buddha.<sup>13</sup> These **10 points** or parts of them are listed in several suttas:<sup>14</sup>

<b>Poṭṭhapāda Sutta</b>	D 9,251:187 f	SD 7.14
<b>Pāsādikā Sutta</b>	D 29,30-33/3:135-137	SD 40a.6, the 4 posthumous state of a tat5hagata
<b>Cūḷa Māluṅkya,putta Sutta</b>	M 63,2/1:426	SD 5.8 (2)
<b>(Aggi) Vaccha,gotta Sutta</b>	M 72,3-14/1:483-486	SD 6.15 (2)
<b>Vacchagotta Saṃyutta</b>	S 33.1-55/3:257-263	SD 86.5 86.6 53.22a 53.22b 53/22c 53.22d 53.22e
<b>Avyākata Saṃyutta</b>	S 44.1-11/4:374-403	SD 63.6 21.13 97.14-17 53.14a+14b 23.15 2.16 53.22
<b>Milinda,pañha</b>	Miln 144 f	

**4.4 In the Suta Sutta** (A 4.183), the Buddha advises Vassakāra, the well-known minister of Magadha, that whatever is seen, heard, sensed or cognized, only those that contribute to *the decline of unwholesome states* and to *the growth of wholesome states* should be uttered.<sup>15</sup>

— — —

<sup>13</sup> The 10 questions are: the world is (1) eternal, (2) not eternal, (3) finite, (4) infinite; the self and the body (5) are identical, (6) different; the tathagata (7) exists after death, (8) does not, (9) neither, (10) both. Further see **Unanswered questions**, SD 49a.10.

<sup>14</sup> See also SD 46.11 (2.2.4).

<sup>15</sup> A 4.183/2:172 f (SD 68.13).

# Abhaya Rāja,kumāra Sutta

## The Discourse to Prince Abhaya

M 58

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying in the squirrels' feeding-ground in the Bamboo Forest near Rājagaha.

### Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta's trick question

2 Then, Prince Abhaya<sup>16</sup> approached Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta. Having approached, he saluted Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, and sat down at one side.

As Prince Abhaya was thus seated at one side, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta said this to him:

3 "Come, my prince, refute the recluse Gotama's doctrine. Then a good report concerning you will be spread about thus:

'Prince Abhaya has refuted the doctrine of the recluse Gotama, so mighty, so powerful!'"

"But how, bhante, shall I refute the doctrine of the recluse Gotama, so mighty, so powerful?"

"Come, my prince, approach the recluse Gotama. Having approached, salute him, and then ask him, thus:

3.2 'Bhante, would the Tathagata utter speech that would be unpleasant and disagreeable to others?'

If, the recluse Gotama, when questioned by you thus, were to answer,

'The Tathagata, my prince, would utter speech that would be unpleasant and disagreeable to others,' then you should say to him,

'Then, bhante, what is the difference between you and an ordinary person? For an ordinary person, too, would utter speech that would be *unpleasant and disagreeable to others*.'

3.3 But if the recluse Gotama, when questioned by you thus, were to answer,

'The Tathagata, my prince, would not utter [393] speech that would be unpleasant and disagreeable to others,'

then, you should say to him,

'Then, bhante, why have you declared of Devadatta<sup>17</sup> thus:

"**Devadatta** is destined for the suffering state, that Devadatta is destined for hell, Devadatta will remain there for the aeon, Devadatta is incorrigible"<sup>18</sup>?

Devadatta was angry and displeased with that speech of yours.'

3.4 My prince, when the recluse Gotama is given this **double-horned question**<sup>19</sup> by you, he will neither be able to throw it up nor swallow it down.

Just as if an iron hook<sup>20</sup> were stuck in a man's throat, he would not be able to either throw it up or swallow it down,

<sup>16</sup> Prince Abhaya was a son of Bimbi,sāra, king of Magadha. See Intro (1).

<sup>17</sup> On Deva,datta's attempts to kill the Buddha, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004 ch 7.

<sup>18</sup> "Incorrigible," *atekiccha*. Comy glosses it as *Buddha,sahassena*, "with a thousand Buddhas," ie after a thousand Buddhas have arisen (MA 3:108). The Canonical texts however say that Devadatta will stay in Niraya (hell) for only an aeon (*kappa*) (V 2:202; M 1:393; A 3:402, 4:140, 160; It 85).

<sup>19</sup> "Double-horned question," *ubhato,koṭika pañha*, ie the horns of a dilemma. See S 42.9.6/4:323; Miln 5, 108, 162.

so, too, my prince, when the recluse Gotama is given this double-horned question by you, he will neither be able to throw it up nor swallow it down.”<sup>21</sup>

4 “Yes, bhante,” Prince Abhaya replied to Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta.

Then, he rose from his seat and after saluting Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, keeping him [the nirgrantha] to his right side, departed and approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he saluted him, and then sat down at one side.

### Prince Abhaya invites the Buddha

4.2 Seated down at one side, Prince Abhaya looked at the sun, and thought:

“It is too late today to refute the Blessed One’s doctrine. I shall refute the Blessed One’s doctrine in my own house tomorrow.”

Then, he said this to the Blessed One,

“Bhante, let the Blessed One and three others<sup>22</sup> consent to accept tomorrow’s meal from me.”

The Blessed One consented by his silence.

5 Then, knowing that the Blessed One had consented, Prince Abhaya rose from this seat, and, having saluted the Blessed One, keeping him [the Blessed One] to his right side, departed.

Then, when the night had ended, early in the morning, the Blessed One dressed, and taking robe and bowl, went to Prince Abhaya’s house and sat down at the prepared seat.

Then, with his own hands, Prince Abhaya served and satisfied the Blessed One with various excellent food, both hard and soft.

### The Buddha answers

When the Blessed One had finished his meal, and washed his bowl and hands, Prince Abhaya, taking a low seat, sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, Prince Abhaya said this to the Blessed One:

6 “Bhante, would the Tathagata utter speech that would be **unpleasant and disagreeable to others?**”

“My prince, is not this biased [one-sided]?”<sup>23</sup>

“Then, bhante, the nirgranthas have lost in this!”

“Why do you say this, my prince: **[394]** ‘Then, bhante, the nirgranthas have lost in this!’?”

<sup>20</sup> “Iron hook,” *aya,siṅghāṭaka*. In his tr, Ṭhānissaro has “two-horned chestnut” ie “the nut of a tree (*Trapa bicornis*) growing in south and southeast Asia. Its shell looks like the head of a water buffalo, with two nasty, curved ‘horns’ sticking out of either side.” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/majjhima/mn058.html>. Unfortunately, he does not give his Pali reading.

<sup>21</sup> For a philosophical analysis on Nāta,putta’s argument to trip the Buddha, see Jayatilleke 1963:226 f.

<sup>22</sup> “The Blessed One and three others,” *Bhagavā ... attā,cattuttho*, lit “The Blessed One, with self as the fourth.” This number would be considered a “group” (*gaṇa*), one short of a saṅgha (which is a minimum of 5 monks). The small number of monks invited probably shows that Abhaya, although a royalty with means, lacks the faith of a follower.

<sup>23</sup> *Na kho’ttha rāja,kumāra ekaṃsenā ti*. “Biased,” *ekaṃsa*, lit “one-sided.” This refers to the double-horned question of the nirgranthas who plan to triick the Buddha with it. See **Subha S** (M99): *ekaṃsa,vādo*, “one-sided speech” (M 99,4/2:197), that is, a statement that is biased and without basis. There the Buddha declares that “I am one who speaks only after making an analysis (*vibhajja,vāda*)” (M 99,4/2:197).

PRINCE ABHAYA RECOUNTS HIS MEETING WITH NĀTAPUTTA

“Now, bhante, I approached Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta. Having approached, I saluted Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, and sat down at one side.

As I was thus seated at one side, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta said this to me:

**6.2** [3] “Come, my prince, refute the recluse Gotama’s doctrine. Then a good report concerning you will be spread about thus:

‘Prince Abhaya has refuted the doctrine of the recluse Gotama, so mighty, so powerful!’”

“But how, bhante, shall I refute the doctrine of the recluse Gotama, so mighty, so powerful?”

“Come, my prince, approach the recluse Gotama. Having approached, salute him, and then ask him, thus:

6.2 [3.2] ‘Bhante, would the Tathagata utter speech that would be unpleasant and disagreeable to others?’

If, the recluse Gotama, when questioned by you thus, were to answer,

‘The Tathagata, my prince, *would* utter speech that would be unpleasant and disagreeable to others,’ then, you should say to him,

‘Then, bhante, what is the difference between you and an ordinary person? For an ordinary person, too, would utter speech that would be unpleasant and disagreeable to others.’

6.3 [3.3] But if the recluse Gotama, when questioned by you thus, he were to answer,

‘The Tathagata, my prince, would not utter speech that would be unpleasant and disagreeable to others,’

then, you should say to him,

‘Then, bhante, why have you declared regarding Devadatta thus: ‘Devadatta is destined for the suffering state, that Devadatta is destined for hell, Devadatta will remain there for the aeon, Devadatta is incorrigible’? Devadatta was angry and displeased with that speech of yours.’

6.4 [3.4] My prince. when the recluse Gotama is given this double-horned question by you, he will neither be able to throw it up nor swallow it down.

Just as if an iron hook were stuck in a man’s throat, he would not be able to either throw it up or swallow it down,

so, too, my prince, when the recluse Gotama is given this double-horned question by you, he will neither be able to throw it up nor swallow it down.”

### Simile of the tender infant

**7** Now at that time a **young tender infant**<sup>24</sup> was lying on its back on Prince Abhaya’s lap.

Then, the Blessed One said this to Prince Abhaya: **[395]**

“What do you think, my prince? If, while you were not mindful of him, or your nurse were not mindful of him, the child were to put a stick or a pebble into his mouth, what would you do to him?”

“Bhante, I would remove it. Bhante, if I could not remove it once, I would hold his head in my left hand, and crooking a finger of my right hand, I would dig it out even if it meant drawing blood.

Why is that? Because I have compassion for the child.”

<sup>24</sup> It is possible that this infant is Jīvaka Komāra, bhacca [1.1].

## The 6 kinds of statements<sup>25</sup>

8 (1) “Even so, my prince, such speech as the Tathagata knows to be untrue, false and not connected with the goal, and that is unpleasant and disagreeable to others:<sup>26</sup> the Tathagata does not utter such speech.

(2) Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be true, real but not connected with the goal, and that is unpleasant and disagreeable to others: the Tathagata does *not* utter such speech.

(3) Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be true, real and connected with the goal, but that is unpleasant and disagreeable to others: the Tathagata *knows the time* to use such speech.

(4) Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be untrue, false and not connected with the goal, but that is pleasant and agreeable to others: the Tathagata does *not* utter such speech.

(5) Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be true, real but not connected with the goal, but that is pleasant and agreeable to others: the Tathagata does *not* utter such speech.

(6) Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be true, real and connected with the goal, and that is pleasant and agreeable to others:<sup>27</sup> the Tathagata *knows the time* to use such speech.

Why is that? Because, my prince, the Tathagata is compassionate to beings.”

## Parable of the chariot

9 “Bhante, when learned kshatriyas, learned brahmins, learned householders, learned recluses, after preparing **a question**, then go to the Blessed One and ask it, bhante, is there already in the Blessed One’s mind the thought:

‘If they come to me and ask me thus, I shall answer thus’? Or does that answer occur to the Tathagata spontaneously?”<sup>28</sup>

10 “In this connection, my prince, I will ask you a question in return.<sup>29</sup> Answer it as you please. What do you think, my prince? Are you skilled in the parts of a chariot?”<sup>30</sup>

“Yes, bhante, I am.”

“What do you think, my prince? When people come to you and ask:

‘What is the name of this part of the chariot?’ is there already in your mind the thought: **[396]** ‘If they come to me and ask me thus, I shall answer thus’? Or does the answer come to you spontaneously?”

<sup>25</sup> \**Cha vacana, patha*; cf **Kakacūpama S** (M 21,11.1/1:126), SD 38.1. See Intro (3).

<sup>26</sup> *Abhūtaṃ atacchaṃ anatta, saṃhitāṃ, sā ca paresaṃ appiyā amanāpā*. “Untrue” (*abhūta*) and “true” (*bhūta*), I think, refer to the falsity or the truthfulness of the statement, respectively. “Unreal” (*ataccha*) and “real” (*taccha*) concern correct reference, whether the words actually reflect the fact. “The goal” (*attha*) here is arhathood or nirvana, or some spiritual development (at least attaining streamwinning). “Unpleasant” (*appiya*) and “pleasant” (*piya*) concern civility and propriety; while “disagreeable” (*amanāpa*) and “agreeable” (*manāpa*) refer to urbanity and aesthetics.

<sup>27</sup> *Bhūtaṃ tacchaṃ attha, saṃhitāṃ, sā ca paresaṃ piyā manāpā*.

<sup>28</sup> “Spontaneously,” *ṭhānaso*, here means both “on the spot” (*ṭhān’uppattika*) and “at that moment” (*taṃ khaṇaṃ*) (MA 3:113). PED: “without an interval or a cause (of change), at once, immediately, spontaneously, impromptu”; naturally, without premeditation.

<sup>29</sup> “I will ask a question in return,” *paṭipucchissāmi*, ie ask a counter-question. See Intro (4) under **Pañha Vyākaraṇa S** (A 4.42) for the 4 ways of answering a question.

<sup>30</sup> *Kusalo tvaṃ rathassa aṅga, paccaṅgānan’ti*. This episode on the parable of the chariot is a good example of the Buddha as one with knowledge of the individual (*puggal’aññū*): see **Dhamm’aññū S** (A 7.64,9/4:116 f), SD 30.10.



“Bhante, I am well known as a **charioteer**, skilled in the parts of a chariot. All the parts of a chariot are well known to me. That answer would come to me spontaneously.”

**11** “Even so, my prince, when learned kshatriyas, learned brahmins, learned householders and learned recluses, after preparing a question, then approach the Tathagata and ask it, the answer occurs to the Tathagata spontaneously.

Why is that? **The Dharma-element** [the true nature of thing]<sup>31</sup> has been fully penetrated by the Tathagata; through such a full penetration, the answer occurs to the Tathagata spontaneously.”

**12** When this was said, Prince Abhaya said this to the Blessed One:

“Excellent, master Gotama! Excellent, master Gotama!

Just as if one were to place upright	what had been overturned,
or were to reveal	what was hidden,
or were to show the way to one	who was lost,
or were to hold up a lamp in the dark	so that those with eyes could see forms,

in the same way, in numerous ways, has the Dharma been made clear by the Blessed Gotama.

I, bhante, go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks.  
May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from this day forth for life.”

— evaṃ —

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<sup>31</sup> “The Dharma-element,” *dhamma,dhātu*, also tr as “element of things” (M:B), “causal cosmic order” (Jayatilleke 1963:448 f); as at D 14,1.15/2:8. Comy gives 2 glosses: (1) the nature of Dharma (*dhamma,sabhāva*); (2) the Buddha’s knowledge of omniscience (*sabb’aññutā,ñāṇa*). However, *dhamma,dhātu* here should not be confused with the same term used to signify the element of mind-objects among the 18 elements, nor does it bear the meaning of an all-embracing cosmic principle that the term acquires in Mahāyāna Buddhism.” (M:NB 1261 n614). See D 2:18; S 2:143, Nett 64 f, Vism 486 f, where *dhamma,dhātu* seems to be used in the sense of a mental state as an irreducible element (M:H 2:64 n1). Cf Dhs 67, 69; Vbh 72, 87, 89.