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Āditta (Pariyāya) Sutta

The Discourse on the Exposition on Burning [The Fire Sermon] | S 35.28 = Mv 1.21

Theme: Everything is burning with greed, hate, and delusion

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What is to give light must endure burning. (Attr to Viktor Frankl)

1 Introduction

1.1 THE THIRD DISCOURSE

This is said to be the third discourse of the Buddha, given after the conversion of the matted hair ascetics, the brothers Uruvelā Kassapa (500 disciples), Nadī Kassapa (250 disciples) and Gayā Kassapa (250 disciples).¹ At the end of the discourse, all the ascetics present attained arhathood.² It is said to be delivered on a flat rock (*piṭṭhi, pāsāna*).

The first discourse, **the Dhamma, cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11),³ is a statement of the Buddha's discovery of "suffering and its ending," and what is merely mentioned, "in short, the five aggregates of clinging⁴ are suffering," is elaborated in the second discourse, **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59),⁵ where the 5 aggregates are given in detail. Here, in the third discourse, the Āditta, pariyāya Sutta (S 35.-28), the focus shifts to the "all," that is, the 6 sense-bases, a teaching specifically given in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23).⁶

The discourse had a special meaning for the matted-hair ascetics because they were fire-worshippers⁷ who kept their ritual fires permanently burning. After a long encounter with them, the Buddha persuades them to give up their *agni, hotra* (Pali *aggi, hutta*), that is, the worship of Agni (Pali *aggi*), the Vedic god of fire.⁸

In allegorical terms, this discourse describes the nature of the human experience of reality, that is, the 6 sense-organs, the 6 sense-objects, the 6 sense-consciousnesses, the 6 sense-contacts, and the 3 feelings that arise in their connection.

1.2 THE FIRE IMAGERY

The fire simile in the Āditta, pariyāya Sutta, fire refers to the 3 unwholesome roots (greed, hate, delusion) [4-8]. Fire is a common imagery in the suttas. Elsewhere, it is variously used in the positive as well as in the negative senses. These same 3 fires are listed in **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33)⁹ and are the subject of a poem in **the Aggi Sutta** (It 93).¹⁰ In **the (Uggata, sarira) Aggi Sutta** (A 4.44),¹¹ reminiscent of

¹ Ninety-two aeons ago, in the time of Phussa Buddha, the 7th past buddha from our own (SD 36.2 (3)), they were the 3 princes, half-brothers of Phussa. (KhpA 202): see SD 2.7 (2.1).

² Mv 1.21 @ V 1:34 f; J 1:82 4:180.

³ See SD 1.1.

⁴ *Pañc'upadāna-k, khandha*, namely, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47; Vbh 1): see SD 17. What is briefly mentioned here is elaborated in the second discourse, **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59), SD 1.2 (2003).

⁵ See SD 1.2.

⁶ See SD 7.1.

⁷ A detailed account of these ascetics is found in **Vinaya** (V 1:24-34) and also in Ñāṇamoli's *Life of the Buddha*, 1992:54-60 64-69.

⁸ V 1:36 = J 6:220; S 1:167; Dh 392; Tha 341; J 5:205, 207.

⁹ D 33.1.10(32)/3:217.

¹⁰ It 93/3.5.4/92 @ SD 62.14.

¹¹ A 4.44/4:41-46 @ SD 3.16.

the **Kūṭa,danta Sutta** (D 5), the Buddha, for the benefit of the brahmin Uggata,sarīra, presents the imagery in a positive sense as the three fires to be tended (*aggi pāricariyā*).¹²

The **Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31) expands these three fires to be tended into the six directions of social relationships and reciprocal responsibilities.¹³ In the **(Khandha) Āditta Sutta**,¹⁴ which appears to be an abridged version of the Āditta,pariyāya Sutta, the aggregates are said to be on fire (see below). **Bodhi** thinks:

Perhaps the present [(Khandha) Āditta Sutta] was composed by simply replacing the sense bases with the aggregates, and was then compressed so that it would not “steal the show” from the more famous sutta, popularly known as the Fire Sermon, regarded by the Pāli tradition as the third formal discourse of the Buddha’s ministry. (S:B 1067 n94)

The Irish poet, T S Eliot, employed the fire allegory of the Āditta Pariyāya Sutta and immortalized it in “The Waste Land” (1922, part 3, especially the note on line 308).¹⁵

2 Buddhist psychology

In the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta, we see the Buddha introducing what we today call “Buddhist psychology,” or, as **Sujato** puts it:

The Buddha is now inventing psychology, setting forth his basic analysis of cognitive processes. Here, we see, for the first time, a specifically psychological treatment of time. Feeling is said to “arise dependent on contact,” whereas previously, arising and ceasing was exclusively the arising and ceasing of rebirth. The most striking features of the discourse, however, is not on technical definition and abstract analysis, but on a stirring, constantly repeated warning: “All is burning ... With what is it burning? With the fires of greed, anger, and delusion...” This famous triad is obviously just a more detailed analysis of “that craving that generates rebirth,” introduced here to correlate with the triad of feeling. “...With the fires of birth, decay & death...” So the reason the eye, etc, are burning is because attachment to our sensory experience gives rise to defilement which generate rebirth.

Thus the Fire Sermon, drawing on a suggestion latent in the “impermanence” of the second sermon, shows the connection between the experience of time in the psychological present moment and the eschatological [ultimate goal] framework which was the original motivation for spiritual practice. This relationship is explored in many ways in the suttas, and all the suttas’ psychological teachings should be seen in this light. The Buddha’s innovation was not to shift the focus of religious concern from eschatology to psychology, but to “demetaphysicalize” [remove the emphasis on metaphysics from] eschatology, explaining rebirth in rational, empirical terms as being no different in principle from the psychological processes observable in the present moment. So seeing the suttas by standing “behind” them looking forward we see a very different scenario than if we stand in the 21st Century looking back. (Sujata, TMA:5 f, digital ed)

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¹² A 4.44,7-16/4:43-45 @ SD 3.16; D 5/1:127-149 @ SD 22.8.

¹³ D 31,27/3:189 f @ SD 4.1 (27) For further discussion, see **(Uggata,sarīra) Aggi S** (A 4.44), SD 3.16 Intro.

¹⁴ S 22.61/3:71 @ SD 17.10.

¹⁵ <http://eliotswasteland.tripod.com/>. See Gombrich, “Recovering the Message of the Buddha.” In (edd) David Seyfort Rugg & Lambert Schmithausen, *Earliest Buddhism and Madhyamaka*, Leiden: EJ Brill, 1990. Repr in *The Buddhist Forum* vol 1 seminar papers 1987-88, ed Tadeusz Skorupski, London: Univ of London (SOAS), 1990:16.

The Discourse on the Exposition on Burning (The Fire Sermon)

S 35.28 = Mv 1.21

[19]

- 1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying at Gayā, sīsā [Gaya Head]¹⁶ with a thousand monks.
- 2 There, the Blessed One addressed the monks, thus:

The all

“Bhikshus, all¹⁷ is¹⁸ burning (*sabbaṃ ādittam*). And what, bhikshus, is the all that is burning?

3 (i) **The eye**, bhikshus, is burning,
forms are burning,

eye-consciousness is burning,

eye-contact is burning, and

whatever feeling arising with eye-contact as condition—

whether pleasant or painful or neutral [neither painful nor pleasant]—that, too, is burning.¹⁹

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of **greed**, with the fire of **hate**, with the fire of **delusion**;

burning with birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair, I say!

4 (ii) **The ear**, bhikshus, is burning,

sounds are burning,

ear-consciousness is burning,

ear-contact is burning, and

whatever feeling arising with ear-contact as condition—

whether pleasant or painful or neutral—that, too, is burning.

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of **greed**, with the fire of **hate**, with the fire of **delusion**;

¹⁶ Skt *gayā, sīsā*. A hill, about a mile (1.6 km) SW of Gayā (where the Buddha is awakened), so called because it consisted of a flat rock or ridge (*hatthi, kumbha, sadisa, piṭṭhi, pāsāṇo*, SA 2:359) or a hill-crest (*gaja, sīsa, sadisa, si-kharo*, UA 74) that looks like an elephant’s head. There was room on the rock for 1000 monks (SA 2:359). To the SE of the hill, The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang recorded seeing the 3 stupas of the 3 matted-hair (*jatilā*) ascetic Kasapa brothers (Beal, *Si-yu-ki*, 1884 2:113; Cunningham, *Ancient Geography of India*, 1924: 524 f). Today, it is called Brahmayoni, an important place of pilgrimage for Hindus. It is believed that from here an underground spring (*yonī*) arises and moves to feed the hot water spas of Brahmakund, 51 km from Rajgir (Rāja, gaha), and which is identified with the Tapodā park (S 1:8). The lake itself is fed by water from seven springs, known as the “7 seers” (*sapta, ṛṣi*). See SD 21.4 (1.3): Tapod’ārāma.

¹⁷ *Sabba*. See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1 the first sutta in the same chapter of the same title.

¹⁸ I have taken **all** (*sabba*) here as an uncountable; hence, the sg “is.” See also *The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage*, 3rd rev ed, 1998: “all” (3).

¹⁹ *Yam p’idaṃ cakkhu, samphassa, paccaṃ upajjati vedayitā sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkham-asukhaṃ vā tam pi ādittam*. In this key para, reflecting the others that follow, each deal with the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*). The key factors are the sense-organ (*ajjhata*), the sense-object (*bahiddha*), the sense-consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the sense-contact (response to stimuli) (*phassa*) and the relevant feelings (*vedanā*). The imagery of “burning” (*āditta*) also refers to “mental proliferation” (*papañca*), as explained by Mahā Kaccāna in **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18, 16/1:-111 f), SD 6.14.

burning with birth, *decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair*,
I say!

5 (iii) **The nose**, bhikshus, is burning,
smells are burning,
nose-consciousness is burning,
nose-contact is burning, and
whatever feeling arising with nose-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral—that, too, is burning.

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of **greed**, with the fire of **hate**, with the fire of **delusion**;

burning with *birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair*,

I say!

6 (iv) **The tongue**, bhikshus, is burning,
tastes are burning,
tongue-consciousness is burning, [20]
tongue-contact is burning, and
whatever feeling arising with tongue-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral—that, too, is burning.

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of **greed**, with the fire of **hate**, with the fire of **delusion**;

burning with *birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair*,

I say!

7 (v) **The body**, bhikshus, is burning,
touch is burning,
body-consciousness is burning,
body-contact is burning, and
whatever feeling arises with body-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral—that, too, is burning.

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of **greed**, with the fire of **hate**, with the fire of **delusion**;

burning with *birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair*,

I say!

8 (vi) **The mind**, bhikshus, is burning,
thoughts are burning,
mind-consciousness is burning,
mind-contact is burning, and
whatever feeling arises with mind-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral—that, too, is burning.

Burning with what?

Burning with the fire of **greed**, with the fire of **hate**, with the fire of **delusion**;

burning with *birth, decay and death; with grief, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and despair*,

I say!

Revulsion

- 9** Seeing thus, bhikshus, the learned noble disciple
is revulsed²⁰ at **the eye**, with forms,
with eye-consciousness,
with eye-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with eye-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.
- He is revulsed at **the ear**, with sounds,
with ear-consciousness,
with ear-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with ear-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.
- He is revulsed at **the nose**, with smells,
with nose-consciousness,
with nose-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with nose-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.
- He is revulsed at **the tongue**, with tastes,
with tongue-consciousness,
with tongue-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with tongue-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.
- He is revulsed at **the body**, with touch,
with body-consciousness,
with body-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with body-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.
- He is revulsed at **the mind**, with thoughts,
with mind-consciousness,
with mind-contact,
with whatever feeling arising with mind-contact as condition—
whether pleasant or painful or neutral.

Liberation

- 9.2 Through revulsion, he becomes dispassionate.
Through dispassion, his mind is freed.
When it is freed, there arises the knowledge: ‘Freed!’²¹
- He understands:
‘Destroyed is birth.
The holy life has been lived.
What needs to be done has been done.
There is no more of this state of being.’”

Arhathood

- 10** The Blessed One said this. The monks joyfully approved of the Blessed One’s word.

²⁰ “Revulsed at,” *nibbindati* (sg *nibbidati*): on the meaning and tr, see *Nibbidā*, SD 20.1 esp (2.1)

²¹ *Vimuttissimā vimuttam iti ñāṇam hoti*, or “When freed, there is the knowledge, it (the mind) is freed.” Note that the self is not addressed here.

11 And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of the thousand monks were, through non-clinging, freed from the defilements.

— evaṃ —

Bibliography

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