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Dhammapada 97

The two levels of religious language
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2004

1 Introduction

1.1 TWO LANGUAGES. The Buddha’s awakening experience, like all path awakenings, is a word-less ineffable experience, a realization that has broken through the language barrier and rises above all verbal categories. Unawakened beings, however, need some kind of language when communicating with one other. As such, the Buddha, in his efforts to transmit his realization of the liberating truth or Dharma, has to rely on the language we are familiar with. To overcome the limitations of conventional language, the Buddha often uses another kind of language, that of imagery and mythology, that is, parables, metaphors, similes, figures of speech and stories.¹

Since the Buddha sometimes speaks in terms of “beings” being “reborn” (and of the universe evolving), as if accepting the opinion that there is some kind of permanent soul, which he elsewhere rejects, there might be some obscurity or inconsistency in his doctrine. The unanimous answer of the Buddhist schools to this difficulty is that two types of statements have to be distinguished in the *Tripitaka*. Sometimes the Buddha used conventional everyday terms, such as “being,” “person,” adopting the popular viewpoint as is some unchanging entity went on from life to life. At other times he speaks of a sequence of conditions with no permanent entity among them, of desire existing through a condition but no one who “desires.”

...

The interpretation of the schools distinguishes everyday language as literally “concealing” (*samvṛti*) from philosophical language as “ultimate” (*paramârtha*). To interpret any text in the *Tripitaka* we have first to settle whether it is of the latter kind, which they called “having its meaning drawn out” (*nûtârtha*), ie to be taken as it stands, as an explicit and definitive statement, or of the former kind, which they called “having its meaning requiring to be drawn out” (*neyârtha*), ie which requires to be restated to relate it to the philosophical standpoint of the ultimate truth.

(A K Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, 1970:150 f)

1.2 PUN AND CONTRADICTION

1.2.1 Dhammapada 97 is a profoundly instructive example of **Pali polysemy**, the mingling of more than one meaning or usage for a single word or term, and where all the senses, or at least some of them, can apply at the same time to its context.² In Dh 97, however, there is only limited displays of the polysemy. In fact, each of the polysemic words in Dh 97 is a pun, where a word is pregnant with two diametrically opposed ideas. The wrong meanings traps the ignorant and unmindful, while the right sense inspires Dharma joy in the observant and wise.

A similar pun—much less obvious—is also found in the famous declaration of the Buddha to teach the liberating Dharma to the world with the words, *pamuñcantu saddham*, “Free your faith!”³

1.2.2 Dhammapada 97 [7] employs two literary devices known in Sanskrit as *śleṣa* (pun), *virodhā* (or *virodhā, bhāṣā*) (apparently contradictory language), and alliteration (*yamaka, anuprāsa*). A number of scholars⁴ have noticed this device in Dh 97 before, but only **K R Norman**⁵ has fully and clearly explained the structure and meaning of the stanza, and rectified various misinterpretations by earlier

¹ Much of the explanatory materials in what follows are a revision of those from “The Buddha’s Teaching Method,” Singapore: National University of Singapore Buddhist Society, 2002.

² SD 1.1 (4.4.5) ; SD 10.16 (1.3.1-1.3.2).

³ See SD 12.2 (3).

⁴ S Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada*, Oxford 1930:92; J Brough, *The Gāndhārī Dharmapada*, Oxford 1962: 182; W Rau, “Bemerkungen un nicht-buddhistische Sanskrit-parallelen zum Pali dhammapada,” *Jñānamuktā-valī, Commemoration Volume in Honour of Johannes Nobel*, New Delhi, 1963:164 f (on *virodhā, bhāṣā*). None of the innumerable other attempts at translating Dh has noted this literary device in Dh 97.

⁵ K R Norman, “Dhammapada 97: A misunderstood paradox.” *Indologica Taurinensia* 7 1979:325-331. Repr in *Collected Papers* vol 2, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1991:187-193. However, see below where centuries before him, the commentator (Bhāṣyakāra) of **Abhidharma, samuccaya** is already aware of the two levels of meaning of Dh 97 and gives a detailed analysis.

scholars. **Minoru Hara**,⁶ a Japanese scholar, has given an insightful comparative study of Dh 97 with Sanskrit and Chinese versions.

Besides the usual interpretation of Dh 97, Norman proposes a new one, differentiating the meaning of five adjectives in the stanza—*assaddha*, *akataññū*, *sandhi-c,cheda*, *hatāvākāsa* and *vantāsa*—into two opposite meanings, good and bad. In the bad sense, *assaddha* means “without faith,” *akataññū* “ungrateful,” *sandhi-c,cheda* (lit “wall-breaker”) “housebreaker,” *hatāvākāsa* “one who has destroyed his opportunity,” and *vantāsa* “eating what has been abandoned by others.” In the good sense, *assaddha* means “without desire,” *akataññū* “knowing the uncreated (ie nirvana),” *sandhi-c,cheda* “cutting off, destroying the links (of rebirth),” *hatāvākāsa* “one who has destroyed the occasions (for quarrels or rebirth),” and *vantāsa* “one who abandoned desire.”

1.3 ABHIDHARMA,SAMUCCAYA BHĀṢYA [AbhsmB]. Hara’s paper⁷ is important in pointing out that, despite Norman’s claims of being the first to give a detailed explanation of Dh 97, such an analysis has been done over a millennium ago by a commentator (*bhāṣyakāra*)⁸ on the *Abhidharma,samuccaya*. The *AbhsmB* discussion opens thus:

āsraddhaś cākṛtajñaś cety asyām gāthāyām hīnārthābhīdhāyīny akṣarāny uttamārthe paridīpitāni

In this very verse, the syllables (which compose the words) *āsraddha*⁹ and *akṛtajña*, which are (prima facie) indicative of bad sense (*hīnārtha*), are transformed into (*paridīpita*) a good sense (*uttamārtha*). (Hara’s tr)

Here we clearly notice that the *bhāṣyakāra* is aware of the double meaning implied in Dh 97 well before K R Norman and other modern scholars. A detailed analysis of the stanza then follows.

After introducing Dh 97, the *AbhsmB* continues with a description of the bad meaning:

1 *Hīno loka catur,vidhaḥ—manas,karma,hīnaḥ, kāya,karma,hīno, vāk,karma,hīna, upabhoga,hīnaś ca |*

2 *manas,karma,hīnaḥ punar dvi,vidhaḥ, kuśala,pravṛtti,vailomyena cāsraddhaḥ, paralokādy-asampratyayena dānādiṣv aprayogāt |*

3 *akuśala,pravṛtṭy-ānukūlyena cākṛtajñaḥ, yatropakārānapekṣitvena matr,vadh’ādi,duścarite nirmarjādātāt |*

4 *kāya,karma,hīnaś cauraḥ samdhi-c,chedakaḥ, atyartham garhita,jīvitatvāt |*

5 *vāk,karma,hīno mṛṣāvād’ādi,pradhānaḥ, tad-rūpasya sabh’ādiṣu praveśābhāvāt | upabhoga,hīnaḥ śvā kākaḥ preto vety evam-ādikaḥ, chardita,bhakṣaṇād iti.*

(*AbhsmB* ed Tatia, p155, ll 24-30)

1 In this world the wretched (*hīna*) are of four kinds, viz the wretched with regard to mental action (*manas,karma,hīna*), with regard to bodily action (*kāya,karma,hīna*), with regard to verbal action (*vāk,karma,hīna*), and finally with regard to (the act) of eating (*upabhoga,hīna*).

2 (Of these, the first, that is,) the wretched with regard to mental action (*manas,karma,hīna*) is further subdivided into (the following) two categories: (Of these, the first is) the man without faith (*āsraddha*), because of his turning away from the practice of good action. Since he has no confidence (*asampratyaya*) in (the existence of) the next world, there is no motivation for him to perform (meritorious) action such as giving (*dāna*).

3 (The second is) the ungrateful person (*akṛtajña*), because of his inclination to the practice of evil action. Since he has no regard to the beneficial action (done for him by somebody else), he is limitless with regard to evil action such as matricide.

⁶ Minoru Hara, “A note on Dhammapada 97.” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35,2-3 Jul 1992:179-191.

⁷ This section is based on Minoru Hara’s paper.

⁸ There are three *bhāṣyas* (prose commentaries) on *Abhidharma,samuccaya*—by an unknown author, by Yaśomitra (4th or 5th cent), and by Sthiramati (6th cent).

⁹ “I read *āsraddha* despite the emendation to *āsrāddha* by N Tatia (p155, n4).” (Hara’s n)

4 (The third, that is,) the wretched with regard to bodily action (*kāya, karma, hīna*) is the man who makes breaches (in a wall) (*saṃdhi-chedaka*), the thief. He leads the most disgraceful way of life.

5 (The fourth, that is,) the wretched with regard to verbal action (*vāk, karma, hīna*) is (one who has lost his opportunity [*hatāvakāśa*]). The man being apt to tell a lie, for such a type of person is excluded from the assembly (*sabhā*) and so forth. (The fifth, that is,) the wretched with regard to (the act of) eating (*upabhoga, hīna*) is (one who eats what is vomited [*vāntāśa*]¹⁰ like) a dog, a crow, and hungry ghost, for he takes what is vomited (by somebody else). (Minoru Hara's tr, 1992:181; Sanskrit slightly ed)

Here we see the bhāṣyakāra employing the well known three kinds of action (*manas- vāk- kāya, karma*), dividing the first, *manas, karma*, into two, and adding eating (*upabhoga*) as the fifth, adding to the total number of adjectives in Dh 97.

Now let us look at the good meaning, as follows:

- 1 *Katham punar etāny akṣarāny uttamārthe pariṇāmyante |
aśraddh'ādi, vacānām arhati pariṇāmanāt |
tatāśraddho vimukti, jñāna, darśana, yogena svapratyayatvāt |
akṛtajño 'saṃskṛta, nirmāṇa, jñānāt |*
- 5 *saṃdhi, chettā punarbhava, praṭisaṃdhi, hetu, kleśa-prahānāt |
hatāvakāśa āyatyām sarva, gatiṣu duḥkhānabhinirvartanāt |
vāntāśo dṛṣṭe dharma upakaraṇa, balena kāyam saṃdhārayato 'pi
bhoga, jīvitāśābhāvād iti.* (AbhsmB ed Tatia, p156, ll 1-5)

1 How, then, are these (same) syllables transformed into the (second,) superior meaning?

2 Because it is possible for these words, *aśraddha* and others, to transform themselves (*pariṇāmana*)¹¹ in the case of a Buddhist *arhat*.

3 Of these, the word *aśraddha* (is transformed into the good meaning of an incredulous person), because of his self-dependence (*sva, pratyayatva*) with regard to knowledge of, and insight into, final emancipation.

4 (Next, the second,) the word *akṛtajña* (ungrateful, is transformed into the good meaning of a knower of the unconditioned), because he has the supernatural knowledge of the unformulated (that is, *nirvāna*).¹²

5 (Then, the third,) *saṃdhi-c, chettṛ* (wall-breaker, is transformed into the good meaning of eliminator of the linkage), because he has abandoned (all) the defilements, which cause the linkage with rebirth.

6 (Then, the fourth,) *hatāvakāśa* (one who has lost his opportunity, is transformed into the good meaning of a destroyer of the occasions), because there exists no possibility of suffering in all the conditions of his future existence.

7 (The last, that is,) *vāntāśa* (eating of the vomited, is transformed into the good meaning of a person who has abandoned desire), because he has no desire for secular enjoyment nor for life, even though he still keeps his body by the force of paraphernalia (*upakaraṇa*) [by the power of supporting conditions] in this present life (*dṛṣṭa, dharma*).¹³

(Minoru Hara's tr, 1992:181; Sanskrit slightly ed)

¹⁰ Cf L Alsdorf. "vāntāni āpātuṃ." *SK Chatterji Jubilee Volume*. Poona, 1955:21-28 = *Kleine Schriften* 178-185. [Hara's fn]

¹¹ Cf D Seyfort Rugg, "Allusiveness and obliqueness in Buddhist texts: *saṃdhā, saṃdhi, saṃdhyā* and *abhi-saṃdhi*." *Dialectes dans les littératures indo aryennes*, ed Collete Caillat, Paris, 1989:303 ff (*pariṇāmanābhi-saṃdhi*). [Hara's fn]

¹² One may emend the text here (*nirmāṇa* to *nirvāna*). [Hara's fn]

¹³ Cf also W Rahula, *Le compendium de la super-doctrine (philosophie) (Abhidharmasamuccaya) d'Asaṅga*. Paris, 1971:185 f. [Hara's fn]. "By the force of paraphernalia (*upakaraṇa*)" is better tr as "by the power of favourable conditions."

It is evident here that the bhāṣyakāra takes the first adjective, *asraddha*, in the good sense of “free from credulity” (ie free from blind belief) because of the word gloss *sva,pratyayatvāt* (“self-dependence”), which is the same as the sense given by the Dhammapada Commentary on Dh 97 (DhA 2:186 f).¹⁴

However, apparently the meaning “without desire” is preferable in view of the nature of the verse, which is originally not imbued with any Buddhist tinge, but simply conveys a general purport.¹⁵ We shall later see even one of the Chinese versions of *Dhammapada* preserves this meaning of “without desire.” It is also possible to translate it in the sense of “not performing the ancestral rite (*śrāddha*),” as W Rau takes it. (Hara 1992:182 f)

Both the bad and the good senses of the second adjective, *akṛtajña*—“ungrateful” and “knower of the uncreated” respectively—are clear enough.

The third adjective, *saṁdhi-c,chedaka*, too, are clear enough in both contexts. However, it is possible to take *saṁdhi* in the sense of “promise, treaty,” as found in treatises on ancient Indian politics¹⁶ (as W Rau takes it). However, due to the presence of the ending, *chedaka* (“breaker”), in the compound, it is better rendered as “wall-breaker.”¹⁷

The fourth adjective, *hatāvakāśa*, demands special attention since the bhāṣyakāra discusses it in some detail (although it is not directly mentioned in his text). Taken in the bad sense, the compound means “one who has destroyed, lost, missed his opportunity” as Norman takes it.

But one may wonder what sort of opportunity (*avakāśa*) is here meant. According to the Bhāṣyakāra,¹⁸ the person who is here styled as *hatāvakāśa* is *vāk-karma-hīna* (the wretched with regard to the verbal action), which is further paraphrased as *mṛṣā,vādādi-pradhāna*. The Bhāṣyakāra proceeds to say that, as the result of his bad habit in speech (*vāk-karma-hīna*), that is, speaking lies (*mṛṣā,vāda*), he loses his opportunity, that is, the right to enter (*praveśa*) into the assembly (*sabhā*). Here the assembly (*sabhā*) means the court of justice, and thus, the whole meaning is that the liar is not entitled to go into court in the capacity of a witness (*sākṣin*). (Hara 1992:183)

The good sense of *hatāvakāśa* entails some discussion. The first member of the compound, *hata*, means “who has killed, destroyed” (the past participle of *hanati*). The second member, *avakāśa*, according to the Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD) means “occasion (for quarrels)” (as taken by Norman). However, Hara suggests that one may also take it in a sense somewhat like “inventing a pretext for quarrels with a malignant intention to harm others” (Hara 1992:183).

The fifth and final adjective, *vantāśa*, albeit a colourful one, poses no problem. However, the phrase *dr̥ṣṭe dharma upakaraṇa, balena* is better translated as “by the power of supporting conditions here and now” (here probably referring to the five aggregates) rather than Hara’s curious rendition, “by the force of paraphernalia in this present life.” The meaning here is that the true practitioner lives on the alms of others (“what is rejected by others”) to working towards spiritual liberation.

¹⁴ *Attano paṭividdha, guṇaṁ paresaṁ kathāya na saddahatī ti assaddho*, “*Asaddho* means ‘by virtue of having realized it by oneself, not through having faith in another’s word.’” (DhA 2:186 f)

¹⁵ Cf Norman 1979:330 (§5.1) & W Rau 1963:175. [Hara’s fn]

¹⁶ Cf Manu, smṛti (Nirnaya Sagar Press, Bombay 1946) 7.160 & Kauṭilya Artha,śāstra (ed RP Kangle, Bombay 1960) 7.1.2 ff, 7.17.1 ff; Mṛccha,kaṭika (Nirnaya Sagar Press, Bombay 1950) 3.5.1, 3.8b, 3.8.3, 3.9cd, 3.9.6-7, 3.14.6-7, 3.14.26-27, 3.14.11, 3.14.11-12, 3.10.11, 3.12b, 3.12.3-5, 3.16.1-2, 3.17.1; Daśa,kumāra,carita (Nirnaya Sagar Press, Bombay 1951) 99,1 ff. “All these passages suggest that we should take the compound *saṁdhi-cheda* in the sense of ‘wall-breaker’ instead of ‘breach of promise, denouncement of a treaty.’ The counterpart of *satya-saṁdha* (true to promise) is rather indicated by such compounds as *saṁdhi-dūṣaṇa*, *samaya-bheda*, or *samaya-vyabhicāra*.” [Hara’s fn, abridged]

¹⁷ Hara lists “all passages of *saṁdhi-cheda* and the like, so far collected from Classical Sanskrit literature” as follows: Manu, smṛti 9.276; Kauṭilya Arthāśāstra 4.6.16, 4.11.19.

¹⁸ *Bhāṣyakāra* here is a major commentary or commentator of the text.

2 The Buddha's expedience

The Buddha does not allow conventional language to limit him in reaching out to his audience. The Buddha's expedience in teaching others is shown in the following ways:

(1) **From the worldly point of view** (Skt *laukika siddhānta*). The Buddha often adopts the current idiom and does not hesitate to speak in terms of beings (*satta*) who die and are reborn in the five destinies.¹⁹ He extols the role of the individual (*eka, puggala*) who is born into the world for the joy, happiness and benefit of the many (A 1:22).

(2) **From the personal point of view** (Skt *prātipauruṣika siddhānta*). The Buddha often tries to adapt his teaching to the intellectual and moral disposition (*āsaya*) of his listeners. To those who do not believe in the afterlife but that everything ends at death (that is, the materialists), he discourses on immortality and karma that come to fruition in other worlds and in a future time (the Nidāna Suttas, A 1:132). To Moliya Phagguna, who believes in the eternity of the self, he teaches the non-existence of a person as a thinking being conditioned by “food” (**Phagguna Sutta**, S 2:13).²⁰ Such is the Buddha's skillful means (*upaya*).

(3) **From the remedial point of view** (Skt *prātipākṣika siddhānta*). The Buddha is the healer of universal suffering who gives his remedies according to the disease: to the sensual (*rāga, carita*), he teaches the contemplation of the impurities of a decomposing corpse (*asubha, bhāvanā*); to those hate-filled (*dosa, carita*), he prescribes thoughts of lovingkindness (*metta, citta*), thinking of near and dear ones; to the deluded (*moha, carita*), he advises reflection on interdependent origination (*paṭicca, samuppāda*).

3 Person and idea

The Nettippakaraṇa, a classic on Buddhist hermeneutics, gives a further useful classification of the Buddha's method of teaching: teaching in terms of **persons** (*puggalādhiṭṭhāna*) and teaching in terms of **ideas** (*dhammādhiṭṭhāna*).²¹ An example of a teaching in terms of **persons** is this Udāna verse:

I searched all around the quarters with my mind
But found none dearer than self;
Even so, is the self dear to everyone else—
Therefore one who loves himself should not harm another. (U 47)

Traditional examples of the direct use of **ideas** (ultimate or Dharma language) are found, for example, in the exposition of the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path in the First Discourse, or in the verse spoken by Assaji to Sāriputta the first time they met. Often enough the Buddha would follow up with analogies and illustrations what he has expressed in the Dharma language (eg **Assu Sutta**, S 2:180).²²

SD 10.6(3.1)

Assu Sutta

The Discourse on Tears | S 15.3/2:179 f = SD 16.13 (for notes)
S 2.4.1.3 = Saṃyutta 2, Nidāna Vagga 4, Anamatagga Saṃyutta 1, Paṭhama Vagga 3

1 At Sāvatti.

2 “Bhikshus, this cycle of life and rebirth (*samsāra*) is without a knowable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

3 What do you think, bhikshus, which is more: the stream of tears that you have shed as you roamed and wandered on through this long course, weeping and wailing from being unit-

¹⁹ “The five destinies,” *pañca, gati*: the hells, the animal kingdom, the hungry ghost realm, the human world, and the heavenly world (D 1:82).

²⁰ S 1.12/2:13 (SD 20.5).

²¹ MA 1:24; PsA 449 (where 4 types are given); Nett 164 f.

²² See **Levels of learning**, SD 40a.4 (4.2).

ed with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable—this or the waters in the four great oceans?”

4 “As we understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, bhante, the stream of tears we have shed as we roam and wander on through this long course, weeping and wailing from being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable—this alone is more than the waters in the four great oceans.” [180]

5 “Good, bhikshus, good! It is good that you understand the Dharma taught by me in this way.

6 This stream of tears that you have shed as you roamed and wandered on through this long course, weeping and wailing from being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable is more than the waters in the 4 great oceans.

7 For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a mother, ...

8 For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a father, ...

9 For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a brother, ...

10 For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a sister, ...

11 For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a son, ... the death of a daughter, ... the loss of relatives, ... the loss of wealth,

12 For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced loss through illness. As you experience this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

13 What is the reason? Because, bhikshus, this samsara [cycle of life and rebirth] is without a knowable beginning It is enough to experience revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.”
(S 15.3/2:179 f, abridged)

The Discourse on Tears is presented in the ultimate language because the truth reference is a direct one, that is, the discourse relates personal experience as it is without the medium of any imagery, except that of “the four great oceans.”

3.2 Kasī Bhāradvāja Sutta

In the **Kasī Bhāradvāja Sutta** (Sn 1.4), the Buddha meets a ploughman and presents the Dharma in terms of ideas, that is, using agricultural imagery:²³

Faith is the seed, discipline the rain,
Moral shame the pole, the mind my yoke’s tie,²⁴

Wisdom is my yoke and plough,
Mindfulness the ploughshare and goad.²⁵
(Sn 77/p13), SD 69.6

3.3 Apāra Sutta

Such metaphors bridge conventional truth (*sammutti, sacca*) with ultimate truth (*param’attha, sacca*), allowing the listener to make a quantum leap from a lower reality of the world to the higher reality of the Dharma. This same teaching is expressed as a direct statement of reality in **the Apāra Sutta** (S 51.1), thus:

Bhikshus, there are these 4 bases of spiritual power, when cultivated and often developed, lead to going from the near shore to the far shore.²⁶ What are the four?

²³ *Saddhā bījaṃ tapo vuṭṭhī | paññā me yuga, naṅgalāṃ | hirī isā mano yottaṃ sati me phāla, pāvanāṃ.*

²⁴ “Yoke’s tie,” *yotta* (Skt *yoktra*), any instrument for tying or fastening, ie, a rope, a thong, halter; the thongs by which an animal is attached to the pole of a plough or a carriage.

²⁵ On the plough and tillage, see <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5672e/x5672e0a.htm>. Video of Indian man ploughing with farm bullocks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwUS7qpr8UA>.

²⁶ *Cattāro’me bhikkhave iddhi, pādā bhāvītā bahulī, katā apārā pāraṃ gamanāya saṃvattanti.* PTS has *wr aparāparaṃ* (“again and again; repeatedly”). The reading *apārā pāraṃ* is found at M 1:134; S 4:174, 5:24, 180; A 5:4; cf *apārā pāraṃ gantu, kāma* (D 2:89; U 90). Comy glosses *apārā pāraṃ* as “(Going) from the rounds to nirvana,” *vaṭṭato nibbānaṃ* (SA 3:132). Here the “near shore” (*apārā*) represents “the rounds” of rebirth and “the far shore” (*paraṃ*) represents nirvana. See S:B 1896 n29.

Here, bhikshus, a monk develops the basis for spiritual power that is accomplished in concentration²⁷ due to the will to act (*chanda*)²⁸ and the forces of exertion.²⁹

He develops the basis for spiritual power that is accomplished in concentration due to effort (*virīya*) and the forces of exertion.³⁰

He develops the basis for spiritual power that is accomplished in concentration due to mind (*citta*) and the forces of exertion.

He develops the basis for spiritual power that is accomplished in concentration due to investigation (*vīmaṃsā*) and the forces of exertion.

These, bhikshus, are the 4 bases of spiritual power, when cultivated and often developed, lead to going from the near shore to the far shore. (S 51.1/5:254, 268 f)

We also find examples of teachings expressed in terms of **both person and idea**. A good example here is that of Dhammapada stanza 294 (which we will discuss in the episode of the weaver's daughter of Āḷavī, §4 below).

3.4 Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī Therī Apadāna

One of the most beautiful applications of the dichotomy of “worldly language” and “Dharma language”³¹ is found in **the Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī Therī Apadāna** (the Harvest³² Story of Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī), of which here is a selection. Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī was the foster mother to young Siddhattha when his uterine mother, Mahā Māyā, died. Try to identify the types of language used here in the Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī Therī Apadāna:

- 27 What I've long wished for, | today is fulfilled.
‘Tis time to beat the drum of joy. | What are your tears for, daughters?
- 28 If there is love for me; | if there is gratitude,
Let all work with firm effort | so that the True Teaching may stand.
- 29 When asked by me, | the Self-awakened One gave women the going-forth.
Therefore, just as I rejoice, | so should you do the same.
- 30 Having thus admonished those women, | preceded by the nuns,
She approached and worshipped the Buddha, | and spoke these words:
- 31 O Well-farer One, I am your mother; | and you, O Wise Hero, are my father:
O giver of happiness of the True Teaching, | O refuge, I was given birth by you, O Gotama!
- 32 O Well-farer One, your physical body was nurtured by me;
My Dharma body, flawless, | was nurtured by you.
- 33 To satisfy a moment's craving, | you had milk suckled by me.
But I, drinking the milk of Dharma from you, | Had peace without end.
- 34 For my raising you, | you owe me no debt, Great Sage!
For women desiring children, | may they have a child like you.³³

²⁷ “The basis for spiritual power that is accomplished in concentration,” *chanda.samādhi, padhāna, saṅkhāra, samannāgataṃ*.

²⁸ “Concentration due to the will to act,” *chanda, samādhi*. See foll n.

²⁹ “The forces of exertion,” *padhāna, saṅkhārā*. The whole phrase is *chanda, samādhi, padhāna, saṅkhāra, samannāgataṃ*. See prev n & **Iddhi, pāda Saṃyutta**, SD 10.3 Intro.

³⁰ On the repetition of “effort” here, see **Iddhi, pāda Saṃyutta**, SD 10.3 (2).

³¹ For a detailed discussion, see Buddhadasa, *Two Kinds of Language*. Tr Bhikkhu Ariyananda. Repr “Everyday Language and Dhamma Language” in Donald K Swearer, 1971b. Bangkok: Sublime Life Mission, 1974.

³² *Apadāna* means “mowing, reaping, harvesting,” here used fig alluding to the fruits of past karma.

³³ To get a son like you | sates all desire for sons. (J Walters, “Gotami's Story.” In Donald S Lopez, Jr (ed), *Buddhism in Practice*, 1995:120).

35 Mothers of kings like Mandhātā | drown in this sea of existence,
But you, O Son! brought me | Across the ocean of existence.

36 Queen mother, royal consort: | these names are easy for women to gain,
But “the mother of the Buddha,” this name | is the most difficult to obtain.

(Ap 2.1.7/27-36/531)

4 Pun & allegory

To catch the audience’s attention and to alert a listener into an intuitive thought-process, the Buddha would make use of paradoxical and ironic language. Soon after his awakening, the Buddha heads for Benares (Vārāṇasī) to look for the group of five monks. On the highroad between Buddha,-gayā and Gayā, the Buddha meets the naked ascetic, **Upaka**,³⁴ who, struck by the Buddha’s radiant personality, says,

“Serene are your senses, friend! Clear and bright is your complexion. Under whom have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?”

The Buddha replies:

All have I overcome, all do I know,
From all am I detached, all have I renounced,
Through the stopping of craving, I am freed,
Having understood all by myself, whom shall I call teacher?

(V 1:8; M 1:171; J 1:81; DhA 4:71 f;
cf Miln 235; UA 54; Kvu 289; Mvst 3:326); SD 12.1(4)

In a society that then placed and today places a central focus on the guru, such an answer would be controversial, to say the least. In Upaka’s case, he is still unable to fathom the Buddha’s reply. In a learning situation (such as during a discourse with the Buddha), however, the listener would often be shocked, as it were, into reality.³⁵ The **Antevāsika Sutta** (quoted at Nm 362, 469) has a mild shock allegory:

Bhikshus, this holy life is lived without student and without teacher (*anantevāsikaṃ idaṃ bhikkhave brahmacariyaṃ vussati anācariyakam*). A monk who has students and a teacher dwells in suffering, not in comfort. A monk who has no students and no teacher dwells happily, in comfort.

And how, bhikshus, does **a monk who has students and a teacher** dwell in suffering, not in comfort? Here, bhikshus, when a monk has seen a form with the eye, there arise in him evil unwholesome states, memories and intentions connected with the mental fetters.³⁶ *They dwell within him (antovasanti)*. Since those evil unwholesome states dwell within him, he is called “one who has students” (*santevāsiko*). *They assail him (te naṃ samudācaranti)*. Since evil unwholesome states assail him, he is called “one who has a teacher” (*sācariyako*).

Further, when a monk has heard a sound with the ear ... smelled an odour with the nose ... tasted a taste with the tongue ... felt a touch with the body ... cognized a mental state with the mind Since evil unwholesome states assail him, he is called “one who has a teacher”.

It is in this way that a monk who has students and a teacher dwells in suffering, not in comfort.

And how, bhikshus, does **a monk who has no students and no teacher** dwell happily, in comfort? Here, bhikshus, when a monk has seen a form with the eye, there do not arise in him any evil unwholesome state, memory or intention connected with the mental fetters. *They do not dwell within him (na antovasanti)*. Since those evil unwholesome states do not dwell within him, he is called “one who has no students”

³⁴ Also known as Kāla, probably a nickname due to his dark complexion (Thi 309), or Upaganena (Divy 393).

³⁵ Such a “shock” is technically called samvega (*samvega*), a religious experience that opens a window into reality, giving one a sense of spiritual urgency. For a discussion, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16), SD 9 (7f) “Sense of urgency.”

³⁶ S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377.

(*anantevāsiko*). They do not assail him (*te na naṃ samudācaranti*). Since evil unwholesome states do not assail him, he is called “one who has no teacher” (*anācariyako*).

Further, when a monk has heard a sound with the ear ... smelled an odour with the nose ... tasted a taste with the tongue ... felt a touch with the body ... cognized a mental state with the mind Since evil unwholesome states do not assail him, he is called “one who has no teacher.”

It is in this way that a monk who has no students and no teacher dwells happily, in comfort.

Bhikshus, this holy life is lived without students and without a teacher. A monk who has student and teacher dwells in suffering, not in comfort. A monk who has no students and no teacher dwells happily, in comfort. (S 4:136 f)

There is a pun on two Pali words in this sutta. A “student” (*antevāsi*) is literally “one who dwells within”; thus one for whom defilements do not dwell within (*na antovasanti*) is said to be “without students.” The word “teacher” (*ācariya*) is here playfully connected with the verb to assail (*samudācarati*); thus one unassailed by defilements is said to be “without a teacher.” The Commentary here glosses *anantāvesikaṃ* (one without student) with *anto vasana, kilesa, virahitaṃ* (devoid of defilements dwelling within), and *anācariyakaṃ* (one without teacher) with *ācarana, kilesa, virahitaṃ* (devoid of the “assailing” defilements).

5 Intentional language

5.1 Intentional language (Skt *sandhā, bhāṣā*; Tib *dgongs-pa*) or *sandhyā, bhāṣā* (lit “twilight language”) is not only a protection against the profanation of the sacred through intellectual curiosity, and misuse of yogic methods and psychic forces by the ignorant and the uninitiated, but has its origin mainly in the fact that everyday language is incapable of expressing the highest experiences of the spirit (which could at best be hinted at through similes and paradoxes).

Intentional language is neither symbolic in the conventional sense (for then even a non-Buddhist intellectual could “translate” it) nor is it ultimate (insofar as it has been written down and therefore subject to mere intellectual interpretation). It is a “third” language, a *tertium quid*, between the conventional expression and the ultimate understanding of the Dharma.

5.2 A stanza in **the Dhammapada** makes an interesting use of intentional language in a very dramatic situation. It was spoken by the Buddha in connection with **Ugga, sena**, an acrobat, while he was precariously poised on top of a high pole:

Let go of the front. Let go of the back.	<i>muñca pure muñca pacchato</i>
Let go of the middle. Crossing to the far shore,	<i>majjhe muñca bhavassa pārāgu</i>
With the mind released from everything,	<i>sabbattha vimutta, manāso</i>
Do not again undergo birth and decay.	<i>na puna jāti, jaraṃ upehisi.</i> (Dh 348) ³⁷

5.3 In our universe, **the sun** is the ultimate source of all life, since without it life as we know it would cease to exist. In terms of the food chain, we ultimately obtain our energy from the sun, that is, through plants acting as solar transformers, converting and storing solar energy in forms digestible to us. Trees are our halfway houses of life, standing between the raw nuclear power of the sun and the fragile terrestrial life. The Bodhi tree, as such, reminds us how interconnected our life is with everything else around us. We can see a hint of this vital fact in this beautiful Dhammapada verse:

Cut down the forest, but not the tree	<i>vanaṃ chindatha, mā rukkhaṃ</i>
From the forest arises fear	<i>vanato jāyati bhayaṃ</i>
Having cut down forest and growths	<i>chetvā vanañ ca vanathañ ca</i>
O bhikshus, you are forest-free!	<i>nibbaṇā hotha bhikkhavo</i> (Dh 283)

The Buddha’s teaching, of course, goes beyond food and ecology, as its primary concern is spiritual liberation. Here the forest stands for ignorance (its darkness) and fear (the wild beasts infesting it),

³⁷ **Ugga, sena Vatthu**, DhA 24.6/4:59-65.

but what is to be cut down is the mental forest (especially wrong view) and undergrowths (meaning unwholesome passions). The foot of a tree provides a delightful and beneficial spot for regeneration and meditation. On a higher level, “forest,” as a tangled mass of trees and growths, represents the mind’s tendency for proliferation or manifoldness of thoughts (*papañca*).³⁸ The single tree is a symbol for mental focus leading to inner liberation.

6 Ultimate understanding

6.1 The Dharma language, however, is at best “conceptual” to the uninitiated or unawakened, especially the intellectually-inclined. Indeed, when the Buddha teaches using Dharma language, it sounds the same to all his listeners but means differently to each of them!

In a remarkable case, the Buddha uses intentional language to communicate with **a weaver’s daughter of Ājavī**.³⁹ When the Buddha gazes at her, she knows that he wants her to approach him. The following dialogue—called the the 4 questions—ensues before the congregation:

Buddha: Where do you come from, young girl?
 Girl: I know not, bhante.
 Buddha: Where are you going?
 Girl: I know not, bhante.
 Buddha: Do you not know?
 Girl: I know, bhante.
 Buddha: Do you know?
 Girl: I know not, bhante. (DhA 3:170 ff)

The four questions mean respectively:

“Where were you before you were reborn here?”
 “Where will you be reborn?”
 “Do you know that you will surely die?” and
 “When will you die?” (DhA 3:172 f)

Those in the crowd who “listen” to the Buddha only conceptually never understand his words—in fact, the crowd never understands! The weaver’s daughter, however, understands the Buddha intuitively, answers his questions correctly, and gains the Wisdom Eye (*paññā, cakkhu*) that sees things on the ultimate (*param’attha*) level.

6.2 Another “shock” stanza in the Dhammapada is **Dh 294**, where we see the application of both person (*puggalādhitthāna*) and idea (*dhammādhitthāna*):⁴⁰

Having killed mother and father,
 And two kings, and having slaughtered
 A realm together with its governor—
 The brahman wanders unafflicted (*anīgho*). (Dh 294)

Lines abc are expressed in terms of *idea*. Line d is expressed in terms of *person*.

In this “**shock-allegory**,” the allegorical sense is expressed in terms of an **idea** (*dhammādhitthāna*). The Commentaries to the Dhammapada and the Nettī-p, pakaraṇa explain the passage as follows:⁴¹

“*mother*” = craving, which gives birth to beings in the 3 planes of existence;
 “*father*” = the conceit “I am”, which gives the egoist value to individuality;
 “*two kings*” = the eternalist and the annihilationist views, that divide the world between them;
 “*realm*” = the 6 pairs of sense-bases beginning with eye-and-form;
 “*governor*” = the will and lust for those. (DhA 3:454 f; NettA 212 f)

³⁸ See eg **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18.8) & SD 6.14.3-4.

³⁹ **Pesakāra, dhītā Vatthu** (DhA 13.7/3:170-176).

⁴⁰ *Mātaraṃ pitaraṃ hantvā / rājāno dve ca sotthiye / veyyaggha, pañcamam hantvā / anīgho yāti brāhmaṇo.*

⁴¹ Nāṇamoli discusses at length the controversy behind this verse at Nett:Ñ 218 n873/2.

7 Dhammapada 97

7.1 NORMAN’S TRANSLATION. The Arahanta Vagga (the Chapter on the Worthy Saint) of the Dhammapada has one of the most interesting stanzas in the Canon, that is, Dh 97. The verse is also quoted in full by the Jātaka Commentary at the end of **the Duddubha Jātaka** (J 322).⁴²

K R Norman insightfully discusses Dh 97 at length in his paper “Dhammapada 97: a misunderstood paradox,”⁴³ from which I draw much of my comments here.

Pali:	<i>Assaddho akataññū ca hatāvakāso vantāso</i>	<i>sandhi-c,chedo ca yo naro sa ve uttama,poriso.</i>	(Dh 97; cf 383) ⁴⁴
Buddhist Sanskrit:	<i>Aśraddhaś cākṛtajñāś ca hatāvakāśo vāntāśaḥ</i>	<i>saṁdhi-c,chetā ca yo naraḥ sa vai tūttama,puruṣaḥ</i>	(Udana,varga 29.23) ⁴⁵

Negative literal sense

The man without faith,
who knows no gratitude,
who is a house-breaker,
who has destroyed his opportunity,

who is an eater of vomit—
he is indeed one of extreme audacity.

Positive Dharma sense

The man without desire,
who knows the unmade,
who has cut off the link,
who has got rid of the occasions
(for quarrels and rebirth),
who is an eater of what is abandoned by others—
he is indeed the highest person.

K R Norman’s translation:

The man who is without desire (without faith), knows the uncreated (is ungrateful), cuts off rebirth (is a housebreaker), who has got rid of occasions (for quarrels or rebirth) (has destroyed his opportunity), has abandoned desire (is an eater of vomit, ie, what has been abandoned by others), is the best person (is one of extreme audacity). (*The Word of the Buddha*, 2000:14, 87 f)

7.2 CHINESE TRANSLATIONS. We can basically classify all the Chinese translations of Dh 97 into four categories, according to wording and versification, and we shall try to list them chronologically here:

(1) The oldest Chinese version of Dh 97 is probably this version translated in 244 CE:

棄欲無著 缺三界障 望意已絕 是謂上人
qì yù wú zhuó | què sān jiè zhàng | wàng yì yǐ jué | shì wèi shàng rén
9 Arahanta Vagga, 羅漢品 第十五 (十章) (Taishō 210 vol 1, p 564n ll 11-12)⁴⁶

He who has given up craving and is detached
Who has broken the hindrances of the three spheres,
And whose desires are annihilated
—Is indeed a superior man. (Tr KL Dhammajoti, 1990:65)

He who abandons desire and has no attachment,
Without hindrance throughout the three worlds,
Having no hope in mind,

⁴² J 322/3:78.

⁴³ *Indologica Taurinensia* 7 1979:325-331, repr *Collected Papers vol 2*, Oxford: PTS, 1991:187-193 (ch 46).

⁴⁴ Cf *aśraddho* [...] *sa ve uttimapuruṣo* in **Patna Dharmapada** v333 in Cone (1989:191) or Roth (1980:127).

⁴⁵ For refs, see Biblio, under Udāna,varga. The Chinese version 無信 ... 是名為勇士 *wú xìn ... shì míng wéi yǒng shì* (T212/T4.750c4; T213/T4.793b16), has been tr Willemsen (1978:132 [29.22]) as “he who is faithless [...] is called a valiant man”; and a Tibetan counterpart in *dad pa med cing* [...] *di ni skyes bu dam pa yin*, verse 29.23 in Beckh (1911:107) or Zongtse (1990:310). See Analayo 2010:18 n31.

⁴⁶ Same reading given at 法句譬喻經羅 (T211 vol 1, p 588c lines 20 f)

Is called the highest person.

(Minoru Hara, 1992:184)

Here only four of the five adjectives are translated, and all reflect only the positive sense.⁴⁷ “It is remarkable,” notes Hara, “that here *āsraddha* is rendered ‘without desire’ instead of ‘without faith’ which is found in all the other Chinese versions” (1992:184). This translation concurs with Norman’s.

(2) The second Chinese version comes from **the Abhidharma, jñāna, prasthāna Śāstra** (阿毘曇八犍度論), translated by Saṅghadeva. The original Sanskrit is lost, but the date of translation is shown by the translator to be 383 CE.

不信不往知 若那羅斷際 害婬捨離婬 彼是無上士
bú xìn bú wǎng zhī ruò nà luó duàn jì hài yín shě lí yín pī shì wú shàng shì
(Taishō no 1543, vol 26, p 916a ll 15-16)

The man who is without faith, without knowing what is gone,
cuts the extremes like Nara,
with his desire destroyed and with his desire abandoned,
is the highest person. (Minoru Hara’s tr, 1992:185)

This versification is different from the previous stanza, and has five characters each line instead of four. All the five adjectives are translated here, and the text has a commentary.

Though this text has many problems, the reading 不往知 (without knowing what is gone) deserves special attention, for this Chinese rendering evidently presupposes the Sanskrit reading of *agata-jñā* in place of *akata-jñā*. In pada c, the single Chinese word 婬 represents both *avakāśa* [opportunity] and *āśā* [hope].
(Hara 1992:185)

(3) The third Chinese version is found in the so called Chinese Udāna, varga (出曜經), translated in 399:

無信無反復 穿牆而盜竊 彼希望意 是名為勇士
wú xìn wú fǎn fù chuān xiáng ér dào qiè pī xī wàng yì shì míng wéi yǒng shì
(Taishō no 212, vol 1, p 759c ll 4-5)⁴⁸

He is without faith and without repetition (sic),
breaks through walls and steals secretly,
having no hope in mind
is called a valiant man. (Minoru Hara’s tr, 1992:185)

Only four of the adjectives are translated here, and all taken in the bad sense. The second adjective *akrtajñā*, here rendered as “without repetition” (無反復) is a possible misreading as *agata-jñā*, as suggested by Hara. Pada c is also possibly corrupted.

(4) The fourth and last Chinese version of Dh 97 is from the Chinese translation made by Xuanzang (596-644) of **the Abhidharmasamuccaya Bhāṣya** (大乘阿毘達磨雜集論), the Sanskrit original of which is discussed above [1.3]. This version is remarkably identical to the Sanskrit version that one might almost surmise that the Sanskrit was reconstructed from the Chinese version.

不信不知恩 斷密無容處 恒食人所吐 是最上丈夫
bú xìn bú zhī ēn duàn mì wú róng chù héng shí rén suǒ tù shì zuì shàng zhàng fū
(Taishō no 1606, vol 31, p 773 ll 12-13)⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Norman’s remarks in Conclusion below. In his footnote, Dhammajoti cites Uv (Skt) 29.23, Uv:C1 23 p750c; Uv:C2 22 p793b; Taishō 31 p773b; Taishō 32 6 p288a; Udv:Tib (Eng tr) 21 p120.

⁴⁸ We have almost the same reading in 法集要頌經 (Taishō 213, vol 1, p 793b ll 16 f), which has 思 for 意 in pada c. Cf also Ch Willemen, *The Chinese Udānavarga*, 1978:132, 137. [Hara’s fn]

⁴⁹ The same version is found in 大乘阿毘達磨雜集論 (Taishō no 1605, vol 31, p 694a ll 24 f), and almost the same reading is given in 阿毘達磨發智論, another tr (657-660 CE) of the lost Abhidharma, jñāna, prasthāna Śāstra by Xuanzang. This version is furnished with a comy. Pada c has a variant reading: 恒希望變吐 (*héng xī wàng biàn tù*), “always seeking *vāntāśa*” (Taishō 1544, vol 26, p 1030b l 23) [here I follow Taishō reading 變 *biàn*,

Without faith, ungrateful,
 breaking the secret (place), losing his opportunity,
 (always)⁵⁰ eating what has been vomited by someone else.
 He is the highest person. (Minoru Hara's tr, 1992:185; revised)

All the five adjectives here are taken in the negative sense. The stanza itself is given a lengthy commentary of some eighteen lines, explaining the puns used in the Sanskrit text. Since this commentary is identical to the original Sanskrit, we need not discuss it further.

7.3 The Dhammapada Commentary explains *asaddho* as meaning “by virtue of his own realization, not through faith in the word of another” (DhA 2:187).⁵¹ Earlier on, Buddhaghosa tells an introductory story that is very similar to that related in **the Pubba,koṭṭhaka Sutta** (S 48.44), although the stanza is not found there. This sutta (see below) relates how the Buddha asks Sāriputta whether he has faith (*saddahāsi tvaṃ Sāriputta*) that the five faculties (*pañc'indriya*) of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, when practised, lead to nirvana (*amata,pariyosānaṃ*).⁵²

Sāriputta replies that he does not have faith in the Buddha in this matter (*na Bhagavato saddhāya gacchāmi*). Others who have not realized this for themselves through wisdom (*paññāya*) would have faith in others in this matter (*yesaṃ hi taṃ bhante aññataṃ assa ... te tatha paresaṃ saddhāya gaccheyyūṃ*). In other words, those who have realized this for themselves would be without doubt (*nibbiccikkichā*) in the matter, as he himself has, and is as such without doubt in the matter. The Buddha then lauds him.

While the Sāriputta commentary on the Pubba,koṭṭhaka Sutta (SA 3:247) is hardly two lines long,⁵³ the Dhammapada Commentary gives the background story in its gloss on **the Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 7.8) that also quotes the Pubba,koṭṭhaka Sutta. The Dhammapada Commentary also gives a detail not found in the sutta:

When the bhikshus heard that [Sāriputta's reply to the Buddha], this talk arose amongst them:

“The elder Sāriputta has never really given up false views! Even today he has not faith in the Fully Self-awakened One himself!”

When the Teacher heard this, he said,

“Bhikshus, why do you say this? For I asked Sāriputta the following question, ‘Sāriputta, do you believe that without cultivating the five spiritual powers, without developing calm and insight, it is possible for one to realize the paths and the fruits?’

And he answered me as follows:

‘Bhante, I do not believe that one can thus realize the paths and fruits.’

“to change,” where Hara has 奕 yì, “great.” As 變吐 does not make sense here, I think it is a Chinese transliteration of *vāntāśa*, “vomit.” Or, both 變 and 奕 are wr.]. Furthermore, this tr is qu in a truncated form in Kumārajīva's tr of Satya, Siddhi Śāstra (成實論, 411-412 CE) (Taishō 1646, vol 32, p 288a, ll 11 f).

⁵⁰ “Always,” 恒, “permanent, constant, fixed,” apparently omitted by Hara.

⁵¹ *Attanā paṭiladdha, guṇaṃ paresaṃ kathāya na saddahatī ti assaddho*. Gogerly (in AS Bishop (ed), *Ceylon Buddhism: Being the collected writings of Daniel John Gogerly*, Colombo, 1908, vol 2:249-266) tr *assaddha* as “not confiding in others,” which can be taken to mean “not having confidence in others,” in which case, notes Norman (1997:325), Gogerly must have been influenced by the comy qu here. V Fausbøll tr it as “non credulous” (*Dhammapadam*, Copenhagen, 1855:18). Norman (1997:325 f) notes that the idea of “credulous” and “credulity” has been continued by EW Burlingame (*Buddhist Legends*, Cambridge, MA, 1921, 2:209), PED: *saddha*¹, Radhakrishnan (*The Dhammapada*, Oxford, 1950:92), and F Edgerton (for the BHS cognate *asraddha*, BHS: *asraddha*). Mrs CAF Rhys Davids tr “The man who taking (naught) on trust” (*Minor Anthologies* 1, London, 1931:35), and KE Neumann tr “Wer keinem Hörensagen traut” [who trusts not any hearsay] (*Der Wahrheitpfad*, Leipzig, 1893:28). [*Der Wahrheitpfad* or “The Path of Truth” is Neumann's free tr of Dh in German verse.] At the close of his article, Norman says “I think Ergardt was correct in rejecting the meaning ‘credulous’ for *as-saddha* in Dh 97, but I am unable to accept his suggestion that it means ‘without faith’ when applied to the *uttama-porisa*.” (1997: 331)

⁵² S 48.44/5:220 = SD 10.7.

⁵³ In the VRI's Chatṭha Saṅgāyana CD ed.

‘Sāriputta, do you not believe that there is such a thing as the fruit of giving and of deeds? Do you not believe in the virtue of the Buddhas and the other saints?’

Indeed, Sāriputta goes not by the faith of others, for the reason that he has by himself attained the truth of the path and fruit by way of insight based on dhyana.⁵⁴ Therefore, he is not at fault.”

Having said that, he showed the connection, and teaching the Dharma, uttered the following stanza:

The man without desire, who knows the unmade,
 who has cut off the link,
 who has got rid of the occasions (for quarrels and rebirth),
 who is an eater of what is abandoned by others—
 he is indeed the highest person. (Dh 97; DhA 7.8/2:187)

7.4 From the above Dhammapada story, it is clear that there are those involved in the story or those living in later times who do not understand that the verb *saddahati* has two slightly different senses, that is, “he has faith in” and “he takes another’s word for it.” When Sāriputta says,

Bhante, I do not go by faith in the Blessed One about this, that *the five faculties*, when cultivated and often developed, has ... the Death-free [nirvana] as its final goal ...

I am one, bhante, for whom this is known, seen, understood, realized, touched by wisdom—I am with neither doubt nor uncertainty about this: that *the five spiritual faculties*, when cultivated and often developed, has the Death-free as its ground, the Death-free as its destination, the Death-free as its final goal. (Pubba,koṭṭhaka Sutta, S 48.44/5:220-222)

(By way of paraphrase) he means to say: “The faculty of faith leads to *nibbāna*. I say this not because of faith in the Buddha, but because I know it from experience. I do not (need to) take the Buddha’s word for it, because I know” (Norman 1979d:326 f). Some take this to mean: “I do not take the Buddha’s word for it, that is, I do not have faith in the Buddha.”

What is quite clear is that there is here no hint that faith is not necessary; in fact the whole discussion is about the necessity of faith. The dispute is only whether Sāriputta has faith in the necessity of faith, or whether he has knowledge.

This view is reinforced by the [commentary] on the other reference which PED gives for the meaning “credulous.”⁵⁵ Sn 853 reads: *na saddho na virajjati*, and [the Mahā Niddeśa] explains: *sāmaṃ sayam abhiññātam attapaccakkham dhammam na kassaci saddahati aññassa samaṇassa vā brāhmaṇassa vā devassa vā Mārassa vā narassa cā brahmino vā* ([Nm] 235,9-237,4): “When one has learnt the *dhamma* for oneself, one does not have to take it on trust from anyone else.” [Nm] then proceeds to quote the *Pubbakoṭṭhaka-sutta* verbatim, and concludes by quoting Dh 97.

Dh 97 is also quoted in the [commentary] on the word *para-ppattiya* “dependent upon others” in Jātaka No 322 (*Daddabha-jātaka*). It is said that of those who are not *para-ppattiya*: *maggañāṇena paṭividdha-dhammā aññesaṃ kathentānaṃ pi na saddahati na gaṇhanti. kasmā? Attano paccakkhato ti, tena vuttam “assaddho ... uttamaporisa” ti* [J 3:78,1¹-18¹]: “Those who have gained the *dhamma* by knowledge of the path do not have faith in the words of others. Why? Because they have realized it by personal experience.”

(Norman 1979d:327)

8 The negative meaning of Dh 97

8.1 One would at once easily notice, albeit to one’s perplexity, the negative meaning of Dh 97. The usual translation for *assaddha* is “without faith” or “faithless.” However, “without faith” has a

⁵⁴ “Attained ... insight based on dhyana, *jhāna, vipassanā, magga, phala, dhammesu*. This clearly refers to the fact that Sāriputta, like Moggallāna and other arhats, is “freed both ways” (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*). See **Pubba,koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44), SD 10.7 (4).

⁵⁵ “Credulous” means “(formal) too ready to believe things and thereby easy to deceive” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dict, 2000), or in a word, “gullible.” This describes the negative aspect of faith (*saddhā*), but it also has a positive aspect: see **Pubba,koṭṭhaka S**, SD 10.7 (1).

broader sense, including both that of “faithless” (having no faith) and of “having nothing to do with faith.” “Faithless” clearly has a narrow meaning of “having no faith,” as found in common usage and phrases.⁵⁶ It is also possible that it has the meaning “ohne Spendefreudigkeit” (“without readiness [joy] in giving), which it has in contexts with *maccharī* (avaricious, envious, selfish”).⁵⁷

8.2 Here, *akataññu* (Skt *akṛtajña*), in the negative sense, literally means “not knowing what has been done (for one),” that is, ungrateful.

8.3 As Edgerton surmises, *sandhi-c,cheda* (Skt *saṁdhi-c, chettar*) here means “housebreaker, burglar” (BHSD: *saṁdhicchettar*).

8.4 Similarly, *hatāvakāsa* (Skt *hatāvakāśa*) means “one who has destroyed, lost or missed, his opportunity.”

8.5 As for *vantāsa* in the negative sense, Alsdorf⁵⁸ quotes the Arḍha,māgadhī *vantāsī* and Pāli *vantādo*⁵⁹ in the sense of “eating, ie taking, what has been abandoned by someone else.” He points to the fact that in the Jain text, *Isibhasiyāim* 45.50 f, the eating or drinking of one’s own vomit is a metaphor for the defection from monkish discipline and relapse into worldly life.⁶⁰ Norman notes, “We may translate as ‘eater of vomit’ without defining whether it is one’s own or another’s which is being eaten.” (1997:191 n2)

8.6 Minoru Hara (1992:186 f) discusses both senses of *uttama,poriso*⁶¹ in some detail quoting from various Sanskrit works.

In addition to the ordinary meaning of “man” or “person,” the [Sanskrit] word *puruṣa* conveys the meaning of “male” and “hero.” Consequently, its derivative *pauruṣa* has a connotation of “manliness,” “heroism,” “courage” and the like. Viewed from a different angle, this word *pauruṣa* is a counter-concept of *daiva*, which etymologically means “derived from *deva*, the god” and often denotes “destiny.” ... Occasionally, *pauruṣa* (recklessness) is contrasted to *buddhi* (considered judgement),⁶² where intelligence (*buddhi* or *jñāna*) is superior to reckless, physical strength (*pauruṣa* or *parākrama*).⁶³ (Minoru Hara 1992:186 f)

If we apply to Dh 97 the *uttama,porisa* in the more mundane sense of *uttama,pauruṣa* (as neuter abstract noun), or as a bahuvrihi (genitive compound), “man of extreme audacity,” all the preceding negative adjectives go well with it. On the other hand, if we take the *uttama,porisa* in the positive sense of the Sanskrit *uttama,puruṣa*, this goes well with the good senses of the five adjectives of Dh 97.

⁵⁶ M 2:294; A 3:181, 436, 5:158, 161, 239, 333; *assaddho appasanno* (D 1:213 f x4), *bhikkhu assaddho* (D 3:252, 282; A 3:3 x2, 7 x2, 183; A 5:152); *asappuriso assaddho* (M 3:21); *puriso ... assaddho* (S 1:95 x2; A 4:79 x4, 80 x8, 81 x6); *assaddho ... dussīlo* (A 2:227 x2, 229, 230, 3:206, 434); *assaddho purisa,puggalo* (S 2:206 f; A 5:123, 125); *assaddho ... ahiriko ...* (S 4:240, 241 x3, 242 x4, 243; A 3:112, 433, 4:145); *ekacco assaddho* (A 2:218 x2, 5:40); *no assaddho* (A 5:336).

⁵⁷ As in *assaddho maccharī* (*Sīha S*, A 4:79 x4, 80 x5, 81 x4); *assaddho hoti maccharī*, “lacking faith, stingy” (S 1:96); *assaddho ca ... maccharī ca* (S 4:241). See Hans-Werbin Köhler, *Śraddhā in der vedischen und altbuddhistischen literatur*, Wiesbaden, 1973:60 (qu by Norman 1979d:328). I thank Lothar Schenk (Germany) and Nina van Gorkom (Netherlands) for their kind communications that help me tr the German in this paper. Any inaccuracy is totally mine as I decided the final wordings.

⁵⁸ Ludwig Alsdorf, “Vāntam āpātum,” in *Indian Linguistics* 16 1955:18, 21-28. See Norman 1979d:329 n2.

Norman notes, “Surprisingly, although he [Alsdorf] quoted *vantāsa* from Dh 97 as an example of the use of *vanta* in the sense of ‘abandoned’ (p26 n7), he dealt with it only as a *bahuvrihi* compound ‘giving up desire,’ and did not note that it could also be taken as a *tatpuruṣa* compound ‘eating what has been abandoned.’ An extended form of this compound is doubtless to be seen in *vantāsika* ‘name of a class of Petas’ (Miln 294,16). Cf *kheḷāsaka* (-ika), ‘eating spittle’ (V 2:188,37; DhA 1:140,1).” (1979:329 n; referencing normalized.)

⁵⁹ *Vantādo*, lit “refuse eater, crow” (PED).

⁶⁰ Ludwig Alsdorf, 1955:18; see prec n.

⁶¹ For this Pali cpd as a descendent of the Upanishadic *uttama,pūruṣa*, cf H Berger, “Pāli porisa, Mensch,” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd-und Ostasiens* 1, 1956:78. [Hara’s fn]

⁶² *Kathā,sarit,sāgara of Soma,deva,bhaṭṭa* (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagara Press), 1930:33.132, 158. [Hara’s fn]

⁶³ *Kathā,sarit,sāgara* op cit 1930:33.132ab, 33.158; cf Raghu,vaṁśa (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagara Press), 1948: 8.28c.

8.7 Apparently, none of the myriad names that have attempted to translate the Dhammapada into modern western languages, except KR Norman [1.3], has noted the negative meaning of Dh 97, that is, it has two senses, or what is technically known in Sanskrit as *śleṣa*.⁶⁴

It seems likely that the verse was originally intended as a riddle or puzzle, whereby the audience was expected to take each of the five adjectives in a bad sense, on first hearing, helped no doubt by the fact that the first of them, *assaddha*, is almost always used in a perjorative sense. The listener would therefore expect the last *pāda* of the verse to be *sa ve adhamapuriso* [“he is truly the lowest of men”], and only when the speaker, paradoxically, said “*uttama-puriso*” would they realise that each word had been used in a punning way, and they would have to go back to the beginning of the verse and take an alternative meaning to each word. (Norman, “Dhammapada 97: a misunderstood paradox,” 1979d:328)

9 The positive meaning of Dh 97

9.1 *assaddha*. It is clear from the Dhammapada Commentary (DhA 2:187), the Mahā Niddesa (Nm 235-237) and the Jātaka (J 3:78) that *assaddha* in Dh 97 has the sense of “without faith in others,” that is, not needing confidence through or in others, not taking on trust, because one already knows for oneself. It is possible that this is the correct sense of the word, but Norman says: “I am not entirely convinced that it could have this sense as a good meaning. The Buddha seems to make it clear that *saddhā* was not a bad thing for those persons who did not have *paññā*” (1979d:329 n3),

but there is, I think, an alternative and better interpretation. The second reference given for *assaddha* in PED is Sn 853. This occurs in **the *Purābheda-sutta*** (Sn 848-61), where the Buddha is asked about the (nature of) the best man (*pucchito uttamam naram*, 848). The Buddha replies that (the best man) *na saddho na virajjati* (853).

(Norman 1979d:329; emphasis added)

Norman’s alternative translation is also found in *The Group of Discourses* (Sn:N 1992), where he renders *na saddho na virajjati* (Sn 853) as “he is not impassioned or dispassioned.” He makes important remarks here:

[Nm] 235,9-11: *na saddho ti sāmam sayam abhiññātam attapaccakkham dhammam na kassaci saddahati* [“when one has learnt the *dhamma* for oneself, one does not have to take it on trust from anyone else”]. [SnA] 549,29: *sāmam adhigatam dhammam na kassaci saddahati* [“when one has understood the Dharma for oneself, one does not take it on trust from anyone”]. In the context, however, *na saddho na virajjati* ought to mean the same as *na rajjati na virajjati* in [Sn] 813 [see next paragraph]. It is likely, then, that *saddhā* here reflects the alternative sense of *śraddhā* “desire” (see Köhler [1973:60] and Norman [1979d:329]), and would therefore mean “desiring.” See the note on **663**.

(Norman, *The Group of Discourses*, 1992:324 n853)

It is that *na saddho* is good, and therefore *saddho* is bad, hence its translation “credulous.” This *pāda* has, however, a parallel at **Sn 813: *na rajjati na virajjati*** “he is neither impassioned nor dispassioned,” ie an *arhat* has neither passion nor lack of passion, being simply indifferent. We can see that if *na rajjati* and *na saddho* are parallel, then *saddha* must be based upon the meaning “desire” which is attested for Sanskrit *śraddhā* from the late Vedic period and also for Prakrit *saddhā*,⁶⁵ but has not hitherto been recognized in Pāli.⁶⁶ We can therefore translate *assaddho* as “without desire.” (Norman 1979d:329)

⁶⁴ S Radhakrishnan, in his tr, *The Dhammapada*, Oxford, 1950:92 notes that “there seems here to be a play on different meanings (*śleṣa*)” but does not elaborate.

⁶⁵ Köhler 1973:3 & n11. “See also the review of Köhler’s book by Minoru Hara ([*Indo-Iranian Journal*] 19 1977: 105-108), who gives further example from Classical Sanskrit.” (Norman’s fn)

⁶⁶ “It is not impossible that another example in Pāli has been overlooked. The most common usage in Sanskrit is the instrumental singular *śraddhayā* ‘gladly.’ The equivalent of this may be in the common Pāli phrase *kula-puttā saddhāya agārasmā anagāriyam gacchanti*, ‘they gladly leave home.’” (Norman’s fn)

Despite all this admirable scholarly analysis, there is a simpler—and I am convinced, better—explanation, attested by a number of suttas, especially **the Pubba,koṭṭhaka Sutta** (S 48.44), where Sāriputta when asked by the Blessed One whether it is through faith (*saddhā*) that he has cultivated the five faculties and awakened, he replies, “Bhante, I do not go by faith in the Blessed One about this.”⁶⁷ Then he goes on to declare:

I am one, bhante, for whom this is known, seen, understood, realized, touched by wisdom—I have no uncertainty,⁶⁸ no doubt,⁶⁹ about this: that *the five spiritual faculties*, when cultivated and often developed, has the Death-free as its ground, the Death-free as its destination, the Death-free as its final goal. (S 48.44/5:221), SD 10.7

In **the Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta** (S 41.8), the householder Citta, answers the Nirgrantha’s question in the same manner, but the latter misunderstands, and takes his words literally, that he has no faith in the Buddha, much to his embarrassment in due course.⁷⁰ Such contexts, even without the mention of the word *assaddha*, show that there are those disciples who gain awakening *not through faith* in the Buddha, but through wisdom in understanding the Dharma. In other words, we can render *assaddha* here in Dh 97, simply as “without faith,” and it fits the context very well.⁷¹

9.2 akataññū. The Dhammapada Commentary explains: *akataññū nibbānaṃ jānātī ti akataññū sacchikata, nibbāno ti attho*, that is, “he is *akataññū* because he knows nirvana as the uncreated, that is, he has realized nirvana.”⁷² The BHS *akṛtajñā*, like the Pāli *akataññū*, is well known as having two senses, one good and one bad.⁷³ This is a good example of a pun or wordplay (*śleṣa*).

9.3 sandhi-c,cheda. The Dhammapada Commentary explains: *vaṭṭa, sandhim samsāra, sandhim chetvā ṭhito ti sandhi-c-chedo*, “having cut the connection with the rounds (of rebirth) and the connection with samsara, he lives [remains].” The *Pali-English Dictionary* is right in seeing *sandhi* here as connected to *paṭisandhi*, (lit, “re-connection”), “rebirth relinking.”⁷⁴ Edgerton, in his interpretation of the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (BHS) (Uv 29.23 equivalent of Dh 97, points out that *sandhi-c, chetar* is primarily, doubtless, the equivalent of *sandhi-c, chedaka* (lit, “house-breaker”), but is used in a paradoxical sense, like *aśraddha* and *akṛtajñā*. We can therefore translate it as “cutting off; destroying rebirth.”

9.4 hatāvakāsa. The Dhammapada Commentary explains: *kusalākusala, bījassa khīṇattā nibbatan-anāvakāso hato assā ti hatāvakāso*, “*hatāvakāsa* means that for one the seeds of the wholesome and the unwholesome have been destroyed, the occasion for birth has been eliminated.” This phrase occurs as an epithet of the Buddha in the Buddha,vaṃsa Commentary (called Madhur’attha, vilāsīnī). IB Horner, in her translation of the Buddha,vaṃsa renders it as “free from the accumulation of kamma” (BA:H 1). As such, Norman concludes:

I presume that *avakāsa* here means “opportunity for (bad) actions,” and I see a connection with the usage which we find in *an-avakāsa-kārin* ([Miln] 383,22) which [the *Critical Pāli Dictionary*] translates as “not occasioning (a quarrel),”⁷⁵ and Miss Horner as “does not give an occasion (to a preceptor).”⁷⁶ I therefore take its meaning in Dh 97 to be: “one who has got rid of occasions (for quarrels, etc)” or “rid of opportunities (for rebirth).”

(Norman 1979d: 330)

9.5 vantāsa. The Dhammapada Commentary explains: *catūhi maggehi kattabba, kiccassa katattā sabbā āsā iminā vantā ti vantāso*, “*vantāso* is one who has done what needs to be done regarding the

⁶⁷ S 48.44/5:220 (SD 10.7).

⁶⁸ “No uncertainty,” *nikkañkhā* = *ni* + *kañkhā*.

⁶⁹ “No doubt,” *nibbīkicchā* = *ni* + *vicikkicchā*.

⁷⁰ S 41.8/4:298-300 (SD 40.7).

⁷¹ See translation at the end of this essay.

⁷² See PED: *kataññū*.

⁷³ See Norman, “Dhammapada 97: a misunderstood paradox,” 1979d:327 f.

⁷⁴ See PED: *sandhi*.

⁷⁵ See CPD: *an-avakāsa-kāri(n)*.

⁷⁶ Miln:H 2:256 (1964).

four paths by the abandoning of all expectations” (DhA 2:188). The PED defines it as “one who has given up all wishes.”⁷⁷ As such, we can translate it as “one who has abandoned desire.”

9.6 *uttama,porisa*. The compound *uttama,porisa* in the positive sense of the Sanskrit *uttama,-puruṣa* goes well with the good senses of the five adjectives of Dh 97 [8.6].

10 Conclusion

Norman thinks that there is “nothing specifically Buddhist” about Dh 97. As such, he concludes, it is possible that it was a pre-Buddhist composition. “It is therefore possible that the set of bad meanings had already been lost when it was included in the Buddhist collections.” (Norman 1979:330)

5.2 There is, however, one small piece of negative evidence which hints that at the time of the compilation of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* the verse was still felt to have two sets of meanings. I deduce this from the fact that the verse is not included in the *Pubbakoṭṭhika-sutta* [see below] ... , although it is included in the quotation of that *sutta* in [Nm 235,11-237,4]. The quotation of the verse with its statement that a man who was *assaddha* was nevertheless *uttama-porisa* would have been so appropriate to the case of Sāriputta that it is strange that it was not quoted. We may assume that either it was not known at all to the compiler(s) of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, or (more likely) it was known to him/them as being ambiguous and therefore dangerous to quote as an illustration.

5.3 It seems clear that by the time [the Mahā Niddesa] was compiled the [Commentary] tradition had completely lost any idea that in Dh 97 the use of the word *assaddha* was paradoxical. There is no trace in Dh-a [the Dhammapada Commentary] of any knowledge that even one of the five adjectives could have both a bad and a good connotation, and all five adjectives could have both a bad and a good connotation, and all five are explained as having only a good sense. (Norman 1979:330 f)

The daily world depends on language and thought, but the Dharma ultimately goes beyond language and thought. Worldly life is mostly the experiences of the physical senses and our perceptions based on them. The Dharma, on the other hand, trains one to see through language and perception, and to transcend them for spiritual liberation, basically through a direct experience and understanding of reality.

Although Buddhism, at least early Buddhism, has a vast collection of scripture, very much larger than those of the book-religions,⁷⁸ there is actually no Buddhist “canon” of scriptures.⁷⁹ The real final authority in Buddhist spirituality is one’s direct experience of reality. If one has not attained some level of awakening, then a learned Dharma teacher (monastic or lay) is usually taken as one’s authority, or more exactly, as a guide for one’s practice. Informed Buddhists generally regard their scriptures as essentially records of the realization, teachings and biographies of the Buddha and his saints, all serving as an inspiration for their own spiritual development, although through the mind and mouth of the skillful teachers, scripture can serve as signposts that help the spiritual journey.

While academic scholars and students measure the letter of the teaching and evaluate their perceptions of the living religion, practitioners value the spirit above the letter, and very well know that the living word is always preserved and perpetuated in the teachings and lives of living Dharma masters, especially those of the contemplative tradition. As such, even though the packaging may be old, even tattered, or mislabeled, or the label lost, all this in no way affects the contents.

The Buddhist texts might be compared to the musical score of some great and beautiful music. The music scholars and the unmusical might point to faults in the notations on the score, but the bottom line is the performance of the score by a virtuoso for the enjoyment of the audience. The Buddhist teachings, like great music, are best heard live, and each performance may be said to be unique, but

⁷⁷ See PED: vanta.

⁷⁸ Such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. According to TW Rhys Davids, the Pali Canon is about 11 times the size of the Christian Bible; the Chinese Tripiṭaka and the Tibetan Kanjur are considerably larger. “Modern printed editions of the Pali Canon run to some fifty moderately sized volumes; the Taishō edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka comprises fifty-five volumes, each containing some 1,000 pages of Chinese character; together with the Tibetan Kanjur and Tenjur comprise 300 traditional *poti* volumes.” (Gethin 1998:40)

⁷⁹ See Gethin 1998:40 f.

always uplifting. Buddhism may be preserved in the dead letters of scripture, but the Dharma is perpetuated in the living spirit of inner stillness. For, without the silence in between the notes there is no music.

In conclusion, we can render Dh 97 as follows:

*Assaddho akataññū ca
sandhi-c,chedo ca yo naro
hatâvakāso vantāso
sa ve uttama,poriso.*

Not through faith, but knowing the unmade,
the man who has broken the connection,
eliminated the opening (for rebirth), given up desire—
he is indeed a supreme person. (Dh 97; cf Dh 383)

— — —

Key

- Abhs
 Dh:Chin = Dharmapada, Chinese tr: see Dhammapada 1990.
 Dh:C1 = Dharmapada, Chinese ed: Fa Jyu Jing (T4 599a-575b). Eng tr KL Dhammajoti, 1995.
 Chs 9-33, 34-35 Eng tr KL Dhammajothi, 1990.
 Uv = Udanavarga
 Uv:C1 = Chu Yau Jing (T4 no 212).
 Uv:C2 = Fa Ji Yau Sung Jing (T4 no 213).
 Uv:Skt = Sanskrit Udānavarga of the Sarvāstivāda, see: (1) NP Chakravarti, 1930; (2) F Bernhard, 1969:872-881.
 Uv:Tib(Eng) = Udāna,varga, Tibetan ed, Eng tr G Sparham, 1983.

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[For more details, see “Textual Conventions” in Sutta Discovery series.]

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