Tāla,puṭa Thera,gāthā

The verses of the elder Tālapuṭa[1]

[A spiritual soliloquy and the joy of spiritual solitude]
(Thera,gātha 1091-1145)
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2007

[For technical explanations, see footnotes. The prefix "II" in a reference refers to "II. Modern Commentary." The symbol ~ in the notes refers to the lemma or headword/s to avoid repetition.]

1 The Thera,gāthā

The Thera,gāthā is one of the fifteen books of the Khuddaka Nikāyā, "the Small Collection" of Discourses, also known as the Fifth Nikāya (*Pañcama,nikāya*). A cognate collection of verses by the elder nuns is known as Therī,gāthā.[2] In both books, in almost every case, they are arhats. These verses are often referred to as "verses of uplift" (*udāna*) as they are usually uttered at the time of awakening or by way of joyful retrospect.

Scholars generally agree that it is difficult to know whether these verses were actually composed or uttered by the elders. However, the structure of the poem does provide an indication of the method by which they were constructed.[3] The verses, for example, are very repetitive, as collated by **William Stede**, in his listing of "The Pādas of the Thera- and Therī-gāthā."[4] Such identical terms, phrases, even lines or stanzas, possibly indicate the existence of a large common pool of refrains and phrases available to the elders.

KR Norman thinks, "It seems likely that some of these verses are very old, perhaps older than Buddhism, for they are found in Jain and Brahmanical literature.[5] It was a time before the concept of copyright in ancient India, and any elder or poet could compose his own verses, or freely repeat a verse he has heard, or borrow them from what John Brough calls 'the treasure-house of versified tags'."[6]

2 Tāla,puṭa

From **the Tāla,puṭa Sutta** (S 20.8), we learn that Tāla,puṭa was a successful actor and dance troupe manager who meets the Buddha and questions him about stage shows and dancing. After being told that those who arouse the three unwholesome roots in others would we reborn in hell, he realizes his predicament and renounces the world.[7] **The Tāla,puṭa Thera,gāthā** (Tha 1091-1145) apparently picks up from where the Tāla,puṭa Sutta leaves off, and records Tāla,puṭa's spiritual soliloquy and lyrical autobiography. For, this is a retelling of his thoughts and experiences before going into retreat [§§1-2], living as a monk [§§3-6], living in the forest [§6], and his awakening [§7].

Tāla,puṭa's Thera,gāthā is interesting because it is in the form of a soliloquy: Tāla,puṭa is addressing himself, or rather his "mind" (*citta*). Since the mind is physically "absent," we can say that it is an apostrophe, that is, addressing an absent subject. He address his mind as *citta* a total of 25 times, in 24 of his 55 verses,[8] that is, nearly half of his Thera,gāthā. The only other Thera,gāthā where the mind is addressed

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[1] *Tāḷa,puṭa Thera,gāthā* lit tr "the elder's verses of Tālapuṭa."
[2] See **Subhā Therīgāthā** (Thī 366-399) = SD 20.7 Intro (1).
[3] Blackstone 1998:4.
[4] JPTS 1924-27:31-226, esp 197-226: his table of repeated pādas.
[5] Norman, Tha:N xxi.
[6] Gāndhārī Dharmapada, London, 1862: xvii.
[7] S 42.2/4:306-308 = SD 20.8.
[8] Tha 1107d, 1108a, 1109d, 1113d, 1114d, 1115d, 1116d, 1117d, 1118d, 1119d, 1120d, 1121d, 1123d, 1124c, 1126a, 1127a, 1129d, 1131c, 1132a, 1133d, 1134ab, 1143b, 1144d, 1145d. Although Tāla,puṭa's verses total 55, his canto is entitled, "The Collection of the Fifty" (*paññāsa,nipāta*).

is in **the Vijita,sena Thera,gāthā** (Tha 355a). As such, in this connection, the Tāla,puṭa Thera,gāthā is unique.[9]

3 Prosody

KR Norman, in the notes to his translation of the Thera,gāthā, makes this observation of the prosody[10] of the Tāla,puṭa Thera,gāthā:

> Unlike some of the other long sets of verses in [the Thera,gāthā], Tālapuṭa's verses show signs of being a unity. The theme, of the restraining of mind, underlies the whole; the repeated refrains, and the similarity of metre [Triṣṭubh & Jagatī] throughout, makes this poem unique among the later *nipātas* of [the Thera,gāthā]. Mrs Rhys Davids is, however, incorrect in stating [Tha:RD 370.1] that the metre is *Triṣṭubh* throughout. Only **1109** and **1100** are *Triṣṭubh.* The other verses are *Jagatī* or mixed *Triṣṭubh/Jagatī.* (Tha:N 272 n1091-1145)

These metres are historically related to the Vedic *trṣṭubh-jagatī* family of metres.[11] Hymns of these ancient metres are recited, not sung.

The tṛṣṭubh (Pali, *tuṭṭhubha*)—anglicized as tristubh—contains a pada[12] of 11 syllables, that is:

4 × [∪ ∪ or ∪] — ∪ — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — — etc.

The jagatī pada contains 12 syllables (that is, with an extra syllable at the end), that is:

4 × [∪ ∪ or ∪] — ∪ — — ∪ ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — etc.

As an example, let us look at **1109,** where *acd* are jagatī and *b* is tristubh:

(a) *Kulamhi mitte ca piye ca ñātake*
˘ – ˘ – – ˘ ˘ – ˘ – ˘ –

(b) *khiḍḍā,ratiṁ kāma,guṇañ ca loke*
– – ˘ – – ˘ ˘ – ˘ – –

(c) *sabbaṁ pahāya idaṁ ajjhupāgato*[13]
– – ˘ – ˘ ˘ – – ˘ – ˘ –

(d) *atho pi tvaṁ citta na mayha tussasî ti*
˘ – ˘ – – ˘ ˘ – ˘ – ˘ –

— — —

[9] Another well know soliloquy (albeit commentarial) is that of **Cakkhu,pāla,** where he addresses himself as "Pālita" (DhA 1.1/1:3-21). Comy on Sn 45 f, recounts **a pratyeka-buddha** addressing his mind (SnA 1:93).

[10] Study of the metrical structure of verses, poems and poetical works.

[11] It is the most prevalent metre of the Ṛgveda, accounting for about 40% of its verses.

[12] In Sanskrit metre (*chandas*) and Pali metre, a ***pāda*** is a quarter (usu a line) of a full verse (like the foot of a quadruped), eg a *śloka* of 24 syllables consists of four padas of 6 syllables each.

[13] Occasionally, when certain words measure up, an emendation may be made, **metri causa** (Latin, "on account of metre) so that the "fault" is corrected, that is, a syllable lengthened, shortened, or even elided, as in pada c.

I
The Elder Tāla,puṭa's Verses
(Tha 1091-1145)

1 Before going into retreat

[97]

1 When indeed will I dwell alone in a mountain gully, without a companion,[14]
with insight seeing all existence as impermanent?
This thought of mine—
when indeed will this be? **1091**

2 When indeed will I, as a silent sage donning a torn [patchwork] robe
of saffron cloth, without craving, without mine-making,
having destroyed greed, hate and delusion,
as one gone into the forest, dwell happily. **1092**

3 When indeed will I, seeing by insight that this body is impermanent,
a nest of destruction and disease,[15] assailed by decay and death—
dwell alone in the woods, free of fear?
when indeed will this be? **1093**

4 When indeed will I dwell,[16] having seized the sharp sword of wisdom made,
having cut the creeper of craving, creeping everywhere,
breeder of fear, bringer of pain—
when indeed will this be? **1094**

5 When indeed will I, with force, wield the sword, made of wisdom, of fiery might,
quickly break up Māra and his army,
and lie in the lion posture—
when indeed will this be? **1095**

6 When indeed will I, exerting myself,
be[17] seen amongst those who respect the Dharma,
those who see true reality, who have conquered their senses—
when indeed will this be? **1096**

7 When indeed will weariness or thirst not trouble me,
nor wind nor heat nor bugs nor creeping creatures,
on Giri-b,baja, bent on the goal—
when indeed will this be? **[98]** **1097**

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[14] "Dwell alone, without a companion," *ekākiyo adutiyo* [vl *addutiyo*]: cf Tha 541 & Miln 398. ***Adutiyo*** is glossed by Comy on **54** as "alone," meaning "without a companion, abstaining from associating with defilements and with groups" (*adutiyo ti asahāyo, kilesa,saṅgaṇikāya gaṇa,saṅgaṇikāya ca virahito*), and in the Comys on **896** and **1091,** it is glossed as "without craving" (*nittaṇho*). **Norman**: "This explanation is justified by such references as *taṇhā,dutiyo poso* (A 2:10; It 9, 109 etc) and *taṇhā hi'ssa dutiya* (S 4:37), although at S 1:25, 38, we find *saddhā dutiyā purisassa hoti.*" (Tha:N 135 54n)

[15] "A nest of destruction and disease," Comy: ***vadha,roga,nīḷan*** *ti maraṇassa ca rogassa ca kulāvaka,bhūtaṁ* ("~ means a nest of death and disease"). Cf *roga,nīḷaṁ* (It 37), *roga,niḍḍhaṁ* (Dh 148), *roga,nīdaṁ* (Uv 1.34).

[16] "Shall…dwell" (*vase,* Tha 1093d), an optative used in the sense of the future: see Tha:N 167 n223. An "optative" or "potential" (*sattamī*) tense, is usu rendered "would…"

[17] "Will…be" (*bhave,* Tha 1096b), an optative used in the sense of the future: see Tha:N 167 n223.

8 When indeed will I, mentally focussed, mindful, understand the four truths,
so hard to see, but which is understood by the Great Seer:
when will I have that wisdom—
when indeed will this be? **1098**

9 When indeed will I, yoked to stillness,[18]
with wisdom see the countless forms, sounds,
smells, tastes, touches, and states[19] as a fiery blaze—
when indeed will this be? **1099**

10 When indeed will I, when spoken to with abuse,
be not displeased on account of that sign.
nor be elated at the sign of praise—
when indeed will this be? **1100**

11 When indeed will I regard[20]
these aggregates and countless mental states, inside and outside,
just like wood or grass or creepers?
When will this thought of mine be? **1101**

12 When indeed will the black rain-cloud
rain its fresh water on my robe in the forest,
as I tread the path trodden by the seers—
when indeed will this be? **1102**

13 When indeed will I, hearing the cry of the crested twice-born,[21] the peacock,
in a forested mountain cave,
rising up, give full thought[22] to attaining the deathless [undying]—
when indeed will this be? **1103**

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[18] "Yoked to stillness," Comy: ***samathehi yutto*** *ti jhāna,vipassanā,magga,samādhīhi samannāgato* ("accomplished in samadhi leading to dhyana, insight,and the path"). The usu tr for *samatha* is "calm, calmness," but I have taken poetic licence here.

[19] "States," Comy: ***dhamme*** *ti mano,viññeyya,dhamme* ("states to be know by the mind"), ie the field of action of the mind, "mental objects."

[20] "Will…regard," *tuleyyaṁ*, an optative used in the sense of the future, see Tha:N 167 n223.

[21] Birds are generally know as "**twice-born**" (*dija* or *dvija*) because they first they are formed in the mother's womb, and then they hatch out from eggs (SnA 1:178). The ancient brahmins often boast that they are "twice-born" (ThīA 269): the first is biological (ie born of the mother), and second, religious, when the 7-year-old initiate (only a male brahmin, kshatriya or vaishya) learns the Gāyatrī Mantra, and by way of the *upanayana* ceremony, when the brahmin youth is invested with a sacred cord (*yajño,pavīta;* Hindi *janeo*), worn permanently over the left shoulder and under the right arm. Non-brahmins and women are prohibited from wearing it. See AL Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, 1989:39 & n5. In **Vasala S** (Sn 1.7), the Buddha humorously says, "He who here harms life, whether once-born [humans, etc] or twice-born [birds, reptiles, etc] | And has no compassion for living beings, he should be known as an outcaste." (Sn 117).

[22] "Will…give full thought," Comy: ***sañcintaye*** *manasi,kareyyaṁ vipasseyyan ti attho* ("~ means wisely consider, see with insight"). It is an optative used in the sense of the future: see Tha:N 167 n223.

14 When indeed will I cross unhindered
over the Ganges, the Yamuna, the Sarasvati,
the Pātāla country, and the Baḷavā,mukha sea[23]—
when indeed will this be? **1104**

15 When indeed will I, like an elephant wandering about unattached,
break through[24] desire for the cords of sense-pleasures;
shunning all signs of beauty—yoked to dhyana—
when indeed will this be? **[99]** **1105**

16 When indeed will I, like a pauper who, afflicted by debt and
harrassed by creditors, finding a treasure, will be pleased,
having realized the teaching of the Great Seer—
when indeed will this be? **1106**

2 Reflections on the retreat

17 For many years have I been begged by you
"Enough of this house-dwelling for you!"
now I am one gone forth
what is the reason, mind, that you are not spurring me on? **1107**

18 Was I not begged by you, mind, thus:
"On Giri-b,baja, the colourfully feathered birds of the sky,
greeting the thunder, great Indra's voice,
will delight us as you meditate in the forest." **1108**

19 Friends and beloved and relatives in the families,
sporting and delighting with sense-pleasures' cords in the world,
giving all up, I have entered upon this—
now then, mind, you are not pleased with me. **1109**

20 This (mind) is mine alone, for it belongs to no one else:
what is there to lament when it is time for arming [wearing armour],[25]
seeing that all this (world) is shaky [unstable],
I have renounced it, desiring for the death-free state. **1110**

21 The speaker of the good word, the highest amongst mankind [the two-legged],
the great healer, the caravan leader of tamable men, says,
"The trembling mind is like a monkey![26]
Very hard it is for one not rid of lust to restrain himself!"[27] **1111**

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[23] *Pātāla,khittaṁ vaḷavā,mukhaṁ ca.* Comy here says that **Pātāla** is located on "the coasts or shores" (*tīra-ṭ,-ṭhānāni*) & Comy on **89** says *mahā,samudde ninnatā padesā* ("a lowlying country on the great ocean"). See "Modern Commentary" below.

[24] "Will…breath through," *padālaye,* an optative used in the sense of the future, see Tha:N 167 n223.

[25] *Sannāha,kāle paridevitena kiṁ.* Comy: That is, to arm himself against the Māra of defilements (*kilesa,māra*). (ThaA 3:154)

[26] This is locus classicus for the expression "monkey mind," or "the mind restless like a monkey." **The Assutava S 1** (S 12.61) compares the mind that always needs an object to cling on as a monkey that moves through the trees, grasping one tree-branch after another (S 12.61.8/2:95) = SD 20.2. See also SD 19.15 Intro (2) on "the monkey."

[27] *Cittaṁ calaṁ makkaṭa,sannibham iti | avīta,rāgena sudunnivārayaṁ.*

22 For sensual pleasures are varied indeed, sweet, delightful,
to which the common worldlings, unknowing, lie stuck;
seeking rebirth over and again, the wish for pain,
led by the mind to be banished to hell. **1112**

23 "Dwelling in the glade, resounding with the cries of peacocks and herons,
the favourite haunt of leopards and tigers,
give up longing for the body: fail not!"
so you, mind, engaged me [urged me on] in the past. **[100]** **1113**

24 **"**Cultivate dhyana[28] and the faculties,[29]
the powers,[30] through developing the awakening factors[31] of samadhi:
attain the threefold knowledge[32] in the Buddha's teaching!"
so you, mind, engaged me in the past. **1114**

25 "Cultivate the way for the attaining of the deathless [undying],
that leads onwards, plunging into the end of all pain,
eightfold, cleansing all the defilements!"
so you, mind, engaged me in the past. **1115**

26 "Wisely and fully regard the aggregates as pain,
abandon that state from which pain arises:
make an end of suffering right here [in this world itself]!"
so you, mind, engaged me in the past. **1116**

27 "With insight wisely regard the impermanent as suffering,
that the empty is not self, that suffering is death;
restrain the mind from its wanderings!"
so you, mind, engaged me in the past. **1117**

3 Living as a monk

28 "Shaven-headed, unsightly, subject to reviling,
with only bowl in hand, find almsfood amongst the families—
apply yourself to the Teacher's Word!"
so you, mind, engaged me in the past. **1118**

29 "Go with a well-restrained mind, when in the streets,
amongst the families, with the mind unattached to sensual pleasures;

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[28] On dhyana, see SD 15.1(8.4).

[29] *Indriya*, viz faith (*saddhā*), effort (*viriya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*): see **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50/5:225 f) = SD 10.4.

[30] *Bala*, the same as *indriya*, but applied to the arhat: see SD 10.5.

[31] *Bojjhaṅga* or *samboijjhaṅga*, viz, mindfulness (*sati*), dharma-investigation (*dhamma,vicaya*), effort (*viriya*), zest (*pīti*), tranquillity (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*): see SD 10.1.

[32] The threefold knowledge (*abhiññā*) are the superknowledges of the arhat, viz, the knowledge: of the recollection of past lives (*pubbe.nivāsânussati,ñāṇa*), of knowledge of the arising and passing away of beings (according to their karma) (or, "divine eye") (*cutûpapāta,ñāṇa*), and of the destruction of these influxes (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*): see **Te,vijja S** (D 13) = SD 1.8 Intro (2.2). The influxes (*āsava*) are 3 or 4 in number: (1) sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence or becoming (*bhav'āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjâsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). The 4 are also known as "floods" (*ogha*) and "yokes" (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is prob older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63).

like the full moon on a clear night!"
so you, mind, engaged me in the past. **1119**

30 "Be a forest-dweller and almsman,
be a cemetery-dweller and wearer of dust-heap cloth [rag-robe wearer],
be one not lying down to sleep, delight in the austerities always!"
so you, mind, engaged me in the past. **1120**

31 Mind, when you engaged me in what is impermanent and shaky,[33]
You are just like one,
having planted trees, wishes to cut them down at the root,
when they are about to fruit.[34] **1121**

32 O formless far-ranging solitary wanderer,
I shall not do your bidding now:
For, pleasures are painful, bitter, very fearful:
I shall wander with a mind fully nirvana-bound! **1122**

33 Not from lack of luck, nor from shamelessness,
nor on a mere whim, nor from banishment,
nor for the sake of livelihood, did I go forth—
but I listened to [obeyed] you, O mind. **1123**

34 Desiring little is praised by the true individuals,
and also the abandoning of disparagement, and the stilling of pain: **[101]**
so you engaged me then, mind,
but now you fall back on your past habitual ways. **1124**

35 Craving, ignorance, and the beloved and the unbeloved, too,
beautiful forms, and pleasant feelings, too,
and the delightful cords of sensual pleasures, too, have been vomitted out:[35]
never can I make myself swallow back what has been vomitted![36] **1125**

36 Every time, mind, your word has been done by me,
in many births, I have never sought to anger you:
The self, born of what you have done,[37]
has wandered on for a long time in the pain caused by you! **1126**

4 The mind as the source of rebirths

37 Only you, mind, make brahmins of us,
you make us kshatriyas and kings, too,

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[33] This and next line: *Tath'upamaṁ citta idaṁ karosi yaṁ maṁ aniccamhi cale niyuñjasi* (Tha 1121cd).

[34] These 2 lines: *ropetvā rukkhāni yathā phalesī mūle taruṁ chettu tam eva icchasu* (Tha 1121ab). Here *phalesī* is a rare grammatical form (which comy is unaware of): it is a future active participle (Geiger 2000 193A), meaning "about to fruit." It also occurs as *phalesin* (*aṅgārino dāni dumā bhadante phalesino chadanaṁ vipphāyo* = "The trees are now crimson-cloaked, sir, having shed their foliage, about to fruit," Tha 527ab). Comy unfamiliar with this form, takes *phalesi* as derived from *phala* ("fruit") and *esi* ("seeking"), taking it to mean "looking for fruits." See K Norman, 1997: 162.

[35] *Manāpiyā kāma,guṇā ca vantā.* On the verse and the next, see Modern Commentary (1125).

[36] *Vante ahaṁ āvamituṁ na ussahe.* See Tha:N 278 n1125.

[37] Tha 1126ab: *Ajjhatta,sambhavo kataññūtāya te | dukkhe ciraṁ saṁsaritaṁ tayā kate.* On a similar wordplay on *kataññūtāya te,* see Modern Commentary (1126) below & also Tha:N 278 n1126.

and, at times, vaishyas and shudras we become;
the deva state, too, is on account of you alone! **1127**

38 Just because of you alone, we become asuras,
rooted in you, we become hell-beings;
then one day, we are amongst the animals, too,
or, in the preta state, too, simply on account of you! **1128**

39 No more indeed will you injure ever and again,
time after time, simply putting up a play:
you fill me with lust so that I am like one gone mad:
Yet, mind, have I ever failed you in any way? **1129**

40 Formerly, this wandering mind wandered
where it wished, where it pleased, where it liked;
Now I shall hold it with wise attention,
As a trainer with his hook holds a drunken [rutting] elephant. **1130** = 77

41 But the Teacher made me see[38] this world
as being impermanent, frail, without essence:
let me leap with joy into the Conqueror's Teaching, mind,[39]
let me cross over the great floods, so hard to cross. **1131**

42 This, mind, is not like in the past:
no more shall I ever[40] return to your control.
I am one gone forth in the Great Seer's Teaching:
those like me are not promoters [sufferers] of ruin. **[102]** **1132**

43 The hills, the seas, the rivers, the earth,
the four quarters, the directions in between, the nadir, the heavens,
the three realms of existence—they are all impermanent and oppressed:
where, O mind, will you go to delight in happiness? **1133**

44 What, my mind, will you do to one who is firmly set for the other shore?[41]
I'm no longer, mind, under your control.
Never would anyone touch a sack [a bellows] with a mouth at both ends,
let alone what is full and flowing with nine streams![42] **1134**

5 Determination for awakening

45 Where wild boars and antelopes frequently flock
on a hillside ledge at the peak,[43] or plunge into the beautiful open space,

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[38] "Made…see," *adhiṭṭhahi*; here it has the sense of "make…appear (by mental determination)." BHSD sv ***adhi-tiṣṭhati***, refers to Tha 1131: "*satthā ca me lokamimaṃ adhiṭṭhahi* (aor) *aniccato*… 'the Teacher made this world appear to me as impermanent' (by his supernatural power, but this time without the usual connotation of magic or illusion)." For other senses, see Tha:N 270 n1134.

[39] *Pakkhanda maṁ citta jinassa sāsane.*

[40] *Alaṁ.*

[41] Be: *Dhiti-p,paraṁ* [Ee Se: *dhī dhī paraṁ*] *kiṁ mama citta kāhisi.* Tha:N: "What will you do to one who has firmness as his aim, my mind?"

[42] The 9 streams (*nava,sota*) are an allusion to the nine openings (*nava,dvāra*): 2 eyes, 2 ears, nose, mouth, rectum, male organ and female organ.

or in a grove sprinkled with fresh water from the rain—
having gone to your cave home, you will rejoice there. **1135**

46 Birds with lovely blue-feathered necks, beautiful crests,
splendid tail feathers, beautiful wings of varied colours,
greet the thunder with their sweet sounds—
they will delight you as you meditate in the forest. **1136**

6 Delighting in the forest life

47 When the sky has rained, and the grass four fingers tall,
when the grove is fully abloom like a radiant cloud,
I'll lie like a tree amongst the hills
that are soft as cotton to me. **1137**[44]

48 Thus I shall act just as a master [a lord];
may whatever that is obtained be enough for me;
then I will make you supple
just as one untiring would well soften a catskin bag. **1138**

49 Thus I shall act just as a master [a lord];
may whatever that is obtained be enough for me;
I shall bring you under my control with effort,
just as a skilled mahout [a hook-holder] an elephant in rut. **1139**

7 Spiritual success

50 With you well tamed, firmly standing,
like a trainer with a straight-running horse,
I am able to practise the blissful way,
ever resorted to by those with guarded minds. **[103]** **1140**

51 I shall strongly bind you to the meditation object,
just as an elephant is bound to a post with a strong rope.
Well guarded by me, well cultivated in mindfulness,
you will be independent from all existences. **1141**

52 With wisdom, having cut off wandering in the wrong way,
restrained by meditation [yoga], you return to the path:
having seen arising, ending and birth,[45]
you will be heir to him who is the foremost speaker. **1142**

53 Under the sway of the four perversions,[46]
you, mind, have led me around in a circle like a cow:[47]

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[43] *Pabbhāra,kūṭe.* Norman: "Although PED gives 'slope' for *pabhhāra-ṭ,ṭhāna,* 'cave' would seem more appropriate if we are to take *vigaḷha* as applying to *pabbhāra* and *sevitā* as applying to *kūṭa.*" (Tha:N 280 n1135). BHSD, in def ***prāgbhāra*** quotes "bird-shelter, rocky overhanging crag with ledge beneath" (Das): Mvyut 5259, 5558.

[44] Cf Olendzki's tr: http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/sutta/khuddaka/theragatha/thag19-ao0.html.

[45] *Disuvā samudayaṁ vibhavaṁ ca sambhavaṁ*, alt tr: "Having seen birth that is arising and cessation." Norman notes the likelihood of ***samudaya*** here as used in the sense of "defilement" (*saṅkilesa*), and alludes to *upādāna-kkhandhānaṁ samudayañ ca atthaṁ-gamañ ca* ["the arising and the passing away of the aggregates of clinging"] (S 3:160) (Tha:N 281 n1142).

[46] See **II: 1143.**

come now, associate with the compassionate Great Sage,
who has cut the bonds of the fetters. **1143**

54 Like a deer roaming free in the colourful grove,
having entered the delightful mountain, garlanded by rain-clouds,
I shall rejoice there in the uncrowded hills,
while you, mind, will surely perish![48] **1144**

55 Under the sway of your desire and power,
men and women have tasted happiness:
they are ignorant, held in Māra's sway—
as your servants, mind, they delight in existence.[49] **1145**

— evaṁ —

II
Modern Commentary

[The number in **bold** print refers to Tha text. The symbol **§** refers to the verse of the translated text.
I have in some places here relied on the technical notes of KR Norman's *Elders' Verses I,* 1969, & the Sutta notes of Khantipalo, 1983. All Pali and references have been normalized.]

1091. An elder's verse (*thera,gāthā*) is usually uttered by way of joyful uplift (*udāna*) just after he has awakened. From the Tāla,puṭa Sutta (S 42.2), we know that Tāla,puṭa, after meeting the Buddha, joins the order and in due course becomes an arhat.[50] Tāla,puṭa's Thera,gāthā begins with his musings on the solitary forest life in "a mountain gully,"[51] which is one of the nine places conducive to meditation.[52]

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[47] See **II: 1143.**

[48] *Asaṁsayaṁ citta parābhavissasi.* Comy: ***Parābhavissasi*** *saṁsāra,byasane ṭhassasî ti attho* ("I shall rejoice, you will remain in disastrous samsara").

[49] *Bhavâbhinandī tava citta sevakā.*

[50] S 42.2/4:306-308 = SD 20.8.

[51] *Pabbata,kandara* (Tha 1091; UA 244) here clearly a tadpurusha; elsewhere may be listed separately or as dvandva ("mountain *and* gully"): see next. CPD (sv *kandara*) remarks that neither Comys nor the context in which *kandara* occurs indicates that it means "glen" or "save" as suggested by PED. DP defines it as "a gully, a gorge, a ravine; an inlet" (V 2:146; D 1:71; A 4:97; Tha 602; J 1:205, 4:286)

[52] A stock phrase of 3 places (forest, *araññа*; the foot of a tree, *rukkha,mūla*; empty house, *suññ'āgāra*) conducive to meditation are give at D 2:291; M 1:56, 297, 398, 425, 2:263, 3:82, 89, 4:297; S 5:311, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 323, 329, 336; A 1:147, 148, 149, 3:92, 100, 4:437, 5:109, 110, 111; Pm 1:175, 2:36. **The Pavevika Sutta** (A 3.92) mentions 7 places: a forest, the foot of a tree, a cemetery, a forest path [a remote forest], the open air, a heap of straw, a thatched shelter (*araññaṁ rukkha,mūlaṁ susānaṁ vana,panthaṁ* [vl *vana,patthaṁ*] *abbhokāsaṁ palāla,-puñjaṁ bhusāgāraṁ*, A 3.92/1:241 = SD 44.2). **The Sāmaññ,phala S** (D 2), probably a very ancient account, gives 9 places suitable for meditation, and the spiritual preparation for living in such places, thus: "Possessing this aggregate of noble moral virtue, this aggregate of noble sense-restraint, this aggregate of noble mindfulness and full awareness, and this aggregate of noble contentment, he resorts to a secluded dwelling: a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain gully [or, a mountain, a gully], a hillside cave, a cemetery, a remote forest [jungle grove], the open air, a heap of straw" (*so iminā ca ariyena sīla-k,khandhena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena indriya,saṁvarena samannāgato iminā ca ariyena sati,sampajaññena samannāgato imāya ca ariyāya santuṭṭhitāya samannāgato vivittaṁ senâsanaṁ bhajati, araññaṁ rukkha,mūlaṁ pabbataṁ kandaraṁ giri,guhaṁ susānaṁ vana,patthaṁ abbhokāsaṁ palāla,puñjaṁ,* D 2.67/1:71 = SD 8.10; V 2:146; M 3:3; A 2:210. These are def at DA 209-210, VbhA 366 f. The oldest reference to an ideal meditation spot is in **Ariya,pariyesanā S** (M 26) and **Saṅgārava S** (M 100): "still in search of

The theme here is solitude. As an erstwhile actor and dancer, he has had his share of socializing, and as such may still fondly recall the experiences he has left behind. His musings on the solitary forest life[53] is often abruptly interrupted by thoughts of his erstwhile pleasurable life as an entertainer.

However, his determination to go into solitary meditation grows in momentum and certainty. The reason is simple: the solitary forest life conduces to meditation, especially when his aim is to gain the "insight seeing all existence as impermanent." So begins Tāla,puṭa's musing on the solitary contemplative life in the forest and of mental restraint. We are reminded how the Bodhisattva himself has pursued the solitary life before his awakening, as recorded in **the Mahā,sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12):

> Sāriputta, such was my **seclusion:** I would plunge into some forest dwelling, and when I saw a cowherd or a shepherd or someone gathering grass or someone gathering sticks or someone gathering forest products as food,[54] I would flee from grove to grove, from thicket to thicket, from valley to valley, from hill to hill.
>
> Why was that? I thought: "Let them not see me and let me not see them!" Just as a wild deer, on seeing human beings, flees from grove to grove, from thicket to thicket, from valley to valley, from hill to hill, so too, I *on seeing a cowherd or a shepherd...*would flee…
>
> (M 12.48/1:78 f) = SD 1.13.

1092. The main theme here is stillness. A well known epithet for the awakened monk in early Buddhism is ***muni,***[55] "silent sage"; hence, the Buddha is well known as Sakya,muni, "the silent sage of the Sakyas." The spiritual state of such a silent sage is called *moneyya.*[56] He is so called because his body, speech and mind are "silent." Perhaps, a better word for this silence is *stillness.* That is to say, his body is still, since he neither harms nor exploits any being in any way; his speech is still, since whatever he says reflects true reality and benefits the listener spiritually in some way; his mind is still, since he is fully awakened and fully at peace with himself. For this reason, the Buddha declares these words that change Aṅguli,māla the serial killer's life forever:

> I stand still, Aṅgulimāla, all the time,
> To all beings, I have laid down the rod.
> But you are unrestrained towards living beings.
> Therefore I stand still and you stand not still. (M 86/2:99; Tha 867) = SD 5.11

To gain inner stillness, it helps to begin by living in an environment that is still, such as a forest, whose natural noise, as we shall see, are actually conducive to mental cultivation.

> These [places] are good for meditation too. They have to be far from peoples' noisy houses and machines. A place to reach only on foot, and where animals, more or less wild, also live happily.

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the wholesome, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I walked by stages through Magadha until eventually I arrived at Senānigama near Uruvelā. There I saw an agreeable spot, a delightful grove with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, smooth banks and nearby a village for alms resort. I sat down there thinking: 'This is conducive for spiritual striving.'" (M 26.17/1:167 = 100.13/2:212).

[53] On the solitary contemplative life, see "without a companion," §1091 n.

[54] *Vana,kammika.* M:ÑB renders it as "woodsman." Here I follow Comy: "one who wanders in the forest seeking (edible) tubers, roots etc." (MA 2:46)

[55] See the ancient **Muni S** (Sn 207-221) mentioned by Divy 20, 35; SnA 518; explained at SnA 254-277; & Sn 414, 462, 523 f, 708 f, 811 f, 838, 844 f, 912 f, 946, 1074 passim (see SnA:Ee index p749); Dh 49, 225, 268 f, 423; Pv 2.1.13, 2.13.3 (explained at PvA 163: "a silent sage (muni) is one who is wise, who knows, regarding what is good for himself and what is good for others," *atta,hitañ ca para,hitañ ca munāti janātî ti* ***muni***,).

[56] "*Munaya* means the adept's silence, atained as the path fruit through the practice of wise silence,' ***munayo*** *ti moneyya,paṭipadāya magga,phalaṁ pattā asekha,munayo* (DhA 3:321); "For, here, *monena* means that which is connected with the practice of wise silence," *idha pana tuṇhī,bhāvaṁ sandhāya* ***monena*** *ti* (DhA 3:395).

A bhikkhu intent on meditation likes such places which are not the favorite dwelling of ordinary people (who only go there for picnics on fine days). The meditative bhikkhu is happy to spend nights and all seasons there wearing his robes made up out of pieces of cloth sewn together —worthless to a thief, and colored an earthy yellow-brown—unattractive to the layman.

Surrounded by cool green trees what will he "make mine"? The surroundings encourage a cool heart with no craving and a minimum of possessions—just his bowl and robes and a few other things. And it is likely that, given this setting, he will be able to "slay" greed, aversion and delusion, the Three Roots of Evil. These three cause all the trouble, (apart from naturally caused disasters: earthquakes, droughts, typhoons and so on—and some diseases) in this world. So when they have been known and seen, through and through, they disappear forever. Why should he not "abide in bliss" then? (Khantipalo 1983: Tālapuṭa's Aspirations 2)

1093. Here, Tāla,puṭa reflects on fear. He practises body-based mindfulness (*kāya,gatā,sati*),[57] noticing its foulness and impermanence. As one yet unawakened, he desires for the forest solitude so that he could fully realize the fruit of this practice, and so overcome all fear. **The Bhaya,bherava Sutta** (M 4) describes how, the Bodhisattva himself overcomes fear and dread (*bhaya,bherava*) with wisdom. He willfully chooses scary places, such as "grove shrines, forest shrines, and tree shrines,"[58] which are generally holy areas that are remote and deserted, except when the occasional devotees come to make votive offerings during the day. And while dwelling there, he recounts, "a wild animal would come up to me, or a peacock would break a branch, or the wind would rustle the leaves." And whenever fear arises in him, he would remain that same posture (reflecting on its nature and impermanence) until his fear is stilled.[59]

1094. The main theme here is craving, which is compared to a creeper (*lata*). In this connection, the Buddha says in **the Dhammapada:**

Savanti sabbadhī sotā	The streams flow everywhere;	
latā ubbijja tiṭṭhati	the creepers sprout and remain:	
taṅ ca disvā lataṁ jātaṁ	seeing that the creeper has arisen,	
mūlaṁ paññāya chindatha	with wisdom cut off its root.	(Dh 340)

Craving is like a stream or current (*sota*) that carries us away and eventually drowns us in it, because craving has the nature of proliferating itself. Craving is like creepers because they choke us by demanding our attention and distracting us from more important things, so that eventually we are strangled and suffocated by them. In pleasure lies the roots of pain.

1095. The theme here is courage, represented by the lion. Tāla,puṭa is evidently recalling how the Buddha himself sits upright in meditation like a lion under the Bodhi tree, fearless in the face of Māra's wiles and fearful attempts to distract him from his meditation.[60] The lion-posture (*sīh'āsana*) usually denotes how a lion lies majestically on its right side to rest or sleep. But here, it clearly refers to the way a lion fearlessly sits in the forest, and whose roar terrifies all the other forest animals. Māra fears that the voice of the Buddha would be heard by the world, by us, and that Māra would loose his grip on us when we attain the wisdom of awakening.

1096. Although the Buddha appears to have awakened fully all by himself, it is important to remember that he has led a rich lay life experiencing the vanity of sensual pleasures, and as a renunciant he has studied and practised under the best teachers to be found then, and after that lived an ascetic life practis-

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[57] See **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119/3:88-99) = SD 12.21.

[58] *Ārāma,cetiya, vana,cetiya, rukkha,cetiya,* respectively.

[59] M 4.20/1:20 f = SD 44.3.

[60] See **Padhāna S** (Sn 427 f) & J 1:71-73. See "Māra's attacks" in Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples,* 2004 ch 21.

ing all the forms of self-mortification of his time. All this gradually makes him realize they are *not* what awakening is about. Then turning to the breath meditation and dhyanas, he won insight into true reality.[61]

The next important point to remember is that the Bodhisattva's resolution and spiritual stamina to struggle for awakening is the result of countless lives of cultivation of various supreme qualities (*pāramī*). He has met previous Buddhas, and experienced various existential situations or life-experiences, so that he becomes the most evolved or "highest" being (*puris'uttama*) of our times.

Even after the Great Awakening, the Buddha does not claim that he is higher than the Teaching. In **the Gārava Sutta** (S 6.2), the Buddha declares that "one dwells in suffering if one is without respect, without deference (for another)."[62] His aggregates of moral virtue, of concentration, of wisdom, of liberation, and of the knowledge and vision of liberation—that is, the tenfold "rightness" (*sammatta*)[63]—are only finally consummate, by his paying respect to a teacher. However, not finding any other awakened being or anyone more virtuous that he is, the Buddha decides that he should respect the Dharma which has brought him spiritual liberation.[64] Just as water finds its own level, a true teacher too bows to the truth.

In keeping with the awakening tradition of the true saints, Tāla,puṭa seeks "those who respect the Dharma" (*dhamma,garūhi tādihi*). As such, he is no renegade monk or loose cannon, but a true seeker who is preparing well for his task, and knows what he is seeking for.

1097. Nature has ways of testing us when we live in the wild outdoors: difficulty of getting proper food and drink, lack of sheltered comfort, pests and bugs, the inclement weather, strange noises, ill health, and loneliness. Tāla,puṭa probably feels all this early in his monkhood. But he is determined to continue.

He refers to **Giri-b,baja**, which the Commentary says refers to the "hilly wilderness,"[65] that is, probably the wilderness of Mt Vulture's Peak, a popular haunt of the Buddha himself. The name Giri-b,baja (Skt, Giri,vraja) means "surrounded by hills," and is actually an ancient name for Rāja,gaha, the capital of Magadha (Sn 408), the first city the newly awakened Buddha visits.

1098. This verse is quite straightforward: Tāla,puṭa is reminding himself of his goal: to meditate for the sake of a calm and clear mind so that true wisdom in the form of understanding the four noble truths, which reflects the essence of true reality. He seeks that which the Buddha himself has already found. Hence, he is putting the Teacher above the Teaching. Again in **Tha 26** he muses on the four noble truths.

1099. The Buddha, in his third public discourse—**the Fire Sermon**—given to the fire-worshipping Kassaps brothers, declares that "all is on fire" (*sabbaṁ ādittaṁ*), that is to say, all our six sense-faculties are *burning* with the fires of greed, of hate, of delusion.[66] The imagery of fire here has at least three important senses.

Firstly, fire burns us with excruciating pain, but the wise person who has been burnt dreads the fire (which is a good simile for "revulsion," *nibbidā,* to worldliness).[67] What better way to understand the nature of pain than through personal experience.

Secondly, the fire imagery evokes the urgency (*saṁvega*) of the situation. We do not philosophize at a dangerous fire: we immediately make an effort to put it out or to flee from it. Even as a Bodhisattva,

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[61] See **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36.17-44/1:242-249) = SD 1.12.

[62] *Dukkhaṁ kho agāravo viharati appaṭisso* (S 1:139 = A 2:20; qu at MA 2:136; also V 2:89 = D 3:244 = M 2:245 = Vbh 381).

[63] As the fivefold Dhamma-k,khandha, see D 2:122 f; A 5.107/3:134; as the tenfold rightness, see D 3:271, 292; M 1:42; A 5:212.

[64] S 6.2/1:138-140 =SD 12.3.

[65] *Giribbaje ti pabbata,kandarāya* (SA 3:152).

[66] **Āditta,pariyāya S** (S 35.28/4:19 f) = SD 1.3; **(Khandha) Āditta S** (S 22.61/3:71) = SD 1.3.

[67] See ***Nibbidā*** = SD 20.1.

Siddhattha, seeing the dangers of the fires of the world,[68] flees from them like a man whose house is ablaze,[69] or whose clothes or whose head is on fire.[70] Then he goes on to seek how to extinguish these fires for good, and he not only finds the answer, but also declares it to the world.

Thirdly, fire is a good servant, but a bad master: the sense-faculties bring us suffering when we over-indulge in them, not knowing when to stop delighting in them. But seeing them for what they all are—impermanent—they become steps towards awakening in this life itself.[71]

Consequently, a popular simile for nirvana, the ending of the roots of suffering, is that of "quenching" or "extinguishing" (*nibbuta*). And the way to putting out the fires of greed, hate and delusion, is the still-ing or calmness of the mind (*samatha*). For, when the mind is calm, it begins to truly see the true nature of reality. The imagery of the world as burning is a popular one. We see this imagery in these two verses from the Therī,gāthā:

Sabbo ādīpito loko	All the world is burning!
sabbo loko paridīpito	All the world is flaring up!
sabbo pajjalito loko	All the world is ablaze!
sabbo loko pakampito	All the world is shaken! **Sīsūpa,cālā Thī** (Thī 200)

Mā'haṁ kāmehi saṅgacchaṁ	May I not meet with sense-desires,
Yesu tāṇaṁ na vijjati	in which no refuge can be found:
Amittā vadhakā kāmā	sense-desires are enemies, murderers,
Aggi-k,khandhûpamā dukhā	they are like blazing mass, painful.

Subhā Kammāra,dhītā Thī (Thī 351)

1100. This verse reflects the meditation training that Tāla,puṭa has received. For, he refers to his reactions to abuse and to praise, two of the eight worldly winds,[72] as being "signs" (*nimitta*). How we react to other's actions, words and thoughts, and to our environment, are almost always the result of our past conditioning.[73] In an important sense, we have no control over such reactions, unless we have the still mind to see through this conditioning and work towards breaking out of the rut. Tāla,puṭa is expressing just this sentiment.

1101. This verse is about Tāla,puṭa reflection on the elements (*dhātu*). We are made up of the four elements, that is, *the four phases of matter*: earth (solidity and resistance), water (fluidity and cohesiveness), fire (heat and decay), and wind (movement). These elements that we really are, are also the very same elements that is the universe around us. They are all impermanent.[74] Here we have not only a reflection on impermanence, but also the interconnection of all existence, animate and inanimate. The Buddha's teachings contain the first statement of ecological awareness in human history.

1102. Here begins Tāla,puṭa's reflection on the beauty of nature, very common in the Thera,gāthā. For most worldly people, especially those seeking pleasurable pursuits amongst nature feel threatened by a

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[68] **Mahā Kassapa**, just before his renunciation, reflects: "We [he and Bhaddā Kāpilāni], sirs, are going forth, thinking, 'The three worlds are like a leaf-hut on fire!" (*mayaṁ bhaṇe āditta,paṇṇa,sālā viya tayo bhavâti pabbajimhā.* SA 2:195; AA 1:179; Tha 3:133; ApA 263).

[69] J 1:61, which describe the young Siddhattha's samvega when he sees how the once beautiful harem women lying asleep in disarray looking like cadavers in a cemetery.

[70] *Āditta,celo vā āditta,sīso vā* (**A 2**:93 = 3 = **3**:307 = 308 = **4**:320 = 321 = **5**:93 = 95 = 98 = 99 = 104 = 105 = **SA** 1:48 = **ThaA** 1:112).

[71] On the perception of impermanence, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) = SD 16.7.

[72] Apparently, "abuse" (*dubbacana*) and "praise" (*tuṭṭha*) here serve as a synecdoche (a part that refers to the whole) for the 8 worldly conditions (*aṭṭha loka,dhamma*): gain (*lābha*) and not gaining or loss (*alābha*), fame (*yasa*) and obscurity or ill-fame (*ayasa*), blame (*nindā*) and praise (*pasaṁsā*), and joy (*sukha*) and pain (*dukkha*) (A 4:157).

[73] On ***Nimitta***, see SD 19.7.

[74] See **Mahā Rāhul.ovāda S** (M 62/1:420-426) = SD 3.11, where we have both the traditional reflection on the elements, and also an "element-like" meditation.

"black rain-cloud" (*pāvusa,kāla,megha*).[75] Forest practitioners like Tāla,puṭa welcome such natural wonders because the natural sound of falling rain helps is in our meditation, as if being encapsulated in a cocoon of watery rhythm from the heavens. After the rains, the air is clear and cool, and the ground and plants clean and fresh. The rains also keep away visitors and animals that might distract the meditator.

1103. The sound of the peacock[76] echoes in the hills with a spacious sound that fills us with joyful peace. The natural environment easily fills us with a peace and joy that conduces to inner stillness and meditation. When we are at peace internally, we are naturally inclined to meditate, which when sustained with wisdom leads on nirvana.

1104. Here, the first impression is that Tāla,puṭa is thinking of attaining psychic powers so that he would be able to fly over the five places, which is not only a mundane desire, but also against the spirit of the rest of the poem, which is that of liberation. But before we go further, we need to look more closely at these names: the Ganges, the Yamuna, the Sarasvati, the Pātāla country, and the Baḷavā,mukha sea, are all, except for Pātāla, are rivers or bodies of water.

From the Commentaries,[77] **Pātāla** probably refers to the delta at the mouth of the Indus. This is evidently a historical fact, since Alexander the Great in his campaigns (summer of 325-324 BCE) was recorded as reaching "Patala," a city at the apex of the Indus Delta (probably east of Hyderabad). In fact, in 325 BCE, it is said that a tsunami off the Makran coast in the North Arabian Sea destroyed part of his fleet. In short, there was a country known as Pātāla in the ancient Indus delta region—which brings us to the next point.

The seas west of India right down to the Cape of Good Hope were hazardous to the sailors of ancient India. **Baḷavā,mukha**, which can be translated as "powerful mouth," could refer to a huge whirlpool, or even the tsunami (which looks with a mouth of waves swallowing everything in its path).[78]

As I have said early, it is unlikely that Tāla,puṭa was hoping to have the power to fly over such areas. This view is supported by another Thera,gāthā passage and other commentarial explanations of *pātāla.* Let us examine these two verses:

Ajjuna Thera,gāthā

Truly was I able to pull myself out of the waters to dry land.
Being borne along on a great flood, I comprehended the truths.

Asakkhiṁ vata attānaṁ | uddhātuṁ udakā thalaṁ
vuyhamāno mahôgho va | saccāni paṭivijjh'ahan ti (Tha 88)

Deva,sabha Thera,gāthā

Crossed are the muds and mires, <u>the abyss</u> [chasms] avoided.
Freed from the floods and bonds, all conceits are eradicated.

Uttiṇṇā paṅkā palipā | <u>pātālā</u> parivajjitā
Mutto oghā ca ganthā ca | sabbe mānā visaṁhatâ ti (Tha 89)

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[75] **Siegfried Lienhard** highlights the striking nature imagery in Thā and Thī, and concludes, by way of a detailed literary analysis, that they draw from the tradition of erotic secular poetry and turn it into a distinctly Buddhist genre ("Sur la structure poétique des Theratherīgāthā," Journal Asiatique 263 1975:375-396). **Kathryn Blackstone** points out that Tha employs nature imagery more extensively and in more positive terms than does the Thī—which may reflect that nuns are prohibited from forest-dwelling,[75] while monks are encouraged to seek forest solitude (*Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha: Struggle for liberation in the Therīgāthā*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998). See **Subhā Thī** (Thī 366-399) = SD 20.7 Intro (1).

[76] "Twice-born" (*dija*) is an epithet for birds: see verse 1101 n.

[77] See ThaA **1104** fn.

[78] On ***Vaḷabhā,mukha,*** the Saṁyutta Comy says that falling into the great ocean here is like falling down the precipice of the Great Hell (*mahā,naraka*) (SA 3:75). According to SED, *vaḍabhā,mukha* (Skt) is the name of the entrance to hell. See Tha:N 274 n1104.

In both the verses, we find the imageries of dangerous landscape—of water in **Tha 88bc** and of an abyss in **Tha 89b**. In **the Pātāla Sutta** (S 36.4), the Buddha states that the "abyss" (*pātāla*) is not a hell in the the great ocean.[79] To the ancient Indians, who like other pre-scientific cultures, believed that the world was flat and if we went too far, we would fall off into the abyss—the Buddha is simply saying that this is not so! "Abyss" is simply "a term (*adhivacana*)" for painful bodily feelings.

Similarly in the Tāla,puṭa Thera,gāthā, the word "abyss" is used in a figurative sense, and which is attended by the imageries of water, especially the flood (*ogha*) and, interestingly, of "bonds" (*gantha*) (**Tha 89c**). All these figures fit together as they refer to the same thing, namely, the mental cankers (*āsava*).[80]

In other words, Tāla,puṭa is poetically (he was a dance manager, after all!) expressing his desire to be free from the four cankers, represented by India's four great rivers. *Pātāla* fits in nicely in a geographical way, as these names are lined up in a progressively greater distance.[81]

The figurative usage of *pātāla* is further attested by two suttas in the Saṁyutta. A verse in **the Viveka Sutta** (S 9.1) has these two lines:

Hard to cross, indeed, is the dusty abyss:	*pātāla,rajo hi duruttamo*	
Don't let dust of sensuality drag you down.	*mā taṁ kāma,rajo avāhari*	(S 759ab/9.1/1:197)

The Commentary here glosses *pātāla,raja* as "the dust of defilements" (*kilesa,rajo*, SA 1:288).

In fact, there is even a discourse entitled **Pātāla Sutta** (S 36.4), "the Discourse on the Abyss," where one who gives in to feelings is described as follows:

He has not risen out of the abyss,	*na so pātāle paccuṭṭhāsi*	
Nor has he found a foothold.	*atho gadham pi n'ajjhagā*	(S 36.4/4:206)

And the one who endures feelings and trembles not at them is described as follows:

He has risen out of the abyss,	*sa ce pātāle paccuṭṭhāsi*	
He has also found a foothold.	*atho gadham pi ajjhagā*	(S 36.4/4:207)

In fact, the Sutta expressly defines *pātāla* as "the painful bodily feelings."[82]

1105. The disciplined monk is often compared in the Suttas to an intelligent or tamed elephant. In fact, Tāla,puṭa is invoking a familiar imagery. **The Dhaniya Sutta** (Sn 1.2) has this verse:

Like a leading bull, having burst its bonds,	*usabho-r-iva chetva bandhanaṁ (iti bhagavā)*	
like an elephant, breaking through galoci creepers,	*nāgo pūti,lataṁ va dālayitvā*	
never again shall I enter a womb—	*n'āhaṁ puna upessaṁ gabbha,seyyaṁ*	
rain therefore rain if you wish.	*atha ce patthayasi pavassa deva.*	(Sn 29)

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[79] S 36.4/4:206 f; on the hells as metaphors, see **Bāla,paṇḍita S** (M 129) = SD 2.22 Intro.

[80] "**Mental cankers**," *āsava.* The term *āsava* (lit "cankers") comes from *ā-savati* "flows towards" (ie either "into" or "out" towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints ("deadly taints," RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsavas*: the cankers of (1) sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh'-āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjâsava*) (D 16.1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as "floods" (*ogha*) and "yokes" (*yoga*). The list of three cankers (omitting the canker of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: āsava.

[81] According to **Norman,** *-khitta* in *Pātāla,khitta* can be derived from *kṣetra* ("field, region," ie country); cf "satrapy" (generic name for the provinces of ancient Median and Persian empires and their heirs, the Sassanid and Hellenistic empires, northwest of India): Tha:N 275 n1104.

[82] *Sarīrakānaṁ dukkhānaṁ vedanānaṁ adhivacanaṁ yad idaṁ pātālo* (S 36.4.4/4:206,12).

The Brahma,deva Sutta (S 6.3) describes a worthy monk as on "aloof from the crowd, with peaceful mind, | He fares like a tamed elephant (*nāgo'va danto*), unperturbed."[83]

Tāla,puṭa, an erstwhile actor and dancer understandably has memory flashes of "signs of beauty" (*subha nimitta*), and he hopes to be rid of them once and for all, that is, by the experience of a higher beauty, that of dhyana. **The Sall'atthena Sutta** (S 36.6) makes an important observation here: where an uninstructed worldling feels pain, he suffers *twice*: he feels it physically and also mentally. Then, he reactively resorts to sensual pleasure as a means of escape, "because, bhikshus, the uninstructed ordinary person knows no other escape than through sensual pleasure."[84]

The awakened person feels only one kind of pain, the physical, that is on the body level, but since he understands the true nature of the body, he is not affected by it. By understanding the true nature of feelings, the noble disciple overcomes suffering and destroys his defilements. We find this refrain towards the end of the verses of every elder in the second half of **the Apadāna:**

The defilements are burnt up in me	*kilesā jhāpitā mayhaṁ*	
all existences have been abolished	*bhavā sabbe samūhatā*	
like an elephant that's burst its bonds	*nāgo va bandhānaṁ chetvā*	
I dwell free from mental cankers.	*viharāmi anāsavo*	(Ap 388.205/316, etc)

1106. From Tha 1123, we deduce that Tāla,puṭa, like Anuruddha and the Sakya youths,[85] have not become a monk because of debts. Tāla,puṭa is reflecting in a spiritual manner, regarding his spiritual development. An unawakened person creates karma endlessly and is relentlessly pursued by them, like a debtor being pursued by a creditor. **The Iṇa Sutta** (A 6.45) explains using various similes how karma is like debts and interests.[86]

Furthermore, the Buddha has declared that if a monastic is unawakened, he or she lives on the country's food as a *debtor*. In **the Cīvara Sutta** (S 16.11), Mahā Kassapa declares, "I ate the country's almsfood as a debtor (*sāṇa*), but on the eighth final knowledge arose."[87] Bakkula, too, makes the same statement in **Bakkula S** (M 124).[88]

When we keep to the Dharma training (that is, life the Dharmafarer's life), we accumulate, as it were, the seven noble treasures (*ariya,dhana*), namely, faith (*saddhā*), moral virtue (*sīla*), moral shame (*hiri*), moral fear (*ottappa*), deep learning (*bahu,sacca*), charity (*cāga*) and wisdom (*paññā*).[89] These qualities are said to be of great assistance (*bahu,kāra,dhamma*) since they help us to become one of the Three Jewels, that is, the Jewel of the Community of Disciples (*saṅgha,ratana*).

Tāla,puṭa's musings before he goes into retreat ends here.

1107. In this section, we have the Tāla,puṭa's verses admonishing himself to go into retreat. He reminds himself, how as a layman he has turned to the homeless life. Now that he is a monk, he should be asserting himself in his spiritual task.

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[83] S 568/6.3/1:141 = SD 12.4.

[84] S 36.6.8c/4:208 = SD 5.5. Comy: The escape is mental concentration, the path and the fruit, but he does not know this, knowing only sensual pleasure. (SA 3:77)

[85] The going forth of Anuruddha, Nandiya, Kimbila, Bhagu, Kuṇḍadhana, Revata, Ānanda and other Sakya clansmen is mentioned in **Naḷakapāna S** (M 68.1-5/1462 f) = SD 37.4.

[86] A 6.45/3:351-354 = SD 37.5.

[87] S 16.11/2:221 = SD 34.16.

[88] M 124.38/3:127) = SD 3.15. The Comy lists 4 ways of using the requisites: (1) as a thief (*theyya,paribhoga,* lit eating by theft), by a morally depraved monastic; (2) as a debtor (*iṇa,paribhoga*), the unreflective use by a virtuous monk; (3) as an heir (*dayajja,paribhoga*), by the 7 learners (*sekha*); and (4) as an owner (*sāmi,paribhoga*), by an arhat (SA 2:199). MA 4:196 glosses *sāṇa* as *sa,raṇa* [= *sa* + *araṇa,* desire, passion, fault] = *sa,kilesa.* SA 2:199 reads *sāṇo ti sa,kileso, sa,iṇo* [with a debt] *hutvā.* Cf *a,raṇa* ("without conflict," M 139.13-14/235-237) = *arajo* (freedom from dust), *nikkileso* (freedom from defilement) (MA 5:32).

[89] **Ariya,dhana Ss 1-2** (A 7.5-6/4:4-6) = SD 37.6.

1108. Tāla,puṭa muses on the beauty of nature again to fire up his mind into putting forth effort in his spiritual practice. By now we can see that he has a fondness for the sky and birds [**1102 f**]. Again here he thinks of the beautifully feathered birds and thunder in the forest, as if he were meditating there [**1136**].

1109. There is a hint of nostalgia about the people and pleasures that Tāla,puṭa has left behind. So he reminds himself of his new spiritual status.

1110. Tāla,puṭa reminds himself of his difficult task ahead, and that, like the Buddha sitting alone under the Bodhi Tree on the Great Awakening night, he too, is alone with his mind in this spiritual quest. He has to arm himself with wholesome qualities to fight Māra's host of defilements, which is really an inner battle. In short, there is no turning back for him in the quest for nirvana. This is the rare occasion when we find war imagery, that is, a peaceful use of war imagery.

1111. Tha 1111c says that "the trembling mind is like [resembles] a monkey" (*cittaṁ calaṁ makkaṭa,-sannibham iti*), that is, the mind that is troubled by lust (**Tha 1111d**).[90] **The Valliya Thera,gāthā** has similar verses:

> A monkey, having approached the five-door hut,
> goes around from door to door, strikes it again and again. (Tha 125)
>
> Be still, monkey, do not run! For, this is not for you as it was before.
> You are restrained by wisdom (now): you will not stray far away. (Tha 126)

1112. As an erstwhile entertainer, Tāla,puṭa is only too familiar with sensual pleasures. Now he has a good idea that worldly pleasures lead only to pain, even to hellish states. All this starts and grows in the mind; so it needs to be tamed.

1113. Once again, Tāla,puṭa thinks of nature and its beings. Although by now we know that he loves the birds, there is a tinge of apprehension as he mentions the wild animals (tigers and leopards), as they can be dangerous animals. He reminds himself not to be attached to the body; for, fear arises from attachment (Dh 212-216). He has long thought of going on this retreat, and shall not fail.

1114. Tāla,puṭa defines his spiritual goal more clearly now in terms of the method and the goal. The method is mental cultivation beginning with the five faculties (*indriya*), that is, faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.[91] Of the five faculties, in practical terms, mindfulness (*sati*) is the most important, as it keeps all the five in harmony so that they are effective bringing about mental focus and dhyana.

When dhyana is attained, the meditator emerges from it with even greater mental focus, and goes on to work with the model of the seven awakening factors (*bojjhaṅga*) is used, that is, mindfulness, investigation of mental states, effort, zest, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity.[92] At this point, with the attainment of awakening, the faculties become powers (*bala*).[93]

In theory, Tāla,puṭa knows all this needs to be done. Now it is a matter to putting them into practice.

1115. Now Tāla,puṭa reflects on the noble eightfold path. Right view underlies all the other seven factors, and which is what makes them all "right" (*sammā*).[94] The path comprises of the understanding of

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[90] In **Assutava S 1** (S 12.61), the monkey represents the mind's need to grasp a mental object every moment, just as a monkey swaying from tree to tree must hold on to a branch each time: (S 12.61/2:94 f) = SD 20.2 Intro (3); see also **Cha,pāṇa S** (S 35.247/3:198-201) = SD 9.15 Intro (2).

[91] See **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50/5:225 f) = SD 10.4.

[92] See **(Bojjhaṅga) Sīla S** (S 46.3/5:67-70) = SD 10.15.

[93] See SD 10.5.

[94] See **Mahā Cattārīsaka S** (M 117/3:71-78) = SD 7.10.

the four truths, the abandoning of craving, the cultivation of the path itself, and the realization of the goal, summarized as the four noble truths.

1116. At this point, Tāla,puṭa applies the first noble truth, that of suffering (*dukkha*), to the five aggregates, that is, the mind-body model of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. Understanding how these aggregates work leads us to abandon their source, that is, craving. Hence, suffering is ended here and now.

1117. From reflecting on the unsatisfactoriness (*dukkhatā*) of the aggregates, Tāla,puṭa goes on to reflect on impermanence (*aniccatā*) as suffering. The impermanent can only bring upon us suffering when we try to look for something permanent, which causes the mind to wander and proliferate with thoughts seeking the unseekable. Hence, the mind has to be restrained.[95] The best way to restrain ourselves is to keep to keep to the precepts or to holy life. The section of Tāla,puṭa's "self-admonishment" ends here.

1118. Here begins the section on Tāla,puṭa's musing on his life as a monk. He reminisces how he first thought of himself as a monk, that he was unsightly (compared to when he was an entertainer), and that he was reviled on his almsround, probably by disappointed fans. Despite all this, or because of it, he reminds himself to keep to the Teacher's Word.

1119. Perhaps as a novice monk (*navaka bhikkhu*), that is, a newly ordained monk, Tāla,puṭa did not conduct himself decorously while on almsround, and was thus reviled. So now he reminds himself to be more restrained, especially to let go of sensual thoughts that he was so used to as an entertainer. He could well have reflected on the Buddha's admonition as recorded in **the Dhammapada:**

A monk who while still young,	*Yo have daharo bhikkhu*	
devotes himself to the Buddha's Teaching,	*yuñjati buddha,sāsane*	
brightens this world	*so imaṁ lokaṁ pabhāseti*	
like the moon free of clouds.	*abbhā mutto 'va candimā*	Dh 382

1120. Tāla,puṭa's thoughts on his practice take on a more serious tone now as he muses on taking up five of the thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*).[96]

1121. As noted above [1121ab n], the Commentary is not sure of the word *phalesī,* interpreting it as meaning "looking for fruits." It is actually a future active participle meaning "about to fruit," which makes better sense, considering Tāla,puṭa's wish to practice. He chides his "mind" (that is, his initial lack of resolve), thus: you are like a man wishing for fruits, plants a tree, and then when it is about to fruit, wishes to uproot it.[97] In other words, he at first decides to work for awakening, but slackens even before attaining the fruit. Or, on a higher level, Talapuṭa thinks: Caught up in samsara, I have created so much karma, but I am going to stop them before they fruit.

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[95] See ***Nimitta* & *Anuvyañjana*** = SD 19.14.

[96] The 13 ascetic practices are as follows: (1) wearing dust-heal robes, (2) wearing only the triple robes, (3) taking only almsfood, (4) going house to house on almsround (5) taking the almsfood in one sitting, (6) taking food from the almsbowl, (7) refusing further food, (8) dwelling in the forest, (9) dwelling at the foot of a tree, (10) dwelling in the open, (11) dwelling in a cemetery, (12) being satisfied with whatever dwelling, (13) sleeping in a sitting posture (V 3:15, M 1:30, 3:40 ff (items 1, 3, 5, 8-13); A 3:220 (items 1, 5-7, 9, 10-13), 5:219 (items 1, 5-13); B 1:59; Nm 188 (items 1-4, 7, 8, 12, 13); J 3:342, 4:8; Miln 133, 348, 351; Vism 59, 65, 72, 80; SnA 494; DhA 1:68, 2:32, 4:30; Vism 2/59-83, Dhutaṅga,niddesa). See **Bakkula S** (M 124) = SD 3.15 Intro (2).

[97] *Yathā koci puriso phalāni icchanto phala,rukkhe ropetvā tato aladdhamphalo va te mulato chindituṁ icchati* (ThaA 3:156). Norman says that Comy's misinterpretation is due to a misunderstanding of *phalesi:* see Tha:N 277 n 1121.

1122. Tāla,puṭa reflects that the mind, because it is formless, can be lost far away in thoughts, but the results of such wandering thoughts, motivated by sensual pleasure, can only be very painful. This verse is very similar to this Dhammapada verse:

The far-ranging solitary wanderer,	*dūraṅgamaṁ eka,caraṁ*	
bodiless, lying in a cave,	*asarīraṁ guhā,sayaṁ*	
that mind, who would restrain,	*ye cittaṁ saññamessanti*	
frees himself from Māra's bonds.	*mokkhanti Māra,bandhanā.*	Dh 37

The Commentaries explain that the mind is said to be "**lying in a cave**" (*guhā,sayaṁ*)—or "**in a cave-home**" (**1134**)[98]—because there is no bodily structure for the mind, and no distinction of form such as the colour blue, and so on: as such it is called formless.[99]

Finally, he overcomes all his procrastinations and wanders forth into the solitary life to work for nirvana. Here, the Commentary quotes **the Makkaṭa Sutta** (S 47.7), which describes how foolish curious monkeys are caught in a trap while the wise ones keep away from it.[100] It is possible that the Commentary is actually referring to **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61), where the mind is compared to a monkey swinging from tree to tree in a forest:

> Just as a monkey, bhikshus, roaming through the forest and mountain-side takes hold of one branch, letting that go, then grabs another, even so, bhikshus, that which is called "mentation" (*citta*),[101] and "mind" (*mano*), and "consciousness" (*viññāṇa*), arises as one and ceases as another, just as night is to day [during the night and during the day].
>
> (S 12.61.7 f/ 2:95 = S 12.61.7/2:96) = SD 20.2

The meaning here is that the mind is like a monkey jumping from branch to branch, always holding on to a branch—meaning that the mind always needs a mind-object, and always looking for a new more pleasurable one. The monkey simile also appears in **1111**.[102]

1123. Tāla,puṭa recalls that he has not become a monk for any wrong reason, but still he has till then allowed himself to be dissuaded by his playful mind to defer his solitary spiritual training.

1124. Tāla,puṭa recalls his first thoughts when he becomes a monk: he is inspired to live the simple renunciant's life, "desiring little" (*appicchatā*), to overcome hypocrisy (*makkha-p,pahānaṁ*), and to be true to his spiritual calling, that is, the "the stilling of pain" (*vūpasamo dukkhassa*). But apparently, he is struggling with his vacillating mind that is probably thinking back about the pleasures he is missing. In fact, this suspicion is confirmed in the next verse.

1125. He has firmly decided to have nothing to do with sensual pleasures, and he has cut familiar ties with loved ones, but unconditionally accept others, even the unbeloved. For, to become a monk is give up the biological family to embrace a larger community of beings, indeed of all life. He is firm in not falling

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[98] Or, *guhā,geha* ("cave-home") at **1134.**

[99] DhA 1:304; ThaA 3:156; cf ThaA 3:159.

[100] S 47.7/5:148 f = SD 41.7.

[101] *Citta, mano* and *viññāṇa* are all synonyms here. Bodhi uses "mentality" for *mano* (S:B 595 & 769 n154). However, here I am influenced by BDict: *citta*, where *adhicitta* = "higher mentality." Moreover, as Bodhi himself notes: "***Mano*** serves as the third door of action (along with body and speech) and as the sixth internal sense base (along with the five physical sense bases); as the mind base it coordinates the data of the other five senses and also cognizes mental phenomena (*dhammā*), its own special class of objects" (S:B 769 n154). As such, "mentation" (a function) is clearly a better tr of *mano* than "mentality" (more of a state). This is just a bit of pedantry probably limited to this passage. Elsewhere, it is best (as Bodhi himself admits) to translate *citta* and *mano* as "mind," as most translators now do, too.

[102] See also **Cha,pāṇā S** (S 35.247/4:198-201 = SD 19.15) for a similar monkey and other animal similes for the mind.

back to his old way; for, he is revulsed at it: he experiences *nibbidā*[103] after hearing the Buddha's answer to his question, as recorded in **the Tāla,puṭa Sutta** (S 42.2).[104]

Evidently, there is a wordplay on ***vanta***, "what has been vomitted." At first blush, the context of *vanta* evokes Tāla,puṭa's revulsion at the world, but here it has a deeper meaning, as the word is used in this famous verse:[105]

Assaddho akataññū ca	Not through faith, and knowing the unmade,
sandhi-c,chedo ca yo naro	The man who has broken the connection,
hatâvakāso vantāso	eliminated the occasion (for rebirth), given up desire—
sa ve uttama,poriso.	He is indeed a supreme person. (Dh 97; cf Dh 383)

Here, for ***vantāsa,*** in the negative sense, Alsdorf[106] quotes the Arḍha,māgadhī *vantāsī* and Pāli *vantādo*[107] in the sense of "eating, ie taking, what has been abandoned by someone else." He points to the fact that in the Jain text, Isibhasiy*āim* 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.[108] 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).

The Dhammapada Commentary defines the positive sense of *vantāsa,* thus: "*vantāso* is one has done what needs to be done regarding the four paths by the abandoning of all expectations."[109] The PED defines it as "one who has given up all wishes."[110] As such, we can translate it as "one who has abandoned desire."

Another wordplay in the same context of Dh 97 is found in the next verse.

1126. In **1126c,** Tāla,puṭa reflects, "**The self, born of what you have done**" (*ajjhatta,sambhavo kataññūtāya te*), which is one of the most interesting sentences in the poem by way of its wordplay. The word *kataññūtā* means "the knowledge or acknowledging what has been done," that is, gratitude. In the opposite sense, there is the adjective, *akataññū* (Skt *akṛtajña*), which literally means "not knowing what has been done (for one)," that is, ungrateful. Apparently, neither sense fits the context here, but there is another sense. (See preceding commentary.)

The Dhammapada Commentary explains: "he is *akataññū* because he knows nirvana as the uncreated, that is, he has realized nirvana."[111] The BHS *akṛtajñā,* like the Pāli *akataññū,* is well known as having two senses, one good and one bad.[112] This is a good example of a pun or wordplay (*śleṣa*).

In the Tāla,puṭa Thera,gāthā, ***kataññūtāya te*** translates "of what you have done," that is, as a result of the mind's actions. The continuity and frequency of such thoughts and the actions they induce gives us a false sense of an abiding entity or soul. In an ironic, even sarcastic, sense, Tāla,puṭa is saying, "Thanks to you, mind, I have this self, bringing me all this pain: what have I done to you to deserve all this?"

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[103] See ***Nibbidā*** = SD 20.1.

[104] S 42.2/4:306-308 = SD 20.8.

[105] See **Dh 97** = SD 10.6.

[106] 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 Dhp 97 as an example of the use of *vanta* in the sense of 'abandoned' (p26 n7), he dealt with it only as a *bahuvrīhi* 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.)

[107] *Vantādo,* lit "refuse eater, crow" (PED).

[108] Ludwig Alsdorf, 1955:18; see prec n.

[109] *Catūhi maggehi kattabba,kiccassa katattā sabbā āsā iminā vantâ ti vantāso.* (DhA 2:188)

[110] See PED: vanta.

[111] *Akataṁ nibbānaṁ jānātî ti* ***akataññū*** *sacchikata,nibbāno ti attho* (DhA 2:188). See PED: kataññu.

[112] See Norman, "Dhammapada 97: a misunderstood paradox," 1979d:327 f.

1127. From this verse (until **1133**), Tāla,puṭa muses on his mind as the source of rebirths. From this first verse, he evidently understands and accepts the Buddha's teaching on karma, that social class and status do not arise with birth, but as a result of our actions. This teaching is given in detail, for example, in **the Vāseṭṭha Sutta** (M 98 = Sn 3.9) (social aspect of karma),[113] and **the Sāleyyaka Sutta** (M 41)[114] and **the Saṅkhār'upapatti Sutta** (M 120) (on the psychological aspect of karma).[115]

1128. This verse's idea continues from **1127** (which deals human and divine births), while this verse deals with the lower births (asuras, animals, hell-beings, and pretas). All such births are the result of what we have thought and done, that is, to say, the workings of the mind.

1129. Tāla,puṭa's understanding of the centrality of the mind becomes more clear and certain. He understands how his mind affects and controls his behaviour, yet all of which are false, just a play.

1130. The wild mind can be trained and controlled like a skilled mahout taming a wild or drunken elephant (see also **1105**, **1139**).

1131. He is more confident now to let go of this world, and cross over the floods of defilements,[116] leaving his old mind behind, for the far shore that is nirvana. The crossing-over is made easier with the help of a teacher, that is, none other than the Buddha himself.

1132. His confidence in crossing over to the far shore of nirvana grows greater. He now clearly knows he is not alone: many others have crossed over, and are free from suffering.

1133. He is now very sure that there is nowhere in this world or even the highest heavens, where true and lasting happiness can ever be found. For whatever exists has to exist in time, and as such has to be impermanent.

1134. With this verse begins his determination to work towards awakening. Apparently, the verses for here on, refer to his actual solitary life and practice in nature. Hence, he seems to be repeating, in parts, what he has mused before, especially his musings on nature. He begins by recollecting the impure nature (*asubha*) of his own body, a bag with two holes and nine oozing streams of impurities.[117] The elder nun **Sumedhā** puts it in a very dramatic reflection, thus:

Kim iva pūti,kāyaṁ asuciṁ	This foul body that is impure,
savana,gandhaṁ bhayānakaṁ	smelling of oozes, frightful—
kuṇapaṁ abhisaṁviseyyaṁ	Why should I cling to a cadaver? —
bhastaṁ saki,paggharitaṁ asuci,puṇṇaṁ	An ever leaking bag, full of impurities. (Thī 466)[118]

1135. Tāla,puṭa (here and in the next verse) returns to his musing of his solitary practice amongst nature: he observes the wilboars and antelopes [**1113**], the hillside ledge at the peak [**1108**], the beautiful open space [**1144, 1137**], the fresh rain-drenched grove [**1102**]. Apparently, here he is addressing himself, when he says, "**having gone to your cave home, you will rejoice there**" [**1103**]. It is improbable that the mind is addressed here, since elsewhere it is always reprimanded, and in the last verse (**1145)**, he speaks of the mind has being held under Māra's sway. The "**cave home**" (*guhā,geha*) of course alludes to the mind [**II: 1122**].

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[113] M 98/2:196 = Sn 3.9/115-123 = SD 37.1.
[114] M 41/1:285-290 = SD 5.7.
[115] M 120.3-36/3:99-103 = SD 3.4.
[116] See Modern Commentary on **1104,** under "mental cankers."
[117] *Ath'assa navahi sotehi asucī savati sabbadā* (Sn 197) = SD 4.8(6) = **Nigrodha,miga J** (J 12/1:148); ThaA 2:135.
[118] See Thī:N 167 n466.

1136. Here again we have the imagery of colourful sky birds [**1103**] and thunder mentioned in connection with meditation [**1108**]. This time, he can see that he is often in deep meditation, almost invisble as he blends with the nature around him.

1137. In this verse onwards (until **1139**), he sings of the beauty of nature and his own spiritual progress. We have an imagery of growth here: the grass sprouts "four fingers tall" almost instantaneously after the rain, and the grove is ablaze with colourful blossom. It is interesting that he combines the imageries of earth ("the grove is full abloom") and of the sky ("like a radiant cloud"). Indeed from the vantage of the hills, he sees the sky and earth as a continuous stretch. He feels himself as a natural and connected part of everything around him: "**I'll lie like a tree amongst the hills**," and there is the imagery of feeling, "**that are soft as cotton to me**." He finds nature invigorating and comforting.

1138. The catskin bag (*biḷāra,bhasta*) simile shows the amount of energy and patience needed for training the mind. The skin has to be well cleaned and prepared, with constant and proper rubbing, until it is soft and silky. This simile also appears in **the Kakacûpama Sutta** (M 21) where we have some helpful details:[119]

> "Bhikshus, suppose there were a catskin bag that was rubbed [treated], well rubbed, thoroughly well rubbed, soft, silky, rid of rustling, rid of crackling. Then, a man came along with a stick or a potsherd, and said, '…I shall make it rustle and crackle.'
>
> What do you think, bhikshus? Could that man…make it rustle and crackle?"
>
> "No, bhante! (M 21.18/1:128) = SD 38.1

The simile's import is clear: the well trained mind is still and silent, undisturbed by sense-stimuli, and mindful.

Tāla,puṭa is determined to be the lord (*issara*), not the slave, of his mind: he wants to be his own refuge. Here the word *issara* is an Indian ancient word for "Almighty God," that is, to say he does not seek for succour or salvation in an external entity, but he looks within for the true creator, that is, his mind, that creates all his sufferings. The usual Buddhist term here would be *nātha*, as evident from this famous Dhammapada verse:

Attā hi attano nātho	You are your own refuge;	
ko hi nātho paro siyā	for, who else can a refuge be?	
attanā 'va sudantena	with a self [mind] that is well-tamed,	
nāthaṁ labhati dullabhaṁ	you've found a refuge difficult to find.	(Dh 160)

The catskin bag (*biḷāra,bhasta*) is an illustration of the necessary energy for taming the mind. It seems that catskin required a lot of work to cure it, to make it supple; so does the mind. For the mind to be supple is meant that one can do with it what one likes. "Oh, today I'll stay in third jhana for a change" -- if he can do so, he has a supple, well-tamed mind.

1139. The Cha,pāṇā Sutta (S 35.247) explains how the physical senses and the mind are each like a wild animal leashed together, and each struggles, seeking its familiar haunt. The eye is like *a snake* that seeks for an anthill to hide in; the ear is like *a crocodile* that runs into water for safety; the nose is like *a bird* trying to fly into the sky; the tongue is like *a dog* going into a village to scavenge; the body is like *a jackal* haunting a charnel ground; and the mind is like *a monkey* in a forest.[120]

The practice of the precepts and sense-restraint keeps the beasts of the five physical senses on a tight leash, and might even keep them tame for a while. However, it is only when we have some skill with mindfulness and meditation that the monkey of the mind can really be leashed and trained. Or, as Tāla,-puṭa puts it, "just as a skilled mahout [controls] an elephant." A mahout not only knows about the behav-

[119] In Kakacûpama S, the simile applies to right speech.
[120] S 35.247/4:198-201 = SD 19.15.

iour of an elephant, but he also shows great lovingkindness of it. As such, the elephant [the mind] always obeys him—even when it is in a rut, a time when the elephant is highly energetic and fierce. Indeed, a spiritual person is often compared to a clever or tamed elephant, and the Dhammapada has a whole canto called **Nāga Vagga** (the elephant chapter) (Dh 320-333, ch 23).

1140. This verse and the next five comprise the conclusion of Tāla,puṭa's Thera,gāthā, where he sings of his spiritual success. The animal imagery continues here, and this time the untamed mind is compared to an unbroken or unruly horse.[121] A tamed and disciplined mind is like a thoroughbred (*ājānīya*).[122]

This Pali term is interesting because it can also mean "the one who understands [knows]," taking it as derived from *ājānāti* ("he understands"),[123] that is, he understand how his mind works, has tamed and liberated it. As such, a morally virtuous and mentally disciplined person is called a "thoroughbred" (*puris'ājānīya*).[124] There are a number of suttas bearing the title of "Thoroughbred."[125] Such a person, with a tamed mind, is always happy, and easily enters into a calm mental state, even dhyana.

1141. The mind is here represented by an elephant [**1139**]. The strong rope represents sustained attention, and the unshakable sunken post is samadhi.[126] The Commentaries on **the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas** (D 22; M 10) give an interesting and helpful explanation of the meditation imageries briefly stated by Tāla,puṭa (**1141**), and concludes with a famous but untraced quote from the Ancients (*porāṇa*):[127]

> Just as man would tie to a post a calf that needs to be tamed,
> Even so here should one tie one's own mind tightly to the object of mindfulness.
> (DA 3:762 f = MA 1:247 = PmA 2:488 f = VA 2:405 f = Vism 268 f)

Guarding the mind is the preliminary and supportive practice for the cultivation of mindfulness. We guard our minds by not taking any sense-experience for more than what it really is. This is clearly stated in the Buddha's famous instruction, called **the Bāhiya teaching** (given to Bāhiya Dāri,ciriya and to the elderly Māluṅkya,putta):

> Here, regarding things[128] seen, heard, sensed[129] and cognized [known] by you:[130]

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[121] See **Khaluṅkha S** (S 8.14/4:190-195) = SD 7.9, for a comprehensive list of the unruliness of such a horse, and parallel conduct in an undisciplined human.

[122] M 1:367; S 1:6; S 1:168 = Sn 462; Tha 174; Thī 114.

[123] DhA 4:1 (***ājānīyâ*** *ti yaṁ assa,dama,sārathi kāraṇaṁ kāreti, tassa khippaṁ jānana,samatthā,* "~ means the horse that has been trained by a trainer; it knows what to do; it has the knowledge and ability when to speed"); J 5:260 (***ājānīyāvâ*** *ti kāraṇâkaraṇa,vijānanakā va,* "~ is one who knows what is proper or improper in terms of action).

[124] A 9.10/5:324l; also ThaA 2:183 on Sumana Tha (***ājānīyenâ*** *ti puris'ājānīyena,* "~ means a thoroughbred person");

[125] Eg **Ājānīya S 1-6** (A 6.5-7/3:282-284).

[126] See foll n.

[127] For the passage and a study, see **The Taming of the Bull** = SD 8.2, esp (4).

[128] "Regarding things seen, heard, sensed and cognized," *diṭṭha,suta,muta,viññatabbesu dhammesu,* lit "in things that are to be seen, to be heard, to be senses, to be cognized." See foll n.

[129] *Muta*, that is, what is tasted, smelt and touched. See prev n.

[130] This verse is the crux of the sutta and *satipaṭṭhāna*. In sutta terms, such experiences are not to be seen as "This is mine" (*etam mama*) (which arises through craving, *taṇhā*), or as "This I am" (*eso'ham asmi*) (due to conceit, *māna*), or as "This is my self" (*eso me attā*) (due to wrong view, *diṭṭhi*) (**Anattā,lakkhaṇa S**, S 3:68). In short, such experiences are not "beliefs" but direct experiences of reality. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. In simple Abhidhamma terms, such a process should be left at the sense-doors, and not be allowed to reach the mind-door. As long as the experience of sensing is mindfully left at its sense-door and taken for what it really is, that is an experience of reality (*param'attha*); after it has reached the mind-door and evaluated, it becomes conventional (*paññatti*) reality, that brings one suffering due to greed, hate or delusion. When such sense-experiences are mindfully left on the reality level, one would in due course see the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. See Mahasi Sayadaw, *A Discourse on Malukyaputta Sutta,* tr U Htin Fatt, Rangoon, 1981.

in the seen	there will only be the seen;
in the heard	there will only be the heard;
in the sensed	there will only be the sensed;
in the cognized	there will only be the cognized.

(U 1.10/6-8 = SD 34.3; M 35.95.12/4:73 = SD 5.9)

This passage is often said today to refer to the practice of "bare attention," that is, simply (without comment) noting phenomena as they arise and fall away. In other words, this is a practical summary of how to train our attention so that distraction and suffering does not arise. This is an important aspect of mindfulness (*sati*), with which we simply notice and remember how events rise and fall, which is called dharma investigation (*dhamma,vicaya*).

As we sustain this effort in mindfulness and noting, the mental effort, too, is sustained, which leads to a blissful sense of empowerment, a joyful and keen interest, known as zest (*pīti*), which in turn, unifies mind and body in singular bliss (*passaddhi*). Such a calm and blissful mind easily slips into samadhi, and on to equanimity (*upekkhā*), wherein we truly untroubled by the vicissitudes of life, and begin to see true reality.[131] We stand at the threshold of awakening.

1142. Sustained mindfulness and proper meditation brings us back to the right path, and to stay on it to journey on towards our true destiny. Mindfulness also allows wisdom to grow on account of our inner stillness, so that we are able to discriminate the true from the false. Whether we are lay or ordained, the basic course of training starts with some level of faith (*saddhā*), which energizes us to commit to a morally virtuous life (*sīla*), which in turn conduces to mental concentration (*samādhi*), leading to wisdom (*paññā*).

The lay person's spiritual training is summarized in **the Dīgha,jānu Sutta** (A 8.54). The lay spiritual training begins with faith in the Three Jewels: in the Buddha as the True Teacher, the Dharma as the Right Method (the path), and the Sangha as the Community of Saints (that is, the goal of the path). While faith serves as a driving force, our actual lifestyle is built on moral virtue (supporting our mental cultivation and mindfulness), and charity, our positive and proactive relationship with others. All this become the bases for wisdom, which begins with our attention constantly "directed to [noting] the rising and falling away [of phenomena] that is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering."[132]

1143. The verse makes an important statement of the nature of the unawakened mind: on account of the four perversions (*vipallāsa*),[133] the mind is "led around in a circle like a cow."[134] What are the four perversions? **The Vipallāsa Sutta** (A 4.49) speaks of four modes of perversion, that is,

what is impermanent	is taken to be permanent;
what is painful	is taken to be pleasurable;
what is not self	is taken to be a (or *the*) self; and

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[131] This is a summary of the awakening factors (*bojjhaṅga*): see **Bojjhaṅga Sīla S** (S 46.3) = SD 10.15.

[132] A 8.54/4:281-285 = SD 5.10.

[133] Comy: ***catub,bipallāsa,vasaṁ*** *anicce niccan ti, asubhe subhan ti, dukkhe sukhan ti, anattani attā ti, imesaṁ catunnaṁ vipallāsānaṁ vasaṁ.* On the 4 *vipallāsā,* see **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:53 = SD 16.11), Nett 85, Vism 683, & BHSD: *viprayāsa.* (Norman at Tha:N 281 n 1143 errs in saying that A 2:53, Nett 85, Vism 683 mentions "only three *vipallāsā*": the "three" refers to the levels—perception (*saññā*), thought (*citta*) and view (*diṭṭhi*)—through which the 4 perversions occur).

[134] Comy: ***Gā,maṇḍalaṁ'va parinesi citta man*** *ti ambho citta, maṁ gāma,dārakaṁ viya ito c'ito ca parikaḍḍhasi* ("~ means 'Hey, mind, like a village boy, you entice me to yourself from here and there.'") PED: ***gāmaṇḍala*** = "'the round of an ox,' like the oxen driven round and round the threshing floor"; cf M 93.18/2:155 which has *gāmaṇḍala*, which Comy glosses as *gāma,dāraka* (MA 3:411). *Gā,maṇḍala* prob simply resolves as *gā* ("going," SED sv) + *maṇḍala* (a circle), ie "going in a circle." PED also has *go,maṇḍala* (sv *go*), "ox-beat, ox-round." See Tha:N 281 n1143 for a fuller discussion, where I think Norman is too free in taking *gāmaṇḍala* as "the circle of the earth" here, but which however translates *go,maṇḍala* (SED sv *go*).

what is impure is taken to be pure.

These four wrong ways of seeing things arises at three levels of mental perversion, getting more intense and addictive each time, that is,

the perversion of perception	(*saññā,vipallāsa*)	how we "recognize" a sense-experience;
the perversion of thought	(*citta,vipallāsa*)	we react to the distorted perception;
the perversion of view	(*diṭṭhi,vipallāsa*)	we harden the thought into a definitive notion.

Here is a well known ancient Indian analogy: a man sees a coiled up piece of rope in the dark and perceives it as *a snake* (= perversion of perception); he assumes that what he has seen *is* a snake (= perversion of thought); he fashions the view that the coiled up object he saw in the dark was a snake, and as such is a *dangerous* object to be destroyed, or at least, avoided (= perversion of view).[135]

If we lose self-control and sink into the depths of perversion, at the level of the perversion of view, we become *addicted* to the unwholesome state. We fall into a predictable need-driven existence: we are being "led around in a circle like a cow."[136] Only through understanding and realizing the Budda Dharma can we break the fetters of perversion.

1144. The imagery of space and movement predominate here. A deer loves the solitude of the forest, and is itself a very silent animal. Again here we have the presence of refreshing rain that also cleanses the air, the plants and the ground of the "uncrowded hills" that Tāla,puṭa rejoices in.

1145. Tāla,puṭa here seems to speak to us directly before he leaves us with his poems. Under the influence of our minds, we think we are enjoying happiness and pleasure, but Māra is delightfully providing us with our every whim and fancy, or giving us promises of happiness and pleasure. This goes on as long as we are ignorant of who and what Māra[137] really is. We can only delight in this world as the servants of our mind and Māra. But we become masters of our own destiny when we see the true nature of the world, and realize that we can rise above all this, to be truly liberated from suffering.

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[135] Candrakirti (600-c650), in Catuḥśataka Ṭīkā, his Comy on Aryadeva's "Treatise of Four Hundred Stanzas" (Catuḥśataka, 3rd cent). See *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha,* 1999:292 n34. See **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:53) = SD 16.11.

[136] **Sāmaññ,phala S** (D 2) uses the simile of "a one-eyed cow, walking in circles" (*go,kāṇā pariyanta,cārinī*) (D 2.5/3:38) = SD 1.4.

[137] In the early texts, **Māra** is mentioned either in a general psychological sense (as a mental experience) or mythologically (as part of a story or imagery). Comys speak of 5 kinds of Māra: (1) the defilements as Māra (*kilesa,māra*), (2) the aggregates as Māra (*khandha,māra*), (3) the karma-formations as Māra (*abhisaṅkhāra,māra*), (4) the deity Māra (*deva,putta Māra*), & (5) death as Māra (*maccu,māra*). (Vism 211; ThaA 2:16, 46; VAṬ:Se 1/481; DAaṬ:Be 1:22, 17:6)

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