

(Gadrabha) Samaṇa Sutta

The Discourse on the Recluse (and the Ass)

[Spiritual learning and growth are effected through spiritual training]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.81/1:229)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

1 Introduction

The Gadrabha Samaṇa Sutta (A 3.81) records the Buddha as declaring that an ass may closely follow behind a herd of cows and regard itself as a cow, but it is still an ass, all the same. Even so, a foolish monastic, without spiritual training, may be closely associated with famous teachers or great establishments, but he remains a foolish monk or nun, all the same. The Dhammapada similarly reminds us:

*Yāva, jīvam ‘pi ce bālo
paṇḍitaṃ payirupāsati
na so dhammaṃ vijānāti
dabbi sūparasam yathā*

Even if a fool, all his life,
draws near to the wise,
he understands not the Dharma,
just as a spoon tastes not the soup. (Dh 64)

*Muhuttam api ce viññū
paṇḍitaṃ payirupāsati
khippaṃ dhammaṃ vijānāti
jivhā sūparasam yathā*

Even if one wise, for just a moment,
draws near to the wise,
he quickly understands the Dharma,
just as the tongue tastes the soup. (Dh 65)

The Gadrabha Sutta is a short discourse on *religious imprinting*. “Imprinting” is a term used in psychology and ethology (a branch of zoology that studies animal behaviour) to describe “any kind of phase-sensitive learning, that is, learning occurring at a particular age or a particular life stage, that is rapid and apparently independent of the consequences of behavior.”¹ It was first used to describe situations in which a person or an animal learns the characteristics of some stimulus, which is therefore said to be “imprinted” onto the subject.



Imprinted geese and cranes flying with an ultralight aircraft
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Christian_Moullec_4.jpg)

¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imprinting_\(psychology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imprinting_(psychology)).

2 Unconscious defence mechanisms

In psychological terms, “imprinting” is very close to, sometimes identical with, such unconscious defence mechanisms² as *transference*, *compensation*, or *identification*. Such psychological defence mechanisms have been described by the Buddha, for example, in **the Khaluṅka Sutta** (A 8.14).³ In modern times, they have been described by Anna Freud (1895-1982), based on the theoretical framework of her father, the German psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who acknowledged their importance in psychoanalysis for the better understanding of the client’s emotions.

2.1 TRANSFERENCE. In therapy context, **transference** refers to a redirection of a client’s feelings from a significant person (usually as a parent, spouse, lover, someone who is admired) to a therapist. (When it is reciprocated by the therapist, it is known as *counter-transference*.) Transference often arises as an erotic attraction to a therapist, but can also manifest in other forms, such as anger, hate, mistrust, dependence, or hero-worship. In religious situations, transference often drives the devotee to treat the teacher or helper as a guru or god.

Transference has been variously defined as “the inappropriate repetition in the present of a relationship that was important in a person’s childhood”,⁴ “the redirection of feelings and desires and especially of those unconsciously retained from childhood toward a new object”,⁵ “a reproduction of emotions relating to repressed experiences, esp[ecially] of childhood, and the substitution of another person...for the original object of the repressed impulses.”⁶

The main negative impact of unconscious defences is where they put us into a “psychological time warp” or “emotional retrospection,” where we relive our desirable or painful past, especially in terms of emotional needs. We react to someone in terms of our unfulfilled wants, or our fears, or our delusions, especially when we really know very little of the person. We are unconsciously but effectively attributing charisma onto the object of devotion. We are doing all this without really knowing why.

There is the classic case of **Vakkali**, as recounted in the Dhammapada Commentary, who on first seeing the Buddha, is physically attracted to him. Vakkali then becomes a monk so that he is able to continue gazing at the Buddha’s person. Aware of Vakkali’s fixation on himself, the Buddha remains silent until the right time.

When the three-month rains-retreat is about to begin, the Buddha tells Vakkali that he should not follow him (the Buddha) around. Vakkali is simply devastated and contemplates suicide. At a very crucial moment, the Buddha appears to him, admonishing him on the true nature of the body so that in great ecstasy, he understands the spiritual teaching and is liberated.⁷

Transference, as such, is a key issue in the psychology of personality and human relationships, one that needs to be properly understood and managed. Secondary transference can cause various other complications in personality and human relationships, to which we shall now turn.

2.1.1 Emotional incest. People sometimes transfer feelings from their parents back to them (emotional incest or covert incest), or to their children (cross-generational entanglements), or to an external subject (person or state) (interpersonal entanglements). **Emotional incest** occurs when a child feels overly responsible for a parent’s emotional well-being beyond normal expectations, or when a parent bonds in an inappropriate, cloying or stifling manner with a child. This usually happens because the parent or parents do not know how to set healthy boundaries. It can occur with one or both parents, between the same sex or the opposite sex. This aberration occurs especially where the parents are emotionally dishonest with themselves, and whose emotional needs are not met by their spouse or other adults.

² In psychodynamics, a *defence mechanism* (or ego defence) is an unconscious reflex or psychological strategies often expressed externally to cope with reality and to maintain self-image (that is, to avoid anxiety or social sanctions). Even healthy persons use different defences, but such a defence becomes pathological only when its persistent use leads to maladaptive behavior such that the individual’s physical and/or mental health is adversely affected.

³ A 8.14/4:190-195 = SD 7.9.

⁴ Leonard H Kapelovitz, *To Love and To Work: A demonstration and discussion of psychotherapy*, 1987: 66.

⁵ Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (8th ed 1976).

⁶ Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language (2nd College Ed 1970).

⁷ On Vakkali, see **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:119-124) = SD 8.8 (incl DhA 25.11/4:118 f).

In an emotionally incestuous relationship, the child becomes a “surrogate spouse,” even though no sexual intercourse occurs. Such a relationship is very harmful to the child, so that he is, as a rule, unable to healthily relate to others, especially with the opposite sex or in marriage. A domineering parent is very likely to become a covert incestuous parent to the child, who will never have a fulfilled married life with the spouse as long as that parent lives. This sort of deviant condition is more likely to arise in a society or family that is rigidly centred around a strong parental figure, especially a patriarch or a matriarch (such as in certain God-religions or strongly Confucianist families or groups).

2.1.2 Interpersonal entanglements in human relationships manifest themselves by way of compulsive behavior motivated by chronic inappropriate emotions, chronic conflicts, or chronic dissociation, such as:

- Chronic guilt: conditioned by being entangled with an authority (guru or god) figure;
- Chronic anger: conditioned by identifying with a victim;
- Chronic anxiety: conditioned by identifying with a hero;
- Chronic sadness: conditioned by identifying a living person with one departed;
- Chronic conflict: conditioned by identifying with two different people;
- Chronic dissociation: conditioned by lack of values or identity or both.

Chronic guilt is a dysfunctional feeling, mostly of fear, sadness, and doubt, when we feel that we have violated, disobeyed or displeased an authority, whether a real person (such as a guru figure) or a virtual figure (such as God or holy being). Very often such an emotion stems from lack of parental love or some kind of parental domination over the growing child, so that the child never really grows up. He or she remains a stunted child in search of a parent-figure, such as a God or guru figure. The chronic guilt may induce the person to be caught up in a rut of ritualistic and religious behaviour spurred by fear and low self-esteem.

Chronic anger is a persistent sense of ill will stimulated by a type of person or situation that reminds us of a loss or hurt, such as those result from family problems where someone is blamed for suffering or loss in the family. A spoilt sibling, for example, could be blamed for the demise of a parent. In work-life, chronic anger could arise through seeing oneself as a victim of office politics or victimization by the employer. Chronic anger can also arise in a parent or sibling who has lost a loved family member through evangelical conversion. Such anger easily arises towards a person or situation that reminds us of the past painful experience.

Chronic anxiety can arise in us if we hero-worship someone and is all out to please that person. This is in some ways similar to chronic guilt except that the root emotion here is more likely to be a great admiration or strong attraction towards someone. This is very common in the early stages of falling in love with someone, and is sometimes called “puppy love.” There is a great desire to please and fear of displeasing the other person. The gnawing fear is that of losing the person’s attention or love.

Chronic sadness can be conditioned by identifying a living person with one departed, that is, we easily project or detect in another person or a situation that reminds us a departed loved one. This sadness pattern is a prolonged mourning that is outside of the Kübler-Ross stages of mourning.⁸ Chronic sadness can be effectively healed through Worden’s “four tasks of grief.”⁹ The cultivation of lovingkindness, especially under the direction of an experienced and compassionate meditation guide, easily removes such sufferings.

Chronic conflict arises from psychological *compartmentalization*, that is, living “separate emotional lives,” a sort of Jekyll-and-Hyde personality. We are leading compartmentalized lives when we identify with two or more different types of isolated lifestyles. For example, we are a member of a religious group but away from it, we live a bohemian life of gambling and drinking. We are often torn between the two,

⁸ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross identified “fives stages of grief”: (1) denial (“This can’t be happening!”); (2) Anger (“Why me? I cannot accept this!”); (3) Bargaining (“Please let him/her live to see the children graduate.”); (4) Depression (“I’m so sad, why bother about anything.”); (5) Acceptance (“It’s going to be OK, I’ve accepted it.”). See *On Death and Dying*, Routledge, 1973; *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*, Simon & Schuster, 2005.

⁹ William Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy*, 3rd ed, Routledge, 2003.

desiring both of them, but fearing that the two worlds would clash, so that we are at a loss as to how to behave appropriately. It is obvious here, we have to abandon the loose life and spiritually upgrade ourselves.

Chronic dissociation is often found in victims of religious oppression (as in the racial politics in Malaysia) and evangelism (as in Singapore), on account of which they lose touch with their cultural or social values, and even their sense of identity. There is often the tacit feeling that the dominating group is wealthier, more socially effective, and as such more successful. Sometimes, such a victim of chronic dissociation may be preoccupied with keeping up with religious Joneses, that they lose touch with Buddhist values and teachings.

2.1.3 Managing personal entanglements. Personal entanglement issues are perpetuated by *denial* (another defence mechanism). What we fail or refuse to see, we cannot deal with. On the other hand, such issues can be corrected, or at least lessened, if they are first understood and accepted. For example, if we notice that we mistrust or violently react to someone who resembles an ex-spouse in some way, or that we are overly compliant to someone who resembles a childhood friend, it could be that there is an underlying issue of personal entanglement.

The next stage is to honestly and calmly reflect, addressing oneself *as a second person* (by way of apostrophic admonishing), where the psychological cause or causes lie. This method is briefly mentioned in **the Vitakka,saṅghāna Sutta** (M 20) by way of “thought reduction,”¹⁰ but used throughout **the Tāla-puta Thera,gāthā** (Tha 1091-1145).¹¹ The principle and process behind this mind-healing method is given in a number of discourses, such as the Sāmañña,phala Sutta (D 2), the Cūḷa Hatthi, padopama Sutta (M 27), the Sāriputta Sutta (S 35.120), and the Apannaka Paṭipada Sutta (A 3.16), thus:

When he cognizes a mind-object with the mind, **he grasps neither its sign nor its detail.**

So long he dwells unrestrained in that mind-faculty, evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure might overwhelm him, to that extent, he therefore keeps himself restrained.

He practises the restraint of it. He guards the restraint of the mind-faculty, he commits himself to the restraint of the mind-faculty.¹²

(D 2.64/1:70; M 27.15/1:180; S 35.120/4:104; A 3.16/113)

In simpler terms, we look closely at the thought-process in this way:

- (1) define the thought (“what am I thinking about here?”); and then
- (2) analyze the thought (“why am I thinking this way?”).

Do not make any effort to give an answer (which would mostly be defensive or intellectualizing). An answer would naturally arise in your mind. Examine that answer, and again ask “why,” and so on until in the end, the thought is no more a problem: the issue is resolved. This way of thinking needs a bit of effort at first, but with some meditation practice, coached by an experienced and compassionate teacher, we would be able to do cultivate wholesome mental habits.

2.1.4 Parataxic distortion. The term *parataxis* (from the Greek, meaning, “to carry along”) and suggests a stringing together of ideas that are not necessarily related. “Parataxic distortion” arises when our evaluation of another is affected by our past (personal life, family, work-life, or social life). For example, a particular feature of a woman might remind us of our own mother, or a particular trait of man might remind us of our father—and this distorts our perception of the individual.

Parataxic distortion is a psychiatric term first used by Harry S Sullivan, a US psychiatrist whose work in psychoanalysis was based on direct and verifiable observation as against the more abstract conceptions of the unconscious mind favoured by Sigmund Freud and his followers. The term is used to explain the inclination to skew our perceptions of others based on fantasy. The “distortion” in the perception is based, not on actual experience with a true individual, but on some projected person of fantasy. For

¹⁰ M 20.6/1:120 = SD 1.6.

¹¹ SD 20.9.

¹² See *Nimitta & anuvyañjana* = SD 19.14 (1.1) for details and other citations.

example, when we fall in love we often create an image of the beloved as the perfect match or soul-mate, only to find out later the person does not match our original perception.

The fantasized person is constructed partly from our experiences and from emotional stress. Stress naturally accompanies the process of seeking a soul-mate or a life partner, or forming a new relationship, although this is perceived as pleasurable. “Falling in love” is a complicated emotional situation where we see more of what we want than what is real in our beloved. We are essentially guided by chemical flows. Inevitably what falls *in* love, also falls *out* of it: we begin to see the reality of the situation, so that break-up is inevitable.

Parataxic distortion is very difficult to avoid completely because of the nature of human interaction and learning. The media, for example, can be a source of parataxic distortion through *stereotyping* of a good-looking, attractively dressed and friendly person as a “good” guy, especially if he is successful (“condo owner”), or titled (“Dr,” “Ven Dr”), or even by skin colour (“white”), too. All this distorts our perception, and prevents good interpersonal communication and personal development.

Overcoming parataxic distortion begins with our respecting and appreciating others for what they are and can be. This begins with a listening heart in accepting the person’s failure and weakness, and rejoicing in his good qualities. We then go on to the level of *giving*—of things, energy, time and above all, wisdom—that is, of spiritual friendship.¹³ People are worth knowing and helping because they can be better beings.

2.1.5 When transference can be good. Not all transference is bad, not according to Buddhist teachings, anyway; that is, where the transference is *platonic* (non-erotic or non-sexual) or *healthy* (that is, not based on a power-mode). Carl Jung, in his *Psychology of Transference* (1969),¹⁴ for example, says that within the transference dyad both actors typically experience a variety of opposites, that of being in love and of psychological growth, the key to success is *the ability to endure the tension of the opposites without abandoning the wholesome aspects*, and that this tension allows one to grow and transform oneself.¹⁵

One of the most famous allusions to wholesome transference is found in **the Metta Sutta’s** only simile—that of a mother and her only child, thus:

Just as a mother would guard her own child, even so towards all beings,	her one and only child, with her own life— let one cultivate a boundless heart! (Sn 149/1.8.7 = Khp 9.7) = SD 38.3
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We are here taught to look upon others as if we are a “mother” to all these beings,¹⁶ and to regard them each as if he or she is our only child, that is, giving our full and unconditional love and acceptance.

We might say that this is *idealistic* love. For, it is difficult to do so in real life. For example, isn’t it delusory if a teacher were to regard her class of hyperactive children as her own offsprings. On a worldly level, it *is* delusory in that she is unable to see great compassion inside her. But on a more magnanimous, even spiritual, level, she will be able to see her potential to be a great teacher and be an effective part of the healthy development of a child. The lovingkindness meditation is a tool to this ideal relationship. The principle is simple: as you think so you are.

In **the Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī Therī Apadāna** (Ap 2.1.7), an account of Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī, the Bodhisattva’s foster mother, we find an interesting word-play (*śleṣa*) of the words “father” (*pitā*) and “mother” (*mātā*).¹⁷ Here are the relevant excerpts:

31 O Well-gone One, I am your mother; | and you, O Wise Hero, are my father:
O giver of happiness of the True Teaching, | O refuge, I was given birth by you, O Gotama!

¹³ On different types of giving, see **Udakūpama S** (A 7.15) = Intro (1.2.4.3). See **Spiritual friendship** = SD 8.1.

¹⁴ From Jung’s *Collected Works*, vol 16, tr RFC Hull, Princeton: Princeton Univ Press, 1969.

¹⁵ *Psychology of Transference*, from *Collected Works*, vol 16, tr RFC Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

¹⁶ On the need for “femininity” in both the male (animus) and the female (anima), see **Individuation** = SD 8.7.

¹⁷ Ap 2.1.7.27-36/531 = SD 10.6 (3.4).

- 32 O Well-gone One, your physical body was nurtured by me;
My Dharma body, flawless, | was nurtured by you.
- 33 To satisfy a moment's craving, | you had milk suckled by me.
But I, drinking the milk of Dharma from you, | Had peace without end.
- 34 For my raising you, | you owe me no debt, Great Sage!
For women desiring children, | may they have a child like you.¹⁸
- 35 Mothers of kings like Mandhātā | drown in this sea of existence,
But you, O Son! brought me | Across the ocean of existence.
- 36 Queen mother, royal consort: | these names are easy for women to gain,
But "the mother of the Buddha," this name | is the most difficult to obtain.
(Ap 2.1.7.31-36/531) = SD 10.6

In these verses of Mahā Pajāpatī, we see a play between the Dharma sense of the words *mātā* and *pitā*, reflecting on her relationship with the Bodhisattva (worldly sense of *mātā*) and the Buddha (Dharma sense of *pitā*). In the worldly sense, she brings up the Bodhisattva in the world, but the Buddha gives her a spiritual birth, that is, liberation from suffering through arhathood.

The Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja Sutta (S 35.127) extends the simile of the mother to other dimensions of a social or interpersonal relationships. When the monk Piṇḍola is asked by the rajah Udena on how the young monks overcome sexual lust, the former replies that they relate to others in an age-appropriate manner.

Master Bhāradvāja, what is the cause, what is the condition, that these young monks, youths with black hair, endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, who have not dallied with sensual pleasures, lead the complete and pure holy life all their lives and maintain it continuously?

Maharajah, this is spoken by the Blessed One:

"Come, bhikshus,

*towards women who are old enough, bear them in mind as your own mother;
towards those old enough to be your sisters, bear them in mind as your sisters;
towards those young enough to be your daughters, bear them in mind as your daughters."*

This is the reason, Maharajah...

(S 35.127/4:110 f) = SD 27.6¹⁹

When the rajah Udena questions further, almost wryly, that lust could arise even in age-appropriate relationships,²⁰ Piṇḍola answers that the Buddha also teaches the perception of the foul (*asubha,saññā*), that is, reflection on the body-parts as a stronger means of overcoming sexual lust.²¹ When the rajah retorts that this may be easy for those undergoing the threefold training (in moral virtue, mental concentration and insight wisdom),²² but not for others, Piṇḍola replies that the Buddha also teaches sense-

¹⁸ To get a son like you | sates all desire for sons. (J Walters, "Gotami's Story." In Donald S Lopez, Jr (ed), *Buddhism in Practice*, 1995:120).

¹⁹ See also D 2:293 f; M 3:90; A 5:109; Vism 239-266.

²⁰ For cases of age-inappropriate attractions, see **Māra Dhītā S** (S 4.25/1:125-127) = SD 36.6; see also **Māra** = SD 36.3.

²¹ This refers to the contemplation of the 31 (or 32 according to Comys) body-parts as being impermanent, etc; also called "mindfulness of the body" (*kāya,gatā,sati*): see eg **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119/3:88-99) = SD 12.21.

²² On the threefold training (*ti,sikkhā*), see **Sīla Samādhi Paññā** = SD 22.6 & **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88/1:235) = SD 24.10c.

restraint or “guarding the sense-doors” (*indriya, gutta, dvāra*), whereby we train ourselves not to grasp at “the signs and details” of the sense-objects.²³ The rajah is finally satisfied with the answers.

All these cases mentioned here are examples of wholesome transference. We are taught how to safely project positive feelings we have or had for our loved ones (as appropriate in terms of gender, age and kinship) onto others in a similar manner. There is a good reason for this, especially for those who are comfortable with the notion of rebirth, that is, the “rebirth connection.” In a number of discourses, the Buddha states that we have been reborn so many times that it is impossible to say that we have not been somehow related to one another.

The classic statement is made in a set of six discourses on human relations, namely,

Mātā Sutta (S 15.14/2:189) = SD 57.2	We have been <i>mothers</i> to others before.
Pitā Sutta (S 15.15/2:189) = SD 57.3	We have been <i>fathers</i> to others before.
Bhata Sutta (S 15.16/2:189) = SD 57.4	We have been <i>brothers</i> to others before.
Bhaginī Sutta (S 15.17/2:189) = SD 57.5	We have been <i>sisters</i> to others before.
Putta Sutta (S 15.18/2:189) = SD 57.6	We have been <i>sons</i> to others before.
Dhītā Sutta (S 15.19/2:189) = SD 57.7	We have been <i>daughters</i> to others before.

The (Saddha) Jāṇussoṇī Sutta (A 10.177) further alludes to relatives who are reborn amongst “the departed” (*peta*): “That [no relative would arise amongst the departed], brahmin, is impossible, there is no way that that realm would, after such a long time, be empty of departed relations or blood relatives.”²⁴

2.2 COMPENSATION. Let us now examine another form of transference. When the object of transference is *inanimate*, such as a status, religion, a hobby, or even an academic subject, the transference is known as **compensation**. For example, monastics who place more importance on being a “Ven Dr” could unconsciously feel that being merely “Venerable” alone is unsatisfactory. As a rule, such a Ven Dr would be a non-meditating “scholar” monk, very busy with worldly affairs rather than with spiritual training. As has often been observed, those who try to straddle two worlds (the worldly and the spiritual), usually end up being skilled in neither, caught in the rut of seeking the attention and patronage of others. In psychological terms, the great importance placed on the academic title is to *compensate* for the lack of spiritual virtue, even faith in the Dharma.²⁵

Similarly, an emotionally undeveloped or socially awkward but intelligent person (usually a late adolescent or young adult) might be drawn to the mystique of the Abhidharma.²⁶ Having mastered the Abhidharma lists, numbers and dogmas, he deems that he has known everything about Buddhism, or at least, the highest doctrines. He thus unconsciously feels compensated for his lack of emotional or social development. However, these awkward symptoms may still linger on in his unwholesome aloofness, dogmatism, intolerance, even fanaticism.

In relation to compensation, there is the inspiring case of the elder **Lakuṇṭhaka Bhaddiya** (“the dwarf”). Although he is a dwarf and lacks good looks, he has an enchantingly beautiful voice. However, he does not in any way use his voice to compensate for his shortcomings. On the contrary, he is instructive on this point, as evident from his Thera, gāthā:

²³ See *Nimitta & Anuvyañjana* = SD 19.14.

²⁴ A 10.177.7a/5:270 f. Cf **Paṭhavī S** (S 15.2/2:179). Evidently here, *peta* retains its early meaning of simply referring to “the departed,” not as the “hungry ghosts” of later times. It is also likely here that *peta* may refer to some sort of intermediate being that the dying prevails in, according to the level of mental attachment to his erstwhile state. See **Tiro, kuḍḍa S** (Kh 7/6 = Pv 1.5/4 f) = SD 2.7 Intro (3).

²⁵ See **How Buddhism Became Chinese** = SD 40b.7 (7.5.2.3).

²⁶ A likely pattern is that such a person is usually a socially inadequate person with a strong self-image. He is likely to go on to become an “expert” in Abhidhamma (in a highly intellectual and intolerant manner). If his self-confidence or self-image is not boosted, then he might go on into more “power” oriented areas such as psychic phenomena, the occult, New Age cults. On the nature of the Abhidharma, see **Dhamma and Abhidhamma** = SD 26.1.

- 469 Those people who have judged [measured]²⁷ me by appearance and who follow me by voice,
Overcome by desire and passion, they know me not.
- 470 The foolish one, surrounded by mental hindrances, neither knows the inside
Nor sees the outside—he is indeed misled by voice.
- 471 Who knows not the inside, but sees the outside:
Seeing only external fruits, he, too, is misled by voice.
- 472 Who knows the inside, and sees the outside:
Seeing without obstructions, he is not misled by voice. (Tha 469-472 ≈ A 4.65)²⁸

If Lakuṇṭhaka Bhaddiya, the sweet-voiced dwarf, had unconsciously or consciously used his voice to attract others, he would be compensating his lack with his gift, and relied on *charisma*²⁹ (but he does not). The problem with charisma is that it consists of admirable or desirable qualities that we attribute onto another. They are *external* measures that do not reveal the inner realities of the person.³⁰

2.3 IDENTIFICATION. When we attribute charisma to another person, there is often enough a desire to imitate that person, even to *become* that person, that is, to *identify* with him—which is another form of transference. Here, certain significant characteristics are transferred onto the admired person or any trigger person, usually a therapist or guru figure. When the person sees such desirable characteristics in the trigger person and tries to acquire them, it is known as **identification**. It is a process by which an individual unconsciously tries to pattern himself after another.

Under normal circumstances, identification is an important phase of personality development, especially where the superego or conscience is modeled after an exemplary other. Identification, however, is necessarily unwholesome when the trigger is a negative one, such as an aggressor. In psychoanalysis, identification as a defence mechanism was first named and described in 1936-67 by the Anna Freud (1895-1982) in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, as where a person facing an external threat, such as disapproval or criticism from an authority figure, identifies with the source of the threat, either by appropriating the aggression or else by adopting other attributes of the threatening figure.

Anna Freud and the Austrian psychoanalyst René A Spitz (1887-1974) argued that this mechanism plays an important part in the early development of the superego, before criticism is turned inward at a later stage of development. The Austrian-born US psychologist Bruno Bettelheim (1903–90) described in an article in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* in 1943 and in his book *The Informed Heart* (1960: ch 4), how even in Nazi concentration camps, some inmates came to identify with their SS guards (the notorious Schutzstaffel who served as Hitler’s paramilitary “praetorian guards”).

An extreme form of identification is known as **the “Stockholm syndrome,”** that is, is a psychological response sometimes seen in an abducted hostage, in which the hostage shows signs of admiration for or loyalty to the hostage-taker, regardless of risk or danger he is in. The syndrome is named after the robbery at the Kreditbanken at Norrmalmstorg, Stockholm, Sweden, in which the bank robbers held bank employees hostage from 23-28 August, 1973. It was reported that the victims became emotionally attached to their victimizers, and even defended their captors after they were freed from their six-day ordeal. The term “Stockholm syndrome” was coined by the criminologist and psychiatrist Nils Bejerot, who assisted the police during the robbery, and referred to the syndrome in a news broadcast.³¹ A possible

²⁷ “Have judged,” *pāmiṃsu*, lit “(they) measured.”

²⁸ Here in Tha, Bhaddiya speaks in the 1st person, in **Rūpa S** (A 4.65/2:71), for the most part, the same verses are given in the 3rd person.

²⁹ See **Lakuṇṭhaka Bhaddiya S** (S 21.6/2:279); also **The Teacher or the Teaching** = SD 3.14 (6).

³⁰ See Piyasilo, *Charisma in Buddhism*, 1992h:81 ff. = §6.722.

³¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockholm_syndrome. However, according to M Namyam, N Tufton, R Szekely, M Toal, S Worboys, EL Sampson, the syndrome “is not a recognized Medical Subject Heading (MeSH), that most sources of information for widely publicized cases were of varying reliability in terms of the events that led to the diagnosis of Stockholm syndrome; the authors had no access to primary sources and identification of a pattern of

explanation for the syndrome is the unconscious motivation for survival through cooperating with the aggressor.

The term, “Stockholm syndrome,” is useful in describing the unhealthy impact of aggressive evangelism upon Third World societies, but more evidently so especially amongst the better educated in their non-white urban population. In Singapore and Malaysia, where there are on-going aggressive evangelizing (including campus and house evangelism) and mega-churches, and where Christians try to have a stranglehold on the upper echelons of business and politics, the grass-root population often feel threatened or disadvantaged, even marginalized, under such oppression. Despite the growing conversion threats, even disrespect shown to non-Christians, it is very common to find Buddhists and Buddhist leaders who actually “tolerate,” even *side* with, such oppressive evangelizing, and who would often try to emulate these evangelists in their organization, activities, and even music (eg Dorothy Hunt’s “Onward Buddhist Soldiers”) and vocabulary (such as “charisma”).³²

Conversely, we have a situation where *other religions* emulate or plagiarize Buddhism, such as **Manichaeism**, the religion of the Babylonian Gnostic, Mani (c210-276). The Manichees, for example, called their founder, “Buddha” Mani. They accepted the notion of rebirth but with a soul. The fourfold structure of the Manichaean community, divided between male and female monks (the “elect”) and lay followers (the “hearers”) who supported them, are clearly based on that of the Buddhist sangha.³³ Mani’s death was referred to as his “nirvana.” Such comprehensive borrowings, however, did not cause any identity crisis in Manichaeism mainly because the Manichees gave allegorical interpretations of their own to the borrowed ideas, terms and stories. These ideas were used in their teachings and given their own interpretations.³⁴

The Buddha, too, as a successful teacher, is a good communicator. To communicate his teachings, the Buddha (and the early teachers) not only introduced new terms (such as *paṭisambhidā*) but even more so adopted numerous old terms (Buddha, arhat, dharma, karma, nirvana) giving them new senses. In adopting such terms, the Buddha is in no way identifying with them as used in the old systems, especially where they are negative. For example, while the pre-Buddhist brahmins take *karma* to refer to religious rituals, the Buddha takes it to mean intentional acts.³⁵ In his article, “Theravāda Buddhism and Brahmanical Hinduism: Brahmanical Terms in a Buddhist Guise” (1991), **KR Norman** investigates the terminology used by the Buddha to show how he copes with this problem.³⁶

2.4 PROJECTION. Transference, as such, can appear in various forms, but in most cases, they are rather negative. Let us look at one last, important, type of transference.

2.4.1 Negative transference. A kind of “negative transference,” where the person transfers undesirable thoughts, desires and qualities onto someone else, is known as **projection**. To some degree, it is a common process that almost everyone undergoes, especially where we attribute our “shadow,” that is, unwanted or undesirable thoughts or emotions, to others.

For example, a woman, troubled by her weight, sees another fat woman, and scorns her, saying, “Look at that pig!” Another common example of projection is where a person is unfaithful to his partner. Instead of consciously dealing with his undesirable thoughts, he unconsciously projects them onto his spouse or partner, and accuses *him or her* of having an affair.

features exhibited in Stockholm syndrome may be due to reporting bias” (“[“Stockholm syndrome”: psychiatric diagnosis or urban myth?](#)” 2008).

³² On a number of occasions, Buddhist youth workers and leaders have told me that it would be good to have “charismatic” monastics. When I asked them to define “charismatic,” they were often at a loss.

³³ See Richard Foltz, “Religions of the Silk Road,” London & NY, 1999.

³⁴ See **How Buddhism Became Chinese** = SD 40b.7 (7.3.1). See also MN Walter, “Sogdians and Buddhism.” *Papers* 174 Nov 2006: 54 f: http://www.sino-platonic.org/complete/spp174_sogdian_buddhism.pdf.

³⁵ On the Buddha’s usage of antecedental terminology, see **Why the Buddha Hesitated?** = SD 12.1 (6).

³⁶ KR Norman, “Theravāda Buddhism and Brahmanical Hinduism: Brahmanical terms in a Buddhist guise,” *The Buddhist Forum 2*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991.

Or, during the first half of the 21st century Singapore and Malaysia, it is not uncommon to find a local Buddhist with low self-esteem holding the notion (tacitly or openly) that only white monks are the best Buddhist speakers around, and *all* local Buddhist speakers are inferior to them.

Projection reduces anxiety by allowing the expression of the unwanted desires or impulses without letting the conscious mind recognize them. As such, projection entails some level of **denial**, a defence that is even more ancient than projection itself. In denial, we remain blind to a significant truth about ourselves. Such a truth can further be shielded by the ego through **compartmentalization**, where we lead separate emotional lives. [2.1.2]

Compartmentalization, projection and such defences are ways by which the ego pretends that it is completely in control of us, when in reality our experience is always changing and shifting being. The ego's complicity in such defences are the result of its being autopolluted by even deeper, our latent tendencies (*anusaya*), which are, freely put, the "store" of our past karma.³⁷

2.4.2 Religion as defence mechanism. The greatest unconscious defence mechanism is *religion*: for the simple reason many people, often everyone in an exclusive group, do not even really know why they believe in a certain idea, except that because others do so, or because they *feel* safe or saved. In the **Brahma-jāla Sutta** (D 1), the Buddha makes the momentous declaration that "all wrong views" (including religion) arise from feelings,"³⁸ that is, from likes and dislikes arising from how we see pleasure and pain. We take religion as giving us a false sense of comfort and security without any real understanding why. For that reason, there is so much "mystery" in such religions, and "faith" is needed so that we can believe. We do not know, cannot know, what true reality is.

Elsewhere, I have stated that religion is often simply the unconscious defence mechanism of denial. It is about *denying* what we do *not* wish to believe.³⁹ This is especially true of the God-faiths and the various Buddhisms. No one has seen God, but they want to believe in "him," so they deny his or her non-existence. Those who are unable to meditate or do not give the Dharma the highest priority, tend to *deny* its spirituality, and often resort to a "vague Buddhism" or convenient religiosity. Understandably, such counterfeit Dharma would not be helpful in real crises, nor bring us to spiritual liberation.

The German philosopher and anthropologist **Ludwig Feuerbach** (1804-1872) based his theory of religion very much upon the idea of *projection*, that is to say, that an anthropomorphic deity is the outward projection of man's anxieties and desires.⁴⁰ Feuerbach, in his most important work, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841),⁴¹ makes an effort to humanize theology. He states that man, insofar as he is rational, is to himself his own object of thought.

Religion, according to Feuerbach, is *our consciousness of the infinite*. Religion therefore is "nothing else than the consciousness of the infinity of the consciousness; or, in the consciousness of the infinite, the conscious subject has for his object the infinity of his own nature."

Feuerbach's thesis was derived from Hegel's speculative theology where the godly Creation remains a part of the Creator, while the Creator remains greater than the Creation. However, when Feuerbach as a student presented his own theory to Hegel, then his teacher, the latter was unimpressed.

In part I of his book, Feuerbach developed what he calls the "true or anthropological essence of religion." Treating of God in his various aspects "as a being of the understanding," "as a moral being or law," "as love" and so on. Feuerbach talks of how man is equally a conscious being, more so than God because man has placed upon God the ability of understanding. Man contemplates many things and in doing so he becomes acquainted with himself. Feuerbach shows that in every aspect God corresponds to some feature or need of human nature. "If man is to find contentment in God," he claims, "he must find himself in God."

Thus, according to Feuerbach, *God is nothing else than man himself*: he is, so to speak, the outward projection of man's inward nature. Man is capable of understanding and applying meanings of divinity to

³⁷ On *anusaya*, see **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18) = SD 6.14 Intro (5).

³⁸ D 1.144/1:45 f = SD 25.2: see also Intro & Comy ad loc.

³⁹ See **How Buddhism Became Chinese** = SD 40b.3 (3.1).

⁴⁰ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/478472/projection>.

⁴¹ Tr George Eliot into English as *The Essence of Christianity*, 1853, 2nd ed 1881.

religion, and it is not that religion that makes a man divine. Simply put, it is man who creates God who creates man. Such a God can only be benevolent to man; otherwise, he is not God.

In part 2, he discusses the “false or theological essence of religion,” that is, the view which regards God as having a separate existence over against man. Such a false view, according to him, leads to the belief in revelation which he believes not only injures the moral sense, but also “poisons, nay destroys, the divinest feeling in man, the sense of truth,” and the belief in sacraments, such as the Lord’s Supper, is to him a piece of religious materialism of which “the necessary consequences are superstition and immorality.”⁴²

2.4.3 Counter-projection. Counter-projection can be an effective method of dealing with an existing projective idea in another to initiate or promote a development pattern in a person. By directing the person to his projection, he could begin to question his own thought-processes and behaviour so as to arouse insight into them. As counsellor or therapist, we could first assume the perspective of the aggressor (say, an evangelist) and reflect this to the client regarding how the aggressor may be perceiving his own conduct against the actual reality facing the aggressor. Such a dialogue may ensue:⁴³

Counsellor: Many Buddhists hold the view that evangelists are very powerful. Do you have fears about them?

Buddhist: (Very uncomfortable) I don’t want to discuss it!

Counsellor: It will be better to say what you think. You may think that by saying your fears, you are confirming it. But it’s just the opposite. Usually, when you state your fear, it’s almost as good as letting it go.

In this case, the client had been psychologically traumatized by a perceived problem, and reacts with a defence mechanism of *counter-projection*, which includes an obsession to remain in a traumatic situation, and this compulsive obsession with the perceived aggressor of the trauma and its projection. In simple terms, the more you worry about the aggressor, the more negative impact he will have on you. When we are unconscious of the effects of a projection upon ourselves, we react with a counter-projection that perpetuates and aggravates it. Counter-projection, in other words, is a condition of being persistently victimized by the views that we have projected onto others. Fearing a “monster,” we create bigger one in our own minds that makes us fear the phantom even more so.

The concept of counter-projection was anticipated by the German philosopher and classical philologist, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), when he says, “He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you.”⁴⁴ The worst monsters are those we have created in our own minds. Since they arose there, we have to destroy them right there.

2.5 OVERCOMING PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENCE MECHANISMS.⁴⁵

2.5.1 Defence mechanisms are rooted in latent tendencies. Defence mechanisms are our *unconscious* efforts to defend ourselves from anxiety or mental pain. Although often helpful in a short term, such habitual tendencies are symptoms of underlying psychological issues that invariably hinder our personal development and realizing of our spiritual potential. It is like sweeping the dirt under the carpet or under the furniture. They are still there, and as they build up, will become really messy and unhealthy in due course.

⁴² Feuerbach’s atheism has been criticized for being inconsistent by people like Max Stirner (*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, “The Ego and His Own,” 1844), and their interlocution for an instructive polemic: see <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ludwig-feuerbach/> & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_Andreas_Feuerbach.

⁴³ See Paul V Trad, *Interventions with Infants and Parents: The theory and practice of previewing*, John Wiley, 1992: 243 f.

⁴⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr RJ Hollindale, London: Penguin, 1973: 102.

⁴⁵ For an overview of various defence mechanisms, see http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Defense_mechanism.

According to Buddhist psychology, the roots of defence mechanisms lie deep inside our unconscious as latent tendencies (*anusaya*).⁴⁶ They are motivated by the three latent roots of lust (*rāga*), aversion (*paṭigha*), and ignorance (*avijjā*). **Lust** is what draws us to those people, events and things that we perceive as pleasurable; **aversion** is basically those qualities that are the opposite of such pleasurable conditions, or what we perceive as preventing or lessening them; and **ignorance** here refers to an existential blindness to the cause and effect process that this love-hate cycle that we are caught up in, hindering us from our wholesome potentials.

2.5.2 Mindfulness exposes the unconscious defences. Defence mechanisms are not problems in themselves, but are symptomatic of underlying conditions that invite and sustain psychological problems. We are not normally aware of them as they are *unconscious* tendencies. As such, we are autopiloted by them so that we are caught in a helpless and painful rut of inability and unwillingness to see true reality about ourselves.

The main reason for our being autopiloted into defences is our unconscious habit of emotional self-reference and categorization, so that a **concept** (*kappa*) is created and in due course *reified*. Concepts are useful in daily life, that is, insofar as we use them and then let them go when we are finished with them. But our concepts also tend to mold us into **predefined habits** (*nati*) of thinking, feeling and behaving. When we perceive any situation as threatening these habits—thus bringing us stress, shame or some negative emotion—we unconsciously and immediately set up our ego-defences.

The defences are best managed with “attentional control training” or mindfulness practice. **Mindfulness** (*sati*) is a *non-judgemental, non-elaborative present-moment awareness*.⁴⁷ We are simply witnesses, acknowledging whatever that comes into our awareness without bias or automatic reaction. We simply note whatever that arises in our minds for what they are: thoughts, memories, ideas, or desires, aversions, worries, or any sensory input. They are just a series of impermanent “selves” or states that come and go. They never last.

The more mindful we are, the easier we tune in with our strengths and weaknesses, and the more accurately and wholesomely we can assess our habits and actions. As such, we are less likely to fall into self-deception because, being mindful, we are less prone to filtering of experiences. In its ideal state, the mind then is able to directly see both mind and body as an uninterrupted experience of reality.⁴⁸

2.5.3 Turning defences into coping mechanisms. A sustained practice of breath meditation gives us the inner stillness to stay focussed on the healing effort. A proper cultivation of lovingkindness should begin with an unconditional acceptance of ourself, *just as we are*. A balanced practice of the two meditation, especially with the guidance of a spiritual friend, is effective in bringing the unconscious defences up and out into the conscious mind where they are more easily resolved.⁴⁹

For example, when we realize that we have been using *anger* as a defence against discussing certain difficult issues with a significant other (that is, the defence mechanism of *aggression*), then we would be able to turn the defence into a *coping mechanism*, so that instead of repressing the negative emotion, we consciously *suppress* it, and instead of being aggressive, we are being merely firm in our decision, saying “no” rationally.

Or, when we realize our sexual addiction is due to our habitually strong sexual lust and past experiences, we could first *rationally* understand the nature of the five aggregates,⁵⁰ and how our mind works,⁵¹ and then *sublimate* our energies in a more healthy and acceptable direction through spiritual friends,

⁴⁶ On *anusaya*, see **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18) = SD 6.14 Intro (5).

⁴⁷ See S Levine, *A Gradual Awakening*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1979; Ajahn Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond*, Boston: Wisdom, 2006: 1-11.

⁴⁸ JD Teasdale, ZV Seagal, JMG Williams, & G Mark, “How does cognitive therapy prevent depressive relapse and why should attentional control (mindfulness) training help.” *Behavior Research and Therapy* 33, 1995: 25-39; JD Teasdale, “Emotional processing, three modes of mind and the prevention of relapse in depression,” *Behavior Research and Therapy* 39, 1999: S53-S77.

⁴⁹ On meditation and the mind, see **Meditation and consciousness** = SD 17.8c.

⁵⁰ On the 5 aggregates, see **(Dve) Khandhā S** (S 22.48/3:47 f) = SD 17.1a & other suttas in SD 17.

⁵¹ On how the mind works, see **The unconscious** = SD 17.8b.

sports, social work, and so on. Building up a meaningful and happy relationship leads to a committed friendship and partnership that is satisfying, creative and liberating.⁵²

As our understanding of Buddhism deepens, we should make an effort to understand the universal characteristic of **not-self** (*anattā*), which basically points to the fact that there is no fixed entity behind any person, situation or thing. If this approach is difficult, the easiest practice is the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*). For, when we see all persons, situations and things as being impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise, we begin to see that they are all unsatisfactory, and ultimately without any abiding essence.

As we realize such a level of impermanence more deeply, we begin to appreciate the present moment with people, our present situation, just as it is, simply letting it come, letting it go. Then we have truly seized the moment. We are truly alive.

— — —

⁵² See **Spiritual friendship** = SD 8.1.

The Discourse on the Recluse (and the Ass)

(A 3.81/1:229)

Originating in Sāvattihī.

The threefold training

1 Bhikshus, there are these three recluse's duties for a recluse.⁵³ What are the three?⁵⁴

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| (1) The undertaking of training in higher moral virtue | (<i>adhi,sīla,sikkhā</i>). |
| (2) The undertaking of training in higher mind | (<i>adhi,citta,sikkhā</i>). |
| (3) The undertaking of training in higher wisdom | (<i>adhi,paññā,sikkhā</i>). |

These, bhikshus, are the three recluse's duties for a recluse.

Therefore, bhikshus, you should train yourselves thus:

- (1) May there be keen desire in us to undertake the training in higher moral virtue.
- (2) May there be keen desire in us to undertake the training in higher mind.
- (3) May there be keen desire in us to undertake the training in higher wisdom.

Thus, bhikshus, you should train yourselves.

The parable of the ass

2a Suppose, bhikshus, an ass follows closely behind a herd of cows, thinking, "I'm one, too! I'm one, too!"

But his colour is not like that of the cows, nor is his sound like that of the cows, nor are his hoofs like those of the cows.

He merely follows closely behind a herd of cows, thinking, "I'm one, too! I'm one, too!"

2b Even so, bhikshus, here, a certain monk follows closely behind a community of monks, thinking, "I'm a monk, too! I'm a monk, too!"

But he has no keen desire to undertake the training in higher moral virtue, like some other monks.

But he has no keen desire to undertake the training in higher mind, like some other monks.

But he has no keen desire to undertake the training in higher wisdom, like some other monks.

He merely follows closely behind a community of monks, thinking, "I'm a monk, too! I'm a monk, too!"

The Buddha's admonition

2c Therefore, bhikshus, train yourselves thus:

- (1) May there be keen desire in us to undertake the training in higher moral virtue.
- (2) May there be keen desire in us to undertake the training in higher mind.
- (3) May there be keen desire in us to undertake the training in higher wisdom.

Thus, bhikshus, you should train yourselves.

— evaṃ —

080421; 080919; 091026

⁵³ "Duties of a recluse," *samaṇassa samaṇa,karaṇīyāni*, lit "that which should be done by a recluse of a recluse," that is to say, these are tasks that he must himself complete for his own wellbeing and liberation.

⁵⁴ See (Ti) *Sikkhā S* (A 3.88/1:235) = SD 24.10c, for a def of these threefold training (*ti,sikkhā*).