

Alagaddûpama Sutta

The Discourse on the Parable of the Water-snake

[Proper grasp of the Buddha's Teaching]
(Majjhima Nikāya 22/1:130-142)
Translated with notes by Piya Tan ©2003

1 Obstructions and liberation

1.1 ARIṬṬHA'S OFFENCE. The person who occasioned the Buddha to give this teaching might as well be a contemporary cult guru who preaches sexual licence. Ariṭṭha (erstwhile vulture killer), the detractor in the sutta, according to the Commentary, is a learned exponent of the Dharma, who is quite familiar with the “obstructions” to spiritual development. However, being less learned in the Vinaya, he holds the view that sexual indulgence is not a hindrance to spiritual development (that one can enjoy sex without sexual desire or feelings!).

In fact, Ariṭṭha comes up with this clever argument: “If some of the sensual pleasures are permissible to lay-followers who are streamwinners, etc, why is an exception made regarding form, voice, touch, etc, of women?” or of men, for that matter! The Commentary states that Ariṭṭha goes so far as to charge the Buddha of exaggerating the importance of the first grave offence (*pārājikā*), that of sexual intercourse, claiming that this urgency is like trying to “chain the ocean.” (MA 2:103)

1.2 PĀCITTĪYA. The Vinaya records the Ariṭṭha holding the view that “what are called stumbling-blocks by the Blessed One are not stumbling-blocks” (more specifically that sexuality is not a hindrance to the monastic life). On account of this, the Buddha declares that anyone holding such a view commits the offence of expiation (*pācittiya*), which entails that the offender confesses (*pacinati*) his offence.¹ An offence of *expiation* means that the offender has committed an immoral act which has to be “pacified” (*samatha*) in one of these three ways:

- (1) being settled in terms of the Vinaya (*sammukha, vinaya*), ie by legal analysis and deliberation;
- (2) by admitting the offence before the Sangha or a monk (*paṭiññata, karaṇa*); or
- (3) by “covering up with grass” (*tiṇa, vatthāraka*), ie a mutual settlement between the disputing parties (or “burying the hatchet”). (V 2:92 f)

1.3 MONASTIC TODAY AND STUMBLING-BLOCKS. The Alagaddûpama Sutta should be studied with the **Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48),² where the Buddha explains how sexual feelings arise. When we are pre-occupied with our physical being and brood over our differences from others, we are likely to arouse sexual feelings within ourselves. What we think is missing from ourselves, we tend to seek externally or in another, imagining that we are “united” with the missing object, thus appropriating or becoming it, as it were. In reality, all this is but a most self-centred or narcissistic enterprise of filling imagined gaps in our emotional life with imagined solutions. As **Lily de Silva** astutely notes, “[w]ith this explanation it becomes quite clear that self-love plays a basic role in sensuality.” (1978:126 f)

The message of the Alagaddûpama Sutta is just as relevant today as it was in the Buddha's time. As Buddhism spreads to the west and the westernized areas of Asia and elsewhere, monastic members—especially the scholar monks—lacking in spirituality, easily and famously fall prey to domesticating and laicizing themselves to the ways of secular society. Such a broad hint is clear from **Paul David Numrich**'s book, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples*, where he reports:

¹ Pāc 68 = V 4:133-136. The novice Kaṇḍaka, a pupil of the loose monk Upananda is expelled for holding such a view (Pāc 70 = V 4:138-140).

² A 7.48/4:57-59 = SD 8.7.

He [Ven Dr Ratanasara of Dharma Vijaya, a Sinhalese mission, in Los Angeles] thinks monks will inevitably begin to shake hands and keep casual company with women as part of their normal pastoral relationships in America. But, he notes, the celibacy issue remains a stickler in the development of a native Theravada *bhikkhu-sangha* in America, for Americans generally seem to view sex as a human necessity, like food and water. Yet celibacy is the most dramatic symbol of the “set apart” character in the Theravada tradition. (Numrich 1996:50)³

SJ Tambiah, in *Buddhism Betrayed?*, writes about of the best known scholar monks of recent times, Walpola Rahula, with the same broad hint of secularizing tendencies amongst scholar monks:

[I]n the 1950s, when he [W Rahula] conducted his research in Paris in association with Professor Demiéville, he devised a distinctive clothing of trousers and cap to withstand the cold and sometimes relaxed the rule regarding meals, thereby again demonstrating that he would not allow conventional rules to obstruct the pursuit of more worthwhile and serious goals.” (1992:24)

Speaking of freelance adjustments of monastic rules, one might add here the peculiar habit amongst some young (and not so young) Theravāda monks of keeping their head unshaven and thick with hair so that they look like laymen. The Vinaya rule says: “Monks, long hair should not be worn. Whoever should wear it long, there is an offence of wrong-doing (*dukkata*). I allow it to be of two months’ growth or two fingers’ breadth long.” (Cv 5.2.2 = V 2:106). Could this be that there is a tacit acquiescence to the abrogation of the “lesser and minor rules” despite the ruling of the Rājagaha Council? In which case, could such monks regard themselves as part of the Theravada monastic community?

1.4 OVERCOMING THE STUMBLING-BLOCKS. In 2000, **Sandra Bell** wrote a heart-warming and inspiring essay summarizing the rooting of Buddhism in the West. Her article, entitled “Being creative with tradition: Rooting Theravāda Buddhism in Britain” appears the very first one in the *Journal of Global Buddhism*, and contains this account of how the forest monks have succeeded where the scholar monks and others have failed:

Ajahn Maha Bōwa [sic] had visited Hampstead [Vihāra] in 1974 and expressed doubts that meditating monks could be successfully transposed to “a country where people were ignorant of the monks’ discipline and the relationship between *Sangha* and laity.”⁴ Three years later Ajahn Chah was less daunted, perhaps because he had already established a hermitage monastery for his Western disciples close to his own Wat Pah Pong, near the village of Bung Wai. From this perspective, it may have seemed just one more step to return some of them to found a branch monastery in Europe or America. Ajahn Chah had successfully established a number of branch monasteries in Ubon Province in Northeast Thailand, and his own disciples had also started their own teaching centers.⁵ Tambiah views Ajahn Chah’s “extraordinary ‘institution building’” as an aspect of the duality inherent in the forest tradition, whereby the ascetic monk becomes an organizer and founder of monasteries. This happens because “dedication to the meditation path necessarily involves the teaching of the hard-won wisdom to others.”⁶

Having never before left Thailand, Ajahn Chah was unfamiliar with an environment where Buddhists formed such a small proportion of the population as to be scarcely noticeable. His strategy was to remain undeterred by the fact that English people as a whole knew nothing about making *dāna* to monks and to set out to tutor those few lay people who claimed to be Theravadins. Ajahn Chah insisted that he and the other monks go out on an alms-round each day in order to maintain an association with the discipline and continuities of monastic life. Displaying the composed comportment prescribed for monks and carrying their alms bowls, they walked a fixed route around

³ See also Prebish 2003:60-68.

⁴ Tambiah 1984:137. [Bell’s ref does not concur.]

⁵ Tambiah 1984:137 [ref corrected].

⁶ Tambiah 1984:137 [ref corrected].

the streets of Hampstead and across the open heath. Predictably, they would return having received nothing but curious stares, but the practice enabled the newcomers to assert their status as mendicant monks among the lay followers whose interest was rekindled by the flurry of fresh activity at the *vihāra*. The ritual of the alms-round acted as a powerful lesson in the significance of mendicancy for maintaining the equilibrium between monks and lay people, some of whom began to turn up with gifts of food at the time that the monks set out from the *vihāra*.

(2000:13; emphasis added)

Today, after Ajahn Chah’s death, numerous forest monasteries and meditation centres have been set in many countries (often several in each) on almost every continent. The hallmark of their success is that they are true to their word as practitioners, totally refraining from sex, from the TV, from driving their own cars, from evening meals and from handling money. In other words, they basically kept to the traditional Pāṭimokkha (monastic code), and their popularity is rapidly growing.

Ratanasara’s sentiments about sexuality and “casual company with women as part of their normal pastoral relationships in America” starkly contrasts against the fact that “Ajahn Chah insisted that he and the other monks go out on an alms-round each day in order to maintain an association with the discipline and continuities of monastic life.” The success of true Buddhist mission lies in the missionary’s giving priority of spiritual development. The purpose of monastic training is not to change the rules, but to follow them and cultivate one’s spiritually.

It should be clarified, however, that the Buddha’s rejection of sexuality as part of the monastic life does not apply to lay followers under the five precepts, of which the third precept applies. For lay followers this rule entails respect for our own person and that of others, and maintaining a healthy social relationship. “The gradual progress towards it [detachment from desires], however, was left to the degree of insight and self-control possessed and developed by the individual lay follower.” (Nyanaponika 1974:3).

2 Sutta summary

As pointed out by Damien Keown, the Alagaddûpama Sutta comprises four main sections:⁷

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|--------------|---|--------------------------|
| (1) §§1-10: | The monk Ariṭṭha holds a serious wrong view | (M 1:130-134,22); |
| (2) §§11: | The parable of the water-snake | (M 1:134,23-29); |
| (3) §§12-14: | The parable of the raft | (M 1:134,30-135,26); and |
| (4) §§15-47: | The Buddha’s admonitions | (M 1:135,27-142,8). |

The first part of this sutta [§1-6] is found in two places in the Vinaya: the announcement of the act of suspension (*ukkhepaniya,kamma*) on **Ariṭṭha** for refusing to give up his false view (V 2:25), and the commission of an offence entailing expiation (*pācittiya*) in refusing to do so after repeated admonitions (V 4:133 f). Apparently Ariṭṭha was not the only one who holds such a wrong view. The novice **Kaṇḍaka**, too, holds the same view and is expelled from the Order (V 4:138 f). The Vinaya Commentary (VA 4:874), declares that Ariṭṭha, the novice Kaṇḍaka and the Vajji,puttakas are enemies of the Teaching.⁸

In §6 we find 10 similes of **the disadvantages of sensual pleasures**. After the Buddha has rebuked Ariṭṭha [§7], these 10 similes are repeated in §8 when the Buddha addresses the monks. §9 records a key statement on the monastic view of sexuality: that there can be no sexual act without sexual desire. One is said to be “bound by delight and lust” (*nandī,rāga.sahagatā*) because they lose one’s freedom of body, speech and mind to them. Such a person’s deeds, words and thought would be coloured or biased by lust and sexuality.

The title simile—**the parable of the water-snake**—appears in §10 which also mentions the nine-limbed Teachings. In §11, the Buddha admonishes on the proper study of the Dharma, warning his followers not to misrepresent him (§12).

⁷ Keown 1992:96.

⁸ See Cullavagga 12/V 2:294 ff.

In the **parable of the raft** [§13]—which is the key simile here—the Buddha goes on to show the serious error that lies in wrongly grasping of what one has learnt, that is, the dangers of misconceiving and misinterpreting the Teaching [§14]. [3.1.4]

The following §§15-17, on **the 6 grounds for self-view**, deal with how a disciple should regard the six senses so that they do not become sources for anxiety through their being the “grounds for views.” §§18-21 further discuss internal (sensuous and mental) and external (physical and social) sources of anxiety. This important passage preserves the Buddha’s rejection of the Upanishadic view of the eternal soul.⁹

The teachings of impermanence and not-self are then applied to the six senses [§§22-29]. Using more similes, the Buddha goes on to list the nature of the arhat [§§30-36].

Despite the Buddhist openness to inquiry (as characterized by **the Kesa,puttiyā Sutta**, A 3.65),¹⁰ and the Buddha admonishing the monks to be equanimous towards both praise and blame by outsiders towards the Teaching [§§38 f], he is very firm against any misconception (M 63), misrepresentation (M 38) and misuse of the Teaching (M 3; V 2:110 f) [§§37-39].

“Let go of what is not yours!” admonishes the Buddha in regards to the 6 types of sense-experiences [40] and he illustrates this with a delightfully unique **Jetavana simile** [§41].

In closing, the Buddha declares that his Teaching is “free from patchwork,” that is, transparent [§42], and mentions the different types of saints and spiritually developed “true individuals”¹¹ found in his Teaching [§§43-47].

3 The Sutta structure and critique

3.1 ARIṬṬHA’S WRONG VIEW.

3.1.1 Damien Keown, in his *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, thinks that the Sutta “probably consists of sections which were originally separate and subsequently placed together by the compilers of the Canon on the basis of the thematic unity” (1992:96). In part (1) [§§1-10], the story of Ariṭṭha is also found in two places in the Vinaya, with additional details regarding the penalty that inflicted on him for his refusal to renounce his wrong views. Keown thinks that “it is possible that the story was imported into the Vinaya from the Majjhima” (1992:97). A V 2:25-27, Ariṭṭha is subjected to the formal act of suspension (*ukkhepanīya, kamma*), while at V 4:133-136, his misconduct is given as the origin of Pācittiya 68. From the internal evidence of the texts as we have them, it is difficult to say which of these three stories is the original one.

However, from his comparison of the Ariṭṭha case in the Alagaddûpama Sutta with the Sāti case in **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya Sutta** (M 38),¹² Keown proposes

The Sāti story does not seem to occur in the Vinaya, so it cannot have been borrowed from that source. If the Sāti story was not borrowed, then perhaps neither was the Ariṭṭha story, and hence the Majjhima version of the Ariṭṭha story may well be the original. (Keown 1992:104)

Furthermore, as evident from the Commentary,¹³ where Buddhaghosa remarks on how the Buddha uses parables in the discourses, it is clear that he regards the whole of the Alagaddûpama Sutta as an integral whole:

When using a parable, the Blessed One sometimes sets out the parable first, and then explains the meaning. At other times, he explains the meaning and then gives the parable. Sometimes he teaches surrounding (*parivāretvā*) the parable with the meaning. For example...in the whole of suttas, such as the Alagaddûpama Sutta, where he says,

⁹ See **Taṇhā Jālīnī S** (A 4.199) = SD 31.15 Intro (3) & Gombrich 1996: 38-42.

¹⁰ See SD 35.4.

¹¹ “True individuals” (*sappurisa*): see discussion at **Sappurisa S** (M 113) = SD 23.7 Intro (3.1).

¹² **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya S** (M 38.14/1:260 f) = SD 7.10.

¹³ At the start of Comy (MA 2:165 f) on **Vatthûpama S** (M 7.1/1:36,11) = SD 28.12.

“Here, bhikshus, some clansmen learn the Dharma—discourses, etc... Suppose a man needing a water-snake [M 22.11/1:134]...,” he taught surrounding the parable with the meaning.

(MA 1:165 f)

As such, we can see that Buddhaghosa takes part (2) of the Sutta as the core parable, and the other parts as giving its meaning. Thus, Buddhaghosa clearly sees the Alagaddûpama Sutta, through the parable of the water-snake, as addressing the dangers of wrongly grasping the dharmas.¹⁴

3.1.2 Returning to the Sutta: in **Part 1**, we see that Ariṭṭha stubbornly clings to his view that it is sexuality is not a stumbling block to a monk’s spiritual development [§2]. Apparently, he is persuaded by the fact that since laymen could enjoy sense-pleasures, yet still become streamwinners, then “why is an exception made regarding form, voice, touch, etc, of women?” (MA 2:103) [§1]. Despite protests from his fellow monks, and later the admonition of the Buddha that one simply cannot enjoy sensual pleasure without sensual desire [§9], Ariṭṭha still refuses to renounce his wrong view. Indeed, he seems to have become “the canonical archetype of pig-headedness” (Keown 1992:97); for, when Buddhaghosa elsewhere discusses the meaning of the term “reluctant to renounce” (*duppaṭinissagi*) in regard to wrong views, he cites Ariṭṭha as an example (DA 3:839).

3.1.3 In **Part 2** of the Sutta, the parable of the water-snake is introduced to point out the dangers of not studying the Dharma for the right purpose, but “only for the sake of criticizing others and for winning debates” [§10]. We clearly see here the Buddha’s warning against the misuse of scripture, which is compared to the danger of wrongly grasping (*dugahūtattā*) a water-snake: on who does so would be bitten and “suffer death or deadly pain” [§10].

We see this theme of the danger of clinging to wrong views in both parts (1-2) of the Sutta. In the first part, Ariṭṭha, motivated by lust, stubbornly holds on to a distorted view of the Teaching. The Buddha clearly points out the error of his view: “But this monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit. For, this will lead to this his harm and suffering for a long time”¹⁵ [§8].

3.1.4 According to Keown, **Part 3**—the parable of the raft [§§13-14]—like the first two parts, is “concerned essentially with illustrating the danger of a wrong grasp or misappropriation of good things rather than advocating their transcendence” (1992:99).¹⁶ The Buddha sums up the parable as follows: “Even so I have shown you that the Dharma is comparable to a raft, which is for crossing over (the waters to the far shore), not for the purpose of grasping” [§13]. As Keown notes:

The word “grasping” (*gahaṇa*) echoes the “wrong grasp” (*duggahūta*) of the teaching by Ariṭṭha, and also the “wrong grasp of the scriptures” (*dugahūtattā dhammānaṃ*) by the foolish men who master them for the wrong purpose. The Buddha is saying that he has taught *dhamma* in the Parable of the Raft so that people will realize that his teachings are to be used for the purpose he intended, namely, reaching salvation, and not for anything else. It is a warning to the brethren not to pervert the teachings as a means to gratifying their personal desires, be it for carnal pleasure as in Ariṭṭha’s case, or “reproaching and gossiping” in the case of the foolish men. (1992:99)

Keown goes on to suggest that the title of the “Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake” is highly appropriate for the first three sections. The common warning is that to grasp the teaching in the wrong way is like grasping a water-snake in a wrong way, bringing upon one death or deadly pains, that is, spiritual failure.

¹⁴ Elsewhere, Buddhaghosa remarks that in Alagaddûpama S, the explanation of false views comes first (perhaps—suggests Keown, 1996:242 n24—meaning our part 4, followed by the explanation of the threefold circle of emptiness (part 4) (MA 1:176,3-4).

¹⁵ *Atha ca panāyaṃ Ariṭṭho bhikkhu gaddhabādhi, pubbo attanā duggahūtena amhe c’eva abbhācikkhati. Attānaṃ ca khaṇati. Bahuṃ ca apuññaṃ pasavati. Tam hi tassa mogha, purisassa bhavissati dīgha, rattaṃ ahitāya dukkhāya*

¹⁶ For an in-depth study of the problem of transcendence, see **Beyond Good and Evil** = SD 18.7(6).

3.1.5 Although the Sutta only mentions Ariṭṭha’s “wrong grasp” that would bring “harm and suffering for a long time to come” [§10], the Commentary gives an interesting detail. Although the Buddha describes Ariṭṭha as *mogha, purisa* (literally, “empty person”),¹⁷ he seeks comfort in the fact that the Buddha also rebukes Upasena Vaṅganta,putta with the same expression, but the latter goes on to realize direct knowledge (*abhiññā*), that is, becomes an arhat (V 1:59). The Buddha however removes Ariṭṭha’s lingering hope by likening his spiritual condition to that of a broken, withered leaf (*mutta, paṇḍu, palāsa*), that is, a state of non-growth (*avirūlhi, bhāva*) (MA 2:104). This finally leaves Ariṭṭha crestfallen, sitting “silent, dismayed, his shoulders drooping, hanging his head, glum, and at a loss for an answer” [§7].

3.2 BUDDHAGHOSA’S EXPLANATION. Let us now examine what the Buddha probably means by the Sutta’s key sentence: *Dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag’eva adhammā*, translated here as “...you should abandon even dharmas, how much more that which are not dharmas!” [§14]. Scholars like John Ross Carter have pointed out the polysemy of the term *dhamma*.¹⁸ However, there are some pointers here, such as the grammatical number and the context of the term. *Dhammā* in the sentence is plural, and as such is unlikely to refer to the Buddha’s Teaching as a whole (which is singular). “Consequently, it is unlikely to imply that the wholesale transcendence of religious practice is envisaged at a certain stage of the Path.” (Keown 1992:101).

Following Keown, let us provisionally render *dhammā* as “good things” and *adhammā* as “evil things.” Buddhaghosa, in his Commentary, interprets the reference to going beyond “good things” more specifically as a warning regarding the danger of being attached to meditative experience:

21 “You must let go of even good things...” Here “good things” (*dhammā*) means calm and insight (*samatha, vipassanā*). The Blessed One says that desire-and-lust (*chanda, rāga*) is to be abandoned by both (*pi*) calm and insight. How does he do this with regards to calm?

“Thus indeed, Udāyi, do I speak of the abandoning of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Do you, Udāyi, see any fetter,¹⁹ tiny or great, whose abandonment I do not speak of?” [M 66.34/1:456]. Here, desire-and-lust is to be abandoned through calm.

“Bhikshus, no matter how pure, how clear, this view may be, if you do *not* stick to it, do *not* prize it, are *not* acquisitive about it, do *not* treat it as a possession...” [M 38.14/1:260 f]. Here, desire-and-lust is to be abandoned through insight.

But here, in reference to abandoning *both*, he says, “You should abandon even the dharmas, how much more that which is not dharmas!”

22 This is the gist: “Bhikshus, speak of the abandoning of desire-and-lust even in such things that are profoundly calm (*santa, paṇītesu*).²⁰ How much more then in respect to this wickedness, vulgarity, baseness, crudeness, that which requires ablution, wherein this foolish one, Ariṭṭha, perceiving no fault, says: “There is no obstruction in having desire-and-lust in the five cords of sense-pleasure.”²¹

“Do not, like Ariṭṭha, throw mud or rubbish on my Teaching!” Thus the Blessed One rebuked Ariṭṭha with this admonition. (MA 2:109)²²

In Buddhaghosa’s first citation—that of **the Laṭukikôpama Sutta** (M 66)—the “abandoning” refers to the letting go of the various dhyanic attainments as one has fully attained them, stage by stage.²³ Here it is meditation attainments that one should not be attached to, but taken as stages in the pilgrim’s progress.

¹⁷ See §6 n on “hollow man.”

¹⁸ Carter 1976a, 1976b, 1978.

¹⁹ On fetters, see text §34n.

²⁰ “Profoundly calm” (*santa, paṇītesu*), Masfield has “the calm state of this (peace)...most choice” (UA:M 643). One could more freely take *santa, paṇīta* as a dvandva here to mean “the tranquil and the exquisite,” referring to *samatha* and *vipassanā* respectively, which fits the context here rather well, too. See PED: *paṇīta*.

²¹ *Pañcasu kāma, guṇesu chanda, rāgaṇi nālaṃ antarāyāyā ti vadati*. This sentence is found only in Comy.

²² Keown inadvertently cites this as “MA 1:209.”

²³ See M 66.26-34/1:455 f = SD 28.11.

A few scholars have disagreed with Buddhaghosa's interpretation here. Richard Gombrich, for example, thinks that Buddhaghosa, interpreting of *dhammā* in terms of "prescribed behaviour or condition, ... therefore drags in types of meditation, which are mentioned nowhere in the text and are completely alien to the context" (1996:25 n27). Although Buddhaghosa belonged to or was reflecting the scholastic tradition of the Mahāvihāra of Anuradhapura in mediaeval Sri Lanka, we can take him as *reinterpreting* the Sutta according to the prevalent Buddhist view of meditation (as *samatha* and *vipassanā*). Such a free interpretation of canonical texts are common with Dharma teachers, as part of a living Dharma transmission, even today. However, in textual criticism,²⁴ a "closer reading" is often desirable, at least for the academicians.

Buddhaghosa's second citation is especially significant because it is a canonical text, namely, **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38), where the parable is mentioned by name. He quotes how the Buddhas, after explaining how consciousness arises interdependently and how a being depends on "food," admonishes thus:

"Bhikshus, no matter how pure, how clear, this view may be, if you stick to it, prize it, be acquisitive about it,²⁵ treat it as a possession,²⁶ would you then understand that the Dharma has been taught **as being comparable to a raft**²⁷ that is for crossing over [the waters to the far shore], not for grasping?"

"No, bhante."

"Bhikshus, no matter how pure, how clear, this view may be, if you do *not* stick to it, do *not* prize it, are *not* acquisitive about it, do *not* treat it as a possession, would you then understand that the Dharma has been taught as being comparable to a raft, which is for crossing over [the waters to the far shore], not for the purpose of grasping?"

"Yes, bhante."

(M 38.14/1:261 f)

The context here is that of interdependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*), that is, a *doctrine*. It is thus clear that the meaning of the parable of the raft is

that one should not become slavishly attached to a view *even when that view is true*. One should understand the true nature of consciousness but not become fixated on it *qua* philosophical theory. It must be put to its proper use as part of the Path and within the context of the rest of Buddhist teachings.

(Keown 1992:103)

3.3 DHARMA AND DHARMAS. Gombrich, in his interestingly exploratory *How Buddhism Began* (1996), has done a useful critical study of the two famous parables of the Alagaddûpama Sutta.²⁸ He begins by pointing out the problem of "scholastic literalism" (his expression):

Texts have been interpreted with too much attention to the precise words used and not enough to the speaker's intention, the spirit of the text. In particular I see in some doctrinal developments what I call scholastic literalism, which is a tendency to take the words and phrases of earlier texts

²⁴ Also called "lower criticism," ie the attempt to reconstruct the original text as far as can be determined, involving reconstruction of transmission history and assessment of the relative value of manuscripts. "Higher criticism" deals with matters such as historical background, authorship, nature and date of composition, etc.

²⁵ "Be acquisitive about it," *dhanāyati* (denom of *dhana*, "treasure") lit "make a treasure of it," he desires (like money), wishes for, strives after. Also read as *vanāyati*, he hankers after.

²⁶ This verse up to here qu in Comy to **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22) (MA 22.21/2:109).

²⁷ "Being comparable to a raft," *kullûpamañi*. The whole phrase can be alt tr as "would you then understand the Dharma as taught in the parable of the raft...?" See **Bodhi**: "This is said to show the bhikkhus that they should not cling even to the right view of insight meditation" (M:ÑB 1233 n406).

²⁸ Gombrich 1996:21-26.

(maybe the Buddha's own words) in such a way as to read in distinctions which it was never intended to make. (Gombrich 1996:21 f)

Gombrich goes on to say that the Buddha is himself aware of the dangers (or disadvantages) of “putting words first” (*pada,parama*), that is, the last of the four types of unawakened learners. From **the Ugghaṭitaññū Sutta** (A 4.143), we know that “the word learner” is one, who though he hears much, recites much, remembers much, and speaks much, is still unable to realize the nature of true reality.

Ugghaṭitaññū Sutta

The Discourse on the Quick Learner

[The four types of unawakened learners]
Aṅguttara 4.143/2:135 & Pug 4.5/42

Bhikshus, there are these four individuals to be found in the world. What are the four?²⁹

- (1) The quick learner (*ugghaṭitaññū*) [an individual who realizes the Dharma³⁰ the moment it is spoken];³¹
- (2) The intellectual (*vipacitaññū*, lit “diffuse learner”) [the individual who realizes the Dharma that is spoken in brief, when its meaning is being analysed in detail];³²
- (3) The trainable (*neyya*) [the individual who in stages realizes the Dharma through recitation, questioning, wise attention, and by associating with, serving and waiting upon spiritual friends];³³ and
- (4) The word learner (*pada,parama*) [the individual who though listening much, reciting much, remembers much, speaking much, there is no Dharma realization for him].³⁴

These four individuals, bhikshus, are to be found in the world.

— evaṃ —

After pointing that “...Buddhism provides the best tools for its exegesis,” (22) Gombrich goes on to discuss *dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag’eva adhammā* (“you should abandon even the dharmas, how much more that which is not dharmas!”) [§14], the Sutta’s key phrase, or, more specifically, the meaning of *dhammā* (plural) here. Just before making this key statement, the Buddha refers to the Dharma in the singular, thus:

Even so I have shown you that the Dharma (*dhamma*) is comparable to a raft, which is for crossing over (the waters to the far shore), not for the purpose of grasping. [§13]

²⁹ A 2:135; with explanations from Pug 4.5/41; Nett 7, 125; AA 3:131.

³⁰ *Dhammābhisamaya*, ie, penetrating into or gaining knowledge of the four truths (PugA 223; BA 127), which refers to the attainment of any of the path to sainthood; when streamwinning is meant, the term is *dhamma,cakkhu,-paṭilābha* (attaining of the Dharma-eye). See S:B 526.

³¹ *Yassa puggalassa saha udāhaṭa,velāya dhammābhisamayo hoti* (Pug 4.5/41).

³² *Yassa puggalassa saṅkhittena bhāsītassa vitthārena athe vibhajiyamāne dhammābhisamayo hoti* (Pug 4.5/41).

³³ *Yassa puggalassa uddesato paripucchato yoniso manasikaroto kalyāṇa,mitte sevato bhajato payirupāsato evaṃ anupubbena dhammābhisamayo hoti* (Pug 4.5/41).

³⁴ *Yassa puggalassa bahum pi suṇato bahum pi bhanato bahum pi dhārayato bahum pi vācayato, na tāya jātiyā dhamābhisamayo hoti* (Pug 4.5/41).

Of this usage, Gombrich explains:

...the Buddha refers to his teaching sometimes as *dhamma* in the singular and sometimes as *dhammā* in the plural, just as we in English can talk of his teaching or his teachings without any change in meaning. Similarly, the raft simile happens to begin with *dhamma* in the singular—"I shall teach you that my teaching is like a raft"—and to end with *dhammā* in the plural; but to imagine that there is a change of reference is sheer scholastic literalism. (Gombrich 1996:24)

The point is clear: the Buddha rebukes Ariṭṭha for taking the Teaching only in a certain sense and clinging on to it. He is repudiating Ariṭṭha's misinterpretation of his words, for grasping the letter at the cost of the spirit. The point here is *not* that the content of his teaching is to be abandoned once one has awakened, but that the Teaching is "pragmatic, a means to an end, and that one should not cling to a particular formulation he used—let alone something he never said at all." (Gombrich 1996:24).

Gombrich then points out that *dhammā* (plural) can also mean the objects of thought (he calls them *noeta*), making this important observation:

Lifting the last words out of context, Mahāyāna texts claimed that the Buddha prescribed the abandonment of all objects of thought; and by the same token that he also recommended the abandonment of opposite, non-objects of thought—whatever they might be. Thus the raft simile became a charter for paradox and irrationality. (Gombrich 1996:25)

As an example of "whatever they might be" (alluding to the Mahāyāna philosophers' revision of the Buddha's words and the like), Gombrich quotes the following excerpt from **the Diamond Sutra** as an example:

[6] *The Lord:* ... Nor does there take place in these Bodhi-beings [Bodhisattvas], these great beings, a perception of a dharma, and likewise [there is] no perception of a no-dharma. Nor Subhūti, does a perception or no-perception take place in them. And why? If, Subhūti, in these Bodhi-beings, these great beings, a perception of a dharma could take place, that would be with them a seizing on a self, seizing on a being, seizing on a soul, seizing on a person. And why? Because the Bodhi-being, the great being, should not seize upon a dharma or a no-dharma. Therefore this saying has been taught by the Tathagata with a hidden meaning, "By those who know the discourse on dharma like unto a raft, dharmas should be forsaken, much more so no-dharmas."

7 *The Lord:* What do you think, Subhūti, *is* there any dharma which has been fully known by the Tathagata as "the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment," or is there any dharma which has been demonstrated by the Tathagata?

Subhūti: No, as I understand the Lord's teaching, there is not any dharma which has been fully known by the Tathagata as "the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment," and there is no dharma which has been demonstrated by the Tathagata. And why? This dharma which has been fully know or demonstrated by the Tathagata,—it is not to be seized, it is not to be talked about, it is neither dharma nor no-dharma. And why? Because an Absolute [*asaṃskṛta*] exalts the Holy Persons. (Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, 1974:69 f; emphasis added)

The Diamond Sutra is a work of the Wisdom Period of early Mahāyāna, whose textual nucleus began appearing from 100 BCE to 100 CE. The Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra (c300-500), the best known of the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñā, pāramitā*) sutras, belong to the later Wisdom Period, just before the rise of Tantric Buddhism (600-1200) and the general disappearance of Buddhism from India. The Perfection of Wisdom centres around **two radical innovations:**

- firstly, it advocates the Bodhisattva ideal as the highest form of religious life (contra the arhat ideal of early Buddhism); and

- secondly, the “wisdom” (*prajñā*) it teaches is into the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and non-production of phenomena (*dharmā*) (contra the more “substantial,” albeit impermanent, nature of being taught earlier).

The tone of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras are profoundly *philosophical*, often with a subtle power of their own, but outgrowing the pragmatic instructive mind-centred spirituality of early Buddhism. The Wisdom period was a time of *the book religion*, as all these sutras were in written (later printed) form (as against the early oral teachings). It is essentially a cult of the written word that worships and celebrates the entrancing beauty and awe of the script and sound of this-worldly emptiness and cosmic Bodhisattvas. It sees itself as transcending the somewhat tedious path of inner stillness beyond language and concept, ending in streamwinning or in nirvana.

3.4 CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE PROBLEMS. Migrant Buddhism reached a new level of perfection of its own in China, and Chinese Buddhism became one of the source and standard for East Asia Buddhism.³⁵ The enduring influence of Chinese Buddhism emanates not only from its religiosity and monasticism, but more so from the semantic power and profundity of the Chinese character. Chinese language comprises pictures and symbols that make up characters, some of which are simple, while others are compound. The simple characters are combined to create compounds. Concrete objects are easily represented by such characters, but abstract ideas, such as wisdom, evil, consciousness, and mind, or foreign names (such as Gautama), are not always adequately represented.

Many difficulties attended the translating of Buddhist sutras from Indic languages into Chinese. There are two main problems:

- (1) The two **languages** come from completely different language stocks. Sanskrit, Pali and other Indic languages belong to the Indo-Aryan family, while the Chinese language is from the Sino-Tibetan family. The Indic languages are alphabetic, while Chinese is monosyllabic. Linguistically, Chinese is said to be an analytic, isolating, or root language, that is, one in which the words are invariable, and syntactic relationships are shown by word order. Indic languages, on the other hand, are said to be synthetic, fusional, or inflecting (also inflected or inflectional).
- (2) There is a vast difference between Chinese and Indian **cultures and philosophies**. Not only did translators discover it was nearly impossible to find synonyms or near-synonyms, or equivalent concepts for the scriptures in the Chinese language, but they also found a very basic difference between the ways of thinking and of expressing thoughts in the two languages.

China’s history profoundly influenced Buddhism. In China, although the state generally failed to regulate the Sangha (unlike, for example, in Japan), because such efforts were tempered by geographical, cultural and political contingencies. Chinese monks, however, irrespective of their ordination lineage, were unified by their adherence to a more or less common monastic code, a common mode of dress, a common stock of liturgical and ritual knowledge, and so on. As such, Chinese monks could easily wander from monastery to monastery in search of new teachers and teachings. Such peregrinations were the norm that contributed to the consolidation of the Chinese Sangha across the empire.³⁶

Such a centralizing of Chinese society and its pragmatism easily lead the Chinese mind to turn away from the *ekāyana*, the “one-going” mind-training of the eightfold path,³⁷ and direct its genius to the *eka-yāna*, “the one vehicle” of cosmic Buddhism. In such a scenario, both *dharmā* and *adhammā* are transcended, albeit mostly philosophically.

3.4 THE PROBLEM OF TRANSCENDENCE. Keown here makes an important rebuttal of the modern wrong view of “**transcendence**,” arising from a misinterpretation of the parable of the raft, by such scholars who claim that the arhat “is above good and evil” (IB Horner 1950:1) and that he has “transcended

³⁵ Seen Piya Tan, *History of Buddhism: A brief strategic study*, 2005 chs 6-9.

³⁶ Robert H Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*. A Kuroda Institute Book. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002:9.

³⁷ On *ekāyana, magga*, see **The Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas** = SD 13.1 (3.2).

ordinary morality” (G Dharmasiri 1986:183). Keown draws his evidence from the Commentary. First, when commenting on the parable of the raft [§§12-14], Buddhaghosa specifically links the moral of the parable to the story of Ariṭṭha, occurring in part (1), mentioning him by name.³⁸ Secondly, Keown notes,

The Commentary makes no reference whatsoever in any shape or form to the interpretation of the parable as suggested by Horner. There is no mention of transcendence, no word of “going beyond good and evil” and no suggestion at all that the *dhamma* or any part of it is to be left behind at any stage of the Path. If the parable indeed had this extraordinary and momentous meaning surely it would not be passed over without a word? (Keown 1992:100)

We have seen that the context of the parable of the raft is that of interdependent arising [3.2]. It is clear that the Buddha does not—as otherwise proposed by scholars like Horner and Dharmasiri—that the view is to be transcended, but *merely not clung to*. Buddhaghosa again makes this very clear in his commentary on **the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38) passage here:

[M 38.14/1:260,32] ...Here “**view**” (*diṭṭhi*) means right view through insight. It is perfectly “**pure**” (*parisuddha*) by seeing the nature of things (*sabhāva*), “**clear**” (*pariyodāta*) by seeing conditionality. “**If you stick to it**” (*allīyetha*) means “if you dwell clinging with views tainted by craving.” “**(If you) prize it**” (*kelāyetha*) means “if you dwell cherishing, sporting, with views tainted with craving.”... “**For crossing over, not for grasping**” (*nittharanathāya no gahaṇ’-athāya*) means “the Dharma taught by me in the parable of the raft is for crossing over the four floods [ie, the *āsava*: sense-desire, existence, views, ignorance], not for grasping: shouldn’t you realize this?” (MA 2:307 f)

This commentary is especially relevant to the understanding of the parable of the raft, as the story of Sāti in the Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya Sutta parallels that of Ariṭṭha here, the main difference being the point of wrong view: while Ariṭṭha holds that sensual pleasure is not an obstacle the monastic spiritual life, Sāti views that it is the “same consciousness” (that is, some sort of soul) continues into the next life.³⁹

Hence, it is clear, from both the text and the commentary, that the parable of the raft addresses the problem attachment and fixation to dharmas (*dhammā*)—meaning both doctrinal or philosophical notions, and meditative states, not matter how sublime—and does *not* reject or transcend moral virtue in favour of a state “beyond good and evil.”⁴⁰

To sum up: the theme of the Discourse of the Parable of the Water Snake and of the Raft Parable is not transcendence but a warning that even good things can be misused. The teachings are good but Ariṭṭha distorts them. The scriptures are good but some people twist them to their own ends. The raft is good but becomes a handicap of misused by being carried around. Calming and insight meditation are good but can be a hindrance if an attachment for them is allowed to develop. From a Buddhist perspective, those who do not follow the Way have little hope of salvation. The Parable of the Water Snake warns that even those who *do* follow the Way can find themselves, if they are not careful, in a spiritual dead-end. (Keown 1992:105)

In short, it can be said that the Sutta centres around the idea of not misrepresenting the Buddha’s teaching. This misrepresentation here is the affirmation or approval of sense-gratification and of self-view. Both of these—sense-gratification and self-view—are clearly obstructions to spiritual development since they

³⁸ Buddhaghosa makes two additional references (MA 2:110, 113) to Ariṭṭha in relation to part (4) of the Sutta [ad §§15, 26], but this does not directly concern the argument here.

³⁹ **Mahā Taṇhā,saṅkhāya S** (M 38.14/1:260 f) = SD 7.10.

⁴⁰ See Keown 1992:103. For a detailed discussion, see **Beyond Good and Evil** = SD 18.7.

spring from craving and ignorance respectively. Above all, the Buddha advises us to keep moving on—neither to stop nor give up—until the final goal is reached.

4 Refuting the doctrine of self

4.1 THE SIX GROUNDS FOR WRONG VIEWS. The Alagaddūpama Sutta is a good example of where the Buddha attempts to refute the doctrine of *ātman* (Skt *attā*). More precisely, as demonstrated by **KR Norman**, the Sutta contains a deliberate refutation of Yajñavalkya’s teaching in the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad.⁴¹ In this connection, two Sutta passages are relevant. The first is the section on the six grounds for views [§15], and the second is the “Let go of what is not yours!” passage [§40]. In the section on the six ground for views [§15], the Buddha declares these six wrong views, namely, that

an ignorant ordinary person... (1) regards form... (2) feeling... (3) perception... (4) formations... (5) what is seen, heard, sensed, and thought... and (6) “The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same; I will endure as long as eternity”..., thus, “This is mine; this I am; this is my self.” (M 22.15/1:135)

KR Norman, in his paper, “A note on Attā in the Alagaddūpamā Sutta” (1981), points out that

The idea the world and the *ātman* (=brahman) are the same is found in the Upanishads, and it is possible to find actual verbal echoes of the Upanishads in this passage, e.g. *eṣa ma ātmā* (Chān[dogyā] Up[anishad] 3.14.3-4) and *yathākratur asmim loke puruṣo bhavati tathetaḥ pretya bhavati sa kratum kurvīta... etam itaḥ pretyābhisambhavitāsmi ti* (ibid 3.14.1 and 4).

In contrast to this false view the Buddha states that someone who is cognizant with the *ariyadham[m]a* looks at *rūpa*, etc. with the thought: *na etaṃ mama n’eso ’ham asmi, na m’eso attā*.⁴² “This is not mine, I am not that, that is not my *attā*.” Consequently he is not anxious about something which does not exist. (Norman 1981:20)⁴³

The Buddha then rephrases this statement in terms of the five aggregates (*khandha*), and exhorts his disciples, “Let go of what is not yours!” [40]. To close his admonition that the aggregates are not their *attā*, that is, a final refutation of the view that the external world, the aggregates and the *attā* are the same, he deftly points to the “the grass, sticks, branches and leaves in this Jetavana” in the famous Jetavana simile [41]. The meaning of the Jetavana simile is that we lose nothing by letting go of our attachment to the aggregates (that is, the body and mind): indeed, we have more to gain, namely, liberation.

We are now in a position to assess the basis of the Buddha’s refutation. The doctrine that the world and the *attā* are the same (*so loko so attā*) also affirms the oneness of the individual *attā* and the world-*attā*. The phrase *eso ’ham asmi* “I am that” is the *tat tvam asi* “That thou art” of the Upaniṣad[s] looked at from the point of view of the first person instead of the second person. Since *loka=attā*, then the Buddha’s argument is:

“If there is a world-*attā*, then there is something belonging to the world-*attā* in me. If there is something belonging to the world-*attā* in me, i.e. if there is a world-*attā*, then I (and all other things) would have *attā* which is part of the world-*attā*, and I would have all the “things” that go to make up the world-*attā*. Form (*rūpa*), etc., would be “mine.” If, however, each individual *attā* were part of the world-*attā*, then each painful sensation felt by one part of the world-*attā* would be felt by every part of the world-*attā*, i.e. when wood is burned the *attā* in us would feel

⁴¹ See KR Norman, “A note on Attā in the Alagaddūpama Sutta,” 1981:19-29.

⁴² See Norman 1981:29 n5 on a wrong reading in V 1:14, 19.

⁴³ Norman thinks that “EJ Thomas is too cautious when he states, ‘There may be here some reference to upaniṣadic doctrine, though it is still not the identity of self and Brahmā’ (*History of Buddhist Thought*, London, 1933:103).”

the pain suffered by the *attā* in it. We do not feel any such pain because there is no world-*attā*.”
(Norman 1981:23)

In other words, nowhere in his teachings, does the Buddha ever mention the “world-soul” or universal Self⁴⁴. We find an interesting parallel in the Jain texts where the *Sūyagaḍamga* 1.1.1, too, refutes the world-soul (Norman 1981:24 f). The similarity of the Jain and Buddhist arguments, Norman concludes, “makes it clear that the Buddha in the [Alagaddūpama Sutta] is not merely refuting the individual *ātman*, but also the concept of the world-*ātman*.” (Norman 1981:25)

The Alagaddūpama Sutta closes with a description of how the fetters are destroyed leading to what type of sainthood this brings. Even for those who fail to walk the path, the Buddha makes this remarkable declaration at the close of the Sutta:

In the Teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, those who have mere faith in me and mere love for me, are all bound for heaven.”⁴⁵

(M 22.47/1:142) = SD 3.13

The Buddha, in other words, provides the chance of liberation for all.⁴⁶

4.2 “LET GO OF WHAT IS NOT YOURS!” The second Alagaddūpama Sutta passage which, according to **KR Norman**,⁴⁷ is a deliberate refutation of Yājñavalkya’s teaching in the *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is the “Let go of what is not yours!” passage, thus:

Therefore, bhikshus, let go of [give up] what is not yours. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

What is it that is not yours?

Form... Feeling... Perception... Formations... Consciousness is not yours. Give it up.

When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

(M 22.40/1:140 f)

Norman shows that, in the light of the passage on the six grounds for wrong views, this passage on “Let go of what is not yours!” must be understood as a satirical allusion to the identification of the world and the self. This identification, constituting the most famous doctrine of the *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya Upaniṣads*, was the culmination of the theory of the equivalence between macrocosm and microcosm, between the universe and man. As Gombrich summarizes the point:

the need for multiple, partial equivalence was short-circuited by identifying the soul/essence of the individual and of the world. The Buddha in a sense kept the equivalence, or at least parallelism, for he argued against a single essence at either level and so made macrocosm and microcosm equally devoid of soul/essence.
(Gombrich 1990:15)

A comparison of the following Sutta passages with their Upaniṣad counterparts show how closely related they are, especially where “there seem to be verbal echoes of Yājñavalkya, here summarized by Gombrich (a student of Norman):

⁴⁴ R. Gombrich, in review of Bhattacharya, *L’Ātman-Brahman dan le Bouddhisme Ancien*, in *Archives Internationales d’Histoire des Sciences*, 1978:128 f. (Quoted by Norman 1981:24)

⁴⁵ “Those who have mere faith in me and mere love for me,” *yesaṃ mayi saddhā, mattaṃ pema, mattaṃ*. This phrase is found in Alagaddūpama S (M 22.47/1:143), **Bhaddāli S** (M 65.27/1:444) & **Kiṭṭhā, giri S** (M 70.21/1:479) = SD 12.1. Cf **Sarakāni Ss** (S 55.24-25/4:375-380). Comy explains that this refers to the insight practitioners (*vipassaka puggalā*) who have not attained any supramundane state, not gaining even stream-entry, they are reborn in a heaven. On the other hand, we can take this passage as is, that is, anyone who has “mere faith, mere love” in the Buddha are reborn in a heaven, without going against the grain of early Buddhism. See M:ÑB 2001:1212 n274.

⁴⁶ On the Sutta closing, see also **Beyond Good and Evil** = SD 18.7(7.3).

⁴⁷ See KR Norman, “A note on Attā in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*,” 1981:19-29.

The sixth wrong view in [the ground for wrong view] passage is that after death I shall be *nicco, dhuvo, etc.* Compare:

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.23: *eṣa nityo mahimā brāhmaṇasya* [This is the eternal greatness of Brahman] (the brāhmaṇa here being one who has realized identity with *brahman*);

[Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad] 4.4.20: *aja ātmā mahān dhruvaḥ* [Unknown is the self, great, constant]. The third point of the *tilakkhaṇas, dukkha*, is not mentioned here, but is of course opposed to *ānanda*, as at

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.9.28: *vijñānam ānandaṁ brahma* [Brahman is bliss and absolute knowledge] and

[Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad] 4.3.33: *athaiṣa eva parama ānandaḥ, eṣa brahmalokaḥ* [This is indeed supreme bliss, this Brahma World].

It remains only to remind readers of the most important and closest parallel of all.

The fifth wrong view is to identify with what has been *dittham sutam mutam*⁴⁸ *viññatari*.

What exactly is that? The answer is

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.5.6: *ātmani khalv are drṣṭe śrute mate vijñāte idaṁ sarvaṁ vidita* [When, indeed, the self is seen, heard, thought, and known, all this is known.]

So here is the form of the microcosm-macrocosm equivalence to which the Buddha is alluding; and we can further see that his fifth wrong view is Yajñavalkya's realization of that identity in life, and his sixth the making real that identity at death. But, says the Buddha, this is something that does not exist (*asat*). (Gombrich 1990:15; reparagraphed & Skt tr Piya Tan)

Gombrich, in his article on “*Kamma* as a reaction to Brahminism” (1996), summarizes the above in these words:

The Buddha does not often use ontological language at all. The most explicit passage in which he denies the *existence* of the *ātman* is in the Alagaddūpama Sutta. Perhaps the most famous of all Upaniṣadic dicta is *tat tvam asi* (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6, 8, 7, etc), “Thou art that”—identifying the individual self/essence with the world self/essence. The transposition of this statement into the first person—“I am this”—in Pali gives us *eso 'ham asmi*, and this is said in several texts to be false. To be precise, the full false statement is *etam mama, eso 'ham asmi, eso me attā*: “This is mine, I am this, this is my self/essence.” (Gombrich 1996:38)

Although this set of three clauses is often mentioned as wrong views, it is in the Alagaddūpama Sutta that it is mostly clearly explained [§§15-29],⁴⁹ “and in terms of other obvious verbal echoes of surviving Upaniṣadic passages.”⁵⁰ In essence, the passage denies that one's self is the same as the world, or that one will become the “world self” at death. The Buddha declares that people worry about something that is non-existent externally (*bahiddhā asati*) and non-existent internally (*ajjhattam asati*). According to Gombrich, “he is referring respectively to the soul/essence of the world and of the individual.” (1996:39)⁵¹

4.3 RELATED TEXTS. Nyanaponika Thera's translation, *The Discourse on the Snake Simile* (1974), has a useful introduction and detailed notes. A helpful current translation is found in *The Middle Length*

⁴⁸ Gombrich here has *mate* (not found in Pali in this context): probably contaminated by proximity of the Skt *mate* below. See text, §15(5)n.

⁴⁹ At M 22.15-29/1:135-139. Gombrich (1996:38 n10): Dr Tuvia Gelblum has shown that virtually all the same set of three clauses, adapted to meet the exigencies of the *āryā* metre, is found as *kārikā* 64 of the Sāṃkhya Kārikā. In that context they refer to realizing that the *puruṣa* (spirit) neither is nor possesses any of the evolutes of *prakṛti* (nature). (Gelblum, “Sāṃkhya and Sartre.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 1 1970:75-82, see pp78-80)

⁵⁰ Gombrich notes that “these echoes are not mentioned by the commentators and seem not to have been noticed before modern times. They are mentioned in Hermann Oldenberg 1923:258.” (1996:39 n11). Both KR Norman (1981) and his student, R Gombrich (1990) have recently made such analyses.

⁵¹ Gombrich's teacher, KR Norman holds the same view (1981:23). Gombrich refers to two other suttas in this connection: **Taṇhā Jālinī S** (A 4.199/2:211-213) = SD 31.15, & **Yamaka S** (S 22.85/3:144) = SD 26.14.

Discourses.⁵² IB Horner's translation in *The Middle Length Sayings*, although dated and inaccurate, has some useful technical footnotes.

The Alagaddûpama Sutta should be studied with the story of **Vakkali** (on homosexuality),⁵³ and the following suttas:

Saññoga Sutta (A 7.48),⁵⁴

(Taṇhā) Bhikkhuṇī Sutta (A 4.159)⁵⁵

where the Buddha explains how sexual feelings arise.

a short instructive sutta of psychological interest, as it is one of the earliest mention of "sublimation," that is, channelling one's unacceptable impulses (eg lust and conceit) in acceptable ways.

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⁵² Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, rev ed 2001:224 ff.

⁵³ See **Vakkali S** (S 22.87/3:119-124) = SD 8.8.

⁵⁴ A 7.48/4:57-59 = SD 8.7.

⁵⁵ A 4.159/2:144-146 = SD 10.14.

The Discourse on The Parable of the Water-snake

(M 22/1:130-142)

1 [130] Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anāthapiṇḍika's park in Jeta's grove, near Sāvattihī.

1

Ariṭṭha's evil false view

2 Now at that time, an evil false view⁵⁶ arose in a monk named Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers:

“As I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called ‘obstructions’⁵⁷ by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.”⁵⁸

3a Now, several monks heard, “It is said that such an evil false view had arisen in the monk named Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, thus:

‘As I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called ‘obstructions’ by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.’”

3b Then, these monk went to the monk Ariṭṭha and asked him,

“Avuso Ariṭṭha, is it true that such a harmful view has arisen in you?”

3c “That is true, avuso. As I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called obstructions by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.”

3d Then those monks, desiring to detach him from that harmful view, pressed and questioned him thus:

“Avuso Ariṭṭha, do not say so! Do not misrepresent the Blessed One: it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would not speak thus. For in many ways the Blessed One has stated how obstructive things are obstructions, and how they are able to obstruct one who indulges in them.

The ten similes

3e The Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them. With⁵⁹

⁵⁶ “False view” (*diṭṭhi, gata*), “recourse to views, field of views: (Ñāṇamoli, 1994): 6 kinds are given at Pm 1:130, 2 kinds at It 43.

⁵⁷ “Obstructions” (*antarāyikā dhammā*), ie obstacles, stumbling-blocks. Comy says that the term means “intentionally transgressing the seven classes of offences. For intentional transgression, even an offence of wrongdoing or of wrong speech hinders the fruit of the way.” Comy here gives a list of ideas and deeds that obstruct either heavenly birth or final deliverance or both. But here sexual intercourse (*methuna, dhamma*), is meant (MA 2:33). See V 1:93, 115, S 2:226, Thī 492, Vism 215, MA 3:102. See V:H 3:21 n5 (on Pāc 68).

⁵⁸ In making this statement, Ariṭṭha directly contradicts the third of the four intrepidities (*vesāraja*) of the Buddha. Because of the Buddha's awakening, no one can justly charge that: (1) he is not fully enlightened, (2) he has not fully destroyed his defilements, (3) those obstructions to the spiritual life declared by the Buddha are not obstructions, (4) the Dharma properly practised does not lead to the goal declared by the Buddha. (M 12.25). The novice Kaṇṭhaka holds a similar wrong view (Pāc 70 = V 4:138-140): see **Mahaka Pāṭihāriya S** (S 41.4) Intro (1.1).

⁵⁹ The 10 similes = V 2:25 = A 3:97 = J 5:210 = Thī 487-91; the first 7 similes are explained in detail in **Potaliya S** (M 54.15-21/1:364-368) = SD 43.8. All of them are explained in Comy. For details, see Nyanaponika 1974 n2. References:

(1) *the skeleton*, a fleshless, blood-smeared bone cannot satisfy the hunger of a starving dog (cf S 2:185=It 17).

(2) *the piece of meat*, for which birds of prey fight, unyielding, often meeting death or deadly pain due to their beaks and claws (cf M 1:145; “shared by many” VA 870 = MA 2:103; Vism 341; Miln 280).

(3) *the grass torch*, carried against the wind severely burns the carrier (cf S 2:152).

- (1) the simile of the skeleton [bare bones]...
- (2) the simile of the piece of meat...
- (3) the simile of the grass torch...
- (4) the simile of the pit of burning coals...
- (5) the simile of the dream...
- (6) the simile of borrowed goods...
- (7) the simile of fruit-laden tree...
- (8) the simile of the butcher's knife and block...
- (9) the simile of the sword stake...
- (10) the simile of the snake's head,

the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.”

3f Yet although pressed and questioned and cross-questioned by those monks in this way, the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, still obstinately held on to the harmful view and continued to insist upon it.

Ariṭṭha holds on to his view

4a Since the monks were unable to detach him [131] from that evil false view, they went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to him, they sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, they said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, such an evil false view had arisen in the monk named Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, thus:

‘As I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called ‘obstructions’ by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.’

4b Then, bhante, when we heard that such an evil false view had arisen in the monk named Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, thus:

‘As I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called ‘obstructions’ by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.’

Then, bhante, we approached the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers. Having approached the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, we said this to him:

‘Avuso Ariṭṭha, is it true that such a harmful view has arisen in you?’

4c When this was said, bhante, the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, said this to us:

‘That is true, avuso. As I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called obstructions by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.’

4d Then, bhante, we, desiring to detach him from that harmful view, pressed and questioned him thus:

‘Avuso Ariṭṭha, do not say so! Do not misrepresent the Blessed One: it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would not speak thus. For in many ways the Blessed One has stated how obstructive things are obstructions, and how they are able to obstruct one who indulges in them.

(4) *the pit of burning coals*, over which a man is dragged by others, then thrown into the flame and consumed by it (cf D 3:283; S 4:188; A 4:234, 5:175; Sn 396; J 1:231, 2:313, 4:118; Vism 124).

(5) *the dream* of a beautiful landscape disappears when one awakes (cf Shakespeare's *Sonnet* 129).

(6) *the borrowed goods*, on which one foolishly prides oneself but are taken away by the owners.

(7) *the fruit-laden tree* [or *fruits on a tree*]: one desiring fruits, unable to climb, axes it down, hurting the one already in it.

(8) *the butcher's knife and block* [or *executioner's block*]: sense-desires cut off one's spiritual development (cf M 1:144).

(9) *the sword stake*, sense-desires are piercing, causing wounds where there are none before (S 1:128=Thī 58=141; Vism 341).

(10) *the snake's head*, sense-desires are a grave risk for one's welfare, present and future (Cf Sn 768).

4e The Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.

(1) With the simile of the skeleton [bare bones], the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.’

- (2) With the simile of the piece of meat...
- (3) With the simile of the grass torch...
- (4) With the simile of the pit of burning coals...
- (5) With the simile of the dream...
- (6) With the simile of borrowed goods...
- (7) With the simile of fruit-laden tree...
- (8) With the simile of the butcher’s knife and block...
- (9) With the simile of the sword stake...

(10) With the simile of the snake’s head, the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.’

4f Yet, bhante, although pressed and questioned and cross-questioned by us in this way, the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, still obstinately held on to the harmful view and continued to insist upon it.

Bhante, since we could not detach the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, from this harmful view, we have reported this matter to the Blessed One.”

5 Then the Blessed One addressed a certain monk thus:

“Come, bhikshu, tell the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, in my name, that the Teacher calls him.” [132]

“Yes, avuso,” he replied in assent to the monks, and he went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to him, they sat down at one side. The Blessed One then asked him:

“Ariṭṭha, is it true that the following evil false view has arisen in you: ‘As I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called obstructions by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them?’”

“That is very true, bhante. As I understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, those things called obstructions by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who indulges in them.”

6 “O hollow man,⁶⁰ to whom have you ever known me teach the Dharma in that way? O hollow man, have I not spoken in many ways regarding obstructions and how they obstruct those who indulge in them?

I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.

(1) With the simile of the skeleton [bare bones], I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.

- (2) the simile of the piece of meat...
- (3) the simile of the grass torch...
- (4) the simile of the pit of burning coals...
- (5) the simile of the dream...
- (6) the simile of borrowed goods...
- (7) the simile of fruit-laden tree...
- (8) the simile of the butcher’s knife and block...
- (9) the simile of the sword stake...

⁶⁰ *Mogha, purisa*, lit “empty person.” Usu tr as “misguided one.” However, while *mogha* evokes more deeply a spiritual lack, “misguided” connotes more of psychosocial errancy. I’m influenced by TS Eliot’s “Hollow Men” (where “empty men” is also mentioned) which fully brings out the meaning here but lacks emotional connection for those unfamiliar with the poem. On *mogha, purisa* as a syn of *asappurisa*, see **Sappurisa S** (M 113) = SD 23.7 Intro (3.2).

(10) the simile of the snake’s head, I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.

But you, O hollow man, have misrepresented us by your wrong grasp, and you have injured yourself, and stored up much demerit. For, this will lead to your harm and suffering for a long time.”⁶¹

No sensual pleasure without sensual desire

7 Then the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus, what do you think? Has this monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, kindled even a spark of wisdom in this Dharma and Discipline?”⁶²

“How can this be, bhante? No, bhante.”

When this was said, the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, sat silent, dismayed, his shoulders drooping, hanging his head, glum, and at a loss for an answer. Then knowing this, the Blessed One told him,

“O hollow man, you will be recognized by your own evil false view. I will question the monks on this matter.”

8 Then the Blessed One addressed the monks thus:

“Bhikshus, [133] do you understand the Dharma taught by me as this monk, Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, does when he misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit?”

“No, bhante. For in many ways the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them. With <the ten similes> the Blessed One has stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.”

“Good, bhikshus. It is good that you understand the Dharma taught by me thus.⁶³ For in many ways I have spoken on obstructions and how they obstruct those who indulge in them. I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification,⁶⁴ much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them. With <the ten similes> I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them.

But this monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit. For this will lead to this hollow man’s harm and suffering for a long time.

9 Indeed, bhikshus, it is impossible that one can indulge in sensual pleasures without sensual desires, without perception of sensual desire, without thought of sensual desire!”⁶⁵

⁶¹ This episode thus far is found in two places in the Vinaya: the commission of an offence entailing expiation (*pācittiya*) in refusing to do so after repeated admonitions (V 4:133 f) and the announcement of the act of suspension (*ukkhepaniya, kamma*) on Ariṭṭha for refusing to give up his false view (V 2:25).

⁶² A similar context for this stock phrase is the Buddha’s rebuke of Sāti (**Mahā Taṇhā, saṅkhaya S**, M 38.6/-1:258). Comy remarks that this phrase refers to “one who has not cultivated the ‘warmth of understanding’ (*ñāṇ’-usmā*) that can mature the ‘seed of wisdom’ (*paññā, bījā*, MAṬ) for winning the paths and fruits.” (MA 2:104)

⁶³ Comy notes that by questioning the other monks, the Buddha wants to clarify the Sangha’s view and to leave no doubt in Ariṭṭha that through his mindset, he had alienated himself from the Sangha (MA 2:105). Compatibility of view (*diṭṭhi, sāmāññatā*) is the last of the 6 qualities constituting the virtues for the spiritual community (*sāraṇīya, dhamma*, D 3:245, A 3:288 f), the first 5 being: showing lovingkindness in deed, in speech, and in thought; communal sharing, compatibility of moral virtue. However, despite Ariṭṭha’s alienation, no disciplinary measure is put upon him. Instead, the Buddha actually clarifies the situation before the assembly in Ariṭṭha’s presence which apparently would benefit him in due course.

⁶⁴ Cf Dh 186; F 2:313, 4:118; Vism 124.

⁶⁵ *Aññatr’eva kāmehi aññatra kāma, saññāya aññatra kāma, vitakkehi kāme paṭisevissatā ‘ti n’etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati*, I.B. Horner: “...this situation does not occur when one could follow sense-pleasures apart from sense-pleasures themselves, apart from perceptions of sense-pleasures, apart from thoughts of sense-pleasures” (M:H 1:171). Here “sensual pleasures” (*kāma*) refers to the sensual objects (*vatthu, kāma*) or sense-experiences, and “sensual desires” refers to “sensuality as mental defilement” (*kilesa, kāma*), the subjective aspect of the sense-process. Comy

2

The parable of the water-snake

10a “Here, bhikshus, some misguided people learn the Dharma⁶⁶—the discourses, the stanzas, the expositions, the verses, the inspired utterances, the sayings, the birth stories, the marvels, and the answers to questions⁶⁷—but having learnt the Dharma, they do not wisely examine the (true) purpose [the meaning]⁶⁸ of those teachings.

Without examining the (true) purpose [the meaning] of those teachings with wisdom, they are not convinced of it [they fail to see its wisdom].⁶⁹

Instead, they learn the Dharma only for the sake of criticizing others and for winning debates, and they do not enjoy the good for the sake of which one learns the Dharma. Those teachings, wrongly grasped by them, bring them harm and suffering for a long time to come.⁷⁰

Why is that? Because of the wrong grasp of those teachings.

10b THE WATER-SNAKE. Suppose a man needing a water-snake, looking for a water-snake, wandering in search of a water-snake, sees a large water-snake and grasps its coils or its tail. It would turn back and bite his hand or his arm or one of his limbs, [134] and because of that he would suffer death or deadly pain.

Why is that? Because of the wrong grasp of the water-snake.

explains “sensual pleasures” as “sexual intercourse.” MAT adds that this includes other physical acts expressive of sensual desire such as hugging and stroking. The Sandaka S (M 76.51) say that an arhat “is incapable of transgression in five cases:

(1) A monk whose taints are destroyed is incapable of depriving a living being of life; (2) He is incapable of taking what is not given, that is, of stealing; (3) He is incapable of indulging in sexual intercourse; (4) He is incapable of knowingly speaking falsehood; (5) He is incapable of enjoying sensual pleasures by storing them up as he did formerly in lay life.” [MA. He is incapable of storing food provisions and other pleasurable goods and subsequently enjoying them.] In **Pāsādika S** (D 3:133 / 29.26), four other things that an arhat cannot do are mentioned: he cannot take a wrong course of action because of desire, hatred, fear or delusion. See M:ÑB 2001:1208 n252.

⁶⁶ Comy says that there are three ways of learning the Dharma: (1) like that of the water-snake simile (the wrong grasp), ie for fame and gain (in which case it “would be better for one to sleep and not study at all”; (2) for crossing over (as in the raft simile), ie fulfilling the moral conduct, the concentration, the wisdom, and the paths and fruitions that are the subject of one’s study; (3) like a steward (or, treasurer, store-keeper), ie by one who has given up the defilements, developed the path and realized the fruition, leaving nothing unpenetrated, nothing unrelinquished, nothing undeveloped, nothing unrealized (in reference to the Noble Truths); such is the keeper of the Scriptures, the guardian of the Tradition, the preserver of the Lineage. The first student is the unenlightened worldling; the second, the 7 noble persons (*ariya, puggala*) who are “learners” (*sekha*); the third, the non-learner (*asekha*), the adept, the arhat. An unenlightened worldling, however, may be a student of the first or the second kind.

⁶⁷ *Sutta geyyā veyyākaraṇa gāthā udāna iti, vuttaka jātaka abbhuta, dhamma vedalla*, collectively called *nav’-aṅga satthu sāsana*, the Teacher’s Nine-limbed Teaching (V 3:8, M 1:133, A 3:86). This is a pre-canonical listing of the Teachings.

⁶⁸ That is, the attainment of the paths and their fruits.

⁶⁹ *Tesaṃ te dhammā paññāya atthaṃ anupaparikkhatam na nijjhānam khamanti*. Bodhi: “Not examining the meaning of those teachings with wisdom, they do not gain a reflective acceptance of them.” “**They are not convinced of its wisdom,**” *na nijjhānam khamanti*, ie “they see no wisdom in it.” They are not convinced because of their failure to understand that the purpose of moral conduct is to attain concentration, the purpose of concentration the attaining of insight, etc. (MAT qu by Nyanaponika 1974:35 n10). Here *nijjhāna* (Skt *nidhyāna*) means wisdom or understanding. This phrase, preceded by “having wisely examined the purpose [and/or meaning]” appears in **Kitāgiri S** (M 70.20 = SD 11.1) and **Caṅkī S** (M 95.27 = SD 21.15). On *nijjhānam khamanti*, cf *nijjhāna, khanti*: see **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65) = SD 35.4 Comy 3a. Cf “One for whom these teachings are accepted thus after being pondered to a sufficient degree with wisdom is called a Dhamma-follower” (S 25.1 & S:B 1099 n169).

⁷⁰ Comy explains that this passage aims at showing the fault in merely gaining intellectual knowledge of the Dharma (as in Ariṭṭha’s case). The “good for sake of which one learns the Dharma” is the paths and fruits. (MA 2:106)

10c So too here some misguided person learns the Dharma—discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, inspired utterances, sayings, birth stories, marvels and answers to questions—but having learnt the Dharma, they do not wisely examine the (true) purpose [the meaning] of those teachings.

Without examining the (true) purpose [the meaning] of those teachings with wisdom, they are not convinced of it [they fail to see its wisdom].

Instead, they learn the Dharma only for the sake of criticizing others and for winning debates, and they do not enjoy the good for the sake of which one learns the Dharma. Those teachings, wrongly grasped by them, bring them harm and suffering for a long time to come.

Why is that? Because of the wrong grasp of the teachings.

Purpose of learning the Dharma

11a Here, bhikshus, some clansmen learn the Dharma—discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, inspired utterances, sayings, birth stories, marvels and answers to questions—and having learnt the Dharma, they examine the (true) purpose [the meaning] of those teachings with wisdom.

Having examined the (true) purpose [the meaning] of those teachings with wisdom, they are convinced of it [they see its wisdom].

They do not learn the Dharma for the sake of criticizing others, nor for winning debates, and they enjoy the good for the sake of which one learns the Dharma. Those teachings, properly grasped by them, bring them welfare and happiness for a long time to come.

Why is that? Because of the right grasp of the teachings.

11b THE WATER-SNAKE. Suppose a man needing a water-snake, looking for a snake, wandering in search of a water-snake, sees a large water-snake and catches it rightly with a cleft stick, and having done so, grasps it rightly by its neck. Then, although the snake might coil around his hand or his arm or one of his limbs, still he would not suffer death or deadly pain.

Why is that? Because of the right grasp of the water-snake.

12 Therefore, bhikshus, when you understand the meaning of my word, remember it accordingly, and when you do not understand the meaning of my word, then you should question and counter-question either me or the learned monks about it.

3

The parable of the raft

13 Bhikshus, I will show you how the Dharma is comparable to a raft, that is for crossing over [the waters for the far shore], not for the purpose of grasping. Listen and pay close attention, I will speak.”

“Yes, bhante,” the monks replied in assent to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this:

“Bhikshus, suppose a man in the course of his journey saw a great stretch of water, whose near shore is dangerous and fearful and whose far shore is safe and free from fear, but there is no ferry or bridge for going across to the far shore. **[135]**

Then he thinks: ‘There is this great stretch of water, whose near shore is dangerous and fearful and whose far shore is safe and free from danger, but there is neither ferry nor bridge for going across to the far shore.

What now if I were to collect grass, wood, branches and leaves, and bind them together into a raft, and supported by the raft, and exerting effort with my hands and feet, I go safely across to the far shore.’

And then the man collects grass, wood, branches and leaves, and binds them together into a raft, and supported by the raft and using his hands and feet, goes safely across to the far shore.⁷¹

Then when he has gone across and arrived on the far shore, he might think thus:

⁷¹ Cf a similar parable at **Asīvisōpama S** (S 35.238.8/4:174) = SD 28.1.

‘This raft has been very helpful to me, since supported by it, and exerting effort with my hands and feet, I went safely across to the far shore. Suppose I were to hoist it on my head or bear it on my shoulder, and then go wherever I want.’

Now, bhikshus, what do you think? By doing so, would that man be doing what should be done with the raft?”

“No, bhante.”

“By doing what would that man be doing what should be done with the raft? Here, bhikshus, when that man has gone across and arrived on the far shore, he might think thus:

‘This raft has been very helpful to me, since, supported by it and using my hands and feet, I went safely across to the far shore. Suppose I were to haul it onto dry land or set it adrift in the water, and then go wherever I wish.’

Now, bhikshus, it is by so doing that that man is doing what should be done with that raft.

Even so I have shown you that the Dharma is comparable to a raft, which is for crossing over (the waters to the far shore), not for the purpose of grasping.

14 Bhikshus, having understood the parable of the raft, you should abandon even the dharmas, how much more that which is not dharmas!⁷²

4

The 6 grounds for self-view

15 Bhikshus, there are these SIX GROUNDS FOR VIEWS.⁷³ What are the six?

Here, bhikshus, an ignorant ordinary person, who has no regard for noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma, who has no regard for the true individuals⁷⁴ and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dharma,

- | | |
|--|--|
| (1) regards form thus: | ‘ <u>This is mine; this I am; this is my self.</u> ’ ⁷⁵ |
| (2) He regards feeling thus: | ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’ |
| (3) He regards perception thus: | ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’ |
| (4) He regards formations thus: | ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’ |
| (5) He regards what is seen, heard, sensed, and | |

⁷² *Dhammā pi vo pahātabbā pag’eva adhammā*. Comy takes *dhammā* (pl) here to mean “good states,” ie calm and insight (*samatha, vipassanā*), citing **Laṭutikôpama S** (M 66.26-33/1:455) as an example of the teaching of the abandonment of attachment to calm, and **Mahā Taṇhāsāṅkhaya S** (M 38.14/1:260 f = SD 7.10) as one of the abandonment of attachment to insight. Bodhi, however, is of the view that “*dhamma* here signifies not good states themselves, but the teachings, the correct attitude to which was delineated just above in the simile of the snake.” (M:NB 1209 n255). This parable of the raft is sometimes misquoted—eg by IB Horner (1950:1), Dharmasiri (1986:183)—to mean that the arhat, being “beyond good and evil” is above morality: see Keown 1992:92-102 for a detailed study. See Intro (3).

⁷³ Comy says that this section is taught to prevent a further misrepresentation of the Dharma, i.e. the introduction of a self-view into the teaching. These grounds for views (*diṭṭhi-t,thāna*) are wrong views themselves as grounds for more elaborate wrong views, namely, the objects (*ārammaṇa*) of views (ie the five aggregates) and the conditions (*paccaya*) for views (ie ignorance, mental perversion, false ideas, etc.). The term *diṭṭhi-t,thāna* also appears in **Brahmajāla S** (D 1) and its Comy. Comys say that these grounds could arise through ignorance, sense-impression (*phassa*), perceptions, thoughts, unskillful attention, bad company, the word of others, etc. These 7 headed by the aggregates are given as “the 8 grounds for views” in **Paṭisambhidā, magga** (Pm 2:139/2.3). See Intro (4).

⁷⁴ “True individuals” (*sappurisā*). For def, see **Sappurisa S** (M 113) Intro (3).

⁷⁵ This threefold grasping (*ti, vidha gāha*) comprises (1) “This is mine” (*etaṃ mama*) (arises through craving, *taṇhā, gāha*), (2) “This I am” (*eso ’ham asmi*) (arises through conceit, *māna, gāha*), and (3) “This is my self” (*eso me attā*) (arises through views, *diṭṭhi, gāha*) (see **Anattā, lakkhaṇa S**, S 3:68). These three are also known as “latent tendencies to ‘I’-making, ‘mine’-making and conceit” (*ahaṅ, kāra, mamaṅ, kāra, mānānusaya*) (M 22.15, 72.15, 112.11 20, S 2:75, 3:236, 4:41, A 1:132, 133). These threefold graspings are the main factors behind conceptual thinking (M 1) and mental proliferation (M 18). In short, such experiences are not “beliefs” but direct reactions to reality. See Bodhi, 1980:8-11; Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f. See Intro (4) esp 4.2.

thought,⁷⁶ found, sought after, mentally pursued⁷⁷ thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

(6) And this ground for views, namely, ‘**The world is the self**; after death I⁷⁸ will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging [136] in nature, eternally the same,⁷⁹

I will endure as long as eternity’—this too he regards thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’⁸⁰

16 Bhikshus, a well-taught noble disciple, who has regard for noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma, who has regard for true individuals and is skilled and disciplined in their Dharma regards **form** thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

He regards **feeling** thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

He regards **perception** thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

He regards **formations** thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

He regards what is **seen, heard, sensed,**

thought, found, sought after, mentally pursued thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

And this ground for views, namely, ‘That which is the self is the world; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same; I will endure as long as eternity’—this

too he regards thus: ‘This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.’

17 Regarding them thus, he is not anxious regarding what is non-existent.⁸¹

5

Anxiety over the non-existent

18 When this was said, a certain monk asked the Blessed One:

“Bhante, can there be anxiety over what is non-existent externally?”⁸²

“There can be, bhikshu,” the Blessed One said.

⁷⁶ *Diṭṭha suta muta viññāta*. This series of terms refers to the aggregate of consciousness by way of its objects: the “seen” (*diṭṭha*) refers to the form-base (*rūp’āyatana*), the “heard” (*suta*) to sound-base (*sadd’āyatana*), the “sensed” (*muta*) to nose-object, tongue-object, and body-object, to the other respective three object-bases, and the “thought” or cognized (*viññāta*) to thought-base (*dhamm’āyatana*) and the remaining 6 internal sense-bases (*ajjhat-tika āyatana*): eye-base, etc.

⁷⁷ Comy: “found,” ie whether sought after or not; “sought after,” ie whether finding them or not; “mentally pursued” (or pondered), resorted to by consciousness, ie whether found or not without being sought after. (MA 2:110)

⁷⁸ “After death I will be,” *so pecca bhavissāmi*. Comy *so = so ahañi*.

⁷⁹ “Eternally the same” (*sassati,sama*), a term from the Bṛhad Aranyaka Upaniṣad 5.10 (*sāsvatīh samāh*) (Nyānaponika 1974:42 n21).

⁸⁰ This is the classic eternalist view, where the personality-view itself becomes an object of craving, conceit and false view of the self. Nyānaponika is of the opinion that this view expresses the identity of the self with the universe, but Bodhi thinks that this view is purely hypothetical “as the Pali is ambiguous and could just as well be pointing to a fundamental dualism of self and world along the lines of Sāṃkhya philosophy with its distinction between changeable Nature (*prakṛti*) and changeless Spirit (*puruṣa*): see *kārikā* 64 of Īśvara,krṣṇa’s Sāṃkhya-kārikā (“Verses on Sāṃkhya,” c 2nd cent). See M:ÑB 2001:1210 n259. See Gombrich 1996: 38 f.

⁸¹ “Not anxious over what is non-existent” (*asati na paritassati*). Comy says that the noun *paritassanā* has two connotations: fear (*bhaya*) and craving (*taṇhā*). As such, an alt tr can be “neither fear nor craving over what is non-existent.” Anxiety over what is non-existent externally (§18) refers to the worldling’s despair over losing or not getting possessions. The eternalist is anxious about what is non-existent internally (§20) when he misinterprets the Buddha’s teaching on nirvana as annihilationism. Comy to Brahmajāla S (D 1) has a long discourse on the n *paritassana*, a term that also occurs in **Uddesa,vibhaṅga S** (M 138.20), **Anupādā Paritassanā S** (S 22.7), **Anupādā Na Paritassanā S** (S 22.8), **Upāya S** (S 22.53), and **Udāna S** (S 22.55). The **Samādhi S** (S 22.5) mentions *tāsa* (anxiety). See **Taṇhā Jālīnī S** (A 4.199) SD 26.12 Intro (3).

⁸² Comy: That is, external property, including inanimate possessions, such as wife and child, friends, etc. However, according to Gombrich, this refers to the non-existent self as perceived by the Vedic brahmins: see Intro 4.2.

“Here, bhikshu, someone thinks thus: ‘Alas, I had it! Alas, I have it no longer! Alas, may I have it! Alas, I cannot have it!’

Then he sorrows, grieves, and laments, he weeps beating his breast and becomes distraught. That is how there is anxiety over what is non-existent externally.”

19 “Bhante, can there be no anxiety over what is non-existent externally?”

“There can be, bhikshu,” the Blessed One said.

“Here, bhikshu, someone does *not* think thus: ‘Alas, I had it! Alas, I have it no longer! Alas, may I have it! Alas, I cannot have it!’

Then he does not sorrow, grieve, nor lament, he does not weep beating his breast nor become distraught.

That is how there is no anxiety over what is non-existent externally.”

20 “Bhante, can there be anxiety over what is non-existent internally?”⁸³

“There can be, bhikshu,” the Blessed One said. “Here, bhikshu, has the view:

‘The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same, I will endure as long as eternity’—this too he regards thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

He hears the Tathāgata or the Tathāgata’s disciple teaching the Dharma for the elimination of all fixations⁸⁴ to grounds for views, mindsets, obsessions, inclination and latent tendencies,⁸⁵ for the stilling of all formations, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the fading away (of lust),⁸⁶ for the ending (of suffering),⁸⁷ for nirvana.

He thinks thus: **[137]** ‘So I will be annihilated! So I will perish! So I will be no more!’

Then he sorrows, grieves and laments, he weeps beating his breast and become distraught.

That is how there is anxiety regarding what is non-existent internally.”

21 “Bhante, can there be no anxiety over what is non-existent internally?”

“There can be, bhikshu,” the Blessed One said. “Here, bhikshu, a monk does not have the view:

‘The world is the self; after death I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same, I will endure as long as eternity’—this too he regards thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self.’

He hears the Tathāgata or the Tathāgata’s disciple teaching the Dharma for the elimination of all fixation to grounds for views, mindsets, obsessions, inclination and latent tendencies, for the stilling of all formations, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for fading away (of lust), for the ending (of suffering), for nirvana.

He does *not* think thus: ‘So I will be annihilated! So I will perish! So I will be no more!’ Then he does not sorrow, grieve nor lament, he does not weep beating his breast nor become distraught.

That is how there is no anxiety regarding what is non-existent internally.”⁸⁸

Not-self

22 “Bhikshus, you may well take hold of that possession that is permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, that would endure eternally the same just like that.⁸⁹ But do you see any such possession, bhikshus?”

“No, bhante.”

⁸³ According to Gombrich, this refers to the non-existent self as perceived by the Vedic brahmins: see Intro 4.2.

⁸⁴ *-adhiṭṭhāna-* see foll n.

⁸⁵ *Diṭṭhi-ṭṭhāna, pariyaṭṭhāna, bhinivesā’nusaya.*

⁸⁶ *virāga* also “fading away of lust” or “dispassion” (see §21).

⁸⁷ *Nirodha* (see §21).

⁸⁸ Comy says that this section deals with a fourfold emptiness (*catu,koṭikā suññatā*), ie absence of self and mine, referring to one who, at the destruction of his own aggregates (ie personality), (1) feels anxiety, (2) feels none; and to one who, at the destruction of external property, (3) feels anxiety, (4) feels none. For another fourfold emptiness see Vism 762 f & S 22.5 (where *tāsa*, “anxiety,” is mentioned).

⁸⁹ Linked to §18.

“Good, bhikshus. I, too, do not see any possession that is permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same, that would endure as long as eternity.

23 Bhikshus, you may well cling to **the self-theory**⁹⁰ that would not cause sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair to arise in one who clings to it.⁹¹ But do you see any such possession, bhikshus?”

“No, bhante.”

“Good, bhikshus. I, too, do not see any doctrine of self that would not arouse sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair in one who clings to it.

24 Bhikshus, you may well rely on that support of views⁹² that would not cause sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair to arise in one who relies on it. But do you see any such possession, bhikshus?”

“No, bhante.”

“Good, bhikshus. I, too, do not see any support of views **[138]** that would not arouse sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair in one who relies on it.⁹³

25 Bhikshus, if there were **a self**, would there be for me what belongs to a self?”⁹⁴

“Yes, bhante.”

“Or, if there were what belongs to a self, would there be for me a self?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“And, bhikshus, since in truth and in reality,⁹⁵ one can find neither self nor what belongs to a self, then this ground for views—‘The self is the world: after death, I will be permanent, everlasting, eternal, unchanging in nature, eternally the same, I will endure eternally the same just like that’—would it not be a entirely and completely foolish teaching?”

“What else could it be, bhante, but an entirely and completely foolish teaching?”⁹⁶

Characteristics of the aggregates

26 “Bhikshus, what do you think? Is **form** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?”

“Painful, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, painful, and subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self?’”

⁹⁰ “You may well cling to a doctrine of the self,” (*atta,vād’upādānam upadiyetha*). For an alt tr (using “assumption” for *upādāna*), see Nyanaponika 1974:43 n27. On the difficulty of translating *atta,vād’upādānam upadiyetha*, see M:ÑB 2001:1197 n176. Clinging to a self-theory (*atta,vād’upādāna*) is one of the 4 clings, the first three being: (1) clinging to sensual pleasure (*kām’upādāna*), (2) clinging to views (*diṭṭh’upādāna*), and (3) clinging to mere rules and rites (*sīla-b, bat’upādāna*) (D 3:230, M 1:66, Vbh 375). 20 kinds of self-views (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*) are listed at Dhs 1214-17. See BDict: upādāna.

⁹¹ Linked to §20.

⁹² “Support of views,” *diṭṭhi,nissaya*. Comy says this is the 62 wrong views mentioned in **Brahmajāla S** (D 1), that emerge from personality-view, and including Ariṭṭha’s evil false view (§2). DA on Mahā Sati’paṭṭhāna S (D 2:292) and MA on Satipaṭṭhāna S (M 1:56) (both identical passages) mention 2 kinds of supports, viz craving as support (*taṇhā,nissaya*) and views as support (*diṭṭhi,nissaya*).

⁹³ Comy: In this section, a threefold emptiness is shown, ie referring to external possessions, self-theory and views as support.

⁹⁴ “What belongs to a self” (*attaniya*) applies to any of the 5 aggregates as well as external objects (all of which have no self). “This passage shows the mutual dependence, and thus equal untenability, of the twin notions “I” and “mine” (Nyanaponika 1974:44 n30; M:ÑB 2001:1211 n264).

⁹⁵ Cf §36. “In truth and in reality,” *saccato thetato*, alt tr “as true and real”; as at **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22.25/-1:138; cf 22.36/1:140); **Yamaka S** (S 22.85.34/3:112); **Anurādha S** (S 22.86.21/3:118 = S 44.2.21/4:384); **Titth’-āyatana S** (A 3.61.2-4/1:174 f x3); Vbh 376 f (x4), 382 (x6); Pug 3.17/38 (x12); Kvu 67 f (x13). Vbh:T tr *saccato thetato* as “firmly as truth” (Vbh:T 487)..

⁹⁶ Comy: Here a twofold emptiness is shown, ie that of the self (*atta*) and of the property of a self (*attaniya*). The 2 supplementary statements in this section suggests that the concepts of “I” and “mine: are inseparably linked, like the philosophical terms, substance (“fire”) and attribute (“hotness”). See Nyanaponika 1974:44 n30.

“No, bhante.”

“Bhikshus, ... Is **feeling**...

“Bhikshus, ... Is **perception**...

“Bhikshus, ... Are **formations**...

“Bhikshus, ... Is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent painful or pleasurable?”

“Painful, bhante.”

“Is what is impermanent, painful, and subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine; this I am; this is my self?’”

“No, bhante.”⁹⁷

27 Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **form** whatsoever—whether past, future or present, internal or external, [139] gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near⁹⁸—all forms should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’⁹⁹

Any kind of **feeling** whatsoever...

Any kind of **perception** whatsoever...

Any kind of **formations** whatsoever...

Any kind of **consciousness** whatsoever—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all forms should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

28 Seeing thus, bhikshus, an instructed noble disciple is revulsed¹⁰⁰ at form, revulsed at feeling, revulsed at perception, revulsed at formations, revulsed at consciousness.

⁹⁷ Norman on this and the following section: “It is important to note that this answer can only be given by those who know, in advance, that the term *attā* is by definition *nicca* [permanent] and *sukha* [pleasant], and therefore anything which is *anicca* and *dukkha* cannot be *attā*. This gives us a clear indication of the type of *attā* that is being discussed. It is the Upanishadic idea of an *ātman* which is *nitya* and *sukha*, and this is in complete agreement with the fact... that some of the phraseology of the non-Buddhist view which is being rejected has Upanishadic echoes.” (Norman 1981:22)

⁹⁸ See **Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47) = SD 17.1. This “totality formula” classification of the aggregates (see prec n) is explained in detail in **Vibhaṅga** and briefly in **Visuddhimagga**: “**internal**” = physical sense-organs; “**external**” = physical sense-objects; “**gross**” = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “**subtle**” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “**far**” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “**near**” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41). See Gethin 1986:40 f; Karunadasa 1967:38f; Boisvert 1995:43-48. As regards the terms “internal” (*ajjhata*) and “external” (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have two applications: (1) the aggregates (*khandhā*) composing a particular “person” are “internal” to them and anything else is “external”; (2) the sense-organs are “internal” and their objects—which may include aspects of the person’s own body or mind, which are “internal” in the first sense—are “external.” Boisvert (1995: 43, 47), however overlooks these applications.

⁹⁹ See **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.27) = SD 1.2.

¹⁰⁰ “He is revulsed at” (*nibbindati*). Comy: He is dissatisfied, disgusted, feels revolted towards. This disillusionment marks the culmination of insight, just before the attainment of the supramundane path (MA 2:114; Vism 21.43-44/650 f). “His lust fades away” (*virajjati*) marks the attainment of the supramundane path (*magga*), when the fetters are finally eliminated. “It (the mind) is liberated” (*vimuttamī*) refers to the attainment of the supramundane fruition (*phala*). The arhat’s subsequent reviewing knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇa, ñāṇa*) is shown by the phrase “there comes the knowledge” and “he understands: ‘Birth is destroyed...’,” in the following paragraph. The choice of translating *nibbindati* as “is revulsed” is deliberate, as it reflects the overwhelming feeling of *samvega* that characterizes seeing the true nature of suffering: we do not merely feel “disillusioned, disenchanting” (or similar refined words) when we are burnt by fire, pained by loss, or cheated by ignorance—we become simply *revulsed* at

29 Feeling revulsed, lust fades away [he is dispassionate]. Through the fading away of lust [Through dispassion], he is liberated. When he is liberated, there comes the knowledge: ‘It (the mind) is liberated.’

He knows: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being.’

6

The arhat¹⁰¹

30 Bhikshus, this monk¹⁰² is called one who has lifted the cross-bar, filled in the moat, broken the pillar, unlocked the bolt: the noble one whose banner is lowered,¹⁰³ has put down the burden, is unfettered.

31 And how, bhikshus, is the monk **one who has lifted the cross-bar?**¹⁰⁴

Here, bhikshus, the monk has abandoned ignorance, cut it off at the root, made a palm stump of it, done away with it, so that it is no longer subject to future arising. That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has lifted the cross-bar.

32 And how, bhikshus, is the monk **one who has filled in the moat?**

Here, bhikshus, the monk has abandoned the rounds of birth that brings rebirth, cut it off at the root... so that it is no longer subject to future arising. That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has filled in the moat.

33 And how, bhikshus, is the monk **one who has broken the pillar?**

Here, bhikshus, the monk abandoned craving, cut it off at the root...so that it is no longer subject to future arising. That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has broken the pillar.

34 And how, bhikshus, is the monk **one who has unlocked the bolt?**

Here, bhikshus, the monk has abandoned the five lower fetters,¹⁰⁵ cut it off at the root...so that it is no longer subject to future arising. That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has unlocked the bolt.

them! There is no hint of hate or revulsion in this spiritual response of disgust (*nibbidā*), but one is blissfully equanimous wisdom—blissful at the fact that we are no victims of craving, ignorance or karma.

¹⁰¹ This section reappears as the 2 **Ceto,vimutti Ss** (A 3:84 f = 5.71-72). Comy: “There are two cities: one is a city of brigands, the other a city of peace. Now to a great warrior of the city of peace (ie a meditator), the following thought occurs: ‘As long as this city of brigands (the self-delusion) exists, we will never be free from danger.’ So he dons his armour (of virtue) and goes to the city of brigands. With his sword (of wisdom) he breaks the gate-pillar (of craving) together with the door-wings, he removes the bolt (of ignorance), fills in the moat (of *samsāra*), and lowers the (enemy’s) flag (of self-conceit). Such a saint (a noble one) has put down for good the burden of the five aggregates (*khandha*), of *kamma*-producing volitions (*kammābhisankhāra*) and of the defilements (*kilesa*); has fully liberated himself from the rounds of existence.” (Nyanaponika 1974:46 n35)

¹⁰² In **Ceto,vimutti S 1** (A 5.71/3:83 = M 1:139), such a monk is said to be both mind-liberated (*ceto,vimutti*; M 1:296-298) and wisdom-liberated (*paññā,vimutti*). See **Ākañkheyya S** (M 1:35 f/6.19), where Comy says that in the terms “liberation through mind” and “liberation through wisdom,” “mind” and “wisdom” respectively signify the concentration and the wisdom associated with the fruit of arhathood. Concentration is called “liberation through mind” (*ceto,vimutti*) because it is the mind is liberated from lust; wisdom is called “liberation through wisdom” because it is liberated from ignorance. The former is normally the result of calm (*samatha*), the latter the result of insight; but when coupled and described as “taintless” (*anāsava*), they jointly result from the destruction of the taints by the supramundane path of arhathood (MA 1:164, M:NB n83).

¹⁰³ *Panna,dhaja*, “whose banner is lowered,” ie, whose fight is over, who is magnanimous in victory: cf **Upāli S** (M 56.29*/1:386) = SD 27.1; also **Ceto,vimutti,phala S 1+2** (A 5.71+72/3:84+85).

¹⁰⁴ *Ukkhitta,paligho*. See Dh 398.

¹⁰⁵ **The 10 fetters** (*dasa samyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) clinging to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (or remorse) (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*kāma,rāga*) is replaced by illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). The abandonment of the lower 5 fetters makes one a non-returner (*opapātika* or *anāgāmi*) (see

35 And how, bhikshus, is the noble one **who has taken down the flag, has put down the burden,**¹⁰⁶ **is unfettered?**

Here, bhikshus, the monk has abandoned the conceit ‘I am’,¹⁰⁷ cut it off at the root [140]...so that it is no longer subject to future arising. That is how, bhikshus, the monk is one who has taken down the flag, has put down the burden, is unfettered.

36 Bhikshus, when the gods with Indra, with Brahmā, with Pajāpati, seek a monk thus liberated in mind,¹⁰⁸ they do not find¹⁰⁹ anything of which to say that ‘This is the support of the thus-gone one’s consciousness’.¹¹⁰

Why is that? One thus gone,¹¹¹ I say, is untraceable even here and now.¹¹²

7

Misrepresenting the Tathāgata

37 Saying thus, bhikshus, teaching thus, I have been baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly accused by some recluses and brahmins thus, ‘The recluse Gotama is one who leads astray.’¹¹³ He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing individual.’¹¹⁴

Ānāpānasati S, M 118.10 = 7.13). This verse technically refers to the non-returner, but here is spoken of an arhat, one who has broken all 10 fetters: see **Laṭukikopama S** (M 66.17/1:454) = SD 28.11.

¹⁰⁶ On the burden and its bearer, see **Bhāra S** (S 22.22/3:25) = SD 17.14.

¹⁰⁷ “‘I am’ conceit” (*asmi,māna*), “ego-conceit,” may range from the coarsest pride to self-assertion to a subtle feeling of one’s distinctiveness or superiority that persists, as the 8th fetter, until the attainment of arhathood. (BDict)

¹⁰⁸ “Thus liberated in mind,” *evaṃ.vimutta,cittaṃ*. Norman: “It is possible that there is something of a word-play in the word *evaṃvimuttacitta*. We translated *vimutta-citta* as ‘one whose mind is released,’ but it might also be interpreted as ‘one whose consciousness (ie the element leading to re-birth) is released (from *samsāra*),’ and who, therefore, cannot be reborn.” (1991a:6)

¹⁰⁹ *anvesaṃ nādhigacchanti*. This sentence is put into the mouth of Māra, trying to look for the monk Godhika, who at the moment of suicide had attained arhathood. There the Buddha declares that Godhika “has passed utterly away with consciousness no longer established (in rebirth)” (*apatiṭṭhena viññāṇena parinibbuto*) (S 1:268).

¹¹⁰ **KR Norman** makes a useful note: “It is noteworthy that the Buddha here uses the word *tathāgata* in connection with a bhikkhu ‘whose mind is released in this way’ (*evaṃvimuttacitta*). It is clear that *tathāgata* is being used here in something much nearer its original literal meaning, and we ought rather to translate [this] passage [within quotes]: ‘This is what the consciousness of one who has gone that way [or who has gone to such a state] is dependent upon.’ The use of the word in this way would explain why the commentators thought it appropriate to apply it to *attā*, as was mentioned above [Norman 1991a:2]. I would suggest that the specific usage of the word *tathāgata* to mean ‘Buddha’ [cf Buddhaghosa’s defs of *tathāgata*, DA 59-68; SA 2:287,25-32, 1:66,21-22] arose from this more general usage, just as the word *sugata* which originally must have had the general sense “one who has fared well,” just as it does in the Sanskrit [SED, sv *sugata*], is also used specifically of the Buddha. It is interesting that when the word *tathāgata* is used in a question directed to the Buddha, which he refuses to answer, the commentaries still do not take *tathāgata* in the sense of the Buddha, but explain it as *satta* ‘being’ [DA 1:118,1; SA 2:201,5, 2:311,1-3, 3:312,29-30].” (1991a:6). See n above on “thus liberated in mind”; also **Cūḷa Māluṅkyā,putta S** (M 63) = SD 5.8 Intro (3).

¹¹¹ “One thus gone” (*tathāgata*), usually applied to the Buddha, but here applies also to the arhat. Comy gives two alternative explanations: (1) Even while alive the arhat is untraceable as a being or individual (ie as an abiding self) because ultimately there is no “being.” (2) The arhat is untraceable here and now because it is impossible for the gods, etc, to find the support for the insight-mind, path-mind or fruition-mind (*vipassanā,citta magga,citta phala,citta*); since the object is nirvana, his mind cannot be known by the worldling. See Nyanaponika 1974:47 n37; KR Norman 1991a esp 5 f.

¹¹² *Diṭṭhe vāhaṃ bhikkhave dhamme tathāgatam ananuvejjo ti vadāmi*. See Norman 1991a:253 f.

¹¹³ “One who leads astray” (*venayika*), alt “one who leads away,” and which Comy glosses as *satta,vināsaka*, “destroyer of (the individuality of) a being.” (MA 2:118). Here *venayika*, used derogatorily by outsiders against the Buddha; but cf **Upāli S** (M 56.29*/1:386 = SD 27.1 v3) where it is complimentary, meaning “one who leads away (from evil,” ie who disciplines another (*sattānaṃ vinayaka*, MA 3:97).

As this is what I am not, as this is what I do not say, these good recluses and brahmins have baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly accused thus, ‘The recluse Gotama is one who leads astray. He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the extermination of an existing individual.’

38 Bhikshus, both before¹¹⁵ and now what I teach is suffering and the ending of suffering.¹¹⁶

If others abuse, revile, scold and harass the Tathāgata for that,¹¹⁷ the Tathāgata on that account feels no annoyance, bitterness nor dejection of the heart.

If others honour, respect, revere and venerate the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account feels no delight, joy nor elation of the heart.

If others honour, respect, revere and venerate the Tathāgata for that, the Tathāgata on that account thinks thus: ‘It is towards this [fivefold aggregate of mind-body]¹¹⁸ that was earlier fully comprehended that they perform such acts.’¹¹⁹

39 Therefore, bhikshus, if others abuse, revile, scold and harass you, too, for that, on that account you should feel no annoyance, bitterness nor dejection of the heart.

If others honour, respect, revere and venerate you for that, on that account you should feel no delight, joy nor elation of the heart.

If others honour, respect, revere and venerate you for that, on that account you should think thus: ‘It is towards this [fivefold aggregate of mind-body] that was earlier fully comprehended that they perform such acts.’

Not yours¹²⁰

40 Therefore, bhikshus, let go of [give up] what is not yours.¹²¹ When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

What is it that is not yours?

Form is not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Feeling is not yours. **[141]** Give it up [Let it go!]. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

¹¹⁴ This refers back to §20 where the eternalist misconstrues the Buddha’s teaching on nirvana as the annihilation of an existing being that is the self.

¹¹⁵ Comy: That is, from as early as the first discourse given under the Bodhi tree (S 5:420-424/56.11, V 1:10-12).

¹¹⁶ This important statement, also made to Anurādha (**Anurādha S**, S 22.86/3:119), refers back to §37. Here the Buddha in effect declares that a living being has no self but is a mere aggregate of factors, material and mental events, connected by a process that is inherently *dukkha*, and that nirvana, the ending of *dukkha*, is not the annihilation of being but the termination of that very same *dukkha* process. This statement should read in conjunction with **Kaccāna, gotta S** (S 2:17/12.15 = 3:134 f/22.90 = SD 6.13), where the Buddha says that one with right view, who has discarded all the doctrines of a self, sees that whatever arises is only *dukkha* arising, and whatever ceases is only *dukkha* ceasing. (See M:ÑB 2001:1211 n267). Cf **Mahā Hatthi, padopama S** (M 28.8/1:185 f) = SD 6.16.

¹¹⁷ ‘For that,’ that is, the teaching of the Four Noble Truths. (Comy)

¹¹⁸ *Pañca-k, khandha*, that is, without the clinging (*upādāna*) (MA 2:118; see V 1:13 f).

¹¹⁹ *Yam kho idam pubbe pariññatam tatha me eva, rūpā kārā karīyanti*. In simpler terms, they honour only the Buddha’s awakening.

¹²⁰ *Na tumhākaṃ*. This section [40] forms a sutta of its own—(**Kāya Na Tumha S** (S 12.37/2:64 f). The following 2 sections [40-41]—text and simile—form, in practically identical words, 4 suttas of similar names: the 2 (**Khandha Na Tumha Ss** (S 22.33-34/3:33 f), but in the 2 (**Dhātu Na Tumha Ss** (S 35.101-102/4:81 f) its theme is the 18 elements (6 internal sense-organs, 6 external sense-fields, 6 sense-consciousnesses). In all these 5 suttas, the word *dīgha, rattam* is omitted in the closing stock phrase.

¹²¹ *Tasmātiha bhikkhave yam na tumhākaṃ tam pajahatha*. Comy: It is the *attachment* or desire (*chanda, rāga*) to the five aggregates, not the aggregates in themselves, that should be given up: they “cannot be torn apart or pulled out.” I have rendered *yam* as “what” (which has a general sense) rather than as “whatever” which connotes that there are certain things that we do “own,” which would go against the teaching of *anattā*.

Perception is not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Formations are not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Consciousness is not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.¹²²

The Jetavana simile¹²³

41 Bhikshus, what do you think? If people carried off the grass, sticks, branches and leaves in this Jetavana, or burned them, did what they liked with them, would you think: ‘People are carrying us off or burning us or doing what they like with us?’”

“No, bhante.”

“Why not?”

“Because, bhante, that is neither our self nor the property of our self.”

“So, too, bhikshus, Let go of what is not yours. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

What is it that is not yours?

Form is not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Feeling is not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Perception is not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Formations are not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

Consciousness is not yours. Give it up. When you have given it up, it would be for welfare and happiness for a long time.

8

The Dharma and its fruit¹²⁴

42 Bhikshus, the Teaching well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear,¹²⁵ free from patchwork.¹²⁶ In the Teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, there is no (more) round of existence for those bhikshus who are arhats with taints destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached their own goal,¹²⁷ destroyed the fetters of being, and are completely liberated through final knowledge.

43 Bhikshus, the Teaching well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork. In the Teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, those monks who, with the

¹²² Comy: Only an aggregate (form, etc) is the basis for the wrong concept of a self, since apart from them there is nothing else to crave for.

¹²³ On the significance of this delightful simile, see Intro (2).

¹²⁴ Here, the descriptions of the 4 saints in §§42-45 are almost identical to those of **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118.9-12).

¹²⁵ ‘Plain, open, clear,’ *uttāno vivaṇo pakāsito*.

¹²⁶ ‘Free from patchwork,’ *chinna,piloṭika*, that is, unlike a patched-up piece of cloth. Comy: a cloth patched up with stitches and knots that are similar to hypocrisy and other deceptions. Sub-Comy: Substituting assumed attitudes and postures for non-existing practice of meditation and insight. Here the analogy—that of a piece of new cloth free of patches or stitches—refers to the inner consistency of the Teaching.

¹²⁷ *sadatthā*, may be resolved two ways: (1) *sa-d-atthā*, ‘one own goal,’ (2) *sant + atthā*, ‘the sublime goal,’ ‘the ideal.’”

destruction of the five lower fetters,¹²⁸ are **spontaneously reborn** [in the Pure Abodes]¹²⁹ and there attain final nirvana, without ever returning from that world.

44 Bhikshus, the Teaching well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork. In the Teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, those monks who, with the destruction of the three fetters¹³⁰ and with the diminishing of lust, hate and delusion, are **once-returners**, all of them¹³¹ returning only once to this world to make an end of suffering.

45 Bhikshus, the Teaching well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork. In the Teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, those monks who, with the destruction of the three fetters, are **streamwinners**, not fated for a suffering world,¹³² sure of liberation, [142] bound for awakening.

46 Bhikshus, the Teaching well proclaimed by me, is plain... free from patchwork, are **truth-followers** or **faith-followers**, all bound for awakening.¹³³

47 Bhikshus, the Teaching well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, clear, free from patchwork. In the Teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork, those who have mere faith in me and mere love for me, are all bound for heaven.¹³⁴

The Blessed One said this. The monks joyfully approved¹³⁵ the Blessed One's word.

— evaṃ —

¹²⁸ The 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*). See §34 n.

¹²⁹ *Opapātika*, that is, reborn in the Pure Abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*), the five highest heavens of the Form World (*rūpa,loka*) where only non-returners assume their last birth to become arhats and attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha ("Non-declining"), Ātappa ("Unworried"), Sudassā ("Clearly Visible"), Sudassī ("Clear-visioned") and Akanitthā ("Highest") (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

¹³⁰ The (first) three fetters: see §43n.

¹³¹ "All of them," *sabbe te*, omitted in **Ānāpānasati S** (M 118).

¹³² *Avinīpāta*, alt tr "not fated for birth in a suffering state"; opp of *vinīpāta*, "the world of suffering," another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (*pañca,gati*) (D 3:234 = 33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tirachāna,yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti,visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura,kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are "happy courses" (*sugati*).

¹³³ These are two classes of individuals on the path of streamwinning. The Dharma-followers or truth-followers (*dhammānussarī*) are disciples in whom the faculty of wisdom (*paññ'indriya*) is predominant and who develop the noble path with wisdom in the lead; their main practice is the contemplation of not-self; when they attain the fruit they are called "right-view attainer" or "vision attainer" (*ditthi-p.patta*). The faith-followers (*saddhā'nussarī*) are disciples in whom the faculty of faith (*saddh'indriya*) is predominant and who develop the noble path with faith in the lead; their main practice is the perception of impermanence; when they attain the fruit they are called "faith-liberated" (*saddhā,vimutta*). (M 70.20, 21; Pug 15/ 1:35-36, Vism 21.75). The elders of old (*porāṇaka therā*) call such spiritually developed person a "lesser streamwinner" (*cūla,sotāpanna*) or "maturing streamwinner" (*bāla,sotāpanna*) (MA 2:120; cf Vism 605/ 29.27). On the truth-follower and the faith-follower, and the assurance of streamwinning in this life itself, see (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) = SD 16.7.

¹³⁴ "Those who have mere faith in me and mere love for me," *yesaṃ mayi saddhā,mattarṃ pema,mattarṃ*. This phrase is found in **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22.47/1:143), **Bhaddāli S** (M 65.27/1:444) & **Kiṭṭā,giri S** (M 70.21/1:479) = SD 12.1. Cf **Sarakāni Ss** (S 55.24-25/4:375-380). Comy explains that this refers to the insight practitioners (*vipassaka puggalā*) who have not attained any supramundane state, not gaining even stream-entry, they are reborn in a heaven. On the other hand, we can take this passage as is, that is, anyone who has "mere faith, mere love" in the Buddha are reborn in a heaven, without going against the grain of early Buddhism. See M:ÑB 2001:1212 n274.

¹³⁵ "Joyfully approved," *attamanā abhinandum*.

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