

Sexuality

A Buddhist perspective

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1 What is “sexuality”?

1.1 SEXUALITY AS A PHYSICAL PROCESS. Sexuality in its broadest sense would cover the use of the body for procreation, or to obtain physical pleasure either with a body, human or otherwise, animate or inanimate. Strictly speaking, a sexual act is *physical*, and the mental aspect (especially enjoyment) is secondary. Early Buddhism, however, in its teachings on the three doors of action—the body, speech and the mind¹—recognizes that speech and mind do play motivational and supportive roles in promoting or sustaining sexuality. [2.3]

The Amba,laṅṅhika Rāhul’ovāda Sutta (M 61), for example, speaks of the purity of “the three doors of action”—of body, speech and mind—by way of “the examination of one’s conscience” or self-review (*paccavekkhana*) (M 61.18).² In the case of wrong acts of body or of speech, they should be confessed to virtuous elders (M 61.9-14); in the case of wrong mental acts (ie thoughts) one should reject them with disgust (M 61.15-17).

The Amba,laṅṅhika Rāhul’ovāda Sutta further gives a set of criteria—another “threefold purity”—whereby we determine our actions. If an action would harm oneself, or harm others, or harm both, such an action should not be done. Here “both” is not redundant, but also refers to “society” at large, or in today’s lingo, “the environment.” In other words, whatever we do, *it should not in any way harm oneself, others or the environment.*

1.2 HOW SEXUALITY ARISES. In the Aggañña Sutta (D 27) account of the re-evolution of the world, the beings who are reborn on earth, on gaining physical bodies, begin to see their external differences. This is how the sutta describes the *mythical* origin of sexuality amongst humans:

16b And, Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāradvāja), those beings continued for a very long time feeding on this rice as their food and nourishment. And, Vāseṭṭha (and Bhāradvāja), as they did so, their bodies became coarser still and among themselves they noticed even greater differences in their looks. Then the female developed female organs,³ and the male developed male organs. And the women became excessively preoccupied with the men, and the men with the women. Owing to this excessive preoccupation with each other, lust was aroused, and their bodies burned [with passion]. Because of this burning, *they indulged in sexual activity.* (D 27.16/3:88)

The ideas contained in the underscored sentence are elaborated in the Saññoga Sutta here, where the Buddha explains, in a *psychological* manner, how sexuality arises.

The Saññoga Sutta (A 7.48) is a remarkable religious text whose statement on sexuality is unparalleled in any other religious texts. The Buddha, in defining how sexuality arises, explains that understanding this, we are able to be free from its “bondage.”

2 WOMANLINESS. A woman considers her own womanly faculty,⁴ her own womanly ways,⁵ her womanly looks,⁶ her womanly pride,⁷ her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments.⁸ She is aroused by this and delights in it.⁹

¹ See (Uggata,sarīra) Aggi S (A 4.44/4:41-46) = SD 3.16.

² See SD 3.10.

³ DA: That is, those who were women in previous lives. Conversely, the others were men in their past lives.

⁴ “Own womanly faculty,” *ajjhataṃ ith’indriyaṃ*, lit “internal womanly sense-organ”. Here referring to the physical features that make one a woman, that is, “womanliness”. The term “femininity” usually refers to the psychological aspect of a woman, related to Jung’s notions of *anima* and *animus*.

Thus aroused, she considers another¹⁰ in terms of a man's faculty,¹¹ his manly ways, his manly looks,¹² his manly pride,¹³ his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. She is aroused by this and delights in it.

Thus aroused, she desires external union,¹⁴ and she desires the [physical] pleasure and [mental] joy arising on account of such a union. Monks, attached to¹⁵ her womanliness, she enters into union with men.

In this way, monks, a woman does not rise above her womanliness.

3 MANLINESS. A man considers his own manly faculty,¹⁶ his manly ways, his manly looks, his manly pride, his manly desires, his manly voice, his manly adornments. He is aroused by this and delights in it.

Thus aroused, he contemplates another in terms of a woman's faculty, her womanly ways, her womanly looks, her womanly pride, her womanly desires, her womanly voice, her womanly adornments. He is aroused by this and delights in it.

Thus aroused, he desires external union,¹⁷ and he desires the pleasure and joy arising on account of such a union. Monks, attached to his manliness, he enters into union with women.

In this way, monks, a man does not rise above his manliness. (A 7.48.2-3/4:57) = SD 8.7

Only when we do not define ourselves as sexual beings, that we break free from its bondage, by becoming true individuals.¹⁸

1.3 THE POWER OF SEXUALITY. **The Aṅguttara Nikāya** opens with a short chapter of the very short discourses (or statements) on how the opposite sexes obsess one another, thus:

1b “No other *form*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the form* of a woman.

A woman's form, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind.

2 No other *sound*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the sound* of a woman.

⁵ “womanly ways,” *itthi,kutta*, eg seductiveness, coquetry, and wiles (AA 4:32). Many of such terms in this sentence and their cognates below are in the Pali singular, which however need to be rendered idiomatically into the English plural.

⁶ “womanly looks,” *itth'ākappa*, ie her physical looks and how she is dressed (AA 4:32).

⁷ “womanly pride,” *itthi,vidha*, ie her pride and conceit (AA 4:32).

⁸ “womanly adornments,” *itth'alaṅkāra*. “adorning the head, the neck, the hands, the feet, the hips (*kaṭṭi*)” (*sīsū-pago gīvūpago hatthūpago pādūpago kaṭṭūpago*, V 4:340)

⁹ “She is aroused by this...” Here I have rendered *tattha* in the English singular, since such an unskillful person would attend to the features mentioned. In the cognate sentences below [4-5] *tattha* is rendered in the English plural, ie referring to the various physical features, to which the skillful person remains unattracted.

¹⁰ “Another,” *bahiddhā*, lit “outside (of herself)”.

¹¹ “Manly faculty,” *puris'indriya*, lit “manly sense-organ”. Here referring to the physical features that make one a man, that is, “manliness.” The term “masculinity” usually refers to the psychological aspect of a man. Note here in the sutta that the reference is “in terms of a man's faculty,” and not “in another man.” This is very significant as this reflects the fact that those sexually attracted to others, consciously or unconsciously, may look for such features that excite them in either sex.

¹² “Manly looks,” *puris'ākappa*, ie his physical looks and how he is dressed.

¹³ “Manly pride,” *purisa,vidha*, ie his pride and conceit.

¹⁴ “She desires external union,” *bahiddhā samyogam ākaṅkhati*. Notice here neither man nor woman is mentioned.

¹⁵ “Attached to,” *sattā* (V 1:185; D 2:246; Nc 23, 34; Dh 342; J 1:376).

¹⁶ “His own manly faculty,” *ajjhataṃ puris'indriyam*, lit “internal manly sense-organ.”

¹⁷ “She desires external union,” *bahiddhā samyogam ākaṅkhati*. Notice here neither man nor woman is mentioned.

¹⁸ On true individuals, see below (5.1) n.

A woman's sound, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind.

3 No other *smell*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the smell* of a woman.

A woman's smell, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind.

4 No other *taste*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the taste* of a woman.

A woman's taste, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind.

5 No other *touch*, bhikshus, do I know, that persists in taking hold of a man's mind as *the touch* of a woman.

A woman's touch, bhikshus, persists in taking hold of a man's mind. (A 1.1-5/1:1 f) = SD 66.1

The same is then said of how a man obsesses a woman on account of the five physical senses.¹⁹

These passages are not saying that sexuality is evil, but that sexual attraction is a powerful one. They are simply warning celibates (such as monastics and those observing the celibacy rule) and couples committed to one another, to be wary of the attractions of sexuality [6].

On a darker note, **the Mātā Puttā Sutta** (A 3.55) similar sexual attraction may arise between a mother and her son (or between a parent and a child). The conditions for such a dysfunctional relationship arises from mutual attraction or dependence, and the power of sexuality on account of the five senses,²⁰ as stated in the Rūp'ādi Vagga above.

Such passages as these have sometimes been misconstrued as misogyny by certain scholars, or worse, as condoning homosexuality [7]. Often such a sexist misconstrual is the result of the scholar's using mis-translations of texts, as noted by Peter Harvey,

It is unfortunate that the Pali Text Society translation of [A 3:55 at A:H 3:56] (above) wrongly says that a woman "will stop to ensnare the heart of a man" instead of that she, through her sight, etc, "persists in overpowering a man's mind," because of *his* attachment to the female form. Sponberg (1992:20 f), Schuster Barnes (1987: 257 n1) and Paul (1979: 54 n14) all use this incorrect translation. (Harvey 2000:379)

The necessity of checking a Sutta passage against the original Pali is vitally important when we are citing them in such significant matters. Translations of a generation ago should be used with care. Or better, learn some Pali enough to have a good nose for a proper translation.

1.4 SEX IS TIME-CONSUMING. In **the (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20), the Buddha somewhat humorously declares that sex and sensuality are "time-consuming" (*kālīka*)²¹ [1.3.3]. The meaning is that sexual activity is motivated by lust that fetters us to the samsaric cycle. Again, it should be noted that Buddhism does not say that sex is evil. Rather, the Buddha declares that sex and sensuality demands much of our time in significant ways

On an everyday level, sexuality entails personal, emotional and social commitments. If the sexual act is only on a bodily level, then it is not very meaningful, or simply reflects a physical need or lack. Meaningful sex must be attended by a positive emotional state in oneself and towards the partner, as it needs to be an expression of mutual love and commitment. The possibility of procreating a new life or lives behooves us to be committed partners to be able to raise our offspring in a wholesome manner and as responsible members.

On a higher level, the meaning is that sexual activity is motivated by lust that fetters us to the samsaric cycle. In the Sambahula Sutta (S 4.21), when Māra (in the form of a venerable brahmin) offers a cryptic advice to a group of young monks insinuating them to enjoy their youth before taking up the

¹⁹ A 1.6-10/1:2 = SD 66.1.

²⁰ A 3.55/3:67-69 = SD 66.2.

²¹ S 4.21/1:117 f = S 1.20.5/1:9 = SD 21.4.

spiritual life, they reply in identical words as Samiddhi's, as recorded in **the (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20), thus:

I [We] have *not* abandoned what is visible right here, avuso, to run after what takes time. I [We] have abandoned what takes time, avuso, to run after what is visible right here.

For, avuso, the Blessed One has declared that sense-pleasures are time-consuming, full of suffering, full of despair, and great is the danger therein, while this Dharma is *visible right here, immediate, inviting us to come and see, accessible, to be personally known by the wise*.

(S 4.21/1:117 f) = (S 1.20.5/1:9) = SD 21.4

The point of this teaching is that the body can be freed from the bonds from sexual and sensual bonds in this life itself: through the Dharma, we are capable of awakening in this life itself. As lay practitioners, we can, through the consistent perception of impermanence,²² attain streamwinning, or as renunciants, we can work towards non-return or arhathood.

1.5 THE BODY IS NEUTRAL. In the patriarchal society of ancient India, as in patriarchal society today, it is understandable that *women* seem to receive the brunt of blame for the weaknesses of men. In a more sexually equitable society of today, the situation becomes more complicated with women's equality, gender preferences, pederasty, and so on. The point remains that it is not just women's bodies are desirable, or that men's bodies are more attractive, but that *any* physical form might be desirable to someone with the inclination for it.

Just as a man is attracted to the *appearance* of a woman's body, a woman, too, is attracted to the *appearance* of a man's body. Or, a person can be attracted to the appearance of another body of the same sex. We are simply projecting fantasy-influenced image upon a conscious object made up of the four elements, looking only at those features that attract, and ignoring what are not desirable.

The body and the world are neutral, so to speak; it what we think and project that decides our sexuality. **The Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) Sutta** (A 6.63) makes this remarkable statement:

3b There are these five cords of sensual pleasures (*kāma,guṇa*):

Forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Sounds cognizable by the ear that are, desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Smells cognizable by the nose that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Tastes cognizable by the tongue that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Touches cognizable by the body that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful.

—Bhikshus, these are not sensual objects (*kāma*), but in the noble discipline, they are called 'cords of sensual desire' (*kāma,guṇa*).²³

The thought of passion is a person's sensuality:

There is no sensuality in what is beautiful (*citra*) in the world.

The thought of passion is a person's sensuality:

What is beautiful in the world remains as they are.

So here the wise remove the desire for them.²⁴ (A 6.63.3/3:410 f) = SD 6.11

²² See Entering the Stream = SD 3.3.

²³ *Api ca kho bhikkhave n'ete kāmā, kāma,guṇā nam'ete ariyassa vinaye vuccanti*. This is an enigmatic statement whose meaning is clarified in the verse that follows. See foll n.

²⁴ This verse, which explains the previous prose sentence, "plays upon the double meaning of *kāma*, emphasizes that purification is to be achieved by mastering the defilement of sensuality, not by fleeing [from] sensually enticing

1.6 MORE PLEASURABLE THAN SEX. Teachers of dhyana meditation often swear by the maxim that “dhyana is better than sex.” That is to say, the bliss of meditation is so refined and profound—something the gross body could not possibly experience—that there is no worldly pleasure to equal it. This quip reflects, on a more profound level, our often wrong attitude towards the body. **The Māgandiya Sutta** (M 75) is a comprehensive statement of the early Buddhist view of pleasure.²⁵

The Buddha’s first discourse to the monks, the **Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11), opens with a key statement on the human body: both sensual indulgence and bodily mortification should be avoided: the body should neither be spoiled nor deprived.²⁶ The body needs to be sufficiently healthy to fully support a healthy mind, especially in the process of mental cultivation.

“Sensual indulgence” here refers to the unmitigated pursuit of sense-pleasures (*kāma,sukha*), which covers any kind of abandonment to bodily pleasure or physical sense-stimulation, including sexuality. Such a pleasure-based predisposition is said to be “low, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, not connected with the goal [unprofitable].” (id).

The main problem with sexuality—the raw pleasures of the body—is that they are never fully satisfactory: if they are, we would have had enough of it and never want it again! And when we are unable to obtain the pleasure that we lust for, we are capable of various unwholesome acts. It is as such understandable why some of us are inextricably drawn to sense-pleasure, especially sexuality. We are addicted to sex when we do not know any greater pleasure.²⁷

The meditator chooses a different path, one that brings a more sublime bliss, that transcends the body. In **the Mahā Saccaka Sutta** (M 36), the Buddha explains,

I thought thus, “Why do I fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states?” I thought thus, “I do not fear the pleasure that has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states!”²⁸ (M 36.32/1:246 f) = SD 1:17

With that thought he turns to the middle way of the breath meditation as attains liberation and nirvana. In **the Laṭukikōpama Sutta** (M 66), for example, the Buddha goes further, and declares:

Udāyī, the joy and pleasure that arise from these five cords of sense-pleasure are called sense-pleasure that is a vile pleasure, a vulgar pleasure, an ignoble pleasure, not to be engaged in, not to be cultivated, not to be developed—I say of this happiness that *it is to be feared*. (M 66.19/1:454) = SD 28.11²⁹

Immediately after that, the Buddha says that, on the other hand, there *are* pleasures that are *not* to be feared. These are the pleasure of deep meditation, that is, of the four form dhyanas,³⁰ and of each and every one of them, the Buddha declares,

This is called the joy of renunciation, the joy of solitude, the joy of peace, the joy of self-awakening, to be engaged in, to be cultivated, to be developed—I say of this happiness that *it is not to be feared*. (M 66.21/1:454) = SD 28.11

objects.” (A:ÑB 1999:302 n34). An almost identical verse (without line c) is found in the Na Santi Sutta (S 1.34). See also Mine: The nature of craving = SD 19.3 (1.2).

²⁵ M 75/1:501-513 = SD 31.5.

²⁶ S 56.11.3/5:421 = SD 1.1.

²⁷ For a detailed study, see **Māgandiya S** (M 75/1:501-513) = SD 31.5.

²⁸ On the two kinds of pleasures—sensual pleasure and the pleasure of enlightenment—see **Arāṇa,vibhaṅga S** (M 139.9/3:233) = SD 7.8. On the experience of bliss by the awakened mind, see (**Kosambī**) **Uṇṇābha S** (S 51.15) = SD 10.10.

²⁹ A similar statement is made in **Bahu,vedanīya S** (M 59.7-10/1:398 f) = SD 30.4.

³⁰ See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.77-84/1:73-76) = SD 8.10

The Commentary explains dhyana as “the joy of renunciation” (*nekkhamma,sukha*) because it turns us away from sense-pleasures (*kāmato nikkhanta,sukha*); as “the joy of solitude” (*paviveka,sukha*) because it is the bliss of being away from the group and from defilements; as “the joy of peace” (*upasama,sukha*) because it is the bliss for the sake of stilling lust, etc; and as “the joy of self-awakening” (*sambodha,sukha*) because it is the bliss for the sake of bringing about the path to awakening (MA 3:171).³¹

Yet, adds the Buddha, even such higher pleasures *should be transcended*, so that we enjoy the bliss of the formless dhyanas, and the cessation of feeling and perception. This last meditative state is that of full liberation, enjoyed only by the Buddha and the arhats.

2 Monasticism is above sexuality

2.1 NO SEX PLEASE, WE'RE MONASTICS. The purpose of the Buddhist monastic life is to provide aspirants with the ideal conditions for spiritual development so that they can awaken in this life itself. The monastic life is also a full-time spiritual alternative to the lay or household life, often described as being In this connection, **the Sambādh'okāsa Sutta** (A 6.26), records Mahā Kaccāna exulting thus: “It is marvellous how the attainment of ‘the open’ (*okāsa*) in the closed [stifling, *sambādha*] has been discovered by the Blessed One....”³²

The Buddha, in compassionately declaring his awakening to the world, gives us the opportunity of an alternative liberating lifestyle, that of a spiritual path:

Furthermore, here a Tathagata appears in the world, an arhat, fully self-awakened one. He teaches the Dharma good in its beginning, good in its middle, good in its end, both in the spirit and in the letter. He proclaims the holy life that is entirely complete and pure.

A householder or householder's son, hearing the Dharma, gains faith in the Tathagata and reflects:

‘The household life is stifling, a dusty path. The life of renunciation is like the open air. It is not easy living in a house to practise the holy life completely, in all its purity, like a polished conch-shell. What if I were to shave off my hair and beard, put on the saffron robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?’

(D 2.40-41/1:62 f, 11.9-10/1:213; M 100.9/2:211; S 16.11.14/2:219; A 10.99.5/5:204)

Of special significance is the phrase “the household life is stifling, a dusty path” (*sambādho gharāvāso rajā,patho*). There is here a wordplay on *sambādha*, “crowded, stifling, narrow, full of hindrances,” which also refers to the sexual organ, male or female.³³ The point here is that in the spiritual life, all our energies are directed to mental cultivation for the sake of spiritual awakening in this life itself.

2.2 TRAINING RULES AND DECORUM. Renunciation entails at least two basic aspects, that is, the socioeconomic and the emotional [2.3]. Socioeconomically, the renunciant gives up family ties or dependence. It should be noted here that the renunciant does not so much give up his family, as he goes beyond his biological family and extends, by way of unconditional acceptance, to regard others as part of his spiritual family.

As a renunciant, he trains himself, as stated in **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2), thus:

Then, after some time, he abandons all his wealth and relatives, shaves off his hair and beard, puts on the saffron robes, and goes forth from the household life into homelessness.

(1) When he has thus gone forth, he lives restrained by the rules of the monastic code [Pāṭimokkha], possessed of proper conduct and resort.

³¹ These 4 joys (*sukha*) also occurs as Yasa S (A 8.86/4:341-342). See also **Salāyatana S** (M 137.16/3:220) = SD 29.5; **Pañcak'aṅga S** (S 36.12-15/4:225 f) = SD 30.1..

³² A 6.26/3:314 F = SD 15.6.

³³ Allusion to the male organ (V 1:216. 2:134), to the female organ (V 4:259; Sn 609; J 1:61, 4:260).

(2) Having taken up the rules of training, he trains himself in them, *seeing danger in the slightest faults*.

(3) He comes to be accomplished in wholesome bodily and verbal deeds, his livelihood is purified, and he is possessed of moral virtue.

(4) He guards the sense-doors, is accomplished in mindfulness and full awareness, and (4) is content.³⁴ (D 2.41-42/1:62 f) = SD 8.10

The Pāṭimokkha comprises 227 rules that govern almost every aspect of the monks' daily life so that his mind conduces to spiritual training, especially meditation. The term "resort" (*go, cara*), literally means "a cow's habitual path or pasture." In the technical canonical sense, this refers to places that are regarded as suitable for collecting almsfood (V 2:208).

Here, however, we can take it more broadly to refer to the two aspects of the renunciant's life. In the *socioeconomic* sense, the monastic should avoid places and situations that are not conducive to spiritual training, and in the *emotional* sense (that is, karmically significant conduct), he should avoid resorting to practices and livelihood that are not conducive to this spiritual life.

In a technical sense, "non-resort" (*agocara*) refers to places that are unsuitable for renunciants (whether for alms or otherwise).³⁵ In the Commentaries, *go, cara* usually refers to places suitable for meditation (Vism 127). We can also take *go, cara* here in a psychological sense of *ārammaṇa*, that is, sense-objects. In other words, one "possessed of proper conduct and resort" can also include the meaning "accomplished in proper conduct of body and of mind."³⁶ This means that a monastic would not indulge in any activity, such as watching movies or TV, reading materials, using the computer, or even conversations or communications, which are capable of arousing sexual feelings or are inappropriate to his training.

The very first rule of the Pāṭimokkha says that a monk should not have sex of any kind, thus:

Whatever monk, who has undertaken the training and the life of a monk, having neither renounced the training nor declared his weakness,³⁷ should engage in sexual intercourse, even with an animal, he is defeated, not in communion, (Pār 1 = V 3:23,33-36)

The nuns' Pāṭimokkha have three such Pārājika rules, the first of which is, mutatis mutandis, identical with the monk's Pārājika 1 (BhPār 1 = V 3:23,33-36)

Whatever nun, filled with desire, should consent to rubbing or rubbing up against or taking hold of or pressing against, below the collar-bone, above the circle of the knee, of a male person who is filled with desire, she too becomes defeated, not in communion, on account of being one who touches above the circle of the knee. (BhPār 5 = V 4:213,34-38)

Whatever nun, filled with desire, for the sake of following what is not really the rule, should consent to the holding of the hand by a male person who is filled with desire, or should consent to the holding of the edge of (her) outer robe (*saṅghāṭi*), or should stand, or should talk, or should go to a rendezvous, or should consent to a man's approaching (her), or should enter a covered place, or should dispose the body for such a purpose, she too becomes defeated, not in communion, on account of being a doer of eight things. (BhPār 8 = V 4:220,33-221,4)

³⁴ On this section, cf **Cha-ḷ-ābhijāti S** (A 6.57): "While living thus as a renunciant, having abandoned the five hindrances, the mental impurities that weaken wisdom, his mind well established in the four focusses of mindfulness, having cultivated the seven awakening-factors according to reality, he is reborn in nirvana..." (A 6.57.7+10/-3386+387) = SD 23.10.

³⁵ D 1:63 = It 118; M 1:33; S 5:187; It 96; Cf Dh 22.

³⁶ See Anubaddha Bhikkhu S (S 47.3) = SD 24.6a (2.3).

³⁷ *Dubbalyam*, ie, declared his intention of leaving the order due to inability to keep the precept.

These are the main rules for monastics regarding sexuality, but there are other rules dealing with the abstention from any sexual or lust-related activity. A breach of Pārājika 1 means that the offender falls immediately and automatically from his monkhood.³⁸ In other lesser offences, there are provisions for the offender's rehabilitation and training.³⁹

2.3 SUPPORTS OF SEXUALITY. Although Buddhism views sexuality as a physical act, it also understands that our motivation or our mental state towards the act decides its true nature. In the Methuna Sutta (S 7.47), the Buddha admonishes those keeping to the holy life (observing celibacy for personal development)—especially monastics and those who have taken up the celibacy rule—to abstain from these seven “bonds of sexuality” (*methuna, saṃyoga*):

- (1) enjoying physical contact;
- (2) socializing (especially for the sake of entertainment);⁴⁰
- (3) lusting after the physical form;
- (4) distracted by pleasurable sounds;
- (5) delighting in frivolities with others;
- (6) approving of others indulging in physical pleasures; and
- (7) living the holy life for the sake of going to heaven. (A 7.47/4:54-56) = SD 21.9

The reason for his advice is simple enough: such acts easily lead on to the sexual acts; or they easily distract us from personal development and the holy life.

The **Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 122) warns that even forest-dwelling monks may not be immune to the powers of pleasure and sexuality:

Ānanda, there is the teacher's undoing;⁴¹ ... there is the pupil's undoing; ... there is the brahmachari's⁴² undoing.

And what, Ānanda, is the teacher's undoing?

Here, Ānanda, some teacher⁴³ resorts to a secluded lodging: the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, [116] a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw.⁴⁴ While he lives thus secluded, brahmins and householders from the town [market town]

³⁸ See Wijayaratna 1990: 89-108.

³⁹ Further on moral virtue for monastics, see Anubaddha Bhikkhu S (A 47.3) = SD 24.6a (2.3).

⁴⁰ Elsewhere, the word *asaṃsaṭṭha* is used in this context. This is a clear allusion to the character of the forest hermit, a wandering forest monk. The expression, “(he) lives socializing” (*saṃsaṭṭhā viharissanti*) occurs at **Anāgata, bhaya S 4** (A 5.80.5+6/3:109) = SD 1.10(3.4). The Vinaya eg disapproves of the nun Thulla, nandā “living and socializing [in close proximity]” with unwholesome lay companions (Saṅgh 9 = V 4:239); Thulla, nandā's female probationer Caṇḍa, kālī “socializing with householders and householders' sons” (*saṃsaṭṭhā viharati gahapati-nāpi gahapati, puttana pi*, V 4:293); the female probationer Caṇḍa, kālī who lived “in close proximity with men and youths” (*purisa, saṃsaṭṭha kumāraka, saṃsaṭṭha*) who were violent (V 4:333); monks should carry out an act of censure (*tajjanīya, kamma*) against monastics living “in the company of householders” (*gihi, saṃsaṭṭha*, Cv 1.4.1 = V 2:4). VA says that they were “mixed up” (*missī, bhūtā*) with the world: in terms of *the body*, they were pounding and cooking for householders, perfuming and adoring themselves, using garlands and chains; in terms of *speech*, they were acting as go-between, running errands (VA 915). Comy gives 5 kinds of socializing (*saṃsagga*): through hearing, seeing, conversing, eating with, and bodily contact (MA 2:143). For an example of a monk who is above such socializing, ie Puṇṇa Mantāni, putta, see **Ratha, vinita S** (M 24.2/1:145 f) = SD 28.3.

⁴¹ “Undoing,” *upaddavo*, may also be rendered as “disaster, calamity” (M:ÑB 1335 n1157).

⁴² “Brahmachari,” *brahma, cāri*, ie one who has taken up the rule of celibacy. The anglicized word is found in English dictionaries like Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary. The Eng “batchelor” is derived from *brahma, cāri*, as in “Batchelor of Arts,” which goes back to the times when western education was monastery-based.

⁴³ Comy: An outside teacher (*titthiyā*) (MA 4:165).

⁴⁴ The more common list is shorter, but probably later: “to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty abode”: see **Anāpāna, sati S** (M 118.17) = SD 7.13 n.

and country visit him, and as a result, he becomes infatuated, harbours desires,⁴⁵ gives in to greed, and reverts to luxury.

This, Ānanda, is called a teacher who is undone. He is one struck down by evil unwholesome states that defile, that bring rebirth, that invite trouble, that ripen in suffering, that lead to further [future] birth, decay and death.⁴⁶ (M 122.21-24/3:116 f) = SD 11.4

The same is said of the unmindful pupil, and the unmindful brahmachari.

2.4 RENOUNCING SEXUALITY. The Alagaddûpama Sutta (M 22) opens with a renegade monk, Ariṭṭha, who rationalizes that “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).

Ariṭṭha (an erstwhile vulture killer), according to the Commentary, is a learned exponent of the Dharmā, but less learned in the Vinaya, he holds the view that sexual indulgence is not an “obstruction” or hindrance to spiritual development, that one can enjoy sex without sexual desire or feelings! The Buddha then summons Ariṭṭha, and having ascertained that he holds those wrong views, chides him for doing so, by declaring

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!⁴⁷
(M 22.9/1:133) = SD 3.13

An important reason why monastics shave off their hair is as a gesture and reminder of *renouncing worldliness and sexuality*. In the animal kingdom, follicular growth (such as the lion’s mane) is a sign of masculinity to attract suitable mates. Conversely, women who display attractive hair-do are like to attract a greater range of would-be mates. Interestingly, we do see today some young (and not so young) Theravāda monks who keep their head unshaven for such a duration so that 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.” (Cv 5.2.2 = V 2:106). Could this be a tacit or unconscious mark of sexuality?

2.5 MONASTICS AND SEXUALITY TODAY. We do not shed our sexual views and attachments as soon as we don the monastic robes. We have stories in the early Buddhist texts of monastics struggling with

⁴⁵ “He becomes infatuated, harbours desires,” *mucchati kāmāyati* (PTS), but Se & Comy (MA 4:165) read *muccham nikāmāyati*. MA 4:165: “He longs for and sets going the craving for infatuation” (*mucchana, taṇham pattheti pavatteti*), ie falling in love, one of the senses of *kāmeti* or *kāmāyati* (M 2:40).

⁴⁶ The phrase “evil unwholesome states...decay and death” occurs repeatedly in Mahā Assa, pura S (M 39.22-29/1:280).

⁴⁷ *Aññatr’eva kāmehi aññatra kāma, saññāya aññatra kāma, vitakkehi kāmehi paṭisevissatā ‘ti n’etaṃ thānam 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 explains “sensual pleasures” as “sexual intercourse.” MAṬ 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.

their sexuality. **The (Taṇhā) Bhikkhuṇī Sutta** (A 4.159), for example, relates how Ānanda exhorts a love-struck nun to overcome her lust for him by sublimating it into spiritual practice.⁴⁸ In the **Vaṅṅisa Ānanda Sutta** (S 8.4): Ānanda counsels the monk Vaṅṅisa when he confesses being troubled by sexual thoughts.⁴⁹ [3.4]

We do not shed our sexual views and attachments as soon as we don the monastic robes. Indeed, in some cases, our sexuality might become more sophisticated and aggravated, if we do not renounce our ego under the competent and compassionate tutelage (*nissaya*) of a qualified teacher. Some of the worst religious scandals have occurred with some of our best known gurus.⁵⁰ From the list of high-profile scandals here, only one case of a Theravadin monk scandal is mentioned, but most other cases remain unpublished because the offending monks would usually disrobe.

The message of the Alagaddūpama 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:

He [Ven Dr Havanpola 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)⁵¹

When a monastic gives a higher priority to religious status, academic qualification, or social engagement⁵² than to the Vinaya and Dharma practice, they are said to be “domesticated,” that is, of a mind and conduct more akin to those of the laity than of a true monastic. A domesticated monastic is more likely to be caught up in sensual pleasures and sexuality.

2.6 MONKS NEED TO KEEP AWAY FROM WOMEN. Those who become monks freely take upon themselves the rule of celibacy so that they can focus their minds and energies on spiritual training, if possible, awaken in this life itself. Understandably, the Buddha frequently admonishes the monks to keep a social distance from women and to be mindful of them.

In the Kul'upaka Sutta 2 (A 5.226), the Buddha speaks of five dangers that would befall a monk who frequents a house, namely,

⁴⁸ A 4.159/2:144-146 = SD 10.14.

⁴⁹ S 8.4/1:188 = SD 16.12.

⁵⁰ Amongst the most notorious are: Eido Shimano Roshi, 1960s-90s, US: see http://www.thezensite.com/Zen-Essays/CriticalZen/Aitken_Shimano_Letters.html; Richard Baker Roshi, 1970s, USA: <http://www.darkzen.org/Articles/Shoes.pdf>; Chogyam Trungpa Tulku, USA, in the 1980s: see Katy Butler, “Encountering the shadow in Buddhist America,” in *Common Boundary*, May-June 1990:14-22 & in *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*, ed Jeremiah Abrams & Connie Zweig, Los Angeles: JP Tarcher, 1991:137-147; Sangharakshita (David P Lingwood), 1990s, UK: see How Buddhism Became Chinese SD 40b (4.3.3.10); Yantra Amaro, 1990s: William Branigin. *The Washington Post* 21 Mar 1994, Tim McGirk, *The Independent*, London, 16 Jan 1996): http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19960116/ai_n9637069, see Wanderers of Today = SD 24.6b (1.2.1); Michael Roach, 2000s to date: <http://shine.yahoo.com/channel/sex/couple-vows-theyll-never-be-more-than-15-feet-apart-171974/>; Shih Chih-hao, Taiwan, 2000-2007: <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2007/07/28/2003371572>; Shih Mingyi, Singapore, 2008-2009: see Skillful Means = SD 30.8 (8.1).

⁵¹ See also Prebish 2003:60-68.

⁵² Here, I used “social engagement,” not in the positive Buddhist activist sense, but in the negative sense of monastics hobnobbing with the laity or involved with social work and neglecting personal practice, such meditation, solitary silent retreats, etc. See Skillful Means = SD 30.8 (8.1).

- (1) He often sees women.
- (2) From seeing them, companionship (*samsagga*) arises.
- (3) From companionship, intimacy (*vissāsa*) arises.
- (4) From intimacy, infatuation (*otāra*) arises.
- (5) And when the mind is infatuated (*otiṇṇa, citta*), it may be expected that he will not delight in the celibate life, or he will commit some foul offence or other, or he will give up the training and return to the low life. (A 5.226/3:259) = SD 66.8⁵³

One of the Buddha's last instructions, given to Ānanda, is about how monks should maintain a healthy social distance from women:

- “Bhante, how are we to conduct ourselves towards women?”
 “By not looking at them, Ānanda.”
 “But if we see them, bhante, how should we behave?”
 “By not speaking to them, Ānanda.”
 “But if they speak to us, bhante, how should we behave towards them?”
 “Then, Ānanda, establish mindfulness!”⁵⁴ (D 16.5.9/2:141) = SD 9

3 Dealing with sexuality

Some academics regard sexuality as being socially constructed,⁵⁵ for example, society or dominant groups in society define what is acceptable or unacceptable sexuality, or accepts new categories of sexuality (such as homosexuality). As interesting as such approaches may be, Buddhism sees sexuality mostly in an ethical and psychological manner. It sees sexuality *ethically*, by way of how it can be a wholesome part of our social lives; and *psychologically*, how sexuality can be a wholesome part of the lay person's life or be sublimated into the spiritual life for renunciants.

3.1 THE ETHICAL APPROACH. Age-appropriate responses are *an ethical conduct* conducive to a healthy social relationship and personal development, but taming our sexual urges into interpersonal respect. The **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja Sutta** (S 35.127) contains an interesting teaching by the Buddha on age-appropriate relationship. The discourse records the rajah Udena visiting the forest monk Piṇḍola Bhāra, dvāja, and the following conversation occurs:

3 Seated thus as one side, the rajah Udena said this to the venerable Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja:
 “How now, master Bhāra,dvāja, what is the cause, what is the reason, that these young monks, black-haired youths, endowed and blessed with youth, in the prime of life, who have still not fully enjoyed sense-pleasures,⁵⁶ live the holy life in its fullness and purity all their lives and keep doing so?”

4 “Maharajah, this was said by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one,

‘Come now, monks,
 towards those old enough to be your mother, mentally regard them as your mother;
 towards those old enough to be your sister, mentally regard them as your sister;
 towards those young enough to be your daughter, mentally regard them as your daughter.’

⁵³ See Wijayaratna 1990: 98.

⁵⁴ On a more positive note regarding women, see (Piṇḍola) Bhāradvāja S (S 35.127 = 4:110 f) = SD 27.6a. On position of women in early Buddhism, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004: 9.5-6 & **Dakkhiṇa Vibhāṅga S** (M 142/3:253-257) = SD 1.9.

⁵⁵ Eg Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* vol 1 “The will to knowledge” [French 1976] 1998, vol 2 “The use of pleasure” 1992, vol 3 “The care of self” [1984] 1990.

⁵⁶ *anikīlītāvino* (pl, S 1:117,25 = 118,14 = 4:110,27 = 111,4), from *na-nikīlītāvi(n)* (mfn) [cf vl S I 9,6: *a-nikkīl°*], “who has not finished playing,” ie one who has not yet enjoyed (sensual pleasures) in full; S 1:9,6 (*pathamena vayasā ~ī kāmesu*); *kāmesu akīlīta-kīlo abhuttāvī akatakāmākīlo*, SA [so E^e C^e; S^e °*kāmakāro*] = 10,20.

(Udena then rebuts:)

5a “But, master Bhāra, dvāja, wanton is the mind. Sometimes,
lustful mental states do arise towards those old enough to be our mothers;
lustful mental states do arise towards those old enough to be our sisters, too;
lustful mental states do arise towards those young enough to be our daughters, too.
(And he asks for another reason for the spiritual discipline of the young monks.)

(S 35.127.3-5/4:110 f) = SD 27.6a (2.4)

3.2 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH. Piṇḍola then answers that the Buddha teaches the recollection of the 32 body-parts, that is, *a psychological practice*. We are made up of various body-parts, inter-related but impermanent and decaying all the time. We should not fall in love with only a part of a person, but with his whole being. In other words, we need to know the person well enough to be able to accept him or her, “warts and all,” so to speak. To see a person only as a sexual being is not to take that person as he or she really is: in other words, we only desires the body but lack respect for the person.⁵⁷

6 “Maharajah, this was said by the Blessed One, who knows and sees, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one,

‘Come now, bhikshus, review this very body, wrapped in skin and full of various impurities, from the soles of the feet upwards and from the crown of the head downwards, thus:⁵⁸

“In this body there are⁵⁹

- (1) head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin;⁶⁰
- (2) flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys;⁶¹
- (3) heart, liver, membranes (around the lungs),⁶² spleen, lungs;⁶³
- (4) large intestines, small intestines, stomach-contents,⁶⁴ faeces[, brain];⁶⁵
- (5) bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat;⁶⁶
- (6) tears, grease, saliva, snot, oil of the joints,⁶⁷ urine.”⁶⁸

⁵⁷ See The Body in Buddhism = SD 29.6a & The Person in Buddhism = SD 29.6b.

⁵⁸ In the Suttas, this practice is called *asubha, saññā* (perception of foulness). The term *asubha, nimitta* (the sign of foulness) in Comys, refers to one or other of the 10 foul objects, ie bodily remains in one of the 10 stages of decomposition (Vism 6.1-11/178 f). On details of practice, see *Kāya, gatā, sati* S (M 119) = SD 12.21 Intro (5). See also *Vibhaṅga* S (S 51.29/5:277 f), on the analysis of will or desire (*chanda*).

⁵⁹ In this meditation of parts of the body, groups (1)-(4) constitute the earth element (*Mahā Rāhul’ovāda* S, M 62.8/1:421 f); groups (5)-(6) constitute the water element (ib M 62.9/1:422). The same sutta describes the fire element as *that by which one is warmed, ages, and burns, and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed and tasted gets completely digested*, or whatever else that is liquid, liquefied and clung to internally and individually [belonging to oneself] (M 62.10/1:422); and the wind element as *up-going winds [burping], down-going winds, winds in the belly [flatulence], winds that course through the limbs, in-breath and out-breath*, or whatever else that is air, airy and clung to internally and individually [belonging to oneself] (M 62.11/1:422 f).

⁶⁰ *Kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco*. The meditation on these five parts “with skin as the fifth” or “skin pentad” (*taca, pañcake kamma-t, thāna*) (Vism 242=8.50) forms the basic spiritual practice first taught to monks at the end of an ordination.

⁶¹ *Mamsam nahāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhi, miñjā vakkam*.

⁶² “Membranes,” alt tr “pleura,” *kilomaka*, ie a pair of membranous sacs surrounding the lungs.

⁶³ *Hadayaṃ yakanam kilomakam pihakam papphasam*.

⁶⁴ *Udariyam*, lit “that which is in the *udara* (stomach),” sometimes tr as “gorge” (Vism:Ñ 8.120/-122/258 f); technically, this includes chyme (food half-digested by gastric juices, expelled into the duodenum).

⁶⁵ *Antam anta, gunm udariyam karisam*. See M 3:90; KhpA 38. Later traditions add the 32nd part—*matthake mattha, lungam* (lit “the brain in the head”) (Kh 3, Pm 1:6 f; Vism 8.42-144/239-266): the “brain” is not listed at S 4:111). Although “brain” is usually listed last, Comys list it as no 20, after “faeces” (KhA 60; Vism 8.126/260) in the set headed by “large intestines” since they have similar or related appearances. For a fascinating discussion on how ancient ascetics obtain such knowledge of the human anatomy, see Zysk 1998:34-37.

⁶⁶ *Pittam semham pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo*.

⁶⁷ *Lasikā*, ie synovial fluid.

7 “That is easy, master Bhāradvāja, for those monks who are developed in body,⁶⁹ developed in moral conduct, developed in mind, developed in wisdom, but it is difficult for those who are undeveloped in body,⁷⁰ undeveloped in moral conduct, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in wisdom.

But master Bhāradvāja, for those monks who are undeveloped in body, undeveloped in moral conduct, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in wisdom, this is difficult.

Sometimes, though one thinks: “I will regard the body as foul,” one still pays attention to the foul as if it were beautiful.

Is there, master Bhāradvāja, another cause, master Bhāradvāja, that these young monks...live the holy life in its fullness and purity all their lives and keep doing so?”

(S 35.127.6-7/4:111 f) = SD 27.6a (2.4)

3.3 THE SPIRITUAL APPROACH. Piṇḍola then answers that the Buddha teaches the practice of sense-restraint, that is, a *spiritual exercise* that should be constantly done. The sense-doors should be guarded thus: “Having seen a form with the eye, do not grasp its signs and features.”⁷¹ Similarly, too, when having heard a sound, or having smelt a smell, or having tasted a taste, or having felt a touch, or having, or having cognized a mental state—do not grasp at the signs and features.⁷² The rajah Udena then confesses that this is very well true as he has himself experienced in this way

10 I, too, master Bhāradvāja, when I enter the harem with unguarded body, unguarded speech, unguarded mind, with the senses unguarded, on that occasion, too, master Bhāradvāja, states of lust fiercely assail me.

But, master Bhāradvāja, when I enter the harem with guarded body, guarded speech, guarded mind, with the senses guarded, on that occasion, too, master Bhāradvāja, states of lust do not assail me.

(S 35.127.9-10/4:112 f) = SD 27.6a (2.4)

The principle behind these teachings is that of perception (*saññā*). We tend to project our past experiences onto our present sense-impressions, looking for signs of pleasant past memories, avoiding signs of past pains, and ignoring what does not make sense to us (since we do not have any past impression of them). As such, we are not really living in the present, but constantly running after the past. In Buddhist mind-training, we re-align our minds to the present moment, where it should happily be.

3.4 TRUE-HEARTED FRIENDSHIP. **The Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31) deals in some detail with the qualities of a false friend and a true friend. For our purposes here, it is sufficient to say that a false friend seems to agree with everything we think or do, wrongly or rightly, but does not really care about us. A true-hearted friend (*suhada,mitta*), on the other hand, is wisely and compassionately concerned that we avoid unwholesome acts (with negative karmic consequences), that we cultivate moral virtue (keep to the five precepts) and enjoy true happiness.⁷³

The (Taṇhā) Bhikkhuṇī Sutta (A 4.159) relates how Ānanda exhorts a love-struck nun to overcome her lust for him in these four ways:

- (1) This body has arisen through food. Yet, based on food, food can be abandoned.⁷⁴
- (2) This body has arisen through craving. Yet, based on craving, craving can be abandoned.

⁶⁸ *Assu vasā kheḷo sīṅghāṇikā lasikā muttam*. Here there are a total of 31 parts of the body. See here (4)n.

⁶⁹ “Developed in body” (*bhāvita,kāya*) means developed in the “body” of the 5 sense-doors (*bhāvita,pañca,-dvārika,kāya*), ie, having sense-restraint: see n on “undeveloped in body,” below here.

⁷⁰ “Undeveloped in body” (*abhāvita,kāya*) means undeveloped in the “body” of the five sense-doors (*abhāvita,-pañca,dvārika,kāya*), ie, lacking in sense-restraint. (SA 2:395)

⁷¹ For details, see *Nimitta* and *Anuvyañjana* = SD 19.14.

⁷² S 35.127.8/4:112 = SD 27.6a (2.4)

⁷³ D 31.15-26/3:185-188 = SD 4.1.

⁷⁴ On food (*āhāra*), see *Āhāra S* (S 46.51) = SD 7.15.

- (3) This body has arisen through conceit. Yet, based on conceit, conceit can be abandoned.
 (4) This body has arisen through the sexual act; and regarding the sexual act, the Blessed One has advised the destruction of that bridge.⁷⁵ (A 4.159/2:144-146) = SD 10.14.

3.5 SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP. In the (Vaṅḡisa) Ānanda Sutta (S 8.4): Ānanda counsels the monk Vaṅḡisa when he confesses being troubled by sexual thoughts. The admonitions are in verses and also recorded in the Thera, gāthā:

4 Then the venerable Vaṅḡisa addressed the venerable Ānanda in verse:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| 4a | I am burning with sensual lust,
Please tell me how to put it out, | My mind is fully afire!
O Gotama, out of compassion! | 721 = Tha 1223 |
| [The venerable Ānanda:] | | | |
| 5 | Through perverting perception, ⁷⁶
Turn away from the sign | Your mind is utterly afire.
Of beauty that arouses lust!" ⁷⁷ | 722 = Tha 1224A |
| 5a | See formations as alien [other], ⁷⁸
Put out the great fire (that is lust): | As suffering, and not as self.
Burn not again and again. | 723 = Tha 1224B |
| 5b | Cultivate the mind on foulness, ⁷⁹
Keep your mindfulness on the body, ⁸⁰ | One-pointed, well-focussed;
Let revulsion ⁸¹ abound. ⁸² | 724 = Tha 1225 |
| 5c | And cultivate the signless, ⁸³
Then, by breaking through conceit, | Discard the tendency to conceit. ⁸⁴
You will fare in peace. | 725 = Tha 1226
(S 8.4/1.4-5:188) = SD 16.12 |

Since Ānanda competently advises Vaṅḡisa on meditation, too, he is more than a true-hearted friend. He is a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇa mitta*).⁸⁵ The special quality of a spiritual friend is that he is willing and able

⁷⁵ "The destruction of that bridge," *setu,ghāta*. (Lit "the destruction of the bridge." I have rendered it here by sense.) Evidently, this is a metaphor that a monastic should uproot all sexual desire. "The point of Ānanda's discourse is that even food, craving and conceit, which are normally factors of bondage, can be skillfully employed to attain arahantship; but with sexuality there is absolutely no skillful way it can be used for the goal of the holy life." (A:ÑB 294 n60)

⁷⁶ "Perverting perception" here refers to *saññā vipallāsa*, ie perceiving permanence, pleasure, selfhood and beauty in what are actually impermanent, suffering, not self and foul: see **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52) = SD 16.11 & **Introd.**

⁷⁷ This line = Tha 1224Bd = Sn 340b.

⁷⁸ On the perception of not self (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*), see (**Satta**) **Saññā S** (A 7.46.15-16/4:53) = SD 15.4.

⁷⁹ The perception of foulness (*asubha saññā*): as the contemplation of the 31 parts of the body is found in **Satipatṭhāna S** (M 10.10 f/1:57) and (**Iddhi,pada**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20.9/5:278); as the cemetery contemplations (5 stages) are in 5 consecutive suttas in the section ending with breath meditation in the **Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta** (S 46.57-61/5:129-131), and the better known 9 charnel-ground contemplations are found in **Satipatṭhāna S** (M 10.14-31/1:58 f) = SD 13.4.3.

⁸⁰ See **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119/3:88-99) = SD 12.21.

⁸¹ On *nibbidā*, see SD 20.1.

⁸² In **Rāhula S** (Sn 2.11) the first 2 lines of this stanza (ie excluding S 724cd = Tha 1225ab) and the next stanza (S 725 = Tha 1226)) close the Buddha's advice to Rāhula: Sn 341b-342.

⁸³ "The signless" (*animitta*), says Comy, is insight (*vipassanā*), so called because it of its removing (*ugghāṭitatā*) the signs of permanence, etc (SA 1:272). See **Nimitta** = SD 19.15.

⁸⁴ "Conceit," *māna*, see "Me: the problem of conceit" = SD 19.2.

⁸⁵ See **Spiritual Friendship** = SD 8.1.

to mentor us in proper meditation. The greats of spiritual friends is, of course, the Buddha. In the **Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 122), the Buddha declares the nature of spiritual friendship, thus:

26a And how, Ānanda, do disciples conduct themselves towards the teacher with friendliness, without hostility?

Here, Ānanda, the teacher teaches the Dharma out of compassion for the disciples, seeking their welfare, caring for them, saying:

‘This is for your welfare. This is for your happiness.’

His disciples wish to listen, they give an attentive ear, they establish their mind in wisdom [direct knowledge]. They neither err nor turn away from the Teacher’s teaching.

This, Ānanda, is how the disciples conduct themselves towards the teacher with friendliness, without hostility.

26b Therefore, [118] Ānanda, conduct yourselves with friendliness [lovingkindness]⁸⁶ towards me, not with hostility. This will be for your welfare and happiness for a long time.

27 Ānanda, I shall not treat you as a potter treats raw damp clay.⁸⁷ Restraining you again and again,⁸⁸ I will admonish you, cleansing you again and again.⁸⁹ The core will remain standing.⁹⁰

(M 122.26-27/3:117 f) = SD 11.4

Often our inclination towards sexual desire may be a sense of loneliness, crying out for acceptance by others, a need of friendship. In this case, the spiritual friend and his teachings are the best way of heal ourselves of such sense of lack.

On the other, if we are married or if we in a committed partnership, we should cultivate true-hearted friendship so that the marriage or friendship does not only revolve around sexuality, but is healthily broadbased. Such a partnership forms a wholesome support for a happy family life, people-helping and social work. Our joy of love and commitment to each other and to the Dharma will inspire other couples to similar Dharma-inspired lives.

⁸⁶ “With friendliness,” *mittavatāya*.

⁸⁷ “As a potter treats raw, damp clay, *yathā kumbha, kāro āmake āmake, matte*. Comy glosses *āmake* as *apakkhe*, and *āmake, matte ti āmake nātisukkhe bhājane*, “an unbaked vessel, not quite dry. The potter gently takes these vessels in both hands, saying, “Do not break,” but I will not proceed with you as the potter does.” (MA 4:166). IB Horner notes: “I do not see the full force of this simile... But I believe it means that whereas the potter gives, and can give, his vessels one chance only, the Teacher is undefeated by any initial failure there may be, and proceeds undeterred with the expectation of final success on the part of his pupil” (M:H 3:162 n1).

⁸⁸ “Restraining you again and again,” *niggayha niggayha*. Comy: “Having exhorted once, I will not be silent. Constantly reproving (*niggahetvā niggahetvā*) again and again, I will exhort, I will instruct” (MA 4:166). Cf *niggayha, vādī* (Dh 76), qu at DhA 2:108.

⁸⁹ “Cleansing you again and again,” *pavayha pavayha* (M 1:442, 444, 3:18 = DhA 2:108), ger of *pavāhati*, “(1) to cause to be carried away, to remove; freq with ref to water: to wash away cleanse (M 1:39; S 1:79, 183, 2:88; Tha 751). (2) to pull out, draw out (D 1:77, better read as *pabāhati*)” (PED abridged). Comy explains that the Buddha removes one’s faults (*dosa*), “as a potter, having removed (*pavāhetvā*, vl *pajahitvā*) the cracked and broken vessels [Se *bhinna, chinna, bhājanāni*] from among those that have been baked, takes the well baked ones, tapping (ie testing) them again and again. So too I having repeatedly removed (faults from you), will again and again exhort and instruct you.” (MA 4:166).

⁹⁰ *Yo saro so thassati*. Comy: “While being exhorted thus by me, those who have reached the pith (*sāra*) of the ways and the paths will persist. The mundane virtues [aforementioned teachings] are also intended as a criterion of spiritual essence.” (MA 4:167). *Sāra* means: (1) the heartwood or pith of a tree; (2) essence (essential truth). IB Horner: “It is no doubt meant that this will persist and endure (like well baked vessels) when all the mistakes and errors that dog as learner’s path have been cleared away and removed (like the cracked and broken vessels from among those that have been well baked)” (M:H 3:162 n4). In Gandhāra J (J 406), the potter imagery is again used to show the Buddha’s role as a teacher. Skilling 1997:393 n97 points to a recurrence of this same imagery in the Saṅgha, bheda, vastu (Gnoli 1978a:78,19) is used in the same way.

4 The laity and sexuality

4.1 THE THIRD PRECEPT. All Buddhists are at least bound by the five precepts (*pañca, sīla*)⁹¹—that is, abstaining from killing, from taking the not given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from taking intoxicants and addictives—which constitutes *natural morality*. That is to say, these precepts are rooted in the *universal values* of life, happiness, freedom, truth and wisdom. It is the third precept that concerns us here.

The **Veḷu, dvāreyya Sutta** applies the golden rule to explain the rationale behind the third precept:

8 Furthermore, householders, a noble disciple reflects thus:

‘If someone were to have sex with my wives,⁹² that would not be desirable nor agreeable to me. Now, if I were to have sex with the wives of another, that would not be desirable nor agreeable to him, too.

What is undesirable and disagreeable to me is undesirable and disagreeable to others, too. How can I inflict upon another what is undesirable and disagreeable to me?’

Having reflected thus, he himself refrains from sexual misconduct, exhorts others to refrain from sexual misconduct, and speaks in praise of refraining from sexual misconduct.

Thus, his bodily conduct is purified in three respects. (S 55.8/5:354) = SD 1.5

This passage exhorts us to “decentralize” sexuality in our lives, and to put it into proper social perspective. If our lives is strongly sex-centred, then we are very likely to live a predatory life of pleasure-hunting. We turn into asuras who measure others as sex-objects in terms of how much pleasure they can give us, and our lives would centre around getting the next sexual fix: we have become sex addicts.

Sexual misconduct, in fact, covers more than just adultery. Technically, *kāmesu micchācāra* means “misuse of sensual pleasures.” Here, “(in) sensual pleasures” (*kāmesu*) refers specifically to objects of sense-pleasure. “Misconduct” refers to any transgression through any of the “doors” or bodily orifices. In broad terms, it refers to any violation of the person of another, that is, non-consensual intercourse. Those who are not to be violated can be summarized as follows:

- (1) minors (children and those below the age of consent);
- (2) those betrothed to another (committed to another or engaged to be married);
- (3) those who are married (ie extramarital sex);
- (4) those bound by vows (such as monastics and celibates);
- (5) those who do not give their consent.

There are four constituents of misconduct in sensual pleasures:

- (1) a forbidden person (any of the five mentioned above);
- (2) the mind to enjoy;
- (3) the effort to engage; and
- (4) consent to the union of sexual organs.⁹³

Traditionally, sexual misconduct is said to have occurred when one has an evil intention and does it with a “forbidden” partner or victim: this is merely the “respect for another’s *person*.” However, the essence of the precept against sexual misconduct is that of “respect for another.” In other words, even when one’s spouse or lover declines to have a relationship, one has to respect that refusal. Otherwise, it amounts to breaking the third precept.⁹⁴ We should not regard even loved ones as sexual objects.

⁹¹ See *Sīlānussati* = SD 15.11 (2.2).

⁹² *me dāresu*, lit. “with my womenfolk.” For def, see *Sāleyyaka S* (M 41.8/1:286 & 41.12/1:287 f) = SD 5.7.

⁹³ Comy adds that if the unwilling victim gives “consent” (*adhivāsanā*) during the course of union, the victim would then break the precept, too (MA 1:199). Technically, in such cases, the precept is broken only when the person is a *forbidden* one. If the erstwhile unwilling partner (who midway consents) is a free adult, then he or she does not break the precept.

⁹⁴ On def of the first 4 precepts, see *Sāleyyaka S* (M 41/1:285-290) = SD 5.7 Intro (2). On the 5th precept, see Sn 398 f; *Sigāl’ovāda S* (D 31.8/3:182 f) = SD 4.1.

4.2 SEX AND MARRIAGE. Sexuality is the door to samsara: humans and other beings are born into the world through a sexual act. An *irresponsible* sexual act (such as rape, incest, etc) is likely to bring on great disadvantages and sufferings onto the child. A *responsible* sexual act, accompanied by love, commitment and the ability to support a family economically and emotionally is the foundation of a healthy society.

Responsibility is less about how is to blame when something goes wrong, but more of a *responding* in a wholesome manner to needs, difficulties and weaknesses of those we love or those to whom we are “responsible.” In short, marriage or commitment to loved ones is vital for individual, social and spiritual progress.

The **Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 73) speaks of lay disciples, dressed in white, enjoying sense-pleasures (*gihī odāta,vasano kāma,bhogī*),⁹⁵ who are streamwinners [5.1]. This means that sex need not be a hindrance to the spiritual life if we are in control of ourselves in a wholesome manner. Sexuality within the context of marriage or a committed loving relationship between suitable partners is not only ethically acceptable, but can be an effective deterrence against unhealthy sex and negative emotions.⁹⁶

In Buddhism, however, marriage is a social convention, not a sacrament. If marriages are made in heaven, they would remain happy for life. The Buddhist texts, however, provide important guidelines for marriage and family life, and key teachings are found in the **Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31).

30 (3) In five ways, young householder, the wife as the direction at the back [the west], should be ministered to by the husband, thus:

- (a) By treating her with respect.
- (b) By not showing her discourtesy.
- (c) By not being unfaithful to her.
- (d) By handing over authority to her.
- (e) By providing her with adornments.

The wife, young householder, as the direction at the back [the west], having been ministered thus by the husband shows him her compassion in these five ways:

- (f) She manages her work very well.
- (g) She is hospitable to those around her [such as servants and husband’s relatives].
- (h) She is not unfaithful to him.
- (i) She looks after the household stores [and property].⁹⁷
- (j) She is skillful and diligent in all her duties.

In these five ways, young householder, the wife, as the direction at the back [the west], having been ministered thus by the husband, shows him her compassion.

Thus the direction at the back [the west] is covered by him and made safe and secure.

(D 31.30/3:190) = SD 4.1

Other early Buddhist texts on marriage and family life include the following:

(Piya) Mallikā Sutta	As you love yourself, love others, too	(S 3.8/1:75)	= SD 38.7
(Uggata,sarīra) Aggi Sutta	Parents, family man, and religion	(A 4.44/2:44)	= SD 3.16
Saṁvāsa Sutta 1	Types of marriages	(A 4.53/2:57-59)	= SD 66.6
Saṁvāsa Sutta 2	The ideal couple	(A 4.54/2:59-61)	= SD 64.11
Sama,jīvi Sutta	The compatible couple	(A 4.55/2:61 f)	= SD 5.1
Kula Sutta	The successful family life	(A 4.255/2:249)	= SD 37.10
Ṭhāna Putta Sutta	Advantages of having a son	(A 5.39/3:43 f)	= SD 4.1
Nakula,mātā Sutta	The 8 duties of a wife of great merit	(A 8.48/4:268 f)	= SD 5.3
Bhariyā Sutta	Seven kinds of wives	(A 7.59/4:91-94)	= SD 38.13

⁹⁵ M 73.10/1:491 = SD 27.4.

⁹⁶ See Harvey 2000: 71-74.

⁹⁷ Including goods brought back by her husband.

5 The saints and sexuality

5.1 LAYMEN STREAMWINNERS. In the **Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 73), Vacchagotta asks the Buddha whether there are laymen streamwinners, who are family people enjoying pleasure of the senses, in the Buddhist community:

“Other than master Gotama; other than the monks; other than the nuns; other than the laymen, householder, dressed in white, brahmacharis [celibates], is there any one layman, a disciple of master Gotama, a householder, dressed in white, enjoying sense-pleasures,⁹⁸ who is a doer of the Teaching, follower of instructions, crossed beyond doubt, become free of uncertainties, gained fearless confidence, and independent of others, dwells in the Teaching?” (M 73.10/1:491) = SD 27.4

The Buddha answers that such saint disciples number “not in the hundreds, but far more.” And the same answer is given by the Buddha when Vacchagotta asks about the presence of female lay streamwinners.

The most essential basis for streamwinning, the very first confirmed stage of awakening, is that of building right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*). This *preliminary right view* arises with the abandoning of the first three fetters, namely, (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), and (3) attachment to vows and rituals (*sīla-b, bata parāmāsa*). When we have overcome these three fetters, we are called streamwinners, or if we consistently work in this Dharma-inspired direction, we are known as “true individuals” (*sappurisa*).⁹⁹

5.2 LAYMEN ONCE-RETURNERS. In the **Cūḷa Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta** (M 14), we are told that Mahānāma,¹⁰⁰ despite being a once-returner,¹⁰¹ complains to the Buddha that he still has defiled mental states, especially lustful thoughts, despite understanding the nature of the three unwholesome roots. From the discourse, we also learn that Mahānāma has not attained any dhyana. The Buddha explains the significance of this fact:

Mahānāma, even if a noble disciple has clearly seen as it really is, with right wisdom, that sense-desires bring little solace [gratification], but much suffering, much despair, more danger here,¹⁰² so long, as he does not gain zest and joy that are apart from sense-pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or something more peaceful than that, he would not be able to be unaffected by sense-pleasures.¹⁰³

But, Mahānāma, when a noble disciple has clearly seen as it really is with right wisdom that sense-pleasures bring little solace, but much suffering, much despair, more danger here, and he gains zest and joy that are apart from sense-pleasures, from unwholesome states, or something more peaceful than that,¹⁰⁴ then he would be able to be unaffected by sense-desires.

(M 14.4/1:91) = SD 4.7

⁹⁸ “A householder... enjoying sense-pleasures,” *gihī odāta, vasano kāma, bhogī*.

⁹⁹ See Udakūpama S (A 7.15) = SD 28.6 Intro (1.2.4.2+3).

¹⁰⁰ He was Sukk’odana’s son, and brother of the monks Anuruddha and Ānanda. As such, he is Sukk’odana’s nephew and the Buddha’s cousin. See Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, 1972:80 f.

¹⁰¹ See M 14.2-5/1:91 = SD 4.7.

¹⁰² See V 4:134.

¹⁰³ This is one of the passages that Bhikkhu Bodhi quotes as “instances of stream-enterers who are not attainers of Jhānas” (2001:51 f).

¹⁰⁴ “Something more peaceful than that,” *tato santatarāṇi*. Comy explains that while zest and joy (*pīti, sukha*) pertain to the first 2 dhyanas, “something higher” is connected with the 3rd and 4th dhyanas (MA 2:63). On *jhāna*, see Sāmañña, phala S (D 2.75-82/1:73-76).

Two significant points arise from the Buddha's statement here. The first is that so long as we have not experienced dhyanic bliss, we will consider sexual pleasure to be very pleasant and desirable. The second point is that even a once-returner, what more a streamwinner, who has not attained dhyana, too, would be drawn to sexual pleasure. But there is a great difference here. While the worldly person is likely to lack self-control in such pleasures, and easily break the third precept (against sexual misconduct), the streamwinner and the once-returner would never deliberately break any of the precepts, even if he were a layman.

6 Celibacy

6.1 LAYMEN NON-RETURNERS. Non-returners are rare amongst laymen¹⁰⁵ because they often indulge in some level of sensuality and sexuality. A non-returner, on the other hand, has destroyed all the five lower fetters, namely, self-identity view, spiritual doubt, attachment to rituals and vows, sensual lust and aversion.¹⁰⁶ In short, a non-returner has overcome all sense-desires.¹⁰⁷

The **Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 73) mentions lay followers who are celibate (*brahma,cārī*) and those who are "enjoying sense-pleasures" (*kāma,bhogī*). In the former case, they are all non-returners, while the latter are either streamwinners [4.1] or once-returners [4.3]. The Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta records Vaccha,gotta asking the Buddha about laymen non-returners, thus,

"Other than master Gotama; other than the monks; other than the nuns, is there any one layman, a disciple of master Gotama, a householder, dressed in white, a brahmachari [a celibate], who,

having exterminated the five lower fetters,¹⁰⁸
 who spontaneously arises (in the Pure Abodes),¹⁰⁹ therein attains nirvana,
 and of a nature not to return from that world?"¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Dīghāvu S (S 55.3) records the Buddha counselling the dying Dīghāvu, a stream-winner, advising him not to worry about his father, Jotika the householder. Dīghāvu, later dies and is reborn in the Suddhāvāsa as a non-returner (S 55.3/5:344-347).

¹⁰⁶ The 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,ditṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) aversion (*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 (*ud-dhambhāgiya*). The abandonment of the lower 5 fetters makes one a non-returner (*opapātika* or *anāgāmī*) (see **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.

¹⁰⁷ See **Ānāpānasati S**, M 118.10 = SD 7.13. Non-returners are reborn in the Pure Abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*), ie, the 5 highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa,loka*) inhabited only by them and where they live out their karma to attain nirvana. These worlds are Āviha ("Non-declining"), Ātappa ("Unworried"), Sudassā ("Clearly Visible"), Sudassī ("Clear-visioned") and Akaniṭṭhā ("Highest") (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46).

¹⁰⁸ The lower fetters: see n above.

¹⁰⁹ The Pure Abodes (*suddh'āvāsa*) are the 5 highest heavens of the form world (*rūpa,loka*) inhabited only by non-returners who assume their last birth to and attain nirvana as arhats (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). The 5 pure abodes, ie their inhabitants and respective lifespans, are: These worlds are Āviha ("Non-declining," 1000 MK), Ātappa ("Unworried," 2000 MK), Sudassā ("Clearly Visible," 4000 MK), Sudassī ("Clear-visioned," 8000 MK) and Akaniṭṭhā ("Highest," 16000 MK) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). MK = *Mahā Kappa*. that is, a full cycle of a world-period or cycle of the universe (V 3:4 = D 3:51, 111 = It 99; D 1:14; A 2:142). For celestial map, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11/1:211-223) = SD 1.7; for world cycle, see **Aggañña S** (D 27/3:80-97) = SD 2.19.

¹¹⁰ "Householder...from that world," *atthi pana bhoto gotamassa ek'upāsako'pi sāvako gihī odāta,vasano brahma,cārī yo pañcannaṃ oram,bhāgiyānaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ parikkhayā opapātiko tatha parinibbāyī anāvatti,-dhammo tasmā lokā'ti*. This question is about the non-returner, which even a layman may attain. However, such lay-

“Not just one, Vaccha, nor a hundred, nor two hundred, nor three hundred, nor four hundred, nor five hundred, but far more laymen, who are my disciples, householders, dressed in white, brahmacharis [celibates], who,
 having exterminated the five lower fetters,
 spontaneously arise (in the Pure Abodes), therein attain nirvana,
 and of a nature not to return from that world.” (M 73.9/1:490 f) = SD 27.4

Understandably, the non-returners are celibate because they have destroyed all the five lower fetters,¹¹¹ including sensual lust, while once-returners have destroyed only the first three fetters and weakened greed, hate and delusion [4.3], and the streamwinners only destroyed the first three fetters [4.1].

As such, in early Buddhism, celibacy is not a reaction against sexuality, taking it to be evil and so on, but rather, understanding its productive and fettering powers, the practitioner periodically abstains from such an indulgence so that his energies are undistracted and fully directed to spiritual training. The body, as it were, is in full service of the spirit, so that we are capable of rising beyond even the heavens.¹¹²

6.2 CELIBACY IS THE TASTE OF THE DIVINE IN THE HUMAN. The key difference between a lay person and a monastic is that the latter is celibate, that is, the total abstinence from sexuality. Since a monastic has renounced the world, he would have not set up a biological family, which in turn is the result of sexuality. Sexuality is the most selfish of human acts. Our minds can be so directed to it, and be directed by it, that we are significantly weakened in the broader human enterprises.

Sexuality is the very root of the biological family. Sexuality is also at the very root of feudalism and the class system of the Buddha’s time. We are born in a class: a brahmin is born a brahmin, a kshatriya a kshatriya, a vaishya a vaishya, a shudra a shudra, and an outcaste an outcaste. However, any members of such classes joins the Buddhist order, he is no more a class member, but a renunciant. He has transcended the biological sex-based family and become part of *a universal and spiritual family*. A monastic’s celibacy authenticates this membership.

While sexuality entails strong attachments and channels time, energy and resources to itself, celibacy focusses our commitment to spiritual development and universal fellowship. Without family responsibilities, we have more time for the spiritual life: to know Dharma, realize Dharma, teach Dharma.¹¹³ Celibacy, in transcending attachment to the physical body, allows us to focus fully on spiritual development, so that we taste the divine life right here in this world.

For this reason, the early Buddhists refer to celibacy as *brahma, cariya*, “the divine life,” “the perfect conduct,” or even “the way of Brahmā.” Furthermore, in the Dhammika Sutta (Sn 2.14), the Buddha exhorts us:

Let the wise avoid a life of incelibacy like a burning pit of embers.
 But those incapable of celibacy, should not transgress another’s wife.¹¹⁴ (Sn 396)

6.2 LIVING LIKE ARHATS. Those who have a good level of self-control could, if they wish, voluntarily lead lives that are sex-free, that is, live as *celibates*. Such a practice can be done periodically or on a more sustained basis. In the former case, where lay followers observe the celibacy (*brahma, cariya*) rule, usually as part of the eight precepts (*atth’āṅga, sīla*), is defined in the (Tad-ah’) Uposatha Sutta (A 3.70) as follows,

men will remain naturally celibate because they have destroyed the fetter of sense-desire. Note here that no lay disciples are mentioned as attaining arhathood: see Laymen Saints = SD 8.6(13).

¹¹¹ The 5 lower fetters, see n above on the 10 fetters (*dasa samyojana*).

¹¹² See Harvey 2000: 89 f.

¹¹³ See Wijayaratna 1990: 89-108; Harvey 2000: 89 f.

¹¹⁴ Cf. “Who go to women dear as life to others... wane like the moon in the dark half” (*Sigāl’ovāda S, D 33.14-15*/3:184*) = SD 4.1..

“As long as they live, the arhats, giving up incelibacy, live a celibate life; dwelling far [from evil], refraining from coupling, the way of the world.

Today I, too, for this night and this day, giving up incelibacy, live a celibate life; dwelling far [from evil], refraining from coupling, the way of the world.

I will emulate the arhats in this manner and the observance will be kept by me.”

(A 3.70.11/1:211) = SD 4.18

The rule of celibacy (along with the other seven of the eight precepts) is observed by the lay follower for the duration of the *uposatha*, that is, the full moon and new moon days, but may also include the seventh or eighth day in between, that is, a weekly affair. The observance usually begins at sun-down of the preceding day and ends at sun-down of the *uposatha* itself.

7 Homosexuality and abnormal sexuality

7.1 ABNORMAL SEXUALITY. The remarkable but late **Cakka,vatti Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 26) contains an interesting prophecy:

And among the generation whose life-span is five hundred years, three things increased: abnormal lust, rampant greed and deviant conduct, and in consequence people’s life-span decreased, their beauty decreased, and as a result, the children of those whose life-span has been five hundred years live, some for two hundred and fifty years, some for only two hundred years.

(D 26.17/3:70) = SD 36.10

According to the Dīgha Commentary on the Sutta, “unnatural or abnormal lust” (*adhamma,rāga*) here refers to incest, that is, “lust between mother and mother’s sister and father’s sister and maternal uncle’s wife and other such improper situations” (*mātā mātucchā pitucchā mātulanī ti ādike ayuttat,ṭhāne rāgo*); “rampant greed” (*visama,lobha*) refers to excessive greed (or neurotic desire) by way of consuming things (*paribhoga,yuttesu pi ṭhānesu atibalava,lobho*, in other words, excessive materialism and consumerism); and “deviant conduct” (*micchā,dhamma*) refer to sexuality “between men and men, women with women.” (DA 3:853). In short, crowded living conditions (such as heavily urbanized cities) are likely to conduce to cases of incest, consumerism, and homosexuality. It should, however, be noted that these commentarial notions are not found in the Canon, or at least not so distinctly expressed.

Taken in their proper perspectives, these statements on sexuality refer to their abnormal (*adhamma*) manifestation, that is, *going against the third precept*, which basically is about respect for personal freedom, for another’s body and for family and society. The fact that the third precept is against “sexual misconduct” (*kāmesu micchācāra*) conversely means that there is such a thing as “proper sexual conduct,” and entails a positive counterpart, the value of contentment, that is, being committed to our partner and the cultivation of lovingkindness and spiritual friendship—or, if one chooses, to live a celibate life (*brahma,cariya*) whether short-term, long-term or life-long [6].

7.2 HOMOSEXUALITY. The early Buddhist texts do mention sexual acts between members of the same sex,¹¹⁵ but there is no category called *homosexuality*, as we know it today. Although there is no mention of clear reference to homosexuality in the four Nikāyas (the Dīgha, the Majjhima, the Saṃyutta and the Aṅguttara),¹¹⁶ we do have references to homosexual acts in the Vinaya. The best known case is that of two young novices who committed “a defiling deed” (*dūsesum*) with one another. On account of this case, the Buddha introduced the rule that no monk should be attended by two novices.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Masturbation is prohibited for monks (Saṅghādisesa 1 = V 3:109), for nuns (Pācittiya 3 & 4 = V 4:259-261, Pāc 93 = V 4:342). Homosexuality is prohibited for monks (Pāc 31, 32, 90, 91, 93 = V 4: 287 f, 341-344). See Wijayaratna 1990: 95 f.

¹¹⁶ See Jones 1979: 79 f.

¹¹⁷ The 2 novices were Kaṇḍaka and Mahaka, pupils of the loose monk Upananda. Pāc 70 records that the novice Kaṇḍaka is expelled for holding the view that sexuality is not a stumbling-block to the monastic celibate training

The Saññoga Sutta (A 7.48) gives some insight into the psychological nature of homosexuality [1.2]. The search for satisfaction through a partner (of whatever sex) is related to one's conscious or unconscious identification with the characteristics or behaviour of one's own perceived sex (be it male or female). The word "sexuality," as such, refers not to one's physical features but to one's *self-love*.

A woman (in a physical sense), fixated on her own sexuality, compares herself with another's sexuality, and similarly fixates on the other's sexuality through unwise consideration (*ayoniso manasikāra*), that is, being not aware of or rejecting (repressing) the fleeting, unsatisfactory and insubstantial nature of the experience. A man similarly fixates on his own sexuality, compares himself with another's sexuality falls into the same condition.¹¹⁸ [1.2]

In both cases—the woman or the man—when the person sexually fixates on another person's sexuality, the former may often enough project onto the latter both female and male sexuality. In other words, this is a case of gender-fused fixation. This is evident, for example, in any homosexual relationship, especially of a sustained nature, where one partner invariably plays a "male" role and the other a "female" role. The relationship fails when one partner fails in this "half-role": the relationship then is incomplete.

In other words, in the case of a man who loves himself in a fixated manner, that is, narcissistically, he would as such love his body, that is, its physical features. In other words, unwittingly, *he has taken on the mind of a woman*, which then goes on to seek another man for sexual satisfaction. Understandably, such a relationship as a rule does not work because of *one's self-love*.

As in any "normal" personal relationship, the homosexual couple will only be happy together when this partnership rises above merely satisfying sexual desire towards wholesome higher goals (especially aesthetic or spiritual ones)—in other words, when they go beyond treating one another as mere objects of sexuality (which also applies to a heterosexual relationship), but regard one another as true individuals capable of personal development and spiritual liberation.

On a more general level, any search for union externally implies that one is still caught up in the limitations of one's own gender identity,¹¹⁹ as Analayo notes,

This shows that the affective investment inherent in identifying with one's gender role and behaviour forms an important link in the arising of sensual desire. In contrast, *arahants*, who have eradicated even the subtlest trace of identification, are unable to engage in sexual intercourse.¹²⁰

(2003:194)

7.2 SUBLIMATING SEXUAL ATTRACTION. The Vakkali Thera Vatthu (DhA 25.11) is a simple moving story about how young man, who upon seeing the Buddha, at once falls in love with his body, and joins the order so that he can gaze on the Buddha's physical beauty. The Buddha, it is said, know all along what is going on in Vakkali's mind.

At the approach of the rains retreat, the Buddha announces to Vakkali that he cannot follow the Buddha, and Vakkali is devastated. He misses the Buddha so much, that he contemplates suicide. At just the right moment, when he is about to kill himself, the Buddha appear before him in a radiant forms, and exhorts him:

Full of joy and faith in the Buddha's Teaching, the monk
Will reach the place of peace, the happiness of the stilling of the formations. (Dh 381)

Having pronounced this Stanza, the Teacher stretched forth his hand to the elder Vakkali and said,

Come, Vakkali! Fear not, look at the Tathāgata!
I will lift you up like (one lifting) an elephant sunk in the mire.

(V 4:138-140). A similar case is that of the renegade monk Ariṭṭha (Pāc 68 = V 4:133-136): see also Alagaddūpama S (M 22/1:130-142) = SD 3.13

¹¹⁸ A 7.48/4:57-59 = SD 8.7.

¹¹⁹ On individuation, see SD 8.7 Intro (4).

¹²⁰ Eg at D 3:133. The eradication of sensual desire has already taken place at the level of non-return. (Analayo's fn)

Come, Vakkali! Fear not, look at the Tathāgata!
I will free you just as the (eclipsed) sun is freed from Rāhu's maw.
Come, Vakkali! Fear not! Look at the Tathāgata!
I will free you just as the (eclipsed) moon is freed from Rāhu's maw.

Vakkali, dramatically inspired, goes into deep meditation, and attains arhathood. He is declared by the Buddha to the foremost of the monks who have great faith. (DhA 25.11/4:118 f).

This moving story shows the Buddha's great compassion is accepting people as they are, and inspiring them to higher levels of spirituality. Where cunning and shady gurus would exploit the weaknesses and dedication of their pupils, or misguide them into greater difficulties, the Buddha and the Dharma are capable of sublimating anyone who is intent on personal development, even to win liberation itself.¹²¹

8 Sex-change

8.1 SEXUAL STEREOTYPES. Does our sex change through our various rebirths? Theoretically speaking, our sex depends very much on our karma (the meaning here will be evident soon). However, it is likely that our sex may not change over many lives. None of the stories of **the Vimāna Vatthu**—hagiographical accounts of those who are reborn as heavenly beings on account of their good deeds—make any reference to sex-change. The sex of the key actors remains the same through their different lives, as far as the accounts of the Vimāna Vatthu, anyway.

Vimāna Vatthu 1-15 and 44 are stories about women, most of whom are said to be female deities (*devī*) in their next lives. The rest of the stories are about men who become gods (*devatā*). In Vv 53, for example a brahmin is reborn as a good, while in Vv 51, a male frog is said to be reborn as a male deity.

The Peta, vatthu—pious accounts of those reborn as ghosts or shades on account of their unwholesome deeds—similarly mention no sex-change. **The Ubbarī Peta Vatthu** (Pv 2.13) is the story of a queen of the rajah Brahma, datta who is said to be reborn for 86,000 lives.¹²² [8.2]

The Buddha's past lives are sometimes mentioned in the discourses, such as **the Kūta, danta Sutta** (D 5),¹²³ **the Mahā Govinda Sutta** (D 19),¹²⁴ and **the Ghaṭikāra Sutta** (M 81).¹²⁵ In all the 547 **Jātaka** stories of the Buddha's past lives, whether he is a human, divine, or subhuman births, he is always depicted as a male character.¹²⁶

There is one rare account of the Bodhisattva reborn as a woman in the very distant past. According to the Jina, *kāla, māli* (written by Ratana, paññā, a 16th century monk in Siam), the Bodhisattva, in the distant past before the Buddha Dīpaṅkara, is *the step-sister* of a Buddha named Purāṇa Dīpaṅkara ("Earlier Dīpaṅkara"). It is said that she makes a gift of mustard oil to a renowned elder monk named Pacchima Dīpaṅkara ("Later Dīpaṅkara").

8.2 NEGATIVE SEX-CHANGE. We often tend to become the desired object that we are preoccupied with. The Story of the Elder Soreyya (DhA 3.9) relates how Soreyya, a seth's son,¹²⁷ living in a city of the same name, upon seeing the elder Mahā Kaccāyana's golden complexion, thinks lustfully, "O how great it would be for my wife to have the golden hue of his body!" At once, it is said, he turns into a woman! Out of shame, *she* runs away, following a caravan to faraway Takka, silā. Caravan travellers, seeing her, proposes that she marries Sāvathī seth's son who is unmarried. She does so and bears him two sons.

¹²¹ See Harvey 2000: 419-434.

¹²² See Harvey 1995: 68.

¹²³ As a brahmin purohita (D 5.10-21/1:134-143) = SD 22.8.

¹²⁴ As Mahā Govinda, the great steward (D 19.29-61/2:230-251) = SD 63.4.

¹²⁵ As the brahmin student, Jotipāla, during the time of Kassapa, the Buddha just before our own (M 81.6-23/-2:46-54) = SD 49.3.

¹²⁶ For a list of births, see JF Jones 1979: 15-19.

¹²⁷ A seth (*setthī*) was a financial entrepreneur who funded large businesses.

One day, a close friend of hers, another seth's son, on a visit to Takka,silā, meets her. Upon hearing her story, he chides her for having had such a lustful thought towards an awakened monk, and advises her to seek Mahā Kaccāyana's forgiveness. She accordingly returns to Soreyya, and meeting Mahā Kaccāyana, seeks his forgiveness, and at once reverts into a man. Having learned his lesson, and deeply moved by religious feeling, he renounces the world, and in due course becomes an arhat.¹²⁸

The next story, **the Isi,dāsī Therī,gāthā** (Thī 400-447), is a canonical one, about the nun Isi,dāsī. In her last life (during our Buddha's time), Isi,dāsī is a beautiful woman, daughter of a wealthy merchant of Ujjenī. Her first marriage is to another merchant's son. Although she loves and serves him well, he still hates her. The same thing happens in the second marriage, and also the third (to a young ascetic). In the end, she becomes a nun, and cultivating herself well, she awakens with full powers, and is able to recall her past lives.

Eight lives ago, she was a man, that is, a rich and handsome young goldsmith who seduced the wives of others. After that, he was born in hell; then he is reborn as a castrated monkey; then a gelded sheep; and then as an ox. Three more times as an animal, and after that as a hermaphrodite. And in her last birth, she is reborn as Isi,dāsī.

The Isi,dāsī story should not be misunderstood as that it is our bad karma to be born as a woman or a hermaphrodite. The moral of the story is that we are victims of our own habitual tendencies, which will follow us in some form, life after life. As we think, so we act; as we thus act, so we reap the fruits. The point is very clear: we should take care what we desire for because ultimately we become what we desire, virtually or really.¹²⁹

8.3 POSITIVE SEX-CHANGES. According to **the Saṅkhār'upapatti Sutta** (M 120), we can choose our own rebirth if we are accomplished in the fivefold "noble growth" (*ariya,vaddhi*), that is, faith, moral virtue, spiritual learning, charity, and wisdom. The discourse closes with the statement that the best of all is not to be reborn at all.¹³⁰

The Sakka Pañha Sutta (D 21) has a story of a Sakya girl, Gopikā, who had great faith in the Three Jewels, and was deeply virtuous. Letting go of her womanly mind (*itthi,citta virajetvā*), she cultivated that of a man, and was reborn in Tāva,timsa heaven as the devaputra Gopaka, which was a higher rebirth than the three monks she had known who were reborn as lowly gandharvas (divine minstrels).¹³¹

The Ubbarī Peta Vatthu (Pv 2.13) is the story of a woman who chooses to be reborn in the brahma-world. It is said that she was a queen of the rajah Brahma,datta for 86,000 lives.¹³² She is also told that

You were a woman, a man, to,	and born in an animal's womb, too.
The limit of the distant past	is thus not to be seen. ¹³³ (Pv 2.13.12)

Realizing that she has gone through so many births, she wearies and decides to change her fortune. She renounces the world, and the closing verse of her story says:

Having cultivated a heart of lovingkindness	for the sake of rebirth in the brahma-world,
having abandoned a woman's mind,	she was reborn in the brahma-world.
(Pv 2.13.19/33)	

It should be noted here that her abandoning "a woman's mind" simply means that she has transcended her sexuality.¹³⁴ The brahma-world is populated by beings of a dhyanic nature; in other words, they are *without form* and as such are *sexless* (Vbh 418).

¹²⁸ Soreyya-t,thera Vatthu, DhA 3.9/1:325-332 (Dh 43); for Eng tr, see *Buddhist Legends* (DhA:B) 2:23-28. See Self & Selves = SD 26.9 (1.6.3).

¹²⁹ For the full story, see *Why Some Marriages Fail* = SD 3.8 (I). See also *Miracles* = SD 27.5a (6.2.1.4).

¹³⁰ M 120/3:99-103) = SD 3.4.

¹³¹ D 21.1.11/2:271 f = SD 70.6.

¹³² See Harvey 1995: 68.

¹³³ This alludes to S 2:178 = S 3:149 = 151, also 5:226.

The Jātaka has an account of a brahma who is reborn as a woman on earth. This is the Culla, bodhi Jātaka (J 443), whose tale is summarized in the Ananusociya Jātaka (J 328). It is said that once our Bodhisattva is reborn in a brahmin family of Benares. When he reaches of age, his parents suggested that he marries. He has no desire to do so, declaring that upon his parents' death, he wishes to become an ascetic.

When his parents insisted, he has a golden image of a beautiful woman made, and says that he would only marry one who looks like it. Now at that time, a brahma has been reborn as a beautiful woman of Kāsi, named Sammilla, bhāsinī, whose features are just like those of the golden image. So Bodhisattva has to marry her, but she too has a similar spiritual disposition, and they live together as celibates. At the deaths of his parents, they both become ascetics.¹³⁵

9 Sexuality in perspective

9.1 MONK OR PRIEST? By definition a monastic (that is, a monk or a nun) is “single,” and as such celibate: he or she has nothing to do with sexuality. If a cleric is not celibate (such as in the Japanese Buddhisms), then it is incorrect to address him or her as monastic, but perhaps as a priest or some proper term. In Japan, in 1872, the Meiji government promulgated a law that simply stated: “From now on Buddhist clerics shall be free to eat meat, marry, grow their hair, and so on.”¹³⁶ Furthermore, there will be no penalty if they wear ordinary clothing when not engaged in religious activities.”¹³⁷ Known informally as the *nikujiki saitai* 肉食妻帯 (“meat-eating and marriage”) law, it was introduced to incapacitate or at least weaken Buddhism as a political and social force in Japan. This decriminalizing measure triggered a century-long debate in the Japanese Buddhist world, as clerical leaders and rank-and-file clerics strove to interpret and react to their new legal context.¹³⁸

This distinction is important as those who are celibate and direct their mind and energies properly to the spiritual; training will be able to taste the fruits of mental stillness and clarity, of compassion and wisdom. This is because such practitioners have to some level experienced or understood at least one of the four noble truths, that is, suffering, its arising, its ending, and the way leading to the ending of suffering.

Furthermore, if a monastic, who has taken monastic vows of celibacy, and who don the marks of monasticism in some form, were to be in celibacy, he at once transgresses the monastic code and is automatically a layman. Anyway kind of sexuality entails some level of attachment to sensuality (*kāma'upa-dāna*) and to sense-pleasures (*kāma, tanhā*). Sensual desire (*kāma-c, chanda*) is the first of the five mental hindrances,¹³⁹ which must be eradicated if we are to progress spiritually.

However, sexuality need not be a hindrance to spiritual growth if we properly enjoy it within the context of marriage and committed partnership. The early Buddhist texts speak of streamwinners who are “enjoyers of sense-pleasures” (*kāma, bhogī*) [4.2, 6.1]. If sexuality is the spice of lay life, it should be used sparingly and in the right way, so that our lives taste of spiritual freedom.

9.2 OVERCOMING THE THREE INTOXICATIONS. The Mada Sutta (A 3.39) says that monastics who are intoxicated with youth (*yobbana, mada*), with health (*ārogya, mada*) or with life (*jīvita, mada*) are as

¹³⁴ That she decides to rise above her sexuality (being a woman) is not that it is bad karma to be one, but that the Brahma-world is populated by dhyanic beings, constantly enjoying the bliss of dhyana, and are formless, so that they are sexless. See Saññoga S (A 7.48), where it is stated that a person should rise above being merely a sexual being in order to spiritually progress (A 7.48, 2-3/4:57) = SD 8.7 [1.2].

¹³⁵ J 328/3:92-97; J 443/4:22-27. This story is identical to that of Mahā Kassapa and Bhaddā Kapilāni (sThīA 68; Ap 2:583; AA 1:176) before their own renunciation. Cf the story of Anittha, gandha, kumāra who similarly declares that he would only marry a woman who resembles the golden figure he possessed (DhA 3:281 f). See Jones 1979: 85 f.

¹³⁶ Robinson & Johnson 1982: 181

¹³⁷ Date, 1930: 621 (qu in Jaffe 2002, see foll).

¹³⁸ See Richard Jaffe, *Neither Monastic Nor Layman: Clerical marriage in modern Japanese Buddhism*, Princeton, 2002: 4, see <http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s7171.html> & <http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUN-KEN/publications/jjrs/pdf/512.pdf>. See also Skillful Means = SD 30.8 (8.3.3).

¹³⁹ On the 5 hindrances, see *Pañca Nivaraṇa* = SD 32.1

such led on to be reborn in suffering states, and that such intoxicated monks would “give up the training and return to the low life.”¹⁴⁰ The reason for this is clear: intoxication with youth, with health or with life is a fixation with the body, a self-identity-view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*). [5.1]

When we are body-bound, fettered to only *physical* reality, we become blind to *spiritual* reality, that is, the cultivation of our potential for goodness and liberation. In this sense, devotion to sense-pleasures is not connected with the goal; it is unprofitable in the spiritual sense.

We should also be wary of monastics who use money, and are socially engaged with the world.¹⁴¹ They often (mis)use social work and religion missions for collecting wealth, power, pleasure and sexuality. The renunciants, by definition, have given up economic security, and live dependent on the laity for their worldly necessities of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. If they are spiritually engaged, they should not have any problem in attracting these necessities.

Furthermore, there is a pleasure that is even more sublime than any kind of sex, that is, the transpersonal joy of dhyana, or profound meditation concentration [1.6]. People who are fixated to sexuality and sensual pleasures clearly have not tasted a pleasure higher than sense-pleasures, and as such are not as spiritually developed as those whose dhyanic bliss guide their lives in mental calm and clarity.

In conclusion, three points should be made clear here. First, Buddhism is *not* against sex, but gives an analysis of the psychological process through which sexuality or the desire for sex arises. The Nibbedhika **Pariyāya Sutta** (A 6.63), for example, declares:

3b There are these five cords of sensual pleasures (*kāma, guṇa*):

Forms cognizable by the eye that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful;

Sounds cognizable by the ear that are...delightful;

Smells cognizable by the nose that are...delightful;

Tastes cognizable by the tongue that are...delightful;

Touches cognizable by the body that are desirable, attractive, pleasant, endearing, associated with sensuality, delightful.

—Monks, these are not sensual objects (*kāma*), but in the noble discipline, they are called “cords of sensual desire” (*kāma, guṇa*).

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:

There is no sensuality in what is beautiful (*citra*) in the world.

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:

What is beautiful in the world remains as they are.

So here the wise remove the desire for them.¹⁴² (A 6.63.3/3:411) = 6.11.¹⁴³

External sense-objects are neither good nor evil, but how we view them makes them so. If our senses are evil, then it would be better if we were blind, deaf, mute and incapacitated!¹⁴⁴

Secondly, the best way to train our faculties is *not* to think in terms of like and dislike, but to be fully aware, when the world of the senses impinges upon us.¹⁴⁵ This teaching is summarized in this well known pericope, that is, the Buddha’s teaching to such disciples as Bāhiya Dārucīriya (U 8) and Māluṅkyaputta (S 35.95):

¹⁴⁰ A 3.39/1:146 f = SD 59.8.

¹⁴¹ See eg Three Roots Inc = SD 31.12 (3.4.4).

¹⁴² This verse, which explains the previous prose sentence, “plays upon the double meaning of *kāma*, emphasizing that purification is to be achieved by mastering the defilement of sensuality, not by fleeing [from] sensually enticing objects.” (A:ÑB 1999:302 n34)

¹⁴³ An almost identical verse (without line c) is found in the Na Santi Sutta (S 1.34/1:22).

¹⁴⁴ **Indriya, bhāvanā** S (M 152) similarly teaches the mastery over one’s sense-faculties rather than removing the sense-objects. (M 152.2/3:298 = SD 17.13)

¹⁴⁵ M 152.11-16/3:301.

In what is seen, there will only be the seen.
 In what is heard, there will only be the heard.
 In what is sense, there will only be the sensed [smelt, tasted, touched].
 In what is known, there will only be the known [cognized]. (U 8; S 35.95.13/4:73)

The third point is the most important, and is clearly evident from the Saññoga Sutta, namely, that self-love is the basis for sexuality [1.2]. We see here how a woman delights in her own physical attributes and is then aroused by and desires for another “in terms a man’s faculty” seeking union, that is, the appropriation of what she considers lacking in herself. A man who delights in his own physical attributes is similarly aroused and desires for another “in terms a woman’s faculty” seeking union, that is, the appropriation of what he considers lacking in himself.

In Mallikā’s words, “There is no one dearer than oneself” (S 3.8).¹⁴⁶ If we learn to be less and less selfish or self-centred, our sexuality will be sublimated into spiritual bliss.

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¹⁴⁶ S 3.8/1:75 = SD 38.7. See Lily de Silva 1978:126 f. On individuation, see also Saññoga S (A 7.48) = SD 8.7 (4).

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