

Kāma-c, chanda

Desire for sense-pleasures

Theme: The first of the five mental hindrances

An essay by Piya Tan ©2006, 2010

1 Definition of *kāma-c, chanda*

1.0 INTRODUCTION. *Kāma-c, chanda* is the first of the five mental hindrances for a very good and natural reason: our minds work, like a computer, with an on-off pattern. *On* here means paying attention to a thing, something which interest us; while *off* means a lack of attention and interest towards something that we see no pleasure in. Behind this reactivity and predictability of samsaric behaviour lies the mother of all emotions: *desire*.

More specifically, our desires are sense-based; for, that is *all* that we really are. We are our senses, and our senses create the world we live in¹ [2.2]. What sort of world have we created for ourselves? If we care to carefully review how we have lived up till now, we have been making choices between like and not-liking, doing and not doing. Even at the moment of waking up, we need to choose between rising up and remaining in bed, for at least a little while longer.

Although there are some choices we would rather not select (like going to work in an office with a rather asura-like boss), we simply try not to think about it, not to give it any attention, so that the pain is much less, that is, less noticed and noted. Our desires, as such, bend the truth to fit our liking.

Ajahn Brahmavamso, in his book, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, for example, recalls of his own youth,

... when I drank my first glass of beer in my early teens, I could not believe how disgusting it tasted. However, the male society in which I lived almost worshipped beer and held it up as an essential part of all celebrations. So, after a short time, I began to enjoy the taste of beer. It wasn't that the taste of beer had changed but that my perception of the taste had changed to fit what I wanted [it to be]. The truth has been bent by desire. Sex is similar. The socially conditioned hormonal hunger for copulation twists raw experience to make sex appear as pleasure. Is sexual pleasure the way things truly are, or just the way desire makes it seem [to be]. (2006: 176)

1.1 CHANDA. Now we will go on to analyse in greater detail the meanings and usages of the term *kāma-c, chanda*, and what we can learn of self-understanding in the process.

1.1.1 Chanda as a morally neutral term. The term *kāma-c, chanda* is resolved as *kāma* (sense-pleasure) and *chanda* (desire). We will first examine *chanda*, as it is the easier of the two. *Chanda* is in itself a morally neutral term, regarded in the Abhidhamma simply as a mental factor (*cetasika*), whose moral quality depends on the intention (*cetanā*) that arouses and directs the desire (which, as such, is a good translation of it). Negative *chanda* arises in our minds with regards to what we see as desirable and to what we cherish; for example,

- the body (kāyasmim chando) S 47.37/5:181;
- sense-objects (rūpesu chando...) S 35.246/4:195;
- sexuality (methunasim chando) Sn 835;
- the world we live in (lokasmim chando) Sn 866; and
- our continued existence (bhava chandam) Thī 14.

Indeed, our whole being, that is, the five aggregates,² are rooted in *chanda*, here meaning negative desire of craving (*taṇhā*). For that reason, the aggregates of an unawakened being is called “the five aggregates of clinging” (*pañc'upādāna-k, khandha*). Here, *upādāna* is the active side of *chanda*, namely, clinging. It is on account of *chanda* (as negative desire) that we cling to the aggregates, to our body and our mind. *Chanda* also has a passive side, that is, as fuel (*upādāna*), it feeds itself, so that we continue to cling, even more tenaciously, to the aggregates.

¹ See **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15) = SD 7.1.

² On the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*), see SD 17.

This process fetters us to our cyclic lives (*samsāra*), which are all impermanent, and as such suffering (the first noble truth). The food or fuel of this process, *chanda*, is, therefore, the “cause” of suffering, the second noble truth.³ It is the key condition that brings about suffering. Only after *chanda* is given up, can we be liberated from suffering.⁴ The purpose of the holy life, therefore, is to abandon *chanda*.⁵

1.1.2 *Chanda* as positive desire. When desire is rooted in any of the three wholesome roots (non-greed, non-hate, non-delusion), it is said to be motivated by a wholesome mind (*kusala, citta*). Once moved by such a wholesome state, we have the desire (*chanda*) to arouse and direct our effort to letting go of the evil we have been doing, to keep on avoiding it, to cultivate good, and maintain it.⁶ Here, *chanda* is clearly a word for right effort (*sammā vāyāma*). The Commentaries regard this as a wholesome desire (*kusala-c, chanda*),⁷ a spiritual desire (or Dharma-moved desire, *dhamma-c, chanda*),⁸ the desire (or will) to create wholesome states.⁹

On a more intense level, *chanda* (as enthusiasm or the desire to act), together with energy (*virīya*), mind (*citta*, that is, mental concentration), and investigation (*vīmaṃsā*), are the predominant support (*ādhipateyya paccaya*)¹⁰ in the cultivation of good (*kusala*) in the mundane sphere, culminating in the bases of spiritual power (*iddhi, pāda*)¹¹ in the supramundane sphere.

1.1.3 *Chanda* as negative desire. When desire is rooted in any of the three unwholesome roots (greed, hate, delusion),¹² it is said to be motivated by an unwholesome mind (*akusala, citta*) and, as such, is unwholesome. Here, *kāma-c, chanda* is synonymous with the unwholesome root of *rāga* (lust) or *lobha* (greed) (Dhs 1153/204; Vbh 541/252).

As a negative quality, *chanda* is synonymous with lust and affection,¹³ and is an early stage in the rise of attachment. According to the 5th-century Sanskrit commentary, **Abhidharma.kośa, vyākhyā**,¹⁴ *chanda* (in its negative sense), is the desire for things *to be* acquired (in the future), while *rāga* is attachment to things *already* acquired.¹⁵

When used in the sense of an immoral quality, *chanda* is referred to as *kāma-c, chanda* (desire for sense-pleasure) or *chanda, rāga* (lustful desire¹⁶ or desire and lust¹⁷). **The Vatthūpama Sutta** (M 7), says that “covetousness and rampant greed (*abhijjhā, visama, lobha*) are an imperfection of the mind (*citassa*

³ “Desire is the root of suffering” (*chando hi mūlam dukkhassa*, S 42.11/4:327-330); “all states are rooted in desire” (*chanda, mūlakā... sabbe dhammā*, A 8.83/4:339, 10.58/5:107).

⁴ “Having abandoned desire, one is thus free from suffering” (*chandaṃ virājetvā evaṃ dukkhā pamuccati* (S 1.30/1:16).

⁵ “The holy life is lived for the sake of abandoning desire” (*chanda, pahān’atthaṃ brahmacariyaṃ vussati*, S 45.41/5:27).

⁶ These are the 4 right efforts: see **Mahā Sakul’udāyī S** (M 77.16/2:11; A 9.82/4:462).

⁷ We find *kusale dhamme chando* (Be We) or *kusala, dhamma-c, chando* (Ce Ee Se) in **Pātubhāva S** (A 6.96/-3:441) = SD 63.9. See PmA 1:168; VvA 116; DhsA 289, 370.

⁸ *Dhamma-c, chanda* is a canonical term: see **Saññā Nānatta S** (S 14.7) where it means “desire for mental state(s)” (S 14.7/2:143) = SD 17.5. See also PmA 1:168; VvA 116; DhsA 289, 370.

⁹ *Kusala dhammesu kattu, kamyatā dhamma-c, chando*, NmA 1:17). Such a process is the 12-step learning process described in **Caṅki S** (M 95), where the 9th step is where “desire for mindfulness arises” (*sati chando jāyati*) (M 95.20/2:173 f) & SD 21.15 (5). See also MA 3:14.

¹⁰ Vbh 288; DhsA 359.

¹¹ **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26.28/3:77) = SD 36.10; **Mahā Sakul’udāyī S** (M 77.17/2:11) = SD 49.5; **Iddhi, pāda Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20/5:276-281) = SD 28.14.

¹² See **(Akusala, mūla) Añña, titthiya S** (A 3.68/1:199-201) = SD 16.4.

¹³ *Chando vā rāgo vā pemam*, Nm 181; *kāma, saṅkhāto chando*, NmA 1:17, DhsA 370.

¹⁴ More fully, Sputārthā Abhidharma.kośa, vyākhyā (ed Unrai Wogihara, 1934), comy on Vasubandhu’s Abhidharma, kośa by Yaśomitra (5th cent, Kucha, Central Asia, on the Silk Road, on the northern rim of the Takla Makan desert).

¹⁵ *Aprāpteṣu viṣayeṣu prārthanā chandāḥ, prāpteṣu rāgaḥ* (qu in Ency Bsm 4: 114). See **Vatthūpama S** (M 7.3(1)/1:36) n = SD 28.12.

¹⁶ As tatpuruṣa, eg, a lustful desire for a meditative state (DA 3:988; MA 3:146).

¹⁷ As dvandva in **Koṭṭhita S** (S 35.232/4:163) = SD 28.4.

upakkileśa),” meaning that the dvandva (“desire and lust”) is really a single imperfection, differentiated only by the sequence of its appearance. First, we desire something, and when we already have it, we tend to cling to it (lust).

In the negative sense, *chanda, rāga* is practically synonymous with *kāma, rāga* and *kāma-c, chanda*.¹⁸ Here, *chanda* is one of the five hindrances and one of the ten fetters.¹⁹ An effective way to weaken this negative *chanda* is to practise sense-restraint. In simple terms, sense-restraint is not to read more than what our senses allow us to know.²⁰

1.2 KĀMA.

1.2.1 According to the Saṃyutta Commentary, speaking in Abhidhamma terms, **the sensuality element** (*kāma, dhātu*) is sensual thought, all sense-sphere phenomena in general and, in particular everything unwholesome, except the ill will element and the violence element, which are listed separately. **The perception of sensuality** (*kāma, saññā*) arises in dependence on the sensuality element by taking it as an object or by way of association (*sampayutta paccaya*, that is, when the perception of sensuality is associated with sensual thought in the same citta)²¹ (SA 2:135). It then quotes the following **Vibhaṅga** definition of the “sensuality element” (*kāma, dhātu*):

The mentation, thinking, intention, fixing, focusing, mental application, wrong thought, *associated with desire*. This is called the sensuality element.

Taking Avīci [crowded hell] the lower limit, the Para, nimmita, vasavatti gods [those who lord over others’ creations], including whatever is in between, occurring therein, included therein by way of aggregates, elements, bases, forms, feelings, perceptions, formations, consciousness. This is called the sensuality element.²² (Vbh §182/86)

1.2.2 The Sammoḥa, vinodanī (Vibhaṅga Commentary) says:

There are two kinds of sensuality [sense-desire], namely, (1) sensuality as the basis (*vatthu, kāma*) and (2) sensuality as defilement (*kileśa, kāma*).

Here, sensuality as defilement is the element which is associated with sensuality that is the sensuality element—this is the name for thought of sensuality (*kāma, vitakka*).

As far sensuality as basis, sensuality itself [ie the object desired] as an element is the sensuality element—this is the name for dharmas [mental data] of the sense sphere. (VbhA 74)

The Vibhaṅga Commentary correlates sensual thought with sensuality as a defilement (*kileśa, kāma*) and sense-sphere phenomena with sensuality as sense-objects (*vatthu, kāma*).

Sensual intention arises dependent on sensual perception by way of either association (*samaputta paccaya*) or decisive support (*upanissaya paccaya*). In Abhidhamma terminology, “association condition”

¹⁸ See eg desire for physical form (MA 3:138, 4:162; SA 1:17 f); desire for form and formless existences (SA 1:17); desire for the earth element (SA 2:152).

¹⁹ Fetters (*saṃyojana*): see (4.4) & n.

²⁰ On how to overcome sensual desire through wise attention, see *Nimitta & Anuvyañjana* = SD 19.14.

²¹ Here **citta** is anglicized and used as a modern Abhidhamma term, usually tr as “consciousness,” but is more specific. Citta is one of the 4 “realities” or “ultimates” (*param’attha*)—the 4 ultimates are matter (*rūpa*), citta (consciousness), mental factors (*cetasika*), and nirvana. Citta is actually a term for possible mental states or mind-moments, of which there are 89 or 121. In simple terms, a citta is a moment of consciousness. See Abhs: BRS 27-31 (or the whole ch).

²² *Kāma, paṭisaṃyutto takko vitakko saṅkappo appanā vyappanā cetaso abhiniropānā micchā, saṅkappo, ayaṃ vuccati kāma, dhātu. Heṭṭhato avīci, nirayaṃ pariyaṃtaṃ karitvā uparito para, nimmita, vasavattī deve anto, karitvā yaṃ etasmiṃ antare ethāvacarā etha pariyaṃpannā khandha, dhātu, āyatanā rūpā vedanā saññā saṅkhārā viññāṇaṃ, ayaṃ vuccati kāmadhātu. Sabbe pi akusalā dhammā kāmadhātū’ ti. (VbhA 74)*

(*sampayutta paccaya*) is a relation between simultaneous mental phenomena, while “decisive-support condition” (*upanissaya paccaya*) is a relation between a cause and effect separated in time.²³

1.2.3 KĀMA-C, CHANDA. The term *kāma-c, chanda* has been variously translated as “excitement of sensual pleasure” (PED), “sensuous desire” (BDict), and “will to sensual desire” (Nett:Ñ 294). *Kāma-c, chanda* arises from unwise attention to a sense-object by regarding it as being pleasurable and desirable. In meditation texts, it is often referred to as “a lustful mind” (*sa, rāgaṃ cittaṃ*).²⁴

In this famous and ancient stock passage, *kāma-c, chanda* is synonymous with “covetousness” (*abhijjhā*):

Here, bhikshus, a monk²⁵ dwells exertive, clearly aware, mindful, **observing [watching] the body in the body**, removing covetousness and displeasure in the world...

(M 10.3A/1:56) = SD 13.3

In this pericope, the dvandva, “covetousness and displeasure” (*abhijjhā, domanassa*) is a synecdoche (or short form) for the set of five mental hindrances. Both *kāma-c, chanda* and *abhijjhā* refer to sensual desire in general which arises from unwisely attending to a sensually attractive sense-object.²⁶ More specifically, here, *kāma-c, chanda* functions as the first and foremost mental hindrance.

According to the early Buddhist analysis of existence, craving (*taṇhā*) is the very root condition that propels and perpetuates cyclic life, and is the key factor for the arising of suffering, as defined in the second noble truth. This central role that craving plays is often referred to in the Suttas,²⁷ and is the theme of a whole chapter in the Dhammapada (Dh canto 24/334-359).

The word *rāga* is a near-synonym of *kāma-c, chanda*, but has a more intensely negative level of desire. *Rāga* literally means “dyed,” coloured thoroughly by an external hue, and is often translated as “lust” or “passion.” We are dyed in lust when our desire for sense-pleasure (*kāma-c, chanda*) reaches a level that is out of our control, and see everything tinted by it.

Rāga, dosa and *moha* (lust, hate and delusion) are the three unwholesome roots (*akusala, mūla*) that motivate us to break the precepts and commit unwholesome deeds through the mind, speech and body. *Rāga*, as such, is a fundamental defilement, referring to “a state of lack, need and want. It is always seeking fulfilment and lasting satisfaction, but its drive is inherently insatiable, and thus as long as it endures it maintains the sense of lack” (Nyanaponika 1978: xiv; he translates *rāga* as “greed.”)

When *kāma-c, chanda* becomes more persistent, it is called *upādāna*. The term *upādāna* has two important senses: an active sense of “grasping” or “clinging,” and a passive sense referring to that which is grasped or clung to, in the sense of its “basis” or “substrata,” often signifying “supply” or “fuel.” In this latter passive sense, *upādāna* forms the ninth of the twelve-link dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*), where it arises in dependence on craving and leads on to existence (*bhava*).

As the conditioning force for continued existence, *upādāna* stands for the four kinds of clinging,²⁸ that is, clinging to sense-pleasures [2], to views,²⁹ to rituals and vows,³⁰ and to a self doctrine.³¹ When

²³ “Association condition” (*sampayutta paccaya*) is a relationship between simultaneous mental phenomena; “decisive-support condition” (*upanissaya paccaya*) is a relationship between a cause and effect separated in time. See **Sa, nidāna S** (S 14.12/2:151-153) = SD 29.8.

²⁴ Eg **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.34(1)/1:59 = D 2:299) = SD 13.3.

²⁵ Here “a monk” (*bhikkhu*) may refer to either an ordained monastic or anyone who is meditating (here, doing satipaṭṭhana) (DA 3:756; MA 1:241; VbhA 216 f; cf SnA 251). See SD 13.3 Intro §3.1a.

²⁶ On wise attention, see **Nimitta & Anuvyañjana** = SD 19.14.

²⁷ See eg **Mahā Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 13) = SD 6.9; **Māgandiya S** (M 75) = SD 31.5; **Pubbe Sambodha Ss 1+2** (S 4.13+14) = SD 14.9+10; **(Vaṅṅisa) Ānanda S** (S 8.4) = SD 16.12; **Atthi, rāga S** (S 22.64) = SD 26.10; **Methuna S** (A 7.47) = SD 21.9; **Piṇḍola Bhāra, dvāja S** (S 35.127) = SD 27.6a; **Māta Putta S** (A 3.55) = SD 66.2; **(Taṇhā) Bhikkhu S** (A 4.159) = SD 10.14; **(Rāga) Anuttariya S** (A 6.121) = SD 14.14; **Saññoga S** (A 7.48) = SD 8.7; **(Āhāra) Taṇhā S** (A 10.62) = SD 31.11.

²⁸ See **Sammā Diṭṭhi S** (M 9.34/1:50 f = SD 11.14).

²⁹ See **Anusaya** = SD 31.3 (4).

³⁰ *Attānūvāda*. Cf D 2:58, 3:230; M 1:66; S 2:3; Dh 212. Regarding *atta, vād’upādāna* (clinging to a self-view), Comy says that they talk about, cling to the “self” (MA 1:219). On *atta, vāda*, see **Sallekha S** (M 8/1:40).

kāma-c.chanda becomes habitual, it is known as *kāma,rāgānusaya*, the latent tendency of sensual lust³² [4.5]. Of these four kinds of clinging, the most evident would clearly be that to sense-pleasures, which explains why it is often addressed on the suttas.

2 Sense-pleasures

2.1 THE PAINS OF PLEASURES. On a deeper mental level, says **the Mahā Mālunḅyā,putta Sutta** (M 64), this sensual desire is reinforced as the latent tendency of sensual lust (*kāma,rāgānusaya*), which is present even in a newborn baby.³³ Sensual lust, together with ignorance, lying deep in our unconscious, as latent tendencies, give rise to the three unwholesome roots of greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). As greed, it looks for and collects what it perceives as sense-pleasures, rejects what it perceives as not pleasurable, and ignores which it perceives to be neither.

The Māgandiya Sutta (M 75), using a graphic imagery, adds that the painful results of craving for sensuality (*kāma,taṅhā*) are like those of a leper who burns his wounds over a fire and scratches them: he feels a fleeting relief but his action only worsens his condition.³⁴ Clinging to sense-pleasures (*kām'upā-dāna*), as such, has a broad range of negative effects, and has to be removed before we can progress on the path to awakening.

The Alagaddūpama Sutta (M 22) gives a list of ten graphic images to illustrate the painfulness and pointlessness of sense-pleasures, as follows:

- (1) *a skeleton*, a fleshless, blood-smearred bone cannot satisfy the hunger of a starving dog;
- (2) *a piece of meat*, for which birds of prey fight, unyielding, often meeting death or deadly pain due to their beaks and claws;
- (3) *a grass torch*, carried against the wind severely burns the carrier;
- (4) *a pit of burning coals*, over which a man is dragged by others, then thrown into the flame and consumed by it;
- (5) *a dream* of a beautiful landscape disappears when we awake;
- (6) *borrowed goods*, in which we foolishly pride ourselves but are taken away by the owners;
- (7) *a fruit-laden tree* [or *fruits on a tree*]: desiring fruits, but unable to climb, someone axes it down, hurting us who is already in it.
- (8) *a butcher's knife and block* [or *executioner's block*]: sense-desires cut off our spiritual development;
- (9) *a sword stake*, sense-desires are piercing, causing wounds where there are none before; and
- (10) *a snake's head*, sense-desires are a grave risk for our welfare, present and future.

(M 22.3e/1:130) = SD 3.13

Such images are also found elsewhere in the early suttas.³⁵ **The Potaliya Sutta** (M 54), for example, gives a detailed explanation of the first seven images.³⁶ **The Vammika Sutta** (M 23), too, has two of these images.³⁷

The Mahā Dukkha-k,khandha Sutta (M 13) is a study of sense-desire (*kāma*),³⁸ where the Buddha first defines it as our seeking to gratify the five physical senses, and he then goes on to show their disadvantages, as follows:

³¹ See *Anusaya* = SD 31.3 (2).

³² See *Anusaya* = SD 31.3 (2).

³³ M 64.3/1:433 = SD 21.10.

³⁴ M 75.13-17/1:506-508 = SD 31.5.

³⁵ V 2:25 = A 3:97 = J 5:210 = Thī 487-91; MA 2:103. For details, see Nyanaponika, *The Discourse on the Snake Simile*, 1974 n2. See also foll n.

³⁶ M 54.15-21/1:364-368 = SD 43.8.

³⁷ M 23/1:142-145 = SD 28.13.

³⁸ It should be noted here that *kāma* is used in this sutta (M 13) in a broad sense, that is, both as the subjective defilement (*kilesa*) or "sense-desire," and as the object of desire (*vatthu*) or "(objects of) sensual pleasure" (Nm 1,1,

- in seeking to earn a living, we have to tolerate bad weather, negative environments, etc;
- when we are out of work, we are distressed;
- when we have accumulated wealth from our work, we may lose that wealth in various ways;
- quarrels and violence occur on all social levels and relationships on account of sense-desire;
- wars occurs on account of sense-desire;
- stealing, robberies, kidnapping, etc, occur on account of sense-desire;
- such criminals suffer the pains of punishment and tortures on account of their sense-desire;
- people misconduct themselves through body, speech and mind on account of sense-desire, as result of which they are reborn in suffering states. (M 13.7-15/1:85-87) = SD 6.9

While the first seven cases are sufferings, as a result of sense-desire, arising in the present, the last refers to suffering arising in a future state (as karmic results).

2.2 THE BODY IS THE SENSES. The Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) Sutta (A 6.63) gives an instructive teaching on the nature of *kāma* (sensual objects), highlighted in this key passage:

Bhikshus, these [the five cords of sense-pleasures] are not sensual objects (*kāma*), but in the noble discipline, they are called “cords of sensual desire” (*kāma,guṇa*).³⁹

*Saṅkappa,rāgo purisassa kāmo
n’ete kāmā yāni citrāni loke
saṅkappa,rāgo purisassa kāo
tiṭṭhanti citrāni that’eva loke
Ath’ettha dhīrā vinayanti chandan ti*

The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:
There is no sensuality in what is beautiful in the world.
The thought of passion is a person’s sensuality:
What is beautiful in the world remain just as they are.
So here the wise remove the desire for them.⁴⁰
(A 6.63.3b/2:411) = SD 6.11

From this teaching, we understand that our physical senses are not the problem: they simply function as sensors by which we experience the world around us. Even the world around us is “neutral,” as it were, and *it all depends on how we perceive it*. They become “cords of sensual desire” (*kāma,guṇa*) when we are attached to what we experience. More importantly, we can experience beauty in the world without being attached to it. Or, if there is any attachment to such sensual pleasures, we ought to remove them. Only in this way we would really enjoy the world and be at peace with ourselves.

Attachment to sense-desires is difficult to overcome when we cling to our senses and sense-experiences. We see them as desirable so that we are unable to let go of them. We are often told that the senses protect our body, but some insight into the nature of our senses will show that this is not the case. In fact, on the contrary, it is the body that serves as the vehicle for the five senses to play in the world.⁴¹ For this reason, sensual desire is regarded as the first of the five lower fetters⁴² that bind beings to samsara.⁴³

In meditation, or when we are profoundly focussed on what we enjoy doing, the world fades away from us, as it were. On a deeper level, even the five senses fade away. Indeed, full focus only arises when the whole physical body “shuts down.” In dhyana or deep meditation, we are no more aware of the phy-

Vbh 256, DhsA 62; cf A 3:410 f): see Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:192 f. In other words, *kāma* tr into English as “sense-desire” as well as “sensual pleasure,” depending on the context, but the one sense should be taken as implicit in the other in the English translation.

³⁹ *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.

⁴⁰ 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 objects.” (A:ÑB 1999:302 n34)

⁴¹ See Brahmavamso 2006: 30-33.

⁴² On the lower fetters, see (4.4) & n.

⁴³ **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.1(7)/3:234).

sical body. We only *feel* the profound bliss of dhyana, as there is no *knowledge* (discursive thought) about it until we emerge from it and review it in retrospect.

The operational verb here is *feel* because there is no knowing, which only comes after the fact. When we emerge from dhyana, and review our practice, we then know what we have experienced. We need not go into dhyana to know this. An athlete might recall a time when he is totally immersed in the “flow” of the second wind⁴⁴ of his running or the “runner’s high” following his victory. There are effectively no thoughts at that moment: it is only an exhilarating wordless feeling. Or, on a simpler level, we are so overjoyed on receiving a gift that we have greatly wished for, and when asked about it, we are likely to say that we are at loss for words. [5.1]

3 Sexual pleasure

3.1 KĀMA AS SEXUAL PLEASURE. The most common manifestation of sense-desire for most people would be some level of sexual fantasy. Sexuality is so universal that it is often addressed in the Suttas.⁴⁵ The Buddha explains sexuality on two important levels: the mythical and the psychological. The Buddha’s explanation of the rise of sexuality is famously given in mythical language in the Aggañña Sutta (D 27), humorously related as a sort of divine devolution and social evolution: how the gods become worldlings, and how these worldlings evolve socially.⁴⁶

A psychological explanation of sexuality is found in **the Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48). The Buddha shows how a woman or a man, on account of preoccupation of their physical being, sees their differences, and on account of this perceived duality, desires what they see as lacking in either of them. As such, each, attached to her or his own sexuality, enters into sexual union with the other. The message of the teaching is that *we are not merely sexual beings*, and need to rise above our physical limitations to realize our mental and spiritual potentials.⁴⁷

Sensual desires arise from self-centred experiences of the world, and in turn reinforce them. We create our own worlds with our habitual collecting of pleasant sense-experiences and avoiding of unpleasant sense-stimuli. Of such experiences, the most powerful—and most selfish—is that of sexuality. It is the doorway to samsara or repeated cyclic lives.⁴⁸

The basic characteristics of sexual lust are clinging (*upādāna*) and multiplying (*guṇa*). It is the most prolific and most difficult of the three unwholesome roots (of lust, hate and delusion) to overcome.⁴⁹ Lust simply seeks to replicate itself: it is insatiable. In evolutionary terms, it is said that sexuality is nature’s way of perpetuating life. But nature makes beasts of us and keeps us so, making us tear at each other, bloody tooth and claw to procreate for the sake of our species’ survival and proliferation.

Sexuality is essentially a *bodily* instinct, a *physical* preoccupation.⁵⁰ If we are preoccupied with our bodies, we would also be attracted to those of others—then we fall fully under the power of sexual preoccupation and proliferation. We become addicted to sexual pleasure *because we know of no higher pleasure*.⁵¹ The solution therefore is have a taste of a greater pleasure, an inner bliss that is independent of the body; in short, meditative bliss. [5]

3.2 THE THREE TRAININGS. Evolution is essentially biological evolution based on natural selection. In other words, the whole process is sex-based in which we remain as animals, albeit, intelligent human animals. It is after all the evolution of *a species*, a group. In animal evolution, the animal (including the human animal), remains within the evolutionary group.

⁴⁴ See eg http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_wind.

⁴⁵ See **Sexuality** = SD 31.7.

⁴⁶ D 27/3:80-97 = SD 2.19.

⁴⁷ A 7.48.2-3/4:57 = SD 8.7.

⁴⁸ On sex and marriage, see **Sexuality** = SD 31.7 (4.2).

⁴⁹ See **(Vīthāra) Paṭipadā S** (A 4.162/2:149 f) = SD 18.3.

⁵⁰ See **The Body in Buddhism** = SD 29.6a.

⁵¹ For a detailed study, see **Māgandiya S** (M 75/1:501-513) = SD 31.5.

Spiritual evolution begins where biological evolution ends, as it were. It is the evolution of *the individual*, that is, the process of individuation, in which we need to grow out of the group, and only in that way, is group consciousness raised to a higher level of being.⁵²

Spiritual evolution is envisioned in Buddhism as the three trainings (*ti, sikkhā*): the training in moral virtue, in mental cultivation, and in insight wisdom.⁵³ *Moral virtue* arises from the disciplining of the body and speech, that is, sublimating bodily action and speech into processes that nurture our minds. When these two karmic doors (action and speech) are wholesomely restrained, we will be able to direct our energies towards *mental cultivation*, which entails focussing our attention inwards towards the mental processes themselves, elevating them to a level of a clear inner stillness. It is in such an inner clarity that we see our true self, realize our spiritual potential, and attain true self-liberation.

The purpose of Buddhism is to bring us beyond biological evolution, through spiritual evolution, to self-liberation; or, more simply, from being mere sexual beings, through mental being (tapping the mind's potential to rise above the physical state), to freedom from suffering.⁵⁴ Sexuality is what binds us to the biological state, relegating us to exist merely as sexual beings, but according to Buddhism, there are *other realms of existence*, namely, the form realm and the formless realm. In other words, besides our sense-world, there are the worlds of beings composed purely of *light* (the devas) and the worlds of those composed of *pure energy* (formless devas).⁵⁵

What separates us from the form beings or the formless beings is our sexuality; what prevents us from becoming divine beings is our fixation with a physical body that depends of material food and sexual reproduction. It is not that sexuality is impure or evil, but that it keeps us within the rut of cyclic lives, within the realm of the physical senses, thus preventing us to enjoying bliss beyond the physical body and winning total liberation.

3.3 APPROPRIATE SEXUAL CONDUCT. The practitioner's moral training centres around the five precepts, which are as follows:

<u>The precepts</u>	<u>rooted in</u>
(1) not destroying life	the value of <u>life</u> or the value of <i>being</i> ;
(2) not taking the not-given	<u>happiness</u> expressed through our ideas and owning things—this is the value of <i>having</i> ;
(3) not committing sexual misconduct	the value of <u>freedom</u> and respect for a <i>person</i> —this is the value of <i>doing</i> ;
(4) not speaking falsehood	the value of <u>truth</u> and beneficial communication—this is the value of <i>seeing</i> ; and
(5) not taking strong drinks or intoxicants	the value of <u>wisdom</u> or the basis for a clear mind in preparation for mental cultivation—this is the value of <i>mind</i> . ⁵⁶

Of special interest here is the third precept: abstaining from sexual misconduct (*kāmesu micchācārā veramanī*). This training rule reminds us, as lay people enjoying sense-pleasure, that we should not fall into the rut of lust, that is, a sense of gratification that is dependent on appropriating external objects (whether a person or thing). This consuming drive is rooted in an unconscious notion of *duality*, that we must *have* what is different from us.⁵⁷

Buddhism does not view sex as being intrinsically evil. Even when the precept against sexual misconduct is broken, the person is not “punished” by any Buddhist law or authority. This precept, like the other four of the five precepts, constitutes *natural morality*. It is “natural” in that it is self-evident that we, and

⁵² See SD 8.7 Intro (4).

⁵³ See **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88/1:235) = SD 24.10c & **Sīla Samādhi Paññā** = SD 21.6.

⁵⁴ For a succinct statement on this, see **Saññoga S** (A 7.48/4:57-59) = SD 8.7.

⁵⁵ For a list of the 31 planes constituting these 3 worlds, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11) = SD 1.7 Table 1.7

⁵⁶ On the 5 precepts, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41) = SD Intro 5.2 (2); **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:352-356) = SD 1.5; **Bhaya Vera S** (A 5.174/3:204-206) = SD 6.4.

⁵⁷ For a psychological explanation, see **Saññoga S** (A 7.48.2-3/4:57) = SD 8.7.

all beings, treasure our lives. No one wants to be exploited or violated by another. This precept is rooted in the respect for another's *person*.⁵⁸ A person has the right to say *no* to any kind of sexual contact. Even one spouse can rightly say *no* to sex to the other, as neither is owned by other, and both are free individuals.

Sex, however, becomes problematic when it misused in the following ways, for example,

- when forced on an unwilling partner (even a spouse who rejects the advance);
- when done with an improper partner, such as another's spouse, or a minor;
- as a self-empowerment through exploiting other, such as children and the disabled;
- as an escape from real issues, such as difficulties or frustration arising from personal problems;

Sex is wrong or unwholesome in such cases because it is an act of exploiting another, of causing pain or unhappiness in the victim or those related to the victim.

On a deeper psychological level, when we often or habitually feel a need for sexual gratification, it is likely that we are *addicted* to sex. **Addiction** means that we are never fully satisfied with it, and keeps on wanting it. This is mainly because we do not understand the true nature of sexuality, that it is merely a physical act that cannot fully gratify itself. As such, we keep on wanting it.

We cling to sexual pleasure (or any sensual pleasure, for that matter) because we are looking at only one aspect of it, *that which we find attractive* or because we have not tasted a greater bliss. This fatal attraction is the proverbial snake that keeps painfully biting its own tail.⁵⁹ Each time we allow ourselves to be unwholesomely attracted to a sensual object, we are very likely to be caught in its rut.⁶⁰

3.4 WHOLESOME SEXUAL CONDUCT. Lay Buddhists who are non-celibate, enjoying sense-pleasures (*kāma, bhogī*)⁶¹—that is, anyone enjoying sense-pleasures *and* also desirous of living a moral and happy life—should only indulge themselves in such pleasures within the limits of the five precepts, that is, they should know *when to stop* and avoid sexual misconduct (*kāmesu micchācārā*). In fact, such people, who enjoy sense-pleasures in a wholesome manner and yet do not neglect their spiritual development, are still capable of attaining streamwinning,⁶² fully awakening to spiritual liberation within seven lives at the most.⁶³

A good Buddhist lay practitioner is one who keeps to *right conduct* regarding sexual behaviour. While such a person understands that sexuality may be the greatest bodily pleasure, he accepts that it is only *impermanent*, and consistently reflects on this truth as the occasion arises. For him, sexuality is only meaningful and wholesome with his spouse or partner, to whom he is *committed* emotionally, socially and spiritually.

One important advantage for the “sense-enjoying” lay practitioner committed to his spouse or partner is that wholesome sexuality between them provides a mutual satisfaction, albeit a temporary one, which allows them *to set effectively aside sexual feelings for more selfless actions*. Indeed, due to the temporary nature of sex, a sex-centred relationship can never last or be a healthy one. What really keeps a couple together is unconditional love and committed partnership.

Often enough, a common higher purpose, such as raising a child or children, or doing social work (or both), serves as a lasting bond for a wholesome family. Wholesome sex, in other words, can be an expression of the fruit of mutual love, that is, the procreation of other beings, and providing them with an environment and opportunities for personal development and a happy life. A good lay Buddhist, in other words, can be one who really knows how to enjoy life in a wholesome way.

⁵⁸ See **The Person in Buddhism** = SD 29.6a.

⁵⁹ Another mythical imagery is that of **Sisyphus** who, in Greek mythology, is a devious king, punished by the gods to push a huge boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll down again, and to repeat the task for eternity. The French author, **Albert Camus**, in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), sees Sisyphus as personifying the absurdity of human life, but concludes, “one must imagine Sisyphus happy” as “The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart.” See **Yodh'ājīva S** (S 42.3) = SD 23.3 Intro.

⁶⁰ On how to break this vicious cycle, see **Nimitta & Anuvyañjana** = SD 19.14.

⁶¹ On *kāma, bhogī*, see **Mahā Vaccha, gotta S** (M 73.10/1:491) = SD 27.4.

⁶² See **Mahā Vaccha, gotta S** (M 73.10/1:491) = SD 27.4.

⁶³ See **Sa, upadisesa S** (A 9.12.10/4:381) = SD 3.3 (3).

3.5 SEX IS THE MOST SELFISH OF HUMAN ACTIONS. Despite all the benefits of the wholesome sexual behavior we have mentioned, it is still a very selfish behaviour. Indeed, *sex is the most selfish of human behavior*, in that we expect not only self-gratification from it, but that it can only satisfy a single person or at best a couple. Even when we think that we are satisfying a partner, our perception is often that of a subtle self-centredness, even superiority (that is, conceit), that *I* have gratified the *other*.

An important purpose of the third precept, as such, is to introduce a level of *selflessness* into the sexual experience. The sexual act between a loving couple is wholesome when done with mutual respect and full awareness of one another. No one is used merely as a tool for the pleasure of the other. Wholesome sex is an expression of the unconditional acceptance of one another.

This means that even when our spouse or partner turns down a sexual advance, we should respect it. At the same time, for a healthy couple to really bond together, sex should never be used to hold the other party to ransom. Sex is most gratifying when both parties fully and mutually surrender to one another in a blissful self-forgetting. This is the closest that the body can ever get to feel what dhyana is like.⁶⁴

4 The nature of lust

4.1 LUST DEMANDS OUR FULL ATTENTION. Let us once again discuss the nature of *kāma-c, chanda* in a broader perspective. Craving (*taṇhā*) constitutes the second noble truth, that is to say, the human predicament as a whole is rooted in craving, which is “accompanied by lust and delight” (*taṇhā nandi, -rāga, sahaḡatā*).⁶⁵ Mythically, as related in **the Māra, dhīta Sutta** (S 4.25), Rāga is one of Māra’s daughters, along with Taṇhā (Craving) and Aratī (Discontent).⁶⁶ This highlights the negative nature of *kāma-c, -chanda* and its close link with the problem of craving.

According to **the Channa Paribbājaka Sutta** (A 3.71), lust not only weakens our goodness, but it also blurs, even blocks out, our vision of the goodness of others, which then easily drives us into unwholesome conduct of body, speech and mind.⁶⁷ **The Sama, citta Sutta** (A 2.4.6) states that sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*) causes people to quarrel with each other, while lust (*taṇhā*) manifesting as passionate attachment to views (*diṭṭhi, rāga*) will cause even recluses to quarrel with each other.⁶⁸

The Sāriputta Koṭṭhita Sutta 3 (S 44.5) shows how passionate attachment often fuels philosophical speculations and argumentations, which boils down to the presence of lust in regards to the five aggregates.⁶⁹ In short, we tend to look at the body and mind as *objects* to be grasped at and owned, not realizing that they are both actually impermanent.

4.2 LUST MAKES US FORGETFUL. When sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*) is present in the mind, one of its consequences is *forgetfulness*. In **the (Nīvaraṇa) Saṅgāraḡa Sutta** (S 44.55), the Buddha famously tells the brahmin Saṅgāraḡa that lust, as one of the five mental hindrances,⁷⁰ demands so much of our attention that it becomes difficult for us to remember even those things we have repeatedly memorized them.⁷¹ As a mental hindrance, sensual lust weakens our wisdom, preventing us from mental development.

When our minds are weakened by lust, not only is our memory impaired, but our perception is squinted, too. Drenched in lust, or even in a lustful moment, we can experience a perversion of perception (*viparīta, saññā*), which induces us to falsely see happiness in what actually bring pain.⁷²

⁶⁴ See **Dhyana** = SD 8.4.

⁶⁵ **Dhamma, cakka-p, pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:421) = SD 1.1.

⁶⁶ S 4.25/1:124 = SD 36.6.

⁶⁷ A 3.71/1:215-217 = SD 18.10.

⁶⁸ In **Sama, citta Vg** (A 2.4.6/1:66) = SD 64.12.

⁶⁹ S 44.5/4:386.

⁷⁰ **The 5 hindrances** (*pañca nīvaraṇa*) are (1) sensual desire, (2) ill will, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) restlessness and remorse, and (5) spiritual doubt (D 2.67-68/1:71) = SD 8.10; see also **Nīvaraṇa** = SD 32.1.

⁷¹ S 46.55/5:121 = SD 3.12.

⁷² See eg **Māgandiya S** (M 75.13-17/1:506 f) = SD 31.5.

The Gaddula,baddha Sutta 2 (S 22.100) explains how lust deludes the mind so that our notions of pleasure are as illusory as an artist's painted images of a woman or a man, which however real they may appear, are actually artistic constructions (S 3:152). Such ideas may be illusory, but their effects are real, as lust can set the whole mind on fire (S 1:188). Indeed, there is fire that is like the fire of lust:

<i>N'atthi rāga,samo aggi</i>	There is no fire like lust,
<i>n'atthi dosa,sama kali</i>	there is no fault like hate,
<i>n'atthi khandha,sama dukkhā</i>	there is no ill like the body [the aggregates],
<i>n'atthi santi,param sukham</i>	there is no bliss greater than nirvana. (Dh 202)

Numerous discourses warn monastics of the dangers of sensual lust because it can make them fall from the holy life or give it up to return to the lay life. **The Yodh'ājīva Sutta** (A 5.76), for example, says that a monk who goes on alms-round without sense-restraint, or who socializes excessively, can easily be so overwhelmed by lust that he might commit an offence or return to lay life.⁷³

The Citta Hatthi,sāriputta Sutta (A 6.60) warns that even after having attained the profoundly blissful states of the form dhyanas or the signless samadhi, but the meditator then excessively socializes with others, he would be overcome by lust and leave the order.⁷⁴ For this reason, the Buddha, as recorded in **the Laṭukikôpama Sutta** (M 66), declares that all the four form dhyanas, and even the four formless dhyana, "need to be transcended," that they are in themselves "not enough" for spiritual liberation. Only the attainment of *the cessation of perception and feeling*, attainable only by the Buddha and the arhats, are truly free of the subtlest mental fetter.⁷⁵

So great is the power of lust that it can bring great mental distress to serious practitioners. In the case of the conscientious nun **Sīhā**, for example, it drives her to the verge of suicide, because for years sensual lust prevents her from attaining any mental peace. And just as she casts the noose around her neck, her mind is completely released (Thī 77-81).

4.3 LUST CAUSES FEAR. Sensual lust causes fear; for, we invariably fear losing what we cling to. And we tend to cling to what we perceive as being pleasurable or empowering. Psychologically, lust is the identification or appropriation with a sense-object (form, sound, smell, taste or touch) that we regard as pleasurable. What we regard as pleasurable is invariably based on past experiences or memories of what we regarded as desirable or gratifying. And when a similar sense-object arises, we superimpose that perception on the present object. As such, we are caught up with the past, and we remain as Peter Pans of pleasure. Such pleasures are neither real nor lasting because they are based on past objects or events, which have all ceased to exist.

More often, our past perceptions and memories condition our present perceptions. Conditioned by the past, lust arises in us towards present objects. When we are caught up in present sense-pleasures, sensual lust arouses a fear of losing them. Furthermore, when we are used to such pleasures, fear arises when we notice their absence.

For this reason, says **the Bhaya Bherava Sutta** (M 4), those with lustful minds often feel fear in the present when they are in a secluded spot, such as a forest, as their minds are under the power of lust.⁷⁶ This shows that lust is a raw stimulation of the physical senses. When we are attracted to people, or a certain kind of person, or a part of a person, and when this desirable object is unavailable, we become bored, lonely, grieved or depressed, or worse, we feel fearful.

According to **the Abhaya Sutta** (A 8.184), *fear towards the future* arises when we are afflicted by some disaster or disease, and *our present lust* for sense-pleasures or *attachment* to the body arouses a fear of death.⁷⁷ **The (Kāma) Bhaya Sutta** (A 8.56) says that sensual lust causes fear not only in the present, but also towards the future.⁷⁸ In this connection, the Dhammapada says:

⁷³ See A 5.76/3:93-100 = SD 69.3.

⁷⁴ See A 6.60/3:392-399 = SD 51.3.

⁷⁵ M 66.26-34/455 f = SD 28.11.

⁷⁶ M 4.4/1:17 = SD 44.3.

⁷⁷ A 8.184/2:173-176 = SD 14.8.

*Kāmato jāyati soko
kāmato jāyati bhayaṃ
kāmato vippamuttassa
n'atthi soko kuto bhayaṃ*

From lust arises grief,
from lust arises fear;
for one who is free from lust,
there is no grief, much less fear. (Dh 215)

4.4 LUST IS A MENTAL FETTER. The Brahm'āyu Sutta (M 91) records how Uttara Mānava, a learned brahmin youth, shadowing the Buddha for seven months, makes a careful observation of his character and conduct. One of his careful and close observations us that the Buddha takes food, feeling its taste, and yet without lusting after the taste (*rasa, paṭisaṃvedī...no ca rasa, rāga, paṭisaṃvedī*).⁷⁹

This important observation shows that a lustful experience is not overcome simply by *avoiding* the experience. In fact, a sense-experience (that is, a sense-faculty or a sense-object) is *not*, in itself, the problem. For, if this were the case, then one who is deaf and blind person would be a well developed person! The problem (its unwholesomeness) arises from our minds' *lusting* for it. In other words, we need to examine our own minds, and remove the lust from our minds, from the way we look at things. The last discourse of the Majjhima Nikāya, **the Indriya Bhāvanā Sutta** (M 152), deals with this issue in some detail.⁸⁰

The (Saṃyojana) Koṭṭhita Sutta (S 35.232) states that neither is the sense-faculty a fetter (*saṃyojana*) of its sense-objects, nor is a sense-object a fetter of their sense-faculty. Just as when two oxen are yoked together, neither is responsible for the other being bound, so too neither the sense-organs nor the sense-objects are responsible for us falling into bondage with his sense-experiences. Rather, it is our desire and lust (*chanda, rāga*) that the fetters. For this reason, spiritual liberation is possible, that is, we can train ourselves not to be overcome by desire and lust.⁸¹ The early Buddhist texts highlight the dominating power of lust by calling it a “fetter” (*saṃyojana*). As a mental fetter, it is called “sensual lust” (*kāma, rāga*), that is, a lusting after sense-objects regarding them as desirable and gratifying in themselves. They are called fetters because they *bind* us to samsara, the cycle of lives and deaths. Sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*) is the first of *the five lower fetters*,⁸² so called because they bind us to the realms of senses.⁸³

As such, says **the Putta,maṃsa Sutta** (S 12.63), when sensual lust is uprooted, our rebirth will go beyond the sense sphere.⁸⁴ Lust, however, can still occur in subtler ways, as “*higher*” *mental fetters* by way of lust for the form-spheres (*rūpa, rāga*), that is, lustful desire to attain the form dhyanas or be reborn in such a realm, and lust for the formless-spheres (*arūpa, rāga*), that is, lustful desire for attaining the formless dhyanas or be reborn in such a realm.⁸⁵ These two lustful desires are two of the five higher fetters.⁸⁶ As such, these fetters are also referred to as a “fetter of lust for existence” (*bhava, rāga, saṃyojana*).⁸⁷

⁷⁸ A 8.56/4:289.

⁷⁹ M 91.14/2:138 f = SD 63.8.

⁸⁰ M 152/3:298-301 = SD 17.13.

⁸¹ S 35.232/4:162-165 = SD 28.4.

⁸² The 5 lower fetters (*orāma, bhāgiya saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*): see **Mahā Māluṅkyā, putta S** (M 64/1:432-437) = SD 21.10. Another five, called the higher fetters (*uddham, bhāgiya saṃyojana*) are (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), and (10) ignorance (*avijjā*). Together they form **the 10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*kāma, rāga*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*): they are the opp sides of the same coin.

⁸³ The sense-world (*kāma, loka*) is one of the three worlds: the other two being the form world (*rūpa, loka*) and the formless world (*arūpa, loka*). See **The Body in Buddhism** = SD 29.6a (5.2) & **The Person in Buddhism** = SD 29.6b (7.2). See also **Sīla Samādhi Paññā** = SD 21.6 (6). The sense-world comprises the 6 lower deva world, the human realm, and the sub-human realms (asuras, ghosts [the departed], animals and the hells. For details, see **Vīññāna-t, thitī** = SD 23.14.

⁸⁴ S 12.63.9/2:99 = SD 20.6.

⁸⁵ See above n on “The 5 lower fetters.”

⁸⁶ **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.1(7)/3:234).

4.5 LUST AS AN ĀSAVA. As lust is a root condition for our sufferings, it is often found together with other defilements. It is an *āsava* or “mental influx.” The term *āsava* literally means “in-flow” and comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards or inwards,” that is, either “into” or “out” towards the observer. It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, cankers, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated, as it a rich term that cannot be fully translated into English.

The Abhidhamma lists four mental influxes, namely,

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| (1) the mental influx of sense-desire | (<i>kām’āsava</i>), |
| (2) the mental influx of (desire for eternal) existence | (<i>bhav’āsava</i>), |
| (3) the mental influx of views | (<i>diṭṭh’āsava</i>), |
| (4) the mental influx of ignorance | (<i>avijjāsava</i>). ⁸⁸ |

Note that *sense-desire* is the first, and this is significant because *sense-desire underlies all the other three influxes*. **The (Cātu) Yoga Sutta** (A 4.10) speaks of these influxes as “the four types of yokes” (*cattāro yoga*), where lust underlies the first three yokes, namely, the yoke to sensuality due to sensual lust (*kāma-rāga*); the yoke to existence due to lust for existence (*bhava-rāga*), and the yoke to views due to lusting after our own views (*diṭṭhi-rāga*). The last yoke, that of ignorance (*avijjā,yoga*), is the ignorance of the true nature of the six spheres of contacts (*phass’āyatana*), that is, the nature of sense-experience.⁸⁹

While lust as craving (*tanhā*) constitutes the second noble truth, which is to be abandoned, ignorance (*avijjā*) is the lack of a true understanding of the noble truths, so that we do not really understand the nature of suffering, and so we crave for sense-pleasures. Craving and ignorance are the twin root-conditions for suffering and samsara.

The influxes are also known as the four “floods” (*ogha*); for we can drown in them. *The influx of existence* is the attachment and desire for the realm of form and of formlessness, and as such, is the craving for dhyanic bliss (profound meditation joy), on account of *the false views* of eternalism and annihilationism. As such, *the influx of view* is subsumed under the influx of existence (MA 1:67). The list of three influxes (omitting that of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the suttas.⁹⁰ The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood.⁹¹

The Ceto, khila Sutta (M 16) applies the same image to the five types of mental shackles (*cetaso vinibandhā*)—doubt about the Teacher, doubt about the Dharma, doubt about the Sangha, doubt about the training, and unresponsiveness and ill will towards fellow practitioners—which undermine the inspiration to practice and thereby prevent growth in the Dharma. These shackles are all manifestations of lust (*rāga*) for sense-pleasures, for the body (one’s own physical being), for forms (the bodies of others), for food (leading to indolence), and for divine birth.⁹²

Lust, as such is not only wide ranging in its grasp, but also lies deep in our minds. It is like a spider that spins its own web and is itself caught therein (Dh 347). It is the nature of lust lying deep in our being that we will now examine.

4.5 LUST IS A LATENT TENDENCY. The roots of lust lie very deep in our unconscious,⁹³ the sum of our conditionings and memories over countless past lives, re-enacting and reinforcing itself repeatedly in this life. Lust haunts the minds of the unawakened, even those of non-arhat saints, in a milder form, as latent tendencies (*anusaya*).⁹⁴ Latent tendencies are like lightning conductors that attract the electrical charges of the storm that is raging around us. But more accurately, it is the latent tendencies that actually brew up the storm in our minds, spewing forth the raging defilements that drive us into lustful, hateful and deluded actions, and clouding and colouring our judgements.

⁸⁷ A 7.8/4:7.

⁸⁸ D 16.1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, DhS §§1096-1100, Vbh §937.

⁸⁹ See A 4.10/2:10.

⁹⁰ D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63.

⁹¹ See BDict: *āsava* & Ency Bsm: *āsava*.

⁹² M 16/1:101-104 = SD 51.4.

⁹³ On the unconscious, see **The unconscious** = SD 17.8b.

⁹⁴ On latent tendencies, see **Anusaya** = SD 31.3.

The oldest list of latent tendencies is perhaps that of the *three* of them, found, for example, in the **Pahāna Sutta** (S 36.3), that is:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| (1) the latent tendency to lust | (<i>rāgānusaya</i>); |
| (2) the latent tendency to aversion | (<i>paṭighānusaya</i>); and |
| (3) the latent tendency to ignorance | (<i>avijjā'nusaya</i>). (S 36.3/4:204-206) = SD 31.1 |

This set of three, in due course, expands into the *seven* latent tendencies, and are listed in the **Saṅgīti Sutta**,⁹⁵ the **Cha, chakka Sutta**,⁹⁶ the **Anusaya Sutta**,⁹⁷ the **Paṭisambhidā, magga**,⁹⁸ the **Vibhaṅga**,⁹⁹ and the **Yamaka** as follows:¹⁰⁰

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) the latent tendency of sensual lust | (<i>kāma, rāgānusaya</i>); |
| (2) the latent tendency of aversion | (<i>paṭighānusaya</i>); |
| (3) the latent tendency of conceit | (<i>mānānusaya</i>); |
| (4) the latent tendency of views | (<i>diṭṭhānusaya</i>); |
| (5) the latent tendency of doubt | (<i>vicikicchā'nusaya</i>); |
| (6) the latent tendency of lust for existence | (<i>bhava, rāgānusaya</i>); |
| (7) the latent tendency of ignorance | (<i>avijjā'nusaya</i>). ¹⁰¹ |

In this list, lust manifests itself in at least two of the seven latent tendencies, that is, as the latent tendency of sensual lust and as the latent tendency of lust for existence (D 3:254; Yam 268). As the **Mahā Māluṅkyā, putta Sutta** (M 64) states, the latent tendency of sensual lust is present even in a newborn baby, even though an infant would not yet be able to conceive any idea of sensuality.¹⁰²

The latent tendency of lust is aroused in connection with the arising of pleasant feeling. This relation, however, as noted in the **Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44), is *not* necessary one, since some pleasant feelings, such as those experienced in dhyana, do not arouse this latent tendency (M 1:303).¹⁰³ As regards the more mundane pleasant feelings, however, only a proper and sustained effort can bring us beyond the grasp of the latent tendency of lust.

4.6 LUST FOR THE DHARMA.

4.6.1 Dhamma, rāga. Interestingly, as pointed in the **Aṭṭhaka, nāgara Sutta** (M 52), lust (*rāga*) need not always be negative, that is, when it is directed to the Dharma. This wholesome form of lust is known “lust for the Dharma” (*dhamma, rāga*). This term applies where we fail to reach a full eradication of the influxes and, due to such lust for the Dharma, attains non-return.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁵ D 33.2.3(12)/3:254, 282.

⁹⁶ M 148.28/3:285 = SD 26.6.

⁹⁷ A 7.11-12/4:8 f.

⁹⁸ Pm §587/123.

⁹⁹ Vbh §816/341, §949/383.

¹⁰⁰ Yam 268; cf Nyanatiloka 1971: 104.

¹⁰¹ See *Anusaya* = SD 31.3 (1). Such list are expanded, I think, to facilitate the explanation the various stages of sainthood, wherein the list becomes fully developed technical terms as the **10 fetters** (*dasa saṃyojana*): (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*śīla-b, bata, parā-māsa*), (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 (*uddhambhāgiya*). On the 3 trainings (*sikkhā*) & the fetters, see **Śīla Samādhi Paññā** = SD 21.6 (4). The abandonment of the lower 5 fetters makes one a non-returner (*opapātika* or *anāgāmi*) (see **Ānāpānasati S**, M 118.10 = SD 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. On the stages of sainthood & the fetters, see **Kiṭṭagiri S** (M 70) = SD 11.1 Intro (5.1).

¹⁰² M 64.3/1:33 = SD 21.10.

¹⁰³ M 44.24/1:303 = SD 40a.9.

¹⁰⁴ M 52.4/1:350 = SD 41.2.

As **Analayo** notes, the way these instances are formulated seems to allow for two explanations. One could either take *dhamma,rāga* to be the factor that has prevented the full eradication of the influxes, or else, to be the factor that has ensured at least the gain of non-return. The commentarial explanation supports the first case, taking *dhamma,rāga* to mean *chanda,rāga*, “lustful desire” towards our meditative experiences (Pm 3:146). This interpretation, apparently, has not gone unchallenged, and the same commentarial records the argument being raised that on this interpretation an unwholesome mental factor is made responsible for leading to such sublime attainment as non-return and its consequent rebirth in the Pure Abodes.

Such a problem could be avoided, argues Analayo, with the other interpretation. On this understanding, just as there could be wholesome forms of craving (*taṇhā*), so too there could be wholesome forms of lust (*rāga*), once such craving or lust is directed towards wholesome objects or goals.¹⁰⁵

4.6.2 Adhamma,rāga. On the other hand, there is lust as a mental factor that is entirely unwholesome, namely, “lust for what is not-Dharma” (*adhammarāga*), sometimes translated as “unnatural lust.” In the Suttas, which are arguably later works, the *adhamma,rāga* is a quasi-technical term referring to a negative social tendencies or situations. **The Cakka,vattī Sīha,nāda Sutta** (D 26), in a prophetic tone, for example, uses *adhamma,rāga* to describe the depravity of a society in moral decline.¹⁰⁶ The Dīgha Commentary on the Sutta says that *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.”¹⁰⁷ The **Attha,sālinī**, the Commentary on the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī, too, agrees (DhsA 366).

Another discourse, **the Paloka Sutta** (A 3.56), describes the dire social consequences of the predominance of *adhamma,rāga*, which apparently not only brings about quarrels and violence, but can also cause adverse climatic conditions and a rise in demonic forces (A 1:160).¹⁰⁸ Due to the profound depths that lust is rooted in our being, it is understandable that the Buddha often resorts of mythical language to describe the negative consequence of lust-driven lives.

4.6.3 Benefits of overcoming lust. From these various sufferings and disadvantages that attachment to lust entails, it is not surprising that the Buddha consistently admonishes us to remove lust. As it is not easy for us to remove all the lust at once, the Buddha teaches us a gradual way of personal training, whereby we overcome the simpler forms of lust. Once we set our minds to training our body and speech, and direct our minds to inner stillness, we begin to overcome lust.

First, we let go of *self-identity*, and its attendant mental fetters, to attain streamwinning. Then, *weakening lust* a bit more, we attain once-return. We go on to sublimate lust into spiritual energy, turning it into *Dharma-lust*, and overcoming all negative lust, we attain non-return. When even the subtlest desire, even to have an opinion or to enjoy a blissful state is abandoned, we become arhats.

The (Hatthaka) Āḷavaka Sutta (A 3.34) points out that, from a worldly perspective, we might perceive happiness as being in the company of people we enjoy, and living in a luxurious ambience. Yet, due to this very lust, we would feel bodily and mental torments and suffering, especially when we do not have access to these external sources of pleasure.

¹⁰⁵ Analayo 2009: 33 f.

¹⁰⁶ D 26.17/3:70 = SD 36.10.

¹⁰⁷ *Mātā mātuucchā pituucchā mātulānī ti ādike ayutta-t,thāne rāgo* (DA 3:853). The Sutta uses two other terms: “rampant greed” (*visama,lobha*) and “deviant conduct” (*micchā,dhamma*). The “**rampant greed**” here refers to excessive greed (or neurotic desire) by way of consuming things (*paribhoga,yuttesu pi thānesu atibalava,lobho*, in other words, excessive materialism and consumerism); and “**deviant conduct**” refers 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. See D 26.17/3:70 = SD 36.10.

¹⁰⁸ A 2.56/1:159 f = SD 72.3.

On the other hand, once we have overcome lust, we will be free from such pains and live truly happily, even if we were to stay out in the open, subject to the mercy of the weather, and the inclemency of climate, with only the hard ground to rest on, as the Buddha himself has done.¹⁰⁹

The Suddhika Nirāmisā Sutta (S 36.31) describes various levels of bliss and liberation, that is, the carnal, the spiritual, the one that is more spiritual than even the spiritual (*nirāmisā nirāmisā, taram*), as follows:

The carnal (<i>āmisā</i>)	the joy, happiness, equanimity of <i>the five sense-faculties</i> .
The spiritual (<i>nirāmisā</i>)	the joy, happiness, equanimity of <i>the form dhyanas</i> .
The transpiritual	the joy, happiness, equanimity of <i>the arhat</i> . (S 36.31/4:237)

5 Abandoning lust

5.1 FIVE WAYS OF DEALING WITH LUST. The Commentaries prescribe a list of six ways of overcoming and preventing lust,¹¹⁰ thus:

- (1) mindfulness of the body's unattractive aspects,
- (2) meditating on them,
- (3) sense-restraint,
- (4) moderation in food, and
- (5) spiritual friends
- (6) conducive conversation.

The first two methods are those of *learning* and *practising the mindfulness of the body*, which is known in the suttas as *asubha, saññā* (perception of foulness). This perception practice is defined as the contemplation of the 31 (commentarial list, 32) parts of the body in **the Kāya, gatā, sati Sutta** (M 119)¹¹¹ and **the Gīrīmānanda Sutta** (A 10.60).¹¹² This practice can be done in connection with the recollection on the four elements.¹¹³ **The (Iddhi, pāda) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 51.20) gives an analysis of desire or enthusiasm (*chanda*) directed towards the overcoming of lust.¹¹⁴ The suttas also prescribe the nine “charnel-ground meditations,” that is, reflecting on the nine stages of bodily decomposition.¹¹⁵ All such practices should close with some cultivation of lovingkindness.

The third method of overcoming and preventing sensual lust is that of sense-restraint, which not to be attached to any of the sense-experiences, or, when we are sitting in meditation, to cut down on paying attention to the physical sense-experiences so that we can be fully focused on the meditation object.¹¹⁶ A well known sutta teaching is that of “grasping neither the sign (*nimitta*) nor the details (*anuvyañjana*)” of our sense-experiences.¹¹⁷

The fourth method is that of moderation in food, defined in the Commentaries as grasping the sign in over-eating,¹¹⁸ that is, being mindful so that we do not over-eat. More specifically, this is defined as

¹⁰⁹ A 3.34/1:136-138 = SD 4.8. On the Buddha's warning against monastics indulging in lust, see **Jīvika S** (It 3.5.2/89 f) = SD 28.9b.

¹¹⁰ MA 1:281-286 = SA 3:165-167 = AA 1:44-51 = ItA 2:176-182; VbhA 270-274. See also DA 3:777-782; cf DA 216.

¹¹¹ M 119.7-17/3:90-93 & SD 12.21 Intro (5). Its basic practice is to reflect of the impermanence and foulness of “head-hair, body, nails, teeth, skin,” which forms the skin pentad, the set of the 32 body parts.

¹¹² A 10.60/5:108-112 = SD 19.16.

¹¹³ See **Mūla, pariyāya S** (M 1), **Mahā Hatthi, padōpama S** (M 28.6-27/1185-191), **Mahā Rāhul'ovāda S** (M 62.8-17/1:421-426) and **Dhātu, vibhaṅga S** (M 140.13-18/3:240-242).

¹¹⁴ **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S**, D 22.5/2:293 = SD 13; **Ānāpāna, sati S**, M 10.10/1:57 = SD 13 = SD 7.13; **Giri-mānanda S**, A 10.60/5:109 = SD 15.15.

¹¹⁵ See M 119.9-17/3:91 f = SD 12.21.

¹¹⁶ See **Sabb'āsava S** (M 2.12/1:9 f) = SD 30.3.

¹¹⁷ See **Nimitta and Anuvyañjana** = SD 19.14.

¹¹⁸ *Ati, bhōjane nimitta-g, gāha*. DA 3:780; MA 1:284 = SA 3:166 = AA 1:50 = ItA 2:180; VbhA 273.

stopping to eat while there is still room for four to five morsels, and drinking water (to fill the belly).¹¹⁹ A more detailed discussion is found in our study of *thīna, middha*.¹²⁰

The fifth method of overcoming and preventing sensual lust is that of spiritual friendship. Ideally, this is a teacher-pupil relationship centering around moral virtue, meditation, and personal development. The teacher acts as a role model and mentor to the pupil. The teacher's task is not only to inculcate Dharma knowledge and meditation skills, but also to mould the pupil's character so that he is able to realize his full spiritual potential.¹²¹

The sixth method is closely related to spiritual friendship, since it should be based on conducive conversation. This is essentially the practice of right speech, that is, refraining from false speech, refraining from divisive speech, refraining from harsh speech, refraining from useless talk,¹²² and speaking the truth at the right time, speech that promotes concord, pleasant and civil speech, and beneficial talk.

5.2 A PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT. Lust begins to weaken, even momentarily abandoned in our meditation, when we let go of the physical senses [2.2]. But we cannot let go of the five senses (that is, our body) by a mere effort of will. For a beginner, *kāma-c, chanda* can only be overcome gradually, as a process, not an event. First, we train ourselves to sit down comfortably but with an alert mind.

Just as our eyes need a bit of time to adjust themselves when we go from a dark room into bright light, or vice versa, even so, we will take a bit of time before we can really feel of our bodily feelings. We can feel our body better after we have closed our eyes and let go of the outside world. If we notice any bodily discomfort, we should mindfully adjust our posture so that the body does not distract us.

A common way to turn away from the external world and the physical body is to keep directing our minds to the present moment. Distraction can be defined as allowing our minds play with the senses so that we stray into the past or the future. Conversely, we can say that our past and future are all sense-experiences, but these are *virtual or constructed realities*, as we only have memories of them. And memories are what we want them to be.

Our memories of the past are but reconstructions of the five sense-experiences; our hopes and plans for the future, too, are but mental constructions of the sense-experiences. They are driven and coloured by our sense-desires. For this reason, such thoughts are called “thoughts of sense-desire” (*kāma, vitakka*).¹²³ Such thoughts hold us down to the world of the five senses so that our mental development are negatively affected.

What we like, we try to remember and collect; what we dislike, we try to deny (push out of our consciousness), and keep on denying or rejecting such ideas. But in doing so, we are only reinforcing and reminding ourselves of them.¹²⁴ And so we are caught in the mood swing between liking and disliking.¹²⁵ This is the virtual world that we create and live in.¹²⁶

When we are drowned in our past memories or swept away into a future fantasy, we actually disempower ourselves. The reason is simple: we cannot change the past, because it is dead and gone; we cannot change the future, because it has not yet come. It is sense-desire that drives us into looking at the past, often with regret not having done this or that, or remorse in having done this or that. And we try to anti-

¹¹⁹ **Tha 983** qu at DA 3:778; MA 1:282; SA 2:107, 3:165; AA 1:47; ItA 1:43, 2:179; SnA 2:494; ThaA 3:99; Miln 407 (with Tha 982), J 255/2:294 (with Tha 982); Nm 2:345; Dhs 404; VbhA 270. Cf A 6.19.6/3:304 f, 8.73.8/4:318 f.

¹²⁰ *Thīna, middha* = SD 32.6 (3.2.4).

¹²¹ See **Spiritual Friendship** = SD 8.1.

¹²² **Mahā Cattārisaka S** (M 117.18-20/3:74 f = SD 6.10; (**Subhāsita**) **Vaṅṅisa S** (S 8.5/1:188 f).

¹²³ Such thoughts express themselves as the “16 doubts”: see **Sabb’āsava S** (M 2.7 f/1:8), **Mahā Taṇhā, saṅkhaya S** (M 38.23/1:265) & **Paccaya S** (S 12.20/2:26 f). In **Paccaya S** (S 12.20), it is said that one who sees dependent arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*) with right wisdom would not speculate in these ways (S 12.20.18-20/2:26 f). See **Bhadd’eka, ratta S** (M 131) = SD 8.9 Intro (3).

¹²⁴ See **Self & Selves** = SD 26.9 (1.6.2).

¹²⁵ See **Hatthi, pad’pama S 1 & 2** (S 35.236-237/4:171 f) = SD 29.7.

¹²⁶ See **Sabba S** (S 35.23/4:15) = SD 7.1.

cipate the future, we become restless. If we persist in looking into the past and delving in the future, we fall into a familiar state of disempowerment called *worry*.

5.2 PRESENT-MOMENT AWARENESS. One of the safest and most effective ways of living in the past or future, and leading false lives, is to train our minds in the present moment. This is not always easy for a beginner, but it become easier when we have something to focus on. The best present-moment object for the mind to focus on is the breath. The reasons for this are simple: the breath is always there and is a good indicator of our emotional state (when we are relaxed we breathe easier, lighter and shorter).

The basic technique of breath meditation is very simple: keep our full attention on the breath, and whenever the mind wanders away, patiently and lovingly bring it back to the breath. Simply let go of other physical sensations, and bring the mind back to the breath. This is like training a pet dog. In due course, the mind gets used to being focussed on the breath. Our attention span has effectively lengthened and remains so.¹²⁷

The breath, in other words, is a stepping-stone, a spring-board, from the world of the senses into the realm of the mind; it is the vehicle that brings us from outer space into inner space. The first we would notice in our inner space is there is no sound at all: it is very peaceful. The body has effectively disappeared. We are now fully *mental beings*, as it were. Our physical senses no more distract us, and our body no more brings us discomfort—there is *no* body around!

All that remains is the breath. But there comes a point when the breath is no more a bodily sensation, but a mental feeling. In fact, after a while, the breath becomes so peaceful that we no more notice it. This is where a great bliss arises and keeps us focused in samadhi. And when the breath totally disappears, we will see the bright mental image (*nimitta*)¹²⁸ of our own still mind.

It is only at this stage that we truly, even if temporarily, overcome sense-desire. However, the more this inner stillness becomes a habit, the easier and longer that we keep out sense-desires. And this is where we begin to see beauty even in the simplest and smallest of things: everything is really beautiful.

In the **Kāma Jātaka** (J 467), the Bodhisattva utters these verses, which succinctly restates what has been explained here:

<i>Yaṃ yaṃ cajati kāmānaṃ</i>	For every sense-desire you sacrifice,
<i>taṃ taṃ sampajjate sukhaṃ </i>	happiness arises therein.
<i>sabbañ ca sukhaṃ iccheyya</i>	For he who wishes all the bliss,
<i>sabbe kāme pariccajati </i>	let him abandon all sense-desires. (J 467/1:174)

5.3 Freedom from lust. The Sati’paṭṭhāna Sutta (M 10), in its contemplation of the mind (*cittānupassanā*), instructs us to be fully aware of a presence or absence of any form of lust.¹²⁹ **The Upavāṇa Sutta** (S 35.70) explains the same meditation exercise as an example for the Buddha Dharma as a directly and immediately visible teaching, inviting one to come and see, leading onwards, and to be experienced personally by the wise.¹³⁰

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (M 10), in its concluding section, on the contemplation on dharmas (*dhammānupassanā*), describes how such an awareness should be cultivated as a preliminary practice, which then leads to insight into how the hindrance of sensual desire has arisen, how to remove it, and how to prevent its future arising:

When there is sensual desire in him, he understands,
 ‘There is sensual desire in me’.
 Or, when there is no sensual desire in him, he understands,
 ‘There is no sensual desire in me’.
 And he understands the arising of unarisen sensual desire;

¹²⁷ See **Anāpāna,sati S** (M 118/3:77-88) = SD 7.13.

¹²⁸ See **Nimitta** = SD 19.7.

¹²⁹ M 10.34(1)/1:59 = D 2:299 = SD 13.3.

¹³⁰ S 35.70/4:41 = SD 62.7.

and he understands the letting go of arisen sensual desire;

and he understands the further non-arising of the sensual desire that he has given up.

(M 10.36/1:60) = SD 13.3

The passage then proceeds to deal with each of the other four hindrances in the same manner. The main idea here is to see sensual desire (or any other mental hindrance) as *as it is* and note their impermanence (their arising and passing away).

In the next step, we displace sensual desire with its opposite, renunciation (*nekkhamma*).¹³¹ Three suttas in the Tika Nipāta (A 3) deal with overcoming of sensual desire, namely,¹³²

- | | <u>overcome</u> | <u>with</u> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| • (Saṅkappa) Vitakka Sutta (A 6.109) | thoughts of sensual desire | thoughts of renunciation, ¹³³ |
| • (Saṅkappa) Saññā Sutta (A 6.110) | perceptions of sensual desire | perceptions of renunciation, ¹³⁴ |
| • (Saṅkappa) Dhātu Sutta (A 6.111) | element of sensual desire | element of renunciation. ¹³⁵ |

5.4 Overcoming lust. Compared to “hate” (*dosa*), notes **the (Akusala,mūla) Añña,titthiyā Sutta** (A 3.68.1), lust is less blameable (*appa,sāvajja*), but it is more difficult to remove (*dandha,virāgī*).¹³⁶ This is understandable because while *lust* is a persistent seeking and savouring of pleasant sense-stimuli, *hate* and its related emotions (anger, etc) are mostly reactions to the failure of attaining a particular sense-stimulus or the inability to sustain it.

For this reason, one of the most common teachings of the Buddha is on how to overcome lust. **The Rāga Paccaya Sutta** (A 2.10.6), for example, lists the two conditions (*paccaya*), either of which causes *the arising of lust*, that is, (1) the “sign of beauty” (*subha.nimitta*), usually a mental fixation on a physical body, and (2) “unwise attention” (*ayoniso manasikāra*), that is, not seeing the true nature of the sense-object.¹³⁷

The best antidote for lust, therefore, says **the (Anussati-ṭṭhāna) Udāyī Sutta** (A 6.29), is wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) on the impermanent nature of the sense-object, or to the less appealing aspects of the body, examining its anatomical make-up and the unattractive nature of its parts.¹³⁸ Further anti-lust strategies, described in **the Nanda Sutta** (A 8.9), are sense-restraint, moderation in food, wakefulness and mindfulness with full awareness.¹³⁹

When we are distracted by lust, especially during meditation, one of the inspiring meditations usually helps, that is, the recollections (*anussati*) on the Buddha, on the Dharma, on the Sangha, on moral virtue, on devatas, and on charity.¹⁴⁰ Such practices build up a happy mind,¹⁴¹ which helps to clear the mind of distractions, and to focus it, as stated in this famous pericope from **the Vatthūpama Sutta** (M 7):

(Having done a recollection on the Three Jewels, ie, one of the first three inspiring meditations,)

he gains inspired knowledge in the goal (*attha,veda*),¹⁴²

he gains inspired knowledge in the truth [reality] (*dhamma,veda*).¹⁴³

¹³¹ Pm 1:163. Renunciation (*nekkhamma*) here refers to letting go of unwholesome states and conduct.

¹³² These suttas actually each deal with the removal of the 3 constituents of wrong thought (*micchā saṅkappa*), ie sensual desire (*kāma*), ill will (*vyāpāda*) and cruelty [violence] (*vihiṃsā*).

¹³³ A 6.109/3:446 = SD 62.10.

¹³⁴ A 6.110/3:446 f = SD 62.11.

¹³⁵ A 6.111/3:447 = SD 62.12. See further, on ill will: *Vyāpāda* = SD 32.5 (6.2).

¹³⁶ A 3.68.1/1:200 = SD 16.4.

¹³⁷ A 2.10.6/1:87.

¹³⁸ A 6.29/3:323 = SD 24.8.

¹³⁹ A 8.9/4:166-168 = SD 8.9.

¹⁴⁰ See **Mental Cultivation** = SD 15.

¹⁴¹ See *Nimitta* = SD 19.7(4.6.3(2)).

¹⁴² *Attha,veda* see SD 28.12 Intro (4) above.

¹⁴³ *Dhamma,veda* see SD 28.12 Intro (4) above.

he gains gladness¹⁴⁴ connected with the truth [reality].
 When he is gladdened, zest is born.
 When the mind is zestful, the body is tranquil.
 The tranquil body feels happy;
 When one is happy, the mind becomes concentrated.¹⁴⁵

As an alternative, the four divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*), too, brings about a joyful state of mind that can lead up to the cultivation of equanimity as a liberation of the mind (*upekkhā ceto, vimutti*), that is a great “escape” (*nissaraṇa*) from lust.¹⁴⁶ The practice of four divine abodes—the cultivation of lovingkindness, of of compassion, of appreciative joy, and of equanimity, are especially effective skilful means for erstwhile God-believers who can sublimate the remnants of their theistic conditionings into truly unconditional love.¹⁴⁷

Such passages describe methods and strategies for that the cultivation of mental stillness (*samatha*) that can also function as antidotes to lust. This point is explicitly stated in **the Dhamma Vijja, bhāgiya Sutta** (A 2.3.10), which indicates that the cultivation of stillness builds the mind which in turn eradicates lust.¹⁴⁸

The lesson here, as such, is very clear. Our attraction of sensual lust is due to our not having tasted a greater bliss, one that is not dependent on the physical senses or the body. When we have tasted the deeper states of mental concentration, accompanied by profound joy and happiness, brought about by purely mental means, these higher states will displace any happiness that is dependent on sense-pleasures. More importantly, such profound bliss generates for us such a clarity of mind that we will be able to see directly into our true nature, and so attain self-liberation. Even on a worldly level, the cultivation of mental stillness can become a powerful antidote to lust by freeing its objects of their false attractions.

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¹⁴⁴ Gladness (*pāmuḍḍa*) here is the first factors leading to mental concentration. The rest, which follow, are zest (*pīti*), tranquility (*passaddhi*), happiness (*sukha*) and concentration (*samādhi*). This set is an abridged set of the 7 awakening-facts (*satta bojjhaṅga*): mindfulness (*sati*), dharma-investigation (*dhamma, vicaya*), effort (*virīya*), zest (*pīti*), tranquillity (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*), each suffixed with “awakening-factor” (*sambojjhaṅga*). Functioning as in the 5 dhyana-factors (*jhān’āṅga*) [see **Dhyana** = SD 8.4], *tranquillity* removes the subtle bodily and mental activities connecte3d with gladness and zest, and brings on a stillness conducive to deep concentration and dhyana. See **Mahā Sakul’udāyī S** (M 77.20/2:12 = SD 6.18).

¹⁴⁵ On this *attha, veda* passage, cf the *nīvaraṇa, pahīna* passage at **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.76/1:73) = SD 8.10n for other refs. See also (**Agata, phala**) **Mahānāma S** (A 6.10.5/:286 f = SD 15.3. On this passage, cf V 1:294; D 1:73; Miln 84.

¹⁴⁶ D 33.2.2(17)/ 3:249.

¹⁴⁷ Another effective practice for such people is the recollection on deity (or the gods): see **Devatā’nussatī** = SD 15.13.

¹⁴⁸ *Samatho bhāvito...cittam bhāvīyati, cittam bhāvitam...yo rāgo so pahīyati* (A 2.3.10/1:61).