

Mahā Suññata Sutta

The Greater Discourse on Emptiness¹

[The joy of spiritual solitude]
(Majjhima Nikāya 122/3:109-118)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

Introduction

1 Sutta themes

1.1 COMPARATIVE STUDY. According to Rod Bucknell's Pali & Chinese Āgama concordance (2004), the Mahā Suññatā Sutta is found in the Taishō Tripiṭaka as **MĀ 191 = T1.738a-740c**,² and the Tibetan Kanjur³ as **P957 (P38.279)** and as **Kj:De 291**.⁴ The Tibetan version is entitled **Mahā,sūnyatā Mahā,sūtra** (The Great Discourse on the Great Emptiness), and Peter Skilling says that since the sutra itself is rather short, here the title must mean "Discourse on the Great Emptiness." (1997:369)⁵

This sutta together with its full commentary has been published by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli as *The Greater Discourse on Voidness* (1965).⁶ The main idea of this sutta is that of the ideal conditions for spiritual development, internal (proper attitude) and external (proper teacher). The sutta is implicitly but beautifully structured on **the noble eightfold path**. Bhikkhu Pesala has done a paraphrased summary of this sutta.⁷

1.2 DANGER OF SOCIALIZING. The sutta opens with the Buddha in Kapila, vatthu where he notices that a large company of monks are staying close together and sees **the danger of their socializing and fraternizing** [§1-2b]. Ānanda informs the Buddha that the monks who have gathered were making robes as it is robe season (which would be the month after the rains retreat, that is, around October-November) [§2c]. The Buddha rebukes Ānanda, exhorting him that a monk who delights in company "does not shine" [§3], that is, would not progress spiritually, not even attain "**liberation of mind that is temporary and pleasant**" [§4b].

The Commentary explains that this "liberation" refers to freedom from defilements through attaining full concentration with the mind fixing itself on the meditation object (*appit'appita,samaye kilesehi vimuttam*) (MA 4:158). This evidently refers to "letting-go through suppression" (*vikkhambhana,pahāna*), that is, the temporary overcoming of the defilements through the attainment of the first dhyana (MA 4:158).⁸

The Buddha points out the danger of lustful desire in physical things [§5]. He speaks of his own "abiding in emptiness" (*suññatā vihāra*) [§6] and encourages the monks to abide thus [§7].

¹ Translated at the request of David Sugiman (Indonesia), National University of Singapore Buddhist Society, in 2004.

² Here, see Choong 1999:79-84.

³ Beijing ed, Ōtani reprint, Tokyo, 1956. *Kanjur* means "Buddha Word" (in Tib tr).

⁴ KJ:De 291 = Kj:De 71.253b-261b, the **mdo chen pos tong pa nyid chen po zhes bya ba**, tr Jinamitra, Prajñāvarman and Ye šes sde prob early 9th cent. For Romanized & other eds, see **Skilling** 1994:xiii f, 182-263; for his critical tr, see 1997:365-400.

⁵ For a discussion on prefix *mahā* before suttas, see Analayo 2005 ad M 122 Intro n & also **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10) = SD 9.2.

⁶ Wheel no 87. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1965.

⁷ <http://www.aimwell.org/assets/Emptiness.pdf>.

⁸ The **Paṭisambhidā,magga** speaks of five kinds of extinction (*nirodha*) of mental defilements and distraction: (1) extinction by suppression (*vikkhambhana nirodha*); (2) extinction by substitution of opposites (*tad-aṅga nirodha*); (3) extinction by cutting off of destruction (*samuccheda nirodha*), ie at the moment of attaining the Path; (4) extinction by tranquillization (*paṭipassaddhi nirodha*), ie at the moment of the fruition on the Supramundane Path; (5) extinction by escape or liberation (*nissaraṇa nirodha*), that is, the attainment of nirvana. (Pm 1:27, 220 f; Vism 410; cf Vism 693). These 5 are also called abandonment (*pahāna*), liberation (*vimutti*), solitude (*viveka*), detachment or dispassion (*virāga*) or letting go or relinquishing (*vossagga*).

1.3 THE MADDING CROWD. The Majjhima Commentary generally stresses on the issues of crowding and of space: a crowded life is spiritually stifling; the spacious life supports a focussed mind that brings liberation. The tone of the Commentary here reflects that of a passage from the prophetic **Cakka-vatti Siha,nāda Sutta** (D 26), where it describes India (Jambu,dīpa) of the future thus:

And in the time when those people have a lifespan of 80,000 years, this Jambu,dīpa [Rose-apple Continent] will be powerful and prosperous, and villages, towns and cities will be but a cock's flight from one to the next.

And in the time when those people have a lifespan of 80,000 years, this Jambu,dīpa would be like the Avīci hell, thick with people like the jungle is thick with reeds and rushes.

At that time, the Benares of today will be a royal city called Ketu,mati, powerful and prosperous, crowded with people and plenty. In Jambu,dīpa there will be 84,000 cities headed by Ketu,mati as the royal capital. (D 26.23/3:75)

The Mahā Suññata Sutta opens with the Buddha noticing the crowded dormitories at Kāḷa Khemaka's dwelling, how the beddings and resting places are placed so close together that they touch one another. **The Commentary** gives this long dramatic account:⁹

Before this, it seems, the Blessed One had never before seen ten or twelve monks dwelling in one place. Then this occurred to him,

"This group-living [social life] (*gaṇa,vāsa*) is extremely common in the rounds of existence. As water collects into rivers, so group-living is common in hell, in the animal world, in the ghost realm, and in the asura existence; and in the human world, the heavenly world, and the Brahmā world, too.

For **hell** is 10,000 yojanas¹⁰ across and is crowded with beings, like powdered lead packed in a tube. There is no counting or reckoning the beings in the place of torture of by the fivefold bind-

⁹ *Ito kira pubbe bhagavatā dasa dvādasa bhikkhū ekaṭṭhāne vasantā na diṭṭha,pubbā. Athassa etad ahoṣi-gaṇa-vāso nāmāyaṃ vaṭṭe āciṇṇa,samāciṇṇo nadi-otiṇṇa-udakasadiṣo, niraya,tiracchāna,yoni,petti,visayāsura,kāyesu 'pi, manussa,loka-deva,loka,brahma,lokesu 'pi gaṇa,vāso 'va āciṇṇo. Dasa,yojana,sahasso hi nirayo tipu,cuṇṇa,-bharitā nāli viya sattehi nirantaro, pañcavidha,bandhana,kamma,kāraṇakaraṇa-ṭṭhāne sattānaṃ pamāṇaṃ vā paricchedo vā natthi, tathā vāsīhi tacchanādi,ṭṭhānesu, iti gaṇa,bhūtā 'va paccanti. Tiracchāna,yoniyāṃ ekasmiṃ vammike upasikānaṃ pamāṇaṃ vā paricchedo vā natthi, tathā ekeka,bil 'ādīsu 'pi kipillik 'ādīnaṃ. Tiracchāna,-yoniyāṃ pi gaṇa,vāso 'va. Peta,nagarāṇi ca gāvutikāni aḍḍha,yojanikāni 'pi peta,bharitāni honti. Evaṃ petti,-visaye 'pi gaṇa,vāso 'va. Asura,bhavanāṃ dasa,yojana,sahassaṃ kaṇṇe pakkhitta,sūciyā kaṇṇa,bilaṃ viya hoti. Iti asura,kāye 'pi gaṇa,vāso 'va. Manussa,loke sāvattiyāṃ satta,paṇṇāsa kula,sata,sahassāni, rāja,gahe anto ca bahi ca aṭṭhā,rasa manussa,koṭiyo vasiṃsu. Evaṃ aññesupī ṭṭhānesu 'ti manussa,lokepi gaṇa,vāso 'va. Bhumma,devatā ādīm katvā devaloka,brahma,lokesu 'pi gaṇa,vāso 'va. Ekekassa hi deva,puttassa aḍḍha,tiyā nātaka,koṭiyo honti, nava 'pi koṭiyo honti, eka-ṭṭhāne dasa,sahassā 'pi brahmāno vasanti.*

Tato cintesi—"mayā sata,sahassa,kapp 'ādhikāni cattāri asaṅkheyyāni gaṇa,vāsa,viddharisan 'atthaṃ dasa pāramiyo pūritā, ime ca bhikkhū ito paṭṭhāy 'eva gaṇaṃ bandhitvā gaṇābhiraṭā jātā ananucchavikāṃ karontī ti. So dhamma,samīvegāṃ uppādetvā puna cintesi—"sace eka-ṭṭhāne dvīhi bhikkhūhi na vasitabban 'ti sakkā bhavēyya sikkhāpadaṃ paññāpetuṃ, sikkhāpadaṃ paññāpeyyaṃ, na kho panetaṃ sakkā. Handāhaṃ mahā,suññatā,paṭi-pattiṃ nāma suttantaṃ desemi, yaṃ sikkhākāmaṇaṃ kula,puttānaṃ sikkhāpada,paññatti viya nagara,dvāre nikkhitta,sabba,kāyika-ādāso viya ca bhavissati. Tato yathā nāma ekasmiṃ ādāse khattiy 'ādāyo attano vajjaṃ disvā taṃ pahāya anavajjā honti, evaṃ evaṃ mayi parinibbute 'pi pañca,vassa,sahassāni imaṃ suttāṃ āvajjivā gaṇaṃ vinodetvā ekī,bhāvābhiraṭā kula,puttā vaṭṭa,dukkhassa antaṃ karissanti ti. Bhagavato ca manorathaṃ pūrentā viya imaṃ suttāṃ āvajjivā gaṇaṃ vinodetvā vaṭṭa,dukkhaṃ khetvā parinibbutā kula,puttā gaṇana,paṭhaṃ vītivattā.

Vālika,piṭṭhi,vihārepi hi ābhidhammika-abhaya-ṭṭhāro nāma vassūpanāyika,samaye sambahulehi bhikkhūhi saddhiṃ imaṃ suttāṃ sañjhayivā "sammā,sambuddho evaṃ kareti, mayaṃ kiṃ karomī ti āha. Te sabbepi anto,-vasse gaṇaṃ vinodetvā ekī,bhāvābhiraṭā arahattaṃ pāpuṇiṃsu. Gaṇa,bhedanaṃ nāma idaṃ suttāṃ ti. (MA 4:155-157)

ing.¹¹ There is no counting or reckoning the beings in the place of paring with adzes, etc.¹² Such is the way they are cooked in groups.

As for the animal world—just as there is no counting or reckoning the termites in a single termite nest; and there is no counting or reckoning of ants in an ant-hill—even so, is the group-living in the animal world, too.

And there are ghost cities a quarter or half a yojana across crowded with ghosts. Such is group-living in the ghost realm, too.

The 10,000-yojana-wide sphere of the asura demons is like the hole in the ear just that a needle might go through. Such is group-living in the asura world, too.

As regards the human world, there are 5,700,000 in families living in Sāvatti; and inside and outside Rājagaha, there are 1,800,000 people. Such is group-living in certain places in the world, too.

Beginning with the earth deities, there is group-living in the heavens and the Brahmā world, too. Each deva has two and a half crores of dancers, even up to nine crores. And there are ten thousand Brahmās living in one place.”

Then he thought, “For four incalculables and a hundred thousand aeons, the ten perfections¹³ have been fulfilled by me for the purpose of undoing group-living. As soon as those monks who formed themselves into groups and find delight in groups, they will act in an unbecoming manner, forming groups and delighting in them.”

Then, the feeling of concern for the Dharma arose in him, and he thought again, “If it were possible to announce a training rule that two monks should not live in one place I would do so, but that is not possible. Come now, let me expound the discourse called ‘The Practice of Great Emptiness’ (*mahā suññatā paṭipatti nāma suttantaṃ*), which for training young men of family desirous of training, will be like a promulgated training rule.

It will be like a full-length looking-glass placed at the city gate. Then, just as kshatriyas [nobles] and so on, seeing their blemishes in the looking-glass, would get rid of them and become unblemished; even so, indeed, even for 5000 years after I have attained final nirvana, young men of families delighting in solitude through paying attention to this discourse, avoiding groups [society], and so will make an end of the suffering of the rounds of existence.”

And the number of young men of family who, by heeding this discourse and avoiding groups [society] would, as it were fulfilling the Blessed One’s wish, have made an end of suffering and attained final nirvana is beyond reckoning.

For, in the Vālīka,piṭṭhi monastery [in Sri Lanka], the Abhidhamma specialist named Abhaya Thera, after reciting this discourse together with a number of monks on the occasion of entering the rains residence, said: “The Fully Self-awakened One enjoins us to act thus, and what are we

¹⁰ A *yojana* is the yoke of an Indian plough (J 6:38, 42). As distance, it is as far as can be covered by a yoke of oxen, ie, about 11.25 km or 7 mi (DhA 1:108, 2:13).

¹¹ See **Bāla,paṇḍita S** (M 129.10/3:166) = SD 2.22 & **Deva,dūta S** (M 130.10/3:182 f) = SD 2.23.

¹² See **Bāla,paṇḍita S** (M 129.12/3:166) = SD 2.22 & **Deva,dūta S** (M 130.12/3:183) = SD 2.23.

¹³ “The ten perfections” (*dasa pāramī*) are a late canonical list of virtuous qualities said to lead to Buddhahood. These 10 qualities, occurring frequently in **Buddha,vaṃsa** (B 6 f, 11, 38, 62, 48), **Cariyā,piṭaka** (Cp 83, 102 f, 588), **Jātakas** (J 1:73, 6:546), **Apadāna** (Ap 5 f, 17, 23, 26, 28 f, 32, 37, 40, 43, 45, 48, 212, 309, 318, 325, 369, 411, 443, 551), & DhA 1:84, are: (1) generosity (*dāna*), (2) moral virtue (*sīla*), (3) renunciation (*nekkhamma*), (4) wisdom (*paññā*), (5) effort (*virīya*), (6) patience (*khanti*), (7) truthfulness (*sacca*), (8) determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), (9) lovingkindness (*mettā*), and (10) equanimity (*upekkhā*). On older usage of *pāramī* as “completeness, perfection, highest state, see Sn 1018, 1020; Pug 70; VvA 2; PvA 139. Cf *pāramī-p.patta* (M 3:28 f; Nc 20, 435; Miln 21, 22). The Skt sources list 6 perfections (*pāramitā*), probably older: (1) generosity (*dāna*), (2) moral virtue (*śīla*), (3) patience (*kṣānti*), (4) effort (*virīya*), (5) concentration (*samādhi*) and (6) wisdom (*prajñā*). These were later also increased to 10 to complement the 10 stages (*bhūmi*) of a Bodhisattva’s career, with the additional perfections: (7) skilful means (*upāya,kausālya*), (8) resolution (*praṇidhāna*), (9) strength (*bala*), and (10) spiritual knowledge (*jñāna*). See BHSD: *pāramitā* for refs.

doing?” And all of them, by avoiding the group and delighting in solitude, attained arhathood within that same rains.

This discourse is called the breaker-up of groups (*gaṇa, bhedanam*). (MA 4:155-157)

1.4 BENEFIT OF SOLITUDE. The Commentary goes at length to give examples where the seeker, when burdened with company, failed to attain his spiritual goal. **The Bodhisattva Vipassī** wandered for seven years with 84,000 renunciants but failed to find awakening; but wandering by himself, he attained his goal in seven days. **Our Bodhisattva himself** wandered with the five monks for six years, but only when they left him, did he win his goal (MA 4:159). One might here add the story of **Sāriputta and Moggallāna**, who during the hill-top festival (*gir’agga samajjā*) had a spiritual experience that led them to renounce the world to become Saṅgha’s pupils. But it was only after they went their separate ways, that they finally met their true teachers in Assaṅgi and the Buddha (V 1:40; J 1:85; DhA 2:84).

It is important to understand here that this teaching of spiritual solitude is not that of an anti-social hermitism, but rather that mental cultivation or meditation can only be effectively by oneself alone. In the quest mental focus leading to spiritual liberation, one has to journey alone. However, once one has won the goal, one may be *with* the crowd (for its benefit), but is never *of* the crowd. Furthermore, it should be said that when one is faced with the greatest of difficulties or with the height of true success, one will be inevitably by oneself. Only when one has stepped down from that pinnacle of pain or of triumph, that one finds oneself in the company of others again. One enters this world alone; one leaves it alone. One can only understand both in one’s aloneness.

The purpose of physical solitude is to train oneself in mental solitude (the wholesome state of not being carried away by worldliness). When one has some mastery of mental solitude, one depends less and less on physical solitude. One can then be alone in a crowd; one can be *with* the crowd, but not *of* the crowd. In other words, physical and mental solitude helps one cultivate mental calm and clarity.

Understandably some religions today discourage their followers against meditation, simply out of fear that the practitioner would discover the truths for themselves. As **Sujato** points out in his work, *A History of Mindfulness*,

Contemplation will always remain a threat to religious orthodoxy, since there is always the uncomfortable possibility that the truth a meditator sees may not agree with the truth that the books say they’re supposed to see. However[,] in Buddhism, unlike Christianity, the contemplative life lies at the very heart of the Founder’s message. (2004b:82)

This spiritual aloneness is most significantly stated in **the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) and a number of other places, attesting to its importance:

Therefore, Ānanda, dwelling with yourselves as islands, with yourselves as refuge, with no other refuge—dwell with the Dharma as an island, with the Dharma as refuge, with no other refuge.
(D 16.2.26/2:100 f= 26.1/3:58, 26.27/77; S 22.43/3:42, 47.9/5:154, 47.13/5:163, 17.14/5:164)

The same sutta goes on to say that this statement refers to the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*.¹⁴

1.5 SAINTHOOD. The Mahā Suññata Sutta recount the four dhyanas [§8]—that is, right concentration—and how they lead on to **stream-winning** through the attaining of dhyanas up to the formless attainments, here called “the imperturbable” (*āneñja*) [§9-10]. It is interesting here to note that the attainment of stream-winning has directly to do with moral virtue and mindfulness regarding the body [§11], that is, right mindfulness as *satipaṭṭhāna*, “focus of mindfulness.” The section on the path of **once-return** deals with right speech [§12] and right thought [§13]. **Non-return** is won with full understanding of the five cords of sense-desires (*pañca, kāma, gūṇa*) and the total destruction of sense-desire, that is, a more refined level of right thought [§14-15]. And finally **arhathood** is attained with right view regarding the five

¹⁴ See *Satipaṭṭhāna S* (M 10) = SD 13.

aggregates of clinging (*pañc 'upādāna-k, khandha*) [§16], so that the conceit “I am” is overcome [§17], and so the whole spiritual path has been traversed [§18]: this is the fruit of right view.

1.6 TWO LEVELS OF SENSE-EXPERIENCE. The Buddha here distinguishes between **two levels of sense-experience**: that of “the five cords of sensual pleasure,” that is, the level of the worldling [§14], and that of “the five aggregates of clinging,” that is, the level of the practitioner [§16]. The five cords of sensual pleasure have a “binding” or “grasping” effect on one who enjoys them. The five aggregates of clinging, on the other hand, are natural states that arise and fall away moment to moment. If a practitioner watches this rise and fall, he would abandon the “I am” conceit, and as such be free from Māra’s grip.

1.7 TEACHER-PUPIL RELATIONSHIP. Next follows the section on **teacher-pupil relationship**. The Buddha exhorts that a pupil should not look up to a teacher purely for his academic prowess, that is, proficiency in “the exposition of Suttas and Geyyā” since this is not the mark of his spiritual attainment. However, if the pupil has found a spiritually accomplished teacher, he should stay with that teacher “even if he is told to leave” [§20].

The Buddha goes on to warn of how the training of a teacher, of a pupil, and of a brahmachari¹⁵ can be undone [§21]. Their **undoing** (*upaddava*) is basically caused by too much socializing and reverting to luxury even if they lead solitary lives [§§22-24a]: this undoing is the result of wrong livelihood. Of the three undoings, however, the Buddha deems the failure of the brahmachari, that is, of a Buddhist practitioner, as the most serious [§24b]. The Commentary (MA 4:165) uses a simile: falling from training in a non-Buddhist system is like falling from the back of the donkey: one is, at worst, covered with dust; but falling from monastic training is like falling from the back of an elephant, that is, where one has freely taken up the rules of training but fails to keep to them.

1.8 SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP. The sutta closes with teachings on spiritual friendship, where the Buddha speaks on the teacher’s compassion in teaching the Dharma and the pupil’s proper attitude towards him [§§25-26]. This section is based on right effort.

THE POTTER SIMILE. The Buddha then makes an enigmatic declaration, “I shall not treat you as a potter treats raw damp clay,” but we have clear hints from his ensuing statements: “Restraining you again and again, I will admonish you, cleansing you again and again. The core that is strong will remain standing.” [§27]. A potter, we all know, shapes clay into various vessels and objects; but the Buddha does not shape anyone in this manner. The potter then fires his wares in a furnace: *the Buddha, however, trains his disciples, who then shape themselves*. When the firing is done, the potter (the Buddha) then carefully checks and tests each artifact for flaws and cracks, rejecting the flawed and cracked ones: what is rejected is the flaw, not the person. *The Buddha points out his disciples’ weaknesses and flaws so that they can correct them for his own spiritual progress*.

2 Three kinds of emptiness (practice)

The Mahā Suññata Sutta teaches the perception of emptiness in three ways: inwardly (*ajjhatta*) [§§9a, 10a], outwardly (*bahiddhā*) [§§9b, 10b], and alternating both ways (*ajjhatta, bahiddhā*) [§§9c, 10c], or alternatively, of internal emptiness, of external emptiness, and both of them alternatively. Evidently, these practices do not fully fruit on their own, but are best done on emerging from dhyanas. The context is clear here, as they are placed immediately after the section of the dhyanas [§§7b-8d]. Let us first look at three attempts at translating these important passages:¹⁶

RC Chalmers (1927):

“[He] ponders on internal emptiness...external emptiness...both internal and external emptiness.”
(*Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 1927 = M:C 2:218)

IB Horner (1959):

“[He] attends to an inward (concept of) emptiness...to an external (concept of) emptiness...to an inward and to an external (concept of) emptiness.” (*Middle Length Sayings*, 1959 = M:H 3:155)

¹⁵ “Brahmachari,” *brahma, cāri*, see §21 n below.

¹⁶ For full refs here, see “Textual Conventions” in the Epilegomena.

Ñāṇamoli (1965):

“[He] brings to mind voidness internally..externally...internally and externally.”

(*The Greater Discourse on Voidness*, 1965:6-7, 23)

Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995):

“[He] gives attention to voidness internally...to voidness externally...to voidness internally and externally.”

(*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 1995 = M:NB 973)

All these translations are acceptable except in the case of Horner, where she has the amplification “concept of,” which as we have seen in **the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta** study.¹⁷ Both the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta (M 122) and the Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 121), it is vital to note, shows that the “emptiness” here is an exercise in the attending to what is absent and what is present that in due course leads to a direct experience of liberation.

The Commentary explains the phrase “abiding in emptiness internally” (*ajjhataṃ suññataṃ...vihari-tum*) [§6], as meaning that it is as if one were alone, though sitting in the midst of company (MA 4:159). “Internally” refers to his one’s sense-spheres (*gocar’ajjhataṃ eva*), or one’s own five aggregates (MA 1:161). Attending to emptiness externally (*bahiddhā*) refers to contemplating on the five aggregates in someone else. **Bodhi** notes,

The emptiness spoken of here thus must be the temporary deliverance of mind reached through the insight contemplation of non-self, as explained at [**Mahā Vedalla S**, M 43.33/1:297 f]. When the insight into non-self is brought to the level of the path, it issues in the fruition experiencing Nibbāna by way of its aspects of emptiness. (M:NB 1334 n 1152, emphases added)

The sutta formulation includes the progression *ajjhataṃ...bahiddhā...ajjhata,bahiddhā*, just as for all the four satipatthanas.¹⁸ This is not merely a mechanical process. **Gethin** explains that this repetition has

to do with the blurring of distinction between self and other—something which is, of course, entirely consistent with the notion of not-self in Buddhist thought. Thus as the *bhikkhu* watches body, feelings, mind and *dhammas* within, without, within and without, rather than seeing a world made up of distinct ‘persons’ or ‘selves,’ he becomes progressively aware of a world of *dhamma* made up entirely of *dhammas* of all of which are ‘not-self.

(*The Buddhist Path of Awakening*, 2001:54 f)

Peter Skilling, in his comparative study of the early sutras, *Mahāsūtras: The great discourses of the Buddha*, has a very useful discussion on these threefold emptiness.¹⁹ After noting the various modern English translations noted above, he adds, “When translating from the Tibetan, I render the terms as ‘inward emptiness,’ etc, in the hope that this gives at least a hint of the adverbial sense.” (1997:378)

The emptiness practice of the Mahā Suññata Sutta is presented as leading to the attainment of “the imperturbable” [§9d, 10d], that is, the fourth formless attainment. This stage of practice will be examined in the next section.

3 Kinds of liberation

3.1 THE IMPERTURBABLE (ANĒṆJA). The Vinaya Commentary glosses *āneñja* as *acala*, “unshaking, steady” (VA 157). The words *ānañja* (BHS *āniñjya*), *āṇañja*, *aneja*, *anejja*, *aneñja*, *aneja*, and *āneñja* are synonyms, with *iñjati* (Ved *ṛñjáte*, ts) as the verb and *iñjita* (ts) as the adjective.²⁰ The adjective “imperturbable” (*aniñjita*) [9d] is an important canonical technical term describing the fourth dhyana and the four formless attainments (*arūpa,samāpatti*) (MA 3:171).

¹⁷ See SD 11.3(7).

¹⁸ See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 2:292 passim) & **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.5/1:56 passim) = SD 10.1.

¹⁹ Skilling 1997:377-383.

²⁰ See CPD: *ānañja*; BHS: *āniñjya*.

However, in the **Sunakkhatta Sutta** (M 105) and the **Āneñja, sappāya Sutta** (M 106), only the fourth dhyana and the two lower formless attainments are discussed as “the imperturbable,”²¹ the higher two attainments are discussed separately elsewhere.²² All the states below the fourth dhyana are classified as “the perturbable” (*inījita*). It is interesting to note that even the attaining of “the imperturbable” does not guarantee one’s attaining even of stream-winning [§9d].

The Mahā Suññata Sutta Commentary on §9d says of the Buddha: “Thinking, I will become free both ways,”²³ he attends to the formless attainment and imperturbability (*āneñja, arūpa, samāpatti*) (MA 4:161).

3.2 TEMPORARY LIBERATION: AND UNCONDITIONAL LIBERATION. The expression “will be liberated both ways” (MA 4:161) mentioned above evidently refers to the liberation of mind that is temporary and pleasant [desirable] [1b above], or in the liberation of mind that is not temporary [unconditioned by time] and unshakable [4ab]. The former is liberation through the dhyanas and the formless attainments, the latter is liberation through the supramundane paths and fruits. **The Mahā Sārôpama Sutta** (M 29) mentions one who goes forth out of faith, reflecting on the nature of suffering, and in due course attains the unconditional liberation (*asamaya vimokkha*) (M 29.6/1:196).

The “unconditional unshakable liberation of mind” (*asāmāyikā akuppā ceto, vimutti*) is the freedom from the defilements and that has nothing to do with the temporal, that is, unconditioned by time. As such, it is freedom that is immovable and supramundane. It consists of “the four noble paths and the four fruits of recluseship” (ie the paths and fruits) (MA 4:159), which quoting **the Paṭisambhidā, magga** (Pm 2:40), adds nirvana.²⁴

3.3 THE 2 KINDS OF LIBERATION. More commonly, the two types of liberation are called the “liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom.” They are respectively *ceto, vimutti* (or, liberation by concentration) and *paññā, vimutti* (or, liberation by wisdom) (A 1:60). The one *liberated of mind* has destroyed all the mental hindrances, and as such could attain dhyana at will. The one *liberated by wisdom* “may not have reached the eight liberations (*vimokkha = jhāna*) in his own body, but through seeing with wisdom, his mental influxes are destroyed” (M 70.16/ 1:478).

All arhats are perfectly liberated in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain the eight liberations (*aṭṭha, vimokkha*), which include the four formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called **liberated both ways**, that is, liberated from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood.

Arhats like Sāriputta, Moggallāna, and Saḷha are “liberated both ways” (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*). The differences between the two types of liberation are given in **the Mahā, nidāna Sutta** (D 15)²⁵ and **the Kīṭāgiri Sutta** (M 70).²⁶

4 The Buddha and visitors

All the three versions of the Mahā Suññata Sutta recount how the Buddha treats his visitors by saying that he would instruct them with a mind bent on solitude. However, the Pali version stand alone in mentioning “kings, the kings’ chief ministers, other religious teachers, the disciples of other religious teachers” [§6]. The relevant Pali passage reads:

²¹ M 105.10/2:254 & M 106.3-9/2:262-264.

²² See V 3:4; cf M 2:229 where wrong views regarding the imperturbable are discussed.

²³ That is, the liberation of mind that is temporary and pleasant [desirable], or in the liberation of mind that is not temporary [unconditioned by time] and unshakable [4b].

²⁴ See M:NB 1224 n348.

²⁵ D 15.35/2:70 f = SD 5.17. See also D 3:262, 228; **Vimokkha S**, A 8.66/4:306; also M 120.37/3:103 = SD 3.4.37.

²⁶ M 70.16-17/1:477 f = SD 11.1 Intro 5.2(2A).

Tatr' Ānanda Tathāgato viveka, ninnen'eva cittena viveka, poṇena viveka, pabbhārena vūpakaṭṭhena nekkhammābhīratena vyanti, bhūtena sabbaso āsava-ṭṭhāniyehi dhammehi añña-d-atthu uyyojaniya, paṭisaṃyuttaṃ y'eva kathaṃ kattā hoti. (M 3:111 ≠ A 4:233)

In the last section—*añña-d-atthu uyyojaniya, paṭisaṃyutta y'eva kathaṃ kattā hoti*—the word **uyyojaniya** can be rendered in two ways: (1) to inspire, incite,²⁷ and (2) to dismiss.²⁸ The Commentary reading, *uyyojanika, paṭisaṃyuttaṃ*, explains that, in saying, “You may go!” the expression is thus connected with words of dismissal, *uyyojanikena vacanena*. The Commentary continues:

When the Blessed One, after a meal, having lain down (to rest) and then risen... went into the attainment of the fruits. At that time, the company assembled to hear the Dharma. The Blessed One... taught Dharma, and without letting pass the right time (to hear it), he *viveka, ninnena cittaṃ parisam uyyojeti*. (MA 4:160)

The Pali phrase here could be rendered in either of two ways: (1) “he inspired (them) with a mind bent on solitude,” or (2) “he dismissed (them) with a mind bent of solitude.” The verb **uyyojēti** itself is ambiguous,²⁹ and according to **IB Horner**

could mean either: with his mind tending to aloofness he dismissed the company; or: with his mind tending to aloofness he inspired the company... It is possible that *uyyojēti* should be understood in both its meanings: that the Lord incited the company to seek aloofness for themselves and also dismissed them in order that they might do so. If we were to take *uyyojēti* only as ‘he dismisses,’ this would imply a certain selfishness on the Lord’s part, and the AA (4:122) is apparently against this: *tesaṃ upaṭṭhāna, gamanakaṃ yevā ti attho*, the meaning is going to their service (ie helping them). (M:H 3:154 n8)

Horner³⁰ goes on to point out that the phrase *añña-d-atthu uyyojaniya, paṭisaṃyutta y'eva kathaṃ kattā hoti*³¹ also occurs in the **(Mahā, purisa, vitakka) Anuruddha Sutta** (A 8.30),³² where the Commentary gives a different explanation, saying that the phrase *uyyojaniya, paṭisaṃyutta, kathaṃ* refers to talk that is going to be of support for the listeners (*tesaṃ upaṭṭhāna, gamanakaṃ*, AA 4:122). This alternative rendition, notes **Analayo**,

based on the meaning of *uyyojēti* as “inciting,” finds support in the Chinese and Tibetan parallels to M 122, as according to MĀ 191,³³ on such occasions, the Buddha would “speak Dharma to advise and help visitors, 說法勸助, and according to the Tibetan version in Skilling 1994: 202, 8, the Buddha would “exchange pleasant words” with the visitors and “proceed to give them a discourse on the Dhamma” [Analayo’s tr], *phan tshun kun dga' bar gtam 'dre bar smra, phebs par smra zhing chos kyi gtam yang zer ro*. This is in fact what one would expect, since the Buddha to talk to others with the intention of dismissing could seem to be, as Horner 1959:155 n8 remarks, “a certain selfishness” on his part. (Analayo 2005 ad M 3:112 n; citations normalized)

²⁷ *Dhammiyā kathāya sandassetvā samādhapetvā samuṭṭejetvā sampahaṃsetvā*: V 1:16, 30, 2:193, 3:138, 4:50, 93, 160, 235, 5:19; D 2:86, 3:209; S 4:183, 329; M 3:276; A 3:75, 5:182; J 3:265; U 87.

²⁸ V 1:179; M 1:524; A 3:75; J 1:119, 293, 3:188, 4:452, 5:217, 6:72.

²⁹ **Uyyojēti** (Skt *ud-yojayati*) is caus of *uyyujjati* (he goes away; makes effort, is active). SED: *ud-uyyuj* defines *udyojayati* (caus) only as “to excite, incite, make active or quick, stimulate to exertion.” BHSD however gives both meanings: (1) he dismisses (Sikṣ 56.2), and (2) Tib *brtson par hgyur* = (to be) made zealous. Edgerton (BHSD) also shows that the meaning depends on the context (p132). See also CPD: *uyyojēti*; DP: *uyyojana*; PED: *uyyojēti*.

³⁰ M:H 3:154 n8.

³¹ EM Hare renders this as “(he) entirely confines his talk to the subject of going apart” (A:H 4:158).

³² Ie the famous discourse in “the 8 thoughts of the great man,” A 8.30.21/4:233,33. See SD 5.18 Intro (5).

³³ MĀ 191 = T1.738b20.

A number of suttas report that the Buddha or Ānanda or a teacher as “having instructed (*sandassetvā*), inspired (*samādapetvā*), roused (*samuṭṭejetvā*) and gladdened (*sampahamsetvā*)... with a Dharma talk.”³⁴ This action sequence reflects the basic structure of the Buddha’s teaching method: (1) the Dharma is shown; (2) the listener/s are filled with enthusiasm; (3) they are fired with commitment; and (4) filled with joy.

The Commentaries³⁵ explain that by instructing, the Buddha dispels the listener’s **delusion**; by inspiring him, **heedlessness** is dispelled; by rousing him, **indolence** is dispelled; and by gladdening, brings the practice to a **conclusion**. In short, when we teach Dharma to benefit others, we should do our best to **bring instruction, inspiration, motivation and joy** to the listener. These four qualities are, in fact, the sixth or last of the ideal skills of a Dharma speaker.³⁶ Clearly here we see the Buddha far from dismissing his audience, but instructing them on the spiritual path.

However, the context of the Mahā Suññata Sutta is clear: it is about emptiness and solitude for the sake of personal development. Reflecting on the dual meaning of the word *uyyojeti*, as used in the Suttas, we can surmise, as Horner suggests, that here the Buddha both inspires his audience and also dismisses then in due course, so that the Dharma session does turn into a socializing session, but to spur one on for spiritual practice and realization. I have applied both these senses in my translation.

5 Related Suttas

The Mahā Suññata Sutta should be studied together with the **Cūḷa Suññata Sutta** (M 121) which opens with a mention of the Buddha’s own “abiding in emptiness” (*suññatā, vihāra*) (M 121.3/3:104), and goes on to elaborate the “truly real, undistorted, utterly pure descent into emptiness.”³⁷ **Choong Mun-keat** makes a useful observation on the relationship between the Cūḷa Suññata Sutta (M 121) and the Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 122), that in M 121 “the practice proceeds vertically, step by step...through the fading away of...perception in the process of practising emptiness” up to the apex of emptiness in the destruction of the influxes. M 122, however, “proceeds horizontally from inner to outer.” (1999:83)

The sutta should be studied with **the Laṭukikôpama Sutta** (M 66/1:447-456), especially M 66.17-34. In fact, §§30-34 elaborates on the various “imperturbable” states, that is, the formless states. The Laṭukikôpama Sutta Commentary gives detailed explanations of a number of important terms common to both suttas.³⁸

The section of “Teacher & Pupil” (especially §§19-24) should be studied with **the Lohicca Sutta** (D 12), where it is stated that wrong view leads one to one of two destinies: the hells or the animal kingdom. The sutta further mentions four kinds of teachers: the first three are false teachers, only the fourth is an accomplished one:

- (1) A teacher who is not accomplished in spiritual training; his pupils do not wish to listen to him.
- (2) A teacher who is not accomplished in spiritual training; his pupils listen to him.
- (3) A teacher who is accomplished in spiritual training; his pupils do not wish to listen to him.
- (4) A teacher who is accomplished in spiritual training; his pupils listen to him.

— — —

³⁴ V 1:18; D 1:126, 149, 2:86, 98, 109, 110, 127, 3:27, 209; M 1:209, 354, 2:139, 3:155; S 2:215, 3:95, 4:183, 5:155; A 3:380, 4:67, 118, 307 (x2), 5:122, 125; U 39, 82, 87.

³⁵ Eg DA 1:293; cf VA 1:65; MA 2:35.

³⁶ See LS Cousins, in his review of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (tr Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi) in JBE 4, 1997: 272, where gives a slightly different listing of the above.

³⁷ M 121.4/3:105 passim as refrain: *yathā, bhuccā avipallatthā parisuddhā suññatāvakkanti*.

³⁸ See, for example, §§3, 9d below.

The Greater Discourse on Emptiness

(M 122/3:109-118)

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyas in Nigrodha's Park³⁹ near Kapila, vatthu.

The crowded lodgings

2a Then, the Blessed One, having dressed himself in the morning and taking robe and bowl, entered Kapila, vatthu for alms.

Then the Blessed One, having gone into Kapila, vatthu for alms, having returned from the almsround and finished his meal, went to the dwelling of Kāla Khemaka⁴⁰ the Sakya for his midday rest.

Now, at that time, there were many lodgings⁴¹ prepared in the dwelling of Kāla Khemaka the Sakya.

Having seen that there were many lodgings [110] prepared in the dwelling of Kāla Khemaka the Sakya, the Blessed One thought:

“There are many lodgings prepared in the dwelling of Kāla Khemaka the Sakya. Do so many monks stay here?”

2b Now at that time, the venerable Ānanda, along with many monks, were⁴² busy making robes in the dwelling of Ghaṭāya the Sakya.⁴³

Then, the Blessed One, after rising from his retreat, went to Ghaṭāya the Sakya's dwelling, and sat down on the prepared seat. Seated thus, the Blessed One addressed the venerable Ānanda:

“Ānanda, there are many lodgings prepared in the dwelling of Kāla Khemaka the Sakya. Do so many monks stay here?”⁴⁴

2c “Yes, venerable sir, there are many lodgings prepared in the dwelling of Kāla Khemaka the Sakya. Many monks are staying there. Venerable sir, this is our robe-making time.”⁴⁵

³⁹ Comy on **Cūḷa Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 14) says that Nigrodha was a Sakya. He came to Kapilavatthu and made a dwelling for the Buddha in his own park, and presented it to him (MA 2:61).

⁴⁰ Khemaka was his name, and had a dark complexion (*kāḷa*) (MA 4:155).

⁴¹ “Lodgings” (*senāsana*). They were of various kinds, such as beds, stools, bolsters and pillows [Horner “mattresses”], straw mats, strips of hide, grass, leaves, branches, all laid out...touching one another; for this is where groups of monks were staying (*mañño pīṭhaṃ bhisi, bimbohanam taṭṭikā camma, khaṇḍo tiṇa, santhāro paṇṇa, santhāro palāla, santhāro ti-ādini paññattāni honti...āhacca ṭhapitāni, gaṇa, bhikkhūnam vasana-ṭ, ṭhāna, sadisaṃ ahoṣi*, MA 4:155).

⁴² “The venerable Ānanda...making robes,” *āyasmā Ānanda sambahulehi bhikkhūhi saddhim...cīvara, kamman karoti*. Here the verb is in the singular; but the English tr dictates a pl verb.

⁴³ Ghaṭāya. This is the only place it is mentioned. Nānamoli/Bodhi take his name as Ghāṭā, but the reading is the cpd *Ghaṭāya, sakkassa*, as followed by IB Horner (M:H 3:153) & Malalasekera (DPPN). Like Kāla Khemaka's dwelling, Ghaṭāya's was also built in Nigrodha's Park monastery (MA 4:157). See Skilling 1997:372 for a discussion.

⁴⁴ Comy explains that this is merely a rhetorical question, since the Buddhas can know by direct knowledge whatever they wish to know. The Buddha asks this with the thought: “As soon as these monks form into a group and delight in the group, they will act improperly. I shall expound the discourse called the practice of great emptiness (*mahā, suññatā, paṭipattim nāma suttantam*) which, like a city gate or like a mirror for the whole body, will be like a training-rule for those noble youths who delight in training.” (MA 4:156). All the versions agree on this: that a large group of monks have gathered together at Ghaṭāya the Sakya's residence, behaving presumably in an excessively sociable manner. Only the Tibetan version differs in saying that many monks have left Kāla Khemaka's residence, leaving many sitting mats (Tib *stan* = *āsana*) spread out in the open (Tib *bla gab med par* = *abhyavakāśam*)—indicating the heedlessness of these monks. Skilling notes that “indeed the wording of the Tibetan *Mahāśūnyatā* brings to mind the 14th and 15th *pāyantikā* of the Prātimokṣa” (1997:373 f). However, the Vinaya of both the Theravāda and of the Mūlasarvāstivāda (which differ from one another) do not refer to this incident.

⁴⁵ Comy: Ānanda intends to say: “These monks are living in this manner not that they delight in being busy, but on account of their making robes” (MA 4:158).

Wrong livelihood: Where a monk shines or not

3 “Ānanda, a monk does not shine [is not beautiful]⁴⁶ who delights in company, who enjoys company, who is devoted to delighting in company; who delights in the group, who enjoys the group, devoted to delighting in the group.⁴⁷ Indeed, Ānanda, for a monk who delights in company, who enjoys company, who is devoted to delighting in company; who delights in the group, who enjoys the group, devoted to delighting in the group, it is not possible that he would attain, at will, without difficulty, the joy of letting-go of sense-pleasures,⁴⁸ the joy of solitude,⁴⁹ the joy of peace,⁵⁰ the joy of self-awakening.⁵¹

But, Ānanda, for a monk who lives alone, away from company, it is expected⁵² that he would attain, at will, without difficulty, the joy of letting-go of sense-pleasures, the joy of solitude, the joy of peace, the joy of self-awakening⁵³—this is possible.

4a Indeed, Ānanda, for a monk who delights in company, who enjoys company, who is devoted to delighting in company; who delights in the group, who enjoys the group, devoted to delighting in the group, it is not possible he would ever attain and abide in either the liberation of mind that is temporary and pleasant [desirable],⁵⁴ or in the liberation of mind that is not temporary [unconditioned by time] and unshakable.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ “Shines” (*sobhati*) in the Buddha’s teaching (MA 4:158).

⁴⁷ “Company,” *saṅgaṇika*; “the group,” *gaṇa*.” Comy explains that “**company**” (*saṅgaṇika*) as a gathering of one’s own group, while “**the group**” (*gaṇa*) is a gathering of various persons, or “society” (MA 4:158). The phrase thus far is found in **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) where it is given as the 4th condition of the 2nd set of 7 conditions for non-decline (*aparahāṇiya, dhammā*): “Monks, so long as monks do not delight in company, do not find pleasure in company, are not caught up with delight in company, then, monks, growth for the monks is to be expected, not their decline.” (D 16.1.7/2:78). See SD 9.

⁴⁸ MA 4:158. It is noteworthy, say **Analayo**, that MĀ 191 = T1.738a24 refers to this *nekkhamma, sukha* (M 122.3/3:110,20) as 無欲之樂, lit “happiness of no desire,” while the Tibetan version in **Skilling** 1994:196,3 speaks of “going forth happiness” (Analayo’s tr), *nges par ‘byung ba’i bde ba dang*. Bapat 1969:3 remarks that the use of 無欲 shows awareness of the correct form *naiṣkāmya*, instead of the form *naiṣkramya* found regularly in later Buddhist texts (cf eg Lalitavistara in Lefmann 1902:136,8 or the Mahāvastu in Senart 1882a:173,13); a form which underlies the Tibetan rendering as “going forth”. (Analayo 2005 ad M 3:111 n). Comy glosses *nekkhamma, sukha* as *kāmato nikkhantassa sukhaṃ*, “happiness of the giving up of sense-pleasure” (MA 4:158). Unfortunately, although I found *naiṣkramya* in BHSD and in SED, I was unable to locate *naiṣkāmya* in either; but cf PED: *nekkhamma*.

⁴⁹ That is, aloofness from sense-pleasures (MA 4:158).

⁵⁰ This peace conduces to allaying lust, ill will and ignorance (see MA 4:158).

⁵¹ *Yan taṃ nekkhamma, sukhaṃ paviveka, sukhaṃ upasama, sukhaṃ sambodha, sukhaṃ, tassa sukhassa nikāma, -lābhī bhavissati akicchā, lābhī akasira, lābhī ti, n’etaṃ iṭhānaṃ vijjati*. See **Laṭukikôpama S** (M 66), where the Buddha says that such joy “should be pursued, that it should be cultivated, that it should be developed, that it should not be feared” (M 66.21/1:444). Comy there explains the dhyanas as *nekkhamma, sukha* (the joy of the letting-go of sense-pleasures) because they bring the bliss from renouncing sense-pleasures; as *paviveka, sukha* (the joy of solitude) because they bring the bliss of being aloof from the crowd and from defilements; as *upasama, sukha* (the joy of peace) because their bliss is for the purpose of quieting down the defilements; and as *sambodha, sukha* (the joy of self-awakening) because their bliss is for the purpose of awakening” (MA 4:158). The dhyanas by themselves, however, are not states of awakening.

⁵² *Pāṭikaṅkham*.

⁵³ This conduces to the attaining the goal of awakening to the path (MA 4:158).

⁵⁴ “The liberation of mind that is temporary and pleasant” (*sāmāyikā kantā ceto vimutti*). The concentrated mind is free from the defilements. Comy qu Pm 2:40 says that this temporary liberation consists in the attainment of the 4 dhyanas and the 4 formless bases (MA 4:158). See **Mahā Sārôpama S** (M 29.6/1:196 f; M:H 1:243).

⁵⁵ “The liberation of mind...unshakable,” *sāmāyikāṃ vā kantaṃ ceto vimuttiṃ upasampajja viharissati asāmāyikāṃ vā akuppan ti*. The former is liberation through the dhyanas and the formless attainments, the latter is liberation through the supramundane paths and fruits. **Mahā Sārôpama S** (M 29) mentions one who goes forth out of faith, reflecting on the nature of suffering, and in due course he attains the unconditional liberation (*asamaya vimokkha*) (M 29.6/1:196).

4b TWO KINDS OF LIBERATION. But, Ānanda, for a monk who lives alone, away from company, it is expected that he would attain and abide either in [111] the liberation of mind that is temporary and pleasant [desirable], or in the liberation of mind that is not temporary [unconditional] and unshakable.⁵⁶

Right mindfulness: The true nature of form

5 Ānanda, I do not see a single form,⁵⁷ from the change and alteration of which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, (physical) pain, (mental) displeasure, and despair in one who lusts for it and delights in it.

6 THE BUDDHA'S OWN ABIDING IN EMPTINESS. However, Ānanda, there is this abode awakened to by the Tathagata [Thus Come],⁵⁸ namely, that having attained and abiding in emptiness internally [in the inner emptiness]⁵⁹ by not attending to any meditation sign.

Now, Ānanda, if while the Tathagata is abiding in this manner, he is visited by monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, kings, the kings' chief ministers, other religious teachers, the disciples of other religious teachers, then with a mind bent on solitude, leaning towards solitude, inclining towards solitude, mentally aloof (from distractions), delighting in letting-go of sense-pleasures, and totally done with things that are the bases for mental influxes,⁶⁰ he is one who only speaks in connection with rousing them to wholesome action and with inspiring them (and of dismissing them).⁶¹

7a Therefore, Ānanda, if a monk were to wish: 'May I attain and abide in emptiness within [the inner emptiness],'⁶² then, Ānanda, he should steady his mind internally, quiet it down, make it one-pointed, concentrate it.

Right concentration: The 4 dhyanas

7b And how, Ānanda, does the monk steady his mind internally, quiet it down, make it one-pointed, concentrate it?

8a Here, Ānanda, the monk, having abandoned the five mental hindrances,⁶³ imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom,⁶⁴ quite detached from sensual pleasures, detached from unwholesome mental

⁵⁶ *Asāmāyikā akuppā ceto, vimutti*. This is freedom from the defilements and that has nothing to do with the temporal, ie unconditioned by time. As such, it is freedom that is immovable and supramundane. It consists of "the 4 noble paths and the 4 fruits of recluseship" (ie the paths and fruits) (MA 4:159), qu Pm 2:40 where nirvana is added.

⁵⁷ Comy glosses with "body" (*sarīra*) (MA 4:159).

⁵⁸ Comy: The Buddha begins with this passage to prevent any criticism that while he enjoins his disciples to live in solitude, he himself is often surrounded by a large retinue. "Emptiness" here refers to the fruition attainment of emptiness. **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121) opens with a mention of the Buddha's own "abiding in emptiness" (*suññatā, -vihāra*) (M 121.3/3:104), and where this section is elaborated.

⁵⁹ "Abiding in emptiness internally" (*ajjhataṃ suññatam... viharitum*), ie, he is as if alone, though sitting in the midst of company (MA 4:159). Cf §9a. See Intro (2).

⁶⁰ "Mental influxes," *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit "inflow, outflow") comes from *ā-savati* "flows towards" (ie either "into" or "out" towards the observer). It has been variously translated as influxes, taints ("deadly taints", RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kām'āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'āsava*), (3) wrong views (*dīṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as "floods" (*ogha*) and "yokes" (*yoga*). The list of three influxes (omitting the influx of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

⁶¹ *Tatr' Ānanda Tathāgato viveka, ninnen'eva cittena viveka, poṇena viveka, pabbhārena vūpakaṭṭhena nekkham-mābhiratena vyanti, bhūtena sabbaso āsava-ṭṭhāniyehi dhammehi añña-d-atthu uyyojaniya, paṭisamiyuttam y'eva katham kattā hoti* (M 3:111 ≠ A 4:233). On the difficulty of this passage, see Intro (4).

⁶² "Then, Ānanda... (should) concentrate it," *ten' Ānanda bhikkhunā ajjhataṃ eva citta. saṇṭhapetabbaṃ sanni-sādetabbaṃ ekodikātabbaṃ samādahātabbaṃ*. This latter sentence very similar to the one in **Dvedhā, vitakka S** (M 19.10/1:116) & A 2:94.

states, enters and remains in **the first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*), accompanied by zest (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*), born of solitude [ie *samādhi*]. He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the zest and happiness born of solitude.

8b Furthermore, Ānanda, the monk, with the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, enters and remains in **the second dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration.⁶⁵ He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the zest and happiness born of concentration.

8c And furthermore, Ānanda, the monk, with the fading away of zest, remains equanimous, mindful and fully aware, and experiences happiness with the body. He enters and remains in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’ He permeates and pervades, suffuses and fills this very body with the happiness free from zest.

8d And furthermore, Ānanda, the monk, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain—and with the earlier disappearance of joy and grief—enters and abides in **the fourth dhyana**, that is neither pleasant nor painful and contains mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.

This is how, Ānanda, the monk steadies his mind internally, quiets it down, brings it to one-pointedness, concentrates it. [112]

THE PATH OF STREAM-WINNING⁶⁶

Wrong concentration: Attending to emptiness and the imperturbable

9a He attends to **emptiness internally**.⁶⁷ While he attends to emptiness internally, his mind does not rejoice in [does not plunge into] the emptiness internally, nor does he brighten with faith, nor is he mentally steadied, nor is he liberated.

When it is thus, Ānanda, the monk knows thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness internally, my mind did not rejoice in [did not plunge into] the emptiness internally, nor did I brighten with faith, nor was I mentally steadied, nor was I liberated.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

9b He attends to **emptiness externally**.⁶⁸ While he attends to emptiness externally, his mind does not rejoice in [does not plunge into] emptiness externally, nor does he brighten with faith, nor is he mentally steadied, nor is he liberated.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk knows thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness externally, my mind did not rejoice in [did not plunge into] emptiness externally, nor did I brighten with faith, nor was I mentally steadied, nor was I liberated.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

⁶³ “The five mental hindrances,” *pañca, nīvaraṇā*, are: (1) sensual lust (*kāma-c, chanda*); (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*); (3) sloth and torpor (*thīna, middha*); (4) restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca, kukkucca*); (5) doubt (*vicikicchā*) (A 3:62; Vbh 378). For detailed study, see *Pañca, nīvaraṇa: the Five Mental Hindrances* = SD 32.1 & SD 32; also (*Nīvaraṇā*) *Saṅgārava S* (S 46.55) = SD 3.12 & *Anīvaraṇa S* (S 46.38b) = SD 2.2(5).

⁶⁴ “That weaken wisdom,” *paññāya dubbalī, karaṇe*. Since the mental hindrances prevent one from seeing the truth and weaken one’s wisdom, they have to be overcome.

⁶⁵ The 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya, tuṇhī, bhāva*) because within it initial application and sustained application (thinking and discursion, *vitakka, vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur (S 2:273); cf. S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī, saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In *Ariya, pariyesanā S* (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate).

⁶⁶ See Intro (1.5).

⁶⁷ “Internally,” ie, to his own sense-spheres (*gocar’ajjhataṃ eva*), or his own 5 aggregates (MA 1:161). See §6 & n above. See also Intro (2).

⁶⁸ That is, to the 5 aggregates of another person (MA 4:161).

9c He attends to **emptiness internally and externally**.⁶⁹ While he attends to emptiness internally and externally, his mind does not rejoice in [does not plunge into] emptiness internally and externally, nor does he brighten with faith, nor is he mentally steadied, nor is he liberated.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk knows thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness internally and externally, my mind did not rejoice in [did not plunge into] emptiness externally, nor did I brighten with faith, nor was I mentally steadied, nor was I liberated.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

9d He attends to **the imperturbable**.⁷⁰ While he attends to the imperturbable, his mind does not rejoice in [does not plunge into] the imperturbable, nor does he brighten with faith, nor is he mentally steadied, nor is he liberated.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk knows thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to the imperturbable, my mind did not rejoice in [did not plunge into] the imperturbable, nor did I brighten with faith, nor was I mentally steadied, nor was I liberated.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

Right concentration: Liberation through emptiness and the imperturbable

10a Then, Ānanda, that monk should steady his mind internally, quiet it down, make it one-pointed, concentrate it on that same concentration sign as before.⁷¹

He attends to **emptiness internally**. While he attends to emptiness internally, his mind rejoices in [plunges into] the emptiness internally, he brightens with faith, he is mentally steadied, he is liberated.

When it is thus, Ānanda, the monk knows thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness internally, my mind rejoiced in [plunged into] the emptiness internally, I brightened with faith, I was mentally steadied, I was liberated.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

10b He attends to **emptiness externally**. While he attends to emptiness externally, his mind rejoices in [plunges into] emptiness externally, he brightens with faith, he is mentally steadied, he is liberated.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk knows thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness externally, my mind rejoiced in [plunged into] emptiness externally, I brightened with faith, I was mentally steadied, I was liberated.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

10c He attends to **emptiness internally and externally**. While he attends to emptiness internally and externally, his mind rejoices in [plunges into] emptiness internally and externally, he brightens with faith, he is mentally steadied, he is liberated.

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk knows thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to emptiness internally and externally, my mind rejoiced in [plunged into] emptiness externally, I brightened with faith, I was mentally steadied, I was liberated.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

10d He attends to **the imperturbable**. While he attends to the imperturbable, his mind rejoices in [plunges into] the imperturbable, he brightens with faith, he is mentally steadied, he is liberated.

⁶⁹ That is, sometimes to himself, sometimes to another (MA 1:161). This “internal/external/internal-external” pattern is also found in connection with mindfulness practice in **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 2:292 passim) & **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.5/1:56 passim). See SD 10.1 Intro (5). See §9a n above.

⁷⁰ “The imperturbable,” *āneñja* or *ānañja*, ie the 4th formless attainment. Comy says of the Buddha, “Thinking, I will become free both ways,” he attends to the formless attainment and imperturbability, *āneñja, arūpa, samāpatti* (MA 4:161). See Intro (3a).

⁷¹ Comy: This refers to the dhyana that was used as the basis for insight. If, after emerging from the basic dhyana, his mind does not enter into emptiness through insight contemplation on his own aggregates or those of others, and he also cannot attain the imperturbably formless attainment, he should return and attend to it again and again. (MA 4:161).

When this is the case, Ānanda, the monk knows thus:

‘Indeed, while I attended to the imperturbable, my mind rejoiced in [plunged into] the imperturbable, I brightened with faith, I was mentally steadied, I was liberated.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

Right mindfulness: Minding the four postures⁷²

11a Ānanda, that monk abides thus, when his mind is inclined to walking, he walks, thinking:

‘While I am walking thus, neither covetousness nor displeasure,⁷³ neither evil nor unwholesome states, [113] will overpower me.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.⁷⁴

11b Ānanda, that monk abides thus, when his mind is inclined to standing, he stands, thinking:

‘While I am standing thus, neither covetousness nor displeasure, neither evil nor unwholesome states, will overpower me.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

11c Ānanda, that monk abides thus, when his mind is inclined to sitting down, he sits down, thinking:

‘While I am sitting down thus, neither covetousness nor displeasure, neither evil nor unwholesome states, will overpower me.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

11d Ānanda, that monk abides thus, when his mind is inclined to lying down, he lies down, thinking:

‘While I am lying down thus, neither covetousness nor displeasure, neither evil nor unwholesome states, will overpower me.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

⁷² This whole section expands on the mindfulness of the 4 postures briefly stated in **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22.3/-2:292 = M10.6/1:56 f) = SD 13.

⁷³ “Covetousness and displeasure,” *abhijjhā, domanassa*, which Walshe (1995:335 & n632) renders as “hankering and fretting for the world”; alt tr “longing and displeasure” or “longing and loathing.” MA says that covetousness and displeasure signify the first two hindrances—sensual desire and ill will—principal hindrances to be overcome for the practice to succeed. They thus represent the contemplation of mind-objects, which begins with the 5 hindrances. Cf M 1:274/39.13; see also **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22.13) and **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.36) on how to deal with the hindrances in one’s meditation. The monk effects the abandoning of the hindrances by the contemplations of impermanence, fading away (of lust), cessation (of suffering) and letting go (of defilements), and thus comes to look upon the object with equanimity. On *abhijjhā, domanassa*, there is an interesting related passage from **Pubba or Pubb’eva Sambodha S**: “Monks, before my awakening, when I was still a bodhisattva, this thought occurred to me... ‘Whatever physical and mental joy (*sukha, somanassa*) there is in the world, that is the gratification (*assāda*) in the world; that the world is impermanent, suffering and of the nature to change, that is the wretchedness (*ādīnava*) in the world—the removal and abandoning of desire and lust for the world, that is the escape from the world’.” (A 1:258/ 3.101, pointed out to me by Robert Eddison). My understanding here regarding the naming of the first two mental hindrances as *abhijjhā, domanassa* is to show that with their elimination the other hindrances are eliminated, too—a view confirmed by Ajahn Brahmavamso (30 March 2003). This is further confirmed by the Comys: “But here since taking *abhijjhā* includes *kāma-c, chanda*, and taking *domanassa* includes *vyāpāda*, therefore it should be understood that the abandoning of the hindrances is spoken of by indicating the pair that is strong among those items that make up the hindrances” (DA 3:759 = MA 1:244 = VbhA 220). Here Gethin adds a parenthetical note: “The taking of *domanassa* includes *vyāpāda* because all *citt[ā]* rooted in aversion is accompanied by unpleasant mental feeling.” (2001:49 f & n95).

⁷⁴ “Fully aware,” ie, to this meditation exercise (*kamma-t, thāna*) (MA 4:162).

THE PATH OF ONCE-RETURN⁷⁵Right speech

12a Ānanda, for that monk abides thus, when his mind is inclined to **talking**, he resolves:

ANIMAL TALK.⁷⁶ ‘Such chatter that is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial, and that does not lead to disillusionment, to fading away [of lust],⁷⁷ to ending [of suffering],⁷⁸ to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana; that is to say, talk about kings, robbers, ministers of state, armies, danger, and wars [battles], about food and drink, about clothing, beds [furniture], garlands and scents, about relatives, about vehicles, about villages, towns, cities, and the countryside, about women and men, [D 1:8] gossips of the street and at the well, tales of the dead, tales of diversity [philosophical discussions of the past and future], talk about the creation of the world and of the sea, and talk of whether things exist or not [or, talk about gain and loss]⁷⁹—I shall not utter such talk.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

12b But, Ānanda, he resolves:

THE TEN BASES OF DISCOURSES.⁸⁰ ‘Such talk, Ānanda, concerning austerity [effacement], conducing as a support for mind’s release, and that leads to complete disillusionment, to fading away [of lust], to ending [of suffering], to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana; that is to say, talk about wanting little, talk about contentment, talk about solitude, talk about aloofness from company, talk about arousing effort, talk about moral virtue, talk about mental concentration, talk about wisdom, talk about liberation, talk about the knowledge and vision of liberation—I shall utter such talk.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

Right intention

13a Ānanda, for that monk abides thus, [114] when his mind is inclined to **thinking**, he resolves:

‘Such thought that is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, not beneficial, and that does not lead to disillusionment, to fading away [of lust], to ending [of suffering], to nirvana, that is to say, thoughts of sense-desire, thoughts of ill will, thoughts of cruelty—I shall not think such thoughts.

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

13b But, Ānanda, he resolves:

⁷⁵ See Intro (1.5).

⁷⁶ Although unstated, this is *tiracchāna, kathā*, or “animal talk,” as animals mostly walk parallel to the ground, so this kind of talk does not lead on upwards. On destiny of wrong views, see **Lohicca S** (D 12.10/1:228). See V 1:188; D 1:7 f, 178, 3:36; M 1:113, 513, 2:1, 23; S 5:419; A 5:128; also D:RD 3:33; S:W 5:355; A:W 5:86. At DA 89, *gehasita, kathā* (householder talk) is grouped with *tiracchāna, kathā*. See Pācittiya 85 where the group of 6 monks indulged in such talk (V 4:163); see V:H 3:82 nn.

⁷⁷ *Virāga* also “fading away of lust” or “dispassion” (see §21).

⁷⁸ *Nirodha* (see §21).

⁷⁹ *Iti, bhavābhāva, kathā*, may be rendered as “being and non-being” or as “profit and loss,” but according to Walshe, the philosophical sense (as in Horner and Ñāṇamoli translations of *Sandaka S*, M 76) is preferable.

⁸⁰ These *dasa kathā, vatthu* are listed in **Ratha, vinīta S** (M 24.2c/1:145), **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122.12/3:113); **Vatthu Kathā S 1** (A 10.49/5:129). In **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122), this list is preceded by the stock, “Such talk concerning austerity [effacement], conducing as a support for mind’s release, and that leads to complete disillusionment, to fading away [of lust], to ending [of suffering], to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana; that is to say, ...” (WT *Yā ca kho ayam, ānanda, kathā abhisallekhikā ceto, vinīvaraṇa, sappāyā* [Ce Se Ke *ceto, vicāraṇa, asappāyā*; Ee *ceto, vivaraṇa, sappāyā*] *ekantanibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati, seyyathidaṃ*) (M 122.12/3:113) = SD 11.4. Cf (**Sāriputta**) **Susīma S** (S 2.29/-1:63). Some of these qualities are mentioned separately, eg **Jiṇṇa S** (S 16.5) says that this passage constitutes Mahā Kassapa’s lion-roar regarding his forest-dwelling (S 16.5/2:202); so too in **Mahā Gosīṅga S** (M 32), he describes the ideal monk in the same terms; **Piṇḍola S** (U 4.6/42 f); **Vaṅganta, putta Upasena Tha** (Tha 581).

‘Such thoughts that are noble and leading onward (to nirvana), that lead the one who practises thus to the utter destruction of suffering,⁸¹ that is to say, thoughts of letting-go of sense-pleasures, thoughts of non-ill will, thoughts of non-violence—I shall think such thoughts.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

THE PATH OF NON-RETURN

The five cords of sense-desire⁸²

14 Ānanda, there are these **five cords of sense-desire**.⁸³ What are the five?

- (1) Forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
- (2) Sounds cognizable by the ear that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
- (3) Smells cognizable by the nose that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
- (4) Tastes cognizable by the tongue that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sense-desire, arousing lust.
- (5) Touches cognizable by the body that are wished for, desirable, agreeable and pleasing, connected with sensual desire, arousing lust.

These, monks, are the five cords of sense-desire.⁸⁴

15a Here, Ānanda, a monk should constantly review his own mind, thus:

‘Do any of these five cords of sense-desire arise in my mind through a sense-base or not?’⁸⁵

⁸¹ “That lead...to the utter destruction of suffering,” *niyyanti* (*niyyāti*) *tak, karassa sammā, dukkha-k, khayāya*, is stock (M 1:68, 81, 322, etc). Horner suggests that *takkarassa* (of one doing thus) “would be better rendered as ‘thinker’.” (M:H 3:157 n4).

⁸² §14 is stock = **Mahā Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 13.8/1:85 f) = **Cūḷa Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 14.7/1:92) = **Arāṇa, vibhaṅga S** (M 139.9/3:234). The word *kāma* (sense-desire) is also tr as “sensual pleasure” and may refer to either the subjective defilement (*kilesa*) or the object of desire (*vatthu*) (Nm 1,1, Vbh 256, DhsA 62; cf A 3:410 f). “**Five cords of sense-desire**” (*pañca kāma, guṇa*), so called because they are the objects of the five physical senses (V 1:3, 17, 225, 293, 3:111; D 1:172, 2:243, 245, 3:60, 238; M 1:47, 85, 3:234; S 1:9, 132; A 3.411; Dh 48, 415; Sn 436; Tha 254; J 3:466, 4:172, 173, 469. 6:127; Ap 547; Nm 1; Vbh 256; Mvst 3.417.2; MA 1:199, 131, 2:261). They are also the qualities of desire, ie, that which brings pleasure to the senses, or desirable sense-experience, as listed in the passage here. They are “cords” (*guṇa*) because they bind one to them, and they “multiply” (*guṇa*) themselves as a result, binding one ever tighter to them. *Kāma* is also desire personified, ie the god of love, sometimes identified with Māra (Tha 3.88; BA 289). It is interesting to note here that there is no “mental pleasure” (*somanassa*) in the list. Such mental pleasures generally arise through mental focus or meditation, and as such are not regarded as *guṇa*, insofar as they provide a lasting sense of satisfaction and inner peace that lead to letting-go. See Intro (1.5).

⁸³ Comy: Up to this point, the Buddha has shown the training for the attainment of the first 2 paths, those of streamwinning and once-return. He now speaks this passages [14-15] to point out the insight needed to attain to **the path of non-return** (*anāgāmi, magga*) that culminates in the abandoning of sense-desire. (MA 4:163)

⁸⁴ **Skilling** (1997:388 f) notes that the Tibetan version “has several statements not found in the Pāli:” In 11.2 (of the Tib version), the Buddha declares: “I do not say, Ānanda, that there is arousal in the mind apart from the five cords of sense-desire (*pañca kāma, guṇa*).” If a monk realizes that his mind is aroused by one or the other of the five cords of sense-desire (§11.3; cf Pali §15b), he should, with regard to the cords of sense-desire, dwell seeing impermanence, decay, dispassion, cessation, release (*anīya kṣaya virāga nirodha niḥsaraṇa*) (§11.4). When he does so (the whole list is repeated), his mind will no longer be aroused by any of the five cords of sense-desires (§11.5).

⁸⁵ *Atthi nu kho me imesu pañcasu kāma, guṇesu aññatarasmim vā aññatarasmim vā āyatane uppajjati cetaso samudācāro ti?* lit ‘Is there an occurrence of any of these five cords of sense-desire arising in my mind through a sense-base or not?’ Here, the Buddha distinguishes between **two levels of sense-experience**: that of “the five cords of sensual pleasure” (*pañca, kāma, guṇa*) [16], that is, the level of the worldling, and “the five aggregates of clinging” (*pañc’upādāna-k, khandha*), that is, the level of the practitioner. The five cords of sensual pleasure have a “binding” or “grasping” effect on one who enjoys them. The five aggregates of clinging, on the other hand, are natural states

15b If, Ānanda, when reviewing, a monk knows thus,
 ‘One or other of these five cords of sense-desire do arise in my mind through a sense-base,’
 then he knows,
 ‘The lustful desire for these five cords of sense-desire has not been abandoned in me.’
 In this way, he is fully aware of them.

15c If, Ānanda, when reviewing, a monk knows thus,
 ‘None of these five cords of sense-desire arise in my mind through any sense-base,’
 then he knows,
 ‘The lustful desire for these five cords of sense-desire has been abandoned in me.’
 In this way, he is fully aware of them.

THE PATH OF ARHATHOOD

Right view: The five aggregates⁸⁶

16 Ānanda, there are **these five aggregates of clinging**,⁸⁷ regarding which a monk should dwell contemplating rise and fall in them,⁸⁸

‘Such is form; such is its arising; such is its disappearance.
 Such is feeling; such is its arising; such is its disappearance.
 Such is perception; such is its arising; such is its disappearance.
 Such are formations; [115] such is their arising; such is their disappearance.
 Such is consciousness; such is its arising; such is its disappearance.’

17 When he dwells contemplating rise and fall in these five aggregates of clinging, the conceit ‘I am’ on account of the five aggregates clinging is abandoned.

When this is the case, he knows thus:

‘The conceit “I am” on account of the five aggregates of clinging has been abandoned.’

In this way, he is fully aware of them.

18 Ānanda, these states are concerned solely with the wholesome (in fruition).⁸⁹ They are noble, supramundane, and unreachable by the evil one.

that arise and fall away moment to moment. If a practitioner watches this rise and fall, he would abandon the “I am” conceit, and as such be free from the grip of Māra [17].

⁸⁶ “**The five aggregates of clinging**,” *pañc’upādāna-k,khandha*, namely, form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*sankhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) (S 3:47 Vbh 1). The aggregates of clinging (*upādāna-k,khandha*) are more fully called “the five groups of existence which form the objects of clinging” (Vism 14.214 f/477 f). **Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47 f) defines the aggregates of clinging as being “with influxes, subject to clinging” (*sāsava upādānīya*). According to the Abhidhamma, all forms (*rūpā*) are classified as “with influxes, subject to clinging,” and so too the resultant (*vipāka*) and functional (*kiriya*) mental aggregates of the arhat (Dhs 1103, 1219). The only aggregates that are “without influxes, not subject to clinging” (*anāsava anupādānīya*) are the four mental aggregates occurring in the cognitive moments of the four supramundane paths and fruits (Dhs 1104, 1220). The reason for this is that *sāsava* and *upādānīya* do not mean “accompanied by influxes and by clinging,” but “capable of being taken as objects of the influxes and of clinging.” Moreover, the arhat’s mundane aggregates can be taken as objects of the influxes and of clinging by *others* (DhsA 347).⁸⁶ The Saṃyutta Comy says that while the form aggregate is of the sense-sphere, the other four aggregates are of the four spheres (sense sphere, form sphere, formless sphere, supramundane) (SA 2:270). See Intro (1.5).

⁸⁷ These two passages [16-17] point out the insight needed for the path of arhathood that culminates in the abandoning of the conceit “I am” (MA 4:163). These passages should be contrasted with those on “the 5 cords of sense-desires” [14-15]: see n at §15a.

⁸⁸ “In them,” *yattha*.

⁸⁹ “Concerned...with the wholesome,” *kusalāyatikā*. Comy glosses as *kusalato āgatā*, coming from the wholesome (MA 4:163). Horner, however, notes that “the sense of the exegesis and of the vll seems to be ‘leading on (step by step) to what is skilled’” (M:H 3:158 n3).

TEACHER & PUPIL⁹⁰Right speech: Looking up to the right teacher

19 What do think, Ānanda? What good does a disciple see in the teacher so as to be worthy of his devotion even if he [the disciple] is told to leave [is rejected]?⁹¹

“Venerable sir, our teachings are rooted in the Blessed One, guided by the Blessed One, has the Blessed One as refuge. It would be good indeed if the Blessed One were to explain its meaning. Having heard the Blessed One, the monks would remember it.”⁹²

20a “Ānanda, a disciple should not regard the teacher as being worthy of his devotion [fit to be followed] for the sake of the exposition of sutras [formulas] or of geyas [hymns].⁹³

Why is the reason for this?

For a long time, Ānanda, you have learned the Dharma, remembered it, recited it, examined it, and well understood it as a view.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ This section should be studied with **Lohicca S** (D 12/1:224-234) & “The Teacher or the Teaching?” (SD 3.14). See Intro (1.5, 3).

⁹¹ “Told to leave,” *panujjamāno*, ie rejected, as at **Vana,pattha S** (M 17.26/1:108).

⁹² *Bhagavaṃ mūlakā no bhante dhammā Bhagavaṃ nettikā Bhagavaṃ paṭisaraṇā. Sādhū vata bhante Bhagavantaṃ yeva paṭibhātu etassa bhāsitaṃ attho. Bhagavato sutvā bhikkhū dhāressanti ti*, at **Mahā Dhamma, samādāna S** (M 46.2/1:309 f), **Vīmaṃsaka S** (M 47.3/1:317), **Naḷakapāna S** (M 68.8/1:465), **Mahā Suññata S** (M 122.19/3:115) = SD 11.4; **Bālena Paṇḍita S** (S 2:24) = SD 21.1, **Parivīmaṃsanā S** (S 12.51/2:81) = SD 11.5, **Candūpama S** (S 16.3/2:199), **Sammāsambuddha S** (S 22.58/3:66), **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.6/4:208) = SD 5.5, **Ānanda S 2** (S 36.16/4:221); A 3.68/1:199, A 8.6/4:158, A 8.83/4:338, A 9.1/4:351, A 10.58/5:106, A 11.20/5:355.

⁹³ *Na kho Ānanda arahati sāvako satthāraṃ anubandhituṃ yadidaṃ suttaṃ geyyaṃ veyyākaraṇassa hetu*. It is unlikely that the passage here is concerned with the listing of the canonical texts, “but,” says Analayo, it “simply spoke of following the teacher for the sake of getting further ‘explanations’ of a ‘discourse’,” conjecturing that the original reading might have been *suta, veyyākaraṇassa hetu* or *suta, veyyākaraṇassa sotuṃ*. (2005 ad M 3:115 n). Although there are isolated occasions, such as at the close of **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18.22/1:114 = SD 6.14), where the discourse is called a *sutta*, the Buddha and the early saints usually referred to their teachings as *dhamma*. The notion of *sutta* as a finalized sermon or text is a post-Buddha development. It should further be noted that only *sutta* and *geyyā* are mentioned here, but the later Canon often mentions “the 9 limbs of the Teacher’s teaching” or “the Teacher’s 9-factored teaching” (*nav’āṅga satthu, sāsana*), comprising of (1) *sutta* (discourses, Sutta Nipāta prose section, Niddesa, Vinaya, Vibhaṅga, and texts with “Sutta” in their titles); (2) *geyyā* (discourse mixed containing stanzas); (3) *veyyā, karaṇa* (prose-exposition, sometimes referring to Abhidhamma); (4) *gāthā* (stanzas, such as Dhammapada, Thera, gāthā, Therī, gāthā, Sutta Nipāta stanzas); (5) *udāna* (inspired utterances, ie Udana); (6) *itī, vuttaka* (Thus-said discourses, ie Iti, vuttaka); (7) *jātaka* (birth-stories, ie Jātaka); (8) *abbhūta, dhamma* (marvellous accounts); (9) *vedalla* (catechetical suttas, such as Cūḷa Vedalla S, Mahā Vedalla S, Sammā Ditthi S, Sakka, paṇha S, Saṅkhāra, bhājanīya S, Mahā Puṇṇama S) (V 3:8; M 1:133; A 2:5, 3:86). The term *nav’āṅga satthu, sāsana*, however, is found only in the Apadāna, Buddha, varṇsa and Commentaries. Of these 9 divisions of the teaching, our *sutta* only mentions the first two. The word “exposition” (*veyyākaraṇa*) in the *sutta* has a general sense, non-technical sense. Having said that, I think *sutta* and *geyyā* here should be taken in their non-technical sense, as referring mainly to the available non-Buddhist teachings of day. Paraphrase: “We should not go to a teacher merely for the sake of explanations of sacred formulas and hymns.” In the *spirit* of the Dharma, we can, of course, extend the Buddha’s admonition to also mean that besides a theoretical study of the texts, we need to learn something more, viz, mental cultivation and spiritual liberation. See eg **Levels of Learning** = SD 40a.4 & **Language & Discourse** = SD 26.11 (3.2.1).

⁹⁴ “Well understood as a view,” *ditthiyā suppaṭividdha*, lit “well penetrated by view.” As at M 1:213. The context here, I think, is that the disciple has only “heard” (*suta, mayā paññā*) the teaching and thought (*cintā, mayā paññā*) about it, and has understood it thus far, but he has no direct experience of it through mental cultivation (*bhāvanā, mayā paññā*) (D 3:219; Vbh 324).

20b But, Ānanda, there is this talk concerning austerity, conducting as a support for the mind's release, and that leads to complete disillusionment, to fading away (of lust), to ending (of suffering), to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana; that is to say,

talk about wanting little,
talk about contentment,
talk about solitude,
talk about aloofness from company,
talk about arousing effort,
talk about moral virtue,
talk about mental concentration,
talk about wisdom,
talk about liberation,
talk about the knowledge and vision of liberation.⁹⁵

It is for the sake of such a talk that a disciple should regard the teacher as being worthy of his devotion even if he is told to leave.

Wrong livelihood: The three undoings

21 This being the case,⁹⁶ Ānanda, there is the teacher's undoing;⁹⁷ this being the case, there is the pupil's undoing; this being the case, there is the brahmachari's⁹⁸ undoing.

22 (1) And what, Ānanda, is **the teacher's undoing**?

Here, Ānanda, some teacher⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰ While he lives thus secluded, brahmins and householders from the town [market town] and country visit him, and as a result, he becomes infatuated, harbours desires,¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰²

This, Ānanda, is the teacher's undoing.

23 (2) And what, Ānanda, is **the pupil's undoing**?

Ānanda, a pupil of that teacher, emulating¹⁰³ the teacher's solitude, resorts to a secluded lodging: the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw. While he lives thus secluded, brahmins and householders from the town [market town]

⁹⁵ These are the 10 topics of talk (*kathā, vatthu*) conducive to spiritual growth and awakening, viz: *app'iccha, kathā, santuṭṭhi, kathā, paviveka, kathā, asaṃsagga, kathā, viriy'ārambha, kathā, sīla, kathā, samādhi, kathā, paññā, kathā, vimutti, kathā, vimutti, nāṇa, dassana, kathā* (M 1:145, 3:113; A 5:129).

⁹⁶ "This being the case," *evaṃ sante*. For some disciples who live alone, it is difficult going (because of lack of understanding regarding the ten topics of talk). Therefore, to show the dangers (*ādīnava*) besetting solitude, he says *evaṃ sante*, which means "being in solitude thus," *evaṃ ekī, bhāve sante*. This passage is spoken to show the danger in solitude when one does not fulfill the proper purpose of solitary living (MA 4:164 f).

⁹⁷ "Undoing," *upaddavo*, may also be rendered as "disaster, calamity" (M:NB 1335 n1157).

⁹⁸ "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.

⁹⁹ Comy: An outside teacher (*titthiyā*) (MA 4:165).

¹⁰⁰ The more common list is shorter, but probably later: "to the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty house": see **Anāpāna, sati S** (M 118.17) = SD 7.13 n.

¹⁰¹ "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).

¹⁰² The phrase "evil unwholesome states...decay and death" occurs repeatedly in **Mahā Assa, pura S** (M 39.22-29/1:280).

¹⁰³ *anubrūhayamāno*.

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

This, Ānanda, is called a pupil 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 future birth, decay and death.

This, Ānanda, is the pupil's undoing.

24a (3) And what, Ānanda, is **the brahmachari's undoing**?

Here, Ānanda, there arises in the world the Tathagata [Thus Come], an arhat, fully self-awakened, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, well-gone, knower of the worlds, unexcelled trainer of tamable persons, teacher of beings human and divine, awakened, blessed. He resorts to a secluded lodging: the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw. While he lives thus secluded, brahmins and householders from the town [market town] and country visit him. Yet, he does not go astray, does not harbour desires, does not give in to greed, nor does [117] he revert to luxury.

But a disciple of this teacher, emulating the teacher's solitude,¹⁰⁴ resorts to a secluded lodging: the forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw. While he lives thus secluded, brahmins and householders from the town [market town] and country visit him, and as a result, he becomes infatuated, harbours desires, gives in to greed, and reverts to luxury.

This, Ānanda, is called a brahmachari 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 future birth, decay and death.

This, Ānanda, is the brahmachari's undoing.

24b But here, Ānanda, the brahmachari's undoing results in more suffering, bears more bitter fruit, than the teacher's undoing or the pupil's undoing, and it even leads one to the lower realms.¹⁰⁵

Right effort: Spiritual friendship with the teacher

25a Therefore, Ānanda, conduct yourselves with friendliness [lovingkindness] towards me, not with hostility.¹⁰⁶ This will be for your welfare and happiness for a long time.

25b And how, Ānanda, do **disciples conduct themselves towards the teacher with hostility, without friendliness**?

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 neither desire to listen nor give an attentive ear nor establish their mind in wisdom [direct knowledge]. They err and turn away from the Teacher's teaching.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ “Emulating the teacher's solitude,” *tassa satthu vivekaṃ anuyutto brūhayamāno*. Cf **Akaṅkheyya S** (M 6), where the exhortation, “devote yourself to empty places” (*brūhetha suññ'āgārānaṃ*), is given repeatedly (M 6/1:33-36).

¹⁰⁵ Comy: Going forth outside the Buddha's Teaching brings small gain, so one who falls away from that falls away only from mundane attainment. He meets no great suffering, just as one who falls from the back of a donkey is only covered with dust. But the going forth in the Teaching brings great gain—the paths, the fruits and nirvana. Thus one who falls away from this meets great suffering, just as one who falls from the back of an elephant (MA 4:165). On an extreme level, **Susīma S** (S 12.70) calls such a one “a thief of the Dharma” (one who ordains for selfish reasons and transgresses monastic rules), who would face suffering more painful than any earthly punishment, his conduct “results in more suffering, bears more bitter fruit, and it even leads one to the lower realms (S 12.70.62/-2:128).

¹⁰⁶ This almost enigmatic statement should be understood in the light of §3-4a, where effectively the Buddha is telling Ānanda to break up the gathering. Understandably, Ānanda, as a mere streamwinner, could still misconstrue this gesture and become upset. Hence this statement.

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

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]¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁹ Restraining you again and again,¹¹⁰ I will admonish you, cleansing you again and again.¹¹¹ The core will remain standing.”¹¹²

28 This is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Ānanda rejoiced and approved of the Blessed One’s word.

¹⁰⁷ *Tassa sāvaka sūssūsanti sotaṃ odahanti <na> aññaṃ cittaṃ upaṭṭhapenti na vokkamma [na] ca satthu sāsanaṃ vattanti.* The first *na* is better omitted and the second *na* should be inserted in PTS ed in accordance with Be Ce Se. *Sūssūsanti* is 3rd pl of *sūssūsati*, desiderative of *suṇāti* (he listens). However, I think it is also possible to render *sūssūsati* as “he listens properly” (*su + suṇāti*), as evident from **Cūḷa Suññata S** (M 121.3/3:104) = SD 11.3.3. The two words, however, are differently derived: *sūssuta* (M 121.3) = *su + suta* (participle of *suṇāti*).

Lohicca S (D 12) speaks of 3 kinds of blameworthy teachers: (1) one gone forth but not realized the spiritual goal; his pupils do not wish to listen to him; (2) one gone forth but not realized the spiritual goal; his pupils wish to listen to him; (3) one gone forth and realized the spiritual goal; his pupils do not wish to listen to him (D 12.6-8/1:230-232). Here (in *Mahā Suññata S*), the teacher who has realized the spiritual goal is meant, and as such is not blameworthy, but the erring pupils are blameworthy.

¹⁰⁸ “With friendliness,” *mittavatāya*.

¹⁰⁹ “As a potter treats raw, damp clay, *yathā kumbha, kāro āmake āmake, matte*. Comy glosses *āmake* as *apak-khe*, 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).

¹¹⁰ “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.

¹¹¹ “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; Thā 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).

¹¹² *Yo sāro so ṭhassati*. 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.

— evaṃ —

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