

The Discourse on the Snake Simile

Alagaddūpama Sutta

with Introduction and Notes

translated by

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Abbreviations:

Comy	Commentary (<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>)
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
PTS	Pali Text Society's edition
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sub-Comy	Sub-commentary (Majjhima-ṭīkā)
Vism	Visuddhimagga

Introduction

The discourse of the Buddha on the Snake Simile (Alagaddūpama Sutta) that is presented here, together with explanatory notes taken mostly from the commentarial literature, is the 22nd text in the “Collection of Discourses of Medium Length” (Majjhima Nikāya).

It is a text rich of contents and graced by many similes. At the very beginning there is a sequence of ten pithy similes on the perils of sense desires; then follows the simile on correctly or wrongly getting hold of a snake (from which our text derives its name); further, and still better known, the parable of the raft; and finally the simile of the vegetation of the Jeta Grove. The evocative power of these similes will strengthen the impact of the sutta’s message, in him who ponders on them deeply and repeatedly.

The main concern of this discourse is to warn against misconceptions, misrepresentations and dilution of the Teaching.

While the Buddha repeatedly stressed that his Teaching should be accepted only after due investigation, and uninfluenced by tradition or external authority; while he also advised his monks to make light of praise and blame of the Teaching uttered by outsiders (see here §38f.); the Master was quite firm, and even stern, when misrepresentations of the Teaching occurred on the part of his monks—that is, by those who had accepted the Teaching and had chosen a life devoted to its realization. Our discourse is not the only one where the Buddha had voiced a stern rebuke of monks who misinterpreted essential parts of the Teaching (see, e.g., MN 38). What moved the Buddha to do so was his deep concern that the efficacy of his unique Path of Deliverance should not be impaired, his Teaching not be undermined from within, and the purity of conduct and wisdom not be tarnished. If that were to be, the raft of the Teaching of which the discourse speaks, would be rendered incapable of carrying those across who have placed their confidence in it. The raft would forever be chained to the hither shore by those very fetters from which it is intended to bring release.

Our discourse deals with two chief obstacles which will impede the raft’s progress: the affirmation of sense-gratification and the affirmation of ego-belief. If, by misrepresenting the Teaching, these are admitted entrance in it, in whatever guise and whatever degree of dilution, they will necessarily nullify the effort for final liberation.

It should be noted that it is the *affirmation*, the approval, of those two tendencies that constitutes misrepresentation of the Teaching. These two tendencies themselves—i.e., sensuality and ego-belief—are deeply ingrained in human nature as we find it. They are, in fact, the two tap-roots from which existence and, with it, suffering spring: craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*). To weaken them first and finally eradicate them is the difficult task before us which, however, we can face courageously if guided by the methods of the Dhamma which are realistic as well as radical. But if what ought to be overcome is actually affirmed and approved, if hidden or open reservations with regard to either of these two tendencies are maintained, there is obviously no chance for achieving mind’s final deliverance from that bondage to craving and ignorance.

The attitude towards dispassion (*virāga*; Skt: *virāgya*) and towards the doctrine of egolessness (*anattā*) is, in fact, a crucial test how far the core of the Teaching has been preserved or impaired or entirely abandoned in those presentations of the Dhamma that appeared after *the Master passed away*; and some of these developments obviously do not stand the test.

Considering all this, we shall understand and appreciate the grave warning and the firm repudiation expressed in our discourse by the Master wishing for the welfare and progress of those who had confidence in his guidance.

The first section of the discourse deals with the rejection of the views held by the monk Ariṭṭha. His views are not merely a misconception of the Teaching but a direct challenge of some of the Buddha's statements. Ariṭṭha expressly denies that what the Buddha taught as obstructive is an obstruction by necessity. He does not specify the obstructions he means, but from the monks' reply, referring to sense-desires (*kāma*), it is evident that they were well aware of Ariṭṭha's intention: the condoning of sexual indulgence for a monk.

It need hardly be stressed that the Buddha's firm rejection of such condonation was meant for monks only. Of his lay followers he did not expect sexual abstinence. To them he advised restraint and mindfulness, and avoidance of giving excessive nourishment to sex desire. Here, if anywhere, a middle path between unrestrained indulgence and enforced repression was apt. But the Buddha made it clear that full deliverance required full detachment from desire. The gradual progress towards it, however, was left to the degree of insight and self-control possessed and developed by the individual lay follower.

For the monk, however, it was expected that the ardor of his quest for the final goal, the serenity of mind and emotional satisfaction derived from meditation, and his relative freedom from external sense titillation—that all these and other factors should enable him to keep the sex urge well in check and his mind tranquil enough for allowing further progress (or at least effort) on the road to radical detachment. He who could not attain to that degree of self-mastery, was free to leave the Order, and no stigma was attached; and he was also free to return whenever he wanted. But inside the Sangha no compromise could be admitted unless the Buddha was to invite disintegration from within and disrepute from without.

(§§10–12). The instance of Ariṭṭha's wrong view is now used by the Buddha as an opportunity to warn against any other wrong approach to the Teaching, and the misuse of it. He gives here the simile of the wrong grasp of a snake to illustrate the harm and the danger of misconceiving the Dhamma.

The harm done is to the individual's character and his progress on the Path; and the danger is the likelihood of his falling into lower forms of existence, or at the least a rebirth unfavorable to the understanding and practicing of the Dhamma. That such results may follow can be easily understood in the case of Ariṭṭha's views which are an outright reversal and corruption of the Teaching. It may, however, at first sight be surprising to the reader that, in the section now under consideration, the misuse of the Teaching for the verbal wrangles of disputation is likewise regarded as a dangerously wrong grasp of the Dhamma.

Here the danger and harm have more subtle, but no less real, roots. The danger in contentiousness is chiefly twofold. It provides one of the many evasions by which the mind shirks from devoting itself earnestly to the actual practice of the Dhamma. Secondly, under the respectable guise of the advocacy of the Dhamma, the attachment to "I" and "mine" finds an easy outlet. In disputations the ego gets the chance to indulge in self-assertion, superiority feeling, self-righteousness and opinionatedness. Furthermore, the ego may attach itself to the Dhamma in an attitude of possessiveness which sometimes may even resemble the behavior of a dog jealously and angrily defending a morsel of food without having himself the inclination to eat it. We see here the danger that an excessive concern with an argumentative advocacy of the Dhamma may strengthen subconsciously the deeply engrained egotistic impulses. It may even become one of the "grounds (or starting-points) for false views" as described by the Buddha (in §15).¹

Finally, from indulging in wordy warfare will also spring feelings of partisanship, intolerance, fanaticism and hostility. Truly, we have here a formidable catalogue of detrimental qualities of mind, and from this we can now better understand why the Buddha applied here, too, the metaphor of the dangerously wrong way of grasping a snake.

(§§13–14). He who is so much preoccupied with doctrinal controversy, furnishes, indeed, a fitting illustration of one who carries the raft of the Dhamma on his head or shoulders; and, in

his case, this will be not *after* the crossing but before he has done, or even seriously tried, the fording of the stream. In fact, this famous parable of the raft will in most cases apply to those who, in the words of the Dhammapada (v. 85), “run up and down the river’s bank” on this side of the stream, without daring or wishing to cross. We find them using the raft for a variety of purposes: they will adorn it and adore it, discuss it, compare it—indeed anything else than use it.

There are, on the other hand, those who wrongly believe that this parable justifies them in jettisoning the raft *before* they have used it, and that it invites them to let go the good teachings along with the false ones, even before they have benefited by the former and fully discarded the latter.

As we see, there are, indeed, many more ways of “grasping wrongly” than of grasping rightly; hence the strong emphasis laid on examining wisely the true meaning and purpose of the Dhamma. And there should be frequent re-examination—lest we forget.

(§§15–17). This section on the “grounds for false views” connects with the mention of “false teachings” in the preceding paragraph (§14).

Here, and in almost all the following sections, up to §41, it is the gravest of all wrong views—the belief in a Self, in an abiding ego-entity—that is dealt with from different angles. Our discourse is one of the most important texts concerned with the Anattā-doctrine, the teaching on Not-self. This teaching is the core of the Buddhist doctrine and a singular feature of it. It is of a truly revolutionary nature, and hence it is not easily absorbed by the human mind which, since an unfathomable past, has been habituated to think, and to induce action, in terms of “I” and “mine.” But this bias towards egocentricity has to be broken on the intellectual, emotional, and ethical level, if deliverance from suffering is ever to be won. In this task, the repeated and careful contemplation of our discourse can become a valuable aid.

In §15, the Buddha speaks of the sources from which the notion of a self is derived and formed. It is, in the first instance, the identification with any or all of the five aggregates (*khandha*) constituting what is conventionally called the personality. Identification with *the body* (or corporeality) is the “ground” or standpoint for materialism (naïve or philosophical). *Feeling* is seen as the core of Being, in the hedonist’s attitude to life, or when, in mystical teachings, the soul is regarded as pure Divine Bliss or Divine Love. The self is identified with *perception* when being is equated with perceiving (*esse est percipi*), when the personality is regarded as “nothing but” a bundle of sensations (Ernst Mach). The *mental formations* contribute to ego-belief when, e.g., the will is regarded as the ultimate essence of self and world; or when any other function of the mind receives an excessive emotional or intellectual emphasis. The aggregate of *consciousness* is circumscribed, in the discourses, by terms denoting the content of consciousness, indicating hereby that the self is here believed to be the totality of mind or consciousness. Included in this view are the conceptions of a Super- or Cosmic Consciousness,² or any notion of an “Over-self” (*mahātmā, paramātmā*), imagined to exist “beyond the five aggregates.”³

The view that the self is the unity of all five aggregates is found, for instance, in those religions which believe in a final resurrection of a (re-animated) body or in other forms of survival of the whole personality, body and mind, be it in an eternal heaven or an eternal hell.

The first five “grounds for false views” can be summarized by the following succinct statement of the Buddha: “Those ascetics and brahmins, O monks, who conceive a self in many ways, all those conceive it as the five aggregates or as one of them” (SN 22:47).⁴

As to the sixth “ground for false views,” it should be noted that it does not consist in the eternalist view itself (which is covered by the foregoing), but in the strong attachment to that view, up to the degree of full identification with it, as part and parcel of one’s individuality: “This (view) is mine, this I am, this is my self.” Such a tenacious clinging to the soul-belief has

its roots firstly in the deep urge for self-assertion and self-perpetuation; and secondly in the “conditioning” forces of education, environment and tradition. Like the other more common types of “self-defense,” this identification with the belief in a self can assume quite a passionate character, with hostility or contempt for those who do not share it.

The persistence of the soul-belief is demonstrated by the fact that from the earliest time of the Teaching up to the present day there have been not only individuals (like Sāti in MN 38), but also groups and sects within the Buddhist fold who believed in a self though they usually relegate it to a realm beyond the five aggregates.

In the next section (§18ff.), it is shown that the belief in “I” and “mine,” instead of giving a feeling of security, is, in fact, a cause of anxiety, fear and worry. And even when the faith in an immortal soul breaks down, its after-effect is still so strong that the assumption of a self that can be destroyed still persists, and, through the fear of annihilation, becomes a source of despair. This belief in “I” and “mine,” and the passionate attachment to it, is at the root of the existentialist philosopher’s “anguish” as well as of the anxiety neuroses that haunt modern man. The belief in unrealities, even if a temporary solace, must ultimately end in disappointment and despair.

Hence the Buddha took great care to question and re-question his monks on this crucial point of soul and self, in order to remove any doubt in this respect. The thorough manner of his inquiry is exemplified in §§22–25 which leave no room for ambiguity on this issue. In §§26–27 all the possible constituents of an alleged self (i.e., the five aggregates) are examined and found to be evanescent, liable to suffering and without a self or any other underlying substance. It should be noted that the statement of the text extends also to the most sublime manifestations of consciousness, be they conceived as internal (“in oneself”) or external.

Though the analysis of “the individual and its property,” as given in the preceding sections, is placed here in the context of refuting wrong views, this is in no way its intrinsic value and purpose, which rather consists in opening the gateway to liberation. To indicate this, §§28–29 speak of the attainment of final deliverance in sainthood (*arahatta*), brought about by insight that leads to alienation and detachment from all that is transient and void of substance. In the following (§§30–36), there is an impressive metaphorical description of the saint (*arahant*), concluding with the solemn declaration of the “untraceable” (i.e., ineffable) nature of one who has uprooted all craving and ignorance. With express reference to that solemn utterance, the Buddha now rejects emphatically the imputation that a denial of self and soul makes him a nihilist (§37) and he summarizes his teaching in those words of wide renown:

“What I teach now as before, O monks, is suffering and the cessation of suffering.”

In the section on “Praise and Blame” (§§38–39), we have a practical application of the anattā-doctrine: it frees the mind from elation and pride in the case of praise, and from dejection and anger in the case of blame. The Buddha asks his disciples to emulate him in this respect. To be unshaken in the serene detachment of one’s mind by any approval or disapproval by others, this is another benefit bestowed by the deep realization of the truth of anattā. Pointing out this additional benefit, the Master makes another earnest appeal to the monks to give up attachment to “what is not yours”: the five aggregates constituting the so-called personality (§§40–41). Indeed, if viewed in the single-minded and passion-free detachment of insight-meditation (*vipassanā*), these physical and mental processes, so long regarded as “I” and “mine,” will be seen to be as alien as the vegetation of the Jeta Grove to which the Buddha’s finger may have pointed while he spoke.

The symphonic rhythm of this great discourse approaches now its finale. It is the majestic voice of uncompromising truth that speaks here in grave tones of crystal-clear penetrative power, without any gentler softening and soothing notes. The teaching as here conveyed, “plain and open, explicit and consistent,” was and is a bold challenge of “public opinion.” It goes counter to the two mighty currents of sense desire and self-affirmation which make up the

“common stream” of mankind. In this discourse, the Buddha rejects repeatedly (in the former case) and excludes carefully (in the latter case) any attempt at compromise in these two respects. Furthermore the Buddha voices here a grave warning that a wrong grasp and misuse of the Dhamma may bring much harm and suffering. All escape routes for circumventing the true purpose and for avoiding the salient truths of the Doctrine were thus envisaged and carefully closed.

In this brief recapitulation, our discourse appears indeed as a rather formidable assemblage of stern messages. Yet, for one who is familiar with the Buddha Word, this will be softened by the fact that in numerous discourses the Buddha spoke of his Teaching as one that offers “gradual training, gradual progress.” It is here that the Buddha’s gentleness and compassion appears, his forbearance with human frailties, and his wise and patient guidance of men. Our discourse, too, ends on an encouraging note of assurance. Having earlier evoked the inspiring image of the saint (see §30 ff.), the Master now speaks of the fruits and highest summit, the final deliverance in saintship, preceded by the three Noble Paths leading to it, to the access stage of mind’s growing maturity for enlightenment, down to those aspirants who, in the indubitable confrontation with the Truth by way of insight-meditation, have won deep faith in the Master and sublime love for him. Of them our discourse says that they are assured of those superhuman realms which are usually called “heaven.” But it may well be as the ancients explain, that it is “the heaven on earth” which is meant here: the superhuman bliss experienced when for the first time, and still imperfect, the insight dawns on the meditator that phenomena, being evanescent and coreless throughout, do not and cannot enforce bondage unless we ourselves forge the chains of craving and delusion.

A Bhikkhu who in solitude
has mind’s tranquility obtained,
enjoys a super human bliss,
if insight in the Teaching dawns.

Whenever in the aggregates
their rise and fall he clearly notes,
to joy and rapture he attains.
To those who know—

this is the Deathless State.

—Dhammapada, vv. 373–374

Thus will a vision stern
Change into freedom’s smile...

—Nyanaponika Thera

The Snake Simile

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One lived at Sāvattḥī, in Jeta's Grove, in Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery.

Ariṭṭha's Wrong View

2. Now, on that occasion a monk called Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture-killers, had conceived this pernicious view: "There are things called 'obstructions'⁵ by the Blessed One. As I understand his teaching, those things are not necessarily obstructive for one who pursues them."

3. Several monks, hearing about it, went to the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, and asked him: "Is it true, friend Ariṭṭha, that you have conceived this pernicious view: "There are things called (obstructions) by the Blessed One. As I understand his teaching, those things are not necessarily obstructive for one who pursues them'?"

"Yes, indeed, friends, (I do hold that view)."

Then those monks, wishing to dissuade Ariṭṭha from that pernicious view, urged, admonished, questioned and exhorted him thus: "Do not say so, friend Ariṭṭha, do not say so! Do not misrepresent the Blessed One! It is not right to misrepresent him. Never would the Blessed One speak like that. For in many ways, indeed, has the Blessed One said of those obstructive things that they are obstructions, indeed, and that they necessarily obstruct him who pursues them. Sense desires, so he has said, bring little enjoyment and much suffering and disappointment. The perils in them are greater. Sense desires are like bare bones, has the Blessed One said. They are like a lump of flesh, like a torch of straw, like a pit of burning coals, like a dream, like borrowed goods, like a fruit-bearing tree, like a slaughter house, like a stake of swords, like a snake's head, has the Blessed One said.⁶ They bring little enjoyment, and much suffering and disappointment. The perils in them are greater."

Yet, though the monk Ariṭṭha was thus urged, admonished, questioned and exhorted by those monks, he still clung tenaciously and obstinately to his pernicious view, saying: "There are things called 'obstructions' by the Blessed One. As I understand his teaching, those things are not necessarily obstructive for one who pursues them."

4. When those monks could not dissuade the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, from his pernicious view, they went to the Blessed One, and after respectfully saluting him, they sat down at one side. Being seated, they told the Blessed One (all that had happened), and they said: "Since, O Lord, we could not dissuade the monk Ariṭṭha from his pernicious view, we have now reported this matter to the Blessed One."

5. Then the Blessed One addressed a certain monk thus: "Go, O monk, and tell the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, that the Master calls him."—"Yes, Lord," replied the monk. He went to the monk Ariṭṭha and spoke to him: "The Master calls you, friend Ariṭṭha."—"Yes, friend," replied Ariṭṭha and he went to meet the Blessed One. Having arrived, he saluted the Blessed One respectfully and sat down at one side. When he was seated, the Blessed One addressed him thus:

"Is it true, Ariṭṭha, that you have conceived this pernicious view: 'There are things called "obstructions" by the Blessed One. As I understand his teaching those things are not necessarily obstructive for him who pursues them.'?"—"Yes, indeed, Lord, I understand the teaching of the Blessed One in this way that those things called 'obstructions' by the Blessed One, are not necessarily obstructive for him who pursues them."

6. “Of whom do you know, foolish man, that I have taught to him the teaching in that manner? Did I not, foolish man, speak in many ways of those obstructive things that they are obstructions indeed, and that they necessarily obstruct him who pursues them? Sense desires, so I have said, bring little enjoyment, and much suffering and disappointment. The perils in them are greater. Sense desires are like bare bones, have I said. They are like a lump of flesh... they are like a snake’s head, have I said. They bring much suffering and disappointment. The perils in them are greater. But you, O foolish man, have misrepresented us by what you personally have wrongly grasped. You have undermined your own (future) and have created much demerit. This, foolish man, will bring you much harm and suffering for a long time.”⁷

7. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks thus: “What do you think, O monks: has that monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, produced any spark (of understanding) in this teaching and discipline?”⁸—“How should that be, Lord? Certainly not, O Lord.”

After these words, the monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, sat silent, confused, with his shoulders drooping and his head bent, brooding and incapable of making a rejoinder.

Then the Blessed One, knowing (his condition), spoke to him: “You will be known, foolish man, by what is your own pernicious view, I shall now question the monks about this.”

8. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks: “Do you, O monks, also understand the teaching proclaimed by me, in the same manner as this monk Ariṭṭha does, who misrepresents us by what he personally has wrongly grasped; who has undermined his own (future) and created much demerit?”

“Certainly not, Lord. For in many ways has the Blessed One told us of those obstructive things that they are obstructions indeed, and that they necessarily obstruct him who pursues them...”

“Good, monks. It is good that you thus understand the teaching proclaimed by me.⁹ For in many ways have I spoken of those obstructive things that they are obstructions, indeed, and that they necessarily obstruct him who pursues them. Sense desires, so have I said, bring little enjoyment, and much suffering and disappointment. The perils in them are greater. Sense desires are like bare bones, have I said. They are like a lump of flesh, like a torch of straw, like a pit of burning coals, like a dream, like borrowed goods, like a fruit-bearing tree, like a slaughter-house, like a stake of swords; like a snake’s head are sense desires, have I said. They bring much suffering and disappointment. The perils in them are greater. But this monk Ariṭṭha, formerly of the vulture killers, misrepresents us by what he personally has wrongly grasped; he undermines his own (future) and creates much demerit. This will bring to this foolish man much harm and suffering for a long time.

9. “Monks, it is impossible indeed, that one can pursue sense gratification¹⁰ without sensual desire,¹¹ without perceptions of sensual desire, without thoughts of sensual desire.”

*The Snake*¹²

10. “There are here, O monks, some foolish men who study the Teaching—discourses, mixed prose and verse, prose expositions, verses, solemn utterances, sayings, birth stories, marvels, and replies to questions—having studied it, they do not wisely examine the purpose of those teachings. To those who do not wisely examine the purpose, these teachings will not yield insight.¹³ They study the Teaching only to use it for criticizing or for refuting others in disputation. They do not experience the (true) purpose¹⁴ for which they¹⁵ (ought to) study the Teaching. To them these teachings wrongly grasped, will bring harm and suffering for a long time. And why? Because of their wrong grasp of the teachings.

“Suppose, monks, a man wants a snake, looks for a snake, goes in search of a snake. He then sees a large snake, and when he is grasping its body or its tail, the snake turns back on him and

bites his hand or arm or some other limb of his. And because of that he suffers death or deadly pain. And why? Because of his wrong grasp of the snake.

“Similarly, O monks, there are here some foolish men who study the Teaching; having studied it, they do not wisely examine the purpose of those teachings. To those who do not wisely examine the purpose, these teachings will not yield insight. They study the Teaching only to use it for criticizing or for refuting others in disputation. They do not experience the (true) purpose for which they (ought to) study the Teaching. To them these teachings wrongly grasped, will bring harm and suffering for a long time. And why? Because of their wrong grasp of the teachings.

11. “But there are here, O monks, some noble sons who study the Teaching;¹⁶ and having studied it, they examine wisely the purpose of those teachings. To those who wisely examine the purpose, these teachings will yield insight. They do not study the Teaching for the sake of criticizing nor for refuting others in disputation. They experience the purpose for which they study the Teaching; and to them these teachings being rightly grasped, will bring welfare and happiness for a long time. And why? Because of their right grasp of the teachings.

“Suppose, monks, a man wants a snake, looks for a snake, goes in search of a snake. He then sees a large snake, and with a forked stick he holds it firmly down. Having done so, he catches it firmly by the neck. Then although the snake might entwine with (the coils of) its body that man’s hand or arm or some other limb of his, still he does not on that account suffer death or deadly pain. And why not? Because of his right grasp of the snake.

“Similarly, O monks, there are here some noble sons who study the Teaching; and having learned it, they examine wisely the purpose of those teachings. To those who wisely examine the purpose, these teachings will yield insight. They do not study the Teaching for the sake of criticizing nor for refuting others in disputation. They experience the purpose for which they study the Teaching; and to them these teachings being rightly grasped, will bring welfare and happiness for a long time. And why? Because of their right grasp of the teachings.

12. “Therefore, O monks, if you know the purpose of what I have said, you should keep it in mind accordingly. But if you do not know the purpose of what I have said, you should question me about it, or else (ask) those monks who are wise.”

The Raft

13. “I shall show you, monks, the Teaching’s similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to. Listen, monks, and heed well what I shall say”—“Yes, Lord,” replied the monks. And the Blessed One spoke thus:

“Suppose, monks, there is a man journeying on a road and he sees a vast expanse of water, of which this shore is perilous and fearful, while the other shore is safe and free from danger. But there is no boat for crossing nor is there a bridge for going over from this side to the other. So the man thinks: ‘This is a vast expanse of water; and this shore is perilous and fearful, but the other shore is safe and free from danger. There is, however, no boat here for crossing, nor a bridge for going over from this side to the other. Suppose I gather reeds, sticks, branches and foliage, and bind them into a raft.’ Now, that man collects reeds, sticks, branches and foliage, and binds them into a raft. Carried by that raft, laboring with hands and feet, he safely crosses over to the other shore. Having crossed and arrived at the other shore, he thinks: ‘This raft, indeed, has been very helpful to me. Carried by it, laboring with hands and feet, I got safely across to the other shore. Should I not lift this raft on my head or put it on my shoulders, and go where I like?’

“What do you think about it, O monks? Will this man by acting thus, do what should be done with a raft?”—“No, Lord”—“How then, monks, would he be doing what should be done

with a raft? Here, monks, having got across and arrived at the other shore, the man thinks: 'This raft, indeed, has been very helpful to me. Carried by it, and laboring with hands and feet, I got safely across to the other shore. Should I not pull it up now to the dry land or let it float in the water, and then go as I please?' By acting thus, monks, would that man do what should be done with a raft?

"In the same way, monks, have I shown to you the Teaching's similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to.

14. "You, O monks, who understand the Teaching's similitude to a raft, you should let go even (good) teachings,¹⁷ how much more false ones!"

Grounds for Views

15. "There are, monks, these six grounds for false views.¹⁸ What are the six? There is here, monks, an uninstructed worldling who has no regard for Noble Ones, who is ignorant of their teaching and untrained in it; who has no regard for men of worth, who is ignorant of their teaching and untrained in it: he considers corporeality thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self';¹⁹ he considers feeling... perception... mental formations thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'; and what is seen, heard, sensed, and thought;²⁰ what is encountered, sought, pursued in mind,²¹ this also he considers thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'; and also this ground for views (holding): 'The universe is the Self.²² That I shall be after death,²³ permanent, stable, eternal, immutable; eternally the same,²⁴ shall I abide in that very condition'—that (view), too, he considers thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'²⁵

16. "But, monks, there is here a well-instructed noble disciple who has regard for Noble Ones, who knows their teaching and is well trained in it; who has regard for men of worth, who knows their teaching and is well trained in it: he does not consider corporeality in this way: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'; he does not consider feeling... perception... mental formations in this way: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'; and what is seen, heard, sensed, and thought; what is encountered, sought, pursued in mind, this also he does not consider in this way: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'; and also this ground for views (holding): 'The universe is the Self. That I shall be after death; permanent, stable, eternal, immutable, eternally the same shall I abide in that very condition'—that (view), too, he does not consider thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'

17. "Considering thus, he is not anxious about unrealities."²⁶

Anxiety about Unrealities

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

"Lord, can there be anxiety about unrealities, in the external?"²⁷

"There can be, O monk," said the Blessed One. "In that case, monk, someone thinks: 'Oh, I had it! That, alas, I have no longer! Oh, may I have it again! But alas, I do not get it!' Hence he grieves, is depressed and laments; beating his breast, he weeps and dejection befalls him. Thus, monk, is there anxiety about unrealities, in the external."

19. "But, Lord, can there be absence of anxiety about unrealities, in the external?"

"There can be, O monk," said the Blessed One. "In that case, monk, someone does not think thus: 'Oh, I had it! That, alas, I have no longer! Oh, may I have it again! But, alas, I do not get it!' Hence he does not grieve, is not depressed, does not lament; he does not beat his breast nor does he weep, and no dejection befalls him. Thus, monk, is there absence of anxiety about unrealities, in the external."

20. "Lord, can there be anxiety about unrealities, in the internal?"

"There can be, monk," said the Blessed One. "In that case, monk, someone has this view: 'The universe is the Self. That I shall be after death; permanent, stable, eternal, immutable, eternally the same shall I abide in that very condition.' He then hears a Perfect One expounding the Teaching for the removal of all grounds for views, of all prejudices, obsessions, dogmas and biases; for the stilling of all (kamma-) processes, for the relinquishment of all substrata (of existence), for the extirpation of craving, for dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna. He then thinks: 'I shall be annihilated, I shall be destroyed! No longer shall I exist!' Hence he grieves, is depressed and laments; beating his breast, he weeps, and dejection befalls him. Thus, monk, is there anxiety about realities, in the internal."

21. "But, Lord, can there be absence of anxiety about unrealities, in the internal?"

"There can be, monk," said the Blessed One. "In that case, monk, someone does not have this view: 'The universe is the Self... eternally the same shall I abide in that very condition.' He then hears a Perfect One expounding the Teaching for the removal of all grounds for views, of all prejudices, obsessions, dogmas and biases; for the stilling of all (kamma-) processes, for the relinquishing of all substrata (of existence), for the extirpation of craving, for dispassion, cessation, Nibbāna. He then does not think: 'I shall be annihilated, I shall be destroyed! No longer shall I exist!' Hence he does not grieve, is not depressed, does not lament; he does not beat his breast nor does he weep, and no dejection befalls him. Thus, monk, is there absence of anxiety about unrealities, in the internal."²⁸

Impermanence and Not-self

22. "You may well take hold of a possession,²⁹ O monks, that is permanent, stable, eternal, immutable, that abides eternally the same in its very condition. (But) do you see, monks, any such possession?"—"No, Lord."—"Well, monks, I too, do not see any such possession that is permanent, stable, eternal, immutable, that abides eternally the same in its very condition."

23. "You may well accept, monks, the assumption of a self-theory³⁰ from the acceptance of which there would not arise sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. (But) do you see, monks, any such assumption of a self-theory?"—"No, Lord."—"Well, monks, I too, do not see any such assumption of a self-theory from the acceptance of which there would not arise sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair."

24. "You may well rely, monks, on any supporting (argument) for views³¹ from the reliance on which there would not arise sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair. (But) do you see, monks, any such supporting (argument) for views?"—"No, Lord."—"Well, monks, I too, do not see any such supporting (argument) for views from the reliance on which there would not arise sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair."³²

25. "If there were a self, monks, would there be my self's property?"—"So it is, Lord."—"Or if there is a self's property, would there be my self?"—"So it is, Lord."—"Since in truth and in fact, self and self's property do not obtain, O monks, then this ground for views, 'The universe is the Self. That I shall be after death; permanent, stable, eternal, immutable; eternally the same shall I abide, in that very condition'—is it not, monks, an entirely and perfectly foolish idea?"—"What else should it be, Lord? It is an entirely and perfectly foolish idea."³³

The Three Characteristics

26. "What do you think, monks: is corporeality permanent or impermanent?"—"Impermanent, Lord."—"And what is impermanent, is it painful or pleasant?"—"Painful, Lord."—"What is impermanent, painful, subject to change, is it fit to be considered thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self'?"—"Certainly not, Lord."—"What do you think, monks: Is feeling... is perception... are mental formations... is consciousness... permanent or

impermanent?"—"Impermanent, Lord."—"And what is impermanent, is it painful or pleasant?"—"Painful, Lord."—"And what is impermanent, painful, subject to change, is it fit to be considered thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self?'—"Certainly not, Lord."

27. "Therefore, monks, whatever corporeality, whether past, future, or present, in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near,—all corporeality should with right wisdom, thus be seen as it is: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

"Whatever feeling... whatever perception... whatever mental formations... whatever consciousness, whether past, future or present, in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all... consciousness should, with right wisdom, thus be seen as it is: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'

28. "Seeing this, monks, the well-instructed noble disciple becomes disgusted³⁴ with corporeality, becomes disgusted with feeling, with perception, with mental formations, with consciousness.

29. "Through his being disgusted, his passion fades away.³⁵ His passion having faded, he is freed.³⁶ In him who is freed there is the knowledge of freedom:³⁷ 'Ceased has rebirth, fulfilled is the holy life, the task is done, there is no more of this to come,' thus he knows."

The Arahant ³⁸

30. "This monk is called one who has removed the crossbar, has filled the moat, has broken the pillar, has unbolted (his mind); a Noble One who has taken down the flag, put down the burden, become unfettered.

31. "And how, monks, is that monk one who has removed the cross-bar? Herein the monk has abandoned ignorance, has cut it off at the root, removed it from its soil like a palmyra tree, brought it to utter extinction, incapable of arising again. Thus has he removed the cross-bar.

32. "And how, monks, is that monk one who has filled the moat? Herein the monk has abandoned the round of rebirths, leading to renewed existence; he has cut it off at the root, removed it from its soil like a palmyra tree, brought it to utter extinction, incapable of arising again.

33. "And how has he broken the pillar? He has abandoned craving, has cut it off at the root, removed it from its soil like a palmyra tree, brought it to utter extinction, incapable of arising again.

34. "And how has he unbolted (his mind)? He has abandoned the five lower fetters, has cut them off at the root, removed them from their soil like a palmyra tree, brought them to utter extinction, incapable of arising again.

35. "And how is the monk a Noble One who has taken down the flag, put down the burden, become unfettered? He has abandoned the conceit of self, has cut it off at the root, removed it from its soil like a palmyra tree, brought it to utter extinction, incapable of arising again. Thus is the monk a Noble One who has taken down the flag, put down the burden, become unfettered.

36. "When a monk's mind is thus freed, O monks, neither the gods with Indra, nor the gods with Brahma, nor the gods with the Lord of Creatures (Pajāpati), when searching will find³⁹ on what the consciousness of one thus gone (*tathāgata*) is based. Why is that? One who has thus gone is no longer traceable here and now, so I say."⁴⁰

Misrepresentation

37. "So teaching, so proclaiming, O monks, I have been baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly accused by some ascetics and brahmins: 'A nihilist⁴¹ is the ascetic Gotama; He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the non-being of an existing individual.'⁴²

"As I am not as I do not teach, so have I been baselessly, vainly, falsely and wrongly accused by some ascetics and brahmins thus: 'A nihilist is the ascetic Gotama; He teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the non-being of an existing individual.'

"What I teach now as before, O monks, is suffering and the cessation of suffering."

Praise and Blame

38. "If for that (reason)⁴³ others revile, abuse, scold and insult the Perfect One, on that account, O monks, the Perfect One will not feel annoyance, nor dejection, nor displeasure in his heart. And if for that (reason) others respect, revere, honor and venerate the Perfect One, on that account the Perfect One will not feel delight, nor joy, nor elation in his heart. If for that (reason) others respect, revere, honor and venerate the Perfect One, He will think: 'It is towards this (mind-body aggregate) which was formerly⁴⁴ fully comprehended, that they perform such acts.'⁴⁵

39. "Therefore, O monks, if you, too, are reviled, abused, scolded and insulted by others, you should on that account not entertain annoyance or dejection or displeasure in your hearts. And if others respect, revere, honor and venerate you, on that account you should not entertain delight or joy or elation in your hearts. If others respect, revere, honor and venerate you, you should think: 'It is towards this (mind-body aggregate) which was formerly comprehended, that they perform such acts.'⁴⁶

*Not Yours*⁴⁷

40. "Therefore, monks, give up whatever is not yours.⁴⁸ Your giving it up will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness. What is it that is not yours? Corporeality is not yours. Give it up! Your giving it up will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness. Feeling is not yours. Give it up! Your giving it up will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness. Perception is not yours. Give it up! Your giving it up will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness. Mental formations are not yours. Give them up! Your giving them up will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness. Consciousness is not yours. Give it up! Your giving it up will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness."⁴⁹

41. "What do you think, monks: if people were to carry away the grass, sticks, branches and leaves in this Jeta Grove, or burnt them or did with them what they pleased, would you think: These people carry us away, or burn us, or do with us as they please?"—"No, Lord."—"Why not?" Because, Lord, that is neither our self nor the property of our self."—"So, too, monks, give up what is not yours! Your giving it up will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness. What is it that is not yours? Corporeality... feeling... perception... mental formations... consciousness are not yours. Give them up! Your giving them up will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness."

The Explicit Teaching and Its Fruit

42. "Monks, this Teaching⁵⁰ so well proclaimed by me, is plain, open, explicit, free of patchwork.⁵¹ In this Teaching that is so well proclaimed by me and is plain, open, explicit and

free of patchwork, for those who are arahants, free of taints, who have accomplished and completed their task, have laid down the burden, achieved their aim, severed the fetters binding to existence, who are liberated by full knowledge, there is no (future) round of existence that can be ascribed to them.

43. “Monks, in this Teaching that is so well proclaimed by me and is plain, open, explicit and free of patchwork, those monks who have abandoned the five lower fetters will all be reborn spontaneously (in the Pure Abodes) and there they will pass away finally, no more returning from that world.

44. “Monks, in this Teaching that is so well proclaimed by me and is plain, open, explicit and free of patchwork, those monks who have abandoned three fetters and have reduced greed, hatred and delusion, are all once-returners, and, returning only once to this world, will then make an end of suffering.

45. “Monks, in this Teaching that is so well proclaimed by me and is plain, open, explicit and free of patchwork, those monks who have abandoned three fetters, are all stream-enterers, no more liable to downfall, assured, and headed for full Enlightenment.

46. “Monks, in this Teaching that is so well proclaimed by me and is plain, open, explicit, and free of patchwork, those monks who are mature in Dhamma, mature in faith,⁵² are all headed for full Enlightenment.

47. “Monks, in this Teaching that is so well proclaimed by me and is plain, open, explicit and free of patchwork, those who have simply faith in me, simply love for me,⁵³ are all destined for heaven.”

48. This said the Blessed One. Satisfied, the monks rejoiced in the words of the Blessed One.

¹ This may result from the unwillingness to give up a wrong view advocated in the argument. It may also come under the heading “What is encountered, this he also considers thus: This is mine...”; that is, he identifies himself with a given situation (here the disputation) and with his own stand taken in it.

² See §27: “Whatever consciousness... gross or subtle.”

³ This, too, falls under the fifth of the “grounds,” being a mental construction (§15: “what is thought”), and something “sought after and pursued in mind,” due to human yearning for permanence.

⁴ See The Wheel No. 11: Anattā and Nibbāna, by Nyanaponika Thera, p. 18.

⁵ **Things called “obstructions”** (*antarāyikā dhammā*). Comy gives here a list of ideas and actions that obstruct either heavenly rebirth or final deliverance or both. Ariṭṭha, so says Comy being a learned exponent of the Teaching, was quite familiar with most of these “obstructions”; but, being unfamiliar with the Code of Discipline (Vinaya), he conceived the view that sex indulgence was not necessarily an obstruction for a monk. Ariṭṭha is said to have used a rather sophistic argument, saying, “If some of the five sense enjoyments are permissible even for lay adherents who are stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*), etc., why is an exception made as to the visible shape, voice, touch, etc., of women?” According to Comy, Ariṭṭha goes so far as to charge the Buddha with exaggerating the importance of the first grave offence (*pārājikā*) for a monk (i.e., sexual intercourse), saying that the emphasis given to it is like the effort of one who tries to chain the ocean.

The similes about sense-desires, given in the following section of the discourse, seem to support the commentarial reference to sexual intercourse.

⁶ **The similes about sense-desires.** Of the ten similes, the first seven were explained in detail in the Potaliya Sutta, (MN 54; see *The Wheel* No. 79). A summary of these explanations follows here; and after each of these, and also for the remaining three similes, and expansion is given of the one-word explanation found in the Comy to our present text:

- (1) **Bare bones**, fleshless, blood-smearred, are thrown to a starving dog but cannot satisfy the animal’s hunger. Similarly, sense-desires give no lasting satisfaction (Comy: *appasādaṭṭhena*).
- (2) **A lump of flesh** for which birds of prey fight each other; if the bird that has seized the lump of flesh, does not yield it, it may meet death or deadly pain from the beaks and claws of the other birds. Similarly, the sense-desires are common to many (*bahusādhāraṇa*), i.e., the same sense objects may be claimed by many and may become the cause of deadly conflict.
- (3) **A torch of straw** carried against the wind may cause severe burns to the careless man if not quickly discarded. Similarly, sense-desires will severely burn (*anudahana*), i.e., greatly harm him who thoughtlessly, and unaware of the great danger, partakes of them in the belief that they will bring light and joy to his life.
- (4) **A pit of burning coals** towards which a man is dragged by others; if he cannot free himself from the grip, he will be thrown into the fire and consumed by it. Similarly, sense-desires are like a vast conflagration (*mahābhitāpa*) into which the victim is dragged by bad company, or by his own deeds, causing his rebirth in miserable states of woe.
- (5) **A dream** of a beautiful landscape that vanishes on awakening. Similarly, sense-desires are a brief illusion (*ittara-paccupaṭṭhāna*) like a dream, and disappointing after one awakens from infatuation to reality.
- (6) **Borrowed goods** on which the borrower foolishly prides himself in public; but which are withdrawn by the owners when they see the boastful man. Similarly, sense-desires are temporary (*tāvakālika*) and not a true and lasting possession of him who enjoys them, filled with vain glory.
- (7) **A fruit tree** climbed by one who craves for the fruits; but another man, likewise greedy for them but unable to climb, chooses another method and fells the tree; and unless the first man quickly

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descends, he will break his limbs. Similarly, in the blind pursuit of sense pleasures one may “break all one’s limbs” (*sabbaṅga-paccaṅga-bhañjana*), may suffer severe injury of body and mind. The Sub-Comy refers also to punishment and torture incurred by reckless deeds to which people are driven by sense infatuation.

(8) **A slaughter house** (or place of execution): because sense-desires are like a butcher’s (or executioner’s) block (*adhikuṭṭana*). This may mean that sense-desires kill much that is noble in man and cut off his higher development.

(9) **A stake of swords**: sense-desires are piercing (*vinivijjhana*) penetrating deep within, causing wounds where there had been none. Unfulfilled or frustrated desire, or the pains of jealousy, are, indeed, like that ancient torture of the state of swords.

(10) **A snake’s head**: sense-desires are a grave risk and peril (*sasaṅka-sappaṭibhaya*) for the present and future welfare, if one walks unwarily.

⁷ This first part of the Ariṭṭha episode occurs twice in the Vinaya Pitaka. In the Cūla Vagga (Kammakkhandaka) it is followed by announcing the Sangha act of suspension (*ukkhepaniya-kamma*) against Ariṭṭha as he did not give up his wrong views. In the Pācittiya section of the Vinaya, Ariṭṭha’s refusal to renounce his wrong view is defined as the monastic offence called “pācittiya.”

⁸ ...**produced any spark (of understanding) in this teaching and discipline** (*usmīkato pi imasmiṃ dhammavinaye*). This is a stock phrase in similar contexts—e.g., in MN 38, where Sāti’s misconceptions are rejected. Our rendering follows Comy: “This refers to one who has (not) produced the ‘warmth of understanding’ (*ñāṇusmā*) that can bring the ‘seed of wisdom’ (*paññā-bija*; Sub-Comy) to the maturity required for attaining to the paths and fruitions of sanctity.”

⁹ Comy says that by questioning the other monks the Master wanted to clarify the opinion held by the community of monks; and, on the other hand, leave no doubt in Ariṭṭha that through obstinately clinging to his views, he had separated himself from the community.

¹⁰ **Can pursue sense gratification** (*kāme paṭisevoissati*). *Kāma* is here *vatthukāma*, the objective aspect of *kāma*, “sensuality,” the sense experience. Comy adds: *methunasamācāraṃ samācarissati*, “It is impossible that he can commit the sexual act (without perceptions and thoughts of sense-desire).” Sub-Comy says that also other physical acts expressive of sexual desire, are to be included, as embracing, stroking, etc.

¹¹ *Aññatra kāmehi*: this refers to *kilesa-kāma*, “sensuality as a defilement of mind,” i.e., sense desire, the subjective aspect of *kāma*.

¹² Comy: After the Master had pointed out Ariṭṭha’s wrong views, he continues now by showing the grievous fault that lies in a wrong grasp of what has been learned (i.e., the serious danger inherent in misconceiving and misinterpreting the Teaching).

¹³ *Dhammā na nijjhānaṃ khamanti*. Comy: The teachings do not become clear, do not come into the range (of understanding); so that one cannot discern whether in the respective place of the exposition, morality is spoken of, or concentration, insight, the paths, the fruits, the round of existence or its ending. Sub-Comy: “That is, one cannot understand that the purpose of morality is the attaining of concentration, the purpose of concentration the winning of insight, etc.”

Nijjhāna has here the meaning of “insight” or “comprehension” (Sub-Comy: *nijjhāna-paññakkhamā na honti*). This phrase appears with the same meaning and in the same context, in the Kīṭāgiri Sutta (MN 70) and the Caṅkī Sutta (MN 95), that is, likewise preceded by an “examination of purpose (or meaning).” Also SN 25:1 confirms our rendering: *Yassa kho bhikkhave ime dhammā evaṃ paññāya mattaso nijjhānaṃ khamanti ayaṃ vuccati dhammānusārī*.

¹⁴ Comy: That is, the attainment of the paths and fruitions of sanctity.

¹⁵ Comy refers this to “the noble sons” mentioned in §11.

¹⁶ **The three ways of studying the teaching.** Comy: “They, the noble sons, study the Teaching for the sake of crossing (the ocean of saṃsāric suffering). There are to wit, three manners of studying the Teaching: studying it in the manner of the Snake-simile (*alagadda-pariyatti*); studying it for the sake of crossing over (*nittharaṇa-pariyatti*); and studying in a treasurer’s (or store-keeper’s) position (*bhaṇḍāgārika-pariyatti*).

- (1) He who studies the Buddha’s word for getting robes and other requisites, or for becoming widely known; that is, he who learns for the sake of fame and gain, his study is that of the Snake-simile (i.e., the wrong grasp); but better than such a study would be for him to sleep and not to study at all.
- (2) But there is one who studies the Buddha’s word, and when morality is the subject, he fulfills morality; when concentration is the subject, he lets it take deep root; when insight is the subject, he establishes himself well in insight; when the paths and fruitions are the subject, he studies with the intention, “I shall develop the path, I shall realize the fruition.” Only the studying of such a one is “studying for the sake of crossing over” (as expressed in the simile of the raft; §13).
- (3) But the studying by one who (as an arahant, a saint) has extinguished the taints (*khīṇāsavo*), is “studying in the Treasurer’s position.” For him, indeed, there remains nothing unpenetrated, nothing unrelinquished, nothing undeveloped, and nothing unrealized. [This refers to the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 3rd Truths, respectively.] He is one who has penetrated the aggregates of existence (*khandha*), who has relinquished the defilements, developed the path and realized the fruition. Hence, in studying the Buddha’s Word, he studies it as a keeper of the scriptures, as a guardian of the tradition, as a preserver of the continuity. Thus his study is like (the activity of) a treasurer (or store keeper).

“Now, when those proficient in the books cannot live at one place, being afraid of starvation, etc., if (in such a situation) there is one who, while himself going the alms round with very great fatigue, as an unliberated worldling takes up studies with the thought: ‘Lest the exceedingly sweet Buddha-word may perish, I shall keep the scriptures (in mind), shall preserve the continuity and guard the tradition,’ in that case, is his study of the Treasurer’s type or is it not?—It is not. And why not? Because his study is not applied to his own situation (*na attano thāne thatvā pariyāpunattā*; Sub-Comy: that of (having to) cross over. An unliberated worldling’s study [be he a monk or a lay follower] will either be of the type of the Snake-simile, or for the sake of crossing over; while for the seven (noble persons; *ariya-puggala*) who have entered the higher training (*sekha*), the study is only for the sake of crossing over; for the saint (*arahat*) it is only of the Treasurer’s type.”

¹⁷ Comy: “The teachings” (*dhammā*) are tranquility (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*). The Blessed One, indeed, enjoins us to abandon desire and attachment (*chanda-rāga*) concerning tranquility and insight. Where, then, has he enjoined the abandonment of desire and attachment in the case of tranquility? He did so in the following saying: “Thus, Udāyi, do I teach the abandoning even of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Do you see Udāyi, any fetter fine or coarse, that I did not tell you to discard?” (MN 66). And in the case of insight, the abandoning was enjoined by him as follows: “And to that view thus purified and cleansed, you should not be attached, should not be enamored of it, and should not treasure it.” But here, in this present text, he enjoined the abandoning of desire and attachment concerning both (tranquility and insight), by saying: “You should let go even (good) teachings, how much more false ones!” The meaning is this: “I teach, O monks, the abandoning of desire and attachment even for such peaceful and sublime states (as tranquility and insight); how much more so in regard to that ignoble, low, contemptible, coarse and impure thing in which this foolish Ariṭṭha does not see any harm, saying that desire and attachment for the five sense-objects is not necessarily an obstruction! But you, O monks, unlike that Ariṭṭha, should not fling mud and refuse into my dispensation!” In this way, the Blessed One again rebuked Ariṭṭha by this admonition.

Notes

- ¹⁸ **Grounds for false views** (*ditṭhiṭṭhāna*). Comy: By the words “There are, monks, these six grounds for false views,” the Master wishes to show this: “He who takes the five aggregates of existence as ‘I’ and ‘mine’, by way of a threefold wrong grasp (*tividha-gāha*), he flings mud and refuse into my dispensation, like this Ariṭṭha.”

Comy and Sub-Comy: False views themselves are “grounds” (or bases, starting-points) for subsequently arising false views, like personality belief, eternalism, etc. (Comy: *ditṭhi pi ditṭhiṭṭhānaṃ*). Further, the “grounds” are the subject-matter (*ārammaṇa*, “object”) of the views, i.e., the five aggregates, the visual objects, etc. Finally, they are also the conditioning factors (*paccaya*) of the false views, e.g., ignorance, sense-impression (*phassa*), (faulty) perceptions and thoughts, unwisely directed attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*), bad company, others’ speech, etc. [These, with the aggregates as the first, are the eight “grounds for false views,” as mentioned in the Paṭisambhidāmagga (*Diṭṭhi-kathā*). The term *ditṭhiṭṭhāna* also occurs in the Brahmajāla Sutta (DN 1) and in the commentary to it.

- ¹⁹ **“He considers corporeality thus: ‘This is mine’.”** Comy: This is wrong grasp (or wrong approach) induced by craving (*taṇhā-gāha*). “This I am”: this is wrong grasp induced by conceit (*māna-gāha*). “This is my self”: this is wrong grasp induced by false views (*ditṭhi-gāha*). Here, reference is to craving, conceit, and false views which have corporeality as object; but corporeality cannot be said to be a self. The same holds true for feeling, perception and mental formations.

- ²⁰ **“What is seen”:** (Comy) the visual sense-object base (*rūpāyatana*); **“heard”:** the sound-base; **“sensed”** (*mutaṃ*): the sense-object bases of smell, taste, and touch-sensations; **“what is thought”:** the remaining seven bases, i.e., the mind-object base (*dhammāyatana*) and the six sense-organ bases.

- ²¹ **“Encountered”:** (Comy) after having been sought for, or not sought for; **“sought”:** encountered or not encountered (before); **“mentally pursued”** (*anuvicaritaṃ manasā*): resorted to by consciousness (*cittena anusāncaritaṃ*)—what was encountered or not encountered without being sought for.

The terms “thought,” “encountered,” etc., refer to the fifth aggregate, i.e., consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*), which was not mentioned in the first part of §15.

- ²² **“The universe is the Self,”** lit.: “This (is) the world, this (is) the self” (*so loko so attā*). That, in fact, an identification of the two terms is intended here, will be shown in the following comments. The best explanation of the passage is furnished in the Brahmajāla Sutta (DN 1) where a similar phraseology is used: “There are, monks, some ascetics and brahmins who are eternalists and who proclaim self and world to be eternal” (*sassatavādā sassataṃ attañca lokañca paññapenti*); subsequently the theorist is introduced as stating his view in similar terms: “Eternal are self and world... they exist as eternally the same” (*sassato attā ca loko ca... atthi idheva sassatisamaṃ*). The last term appears likewise in our text; see Note 21. From this we may safely conclude that it is the identity, or unity, of the Self (or soul; *mahātman*, *paramātman*) with the universe (or the Universal Spirit, Brahman) which is conveyed by our text.

In the Commentary specific to our text, this eternalistic view is rendered and classified in the terminology of the Dhamma. The Commentary says:

“This statement (‘The universe is the Self’) refers to the (wrong) view ‘He considers corporeality, etc., as the self (*rūpaṃ attato samanupassatī ti ādinā nayena*).”

The canonical quotation (e.g., in MN 44), included here in the Commentary, has two implications which are of importance for understanding the reason why it was cited in this context:

- (1) As very often in the commentaries (e.g., to Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta), the term “world” (*loko*) is explained as truly referring to the five aggregates (*khandhā*, i.e., corporeality, feeling, etc.), singly or *in toto*.
- (2) This quotation is the formula for the first of the twenty types of personality-belief (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*; e.g., in MN 44). In the first five of these twenty, the self is said to be identical with each of the five aggregates (as in the earlier part of §15 of our text). Hence the application of this quote to our textual passage signifies that the theorist conceives the “world” (i.e., corporeality, feeling, etc.) as

identical with the self.

The double “*So (loko) so (attā)*” in our text, should therefore, be taken as standing for “*yo (loko) so (attā)*,” lit.: what is the world that is the self. In the Comy to MN 44 we find a similar phrase: “Someone considers corporeality as self: what is corporeality that is ‘I’; what is ‘I’ that is corporeality. Thus he considers corporeality and self as non-dual’ (... *yaṃ rūpaṃ so ahaṃ, yo ahaṃ taṃ rūpan’ ti rūpañca advayaṃ samanupassati*).” According to this interpretation the phrase has been translated here by “This universe is the Self.”

Mostly, the first five types of personality-belief are explained as referring to the wrong view of annihilationism (*uccheda-ditṭhi*). [See, e.g., Paṭisambhidāmagga, Diṭṭhikathā, Ucchedaditṭhi-niddesa; further Comy to MN 44.]

But their being quoted in our context, shows that they may also apply to eternalism (*sassata-ditṭhi*). We have come to this conclusion since it is improbable that, in our textual passage two mutually exclusive views should have been combined in a single statement formulating the sixth “ground for false views”; that is, in the first part of that statement, annihilationism, and in the second, eternalism.

²³ “**That I shall be after death...**” (*so pecca bhavissāmi*). Comy explains by “*so ahaṃ*,” a Pāli idiom, meaning literally “this I.” *Pecca*: lit. “having gone,” i.e., to the other world.

²⁴ “**Eternally the same**” (*sassati-samaṃ*): an Upanishadic term; see Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 5.10: *sāsvatīḥ samāḥ*.

This entire statement of the sixth ‘ground for views’ may well have been the original creed of an eternalistic doctrine. The phrasing appears rather vague in the first part, and in general it is rather loosely worded (*so* for *so ahaṃ*). To contemporaries, however, the meaning may have been quite clear since it was perhaps the stock formula for teachings that were well known. Hence, in this translation, we have left the first part of the statement in its rather cryptic and ambiguous original form, while giving the interpretations in the notes only.

²⁵ He identifies himself entirely (Sub-Comy: *attānaṃ viya gaṇhāti*) with that eternalist misconception (*gāha*), induced by craving (for self-perpetuation), by false views (tenaciously maintained) and by conceit (deeply ingrained ego-centricity). Here one view serves as subject-matter for another view (Comy, Sub-Comy).

²⁶ “**He is not anxious about unrealities**” (*asati na paritassati*); or “about the non-existing” (“I” and “mine”). The verb *paritassati* has, according to Comy, the twofold connotation of fear (*bhaya*) and craving (*taṇhā*). Hence this passage may also be rendered: “he has no fears nor cravings concerning the non-existent.” Comy and Sub-Comy to the Brahmajāla Sutta have a long disquisition about the corresponding noun *paritassana*, occurring also in MN 138; SN 22:7, 8, 53, 55.

Comy: “By showing herewith the taint-free saint who has no anxiety at the destruction of his own (lit.: internal) aggregates, the Blessed One concludes his exposition.

²⁷ “**In the external**” (*bahiddhā*): concerning external property which includes also animate possessions, like wife and child, friends, etc.

²⁸ This section deals, according to Comy, with a “four-fold voidness” (*catukoṭīkā suññatā*), i.e., absence of self and mine, referring to one who, at the destruction of his own aggregates (i.e., his personality), (1) feels anguish, (2) feels none; and to one who, at the destruction of external property (3) feels anguish, (4) feels none. For another classification of the “four-fold voidness,” see *Visuddhimagga* (translated by Ñāṇamoli as *The Path of Purification*), p. 762 f; and SN 22:5, where likewise reference to “anxiety” or “anguish” (*tāso*) is made.

²⁹ *Pariggahaṃ pariggaṇḥeyyātha*. This links up with §19: the anxiety about external possessions.

Notes

³⁰ *Attavādupādānam upādiyetha*. While in most translations the term *upādāna* has been rendered by “clinging,” we have followed here a suggestion of the late Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, rendering it by “assumption” [see *The Wheel* No. 17: *Three Cardinal Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 19, BPS, Kandy)]. In this context, the word “assumption” should be understood: (1) in the sense of a supposition, (2) in the literal sense of its Latin source: *adsumere*, “to take up,” which closely parallels the derivation of our Pāli term: *upa-ādāna*, “taking up strongly.” In this sense we have used it when translating the derivative verb *upādiyetha* by “you may accept.” *Attavādupādāna* is one of the four types of clinging (see Nyanatiloka’s *Buddhist Dictionary*), conditioned by craving (*taṇhā*). This term comprises, according to Comy, the twenty types of personality-belief (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*).

Quoting this passage of our text, the Ven. Dr. Walpola Rāhula remarks: “If there had been any soul-theory which the Buddha had accepted, he would certainly have explained it here, because he asked the monks to accept that soul-theory which did not produce suffering. But in the Buddha’s view, there is no such soul-theory...” (*What the Buddha Taught*, London, 1959; p.58).

³¹ *Diṭṭhinissayaṃ nissayetha*. *Nissaya*, lit.: support basis. Comy explains this phrase as the sixty-two false views headed by personality-belief (see DN 1, Brahmajāla Sutta). They form the theoretical or ideological basis, or support, for the various creeds and speculative doctrines derived from them. Sub-Comy: “The view itself is a support for views; because for one with incorrect conceptions, the view will serve as a prop for his firm adherence to, and the propagation of, his ideas.” Alternative renderings: You may well place reliance on a view, or may derive conviction from it.

See Satipatṭhāna Sutta where, in explanation of *anissito* the Comy mentions *taṇhānissaya* and *diṭṭhinissaya*, “dependence on craving and views.”

³² In this section, according to Comy, a “three-fold voidness is shown,” i.e., referring to external possessions, self-theory and reliance on speculative views.

³³ The two supplementary statements in this section suggest the following implications: The concepts of “I” and “mine” are inseparably linked; so also, in philosophical terms, are substance and attribute. If there is personality-belief or self-theory, there will be necessarily acquisitiveness or possessiveness in some form or other; at least these views themselves will be held with strong tenacity and be regarded as an “inalienable property” (see Note 22). There is no pure, abstract self or substance without its determination, property or attribute. On the other hand, acquisitiveness and possessiveness—even if of a quite unphilosophical character—cannot be without at least a tacit assumption of a proprietary self; this applies also to materialistic doctrines (annihilationism). Since in truth and fact neither an abiding property (or attribute) can be established nor an abiding self (or substance), either of these terms is left without its essential referent. Hence the conception of individual immortality as formulated in the sixth ground for views, is found to be devoid of any basis and is, therefore, rejected by the Buddha as a fool’s doctrine, being outside of serious consideration.

Comy: Here a “two-fold voidness” is shown, that of self (*attā*) and of property (or properties) belonging to a self (*attaniya*).

³⁴ “**He becomes disgusted**” (*nibbindati*). Comy: he is dissatisfied, repelled. This disgust (or “turning away,” revulsion; *nibbidā*) signifies the stage of “insight leading to emergence” (*vuṭṭhānagāmini-vipassanā*; *Vism* p. 722f.), which is the culmination of insight, immediately preceding the attainment of the supramundane path (of stream-entry, etc.).

³⁵ “**His passion fades away**” (*virajjati*). This signifies, according to Comy, the attainment of the supramundane path (*magga*); that is the single “moment of entering into one of the four stages of holiness produced by intuitional insight (*vipassanā*) into the impermanency, misery and impersonality of existence, flashing forth and forever transforming one’s life and nature” (Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*). It is at that moment that the fetters are finally eliminated.

³⁶ **“He is freed”** (*vimuccati*). This points to the attainment of the supramundane fruition (*phala*), that is “those moments of consciousness which follow immediately after the path-moment as its result, and which under given circumstances may repeat for innumerable times during a life-time” (*Buddhist Dictionary*).

³⁷ **“Knowledge of freedom”** refers to the stage of reviewing (*paccavekkhana*) the preceding experience of path and fruition, the defilements abandoned, etc. See *Vism* p. 789.

³⁸ This section appears also in AN 5:71 & 72/A III 84. Comy explains the metaphorical expressions as follows:

“There are two cities: one is a city of brigands, the other a city of peace. Now, to a great warrior of the city of peace (i.e., a meditator) the following thought occurs: ‘As long as this city of brigands (the self-delusion) exists, we shall never be free from danger.’ So he dons his armor (of virtue) and goes to the city of brigands. With his sword (of wisdom) he breaks the gate pillar (of craving) together with the door wings, he removes the bolt (of the five lower fetters), lifts the cross-bar (of ignorance), fills in the moat (of *saṃsāra*), and lowers the (enemy’s) flag (of self-conceit). Such a saint (a Noble One) has put down for good the burden of the five aggregates (*khandha*), of kamma-producing volitions (*kammābhisankhāra*) and of the defilements (*kilesa*); has fully liberated himself from the round of existence.”

³⁹ **When searching will (not) find out** (*anvesaṃ nādhigacchanti*). The same phrase is used in the Godhika Sutta (SN 4:23/S I 122) by Māra: *anvesaṃ nādhigacchāmi*, “Searching I cannot find”—i.e., the consciousness of the monk, Godhika who, at the moment of committing suicide, had attained sainthood (*arahatta*). About him the Buddha declares that he “has passed away finally with a consciousness that no longer gives a footing” (for a rebirth; *apatiṭṭhena viññāṇena parinibbuto*).

⁴⁰ *Diṭṭh’ev’āhaṃ bhikkhave dhamme Tathāgataṃ ananuvejjo’ti vadāmi*. Comy: The term *tathāgato* (lit.: “thus-gone”) may refer either to a being (*satto*) or to the greatest man (*uttamo puriso*; the Buddha) and a taint-free saint (*khīṇāsavo*). *Ananuvejjo** means either “non-existing” (*asaṃvijjamāno*) or “not traceable” (*avindeyyo*). If *tathāgato* is taken as “a being” (in the sense of an abiding personality), the meaning “non-existing” applies; if in the sense of a taint-free saint, the meaning “not traceable” is apt. The intention implied in the first case, is: “O bhikkhus, even of a taint-free saint during his lifetime, here and now, I do not declare that he is ‘a being, a personality’ (in the sense of an abiding entity); how, then, should I declare it of a taint-free saint who has finally passed away, without any future rebirth? One thus-gone is untraceable; because in the ultimate sense (*paramatthato*), there is no such thing as ‘a being’ (*satto*). Searching for the basis of consciousness of such a non-existing (being) how can they find it, how can they obtain it?” In the case of the second explanation, the intention is this: “I say that Indra and other gods cannot trace a taint-free saint by way of consciousness (*viññāṇavasena*). For the gods who are with Indra and other deities, even if they make a search, cannot know about the consciousness of insight or that of the supramundane path or fruition (of sainthood; *arahatta*) that ‘it proceeds based on such or such an object.’ How, then, could they know it in the case of one who has finally passed away (*parinibbuto*), and has not been born again?” [Sub-Comy: “The consciousness of insight (*vipassanā-citta*) that aims at the attainment of the highest fruition (i.e., *arahatta*) leaps forward to the unconditioned element (*Nibbāna*) in the thought: “Non-origination is safety. Non-origination is safety!”] (* The Burmese Sixth Council edition reads *ananuvajjo*.)

⁴¹ **“A nihilist”** (*venayiko*). Comy: *satta-vināsako*, “destroyer of a being’s (personality)”; a denier of individuality.

⁴² **“The annihilation of an existing creature”** (*sato sattassa ucchedaṃ*). Sub-Comy: “One who speaks of doing away with a being that has existence in the ultimate sense (*paramatthato*), would actually be one who teaches the destruction of a being. But I am speaking of what does not exist in the ultimate sense. I am using that (term ‘being’) only in the conventional sense as done in common parlance (*yathā loke voharati*).”

Notes

- ⁴³ “**For that**” i.e., for proclaiming the Four Truths (Comy).
- ⁴⁴ Comy: “**Formerly**, that is when still in the environ of the Bodhi tree before turning the Wheel of the Dhamma; and also from the time of turning the Wheel when teaching Dhamma, it was only the Four Truths that I proclaimed.” In our sentence, the term “suffering” includes also its roots, the origination; and the term “cessation” also the path that leads to the cessation.
- Sub-Comy: “There is no teaching of the Master that is unrelated to the Four Truths. By saying, ‘What I teach now as before, is suffering and the cessation of suffering,’ the Blessed One indicates this: ‘Never do I teach a self that is annihilated or destroyed, nor do I teach that there is any kind of self.’”
- ⁴⁵ *Evarūpā kāra kariyanti*. Some Burmese texts and the paraphrase in Comy have *sakkāra*; then to be translated: “that they pay such respect.”
- ⁴⁶ In the ultimate sense, praise and blame do not refer to a self or ego, but to that five-fold aggregate (*pañcakkhandhakam*) which was comprehended by the Buddha as an evanescent combination of material and mental processes, void of an ego-entity. Hence there is no reason for elation or dejection. A passage similar to Sections 38–39 is found at the beginning of DN 1.
- ⁴⁷ “**Not yours**” (*na tumhākam*) is also the title of a section of suttas in the Saṃyutta Nikāya (SN 22:33ff.).
- ⁴⁸ Comy stresses that it is the attachment to the five aggregates, the desire for them (*chanda-rāga*) which should be given up; it is not so that the five aggregates themselves should be, as it were, “torn to pieces or pulled out” (*na ūppāṭetvā luñcivā vā*).
- ⁴⁹ Sub-Comy: “Only corporeality, feeling and the other aggregates are the basis for the wrong concept of a self, since apart from them there is nothing else to be craved for.”
- ⁵⁰ “**This Teaching**”: these words refer, according to Comy, to the entire exposition beginning with §26.
- ⁵¹ “**Free of patchwork**” (*chinna-pilotika*); lit., “devoid of the nature of a patched cloth.” Comy: *Pilotika* is a torn rag cloth patched up with stitches and knots which are similar to hypocrisy and other deceptions. Sub-Comy: substituting assumed attitudes (*iriyapatha-santhapana*) for an actually, in that individual, non-existing practice of meditation and insight. *Pilotika* means also “refuse,” referring to false and unworthy monks who do not have any footing in the Buddha’s dispensation.
- This phrase *chinna-pilotika* seems, however, to point to the inner consistency of the Teaching which, like a new cloth (Comy: *ahata-sātaka*), is of one piece and is not in need of patching up contradictions, by artificial attempts of reconciling inconsistencies. Hence the term may freely be rendered by the single word “consistent.”
- ⁵² *Dhammānusārino saddhānusārino*. These two terms refer to those whose minds are in the process of ripening towards stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), either by way of strengthening the wisdom-faculty (*paññindriya*) through the contemplation of no-self (in the case of the *dhammānusāri*), or by way of strengthening the faith-faculty (*saddhindriya*) through the contemplation of impermanence (in the case of the *saddhānusāri*). When they actually reach the path of stream-entry (*sotāpattimagga*), they are called “mature in Dhamma” and “mature in faith.”
- ⁵³ **Those who have simply faith in me**. Comy: This refers to persons devoted to the practice of insight-meditation (*vipassaka-puggalā*). When monks are seated after having got a firm footing in insight-meditation, there arises in them a unique and fully absorbing faith in, and love for, the Master of the Ten Powers (i.e., the Buddha). (Sub-Comy: because in pursuance of their insight-meditation they have received proof that “the Dhamma is well-proclaimed.”) Through that faith and love they are as if taken by the hand and transported to heaven. They are said to be of assured destiny (*niyatagatika*), i.e., of the final attainment of Nibbāna. The Elder Monks of old say that such bhikkhus are lesser stream-enterers (*cūla-* or *bāla-sotāpanna*; Vism 703).