

# **On The Way To The Far Shore** ***Pārāyanavagga***

**Q&A with The Buddha on the Way to Awakening**



by  
**Leigh Brasington**

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## **Dedication**

For those who seek to evolve,  
by following the Buddha's instructions.

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## Abbreviations and Notes

AN – Aṅguttara Nikāya (book.sutta)

Dhp – Dhammapada (verse)

DN – Dīgha Nikāya (sutta.verse)

Iti – Itivuttaka (verse)

MMK – Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā (chapter) (**Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way** by Nāgārjuna)

MN – Majjhima Nikāya (sutta.verse)

PED – Pāḷi-English Dictionary from the Pāḷi Text Society

SN – Saṃyutta Nikāya (book.sutta)

Sn̐ – Suttanipāṭa (book.sutta)

Ud – Udāna (book.sutta)

Vsm – Visuddhimagga (**The Path of Purification** by Buddhaghosa, translated by the Ven. Nāṇamoli, BPS 1956 +)



All the internet URLs mentioned in this book can be found at

<https://leighb.com/wtfs/links.htm>. Most of the suttas mentioned can be found at [Sutta Central](https://leighb.com/suttacentral.htm) via <https://leighb.com/suttacentral.htm>.

## Preface

In 2015 I was staying at the Insight Meditation Society's [Forest Refuge](#) for two months. I wanted to read K. R. Norman's translation of book 4 of the Suttanipāta, found in his **The Rhinoceros Horn – And Other Early Buddhist Poems** for the half hour of reading that Joseph Goldstein said I was allowed to do just before bed. But the small library at the Forest Refuge did not have a copy of that book. So I offered to buy them a copy as long as I could hang onto it during those 2 months. This was agreed and I started reading.

Prior to this, I had found Norman's translation rather difficult going – it's more literal and just harder to understand. But I read thru book 4 and then continued on reading book 5, since most scholars consider book 5 to also be early material, just like book 4. When I finished book 5, I turned to the beginning and read books 1, 2 and 3 – and then reread books 4 and 5. I continued doing this and by the end of those 2 months I had not only made several passes thru the whole of the Suttanipāta, but had gained a much deeper appreciation of book 5.

The next year, the [Barre Center for Buddhist Studies](#) (BCBS), invited me to teach a weekend class on any subject of my choosing. So I agreed to teach Suttanipāta Book 5 – I knew I would have to study far more extensively than I had done previously in order to do so – and teaching that class was going to force me to do exactly that.

However I became very ill before the class was scheduled to occur and it had to be canceled. But the idea was still there. After I had recovered, in 2022 I was again invited by BCBS to teach a weekend class. Once again I agreed to teach Suttanipāta Book 5 (Snp 5). This time, after much study on my part, I taught the class in June of 2023. The class went well. I was subsequently invited to teach a class for the [Sati Center](#) in the winter of 2024. I decided to repeat the Snp 5 class. My teachings were recorded and Rob Hammond produced a transcript, which I then massaged it into this book.

The reason I wanted to deeply study Snp 5 is that it is a series of questions posed to the Buddha about "the way to the far shore" – the way to awakening.<sup>1</sup> As I read and reread those questions and answers during those two months back in 2015, I realized there is a lot of brilliant teaching in these 16 suttas. So with the transcript in hand as a starting point, I thought I would share what I've learned from the Buddha about the way to liberation.

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1. Throughout this book, I will use “awakening” rather than the perhaps more familiar “enlightenment” since “enlightenment” is not an accurate translation, having been chosen by the early translators to suggest a connection with the European Enlightenment. See Analayo (2021).

## Introduction

Book Five of the Suttanipāta is entitled *Pārāyanavagga*,<sup>1</sup> which can be translated as the "Way to the Far Shore". There are 16 suttas in this collection. All of them are questions posed to the Buddha and his answers. The nature of all of the questions is, in general, "How can I awaken?" or "How can I escape dukkha?" What's so remarkable about this collection is the Buddha's explicit instructions on what must be done to find liberation.

Some scholars regard both the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (Snp 4) and the *Pārāyanavagga* (Snp 5) as being considerably earlier in composition than the bulk of the Pāli Canon. As such they may reveal an earlier form of Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> Much like Gil Fronsdal's wonderful book, **The Buddha before Buddhism** on the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, gives us an idea of what the Buddha's teachings were like before the establishment of Buddhism as an institution, the same can be said for the *Pārāyanavagga*, as it appears to have been composed only a little later than the *Aṭṭhakavagga*.

In this book, there is a chapter for each sutta. Each chapter begins with an English translation of the sutta. These translations at the start of each sutta are my own. For each translation, I began with either the translation from [Sutta Central - Snp 5](#) or [Access To Insight - Snp 5](#), whichever I found most helpful. I would then tweak that based on Norman, Bodhi, the other translations, and my own understanding of the Pāli. The link on a translator's name points to that translator's original version of each sutta. Each translation is followed by a quick summary of the sutta. All of these summaries can also be found in [Appendix 1 - Summaries of the 16 Suttas](#). Then comes my commentary on the sutta, including looking in detail at various verses, sentences, phrases, sometimes even words. Please keep in mind that I am not a Pāli scholar and I'm not formally trained in scholarly analysis. These commentaries are just my understanding of these suttas based on my practice, books I've read, conversations I've had, and my study of the suttas in the five Nikāyas. But hopefully there will be some information you find useful as you make your way to the far shore.

Perhaps the best way to start gleaning useful information from what is here is by looking at the themes found in the suttas. [Appendix 2 - Themes in Suttanipāta 5](#) is a chart showing various themes found here. The themes that occur frequently will give some ideas of how to practice and apply what is found here to your own journey to the far shore.

The most common theme is "craving", appearing in 11 of the 16 suttas. This should not be surprising since dukkha arises dependent on craving and dukkha ceases with the ceasing of craving – the Second and Third Noble Truths. Here in the *Pārāyanavagga* we find these two truths mentioned repeatedly, although never called "Second Noble Truth" or "Third Noble Truth". The overcoming of craving is at the heart of the Buddha's teachings throughout the suttas of the Pāli Canon. "Craving" is clearly the problem that needs to be addressed. The

word "craving" appears in more than 335 suttas,<sup>3</sup> as well as being implied in many more teachings on the Four Noble Truths.

But how do we overcome craving? It is such a strong tendency in the unliberated person, stranded on the fearful near shore. Well, the second most common theme is "mindful/mindfully/mindfulness", appearing in 10 of the 16 suttas. Again, this is not surprising since "mindful", etc. is mentioned in over 900 suttas.<sup>4</sup> Nowhere in the *Pārāyanavagga* is mindfulness defined, explained or instructions given on how to practice it – it seems the Buddha felt his questioners already had access to that information. Instead we find "mindful", "mindfulness", "wander mindful", "ever mindful", "one who lives mindfully". Of course today we have the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas<sup>5</sup> as well as numerous books on mindfulness.<sup>6</sup> See the chapter [Ever Mindful](#) in this book for a more extensive discussion on mindfulness.

Another helpful practice is "abandoning", which is mentioned in 7 of the 16 suttas. The word "abandon" might not appear in some translations, but other words like "give up" and "dispel" refer to the same action. We also find phrases like "calling nothing their own", "traveling with nothing", "one who has nothing", "given up all the countless different things", "having nothing, taking nothing" in reference to those who have reached the far shore. We also find "renunciation" mentioned explicitly in one sutta, but clearly this is what is meant by "abandoning", "give up", "dispel" in numerous other suttas.

Another frequently occurring theme is "sensual desire" which appears in 9 of the 16 suttas. Sensual desire is the second most problematic of the unwholesome mind states mentioned, after craving. Other unwholesome states mentioned include clinging (in 3 suttas), *āsava*s (3), heedlessness (3), fear (2), ignorance (2), avarice (2), rites & rituals (2), doubt (2), attachment (2), agitation (1), desire (1), dissatisfaction (1), mental dullness (1) and regret (1).

"Birth", "old age", and "death" are mentioned in a half dozen suttas. It seems that some of the questions are about how to not be reborn. The Buddha's answers are generally phrased such that they could be both how to avoid rebirth, and how to overcome the *āsava* of becoming, depending on the depth of your understanding.

"Nothingness" is only mentioned in 2 suttas, the "cessation of consciousness" is also only mentioned in 2 suttas, and "empty" is only mentioned in 1 sutta. Details on all of these very important topics will be found in the relevant suttas.

Imagery of crossing to the far shore shows up with themes like "flood/streams", "crossing over", and "island".



All 16 suttas are in verse. Pāḷi poetry relies on meter (the number and type of syllables in a line). Hence we can be sure these suttas are not recordings of actual conversations. But they all are good Dhamma. Whether or not there ever were conversations with each of the questioners is irrelevant. All suttas, including these, should be read, not as history, but as



practice instructions. Here the instructions teach the way to the far shore.

Most of the Pāli words are translated and there is a [Glossary](#) at the end of the book. However a few Pāli words do not have adequate English words and are left untranslated. These include:

- *dukkha* – bummer, unsatisfactoriness, stress, suffering
- *nibbāna* (Pāli) / *nirvana* (Sanskrit) – literally “not burning,” *i.e.*, not burning with the fires of greed, hatred, or delusion; the goal of the holy life; the realization that brings an end to *dukkha*
- *papañca* – mental proliferation
- *saṃsāra* – worldly existence, the infinitely repeating cycles of birth, *dukkha*, and death
- *vedanā* – initial automatic mental categorization of sensory input as pleasant, unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant; valence; feeling (but not emotion!)

Book Five of the Suttanipāta starts with a [Prologue](#), then come the 16 suttas, and finally there are two [Epilogues](#). The Prologue and both Epilogues were highly likely composed well after the 16 suttas which appear to be very early material, as mentioned above. None of these three have anything useful to say about practice on the spiritual path.

And finally, the questioners have various ways they address the Buddha. They refer to him as the "Blessed One", the "Great Seer", the "Sakyan", "Good Sir", and many more. All of these are collected in [Appendix 3 - Epithets for the Buddha](#).

1. *Pārāyanavagga* is composed of *Pāra* - *yana* - *vagga*. *Pāra* is "the other side, the far shore", and *Yāna* is "going, proceeding". *Pārāyana* literally is "going to the far shore;" in the compound, the meaning is "the highest (farthest) point, final aim, chief object, ideal". *Vagga* is "a section or chapter of a canonical book". So literally "The Going to the Far Shore Chapter". The definitions of *Pāra*, *yana*, *vagga* and *Pārāyana* are all from the PED.

2. Gomez (1976)

3. See <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/craving.htm>

4. See <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/mindfulness.htm>

5. DN 22, MN 10 and many suttas at SN 47

6. See Anālayo (2003), Sujato (2005), Goldstein (2013)

## Sutta Numbering in Suttanipāta Book Five

Translators use 2 different methods for numbering the 16 suttas in the *Pārāyanavagga*. They differ in how they treat the [Prologue](#) found prior to the first actual sutta.

### Method #1 - 0 relative

The [Prologue](#) is ignored for sutta numbering. It is treated as though it was Snp 5.0. The first sutta is Snp 5.1. This makes total sense, especially since the Prologue is clearly a later addition. This numbering method is used by [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#) and by [Access to Insight](#).

### Method #2 - 1 relative

The [Prologue](#) is numbered as Snp 5.1. It is treated the same way as the actual suttas. The actual first sutta is Snp 5.2; the last and 16th sutta is Snp 5.17. This provides oodles of confusion in that e.g. the 4th sutta is Snp 5.5, etc. This numbering method is used by [K. R. Norman](#) and [Sutta Central](#).

### This Book

This book uses Method #1 - 0 relative. That way the first sutta is Snp 5.1 and the 16th one will be Snp 5.16. If you are looking up a sutta in [K. R. Norman](#) or [Sutta Central](#), you will need to add 1 to the sutta number to find the correct sutta. **Always double check the sutta's name to make sure you have the correct sutta!**

The translation collections I consulted are listed in [Appendix 4 - Translations](#). The link on a translator's name points to that translator's original version of each sutta. The translations at the start of each sutta are my own. I would take the translation from either [Sutta Central - Snp 5](#) or [Access To Insight - Snp 5](#) that I found most helpful, and then tweak it based on Norman, Bodhi, the other translations, and my own understanding of the Pāli.

This webpage outlines [An Easy Way to Find the Pāli in Suttas](#) and is found at <https://leighb.com/paliinsuttas.htm>.

## Prologue

The *Pārāyanavagga* starts out with a Prologue about how these suttas came to be. I am very skeptical. It's cute, but it has nothing to do with the *Pārāyanavagga*'s teachings. This tale seems to have been added to show the superiority of the Buddha over the brahmins. There are numerous later suttas that were composed to show that Buddhism is superior to some other spiritual tradition.<sup>1</sup> This Prologue is just another example.

The Prologue story is that a kindly old brahmin named Bāvari hosted another brahmin who demanded five hundred coins. Bāvari said he didn't have such money, so the other brahmin performed a ritual and uttered this dreadful curse: “If, good sir, you do not give me what I ask, then on the seventh day, let your head explode in seven!”

Bāvari became distressed, anxious and distraught, and lost his appetite. A deva visited Bāvari and said, "That charlatan understands nothing about the head, he only wants money". Bāvari asked the deva about heads and head-splitting and she said she didn't know, but the Buddha would know – Bāvari should visit the Buddha.

Bāvari summoned his 16 young brahmin students (one of whom is very old!) and tells them to go to the far kingdom of Kosala and ask the Buddha about heads and head-splitting. They will know him because the Buddha will have the 32 marks of a great man. They are to mentally ask the Buddha what he knows about Bāvari, and about heads and head-splitting. If he is the real deal, he will answer without them having to say a word.

The 16 students pass thru 16 different locations before reaching the Buddha in Magadha, not Kosala (it surely took more than a week, but Bāvari, still back home, seemed to be over his fear of his head splitting). They mentally questioned the Buddha and after confirming he was the real deal, they asked about heads and head-splitting. The Buddha replies:

“Know ignorance as the head, and knowledge as the head-splitter when joined with faith, mindfulness, concentration, enthusiasm, and energy. May the brahmin Bāvari be happy, together with his students. Please ask whatever you want.”

So instead of rushing back to tell Bāvari what the Buddha said, the 16 students supposedly asked the questions found in the following 16 suttas.

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1. E.g. DN 2, DN 29, MN 35, MN 36, MN 56, MN 58, MN 77, SN 2.30, SN 3.1, SN 22.60, AN 3.72, AN 9.38, Snp 2.14

## Snp 5.1 - Ajita

Snp 5.1 PTS: Sn 1032-1039

**Ajita-māṇava-pucchā**

**Ajita's Questions**

translated from the Pāli by

[John D. Ireland](#) © 1994

adapted by Leigh Brasington

from translations from the Pāli by

K. R. Norman and [Bhikkhu Sujato](#)

1032 [Ajita:]

"By what is the world enveloped? Why does it not shine? What do you say is its tar pit?

<sup>1</sup> What is its great fear?"

1033 [The Buddha:]

"The world is enveloped by ignorance, Ajita. Because of wrongly directed desire and heedlessness it is not known (as it really is). Longing is its tar pit, and its great fear is dukkha."

1034 [Ajita:]

"Everywhere flow the streams. What is the obstruction for the streams, tell me the restricting of them, by what are they cut off?"

1035 [The Buddha:]

"Whatever streams are in the world, it is mindfulness that obstructs them and restricts them, and by wisdom they are cut off."

1036 [Ajita:]

"It is just wisdom and mindfulness. Now mind-and-body, sir, explain this: where does it cease?"

1037 [The Buddha:]

"This question you have asked, Ajita, I will answer for you: where mind-and-body completely cease. By the cessation of consciousness they cease."

1038 [Ajita:]

"Those who have fully understood the Dhamma, those who are training and the other individuals here, explain their (rule of) conduct."

1039 [The Buddha:]

"Not craving for sensual pleasures and with a mind that is pure and tranquil a bhikkhu should mindfully go forth, skillful in all situations."

My summary:

B: The world is enveloped by ignorance. Because of wrongly directed desire and heedlessness it is not known as it really is. Longing is where we get stuck. The great fear is dukkha.

B: Mindfulness obstructs and restricts the streams of dukkha; by wisdom they are cut off.

B: Mind-and-body completely cease with the cessation of consciousness.

B: The practice is not craving for sensual pleasures, with a mind that is pure, tranquil, and mindful.

The first Sutta is to Ajita, who asks, "By what is the world shrouded, why does it not shine? Tell me, what is its tar pit? What is its greatest fear?" The question is not exactly clear as to what he's asking, but the answer is helpful for this figuring out.

"The world is shrouded/enveloped in ignorance." We cannot see clearly because we ignore what is actually happening. The Pāli word is *avijjā*, which means "not knowing". *Vijjā* is to know something, so *avijjā* is not knowing. *Loko* is "world", *nivuto* is "shrouded/enveloped". So "Ignorance conceals the true nature of the world. Wanting and negligence make it not shine. Longing is its tar pit/sticky lime." In other words, longing is how we get caught, trapped. How do you personally get caught with your longings, your desires?

"Dukkha is its greatest fear." Basically we are afraid that we will experience dukkha. I once made the comment that all aversion is rooted in fear. Somebody said, "I hate broccoli, but I'm not afraid of it." And I replied, "Actually, you are. You're afraid if you put it in your mouth, you will experience unpleasant vedanā – dukkha vedanā." So often fear is what drives us, and that fear is fear of dukkha vedanā – or simply fear of dukkha.

Ajita continues, "The streams flow everywhere. What is there to block them? Tell me the restraint of streams. By what are they cut off/locked out/controlled?"<sup>2</sup> The "streams" Ajita is referring to would be dukkha.<sup>3</sup>

"Whatever streams/currents there are in the world, it is mindfulness that obstructs them and restricts them." If you are caught in a current that you don't want to be caught in, then the first thing is mindfulness. "Cutting off/control-over/locking-out of these streams is due to wisdom." With mindfulness, we have the ability to become more aware of what's actually happening; with that awareness, we then have the ability use our wisdom to act in ways that avoid getting caught.

Ajita then asks, "Ah, wisdom and mindfulness! Now that which is name-and-form – please tell me where does this all cease?" "Name-and-form" is *nama-rupa*. "Name-form" is the literal translation. Sometimes, particularly in talking about dependent origination, you see *nama-rupa* translated as mind-and-body. *Nama-rupa* is used in many different contexts and I

don't think there's any one translation that captures all the uses. Another way to translate nama-rupa is "concept-and-manifestation". If I say to you, "smartphone", you know what a smartphone is, right? That's a name, a *nama*. That's a concept. If I hold up a smartphone, that's a manifestation, that is a *rupa*. Mostly what we're dealing with is our concepts and the manifestations of those concepts. What Ajita wants to know is, where does that come to an end?

"This question you have asked, Ajita, I will answer for you: where mind-and-body completely cease. By the cessation of consciousness they cease." That sounds really weird! Is enlightenment just going unconscious? That doesn't make much sense. So what's going on here?

To help understand this, it's useful to know that the cessation of consciousness shows up in 8 suttas.<sup>4</sup> In [Appendix 1 - Summaries of the 16 Suttas](#) for this sutta, concerning the cessation of consciousness, it says see [DN 11](#). So to understand this, let's take a look at [Dīgha Nikāya 11](#). There are some verses at the end of a very nice mythological tale about a monk who wants to know where the four elements cease without remainder. He goes up through all the heavens trying to find the answer. Nobody knows. Finally, Brahma tells him, "Hey, you look like a Buddhist monk, go ask the Buddha." So that monk asks the Buddha, who answers, "You've asked your question wrong."

"This is how the question should have been put:

‘Where do earth, water, fire and air no footing find?  
Where are long and short, small and great, beautiful and ugly -  
Where are “name-and-form” wholly brought to an end?’

"And the answer is:

‘Consciousness that is signless, limitless, all-illuminating,

That's where earth, water, fire and air no footing find,  
There both long and short, small and great, beautiful and ugly -  
There “name-and-form” are wholly brought to an end.

With the cessation of *viññāṇa* [divided-knowing] all this is brought to an end’"

(*Viññāṇa* is the word we usually translate as consciousness; it literally means "divided knowing".)



Consciousness that is signless.<sup>5</sup> Can you see the flowers below?



You see the flowers? There are no flowers. There are only colored shapes. If you are reading this on a digital device, there are only pixels. Your mind makes the flowers. This is *sañña*, which is one of the five aggregates – *khandhas*. We go around *sañña*-izing, or conceptualizing, our sensory input. Usually *sañña* is translated as "perception", but I think a much more accurate translation is "conceptualization". So you conceptualize those colored

shapes as flowers. And you do that by picking up the signs of the colored shapes. The signs of the colored shapes are the signs of flowers.

What the Buddha is saying is that *nama-rupa* comes to an end with consciousness that's not using signs to conceptualize what's going on. If you can do that, you realize that normally what we're doing is interacting with the world in terms of our concepts. We go around conceptualizing the whole world. But if you don't conceptualize and can still remain conscious, you realize how we are totally caught up interacting with our concepts rather than actual reality. If you don't conceptualize and can still remain conscious, it's like you're experiencing the world raw without adding conceptualizations on top of it. It's signless.

It's limitless because you're not conceptualizing any limits. You realize, "Oh, it's like this everywhere, even in the places from which no current sensory input is being received. Where there's no current sensory input, there's no conceptualizing obviously. And where there is current sensory input, now there's also no conceptualizing either." This is all-illuminating. You realize the whole world is like this. You have stopped "thingifying"<sup>6</sup> your experience – and when you do that, there are no names, there are no forms, there are no dualities.

Now, the other thing to say about the world is that the only world we know is the world of our senses. The only thing you've ever seen in your life is neurological activity in your visual cortex. You've never seen a tree – you just see neurological activity in your visual cortex. You've never touched a tree. What you experience when you touch a tree is the pressure receptors in your fingers being activated. Then we interpret all this stuff with our concepts. We have to do that because we have to have to find food to eat, we need clothes to wear, we need shelter to keep warm and keep the rain off. So conceptualization is actually very useful, but it somewhat hides what's actually going on. Sometimes our conceptualizations are accurate and sometimes they are not. The name-and-form, the conceptualizing and manifesting, that we do experience comes to an end with consciousness that is signless, limitless, and all-illuminating. Then water, earth, fire, and air, and wind, no footing find. There long and short, small and large, beautiful and ugly, there name-and-form are all come to an end.

Finally there is this very strange sentence: "With the cessation of consciousness all this comes to an end." The word *viññāṇa*, which we translate as consciousness, is literally "divided knowing". For example, you're not aware of the pressure on your left foot until you read "pressure on your left foot". You weren't conscious of it. But then you divided that sensory input out from the rest of the field of current sensory input. It's the same with what's in your peripheral vision. You weren't aware of what's in your peripheral vision until you read the phrase. But then you divided your peripheral vision from what you had been looking at, presumably this book. So with the cessation of divided knowing, with the cessation of chopping the world up into bits and pieces, what I call "thingifying the world", that's where *nama-rupa* comes to an end. You do that with consciousness that's signless. You do that with the consciousness that's not getting lost in the concepts that are created by the signs of things. It not only sees through the flowers, it also doesn't get lost in the concept of book or screen or anything else.



To finish of the sutta: Ajita asks, "Those who have fully understood the Dhamma, those who are training and the other individuals here, explain their conduct." The word *dhamma* has multiple meanings: The Dhamma, doctrine, phenomena, mind objects.<sup>7</sup> I suspect all possible meanings are meant here including the sense of understanding the phenomenal world. So the people that are training to understanding the phenomenal world, or who have already succeeded in doing so, what are they like? How do they behave?

"Not craving for sensual pleasures and with a mind that is pure and tranquil one should mindfully go forth, skillful in all situations." Part of being "skillful in all situations" is understanding the phenomenal world and thus not being fooled by your conceptualizing. The idea isn't that you never conceptualize, you have to conceptualize to find something to eat. The Buddha obviously conceptualized; he ate with his hand, but he never ate his fingers. He was conceptualizing that the food is different from his fingers. But he wasn't fooled by his conceptualizing. That's what we're after – to experience the world from time to time without concepts, just experience it raw. When we can do so, there is nothing to crave or cling to; hence, that's the end of dukkha.

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1. The Pāli *kissābhilepanam* is translated in multiple ways: "with what is it soiled?" (Ireland), "what is its tar pit?" (Sujato), "what is its adhesive?" (Bodhi), "what is its (sticky) lime?" (Norman), "with what is it smeared?" (Thanissaro), and "with what is it polluted; tarnished; stained; defiled?" It seems to point to dirty and sticky. I went with "tar pit" since that seems to capture the range of translations.

2. "Flow" in "The streams flow everywhere" is a translation of *savanti*. You might be familiar with the Pāli word *āsava* where the *sava* is "dripping, flowing with" and *āsava* itself is literally "out-flow".

3. "Streams" in the "restraint of streams" is *sotānam*, which literally is "stream; river; current". You might be familiar with the Pāli word *sotāpana*, the name for the first level of awakening: "stream entry".

4. See <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/cessationofconsciousness.htm>

5. See [Appendix 5 - Nonduality](#) for more on "Signless" and how it relates to nonduality.

6. See [Appendix 5 - Nonduality](#) for more on "Thingifying" and how it relates to nonduality.

7. Pāli was an oral language so it didn't have capitalization - it didn't have any letters at all. When a Pāli word is capitalized, it's just the translator trying to help you understand the intended meaning. So *Dhamma* would refer to the teachings of the Buddha and *dhamma* would be one of other possible meanings, like "doctrine", "phenomena", "mind objects". In Ireland's translation at the beginning of this chapter, he uses "the Dhamma" – so he understands the Pāli *dhamma* (no "the!") as the teachings of the Buddha. But it is not clear

exactly what Ajita meant – he could have meant "teachings of the Buddha", or "doctrine" (in general), or "phenomena".

## Experiencing the World Raw

"... it's like you're experiencing the world raw ..."

I probably should say more about what I mean when I write about "experiencing the world raw". But all the words that I could possibly write about it will not capture what it's like. You have to experience it for yourself. If you've never eaten a mango and somebody describes a mango to you, you have no idea what it tastes like. You actually have to bite into the mango. By experiencing the world raw, I mean experiencing the world and not conceptualizing your experience – but no words are able to describe such an experience.

The advice given to Bāhiya in [Udana 1.10](#) teaches a practice for learning to do that. The advice to Bāhiya is "in seeing there is just seeing; in hearing, just hearing; in sensing, just sensing; in cognizing, just cognizing. When you can do that Bāhiya, there's no you in that, there's no you in this, there's no you in between. Just this is the end of dukkha." So if you want to get to a place where you're experiencing the world raw, then the practice to do is the Bāhiya practice. This is an open awareness practice – and since you're seeing, you would do it with your eyes open. And importantly, it's non-dual. You're not seeing tree and house and bird and car and so forth. At first you see seeing, but then you want to step even further back and there is just seeing. There's not even seeing seeing. There's just seeing – and then the same for the other senses. That's how you would practice to get to experiencing the world raw.

One place to do this is when going for a walk some place where you don't have to worry about navigating back, and there's no tree roots or rocks in the path, and it's not too busy – I wouldn't do this in a city. You walk along and see if you can just sort of step back from the usual processing of sensory field inputs into objects. You're then just seeing the visual field and you're just hearing the auditory field. If you can do that, then you begin to experience the world without conceptualizing your experience. When it's going well, what I find is I can sense my feet going up and down, but I'm not conceptualizing my feet going up and down. There's just a sense of things moving and the visual field streaming past me. At that point I've got the seeing, hearing, sensing. The mind – the cognizing – is the hard one. Get good at those first three and then you can try and work with the mind.

When you can get good at this practice, you integrate it – in that you realize that mostly what we are interacting with is our concepts, rather than the reality that our concepts are supposed to be representing. Actual reality is not made of concepts – concepts are something we add on top of our raw sensory data. Modern neuroscience talks about top-down / bottom-up processing – AKA predictive processing. "Bottom-up processing refers to the fact that perceptions are built from sensory input. ... Top-down processing refers to how we interpret sensations due to influences from our available knowledge, our experiences, and our

thoughts."<sup>1</sup> To use the words from the suttas, bottom-up processing is sense contact (*phassa*) and feeling-tone/valence (*vedanā*); top-down processing is perception/conceptualization (*sañña*) co-joined with mental activities (*sankhāra*) like thoughts, emotions, memories, intentions. When we experience a sense contact (bottom-up), to process it, we guess at what it is we are experiencing (top-down). If our guess matches closely enough to the incoming sense data, that's what we perceive. If our guess does not match closely enough, we guess again until we get a close enough match. Remember all of this is verbs even though we often use nouns to discuss this. The noun (concept) that arises as an end result of this processing (verbs) is a concept – and we believe the static noun (concept) matches the dynamic environment.<sup>2</sup>

The Bāhiya practice is designed to take us back to the raw sense contact experience without the further *sañña* processing (the *vedanā* processing is automatic and will still happen, but no top-down processing takes place with correctly done Bāhiya practice).

Once you get good at experiencing this (biting into the mango, so to speak), you're less likely to be fooled by your conceptualizing. That's the whole idea. What usually we do is that we conceptualize, for example, this is my smartphone. Well, no, this is a bunch of plastic and silicon and metal and glass. And it's only temporarily mine. If I lose it, it's not mine. When it wears out, it's electronic waste to be disposed of – and then it's no longer mine. Thus we start seeing the world differently, we more easily become aware of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta* – inconstancy, unsatisfactoriness, not-self/emptiness.<sup>3</sup>

When you can get to the point in meditation where there is no conceptualizing of anything and there's just the raw sensory input, that can teach you that when there is anything, what we're experiencing is our concepts. And our concepts aren't necessarily correct. Look at all the political division in the United States here in the mid 2020's. It's all arguing about different concepts: This is a human. No, this is not a human. That's a threat. No, that's not a threat. It just goes on and on and on like that.

The idea is for you to step back far enough to see the limitations of concepts by actually experiencing the world prior to conceptualizing. When you can do that and understand the limitations of concepts, you don't get lost as easily in your own concepts. You're still going to have to use concepts, because that's how you're going to get something to eat, wear, etc.

Nibbāna is a concept and it's described in the suttas negatively: not this, not that. We can't definitively say what it is other than it's the end of *dukkha*, the end of greed, hatred and delusion. That's about as positive as we can get – it's the end of something. The reason that it's the end of greed, hatred, and delusion is that your conceptualizing of the world no longer finds anything for you to be greedy about, or to hate, or to be deluded about. Just this is the end of *dukkha*.<sup>4</sup>

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1. See "Bottom Up And Top Down Processing" at <https://jackwestin.com/resources/mcat-content/perception/bottom-up-and-top-down-processing>.

2. For further information on bottom-up / top-down processing, see the youtube video "Non-dual Awareness and Awakening" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvPtqGp9PHA> and/or read Andy Clark's **Surfing Uncertainty: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind** or his **The Experience Machine: How Our Minds Predict and Shape Reality**. **Surfing Uncertainty** is a difficult read; hopefully **The Experience Machine** is an easier read – I have not yet read it.
3. See [Appendix 5 - Nonduality](#) for more on "emptiness" and how it relates to nonduality.
4. See [Appendix 5 - Nonduality](#) for more on "*Nibbāna*" and how it relates to nonduality.

## Cessation of Viññāṇa [divided-knowing]

"With the cessation of *viññāṇa* [divided-knowing] all this is brought to an end."

More can also be said about my unorthodox interpretation of the line, "With the cessation of *viññāṇa* [divided-knowing] all this is brought to an end." The Pāli word *viññāṇa* literally means "divided knowing". The prefix "vi" in this instance is an "inseparable prefix of separation"<sup>1</sup> and "ñāṇa" is "knowledge". Making this a verb-form (gerund) yields "divided knowing". In order to become conscious of something, you divide the something out from all the other possible sensory inputs, as was discussed in the previously.

The orthodox interpretation of this line is that this cessation of consciousness is a path moment. A path moment is an experience without an experiencer that takes you to the next of the four levels of awakening. But I don't think that's what's being referred to here, because path moments are a much later idea found in the commentaries, not in the suttas. What I think the Buddha is doing here is reverting back to the literal meaning of *viññāṇa*: divided knowing. With the cessation of divided knowing, with the cessation of breaking the world up into bits and pieces, what I refer to as "thingifying", all dualities come to an end. It's the same as the Bāhiya practice: with seeing, there's just seeing, etc. This sentence is definitely not about going unconscious – the first part of the answer is "consciousness that is signless, limitless, all-illuminating" – which certainly does not apply to someone who is unconscious. So the cessation of consciousness here would be the same as the cessation of conceptualizing.

"Viññāṇa (Consciousness)" is not a well defined term in the suttas. It can be synonymous with "mind"; it can refer to the fifth *khandha* (aggregate), the sixth *dhātu* (element), sense consciousness, as well as opposed to unconsciousness, or it can be used literally as "divided knowing". Sutta [MN 112](#) uses it in all four of the first four ways mentioned just above. Consciousness also occurs as the third of the twelve links of dependent origination. But consciousness does not appear in the earliest recension of dependent origination found in [Suttanipāta 4.11](#).<sup>2</sup> Consciousness appears to have been added in at some later time, and it's more like mental processing (as opposed to divided knowing) when it appears in the links of dependent origination.

Here, in the line we are discussing, my understanding is that the ceasing of *viññāṇa* is the ceasing of chopping the sensory world up into distinct/discrete objects – what I referred to above as "thingifying". When you do cease thingifying, then all dualities disappear – no long and short, no small and great, no beautiful and ugly, no name-and-form. At this point, you experience the world non-conceptually. Having experienced the world non-conceptually, you can finally begin to deeply experience the limitations of your usual concepts, thereby getting a chance for a more accurate picture of what's actually happening. Having a more accurate picture of what's actually happening enables you to see the futility of your craving and

clinging – and hopefully you manage to do less of that, or even eliminate it entirely – just this is the end of dukkha.

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1. See Davids **Pāli-English Dictionary** (1926 + 1959) under *vi*.

2. See my book [Dependent Origination and Emptiness](#) for more on this "earliest" point, especially in the chapter "The Key".

## Snp 5.2 - Tissametteyya

Snp 5.2 PTS: Sn 1040-1042

**Tissametteyya-māṇava-pucchā:**

**Tissametteyya's Questions**

adapted by Leigh Brasington

from translations from the Pāli by

Thanissaro Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Sujato

1040 [Tissametteyya:]

"Who here in the world is contented?

Who has no agitations?

What thinker knowing both sides, is not stuck in between?

Whom do you call a great person?

Who here has overcome the seamstress?"

1041 [The Buddha:]

"One leading the spiritual life among sensual pleasures, ever mindful, free from craving;

A practitioner, through appraising things, is quenched and has no agitations.

1042

"The thinker knowing both sides, is not stuck in between.

This one I call a great person.

This one here has overcome the seamstress."

My summary:

Q: Who has succeeded on the spiritual path?

A: Those leading the spiritual life among sensual pleasures, rid of craving, ever mindful.

Tissametteyya wants to know who has succeeded on the spiritual path. His defining qualities for spiritual success are: being contented, no agitations, not getting caught in extremes or the middle, and having overcome the seamstress. The seamstress is usually taken to be a metaphor for craving.

The Buddha begins his answer by speaking of those leading the spiritual life among sensual pleasures, who are not caught in craving, and who are ever mindful. This is what it takes to succeed on the spiritual path. There are going to be sensual pleasures out there; don't get hooked, don't lose your way, don't get lost in craving. Also it is very important to keep your mindfulness up. The phrase "ever mindful" (*sadā sato*) will appear again in this sutta collection,<sup>1</sup> plus the next chapter, [Ever Mindful](#), discusses it in some detail – it's a very



important practice.

The Buddha goes on to say, "A practitioner, through appraising things, is quenched and has no agitations." One needs to investigate, gain insight, reflect/consider/appraise until one is quenched. The Pāḷi translated as "quenched" is *nibbuto* and refers both to quenching a fire and quenching the mental fires of greed, hatred and delusion. *Nibbuto* is the verb form of the noun *nibbāna* - the goal of the Buddhist spiritual path. Quenching these three fires overcomes all agitation.

"The thinker knowing both sides, is not stuck in between. This one I call a great person. This one here has overcome the seamstress." The one who has practiced as described in the previous two paragraphs **is** the thinker who doesn't get stuck in extremes or in between. This one **is** the great person. This one has overcome the seamstress – craving.

What is meant by "both sides" and "in between/the middle" is not clear. But there is a sutta in the numerical discourses at [AN 6.61](#) that delves into exactly what is meant here. These terms in Snp 5.2 are interpreted in six different ways by six different monks:

1. Contact is one side. The origin of contact is the second. The cessation of contact is the middle.
2. The past is one side. The future is the second. The present is the middle.
3. Pleasant vedanā is one side. Painful vedanā is the second. Neutral vedanā is the middle.
4. Name/Nama is one side. Form/Rupa is the second. Consciousness is the middle.
5. The six senses are one side. The six sense objects are the second. Consciousness is the middle.
6. Personal existence is one side. Its origin is the second. The cessation of personal existence is the middle.

They all agree that "craving is the seamstress, for craving weaves one into becoming in one state or another. That is how one directly knows what should be directly known and completely understands what should be completely understood. Knowing and understanding thus they make an end of dukkha in this very life."

In AN 6.61, the six monks agree each has spoken well, but they are now curious what the Buddha had in mind when he spoke those words – so they go see him and ask him that. He agrees that they all have spoken well, but that what he had in mind when speaking with Tissametteyya was that "Contact is one side. The origin of contact is the second. The cessation of contact is the middle" – and remember, we are to not get stuck in the middle. But what exactly does this entail?

Contact is defined as the coming together of three things: Sense object, sense organ, and sense consciousness – see [MN 18](#) for example. In the teachings on dependent origination, contact arises dependent on *nama-rupa* – Name & Form, so contact ceases when either *nama*

or *rupa* ceases. Luckily there is a sutta, [Snp 4.11](#) – Quarrels and Disputes – where the Buddha says, "Contact is dependent upon *nama* and *rupa*. ... By the disappearance of *rupa*, contact is not experienced." The questioner in that sutta then asks, "For whom does *rupa* disappear?" The answer is cryptic:

One's conceptualization of concepts is not the ordinary kind,  
 nor is one's conceptualization of concepts abnormal;  
 one is not without conceptualization,  
 nor is one's conceptualization of that which has ended –  
 to such a one form disappears.  
 Conceptualization is indeed the source of *papañca* (obsessive proliferation).

"Conceptualization" is my translation of the Pāli word *sañña*. It's usually translated as "perception", but I think "conceptualization" better captures what the Buddha is teaching. Fully unpacking the answer given in this verse is difficult – I didn't attempt to do so until the last chapter of my book [Dependent Origination and Emptiness](#) (DO&E). That chapter is entitled "Don't Be Fooled By Your Conceptualizing" and builds on all that has gone before it. What we can say here is that when there is a sensory input, we conceptualize that input, which then provides us with the name/identification of that input. Unfortunately, we believe those concepts to be real – to be a totally accurate reflection of the underlying reality – and this is what gets us into trouble. In this verses from [Snp 4.11](#), the Buddha is not saying we should operate without concepts, or that all concepts are false – he's indicating that we need to not be fooled by our conceptualizing.

So folding the Buddha's teaching in [Snp 4.11](#) into his answer to Tissametteyya, we have the following:

"Contact is one side." This is clear by itself.

"The origin of contact is the second." This is *nama-rupa*. If either *nama* or *rupa* cease, then contact will not originate.

"The cessation of contact is the middle." The verses above from [Snp 4.11](#) teach that *rupa* ceases with not being fooled by one's conceptualizing. Conceptualizing hasn't ceased, rather one no longer believes one's concepts are an exact match for physical reality (*rupa*). Experientially understanding this, one does not get stuck in the middle.

The reason one does not get stuck in the middle is that by not being fooled by one's conceptualizing, the tendency to generate *papañca* (obsessive proliferation) has been squashed. With no *papañca*, then there is no craving to "weave one into becoming in one state or another. That is how one directly knows what should be directly known and completely understands what should be completely understood. Knowing and understanding thus they make an end of dukkha in this very life."<sup>2</sup>

We will return to this verse from [Snp 4.11](#) later in this book in the chapter [Snp 5.14 - Posāla](#).

## 1. [Snp 5.15 - Mogharāja](#)

2. See [MN 18](#) for more details about how the ending of *papañca* leads to the ending of delight, welcoming, and holding – activities which lead to craving, clinging, discontent, agitation, and dukkha.

## Ever Mindful

Mindfulness has gotten a lot of deservedly top billing lately and hopefully you have some idea what mindfulness is about. I would translate mindfulness – *sati* – as remembering to be fully present with what's happening in the here and now. You're not lost in the past or the future; you're paying full attention to what's going on in the here and now.

Since there are over 900 suttas where mindfulness occurs,<sup>1</sup> clearly the practice of mindfulness is an important part of the Buddha's teachings. There are multiple mindfulness practices given in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. There are 13 in the Pāli sutta versions and there are multiple other versions. Maybe you're familiar with [Bhikkhu Analayo's teachings from some of the Āgamas](#), the Chinese versions; there are two Āgama versions that he teaches from there. There are also a Sanskrit version and another Pāli version in the Abhidhamma.

Bhikkhu Analayo's PhD thesis is on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and it has been turned into wonderful [scholarly book on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta](#). There's an excellent book by Bhikkhu Sujato called [A History of Mindfulness](#) that you can download from my website. It provides many details about the history of the mindfulness suttas and how they came to be in their present forms. Joseph Goldstein has a really brilliant book called [Mindfulness](#), which is a collection of discourses he gave at the Forest Refuge on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and how to do the practices taught in this sutta.

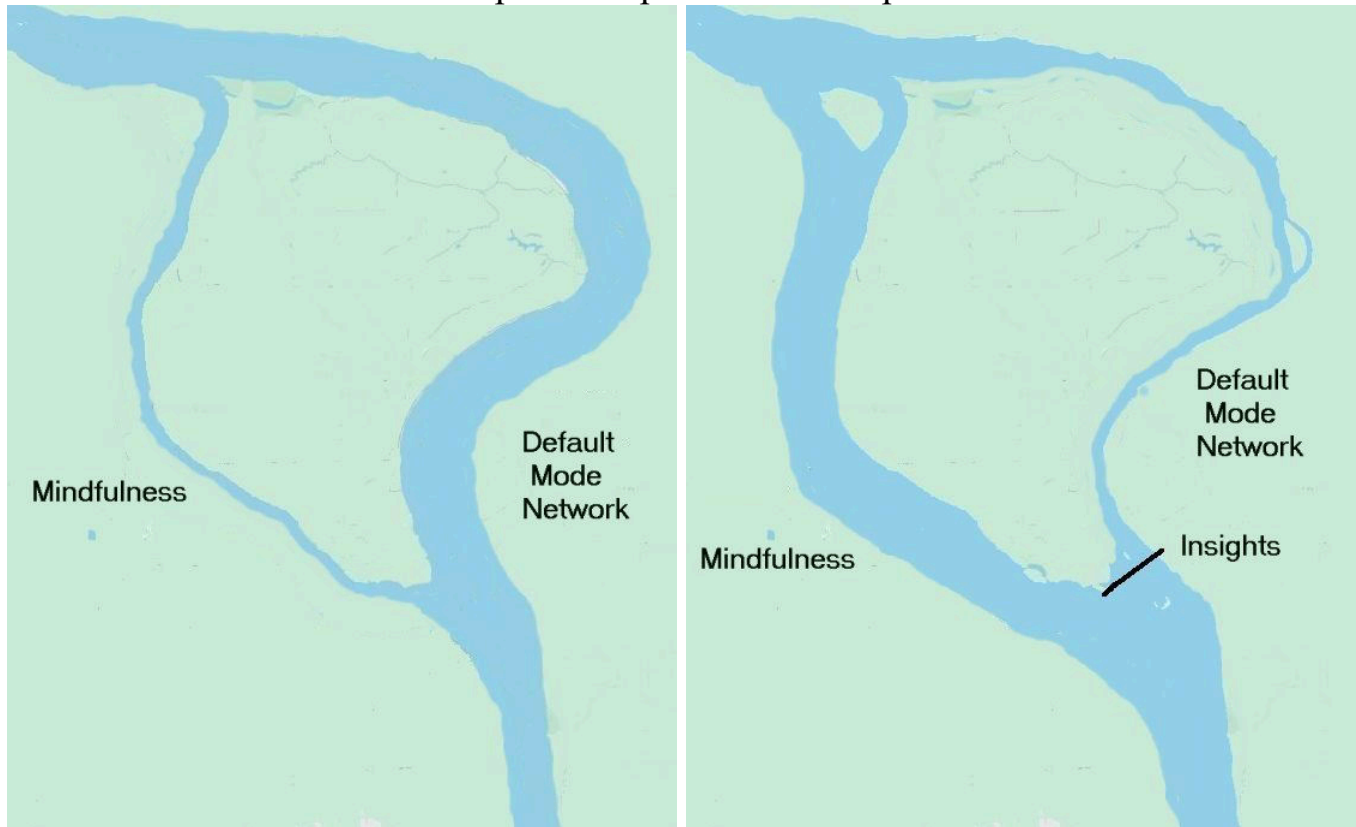
The “ever mindful” phrase in the answers to [Snp 5.2 - Tissametteyya's](#) and [Snp 5.15 - Mogharāja's](#) Questions packs considerably more power than is usually found in the twenty-first-century secular mindfulness teachings. Modern neuroscience has identified the Default Mode Network (DMN) that is activated in our brains when we are not focusing on an external task. It is a large-scale brain network that ties together several areas of the brain that seem to be active when we are generating a sense of self. The Wikipedia article on the DMN says:

It is best known for being active when a person is not focused on the outside world and the brain is at wakeful rest, such as during daydreaming and mind-wandering. ... Other times that the DMN is active include when the individual is thinking about others, thinking about themselves, remembering the past, and planning for the future.<sup>2</sup>

If the above description of the DMN sounds like the opposite of mindfulness and more like *papañca*, you begin to get a sense of what the Buddha is talking about when he says to be “ever mindful” – rather than our usual way of being lost in *papañca*. Basically, in addition to not being fooled by our conceptualizing, we need a new default, one superior to the DMN. And that would be being “ever mindful.” When there is no task at hand that needs your full attention (which of course also requires mindfulness), then just be fully mindful of your current sensory input – continuously mindful of the here and now – rather than wandering off

into *papañca*. This combination of emptiness and being ever mindful is our method for not getting fooled by our conceptualizing and for engaging with the world as it is actually manifesting.

Perhaps a metaphor will be helpful:



Imagine there's a river flowing along. There's an island and the river splits into two channels, one on each side of the island. One channel is very narrow; some water flows down it. This is the mindfulness channel. But most water goes thru the other channel, which is very wide. This is the distraction channel, the default mode network channel. We have this ever-flowing river of mental activity. Our job is to actually get enough rocks tossed into the mouth of the wide channel, so we start damming up this default mode network channel and at the same time widen the narrow mindfulness channel until the river actually switches course. The widening of the mindfulness channel is done via mindfulness practice. The rocks we toss into the wide default mode network channel to begin damming it up are insights. The insights into the non-dual, interconnected nature of reality are the biggest rocks that do the most to alter the course. Once that happens, when we have nothing to do in the future, we're just mindful of the present as opposed to getting lost in thought.

I suspect that's what is happening when someone is fully awakened. Unfortunately, we don't have enough fully awakened people around to ask questions of to see if that's the case, but this is my best guess. In other words, we're trying to establish a new default – and the new default is mindfulness. This is what "ever mindful" means. If we're mindful, then we're not getting lost in distractions. Notice how you seem to be the center of almost all of your distractions. You're wanting something or wanting to get rid of something – craving and clinging. If we have a new default of just paying attention to the present moment, then there's

no craving, no clinging, hence no dukkha.

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1. For a list of mindfulness suttas see <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/mindfulness.htm>.

2. From the article “Default mode network” at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Default\\_mode\\_network](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Default_mode_network). For a more detailed look at the DMN, see "What Your Brain Is Doing When You're Not Doing Anything" at <https://www.quantamagazine.org/what-your-brain-is-doing-when-youre-not-doing-anything-20240205/>

## Snp 5.3 - Punṇaka

Snp 5.3 PTS: Sn 1043-1048

**Punṇaka-māṇava-pucchā**

**Punṇaka's Questions**

translated from the Pāli by

[John D. Ireland](#) © 1994

1043 [Punnaka:]

"To him who is free from craving, who has seen the root (of things) I have come with a question: for what reason did sages, warriors, brahmanas and other men prepare, here in this world, various sacrificial gifts for the gods (*devata*)? I ask the Blessed One this, let him tell me the answer."

1044 [The Buddha:]

"Whatever sages, warriors, brahmanas and other men, Punnaka, prepared various sacrificial gifts for the gods, they did so in the hope of this or that (future) existence, being induced by (the fact of) old age and decay."

1045 [Punnaka:]

"By preparing various sacrificial gifts for the gods, being zealous in sacrificing, do they cross beyond birth and decay, Blessed One?"

1046 [The Buddha:]

"They hope and extol, pray and sacrifice for things of the senses, Punnaka. For the sake of such reward they pray. These devotees of sacrifice, infatuated by their passion for existence, do not cross beyond birth and decay, I say."

1047 [Punnaka:]

"If these devotees of sacrifice do not cross beyond birth and decay through sacrifice, Sir, then by what practice does one cross beyond birth and decay in this world of gods and men?"

1048 [The Buddha:]

"One who has comprehended in the world the here and the beyond, in whom there is no perturbation by anything in the world, who is calm, free from the smoldering fires, untroubled and desireless — one has crossed beyond birth and decay, I say."

My summary:

Q: Why do people perform sacrifices?

A: In the hope of escaping the ravages of old age.

Q: Does it work?

A: No.

Q: What does work?

A: Becoming wise; undisturbed by the world; peaceful; having an unclouded mind, free from desire.

Most spiritual practices, across all religions, are in some way or another trying to escape dukkha. These might be trying to escape old age and death – which is rather inevitable dukkha. So you're not dead yet – that's a good thing. What are you going to do with the fact that you're not dead yet, but there is the fact that at some point you will be dead? Performing sacrifices is not going to get you off the hook. What works?

Well, it turns out, there is nothing that can prevent you from dying at some future point. You're going to have to learn to deal with that fact. Ireland's translation of the Buddha's reply is clear about the things you can do to come to terms with death:

"One who has comprehended (Saṅkhāya - reflecting; considering; appraising; comprehending)  
in the world (lokaṃ - the world)  
the here and the beyond," (paroparāṇi - above and beyond; high and low; superior and inferior)..."

In other words, gain insight into what is actually happening in as broad a manner as you can.

"...in whom there is no perturbation by anything in the world, who is calm, free from the smoldering fires, untroubled and desireless..."

Use these insights to guide your life such that nothing in the world is disturbing, so you can become peaceful, with an unclouded mind, untroubled, desire-less and free from hope.

"... one has crossed beyond birth and decay, I say."

Then these insights can enable you to come to terms with the ravages of old age.

K. R. Norman translates the Buddha's reply slightly differently:

He for whom having considered what is far and near in the world,  
There are no commotions anywhere in the world, I say.  
Calmed, without fumes of passion, without affliction, without desire,  
He has crossed over birth and old age.

The first thing to do is to understand how the world works. This is insight. Ayya Khema defined an insight as an understood experience. If you just have the understanding without the experience, that's better than not having the understanding. But it's not going to be transformative. If you have the experience with no understanding, that's just confusion. To



gain the understood experiences, appraise the world high and low; understand how the world works.

These insights, if they are deep and profound enough, lead to a mind that is peaceful, unclouded, untroubled, desire-less and free from hope. Sacrifices aren't going to get you there. What's going to get you there is practice. There is an old joke: A tourist stops someone on the street in New York and asks, how do I get to Carnegie Hall? And the reply is "Practice." It's the same for us for coming to terms with old age, sickness, and death.

Three Suttas shed light on the Buddha answer to Punnaka's questions in more detail: [AN 3.32](#), [MN 26.19](#) and [AN 4.41](#):

In [AN 3.32](#), Ānanda asks the Buddha how to overcome I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit (conceiving of a self) in regard to this conscious body, in regard to all external objects, and thereby gain liberation.

The Buddha replies that one needs a state of mind that is peaceful and sublime in that there is the "stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all assets (*upadhi*),<sup>1</sup> the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna." Then, the Buddha reminds Ananda of Punnaka's questions in our current sutta, Snp 5.3, and tells Ananda that this is what he (the Buddha) meant when he answered Punnaka: "One who has comprehended in the world the here and the beyond, in whom there is no perturbation by anything in the world, who is calm, free from the smoldering fires, untroubled and desireless — one has crossed beyond birth and decay, I say."

It's worth looking closely at the Buddha's reply in AN 3.32: "stilling of all fabrications (*sabbasaṅkhārasamatho*), the relinquishing of all assets (*upadhi*), the destruction of craving, dispassion (*virāga*), cessation, nibbāna."

The "stilling of all fabrications" (*sabbasaṅkhārasamatho*) once again takes back to "consciousness that is signless" which was discussed in some detail in [Snp 5.1 - Ajita](#), above. It also points to the same thing as the famous description of Nibbāna found at [Ud 8.3](#): without birth, without beings, without made things, without fabrications (*ajāta, abhūta, akata, asaṅkhata*). "Fabrications" in both instances is *saṅkhāra/saṅkhata* – first as a noun, then as a past participle. *Saṅkhāra* literally means "making together", and in its most general sense, all the things of creation are fabrications/*saṅkhāra*. And who is the creator? the thingify-er? the conceptualizer? To get beyond that, we need the "peaceful and sublime" mind and insight into the nature of reality.

The "relinquishing of all assets" is overcoming clinging (*upādāna*). This is combined with "the destruction of craving" in the links of dependent origination in order to overcome dukkha.

"Dispassion" is *virāga* which literally means "not-colored" – our minds are generally colored by our wants and desires and fears and dislikes. A dispassionate mind is an unclouded mind;

it has clarity.

"Cessation" is the cessation of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion; the cessation of all dukkha – which is Nibbāna.

[MN 26.19](#) delivers the same message found in the Buddha's reply in AN 3.32. In MN 26.19 the Buddha says he is reluctant to teach because "this generation is addicted to its lifestyle; it will be hard for these people to see this-that conditionality, dependent origination and hard to see the stilling of all fabrications, etc." Clearly, even before beginning to teach, the Buddha felt these were very important points that people need to practice and understand.

The Pāli word *vidhūmo* in this sutta is translated by Ireland as "free from the smoldering fires" and by Norman as "without fumes of passion". This is the same meaning as *virāga* in AN 3.32 – don't let your mind be clouded by smoke from the smoldering fires of passion – your wants and desires and fears and dislikes.

Additionally, in [AN 4.41](#), the Buddha explains in some detail how to reflect, consider, appraise the world above and beyond, high and low, superior and inferior. In that sutta, four practices are given: (1) the jhānas, (2) the perception of light, (3) mindfulness of *vedanā* & *saññā* (perceptions/conceptualizations) & thoughts, and (4) the rise and fall of the five aggregates (*khandha*). The Sutta closes with the Buddha referring back to our current sutta, Snp 5.3, and saying that he was referring to these four practices when he answered Puṇṇaka's Questions.

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1. "*Upadhi* has two distinct shades of meaning. Primarily, in accordance with its etymology it means 'foundation', 'basis', 'ground', 'substratum' or 'support'. Secondly, in verse 6 of MN 26, 'wife and children, men and women slaves, goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, elephants, cattle, horses, and mares, gold and silver' are referred to as *upadhi*. Perhaps the term 'assets' will do justice to both senses, since assets are 'things' laid by which one 'relies on' as supports. *Upadhi* covers the whole gamut of footholds or assets, which culture provides for measuring self-identity: gender, nationality, ethnicity, rank, occupation, power, wealth and status symbols." (From John Peacock's *The Ubiquity of Dukkha: The Aetiology of Distress in Early Buddhism*.)

## Snp 5.4 - Mettagū

Snp 5.4 PTS: Sn 1049-1060

**Mettagū-māṇava-pucchā**

**Mettagū's Questions**

translated from the Pāli by

[John D. Ireland](#) © 1994

with tweaks by Leigh Brasington

1049 [Mettagū:]

"I ask the Blessed One this question, may he tell me the answer to it. I know him to be a master of knowledge and a perfected being. From whence have arisen these many forms of sufferings evident in the world?"

1050 [The Buddha:]

"You have asked me the source of suffering. Mettagū, I will tell it to you as it has been discerned by me. These many forms of sufferings evident in the world have arisen from worldly attachments.

1051

"Whoever ignorantly creates an attachment, that stupid person comes upon suffering again and again. Therefore one of understanding should not create attachment, seeing it is the source of suffering."

1052 [Mettagū:]

"What I did ask you have explained, now I ask another question. Come tell me this: how do the wise cross the flood, birth and old age, sorrow and grief? Explain it thoroughly to me, O sage, for this Dhamma has been understood/found out/discovered by you."

1053 [The Buddha:]

"I will set forth the Dhamma, Mettagū, a teaching to be directly perceived [to be seen for oneself], not something based on hearsay, by experiencing which and living mindfully one may pass beyond the entanglements of the world."

1054 [Mettagū:]

"I rejoice in the thought of that highest Dhamma, great sage, by experiencing which and living mindfully one may pass beyond the entanglements of the world."

1055 [The Buddha:]

"Whatever you comprehend, Mettagū, above, below, across and in between, get rid of

delight and attachment to it. Consciousness should not take a stance in becoming.<sup>1</sup>

1056

"Living thus, mindful and diligent, one who has forsaken selfish attachments may, by understanding, abandon suffering, birth and old age, sorrow and grief, even here in this life."

1057 [Mettagū:]

"I rejoice in the words of the great sage. Well explained, O Gotama, is the state of non-attachment. The Blessed One has surely abandoned suffering as this Dhamma has been realized by him.

1058

"They will certainly abandon suffering who are constantly admonished by you, O Sage. Having understood, I venerate it, Noble One. May the Blessed One constantly advise/instruct/admonish me also."

1059 [The Buddha:]

"Whom you know as a true brahmana, a master of knowledge, owning nothing, not attached to sensual existence, they have certainly crossed this flood. Having crossed beyond they are kind and freed from doubt/desire.

1060

"One who has discarded this clinging to renewal of existence is one who has realized the highest knowledge. Free from craving, undistressed, desireless, they have crossed beyond birth and old age, I say."

My summary:

Q: What is the source of dukkha?

A: Attachment.

Q: How do the wise cross the flood of dukkha?

A: Expel delight and attachment, uproot consciousness of becoming. Live mindfully and be vigilant. Thru understanding, abandon attachments.

Q: May the Buddha regularly instruct me.

A: Be a master of knowledge, own nothing, be unattached to sensual existence. Discard clinging to renewal of existence. Be free from craving, undistressed, desireless.

Mettagū wants to know what is the source of all this dukkha in the world. The Buddha replies that he has discovered that "These many sufferings evident in the world have arisen from worldly attachments." The Pāḷi translated as "arisen from worldly attachments" is *upadhinidānā*. The word *upadhi* was discussed in the previous chapter – see especially footnote 1 from the previous chapter. In that chapter, *upadhi* was defined as "assets". We could also translate it as "all the accouterments of one's lifestyle". The Pāḷi word *nidānā* translates to "source" or "foundation". So the compound *upadhinidānā* would be "assets as

source" or "acquisitions as foundation" or "arisen from worldly attachments". Specifically, dukkha arises from attachment to the accouterments of one's lifestyle. Throughout the rest of the above translation of this sutta, "attachment" is attachment to one's *upadhi*. *Upadhi* includes everything from your gender, your nationality, your cell phone, your car, your loved ones, your friends, all of these things. If you get attached to them, that's where the dukkha gets in.

The Buddha goes on to say that anyone who ignorantly creates an attachment is being foolish. Therefore, a wise person "should not create attachment, seeing it is the source of suffering." Mettagū is pleased with this answer, but he has another question.

"How do the wise cross the flood, birth and old age, sorrow and grief?" The metaphor of "the flood" is very common throughout the suttas. It represents the flood of dukkha that is encountered in ordinary life. In the very first sutta in the Connected Discourses, the Saṃyutta Nikāya, a deva asks the Buddha:

"How, dear sir, did you cross the flood?"

"By not halting, friend, and by not straining I crossed the flood."

"But how is it, dear sir, that by not halting and by not straining you crossed the flood?"

"When I came to a standstill, friend, then I sank; but when I struggled, then I got swept away. It is in this way, friend, that by not halting and by not straining I crossed the flood."

There are more than 40 suttas where the image of crossing the flood appears as a metaphor for overcoming dukkha.<sup>2</sup> There is the famous simile of the raft found in [MN 22.13](#): you're on the near shore, and you want to get to the far shore. The near shore is dangerous because there is a lot of "birth and old age, sorrow and grief" going on here. But there is no bridge or a ferryman to take you across, so you make a raft and use your hands and feet to propel yourself upon the raft to the far shore, which is safe and free from fear. "The Way to the Far Shore" is the name of this collection of suttas. So how do we cross the flood? What's the raft to get us across in MN 22? The Dhamma – the teachings of the Buddha.

Back to the sutta. The phrase "birth and old age" is *jātim jaram* – notice that *jātim* is just "birth", not "rebirth" as it is often translated. But the phrase *jātim jaram* does indeed refer to multi-lifetimes of the roaming in *samsāra* – which is full of sorrow and grief.

The Buddha answers the question of how to cross the flood by giving a "Dhamma teaching to be seen for oneself..., by experiencing which and living mindfully one may pass beyond the entanglements of the world." We are back to Ayya Khema's definition of an insight as an "understood experience". The seeing for oneself is the understanding necessary for the experience to be transformative. And one must live mindfully to fully actualize the transformation.

This is that Dhamma teaching, our raft: "Whatever you comprehend..., above, below, across and in between, get rid of delight and attachment to it." This instruction is very clear – but

very difficult to implement. It's going to take a lot of insight into the inconstant, unsatisfactory, empty nature of everything you encounter. The Pāli word *nandi*, which is usually translated as "delight", seems to have a negative connotation in the suttas. It not only refers to a feeling of pleasure, but also includes a turn towards craving and clinging. Perhaps "relishing" provides clearer sense in English of this deeper involvement.

"Attachment" also refers to views and opinions, not just material objects, so sometimes you see this translated as "get rid of delight and dogmatism." When you're dogmatic about something, you don't have an open mind. But you really are going to have to change your mind to get anywhere else – you can't get anywhere else unless you leave where you currently are. This applies to your mind as well as any physical location. Whatever views that you currently have need to be held very lightly. The teachings on Right View sometimes are about the Four Noble Truths, sometimes they are about dependent origination. But in multiple places in the Suttanipāṭa, Right View is about not holding to fixed views, keeping an open mind.<sup>3</sup> This is step one.

Step two is that "consciousness should not take a stance in becoming." Every translation I consulted – Ireland, Norman, Bodhi, Sujato, and Thanissaro – had something different for this sentence. I checked the Pāli and went with Thanissaro's translation; it seems to make the most sense for what the Pāli *panujja viññāṇam bhava na tiṭṭhe* means. And there is a line in the last verse of this sutta that seems to shed light on what exactly is meant: "One who has discarded this clinging to renewal of existence is one who has realized the highest knowledge." "Becoming" and "existence" are translations of the same word – *bhava*.<sup>4</sup> Here we have *bhava* translated both ways, which makes it clear that what the Buddha is teaching is to not have attachment, or even belief, in future existence – which would include neither attachment to becoming something in this life nor believing in future lives. This sentence would seem to blow a hole in anyone's "immortality project". And not believing in future lives takes care of any dukkha around *jātim jaram* – "birth and old age" – the roaming in *samsāra*.

"Living thus, mindful and diligent,..." One who has undertaken the previous two steps – overcoming attachment and not holding beliefs about the future – must also live mindfully and continue to be diligent in following the path of the Dhamma. Thus "...one who has forsaken selfish attachments may..." (letting go of attachments is recapitulated) "...by understanding,..." I take this to mean that the overcoming attachments is not thru revulsion, but thru understanding the inconstant, unsatisfactory, empty nature of all possible attachments. This is the method to "abandon suffering, birth and old age, sorrow and grief, even here in this life." The last phrase certainly indicates that the Buddha taught liberation in this very life – not something achieved after death.

Mettagū approves of the Buddha's answer. Then he asks, "May the Blessed One constantly advise/instruct/admonish me also." Indeed, it would be great to have the Buddha around to instruct you and remind you to keep being diligent.

The Buddha responds by describing one who has reached the Far Shore: "Whom you know as



a true brahmana, a master of knowledge, owning nothing, not attached to sensual existence, they have certainly crossed this flood." Becoming "a master of knowledge" is going to be difficult enough. "Owning nothing" is going to be impossible as a lay person – but lay people can strive towards not being attached to anything. "Not attached to sensual existence" is also going to be quite difficult. But notice it doesn't say "not experiencing pleasant vedanā". It's the attachment that is the problem. The Buddha points out in the Gradual Training when he discusses the abandoning of the hindrances, that the desire for sensual gratification is like being in debt.<sup>5</sup> We are in debt to our senses, there is no let up in seeking sensual gratification because no sense pleasure is ultimately satisfying – it only leads to wanting more. This non-attachment is definitely going to be a difficult job – it will require a deep understanding of the inconstant, unsatisfactory, empty nature of sense pleasures.

"Having crossed beyond they are kind and freed from doubt/desire." This is what liberation is like. "One who has discarded this clinging to renewal of existence is one who has realized the highest knowledge." The penetration of the delusion of self is the way to awakening. The self in the suttas is the mechanism for rebirth – it's that essence of you that you hope will someday be eternally happy. This delineation of "self" can be understood from the Discourse on Not-Self (the so called second sermon) at [SN 22.59](#).

Also, one with Right View does not take a stand about My Self ([SN 12.15](#)). One who has penetrated the delusion of self has discarded clinging to renewal of existence. The liberated one is "Free from craving, undistressed, desireless, they have crossed beyond birth and old age, I say."



A couple of things in the sutta are quite difficult to implement: "get rid of delight" (regarding everything you are aware of) – and – "owning nothing, not attached to sensual existence."

These are things I've been working on for decades, it's really tricky. In Buddhism, they teach about the three personality types, the greedy type, the aversive type, and the deluded type. Well, I'm very definitely the greedy type. When I first encountered the suttas, I found all this about not getting attached, not taking delight, and so forth. I definitely wasn't too sure about that sort of stuff. But I certainly found lots of other very useful things in the suttas, so I kept studying them.

Now, remember, you're getting this from a greedy type. But I think that it is possible to enjoy the pleasant vedanā of an experience without having attachment, without having craving or clinging. It's just a pleasant experience, and you're just experiencing it. It takes mindfulness to do that. Because the default is: it's pleasant, I want more, I want to get it again, I want to make sure it doesn't go away.

You need to use your mindfulness to just experience: "This is pleasant, I'm just going to enjoy it." Mindfulness seems to be the key for doing that. I certainly don't always manage, I get lost. This is just what happens. Maybe I get lost because of a habit of really enjoying pleasant

experiences. But definitely mindfulness seems to be the key; it's the full awareness of what's going on.

Another thing that is helpful, again, is recognizing the conceptualizing. The craving and clinging that arises around an incoming pleasant vedanā is arising around the concept of how the pleasant vedanā is being generated. Whatever is giving that pleasant vedanā to me, it's this thing, or it's this person, or it's this situation. But that's a concept. Now can I see the concept more clearly? Can I see the concept is of something that's impermanent, not going to give everlasting happiness, and in fact is dependent on many other things? It's without self, it's empty. This is another way to address the delight.

Awakening does not mean one no longer experiences pleasure. In the Aṅguttara Nikāya we find the following statements about the awakened ones:

AN 3.66 "experiencing bliss"

AN 4.62 "the bliss of blamelessness"

AN 4.198 "dwells hungerless, quenched and cooled, experiencing bliss"

AN 5.30 "bliss of peace, bliss of enlightenment"

AN 5.180, 6.42, 8.85 "the unsurpassed bliss of liberation"

AN 10.26 "bliss, the attainment of the goal, the peace of the heart"

I can certainly notice when I'm having a very pleasant experience. If I can be fully present with that experience, it's even more pleasant. If I'm not thinking about, "Oh, I don't have my camera, I need to take a picture" or whatever, then the experience is definitely more pleasant than if I'm trying to capture it. Just being totally in the moment, heightens the pleasure of any pleasant experience – because of not wasting bandwidth thinking about how to keep it, or repeat it, or anything else.

I often refer to cameras as "*anicca* stoppers". That's what we are attempting to do with a camera. You're at a party and eventually the party's going to end. But you don't want that, you want to stop *anicca*, and you're going to do it with your camera. I took a three-year trip around the world and did not take a camera. So I had to be fully present because this was my one and only chance to enjoy this view from the top of this mountain, or the sunset, or whatever. I think in some ways that was much better. Once I was sitting on the top of a mountain eating my lunch. This couple walks by in front of me; the husband is taking pictures like crazy. The woman apologizes for walking in front of me, which she didn't need to do. She said, "We like to take a lot of pictures, so when we go home, we can finally enjoy our vacation." I didn't say anything. But this is often how we run our lives. We are experiencing a delightful situation, but there's so much more going on in our minds other than just being present with the delightful situation.

In order to do this, it's really helpful to have a daily meditation practice. This is part of the diligence the Buddha mentioned in the sutta. It's really important to not get lost in "attachment strategies" – such as trying to keep a pleasant experience or figuring out how to get it again. Just enjoy the pleasant experience. It's also very helpful to see the limitations of



whatever you are taking delight in. Nothing and no one is perfect. One of the ways to see the limitations is to realize, "I'm conceptualizing this experience and my concepts aren't necessarily fully accurate." All of this requires mindfulness, and it requires awareness of the three characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta*. So mindfulness, being fully present, and recognizing that what I'm really attached to, what I'm really attracted to, is my concept of the thing, not the thing itself.

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1. Every translation I consulted – Ireland, Norman, Bodhi, Sujato, and Thanissaro – had something different for this sentence. I checked the Pāli and went with Thanissaro's translation; it seems to make the most sense, especially in light of the last verse: "One who has discarded this clinging to renewal of existence...."

2. DN 16, 20, 21, 33, 34, MN 106, SN 1.1, 1.5, 2.15, 4.25, 8.8, 10.3, 35.238, AN 4.196, 5.55, Ud 7.1, 7.3, 8.6, 8.10, Iti 107, Snp 1.2, 1.9, 1.10, 1.12, 2.5, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 4.1, 4.2, 4.7, 4.15, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.12, Thag 1.15, 1.89, 13.1, 15.1, 16.9, 19.1, 21.1, Thig 1.10 - see <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/crossflood.htm>

3. Snp 1.8, Snp 4.3, Snp 4.5, Snp 4.8, Snp 4.10, Snp 4.12, Snp 4.13

4. In his book **The Paradox of Becoming**, Thanissaro Bhikkhu makes a very good argument that *bhava* most frequently should be translated as "becoming".

5. e.g. DN 2.68-69

## Snp 5.5 - Dhotaka

Snp 5.5 PTS: Sn 1061-1068

**Dhotaka-māṇava-pucchā**

**Dhotaka's Questions**

translated from the Pāli by

**Bhikkhu Sujato**

(as Snp 5.6)

with tweaks by Leigh Brasington

1061 [Dhotaka:]

“I ask you, Blessed One; please tell me this, I long for your voice, great seer. After hearing your message, I shall train myself for Nibbāna.”

1062 [The Buddha:]

“Well then, be keen, alert, and mindful right here. After hearing this message, go on and train yourself for Nibbāna.”

1063 [Dhotaka:]

“I see in the world of gods and humans a brahmin traveling with nothing. Therefore I bow to you, All-seer: release me, Sakyan, from my confusion/doubts.”

1064 [The Buddha:]

“I am not able to release anyone in the world who has confusion/doubts, Dhotaka. But when you experientially understand the supreme Dhamma, you shall cross this flood.”

1065 [Dhotaka:]

“Teach me, brahmin, out of compassion, the principle of seclusion that I can understand. I wish to practice right here, peaceful, independent, as unobstructed as space.”

1066 [The Buddha:]

“I shall explain that peace for you that is apparent in the present, not relying on hearsay/tradition. Having understood it, one who lives mindfully may cross over entanglement in the world.”

1067 [Dhotaka:]

“And I rejoice, great seer, in that supreme peace, having understood which, one who lives mindfully may cross over entanglement in the world.”

1068 [The Buddha:]

“Once you have understood that everything you are aware of in the world—above, below, all round, between—is a snare, don’t crave for any state of becoming.”

My summary:

D: Teach me.

B: Be keen, alert, and mindful.

D: Release me from my confusion/doubts.

B: I cannot release anyone from their confusion/doubts.

D: Teach me the principle of seclusion.

B: Everything is a snare. Don't crave for any state of becoming / for existence or non-existence.

Dhotaka wants instruction to train for realizing Nibbāna. The Pāḷi is *nibbānamattano*, which is literally "one's own nibbana-ing". Notice it's a verb. not a noun – Nibbāna does not have ontological existence, it is an action. This is variously translated as "extinguishment" (Sujato), "unbinding" (Thanissaro), "quenching" (Norman).

The Buddha says one must be keen and alert – you actually have to work at the practice, it's got to be a priority. This also requires mindfulness: pay attention to what's going on in the here and now. Be keen, alert and mindful right here, right now.

Dhotaka is grateful for these instructions. He then requests that the Buddha release him from his confusion/doubts – the Pāḷi word is *kathaṅkathāhi* which can mean "confusion; doubt; questioning; lit. asking how?" The Buddha replies that he is not able to release anyone in the world from their confusion/doubts, but when you experientially understand the supreme teachings (*Dhamma*), you shall cross the flood. In other words, Buddhism is a do-it-yourself project. You get instructions, and they're very useful instructions, but you're going to have to do the work yourself.

In [Majjhima Nikāya 107](#), a merchant from Sāvattthī comes to visit the Buddha. The Buddha teaches the [Gradual Training](#) to him and afterward the merchant asks, "Do all your monks become fully enlightened?"

The Buddha says, "No."

"Well, why not?"

The Buddha says, "Do you know the way to Rājagaha?"

"Yes, sir, I am skilled in the way leading to Rājagaha."

The Buddha says, "Suppose you give those instructions to someone and they don't follow them."

"Well, that's their problem, not mine."

The Buddha says, "Just so. I'm only the shower of the way. Everybody has to do the practice for themself."

Dhotaka wants the Buddha to remove his confusion/doubts, but the Buddha can only show the way to the removal of confusion and doubts; you've got to do the practice yourself. You have to experientially understand (*abhiñānamāno*) the supreme teachings.

Dhotaka requests, "Teach me out of compassion the principle of seclusion so that I may understand. I wish to practice right here, peaceful, independent, unobstructed as space."

The Buddha says, "I shall teach that peace for you that is apparent in the present, not relying on hearsay/tradition. Having understood it, one who lives mindfully may cross over. Once you have understood that everything you are aware in the world – above, below, all around, in between – is a snare, don't crave for any form of becoming."

At the end of this last sentence, we have *bhavābhavāya*, which could be literally translated as "becoming or not becoming", "existence or non-existence", "life or no life", but I think it is more accurate to say "any form of becoming". This would include both eternalism and annihilationism – which were ideas about what happens after death at the time of the Buddha. Brahmanism taught reincarnation – so life after life until you merged with Brahma – eternalism. The Jains also taught reincarnation, but the idea was to clean up your karma so there would eventually be no reincarnation – annihilationism. But I think *bhavābhavāya* would also include any form of becoming or not becoming in this life – becoming rich and famous, not becoming ill, etc. Whatever you are aware of, don't fall into craving for anything in this life or a next life.

"Once you have understood that everything you are aware of in the world,..." – that's your concepts. "Once you know that all of your concepts – above, below, all around, in between – are a snare..." that is, don't get lost in your concepts, then don't crave for becoming this or not becoming that. So again, the Buddha is once again teaching, "Don't be fooled by your conceptualizing." We have to conceptualize. You need conceptualization to eat, find shelter, etc. But though you need conceptualizing to keep yourself alive, don't fall into craving because of it. This is the way of crossing the flood to the far shore.

## Atammayatā

The Pāli word *atammayatā* occurs in the next chapter. It is not a well-known word in any Buddhist circle – it doesn't even appear in the Pali Text Society Dictionary (PED) from 1926/1959. Yet Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu taught it as “the highest word in Buddhism, the final word of Buddhism.”<sup>1</sup> The word only appears in a handful of suttas (that I have managed to find):

MN 113 – A True Person – Sappurisasutta

MN 137 – The Analysis of the Six Sense Fields – Saḷāyatanavibhaṅgasutta

AN 3.40 – In Charge – Ādhipateyyasutta

AN 6.104 – Not Fashioned by Anything – Atammayasutta

Each of these contexts suggests that the term has an important meaning.

A literal analysis gives us: *a* (not), *tam* (that), *maya* (to make, create, fabricate, or produce), and *tā* (the state of being or suffix “-ness”). Thus, *atammayatā* is “the state of not being made up by, or made up from, that (thing or condition).” The most common translations seem to be “non-identification” or “determined”. But from the contexts above and the literal meaning, these are rather poor choices. *Atammayatā* is the quality of experience prior to, or without, subject/object duality. Since *atammayatā* is the state of not being made up by/from that (thing or condition), it can be simply translated as “non-concocting/non-fashioning any state”. It's the state of experiencing the world raw as discussed above in [Snp 5.1 - Ajita](#) and [Experiencing the World Raw](#).

So why does Ajahn Buddhādāsa call *atammayatā* “the highest word in Buddhism, the final word of Buddhism”? He sees it at the transition point between insights into the state, or reality, of nature (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, emptiness, etc.) and the insights regarding liberation and the realization of Nibbāna (disenchantment, dispassion, liberation, Nibbāna). For an excellent and deeper discussion of *atammayatā* see “Atammayata: The Rebirth of a Lost Word”, by Santikaro at <https://www.suanmokkh.org/articles/4>.

Hopefully, this short chapter gives you the background to fully understand what the Buddha is teaching in the next chapter.

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1. Santikaro (1993)

## Snp 5.6 - Upasīva

Snp 5.6 PTS: Sn 1069-1076

**Upasīva-māṇava-pucchā**

**Upasīva's Questions**

translated from the Pāli by

**K. R. Norman**

(as Snp 5.7)

with tweaks by Leigh Brasington

to remove unnecessary parenthetical additions

and convert "nothingness" to "no-thingness" when the Buddha is speaking

1069 [Upasīva:]

‘Alone, without support, Sakyan, I am not able to cross over the great flood. One with all-round vision, tell me an object (of meditation), supported by which I may cross over this flood.’

1070 [The Buddha:]

‘Having regard for no-thingness, possessing mindfulness, Upasīva, ‘supported by “it does not exist”, cross over the flood. Abandoning sensual pleasures, abstaining from (wrong) conversations, look for the destruction of craving day and night.’

1071 [Upasīva:]

‘One whose passion for all sensual pleasures has gone,’ said the Venerable Upasīva, ‘supported by the (state of) nothingness, having left the other (states) behind, being released in the highest release from perception, would they stay there not subject (to saṃsāra)?’

1072 [The Buddha:]

‘One whose passion for all sensual pleasures has gone, Upasīva,’ said the Blessed One, ‘supported by no-thingness, having left the other (states) behind, being released in the highest release from perception, they would stay there not subject (to saṃsāra).’

1073 [Upasīva:]

‘One with all-round vision, if one should remain there not subject (to saṃsāra), for a vast number of years, (and) being released in that very place were to become cold, would consciousness disappear for them in such a state?’

1074 [The Buddha:]

‘Just as a flame tossed about by the force of the wind, Upasīva,’ said the Blessed One, ‘goes out and no longer counts (as a flame), so a sage released from their mental body goes out and no longer counts (as a sage).’

1075 [Upasīva:]

One (who) has gone out, do they not exist, or (do they remain) unimpaired for ever? Explain this to me well, sage, for thus is this doctrine known to you.'

1076 [The Buddha:]

'There is no measuring of one who has gone out, Upasīva,' said the Blessed One. 'That no longer exists for them by which one might speak of them. When all phenomena have been removed, then all ways of speaking are also removed.'



Alexander Wynne in "The Origin of Buddhist Meditation" summarizes this sutta as follows:<sup>1</sup>

1069–70 Upasīva asks what meditative object one should practice in order to escape suffering. The Buddha answers that one should observe 'nothingness' mindfully; the word *satimā* appears to mean that this practice combines meditative absorption with the practice of mindfulness. [Wynne has gone astray here. See the discussion below.<sup>2</sup>]

1071–72 Upasīva asks if this state of meditation can be sustained without falling away from it, probably because he was surprised to hear that one must observe 'nothingness' and practice mindfulness at the same time. The Buddha answers that this state of meditation can be sustained without falling away from it.

1073–74 Upasīva asks if consciousness disappears for the one who, after sustaining this state of meditation for some time, attains liberation at death ('becomes cool'). For the Buddha, the issue is not in question because the state of the living liberated person cannot be reckoned.

1075–76 Upasīva asks if the one who is liberated/dead exists in a state of eternal bliss, or ceases to exist. The Buddha again denies the possibility of answering this question, because all modes of speaking do not apply to this living person. The conceptual framework upon which the dichotomies of existence and non-existence are based has ceased to function for the sage, even when he is alive.

My summary:

Snp 5.6 - Upasīva

Q: Tell me an object (of meditation), supported by which I may cross over this flood

A: Having regard for no-thingness, possessing mindfulness, supported by (the belief) "it does not exist," then abandon sensual pleasures, abstain from (wrong) conversations, look for the destruction of craving

Q: Would one who has done this, remain in this state?

A: Yes

Q: What can we say about the consciousness of one in that state who then dies?

A: The question is invalid, nothing can be said. [see [MN 72](#) - "To Vacchagotta on Fire"]

[no-thingness = *atammayatā* (non-concocting; non-fashioning)]<sup>3</sup>

[no-thingness is not the State of Nothingness (Jhāna 7)]

[from K.R. Norman: The Buddha is referring to the no-thingness of *atammayatā* (non-concocting; non-fashioning) but Upasīva (in 1072), and Alexander Wynne in "The Origin of Buddhist Meditation" (in his summary of 1071-72), think he is referring to the Realm of Nothingness (the 7th Jhana)]

[the Niddesa (ancient commentary) makes the same mistake in regarding no-thingness as 7th Jhana)]



"One with all-round vision, tell me an object (of meditation), supported by which I may cross over this flood."

"Having regard for no-thingness, possessing mindfulness, Upasīva," said the Blessed One, "supported by 'it does not exist', cross over the flood."

Upasīva asks what basis/foundation/support<sup>4</sup> one should practice in order to escape dukkha. The Buddha answers that one should mindfully observe "no-thingness". The Buddha is referring to the no-thingness (*no-thingifying*) of *atammayata* (non-concocting; non-fashioning; literally: not made of this) but Upasīva (in 1072), and Wynne (in his summary of 1071-72), think he is referring to the Base of Nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana* - aka the 7th Jhāna). This is a controversial point here at 1072. Both the ancient commentaries and some modern scholars (such as Wynne, Bhikkhu Sujato, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu)<sup>5</sup> interpret this to mean the seventh jhāna, the Base of Nothingness.

As a long-time practitioner of the Base of Nothingness, my response is "No, that's not what is being talked about." I do not see the seventh jhāna here. Notice that the Pāli words *ākiñcaññaṃ* ("no-thingness") and *ākiñcaññāyatana* ("Base of Nothingness") are **not** the same. The Base of Nothingness always includes the *-āyatana* (sense base, stretch, extent, reach, compass, region; sphere, locus, place, spot; position, occasion).<sup>6</sup> Confusing *ākiñcaññaṃ* (i.e. *atammayata*) with *ākiñcaññāyatana* completely misses the profound instruction the Buddha is giving Upasīva.

Wynne goes on to say, "the word *satimā* appears to mean that this practice combines meditative absorption with the practice of mindfulness." Respectfully, No. Actually, the word *satimā* combines *ākiñcaññaṃ* (the practice of *atammayata*) with the practice of mindfulness. In other words, one is mindfully aware of non-concocting, non-fashioning. This is the same as what was talked about earlier in [SnP 5.1 - Ajita](#): Don't thingify the world. Don't take your sensory input – your visual input, your auditory input, etc. – and break it into a bunch of things that you conceive of as having actual independent existence. This is what the phrase "supported by 'it does not exist'" is referring to.

Both mindfulness and "it does not exist" don't make much sense when trying to combine them with the Base of Nothingness. The Base of Nothingness is an absorption state – there is



only the experience of a deep sense of there being nothing. There is no room for any insight while there, no room for mindfulness and "it does not exist." But these two definitely are teaching a liberating practice when combined with the no-thingness of *atammayata* (non-concocting; non-fashioning; not made of this) – which is basically the same practice given to Ajita in [Snp 5.1 - Ajita](#).

"Mindfully contemplating no-thingness, depending on the perception, there is no thing..." (this is Sujato's translation of the instructions). At the most profound level, all the "things" we experience are just our concepts. And even at the conventional level, it turns out that there are no independent things in the entire universe. Everything arises dependent on other things. And those other things also are arising dependent on still other things – until we at last find the all-encompassing vast net of dependencies. Nothing has independent existence.

When we carve the world up into bits and pieces, when we thingify our experience, we're missing the bigger picture. At the conventional level, this teaching is that there are no separate things, no independent thingness. The things we experience in this world are due to the divisions that we make. We divide the world up into all these bits and pieces – because we can't take in the whole universe, our minds aren't big enough. In order to take in the whole universe, our minds would have to be as big as the whole universe, and that's not going to happen. So we break our sensory input into bits and pieces. But we need to realize that our breaking the world into bits and pieces – into concepts – is not a fully accurate picture of what's going on. It might be an accurate enough picture to get us enough to eat and a place to live and clothes to wear. But if we are basically lost in the things of the world – lost in the thingifying we've done – we're not going to cross the flood.

"Mindfully regard no-thingness, supported by 'it does not exist', cross over the flood. Leaving behind sensual pleasures, abstaining from chatter, watch for the destruction of craving day and night." Giving up sensual pleasures is difficult, but if you can truly see the emptiness of your pursuit of sensual pleasures and those pleasures' only momentary reward, then this letting go becomes more possible. You will still encounter sense pleasures, but it's the pursuit of those pleasures that needs to be abandoned – pursuing sense pleasures will not enable anyone to cross the flood.

"Refraining from chatter." "Chatter" is Sujato's translation of *kathāhi* – which means "talk; speech; conversation; discussion; argument; debate; lit. talk" – and "chatter" is a good choice. Multiple suttas in Suttanipāta book 4 recommend refraining from argumentation.<sup>7</sup> What does arguing do to your state of mind? And how often to you actually convince the other person to change to your point of view?

In other suttas,<sup>8</sup> part of the definition of right speech is refraining from idle chatter. So how much of your life do you waste just chattering on about nothing? Or having something chatter on about nothing to you? There's the TV, there's Facebook, there's Youtube. Lots of engaging stuff there, some of it might even be useful. But I don't think anybody has ever been lying on their death bed saying, "I never watched enough cat videos." Look at how you're spending your communication time. Communication at the time of the Buddha was talking; they didn't

have any other methods. We've got so many other methods – computers and phones and letters and billboards and graffiti - as well as talking; there's all sorts of ways to communicate. Make sure your communicating is useful.

"Watch day and night for the ending of craving." Here we are instructed to notice when craving appears – and then let it go. We're probably not going to get to the place where we don't crave until we get to at least to the third stage of awakening. So craving is going to come up; recognize when craving appears and let it go. After all, dukkha arises dependent on craving; the way out of dukkha is the ending of craving. But the ending of craving is not going to occur for one who is continually indulging in craving. Be aware of any craving that arises, then let it go. We might not always succeed in letting it go, oh well. But seeing the empty nature of what we are craving, seeing how it's not an independent thing, seeing how what we crave is our own concoctions, seeing how we are craving our concepts instead of reality, makes it easier to let go.

"One whose passion for all sensual pleasures has gone," said the Venerable Upasīva, "supported by nothingness, having left the other behind, being released in the highest release from perception (*saññāvimokkhe*), would they stay there not subject (to *samsāra*)?" In other words, if I can get to this place that you're talking about, can I stay there? "Perception" is the usual translation of word *saññā*. You can see *saññā* in the word *saññāvimokkhe*, translated as "release from perception". Although "perception" is the standard translation of *saññā*, translating it as "conceptualization" gives a much better understanding of what the Buddha is actually teaching. It's not that conceptualizing is bad or evil. We have to conceptualize in order to survive. Just don't get fooled by your conceptualizing; don't become fettered by your conceptualizing.

"One whose passion for all sensual pleasures has gone, Upasīva," said the Blessed One, "supported by no-thingness (i.e. *atammayata*), having left the other behind, being released in the ultimate liberation from conceptualizing, they would stay there not subject (to *samsāra*)." If you can get to that point, you will have experienced the world in such a way that you can stay there. In other words, this breakthrough is irreversible – you have experienced the world as it is and there is no going back.

"If one should remain there not subject (to *samsāra*), for a vast number of years, (and) being released in that very place were to become cold, would consciousness disappear for one in such a state?" Here consciousness is being used in our usual way of talking about consciousness. The Pāli word is *viññāṇa*; but it's not the literal "divided knowing" mentioned in [Snp 5.1 - Ajita](#); it's the ordinary meaning. So if someone can get to this point of not being fooled by their conceptualizing – their thingifying the world – and were to stay there, then when they were to grow cold right there – in other words, when they die – would the consciousness of such a one pass away?

"Just as a flame tossed about by the force of the wind, Upasīva," said the Blessed One, 'goes out and no longer counts (as a flame), so a sage released from their mental body goes out and no longer counts (as a sage).' It's quite possible to ask questions that seem to make a lot of

sense that actually on closer examination don't make any sense at all. Vacchagotta was a wanderer from another spiritual sect who comes to the Buddha repeatedly<sup>9</sup> and wants to know the answer to various questions. In [Majjhima Nikāya 72](#) he asks very similar questions as Upasīva: "What happens to a liberated one after death. Do they exist? Do they not exist? Do they both exist and not exist? Do they neither exist or not exist?"

The Buddha replies, "Vacchagotta, if there was a little fire burning right here, would you know there's a fire burning here?"

"Yes, Venerable Sir."

"If you put more sticks on the fire, what happens?"

"The fire blazes up and gets bigger."

"What if you don't put any more sticks on the fire?"

"Well, eventually it would go out."

"Vacchagotta, when the fire goes out, which way does it go? East, west, north, south, up, down?"

"Venerable Sir, the question makes no sense. It just goes out."

"It's the same for an awakened one. In the same way, Vaccha, any means by which an awakened one might be described has been given up, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated, and unable to arise in the future. An awakened one is freed from reckoning in terms of any aggregate (including consciousness)."

So like asking which way does the fire go when it goes out, asking what happens to the consciousness of one who's liberated doesn't make any sense. You can't say anything about it. The body of a fully awakened one obviously eventually dies – the Buddha got old, sick, and died. That happens to everybody. But we can't say anything about the Buddha consciousness.

In [Majjhima Nikāya 38](#), there's a misguided bhikkhu named Sāti, the son of a fisherman, who thinks his consciousness transmigrates from incarnation to incarnation. Other bhikkhus hear this and try to convince him that's not what the Buddha teaches, but he refuses to give up his pernicious view. So the other bhikkhus go tell the Buddha about Sāti. The Buddha says to one of the bhikkhus, "Tell Sāti the master calls." So Sāti comes to see the Buddha. The Buddha asks him if the transmigrating of consciousness is what he believes the Buddha is teaching. Sāti confirms that he understands that the Buddha teaches that consciousness transmigrates. Then the Buddha asks, "Sāti, what is consciousness?"

"It is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and there the results of good and bad actions."

Is this a good definition of consciousness? Speaking is sometimes called speaking your mind. Right? So for speaking, it's consciousness that is speaking. And it feels – you feel thirsty, you drink some water, you feel pleasure, you're conscious of that pleasure, you smile. And it experiences here and there the results of good and bad actions. It gets the karmic resultants. Do you think this is a good description of consciousness?

The Buddha replies, "You misguided man, when have you ever known me to teach Dhamma like that? For on many occasions, I have said that consciousness is dependently originated. For without supporting conditions, there is no origination of consciousness."

The Buddha then ask the monks if they think Sāti is right, they reply, "No, venerable sir, you have taught many times that consciousness is dependently originated."

Then the Buddha says that consciousness is reckoned by the conditions on which it depends. When it depends on eye and sights, it's eye consciousness; ear and sounds, ear consciousness; nose and smells, nose consciousness; tongue and tastes, tongue consciousness; body and textures, body consciousness; mind and mind objects, mind consciousness. This is just like a fire being reckoned by the condition on which it depends. If it's burning on a house, it's a house fire. If it's burning in the forest, it's a forest fire. If it's burning on rubbish, it's a rubbish fire. If it's burning on chaff, it's a chaff fire. If it's burning on logs, it's a log fire. So too with consciousness. Consciousness requires a condition on which it depends – either five sense input or input from your mind. It's not an independent thing. We do talk about sense consciousness, but that's just a way of reckoning it – there are not six different types of consciousness. Just like there are not six different types of fire. Fire is always fuel and oxygen uniting in the presence of heat, whether the fire is burning on a house or a forest or chaff or rubbish. When a fire goes out, we cannot say where it went, what it's like now that it has gone out, how hot or cold that fire now is – these ideas no longer make sense. The same applies to consciousness.

Then in MN 38, the Buddha starts with a series of questions and answers about dependent origination that goes on for page after page and is actually quite tedious. However, it is clear when we reach the end of that section that the bhikkhus do have a good understanding of dependent origination. At MN 38.23, we get to the heart of the matter. "Bhikkhus, knowing and seeing in this way [that is, in terms of dependent origination] would you run back to the past thus: Were we in the past? Were we not in the past? What were we in the past? How were we in the past? Having been what, what did we become in the past?"

"No, venerable sir."

"Knowing and seeing in this way would you run forward to the future thus: Shall we be in the future? Shall we not be in the future? What shall we be in the future? How shall we be in the future? Having been what, what shall we become in the future?"

"No, venerable sir."

"Knowing and seeing in this way, would you now be inwardly perplexed about the present thus: Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?"

"No, venerable sir."

"Bhikkhus, are you saying this just because I'm your teacher?"

"No venerable sir."

"Are you saying this because you know it from your own experience?"

"Yes venerable sir."

If you truly understand dependent origination at the deepest level, then you don't think about what was I in the past, or what will I be in the future, or even what am I now. You realize that you are nothing but the intersection of a bunch of Streams Of Dependently Arising Processes Interacting (SODAPI).<sup>10</sup> That's all there is. And the idea of there being a self – a me-thing – doesn't occur. If a self is not conceived of, then questions like "What was I in the past?" or "What shall I be in the future?" simply do not arise.

For example, if you understand that the planet Earth is a sphere, then the question, "If someone falls off the edge of the world, does it hurt?" simply does not arise. You are not so deluded that you think it is possible to fall off the edge of the world. A liberated one has overcome the delusion of self, so those self-referencing past or future questions don't arise.

I once heard a talk by Joseph Goldstein who pointed out that actually it's much more accurate to think of yourself as a verb, not as a noun. I thought Joseph's point was quite interesting, really right on. Furthermore, you're not just a single process, you're a collection of processes. You're a circulatory process, a digestive process, a respiratory process, and more. It's all in motion, it's all moving, it's all changing all the time.

I started contemplating this, and I realized actually there aren't any nouns at all; it's just some verbs move kind of slow. Interestingly, the Navajo language, spoken by the indigenous Navajo people of the American southwest, is a "verb-heavy" language – it has a great preponderance of verbs but relatively few nouns<sup>11</sup> – which seems a more accurate way of conceptualizing the world we encounter. Think of a wooden table – it's not a noun, it's trees doing their thing – well, some carpenter's thing as well, but it's in motion. It's not changing fast, but it, like everything else, is changing. You can't find a single thing in all of creation that's not changing. Everything arises because of causes and conditions, and they stick around while there are supporting conditions. When the supporting conditions cease, they cease. This is what the Buddha is saying. Look at yourself that way also: you are a dependently originated collection of processes. When you truly get this, those questions about how was I in past, will be in the future, am right now, just do not occur. When you experientially

understand this, the question about what happens to a liberated person after death also does not occur – you understand that there never was an entity there in the first place.

Now you may think you are an independent entity, yet you are completely dependent on the 14.7 pounds of air pressure per square inch (1kg / cm<sup>2</sup>) of your body to keep you alive. If that air pressure were to disappear, even if you had oxygen coming in through your mouth or nose, you'd still die very quickly. You are not independent of the atmosphere in which we live. You depend on the pressure of the atmosphere, and also depend on it to provide you your needed oxygen.

You are not independent of food. Since almost no one grows all of their own food, you probably don't either. You're dependent on the grocery store and the people who bring the food to the grocery store and the farmers who grow the food and so forth. You're not an independent thing.

You are not independent of electricity. Suppose all of the electricity in the country you live in were to go away. Suppose your whole continent suddenly has no electricity. How long would you last? You can't buy food from the grocery store because it takes electricity to order the food so that the trucks bring the food to the grocery store. There are no lights in the grocery store and the cash registers don't work. Maybe you have natural gas heat, but maybe the thermostat requires some electricity and you freeze. If all electricity disappeared, unless you lived in the third world in a place with subsistence agricultural, you'd probably die within a few weeks. You're not independent of the people and infrastructure that are keeping the electricity going.

Once you start seeing past the things of the world, you start seeing the flow of verbs and then you realize that actually all of the verbs are dependent on other verbs – and that there's really only one verb: unfolding. We could say, "the universe is unfolding", but "the universe is" is superfluous. There's just unfolding. When you can get to that, the question about what happens to an enlightened one after death just doesn't arise because there's just this giant unfolding. That's all that's happening. And the fully awakened ones have realized that and they're not conceiving of themselves in the past or the future or even in the present. And they are not identifying with the unfolding either! There's just sensory input happening and they're not getting attached to it.

Another question from Upasīva: "One (who) has gone out, do they not exist, or (do they remain) unimpaired for ever? Explain this to me well, sage, for thus is this doctrine/truth/phenomena known to you."

Upasīva still wants to know what happens to an awakened one after death. He was just told that asking about their consciousness after death makes no sense. Now he wants to know if they still exist or not. Nonsense questions are endless. "Where does your lap go when you stand up?" "Where does your voice go when you stop speaking?" We could even ask, "Where does your consciousness go when you are in deep dreamless sleep?" But these are all questions about nouns when actually there are only verbs and concepts.



"There is no measuring of one who has gone out, Upasīva," said the Blessed One. "That no longer exists for them by which one might speak of them. When all phenomena have been removed, then all ways of speaking are also removed."

One who has fully come to the end of the path cannot be defined. There is nothing by which others might describe them. When all conceiving of things has been eradicated, all ways of speech are also eradicated. Nagarjuna talks about the ultimate as indescribable, inconceivable, indivisible.<sup>12</sup> Once you grok the full holistic nature of the ultimate universe, you do understand it, but you can't talk about it because any word that you use is a concept. The indescribable, inconceivable, indivisible nature of the universe doesn't lend itself to concepts. There's just the giant unfolding. And so, what I think the Buddha is teaching here is if you can, for example, do the Bāhiya practice<sup>13</sup> really well, then what you see, what you experience is just the giant unfolding. There are no things. You stop looking at the world in terms of nouns. You start seeing processes, but then you move beyond seeing separate processes and realize they're all interconnected until eventually there's just unfolding. But even "unfolding" is just one more concept, more concocting, fashioning – we have to get beyond even that to the indescribable, inconceivable, indivisible; to *atammayata*.

At least this is my interpretation of this particular sutta. As I say, the orthodox view<sup>14</sup> is different and some modern scholars interpret it differently, but I'm going to go with what I understand, especially since the orthodox view doesn't really make sense and this understanding describes a profound method of practice leading to liberation.

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1. Wynne 2007, pg 67ff

2. from K.R. Norman: "The Buddha is referring to the no-thingness of *atammayatā* (non-concocting; non-fashioning) but Upasīva (in 1072), and Alexander Wynne in "The Origin of Buddhist Meditation" (in his summary of 1071-72), thinks he is referring to the Realm of Nothingness." (aka the 7th Jhana) (Norman, 2001) pg 412

3. See [Appendix 5 - Nonduality](#) for more on "no-thingness" and "*atammayatā*" and how they relate to nonduality.

4. Wynne translates *ārammaṇaṃ* as "meditative object", which is how it is used in the commentaries. But it also means 'base, basis, foundation, support'. I think that's what's meant here, and not an object.

5. Bhikkhu Sujato and Thanissaro Bhikkhu appear to take their interpretation from the ancient Pāli commentary. But this commentary was composed centuries after the Buddha's death in Sri Lanka, a definitely different culture than the India of the Buddha. In addition to taking the [Prologue](#) for this collection as literally true, this commentary seems to find immaterial states where there are actually far more profound teachings than the immaterials – e.g. verse 874 in [Snp 4.11](#), as well as here in Snp 5.6 and in [Snp 5.14 - Posāla](#). One must be



very careful when using any of the ancient commentaries.

6. See this [list of all references to the Immaterial States](#).

7. Snp 4.3, Snp 4.5, Snp 4.8, Snp 4.10, Snp 4.12, Snp 4.13

8. e.g. in each of DN 1 - DN 13

9. See <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/vacchagotta.htm> for a list of all the suttas where Vacchagotta is mentioned.

10. See [Appendix 5 - Nonduality](#) for more on "SODAPI" and how it relates to nonduality.

11. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navajo\\_grammar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navajo_grammar)

12. **Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā** (MMK), chapter 18 - See Batchelor, 2001

13. see [Experiencing the World Raw](#)

14. When I use the phrase 'orthodox view' I am frequently referring to the Niddesa, which can be found making the bulk of Bhikkhu Bodhi's **The Suttanipāta** (2017).

## Snp 5.7 - Nanda

Snp 5.7 PTS: Sn 1077-1083

**Nanda-māṇava-pucchā**

**Nanda's Questions**

translated from the Pāli by

**Bhikkhu Sujato**

(as Snp 5.8)

1077 [Nanda:]

“People say there are sages in the world, but how is this the case? Is someone called a sage because of their knowledge, or because of their way of life?”

1078 [The Buddha:]

“Experts do not speak of a sage in terms of view, learning, or knowledge. Those who are sages live far from the crowd, I say, untroubled, with no need for hope.”

1079 [Nanda:]

“As to those ascetics and brahmins who speak of purity in terms of what is seen or heard, or in terms of precepts and vows, or in terms of countless different things. Living self-controlled in that matter, have they crossed over rebirth and old age, good sir? I ask you, Blessed One; please tell me this.”

1080 [The Buddha:]

“As to those ascetics and brahmins who speak of purity in terms of what is seen or heard, or in terms of precepts and vows, or in terms of countless different things. Even though they live self-controlled in that matter, they’ve not crossed over rebirth and old age, I declare.”

1081 [Nanda:]

“As to those ascetics and brahmins who speak of purity in terms of what is seen or heard, or in terms of precepts and vows, or in terms of countless different things. You say they have not crossed the flood, sage. Then who exactly in the world of gods and humans has crossed over rebirth and old age, good sir? I ask you, Blessed One; please tell me this.”

1082 [The Buddha:]

“I don’t say that all ascetics and brahmins are shrouded by birth and old age. There are those here who have given up all that is seen, heard, and thought, and precepts and vows, who have given up all the countless different things. Fully understanding craving, free of defilements, those people, I say, have crossed the flood.”

1083 [Nanda:]

"I rejoice in the words of the great seer! You have expounded non-attachment well, Gotama. There are those here who have given up all that is seen, heard, and thought, and precepts and vows, who have given up all the countless different things. Fully understanding craving, free of defilements, those people, I agree, have crossed the flood."

My summary:

Q: Is someone a sage because of their knowledge, or because of their way of life?

A: Not because of knowledge. Sages live far from crowds, untroubled, with no need for hope

Q: Do those who live self-controlled cross over birth & old age?

A: No, not necessarily

Q: Then who has crossed over birth & old age?

A: Those who have fully understood craving, and are free of defilements

"People say there are sages in the world, but how is this the case? Is someone called a sage because of their knowledge or because of their way of life?"

"Experts do not speak of a sage in terms of view, learning or knowledge. Those who are sages live far from the crowd untroubled with no need of hope."

So it's not your knowledge that makes you a sage. In English, we think of a sage as a wise person, but the Buddha is saying that a *Muni*, a wise person, is wise because of how they live their life. They live far from the crowd. They're not entangled with other people and they're untroubled and they have no need for hope.

When I first met Ruth Denison, who was a very amazing teacher who lived in Southern California, on her station wagon, she had a bumper sticker that said, "I feel so much better since I gave up all hope." What? I didn't get it.

Our hopes are grasping after the future. "I hope that this goes well for me." "I hope when I go to the dentist, I don't have any cavities." If your hope is met and you don't have any cavities, you feel good. If your hope is not met and you've got a cavity, it's going to cost you money and it's going to hurt and you have to come back in three weeks when there's an appointment. But if you just go to the dentist and take care of it, if it needs to be taken care of, instead of having a hope for one way or another, that's less a source of dukkha.

In the Tibetan tradition, there's a book called *The Flight of the Garuda*. In it full awakening, liberation, is talked about as the absence of fear and hope. This is the absence of aversion and attraction, basically. So a sage is someone who's away from the madding crowd, the maddening crowd, and they're untroubled with no need for hope.

"As to those ascetics and Brahmins who speak of purity in terms of what is seen or heard, or in terms of precepts and vows, or in terms of countless different things, living self-controlled

in that matter, have they crossed over birth and old age, good sir?" In some of the spiritual traditions at the time of the Buddha, and even today in India, purity is in terms of what is seen or heard. In other words, you're pure based on what you experience. Does this purity enable one to cross the flood?

"As to those ascetics and Brahmins who speak of purity in terms of what is seen and heard, or in terms of precepts and vows, or in terms of countless different things, even though they live self-controlled in that matter, they've not crossed over birth and old age, I declare." In other words, purity is not good enough. You may be leading a really pure life, but you haven't tackled the big existential issues of old age, sickness, and death.

"So, then who exactly in the world of gods and humans has crossed over?"

"I don't say that all ascetics and Brahmins are shrouded by birth and old age. There are those here who have given up all that is seen, heard, thought, and precepts and vows, given up all the countless things, fully understanding craving, free from defilements. Those people, I say, have crossed the flood." The giving up all that is seen, heard, and thought, that's the giving up attachment to concepts. Those people are not lost in conceptualization.

The giving up of precepts and vows may seem strange at first – but this does seem to be referring back to Nanda's usage. Nonetheless to find freedom, you don't keep your precepts or your vows because you're attached to them. You keep them because you see that's what works. To take an extreme example, you don't refrain killing another because you are worried that if you kill someone, you're going to hell – i.e. you are attached to avoiding that destination. You refrain from killing another because you see that's a better way to live. The giving up precepts and vows doesn't mean that you kill people or steal from them or do things like that. It means that you keep the precepts because it's the most useful way to behave.

Those who have given up all the countless different things are those who have seen the limitation in all those countless thing. They've seen the conceptual nature of reality and penetrated it. "Fully understanding craving, free of defilements, those people, I say, have crossed the flood." Once again, we are back to the Third Noble Truth. By not being attached to "the rules" just because they are rules, and by penetrating the nature of the countless things – i.e. seeing they are not worth craving, and living free from defilements, these are the people who become liberated.

## Snp 5.8 - Hemaka

Snp 5.8 PTS: Sn 1084-1087

**Hemaka-māṇava-pucchā**

**Hemaka's Question**

translated from the Pāli by

**Bhikkhu Sujato**

(as Snp 5.9)

with tweaks by Leigh Brasington

1084 [Hemaka:]

“Those who have previously answered me before I encountered Gotama’s teaching, said ‘thus it was’ or ‘so it shall be.’ All that was just the testament of hearsay; all that just fostered speculation: I found no delight in that.

1085

“But you, sage, explain to me the teaching that destroys craving. Having understood it, one who lives mindfully may cross over clinging in the world.”

1086 [The Buddha:]

“The removal of desire and lust, Hemaka, for what is seen, heard, thought, or cognized here; for anything liked or disliked, is Nibbāna, the state that does not pass.

1087

“Those who have fully understood this, mindful, are quenched in this very life. Always at peace, they’ve crossed over attachment to the world.”

My summary:

Q: Explain to me the teaching that destroys craving, so that one who lives mindfully may cross over clinging in the world.

A: The removal of desire and lust for what is seen, heard, thought, or cognized; for anything liked or disliked – this is Nibbāna. Those who understand this, and are mindful, are liberated.

"Those who have previously answered me before I encountered Gotama's teaching said, 'Thus it was or so it shall be.' All that was just the testament of hearsay. All that just fostered speculations. I found no delight in that."

Hemaka is displeased with other teachers who have apparently only taught metaphysics.

"But you, Sage, explained to me the teaching that destroys craving. Having understood it, one who lives mindfully may cross over clinging in the world."

Instead, he wants to know how to destroy craving. He apparently has already encountered Gotama's teaching and understands the Second and Third Noble Truths. He sees the necessity of getting beyond craving, but does not know how to do so. So he asks the Buddha's advice.

"The removal of desire and lust, Hemaka, for what is seen, heard, thought, or cognized here; for anything liked or disliked, is Nibbāna...." There are over 80 suttas where the Buddha speaks of the removal of desire and lust as a means for finding freedom, Nibbāna.<sup>1</sup> And Nibbāna is "the state that does not pass." Once someone can make the breakthrough to full awakening, it's an unending new state, unshakable.

"Those who have fully understood this, mindful, are quenched in this very life." The fires of greed, hatred and delusion are quenched. This is awakening.

"Those who have fully understood this ... Always at peace, they've crossed over attachment to the world." To fully understand this would entail fully implementing it. Mindfulness seems to be the method for implementing it. If there is no desire or lust, then there is not going to be any attachment or clinging – this is a state of unending peace. I'll admit, easier said than done – but this sutta certainly gives a clear teaching on what needs to be done.

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1. See <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/desireAndLust.htm>

## Snp 5.9 - Todeyya

Snp 5.9 PTS: Sn 1088-1091  
Todeyya-māṇava-pucchā  
Todeyya's Questions  
translated from the Pāli by  
[Bhikkhu Sujato](#)  
(as Snp 5.10)

1088 [Todeyya:]

“In whom sensual pleasures do not dwell, and for whom there is no craving, and who has crossed over confusion/doubts—of what kind is their liberation?”

1089 [The Buddha:]

“In whom sensual pleasures do not dwell, and for whom there is no craving, and who has crossed over confusion/doubts—there is no further liberation.”

1090 [Todeyya:]

“Are they free of hope, or are they still in need of hope?  
Do they possess wisdom, or are they still forming wisdom?  
O Sakyan, elucidate the sage to me, so that I may understand, All-seer.”

1091 [The Buddha:]

“They are free of hope, they are not in need of hope.  
They possess wisdom, they are not still forming wisdom.  
That, Todeyya, is how to understand a sage, one who has nothing, unattached to sensual life.”

My summary:

Q: In whom sensual pleasures do not dwell and for whom there is no craving, and who has crossed over doubts – of what kind is their liberation?

A: That is their liberation.

Q: Are they free of hope; do they possess wisdom?

A: They are free of hope; they possess wisdom. A sage is one who has nothing, and is unattached to sensual life.

“In whom sensual pleasures do not dwell, and for whom there is no craving, and who has crossed over confusion/doubts—of what kind is their liberation?” In other words, what is liberation like for someone in whom sensual pleasures do not dwell, and there's no craving and no confusion or doubt?



The Buddha replies that their liberation is none other than this – no sensual pleasures dwelling within, no craving, no confusion, no doubt. This is what it means to be fully liberated, fully awakened, enlightened.

“Are they free of hope, or are they still in need of hope?” The Pāḷi word *Sujato* is translating as "hope" is *āsā* which means "expectation, hope, wish, longing, desire". So we could translate this as “Are they free of wishes, or are they still wishing?” or as “Are they free of expectations, or are they still expecting?” – or "longing" or "desiring". Or we could even say "Are they satisfied or is there still any dissatisfaction?"

“Are they free of hope, or are they still in need of hope?  
Do they possess wisdom, or are they still forming wisdom?”

"They are free from hope, they are not in need of hope." In other words, they are satisfied with their life as it is.

"They possess wisdom, they're not still forming wisdom." They have arrived at the understanding necessary for liberation. There is nothing more that needs to be learned.

This is a depiction of Nibbāna: Sensual pleasures do not dwell, no craving, no doubt, no need of hope, no need of more wisdom – they've arrived. Notice it is "sensual pleasures do not dwell." This does not mean a liberated one does not experience pleasure – it means they are not attached to any pleasure they do experience. They are wise and satisfied. "A sage is one who has nothing, and is unattached to sensual life."

## Snp 5.10 - Kappa

Snp 5.10 PTS: Sn 1092-1095  
Kappa-māṇava-pucchā  
Kappa's Question  
translated from the Pāli by  
[Bhikkhu Sujato](#)  
(as Snp 5.11)  
with tweaks by Leigh Brasington

1092 [Kappa:]

“For those afflicted by old age and death, stuck mid-stream as the terrifying flood arises, tell me an island, good sir. Proclaim to me an island so this may not occur again.”

1093 [The Buddha:]

“For those afflicted by old age and death, stuck mid-stream as the terrifying flood arises, I shall proclaim to you an island, Kappa.

1094

“Having nothing, taking nothing: this is the island with nothing further. I call it Nibbāna, the ending of old age and death.

1095

“Those who have fully understood this, mindful, are quenched in this very life. They don’t fall under Māra’s sway, nor are they his lackeys.”

My summary:

Q: Tell me an island as the terrifying flood rises.

A: Having nothing, taking nothing: this is the ultimate island.

“For those afflicted by old age and death,” said Venerable Kappa, “stuck mid-stream as the terrifying flood arises, tell me an island, good sir. Proclaim to me an island so this may not occur again.”

The image of *saṃsāra* being a flood that overwhelms people is quite common in the Suttas. In fact, it shows up in multiple suttas here this collection. So you're caught in mid-stream – the stream of old age and death. The flood is rising. Where is an island to which you can escape? The island is a very common simile for Nibbāna.<sup>1</sup> So Kappa is saying, *saṃsāra* is a problem. How can I escape?

“For those afflicted by old age and death,” replied the Buddha, “stuck mid-stream as the terrifying flood arises, I shall proclaim to you an island, Kappa. Having nothing, taking nothing: this is the island with nothing further. I call it Nibbāna, the ending of old age and death.”

"Having nothing, taking nothing." This is renunciation. As a monastic you really can get down to having nothing, taking nothing – except three robes and a bowl. But as laypeople we're going to need more than just three robes and a bowl. However we do need to come to terms with our possessions. We need to ignore what the culture is telling us/selling us. The culture basically is saying, if you've got a problem, buy this, it's on sale. Whereas what the Buddha is saying is that freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose. We want to try to get to a place where we're using our possessions in a way that supports us being alive, but we're not lost in those possessions.<sup>2</sup>

George Carlin has a great routine on stuff. It's on YouTube at

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x\\_QkGPCL18&pp=ygUUR2VvcmdlIENhcmxpbjAgc3RlZmY%3D](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x_QkGPCL18&pp=ygUUR2VvcmdlIENhcmxpbjAgc3RlZmY%3D)

He really captures how we in Western civilization are overwhelmed by our stuff.

Ayya Khema said that every six months or so, you should go through all of your possessions and anything that you haven't used or worn or whatever, give it away. Just unburden yourself. So this particular instruction – having nothing, taking nothing – for laypeople, it means coming to terms with your possessions. Practice renunciation. You don't need a new car every year. You don't need every version of the iPhone. Renunciation is an important part of the path; but it goes against this culture and you're not going to get any support for it from the culture.

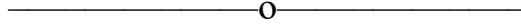
"This is the isle of with nothing further." If you really can get to the place where you are not actually possessing your possessions; you're just using them, then this is a place of freedom. There's no clinging, there's no craving, there's no dukkha, there's nothing further.

“Having nothing, taking nothing: this is the island with nothing further. I call it Nibbāna, the ending of old age and death.” Nibbāna is the goal. Nibbāna is "not burning", not burning with the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion. If you have nothing and are taking nothing, there's nothing to be greedy about. Hatred is rooted in fear – fear that you will lose something. But if you have nothing to lose, that's freedom. And with nothing possessed, nothing taken, there is no clinging or craving, no delusion about possessions, and thus no dukkha. This is the ending of old age and death because there is no clinging or craving for life to be other than it is.

“Those who have fully understood this, mindful, are quenched in this very life.” Notice there are two components – full understanding plus mindfulness. No positive theme occurs more often in this sutta collection than mindfulness. It is an essential practice for liberation.

“They don't fall under Māra's sway, nor are they his lackeys.” "Māra" is a verbal noun meaning "causing death" or "killing". So Māra is the angel of death. One with full

understanding is no longer conceiving of a self, a being that will die. So Māra has no power over them, they are freed from old age and death. Māra also is the tempter figure in the suttas. One who is content with "having nothing, taking nothing" is beyond temptation.



You might be wondering about the Pāli for "Having nothing, taking nothing" and how close is it to the "no-thingness" of [Snp 5.6 - Upasīva](#). Here's a table of the Pāli with translations taken from SuttaCentral's "Pāli word lookup":

having nothing	<i>akiñcanam</i> - with nothing; is nothing; having no; possession-less
taking nothing	<i>anādānam</i> - free from attachment; not grasping; not taking anything as one's own (notice <i>dāna</i> in the Pāli)
no-thingness	<i>ākiñcaññam</i> - nothingness; emptiness

The Pāli words here are definitely different from what is found in [Snp 5.6 - Upasīva](#). This sutta is about renunciation; Snp 5.6 is about *atammayata*.

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1. There's a fantastic book called **The Island** by Ajahn Amaro and Ajahn Passano on Nibbāna. It is a free download from <https://www.abhayagiri.org/media/books/The-Island-Web-2020%20ed..pdf>. Highly recommended if you're interested in reading about what the Suttas have to say about Nibbāna.

2. Kim Allen has a wonderful book about renunciation and letting go entitled [Full Simplicity](#).

## Snp 5.11 - Jatukaṇṇī

Snp 5.11 PTS: Sn 1096-1100  
Jatukaṇṇī-māṇava-pucchā  
Jatukaṇṇī's Question  
translated from the Pāli by  
[Bhikkhu Sujato](#)  
(as Snp 5.12)  
with tweaks by Leigh Brasington

1096 [Jatukaṇṇī:]

“Hearing of the hero with no desire for sensual pleasures,  
who has passed over the flood,  
I’ve come with a question for that desireless one.  
Tell me the state of peace, O natural visionary.  
Tell me this, Blessed One, as it really is.

1097

“For the Blessed One has overcome sensual desires,  
just as the blazing sun with its brilliance overcomes the earth.  
May you of vast wisdom explain the teaching  
to me of little wisdom so that I may understand  
the giving up of birth and old age here.”

1098 [The Buddha:]

“With desire for sensual pleasures dispelled,  
seeing renunciation as sanctuary,  
don’t be taking up or putting down  
anything at all.

1099

“What came before, let wither away,  
and after, let there be nothing.  
If you don’t grasp at the middle,  
you will live at peace.

1100

“One rid of greed, brahmin,  
for the whole realm of name-and-form,  
has no defilements by which  
they might fall under the sway of Death.”

My summary:

Q: Tell me the state of peace, so that I may understand the giving up of birth and old age.

A: Dispel sensual desire, see renunciation as sanctuary; don't hanker after the past, future, or present; get rid of greed.

We often hear the story that the Buddha left home because he saw an old person, a sick person, a dead person and a renunciate. But that's mythology. The story does appear in the suttas, but for a previous Buddha named Vipassī. That story occurs in [Long Discourse #14](#), which is obviously a mythological discourse. But that bit of mythology is not why our Buddha left home.

In [Suttanipāta 4.15](#), the Buddha indicates he left home because he was seeking peace. He was from the Sakyans which was a warrior culture. So, think of where the Buddha grew up as more like a macho culture where people are always quarreling. He wasn't into quarreling; he was seeking peace. This is why he left home.

Certainly, some of the things that he found disturbing were old age, sickness and death. Definitely the Buddha-to-be was looking for some way to deal with those. But in this sutta, the questioner recognizes that the Buddha knows something about the state of peace, so Jatukaṇṇī's first request is to learn about the state of peace.

Jatukaṇṇī recognizes that the Buddha is an accomplished one and heaps praise on him in the first two verses while also asking the Buddha to tell him not only about "the state of peace", but also about "the giving up of birth and old age here."

The Buddha's initial instructions are that sensual pleasures should be dispelled, one should see renunciation as sanctuary, and don't be taking up or putting down anything at all.

That last instruction is to not get lost in acquiring or rejecting. Don't get lost in the first two hindrances: sensual desire and aversion.

The Buddha continues:

"What came before, let wither away,  
and after, let there be nothing.  
If you don't grasp at the middle,  
you will live at peace."

Again, this teaching is all about renunciation. The "before" is the past; don't cling to anything from it. The "after" is the future; don't seek to acquire anything from it. "The middle" is the present – between the past and the future. "If you don't grasp at the middle, you will live in peace." If you are not craving and clinging here in the present, you will live in peace.

"One rid of greed, brahmin,  
for the whole realm of name-and-form,

has no defilements by which  
they might fall under the sway of Death.”

If one is not greedy for anything in either the mental or physical realms, then one has no defilements – this is the way to the deathless (which is another name for Nibbāna). This would include not being greedy for any type of rebirth (no craving for becoming – *bhavataṇhā*), no greed for not being reborn (no craving for not becoming – *vibhavataṇhā*) as well as no greed in this current human realm for anything at all.



## Snp 5.12 - Bhadrāvudha

Snp 5.12 PTS: Sn 1101-1104  
Bhadrāvudha-māṇava-pucchā  
Bhadrāvudha's Questions  
translated from the Pāli by  
[Bhikkhu Sujato](#)  
(as Snp 5.13)  
with tweaks by Leigh Brasington

1101 [Bhadrāvudha:]

“I beseech you, the shelter-leaver, the craving-cutter,  
the imperturbable, the delight-leaver,  
the flood-crosser, the freed,  
the formulation-leaver, the intelligent.

1102

“Different people have gathered  
from across the nations  
wishing to hear your word, O hero.  
After hearing the spiritual giant  
they will depart from here.  
Please, sage, answer them clearly,  
for truly you understand this matter.”

1103 [The Buddha:]

“Dispel all craving for attachments  
above, below, all round, between.  
For whatever a person grasps in the world,  
Māra pursues them right there.

1104

“So let a mindful bhikkhu who understands  
not grasp anything in all the world,  
observing that, in clinging to attachments,  
these people cling to the domain of death.”

My summary:

Q: Please teach the Dhamma.

A: Dispel all craving for attachments.

Many of these suttas have multiple epithets for the Buddha. This one is particularly fertile with 8 epithets. All the epithets in this collection are given in [Appendix 3 - Epithets for the Buddha](#) sorted by sutta number.

Apparently, different people have gathered wishing to hear the Buddha's teachings. No clear question is asked – basically Bhadrāvudha is requesting the Buddha to teach the Dhamma. What follows is basic instructions for crossing the flood.

“Dispel all craving for attachments, above, below, all round, between. For whatever a person grasps in the world, Māra pursues them right there.” This is the Second and Third Noble Truths. It's not explicitly stated as such, but that is what this teaching is. Don't crave, because that's how Māra pursues you.

“So let a mindful bhikkhu who understands not grasp anything in all the world, observing that, in clinging to attachments, these people cling to the domain of death.” Again we find the Second and Third Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are not explicitly called by those names in the Suttanipāta, but we do find the heart of them here in this sutta, as well as in other suttas in this collection. The clinging to attachments is unknowingly clinging to domain of death, clinging to dukkha. Don't do that!

## Snp 5.13 - Udaya

Snp 5.13 PTS: Sn 1105-1111

Udaya-māṇava-pucchā

Udaya's Questions

translated from the Pāli by

[Bhikkhu Sujato](#)

(as Snp 5.14)

with major tweaks by Leigh Brasington

1105 [Udaya:]

“To the meditator, settled and stainless, who has completed the task, is free of defilements, and has gone beyond all things, I have come seeking with a question. Tell me the liberation by the highest knowledge, the smashing of ignorance.”

1106 [The Buddha:]

“The giving up of both sensual desires and dissatisfaction; the dispelling of sloth, and the prevention of remorse;

1107

"pure equanimity together with mindfulness; headed by reflection on *dhamma*—this, I declare, is liberation by the highest knowledge, the smashing of ignorance.”

1108 [Udaya:]

“What fetters the world? What is its examination? With the giving up of what is Nibbāna spoken of?”

1109 [The Buddha:]

“Delight fetters the world. It is to be examined by means of thought. With the giving up of craving, Nibbāna is spoken of.”

1110 [Udaya:]

“For one living mindfully, how does consciousness cease? We’ve come to ask the Buddha; let us hear what you say.”

1111 [The Buddha:]

“Not taking delight in *vedanā* internally and externally—for one living mindfully, that’s how consciousness ceases.”

My summary:

Q: Proclaim the release through understanding, the destruction of ignorance.

A: Abandon both desire and aversion, dispel sloth, ward off perplexities, purify by

equanimity and mindfulness, then investigate mental phenomena.

Q: What is the world's fetter?

A: Delight (*nandi*)

Q: What is its examination?

A: Thinking.

Q: Abandon what to reach Nibbana?

A: Abandon craving; do not take delight in *vedanā*; live mindfully - thus consciousness ceases.

“To the meditator, settled and stainless,” said Venerable Udaya, “who has completed the task, is free of defilements, and has gone beyond all things,....” In [Snp 5.7 - Nanda](#) and [Snp 5.9 - Todeyya](#), we saw that one "who has completed the task", is liberated.

"Tell me the liberation by the highest knowledge, the smashing of ignorance.” In other words, explain to me the way to the far shore.

The Buddha answers by providing a list of things to do:

- give up of both sensual desires and dissatisfaction;
- dispel sloth;
- prevent remorse;
- pure equanimity together with mindfulness;
- headed by reflection on phenomena –  
This is liberation by the highest knowledge, the smashing of ignorance.

The phrase "reflection on phenomena" is *dhammatakkapurejavam*. *Dhammatakkā* is "reflection on dhamma;" *-purejavam* is "headed by" or "leading the way." *Dhamma* here is probably best understood as both phenomena and the Dhamma.

We could rephrase this as

- give up of both the 1st and 2nd hindrance;
- dispel the 3rd hindrance;
- prevent the 4th hindrance;
- (practice) pure equanimity together with mindfulness;
- reflect on phenomena/Dhamma.  
This is liberation by the highest knowledge, the smashing of ignorance.

The phrase translated as "pure equanimity together with mindfulness" is *upekkhāsatisamsuddham*.<sup>1</sup> This is very similar to "mindfulness fully purified by equanimity" – *upekkhāsatiṭṭhārasuddhim* which is found at the heart of the description of the fourth jhāna. So is this recommending the abandoning of the hindrances and the practice of the fourth jhāna? Perhaps. But it is a bit cryptic.

My translation here differs from other translations:

"purified by equanimity and mindfulness, preceded by the examination of mental states" (Norman), (Horner)

"pure equanimity and mindfulness, preceded by investigation of principles" (Sujato)

"purified by equanimity and mindfulness, preceded by thought on the Dhamma" (Bodhi)

"equanimity-&-mindfulness purified, with inspection of mental qualities swift in the forefront" (Thanissaro)

The first three above take *-purejavam* (preceded) as indicating that investigation preceded equanimity and mindfulness; it's a bit difficult to tell what is preceding what in Thanissaro's translation, but it certainly can be taken as investigation preceding liberation, which is what I have.

We definitely find in the [Gradual Training](#) that insight practice follows the abandoning of the hindrances and practicing the jhānas; in fact insight practice immediately follows the fourth jhāna. The phrase *dhammatakkapurejavam* is composed of *dhamma-takka-pure-javam* which would be phenomena–reasoning–headed-by, and it just makes more sense to say all the list above from "abandon sensual desires and dissatisfaction" thru "reflect on phenomena" has preceded "liberation by the highest knowledge, the smashing of ignorance." If so, then these instructions would be "Abandon the hindrances, practice the fourth jhāna, practice insight."<sup>2</sup>

There is a great pun here because the root of the word translated as "prevention" is *nivāraṇa*; the word for "hindrance" is *nīvaraṇa*. The only differences are the "i" is long and the "a" is short for "hindrance". So there's definitely a pun here. And remember, Pāli is only a spoken language, so the two would be even more similar when said aloud than when we see them written. Perhaps this may be the earliest reference to the hindrances in the whole of the canon, time-wise.<sup>3</sup>

If this interpretation of these instructions is correct, this is a summary of overcoming the hindrances, practicing the jhānas, practicing insight, and becoming liberated, which are the last four steps in many of the recensions of the Gradual Training. So this could be thought of as the granddaddy of the Gradual Training; perhaps the Gradual Training developed out of this. For more on the Gradual Training, see my free book on the subject at <https://leighb.com/gt>.

Udaya continues, "What fetters the world? What is its investigation? With the giving up of what is Nibbāna spoken of?"

"Delight fetters the world...."

"Delight" is *nandi*. Remember that *nandi* could also be translated as "relishing". The full Pāli is *nandisamyojano* which is literally delight-fetter. It could best be translated as "with delight as bond; having enjoyment as the fetter." In other words we get lost in our delight & enjoyment, our relishing, and are thus trapped and don't make progress on the spiritual path.

"It is to be investigated by means of thought...."

The Pāli for this is also interesting: *vitakkassa vicāraṇam*. Here we find *vitakka* and *vicāra* which are both mentioned in the description of the first jhāna. I do Not think this is referring to jhāna!<sup>4</sup> But it interesting that these two words appear together here in a sutta when (perhaps) jhāna practice is referred to earlier. Here it is just "investigate by means of thought."

"With the giving up of craving, Nibbāna is spoken of."

Once again, we encounter the Third Noble Truth. Clearly the essence of the Second and Third Noble truths is very early, even if the phrase "Noble Truths" is not yet occurring in these suttas.

"For one living mindfully, how does consciousness cease?"

We discussed the cessation of consciousness back in [Sn 5.1 - Ajita](#) and [Cessation of Viññāṇa \[divided-knowing\]](#). I won't repeat that here, but remember "consciousness" (*viññāṇa*) is literally "divided knowing". The Buddha's answer is interesting.

"Not taking delight in *vedanā* internally and externally—for one living mindfully, that's how consciousness ceases."

I understand this to mean that if you don't take delight in *vedanā*, you won't become attached to the source of that *vedanā* because you have not divided it from the larger reality. That is, you are not lost in focusing on any source of *vedanā*, internally or externally. In doing that, there is no I-making (internally), no mine-making (externally). By not getting trapped (fettered) in this way of becoming lost, you won't get caught up in craving and clinging. And of course, mindfulness is necessary – and mindfulness of *vedanā* is the second establishment of mindfulness which is found in many suttas.<sup>5</sup>

At [AN 3.33](#) Sāriputta received a discourse where the Buddha taught:

"Therefore, Sāriputta, you should train yourselves thus: (1) 'There will be no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to this conscious body; (2) there will be no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit in regard to all external objects; and (3) we will enter and dwell in that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, through which there is no more I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit for one who enters and dwells in it.'"

The "no I-making, mine-making, and underlying tendency to conceit" would be a side effect of the cessation of consciousness – the cessation of divided knowing.

By doing this, one becomes one "who has cut off craving, stripped off the fetter, and, by

completely breaking through conceit, has made an end of dukkha. And it was with reference to this that" the Buddha answered Udaya's first question in this sutta.

AN 3.33 is a commentary on what we just saw above in this sutta, Snp 5.13. AN 3.33 is likely a later sutta. Whether "later" means it's late in the Buddha's teaching career or after his death is unknowable. But the phrase, "liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom", only appears in suttas that seem to be later compositions. In the material we can identify as early, we don't find this phrase, and suttas that are clearly later, we do sometimes find this. So I'm taking that as a marker that this is a later sutta, as well as the fact that it is referencing an earlier sutta. But whether it's early or late, it is good Dhamma and sheds more light on just what was meant in the Buddha's answers to Udaya.

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1. *upekkhāsatisaṃsuddham* could also be translated as "purity with/by equanimity and mindfulness".
  2. See Wynne, p. 88 for a similar discussion. This time we agree.
  3. Thanks to Claralynn Nunamaker for pointing this out during the Sati Center class on Snp 5.
  4. See Wynne, pp. 88-89 where he seems to be leaning at least a bit towards *vitakkassa* and *vicāraṇaṃ* referring to 1st Jhāna by quoting John Brough (1962). I do not agree.
  5. E.g. DN 22, MN 10, SN 36, SN 47



## Snp 5.14 - Posāla

Snp 5.14 PTS: Sn 1112-1115  
Posāla-māṇava-pucchā  
Posāla's Questions  
adapted by Leigh Brasington  
from translations from the Pāli by  
[Bhikkhu Sujato](#) &  
K. R. Norman  
(as Snp 5.15)

1112 [Posāla:]

“To the one who reveals the past,  
who is imperturbable, with doubts cut off,  
who is profoundly learned (in) all mental phenomena,  
I have come seeking with a question.

1113

“For one who perceives the disappearance of form,  
who has entirely given up the body,  
and who sees nothing at all internally and externally,<sup>1</sup>  
I ask the Sakyan about knowledge for (such a) one.  
How should one like that be guided?”

1114 [The Buddha:]

“A *tathāgata* knows experientially  
all the states/standings of consciousness.  
And he understands this one who persists,  
committed to liberation as their goal.

1115

“Having understood the source of no-thingness,  
and thus [that] delight is a fetter –  
exactly like that, with experiential understanding,  
one has direct insight into this matter from that.  
That is their knowledge of truth,  
the brahmin who has lived the perfected life.”

My summary:

Q: For one who perceives the disappearance of form, entirely given up the body, sees nothing at all, how should one like that be guided?

A: Knowing the origin of no-thingness and thus that delight is a fetter, one then sees the

matter clearly. That is the knowledge of reality for that one.

This is another rather cryptic sutta. The translation above is my own, created by taking Norman's and Sujato's translations, mashing them together, and then diving deep into the Pāḷi to edit that mashup. I do think what I have above does capture both the question being asked and the Buddha's answer in a more approachable form than other translations.<sup>2</sup>

“For one who perceives the disappearance of form,  
who has entirely given up the body,  
and who sees nothing at all internally and externally,  
I ask the Sakyan about knowledge for (such a) one.  
How should one like that be guided?”

In [SnP 4.11](#), the questioner asks a related question: "In what state must one be for form to vanish? And what will make pleasure and pain disappear?" The answer is a bit cryptic:

874      Neither perceiving ordinary perceptions,  
         nor misperceiving perceptions,  
         nor unable to perceive,  
         nor having perception destroyed –  
         maintaining oneself in this way,  
         forms do not occur  
         because obsessive proliferations have perception as origin.<sup>3</sup>

This is the key verse in [SnP 4.11](#), but it is a little unclear exactly how we should translate/understand it. *Saññā* is usually translated as “perception;” however, perhaps a more accurate translation would be “conceptualization.” When there is a sensory input, we conceptualize that input which then provides us with the name/identification of that input. Unfortunately, we believe those concepts to be real – to be a totally accurate reflection of the underlying reality – and this is what gets us into trouble. Here the Buddha is not saying we should operate without concepts, or that all concepts are false – he's indicating that we need to not be fooled by our conceptualizing. Thus, translating this verse again we have the Buddha's answer to the question: "In what state must one be for form to vanish?"

874      One's conceptualization of concepts is not the ordinary kind,  
         nor is one's conceptualization of concepts abnormal;  
         one is not without conceptualization,  
         nor is one's conceptualization of that which has ended –  
         to such a one form disappears.  
         Conceptualization is indeed the source of *papañca* (obsessive proliferation).<sup>4</sup>

This is pointing to the same disappearance of form as in “Where neither water, nor earth, nor fire, nor air gain a foothold” found in DN 11, Ud 1.10, and Ud 8.1 – because form is defined in the suttas as these four elements. So for form to disappear, our perception/our

conceptualization must become non-ordinary. To put it simply, we need to be able to process the world both from a non-dual perspective as well as from an as-accurate-as-possible dualistic perspective.<sup>5</sup> These insights into our conceptualizing, that are gained from understanding the source of no-thingness, check our tendency towards obsessive proliferation which can lead to craving and clinging – those two are a setup for dukkha.<sup>6</sup>

It seems from Posāla's question that he has managed to perceive the disappearance of form. He also has "entirely given up the body, and sees nothing at all internally and externally." He is no longer being fooled by his conceptualizing. He has stopped "thingifying" his experience – see back at the chapters [Snp 5.1 - Ajita](#) and [Experiencing the World Raw](#) for detailed discussions of "thingifying". Now Posāla wants to know, "How should one like that be guided?"

The Buddha answers, "A *tathāgata* knows experientially all the states/standings of consciousness." The Pāli is *viññāṇaṭṭhitiyo* and I translated it as "states/standings of consciousness". This is the same Pāli word found in DN 15 and AN 7.44 where "seven stations of consciousness" (plus two dimensions in DN 15) are discussed. But both of these suttas appear to be late compositions and the discussion in both centers around planes of rebirth. If Posāla has reached a depth of understanding where he has stopped "thingifying" his experience, he's not seeking a rebirth, he's asking the Buddha about how to reach the end of the path – awakening, Nibbāna.

I translated *viññāṇaṭṭhitiyo* as "states/standings of consciousness" based on *viññāṇa-ṭṭhitiyo*. *Viññāṇa* you might recognize as "consciousness". *-ṭṭhitiyo* is *ṭhiti* and according to the Digital Pāli Dictionary, *ṭhiti* is defined as

- ṭhiti 1 fem. stability; constancy; continuity; endurance; persistence; longevity; lit. standing
- ṭhiti 2 fem. state; station; support; lit. standing
- ṭhiti 3 fem. existence; happening; occurrence; lit. standing
- ṭhiti 4 fem. (abhidhamma) presence (uppāda, ṭhiti, bhaṅga 3 moments of arising, presence & dissolution)
- ṭhiti 5 fem. stagnation, stationariness

All the translators agree on ṭhiti 2; they just don't agree on what the phrase means in this context. Other than Norman, the consensus seems to be that it is referring to the DN 15/AN 7.44 seven stations of consciousness. But as said above, Posāla is not seeking a rebirth in any state.<sup>7</sup>

“A *tathāgata* knows experientially, all the states/standings of consciousness. And he understands this one who persists, committed to liberation as their goal.”

The Buddha understands the implications of the no-thingness Posāla has described. Furthermore, he knows what to teach to one who is "committed to liberation as their goal."

“Having understood the source of no-thingness,....”

No-thingness is *ākiñcaññasambhavaṃ* – again not the same as *ākiñcaññāyatana*, the Base of Nothingness (aka jhāna 7). But again, as in [Snp 5.6 - Upasīva](#), the orthodox interpretation of this sutta is jhāna 7.<sup>8</sup> And again, the Buddha's actual teaching is far more profound than anything to do with an immaterial state. The Digital Pāli Dictionary translates *ākiñcaññasambhavaṃ* as "source of nothingness; origin of emptiness [ākiñcañña + sambhava]". So the Buddha is saying (paraphrased), "Having understood why you perceive the disappearance of form, why you have entirely given up the body, and why you see nothing at all internally and externally, you now need to see that delight is a fetter."

“Having understood the source of no-thingness,  
and thus [that] delight is a fetter – ....”

If the things that people delight in have no substantial existence, why would you be all caught up in taking "pleasure; enjoyment; relish; delight" in the insubstantial? The Pāli translated as "delight" is *nandi* and it means "pleasure; enjoyment; relish; delight". This does not mean that there will not be any pleasure or enjoyment on the spiritual path. It just means that the pursuit of these delights is a fetter and will hold you back from being committed to liberation as your goal.

“Having understood the source of no-thingness,  
and thus [that] delight is a fetter –  
exactly like that, with experiential understanding,  
one has direct insight into this matter from that.”

With that experiential understanding, you have the guide for liberation. And it's the same as we have encountered before: dukkha arises dependent on craving and clinging – craving and clinging for the delights and pleasures. Understand this experientially and you have direct insight into what needs to be done for liberation.

“Having understood the source of no-thingness,  
and thus [that] delight is a fetter –  
exactly like that, with experiential understanding,  
one has direct insight into this matter from that.  
That is their knowledge of truth,  
the brahmin who has lived the perfected life.”

The truth taught here is not referenced as a Noble Truth - but it is the same as the Third Noble Truth: give up craving for and clinging to delights and pleasures, then no more dukkha will arise. This is how to live a perfected life.

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1. Once again, the Base of Nothingness pops up in the standard interpretation. Sujato has a comment: "See Snp 4.11. The question refers to a meditator who has attained the dimension of nothingness." But once again, I don't think that is what this means. In the first place, Snp

4.11 is about Quarrels & Disputes – see [https://leighb.com/snp4\\_11.htm](https://leighb.com/snp4_11.htm) – and although the orthodox interpretation of the key verse there, [Snp 874](#), is misinterpreted as the four immaterial states, that sutta has nothing to do with the Base of Nothingness. Snp 4.11 does however answer the questions posed there: "In what state must one be for form to vanish? And what will make pleasure and pain disappear?" These are also definitely addressed in this sutta.

2. Norman's translation is good but difficult to parse since it sticks very closely to the Pāli. Bodhi's verse 1114 implies the question is for a liberated one, but a liberated one is not need of further guidance. Thanissaro says the fetter of delight is the origin of nothingness, rather than insight into the origin of nothingness leads to seeing delight as a fetter. Sujato (as well as the ancient commentary and Thanissaro) interprets the nothingness as the immaterial state the Base of Nothingness, and thereby goes completely off course by interpreting the fetter as desire for rebirth in the Base of Nothingness. Also Bodhi, Thanissaro, and Sujato translate *viññāṇaṭṭhitiyo* as "stations/planes of consciousness" implying this is referring to the stations of consciousness mentioned in the much later Dīgha Nikāya number 15.

3. Translated by Santikaro based on Ajahn Buddhādāsa's translation in **Paṭiccasamuppāda From the Buddha's Own Lips** (in Thai).

4. For much more on this verse, see the footnotes at [https://leighb.com/snp4\\_11.htm](https://leighb.com/snp4_11.htm)

5. There is much more on these 4 suttas – [Snp 4.11](#), [DN 11](#), [Ud 1.10](#) and [Ud 8.1](#) – in my free-to-download book **Dependent Origination and Emptiness: Streams Of Dependently Arising Processes Interacting**.

6. See [MN 18](#) for a discussion on how obsessive proliferation can lead to dukkha.

7. Given that Posāla "perceives the disappearance of form, has entirely given up the body, and sees nothing at all internally and externally", he is either already skilled in the immaterial states or has insight far beyond what can be learned from experiencing any immaterial state. If he is already skilled in any immaterial state, the orthodox view is that he will be reborn in the heaven corresponding to the state he is most skilled in – presumably *Ākāṇhaññāyatanūpagā deva* – The Devas of the Sphere of Nothingness. The Buddha's answer would make no sense if that was Posāla's question. But the Buddha's answer does make sense in that it is a guide for what to do next for one with that depth of insight: see delight as a fetter.

8. Again, Wynne mistakes "nothingness" for jhāna 7 see pp. 90-91. And again, this is a mistake.

## Snp 5.15 - Mogharāja

Snp 5.15 PTS: Sn 1116-1119

**Mogharāja-māṇava-pucchā**

**Mogharāja's Question**

translated from the Pāli by

[John D. Ireland](#) © 1994

1116 [Mogharāja:]

"Twice have I asked Sakka<sup>1</sup> but the Seeing One has not answered me. I have heard a divine sage replies when asked a third time.

1117

"I do not know the view of the greatly famous Gotama concerning this world, the next world and the Brahma-world with its deities.

1118

"To him of supreme vision I have come with a question: how should one regard the world so that one is not seen by the King of Death?"

1119 [The Buddha:]

"Look upon the world as empty, Mogharāja, ever mindful; uprooting the view of self you may thus be one who overcomes death. So regarding the world one is not seen by the King of Death."

My summary:

Q: How should you look upon the world so the King of Death won't see you?

A: Look upon the world as empty, ever mindful. Uproot the view of self, then the King of Death won't see you.

This is probably the most interesting Sutta in the whole collection. The questioner is Mogharāja. *Rāja*, as you may know, is "king". *Mogha* means "useless; pointless; futile; ineffective; unprofitable; vain; stupid; foolish; lit. empty". So the king of foolishness, the pointless king, the king of emptiness, asks the Buddha three times a rather strange question – a question that may seem foolish, pointless, unprofitable, even empty. Apparently, the Buddha did not answer Mogharāja the first two time. Maybe he thought the question was useless, pointless, foolish. Maybe the asking three time is simply a literary device to pad the length of the sutta. Who knows? It doesn't matter.

The question is definitely strange. "How should one regard the world so that one is not seen by the King of Death?" Would you ever ask "How should one regard the government so that



one is not seen by the Tax Collector?" Of course not – that would be foolish.

The Buddha's three-part answer is brilliant. The first part is, "Look upon the world as empty..." What exactly does that mean? Luckily Ānanda asks the Buddha in [SN 35.85](#), "Venerable sir, it is said, 'Empty is the world, empty is the world.' In what way, venerable sir, is it said, 'Empty is the world'?"

"It is, Ānanda, because it is empty of self and of what belongs to self that it is said, 'Empty is the world.' And what is empty of self and of what belongs to self? The eye, Ānanda, is empty of self and of what belongs to self. Forms (sights) are empty of self and of what belongs to self. Eye-consciousness is empty of self and of what belongs to self. Eye-contact is empty of self and of what belongs to self. Whatever *vedanā* arises with eye-contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—that too is empty of self and of what belongs to self. And the same for ear and sounds, nose and smells, tongue and taste, body and tangibles, mind and mind objects.

"It is, Ānanda, because it is empty of self and of what belongs to self that it is said, 'Empty is the world.'"

The world is the world of our sense experiences. That's all we know.<sup>2</sup> We certainly hope that our sense experiences closely match whatever is out there beyond our senses, but we actually have no way of really knowing. All you've ever seen is neurological activity in your visual cortex, all you've ever heard is your ear drum jiggling those three little bones in your middle ear, etc. In none of that, is there a self or what belongs to a self – not in the forms we see, the sounds we hear, or even in the mental activities in our minds.

There is also the well-known teaching from [DhP 279](#):

*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā* – All of creation is without permanence,  
*sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā* – All of creation is without lasting satisfaction,  
*sabbe dhammā anattā* – All phenomena are without self.

Putting the quotes from SN 35.85 and DhP 279 together we arrive at "All phenomena are empty." Sense organs, materiality, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, mind objects (concepts, thoughts, emotions, memories, intentions, etc., even consciousness), as well as Nibbāna, all are empty because they are empty of self and of what belongs to self. We also can see from SN 35.85 that emptiness is an experience – it is very important to keep in mind that the Buddha was not doing metaphysics; he was a phenomenologist, telling us to analyze the phenomena we experience and our responses to those experiences.

A second understanding of emptiness – as "empty of (conceptualized) things" – can be gleaned from [MN 121](#) – "The Smaller Sutta on Emptiness." There Ānanda wants to know what the Buddha means when he says, "These days I often practice the meditation on emptiness."



The Buddha replies by describing his "genuine, undistorted, pure entry into emptiness, supreme and unsurpassed." This provides instructions for a gradual descent to a mind state empty of conceptualization. By way of examples, he points out that the meditation hall is empty of the disturbances of village life. The forest is empty of the disturbances of the meditation hall. By not attending to the perception of forest, one can focus on singleness based on the perception of earth and then there are no disturbances of forest. By not attending to the perception of earth, one focuses, in turn, on singleness based on each of the four immaterial states,<sup>3</sup> dropping one and moving on to the even more subtle next one. One regards each of these meditation states as empty of whatever is not there, and for whatever remains, one understands, "There is this." Finally, not attending to the perception of any quality of any of the previous objects, one attends to the singleness based on the signless concentration of mind. "Signless concentration of mind" in Pāli is "*animittam cetosamādhim*":

*animittam* = signless

*cetosamādhim* = mind samādhi

*samādhi* = "concentration", but maybe more accurately "indistractability"

The signless concentration of mind is a mind that is not conceptualizing based on signs and is indistractable. The "signs" of an object are what we use to conceptualize what the object actually is. Thus I understand the signless concentration of mind to be a mind that is not conceptualizing its sensory input – it is not distracted by processing any signs from what it is being experienced, i.e. it is not conceptualizing.

This is also what the practice instructions to Bāhiya in [Ud 1.10](#) are pointing towards: "In seeing will be merely seeing; in hearing will be merely hearing; in sensing will be merely sensing; in cognizing will be merely cognizing." When you can do that, "then you will not be 'in that.' When you are not 'in that,' then, you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between the two. Just this is the end of dukkha." In other words, if you can do that practice, you will not be experiencing a self or what belongs to a self.

Continuing with [MN 121](#), "Then there is only the non-emptiness connected with the six sensory spheres, dependent on this very body and conditioned by life. This is one's genuine, undistorted, pure descent into emptiness, supreme and unsurpassed." All that is happening at this point is the happening of the six senses with no further processing of the sensory input. If one can deeply realize that even the signless concentration of mind is concocted and mentally fashioned, and drop that, one becomes liberated. (There is far more to this profound sutta than in this very brief summary!)

Both of these sutta understandings ("empty of a self and what belongs to a self" and "empty of (conceptualized) things") fit the Buddha's answer to Mogharāja, as does Nāgārjuna's "empty of essence" and "dependently originated." All of these can also arise from insights gained while viewing the world from a Streams Of Dependently Arising Processes Interacting perspective.<sup>4</sup>

"Look upon the world as empty, Mogharāja, ever mindful;...." Once again we find the very important instruction to be ever mindful. I don't think I need to say anything more here - you have been practicing it ever since that chapter on [Ever Mindful](#), haven't you? You can't get to the far shore if you don't follow the instructions. The Buddha does mention "mindfulness" in 10 of these 16 suttas. Seems kinda important. Don't sweat it if you are not perfect right off the bat. Just keep practicing.<sup>5</sup>

"Look upon the world as empty, Mogharāja, ever mindful; uprooting the view of self...." It's not that we have identified with the wrong object (e.g. body, thoughts, memories, consciousness), it's that the act of identification itself is wrong. There can never be a correct object to identify with.

The phrase "This is not me, this is not mine, this is not my self" appears in over 50 suttas.<sup>6</sup> The "this" in that phrase frequently refers to one of the five aggregates: body, *vedanā*, conceptualization, mental activities, or consciousness. We swap our objects of identification willy-nilly. We say, "I'm ill" (body) or "I'm a Buddhist" (conceptualization) or "I'm sad" (mental activity) – all in the same day, maybe in the same hour, or less. But the aggregate we most identify with is our consciousness. This is what the monk Sāti, the son of a fisherman, was doing in MN 38, and which we discussed back in [Snp 5.6 - Upasīva](#). We mostly want to find the deathless by finding something that we can identify with that will transcend death. But this is not going to work.

The self is also the craver, the clinger. The Buddha's strategy is to uproot the tendency to identify with anything and thereby uproot the sense of self – yielding no more craver or clinger. My choice for the most profound sutta in the Pāli Canon is [Saṃyutta Nikāya 12.15](#) – the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*. There the Venerable Kaccānagotta asks the Buddha "In what way is there Right View?"

The Buddha replies "This world, Kaccāna, for the most part depends on a duality – upon the notion of existence and the notion of non-existence." The duality of existence and non-existence actually turns out to have its limitations. For example: Does Santa Claus exist or does Santa Claus not exist? Well if he exists and he lives at the North Pole, he's in real trouble because the ice he lives on is melting. But if he does not exist, how come, if you have a misbehaving three-year-old two weeks before Christmas and you say, "Santa Claus is watching", you get good behavior immediately. So non-existent Santa Claus has the power to change a child's behavior. And of course Santa rides at the end of the Christmas parade and sells Coca-Cola and all the rest of it. So concepts of existence and non-existence don't really capture all that's going on.

The Buddha goes on to say, "One with Right View does not take a stand about My Self." Saying either that my self exists or that my self does not exist is falling into the duality of existence and non-existence.

Once the wanderer Vacchagotta came to the Buddha and asked, "Venerable sir, tell me once and for all, is there a self?" The Buddha didn't say anything. "Venerable sir, once and for all,

is there no self?" The Buddha didn't say anything. Vacchagotta left. After he was gone, Ānanda asked the Buddha why he didn't answer Vacchagotta. He replied, "If I had said there was a self, Vacchagotta would have fallen into the mistake of eternalism, thinking he had a soul that was going to exist forever. If I had said there was no self, he would have fallen into the mistake of annihilationism<sup>7</sup> – that he would be utterly destroyed at death. Better not to say anything so he doesn't get more confused than he is already."<sup>8</sup> That was good, because Vacchagotta kept coming back and asking more questions, and eventually he asked to become a monk, and eventually after asking still more questions, he became fully awakened.<sup>9</sup>

Remember in the previous chapter we found that everything is dependently originated? This would obviously include you. The Buddha is not saying that there's no self. What he's saying is that everywhere you look you can't find a self. If you look closely, all that you do find are dependently originated phenomena. Everything is dependent upon other things. There's no essence to anything.

"Everything exists': That is one extreme. 'Everything doesn't exist': That is the second extreme. Without veering towards either of these extremes, a Tathagata teaches the Dhamma by the middle:" Dependent Origination, or as I like to put it, there are just Streams Of Dependently Arising Processes Interacting – SODAPI. There are no entities, no nouns. There are only processes interacting. Every process is interrelated to enough other processes so that it's just one massive net of interrelatedness. And this "me" I find so compelling – it's only a tiny, limited view of something so much larger, it's just another node in this vast net of interactions.

This is "such a brilliant solution from the Buddha – the middle way between the concepts of annihilation (I die and that's it), and eternalism (I die and I keep on going forever). The solution is 'I never existed in the first place as this personal identity.' So how could I even die or be born or anything? Because there's no I to be found."<sup>10</sup> There's only SODAPI.

"Look upon the world as empty, Mogharāja, ever mindful; uprooting the view of self you may thus be one who overcomes death. So regarding the world one is not seen by the King of Death."

The Deathless is another name for Nibbāna. So being one who overcomes death would be one who realizes Nibbāna. The means for overcoming death, realizing Nibbāna, are seeing the world as empty and being ever mindful. This can provide enough insights into the nature of reality that the view of self is uprooted. These insights are along the lines of seeing that not only is there nothing worth craving or clinging to, there is nothing that can really be obtained or clung to. If my self is understood in the same way, then the view of self is uprooted. There never has been anyone there, there is no one to die – the Deathless has been achieved.

Mogharāja's seemingly foolish question leads to an answer full of deep teachings – which hopefully are accessible if you have understood what has been taught in the preceding suttas.

1. The name "Sakka" is used here as a title for the Buddha. It means, "a man of the Sakya clan". The Buddha is also sometimes called Sakyamuni, "the sage of the Sakyas".
2. See [SN 12.44](#) for the Buddha's discussion of the world as the world of our sense experiences.
3. The four immaterial states are the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, the base of no-thingness, and the base of perception nor non-perception. See the chapter on "The Immaterial Jhānas" in **Right Concentration** for details.
4. For much more on Nāgārjuna and on Streams Of Dependently Arising Processes Interacting see my free-to-download book [Dependent Origination and Emptiness: Streams Of Dependently Arising Processes Interacting](#).
5. For a recap of the details associated with this phrase "ever mindful", see the earlier chapter [Ever Mindful](#).
6. For a list of suttas containing "not my self" see <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/notmyself.htm>.
7. Annihilationism assumes there is an actual "self" that is destroyed at death.
8. SN 44.10 is where Vacchagotta asks about the self.
9. Vacchagotta becomes a monk in MN 72 and becomes an arahant in MN 73.
10. This quote from Victor Bradford was made during one of the courses I taught on the sutta.

## Snp 5.16 - Piṅgiya

Snp 5.16 PTS: Sn 1120-1123

**Piṅgiya-māṇava-pucchā**

**Piṅgiya's Question**

translated from the Pāli by

[John D. Ireland](#) © 1994

with tweaks by Leigh Brasington

1120 [Piṅgiya:]

"I am old and feeble, the comeliness of youth has vanished. My sight is weak and I am hard of hearing. I do not wish to perish whilst still confused. Teach me the Dhamma by understanding which I may abandon birth and decay."<sup>1</sup>

1121 [The Buddha:]

"Seeing heedless people afflicted and suffering suffering hardship because of their physical bodies, Piṅgiya, you should be heedful and let go of (attachment to) your physical body so there is no further becoming."

1122 [Piṅgiya:]

"In the ten directions — the four quarters, four between, and those above and below — there is nothing in the world not seen, heard, sensed or understood by you. Teach me the Dhamma by understanding which I may abandon birth and decay."

1123 [The Buddha:]

"Seeing men caught in craving, Piṅgiya, tormented and afflicted by old age, you should be heedful and let go of craving so there is no further becoming."

My summary:

Q: Teach me the Dhamma so that I may abandon birth and decay.

A: Be diligent and let go of attachment to your physical body so there is no further becoming.

Q: (same as above)

A: Be diligent and give up craving so there is no further becoming.

Piṅgiya is now old and does not wish to die confused. He wants to learn and understand Dhamma so he can abandon birth and old-age/growing-old/decay. He seems to be looking for a way beyond being reborn and then growing old again.

"Seeing heedless people afflicted and suffering hardship because of their physical bodies, Piṅgiya, you should be heedful and let go of (attachment to) your physical body so there is no further becoming."

Heedfulness is a very important aspect of the path to awakening. "Heedless" is *pamatta* and "heedful" is *appamatta* which is "diligent (in); vigilant (about); careful (about); attentive (to)". You might be familiar with *appamatta* in the Buddha's last words: *vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādetā* "ti – "fabrications/concoctions disintegrate, diligently accomplish one's purpose." *Appamatta/appamāda* occurs in over 275 suttas,<sup>2</sup> so it's clearly an important trait to have on the way to the far shore.

The Buddha's advice seems to be "be heedful/diligent" and "let go of identification with your physical body." In [Snp 5.14 - Posāla](#) says he "perceives the disappearance of *rūpa*/form/materiality, [and] has entirely given up the *kaya*/body." This seems to be the direction the Buddha is suggesting for Piṅgiya to pursue.

But Piṅgiya is not satisfied with that answer, or perhaps doesn't understand what he is to do. He asks the same question again after praising the Buddha.

The Buddha now replies, "Seeing men caught in craving, Piṅgiya, tormented and afflicted by old age, you should be heedful and let go of craving so there is no further becoming."

Once more, we find the Buddha teaching that giving up craving is the path to follow for overcoming dukkha.

The Pāli *apunabbhava* I have translated as "no further becoming", which is the same translation as Thanissaro. You often see it translated as something like "not come again to birth" (Ireland), "not to be reborn" (Sujato), "non-renewed existence" (Norman), or "end to renewed existence" (Bodhi). Clearly the orthodox understanding is that the question and answer both are referring to rebirth. But *apunabbhavāya* is *a-puna-bbhavāya* – *a* is "not;" *puna* is "again; once more" and *-bbhavāya* is *bhava* which "becoming" or "existence". Thanissaro Bhikkhu's excellent book, **The Paradox of Becoming**,<sup>3</sup> makes a very good case for *bhava* mostly being accurately translated as "becoming". Therefore I have translated *apunabbhavāya* as "no further becoming" which gives it both a rebirth understand and an understanding of "no further becoming in this life, i.e. no craving or clinging", hence liberation without any recourse to rebirth needed.

The usual interpretation of the twelve links of dependent origination in the moment-to-moment interpretation is that "birth", which comes almost at the end and arises dependent on becoming, is the birth of a self, a sense of self. So if you can give up that becoming, then you don't give birth to a self, thus you don't give birth to the craver or the clinger. That would be an interpretation with no need of rebirth.

To summarize the instructions to Piṅgiya: to overcome birth and old age, be diligent, let go of the physical body, let go of craving.

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1. *Jara*: decay, decrepitude, old age.

2. See <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/diligence.htm>
3. Thanissaro (2008)



## Epilogues

The prose of the [first epilogue](#), translated by Bhikkhu Sujato, is as follows:

“This was said by the Buddha while staying in the land of the Magadhans at the Pāsāṇake shrine. When requested by the sixteen brahmin devotees, he answered their questions one by one. If you understand the meaning and the teaching of each of these questions, and practice accordingly, you may go right to the far shore of old age and death. These teachings are said to lead to the far shore, which is why the name of this exposition of the teaching is 'The Way to the Far Shore.'”

The verses of this epilogue end with:

If you practice in accordance  
with each of these questions  
as taught by the Buddha,  
you’ll go from the near shore to the far.

Developing the supreme path,  
you’ll go from the near shore to the far.  
This path is for going to the far shore;  
that’s why it’s called “The Way to the Far Shore”.

There is a [second epilogue](#) of verses by Piṅgiya – the questioner in Snp 5.16 (just preceding these Epilogues). In it Piṅgiya praises the Buddha as the great teacher and then extols his faith in the Buddha.

## Conclusions

So what are we to **do** with all these instructions for reaching the far shore? How can we get a handle on all this?

Whatever a person grasps in the world, Māra pursues them right there. Fully understanding craving, free of defilements, those people have crossed the flood. This is the way to the far shore.

With the giving up of craving, Nibbāna is spoken of. The removal of desire and lust for what is seen, heard, thought, or cognized; for anything liked or disliked, is Nibbāna. Whatever you comprehend, above, below, across and in between, get rid of delight and attachment to it. So let a mindful one who understands not grasp anything in all the world. This is the way to the far shore.

Because of wrongly directed desire and heedlessness, the world is not known as it really is. Calmed, without fumes of passion, without affliction, without desire, free from craving, undistressed, this is the way to the far shore.

Be keen, alert, and mindful right here. Look upon the world as empty, ever mindful. One who in the midst of sensualities, follows the holy life, ever mindful, craving-free; they make their way to the far shore.

Having regard for no-thingness, possessing mindfulness, supported by “it does not exist”, cross over the flood. Abandon sensual pleasures, abstain from useless conversations, look for the destruction of craving day and night. Having understood the source of no-thingness, and thus that delight is a fetter – one has experiential understanding; that is their knowledge of truth. This is the way to the far shore.

Having nothing, taking nothing: this is the island with nothing further. I call it Nibbāna. With desire for sensual pleasures dispelled seeing renunciation as sanctuary, don't be taking up or putting down anything at all. This is the way to the far shore.

What came before, let wither away, and after, let there be nothing. If you don't grasp at the middle, you will live at peace. Don't cling to the past, don't hanker after the future. If you don't grasp anything in the present, you will find your way to the far shore.

The giving up of both sensual desires and dissatisfaction; the dispelling of sloth, and the prevention of remorse; pure equanimity together with mindfulness; reflecting on *dhamma*—this is liberation by the highest knowledge, the smashing of ignorance. This is the way to the far shore.

In summary:

Craving is a setup for dukkha. Don't do that.

Don't cling to the past, don't hanker after the future, don't grasp anything in the present.

Be diligent. Don't be fooled by your conceptualizing.

View the world as empty, ever mindful.

## Afterword

I hope you have found this journey on the way to the far shore useful. The Buddha's teachings in **The Way to the Far Shore** are practical instructions for waking up. But no instructions are useful unless you put them into action. What's taught by the Buddha here has to be practiced. It appears that mindfulness is the key to unlocking all the other practices. Being "ever mindful" is certainly a work in progress for all of us – but it does bring great reward.

As they say in Indonesia, "Selamat Jalan," which literally means "Blessings on your journey!" May your journey on this spiritual path be blessed and fruitful!

## Appendix 1 - Summaries of the 16 Suttas

[Leigh's commentary in brackets]

### [Snp 5.1 - Ajita](#)

B: The world is enveloped by ignorance. Because of wrongly directed desire and heedlessness it is not known as it really is. Longing is where we get stuck. The great fear is dukkha.

B: Mindfulness obstructs and restricts the streams of dukkha; by wisdom they are cut off.

B: Mind-and-body completely cease with the cessation of consciousness.

B: The practice is not craving for sensual pleasures, with a mind that is pure, tranquil, and mindful.

[re cessation of consciousness - see [DN 11](#) – Viññāṇa literally means "divided knowing"]  
[see also [SN 12.31](#)]

### [Snp 5.2 - Tissametteyya](#)

Q: Who has succeeded on the spiritual path?

A: Those leading the spiritual life among sensual pleasures, rid of craving, ever mindful  
[see also [AN 6.61](#)]

### [Snp 5.3 - Puṇṇaka](#)

Q: Why do people perform sacrifices?

A: In the hope of escaping the ravages of old age.

Q: Does it work?

A: No.

Q: What does work?

A: Becoming wise; undisturbed by the world; peaceful; having an unclouded mind, free from desire.

[see also [AN 3.32](#) and [AN 4.41](#) ]

### [Snp 5.4 - Mettagū](#)

Q: What is the source of dukkha?

A: Attachment.

Q: How do the wise cross the flood of dukkha?

A: Expel delight and dogmatism, uproot consciousness of becoming. Live mindfully and be vigilant. Thru understanding, abandon attachments.

Q: May the Buddha regularly instruct me.

A: Be a master of knowledge, own nothing, be unattached to sensual existence. Discard clinging to renewal of existence. Be free from craving, undistressed, desireless.

### [Snp 5.5 - Dhotaka](#)

D: Teach me.

B: Be keen, alert, and mindful.

D: Release me from my doubts.

B: I cannot release anyone from their doubts.

D: Teach me the principle of seclusion.

B: Everything is a snare. Don't crave for any state of becoming / for existence or nonexistence.

### [Snp 5.6 - Upasīva](#)

Q: Tell me an object (of meditation), supported by which I may cross over this flood

A: Having regard for no-thingness, possessing mindfulness, supported by (the belief) “it does not exist,” then abandon sensual pleasures, abstain from (wrong) conversations, look for the destruction of craving

Q: Would one who has done this, remain in this state?

A: Yes

Q: What can we say about the consciousness of one in that state who then dies?

A: The question is invalid, nothing can be said. [see [MN 72](#) - "To Vacchagotta on Fire"]

[no-thingness = *atammayatā* (non-concocting; non-fashioning)]

[no-thingness is not the State of Nothingness (Jhāna 7)]

[from K.R. Norman: The Buddha is referring to the no-thingness of *atammayatā* (non-concocting; non-fashioning) but Upasīva (in 1072), and Alexander Wynne in "The Origin of Buddhist Meditation" (in his summary of 1071-72), think he is referring to the Realm of Nothingness (the 7th Jhana)]

[the Niddesa (ancient commentary) makes the same mistake in regarding no-thingness as 7th Jhana)]

### [Snp 5.7 - Nanda](#)

Q: Is someone a sage because of their knowledge, or because of their way of life?

A: Not because of knowledge. Sages live far from crowds, untroubled, with no need for hope

Q: Do those who live self-controlled crossed over birth & old age?

A: No, not necessarily

Q: Then who has crossed over birth & old age?

A: Those who have fully understood craving, and are free of defilements

### [Snp 5.8 - Hemaka](#)

Q: Explain to me the teaching that destroys craving, so that one who lives mindfully may cross over clinging in the world.

A: The removal of desire and lust for what is seen, heard, thought, or cognized; for anything liked or disliked – this is Nibbāna. Those who understand this and are mindful are liberated.

### [Snp 5.9 - Todeyya](#)

Q: In whom sensual pleasures do not dwell and for whom there is no craving, and who has crossed over doubts – of what kind is their liberation?

A: That is their liberation.

Q: Are they free of hope; do they possess wisdom?

A: They are free of hope; they possess wisdom. A sage is one who has nothing, and is unattached to sensual life.

#### [Snp 5.10 - Kappa](#)

Q: Tell me an island as the terrifying flood rises.

A: Having nothing, taking nothing: this is the ultimate island.

#### [Snp 5.11 - Jatukaṇṇī](#)

Q: Tell me the state of peace, so that I may understand the giving up of birth and old age.

A: Dispel sensual desire, see renunciation as sanctuary; don't hanker after the past, future, or present; get rid of greed.

#### [Snp 5.12 - Bhadrāvudha](#)

Q: Please teach the Dhamma.

A: Dispel all craving for attachments.

#### [Snp 5.13 - Udaya](#)

Q: Proclaim the release through understanding, the destruction of ignorance.

A: Abandon both desire and aversion, dispel sloth, ward off perplexities, purify by equanimity and mindfulness, then investigate mental phenomena.

Q: What is the world's fetter?

A: Delight (*nandi*)

Q: What is its examination?

A: Thinking.

Q: Abandon what to reach Nibbana?

A: Abandon craving; do not take pleasure in vedanā; live mindfully - thus consciousness ceases.

[re cessation of consciousness - see [DN 11](#) & [SN 22.53](#) – Viññāṇa literally means "divided knowing"]

[see also [AN 3.33](#)]

#### [Snp 5.14 - Posāla](#)

Q: For one who perceives the disappearance of form, entirely given up the body, sees nothing at all, how should one like that be guided?

A: Knowing the origin of no-thingness and thus that delight is a fetter, one then sees the matter clearly. That is the knowledge of reality for that one.

#### [Snp 5.15 - Mogharāja](#)

Q: How should you look upon the world so the King of Death won't see you?

A: Look upon the world as empty, ever mindful. Uproot the view of self, then King of Death won't see you.

[the Deathless is a synonym for Nibbāna]

[see [SN 35.85](#) ("the world is empty of self and of what belongs to self")]

#### [Snp 5.16 - Piṅgiya](#)

Q: Teach me the Dhamma so that I may abandon birth and decay.

A: Be diligent and let go of attachment to your physical body so there is no further becoming.

Q: (same as above)

A: Be diligent and give up craving so there is no further becoming.



## Appendix 2 - Themes in Suttanipāta 5

1	Theme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
2	mindfulness	1	2		4	5	6		8		10		12	13		15	
3	Cessation of consciousness	1												13			
4	restraint of the senses	1															
5	dukkha	1			4												
6	name-and-form	1										11					
7	wisdom	1								9		11					
8	sensual desire	1	2	3	4		6	7	8	9		11					
9	fear	1									10						
10	craving/avarice	1	2		4	5	6	7	8	9			12	13			16
11	heedlessness	1			4												16
12	skillfulness	1															
13	ignorance	1												13			
14	avarice	1										11					
15	flood/streams	1									10	11	12				
16	contentment		2														
17	quenched		2	3		5			8		10						
18	agitation		2														
19	spiritual life		2														
20	middle		2									11					
21	birth			3	4			7			10	11					16
22	old age/decay			3	4			7			10						16
23	sickness			3													
24	death			3			6					11	12				16
25	becoming			3	4	5											
26	rite & rituals			3				7									

27	rooted			3		6									
28	desire			3											
29	crossing over			3	4	5	6	8							
30	stilling of mind			3									14		
31	direct experience			4											
32	upadhi			4		7									
33	clinging			4	5						12				
34	consciousness			4		6						13			
35	abandoning			4		6	7			11	12	13			16
36	delight			4								13	14		
37	attachment			4			8								
38	doubt				5			9							
39	peace				5		8								
40	seclusion				5										
41	contentment				5										
42	nibbana/deathless				5		8	10					14	15	
43	nothingness					6							14		
44	fire/flame					6									
45	investigation					6									
46	perception					6									
47	emancipation/liberation					6		9			12	13	14		
48	measureless					6									
49	stand/tittthe					6									
50	asavas						7			11		13			
51	sila						7								
52	purity						7					13			
53	world							8						15	
54	Mara								10						
55	island								10						
56	extinction								10						
57	dry up									11					

<b>58</b>	reject/aversion											11					
<b>59</b>	security											11					
<b>60</b>	renunciation												12				
<b>61</b>	dissatisfaction													13			
<b>62</b>	mental dullness													13			
<b>63</b>	regret													13			
<b>64</b>	equanimity													13			
<b>65</b>	vedana													13			
<b>66</b>	empty															15	
	Theme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

## Appendix 3 - Epithets for the Buddha

-	World Leader, Sakyan, beacon, Awakened One, Buddha, Blessed One, Clear-eyed One, lion, supreme person, cutter of craving, Good sir, Realized One
1	
2	
3	the imperturbable, the seer of the root
4	Blessed One, a knowledge master, evolved, great seer, spiritual giant
5	Blessed One, a brahmin traveling with nothing, All-seer, Sakyan, brahmin, great seer
6	Alone and independent, O Sakyan, All-seer, sage
7	Blessed One, the great seer
8	sage
9	O Sakyan, sage, All-seer
10	good sir
11	hero, no desire for sensual pleasures, passed over the flood, desireless one, O natural visionary, Blessed One, you of vast wisdom
12	the shelter-leaver, the craving-cutter, the imperturbable, the delight-leaver, the flood-crosser, the freed, the formulation-leaver, the intelligent, hero, spiritual giant, sage
13	meditator, rid of hopes, completed the task, free of defilements, gone beyond all things, the Buddha
14	one who reveals the past, imperturbable, with doubts cut off, gone beyond all things, Sakyan
15	Sakyan, Clear-eyed One, divine seer, renowned Gotama, one of excellent vision
16	
-	the Buddha, Clear-eyed One, kinsman of the Sun
—	immaculate one of vast intelligence, desireless, unentangled, spiritual giant, one who's given up stains and delusions & conceit and contempt, the Buddha, all-seer, dispeller of darkness, brahmin, Gotama, splendid, a beacon, sage

(obviously the sutta numbers are 0 relative)

## Appendix 4 - Translations

### Books

[The Rhinoceros Horn - And Other Early Buddhist Poems: Suttanipāta](#), translated by K. R. Norman, ISBN: 0860131548

[The SuttaNipāta: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses](#), translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom 2017, ISBN: 1614294291

Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation is easier reading, Norman's is more literal.

### Online

[Sutta Central](#) If you use the translations by Bhikkhu Sujato, you can [easily find the corresponding Pāli](#).

[Access To Insight](#) J. D. Ireland's translations, when available, are generally preferable to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, but reading both gives you an even better understanding.

This webpage outlines [An Easy Way to Find the Pāli in Suttas](#).

The translations at the start of each sutta are my own. I would take the translation from either [Sutta Central](#) or [Access To Insight](#) that I found most helpful, and then tweak it based on Norman, Bodhi, the other translations, and my own understanding of the Pāli.

## Appendix 5 - Nonduality

This book has a number of words that point in the direction of nonduality. From Wikipedia: "Nondualism includes a number of philosophical and spiritual traditions that emphasize the absence of fundamental duality or separation in existence. This viewpoint questions the boundaries conventionally imposed between self and other, mind and body, observer and observed, and other dichotomies that shape our perception of reality."<sup>1</sup> So this appendix attempts to provide shades of meaning for the words in this book that point in the direction of nonduality, as understood in Buddhist traditions.

**Emptiness:** For the Buddha, "empty of self or what belongs to self." For Nagarjuna (2nd century CE), "Because there are no things at all which are not dependently originated, there are no things at all which are not empty"<sup>2</sup> – equating dependent origination and emptiness. This is not nonduality – but it does point away from the usual conventionally imposed separations we tend to make in sensing the world.

**SODAPI:** Streams Of Dependently Arising Processes Interacting – my acronym pointing to the dependently originated nature of all there is. Nothing stands alone, everything arises dependent on other things. And the "things" are processes, not static nouns. This also is not nonduality – but again it points away from the usual conventionally imposed separations we tend to make in sensing the world.

**Signlessness:** We use signs to conceptualize what we are sensing. For example, if you see a collection of five pieces of wood, four of which are similar and vertical, and the fifth is broad and flat and attached atop the vertical four, we conceptualize that we are seeing a wooden table. The signs are "4 similar and vertical", "1 broad and flat", "wooden". Signlessness is sense contact (followed automatically by *vedanā*), but with no further processing; not becoming conscious of the signs of the object that we would use to conceptualize what the object is. The practice given to Bāhiya in [Udana 1.10](#) is a practice that leads to experiencing signlessness: "In seeing will be merely seeing; in hearing will be merely hearing; in sensing will be merely sensing; in cognizing will be merely cognizing." There is holistic sensing rather than the usual sensing of separate signs which are used to conceptualize all the separate things being sensed. Also the verses at the end of [DN 11](#) speak of "consciousness that is signless" and go on to describe various aspects of nonduality: the 4 elements find no footing; long and short, small and great, beautiful and ugly, name-and-form are wholly brought to an end.

**Thingifying:** This is my word for the dualistic process of sensing some limited part of the universe (which is all we can ever do), and mentally chopping it up into bits and pieces – both as nouns and/or as verbs. This action is the opposite of nonduality. But it is how we mostly lead our lives. We need to do this to find food, clothing, shelter, etc. But it is not an

accurate picture of what's really happening – what's really happening is nonduality – by thingifying, we miss the unified nature of the universe.

**No-thingness** (*ākiñcaññaṃ*): In "The Way to the Far Shore", *ākiñcaññaṃ* refers to *atammayattā* – literally "not made of that state" or maybe a little clearer "non-concocting/non-fashioning any state". This would be the exact opposite of "thingifying". This is experiencing the world and not breaking it up into various things. This is the experience of nonduality.

**Atammayattā**: This word does not appear in "The Way to the Far Shore"; instead what we find is *ākiñcaññaṃ*, best translated as "no-thingness". *Atammayattā* literally means "not made of that state" or "non-concocting/non-fashioning any state". This is a mental experience of no-thingness, there is no thingifying happening. So this is also an experience of nonduality since it is basically the same as *ākiñcaññaṃ*. See the chapter on [Atammayattā](#) for more information.

**Asaṅkhatā**: This word also does not appear in "The Way to the Far Shore". It is (far too often) frequently (mis-)translated as "the unconditioned". That is Not what it means! *A* is "not" and *saṅkhata* is the past participle of *sankhāra*. *Sankhāra* is literally "making together" and is best translated as "fabricating/fashioning/concocting". So *asaṅkhatā* would be "non-concocting/non-fashioning" – which is very similar to *atammayattā* – it just doesn't have the sense of "state" associated with it. It is the opposite of "thingifying". It is one of the words the Buddha uses when he is describing *Nibbāna* in [Udana 8.3](#).

**Nibbāna**: Literally "blowing away." It refers to a fire going out, not burning (the latter of which is often given as a more literal translation). It is the goal of the Buddhist spiritual path. It is the extinguishing of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion. It is described in [Udana 8.3](#) as *ajāta*, *abhūta*, *akata*, *asaṅkhata* – "without birth, without beings, without made things, without fabrications". The verses at the end of [DN 11](#) are also often thought of as a description of *nibbāna*. The word *nibbāna* appears in more than 300 suttas.<sup>3</sup> Most of these references just refer to it rather than describe it, but from the suttas mentioned above and other sources, it seems rather obvious it is a state of nonduality. *Nibbāna* is a concept, just like all the other words in this appendix. It's not a place, it does not have ontological existence, and it's certainly not a heaven for arahants; it's a realization. It's the end of dukkha, the end of greed, hatred and delusion. The reason that it's the end of greed, hatred, and delusion is that your conceptualizing of the world no longer finds anything for you to be greedy about, or to hate, and you are no longer deluded because you have penetrated the empty nature of the world – it is all without a self or what belongs to a self. Thus there is no craver, no clinger; hence no craving, no clinging. Just this is the end of dukkha.

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1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nondualism>

2. Nagarjuna, *Mula madhyamaka karika*, chapter 24



3. see <https://leighb.com/suttaidxs/nibbana.htm>

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May any merit from this project be to the benefit and liberation of all beings everywhere!

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Ever Mindful – drawn by the author

## Glossary

This Glossary is also available at <https://leighb.com/wtts/glossary.htm> which may be useful to avoid flipping back and forth to this page in the book.

*Abhidhamma* – the third division of the Pāli Canon, consisting of a deconstructionist, metaphysical view of the Buddha's doctrine

*abhijānamāno* – experientially understand [Ayya Khema's definition of an insight]

*anattā* – literally “not-self”; coreless, empty

*anicca* – inconstancy, ever-changing, impermanent

*anupubbāsikkhā* – gradual (or graduated) training

*appamatta* – diligent (in); vigilant (about); careful (about); attentive (to); heedful

*arahant* – A worthy one, meaning fully awakened

*atammayata* – non-concocting; non-fashioning; literally: not made of this

*avijjā* – not knowing

*ākiñcaññaṃ* – no-thingness

*ākiñcaññāyatana* – the Base of Nothingness, aka the 7th Jhāna

*ākiñcaññasambhavaṃ* – source of no-thingness

*āsava* – intoxicant; also translated as outflow, influx, effluent, canker, taint

*āsā* – expectation, hope, wish, longing, desire

*bhava* – becoming; existence

*bhavataṇhā* – craving for becoming

*citta* – heart/mind

*dāna* – giving, gift

*dhātu* – element, aspect

*dhamma* – The Dhamma, doctrine, phenomena, mind objects

*Dhamma* – the teaching of the Buddha and also "the way things truly are"

*dukkha* – bummer,<sup>1</sup> unsatisfactoriness, stress, suffering

*jara* – decay, decrepitude, old age

*jātim jaram* – birth and old age

*jhāna* – literally: meditation; one of four (later eight) states of concentration

*jhāyati* – to meditate

*kathaṅkathāhi* – confusion; doubt; questioning; lit. asking how?

*kathāhi* – talk; speech; conversation; discussion; argument; debate; lit. talk

*kāya* – group, heap, collection, body

*khandha* – one of the five aggregates: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhārā* & *viññāṇa*

*loka* – world

*mettā* – loving-kindness, unconditional love

*mogha* – useless; pointless; futile; ineffective; unprofitable; vain; stupid; foolish;" lit. empty

*muni* – wise person

- nandi* – delight; pleasure; enjoyment; relish  
*nāma* – name  
*nāma-rūpa* – name-and-form, sometimes translated as “mind-and-body” or “mentality-and-materiality,” especially in the context of dependent origination  
*ñāṇa* – knowledge  
*nibbāna* – literally “not burning”, i.e., not burning with the fires of greed hate or delusion; the goal of the holy life, the realization that brings an end to *dukkha*  
*nibbuto* – verb form of the noun *nibbāna*  
*nidānā* – source; foundation  
*nivāraṇa* – prevention  
*nīvaraṇa* – hindrance  
*pamatta* – heedless, negligent  
*paññā* – wisdom  
*papañca* – mental proliferation  
*pāra* – the other side, the far shore  
*pārāyana* – going to the far shore  
*paroparāni* – above and beyond; high and low; superior and inferior  
*phassa* – contact, sense-contact  
*rāja* – king  
*rūpa* – materiality, body  
*sabbe* – all  
*saṃsāra* – worldly existence, the infinitely repeating cycles of birth, *dukkha*, and death  
*samādhi* – indistractability, concentration  
*samphapalapa* – gossip or idle chatter; useless speech  
*saṅkhāra* – concoction, fabrication, fashioned, literally: making together  
*saṅkhāya* – reflecting; considering; appraising  
*saññā* – conceptualization, perception, naming, identifying  
*sati* – mindfulness, remembering to be here now  
*sīla* – morality, ethical behavior  
*sutta* – discourse, teaching  
*Suttas* – the second division of the Pāli Canon, consisting of discourses given by the Buddha or his closest disciples  
*taṇhā* – craving (literally “thirst”)  
*tathāgata* – one arrived at suchness, a fully awakened one  
*thru* – through  
*upadhi* – assets; foundation; basis; ground; substratum; support; things laid by which one relies on as supports  
*upādāna* – clinging  
*upekkhā* – equanimity; literally: gaze upon  
*vagga* – a section or chapter of a canonical book  
*vedanā* – the initial categorization of a sense input as pleasant, unpleasant or neither unpleasant or pleasant; valence  
*vibhavataṇhā* – craving for not becoming  
*vicāra* – examining  
*virāga* – dispassion; literally: “not-colored”

*Visuddhimagga* – a 5th century CE commentary on the Buddha's teachings

*vitakka* – thinking

*viññāṇa* – consciousness; occasionally it means "mind;" literally "divided knowing"

*yāna* – going, proceeding

1. See the essay "*Dukkha* is A Bummer" at <https://leighb.com/bummer.htm> for a detailed exploration of why "bummer" is a good translation of *dukkha*.

## About the Author



Leigh Brasington was born and raised in Mississippi. In 1971, he graduated from [Rhodes College](#) in Memphis with a B.A. in mathematics, with honors, Phi Beta Kappa. He then began a more than 35 year career of “[playing with computers for money](#).” After he moved to San Francisco in 1974, he began taking extended time to [travel](#): 3 years around the world in '79-'81, a year traveling in Australia and Asia in '88, 6 months around the world in '98, plus numerous shorter trips overseas as well.

He began meditating in 1985 and eventually became the senior North American student of [Ven. Ayya Khema](#). She authorized him to teach and he began leading residential retreats in 1997. He has taught jhānas, dependent origination, and insight practices in over [one hundred and sixty residential retreats](#).

Near the end of 2008, he retired from software engineering and over the next three years, he spent twenty months in retreat at the Insight Meditation Society's [Forest Refuge](#). This was a wonderful time of deepening his understanding of the Dhamma.

He is the author of the books

**[Right Concentration](#): A Practical Guide to the jhānas,**  
**[Dependent Origination and Emptiness](#): Streams Of Dependently Arising Processes Interacting, and**  
**[The Gradual Training](#): The Buddha's Step-by-Step Guide for Awakening.**