

Alagaddupama Sutta

**“The Right Way
To
Study the Dhamma”**



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PREFACE

This sutta high-lighted three important criteria:

1. *To the Monk, the sensual pleasure is an obstruction to the path of enlightenment. However, Householder could still attain Sotapanna, Sekadagam & Anagami Magga/Phalan while living in sensual world.*
2. *Dhamma should be learnt, and studied for its true meaning; it is like catching a water snake, you must have the know-how to safe guard your life.*
3. *The study of Dhamma is like a raft that could carry you to cross the ocean of samsara and we should let go after you have crossed to the other shore. We should then let go and unattached to you.*

The use of “I and Mine”: “*I and mine.*” is often mentions in many suttas in the Sutta Pitaka and the term is used to denote the subject related to conceit and selfishness and sometimes in relation to self (Atta) (atman). To better understand this term we need to look at the following subject:

1. The Five Aggregates (*The five Khandas*).
2. The Doctrine of *Self*.
3. The Ti-lakkhana (*Anicca, Dukha, Anatta*)

The Five Aggregates: In the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*. Buddha describes the total makeup of all sentient being to be five aggregates (*Panca khandas*). Each and every one of us is a make-up of five aggregates: form (the body), feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness. The Buddha further states that each of the five components is **not self**. It is because each and every one of them is subject to change and is impermanent.

The Doctrine of Self: What is a self? A self is an eternal entity believed by a Brahmin (Hindu) to be his atman, **his soul**. In the Brahmin *Doctrine of Self* it is the atman that sees, has volitional thoughts, feelings, perception, and consciousness. The atman is also the bearer of karma (Pali – Kamma) the result of good or bad actions. Therefore you can understand what the Buddha was referring to in the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* when he declared each of the components of our makeup were not self.

Majjhima Nikaya 2, Sabbasava Sutta: ---“ It is this self of mine that speaks, feels, and carries the result of good and bad actions; but this self of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity.” **This, the Buddha declares, “it is unwise to accept this doctrine.”**

The Buddha also states: “*The belief that the self after death is permanent, everlasting, eternal, is a foolish teaching.*”

Digha Nikaya 1, Brahmajala Sutta --- The Buddha declares the Brahmin view of an eternal self is a wrong view.

The Ti-lakkhana: The Three Characteristics of Existence. In the *Anguttara Nikaya Dhamma-niyama*

Sutta the Enlightened One declares these three things are true whether or not a Tathagata (Buddha) appears or not. This applies to all things not just to humans. All things are impermanent, subject to change (*anicca*). All things are imperfect (*dukkha* --- includes suffering). All things lack an eternal entity – self (*anatta*).

Learning the Dhamma the Right Way: There are two groups of people who study the Dhamma for different purpose and intent. One group of Buddhist Dhamma teachers who study the Dhamma with their sole intention to use it for debate and defend themselves; and the other group is to study the Dhamma and to ascertain the true meaning of the Dhamma.

In the case of the first group, *Buddha compared them to those in search of the water snake without the know-how to catch the snake thereby putting their lives on the line in catching the water snake, they grasp the Dhamma in the harmful way.:*

- To study the Dhamma either for attacking others
- To study the Dhamma for defending themselves in debate.
- They don't reach the goal for which people study the Dhamma.

In the case of the second group, *Buddha compared them to those in search of the water snake with the know-how to catch the water snake. They are the Buddhist Dhamma teachers who study the Dhamma and having studied the Dhamma, they ascertain the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment.*

- To study the Dhamma and to ascertain the meaning of the Dhamma.
- To study the Dhamma not for attacking or defending themselves in the debate.
- They reach the goal for which people study the Dhamma.

In the snake simile, Buddha used the Snake-simile to illustrate precisely what people, who don't fully comprehend the meaning of religions, have been doing throughout the history of religion. It illustrates the danger of the wrong grasp of a religion. If a man who does not know how to catch a poisonous snake were to hold the snake either by his body or by his tail he may get bitten by the snake and consequently suffer severe injury or death.

In the raft simile, the Buddha pointed out that if a man who, after crossing over the vast expanse of water by a raft, were to determine to carry the raft over his shoulders, thinking by doing so he would show his gratitude to the raft for helping him to save his life, he would be foolish.

The statement in the Diamond sutra – “ *You monks! Know that my spoken Dharma is like the bamboo raft. The Dharma that is honored must be relinquished. How much more, so is it with what is not the Dharma?*” *This statement should be interpreted as one to relinquish the Dhamma after you have crossed the water of samsara, not before. (See appendix-B)*

The wrong grasp of religion can lead man to justify his greed, hatred and foolishness. His distorted views, distorted perception and distorted consciousness force him to grasp a religion wrongly and undermine its very foundation, causing more pain and suffering — as does the wrong grasp of the snake.

Clinging to beliefs without practice can also easily make people of religion fanatics who seek refuge in violence to resolve problems, for they are totally ignorant of what their religion teaches them.

We are supposed to use the Buddha Dhamma without clinging to it, but only to cross this cycle of birth and

death—Samsara. He advised us to use his teaching like a raft which is used only to cross a body of water not to cling to it. It is the understanding how we should use it to guide our daily life in the right direction.

The Buddha then said: Monk, we should look at all the five aggregates, internal or external to be: - 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

"Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows

- *disenchanted with form,*
- *disenchanted with feeling,*
- *disenchanted with perception,*
- *disenchanted with fabrications,*
- *disenchanted with consciousness.*

Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, 'Fully released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'

Compiled for the Serene Joy and Emotion of the Pious.

*Maung Paw, California
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Majjhima Nikaya 22

Alagaddupama Sutta



It is the tradition of female devotees in presenting before the Buddha (shrine) and the member of Sanghas to wear the scarf (shawl) to wrap around the neck to cover the breast area, to tone down the exposure. In Theravada countries, this practice is strictly observed by lady folks. Sensual pleasure by eye, nose, smell, touch and hearing should be well guarded. *(Then why shouldn't the sight, sound, smell, taste, and feel of a woman be proper?) It is improper for one in quest of liberation in this very life.*



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Alagaddupama Sutta

The Water-Snake Simile

Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.
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Translator's Introduction

This is a discourse about *clinging to views (ditthi)*. Its central message is conveyed in two similes, among the most famous in the Canon: the simile of “*the water-snake*” and “*the simile of the raft*”. These two similes focus on the skill needed to grasp right view properly as a means of leading to the cessation of suffering, rather than an object of clinging, and then letting it go when it has done its job.

The first section of the discourse, leading up to the simile of the water-snake, focuses on the danger of misapprehending the Dhamma in general, and particularly the *teachings on sensuality*. The discourse doesn't explain how the offending monk, *Arittha*, formulated his misapprehension of the Dhamma, but the Commentary suggests a plausible scenario:

"Here the monk... having gone into seclusion, reasons as follows:

'There are people living the household life, enjoying the five pleasures of the senses, who are stream-winners (Sotapanna), once-returners (Sekadagami), and non-returner (Anagami)

As for monks, they see pleasurable forms cognizable via the eye; hear... smell... taste... feel (pleasurable) tactile sensations cognizable via the body. They use soft carpets and clothing. All this is proper. Then why shouldn't the sight, sound, smell, taste, and feel of a woman be proper? They too are proper!' Thus... comparing a mustard seed with Mount Sineru, he gives rise to the harmful viewpoint, 'Why did the Blessed One -- binding the ocean, as it were, with great effort -- formulate the first *parajika* training rule (against sexual intercourse)? There is nothing wrong with that act.'"

Regardless of how Arittha actually arrived at his position, the Commentary's suggestion makes an important point: that just because an idea can be logically inferred from the Dhamma does not mean that the idea is valid or useful. The Buddha himself makes the same point in [AN II,25](#):

"Monks, these two slanders the Tathagata. Which two? He who explains a discourse whose meaning needs to be inferred as one whose meaning has already been fully drawn out. And he who explains a discourse whose meaning has already been fully drawn out as one whose meaning needs to be inferred..."

Having established this point, the discourse illustrates it with the simile of the water-snake, which in turn is an introduction to the simile of the raft.

It is important to underline the connection between these two similes, for it is often missed. Many a casual reader has concluded from the simile of the raft simply that the Dhamma is to be let-go. In fact, one major Mahayana text -- the Diamond Sutra -- interprets the raft simile as meaning that one has to let go of the raft in order to cross the river.

However, the simile of the water-snake makes the point that the Dhamma has to be grasped; the trick lies in grasping it properly. When this point is then applied to the raft simile, the implication is clear: *One has to hold onto the raft properly in order to cross the river. Only when one has reached the safety of the further shore can one let go.*

Taken together, these two similes set the stage for the remainder of the discourse, which focuses on the teaching of not-self. This is one of the most easily misapprehended

teachings in the Canon largely because it is possible to draw the wrong inferences from it.

Two mistaken inferences are particularly relevant here. The first concerns the range of the not-self teaching. Some have argued that, because the Buddha usually limits his teachings on not-self to the five aggregates -- form, feeling, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness -- he leaves open the possibility that something else may be regarded as self. Or, as the argument is often phrased, he denies the limited, temporal self as a means of pointing to one's identity with the larger, unlimited, cosmic self. However, in this discourse the Buddha explicitly phrases the not-self teaching in such a way as to refute any notion of cosmic self. Instead of centering his discussion of not-self on the five aggregates, he focuses on the first four aggregates plus two other possible objects of self-identification, both more explicitly cosmic in their range:

- *all that can be seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, pondered by the intellect; and*
- *the cosmos as a whole, eternal and unchanging.*

In fact, the Buddha holds this last view up to particular ridicule, as the teaching of a fool, for two reasons that are developed at different points in this discourse: (1) If the cosmos were "me," then it must also be "mine," which is obviously not the case. (2) There is nothing in the experience of the cosmos that fits the bill of being eternal, unchanging, or that deserves to be clung to as "me" or "mine."

The second mistaken inference is that, given the thoroughness with which the Buddha teaches not-self, one should draw the inference that there is no self. This inference is treated less explicitly in this discourse, although it is touched upon briefly in terms of *what* the Buddha teaches here and *how* he teaches.

In terms of what: He explicitly states he cannot envision a doctrine of self that, if clung to, would not lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. He does not list all the possible doctrines of self included under this statement, but [MN 2](#) provides at least a partial list:

I have a self... I have no self... It is precisely by means of self that I perceive self... It is precisely by means of self that I perceive not-self... It is precisely by means of not-self that I perceive self... or... This very self of mine -- the knower that is sensitive here and there to the ripening of good and bad actions -- is the self of mine that is constant, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and will endure as long as eternity. This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. Bound by a fetter of views, the uninstructed run-of-the-mill

person is not freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. He is not freed, I tell you, from suffering and stress.

Thus the view "I have no self" is just as much a doctrine of self as the view "I have a self." Because the act of clinging involves what the Buddha calls "I-making" -- the creation of a sense of self -- if one were to cling to the view that there is no self, one would be creating a very subtle sense of self around that view (see [AN IV.24](#)). But, as he says, the Dhamma is taught for "the elimination of all view-positions, determinations, biases, inclinations, and obsessions; for the stilling of all fabrications; for the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Unbinding."

Thus it is important to focus on *how* the Dhamma is taught: Even in his most thoroughgoing teachings about not-self, the Buddha never recommends replacing the assumption that there is a self with the assumption that there is no self. Instead, he only goes so far as to point out the drawbacks of various ways of conceiving the self and then to recommend dropping them. For example, in his standard series of questions building on the logic of the inconstancy and stress of the aggregates, he does not say that because the aggregates are inconstant and stressful there is no self. He simply asks, When they are inconstant and stressful, is it proper to assume that they are "me, my self, what I am"? Now, because the sense of self is a product of "I-making," this question seeks to do nothing more than to induce disenchantment and dispassion for that process of I-making, so as to put a stop to it. ***Once that is accomplished, the teaching has fulfilled its purpose in putting an end to suffering and stress.*** That's the safety of the further shore. As the Buddha says in this discourse, "Both formerly and now, monks, I declare only stress and the cessation of stress." As he also says here, when views of self are finally dropped, one is free from agitation; and as [MN 140](#) points out, when one is truly unagitated one is unbound. The raft has reached the shore, and one can leave it there -- free to go where one likes, in a way that cannot be traced.

The Water-Snake Simile

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying in *Savatthi*, at Jeta's Grove, *Anathapindika's park*. Now on that occasion this harmful viewpoint (*ditthigata*) had arisen in the monk *Arittha* Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers:

1.The Harmful Viewpoint (Sexual Ethics)

"As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, those acts the Blessed One says

are obstructive, when indulged in, are not genuine obstructions."

A large number of monks heard, "They say that this harmful viewpoint has arisen in the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers:

'As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, those acts the Blessed One says are obstructive, when indulged in, are not genuine obstructions.'"

So they went to the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers and on arrival said to him, "Is it true, friend Arittha, that this harmful viewpoint has arisen in you -- 'As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, those acts the Blessed One says are obstructive, when indulged in, are not genuine obstructions'?"

"Yes, indeed, friends. I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, and those acts the Blessed One says are obstructive, when indulged in are not genuine obstructions."

Then those monks, desiring to pry the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers away from that harmful viewpoint, quizzed him back and forth and rebuked him, saying,

"Don't say that, friend Arittha. Don't misrepresent the Blessed One, for it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would not say anything like that. In many ways, friend, the Blessed One has described:

2. The Obstruction acts

Obstructive acts, and when indulged in, they are *genuine obstructions*.

- The Blessed One has said that sensual pleasures are of little satisfaction, much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.
- The Blessed One has compared sensual pleasures to a chain of bones: of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.
- The Blessed One has compared sensual pleasures to a lump of flesh... a grass torch... a pit of glowing embers... a dream... borrowed goods... the fruits of a tree... a butcher's ax and chopping block... swords and spears... a snake's head: of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks." [1]

And yet even though he was quizzed back and forth and rebuked by those monks, the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers, through stubbornness and attachment to that very same harmful viewpoint, continued to insist, "Yes, indeed, friends. I understand

the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, and those acts the Blessed One says are *obstructive, when indulged in are not genuine obstructions.*"

So when the monks were unable to pry the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers away from that harmful viewpoint, they went to the Blessed One and on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they [told him what had happened.]

So the Blessed One told a certain monk, "Come, monk. In my name, call the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers, saying, 'The Teacher calls you, friend Arittha.'"

"As you say, lord," the monk answered and, having gone to the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers, on arrival he said, "The Teacher calls you, friend Arittha."

"As you say, my friend," the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers replied. Then he went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Is it true, Arittha, that this harmful has arisen in you -- 'As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One,

"those acts the Blessed One says are obstructive, when indulged in, are not genuine obstructions'?"

"Yes, indeed, lord. I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, and those acts the Blessed One says are obstructive, when indulged in are not genuine obstructions."

"Worthless man, from whom have you understood that Dhamma taught by me in such a way?

- Worthless man, haven't I in many ways described obstructive acts? And when indulged in they are genuine obstructions.
- I have said that sensual pleasures are of little satisfaction, much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks. I have compared sensual pleasures to a chain of bones: of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.
- I have compared sensual pleasures to a lump of flesh... a grass torch... a pit of glowing embers... a dream... borrowed goods... the fruits of a tree... a butcher's ax and chopping block... swords and spears... a snake' head: of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.

But you, worthless man, through your own wrong grasp [of the Dhamma], have both

misrepresented us as well as injuring yourself and accumulating much demerit for yourself, for that will lead to your long-term harm and suffering." [2]

Then the Blessed One said to the monks, "What do you think, monks? Is this monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers even warm [3] in this Doctrine and Discipline?"

"How could he be, lord? No, lord."

When this was said, the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers sat silent, abashed, his shoulders drooping, and his head down, brooding, at a loss for words.

Then the Blessed One, seeing that the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers was sitting silent, abashed, his shoulders drooping, his head down, brooding, at a loss for words, said to him, "Worthless man, you will be recognized for your own harmful viewpoint. I will cross-examine the monks on this matter."

Then the Blessed One addressed the monks,

"Monks, do you, too, understand the Dhamma as taught by me in the same way that the monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers does when, through his own wrong grasp, both misrepresents us as well as injuring himself and accumulating much demerit for himself?"

"No, lord, for in many ways the Blessed One has described obstructive acts to us as that, when indulged in they are genuine obstructions.

- The Blessed One has said that sensual pleasures are of little satisfaction, much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.
- The Blessed One has compared sensual pleasures to a chain of bones: of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.
- The Blessed One has compared sensual pleasures to a lump of flesh... a grass torch... a pit of glowing embers... a dream... borrowed goods... the fruits of a tree... a butcher's ax and chopping block... swords and spears... a snake's head: of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks."

"It's good, monks, that you understand the Dhamma taught by me in this way, for in many ways I have described obstructive acts to you, and when indulged in they are genuine obstructions.

- I have said that sensual pleasures are of little satisfaction, much stress, much

despair, and greater drawbacks.

- I have compared sensual pleasures to a chain of bones: of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.
- I have compared sensual pleasures to a lump of flesh... a grass torch... a pit of glowing embers... a dream... borrowed goods... the fruits of a tree... a butcher's ax and chopping block... swords and spears... a snake' head: of much stress, much despair, and greater drawbacks.

But this monk Arittha Formerly-of-the-Vulture-Killers, through his own wrong grasp [of the Dhamma], has both misrepresented us as well as injuring himself and accumulating much demerit for himself, and that will lead to this worthless man's long-term harm and suffering. *For a person to indulge in sensual pleasures without sensual passion, without sensual perception, without sensual thinking: That isn't possible.* [4]

3. The Water-Snake Simile

"Monks, there is the case where some worthless men study the Dhamma: dialogues, narratives of mixed prose and verse, explanations, verses, spontaneous exclamations, quotations, birth stories, amazing events, question and answer sessions [the earliest classifications of the Buddha's teachings]. Having studied the Dhamma, they don't ascertain the meaning (or: the purpose) of those Dhammas [5] with their discernment. Not having ascertained the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment, they don't come to an agreement through pondering. They study the Dhamma both for attacking others and for defending themselves in debate. They don't reach the goal for which [people] study the Dhamma. *Their wrong grasp of those Dhammas will lead to their long-term harm and suffering.* Why is that? Because of the wrong-graspedness of the Dhammas.

3.1 A Man looking for a Water Snake

"Suppose there were a man needing a water-snake, seeking a water-snake, wandering in search of a water-snake. He would see a large water-snake and grasp it by the coils or by the tail. The water-snake, turning around, would bite him on the hand, on the arm, or on one of his limbs, and from that cause he would suffer death or death-like suffering.

Why is that? It is because of the wrong-grasped ness of the water-snake.

In the same way, there is the case where some worthless men study the Dhamma... Having studied the Dhamma, they don't ascertain the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment. Not having ascertained the meaning of those Dhammas with their

discernment, they don't come to an agreement through pondering.

- They study the Dhamma both for attacking others and for defending themselves in debate.
- They don't reach the goal for which [people] study the Dhamma.

Their wrong grasp of those Dhammas will lead to their long-term harm and suffering. Why is that? It is because of the wrong-grasped ness of the Dhammas.

3.2. To Study the Dhamma with discernment

"But then there is the case where some clansmen study the Dhamma... Having studied the Dhamma, they ascertain the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment. Having ascertained the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment, they come to an agreement through pondering.

- They don't study the Dhamma either for attacking others or
- for defending themselves in debate.
- They reach the goal for which people study the Dhamma.

Their right grasp of those Dhammas will lead to their long-term welfare and happiness. Why is that? It is because of the right-graspedness of the Dhammas.

"Suppose there were a man needing a water-snake, seeking a water-snake, wandering in search of a water-snake.

- *He would see a large water-snake and pin it down firmly with a cleft stick.*
- *Having pinned it down firmly with a forked stick, he would grasp it firmly by the neck.*
- *Then no matter how much the water-snake might wrap its coils around his hand, his arm, or any of his limbs, he would not from that cause suffer death or death-like suffering.*

Why is that? It is because of the right-graspedness of the water-snake.

In the same way, there is the case where some clansmen study the Dhamma... Having studied the Dhamma, they ascertain the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment. Having ascertained the meaning of those Dhammas with their discernment, they come to an agreement through pondering.

- They don't study the Dhamma for attacking others
- They don't study the Dhamma for defending themselves in debate.
- They reach the goal for which people study the Dhamma.

Their right grasp of those Dhammas will lead to their long-term welfare and happiness. Why is that? It is because of the right-graspedness of the Dhammas. [6]

"Therefore, monks, when you understand the meaning of my statements that is how you should remember them. But when you don't understand the meaning of my statements, then right there you should ask me or the experienced monks.

4.The Raft Simile

"Monks, I will teach you the Dhamma compared to a raft.

- for the purpose of crossing over, and
- not for the purpose of holding onto.

Listen and pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, lord," the monks responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said: "Suppose a man were traveling along a path. He would see a great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious and risky, the further shore secure and free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. The thought would occur to him, 'Here is this great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious and risky, the further shore secure and free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other.

What if I were to gather grass, twigs, branches, and leaves and, having bound them together to make a raft, were to cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with my hands and feet?' Then the man, having gathered grass, twigs, branches, and leaves, having bound them together to make a raft, would cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with his hands and feet. [7] Having crossed over to the further shore, he might think,

4.1.'How useful this raft has been to me!

- *In dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands and feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore.*

- *Why don't I, having hoisted it on my head or carrying on my back, go wherever I like?'*

What do you think, monks: Would the man, in doing that, be doing what should be done with the raft?"

"No, lord."

4.2. What should be done with the Raft?

"And what should the man do in order to be doing what should be done with the raft? There is the case where the man, having crossed over, would think, 'How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands and feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore.

- Why don't I, having dragged it on dry land or
- Sinking it in the water, go wherever I like?'

In doing this, he would be doing what should be done with the raft. In the same way, monks, I have taught the Dhamma compared to a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Understanding the Dhamma as taught compared to a raft, you should let go even of Dhammas, to say nothing of non-Dhammas."

5. Six View-Positions

"Monks, there are these six view-positions (*ditthitthana*). Which six?

5.1. The wrong Viewers (Eternity)

There is the case where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person -- who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma, he assumes about the **five aggregates**:—

- "He assumes about **form**: 'This is me, this is my self, and this is what I am.'
- "He assumes about **feeling**: 'This is me, this is my self, and this is what I am.'
- "He assumes about **perception**: 'This is me, this is my self, and this is what I am.'
- "He assumes about **fabrications (impulse)**: 'This is me, this is my self, and this is what I am.'
- "He assumes about (**consciousness**) what seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained,

sought after, and pondered by the intellect: 'This is me, this is my self, and this is what I am.'

"He assumes about the view-position -- 'This cosmos is the **self**. [8] After death this I will be constant, permanent, and eternal, not subject to change. I will stay just like that for an eternity': 'This is me, this is my self, and this is what I am.'

5.2. The Right Viewers (No-self)

"Then there is the case where a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones -- who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed and disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for men of integrity, is well-versed and disciplined in their Dhamma assumes about the **five aggregates**:

- He assumes about **form**: 'This is not me, this is not my self, and this is not what I am.'
- "He assumes about **feeling**: 'This is not me, this is not my self, and this is not what I am.'
- "He assumes about **perception**: 'This is not me, this is not my self, and this is not what I am.'
- "He assumes about **fabrications**: 'This is not me, this is not my self, and this is not what I am.'
- "He assumes about (**consciousness**) what seen, heard, sensed, cognized, attained, sought after, and pondered by the intellect: 'This is not me, this is not my self, and this is not what I am.'

"He assumes about the view-position -- 'This cosmos is the self. After death this I will be constant, permanent, and eternal, not subject to change. I will stay just like that for an eternity': '*This is not me, this is not my self, and this is not what I am.*'

"Seeing thus, he is not agitated over what is not present." [9]

5.3. Some who think this is not mine.

When this was said, a certain monk said to the Blessed One, "Lord, might there be agitation over what is externally not present?"

"There might, monk," the Blessed One said. "There is the case where someone thinks,

- '*O, it was mine!*

- *O, what was mine is not!*
- *O, may it be mine!*
- *O, I don't obtain it!*

He grieves and is tormented, weeps, beats his breast, and grows delirious. It's thus that there is agitation over what is externally not present."

"But, lord, might there be non-agitation over what is externally not present?"

5.4. Some who doesn't think this is not mine

"There might, monk," the Blessed One said. "There is the case where someone doesn't think,

- **'O, it was mine!**
- **O, what was mine is not!**
- **O, may it be mine!**
- **O, I don't obtain it!**

He doesn't grieve, isn't tormented, doesn't weep, beat his breast, or grow delirious. It's thus that there is non-agitation over what is externally not present."

6. Agitation and Non-Agitation

"But, lord, might there be agitation over what is internally not present?"

6.1. Some who are agitated

Agitation" "There might, monk," the Blessed One said. "There is the case where someone has this view:

- 'This cosmos is the self.
- After death this I will be constant, permanent, and eternal, not subject to change.
- I will stay just like that for an eternity.'

He hears a Tathagata or a Tathagata's disciple teaching the Dhamma for the elimination of all view-positions, determinations, biases, inclinations, and obsessions; for the stilling of all fabrications; for the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Unbinding. The thought occurs to him,

- 'So it might be that I will be annihilated!
- So it might be that I will perish!
- So it might be that I will not exist!

He grieves and is tormented, weeps, beats his breast, and grows delirious. *It's thus that there is agitation over what is internally not present.*"

6.2. Some who are non-agitated

"But, lord, might there be non-agitation over what is internally not present?"

"There might, monk," the Blessed One said. "There is the case where someone doesn't have this view:

- 'This cosmos is the self.
- After death this I will be constant, permanent, and eternal, not subject to change.
- I will stay just like that for an eternity.'

He hears a Tathagata or a Tathagata's disciple teaching the Dhamma for the elimination of all view-positions, determinations, biases, inclinations, and obsessions; for the stilling of all fabrications; for the relinquishing of all acquisitions; the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; Unbinding. The thought doesn't occur to him,

- 'So it might be that I will be annihilated!
- So it might be that I will perish!
- So it might be that I will not exist!

He doesn't grieve, isn't tormented, doesn't weep, beat his breast, or grow delirious. *It's thus that there is non-agitation over what is internally not present.*"

7. Abandoning Possessions and Views

"Monks, you would do well to possess that possession, the possession of which would be constant, permanent, and eternal, not subject to change that would stay just like that for an eternity. But do you see that possession, the possession of which would be constant, permanent, and eternal, not subject to change that would stay just like that for an eternity?"

"No, lord."

"Very good, monks. I, too, do not envision a possession, the possession of which would be constant, permanent, and eternal, not subject to change that would stay just like that for an eternity.

"Monks, you would do well to cling to that clinging to a doctrine of self, clinging to which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. But do you see a clinging to a doctrine of self, clinging to which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair?"

"No, lord."

"Very good, monks. I, too, do not envision a clinging to a doctrine of self, clinging to which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

"Monks, you would do well to depend on a view-dependency (*ditthi-nissaya*), depending on which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. But do you see a view-dependency, depending on which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair?"

"No, lord."

"Very good, monks. I, too, do not envision a view-dependency, depending on which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

"Monks, where there is a self, would there be [the thought,] 'belonging to my self'?"

"Yes, lord."

"Or, monks, where there is what belongs to self, would there be [the thought,] 'my self'?"

"Yes, lord."

"Monks, where a self or what belongs to self are not pinned down as a truth or reality then the view-position –

'This cosmos is the self. After death this I will be constant, permanent, and eternal, not subject to change. I will stay just like that for an eternity' -- Isn't it utterly and completely a fool's teaching?'"

"What else could it be, lord? It's utterly and completely a fool's teaching."

7.1. Is the Five Aggegates stressful?

"What do you think, monks -- Is form constant or inconstant?" "Inconstant, lord." "And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?" "Stressful, lord." "And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?"

"No, lord."

"...Is **feeling** constant or inconstant?" "Inconstant, lord."...

"...Is **perception** constant or inconstant?" "Inconstant, lord."...

"...Are **fabrications** constant or inconstant?" "Inconstant, lord."...

"What do you think, monks -- Is consciousness constant or inconstant?" "Inconstant, lord." "And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?" "Stressful, lord." "And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: '*This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am*'?"

"No, lord."

"Thus, monks, any form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as:

'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'

- "Any feeling whatsoever..."
- "Any perception whatsoever..."
- "Any fabrications whatsoever..."

"Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every consciousness is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: '*This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.*'"

"Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows

- *disenchanted with form,*
- *disenchanted with feeling,*
- *disenchanted with perception,*
- *disenchanted with fabrications,*
- *disenchanted with consciousness.*

Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, 'Fully released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the

This, monks, is called a monk whose cross-bar is thrown off [10], whose moat is filled in, whose pillar is pulled out, whose bolt is withdrawn, a noble one with banner lowered, burden placed down, unfettered.

7.2. "And how is a monk one whose cross-bar is thrown off?"

There is the case where a monk's ignorance is abandoned, its root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. This is how a monk is one whose cross-bar is thrown off.

7.3. "And how is a monk one whose moat is filled in?"

There is the case where a monk's wandering-on to birth, leading on to further-becoming, is abandoned, its root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. This is how a monk is one whose moat is filled in.

7.4. "And how is a monk one whose pillar is pulled out?"

There is the case where a monk's craving is abandoned, its root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. This is how a monk is one whose pillar is pulled out.

"And how is a monk one whose bolt is withdrawn? There is the case where a monk's five lower fetters are abandoned, their root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. This is how a monk is one whose bolt is withdrawn.

7.5. "And how is a monk a noble one with banner lowered, burden placed down, unfettered?"

There is the case where a monk's conceit 'I am' is abandoned, its root destroyed, like an uprooted palm tree, deprived of the conditions of existence, not destined for future arising. This is how a monk is a noble one with banner lowered, burden placed down, unfettered.

"And when the devas, together with Indra, the Brahmas, and Pajapati, search for the monk whose mind is thus released, they cannot find that 'The consciousness of the one truly gone (tathagata) [11] is dependent on this.' Why is that? The one truly gone is untraceable even in the here and now. [12]

"Speaking in this way, teaching in this way, I have been erroneously, vainly, falsely, unfactually misrepresented by some brahmins and contemplatives [who say], 'Gotama the contemplative is one who misleads. He declares the annihilation, destruction, extermination of the existing being.' But as I am not that, as I do not say that, so I have erroneously, vainly, falsely, unfactually misrepresented by those venerable brahmins and contemplatives [who say], 'Gotama the contemplative is one who misleads. He declares the annihilation, destruction, extermination of the existing being.' [13]

8. What isn't yours?

"Both formerly and now, monks, I declare only stress and the cessation of stress. [14] And if others insult, abuse, taunt, bother, and harass the Tathagata for that, he feels no hatred, no resentment, and no dissatisfaction of heart because of that. And if others honor, respect, revere, and venerate the Tathagata for that, he feels no joy, no happiness, and no elation of heart because of that. And if others honor, respect, revere, and venerate the Tathagata for that, he thinks, 'They do me such service at this that has already been comprehended.' [15]

"Therefore, monks, if others insult, abuse, taunt, bother, and harass you as well, you should feel no hatred, no resentment, and no dissatisfaction of heart because of that. And if others honor, respect, revere, and venerate you as well, you should feel no joy, no gladness, and no elation of heart because of that. And if others honor, respect, revere, and venerate you, you should think, 'They do us [16] such service at this that has already been comprehended.'

"Therefore, monks, whatever isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare and happiness. And what isn't yours?

Form (body) isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term

welfare and happiness.

Feeling isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare and happiness.

Perception isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare and happiness.

Thought fabrications aren't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare and happiness.

Consciousness isn't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare and happiness.

"What do you think, monks: If a person were to gather or burn or do as he likes with the grass, twigs, branches and leaves here in Jeta's Grove, would the thought occur to you, 'It's us that this person is gathering, burning, or doing with as he likes'?"

"No, lord. Why is that? Because those things are not our self, nor do they belong to our self."

"Even so, monks, whatever aren't yours: Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare and happiness.

And what isn't yours?

- Form isn't yours...
- Feeling isn't yours...
- Perception isn't yours
- Thought fabrications aren't yours
- Consciousness isn't yours:

Let go of it. Your letting go of it will be for your long-term welfare and happiness.

9. The Well-Proclaimed Dhamma

"The Dhamma thus well-proclaimed by me is clear, open, evident, stripped of rags. In the Dhamma thus well-proclaimed by me -- clear, open, evident, stripped of rags -- there is for those monks who are arahants -- whose mental effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed

the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis -- no (future) cycle for manifestation. This is how the Dhamma well-proclaimed by me is clear, open, evident, stripped of rags. [17]

9.1 The attainment of Non-returner.

"In the Dhamma thus well-proclaimed by me -- clear, open, evident, stripped of rags -- those monks who have abandoned the five lower fetters are all due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world. This is how the Dhamma well-proclaimed by me is clear, open, evident, stripped of rags.

9.2 The Attainment of Once-returner (Anagami)

"In the Dhamma thus well-proclaimed by me -- clear, open, evident, stripped of rags -- those monks who have abandoned the three fetters, with the attenuation of passion, aversion, and delusion, are all *once-returners* who, on returning only one more time to this world, will make an ending to stress. This is how the Dhamma well-proclaimed by me is clear, open, evident, stripped of rags.

9.3 The Attainment of Stream-winner

"In the Dhamma thus well-proclaimed by me -- clear, open, evident, stripped of rags -- those monks who have abandoned the three fetters, are all **stream-winners**, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening. This is how the Dhamma well-proclaimed by me is clear, open, evident, stripped of rags.

9.4 The Attainment of Cula-Sotappana – Dhama –follower

"In the Dhamma thus well-proclaimed by me -- clear, open, evident, stripped of rags -- those monks who are Dhamma-followers and conviction-followers [18] are all headed for self-awakening. This is how the Dhamma well-proclaimed by me is clear, open, evident, stripped of rags.

9.5 The Attainment of the Blissful World of Deva

"In the Dhamma thus well-proclaimed by me -- clear, open, evident, stripped of rags -- those monks who have a [sufficient] measure of conviction in me, a [sufficient] measure of love for me, **are all headed for heaven**. This is how the Dhamma well-proclaimed by me is clear, open, evident, stripped of rags."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's

words.

Notes

1. The first seven of these comparisons are treated in detail in [MN 54](#). The simile of the butcher's ax and chopping block is mentioned in MN 23, the simile of swords and spears in [SN V.1](#), and the simile of the snake's head in [Sn IV.1](#).
2. Apart from a few minor details, this story up to this point is identical with the origin story for [Pacittiya 68](#) and the origin story for the rules concerning the act of banishment given in Cullavagga (Cv) I.32.1-3. **Arittha** was the first monk to be banished from the Sangha. Cv I.34 reports that, instead of making an effort to mend his ways so that the act of banishment might be rescinded, he simply disrobed.
3. The image here is apparently that of trying to start a fire with the friction of a fire stick. Arittha hasn't even been able to create any warmth, much less the spark of insight that would create light.
4. According to the Commentary, "*indulge in sensual pleasures*" here means indulging in sexual intercourse; the Sub-commentary adds that other acts expressing sexual desire -- such as hugging and petting -- should be included under this phrase as well.
5. The Pali switches from the singular (Dhamma) to the plural (Dhammas) here. This is one of the few discourses that uses the plural form to mean "teachings" rather than "phenomena." This same use of "Dhammas" to mean "teachings" reoccurs in the raft simile, below.
6. These last two sentences are missing in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* but are present in *The Middle Length Sayings*.
7. According to SN XXXV.197: "The great expanse of water stands for the fourfold flood: the flood of sensuality, the flood of becoming, the flood of views, and the flood of ignorance. The near shore, dubious and risky, stands for self-identity. The further shore, secure and free from risk, stands for Unbinding. The raft stands for just this noble eightfold path: right view...right concentration. Making an effort with hands and feet stands for the arousing of persistence."
8. The Pali here reads, *so loko so atta*. The translation given here follows the interpretation of Nyanaponika Thera in his translation of this discourse. Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his notes to the translation of this discourse in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, calls this interpretation hypothetical, and instead suggests that this phrase indicates the Sankhya theory of the changeless "person" as opposed to unchanging "nature." However, in his later translation of [SN XXII.81](#), which contains an identical passage, he adopts Nyanaponika's interpretation as well.
9. On non-agitation, see [MN 138](#) and [MN 140](#).
10. See [Dhp 398](#).

11. The term "tathagata" is often, but not always, reserved for the Buddha. Sometimes, as in the case here, it is used to refer to the arahant.

12. See [SN XXII.85](#) and [SN XXII.86](#). Also, compare Dhp 92-93.

13. **Annihilationism** is one of the two extremes of wrong view criticized most heavily by the Buddha (the other is **eternalism**, as represented by the sixth of the six view-positions). Some interpreters, citing this passage, have tried to limit the meaning of annihilationism simply to the idea of the annihilation of an existing being. The teaching that there is no self, they then argue, does not count as annihilationism because there is no self to be annihilated. This interpretation ignores [SN XLIV.10](#), which counts the statement "there is no self" as siding with annihilationism.

As for the term, "existing being": [SN XXII.36](#) and [SN XXIII.2](#) state that a being is defined by his/her/its objects of clinging. [SN V.10](#) indicates that one of the ways of overcoming clinging is to focus on how the concept of "being" arises, without assuming the truth of the concept. And as [MN 72](#), [SN XXII.85](#), and [SN XXII.86](#) maintain, when clinging is gone, one is called not a being but a *tathagata* -- who, freed from clinging, cannot be classified as or identified with anything at all.

14. Some have suggested, citing [SN XII.15](#), that this passage means that there are only two things happening in reality: stress and the cessation of stress. However, in the context of [SN XXII.86](#), where this statement also occurs, it clearly means simply that the Buddha is selective in the topics he chooses to address. In that discourse, he is refusing to take a stand on questions regarding the ontological status of the Tathagata after death. Here he is refusing to take a stand on the related question of the status of the "existing being" (see [note 13](#)). In every case, the Buddha chooses to take a stand only on questions where the process of answering would be conducive to Awakening. On this point, see [MN 63](#) and [SN LVI.31](#).

15. According to the Commentary, "this" here refers to the five aggregates. As [SN XXII.23](#) points out, "comprehension" means the ending of passion, aversion, and delusion with regard to the object comprehended. In other words, the Buddha sees that the honor and respect he receives is aimed at the five aggregates; because he has no passion, aversion, or delusion with regard to those aggregates, he is not overjoyed by any honor paid to them.

16. The Thai edition of the Pali Canon has the word "us" here, whereas the Burmese, Sinhalese, and PTS editions have "me."

17. This last sentence is missing from this paragraph and all the following paragraphs both in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Bhikkhu Ñanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans.; Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995) and in *The Middle Length Sayings* (3 vols.; I.B. Horner, trans.; Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1954-1959).

18. Dhamma-followers and conviction-followers are apparently those who are following the path to stream-entry but have yet to reach the fruit of stream-entry.

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Appendix-A

No-self or Not-self?

by

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

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One of the first stumbling blocks that Westerners often encounter when they learn about Buddhism is the teaching on **anatta**, often translated as no-self. This teaching is a stumbling block for two reasons.

First, the idea of there being no self doesn't fit well with other Buddhist teachings, such as the doctrine of **kamma** and **rebirth**: If there's no self, what experiences the results of kamma and takes rebirth?

Second, it doesn't fit well with our own Judeo-Christian background, which assumes the existence of an **eternal soul or self** as a basic presupposition: If there's no self, what's the purpose of a spiritual life?

Many books try to answer these questions, but if you look at the Pali Canon -- the earliest extant record of the Buddha's teachings -- you won't find them addressed at all. In fact, the one place where the Buddha was asked point-blank whether or not there was a self, he refused to answer.

When later asked why, he said that to hold either that there is a self or that there is no self is to fall into extreme forms of wrong view that make the path of Buddhist practice impossible.

The Buddha said that there are two types of people who misrepresent him: those who draw inferences from statements that shouldn't have inferences drawn from them, and those who don't draw inferences from those that should.

For these reasons, the Buddha advised paying no attention to such questions as

- *"Do I exist?" –it infers the existence of eternal soul*

- *"Don't I exist?" – it infers the annihilation doctrine.*

So, however you answer them, they lead to suffering and stress.

To avoid the suffering implicit in questions of "self" and "other," he offered an alternative way of dividing up experience: the four Noble Truths

- The truth of stress,
- The cause of stress,
- The cessation of stress, and
- The path to its cessation.

Stress should be comprehended, its cause abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed. These duties form the context in which the anatta doctrine is best understood.

Buddhism should look not at the questions: "Is there a self? What is my self?"

Buddhism should be looked at

- Am I suffering stress because I'm holding onto this particular phenomenon?
- Is it really me, myself, or mine?
- If it's stressful but not really me or mine, why hold on?"

These last questions merit straightforward answers, as they then help you to comprehend stress and to chip away at the attachment and clinging -- the residual sense of self-identification -- that cause it, until ultimately all traces of self-identification are gone and all that's left is limitless freedom.

In this sense, the anatta teaching is not a doctrine of no-self, but a strategy of not-self for shedding suffering by letting go of its cause, leading to the highest, undying happiness.

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<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/modern/thanissaro/notself2.html>

Appendix – B

Excerpt from Diamond Sutra

The Diamond Perfection of Wisdom Sutra
(T235.8.748c-752c)

Translated into Chinese by Kumàrajāva

Subhâti said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, isn't it doubtful that there are sentient beings who will hear thus the words spoken in this discourse and become genuinely faithful?"

The Buddha addressed Subhâti, saying, "Do not say this. In the final five hundred year era after the Tathàgata's death⁶, those who uphold the precepts and cultivate the blessed will be able to give rise to the faithful mind from these passages because they are true. It should be known that these people would not have been with one Buddha, two Buddhas, three, four, or five Buddhas and sown the good roots. They will have sown the good roots with a measureless hundreds of thousands of Buddhas.⁷ Hearing these passages, even for a single recitation, they shall give rise to a pure faith. Subhâti, the Tathàgata fully knows and fully sees that these sentient beings will attain thus such measureless blessed virtue. And why? These sentient beings will not return to the images of a self, images of a person, images of sentient beings, or images of a soul.

They would have no images of the Dharma and also no images of the non-Dharma. And why? If these sentient beings' minds were to grasp such images, they would become attached to a self, a person, sentient beings, and a soul. If they were to grasp the images of the Dharma, they would become attached to a self, a person, sentient beings, and a soul. And why?

If they were to grasp the images of the non-Dharma, they would become attached to a self, a person, sentient beings, and a soul. This is why one should not grasp the Dharma and why one should not grasp the non-Dharma. It is because of this meaning that the Tathàgata always says,

'You monks! Know that my spoken Dharma is like the bamboo raft. The Dharma that is honored must be relinquished. How much more so is it with what is not the Dharma?'

7. "Subhâti, what do you think? The Tathàgata has attained the supremely unexcelled *bodhi*, no? The Tathàgata has a teaching of the Dharma, no?"

Subhâti replied, "As I have understood the meaning of the Buddha's discourse, there is no certain Dharma called 'the supremely unexcelled *bodhi*'. Also, there is no certain Dharma that the Tathàgata can expound. And why? The Dharmas expounded by the Tathàgata are intangible and inexpressible. They are neither Dharmas nor non-Dharmas. And why is that? All of the Sages make discriminations from the unconditioned Dharma."