

# Early Buddhist Meditation

## A Philosophical Investigation

Lecture 1

Sāriputta or Kaccāna? Two Philosophical Orientations

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# Difficult questions

## **Is Buddhist awakening possible?**

Can philosophy or philology play any role in understanding?

## **The Eightfold Way**

Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) precedes Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) and Right Absorption (*sammā-samādhi*)

Serious meditative practice requires enquiry

‘What is the meaning of Buddhist meditation?’

Tradition and rationalism hinder an open-minded enquiry

This might prevent an objective appreciation of the Buddha’s teachings on meditation

**Q. What is the meaning of Buddhist meditation?**

**A1. Tradition:** To purify the mind and attain insight, ending *dukkha*.

**A2. Secular rationalist:** To understand the mind, correct faulty activity, and bring about well-being.

**A3. Atheist:** There is no meaning, it is meaningless religious ritual, in which some might falsely invest meaning, through fantasy.

# An open enquiry into early Buddhist meditation

Traditional and secular positions insist on insight enabled by varying degrees of calm.

The authenticity of the calm-insight ideal is doubtful

It might be a non-Buddhist element which was Buddhicized.

## **The remit for an open enquiry into the truth of Buddhism**

- The focus: a philosophical investigation into early Buddhist meditation, as recorded in the Pali Suttas - the only complete Suttanta literature in an Indic dialect to have survived.
- A philosophical investigation means: to analyse ideas, sometimes with reference to other systems of knowledge. However the focus is on the logic of the Buddhist ideas seen from within the tradition, and the conceptual relations between them.
- We will hopefully be in a position to say sensible things about whether Buddhist awakening is a plausible and desirable goal.

## Embodiment & cognition

The body of the Tathāgatha remains, mendicants, but its connection with 'being' (*bhava-*) has been severed. As long as his body remains gods and men see him; when the body breaks up, after life has been exhausted, gods and men do not see him.

DN I.46: ***ucchinnabhavanettiko, bhikkhave, tathāgatassa kāyo tiṭṭhati. yāv' assa kāyo ṭhassati, tāva naṃ dakkhanti devamanussā. kāyassa bheda uddham jīvitapariyādānā na naṃ dakkhanti devamanussā.***

# The Interpretation of DN I.46

DN I.46: *ucchinnabhavanettiko, bhikkhave, tathāgatassa kāyo tiṭṭhati.*

**T. W. Rhys' Davids:** 'The outward form, brethren, of him who has won the truth, stands before you, but that which binds it to rebirth is cut in twain.'

**Buddhaghosa:**

'His connection to being has been severed, means, for him, the connection with being has been severed, by the sword of the path of an arahant.'

DNa I.128: *arahattamaggasatthena ucchinnā bhavanetti assā ti ucchinnabhavanettiko.*

DNa I.127-28: *idha pana nettisadisatāya bhavataṇhā nettī ti adhippetā.*

# Mangoes & corpses

It is just like, mendicants, when a bunch of mangoes is cut off at the stalk: whatever mangoes are connected to the stalk, they all follow the (bunch as it falls).

**DN 1.46:** *seyyathāpi bhikkhave ambapiṇḍiyā vaṇṭacchinnāya, yāni kāni ci ambāni vaṇṭapaṭibandhāni, sabbāni tāni tadanvayāni bhavanti.*

**SN 2.26:** But I do not say, sir, that making an end of suffering occurs without reaching the end of the world. And yet, sir, I declare that the world, its arising, cessation and the way thereto occurs in this very fathom-long ‘corpse’ (*kaḷevare*), endowed with perception and mind.

SN 1.62: *na kho panāhaṃ āvuso appatvā lokassa antaṃ dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ vadāmi. api ca khvāhaṃ āvuso imasmim̐ yeva byāmamatte **kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake** lokañ ca paññapemi lokasamudayañ ca lokanirodhañ ca lokanirodhagāminiñ ca paṭipadan ti.*

# The Buddha & Daṇḍapāṇi

Teaching in such a way, sir, one abides without quarrel in the world with its gods, Māras and Brahmas, and among persons, including its ascetics, brahmins, gods and men; and in such a way that conceptualisations do not lie dormant in that Brahmin who abides disassociated from sensual pleasures, who is free from doubt, his perplexity cut away, devoid of thirst for being and non-being: I teach thus, sir, I speak thus.

**MN 1.108:** *yathāvādī kho āvuso sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyā pajāya sadevamanussāya na kenaci loke viggayha tiṭṭhati, yathā ca pana kāmehi viṣaṃyuttaṃ viharantaṃ taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ akathaṃkathim chinnakukkuccaṃ bhavābhava vītataṇhaṃ saññā nānuseti. evaṃvādī kho ahaṃ āvuso evamakkhāyī ti.*

## Kaccāna's teaching

I understand the meaning of the instruction given by the Blessed One, in brief and without a detailed analysis, in detail as follows. Dependent on the eye and forms arises eye-sentience (*cakkhu-viññāṇaṃ*), the coming together of all three is contact, from contact there is sensation, what one senses (*vedeti*) one apperceives (*sañjānāti*), what one apperceives one thinks over (*vitakketi*), what one thinks over one conceptually proliferates (*papañceti*), because of which, conceptual proliferation, apperception and reckoning (*papañca-saññā-saṅkhā*) afflict a person, with regard to (all) forms, of the past, future and present, to be sensed by the eye.

**MN 1.112:** *bhagavatā saṃkhittena uddesassa uddiṭṭhassa vitthārena atthaṃ avibhattassa evaṃ vitthārena atthaṃ ājānāmi: cakkhuñ c' āvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tatonidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasaññāsaṅkhā samudācaranti atītānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuvīññeyyesu rūpesu.*

# Cognition, suffering and its cessation

And what, *bhikkhus*, is the cessation of suffering? Dependent on the eye and forms arises eye-sentience (*cakkhu-viññāṇaṃ*), the coming together of all three is contact, from contact there is sensation, from sensation there is craving. But with the complete cessation and fading away of that craving, there is the cessation of grasping, from the cessation of grasping there is the cessation of becoming, from the cessation of becoming there is the cessation of birth, from the cessation of birth, old-age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, depression and tribulation cease. Thus is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.

**SN II.72:** *katamo ca bhikkhave dukkhassa atthaṅgamo? cakkhuñ ca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phassa, phassapaccayā vedanā, vedanāpaccayā taṇhā. tassā yeva taṇhāya asesavirāgaṇirodhā upādānaṇirodho, upādānaṇirodhā bhavaṇirodho, bhavaṇirodhā jātinirodho, jātinirodhā jarāmaṇaṇaṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā nirujjhanti. evam etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti. ayaṃ kho bhikkhave dukkhassa atthaṅgamo.*

# The *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* on meditation?

The source from which conceptual proliferation, apperception and reckoning afflict a person, if this is not delighted in, approved of or clung to, just this is the end of the latent tendencies towards passion (and: repulsion, view, doubt, conceit, passion for being, ignorance etc.); it is here that these evil, unskilful states cease without remainder.

**MN I.111:** *yatonidānaṃ bhikkhu purisaṃ papañcasaññāsaṅkhā samudācaranti, ettha ce n' atthi abhinanditabbaṃ abhivaditabbaṃ ajjhositabbaṃ, es' ev' anto rāgānusayānaṃ ...pe... etth' ete pāpakā akusalā dhammā aparisesā nirujjhantī ti.*

# The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* on bare cognition

Or, mindfulness is established for him (with the idea) ‘there is a body’, just to the extent (required) for a measure or knowledge, a measure of recollection, so that he abides without dependence, not clinging to anything in the world.

**MN 1.56:** *atthi kāyo ti vā pan’ assa sati paccupaṭṭhitā hoti, yāvad eva ñāṇamattāya paṭissatimattāya, anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati.*

# Insight & liberation in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*

The (*bhikkhu*), when his mind (*citte*) is thus concentrated, purified (*parisuddhe*), cleansed (*pariyodāte*), without blemish, devoid of defilement, supple, workable, still, and in a state of imperturbability, he directs and turns the mind (*cittaṃ*) towards the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions.

DN 1.83: *so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ṭhite āneñjappatte, āsavānaṃ khayañāṇāya cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti.*

When the (*bhikkhu*) knows and sees thus, his mind is freed from the corruptions of sensual pleasure, being, and ignorance. When (it) is released, there is the knowledge ‘(it is) released’, and he understands: ‘birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived, done is what had to be done, nothing more is required for the state thus.

DN 1.84: *tassa evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato, kāmāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, bhavāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, avijāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati, vimuttasmiṃ vimuttam iti ñāṇaṃ hoti, khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāyā ti pajānāti.*

## The *Dīghanakha Sutta* (MN 74)

At that time venerable Sāriputta was stood right behind the Blessed One, fanning him. He then had this thought: ‘The Blessed One, apparently, advises the abandoning of all of these phenomena through understanding, the Blessed One, apparently, advises the relinquishing of all of these phenomena through understanding’. While he was reflecting thus, the mind of venerable Sāriputta was released from the corruptions without grasping.

**MN 1.500:** *tena kho pana samayena āyasmā sāriputto bhagavato piṭṭhito ṭhito hoti, bhagavantam bījayamāno. atha kho āyasmato sāriputtassa etad ahosi: tesam tesam kira no bhagavā dhammānaṃ abhiññā pahānam āha, tesam tesam kira no sugato dhammānaṃ abhiññā paṭinissaggam āhā ti. iti h’ idaṃ āyasmato sāriputtassa paṭisañcikkhato anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimucci.*

# The Vinaya on Sāriputta's liberation?

And then venerable Assaji uttered this Dhamma teaching to Sāriputta, the wanderer: 'Those phenomena which originate from a cause, the Tathāgata teaches their cause, and their cessation; the great ascetic teaches thus.' And then, having heard this Dhamma teaching, the spotless, untainted insight into Dhamma arose in Sāriputta, the wanderer: 'whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of cessation.'

**Vin 1.40:** *atha kho āyasmā assaji sāriputtassa paribbājakassa imaṃ dhammapariyāyaṃ abhāsi: ye dhammā hetuppabhavā, tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha, tesañ ca yo nirodho, evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo ti. atha kho sāriputtassa paribbājakassa imaṃ dhammapariyāyaṃ sutvā virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi: yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ ti.*

# Attaining the ‘immortal’

[Moggallāna:] ‘Your faculties are tranquil, sir, the colour of your skin is pure and clear. Perhaps you have attained the immortal?’

[Sāriputta:] ‘Yes, sir, **I have attained the immortal.**’

Vin 1.41: *vippsannāni kho te āvuso indriyāni parisuddho chavivaṇṇo pariyodāto. kacci nu tvaṃ āvuso amataṃ adhigato. ām’ āvuso **amataṃ adhigato** ti.*

## **The Vinaya statement of the Buddha’s awakening**

(I am) an arahant, *bhikkhus*, a Tathāgata, fully awakened: focus your hearing, *bhikkhus*, **the immortal has been attained**, I will instruct (you), I will teach the Dhamma.

Vin 1.9: *arahaṃ bhikkhave tathāgato sammāsambuddho, odahatha bhikkhave sotaṃ, **amataṃ adhigataṃ**, aham anusāsāmi, ahaṃ dhammaṃ desemi.*

# Sāriputta's calm-insight practice, Anupada Sutta (MN 111)

MN III.25

Here, *bhikkhus*, Sāriputta, separated from sensual desire and unskillful states, passed his time having attained the first *jhāna*, a state of joy and bliss born from seclusion, possessing reasoning and reflection.

**The phenomena which (occur) in the first *jhāna* - reasoning, reflection, joy, bliss, oneness of mind, contact, sensation, apperception, volition, consciousness, will, determination, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention - those phenomena were analysed successively.**

**Those phenomena were known as they arose, as they endured, and then as they faded away.** He understood thus: 'Thus, apparently, these phenomena, having not been, they come into being, having come into being, they disappear'.

Neither attracted nor averse to those phenomena, independent, unbound, detached and released (from them), he abided with an unrestricted mind, and understood: 'There is a higher release'. **Through focusing on this (idea), he became certain 'there is (a higher release)'**.

# Sāriputta's liberation in MN 111

## **MN III.28**

Having emerged, mindful, from that attainment (of 'neither perception nor non-perception'), he saw into those phenomena which had passed away, ceased, altered (as follows): 'Thus, apparently, these phenomena, having not been, they come into being, having come into being, they disappear'.

## **MN III.29**

Having transcended the 'sphere of neither perception nor non-perception', Sāriputta abided having attained the cessation of perception and sensation. And having seen with insight, his corruptions were destroyed ...

Neither attracted nor averse to those phenomena, independent, unbound, detached and released (from them), he abided with an unrestricted mind, and understood: 'There is no a higher release' (*so n' atthi uttari nissaraṇan ti pajānāti*). Through focusing on this (idea), he became certain 'there is no (higher release)'.

# Early Buddhist soteriologies

1. **Pure insight**, e.g. *Dīghanakha Sutta*: meditation does not figure directly.
2. **Meditation plus insight i)**, e.g. *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta*, where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, as in the *Anupada Sutta*, but leading to liberation directly.
3. **Meditation plus insight ii)**, e.g. *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, where insight occurs after a meditative progression culminating in the 4th *jhāna*.
4. **Meditation plus insight iii)**, e.g. *Anupada Sutta*, where insight occurs at different levels of meditation, but only to direct adept onwards towards final a high meditative concentration which is liberating.
5. **Pure Meditation**, e.g. the *Nivāpa* or *Mahācunda Suttas*, which focus on the attainment of the 'cessation of perception and sensation' or the 'deathless element', and have no interest in, or are hostile to, insight practice.

# Kaccāna and Sāriputta: the philosophical difference

## **Kaccāna**

- The experience of 'mind' or 'consciousness' is constructed/conditioned.
- Implications: conditioning must be undone, 'consciousness' must be deconstructed, through paying mindful attention to the sensory and somatic root of experience.

## **Sāriputta and the calm-insight tradition(s)**

- The experience of 'mind' or 'consciousness' must be conditioned in a certain way.
- Proper conditioning allows either for a higher form of knowledge, or a state of non-experience, which were believed (not by the same people) to be liberating.

## Consciousness in MN 43, MN 28 *and* MN 140

MN I.292: '(It) perceives, (it) perceives', sir, therefore (it) is called 'perception'. And what does it perceive? It perceives pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain.

MN I.190: But when, sir, a person's eye is not impaired, and external visible forms come into its range, and there is an appropriate act of attention, thus the appearance of that type of consciousness comes to be.

MN III.242: And then only consciousness remains, **purified and cleansed**, by which one knows something: one perceives pleasure, one perceives pain, one perceives neither pleasure nor pain.

## Dharmaguptaka Insight simile after the fourth *jhāna*

It is just like a private room that has been plastered inside and outside, and whose door has been firmly shut and locked, with no wind or dust [entering]. Inside a lamp has been lit, which nobody touches or agitates. The flame of that lamp rises quietly and without perturbation.

Dharmaguptaka Dīrghāgama parallel to the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (DN 3)