

# Layman Saints

## A study of lay persons on the path of awakening

[On the ease of gaining awakening]

Essay and translations by Piya Tan ©2004

### 1 Introduction

There is a trend amongst some scholars of early Buddhism, especially those before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to maintain a **sharp distinction between the monastic members and the lay followers**. Jeffrey Samuels, in his insightful study, remarks that

The distinction between these two communities is most often based on their religious activities and obligations. While the monastics are often identified as preservers of Buddhist doctrine and practice, the responsibilities and concerns of the laity are believed to be limited to the accumulation of merit through supporting the monastics with food, shelter and clothing.

(Samuels 1999:231)

He goes on to give over a page of examples of illustrious scholars who hold similar notions: Nalinaksha Dutt [231, 235],<sup>1</sup> Max Weber [231],<sup>2</sup> Etienne Lamotte [231],<sup>3</sup> Akira Hirakawa [231, 235],<sup>4</sup> George Bond [232],<sup>5</sup> and Gananath Obeyesekere [238];<sup>6</sup> and in his footnotes mentions Edward Conze [239 n2]<sup>7</sup> and Louis de la Vallée Poussin [241 n46].<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Samuels notes that “While the dominant view of early Buddhism still maintains a sharp distinction between the monastic order and the laity, some scholars have begun to challenge that perception” (1995:232). Gregory Schopen, for example, in his work on early donative inscriptions in India, questions this view by showing how a significant number of people who had donated to sacred sites and were involved in merit-making activity were monks and nuns, including monks and nuns who were doctrinal specialists. Schopen concludes that

None of this accords very well, if at all, with received views on the matter, with the views that maintain that there was a sharp distinction between the kinds of religious activities undertaken by monks and the kinds of religious activities undertaken by laymen, and with the view that cult and religious giving were essentially and overwhelmingly lay concerns in the Indian Buddhist context.

(Schopen 1997:30)

Further to Samuels’ list, one might add Peter Masefield’s *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism* (1986)<sup>9</sup> which opens with a long chapter on “The Spiritual Division of the Buddhist World” (1986:1-36), wherein

<sup>1</sup> Nalinaksha Dutt, “Place of laity in early Buddhism.” *Indian Historical Quarterly* 21:163, 178, 182 f.

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, tr HH Gerth & D Martindale. Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958:214.

<sup>3</sup> Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the origin of the Śāka era*, tr Sara Webb-Boin. Louvain & Paris: Peeters Press, 1988:62.

<sup>4</sup> Akira Hirakawa, *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to early Mahāyāna*, tr Paul Groner. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990:61 f, 107.

<sup>5</sup> George Bond, *The Buddhism Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious tradition, reinterpretation and response*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988:23, 25, 27.

<sup>6</sup> G Obeyesekere, “Theodicy, Sin and Salvation in a Sociology of Buddhism.” In E Leach (ed), *Dialectic in Practical Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968:28. [Bibliographic details missing in Samuels.]

<sup>7</sup> E Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India: Three phases of Buddhist philosophy*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1962:32.

<sup>8</sup> L de la Vallée Poussin, *The Way to Nirvana: Six lectures on ancient Buddhism as a discipline of salvation*. Repr Sri Satguru Publications, 1917:150 f.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Masefield devotes about 9 pages of his book to “Sāvaka devas,” showing that many devas were saints of the path (1986:12-21). See eg **Sakka, pañha S** (D 21.1.11/2:271 f) [10]. Besides devas, even non-humans like the

he has “sought to show that during the Nikāya period the criterion of spirituality was always whether one were a *sāvaka*,<sup>10</sup> never whether one were a *monk*” (1986:21; emphases added).

In this short study, I have summarized the salient points of **Jeffrey Samuels’** paper, “Views of householders and lay disciples in the *Sutta Piṭaka*: A reconsideration of the lay/monastic opposition” (1999),<sup>11</sup> and also made a note of **Bodhi’s** “The Jhānas and the Lay Disciple” (2001).<sup>12</sup> I have included my own translations of related suttas and comments where relevant. Samuels endeavours to show that

the portrayal of the laity in these early texts is not limited to *merely* providing the monks and nuns with food, shelter and clothing. Alongside references in the Pali canon that depict the laity’s primary role as supporters of the monastics are a plethora of references in which householders and lay disciples are portrayed as practitioners of the Buddha’s *dhamma*, proceeding along on the path of enlightenment. (Schopen 1997:232)

The central aim of Bodhi’s paper is to discuss “the question whether or not *jhāna* is necessary to attain the ‘paths and fruits’” (2001:37).<sup>13</sup> In answering the question, Bodhi shows the vital spiritual lives and attainments of the laity that are on par with the monastic saints.

In pursuing this question I intend to pick up an important but generally neglected clue the *suttas* lay at our doorstep. This is the fact that many of the Buddha’s followers who attained the first three stages of awakening, from stream-entry through non-returning, were lay people. (Bodhi 2001:38; cf Schopen 1999:236 f)

Schopen, however, goes a step further and lists evidence from the Suttas “that lay people can achieve the fourth fruit—*arahantship*” (Schopen 1995:237).

## 2 The laity’s lack

A close examination of the passages in the Pali Canon, especially the Sutta and the Vinaya, referring to householders and lay people reveal two apparently opposing views:

- (1) that the laity primarily functioned to serve and support the monks and nuns; and
- (2) that the laity were able to progress along the spiritual path by listening to the Dharma and practising certain forms of meditation.<sup>14</sup>

A classic example of (1) where the laity are monastic supporters, and where the monastic spiritual life (“the fruits of reclusheship,” *sāmañña, phala*) is acclaimed as the superior path is found in **the Sāmañña-phala Sutta** (D 2), where it is declared that

A householder or householder’s son, hearing the Dharma, gains faith<sup>15</sup> in the Tathāgata and reflects:

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yakshini **Punabbasu, mātā** (a *vemānika, peta*, DA 509) and her son Punabbasu both became streamwinners (S 1:210; SA 1:311).

<sup>10</sup> BDict on **Sāvaka**: “Hearer,” ie “Disciple,” refers, in a restricted sense (then mostly *ariya-sāvaka*, “noble disciple”), only to the 8 kinds of noble disciples (*ariya-puggala*, qv). In other words, a *sāvaka* is a saint or “noble person” (*ariya-puggala*): a streamwinner, a once-returner, a non-returner, or an arhat. Such saints can be either ordained or lay.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Samuels, “Views of householders and lay disciples in the *Sutta Piṭaka*: A reconsideration of the lay/monastic opposition,” *Religion* 29 1999:231-241.

<sup>12</sup> Bodhi, “The Jhānas and the Lay Disciple,” in *Buddhist Studies in honour of Professor Lily de Silva*. Ed PD Premasiri. Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya, 2001:36-64.

<sup>13</sup> For a background on *jhāna*, see “Dhyana” (SD 8.5); see also “The Layman and Dhyana” (SD 8.6, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> An interesting reading here is Peter Masefield, *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1986.

<sup>15</sup> “Faith,” *saddhā*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlaka, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati, saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M

‘The household life is stifling, a dusty path.<sup>16</sup> The life of renunciation is like the open air. It is not easy living in a house to practise the holy life completely, in all its purity, like a polished conch-shell. What if I were to shave off my hair and beard, put on the saffron robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?’

So after some time he abandons all his wealth and relatives, shaves off his hair and beard, puts on the saffron robes, and goes forth from the household life into homelessness.

(D 2.42/1:62 f)<sup>17</sup>

The last stanza of **the Muni Sutta** (Sn 221) clearly declares the disparity between the lay life and the renunciant’s life:

As a blue-necked crested peacock that goes through the air  
Attains not to the speed of a swan,  
Even so, the householder equals not the monk,  
The lonely sage meditating in the forest.

(Sn 221/1.12.15)

**The Sutta Nipāta** is an exceptional anthology of very early Buddhist texts reflecting an incipient period when the monastic community comprised mostly wandering ascetics or **eremites**, especially during the first decade of the ministry. Apparently, as the early monastics became more settled as **coenobites** with the donation of more parks and monasteries to the Order, the lay community grew and teachings were given to them more frequently and in greater depth.<sup>18</sup>

### 3 Teaching the masses

The Buddha’s purpose in arising in this world is **to teach the Dharma for the upliftment and liberation of beings** from spiritual ignorance and suffering.<sup>19</sup> Contemplating on lotuses in a pond, the Buddha

1:320,8 401,23); also called *avecca-p.pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69). “Wise faith” is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). **Gethin** speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): “Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith is its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody...the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary.” (Gethin 2001:207; my emphases).

<sup>16</sup> *Sambādho gharavāso rajāpatho*. There is a wordplay on *sambādha*, “crowded, stifling, narrow, full of hindrances.” The word *sambādha* also refers to the male organ (V 1:216, 2:134) or the female organ (V 4:259; Sn 609; J 1:61, 4:260).

<sup>17</sup> This passage is stock, found in many places: D 1:63, 100, 124, 147, 157, 171, 181, 206, 214, 232, 250; M 1:179, 267, 344, 412, 521, 2:38, 162, 226, 3:134; S 2:219, 5:350; A 2:208. A dramatic example of this attitude is found in **Raṭṭha, pāla S** (M 82.3-14/2:55-61).

<sup>18</sup> For a study of the eremite-to-coenobite (wandering-to-settled life) transition of the early monastics, see S Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962, esp pp53-57 (ch 3).

<sup>19</sup> This purpose is fully declared in **Udumbarikā Sihanāda S** (D 25):

“But, Nigrodha, I tell you this: Let an intelligent man come to me, who is honest, trustworthy, upright, and I will instruct him, I will teach him Dharma. If he practises what he is taught, then, within seven years,...let alone seven years...**even in seven days he can attain the goal.**

Nigrodha, you may think, ‘The recluse Gotama says this out of desire to win disciples.’ But you should not think so. **Let whoever is your teacher remain as your teacher.**

Nigrodha, you may think, ‘The recluse Gotama [57] says this out of desire to make us fall from our rules.’...Let your rules remain as your rules.

Nigrodha, you may think, ‘The recluse Gotama says this out of desire to make us fall from our livelihood...Let your livelihood remain as your livelihood.

Nigrodha, you may think, ‘The recluse Gotama says this with the desire to establish us in the unwholesome things along with teachings considered unwholesome.’...Let what you consider unwholesome continue to be so considered.

notices that some of the lotus buds are still immersed in the muddy waters while others have risen well above the waters. Still others are obscurely trying to reach the light, close to opening, just floating on the surface. Surveying the world with his divine eye, the Buddha sees that human beings fall into three categories: (1) those who have sunk completely into error, (2) those who have already reached the Truth or are ready for the Truth, and (3) those who still float uncertainly between error and truth.

**The first kind of lotus**—drowned in the dark and murky waters—represents those with much dust in their eyes, with dull faculties, with bad qualities, difficult to teach, not seeing blame and fear in the other-world. For such beings, there is little hope, at least for the time being, of bringing them out of the darkness of their ignorance and delusion. They are like the poor field that would be cultivated only after the better ones have been cultivated.

Then there is **the second**, in-between, group (the lotuses bobbing up and down on the water level), hesitating between the true and the false, wavering between good and evil. They would either be saved or be lost, depending on whether or not they hear the Dharma. To mix the metaphors in a helpful way, we can take this second imagery as referring to the moderate field waiting for cultivation by the wise farmer, and to the rich field, heavy with crop, merely waiting for harvest and celebration.

**The third group** (the lotuses standing high above the waters and opened in the sunlight) is the best audience since they have good roots, that is, enjoying the fruit of their past good karma. They are those with very little dust or do dust in their eyes, with keen faculties, with good qualities, easy to teach, seeing blame and fear in the otherworld. This too may refer to the rich field, especially those who at once awaken upon hearing the Teaching.

It is **for the sake of the rich fields, for the love of the medium fields and not forgetting the poor fields** that the Buddha resolves “to set the Wheel of Truth in motion”. In aspiring to declare the Dharma to all, the Buddha sees the world as a single mission field, not as an artificially stratified society, divided by race, religion and status.

The Buddha’s decision to openly teach the Dharma is **a revolutionary action** in the history of Indian religion, indeed, in the history of religion, making it the world’s first missionary religion. In his book, *Gotama Buddha*, Nakamura remarks:

In India at that time it was rare for religious teachers to instruct the people at large. Philosophers in the *Upaniṣads* are depicted as teaching only a limited group of students: their own children or perhaps people with high qualifications.<sup>20</sup> It was Gotama who broke down such customary restrictions on teaching; to do so, however, required resolution and courage, which he may have gained by means of such psychological phenomena as quelling Māra and hearing Brahmā’s encouragement.

(Nakamura, 2000:235; see also 228 f)

## 4 The parable of the fields

A good teacher knows his students. The Buddha’s remarkable teaching skill is well illustrated in the **Desanā Sutta** (S 42.7), where he gives **the parable of the fields**:

“Now what do you think, headman? Suppose a farmer here has three fields, one excellent, one moderate, and one poor, hard, salty, of bad soil. Now what do you think, headman? When that

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Nigrodha, you may think, ‘The recluse Gotama says this with the desire to separate us from the wholesome things along with teachings considered wholesome.’...Let what you consider wholesome continue to be so considered—I do not speak for any of these reasons.

There are, Nigrodha, unwholesome things that have not been abandoned, defiled, conducive to rebirth, fearful, productive of painful results in future, associated with birth, decay and death. It is for the abandonment of these things that I teach Dharma. If you practise accordingly, these defiled things will be abandoned...and by your own insight and realization, you will attain the fullness of wisdom.” (D25.22b/3:56 f). Cf V 1:20.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Yājñavalkya (Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad IV, 3, 33); Satyakāma (Chāndogya Up IV, 10); Raikva (Chāndogya Up IV, 2, 3); Prajāpati (Chāndogya Up VIII, 7 f.); Yama (Kāthā Up I, 21 f.).

farmer wants to sow his seeds, which field would he sow first: the excellent field, the moderate field, or the one that is poor...?”

“The farmer, Lord, wishing to sow his seeds, would first sow the excellent field, and having done so he would sow the moderate one. Having done so, he might or might not sow the field that is poor.... Why so? Because in any case it might do for cattle-food.”

“Well, headman, just like the excellent field are **my monks and nuns**, I teach them Dharma that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the holy life that is wholly perfect and pure. Why is that? Because, headman, these people abide with me for their island, with me for their cave and shelter, with me for stronghold, with me for their refuge.

Then, headman, just like the moderate field are **my laymen followers and laywomen followers**, I teach them Dharma that is good...I make known to them the holy life... Why is that? Because, headman, these people abide with me for their island...for their refuge.

Then, headman, just like that field that is poor, hard, salty, of bad soil, are **the wandering ascetics and brahmins** that hold other views than mine. To them also I teach Dharma that is good... I make known to them the Holy Life... Why so? Because **if it be that they understand but a single sentence of it, that would be their benefit and happiness for a long time to come.**”  
(S 42.7/4:315-317)

The parable of the fields points to effective spiritual management and investment. Those who are able and ready are taught the Dharma first since they are the best students and heirs of the Dharma [11]. As such, they are the ones who would propagate the Teaching and ensure its long life and maximum benefit for the world. **The secret of the success of the spread of the Buddha Word is not by mass evangelism, but rather that the Buddha chooses his audience wisely, giving priority to them according to their readiness (*upanissaya*) to understand what he teaches.**

## 5 The graduated discourse

Although texts like **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2) extol renunciation and recluseship, there are many other texts that record teachings appropriate for the laity. The most common of such a teaching is **the graduated discourse** (*ānupubbī,kathā*), that is, “a talk on giving, on moral virtue, on the heavens, on the danger, degradation and impurity in sensual pleasures and the benefits of renunciation.”<sup>21</sup> In **the Udāyi Sutta**, the Buddha advises Ānanda that when teaching the laity, the Dharma teacher should give such a graduated discourse (A 5.159).

There are also numerous other Pali suttas dealing with giving and moral virtue taught to lay people. Those suttas that show **the importance of giving** include the following suttas:

**Apaṇṇaka Sutta** (M 60.5-6/1:401 f, 10/1:403)

**Udaya Sutta** (S 7.12/1:173 f),

**Devahita Sutta** (S 7.13/1:174 f),

**Aputtaka Sutta** (S 3.19/1:89-91),

**Puggala Sutta** (S 3.21/1:93-96), and

**the Aṅguttara Nikāya.**<sup>22</sup>

Those suttas where the Buddha speaks on **moral virtue** include the following:

**Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta** (D 4/1:111-126),

**Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16/2:72-168),

<sup>21</sup> D 1:148, 2:41, 43, 44; M 1:379 f, 2:145; A 4:186, 209. This is the first of **the 5 conditions for a Dharma teacher**, viz: (1) he should teach Dharma by giving a graduated discourse; (2) he should give a well-reasoned discourse; (3) he should teach out of compassion; (4) he should not teach for the sake of worldly profit; (5) he should teach Dharma without hurting (*anupahacca*) himself or others (ie without exalting himself and belittling others) (A 5.159/3:184).

<sup>22</sup> Eg A 2:65, 391, 3:39, 49, 336, 4:62, 230.



**Apaṇṇaka Sutta** (M 60/1:400-412),  
**Pacchā,bhūmaka Sutta = Asibandhaka,putta Sutta** (S 42.6/4:311-314),  
**Veḷudvāreyya Sutta** (S 55.7/5:352-356),  
**Puggala Sutta** (S 3.21/1:93-96),  
**Pañca,vera,bhaya Sutta** (S 12.41/2:68-70), and  
**the Aṅguttara Nikāya.**<sup>23</sup>

Besides discussing the five precepts, the Buddha also exhorts his lay audience to cultivate the ten wholesome courses of action (*dasa kusala kamma,patha*),<sup>24</sup> for example, in **the Mahā Vacchagotta Sutta** (M 73.5/1:489 f) and **Esukāri Sutta** (M 96.8/2:179 f). The rewards arising from giving and moral virtue not only include a favourable rebirth in the heavens but are also conducive to the attaining of stream-winning, once-return and non-return. Such ideas are often found in the accounts of **the Vimāna,vatthu** of the Khuddaka Nikāya.

The full benefit of the graduated discourse is clearly evident in **the (Vesālī) Ugga Sutta** (A 8.21),<sup>25</sup> where it forms the second of the Vesālī layman Ugga's wonderful and marvellous qualities,<sup>26</sup> of which he himself declares before the Buddha in this lion-roar:

<sup>23</sup> Eg A 1:56, 57, 62, 3:203 ff, 247.

<sup>24</sup> **The 10 wholesome courses of action** (*kusala kamma,patha*):

- (1) having given up killing, he shows compassion to all living beings (*pāṇātipātāṃ pahāya...sabba,pāṇa,bhūta,-hitānukampī hoti*);
- (2) having given up taking the not-given, he does not take the not-given by way of theft (*adinnādānaṃ pahāya...adinnaṃ theyya,saṅkhātāṃ anādātā hoti*);
- (3) having given up sexual misconduct, he does not transgress proper moral conduct (*kāmesu,micchācāraṃ pahāya...na cārittaṃ āpajjitā hoti*);
- (4) having given up false speech, he does not tell a conscious lie (*musa,vādaṃ pahāya...na sampajāna,musā bhāsītā hoti*);
- (5) having given up slander, he speaks words conducive to concord (*pisūṇaṃ vācaṃ pahāya...samattakaraṇī vācaṃ bhāsītā hoti*);
- (6) having given up harsh speech, he speaks words appropriate and pleasant to the masses (*pharusāṃ vācaṃ pahāya...bahu,jana,manāpā tathā,rūpī vācaṃ bhāsītā hoti*);
- (7) having given up frivolous chatter, he speaks at the right time, what is true, connected to the spiritual goal, on the Dharma, on the Vinaya, words worth treasuring (*samphappalāpaṃ pahāya...kāla,vādī bhūta,vādī attha,vādī dhamma,vādī vinaya,vādī nidhāna,vādī vācaṃ bhāsītā hoti*);
- (8) he is without covetousness (*anabhijjhālu hoti*);
- (9) his mind is free from ill will, thinking, "May all beings be happy at heart!" (*abyāpanna,citto hoti...sukhī attānaṃ pariharantū ti*);
- (10) he is one of right view, and realizes super-knowledge for himself (*sammā,dīṭṭhiko hoti...sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedentī ti*) (D 3:269, 290; M 1:287; A 5:266, 275-278).

(1)-(3) are bodily actions (*kāya,kamma*); (4)-(7) are verbal actions (*vacī,kamma*); (8)-(10) are mental actions (*mano,-kamma*). For details, see **(Kusalākusala) Sañcetanika Sutta 1** (A 10.206/5:292-297) = SD 3.9.

<sup>25</sup> On Ugga of Vesālī (A 8.21) and Ugga of Hatthi,gāma (A 8.22), see **The Layman and Dhyana** = SD 8.5(11).

<sup>26</sup> **Ugga's 8 remarkable qualities**, in brief, are:

- (1) on his first seeing the Buddha, faith arose in him;
- (2) he waited upon the Buddha, full of faith, and on listening to the graduated discourse attained non-return, thereupon taking upon himself the rule of celibacy;
- (3) he released his 4 wives from their marital obligations;
- (4) he distributed his wealth impartially amongst the virtuous;
- (5) he always attended upon a monk with respect;
- (6) he listened with respect to a monk teaching the Dharma;
- (7) devas would visit him proclaiming the virtue of the Dharma, and in response to them he shows no arrogance;
- (8) he had abandoned the 5 lower fetters, ie he is a non-returner (A 8.21/4:208-212): cf Uttarā Nanda,mātā at [9] below.

With a faithful heart, venerable sir, I then waited upon the Blessed One.

The Blessed One then gave me **a graduated discourse**, namely, a talk on generosity [giving], on moral virtue, on the heavens, on the danger, degradation and impurity in sensual pleasures and the benefits of renunciation. When he knew that my mind was ready, receptive, free from hindrances, uplifted and clear [confident], he expounded to me the Dharma teaching unique to the Buddhas,<sup>27</sup> namely, suffering, its arising, its ending, and the path.

Just as a clean cloth, free from any stain, would take dye truly well, even so, while I sat there, the spotless eye of the Dharma arose in me, thus: ‘All that is subject to arising is subject to ceasing.’<sup>28</sup>

Then, venerable sir, having thus seen the Dharma, attained to the Dharma, understood the Dharma, fathomed the Dharma, I crossed beyond doubt, cast off uncertainty, gained fearless confidence, independent of others, dwell in the Teacher’s Teaching.<sup>29</sup>

On that very occasion, I went for refuge to the Buddha, to the Dharma and to the Sangha, and I took upon myself the rules of training with celibacy as the fifth.<sup>30</sup> (A 8.21.5-6/4:209 f)

From **the Ugga Sutta** (A 8.21.5-6/4:209 f), it is clear that the Buddha also teaches the four noble truths to the laity. This same conversion process is found in the following lay disciples:

Pokkharā, sāti in **the Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 3.2.21/1:110);

Kūṭadanta in **the Kūṭa, danta Sutta** (D 5.29/1:148);

Upāli in **the Upāli Sutta** (M 56.18/1: 379 f);

Brahmāyu in **the Brahmāyu Sutta** (M 91.36/2:145);

General Sīha in **the Sīha Sutta** (A 8.12.9/4:186).

In **the Mahāpadāna Sutta** (D 14), the Buddha of the past, Vipassī, similarly converts the laymen, prince Khaṇḍa and Tissa the chaplain’s son (D 14.3.11/2:41), and a congregation of 84,000 (D 14.3.14-15/2:43).

The Yakkha Saṃyutta has an interesting sutta that relates how non-humans can become streamwinners. **The Punabbasu Sutta** (S 10.7) is about a yakshini (or ogress) Punabbasu, mātā<sup>31</sup> and her son Punabbasu both became streamwinners merely by listening to the Buddha expounding on the four noble truths (S 1:210; SA 1:311).

## 6 Beyond the graduated discourse

While it is true that generosity, moral virtues and other topics of the graduated discourse are commonly taught to lay people, there are also many instances in the suttas where they receive the same profound discourses as monastics do. In **the Maṇḍapeyya Kathā** (Pm 10.4) of the Paṭisambhidā, magga of the Khuddaka Nikāya, the recipients of “the fine extract of the teaching” (*maṇḍa, desanā*), that is, the 37

**The 10 Fetters** are: (1) Personality view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 10.13/5:17; Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by illwill (*vyā-pāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram, bhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham, bhāgiya*).

<sup>27</sup> “The Dharma teaching unique to the Buddhas” (*sāṃukkamsikā dhamma, desanā*). *Sāṃukkamsikā*, lit “originally discovered (by the Buddha).”

<sup>28</sup> This is stock passage referring to the attainment of Stream-winning (DA 1:278; MA 3:92; AA 4:102; UA 283; ThaA 1:235).

<sup>29</sup> Up to this point, as at D 1:148, 2:41, 43, 44; M 1:379 f, 2:145; A 4:186, 209. See foll para.

<sup>30</sup> *Brahma, cariya, pañcamāni sikkhā, padāni*. In the usual formula of the 5 precepts, the 3rd precept is the abstinence from sexual misconduct. Here Ugga takes upon himself the rule of **celibacy** (*brahma, cariyā*) as he has become a non-returner and has uprooted sensual desire.

<sup>31</sup> The Dīgha Comy says that she was a preta “with a celestial mansion” (*vemānika, peta*) (DA 509).

factors of awakening,<sup>32</sup> are the monks, the nuns, the male lay followers, female lay followers, deities, humans and others (Pm 10.3-4/2:86).

Similarly, in **the Nagara Sutta** (S 12.65), the Buddha, after expounding on insight into dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*) and the eightfold path, concludes by declaring that this “ancient path” (the noble eightfold path) discovered and travelled by the Buddhas has been explained to the monks, the nuns, the male lay followers and female lay followers and that “this holy life has become successful and prosperous, widespread, popular, reached the masses, well proclaimed amongst devas and humans”<sup>33</sup> (S 12.65/ 2:104-107 = S 51.10/5:262).

**The Acchariya Sutta 2** (A 4.128) makes an important statement on the ability of all the four companies to overcome their defilements and spiritually change through hearing the Dharma:

There are people who delight in attachment (*ālaya,rāmā*) (to sense-pleasures)...

There are people who delight in conceit (*māna,rāmā*) (in terms of superiority complex, equality complex, inferiority complex)...

There are people who delight in excitement (*anupasama,rāmā*) [lack of mental calm]...

There are people who have fallen into ignorance (*avijjā,gatā*)...

But when the Dharma is taught by the Tathāgata for the abolition of attachment...conceit... excitement...ignorance, people wish to listen to it, give ear to it, turn their minds to it.

(A 4.128/2:131 f)

What is even more remarkable is a short discourse, **the Rāsiya Sutta** (S 42.12.4-5), where the Buddha’s teaching to Rāsiya the headman is practically identical to the opening section of the first discourse, **the Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11.3-4/5:421),<sup>34</sup> that is, the avoiding of the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification for the middle way, and the noble eightfold path. At the end of the long anthology of teachings given to Rāsiya, he takes refuge in the Three Jewels without any mention of his attainment (S 42.12.4-5/4:330 f).

A number of other lay followers were taught advanced topics such as the five aggregates, not-self and even dependent arising. **The Nakula,pitā Sutta** (S 22.1) records how when the old and infirm Nakula,-pitā asks the Buddha for a brief teaching, is admonished thus: “My body may be sick but my mind will not be sick.” Later, Sāriputta elaborates this terse teaching in terms of the five aggregates, that is, one should not think that “I am” any of them or that any of them is “mine” (S 22.1/3:1-5). Similarly, **the Soṇa Sutta 1** (S 22.49) records how the Buddha teaches Soṇa the householder’s son of Rājagaha, not to harbour conceit on the basis of the five aggregates (S 22.49/3:48-50), but we shall look at the details below [15].

One of the most important anthologies in the Pali Canon, **the Nidāna Saṃyutta** (“the connected sayings on the links”) of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, a chapter on dependent arising, contains a number of suttas addressed to lay people and non-Buddhists:

**Moliya Phagguna Sutta** (S 12.12/2:12-14): to Phagguna (who wears a top-knot) on the four kinds of food (*āhāra*)<sup>35</sup> in connection with dependent arising;

<sup>32</sup> *Bodhi,pakkhiya,dhammā*. **The 37 factors of awakening** are: the 4 foundations of mindfulness, the 4 right efforts, the 4 roads to spiritual power, the 5 spiritual faculties, the 5 spiritual powers, the 7 awakening factors, the noble eightfold path (Vbh 249). Here, the Paṭisambhidā,magga passage has the 4 noble truths at the head of the list.

<sup>33</sup> *Idaṃ...brahmacariyaṃ iddhaṃ c’eva phitaṃ ca vitthāritaṃ ca bahujaññaṃ puthubhūtaṃ yāvad eva manussehi supakāsitaṃ*.

<sup>34</sup> See SD 1.1.

<sup>35</sup> The 4 **kinds of “food” or “nutriments”** (*āhāra*) are solid food, contact (sense-stimuli), volition, consciousness (D 3:228; M 1:48, 1:261; S 2:13, 48, 98-105; Vbh 401). Comys: They are so called because they nourish (*aharanti*) their own effects. Although there are other conditions for beings, these four along are called “food” because they serve as *special conditions* for the personal life-continuity (*ajjhatika,santatiyā viśesa,paccayattā*). For **edible food** (*kabalinkāra āhāra*) is a special condition for the physical body of those beings who subsist on edible food. In the mental body, contact is the special condition for feeling, mental volition for consciousness, and con-



**Acela Kassapa Sutta** (S 12.17/2:18-22): to the naked ascetic Kassapa on suffering and the middle way in connection with dependent arising; in due course, he joins the Order and becomes an arhat.

**Timbaruka Sutta** (S 12.18/2:22-23): to the wanderer Timbaruka on the arising of pleasure and pain.

**Pañca, bhera, bhaya Sutta 1** (S 12.41/2:68-71): to Anātha, piṇḍika the householder on the five things that are hated and feared (that is, the pains that follow one here and hereafter due to transgression of the precepts) and on the limbs of stream-winning [14],<sup>36</sup> and closing with an exposition of dependent arising.

**Aññatra Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (S 12.46/2:75 f): on who feels the result of an action, the answer of which is expounded by way of dependent arising.

**(Sabba) Jāṇussoṇī Sutta** (S 12.47/2:76 f): on whether “all” exists or not, answered by way of dependent arising.

**Lokāyatika Sutta** (S 12.48/2:77): a materialist (*lokāyatika*) questions the Buddha on the nature of existence, the answer of which is given by way of dependent arising.

In all these cases, except that of Acela Kassapa (who becomes an arhat), the interlocutors take refuge at the end of the discourse.

## 7 The lay follower as spiritual exemplar

Buddhism is the world’s first missionary religion (V 1:20). As a rule, all the accomplished disciples, monastic and lay, are teachers of the Dharma, or at least its exemplar. Chapter 16 of the very first book of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, **the Ekaka Nipāta** (“the book of ones”), has four sections, respectively listing “the foremost” (*etad-agga*) amongst fourfold assembly: the monks, the nuns, the laymen and the lay women. The foremost amongst the lay followers are the following:

### Male lay disciples (*sāvaka upāsaka*)

The first to go for refuge  
Foremost amongst donors  
Foremost amongst Dharma speakers  
Foremost amongst those who lead a community  
by means of the four conditions of welfare  
Foremost amongst givers of excellent food  
Foremost amongst givers of pleasant gifts  
Foremost amongst supporters of the Sangha  
Foremost amongst those with wise faith<sup>37</sup>

Tapussa and Bhallika the merchants.  
Anātha, piṇḍika (Sudatta the householder).  
Citta the householder of Macchika, saṇḍa

Hatthaka Āḷavaka [of Āḷavī].  
Mahānāma the Sakya.  
Ugga the householder of Vesālī.  
Uggata the householder.  
Sūra Ambaṭṭha.

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sciousness for name-and-form. **The products of food** (what it nourishes): (1) Edible food put into the mouth produces the groups of form with nutritive essence as the eighth (*oja’atṭhamaka, rūpāni*, an Abhidhamma term for the simplest cluster of material states); (2) contact as food (*phass’āhāra*) produces the three kinds of feeling [pleasurable, painful, neutral]; (3) mental volition as food (*mano, sañcetanāhāra*) produces the three kinds of existence [sense-world, form-world, formless world]; and (4) consciousness as food (*viññāṇ’āhāra*) produces name-and-form (*nāma, rūpa*) at rebirth (MA 1:207 ff; SA 2:22-27; KhA 75 ff). See also Vism 11.1-3/341. In **Āhāra S** (S 46.61/5: 102-107) & **Abhisāṇḍa Ss** (S 55.31-33/5:391-392) *āhāra* is used in a broader sense of “special condition” without reference to the four kinds of food. See also S:B 731 n19 (*These four kinds of nutriments have craving as their source.*)

<sup>36</sup> “The limbs of stream-winning” (*soṭāpannassa aṅgāni*) (D 33.1.11(14)/3:227), ie the qualities of one who has attained stream-winning, namely, wise faith in the Buddha, in the Dharma, in the Sangha, and “the virtues dear to the noble ones.” For a shorter statement on the limbs of a streamwinner, see **Ogadha S** (S 55.2/5:343 f). On the faith of the streamwinner, see Gethin 2001:116. See also SD 8.5(10). Cf “limbs of stream-winning” (*soṭāpatti-y-aṅgāni*) (SD 8.5(2)).

<sup>37</sup> “Wise faith,” *avecca-p, pasanna*, lit “serene through understanding.”

Foremost amongst those loved by the people  
Foremost amongst those who trust one another

Jīvaka Komara,bhacca (the doctor).  
Nakula,pitā the householder.

Female lay disciples (*sāvikā upāsikā*)

The first to go for refuge  
Foremost amongst givers  
Foremost amongst the learned  
Foremost amongst those dwelling in  
lovingkindness  
Foremost amongst dhyana attainers (*jhāyī*)  
Foremost amongst givers of excellent food  
Foremost amongst givers of medicine  
to the sick  
Foremost amongst those with wise faith  
Foremost amongst those who trust one another  
Foremost amongst those who have faith  
through listening

Sujātā the daughter of Senāni.  
Visākhā the mother of Migāra.  
Khujj’uttarā (the hunchback).  
  
Sāmāvatī.  
Uttarā the mother of Nanda (of Veḷukaṇṭa).<sup>38</sup>  
Suppavāsā the daughter of the Koliyas.  
  
Suppiyā the lay disciple.  
Kātiyānī.  
Nakula,mātā the housewife.  
  
Kālī the lay disciple of Kurara,ghara.<sup>39</sup>

(A 1:25 f)

In the **Duka Nipāta** (“the book of twos”), pairs of disciples are given as examples and criteria, as “the scales and measure” (*tulā... pamāṇam*), of discipleship, and whom practising disciples should aspire to emulate:

For monks, they should aspire to be like the monks Sāriputta and Moggallāna (A 2.12.1/1:88).

For nuns, they should aspire to be like the nuns Khemā and Uppala,vaṇṇā (A 2.12.2/1:88).

For laymen, they should aspire to be like laymen Citta the householder and Hatthaka Āḷavaka [of Āḷavī] (A 2.12.3/1:88).

For laywomen, they should aspire to be like the laywomen Khujj’uttarā and Uttarā the mother of Nanda [Nanda,mātā] (of Veḷukaṇṭa) (A 2.12.4/1:88 f).

In the **Eka,putta Sutta** (A 17.23/2:235 f), the Buddha says that a faithful lay disciple would rightly implore her only son to be like Citta and Hatthaka. In the **Eka,dhītu Sutta** (A 17.24/2:236), the faithful female disciple would rightly implore her only daughter to be like Khujj’uttarā and Nanda,mātā Veḷukaṇṭakiyā. The fact that they are presented in pairs is vital in emphasizing spiritual friendship.<sup>40</sup>

## 8 The lay follower as Dharma teacher

In the **Dasaka Nipāta** (“the book of tens”) of the *Anguttara Nikāya*, a chapter called **Upāsaka Vagga** (“the chapter on lay followers”) contains two interesting suttas—the first being **Anātha,piṇḍika** and the second, **Vajjiya,māhita**—where a lay follower refutes the wrong views of a group of wanderers. In the first text, the **(Anātha,piṇḍika) Diṭṭhi Sutta** (A 10.93/5:185-189), whose locale is *Sāvattihī*, the wanderers accuse *Anātha,piṇḍika* of “holding on to suffering, making suffering your refuge” (*dukkham...allīno...ajjhūpagato*), but he replies:

<sup>38</sup> The **Buddha,vaṁsa** says that Uttarā Nanda,mātā is the foremost of those laywomen who waited on the Buddha (B 26.20). DPPN says that it is possible that she is a different namesake: see DPPN 1:361 f, 2:935. DhA mentions Veḷukaṇṭakī Nanda,mātā and Khujj’uttarā as the chief laywomen disciples of the Buddha (DhA 1:340), but they are not listed so in the *etadagga* list of the *Anguttara*. It is possible that both held both the distinctions. See also [9] below.

<sup>39</sup> Kālī is also the most senior of women streamwinners (AA 1:458; SnA 1:208 f) and was a close friend and companion of Kātiyānī (AA 1:455).

<sup>40</sup> On the spiritual friendship of the monks, see **Dhamma,cetiya S** (M 1:121).

Venerable sirs, whatever has come into being, whatever is put together, willed, dependently arisen, is impermanent. Whatever is impermanent is suffering. Whatever is suffering is not mine, I am not it, it is not my self.<sup>41</sup> Having seen this rightly with proper wisdom as it really is, I also know the higher escape from it as it really is. (A 10.93.6/5:188)

At the end of the discourse, the Buddha praises Anātha,piṇḍika for his defending the Teaching against being misrepresented by other religions:

Even a monk who has reached a hundred years in this Dharma and Vinaya should well censure wanderers of other religions, who should be censured, with the Dharma [justly], just as the householder Anātha,piṇḍika has censured them.<sup>42</sup> (A 10.93.8/5:189)

We shall look at the lay teacher Vajjiya,māhita later below [15]. Let us now briefly look at the two foremost lay Dharma teachers: the laywoman Khuji'uttarā and the householder Citta.

**Khuji'uttarā** (Uttarā the hunchback) was a treasurer's daughter but later became a maid-in-waiting of queen Sāmāvatī. Of the eight pieces of money she received, she used only four to buy flowers from Sumana the garland-maker and kept the other four for herself.

One day, the Buddha visited Sumana and Khuji'uttarā, after listening to the Buddha becomes a streamwinner. She spends all her ill-saved money on flowers. When questioned by Sāmāvatī, she told everything. Impressed, Sāmāvatī asks her to regularly listen to Buddha's teachings and then instruct them (Sāmāvatī and the 500 women-in-waiting) accordingly. They all became streamwinners.

After Sāmāvatī and the 500 women died in a tragic fire, Khuji'uttarā continued listening and teaching the Dharma (DhA 1:209 f). Later she was declared by the Buddha to be foremost of laywomen who are learned (*bahu-s,suta*) (A 1:26) [7]. According to Dhammapāla, the teachings that Khuji'uttarā received from the Buddha (which she conveyed to Sāmāvatī) are canonized as **the Iti-vuttaka**, the fourth book of the Khuddaka Nikāya (ItA 24 ff).

**Citta the householder** (Citta Gahapati) was from Macchika,saṇḍa where he was a seth house-lord (*seṭṭhī,gahapati*).<sup>43</sup> One day, seeing the elder Mahānāma (one of the first five monks) on almsround, he is impressed with the elder's calm and bright demeanour. He invites the elder to his park, the Ambaṭak'ārāma, and there offers him almsfood. After listening to a detailed exposition on the six sense-bases (*saḷ-āyatana,vibhatti*) expounded by the elder, Citta becomes a streamwinner (AA 1:187 f). On another occasion, Sāriputta and Moggallāna visit Citta, and after listening to Sāriputta, Citta becomes a once-returner (DhA 2:73-83). In due course, he becomes a non-returner (AA 1:188).

Chapter 41 of the Saṃyutta Nikāya is **the Citta Saṃyutta** (S 4:282 ff), comprising ten suttas related to Citta. On the occasions when Citta poses a question, it is apparent that he already knows the answer, but nevertheless asks the question to start off a Dharma discussion with the monks. He often teaches Dharma to the monks and is applauded for it (S 41.1, 5, 7). The suttas of the Citta Saṃyutta show him to be not only knowledgeable and wise in the Dharma but also as a man of mischievous humour. For example, he meets the Jain teacher Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta and leads him into an embarrassing verbal trap (S 41.8).

<sup>41</sup> *N'etam mama, n'eso'ham asmi,na m'eso attā ti.*

<sup>42</sup> *Yo pi so bhikkhave bhikkhu vassa,sat'upasampanno imasmiṃ dhamma,vinaye, so pi evam evaṃ añña,titthiye paribbājake saha dhammena suniggahitāṃ niggahēyya, yathā taṃ Anātha,piṇḍikena gahapatinā niggahitā ti.* The verb *niggahēyya* (fr *niggahātī*) has these connotations: "to restrain, coerce, subdue; to rebuke, censure, humble; to chastise, punish, degrade" (DPL).

<sup>43</sup> A *gahapati* (houselord) was an owner of land employed in agriculture, or in charge of an agricultural enterprise. He was either a kshatriya or a brahmin (but never a shudra). A *seṭṭhī* (seth) was a merchant, financier or banker. When one was both a house-owner and a seth, one was known as a *seṭṭhī,gahapati* (seth houselord) as in the case of Citta. The three terms, *gahapati*, *seṭṭhī* and *seṭṭhī,gahapati* were not synonyms. See Chakravarti, 1987:65-94 (ch 3).

To **Acela Kassapa** who has gained nothing from his 30 years of naked asceticism, Citta proclaims that during that same period he is able to attain the four dhyanas and the fruit of non-return (S 41.9) [9].<sup>44</sup> Humour is also evident while Citta is on his deathbed. His relatives think he is babbling away when he is actually admonishing the local deities on impermanence. Before taking his last breath, Citta exhorts his relatives in generosity. Understandably, he is regarded as the ideal layman (A 1:88, 2:164, 3:451).

## 9 The lay follower as meditator

All the important suttas on meditation such as **the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna** (D 22), **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10) and **the Ānāpāna, sati Sutta** (M 118) are addressed to monks. Understandably, this is because they are the best field for sowing the Dharma seeds [3]. It is interesting to note that the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (and the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta), along with other profound suttas, such as **the Mahā Nidāna Sutta** (M 15; S 12.60/2:92 f) and **the Āneñja, sappāya Sutta** (M 106), are all taught in the park outside the town of Kammāsa, damma of the Kuru tribe. Buddhaghosa says that the people there were of great wisdom and the food there was nutritious, and as a compliment to these virtues, the Buddha delivered these discourses there (SA 2:89).<sup>45</sup>

The cultivation of the four focusses of mindfulness (*cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*) is often associated with monastics. However, there are a number of passages that show lay people practising it.<sup>46</sup> In **the Kandaraka Sutta** (M 51), for example, the Buddha points out to Kandaraka the wanderer and Pessa the elephant trainer's son that the monks dwell practising the four focusses of mindfulness.<sup>47</sup> Pessa then declares:

It is wonderful, venerable sir! It is marvellous, venerable sir! How well these four focusses of mindfulness have been made known by the Blessed One for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of physical and mental pain,<sup>48</sup> for gaining the right way, for the realization of Nirvana.

From time to time, venerable sir, **we, the white-clad lay people, too, dwell with our minds well established in these four focusses of mindfulness.**

Here, venerable sir, having put away covetousness and displeasure in the world, we dwell exertive, fully aware, mindful, contemplating the body in the body...feelings in the feelings...the mind in the mind...mind-objects in the mind-object. (M 51.4/1:340)

<sup>44</sup> For details, see **The Layman and Dhyana** = SD 8.5(8a).

<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that although the suttas generally depict the Buddha as addressing the monks, it is highly probable that nuns, laymen and laywomen are also present in the congregation. Otherwise, other members of the audience (if any) are not mentioned, unlike in the Mahāyāna sutras where the audience is often mentioned in some detail, eg "Thus have I heard. Once the Buddha was staying on Gr̥dhra-kūṭa near Rājagṛha with a large assembly of monks number twelve thousand. There were 80,000 bodhisattvas-mahāsattvas. Besides all the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, there were gods, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kiṁnaras and mahoragas. There were great wheel-turning monarchs, lesser wheel-turning monarchs, and kings of the gold wheel, of the silver wheel, and other wheels. And also kings and princes, ministers and people, men and women, and the fabulously wealthy, each surrounded by a 100,000 myriad followers..." (Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra, ch 1).

<sup>46</sup> The so-called Satipaṭṭhāna method of meditation is commonly taught to lay Buddhists of the Theravāda even today, esp following the Myanmar teachers.

<sup>47</sup> **Satipaṭṭhāna** is best resolved as *sati* + *upaṭṭhāna* (lit "placed near"), following the old Skt name *Smṛty-upa-sthāna Sūtra*. The Pali *sati* originally means "memory," but in Buddhist usage, also denotes "present awareness". TW Rhys Davids brilliantly renders it as "mindfulness" (1910) which has stuck ever since (D:RD 2:327 et al & Introd). The Skt *smṛti* adopted by BHS is used in brahminical religion and philosophy to mean "oral tradition". DA explains the connection of the four focusses of mindfulness to the **five aggregates** as follows: the contemplation of body is concerned with the aggregate of form (*rūpa-k, khandha*); the contemplation of feelings is concerned with the aggregate of feelings (*vedanā-k, khandha*); the contemplation on mind is concerned with aggregate of consciousness (*viññāṇa-k, khandha*); and the contemplation of mind-objects is concerned with the aggregates of perception (*saññā-k, khandha*) and of mental formations (*saṅkhāra-k, khandha*). See Gethin 2001:29-68 (ch 1).

<sup>48</sup> *Dukkha, domanassa*, sometimes tr as "pain and sadness." See Walshe 1996 (D:W 589 n627). For a broader sense of *domanassa*, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.3/1:56) = SD 13.1 (4.2e).

Besides this passage, there are others showing that lay disciples who are skilled in the attaining of dhyana (*jhāna*). In the **Mahā Sudassana Sutta** (D 17), king Sudassana (the Buddha's past life as a king ruling from the city of Kusāvatī),<sup>49</sup> could not only attain the four dhyanas but also dwell in the four divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*) of lovingkindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity (D 17.2.3/2:186).

In the **Acela Sutta** (S 41.9), when Acela Kassapa (the naked ascetic) tells his friend Citta the householder that in his 30 years as a naked ascetic he has not gained any spiritual attainment, Citta replies that in his 30 years as a lay disciple, he is able to enter into the four dhyanas and to remain above sensual lust—in fact, he is a non-returner (S 41.9/4:300-302).<sup>50</sup>

In the **Nanda, mātā Sutta** (A 7.50), Uttarā Nanda, mātā declares to Sāriputta the seven marvels<sup>51</sup> that comprise her spiritual attainments. Of these, the last two are most significant, namely, that she could abide in the four dhyanas for as long as she wishes, and that she has overcome the five lower fetters [5n], that is, she is a non-returner (A 7.50.6-7/4:66 f).

One of the interesting records of a layman's experience of dhyana is found in the **Uṇṇābha Brāhmaṇa Sutta** (S 48.42). The Buddha, by way of a catechism, instructs the brahmin Uṇṇābha on the five physical sense-faculties and the purpose of mindfulness.<sup>52</sup> In due course, the Sutta giving no details of any meditation instruction, the Buddha declares of Uṇṇābha:

So, too, monks, the brahmin Uṇṇābha has gained faith in the Tathāgata that is settled, deeply rooted, established, firm. It cannot be removed by any ascetic or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world. If, monks, the brahmin Uṇṇābha were to die at this time, there is no fetter bound by which he might again come to this world. (S 48.42/5:217-219)

The last sentence is the usual way of declaring one to be a non-returner. Strangely, however, the Commentary says that this was stated to indicate that he stood in the position of a “dhyana non-returner,” meaning that he was a streamwinner who had abandoned the five mental hindrances by the first dhyana. If he were to die without having fallen from dhyana, he would be reborn in a higher world and attain final Nirvana there. If he were to lose the dhyana, his destiny would be undetermined. However, he did not lose it; so his destiny was determined. As such, the Buddha made this declaration to point out that he was a “dhyana non-returner” (SA 3:246).

## 10 Restraint and retreat

**10.1 SENSE-RESTRAINT. The (Piṇḍola) Bhāradvāja Sutta** (S 35.127) records a dialogue between king Udena of Avantī and Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja on how the young monks are able to keep themselves from lust. Piṇḍola explains that the Buddha instructs these young monks to regard the older women as mothers.

<sup>49</sup> Kusāvatī, the royal city of Mahā Sudassana, was the ancient name of Kusinārā (D 2:146).

<sup>50</sup> For details, see “The Layman and Dhyana,” SD 8.5(8a).

<sup>51</sup> The 7 marvels of Uttarā Nanda, mātā are:

- (1) that she could communicate with powerful devas (such as Vessavaṇa);
  - (2) that she remained mentally undisturbed when the king slew her only son Nanda;
  - (3) that when her late husband, reborn as a yaksha, appeared in true form before her, she remained mentally undisturbed;
  - (4) that from the day she married her husband she never had any evil thought against him, much less evil deeds;
  - (5) that from the day she professed to be a lay disciple, she never had intentionally broken any precept;
  - (6) that she could abide in the 4 dhyanas for as long as she wished;
  - (7) that she had overcome the 5 lower fetters [5n], ie she had become a non-returner: cf Ugga [5] above.
- SnA also says that she kept a daily fast and knew the Piṭakas (collection of teachings) by heart (SnA 1:370).

<sup>52</sup> The same catechism is also found in **Mahā Vedalla S** (M 43.21-22/1:295). “Though the five faculties are usually identified with the physical sense organs, here they seem to correspond to the five kinds of sense consciousness, for the physical sense faculties cannot properly be said to experience (*paccanubhoti*) an objective domain (*visaya*) or resort (*gocara*). Their function is only to serve as the media through which consciousness cognizes objects” (S:B 1936 n225).



women of similar age as sisters, and younger women as daughters. Udena however retorts that lust does not respect age. Piṇḍola then replies that the Buddha teaches these monks the perception of the impurities of the 31 parts of the body.<sup>53</sup> Udena retorts that this is difficult practice for those monks who are unrestrained in body, undeveloped in mind, immature in wisdom. Finally, Piṇḍola replies that the Buddha teaches them the restraint of the senses.<sup>54</sup> Udena then retorts that when he guards (*rakkhati*) his senses on entering the royal harem, lust does not arise in him, too (S 35.127/4:110-113).

Similarly, in **the (Mahā Kaccāna) Lohicca Sutta** (S 4:116 ff), Mahā Kaccāna admonishes the brahmin and a group of brahmin youths on the guarding of the sense-doors. The brahmin Lohicca then rejoices in Mahā Kaccāna's teaching and takes refuge.

**10.2 LAYMEN AND RETREATS.** The **Paṭisambhidā, magga** contains a discussion of the “power of the pervasive concentration” (*samādhi, vipphārā iddhi*), that is, the ability to attain the four form dhyanas (*rūpa-jjhāna*) and the four formless attainments (*arūpa, samāpatti*). The people with such a power are listed as follows: the venerable Sāriputta, the venerable Sañjīva, the venerable Khaṇu Koṇḍañña, the laywoman **Uttarā** and the laywoman **Sāmāvatī** (Pm 22.26/2:211 f). Interestingly, even though laywomen are mentioned, no layman is mentioned.

The Pali Canon also mentions lay followers practising meditation without mentioning any ensuing attainment. In **the Saṅkha Sutta** (S 42.8), for example, Asibandhaka, putta the headman is instructed on the precepts of moral virtue as the basis for the cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*). At the end of the discourse, Asibandhaka, putta takes refuge in the Three Jewels (S 42.8/4:317-322).

**The Pīti Sutta** (A 5.176) is a remarkably warm discourse on the Buddha's exhorting the laity to observe solitary retreat (*paviveka*), a common practice for the Buddha himself and the monastics. One day when Anāthapiṇḍika comes accompanied by 500 lay disciples to make offerings of the four requisites (robes, almsfood, lodging and medicine for the sick), the Buddha compliments them for their devotion and generosity, but advises them also to train themselves in “the joy of solitary retreat” (*paviveka pīti*). Sāriputta then responds by stating these **five benefits of keeping solitary retreat**:

- (1) physical pain and mental pain connected with sensual desire do not arise during that time;
- (2) physical pleasure and mental pleasure connected with sensual desire do not arise during that time;
- (3) physical pain and mental pain connected with the unwholesome do not arise during that time;
- (4) physical pleasure and mental pleasure connected with the unwholesome do not arise during that time;
- (5) physical pain and mental pain connected with the wholesome do not arise during that time.

The Buddha then approves of Sāriputta's word (A 5.176/3:206-208).

**10.3 CAN DEVAS BECOME SAINTS?** One of the most inspiring stories of sense-restraint and moral virtue is that of the laywoman Gopikā found in **the Sakka, pañha Sutta** (D 21.1.11). Sakka, deva-rajah of Tāvātimsa [the heaven of the 33], tells the Buddha that his older devas inform him that whenever there is a Buddha in the world, the heavenly community swells and the asura<sup>55</sup> population falls.

Sakka then relates the example of **Gopikā the Sakya girl**, who had faith in the Three Jewels, kept the precepts with great care,<sup>56</sup> and “rejecting her womanly mind, cultivated a manly mind.”<sup>57</sup> After death, she

<sup>53</sup> On the 31/32 parts of the body, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10.10-13/1:57 f) = SD 13.3.

<sup>54</sup> *Indriyesu gutta, dvārā*, ie “guarding the sense-faculties.”

<sup>55</sup> **The asuras** (*asura*), lit *a-sura* (non-devas or anti-gods), are the titans, demi-gods, opponents of the gods according to Vedic mythology. The Buddhists too regard them as “fallen gods” (*pubba, devā*, lit “gods of old,” SnA 484). When incorporated into Buddhism, the asura birth is regarded as one of the four suffering states, the others being the hells (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tiracchāna, yoni*), and the realm of the departed (*petti, visaya*) (eg It 93; J 6:595, 5:186; Pv 4.11). In the Mahāyāna, the asura forms one of the six modes of existence according to the wheel of life (*bhava, cakra*). They are said to live just below the deva realm on the slopes of the mythical Mt Meru (the Indian Olympus). Psychologically, they embody self-centred and destructive violence and sensuality.

<sup>56</sup> This description is stock passage or “coded text” are actually the “limbs of stream-winning” (*sotāpannassa aṅgāni*, D 33.1.11(14)/3:227), ie the qualities of one who has attained Stream-winning [14]. Cf *sotāpatti-y-aṅga* [6]

was reborn amongst in Tāvātimsa, “gaining sonship (*puttatta*) amongst us”<sup>58</sup> as the devaputra Gopaka. Now at that time, too, there were three monks who had been reborn there “in the inferior bodies of gandharvas [celestial minstrels],”<sup>59</sup> and they lived indulging in sense-pleasures as attendants and servants of the gods.

Seeing them so, Gopaka rebuked them, “Where are your ears, good sirs, that you did not hear the Dharma from the Blessed One!”<sup>60</sup> She then told them how she, overcoming her sexuality, came to be reborn in Tāvātimsa,

But you, after having lived the holy life under the Blessed One, have been reborn in the inferior bodies of gandharvas! Painful it is for us to see fellows-in-the-Dharma reborn in the inferior bodies of gandharvas! (D 21.1.11/2:272)

On being thus rebuked, two of the gandharvas “immediately aroused mindfulness”<sup>61</sup> and were in due course reborn amongst the Brahmā Purohitā [the Realm of Brahmā’s Retinue], but one remained attached to sense-pleasures (D 21.1.11/2:271 f). The verse section of the sutta provides the details for the prose account, relating how the two devas gained spiritual excellence (*visesa*), and here refers to one of the levels of sainthood:

Even here [in the deva world], they gained the knowledge of excellence,  
These two won excellence amongst the host of Brahmā’s Retinue.<sup>62</sup> (D 21.1.12/2:275)

This stanza is very significant in saying that sainthood (or at least the spiritual life) is attainable “here (in the deva world)” (*idha*). In fact, **the Sakka,pañha Sutta** (D 21) records that Sakka himself acquires the Dharma-eye (*dhamma,cakkhu*) (D 2:288) and declares himself a streamwinner (D 2:284). Elsewhere, Sakka declares himself a fellow-in-the-holy-life (*brahma,cārī*) of Moggallāna (M 1:255). In other word, devas, too, can attain spiritual development and become saints.<sup>63</sup>

above. For a shorter statement on the limbs of a streamwinner, see **Ogadha S** (S 55.2/5:343 f). On the faith of the streamwinner, see Gethin 2001:116

<sup>57</sup> *Sā itthi,cittam virājetvā purisa,cittam bhāvetvā*. This statement is a psychological one. Walshe rendering as “She rejected the status of a woman...” is too strong. For a better understanding here, this statement should be read alongside **Saññoga S** (A 7.48): “A woman does not think about herself by way of her womanly faculty, her womanly ways...she is not aroused by them and delights not in them. Thus unaroused, she does not contemplate another in terms of a man’s faculty, his manly ways...” (A 7.48.4/4:58). In psychological terms, she refuses to look at herself as a sexual being.

<sup>58</sup> This expression is helpful in clarifying the “birth” of **devas**. They arise spontaneously (*opapātika*), hence terms like *deva,putta* (“deva’s son”) is figurative. The term *deva,putta* is used only in reference to the gods of the sense-world. The Nikāyas speak of 4 kinds of birth (*yonī*): the womb-born or viviparous (*jalābu,ja*); the egg-born or oviparous (*aṇḍa,ja*); the moisture-born, arising in putrescence or waste (*saṃseda,ja*); the spontaneously born or the apparitional (*opapātika*) (D 3:230; M 1:73). In psychological terms, the Comys list 3 kinds of “gods” (*devā*): god by convention (*sammuti,deva*), ie royalty or one in power; god by birth (*upapatti,deva*), the celestial beings; god by one’s purity (*visuddhi,deva*), ie the saints (Nc 307; KhA 123).

<sup>59</sup> *Hīnaṃ gandhabba,kāyaṃ*. Here, the sense is not that the body was imperfect in form but in spirit.

<sup>60</sup> *Kuto,mukhā nāma tumhe mārisā tassa bhagavato dhammaṃ assutvā*. Here *kuto,mukhā nama* is idiomatic, lit tr “where are you faces...”

<sup>61</sup> *Diṭṭhe va dhamme satim*. Curiously, there is apparently no verb for this clause in the text: *Dve devā diṭṭhe va dhamme satim paṭilabhiṃsu kāyaṃ brahma,purohitam*. It is significant that the sutta immediately following **Sakka,pañha S** is **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22).

<sup>62</sup> *Yan te dhammaṃ idh’aññāya visesaṃ ajjhagaṃsu te | Kāyaṃ brahma,purohitam duve tesam visesa,gū*.

<sup>63</sup> For a detailed study of sainthood amongst the devas, see Masefield 1986:2, 12-21.

## 11 Counselling the dying

**The Dīghāvu Sutta** (S 55.3) records how the Buddha counsels the dying Dīghāvu, a streamwinner, advising him not to worry about his father, Jotika the householder. The Buddha teaches him how to reflect on the virtues of the Three Jewels, and to contemplate on impermanence, on suffering and on not-self. This latter set forms the basis for “the six things that partake of true knowledge” (*cha vijjā, bhāgiyā dhammā*), that is, the perceptions of impermanence, of suffering, of not-self, of letting go, of dispassion, and of cessation.<sup>64</sup> Dīghāvu later passes away and arises spontaneously in the *Suddhāvāsa* as a non-returner (S 55.3/5:344-347).

**The Anāthapiṇḍik’ovāda Sutta** (M 143) records the last days of Anāthapiṇḍika (then a streamwinner) and Sāriputta (accompanied by Ānanda) gives him terminal counseling. Abridged, this is Sāriputta’s admonition given to Anāthapiṇḍika on his deathbed:

“Then, householder, you should train yourself thus:

‘I will not cling to any of the sense-faculties...and my consciousness will not be dependent on any of them.

I will not cling to any of the sense-objects...

I will not cling to any of the sense-contacts...

I will not cling to any feeling arising from any of the sense-contacts...

I will not cling to any of the five elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space)...

I will not cling to any of the five aggregates...

I will not cling to any of the four formless attainments...

I will not cling to this world or the other world...

I will not cling to what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, encountered, sought after and examined by the mind, and my consciousness will not be dependent on any of them.”

Anāthapiṇḍika weeps. When Sāriputta asks him if he is losing heart, he replies that he has never heard such a Dharma talk before. Sāriputta replies that such a Dharma talk “is not given to white-clad lay people” but only to renunciants.

[Anāthapiṇḍika:] “Well then, venerable Sāriputta, let such talk on the Dharma be given to white-clad lay people. There are householders, with little dust in their eyes, who are falling away because they do not hear the Dharma. There will be those who will understand the Dharma.”<sup>65</sup>

Soon after Sāriputta and Ānanda have left, Anāthapiṇḍika dies and is reborn in Tusita heaven.<sup>66</sup> (M 143/3:258-263) = SD 23.9

## THE SAINTHOOD OF THE LAY DISCIPLE

### 12 Three kinds of lay saints

So far, we have seen that lay followers are able to attain to the spiritual levels of streamwinner and non-returner [9-10]. There are also cases of **lay once-returners** (*sakadāgami*).<sup>67</sup> These three levels consti-

<sup>64</sup> These 6 perceptions are found along with others in **Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta** (S 46.71-76/5:132 f). Also listed at A 3:334.

<sup>65</sup> This sentence is identical to Brahmā Sahampati’s invitation to the Buddha to teach (V 1:5-7 = M 1:169 = S 1:138 f) except that the word “householders” here is replaced by “beings.”

<sup>66</sup> See however A 6.133/3:451, where Anāthapiṇḍika is declared a lay arhat [15b].

<sup>67</sup> Examples of laymen once-returners are **Purāṇa**, the father of Migasālā, and **Isidatta**, her uncle, both of whom are reborn in Tusita (A 6.44/3:348). In **Dhamma, cetiya S** (M 89.18/2:124) and **Thapataya S** (S 55.6/5:348-352) both are “chamberlains” or keepers of the women’s quarters (*thapataya*; Skt *sthapataya*) of king Pasenadi. Comy to Thapataya S says that at the time (in the Thapataya S) Isidatta was a once-returner, Purāṇa a streamwinner content with his own wife (ie one who is chaste but not celibate) (SA 3:278). For **Miga, sālā S**, see SD 3.2.6. See S:W 5:303 n1, S:B 1955 n326.

tute the first three types of saints (*ariyā*): the streamwinner, the once-returner and the non-returner (in ascending order of spiritual attainment). In the case of **the streamwinner**, he has uprooted the first three mental fetters (*samiyojanā*), namely:

- (1) personality view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*),
- (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), and
- (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*).

**The once-returner**, too, has destroyed the first three fetter and diminished his unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion. **The non-returner** has destroyed all the five lower fetters, that is, the first three and

- (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), and
- (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*).

And one becomes an **arhat** with the destruction of the five higher fetters, that is:

- (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*),
- (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*),
- (8) conceit (*māna*),
- (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), and
- (10) ignorance (*avijjā*).

One then attains final knowledge early in this very life, or if he does not attain final knowledge early in this very life, then he attains final knowledge at the time of death.

The first arhat is, of course, the Buddha himself, but he is not the only one. This is clearly stated in **the Mahā Vacchagotta Sutta** (M 73), where the Buddha answers the wanderer Vacchagotta's question:

(a) (Apart from the Blessed One himself,) Vaccha, there are not only one hundred, or two or three or four or five hundred, but far more, monks...far more nuns, my disciples, who, having realized direct knowledge for themselves here and now, through the destruction of the mental cankers,<sup>68</sup> attain and dwell in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom<sup>69</sup> that are canker-free [that is, they are **arhats**].<sup>70</sup>

(b) (Apart from the Blessed One, the monks and the nuns,) Vaccha, there are not only one hundred, or two or three or four or five hundred, but far more laymen followers...far more white-clad laywomen followers, leading the holy life [celibacy] who, with the destruction of the five lower fetters, will be reborn spontaneously [reappear as **non-returners** in *Suddhāvāsa*]<sup>71</sup> and there attain final Nirvana without ever returning from that world.

<sup>68</sup> "Mental cankers" (*āsava*), see (17) below under n on *patta, yoga-k, khemaṇi*.

<sup>69</sup> "The cankerless liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom," *anāsavaṃ ceto, vimuttiṃ paññā, vimuttiṃ*. In the highest sense, "**liberation of mind**" (*ceto, vimutti*) refers to the fruition of arhathood (*arahatta, phala*), esp the concentration associated with it. In a more restricted sense, it refers to the dhyanic mind in the 4 boundless states (*appamañña*), ie, the divine abodes (*brahma, vihāra*). One who is "**liberated by wisdom**" (*paññā, vimutta*) "may not have personally attained the 8 liberations (*vimokkha*), but through seeing with wisdom, his mental cankers are destroyed" (M 70.16/1:478). All arhats are perfectly liberated in the same way from ignorance and suffering, but are distinguished into two types on the basis of their proficiency in concentration. Those who can attain **the 8 liberations** (*aṭṭha, vimokkha*), which include the 4 formless attainments and the attainment of cessation, are called "liberated both ways" (*ubhato, bhāga, vimutta*), ie, liberated from the physical body by means of the formless dhyanas, and from all defilements by the path of arhathood. Arhats like Sāriputta and Moggallāna are "liberated both ways." The differences between the two types of liberation are given in **Mahā, nidāna S** (D 2:70 f) and **Kīṭāgiri S** (M 1:477 f). See A 1:60. For full list of the 8 liberations, see **Mahā Nidāna S** (D 15.35/2:70 f). See also M 120.37/ 3:103 = SD 3.4.37.

<sup>70</sup> *āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ ceto, vimuttiṃ paññā, vimuttiṃ diṭṭhe'va dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharatī ti*. Cf **Ānāpāna, sati S** (M 118.9/3:80) = SD 7.13.

<sup>71</sup> **Suddh'āvāsa** or "pure abodes" are a group of 5 heavens in the formless realm populated only by non-returners, and where they attain arhathood and Nirvana. The 5 pure abodes, ie their inhabitants and respective lifespans, are: These worlds are Āviha ("Non-declining," 1000 MK), Ātappa ("Unworried," 2000 MK), Sudassā ("Clearly

(c) (Apart from the Blessed One, the monks, the nuns, the white-clad laymen, and the white-clad laywomen, living the holy life,) Vaccha, there are not only one hundred, or two or three or four or five hundred, but far more white-clad laymen followers,...white-clad laywomen followers, my disciples, enjoying sensual pleasures, the doers of my teaching, the heeders of my advice, crossed over doubt, gone beyond uncertainty, won fearless confidence, who, independent of others, dwell in the Teacher's Teaching" (as **once-returners** and **streamwinners**).

(d) [Vacchagotta:] "Master Gotama, if only Master Gotama were accomplished in this Dharma, but no monks...no nuns...no laymen living the holy life...no laywomen living the holy life...no laymen enjoying sensual pleasure...no laywomen enjoying sensual pleasures were accomplished in the Dharma, then the holy life would be deficient in that respect.

(e) But because there are monks...nuns...laymen living the holy life...laywomen living the holy life...laymen enjoying sensual pleasure...laywoman enjoying sensual pleasures, accomplished in the Dharma, then the holy *is* complete in that respect.

(f) Master Gotama, just as the river Ganges inclines towards the ocean, slopes towards the ocean, flows into the ocean, merges with the ocean, even so, the Master Gotama's assembly with its renunciants and householders, inclines towards Nirvana, slopes towards Nirvana, flows towards Nirvana, merges with Nirvana. (M 73.7-14/1:492 f)

What is most significant here in regards to lay sainthood is statement (c) where white-clad male and female lay disciples **enjoying sensual pleasures** (*kāma, bhogī*) are declared to be "the doers of my teaching, the heeders of my advice, crossed over doubt, gone beyond uncertainty, won fearless confidence, who, independent of others, dwell in the Teacher's Teaching."<sup>72</sup> This clearly means that the Buddha's Teaching is not meant merely for monastics and arhats, but for anyone who is able to follow the Teaching, even if they are those "enjoying sensual pleasures."

### 13 Why no mention of lay arhats?

It is also interesting to note that where **arhats** are mentioned [12a], no lay disciples are said (in the Mahā Vacchagotta Sutta) to have attained to that state. Similarly, **the Naḷakapāna Sutta** (M 68) seems to present the idea that only monastics attain arhathood. In this sutta, the Buddha points out to Anuruddha the states attained by certain deceased disciples. First, the Buddha points out the destinies of the deceased monks and nuns, thus:

(1) The monk or nun "was established in final knowledge (*aññā*)" [ie become an **arhat**].

(2) He or she, "with the destruction of the five lower fetters, has reappeared spontaneously (in the Pure Abodes) and there will attain final Nirvana without ever returning from that world" [ie become a **non-returner**].

(3) He or she, "with the destruction of the five lower fetters and with the diminishing of greed, hate and delusion, has become a **once-returner**, returning only once to this world to make an end of suffering."

(4) He or she, "with the destruction of the three fetters, has become a **streamwinner**, no longer bound for the lower world,<sup>73</sup> sure of liberation, destined for awakening."

(M 68.8-23/1:464-468)

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Visible," 4000 MK), Sudassī ("Clear-visioned," 8000 MK) and Akaṇiṭṭhā ("Highest," 16000 MK) (D 3:237, M 3:103, Vbh 425, Pug 42-46). MK = *Mahā Kappa*, that is, a full cycle of a world-period or cycle of the universe (V 3:4=D 3:51, 111=It 99; D 1:14; A 2:142). For celestial map, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (SD 1.7); for world cycle, see **Aggañña S** (SD 2.19), 2003.

<sup>72</sup> *Sāsana, kārā ovāda, patikārā tiṇṇa, vicikicchā vigata, kathañkathā vesārajja-p, pattā अपरा-p, paccayā satthu, -sāsane viharanti.*

<sup>73</sup> *Avinīpāta*, alt tr "not fated for birth in a suffering state"; opp of *vinīpāta*, "the world of suffering," another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes the **5 courses**



Only statements (2), (3) and (4) are made where the deceased laymen and laywomen are mentioned. In other words, the lay disciples are mentioned only as having become non-returners, once-returners and streamwinners. Similarly, in **the (Kapilavatthu) Sakka Sutta** (A 10.46), the Buddha declares that even if one were to dwell only a night and a day properly observing the precept day (*uposatha*), one would spend thousands of years of utter happiness, and would become a once-returner or a non-returner, or “with absolute certainty” (*apaṇṇakam*), become a streamwinner (A 10.46/5:83-86).

**The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) records that during the Buddha’s last journey, he sojourned at Nādikā. While he was there, Ānanda asks him about the spiritual destiny of various disciples. The list of lay disciples mentioned by the Buddha is as follows:

<u>Non-returners:</u>	The laymen Kakudha, Kālīṅga, Nikāṭa, Kaṭṭissabha, Tuṭṭha, Santuṭṭha, Bhadda and Subhadda amongst a total of over 50 such lay followers.
<u>Once-returners:</u>	The layman Sudatta, amongst a total of over 90 such lay followers.
<u>Streamwinners:</u>	The laywoman Sujātā, amongst a total of over 500 such lay followers. (D 16.2.5-7/2:92-94) <sup>74</sup>

**The Janavasabha Sutta** (D 18), whose locale is also Nādikā, mentions

<u>Once-returners:</u>	Magadha followers [Number not mentioned].
<u>Streamwinners:</u>	Over 2,400 Magadha followers. (D 18.27/2:217 f)

It is interesting that here, too, no lay disciples are mentioned as having attained to arhathood. Even if such omissions are common throughout the Canon, it is wrong to say that no lay disciples have become arhats or even that the path of arhathood is not for the lay disciples: for, as we shall presently see, this is clearly not the case [15]. In other words, such a negative claim is at best based only on an argument from silence. In fact, there are at least two good reasons **why the lay arhat is not given the limelight in the early Canon**.

Firstly, as evident from the parable of the fields [3], the Buddha, like a wise farmer, would obviously first attend to the most fertile field, namely, the monastics who have dedicated their lives to wisdom and awakening. However, the laity is a very close second kind of field which could also give good yield. The second reason, the most vital one, as stated earlier [3], is that *the secret of the success of the spread of the Buddha Dharma is not that the Buddha preached to the masses, not by mass evangelism, but rather that he chooses his audience wisely, giving priority to them according to their readiness (upanissaya) to understand and practise what he has taught*.

In other words, it would clearly be more advantageous for Buddhism as a missionary religion (that is, conducive for the long life of the Teaching) to have a greater number of enlightened renunciants as full-time practitioners, exemplars and teachers rather than a big number of lay arhats who cannot be as committed to spiritual work as the renunciant can. At the end of this study [19], we shall look at the second reason why lay arhats are not as numerous as renunciant arhats.

## 14 The Dharma Mirror

**14.1 THE STREAMWINNER.** Let us now turn to an interesting teaching in **the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) that has so far been neglected. It is said that the Buddha, not to weary from Ānanda’s questioning regarding the spiritual destiny of various disciples at Nādikā, teaches him the Dharma Mirror or Mirror of the Dharma (*dharm’ādāsa*) by which if one wishes, one could declare of oneself,

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(*pañca,gati*) (D 3:234=33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal kingdom (*tirachāna,yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti,visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura,kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (*sugati*). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika & Bodhi (tr), *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 1999:14-19.

<sup>74</sup> This passage of **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.2.5-7/2:92-94) is split up into the 3 **Giṇjakāvasatha Ss** (S 55.8 & 9/5:356-359).

“I have destroyed hell, the animal birth, the realm of the departed [ghosts], the plane of misery, the evil destiny, the lower realm. I am a streamwinner, not bound for the lower world, sure of liberation, destined for awakening!”

This Dharma Mirror is none other than “**the four limbs of streamwinning**,”<sup>75</sup> that is,

- (1) “Here, householder, a noble disciple possesses wise faith<sup>76</sup> in the Buddha thus:  
‘The Blessed One is an arhat, the fully self-awakened one, accomplished in wisdom and conduct, well-farer, knower of worlds, peerless guide of tamable people, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.’
- (2) He possesses wise faith in the Dharma thus:  
‘Well-taught is the True Teaching of the Blessed One, to be self-realized, timeless, for one to “come and see,” leading onward, to be personally known by the wise.’
- (3) He possesses wise faith in the Sangha thus:  
‘Of good conduct is the Blessed One’s Community of Holy Disciples; of upright conduct is the Blessed One’s Community of Holy Disciples; of right conduct is the Blessed One’s Community of Holy Disciples; of proper conduct is the Blessed One’s Community of Holy Disciples. These four pairs of Persons, the eight Individuals are this Blessed One’s [70] Community of Holy Disciples: worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of salutation with the lotus-palms, an incomparable field of merit for the world.’
- (4) He possesses virtues dear to the noble ones,<sup>77</sup> unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, giving rise to concentration.”<sup>78</sup> (D 16.2.8-9/2:93 f)

That the Buddha should make a point of the Dharma Mirror is very significant. The significance becomes more evident when this teaching is read alongside the **Sa,upādi,sesa Sutta** (A 9.12),<sup>79</sup> where nine kinds of saints (short of the arhat) are mentioned, namely, five kinds of non-returners, the once-returner and these three kinds of streamwinners, namely, the one-seeder streamwinner, the clan-to-clan-goer streamwinner, and the seven-at-most streamwinner<sup>80</sup> (A 9.12.8-10/4:380-382).

<sup>75</sup> *Sotāpānassa aṅgāni* (D 33.1.11(14)/3:227), ie the qualities of one who has attained stream-winning. Cf “limbs for stream-winning,” *sotāpatti-y-aṅga* [6] above. For a shorter statement on the limbs of a streamwinner, see **Ogadha S** (S 55.2/5:343 f). On the faith of the streamwinner, see **Entering the Stream** = SD 3.3(5) & Gethin 2001: 116.

<sup>76</sup> “Wise faith,” *avecca-p, pasāda*. There are 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlaka, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati, saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,8, 401,23). “Wise faith” is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). **Gethin** speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective (eg ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387): “Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith in its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody...the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary” (Gethin 2001:207; my emphases). The streamwinner’s faith is defined in the **Vimamsaka S** (M 47) as “his faith is strong, supported by reasons, rooted in vision” (*ākāra, vatī saddhā dassana, mūlikā dāḥā*, M 47.16/1:320).

<sup>77</sup> “Virtues dear to the noble ones,” *ariya, kantāni sīlāni*. These virtues are explained at Vism 221 f. SA says that the noble ones do not violate the Five Precepts; hence, these virtues are dear to them (SA 2:74).

<sup>78</sup> “Unbroken, ... giving rise to concentration,” *akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi bhujissehi viññū-pasatthehi aparāmaṭṭhehi samādhi, sarivattanaikehi*. See UA 268. For details, see Vism 1.143 ff/51-58.

<sup>79</sup> See “The Layman and Dhyana,” SD 8.5(3) (2005).

<sup>80</sup> Respectively, *eka, bījī, kolaṅkola* and *satta-k, khattu, parama*: see **The Layman and Dhyana** = SD 8.5(3).

These passages from the Sa,upādisesa Sutta are interesting because of their treatment of the threefold training (*sikkhā*). These types of streamwinners are all “accomplished in moral virtue, but is moderately accomplished in concentration, moderately accomplished in wisdom” (*samādhismim mattaso, kārī, paññāya mattaso, kārī*), that is, their meditative attainment are at best “moderate” (*mattaso kārī*), which the Commentary glosses as “limited, not accomplished” (*pamāṇa, kārī na paripūra, kārī*, AA 4:174). This probably means that they are unable to attain full concentration, that is, they are not attainers of dhyana (*jhāna, lābhī*).

It is also possible that the phrase “**moderately accomplished in concentration**”<sup>81</sup> refers the dhyana “with mental cankers, partaking of merit, ripening in acquisitions [of the aggregates]”<sup>82</sup> (M 117.7, 13 etc). In any case, it is clear that one does not need to attain dhyana to become a streamwinner. The important point of this passage is that even if one is unable to become an arhat in this life, one could still become a streamwinner, and within seven lives at most one would gain arhathood.

As such, it is not really difficult to gain awakening. This generous, albeit somewhat enigmatic, remark made by the Buddha at the conclusion of the Sutta confirms such a facility for awakening:

Not until now, Sāriputta, has this Dharma discourse been thus declared to the monks, the nuns, the laymen or the laywomen. What is the reason for this? Lest after listening to this Dharma discourse they become heedless! However, Sāriputta, through my being questioned, I have spoken this Dharma discourse. (A 9.12.10/4:382)

In other words, the Buddha speaks very little regarding the ease with which lay followers could attain stream-winning so as to encourage his disciple to strive for the highest goal, arhathood. In this way, the Teaching could be experienced and taught by the most able and wisest of disciples for the benefit of the greatest number of beings.

**14.2 THE LESSER STREAMWINNER.** If one thinks that even becoming a streamwinner in this life is difficult, if not impossible, then one could become a “lesser streamwinner” (*cūḷa sotāpanna, cullaka sotāpanna*). This notion is mentioned in **Buddhaghosa’s** Visuddhi, magga (Vism) and in **Buddhadatta’s** Abhidhammāvatāra (Abdhv) at the conclusion of the exposition of “purification by crossing beyond doubt” (*kaṅkhā, vitaraṇa, visuddhi*) of the seven purifications:<sup>83</sup>

*Iminā pana ñāṇena samannāgato vipassako Buddha, sāsane laddh’assāso laddho, paṭiṭṭho niyata, gatiko cūḷa, sotāpanno nāma hoti.*

Now one with insight possessed of this knowledge (of the crossing beyond doubt) is one who has found solace in the Buddha’s teaching, who has found a footing, whose destiny is sure—he is called a lesser streamwinner. (Vism 19.27/605; cf Abdhv 119)

Here, Gethin notes:

Therefore what seems to be envisaged with the notion of the *cūḷa-sotāpanna* is that the completion of the fourth purification [of the crossing beyond doubt] marks a definite beginning of the process that culminates in the path of stream-attainment proper, the *lokuttara* path moment. One might then put it that, loosely speaking, the path of stream-attainment extends to the conclusion

<sup>81</sup> *Samādhismim mattaso kārī*. See **The Layman and Dhyana** = SD 8.5.3b, 2005.

<sup>82</sup> *S’āsavā puñña, bhāgiyā upadhi, vepakkā*. See **The Layman and Dhyana** = SD 8.5.3b, 2005.

<sup>83</sup> The 7 purifications (*satta, visuddhi*) are: (1) purification of moral virtue (*sīla, visuddhi*); (2) purification of mind (*citta, visuddhi*); (3) purification of view (*dīṭṭhi, visuddhi*); (4) purification by crossing over doubt (*kaṅkhā, vitaraṇa, visuddhi*); (5) purification by the knowledge and vision of the path and the not-path (*maggāmagga, ñāṇa, dāssana, visuddhi*); (6) purification by the knowledge and vision of progress (*paṭipadā, ñāṇa, dāssana, visuddhi*); (7) purification by knowledge and vision (*ñāṇa, dāssana, visuddhi*) (**Ratha, vinīta S**, M 24.8-15/1:147-149; Vism 1-710). For details, see **Bhāvanā** = SD 15.1(11).

of the fourth purification (ie the acquisition of the knowledge that causes one to pass beyond doubt) up to the seventh purification (“by knowledge and seeing”).

(Gethin 2001:137, see also 133-138)

The term *cūḷa, sotāpanna* or *culla, sotāpanna* is a commentarial one, and is not found in the Canon. However, the notion of a “lesser streamwinner” is found in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1),<sup>84</sup> the key passages runs as follows:

Monks, the eye is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The ear is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The nose is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The tongue is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The body is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The mind is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

Monks, one who has faith thus, who firmly believes these truths [is convinced of these truths], is called **a faith-follower**,...

Monks, one who accepts these truths after pondering over them with some wisdom thus,<sup>85</sup> is called **a truth-follower**,

he has entered the fixed course of rightness, entered the plane of superior persons, gone beyond the plane of the worldlings.<sup>86</sup>

He is incapable of doing any intentional deed by which he might be reborn in hell, or in the animal world, or in the ghost realm. He is incapable of dying without attaining the fruit of stream-winning.<sup>87</sup> (S 25.1/3:225)

The message of this short but remarkable sutta is clear: whether one merely has faith in the impermanence of the six senses (that is, as a faith-follower, *saddhā’nusārī*), or accepts this truth after wisely examining (that is, as a truth-follower, *dhammānusārī*), one is assured of becoming a streamwinner. One would not die without having realized the fruit of stream-winning.<sup>88</sup>

## LAY FOLLOWERS & ARHATHOOD

### 15 Lay arhats

**15.1 THE MAHĀ VACCHAGOTTA SUTTA** [12] is not alone in declaring the sainthood of the laity. There are a significant number of suttas that speak of the spiritual attainments of lay disciples. **The Soṇa Sutta 1** (S 22.49), for example, records how the Buddha teaches Soṇa the householder’s son of Rājagaha, by way of a Socratic dialogue, that on the basis of the five aggregates, one should never harbour conceit (*māna*) by thinking “I am better than...” or “I am equal to [as good as]...” or “I am inferior to ...” because the aggregates are all “impermanent, suffering, subject to change.” Any kind of aggregate whatever—“whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near”<sup>89</sup>—all should be seen as they really are with right wisdom thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this

<sup>84</sup> S 25.1/3:225 = SD 16.7. See also Gethin 2001:133-138.

<sup>85</sup> *Yassa kho bhikkhave ime dhammā evaṃ paññāya mattaso nijjhānaṃ khamanti.*

<sup>86</sup> *Yo bhikkhave ime dhamme evaṃ saddahati adhimuccati, ayaṃ vuccati saddhā’nusārī okkanto sammatta, - niyāmaṃ sappurisa, bhūmiṃ okkanto vītivatto putthajjana, bhūmiṃ.* The operative verbs here are *saddahati* (“he has faith (in)”) and *adhimuccati* (“he resolves, adheres to, is sure of”). I have rendered *adhimuccati* here as “(he) firmly believes...”.  
<sup>87</sup> *Abhabbo taṃ kammaṃ kātuṃ yaṃ kammaṃ katvā nirayaṃ vā tiracchāna, yoniṃ vā petti, visayaṃ vā uppajjeyya. Abhabbo ca tāva kālaṃ kātuṃ yāva na sotāpatti, phalaṃ sacchikaroti.*

<sup>88</sup> See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1) = SD 16.7 esp Intro (1.6).

<sup>89</sup> *Yaṃ kiñci...atītānāgata, paccupannaṃ ajjhattaṃ vā bahiddhā vā olārikaṃ vā sukhumaṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre vā santike vā...* (S 22.48/3:47, etc). This classification of the aggregates is explained in detail in **Vibhaṅga** and briefly in **Visuddhi, magga**: “internal” = physical sense-organs; “external” = physical sense-objects; “gross” = that which impin-

is not my self.”<sup>90</sup> Such teachings, usually given to monastics, are also here taught to lay followers. At the end of the discourse, Soṇa the householder’s son becomes an arhat (S 22.49/3:48-50) [6].

In the short (**Upāsaka**) **Mahānāma Sutta** (S 55.37), the Buddha gives one of the most comprehensive definitions of a **lay follower** (*upāsaka*), in answer to a question by Mahānāma. A lay follower is

- (a) one who has gone for refuge (*saraṇaṃ gato*) in the Three Jewels;
- (b) one who is accomplished in virtue (*sīla,sampanno*), that is, who keeps to the five precepts;
- (c) one who is accomplished in faith (*saddhā,sampanno*), that is, faith in the awakening of the Buddha;
- (d) one who is accomplished in charity (*cāga,sampanno*); and
- (e) one who is accomplished in wisdom (*paññā,sampanno*) (S 55.37/5:395).

The last factor is especially interesting, and is stated here in full thus:

Here, Mahānāma, a lay follower is wise, possessing wisdom directed to arising and passing away, noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering. (S 55.37.7/5:395)

“In this passage,” observes Samuels, “there is neither a portrayal of a layperson’s life as being replete with hindrances nor an assertion that a lay follower (*upāsaka*) must become a monastic.”<sup>91</sup> In fact, the last passage can be taken as a definition of awakening (*bodhi*), that is, the complete destruction of suffering.

**15.2 LAY ARHATS.** The names of many lay arhats are mentioned in the Suttas. **The Vajjiya,mahita Sutta** (A 10.94 /5:189-192) records how Vajjiya,māhita [8], a householder of Campā, a faithful and wise lay follower refutes the wrong views of a group of wanderers that the Buddha is biased against asceticism and is a nihilist. In **the Chakka Nipāta** (“the book of sixes”) of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, Vajji,māhita is included in the roll of names of lay disciples “have seen the deathless” (*amata-d,dasa*) (A 6.120.1/3:451), that is, awakened as an arhat.

The Chakka Nipāta of the Aṅguttara Nikāya has a series of twenty-one suttas called **Amat’addasa Sutta**,<sup>92</sup> each mentioning a lay disciple “who have seen the deathless” (*amata-d,dasa*) through having attained the following six virtues:

- (1) Wise faith in the Buddha (*buddhe avecca-p,pasāda*);
- (2) Wise faith in the Dharma (*dhamme avecca-p,pasāda*);
- (3) Wise faith in the Sangha (*saṅghe avecca-p,pasāda*);
- (4) Noble moral virtue [of the saints] (*ariya sīla*);
- (5) Noble wisdom [of the saints] (*ariya ñāṇa*);
- (6) Noble liberation [of the saints] (*ariya vimutti*).

It is clear that these six virtues are an extended version of the four limbs of stream-winning (*sotāpanassa aṅgāni*) [6, 14]. The full *amat’addasa* list of awakened lay followers thus spiritually endowed (that is, they are **arhats**) are as follow:

- (1) Tapussa the householder.
- (2) Bhallika the householder.
- (3) Sudatta, that is, Anātha,piṇḍika the householder.<sup>93</sup>
- (4) Citta the householder of Macchika,saṇḍa.

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ges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “subtle” = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “far” = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “near” = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41).

<sup>90</sup> See **Anatta,lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.27).

<sup>91</sup> These 5 qualities are all integral to a lay follower, and they are not separate “types” of lay followers, as Samuels 1999:237 seems to take them.

<sup>92</sup> A 6.131-151 (PTS ed 3:451).

<sup>93</sup> In **Anātha,piṇḍik’ovāda S** (M 143/3:258-263), Anātha,piṇḍika is said to have been reborn in Tusita [11]. It is likely that he attained arhathood there in due course.



- (5) Hatthaka Ālavaka [of Ālavī].
- (6) Mahānāma the Sakya.
- (7) Ugga the householder of Vesālī.
- (8) Uggata the householder.
- (9) Sūra Ambaṭṭha.
- (10) Jivaka Komāra, bhacca (the doctor).
- (11) Nakula, pitā the householder.
- (12) Tava, kaṇṇika the householder.
- (13) Pūraṇa the householder.
- (14) Isi, datta the householder.
- (15) Sandhāna the householder.
- (16) Vijaya the householder.
- (17) Vajjiya, māhita the householder.
- (18) Meṇḍaka the householder.
- (19) Vāsetṭha the lay disciple.
- (20) Ariṭṭha the lay disciple.
- (21) Sāragga the lay disciple. (A 6.131-151/3:450 f; PTS ed A 6.119-120)

In early Buddhism, **lay arhats** form an integral part of the noble community of disciples (*ariya, -sāvaka, saṅgha*), comprising the whole spiritual community of saints who are monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. The Buddha is very clear about his mission from the very start, as evident from this passage in **the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16.3.34-36/2:112-114) where the Buddha declares that he would not pass away until all the fourfold spiritual assembly of accomplished disciples are established [17]. Such lay saints have practised the Teaching, mastered and penetrated it, and go on to declare the Dharma for the benefit of others. They have all known the Dharma and they make the Dharma known.

## 16 The Gilāyana Sutta

**The Gilāyana Sutta** (S 55.54) is an important text dealing with **lay arhathood**. Mahānāma the Sakya asks the body about how a “wise lay follower”<sup>94</sup> should counsel another “wise lay follower” who is seriously ill or dying. The Buddha replies that they should be given **the four assurances** (*assāsaniyā dhammā*),<sup>95</sup> that is, the four limbs of stream-winning, namely, wise faith in the Three Jewels and moral virtue praised by the saints [6, 14]. Then he should be instructed to let go of thinking about parents, about wife and children, and about sense-pleasures. He should then let go of even desire for celestial sense-pleasure:

‘But, friend, even the Brahmā world is impermanent, uncertain,<sup>96</sup> trapped in self-identity.’<sup>97</sup>  
 Reverend,<sup>98</sup> it would be good if your mind let go of the Brahmā world and you direct<sup>99</sup> your mind to the cessation of self-identity.’<sup>100</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Sa, pañña upāsaka*, Comy glosses as “a streamwinner” (SA 3:291). In practice, however, this could refer to any capable person wishing to counsel the sick or dying who has a reasonably clear mind.

<sup>95</sup> Also called “the Mirror of the Dharma” [14].

<sup>96</sup> “Uncertain,” *adhuva*, more usu *addhuva*, “not fixed, not permanent, uncertain, doubtful” (CPD).

<sup>97</sup> “Trapped in self-identity,” *sakkāya pariyāpanno*, lit “included in self-identity”; alt tr “enmeshed in self-identity.” Childers (DPL): “included, contained, belonging to.” As in **Sīha S** (S 22.78) where the devas who regard themselves as permanent, stable and eternal are really “impermanent, unstable, not eternal, trapped in self-identity” (S 3:85). The Comy there explains the expression as “included within the five aggregates”. Thus when the Buddha teaches them the Dharma sealed with the three characteristics [impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, not-self], exposing the faults in the round of existence, the fear of knowledge enters them (SA 2:288).

<sup>98</sup> “Reverend,” *āyasmā*, like *bhante* (venerable sir), is usu used in addressing monks but is here used for lay followers. The Buddha’s instruction is given in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, using *āyasmā* for the dying “wise lay followers”. However, keepin to modern English idiom, I have rendered it as “reverend, you” as applicable.

If he says thus, ‘My mind has turned away from the Brahmā world and is directed to the cessation of self-identity,’—then, Mahānāma, **there is no difference between a lay follower who is thus liberated in mind and a monk who has been liberated in mind for a hundred years,**<sup>101</sup> that is, there is no difference between the one liberation and the other.<sup>102</sup>

(S 55.54/5:408-410)

The closing paragraph is very significant in that, in terms of spiritual liberation, the dying layman who has directed his mind to the cessation of self-identity (becoming one who is liberated in mind) is not different from a monk who has been liberated in mind for a hundred years.” This means that the layman dies an arhat.

## 17 The fourfold assembly

The possibility of the laity becoming saints, including becoming arhats, is not an afterthought of the Buddha, nor are lay arhats some kind of appendage to the monastic Sangha of saints. From the very start, the Buddha has thought of the lay saints as being part of the fourfold noble community of saints (*ariya, -saṅgha*). This is clearly evident from a number of suttas, such as **the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (M 16). The Sutta records that during the Buddha’s last days, once when he is alone, Māra, the personification of Death, appears to him and invites him to pass away. The Buddha replies to Māra in the very same words that he had used when Māra appeared to him under the Goatherd’s Banyan Tree during the fifth week after the Awakening (after Brahmā had invited the Buddha to teach the Dharma)<sup>103</sup> that he will not pass away until there are the fourfold community of saint disciples (*sāvaka*):

[At the Cāpāla Shrine.]

**3.34** “Ānanda, once, when I had just attained the supreme self-awakening, I stayed under the Goatherd’s Banyan Tree on the bank of the river Nerañjarā at Uruvelā. Then Māra the Evil One came to me, stood at one side and said:

‘May the Blessed One now attain final Nirvana, may the Well-farer now attain final Nirvana. Now is the time for the Blessed One’s final Nirvana.’

**3.35** Then I said to Māra:

‘Evil One, I will not enter final Nirvana until I have **monk disciples**<sup>104</sup> who are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, bearers of the Dharma, trained in accordance with the Dharma, correctly trained and walking the path of the Dharma, who will pass on what they have gained from their Teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyse it, make it clear; until they shall be able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma in all its wonder.’”

<sup>99</sup> “Direct,” *upsamharāhi*, ie “draw or collect (your mind) towards”.

<sup>100</sup> “Cessation of self-identity,” *sakkāya, nirodha*, ie Nirvana. This instruction is direct the dying person’s mind away from rebirth in the Brahmā world towards the attainment of Nirvana.

<sup>101</sup> I follow the Thai Pali here. See S:B 1961 n371.

<sup>102</sup> “Between the one liberation and the other,” *vimuttiya vimuttiṇi*, as at A 3:34 in ref to arhathood. Comy says that when one liberation is compared to the other, there is no difference to be found (SA 3:292). In effect, this is a statement that the dying layman has become an arhat.

<sup>103</sup> See **Satta, vassa S** (S 1:122-124). See also J 1:78.

<sup>104</sup> *Bhikkhū...sāvaka*. D:W renders this as “monks and disciples,” but it seems out of context. I take it as a *tadpurusha* (P *tappurisa* cpd: see Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 1974:77 f), or more exactly a “split *tadpurusha*,” ie as *bhikkhu, sāvaka*, and also *bhikkhunī, sāvikā, upāsakā, sāvakā* and *upāsikā, sāvikā*. Following this, EM Hare’s alt tr is “till my monks <nuns, laymen, laywomen> shall be disciples...” (A:H 4:207 f ad A 4:310 f). If we accept Walshe’s tr, then “monks” (*bhikkhū*) here would refer to the “worldlings,” that is, those still outside the path to awakening, while “disciples” (*sāvaka*) refers to those monks on the path, that is, one of the eight types of Saints. This categorization similarly applies to the other three pairs of “followers and disciples.” However, I think the context here refer only to the 4 types of noble saints (*ariya, sāvaka*)—ie the sainthood of the monastic and the lay—and not to the worldly Sangha nor unawakened lay assembly.

‘Evil One, I will not enter final Nirvana until I have **nun disciples** who are accomplished...

‘Evil One, I will not enter final Nirvana until I have **laymen disciples** who are accomplished...

‘Evil One, I will not enter final Nirvana until I have **laywomen disciples** who are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, bearers of the Dharma, trained in accordance with the Dharma, correctly trained and walking the path of the Dharma, who will pass on what they have gained from their Teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyse it, make it clear; until they shall be able by means of the Dharma to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the Dharma in all its wonder .”<sup>105</sup> (D 16.3.34-36/2:112-114; cf 16.3.7-9/2:104-106)

Jeffrey Samuels, in his paper, “Views of householders and lay disciples in the *Sutta Piṭaka*” (1999: 237),<sup>106</sup> observes that the above passage, found almost verbatim in **the Bhūmi,cāla Sutta** (A 8.70/4:310 f), adds a crucial term—**patta,yoga-k,khema**<sup>107</sup>—to the qualification of the four kinds of disciples, that is:

D 16.3: viyattā vinītā visāradā bahu-s,sutā dhammadharā...

A 8.70: viyattā vinītā visāradā **patta,yoga-k,khemā** bahu-s,sutā dhammadharā...

Fully translated, it reads “accomplished, trained, skilled, **attained to the security from the yoke**, learned, bearers of the Dharma.” This important phrase, **patta,yoga-k,khema**—referring to the attainment to the perfect peace of Nirvana—is found in **the Bhūmi,cāla Sutta** (A 8.70/4:310 f) but not in the **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** identical passage. It is possible that in the process of the compiling of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, this important term might have been omitted (rather than it being *added* into the Bhūmi,cāla Sutta).

## 18 Is one gone forth the foremost in recluseship?

There are a number of other important passages that imply the attainment of Nirvana by the laity. In such passages, we find the interesting term **ñāya** (Skt *nyāya*), which has a range of meanings, as evident from the *Pali-English Dictionary*:

1. method, truth, system, *later* = logic: *ñāya, gantha* book on logic (Dāṭhv 3.41);
2. fitness, right manner, propriety, right conduct, often applied to the “right path” (*ariya, magga* = *ariya, ñāya*, V 1:10) D 3:120; S 5:19, 141, 167 f, 185; A 2:95, 4:426, 5:194; Dh 1:249; *ariya, ñāya* S 2:68, 5:387; = the causal law S 5:388; = *kaḷyāna, kusala, dhammatā* A 2:36; used in apposition with *dhamma* and *kusala* D 2:151; M 2:181, 197; is replaced herein by *sacca* S 1:240; = *nibbāna* at Vism 219, 524; *ñāya, paṭipanna*, walking in the right path S 5:343; A 2:56, 3:212, 286, 5:183.

The *Buddhist Dictionary* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 1972) adds that *ñāya* is

3. “right method,” often used as a name for the noble eightfold path (see *magga*), eg in **the Sati-paṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10, D 22).
4. Nirvana (“Nirvana is called the true way, *ñāyo vuccati nibbānam*) (Vism 7.92/219).

**The Paṭipadā Sutta 2** (S 45.24), for example, says

<sup>105</sup> “The Dharma in all its wonders,” *sappāṭihāriya dhamma*.

<sup>106</sup> Samuels however does not give the reference to **Bhūmi,cāla S** (A 8.70/4:310-237).

<sup>107</sup> *Yoga* (yoke) here, like *ogha* (flood), is a syn for *āsava*, lit “cankers” and comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the canker of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*dīṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāśava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). The list of 3 cankers (omitting the canker of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsava* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

Monks, whether for a lay person or for one gone forth, I praise the right way. Whether it is a lay person or one gone forth who is practising rightly, because of undertaking the right way of practice, he attains **the true way** (*ñāya*),<sup>108</sup> the wholesome Dharma. And what, monks, is that right way? It is *the noble eightfold path*... This, monks, is called the right way.

Monks, whether for a lay person or for one gone forth, I praise the right way. Whether it is a lay person or one gone forth who is practising rightly, because of undertaking the right way of practice, he attains **the true way**, the wholesome Dharma.<sup>109</sup> (S 45.24/5:18 f)

The Commentary glosses “the true way” (*ñāyaṃ dhammaṃ*) as “the noble path,” ie the noble eightfold path (*ariya,magga,dhammaṃ*) (SA 3:132). **The Pañca,bhara,bhaya Sutta** (S 12.41), addressed to Anāthapiṇḍika on the fruits of stream-winning, defines *ñāya* as “skillful considering of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*)” (S 12.42.5/2:70).<sup>110</sup> The Commentary gives both meanings, that is, as “the noble eightfold path” and as “dependent arising” (SA 2:73). In other words, in the Paṭipadā Sutta, *ñāya* means “the way to Nirvana.”

The importance of **the Paṭipadā Sutta** (S 45.24) is attested by the fact that it is the basis for a “dilemma” in the **Milinda,pañha** (Miln 242-244). The gist of the dilemma is given here:

[Milinda:]

If, venerable Nāgasena, a white-clad householder, enjoying sense-pleasures, dwelling in a lodging crowded with wife and children, accustomed to Benares sandalwood, using garlands, perfumes and unguents, handling gold and silver [money], his hair in a top-knot adorned with a variety of jewels and ornaments, is practising the true way... asceticism (*tapo,kamma*) then is fruitless, going forth is useless, keeping to the monastic rules of training is fruitless, undertaking the ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*) is vain.

What is the good of building up suffering in these ways? Is not happiness then to be won simply through happiness?

[Nāgasena:]

Going forth, sire, has many special qualities. It is not possible to count them.

All that is to be done, sire, by one who has gone forth takes effect quickly and without delay.

Why? One who has gone forth has few wishes, aloof, alone, assertive, without desire, homeless, endowed with moral virtue, living an austere life, skilled in the ascetic practices. (Miln 242-244)

These numerous qualities of the renunciant saints are connoted in the parable of “the city of the Dharma” (Miln 341-347). But Nāgasena makes no mention of the lay followers’ ability at attaining sainthood. Later on, however, he concedes that the laity can attain Nirvana, but the groundwork has been done in previous lives:

Those householders, sire, living in a house, enjoying sense-pleasures, who realize the peace and highest goal of Nirvana, have all in former births completed the training, and had finished all the stages of the thirteen ascetic practices. Their conduct and progress having thus been purified, they now, even as householders, realize the peace and highest goal of Nirvana. (Miln 352)

<sup>108</sup> Although Comy (eg SA 2:73) tries to relate *ñāya* to *ñāṇa*, it is actually derived from *ni + i*.

<sup>109</sup> *Gihino vā’haṃ bhikkhave pabbajito vā sammā,paṭipadaṃ vaṇṇemi. Gihi vā bhikkhave pabbajito vā sammā,-paṭipanno sammā,paṭipattādhikaraṇa,hetu ārādhako hoti ñāya dhammaṃ kusalaṃ. Katamā ca bhikkhave sammā,-paṭipadā, seyyāthidaṃ sammā,dīṭṭhi,,sammā.samādhī. Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave sammā,paṭipadā. Gihino vā’haṃ bhikkhave pabbajitassa vā sammā,paṭipadaṃ vaṇṇemi.Gihi vā bhikkhave pabbajito vā sammā,paṭipanno sammā,-paṭipattādhikaraṇa,hetu ārādhako hoti ñāya dhammaṃ kusalaṃ.* S:B omits the second last sentence. Also A 2.4.10/1:69.

<sup>110</sup> See SD 3.3.3(2).

## 19 Destiny of the lay arhat

In the **Tevijja Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 71), when Vacchagotta asks, “Master Gotama, is there any householder who, without abandoning the householder’s fetters,<sup>111</sup> when the body has broken up, makes an end of suffering?” the Buddha answers that *there is none* (M 71.11/1:483). Here, “householder’s fetters” (*gihi,samyojana*) refers to attachment to the requisites of a householder (such as land, ornaments, wealth, grain, etc, says the Mahā Tīkā).

The Majjhima Commentary says that even laymen, on becoming arhats, have destroyed all attachment to worldly things and thus either went forth as monks or passed away immediately after their attainment and also mentions Santati the privy councillor, Uggasena the treasurer’s son, and the boy Vīta,soka as examples of layman arhats (MA 3:196). This point about the lay arhat’s destiny is discussed in **the Milinda,pañha**:

There are two destinies for a householder who has attained arhathood: either, that very day, he goes forth or he attains final Nirvana.  
(Miln 264; cf 164)

This well known statement is only found in the Commentaries (eg MA 3:196) but is untraced in the Canon.

The Milinda,pañha explains that the lay disciple, upon attaining to arhathood, either ordains that very day or will enter final Nirvana. This, Nāgasena argues, is not the defect of arhathood but the defect of being a layperson, just as in the case of someone who has a stomach disorder, “it is not the defect in the food, but the defect of the stomach” (Miln 265). Two famous canonical examples of lay arhats are Yasa and Bāhiya Dārucīriya. Yasa joined the Order (V 1:17) but Bāhiya died shortly.<sup>112</sup>

My own understanding of this interesting situation—that layman arhats must join the order or die within a day—is a dramatic way of saying that on ordaining, they are bound by the Vinaya, so that they have to go on almsround, keep healthy, teach the others and be an example to them. In other words, one of the purposes of the Vinaya is that the monastics live on for the sake on the teaching.

## 20 The monastic-lay divide

Jeffrey Samuels, in his paper, “Views of householders and lay disciples in the *Sutta Piṭaka*” (1999), tries to show that in the Buddhism of the Buddha’s time, there were almost no difference in the spiritual practices between the monastics and the lay, that the laity attained to sainthood just like the monastics (albeit in lesser but significant numbers), and that the monastic-lay divide is less distinct than it is today. He goes on to question the cause of the strong disparity today between the ordained community and the lay followers.

While these two categories appear distinct and separate to us today, these two categories might have been more indistinct and less meaningful during the period represented in the Pāli canon. For instance, in some of the passages highlighted, the lay community, like the monastic community, is shown to be given profound teachings, to have practiced various forms of Buddhist meditation and to have reached the highest goal of the tradition—enlightenment.

If the two communities are less distinct in the period of the Pāli canon, then it might be fruitful to question when and under what circumstances did the sharp distinction first arise. Is it possible that the early centuries of Mahāyāna Buddhism, with its posturing about the superiority

<sup>111</sup> **The Kathā,vatthu** says that the householder’s fetters are such that one “would indulge in sexual relations, cause sexual relations to arise, indulge in a house crowded with children, seek to enjoy sandalwood from Kāsī, wear garlands, use perfumes and unguents, accept gold and silver [money], acquire goats and sheep, poultry and pigs, elephants, cattle, horses and mares, partridges, quails, peacocks and pheasants, wear attractive turbans, wear white garments with long tunics, be a house-dweller all his life” (Kvu 267 f). See Masefield 1986:11.

<sup>112</sup> On **Yasa**, see V 1:15-20; DhA 1:72, & also **The Great Commission** = SD 7.6. On **Bāhiya Dārucīriya**, see U 1.10/6-9; Ap 2:475 ff; AA 1:282; DhA 2:209 ff; UA 77 ff; cf Dh 142.



of its own path because it includes the laity, may have prompted the Theravāda tradition to define itself against the Mahāyāna school by posturing a distinct opposition between the lay and the monastic communities? (Samuels 1999:238 f)

As Samuels himself admits, this question merits a separate in-depth study. However, a few closing remarks here are in order. Historically, it should be noted that the Mahāyāna (which first developed in India, before or around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE) had no contact whatsoever with the Theravāda (already entrenched in Sri Lanka by Asoka's time, that is, the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE).<sup>113</sup> As regards the distinct monastic-lay divide existing today, an important reason for it is the strong tendency amongst Buddhists today to be teacher-centred rather than teaching-centred. In other words, most lay Buddhists today are more familiar with the particular (even idiosyncratic) teachings and persons of particular gurus, ajahns, sayadaws and teachers rather than with the canonical teachings themselves. While the nominal Buddhist today generally has very little useful knowledge of Buddhist scripture, the lay practitioner has little more than a pious respect for the Canon, taking their respective gurus as the final spiritual authority.

In the realities of **religious economics**, there are great advantages in the contemporary monastic-lay divide. The monastics have become religious virtuosi, ritual specialists, entrepreneurs (*seṭṭhi*) and the new royalty attracting generous donations, high fees and pious perks from a materialistic lay clientele in an urbanized society. Otherwise, the predominant form of Buddhism of a community is often defined by **the seths**<sup>114</sup> predominating in that community.<sup>115</sup> In this scenario, where charisma replaces canon, the monk has become priest, and the laity clients.

The Buddha's Teachings began with the awakening of an insightful man in search of spiritual liberation, found it, and who, out of his wisdom and compassion, proclaimed his awakening to the world through a spiritually accomplished community of monastic and lay practitioners. The laity supported the renunciants with their basic supports of almsfood, clothing, shelter and medicine so that the renunciants could devote themselves to speedily win awakening. A significant number of the laity, too, worked towards awakening, even if the majority did good works storing up their merits for a future that would attract more conducive conditions for awakening.

In the final analysis, it is vital to remember that every monastic and saint was a lay person before. The Buddha himself never once said that arhathood could be attained only by the renunciant. On the contrary, **the Kathāvatthu**, for example, dealing with the question on whether a layperson may become an arhat,

<sup>113</sup> See for example Walpola Rahula, *Zen and the Taming of the Bull*, London: Gordon Fraser, 1978:72.

<sup>114</sup> In "The Spread of Buddhism Beyond India" (Lecture, 2004) §37, Piya Tan applies the following framework of the 4 periods of Buddhist history, lasting roughly 500 years each (except the last), to **the social development of Buddhism**, in which the seth predominates in the 4<sup>th</sup> period (our own times):

1<sup>st</sup> period—the liberated saint or **Arhat**, in whom all cravings are extinguished and who will no more be reborn.  
2<sup>nd</sup> period—the **Bodhisattva**, the hypostasis (or embodiment) of compassion, that is, a being (human or otherwise) who wishes to save other beings, even at the cost of postponing his own enlightenment.

3<sup>rd</sup> period—the **Siddha**, the holy man or religious adept who is totally in harmony with his environment that he is under no constraint whatsoever and as a free agent is able to manipulate the cosmic forces both inside and outside himself.

4<sup>th</sup> period—the **Seth (Śreṣṭhī)**, a secular professional or executive, a person of means, whose charisma and social success are regarded as blessings of past good karma, as such, worthy of emulation and respect as a teacher. [*Seth* is a modern Hindi word for a wealthy entrepreneur or businessman. The traditional definition of *seṭṭhi* is given in the PED as "foreman of a guild, treasurer, banker, "City man," wealthy merchant, V 1:15 f, 271 f, 2:110 f, 157, S 1:89...etc."]

An interesting development in lay Buddhism in Malaysia and Singapore is the promotion of the notion of **Buddhism as corporate success**—that Buddhism in urban Singapore is effectively run by successful lay professionals. The success—academic, social and economic—of a lay Buddhist teacher or leader is regarded as his or her "good karma," and such a person serves as a model or ideal for other lay Buddhists.

<sup>115</sup> "Community" here refers to a "society" (ie a registered body), a section of society at large or a following around a Buddhist teacher.

states that the Uttarāpathakas (“Northerners”)<sup>116</sup> answer affirmatively, mentioning Yasa the layman, Uttiya the householder and Setu the brahmin youth as examples of lay arhats (Kvu 1:268), and its Commentary (KvuA 4.1/73) quotes the Buddha Word in **the Dhammapada**:

Though well adorned [finely clad], if he fares in calmness,  
At peace, tamed, self-controlled, living the holy life,  
Having put down the rod towards all beings—  
He is a brahmin, he is a recluse, he is a monk.<sup>117</sup> (Dh 142; Kvu:SR 157 f)

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<sup>116</sup> Uttarāpathaka refers to a “northerner,” probably an inhabitant of the region of Gandhāra, Kasmīra (Kashmir) and Kambojā. See DPPN: Uttarāpatha.

<sup>117</sup> *Alaṅkato ce pi samāṇi careyya | santo danto niyato brahmacārī | sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ | so brāhmaṇo so samaṇo so bhikkhu.*