QUESTIONS ON SELF AND PERCEPTION IN THE POṬṬHAPĀDASUTTA OF THE DĪGHANIKĀYĀ

The study of the Poṭṭhapādasutta is of particular interest to us, as it deals with awareness and self, related and even identified by people not professing the Buddhist creed. It will give us another chance to correctly evaluate early Buddhism's opinion regarding them.

The Poṭṭhapādasutta does not display the characteristics of a masterly composition in the way, for instance, the Brahma-jālasutta does. For one thing, its literary unity is rather loose; strung together, we find in it several topics unrelated to each other. Secondly, even the author felt compelled to let “two or three days pass” (18) from the first to the second dialogue between the Buddha and Poṭṭhapāda, which will be taken by us as the two parts composing the sutta.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUTTA

The sutta opens with a general introduction (1–5) giving the circumstances in which the meeting of the Buddha with Poṭṭhapāda took place. This general introduction offers two striking features.

As a rule, if we are to go by the information provided by the suttas of the Dīghanikāya, other people took the first step in order to meet the Buddha and consult him or argue with him. In this sutta the Buddha himself takes the initiative to go and see Poṭṭhapāda before entering Sāvatthī for his alms round.

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2 Numbers within round brackets will correspond with the paragraph numbers in the Nalanda Edition, BHĪKKHU J. KASHYAP (Gen. Editor), The Dīghanikāya (1. Silakkhandha Vagga), Pali Publication Board (Bihar Government), 1958. Other quotations from the Tipiṭaka will conform also with the same Nalanda Edition.

3 Another such case is found in D III, p. 3 f., Paṭṭikasutta, where the Buddha delays, in the same way, his entry into Anupiya for alms in order to visit Bhaggava. There is in both cases an exact literal correspondence in the paragraphs that state this circumstance. In both cases the Buddha is politely welcomed and invited to be seated.
The introduction draws an eloquent contrast between the boisterous behaviour of mendicants belonging to other sects as well as their addiction to idle talk, and the atmosphere of silence of which the Buddha was so fond as well as his habit to speak only of matters that were spiritually profitable.

PART I:

ON PERCEPTION AND THE UNEXPLAINED QUESTIONS

This part begins with a question of Potti̯hapāda to the Buddha concerning *abhisaññā-nirodho* ("restraint of consciousness"), which is the final aim of all yogic practices. He refers to samañas and brāhmañyas who having met to discuss such matters had given the following solutions to the problem:

1. According to some, ideas (*saññā*) arise and cease in a man without reason, without cause; when they arise, man is conscious, (*saññi*); when they cease, man is unconscious (*asaññī*).

2. Others rejected that opinion and said that "awareness" is man's self (*saññā... purissassa attā*). That "self-awareness" comes and goes. When it comes man is conscious; when it goes, man is unconscious.

3. Others asserted, in opposition to the two previous views, that there are some samañas and brāhmañyas endowed with special powers and thus able to infuse ideas (*saññā*) into others and to withdraw them. When they infuse those ideas into a man, he is conscious; when they withdraw them, he is unconscious.

4. Others said, against the immediately preceding ones, that what they described as the work of men endowed with special powers was to be attributed to deities commanding those special powers.

Recapitulating, we may say that some would not admit of any cause for the production or vanishing of ideas or awareness; others propounded that ideas or awareness, identified with the self, come and go making thereby man conscious or unconscious as the case may be; still others thought that ideas and awareness in a man depended on the influence exercised on them either by other men or by gods endowed with special miraculous powers.

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4 The paragraph that enumerates the topics of conversation of the three hundred followers of Potti̯hapāda reproduces literally the paragraph of the *Brahmajālasutta* containing the topics of conversation from which Gotama the samaña abstains. Cfr. D I, p. 9, *Brahmajālasutta*, 17.
The main topic in question is here the cessation or restraint of awareness or ideas. Thus all the opinions described above end with the same phrase: “Thus it is that some explain the restraint of consciousness (saññā)”. The two last opinions are less fit to explain consciousness and its disappearance in the ordinary run of human life and for all men. They seem to be more adequate to explain extraordinary cases of people fallen under the spell of yogis who could influence other people’s minds and cases of “possession” or unexplained loss of consciousness in cases of swoon. These opinions are not deemed to be of consequence and as a matter of fact they are left undiscussed in the sutta.

This introduction to the first part of the sutta ends with the words:

“At that, Sir, a remembrance concerning the Blessed One arose in me, in this way: ‘Would that the Lord, the Blessed One were here, he who is so well versed in these matters’. The Lord, Sir, is well versed, the Lord is of mature knowledge regarding the restraint of consciousness. How then, Sir, is the restraint of consciousness?”

Poṭṭhapāda addresses the Buddha not only as “Sir” (bhante), which was the usual courtship payed to him by non-Buddhists, but also as “Lord” (bhagavā) and “Blessed One” (sugata), which were titles given him by his followers. This may mean that faith in the Buddha was dawning on him. As a matter of fact the result of the dialogue was that Poṭṭhapāda became an upāsaṅka, a lay devotee of the Lord by the triple formula of taking refuge in the Buddha, the Doctrine (dhamma) and the Order of Monks (saṅgha).

Wilful arisal and restraint of ideas (7-9)

The Buddha tackles in the first place the opinion that ideas and awareness arise and cease without reason, without a cause. He says that people holding such opinion are wrong “from the beginning”, which may be equivalent to saying “from beginning to end”. He retorts:

“What is the reason for that? Because, Poṭṭhapāda, due to a reason, due to a cause, the ideas of a man arise and are restraint. By training an idea arises, by training another idea is restrained”

5 Nirodha, in this context, is wilful cessation, that is “restraint”. Inasmuch as an idea is restrained it ceases. That is why nirodha may be translated either as “restraint”, or merely as “cessation”, according to context. The
It is noteworthy that the reason or cause for the arisal or restraint of ideas does not point here to the “material cause” or “psychological condition” required for such arisal and cessation but to the wilful causality of the moral agent. Notwithstanding passages as this—there are many such passages in the Canon—, later Buddhism came to deny the reality of the moral agent.

What is the training spoken of here by the Buddha? Here the *sutta* introduces the passages on training contained in the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*. The training begins with renunciation of the world. It continues with the detailed observance of morality, consisting mainly in abstentions from practices unbecoming such an individual. It progresses further through the restraint of the senses, through the acquisition of mindfulness and self-possession in whatever one does, through his satisfaction in possessing nothing, through the purification of the mind from the *nivarana* (hankering, ill-will, torpor, flurry). After that, both the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* and the *Poṭṭhapaṭṭasutta* insert a description of the practice of the four *jhānas* (the four stages of concentration) but the treatment of the latter is different, since the Buddha is going to explain how in this excercise we meet with a wilful restraint of consciousness.

same will hold in the case of *nirujjhati*, which will mean either “is restrained” or “it ceases”.

6 Cfr. “The four material elements, bhikkhu, are the reason, the four material elements are the condition for the designation of the *khandha* of the body; sensorial contact is the reason, sensorial contact is the condition for the designation of the *khandha* of feeling; sensorial contact is the reason, sensorial contact is the condition for the designation of the *khandha* of perception, etc.” S. II-III, p. 324, *Khandhasamyutta*, 82.

7 This matter is amply discussed in our book: *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, Mouton Publishers, División de Walter de Gruyter and Co., The Hague, 1980, where the whole first part is devoted to prove the reality of the self as moral agent.

8 D I, p. 55 f., *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, 55-76.

9 It is well known thath *dukkha*, pain, occupies a central position in the Buddhist view of human existence. The main purpose of all Buddhist practices is the obliteration of such omnipresent reality. Maybe that is why in so many parts of the Canon the experience of *sukha* is hailed as the result of certain achievements. We call attention to this because this fact is going to be stated in the paragraphs that follow. We shall find another proof of this in paragraphs 25-27 of this very *sutta*, quoted below. Many are the testimonies confirming this that could be adduced from different parts of the Canon. We shall specify here a few of them, which though expounded previously in the first volume of the *Dīghanikāya* were inserted in the complete recitation of the *Poṭṭhapaṭṭasutta*. Thus as a result of the practice of stern morality the bhikkhu is free from fear and also: “endowed with such noble body of moral practises he experiences in his own self (ajjhattam) a happiness free from blemishes” (D I, p. 62 *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, 63). Likewise as a result of mastery over the senses “he experiences
The treatment of the four jhānas connects with the passage alluded to in the last footnote ending with the words, “the mind of one possessed of that blissful ease becomes concentrated”. That is as it should be, since jhāna means precisely “concentration”.

In the first jhāna, the consciousness that is restrained is the previous apprehension (saññā) of lust, and a subtle, true apprehension (saññā) of joy and bliss born of separation from lust is substituted for it. The adept becomes conscious of it only. The exposition of the first jhāna in this context ends with the statement: “Thus by training one idea arises, by training another idea is restrained. Such is the training, said the Lord”. This statement will be repeated at the end of everyone of the exercises that follow.

In the second jhāna, the subtle, true idea of joy and bliss born of separation from lust is restrained and the subtle, true idea of joy and bliss born of trance (samādhi) takes its place. The adept becomes conscious of this only.

It the third jhāna, the idea that desplaces the previous one is the subtle, true idea of the joy and bliss of equanimity.

In the fourth jhāna, the idea of which the individual training himself becomes conscious, with the consequent displacement of the previous one, is the subtle, true idea of neither ill-being nor well-being (adukkhhamasukhe). ¹⁰

In the wake of the practice of the fourth jhāna, the text introduces another series of exercises which run on a different line. These exercises belong to a group of them called the vimokkhas (exercises in liberation). Three of them are included here, beginning with the fourth. These are concatenated in the same way as were the four jhānas, so that the consciousness origina-

in his own self (ajjhattam) an undefiled happiness” (Ibid., Sāmaññaphalasutta, 64). Again, “for one who sees the five nivaraṇas eliminated in his self (attani) there arises an excessive delight (pamojjam); for one [so] delighted there arises joy (piti); the body of one enjoying such joy becomes calm; one whose body is [so] calmed experiences a blissful ease (sukha); the mind of one possessing such blissful ease becomes concentrated” (D I, p. 65, Sāmaññaphalasutta, 76). The sukha of which the last passage speaks does not interfere with concentration of mind, on the contrary it seems to be its necessary condition. It must therefore be understood to mean a happiness permeated by calm and ease. On the other hand, pamojja and piti do not seem in the context to possess the quality of calm and ease, but to be coloured by a certain amount of thrill or excitement.

¹⁰ Upekkha, translated in the previous paragraph as “equanimity” seems to be already a neutral position between ill-being and well-being. But upekkha does not seem to connote an absolute indifference or equanimity, since it gives rise to sukha, a feeling which is radically suppressed in the fourth jhāna.
ting in each following *vimokkha* restrains the one produced by the preceding one.

In the first of these new steps, the things to be transcended are the consciousness of materiality (*rūpasāññā*) and the consciousness of obstruction or limitation (*patighasaññā*) produced by material things. In its place there wakes up the subtle, true idea of the sphere of infinitude of space.

After that, the new idea produced is the subtle, true idea of the infinitude of mind or intellect (*viññāna*). This is replaced in the following step by the subtle, true idea of the sphere of nothingness. Thus the process is being subiectified and emptied of objective contents, until the adept comes to the final restraint of consciousness, corresponding with the *nīrūbija samādhi* of Pātañjalajala yoga. The attainment of this condition is explained with the words:

"From the time, Poṭṭhapāda, that a *bhikkhu* herein [in this self-training] becomes conscious of his own accord [passing] gradually from one stage to another, he attains the summit of consciousness. To him [thus] established in the summit of consciousness this comes to mind: 'There is harm for me while thinking, there is welfare for me in not thinking.' If I were to go on thinking and mentally constructing (*abhisamkhareyya*), these ideas of mine would cease, and other coarse ones (*oḷarikā*) would arise. It were better if I were not to go on thinking and mentally constructing.

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11 A knower of the complete catalogue of the *vimokkhas* will notice that no mention is made of the seventh one, i.e. the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness (*nevasaṅkkhānasāṅkkhāgatana*), which immediately precedes the last and most perfect one, viz. restraint or cessation of perception and feeling (*saṅkhāvedayaññatimodhā*). Is it so that the seventh *vimokkha* sharing somehow in the condition of unconsciousness does not fully come within the scope of what the *sutta* calls *abhisamkhaññatimodhā*? On the other hand, it seems it ought to find a place here, since having a relative share of consciousness, *abhisamkhaññatimodhana*, as meaning "absolute restraint of consciousness", could very well be applied to it. Possibly we find here a catalogue of the *vimokkhas*, where the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness, being a later refinement of thought, had not yet been introduced as an intermediate stage between consciousness of the sphere of nothingness and the complete restraint of consciousness.

12 This shows that people who propounded the thesis of an unconscious self after death were not basically wrong in their justification of such position when they said that "consciousness (*saṅkha*) is an ill, an abscess, a dart, while the peaceful state, the excellent thing is what they called unconsciousness (*asaṅkha*)". (P III, p. 23, *Pañcattayasutta*, 3). They were wrong in their motivation which was plainly asimanic.

13 As a matter of fact, all the ideas willfully developed by means of restraint, beginning with the first *jhāna*, are called "subtle" (*sukhuma*). Therefore, coarse ideas will be ideas of lust (*kāma*), which are restrained in the first place with the practice of the first *jhāna*. 
For him [thus] not thinking and mentally constructing even those ideas are restrained and other coarse ones do not arise. He attains to complete restraint. So it is, Poṭṭhapāda, that deliberate attainment of gradual restraint of consciousness takes place” (9) 14.

14 As already indicated, absolute restraint of consciousness is also the highest aim of Pāṭañjala yoga, where it is as well a wilfull attainment brought about by means of exercise (abhāya) and dispassion (vairāgya). The way to perfection, as described in the Yogasūtras, consists in the gradual substitution of ever more refined mental impressions (samśkāras) for those of the lower type, until eventually even the subtler of all are finally restrained. This is clearly stated in: tajjāh samśkōro nyasa samśkārapratibandhi (Yogasūtras, I, 51); tasyāpi nirodhē sarva nirodhānirbhīṣaṃ saṃādhi (Ibid., I, 52). This finds an echo in na... abhisākharēyyam and na... abhisākharōti used in our text. Saṃkērānam nirodha, which literally means “the restraint of the saṃskāras”, is mentioned by the Buddha as the final aim in M III, p. 22 f., Pañcattayasutta, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. In opposition to the condition induced by the restraint of the saṃskāras, all other conditions, even the higher ones, are said to be saṅkhāta (Ibid.), this being consonant, by way of contrast, with the final aim, already mentioned. According to A. B. Kārī (Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon, Varanasi, 1963, p. 86) “The root conception of saṅkhāra is doubtless the impressions resulting in dispositions, predispositions or latent tendencies, which will bear fruit in action in due course”. We find a confirmation of this in M III, p. 162 f., Saṅkhārapattīsutta, “The sutta of rebirth by means of saṃskāras”, where it is shown how one can attain certain kinds of rebirth by fixing in the mind mental impressions conducive to them and even to the destruction of the āsavas leading to no new existence. The root conception of saṅkhāra in the Pali Canon could be the subject of a very interesting study. The same texts of the Pañcattayasutta quoted in this footnote say that all other conditions of consciousness, as opposed to saṅkhāranām nirodha are of a course nature (olarika), apparently contradicting what has been stated in the preceding footnote. Thus the Pañcattayasutta brands as olarika, and therefore not subtle (sukhuma) a condition apparently referring to the sixth vimokka, i. e. the sphere of nothingness (M III, p. 22, Pañcattayasutta, 2) as well as a condition seemingly referring to the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness, the seventh vimokka (Ibid., pp. 23-24, Pañcattayasutta, 4). Nevertheless the condition of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness, in the complete catalogue of the vimokkas, is considered a more perfect condition than the infinitude of space, infinitude of intellect, and the sphere of nothingness mentioned in the Poṭṭhapādāsutta and said to be sukhum. Even the condition of unconsciousness, which outwardly seems to correspond with the eighth and mast perfect vimokka (saṅnāvedayintirodhā) is stigmatized as something olarika (M III, p. 24-25, Pañcattayasutta, 5). There is really no contradiction in this matter between the Poṭṭhapādāsutta and the Pañcattayasutta. The conditions reviewed in the latter are not those of the vimokkas, since they are products of heretical thinking that contemplates the self after death as identified with the khandhas and with all yogic conditions. Their position is entirely asimanic as it is expressly said in the passage of the Pañcattayasutta quoted in the last place. The genuine vimokkas do not assume a self thus identified and in their exercise no asimāna is possible. Cf. M I, p. 372, Cūlavedallasutta, 6, and S II-III, p. 450, Sāriputta-tasāmyutta, 1.
Poṭṭhapāda is then questioned by the Buddha whether or not he had previously heard of such deliberate attainment of gradual restraints of consciousness. He had not. This cannot mean that the process as such was a monopoly of Buddhism, unless one is of opinion that yoga, as a system of mental training, originated in Buddhism and had not yet spread on to other circles.

Two subsidiary questions (10-11)

The Buddha has referred to the adept who gradually advancing from one wilful consciousness to another attains finally the summit of consciousness. Now Poṭṭhapāda inquires whether there is only one summit of consciousness or the existence of several (puthū) summits of consciousness should be admitted. The reply is as follows:

"I propound, Poṭṭhapāda, both, one summit of consciousness and several summits of consciousness".

He gives later on the following explanation:

"As one goes on attaining gradual restraint, so I propound every further attainment as a summit of consciousness. So it is, Poṭṭhapāda, that I propound both: one summit of consciousness and various summits of consciousness".

What the Buddha means to say is that there is absolutely speaking only one summit of consciousness, which will consist in the last degree of perfection of consciousness that can be attained by means of restraint (nirrodha), while relatively speaking there are several summits of consciousness, these being everyone of the several attainments preceding the final one.

Let us now ponder the implications of this teaching. Every summit of consciousness is reached on the attainment of a corresponding restraint. Thus in the first case on the restraint of the consciousness of lust being achieved, "at that time, arises the subtle, true idea of joy and bliss born of separation [from lust]" and one becomes conscious only of that. This summit of consciousness is reached by the practice of the first jhāna, which is followed by the practices listed above.

The problem here is to determine which is the ultimate or absolute summit of consciousness. The solution to the query is apparently in paragraph 9, where we read:

15 Yaha yatha kho, Poṭṭhapāda, nirodam phusati, thatā tathāham saññaggam paññapemi.
“From the time, Poṭṭhapāda, when a bhikkhu herein [in this training] becomes conscious of his own accord, [passing] gradually from one stage to another and from that again to another, he attains the summit of consciousness. To him thus established in the summit of consciousness...”.

This seems to point to the consciousness of the sphere of nothingness, last mentioned in the previous paragraph, as the summit of consciousness. The difficulty is that according to the principle enunciated in the original words quoted in footnote 15, reaching a definite summit of consciousness implies a previous attainment of nirodha, and there is still another nirodha, the final one, to come:

“From him [thus] not thinking and mentally constructing even those ideas are restrained, and other coarse ideas do not arise. He attains to [absolute] restraint”. (9)

In the yoga system, this would not present any sort of difficulty, since with the final attainment of restraint “then [takes place] the establishment of the seer in its own nature”.16 For the yogi that will be the ultimate summit of consciousness, since the puruṣa is essentially pure consciousness. This cannot be the case here inasmuch as the Pāli Canon oftentimes denies that consciousness be the self. The true nirguṇa self is not that of vedānta or sāṅkhya, but the self of early Buddhism.

In the passage, however, that is engaging our attention, the process culminates with the last restraint mentioned at the end of the above given quotation, seing that after that we find the statement, “So it is, Poṭṭhapāda, that the deliberate attainment of gradual restraint of consciousness takes place”(9). It is not within the scope of the present passage to discuss what comes after that. Therefore, the last and highest summit of consciousness will be the consciousness of the sphere of nothingness.

Poṭṭhapāda then proposes a second question to the Buddha:

“But then, Sir, does consciousness (sāññā) arise first and then knowledge (ñāna), or knowledge arises first and then consciousness, or do consciousness and knowledge arise neither preceding [one another]?”

The answer is:

“Now, Poṭṭhapāda, consciousness arises first and then knowledge, and it is by the arisal of consciousness that there is arisal of knowledge. He [the bhikkhu] recognizes: ‘My knowledge has arisen having this as a cause”. (11)

16 Yogasūtras, I, 3.
We have again translated saññā as consciousness following the translation mostly given to the term in the previous passages, but we deem the translation really fitting in here is “perception”. Perception is the first definite awareness or consciousness we have of a given object which is followed by the knowledge of the latter. This is proved to be true specially on the strength of the statement that follows:

“This, Poṭṭhapāda, is to be understood in this way, that perception arises first and then knowledge, and from the arisal of perception (saññā) there takes place the arisal of knowledge (ñāna)”. (11).

How to translated the term SAÑÑĀ

It must be a principle of translation that the rendering of a technical term be uniform all through, that being possible. But is it possible in the case of saññā?

In the text we are analysing, it seems clear that used in a general way saññā means “consciousness or awareness” and saññī, “conscious”. The same applies to the usage of the term saññī made in the Brahmajālasutta referring to the self after death as being possibly conscious (saññī) or unconscious (asaññī), etc. 17

But when we find saññā used in the plural number as in: sahetū hi, Poṭṭhapāda, sappaccayā purisassa saññā uppaṭtanti pi nirujjhati pi, it seems more suitable to translate saññā as “idea”, thus rendering the phrase as:

“For, Poṭṭhapāda, due to a reason, due to a cause, the ideas of a man arise and are restrained. By training an idea arises, by training another idea is restrained”. (7).

While in paragraph 11, as we have just indicated, it seems more expedient to translate saññā as “perception”, when saññā is reputed to be the cause of knowledge, which in this case will be a function of viññāna or intellect.

A. B. KEITH rejects STCHERBASTKY’S opinion that “from the very beginning Buddhism had established this difference: viññāna and its synonyms, citta, manah, represent pure sensation, the same as the kalpanāpoḍha pratyakṣa of Dignāga, and samjñā corresponds to definite ideas.” And he comments: “The realization of the possibility thus of treating viññāna in the scheme of the five skandhas must have been slow; it is emphatically not reached in the Pāli texts of the Canon and, like all refined conceptions, can be at-

17 D I, p. 28 f., Brahmajālasutta, 75 f.
tributed to early Buddhism only at the expense of historical truth”. 18

The same author translates saññā as “perception”. 19 In another passage he writes: “perception (saññā) covers both sense-perception and the wider form of perception which takes place not through the senses, but by the agency of the mind”. 20 Examples of this would be maraṇasaññā, aniccasaññā, dukkhasaññā, anattasaññā, to which we shall refer later on. Once this double sense of perception is admitted there seems to be no difficulty in rendering saññā as “perceptive”. There can be no consciousness without any kind of perception, and any kind of perception must needs be the cause of consciousness, following the principle stated in this sutta which establishes a kind of paṭiccasamuppāda between saññā and nāṇa: saññuppāda ca pana nāṇuppāda hoti (11), and even when we have preferred to render saññā, in the plural number, as “ideas”, there seems to be no valid objection to its rendering as “perceptions”.

When referring to the fact that, according to this sutta, nāṇa takes its rise from saññā we said that we take nāṇa to be a function of viṁśaṇā. A. B. KEIRH translates viṁśaṇā as “intellect”, saying: “Intelligence (viṁśaṇa) is undoubtedly the chief term which comprehensively covers mental phenomena in the Canon”. 21 And: “The last aggregate is viṁśaṇa, and, as it is credited with appreciation of feeling as well as perceptive power, it is clear that, even in this collection of terms, it practically is wide enough to include both perception and feeling”. 22

Coming back to saññā, in compounds such as asubhasaññā, maraṇasaññā, aniccasaññā, dukkhasaññā, dukkhe anattasaññā, saññā means a perception or idea that is deliberately produced, fos-

18 The Religion and philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads, London, 1925, pp. 559-560. See M I, p. 362, Mahāvedallasutta, 3: “Whatever one feels (vedati) that he perceives (sañjāṇati); whatever one perceives, that he discriminates (vijāpāti). Therefore these states are conjoined, not disjoined, and it is not possible to declare the difference between them having analysed them again and again”.


20 Ibid., p. 51.

21 Ibid., p. 84.

22 Ibid., p. 87. He supports his position quoting M I, p. 360 f., Mahāvedallasutta, 1 f. Other references could be given. Thus in M III, p. 327, Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta, 13-16 viṁśaṇā, as discriminating consciousness, makes feeling (sukha, dukkha, adukkhhasukha) the object of its discrimination, and where pajāṇati expresses the discriminating function of viṁśaṇa regarding feeling, which in its turn proceeds from sensorial contact. But in A III, p. 118, Chakkaniyātā, 6, 9, 11, the discriminating function expressed by pajāṇati is attributed to saññā. This may be a relative discrimination that has to be finally apprehended by viṁśaṇa.
tered, intensified. In such cases, the most suitable translation seems to be "awareness", with the connotation of "reflective awareness" or "deliberate consideration". Thus we read:

"Seven kinds of awareness, bhikkhus, when developed, made to increase, are of great fruit, of great advantage, merging into the deathless, having the deathless as their goal. Which seven? Awareness of the impure, awareness of death, awareness of loathsomeness regarding nutriment, awareness of disgust regarding the whole world, awareness of impermanence, awareness of ill in what is impermanent, awareness of non-self in ill".

It may be concluded from all this that saññā may always be translated as "perception", and saññī as "perceptive", notwithstanding the possible choice of other terms, justified by the endeavour to express certain nuances in meaning according to context.

**Consciousness and the self (12-15)**

Poṭṭhapāda's next query bears upon the relation between consciousness and the self:

"What then, Sir, is consciousness (saññā) man's self (ātā), or is consciousness one thing and the self another?" (12).

It may be presumed that Poṭṭhapāda, being a non-Buddhist, was inclined to identify the self with the factors of existence or some of them, in this case with saññā as consciousness. Buddha's reaction to the question is not an uncompromising or absolute denial of the reality of the self —this is never found in the Pāli texts—, but an inquiry as to what kind of self Poṭṭhapāda had in view:

"What self, Poṭṭhapāda, are you referring to?"

Poṭṭhapāda replies:

"I am, Sir, referring to a gross material self (ōlarikam at-tānam) endowed with form, made of the four elements, feeding on mouthfuls of food". (12)

In the first place, Poṭṭhapāda refers to man's self as constituted by the grossly material part of man, his body. The Buddha does not accept the reality of such self in man, as it becomes clear from the usage in his answer of the conditional abhavissa,

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23 A III, p. 188 f., Sattakanipāta, 5, 6, 7, f.
this aplying as well to all other kinds of self put forward by Poṭṭhapāda. The purport of his answer is that, even while admitting such a self, the self would be one thing and consciousness another:

“And if, Poṭṭhapāda, there was a self for your (te attā abhavissa) material, made of the four elements, feeding on mouthfuls of food, even so, Poṭṭhapāda, for your consciousness would be one thing and the self another. That consciousness will be one thing and the self another is to be understood in the following way. This very self (sāyam attā), Poṭṭhapāda, material, made of the four elements, feeding on mouthfuls of food alone persists (tiṭṭhateva), while regarding this man some thoughts arise and others case” (12).

The difference between consciousness and the self is established in this case on the strength of the relative permanence of what is deemed to be the self as compared with consciousness which manifests itself in ever changing flashes of ideas. Obviously, the Buddha does not forego here his conviction that all composite things are impermanent, he only stresses the fact that, compared with the constant flow of ideas, the body enjoys a certain amount of permanence, this proving its difference from mental phenomena. If both were identical, the body would change with every change of consciousness. Moreover, latent in this way of arguing is the conviction that the self can in no way be subject to change, since following every change the self would become another and thereby deny itself. This is illustrated with a passage taken from another part of the Canon:

“If one was to say: ‘The eye is the self’, that is not fitting. The arising and decay of the eye is evident. In such case the result is that, ‘For me the self arises and disappears’. Therefore it is not fitting that one should say: ‘The eye is the self for me’. Thus the eye is non-self” 24.

Poṭṭhapāda mentions then two other types of self, regarding which the Buddha applies the same reasoning to prove that even in such cases consciousness would be one thing and the self another. The second self is one made of mind (manomaya), provided with all primary and subsidiary limbs, not deficient in any one of the senses. It is therefore a subtle reproduction of the body. 25

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24 M III, p. 382, Chachakkasutta, 8-9. The same reasoning applies to visible forms, sight-consciousness, the eye’s sensorial contact, feeling, thirst (tanhā) as well as to all the senses and their corresponding consciousness, contact, etc.

25 This is explicitly stated in D I, p. 68, Sāmaññaphalasutta, 87-89, where the creation of such subtle body is admitted as a yogic power to which a
third self is precisely one made of consciousness (saṁññāmaya), still more subtle, having no form. 26 Even in this case, the ideas or states of consciousness (saṁññā) would go on changing while this self made of consciousness (again saṁññā) would persist through those changes. We could not wish for a clearer confirmation of the latent conviction mentioned above. Saṁññā as self would not suffer any changes, while saṁññā as consciousness would be just an uninterrupted flow of ever changing mental states.

This section of the Potṭhapādasutta ends with an exchange of words that is very significant. Potṭhapāda asks:

"Is it then possible, Sir, for me to understand whether consciousness is the self of man or whether consciousness is one thing and the self another?"

The Buddha replies:

"Difficult ineed is this for you to understand, Potṭha- pāda, for you being of other views, belonging to another persuasion, having different leanings, having another training (yoga), following a different master" (15).

Such difficulty was experienced, according to Buddhist texts, by people of all other sects, unable to separate from the self all empirical factors, this being specially the case with cons-

bhikkhu may aspire when he is possessed of a mind or intellect (citta) that is concentrated, cleansed, purified, free from blemishes, rid of the deprivities, and therefore supple, easily bent, invested with stability. Then he can apply his intellect to the creation of a body made of mind (manomaya kāya), endowed with form, provided with all main and subsidiary limbs, not deficient in any of the senses". He can do that in the same way as one can pull a reed out of its sheath, or a snake out its slough, or a sword out of its scabbard, being able to distinguish clearly between the two.

26 The annihilationists in D I, p. 30, Brahmapālasutta, 85-87, speak also of three kinds of self, two of which, the first and the third, coincide with the first and second proposed by Potṭhapāda. In between them, the annihilationists admit of a self not so subtle as the one made of mind and not so coarse as the first one. The annihilationists do not mention the third self proposed by Potṭhapāda. There seems to be a perfect parallelism between the scheme of selves propounded by Potṭhapāda and the three possible becomings mentioned in M I, p. 67, Sammādiṭṭhisutta, 8, to wit, kāmabhava, rūpabhava, and arūpabhava. The first one seems to postulate a gross material body, which is the first kind of self in Potṭhapāda’s series. The second one seems to correspond with a kind of being still provided with form (rūpi), but too subtle to be involved in kāma, as could be the manomaya atta mentioned by Potṭhapāda which ought to be with form (rūpi) — even as the miraculous body made of mind described in the Samaññaphalasutta — since it is provided with limbs and senses. The third kind of becoming seems to postulate a being similar to the third self postulated by Potṭhapāda, made of consciousness, devoid of form.
ciousness, as explicitly testified in other parts of the Canon.27 One thing becomes clear. The Buddha does not deny here the reality of the self, on the contrary he accepts implicitly the principle that the self, if it is to be the true self, cannot be subject to change. This is precisely one of the main reasons given in many parts of the Canon to prove that things are non-self, namely that they are impermanent (anicca).

The unanswered questions (16-20)

Granting that he may find it difficult to understand the question of the identity or difference between consciousness and the self, Poṭṭhapāda consults the Buddha about other questions surmising, so it seems, that he will be able to understand the answers to them. The questions are: “Whether the world is eternal or not; whether the world is infinite or not; whether the soul (jīva) and the body are the same thing or just different things; whether the Tathāgata exists or does not exist, both exists and does not exist, both neither exists nor does not exist after death”.

This set of questions seems to contain the ten topics on which the sophists mostly discussed, seeing that it is recorded very often in the Buddhist texts. The most important of them, from the Buddhist point of view, are those that refer to the Tathāgata’s existence or non-existence after death; they are singled out at times without any reference to the rest of them.28

The Buddha, on being questioned about everyone of the alternatives, gives the same answers: “That, Poṭṭhapāda, has not been explained by me”. The general reason given for such attitude is:

“But because that, Poṭṭhapāda, is not connected with spiritual profit, is not connected with dhamma, does not belong to the beginning of the holy life, is not conducive to disgust, dispassion, restraint, calmness, intuition, illumination, nibbāna”. (16).

These questions—and in general all views that go under the name of diṭṭhis—are not connected with spiritual profit, or with dhamma, or with the beginning of the holy life, because they distract the mind and hinder it from application to what is most urgent, to wit the abolishment of existential pain (dukkha).29 They are not conducive to disgust for the world, dispassion, restraint, calmness, because their discussion gave rise to passionate wran-

27 The most eloquent testimony is found in S II-III, pp. 80-82, Nidānasamīyutta, 64; such difficulty was experienced at times even by the disciples of the Buddha. Cfr. S IV, p. 151, Sālayatanasamīyutta, 234.
28 S IV, p. 321 f., Abyākatasamīyutta, suttas: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11.
29 This point is specially stressed in the Cūḷamālukyasutta, M II, pp. 107 f.
gling quarrels, thus fostering asmināna or self-conceit, clearly manifested in the obstinacy and sense of possessiveness with which these views were propounded, a thing plainly indicated in our text by the dogmatic, intolerant expression appended to each of them: “This is true, the rest is false”. (16) They are not conducive to intuition and illumination, because they are mostly speculative and based on argument, not a result of direct contemplation of reality. From what precedes one quite realizes that these opinions are not conducive to nibbāna. All these views, and others like them, should be shunned not merely for being useless, but just for being positively harmful.

Having dealt elsewhere with the rest of the questions, we wish to insist here on the second pair of views, namely whether the “soul” is the same as the body or different from it. The terms used are jīva and sarīra. No doubt is likely to arise about the meaning of sarīra, “the body”, but the precise translation of jīva is problematic. It may mean “life”, as in jāvajīvañ, “as long as life lasts”. It may mean also “living being” and hence the principle of life. With the Jainas it means both the principle of life and the self, mainly the former. As Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson says:

“In a most interesting note, Dr. Jacobi suggests that the Jainas have arrived at their concept of soul, not through the search after the Self, the self-existing unchangeable principle in the ever changing world of phenomena, but through the perception of life. For the most general term for soul is life (jīva), which is identical with self (āyā, ātman), and the way in which the category jīva is divided and subdivided, building up from the lesser to the more developed life, certainly bears out Dr. Jacobi’s contention; for the Jaina lay stress on Life not Self.”

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31 It is true that the holders of those views appeal to yogic intuition. Thus in D I, p. 21 f., Brahmajālasutta, 53-56, but such yogic intuition is ultimately rooted in sensorial contact, as stated later on in the same sutta. Cfr. our article: “Comments upon the Brahmajālasutta”, Boletín de la Asociación Española de Orientalistas, Año XIV, 1978, pp. 92-93.

32 We have just given in a summary form the position taken by Early Buddhism regarding the dīṭṭhis. For a broader treatment of the question see our book: Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism, pp. 294 f.

33 D III, p. 103, Pāśādikasutta, 23.

34 See Mahāvagga, pp. 208-209. Cottakkhandhaka, where the text speaks of ekendriya jīva, “a living being with only one sense”, and informs us that “men believe there is life in trees” (jīvasamāno... manussā rukkhas-mim); Pācittiya, p. 55 (5, 11, 89) speaks again of ekendriya jīva with reference to trees.
In the Sāmaññaphalasutta, while describing Makkhalī Gosāla’s heresy, satā, pānā, bhūtā and jīva are used as synonyms; and in accordance with Jain philosophy, where jīva is one of the fundamental tattvas, Pakudha Kaccāyana, another samaṇa, propounds a system of philosophy with seven fundamental categories, called kāyas, namely, earth, water, fire, air (the four classical elements), happiness, pain and jīva, which are, according to him uncreated, unchangeable, steadfast, not interfering with each other.

All this seems to favour the translation of the term jīva in this context as “soul”, thus insisting on the fact of its being the principle of life, better than on its being the “self”, although embracing both. Early Buddhism, even though being originally a samanic system, left aside the term jīva, making a constant use of the term attā, thus disentangling it from all commitment to physiological and psychological processes. In many parts of the Canon we see other samaṇas, besides the Buddhists, exclusively accepting the use of the term attā, but falling into the wrong view that identifies it with the existential factors. The Jains, however, came to accept the term attā or its equivalent, without thereby abandoning the original jīva.

In addition to the preceding evidence, we may note that the distinction between the living body and the principle of life would lend itself to subtle disquisitions of which the sophists were so fond. We do find in the Pāli Canon an inquiry on the relation between life and some vital activities, but without any allusion to the relation prevailing between the living principle and the body. The only thing we are told is that the body dies when it is forsaken by vitality (āyu), vital heat (usmā) and the intellect (viññāna), and the dead body is then described as lying

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35 The Heart of Jainism, New Delhi, 1970, p. 95. To note that the permanence and immutability of the self as compared with the world of phenomena is only relative in Jainism. The division of the jīva category to which the quotation refers is built on the different number of senses possessed by the different jīvas (Ibid., pp. 97-101). We read on p. 99: “All vegetable life, Vanaspatikāya, also possesses but one indriya”. The antecedent footnote has registered the expression: ekendriya jīva, a typically Jaina term, and, we may surmise, a term reflecting a mentality common to non-brahmanic circles.

37 D I, u. 49, Sāmaññaphalasutta, 25.
38 In M I, pp. 364-365, Mahāvedallasutta, 9-10, it is said that the senses owe their existence to āyu, “vitality”, whose existence depends on usmā, “vital heat”, which on its turn depends for its existence on āyu and usmā. A little before we are told that the mind (mano) is the repository (pajīsaraṇa) of the senses (Ibid., 8); and later on it is noted that vitality does not make any impression on the mind and is therefore nothing to be felt, otherwise life would cease when the bhikkhu enters into the stopping of feeling and perception.
down as something cast away, discarded, inanimate lige a log.\(^{39}\)
The difference between the living body and \textit{viññāṇa} is expressly stated in the Canon,\(^{40}\) not so the difference between the living body and the principle of life.\(^{41}\)

One is liable to be impressed by the emphatic treatment that these two opposite views, namely whether or not \textit{jīva} and \textit{sarīra} are the same thing, are given in the \textit{Jāliyasutta}.\(^{42}\) This \textit{sutta} speaks of a bhikkhu, endowed with a perfect moral practice, going through the first, second, third and fourth \textit{jhāna}, as well as the exercise by which he intuitively contemplates material body as distinct from intellect (\textit{viññāṇa}), and the latter as bound to the body and, as it were, threaded through it.\(^{43}\) After everyone of these exercises we find the following bit of dialogue with the Buddha questioning and the hearer replying:

"Now, friend, regarding the bhikkhu who thus knows, thus sees, is it proper that he should posit the question: 'Is \textit{jīva} what \textit{sarīra} is, or is \textit{jīva} one thing and \textit{sarīra} another thing?'".

"It is proper, friend".

"But then, friend, I who thus know, thus see, do not posit the question: 'Is \textit{jīva} what \textit{sarīra} is, or is \textit{jīva} one thing and \textit{sarīra} another thing?'".

In the last stage of perfection, the bhikkhu is said to have attained to the knowledge of the destruction of the \textit{āsavas}, which implies the true knowledge of pain, its arisal, its destruction, and the way leading to its destruction; as well as the true knowledge of the \textit{āsavas}, their arisal, their restraint, and the way leading to their restraint. The passage ends with the words:

\(^{39}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 365 (para. 10).

\(^{40}\) Thus according to D I, p. 67, \textit{Sāmaññaphalasutta}, 85, a bhikkhu may succeed in contemplating the body (\textit{kāyo}) and the intellect (\textit{viññāṇa}) as two different entities.

\(^{41}\) Someone may be tempted to say that if two entities can be separated, by this very fact their difference will be established. Now then if the principle of life and the body are separated at death, this proves the difference between the two. The argument is fallacious inasmuch as by such "separation" the "living body" ceases to be a living body.

\(^{42}\) D I, pp. 134-135. This \textit{sutta} is used as a component part of the preceding one. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 134-135, \textit{Mahālīsutta}, 18-19.

\(^{43}\) This exercise is technically called \textit{nāṇadassana}. Since the texts of these two \textit{suttas} enjoin that the whole matter should be expanded following the pattern established in the \textit{Sāmaññaphalasutta}, it seems that what we are going to say instantly should apply also to the exercises that in the \textit{Sāmaññaphalasutta} intervene between this exercise on \textit{nāṇadassana} and the final knowledge of the \textit{āsavas}, which is the immediate step towards perfection.
"The mind of one thus knowing, thus seeing, is freed from the āsava of sensual enjoyment, ...is freed from the āsava of becoming, ...is freed from the āsava of ignorance. In one thus freed arises the knowledge of being freed. He knows: 'Destroyed is birth, lived is the holy life, what was to be done is done, there will be no more life in these conditions'".

Then the question is repeated as above: "Now, friend, regarding the bhikkhu..." The answers is negative. A man arrived at this stage of perfection would not even think of positing the question whether jīva and sarīra are one thing or two different things.

The correlative meanings of jīva and sarīra are not clarified by any further explanation of the terms. The purpose of the Jāliyasutta and its corresponding part in the Mahālīyasutta seems rather to be the setting forth of what is exclusively Buddhist in the training of a bhikkhu. That is contained in what came to be known as the Four Noble Truths and in the doctrine of the knowledge of the āsavas, their arisal, their destruction and the way leading to their destruction. All the other items of training which in the Sāmaññaphalasutta precede the last and most perfect one, and are inserted in the Jāliyasutta, seem to be something that the Buddhist bhikkhu had in common with people of other sects. That would explain why the bhikkhu who had not attained to the last stage of perfection could think of positing the question about the identity or difference regarding jīva and sarīra, even as his non-Buddhist counterpart could do, while the Buddha, being already a perfect man, would never contemplate such discussion.

After all that has been said, we incline to think that the term jīva in the questions that at present engages our attention, should be taken to mean the principle of life but with the accompanying connotation of being the self as well.

But the reasoning that would interpret the indisposition of the genuine Buddhist to discuss the question of the identity or difference of jīva —which also means the self— in relation to the body as being a sign of the absolute denial of the reality of the self is inadmissible. The argument would prove too much. It would prove also that early Buddhism's aversion to discuss the Tathāgata's existence or non-existence after death resulted in the denial of the reality of the Tathāgata. Early Buddhism never denied the reality of the Tathāgata, it only held that he was something indefinable or incomprehensible. Early Buddhism abhorred any intellectual entanglement in the dīṭṭhis for reasons stated abo-

44 This point is discussed at length in our book: Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism, p. 28 f., Chapter 13: "Self and Non-Self after liberation".
ve and because they were framed within a mentality alien to it, namely the identity of the self with the empirical factors in man. Within this mentality early Buddhism fought shy of admitting not only the diṭṭhi expressed as “I have a self”, but also the diṭṭhi proclaimed as “I have no self”. Such is also basically the attitude reflected in the Jāliyasutta when it asserts that the bhikkhu who attains to the knowledge and restraint of the āsavas would not even think of positing the questions whether jīva and sarīra are identical or different. There is no bias here against the reality of the true self, which transcends the plane where the assertions and denials of the heretics take place. We read somewhere else that, “A bhikkhu whose mind is thus liberated, does not agree or disagree with anyone (na kenaci sānvadati, na kenaci vivadati)” but rests assured with the calm possession of truth.

Coming back to the Poṭṭhapādasutta, after Buddha's assertion that he had not given a definite answer to those questions, Poṭṭhapāda inquires: “Then, Sir, what has been declared by the Blessed One?” The answer is:

“This is pain, Poṭṭhapāda, has been declared by me; this is the arisel of pain, Poṭṭhapāda, has been declared by me; this is the restraint of pain, Poṭṭhapāda, has been declared me; this is the way to the restraint of pain, Poṭṭhapāda, has been declared by me”. (16).

And on being asked for the reason why this had been declared by the Buddha, the latter gives an answer opposite to the one given before: “Because, this, Poṭṭhapāda, is connected with spiritual profit, is connected with dhamma, etc.”

A reader of the Pāli Canon knows quite well the central position of this doctrine in the teaching of the Buddha. Poṭṭhapāda gives his assent and the Buddha departs. Poṭṭhapāda’s followers ridicule their leader for welcoming the Buddha's teaching regardless of the fact that the Buddha had not given a definite answer to any of the questions proposed. Poṭṭhapāda says in answer:

“All the same, he declares a true, real, valid method, based on dhamma, established on dhamma. When he does declare a true, real, valid method, based on dhamma, established on dhamma, how could a wise man like me not approve what was well said by Gotama the samaṇa as being well said?” (17)

As Poṭṭhapāda addresses himself here to non-Buddhists, it seems that the term dhamma should be understood as having a more ge-

45 M I, pp. 12-13, Sabbāsavanāsutta, 6.
46 M II, p. 196, Dīghanakhasutta, 5.
neral sense than precisely the one given it in Buddhist circles. "Righteousness" would be quite an adequate rendering of the term, on condition that it may connote not merely ethical righteousness but all that in the nature of things leads to liberation. Obviously for a Buddhist this "Righteousness" finds an adequate expression only in dhamma as explained by the Buddha.

PART. II:

ABSOLUTE HAPPINESS OF THE SELF AFTER DEATH AND SAMSARIC EXISTENCE (18-36)

As already indicated, the composer of the suttā lets two or three days elapse before this second encounter between Poṭṭhapāda and the Buddha takes place. This time Poṭṭhapāda goes to meet the Buddha accompanied by Citta.

Ekaṁsīka and anekamsīka

After the customary exchange of greetings, Poṭṭhapāda informs the Buddha of his own company's reaction at the position taken by the Master regarding the unexplained questions and of the answer he had given them. The Buddha asserts that all those mendicants are blind, that among them only Poṭṭhapāda has eyes to see. There are two interesting terms used in this dialogue by the Buddha, viz. ekaṁsīka and anekamsīka.

The Buddha confirms his attitude towards the unexplained questions and the reasons he has for leaving them unexplained. But this time he qualifies the unexplained questions as anekamsīkā, while he describes other questions as ekaṁsīkā. Considering the etymological meaning of these two terms they could be translated as "many-sided" and "one-sided" respectively. The terms seem to refer primarily to all the possible sides of the questions involved. Thus when one inquires into the eternity or non-eternity of the world, he posits the question as having two possible sides or aspects. Thus too, the question whether the Tathāgata is, is not, both is and is not, both neither is nor is not after death, will present four possible sides or aspects. In contrast with this, the four truths that assert pain, the arisal of pain, the restraint of pain and the way leading to the restraint of pain are one-sided. Asking whether pain exists or does not exist, one would put a question where two sides or aspects would be considered. As the Buddha puts it:
“There are things, Poṭṭhapaḍa, that have been shown and declared by me as “one-sided” (ekamśiṅkā); there are things, Poṭṭhapaḍa, that have been shown and declared by me as “many-sided” (anekamśiṅkā”). (19)

The Buddha presently declares that the questions: “whether the world is eternal or not, whether it is infinite or not, etc.”, are those that have been shown and declared by him as anekamśiṅkā. He has done so because those questions “are not connected with spiritual profit, are not connected with dhamma, etc.” On the other hand, the truth of pain, of the arisal of pain, etc. have been shown and declared by him as ekamśiṅkā for opposite reasons.

Obviously truths declared ekamśiṅkā by the Buddha are in his opinion truths that are definitely settled and having an absolute value, they can never be invalidated. In opposition to this, we would say that anekamśiṅkā questions are those not definitely settled and having no absolute value. This does not mean of necessity that they have a relative value being true to a certain extent or from a certain point of view. In point of fact the truths enumerated in the list we are discussing do not belong to the same logical category. The questions regarding the world and maintaining its eternity or non-eternity, its finitude or infinitude are left unsettled mainly for lack of evidence, being merely conjectural; while the questions concerning the Tathāgata after death are positively wrong inasmuch as they try to give a conceptual description of the Tathāgata when he has entered his final mystery where our categories of thought find no application. Nevertheless all these truths are declared anekamśiṅkā in the same way.

In the present context the reason given by the Buddha to declare those ten questions anekamśiṅkā is simply that their discussion is spiritually unprofitable, not conducive to dispassion and consequent nibbāna, but the truths in question may be such in different degrees. For the reasons given above, the Buddha is not ready to give them any consideration, leaving them as they stand without trying to establish one logical option in preference to the rest. From this point of view the terms ekamśiṅkā and anekamśiṅkā will have the connotation of “settled” and “unsettled” respectively. The Pāli Text Society’s Pāli-English Dictionary translates the first term as “certain” and the second as “uncertain”, while A Critical Pāli Dictionary more fittingly translates anekamśiṅkā as “uncertain, undetermined” (cursive ours). That the truths called ekamśiṅkā by the Buddha are to his mind “certain” is something indisputable, but the Buddha chooses not to say or to suggest anything about the possible certainty or uncertainty of the ques-
tions he calls anekāṁśikā, he merely refuses to lend them his attention leaving them “unsettled or undetermined”. This is radically the connotation of the term abyākatā applied to these questions in other parts of the Canon.

In a passage of the Udāna the same questions are proposed in the following way: “The world is eternal, this alone is true, the rest is false; the world is non-eternal, this alone is true, the rest is false, etc.”, thus presenting every side of the question as ekāṁśikā, as the only valid side against the others advanced by the opponents. The text observes that the disputants—non-Buddhists—were violently insulting each other. The Buddha then illustrates the foolishness of such behaviour by recounting the story of the king and the men born blind to whom an elephant was brought for tactual inspection. Different parts of the animal were given for examination to different groups of blind men. Those who had passed their hands along the head, got the idea that the elephant was something like an earthen pot. Those who had been given an ear to be felt with the hands, thought that the elephant was something like a winnowing basket. Those who had stroked one tusk, imagined the elephant to be like a peg or a post, etc. At being asked by the king what sort of thing the elephant was, the blind men started contradicting each other, quarreling violently among themselves to the amusement of the king and his courtiers. The Buddha ends his exposition with the following words:

“In the very same way, bhikkhus, the wandering mendicants of other sects are blind, sightless. They do not know what is profitable, they do not know what is unprofitable; they do not know what is dhamma, they do not know what is non-dhamma. They thus not knowing proceed being quarrelsome, disputatious, controversial, striking each other with piercing words, saying: ‘Such is dhamma, dhamma is not such; such is non-dhamma, dhamma is such’.”

Taken on its face value, the simile of the elephant and the blind applied here to the unexplained questions would imply that all of them are or may be somehow true, that the truth in every case is relative not absolute, contradicting the defiant attitude of everyone of the parties expressed with the words: “This alone is true, the rest is false”. But the quotation just given suggests that none of them was in possession of the truth or on the way to attain to it, not in any way a truth that could be operative for the sake of liberation. The simile is better adapted to illustrate the Jaina position, the so called anekāṁśatavāda, and as far as we know the Jainas do make use of it for the said pur-

47 K I, pp. 142-145, Udāna, 6, 4.
pose. One thing seems certain, that the *anekāntavāda* was in the air during the gestation of the Pāli Canon.⁴⁸

Early Buddhism and Jainism differ widely in this respect. For the latter all truths have only a relative value, so that the *anekāntavāda* obtains a universal validity. Buddha, on the contrary states his Four Noble Truths as having an absolute value, i.e. as being *ekamāsikā*, while he refuses to discuss and therefore leaves “unsettled”—declaring them *anekāmāsikā*—the questions whether the world is eternal or not, is infinite or not etc. Sometimes, disregarding both the extremes, the Buddha marks out a middle way solution. Such is the case in the conflict between eternalism (*sabbānī atthi*) and nihilism (*sabbānī natthi*) as indicated in the last footnote. This middle way is not necessarily a synthesis of two antithetical positions, since conditional existence can in no way be said to be either absolute being or absolute non-being or both together, it is neither. On the other hand conditional existence “is”, since it really originates, thus contradicting absolute non-being, an “is not” since it degenerates and perishes, thus contradicting absolute being. It has therefore a relative value in harmony with what the Jainas have to say of all reality. From the possession of antithetical attributes, the Jainas declare reality—all reality—to be indescribable, and this applies even to the self.

Regarding the true self, which in the Pāli Canon is designated at times as the Tathāgata, we find two different stances. In the *Yamakasutta*⁴⁹ Sāriputta argues against Yamaka’s annihilationist persuasion that the bhikkhu whose āsavas are destroyed is annihilated and perishes after death. Sāriputta makes Yamaka confess that the Tathāgata, seeming that he exhibits antinomical characteristics in this very life is in truth and reality unconceivable, much more, therefore, he will be so after death; and on being questioned by Sāriputta about the final conclusion of the whole matter, Yamaka replies that in the case of the Tathāgata after death whatever was impermanent and painful in him has vanished. We would say that this is the only *ekamāsikā* truth here. As indicated, the *Yamakasutta* declares the true self or the Tathāgata unconceivable in this very life by reason of its antithetical characteristics, which are to some extent at least

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⁴⁸ Cfr. the use made of the word *anta*, a component of the *anekāntavāda*: “Everything is”, this, Kaccana, is one extreme (*anta*); ‘Nothing is’, this the other extreme (*anta*). Disregarding both extremes, the Tathāgata, going a middle way, teaches his doctrine: ‘Depending on ignorance arise the inner complexes, etc.’” S II-III, p. 17, *Nidānasamyutta*, 15. Repeated at S II-III, pp. 353-354, *Khandhasamyutta*, 90.
expressed as “is” and “is not”. This could be consonant with the Jaina position, but it does not apply to the Tathāgata after death, to whom neither is, nor is not, nor both is and is not, nor both neither is nor is not are applicable, because all ways of designation have been obliterated in his case.50

When all is said, one feels that the etymology of ekāṁsikā and anekāṁsikā ought to be somehow disregarded and that a more or less derivative meaning ought to be accepted. We deem that “settled” and “unsettled” would be a quite good rendering of them.

On the self being absolutely happy after death (21-23)

This question is introduced by the Buddha, without any intervening question on Poṭṭhapāda’s part. He refers to certain samānas and brāhmaṇas who profess the following opinion: “The self after death is absolutely happy and healthy”. The Buddha shows that the holders of such opinion could not substantiate their statement. Guided by the preceding considerations we can assert that this was for the Buddha an irrelevant question, what mattered to him was the attainment of nībbanā, thereby making impossible any other further existence, either happy or miserable. Moreover, existential happiness can never be absolute for early Buddhism, as pain is the concomitant of all kinds of existence, while suppression of pain follows only the suppression of samsaric existence in nībbanā. Even so, in this context, the Buddha merely tries to make those people see that they had no grounds to think as they did.

In the first place, the Buddha bids them look around and see whether they can discover people in the world who are absolutely happy. They obviously cannot. The Buddha follows here the socratic method of debate consisting in a series of questions. The first question concerns the world in general:

“But, venerable ones, do you find yourselves knowing and seeing people absolutely happy?”

The answer is, obviously, “no”. Then the Buddha appeals to their personal experience:

“But are you conscious of your self (attā) as having been absolutely happy for one night or for one day, or for half a night or for half a day?”

They could have answered, perhaps, that there had been nights and days when they had experienced joy and happiness, even to

50 Cfr., for instance, D II, pp. 54-55, Mahānidānasutta, 32.
a great degree, but absolute happiness is not a prize to be grasped in this world. Absolute happiness means a happiness consummate in every way, perfectly secure and lasting. Therefore the answer was again negative. The Buddha proceeds:

"But then, venerable ones, do you know: 'This is the way, this is the method for the realization of a world that is absolutely happy?"

Buddha's interlocutors had also to confess their ignorance as to that. Obviously the only way to absolute happiness was the way shown by the Buddha, but it was a way leading the adept not to any other world found within the realm of samsaric existence but outside of it. The only source of knowledge left in this matter was therefore revelation:

"But then, venerable ones, do you hear the voice of speaking gods who themselves have attained to a world absolutely happy, saying: 'Be virtuous, Sirs, be righteous, Sirs, for the realization of an absolutely happy world, since we too, Sirs, behaving thus have attained to an absolutely happy world?''

Since, according to early Buddhism, gods were still within the round of existences, such revelation was also impossible. 51

Finally Poṭṭhapāda had to agree that the opinion of those sāmaṇas and brāhmaṇas was utterly incongruous. The Buddha then compares those sāmaṇas and brāhmaṇas to one in love with the most beautiful lady in the land, of whom he knows absolutely nothing. He compares them also to a man building a staircase at a spot, void of any building, where four roads meet and, at being questioned by the passers-by, not being able to tell them which side of the future building the staircase was planned or whether the building was to be high, low, or of medium size.

We have our attention turned towards the self, thus in the nominative, since the talk is about some sāmaṇas and brāhmaṇas propounding that the self (attā) is absolutely happy and healthy after death. Nevertheless, T. W. RHYS DAVIDS, carried by his anti-attā prejudice, translates the second of the above given questions as: "Or further, Sirs, can you maintain that you yourselves..." It is clear that for him attā in Buddha's lips could have only a merely reflexive sense. But here the Buddha was referring to the same self mentioned by those sāmaṇas and brāhmaṇas.

No, the Buddha did not loathe pronouncing the word attā. We are not going to say that the Buddha, by so doing, asserted even indirectly the reality of the self assumed by the heretics. He was merely accepting it for the sake of controversy. The main point at issue is here not the reality of the self but the possibility of absolute happiness on a samsaric level. On the other hand, it cannot be said either that by denying the possibility of an absolutely happy self within the realm of transmigrational existence the Buddha was denying in an absolute way the reality of the self.

The self here involved is the self of the heretics, identified with the existential factors, of whom absolutely happiness and even health are predicated even as they can be predicated of the body and the mind. But of this we are told time and again: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self (me attā, in the nominative!)”. The absolute happiness here rejected is one to be realized on the empirical level, where the unqualified (ekamsīka) truth obtains that all is pain (sabbam dukkham).

On personal existence (24-32)

Again without any intervening question on the part of his interlocutors, the Buddha introduces a new topic. This part of the sutta discusses what in the text is labelled as attapaṭilābha. This is translated by T. W. Rhys Davids as “modes of personality” in the plural, and simply as “personality” in the singular. The word, as it is, occurs only in this context, anywhere else the term used is attabhāvapaṭilābha, which may be literally translated as “assumption of personal existence”.

The word attabhāva, as G. C. Pande well remarks,

“is a curious expression. It seems to have meant an individual existence, a particular individual life. It was the result of past kamma and included the physical aspect of personality. It could not be permanent, else, naturally, no release for misery would be possible. For those who used the compound, the meaning of Āttā taken separately may not have been important.”

52 See our book: Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism, in particular the first part dealing with the “Existential Self”.

53 See our book: Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism, specially the second part entitled: “The Metaphysical Self”.

54 Studies in the Origins of Buddhism, Allahabad, 1957, pp. 486-487. The last words of the quotation contain a reference to the controversy around the term attā. As pointed out above, the Buddha never made a problem of the use of the term attā. A Critical Pāli Dictionary explains attabhāva as: “the existence as an individual, proper nature; but most frequently concrete: a living being, or its bodily form, person, personality, i. e. the various
One thing is clear. This topic is introduced as if the Buddha himself allowed the possibility of the three kinds of personal existence, since he begins their description with the words: *tayo kho me, Potṭhapāda, attapaṭilābhā*. The description of these three kinds of personal existence is as follows:

How, Potṭhapāda, is the gross material assumption of personality? Corporeal, made of the four elements, feeding on mouthfuls of food, such is the gross material (*oloṭiko*) assumption of personality.

“How is the assumption of personality made of mind (*manomayo*)? Corporeal, made of mind, with all main and subsidiary limbs, not devoid of any senses.

How is the incorporeal assumption of personality? Incorporeal, made of consciousness (*saṅhamayo*), such is the incorporeal assumption of personality”. (24).

These three descriptions coincide almost literally with the three kinds of self enumerated by Potṭhapāda in paragraphs 12-14, the only discrepancy consisting in the qualification of *rūpi*, “corporeal”, given here to the second assumption of personality. The real difference is that Potṭhapāda designated everyone of them as *attā*, self, while the Buddha calls them *attapaṭilābhā*—better *attabhāvapaṭilābhā*—in the sense already explained by Pande, and where *attā*—may be an indication of personal continuity of personality in the moral sense, without of course impairing the reality of the moral agent but asserting it. 55

We are confronted here with three possible levels of existence. Of the first two, we find independent testimonies in the Canon evincing the fact that they were admitted by the Buddhists.

Regarding the first, we are told that on certain occasion a *devaputta* appeared to the Buddha filling the whole Jeta Grove with the splendour he was irradiating. He was requested by the Buddha to create a gross material *attabhāva*. 56 He did so, and saluting the Buddha stood at one side.

The second level of existence is independently attested in another passage of the *Aṅguttara*. We are told there that Kakudha, Mahāmoggallāna’s attendant, was reborn after death as a *deva-*

appearances of the *attā*, opp. the continual existence of the *attā*. The last words accord somehow with our distinction between the “existential self” and the “metaphysical self”.


putta, assuming an attabhāva with a huge body made of mind and filling two or three village fields.57

The third level of existence is not mentioned as attabhāva, but the arūpa level of existence, as contrasted with the rūpa one, is mentioned in several catalogues as being common to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, with the difference that the latter identified the ontological self with those levels of existence.58

Even if these three levels of existence were admitted by early Buddhism, this is not the doctrinal import of this part of the Poṭṭhapādasutta. This is declared with the following words, repeated of everyone of those three levels:

57 A II, p. 379, Pañcakaniṇīpāta, 10, 10. The power to create such a body is a supernatural power to which a bhikkhu can aspire by means of yogenic exercises. Cfr. D I, p. 86, Samāññaphalasutta, 87. 58 We met with this heretical identification precisely with these three levels of existence in this very sutta, paragraphs 12-14. The complete catalogue of possible levels of existence is found at D III, p. 86, Sappasāda-niyasutta, 17, where certain gods are introduced capable to remember in detail all their previous attabhāvas, these being: endowed with form (rūpinī), devoid of form (arūpinī), endowed with perception (saññinī), devoid of perception (nevasaññinīnaṁsaññinī). It seems that this logical division of attabhāva is to be analysed as containing first of all the most general division: rūpi and arūpi, while those that follow are subdivisions of the arūpi type. In A II, p. 37, Caturkaniṇīpāta, 4, 4, the Tathāgata is proclaimed best of all beings, these being classified into: rūpino, arūpino, saññino, asaññino, nevasaññināsaññino. The same conceitful fancies entertained by untrained people or heretics are found in S II–III, p. 278, Khandhavagga 47: rūpi bhavissanī, arūpi bhavissanī, saññī bhavissanī, asaññī bhavissanī, nevasaññināsaññī bhavissanī. Cfr. also S IV, p. 181, Salāyatanasamayuttā, 248. In S IV, pp. 344-345, we read that whatever reason of cause there might be for the designation of the Tathāgata as rūpi, or arūpi, or saññi, or asaññi, or nevasaññināsaññi, all those reasons and causes have been obliterated "entirely, wholly, in every way, absolutely, without remainder", therefore no one can define the Tathāgata in any of those ways, and hence no one can say of him that he exists, that he does not exist, both that he exists and does not exist, that he both neither exists nor does not exist. D III, p. 108, Pāsadikasutta, 31 speaks of the self identified by the heretics with the modes of existence, accepting for such a self one of the following possibilities while rejecting all the others: rūpi, arūpi, rūpi ca arūpi ca, neva rūpi nārūpi, saññi, asaññi, nevasaññināsaññi, thus increasing the catalogue with two more types of self. D I, pp. 30-32, Brahmajālasutta, 85 f. enumerates two kinds of self that could be labelled as "gross material", one human, made of the four elements, born of father and mother, and another divine or heavenly, with form, moving in the realm of sensual pleasures, feeding on mouthfuls of food; this is followed by another self which is divine or heavenly, with form, made of mind, endowed with all limbs and sensorial faculties; the following selves coincide with the conditions of the vimokkhas beginning with the sphere of infinitude of space, but stopping short of the final and most perfect vimokkha. See our book: Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism, p. 170, 178, 235, 243.
"I, Poṭṭhapāda, teach dhamma for the leaving aside of the gross material (or made of mind, or incorporeal) assumption of personality, so that following [this dhamma] your impure dispositions will vanish, the pure ones will increase, and you will dwell having attained the plenitude and full development of wisdom in this very life, having realized [this dhamma] by yourself by means of higher wisdom. Maybe it occurs to you, Poṭṭhapāda, that [with all that] the state [of such a man] will be painful, but this, Poṭṭhapāda, sould not be viewed in this manner. There will result thrilling joy, happiness, serenity, awareness, discrimination, and a happy state”. (25-27).

The ultimate end of Buddhims is liberation, and its teachings are always given with that one aim in view. This is also the import of the paragraphs that follow (28-32), where the Buddha says that if anyone should ask him about the nature of any of those levels of existence he would answer just explaining to him the dhamma for the leaving aside of them and the personal attainment of higher wisdom in this very life. This will be like building a staircase to a building that has already been erected.

Then Citta, Poṭṭhapāda’s companion in this part of the dialogue, questions the Buddha about the relation existing between those three levels of existence or assumption of personal existence. The Buddha answers that while one of those levels of existence is going on, it does not fall under the category of the other two, but has its own denomination. (33) To clarify this point, to a pertinent question of the Buddha, Citta answers:

"I was in the past, it is not so that I was not; I shall be in future, it is not so that I shall be not; I am now, it is not so that I am not".

And to a second question of the Buddha he answers again:

"The assumption of personality that I had in the past, that assumption of personality was real at that time, while the future and present were unreal; the assumption of personality which I will have in future, that assumption of personality will be real at that time, while the past and the present will be unreal; the assumption of personality which I have now at present, this assumption of personality is real, while the past and the future are unreal". (34).

Then the Buddha concludes:

"In the same way, Citta\textsuperscript{59}, at the time when a gross material assumption of personality goes on, at that time it does

\textsuperscript{59} Evameva, Citta, These words seem to imply that the Buddha accepts Citta’s answer to a question he himself had worded. Therefore in what fol-
in no way fall under the denomination of either an assumption of personality made of mind, or an incorporeal assumption of personality. (The same correlative distinction applies to an assumption of personality made of mind, and to an assumption of personality that is incorporeal). (35)

There follows a simile that has been the object of diverse interpretations:

"Even as, Citta, from the cow milk [is produced]; from milk, curds; from curds, clarified butter; from clarified butter, cream of clarified butter, when it is milk, then in does in no way fall under the denomination of curds, or clarified butter, of cream of clarified butter, it only falls then just under the denomination of milk. (A similar statement is made of the other evolutorial stages in relation to the rest of them). In the same way, Citta, at the time when a gross material assumption of personality goes on, at that time it does in no way fall under the denomination of either an assumption of personality made of mind, or an incorporeal assumption of personality, etc. And these, Citta, are popular expressions, popular ways of speaking, popular usages, popular denominations, of which the Tathāgata makes use without being attached to them". (36).

In the Introduction to the first volume of the Dighanikāyapāli of the Nālandā Edition we read:

"Citta Hatthisāriputta raised the question about the nature of 'identity' of the self in course of transmigration from one plane of existence to another. This was explained with the simile of the milk in the course of fermentation, which elucidates the law of Universal Flux, and proves that the identity is to be accepted only for practical consideration, not as a metaphysical truth".60.

We do not see how the text justifies the assertion that the question raised by Citta concerns the "identity of the self in course of transmigration". In the first place, the discussion of the three levels of existence is introduced by Buddha himself. All the questions found in the passage are posited by the Buddha, except the one referring to the correlative reality of a given assumption of personality at the time of its existence in opposition to the unreality of the other two. This reality and unreality are admitted by the Buddha, who illustrates the point by means of

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60 Bhikkhu J. Kashyap (Gen. Editor), The Dighanikāya (1. Sīlakkhandha Vagga), Pāli Publication Board (Bihar Government), 1958, Intr., p. XVIII.
the simile of different stages of transformation of the milk, to which different names are given, because obviously they are different from each other, being real at the time they exist. The law of Universal Flux is not the point at issue here. The essential factor of a simile is what in the case of a fully developed comparison (upamā) goes by the name of sādharaṇa dharma, that is, the quality that is common to both the subject of comparison (upameya) and the object with which it is compared (upamāna). In this case, the three levels of existence are the upameya, the different products of the fermentation of the milk are the upamāna. The sādharaṇa dharma is in that the three levels of existence as well as the different products of the milk are subject to divers designations suitable to the reality in every case signified by them. This is all the simile as such tries to convey. The rest is not an outcome of textual interpretation but of imaginary reading into the text. 61

No justification can be found either, for the note that T. W. Rhys Davids appends to the translation of the simile:

The point is, of course, that just as there is no substratum in the products of the cow, so in man there is no ego, no constant unity, no ‘soul’ (in the animistic sense of the word, as used by savages). There are a number of qualities that, when united, make up a personality — always changing. When the change has reached a certain point, it is convenient to change the designation, the name, by which the personality is known — just as in the case of the products of the cow. But the abstract term is a convenient form of expression. There never was any personality, as a separate entity, all the time” 62.

The implication that there is no substratum in the products of the cow is unfounded, as not being contemplated by the text. G. C. Pande says that the words: “An these, Citta, are popular expressions, etc.” are a corrective to the simile of the transformation of milk, establishing an unchanging identity between changing appearances, which is clearly un-Buddhistic.” 63 But the simile and the appended words, taken by themselves, would mean

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61 This very simile is used in other contexts where four kinds of people are compared and one of them, the last one, is proclaimed best. In every case, the simile goes on saying that, in the same way, of the four products of the milk: curds, butter, clarified butter, and cream of clarified butter, the last one is the best. Here, the four classes of men are the upameya; the four products of milk, the upamāna; and the quality of being best the sādharaṇa dharma. And this is what the simile is meant to convey, nothing more. S. II-III, Jhānasamyutta, 1, 2, 3, etc.


just the contrary, namely that the different products of the milk and in their turn the three levels of existence are mere deno-
minations of one and the same reality underlying them all, even as we are told in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad that by knowing a lump of clay we know all its modifications, since the latter are mere outward denominations (nāmadheya) of the same unchanging substance. In the interpretation of a text, the context is of paramount importance, and this text, within the frame of its own context, means that the Buddha is interested in discussing the three levels of existence solely inasmuch as he preaches dhamma for their abolition, free from any attachment to them, an attachment found in people of other sects.

Besides, the ‘soul’, better the self, disowned by the Buddha was not an animistic concept proper to savages, but a self turned into the object of philosophical discussions, but generally iden-
tified with the existential factors, particularly with conscious-
ness. And as to the abstract term “personality”, mentioned by Rāys Davids, we must point out that it is never found in the Pāli texts. The reference is all through to attā, a concrēte term never made by the Buddha an object of theoretical discussions, but being dealt with always either as the subject of liberation (moral self) or as the metaphysical entity that should never be identified with whatever is external to it (metaphysical self). Thus we shall be told time and again of whatever is alien to the self: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self (me attā)”, making of this a compelling motive to discard all that is non-self, precisely because it is non-self, and thus attain release.

About the existence of an “ego”, as being the common factor in the different stages of transmigration, early Buddhism expe-
ressed itself in the same way as other systems of thought that ad-
mitted the reality of the self. Even in our sutta, the Buddha accepts, as they stand, Citta’s words: “I was in the past, it is not so that I was not; I shall be in future, it is not so that I shall not be; I am now, it is not so that I am not”. The difference was that the Buddha never fell into the trap of identifying

64 Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI, i, 4–6.
65 It may be pointed out that in the Poṭṭhapādasutta some theoretical discussions on the self and consciousness are found. But the questions are introduced by Poṭṭhapāda, not by the Buddha, the latter taking advantage of the occasion to disabuse his partner in dialogue of such illusory selves, giving in the process the criterium to settle that something is not the self, namely its impermanence. It is on this principle that the Pāli texts prove that the khandhas, the senses, the elements, etc. cannot be the self or someth-
ing belonging to the self, are anattā, and should therefore be discarded by the aspirant to liberation.
the metaphysical entity of the true self with the different stages of transmigration. His persistent view was that the true self is by nature metaphysically alien to anything constituent of samsaric reality, but without denying the reality of the moral self. This means that the Buddha accepted those expressions of Citta without any kind of conceit, and there lies the whole difference, that is why the Buddha makes explicit his total lack of attachment to the three levels of existence being discussed an his interest in them only insofar as they should be abandoned for the sake of liberation.

CONCLUSION OF THE SUTTA

The sutta concludes with an account of the conversion of both Poṭṭhapāda and Citta, but with a difference. In spite of the leading part played by the former in the sutta, he became only an upasaka, a lay follower, while Citta enrolled himself in the sangha, and not long after attained the perfection of arahantship.

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