

TWO SMALL REMNANTS OF 'PRE-HĪNAYĀNIST' BUDDHISM IN THE PĀLI NIKĀYAS

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As is well known, the *Aṭṭhaka-* and *Pārāyana-vaggas* of the Sutta Nipāta represent texts of the greatest antiquity and present a teaching significantly different from that of most of the later strata of the bulk of the Pāli texts¹. These texts, or their Prakrit or Sanskrit equivalents, are quoted or referred to by name in the later texts of several different schools, and thus would appear to have circulated widely and been esteemed in the Buddhist world in the earliest period to which we have access². At present, if we wish to read more teachings such as these, integrally combining 'forest' asceticism with a direct, non-conceptual meditation approach to the Undying, we are forced to turn to Mahāyāna texts such as the *Samādhirājasūtra*. Here, however, I would like to call attention to two brief, isolated verse passages that clearly belong to the same teaching as the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, but somehow managed to slip by the editors/authors of the Theravādin Canon, perhaps by being disguised as the concluding verses of otherwise more ordinary, mild-mannered Pāli suttas. Possibly, the existence of these verses (in addition to their intrinsic spiritual value) could add to the suggestion that the teaching genre of these texts may once have been much more widespread, if not the norm of earliest Buddhism, than it might now appear from the extremely limited sample of surviving texts of 'Hīnayānist' Buddhism (which may, after all, be mostly just late products of the cenobium) to which we currently have access.

1 Cf., for example, Luis O. Gomez, 'Proto-Mādhyamika in the Pāli canon', *Philosophy East and West* 26, 2, April 1976, pp.137-65.

2 See P.V. Bapat, *Arthapada Sutra* (Santiniketan 1951), pp.1-3, and R. Salomon, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra* (Seattle-London 1999), pp.27, 158-63. Also K.R. Norman, *The Group of Discourses II* (PTS 1995), pp.xxviii, xxxiv and xxxv.

The first passage occurs at *Āṅguttara Nikāya* II 24 and, according to the *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana* edition (as presented in the *Dhammagiri-Pāli-Gaṅṭhamālā Series*) which differs slightly from the PTS ed., runs as follows:

*yam kiñci diṭṭham va sutam mutam vā
ajjhositam saccamutam paresam /
na tesu tādi sayasamvutesu
saccam musā vāpi param daheyya //
etañca sallam paṭikacca disvā
ajjhositā yattha pajā visattā /
jānāmi passāmi tatheva etam
ajjhositam natthi tathāgatānan ti //*

For more Sanskrit-oriented readers, I would, ignoring metrical considerations, offer the following (tentatively rendered) *chāyā*:

*yat kiñcid dṛṣṭam vā śrutam matam vā
adhyavasitam satyamataṃ pareṣāṃ /
na teṣu tādṛk svayam samvrteṣu
satyam mṛṣā vāpi param dadhyāt //
etam ca śalyam pratikṛtya dṛṣṭvā
adhyavasitā yatra prajā visaktā /
jānāmi paśyāmi tathaiva etad
adhyavasitam nāsti tathāgatānām iti //*

One possible translation:

Whatever (is) seen, heard or thought (is) grasped (as) a true thought by others. Such a one (as the sage), among those tied up by themselves, would not take (these), whether true or false, as the Beyond³. And having previously seen this stake, stuck on which are

people attached, — ‘Thus I know, I see’; there is not this grasping for *tathāgatas*⁴.

The other passage in question is verse 786 (*sutta* 230 (IX 10)) of the *Sagāthavagga* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. According to the critical edition by G.A. Somaratne (PTS 1998), the text runs:

*ahū pure dhammapadesu chando
yāva virāgena samāgamimha
yato virāgena samāgamimha
yam kiñci diṭṭham va sutam mutam vā
aññāya nikkhepanam āhu santo ti //*

Chāyā (again ignoring the metre):

*abhūt puro dharmapadesu chando
yāvad virāgeṇa samāgamāma
yato virāgeṇa samāgamāma
yat kiñcid dṛṣṭam vā śrutam matam vā
ājñāya nikṣepaṇam āhuḥ santa iti //*

Translation:

Formerly, there was desire for verbal expressions⁵, until we met with dispassion. Since we met with dispassion, having understood whatever (is) seen, heard, or thought, the good say ‘putting down’.

Both of these passages contain the key repeated phrase and theme of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (also expressed in the same way in the ‘*Nandamāṇavapucchā*’ of the *Pārāyanavagga* at *Sutta-Nipāta* (Sn) 1082-3) of abandoning whatever is ‘seen, heard or thought’ and any belief in their ultimate validity (that they are true or false), seeking purity through them, or constructing further verbal conceptualisations upon them. In order to cross the flood of repeated rebirth and becoming (see, e.g., Sn 779, 803, 877, 901, 902) and reach the Beyond, direct contact with or knowledge of the Absolute, the end of

3 Cf. *Vajracchedikā*, ed. Max Müller, p.32, lines 13-14/p.37, lines 11-12: . . . *yaṣ tathāgatena dharmo ’bhisambuddho deṣito nidhyāto na tatra satyam na mṛṣā / . . . yaṣ ca subhūte tathāgatena dharmo ’bhisambuddho deṣito vā tatra na satyam na mṛṣā //* . . . that dharma fully-awakened to, shown, (and) meditated on by a *tathāgata* — there (there is) neither true nor false / . . . and that, O *Subhūti*, dharma (which is) fully-awakened to or shown by a *tathāgata* — there (there) is neither true nor false’.

4 *Tathāgata* is here, presumably, in its use as an epithet of any fully accomplished sage, not just of the periodically appearing Buddhas as in the later texts.

5 Here I follow E. Conze’s entry for **dharmapada** in his *Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature*, Tokyo 1967, p.210.

diversification (*papañca* or *prapañca*, Sn 874) and perception (*saññā* or *saṃjñā*, also, e.g., Sn 847), the yogi must abandon all involvement with the realm of sensory experience (*saṃjñā* and *prapañca*), which includes all thoughts and verbal conceptualisations. Far from containing ultimate truth and being a place to seek purity and the basis of spiritual practice (as apparently was assumed by the other systems of the Buddha's time that would form the milieu of these texts), thoughts and verbal understanding are just conditioned sensory experience no more real than the objects of the other five senses and belong entirely to the relative (*saṃvṛti*) world. Only the non-diversified realm of the Absolute, known only by the direct non-verbal *prajñā* of the sage is actual truth (*paramārtha*). The *Aṭṭhaka* and these related verses use words to point directly or re-orient us to this totally other dimension of the Absolute, and this is also the purpose of much of the Prajñā-pāramitā literature, Mādhyamika texts, etc. At the same time, the *Aṭṭhaka* clearly and integrally sets forth the ascetic, renunciant, yogic life and practice which is essential to and inseparable from the process of going from the suffering realm of diversified sense data (including thoughts!) and perception to the non-diversified, perception-free *mokṣa* of the Absolute. Such close combination can also sometimes be found in Mahāyāna texts such as the gāthās of Chapter 19 of the *Samādhiraṅgasūtra*.

It appears that the above two passages derive from the same contemplative (and, in this case, also 'textual') tradition as the *Aṭṭhaka* and *Pārāyana-vaggas*. This tradition, or at least derivatives of it, has left more abundant literary remains in later, rather less clean and more problematic forms, such as the Prajñāpāramitā, *Samādhiraṅga*, Mādhyamika, the *Satya*-(or *Tattva*-)-*siddhiśāstra* of Harivarman, etc., but sources for its 'original' form, apparently suppressed by the development of 'Hīnayānistic' Buddhism, are presently more sparse. These two surviving, isolated passages may suggest that they were once more copious. It only remains to be regretted that all such historical discussion, whether true or false, is just something seen, heard, or thought, not the Beyond.

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Translated from the Chinese Version by
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Eleventh Fascicle
Part 20
(A Spiritual Friend)

3. 1 '... When the brahmin Nayātikrama had risen from his seat and again had sat down on the seat reserved for the chief [of the assembly], he very much disliked his having been ranked foremost in that gathering. [He thought to himself with regard to] the vows [formerly] taken by him: These people have made me move to another seat so as to fill the vacancy². Now that I have made known scriptural authority³, it will be difficult [for me] to keep up my practice (*śīla*). Supposing there is a really virtuous person who wholeheartedly keeps his vows; he performs actions [in conformity with] places he hopes to be born in. I [would] in fact destroy⁴ for good the virtue (*guṇa*) [resulting from my brahminical studies and practice should I become attached to name and fame]. – Then the person in charge of the munificence [function] (*dānasvāmin*) provided five hundred ounces of gold, one golden staff, one golden jug for ablutions, one thousand head of cattle and one beautiful girl⁵. [He] handed over [these various *yajña* ingredients] to the [new] chairman⁶

1 See T2, 598b5 ff.; Hayashi, p. 177 ff.

2 From the context it can be inferred that, after Nayātikrama's reciting a text unknown to the large gathering of learned brahmins and after the brahmins' proposal that he should assume the position of being their chief, the actual chief and chairman of that *yajña* function had perforce vacated his seat.

3 Cf. Karashima, p. 227: 經藉, 'a scriptural text'.

4 For 壞敗 Hayashi reads 懷敗 which does not seem correct.

5 Cf. Divy(V), p. 152, 14: *kanyā ca sarvālaṃkāravibhūṣitā*; at BSR 16, 2 (1999), p. 213, where the ingredients of the *yajña* are enumerated, the beautiful girl is omitted.

6 上坐, *uttamāsana*, 'he who [occupies] the highest seat'.