

# The Nibbāna Sermons 1 to 11 by Bhikkhu K Ñāṇananda

*An e-learning course hosted by the*  
Numata Center for Buddhist Studies  
University of Hamburg  
*in collaboration with the*  
Barre Center for Buddhist Studies  
Massachusetts

## INTRODUCTION

---

“Recently we have had an occasion to listen to a series of sermons on *Nibbāna* and there have been differences of opinion regarding the interpretation of some deep *suttas* on *Nibbāna* in those sermons. And so the venerable Great Preceptor suggested to me that it would be useful to this group if I would give a set of sermons on *Nibbāna*, touching on those controversial points.

At first, for many reasons, I hesitated to accept this invitation for a serious task, but then, as the venerable Great Preceptor repeatedly encouraged me on this, I gave some thought as to how best I could set about doing it. And it occurred to me that it would be best if I could address these sermons directly to the task before us in this Nissarana Vanaya, and that is meditative attention [*yoniso manasikāra*], rather than dealing with those deep controversial *suttas* in academic isolation. And that is why I have selected the above quotation as the theme for the entire set of sermons, hoping that it would help create the correct atmosphere of meditative attention.

*etaṃ santam etaṃ paṇītam, yadidaṃ sabbasaṅkhārasamatho  
sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānam.*

‘This is peaceful, this is excellent, namely the stilling of all preparations, the relinquishment of all assets, the destruction of craving, detachment, cessation, extinction.’

This in fact is a meditation subject in itself, a *kammaṭṭhāna*. This is the reflection on the peace of *Nibbāna*, *upasamānussati*.”

(Bhikkhu K. Ñāṇananda 2003: 1)

- 
- The *Nibbāna Sermons* as a learned piece of contemplative scholarship on the meditative theme of *upasamānussati*, “recollection of peace”, that is, the *Nibbāna*-experience itself.
  - The Pali discourses present *Nibbāna* by means of an illustrated, figurative, often metaphorical mode of exposition.
  - The later Theravāda tradition – including Abhidhamma, post-canonical, paracanonical and commentarial literature – understood such an exposition as contingent, provisional, conventional, in contrast to the universally valid, categorical, definitive exposition of the Abhidhamma, represented as the acme of the Buddha’s word.
  - The status of the commentaries came to be enhanced by the popular belief that their content is ultimately traceable to a miscellany of the Buddha’s own word scattered in different places, *pakiṇṇaka-desanā*:  
“[b]ut the true state of affairs seems to be rather different. Very often the commentaries are unable to say something conclusive regarding the meaning of deep *suttas*. So they simply give some possible interpretations and the reader finds himself at a loss to choose the correct one. Sometimes the commentaries go at a tangent and miss the correct interpretation. Why the commentaries are silent on some deep *suttas* is also a

problem to modern day scholars. There are some historical reasons leading to this state of affairs in the commentaries.”

(Bhikkhu K. Ñāṇananda 2003: 2)

---

---

## the epistemological & scriptural foundations

---

---

### ancient Indian approach to truth: valid means of knowledge

- (1) oral tradition (the ancient sayings handed down by oral transmission)
- (2) logic (philosophical analysis, reasoning & inference)
- (3) direct knowledge (extrasensory/meditative perception, intuitive knowledge)

### the Buddha's epistemology

based on and priorities (3), points out the limits of (1) & (2)

*diṭṭhadhammābhiññāvosānapāramippattānaṃ,  
ādibrahmacariyaṃ paṭijānantānampi kho ahaṃ ... vemattaṃ  
vadāmi.*

*santi ... eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā anussavikā. te anussavena  
diṭṭhadhammābhiññāvosānapāramippattā, ādibrahmacariyaṃ  
paṭijānanti; seyyathāpi brāhmaṇā tevijjā.*

*santi pana ... eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā kevalaṃ  
saddhāmatkena diṭṭhadhammābhiññāvosānapāramippattā,  
ādibrahmacariyaṃ paṭijānanti; seyyathāpi takkā vīmaṃsī.*

*santi ... eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu  
sāmaṃyeva dhammaṃ abhiññāya*

*diṭṭhadhammābhiññāvosaṇapāramippattā, ādibrahmacariyaṃ paṭijānanti.*

*tatra ... ye te samaṇabrāhmaṇā pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu sāmānyeva dhammaṃ abhiññāya diṭṭhadhammābhiññāvosaṇapāramippattā, ādibrahmacariyaṃ paṭijānanti, tesāham asmi.*

*tadamināpetam ... pariyāyena veditabbaṃ, yathā ye te samaṇabrāhmaṇā pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu sāmānyeva dhammaṃ abhiññāya diṭṭhadhammābhiññāvosaṇapāramippattā, ādibrahmacariyaṃ paṭijānanti, tesāham asmi.*

“I say that there is a diversity among those recluses and brahmins who claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge here and now.

There are some recluses and brahmins who are traditionalists, who on the basis of oral tradition claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge here and now; such are the brahmins of the Three Vedas.

There are some recluses and brahmins who, entirely on the basis of mere faith, claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge; such are the reasoners and investigators.

There are some recluses and brahmins who, having directly known the Dhamma for themselves among things not heard before, claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge.

‘I ... am one of those recluses and brahmins who, having directly known the Dhamma for themselves among things not heard before, claim [to teach] the fundamentals of the holy life

after having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge.”

(*Saṅgārava-sutta*, MN 100 at M II 211,8; trsl. Ñāṇamoli 1995: 820)

→ “[in the early discourses, the Buddha] is never simply described as a *vibhajja-vāda* or *vibhajja-vādin*; it is always a question of being one who responds critically in a particular matter, as indicated by the pronoun *ettha*. In fact, elsewhere and on other issues, the Buddha’s position is represented as unequivocal ... there would in fact be some support in the *Nikāyas* for calling him [also] an *ekaṃsa-vādin*. It is true that this exact term is not found, but in the *Poṭṭhapāda-sutta* (D I 191) we find the Buddha declaring that he has made known *ekaṃsikā* teachings, namely the Four Noble Truths.”

(Cousins 2001: 133–134)

→ “it is not appropriate to think that the Buddha employed only the *Vibhajjavāda* methodology at all times in relation to all propositions. His answers varied depending on the nature of the questions. His statements were sometimes categorical and at other times analytical. Therefore, the Canonical evidence does not support the traditional claim that the Buddha can be branded as a *Vibhajjavādin*.”

(Abeynayaka 2009: 96–97)

## **the Buddha’s epistemology for Buddhist disciples**

exposes and re-qualifies the means of knowledge:

- limits of oral tradition (1): material committed to memory might be wrongly remembered or well-remembered material might be false and misleading or be misinterpreted and decontextualised

→ might be related to learnedness in the Teacher's teachings (the textual transmission of the Teacher's teachings has limits too!)

*na tāvāhaṃ pāpima parinibbāyissāmi, yāva me bhikkhuniyo  
na sāvīkā bhavissanti, viyattā vinītā visāradā bahussutā,  
dhammadharā dhammānudhammapaṭipannā, sāmīcipaṭipannā  
anudhammacāriniyo, sakaṃ ācariyakaṃ uggahetvā,  
ācikkhissanti desessanti paññāpessanti paṭṭhapessanti,  
vivarissanti vibhajissanti uttānī karissanti – uppannaṃ  
parappavādaṃ sahadhammena suniggahītaṃ niggahetvā –  
sappāṭihāriyaṃ dhammaṃ desessanti.*

“I will not attain Parinibbāna, Wicked One, for as long as my nuns are not [true] disciples, accomplished, disciplined, confident, learned, bearers of the teaching, practising in conformity with the teaching, correct in their practice, living in conformity with the teaching, and having learned it from their own teacher, will declare, reveal, make known, set forth, open up, analyse, make plain – after giving a good rebuke with reason to the doctrines of others that have arisen – and teach the *sappāṭihāriya* teaching.”

(*Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, DN 16 at DN II 105,8; trsl. with modifications after Ānandajoti 2008: 95–96)

- limits of logical reasoning (2): might appear convincing, but then fall apart upon closer inspection or else prove false if based on false premises (heuristic not eristic!)

→ to be enhanced to the tetralemma model

- shared limits (1+2): the acceptance of a view (dogmatism vs. faith vs. investigation vs. firm confidence)

- shared limits (1+2): what has not been well remembered or what does not appear to be soundly reasoned might prove to be true (*Sandaka-sutta*, MN 76 at MN I 520,3 and *Caṅkī-sutta*, MN 95 at MN II 171,10)

- limits of experience (3): in the absence of established right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), experience as the chief culprit for the arising of wrong views (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) when upheld one-sidedly and dogmatically

→ 49 out of 62 grounds for formulating (wrong) views in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (DN 1) are pure or at least to an extent “direct” meditative experiences, whereas 13 grounds are based on pure reasoning

(cf. Bodhi 1992 [1978]: 6; Anālayo 2003: 45; Anālayo 2009)

→ yet, direct knowledge of the real nature of present experience at the six sense bases (*saḷāyatana*) and its cessation qua direct experience of *Nibbāna* and knowledge of liberation is possible:

it is a “sphere of experience that should be known”, *āyatane veditabbe* (*Kāmaguṇa-sutta*, SN 35.117 at SN IV 98,3 with the commentary, Spk II 391,3) for “there is that sphere of experience”, *atthi ... tad āyatanam* (*Nibbānapaṭisaṃyutta-sutta*, Ud 8.1 at Ud 80,9).

This sphere of experience is to be realised through a method of exposition (*pariyāya*) for attaining valid final knowledge (*añña*) independent of faith (*saddhā*), personal preference (*ruci*), oral tradition (*anussavā*), reasoning (*ākāraparivitakkā*), and acceptance of a view (*diṭṭhinijjhānakkhanti*):

“There is a method of exposition by means of which a monk—apart from faith, apart from personal preference, apart from oral tradition, apart from reasoned reflection, apart from

acceptance of a view after pondering it—can declare final knowledge thus: ‘Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being.’ And what is that method of exposition? Here, monks, having seen a form with the eye, if there is lust, hatred, or delusion internally, a monk understands: ‘There is lust, hatred, or delusion internally’; or, if there is no lust, hatred, or delusion internally, he understands: ‘There is no lust, hatred, or delusion internally.’

Since this is so, are these things to be understood by faith, or by personal preference, or by oral tradition, or by reasoned reflection, or by acceptance of a view after pondering it?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“Aren’t these things to be understood by seeing them with wisdom?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“This, monks, is the method of exposition by means of which a bhikkhu can declare final knowledge thus: ‘Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being’.”

(*Atthinukhopariyāya-sutta*, SN 35.153 at SN IV 139,5; trsl. with integrations after Bodhi 2000: 1214–1215)

▪ “[the Buddha’s awakening] represents the human experience around which the religion would develop its practices and ideals. This was the experience whereby Śākyamuni became an ‘Awakened One’ (*buddha*). His disciples came to believe that all aspects of Buddhist doctrine and practice flow from this experience of awakening (*bodhi*).”

(Gómez 1987: 355)

▪ “the Buddhist emphasis on ‘inner experience’ is in large part a product of modern and open lay-oriented reform movements” ... “a product of twentieth-century reforms inspired in part by Occidental models.” “[Such a concept of] religious experience is a relatively late and distinctly Western invention.”

(Sharf 1995: 246 and 259 + Sharf 2000: 271; critical replies in Anālayo 2013b: 32–33 note 63 and Dhammadinnā 2014: 105–106 note 92)

→ direct final knowledge of ‘all’ (*sabba-*) ≠ ‘Theravāda’ commentarial & Abhidhammic omniscience (*sabbaññā*)

→ *sabbaññā* of the ‘Theravāda Buddha’ impugned by Protestant and Catholic polemicists and debaters who paved the way to Buddhist revivalism and the emergence of ‘Protestant Buddhism’ in Sri Lanka

→ knowledge of conditionality & its cessation ≠ Theravāda *Paṭṭhāna*-project

→ etc. ...

THE  
**KRISTİYĀNI PRAJŅĀPTI;**  
 OR  
 THE EVIDENCES AND DOCTRINES  
 OF  
 THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.  
 IN THREE PARTS.

BY THE LATE  
**REV. D. J. GOGERLY.**

PART I.  
**ON BUDDHISM.**

COLOMBO:  
 CHRISTIAN VERNACULAR EDUCATION SOCIETY.

1885.

**ON BUDDHISM:**

*Being the First Part of the Kristiyāni Prajñapti.*

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING GAUTAMA BEING SARVAJŅĀ \*  
 OR OMNISCIENT.

THE founder of Buddhism did not deduce his doctrines from reasonings on their nature, but from his own intuitions. Thus when he delivered his first discourse at Benares, after declaring the four leading doctrines of his system, he states at the close of each of the doctrines: Me bhikkhave pubbé ānānussutesu dhammesu chakkhun udapādi ñāṇaṇ udapādi paññā udapādi vijjā udapādi āloko udapādi. † “Bhikshus! for the attainment of these previously unknown doctrines the eye, the knowledge, the wisdom, the clear perception, the light were developed within me.”

In many of his discourses he affirms that he did not derive his doctrines from the instruction of others, nor from various reasonings, but from his own underived wisdom; and

[Note. The Pāli quotations are not literally translated but their correct sense is given.]

\* සර්වඥ.

† මෙ භික්ඛවෙ පුබ්බෙ අනානුසුතෙසු ධර්මෙසු චක්ඛුං උදපාදි ඤාණං උදපාදි පඤ්ඤා උදපාදි විජ්ජා උදපාදි ආලොකො උදපාදි.

Therefore the truth of his system depends upon the unlimited extent and the unerring nature of his knowledge. He is accordingly styled Sarvajña \* or the Omniscient One. By this word the Buddhists mean that Gautama is fully acquainted with all existing things; but some

---

“The entire teaching of the Buddha could be summed up in a single Pāli word. What do you think it is?’ ...

‘*Yāvadeva*’, comes the unexpected answer. Bhante adds the Sinhala word: ‘*hudek*’. In English, it means ‘merely for the sake of’. ... ‘That one word transcends all those isms. We might as well call this teaching a *yāvadeva-ism*. Each step on the way is merely for the sake of taking the next, and that too is merely for the next. In other words, one has to reverse *paṭiccasamuppāda*. We encounter the word *āhāra* (food, nutriment), for both good and the bad. *Hetu*, *paccaya*, *āhāra* all indicate causality. Later tradition tried to make a distinction between *hetu* and *paccaya* but we do not see this in early texts. For example, we find phrases such as ‘*ko hetu, ko paccayo*’. The teaching was given to be made use of, to go to the other shore, not to get entangled in words.’ ...

‘That’s why we said that it is when *pariyatti* (scriptural study) overtook *paṭipatti* (practice) that the decline started. How can one understand the texts with-out any practice? It would be just a collection of words. We need both: *sāttham sabyañjanam* (right meaning and right phrasing). If the meaning is wrong, the phrasing would be wrong, and vice versa. However, if the meaning is right, even if the phrasing is wrong, there is the possibility of making corrections. Otherwise we’ll be passing the *piṭaka*, the basket, in the dark.’

‘I’m reminded of one beautiful line from a story mentioned in the commentaries, which my teacher (Ven. Ñāṇārāma Mahāthera) used often in his Dhamma talks: *añño esa, āvuso, gatakassa maggo nāma* [Vism III.41 at Vism 97,6] — This path is different, friend, to one who has travelled by it.”

(Bhikkhu K. Ñāṇananda in Bhikkhu Yogānanda 2016: 39–40)

---

---

## the textual & historical background: Theravāda

---

### ***theravāda* in the Pali discourses: the ‘Sayings of the Elders’**

▪ *tāvataken’ eva oṭṭhapahatamattena lapitalāpanamattena ñāṇavādañ ca vadāmi theravādañ ca jānāmi passāmī ti ca paṭijānāmi*

“as far as mere lip-reciting and mere repetition were concerned, I [could] say the sayings of knowledge and the sayings of the elders, and claim that I knew and saw them”

(*Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, MN 26 at MN I 164,4; trsl. Anālayo 2013: 215 note 1; cf. also *Cūlasāropama-sutta*, MN 36 at MN I 240,26; *Bodhirājakumāra-sutta*, MN 85 at MN II 93,19; *Saṅgārava-sutta*, MN 100 at MN II 212,1)

→ “the occurrence of the term *theravāda* in the account of the apprenticeship of the future Buddha under Aḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta is unique to the Pāli canon”

(Anālayo 2013: 216)

▪ *theravādan ti thirabhāvavādaṃ, thero aham etthā ti etaṃ vacanaṃ*

“a *theravāda* is [a] declaration of being certain; ‘I am sure of this’ is what is meant”

(commentary on the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, Ps II 171,15; trsl. Gethin 2012: 6 note 11)

→ the commentarial explanation that Gotama declared his certainty about the teachings of Aḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta is acceptable (so also Ñāṇamoli 2005 [1995]: 257), yet “it is, of course, possible that because of the negative context here the commentary deliberately chooses to avoid an explanation in terms of ‘declaration of the elders’”

(Gethin 2012: 6 note 11)

→ “[c]onsidered within its narrative context, I do not find this explanation compelling, since the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* continues with Gotama approaching his teachers with the query, what they had actually realized. This conveys the impression that he was aware of the need for some personal realization beyond the type of knowing and seeing that comes from theoretical knowledge, which would make it less natural for him to claim that he had reached certainty after merely learning a theory.”

(Anālayo 2013: 216)

→ alternative interpretation adopted by the majority of translators of this passage: *theravāda* as a reference to some theory (“the sayings of the elders”) Gotama would have learnt from the elder disciples of Aḷāra and Uddaka.

(e.g., Chalmers 1926: 115; Horner 1967: 208; Neumann 1995 [1896]: 186)

→ “[o]nce having learned the *theravāda* from these senior disciples the neophyte would then approach the master himself for further clarification of specific points, “which is in fact precisely what Gotama did according to the report given in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*. On this interpretation of the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, the present reference to *theravāda* as sayings of the elders Aḷāra or Uddaka and their disciples would stand in a natural continuity to references in later Pāli literature to *theravāda* as sayings of Buddhist elders.

... it seems to me that the sense of *theravāda* as the ‘sayings of the elders’ – in this case obviously not Buddhist elders – does yield a meaningful reading of the present passage.”

(Anālayo 2013: 216 + 217 note 10)

## ***theravāda* in the Pāli commentaries & chronicles**

*ācariyavādo nāma dhammasaṅgāhakehi pañcahi arahantasatehi ṭhapitā pāḷivinimuttā okkantavinicchayappavattā aṭṭhakathātanti. attanomati nāma sutta-suttānuloma-ācariyavāde muñcivā anumānena attano anubuddhiyā nayaggāhena upaṭṭhitākāra-kathanam. api ca suttantābhidhammavinayatṭhakathāsu āgato sabbopi theravādo attanomati nāma. taṃ pana attanomatim gahetvā kathentena na daḷhaggāhaṃ gahetvā voharitabbaṃ. kāraṇam sallakkhetvā atthena pāḷim, pāḷiyā ca attham saṃsanditvā kathetabbaṃ. attanomati ācariyavāde otāretabbā. sace tattha otarati ceva sameti ca, gahetabbā. sace neva otarati na sameti, na gahetabbā. ayañhi attanomati nāma sabbadubbalā. attanomatito ācariyavādo balavataro. ācariyavādo pi suttānulome otāretabbo. tattha otaranto samentoyeva gahetabbo, itaro na gahetabbo. ācariyavādato hi suttānulomaṃ balavataṃ.*

“[t]he view of the teachers’ (*ācariyavāda*) refers to the series of expositions of meaning (*aṭṭhakathā*) constituted by the judgements passed down separately from the canonical text and established by the 500 arahats who were the compilers of the Teaching. ‘Individual opinion’ refers to exposition in a form established by one’s own inference, reasoning and good understanding separate from Sutta, the principles of Sutta, and the tradition of the teachers. The entire [body of] opinion of elders (*sabbo theravādo*) that has come down in the commentaries to the Suttanta, Abhidhamma and Vinaya is also called ‘individual opinion’. But in adopting an individual opinion one should explain it without holding to it stubbornly and come to a conclusion; the evidence should be explained by considering the meaning of the canonical text and applying the meaning to the canonical text; individual opinion should fit with the view of the teachers; if it fits and agrees with this, it

should be accepted; but if it does not fit and agree, it should not be accepted. For it is individual opinion that is certainly weakest of all; the view of the teachers is firmer, but it also should fit with the principles of Sutta; when it fits and agrees with this it should be accepted, otherwise it should not; the principles of Sutta are firmer than the view of the teachers.”

(Sp I 231,9, cf. Nett-ṭ (B<sup>o</sup>) 56; trsl. Gethin 2012: 8)

→ “in the majority of instances *theravāda* appears to be used [by the commentaries] simply and unproblematically to refer to ‘the opinion or view of an elder or elders’, where the elders are monks of some authority.”

(Gethin 2012: 7)

→ hierarchies of scriptural authority:

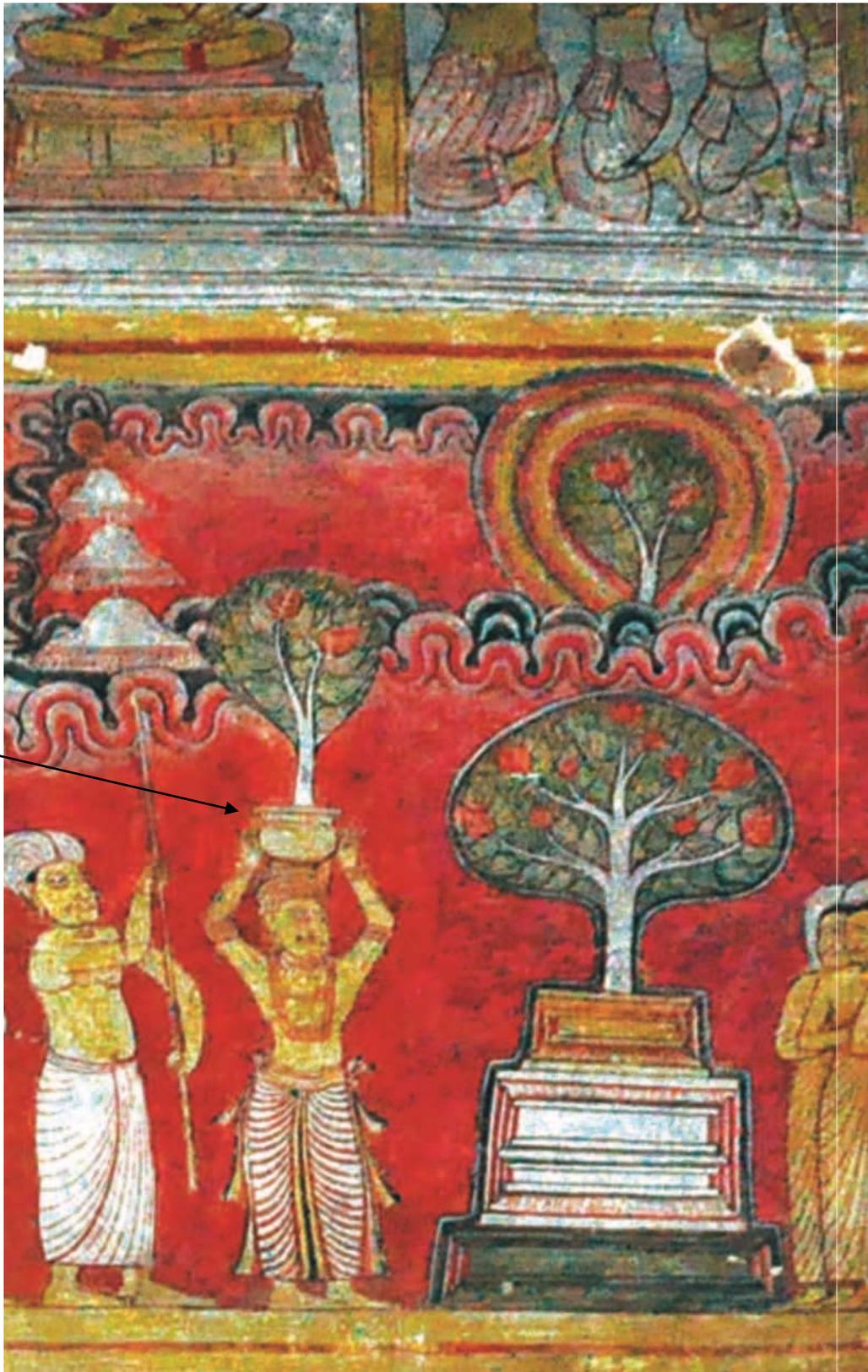
*theravāda* is not to override the actual canonical texts, which are referred to in the commentarial tradition as the *pāḷī*.

→ elsewhere in the same *Vinaya* commentary (Sp I 52,7), *theravāda* features as a reference to the Pali canon, together with its commentaries.

Here the term occurs in a description of the arahant Mahinda’s ability to learn the canon and the commentaries within three years.



The Bodhi-tree arrives in Lankā:  
Kelaniya



The Bodhi-tree arrives in Lanka:  
Dambulla Cave 2



The Bodhi-tree arrives in Laṅkā:  
Wat Pho, Bangkok



Bodhi-tree pūjā: Sumathipāla Araññā, Kanduboda

▪ *pañcasatehi therehi dhammavinayasamṅgaho,  
therehi katasamṅgaho theravādo 'ti vuccati*

“the collection of the Teaching and the Discipline [was made] by the five hundred elders — this collection made by the elders is called *theravāda*”

(Dīp 4.6)

→ *theravāda* as the ‘Sayings of the Elders’ qua the five *Nikāyas* and the *Vinaya* of the Pali canon that according to the traditional account were collected at the first *saṅgīti* according to the *Dīpavaṃsa*

→ “the language of the proceedings of the Council ... might have been Old Mg [Māgadhī] or more likely Old AMg [Ardhamāgadhī], or even a more supra-regional type of Prakrit”

(Roth 1980: 78)

▪ *aṭṭhārasanikāyā ... etesu pana sattarasa vādā bhinnakā,  
theravādo asambhinnako ti veditabbo*

“the eighteen schools ... of these seventeen doctrines should be seen as schismatic, the Theravāda as non-schismatic”

(Kv-a 3,13; trsl. Anālayo 2013: 218 note 17)

→ *theravāda* portrayed as the single non-schismatic tradition in the commentary on the *Kathāvatthu* [introducing a quotation from the *Dīpavaṃsa* on the arising of the different schools]

→ “[t]hus the proper name Theravāda for the Buddhist tradition nowadays found in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia has

its root in the conception of *theravāda* as the Pāli canon, in the sense that the Theravāda school is the tradition that transmits and follows the Pāli recension of the canon that according to the traditional account had been recited by the elders at the time of the first *saṅgīti* — the *theravāda*.”

(Anālayo 2013: 218)

### ***theravāda* qua Pali tradition, Pali as the ‘sacred language’**

→ “[t]he preservation, transmission, and study of the Pali canon and the use of Pāli as a liturgical language—by monastics and laity—is one distinctive and unifying feature of the Theravādin lineages ... Pali was a resource, a database, that offered stability and continuity to a congeries of constantly evolving traditions.”

(Skilling 2009: 64)

→ “the actual importance of what we know as the Pali Canon has not lain in the specific texts collected in that list, but rather in the idea of such a collection.”

(Collins 1990: 104)

### ***theravāda* as a pure monastic lineage**

→ the Pali *Vinaya* as law and ritual: between literalism, nominalism, legalism and pragmatism

### **Theravāda as a modern invention?**

→ “[w]hile there clearly is continuity in the sense of shared identity based on the ‘Sayings of the Elders’, tradition did not consistently use the term *theravāda* to refer to this sense of identity.”

(Anālayo 2013: 221)



Bhikkhu Ānanda Metteyya

→ “[the Burma-ordained British monk Ānanda Metteyya (née Allan Bennett)] was himself the source of our modern use of ‘Theravāda’ [Buddhism as a term covering the Buddhist traditions of Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand] – and not a Burmese text or Burmese informant.”

Perreira (2012: 554)

### **the habit makes the true Theravāda!**

“[i]n one case in which the term is used – and is used emphatically – Theravāda is assigned a meaning that contemporary readers might scarcely expect. This is in the Burmese *Vaṃsadīpanī* (‘Treatise on the lineage [of theras]’), attributed to Vinaya jurist Mehti Sayadaw (1742–?) at Toungoo, Burma, in 1799. *Vaṃsadīpanī* is a polemical work written after decades of factionalism which divided the Burmese saṅgha into ‘hat-wearers’, ‘single-shoulder robe-wearers’, and ‘two-shoulder robe wearers’. Methi Sayadaw comes down strongly in favour of covering both shoulders with the robe, which he describes as ‘orthodox’ and true ‘Theravāda’, as opposed to the Ācariyavāda of the other

‘shameless’ monks. Here the habit makes the true Theravāda monk through adherence to the authorized dress code: the reason for this is clear, since the factions are required to prove that their preferred styles are supported by scriptures – the Vinaya and its commentaries, the authority of which is traced back to the first council. This was an inside dispute over monastic practice. The controversy did not concern lay practice, although naturally the monastic factions reached out to enlist royal and lay support. ‘Theravāda’ was indeed a keyword: but only monks and novices could merit the name, by wrapping the robe in the proper fashion.”

(Skilling 2012: xx)

### **rheterics of invention?**

→ “[p]erreira (2012, 553f), the question here is not if the Burma-ordained monk Ānanda Metteyya had personal acquaintance with a manuscript of this particular work. The point is rather that this work clearly shows that Burmese monks were sufficiently familiar with the conception *theravāda* for it to be employed as a source of authority in a polemical discussion.

Besides the occurrence of the expression in this work, the term *theravāda* in the commentary on the *Kathāvatthu* and in the Ceylonese chronicles does designate the Theravāda tradition as distinct from other Buddhist schools. This concept of the Theravāda tradition must have been known in Burmese and Sri Lankan monastic circles, so that Ānanda Metteyya could easily have come to know of it, in some form or another, from his monastic teachers in Burma or during his previous stay in Sri Lanka, when he apparently learned Pāli.

In fact Ānanda Metteyya himself points to the Pāli commentaries, the Ceylonese chronicles and Oldenberg’s introduction to the PTS edition of the *Vinaya* as sources for his

usage ... [he] was not the first to use the term Theravāda in the sense of a school, and the sources that apparently inspired his usage were available in the West already before his departure to Asia.

When evaluating the finding that Theravāda as a designation for the sense of shared Buddhist identity among countries like Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand is attested to only at the beginning of the 20th century, two questions need to be asked: 1) does the same term occur earlier in a related meaning?, and 2) has the sense of identity to which it refers already been in existence before? It seems to me that both questions would receive a clear affirmative reply. While the usage may be (comparatively) new, the term itself is old and what it now refers to is similarly an ancient phenomenon. In other words, the use of the expression Theravāda to refer to the sense of shared Buddhist identity among countries of South and Southeast Asia is not just the result of an unprecedented invention by a Western convert to Buddhism.”

(Anālayo 2013: 222–223)

[to be continued, lecture 1, 2018 course]

## References

- Abeynayake, Oliver 2009: “The Theravāda Tradition: Its Identity”, *Journal of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Sri Lanka*, 7: 90–100.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu 2003: *Satipaṭṭhāna, the Direct Path to Realization*, Birmingham: Windhorse, 2003.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu 2009: “Views and the Tathāgata – A Comparative Study and Translation of the Brahmajāla in the Chinese Dīrgha-āgama”, in K.L. Dhammajoti et al. (ed.), *Buddhist and Pali Studies in Honour of the Venerable Professor Kakkapalliye Anuruddha*, Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2009, 183–234.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu 2013: “A Note on the Term Theravāda”, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 30.2: 215–235.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu 2013: “The Chinese Parallels to the Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta (2)”, *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, 5: 9–41.
- Ānandajoti, Bhikkhu 2008: *Mahāparinibbānasuttam, The Discourse about the Great Emancipation (DN 16)*, <http://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net/Texts-and-Translations/Mahaparinibbanasuttam/Mahaparinibbanasuttam.pdf>
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu 1992 [1978]: *The All Embracing Net of Views, The Brahmajāla Sutta and its Commentaries*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu 2000: *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, Translated from the Pāli*, Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Chalmers, Robert 1926: *Further Dialogues of the Buddha, Translated from the Pali of the Majjhima Nikāya*, London: Oxford University Press, vol. 1.
- Cousins, L.S. 2001: “On the Vibhajjavādins, The Mahimsāsaka, Dhammaguttaka, Kassapiya and Tambapaṇṇiya Branches of the Ancient Theriyas”, *Buddhist Studies Review*, 18.2: 131–182.
- Dhammadinnā, Sāmaṇerī 2014: “Semantics of Wholesomeness: Purification of Intention and the Soteriological Function of the Immeasurables (appamāṇas) in Early Buddhist Thought”, in Chuang Kuo-pin (ed.), *Buddhist Meditative Traditions, Their Origin and Development*, Taipei: Shin Wen Feng Print Corporation, 31–109.

Gethin, Rupert 2012: “Was Buddhaghosa a Theravādin? Buddhist Identity in the Pali Commentaries and Chronicles”, in Peter Skilling et al. (ed.), *How Theravāda is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1–63.

Gómez, Luis O. 1987: “Buddhism in India”. In Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 351–385.

Horner, I.B. 1967: *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya)*, London: Pali Text Society, vol. 1.

Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu 2005 [1995]: *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, Bhikku Bodhi (ed.), Boston: Wisdom.

Ñānananda, Bhikkhu K. 2003: *The Mind Stilled, Volume I – VII, Library Edition (The Nibbāna Sermons 1–5)*, Sri Lanka: Dharma Grantha Mudrana Bhāraya.

Neumann, Karl Eugen 1995 [1896]: *Die Reden des Buddha, Mittlere Sammlung, Aus dem Pāli-Kanon Übersetzt*, Herrnschrot: Beyerlein & Steinschulte.

Roth, Gustav 1980: “Particular Features of the Language of the Ārya-Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins and their Importance for Early Buddhist Tradition”, in Heinz Bechert (ed.), *The Language of the Earliest Buddhist Tradition*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 78–135.

Sharf, Robert H. 1995: “Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience”, *Numen*, 42: 228–283.

Sharf, Robert H. 2000: “The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 7.11–12: 267–287.

Skilling, Peter 2009: “Theravāda in History”, *Pacific World, Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, third series, 11: 61–93.

Skilling, Peter et al. (ed.) 2012: *How Theravāda is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Yogānanda, Bhikkhu 2016: *The Heretic Sage, Discussions with Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde Ñānananda*, Sri Lanka: Kaṭukurunde Ñānananda Sadaham Senasun Bhāraya.

Young, R.F. and G.P.V. Somaratna 1996: *Vain Debates, The Buddhist-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth-century Ceylon*

(Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 23), Vienna:  
University of Vienna.