

The *Alagaddūpuma Sutta* reports that contemporary recluses and Brahmins were of the opinion that the Buddha was an annihilationist, since according to them he taught the annihilation, destruction and non-existence of a [truly] existing being. *Sato sattassa ucchedaṃ vināsaṃ vibhavaṃ paññāpeti* (M. I, 140). In reply to such mistaken assessments of his teaching, the Buddha would point out that what he taught as merely *dukkha* and its cessation. General Siha and the Brahmin Verañja had a similar misunderstanding of the Buddha's teaching. In reply to their assumptions that he was an annihilationist, the Buddha admitted, tongue in cheek, that in a way he could indeed be considered to be teaching annihilation, as he taught the annihilation of unwholesome mental states, or else the annihilation of lust, anger and delusion (*Vin. I, 235 = A. IV, 182; Vin. III, 2 = A. IV, 174*).

Not only recluses and Brahmins, but at times even Buddhist monks could have misunderstandings in this respect. According to a discourse in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the monk Yamaka had proclaimed that an arahant will be annihilated at death (*S. III, 109*). This amounts to adopting one of the four modes of the tetralemma about the future destiny of an awakened being, a *tathagata*, according to which *tathagata* either exists after death, or does not exist, or both, or neither. The Buddha consistently refused to take up any of these positions (e.g. M. I, 484). The basic problem involved in such proposals is the same as the one illustrated in the *Pañcattiya Sutta* with the imagery of a dog that keeps running in circles around a pillar to which it is bound, namely the assumed existence of self about which predications can be made. The monk Yamaka's mistaken assertion was taken up by Sāriputta for closer examination, with the result that Yamaka had to admit that it was impossible to find a *tathāgata* in truth and fact even here and now, hence what to say of any future existence or non-existence of a *tathāgata* after death (*S. III, 112*, see also TATHĀGATA).

What happens at the death of an awakened one is put rather succinctly by the novice Adhimutta, who was about to be killed by a gang of brigands.

Unruffled by any fear of death, he told the gang leader that from his perspective there was no cause to lament at the prospect of being killed, as merely *sañkhāras* will come to be non-existent, *sañkhārā*

vibhavissanti, tattha kā paridevanā (*Thag. 715*). Hence, far from being a frightening teaching that leads to the annihilation of a self, the Buddhist path to liberation is a path that leads to the annihilation of any fear, even to the annihilation of the fear of being annihilated at death.

Anālayo

Reference

- 1 Cf. e.g. A.V, 10: *bhavanirodho nibbānam*; or the explanation of the *anupādisesa Nibbāna-dhātu* at It. 38 as *vamhi nirijjhanti bhavāni sabbaso*.

VIBHAVATAṆHĀ, "craving for non-existence" or "craving for non-becoming", is the third of the three types of craving listed in the standard expositions of the second noble truth (e.g. M. III, 250, see also TAṆHĀ). Such craving for non-existence would cover suicidal intentions, in the sense of those types of craving that motivate someone to forcefully put an end to life (see also SUICIDE). Yet, for *vibhava-taṇhā* to be explicitly mentioned in the succinct presentation of the arising of *dukkha* in the formulation of the second noble truth, alongside such basic motivating forces as sensual craving and craving for existence, *kāma-taṇhā* and *bhava-taṇhā*, one would expect *vibhava-taṇhā* to have broader implications than merely the wish to commit suicide.

Here it is of interest that the *Brahmajāla Sutta* lists altogether seven grounds, *vatthu*, that lead to the arising of annihilationist views (*D. I, 34*). These seven are different modes of identifying a type of self and its cessation. The first of these seven modes identifies the self with the material body, assuming that with the death of the body the self will become annihilated. This mode of thinking would correspond to the type of reasoning that motivates suicide, which assumes that, by cutting short life and forcefully bringing about the death of the material body, all problems will similarly come to an end. Whether this is based on an explicit belief in a self or only on an implicit self-notion, the rationale behind such a suicidal attempt is to find a solution through escape from the material body.

In its treatment of annihilationist views, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* also lists the possibility of identifying the self with a divine material body that

feeds on gross food, or with a divine mind-made body that is endowed with limbs and faculties. The final four grounds for annihilationist views in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* involve the four immaterial attainments, namely the attainment of boundless space, boundless consciousness, nothingness and neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

From the perspective of attempting to find a deeper meaning and a broader scope of implication for the term *vibhava-taphā*, the final four grounds for annihilationist views listed in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* are intriguing, since they suggest that non-existence or non-becoming may have been envisaged as a goal to be reached through meditation practice in ancient India, in particular through attaining any of the immaterial spheres. Since the experience of these immaterial spheres requires a considerable amount of meditative proficiency and practice, an annihilationist view related to the attainment or experience of these states could not reasonably assume that all beings are destined to such annihilation. That is, from the perspective of the upholders of such a view, annihilation would probably not have been considered as the inevitable fate of all beings, but rather as a goal to be attained through an appropriate form of conduct and meditation practice. The idea behind such an aspiration for annihilation could be a merger with a form of ultimate reality, held to be equivalent to boundless space, or to boundless consciousness, or to nothingness, or to neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Attaining such a merger at the death of the body any self-hood would be successfully annihilated.

Support for this interpretation could be gathered from the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta*, which describes the development of insight and detachment in regard to the experience of the immaterial attainments (*M. III, 244*). In the concluding section of this description, just before turning to the attainment of final liberation, the *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta* indicates that at this high point of meditative development and mature insight one will be free from intentions and volitions in regard to existence or non-existence, *n'eva abhisaiṅkharoti nābhisañcetayati bhavāya vā vibhavāya vā*. In this context, intentions and volitions in regard to *vibhava* most certainly do not refer to any suicidal impulse. Instead, the implication of the passage seems to be that one who has reached this lofty stage of mental development is aloof from interest in any form of existence as well as in the type of merger with an

ultimate immaterial reality that involves a cessation of the self, such as appears to be implicit in the *Brahmajāla Sutta's* description.

That annihilation was by some contemporaries of the Buddha perceived as a goal to be attained through a particular mode of conduct and practice would also be implicit in the formulation of the aspiration "may I not be, may it not be for me, I shall not be and it will not be for me", *no c' assaṃ, no ca me siyā, na bhavissāmi, na me bhavissati*, which a discourse in the *Samyutta Nikāya* explicitly identifies as an expression of an annihilationist view, *ucchedadiṭṭhi* (*S. III, 99*; see also VIBHAVA). Since this formulation clearly involves an aspiration, here again it would not make much sense to assume that all beings are destined to annihilation. Nor does this formulation appear to be merely the expression of a suicidal intention, since a discourse in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* reckons this aspiration as supreme among heterodox views (*A. V, 63*). Instead, what this aspiration most probably intends is a form of annihilation that requires effort and practice, such as would indeed be required for attaining the immaterial spheres.

From this perspective, then, *vibhava-tapha* could be understood to comprise craving for annihilation in a materialist as well as a spiritual sense, ranging from the wish to destroy the physical body by suicide to the aspiration for leaving behind the sense of selfhood through a mystic merger with an ultimate reality. The decisive factor that these different modes of craving share in common is the assumed sense of a self that lurks behind them. From a Buddhist perspective, all these forms of craving are but manifestations of ignorance, since however refined the experience they aim at may be, the truth of the matter is that there was never a self to be annihilated in the first place.

Anālayo

VICIKICCHĀ, "doubt", (Skt. *vicikitsā*) is reckoned in early Buddhism as a mental obstruction in regard to the development of mental tranquillity, *samatha*, as well as in regard to the development of liberating insight, *vipassanā*. The role of *vicikicchā* as an obstruction to the development of deeper states of concentration is reflected in its inclusion as the fifth among the five hindrances (e.g. *D. I, 246*; see also N*VARAṆĀ). The debilitating effect of *vicikicchā* in relation to liberating

ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF BUDDHISM

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VOLUME VIII

FASCICLE 3 : Vācā – Z hong a-han



2009