

VOICES OF LIBERATION

Theragāthā & Therīgāthā:

Verses of the Elder Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs
on the Path to the Realm of Nibbāna

VOLUME I



Bhante Mudita Bhikkhu Thera

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Voices of Liberation

Theragāthā & Therīgāthā: Verses of the Elder Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs on the Path to the Realm of Nibbāna (Volume I)

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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

*Homage to the Blessed One, the Supreme Arahant,
the Rightly and Fully Awakened One*

礼敬彼世尊、阿罗汉、正等正觉者



Acknowledgments

This book exists because the voices of the Elder Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs have survived.

Before acknowledging anyone else, I therefore wish to acknowledge those whose words fill these pages: the ancient elders of the Gautama's Saṅgha who entered the holy life (*brahmacariya*), undertook the training, practiced Gautama's true Dhamma, and left behind their verses as testimony to what they experienced and attained.

The *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* are not merely ancient literary collections. They preserve the voices of practitioners who walked the path. They speak of renunciation, discipline, meditation, higher seeing, disenchantment, dispassion, relinquishment, liberation, deathlessness, and freedom. Their testimony is the foundation upon which this book has been written.

I am deeply grateful to the **Tipiṭaka**, and particularly to the Pāli tradition through which these voices have been preserved for more than two thousand years. Whatever difficulties of transmission, language, interpretation, and historical development may surround the ancient texts, the survival of these verses itself is a remarkable gift. Without the preservation of the Pāli Canon, we would not have this direct opportunity to hear the words attributed to those early disciples of Gautama the Supreme Arahant (*Mahā Arahant*).

I offer my gratitude to the countless generations of **bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, teachers, reciters, scribes, translators, scholars, and practitioners** who helped preserve Gautama’s Dhamma through changing times and cultures. Their efforts made it possible for these ancient voices to reach readers far removed from the world in which the verses first arose.

I am particularly grateful for the **Pāli language** itself. Working with the original terminology has repeatedly reminded me that words carry histories, contexts, and meanings that can become obscured through translation. Terms such as *Dhamma*, *brahmacariya*, *brahmavihara*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *nibbida*, *virāga*, *vimutti*, and *Nibbāna* cannot always be reduced to convenient modern equivalents without losing something of their original direction. My effort throughout this book has therefore been to remain attentive to the language of the texts and to allow the elders’ own vocabulary to guide the interpretation.

I also acknowledge with gratitude the teachers and spiritual traditions that have shaped my own understanding of the Arahant path. My years of bhikkhu training **Pa-Auk Forest Monastery and Meditation Center in Myanmar**, samādhi practice, sutta study, and yogi life within the Saṅgha have provided the practical background from which I approach these verses. The *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* are written by yogis, and they should therefore also be approached through the perspective of yogi practice—not only through intellectual analysis.

This book is also indebted to **Gautama, the Supreme Arahant**, whose teaching established the liberation path of renunciation for Arahants that these elders undertook. The elders whose voices appear in these collections did not invent a path of their own. They followed the true Dhamma taught by their Teacher, entered the holy life, practiced, and declared their attainment.

For that reason, my deepest gratitude is directed toward **Gautama the Tathāgata** who have gone to the Deathless Realm of Nibbāna outside of the universe. My deepest gratitude also goes toward the Gautama lineage of bhikkhu and bhikkhuni disciples who preserved his Dhamma until today.

I am grateful, too, for the many people whose questions, conversations, criticisms, encouragement, and sincere engagement have contributed to my thinking over the years. Not every person who has influenced this book will agree with its conclusions, and that is not necessary. Serious questions often become more valuable when they force us to return to the dhamma foundation and human logic and examine what they actually say.

That principle has been central to this work.

The purpose of *Voices of Liberation* is not to make the elders conform to a predetermined modern theory. It is to listen to them. As I wrote in the Prologue, **“Interpretation must not be allowed to erase the testimony of the practitioners themselves.”**

I therefore acknowledge with respect even those whose interpretations differ fundamentally from mine. Their work has contributed to the wider conversation within which this book has been written. Differences of interpretation of the Buddha’s Dhamma should invite deeper examination rather than prevent us from returning to the texts themselves.

I am grateful for the opportunity to live in a time when ancient Buddhist texts are widely accessible and can be studied across languages, traditions, and geographical boundaries. Modern technology has made it possible for readers around the world to encounter texts that were once available only within particular monastic and scholarly communities. This accessibility carries a responsibility: we must use it not merely to repeat inherited interpretations, but to examine the sources carefully for ourselves, as an independent researcher and scholar to go as deep as to see Arahantism, the true Dhamma from Gautama the Supreme Arahant instead of seeing him as a Buddha. This distinction is crucial.

Above all, I am grateful to the **readers** who are willing to undertake that examination.

This book asks the reader to do something simple but demanding: **listen**. Listen to the Bhikkhus. Listen to the Bhikkhunīs. Listen to those who renounced the world. Listen to those who practiced. Listen to those who

saw. Listen to those who became disenchanted with worldly existence. Listen to those who developed dispassion. Listen to those who relinquished worldly attachment. Listen to those who declared liberation from the world. And listen carefully to what they say about the destination of the path.

The title *Voices of Liberation* was chosen precisely for this reason. The elders are not merely subjects of a later philosophical discussion. They are voices of yogi practitioners who undertook the holy life and spoke about the result of their practice.

My final acknowledgment, therefore, belongs to those voices themselves. Across more than two thousand years, their words have continued to speak.

May we have the humility to hear them.

May we have the discernment to understand them.

May we have the courage to practice what leads toward true liberation.

And may the ancient voices of these Elder Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs once again be heard as what they intended to be:

voices pointing beyond worldly bondage, toward the Deathless Realm of Nibbāna.



Dedication

**To Gautama, the Supreme Arahant,
who rediscovered the ancient path to liberation.**

To the Elder Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs
whose voices have crossed the centuries—
those who left the household life,
entered the holy renunciate life,
walked the path of Gautama's true Dhamma,
and realized liberation for themselves.

To those who renounced what binds their mind to the world,
who cultivated the mind,
who saw deeply,
who became disenchanted with the world,
who abandoned inner worldly attachment,
and who crossed beyond the universe
toward the Deathless realm.

And to all sincere yogis
who still seek that same freedom today—
not merely peace within the world,
but release from the world
and the path to the Realm of Nibbāna.

**May these ancient voices be heard again.
May their words become a living path.
May those who hear them understand, practice,
and realize the same liberation for themselves.**

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Prologue: Why I Wrote Voices of Liberation

I have written this book because I believe that something fundamental has been lost in the way the Dhamma of Gautama the Supreme Arahant is understood and practiced today.

Voices of Liberation: Theragāthā & Therīgāthā: Verses of the Elder Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis on the Path to the Realm of Nibbāna is an attempt to return directly to the voices of those who followed Gautama the Supreme Arahant, entered the holy life (*brahmacāriya*), practiced his teaching (*dhamma*), and became *Arahants* themselves who were ready to exit the universe to enter the deathless *realm of Nibbāna*.

This book is therefore not primarily an academic study of ancient Buddhist literature. It is not an attempt to fit the words of the elders into theories developed many centuries after them. Nor is it an attempt to reconcile Gautama's original liberation teaching with whatever forms Buddhism has subsequently taken.

The purpose is much simpler and, at the same time, much more serious:

What did the earliest disciples of Gautama the Supreme Arahant actually practice, and what did they say they attained?

I believe this question has become increasingly important because Buddhism today is moving further and further away from its original purpose.

For more than two thousand years, the Dhamma has passed through different cultures, languages, philosophical systems, religious institutions, and interpretive traditions. In that long process, teachings have been added, transformed, reinterpreted, simplified, and sometimes fundamentally misunderstood. What began as a direct path of liberation from the world has, in many places, become something very different.

Buddhism today is increasingly being presented as philosophy, psychology, mindfulness, secular ethics, stress reduction, self-development, or a method for becoming more comfortable or competitive within ordinary worldly life.

These things may have their own value. But they are not the liberation teaching of Gautama the Supreme Arahant.

Gautama did not leave the household life, establish the bhikkhu-saṅgha, teach renunciation, develop samādhi, teach higher seeing, and direct his disciples toward complete liberation merely so that human beings could become somewhat calmer or psychologically healthier while remaining fully invested in the world.

His Dhamma was a **teaching of liberation from the world and enter the realm of Nibbāna (Nibbāna-dhātu)**. The destination was **outside of the universe** where the universal law of decay and death does not apply.

The task was to cut all bondages with the world and become disenchanted with the world (*nibbida*), relinquish worldly passion (*viraga*), and liberated from the world (*vimutti*), and enter the Deathless realm of **Nibbāna**.

That is the Dhamma that I believe must be recovered.

True Dhamma Is Not a Teaching of Secularization

One of the great dangers facing Buddhism today is secularization.

As Buddhism enters the modern world, teachings that once pointed beyond ordinary existence are increasingly translated into concepts that remain entirely within ordinary existence.

Renunciation becomes "simplicity." Samādhi becomes "calm or relaxation." Mindfulness becomes "present-moment awareness." Wisdom becomes "psychological insight." Liberation becomes "freedom from stress." Nibbāna becomes a metaphor for psychological peace. The Deathless becomes a symbolic description of a state of mind.

In this process, the language may remain Buddhist, but the destination has changed. A teaching intended to lead beyond *loka* is transformed into a teaching for living better within *loka*. That is not a small change.

It changes the entire direction of the path.

If the problem is understood merely as psychological discomfort, then psychological improvement becomes the solution.

If the problem is understood as attachment to worldly existence, then relinquishment becomes necessary.

If the problem is understood as repeated conditioned existence subject to arising and passing away, then the practitioner must seek release from that condition.

And if Nibbāna is the Deathless, then liberation cannot simply mean becoming happier within the realm of death and decay.

This distinction is fundamental to the reading offered in this book.

The Question of Anattā

One of the clearest examples of this transformation concerns *anattā*.

In contemporary Buddhism, *anattā*—usually translated as "no-self" or "non-self"—has become one of the most prominent teachings and, in many circles, one of the highest practices.

The standard explanation is familiar. "This is not my self." "This I am not." "This does not belong to me."

The practitioner is encouraged to examine the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness and repeatedly recognize that none of them is self.

This interpretation has become so dominant that it is often treated as though it were the central method by which liberation is accomplished.

It appears in meditation instructions, books, courses, lectures, modern Buddhist psychology, and increasingly in explanations produced by artificial-intelligence systems trained on the modern Buddhist consensus.

But there is a question that deserves to be asked before this interpretation is accepted as the original practice of Gautama Buddha:

Did Gautama Buddha's early disciples actually practice in this way?

The answer is NO!

The *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* preserve the voices of elder bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs who entered the Buddha's path and described their own practice and realization.

They speak about leaving the household life.

They speak about renunciation.

They speak about abandoning sensuality.

They speak about overcoming attachment.

They speak about meditation.

They speak about seeing.

They speak about dispassion.

They speak about release.

They speak about freedom.

They speak about deathlessness.

They speak about crossing over.

They speak about escape from the world.

They speak about the end of bondage.

And they speak as people who have **attained** something.

Yet when these verses are read through the modern assumption that *anattā*—understood as the denial of self—is itself the supreme practice, something remarkable becomes visible:

No elder bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs actually practiced *ANATTĀ*! They did not even mention this word. Why? Why has a concept of *ANATTĀ* that no one practiced at the Buddha's time become a central practice for today's practitioners? What has happened?

Their voices only describe a path of renunciation, concentration, higher seeing, disenchantment, dispassion, relinquishment, and release.

This deserves serious consideration.

If the people who actually completed Gautama Buddha's path do NOT describe their liberation practices in the language in which modern Buddhism teaches such as *anattā*, then we must ask how and why *anattā* became transformed into one of the dominant practices of Buddhism today.

That historical and doctrinal development cannot simply be assumed away. It must be examined.

Listen to the Voices

That is why I have chosen the title **Voices of Liberation**. The title is deliberate.

Voices means that the elders themselves are allowed to speak. These are not merely statements about Buddhism written by later interpreters. They are the words attributed to men and women who entered the Buddha's dispensation, undertook the holy life, practiced the path, and declared their practices and attainment.

Liberation means that we must listen to these voices according to the destination they themselves describe. They were not practicing merely to improve their worldly personalities. They were not seeking merely a healthier relationship with life. They were not attempting simply to become mindful human beings.

They were seeking **vimutti**—release. Release from what? From *loka* – the world. From the bondages to the world. From attachment to worldly phenomena. From the bondage of worldly-conditioned existence.

And toward what? Toward a real **Deathless and Blissful Permanent existence**.

The Realm of Nibbāna

The subtitle of this book uses the expression "**Realm of Nibbāna**." The word "realm" renders the Pāli *dhātu*. It should not be understood as requiring a particular conception of physical space, geography, or material location as we are perceiving using our senses.

The important distinction is ontological and soteriological. Nibbāna does not belong to *loka* – the world we are living in and familiar with. It is not another loka-conditioned region within the universe under the universal law of decay and dissolution. It is not simply another existential state produced by causes and conditions of this universe. It is not subject to the universal law governing all existence in this universe, that is characterized by arising and passing away under the universal law of death. Whatever belongs to world-conditioned existence is subject to decay and death.

Nibbāna is the Deathless. Therefore, when the elders speak of **deathlessness, release, escape, crossing over, going beyond, peace, permanence, freedom, and final liberation**, these expressions deserve to be taken seriously. They should not automatically be reduced to metaphors for psychological well-being. They point toward the very purpose of Gautama Buddha's liberation teaching.

Whether the Deathless is described in terms of a realm, dimension, mode of existence, reality beyond the universe, or by another conceptual framework, the essential point remains:

Nibbāna-dhātu does not belong to loka. It is beyond the jurisdiction of loka-conditioned arising and passing away. It is beyond the realm governed by universal law of decay and death. That is why the attainment of Nibbāna-dhātu is liberation from the loka.

They Were Going Somewhere

A major difference between the reading presented in this book and many modern interpretations of Buddhism concerns the direction of the path.

Modern Buddhism often places enormous emphasis upon changing one's relationship with the present world.

The Buddha's disciples, however, repeatedly speak of **going beyond**. This is not merely a change in attitude. It is a movement of liberation.

They came from the world. They entered Gautama Buddha's path. They confronted the conditions of worldly existence. They renounced. They practiced. They developed samādhi. They saw. They became

disenchanted with the world. They developed dispassion. They relinquished attachment. They became liberated from the world. And they reached the Deathless. This is the movement that I believe must be restored to the center of Buddhist understanding.

From the world → renunciation → practice → higher seeing → disenchantment → dispassion → liberation → the Deathless.

The *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā* become profoundly different when read from this perspective. They are not merely collections of ancient poems. They are not merely autobiographical religious literature. They are not simply historical documents illustrating what some early Buddhists happened to believe.

They are **voices of practitioners who speak about the path from bondage to liberation**. Their words should therefore be read as testimony.

Recovering the Original Direction

I do not claim that every question concerning the early Buddhist texts is simple. Nor do I claim that every verse can be understood without interpretation. But I do insist upon one basic principle:

Interpretation must not be allowed to erase the testimony of the practitioners themselves.

When later interpretations conflict with the plain direction of the elders' own descriptions of practice and realization, we should not automatically force the elders to conform to those later interpretations. We should stop and reconsider.

The purpose of this book is therefore not to create another philosophical system. It is to ask the reader to listen. Listen to the bhikkhus. Listen to the bhikkhunīs. Listen to those who renounced. Listen to those who practiced. Listen to those who saw. Listen to those who became disenchanted. Listen to those who let go. Listen to those who declared liberation. And above all, listen to what they say about **where the path leads**.

If we genuinely want to know the Dhamma of Gautama the Supreme Arahant, then we must be willing to follow the path all the way to its destination. He taught how to **go beyond the world**. He taught liberation from bondage to worldly-conditioned existence. He pointed toward **Nibbāna-dhātu, the Deathless realm**.

And the elders who followed him left their voices behind so that we could hear what that path was like. Those voices deserve to be heard again.

That is why I wrote this book.

This is *Voices of Liberation*.

Anattā: What Did the Buddha Mean in the Anatta-Lakkhana Sutta (SN 22.59 Not-self and Sign Sutta)? Do humans have soul-spirit (attā)?

One of the reasons *anattā* has become a dominant practice today relates to the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* (SN 22.59).

This sutta deserves especially careful attention because the meaning assigned to *anattā* in modern Buddhism has become one of the foundations upon which much contemporary Buddhist teaching is constructed. It is commonly presented as meaning that there is no self, no soul or spirit, and no enduring spiritual principle, and that the realization of this absence is itself the central practice of liberation. And this is called awakening, Buddhahood.

Based on this interpretation of *anattā*, today's mainstream academia claims humans have no soul or spirit (*attā*). Humans are viewed as merely a bundle of aggregates coming together based on conditions, and without those conditions, these aggregates simply disappear into nothing. To them, there is no human essence whatsoever to be termed as soul or spirit, and thus, Nibbāna becomes nothingness.

Let us revisit this sutta and look in detail at what *anattā* and *lakkhaṇa* actually mean. Does this sutta discuss the existence of the human soul-spirit (*attā*) or not? Do humans have soul-spirit (*attā*) or not?

Before accepting this interpretation, we should return to the actual words of the *Tathāgata*. The title of the sutta is **Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta**.

Anatta-Lakkhaṇa: Anattā and Lakkhaṇa

The Pāli word **Anattā** means **Not-Attā, Not-Self, or Not-Soul/Spirit**. Basically this sutta argues that the five aggregates (the human body, feeling, perception, mental formations and sense-derived-consciousness) are not our **Attā**, our Self, or our Soul-Spirit. The sutta never discuss if **Attā**, Self, or Soul-Spirit exist or not exist for humans. Because of course humans have **Attā**, Self, or Soul-Spirit. This is without question for normal humans to question. If this sutta is to discuss whether **Attā**, Self, or Soul-Spirit exist or not exist, then the sutta would raise such question directly.

Then why modern mainstream academia derives their conclusion that humans have no **Attā**, Self, or Soul-Spirit?

The Pāli word **lakkhaṇa** carries meanings such as **mark, characteristic, sign, distinguishing feature, attribute, or identifying quality**. It refers to a feature by which something is recognized or distinguished.

Similar to the conclusion for **Anattā** that the **five aggregates are not attā**. The conclusion for **lakkhaṇa** is that the **five aggregates are sign, characteristics, or Manifestation of attā**.

This is another aspect of this sutta that deserves careful consideration. If the five aggregates are not **attā**, this does not mean that they are unrelated to **attā**. They are the phenomena through which human **attā** is manifested.

The physical body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and sense-derived-consciousness are not our **attā**, our true Self, not our-soul-spirit, but they constitute the observable and experiential manifestation of an individual being, of our **attā**, of our true Self, of our-soul-spirit.

In this sense, the aggregates may be understood as the **manifestation or incarnation of attā**, while not themselves being identical with **attā**.

The distinction is therefore not necessarily a distinction between two unrelated things. Rather, it can be understood as a distinction between **that which is manifested** and **that which manifests through it**.

The five aggregates are the manifested complex. **Attā** is the underlying soul-spirit.

This provides a fundamentally different way of understanding the Buddha's teaching from the modern proposition that "there is no **Attā**, self or soul-spirit." Here is the discussion in much details.

The Buddha's teaching in this sutta concerns the five aggregates:

1. **Rūpa-khandha** — the aggregate of form (human body)
2. **Vedanā-khandha** — the aggregate of feeling
3. **Saññā-khandha** — the aggregate of perception

4. **Saṅkhāra-khandha** — the aggregate of mental formations
5. **Viññāṇa-khandha** — the aggregate of sense-derived-consciousness

The Buddha examines these five aggregates and teaches that they are **anattā**.

The crucial question is: **What exactly does this statement mean?**

The answer begins with recognizing what the Buddha is actually identifying as *anattā*. He is identifying the **five aggregates**.

He is not, in this discourse, making the simple statement: "There is no *atta*."

Rather, he is teaching that **the five aggregates are not *atta***. This distinction is fundamental.

The Five Aggregates Are Not Attā (Anatta)

The five aggregates constitute the complex of physical and mental phenomena through which ordinary human experience is manifested.

Rūpa khandha is the physical aspect. **Vedanā khandha, saññā khandha, saṅkhāra khandha, and viññāṇa khandha** comprise the mental aspect. Thus, the five aggregates can be understood broadly as **rūpa and nāma**—matter and mind, or the physical and mental phenomena constituting embodied experience.

Yet the Buddha identifies all five aggregates as *anattā*. In other words: **Rūpa khandha is not *atta*. Vedanā khandha is not *atta*. Saññā khandha is not *atta*. Saṅkhāra khandha is not *atta*. Viññāṇa khandha is not *atta*.**

This is a very different statement from simply saying: "**There is no *atta*.**"

The two statements should not be confused.

If we say, "This body is not my soul," we have made a distinction between the body and the soul. We have not thereby established that no soul exists.

If we say, "This sense-derived-consciousness is not my soul," we have again distinguished sense-derived-consciousness from soul. We have not logically demonstrated the non-existence of soul.

Likewise, when the Buddha identifies the five aggregates as *anattā*, the immediate teaching is that **the five aggregates are not atta**.

The statement establishes a distinction. It does not, by itself, constitute a doctrine that *atta* does not exist.

This is simple logical discrimination, but it becomes extremely important when interpreting the Buddha's teaching.

The Five Aggregates as Manifestation of Atta (Lakkhana)

This is another aspect of this teaching that deserves careful consideration. If the five aggregates are not *atta*, this does not mean that they are unrelated to *atta*. They are the phenomena through which embodied human existence is manifested.

The physical body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and sense-derived-consciousness constitute the observable and experiential manifestation of an individual being.

In this sense, the aggregates may be understood as the **manifestation or incarnation of *atta***, while not themselves being identical with *atta*.

The distinction is therefore not necessarily a distinction between two unrelated things. Rather, it can be understood as a distinction between **that which is manifested** and **that which manifests through it**.

The five aggregates are the manifested complex. *Atta* is the underlying soul-spirit.

Thus: **The aggregates are not *atta*.**

But: **The aggregates are the manifestation of *atta*.**

This provides a fundamentally different way of understanding the Buddha's teaching from the modern mainstream academia's proposition that "there is no self, or soul-spirit."

The Aggregate of Consciousness

Particular care is also required concerning **viññāṇa-khandha**, the aggregate of consciousness.

In contemporary explanations, *viññāṇa* is often spoken of as though it were simply "consciousness" in its totality. But the Buddha's teaching distinguishes consciousness according to the sense bases through which this sense-derived-consciousness arises.

The six forms of sense-derived-consciousness are:

1. **Cakkhu-viññāṇa** — eye-consciousness
2. **Sota-viññāṇa** — ear-consciousness
3. **Ghāṇa-viññāṇa** — nose-consciousness
4. **Jivhā-viññāṇa** — tongue-consciousness
5. **Kāya-viññāṇa** — body-consciousness
6. **Mano-viññāṇa** — mind-consciousness

Eye-consciousness arises in dependence upon the eye and visible forms. Ear-consciousness arises in dependence upon the ear and sounds. Nose-consciousness arises in dependence upon the nose and odors. Tongue-consciousness arises in dependence upon the tongue and tastes. Body-consciousness arises in dependence upon the body and tactile phenomena. Mind-consciousness arises in dependence upon the mind faculty and mental objects.

Therefore, when the Buddha identifies **viññāṇa-khandha** as *anattā*, we should carefully understand what is being identified. The Buddha is not necessarily declaring that every possible dimension or mode of human consciousness is identical with this aggregate of sense-dependent consciousness.

Rather, the *viññāṇa-khandha* concerns consciousness as it operates through the six sense bases. This distinction becomes particularly important when considering the possibility of a consciousness or spiritual

principle that is not reducible to the six sense-based processes of ordinary embodied existence.

Nāma-Rūpa and the Manifested Human Being

The five aggregates can therefore be viewed through the broader distinction between **nāma** and **rūpa**. **Rūpa** refers to the physical body. **Nāma** encompasses the mental phenomena. Together, nāma and rūpa describe the manifested psycho-physical complex of embodied existence.

This is precisely why the five aggregates should not automatically be identified with the totality of what a human being is. The body is one aspect. Feeling is one aspect. Perception is one aspect. Mental formations are one aspect. Sense-based consciousness is one aspect.

These are the components of manifested existence. They arise, change, and pass away. They are conditioned by the universal laws of this world. They are subject to alteration. And they therefore cannot be regarded as the spiritual identity.

This is why the Buddha identifies them as *anattā*.

Anattā Means Humans Do Have Soul-Spirit (attā)

Anattā Is Not the Same as "There Is No Self or Soul-Spirit"

This brings us to the central point. The statement: "**The five aggregates are anattā.**" should not automatically be translated into the philosophical proposition: "**There is no self or soul-spirit.**"

The first statement concerns the **five aggregates**. The second statement concerns the **existence of attā itself**.

The first does not logically establish the second. This distinction has profound consequences for Buddhist practice.

If *anattā* is understood as "there is no self," then the practitioner may make the denial of self itself into the object of meditation. The practitioner repeatedly thinks: "**This is not self.**" "**That is not self.**" "**There is no self.**" Eventually, *anattā* itself becomes a doctrine to be intellectually affirmed and psychologically reinforced, or Brainwashed.

But if the Buddha's teaching is instead understood as identifying the **five aggregates as not atta**, then the direction of practice becomes different.

Basic human logic tells that if the **five aggregates as not atta, not human's true Self, not human's soul-spirit, this means human's soul-spirit does exist, but just not the Five Aggregates.**

What, Then, Is Atta, the Human Soul-Spirit?

This brings us to a question that modern Buddhism often avoids because the answer is assumed before the question is even examined:

If the five aggregates are not atta, what is atta?

The Buddha's statement becomes meaningful precisely because a distinction is being made.

The five aggregates are not atta. Therefore, atta should not be confused with the five aggregates. The body is not atta. Feeling is not atta. Perception is not atta. Mental formations are not atta. Sense-based consciousness is not atta. The mistake is to take the statement "**these are not atta**" and immediately transform it into the completely different statement "**there is no atta.**" The first is a distinction. The second is a denial of existence. They are not the same proposition.

This distinction is particularly important in a teaching directed toward liberation, because the Buddha's concern is not merely to persuade his disciples to adopt a philosophical theory concerning whether a self exists. His teaching concerns the nature of worldly existence, the bondage created through attachment, and the way to become liberated.

The Dual Composition of the Atta/ Ātma

The Atta or *ātma* in Sanskrit is a complex composite entity with a dual heritage—operating as a morphogenetic information field populated by a fractal of the source consciousness of the universe:

- **The Brahmā:** **Brahmā** is the source, progenitor, and high celestial Father of the cosmic mankind race. **Brahmā** imparts the morphogenetic information field—the structural blueprint, form, knowledge and lineage—that defines the *ātma* as the cosmic mankind race within the universe.

- **The Source of the Universe:** The content that fills according to the information field—the underlying essence of mankind consciousness—is a fractal derivative derived directly from the source of the universe, functioning like a cosmic Mother.

Citta-Ātmā: The Mind-Heart (Citta) and the Self/Soul-Spirit (Ātmā)

While *citta* is the total sphere of consciousness, spanning from its most superficial external projections down to its deepest, unconditioned nucleus, *ātmā* is the innermost core depth of *citta* itself.

1). Citta as the Total Sphere of Consciousness

Citta is the complete matrix of mind-heart awareness. It is the entire domain of conscious experience.

- **The Spectrum of Mind-Heart:** *Citta* encompasses the entire spectrum of awareness—from the outer peripheral layers (thoughts, feelings, sensory projections, past memory impressions) down to its own absolute center.
- **The Exterior Surface:** The outer layer of *citta* is what forms a person's visible **outlook** and interaction with the world. It is dynamic, easily disturbed by external impacts, and prone to surface turbulence.

2). Ātmā as the Core Depth of Citta

Ātmā is **the deep layer, the essence of *citta* itself**—its essential ground (*svabhāva*).

- **The Unshakable Foundation:** *Ātmā* is *citta* in its primary, essential existential state—unmoved by external impressions (*vr̥ttis*), self-luminous.
- **Core vs. Surface:** The distinction between *citta* and *ātmā* becomes a distinction between the **surface ripples** of consciousness (*citta*'s exterior outlook) and the **oceanic depth** of consciousness (*ātmā*).

Atta / Ātma Is Not Eternal and Indestructible

A major misunderstanding in Indian religious thought is the assumption that **ātma** in Sanskrit, or **atta** in Pāli, means an absolutely eternal,

indestructible, and already liberated soul-spirit. Such an interpretation turns terms describing the **nature and continuity of the living entity** into a claim that the entity is itself an absolute, unconditioned reality.

In my book “**Bhagavad-Gītā: A Theravāda Buddhist Reading - Volume I**”, verse **2.18** and **4.6**, **ātma** is described as **ajāḥ** (*aja*), **avyayātmā** (*avyayātman*), **anāśin**, **nitya**, and **aprameya** describe the ātma in relation to the physical world.

Traditional translations routinely inflate the terms **nitya**, **anāśin**, and **aprameya** into sweeping, abstract metaphysical dogma—rendering them as “*eternal*,” “*indestructible*,” and “*immeasurable*.” This vague language obscures the operational reality of the text. In the direct context of Arjuna’s battlefield paralysis, Kṛṣṇa is pointing out a concrete dimensional boundary: **the real inner entity (Śarīrin, Dehin, Ātma) simply operates beyond the physical plane and easily survives physical realm changes.**

1). Nityasya (Nitya): "Eternal" vs. "Continuously Lasting"

Traditional Error: Translating *nitya* as “eternal” smuggles in an unconditioned, timeless state, confusing the embodied entity inside *saṃsāra* with ultimate liberation (*Nibbāna*).

Etymological Root: Derived from the prefix **ni** (“downward,” “inward,” “dwelling within”) + the suffix **-tya** (“belonging to,” “abiding in”).

Literal Sense: *Ni-tya* literally means “inwardly abiding” or “that which stays continuously in its own state.”

The Clarification: Etymologically, *nitya* denotes **uninterrupted continuity across time**. It means the embodied entity stays inwardly present and continuously lasts through physical realm changes while the outer 3D physical body (*deha*) crumbles. It is “eternally” present only relative to the temporary physical vehicle, remaining bound to cosmic cycles until ultimate release.

2). Anāśinaḥ: Generic "Indestructible" vs. "Physically Non-Perishing"

Traditional Error: Translating *anāśin* as a blanket “indestructible” hides the specific physical threat Kṛṣṇa is addressing on the battlefield.

Etymological Root: Privative prefix **a-** ("non-" / "not") + **nāśin** (from the verbal root **naś**, "to disappear," "to perish," "to undergo physical destruction/dissolution").

Literal Sense: *A-nāśin* means "non-disappearing" or "immune to physical ruin."

The Clarification: In Chapter 2 (and explicitly reinforced in 2.17, 2.20, and 2.23), *naś* addresses Arjuna's fear that physical weapons (*śastrāṇi*), fire, or physical trauma can annihilate a life. *Anāśin* means the embodied entity is **physically non-perishing**—weapons operate strictly on a lower dimensional plane and cannot cause its dissolution or physical death.

3). Aprameyasya: Mystical "Immeasurable" vs. "Physically Immeasurable"

Traditional Error: Translating *aprameya* as "immeasurable" makes it sound like an incomprehensible theological mystery rather than a statement about physical metrics.

Etymological Root: Prefix **a-** ("not") + **pra-** ("forth/intensively") + **meya** (future passive participle from **mā**, "to measure, gauge, weigh, or bound").

Literal Sense: *A-prameya* means "incapable of being measured or bounded by empirical means (*pramāṇa*)."

The Clarification: A 3D physical body can be measured (*meya*) using length, mass, volume, or physical instruments. Because the embodied entity is a higher-dimensional structure, it cannot be detected, weighed, or bounded by physical tools or sensory organs. It is strictly **unmeasurable by physical means**.

These three terms do not mean the embodied entity has achieved ultimate salvation. They simply define its dimensional immunity: physical weapons cannot kill it (*anāśin*), physical scales cannot weigh it (*aprameya*), and physical death cannot stop it from persisting (*nitya*). It easily survives physical realm changes—which is precisely why dying physically changes nothing, and why forced reincarnation (*bhava*) remains a trap until the roots of *rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha* are destroyed.

In **Gītā 4.6**, The traditional rendering of **ajāḥ** (*aja*) as "eternal/unborn" and **avyayātmā** (*avyayātman*) as "imperishable soul" obscures the operational physics Kṛṣṇa is outlining. Similar to **nitya**, **anāśīn**, and **aprameya** in **Gītā 2.18**, they are used to define how the embodied entity (*ātmā*) survives physical destruction, here **ajāḥ** and **avyayātmā** define how the entity operates outside the physical plane of biological origin and thermodynamic decay.

1). Ajāḥ (Aja): "Unborn" vs. "Non-Originated in the Physical Plane"

- **Traditional Error:** Translating *ajāḥ* as a vague mystical attribute ("uncreated," "eternal god") frames it as an incomprehensible metaphysical assertion.
- **Etymological Root:** Privative prefix *a-* ("non-" / "not") + *jaḥ* (from the verbal root *jan*, "to be born," "to be generated," "to come into biological manifestation").
- **Literal Sense:** *A-jaḥ* literally means "non-generated," "unborn," or "not produced through physical birth."
- **The Reality:** Biological bodies (*deha*) are generated (*jan*) through physical conception, cellular division, and spatial assembly. Kṛṣṇa stresses that the real entity (*ātmā*) does not originate at biological birth. It enters the physical container from outside the physical system. Because physical birth (*janma*) is merely the pairing of an *ātmā* with a temporary physical vehicle, physical death (*mṛtyu*) is merely its decoupling. The *ātmā* itself is *ajāḥ*—it was never generated by physical parents or formed by physical elements.

2). Avyayātmā (Avyayātman): "Imperishable Soul" vs. "Physically Non-Decaying Inherent Nature"

- **Traditional Error:** Translating *avyayātmā* as "imperishable soul" treats it as a static, dogmatic label rather than describing its immunity to physical decay of the body.
- **Etymological Root:** Privative prefix *a-* ("non-" / "not") + *vyaya* (from *vi-i*, "to pass away," "to decay," "to spend," "to undergo

reduction or loss") + *ātmā* (*ātman*, "self," "essential nature," "underlying structure").

- **Literal Sense:** *A-vyaya-ātmā* means "having a nature (*ātmā*) that is free from depletion, loss, or physically decay (*avyaya*)."
- **The Reality:** Every structure in the physical world is subject to entropy (*vyaya*)—matter degrades, physical bodies age, wear out, and lose energy. *Avyayātmā* indicates that the non-physical core entity *ātmā* operates under non-physical laws: it does not suffer structural attrition, energy loss, or qualitative degeneration through the wear and tear of time. Even while operating through a physical body that is steadily decaying, the underlying *ātmā* retains its essential integrity unchanged.

The Dimensional Synthesis: Operational Reality of 4.6

When Kṛṣṇa states in 4.6: **ajo 'pi sann avyayātmā...**

"Indeed, not originated in the physical plane (ajo) and having a physically non-decaying nature (avyayātmā)..."

he is not indulging in abstract theological self-praise. He is stating a concrete principle of dimensional physics:

Term	Operational Operational Boundary	Physical Contrast
Ajaḥ	Non-generated by biological conception	Unlike the physical body (<i>deha</i>), which is born/assembled
Avyayātmā	physically Non-decaying; immune to physical entropy	Unlike physical matter, which undergoes wear, attrition, and decay

Term	Operational Operational Boundary	Physical Contrast
Anāśin	Physically non-perishing	Cannot be destroyed by weapons, fire, or trauma
Aprameya	Physically immeasurable	Cannot be detected, weighed, or bounded by 3D physical tools
Nitya	Continuously lasting / inwardly abiding	Persists continuously across physical realm changes and deaths

The Trap of Involuntary Reincarnation

Because the *ātmā* is physically non-perishing (*anāśin*), non-generated in the physical plane (*ajah*), and physically non-decaying (*avyayātmā*), physical destruction (trauma, weapons, war) cannot terminate its existence. It simply survives the collapse of the physical vehicle and remains bound to the universal laws of decay and dissolution within *saṃsāra*.

These attributes confirm dimensional immunity to physical forces—they do not imply that the entity (*ātmā*) itself has gained absolute freedom or has already attained liberation from worldly trappings. On the contrary, because it is defiled and trapped, it will continue to experience forced, involuntary reincarnation (*bhava*). It must be purified by eradicating the root causes of worldly bondage—*rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha*—and then liberated from the world as an Arahant; this is exactly the liberation path of renunciation practice taught by Gautama, the Supreme Arahant.

Traditional dogma mistakenly believes this *ātmā* has already gained its absoluteness and ultimate freedom. Thus, their path to freedom becomes a mere awakening (*buddhi*) to its pre-existing state, turning Gautama the Supreme Arahant's liberation path of renunciation into a procedural pursuit toward Buddhahood without requiring true renunciation. When becoming an Arahant degenerates into becoming a Buddha, Gautama's true *dharmā* and his lineage of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* lose their true meaning. This was even predicted by Gautama himself in the Pali Vinaya—that his true *dharmā* would only last for five hundred years.

Ātma in Rig Veda

Ātman as the divine "soul/spirit" imparted by gods aligns directly with both biblical genesis narratives (e.g., God breathing the "breath of life" into Adam) and **Rig Veda** via extraterrestrial genetic/spiritual engineering of humanity perspective. Here is a direct translation comparison using this framework to evaluate *ātmā* as the divine spark, soul, or spiritual life-force bestowed upon creation.

(1). Rig Veda 10.168.4

Original Sanskrit: *ātmā devānām garbho bhuvanasya...*

Traditional Distorted Academic Translation: *"The wind is the breath of the gods, the germ of the world..."*

Divine Spirit/Soul Translation: *"The Soul/Spirit (ātmā) imparted by the heavenly visitors (Devas) is the embryonic origin (garbha) of human existence in this world..."*

The *Devas* (extraterrestrial bio-engineers/gods) did not merely create a physical shell; they infused the human organism with an *ātmā*—a divine spark, spirit, or consciousness. This divine spirit served as the *garbha* (seed/germ) that elevated early hominids into conscious human beings.

(2). Rig Veda 10.16.3 (The Return of Ātmā at Death)

Original Sanskrit: *sūryam cakṣur gacchatu vātam ātmā, dyām ca gaccha prthivīm ca dharmāṇā, apo vā gaccha yadi tatra te hitamoṣadhīṣu prati tiṣṭhā śarīraiḥ*

Traditional Wrong Academic Translation: "May your eye go to the Sun, may your breath go to the wind..."

Divine Spirit/Soul Translation: "May the Soul/Spirit (*ātmā*) go to the wind/atmosphere, passing through the **Sun's Eye (portal)**! Go to the heavens and to the earth according to cosmic law (*dharmāṇā*). Go to the waters if your place is there, and settle among the plants with your physical remains (*śarīraiḥ*)."

Upon the death of the body, **The Ātmā (Soul/Spirit)** shoots upward through the **Sun's Eye portal** (*sūryaṁ cakṣur*) into the higher atmospheric/cosmic dimensions. **The Śarīra (Physical Body/Remnants)** remains on Earth, decomposing into the soil to nourish plant life (*oṣadhi*) and merge with the waters (*apas*). The plants absorb the physical nutrients of the body. In ancient Vedic cosmology, this completes the natural loop: human bodies return to the soil, feed plant life, which in turn becomes food (*anna*) for future living organisms.

(3). Rig Veda 7.87.2

Original Sanskrit: *ātmā te vāto raja ā vivāti...*

Traditional Academic Translation: "The wind, which is your breath, blows through the atmosphere..."

Divine Spirit/Soul Translation: "Your Spirit/Soul (*ātmā*) moves through the atmosphere like a force field..."

The *Devas* possess an expanded, spirit-energy (*ātmā*) capable of manipulating environmental elements and controlling atmospheric conditions.

Other Rig Vedic Terms for the Vital Faculties that Survive Death

The *Rgveda* belongs to an early Indo-Aryan culture with soteriological focus was on: **Yajña** (sacrificial harmony), **Ṛta** (divine order) and **Amṛta** (immortality/non-death) in the heavenly realm of the ancestors (*Pitṛ-loka* / *Svar*). The Rig Veda describes the destiny of the deceased is **Pitṛ-yāna** (the Path of the Ancestors, i.e. Brahma), entering the highest heaven (*parame vyoman*) to live forever among the gods (*Devas*) and ancestors (*Pitṛs*).

The Rig Veda views human existence holistically and uses distinct terms for the vital life-forces and conscious entities that survive physical death to journey to **Svar** (the heavenly realm of light ruled by Yama).

In Rig Veda, Man is a combination of **Asu** (vital life-force) and **Manas** (conscious mind). Death is a transition of these vital faculties to a heavenly afterlife, supported by sacrificial merit.

The Role of Cremation (*Agni*): In hymns such as **RV 10.14** and **RV 10.16**, Agni (the fire god) is asked not to burn the deceased to ashes destructively, but to gently refine their *asu* and *manas*, freeing them from physical flaws and carrying them to King Yama's realm.

The Rig Vedic Terms for the Vital Faculties that Survive Death are:

Term	Root Meaning	Rig Vedic Concept	Survival After Physical Death
Asu (असु)	"Life-force" / "Vital energy"	The essential breath, life-principle, and animation of a living being.	Yes. Upon death, the <i>asu</i> is reunited with a perfected, luminous spiritual body in the heavenly realm (<i>Svar</i>).
Mana (मनस्)	"Mind" / "Intentionality"	The seat of active consciousness, thought, feeling, desire, and perception.	Yes. Funeral hymns (e.g., RV 10.58) explicitly speak of calling back or guiding the deceased person's <i>manas</i> so it travels safely to the realm of the ancestors (<i>Pitrs</i>).
Tanū (तनू)	"Self" / "Physical-form"	Primarily for physical body or persona. In late hymns, it	Transformed. The funeral fire (<i>Agni Kravyād</i>) consumes the physical <i>tanū</i> , while

Term	Root Meaning	Rig Vedic Concept	Survival After Physical Death
		denotes the whole individual.	Agni prepares a "divine <i>tanū</i> " (<i>daivī tanū</i>) for the deceased in heaven.
Jīva (जीव)	"Living one" / "Life"	Refers to the active living state or the living individual bound to earth.	No (Implicitly). It describes the individual while alive (<i>jīvo mṛtasya</i>), contrasting life with death.

The Significance of Anattalakkhaṇa

The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* should therefore be read with great care.

Its teaching is not simply: **"There is no self, or Soul-Spirit."**

Its immediate subject is: **"These five aggregates are anatta," and the Five Aggregates are Manifestation of Atta (Lakkhana).**

Lakkhaṇa directs our attention toward the characteristic or distinguishing mark of these aggregates. The Five Aggregates and the **Soul-Spirit** are not **two separately** things. They are **One** thing. The Five Aggregates are the manifestation, the sign, the characteristics of the **Soul-Spirit**.

The Buddha is teaching his disciples how to understand the nature of the five aggregates and, consequently, how not to identify with the five aggregates, because they are worldly. And his liberation path of the renunciate is a precise methodology to cultivate disenchantment from the worldly (*nibbida*), fading off worldly passion (*viraga*), and liberation from the world (*vimutti*).

The purpose of the Buddha's path is not to arrive at the conclusion: **"I do not exist."** The purpose is to become liberated from the world and to exit the universe and enter the **Deathless realm of Nibbana**.

Two Radically Different Liberations

The distinction between today's mainstream academia's liberation teaching and Gautama's *Vimutti* liberation (**Arahanism**) highlights a fundamental divide: **psychological liberation within the universe versus ontological exit from the universe.**

1). Mainstream Academia's Liberation: Freedom from Internal Bondage

This version of liberation refers to a state of **internal, psychological freedom**:

- **The Problem:** Bondage is caused by internal defilements—compulsory desires (*kāma*), fear (*bhaya*), anger (*krodha*), and egoic attachment (*saṅga*).
- **The Scope:** It does not seek to escape the physical laws of the universe. The universe operates under the law of decay and dissolution, as long as anyone, any soul-spirit stays in the universe, it will eventually result in dissolution into the source of the universe. Mainstream Academia's non-dual awakening leads to transcendence & merging with the source of universe, which differs from Gautama's true dhamma of Arahanism with noble duality for liberation from the world, and the universe. The distinction between today's mainstream academia's "transcendence of duality" (*dvandvātīta*) and Gautama's uncompromising ethical dualism (Arahanism) exposes a fundamental cosmological divide between world-sustaining absorption and world-transcending exit.
- **The Posture:** The liberated individual remains fully active within the cosmic structure. By anchoring their mind in non-dual transcendence knowledge (*jñāna*), they transcend internal duality and friction. The universal law of aging and death still apply for their goal remains inside the universe, but the inner actor is unaffected by worldly dualities of heat and cold, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, wholesome and unwholesome, yin and yang, while sustaining the worldly order (*lokasaṅgraha*).

2). Gautama's *Liberation*: Freedom from the Laws of worldly existence (*Jārāmaraṇa*)

Gautama's motive to leave his life as a princess and completely renounce the world (*pabbajjā*) was not merely to find mental peace or overcome internal anxiety—it was driven by the direct, disturbing realization of **Old Age (*jarā*) and Death (*marāṇa*)**:

- **The Problem:** The entire fabric of the universe (the *loka*) is governed by the law of impermanence, conditionality, and dissolution (*dukkha*). As long as one remains within the cosmic realms of existence, one is subject to compulsory cycles of aging and death.
- **The Realization:** True safety cannot be achieved by merely changing one's mental attitude while remaining inside a realm where everything is governed by the universal law of decay and death. Aging and death are non-negotiable structural laws of the universe.
- **The Solution:** To overcome aging and death, one must **transcend and exit the universe itself**. Gautama's liberation is an absolute severance from the entire Universal process of *saṃsāra*—the ending of involuntary reincarnation within the universe through the complete eradication of *rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha*.

Mainstream academia's liberation is psychological mastery over the mind within the world: it allows the individual to stand untouched by fear and desire while fulfilling their role inside the cosmic machinery.

Gautama's liberation is ontological emancipation from the world: recognizing that the universe is an inescapable trap of decay and death, his path requires the practitioner—as a renunciate (*bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī*)—to completely purify the *citta*, means to detach from the world. Upon physical dissolution, the purified *citta* passes through the Pure Abodes Brahma heavens as the gateway threshold, completing its final, irreversible exit from this universe to Nibbāna-Dhātu—the realm entirely beyond aging and death with permanent existence and bliss.

Mainstream Academia's Non-Dual Transcendence & Merging with the Source of Universe vs. Gautama's True Dhamma of Arahanism with Noble Duality for Liberation from the World

The distinction between today's mainstream academia's "transcendence of duality" (*dvandvātīta*) and Gautama's uncompromising ethical dualism (**Arahanism**) exposes a fundamental cosmological divide between **world-sustaining absorption** and **world-transcending exit**.

1). Mainstream academia's "Transcendence of Duality" (*Dvandvātīta*)

Mainstream academia views dualities (*dvandva*)—such as pleasure and pain, success and failure, hot and cold—as temporary, surface-level fluctuations of the material field (*prakṛti / guṇas*).

- **The Unconditioned Core:** Their "unconditioned core" is the awakening for the ultimate nature of the universe that stands completely untouched behind the field of duality. To remain "anchored" in this core means realizing that the world's conflicts are merely the *aggregates* acting upon the *aggregates*.
- **Dissolution of Ethical Friction for Action:** Because mainstream academia's ideal of life is a lay person's life without necessity of renunciation to become a bhikkhi/bhikkhuni, their primary objective is to live inside the world without accumulating karmic debt, their non-dual transcendence effectively neutralizes worldly moral friction. Good and bad, wholesome and unwholesome, killing and being killed, success and failure are subsumed into a higher divine cosmic order. The actor transcends the opposites, allowing them to remain fully active in the world (*karmany abhipravṛttah*) while claiming awakening, becoming a Buddha, as their final goal instead of becoming an Arahant as the final goal based on Gautama's true dhamma.

2). Arahanism's Noble Dualism: The Structural Engine of Liberation

In Gautama's liberation teaching, non-duality is not the path to freedom; it is a cosmic trap that keeps beings bound to the natural order. Arahanism affirms that the **Manussa (human) lineage** relies entirely upon a sharp, uncompromising dualistic framework:

- **The Absolute Law of Values:** Gautama does not collapse *kusala* (wholesome) and *akusala* (unwholesome) into a singular non-dual matrix. The entire discipline of *Sīla* (ethical alignment), *Samādhi* (concentration), and *Paññā* (wisdom) relies on actively discerning, developing, and perfecting the wholesome (*sugataa*) while systematically abandoning and destroying the unwholesome.
- **Purity vs. Defilement:** The *citta* is not merely "realizing its own pre-existing non-dual nature." It is undergoing a rigorous, real operational process of **purification**—uprooting the actual, binding defilements of *rāga* (worldly craving/attachment), *dosa* (fear/anger/aversion for worldly survival and empowerment), and *moha* (ignorance/delusion, not knowing Gautama's path liberation from the world to enter the deathless realm of Nibbana).
- **The Noble (Ariyan) Distinction:** This rigid dualistic structure is what elevates human existence above the natural, animalistic, or purely cosmic order. Where nature operates through raw power, instinct, and indifferent cycles of creation and destruction, the *Ariyan* path operates through the **civilized, values, moral responsibility, and conscious choice**.

Mainstream Academia's non-duality serves a world-sustaining function: by rising above dualities, a lay actor can perform heavy, complex, or violent worldly duties without internal conflict or karmic debt, maintaining the divine cosmic hierarchy.

In contrast, Arahantism asserts that non-dual naturalism remains trapped within the world, operating through power rather than moral truth. Gautama's path of liberation requires the practitioner—as a renunciate (*bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī*)—to stand firmly on the noble duality of values. By using *kusala* to eradicate *akusala*, the practitioner completely purifies the *citta*. Once perfected, their actions become purely inoperative (*akiriya*), and upon physical dissolution, their purified *citta* passes through the Pure Abodes Brahma heavens as the gateway threshold, completing its final exit of this universe into Nibbāna-Dhātu.

PART I — Theragāthā: Verses of the Elder Bhikkhus

Step into the living words of the Elder Bhikkhus.

The **Theragāthā**—the *Verses of the Elder Bhikkhus*—is one of the most remarkable collections preserved in the Pāli Canon. Found within the **Khuddaka Nikāya**, it brings together the voices of early accomplished senior Bhikkhu disciples of Gautama lineage who lived, practiced, struggled, awakened, purified and were liberated during the generations surrounding **Gautama the Supreme Arahant**.

Unlike a philosophical treatise written from a distance, the *Theragāthā* speaks in the first person of those who actually walked the path. These are the voices of men who left household life, entered the training, confronted their own minds, overcame obstacles, cultivated concentration and wisdom, and finally declared the completion of the path. Their verses preserve something extraordinarily rare: the testimony of yogis describing liberation from within their own experience.

The collection is traditionally organized into **twenty-one chapters (nīpātas)**, arranged primarily according to the number of summary verses attributed to each elder. Within these chapters are hundreds of verses associated with individual bhikkhus, each carrying something of the character, circumstances, practice, and realization of its speaker.

Some verses recall the difficulties of leaving behind family and worldly life. Others describe solitude, meditation, the discipline of the monastic training, encounters with Māra, the overcoming of sensuality, fear, doubt, attachment, and other obstacles. Still others speak with extraordinary directness about the realization of the **Dhamma**, the ending of craving, and the attainment of **arahantship**.

For this reason, the *Theragāthā* should not be approached merely as ancient religious poetry. Its verses are **statements of practice and attainment**. They give us access to the voices of the early Bhikkhu Saṅgha and allow us to hear how those who followed Gautama the Supreme Arahant understood the liberation path of renunciation they had actually undertaken.

The word *thera* means an elder, while *gāthā* means a verse or stanza. Thus, *Theragāthā* literally means the **Verses of the Elders**. The designation is significant: these are elder bhikkhus whose lives and attainments form part of the early Arahantist (Buddhist+) tradition.

The literary form varies considerably. Some verses are simple and direct; others are rich in imagery, metaphor, dialogue, and dramatic expression. Nature appears frequently—forests, mountains, rivers, trees, caves, the dawn, and the night sky become settings against which the inner struggle of the yogi unfolds. Yet beneath the literary forms lies a consistent purpose: **liberation**.

The elders repeatedly point away from the attractions of the worldly and toward what lies beyond them. They speak of abandoning worldly attachment, overcoming the defilements of worldly bondages, mastering the mind, developing concentration, seeing according to reality, and reaching the goal for which the holy life was undertaken.

The *Theragāthā* therefore provides not only historical and literary material but also a practical window into the **Path to Liberation from the World**.

These verses allow us to encounter liberation through many different human voices. One elder may speak of his former life; another of the loneliness of the forest; another of overcoming sensual desire; another of the discipline required for liberation; another of the moment when the work was finally completed. Their circumstances differ, their personalities differ, and their expressions differ—but the direction of their practice converges. They had undertaken a journey from the world toward liberation from it.

This is what makes the *Theragāthā* especially valuable for a contemporary practitioner. The verses do not present liberation as an abstract theory. They show that the Path was practiced by real human beings, under real conditions, through discipline, meditation, discernment, perseverance, and direct knowledge.

The elders did not merely discuss liberation. **They practiced for it. They attained it. And they spoke of what they had found.**

In reading the *Theragāthā*, therefore, we should listen carefully to the distinction between what the elders actually say and what later generations may have said about them. The ancient verses deserve to be encountered on their own terms. Their language, their repeated themes, their descriptions of practice, and their declarations of attainment all contribute to our understanding of the Dhamma preserved by the early Bhikkhu Saṅgha.

This volume invites the reader to enter that world.

It is an encounter with bhikkhus who lived close to Gautama the Supreme Arahant and with the generations of elders who carried their training forward. Their verses preserve stories of struggle and renunciation, but also something more important: **the possibility of completion of the path of liberation.**

The *Theragāthā* is, ultimately, a collection of voices from the Path.

Listen to them not merely as verses from the distant past, but as the recorded voices of yogis who undertook the training and reached its goal.

These are the voices of liberation.

1. Ekanipāto — Chapter of the Ones

1.1. Subhūti

**Channā me kuṭikā sukhā nivātā, Vassa deva yathāsukhaṃ;
Cittaṃ me susamāhitaṃ vimuttaṃ, Ātāpī viharāmi vassa devā ti.**

Covered is my kuti (little hut), comfortable, Wind-sheltered; O rain deva, do as you like. My Citta (mind) is well-concentrated (susamāhitaṃ) and liberated (vimuttaṃ); I live (viharāmi) ardent/ energetic (ātāpī), O rain deva.

Commentary: Much like a kuti (little hut) is thatched (*channā*), comfortable (*sukhā*), and sheltered from wind (*nivātā*), so the person lives in the physical shelter (kuti) is entirely secure and unbothered by external storms. A bhikkhu's mind (**Citta**) is well-concentrated (*susamāhitaṃ*) and liberated (*vimuttaṃ*), so the soul-spirit (**Ātmā**) lives in the Citta (mind) is well protected and unaffected by the storms of the outside world (loka), ātāpī (adjective: "possessing *tapas*", ardent/ energetic).

Citta-Ātmā: The Mind-Heart (*Citta*) and the Self/Soul-Spirit (*Ātmā*)

While *citta* is the total sphere of consciousness, spanning from its most superficial external projections down to its deepest, unconditioned nucleus, *ātmā* is the innermost core depth of *citta* itself.

1). *Citta* as the Total Sphere of Consciousness

Citta is the complete matrix of mind-heart awareness. It is the entire domain of conscious experience.

- **The Spectrum of Mind-Heart:** *Citta* encompasses the entire spectrum of awareness—from the outer peripheral layers (thoughts, feelings, sensory projections, past memory impressions) down to its own absolute center.
- **The Exterior Surface:** The outer layer of *citta* is what forms a person's visible **outlook** and interaction with the world. It is dynamic, easily disturbed by external impacts, and prone to surface turbulence.

2). *Ātmā* as the Core Depth of *Citta*

Ātmā is the deep layer, the essence of *citta* itself—its essential ground (*svabhāva*).

- **The Unshakable Foundation:** *Ātmā* is *citta* in its primary, essential existential state—unmoved by external impressions (*vr̥ttis*), self-luminous.
- **Core vs. Surface:** The distinction between *citta* and *ātmā* becomes a distinction between the **surface ripples** of consciousness (*citta*'s exterior outlook) and the **oceanic depth** of consciousness (*ātmā*).

Citta Susamāhitam Vimuttam

(1). **Susamāhitam:** "*Thoroughly and completely established together – in Samādhi.*"

- **Prefix su-** : Well, thoroughly, perfectly, auspiciously.
- **Prefix sam-** : Together, completely, in union, perfectly integrated.
- **Prefix ā-** : Towards, fully, completely (intensive prefix).
- **Root dhā** : To put, place, set, hold, fix, establish.
- **Suffix -ta** : Past passive participle suffix.
- **Form:** su + sam + ā + dhā + ta = *susamāhita* (Neuter nominative: *susamāhitam*). Literally: "*Thoroughly and completely placed/established together.*"

In the *R̥gveda* and early Upaniṣads, the root **dhā** with the prefix **sam-ā-** (*samādhā*) refers to the act of setting something firmly in its proper place or assembling parts into a harmonious, unbroken whole.

- In ritual contexts, *samāhita* describes the sacrificial fire deva (*agni*) or ceremonial offerings when they are perfectly set, centered, and stabilized without turbulence or disruption (*R̥gveda* 10.56.1).
- In early Upaniṣadic thought (e.g., *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1.5), a *samāhita-citta* or *samāhitātmā* denotes an inner state where the senses and mental faculties are pulled back from outward dispersion and fixed firmly in the center—unshaken by external disturbances.

In the **Pali Canon** Suttas, **samāhita** is the past participle form of the state reached in **Samādhi** (Concentration). The addition of **su-** elevates this to the highest, unbroken degree of concentration:

- In the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2), when the Citta enters the four jhānas, it is described as *samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte* ("when the Citta is concentrated (*samāhite*), purified (*parisuddhe*), bright (*pariyodāte*)").
- **Susamāhitam** goes beyond temporary suppression of thought; it signifies that the Citta is immovably fixed, perfectly centered, and fully anchored within Samadhi (Concentration). Because it is thoroughly concentrated, external disturbances—like the storming rain outside the *kuṭi*—cannot shake or scatter it.

(2). Vimuttam: Literally: "*Completely unbound, released, or separated from all ties.*"

- **Prefix vi-** : Away from, un-, dis-, complete detachment/ separation.
- **Root muc / mokṣ:** To release, untie, unbind, discharge, set free.
- **Suffix -ta:** Past passive participle suffix (muc + ta -> *mutta*).
- **Form:** vi + *mutta* = *vimutta* (Neuter nominative: *vimuttam*). Literally: "*Completely unbound,*" "*thoroughly released,*" or "*separated from all ties.*"

In the *Ṛgveda*, the root **muc** is prominently used in prayers to the gods (especially Varuṇa and Agni) requesting untying or releasing from bonds (*pāśa*), debt (*ṛṇa*), or illness.

- In *Ṛgveda* 1.24.15, a verse attributed to the seer Śunaḥśepa—we encounter one of the oldest structural representations of human bondage and release in Vedic literature. "ud uttamam varuṇa pāśam asmad avādhamam vi madhyamam śrathāya | athā vayam āditya vrata tavānāgasō aditaye syāma ||" ("O Varuṇa, unloose from us the upper bond, untie the middle, loosen the lowest").
- In the Vedic sacrificial view, liberation (*mukṭi*) meant unbinding the physical or subtle body from snares, evil spirits, or death (*mṛtyu*).

In the **Pali Canon** Suttas, **vimutta** transitions from prayer for unbinding to the ultimate transcendent reality—the complete unbinding of the Citta from the worldly chains (*saṃyojana*) of **rāga**, **dosa**, and **moha**.

- The prefix **vi-** emphasizes **transcendence through separation**: the Citta is not merely quieted; it is fundamentally disconnected and unhitched from the world (*loka*) and the universe which contains billions of worlds altogether.
- In passages such as the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* (SN 22.59), the sequence flows from understanding impermanence for all worldly phenomena -> *nibbindati* (becomes disenchanted from the world) -> *virajjati* (fades away worldly passion) -> *vimuccati* (is released from the world). Thus, **vimuttaṃ** represents the ultimate state of liberation where the Citta, having abandoned all worldly phenomena, transcends the samsāric world entirely.

Ātmā Ātāpī Viharāmi

(3). Ātāpī

- **Prefix ā-** : Towards, fully, intensively.
- **Root tap:** To burn, shine, radiate heat, exert effort, undergo ascetic yogic effort *tapa*.
- **Suffix -in:** Possessive suffix indicating "one who possesses or practices" (Nominative singular masculine: *ātāpī*).
- **Form:** ā + tap + in = *ātāpī*. Literally: "One who burns," "possessing intense yogic tapa practices/ardence," or "one who vigorously burns away impurities."

The root **tap** is central to Vedic cosmology and spiritual discipline under the concept of **Tapas** (तपस्).

- In the *Rgveda* (e.g., 10.190.1, the *Aghamarṣaṇa Hymn*), *tapas* is the primordial, creative consciousness / energy of the source of the universe. Human soul-spirit (*ātmā*) as a fractal of this source also contains this creative primordial consciousness: "*ṛtaṃ ca satyaṃ cābhīddhāt tapaso 'dhyajāyata*" ("Order (*ṛta*) and Truth (*satya*) were generated / manifested (*adhyajāyata*) from glowing / intensely kindled (*abhīddhāt*) Tapas").

- In the **R̥gveda 10.129 Nāsadīya Sūkta**, the primordial One (*Tad Ekam*) arises from a dark, formless void through the intense power of **Tapas**. Verse 3 explicitly names this cosmic emergence.

The Core Verses: RV 10.129.1–3: *nāsad āsīn no sad āsīt tadānīm
nāsīd rajo no vyomā paro yat / tama āsīt tamasā gūḷham agre
'praketam salilam sarvam ā idam || tuchyena ābhu apihitam yad āsīt
tapasas tan mahinājāyata ekam |||*

*"There was neither non-existence (asat) nor existence (sat) then;
there was no realm of space, nor the sky beyond. In the beginning
was darkness hidden by darkness; all this was unmanifest,
indistinguishable water. That empty void which was covered by
husk—that One (Ekam) was born / manifested (ajāyata) by the
greatness (mahinā) of Tapas!"*

Mainstream academia claims that “Before the Buddha, contemporary movements like Jainism and various ascetic sects used *tapas* to mean severe physical self-mortification—such as starvation, holding painful postures, or exposing oneself to extreme weather—to burn up bad karma. The Buddha tried these extreme practices for six years and nearly died. Consequently, throughout the Pali Canon, he **redefines Tapa from external physical torture to internal mental discipline.**”

This is completely ignorant, stupid and wrong accusation.

The textual evidence across the Pali Canon demonstrates that Gautama Buddha never rejected **tapas**. Rather, he rejected physical self-torture (*attantāpana* or *dukkarakārikā*), which is precisely **NOT tapas**.

He explicitly used the term *tapas* (and its verbal/adjectival forms *tapati*, *tāpaso*, *ātāpī*) to describe the radiant, primordial, concentrated spiritual energy of the Citta that incinerates mental defilements (*kilesa*) and powers the attainment of **Arahantship** and **Nibbāna-Dhātu**.

(1). Direct Affirmation: Gautama Buddha Declares His Own Path as Tapas

In the **Bhaya-bherava Sutta (MN 4)**, Gautama Buddha directly refutes the notion that he is an opponent of *tapas*. He affirms that he lives possessing genuine *tapas* (*tapasī*): *So kho ahaṃ, brāhmaṇa, tapassī ceva homi paramo ca tapassīnāṃ* |

*"Indeed, brāhmaṇa, I am one who has **tapas** (tapassī), and I am the foremost among those who possess **tapas**."*

He does not abandon the word or distance himself from it—he claims the supreme mastery of it.

(2). True Tāpasa: One who Practise Tapas

In the **Sutta Nipāta (verse 492, Māgha Sutta)**, Gautama Buddha described *tāpaso* (one who practices *tapas*): *Ye vedha pāpāni nudanti hitvā, pariggahaṃ amamā cerayanti* | *Te tādisā tāpasā sādhurūpā, etehi havyāny anumodayetha* ||

"Those here who drive away evil and hatred (pāpāni), who have abandoned worldly possessions and wander without ownership (amamā)—such ones are true tāpasā of good nature."

Here, one who practices *tapas* is required to have good nature by abandoning *evil and hatred*, unwholesome states (*pāpāni*) of the mind-heart (*citta*), one abandons worldly possessions, ownership (*amamā*) of anything worldly, and becomes spiritual oriented, such person is one could induce the primordial, creative consciousness / energy of the source of the universe, that can purify the mind-heart (*Citta*), lead to liberation.

(3). Manifestation of Tapas: Patient Endurance (*khantī*)

In the **Dhammapada (verse 184, Ovāda-Pātimokkha)**, Gautama Buddha defines the supreme manifestation of *tapas*: *Khantī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā, nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti buddhā* |

*"Patient endurance (khantī) is the supreme **tapas** (paramaṃ tapo); 'Nibbāna is supreme,' say the Buddhas."*

Tapas as the inner consciousness/ power of the mind-heart, manifest externally as **patient endurance** (*khantī*) for any worldly sufferings, for such a person with *Tapas* already sets their eyes on the supreme *Nibbāna*.

(4). Tapas Ignited Through Jhāna, Tapas as Spiritual Fire/Power (*tejas*)

In the **Dhammapada (verse 387)**, Gautama Buddha explicitly ties the verbal root of *tapas* (*tapati* = to shine forth/ radiate) to the practice of **jhāna**: *Divā tapati ādicco, rattim ābhāti candimā | Sannaddho khattiyo tapati, jhāyī tapati brāhmaṇo | Atha sabbam ahorattim, buddho tapati tejasā ||*

"The sun shines (tapati) by day; the moon glows by night. The warrior shines (tapati) in armor; the brāhmaṇa shines (tapati) by absorption in Jhāna (jhāyī). But day and night, all through, the Buddha shines (tapati) by his spiritual fire/ power (tejas)."

(5) Tapas as the internal ignition of primordial consciousness innate to the soul-spirit (*ātmā*) can burn away defilements and purify the Citta.

SN 12.70 (Susima Sutta): Tapas as Internal Ignition for Liberation

When *Susīma* asks about the spiritual life, the Buddha explicitly affirms *tapas* as: *"Susīma, **tapas** is for the purpose of direct knowledge, for the purpose of full understanding, for the purpose of the complete destruction of the taints (āśava)."*

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), the formula for establishing mindfulness opens with: *"ātāpī sampajāno satimā"* ("ardent, fully aware, mindful").

Mainstream Academia's Wrong Accusation and Attack on *Tapas*

Academic Indology and Buddhist Studies routinely translate *tapas* as "austerity," "penance," or "self-mortification," equating it with physical self-torture. This translation is a fundamental conflation that distorts the early Pali Suttas. It misreads the Suttic critique of bodily self-infliction, missing how Gautama Buddha distinguished external physical torment from internal spiritual exertion.

The Fundamental Flaw: Confusing *Paritāpana* with *Tapas*

Mainstream scholarship accuses early Buddhism of either maintaining a contradiction—rejecting *tapas* in principle while demanding "asceticism" in practice—or presenting the Buddha as a reformer who simply softened harsh self-mortification into a milder form of physical restraint.

Both assertions rest on a category error. Across the early Suttas (e.g., *Kandaraka Sutta* [MN 51], *Māgaṇḍiya Sutta* [MN 75], *Devadaha Sutta* [MN 101]), the Buddha does **not** reject *tapas*. He rejects **paritāpana** (the deliberate infliction of affliction, torment, and physical pain upon the body), which has nothing to do with *tapas*.

When the Buddha critiques those who starve their stomachs, bake under the summer sun, or sleep on thorns, he labels them **attantapo attaparitāpanānuyogamanuyutto** ("self-tormentors devoted to the pursuit of afflicting themselves"). The critique targets the **paritāpana**—the useless physical torment that leaves *rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha* completely untouched within the Citta.

Root of the Academic Misinterpretation

Mainstream academia's erroneous association stems from three methodological failures:

(1). Indiscriminate Application of Hinduism Frameworks

Academic Indology heavily relied on Jain texts (*Nigaṇṭha* traditions) and medieval *Dharmashāstras*, where they claim *tapas* had indeed devolved into physical mortification (*sallekhanā*, *pañcātapa*). Early European scholars flattened these distinct traditions, assuming that because Jains

called bodily torture *tapas*, the Buddha must have been addressing and rejecting the same definition.

(2). Victorian Theological Framing

Nineteenth-century colonial translators (such as T.W. Rhys Davids and V. Trenckner) viewed Indian spiritual practices through the lens of medieval Christian monasticism. They mapped the Latinate concepts of "**penance**" and "**mortification of the flesh**" directly onto *tapas*. This linguistic choice loaded the term with connotations of self-punishment for sin, a concept entirely alien to the early Pali framework of mind-purification.

(3). Etymological Surface-Reading

Because the active participle **ātāpī** (adjective: "possessing *tapas*", ardent exertion) and the label **attantapo** (self-tormentor) share the verbal root *tap* ("to heat" / "to burn"), academic lexicography lumped them together under "austerities." They failed to recognize the deliberate functional distinction of the two in the Suttas.

The Suttic Reality

In the **Kandaraka Sutta (MN 51)**, the Buddha criticized physical self-torture (**attaparitāpana**), calling it futile, painful, and unhelpful because it leaves the defilements of the Citta untouched: *Idha, kandaraka, ekacco attantapo hoti attaparitāpanānuyogamanuyutto... Ayaṃ vuccati, kandaraka, puggalo attantapo attaparitāpanānuyogamanuyutto |*

"Here, Kandaraka, a certain person torments himself (attantapo) and is devoted to the practice of torturing himself... This person is called one who torments himself and is given to self-mortification."

- **Attantapo** (*atta* + *ntapo*): Self-tormenting / self-scorching.
- **Attaparitāpanānuyoga**: Devotion to inflicting pain on the body.

To Gautama Buddha, starving the stomach or baking in the summer sun is *paritāpana* (inflicting affliction). It leaves *rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha* completely untouched within the Citta.

Across the entire *Kandaraka Sutta* (MN 51), **tapas** (or **tapo**) or other derived forms of **tapas**, **does NOT appear even once**.

In MN 51, the Buddha does not critique or reject *tapas* at all as a concept or practice. The standalone word *tapas* and its related word is completely absent. His entire condemnation in MN 51 is directed at **paritāpana** (bodily torture), while he simultaneously upholds **ātāpī** (adjective: "possessing *tapas*") as the required practice for purifying the Citta.

MN 36 (Mahā-Saccaka Sutta): The Buddha's Practice

The mainstream academia claim that before his liberation, the Buddha attempted the extreme physical austerities of the ascetic traditions of his day: extreme breath-retention (generating intense physical head-heat) and near-total starvation. Then reflecting on those extreme physical practices, he declared: *"Whatever ascetics or brahmins in the past, present, or future experience painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion, this is the utmost—there is nothing beyond this. And yet by this severe, painful austerity (tapas) I did not attain any higher human state, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to awakening?"*

This is wrong accusation on *tapas*.

In the descriptions of extreme breath-retention and starvation in **MN 36 (Mahā-Saccaka Sutta)**, the Buddha **does not** use the standalone noun **tapas** (or **tapo**) to describe his actions.

(1). The Actual Pali Terms Used in MN 36

When detailing his pre-liberation practices with severe physical pressure, breath-retention, and starvation, Gautama Buddha uses specific technical terms: **Dukkarakārikā**: Doing what is hard/painful to do (bodily torture/ordeals). **Oḷārikaṃ padhanaṃ**: Coarse, gross physical striving. **Kaṭukā / Dukkha-vedanā**: Harsh, painful physical sensations.

The key sentence where modern translators incorrectly insert the word "austerity (*tapas*)" actually reads in Pali: *Na kho panetāya kaṭukāya dukkarakārikāya adhicchigghem' alamariyaññadassanavisesaṃ adhigacchāmi |*

*"Yet by this harsh, painful physical ordeal (**katukāya dukkarakārikāya**), I did not attain any higher noble knowledge and vision."*

(2). Where the Root tap Appears in MN 36

The root tap appears in MN 36, but strictly in its active form **ātāpī** when describing proper, noble effort—or as a verb describing the spiritual power caused by practice: **Ātāpī** (adjective: "possessing *tapas*"): When the Buddha describes his firm, relentless resolve, he states: *"My energy was aroused and unsluggish..."* And in describing proper contemplation, the text utilizes **ātāpī** (adjective: "possessing *tapas*", ardent, energy of consciousness).

(3). Why Translators Misread MN 36

Translators routinely render *dukkarakārikā* as "austerities" or "tapas."

Because Hinduism later claimed physical torture was *tapas*, commentators conflated Gautama Buddha's rejection of **dukkarakārikā** (painful physical ordeals) with a rejection of *tapas*.

In reality, MN 36 demonstrates that the Buddha abandoned crushing his body (*dukkarakārikā*) because it failed to generate spiritual fruit, turning instead to the Jhāna—where true, radiant **tapas** is ignited within the Citta.

Ātāpī Viharāmi

Here, **Ātāpī** signifies the active, burning energetic primordial consciousness, needed to prevent unwholesome states from arising and to burn up existing defilements (*kilesa*). It is not passive relaxation inside the hut; it is an active, dynamic internal energy (*vīriya*) that one dwells with it (*viharāmi*), keeping the Citta completely sheltered from external worldly conditions.

The bhikkhu abides (*viharāmi*) in a state of continuous flow of active, burning energetic primordial consciousness. The practice of Brahmachariya is maintained with unwavering diligence.

What Is the Release, *Mukti* / *Mokṣa* in *Ṛgveda*? (The Nature of Liberation)

In the *Ṛgveda*, the root **muc** is prominently used in prayers to the gods (especially Varuṇa and Agni) requesting untying or releasing from bonds (*pāśa*), debt (*ṛṇa*), or illness. In the Vedic sacrificial view, liberation (*mukti*) meant unbinding the physical or subtle body from snares, evil spirits, or death (*mṛtyu*).

In this early Vedic, release (*mukti* / *mokṣa*, from *muc*) is understood concretely as **unbinding, acquittal, and restoration to Wholeness**.

In *Ṛgveda* 1.24.15: ud uttamam varuṇa pāśam asmad | avādhamaṁ vi madhyamaṁ śrathāya | athā vayam āditya vrata tavānāgasō aditaye syāma ||

"Loosen the upper bond from us, O Varuṇa, untie the middle, loosen the lowest."

To understand what the worshipper is bound to and what release signifies here, we must examine the specific nature of **Varuṇa**, his **pāśa** (fettters), and the Vedic cosmological view of human existence.

(1). What Are Humans Bonded To? (The Nature of the Fetters)

In the *Ṛgveda*, **Varuṇa** is the guardian of **Ṛta**—the divine order. When a human violates **Ṛta**, he suffers **pāśa** (bonds or snares).

The Three Bonds (Uttama, Madhyama, Adhama)

The verse explicitly divides the bondage into a threefold spatial and somatic hierarchy:

- **The Upper Bond (*Uttamam Pāśam*):** at the head or crown of the individual. Cosmologically, it links to the heavenly sphere (*svaṛ/dyu*). Somatically/psychically, it represents mental confusion, spiritual affliction, blindness to **Ṛta**, and heavy guilt that weighs down consciousness from above.
- **The Middle Bond (*Madhyamaṁ Pāśam*):** at the chest or midsection. Cosmologically, it links to the atmospheric realm (*antarikṣa*).

Somatically, it binds the life energy (*prāṇa*), the heart (*hrd*), physical vitality, and emotional balance, causing anxiety, disease, and shortness of life.

- **The Lower/Lowest Bond (*Adhamam Pāśam*):** at the feet or lower limbs. Cosmologically, it links to the earth (*prthivī*) and the underworld. Somatically, it represents physical paralysis, total immobility, decay, entangling karmic consequences, and the gravitational pull toward **Mṛtyu** (death) and decay.

What Caused the Bondage?

The bondage is caused by **Enmity/Sin (*Āgas* or *Enas*)**. This verse explicitly asks to be made **anāgas** (*an-* [without] + *āgas* [sin/transgression] = guiltless/faultless). In the Vedic worldview, a person in bondage is physically or psychically ill, sick, unwholesome and is "trapped" within realms of existence.

The Unbinding and Transition to *Aditi* (Freedom)

The verb forms used—**ut-śrathāya** (loosen upward), **vi-śrathāya** (untie outward/apart), and **ava-śrathāya** (loosen downward)—describe an act of surgical release. The three knots are untied in their respective locations so that the human being is no longer constricted at the head, heart, or feet.

The ultimate purpose of unbinding the three fetters is: "*So that we, abiding in your sacred law (vrata), sinless/guiltless (anāgaso), may belong to **Aditi (Freedom)**.*"

Aditi (literally *a-diti* = "unbound," "undivided,") represents boundlessness and primordial freedom.

Release (*Mukti*) in this Vedic context means: **Exoneration:** The removal of sin/guilt (*āgas*) so that one aligns with the divine order (*Ṛta*).

Somatic/Life Restoration: Freedom from sickness/decaying, death (*mṛtyu*), allowing one to become wholesome. **Entry into Boundlessness and Primordial Freedom (*Aditi*):** Moving from a state of being trapped (*diti*) to a state of unrestricted, free existence (*aditi*).

Parallel Confirmation: RV 1.25.21

The exact same threefold structure appears in the very next sūkta, RV 1.25.21, demonstrating that this was an established liturgical formula in early Vedic thought: *ud uttamaṁ mumugdhi no vi madhyamaṁ cṛṣa / avādhamāni jīvase ||*

"Loosen upward the highest bond from us, untie asunder the middle bond, [loosen] downward the lowest bonds—so that we may live (jīvase)!"

The Three Fetters: Head-Binding (*Śīrṣataḥ*), Heart-Trembling (*Hṛtkampa*), And Foot-Shackling (*Padbīṣa*): are regarded as devastating problems in the Vedic tradition, because human body was understood not as an isolated physical object, but as a microcosm (*puruṣa*) woven directly into the cosmic order (*Ṛta*).

(1). The Highest Bond: Head-Binding (*Śīrṣataḥ*)

The head (*śīrṣa*) is defined in the *Atharvaveda* (10.2.27) as the **Devakośa**—the "closed treasury of the deva-gods." It is the seat of *manas* (mind-will), spiritual vision, and the gateway connecting the individual to *Dyu* (the upper celestial realm of light). When bound around the head (*śīrṣataḥ*): The "treasury" is sealed shut; Mental light is replaced by confusion, delusion, and spiritual blindness; The individual experiences heavy cognitive disorientation, existential sin/guilt (*āgas*), and alienation from divine order (*Ṛta*).

- **Loss of Cosmic Alignment:** A person whose head is bound cannot perceive truth or act with wisdom. They lose their moral compass because their connection to the cosmic mankind Brahma realm is severed.
- **Inability to Perform Right Action:** In the Vedic worldview, all purposeful human action begins with clear mental focus (*manas*). If the head is bound, every intention is corrupted at its source level, trapping the individual in continual ignorance and spiritual suffering.

(2). The Middle Bond: Trembling of the Heart (*Hṛtkampa*) & Constriction of Life Force (*Prāṇa*)

The middle region—the chest, heart (*hṛdaya*), and lungs—is the realm of **Prāṇa** (vital energy, life force, foundation for psychic powers) and emotional equilibrium, corresponding to *Antarikṣa* (the atmospheric middle space). When bounded, it manifests physically and psychically as: **Hṛtkampa**: Violent trembling, palpitations, and terror in the heart. **Prāṇa-Constriction**: Suffocation, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. **Internal Agony**: Acute emotional dread, anxiety, and panic.

- **Disruption of the Life-Engine**: *Prāṇa* is the fuel of existence. When the chest is constricted, life-force cannot circulate. The body loses its vital warmth and resilience, making it vulnerable to severe disease.
- **Paralysis of Emotional Stability**: The heart is the center of courage and composure. *Hṛtkampa* destroys inner calm, leaving a person in a constant state of mortal terror and helplessness.

(3). The Lowest Bond: Foot-Shackle (*Padbīṣa*) & Physical Paralysis

The lowest region—the legs, feet (*pāda*), and base—anchors the human being to *Pr̥thivī* (the earth). The term **Padbīṣa** specifically refers to a heavy wooden or metal shackle used to immobilize animals or prisoners. When bounded: The legs are locked, resulting in physical paralysis or severe lameness. The body loses its capability to move forward, walk, or act upon the earth. It drags the individual down toward **Mṛtyu** (death) and physical decay.

- **Loss of Human Agency**: A human who cannot walk cannot engage in life, perform daily duties, or walk the path of virtue. Physical immobility turns a living person into a passive victim of decay.
- **The Gravitational Pull of Death**: In Vedic thought, mobility represents life (*jīva*), while absolute immobility represents death (*mṛtyu*). The foot-shackle is the direct grip of Yama (death) pulling the body down into the dirt before its natural time.

When an individual is liberated from the three bonds—the highest at the head (*uttama*), the middle at the chest (*madhyama*), and the lowest at the feet (*adhama*)—the Vedic texts describe a profound, total restoration. The individual transitions from a state of paralysis, sin/guilt, and sickness to **Wholeness (*Sarvatāt*)**, **Boundlessness/Freedom (*Aditi*)**, **Divine Light (*Svar/Jyoti*)**, and **Life (*Āyus*)**.

(1). Entry into Boundlessness (*Aditi*) and Freedom from Sin (*Anāgas*)

Upon the loosening of the three fetters, one ceases to be constricted (*diti*) and enters the state of **Aditi**—the infinite, undivided, wholesome and unblemished state of existence.

Ṛgveda 1.24.15: *ud uttamaṁ varuṇa pāśam asmad avādhamaṁ vi madhyamaṁ śrathāya | athā vayam āditya vrata tavānāgaso aditaye syāma ||*

"O Varuṇa, loosen the highest bond upward from us! Unloose the lowest [bond] downward, and the middle [bond] asunder! Then, O Āditya, remaining in thy sacred vow, may we, sinless/blameless (*anāgasah*), belong to Aditi (*Boundlessness*)!"

(2). Restoration of Life (*Āyus*) and Overcoming Death (*Mṛtyu*)

Ṛgveda 1.25.21: *ud uttamaṁ mumugdhi no vi madhyamaṁ cṛṣa | avādhamaṁ jīvase ||*

"Unbind the highest bond upward from us! Untie the middle bond asunder! [Unbind] the lowest bonds downward, that we may live (*jīvase*)!"

Atharvaveda 19.44.4 — Re-standing and Strength

muñcāmi tvā haviṣā jīvano madhyamato pāśāt | ut te sthāmāyatan pṛthivyām ||

"I release thee by this consecrated offering, that thou mayest live, from the middle fetter! Upward is thy firm footing (*sthāman*) established upon the earth (*pṛthivyām*)!"

(3). Emergence from Darkness into Light (*Svar / Jyoti*)

When the highest bond (*uttama pāśa*) is lifted upward (*ud*) from the head, the dark veil over the mind (*manas*) dissolves. The individual steps out of suffering and beholds the supreme light of truth (*Satya*).

Ṛgveda 1.50.10 — Rising Beyond Darkness

*ud vayan̐ tamasas pari jyotiṣ paśyanta uttaram / devaṁ devatrā sūryam
aganma jyotir uttamam //* "Beholding the higher light beyond the
darkness, we have reached Sūrya, the god among gods—the supreme
Light (jyotir uttamam)!"

Atharvaveda 7.83.3 — Awakening from Deathly Slumber

*vi varha śirasah pāśaṁ vi granthiṁ śrathayā krimeḥ / ut tiṣṭha jīva mā
mr̥to mā te prāṇaṁ mayīdharam //* "Tear away the bond/snare (pāśa)
from the head! Untie asunder the knot (granthi) of the worm (krimi)!
Rise up (uttiṣṭha)! Live (jīva)! Do not die! Let not thy vital breath (prāṇa)
be taken away!"

(4). Attainment of Total Wholeness (*Sarvatāt*) and Soundness

When all three levels are unchained, the human being reaches **Sarvatāt**—complete wholesome of body, breath, and mind, where no part of the microcosm remains diseased or restricted.

Ṛgveda 10.100.1–11 (Recurring Refrain)

ā sarvatātim aditiṁ vṛṇīmahe... "for **Wholeness (*Sarvatāt*) and Aditi
(unbound state)...**"

Atharvaveda 6.96.3 — Freedom from All Evil and Affliction

*muñcantu mā varuṇasya pāśād yad uttamaṁ yad adhamam yan
madhyamam / sarvaṁ tad asmad duritaṁ sujātā sarvair aṅgaiḥ saha
lokam ema //* "May [the pure deities] release me from Varuṇa's fetter—
that which is highest, that which is lowest, and that which is middle! May
all that sin / spiritual affliction (duritam) be driven away from us! O well-
born ones (sujātāḥ), with all our parts whole, may we enter the world
(lokam ema)!"

In the *Rgveda*, **Āditya** is a **patronymic title** meaning "*Son/Offspring of Aditi*" (*a-diti* = the unbound, absolute freedom, *sugati*, and wholeness).

In the earliest layers of the Veda, the **Ādityas** are a group of solar, celestial, and Brahma deities who uphold divine order (**Ṛta**). **Varuṇa is prominent member of the Ādityas**. The *Rgveda* frequently speaks of the Ādityas in the plural. While later Puraṇic texts expand their number to 12 (one for each solar month), the earliest Vedic texts name 6, 7, or 8 chief Ādityas:

- i. **Varuṇa** (The King and Guardian of Ṛta)
- ii. **Mitra** (The Lord of Alliances, Contracts, and Light)
- iii. **Aryaman** (The Lord of Hospitality and Nobility)
- iv. **Dakṣa** (The Power of Will / Conscious Capability)
- v. **Bhaga** (The Dispenser of Due Shares / Fortune)
- vi. **Amśa** (The Apportioner)
- vii. **Sūrya / Mārtaṇḍa** (The Solar Orb)

In **RV 1.24.15**, calling Varuṇa "*Āditya*" is addressing him by his divine family/functional title: "**O Son of Aditi!**"

Bondage in the Pali Canon

The concepts of bondage and being bonded means the deep psychological and cosmological mechanisms that bind the **Citta** (mind) to **saṃsāra** and the world (**loka**). The state of being bonded is defined as being trapped in involuntary reincarnation, subject to birth, aging, sickness, and death.

1). The Primary Classifications of Bondage

The Pali Canon categorizes bondage under several precise technical frameworks:

A. The Ten Fetters (*Samyojana*)

The *Samyojanas* are the primary bonds that tie an uninstructed worldly person (*puthujjana*) to the wheel of rebirth (*samsāra*). They are divided into two sets:

- **Five Lower Fetters (*Orambhāgiya-saṃyojana*)** — Bind the Citta to the lower realms of existence (sensual sphere):

Sakkāya-diṭṭhi: The Body view (believing the body is real).

Vicikicchā: Skeptical doubt regarding the ultimate deathless reality and the ancient path to liberation.

Sīlabbata-parāmāsa: Clinging to mere rites, rules and rituals.

Kāmacchanda: Sexual and sensual desire / craving for sensory stimulation.

Byāpāda: fear, anger, ill-will, resentment, or aversion (*dosa*).

- **Five Higher Fetters (*Uddhambhāgiya-saṃyojana*)** — Bind the Citta to the higher rupa and arupa realms:

Rūparāga: attachment to *rūpa* realm (*rūpa-dhatu*).

Arūparāga: attachment to *arūpa* realm (*arūpa-dhatu*).

Māna: Ego, conceit, worldly pride.

Uddhacca: Restlessness, mental agitation.

Avijjā: Ignorance of the true nature/laws of the world. Not knowing the conflict of the laws/values for cosmic mankind race (Brahma) and the universal laws from the source of universe.

B. The Three Root Fires / Poisonous Bonds

At the core of all bondage to the world lie the three roots of defilements:

- **Rāga**: Sexual craving, lust, passion, worldly attachment.
- **Dosa**: Fear, anger, violence, hatred, ill-will.
- **Moha**: Delusion, ignorance, spiritual blindness. Not knowing the path to liberation.

C. The Four Bondages / Ties (*Yoga & Gantha*)

The Suttas often use the word **Yoga** (literally "yoke" or "bond") and **Kāyaganthi** ("bodily tie/knot"):

- a. **Kāmayoga**: The bond of sexuality and sensuality.
- b. **Bhavayoga**: The bond of worldly existence/becoming.
- c. **Diṭṭhiyoga**: The bond of wrong views and understanding, such as wrong awakening to the non-dual knowledge/view which leads to dissolution to the source of universe.
- d. **Avijjāyoga**: The bond of ignorance of the true nature/laws of the world. Not knowing the conflict of the laws/values for cosmic mankind race (Brahma) and the universal laws from the source of universe.

2). The State of Being Bonded (*Baddha*)

In the Pali Suttas, an individual who is bonded (*baddha*) is described through vivid structural and existential characteristics:

I. Subjection to Māra's Snares (*Māra-pāsa*)

Māra is the **personification** of **Death**, the universal law of decay and dissolution. The ancient Vedic metaphor of Varuṇa's noose (*pāśa*) evolves in the Suttas into **Māra's snare** (*Māra-pāsa*). Anyone bound by *rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha* is caught in Māra's net:

"Bound by the craving/attachment (raga) to happiness and joy (nandi) (nandirāga-baddha), caught in Māra's snare, one is not released from Māra's fetters..." — Sutta Nipāta

II. Misapprehension of *Anattā*

The state of bondage is fundamentally caused by misunderstanding of **Anattā** as humans having no soul-spirit (*āttā*), no spiritual essence at all but only five aggregates. Not knowing **Anattā** only means the five aggregates (*khandha*) are not "mine," "I am this," or "this is my self." They don't know human's have soul-spirit (*āttā*) beyond the five aggregates.

III. Involuntary Reincarnation (*Saṃsāra*)

Because of worldly craving (*taṇhā*) and clinging (*upādāna*), the Citta is perpetually yoked to new worldly existence. Upon the dissolution of one body, the Citta is propelled by its own worldly attachments into another womb, another world, and another cycle of birth and death.

3). The Nature of Liberation (*Vimutti*)

Just as bondage is the internal tying of the Citta to the world through *rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha*, liberation (*vimutti*) is the complete untying and unbinding from the world:

- **Cessation of Worldly Clinging:** It is through the complete cessation of worldly craving and clinging, the complete eradication of *rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha*, that we can escape our involuntary reincarnation and gain true freedom from the trap of the world.
- **Transcendence of the World (*Loka*):** We are trapped into the world, that results in the involuntary reincarnation in this world, and all the worlds in the universe. We call the pulling force of the world is the defilements of the mind-heart Citta, namely *rāga*, *dosa*, and *moha*. Our goal of practice is to purify the Citta, sever the attachment to the world. The purified Citta will disenchant from the world (*nibbida*), fading off world passion (*viraga*) and be liberated from the world (*vimutta*).
- **The Exit Threshold:** The exit point from *saṃsāric* worlds to the deathless realm of *Nibbāna* is specifically through the Pure Abodes Brahma heavens. Upon the dissolution of the final body of an Arahant (a fully purified mankind), the purified mind-heart Citta of the Arahant enters the rupa realm, and liberation is realized through the exit of this world to the outside of the universe to go to the *Nibbāna-dhātu*, the deathless realm of *Nibbāna*. The Pure Abodes Brahma heavens of the rupa realm serves as the final threshold, the "gateway" through which this transcendence occurs.

The Unconditioned Realm (*Asaṅkhata-Dhātu*), Deathless (*Amata*), Pure Wholesomeness (*Sugata*) with Ultimate Peace (*Santi*)

Everything in the world is conditioned (*saṅkhata*) by the universal laws of the universe which contains billions of worlds—including the laws of decay and dissolution. Nibbāna-Dhātu is a realm that is completely unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*) by the laws we observe in this universe because it is outside of the jurisdiction of this universe. That is why mankind in the realm of Nibbāna has no death, they can enjoy permanent blissful life, ultimate Peace (*Santi*), and without sufferings as we experienced here in this world.

In short, the liberated life in the realm of Nibbāna is not nothingness, annihilation or empty voidness; it is a new life with the perfect freedom. In the Pāli Canon, specifically within the **Asaṅkhata Saṃyutta** (SN 43.1–44), the Buddha delivers a series of short discourses outlining the **epithets, characteristics, and synonyms of Nibbāna**. This definitive canonical list contains **35 characteristics** describing what the realm of Nibbāna is like including:

Asaṅkhata (unconditioned) ananta (infinite) anāsava (taintless, undefiled), Sacca (truth, real) pāra (beyond, the other shore) nipuṇa (perfect) sududdasa (hard to be seen); Ajajjara (un-aging, undecaying) dhuva (permanent, constant) apalokita (undisintegrating), Anidassana (non-manifestive) nippapa (free from proliferation/diffuseness) santa (calmed, peace).

Amata (deathless) paṇīta (sublime, excellent) siva (auspicious) khema (secure, safe), Taṇhākkhaya (destruction of craving) acchāriya (wondrous, extraordinary) abbhuta (un-precedented, marvellous); Anītika (free from harm/ plague) anītikadhamma (of a nature free from harm/ plague), Nibbāna (unbinding) sugata (pure wholesomeness) desita (shown, pointed out).

Abyābajjha (without oppression, un-afflicted) virāga (dispassion), Suddhi (purity, cleanness) mutti (release, unbinding) anālaya (un-clinging, free from attachment); Dīpa (island) leṇa (cave) tāṇa (guard, protection), saraṇa (refuge, shelter) parāyana (final destination, ultimate goal).