

## Channa's Suicide in the *Samyukta-āgama*

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### ABSTRACT

*The present article offers a translation of the Samyukta-āgama parallel to the Channa-sutta of the Samyutta-nikāya, which describes the events surrounding the suicide of a monk who might have been an arahant.*

### Keywords

*Samyukta-āgama*, comparative studies, suicide, Arahant, Channa

### Introduction

The theme of suicide,<sup>1</sup> in particular the question whether an arahant could deliberately end his or her own life, is a topic often discussed mainly based on the material found in the Pāli canon. In order to make available some of the relevant canonical material extant in Chinese, with the present article I translate and discuss the perspective afforded by the *Samyukta-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation on the case of Channa's suicide. In what follows, I first translate the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse, presumably the (Mūla-)Sārvāstivāda version of Channa's suicide,<sup>2</sup> and then examine its presentation of this event.

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1. The present article builds on an earlier survey of some of the more general aspects of the theme of suicide, based on Pāli sources, in Anālayo (2007a); and on a brief study of the theme of death in early Buddhism in Anālayo (2007b).
  2. On the school affiliation of the *Samyukta-āgama* cf. Lü (1963, 242); Waldschmidt (1980, 136); Mayeda (1985, 99); Enomoto (1986, 23); Schmithausen (1987, 306); Choong (2000, 6 note 18); Hiraoka (2000); Harrison (2002, 1); Bucknell (2006, 685); and Glass (2010).

Translation<sup>3</sup>[Discourse to Channa]<sup>4</sup>

1. Thus have I heard. At one time, the Buddha was staying at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Feeding Place.
2. At this time, the venerable Channa, who was staying in Pāvārika's Mango Grove at Nālanda,<sup>5</sup> was seriously ill.
3. Then, the venerable Sāriputta heard that the venerable Channa, who was staying in Pāvārika's Mango Grove at Nālanda, was seriously ill. Having heard this, he said to the venerable Mahākoṭṭhita:<sup>6</sup> 'Venerable friend, did you know that the venerable Channa, who is staying in Pāvārika's Mango Grove at Nālanda, is seriously ill? We should go together to see him'. The venerable Mahākoṭṭhita accepted [the suggestion] by remaining silent.<sup>7</sup>
4. Then, the venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Mahākoṭṭhita together approached Pāvārika's Mango Grove at Nālanda and went to the hut where the venerable Channa was staying. On seeing from afar the venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Mahākoṭṭhita, the venerable Channa wanted to get up from the bed on which he was resting. The venerable Sāriputta said to the venerable Channa: 'You should just not get up!'.<sup>8</sup>

The venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Mahākoṭṭhita sat on another seat and asked the venerable Channa: 'How is it, venerable Channa, is your affliction bearable, is it getting worse or better?' ... (as above described in full in the discourse to Khema).<sup>9</sup>

3. The translated section ranges from T II 347b<sub>14</sub> to 348b<sub>1</sub>. For ease of comparison, I adopt the paragraph numbering used in the English translation of MN 144 in Nāṇamoli ([1995] 2005, 1114–1116); the translation of SN 35.87 in Bodhi (2000, 1164–1167) does not use paragraph numbering. For the same reason of facilitating comparison, I employ Pāli terminology (except for anglicized terms like 'Dharma'), without thereby intending to take a position on the original language of the *Saṃyukta-āgama*, which according to de Jong (1981, 108) would in fact have been in Sanskrit.
4. SĀ 1266 does not have a title. Akanuma ([1929] 1990, 112) suggests the name of its main protagonist, 闍陀, as a title, which I have followed. 闍陀 could in principle be rendering Chanda, Chandaka or Channa, cf. Akanuma ([1930] 1994, 128); on the different Channas known in the Theravāda tradition cf. also Malalasekera ([1937] 1995, 923f). The *Saṃyutta-nikāya* counterpart, SN 35.87 at SN IV 55,28, has the title *Channa-sutta*; whereas the *Majjhima-nikāya* version of the same discourse, MN 144 at MN III 266,ult., gives the title as *Channovāda-sutta*.
5. According to SN 35.87 at SN IV 55,31, he was staying at Mount Vulture Peak, together with Sāriputta and Mahācunda.
6. In SN 35.87 at SN IV 56,1, the other monk whom Sāriputta invites to come along to visit Channa is Mahācunda.
7. SN 35.87 at SN IV 56,5 reports that the other monk (Mahācunda) verbalizes his agreement.
8. A description of Channa trying to get up to receive his visitors is not found in SN 35.87. Similar descriptions are a recurrent feature in other Pāli discourses, cf. e.g. SN 22.87 at SN III 120,2; SN 22.88 at SN III 125,4; SN 35.74 at SN IV 46,13; SN 35.75 at SN IV 47,ult.; AN 6.56 at AN III 379,16; though in these instances such an action is undertaken by a sick monk to express his respect towards the Buddha who is arriving, not towards a fellow monk.
9. This type of abbreviation (cf. in more detail Anālayo [2010, 6 note 10]) indicates that the three similes for illustrating the condition of a sick person should be supplemented from SĀ 103 at T II 29c<sub>16</sub>. These three similes illustrate the pain experienced by the diseased person with the examples of a strong man who tightens a rope around the head of a weak person, a butcher

5. The venerable Channa said: 'My body is ill now, extremely painful so that it is difficult to bear, the disease that has manifested is getting worse, not better. I just wish to take a knife and kill myself, [since] I do not enjoy living in pain'.<sup>10</sup>
6. The venerable Sāriputta said [347c]: 'Venerable Channa, you should make an effort, do not harm yourself. While you are [still] in the world, I will come to take care of you. If you lack anything,<sup>11</sup> I shall supply you with medicine in accordance with the Dharma. If you do not have anyone to attend to your sickness, I will certainly attend on you in conformity with your wishes, not contrary to your wishes'.
7. Channa replied: 'I am provided for. The Brahmins and householders of Nālanda are looking after me, I do not lack anything [regarding] robes, blankets, beverages, food, bedding and medicine. I have myself disciples who, [while] living the holy life, look after my illness in accordance with my wishes, not contrary to my wishes. Yet my disease oppresses this body with extreme pain that is difficult to bear. I just wish to kill myself, [since] I do not delight in a life of pain'.<sup>12</sup>
8. Sāriputta said: 'I will now ask you, you may answer me in accordance with what you think'.<sup>13</sup> Channa, the eye, eye-consciousness and the form cognized through the eye — could these be a self, [or] be distinct from a self [in the sense of being owned by it],<sup>14</sup> or exist [within a self], or else [could a self] exist [within them]?'.<sup>15</sup> Channa replied: 'No'.
9. The venerable Sāriputta asked again: 'Channa, the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind, mind-consciousness and the mind-objects cognized through mind-consciousness — could these be a self, [or] be distinct from a self [in

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who carves up the belly of a cow, and two strong men who roast a weak person over a fire. In addition to these three, SN 35.87 at SN IV 56,<sup>17</sup> describes a strong man cleaving someone's head with a sharp sword.

10. In SN 35.87 at SN IV 57,<sup>6</sup> Channa explains that he does not wish to live.
11. SN 35.87 at SN IV 57,<sup>10</sup> reports Sāriputta also offering to supply Channa with food.
12. Instead of indicating that he does not delight in a life of pain, in SN 35.87 at SN IV 57,<sup>23</sup> Channa mentions that he has served the teacher in an agreeable way and concludes by proclaiming that his using the knife will be blameless; cf. below note 22.
13. In SN 35.87 at SN IV 57,<sup>28</sup> Sāriputta first asks permission to put his questions.
14. The supplementation of '[in the sense of being owned by it]' suggests itself from SĀ 109 at T II 34b<sub>20</sub>, where the question 云何見色異我, 'how is form regarded as distinct from self?', receives the reply 見色是我所, '[by] regarding form as "this is mine"'; cf. also the next note.
15. SĀ 1266 at T II 347c<sub>10</sub>: 是我, 異我, 相在. Choong (2000, 59) explains that this cryptic formulation functions in the *Samyukta-āgama* as the counterpart to the three-part Pāli set phrase *etaṃ mama, eso 'ham asmi, eso me attā ti*, 'this is mine, this I am, this is my self', found in the present case in SN 35.87 at SN IV 58,3. As Choong notes, the same formulation also parallels a four-part Pāli set phrase where a self is regarded as identical with an aggregate, as possessing an aggregate, as containing an aggregate, or as itself being within the aggregate. In the case of *Samyukta-āgama* passages paralleling this four-part formula, 相在 covers the last two alternatives, as can be seen e.g. in SĀ 45 at T II 11b<sub>5</sub>: 色是我, 色異我, 我在色, 色在我, which is then summarized two lines later as 色是我, 異我, 相在. This suggests that 相在 is probably best rendered as the aggregate 'existing [within the self] or else [with a self] existing [within it]'.

the sense of being owned by it], or exist [within a self], or else [with a self] existing [within them]?' Channa replied: 'No'.

10. The venerable Sāriputta asked again: 'Channa, what have you seen in the eye, eye-consciousness and form, what have you cognized, what have you known, wherefore you state that the eye, eye-consciousness and form are not a self, are not distinct from a self [in the sense of being owned by it], do not exist [within a self], and are without [a self] existing [within them]?'.

Channa replied: 'I have seen the cessation of the eye, eye-consciousness and form, I have known their cessation,<sup>16</sup> therefore I see eye, eye-consciousness and form as not a self, as not distinct from a self [in the sense of being owned by it], as not existing [within a self], and as being without [a self] existing [within them]'.<sup>17</sup>

[Sāriputta] asked again: 'Channa, what have you seen in the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... mind, mind-consciousness and mind-object, what have you known, wherefore you see mind, mind-consciousness and mind-object as not a self, as not distinct from a self [in the sense of being owned by it], as not existing [within a self], and as being without [a self] existing [within them]?'.

Channa replied: 'Venerable Sāriputta, I have seen the cessation of mind, mind-consciousness and mind-object, I have known their cessation, therefore I see mind, mind-consciousness and mind-object as not a self, as not distinct from a self [in the sense of being owned by it], as not existing [within a self], and as being without [a self] existing [within them].

Venerable Sāriputta, yet now my body is sick and in pain, I am not able to bear it. I wish to take a knife and kill myself, [since] I do not delight in a life of pain'.<sup>18</sup>

11. Then, the venerable Mahākoṭṭhita said to the venerable Channa: 'You should now develop proper recollection of [our] great teacher, according to the maxim taught by him: "If there is dependency, there is agitation. If there is agitation, there is inclination. If there is inclination, there is no tranquillity. If there is no tranquillity, then there arises coming and going. If coming and going arises, then there is future birth and death. Because there is future birth and death, there is future appearing and disappearing. Because there is future appearing and disappearing, there is then birth, old age, disease, death, sadness, sorrow, pain and vexation. In this way, this entire great mass of *dukkha* arises".<sup>19</sup> [348a]

16. This reference to having seen the cessation of sense-experience, found similarly in SN 35.87 at SN IV 58,<sup>32</sup> would imply that he claims to have experienced *Nirvāṇa* and thus reached some level of awakening, though not necessarily the highest.

17. Unlike Sā 1266, which has a question and answer exchange for each sense (with the senses ear, nose, tongue and body presented in an abbreviated manner), in SN 35.87 at SN IV 58,<sup>22</sup> Sāriputta continues right away by inquiring after the other senses, with Channa in his reply covering all six senses.

18. In the corresponding section of SN 35.87 at SN IV 59,<sup>6</sup> Channa does not repeat his intention to commit suicide.

19. Adopting the variant 大 instead of 一, in accordance with corresponding formulation in the treatment of the cessation of *dukkha* just below. The corresponding maxim in SN 35.87 at SN

According to the maxim taught [by our great teacher]: “If there is no dependency, there is no agitation. If there is no agitation, there is no inclination. If there is no inclination, there is tranquillity. Because there is tranquillity, there then arises no coming and going. If no coming and going arises, there is no future appearing and disappearing.”<sup>20</sup> If there is no future appearing and disappearing, there is then no birth, old age, disease, death, sadness, sorrow, pain and vexation. In this way, this entire great mass of *dukkha* ceases”.<sup>21</sup>

Channa said: ‘Venerable Mahākoṭṭhita, my service to the Blessed One is now completed,<sup>22</sup> my following the Well-gone One is now completed, being in conformity with his wishes, not contrary to his wishes. What is to be done by a disciple, I have now already done.’<sup>23</sup>

If other disciples are to serve the teacher, they should serve the great teacher like this, in conformity with his wishes, not contrary to his wishes. Yet now my body is sick and in pain, it is difficult to bear it up. I just wish to take a knife and kill myself, [since] I do not delight in a life of pain’.

12. Then, in Pāvārika’s Mango Grove at Nālanda, the venerable Channa took a knife and killed himself.<sup>24</sup>
13. Then, having taken care of the venerable Channa’s bodily remains,<sup>25</sup> the venerable Sāriputta approached the Buddha, paid respect with his head at [the

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IV 59,10 is rather brief, as it mentions only dependency and agitation. In the present passage I have opted not to translate *dukkha*, or more precisely to use the Pāli term for rendering its Chinese equivalent 苦, since I find, like Bailey (2003, 32), that ‘*dukkha* is an untranslatable word’. On the difficulties involved in the standard rendering ‘suffering’ cf. e.g. Collins (1998, 140) or Gowans (2003, 120f); on the different nuances of *dukkha*, cf. Schmithausen (1977) and Hoffman (1987, 27–45); for a recent discussion of how to translate the term cf. Harvey (2009, 213–216).

20. The intermediate step of ‘future birth and death’ is not mentioned any longer.
21. The corresponding maxim in SN 35.87 at SN IV 59,10 indicates that the absence of dependency leads to the absence of agitation, to tranquillity, to no inclination, to no coming and going, to no passing away and being reborn, to being neither here, nor there, nor in between, and concludes that this is the end of *dukkha*; for another occurrence of a similar series cf. Ud 8.4 at Ud 81,6.
22. SN 35.87 has no reply by Channa at this point. A comparable statement by Channa occurs in SN 35.87 at SN IV 57,23 at an earlier point in the discourse, before Sāriputta checks Channa’s development of insight by questioning him on his attitude towards the senses. At that point in SN 35.87 at SN IV 57,26, Channa explicitly proclaims that he will use the knife blamelessly, *anupavajjam Channo bhikkhu sattham āharissati* (B°, C° and S°: *anupavajjam* and *sattham*). This is preceded by Channa indicating that he has honoured the teacher, SN 35.87 at SN IV 57,23, *me ... satthā paricīṇṇo*. The similar formulation *satthā ca paricīṇṇo me* at Th 178 or *paricīṇṇo mayā satthā* at Th 604, Th 656, Th 687, Th 792, Th 891, Th 918, Th 1016, Th 1050, Th 1088, and Th 1185, forms part of a declaration of having reached full awakening, as is the case for *paricīṇṇo me bhagavā*, *paricīṇṇo me sugato* in MN 73 at MN I 497,5.
23. SĀ 1266 at T II 348a7: 弟子所作, 於今已作. The closely similar expression ‘having done what is to be done’, 所作已作, is a standard pericope in the *Samyukta-āgama* to describe the attainment of full liberation, being the counterpart to *katam karanīyam* in Pāli discourses, cf. e.g. SĀ 1 at T II 1a13 and its parallel SN 22.12 at SN III 21,14, to mention just one out of numerous occurrences.
24. SN 35.87 at SN IV 59,18 indicates that Channa killed himself after Sāriputta and Mahācunda had left.
25. SĀ 1266 at T II 348a13: 舍利; for a detailed study of this term cf. Silk 2006.

Buddha's] feet and, standing back to one side, said to the Buddha: 'Blessed One, in Pāvārika's Mango Grove at Nālanda the venerable Channa has taken a knife and killed himself. How is it, Blessed One, where has the venerable Channa gone to, where has he been reborn? What is his next life?'

The Buddha said to the venerable Sāriputta: 'Did he not declare of himself: "Venerable Mahākoṭṭhita, my service to the Blessed One is now completed, my following the Well-gone One is now completed, being in conformity with his wishes, not contrary to his wishes. If others are to serve the teacher, should they not serve him like this, in conformity with his wishes, not contrary to his wishes"?''

At that time, the venerable Sāriputta asked again: 'Blessed One, formerly the venerable Channa had as supporters families in the Brahmin village Pubbavijjhana,<sup>26</sup> he was very intimate with these families and was spoken well of in these families'.

The Buddha told Sāriputta: 'That is so, Sāriputta. A clansman with right wisdom who is rightly and well liberated [can] have families as his supporters, be intimate with families and be spoken well of in families. Sāriputta, I do not say that in this he has committed a serious fault.

If someone gives up this body to continue with another body, I say that this is indeed a serious fault.<sup>27</sup> If, [however], someone has given up this body and does not continue with another body, I do not say that this is a serious fault. There is therefore no serious fault in that he has taken a knife and killed himself in Pāvārika's Mango Grove at Nālanda'.

In this way, the Blessed One declared the venerable Channa to [have reached] the supreme.<sup>28</sup> When the Buddha had spoken this discourse, the venerable Sāriputta was delighted, paid his respects and left.

### Study

Compared with the Pāli version, the *Saṃyukta-āgama* discourse shows a number of small variations. Nevertheless, its basic presentation accords with the Pāli discourse in that both versions give the impression of recording the suicide of

26. SĀ 1266 at T II 348a21: 先於鎮珍尼, where I assume that the correct reading should be 於先鎮珍尼, with 先 rendering *pubba*, while for the remaining part I conjecture *vijjhana*, following to some extent Akanuma ([1930] 1994, 512), who seems to relate the present occurrence of 鎮珍尼羅門聚落 to Pubbavijjhana. SN 35.87 at SN IV 59,28 reads Pubbavijjhana and notes Pubbavijjhana as a variant, B<sup>e</sup> and S<sup>e</sup> read Pubbavijja and C<sup>e</sup> Pubbacira; MN 144 at MN III 266,23 gives the name of this village as Pubbajira, which in the Pāli versions is moreover introduced as a village of the Vajjians.

27. The term used in this context in SĀ 1266 at T II 348a26 is 過, for which Hirakawa (1997, 1156) gives among others the equivalents *aparādha*, *avadya*, *duṣṭa*, *doṣa*, *sāvadya*. Thus, the Chinese rendering would not support the suggestion by Keown (1996, 23f) that the expression *sa-upavajja*, used in the corresponding section in SN 35.87 at SN IV 60,3, means being '[subject to] rebirth' instead of being 'blameworthy', a meaning suggested by the gloss in Ps V 82,9 and Spk II 371,19 of *anupavajja* as *appaṭisandhika*. The circumstance that according to SĀ 1266 at T II 348a27 the Buddha comments that there is 'no serious fault', or more literally 'no great fault', 無大過, in Channa's suicide shows a slight difference in evaluation compared to SN 35.87, in that this falls short of condoning Channa's action as completely faultless; cf. also Delhey (2009, 89).

28. Such a statement by the reciters is not found in SN 35.87.

an arahant.

This is not, however, the view of the later Theravāda tradition. According to the Pāli commentary, Channa was still a worldling when he used the knife and became an arahant only in the short interval between his committing suicide and his passing away.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, if events were as the commentary suggests, one would be at a loss to understand why, in reply to Sāriputta's inquiry after Channa's rebirth, the Buddha reminds Sāriputta of Channa's earlier declaration, which in both versions involves an implicit claim to being an arahant. Such a reminder makes sense only as a way of confirming that Channa's earlier claim was justified. According to the commentarial explanation, however, Channa's earlier claim would have been thoroughly mistaken, as he would have still been a worldling. In this case, Sāriputta would have been quite right in doubting the outcome of Channa's suicide, hence the Buddha could have acknowledged the appropriateness of Sāriputta's doubts and perhaps even informed him that Channa had managed to accomplish at the last minute what he had mistakenly believed himself to have already accomplished. This would hold true not only on the commentarial suggestion that Channa was still a worldling, but also on the assumption that he had reached the stage of a disciple in higher training (*sekha*). In that case, too, Sāriputta would have been right in asking about Channa's rebirth and there would have been no reason for the Buddha to remind Sāriputta of Channa's earlier declaration.

For the Pāli and Chinese versions of the present discourse to be describing the suicide of an arahant might at first sight seem to conflict with the canonical dictum that an arahant is incapable of intentionally depriving a living being of life.<sup>30</sup> However, it is not clear whether this stipulation covers suicide, as it could be intended to cover only cases of depriving another living being of life.<sup>31</sup>

According to the third *pārājika* rule in the Pāli *Vinaya*, to incite someone else to commit suicide entails loss of being in communion with the monastic community.<sup>32</sup> The attempt to kill oneself falls into a different category of rules, as jumping from a cliff to kill oneself is reckoned a rather minor type of transgression, a *dukkata* offence.<sup>33</sup> A close inspection of the formulation of this rule brings to light that the *dukkata* is not for the act of attempting suicide as such, but for the act of jumping from a cliff. This was indeed the problem in the case leading to this rule, since the monk attempting suicide had jumped on someone else, causing the latter's death but surviving himself. The next story in this part of the Pāli *Vinaya* applies the same ruling to the act of throwing a stone down from a cliff,

29. Spk II 373,11.

30. E.g. DN 29 at DN III 133,14: 'a monk whose influxes are destroyed is incapable of intentionally depriving a living being of life', *abhabbo ... khīṇāsavo bhikkhu sañcicca pāṇaṃ jīvitaṃ voropetum*; with a counterpart in its parallel Dā 17 at T I 75b14: 'if a monk is an arahant, with influxes destroyed, he does not do nine things. What are these nine? One: he does not kill', 若有比丘漏盡阿羅漢 ... 不為九事, 云何為九, 一者不殺。

31. Delhey (2006, 26) points out that 'there seems to be no reason to presuppose any similarity of moral judgement regarding the killing of others and suicide'.

32. Vin III 73,10; a rule found similarly in the other *Vinayas*, cf. Pachow (1955, 75f). On the term *pārājika* cf. e.g. Heirman 1999; on the significance of 'not being in communion', *asaṃvāsa*, cf. the recent study by Clarke 2009.

33. Vin III 82,24. As, e.g., Upasak (1975, 114) explains, a '*dukkata* is a sort of light offence'.



with the result of unintentionally causing the death of someone below. This confirms that the suicidal intention in the first case was only incidental to the rule.<sup>34</sup> That is, at least from the viewpoint of the Pāli *Vinaya*, for a monk to attempt to commit suicide in a way that does not involve jumping from a cliff seems not to be an infringement of his precepts.

This is in fact explicitly stated in the *Vinaya* of the Sarvāstivādins, namely that suicide is not an offence.<sup>35</sup> Yet, in other *Vinayas* an attempt to commit suicide or its successful completion is reckoned an offence.<sup>36</sup> The *Milindapañha* similarly suggests that the Buddha had laid down a precept against killing oneself,<sup>37</sup> and the Pāli commentary on the *Vinaya* incident of jumping from a cliff delivers a general ban on suicide attempts.<sup>38</sup> The commentary on the *Dhammapada* then quotes the Buddha to the effect that an arahant just will not commit suicide.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly there is some degree of ambivalence surrounding the theme of suicide committed by a monastic or an arahant. In fact, though the discourse records of Channa's suicide give a clear indication that from their perspective he was an arahant before killing himself, their narration also suggests some degree of ambiguity, evident in the description of how the two monks who had come to visit Channa try to dissuade him from his plan. Apparently Channa's wish to avoid the painful experience of his disease by killing himself aroused doubts in his visitors about his degree of detachment. Consequently, he gets a teaching on detachment from one of them, and after his death Sāriputta asks the Buddha about Channa's rebirth, clearly implying that Sāriputta thinks him still subject to being reborn.<sup>40</sup>

34. This has already been pointed out by Harvey (2000, 290).

35. T 1435 at T XXIII 382a2: 'suicide is not an offence', 自殺身無罪. The same *Vinaya* also takes up the case of throwing oneself down and falling on someone who then dies, with the Buddha indicating that this involves no offence, adding that in future, however, one should not kill oneself for some small matter, T 1435 at T XXIII 436c16: 無罪, 從今日莫以小因緣便自殺.

36. According to the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 983a14: 'making an effort with the wish to kill oneself is a grave offence', 方便欲自殺偷蘭遮 (this ruling is in relation to the above-mentioned case of jumping from a cliff and thereby unintentionally killing someone else). The Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 7c5, indicates that 'if one kills oneself, one incurs a grave offence', 若自殺身, 得偷羅遮罪 (a ruling given in regard to a mass suicide of monks who were disgusted with their own bodies, being the counterpart to SN 54.9 at SN V 320,7 or Vin III 68,1, on which cf. e.g. Mills (1992)). A similar ruling is found in the (Mūla-) Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1458 at T XXIV 538b19, cf. also T 1459 at T XXIV 622b9. For a discussion of these and other *Vinaya* passages relevant to the theme of suicide cf. e.g. Demiéville ([1957] 1973, 349f); Koike (2001, 159–167); and Delhey (2006, 31f). Faxian (法顯) in his travel records reports a tale of a monk who, on the brink of committing suicide, reflects that the Blessed One has laid down a rule against killing oneself, T 2085 at T LI 863a19: 世尊制戒, 不得自殺. A similar tale, though without any reference to such a rule, occurs in the travel records of Xuanzang (玄奘); cf. T 2087 at T LI 922a5. Deeg (2005, 433) holds that this tale refers to the Channa incident, though Delhey (2009, 86 note 57) thinks this to be unlikely.

37. Mil 196,2: 'the Blessed One laid down a training precept: monks, one should not kill oneself, whosoever would kill himself should be dealt with according to the rule', *bhagavā sikkhāpadaṃ paññāpesi: na bhikkhave attānaṃ pāṭetabbaṃ, yo pāṭeyya yathā dhammo kāretabbo*.

38. Sp II 467,16, for a translation and discussion of this passage cf. Keown (1999, 267) and Harvey (2000, 290f).

39. Dh-p II 258,6: 'monks, those whose influxes are destroyed just do not deprive themselves of life with their own hands', *bhikkhave, khīṇāsavā nāma na sahatthā attānaṃ jīvītā voropenti*.

40. As de Silva (1987, 41) notes, 'this episode clearly shows that Sāriputta, who was the most emi-



In other Pāli discourses, the set of similes that Channa uses to describe his suffering condition occurs not only in illustrations of a sick person's condition,<sup>41</sup> but also to depict the pain experienced by the bodhisattva Gotama when he practised breath control.<sup>42</sup> Since in this instance the Buddha makes a point of specifying that the pain experienced by him on this occasion did not affect his mind at all,<sup>43</sup> these similes need not be read as descriptions of a state of mental distress, but may just be meant to illustrate the severity of the pain that is being experienced.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding the theme of a fully awakened one and the experience of pain, it is noteworthy that several Pāli discourses report the Buddha having back pain and thereupon asking one of his eminent disciples to deliver a discourse in his stead, as he wants to take a rest.<sup>45</sup> This goes to show that full awakening does not imply that one feels no pain at all or will not bother to alleviate pain. According to the commentaries, however, the real reason was that the Buddha wanted to make use of the new hall, in which he and the monks had assembled, by way of each of the four bodily postures;<sup>46</sup> or else that he wanted to give one of his disciples an occasion to deliver teachings.<sup>47</sup> A similar reasoning is also proposed in the *Saṅghabhedavastu*.<sup>48</sup> This gives the impression that the later tradition did not feel comfortable with the idea that the Buddha handed over the teaching duty because he felt pain and wanted to take a rest.

The same tendency may lie behind the case of Channa. Perhaps later tradition thought that, had he been an arahant, he would have just put up with the pain. To rephrase the same in the terms used in the *Channa-sutta* and its parallel by one of Channa's visitors: How could the wish to kill oneself arise in one who has reached the total absence of dependency and agitation?

Keown (1996, 27) explains that 'why the commentary should take such pains to establish that Channa was not an Arhat ... is that the tradition simply found it inconceivable that an Arhat would be capable of suicide ... by maintaining that

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ment disciple of the Buddha, and who was renowned for his wisdom, did not have vision into the mental make-up of a colleague regarding his emancipation'.

41. MN 97 at MN II 193,1; MN 143 at MN III 259,8; and AN 6.56 at AN III 379,25.

42. MN 36 at MN I 243,23 (cf. also MN 85 at MN II 93,23 and MN 100 at MN II 212,6).

43. MN 36 at MN I 243,30: 'such arisen painful feeling did not invade my mind and persist', *evārūpā pi kho me ... uppannā dukkhā vedanā cittaṃ na pariyādāya tiṭṭhati*; with a similarly worded counterpart in fragment 333r6 in Liu (2009, 53): *evamrūpā me ... duḥkhāṃ tivrāṃ kharāṃ kaṭukāṃ amanāpāṃ vedanāṃ vedayamānasya cittaṃ [na] pariyādāya tiṭṭhati*; (Liu (2009, 27) notes that throughout the Skt. text, as in the present instance, the particle *na* tends to be missing).

44. On the absence of grasping in the case of Channa cf. also de Silva (1996, 125).

45. Cf. e.g. DN 33 at DN III 209,17; MN 53 at MN I 354,24; SN 35.202 at SN IV 184,7; and AN 10.67 at AN V 123,1.

46. Ps III 28,13 and Spk III 52,14 indicate that the Buddha 'wanted to make use of the assembly hall in the four postures', *santhāgārasālaṃ pana catūhi* (Ps: *catuhi*) *iriyāpathehi paribhujitukāmo ahoṣi*.

47. Mp V 44,18 explains that the Buddha 'said this to make an occasion for the elder', *therassa okāsakaraṇatthaṃ evam āha*.

48. The *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 6,20, reports the Buddha mentioning his back pain and asking Mahāmaudgalyāyana to reply in his stead to a question on the origins of the Śākyans, which is preceded at Gnoli 1977: 6,10 by the Buddha reflecting that it would be better for him not to answer this question himself, since this may be misinterpreted by others as self-praise on his part.

Channa was unenlightened until the very end, the image of the Arhat remains untarnished'.

Yet, the possibility that the detachment of a fully awakened one is compatible with the rather grisly act of cutting one's own throat appears to be affirmed in the discourse versions of Channa's suicide;<sup>49</sup> whereas other texts reflect a different attitude. A similar ambivalence can be observed in the case of those texts that deal with the suicide of Vakkali, which I intend to examine in a subsequent paper.

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### Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>	SĀ	<i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
B <sup>e</sup>	Burmese edition	S <sup>e</sup>	Siamese edition
C <sup>e</sup>	Ceylonese edition	SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
DĀ	<i>Dirgha-āgama</i> (T 1)	Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā</i>
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i>	Spk	<i>Sāraṭṭhappakāsinī</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>	T	Taishō (CBETA)
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>	Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>	Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>	Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>		

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49. Thus de La Vallée Poussin (1922, 25) remarks that 'the *arhat* ... if he is not, like a Buddha, capable of abandoning life in a quiet way, there is no reason why he should not have recourse to more drastic methods', cf. also id. (1919, 692) and Thakur (1963, 109). Filliozat (1963, 36): 'l'attentat à sa propre vie est un péché grave, mais il n'en est pas de même de l'abandon d'un corps devenu inutile et dont on est déjà tout à fait détaché affectivement'. Lamotte (1965, 157) explains that 'le suicide se justifie dans la personne des Saints qui ont au préalable détruit le désir'. Wayman (1982, 290) comments that 'the example of Channa shows the acknowledgement of exceptional cases where suicide was justified'. Wiltshire (1983, 137) concludes that 'if this body has lost its essential usefulness ... then the body can be relinquished ... Buddhism therefore is not coterminous with stoical behavior, but recognises that there are conditions and situations too oppressive to be endured'; cf. also Becker (1990, 547). Schmithausen (2000, 37) reckons the discourse on Channa to be one among 'a couple of canonical suttantas obviously reporting cases of saints committing suicide'. Delhey (2009, 87) sums up that, from an early Buddhist viewpoint, 'the released one ... can, at least if he is gravely ill, end his life by his own hand'; cf. also Filliozat (1967, 73); Berglie (1986, 34); and Oberlies (2006, 218).

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