

Dabba's Self-cremation in the *Samyukta-āgama*

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ABSTRACT

The present article studies the self-cremation of Dabba Mallaputta, based on a translation of the Samyukta-āgama parallel to two discourses in the Udāna that record this event.

Keywords

Samyukta-āgama, self-cremation, suicide, Arahant, Dabba, Saddharmapūṇḍarīka-sūtra.

INTRODUCTION

The present article constitutes the final part in a trilogy of papers on the question of whether an arahant could deliberately end his or her own life. The case studied in this paper differs from the suicide of Channa and Vakkali discussed previously,¹ as Dabba does not 'use the knife', but rather rises into the air and cremates himself.

In what follows, I first translate the *Samyukta-āgama* discourse. Then I study the fire imagery inherent in this tale, and briefly survey the motif of auto-cremation in Buddhist literature and religious practice. I then examine the possible genesis of the Dabba narrative, after which I briefly evaluate the implications of this tale, as well as of the Buddha's deliberate decision to pass away, within the context of the general ancient Indian attitude towards suicide.

TRANSLATION

[Discourse on Dabba]²

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, at the Squirrels' Feeding Place. At that time the venerable Dabba

1. Anālayo 2010a and 2011b. In another study at present under preparation, I intend to discuss the mass suicide of monks reported in SN 54.9 and its parallels.
2. The translated text is SĀ 1076 at T II 280b₂₅ to c₁₇, which does not provide a title, as is the case

Mallaputta approached the Buddha, paid respect with his head at the Buddha's feet and, standing back to one side, said to the Buddha: 'Blessed One, I wish to attain final *Nirvāṇa* in front of the Buddha'.³

The Blessed One remained silent. In the same way [Dabba] informed [the Buddha] three times [of his intention]. The Buddha said to Dabba Mallaputta: 'What exists is conditioned by formations, its nature is just like that!'⁴

Then, in front of the Buddha, [280c] the venerable Dabba Mallaputta entered concentration of such a type that, ascending into the air towards the east, he manifested the four postures of walking, standing, sitting and reclining.⁵

He [then] entered into the fire concentration, so that the lower parts of his body emitted fire. His entire body blazed up with a radiance spreading in the four directions, [coloured] blue, yellow, red, white, and crystal colour. The lower parts of his body emitted fire and, while this was burning his body, the upper part of his body emitted water, which sprinkled over his body. Then the upper part of his body emitted fire, which was burning the body downwards, while the lower parts of his body emitted water, which sprinkled upwards over the body.

Having manifested these various kinds of miracles in each of the ten directions, being in mid-air he emitted fire from within his body that burned his own body and thus he attained *Nirvāṇa* without remainder,⁶ completely disappearing and being extinguished, so that no soot was left behind. Just like a lamp, burning in mid-air, whose oil and wick are completely extinguished,⁷ in the same way

for the parallel *SĀ*² 15 at T II 378a28 to b16, translated in Bingenheimer 2011 (p. 86f). Akanuma ([1929] 1990, 96) suggests the name of its protagonist, 陀驪, as a title, which I have followed; the B^e and C^e editions of Ud 8.9 and Ud 8.10 are entitled as the 'first' and the 'second' version of the 'Discourse on Dabba'. For the sake of facilitating comparison, I employ Pāli terminology in my translation of *SĀ* 1076 (except for terms like '*Nirvāṇa*'), without thereby intending to take a position on the original language of the *Samyukta-āgama* or on Pāli terminology being in principle preferable.

3. In Ud 8.9 at Ud 92,²⁹ he says: 'It is time for my final *Nirvāṇa*, Well Gone One', *parinibbānakālo me dāni sugatā ti*.
4. *SĀ* 1076 at T II 280b²⁹: 此有為諸行，法應如是。I am not sure I have been successful in rendering this cryptic formulation in *SĀ* 1076, which must be intending some sort of permission, otherwise Dabba would not have carried out his plan; cf. also *SĀ*² 15 at T II 378b², where the Buddha replies: 'enter *Nirvāṇa*, I do not hinder you', 汝入涅槃，我不遮汝, and Ud 8.9 at Ud 92,³⁰ where without remaining silent the Buddha replies directly, giving Dabba permission to do what he wants to do, *yassa dāni tvaṃ, dabba, kālaṃ maññasī ti*. A reference to formations (*saṅkhāras*) can be found in a similar context in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 397a¹⁰, where the Buddha gives Subhadra permission to pass away: 'all formations are completely impermanent, you may know yourself the [proper] time for what is to be done', 一切諸行皆悉無常，汝於所作自可知時。
5. While Ud. 8.9 does not report any other miracle, apart from his auto-cremation (cf. note 6 below), according to Ud-a 432,²⁵ he had displayed all the miracles that are within the purview of a disciple, *sāvakaśādhāraṇāni sabbāni pāṭihāriyāni dassevā*.
6. Ud 8.9 at Ud 92,³³ records that once Dabba had risen up into space cross-legged, he passed away after 'having attained the fire element', *tejodhātum samāpajjitvā*; Ud-a 432,¹² explains that the reference to attaining the fire element intends the attainment of the fourth absorption based on the fire *kaṣiṇa*.
7. The simile in Ud 8.9 at Ud 93,⁴ is slightly different, as it compares Dabba's passing away without leaving ashes or soot behind to burning ghee or oil, in which case similarly no residues are left behind; a simile also found in *SĀ*² 15 at T II 378b¹⁰.

Dabba Mallaputta attained *Nirvāṇa* in mid-air with his body and mind completely extinguished.

Then the Blessed One spoke in verse:

Just as a burning iron pellet,
that is blazing up in flames.
When its heat eventually comes to be extinguished,
no-one knows whither it has returned.⁸
So, too, liberated ones,
cross over the mire of defilements,
having cut off the torrents forever.⁹
No-one knows where they have gone.
Having attained imperturbability,
they enter *Nirvāṇa* without remainder.¹⁰

When the Buddha had spoken this discourse, the monks, who had heard what the Buddha said, were delighted and received it respectfully.¹¹

STUDY

Besides a few minor variations, the main difference between the *Saṃyukta-āgama* discourse translated above and its parallels in the *Udāna* is the description of Dabba's performance of various magical feats, among them the so-called twin miracle of simultaneously producing fire and water from different parts of one's own body. While the Theravāda tradition attributes the ability to perform this miracle only to the Buddha,¹² according to the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition — this

8. The corresponding stanza in Ud 8.10 at Ud 93,²³ seems to be about a blazing spark that comes off from a hammer, presumably used by a smith who is beating a heated piece of iron on an anvil; cf. also the parallel versions listed below note 46.
9. Ud 8.10 at Ud 93,²⁵ speaks of having crossed over the flood of the bondage of sensual desire, *kāma-bandhohghatāriṇaṃ*; cf. also SĀ² 15 at T II 378b¹⁴, which refers to the mire of sensual desires, 諸欲淤泥.
10. Ud 8.10 at Ud 93,²⁶ does not refer to the imperturbable, instead saying that they have attained a happiness that cannot be shaken, *pattānaṃ acalaṃ sukhaṃ*.
11. Chung (2008, 211) lists Hoernle fragment 147/u.f. recto 1 as a parallel to the present conclusion in SĀ 1076 at T II 280c^{16f}. In the introduction to his edition of this fragment, Hartmann (1998, 357) points out that the case is problematic, as the fragment does not have the above reference to the monks rejoicing, instead reading (id. 358) R1: *[sya] bhāṣita[m abhi]na [lyā] numodya utthāyāsa[n] .. [r]*. Hartmann (1998, 357) notes that this passage 'could hardly refer to the Buddha as the speaker of the foregoing'. Another problem would be that the only protagonist of the discourse who according to the standard formulation of discourse conclusions could be portrayed as getting up from his seat — the one who has come to visit the Buddha — has self-cremated himself. Thus, even though the remainder of the fragment is a parallel to the next discourse in the *Saṃyukta-āgama*, SĀ 1077, translated in Anālayo 2008a, perhaps in this case the sequence of discourses in the *Saṃyukta-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation (T 99) differs from the sequence attested in the Sanskrit fragment.
12. Jā I 77,²¹ indicates that the Buddha performed the twin miracle four times, once right after his awakening, once when visiting his relatives in Kapilavatthu and twice in reply to being challenged by non-Buddhist wanderers. A miracle performed in reply to one of these two challenges is recorded in DN 24 at DN III 27,¹² although the description only indicates that the Buddha had attained the fire element, *tejodhātum samāpajjitvā*, rose up into space and then displayed flames, without any reference to the twin miracle. The parallel DĀ 15 at T I 69a²⁶, translated in Weller 1928 (p. 134), does not even mention a magical display of fire; cf. also the discussion in Weller

being the tradition probably responsible for the transmission of the *Samyukta-āgama* preserved in Chinese¹³ — adept disciples are also able to perform this feat.¹⁴

While disagreeing on some of the miracles performed by Dabba, the parallel versions agree that he magically produced fire and burnt himself in mid air. In the Theravāda narrative tradition, Dabba is in fact repeatedly associated with the element fire. The commentary on the *Theragāthā* reports that his birth took place when his dead mother was placed on a funeral pyre.¹⁵ Because of the heat her belly burst open, whereon the child emerged without harm.¹⁶ The Pāli *Vinaya* records that Dabba, who had become an arahant at the age of seven and thereupon had taken on himself the task of allotting quarters to incoming monks, would enter the fire element and, with his finger alight, illuminate the path for monks who had come in at night.¹⁷ His abilities in this respect are also reported in other *Vinayas*, some indicating that he would have one finger burning with fire,¹⁸ others that he could do so with up to five fingers,¹⁹ or with his whole hand,²⁰ references that show that the idea of his pyrotechnic abilities was well known in different Buddhist schools.

[1922] 1987 (p. 635f). The other challenge is situated at Sāvattihī; cf. also Dhṛp-a III 213,15. Paṭiṣ I 125,2 indicates that only a Buddha can perform the twin miracle, as it is outside the purview of disciples, *asādhāraṇaṃ sāvakehi*. According to the *Mahāvamsa* 17.44 and 31.99, the twin miracle was also performed by the Buddha's relics. A brief survey of the motif of the twin miracle can be found in Anālayo 2009b; cf. in more detail Skilling 1997 (303–315), as well as Foucher 1909 (10–16), Rhi 1991 (51–72) and Schlingloff 1991 and 2000 (488–515).

13. On the school affiliation of the *Samyukta-āgama* cf., see e.g., 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), Oberlies (2003, 64), Bucknell (2006, 685) and Glass (2010).
14. This is stated explicitly in the *Divyāvadāna* (Cowell 1886, 161,13), which follows a description of the twin miracle with the indication that this is *tathāgatasya sarvaśrāvakasādhāraṇā ṛddhiḥ*. Skilling (1997, 315) concludes that 'the Mūlasarvāstivādins, Sarvāstivādins, Lokottaravādins, Mahīśāsakas, Aśvaghōṣa, and Asaṅga along with the *Ratnagūṇasamcaya*, *Ekottarikāgama*, *P'u yao ching*, and *Book of Zambasta*, disagree with the Theravādins, holding that an auditor as well as a Buddha could perform the *yamakaprātihārya*'.
15. Nāṇananda (2010, 23) explains that 'because of his power of merit, [the] flames of his mother's funeral pyre could not burn him, but by his power of determination, he cremated his own body ... leaving no ash or soot'. Hence, as Wilson (2003, 36) highlights, 'Dabba passed away in the same igneous manner in which he was born'. The motif of birth from fire recurs in the tale of Jyotiṣka, cf., e.g., Cowell (1886, 270,3), and for further versions and representations in art, Härtel (1981).
16. Th-a I 43,11. In this way Dabba is born without having to pass through the vagina of his mother and thus in this respect is comparable to the Buddha's birth from the side of his mother; cf., e.g., the *Buddhacarita* 1.9 (Johnston [1936] 1995, 1), the *Mahāvastu* (Senart 1882, 206,4), T 184 at T III 463c13, T 185 at T III 473c1, T 188 at T III 618a17, T 189 at T III 625a24, T 193 at T IV 58b21, and Bu ston's *History of Buddhism* (Obermiller [1932] 1986, 11).
17. Vin II 76,24.
18. The Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya* reports that he was able to produce light with the little finger of his right hand, T 1425 at T XXII 394c9.
19. According to the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, he could use one of his fingers, or else two, three, four or five fingers to provide illumination when assigning lodgings, T 1442 at T XXIII 695c14.
20. That his abilities involved the whole hand is recorded in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* (T 1428 at T XXII 587b25), the Mahīśāsaka *Vinaya* (T 1421 at T XXII 15b4; preceded by indicating that he entered concentration on the fire element for this purpose), and in the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (T 1435 at T XXIII 22a14); cf. also T 203 at T IV 457a7 and the *Anavatapta-gāthā* (Hofinger 1954,122,30 and T 1448 at T XXIV 88b22).

For a proper evaluation of the significance of the tale of his self-cremation, it needs to be kept in mind that tradition considered Dabba's dramatic way of ending his own life as something that actually happened.²¹ The *Saṃyukta-āgama* discourses and their *Udāna* parallels make a point of highlighting that Dabba's auto-cremation was so successful that no ashes or soot remained. No doubt this story is meant to be heard or read literally, as an account of what really took place.

Dabba's auto-cremation appears to be the only episode of this kind in the Pāli discourses.²² A reference to the auto-cremation of an arahant can be found in one of the Chinese parallels to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, which reports that this mode of ending his life was undertaken by Subhadra, the last disciple of the Buddha.²³ The parallel discourse versions do not report that he cremated himself,²⁴ which thus suggest that this is an element added later.²⁵

Turning to comparable stories in the *Vinayas*, the same conclusion would hold for the auto-cremation of the arahant Gavāmpati on the eve of the first council or communal recitation,²⁶ reported in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*,²⁷ which is not recorded in other *Vinaya* versions of the same event. The *Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya* records a whole series of self-cremations by monks on hearing that the Buddha had passed away.²⁸ This narration is also without a counterpart in other *Vinayas*.

21. In relation to other stories that depict the renunciation of parts or the whole of one's body, Durt (2000, 8) notes that 'la rhétorique, à la fois macabre et grandiloquente, du renoncement au corps ne doit pas être sous-estimée. Elle a eu un retentissement historique dans le bouddhisme chinois, comme le montrent notamment les biographies de moines'.
22. Keown (1996, 17 note 21), cf. also Keown ([1998] 1999, 395 note 26), after referring to 'the aged Arhat Dabba [who] rises in the air and disappears in a puff of smoke', suggests that 'there is a similar passage on Bakkula at M. iii. 124–128'. This does not appear to be correct. The *Bakkula-sutta*, MN 124, and its parallel, MĀ 32, translated in Anālayo 2007, make no reference to an auto-cremation of Bakkula, something only reported in the commentary, Ps IV 196,²³. Besides, it also does not seem that Dabba should be reckoned as 'aged'; cf. below note 60.
23. In terminology closely reminiscent of the Dabba tale, T 7 at T I 204b²⁵ reports that Subhadra entered concentration on the fire element and attained final *Nirvāṇa* in front of the Buddha, 即於佛前入火界三昧而般涅槃.
24. The Sanskrit fragment S 362 folio 173 V₄ (Waldschmidt 1950, 62), DĀ 2 at T I 25b²⁵, T 5 at T I 172b², T 6 at T I 188a¹, SĀ 979 at T II 254b²⁹, EĀ 42.3 at T II 752c¹¹, and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (T 1451 at T XXIV 397a¹¹), with its Tibetan parallel in Waldschmidt (1951, 471), as well as the *Avadānaśataka* (Speyer [1906] 1970, 234,⁶) agree that he decided to pass away before the Buddha. In none of these versions, however, does he use self-cremation for that purpose. In fact the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* continues reporting what happened afterwards in relation to the disposal of his body.
25. In a survey of scriptural models for spontaneous combustion, Benn (2007b, 103f) also notes that according to EĀ 26.9 at T II 641c³ Mahāmaudgalyāyana 'passed away after having gone through all the various stages of *dhyāna* (trance), and after entering the *samādhis* of fire and water and shooting both those substances from his body'. His actual death is then preceded by another progressive attainment of the four absorptions, and on arising from the fourth absorptions he reaches final *Nirvāṇa*; cf. EĀ 26.9 at T II 641c²⁷: 從第四禪起, 尋時取滅度, i.e., he does not pass away by self-cremation.
26. On the significance of the term *saṅgīti* cf., e.g., Tilakaratne (2000) and Skilling (2009: 55–60).
27. T 1451 at T XXIV 403b²³ and D 6 da 303a⁵ or Q 1035 ne 287a³. References to Gavāmpati's self-incineration are found in several works outside of the canonical *Vinayas*; cf. Przyłuski (1926, 10 and 66) and Lamotte ([1944] 1981, 97 note 2).
28. T 1425 at T XXII 491a². The description of the first and last case indicates that these auto-cremations took place by moving up into the sky and entering concentration on fire. Regarding the fire imagery, it is also worth noting that these self-incinerations are preceded by report-

A self-incineration of Paccekabuddhas is recorded in the *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel to the *Isigili-sutta*.²⁹ The circumstance that no such occurrence is mentioned in the Pāli version indicates that this *Ekottarika-āgama* tale, like many others in this collection, probably reflects later developments.³⁰ Other instances of auto-cremation by a single or several Paccekabuddhas can be found in the *Mahāvastu*, in the *Lalitavistara*, and in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* as well as the *Saṅghabhedavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.³¹

Thus within the textual corpus of the early discourses and the *Vinayas*, it seems that the Dabba episode is the only of its kind that is recorded similarly in parallel versions, making it probable that we have here a fairly early, perhaps even the earliest, textual report of self-cremation in the Buddhist tradition.

The perhaps most famous textual instance of auto-cremation occurs in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, where a bodhisattva sets himself on fire as an offering to the Buddha. Unlike the texts surveyed so far, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* episode was taken literally in subsequent times as a script to be acted out, thus generations of Chinese Buddhists actually undertook self-cremation, reciting or invoking precisely this passage.³² The presumably earliest reported case of self-cremation in China involves a fourth century monk who had the constant aspiration to follow the example of the Medicine King and burn his body as an offering.³³ Such re-enacting of the scriptural model provided in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* forms a continuum with practices in China that predate the introduction of Buddhism and which,³⁴ needless to say, have continued up to present times.

Notably, some aspects of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* episode parallel elements of the Dabba tale. Both the Bodhisattva Sarvasattvapriyadarśana (the future Bhaiṣajyarāja) and Dabba undertake their feats in front of a Buddha. While

ing that Mahākāśyapa, while on his way to the Buddha's funeral, manifested his finger being alight (T 1425 at T XXII 490a28).

29. EĀ 38.7 at T II 723b indicates that the Paccekabuddhas cremated their bodies while being up in space and attained final *Nirvāṇa*, 諸辟支佛即於空中燒身, 取般涅槃; for a translation of EĀ 38.7 cf. Anālayo (2010c), for a comparative study of EĀ 38.7 and its parallel MN 116 cf. Anālayo (2011a, 654–657).
30. Anālayo 2009c.
31. Senart (1882, 357,16), Lefmann (1902, 18,22), Dutt (1984a, 5,19), and Gnoli (1977, 92,16); cf. also Bu ston's 'History of Buddhism' in Obermiller ([1932] 1986, 7). Wilson (2003, 41) comments on the self-incineration of Paccekabuddhas that 'the appearance of the Buddha of this epoch rendering their continued existence in this world superfluous, these solitary Buddhas committed their bodies to the flames in what may be seen through the lenses of Vedic-Hindu mortuary rites as a sacrificial act of passing the torch to their successor'. For a Bhārhut relief apparently depicting such an act of self-incineration cf. Lüders ([1941] 1966, 44).
32. Benn (2009, 108) notes that 'the *Lotus Sūtra* provided not only a template for auto-cremation, by showing readers how and why it might be performed, but also the liturgy: self-immolators chanted the chapter on the Medicine King as they enacted it, thus making the scripture into a kind of performative speech'; cf. also Gernet (1960, 541–544), Jan (1965, 246f) and Kieschnick (1997, 42f). At times auto-cremations also appear to have been inspired by the account of the Buddha's cremation; cf. Benn (2007a, 37).
33. T 2059 at T L 404c13: 常欲仰軌藥王燒身供養; discussed in Benn (2007a, 33f).
34. Benn (2004, 759) explains that 'as practised in China, auto-cremation ... developed after a particular interpretation of certain Indian texts was combined with indigenous traditions, such as burning the body to bring rain, a practice that long predated the arrival of Buddhism in China'.

the bodhisattva performs the self-cremation through conventional means by wrapping himself in a cloth soaked in oil and setting this on fire, a stanza that follows the prose description of his deed indicates that at that time he was in a type of *samādhi*, explained in the text to be a form of concentration that displays all kinds of forms.³⁵ The reference to such an ability brings to mind Dabba's miraculous feats described in the two *Saṃyukta-āgama* versions, displaying colours and different postures after he had entered the appropriate type of *samādhi*.

On being reborn, the bodhisattva then worships the remains of another Buddha by burning his forearms. When the audience witnessing his feat is dismayed at the deplorable condition to which his body has been reduced, he makes a vow and thereon his forearms are restored.³⁶ The net result of this episode is also to some extent reminiscent of Dabba, who was able to set his fingers or hand on fire without suffering any damage. Most notably, when the bodhisattva sets himself on fire for the first time, he illumines all directions,³⁷ just as Dabba was able to illumine the surroundings by setting his fingers or hand on fire.

While these elements in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* do not correspond exactly to the narrative material related to Dabba, they do give the impression of some degree of narrative continuity. Such narrative continuity can in fact also be seen with other texts. Thus the motif of burning an arm that is then restored recurs in the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*, where Kṣemadatta wraps his right arm in a robe, soaks it with oil and then burns it as an offering to a Buddha, illumining all directions.³⁸ When the audience is distressed, he makes a vow and his arm becomes as it was before.

In the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka*, the bodhisattva who was to become the Buddha Śākyamuni sets his arm on fire, after having wrapped it in oiled cloth, to light the way for merchants lost at sea.³⁹ An *Avadāna* collection reports that the bodhisattva destined to become the Buddha Dīpaṃkara set his head on fire to provide light for a meal offering to the Buddha of that time.⁴⁰

While a comprehensive review of textual accounts of such partial or total self-cremations would carry me beyond the confines of the present paper, perhaps the above examples suffice for the time being to convey the impression that some form of the Dabba tale, with a self-cremation through *samādhi* by someone able to illuminate the surroundings by setting his hand on fire without suffering any damage, could have provided the blueprint for the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* episode and similar tales.

35. The stanza in Kern ([1884] 1992, 408,¹⁴) just refers to an unspecified form of *samādhi*, but earlier the text indicates that the bodhisattva had acquired the *sarvarūpasamdarśanaḥ samādhiḥ*; cf. Kern ([1884] 1992, 405,¹⁴). The Chinese translation by Kumārajīva uses the corresponding expression 現一切色身三昧 or 一切現諸身三昧 on both occasions, i.e., when describing his original attainment of this concentration and in the stanza that refers back to his self-cremation, T 262 at T IX 53a₂₆ and 53b₂₃. The translation by Dharmarakṣa describes his attainment of the concentration that displays all, 普現三昧, T 263 at T IX 125b₄, followed by a reference to just the *samādhi*, 三昧, in the stanza at T IX 125c₂.

36. Kern ([1884] 1992, 413,⁷), T 262 at T IX 54a₅ and T 263 at T IX 126a₁₆.

37. Kern ([1884] 1992, 407,⁹), T 262 at T IX 53b₁₀ and T 263 at T IX 125b₁₈.

38. Vaidya (1961, 219,⁸) and T 639 at T XV 598b₂; cf. also Filliozat (1963, 23).

39. Yamada (1968, 371,²).

40. T 152 at T III 14c₂₇, translated in Chavannes (1910, 86).

Although this need not have been the original intention of these textual descriptions, it seems clear that the depiction of a deliberate decision by highly accomplished practitioners — arahants, Paccekabuddhas and advanced bodhisattvas — to end their own life has been taken literally by subsequent tradition. In fact texts that originated in China and were of considerable importance in the history of Chinese Buddhism clearly recommend the practice of auto-cremation. One example is the Discourse on Brahmā's Net (梵網經), according to which to be reckoned a bodhisattva who has gone forth requires burning one's body, an arm or a finger as an offering to Buddhas.⁴¹ Another example is the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra*, which proclaims that a monk who in front of an image of the Tathāgata burns his body as a lamp or sets fire to a finger joint will forever be free from the influxes (*āśava*).⁴² The impact of such recommendations can still be seen in present times in the practice of burning cones of incense on one's head at the time of ordination into the monastic order.⁴³

Cases of metaphors taken literally in the Pāli *Udāna*

Turning from later developments to what might be the precedents for the Dabba episode reveals still another dimension of the impact of literalism, an appreciation of which requires a closer examination of the Dabba narration and its relation to the stanzas that accompany it in the light of other discourses in the *Udāna* collection.

Unlike the *Samyukta-āgama*, where each of the extant versions of this collection has a single discourse with the Dabba tale, the *Udāna* has two discourse versions that report the same episode. These two versions immediately follow each other within the *Udāna* collection. The prose of the first of these two versions corresponds to the *Samyukta-āgama* narration, while the second *Udāna* discourse reports that the Buddha, who in the meantime had moved from Rājagaha to Sāvattihī, recounts the whole event to the monks dwelling at Jeta's Grove. This is fairly rare among Pāli discourses, that is, a discourse that reports an event followed by another discourse that depicts how the Buddha then reported this event to the monks.⁴⁴ Considered in conjunction, these two discourses convey the impression of a conscious effort on the side of the reciters to draw attention to this tale and perhaps also ensure that it is considered authentic.

Another difference between the two *Udāna* versions is to be found in the stanzas that come at their respective ends. The first *Udāna* discourse is followed by stanzas describing the death of an arahant, without any reference to fire.⁴⁵ The stanza at the end of the second discourse has a simile of a blazing spark or pellet that is extinguished as a way of illustrating the destiny of an arahant, who has

41. T 1484 at T XXIV 1006a19: 若不燒身臂指, 供養諸佛, 非出家菩薩。

42. T 945 at T XIX 132b14: 能於如來形像之前, 身然一燈, 燒一指節 ... 永脫諸漏; for a discussion of this and the above passage from the 梵網經 cf. Benn (1998).

43. On burning the head at ordination cf. in more detail Benn (1998, 301–310).

44. Another such case, noted by Kuan (2008, 137), is SN 47.43 at SN V 185,3, where the Buddha reports his original delivery of the discourse SN 47.18 at SN V 167,4, although the two discourses do not follow each other immediately.

45. Ud 8.9 at Ud 93,12, with Indic language parallels in the *Udāna(-varga)* 26.16 (Bernhard 1965, 322), in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (Dutt 1984a, 258,8, and Wille 1990, 142,1); cf. also the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (La Vallée Poussin [1913] 1992, 520,4).

gone beyond the flood of sensual desires,⁴⁶ similar to the stanza found at the end of the *Saṃyukta-āgama* discourses.⁴⁷

Both of the stanzas from the two Pāli *Udāna* discourses recur in a Chinese *Udāna* collection that similarly combines stanzas with prose.⁴⁸ None of these two instances, however, has any reference to Dabba or an auto-cremation in their respective prose sections.

The present instance thus conforms to a recurrent pattern that can be observed when comparing this Chinese *Udāna* collection and the Pāli *Udāna*, where most of the Chinese parallels to the actual *udānas* do not have the prose narration that according to the Pāli *Udāna* collection records the occasion for the delivery of the respective *udāna*.⁴⁹ Judging from this pattern, in the Theravāda tradition the *udānas* — stanzas that appear to be common heritage of the Buddhist schools — were at some point associated with prose narrations that eventually became canonical. While some of these narrations might be drawing on ancient material, in general it is safe to conclude that the prose is later than the stanzas.

What makes this pattern of interest to my present topic is that at times a stanza in the Pāli *Udāna* that evidently has a symbolic sense is accompanied by a prose narration that reflects a literal understanding of this stanza. An example that illustrates this is a stanza that inquires:

What is the use of a well,
if water is there all the time?
Having cut craving at its root,
what would one go about searching for?⁵⁰

While the stanza obviously uses the image of the well as an illustration, the prose that purports to record the original occasion when the stanza was delivered reports that Brahmins of a particular village had blocked a well with chaff in order to prevent the Buddha and his monks from drinking. When the Buddha requested Ānanda to fetch some water for him, the well by itself threw up all chaff and was filled with clean water to the brim. Pande (1957, 75) comments that 'the author of the prose ... seems to have grossly misunderstood the ... verse, which intends "water" in no more than a merely figurative sense'. The Chinese parallel to this stanza in fact does not mention any such incident and instead provides an interpretation of the well imagery.⁵¹

46. Ud 8.10 at Ud 93,23, with Indic language parallels in the *Udāna(-varga)* 30.35f (Bernhard 1965, 400f), and in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (Dutt 1984b, 81,15); cf. also Enomoto (1994, 21), Nakatani (1987, 86), and SHT V 1100 V1, Sander (1985, 95).

47. SĀ 1076 at T II 280c11 and SĀ² 15 at T II 378b12.

48. T 212 at T IV 734b11 and at T IV 757c1. Another *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese, T 213, as well as the Sanskrit and Tibetan *Udāna* collections, do not have prose sections appended to their stanzas; for a survey of the different *Udāna* collections cf. Anālayo (2008b).

49. For a more detailed examination of this pattern cf. Anālayo (2009a).

50. Ud 7.9 at Ud 79,5: *kiṃ kayirā udapānena, āpā ce sabbadā siyūṃ? taṇhāya mūlato chetvā, kissa pariyesanaṃ care ti* (E° *pariyesanañ*)?, with Indic language parallels in the *Udāna(-varga)* 17.9 (Bernhard 1965, 236), in the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra* (§7.11, fragment TM 361 156R1f, Waldschmidt 1950, 52), and in the *Divyāvadāna* (Cowell 1886, 56,12).

51. T 212 at T IV 707c20.

Moving from water to fire and thus coming closer to the Dabba tale, another stanza from the *Udāna* collection refers to moths that are burnt to death because of being attracted by a burning lamp. In the Pāli stanza and its Sanskrit and Tibetan parallel, the motif of falling into a flame is clearly a simile used for the purpose of illustration.⁵²

According to the prose of the Pāli *Udāna*, however, this actually happened. On realizing that many moths were meeting with misfortune by falling into what in the prose have become literal lamps, the Buddha then speaks the inspired utterance in question.⁵³ This may well be another case where what originally was a simile has been taken literally, in fact in the prose passage in the Chinese parallel the motif of a moth being burned by a lamp is still a simile.⁵⁴ As a consequence of this apparent instance of literalism, the prose of the Pāli *Udāna* depicts the Buddha as lacking compassion for the misfortune of these insects, since, rather than pronouncing an inspired utterance, he could have just asked one of the monks to put out the lamps and thereby stop the mass destruction of innocent creatures.

A similar instance of the ‘literalization of a metaphor’ might stand in the background to Dabba’s auto-cremation,⁵⁵ occasioned by the stanza’s description, in relation to an arahant, of a splinter or pellet that is all ablaze with fire and then extinguished. A literal interpretation of this motif, along the lines of the above instances of the water in the well and the moth falling into a flame, could indeed result in imagining that the issue at stake must refer to the cremation of an arahant’s body.

In other words, the first stage of the textual development of the Dabba tale could have been the existence of a mere stanza without an explicit mention of any auto-cremation, such as still nowadays found in several of the *Udāna* collections extant in Chinese, Sanskrit and Tibetan.⁵⁶ Over the course of oral transmission, this stanza would have been accompanied by an explanation of its significance, such as now found in the prose section that accompanies this stanza in the Chinese *Udāna* collection and in the Pāli commentary on the *Udāna* of the Pāli canon. Alongside such explanations, however, a literal understanding of the stanza apparently related it to the tale of an arahant who cremates himself.

52. Ud 6.9 at Ud 72,18: *patanti pajjotam ivādhipātā* (B° and C°: *ivādhipātakā*), which has a counterpart in Uv 29.5 (Bernhard 1965, 367): *patanti hi dyotam ivāndhakārād*, and the Tibetan version (Beckh 1911, 104 or Zongtse 1990, 303): *me nang lhung ba’i phyee ma leb dang ’dra*.

53. Ud 6.9 at Ud 72,11: *addasā kho bhagavā te sambahule adhipātake tesu telappadīpesu āpātāparipātāṃ anayaṃ āpajjante byasanāṃ āpajjante anayabyasanāṃ āpajjante* (C° reads *vyasanāṃ* and does not have *anayabyasanāṃ āpajjante*). On having realized this, the Buddha then reacts by delivering an inspired utterance, *udāna*.

54. T 212 at T IV 748a26: ‘like a moth that throws itself into a flame without considering subsequent worries’, 如蛾投火不顧後慮. This is particularly remarkable as the actual stanza in T 212 at T IV 748a20 (and in the other *Udāna* collection preserved in Chinese, T 213 at T IV 793a9, which unlike T 212 is without prose) does not refer to moths being burnt, but instead speaks of birds that throw themselves into a net (T 213: that fall into a net).

55. In a study of instances of the gift of the body, Ohnuma (1998, 356) speaks of a ‘literalization of a metaphor’, which takes place when ‘a traditional Buddhist metaphor ... is “literalized” or turned into an actual, literal story’.

56. Besides the Sanskrit version mentioned above in note 46, the simile of the glowing spark occurs on its own, without any accompanying prose, in the Tibetan *Udāna* collection, Beckh (1911, 118 stanza 30.36) or Zongtse (1990, 341 stanza 30.37), and in one of the two Chinese *Udāna* collections, T 213 at T IV 795as, translated in Willemen (1978, 144 stanza 30.36).

The powerful attraction of the resulting tale would then have inspired further developments, resulting in the various miracles Dabba performs prior to his self-cremation in the two *Samyukta-āgama* versions on the one hand and in the doubling of the discourse in the Pāli *Udāna* on the other hand. In both cases, the inclusion of this tale as part of a canonical discourse corresponds to tendencies in the respective collections to include material of a more commentarial type.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, given that this tale is found in parallel discourse versions, it would have had to come into being at an early stage in the evolution of Buddhist literature.⁵⁸

The doubling of the tale in the Pāli *Udāna* collection is in fact strange in that it results in the same tale leading to two different inspired utterances by the Buddha. Once the Buddha is on record as having uttered a particular stanza at the time of Dabba's passing away, it would certainly have been more natural to employ the same stanza when reporting what had happened. This gives the impression as if perhaps the doubling of the narrative was accommodating the stanzas already in existence. As a result, one of the two versions came to be associated with a different stanza.

Be that as it may, the tale of Dabba's auto-cremation, itself perhaps the outcome of literalism, in turn seems to stand at the outset of textual descriptions that inspired further literalism, which in the transition from India to China then ended up in a long series of actual instance of self-cremation by monastic and lay Buddhists, male and female. Without thereby intending to deny the complex interweaving of various cultural and religious factors that must have contributed to this development, it nevertheless seems to me that if my hypothetical reconstruction should be correct — and I need to stress that this is just a hypothesis — then a poetic spark would have set fires burning all the way down the history of Buddhism up to modern times.

Arahants and suicide

In as much as the term suicide stands for the deliberate decision to end one's life, the Dabba tale and its successors, be they only textual imagination or actual happenings, would indeed fall under this category. Regarding the nature of the 'suicide' undertaken by Dabba, it is noteworthy that the different versions agree on beginning their account with Dabba requesting the Buddha's permission. This introductory narration only makes sense as part of a story that originally intended to depict an arahant who deliberately ends his life. In fact, in the two *Samyukta-āgama* discourses the Buddha at first remains silent and only replies when Dabba has made his request for a third time, in line with a recurrent trope in the early discourses where a request made for a third time signals the importance the petitioner attaches to the request and his keenness on having it granted.

57. In the case of the *Samyukta-āgama*, an example would be SĀ 506 at T II 134a7 (translated in Anālayo [2012c]), a discourse that reports Mahāmoggallāna visiting the Buddha who is spending the rainy season retreat in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, paralleling Dhṛ-a III 216,¹³; for more cases of inclusion of material in the *Samyukta-āgama* that in the Pāli tradition is found in commentarial literature cf. Anālayo (2010b, 2–5); for another case found in the *Udāna* and in the two *Samyukta-āgamas* that also appears to reflect later influences cf. Anālayo (2012b: 392 note 66).

58. For a critical reply to the suggestion by Schopen (1985) that parallelism should be seen rather as the result of later levelling, cf. Anālayo (2012a).

In line with the difficulties that the notion of an arahant deliberately ending his or her life has for some later traditions — evident in the cases of Channa and Vakkali I studied in my earlier papers — the Pāli commentary reasons that Dabba was on the verge of passing away anyway, a condition of which he had just become aware.⁵⁹ Viewed in this light, Dabba's request and the Buddha's permission are only concerned with how Dabba should pass away, that is, if he should do so in the spectacular manner described in the discourses. The commentary then records another explanation as well, according to which Dabba was not on the verge of passing away.⁶⁰ His decision was rather motivated by the grudge some monks bore against him, which had motivated them to stage a wrong accusation that he had committed a *pārājika* offence by engaging in sex.⁶¹ This line of reasoning is also recorded in a version of the Dabba episode found in a collection of tales preserved in Chinese translation.⁶² According to the Pāli commentary such an interpretation should be rejected, however, since arahants would not be motivated by praise or blame to prolong or shorten their lives.⁶³

The expression used by Dabba to communicate his intention to the Buddha in the *Udāna* discourse, indicating that for him the time for final *Nirvāṇa* had come, is *parinibbānakālo*.⁶⁴ The same expression recurs in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* to indicate that the time for the Buddha's final *Nirvāṇa* has come, preceded by making it clear that he could have lived much longer.⁶⁵ Judging from this passage, it

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59. Ud-a 431,4 explains that on emerging from a meditative attainment he reviewed his life-formations, which were exhausted and only going to last a few more moments, *samāpattito vuṭṭhahitvā, attano āyusañkhāre olokesi. tatha te parikkhīṇā katipayamuhuttakālā upaṭṭhahimsu*.
60. Ud-a 431,21, an explanation that begins by indicating that he had been neither old nor sick, *na tāva thero jīṇṇo, na ca gilāno*. Regarding his age, from the viewpoint of the above-mentioned *Vinaya* account that he had become an arahant at seven and then decided to take up the duty of allotting quarters and meal invitations to other monks, Vin II 74,25, it would follow that he was seven at a time when the Buddhist monastic order had already grown to such a size that it needed someone to ensure the proper distribution of living quarters and meal invitations. Since the account in Ud 8.9 and Ud 8.10 implies that the Buddha was still alive at the time of Dabba's death, it would follow that at that time Dabba could not have been older than perhaps being in his forties. In fact Malalasekera ([1937] 1995, 1060) concludes that 'Dabba evidently died young'.
61. On the wrong accusation levied against Dabba by the nun Mettiyā cf. the discussion in Horner ([1938] 1990, 266f), von Hinüber (1995, 37) Hüsken (1997, 96–98), von Hinüber (1997), Nolot (1999, 66–68), Heirman (2000) and the solution of the conundrum by Clarke (2008).
62. After referring to his being slandered, T 203 at T IV 457a13 continues by reporting that, being disgusted, he went up into the sky, performed eighteen transformations and entered concentration on bright fire. As the blazing fire in the sky was extinguished, no bones remained, 駝驃厭惡, 即昇虛空, 作十八變, 入火光三昧, 於虛空中, 如火焰滅, 無有屍骸.
63. Ud-a 431,29: *taṃ akāraṇaṃ, na hi khīṇāsavā ... pasesaṃ apavādādibhayena parinibbānāya cetenti ghaṇanti vāyamanti, na ca pasesaṃ pasamsādihetu ciraṃ tiṭṭhanti*.
64. Ud 8.9 at Ud 92,29 (this part is abbreviated in Ud 8.10): 'it is time for my final *Nirvāṇa*, Well Gone One', *parinibbānakālo me dāni sugatā ti*.
65. DN 16 at DN II 104,17: 'venerable sir, it is time for your final *Nirvāṇa*, Blessed One', *parinibbānakālo dāni bhante bhagavato*; cf. also AN 8.70 at AN IV 310,13 and Ud 6.1 at Ud 63,17. This remark is preceded in DN 16 at DN II 103,1 by the indication that one who has developed the four roads to [spiritual] power can, if he so wishes, remain alive for a *kappa* or its remainder. Whatever the term *kappa* means, it definitely entails an extra time period. This indication is then followed by the declaration that the Tathāgata had developed the four roads to [spiritual] power and thus would have been able to remain alive, if he wished. The parallels to DN 16 agree that the

would be natural if the same phrase used by Dabba would have similar implications. That is, the phrasing of the *Udāna* discourse reads as if he decided to enter *Nirvāṇa* even though he could have lived longer.

Be that as it may, for my main topic of suicide by fully awakened ones it is significant that the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* and its parallels agree that the Buddha gave up his life deliberately.⁶⁶ Needless to say, the description of this act of deliberately letting his life end cannot have been intended to portray him acting with an unwholesome state of mind. This in turn indicates that tradition did envisage that such a decision can be taken without being motivated by defilements. In other words, this passage portrays a fully awakened one taking the deliberate decision to let life end.⁶⁷ Unlike the other cases discussed so far — Channa, Vakkali and Dabba — the report of the Buddha's deliberate letting his life end does not appear to have led to ambivalence in later tradition regarding the possibility that an awakened one could take the decision to end his or her own life.⁶⁸

The fact that the parallel versions of the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* unanimously attribute the Buddha's passing away to a conscious decision taken by him, even though he would have been able to live longer, provides a strong argument in favour of the notion that, according to early Buddhist canonical literature, a fully awakened one can deliberately end his or her own life.

This certainly in no way exonerates the cases of actual auto-cremation mentioned above. Paraphrasing the words of the *Channa-sutta* and its *Saṃyukta-āgama* parallel, killing oneself is blameworthy if after death one is reborn,⁶⁹ in other words, suicide is blameworthy if one does not pass away as an arahant. According to this dictum, the conscious decision to let one's life end is only acceptable when

Buddha could have continued to live for a *kalpa* or its remainder; cf. Sanskrit fragment S 360 folio 173 R4-6 (Waldschmidt 1950, 19), DĀ 2 at T I 15b20, T 5 at T I 165a10 (which mentions the potential of the *ṛddhipāda* to enable remaining alive for a *kalpa* or its remainder, but does not explicitly attribute the *ṛddhipāda* to the Buddha, although this much is clearly implied), T 6 at T I 180b15, T 7 at T I 191b16, and the Tibetan version in Waldschmidt 1951: 205,16; cf. also the *Divyāvadāna* (Cowell 1886, 201,7).

66. DN 16 at DN II 106,22: *āyusarikhāraṃ ossaji*, Sanskrit fragment TM 361 folio 166 V4 (Waldschmidt 1950, 53): *āyūḥsaṃskārān-uts[r]jati*, DĀ 2 at T I 15c20: 捨命住壽, T 5 at T I 165a23: 放棄壽命; T 6 at T I 180c6: 棄餘壽行, T 7 at T I 191c8: 捨壽, and the Tibetan version (Waldschmidt 1951: 213,4): *tsh'e'i 'du byed ni spangṣ so*; cf. also the reference in the *Divyāvadāna* (Cowell 1886, 203,7) to *āyūḥsaṃskārān utsaṣṭum*.
67. Blum (2004, 206) comments that 'almost akin to a pronouncement of suicide, the *sūtra* reads, "and now, Ānanda, the Tathāgata has today at Chāpāla's shrine consciously and deliberately rejected the rest of his allotted time". Delhey (2006, 36) observes that 'even the death of the Buddha can be considered as a kind of suicide'; cf. also the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Pradhan (1967, 74,28f), discussed in Berglie (1986, 29f and 38), and Lamotte (1965, 158f).
68. Needless to say, the famous last meal of the Buddha takes place only after he has decided to renounce his life principle; cf. DN 16 at DN II 127,2. Moreover, except for DĀ 2 at T I 18b5 (which refers to some sort of mushroom), the other parallels do not report anything unusual about this meal, the point of relating the episode instead being that one of the monks present commits a theft (an event also known to the Theravāda tradition; cf. the narration in Pj II 159,20 in relation to Sn 83-90); cf. Sanskrit fragment 360 folio 187 V3 (Waldschmidt 1950, 25), T 5 at T I 167c17, T 6 at T I 183b5 (T 7 at T I 197a29 does not mention either the nature of the meal or the theft) and the Tibetan version (Waldschmidt 1951: 257,31). For a comparative study of the Buddha's last meal cf. Waldschmidt ([1939] 1967, 88-119) and An (2006); the discussion in Mettanando (2000) is based on the Pāli account only.
69. SN 35.87 at SN IV 60,1 and SĀ 1266 at T II 348a25.

the person in question will not be reborn.⁷⁰ It is important to keep in mind this distinction, in that the examples I have been discussing in this and previous papers are of a special kind, different from the suicide of those who are not fully awakened or else on the brink to such attainment.

Attitudes to suicide in ancient India

Ancient Indian spiritual traditions did consider suicide appropriate in such circumstances,⁷¹ particularly famous in this respect being the Jain tradition's advocating a practice often referred to as *sallekhanā*, where the accomplished saint fasts to death.⁷² The Jain tradition sees the undertaking of such fasting to death as quite different from ordinary suicide, which is in fact not allowed.⁷³ The aspirant has to get permission for his undertaking from his teacher, who needs to ascertain that the fast to death is undertaken with the proper attitude. This proper attitude is described in the *Āyāraṅga* as requiring that the aspirant neither longs for life nor for death,⁷⁴ precisely the attitude that Buddhist texts associate with an arahant.⁷⁵

Strabo reports that Alexander the Great was able to witness an auto-cremation, undertaken by the Indian Kalanos who had accompanied him during part of his journey.⁷⁶ Thus already in ancient times the Indian attitude to self-inflicted death was known to a western audience. Behind this attitude stands to some

70. Olivelle (1978, 20) explains that in the ancient Indian setting 'suicide in the various ascetic traditions ... has one characteristic in common. It is resorted to at the end of a life of asceticism when the ascetic has already reached perfection'. In the case of early Buddhism, as pointed out by Harran (1987, 129): 'while suicide ... may be appropriate for the person who is an *arhat*, one who has attained enlightenment, it is still very much the exception to the rule'. Florida (1993, 41) holds that the rationale behind this position appears to be that 'since the body is by nature mortal and corruptible it is only of instrumental value, there is no absolute duty to hold on to it when it has lost its utility'.

71. Cf., e.g., Kane (1941, 924–928) Kane (1953, 604–614), Filliozat (1967), Sircar (1971), Oberlies (2006), and on suicide as a form of threat to obtain some objective, Hopkins (1900).

72. Cf., e.g., Tatia (1968) Tukol (1976) Caillat (1977), Bronkhorst ([1993] 2000, 31–36), Settar (1990); on suicide by *Ājīvikas* cf. Basham (1951, 63f, 84–90, 127–131).

73. Cf. the contrast made in the *Viyāhapaṇṇatti* 2.1, Lalwani (1973, 163f), between the death of a fool by entering fire, taking poison, etc., and the death of the wise by remaining motionless and refusing food. For a case study of a 'foolish' death by auto-cremation cf. Settar (1990, 81f).

74. A description of the preparation for fasting to death in the *Āyāraṅga* 1.7.8.4, Jacobi (1882, 38,22), indicates: *jīviyaṃ nā 'bhikaṃkhejjā maraṇaṃ no vi patthae, duhato vi na sajjejjā jīvite maraṇe tahā*; translated in Jacobi ([1884] 1996, 75) as 'he should not long for life nor wish for death, he should yearn after neither, life or death'. Tukol (1976, 10) points out that wishing for death to occur more quickly or else for it to come later are considered forms of transgression. Skoog (2003, 298) indicates that '*sallekhanā* requires dispassion on the part of the person who is allowed to engage in the process. Part of the screening process by the religious supervisor involves deciding whether the practitioner is truly ready to take on the long process of fasting to death'. Thus, as already noted by de La Vallée Poussin (1922, 25), 'while practising starvation, the Jain must avoid any desire for death'.

75. Cf., e.g., the stanza attributed to Sāriputta at Th 1002f: *nābhinandāmi maraṇaṃ nābhinandāmi jivitaṃ*, according to which he delighted neither in death nor in life. This phrase occurs frequently in the *Theraḡāthā* collection and thus would convey an attitude held in general esteem; cf., e.g., Th 196, Th 606, Th 654 and Th 685.

76. Geography of Strabo 15.1.68, Jones (1930, 118,3); cf. also Majumdar (1960, 187) and for a critical examination of this tale Fick (1938).

degree a different value system. The emphasis in the Indian context is often not on a value of life as such,⁷⁷ but rather on the overarching importance of non-violence, *ahiṃsā*, in order to avoid the karmic consequences that will be incurred when harming others. As the case of the Jains shows, *ahiṃsā* was evidently not seen as being in conflict with suicide by an advanced practitioner.⁷⁸

This decisive difference explains how at least part of the early Buddhist tradition could have had an approving attitude towards the suicide of a fully accomplished one. As Schmithausen (2000, 36 and 38) points out, 'in contrast to ordinary living beings, saints (i.e. fully liberated persons, arhats) do not regard their biological life as something valuable and are indifferent to it', since for them 'the ultimate value is obviously not (biological) life but *nirvāṇa*'.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>	Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
B ^e	Burmese edition	Q	Peking edition
C ^e	Ceylonese edition	SĀ	<i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
D	Derge edition	SĀ ²	(partial) <i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)	SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i>	Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>	T	Taishō (CBETA)
E ^e	PTS edition	Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)	Th-a	<i>Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>	Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)	Ud-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>	Uv	<i>Udānavarga</i>
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>	Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Pj	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i>	⟨	emendation

77. Pace Keown ([1998]/1999, 387), who affirms that 'to choose death over life is to affirm all that Buddhism regards as negative', it 'is to negate in the most fundamental way the values and final goal of Buddhism'.

78. As noted by Young (1989, 88) it is quite telling that 'a religion which has, as a cardinal doctrine, *ahiṃsā* or non-injury to any living creature — including never killing an insect intentionally or unintentionally — yet has as an ideal: religious, self-willed death'. Skoog (2003, 298) explains the reasoning to be that '*sallekhanā* does not harm another being; in fact it can and should be considered a supreme act of nonviolence, as one is no longer harming another being through the process of harvesting, storing, cooking, and consuming food'. Delhey (2006, 56f) then concludes that 'suicide does not fulfil all the requirements that are needed to judge it in the same way as killing other living beings' as can be seen with the Jains, whose creed 'combines a much stricter interpretation of the doctrine of *ahiṃsā* [compared to the Buddhists] with a remarkably positive attitude to a certain form of religious suicide: voluntary fasting unto death'. In the case of Buddhism, then, taking 'a position according to which life is considered as sacred and as a basic value in Buddhism is not in accordance with most of the ways in which suicide is dealt with in Buddhist texts'.

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