

How To Construct a Sutta?

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So hopefully that as we go through this, everyone can follow along at the presentation.

But I can say a little bit, the genesis, so the origin of my study of the *sutta*, is that I'm very fond of this saying that I understood it before: nothing whatsoever is worth clinging to. That's the way I liked it. And now I translated it differently, but I've taught it and just repeated it. And I thought it was really great. And then about a year ago or so, I thought, well, I want to find out the actual passage. Where is it in the *suttas*?

And so I found it in this text. I don't think I had read this text before that were texts for today. And so I thought that was kind of a somewhat strange text and interesting. And as I looked at it, I said, wait, this has this, this literary structure that I've been familiar with in a few other *suttas*. And as far as I know, no one's ever reported or written about this structure in the Buddhist texts. It's a structure that is first found in Homer. In the late, maybe 1870s, maybe, they found it in Homer. They found it in the Bible. And then they found it all over the place.

It's a lot of different cultures. It seems to be particularly prominent in oral cultures around the world. And maybe it's a natural kind of structure for the human mind to operate under. I've seen this structure as being similar to structure to how rituals can be structured. That you go into the ritual, there's a pivotal point in the ritual where something happens, and then you return to the world again. And so maybe it's a structure that's deep in human culture, the human mind, that is being replicated in these, the composition of these kinds of texts. And I think of it as a storyteller's technique.

And so this is, so what we have here in this text is the narrator of the text has a huge role in the text we have. The tradition is that all the, all the *suttas* came from Ānanda, because Ānanda accompanied the Buddha everywhere. And Ānanda has a very good memory. So he memorized everything, and he's like the court reporter. So of course, whatever was written

down by Ānanda, that's how it happened. But that's a fairly naive piece of orthodox teaching that all the *suttas* come from the Buddha, and we can rely on them of just whatever says there is the Buddha's teachings.

And one of the things that stands out in this, this *sutta*, on the shorter discourse on the destruction of craving, it has this literary structure, and it has a lot of elements that is the words of the narrator, not the words of any of the characters. And so we have, you know, now we have someone's creativity and everyone remembers things in selective ways and presents it in ways that they want to present something for some, sometimes for a larger purpose. And the question is, what purpose was this particular text composed? And you know, and then some of this involved the Buddha teaching something. But so maybe Ānanda was there. But there's no evidence that Ānanda went with Moggallāna, this monk, to Sakka's heaven and to see what was going on to do his court reporting and capture it and be ready.

So, you know, how did he learn this if it was Ānanda? But more likely what we'll see is this text was written many centuries after, as we have it, many centuries after the Buddha lived. And so one of the fascinating things about this text for me is how it's a very clear example of something that could not have come from the Buddha's time. And so it puts a big question mark between all the *suttas*. Do we naively accept them all as teachings of the Buddha, or can we find evidence for historical stratifications of the texts, texts that were written early, middling, or fairly late in the history of the composition of these texts? And how late were they written, some of these composed, where they composed?

And in the last little piece, I'll say that the earliest really concrete evidence for the middle-length discourse, for example, as a collected body of work in the form that we have today is not until some point in the fifth century, the Common Era. So about a thousand years after the Buddha is when we get, you know, real evidence that we can rely on dating, that this book existed at that time. And so a thousand years is a long time for things to change. And there's a very strong, I wish among Theravādan Buddhists to believe that this has been unchanged in his time with the Buddha. And there's an interesting phenomena that we see through looking at Chinese translations of *sūtras*, *suttas*, texts.

And that is we see that in Sanskrit versions of certain texts, that over the centuries they were added to and changed. But the Chinese, when they translated a text into Chinese, a Buddhist text, they tended to preserve it the way it was translated. They didn't change that then anymore. So I did my dissertation on a *sūtra* that was translated into Chinese in the year 179. But the Sanskrit version that we have that survives of this text, the earliest manuscript made, I don't remember anymore now, but it's a text that was probably completed about a thou-

sand years later. So the year 1000, 1100 or something. And there's a lot of additions to it. It's changed a lot since 179.

And so in India, there's no evidence of what the text looked like in Sanskrit in the beginning of the Common Era, but that was saved in China. And what we see is that there were some ways in which staying faithful to a text and keeping it exactly how it was passed down was not something that people were in India were particularly inclined to do when it came to Buddhist *sūtras*. And when I did my dissertation, it was on Mahāyāna *sūtras*. And it didn't occur to me to apply this principle to the Pāli Canon at first. I thought, surely that must be a fairly consistent, you know, unchanged kind of body of texts. But as I've been studying it more and more, there's no reason to think that's the case, that the Pāli Canon is quite fluid, these texts. And it just happens to be that once we have might very well be the accident, accident or the coincidence of when it was written down.

And when it was written down in a form that survived down to the present, or when it was selected by someone to be put into the middle-length discourse. And then this famous teacher, Buddhaghosa, he wrote his commentary about that text. So once he wrote the commentary about the middle-length discourse, then it wasn't going to change anymore. And so it's relatively stable. But there's been some changes since then. And give you an example of how these Buddhist texts can change over the years, even in the modern era. In 1954, there was the sixth council of Buddhist monks to talk about the *suttas*, the canon. And there was a big deal. The Theravādan monks came from all kinds of Theravādan countries, and they didn't want to come to Burma for this meeting until the Burmese had someone in Burma who could recite from memory the entire canon.

And there was one monk who took that task on and learned to memorize it. So he could go to that council and recite the whole thing from memory. And then later he started a school in Burma, teaching this to other people. And so they met and they reviewed all the *suttas*, the different versions they had, kind of to standardize them, I suppose. And at some point during that conference, they decided that they saw that, they saw, they knew that in the long discourses of the Buddha, there's the greater discourse on the foundations of mindfulness. And then there's the ordinary discourse in the middle-length discourses, ordinary discourse on the foundation of mindfulness. The greater one has a long explanation about *Four Noble Truths*. That's many pages long. And that's absent in the version of the discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in the middle-length discourses.

And at that council, they decided that was kind of a mistake. It must have dropped out someplace. So they took the long commentary about the *Four Noble Truths* from the long version

and stuck it into the short version. So now the Burmese version of that text has, you know, is just the same length as the one in the long discourses. So this is an example of how people decided how to change a *sutta*. And that's how it's now presented in Burma and that change. So what I'm trying to say is *suttas* change and they're fluid and they would probably, you know, if I was going to venture a guess, you know, at least 90% if not 99% of the different versions of *suttas* that have existed in India down through the centuries did not survive. And so sometimes we have only one version that survives, and that's in the Pāli Canon.

Sometimes we have different versions that survive in Chinese, some in Gāndhārī, a language of ancient kind of Pakistan area. And so we have, you know, different, different, these ancient *suttas* surviving in different languages, but even the ones that survive are probably just a small percentage of what actually existed at some point. And so we have these, but we have some texts and it's phenomenal what we have. And to really understand what's going on there in some historically accurate way takes textual archaeology. And some of that textual archaeology is no different than an archaeologist taking a brush and slowly brushing away the dirt and maybe finding one little bead or one little piece of evidence that they, from which they can construct the story of a civilization or something.

And so it's a little bit of a thankless task to kind of dive down into these *suttas*, but to get some kind of historical understanding of them, it takes a lot of careful work. And so, you know, I don't say that my study of this text here was as careful as it could have been, but for some of you was probably more careful than you care for. So what I want to start with is, so the text that we're looking at is called the shorter discourse on the destruction of craving. And it has this famous line, nothing whatsoever is worth clinging to, being attached to. And it has a precursor, a prequel in the long discourses called Sakka's Questions. And both of these texts involve the god Sakka going to talk to the Buddha.

And in the long discourses, the one there, Sakka's Questions, Sakkapañha, Questions of Sakka. The Buddha is sitting in Sakka's cave. Apparently Sakka had a cave. And so he's sitting there meditating. And Sakka doesn't want to really wake the Buddha up out of his meditation. He wants to be very careful and respectful. So he asks a kind of *gandhabba*. *Gandhabba* is kind of like a heavenly musician to go and sing a song to kind of wake the Buddha up. So that the Brahmā might go, Sakka can go and ask the Buddha a question. And you don't really get sense of, at least some of the English translations of the song that this heavenly musician sings, is kind of erotic. It's kind of describes the beautiful body parts of the heavenly musician lady that he's in love with and that he's hoping to marry.

And he talks about his love for this woman to be as devoted as an *arahant* is devoted to the

Dhamma. It's kind of, I mean, in terms of the Pāli, it's kind of like a wild thing. It's like going and going up to the Pope to get his attention and playing The Doors, and “Come on, baby, light my fire.” And so, you know, it's a little unusual. So it's kind of a fun, strange kind of text to have this erotic kind of song that's being sung to the Buddha. And the Buddha kind of comes out of his meditation and is very polite and says, that was a nice song you sang. And then there's a lot more goes on. But then the heavenly musician says, you know, Sakka wants to talk to you. And the Buddha says, sure. And the Sakka asks all these questions. And the last questions he asks gets a reply that kind of begs a next question. But Sakka doesn't ask the next question.

So now I'll show you the PowerPoint slide. How to construct a *sutta*? To evoke wonder and amazement. Maybe that's the purpose of some of these texts. So just keep that in mind. And so then here is one of the earliest pieces of Buddhist art, or Buddhist art from the earliest phase we have it. This is from Bodh Gayā, where the Buddha was enlightened. So there's these friezes, these rock engravings that survive. And during that time, there's a lot of them in some of these ancient *stūpas* that exist and temples they were made.

And here, I don't know if you can see my cursor, but here is the cave. It's relatively small. It looks like it has a seat inside of it. And this is Sakka's cave. And here on the side, a person you see there is Sakka. And he's, I think it's Sakka, or it's that heavenly musician. So I can't tell what the person has in their hand here, if that's a lute of some kind. But anyway, so here's the Buddha. And during that time, we don't know quite why, but the Buddha was not depicted in these kinds of artwork. So here it's an empty chair. But this is the little cave that he was meditating in when the musician sang his musical instrument and his song, and Sakka came and questioned the Buddha.

So why I'm showing you this, this comes from the first century before the Common Era. And the story of long discourses, the Questions of Sakka, was important enough in the Buddhist milieu at that point that they made carvings of it. And here you see, let's see there, and here we see it again. This is a little bit harder to tell. You have to kind of believe me. If you see the arch here going around all the way around, kind of. It's broken off part of it. This is the cave as well. And there's people sitting on the side here kind of worshipping. And here we have a throne, a seat on the throne. And again, they're not going to show the Buddha because at that era, the first century before the Common Era, they didn't do that.

So, so it gets, again, this is a picture of, and it's called the Indrasālaguhā. *Guhā* means cave, and Indra is another name for Sakka. And Bhārhut is one of the great *stūpas* that survived from ancient India. And there, there was lots of friezes, lots of carved images on sculpture,

on the gates and the walls and different places. And here we have Sakka's cave again. So again, it was important. It was an important story at the time. And then, and here we have the second century Common Era in Mathurā, another place for Buddhist art, one of the first places in India where depictions of the actual Buddha appeared. And here we have Buddha again in the cave, and to the right here is Sakka, and to the left is the heavenly musician singing erotic songs, and he's holding his lute here.

So, so this is an important story. And then, let's see. So in Majjhima 21, Sakka asks to talk to the Buddha. And then the Buddha said, taught, thought to himself, for a long time now, this spirit, meaning Sakka, has led a pure life. Any question he asks me will be beneficial, not unbeneficial. And he will quickly understand any answer I give to his question. So the Buddha addressed Sakka in verse: ask me your question, Vāsava, whatever you want to solve, each and every question you have. See, oh, I know what I can do. I can, this one. So then, and now, so here's Sakka's first question to the Buddha in that, the long discourse 21.

Having been granted an opportunity by the Buddha, Sakka asked the first question. Good fellow, what fetters bind the gods, humans, titans, dragons, centaurs, and any other diverse creatures, so that, though they wish to be free of enmity, violence, hostility, and hate, they still have enmity, violence, hostility, and hate? So these kinds of questions makes the *suttas* timeless because some of these issues are current in our society today. So this should be interesting. What keeps people bound, attached, so that they're caught up in enmity, violence, hostility, and hate? And the Buddha answered him this way: Lord of gods, the fetters of jealousy and stinginess bind the gods, humans, titans, dragons, centaurs, and any of the other diverse creatures, so that though they wish to be free of enmity, violence, hostility, and hate, they still have enmity, violence, hostility, and hate.

So jealousy and stinginess is here identified as an underlying condition for these painful states that people have. So that's his answer. And then there's about 14 questions and answers that go on in the text between Sakka and the Buddha. And Sakka's last question is this: good fellow, have all ascetics and brahmins reached the ultimate end, the ultimate sanctuary from the yoke, the ultimate spiritual life, the ultimate goal? And the Buddha answers, no. Only those *bhikkhus* who are liberated in the destruction of craving are the ones who have reached the ultimate end, the ultimate security from bondage, the ultimate holy love, the ultimate goal.

So here's the Buddha's answer. And then it seems like maybe the obvious question is, well, how do you do that? How are you liberated by the destruction of craving? How do you reach the ultimate end? And the Buddha, so that answer is, that question is not asked in

the long discourses, but Sakka does ask it in Majjhima 37. How in brief is a *bhikkhu* liberated in the destruction of craving when it has reached the ultimate end, the ultimate security from bondage, the ultimate holy life, the ultimate goal, one who is foremost among gods and humans? So that last passage, the last phrase, is not in the long discourse 21, but the rest of it is pretty comparable. I think maybe here, here are comparing them, what's bold is the same. And so maybe I skip, yeah.

So, so there is, so in Sakka, in this shorter discourse on the destruction of craving, this is where Sakka finally gets a chance to ask the Buddha this question. And now what's interesting about these texts is that if you remember in Dīgha 21, the Buddha praised Sakka for living a pure life. He asked a question he'll understand quickly to great benefit. And eventually in Long Discourse 21, Sakka becomes a stream-enterer or says he's a stream-enterer. So he's like a hot guy. He's a good practitioner to any teacher's, you know, wonderful, you know, students. We don't get that impression of Sakka in Majjhima 37. Majjhima 37, he seems totally caught up in his sensual pleasures. And he asked this important question, and then he shows no interest or has no effect on him seemingly.

And that's part of it. It's very strange that Sakka is portrayed this way in this text. It's almost like a satire maybe, or it's very pointed. It's very different than Sakka is usually depicted in the *suttas*, which is much more respectful. And why has Sakka changed so dramatically between these two *suttas*? The composers of, you know, clearly that's a different milieu maybe or a different time or a different reason. Sometimes I look at these texts and wonder if Majjhima 37 is trying to make a kind of a satire, a parody of Majjhima 21. And it certainly seems like it's humorous and strange and what's the purpose for this. So that's part of the drama that's going on here, maybe.

So I've talked now for a while and there's more to do, more slides and more talking to be done. But do we want to pause for a moment and give you a chance to ask questions or make comments of what I've said so far? Otherwise, it's just too much informational at once. Maybe. Yes, Cody. I noticed some interesting connections in Stephen Batchelor's recent book where he talks about the intersection between the Greeks and the Buddhists of India. He gives a little explanation as to why they started depicting the Buddha instead of showing kind of the absence of. And I found it interesting that you mentioned that this particular storytelling modality was something that was inherited from other cultures as well. So I wonder if, if this is a later edition, if that was a result of that cultural, the same cultural exchange that resulted in the Buddha starting to be depicted differently in statues and whatnot.

Yeah, that's an interesting question. I never thought of that way. I kind of assumed that it

wasn't borrowed from somewhere else, but rather it spontaneously arises in different cultures, this kind of thing, because it's so pervasive and all over the world. But your idea, you know, it is found in Homer, which is very important for the Greeks. So, you know, is it a technique that maybe was borrowed from, because the Greeks were making their way to India, to the edges of India. They were up there in what's now Pakistan for a long time. And so that might be interesting things to consider, but I don't know how we're going to solve that. But the, you know, it's very hard to kind of understand the origins of where these texts were composed. But there is some kind of strong suggestion that it was probably composed in western, kind of northwestern India. So not too far away from where the Greeks were.

Mike? Is it okay to ask a question that kind of skips ahead a bit? Well, you can ask, but if I have permission not to answer. Okay. Or put off the answer until we get to it. So your essay mentions that kind of symmetric structure. Yeah. And there was something in there about the, so we hear the Buddha's answer twice in the audio recording and in the text of the translation. And when I was both listening to it, the audio recording and reading the text, I was surprised that when Moggallāna returns to the Buddha, we don't get it a third time. Oh, that's strange in the, you know, I didn't notice this. This is, they're reading Sujato's translation. Yeah. So maybe Sujato chose not to include that because it seemed for him, it just seems too redundant. I mean, there's a, there's a patience issue among Western audiences. Okay.

And there's an idea of repetition is not so, especially when you read it, is, you know, why do I bother? You know, it's like I got the point. And, but if you're chanting and singing these songs and performing them, you know, the refrain of a song is as important as the other lyrics. You don't get tired of the refrain. So I think in the oral culture, there was a very different receptivity for the repetition than we have. So I suspect that Sujato just didn't include it. And because it's in, it's in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation. It's also in the Pāli that I've looked at. That was my question. Okay. So it does appear the third time now. Yeah. All right. Thank you. Mm-hmm.

So before we go further into this text, I want to introduce you to these texts that were mentioned as maybe precursors to Majjhima 37. And there's one text in the connected discourses of the Buddha, chapter 51, *sutta* 14, and the title is Moggallāna. And at one time, the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvattthī in the mansion of Migāra's mother. So that's the same place where Buddha is living in Majjhima 37. Now, on that occasion, a number of *bhikkhus* who dwelt on the ground floor of the mansion were restless, puffed up, personally vain, rough-tongued, rambling in their talk, muddle-minded, without clear comprehension, unconcentrated, scatterbrained, loose in their faculties.

Wow. I mean, this is serious kind of misbehavior. I mean, they could have just said there's a bunch of monks being, you know, restless down there, but they really go into it. And it makes me, you know, it's kind of strange that Buddha was supposed to be like this phenomenally effective teacher who could just get people enlightened just listening to his talks. And here the monks who are living in the same house as him are behaving this way. That's, you know, it's quite a story to tell. It's almost hard to believe that this is the case. And then the Blessed One addressed the Venerable Mahāmogallāna thus: Moggallāna, your brothers in the holy life dwelling on the ground floor of Migāra's mother's palace are restless and so forth, loose in their faculties. Oh, Moggallāna, stir up a sense of urgency in these *bhikkhus*.

And the sense of urgency is a word that Pāli, some of you know, some *vega*, a sense of, you know, like we got to practice. And yes, Venerable Sir, the Venerable Mahāmogallāna replied. Then he performed a feat of spiritual power such that he made the mansion of Migāra's mother shake, quake, and tremble with his toe. Then those *bhikkhus*, shocked and terrified, stood to one side and said, it is wonderful indeed, it is amazing indeed, sir. There is no wind in this mansion of Migāra's mothers, who has a deep base and is securely planted, immobile, unshaking, yet it shook, quaked, and trembled. Then the Blessed One approached those *bhikkhus* and said to them, why, *bhikkhus*, are you standing to one side shocked and terrified? And they explained what had happened.

And, *bhikkhus*, Bhikkhu Moggallāna, desiring to stir up a sense of urgency in you, made the mansion shake, quake, and tremble with his toe. What do you think? By having developed and cultivated what things has the Bhikkhu Moggallāna become powerful and mighty? So here he has, they got the monks' attention. I mean, they really got shocked at, you know, the quaking and shaking. And so they have a sense of urgency. And so they're ready to get teaching. And what does he teach them? How Moggallāna was so powerful and mighty that he could shake the palace, his psychic powers, what he had. He didn't offer them liberation teaching. It's a little bit strange, I think.

And then the rest of the text is all about what they should do to develop, or what it took to develop these, these powers that allow you to use your toe to shake a palace. I probably never, none of you ever thought that you wanted to develop that power before, and now you have something to look forward to, one part of the *Dhamma* to be able to do that. So, so this, so this, this, this story, including the palace of Migāra's mother, of the mansion, is, is very close to the second act of Majjhima 37, where someone, Mahāmogallāna, recognizes that someone, Sakka, doesn't have enough sense of urgency, spiritual urgency, and so he decides to kind of wake him up. And so he touches his toe and shakes the palace and gets his

attention so that he'll listen to some kind of teachings or do something. He'll remember the Buddha's teachings.

So it's very similar, except the characters are changed. And here, now, things that Sakka, the Buddha, you know, so to some degree, so all this change here. And Sakka is the same as the restless monks. So it's relatively easy to see this story, Moggallāna, that might have been the precursor for the second act in Majjhima 37. It seems like almost the same story, kind of. And then we have in the numerical discourses of the Buddha, we have a discourse that's on Book 7. And it's the discourse number 61. And in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation, the title of it is Dozing. And some of you might have, maybe some of you have dozed during meditation. Never. You know, I think it's maybe accidentally happened to me a few times.

And so on one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling among the Bhaggas at Sumsumāra-gira. Now, on that occasion, Mahāmoggallāna was sitting and dozing. When I was dozing, in Japan, a retreat there with the abbot sitting next to me, I was wearing Zen robes with long sleeves, and he would just reach over and yank at my sleeve to wake me up. That was very nice. So teachers noticed their students dozing and, you know, wanted to do something about it. And so it says here, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, the Blessed One saw Venerable Mahāmoggallāna sitting and dozing. So he has a kind of telescopic view that he can see things far away with his mind eye. And he saw that Mahāmoggallāna was dozing.

And then, just as a strong man might extend his drawn-in arm and draw in his extended arm, or draw in his extended arm, the Blessed One disappeared from the Deer Park and reappeared before Venerable Mahāmoggallāna. The Blessed One sat down on the seat, was prepared for him and said, so here we have the same story where Mahāmoggallāna goes to Sakka, you know, the same way, as quickly as a person can straighten out a bent arm, that's how long it took the Buddha to travel in this earth, from one place to another. But in Majjhima 37, for Moggallāna to go up to the heavens to visit Sakka up there. And then the Buddha gets his attention, shows up, says, are you dozing? And Moggallāna says, yes, sir.

Therefore, Moggallāna, you should not attend or attend to or cultivate the object that you were attending to when you became drowsy. By such means, it is possible that your drowsiness will be abandoned. So if you are doing some meditation practice, don't do it. Well, you got drowsy, don't do that. And then he goes through all kinds of advice of what to do. But if that doesn't work, try this. If that doesn't work, try this. If that doesn't work, try this. It goes through all these things. And then after he tries all these things, then he teaches Mahāmoggallāna different teachings that are like, you should train yourself thus. We will not approach

families for alms with a head swollen with pride. You train yourself thus. We will not engage in contentious talk.

So, you know, I don't know why that needs to be told to him, but, you know, it's just good advice, I suppose. And the Buddha says, Moggallāna, I do not praise bonding with everyone whatsoever, nor do I praise bonding with no one at all. I do not praise bonding with householders and monastics. But I do praise bonding with quiet and noiseless lodgings, far from the flurry of people, remote from human habitation and suitable for seclusion. So it's kind of interesting. There's a place for bonding with people, but you want to bond to a place that's good for meditation rather than to people. So you can have your own opinions about that little teaching. It's a little unusual, maybe, or a little bit. It's not really liberation teaching.

Maybe Mahāmoggallāna was meditating in a noisy social environment and said, you know, maybe you should go somewhere else. But the whole, Mahāmoggallāna was already a senior monk, and the whole teaching is, you know, kind of nice. It's practical and used, but there's no liberation teachings here. And maybe Mahāmoggallāna was getting a little bit tired of being preached at about all the things you can do to overcome drowsiness. And then Mahāmoggallāna said to the Blessed One, briefly, Bhante, how is a *bhikkhu* liberated in the destruction of craving, one who has reached the ultimate conclusion, ultimate end, has won the ultimate security from bondage, lived the ultimate spiritual life and gained the ultimate consummation? It's a different translations, but it's the same wording that we've seen where the Sakka asked the Buddha that question, the same question.

So here we have the same question again. And then the Buddha answers like he answers Sakka in Majjhima 37, where the Buddha gives this seven statements, seven steps for becoming fully awakened. So here we have a story that's very similar to the Act 1 of parts of it, to Act 1 of Majjhima 37, that of someone going to the Buddha to ask a question about this, asking the very question that was not asked in a long discourse 21. And then the Buddha gives the same answer that he gives in Majjhima 37. So this maybe suggests that this text here, in the numerical discourses, is the precursor, is the story that was used to kind of compose Act 1 in Majjhima 37. The fact that using the same words, the same ideas, is more than just a coincidence. Somehow these texts are kind of in relationship to each other.

And it's hard to be really sure what the exact relationship with them is. But I think it's fair to have seriously consider that these two *suttas* that I just read to you are the material from which Majjhima 37 was put together or, you know, something like that. So now we go back to the slideshow. So here is, so, so the Buddha gives here in the top here: only those *bhikkhus* who are liberated in the destruction of craving are the ones who have reached the ultimate

end, the ultimate security from bondage, the ultimate holy life, the ultimate goal. And, and so that's, that's the Buddha's final answer to Sakka, the 14 questions, in the Questions of Sakka. And when he gives that final answer, this is what Sakka says:

Delighted, Sakka approved and agreed with what the Buddha said, saying, that's so true, Blessed One, that's so true, Holy One. Hearing the Buddha's answer, I've gone beyond doubt and got rid of indecision.

Going beyond doubt and get rid of indecision is kind of a description of stream entry. And so he really understood. It was really beneficial for him. Then he says, turbulence, agitation, sir, is a disease, a boil, a dart. Turbulence drags a person to be regenerated in one state of existence or another. In other words, it gets to become reborn. And I bolded this word turbulence. You'll see why. But turbulence is kind of almost a synonym for shake and quake. But here, and then also in Majjhima 21, Sakka as a stream-enterer, Sakka said, I am the Buddha's disciple, a stream-enterer, not liable to be reborn in the underworld, destined for awakening. Once upon a time, sir, a battle was fought between the gods and the titans. In that battle, the gods won and the titans lost. It occurred to me as the victor, now the gods shall enjoy both the nectar of the gods and the nectar of the titans.

So we have *oja*, *oja* AA, and here we have *eja* with long A. It seems very similar that there's, these are, these are very important words here that's being said, the nectar of the gods. And this *oja* apparently, I've read, is a one way of referring to *soma*. And *soma* was kind of a psychedelic drink that they had in the ancient Vedic times. But then Sakka says this. Can you share your screen, Gil? It's not. Oh, I'm not sharing it? No, it's not at all. Oh, I wish you to. Oh, thank you for telling me. I thought I had. Oh, so let me come back and show you. So here's the turbulence is a disease. So Sakka hears his teachings of the Buddha about how to go to end craving, become liberated. And his response is to show his insight. He understands something. And turbulence is probably a term that's the final restlessness, final agitation before enlightenment.

And it's like probably in English we might say stress, because stress is, or English speakers, is kind of a universal issue that is kind of at the center of almost all things. And so he's using the word turbulence here. And then here he's talking about having won the battle with the titans. And now he has this idea that because he's a victor, now he can enjoy this wonderful sensual pleasure or this wonderful nectar of *oja*. And so *oja* and *eja* are almost the same word. And, but then he has a change of heart about it.

But sir, that joy and happiness of *oja*, of this nectar, belongs to the sphere of sticks and swords. It's kind of more of the same, that same world, same as the fighting he had done. It doesn't lead to disillusionment, dispassion, cessation, peace, insight, awakening, and extinguishment through *nibbāna*. But the joy and happiness I feel, I feel listening to the Buddha's teachings is not in the sphere of the sticks and the sword. It does lead to disillusionment, dispassion, cessation, peace, insight, awakening, and extinguishment.

So here, Sakka really has understood well, and he now understands what kind of joy that's worth pursuing and what not. And it's kind of a *Dhamma* joy and happiness that's worth doing, listening to the *Dhamma*. He's not interested in celestial pleasures anymore. This is very different than the Sakka in Majjhima 37, where he also talked about this battle that he won.

Once upon a time, a battle was fought between the gods and the titans. In that battle, the gods won and the titans lost. When I returned from the battle as a conqueror, a victor, I created the palace of victory. The palace of victory has a hundred towers.

And then he goes on and on to talk about all the wonderful towers he has. So here you see a very strong contrast between these two Pāli *suttas*. In the long discourses, Sakka understands the *Dhamma* in a significant way, and he's not going to have anything to do anymore with sensual pleasures, with battles and wars. He's stepping out of that world in order to listen to the *Dhamma*, because he's become a stream-enterer. And in Dīgha 21, the text presents Sakka as this is his first visit to the Buddha, first time he meets him. And that's all it takes to become a stream-enterer.

And then Majjhima 37, you get a very different Sakka. And he's not interested in the, he gets this wonderful liberation teachings, but he doesn't appreciate it, he doesn't delight in it, he doesn't comment on it, doesn't say that his, you know, show his own understanding, doesn't claim he has some kind of attainment from it. Instead, he goes back right away and decides to enjoy the palace he built and the pleasures he had and the maidens he has. And so it's a very, it's a remarkably different presentation. So, and so in Majjhima 37, when Moggallāna realizes that Sakka needs some sense of urgency, Moggallāna thought, the spirit lives much too negligently. Why don't I stir up a sense of urgency in him? Then Moggallāna used his psychic power to make the palace of victory shake and quake and tremble with his big toe.

I put in the Pāli of shake, *saṅkampeti*, because I'm doing a lot of teachings about *anukampā*, which I'm translating as care, many of you know. And here you have the same root word,

kamp. *Kamp* means to shake. So *anukampā* is the heart shaking or trembling or something in the presence of other people and the suffering of their people perhaps. So just a, and now here's Sakka in, in long discourse 21: turbulence is a disease, is a boil, a dart. Turbulence drives a person to be regenerated in one state of existence or another. So this idea of shaking and turbulence really see as agitation, it's kind of emphasized in both texts. Yeah, so I think that's, yeah, so that's the slideshow.

And so we have this unusual text, the Majjhima 37, and the way Sakka is depicted is unusual. And if people are familiar with the other texts, which they probably were, from those slides I showed you, that the long discussion, the Sakka's Questions discourse, was fairly popular, was well known. And there's lots more carvings in India to survive of that cave. All of the caves seem pretty small. When I first read Long Discourse 21 and Buddha meditating in Sakka's cave, I imagined it to be a majestic grotto, just a huge place. And all the depiction of it, it just looks like a little niche, a little cubicle or something inside of a hill. Not much of a cave for a great god to be living in my mind. But I guess everyone was used to simpler things, quarters back then, and were a little bit humbler than we are today when we want to think of grand things.

So now I'll pause and, and see. We're at the hour. And so I think this was what offered as a one-hour program. So, you know, if, and then the idea was to spend another half an hour if those who want to stay and take questions and discussion about this. And then I'm going to have another half hour afterwards with a subset of you that are people who have signed up for this new certificate program that we have at IMC, who are doing some of the kind of ongoing now study. And so we have these two extra times. If anybody, any of you want to do that. So let me turn it over to you first now. I've talked a lot. Hopefully you could follow and understand a little bit more how unusual Majjhima 37 is. So anything that you'd like to ask or say?

Thank you, Gil. I love this *sutta*, Majjhima 37. I was introduced to it maybe a year ago. And I find Sakka of the Majjhima very relatable, much more so than in the Dīgha Nikāya, because he has what I've heard called palace-induced amnesia. I did not make that up. I need to attribute it to Ajahns Kovilo or Nisabho. I can't remember which one. But I can very much relate to having profound experiences of hearing these transformative teachings and being like, yeah, wow, I really get it. And then I come back, you know, to my home. And maybe it's not quite like amnesia, but it's so easy to forget, right? And so that part where he, you know, had that palace-induced amnesia, I guess I just love that term. And like I said, I relate to it very much.

But be careful. I'm going to shake the computer for you. But, but here's the other thing that I think is very interesting, this chiasmatic structure, I guess is how you pronounce it. And how you pointed out that when Moggallāna shook Sakka's palace with his toe, that that was sort of like the dramatic climax, right? The tension point where, you know, you build up to that and then that, you know, that happens. And then what, right? And that, I think, for me anyway, ties into something that you didn't mention, which I thought you would, which is the, how the first time I read this, one of the first things that popped out at me was how the, basically the fourth tetrad of the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* is mentioned here now a couple of times. The, you know, the fourth tetrad, which mentions, I guess, what I think of is like the liberation sequence, right? The *anicca, virāga, nirodha, paṭinissagga*.

Do we say it in English for people who don't know the Pāli? So the impermanence, dispassion, cessation, and relinquishment, right? Yeah, and so that's in the middle teachings of the Buddha's description of how to become liberated, those seven steps. Right. Yeah. That's the destruction of craving. That's what happens, right? And so it echoes that final tetrad of the *ānāpānasati*. And I don't think it's really found in that exact form, maybe in one or two other *suttas* that I'm familiar with. But I think that's really significant. And so I guess I'm just wondering what you make of that or whether you have any ideas about that particular, just the language of the fourth tetrad, and also how it seems to me as a practitioner, not really a scholar, I'm kind of a scholar wannabe, but really much more of a practitioner, that the first part of that liberation sequence, the *anicca* or impermanence, I think is maybe what Moggallāna was trying to trigger, right, that if Sakka had really paid attention to what he was pointing out, then maybe it would have gone, you know, all the way through that liberation sequence to relinquishment, right?

So that's, for me, is I guess a practitioner, something that I found interesting. Yeah, so I guess that's, that's all I have. I know, you know, and this is maybe a little bit obscure, but I also am curious about why you translated *abhinivissa* as clinging instead of adhering as Bhikkhu Bodhi did, whether there was a conscious decision on your part about that. So I think there was a lot you said. And yeah, I think there's definitely a literary play here between the middle of the seven steps to liberation where *anicca* is at the heart of it with the shaking of the palace. And I think this is maybe a literary way to give emphasis to the importance of *anicca*. And now they're doing it on a celestial, in a celestial level.

And I could imagine that the worldly audience listening to this would have somehow also gotten some big, also gotten a sense of urgency to know about this tremendous power that Moggallāna has, and feel in awe and wonder and somehow get some urgency around that.

Maybe. Why did I, now, in this essay, I gave a lot of thought to how to translate this word that I had been reciting to myself as clinging: nothing's worth clinging to. And I decided that the clinging isn't, isn't so good because the word clinging appears later in a different way. It's in step number five. And so I didn't want to translate the both same word, the same, two different Pāli words the same way.

And I like, I liked clinging a lot. I wanted to keep it. Adhering didn't quite work for me because in English, in my English, it's too easily to read like, adhering means to some kind of belief system, some principle, some doctrine, adhering, in my mind, associated with doing that rather than with adhering to my sense of self, my adhering to my hatred or my greed. It just kind of doesn't work for me. But I decided, so in this article, I translated it as attachment, being attached to. And I thought that I was really happy to do that because in popular English, we often use the word attachment. But this poor word attachment has been really unused by most translators of Pāli texts. It's somehow, it's an orphan word in the Buddhist translation world.

And so I thought that that's a good word to use. And it kind of uses kind of the combination of clinging and adhering. It kind of fits nicely in both. And it's an underused word. So I thought, finally, we can give this poor English word a Buddhist role. So that's the reason. And then just briefly, I wonder whether you could just speak to the fourth tetrad and that liberation sequence and how it's sort of repeated almost verbatim from the fourth tetrad of the *Ānāpānasati*. I don't think it's verbatim. I mean, the same words and the same sequence, but each word is embedded in each step. So there's a lot of text that goes around it. Maybe my, I haven't studied this carefully enough to answer your question, but in my sense is these four steps repeated frequently in the *suttas* are quite common. It's not just the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*.

So, to me, it was, you know, yeah, of course it's there. It's, you know, it's a standard sequence of description of the process to awakening. And so I just appreciated it. And so I didn't give it any really more thought, but I think it certainly deserves more thought and consideration how it worked, why it's there. And the way that my mind works around the *suttas* for better or for worse, I'm always wondering about what's later and what's earlier, what was composed, the historical strata. And the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, kind of, you know, if I shake it, it sounds like a later *sutta* that was composed, you know, quite a long time after the Buddha. And the reason I think that is because it's a composite. It's bringing together. It's unifying all these different teachings that existed already to try to unify and show how they can work together. And I think that belongs to a later era.

So maybe this idea of these four steps is a later era and speaks to the era when Majjhima 37 was starting to be written. But, I mean, that's just pure speculation. Right. So then Meg, hi. It's wonderful to see you. Yeah, Meg. It's good. Oops. Oops. There you go. Yeah. Well, actually, I missed most of it because the time change was not nine hours. It was eight. Yeah, I learned that morning. Sharing for everything. So, you know, I didn't really hear most of what you said. But there was one thing that really stumped me. All the monastics that I know have a really exquisite *sīla*. And they would never say anything that was remotely deceptive. And I find it strange that Moggallāna was depicted in the second act as using deception when he asked Sakka to relate the teachings so that he could hear them too. He already heard them.

Oh, my understanding is that Sakka wasn't asking it for his own sake. He just wanted to know if Sakka, he was curious, did Sakka understand? Did Sakka remember? How important was this? But in the first act, he was sitting there. No, but he wants to know if he remembers. He wanted to find out how do these teachings live in him? Did he remember? Does he stay way close to them? Oh, fine. But then why did he add so that I can hear them too? Oh, yeah, that's a good question. I like that. It doesn't make any sense at all. I mean, maybe. I appreciate your concern, maybe, that one possible justification is that in the ancient world, there were no books. And so they regularly asked each other to repeat the teachings that they already knew so they could hear it again. So it was just a common practice because of the, again, was missing. You can't go to the library and look up the book again.

Yeah. You had to find someone who recited for you. Yeah, okay. And I kind of think, I thought that part of the reason why the Buddhist liberation teaching appears used three times in the *sutta* is because that's also, it makes it, it's a refrain that really makes a difference in the audience. They hear it, they hear it again, and then they're more likely to remember it. Yeah, that I totally get. Yeah. Okay, great to see you. I hope I'll be able to see the rest of it later. Yeah, yeah, it's being recorded. So it'll be posted at some point. Everyone can look at it. Yes. So then we have Scott. Hi, thank you very much, Gil. I had one question, but then something you said raised another question. So the first one is, I thought I heard you say that the Majjhima 37 came together, or it looks like there were aspects of two other *suttas*, and I missed what the numerical *sutta* was.

Yes, the numerical *sutta* is in the Book 7, and it says this course 61, and the title in Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation is Dozing. Thank you. Yeah. And then the second, these are both referenced in my essay as well, so you'll find the information there too. Okay. Thank you. And the second question then was, you just mentioned that you feel like the *Ānāpānasati* was, you know, amalgam a little bit of earlier teachings, which I had heard before. But then I became

curious, do you have a similar view of 119? You know, mindfulness of the body. Yeah, I think so. And there also I think there, what we seem to have in the three *sati suttas*, the three mindfulness discourses in the Majjhima, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Mindfulness of Breathing *sutta*, and then the Mindfulness of the Body *sutta*, what they have in common is bringing together different lists, different teachings, and harmonizing them, putting them together.

And it seems to be at some point a strong tendency to want to show how things work together or hold things together in harmony, in unity. And maybe there was a time when there started to be less unity in the *suttas* and more argument about what the right practice is and right teachings are. And we do know that in later Buddhism, there became a real heavy divide between mindfulness and concentration practice, *jhāna* practice. Right. And I don't know if this is the reason that made 119, but there we see mindfulness combined with *jhāna* practice. So they're harmonizing those, bringing those together there. So I think it's a part of that unification effort. Thank you very much.

Mike? So this seven-step process starts with, quote, hearing that nothing is worth being attached to. And when I read that, I thought, it's not that easy to hear it. And so I'm wondering if there's something about either Buddhist culture or the translations or something that I'm missing that would cause me to misunderstand what they're trying to say. Yeah. So hearing nothing is worth being attached to, that's confusing for you? Or all the steps are confusing? What's confusing is, yeah, I could hear this. Is it going to lead to enlightenment? Well, no, only if I start practicing. No, you know, I couldn't. Please be patient with me. I couldn't quite hear what you said. Can you say it again?

Okay. So it seems to, the text seems to say all you have to do is hear something and boom, boom, boom. These things will happen automatically and you're done. Yes. All right. Clearly it's not that easy. So I'm wondering what am I missing about this? Yes, yes, good question. Excellent question. So you better be ready to write this down, memorize it, chant it, the answer I gave you. You should probably go and spend three months doing the three-month retreat at IMS. And then on the, maybe the 10 days before the end, have someone read you this statement: nothing's worth clinging to, nothing's worth being attached to. Your mind will be maybe so fertile, so ready, so prepared to understand how this can apply every moment of your life, that there's nothing to cling to, nothing to hold on to.

And your life has become so simplified in that retreat context that it's really easy to see the moment-to-moment flow of attachment and freedom from it. And you've heard nothing is worth clinging to. And now you're hanging out right there on the edge between clinging and

non-clinging. And it's all you need to, for this, the rest of this process just to unfold on its own. So you have to, you have to prepare yourself for it. You don't just go, you know, watch Netflix and then open the book and say, you know, how does this work?

Ash. Thanks, Gil, for this. I'm in that same vein of the seven things that the Buddha, you know, gives the instruction. And in the middle of it, it doesn't seem like it's just boom, boom, boom, everything will happen. For me, I read the key piece in number four, where we're abiding in observation or meditation of the inconstancy of that which is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensation. And I think that's the easy thing to forget. And the humbling thing about this *sutta* is that even the great Indra can be made to look like a fool as a, you know, as a consumer of, you know, craving of these palaces filled with nymphs and so forth.

And so anyway, that's what I draw out of it, like the kernel in there in the middle is the earth-shaking toe is the, oh, we just sit and observe what arises and passes as, you know, a sensation coming in through the six sense doors as pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, and, you know, states. That's huge to that practice. But the question is, do we have to intentionally direct our attention to observe this or does it just happen? But after three months on a retreat, does, is that's actually what you end up kind of naturally seeing on your own. That's just the unfolding of it. But what I appreciate very much was both, both Michelle and you pointing out the kind of how human it is to get, you know, even Sakka. So it's kind of inspiring now to hear you guys' interpretation. Even Sakka, who was a stream-enterer, can lose track of all this. So how much, if he can do it, so much more us. So let's be really careful. Let's be really careful. Let's not spend too much time in palaces. Palatial amnesia, is that your word, Michelle? Palace-induced amnesia. Great.

And Bonnie, from your palace there. Hi, Gil. I'm really appreciating what Ash and Mike just said. I was so struck by the instructions that were given to Sakka about not being attached to anything. And then very ironically, Sakka was not even attached to the teachings, that he just let everything go, but that was not the point. So it brought up to me the whole question of how does one hold the teachings? And as you described, of course, the teachings hold you when you're on a long retreat. But in the daily life, it's like one doesn't grasp them. You have to find some other way of abiding with them. So my mind just began to kind of play with this holding and grasping and attaching in regard to the teachings.

Yeah, this is very interesting to hear this. And I was looking back at what I read earlier where the Buddha is giving Mahāmogallāna this teaching on bonding. I don't know what the Pāli is. I want to go back and see now. But from this numerical discourse, 7.61, the Buddha said to Moggallāna, I do not praise bonding with everyone whatsoever, nor do I praise bonding

with no one at all. I do not praise bonding with householders or monastics. But I do praise bonding with quiet and noiseless lodgings far from the flurry of people, remote from human habitation and suitable for seclusion. So when I heard what you said, Bonnie, maybe there's a healthy bonding to the teaching that is not exactly the same as clinging. And that's not what we have Sakka doing, as you said. You know, he just kind of like says, you know, says great. And he has important duties to do, hang out with his maidens. Thank you.

So then part of the challenge for people like me who's trying to have a real wish to try to understand the historical layering of these texts and when they were written, it's kind of a fool's errand because it's so hard to do and really hard to do well. But if you try to understand when Majjhima 37 might have been composed, one of the things that we quickly see is that there's a really wide range of time in which it was possible to have been composed, and we can't really know in that range. And it might be like a, you know, it might be, you know, 600, 600 year period, where there's kind of a black hole in time where we don't really know where and when it was composed, and when it was composed in its current form.

Because these texts were changing so much in ancient India, some of these texts have so many surviving versions of them. I think the Aṅgulimāla Sutta, there are 17 different versions of the Aṅgulimāla Sutta. Which one is the real one? You know, which one, you know, is the Pāli one any realer than the others? And it turns out that the Aṅgulimāla Sutta, the Pāli version, is one of those Pāli texts that's constructed as a chiasmus, the same structure there as well. And I used to read the Aṅgulimāla Sutta and thought it was kind of a strange, disjointed bunch of vignettes. And then when I saw the structure, I saw it fits perfectly. It's actually very tightly and carefully constructed to be this perfect chiasmic structure for all kinds of reasons.

And so, and, you know, 17 different versions of them. Some of them are very, very simple of Aṅgulimāla Sutta. So I kind of like to think that when you have this storyteller's technique that's used so beautifully, that it probably is many, many centuries after the Buddha. After a time when *suttas* were being recorded or written down, composed, memorized, among the monastic community as simply a way of organizing the Buddha's teachings, to a time when *suttas* were used not just for monastics in their own study, but in order to be able to present the *Dhamma* to a much wider range of people than just to *bhikkhus*, just to monastics, maybe a popular audience. Maybe there were storytellers who wandered around and told these entertaining *suttas* for the laity.

And what was the purpose of some of these *suttas*? It was to inspire people with wonder and awe. And for back in ancient India, issues of power and awe, psychic power, were pretty prominent and interesting for people. And so we see that this whole thing with Mahāmog-

gallāna, one of the maybe precursor texts for it, the Buddha even describes what it took for Mahāmoggallāna to develop his psychic powers. And that's the only purpose of the text. You know, it's just a short little text and it's just laying out this is what you do. And as if this was an important thing. So here we see that in Majjhima 37, after Mahāmoggallāna shakes the palace, Sakka's maidens are in awe and wonder at what has just happened.

And they express their wonder at the power of some monk and who can do that. And then even more amazement that the teacher for Mahāmoggallāna, he must really be powerful. So this idea of power again is something that maybe became more important for popular audience of people or an audience of people for whom maybe enlightenment wasn't so prominent as an interest for them, but spiritual power and what was powerful was of interest to them because they worshiped them, they got merit with them. And Sakka himself was, as Indra, was a very important god in ancient India, and modern India as well. And there were temples to Indra, there was people worship Indra, and I wouldn't be surprised if Sakka as a Buddhist god was present in, you know, the altars or shrines to Sakka in some of these Buddhist shrine places. And he was adopted in, into the Buddhist worldview, and because that's what people wanted or expected, or there was already a strong orientation around it, around this god.

So when was this Majjhima 37 written? How was it composed? I've offered you some ideas. I think that the primary takeaway from me is that this, certainly this text was composed as in its current form many centuries after the Buddha. And it's a carefully constructed text. There was a lot of thought and care that went into how it was put together. And so we see that, we see the craftsmanship, the craftship of the people who did it. And some of it is quite beautifully done.

And so what perspective does that provide us with the other *suttas*? One of them for me is to be careful not to assume too easily that any *sutta* you're reading contains the teachings of the historical Buddha. It certainly may, but I think we have to have a little question mark behind us and to be willing to look at this, these texts for how they support our practice, how they support our way of seeing and understanding in *dharmic* ways and ways that are freeing and liberating for us. And be careful that we don't get too dogmat, too fundamentalist around this is the truth. This is what the Buddha taught, and which I kind of think is kind of a non-Buddhist thing to do.

So hopefully this was interesting for you, to get this kind of glimpse into these texts, and maybe it's different than how most of you have looked at these texts before. And so I thank you for listening and being here. So now it's time to stop it, because I said I would meet with

these people in the certificate program for half an hour, and some of them have been doing a more in-depth study of the Majjhima. So they probably have other things to say. So for the rest of you, thank you very much for being part of it. And maybe there's interest in this kind of things. We'll do something like this again.