Turmoil and Tranquility in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*: A Study of Emotions in Early Buddhist Scripture

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Abstract—Emotions are essential to the Buddhist conception of the Path. The early Buddhist discourses, in particular, rely on emotion terms to discuss the motivations and challenges of renouncing the household life and joining the monastic community. These canonical texts also describe the emotional disposition of the Buddha and his enlightened disciples. The capacity to address the pivotal roles emotions play at different stages on the Buddhist path is fully displayed in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. This early scripture depicts the experience of turmoil (*saṃvega*) that set the Buddha on the route to nirvana, as well as the state of tranquility (*santi*) that is exemplary of the liberated sage. In this article, I explore the complex textual representations of these emotions. I argue that the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* describes turmoil and tranquility as existential states, and further suggest that this Buddhist discourse provides a useful framework for comprehending how these contrasting emotions can both be vital to the pursuit of liberation.

Keywords: Emotions, early Buddhism, turmoil, tranquility, *saṃvega*, *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*

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The classical Indian ideal of tranquility (Pāli *santi*; Skt. *śānti*) has long been associated with the teachings and practices taught by the Buddha. Yet this prevalent association can be slightly misleading. There is no disputing that one of the main goals of early Buddhism is to attain a quiet and peaceful disposition. However, the Buddhist tradition has consistently recognized that the path leading to tranquility is filled with emotional turmoil. In fact, experiencing some form of turmoil (*saṃvega*) is itself a Buddhist ideal.[1] Various canonical Buddhist texts propose that the process of learning to calm the mind and see reality as it truly is necessarily entails a type of emotional upheaval.[2] The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, in this regard, is a unique and intriguing early discourse since it includes normative representations of both the Buddhist experiences of turmoil and tranquility. In this relatively short scripture, we have, on the one hand, the Buddha recalling the tumultuous feeling of *saṃvega* that propelled him to renounce the household life, and, on the other hand, several verses praising the deep serenity of the sage (*muni*) who perfected the Dharma. The juxtaposition of these two canonical representations will be at the center of this article. In the following pages, I explore how the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* along with its commentarial literature[3] articulate and illuminate the

[1] One may also refer to *saṃvega*, more broadly, as an Indian śramaṇic ideal found in the Buddhist, Jain, and Pātañjala traditions. For a survey of *saṃvega* in these different traditions of renunciation, see Acri 2015.

[2] On this function of *saṃvega* in early Buddhist canonical literature, see Feinberg 2023.

[3] There are two separate Pāli commentaries on the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. These commentaries are aligned in the way they interpret and explicate this discourse. The first commentary is the *Attadaṇḍasutta-vaṇṇanā*, which is located in the *Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā*. The second commentary is the *Attadaṇḍasutta-niddesa* located in the *Mahāniddesa* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*. The *Mahāniddesa* commentary is more extensive than the *Aṭṭhakathā* and, at times, it can be quite wordy and repetitive. In many cases, the *Mahāniddesa* works simply like a second layer of commentary, as if it were expounding on the remarks made in the Aṭṭhakathā. Bodhi (2017: 1189–1202) offers a complete translation of the *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary on the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* and a partial translation of the *Mahāniddesa* commentary on this scripture that covers its essential parts.

contrasting Buddhist ideals of turmoil and tranquility.[4] I contend that this early scripture presents these pivotal emotional experiences as existential states. Rather than painting the familiar picture of emotions as private mental events, the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* depicts *saṃvega* and *santi* as modes of existence that can shape the Buddhist disciple's perception, interaction, and basic orientation in the world.[5]

In recent decades, increasing scholarly attention has been given to the subject of emotions in classical Indian Buddhism. One emerging direction of research that is especially germane to this discussion is the study of transformative emotions like *saṃvega*, *bhaya* (fear) and *nibbidā* (revulsion).[6] From a traditional Buddhist standpoint, these emotions are particularly elusive on account of the difficulty to classify and explain them by means of meta-categories like *cetasika,* (mental faculty), *kilesa* (defilement), *vedanā* (feeling) or *saṅkhāra* (volitional activity). Exploring the nature of these emotions, therefore, calls for a close examination of their different functions and meanings in various types of Buddhist texts. The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, in this context, has not received any careful attention from scholars working on

[4] The relationship between the ideals of turmoil and tranquility in Buddhist thought is occasionally addressed through the traditional pairing of the terms *saṃvega* and *pasāda*. Towards the end of this article, I will bring up the *saṃvega-pasāda* scheme and briefly discuss its relevance to my exploration of turmoil and tranquility in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. In the meantime, it is worth keeping in mind that the *saṃvega-pasāda* pairing and the complex understanding of the complementary relationship between these concepts is developed in later phases in the intellectual history of Theravāda Buddhism. In early Buddhist scripture, this pairing is conspicuously absent. In the Pāli canon, for example, we find no *sutta* in which *saṃvega* is followed by or transitions into *pasāda*. In fact, the loaded term *pasāda* (Skt. *prasāda*), which bears different meanings, many of which have little to do with tranquility, is never explicitly combined with *saṃvega* in the early Buddhist discourses. However, the basic idea of *saṃvega* leading to a peaceful state is invoked in the Pāli canon, primarily in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (see for example KN 4.37). For more on this topic and the use of this pairing in later Pāli and Theravāda literature, see Walker 2018.

[5] I am using here terminology that is prevalent in existential phenomenology. On emotions as perceptual modes that shape how one sees the world, see Carron 2008 and Tzohar 2021; on emotions as ways being embedded in the world, see Ratcliffe 2008 and Kenaan and Ferber 2011; on emotions, phenomenology, and orientations, see Ahmed 2004 and Ahmed 2006.

[6] On *saṃvega*, see Ṭhānissaro 1997; Acri 2015; Brons 2016; Walker 2018; Nguyen 2019; Liang and Morseth 2021; and Feinberg 2023. On *bhaya*, see Brekke 2002; Heim 2003; Giustarini 2012; and Finnigan 2021. On *nibbidā*, see Evmenenko 2012.

such emotions,[7] nor has it been part of the broader scholarly discussion on the classical Buddhist conception of emotions. This is an oversight this study aims to correct.

The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* is located in the *Suttanipāta* of the Pāli Canon,[8] and a parallel version of this discourse is extant in Chinese translation.[9] Both versions of this text are comprised of exactly twenty verses. The contents of this Buddhist scripture raise various exegetical issues, one of which concerns the compositional logic of the text. Generally speaking, the motives and historical circumstances behind the composition of the scriptures belonging to the vast corpus of early Buddhist discourses is a subject of much scholarly debate. Yet when it comes to the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, there is a particularly glaring issue concerning how the verses constituting this text fit together. Addressing this issue, Bodhi (2017: 147) observes that the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* "seems to be constituted by two sections that sit loosely together". The first of these two sections is comprised of the scripture's five opening verses in which the speaker provides a first-person account of his past experience of

[7] In his fascinating essay on *saṃvega*, Coomaraswamy (1943: 174) quotes the opening verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, yet he does not comment on their meaning and significance.

[8] Sn IV.15 (KN V.53). The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* belongs to a collection of scriptures called the *Aṭṭhakavagga* (The Chapter of Octads). On the key themes and compositional history of this collection, see Bapat 1951: *1-21; and Bodhi 2017: 138-48.

[9] The early Chinese translation of the only existing parallel version of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* (T.198, 189b12-189c22) is dated to the third century AD, and is attributed to the Chinese translator Zhi Qian. This discourse is part of a much longer text called the *King Virūḍhaka Scripture* (*wei lou le wang jing* 維樓勒王經). This extensive scripture places the preaching of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* in the aftermath of a story about a rogue king called Virūḍhaka. In the Pāli tradition, there is a clear editorial distinction between the framing narrative, which appears in the *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary on the *Suttanipāta*, and the twenty verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, which are in the *Suttanipāta* compilation itself. The Chinese text does not make the same distinction. However, at the point where the narrative about King Virūḍhaka ends and the verses preached by the Buddha begin, the Chinese text clearly states that this (i.e., the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*) is an "Arthapada scripture" (*yi zu jing* 義足經). In this manner, the Chinese text also indicates that there is a distinction to be made between the framing narrative and the twenty verses preached by the Buddha. (For a translation of the entire *King Virūḍhaka* Scripture, see Bapat 1951: 164-81. On the parallels between the Chinese *Arthapada* and the Pāli *Aṭṭhakavagga*, see Bapat 1951: *1-21.) I would further like to clarify that the Chinese translation of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* is most likely not based on the Pāli version of this text. In fact, many of Zhi Qian's translations were based on earlier Chinese translations of Indic Buddhist scriptures that he merely revised. While the early Chinese translation of the parallel version of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* does not perfectly match the Pāli discourse, it is clearly the same text, and it closely aligns with the Pāli. For more information about Zhi Qian and his canonical translations, see Nattier 2008: 116-48.

saṃvega. The second section begins with a remark that "interrupts" the flow of the text,[10] stating that "At this point, the trainings are recited" (Sn IV.15.6, 183). After this remark, the fifteen remaining verses of the second section consist of more typical Buddhist trainings or teachings on nirvana, the Path, and the *arahant*.

Reflecting on the compositional logic of this discourse, the *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary on the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* offers its own exegetical breakdown of the text.[11] Setting aside for now the question of whether the Pāli commentary provides the most plausible explanation for how the different parts of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* fit together, I would like to begin this discussion by highlighting the commentary's basic division of the scripture into three main sections. The first section is made of the five opening verses, where the Buddha describes the emotional turmoil he underwent when he was initially struck by the horrible violence and misery permeating the world. The second section includes the ten middle verses. In this section, the Buddha delivers a number of doctrinal precepts and speaks about the attainment of peace[12] and other spiritual rewards. The third section consists of the final five verses in which the Buddha lauds the sage for his tranquil demeanor and stoic character.

In this breakdown of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta,* what stands out is the structural symmetry and thematic contrast that the commentary draws out between the five opening verses of the text and the five closing ones. The Buddha's past experience of turmoil and unrest portrayed in the scripture's opening section is counterbalanced with the *arahant*'s tranquility and indifference described in the closing section. The point of this contrast is not to suggest

[10] Bodhi suggests that "this seems to be a remark by the compilers that was absorbed into the *sutta*." For more on this interjection in the *sutta*, see Norman 2001: 383; and Bodhi 2017: 1539, n. 2009.

[11] According to the *Aṭṭhakathā*, the first five verses of the discourse deal with the Buddha's wish to relate in some detail the meaningful experience of *saṃvega* he had when he was "still only a *bodhisatta*," i.e., prior to his awakening (Pj II 566). The commentary then states that in the ensuing sixth verse, the Buddha speaks of the importance of focusing one's training and attention on the goal of nirvana. In the next nine verses, the Buddha elaborates on how to train for nirvana and what it means to attain the state of an *arahant*. Lastly, the *Aṭṭhakathā* explains that in the final five verses of the scripture, the Buddha speaks in praise of the *arahant*, mainly referred to in this text as the *muni* (sage).

[12] Verses twelve and fifteen specifically mention the benefit of attaining peace or living peacefully. The *Aṭṭhakathā* also highlights the phrase "living peacefully," stating that with it, the Buddha shows the attainment of arahantship. (Pj II 568).

that experiencing emotional turmoil is bad and that being tranquil is good, but instead, to demonstrate that both of these emotional states are valuable and play a significant role at different stages on the Buddhist path. This contrast also casts light on what exactly it means to be in a state of *saṃvega* and how it dramatically differs from being in a state of *santi*. In my reading of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, which is largely predicated on the Pāli commentary, I will illustrate how the opening and closing verses come together to illuminate each other. My claim is that the emotions represented in the opening and closing sections of this scripture intentionally correspond with the existential states that characterize the early and late stages of the Buddhist path.

The framing narrative and title of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*

Before analyzing the representations of turmoil and tranquility in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, I would like to briefly address two important matters that affect my reading of this discourse. The first is the original context in which the Buddhist tradition situates the uttering of this discourse. The second is how to interpret the compound *atta-daṇḍa*, which appears in the title of this Pāli *sutta*.

The *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary on the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* places the preaching of this discourse in the midst of a quarrel between two clans. According to the Pāli commentary, a dispute once broke out between the Sākyans and the Koliyans over a source of water. As the two clans were about to wage war against each other, the Buddha intervened, seeking to prevent any violence from taking place. While deliberately standing between the furious armies of the Sākyans and Koliyans, the Buddha uttered the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*.[13]

In the Chinese *Arthapada*, we find a preamble to this scripture that situates the preaching of this discourse in a different setting. According to the *Arthapada*, a rogue king by the name of Virūḍhaka had directed a terrible massacre in which many Sākyans were unjustly killed.[14] Shortly after the

[13] The Theravāda exegetical tradition also provides another framing narrative for the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. According to the commentary on the *Purābheda Sutta*, this scripture was originally spoken to the gods at the Great Gathering. For more on the different framing narratives of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, see Bodhi 2017: 147-48.

[14] On the different Chinese canonical versions of the story of Virūḍhaka's massacre of the Sākya (Skt. Śākya) people, see Pu 2013.

carnage occurred, the Buddha arrived in Kapilavastu, the city of the Sākyans, and witnessed the aftermath of the horrible slaughter. Then, in front of a crowd of people consisting of an assembly of monks and the surviving Sākyans, the Buddha uttered a discourse of twenty verses, which is known in Pāli as the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*.[15]

The differences between these framing narratives are substantial and have the potential to significantly alter one's reading of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta.* That said, for the purposes of this discussion, I will merely highlight that both the Chinese *Arthapada* and the Pāli *Aṭṭhakathā* clearly situate the preaching of this discourse in a violent setting. This fact seems especially relevant for explicating the scripture's title and opening lines that include the compound *atta-daṇḍa*.

> Fear is born from one's own stick (*atta-daṇḍa*);
> see the people quarrel.
> I will speak [now] about [my] anxiety (*saṃvega*);
> how I was anxious [in the past].[16]

When examining this verse, the less difficult part to deal with consists of the third and fourth legs, where the Buddha announces he intends to speak about his past experience of *saṃvega*.[17] This announcement sets the stage for the following four verses that expound on the existential crisis the Buddha underwent when he was "still only a *bodhisatta*," i.e., prior to his nirvana (Pj II 566). The more ambiguous part of this verse consists of the first two legs. These legs are made of what seems to be a general statement about the origin of fear—"fear is born from one's own stick (*atta-daṇḍa*)"—followed by the use of the second person to directly address

[15] The Chinese preamble adds that this scripture is a summary of the Buddha's teaching, which is meant to accommodate the transmission of the Dharma to later generations and facilitate the long-term preservation of this teaching in the world.

[16] *attadaṇḍā bhayaṃ jātaṃ,*
janaṃ passatha medhagaṃ.
saṃvegaṃ kittayissāmi,
yathā saṃvijitaṃ mayā. (Sn IV.15.1, 182)

[17] In the fourth leg of the early Chinese translation of this scripture, the Buddha also announces his desire to speak about how he freed himself from fear (T.198, 189b13). The promise of eradicating fear and attaining tranquility is thus already suggested in the opening verse of the Chinese version.

the audience—"see the people quarrel." The crucial question with respect to these opening lines is how to interpret the compound *atta-daṇḍa* in this context and, more specifically, what to make of the statement that fear is born from *atta-daṇḍa*.

The *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary offers an illuminating gloss of *atta-daṇḍa,* clarifying that fear is born "from one's own misconduct" (*attano duccarita-kāraṇā*).[18] The word *kāraṇa* has a double meaning in this exegetical gloss, carrying both the sense of "cause" and "punishment." The claim here is that fear is caused by one's bad behavior and more particularly that it comes from dreading the punishment one will endure because of one's past misdeeds. The Pāli commentary also includes a sophisticated double use of the word *daṇḍa*. The literal meaning of *daṇḍa* is "stick," yet by metaphorical extension, it also refers to "violence" and "punishment," both of which often involved the use of a stick in the ancient world. The *Aṭṭhakathā* thus points out that fear comes from one's own violence and the retribution one will eventually have to face because of it (Pj II 566). The *Mahāniddesa* elucidates this claim, explaining that from a karmic or metaphysical standpoint, the fear, misery, and grief one experiences in the present are simply the result of wrongful actions committed in the past. The *Mahāniddesa* further states that from an experiential perspective, fear often comes in the form of worrying about the consequences of our actions, which, in many cases, means dreading the

[18] Norman and Bodhi, for instance, reject the Pāli commentary's reading of this opening leg. Both scholars provide a translation of the *sutta*'s first leg that deviates from the entire discussion in the commentary regarding one's misconduct as the origin of fear. They do so by considering the first element in the *atta-daṇḍa* compound, i.e., *atta*, as the past participle "taken up" or "embraced." Thus, Norman (2001: 122) translates the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s opening leg: "Fear comes from [the one who] embraced violence," and Bodhi (2017: 315) translates it: "Fear has arisen from one who has taken up the rod." The two translations are fairly similar, even though Norman translates *daṇḍa* as "violence," while Bodhi chooses the more literal translation of "rod." Both scholars provide sound philological justification for their translation, referencing at least one example of a canonical case where the compound *atta-daṇḍa* means "one who has taken up the rod" or "one who embraced violence." (Norman 2001: 380-81; and Bodhi 2017: 1539, n. 2003). What I find most intriguing here is the hermeneutical implications of their reading of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s opening verse. According to Norman and Bodhi, the *sutta* opens by stating that fear comes from the one who has taken up a stick, i.e., the person who resorts to violence. This interpretation of the text suggests that it is not necessarily one's own misconduct or violence that is the root of fear, as the Pāli commentary states. Instead, it is the general act of embracing violence or the threatening act of taking up a rod that is the origin of fear.

inevitable punishment we will meet because of our past transgressions (Nidd I.15:1, 402–04).[19]

Thus, the Pāli commentary states that the Buddha reproached the Sākya and Koliya people in the opening lines of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. In so doing, he revealed to them how their wrongful actions in the past have led to the current dreadful situation they perceive around them as they "see the people quarrel." The *Aṭṭhakathā* further explains that the Buddha then proceeded to talk about his past experience of *saṃvega* as he began to deliver a teaching on the appropriate disposition and conduct (Pj II 566). In this manner, the commentary makes it clear that the framing narrative and opening lines of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* do not merely place this text in the context of violence, but also address the predominant emotion of fear (*bhaya*) endemic to those who live in a world of animosity and misery. In contrast to the fear of the Sākyans and Koliyans, or, more broadly, the fear of sentient beings trapped in *saṃsāra*, the Buddha's past experience of saṃvegic anxiety holds the power and promise of pulling one out of the endless cycle of violence and suffering.[20] Therefore, the discourse begins with a depiction of the everyday reality that is characterized by hostility and fear, to which it will first offer an alternative in the form of the Buddha's emotional turmoil, and later in the form of the sage's tranquility.

Danger vs. security

In the opening verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, the Buddha recollects the experience of saṃvegic turmoil that set him on the path to Buddhahood. The depiction of this transformative experience begins with an emphasis on feeling fear. The Pāli term *bhaya*, which appears in the scripture's first couple of verses, can denote both fear and danger. Hence, *bhaya* may refer to the frightened attitude one has towards an object as well as to the frightening object itself. With this in mind, I would argue that the notion of *saṃvega* articulated in the opening verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* involves realizing what is objectively dangerous and, accordingly, feeling the appropriate fear. The Buddha describes this experience as follows:

[19] The *Mahāniddesa* provides both a "worldly" version of retribution for misconduct that is enacted by the state or the king, as well as a "cosmic" one, which is meted out in hell according to one's karma.

[20] On the different modes and roles of fear (*bhaya*, *saṃvega*, etc.) in classical Buddhist thought, see Brekke 2002; Acri 2015; Finnigan 2021; and Feinberg 2023.

When I saw the people quivering,
like fish in [a river with] little water;
when I saw them hostile towards each other,
fear came upon me.[21]

The first thing the Buddha perceived in his saṃvegic state was people quivering. The *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary hones in on what causes people to quiver, stating that "in this context, 'quivering' [means] trembling out of thirst and so forth."[22] "Thirst" (*taṇhā*) here is a prevalent technical Buddhist term that refers to one's primal craving as the source of suffering. The *Aṭṭhakathā* mentions that thirst is only the first element in a list of reasons why people in the world quiver. The *Mahāniddesa*, in its more exhaustive style, names many other such reasons, including misconduct, lust, and delusion (Nidd I.15:2, 407–08). The main point both Pāli commentaries make is that fundamentally, people in the world are perpetually shaking because they are conditioned to suffer. It is not the case that they are temporarily afraid of a specific threat or some other provisional reason. The trembling people suffer from is inherent to the type of lives they are leading. Nevertheless, most people remain in some form of denial of their trembling and the great danger that is intrinsic to their preconditioned situation. When the Buddha first noticed this, he could not help but feel deeply concerned and anxious.

In the second leg of this verse, the fish simile appears, illuminating the first leg and adding a poetic component to the Buddha's account of his emotional turmoil. The Buddha says he saw people in the world quiver or flounder[23] like fish swimming in shallow water. The *Mahāniddesa* unpacks this simile, explaining that just as fish flounder in a river where the water is evaporating while different birds are attacking from the air, grabbing the fish with their claws, and devouring the fish's flesh, so people in the world quiver with

[21] *phandamānaṃ pajaṃ disvā,*
macche appodake yathā.
aññamaññehi vyāruddhe
disvā maṃ bhayam āvisi. (Sn IV.15.2, 183)

[22] *tattha phandamānan ti taṇhādīhi kampamānaṃ.* (Pj II 566)

[23] Norman (2001: 122) uses "floundering" to translate the Pāli word *phandamānam*. It is an excellent translation that works particularly well with the simile that compares the movement of people in the world to that of fish in shallow water. Nevertheless, I chose to translate *phandamānam* as "quivering" based on the Pāli commentary, which glosses *phandamānam* with *kampamānaṃ*, a word that means to shake, quiver, or tremble nervously. (Pj II 566).

thirst (Nidd I.15:2, 408). The commentary's graphic unpacking of this simile highlights the anguish and hopelessness that people in the world share with these miserable fish. This simile, therefore, is designed to stress that for the person driven by craving, dangerous threats are coming from every direction. The constant trembling the Buddha witnessed in his *saṃvega* is part of a growing recognition of the great threat of saṃsāric existence. Consequently, the fear the Buddha experienced is a direct result of perceiving the reality of danger that is endemic to the human condition.

The simile of the fish floundering in a river with little water is operating here on at least two levels. The first level relates directly to the *Aṭṭhakathā*'s framing narrative, which situates this discourse in the midst of a dispute between two clans over water. The Buddha thus compares the alarming situation of the Sākyans and Koliyans, who are fighting over a source of water, to the state of the frantic fish swimming in a river whose water is quickly evaporating. However, the commentary makes it clear that on a more abstract level, the Buddha is also making a general statement about the precarious situation of sentient beings living in a world driven by craving and permeated by suffering. The second verse in the early Chinese translation of this scripture can help us better understand the abstract level on which the fish simile operates.

> The people of the world were[24] all rolling around in agony,[25]
> like fish in a dry [body of] water that was cut from its stream.
> Living in agony, their minds wished harm [on others],
> replacing their fears with deluded pleasures.[26]

In this parallel version of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, it is apparent the text is making general statements about the nature of saṃsāric existence. The first leg of this Chinese verse simply tells us that in his *saṃvega*, the Buddha became

[24] I translate the opening verses of this Chinese scripture using the past tense. My reason for doing so is predicated on the Pāli version of this text in which the Buddha speaks about his past experience of *saṃvega.* Bapat (1951: 172-173) also elects to translate the opening verses in the past form.

[25] Instead of the more literal translation of 展轉苦 as "rolling around in agony," one could simply translate this phrase as "repeatedly suffering."

[26] 展轉苦皆世人
如乾水斷流魚
在苦生欲害意
代彼恐癡冥樂. (T.198, 189b14-189b15)

aware of the pervasiveness of human suffering. Then, in the second leg, the fish simile appears as it does in the Pāli version, yet with a slightly different emphasis. The Chinese text states that people were rolling around in agony "like fish in a dry [body of] water that was cut from its stream." Along with the emphasis on the misery and helplessness that both fish and people share, this version of the fish simile strongly underscores the resemblance between the world and a body of water in a dire state. Finally, in the third and fourth legs of this verse, we find the claim that people's hostility and intention to harm others are rooted in their suffering and, more precisely, in their habit of replacing fears with deluded pleasures. The Buddha expresses here a critique of the prevalent human failure to face the facticity of suffering and feel appropriately terrified. Shirking from embracing the emotion of existential dread, people remain occupied with casting their frustrations on others and searching for temporary distractions that will allow them to continue living in denial of their truly agonizing situation.

The notion of a positive and useful experience of fear is strongly insinuated in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* by the fact that in this scripture, the Buddha himself shares with a crowd of people an intimate account of the pivotal moment in his past when he was overtaken by fear. In the second verse of the Pāli version, the Buddha explicitly says: "when I saw them hostile towards each other, fear came upon me." The *Mahāniddesa* explains that during this transformative experience, the Buddha plainly saw the ubiquity of violence and animosity in the world and realized that all of this hostility leads to nothing but suffering and death (Nidd I.15:2, 408). The feeling of fear the Buddha describes in this scripture is presented as an essential phase in the process of coming to terms with the perils of *saṃsāra*. This saṃvegic turmoil involved in perceiving the terrifying aspects of sentient existence is taken as necessary and therefore should be considered a Buddhist ideal.

Nevertheless, the closing verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* make it fairly obvious that while *saṃvega* is vital for facing reality and shifting one's attitude from complacency to urgency, the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path is to eventually transcend this state of anxious agitation and attain peace. In contrast to the emotional turmoil depicted in the opening verses as a fearful attitude towards the danger that is *saṃsāra*, the tranquility of the sage is described in the closing verses as a feeling of total security in the world. In the Pāli version of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, the fearlessness of the *arahant* is articulated in the nineteenth verse.

For the one who has no lust, the knower,
there is no accumulation [of merit or demerit] at all.
Abstaining from instigating,
he sees security everywhere.[27]

The *Aṭṭhakathā* explains that this verse portrays the *arahant* as one who no longer initiates any type of volitional activity (*saṅkhāra*). Free of desire and endowed with understanding, he transcends the karmic framework of intentionally engaging in actions that are either meritorious or not. While inhabiting this position that is beyond good and evil, the *arahant* "sees security everywhere" (*khemaṃ passati sabbadhi)*. The commentary glosses this expression with the phrase "he only sees fearlessness all around" (*sabbattha abhayam eva passati*), (Pj II 569). The translation here is challenging since the word *abhaya* means both "lack of danger" and "fearlessness." With these two meanings in mind, I believe the commentary conveys the notion that the *arahant* does not see danger anywhere, i.e., he perceives only safety, as well as the idea that all the *arahant* witnesses in his vicinity are other beings demonstrating fearlessness.

The *Mahāniddesa* comments on the expression "he sees security everywhere," by explaining that the defilements (*kilesā*), beginning with passion, hatred, and delusion, produce fear (*bhaya*), and thus, the one who has abandoned the defilements sees security everywhere. We find here the same line of reasoning used earlier in the Pāli commentary, which considers fear to be rooted in misconduct and the possibility of eradicating fear to be the result of removing the root causes of one's detrimental behavior (i.e., the defilements). The *Mahāniddesa* also offers several glosses for the word "security" (*khema*) in the context of this verse, stating that wherever the *arahant* looks, he perceives no danger (*abhaya*), no misfortune (*anupaddava*), no trouble (*anupasagga*), and no disturbance (*anupasaṭṭha*), (Nidd I.15:19, 443).

Considering these exegetical explanations, there are at least two plausible possibilities to interpret the claim that the *arahant* "sees security everywhere." The first is that the sage no longer perceives anything as dangerous. Having

[27] *anejassa vijānato,*
n'atthi kāci nisaṅkhati.
virato so viyārabbhā,
khemaṃ passati sabbadhi. (Sn IV.15.19, 185)

attained nirvana, the worldly threats of violence, pain, and even death no longer concern him. Such is the case since the Buddha's Dharma holds the promise of eradicating all fear. For the Buddhist practitioner, "When fear comes, it must be noticed and seen to be a creation of the imagination, something we choose to construct. Once identified as such, it can be dismantled, leaving a peacefulness in its wake." (Heim 2022: 85). The *arahant* is one who has mastered this practice, ceasing to construct a reality of danger that routinely elicits feelings of dread and terror.

Another exegetical possibility of interpreting the *arahant*'s pervasive perception of security and the claim that he "only sees fearlessness all around" alludes to the power of the sage to extend his peacefulness to his surroundings. The idea of possessing the capacity to spread one's tranquility and non-violence to one's environment is not exclusively Buddhist. We find this idea in other classical Indian traditions of renunciation; for example, fragment II.35 of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* states that "In the presence of (a yogin) firmly established in *ahiṃsā* (nonviolence), violence ceases" (Raveh 2012: 132). Interestingly, Gokhale (2020: 98) suggests that, like many other notions in the *Yoga Sūtra*, this fragment might be rooted in Buddhist thought. He adds that supernormal powers (such as spreading peacefulness) are commonly invoked in Buddhist texts. These powers arise from perfecting certain meditation practices and are often considered among the fruits of renunciation. Gokhale further explains that from a rational standpoint, the idea of extending one's fearlessness and perceiving it all around reflects the possibility that one's temperament and way of life can profoundly influence the sentient beings in one's vicinity. Perhaps the Pāli framing narrative of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* may serve as an example of this power. According to the *Aṭṭhakathā*, on the occasion when the Buddha uttered the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, his presence resulted in creating peace between the hostile Sākyans and Koliyans and inspiring members of both clans to renounce the household life and join the monastic community (Pj II 566).

There is a striking contrast in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* between the saṃvegic perception of reality as dangerous in the opening verses, and the serene vision of the world as completely secure in the closing section. This contrast reveals two "ways of seeing" that are absolutely essential to the

Buddhist path.[28] The emotions of turmoil and tranquility are represented in this scripture as different existential modes that shape and color one's reality. The former places the unenlightened subject in a world of fear and terror, while the latter situates the liberated being in a secure and peaceful environment.

Searching for a home vs. renouncing all possessions

The commotion the Buddha experienced in his *saṃvega* also involved feelings of disorientation and alienation. In the third verse of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, for example, the Buddha describes a world characterized by disorder and instability, in which he once struggled to find a place where he could truly feel safe and at home. In the Pāli version, this existential struggle is expressed in the third verse of the scripture.

> The entire world had no essence,
> all directions were in chaos.
> Searching for a place for myself,
> I did not see [one that was] unoccupied.[29]

The first leg of this verse presents the world as completely devoid of essence. The Pāli commentary elects to explain the essencelessness of the world in metaphysical terms. What I mean by that is twofold. First, the *Mahāniddesa* hones in on the word "entire" (*samanta*), which modifies the "world" in this verse. By doing so, the commentary explains that when saying "The entire world had no essence," the Buddha is stressing that there is no essence in this world or in the many heavens and hells that make up the Buddhist universe. The essencelessness of this world is not juxtaposed with the substantiality of another world. Since there is nothing permanent and stable one can hold onto anywhere, there is no solid ground to be found in the entire cosmos. The second point made in the *Mahāniddesa* clarifies what it means to have no essence. When the Buddha describes the world as "essenceless" (*asāra*), he is stating that *saṃsāra* is bereft of substance, permanence, stability, and

[28] On emotions as "ways of seeing" in classical Buddhist thought, see Tzohar 2019; and Tzohar 2021.

[29] *samantam asāro loko,*
disā sabbā sameritā.
icchaṃ bhavanam attano,
nāddasāsiṃ anositaṃ. (Sn IV.15.3, 183)

so forth. Having established that, the commentary proceeds to compare the world to a mirage or a magical illusion (Nidd I.15:3, 409–10).

The second leg of the third verse continues to depict the world the Buddha inhabited in *saṃvega*, yet this time with a focus on what was happening on the ground. The text describes a world where chaos roams in every corner and peace cannot be found. The emphasis on physical mayhem joins the metaphysical characterization of the world as devoid of substance and permanence. In this manner, the first two legs of the third verse in the Pāli version offer a glimpse of reality shaped by *saṃvega*. The third verse in the Chinese version of this scripture can help us gain a more vivid picture of the world in this state of emotional turmoil.

> The entire world was in flames,
> all ten directions in disorder with no peace.
> Proud of themselves, [people] did not abandon desire.
> Because they did not see [the world burning], they latched onto
> deluded thought.[30]

The fire imagery invoked in this verse is ubiquitous in Buddhist literature. Typically, Buddhist texts use fire to represent passion, change, instability, and danger.[31] When the Buddha says in this scripture that the world is burning, he is likely stating that everything is in flux and nothing permanent or stable exists. At the same time, through the fire imagery, the Buddha also conveys that the world is a dangerous and terrifying place. Much like the famous burning house parable in the *Lotus Sūtra*,[32] the image of a world in flames calls

[30] 一切世悉然燒
悉十方亂無安
自貢高不捨愛
不見故持癡意. (T.198, 189b16-189b17)

[31] On the fire imagery in early Buddhist literature, see Gombrich 2006: 65–66; and Hamilton 2000: 100–02.

[32] The fire imagery is prevalent in early Buddhist literature and even the specific burning house metaphor appears in the Pāli canon (see for example AN 1.101). Therefore, it is possible that Zhi Qian, the Chinese translator of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, was familiar with the image of a world on fire from his work on *āgama* literature. However, Zhi Qian also translated serval Mahāyāna scriptures, including the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* and the *Aṣṭsāhasrika Prajñāparamitā.* Now, given that this image of a world on fire is one of the most obvious instances where the Chinese translation is clearly different from the Pāli version (Bapat 1951: 174, n. 17), I wonder whether Zhi Qian had in mind here the famous *Lotus Sutra* parable of the burning house.

for immediate action. The urgency often associated with *saṃvega* thus comes to the forefront through the figurative use of fire. Moreover, considering that in the third leg of this verse, the Chinese text also mentions the detrimental force of desire, one might also consider fire here to be a figure used to describe a world driven by passion and lust. In the fourth and final leg of this verse, the Buddha explains that people's inability to see the world burning is the reason why they continue clinging to their ignorant views. In other words, the scripture suggests that one must experience reality as terrifying or alarming in order to abandon the primal confusion that is the root of saṃsāric existence.

That said, the Buddha's initial understanding of the human existential predicament in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* goes beyond seeing that everything is burning. In his *saṃvega*, the Buddha also realized that there is nowhere to hide in the world. The third verse of the Pāli version ends with the Buddha recalling the experience of searching for a place for himself and failing to find one that was not occupied. The Pāli commentary claims that the Buddha is lamenting here over the fact that there is no place that truly offers refuge or shelter in the world. Such is the case because every place is occupied by suffering. The *Mahāniddesa* states that in his *saṃvega*, the Buddha realized that "all youth is occupied by old age, all health is occupied by sickness, all life is occupied by death, all profit is occupied by loss, all glory is occupied by disgrace, all praise is occupied by insult, and all happiness is occupied by suffering."[33]

Along with the overwhelming feeling of fear, the emotional turmoil the Buddha describes in the opening verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* expresses a sense of disorientation. In his *saṃvega*, the Buddha searched for a home (*bhavana*) that would offer him stability but quickly recognized that there was no place in the world where he could genuinely be secure and at peace. The feeling of having no abode to dwell in, no solid ground to stand on, no truth to abide by, and nowhere to turn to in a time of need was crucial in encouraging the Buddha to seek the path of liberation. *Saṃvega* here entails an experience of searching for a home and realizing the world has nothing permanent and stable to offer that may qualify as such. This disorienting feeling of having no direction and nothing constant to depend on is represented in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* as part of the vital experience of emotional turmoil. On the contrary, the

[33] *sabbaṃ yobbaññaṃ jarāya ositaṃ, sabbaṃ ārogyaṃ byādhinā ositaṃ, sabbaṃ jīvitaṃ maraṇena ositaṃ, sabbaṃ lābhaṃ alābhena ositaṃ, sabbaṃ yasaṃ ayasena ositaṃ, sabbaṃ pasaṃsaṃ nindāya ositaṃ, sabbaṃ sukhaṃ dukkhena ositaṃ*. (Nidd I.15:3, 411)

scripture describes the *arahant*'s tranquility as a permanent state of having no abode and no possessions. This Buddhist ideal is explicitly expressed in the closing verses of the Chinese version.

> Having abandoned all name and form,
> one is not attached to the thought of having something.
> One who has no possessions, also has no abode.
> That person feels no resentment towards the entire world.[34]

It is made fairly obvious here that the opposite of the saṃvegic search for a home or anything stable to rely on is not about finding a lasting physical abode or some permanent metaphysical assurance. Instead, the tranquility of the *arahant* is articulated as a radical form of renunciation that entails no attachments, no possessions, and no abode of any kind. In this state of peace, one is not merely free of experiencing agony but also devoid of any feelings of bitterness or animosity towards others. This Buddhist notion of having no possessions is further developed in the closing verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s Pāli version.

> One who does not claim as 'mine'
> anything at all here in name-and-form,
> who does not sorrow over what is nonexistent,
> truly does not lose out in the world.
>
> One for whom nothing is taken
> as 'this is mine' or '[this belongs] to others,'
> not finding anything to be taken as 'mine,'
> does not sorrow, thinking: 'It is not mine.'[35] (Bodhi 2017: 317)

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[34] 一切已棄名色
不著念有所收
已無有亦無處
一切世無與怨. (T.198, 189c15-189c16)

[35] *sabbaso nāmarūpasmiṃ,*
yassa n'atthi mamāyitaṃ.
asatā ca na socati,
sa ve loke na jīyati.

yassa n' atthi idaṃ me ti,
'paresaṃ' vā pi kiñcanaṃ.
mamattaṃ so asaṃvindaṃ,
n' atthi meti na socati. (Sn IV.15.16-17, 184)

The argument in the first of these two verses is that the *arahant*, being one who does not consider anything to be his own, never loses because he has nothing to lose. According to the Pāli commentary, the *sutta* is working with the notion that losing must entail the loss of something and, therefore, the one who has no possessions to begin with simply never loses.[36] In this respect, the *Aṭṭhakathā* explains, for example, that when it says in the third leg that one feels no sorrow over what is nonexistent, the point is that the person who never claims anything as 'mine' never grieves once something is gone, i.e., becomes nonexistent (Pj II 568). The second verse presents a similar argument, yet it seems to push this line of reasoning a step further by deconstructing the notion of ownership. While in the first verse, the text states that after ridding himself of a sense of ownership, the *arahant* overcomes any sorrow triggered by loss, in the second verse, the *arahant* is described as one who does not even make the distinction between what is his and what belongs to others. Avoiding making this distinction establishes the sage in equanimity and allows him to never experience anguish over not owning something.[37]

With respect to both of these verses, I should mention that the Buddha's attack here on the concept of possession or ownership is quite germane to the context in which the Pāli commentary situates the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*. As I have mentioned, according to the *Aṭṭhakathā*, the Buddha delivers this discourse in order to resolve a conflict between two clans over water. It seems these verses work particularly well as a direct response to the hostile dispute over the possession of a precious resource.

In the larger sense, the sage's tranquility is characterized in this scripture as a state of non-attachment. The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* thus outlines the stark difference between the desperate search for something reliable to hold onto associated

[36] It is worth mentioning that if we follow this logic, the one who never claims anything as 'mine' also never wins.

[37] One issue worth raising concerns what the text means exactly when it says in the second leg that the *arahant* does not consider anything to belong to someone else. Is the *sutta* stating that the *arahant* does not acknowledge the property of others? Unfortunately, the commentary does not expound much on this issue. (The commentary, Nidd I.15:17, 438, does, however, quote different *sutta*s in which the Buddha encourages his disciples to abandon everything. For an example of such a *sutta*, see SN 22.33.) The way I make sense of this claim is by gathering that if one has no notion of "this is mine," then the notion of "something [belonging] to others" is rendered meaningless. That is because the concept of something belonging to someone else can only exist in contrast to the concept of something belonging to oneself. The meaningfulness of these opposite concepts is interdependent. In this sense, the *arahant* ultimately transcends the binary distinction between owning and not owning something.

with *saṃvega*, and the complete renunciation of all possessions linked to *santi*. The ideals of turmoil and tranquility are represented here as two opposite forms of existential orientation. The former entails a restless striving to find a home or a direction that offers assurance and stability, while the latter involves fully giving up on this pursuit and arriving at a homeless form of peaceful dwelling.

Seeing the dart vs. witnessing cessation

The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s canonical representation of emotional turmoil ends with a moment of penetrating vision. In verses four and five of the Pāli version, the Buddha's experience of *saṃvega* begins to shift dramatically as he realizes that there is a possible way out of the cycle of violence and suffering. This epiphany is a significant part of the Buddha's saṃvegic crisis. It counters the overarching pessimistic view of the human condition with a productive insight into the prospect of eliminating suffering.

> Even at the end, when I saw [them still] hostile,
> dissatisfaction came over me.
> Then I saw the dart, here,
> difficult to see, stuck in the heart.
>
> Pierced by that dart,
> one flees in all directions;
> but after pulling out the dart,
> one does not flee nor does one sink.[38]

These verses begin with the Buddha's last disappointing look at the people around him before he keenly perceived the source of their misery. What the

[38] *osānetv eva vyāruddhe,*
disvā me aratī ahu.
ath'ettha sallaṃ addakkhiṃ,
duddasaṃ hadayanissitaṃ.

yena sallena otiṇṇo,
disā sabbā vidhāvati
taṃ eva sallaṃ abbuyha,
na dhāvati na sīdati. (Sn IV.15.4-5, 183)

Buddha saw next is a dart situated in the heart.[39] The Pāli word for "dart" here is *salla*, which also may be translated as "arrow." I am following Norman and Bodhi's lead in translating this as a small object that is harder to see, like a dart or a barb. This translation maintains the ambivalence regarding whether the Buddha actually saw a subtle object or merely realized something fundamental about the human existential predicament.

The *Aṭṭhakathā* commentary specifies that the dart the Buddha perceived was situated in the heart of the hostile beings of the world mentioned previously. This dart is glossed in the *Aṭṭhakathā* as "the dart of passion and so forth" (*rāgādi-salla*). As usual, the *Mahāniddesa* fills in the blanks, identifying this dart with seven defilements, namely, passion, hatred, delusion, pride, views, sorrow, and doubt. The *Aṭṭhakathā* also glosses the word "heart" (*hadaya*) with "mind" (*citta*), suggesting that the dart of which the Buddha speaks here is figurative rather than literal, mental rather than physical (Pj II 567; and Nidd I.15:4, 412).

In the second of these verses, the Buddha says that the person pierced by this dart runs in every direction, but once the dart is removed, that person does not run, nor does he sink. The Pāli commentary elaborates on this, explaining that the one struck by this dart flees in every direction both in a literal and figurative sense. That person runs in the different geographical directions as well as in the directions of misconduct and other such bad habits. This frantic fleeing in every direction ties to the saṃvegic sense that people in the world are moving fast yet going nowhere. As for the person who has removed the dart, the commentary explains that he does not run in those directions and does not sink in the four floods.[40]

The Pāli commentary's remarks on the dart perceived by the Buddha indicate that the Theravāda exegetes consider the Buddha's "seeing" in these verses primarily as a cognitive act. Thus, if we follow the Pāli commentary, the scripture's description of the moment the Buddha saw the dart of passion and ignorance lends a strong cognitive component to the experience of saṃvegic turmoil. This component also appears in other early Buddhist discourses that draw on the connection between feeling fear and perceiving the three marks of existence.[41]

[39] This turn occurs in the Chinese translation at exactly the same point in the scripture (T.198, 189b19).

[40] According to the commentary, the four floods are the flood of desire, the flood of existence, the flood of views, and the flood of ignorance (Pj II 567; and Nidd I.15:5, 420).

[41] On the relationship between fear and knowledge in the *Lion Sutta* (AN 4.33), for example, see Feinberg 2023: 85–95.

Addressing this cognitive aspect of *saṃvega*, Coomaraswamy explains that the saṃvegic feeling of shock must include a "second phase"[42] that transcends the sensory and affective experience alone. In Coomaraswamy's words:

> "[*S*]*aṃvega* is a state of shock, agitation, fear, awe, wonder or delight induced by some physically or mentally poignant experience. It is a state of feeling, but always more than a merely physical reaction. The 'shock' is essentially one of the realisation of the implications of what are strictly speaking only the aesthetic surfaces of phenomena that may be liked or disliked as such. The complete experience transcends this condition of 'irritability.'"[43]

The *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* clearly describes the Buddha's past experience of turmoil as one involving a second phase that has a substantial reflective character. The saṃvegic insight reveals to the Buddha the disturbing reality of people desperately running in every direction because of a poison dart that is stuck in their hearts. Yet at the same time, this insight also opens a horizon of hope, as the Buddha becomes aware of the possibility of pulling out the dart and ending the condition of suffering. Hence, the ideal experience of *saṃvega* in this scripture involves coming to terms with the human condition and realizing that something can be done about it.

The Buddha's awareness of the facticity of suffering and his alarming sense that immediate action is required for the sake of changing one's fate is directly opposed to the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s account of the *arahant*'s dispassionate temperament and his tranquil view of the world.

> Not following anyone, he arrives at this [liberating] wisdom.
> What he seeks is truly impossible to learn.
> Being dispassionate, he relinquishes [everything] and has no karmic bonds.
> That person reaches peace as he witnesses cessation.[44]

[42] Trainor (1997: 175–76) offers insightful comments on Coomaraswamy's conception of *saṃvega* as comprised of two phases.

[43] Coomaraswamy 1943: 176.

[44] 不從一致是慧
所求是無可學
已厭捨無因緣
安隱至見滅盡. (T.198, 189c19-189c20)

Unlike the insight into the condition of suffering gained in the experience of *saṃvega*, the wisdom of the enlightened sage has no clear thematic content. The Chinese version of the scripture, in particular, grants this wisdom a kind of ineffable quality. The figure of the *arahant* is repeatedly depicted in the closing verses of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* as one who is not stirred or affected by his perception of reality. Dispassionate and detached, he cuts off all ties to the world. The last line of the verse quoted above specifically states that the *arahant* "reaches peace as he witnesses cessation." This portrayal of the *arahant* provides us with a mirror image of the Buddha's saṃvegic perception. To recall, the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* speaks of the fear and restlessness the Buddha once experienced as he saw an essenceless world burning in the flames of impermanence. Even in his moment of saṃvegic insight, the Buddha perceived the disturbing image of a person pierced by a dart running frantically in every direction. On the other hand, the scripture says that the *arahant* attains tranquility as he witnesses the transient nature of phenomena. Bapat translates this line: "And Peace doth he attain, having seen the destruction of things" (Bapat 1951: 180). The vision of everything passing away and turning into nothing does not elicit from the *arahant* feelings of fear, despair, or melancholy; on the contrary, it leads him to a deep state of quiescence.

Finally, just as the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* begins with the anxiety and emotional turmoil that once overwhelmed the Buddha, it ends with the equanimity and peacefulness that characterize the *arahant*.

> The sage does not speak [of himself]
> as among equals, inferiors, or superiors;
> peaceful (*santo*), without malice,
> he does not take nor does he reject.[45]

The *Mahāniddesa* points to an etymological feature that is highlighted in this verse. The Pāli for sage is *muni*, which is derived from the word *monam* (silence). The verse thus explicates that the quintessential silence of the sage is a refusal to speak about himself out of pride (Nidd I.15:20, 443). More specifically, the sage avoids comparing himself to others by claiming he is equal, superior, or inferior

[45] *na samesu na omesu,*
na ussesu vadate muni.
santo so vītamaccharo,
nādeti na nirassati. (Sn IV.15.20, 185)

to someone else.[46] The tranquility of the *arahant* is paired here with silence, while the experience of saṃvegic turmoil involves voicing one's shock, fear, and dismay.[47] The silence of the sage underscored in this closing verse goes beyond the physical binary of speaking or remaining quiet. It is a silence that reflects the calmness and stillness of the *arahant*'s state of mind as opposed to the unrest and commotion that is experienced in *saṃvega*.

Conclusion

In this article, I proposed that the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* provides an outlook on the Buddhist pursuit of nirvana that highlights the predominant emotional states one is expected to inhabit in the early and late stages of the Path. The opening verses of the scripture focus on the experience of turmoil that can propel one to renounce the everyday life, while the closing verses center on the state of tranquility that is exemplary of the enlightened sage. In between these opening and closing stanzas, the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* lays out some of the fundamental precepts taught by the Buddha. Through this unique compositional structure, the text underscores the crucial role *saṃvega* has in driving one to take on the Dharma and practice it with urgency. Yet at the same time, this discourse exposes the limits of the saṃvegic impetus by contrasting it with the coveted emotion of *santi* that characterizes the affective terrain of the *arahant*.

As a whole, the structure and contents of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* speak to the power of engaging with the Buddha's teachings in a state of *saṃvega*. What makes this scripture special is the fact that the Buddha reiterates his past experience of turmoil in the first five verses before preaching the Dharma in the following ten verses. In this regard, the text first provides an account of the ideal emotional response to the truth the Buddha realized about the nature of reality, and then proceeds to give the audience a taste of that truth. Another way of looking at this dynamic involves considering that within the affective logic of this text, the Buddha is using his past experience to set an example of how a saṃvegic reaction should pan out, and then, he invites his audience to

[46] Both the Pāli *sutta* and the commentary commend the *arahant* for not comparing himself to other people at all. Even the perception of others as equals is considered harmful. The Chinese text articulates this in a slightly different way: "When superior he is not arrogant; when inferior he does not dread. Nor is he seen abiding [only] among equals" (上不憍下不懼, 住在平無所見, T.198, 189c121).

[47] For canonical examples of verbalizing the feeling of *saṃvega*, see AN 4.33; and SN 51.14.

react in a similar manner to the teaching he delivers in the following verses.[48] To this dynamic, the scripture adds a depiction of the *arahant*'s tranquility in the final five verses, which underlines the ultimate benefit of engaging with the Buddha's Dharma in a saṃvegic mode.

In my reading of the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, I addressed how the juxtaposition of turmoil and tranquility can help us better comprehend the depth, character, and function of these emotions in early Buddhism. For many centuries, Theravāda thinkers have been reflecting on the relationship between turmoil and tranquility by using the terminological pairing of *saṃvega* and *pasāda* (serene confidence). While the explicit pairing of these Buddhist terms does not appear in the early *sutta*s nor is it prominent in the early Pāli commentaries,[49] invoking this pairing here can help to clarify what exactly the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* contributes to our understanding of the relationship between turmoil and tranquility in Buddhist thought. In the Theravāda tradition, the *saṃvega-pasāda* scheme captures two essential modes of the aesthetic experience. These two modes, which may also be rendered the poles of our affective experience in general, are stirring (*saṃvega*) and stilling (*pasāda*) the mind and body.[50] Various Buddhist practices, texts, and images are designed to elicit turmoil and tranquility, for these two emotions have a significant soteriological purpose in the Buddhist conception of the Path. The pairing of *saṃvega* and *pasāda* is thus used by scholars to outline two noticeably distinct emotional registers of the Buddhist practitioner. Yet the phenomenology of these emotions and the matter of how they manifest, operate, and interact with each other remains much less clear. In this article, I highlighted what the contrasting framework developed in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* can reveal about the different aspects of the early Buddhist conception of turmoil and tranquility. On the one hand, I addressed the association of *saṃvega* with the reality of danger, the feeling of alienation, and the understanding of the human condition, and on the other hand, the relationship of *santi* with total security, non-attachment, and the dispassionate attitude towards the transient nature of things.

Finally, I argued that turmoil and tranquility are presented in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta* as existential states. The emotions of *saṃvega* and *santi* are described

[48] On this notion of guiding the audience's emotional response to the Buddha's word, see Feinberg 2023: 60–98.

[49] See n. 4.

[50] On *saṃvega* and *pasāda* in Theravāda Buddhism, see Walker 2018; Scheible 2016: 28; and Collins 2003: 652, n. 3.

in this discourse as ways of being embedded in the world. Everything one perceives in these existential states is touched by an emotion that completely reconfigures one's field of experience. In this regard, the scripture's notion of *saṃvega* and *santi* challenges the supposition that emotions in Buddhist thought are merely considered private mental events. There is a tendency to rely heavily on the metaphor of inwardness when contemplating the nature of emotions in early Buddhism.[51] It is often taken as a forgone conclusion that emotions simply reflect an internal commotion or inner calm. However, in the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*, the depiction of experiencing turmoil and tranquility is predominantly pointing at the world. The Buddha, for example, does not elect to articulate in this discourse his experience of *saṃvega* by focusing on his past internal struggles, nor is there an introspective character to the text's description of the *arahant*'s state of *santi*. Instead, these emotional states are expressed by speaking of what the Buddha and the *arahant* experience all around them, as if their emotions are plastered all over the phenomenal world. The crux of my argument concerning the *Attadaṇḍa Sutta*'s description of *saṃvega* and *santi* points to the interactive aspect of these existential feelings and how they shape one's reality.

[51] For a study that challenges the prevalent rhetoric of "inwardness" in the discussion of emotions in classical Buddhism, see Tzohar 2021: 284. The tendency of which I speak here specifically stands out in the way *saṃvega* is often defined and explained. For example, Bodhi (2012: 40) suggests that "*saṃvega* might be described as the inner commotion or shock we experience when we are jolted out of our usual complacency by a stark encounter with truths whose full gravity we normally refuse to face." This is a solid explanation; yet, my main concern with it is the characterization of *saṃvega* as an "*inner* commotion." Bodhi seems to take it as a given that the experience of *saṃvega* is a private internal event.

Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
KN	Khuddaka Nikāya
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
Nidd I	Mahāniddesa
Pj II	Paramatthajotikā II (Suttanipāta-aṭṭhakathā)
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sn	Suttanipāta
Skt.	Sanskrit
T.	Taishō edition (SAT)

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