

# 12

## (Vaṅgīsa) Ānanda Sutta

The Discourse by Ānanda (to Vaṅgīsa) | S 8.4

Theme: How to overcome lust

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005, 2014

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 ORIGINS

**Vaṅgīsa** came from a brahmin family and was proficient in the Vedas. He won fame as a skull-tapper: by tapping his finger-nails on skulls, he was able to tell where the skull's owner had been reborn. For three years, he made much money in this way. Then, despite his colleagues' protests, he went to see the Buddha. (According to **the Apadāna**, he saw Sāriputta first and learnt from him about the Buddha.)<sup>1</sup> The Buddha gave him an arhat's skull and Vaṅgīsa could make nothing of it. He decided to join the order to learn its secret.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1.2 VAṄGĪSA BECOMES A MONK

Vaṅgīsa is ordained by **Nigrodha,kappa**<sup>3</sup> (who lives at Aggālava Cetiya)<sup>4</sup> and, meditating on the 31 parts of the body,<sup>5</sup> he wins arhathood. He then visits the Buddha again and praises him in various verses, full of similes and metaphors. This brings him reputation as a poet (*kāvya,citta*<sup>6</sup> or *kāveyya,matta*<sup>7</sup>). Later, the Buddha declares him as the foremost among those monks with ready wit (*patibhānavantānaṃ*) (A 1:24,21).

His resolve to attain to this position was made in Padum'uttara Buddha's time.<sup>8</sup> **The Apadāna** says that he was called Vaṅgīsa, both because he was born in Vaṅga and also because he was a master of the spoken word (*vacana*),<sup>9</sup> that is, he is *vāḅgīsa*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ap 541.28-36/2:497 f.

<sup>2</sup> DhA 26.38/4:226-228. A Skt parallel from E Turkestan is found in A F R Hoernle, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1916:709 ff (5<sup>th</sup> fragment). Cf DhA 26.30b/4:189-192.

<sup>3</sup> His name was **Kappa**, and was called **Nigrodha** because he awakened under a banyan tree (SnA 1:346). Saṃyutta Comy says he was so called also because he dwelled under a banyan tree (SA 1:268).

<sup>4</sup> S 1:185. **Aggālava Cetiya**, the term Aggālava comes from *agga* [(1) foremost, chief, best; (2) a house, perhaps related to *agāra*, but only as ifc, eg *uposath'agga*] + *ālavī*, *ālava(ka)*. It is possible that *aggālava* = Skt: *agny-ālaya* (abode of fire) or *agny-agāra* (fire-house) (cf SED 6d). If this was the case, then there would probably have been a fire shrine there (like the one belonging to Uruvela Kassapa, V 1:24).

Occurrences: *ālavīya agge cetiyē* V 2:172 3:145 4:34 (quoted SnA 3); Sn p59, S 1:185, A 4:216 218; *aggālave* only, id, Sn 343 = Tha 1263; *ālavī nissāya aggālave cetiyē*, J 1:160 2:282 3:78 351, DhA 3:299; *aggālava-cetiya* (n), DhA 3:170 (wr for *-ve cetiyē?*); *aggālava-vihāra*, SnA 345, SA 1:267, DhA 3:171).

The Aggālava Shrine was the chief shrine of Ālavī (SnA 314) that was originally dedicated to the worship of yakshas and nāgas but later was converted into a vihara and retained its old name (SnA 344 f = SA 1:268 ad S 1:185). The Buddha resided here a number of times in the course of his ministry.

The Jātaka Comy remarks that many lay-women and nuns flocked to the Shrine by day to listen to the Buddha, but none of them were there when He taught in the evenings (J 1:160). It was during one such evening that the monks slept in the Dharma hall together with the unordained and the monks were seen in various indecorous postures. This prompted the Buddha to introduce a special rule (V 4:16; J 1:161).

<sup>5</sup> See **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,10/1:57), SD 13.3; **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119,7/3:90) + SD 12.21 (5).

<sup>6</sup> Ap 541.39/2:498.

<sup>7</sup> S 8.12/1:196 = v753; Tha 1252/112. See also SA 1:176, 286; ThaA 3:198.

<sup>8</sup> SA 1:285 f; DhA iv.226f; ThaA 3:180 f; ApA 528 f; Dīpv 4.4.

<sup>9</sup> Ap 541.27/2:497.

### 1.3 RELATED TEXTS

**1.3.1** The Saṃyutta Nikāya devotes one whole section to Vaṅgīsa—the **Vaṅgīsa Thera Saṃyutta**<sup>11</sup>—recounting various incidents in his life and his poems on these occasions. **The Milinda,pañha** also has a poem attributed to Vaṅgīsa in praise of the Buddha (Miln 390).

**The (Nigrodha,kappa) Vaṅgīsa Sutta** (Sn 2.12) records Vaṅgīsa asking the Buddha about Nigrodha,-kappa’s destiny upon his death. The Buddha reassures Vaṅgīsa that his preceptor dies an arhat (Tha 1263-1278) [1.3.2].

**1.3.2 The Thera,gāthā** contains numerous verses spoken by him on various occasions (Tha 1209-1279; most of them repeated in **the Vaṅgīsa Saṃyutta**, S 8/1:185-196):<sup>12</sup>

Tha 1209-1212	<b>Nikkhanta Sutta:</b> on his attempts to suppress desires on seeing gaily dressed women <sup>13</sup>	S 8.1/1:185 f
Tha 1212-1218	<b>Anabhirati Sutta</b> or Arati Sutta: self-admonitions against his dissatisfaction ( <i>anabhirati</i> ) with his teacher Nigrodha,kappa <sup>14</sup> (SD 53.7)	S 8.2/1:186 f
Tha 1219-1222	<b>Pesalā Atimaññanā Sutta:</b> self-admonitions against conceit because of his facility of speech <sup>15</sup>	S 8.3/1:187 f
Tha 1223-1226	<b>(Vaṅgīsa) Ānanda Sutta:</b> when (before awakening) his mind burned with lust he seeks Ananda’s admonition <sup>16</sup> (SD 16.12)	S 8.4/1:188
Tha 1227-1230	<b>(Vaṅgīsa) Subhāsita Sutta</b> (S 8.5 = Sn 3.3/p79/451-454): in praise of sermons by the Buddha <sup>17</sup>	S 8.5/1:188 f
Tha 1231-1233	<b>(Vaṅgīsa) Sāriputta Sutta:</b> on his meeting Sāriputta <sup>18</sup>	S 8.6/1:189 f
Tha 1234-1237	<b>Pāvāraṇā Sutta:</b> a discourse given at a Pāvāraṇā ceremony <sup>19</sup>	S 8.7/1:190-192
Tha 1238-1245	<b>Paro,sahassa Sutta:</b> his praise of the Buddha and on nirvana <sup>20</sup>	S 8.8/1:192

<sup>10</sup> Ap 541.10/496; Comy explains *vāḅgīsa* = *vādīsa*, “skilled with speech” (ApA 530). On Vaṅgīsa’s past, as a poet, and his ready wit, see SD 58.7 (1.1.5).

<sup>11</sup> S 8.1-12/1:185-196.

<sup>12</sup> For a summary of these suttas, see SD 58.7 (1.1.5.3).

<sup>13</sup> S 8.1/1:185 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1209-1211).

<sup>14</sup> S 8.2/1:186 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1212-1218). **Nigrodha,kappa** is a resident solitarian (*vihāra,-garuka*)—he places importance (*garuka*) on keeping to his cell—as soon as he returns from his alms-round, he would enter his cell and not emerge until evening or the next day. This disaffects Vaṅgīsa, but he quells through self-admonition (S 1:186; SA 1:169 f). He also has doubts about Nigrodha,kappa’s awakening as he has seen him sleeping with his arms moving about involuntarily (*hattha,kukkucca*). Generally this is unbecoming of an arhat, but in his case it is an old habit (of no new karmic consequence). (ThaA 3:198)

<sup>15</sup> S 8.3/1:187 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1219-1222).

<sup>16</sup> S 8.4/1:188 (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1223-1226) = **Vaṅgīsa Ānanda S** (SD 16.12, this Sutta).

<sup>17</sup> S 8.5/1:188 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1227-1230). After Tha 1224, ThaA & Ce insert: *Saṅkhāre para-to passa, dukkhato mā ca attano | nibbāpehi mahā,rāgaṃ, mā ḅayhittha punappunaṃ*, “See formations as alien [other], As suffering and not as self. | Put out the great fire that is lust, burn not again and again” (Tha 1224B). Comy is silent about this verse, but it is included in S 1:188, with *ḅayhittho* for *ḅayhittha*. The idea, however, is expressed at Tha 1160 f, attr to Moggallāna.

<sup>18</sup> S 8.6/1:189 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1231-1233).

<sup>19</sup> S 8.7/1:190-192 (with a long prose intro, missing from Tha 1234-1237).

<sup>20</sup> S 8.8/1:192 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1238-1245). Comy says that Tha 1242-1245 are uttered by Vaṅgīsa when invited by the Buddha to give an example of his unpremeditated verse style. “We might then suppose that all four verses are in the same metre, but Alsdorf (App 2:238) while identifying Tha 1243-1245 as old

Tha 1246-1248	<b>Koṇḍañña Sutta:</b> in praise of his colleague, Añña Koṇḍañña <sup>21</sup>	S 8.9/1:193 f
Tha 1249-1251	<b>Moggallāna Sutta:</b> In praise of his colleague, Moggallāna <sup>22</sup>	S 8.10/1:194 f
Tha 1252	<b>Gaggarā Sutta:</b> Describes the Buddha as he sits surrounded by the monks on the banks of the Gaggarā at Campā. <sup>23</sup>	S 8.11/1:195 f
Tha 1253-1262	<b>(Arahatta) Vaṅgīsa Sutta:</b> recalling his meeting with the Buddha and a canticle to him celebrating his arhathood. <sup>24</sup>	S 8.12/1:196
Tha 1263-1278	<b>(Nigrodha,kappa) Vaṅgīsa Sutta</b> (Sn 343-358). <sup>25</sup> A long poem to the Buddha, questioning him on the destiny of Nigrodha,kappa (Vaṅgīsa's teacher). The Commentary (ThaA 3:198 f) says that when Nigrodha,kappa died, Vaṅgīsa was absent and wished to be assured by the Buddha that his teacher had reached nirvana. <sup>26</sup> The poem is, as such, a eulogy of the Buddha.	Sn 2.12
Tha 1279	His homage to the Buddha as the deva of devas ( <i>deva,deva</i> ).	

#### 1.4 OCCASION FOR THE (VAṄGĪSA) ĀNANDA SUTTA

**1.4.1** According to Commentary to **the (Vaṅgīsa) Ānanda Sutta**, once when the venerable Ānanda was invited to the royal palace to teach the Dharma in the maharajah's harem (*anto,nivesana*, "inner abode"), he brought along the newly ordained Vaṅgīsa as his companion. When Vaṅgīsa saw the beautifully attired women in their fineries, he took them as a sign of beauty (*subha,nimitta*),<sup>27</sup> so that his mind became filled with lust, but at the first chance, he expressed his distress to Ānanda, whose admonition is the occasion for this Sutta. (SA 1:271)

**1.4.2 The Visuddhi,magga** quotes Vaṅgīsa's verses, albeit in a different sequence, and says that he was overcome with lust when, soon after his ordination, while on his alms-round, he saw a woman.<sup>28</sup> A Sanskrit version of the same story, along with the verses, is found in the Chinese **Saṃyukta Āgama**.<sup>29</sup> Buddhaghosa's Visuddhi,magga account is probably based on a very ancient source preserved in the Sanskrit tradition.

**1.4.3** It will be seen below (right-hand concordance citations), that the verses of the (Vaṅgīsa) Ānanda Sutta are found in **the Vaṅgīsa Thera,gāthā**. Apparently, these verses are older since they arose in connection with teachings given by Ānanda to Vaṅgīsa, and the verses of the Thera,gāthā were later collected and arranged according to the elders' names.

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Āryā makes no mention of Tha 1242. There seems to be no reason for doubting that Tha 1242 is old Āryā, too, although rather corrupt." (Tha:N 294 n1242-45)

<sup>21</sup> S 8.9/1:193 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1245-1248).

<sup>22</sup> S 8.10/1:194 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1249-1251).

<sup>23</sup> S 8.11/1:195 f (with prose intro, missing from Tha 1252).

<sup>24</sup> S 8.12/1:196 has a prose intro not found in Tha 1253-1262. Their readings however do not fully agree.

<sup>25</sup> Sn 2.12/p59-62 = Sn 343-358 has a prose intro not found in Tha 1263-1278. While Tha 1270 has the reading *sanikam* ("graceful"), Sn 350 has *saṇim*. See Tha:N 298 n1270.

<sup>26</sup> See ThaA 3:198; SnA 346.

<sup>27</sup> *Subha,nimitta*: on a positive usage of this, see SD 19.7 (4.5+4.6).

<sup>28</sup> Vism 1.103/38.

<sup>29</sup> Fumio ENOMOTO, *A Comprehensive Study of the Chinese Saṃyukyāgama; Part 1: Saṃgītinipāta*. Kyoto: Kacho Junior College, 1994:44 f.

Interestingly, only the first verse (S 721 = Tha 1223) is spoken by Vaṅgīsa, and the rest (S 722-726 = Tha 1224-1226) are spoken by Ānanda but are included in Vaṅgīsa's Thera,gāthā. This is understandable as they are personal instructions given to him by Ānanda to Vaṅgīsa.

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## (Vaṅgīsa) Ānanda Sutta

### The Discourse by Ānanda (to Vaṅgīsa)

S 8.4

1 At one time, the venerable Ānanda was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika's Park in Jeta's Forest at Sāvattthī.  
2 Then in the morning, the venerable Ānanda, taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvattthī for alms, with the venerable Vaṅgīsa as attendant monk.<sup>30</sup>

3 Now at that time, dissatisfaction has arisen in the venerable Vaṅgīsa. Sensual lust had corrupted his mind.<sup>31</sup>

4 Then the venerable Vaṅgīsa addressed the venerable Ānanda in verse:

4.2	I am burning with sensual lust, My mind is fully afire! Please tell me how to put it out, <sup>32</sup> O Gotama, out of compassion! <sup>33</sup>	<i>kāma,rāgena ḍayhāmi cittam me pariḍayhati. sādhu nibbāpanaṃ brāhi anukampāya Gotamā ti</i>	S 721 = Tha 1223
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[The venerable Ānanda:]<sup>34</sup>

5	Through perverting perception, <sup>35</sup> your mind is utterly afire. Turn away from the sign of beauty that arouses lust! <sup>36</sup>	<i>saññāya vipariyesā cittan te pariḍayhati nimittam parivajjehi subhaṃ rāgûpasamhitam</i>	S 722 = Tha 1224
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6	See formations as alien [other], <sup>37</sup> as suffering, and not as self. Put out the great fire (that is lust): burn not again and again.	<i>saṅkhāre parato passa dukkhato mā ca attato nibbāpehi mahārāgam mā ḍayhittho puna-p,punaṃ</i>	S 723 = Tha 1224B <sup>38</sup>
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<sup>30</sup> "Attendant monk," *pacchā,samaṇa*, lit "rear recluse." Skt *paśca-c,chrmaṇa*, opp *purahśramaṇa* (Avadś 2:67, 150; Divy 154, 330, 494), a junior monk (or wanderer) who walks behind a senior usu on alms-round. Often used in ref to a personal attendant, such as one of the Buddha: Ānanda (V 1:46, 3:10, 4:78; PvA 38, 93); Nāga,samāla (U 90); see also J 4:123; Miln 15 (Nāgasena). Traditionally, any junior monk would walk behind the senior.

<sup>31</sup> *Tena kho pana samayena āyasmato Vaṅgīsassa anabhirati uppannā hoti, rāgo cittam anuddhaṃseti*. On the reason for this, see above, Intro 1.4.

<sup>32</sup> "Put it out," *nibbāpanaṃ*, like *nibbāpehi* at v723c [§6], is clearly a pun alluding to the extinguishing of a fire and to awakening.

<sup>33</sup> Vaṅgīsa addresses Ānanda by his *gotra* because the latter is of the Gotama clan (like the Buddha), and also out of respect, he does not address Ānanda by his personal name.

<sup>34</sup> Note that although these are Ānanda's verses, they are included in Vaṅgīsa's Thera.gāthā.

<sup>35</sup> "Perverting perception" here refers to *saññā vipallāsa*, ie perceiving permanence, pleasure, selfhood and beauty in what are actually impermanent, suffering, not self and foul: see **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52), SD 16.11 Intro.

<sup>36</sup> This line = Tha 1224Bd = Sn 340b.

<sup>37</sup> On the perception of non-self (*dukkhe anatta,saññā*), see **(Satta) Saññā S** (A 7.46,15-16/4:53), SD 15.4.

7	Cultivate the mind on foulness, <sup>39</sup> one-pointed, well-focused; keep your mindfulness on the body, <sup>40</sup> let revulsion <sup>41</sup> abound. <sup>42</sup>	<i>asubhāya cittam bhāvehi ek’aggam̃ susamāhitam̃ sati kāyagatā ty-atthu nibbidā bahulo bhava</i>	(406)	S 724 = Tha 1225
8	And cultivate the signless, <sup>43</sup> discard the tendency to conceit. <sup>44</sup> Then, by breaking through conceit, you will fare in peace.	<i>animittañ ca bhāvehi mānānusayam ujjaha tato mānābhisamayā upasanto carissatīti</i>		S 725 = Tha 1226

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<sup>38</sup> After Tha 1224, Ce & ThaA insert: *Saṅkhāre parato passa, dukkhato mā ca attano | nibbāpehi mahā,rāgam̃, mā ḍayhittha punappunam̃* = “See formations as alien [other], As suffering and not as self. | Put out the great fire that is lust, burn not again and again” (Tha 1224B). Comy is silent about this verse, but it is here included at S 1:-188, with *ḍayhittho* for *ḍayhittha*. Cf in Moggallāna’s Thera.gāthā which has the same idea: *Sukhumam̃ paṭivijjhan-ti vālaggam̃ usunā yathā | ye pañca khandhe passanti parato no ca attato || ye ca passanti saṅkhāre parato no ca attato | paccabyādhiṃsu nipuṇam̃ vālaggam̃ usunā yathā* = They pierce the tip of a fine hair with an arrow, as it were, | those who see the 5 aggregates as other [alien], and not as self. || They who see formations other [alien], and not as self, | have pierced the tip of a fine hair with an arrow, as it were. || (Tha 1160 f).

<sup>39</sup> The perception of foulness (*asubha saññā*): as the contemplation of the 31 parts of the body is found in **Sati-paṭṭhāna S** (M 10,10 f/1:57) and (**iddhi,pada**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 51.20,9/5:278); as the cemetery contemplations (5 stages) are in 5 consecutive suttas in the section ending with breath meditation in **the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta** (S 46.-57-61/5:129-131), and the better known 9 charnel-ground meditations are found in **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,14-31/-1:58 f), SD 13.3 (A6).

<sup>40</sup> See **Kāya,gata,sati S** (M 119/3:88-99), SD 12.21.

<sup>41</sup> On *nibbidā*, see SD 20.1.

<sup>42</sup> In **Rāhula S** (Sn 2.11) the first 2 lines of this stanza (ie excluding S 724cd = Tha 1225ab) and the next stanza (S 725 = Tha 1226) close the Buddha’s advice to Rāhula: Sn 341b-342.

<sup>43</sup> “The signless” (*animitta*), says Comy, is insight (*vipassanā*), so called because of its removing (*ugghātittā*) the signs of permanence, etc (SA 1:272). See **Nimitta**, SD 19.15.

<sup>44</sup> “Conceit,” *māna*, see “**Me: The problem of conceit**,” SD 19.2.