

## Study Guide for MN 22

### *Alagaddupama Sutta*

#### On right views and how to relate to them

This sutta contains a full range of teachings. While you are encouraged to read the entire sutta, for this month the key passages are MN 22.1-14, 18-21, 37-38, 42. These are the sections which focus on the two important themes of 1) how to relate to the teachings, and 2) the purpose of the Buddha's teachings.

In the opening of the sutta the Buddha forcefully addresses the monk Arittha who has a pernicious view. While we will consider some of the issues related to his wrong view later in the year, for now it is enough to realize that the monk was saying that obstructions are not or need not be obstructions to the Buddhist path. It is not fully obvious what he means by obstructions (please read Bhikkhu Bodhi's footnote on this). The story of this monk suggests how easy it is to misunderstand the Buddha's teachings – even monks at the time of the Buddha came to mistaken conclusions.

In response to the monk's pernicious views the Buddha first gives instructions on how to hold the teachings. This he does through the simile of the snake and the simile of the raft. Please consider these carefully.

In sections 20 and 21 the Buddha then explains the purpose of his teachings in one particular way and in section 38 he does so in another way. It is perhaps easier to understand the Buddha's teachings if we understand the goal of those teachings. If Arittha had understood this purpose he would probably not have come to his wrong view.

#### Notes:

It is likely that this sutta was an important source for some later Mahayana Buddhist teachings. The simile of the raft reappears in the Diamond Sutra, a key discourse for that tradition. There is however, an important difference between the two versions of the simile. Those of you who are familiar with the Diamond Sutra may find it interesting to compare the two. Also, the statement in sections 20 and 21 where the Buddha explains the purpose of his teaching as eliminating

“all standpoints, decisions, obsessions, adherences, and underlying tendencies, for the stilling of all formations, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the destruction of craving, for dispassion, for cessation, for Nibbana”

is a foundational perspective for the great Buddhist teacher, Nagarjuna. The Mahayana tradition has claimed Nagarjuna as one their major philosophers.

Reflections:

Section 38 opens with a passage much loved and quoted by Western Vipassana teachers. However, the passage is often slightly misquoted as “The Buddha teaches one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering.” Do you think there is any significant difference between this quote and the original as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi?

In section 42 the Buddha declares his teaching as being clear, open, evident, and free of patchwork. What do you think this means?

Consider more carefully Ariththa’s view that obstructions are not really obstructions on the Buddhist path. Can you recollect ever reading or hearing Buddhist teachers say something akin to the idea that obstructions (e.g., defilements or attachments) are not really obstructions? How do you think the Buddha might have responded had he heard these similar teachings?