

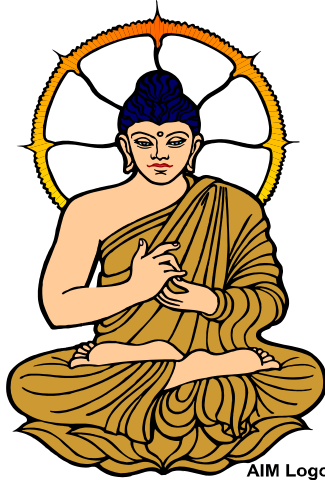
Selected Discourses from The Suttanipāta



by
Bhikkhu Pesala

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Bhikkhu Pesala

Association for Insight Meditation

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Foreword

These translations are my own. They differ on some key points from those of Bhikkhu Bodhi, Ajahn Thanissaro, and other translators. Translation from Pāli to English is an art rather than a science. My aim has always been to make them easy to understand rather than being literal. The meaning sometimes only becomes clear on knowing the context of the discourse.

In several places I have added the Pāli term in parenthesis. An index serves as a glossary of Pāli terms used in the translation.

Kasibhāradvāja Suttaṃ

(Sn.12)

A Discourse to the Farmer Bhāradvāja

Thus have I heard — At one time the Blessed One was dwelling among the Maghadans at the southern hill, near the brahmin village of Ekanāḷa. On that occasion five hundred ploughs of a farmer of the Bhāradvāja brahmin clan were at work sowing the fields. In the morning, the Blessed One, having dressed and taking the almsbowl and double-robe approached the place where the farmer Bhāradvāja was working. On that occasion the farmer Bhāradvāja was distributing food. Then the Blessed One approached the place of food distribution and stood at one side.

The farmer Bhāradvāja saw the Blessed One standing there for alms. Having seen the Blessed One, he said: “I, recluse, plough and sow, and having ploughed and sown, I eat. You too, recluse, should plough and sow, and having ploughed and sown you should eat.”

“I too, Brāhmaṇa, plough and sow, and having ploughed and sown, I eat.”

“We do not see the Venerable Gotama’s yoke, or plough, or plough-share, or goad, or oxen. However, the Venerable Gotama says: “I too, Brāhmaṇa, plough and sow, and having ploughed and sown, I eat.”

Then the farmer of the Bhāradvāja brahmin clan addressed the Blessed One in verse:—

“You claim to be a farmer, but we see no ploughing.

We ask about your ploughing, let us know about your ploughing.”

[The Blessed One replied]

“Confidence is the seed,¹ austerity is the rain,² wisdom is my yoke and plough.

Modesty is the beam, mind is the straps, mindfulness my goad and plough-share.

“My bodily action and speech are guarded, my stomach restrained regarding food.

The truth destroys the weeds, gentleness is my release.

¹ [As it is said in the [Caṅki Sutta](#)]: “When faith is born he approaches, having approached he sits close ...” so faith or confidence is the seed of all the good states that follow from it. (SnA.i.145)

² Just as rain prevents the farmer’s seeds from withering, austerity prevents confidence from withering. Here, austerity (*tapo*) refers to sense-faculty restraint. (SnA.i.145)

“Exertion is my yoked oxen that bring me to freedom from bondage.
Going without turning back, having gone where one does not
grieve.

“In this way ploughing is done, bearing the fruit of immortality.
Having ploughed this ploughing, one is released from all
suffering.”

Then the brahmin farmer Bhāradvāja having filled a large bronze bowl with milk rice and having paid homage placed it near him saying: “May the Venerable Gotama eat the milk rice. The venerable is a farmer as the Venerable Gotama ploughs and farms the fruit of immortality.”

“I do not eat food obtained by reciting verses, brāhmaṇa, this is not the way of those who see rightly.

The Buddhas refuse what is gained by chanting verses, this, brāhmaṇa, is not their mode of livelihood.”

“To the accomplished great sage who has destroyed the outflows and tranquillised remorse,
Other food and drink should be offered; that is the field of merit.”

“To whom then, venerable Gotama, should I give this milk-rice?”

“I do not see, brāhmaṇa, in the world with its gods, māras, brahmas, with its recluses and priests, its gods and men, except for a Tathāgata or a Tathāgata’s disciple anyone who could properly digest this milk-rice. So, brāhmaṇa, you should discard this milk-rice in a place where there is no grass or drop it into water without life.”

Then the brahmin farmer Bhāradvāja dropped that milk-rice into water without life. Then that milk-rice when thrown into water hissed and sizzled, boiled and steamed. Like a plough-share heated the whole day when thrown into water hisses and sizzles, boils and steams, likewise that milk-rice when thrown into water hissed and sizzled, boiled and steamed.

Then the brahmin farmer Bhāradvāja, in awe with his hair standing on end, approached the Blessed One, having approached and fallen down with his head at the feet of Blessed One, said to the Blessed One: “It is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvellous, venerable sir! It is as if, venerable sir, someone had set upright what had been overturned, revealed what was hidden, pointed out the path to one who was lost, brought a light into the darkness so that those with eyes can see. Thus, venerable sir, the Blessed One has explained the Dhamma in various ways. I go for refuge to the Blessed One,

to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha. May I obtain the going-forth in the presence of the Venerable Gotama, may I obtain ordination?"

The brahmin farmer Bhāradvāja obtained the going forth in the presence of the Blessed One, he obtained ordination. Before long the Venerable Bhāradvāja dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, striving energetically and resolute, realised by direct knowledge in this very life the goal of the holy life for the sake of which sons of good families rightly go forth from the household life to homelessness, and abided in it, knowing: "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what ought to be done has been done, there will be no more of this." The Venerable Bhāradvāja become another of the Arahants.

Parābhava Suttam

(Sn.18)

The Causes of Downfall

Thus have I heard — At one time the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in the Prince Jeta grove in Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then a certain deity, when the night was far spent, illuminating the entire Jeta grove approached the Blessed One. Having approached he paid homage to the Blessed One and stood at once side. Standing at one side that deity addressed the Blessed in verse:¹

“I wish to ask you, Gotama, about a man who suffers downfall.
I have approached you to ask about the causes of downfall.

[The Buddha replied:]

“Easily known is the one who progresses, easily known is the one who declines.
One who loves the truth progresses, one who detests the truth declines.

[The deity asked again:]

“Thus we understand the first cause of downfall.
We ask the Blessed One about the second cause of downfall?²

[The Buddha replied:]

“He is fond of the wicked,³ having no affection for the peaceful.
He approves of the doctrine of the wicked, this is the cause of downfall.

“Slothful by nature, talkative, a man without energy.
Lazy, angry and irascible, this is the cause of downfall.

“Whose mother or father are decrepit, their youthfulness gone,
Though affluent, if one does not support them, this is the cause of downfall.

¹ The introduction is identical to that of the [Maṅgala Sutta](#), which asks about auspicious signs.

² This verse is repeated after each reply, but with different numbers. Hereafter, they are omitted from my translation.

³ According to the Commentary, wicked (*asanta*) refers to the six heretical teachers, and wicked doctrines refers to the 62 wrong-views. The peaceful (*santa*) refers to the Buddha and his disciples, and Pacceka Buddhas, who have tranquillised the defilements.

“Whoever deceives a priest or recluse, or another alms mendicant,
By telling lies, this is the cause of downfall.

“The man who has abundant wealth and gold.
Eating delicious food alone, this is the cause of downfall.

“The man who is obdurate due to his birth, wealth, or clan,
Looking down on his own relatives, this is the cause of downfall.

“The man who is a womaniser, drunkard, or gambler.
Squandering all that he earns, this is the cause of downfall.

“Not content with his own wife, he visits prostitutes,
Corrupting the wives of others, this is the cause of downfall.

“Though past his youth, he brings a young wife with breasts like
the Timbaru fruit.¹
Due to jealousy for her he cannot sleep, this is the cause of
downfall.

“A woman addicted to drink,² a spendthrift, or a man like that,
Placing such a one in authority, this is the cause of downfall.

“One of little wealth, with great ambition, from a family of rulers,
Seeks power over others, this is the cause of downfall.

“These causes of downfall in the world, a wise man considers
carefully.
Endowed with noble one’s vision, he is blessed with happiness.”

¹ *Strychnos nux vomica*. It has a firm fruit the size of a large apple. It is probably no accident that the Timbaru fruit was used for comparison, as it contains the powerful toxin, strychnine. The Commentary glosses: *Timbarutthaninti timbaruphalasadisatthaniṃ taruṇadārikaṃ* = “A young girl with breasts like Timbaru fruits.” Wealthy men have always been able to obtain wives much younger than themselves. Being already married has never been a problem. Millionaires either keep a mistress or get a divorce if polygamy is illegal. In cultures where daughters are treated like one’s own property, marriages of teenage girls to older men is still common.

² The Commentary glosses: “Greedy for fish, meat, etc.,” i.e. addicted to sensual indulgence.

Vasala Suttam

(Sn.20)

The Outcaste

Thus have I heard — At one time the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in the Prince Jeta grove in Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then, in the morning, having dressed and taking the double-robe and almsbowl, the Blessed One entered Sāvatti for alms. On that occasion, in the dwelling of a fire-worshipping brahmin, Aggika Bhāradvāja, the fire was lit and the sacrifice was prepared. Then as the Blessed One was walking from house to house for alms he arrived at the dwelling of the brahmin Aggika Bhāradvāja. The brahmin Aggika Bhāradvāja saw him coming from a distance. Having seen him he said to the Blessed One: “Stop there shaveling! Stop there recluse! Stop there outcaste!”

When this was said, the Blessed One said to the brahmin Aggika Bhāradvāja: “Do you know, brahmin, what an outcaste is? What makes one an outcaste?”

“No, friend Gotama,¹ I do not know what an outcaste is. What makes one an outcaste. It would be good if the venerable Gotama would teach me about this matter, so that I would know what an outcaste is, what makes one an outcaste.”

“Then, brahmin, listen and pay careful attention, I will speak.”

“Very well, friend,” the brahmin Aggika Bhāradvāja replied to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said:—

“The man who is angry, fault-finding, evil-minded, and envious.

A hypocrite whose views are wrong, know him as an outcaste.

“Whether once-born or twice-born,² whoever injures living beings,

Who has no compassion for living things, know him as an outcaste.

“Whoever destroys and besieges villages and towns,

Who is known as an oppressor, know him as an outcaste.

“In villages or forests, whatever belongs to others,

Whoever take by theft, know him as an outcaste.

¹ “*Bho*” — a familiar form of address used when speaking to equals or inferiors. The term “*Bhavam*,” which the brahmin uses when asking the Buddha to teach him is more respectful.

² Twice-born are those beings born from eggs such as birds and reptiles. Fertile eggs are living, so removing them from the nest breaks the first precept regarding killing.

- “Whoever, having incurred debts, when pressed to pay up,
Claims, ‘I am not indebted to you,’ know him as an outcaste.
- “Whoever desiring any little thing, takes it, having killed or
beaten¹
a person going along a path, know him as an outcaste.
- “The man who, for his own sake, for that of others, or for wealth,
Commits perjury in court, know him as an outcaste.
- “Whoever has affairs with the wives of his relatives or friends,
Whether by force or by mutual affection, know him as an outcaste.
- “Whoever, though affluent and able, does not support his mother
or father
Who are decrepit with youthfulness gone, know him as an
outcaste.
- “Whoever strikes his mother or father, brother, sister, or mother
or father-in-law,
Or harasses them with speech,² know him as an outcaste.
- “Whoever being asked for beneficial advice, exhorts to do what
is harmful,
Speaking deceitfully in riddles, know him as an outcaste.
- “Whoever, having done an evil deed, not wishing others to know,
Concealing his behaviour, know him as an outcaste.
- “Whoever having gone to another family, and having eaten
delicious food,
Does not reciprocate their hospitality, know him as an outcaste.
- “Whoever deceives a priest, a recluse, or another who lives on
alms,
By lies and deceit, know him as an outcaste.
- “Whoever, when a priest or recluse comes at the meal-time,
Harasses him with speech and does not give, know him as an
outcaste.

¹ The Commentary glosses: *hantvā* as having killed (*māretvā*), having beaten (*koṭṭvā*), he takes their property.

² He strikes them with his hand, a clod, or with something else, or angers them with harsh speech.

“Whoever speaks empty words,¹ entangled in ignorance,
Longing for trivial gains, know him as an outcaste.

“Whoever exalts himself, and denigrates others,
Wallowing in conceit, know him as an outcaste.

“Wrathful and stingy, of evil desires, envious and fraudulent.
Shameless and reckless, know him as an outcaste.

“Whoever reviles the Buddha or his disciples,
Whether one gone-forth or a householder, know him as an
outcaste.

“Whoever is not an Arahant, who claims to be an Arahant,²
He is the greatest thief in the world, he is the lowest of outcastes.

“Thus I have shown those who are outcastes.
Not by birth is one an outcaste, not by birth is one a brahmin.³
By kamma one is an outcaste, by kamma one is a brahmin.

“Know this too by this illustration that I will give.
The son of an outcaste clan of dog-cookers,⁴ the famous Mātaṅga.

“Mātaṅga⁵ attained the pinnacle of fame, so hard to achieve.
Many nobles and brahmins came to serve him.

¹ He makes predictions that on such and such a day this or that will happen. Astrology and divination are animal arts (*tiracchāna vijjā*) that are a wrong-livelihood for monks.

² An offence of defeat for a Buddhist monk or nun.

³ Does this conflict with the teaching in the Lesser Discourse on the Analysis of Kamma, which teaches that rebirth in a low family is due to not showing due respect to those deserving respect such as parents, teachers, and recluses; and that being reborn into a family of high status is due to paying due respect? No! It does not conflict with that teaching. The result of past kamma bears fruit at the time of birth. This teaching is about the lack of morality and good character that justifies someone being regarded as an outcaste; as someone to be shunned. Character depends on both nature and nurture. Status depends on wealth and influence. The Buddha tells the story of Mātaṅga to illustrate the dominance of character over status. One could cite many such cases from the present-day. Character is easily spoiled by wealth or fame. Being born poor and of low social status is certainly a disadvantage, but it is not an indicator of weak character and defective morality.

⁴ Sopāka is the name of a very low-caste that the PTS dictionary cross-references to **Sapāka** = dog-cooker, an outcaste.

⁵ Although the Buddha did not state it in this discourse, the Bodhisatta was born as Mātaṅga in one of his previous existences. The dustless highway in the following verse refers to the practise of chastity and the Sublime States (*Brahmavihāra*), and not to the Noble Eightfold Path leading to nibbāna as in other translations. Had he attained nibbāna as Mātaṅga, the Bodhisatta would not have taken rebirth again in the human realm. The Suttanipāta Commentary (Sn.A.i.184-191) tells the story of Mātaṅga in some detail.

“Mounting the celestial chariot, driving on the dustless highway.
Having freed himself from sensual passion, he arose in the
Brahma realm.

His birth did not prevent him from rebirth in the Brahma realm.

“Brahmins born into a family of those who recited the mantras,
Their evil deeds are always to be seen.

“In this very life they are despised, and hereafter they go to a bad
destination.

Their birth does not protect them from an evil destination or
being despised.

“Not by birth is one an outcaste, not by birth is one a brahmin.

By kamma one is an outcaste, by kamma one is a brahmin.”

When this was said, the brahmin Aggika Bhāradvāja said to the Blessed One: “Excellent, Venerable Gotama, magnificent, Venerable Gotama! It is as if, Venerable Gotama, what was overturned was set upright, what was hidden was revealed, the right way was pointed out to someone who was lost, or a light was lit in the darkness so that those with eyes could see. Thus, the truth has been explained in various ways by the Venerable Gotama. I go for refuge to the Venerable Gotama, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha of monks. May the Venerable Gotama regard me as a disciple gone to him for refuge from today onwards for as long as I live.”

Āmagandha Suttam

(Sn.42)

The Stench

1. Millet, cingula beans and peas, edible leaves and roots, the fruit of any creeper; the virtuous who eat these, obtained justly, do not tell lies out of sensuous delight.
2. O Kassapa, you who eat any food given by others, which is well-prepared, nicely arranged, pure and appealing; he who enjoys such food made with rice, eats [rotting flesh that emits a] stench.
3. O brahmin, although you say that the charge of stench does not apply to you whilst eating rice with well-prepared fowl, yet I inquire the meaning of this from you: of what kind is your stench?
4. **The Buddha Kassapa:** Taking life, beating, wounding, binding, stealing, lying, deceiving, worthless knowledge, adultery; this is stench. Not the eating of meat.
5. In this world those individuals who are unrestrained in sensual pleasures, who are greedy for sweet things, who are associated with impure actions, who are of nihilistic views, [which are] crooked and difficult to follow, this is stench. Not the eating of meat.
6. In this world those who are rude, arrogant, backbiting, treacherous, unkind, excessively egoistic, miserly, and do not give anything to anybody; this is stench. Not the eating of meat.
7. Anger, pride, obstinacy, antagonism, deceit, envy, boasting, excessive egoism, association with the immoral; this is stench. Not the eating of meat.
8. Those who are of bad morals, refuse to pay their debts, slanderous, deceitful in their dealings, pretentious, those who in this world, being the vilest of men, commit such wrong things; this is stench. Not the eating of meat.
9. Those persons who, in this world, are uncontrolled towards living beings, who are bent on injuring others, having taken their belongings; immoral, cruel, harsh, disrespectful; this is stench. Not the eating of meat.
10. Those who attack these living beings either out of greed or of hostility and are always bent upon evil, go to darkness after death, and fall headlong into woeful states; this is stench. Not the eating of meat.

11. Abstaining from fish and meat, nakedness, shaving of the head, matted hair, smearing with ashes, wearing rough deerskins, attending the sacrificial fire; none of the various penances in the world performed for unhealthy ends, neither incantations, oblations, sacrifices nor seasonal observances, purify a person who has not overcome his doubts.
12. He who lives with his senses guarded and conquered and is established in the Dhamma, delights in uprightness and gentleness; who has gone beyond attachments and has overcome all sorrows; that wise man does not cling to what is seen and heard.
13. Thus the Buddha Kassapa preached this again and again. That ascetic who was well-versed in the [Vedic] hymns understood it. The sage who is free from defilements, non-attached and difficult to follow, uttered this [discourse] in beautiful stanzas.
14. Thus having listened to the well-spoken words of the Buddha who is free from defilements, which end all misery, he worshipped the Tathāgata with humble mind and requested to be admitted into the Order at that very place.

(Sutta Nipāta, Hammalawa Saddhātissa, Curzon Press)

Commentary to the Āmagandha Sutta

Where was the Āmagandha Sutta taught? By whom was it taught, and to whom? The Commentary to a Sutta often adds important information about the context in which the teaching was given. Out of context, some discourses can easily be misunderstood.

The Commentary traces the origin of this sutta to a period before the appearance of Buddha Gotama. A Brahmin named Āmagandha led the life of a hermit along with five hundred disciples. They lived in the Himalayan foot hills where they had a hermitage and lived on forest fruits and roots. They abstained completely from fish and meat. Due to a deficiency of salt in their diet, all of the hermits suffered from jaundice. For this reason they went to a border village to beg for salt and vinegar. Being warmly invited by the villagers who respectfully provided them with almsfood, they spent four months a year in dwellings built by the villagers.

Then the Buddha arose in the world and after setting in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma, he arrived at Sāvatti after some years. While residing there, the Buddha saw these hermits in his divine eye and realised that they had the necessary perfections for the attainment of Arahantship. Accordingly, the Buddha went to the village where they stayed for four months of the year,

and taught the Dhamma to the villagers. The villagers became Stream-winners, Once-returners, and Non-returners, while a few of them entered the Saṅgha and became Arahants.

When the hermits led by Āmagandha came to the village to seek salt as usual, they noticed a conspicuous change in the behaviour of the villagers. The villagers no longer greeted them with the great excitement that they had shown previously. Āmagandha asked whether there was a famine, or if they had been punished by the king, or whether there was some fault in the conduct of the hermits to explain the transformation of the village. The villagers told him about the arrival of the Buddha, whose teaching of the Dhamma they had heard, and from which they had all benefited immensely. When the hermit Āmagandha heard the word "Buddha," he asked, "Did you say 'Buddha,' householder? Even this sound is rare to hear in this world." When the householder confirmed it he was pleased and asked further, "Does the Buddha eat stench?" The householder asked, "What is this stench?" Āmagandha replied, "Fish and meat is called stench." The householder replied, "Venerable sir, the Buddha does eat fish and meat." Disappointed at this, Āmagandha resolved to go and see the Buddha and ask him about it himself.

Having asked where the Buddha stayed, Āmagandha set off hastily towards the Jetavana grove at Sāvatti, accompanied by the five hundred hermits. When the hermits arrived, the Buddha was seated in the fourfold assembly to teach the Dhamma. After mutual exchange of friendly greetings, the hermit Āmagandha asked the Buddha if he avoided eating fish and meat, which he considered to be stench. The Buddha replied that fish and meat should not be considered as stench. On the other hand, all kinds of mental defilements and unwholesome deeds should be regarded as stench. To convince Āmagandha completely, the Buddha recollected the same dialogue between himself and the Buddha Kassapa.

At that time the Bodhisatta had been a Brahmin by the name of Tissa who had asked the same question. Āmagandha's pride was humbled, and he entered the Saṅgha along with his five hundred disciples, who all attained Arahantship.

Brāhmaṇadhammika Suttaṃ

(Sn.50)

The Good Conduct of the Brahmin

Introduction

This discourse is referenced by the late Venerable Sayādaw in his discourse on cows and intoxicants (Goṇasurā Dīpanī). The section on cows is translated as **Cow Dhamma**. Largely due to the influence of this famous Sayādaw the eating of beef is not common in Burma. The Burmese are rarely vegetarians — eating pork, goat, duck, chicken, and all manner of sea-food — but not often eating beef. The late Sayādaw emphasised the debt of gratitude owed to cattle that — in his era — laboured on farms pulling ploughs, threshing the crops, and transporting goods to market, as well as providing milk and butter.

There are ten kinds of meat proscribed by the Buddha in the Vinaya Mahāvagga as not allowable to be eaten by monks, but beef is not one of them. Nevertheless, this discourse indicates that cattle have a special place in Buddhism, though they are not sacred as in Hinduism. There are ten kinds of meat not allowable for monks (even if free from the three defects of seeing, hearing, or thinking that the animal has been slaughtered to offer almsfood), with the reasons why they are unsuitable for almsfood:

1. Human flesh (not helpful for arousing faith in those who have no faith)
2. Elephant flesh (a symbol of royalty, and the king might disapprove)
3. Horse flesh (a symbol of royalty, and the king might disapprove)
4. Dog's flesh (disgusting)
5. Snake flesh (disgusting, and some *nāgā* might harm the monks)
6. Lion's flesh (danger from lions)
7. Tiger's flesh (danger from tigers)
8. Panther/leopard's flesh (danger from panthers)
9. Bear's flesh (danger from bears)
10. Hyena's flesh (danger from hyenas).

The ancient brahmins referred to lived during the time of King Okkāka, the first king of the Sakyan race. It is the nature of traditions to degrade over many generations. The Saṅgha has suffered the same fate as the ancient brahmins, no longer being content with the four basic requisites, but in many cases falling under the influence of sensual pleasures. The remedy is to study and practise the teachings so that one again becomes intent on the pursuit of knowledge and insight. Lay Buddhists should do the same, becoming intent on the pursuit of knowledge and insight rather than on accumulating mundane merit.

Translation

Thus have I heard — At one time the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in Prince Jeta's grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then a large number of wealthy brahmins, decrepit, venerable, elderly, having reached the end of life, approached the Blessed One; having approached, they exchanged polite and friendly greetings. Having engaged in friendly conversation, they sat down at one side. Sitting at one side, those wealthy brahmins said to the Blessed One: "Are the brahmins of today seen to follow the practices of the ancient brahmins?"

"No, brahmins, the brahmins of today do not follow the practices of the ancient brahmins."

"It would be good if the Venerable Gotama would speak about the practices of the ancient brahmins, if it is not troublesome to the Venerable Gotama."

"Then, brahmins, listen and pay careful attention, I will speak."

"Very well, venerable sir," those wealthy brahmins replied to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this:—

"The sages of former times, virtuous and self-controlled,
Renouncing the five strands of sensuality, they lived intent on
their own welfare.

"The ancient brahmins kept no cattle, grain, nor wealth.
Learning and recitation was their wealth and grain, the brahmins
guarded this treasure.

"Whatever food was placed at their door,
They regarded it as given by those with faith in seekers.

"With cloths of various colours, beds and dwellings,
Prosperous people of the country honoured those brahmins.

"The brahmins were inviolable, they were invincible, being
protected by the truth.
No one obstructed them, the doors of all households were open
for them.

"Practising chastity until the age of forty-eight.
Learning and good conduct was the brahmins' quest.

“The brahmins did not go to others’ wives, neither did they purchase a wife.

Only living together by mutual affection, they delighted in each other’s company.

“Except during the fertile season, after menstruation had ceased, The brahmins did not engage in sexual intercourse.

“Chastity, morality, integrity, gentleness, and austerity, Restraint, harmlessness, and patience they praised.

“Whoever was supreme among them, observed constant chastity. He did not engage in sexual intercourse, not even in his dreams.

“He fulfils his training, those with discretion, Praise chastity, morality, and patience.

“Rice, bedding, cloths, ghee, and oil received as alms, Collected righteously, they made an offering from them.

“In making offerings, they did not kill cattle. Like our mother, father, brother, or other relatives, Cattle are our best friends, since they produce medicines.

“They give food, strength, beauty, and happiness, Knowing these benefits, they did not kill cattle.

“Refined, corpulent, handsome, and honoured, The brahmins were attentive to their duties to be done and avoided.

While these were maintained, their community prospered.

“They became corrupt, having seen worthless things — Decorated palaces and bejewelled women.

“Chariots yoked with thoroughbreds, beautifully decorated Gateways and dwellings, with well-proportioned sections precisely measured.

“Enjoyment of herds of cattle, harems of lovely women, Excellent human wealth, were coveted by the brahmins.

“They composed verses and approached King Okkāka, Saying, ‘You have abundant wealth, sacrifice and offer wealth to us.’

“Persuaded by the brahmins, the king, the lord of chariots,
Performed the horse sacrifice, the human sacrifice,¹
Sacrificed wealth to the brahmins, without holding back.

“Cattle, beds, clothes, adorned women,
Chariots pulled by thoroughbreds, and beautifully decorated,
Charming dwellings, divided into well-proportioned rooms,
Filled with various grains, he gave wealth to the brahmins.

“They, having obtained wealth, agreed to storing it,
Overwhelmed by desire, their craving grew all the more.
Having composed verses, they approached Okkāka again.

“Like water and earth, gold and grain,
Thus are cattle to human beings, requisites for life,
Sacrifice much property, sacrifice great wealth.’

“By that the king, the lord of chariots, persuaded by the brahmins,
Had several hundred thousand cattle slaughtered in sacrifice.

“Neither with hooves nor horns, did they harm anyone,
The cattle were as tame as lambs, giving buckets of milk,
Taking them by the horns, the king slaughtered them with a
sword.

“Then the gods and ancestors, Indra, the jealous gods and demons
Cried out, ‘This is unjust,’ as the sword fell on the cows.

“In former times there were three diseases: desire, hunger, and
decay,
From the slaughter of cattle, ninety-eight came into existence.²

¹ It seems improbable that human beings or horses were sacrificially slaughtered to honour the brahmins. It is more likely that horses were donated to them along with grooms and charioteers.

² There is ample evidence that a vegetarian diet is healthier than one that relies heavily on meat, especially red meat. During the Buddha’s time nine foods were regarded as superior foods, which a monk could not request for his own use unless sick: ghee, butter, oil, honey, palm-sugar, fish, meat, milk, and curds. The staple diet of grains, pulses, and vegetables was apparently the norm, while wealthy donors offered the superior foods to the monks, resulting in them becoming sick. To combat these digestive problems the Buddha allowed (recommended) the monks to do sweeping. The first five of these superior foods were permitted as seven-day medicines for monks to take when famished due to being unable to digest regular almsfood at the right time. They can be consumed at any time, and stored until before dawn on the eighth day after receiving them.

“This unrighteous cruelty has come down from the ancient brahmins.

The slaughter of innocent beasts, the sacrificing priests fell from righteousness.

“Thus this ancient practice of the ancients blamed by the wise,
Whenever this is seen the sacrificing priests are blamed by the people.

“Thus when righteousness was lost workers and merchants were divided,
Many warriors were divided, and wives disregarded their husbands.

“Warriors, brahmins and others who protected their clans,
Disregarding reputation of birth,¹ came under the sway of sensuality.”

When this had been said, those wealthy brahmins said to the Blessed One: “It is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvellous, venerable sir! It is as if, venerable sir, someone had set upright what had been overturned, revealed what was hidden, pointed out the path to one who was lost, brought a light into the darkness so that those with eyes can see. Thus, venerable sir, the Blessed One has explained the Dhamma in various ways. We go for refuge to the Blessed One, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha. May the Blessed One regard us as disciples who have taken refuge from today for as long as we shall live.”

¹ Status in Indian society was structured according to four main castes: brahmins, warriors, merchants, and employed workers, with beggars, slaves, garbage collectors, fishermen, slaughtermen, or leather-workers being regarded as outcastes. The Buddha redefined the meaning of caste in the Caṇḍāla Sutta and the *Brahmaṇavagga* of the Dhammapada — teaching that it was conduct that made one a brahmin or an outcaste, and not birth. Nevertheless, worldly values determined, and still determine, to a great extent, that one would not marry outside of one’s current social status. Parents would seek a suitable bride for their son from a family of similar social status. Due to sensual desire, one might marry another below one’s social status. See also the *Soṇa Sutta*, wherein the decline in the standards of brahmins during the Buddha’s time is taught. The Sakyans, who were of the warrior caste, were also too proud of their status due to birth as shown by the story of the Buddha’s cousin, Mahānāma.

Padhāna Suttaṃ

(Sn.74)

Striving



Fasting Buddha:

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Introduction

While the Bodhisatta was practising austerities for six years he fasted so severely that his flesh wasted away, and his former athletic physique was transformed to that of a living skeleton. It was after this period of severe austerity that he gave up fasting and extreme austerities, taking enough food to regain his health and strength, before he sat under the Bodhi tree for the final struggle against Māra.

The Bodhisatta Gotama had to undergo these austerities due to having insulted the Buddha Kassapa in an earlier birth as the Brahmin Jotipāla, when he had disparaged the Buddha as a shaven-headed recluse. Not all Bodhisattas have to undertake austere practices in the final existence.

The deity known as Māra, Namuci, or Pāpima (the evil one) approached the Buddha on several occasions during his life, and finally in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta to request the Buddha to pass away. The Buddha then replied that his final demise would occur in three months from that time, which declaration caused a great earthquake.

There are five kinds of Māra, but here Māra devaputta, the evil deity, is clearly meant. In his reply to Māra, the Bodhisatta names the ten defilements which are the armies of Māra. If “Māra” meant the mental defilements in every context, then prior to his Enlightenment (as here) the Bodhisatta might perhaps have entertained doubts, sensual thoughts, or discontent, but the Bodhisatta had cultivated the perfections for 91 aeons to reach the eve of his final liberation. Certainly, after his full awakening to Buddhahood, he could not have had any mental defilements, so we should conclude that Māra refers to an actual deity whenever he appears to the Blessed One in a vain attempt to obstruct him.

Translation

“I was engaged in striving on the banks of the river Nerañjara,
Deep in concentration, exerting strenuously to gain freedom
from bondage.

“Then Namuci¹ approached and spoke to me with words
[seeming] compassionate:

‘You are so thin and discoloured, you are close to death.’

“A thousand parts belong to death, only one part of you is alive.
Live, friend, life is better than death, live and make merits.’

¹ A name for Māra, which the Commentary glosses as “*Na muñcati*,” one who does not free others.

- “You could live the holy-life, performing fire sacrifices.
You would make great merit, what is the use of striving?”
- “The path of striving is difficult, painful, and hard to master.’
Speaking these verses, Māra stood in the Buddha’s presence.
- “Then the Buddha said to Māra, who had spoken these words:
‘Evil one, the kinsman of heedlessness, why have you come here?’
- “I have no need of even the slightest merit.
Speak about merit to those who have need of it.
- “I possess confidence, energy, and wisdom,
Thus I am resolute too, why do you ask me to live?
- “Even the rivers and streams dry up when the wind blows,
So why shouldn’t my blood dry up in this struggle?
- “Let the blood dry up, let the bile and phlegm dry up.
As my flesh wastes away, my mind gets more purified.
Mindfulness and wisdom increase, concentration becomes firm.
- “Dwelling thus, experiencing extreme pain,
My mind does not incline to sensuality. Behold the purity of being!
- “Sensuality is your first army, your second is discontent.
Your third is hunger and thirst, your fourth is called craving.
- “Your fifth is sloth and torpor, the sixth is called cowardice.
The seventh is doubt, and the eighth is stubbornness and disrespect.
- “Gain, reputation, and honour, and fame gained by wrong means,
One praises oneself and disparages others.
- “These, Namuci, are your [ten] armies, the fighting forces of darkness.
One who is not valiant will not defeat them, and having defeated
them gain bliss.
- “I wear this crest of muñja grass,¹ life is disgusting to me,
Death in battle is better for me, than to live on defeated.
- “Submerged herein some recluses and priests are unseen.
They do not know the path that the well-disciplined ones follow.

¹ A warrior wears this crest in battle to show that he is ready to die rather than be captured.

“Having seen his armies all around with Māra mounted on his elephant,

I go forward into battle, may I not be dislodged from my seat.

“The world with its deities cannot overcome your army,
But I will destroy it with wisdom, like an unbaked pot with a rock.

“Having mastered my thoughts, and with mindfulness firmly established,

I will wander from country to country, training many disciples.

“Heedful and resolute, they will practise my teaching,
Contrary to your wish, they will go where they will not grieve.”

“For seven years¹ I have followed the Blessed One step by step,
I did not get any chance to access the fully awakened and mindful one.

“Like a stone with the appearance of fat circled around by a crow,
[Thinking] perhaps I will find something tender here, something to eat.

“Not getting anything to eat, the crow departed.
Like the crow pecking at a rock, we depart from Gotama.”

“He was so upset that he dropped the lute that he was carrying.
The evil spirit departed from there at once.”

¹ Why seven and not six? My opinion is that Māra tried to prevent the Bodhisatta from leaving the palace. One year would cover the period of his wife’s pregnancy, which would surely give rise to conflicts regarding his responsibilities to his wife and son-to-be. It was on hearing the news of his son’s birth that the Bodhisatta declared, “A fetter (*rāhula*) has arisen.” Hence, King Suddhodana had his grandson named as “Rāhula.” After considering that his son, like everyone else, was not yet free from aging and death, the Bodhisatta decided that his first duty was to seek some means to escape from the endless cycle of birth and death. Instead of being a fetter, the birth of his son was the final push that he needed to set out on his noble quest for Enlightenment, so he left at once, before any feelings of attachment for his son could develop.

Dhammika Suttaṃ

(Sn.66)

Skilful Practice

Thus have I heard:– At one time the Blessed one was dwelling at Prince Jeta’s grove, at Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then the lay-disciple Dhammika, together with five hundred disciples, approached the Blessed One; having approached, they paid homage to the Blessed One and sat down at once side. Sitting there, the lay-disciple Dhammika addressed the Blessed One in verse:–

“I ask Gotama of profound wisdom, what is the skilful practice for a disciple.

For one who has gone forth into homelessness, and for one who is a householder.

“For you know the destiny of the world with its gods, and the way to the beyond.

There is no-one comparable to you in seeing the most subtle truth.

“Having perfectly realised all knowledge, out of compassion you show it to living beings

You reveal what is hidden, you are omniscient, stainless, and enlighten the world.

“The elephant god Erāvaṇa, having heard that you were the conqueror, came to see you.

Having heard what you said, he expressed his appreciation saying “Well said!”

“The king of gods, Vessavaṇa, too, came to question you.

He was also delighted with your answer when you spoke to him.

“None of those disputing heretics, neither the Ājivakā nor the Nigaṇṭhā

Can overcome you in debate, as one standing still cannot overtake one walking swiftly.

“These disputing brahmins, whoever they may be,

All of the disputants expect an explanation from you.

“This profound and blissful teaching, which is well taught by the Blessed One

We are all desirous of hearing, please teach us as requested.

“Let all of these monks and lay disciples seated here to listen to you,
Heed the stainless Buddha’s teaching as gods heed the well-
spoken words of Vasava.

The Buddha:

“O monks, listen to me, I will teach the scrupulous practice.
Let the wise man intent on progress practice suitably for one
gone forth.

“Let a monk not walk for alms into the village at the wrong time.¹
Temptations assail one who walks at the wrong time, so the wise
avoid it.

“Sight, sounds, tastes, smells, and touches intoxicate living beings.
Abandoning desire for these things, one should go at the right
time for breakfast.²

“Having obtained alms, he should sit alone (to eat)
Reflecting inwardly, composed, and undistracted.

“If he should speak to a lay disciple, to a monk or anyone,
He should speak only of the Dhamma, not slandering or
denigrating others.

“Some engage in controversy, but we do not praise those of
inferior wisdom.
They are trapped by defilements as they are deeply attached to
controversy.

¹ The wrong time is during the hours of darkness, or during the day when many people will be in the streets. The right time is after dawn, but before sunrise. This allows householders to offer alms before they have to leave for work, and the monks can be on their way back to the monastery before the streets become crowded and before the sun gets high in the sky.

² A monk can enter the town at the wrong time on some business, e.g. to visit a doctor, or to set out on a journey, but unless there is a valid reason he should stay in the monastery to avoid sense-objects that might defile the mind if he is careless. Normally, he should enter the town only to collect his morning meal (*pātarāsaṃ*). The current practice of having the main meal just before midday and a light breakfast is back to front. The original practice was to take only one meal a day. The Buddha allowed monks to keep back some almsfood to eat later if they were unable to observe the practice of eating only one meal a day, which is what he recommended for health. Forest monks who live properly, rise before dawn, perform some religious duties, then set out for alms at first light. On returning, they eat their meal, wash their almsbowl, then eat nothing else until the following day. They will be famished by 7:00 or 8:00 am if returning to a remote lodging, so they might stop on the return journey to eat their meal.

“Almsfood, dwellings, furniture, and robes should be used with due care,
By a disciple of the supremely wise one who has heard the Dhamma.

“Therefore, being unattached to these requisites,
A monk should be like a drop of water on a lotus leaf.

“I will tell you the duty of a householder, how he becomes a good disciple.
For it is not possible to fulfil the monk’s duty if one possess property.

“Let him not kill, nor destroy life, nor cause others to do it.
Laying aside the stick, let him not punish the strong or the weak.

“Let a disciple not take the property of others knowing that it belongs to them.
Not grabbing, or causing others to grab, he should abandon all stealing.¹

“A wise man shuns unchastity as a pit of glowing embers,
If he is unable to lead a life of chastity, he does not go to another man’s wife.

“When in an assembly or in public let him not speak falsehood.
Neither lying nor causing others to lie, he should abandon all untruthfulness.

“A householder who delights in the Dhamma should not drink intoxicants.
Neither drinking himself or urging others to drink, he does not praise intoxication.

“Fools commit evil due to drunkenness, and make others heedless too.
One should avoid this demerit, the madness and delusion of fools.

“Neither killing, stealing, telling lies, nor drinking intoxicants,
Avoiding unchastity and not eating at the wrong time at night.

¹ There are many ways to take what is not given. The precept covers all dishonest means of obtaining property, whether that be by robbery, protection rackets, theft, fraud, blackmail, or overcharging by manipulating the price of scarce commodities. A good disciple should not engage in profiteering, coercion, misleading advertising, or deceit of any kind to make a living. Being free from excessive greed, he should be content with a small profit, and do an honest day’s work.

“Not wearing ornaments or perfumes, sleeping on the floor too,
This will be an eightfold observance taught by the Buddha to
remove suffering.

“One should observe the *Uposatha* on the full-moon, new-moon,
and half moon days.
During the three months of the Rains Retreat, and the preceding
and following months.¹

“Then, on the following morning, the wise one who has observed
the uposatha
Should provide suitable food and drink to the community of
monks.

“Let him support his mother and father by pursuing a righteous
livelihood.
The householder who is diligent in these duties is reborn among
the radiant gods.”²

¹ The text says the *Uposatha* days of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth. A lunar month is about 29¼ days. If there are 30 days in a lunar month, then both the full-moon and the new-moon will be fifteen days after the preceding *Uposatha*; if there are 29 days, the second *Uposatha* will fall fourteen days after the preceding one. This Sutta shows that the traditional practice during the Buddha’s time was for lay devotees to observe four *Uposatha* days a month during five months of the year. This was during the month preceding Āsālha (July/August) when the Rains Retreat begins, and the month following the Rains, when the Kathina ceremony is held. During the remaining seven months of the year, the Buddha would set off on a tour of the countryside, stopping only one or two nights at each place on the way, before returning to the place where he would observe the Rains.

² The translation of this discourse on Access to Insight is abridged, so I have made my own translation of the full Sutta by consulting the PTS dictionary. It is a free translation to convey the essential meaning.

Salla Suttam

(Sn.112)

The Arrow

- “There is no indication of the life-span of mortals.
Life is difficult, short, and bound up with suffering.
- “Once born, one is going to die, and there is no avoiding this.
When old age or another cause arrives there is death. That’s how
it is for living beings.
- “Once they are ripe, fruits are always in danger of falling.
It is the same for mortals, who live in constant fear of death.
- “Like clay pots, which once made, are liable to be broken.
All will break up in the end, thus it is with mortals too.
- “The young and the old, the foolish and the wise too.
All are trapped by death, and all face death in the end.
- “When overcome by death, they go to the other world.
Neither a father can save his children, nor relatives their kin.
- “See how, while their relatives are lamenting,
Men are carried off by death. Like cattle led to slaughter.
- “Since the world is thus afflicted with aging and death,
The wise do not sorrow, having understood the nature of the
world.
- “You do not know the path from where he came, nor where he
has gone.
Both are hidden from you, so there is no benefit in grieving.
- “One who laments gains nothing
A fool only harms himself, a wise man would lament if it was
beneficial.
- “From weeping and grieving, no mental peace can come.
It will only lead to greater pain, and bodily harm.
- “He becomes pale and thin, and only harms himself.
He cannot raise the dead, so his lamentation is fruitless.
- “One who cannot abandon grief, is dragged further into sorrow.
Bewailing the dead, one becomes a slave to grief.

“Look at others who are reaping the results of their kamma.
When under the power of death, beings tremble with fear.

“Whatever one expects, the result is something different.
From this comes disappointment, see, that’s how the world is.

“If one lives a hundred years, or even longer than that.
Finally he is separated from relatives, and leaves this life behind.

“Therefore, having heard the Arahant, the Buddha, give up
lamenting.
Having seen one passed away, reflect, “He will not be seen by
me again.”

“As a house that is on fire is extinguished by water,
Likewise, a resolute, wise, intelligent, and skilful man,
Quickly extinguishes his grief, as the wind blows away a tuft of
cotton.

“Lamentation, longing, and sorrow, that is of one’s own making,
One desiring happiness should extract the arrow he has stuck
into himself.

“Having extracted the arrow, he attains mental peace.
Transcending all grief, he is sorrowless and stilled.”

Kāma Suttaṃ

(Sn.151)

A Discourse on Sensual Pleasures

Introduction

The Buddhist Kāma Sutta is poles apart from the infamous Kāma Sutra, an ancient Hindu text on sexuality. Buddhists are not generally puritanical about sexuality, but the Buddhist texts advise treating it with great caution, as one treats a fire in one's own house. The third precept to abstain from sexual misconduct (*kāmesu micchācārā verāmaṇi sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*). In particular, *kāma* refers to sexual relations, but the word covers sensual pleasures of all types. The Commentary makes it clear that not only sexual pleasures are referred to here. Though such coarse pleasures are greatly desired by ordinary mortals, the most refined sensual and aesthetic pleasures suffer from the same defects.

Translation

“One who desires sensual pleasures, having succeeded in his aims,
Will surely be delighted, having obtained what a mortal desires.

“However, one who desires those sensual pleasures,
If those pleasures come to ruin,¹ is oppressed like someone
pierced by an arrow.

“One who avoids sensual pleasures, like one avoids treading on
a snake's head,
Such a one overcomes attachment to this world.

“Fields, clothing, or gold, cattle and horses, slaves and workers,
Women, relatives, various sensual pleasures, a man who
covets these;

“Being feeble will be overpowered, oppressed by troubles,
Suffering will follow him, like water penetrates a damaged ship.

¹ In the Commentarial introduction, a brahmin farmer was anticipating a good harvest. The Buddha, knowing that it would be destroyed, asked the brahmin how his crop was doing. Venerable Sāriputta and Moggallāna also spoke politely to the brahmin. The brahmin therefore promised to offer alms after the sale of his crop. A great storm came just before the brahmin could harvest his crop, and he was greatly disappointed. The Buddha therefore taught him this discourse on the disadvantages of sensual pleasures.

“Therefore a person should always be mindful, avoiding sensual pleasures,
Abandoning them one will cross the flood,¹ as a bailed-out boat reaches the far shore.”

¹ A flood (*ogha*) is often used as a simile for defilements. The brahmin farmer’s crop was ruined by a great flood, and the happiness of human beings is destroyed by the flood of sensuality (*kāmoḡha*). Having abandoned sensual desires, and bailed-out one’s “boat,” a mindful person can cross the river that is in full flood and reach the far shore (a simile for nibbāna).

Attadaṇḍa Suttaṃ

(Sn.182)

Taking Up A Weapon

Introduction

At one time the Buddha's relatives, the Sakyā, were taking up arms to fight with their neighbours, the Koliyā, over the irrigation waters of the river Rohiṇī, which divided their territories. The Buddha admonished them, asking them which was more valuable, blood or water, and the conflict was averted. Out of gratitude, 250 youths from each clan went forth as monks.

Translation

"Fear is born from taking up weapons. See how people fight!
I will tell you of the urgency,¹ that arose in me.

"Seeing the people thrashing about like fish in shallow water,
Having enmity for each other, seeing them alarm² arose in me.

"Throughout the entire world, emptiness pervaded all directions.
Wanting an abode for myself, I saw nowhere that was unoccupied.

"Seeing them locked in continuous conflict I became alarmed.²
Then I perceived a dart, difficult to see, buried deep in their hearts.

"Whoever is pierced by this arrow, runs about in all directions.
However, once it is pulled out, one neither runs nor sinks.

"Therein, whatever skills are learnt in this infatuated world,³
One should not be intent on sensual pleasures,
But should train oneself for nibbāna.

"Truthful and not impudent, honest and free from slander,
The evils of anger, greed, and avarice should be overcome by a sage.

¹ Spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*).

² Alarm (*bhaya*). The Buddha is entirely free from fear, but foreseeing the danger for his relatives, he knew that he needed to intervene immediately to stop pointless slaughter and much evil kamma.

³ Skills are learnt (*sikkhānugīyanti*) in this world to earn a living. Every responsible parent urges their children to get a good education and learn some trade in order to earn a living. Someone who has no skill or qualification can only do some menial labour. The motivation is to enjoy better and more refined sensual pleasures. It is better to be intent on gaining knowledge and skills to help others achieve well-being and happiness, than to be intent on enjoying sensual pleasures.

“Shun sleeping, laziness, and sloth, do not associate with the heedless.

Not remaining conceited, a man should focus on cessation.

“Do not be led into falsehood, do not be infatuated by forms,
Fully understand pride, do not act in haste.

“Do not delight in the old, do not form affection for the new.
Do not sorrow over the past, nor develop craving for what is imagined.¹

“Greed I call the great flood, obsession I call longing.
The foundation of fixation is the mire of sensuality so difficult to transcend.

“The sage, not deviating from the truth, is a brahmin standing on firm ground.
Having relinquished everything, he is indeed called a saint who is calmed.

“The wise man who truly knows, having realised the Dhamma independently,
Behaving rightly in the world, he envies no one here.

“One here who crosses over desire, breaks the bond so hard to transcend.
Neither grieves nor worries, having cut the stream is without bonds.

“Wither away what came before, after let there be nothing.
In between grasp nothing, wandering at peace.

“In all mind and matter, regard nothing as one’s own.
Not grieving for what does not exist, one loses nothing in the world.

“One who does not think, ‘This is mine,’ or ‘That belongs to others,’
Not finding anything as a self, he cannot grieve thinking, ‘This is not mine.’

¹ **Ākāsa:** The sky, space, or a game played in one’s mind. If people cannot enjoy sensual pleasures in the present, they recollect pleasures enjoyed in the past, or fantasize about pleasures that they wish to enjoy in the future. One should abandon day-dreams, and dwell in the present.

“Neither cruel nor greedy, free from desire, he is equanimous everywhere.

That is the benefit that I declare, if asked about one who is unshakeable.

“Desireless, understanding, accumulating nothing.

Abstaining from any endeavour,¹ he sees peace everywhere.

“The sage does not say that he is the same, nor inferior, nor superior.

The calmed saint is without meanness, he does not take nor reject.”

¹ One who has not yet attained Arahantship has to strive and make an effort to achieve that goal, but one who has attained the goal is at peace. He has no more ambition.

Dhotaka Māṇava Pucchā

(Sn.204)

The Questions of Dhotaka

“I ask the Blessed One to tell me (said the Venerable Dhotaka)
I would like the great sage to speak.
Having heard your speech, I will train myself for cessation.

“Then strive hard (Dhotaka said the Blessed One) be prudent and
mindful
Having heard my speech, train yourself for cessation.

“I see in the world of gods and humans, a saint owning nothing.
I pay homage to the Omniscient One. If possible,¹ please free
me from doubts.

“I am not able to liberate anyone,² having doubts in the world,
Dhotaka.
When you understand the excellent Dhamma, thus you will cross
the flood.

“Instruct me, Lord,³ out of compassion, so that I can know that
secluded state.
So that I can understand that unobstructed state like space, and
abide in it here and now.

¹ Both Venerable Hammalawa Saddhātissa and Bhikkhu Bodhi translate “Sakka” as Sakya. However, it also means “possible.” I hesitate to differ from two well-known Pāli scholars, but in this context “possible” makes more sense to me. The Commentary says nothing about the word.

² This statement by the Buddha that he is unable to liberate anyone even if they have faith in his Omniscience and implore him with the utmost respect, sets Buddhism apart from all other religions. It is no use pretending to understand if you do not. Faith alone is insufficient — only diligent and continuous practice of the correct method leads to insight knowledge, and only the maturation of insight knowledge leads to liberation. At the relatively early stage of insight called Purification by Overcoming Doubt, the meditator sees for himself or herself that there is no self, no person or being who performs actions, feels sensations, or thinks thoughts. There is just a relentless process of conditioned mental and physical phenomena. If the meditator stops practising at this stage and does not proceed all the way to the Path and Fruition of Stream-winning, personality-view will not be destroyed, and doubt will not be eradicated. Egoism may reassert itself when they lose mindfulness and revert to normal life. That is why meditators are often not very obviously different to non-meditators. It depends on how deep their insight is. The Stream-winners and other Noble Ones are very different to ordinary individuals who have only unstable faith and morality.

³ Lord (Brahma)

“I will extol that peace (said the Blessed One to Dhotaka) realisable
not based on hearsay.

Having understood that, dwelling mindful, one will transcend
attachment to the world.

“I am delighted to hear about that ultimate peace from the great
sage,

Having understood which, dwelling mindful, one will transcend
attachment to the world.

“Whatever you can know (Dhotaka said the Blessed One),

Above, below, across, or in between,

Having understood that this is a bond in the world, do not create
craving for existence or non-existence.”

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