

The Kandaraka and Potaliya Suttas

Two Discourses of the Buddha from the Majjhima Nikāya

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Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy • Sri Lanka

The Wheel Publication No. 79.

First BPS edition: 1965.

BPS Online Edition © (2008)

Digital Transcription Source: BPS Transcription Project

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These two discourses first appeared in 1925 in the periodical *The Blessing*, published by the “Servants of the Buddha” in Colombo. The introductions, and some of the notes, were written by the then-president of that society, Dr. Cassius A. Pereira (the late Venerable Kassapa Thera). In this reprint, a few alterations have been made in the texts and notes.

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Introduction to the Kandaraka Sutta

(*Majjhima Nikāya No. 51*)

The scene of this Sutta is set at Campa, where the Buddha was temporarily residing with his company of bhikkhus on the bank of the Gaggara tank.¹

Campa, the capital of Aṅga, was on the east bank of the river of the same name, which formed the eastern boundary of Magadha. Prof. Rhys Davids was of the opinion that it was close to the modern Bagalpur.

The Commentary states that the tank was named after a certain Queen Gaggara, by whose order it was constructed. On the bank was a grove of sweet-scented Campaka trees where the wandering ascetics were accustomed to tarry.

This Sutta may be summarized as follows:

Pessa, a Buddhist, and Kandaraka, an ascetic of an alien sect, visit the Buddha. Kandaraka is deeply impressed with the demeanour of the silent disciples. The Master explains to him that there are both asekkhas and sekhas in that company.

Asekkhas, it should be noted, are arahant saints, who require no further training, having destroyed the fetters (*saṃyojana*) that bound them to existence. Sekhas, on the other hand, are those who have attained the first stages of sainthood but have not yet attained to the arahant fruit (*phala*) stage. The first seven of the Eight Noble individuals (*attha ariya puggala*) are *sekhas*.

The term “tank,” as used in India and Ceylon, signifies an artificial pond or lake, mostly used as a water-reservoir.

The Buddha then proceeds to explain his method of training, i.e., the four foundations of mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna). Readers may refer to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya, or the Majjhima Nikāya, for details.² Pessa, pleased with the brief discourse, contrasts the openness of the animals with the dissimulation of men. He also expresses his admiration at the conciseness and lucidity with which the Buddha expounds (having understood the real nature of the world), what is truly advantageous and disadvantageous. Continuing, he says that they, laymen as they are, also abide in meditation on these *satipaṭṭhānas*, though not continuously (as monks are expected to), but as time permits.

The Buddha then takes up a new subject, in order to reveal a further contrast between his disciples and others, so that Pessa may appreciate their conduct the better. Unfortunately, soon after the enumeration of the four individuals that are found in this world, Pessa, having expressed his opinion with regard to them, takes leave of the Master.

Thereupon the Buddha draws the attention of the disciples to the fact that, had Pessa remained to hear an exposition of the four kinds of individuals, he would have gone away acquiring a great gain (in other words, having realised the first path of sainthood [*sotāpatti*]).

¹*Bhikkhu* means, literally, a beggar or mendicant. As there is no equivalent in English which exactly corresponds to this word, we prefer to retain the Pali term. A bhikkhu is not a priest who acts as a mediator between God and man. He has no priestly duties to perform. Having renounced worldly pleasure, he lives a life of voluntary poverty and perfect celibacy with the object of attaining Deliverance from Suffering. Nor is the bhikkhu a “beggar” in the common sense of the word: when collecting his alms food, he does not beg, but stands in front of the houses silently, giving opportunity to the pious householder to acquire the merit of supporting a bhikkhu in his noble quest for Deliverance.

²The latter version is translated in *The Wheel*, No. 19. See also *The Wheel*, No. 60: *The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and its Application to Modern Life*.

Here is manifest the irresistible force of kamma, with which even a Buddha cannot interfere. The Commentary states that by reason of two conditions one fails to attain to sainthood, even when ripe for it, viz. evil company and lack of effort on one's own part.

Finally, the Buddha, at the request of the disciples, speaks at length on the four individuals.

The description of the first individual enables the reader to understand, to some extent, the austerities of those addicted to self-mortification.

The fourth individual, who neither torments self nor others, is the model of a bhikkhu: one who, as "a youth of a good family," upon seeing a Buddha appear on earth, and hearing him, is compelled to leave his uncongenial home and embrace the independent life of a homeless one. There he lives in strict accordance with the precepts (*sīla*); cultivates one-pointedness of mind (*samādhī*) and insight (*paññā*); and finally attains arahantship, the deliverance of mind.

The Kandaraka Sutta

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One, with a large company of bhikkhus, was staying at Campa on the bank of the Gaggara tank.

Then Pessa, the mahout's son, and Kandaraka, the wandering ascetic,³ approached the Blessed One. Drawing near, Pessa, the mahout's son, saluted the Blessed One respectfully and sat down on one side. But Kandaraka, the wandering ascetic, exchanged friendly greetings with the Blessed One, and after the customary salutations remained standing aside.

Standing thus, Kandaraka, the wandering ascetic, surveyed the silent company of bhikkhus and addressed the Blessed One as follows: "It is wonderful, friend Gotama! It is marvellous, friend Gotama! ⁴ How well has this company of bhikkhus been trained by you. And those who were exalted Fully Enlightened Ones in the distant past, friend Gotama, did those Blessed Ones also train the company of bhikkhus well, even to this pitch of perfection, as, at the present time, the company of bhikkhus has been well trained by you? And those, friend Gotama, who will be exalted Fully Enlightened Ones in the distant future, will they also train the company of bhikkhus well, even to this pitch of perfection, as at the present time, the company of bhikkhus has been well trained by you?"

"That is so, Kandaraka, that is so. And those, Kandaraka, who were exalted Fully Enlightened Buddhas in the distant past, and those who will be exalted Fully Enlightened Buddhas in the dim future, fulfil this work, even as, at the present time, the company of bhikkhus has been well trained by me.

"There are bhikkhus, Kandaraka, in this company, who are arahant saints: having extinguished the corruptions, completed the ascetic life, done what was to be done, laid down the burden, attained their goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, and who are delivered by right insight. ⁵

³*Paribbājaka*. This term is not applied to Buddhist bhikkhus. The paribbājakas were a class of wandering ascetics who generally carried their requisites with them.

⁴Being a non-Buddhist, Kandaraka addresses the Buddha as *bho* ("friend"), a term of address used to equals and inferiors, instead of the respectful term *Bhante* (Reverend Sir, Your Reverence, Lord) as used towards one's teacher or senior, and by the Buddhist lay follower in addressing bhikkhus.

⁵A stock passage often repeated in the suttas in order to describe the state of an Arahant or saint, who is also called an *asekha*, that is "one beyond the need of training."

“There are also bhikkhus, Kandaraka, in this company, who are undergoing training ⁶ of virtuous conduct and tranquil department, prudent, discreet in their actions, and who live with their minds firmly established in the four foundations of mindfulness. What are the four?”

“Here, Kandaraka, a bhikkhu abides in meditation on the body, strenuous, clearly conscious, mindful, having overcome covetousness and despair concerning the world; ⁷ abides in meditation on the sensations ... on thoughts ... on the states of mind, ⁸ strenuous, clearly conscious, mindful, having overcome covetousness and despair concerning the world.”

Upon this being said, Pessa, the mahout’s son, addressed the Blessed One as follows: “It is wonderful, Lord! It is marvellous, Lord! How well the Blessed One has expounded the four foundations of mindfulness, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of pain and despair, for the attainment of the path, for the realisation of nibbāna. And we householders also, Lord, dressed in white clothing, from time to time abide with minds firmly established in these four foundations of mindfulness. Here, Lord, we abide in meditation on the body, strenuous, clearly conscious, mindful, having overcome covetousness and despair concerning the world; we abide in meditation on the sensations ... on thoughts ... on the states of mind, strenuous, clearly conscious, mindful, having overcome covetousness and despair concerning the world.

“Wonderful, Lord! Marvellous, Lord! The Blessed One knows what is of advantage and what of disadvantage for beings, despite the fact that among men, deceitfulness, vice and treachery are going on. Truly, Lord, men are deceitful, ⁹ whereas animals, Lord, are open.

“I, Lord, can remember the character of an elephant: whilst going to and returning from Campa, he will display all his treacherous habits, deceitful tricks, cunning practices and crooked ways. But, Lord, our slaves, servants, and workmen behave in one way with the body, another way verbally and, yet, vastly different will be their thoughts Truly, Lord, men are deceitful, whereas animals, Lord, are open.”

“That is so, Pessa, that is so. Deceitful indeed, Pessa, are men, whereas animals, Pessa are open.

“These four individuals, Pessa, exist and are found in the world. Who are these four?”

“Here, Pessa, a certain individual is a tormentor of self, is addicted to the practice of self-torment; whilst another, Pessa, is a tormentor of others, is addicted to the practice of tormenting others. Again, Pessa, a certain individual is a tormentor of self and others; whilst, Pessa, another is neither a tormentor of self nor of others, is not addicted to the practice of tormenting self or others; he, neither tormenting self nor others, in this life itself, is desireless, quenched [of passions], cool, experiences happiness, lives nobly. Of these four individuals, Pessa, which finds favour with you?”

⁶*Sekha*.

⁷Concerning the world, there is an ant. Pali: *loke*, lit. “in the world.” Buddhaghosa, in his commentary to the Satipatthāna Sutta, says, “This body itself is the ‘world’; the five aggregates that are clung to [*upādānakkhandha*] also are the world.”

⁸*Dhammesu dhammānupassi viharati*. Scholars have given various renderings of the enigmatical term, “*dhamma*,” such as, “ideas,” “mental phenomena,” “conditioned nature of existence,” etc. We are of opinion that none of them corresponds to the meaning of *dhamma* as used in this connection. Under *dhamma* are here considered the Five Hindrances, the Factors of Enlightenment, the Five Aggregates, the Six Spheres of Sense, and the Four Noble Truths. Some *dhammas* are got rid of, some cultivated. As such it would almost be preferable to retain the Pali term. However we venture to give “states of mind” as the closest equivalent.

⁹*Gahanaṃ*, lit., jungle, impenetrable thicket. Cf. Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, Part I, p 255: “The ways of men are past finding out, but the ways of the beasts are easy to discover.”

“That individual, Lord, who torments self and is addicted to the practice of self-torment, finds no favour with me. And that individual, Lord, who torments others and is addicted to the practice of tormenting others, he too, finds no favour with me. And that individual, Lord, who torments self and others and is addicted to the practice of tormenting self and others he, also, finds no favour with me. But that individual, Lord, who neither torments self nor others and is not addicted to the practice of tormenting self or others, who, in this life itself, is desireless, quenched [of passions], cool, experiences happiness, lives nobly: that individual finds favour with me.”

“And why, Pessa, do these other three individuals find no favour with you?”

“That individual, Lord, who torments self and is addicted to the practice of self-torment, he torments and mortifies himself who craves happiness and abhors misery; therefore, that individual finds no favour with me.

“And that individual, Lord, who torments others and is addicted to the practice of tormenting others, he torments and mortifies others who crave happiness and abhor misery; therefore that individual finds no favour with me.

“And that individual, Lord, who torments self and others, and is addicted to the practice of tormenting self and others, he torments and mortifies self and others who crave happiness and abhor misery; therefore that individual finds no favour with me.

“But that individual, Lord, who is neither a tormentor of self nor of others, and is not addicted to the practice of tormenting self and others, he, in this life itself, is desireless, quenched [of passions], cool, experiences happiness, lives nobly; therefore that individual finds favour with me.

“And now, Lord, we depart; we have many duties and much to do.”

“You, O Pessa, are aware of the hour.” Thereupon, Pessa, the mahout’s son, pleased with the words of the Blessed One, expressed his thanks, rose from his seat and, having saluted the Blessed One respectfully, passed reverently to the right and departed.¹⁰

Then the Blessed One, shortly after the departure of Pessa, addressed the bhikkhus. “Highly intelligent, O bhikkhus, is Pessa, the mahout’s son; a man of great understanding. If, O bhikkhus, Pessa had remained seated for a while until I explained in detail these four individuals, he would have gone away having acquired a great advantage.¹¹ And even in this short time. O bhikkhus, Pessa did acquire a great advantage.”

“This is the opportunity, O Blessed One ! Now is the time, O Accomplished One, that the Blessed one should describe in detail these four individuals. The bhikkhus having listened to the Blessed One, will bear it in mind.”

“Very well, O bhikkhus; listen and bear it well in mind. I shall speak.”

“Yes Lord,” responded the bhikkhus. The Blessed One spoke as follows:

“And which individual, O bhikkhus, is a tormentor of self, is addicted to the practice of self-torment?”

“Here, O bhikkhus, a certain individual is naked, devoid of social habits,¹² licks his hands [after eating],¹³ does not accept alms if called or requested to wait,¹⁴ and neither accepts food

¹⁰To pass a person, keeping one’s right side to him, is a sign of reverence and respect.

¹¹Having attained the *sotāpatti* state, i.e. the first path of sainthood (Comy.).

¹²*Muttācāro*, e.g., eating food whilst standing instead of sitting down, as the religious usually do (Comy.).

¹³Instead of washing (Comy.).

¹⁴For he would then be obeying others (Comy.).

brought to him, nor specially prepared for him, nor an invitation [to dine]. Neither does he accept from the brim of a pot, or from the brim of a cooking vessel;¹⁵ nor anything handed across a threshold, over a stick, or over a rice pounder;¹⁶ not from two people eating together,¹⁷ nor from a woman with child;¹⁸ nor from one giving suck,¹⁹ nor from one indulging in courtship with a man.²⁰ Nor does he accept food that has been collected from others,²¹ nor from where a dog is waiting for food,²² nor from where swarms of flies are buzzing round;²³ he neither eats fish nor flesh, nor drinks spirituous liquor, arrack, nor fermented rice.

“He goes to one house only [for alms], or takes but one mouthful; or he goes to two houses, or takes two mouthfuls; ... or he goes to seven houses or takes seven mouthfuls. He maintains himself on one small plateful, or on two small platefuls, ... or seven small platefuls; he takes food only once a day, or only once in two days ... or only once in seven days; thus, in this manner, even with intervals of half a month, he lives addicted to the practice of taking food only at certain intervals.

“He eats only herbs, or weeds, or wild rice, or waste shreds, or hide, or water plants, or rice dust, or the scum of boiling rice, or the refuse of sesamum seeds, or grass, or cowdung; he lives on roots and fruit found in the forest, or eats only fallen fruit. He wears garments of hemp, or clothing of hemp interwoven with other materials, or cloths taken from corpses, or rags found on dust heaps, or the bark of tiritaka trees, or deer skins with the hoofs attached, or a dress made of kusa grass, or made of strips of bark, or of strips of wood, or garments made of human hair, or of horse hair, or of owls’ feathers.

“He is a plucker out of hair and beard and is addicted to the practice of pulling out the hairs of the head and beard; he always stands upright and never accepts a seat; or he constantly squats on the heels, and is addicted to the practice of continually squatting on the haunches; or he uses a thorn bed, always sleeping on a bed of thorns; or he bathes for the third time in the evening, and is addicted to the practice of purification by water. Thus, in this manner, he lives addicted in various ways to the practice of mortifying and tormenting the body.

“This individual, O bhikkhus, is said to be a tormentor or self, addicted to the practice of self-torment. And which individual, O bhikkhus, torments others, is addicted to the practice of tormenting others?

“Here, O bhikkhus, a certain individual is a butcher, a pig-killer, a fowler, a deer-stalker, a hunter, a fisherman, a robber, a public executioner, a jailer, or follows any other cruel occupation whatsoever.

“This individual, O bhikkhus, is said to be a tormentor of others, addicted to the practice of tormenting others.

“And which individual, O bhikkhus, is a tormentor of self and others, is addicted to the practice of tormenting self and others?

¹⁵For the vessels may be struck with the spoon (and thereby damaged on account of him) (Comy.).

¹⁶Lest it should have been placed there specially for him (Comy.).

¹⁷That is, if one rises and offers the ascetic food, he may thus be deprived of his just portion by the other individual (Comy.).

¹⁸Lest the child should suffer (Comy.).

¹⁹Lest the child should be deprived of milk (Comy.).

²⁰Lest their amours be interrupted (Comy.).

²¹In times of drought, the followers of the naked ascetics collect rice from various people and prepare it for the ascetics. The strict naked ascetics do not accept this kind of food (Comy.).

²²Lest the dog should be deprived (Comy.).

²³Lest the flies be driven away and thus be deprived (Comy.).

“Here, O bhikkhus, a certain individual is either an anointed king of warrior caste, or a Brahmin of enormous wealth. On the eastern side of the city he has a new sacrificial hall built, has the head and beard shaved, dons the raw hide of an antelope, rubs the body with clarified butter and oil; and, inflicting wounds ²⁴ on his back with the horns of a deer, goes to the sacrificial hall, accompanied by his chief queen and a Brahmin chaplain. There he sleeps on the bare floor.

“If there be a cow having a calf of similar appearance [to herself], the king maintains himself on the milk in the first teat; the chief queen lives on the milk in the second teat; the Brahmin chaplain on that in the third; with the milk in the fourth teat, they make an offering to fire; and the little calf maintains itself on what is left.

“He speaks thus: ‘Let so many bulls, so many steers, so many heifers, so many she-goats, and so many rams be slaughtered for a sacrifice; let so many trees be cut down for sacrificial posts; let so much kusa grass be cut for the enclosure!’

“Then his slaves, servants and workmen, terrified with sticks, driven by fear, with woeful faces and in tears, do the work.

“This individual, O bhikkhus, is said to be a tormentor of self and others, addicted to the practice of tormenting self and others.

“And which individual, O bhikkhus, is neither a tormentor of self nor of others, is not addicted to the practice of tormenting self or others; who, neither tormenting self nor others, in this life itself is desireless, quenched [of passions], cool, experiences happiness, lives nobly?

“Here, O bhikkhus, an Accomplished One appears in the world, an Exalted One, a Fully Enlightened One, endowed with perfect knowledge and pure conduct, gone, knower of worlds, an incomparable guide for the training of men, teacher of gods and men, Enlightened and Blessed. He, having by his own wisdom comprehended this world, together with the worlds or the gods, Māras, and Brahmas, including the communities of recluses and Brahmins, gods, and men, makes it known. He expounds the truth, glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, and glorious in its consummation, both in the spirit and the letter, making known the holy life of perfect purity.

[Acquisition of confidence] “A householder, or the son of a householder, or one born in some other class, hears that truth. Hearing the truth, he acquires confidence in the Blessed One. Possessing that confidence, he reflects thus: ‘Cramped is household life, a den of filth; but the open air is the life of the recluse. Not easy is it for one living the household life to lead the radiant holy life, [shining as a polished conch shell] in all its perfection and purity. How if I should shave head and beard, put on the yellow robes, and go forth from home to homelessness!’

[Renunciation] “Subsequently, abandoning his possessions, whether few or many; forsaking his circle of relatives, be it small or large; he shaves head and beard, dons the yellow robes, and goes forth from home to homelessness.

[Practice of the precepts] “And now, as a recluse, he observes the rules regulating the life of the bhikkhus. Renouncing killing, he abstains from taking the life of any living creature; laying aside stick and sword, modest and merciful, he lives kind and compassionate to all living creatures. Renouncing theft, he abstains from taking what is not given; only what is given to him he takes, waiting till it is given; and he lives with a heart honest and pure. Renouncing incontinence, he lives the celibate life, aloof [from sensuality], abstaining from the vulgar practices of sexuality. Renouncing lying, he abstains from false speech; speaking the truth and never deviating from it, he is reliable, trustworthy, and no deceiver of people. Renouncing

²⁴*Kanduvamano*, lit. scratching.

slander, he abstains from tale-bearing; what he hears here he does not relate elsewhere, to create discord with these people; nor does he repeat to these what he heard elsewhere, to create dissension with those people. Thus he reconciles those who are divided and encourages those who are united; concord gladdens him, he delights and rejoices in concord, and he utters words conducive to concord. Renouncing harsh speech, he abstains from unkind words; those words that are blameless, pleasant to the ear, affectionate, going to the heart, courteous, agreeable and giving pleasure to many, such are the words he utters. Renouncing frivolous talk, he abstains from idle chatter; speaking at the right time, in accordance with the facts, to the purpose, in accord with the doctrine and discipline, he utters words worthy of remembrance, seasonable, appropriate, concise, and to the point.

“He refrains from injuring seeds and all forms of vegetation. Taking but one meal daily,²⁵ and abstaining from food at night, he refrains from eating at unseasonable hours. He refrains from dancing, singing, music and horn, and watching theatrical exhibitions. He abstains from wearing garlands, perfumes, ointments, ornaments, and personal decorations. He refrains from the use of high and luxurious beds. He refrains from accepting gold and silver, uncooked corn, raw meat, women and girls, male and female slaves, goats and sheep, fowls and pigs, elephants, cattle, horses and mares, land and buildings. He refrains from the practice of going on errands like a messenger. He abstains from trading, from false balances, unjust weights and fraudulent measures. He refrains from bribery, deception, fraud and crooked practices; from wounding, killing, chaining, highway robbery, plundering and violence.

“He contents himself with the robe that protects his body, and with [the almsfood gathered in] the almsbowl which stills his hunger.²⁶ Wherever he goes, takes with himself [these two things]. Just as a bird carries its wings wherever it flies, even so the bhikkhu is contented with the robe protecting his body and with the almsbowl for satisfying his stomach, taking these with him wherever he goes. Possessing this noble code of morality, he experiences within himself the bliss of blameless conduct.

[Sense control] “Perceiving a form with the eye, he is neither arrested by its general appearance nor by its details; inasmuch as the evil, de-meritorious states of covetousness and grief would result from living with the organ of vision unrestrained, he practises the control of it; guarding the organ of sight, he brings it under subjection, Hearing a sound with the ear, smelling an odour with the nose, tasting a flavour with the tongue, feeling a touch with the body, or cognising an idea with the mind, he is neither arrested by its general appearance nor by its details; inasmuch as the evil de-meritorious states of mind would result from living with the organs of sense unrestrained, he practices the control of them; guarding the organs of sense, he brings them under subjection. Possessing this noble control of the senses, he experiences within himself an unblemished bliss.

[Mindfulness] “Whether going or coming, looking straight ahead or looking aside, bending or extending the limbs, donning his robes, carrying his bowl, eating, drinking, chewing or swallowing, answering calls of nature, walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, walking, speaking or silent, he is fully conscious of what he is doing.

[Inhibition of the Hindrances] “And possessing this noble code of morality, this noble control of the senses, and this noble mindfulness, he seeks a lonely abode: in the forest, at the foot of a tree, on a mountain, in a cleft, in a rocky cave, in a cemetery, in the depths of a jungle, in an open space, or on a heap of straw.

²⁵*Eka-bhattiko*, lit.: he who takes one meal a day. This does not mean that the bhikkhu is allowed to take only one meal a day. Buddhaghosa says that it may mean any number of meals taken before mid-day. The usual practice is to take a light meal, generally rice-porridge, in the morning, and a more substantial meal at about 11 am.

²⁶Literally, “which protects his stomach”.

“Having returned from the alms round and taken his meal, he sits down, with legs crossed, the body erect, and his mindfulness alert.²⁷ Abandoning covetousness, abiding with thoughts free of greed, he purifies his mind of covetousness. Abandoning the taint of ill-will, abiding with thoughts free from ill-will, kind and compassionate to all living creatures, he purifies his mind of the taint of ill-will. Abandoning sloth and torpor, abiding free from sloth and torpor, with a lucid mind,²⁸ mindful and aware of folly, he purifies his mind of sloth and torpor. Abandoning restlessness and worry, abiding free from restlessness, with mind appeased, he purifies it of restlessness and worry. Abandoning doubt, he abides free from indecision; free from uncertainty with regard to meritorious conditions, he purifies his mind of doubt.

[Jhānas] “Abandoning these five hindrances which are defilements of the mind and which stultify wisdom; remote, indeed, from sense-desires and de-meritorious conditions, he lives abiding in the first jhāna,²⁹ born of seclusion, accompanied by initial and sustained application, conjoined with joy and happiness. Stilling initial and sustained application, by unification of the mind having tranquillity within, he lives abiding in the second jhāna, born of concentration, void of initial and sustained application, conjoined with joy and happiness. Detached from delight, he abides serene, mindful and completely conscious, experiencing in his person that bliss, of which the Noble Ones say: ‘Endowed with equanimity and mindfulness, he abides in bliss.’ Thus he lives, abiding in the third jhāna. Abandoning pleasure and pain, leaving behind former joy and grief, he lives abiding in the fourth jhāna, which is beyond pleasure and pain, and is endowed with equanimity and purified by mindfulness.

[Knowledge of past lives] “Thus with thoughts tranquillised, purified, cleansed, free from defilements, pliable, alert, steady, and unshakable, he directs his mind to the recollection and cognition of former existences. He recalls his varied lot in former existences, as follows: first one life, then two lives, then three, four, five, ten, twenty, up to fifty lives; then a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand; then the passing away of many world cycles, then the arising of many world cycles: ‘In that place, I was of such a name, such a family, such a caste, such a sustenance, such the pleasure and pain I experienced, such my life’s end. Vanishing from there, I came into existence elsewhere. Now, such was my name, such my family, such my caste, such my sustenance, such pleasure and pain did I experience, such was that life’s end. After dying, I came into existence here.’ Thus he recalls the mode and details of his varied lot in former existences.

[Divine Eye] “Thus with thoughts tranquillised, purified, cleansed, free from defilements, pliable, alert, steady, and unshakable, he directs his mind to the perception of the disappearing and re-appearing of beings. With clairvoyant vision, purified and super-normal, he perceives beings disappearing from one state of existence and re-appearing in another; he beholds the base and the noble, the beautiful and the ugly, the happy and the miserable, and beings in accordance with their deeds. He thinks: ‘These beings are given to evil ways in deed, word and thought. They revile the Noble Ones, hold false views, and incur the evil consequences of such views. Upon the dissolution of the body after death they are reborn in states of suffering, of misery, and of torment. But those beings are given to ways of virtue in deed, word, and thought. Not reviling the Noble Ones, they hold right views, and acquire the meritorious results of such

²⁷*Parimukhaṃ satim̐ thapetvā*, lit. fixing mindfulness in front.

²⁸*Āloka-saññi*, lit. perceiving light.

²⁹*Jhāna*, also translated as “meditative absorption [of mind],” is not a trance, but a fully conscious religious experience attained through strong concentration of mind on specific subjects of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*). In other words, it is “one-pointedness of the mind” cultivated as a means to an end, not an end in itself. The word “trance” is indicative of mental passivity. Trance as auto-hypnotism and its resultant phenomena are all subjective. Jhānas, on the other hand, are exercises of intense mental activity. For further particulars see the Chapter IV of *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, tr. by Nāṇamoli Thera.

views. Upon the dissolution of the body after death they are reborn in realms of divine happiness.'

[Knowledge of the Extinction of the Corruptions] "And he turns his mind to the comprehension of the cessation of the corruptions. He realises in accordance with fact, 'This is sorrow.' ... 'This is the arising of sorrow.' ... 'This is the cessation of sorrow.' ... 'This, the path leading to the cessation of sorrow.' Likewise, in accordance with fact, he realises, 'These are the corruptions.' ... 'This is the cessation of the corruptions.' ... 'This is the path leading to the cessation of the corruptions.' Thus cognising, thus perceiving, his mind is delivered from the corruption of sensual craving; from the corruption of craving for existence; from the corruption of ignorance. Upon being delivered, he knows, 'Delivered am I,'³⁰ and he realises, 'Rebirth is ended; fulfilled the holy life; done what was to be done; there is none other beyond this life.'

"This individual, O bhikkhus, is said to be neither a tormentor of self nor of others, addicted neither to the practice of tormenting self nor others; he, neither tormenting himself nor others, in this life itself, is desireless, quenched [of passions], cool, experiences bliss, lives nobly."

Thus spoke the Blessed One. The bhikkhus, delighted, rejoiced at his words.

³⁰The reference is to the "Process of Retrospection" (or reviewing, *paccavekkhana-vīthi*). See *Path of Purification*, Ch. XXII, § 19ff.

Introduction to the Potaliya Sutta

(Majjhima Nikāya No. 54)

It appears to have been a common and worthy practice in ancient India for rich men to renounce the world and take to a religious life, just as the modern Croesus decides to “enjoy life” and expend, on his comfort and pleasure, some of his hard-won wealth.

To such an individual we are introduced in this sutta: one who, formerly wealthy, has renounced all worldly matters, making his sons his heirs and himself their charge.

Potaliya, an ex-merchant, and now an ascetic of an abstemious order, the Tirthakas, is annoyed at being addressed by the Master as “householder” (this term being most commonly used to designate a merchant who is yet immersed in trade). The Buddha then explains to Potaliya what renunciation of worldly desires actually signifies in his dispensation, and Potaliya is not only appeased but becomes a convert.

The Buddha frequently used allegory and parable in his teaching, and this sermon contains many a simile illustrating what the good Buddhist’s outlook on material pleasures should be.

That worldly success and wealth are a delusion and a snare is proved by the fact that, out of 120,000 suicides in the United States of America during the year 1922, no fewer than 74 were of the millionaire class. Wealth and temporary well-being might gloss over much of the misery of life, but to one who learns to “see things as they really are,” through the veneer of what is today called “civilisation,” the awakening can be terrible.

To a seeker, disillusioned from the shallowness of the animistic cults, Buddhism alone offers the sympathy needed by the despondent. Moreover it shows a “way out,” an emancipation which, by the law of contraries, can be nothing less than Bliss.

The Potaliya Sutta

Potaliya the Householder

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying in Aṅguttarāpa,³¹ at a market town of the Aṅguttarāpas named Apana. And in the morning, the Blessed One robed himself, took bowl and robe, and entered Apana for alms. Having gone his round for alms in Apana, he returned; and, after the meal, repaired to a certain forest to spend the day. There he entered and sat at the foot of one of the trees.

Now Potaliya, the householder, arrayed in under- and upper-garments, with parasol and sandals, was strolling along taking a walk, and arrived at this wood;³² entering, he approached the Blessed One. Drawing near, he exchanged friendly greetings with the Blessed One, and having passed the customary compliments, remained standing at a little distance. As he stood there, the Blessed One addressed Potaliya, the householder, as follows:

“Seats are to be found, householder³³; be seated, if you wish.”

³¹*Aṅguttarāpa*: Northern (*uttara*) part of the Aṅga country, drained by the waters (*āpo*) of the river Mahi.

³²Wood: a thickly-shaded, beautiful spot on the bank of the river, not far from the township (Comy.).

³³The ground, strewn with fallen leaves, afforded comfortable seats.

When spoken to in this way, Potaliya, the householder, thinking: “The ascetic Gotama addresses me as ‘householder,’”³⁴ was offended and displeased, and remained silent.

For the second time the Blessed One addressed him thus: “Seats are to be found, householder; be seated, if you wish.” A second time also Potaliya, the householder, ... was offended and displeased, and remained silent.

For the third time the Blessed One said, “ ... householder, be seated.” Being spoken to thus, Potaliya, the householder, thinking: “The ascetic Gotama addresses me as ‘householder,’” was offended and displeased, and spoke to the Blessed One as follows: “It is unseemly, friend Gotama, it is improper, for you to address me as ‘householder.’”

“It is because, householder, whoever has your bearing, characteristics, and signs, must be a householder.”

“Indeed! But I, friend Gotama, have given up all occupations and put an end to all worldly affairs.”³⁵

“In what way then, householder, have you given up all occupations and put an end to all worldly affairs?”

“Whatever wealth I had in this world, friend Gotama, whether corn, silver, or gold, all that have I bestowed on my sons as an inheritance, regarding which I never give advice, not find fault, but live principally supplied with food and clothing. Thus, in this way, friend Gotama, have I given up all occupations and put an end to all worldly affairs.”

“In one way, certainly, householder, you speak of putting an end to all worldly affairs; but, truly, another is the total cessation of worldly affairs in the discipline of the *Ariya*.³⁶”

“In what way then, Lord, are worldly affairs brought to an end in the discipline of the ariyas? It would be well, Lord, if the Blessed One would expound to me the doctrine as to the way in which worldly affairs are brought to an end in the discipline of the ariyas.”

“Very well, householder; listen and bear it well in mind; I will speak.”

“Very good, Lord,” responded Potaliya the householder.

The Blessed One spoke as follows:

“These eight doctrines, householder, in the discipline of the ariyas, are conducive to the breaking off of worldly affairs. Which eight?”

“Relying³⁷ on non-killing, the killing of living beings should be abandoned. Relying on that which is given, stealing should be abandoned. Relying on the truth, lying should be abandoned.

Relying on words free from malice, slander should be abandoned. Relying on freedom from greed and craving, greed and craving should be abandoned. Relying on freedom from scolding and harshness, scolding and harshness should be abandoned. Relying on freedom from hatred and despair, hatred and despair should be abandoned. Relying on freedom from pride, pride should be abandoned.

³⁴*Gahapati*, a term invariably applied to laymen.

³⁵*Vohāra-samucchedo*: In the teaching of the Buddha this refers to the giving up of the eight ignoble (*an-ariya*) practices: killing, stealing, lying, malice, greed and craving, scolding and harshness, hatred and despair, and pride.

³⁶*Ariya* is a term which frequently appears in the suttas, meaning a Buddha, an arahant and a saint. It signifies those who are “far removed from the state of a worldling”. Here the term is applied to the Buddha.

³⁷*Nissaya*: “relying on” or “because of”.

“These eight doctrines, householder, briefly stated, not elaborated in detail, in the discipline of the ariyas, are conducive to the breaking off of worldly affairs.”

“It would be well, Lord, if the Blessed One, out of compassion, would expound to me in detail these eight doctrines which are briefly stated, not elaborated in detail, by the Blessed One, and are conducive to the breaking off of worldly affairs in the discipline of the ariyas.”

“Very well, householder; listen, and bear it well in mind. I will speak.”

“Very good, Lord,” responded Potaliya the householder.

The Blessed One spoke as follows:

“Truly it was said: ‘Relying on non-killing, the killing of living beings should be abandoned.’ Concerning what was this said?

“In this world, householder, a noble disciple reflects thus: ‘Because of these fetters I may become a killer of living beings; therefore I have set myself to eliminate and eradicate these fetters. Certainly, if I became a destroyer of life, I should reproach myself because of the killing of living beings; the wise having examined [my fault] would rebuke me; and, upon the dissolution of the body after death, a state of misery is to be expected for having destroyed life. Undoubtedly, this killing of living beings is a fetter, a hindrance; and these corruptions, vexations, and sufferings would arise on account of killing; but he who refrains from destroying life does not have these corruptions, vexations, and sufferings.’

“For this reason was it said, ‘Relying on non-killing, the killing of living beings should be abandoned.’ Truly it was said, ‘Stealing should be abandoned; lying, slander, greed and craving, scolding and harshness, hatred and despair, and pride, should be abandoned.’ Concerning what was this said?

“In this world, householder, a noble disciple reflects thus: ‘Through these fetters one may become a thief, liar, backbiter, greedy and avaricious, scolding and harsh, hating and despondent, and proud; therefore have I set myself to eliminate and eradicate these fetters. Certainly, if I became any of these, I should reproach myself. The wise, having examined [my faults], would rebuke me; and upon the dissolution of the body, after death, a state of misery is to be expected for having these blemishes. Undoubtedly they constitute fetters and hindrances; and these corruptions, vexations, and sufferings would arise on account of them; but he who is not tainted in this way does not have these corruptions, vexations, and sufferings.’

“Because of this was it said: ‘Relying on freedom from these fetters, they should all be abandoned.’

“These eight doctrines, householder, both briefly stated and elaborated in detail, are conducive to the breaking off of worldly affairs in the discipline of the ariyas; yet these alone do not constitute, in the discipline of the ariyas, the breaking off of worldly affairs completely and in every way.”

“In what way then, Lord, are worldly affairs broken off completely and in every way in the discipline of the ariyas? It would be well, Lord, if the Blessed One would expound to me the doctrine as to the way in which worldly affairs are broken off completely and in every way, in the discipline of the ariyas.”

“Very well, householder; listen and bear it well in mind. I will speak.”

“Very good, Lord,” responded Potaliya the householder.

The Blessed One spoke as follows:

“It is as if, householder, a dog, overcome with hunger and weakness, was present at a slaughter-house; and a skilful butcher or butcher’s apprentice were to throw near him a bare

bone, closely-cut, scraped, fleshless, but smeared with blood. What do you think, householder? Would that dog, by gnawing such a bare bone, closely-cut, scraped fleshless, but smeared with blood, appease its hunger and weakness?"

"Certainly not, Lord. And for what reason? Because Lord, it is a bare bone, closely cut, scraped, fleshless and merely smeared with blood; and the dog would only suffer fatigue and vexation."

"In exactly the same way, householder, the noble disciple reflects thus: 'It was said by the Blessed One that sense-desires are like a bare bone, full of pain, full of despair;' thus, thinking 'Here is much danger,' and having, with right wisdom, seen this as it really is" he, rejecting whatsoever equanimity is changeful³⁸ or bound up with diversity, cultivates whatsoever equanimity is constant,³⁹ dependent on unity, and where worldly desires and clinging perish utterly and without remainder.

"It is as if, householder, a vulture, or a heron, or a hawk, having taken a small piece of flesh, were flying up, and vultures, or herons, or hawks, were constantly following and snatching at the flesh and tearing it into bits. What do you think, householder? If that vulture, or heron, or hawk, did not at once let go of that small piece of flesh, it would in consequence suffer death, or misery comparable to that of death."

"That is so, Lord."

"In exactly the same way, householder, the noble disciple reflects thus: 'It was said by the Blessed One that the sense-desires are like a small piece of flesh, full of pain, full of despair.' Thinking thus 'Here is much danger,' and having, with right wisdom, seen this as it really is, he, rejecting whatsoever equanimity is changeful or bound up with diversity, cultivates whatsoever equanimity is constant, dependent on unity, and where worldly desires and clinging perish utterly and without remainder.

"It is as if, householder, a person carrying a flaming torch of dry grass, were to go against the wind. What do you think, householder? If that person did not get rid of it at once, that flaming torch of dry grass would burn his hand, or arm, or some other part of his body; and, in consequence, he would suffer death, or misery comparable to that of death.

"That is so, Lord."

"In exactly the same way, householder, the noble disciple reflects thus: 'It was said by the Blessed One that sense-desires are like a torch of dry grass' ... and he cultivates that constant equanimity, dependent on unity, where worldly desires and clinging perish utterly and without a remainder.

"It is as if, householder, there were a pit of glowing embers, deeper than the height of a man, filled with glowing embers free from flame and smoke; and a person desiring to live and not wishing to die, longing for happiness and loathing pain, were to come, and two strong men were to seize that person by each arm and drag him towards the pit of glowing embers. What do you think, householder? Would that person struggle this way and that?"⁴⁰

³⁸*Nānatta-upekkhā*: the changeful complacency of the worldling. This refers to the normal equanimity of everyday life, which, varying with the diversity of sense-impressions, arouses sufficient passing interest to lull the intellect. The average man, ever-quenching, or seeking to quench, this thirst and that, is blind to life's innate misery. He never pauses to ask "Whence?" "Why?" "Whither?" But this complacency wilts when its cause, the mist of ignorance, vanishes before the sun of truth.

³⁹*Ekatta-upekkhā*: this is the unique equanimity of one who has attained the fourth *jhāna* (or absorption). This becomes constant in the hypercosmic equanimity of the arahant. But even with the first *jhāna*, the practiser is lifted out of the muck of average, mundane complacency.

⁴⁰*Kāyaṃ saññāmeyya*, lit.: "would bend the body".

“That is so, Lord; and for what reason? Because, Lord, it would be known to that person, ‘If I were to drop into this pit of glowing embers, I should, in consequence, suffer death, or misery comparable to that of death.’”

“In exactly the same way, householder, the noble disciple reflects thus: ‘It was said by the Blessed One that sense-desires are like a pit of glowing embers ...,’ and he cultivates that constant equanimity, dependent on unity, where worldly desires and clinging perish utterly and without remainder.

“It is as if, householder, a person were to see in a dream a lovely park, grove, landscape, or lotus-pond; upon awakening he would see nothing of it!

“In exactly the same way, householder, the noble disciple reflects thus: ‘It was said by the Blessed One that sense-desires are like a dream ...’ and he cultivates that constant equanimity, dependent on unity, where worldly desires and clinging perish utterly and without remainder.

“It is as if, householder, a person were to borrow some property obtainable on loan, a chariot suitable for a citizen, or an ear-ring of choice gems, and were to resort to the midst of the market-place, furnished and equipped with those borrowed goods. The people, seeing him, would say: ‘What a wealthy man! Just see how the wealthy enjoy their riches!’ But should the owners see him anywhere, they would take back their property on the spot. What do you think, householder? Is not this truly enough to upset that person?”

“It is, Lord; and for what reason? Because the owners, Lord, take back their property.”

“In exactly the same way, householder, the noble disciple reflects thus: ‘It was said by the Blessed One that sense-desires are like borrowed goods ...’ and he cultivates that constant equanimity, dependent on unity, where worldly desires and cunning perish utterly and without remainder.

“It is as if, householder, not far from a village, or a small market-town, there were a thick forest in which there was a fruit-tree loaded with fruit, none having fallen to the ground; and a person were to come desiring fruit, looking for, and wandering in search of fruit. He, entering the forest, would see that fruit tree loaded with fruit, and would think thus: ‘This, indeed, is a fruit tree loaded with fruit, and none has fallen on the ground; but I know how to climb the tree. What if I were to climb this tree, eat as much as I like, and then fill my pouch?’⁴¹ And, climbing the tree, he would eat as much as he liked, and would then fill his pouch. Meanwhile a second person comes desiring fruit, looking for, and wandering in search of fruit, and carrying a sharp axe. He, entering the forest, would see that fruit tree loaded with fruit, and would think thus: ‘This, indeed, is a fruit tree loaded with fruit, and none has fallen on the ground; but I do not know how to climb the tree. What if I were to fell this tree at the root, eat as much as I like, and then fill my pouch?’ And he would fell that tree at the root. What do you think, householder? If that person who first climbed the tree did not get down immediately, the tree, in falling, would crush his hand, foot, or some other part of his body; and, in consequence, he would suffer death, or misery comparable to that of death.”

“That is so, Lord.”

“In exactly the same way, householder, the noble disciple reflects thus: ‘It was said by the Blessed One that sense-desires are like a fruit tree, full of pain, full of despair’. Thus, thinking ‘Here is much danger,’ and having, with right wisdom, seen this as it really is, he, rejecting whatsoever equanimity is changeful or bound up with diversity, cultivates whatsoever equanimity is constant, dependent on unity, and where worldly desires and clinging perish utterly and without remainder.

⁴¹*Ucchaṅga*: a pouch or pocket formed by folding the undergarment at the waist.

Now, householder, that noble disciple who has attained the unrivalled purification of mindfulness born of equanimity,⁴² recalls his varied lot in former existences, namely, first one life, then two lives, then three, and so on Thus he recalls the mode and details of his varied lot in former existences. Then, householder, that noble disciple who has attained the unrivalled purification of mindfulness born of equanimity, with clairvoyant vision, purified and supernormal, perceives beings disappearing from one state of existence and reappearing in another; he beholds the base and the noble, the beautiful and the ugly, the happy and the wretched, beings passing on in accordance with their deeds. Lastly, householder, that noble disciple who has attained the unrivalled purification of mindfulness born of equanimity, after the extinction of the corruptions, lives corruption-free, having intuitively attained and realized, in this life itself, the mental emancipation and deliverance through wisdom."⁴³

"In this way, then, householder, are worldly affairs brought, in every way and definitely, to an end in the discipline of the ariyas.

"What do you think, householder? Such being the breaking off of worldly affairs completely and in every way, according to the discipline of the ariyas, do you actually perceive such a consummation in yourself?"

"What am I, Lord, and what total and definite breaking off of worldly affairs in the discipline of the ariyas! Far am I, Lord, from the complete, entire breaking off of worldly affairs [as understood] in the discipline of the ariyas.

"Formerly, Lord, we were of opinion that the heretical wandering ascetics who really know not [the breaking off of worldly affairs], knew it; and gave them who really know not, the food intended for those who know. On the other hand, Lord, we thought that the bhikkhus who really know [the breaking off of worldly affairs], knew not; and we gave them who really know, the food intended for those who know not. But now, Lord, we know that the heretical wandering ascetics who really know not, do not know it; and we shall give them who really know not, the food intended for those who know not, and shall put them in the places intended for those who know not. On the other hand, Lord, we now know that the bhikkhus who really know, do know it; and we shall give them who really know the food intended for those who know; and shall put them in the places intended for those who know.

"Truly Lord, the Blessed One has caused to arise in me pious love⁴⁴ towards the ascetics, pious faith in the ascetics, and pious respect for the ascetics.

"Excellent, Lord, excellent! It is as if, Lord, a man were to set upright that which was overturned, or were to reveal that which was hidden, or were to point out the way to one who had gone astray, or were to hold a lamp amidst the darkness, so that those who have eyes may see. Even so has the doctrine been expounded in various ways by the Blessed One.

"So I, too, Lord, take refuge in the Buddha, the Doctrine, and the Order. May the Blessed One receive me as a follower,⁴⁵ as one who has taken refuge from this very day to life's end."

⁴²*Upekkhā-sati-parisuddhi*: this is a characteristic of the fourth *jhāna*.

⁴³he preceding refers to the "threefold-knowledge" (*tevijja*): knowledge of past lives (*pubbenivāsa*), the divine eye (*dibba-cakkhu*), and the knowledge of the extinction of the corruptions (*āsavakkhaya-ñāna*).

⁴⁴*Samana-pema*: as distinguished from ordinary worldly affection (*gehasita-pema*).

⁴⁵*Upāsaka*: the designation for a male lay-follower of the Buddha. It literally means: "to sit close by." One becomes an *upāsaka* immediately after taking the Three Refuges. A female lay-follower is called *upāsikā*.

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