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Velāma Sutta

The Discourse on Velāma (the brahmin) | A 9.20

Theme: On right giving and the highest thought

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

1 Sutta origin

According to **the Dhammapada Commentary**, the Buddha teaches the Velāma Sutta to console Anātha,piṇḍika, the order's foremost lay supporter, and donor and builder of Anātha,piṇḍik'ārāma in Jeta,vana, on discovering that he has been reduced to poverty and feels disappointed in not being able to provide the order with excellent fares.¹ In fact, the Sutta opens with Anātha,piṇḍika saying that he is only able to offer “a coarse mess of broken rice grains along with sour gruel” [§1].

The Buddha goes on to explain that it is not *what* one gives that matters spiritually, but *how* one gives it [§§2-3]. He then relates a Jātaka story of his past life as the brahmin Velāma, when he prepares a huge donation but fails to find a suitable recipient. Velāma's story is given in full in the Aṅguttara Commentary to the Sutta,² where it is briefly told.

The introductory story to **the Khadir'āṅgāra Jātaka** (J 40)³ also refers to the Velāma story. This Jātaka is of course related to Anātha,piṇḍika. A female terrestrial deity lives with her children in the upper story of his mansion, and they will come down to the ground floor whenever the Buddha visits Anātha,piṇḍika. Seeing that Anātha,piṇḍika is fervently generous, she tries to check his generosity by talking to his manager and his eldest son, but fails in her attempts.

Finally, when Anātha,piṇḍika's wealth is exhausted, the deity approaches Anātha,piṇḍika and warns him of his impending ruin. He however orders her out of the house, and she has to obey. In despair, she seeks the help of Shakra, who suggests that she should recover all his debts, and also reveals to him lost hidden treasure. She conveys the message to Anātha,piṇḍika, but before pardoning her, takes her to see the Buddha, who then relates the Khadir'āṅgāra Jātaka. The Velāma Sutta is also given on this occasion. This Sutta is often referred to in the Commentaries, where it is well known as “Velāma's great sacrifice” (*Velāma mahā,yañña*).⁴

2 Significance of the Sutta

2.1 The teaching of the Velāma Sutta is very similar to that of **the Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 142).⁵ Due to the almost calculative nature of the astronomical numbers (84,000) [§4] and the hierarchy of gifts [§5b], the Velāma Sutta and the Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta—at least their hyperbolic numbers and hierarchy of giving—clearly lack the simplicity of the early Suttas. They are evidently late compilations, even post-Buddha. The Velāma Sutta, however, climaxes in a very ancient teaching—that of the perception of impermanence.⁶ [2.3]

¹ DhA 9.4/3:10 f.

² AA 4:180-183.

³ J 40/1:226-334. For a continuation of the story, see **Siri J** (J 284/2:409 ff). Cf **Visayha J** (J 340/3:128-132 = Jātaka,māla no 5), where in a past life, our Bodhisattva again makes generous gifts until Shakra's seat heats up. See also J 1:45.

⁴ DA 1:234; MA 1:135; AA 2:12; DhA 3:11; KhA 222; ItA 1:91, 2:48; J 1:228; VbhA 2084/414 (mentioned together with Vessantara's giving).

⁵ M 142/3:253-257 = SD 1.9.3.

⁶ Six advantages of contemplating impermanence are listed in (**Ānisaṃsa**) **Anicca Saññā S** (A 6.102): “(1) All formations will be appear transient to me (*sabba,saṅkhārā ca me anavaṭṭhito khāyissanti*). (2) My mind will not delight in all the world [or in the world of the all] (*sabba,loke ca me mano nābhiramissati*). (3) My mind will rise above all the world (*sabba,lokā ca me mano vuṭṭhahissati*). (4) My mind will tend towards nirvana (*nibbāna,poṇaṇ ca me mānasam bhavissati*). (5) The mental fetters will be broken by me (*saṃyojanā ca me pahānam gacchanti*).

2.2 While the legend of Velāma’s great offering is related for the benefit of Anātha,piṇḍika (the Buddha’s chief layman supporter), another similar story—that of “the incomparable giving” (*asadisa, dāna*)—is given in connection with king Pasenadi (the Buddha’s chief royal supporter).⁷ This legend is related as a story of the past in **the Āditta Jātaka** (J 424) in connection with giving alms to pratyekabuddhas,⁸ and in **the Asadisa,dāna Vatthu** (DhA 13.10) regarding king Pasenadi’s incomparable giving to the Buddha and the order.⁹ Velāma’s giving clearly outdoes even Pasenadi’s “incomparable giving.”

2.3 The most significant part of the Velāma Sutta is its closing, that is, the statement that the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), if done “for even the moment of a finger-snap” [§5b] is better than the cultivation of lovingkindness, or observing the precepts, or going for refuge, or building a monastery, or feeding the Buddha, or feeding the Sangha, or doing any other kind of material giving. It is important to see also this in proper context: it does not mean here that the perception of impermanence could or should be done to the exclusion of the other mentioned teachings (especially the cultivation of lovingkindness, the observance of precepts, going for refuge and practising charity). Rather, they should be practised in relation to one another, with priority given to the perception of impermanence.

The perception of impermanence here should be taken in the context of streamwinning, especially those teachings given in two remarkable suttas related to lay spiritual training (but also suitable for monastics who are not striving for arhathood), namely, **the Sa,upādisesa Sutta** (A 9.12)¹⁰ and **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1).¹¹ In fact, the last practice on the list (the most important), that is, the perception on impermanence, leads to the very first person on the list, that is, the one endowed with right view (that is, the streamwinner).

2.4 Finally, it is important to understand that the Velāma Sutta is not about numbers, but *a reminder on the priority of spiritual practice*—that the teaching comes before the teachers. Giving may well be good, but it has an instrumental purpose, that of serving as a wholesome support for mental concentrations, which in turn should be instrumental in one’s realizing insight wisdom, leading to spiritual liberation.

3 The Sa,upādisesa Sutta

In **the Sa,upādisesa Sutta** (A 9.12), the Buddha, on being questioned by Sāriputta regarding the destiny of other sectarian wanderers, gives a teaching of the nine kinds of saints (five kinds of non-returner, the once-returner, and three kinds of streamwinner), and concludes with these words, on the ease of becoming a streamwinner:¹²

Furthermore, Sāriputta, here a certain person fulfills moral virtue, but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom.¹³ With the total destruction of the three fetters,¹⁴ he is a **single-seeder**,¹⁵ having taken only one more human birth, makes an end of suffering.¹⁶

And (6) I shall attain to supreme recluseship (*paramena ca sāmāññena samannāgato bhavissāmī ti*)” (A 6.102/-3:443), SD 93.7.

⁷ That is, after the death of Bimbisāra, a streamwinner and chief royal supporter. He dies from the tortures inflicted on him by his own son, Ajāta,sattu. See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2/1:47-86), SD 8.10 (1), esp D 2,99-102 (the Sutta conclusion).

⁸ J 424/3:469-474 @ SD 22.10a (1.2).

⁹ DhA 13.10/3:182-192 @ SD 22.10 (3.2).

¹⁰ A 9.12/4:378-382 @ SD 3.3(3).

¹¹ S 25.1/3:225 (SD 16.7).

¹² See **Sa,upādisesa S** (A 9.12/4:378-382), SD 3.3(3).

¹³ *Idh’ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī*. PTS ed has wr: *idh’ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ na paripūrakārī, paññāya na paripūrakārī*.

¹⁴ They are the first 3 of **the 10 fetters** (*samyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,ditthi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*pa-*

This, Sāriputta, is the seventh person ...

Furthermore, Sāriputta, here a certain person fulfills moral virtue, but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom.¹⁷ With the total destruction of the three fetters, he is a **clan-to-clan-goer**,¹⁸ having re-arisen and wandered amongst two or three families, makes an end of suffering.¹⁹

This, Sāriputta, is the eighth person ...

Furthermore, Sāriputta, here a certain person fulfills moral virtue, but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom.²⁰ With the total destruction of the three fetters, he is a **seven-at-most**,²¹ having re-arisen and wandered amongst gods and humans for seven lives at the most, makes an end of suffering.²²

This, Sāriputta, is the ninth person who having died with the aggregates of existence remaining is freed from hell, freed from the animal kingdom, freed from the ghost realm [the realm of the departed], freed from the state of misery, the evil destination, the suffering state.

Sāriputta, some of the wanderers of other faiths are foolish and unintelligent; some will know those with the aggregates of existence remaining as those with the aggregates of existence remaining; some will know those without aggregates remaining as those without aggregates of existence remaining.

Sāriputta, these are the nine persons who, having died with the aggregates of existence remaining, are freed from hell, freed from the animal kingdom, freed from the ghost realm, freed from the state of misery, the evil destination, the suffering state.

Not until now, Sāriputta, has this Dharma discourse been declared to monks, nuns, laymen or laywomen. What is the reason for this?

So that after hearing this Dharma discourse, they do not bring heedlessness upon themselves! Moreover, Sāriputta, this Dharma discourse has been given by me simply because of my being questioned. (A 9.12/4:381 f)

What is interesting about the Sa,upādisesa Sutta is that it does not mention arhathood as a goal, and concludes with the mention that if such a teaching were openly promoted the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen would be “heedless,” that is, not consider arhathood when they are capable of doing so. But in the course of his teaching, when questioned, he nevertheless gives this short-cut, as it were, to awakening.

A survey of the early suttas will reveal a tenth type of “saint” (or saint-to-be) as it were, one which later authorities called “the lesser stream-winner” (*cūḷa, sotāpanna, culla, sotāpanna*). This is the person

tiḡha), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭiḡha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram, bhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*ud-dham, bhāgiya*). For details on the 3 fetters, see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

¹⁵ *Eka, bījī*.

¹⁶ *Puna ca paraṃ Sāriputta idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso, kārī, paññāya mattaso, kārī. So tinnam saṃyojanānam parikkhayā eka, bījī hoti ekañ-ñeva mānusaḡam bhavaṃ nibbattetvā dukkhass'antam karoti.*

¹⁷ *Idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso, kārī, paññāya mattaso, kārī.*

¹⁸ *Kolaṃ, kola.*

¹⁹ *Puna ca paraṃ Sāriputta idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso, kārī, paññāya mattaso, kārī. So tinnam saṃyojanānam parikkhayā kolaṅkolo hoti, dve vā tīṇi vā kulāni sandhāvitvā saṃsaritvā dukkhass'antakaro.*

²⁰ *Idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso, kārī, paññāya mattaso, kārī.*

²¹ *Satta-k, khattu, parama.*

²² *Puna ca paraṃ Sāriputta idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti samādhismiṃ mattaso, kārī, paññāya mattaso, kārī. So tinnam saṃyojanānam parikkhayā satta-k, khattu, paramo hoti, satta-k, khattu, paramam deve ca mānuse ca sandhāvitvā saṃsaritvā dukkhass'antam karoti.*

working his way to become a stream-winner in this life itself. The main teaching for such postulants is the perception of impermanence, mentioned at the climactic close of the Velāma Sutta.

4 (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta

The best known sutta that speaks of entering the stream here and now, that is, becoming a lesser streamwinner, is the short but remarkable (**Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1),²³ whose key passage runs as follows:

Bhikshus, the eye is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The ear is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The nose is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The tongue is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The body is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

The mind is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

Bhikshus, one who has faith thus, who firmly believes in these truths [is convinced of these truths], is called **a faith-follower**,...²⁴

Bhikshus, one who accepts these truths after pondering over them with some wisdom thus,²⁵ is called **a truth-follower**,

he has entered the fixed course of rightness, entered the plane of superior persons, gone beyond the plane of the worldlings.

He is incapable of doing any intentional deed by which he might be reborn in hell, or in the animal world, or in the ghost realm. He is incapable of dying without attaining the fruit of stream-winning.²⁶ (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7

The message of this short but remarkable Sutta—and the Velāma Sutta, especially its closing instruction—is clear: the reflection on impermanence is the beginning of the path of awakening through stream-winning. Whether we merely have faith in the impermanence of the six senses (that is, as a faith-follower, *saddhā'nusārī*), or accept this truth after wisely examining (that is, as a truth-follower, *dhammānusārī*), we are assured of becoming a streamwinner. We would not die without having realized the fruit of streamwinning in this life itself.

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The Discourse on Velāma (the brahmin)

A 9.20

1 Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One was dwelling in Anāthapiṇḍika's Park in Jeta's Forest near Sāvattḥī. Then the houselord Anātha,piṇḍika approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side.

²³ S 25.1/3:225 @ SD 16.7; also the other 9 suttas in **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25). See also Gethin 2001:133-138.

²⁴ *Yo bhikkhave ime dhamme evaṃ saddahati adhimuccati, ayaṃ vuccati saddhā'nusārī okkanto sammatta,niyā-maṃ sappurisa,bhūmim okkanto vitivatto putthajjana,bhūmim.* The operative verbs here are *saddahati* ("he has faith (in)") and *adhimuccati* ("he resolves, adheres to, is sure of"). I have rendered *adhimuccati* here as "(he) firmly believes...".

²⁵ *Yassa kho bhikkhave ime dhammā evaṃ paññāya mattaso nijjhānam khamanti.*

²⁶ *Abhabbo taṃ kammaṃ kātuṃ yaṃ kammaṃ katvā nirayaṃ vā tiracchāna,yonim vā petti,visayaṃ vā uppajjeyya. Abhabbo ca tāva kālaṃ kātuṃ yāva na sotāpatti,phalaṃ sacchikaroti.*

When Anātha,piṇḍika was seated thus at one side, the Blessed One said this to him:²⁷

“Houselord, is alms given in your family?”²⁸

“Yes, venerable sir, alms is given in my family; but it consists of a coarse mess of broken rice grains along with sour gruel.”²⁹

The wrong way of giving (of the false person)

2 ³⁰“Houselord, whether one gives a gift [alms] that is coarse or choice, if one gives carelessly, thoughtlessly,

not with one’s own hands,

as if throwing something away,³¹

with a view that it will come to nothing,³²

then, wherever that almsgiving bears fruit,³³ his mind will not turn to the enjoyment of good food, nor to the enjoyment of fine clothes, nor to the enjoyment of splendid carriages, nor to the enjoyment of the five cords of sense-pleasures in their sweetness.³⁴

³⁵One’s [393] sons or women [wives and daughters] or servants or messengers or workers will not have the desire to listen to one, nor give ear, nor focus their minds to understand.

Why is that?

Such, houselord, is the result of deeds done carelessly.

The right way of giving (of the true individual)

3 Houselord, whether one gives a gift [alms] that is coarse or choice, if³⁶

²⁷ **Jātaka Comy** says that Anātha,piṇḍika regularly goes to see the Buddha twice a day, sometimes with numerous friends (J 1:9 ff). The Jātaka Comy adds that he sometimes visits the Buddha thrice a day (J 1:226). However, he never asks the Buddha a single question fearing that it might weary him (recalling that the Buddha was “a delicate prince”). He does not wish the Buddha to feel obliged to answer him in return for his generosity to the order. As such, the Buddha would usually address him first, as on this occasion (DhA 1:3). There is however at least one discourse given in response to Anātha,piṇḍika’s questioning, ie, regarding who are those worthy of offerings (A 2.4.4/1:62 f), and he also consults the Buddha regarding the marriage of his daughter, Cūḷa Subhaddā (DhA 3:466). Further, see **Anātha,piṇḍika S 1** (S 55.26), SD 23.2a (1).

²⁸ Comy notes that this question is not asked concerning gifts to the order, but to the world in general (*lokiya, mahā, janassa*) (AA 4:178). Cf *Vinaya Texts* 3:9n; S 1:318 = S:W 1:115 & AA 795; D 2:354.

²⁹ *Diyyati me bhante kule dānaṃ; tañ ca kho lūkhaṃ kaṇājakam̐ bilaṅga, dutiyan ti.*

³⁰ This whole section: *Lukhañ ca pi gahapati dānaṃ deti paññātaṃ vā, tañ ca asakkaccaṃ deti, acittikatvā deti, asahatthā ca deti, apaviddhaṃ deti, anāgamana, diṭṭhiko deti; yattha yattha tassa tassa dānassa vipāko nibbattati, na uḷārāya bhatta, bhogāya cittaṃ namati, na uḷārāya vattha, bhogāya cittaṃ namati, na uḷārāya yāna, bhogāya cittaṃ namati, na uḷāresu pañcāsu kāma, guṇesu bhogāya cittaṃ namati.*

³¹ “As if throwing something away,” *apaviddhaṃ*, also “rejected, abandoned (often of a dead body),” D 3:256, 2 ≠ M 2:22, 20 (MA 4:81, 10: *apaviddhaṃ ti chaḍḍetu, kāmo hutvā vammike uragam̐ pakkhipanto viya deti*, “he gives with the desire of throwing away, as if casting a snake onto an anthill”); S 3:143; Sn 200; Dh 292; Th 315; J 3:426, 20*, 6:499, 6*.

³² These 4 lines as at **Cūḷa Puṇṇama S** (M 110.12/3:22), where M:ÑB has: “Here an untrue man (*asappurisa*) gives a gift carelessly, gives it not with his own hand, gives it without showing respect, gives what is to be discarded, gives it with the view that nothing will come of it” (M:ÑB 893).

³³ See S 1:92.

³⁴ “Nor to the enjoyment. . . in their sweetness,” *na uḷāresu pañasu kāma, guṇesu bhogāya cittaṃ namati.*

³⁵ This para: *Ye pi ssa te honti puttā ti vā dārā ti vā dāsā ti vā pessā ti vā kammakarā ti vā, te pi na sussusanti na sotam̐ odahati na añña, cittaṃ upaṭṭhapenti.*

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|--|-------------------------------|
| (1) one gives with care, | <i>sakkaccaṃ deti,</i> |
| (2) one gives after some thought, ³⁷ | <i>citti,katvā deti,</i> |
| (3) one gives with one's own hands, | <i>sahatthā deti,</i> |
| (4) one gives not as if throwing something away, ³⁸ | <i>anapaviddham deti,</i> |
| (5) one gives seeing what is to come, ³⁹ | <i>āgamana,ditṭhiko deti,</i> |

then, wherever that almsgiving bears fruit, his mind will turn to the enjoyment of good food, or to the enjoyment of fine cloth, or to the enjoyment of splendid carriages, or to the enjoyment of the five cords of sense-pleasures in their sweetness.

One's sons or women [wives and daughters] or servants or messengers or workers will have the desire to listen to one, and give ear, and focus their minds to understand.⁴⁰

Why is that?

Such, houselord, is the result of deeds done with care.

The Velāma Jātaka⁴¹

The brahmin Velāma's gifts

4 Long ago, houselord, there was the brahmin Velāma. He gave great gifts [alms] such as these:

- (1) he gave 84,000 golden bowls full of silver;
- (2) he gave 84,000 silver bowls full of gold;
- (3) he gave 84,000 copper bowls full of gems;
- (4) he gave 84,000 elephants, caparisoned in gold, with golden banners, each covered with a golden net;
- (5) he gave 84,000 chariots, spread with lion-skins, with tiger-skins, with leopard-skins, with saffron-coloured blankets, with gold trappings, with golden banners, each covered with a golden net;
- (6) he gave 84,000 milk cows spread over with fine jute cloth,⁴² with silver milk-pails;
- (7) he gave 84,000 maidens, adorned with jewelled ear-rings;

³⁶ An almost identical list of 5 conditions of giving is found in **Cūḷa Punnama S** (M 100,23/3:24), SD 45.4. First 4 factors at **Paṃyāsi S** (D 23,32.19, pl), SD 39.4. For various conditions of giving, see **Aputtaka S 2** (S 3.20/1:91-93), SD 22.5 (2).

³⁷ (**Aṭṭha**) **Dāna Ss 1-2** (A 8.31-31/4:236 = SD 6.6) advise here thus: "One gives thinking, "This is an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind," ie to facilitate one's spiritual development.

³⁸ That is, not "dumping" away things that we do not want any more, but rather by way of sharing our good fortune, and to do so mindfully.

³⁹ *Āgamana,ditṭhiko deti*, lit "he gives with the view of the coming," ie with a view of its karmic wholesome results. Cf *ayañ ca etad-agga,sannikkhepo nāma catūhi kāraṇehi labbhati: atth'uppattito āgamanato ciñña,vasito guṇātirekato ti*, "and as regards this laying down of **the foremost position**, one gains it in 4 ways, namely, (1) on account of the arising of the goal (*attha*), (2) on account of regard for the future (*āgamana*), (3) on account of the virtue of habit (*ciñña*), and (4) on account of one's exceptional virtue (AA 1:125,6)—which is spoken in connection with those disciples who have attained to their respective foremost positions. That is to say, after doing various acts of merit, with their minds wholesomely focuses, they aspire towards their desired position. Similarly, as taught in such suttas, esp the last (and most important) reason for giving—one gives thinking, "This is an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind" (*cittālaṅkāraṃ citta,parikkhār'attham*): see (**Maha-p-phala**) **Dāna S** (A 7.49/4:59-62 = SD 2.3), **Dāna S 1** (A 8.31/4:236), SD 6.6a, & **Dāna Vatthu S** (A 8.33/4:236 f), SD 6.6c. On *āgamanto*, see AA 1:128,23, 132,17, 133,15, 134,5.

⁴⁰ This para: *Ye pi'ssa te honti puttā ti vā dārā ti vā dāsā ti vā pessā ti vā kammakarā ti vā, te pi na sussusanti na sotam odahati na añña,cittam upaṭṭhapenti*.

⁴¹ This canonical Jātaka is not found amongst the commentarial 547 Jātakas. See **Myths in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (3.4.3). Cf **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17), SD 36.12.

⁴² *Caturāsīti dhenū,sahassāni adāsī dukūla,santhanāni kamsūpadhāraṇāni*. DPL gives *dukūla* as "fine cloth." Cf E M Hare's tr of *dukūla,santhanāni*, "with tethers of fine jute" (A:H 4:263).

(8) he gave 84,000 couches, [394] spread over with long-furred rugs, and coverlets embroidered with long-furred rugs, embroidered white woollen sheets, choice rugs of Kadalī deer hide, spreads with red canopies, and crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the head and feet;⁴³

(9) he gave 84,000 pieces of cloth of fine flax, of fine silk,⁴⁴ of fine wool, of fine cotton.

And what more to say of the food and drinks: food hard and soft, food to be licked and drunk, flowing like a river, I say!

5 Houselord, you might think that this brahmin Velāma who gave those great gifts were someone else. But, houselord, it is not to be viewed thus.

At that time, I was the brahmin Velāma; I gave those great gifts.

But then, houselord, there were none worthy of the gifts; no one purified [blessed] the gifts.⁴⁵

Greater than the great gifts

5.2 AN INVERSE SCALE OF TRUE PRACTICE

(1) For, houselord, though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts, if he were to feed a single person endowed with [attained to] right view (diṭṭhi, sampanna),⁴⁶ greater would be the fruit.

(2) And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts, and even if the brahmin Velāma had fed a hundred persons of right view, greater would the fruit be if he were to feed a single once-returned.

(3) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts*, and even if the brahmin Velāma had fed a hundred once-returned, greater would the fruit be if he were to feed a single non-returned.

(4) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts*, and even if the brahmin Velāma had fed a hundred non-returned, greater would the fruit be if he were to feed a single arhat.

(5) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts*, and even if the brahmin Velāma had fed a hundred arhats, greater would the fruit be if he were to [395] feed a single pratyeka-buddha.

(6) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts*, and even if the brahmin Velāma had fed a hundred pratyeka-buddhas, greater would the fruit be if he were to feed a single Tathagata, arhat [worthy one], fully self-awakened one.

(7) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts*, and even if the brahmin Velāma had fed the order of monks with the Buddha at the head, greater would the fruit be if he were to build a monastery dedicated to the Sangha of the four quarters.

(8) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts*, and even if the brahmin Velāma had, built a monastery dedicated to the Sangha of the four quarters, greater would the fruit be if he were, bright with faith, to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

(9) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts*, and even if the brahmin Velāma had, bright with faith, taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, greater would be the fruit if he were to take upon himself the training-rules—

⁴³ *Catur-āsīti pallaṅka, saḥassāni adāsi gonak'atthatāni paṭik'atthatāni paṭalik'atthatāni kadali, miga, vara, pac-cattharanāni sa, uttara-c, chaddāni ubhato lohita-kūpadhānāni*. Almost as at **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17,2.5/2:187), SD 36.12.

⁴⁴ Evidently, silk was available in India in the Buddha's time. Recent microscopic analysis of archaeological thread fragments found inside copper-alloy ornaments from Harappa and steatite beads from Chanhu-daro, two important Indus sites, have yielded silk fibres, dating to c 2450-2000 BCE: see Ball, "Rethinking silk's origin," 2009 & Good, Kenoyer & Meadow, "New evidence for early silk in the Indus civilization" 2009. On silk in the Indian subcontinent, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_in_the_Indian_subcontinent.

⁴⁵ This last sentence means that no one was "pure" enough, ie, has the past good karma of being able to enjoy the giving, and the present wholesome mind of rejoicing in it.

⁴⁶ That is, a streamwinner (*sotāpanna*) (AA 4:185): see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

to abstain from taking life,
 to abstain from taking the not-given,
 to abstain from sexual misconduct,
 to abstain from false speech,
 to abstain from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks and that which causes heedlessness.

(10) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts, and even if the brahmin Velāma had taken upon himself the training-rules—to abstain from taking life, to abstain from taking the not-given, to abstain from sexual misconduct, to abstain from false speech, to abstain from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks and that which causes heedlessness—*

*greater would be the fruit if he were to cultivate a heart of lovingkindness for even just as long as it takes to tug at the cow’s teat (to milk it).*⁴⁷

(11) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma gave those great gifts, and even if he were to cultivate a heart of lovingkindness [396] for just as long as it takes to tug at the cow’s teat (to milk it),*⁴⁸

*greater would be the fruit if he were to cultivate the perception of impermanence for even the moment of a finger-snap!*⁴⁹

— evaṃ —

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⁴⁷ “If he were to cultivate...just as long as it takes to tug at the cow’s teat (to milk it),” *antamaso gaddūhana.mattam pi metta,cittam bhāveyya*. Comys gloss *gaddūhana,matta* as *goduhana,mattam* (lit “the extent of a cow-milking”) or more fully, *gāvim ṭhane gahetvā ekam khīra,bindum dūhana,kāla.mattampi*, “for just the time it takes, having tugged at the cow’s teat, to get a drop of milk”; alternatively, they gloss it as *gandha,ūhana,mattam* (lit “the extent of a scent-sniff”), ie the time it take for a single sniff of a piece of incense nipped between two fingers (MA 4:195 = SA 2:224 = AA 4:195). The expression also occurs in **Okkha S** (S 20.4/2:264) in the same connection, ie the moment it takes to cultivate lovingkindness, as praised by the Buddha. The expression is also found in **Bakkula S** (M 124,33/3:127 = SD 3.15), where Bakkula claims that he had never been sick for even such a short moment. From here on, PTS repeats the whole of §5b, concluding with the following section.

⁴⁸ Even when lovingkindness is cultivated for longer periods or as the main practice, a moment of the perception of impermanence is still “of greater fruit.” This show the primacy of *the perception of impermanence* in the attaining of the path of awakening, esp that of streamwinning: see (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7. Cultivating lovingkindness, however, is helpful in sustaining our meditation practice and inspiring others to practise in a similar manner.

⁴⁹ “For even the moment of a finger-snap,” *accharā,saṅghāta,mattam*. Also in **Cūl’accharā S** (A 1.6.3-5/A 1:10), in the same context of lovingkindness. See Intro (2-4).