

7

Tiro,kuḍḍa Sutta

The Outside-the-Wall Discourse | Khp 7/6

Tirokuḍḍa Peta,vatthu The Outside-the-Wall Preta Story | Pv 1.5/4 f

Theme: The departed and merit

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003; rev 2010

1 Dedication of merit

1.1 THE GRATEFUL DEAD. The Tiro,kuḍḍa Sutta is important and interesting as it gives us a good idea of how the departed may suffer and how they can be helped, or rather, how they can help themselves, that is to say: the living relatives *make the offering on the departed's behalf* (giving by proxy), and the departed then *rejoice* in this action. The most familiar section of this sutta is, of course, verse 4:

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| 4 | <i>Idam vo ñātīnaṃ hotu
sukhitā hontu ñātayo.</i> | Let this be for relatives!
May relatives be happy! |
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Evidently, from verses 5cd and 6ab here, that the departed, by rejoicing in the gifts from the living, bless the latter in return. This generation of wholesome spiritual energy uplifts the suffering departed to a higher level of being.

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| 5 | <i>Pahūte anna,pānamhi
sakkaccaṃ anumodare:¹
Ciraṃ jīvantu no ñātī
yesaṃ hetu labhāmase</i> | In the abundant food and drink
they wholeheartedly ² rejoice:
“ <i>Long may our relatives live,
on whose account we gain these!</i> ” |
| 6 | <i>Amhākañ ca katā pūjā
dāyakā ca anipphalā.</i> | <i>For honour to us has been done,
and givers are not fruitless!”</i> |

The Kathā,vatthu and its Commentary clearly reject the view that the ghosts benefit by the very same physical items offered in their names (Kvu 7.6/349) (as held by some sects like the Rājagiriya and the Siddhatthika, KvuA 99). The ghosts’ spiritual change occur when they greatly rejoice and become happy on seeing the offerings made in their name (*nanu petā attano atthāya dānaṃ dentam anumodenti cittam pasādentī, pītiṃ uppādentī, somanassaṃ paṭilabhanṭī ti.—Amantā, Kvu 7.6/349*). [1.4]

1.2 THE REJOICING DEAD. In addition to the above verse, some Theravada Buddhists dedicate merit to their departed by reciting a Sinhalese Pali verse of “sharing” accumulated merit (*patti,dāna*) with various beings so that they may rejoice in them (*patt’ānumodanā*):

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|---|---|
| <i>Ettāvatā ca amhehi
sambhataṃ puñña,sampadam
sabbe <u>sattā</u>’numodantu
sabba,sampatti,siddhiyā</i> | To the extent that this
store of merit has been won by us:
may all <u>beings</u> rejoice (in it)
may they gain every attainment! |
| <i>Ettāvatā ca amhehi
sambhataṃ puñña,sampadam
sabbe <u>devā</u>’numodantu
sabba,sampatti,siddhiyā</i> | To the extent that this
store of merit has been won by us:
may all <u>devas</u> rejoice (in it)
may they gain every attainment! |

¹ Anumodare = anumodanti (KhpA 209 = PvA 26). See §5b.

² “Wholeheartedly,” *sakkaccaṃ*. PvA:BM has “respectfully.” This is what empowers the departed, uplifting them from their suffering state, that is, to say, their own wholesome mental state such as by wishing their living relatives well as shown here. See §5b.

*Ettāvata ca amhehi
sambhataṃ puñña, sampadam
-sabbe bhūtā'numodantu
sabba, sampatti, siddhiyā*

To the extent that this
store of merit has been won by us:
may all spirits³ rejoice (in it)
may they gain every attainment!

All these verses quoted above are not those of “transference” of merit, for the simple reason that “merit” (*puñña*) cannot be deposited by one being onto another⁴ [4]. Verse 4 above (*idam vo...*) is a “verse of dedication of merit” to the departed. The last three verses are “verses of rejoicing” (*ettāvata ca...*), for inviting all beings, including devas and spirits, to show their gladness by rejoicing in our merit-making, and in that way, generate an atmosphere of wholesome spiritual energy benefitting numerous beings.⁵

This Sutta should be studied in connection with **the Jāṇussoṇi Sutta** (A 10.177) where the brahmin Jāṇussoṇi asks the Buddha whether his ancestral offerings (Skt *śrāddhā*, P *saddhā*) are received by the departed. The Introduction to this Sutta contains further important discussion related to the topic here.⁶

2 The Tirokuḍḍa Sutta's origin story

2.1 STORY OF THE PAST. The Commentary to the Khuddaka Pāṭha, the first of the 15 books of the Khuddaka Nikāya, tells the origin story of this Sutta.⁷ Ninety-two aeons ago, in the city of Kāsī (modern Benares), there were the rajah Jayasena and his queen Sirimā. She gave birth to a son Phussa who eventually became the Buddha of that period.⁸ Jayasena had three other sons, each by a different mother, all younger half-brothers to Phussa. Proud at his son's Buddhahood, the rajah alone attended to Phussa. Even the three young princes were refused that honour.

When a revolt arose in the border region,⁹ the rajah sent his three princes to quell it. On their return, they were traditionally granted a boon. Understandably, they asked for the honour of attending on the Buddha, but were refused. On their insistence, the rajah finally relented and granted only 3 months out of the 7 years first requested.

The princes sent a letter to their country agent to prepare dwelling and food for the rains-retreat of the Buddha and his sangha. Clothing themselves in yellow cloth, the princes themselves attended to the Buddha. Their treasurer, a man of faith, took care of the almsfood for the sangha headed by the Buddha. The country agent, with the help of his relatives arranged the alms-offerings and took care of everyone else.

However, there were amongst them those who had ill will in their hearts. They obstructed the alms-giving, ate the food to be offered, and set fire to the refectory. When the Invitation (*pāvāraṇā*)¹⁰ was over, the princes took leave of the Buddha and returned to the father, the rajah. Soon after, the Buddha passed away.

³ “Spirits,” *bhūtā*, lit “that which exists,” ie any animate being, usu classified as “moving or still” (*tasa vā thāvarā vā*, S 1:141, 4:117, 351, 5:393; Sn 146, 629; Dh 405, Tha 876; J 5:221; KhA 245; DhA 4:175; Nc 479). As this is a late verse, I have rendered it in the popular vernacular: Miln 23; J 2:215, 3:511, 4:245, 6:269; cf V 4:84.

⁴ See **Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.177/5:269-273) & SD 2.6a Intro.

⁵ See eg Harvey 1990:42-44. For a case of “transference” of demerit, we have Mahā Kassapa who is said “to relieve unfortunate beings of their negative bio-moral status by accepting their gifts” (2003:65), see Liz Wilson 2003: ch 3. However, here the reality is that the donors, by their own actions, generate good karma for themselves. Mahā Kassapa, as it were, gives them the supportive conditions for it.

⁶ **Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.177/5:269-273), SD 2.6a.

⁷ This sutta and its origin story are found in Kh:Ñ sutta 7 (**The Minor Readings and The Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning**, tr Ñāṇamoli, 1960: sutta 7) and also in Pv 1.5 (Peta, vatthu and its Commentary with minor differences in details; tr Pv:BK = **Elucidation of the Intrinsic Meaning, the so-named Commentary on the Petavatthu** [Paramatthadīpani] tr U Ba Kyaw & P Masefield, London: PTS, 1980).

⁸ Phussa Buddha was the 18th Buddha in the 24 preceding Gotama (Bv ch 19). See n7.

⁹ PvA: “So they made it appear as though there were a disturbance on the border.” (PvA:BM 23)

¹⁰ *Pāvāraṇā*. This ceremony concludes the annual three-month monastic rains-retreat, during which monks invite one another to be admonished regarding any misconduct that had been “seen, heard or suspected” of them.

The rajah, the princes, the country agent and the treasurer, too, passed away in due course and were reborn in the heavens. The country agent's relatives, who had ill will in their hearts, were reborn in the hells. Ninety-two aeons¹¹ passed and those with ill will were reborn in hell after hell. During the time of Kassapa Buddha,¹² they were reborn as pretas or ghosts (*petā*).¹³ [3]

When they saw some devotees giving alms and dedicating merit to their departed relatives, who were then relieved of their sufferings, the ghosts approached Kassapa Buddha if they too could gain such blessings. Kassapa prophesied that this could only happen in the time of Gotama Buddha, when their relative, the country agent, would be reborn as rajah Bimbisāra.

2.2 STORY OF THE PRESENT. During this Buddha-interval,¹⁴ in our own Buddha's time, the three princes were reborn as the three matted-hair Kassapa brothers of Gayā, sīsā (V 1:23). The treasurer was reborn as the great guildmaster (*mahā,seṭṭhī*) Visākha, and his daughter was Dhammadinnā (MA 2:355).

After our Buddha was awakened, he went on to teach the Five Monks and then the three matted-hair ascetics and their disciples. Then the Buddha went to Rājagaha with them to meet rajah Bimbisāra, who, upon listening to the Dharma, attained streamwinning that very same day. On the following day, the ghosts (Bimbisāra's relatives) had hoped he would dedicate merit of his offerings to them. But the rajah was engrossed with the thought of building a dwelling-place for the Buddha. The disappointed ghosts made a horrible screeching in the night around the rajah's residence.

The following day, when Bimbisāra told the Buddha about what had happened, the Buddha told the rajah not to fear anything and related to him its cause. Realizing that he could help his own relatives, the rajah invited the Buddha for an alms-meal the following day.

Just as the rajah was pouring the dedication water (*dakkhin'odaka*) and making this dedication: "Let this be for our relatives (*idaṃ vo ñātīnaṃ hotu*)," it is said, lotus-covered pools arose for the ghosts who bathed and drank in them until their weariness and thirst were allayed. When the rajah offered porridge, hard food and soft food, the same appeared in divine form to the ghosts, and of which they partook and were refreshed.¹⁵ When the rajah offered cloth and dwelling-place, the same appeared in divine form to the ghosts. At the close of the ceremony, the Buddha blessed the rajah by reciting the stanzas beginning, "Outside the walls they wait..." (Abridged from KhpA 201-206)

3 What (or who) really are the pretas?

1.1 MEANING OF PETA. The Pali term *petā* is usually translated as "ghost" or anglicized as "preta," after the Sanskrit *preta*. They are also popularly, especially amongst Asian Buddhists, called "hungry ghosts." The Pali-English Dictionary (PED) gives the etymology of *petā* as *pa* + *√i* (to go), meaning "gone past, gone before," that is, the departed. A better etymology is perhaps *pa* (Skt *pra*) + *ita*, "gone" (pp of *eti*) [from *√i*, "to go"]. In the early Buddhist canon, the pretas form one of the five destinies (*pañca, gati*), namely,

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (1) the suffering states [hells] | (<i>niraya</i>); |
| (2) the animal womb | (<i>tiracchāna, yoni</i>); |

¹¹ "Aeon" (*kappa*), a world-cycle; see **Kappa S** (A 4:156) & **Aggañña S** (D 27), SD 2.19 Appendix. Our present aeon is a "fortunate aeon" (*bhadda, kappa*) with 5 Buddhas: Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, our own Gotama (D:RD 2:6 f) and the future Buddha Metteyya (D 26.25/3:75). Six other Buddhas are mentioned in **Mahāpadāna S** (D 14): Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, and our own Gotama, making "the 7 Buddhas." Vipassī is said to be arisen 91 aeons ago. The list is further expanded in the Buddhavaṃsa and the Sri Lankan chronicle Thūpavaṃsa, which mention that Phussa is said to have appeared in the aeon preceding Vipassī, ie 92 aeons ago (as stated above), and Phussa himself was preceded by some 17 other Buddhas.

¹² Kassapa Buddha, ie, the Buddha immediately before Gotama (B ch 25).

¹³ "Ghosts," *petā*, also "hungry ghosts" or "shades, manes": see Intro (3).

¹⁴ "Buddha-interval" (*buddh'antara*). Unlike a world-cycle (*kappa*) or world-interval (*antara, kappa*), a Buddha-interval is not a fixed period. For example, although our auspicious aeon has 5 Buddhas, 60 aeons elapsed between Vipassī and his immediate successor, Sikhī.

¹⁵ DhA 1:103 f: see above Intro (3).

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| (3) the realm of the departed | (<i>petti,visaya</i>); | |
| (4) the human world | (<i>manussa</i>); and | |
| (5) the gods | (<i>deva</i>). | (S 56.102-131/5:474-477; A 9.68/4:459) |

According to **the (Pañca) Gati Sutta** (A 9.68), all these five destinations may be transcended by the practice of the four satipatthanas.¹⁶

1.2 DAKKHIṆA

1.2.1 The Buddhist *peta* is cognate with the Vedic *pitarah* or *pitṛ* (manes, souls of the “fathers”), especially the spirits before the obsequial rites are performed, and the brahmanical *preta*, ghosts of departed ones suffering due to past misdeeds. In the first sense, the pretas are akin to “shades” or “manes,” of which the PED notes that “they may be raised in this existence by means of the *dakkhiṇā* (sacrificial gifts) to a higher category of *mah’iddhikā petā* (alias *yakkhā*), or after a period of expiation shift into another form of existence...” (472) [4]. This is the kind of preta referred to in **(Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi Sutta** (A 10.177).¹⁷

1.2.2 The **Tiro,kuḍḍa Sutta** (Kh 7 = Pv 1.5) evidently refers to the brahminical pretas, which understandably the brahmin Jāṇussoṇi is asking about. Evidently here, *peta* retains its early meaning of “the departed,” not of “hungry ghosts,” as in later times. It is also likely here that *peta* may refer to some sort of intermediate being or state (*antarā,bhava*) that the dying prevails in, according to the level of mental attachment to his erstwhile state.¹⁸

1.3 SUFFERING OF THE PRETAS. A whole section in the Saṃyutta—the **Lakkhaṇa Saṃyutta**—mentions various kinds of suffering pretas that would characterize the Vedic *pitarah* or *pitṛ*.¹⁹ Some of the pretas mentioned here are:

- a skeleton moving through the air, being stabbed and torn apart by vultures, crows and hawks (previously a cattle butcher);
 - a piece of meat moving through the air, being stabbed and torn apart by vultures, crows and hawks (previously another cattle butcher);
 - a man with needle-hairs all over his body, puncturing him all over (previously a slanderer);
 - a man with testicles the size of pots, chased by vultures, crows and hawks (previously a corrupt magistrate);
 - a dung-eater, eating dung with both hands (previous had rice-pots filled with dung and offered them to the monks);
 - a monk moving through the air with his robes, bowl, waistband and body flaming (an evil monk).
- (S 19.1-21/2:254-262)

A whole book in the Khuddaka Nikāya—the **Peta,vatthu** or “Preta Stories”—contains longer stories of such pretas, detailing the karma that led to their states.

1.4 HOW A PRETA IS LIBERATED. From the majority of the preta stories, it appears that their food usually comprises filth such as dung, urine, pus and blood, but more often they are unable to partake of any food. They are often depicted as beings with a pinhead mouth, a narrow stick-like neck with pot-bellies. **U Ba Kyaw** and **Masefield** add:

Moreover when alms are assigned to this and that preta we find that it is not so much a case of them being sustained, as pretas, by such offerings but rather that, by means of such offerings, they are transformed into yakkhas or vimāna-owning devatās. This would in turn explain the different readings of the previous note [PvA:BM 35n59: *pettivisayam*, vl *pittivisayam*] since the preta sustained by offerings from relatives and so on approximates more closely to the Brāhmanic *pitṛ* (or

¹⁶ **(Pañca) Gati S** (A 9.68/4:459), SD 2.20. On **Sati’paṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10), SD 13.

¹⁷ **(Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.177.6/5:270), SD 2.6a.

¹⁸ On the intermediate being, see **Is rebirth immediate?** SD 2.17 (1.3; 3).

¹⁹ S 19.1-21/2:254-262.

intermediary preta) rather than the Buddhist (suffering) peta. In Aṅguttara [Jāṇussoṇi Sutta] passage “peta” may mean nothing more than “departed.” (PvA:BM 35 n60)

While almost all of the beings of four of the five realms have some sort of “realm” or common spatial location, apparently only the pretas do not have such a realm. In fact, they can appear in any form, sub-human, human or divine, but invariably with some marked degree of suffering. [1.1]

The early Pali Canon has remarkably few accounts of pretas, unlike accounts of the devas. Understandably this lack of development in the preta mythology attests to the fact that it was not an important part of Buddhist training as taught by the Buddha. Whatever accounts we have of the pretas in the early canon is simply an accommodation of popular religion and mythology as a skillful means until such times their deeper understanding of the Dharma weans them off such beliefs and their attending rituals for a more direct understanding of true reality.

4 “Transference” of merit?

4.1 ORIGINS OF THE “TRANSFERENCE” VIEW

4.1.1 Provisional teaching. In popular Buddhism, we often hear of the “transferring” of merit, which gives us the wrong impression that merit is like currency or commodity that can be “given” to someone. More correctly, it should be said that we “dedicate the merit to a deceased person for his upliftment. Even this is only *provisional* language, since it does not lead to awakening in this life. The meaning of such a ritual or process still needs to be explained or “drawn out” (*neyy’attha*).

The point that merit is non-negotiable and non-transferable is clearly stated in **the Nidhi,kaṇḍa Sutta** (Khv 8), “No one else has a share in it” (*asadhāraṇam aññesaṃ*) (Khv 8.9/7). We should ask ourselves then, what is the meaning and purpose of dedicating merit?²⁰

4.1.2 Mahāyāna roots? The notion of the “transference of merit” began as a Sinhalese tradition but its roots are probably in post-Buddha developments in India. **PS Jaini**, in his article “Karma and the problem of rebirth in Jainism,” states that the Jains have been able to keep out practices that contradict the individual idea of karma such as śraddha and transference of merit (1980:235).²¹ In the case of Theravāda Buddhism, **Heinz Bechert** suggests that the transference of merit was a borrowing from Mahāyāna doctrine where Bodhisattvas can save others by their enormous store of merit (1992:95-108).

4.1.3 Emotional need? There is another likely explanation for the tradition of merit transference in popular Theravāda Buddhism. **Richard Gombrich**, for example, says that the notion of merit transference arose out of the emotional needs to escape from the responsibility of the orthodox karma doctrine. When the dead relatives receive the merit they are believed to say “thank you” (*anumodare*; sg *anumodati*). In an attempt to integrate merit transference with canonical teachings, some proponents argue that in reality no merit is transferred and the dead do not give thanks: they simply *rejoice* in the good deed, which is the correct meaning of *anumodati*. (1972:203-219).

In fact, *anumodati* (“he rejoices,” plural *anumodare*) is the operative word in connection with the early Buddhist teaching of merit (*puñña*), and nowhere in the Canon is there any teaching regarding the “transfer” of merit. Moreover, only the “departed” (*petā*)—that is, one of the four suffering subhuman realms²²—can benefit from such a dedication of merit. In the case of any living being—there are in reality no “dead” beings since all are reborn²³—the cultivation of lovingkindness (*mettā, bhāvanā*) is the proper practice for promoting their wellbeing.

²⁰ See (**Saddha**) **Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.177/5:269-273) = SD 2.6a.

²¹ See also Reichenbach 1990:11.

²² Sn 231 where *catuhi apāyehi* is glossed as *cattāro apāyā nāma niraya, tiracchāna, pettivisaya, asurakāyā*, “the four states of misery are hell, the animal-birth, the ghost realm, the demon world” (KhA 189). Cf Sn 377::SnA368. See also D 3:234, 264; M 1:73; A 4:459; Nc 550; cf S 5:474-77; Vism 552. Also Pañca, gati, dīpana (ed L Feer, JPTS, 1884:152 ff; tr Feer, *Annales du Musée Guimet* 5:514-28).

²³ There are only “dead” bodies and “departed” beings.

4.2 CENTRED ON LOVINGKINDNESS. From a close examination of the Tirokuḍḍa Sutta, it is clear that the departed are, by their own effort, spiritually uplifted when “they rejoice” (*anumodare*) [§5b] in the offerings dedicated to them. Moreover, it is not just “relatives” (*ñāti*) who can benefit from this practice, but any departed “relative, friend and companion” [§10].²⁴

The Saddhamma-p, pakāsīnī (Paṭisambhidā, magga Commentary, commenting on the psychic powers of beings on account of karmic result (*kamma, vipāka, ja iddhi*), makes an interesting remark that such power are found in pretas who have “a constituent of joy” (*sukha, samussaya*), which I take to mean sufficient build-up of positive mental states such as those arising from a dedication of merit or cultivation of lovingkindness from humans. The point is that this store of joy would have the capability of propelling the pretas out of their state into more wholesome ones.

4.3 MERIT FOR ALL BEINGS. The Canon, in fact, teaches that mankind is spiritually one family, as evident from the Buddha’s answer to **Jāṇussoṇi**: “There is no way that the realm (of the departed) would, after such a long time, be empty of departed relations or blood relatives.”²⁵ The first three suttas of the Anamatagga Saṃyutta (S 15.1-3, eg **the Paṭhavī Sutta**, S 15.2) gives an even more universal view of familyhood of mankind—this cycle of life (*saṃsāra*) is without beginning and has lasted unimaginably long that it is impossible to speak of someone who has not been one’s parent, sibling, child or relative. (S 15.1-3/2:178-180)

4.4 “NO ONE ELSE HAVE A SHARE IN IT.” That merits are measurable or can be “transferred” is a faith-belief in popular, mostly uninformed Buddhism. Even when we speak of a “dedication” of merit, if it is done purely as a ritual, that is, without a moral virtue and a mindful heart of lovingkindness, it is a merely *provisional* or “worldly” action. It becomes more spiritually efficacious when its meaning and purpose are “drawn out.”²⁶ The point is clear that merit is non-negotiable and non-transferable, as stated in **the Nidhi,kaṇḍa Sutta** (Khp 8): “No one else have a share in it” (*asādhāraṇam aññesaṃ*) (Khp 8.9/-7).²⁷

In short, the late notion of “‘transference’ of merit” should be understood and practised as a simpler form of the cultivation of lovingkindness. Conversely, without lovingkindness, any dedication of merit will not work. The dedication of merit also reminds us of the interconnectedness of all life, that all living beings belong to the same spiritual family and need to work towards awakening. As such, the dedication of merit is *not* merely a periodic ritual, but a regular practice for personal development and for providing a conducive environment for others to grow spiritually, too.

Reading

- (1) Aggacitta Bhikkhu, *Honouring the Departed: A Buddhist perspective*, 2004.
- (2) Heinz Bechert, “Buddha-field and transfer of merit in a Theravāda source,” 1992.
- (3) Richard Gombrich, “‘Merit transference’ in Sinhalese Buddhism,” 1972.
- (4) Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: teachings, history and practices*, 1990.
- (5) B C Law, *The Buddhist Conception of Spirits*, 1936.
- (6) James P McDermott, “Karma and rebirth in early Buddhism,” 1980:165-192 (ch 7), esp pp190-192.
- (7) P D Premasiri, “Significance of the ritual concerning offerings to ancestors in Theravāda Buddhism,” 1991:151-158.
- (8) Bruce R Reichenbach, *The Law of Karma: A philosophical study*, 1990:11, 152-168.
- (9) G Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks*, 1997:23-55 (Ch 2: Two problems in the history of Indian Buddhism: The layman/monk distinction and the doctrine of the transference of merit.)
- (10) Liz Wilson, “Beggars can be choosers: Mahākassapa as a selective eater of offerings.” In John Clifford Holt, J N Kinnard, J S Walters (eds), *Constituting Communities: Theravāda Buddhism and the*

²⁴ See fn there.

²⁵ A 10.177.8/5:270 f @ SD 2.6a

²⁶ See **Neyy’attha Nxit’attha S** (A 2.3.4-6/1:60), SD 2.6b.

²⁷ See **(Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.177/5:269-273).

Religious Cultures of South and Southeast Asia. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003:57-70.

- (11) F L Woodward, “The Buddhist doctrine of reversible merit,” 1914:38-50. [A defence of the thesis that transfer of merit is consistent with Theravāda.]

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The Outside-the-Wall Discourse

Khp 7/6

The Outside-the-Wall Preta Story

Pv 1.5/3-5

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|---|---|
| <p>[Pv 3] 1 <i>Tiro, kuḍḍesu tiṭṭhanti
sandhi, siṅghātakesu ca
dvāra, bāhāsu tiṭṭhanti
āgantvāna sakam gharam</i></p> | <p>Outside the walls²⁸ they lurk [stand],
at junctions and cross-roads.
They stand at the door-posts,²⁹
having returned to their own homes.</p> |
| <p>2 <i>pahūte anna, pānamhi
khajja, bhojje upaṭṭhite
na tesam koci sarati
sattānam kamma, paccayā</i></p> | <p>Food and drinks are aplenty,
food hard and soft are served,
but no one recalls them,
(these) beings conditioned by karma.³⁰ [Pv 4]</p> |
| <p>3 <i>Evam dadanti nātīnam
ye honti anukampakā
sucin paṇītam kālena
kappiyam pāna, bhojanam:</i></p> | <p>Thus they give to their relatives,
they who are compassionate,
pure, exquisite, timely,
fitting drink and food, (saying:)</p> |
| <p>4 <i>Idam vo³¹ nātīnam hotu
sukhitā hontu nātayo.
Te ca tattha samāgantvā
nāti, petā samāgatā</i></p> | <p>“Let this be for relatives!
May relatives be happy!”³²
And they, having gathered there,
the departed relatives gather, too.</p> |
| <p>5 <i>pahūte anna, pānamhi
sakkaccam anumodare:</i>³³</p> | <p>In the abundant food and drink
<u>they wholeheartedly</u>³⁴ rejoice.³⁵</p> |

²⁸ *Tiro, kuḍḍa*. The prefix *tiro-* is prob related to *tarati* (“to go across”) and means “across, beyond, over, outside, afar” (PED): *tiro, kuḍḍam* (“through a wall,” M 1:34 = 2.18; A 4:55; Vism 394); *tiro, kuḍḍesu* (Kh 7.1 = Pv 1.5.2).

²⁹ “The door-posts,” *dvāra, bāhāsu*. **Bāhā**, only as (1) suffix in *ālambana* ~ (lit, ‘handing down,’) a post to hold on to, a balustrade, a support” (V 2:120, 152); (2) *dvāra*~ “doorpost” (D 2:190). See **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17), where queen Subhaddā is described as standing at the door-post of the Dharma palace (D 17.2.8/2:190), SD 36.12.

³⁰ “Conditioned by their karma,” *kamma, paccayā*. Pv:BK has “on account of their deeds.”

³¹ Traditionally, esp in Sinhala Bsm, this is often taken as a pronoun, *vom* “your,” and changed to *me*, “my,” when reciting for one’s own relations and friends. This is, however, a later innovation. Textually and grammatically, *vo* here is actually *ve*, an emphatic particle, marked by an exclamation mark here. See PED: *Vo*². The reverse equivalence of *ve* for *vo* is also common: see eg **Sela S** (M9, Sn 560 = Tha 830) n, SD 45.7.

³² Comys make an interesting remark here: “an object dedicated in this manner becomes a condition for the departed to do wholesome actions” [like wholesome thoughts, vv 5cd & 6ab] that fruit immediately (KhA 209; PvA 27). It appears that the departed here uplift themselves through their own spiritual energies (with initial help from relatives). Cf Pv:BM 34 n46.

- Ciraṃ jīvantu no ñātī
yesaṃ hetu labhāmase*
- 6 *Amhākaṃ ca katā pūjā
dāyakā ca anipphalā.
Na hi tattha kasī atthi
go,rakkh'ettha na vijjati*
- 7 *vaṇijjā tādisī n'atthi
hiraññaṇa kayakkayaṃ,
ito dinnena yāpenti
petā kāla,gatā tahiṃ.*
- 8 *Unname udakaṃ vaṭṭaṃ
yathā ninnam pavattati,
evam eva ito dinnam
petānam upakappati.*
- 9 *Yathā vāri,vahā pūrā
paripūrenti sāgaraṃ
evam eva ito dinnam
petānam upakappati.*
- 10 *Adāsi me akāsi me
ñāti,mittā sakhā ca me
petānam dakkhiṇam dajjā
pubbe katam anussaram*
- 11 *Na hi ruṇṇam vā soko vā
yā c'aññaṇa paridevanā,
na taṃ petānam atthāya:
evam tiṭṭhanti ñātayo.*
- 12 *Ayaṇ ca kho dakkhiṇā
dinnā saṅghamhi suppatiṭṭhitā
dīgha,rattaṃ hitāy'assa*
- “Long may our relatives live,
on whose account we gain these!*
- For honour to us has been done,
and givers are not fruitless!”³⁶*
- There is no farming there,
nor cattle-herding found;
- Businesses, too, there are none,
(nor) buying and selling with money:
with what is given here are supported
the departed over there.
- Just as water falling on highlands
reaches down to the lowlands,
even so what is given here
accrues to the departed ones.
- Just as the swollen rivers
fill the ocean full,
even so what is given here
accrues to the departed ones.
- He gave to me; he worked for me:
a relative, friend, and companion to me³⁷—*
give offerings then for³⁸ the departed,
recalling what they have done before.
- Neither tears nor sorrow
nor any mourning whatever—
they help not the departed—
the (departed) relatives remain the same.
- But when an offering is made,
well placed, to the Sangha given,
will be for their good for a long time:

³³ *Anumodare* (“they rejoice”) = *anumodanti* (KhpS 209 = PvA 26), 3 pl med of *anumodati*. See tr n.

³⁴ “Wholeheartedly,” *sakkaccam*. PvA:BM has “respectfully.” This is what empowers the departed, uplifting them from their suffering state, that is, to say, their own wholesome mental state such as by wishing their living relatives well as shown here. See (1).

³⁵ This sentence is salient in referring to how the preta's existential or spiritual state is positively transformed. see (1). On the significance of the Buddhist dedication of merit to pretas against the brahminical offering to ancestors (*saddha*), see (**Saddha**) **Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 10.177) @ SD 1.6a (1.5.2).

³⁶ “Givers are not fruitless,” *dāyakā ca anipphalā*. Cf (Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi S: “the giver is not fruitless,” (*dāyako pi anipphalo*) (A 10.177.9/5:270), SD 2.6a. See Intro above.

³⁷ From this passage it is clear that, although relatives are given priority in merit-dedication, this practice covers any departed ghost. It might be argued that “relative, friend, and companion” simply reflect the *relationship* or bond that existed between the living and the departed. Nevertheless, in practice, modern Buddhists would dedicate merit to any departed human. See Intro (2).

³⁸ *Petānam* is 3 pl gen, translatable as “to the departed” or “for the departed.” The latter applies better here considering, that we cannot directly make any material offering to them, but this must be done by means of acts of loving-kindness.

ṭhānaso upakappati.

it serves them now as well.

13 *So ñāti, dhammo ca ayaṃ nidassito,
petāna pūjā ca katā uḷārā,
balañ ca bhikkhūnam anuppadinnam,
tumhehi puññaṃ pasutaṃ anappakam.*

This duty to relatives has been shown—
on how to best honour the departed;
strength, too, has been given to the monks—
not small is the merit accrued to you!

— evaṃ —

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[See also (Saddha) Jāṇussoṇi Sutta @ SD 2.6 Bibliography]

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