

Pañca,ratha,sata Sutta

The Discourse on the Five Hundred Carts

[Even in gain, the evil decline]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 17.36/2:242)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2007

Introduction

Both **the Pakkanta Sutta** (S 17.35) and **the Pañca,ratha,sata Sutta** (S 17.36) are about the futile material gains and social status that Devadatta seeks and gains.¹ While the Pakkanta Sutta does not mention how Devadatta found his ill-gotten gains, the Pañca,ratha,sata Sutta expressly states that they come from his patronage by the patricide rajah Ajāta,sattu.

The Pañca,ratha,sata Sutta has the enigmatic simile of sprinkling bile on a dog's nose, which apparently makes it more fierce. The import clearly is that when an evil person receives some kind of benefit or inducement, it would only aggravate his evil nature.

According to the Saṃyutta Commentary, the event recounted in **the Pakkanta Sutta** (S 17.35) occurs not long after Deva,datta has caused a schism, and has left the Bamboo Grove to Gaya,sīsa.² **The Vinaya** (Cv 7.2.5), however, conflates the accounts of the the Pakkanta Sutta and the Pañca,ratha,sata Sutta, but places the events of the latter Sutta before the former. That is to say, the accounts refer to events before Devadatta's schism, but on the occasion when he wins the rajah Ajāta,sattu's patronage, and the simile of the bile on the dog's nose is mentioned first, followed by the prose homily on parables of the plantain tree, the bamboo, the reed, and the she-mule. All the similes are then summarized in verse.³ Neither the prose homily nor the verse is found in the Pañca,ratha,sata Sutta.

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¹ S 17.35/2:241; S 17.36/2:242.

² SA 2:211; on Deva,datta's schism, see Cv 8.4-5 = V 2:199-206.

³ Cv 7.2.5/2:187 f.

The Discourse on the Five Hundred Carts

(S 17.36/2:242)

1 (The Blessed One) was residing in the squirrels' feeding-ground in the Bamboo Grove near Rāja-gaha.

Ajāta,sattu patronizes Deva,datta

2 Now at that time, prince Ajāta,sattu was going on his way to attend to Deva,datta, morning and evening, with five hundred carts, bringing five hundred pots of food to him.

3 Then, a number of monks approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and then sat down at one side.

4 Seated thus at one side, the monks said this to the Blessed One:

“Prince Ajāta,sattu, bhante, is going on his way to attend to Deva,datta, morning and evening, with five hundred carts, bringing five hundred pots of food to him.”

Gain, honour and praise can be destructive

5 “Bhikshus, do not envy Deva,datta's gain, honour and praise.⁴ Bhikshus, so long as prince Ajāta,sattu were to go on his way to attend to Deva,datta, morning and evening, with five hundred carts, bringing five hundred pots of food to him, so long only decline would be expected of Deva,datta, not growth.

6 Bhikshus, it is as if one were to break bile⁵ on a fierce dog's nose. So it would be, bhikshus, even more so, it only make the dog more fierce.

Even so, bhikshus, so long as prince Ajāta,sattu were to go on his way to attend to Deva,datta, morning and evening, with five hundred carts, bringing five hundred pots of food to him, so long only decline would be expected of Deva,datta, not growth.

Spiritual training

7 So violent, bhikshus, are gain, honour, and praise; so bitter, vile, an obstruction to the attainment of the supreme safety from bondage.

Therefore, bhikshus, train yourselves thus:

‘We will abandon gain, honour and praise that have arisen, and we will not let arisen gain, honour and praise continue to obsess the mind.’

8 This, bhikshus, should you train yourselves.”

— evaṃ —

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⁴ “Gain, honour and praise,” *lābha,sakkāra,silokam*.

⁵ “Were to break bile,” *pittam bhindeyyum*, ie burst a bile bladder onto a dog's nose. PED: *pitta*, notes: “S 2:242. The passage is not clear, in [Comy] on U 1.7 we read *cittam*, see Morris [JPTS 1891-93:4 f].” **Bodhi** follows SA's comment, “They would throw (*pakhip,peyyum*) bear bile or fish bile over its nostrils.” SAṬ glosses *pakhippeyyum* here with *osiñceyyum*, “they would sprinkle” (SAṬ:VRI 2:178). Woodward has “Just as if they were to crumble [dried] liver on the nose of a fierce dog” (S:W 2:164). **Horner** at V 2:188 has “as if they were to throw a bladder at a fierce dog's nose” (V:H 5:263). See UA 65, where **Masefield** notes: “It does not seem inconceivable that one might burst the bile-container at the dog's nose such that its contents might spurt *into* its nostrils, which is obviously how SA understands it. It is also worth noting that, at KhpA 60 f = VbhA 243 f = Vism 260, a disturbance of the contents of the bile-container is said to result in beings becoming crazy and demented; cp also VbhA 65 = Vism 359. Bile would seem therefore to be the ideal substance to enrage an already quick-tempered dog, just as in the West the spleen was long held to be the seat of anger... The Thai translation renders this simply as punching the dog on the nose.” (UA:M 225 f).