

Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa Sutta

The Discourse on

Emerging From the Rains-retreat

Or, (Sāriputta) Sīha,nāda Sutta = The (Sāriputta) Lion-roar Discourse

[How to cultivate impartiality and humility]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 9.11/4:373-378)

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1 Sutta summary

The Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa Sutta (A 9.11) teaches us how to cultivate impartiality and humility, especially in the face of hostility. Four of these practices (1)-(4) recur in **the Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta** (M 62), and Sāriputta gives a lion-roar by way of telling the Buddha that he dwells with his mind like these four primary elements in this manner, but adds his own similes to each of them.

It should be noted that when space (*ākāsa*), and sometimes, consciousness (*viññāna*), are listed together with the 4 “primary elements” (*mahā,bhūta*) as a set of 5 or 6, they are called “elements” (*dhātu*), while the term *mahā,bhūta* is used only for the set of the first 4 “primary” elements (earth, water, fire and wind).

This story of Sāriputta's inner stillness and humility is retold in summary in **the (Sīha,nāda) Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 7.6) but with additional details, not found in the Sutta account. The Commentary account highlights the *narrative* aspect, as a teaching for the general masses.¹ The Sutta account is meant for more serious and focussed practice.

2 Sāriputta's humility

The Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa Sutta is one of the canonical records that attest both to Sāriputta's great wisdom, and to his equally great compassion and humility. Sāriputta not only forgives the person who slanders against him, but also seeks the forgiveness of that same accuser for having offended him in any way.

We find two other stories of Sāriputta's great patience in **the (Micchā,dīṭṭhika Brāhmaṇa) Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 26.7) where a brahmin fails to provoke anger in Sāriputta,² and **the (Mātu) Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 26.17) where Sāriputta's mother reviles him as she disapproves of his becoming a monk.³

Sāriputta's equanimity reminds us of a well known Dhammapada verse:

*Selo yathā eka,ghano
vātena na samīrati
evam nindā,pasaṃsāsu
na samiñjanti paṇḍitā*

Just as a solid rock
is unshaken by the wind,
even so, praise and blame
shake not the wise.

(Dh 81)

— — —

¹ DhA 7.6/2:178-181 = SD 28.2b.

² DhA 26.8/4:46 f.

³ DhA 26.17/4:164 f.

The Discourse on Emerging from the Rains-retreat (A 9.11/4:373-378)

1 Thus have I heard.

Sāriputta sees the Buddha

At one time the Blessed One was residing in Anātha,piṇḍika's park in Jeta's grove near Sāvattḥī.

Then the venerable Sāriputta went up to the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, the venerable Sāriputta said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, I have emerged from the rains-retreat at Sāvattḥī. Bhante, I wish to leave on a peregrination [a wandering] of the country-side.

“Please, Sāriputta, do as you deem fit here.”⁴

Then, the venerable Sāriputta, rose from his seat, saluted the Blessed One, and keeping the Blessed One to his right, departed. [374]

Complain against Sāriputta

2a Now not long after the venerable Sāriputta had left, a certain monk approached the Blessed One and said this:

“Bhante, the venerable Sāriputta has offended against me, and without asking my forgiveness, has departed on a peregrination.”⁵

Then the Blessed One addressed a certain monk,

“Come now, bhikshu, address Sāriputta in my name, saying, ‘Avuso Sāriputta, the Teacher summons you.’”

“Yes, bhante,” the monk replied to the Blessed One, and went up to the venerable Sāriputta. Having gone up to the venerable Sāriputta, he said this to him:

“Avuso Sāriputta, the Teacher summons you.”

“Yes, avuso,” the venerable Sāriputta answered to the monk in assent.

The sangha is assembled

2b Now at that time, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna and the venerable Ānanda, bringing their keys along with them, went from residence (*vihāra*) to residence,⁶ saying,

“Approach, venerables! Approach, venerables! The venerable Sāriputta would now make a lion-roar in the presence of the Blessed One!”

3 Then the venerable Sāriputta went up to the Blessed One, saluted him and then sat down at one side. As the venerable Sāriputta was seated down at one side, the Blessed One said this to him:

⁴ *Yassa dāni tvaṃ Sāriputta kālaṃ maññasī ti*, lit “Please do what you think it is now the time to do.” This is stock: **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.103/1:85 = SD 8.10); **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.3.6/2:104 = SD 13), **Sekha S** (M 53.3/1:354 = SD 21.14), **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90.17/2:132 f = SD 10.8); **Puṇṇ'ovāda S** (M 145.6/3:269 = S 35.88/4:62,31 = SD 20.15), **Avassuta S** (S 35.243/4:183,15,30), **Khemā Therī S** (S 44.1/4:379,29), **Vesālī S** (S 54.9/5:321,16,17) & **Thapatayā S** (S 55.6/5:348,27). See Joy Manné, “On a departure formula and its translation,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 10, 1993:27-43.

⁵ All the main Comys gloss *āsajja* with *ghaṭṭetvā* (“having struck”) (DA 1:276; MA 2:281; SA 1:133; AA 4:171). Native Comy adds that, on seeing Sāriputta departing with a large retinue, he became angry, and thought, “I will stop this departure!” It is said that when Sāriputta was leaving the Blessed One, the corner of Sāriputta's robe brushed the elder (they say the wind blew it aside) and it was on such a trifle that he trumped up a deliberate offence (AA 4:170). The story is retold with this detail at (**Siha,nāda**) **Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 7.6/2:178-181 = SD 28.2b).

⁶ “Went from residence to residence,” I follow Ce Ee *vihārena vihāraṃ anvāhiṇḍanti*; vll: Be *vihāre āhiṇḍanti*; Se *vihāraṃ āhiṇḍanti*

“Here, Sāriputta, a certain fellow brahmachari [colleague in the holy life] has made a public complaint,⁷ saying,

“The venerable Sāriputta has offended against me, and without asking my forgiveness, has departed on a peregrination.””

The four primary elements⁸

4 THE EARTH ELEMENT. Bhante, just as they throw things clean and foul⁹ on the earth—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—**the earth is not pained, ashamed, or disgusted**,¹⁰ because of that;

even so, [375] I dwell with the mind like the earth, bountiful, grown great,¹¹ boundless, hate-free, without ill will.¹²

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari [a certain colleague in the holy life] whom he had offended.¹³

THE WATER ELEMENT. Bhante, just as they wash things clean and foul—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—**water is not pained, ashamed, or disgusted, because of that**;

even so, I dwell with the mind like water, bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended.

THE FIRE ELEMENT. Bhante, just as they burn things clean and foul—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—**fire is not pained, ashamed, or disgusted, because of that**;

even so, I dwell with the mind like fire, bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended.

THE WIND ELEMENT. Bhante, just as the wind blows on things clean and foul—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—**the wind is not pained, ashamed, or disgusted, because of that**;

even so, I dwell with the mind like wind, bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended.

⁷ *Khīyana, dhammaṃ āpanno*: cf **Sīvatthika S** (A 5.249.8/3:269); also Pāc 79 = V 4:152.

⁸ More elaborately contextualized in **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62.13-16/1:423 f) = SD 3.11.

⁹ “Things clean and foul,” *sucim pi...asucim pi*. Here I follow Nina van Gorkom, email 23 May 2003.

¹⁰ “Is not pained, humiliated, disgusted,” *aṭṭhiyati vā harāyati vā jigucchati vā*. For fuller analyses of these terms, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11.5/1:213) = SD 1.7 n sv.

¹¹ The mind “grown great” (*maha-g.gattā*) or exalted perception refers to the mind in dhyana, ie in the form sphere (*rūpāvacara*). See **Catuttha Jhāna Pañha S** (S 40.4) = SD 24.14 Intro (4).

¹² *Evam evaṃ kho ahaṃ, bhante, paṭhavī, samena cetasā viharāmi vipulena maha-g, gatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjena*.

¹³ *Yassa nūna, bhante, kāye kāya, gatā, sati anupatṭhitā assa, so idha aññataram sabrahmacārim āsajja appaṭi-nissajja cārikam pakkameyya*.

¹⁴ Comy glosses *rajo’harāṇa* with “a cloth [rag] for sweeping away dirt” (*rajja, sammajja, colāka*, AA 4:171). In Jainism, the *rajo’harāṇa* or *rajopaharāṇa* was a small whisk-broom carried by Jain monks, nuns, and ascetics to

even so, I dwell with the mind like a whisk-broom, bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended.

THE CHANDALA BOY OR GIRL. Bhante, just as a chandala [outcaste]¹⁵ boy or a chandala girl, with a vessel in hand,¹⁶ clad in rags, entering a market-town or a village, *mentally humbling himself*¹⁷ before entering;

even so, like the chandala boy or chandala girl, I dwell with the mind that is bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended.

THE HORNLESS BULL. Bhante, just as a *hornless bull*, meek, well-tamed, well-trained, roaming from street to street, from crossroad to crossroad, harms nothing with its feet or horns;

even so, like the hornless bull, I dwell with the mind that is bountiful, grown great, boundless, hate-free, without ill will.

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended.

THE YOUTH OR MAIDEN. Bhante, just as a man or a woman, a youth or a maiden,¹⁸ with head washed and well dressed and decked up, would be pained, ashamed and disgusted with a carcass of a snake, [377] a dog, or a human around their neck;

even so, I am pained, ashamed and disgusted with this foul body of mine.

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended.

THE POT OF FAT. Bhante, just as a man might carry around¹⁹ a pot of fat,²⁰ full of holes and cracks, oozing and trickling;²¹

even so, I carry around this foul body, full of holes and cracks, oozing and trickling.

Surely, bhante, for he who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, would here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a certain fellow brahmachari whom he had offended.

The offender confesses

5 Then the monk, arranging his upper robe to one side, bowed his head at the Blessed One's feet, and said this to the Blessed One:

“A transgression²² has overcome me, bhante, in that I was so foolish, so ignorant, so unskilled, as to have made a baseless, empty, false, and untrue accusation against the venerable Sāriputta.

brush small insects out of their path or where they will sit. I think it is likely that Sāriputta would be referring to the Jain device.

¹⁵ A chandala (*caṇḍāla*) is an outcaste, usu classed with the lowest of them, the Pukkusas. The chandalas are said to eat dog-flesh (J 5:450; cf Thī 509), or are corpse-removers (J 3:195).

¹⁶ *Kaḷopi,hattho*, which Comy glosses “a container or bowl in hand” (*pacchi,hattho ukkhali,hattho vā*, AA 4:171). EM Hare notes that “It seems likely that this is the same kind of receptacle as used by the present-day Rodiyas of Ceylon [Sri Lanka]; this consists of a scuttle fixed to the end of a stick (so that there shall be no contact between giver and receiver). The Sinhalese call this *kolapotta*.” (S:H 4:250 n3). See D:RD 1:227 n3; V Trenckner, *Pali Miscellany*, London, 1879: 60.

¹⁷ “Mentally humbling himself,” *nīca,cittam yeva upaṭṭhapetvā*.

¹⁸ *Itthī vā puriso vā daharo yuvā.*, as at V 2:255, 3:68; **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.92/1:80); **Mahā Sakul'udāyī S** (M 77.19,31/2:19), **Ākañkheyya S** (M 5/1:32), **Vitakka,saṅghāna S** (M 20/1:119); **Jātaka Nidāna,kathā** (J 1:5).

¹⁹ *Parihareyya* (1st sg pres med), from *pariharati*. “he carries about” (D 2:19; M 1:83; Sn 440). *Pariharati* also means “he takes care of, attends to,” “he moves around, goes around,” “he takes up, proposes”: see PED.

²⁰ *Meda,kathālika*, “a cooking pot or saucepan for frying fat” (PED). For a detailed reflection, see Vism 6.89/195.

²¹ *Seyyathā'pi, bhante, puriso meda,kathālikam parihareyya chiddāvachiddam uggharantam paggharantam*.

²² *Accaya*: see foll n.

Bhante, may the Blessed One please accept [forgive] my transgression as such, so that I may henceforth restrain myself.”²³

“Yes, bhikshu, a transgression overcame you in that you were so foolish, so ignorant, and so unskillful as to have made a baseless, empty, false, and untrue accusation against the venerable Sāriputta.

But because you, bhikshu, see your transgression as such, and make amends in accordance with the Dharma, we accept your admission of a transgression as such.

For, bhikshu, it is a cause of growth in this Vinaya [this Discipline] of the noble ones²⁴ when, seeing a transgression as such, one makes amends in accordance with the Dharma and exercises restraint in the future.”²⁵ [377]

Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Sāriputta,

“Sāriputta, forgive this hollow man lest his head shatter into seven pieces!”²⁶

The venerable Sāriputta said thus.²⁷

“Bhante, I forgive this venerable if this venerable has spoken thus. And let this venerable forgive me, too.”²⁸

— evaṃ —

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²³ *Accayo maṃ, bhante, accagamā yathābālaṃ yathā, mūlhaṃ yathā, akusalaṃ, yo ahaṃ āyasmantaṃ sāriputtaṃ asatā tucchā musā abhūtena abbhācikkhiṃ. Tassa me, bhante, bhagavā accayaṃ accayato paṭiggaṇhatu āyatiṃ samvarāyā ti.* Both this confession and the foll para (the Buddha’s response) are stock monastic formula used when confessing transgressions (V 1:314, 4:18 f). For more refs, see CPD: *accaya*. See **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.101/1:85), **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140.33/3:246) = SD 4.17, (**Taṇhā**) **Bhikkhuṇī S** (A 4.159.8/2:146); **Vuṭṭha Vass’āvāsa S** (A 9.11.6/4:378). Cf the wanderer’s Nigrodha’s confession in **Udumbarika Sihanāda S** (D 25.22a = SD 1.4) & Susīma’s confession in **Susīma S** (S 12.70 = SD 16.6).

²⁴ *Ariyassa vinaye*, which Comy glosses with “the blessed Buddha’s teaching” (*Buddhassa bhagavato sāsane*, SA 4:171).

²⁵ This is stock: cf V 1:315, 2:126; D 1:85, 3:55; M 3:246; S 2:127; A 2:146.

²⁶ On head-shattering, see **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3.1.21/1:95) = SD 21.3 Intro (4.1).

²⁷ (**Sīha, nāda**) **Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 7.6.12/2:180) here has: “The elder, sat crouching, and putting his palms together, and seeks his forgiveness, . . .” (*ukkuṭikāṃ nisīditvā añjalim paggayha*) which hints at a later time when such acts are more formalized.

²⁸ Cf Sāriputta’s gesture here with that reported in (**Sīha, nāda**) **Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 7.6.12/2:180) = SD 28.2b.