

## (Sīha,nāda) Sāriputta Thera Vatthu

### The Story of the Elder Sāriputta (the Lion-roar)

[A saint is never offended]

(DhA 7.6/2:178-181)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2009

#### Introduction

The **Dhammapada Commentary** version of the Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa Sutta (A 9.11) summarizes its Dharma teachings, highlighting them as Sāriputta's lion-roar. While the Sutta highlights *the Dharma*, the commentarial story highlights *the person*. This is understandable, as the Sutta is meant to teach the Dharma directly (*nīta'attha*), while the Dhammapada story is an occasion for an inspiring account for those better disposed to stories so that its meaning could be drawn out (*neyy'attha*) in due course.

We find two other stories of Sāriputta's great patience in the Dhammapada Commentary, that is, **the (Micchā,dīṭṭhika Brāhmaṇa) Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 26.7) where a brahmin fails to provoke anger in Sāriputta,<sup>1</sup> and **the (Mātu) Sāriputta Thera Vatthu** (DhA 26.17) where Sāriputta's mother reviles him as she disapproves of his becoming a monk.<sup>2</sup>

This story of Sāriputta's lion-roar should be reflected on along with the Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa Sutta (A 9.11).

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## The Story of the Elder Sāriputta

### (the Lion-roar)

(DhA 7.6/2:178-181)

#### Sāriputta the wandering forest monk

**1** *Paṭhavi,samō ti*: This Dharma teaching was given by the Teacher while he was residing in Jeta's grove with reference to the elder Sāriputta.

**2** At one time, when the rains-retreat was over, the elder Sāriputta, desired to depart on a peregrination [a wandering]. Taking leave of the Blessed One, he bowed to him, and left with his retinue. Many other monks followed the elder.

**3** But the elder, knowing those monks by their names and clans turned them back, addressing them by their names and clans. A certain monk whose name and clan were not known, thought,

“Oh, he should have turned me back by addressing me by my name and clan!”

But in the midst of the great gathering of monks, the elder did not notice him.

Thinking, “He does not greet me as he does the other monks,” he nursed a grudge.

**4** Now a corner of the elder's robe touched the monk's body, worsening his grudge.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> DhA 26.8/4:46 f.

<sup>2</sup> DhA 26.17/4:164 f.

<sup>3</sup> Comy on **Vuṭṭha Vass'āvā S** (A 9.11) says 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)

### False accusation

5 As soon as he knew that the elder had left the vicinity of the monastery, he went up to the Blessed One and complained about the elder,

“Bhante, the venerable Sāriputta, who considers himself, ‘I’m your foremost disciple,’ having struck my ear as if to break it, has departed on a peregrination without asking for forgiveness!”

6 The Blessed One sent for the elder.

### The community assembled

7 Thereupon the elder Mahā Moggallāna and the elder Ānanda thought,

“The Teacher does not know that our eldest brother did not really strike this monk, but he would wish to make a lion-roar, and so mustered the community.

With key in hand, they opened the doors of the walled courtyard,<sup>4</sup> and mustered the full assembly, saying,

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

### Sāriputta’s lion-roar

8 And the elder, upon arriving, saluted the Blessed One, and sat down. The Blessed One then asked about the matter.

The elder instead of saying, “I did not strike this monk,” spoke on his own qualities, beginning with the words,

“Bhante, for whom who is not established in the mindfulness of the body in the body, he might here depart on a journey without seeking the pardon of a fellow brahmachari [a colleague in the holy life] whom he had offended.”<sup>5</sup>

9 Then he said,

“Bhante, just as they throw things clean and foul<sup>6</sup>—things soiled with dung, with urine, with spittle, with pus, or with blood—*the earth is not pained, ashamed, or disgusted,*<sup>7</sup> because of that,” regarding his body in the same way as he would regard earth, water, fire and wind.

He regards his mind as he would a whisk-broom [cleaning-rag] (*raj’oharāṇa*),<sup>8</sup> as a chandala [out-caste] boy, as a hornless bull.

He compares the oppression he suffers by way of the body to such like the oppressiveness of a snake or a corpse and so on.

He declares that the caring of his own body is like caring for a pot of fat.

As the elder spoke of his own virtues by way of these nine similes, the great earth shook, nine times successively, to its very ocean rim.

10 When he referred to the similes of the whisk-broom, the chandala youth, and the pot of fat, those monks who are still worldlings were unable to restrain their tears, while in those who have destroyed their influxes [the arhats] aroused a sense of urgency in the Dharma (*dhamma, samvega*).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Te kuñcika, hatthā pariveṇa, dvārāni vivarivā.* The term *pariveṇa* may refer to a walled courtyard of a *vihāra* (MA 5:47), or a walled area wherein the toilets are located (VA 5:978, 6:1214; cf 3:574, 5:1068), or other enclosed areas, such as a pavilion, or with trees (VA 4:777, 6:1225). This passage apparently reflects a time when the community was more settled, with each monk having his own cell. **The Vuṭṭha Vass’āvāsa S** (A 9.11) has “went from residence to residence [vihara to vihara]” (*vihārena vihāraṃ anvāhiṇḍanti*), which records an earlier monastic time, when the *vihāra* (residence) were smaller and fewer. (A 9.11.2a/4:374) = SD 28.23a.

<sup>5</sup> *Yassa nūna, bhante, kāye kāya, gatā, sati anupaṭṭhitā assa, so idha aññataraṃ sabrahmacāriṃ āsajja appaṭi-nissajja cārikam pakkameyya.*

<sup>6</sup> “Things clean and foul,” *sucim pi... asucim pi.* Here I follow Nina van Gorkom, email 23 May 2003.

<sup>7</sup> “Is not pained, humiliated, disgusted,” *aṭṭiīyati vā harāyati vā jigucchati vā.* For fuller analyses of these terms, see **Kevalāḍḍha S** (D 11.5/1:213) = SD 1.7 n sv.

<sup>8</sup> In Jainism, the *rajoharāṇa* or *rajopaharāṇa* was a small whisk-broom carried by Jain monks, nuns, and ascetics to brush small insects out of their path or where they will sit. See **Vuṭṭha Vass’āvāsa S** (A 9.11.4/4:376) n.

The accusing monk is contrite

**11** Even as the elder spoke on his own virtues, [180] fieriness (*dāha*) arose throughout the body of the accusing monk.<sup>10</sup> At once, he fell at the Blessed One's feet, admitted to his slander, and confessed his fault.

The Teacher, addressing the elder, said,

“Sāriputta, forgive this hollow man lest his head shatter into seven pieces!”<sup>11</sup>

The elder, sat crouching, and putting his palms together,<sup>12</sup> said,

“Bhante, I forgive this venerable. Let this venerable forgive me, too, if I have in any way offended him.”<sup>13</sup>

Sāriputta's virtue

**12** The monks remarked,

“See now, avuso, this elder's unfathomable virtue! He shows neither anger nor hate towards this monk who has falsely accused him. Instead, he himself sat crouching, putting his palms together, and seeks his forgiveness!”

**13** The Blessed One, hearing this, asked what they were talking about.

“It is about this matter, bhante,” they replied.

“Bhikshus, someone like Sāriputta is incapable of either anger or hate. Sāriputta's mind is like the great earth, like a city pillar, like a pool of clear water.”

So saying, he showed the connection, and teaching the Dharma, uttered this verse:

*Pathavi, samo no virujjhati  
inda, khil'upamo tādi subbato  
rahado'va apetaka-d, damo  
samsārā na bhavanti tādino ti.*

Like the earth, he is untroubled,  
such is the well-disciplined, like the city pillar,  
like a pool free from mud:  
samsara exists not for such a one. (Dh 95)

At the end of the teaching, nine thousand monks attained arhathood along with the analytical knowledges.

— 090410; 090413; 091128 —

<sup>9</sup> On *samvega*, see **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 9) Intro (7f).

<sup>10</sup> The expression here—of feeling heat arising throughout his body—alludes to a feeling of embarrassment (“red in the face”), even guilt, at having done an unjust and false action, such as his malicious accusation against Sāriputta. The contemporary expression of one being “hot under the collar” however refers to one's being angry or disturbed about something.

<sup>11</sup> On head-shattering, see **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3.1.21/1:95) = SD 21.3 Intro (4.1).

<sup>12</sup> This preceding line (*ukkuṭṭikam nisīditvā añjalim paggayha*), which hints at a later time when such acts are more formalized, is not found in **Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa S** (A 9.11.5/4:377) = SD 28.2a.

<sup>13</sup> *Khamām'ahaṃ, bhante, tassa āyasmato, khamatu ca me so āyasmā, sace mayhaṃ doso atthi ti āha*. This gesture of Sāriputta's seems somewhat contrived: cf the parallel passage in **Vuṭṭha Vass'āvāsa S** (A 9.11.5/4:377) = SD 28.2a, which is more appropriate of his station.