

12

(Rāja) Jarā Marañā Sutta

The (Rajah) Discourse on Decay and Death | S 3.3

Be **Jarā,marañā Sutta** The Discourse on Decay and Death, Ee **Rāja Sutta** The Discourse to the Rajah

Theme: Even the most powerful must die

Translated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2013

Introduction

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th'inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Thomas Gray (1751)¹

The (Rāja) Jarā Marañā Sutta (S 3.3), the third sutta in the Kosala Saṃyutta,² is a reflection on impermanence, or more exactly, on decay and death (*jarā,marañā*). The Sutta opens with the rajah Pasenadi, now a devotee of the Buddha, asking him a question on the meaning of life. The Buddha answers with a variation of the first noble truth, that of suffering: “Maharajah, for one who is born, there is nothing other than decay and death.” [§3]

Everyone in society, no matter what class—kshatriya (warrior), brahmin (priest) or houselord (the propertied)—no matter how rich, are all subject to decay and death [§§4-5], even those who have left the world, the great arhats, too, are subject to decay and death. Or more exactly *their bodies* are subject to decay and death, but they are no more subject to rebirth, and so have gone beyond suffering [§6].

The Sutta closes with “the royal chariot verse” which has three words, all meaning “good,” that is, *sata, santa* and *sabbhi*. The second word, *santa*, however, can also mean “peaceful.” [§8]

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The (Rajah) Discourse on Decay and Death

S 3.3

1 Originating in Sāvathī.

Pasenadi’s question

2 Sitting at one side, the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala said this to the Blessed One:
“Bhante, for one who is born, is there anything other than decay and death?”³

The Buddha’s teaching

3 “Maharajah, for one who is born, there is nothing other than decay and death.”

4 Maharajah, even for a kshatriya of the great halls, fabulously wealthy, greatly rich, with abundant gold and silver, with abundant supplies, with abundant wealth and grain,
for him, too, there is nothing other than decay and death.

¹ “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751), lines 33-36: <http://www.thomasgray.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?text=elcc>.

² On Kosala Saṃyutta, see **Dahara S** (S 3.1) @ SD 42.11 (1).

³ *Atthi nu kho bhante jātassa aññatra jarā,marañāti.*

5.1 Maharajah, even for a brahmin of the great halls, fabulously wealthy, greatly rich, with abundant gold and silver, with abundant supplies, with abundant wealth and grain,
for him, too, there is nothing other than decay and death.

5.2 Maharajah, even for a household of the great halls, fabulously wealthy, greatly rich, with abundant gold and silver, with abundant supplies, with abundant wealth and grain,
for him, too, there is nothing other than decay and death.

6 Maharajah, even for monks who are arhats, with mental influxes⁴ destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what is to be done, laid down the burden, reached their own goal,⁵ destroyed the fetters of being, completely liberated through direct knowledge,⁶
even for them this body is subject to breaking up, subject to being laid down.⁷

7 The Blessed One said this. The Teacher, the Sugata [well-farer], having said this, added:⁸

The royal chariot verse

8 *Jīranti ve rāja,rathā sucittā
atho sarīram pi jaram upeti
satañ ca dhammo na jaram upeti
santo have sabbhi pavedayantīti.*

The royal chariot, well-adorned, indeed decay!
And the body, too, comes to age.
But the truth of the good does not decay.
Indeed, the peaceful teach the good. = Dh 151

— evaṃ —

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⁴ “**Mental influxes**,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “in-flow, out-flow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as influxes, taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 kinds of *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*oghā*) and “yokes” (*yogā*). The list of three influxes (omitting the influx of views) [43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.

⁵ *Sadatthā*, may be resolved as: (1) *sa-d-atthā*, “one’s own goal,” (2) *santa + atthā*, “the sublime goal,” “the ideal.”

⁶ *Ye pi te mahā,rāja bhikkhū arahanto khīṇ’āsavā vusitavanto kata,karaṇīyā ohita,bhārā anuppatta,sa-d-atthā parikkhīṇa,bhava,sāmyojanā samma-d-aññā,vimuttā.*

⁷ *Tesaṃ pāyaṃ kāyo bhedana,dhammo nikkhepana,dhammo’ti.*

⁸ Only in Be Se.