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(Cira-t,thita) Kula Sutta

The Discourse on the Family (That Lasts Long) | A 4.255/2:249

Theme: Four things that make a wealthy family stand long

Translated by Piya Tan ©2007, 2011

1 Significance of the Sutta

1.1 SUTTA HIGHLIGHTS. The (Cira-t,thita) Kula Sutta (A 4:255) is a short teaching dealing with basic home management. The wisdom taught is simple and practical: look for what is lost; repair what needs repairing; eat and drink in moderation, and have someone virtuous to manage things. Such teachings are a part of an important collection of Buddhist teachings for the laity, known as the “householder’s discipline” (*gihi,vinaya*),¹ the classics of which are **the Sigāl’ovāda Sutta** (D 31)² and **the Dīghajānu Sutta** (A 8.54).³

The first two admonitions relate to **material possessions**. To make a habit of looking for what is lost means that there is no need to obtain new ones. Not only is wealth not dissipated in purchasing replacements, but the house does not become cluttered up since what is lost might still be somewhere hidden in it.

To habitually repair what is worn out is to promote the recycling of things and avoid wastage. This is especially true when the worn-out object or device only needs a bit of touch-up or a minor repair. Often, we only need to look up or ask around for some information on how to do so. A classic account of recycling is that of the Dhammapada story of the recycled robes.⁴

Eating and drinking in moderation not only saves money and avoids wastage, but also keeps us healthy. **The Doṇa,pāka Sutta** (S 3.13), for example, relates how the Buddha helps rajah Pasenadi overcome his problem of gluttony so that he loses some weight and gains good health.⁵

To have someone virtuous to manage things, according to the Commentary, refers to the position of a treasurer or store-keeper (*bhaṇḍ’āgārika-t,thāna*) (AA 3:220), that is, managing of wealth and property. However, we can take its sense more broadly, not only to mean that a morally good and capable person should manage the family’s finance and assets, but the general wellbeing of everyone.

The Sigāl’ovāda Sutta (D 31), in its teachings on the lay person’s conduct actually specifies that, in response to the wife’s love for him, he should reciprocate by “handing over authority to her” (*issariya, -vossaggena*). The Pali term literally means “surrendering over lordship,” giving, according to the Commentary, means giving her full authority concerning the management of the food and meals of the house (*bhatta,geha*, DA 3:955).

While her husband works and manages the family’s finance, the Sutta adds that she should look after the household stores and property, which of course, includes what he brings back.⁶ Understandably here, it means that husband and wife share the task and authority of running the house and family.

1.2 SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE. Although the (Cira-t,thita) Kula Sutta presents the Buddha as giving mundane advice on home management, we know that this is merely an abstract, a cameo, from his wider teachings on spiritual growth and awakening. As such, we can tease out further useful teachings on a higher, even spiritual, level. For example, we can well apply these guidelines to our own workplace, or Buddhist centre, or a Buddhist community.

Firstly, to “**look for what is lost**” can also refer to family members or friends we have not spent enough quality time with, and so need to do so. Or, there might be some relative or friend with whom we

¹ This term is commentarial (DA 3:492), a byname for **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31/3:180-193) = SD 4.1 (DA 3:959). For suttas related to the householder’s discipline, see **Dīgha,jānu S** (A 8.54/4:281-285) = SD 5.10 Intro.

² D 31/3:180-193 = SD 4.1.

³ A 8.54/4:281-285 = SD 5.10.

⁴ **How robes are recycled** = SD 37.14.

⁵ S 3.13/1:81 f = SD 37.13.

⁶ D 31.30/3:190 = SD 4.1.

have lost touch, so that it is worth looking him or her up. Here we might even include our old teachers, whom we have lost touched with. It would be great to be able to visit them even just to pay our respects.

Secondly, “**repair what needs repairing**” means more than merely putting old things back into good working order. On a deeper level, we might have neglected certain types or aspects of our meditation practices. So it would be good reconnect with such practices. Or, we might have stopped our practice for some time, and need to get back to our wholesome practice again. On a community level, we should try to nip organisational or interpersonal problems by properly investigating, reconciling and healing those individuals and parties concerned.

On a social or positive emotion (*brahma, vihāra*) level, we might have hurt someone, and been apart for a while. It might be time for visit at a proper time to patch things up. Or, we could send a happy message or email reflecting on how special your friendship means. Or, even do something as simple yet effective as directing a lovingkindness meditation to that special relative, friend, colleague or teacher.

To “**eat and drink in moderation,**” in itself is part of our practice in moderation and moral virtue, as a basis for mental cultivation. We should also learn to eat more healthy food and have more healthy eating habits (like having regular meals). Another great idea is to strengthen our bonds with someone or a few friends over a relaxed meal.

Beyond the biological family, that is, in terms of a Buddhist group or a spiritual community, this means that, whenever we can afford it, to share food and eat together as a community as part of a Dharma event. True Buddhist monastics are very easy to feed as they are moderate eaters, to whom we, each of us often need only give as little as just a spoonful of food. After all, in an average meal, we can only need about 30 to 50 spoonfuls of food for a healthy intake.

To “**have someone virtuous to manage things**” need not just apply to our homes, but also where we work, and of course, at our Buddhist centre or group. This means recognizing another’s talents and showing our gladness over it. Working in this way also strengthens our spiritual friendship with others.

While most Buddhist groups are run on a volunteer basis, we might need to actually employ, or at least support, a worker or teacher who is well qualified, experienced or competent in his work. In this way, we would be able to get the best possible team or workers. Even then, such workers should first be selected on account of their commitment to the Dharma, and not be mere employees. Buddhist work at any level must be done with lovingkindness, if not with vision and direction.

2 Kula Suttas

There are at least eight discourses named Kula Sutta, five of which are listed in the Dictionary of Pali Proper Names. They are as follows:

(Ceto,vimutti) Kula Sutta (Asibandhaka,putta)	S 20.3/2:263	One unliberated is like a family with too many women
Kulā Sutta	S 42.9/4:322 f	Eight causes of the destruction of families
(Cira-ṭ,ṭhita) Kula Sutta	A 4.225/2:249	Four ways that make a wealthy family stand long
(Pabbajita) Kula Sutta	A 5.199/3:244 f	Five benefits to a family visited by virtuous renunciants
Kul’upaka Sutta 1	A 5.225/3:258 f	Five disadvantages of a monk frequenting a house
Kul’upaka Sutta 2	A 5.226/3:259	Five disadvantages of a monk frequenting a house
(Sattaka Upagantabba) Kula S	A 7.14/4:10	Seven reasons for approaching a family
(Navaka Upagantabba) Kula S	A 9.17/4:387 f	Nine conditions when a family may be approached

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The Discourse on the Family (That Lasts Long)

A 4.255/2:249

The wealthy family that fails

1 Whatsoever families, bhikshus, that have attained greatness of wealth, all of them *cannot* stand long for four reasons, or for one or other of them. What are the fours?

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| (1) They do not look for what is lost. | <i>naṭṭhaṃ na gavesanti</i> |
| (2) They do not repair what is worn out. | <i>jiṇṇaṃ na paṭisaṅkharonti</i> |
| (3) They drink and eat excessively. | <i>aparimita, pāna, bhojanā honti</i> |
| (4) They put authority in an immoral woman or man. ⁷ | <i>dussīlaṃ itthiṃ vā purisaṃ vā
ādhīpacce ṭhapenti</i> |

Whatsoever families, bhikshus, that have attained greatness of wealth, all of them cannot stand long for these four reasons, or for one or other of them.

The wealthy family that lasts

2 Whatsoever families, bhikshus, that have attained greatness of wealth, all of them *stand long* for four reasons, or for one or other of them. What are the fours?

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| (5) They look for what is lost. | <i>naṭṭhaṃ gavesanti</i> |
| (6) They repair what is worn out. | <i>jiṇṇaṃ paṭisaṅkharonti</i> |
| (7) They do not drink and eat excessively. | <i>parimita, pāna, bhojanā honti</i> |
| (8) They put authority in a virtuous woman or man. | <i>sīlavantaṃ itthiṃ vā purisaṃ vā
ādhīpacce ṭhapenti</i> |

Whatsoever families, bhikshus, that have attained greatness of wealth, all of them stand long for these four reasons, or for one or other of them.

— evaṃ —

111119; 111120; 111127; 111215; 120419; 120428a

⁷ Comy limits this to the position of a treasurer or store-keeper (*bhaṇḍ'āgārika-t,thāna*) (AA 3:220), ie the custody and dispensing of wealth and things, but we can take its sense more broadly. See Intro (1.1).