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(Udāna) Satta Sutta 1

The First (Udāna) Discourse on the Stuck | U 7.3

Theme: How not to be stuck to suffering

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Overview

1.1 COMMON THEMES

The following three suttas centre on the same polysemous word *satta*¹ as a play on its senses of “a being” (n) and “stuck or attached” (past participle of *sajjati*: “hanging, clinging, attached or stuck to).²

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| (Rādha) Satta Sutta | S 23.2/3:189 f | SD 52.2e | on <i>satta</i> as “being” and as “stuck” |
| (Udāna) Satta Sutta 1 | U 63/7.3/75 | SD 52.2f | we are fettered to sense-desires |
| (Udāna) Satta Sutta 2 | U 64/7.4/75 f | SD 52.2g | we are caught in sense-desires |

1.2 THE (UDĀNA) SATTA SUTTAS

1.2.1 The two **(Udāna) Satta Suttas** (U 7.3 + U 7.4) are based on the same background—a festival of sensual indulgence in Sāvattihī. **The (Udāna) Satta Sutta 1** records the monks witnessing the excitement in the city [1.2.2], while in **the (Udāna) Satta Sutta 2**, it is the Buddha himself who witnesses the orgy.

Such an account reminds us of the highly urbanized state of central Gangetic plains in the Buddha’s time. Sāvattihī, the capital of Kosala, was ruled by king Pasenadi. Together with Magadha, ruled by king Bimbisāra, and then his son, Ajātasattu, the two kingdoms unified much of the plains, to bring wide-spread peace, a prospering economy and a rise in population inhabiting the cities and market-towns.³

1.2.2 The Sutta Commentary tells us that the Sutta background is that of an occasion when the residents of Sāvattihī, except for the noble disciples, have proclaimed a festival and are readying a drinking-area (*āpāna, bhūmi*) according to their means, and then indulging in sensual pleasures by way of eating, drinking and gratifying their senses, openly and secretly.

The monks, on their almsround in Sāvattihī, see those people, here and there, such as in their houses, in the parks and gardens, indulging in sensual pleasures. These monks, upon returning to the monastery (*vihāra*), report the matter to the Buddha, hoping to receive some subtle and profound Dharma-teaching. (UA 365)⁴

1.3 TEACHINGS OF THE (UDĀNA) SATTA SUTTA 1

1.3.1 Teaching

1.3.1.1 Both the (Udāna) Satta Sutta 1 (U 7.3) and 2 (U 7.4) have teachings in both prose and verse. Hence, they belong to the category or “limb” (*aṅga*) of **geyya** (mixed prose and verse) in the ninefold limbs of the Teacher’s teaching (*nav’aṅga satthu, sāsana*). The 9 limbs of the Teacher’s teaching are:

¹ See SD 52.2 (4.1).

² V 1:185; D 2:246; Nm 1:23, 24; Dh 342; J 1:376.

³ On the condition of the central Gangetic plains during the Buddha’s time, see SD 52.1 (2.2.1.9-2.2.1.11).

⁴ On the possibility that (Udāna) Satta Ss 1+2 once formed a single sutta, see SD 52.2g (1.2.3).

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| (1) the discourses, | <i>sutta</i> | Sutta Nipāta |
| (2) prose with verse, | <i>geyya</i> | Sa,gāthā Vagga of Saṃyutta (S 1); U 7.3 + U 7.4 |
| (3) expositions, | <i>veyyakaraṇa</i> | Bhadd'eka,ratta Sutta (M 131) |
| (4) verses, | <i>gātha</i> | Dhammapada, Thera,gāthā, Therī,gāthā |
| (5) verses of uplift, | <i>udāna</i> | Udāna |
| (6) thus-said teachings, | <i>iti,vuttaka</i> | Iti,vuttaka |
| (7) birth-stories, | <i>jataka</i> | Mahā Sudassana Sutta (D 17); Jātaka |
| (8) marvels, and | <i>abbhuta,dhamma</i> | Acchariya,abbhuta Sutta (M 123) |
| (9) catechisms. ⁵ | <i>Vedalla</i> | Mahā Vedalla Sutta (M 43); Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta (M 44) |

1.3.1.2 The prose section of the (Udāna) Satta Sutta 1 describes how most of the citizens (*nāgaraka*) of Sāvattihī “**excessively attached to sensual pleasures. They dwelt soaked in them, hankering after them, fettered by them, stupefied by them, infatuated with them, utterly intoxicated by them**” [§3]. The Commentary gives some explanation for each of the key words in this statement. (These descriptions are given in the footnotes in the text) [§3].

1.3.1.3 Hence, the background of both the (Udāna) Satta Sutta 1 and 2 are exactly the same. They differ only in two ways:

- (1) while in Sutta 1, it is the monks who witness the orgy in Sāvattihī, in Sutta 2, it is the Buddha himself; and
- (2) that they each have their own closing verse: while the Sutta 2 verse has 6 lines, that of Sutta 1 has only 4 lines. [§8]

1.3.2 The *kāmesu sattā* verse [§8]

1.3.2.1 [§8a] “Beings are stuck by the bonds of the senses to sensual pleasures” (*kāmesu sattā kāma,saṅga,sattā*). This line is interesting because it has *both senses* of ***kāma*** (the objective and the subjective), that is, as sense-object (*vatthu,kāma*) and as sense-pleasure or defilement (*kilesa,kāma*).⁶

The sense-objects—those of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, that is, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts—are “neutral.” They are neither good nor bad, rising and falling away as our senses—consciousness, to be exact—cognizes them. Even the Buddha and the arhats, too, experience these sense-objects, but they show no clinging (*upādāna*) whatsoever to them or on their account.

Hence, their being is said to comprise simply of the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*), that is, merely of form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. However, the unawakened (like us) are still “stuck” (*satta*) to them; hence, our being comprises the 5 aggregates of clinging (*pañc’upādāna-k,khandha*).⁷ In other words, this is our “sense-pleasures as defilements” (*kilesa,kāma*). In a simple term, this is our craving (*taṇhā*).

1.3.2.2 [§8b] “Not seeing the fault in the fetters” (*saṃyojane vajjam apassamānā*). “The fetters” (*saṃyojana*) here probably refers simply to all the defilements preventing awakening. As a later technical

⁵ For details, see SD 30.10 (4); SD 26.11 (3.2.1.3).

⁶ See SD 38.4 (3.1.2); SD 41.4 (2.3.1).

⁷ For a summary of the 5 aggregates, see SD 52.2e (1.2.1.3).

can see how suffering overwhelm even this life itself, which is bad enough. We can only rise above the “floods” by abandoning sensual lust, existence, views and ignorance.

Of course, this is a very tall order, even when we are good meditators. It is like we have to climb over a high mountain to find freedom on the other side. We begin with simply walking forward, step by step, as far as we can, and taking breaks and rests whenever we need to. We begin our spiritual journey by the practice of **the perception of impermanence**, which is seeing and understanding how everything in this world is Impermanent. Over time, this practice builds up our understanding of the true nature of reality, and in this life itself, we will be able to reach the path of awakening.¹³

1.4 SAMAJJA

1.4.1 Origin

1.4.1.1 The prose section of the (Udāna) Satta Sutta 1 simply tells us of how the people of Sāvattihī are all caught up in festive orgy of eating, drinking and indulging in sensual pleasures—a bacchanalia. We are not told exactly what kind of festival it is. It is clearly a *samajja*, such as the well-known “hill-top festival” (*gir’agga sāmajjā*), held in Rājagaha,¹⁴ celebrated by the inhabitants (*nāgaraka*) themselves.

1.4.1.2 The hill-top festival (*gir’agga samajja*) was held from time to time (*kālānukālam*, SnA 1:326) in Rājagaha, and probably elsewhere, too. The Commentaries tell us that it was an annual festival held all over Jambu,dīpa (BA 126), and was also celebrated during the time of Dīpaṅkara Buddha (J 3:538). It was held in the open air in the afternoon and was attended by people of all levels of society from Aṅga and Magadha. Special seats were prepared for the prominent members of the audience, and the festivities seem to have consisted chiefly of nautch dances (SnA 1:326).

1.4.1.3 Buddhaghosa explains that it was a great or foremost festival celebrated on a hill or a festival in the most prominent place (of the city).¹⁵ He tells us that it was announced for seven days before it started, and was held on level ground under a shadow of a hill and outside the city. It was probably a popular secular festival, similar to a modern fun-fair, a circus or a popular music festival.¹⁶

1.4.2 Buddhist connections

1.4.2.1 According to the Vinaya accounts, there were also singing and music, and the festival was attended not only by the laity, but also by members of religious orders.¹⁷ Probably, for that reason, it is said that the “group of 17 monks” (*satta,rasa vaggīyā*),¹⁸ and the “group of 6 nuns” (*cha-b,baqqiyā*)¹⁹ were recorded as visiting the event. These were occasions for declaring such actions as entailing the offence of “expiation” (*pācittiya*).

¹³ See esp (Anicca) Cakkhu S (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

¹⁴ V 4:85,12.

¹⁵ *Gir’agga,samajjo’ti girimhi agga,samajjo girissa vā agga,dese samajjo* (VA 831,33).

¹⁶ See all V:H 2:335 n1; *Vinaya Texts* 1885 3:71 n3 & D:RD 1:7 n4.

¹⁷ V 2:107 f, 150, 4:85, 267; VA 4:948.

¹⁸ Pāc 37 (V 4:85 f).

¹⁹ Bhī Pāc 10 (V 4:267 f).

1.4.2.2 It was at such a festival that **Upatissa** (Sāriputta) and **Kolita** (Moggallāna) decide to renounce and see the truth.²⁰

The Sanskrit equivalent of *gir'agga,samajja* is *giri-v-aggu,samāgama* (Avadāna Śataka 2:24).

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(Udāna) Satta Sutta 1

The First (Udāna) Discourse on the Attached

U 7.3

1 Thus have I heard.²¹

2 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika's monastery-park in Jeta's grove outside Sāvattthī.

3 At that time, the people²² in Sāvattthī²³ were,²⁴ for the most part, excessively²⁵ attached to sensual pleasures.²⁶ They dwelt soaked²⁷ in them, hankering²⁸ after them, fettered²⁹ by them, stupefied³⁰ by them, infatuated³¹ with them, utterly intoxicated³² by them.³³

4 Then, at dawn, some monks, having dressed themselves, taking bowl and robe, entered Savattthī for alms.

5 A large number of monks, having entered Sāvattthī and walked around for alms, returned from their alms-round, after their meal,

²⁰ VA 5:974; AA 1:156; DhA 1:89; SnA 1:326; ThaA 3:93; ApA 210 f.

²¹ §§1-3 are as at **(Udāna) Satta S 2** (U 7.2), SD 52.21g.

²² "The people," *manussā* (masc, 3 pl). Although the n is masculine, there is nothing in the context to indicate that the activities were restricted only to males.

²³ Ee Se *sāvattthiyam* (loc); Be Ce *sāvattthiyā* (gen).

²⁴ "Were," *honti* (Be omits, but found in many MSS): see U:M 161 n10.

²⁵ "Excessively," *ativelam*, "passing the proper limit, too much, improper."

²⁶ *Tena kho pana samayena sāvattthiyā manussā yebhuyyena kāmesu ativelam sattā honti* [Be Ke omit].

²⁷ "Soaked," *rattā*. Comy: "**Rattā** means imbued with, impassioned by, yearning and lusting by altering consciousness, just as cloth is altered by dying" (SnA 364,23).

²⁸ "Hankering," *giddhā*. Comy: "**Hankering after** by way of coveting, whose own nature is that of longing, engaging in hankering (*gedha*)" (SnA 364,25).

²⁹ "Fettered," *gathitā*. Comy: "As if knotted (*ganthita*), so that it is difficult to be released, bound up (*paṭibaddha*)" (UA 364,26).

³⁰ "Stupefied," *mucchitā*. Comy: "On account of defilements, fallen into dullness, delusion, on account of unknowing, as if misperceiving things" (UA 364,27).

³¹ "Infatuated," *ajjhoppānā* (not to be confused with *ajjhāpanā*), persistently consummating, such as by swallowing, regarding them as if they are not to be shared with others" (UA 365,2).

³² "Utterly intoxicated," *sammattaka,jātā* (*sam + matta + ka & jāta*), ie, "completely drunk" (*sammattā suṭṭhu mattā*), as a result of just a mere bit of pleasure from gulping down sensual pleasures (*kāmesu pātavyatā*) (UA 365,3). *Pātavyatā* (Be *pātabyatā*) usu means "bringing to fall, downfall, destroying," but Comys often take it as derived from √PIV, to drink, hence, "imbibing, indulging (in), gulping down." See MA 2:371 (M:H 1:369 n2); AA 2:359, *pātavyatan'ti pivitabbatam paribhūñitabbatam* (A:W 1:244 n2 where correct reading to "√PIV, to drink").

³³ *Rattā giddhā gathitā* [Be Ce; Ee Se *gadhitā*] *mucchitā ajjhoppānā* [Ee Se; Be Ce *ajjhosannā*] *sammattaka,jātā* [Be Ce Se Comy; Ee *sampattaka,jātā*] *kāmesu viharanti*. Comy glosses *sammattaka,jātā* as "having become (*jāta*) completely (*sam*) intoxicated (*mattaka*); ie, *sammattā = suṭṭhu*. (UA 365)

approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side.

6 Sitting at one side, those monks³⁴ said to the Blessed One:

“Here, bhante, *the people in Sāvattthī were, for the most part, excessively attached to sensual pleasures. They dwelt soaked in them, hankering after them, fettered by them, stupefied by them, infatuated with them, utterly intoxicated by them.*”

7 Then, the Blessed One, understanding the significance of the occasion, uttered this udana:

The *kāmesu sattā* verse³⁵

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| <p>8 <i>Kāmesu sattā kāma,saṅga,sattā</i>³⁶</p> <p><i>saṃyojane vajjam apassamānā</i> <i>na hi jātu saṃyojana,saṅga,sattā</i> <i>oghaṃ tareyyuṃ</i>⁴⁰ <i>vipulaṃ mahantaṃ</i>⁴¹ti.</p> | <p>Beings are stuck to sensual pleasures by the bonds of desire,³⁷</p> <p>not seeing the fault in the fetters.³⁸</p> <p>For, surely, those who are stuck to the fetters’ bonds³⁹</p> <p>cannot cross the flood⁴¹ that is vast and great!</p> |
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³⁴ “Those monks,” *te bhikkhu* (only in Be).

³⁵ This verse qu in Peṭk 10,51, 153.

³⁶ Ke *kāme saṅga,sattā*.

³⁷ In this line, we have both senses of *kāma* (the objective and the subjective): as sense-object (*vatthu,kāma*), and as sense-pleasure or defilement (*kilesa,kāma*) [1.3.2.1].

³⁸ On “the fetters” (*saṃyojana*) here (1.3.2.2).

³⁹ On “the bonds” (*saṅga*), see (1.3.2.3).

⁴⁰ Se *ogha,tareyyuṃ*.

⁴¹ On the “flood” (*ogha*) as the “influxes” see (1.3.2.4).