

Let go now

A reflection of Yasa's renunciation
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Yasa, one of the Buddha's earliest disciples, appears in a Vinaya story as a young man with 3 palaces, one each of the northern Indian seasons (summer, winter and the rains), and a large harem of women musicians, dancers, etc. This account, in fact, is the same as that of the Bodhisattva's youth. Some scholars even thought that the story of the luxurious life of the Bodhisattva must have come from this Yasa episode.¹

Parallel lives

However, **the Sukhumāla Sutta** (A 3.38) contains this same episode, and Vinaya accounts are generally later than those of the suttas. In fact, it is possible that the story of Yasa's luxurious life as a youth could have been based on that of the Bodhisattva's! Anyway, it is not the rule that only one person should have a youth of luxury.

While in the case of the Bodhisattva, he renounces the world, leaves his palaces, meets the 2 teachers, and then practices 6 years of self-mortification. Yasa, on the other hand, flooded with so much luxuries and pleasures, simply tires of it and leaves home—and meets the Buddha in the famous deer park where the Buddha has taught the first discourse.

Yasa's renunciation

The Vinaya story gives us this account:

Now at the time, the Blessed One, having risen from the night, early at dawn, was walking up and down in the open.² The Blessed One saw the son of family, Yasa, coming in the distance. Having seen him, the Blessed One stepped out of the walk-way³ and sat down on a prepared seat.

Then Yasa, the son of family, when he was near the Blessed One, uttered the inspired saying:

“Oh, what trouble indeed! Oh, what affliction indeed!”

Then the Blessed One said this to Yasa, the son of family:

“Here, Yasa, there is no trouble; here there is no affliction. Come, Yasa, sit down: I will show you the Dharma.”

Then Yasa, the son of family, thought:

¹ Reading (The story of Yasa): “The great commission” (SD 11.2).

² This walking is both a meditation as well as a mild exercise.

³ “Walk-way,” *caṅkamā*, or ambulatory, which could also be a cloister or arcade (V 1:15, 182, 2:220; D 1:105; S 1:212; A 1:114, 183, 3:29, 4:87), also tr as gerund “walking” (S 4:104).

“I hear that this is not trouble, I hear that this is not affliction,” joyful, uplifted, he took off his golden sandals, approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side.

On account of Yasa’s spiritual maturity, upon listening to the Buddha’s teaching, he at once becomes a streamwinner. Then, he goes for the 3-refuges.

The first 3-refuge lay followers

Yasa’s father then comes along, looking for his son, and he, too, meets the Buddha. The monk Yasa is sitting behind the Buddha. The story tells us that the Buddha makes Yasa invisible so that his father does not see him. Psychologically, we can interpret this as meaning that it is often difficult for our parents to understand us when we seek a life that suits us better than what they wish for us. In this way, it is often difficult for a parent to “see” his son as a free individual.

Streamwinners

Yasa’s father, listening to the Buddha teaching, becomes a streamwinner, too. He becomes the 1st 3-refuge layman. Of course, technically, Yasa is the 1st 3 refuge layman, but he then becomes a monk. As Yasa listens to the Buddha teaching his father, Yasa himself becomes an **arhat**. It is then that his father is able to see him again. But this is an awakened Yasa the arhat. Since an arhat will never return to the world, to his erstwhile “home,” Yasa’s father invites them for a meal the next morning.

In Yasa’s previous home, after the meal offering, the Buddha teaches Yasa’s mother and erstwhile wife, and they both became streamwinners. They, too, go for refuge, becoming the 1st 3-refuge lay women.

Worldliness

Yasa’s story shows how when we are blessed with good karma (all the luxury and pleasure that life can bring), we will realize that this is not real happiness. Ironically, for most of us who do not enjoy or have not enjoyed such good karma, still imagine we may find something pleasurable, or even something good, in life.

We seek this in wealth, power, pleasure, glory and worldliness. Ironically, whether we are lay or monastic, as long as we are not really happy in the Dhamma, we will continue to run after praises, gains and glory, and when we do get them, our friends and followers (themselves not really happy) rejoice, forgetting what Dhamma joy can bring.

Renunciation

As long as we are not truly happy in life—happy in the real sense of spiritual joy—we will continue to be caught by Māra’s bait. Indeed, we may even hate the world Māra. The point is we should truly **renounce** the world whether we are lay or monastic. We begin by giving up useless and wrong views, and plan our lives so that we can look deeper into the Buddha Dhamma.

Interestingly, nowadays, being a monastic need not mean that we can be **renunciants**: we may be more caught up in the world than the laity. Hence, even as good **lay** practitioners, we can attain the path in this life itself. **Yes**, the Buddha has made it that easy for us. When we are caught up with the world, renunciation seems harder, if we remember what it means at all. However, when we are good monastics, that it is even easier to renounce the world, and find true happiness here and now.

Though well adorned, if he should live consistently
peaceful (of passion), trained (in the senses), certain in the holy life,
having put down the rod of violence towards all beings—
he is a brahmin, a recluse, a monk [bhikkhu]. (Dh 142)

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