

60.7

Yassa dani ... kālaṃ maññati

Formula for departure or invitation?

A brief study by TAN Beng Sin (Piya Tan) ©2023

1 *Yassa dāni bhagavā kālaṃ maññati*

1.1 OCCURRENCES OF THE FORMULA

1.1.1 SD 60.6 (3.3)

We did a brief study of the above formula in **SD 60.6 (3.3)**. This is a more elaborate examination of it.

The phrase *yassa dāni bhagavā kālaṃ maññati ti*, “It’s time, let the Blessed One do as he deems fit,” is stock. It appears in other situations (with other people), with some syntactical variations to reflect the social context. Here it serves simply as a polite announcement that the meal-offering is ready and that the Buddha may arrive at the meal-hall at his convenience.

There are well over 50 occurrences of the *yassa dāni* pericope in the Pali canon (almost all in the suttas, a few in the Vinaya), used in various situations, as will be seen below.

1.1.2 Joy Manné’s paper (1993)

1.1.2.1 As a young student of early Buddhism, scholar Joy Manné, wrote a paper about the *yassa dāni* stock phrase entitled “On a departure formula and its translation.”¹ To be clear, Manné did not actually discuss the *yassa dāni* formula in general, but a special occurrence of it, which she identified as a “departure formula,” of which there are many instances in the suttas. This was research she did as part of her doctoral dissertation in 1991.²

As the text for **the departure formula**, Manné quotes this pair of sentences:

(a) *Handa ca dāni mayāṃ (bhante) gacchāma, bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti;*

“Well, (bhante,) I must go now. I have many duties and much work.”

(b) *Yassa dāni tvaṃ (mahā, rāja) kālaṃ maññasī ti.*

“It’s time, (maharajah,) do as you deem fit.”

This departure formula (Pali) is often found in the narrative passages of the suttas. Manné has numbered them as (1) and (2), but I have used (a) and (b) respectively so as not to be confused with the numbering in my list below, which is romanized. The speaker of (a) is the “great king” (*mahā, rāja*), while is the Buddha as respondent. Hence, (a) the actual departure formula, and (b) the formal response.³

1.1.2.2 Manné’s paper is an example of how a scholar would approach sutta as literature by trying to figure out the various possible nuances, situations or contexts of the dialogue in which the stock phrase occurs. According to Manné:

The question is[:] do the various translations of this formula reflect the different situations in which it occurs, and are they therefore sensitively responding to the sense and atmosphere of

¹ J Manné, “On a departure formula and its translation,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 10,1 1993:27-44.

² Manné’s paper constitutes ch III of her doctoral dissertation, “Debates and case histories in the Pali canon” (Utrecht 1991).

³ Curiously, Manné qu N Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966: ch III. But there is no such discussion at all in Wagle’s book. Moreover, the book is poorly written, sketchy and repetitive.

the texts when they vary their terminology? Or is there one consistent translation that would fit all cases?

This is not simply a matter of words. The suttas are not only religious documents: they are also narrative literature. The choice of words in a sutta is intended to influence us, and the words we choose (or accept) in translation both reflect and influence our understanding and interpretation of the sutta.

Formulas play an important part in this (as in other) oral literature. They function, whatever their length, not only to indicate the type of literature⁴ but also as a short-hand for setting an atmosphere, for indicating a particular state of affairs, for summarising a character, for showing social status⁵ and for creating expectations on the part of the listener, as well as to render the communication of the Teaching consistent and easily memorable.⁶

If we correctly and fully grasp what its formulas imply, we are aided in our appreciation of this literature.⁷ If we misunderstand them we may also miss important points, make false interpretations and generally be led astray.

(Manné 1993:29, paragraphed)

Manné's suggestions are clearly applicable when we study the suttas as literature; she is aware that suttas are "not simply a matter of words." She even accepts the fact that they "are not only religious documents; they are also narrative literature" but she tells us no more; she stops right there.

1.1.2.3 Understandably, too, her paper, interesting and intuitive as it is, is limited by her notion that it is "narrative." She misses a vital quality that thinking Buddhists see in the suttas—that the early texts are authentic spiritual records of the awakening experiences of the Buddha and the early saints, and thus a guide for Buddhist seekers today.

When we study the suttas carefully, especially as an integral whole, and work the trajectories of the various texts and contexts of the suttas, these will guide us to the kind of practice and path of freedom as envisioned in early Buddhism. When we fail to do this or see the suttas in worldly ways, then we have misunderstood the nature and purpose of the suttas. Then, as Manné concludes, "If we misunderstand them we may also miss important points, make false interpretations and generally be led astray."

1.1.2.4 The suttas often contain "**narratives**" that contextualize and connect the events related to their teachings, and sometimes give related details of the lives or acts of the Buddha, his early disciples and other actors of the times. And, yes, the *yassa dāni* formula is a well-known part of this common social narrative of the day. In this case, this *yassa dāni* stock plays quite a direct role in the sutta narratives; it is simply an **invitation** formula—as we shall clearly see in the cases we have listed below [1.2].

Manné's paper, as we have noted, discusses and speculates on only one aspect of the *yassa dāni* formula, that is, as a departure formula—as the title, "On a departure formula and its translation" suggests—that is when the visitor or audience politely takes leave of the Buddha. Here, it should be noted that the Buddha himself is never recorded as using the *bahu,kicca* dismissal formula. [1.2.0]

⁴ See Manné, "Categories of sutta in the Pali literature and their implications for our appreciation of the Buddhist teaching and literature," *J of the Pali Text Soc* 15 1990:29–87.

⁵ On this point, see Wagle 1955: ch III.

⁶ On this point, see L S Cousins, "Pali oral literature," in (edd) P Denwood & A Piatigorsky, *Buddhist Studies: Ancient and Modern*, London: Curzon Press, 1983.

⁷ See eg J Bronkhorst, *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1986; where, among other methods, the study of particular formulas has been used to show the character of and early influence upon Buddhist meditation.

1.1.3 The departure formula in the suttas

1.1.3.1 Here is a list of sutta references for the occurrences of **the departure formula**—*handā ca dāni ... yassa dāni ...* [1.1.2.1]—along with their respective contexts: [S = Sutta]

- (1) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvaṃ, mahārāja, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti
 - **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2,103/1:85),⁸ SD 8.10: King Ajāta, sattu takes leave of the Buddha,
 - **Kaṇṇa, katthala S** (M 90,18/2:133), SD 10.8: King Pasenadi takes leave of the Buddha.
- (2) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ bho gotama, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvaṃ, ambaṭṭha, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti
 - **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3,2.12/1:106), SD 21.3: Ambaṭṭha takes leave of the Buddha.
- (3) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ bho gotama, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvaṃ, brāhmaṇa, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti
 - **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16,1.6/2:76), SD 9: chief minister Vassa, kāra takes leave of the Buddha.
 - **(Sattaka) Vassakāra S** (A 7.20,15/4:21), SD 55.10b: *same as preceding.*
- (4) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ marisa, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvaṃ, mahā, rājāno, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti
 - **Āṭāṇāṭiya S** (D 32,11/3:205), SD 101.1: the 4 great kings take leave of the Buddha.
 - *Same* (D 32,12/3:206), SD 101.1: *the Buddha relates the whole incident to the monks.*
- (5) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ bho gotama, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“Yassa dāni tvaṃ, aggivessana, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti
 - **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,55/1:251), SD 49.4: Mahā Saccaka (Aggi, vessana) takes leave of the Buddha.
- (6) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvaṃ, pessa, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti
 - **Kandaraka S** (M 51,6.3/1:342), SD 32.9: elephant driver’s son Pessa takes leave of the Buddha.
- (7) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ bhante ānanda, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvaṃ, mahā, rāja, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti
 - **Bahiṭika S** (M 88,20/2:117), SD 49.12: King Pasenadi takes leave of the elder Ānanda.
- (8) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvaṃ, gaha, pati, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti
 - **Upāli (Gaha, pati) S** (M 56,18.5/1:380), SD 27.1: the houselord Upāli takes leave of the Buddha.
- (9) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni, mahā, rāja, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti (Buddha to King Pasenadi) 3rd person
 - **Aṅgulimāla S** (M 86,14.13/2:102), SD 5.11: King Pasenadi takes leave of the Buddha.
 - **Dhamma, cetiya S** (M 89,20/2:125), SD 64.10 (forthcoming): King Pasenadi takes leave of the Buddha.
- (10) *“handā ca dāni mayāṃ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kiccā mayāṃ bahu, karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvaṃ, mahā, rāja, kālaṃ maññaṭi ti
 - **Kosala S 2** (A 10.30/5:69), SD 64.15: King Pasenadi takes leave of the Buddha.

⁸ Where the PTS *paragraph* refs differ from those of the SD, please use the PTS *vol:page* refs to locate the quote.

- (11) “*handa ca dāni mayam̐ bho gotama, gacchāma bahu,kiccā mayam̐ bahu,karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvar̐, māṇava, kālaṃ maññasī ti
 • (Brahma,vihāra) Subha S (M 99,29/2:208), SD 38.6: brahmin youth Subha takes leave of the Buddha.
- (12) “*handa ca dāni mayam̐ bho ānanda, gacchāma bahu,kiccā mayam̐ bahu,karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvar̐, brāhmaṇa, kālaṃ maññasī ti
 • Gopaka Moggallāna S (M 108,28/3:14), SD 33.5: chief minister Vassa,kāra takes leave of Ānanda.
- (13) “*handa ca dāni mayam̐ bho gotama, gacchāma bahu,kiccā mayam̐ bahu,karaṇīyā ti.*
“yassa dāni tvar̐, vassakāro, kālaṃ maññasī ti
 • (Catukka) Vassakāra S (A 4.187,7.2/2:181), SD 45.6: chief minister Vassa,kāra takes leave of the Buddha.

1.1.3.2 Manné (1993:30-32) discusses how the departure formula has been rendered by various leading translators (Dīgha translations T W Rhys Davids & C A F Rhys Davids, and Majjhima translations by I B Horner) and a scholarly essay (G MacQueen’s study of the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, D 2). After some discussions on the departure formula as used by the following people:

King Ajāta,sattu in the Sāmañña,phala Sutta (D 2),	[1.1.3.1 (1)]
Mahā Saccaka in the Mahā Saccaka Sutta (M 36),	[1.1.3.1 (5)]
the elephant driver’s son Pessa in the Kandaraka Sutta (M 51),	[1.1.3.1 (6)]
the chief minister Vassa,kāra in the Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta (M 108),	[1.1.3.1 (12)]

Manné concludes that there is no differentiation of special social ranking (such as the king speaking to the Buddha) but that it is simply a polite form of leave-taking used by others towards the Buddha or by the Buddha himself towards others⁹ [1.2]. Manné criticizes the scholars mentioned above for suggesting that the departure formula suggests anything other than being a formal polite departure formula (Manné 1993:30-36).

In fact, Manne analyzes the *yassa dāni* stock only as a “departure formula.” She seems to be aware that it has other usages but does not go into them.

We shall now examine the other usages of the *yassa dāni* formula as it appears in the suttas.

1.2 THE YASSA DĀNI FORMULA

1.2.0 Occurrences of the formula

The stock phrase *yassa dāni tvar̐ kālaṃ maññatī ti* appears in the suttas, with some syntactical variations to reflect the social context. It translates literally as “for which now one thinks of the time” or “for which this now may one think it the time.” There are well over 50 occurrences of the ***yassa dāni* stock phrase** in the Pali canon (almost all in the suttas, a few in the Vinaya), used in various situations, as we have listed below.¹⁰

In the lists below [1.2.1-1.2.5], the **following asterisk (*) convention** designates the usages of the *yassa dāni* formula, in at least 3 ways, as follows:

- * as departure formula [1.1.3]
- ** as invitation/announcement formula
- *** as dismissal/taking leave formula

⁹ Manné 1993:33-42.

¹⁰ This list is not comprehensive; other occasions are further listed below.

1.2.1 ...11 yassa dāni kālaṃ maññasi

(1)	Sāmañña,phala Sutta**	Jīvaka to King Ajāta,sattu	D 2,9/1:49	SD 8.10;
(2)	Mahā,parinibbāna S***	the Buddha dismisses Ānanda	D 16,3.6/2:104 ¹²	SD 9;
¹³ [3]	Āyu,saṅkhār'ossajjana S***	– ditto –	U 6.1/63	(SD 9);
(4)	Mahā Sudassana Sutta	army is ready for Queen Subhaddā	D 17,2.7/2:189	SD 36.12
(5)	Upāli Sutta**	doorkeeper to Nāta,putta	M 56,22/1:382	SD 27.1;
(6)	Dhamma,cetiya Sutta**	Dīgha Kārāyaṇa to King Pasenadi	M 89,5/2:119	SD 64.10;
(7)	Vinaya (Cv 6.1.3)**	monks to a Rājagaha seth	V 2:147,3;	

1.2.2 yassa dāni tvaṃ ... kālaṃ maññasi

(8)	Sāmañña,phala S*	the Buddha to King Ajāta,sattu	D 2,103/1:85	SD 8.10;
(9)	Ambaṭṭha Sutta*	the Buddha to brahmin Ambaṭṭha	D 3,2.12/1:106	SD 21.3;
(10)	Mahā,parinibbāna S*	the Buddha to brahmin Vassa,kāra	D 16,1.5.3/2:76	SD 9;
(11)	Mahā Saccaka Sutta*	the Buddha to brahmin Aggivessana	M 36,55/1:251	SD 49.4;
(12)	Kandaraka Sutta*	the Buddha to Pessa, a mahout's son	M 51,6.3/1:342	SD 32.9;
(13)	Upāli Sutta*	the Buddha to the houselord Upāli	M 56,18.4/1:380	SD 27.1;
(14)	Raṭṭha,pāla Sutta***	the Buddha dismisses Raṭṭha,pāla	M 82,16/2:61	SD 92.5;
(15)	Aṅguli,māla Sutta*	The Buddha to King Pasenadi	M 86,14.3/2:102	SD 5.11;
(16)	Bāhitika Sutta*	Ānanda to King Pasenadi	M 88,20/2:117	SD 49.12;
(17)	Dhamma,cetiya Sutta*	the Buddha to King Pasenadi	M 89,20/2:124	SD 64.10;
(18)	Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta**	servant to King Pasenadi	M 90,17.1/2:133	SD 10.8;
(19)	Kaṇṇaka-t,thala Sutta*	the Buddha to King Pasenadi	M 90,17.7/2:133	SD 10.8;
(20)	(Brahma,vihara) Subha S*	the Buddha to māṇava Subha	M 99,29/1:208	SD 38.6;
(21)	Saṅgārava Sutta**	brahminee Dhananjani to Saṅgārava	M 100,5/2:210	SD 10.9;
(22)	Gopaka Moggallāna S*	Ānanda to brahmin Vassa,kāra	M 108,28/3:14	SD 33.5;
(23)	Puṇṇ'ovāda Sutta***	the Buddha dismisses Puṇṇa	M 145,6/3:269	SD 20.15;
[24]	= Puṇṇa Sutta***	– ditto –	S 35.88/4:62,31	(SD 20.15);
(25)	Khemā Therī Sutta*	the Buddha to King Pasenadi	S 44.1/4:379,29;	
(26)	(Catukka) Vassakāra S*	the Buddha to Vassa,kāra	A 4.187,7.2/2:181	SD 45.6;
(27)	(Sattaka) Vassakāra S*	the Buddha to Vassa,kāra	A 7.20,15/4:21	SD 55.10b;
(28)	(Navaka) Sīha,nāda S*	Sāriputta takes leave of the Buddha	A 9.11,1.3/4:373	SD 28.2a;
(29)	Meghiya Sutta***	the Buddha dismisses Meghiya	A 9.3,5.2/4:356 = U 4.1	SD 34.2;
(30)	Kosala Sutta 2*	the Buddha to King Pasenadi	A 10.30/5:69	SD 64.15;
(31)	Meghiya Sutta***	the Buddha dismisses Meghiya	U 4.1,5.2/34 = A 9.3	SD 34.2;
(32)	Dabba Sutta 1***	the Buddha dismisses Dabba	U 8.9/92;	

1.2.3 yassa dāni ... kālaṃ maññatha (pl)

(33)	Mahā,parinibbāna S*	informing the Kusināra followers	D 16,6.12.2/2:159	SD 9;
(34)	Āṭṭhānāya Sutta***	the Buddha dismisses the 4 great kings	D 32,11+12/3:205 f	SD 101.1;
(35)	Thapatayā Sutta**	announcing the Buddha's arrival	S 55.6,5/5:348,27	SD 42.7;

¹¹ Here, the ellipsis (...) means that sentences below precedes the formula; "... bhante bhagavā ..." means this phrase occurs in place of the ellipsis in the header.

¹² Buddha to distracted Ānanda.

¹³ Square brackets here refer to a reprise of the prec title.

1.2.4 ... yassa dāni kālaṃ maññatha (pl)

(36)	Mahā,parinibbāna S**	Vāsetṭhas told about the parinirvana	D 16,6.12.1/2:158 ¹⁴	SD 9;
[37]	– ditto –**	– ditto –	D 16,6.12.2/2:158 ¹⁵	SD 9;
(38)	Saṅgīti Sutta***	the Buddha dismisses the audience	D 33,1.4/3:209;	
(39)	Avassuta Sutta***	the Buddha takes leave	S 35.202,7/4:183,30	SD 60.6;
(40)	(Pañcaka) Sārandada S**	to Licchavīs, about Buddha’s arrival	A 5.143/3:168,7;	
(41)	Pāṭaligāmiya Sutta***	the Buddha dismisses the audience ¹⁶	U 8.6/87;	
(42)	Vinaya (Mv 6.28.6)***	the Buddha dismisses the audience	V 1:228;	

1.2.5 yassa dani ... kālaṃ maññati (3 sg, polite):

(43)	Poṭṭhapāda Sutta***	Poṭṭhapāda dismisses the Buddha	D 9,30.3/1:189	SD 7.14;
(44)	Mahā,parinibbāna S***	Vassa,kāra takes leave of the Buddha	D 16,1.5/2:76	SD 9;
(45)	Mahā,parinibbāna S*	brahmin Vassa,kāra to the Buddha	D 16,1.21/2:84	SD 9;
(46)	– ditto –**	Ānanda invites the Buddha	D 16,3.49/2:119	SD 9;
(47)	Saṅgīti Sutta**	inviting the Buddha to the new hall	D 33,1.3/3:208;	
(48)	Mahā Govinda Sutta***	Govinda takes leave of King Reṇu	D 19,39/2:237	SD 63.4;
[49]	– ditto –***	Govinda takes leave of 6 kshatriyas	D 19,40/2:238	SD 63.4;
[50]	– ditto –***	Govinda takes leave of 7 brahmins	D 19,41/2:243	SD 63.4;
[51]	– ditto –***	Govinda takes leave to renounce	D 19,46/2:243	SD 63.4;
(52)	Sekha Sutta**	inviting the Buddha for a meal	M 53,3.2/1:354	SD 21.14;
(53)	Raṭṭha,pāla Sutta***	the Buddha dismisses Raṭṭhapāla	M 82,15/2:61	SD 92.5;
(54)	Brahmāyu Sutta**	the Buddha consents to meet Brahmāyu	M 91,26/2:142	SD 63.8;
[55]	– ditto –**	consent relayed to Brahmāyu	M 91,27/2:142	SD 63.8;
(56)	Avassuta Sutta***	the Buddha takes leave (backache)	S 35.202,5/4:183,15	SD 60.6;
(57)	Vesālī Sutta**	Ānanda invites the Buddha	S 54.9/5:321,16 f;	
(58)	Bharaṇḍu Sutta**	the Buddha invited to a hermitage	A 3.126/1:277,18;	
(59)	Nārada Sutta**	Piyaka is told to invite King Muṇḍa	A 5.50/3.59;	
[60]	– ditto –**	Piyaka invites King Muṇḍa	A 5.50/3.59;	
(61)	Pāṭaligāmiya Sutta**	Pāṭali followers to the Buddha	U 8.6/86;	
(62)	Vinaya (Mv 6.28.3)**	Pāṭaligāma followers invite the Buddha	V 1:227	SD 55.3.

1.3 CONCLUSION**1.3.1 Variations of the yassa dāni formula**

We should note that phrase (1) of the departure formula—*bahu,kicca ... bahu,karaṇīya* [1.1.2.1]—is simply a statement that one is busy with worldly affairs, just as we would say: “Please excuse me, I have some business to attend to.” Any other significance of the occasion is not reflected in this formula, but in the circumstance itself.

For example, in the case of the **Kandaraka Sutta** (M 51), if Pessa the elephant driver’s son does not depart but stays on “for a moment” to listen to more of the Buddha’s teaching, he, being a wise person, would have understood it to his great benefit.¹⁷

¹⁴ Anuruddha’s instruction to Ānanda.

¹⁵ Ānanda’s instruction to the Mallas.

¹⁶ Cf *kālo bhante* (D 9,4.17), SD 9; cf *yāno kālo mahārāja* (M 90,17.1), SD 10.8.

¹⁷ M 51,7/1:342 (SD 32.9).

In the **Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2), after King Ajāta,sattu has left, the Buddha states that if the king had not killed his own father, he would have attained at least streamwinning from listening to the teaching that had been given to him. His departure has nothing to do with his not attaining streamwinning. Interestingly, it should also be noted that one does not become a streamwinner (or any of the path saints) by merely listening to a sutta teaching; one has to be spiritually right and ready for it, too.

1.3.2 The *yassa dāni* sentence itself

In the departure formula [1.1.2.1], phrase

(1) *handā ca dāni* the opening of the leave-taking formula (followed by the rest of the formula).

(2) the polite acknowledgement (often by the Buddha but not always).

Phrase (2) is the actual ***yassa dāni*** formula, and it may function as a departure formula, as an invitation or announcement formula, or as a dismissal or leave-taking formula. In other words, phrase (2) may function independently as a formal and polite meaning phrase, basically, “It’s time, sir!”

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