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Time and Time Again

Reflections on cyclic life

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SD 16.13

Udaya Sutta

The Discourse to Udaya | SD 16.13(1) = Saṃyutta Nikāya 1, Sa,gāthā Vagga 7, Brāhmaṇa Saṁyutta 2, Upāsaka Vg

Theme: The repetitive cycle of life

At Sāvatthī.

Then, in the morning, the Blessed One, having dressed, and taking bowl and robe, approached the brahmin Udaya. Then the brahmin Udaya filled the Blessed One’s bowl with boiled rice.

A second time, in the morning, the Blessed One, having dressed, and taking bowl and robe, approached the brahmin Udaya. And a second the brahmin Udaya filled the Blessed One’s bowl with boiled rice.

A third time, in the morning, the Blessed One, having dressed, and taking bowl and robe, approached the brahmin Udaya. And a third time the brahmin Udaya filled the Blessed One’s bowl with boiled rice, after which he said this to the Blessed One:

“This nuisance of the ascetic Gotama keeps coming again and again!”

[The Blessed One:] they sow the seeds;

Punappunaṁ c’eva vapanti bijaṁ

Punappunaṁ vassati deva,rājā

Again and again, down comes the rain;3

Punappunaṁ khattamā kasanti kassakā

Punappunaṁ aṅhām upeti raṭṭham

Again and again, the farmers plough the fields;

Punappunaṁ yācakā yācayanti

Punappunaṁ dāna,patī dadanti

Again and again, the land yields grain;

Punappunaṁ khettaṁ kasanti kassakā

Punappunaṁ dāna,patī daditvā

Again and again, the beggars beg;

Punappunaṁ aṅhām upeti raṭṭham

Punappunaṁ saggam upeti ṭhānaṁ

Again and again, the master givers give;

Punappunaṁ yācakā yācayanti

Punappunaṁ dāna,patī daditvā

Again and again, when the master givers’ given,

Punappunaṁ khettaṁ kasanti kassakā

Punappunaṁ dāna,patī daditvā

Again and again, they find a place in heaven;

Punappunaṁ saggam upeti ṭhānaṁ

Punappunaṁ saggam upeti ṭhānaṁ

Again and again, the milkers milk the cows;

Punappunaṁ kīraṇikā duhanti

Punappunaṁ vaccho upeti mātaraṁ

Again and again, the calf goes to its mother;

Punappunaṁ kilamati phandati ca

Punappunaṁ gabbham upeti mando

Again and again, you struggle and suffer;

Punappunaṁ jāyati miyyati ca

Punappunaṁ sivathikārām haranti

Again and again, the foolish finds the womb;

Maggaṁ ca ladhā apunabhavovāya

Punappunaṁ jāyati bhūri,pañño ti4

Again and again, he is born and he dies;

But when one has found

Punappunaṁ jāyati miyyati ca

Na paññāṁ jāyati bhūri,pañño ti4

one great in wisdom

But when one has found

Punappunaṁ jāyati miyyati ca

Na paññāṁ jāyati bhūri,pañño ti4

one great in wisdom

But when one has found

Punappunaṁ jāyati miyyati ca

Na paññāṁ jāyati bhūri,pañño ti4

1 Comy says that the Buddha visited Udaya on three separate consecutive days (SA 1:257). This is actually self-evident, as Bodhi notes, “Although the text itself conveys the impression that the Buddha went to the same house for alms three times on the same morning, this would be contrary to proper monastic etiquette, so [SA] must be reliable on this point.” (S:B 451 n464).

2 Pakatthaḥako yaṁ samano Gotamo punappunaṁ āgacchatī ti. Pakatthaka, from Skt prakarṣaka, “harasser, disquieter (name of the god of love),” from prakarṣ, to trouble, to disturb” (SED 654cd). The Buddha’s humour is evident here, as he gives a higher meaning to “again and again” (punappunaṁ).

3 Puna-p, punapnaṁ vassati deva, rājā, lit “again and again the rain-gods rains down.” See SD 55.12a (S:3.4).
When this was said, the brahmin Udaya said to the Blessed One:

“Marvellous, Master Gotama! Marvellous, Master Gotama! Venerable sir,
just as if one were to place upright what had been overturned,
or were to reveal what was hidden,
or were to show the way to one who was lost,
or were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms,
in the same way, in numerous ways, the Dharma has been made clear by the Blessed Gotama.
Let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who from today has gone for refuge for life.”

— evam —

Now, here is a contemporary version of this poem:

**SD 16.13(2)**

**Singapora Again and Again**

(A contemporary sutra)

Piya Tan

Again and again, we study hard;
Again and again, the exams come;
Again and again, the results show;
Again and again, we look for jobs.
Again and again, we get hired;
Again and again, we face the day;
Again and again, the traffic jams;
Again and again, we’re late for work;
Again and again, we get fired.
Again and again, we do wrong;
Again and again, we get caught;
Again and again, we’re punished;
Again and again, we’re free;
Again and again, we start all over.

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4 It is interesting to compare **Udaya S** with Ecclesiastes, esp **Ecc 3.1-8**: “To everything there is a season, | A time for every purpose under heaven: | 2 | A time to be born, | And a time to die; | | A time to plant, | And a time to pluck what is planted; | 3 | A time to kill, | And a time to heal; | | A time to break down, | And a time to build up; | 4 | A time to weep, | And a time to laugh; | | A time to mourn, | And a time to dance; | 5 | A time to cast away stones, | And a time to gather stones; | | A time to embrace, | And a time to refrain from embracing; | 6 | A time to gain, | And a time to lose; | | A time to keep, | And a time to throw away; | 7 | A time to tear, | And a time to sew; | | A time to keep silence, | And a time to speak; | 8 | A time to love, | And a time to hate; | | And a time of war, | And a time of peace (NKJV). Such passages evoke a cycle of fleeting vanity or purposelessness in life. Ecclesiastes is also greatly concerned with death. It however proposes that until God decides what to do next, or while man lives, he should enjoy life, work and companionship. It is an Old Testament book, and reflects little of the novel New Testament notions, esp of resurrection. In fact, the **Jewish Encyclopedia** notes, “had it not been adopted before the doctrine of the Resurrection became popular, it is probable that the author’s views on that subject would have caused his book to be excluded therefrom.” Another interesting point is that the Hebrew name for God is not found in it, and it probably had as its source an outside text or teaching. Most scholars agree that Ecclesiastes was compiled around 250 BCE (well after the Buddha, during Asoka’s time). It is one of the most Buddhist books of the Bible, and serves well as a bridge to the Dharma.
Again and again, we are born, and then we die;
Again and again, we’re burned, we’re buried;
Again and again, back to earth, fire, water and wind;
Again and again, our loved ones pray and cry;
Again and again, we are born and reborn;
Like plants we grow, like beasts we herd on:
Who really see change are truly happy and free.

Notice how real the feeling is with this contemporary version. We may laugh—that is because it is an irony: we work hard, play life games, and yet they all finally come to nothing as it were, but only to repeat like Sisyphus’ labour—and we think it’s fun!

Ultimate language

Traditional examples of the use of **ultimate or Dharma language**—or *logos*—are found, for example, in the exposition of the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path in the First Discourse, or in the verse spoken by Assaji to Sāriputta the first time they met. Often enough the Buddha would follow up with analogies and illustrations of what he has expressed in the Dharma language (for example, the Assu Sutta, S 2:180).

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**SD 16.13(3)**  
**Assu Sutta**

The Discourse on Tears  

Traditional **S 2.4.1.3** Samyutta 2, Nidāna Vagga 4, Anamatagga Samyutta 1, Patham Vagga 3

Theme: The true nature of cyclic life

1. At Sāvatthi ...
2. “Bhikshus, this cycle of life and rebirth (*saṁsāra*) is without a knowable beginning.  

8 A beginning point of beings roaming and wandering on, shrouded in ignorance, fettered by craving, cannot be discerned.  

3. What do you think, bhikshus, which is more: the stream of tears you have shed as you roamed and wandered through this long course, weeping and wailing from being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable—this, or, the waters in the four great oceans?”  

4. “As we understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, venerable sir, the stream of tears we have shed as we roam and wander through this long course, weeping and wailing from being united with...

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5 See Yodhājīva S (S 42.3), SD 23.3 (1).  
6 See Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S (S 56.11/5:420-424), SD 1.1.  
7 See V 1:40; J 1:85; Mvst 3:60 (cf Mvst 3:328), & Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004:5.11.  
8 *Pubba,koṭi na paññāyati, avijjā,nīvaraṇānaṁ sattānaṁ taṇhā,saṁyojanānaṁ sandhavataṁ saṁsaraṁ.*  
9 From this statement—and the lack of a similar one on an “ending point”—it is likely that anamat’agga, as used here, means “without a knowable beginning.” See prec n & SD 48.3 (1.2.3).  
10 According to Vijjā, bhāgiya S (A 2.3.10), while craving prevents (“fetters”) liberation, ignorance hinders (“shrouds”) wisdom, (*rāg'upakkiliṭṭhaṁ vā ... cittaṁ na vimuccati, āvijj'upakkiliṭṭhā vā paññā na bhāviyati*, A 2.3.10/1:61).
11 “Cannot be discerned” *na paññāyati*. *Paññāyati* (the passive of *pajānati*, “to know, understand”) means “to be known, to be clear or evident, to be perceived, seen or taken for, to appear” (*lt* 89; DhA 1:14, 95, 2:75). The implication here is that a “beginning” or an “ending” of the time-space continuum does not exist as a fixed reality. Time has neither beginning nor ending. The physical universe may end but it will re-arise ad infinitum.

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the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable—this alone is more than the waters in the four great oceans.”

5 “Good, good, bhikshus! It is good that you understand the Dharma taught by me in such a way.

6 This stream of tears you have shed as you roamed and wandered through this long course, 
weeping and wailing from being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, is more 
than the waters in the 4 great oceans.

7 (1) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a mother.
As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable 
and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 
four great oceans.

8 (2) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a father.
As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable 
and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 
four great oceans.

9 (3) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a brother.
As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable 
and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 
four great oceans.

10 (4) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a sister.
As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable 
and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 
four great oceans.

11 (5) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a son.
As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable 
and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 
four great oceans.

12 (6) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a daughter.
As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable 
and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 
four great oceans.

13 (7) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the loss of relatives.
As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable 
and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 
four great oceans.

14 (8) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the loss of wealth.
As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable 
and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 
four great oceans.

15 (9) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced loss through illness.
As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable 
and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 
4 great oceans.

16 What is the reason?

12 §§9+10 omitted in PTS ed, but found in other MSS.
13 §§9+10 omitted in PTS ed, but found in other MSS.
Because, bhikshus, with neither a beginning nor an ending is this samsara. A first point is not to be
discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

17 For such a long time, bhikshus, you have suffered painfully, suffered deeply, suffered disastrous-
ly, swelling the graveyards.  

18 Surely, bhikshus, this is enough to feel revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dis-
passionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.”

— evāṁ —

The experiential part of the Discourse on Tears (“weeping and wailing...”) is in ultimate language be-
cause the truth reference is a direct one, that is, the discourse relates personal experience. The imagery
portion (“the 4 great oceans...”, “death of a mother...” etc) uses the conventional language of the world.

Bibliography

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14 On anamatagga, see SD 28.7a (2); SD 48.3 (1.2.3).

15 Evaṁ digha,rattaṁ vo bhikkhave dukkhaṁ paccanubhūtaṁ tibbaṁ paccanubhūtaṁ vyasanāṁ paccanubhūtaṁ
kaṭasi vaḍḍhitā.

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