

# (Tamo,joti) Puggala Sutta

## The Discourse on Persons

### (in Terms of Darkness and Light)

[Two kinds of decline and two kinds of progress]

(Sāmyutta Nikāya 3.21/1:93-96; abridged in Aṅuttara Nikāya 4.85/2:85 f & Pug 4.19/51 f)  
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#### Introduction

**1.1 The (Tamo,joti) Puggala Sutta**, without the similes and verses, is found as **the (Saṅkhitta) Puggala Sutta** (A 4.19)<sup>1</sup> and as **the Puggala Paññatti** (Pug 4.19).<sup>2</sup> The Puggala Sutta theme, the set of four categories of persons, is apparently ancient, as it appears in some form in all the five Nikāyas, as follows:

- **(Tamo,joti) Puggala Sutta** (S 3.21/1:93-96): the complete sutta;
- **Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33.1.11(49)/3:233): a bare list of the four types of persons;
- **(Saṅkhitta) Puggala Sutta** (A 4.85/2:85 f): the sutta without similes and verses;
- **Puggala Paññatti** (Pug 4.19/51 f): the sutta without similes and verses;
- **Bāla,paṇḍita Sutta** (M 129.25/3:169 f): description of one “in darkness”;
- **Cha-ḷ-ābhijāti Sutta** (A 6.57/3:384-387): black and white birth, black and white dharmas.<sup>3</sup>

The Sutta lists the following four types of persons in terms of karmic progress, thus:

- (1) One in darkness faring into darkness, or, from darkness to darkness (karmic stagnation);
- (2) One in darkness faring into light, or, from darkness to light (karmic progress);
- (3) One in light faring into darkness, or, from light to darkness (karmic descent); and
- (4) One in light faring into light, or, from light to light (karmic ascent).

According to the Commentary, we are moving “into darkness” (*tamo*) because we are “yoked to darkness” (*tamena yutto*) by being reborn into a low family, and we are “faring into darkness” (*tama,parāyaṇo*) because we are heading for the darkness of hell. We are “in light” (*joti*) because we are yoked to light by being reborn into a high family, and “faring into light” (*joti,parāyaṇo*) because we are heading for the light of heavenly rebirth. (SA 1:162)

**1.2** It is important to understand that this Sutta is *not* an explanation of or justification for our current fortune and status, but is a *reminder* of the following realities:

- (1) When we are facing misfortune and difficulties, there is a tendency that they would overwhelm us, so that it is not easy to get out of such a rut. In such a situation, we should not be defeatist but ask ourselves, “What do I do next?” (see **Ṭhāna Sutta**, A 5.48.6/3:56). Understanding this, too, we should show compassion towards such suffering beings, as this attitude can help them realize their own inner goodness and so emerge from their predicament.
- (2) For some of us, misfortune and difficulties are great learning situation, and we become like diamonds created from fire and pressure, if we refuse to regress but move on to good fortune.
- (3) When we are enjoying good fortune and status, it is easy to think that we are in control and that we can change things in any way we wish. The truth is that the only thing we can and should change is the self first, then the world. We are often living on the momentum of our past good karma—eating stale food, as it were<sup>4</sup>—and when that momentum dies, we plummet into difficulties and misfortune.
- (4) The wise, seeing their good fortune and blessings, know that these are all impermanent, but are an excellent opportunity to invest in new efforts of spiritual progress.

<sup>1</sup> A 4.85/2:85 f.

<sup>2</sup> Pug 4.19/51 f.

<sup>3</sup> Besides the 4 types of persons, this Sutta also lists two more (totalling 6 kinds of persons): SD 23.10.

<sup>4</sup> See the story of Visākha & her father-in-law, Migāra: see SD 14.11 Intro (1).

Our actions may change the world, but it is our spirituality (inner goodness) that brings true and lasting happiness into it.

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## The Discourse on Persons (in Terms of Darkness and Light)

(S 3.21/1:93-96 = A 4.85/2:85 f; Pug 4.19/51 f)

1 At Sāvattihī.

2 Then the rajah Pasenadi of Kosala approached the Blessed One. Having approached and saluted the Blessed One, he sat down at one side. When the rajah Pasenadi Kosala was seated thus at one side, the Blessed One said this to him:

“Maharajah, there are these four persons existing in the world.

3 What are the four?

- |                     |                      |                                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (1) One in darkness | faring into darkness | ( <i>tamo, tama, parāyaṇa</i> );     |
| (2) One in darkness | faring into light    | ( <i>tamo, joti, parāyaṇa</i> );     |
| (3) One in light    | faring into darkness | ( <i>joti, tama, parāyaṇa</i> ); and |
| (4) One in light    | faring into light    | ( <i>joti, joti, parāyaṇa</i> ).     |

### Faring from darkness into darkness

4 (1) And how, maharajah, is a person one who fares from darkness to darkness?

Here, maharajah, a certain person is one reborn into a low family—a family of outcastes [chandalas], or of bamboo-workers, or of hunters, or of cart-makers, or of flower-scavengers<sup>5</sup>—poor, with little food and drink, who lives in difficulty, [94] where food and clothing are difficult to get.

And he is of poor complexion [swarthy], ugly, deformed [dwarfish], with much illness, purblind, deformed (in either arm or both), lame (in either or both legs), or paralyzed [quadriplegic].<sup>6</sup> He receives no food, drink, clothing, or transport; no garlands, scents, or unguents; no bedding, dwelling, or lights.

But he is ill-conducted in body, ill-conducted in speech, ill-conducted in mind. On account of bad conduct in body, in speech and in mind, after death, when the body breaks up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

SIMILE OF STAGNATION. Maharajah, it is as if a person were to go from blindness into blindness, or from darkness into darkness, or from blood-stain to blood-stain.<sup>7</sup> Such is the simile, maharajah, for this person, I say.

Such, maharajah, is a person who fares from darkness to darkness.

<sup>5</sup> *Caṇḍāla, kule vā veṇa, kule vā nesāda, kule vā ratha, kāra, kule vā pukkusa, kule vā*. The outcastes (*caṇḍāla*) are the most despised of the outcastes: see Madan Mohan Singh, *Life in North-Eastern India in Pre-Mauryan Times*, 1967:16-20. SA glosses *vena, kula* as *vilīva, kāra, kula*, “family of basket weavers” (SA 1:162 = AA 2:175 = 3:111 = PugA 227); but the occupations are listed separately at Miln 331. *Nesāda, kula* = *miga, luddakādīnaṃ kule*, “such families as deer hunters, etc”; *ratha, kāra, kula* = *camma, kāra, kula*, “family of leather workers” [Bodhi: “Because the straps of carts are made of leather”(?), *rathesu cammena hanana, karaṇato*, SAṬ:VRI 1:170; *rathesu cammena nahana, karaṇato*, AAṬ:VRI 2:79]; and *pukkusa, kula* = *puppha, chaḍḍaka, kula*, “family of those who discard (wilted) flowers” (SA 1:162 = AA 2:175 = 3:111 = PugA 227). “Perhaps the latter more generally included all sweepers and refuse removers.” (S:B 409 n250)

<sup>6</sup> *So ca hoti dubbaṇṇo duddasiko okoṭimako bavh’ābādho, kāṇo vā hoti kuṇī vā khañjo vā pakkhahato vā*: V 2:90 = M 3:169 = S 1:94 = A 1:107 = 2:85 = 3:385 = Pug 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Seyyathā pi mahārāja puriso andhakārā vā andhakāraṃ gaccheyya, tamā vā tamaṃ gaccheyya, lohita, malā vā lohita, malaṃ gaccheyya*. I have rendered the last half of the sentence literally due to its difficulty. The word *lohita, mala* (alt tr “bad blood”) does not seem to be explained anywhere except in *Sārattha, dīpanī*, a *Vinaya Ṭikā* (Be:VRI 2:10) as *dosa*, “a fault.”

Faring from darkness into light

5 (2) And how, maharajah, is an individual one who fares from darkness to light?

Here, maharajah, a certain person is one reborn into a low family—a family of outcastes [chandalas], or of bamboo-workers, or of hunters, or of cart-makers, or of flower-scarvengers—poor, with little food and drink, who lives in difficulty, where food and clothing are difficult to get.

And he is of poor complexion [swarthy], ugly, deformed [dwarfish], with much illness, purblind, deformed (in either arm or both), lame (in either or both legs), or paralyzed [quadriplegic]. He receives no food, drink, clothing, or transport; no garlands, scents, or unguents; no bedding, dwelling, or lights.

But he is well-conducted in body, well-conducted in speech, well-conducted in mind. On account of good conduct in body, in speech and in mind, after death, when the body breaks up, he re-appears in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven.

SIMILE OF ASCENT. Maharajah, it is as if a person on the ground were to mount a palanquin, or from the palanquin were to mount a horse, or from horse-back were to mount an elephant's back (or shoulders), or from there were to ascend a mansion. Such is the simile, maharajah, for this person, I say.

Such, maharajah, is a person who fares from darkness to light.

Faring from light into darkness

6 (3) And how, maharajah, is an individual one who fares from light to darkness?

Here, maharajah, a certain person is one reborn into a high family—a family of kshatriyas of the great halls, or of brahmins of the great halls, or of householders of the great halls—wealthy, greatly wealthy, with much property, abundant in gold and silver, [95] abundant in means of enjoyment, abundant in treasure and grain.<sup>8</sup>

And he is handsome, attractive, charming, graceful, endowed with excellent complexion to a perfection. He receives food, drink, clothing, transport; garlands, scents, and unguents; bedding, dwelling, and lights.

But he is ill-conducted in body, ill-conducted in speech, ill-conducted in mind. On account of bad conduct in body, in speech and in mind, after death, when the body breaks up, he re-appears in a plane of misery, an evil destination, a lower realm, in hell.

SIMILE OF DESCENT. Maharajah, it is as if a person in a mansion were to descend onto an elephant's back, from an elephant's back were to dismount onto horseback, or from horseback were to dismount onto a palanquin, or were to dismount from a palanquin onto the ground. Such is the simile, maharajah, for this person, I say.

Such, maharajah, is a person who fares from light to darkness.

Faring from light into light

7 (4) And how, maharajah, is an individual one who fares from light to light?

Here, maharajah, a certain person is one reborn into a high family—a family of kshatriyas of the great halls, or of brahmins of the great halls, or of householders of the great halls—wealthy, greatly wealthy, with much property, abundant in gold and silver, [95] abundant in means of enjoyment, abundant in treasure and grain.<sup>9</sup>

And he is handsome, attractive, charming, graceful, endowed with excellent complexion to a perfection. He receives food, drink, clothing, transport; garlands, scents, and unguents; bedding, dwelling, and lights.

<sup>8</sup> *Idha mahārāja ekacco puggalo ucce kule paccājāto hoti khattiya, mahāsāla, kule vā brāhmaṇa, mahāsāla, kule vā gahapati, mahāsāla, kule vā aḍḍhe maha-d, dhane mahā, bhoge pahūta, jāta, rūpa, rajate pahūta, vittūpakaraṇe pahūta, dhana, dhaññe.*

<sup>9</sup> *Idha mahārāja ekacco puggalo ucce kule paccājāto hoti khattiya, mahāsāla, kule vā brāhmaṇa, mahāsāla, kule vā gahapati, mahāsāla, kule vā aḍḍhe maha-d, dhane mahā, bhoge pahūta, jāta, rūpa, rajate pahūta, vittūpakaraṇe pahūta, dhana, dhaññe.*

And he is well-conducted in body, well-conducted in speech, well-conducted in mind. On account of good conduct in body, in speech and in mind, after death, when the body breaks up, he re-appears in a state of joy, in a happy destination, in heaven.

SIMILE OF ASCENT. Maharajah, it is as if a person on the ground were to cross over from palanquin to palanquin, or from horseback to horseback, or from one elephant's back (or shoulders) to another, or from mansion to mansion. Such is the simile, maharajah, for this person, I say.

Such, maharajah, is a person who fares from light to light. [96]

8 These, maharajah, are these four persons existing in the world.

- 9 A poor person, O rajah, who is without faith, mean,  
Miserly, evil in thought, holding wrong views, disrespectful, 419  
Who abuses recluses, brahmins, or others, even beggars,  
Who scolds them, wrathful, a nihilist,  
Who hinders another giving food to those who ask: 420  
When such a person dies, O rajah, lord of mankind,  
He goes to a terrible hell, faring from darkness to darkness. 421
- 10 A poor person, O rajah, who has faith, not mean,  
A man who gives with the best intention, with mind unscattered, 422  
Who, rising up, venerates recluses, brahmins, or others, even beggars,  
He trains himself in peaceful conduct,<sup>10</sup>  
Who hinders not another giving food to those who ask: 423  
When such a person dies,<sup>11</sup> O rajah, lord of mankind,  
He heads for the realm of threes,<sup>12</sup> faring from darkness to light. 424
- 11 If a rich person, O rajah, is one without faith, mean,  
Miserly, evil in thought, holding wrong views, disrespectful, 425  
Who abuses recluses, brahmins, or others, even beggars,  
Who scolds them, wrathful, a nihilist,  
Who hinders another giving food to those who ask: 426  
When such a person dies, O rajah, lord of mankind,  
He goes to a terrible hell, faring from light to darkness. 427
- 12 If a rich person, O rajah, is one with faith, not mean,  
A man who gives with the best intention, with mind unscattered, 428  
Who, rising up, venerates recluses, brahmins, or others, even beggars,  
He trains himself in peaceful conduct,<sup>13</sup>  
Who hinders not another giving food to those who ask: 428  
When such a person dies, O rajah, lord of mankind,  
He heads for the realm of threes, faring from light to light. 429

— evaṃ —

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<sup>10</sup> *Sama, cariyāya sikkhati.*

<sup>11</sup> *Mīyamāno.*

<sup>12</sup> *Upeti tidivam thānam;* ie Tāvātimsa, the heaven of the 33 gods.

<sup>13</sup> *Sama, cariyāya sikkhati.*