

Sādhu Sutta

The Discourse on the Good

[The benefits of giving]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 1.33/1:20-22)¹

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

1 Introduction

1.1 RELATION TO OTHER TEXTS. The **Sādhu Sutta** (S 1.33) consists of a set of seven popular stanzas on giving (S 95-100), *all spoken by devas*, which means that they are probably ancient gnomic² stanzas. The first two stanzas (S 95 f) are found in the **Macchari Sutta** (S 185), which precedes the Sādhu Sutta,³ and also the **Bilāra Kosiya Jātaka** (J 450), spoken by Shakra to a miser.⁴

The last five stanzas (S 97-108) are found in the **Āditta Jātaka** (J 424).⁵ **S 100** [§7] is apparently well known and, besides the Sādhu Sutta and the Āditta Jātaka, it is also found in the **Aṅkura Peta,-vatthu** (Pv 2.9.75)⁶ and the **Devôrohaṇa Vatthu** (DhA 14.2).⁷

An interesting, probably unique, feature of the Sutta verses is **the refrains**. Firstly, they appear *before* the stanza, whereas the usual case is that the refrain comes after the stanza. Secondly, they are *incremental* or *cumulative*, beginning with a single line [§3], and then increasing by a line each for each stanza, so that the last spoken by the devas has six lines [§8]. The refrains serve as a reminder to the audience of an oral tradition of the key lines of each stanza.

1.2 SATULLAPA,KĀYIKĀ DEVĀ. One of the nine traditional virtues of the Buddha is said to be that he is “a teacher of gods and humans” (*satthā, deva, mānussānaṃ*).⁸ This qualities as such presupposes the existence of devas, that is, divine beings. A whole section, called the **Devatā Saṃyutta** (S 1.1-81), a collection of teachings given in relation to such beings, opens the very first book of the Saṃyutta Nikāya.⁹ Chapter 4 of the Devatā Saṃyutta (S 1.31-40) is entitled **Satullapa,kāyikā Vagga** (the Chapter on the Satullapa Host).¹⁰

Such suttas, however, rarely mention the name or group-name of the devas, except for the Satulla,-kāyikā devas (S 1.31-34, 36, 38) and those of the Pure Abodes (*suddhāvāsa, kāyikā devā*) (S 1.37), the realm of the non-returners. According to the Saṃyutta Commentary, the devas are called *sattulapa,kāyikā* (“belonging to the host of those who extol goodness”) because they had been reborn in heaven as a result of extolling the Dharma of the good by way of undertaking it (SA 1:54). Interestingly, *the Saṃyutta is the only place where these devas are mentioned*.

That the Buddha often gives teachings to devas presupposes the existence of such beings we call “angels” and other celestial beings, even being of other universes.¹¹ Incidentally, it is also well known that

¹ S:Ee 1.4.3/20-22.

² A **gnome** (from the Greek meaning “an opinion”) is a pithy saying, covering both religious and secular topics, usually put into verse to aid memorization. The Elizabethan critic Henry Peacham (1576?-1643?) as “a saying pertaining to the manners and common practices of men, which declareth, with an apt brevity, what in this our life ought to be done, or not done.” Broadly speaking, gnomes would also include popular proverbs, such as, “make hay while the sun shines,” and “strike while the iron is hot,” whose authorship is generally unknown and only attributive.

³ S 85 & 89 = 1.32/1:18 f.

⁴ J 450/4:64 f.

⁵ J 424/3:469-474 = SD 22.10a. The first two stanzas (S 97 f), however, are reversed here.

⁶ Pv 2.9.75/28 (given as verse 74 in PvA:M 142).

⁷ DhA 14.2/3:221, on the twin psychic wonder (on Dh 181).

⁸ For the recollection on the Buddha’s virtue, see **Buddhānussati** = SD 15.7(3.7).

⁹ S 1-81/1:1-45. This chapter is followed by the one of devaputras (young devas), **Deva,putta Saṃyutta** (S 2.1-30/1:46-67).

¹⁰ S 1.31-34, 36, 38.

¹¹ See **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29.2/5:59 f = SD 16.15) on the existence of parallel universes.

other beings, including animals,¹² also benefit from the very all-embracing universal compassion of the Buddha's teachings.

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The Discourse on the Good

(S 1.33/1:20-22)

1 In the monastery [park] near Sāvattihī.¹³

2 Then, when the night was far spent, a number of devatas of the Satullapa Host,¹⁴ of exceeding beauty, illuminated the whole of Jeta, vana. They approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and then stood at one side.

3 One devata, standing thus at one side, uttered this udana [inspired utterance] in the Blessed One's presence:

*Sādhū kho, mārisa, dānaṃ
Maccherā ca pamādā ca
evaṃ dānaṃ na dīyati
puññaṃ ākaṅkhamānena
deyyaṃ hoti vijānatā ti.*

Good is giving, sir!
Through stinginess and heedlessness,
no giving is made
by one desiring merit,
who knows, there is what should be given. (S 95)

4 Then another devata, uttered this udana [inspired utterance] in the Blessed One's presence:

*Sādhū kho, mārisa, dānaṃ
apī ca appakasmim pi sāhu dānaṃ.
Appasm'eke pavecchanti
Bahu'eke na dicchare
Appasmā dakkhiṇā dinnā
sahassena samam mitā ti.*

Good is giving, sir!
Furthermore, even where there's little, giving is good.
Some give from the little they have,
some, with a lot, have no wish to give:
a gift given from what little there is,
is worth a thousand times! (S 96)

5 Then another devata, uttered this udana [inspired utterance] in the Blessed One's presence:

*Sādhū kho, mārisa, dānaṃ
appakasmim pi sāhu dānaṃ
apī ca saddhāya pi sāhu dānaṃ
Dānaṃ ca yuddhaṃ ca samānaṃ āhu
appāpi santā bahuke jinanti
appam pi ce saddahāno dadāti
ten'eva so hoti sukhī paratthā ti.*

Good is giving, sir!
Even where there's little, giving is good.
Furthermore, good too is giving out of faith.¹⁵
Giving and war are alike, they say:
The few good conquer the many,¹⁶
even a little, given with faith,
brings him happiness in the hereafter.¹⁷ (S 97)¹⁸

¹² For stories of animals reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-three as devaputras (godlings or ministering angels), see **Maṇḍūka Vimāna Vatthu** (Vv 51/5.1/59; VvA 216 ff) = SD 15.7(3.7.2); the Bodhisattva's horse, **Kaṅṭhaka** (J 1:64 f; Vv 15-22/81); the elephant **Pārileyya** (DhA 23.7/4:26-29) and the monkey of the Pārileyyaka forest (DhA 1.5b/1:58-65).

¹³ Ee *Sāvattihī ārāme*; Ce *Sāvattihī, nidānaṃ*.

¹⁴ On the Satullapa Host, see Intro (1.2).

¹⁵ "Faith" (*saddhā*), here, says Comy, means faith in karma and its fruit (SA 1:62).

¹⁶ Comy: Just as in war, a few heroes conquer many cowards, even so one endowed with faith, etc, in giving even a small gift, crushes much stinginess and gains abundant fruit of the giving. (SA 1:62)

- 6 Then another devata, uttered this udana [inspired utterance] in the Blessed One's presence:

<i>Sādhu kho, mārīsa, dānaṃ appakasmim pi sāhu dānaṃ saddhāya pi sāhu dānaṃ api ca dhamma, laddhassāpi sāhu dānaṃ. Yo dhamma, laddhassa dadāti dānaṃ uṭṭhāna, vīriyādhigatassa jantu atikkamma so vetaraṇiṃ yamassa dibbāni ṭhānāni upeti macco ti.</i>	Good is giving, sir! Even where there's little, giving is good. [21] Good too is giving out of faith. Furthermore, good is giving of the rightly gained. ¹⁹ Who gives of what is rightly gained, arising from striving and effort, having crossed Yama's Vetaraṇī [Death's river], ²⁰ the mortal arrives in heavenly states. (S 98)
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- 7 Then another devata, uttered this udana [inspired utterance] in the Blessed One's presence:

<i>Sādhu kho, mārīsa, dānaṃ appakasmim pi sāhu dānaṃ saddhāya pi sāhu dānaṃ dhamma, laddhassāpi sāhu dānaṃ api ca viceyya dānaṃ pi sāhu dānaṃ. Viceyya dānaṃ sugata-p, pasattham ye dakkhiṇeyyā idha jīva, loke etesu dinnāni maha-p, phalāni bījāni vuttāni yathā sukhette ti.</i>	Good is giving, sir! Even where there's little, giving is good. Good too is giving out of faith. Good is giving of the rightly gained But discriminate giving is good, too. (S 99) Discriminate giving ²¹ is praised by the Well-gone: To those worthy of offerings in this living world, what is given bears great fruit, like seeds sown in a fertile field. (S 100) ²²
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- 8 Then another devata, uttered this udana [inspired utterance] in the Blessed One's presence:

<i>Sādhu kho, mārīsa, dānaṃ appakasmim pi sāhu dānaṃ saddhāya pi sāhu dānaṃ Dhamma, laddhassāpi sāhu dānaṃ viceyya dānaṃ pi sāhu dānaṃ api ca paṇesu pi sādhu saṃyamo. Yo pāṇa, bhūtāni²³ aheṭṭhayaṃ caram parūpavādā na karonti pāpam bhīruṃ pasaṃsanti na hi tattha sūraṃ bhayā hi santo na karonti pāpan ti.</i>	Good is giving, sir! Even where there's little, giving is good. Good too is giving out of faith. Good is giving of the rightly gained Discriminate giving is good, too. But, restraint towards living beings is good, too. One who fares not harming any living beings, does no evil on account of others' censure. Therein, they praise the fearful, not the brave; for, the good does no evil out of fear. (S 101)
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¹⁷ It should be noted that this is spoke by a deva, representing a mundane view of merit, that is, karmic benefit (*puñña*) for a better rebirth. See the last stanzas (by the Buddha).

¹⁸ Qu at AA 2:92 on **Padhāna S** (A 2.1.2/1:49).

¹⁹ "Rightly gained" (*dhamma, laddhassa*), which Comy explains as being either wealth (*bhogassa*) rightly gained, or a person (*puggalassa*) who has gain righteousness, ie, a noble disciple (SA 1:61). **Bodhi**: "The former alternative makes better sense," and cites **Patta, kamma S** (A 4.61.13/2:68,13-20) = SD 37.12.

²⁰ **Yama** is the god of the hells, a mythical judge of the dead: see **Deva, dūta S** (M 130/3:178-187) = SD 2.23.

²¹ "Discriminate giving" (*viceyya dānaṃ*). See **Āditta S** (J 424) = Intro (1.3).

Vetaraṇī is the Buddhist version of the river Styx of Greek mythology, over which the dead crosses over into Hades (the underworld). Vetaraṇī however is more dreadful (see Sn 674; SnA 482,4-6). Comy says that Vetaraṇī is only a synecdoche (*desanā, sīsa*, "at the head of the teaching"), referring to all the 31 great hells (*mahā, niraya*), over which he has actually passed (SA 1:61).

²² This verse is also at **Āditta J** (J 424.13(5)/3:472) = SD 22.10a & Pv 2.9.75/28 (given as verse 74 in PvA:M 142). See Intro (1.1(1) fn).

²³ Be; Ce Ee *pāṇa, bhūtesu*.

9 Then another devata said this to the Blessed One, [22]

“Which one, Blessed One, is well spoken?”

“You have all spoken well in your own way,²⁴ but listen to me, too:

*Addhā hi²⁵ dānaṃ bahudhā pasatthaṃ
dānā ca kho dhamma, padaṃ va seyyo
pubbe ca hi pubbatāre ca santo
nibbānam ev’ajjhagamūṃ sapaññā ti.*

Surely, giving is praised in many ways,
but even better giving is the Dharma path,²⁶
for, in the past, and even before that,²⁷ the good,
the wise, have truly attained nirvana. (S 102)

— evaṃ —

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²⁴ “In your own way” (*pariyāyena*), which Comy at **Sabbhi S** (S 1.31/1:17) glosses as “with a reason” (*kāraṇeṇa*), which is unhelpful. **Bodhi**: “I understand the purport to be that their verses are only provisionally correct, acceptable from a mundane point of view. The Buddha’s verse is definitive (*nippariyāyena*) because it points to the ultimate goal” (S:B 363 n62). On the differences between *pariyāyena* and *nippariyāyena*, see the 10 suttas of **Pañcācāla Vagga** of the Navaka Nipāta (A 9.42-51/4:449-454): see (**Pañcācāla, caṇḍa**) **Sambādha S** (A 9.42/4:449-451) = SD 33.2.

²⁵ Be *saddhā hi*; Ee *saddhāhi*; Ce Ee (1998) *addhā hi*. See S:B 365 n69.

²⁶ See expl ad loc in **Āditta J** (J 424.13, v8) = SD 22.10a fn.

²⁷ Native Comy: “In the past” refers to the time of Kassapa Buddha and other Buddhas; “even before that” is the time of Koṇāgamana and so on (SA 1:62). J Comy: “In the past” refers to the time of Kassapa Buddha and other Buddhas; “even before that” is the time of Vessabhū and so on (J 3:474).