

(Dāna) Vaccha,gotta Sutta**The Discourse to Vaccha,gotta (on Giving)**

[Benefits of wise giving to those freed from mental hindrances]

(Aṅguttara 3.57/1:160-162)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2007

1 Vaccha,gotta

Vaccha,gotta is a wanderer who approaches the Buddha for teachings on numerous occasions.¹ **The (Dāna) Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (A 3.57) records probably one of the earliest meetings, if not the first, that he has with the Buddha. The Sutta opens with the wanderer Vaccha,gotta politely asking the Buddha if it is true that he advocates giving only to himself and his monastics, and not to others [§§1-2]. The Buddha denies this and explains how right giving is done.

The Buddha points out to Vaccha,gotta that anyone who obstructs others from giving, especially to the morally virtuous, creates three kinds of obstructive karma, that is,

- (1) the donor is prevented from making merit;
- (2) the recipient is prevented from receiving the gift; and
- (3) the obstructor creates bad karma (through thought) even before that. [§3b]

The best giving is to those who are truly spiritually developed [§§3-5]. The Sutta closes with nine verses taken from **the Gihi Sutta** (A 5.179).²

On another occasion, Vaccha,gotta, consults the Buddha on a wide range of topics. As such, he can be taken as a model for a true seeker who is constantly questioning the Buddha, so that his wisdom progressively grows. **The Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 73), the Greater Discourse to Vaccha,gotta, recounts Vaccha,gotta's final conversion, going forth and attainment of arhathood.³

2 Right giving

On a more worldly level, the Sutta can be said to deal with how we acquire merit by giving (that is, offering alms) to ascetics and brahmins, or in more current terms, to monastics and lay religious. The teaching on giving here, of course, applies to any kind of giving, but we are admonished, as explained in detail in **the (Sumana) Dāna Sutta** (A 6.37), to practise discriminate giving (*viceyya,dāna*),⁴ that is,

- (1) to be wholesome-minded before, during and after giving, and,
- (2) ideally, to give to those who have overcome the three unwholesome roots (greed, hate, and delusion) or practising to overcome them. (A 6.37/3:336 f = SD 22.1)

The (Dāna) Vaccha,gotta Sutta (A 3.57) basically defines that the best giving is that given to the best recipients, namely,

- (1) those who have abandoned five qualities (the five mental hindrances),⁵ that is, those who are able to attain samadhi, even dhyana (or simply, are able meditate effectively) [§4b], and
- (2) they are endowed with the five aggregates⁶ of the adept (that is, the arhat) [§5].

¹ See **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72) = SD 6.15 Intro (1).

² These verses are also found almost verbatim in **Gihi S** (A 5.179/3:214), spoken by the Buddha to Sāriputta. The verses are able to stand on their own, and were probably inserted here since they deal with giving, but originally part of Gihi S, where they are preceded by more verses.

³ M 73/1:489-497 = SD 27.4.

⁴ This is not *discriminatory giving*, which is based on personal bias, probably the result of fear, greed, a political agenda, etc: see eg **Kim,dada S** (S 1.42/1:32) = SD 2.9; **Dutiyaṅguttaka S** (S 3.20) = SD 22.5; see **Dāna S 1-2** (A 8.31-32/4:236) = SD 6.6 Intro for other suttas.

⁵ "Mental hindrances" (*nīvaraṇā*): sensual desire (*kāma-c,chanda*), ill will (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thīna,-middha*), restlessness and worry (*uddhacca,kukkucca*), spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*) (A 3:62; Vbh 378).

The point is very clear: the arhat, especially the full-fledged arhat (that is, one liberated both ways),⁷ is the best recipient of giving in terms of merit.

However, most of us today would not recognize an arhat even if we met one (that is, unless we canonize them ourselves!). But all is not lost, as the Sutta has a clear provision for this, and this is found in its key sentence, thus:

However, Vaccha, I declare that giving made to the morally virtuous is of great fruit, and not so of those made to the immoral.

Api cāham Vaccha sīlavato dinnam maha-phalam vadāmi, no tathā dussīle. [§4a]

On a universal level, say, of moral ecology (respect for life and environment), it should be understood that our giving should not harm ourselves, others (the recipient and the non-recipient) and the environment. This is the basis for right livelihood,⁸ which may basically be described as *working as if life and happiness really mattered*.

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⁶ These 5 aggregates (*khandha*) comprise of the threefold training (moral virtue, samadhi and wisdom) and the liberative aspects (liberation, and the full awareness of it) [§5], and should not be confused with the aggregates of clinging, for which see **SD 17.1ab**.

⁷ *Ubhato,bhāga,vimutta*, such as Sāriputta and Moggallāna: see **Pacalā S** (A 7.58/4:85-91) = SD 4.11 Intro (2).

⁸ See **Right Livelihood** = SD 37.8.

The Discourse to Vaccha,gotta (on Giving)

(A 3.57/1:160-162)

The wanderer Vaccha,gotta questions the Buddha

1 Then the wanderer Vaccha,gotta approached the Blessed One, and and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, he sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, the wanderer Vaccha,gotta said this to the Blessed One:

“Master Gotama, I have heard it said thus:

‘The recluse Gotama said thus:

“Giving should only be made [161] to me; it should not be made to others.

Giving should only be made to my disciples; it should not be made to others.

Only giving made to me is of great fruit, not so giving made to the disciples of others.

Only giving made to my disciples is of great fruit, nor so giving made to the disciples of others.””

2a⁹ Master Gotama, do those who have said thus, namely,

‘The recluse Gotama said thus:

Giving should only be made to me; it should not be made to others.

Giving should only be made to my disciples; it should not be made to others.

Only giving made to me is of great fruit, not so giving made to the disciples of others.

Only giving made to my disciples is of great fruit, nor so giving made to the disciples of others.’—

2b Do those who speak thus, say what has been said by master Gotama, and not misrepresent him with what is contrary to fact? And do they explain (the matter) in accordance with the Dharma so that there arises no reasonable ground for disputation or censure? For, we have no wish to misrepresent master Gotama.”¹⁰

3a “Vaccha, those who said thus:

‘The recluse Gotama said thus:

Giving should only be made to me; it should not be made to others.

Giving should only be made to my disciples; it should not be made to others.

Only giving made to me is of great fruit, not so giving made to the disciples of others.

Only giving made to my disciples is of great fruit, nor so giving made to the disciples of others.’—

They do *not* say what I have said, but they misrepresent me with what is untrue and contrary to fact.

Three obstructions, three impediments

3b Vaccha, those who prevent another from giving to others cause three obstructions, puts up three impediments.

What are the three?

- (1) He obstructs the donor from giving from making merit.
- (2) He obstructs the recipient from receiving the gift.
- (3) Even before that, he undermines and harms himself.¹¹

⁹ From here I have followed my own numbering, as the PTS ed does not number these paras, giving “2” to the whole section of verses.

¹⁰ *Kacci te bhoto Gotamassa vutta,vādino, na ca bhavantam abhūtena abbhācikkhanti, dhammassa cānu-dhammam vyākaronti, na ca koci saha,dhammiko vādānuvādo gārayham thānam āgacchati, anabbhakkhātu,kāmā hi mayam bhavantam Gotaman ti.* With the last phrase (spoken by outsiders), this is stock: D 1:161; M 1:368 f; M 2:127; S 3:6, 4:330, 340 ×2; A 1:161, 2:190, 4:182. Cf D 3:115 ×2; M 2:77, 222, 233, 243, 3:77, 78, 3:139, 140; S 2:33 ×2, 34, 36 ×2, 38 ×2, 39, 41 ×2, 3:33, 41 ×2, 4:51, 54, 4:326 ×2, 381, 382, 5:7 ×2; A 3:4 ×2. The term *saha,-dhammika* has at least 4 important senses: (1) a follower of the same Dharma (doctrine) (M 1:64); (2) (adj) just, justified, legitimate, reasonable (S 4:299 f); (3) in accordance with the Dharma (M 1:482; Dhs 1327); (4) regarding the Dharma (V 1:134; D 1:94, 161; M 1:368). The context above points to sense (2). On *saha,dhammika*, see BHSD: sahadharmika & S:B 747 n72.

¹¹ *Pubb’eva kho pan’assa attā khato ca hoti upahato ca.*

Vaccha, those who prevent another from giving to others cause these three obstructions, these three impediments.

The benefits of giving

4a Vaccha, this I say: even if one throws away the washings from a pot or bowl into a village pool or pond, wishing that beings there may feed on them—even this, Vaccha, would a be source of merit, not to speak of making a gift to human beings.¹²

However, Vaccha, I declare that **giving made to the morally virtuous is of great fruit, and not so of those made to the immoral.**¹³

For he has abandoned five qualities and is accomplished in five qualities.

4b What are the five qualities that he has abandoned?

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|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| (1) He has abandoned | sensual desire | (<i>kāma-c, chanda</i>). | |
| (2) He has abandoned | ill will | (<i>vyāpāda</i>). | |
| (3) He has abandoned | sloth and torpor | (<i>thīna, middha</i>). | [162] |
| (4) He has abandoned | restlessness and worry | (<i>uddhacca, kukkucca</i>). | |
| (5) He has abandoned | doubt | (<i>vicikicchā</i>). | |

These are the five qualities that he has abandoned.

5 What are the five qualities that he is accomplished in?

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|---------------------------|--|---|
| (1) He is accomplished in | the adept's aggregate of moral virtue | (<i>asekkhena sīla-k, khandha</i>). |
| (2) He is accomplished in | the adept's aggregate of concentration | (<i>asekkhena samādhi-k, khandha</i>). |
| (3) He is accomplished in | the adept's aggregate of wisdom | (<i>asekkhena paññā-k, khandha</i>). |
| (4) He is accomplished in | the adept's aggregate of liberation | (<i>asekkhena vimutti-k, khandha</i>). |
| (5) He is accomplished in | the adept's aggregate of knowledge
and vision of liberation | (<i>asekkhena vimutti, ñāṇa, dassana-k, khandha</i>). |

These are the five qualities that he is accomplished in.

Thus the virtuous has abandoned five qualities and are accomplished in five qualities, I say!

Closing verses¹⁴

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| 6 | <i>Iti kaṅhāsu setāsu
rohiṅṅsu harīsu vā
kammāsāsu sarūpāsu
gosu pārevatāsu vā</i> | Whether amongst the black or the white,
the red or the brown,
the mottled, the plain,
or the dove-hued, there is a bull, |
| 7 | <i>Yāsu kāsu ci etāsu
danto jāyati puṅgavo
dhorayho bala, sampanno
kalyāṇa, java, nikkamo</i> | amongst them, which is
born, a tame bull,
patient with burdens, endowed with strength,
which moves with good speed: |
| 8 | <i>Tam eva bhāre yuñjanti
nāssa vaṇṇaṃ parikkhare
evam eva manussesu
yasmiṃ kasmiṃ ci jātiye</i> | They yoke it to burdens,
regardless of its colour.
Even so, with human beings,
amongst those who are born— |

¹² *Ahaṃ kho pana Vaccha evaṃ vadāmi: ye'pi te candanikāya vā oligalle vā pāṇā, tatra'pi yo thāli, dhovanam vā sarāva, dhovanam vā chaḍḍeti. Ye tatha pāṇā, te tena yāpentū ti. Tato nidānam pahaṃ Vaccha puññassa āgamam vadāmi, ko pana vādo manussa, bhūte.* This statement clearly applies to the laity. For monastics, this applies as long as it is not against the monks' Sekhiya 54 and nuns' Sekhiya 56, which says: "I shall not, when amongst houses [in a village or an inhabited area], throw away bowl-washing with rice grains in it" (V 4:199).

¹³ *Api cāhaṃ Vaccha sīlavato dinnam maha-p, phalam vadāmi, no tathā dussīle.* This is the Sutta's key sentence, explained in Intro (2).

¹⁴ These verses are also found almost verbatim in **Gihī S** (A 5.179/3:214): see Intro (1).

- 9 *Khattiye brāhmaṇe vesse
sudde caṇḍāla,pukkuse
yāsu kāsu ci etāsu
danto jāyati subbato* kshatriyas, brahmins, vaishyas,
shudras, outcastes, refuse-removers—
amongst those such as these
there is born one tamed, well-disciplined,
- 10 *Dhamm’attho sīla,sampanno
sacca,vādī hirīmano
pahīna,jāti,marāṇo
brahma,cariyassa kevalī.* established in Dharma, endowed with moral virtue,
truth-speaker, one with moral shame,
who has abandoned both life and death,
fully lived the holy life,
- 11 *Panna,bhāro visamīyutto
kata,kicco anāsavo
pāragū sabba,dhammānaṃ
anupādāya nibbuto.* whose burden is laid down, unyoked,
whose task is done, free of mental cankers,
crossed over beyond all states,
unclinging, become cool:
- 12 *Tasmiṃ ñeva viraje khetto
vipulā hoti dakkhiṇā
bālā ca avijānantā
dummedhā assutāvino.* in this very dustless field,
abundant is the given.
But the foolish who know not
with little wisdom, uninstructed,
- 13 *Bahiddhā dadanti dānāti
na hi sante upāsare
yo ca sante upāsanti
sappaññe dhīra,sammate* make the giving outside,
but comes not near the good.
But those who go near the good,
the wise, those revered as wise,
- 14 *Saddhā ca nesam sugate
mūla,jātā patiṭṭhitā,
deva,lokaṃ ca te yanti
kule vā idha jāyare
anupubbena nibbānaṃ
adhigacchanti paṇḍitā ti.* and those with faith in those well-gone,¹⁵
established in the root birth.¹⁶
they go to the celestial world, and
into a good family, or if born here,
in due course [in stages], nirvana
they attain: they who are wise. [163]

— evaṃ —

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¹⁵ “In those well-gone” (*nesam sugate*) here clearly does not refer to the Buddha, but to all saints in general, or to the arhats specifically.

¹⁶ Comys agree that this refers to the attainment of streamwinning. Native Comy: “~ should be understood by way of the streamwinner’s faith” (*mūla,jātā patiṭṭhitā ti iminā sotāpannassa saddham dasseti*, AA 2:259); or more simply glossed as “the arising of faith through the path” (*maggena āgata,saddhā vuccati*, SA 3:248). Dīgha Comy: “**Established in the root birth** means being in the root state on account of the path of streamwinning, by which one is established in the root path: *Mūla,jātā patiṭṭhitā ti magga,mūlassa sañjātI10attā tena magga,mūlena patiṭṭhitā*, DA 3:864). Majjhima Comy: “**Root birth** means born at the source by virtue of the path of streamwinning. For the path of streamwinning is called the root of faith.” (*Mūla,jātā ti sotāpatti,magga,vasena sañjāta,mūla*. *Sotāpatti,maggo hi saddhāya mūlam nāma*, MA 2:388; cf ItA 2:79, under Nivīṭṭhā ti). Saṃyutta Comy: “~ is said to be the arising of faith on account of the path” (*mūla,jāta patiṭṭhitā ti maggena āgata,saddhā vuccati*, SA 3:245). A near-syn would be “the noble birth” (*ariya,jāta*, which can refer to any of the four stages) as in **Āṅguli,māla S** (M 86.15/2:102 = SD 5.11).