

(Dāna) Sīha Sutta

The Discourse to Sīha (on Giving)

[The visible fruits of giving & general Sīha's lion-roar]
(Aṅguttara Nikāya 7.54/4:79-82)
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

1 Summary

General Sīha is the erstwhile Jain devotee who converted to Buddhism during his first meeting with the Buddha.¹ This Sutta records events that probably occurred soon after his conversion when he asks the Buddha whether it is possible to see the fruit of giving here and now (*sandiṭṭhika*).² The Buddha replies by saying that it is the “faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving” (*saddho dāna, pati anuppadāna, rato*) who would enjoy such immediate benefits, namely,

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| (1) the arhats would <u>show compassion</u> to them first | [§2]; |
| (2) the arhats would <u>visit</u> them first | [§3]; |
| (3) the arhats would <u>accept alms from</u> them first | [§4]; |
| (4) the arhats would <u>teach</u> them first | [§5]; |
| (5) <u>a good report</u> about them would spread about | [§6]; |
| (6) they would <u>approach any assembly</u> with confidence | [§7]; |
| (7) after death, they will be reborn in a happy destination | [§8]. |

The apparently overjoyed Sīha exults by giving his lion-roar (declaration of faith) that he himself has all these qualities except for the last, that is, he does not know what his rebirth would be [§9]. The Buddha however assures him that he would be reborn in a happy destination [§10].

2 The key message

The interesting point is that Mahānāma has all the “here and now” benefits of being a generous donor, that is, in the form of the first six benefits. The seventh and last benefit is *not* a “here and now” benefit, as it concerns an afterdeath. Nevertheless, the Buddha assures him *here and now* that he will be reborn in a happy state.

This simple Sutta has a vital instruction: when practising the Dharma, we must insist on *immediate* benefits. And the most important of this immediate benefit is that we are assured of liberation, that is, at least streamwinning in this life itself. In fact, this is not a benefit we *ask* for, but rather one that we *choose* to have. It is like food: no one can or should force it down your throat—you have to take it yourself, especially when the food is ready and waiting.³ Or, at least you should learn swimming now before you take a dip in the sea of samsara, and not to rely on a single Life-saver!

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¹ See **(Licchavī) Sīha S** (A 8.12/4:179-188) = SD 30.15

² For a deeper level of *sandiṭṭhika*, see **Dhammānussati** = SD 15.9(2.2).

³ On attaining streamwinning in this life, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225) = SD 16.7 & **Entering the Stream** = SD 3.3.

The Discourse to Sīha (on Giving)

(A 7.54/4:79-82)

The visible fruits of giving

1a At one time, the Blessed One was staying in the Hall of the Gabled House⁴ in Mahāvana [the Great Wood].

1b Then the general (*senā,pati*) Sīha approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and sat down at one side. Seated thus at one side, the general Sīha said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, **is it possible that the fruit of giving be seen here and now?**”⁵

2 “On this matter, Sīha, let me question you in turn. Answer it as you see fit.

The arhats show compassion to the charitable first

(1) What do you think, Sīha? If there were two persons: one of them is without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive; the other is a faithful master giver who delights in giving.⁶

What do you think, Sīha? On whom would the compassionate arhats⁷ first show compassion: to the person without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, or to the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving?”

“Bhante, as regards the person without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, why should the compassionate arhats show him compassion first?

Indeed, bhante, the compassionate arhats would first show compassion to the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving.”

The arhats visit the charitable first

3 (2) “What do you think, Sīha? Which person would the visiting arhats⁸ first visit: the person without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, or the **[80]** person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving?”

“Bhante, as regards the person who is without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, why should the visiting arhats visit him first?

Indeed, bhante, the visiting arhats would first visit the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving.”

The arhats show receive alms from the charitable first

4 (3) “What do you think, Sīha? Which person would the receiving arhats first receive alms: the person without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, or the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving?”

“Bhante, as regards the person who is without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, why should the receiving arhats receive alms from him first?

Indeed, bhante, the receiving arhats would first receive alms from the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving.”

⁴ “The Hall of the Gabled House,” *kūṭ ‘āgāra, sālā*. See DPPN: *kūṭāgārasālā*. See below §3.51n on the Invitation.

⁵ *Sakkā nu kho bhante sandiṭṭhikam dāna, phalaṃ paññāpetun ti*. Cf Ajāta, sattu’s question to the Buddha on “the fruit of reclusehood visible here and now”: **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.14/1:51) = SD 8.10.

⁶ *Tam kiṃ maññasi Sīha, idh’assu dve purisā eko puriso assaddho maccharī kadariyo paribhāsako, eko puriso saddho dāna, pati anuppadāna, rato*.

⁷ “Compassionate arhats,” *arahanto...anukampantā*.

⁸ “Visiting arhats,” *arahanto...upasaṅkamantā*.

The arhats show teach the charitable first

5 (4) “What do you think, Sīha? Which person would the teaching arhats first teach: the person without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, or the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving?”

“Bhante, as regards the person who is without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, why should the teaching arhats teach him first? Indeed, bhante, the receiving arhats would first teach the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving.”

A good report is broadcast about the charitable

6 (5) “What do you think, Sīha? Of whom would a good report be spread about: the person without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, or the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving?”

“Bhante, as regards the person who is without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, why should a good report be spread about?

Indeed, bhante, it is the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving, of whom a good report would be spread about.”

The charitable approaches any assembly with confidence

7 (6) “What do you think, Sīha? Who would approach with confidence, without trouble, any⁹ congregation, be it a kshatriya congregation, be it a brahmin congregation, be it a householder congregation, be it a recluse congregation:¹⁰ [81] the person without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, or the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving?”

“Bhante, as regards the person who is without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, how would he ever be able to approach with confidence, without trouble, any congregation, be it a kshatriya congregation, be it a brahmin congregation, be it a householder congregation, be it a recluse congregation?

Indeed, bhante, it is the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving, who would approach with confidence, without trouble, any congregation, be it a kshatriya congregation, be it a brahmin congregation, be it a householder congregation, be it a recluse congregation.”

The charitable is reborn in heaven

8 (7) “What do you think, Sīha? Who will, after death, when the body has broken up, be reborn in a happy place, in heavenly world: the person without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, or the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving?”

“Bhante, as regards the person who is without faith, stingy, mean, and abusive, how will he ever, after death, when the body has broken up, be reborn in a happy place, in heavenly world?

Indeed, bhante, it is the person who is faithful, a master giver, who delights in giving, who will, after death, when the body has broken up, be reborn in a happy place, in heavenly world.”

Sīha’s faith in the Buddha

9 “Bhante, these six fruits of giving visible here and now shown by the Blessed One—I go not here by faith in the Blessed One. *For, I know them myself*:¹¹

I, bhante, am a donor, a master giver. The compassionate arhats show compassion to me first.

I, bhante, am a donor, a master giver. The visiting arhats visit me first.

I, bhante, am a donor, a master giver. The receiving arhats receive from me first.

I, bhante, am a donor, a master giver. The teaching arhats teach me first.

⁹ *Yaññadeva = yañ ñad eva.*

¹⁰ This passage also in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16), where it is the last of the 5 advantages of being morally virtuous (D 16.1.24/2:85); also at V 1:227 f; cf D 1:126; DA 2:473; UA 242, 362, 384.

¹¹ Cf a similar remark by Sāriputta: **Pubba,koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44/5:220-222) = SD 10.7 Intro (3); also see Citta Gaha,pati: SD 10.7 Intro (4) & **Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta S** (S 41.8.5/4:298) = SD 40.7.

I, bhante, am a donor, a master giver. Of me is this good report spread about thus:
‘The general Sīha is a donor, benefactor, a sangha supporter.’¹² [82]

I, bhante, am a donor, a master giver. Any congregation, be it a kshatriya congregation, be it a brahmin congregation, be it a householder congregation, be it a recluse congregation, I will approach it with confidence, without trouble.

Bhante, these six fruits of giving visible here and now shown by the Blessed One—I go not here by faith in the Blessed One. For, I know them myself.

But, bhante, when the Blessed One said this of me, thus:

‘Sīha the donor and master giver, after death, when the body has broken up, is reborn in a happy place, in heavenly world’—this I know not.

For, bhante, here I go by faith in the Blessed One.”

10 “So it is, Sīha! So it is, Sīha! Sīha the donor and master giver, after death, when the body has broken up, *is* reborn in a happy place, in heavenly world!”¹³

— evaṃ —

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¹² *Sīho senāpati dāyako kāraṅko saṅghūpaṭṭhāko.*

¹³ *Evam etaṃ Sīha evam etaṃ Sīha, dāyako Sīha dāna, pati kāyassa bhedaṃ param, maraṇā sugatim saggaṃ lokam upapajjati ti.* Rather than the future tense, *upapajjissati*, the simple present is used. There is an almost prophetic tone to this sentence as we read it today (after the fact)! This also reflects the truth that *anyone* who is morally charitable will be reborn in a heavenly world.