

## Pakkanta Sutta

### The Discourse on the Departure

[Even in gain, the evil decline]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 17.35/2:241)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2007

#### 1 Buddhism abused

**1.1 SHAMELESS MONASTICS.** The Buddha often uses stories to illustrate some of the common and deep-rooted human failings, especially amongst monastics. The purpose of such stories, whether historical or mythical, are not mere scriptural records and texts for chanting, memorizing or intellectual discussion, but are living reminders that these misdemeanours still occur in our own times and they need to be corrected.

In the Buddha's time, when any monastic's conduct is regarded as unhelpful, even destructive, to personal development or the public good, a rule is made and which is then followed by the monastic community. Those who break such rules are admonished, rehabilitated or heal themselves by admitting to their offence and making amends so that they are back in the stream to awakening. The laity plays a vital role in the promulgation of many such rules.<sup>1</sup>

In the urban Buddhism of the early 2000s, the Vinaya is at best a ritualistic external for many monastics, and at worst, non-existent, so that a monastic with poor training easily falls into and remains in the religious limbo of being *neither lay nor ordained*, trying to live off the benefits of both worlds. While it is hard to imagine monastics of the Buddha's time living as seths, or driving around in splendid chariots, or living in palatial mansions, we today often see monastics with credit cards, with cell-phones and cameras, driving around in their own expensive cars, living comfortably in their palatial residences, provided with life's necessities and sensuality with hotel-like regularity and luxury. The Vinaya declares such monastics to be "shameless" (*alajjī*).<sup>2</sup>

A morally wholesome person is said to be moderated by moral shame (or self-respect) (*hiri*) and moral fear (an understanding of karmic consequences) (*otappa*). A morally *shameless* person is one who lacks wholesome self-respect, but instead has a over-blown ego, even narcissism; and he gives no thought to karma or has no fear of karmic consequence simply because he does not really belief in them. In other words, he lacks either faith or wisdom (usually both) in the Dharma. A shameless person's religion is *himself*.

**1.2 RITUALIZATION OF BUDDHISM.** According to **the Brahma,jāla Sutta** (D 1) all religious feelings are just that: they are rooted in sense-experiences (*phassa*), the bases for feelings (*vedanā*), which in turn leads to craving (*taṇhā*).<sup>3</sup> Religious people tend to crave for some sort of comfort in feeling protected from dangers or feeling secure from failures, or their religious motivation is predominantly fear, especially the fear of death and of God.<sup>4</sup> Similarly the morally shameless person is primarily motivated by cravings arising from his reactive feelings to sense-experiences.

Sophisticated as a shameless person may appear, deep down he (or she) feels a profound sense of insecurity. Hence, there is a great drive to succeed at any cost, whether it hurt others, or society, or even himself. Inevitably, such a mental attitude imprisons him the rut of habitual tendency to collect success and pleasure as if they are things. Even people are regarded as mere tools in his drive for success and pleasure. The shameless person's existence is that of a helpless ritual of collecting things.

<sup>1</sup> For a psychological study, see "I" the Nature of Identity = SD 19.1 esp (6.2-7.3).

<sup>2</sup> V 1:91, 2:9, 3:179, 4:150; Dh 316; VA 1:234; J 1:340; SA 2:142; UA 260 ("shameless means without shame, bereft of the disgust with evil," *allajjino ti na lajjino, pāpa,jigucchā,virahitā ti attho*). On the laicization of monastics, see **Beyond Good and Evil** = SD 18.7 (5.2).

<sup>3</sup> D 1.144/1:44 f = SD 25.2 & comy (SD 25.3) ad loc.

<sup>4</sup> On feeling (*vedanā*) as the root of religion, see **Deva,daha S** (M 101) = SD 18.4 Intro (5.2).

Among the important reasons for the persistence of such aberrations especially amongst urban monastics are the ritualization and commodification of Buddhism. By **ritualization** is meant that we tend to look at Buddhism as an *external* means of solving immediate and worldly problems. Furthermore, in a society where status and wealth have a high priority, we easily attach this external importance to the monastic robes rather than the moral virtue and wisdom of their wearers.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, the lack of Dharma knowledge even invoke *fear* towards the robe-wearers, so that we have neither the courage nor wisdom to speak out against such monastic misdemeanours and offences, when it is common in the Buddha's days to do so. As already mentioned, many of the monastic rules are made by the Buddha on account of complaints and proposals by the laity.

Ritualized Buddhism places religious security in the monastics or in rituals, instead of putting forth personal effort towards inner stillness and self-understanding. All this have effectively *brahminized* the monastics: monks and nuns have become professional priests and shamans. We have reverted to the darkness of pre-Buddha days. Indeed, it is not difficult to see that, on account of the affluence, activities and attitude of such monastics, that they are veritably the *royalty* of our times, and tax-free, too.

Over-dependence on ritual routines or performing rituals for their own sake (that is, without proper mindful reflection) turns us into robotic Buddhists. When we are unthinking and unquestioning, we are likely to be controlled and terrorized by superstition; we easily fall prey to wrong views of the foolish and the evil; and we are easily exploited by the greedy, the cunning and the deluded. The reason for this is simple: we have sought refuge on external things, instead of working towards self-understanding and inner stillness.

**1.3 COMMODIFICATION OF BUDDHISM.** By **commodification** or “thingification” here is meant perceiving Buddhism in an almost exclusively *physical* manner, and Buddhism is *measured* by what or how much we can gain from it. Instead of personal practice, we think of religiosity as the number of monastics we meet or know. Instead of inner stillness, we collect religious initiations, and pride in public recognition for donations and services rendered. We appear in Buddhist gatherings only to be *seen* rather than to *see* the Dharma. We treat dead and dusty *relics* (manufactured for almost every saint we know!) as if they can bring us to nirvana, or as being as good as, or even better, than knowing the Buddha Dharma itself. The bottom line is that this is **business Buddhism** or **money monasticism**, a form of religious materialism or spiritual materialism.

Religious materialism is the immediate and sustained concern with *self and things*, and is rooted in greed, hate, delusion and fear. What we fail to find through personal effort we think we could achieve through religion; or, we perceive ourselves as failures or underachievers, and seek to fulfill our desires through religion. Or, maybe we have been victims of abuse, or maybe we have unresolved sexual problems, or maybe we have been brought up with the notion that social status and wealth matter greatly in life. As such, we might see religion as a means of achieving our goals or satisfying our needs.

All such wrong self-views may help to explain why many monastic today appear to be single-mindedly concerned with money, pleasure, status, buildings and materialism. As the Buddha has warned in **the Mañi,cūḷaka Sutta** (S 42.10):

For whomever money [gold and silver] are allowable, for him the five strands of sense-pleasure are allowable, too. For whomever the five strands of sense-pleasure are allowable, you can for sure consider him as one who neither has the quality of a recluse nor is he a son of the Sakya.  
(S 42.10/4:326)

A monastic who uses money is very likely to indulge in what money buys: sense-pleasures, sexual pleasure, material pleasure, and collecting people and things. The situation is worsened when a monastic is deeply ingrained in academic learning rather than guided by his monastic training and compassion. Such a monastic will forget that he has renounced attachment to *the biological family* for the benefit of *the cosmic family*. Instead he sees the world as his oyster to be collected and relished. When we fail to see or

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<sup>5</sup> For a psychological study, see “**Me**” the Nature of Conceit = SD 19.2a esp (2.3-5).

cultivate the goodness within ourselves, we tend to misuse and abuse people, to seek status, and to collect sense-pleasures—that is, to direct our minds outside, vainly trying to fill that emotional abyss inside us.

To counter the commodification of Buddhism, we should understand that *we are Buddhism*: Buddhism is our conduct, speech and thinking. It is not *what* Buddhism can do for you that will truly help you, but rather *what you can do for yourself*, without harming yourself, others or the environment. That is to say, we can and should make the effort towards spiritual liberation or at least towards present happiness.

**1.4 THE THREE SUPREMACIES.** Religious materialism is great stumbling block to our spiritual development because we tend to see the self and the world merely as separate things, that self is the “I” and the world as the “other,” in other words, as opposing entities. As a result, there is a tendency to *measure* them, and so to fill our minds, to proliferate our thoughts, about them, and to try to be in control of everything.

To overcome religious materialism, we need to understand the nature of personal priorities, such as that taught in **the Ādhipateyya Sutta** (A 3.40).<sup>6</sup> According to the Sutta, we should give proper priority to these three things, that is, *self, the world and the Dharma*. The three priorities or supremacies (*adhipateyya*) can be briefly as follows:

- Self-supremacy (*att’ādhipateyya*) is self-respect or self-regard. In the negative sense, this is self-pride. In a positive sense, this is moral fear (*ottappa*).
- World-supremacy (*lok’ādhipateyya*) is the influence of the world, that is, other-regard, the fear of censure. In a negative sense, this is motivated by the fear of “losing face.” In a positive sense, this is moral shame (*hiri*).
- Dharma-supremacy (*dhamm’ādhipateyya*) is the influence of the Dharma, that is, the love of moral virtue for its own sake. This sense can only be positive.

According to the three supremacies (*ādhipateyya*), our first priority is to *ourselves*, that is, to personal development. With at least a wholesome desire and aspiration towards personal development, we are in a healthy position to help *others*, or to face *the world* and better it, so that we create and maintain a wholesome environment where we are, or as far as our compassionate wisdom reaches. When we have truly understood and tasted personal development (self supremacy) and the betterment of others (world supremacy), we begin to experience true self-liberation (Dharma supremacy), the priority of truth.

Here, we can also take “dharma” (*P dhamma*) to mean “mental states” or what we understand as *our mind*. When we understand ourselves, we begin to understand others, and when we understand both self and other, we understand what the mind really is and how it works. Now, we understand that the self and the world are not separate entities, but interrelated mental states or events. We create our own world, we create our own God, gods and demons: only we can liberate ourselves from them. For, *we are the world*.

In other words, religious materialism in all its forms is given up and prevented from recurring by our giving the highest priority to our *spiritual development*. The true purpose of life is to *grow*; our purpose in life should be to grow spiritually through self-acceptance, self-understanding and self-liberation. Through self-acceptance, we begin to understanding the meaning of life, that the imperfection, failures and pains of living are signs that we have yet to be fully developed, that we can be better. And that betterment can only be fulfilled by accepting life for what it is (impermanent); that our sufferings arise through desiring to look for permanence in what is impermanent; the goal of life is self-liberation; and our purpose in life is to work towards that liberation, which is supreme happiness.

### 3 Versions of the story

Discourses like **the Pakkanta Sutta** (S 17.35) and **the Pañca,ratha,sata Sutta** (S 17.36) (which follows) serve as reminders that even monastics can fail in their training and religiosity if they fall into the rut of luxury. Such suttas admonish us, both monastic and lay, on the dangers of luxury and licence, that unwholesomeness is to be avoided so that we direct our energies to the wholesome effort towards self-

<sup>6</sup> A 3.40/1:147-150 = SD 27.3; see also **The Teacher or the Teaching?** = SD 3.14(14).

liberation.<sup>7</sup> The importance of the Pakkanta Sutta is reflected in that it is found, with interesting variations in a number of other texts and Commentaries, as follows:

Culla,vagga 7.2.5	V 2:187 f	
(Brahmā Saham,pati) Deva,datta Sutta	S 6.12/1:153 f	(with S 597, by Sahampati)
Pakkanta Sutta	S 17.35/2:241	(similes elaborated)
(Parābhava) Deva,datta Sutta	A 4.68/2:73	
Milinda,pañha	Miln 166	(verse allusion)
Netti-p,pakaraṇa	Netti 130	(verse only, Netti §775)
Kāla-t,thera Vatthu	DhA 12.8/3:156	(verse quoted)

Amongst the non-Pali sources of the Pakkanta Sutta are:

[Sanskrit] Saṅghabheda,vastu 2:71-73	Uv 13.1 f	(Enomoto 1994 no 1064)
別譯雜阿含	bza003	
別譯雜阿含英譯		BZA English
雜阿含	za1064	
增壹阿含(12.7)	T.02.0125.0570b20	
增壹阿含(23.7)	T.02.0125.0614a18	
雜寶藏經(37)	T.04.0203.0465b20	

All these versions of the Pakkanta Sutta (including an English translation) are found in **the Shorter Saṃyukta Āgama** website.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Saṃyutta Commentary, the event recounted here occurs not long after Deva,datta has caused a schism,<sup>9</sup> and has left the Bamboo Grove to Gaya,sīsa.<sup>10</sup> Both **the Vinaya** (Cv 7.2.5) and **Pakkanta Sutta** (S 17.35) accounts, however, record the Buddha as uttering the verse below (which recurs in almost all the references above), not after Devadatta's schism, but when he wins Ajāta,sattu's patronage, and also without the homily on gain, honour and praise.<sup>11</sup>

Truly, the plantain's fruit destroys the plantain;  
its fruit, the bamboo; its fruit, the reed—  
honour destroys the false person,  
just as the she-mule is destroyed by her foetus.

(Cv 7.2.5/V 2:188; S 597/6.12/1:154; S 17.35/2:241; A 4.68/2:73;  
Netti §775/130; qu at DhA 3:156; cf Miln 166)

According to the Saṃyutta Commentary, when a she-mule mates with a horse, and becomes pregnant, she is unable to deliver when the time comes. She stands striking the ground with her hoofs. Then they tie her feet to four stakes, cuts her belly open to remove the foal, and she dies right there. (SA 2:211)

**The Purisa Sutta** (S 3.2) records the Buddha's admonition to rajah Pasenadi that the three unwholesome roots—greed, hate and delusion—arise in a person only for his "harm, suffering and discomfort" (*ahitāya dukkhāya aphāsu,vihārāya*):

<i>Lobho doso moho ca</i>	Greed, hate and delusion,
<i>purisaṃ pāpa,cetaṣaṃ</i>	turns a person's mind evil,
<i>hiṃsanti atta,sambhūta</i>	they arise within the self, harming him
<i>taca,sāraṃ va sam phalaṃ</i>	like the reed is harmed by its own fruit.
	(S 383/3.2/1:70)

<sup>7</sup> See eg **Entering the stream** = SD 3.3.

<sup>8</sup> <http://buddhistinformatics.chibs.edu.tw/BZA/cluster.xql>.

<sup>9</sup> Cf DhA 12.6/3:151-154; 12.7/3:154.

<sup>10</sup> SA 2:211; on Deva,datta's schism, see Cv 8.4-5 = V 2:199-206.

<sup>11</sup> Cv 7.2.5/V 2:188; S 17.35/2:241.

The Sutta Commentary explains that the reed is called *taca, sāra* because its bark (*taca*) is hard like heart-wood (*sāra*). The Commentary also glosses *sam* as the reflexive pronominal adjective, *attano* (“self”). (SA 1:136).<sup>12</sup>

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## The Discourse on the Departure

(S 17.35/2:241)

1 At one time, the Blessed One was residing on Mount Vulture’s Peak near Rāja, gaha, not long after Deva, datta had left.

### Deva, datta’s gains and the dangers

2 Then, the Blessed One addressed the monks with regards to Deva, datta:

3 “Bhikshus, Deva, datta’s gain, honour and praise<sup>13</sup> have arisen for his own destruction. Deva, datta’s gain, honour and praise have arisen for his own downfall.

4 PARABLE OF THE PLANTAIN TREE. Bhikshus, even as the fruit of a plantain tree brings its destruction, just as its fruit brings its downfall, even so, bhikshus, Deva, datta’s gain, honour and praise have arisen for his own destruction.

5 PARABLE OF THE BAMBOO PLANT. Bhikshus, even as the fruit of bamboo brings its destruction, just as its fruit brings its downfall, even so, bhikshus, Deva, datta’s gain, honour and praise have arisen for his own destruction.

6 PARABLE OF THE REED. Bhikshus, even as the fruit of reed brings its destruction, just as its fruit brings its downfall, even so, bhikshus, Deva, datta’s gain, honour and praise have arisen for his own destruction.

7 PARABLE OF THE SHE-MULE. Bhikshus, even as the foetus of she-mule brings its destruction, just as its fruit brings its downfall, even so, bhikshus, Deva, datta’s gain, honour and praise have arisen for his own destruction.

### The dangers of gains

8 Thus dreadful, bhikshus, are gain, honour and praise—bitter, vile, and obstructive to the attaining of the supreme security from bondage.<sup>14</sup>

9 Thus, bhikshus, you should train yourselves.

10 The Blessed One said this. Having said this, the Sugata [well-gone], the teacher, further said this:

<i>Phalaṃ ve kadaliṃ hanti</i>	Truly, the plantain’s fruit destroys the plantain;
<i>phalaṃ veḷuṃ phalaṃ naḷaṃ</i>	its fruit, the bamboo; its fruit, the reed—
<i>sakkāro kāpurisaṃ<sup>15</sup> hanti</i>	honour destroys the inferior person,
<i>gabbho assatarim yathā</i>	just as the she-mule is destroyed by her foetus. [242]

— evaṃ — 080101; 080429; 081229

<sup>12</sup> For other examples of reflexive pronominal adjs, see Tha:N 659n & Thī:N 136n; also S:B 499 n657.

<sup>13</sup> “Gain, honour and praise,” *lābha, sakkāra, silokaṃ*. Comy explains “gain” (*lābha*) as that of the four requisites; “honour” (*sakkāra*) as such gains that are well-made and crafted; and “praise” (*siloka*) as vocal acclamation (*vaṇṇa, ghosa*) (SA 2:205).

<sup>14</sup> *Dāruṇo bhikkhave lābha, sakkāra, siloko kaṭuko pharuso antarāyiko anuttarassa yoga-k, khemassa adhiḡamāya*. This stock is listed only in the first sutta of the chapter (S 17), and is here represented by a *peyyāla*.

<sup>15</sup> *Kāpurisa = ka* (a prefix connoting contempt) + *purisa* (BHS *kāpuruṣa*), a worthless or contemptible man; an evil or inferior person (V 2:188; S 1:91; Pv 21.31; Tha 1018; J 2:42 ×2). Cf *akāpurisa, sevita* (mfn), practised or cultivated by superior persons or true individuals; not practised by inferior or false persons (D 3:279; A 3:24; Tha 649; Thī 189; MA 2:231; ThaA 2:274; ThīA 162).