

Yajamāna Sutta

The Discourse on the Sacrificer

[Even material giving is fruitful]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 11.16/1:233 f)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

1 The sacrificer

The term *yajamāna* (ts) here is Pali borrowed from the Sanskrit, and is translated as “sacrificer.” But this is quite misleading, as the *yajamāna* is actually only the *sponsor* of the sacrifice (*yajña*), and it is the brahmin ritual specialists who actually perform the sacrifice. Traditionally, any married male of one of the three “twice-born” classes¹—the brahmins (priestly or teaching class), the kshatriya (nobility or ruling class) and the vaishya (the business class)—are allowed (or can afford) to perform such a sacrifice. This indicates the centrality of marriage in the brahminical system is understandable: it is a measure against the world-renunciation ideal championed by early Buddhism.

The sponsor first undergoes *dikṣā* (consecration), whereby he is set apart from others, having to keep to certain strict observances, highlighted by being initiated into the worship of a deity, until this period ends with a bath. The brahmins are specialists in their own fields, namely:

- The *hotṛ* the leading priest (Ṛg,veda specialist), recites the invocations and litanies;
- The *adhvaryu* a priest of the Yajur,veda, responsible for the physical details of the sacrifice;
- The *udgātṛ* a priest of the Sāma,veda, responsible for the singing of the hymns; and
- The *brahman* an expert priest who oversees everything, correcting any mistakes.

The Upaniṣads mention various assistants to these priests. For example, the *āgnidhra* (fire-kindler) assists the *adhvaryu*; the *prastotṛ* (Prastāva reciter) and the *pratiharṛ* (the “averter”) assist the *udgātṛ*.²

The Buddha often speaks against such sacrifices or seeking spiritual liberation outside of oneself. The ancient brahmins worshipped fire (Agni) as a god, but the Buddha, in **the (Uggata,sarīra) Sutta** (A 4.44), for example, ethicizes or demythologizes such a notion and speaks of fire as our respect and duties towards our parents, family, household and virtuous religious.³ In **the Kūṭa,danta Sutta** (D 5), the Buddha states that if any sacrifice is to be made, it should not involve any killing, which would be karmically unwholesome.⁴

2 Giving

Paraphrased, Sakra’s question is a simple one: “How does a worldly or material offering bring great benefit?” The Buddha’s answer is also a simple one: “When it is offered to the Sangha.” The best recipient of almsgiving is the Sangha, that is the community of noble disciples (the saints), who due to their own goodness are “a supreme field of merit for the world,” as explained by Buddhaghosa:

¹ The ancient brahmins often boast that they are “twice-born” (ThiA 269): the first is biological (ie born of the mother), and second, religious, when the 7-year-old initiate (only a male brahmin, kshatriya or vaishya) learns the Gāyatrī Mantra, and by way of the *upanayana* ceremony, when the brahmin youth is invested with a sacred cord (*yajño,pavīta*; Hindi *janeo*), worn permanently over the left shoulder and under the right arm. Non-brahmins and women are prohibited from wearing it. See AL Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, 1989:39 & n5. In **Vasala S** (Sn 1.7), the Buddha humorously says, “He who here harms life, whether once-born [humans, etc] or twice-born [birds, reptiles, etc] | And has no compassion for living beings, he should be known as an outcaste.” (Sn 117). See also **Tala,puṭa Tha** (Tha 1103) = SD 20.9.13 & n.

² See P Olivelle (tr), *Upaniṣads*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996:xliv-xlv.

³ A 4.44/4:41-45 = SD 3.16. Similarly in **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31), the Buddha demythologizes worship of the geographical directions as gods, but as social ethics and duties (D 31/3:180-192) = SD 4.1. On demythologization, see **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5) = SD 22.8 Intro (3).

⁴ D 5.18a/1:141 = SD 22.8. On the Buddha’s stand on animal sacrifices, see **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5) = SD 22.8 Intro (4).

Anuttaram puñña-k,khettam lokassa, “a supreme field of merit for the world”: an incomparable place in all the world for growing merit. Just as the place for growing the king’s or a courtier’s rice or corn is the king’s rice-field or the king’s corn-field, so the Sangha is the place for growing all the world’s merit.

For the various kinds of merit bringing welfare and happiness for the world grow depending on the Sangha.

Therefore, the Sangha is “a supreme field of merit for the world.”

(Vism 98/220) = SD 15.10a(4)

The (Sumana) Dāna Sutta (A 6.37) speaks of the six limbs of perfect giving (*cha-l-aṅga,samannā-gatam dakkhiṇam*), that is, three of the giver (happy before giving, while giving, and after the giving) and three of the recipient (he or they are free from greed, from hate, and free from delusion).⁵

The Velāma Sutta (A 9.20) records how the Buddha consoles Anātha,piṇḍika who confesses that, due to the exhaustion of his wealth, he is unable to give lavish alms-offering as he has done before. The Buddha explains to him that it is not *what* one gives that counts, but *how* one gives, that is, of the five conditions of the true individual’s giving.⁶

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (1) one gives with care, | <i>sakkaccam deti,</i> |
| (2) one gives after some thought, ⁷ | <i>citti,katvā deti,</i> |
| (3) one gives with one’s own hands, | <i>sahatthā deti,</i> |
| (4) one gives not as if throwing something away, | <i>anapaviddham deti,</i> |
| (5) one gives with regard to the future, ⁸ | <i>āgamana,diṭṭhiko deti,</i> |

then, wherever that almsgiving bears fruit, his mind will turn to the enjoyment of good food, or to the enjoyment of fine cloth, or to the enjoyment of splendid carriages, or to the enjoyment of the five cords of sense-pleasures in their sweetness.

One’s sons or women [wives and daughters] or servants or messengers or workers will have the desire to listen to one, and give ear, and focus their minds to understand.⁹

(A 9.20.3/4:392 f) = SD 16.6

A detailed discussion on the proper conditions for giving is given in the Introduction to **the Aputtaka Sutta** (S 3.20).¹⁰

3 Opadhika

3.1 S 915 [§4a] pāda c has the word *opadhikam*, which the Critical Pali Dictionary (CPD) says is a secondary derivation (*taddhita*) from *upadhi* + suffix *-ika* (cf BHS *aupadhika*),¹¹ and defines *opadhika* as follows: “pertaining to, caused by, material objects, used as an epithet of the merit (*puñña*) resulting from the donation of material objects.” The phrase *opadhikam puñnam* is found in a number of canonical texts.¹²

⁵ (Sumana) Dāna S (A 6.37/3:336 f) = SD 22.1.

⁶ An almost identical list of 5 conditions of giving is found in **Cūḷa Punnama S** (M 100.23/3:24) = SD 45.4.

⁷ (Aṭṭha) Dāna Ss 1-2 (A 8.31-31/4:236 = SD 6.6) advise here thus: “One gives thinking, “This is an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind,” ie to facilitate one’s spiritual development.

⁸ *Āgamana,diṭṭhiko deti*, lit “he gives with the view of the coming,” ie with a view of its karmic wholesome results. Cf *ayaṇ ca etad-aggā,sannikkhepo nāma catūhi kāraṇehi labbhati: atth’uppattito āgamanato ciṇṇa,vasito guṇātirekato ti*, “and as regards this laying down of the foremost position, one gains it in four ways, namely, on account of the arising of the goal (*attha*), on account of regard for the future (*āgamana*), on account of the virtue of habit (*ciṇṇa*), on account of one’s exceptional virtue (AA 1:125,6); on *āgamanto*, see AA 1:128,23, 132,17, 133,15, 134,5.

⁹ This para: *Ye pi’ssa te honti puttā ti vā dārā ti vā dāsā ti vā pessā ti vā kammakarā ti vā, te pi na sussusanti na sotam odahati na añña,cittam upaṭṭhapenti.*

¹⁰ **Aputtaka S** (S 3.20/1:91-93 = SD 22.5 Intro (2).

¹¹ See BHS: *upadhika & aupadhika*.

¹² S 1:233; A 4:292, 293; It 19, 78; Ap 195, 262; Vv 735; Kvu 554.

3.2 CPD DEFINITION. The CPD (under “Remarks”) also notes that Buddhaghosa and the grammarians interpret *opadhika* differently. According to them it means relating to or aiming at upadhi, which was understood as *khandha* (the aggregates) the basis of a new existence. This interpretation, CPD notes, is clearly contradicted by the canonical usage.

3.3 BHSD DEFINITION. The CPD remarks probably has to do with the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary (BHSD) definition of *aupadika* = *upadhika*, that is,

- (1) [after mentioning the Pali cognate] “(adj) in BHS the word acquires a new meaning based on *upadhi* (2) [as “material thing”], material, consisting of or relating to material things; chiefly as epithet of *punya, kriyā, vastu*... Mvyut 1703 ~*kaṃ puṇyakriyāvastu*; Śiks 138.7 ~*kānām*.”
- (2) “(substantive) what relates to material things... *bhagavān dhike ‘sthāt abhinirhṛtapinḍapātaḥ* (Divy *sthitaḥ*, omitting *abhi-*), ‘the Lord remained (without partaking of) the material gift (a meal which his monks received),’ MSV¹³ 2.128.3.”

3.4 PUÑÑA, BHĀGIYĀ UPADHI, VEPAKKĀ. This phrase appears in the **Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta** (M 117) in the Buddha’s definition of right view (*sammā, diṭṭhi*):

And what, bhikshus, is **right view**?

Bhikshus, there are two kinds of right view, I say.

Bhikshus, there is the right view with mental cankers,¹⁴ partaking of merit,¹⁵ ripening in acquisitions¹⁶ (of aggregates).¹⁷

Bhikshus, there is the right view that is noble, without mental cankers, supramundane, a path factor.¹⁸ (M 117.6/3:72) = SD 6.10

In the phrase “ripening in acquisitions” (*upadhi, vepakka*) here, “acquisitions” is *upadhi*, which literally means “that on which something is laid or rests, basis, foundation, substratum.” Here, as defined in Cone’s Dictionary of Pali (DP), the term means both “worldly possessions or belongings” as well as “attachment to such possessions (forming a basis for rebirth)”. The Commentaries say there are four types of upadhi:¹⁹

- (1) the five cords of sense-pleasures (*kāma*) (MA 2:170; ItA 1:64);
- (2) the five aggregates (*pañcak, khandha*) (MA 3:171; ItA 1:89);
- (3) the defilements (*kilesa*) (MA 3:171; SnA 1:45 f; ItA 1:64; Nm 1:103);
- (4) volitional activities (*abhisankhāra*) (ItA 1:64; Nm 1:103).

The term *upadhi* is often confounded with the near-synonym *upādi* (trace (of clinging), substrate).²⁰

The Majjhima Commentary glosses *upadhi, vepakka* (which is the adjective form of the noun *upadhi, vipāka*) as “giving results by way of the acquisitions” (MA 3:141), which its Ṭīkā explains as the continuity of the five aggregates (MAT:Be 2:306). Since such a right view is said to be “with mental cankers,... in the form of acquisitions [of aggregates]” (*s’āsavā puñña, bhāgiyā upadhi, vepakka*), it is mundane right view, partaking of merit, and as such does not go beyond the worldly life-cycle.

From the Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta usage of “partaking of merit, ripening in acquisitions” (*puñña, bhāgiyā upadhi, vepakka*), we can safely conclude that *opadhikaṃ puññaṃ* [§4c] refers to acts of merit

¹³ Mūla, sarvāstivāda Vinaya.

¹⁴ “With mental cankers,” *s’āsava* = *sa + āsava*. See M 117 = SD 6.10 Intro (4) n.

¹⁵ “Partaking of merit,” *puñña, bhāgiya*, lit “having a share of merit,” or “concerned with merit” (RM Gethin, *The Path to Awakening*, 2001:216).

¹⁶ “Acquisitions,” *upadhi*, lit “that on which something is laid or rests, basis, foundation, substratum.” See M 117 = SD 6.10 Intro (4) n.

¹⁷ “With mental cankers,... in the form of acquisitions [of aggregates],” *s’āsavā puñña, bhāgiyā upadhi, vepakka*. See M 117 = SD 6.10 Intro (4) n.

¹⁸ “Of the noble ones,... a path factor,” *ariyā anāsavā lokuttarā magg’añgā*.

¹⁹ SA 1:31 = SnA 1:44 f.

²⁰ See **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 22.22/2:314) = SD 13.2.

that keep us within samsara. Merit (*puñña*) as a rule keeps us within samsara, but when they are taken as the bases for wholesome karma (*kusala*), then they will bring spiritual liberation.²¹

The Commentaries in fact glosses *karotaṃ opadhikaṃ puññaṃ* (S 913a) as: “merit whose result is *upadhi* (the aggregates)” (*karotaṃ opadhikaṃ puññaṃ ti upadhi, vipakāṃ puññaṃ*).²² As such, **John D Ireland** has rendered the phrase *opadhikaṃ puññaṃ* (It 19, 78)²³ as “good works undertaken with a view to rebirth” (It:I 130) and “the merit for thy future births” (It:I 172), respectively. **Peter Masefield** gives a more technical rendition as “substrate-producing bases of meritorious deeds” (It:M 14) and “that which is substrate-producing, that merit” (It:M 70).

4 Benefits of giving

4.1 BENEFICIAL GIVING. Giving or generosity of any kind is always fruitful, as the Buddha declares in **the (Saddhā) Jāṇussoṇī Sutta** (A 10.177), “the giver is not fruitless.” Even when an evil person gives, the karmic benefit is there. However, when we are generous but do not keep the precepts, then we are likely to enjoy karmic blessings such as being well cared for and getting physical needs, etc, but we may attain a rebirth that reflects our immorality, such as being reborn as another’s pet!²⁴ As such, we should not only be generous, but we should also be morally virtuous. Otherwise, even the evil who are generous can go to heaven.

However, if we give only for the sake of a good rebirth, that is all we will get. But rebirth in the heavens keeps us in samsara, this cycle of life and death, and is no guarantee of spiritual liberation. We must give not out of greed, hate, delusion of fear, but with the right mind and the right intention. Discourses such as **the (Maha-p,phala) Dāna Sutta** (A 7.49), **the (Aṭṭha) Dāna Suttas 1 & 2** (A 8.31-32)²⁵ and **the Dāna Vatthu Sutta** (A 8.33)²⁶ admonish us on the right intention for giving. All these suttas teach that the best intention for giving thus: “One gives thinking, ‘This is an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind.’”²⁷

In other words, the giving is part of one’s cultivation of moral virtue as a support for mental cultivation. With abundant moral virtue, it is easier for one to cultivate the mind. Conversely, if one finds difficulty in meditating, then one should examine one’s moral conduct and rectify any unwholesome habits or resolve negative thoughts. The best way of garnering our spiritual energies is to perform virtuous deeds, such as generosity and keeping the precepts, and mindfully recall our intention is doing so is so that our mind is always wholesome (“beautiful”) and is able to focus effectively.

4.2 ORIGIN STORY. The Sāmyutta Commentary gives the origin story of the Yajamāna Sutta as follows: every year, the people of Aṅga-Magadha (the realm of Bimbisāra) would congregate and make great sacrifice of their best ghee, honey, molasses, etc, to Mahā Brahmā (the Almighty God of the ancient Indians). Sakra, the leader of the gods, out of compassion, would then appear before them in the guise of Mahā Brahmā, lead them to the Buddha, and then ask him a question on the most fruitful type of sacrifice. (SA 1:351)

The Brahma,deva Sutta (S 6.3) records how Brahmā Sahampati himself appears before a devout brahminee devotee, explaining to her that high gods do not and cannot partake of earthly sacrifice (since they are from a different dimension), and that rituals and offerings are not the way to godliness. Food

²¹ On their definitions and relationship, see **Beyond Good and Evil** = SD 18.7(6).

²² SA 1:352,4 = A 4:292,21 (~an ti upadhi, vipākāṃ, AA 4:140,6) = 293,10 = Kvu 554,9 = Vv (1977) 635 (~an ti upadhi nāma khandhā, upadhissa karaṇa, sīlam upadhi, payojanan ti vā ~am, VvA 154,23)

²³ It 1.3.7/19, 3.4.4/78.

²⁴ *Dāyako pi anipphalō ti* (A 10.177.7g/5:273) = SD 2.6. The pl form of this sentence—*dāyakā ca anipphalā*—appears in **Tiro,kuḍḍa S** (Kh 7.6b) = SD 2.7.

²⁵ A 8.31-32/4:236 = SD 6.6.

²⁶ A 8.33/4:236 f = SD 6.6.

²⁷ *Cittālankāra, citta, parikkhār’attham dānam deti.* A 7.49.4(7)/4:62 = SD 2.3; A 8.31-32/4:236 = SD 6.6; A 8.33/4:236 f = SD 6.6.

offerings are best given to virtuous religious practitioners, the merit of which brings one future happiness.²⁸

— — —

The Discourse on Sacrificer

(S 11.16/1:233 f)

- 1 At one time the Blessed One was staying on Mount Vulture’s Peak near Rājagaha.
- 2 Now at that time, Sakra the leader of the devas, approached the Blessed One. Having approached him, and saluted him, he stood at one side.
- 3 Standing thus at one side, Sakra the leader of the devas addressed the Blessed One in verse:

4a *Yajamānānaṃ manussānaṃ
puñña,pekkhāna pāṇinaṃ
karotaṃ opadhikaṃ puññaṃ,
kattha dinnāṃ maha-p,phalan ti.* For humans who are sacrificers [alms-givers],
living beings looking for merit,
making merit of the worldly kind—
how could such a gift be of great fruit? (S 915)

[The Blessed One:]

4b *Cattāro ca paṭipannā,
cattāro ca phale thitā
esa saṅgho uju,bhūto
paññā,sīla,samāhito.* Four are those practising the way,
and four established in the fruits:
this is the community that is upright,
wise, morally virtuous, mentally focussed.²⁹ (S 916)

4c *Yajamānānaṃ manussānaṃ
puñña,pekkhāna pāṇinaṃ
karotaṃ opadhikaṃ puññaṃ
saṅghe dinnāṃ maha-p,phalan ti.* For humans who are sacrificers [alms-givers],
living beings looking for merit,
making merit of the mundane kind—
a gift to the Sangha³⁰ bears great fruit. (S 917)

— evaṃ —

080101; 080505; 090924

²⁸ S 6.3/1:140-142 = SD 12.4.

²⁹ *Paññā,sīla,samāhito* = Pv 4.3.49 = Vv 34.23; Dh 229d. The past participle *samāhito* here may be taken either to mean “concentrated” (pp of *samādahati*, to put together, compose) (V 3:4; D 1:13; S 1:169; A 2:6 ~*indriya*, 3:312, 343 f, 5:3, 93 f, 329 f; Sn 212, 225, 972; Dh 229, 362; It 119; Pug 35) or “endowed with” (as syn of *sampanna*, *samupeta* or *samannāgata*) (D 19.50/2:247 *khanti,bāla,samāhitā*; S 265a/2.6/1:48 *sīla,samāhitā*). **Bodhi** however takes it as “endowed with,” “following [S 265a*], where *sīla,samāhitā* is glossed as *sīlena samāhitā samupetā* [‘endowed with, accomplished in, moral virtue,’ SA 1:105]” (S:B 498 n647). I have, on the other hand, rendered the sense foll the context. Moreover the former sense is much more common.

See also Masefield, *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism*, 1986:40.

³⁰ Giving to the Sangha: see Intro (2).