

Dāru-k,khandha Sutta 1

Paṭhama Dāru-k,khandha Sutta 1

The First Discourse on the Log of Wood

[Keeping to the middle way leads to liberation]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 35.241/4:179-181)

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Introduction

The Dāru-k,khandha Sutta 1 (S 35.241) is one of the most idyllic in its simplicity, similes and setting. The sutta theme is simply that of right living the holy life by keeping to the middle way (symbolized by the log's continuous moving midstream) for the sake of awakening (reaching the great ocean). We are at once reminded of another similarly idyllic discourse, **the Pheṇa,piṇḍa Sutta** (S 22.95), similarly set on the Ganges bank, but at Ayodhya, where the Buddha, seeing some froth and bubbles, compared them to the five aggregates.¹

The Dāru-k,khandha Sutta similes are graphically clear in conveying their spiritual significance, explained by the Buddha himself, as follows:

<u>Imagery</u>	<u>Interpretation</u>
• “this bank”	the six internal sense-bases,
• “the far shore”	the six external sense-objects,
• “sinking midstream”	lust and desire,
• “caught on a sandbank”	the “I am” conceit,
• “being seized by humans”	socializing with the laity to the neglect of one's practice,
• “being seized by non-humans”	living the spiritual life for the sake of heavenly birth,
• “seized by a whirlpool”	the five cords of sense-pleasures, ² and
• “being rotten internally”	living the religious life falsely.

The beauty of such similes is this simplicity, aptness and integrity: there is a clear connectedness amongst the component images. The key image is *the log*, but there are also water and movement imageries. As long as there is clear direction and effort in the spiritual life, we gain the goal in due course.

“A certain monk” asks the Buddha to explain the imagery. He could be any of us who has yet to understand the parable and be moved into greater effort in our spiritual life. The sutta concludes with a layman, a humble **cowherd** (*gopalaka*) (an eavesdropper, as it were), who is immediately inspired to renounce the world. So moved is he by the parable, that he wishes to renounce at once. The Buddha, however, reminds him to settle his worldly affairs first, that is, return the cows to their owners, that is, it is time to “count his own cows” now (Dh 19).

The Dāru-k,khandha Sutta 2 (S 35.241) is identical to the Dāru-k,khandha Sutta 1 up to §12, except for two points. Firstly, the questioner is the monk Kimbila. Secondly, in §12, “being rotten internally” (*anto,pūti*) is defined in Vinaya terms, and end right there. In both cases, the Buddha is addressing his teachings to the monks, and it is on the scenic Ganges bank, and in the first Sutta we can easily visualize the cowherd and his cows, nearby. It is an idyllic setting worthy of reflecting on before a sitting meditation.

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¹ Form is compared to a great lump of froth, feeling to a water-bubble, perception to a mirage, mental formations to a large plantain tree, and consciousness to a magical illusion. (S 22.95/3:140-143) = SD 17.12.

² Cf **Ūmi,bhaya S** (A 4.122), where a more detailed def and admonition is given. (A 4.122/2:123-126) = SD 47.9.

The First Discourse on the Log of Wood

(S 35.241/4:179-181)

1 At one time the Blessed One was staying on the bank of the Ganges near Kosambī.

The parable of the great log of wood

2 The Blessed One saw a great log of wood being carried along by the Ganges river current. Seeing this, he addressed the monks:

“Bhikshus, do you see that great log of wood being carried along by the Ganges river current?”

“Yes, bhante.”

3 If, bhikshus, that log of wood,

does not land on this bank,

does not land on the far shore,

does not sink midstream,

does not get caught on a sandbank [high ground],

is not seized [hauled up] by humans,

is not seized [hauled up] by non-humans,

is not seized by a whirlpool,

is not rotten internally,

na orimam tīram upagacchati,

na pārimam tīram upagacchati,

na majjhe saṃsīdissati,

na thale ussīdissati,

na manussa-g,gāho gahessati,

na amanussa-g,gāho gahessati,

na āvaṭṭa-g,gāho gahessati,

na anto,pūti bhavissati,

then, bhikshus, that log of wood would tend towards the ocean, slant towards the ocean, slope towards the ocean.

What is the reason for that?

Because, bhikshus, the Ganges river current tends towards the ocean, slants towards the ocean, slopes towards the ocean.

Even so, bhikshus,

if you do not land on this bank,

if you do not land on the far shore,

if you do not sink midstream,

if you are caught on a sandbank [high ground],

if you are not seized by humans,

if you are not seized by non-humans,

if you are not seized by a whirlpool,

if you are not rotten internally, [180]

then, bhikshus, you would tend towards nirvana, slant towards nirvana, slope towards nirvana.

What is the reason for that?

Because, bhikshus, right view tends towards nirvana, slants towards nirvana, slopes towards nirvana.

The parable explained

4 When this was said, a certain monk said this to the Blessed One:

“What now, bhante, is ‘this bank,’

what is ‘the far shore,’

what is ‘sinking midstream,’

what is ‘caught on a sandbank,’

what is ‘seized by humans,’

what is ‘seized by non-humans,’

what is ‘seized by a whirlpool,’

what is ‘rotting internally’?”

5 “‘**This bank,**’ bhikshu, this is a designation for the six internal sense-bases.

6 ‘**The far shore,**’ bhikshu, this is a designation for the external sense-bases.

7 ‘**Sinking midstream,**’ bhikshu, this is a designation for lust and desire.

8 ‘Caught on a sandbank,’ bhikshu, this is a designation for the ‘I am’ conceit.

9 And what, bhikkhu, is ‘seized by humans’? Here, bhikshu, he lives associating with laypeople—he rejoices with them, he sorrows with them. He is happy when they are happy, and sad when they are sad. He involves himself in their current affairs and duties as if they were his own.³ It is in such a way that he is intimate with the village.⁴

This, bhikshu, is called ‘seized by humans.’

10 And what, bhikkhu, is ‘seized by non-humans’? Here, bhikshu, a certain person lives the holy life aspiring for rebirth in one of the groups of devas, thinking, ‘By this rule or vow or austerity or holy life, I shall become a deva or one amongst them.’⁵

This, bhikshu, is called ‘seized by non-humans.’

11 ‘Seized by a whirlpool’, bhikshu, this is a designation for the five cords of sense-pleasures.⁶

12 And what, bhikkhu, is ‘being rotten internally’?⁷ Here, bhikshu, a certain person is immoral, evil by nature, impure, of suspicious behavior, given to concealed deeds, a false ascetic claiming to be an ascetic, [181] not celibate, claiming to be celibate [a brahmachari], rotten internally [rotten to the core], drenched in lust, filthy.⁸

This, bhikshu, is called ‘rotting internally.’”

Nanda the cowherd

13 Now at that time, Nanda the cowherd was standing not far from the Blessed One.

14 Then Nanda the cowherd said this to the Blessed One:

“Indeed, bhante,

I will not land on this bank,

I will not land on the far shore,

I will not sink midstream,

I will not be caught on a sandbank [high ground],

no humans will seize me,

no non-humans will seize me,

no whirlpool will seize me,

I will not be rotten internally!

na orimam tīram upagacchāmi,

na pārīmam tīram upagacchāmi,

na majjhe saṃsīdissāmi,

na thale ussīdissāmi,

na maṃ manussaggāho gahessati,

na amanussaggāho gahessati,

na āvaṭṭaggāho gahessati

na antopūti bhavissāmi.

Bhante, may I receive the going forth before the Blessed One, may I receive the ordination.”

15 “In that case, Nanda, return the cows to the owners.”

“The cows will go back, bhante, out of attachment to their calves.”

³ Such intimacy with the laity is considered unbecoming and unskillful of a monastic. See **Nāga,datta S** (S 9.7/1:200 f) & **Dāru-k,khandha S 1** (S 35.241/4:180); also A 3:116 f. The phrase *samāna,sukha,dukkha* (“same in joy and sorrow”) (D 3:187; S 1:201) is exemplified in a negative sense at **Hālidakāni S 1** (S 22.3.18/3:11), but in **Sigāl’ovāda S**, it has a positive sense, characteristic of a true friend (D 31.21/3:187): see SD 3.16.

⁴ Also at **Hālidakāni S 1** (S 33.2.18/3:11); see UA 232; ThaA 3:69; NmA 1:25; cf KhpS 243..

⁵ *Api ca kho aññataram deva,nikāyam pañīdhāya brahma,cariyam carati iminā ’haṃ sīlena vā vatena vā tapena vā brahma,cariyena vā devo vā bhavissāmi dev’aññataro vā ’ti.* Comy: That is, he wishes to become a deva,rajah or a deva,putra (lesser celestial being) (AA 4:32). The whole passage is stock: see D 3:239; M 1:102; S 4:180; A 4:18; cf A 9.72/4:459.

⁶ Cf **Ūmi,bhaya S** (A 4.122), where a more detailed def and admonition is given. (A 4.122/2:123-126) = SD 47.9.

⁷ The answer is given in Vinaya terms, and the sutta then ends with the section of “Nanda the cowherd.”

⁸ *Idha, bhikkhu, ekacco dussīlo hoti pāpa,dhammo asuci,saṅkassara,samācāro paṭicchanna,kammanto assamaṇo samaṇa,paṭiñño abrahmacārī brahmacāri,paṭiñño anto,pūti avassuto kasambu,jāto.* Comy says that people will remember his deed with suspicion, or he recalls others with suspicion, and when seeing people talking amongst themselves, he suspects they must be discussing his faults. He is “filthy,” ie, refuse-like, on account of his defilements, such as lust, etc, (SA 3:42). As at (**Samudda**) **Uposatha S 2** (A 8.20/239 f = U 5.5/52, 55), **Aggi-k,khandh-ôpama S** (A 7.68/4:128), **Pahārāda S** (A 8.19/4:201); see also DA 1:122; SA 3:42; AA 2:177, 4:64; UA 297; DhkA 207; Nm 483 :: NmA 455, 338.

“Now, Nanda, return the cows to the owners.”

Then Nanda the cowherd, having returned the cows to the owners, approached the Blessed One, and said this to the Blessed One:

“The cows, bhante, have been returned to the owners. Bhante, may I receive the going forth before the Blessed One, may I receive the ordination.”

Nanda the cowherd received the going forth before the Blessed One, and received the ordination.

Then, Nanda the cowherd, not long after he was ordained, dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute, having right here and now realized it for himself through direct knowledge, attained and dwelled in that supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being.”⁹

16 And the venerable Nanda became one of the arhats.

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⁹ On this para and the next (the attainment of arhathood), see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9.56b/1:203) n = SD 7.14.