

## Jīvika Sutta

The Discourse on the Livelihood | It 91/89 f

Traditional: It 3.5.2 Khuddaka Nikāya, Iti,vuttaka 3, Tika Nipāta 5, Pañcama Vagga 2

Theme: The true purpose of the spiritual life

Translated by Piya Tan ©2009

### 1 Introduction

**The Jīvika Sutta** (It 3.5.2), without the verses, forms two paragraphs of **the Piṇḍolya Sutta** (S 22.-80).<sup>1</sup> On account of its simplicity and brevity (and maybe the verses, too), the Jīvika Sutta could be very ancient text, going back to the Buddha's time. The Piṇḍolya Sutta, on the other hand, evokes a sentiment reflective of an organized and settled monastic system, a text that has built on the older Jīvika Sutta passage to domesticate monastics, especially new ones, so that they are deferent to elders and amenable to training.

Like **the Piṇḍolya Sutta** (S 22/80), the Jīvika Sutta is an unequivocal reminder of the Buddha to the monastics of their true goal. Being an alms-collector is the lowest of livelihood (*antam jivikānam*), an extreme livelihood, despised by others. This is especially true when one becomes an alms-collector, a generic term that includes Buddhist monks and nuns, to escape punishment from crimes committed, or to dodge national service, or to avoid paying taxes or discharging one's debts, or for the sake of an easy and pleasurable life [§2].

Even though being an alms-collector is the lowest of livelihood, however, when it is taken up with the right mind, that is, with the aim of attaining spiritual liberation, it serves one well to gain that goal. This truly spiritual livelihood is inspired by the understanding that we are overwhelmed by suffering, and need to bring an end to it. [§3]

### 2 Parable of the cremation firebrand

However, “covetous, strongly lusting after sense-pleasures, with a mind of ill will, with a mind of corrupted intentions, muddle-headed, lacking concentration, scatter-brained, uncontrolled in faculty” [§4]

The cremation firebrand<sup>2</sup> [§§5+8] is a well known Buddhist parable. There is a discourse name after it, that is, **the Chavālāta Sutta** (A 4.95), which states that a person who is bent on neither his own benefit nor the benefit of others is like a cremation firebrand, burning on both ends, and with dung smeared in between.<sup>3</sup>

The cremation firebrand burning on both ends, despite its burning, is a dark imagery, as it is associated with death. Understandably, the discourse adds that it “cannot be used as firewood in the village, nor in the forest” [§5]. This is a powerful imagery, put into words in the paragraph that follows it [§6], which means that a depraved monastic, forgetting that he has given up the lay life for living the spiritual life leading to liberation. In being depraved, he gains neither the benefit of a good lay person, nor the blessings of renunciation. Both “ends” of his life are burning with the fire of lust, hate and delusion, for there is only dark states in him. He is just like a cremation firebrand burning on both ends, awaiting a cycle of re-deaths.

### 3 The verses

He three closing verses of the Jīvika Sutta are instructive on their own. However, only §8 is directly related to the discourse theme, and serves as a succinct verse summary: the depraved monastic is with neither worldly wealth nor the benefits of renunciation, but comes to nothing like a burnt firebrand at a funeral pyre.

<sup>1</sup> S 22.80.18b-19/3:91-94 = SD 28.9a.

<sup>2</sup> A firebrand of a funeral pyre” (*chavālāta*; Skt *śavālāta*), *chavālata* = *chava* (“corpse”) + *alāta* (“firebrand”): S 3:93 = A 2:95; see **Chavālata S**, A 4.95 (SD 64 no 5) = It 90 = J 1:482; Vism 54, 299.

<sup>3</sup> A 4.95/2:95 f = SD 64.5.

§§8-9 are also found in the same sequence in the Dhammapada (Dh 307 f), and apparently comes from a time when there was a significant trend in rise of “yellow-necks” (*kāsāva, kaṇṭhā*), a pejorative term for “defilers of the way” (*magga, dūsī*, Sn 84 f), that is, immoral (*dussīla*) monks (SnA 162). The term is also found in **the Dakkhiṇa, vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 142), where they are referred to as “members of the religious lineage... of evil nature” (*gotra, bhuno kāsāva, kaṇṭhā dussīlā pāpa, dhammā*).<sup>4</sup> The Majjhima Commentary says that “members of the religious lineage” (*gotra, bhuno*) are those who are “monks” only in name. They go about with only a piece of yellow cloth around their necks or arms, and will support their wives and children by engaging in trade and farming, etc (MA 5:74 f). How uncannily a premonition this is of the laicized “neither ordained nor lay order members” and clergies that abound in our times?

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## The Discourse on the Livelihood

It 91/89 f

1 This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, spoken by the Arhat [worthy one], thus have I heard.<sup>5</sup>

2 <sup>6</sup>“This, bhikshus, is the lowest of livelihoods, that is to say, alms-gathering.<sup>7</sup> This is an abusive term in the world: “You scrap-collector! You wander about with bowl in hand!”<sup>8</sup>

And yet, bhikshus, sons of family intent on the goal, take it up for a good reason: not by the fear of rajahs, nor the fear of thieves, nor on account of debts, not for the sake of livelihood.

3 But rather they do so, thinking,

‘I am immersed in birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair; overwhelmed by suffering, overcome by suffering.

Perhaps, there is a making an end of this whole mass of suffering to be found!’

### The parable of the funeral firebrand

4 In this way, bhikshus, this son of family is one who has gone forth, [90] but he is covetous, strongly lusting after sense-pleasures, with a mind of ill will, with a mind of corrupted intentions,<sup>9</sup> muddle-headed, without full awareness, lacking concentration, scatter-brained, loose in faculty.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> M 142.8/3:256 = SD 1.9.

<sup>5</sup> *Vuttam h’etaṃ bhagavatā. Vuttam arahatā’ ti me sutam.* This is said to be spoken by the laywoman **Khujj’uttarā**: see SD 16.14 Intro (1).

<sup>6</sup> §§2-4 are found in **Piṇḍolya S** (S 22.80.18b-19/3:93) = SD 28.9a.

<sup>7</sup> *Antam idam, bhikkhave, jīvikānam yad idam piṇḍolyam* = It 89,10 qu at DA 1:103,10 & Satta, nīti 360,27 *antam* = *lāmakam*. *Anta* usu means “extreme,” but here has the sense of “worst, low(est), mean(est), contemptible.”

<sup>8</sup> *Abhisāpōyam, bhikkhave, lokasmim piṇḍolo vicarasi pattapāṇi ti.* Also at **Piṇḍolya S** (S 22.80.18b/3:93) = SD 28.91, where Comy glosses *abhisāpa* with *akkosa* (“he scolds”). It adds: “For, when people are angered, they abuse their antagonist by saying, ‘You should put on a monk’s robe, get yourself an skull-bowl (*kapāla*), and roam about seeking alms!’” (SA 2:300). Here, instead of the usual *patta* (almsbowl), *kapāla* is used, indicating a kind of bowl used by non-Buddhist ascetics: this seems to have a pejorative sense.

<sup>9</sup> *Paduṭṭha, mana, saṅkappo.*

<sup>10</sup> *Abhijjhālu kāmesu tibba, sārāgo, byāpanna, citto paduṭṭha, mana, saṅkappo, muṭṭha-s, sati asampajāno asamāhito vibbhanta, citto pākat’indriyo.* A full list of negative epithets in this connection are found in **Jantu S** (S 2.25/1:61 f), where its Comy explains them. The last 5 epithets are identical. Comy: “**restless**” (*uddhatā*) means of a restless temperament due to perceiving unallowable as allowable, what is blameworthy as blameless (in accordance with the Vinaya), and conversely; “**arrogant**” (*unnaḷā*) means puffed up with empty conceit like a fat reed; “**vain**” (*capalā*) means vain on account of robes, bowl, adornment, etc; “**sharp-tongued**” (*mukharā*) means rough in speech; “**ram-**

5 Bhikshus, just as a firebrand of a funeral pyre,<sup>11</sup> lit on both ends, and smeared with dung in the middle, cannot be used as firewood in the village, nor in the forest,<sup>12</sup>

6 in just the same way, bhikshus, do I speak of this person—he has abandoned his household wealth, and yet does not fulfill the purpose of asceticism.

### Verses of the training

7 This is the meaning of what the Blessed One said. The meaning here is spoken thus:<sup>13</sup>

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| <p>8 <i>Gihī, bhogā parihīno</i><br/><i>Sāmaññ'atthañ ca dubbhago;</i><br/><i>paridhamsamāno pakireti</i><br/><i>chavālatam va nassati.</i></p>      | <p>Bereft of household goods,<br/>he is without wealth in the ascetic's goal, too,<br/>coming to ruin, he is scattered—<br/>he perishes like a firebrand of the dead.</p>          |
| <p>9 <i>Kāsāva, kaṇṭhā bahavo</i><br/><i>pāpa, dhammā asaññatā;</i><br/><i>pāpā pāpehi kammehi</i><br/><i>nirayaṃ te upapajjare.</i></p>             | <p>Many are the yellow-necks,<sup>14</sup><br/>evil by nature, unrestrained.<br/>The evil, through evil karma,<br/>are reborn in the lower realm [hell]. [Dh 307]<sup>15</sup></p> |
| <p>10 <i>Seyyo ayo, guḷo bhutto</i><br/><i>tatto aggi, sikhūpamo;</i><br/><i>Yañ ce bhuñjeyya dussīlo</i><br/><i>raṭṭha, piṇḍam asaññato ti.</i></p> | <p>Better to swallow an iron ball,<br/>glowing as with fiery tongues of fire,<br/>than for one immoral to feed on<br/>the country's alms, unrestrained.<sup>16</sup> [Dh 308]</p>  |

**bling in talk**” (*vikīṇṇa, vācā*) means unrestrained in speech, rambling aimlessly all day; **“muddle-headed”** (*muṭṭha-s, satino*) means bereft of mindfulness, without mindfulness, forgetting what has been done right here; **“without full awareness”** (*asampajānā*) means lacking in wisdom; **“lacking concentration”** (*asamāhitā*) means lacking access and full concentration, like a ship caught in strong currents; **“scatter-brained”** (*vibbhanta, cittā*; Comy *vibbhanta, -cittā*) means with wandering minds, like foolish deer caught in the path; **“loose in faculty”** (*pākat'indriyā*) means with open faculties due to non-restraint like when they were still laymen. (SA 1:115)

<sup>11</sup> “A firebrand of a funeral pyre,” *chavālata* = *chava* (“corpse”) + *alāta* (“firebrand”): S 3:93 = A 2:95 (Chavālata S, A 4.95) = It 90 = J 1:482; Vism 54, 299.

<sup>12</sup> This is, as it were, an ironic presage of “funeral monastics” of later times, who earn a living by performing the last rites, often charging high fees for them, but “moneytheists,” lacking in restraint and moral virtue.

<sup>13</sup> *Saṃvejanīyesu thānesu, saṃvijjeth'eva paṇḍito | ātāpī nipako bhikkhu, paññāya samavekkhiya || Evaṃ vihārī ātāppī, santa, vutti anuddhato | ceto, samatham anuyutto, khayam dukkhassa pāpuṇe ti ||*

<sup>14</sup> More fully described in **Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga S** (M 142) as “members of the religious lineage who are “yellow-necks,” immoral, of evil nature” (*gotrabhuno kāsāva, kaṇṭhā dussilā pāpa, dhammā*). Its Comy says that “members of the religious lineage” (*gotra, bhuno*) are those who are monks only in name (M 3:256,7 = Sāra, saṅgha 25,9). They will go about with only a piece of yellow cloth around their necks or arms, and will support their wives and children by engaging in trade and farming, etc (MA 5:74 f). They are those who ritually don the saffron robe, and when they remove them, leave the saffron taints on their necks. On *kāsāva, kaṇṭha*, see It 43 (ItA 177); Dh 307a (Dh:P 113, Uv 1.9, *kāsāya, kaṇṭha*; DhA 3:478) qu at V 3:90 (VA 486); AA 1:90,13+24, wr *kāsāva, khaṇḍam*; SnA 162,2, 164,23; Sadda, nīti 78,4, 78,1 *kaṇṭha, samaṇa*. Does this uncanny premonition refer to the laicized gurus and their followers who claim to be “neither ordained nor lay order members” in our own times? See further M 142.8/-3:246 = SD 1.9 & nn.

<sup>15</sup> DhA tells the story of Moggallāna's vision of five skeletal pretas flying through the air, all ablaze, along with bowls, robes, girdles, etc. They were monks from the Buddha Kassapa's time, but who failed to keep to their Vinaya rules. (DhA 22.3/3:480 f; cf Pār 4.1 = V 3:87-91; VA 2:481-501)

<sup>16</sup> DhA tells the story of “those of the Vaggu, mudā banks” (*vaggu, mudā, tīriyā*), clearly distinct from Yasoja and his companions, when food was scarce in Vajji country, went about praising one other's superhuman qualities, so that the laymen, deceived by their pretensions, supported them in great luxury. When the Buddha discovered this, he rebuked them strongly and laid down the rules of the fourth Pārājikā (defeat offence). (Pār 4.1 = V 3:87-91; VA 2:481-487; DhA 22.3/3:480 f). Comys say that there are **4 ways of using the monk's requisites**: (1) by theft (*they-*

This matter [meaning] too was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.<sup>17</sup>

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*a,paribhoga*), the use made by a morally depraved monk (It 3.5.2(10\*)/90); (2) as a debt (*ṇa,paribhoga*), the unreflective use made by a virtuous monk (cf S 16.11/2:211, where it simply refers to Maha Kassapas’s pre-arhat state); (3) as a heritage (*dāyajja,paribhoga*), the use made by the seven learners (*sekha*) (excluding one with the fruit of arhathood); (4) as an owner (*sāmi,paribhoga*) or “debt-free” (Tha 789; M 86.18/2:105\* = Tha 882), the use made by an arhat. (MA 3:343, 5:32; SA 2:199; J 5:253; Vism 1.125-127/43).

<sup>17</sup> *Ayam pi attho vutto bhagavatā. Iti me sutan ti.*