

Yasoja Sutta

The Discourse to Yasoja

[Spiritual resilience in the face of rejection]
(Udāna 3.3/24-27)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2009

1 Sutta summary and comments

The Yasoja Sutta is an inspiring account of a group of 500 monks led by Yasoja, who initially are somewhat undisciplined by being overexcited and noisy on arriving in the monastery where the Buddha is residing. The Buddha chides them for their rowdiness, and dismisses them so that they have to spend the rains on their own elsewhere.

They choose to spend the rains on the river Vaggu, mudā banks. Contrite over their error, the monks have great faith in the Buddha's compassion as a teacher. We are reminded of a very important admonition the Buddha has given in **the Mahā Suññata Sutta** (M 22) regarding such a situation, thus:

Ānanda, there is this talk concerning austerity, conducing as a support for the mind's release, and that leads to complete disillusionment, to fading away (of lust), to ending (of suffering), to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana; that is to say, talk about wanting little, talk about contentment, talk about solitude, talk about aloofness from company, talk about arousing effort, talk about moral virtue, talk about mental concentration, talk about wisdom, talk about liberation, talk about the knowledge and vision of liberation.

It is for the sake of such a talk that a disciple should regard the teacher as being worthy of his devotion even if he is told to leave. (M 22.20/3:115) = SD 11.4

By the end of the rains retreat, the monks attain arhathood. When they visit the Buddha, he is in deep meditation, a formless attainment called the imperturbable concentration. They too go into the same meditation. Only arhats could do this sort of meditation. They meditate the whole night, and when morning comes, the Buddha utters an inspired utterance praising them.

2 Related discourses

The Yasoja Sutta (U 3.3) should be studied with **the Sārajja Sutta** (A 5.101), **the Jīvika Sutta** (It 3.5.2), and **the Piṇḍolya Sutta** (S 22.80).¹ The shortest text is the Sārajja Sutta (A 5.101), which only gives a definition of the term *sārajja*, and is probably the oldest of the four. The Yasoja Sutta is about how 500 monks led by Yasoja, who after making a noisy entrance, was dismissed by the Buddha to stay away. Undaunted, they spent the rains cultivating so that they attained arhathood with that period, to the Buddha's approval. This is clearly an ancient text, too.

The Jīvika Sutta and the Piṇḍolya Sutta probably come from around the same period, not earlier than the first 20 years of the ministry but probably not later than Asoka's time (3rd century BCE). However, the Jīvika Sutta, from its brevity and simplicity, is probably slightly earlier than the Piṇḍolya Sutta, which betrays elements of the miraculous. Both discourses reflect a time when the order was more settled, urbanized and populous.

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¹ U 3.3/25-27 = SD 28.9c; A 5.101/3:127 = SD 28.9a (3.1); It 91.2-3/3.5.2/89 f = SD 28.9b; S 22.80/3:91-94 = SD 28.9a.

The Discourse to Yasoja

(U 3.3/24-27)

1 Thus have I heard.

Yasoja and the noisy monks

2 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika's park, in Jeta's grove, near Sāvathī.

3 At that time, some five hundred monks led by Yasoja arrived in Sāvathī to see the Blessed One.

Now these visiting monks were exchanging greetings with the resident monks, while lodgings were being arranged, and robes and bowls were being put away—there was a loud noise, a great noise.

4 Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Ānanda:

“What is that loud noise, great noise? It sounds to me like fishermen hauling a great catch!”²

“They, bhante, are the some five hundred monks led by Yasoja arrived in Sāvathī to see the Blessed One.

These visiting monks are exchanging greetings with the resident monks, while lodgings are being arranged, and robes and bowls are being put away—that is the loud noise, the great noise.”

The Buddha dismisses the noisy monks

6 “In that case, Ānanda, summon the monks with these words of mine:

‘The teacher summons the venerables.’”

“Yes, bhante,” the venerable Ānanda replied to the Blessed One, and [25] approached the monks.

7 Having approached the monks, he said this to them:

“The teacher summons the venerables.”

“Yes, avuso,” the monks replies to the Blessed One, and approached the Blessed One.

Having approached the Blessed One, they saluted him, and sat down sat one side.

8 While they were seated thus at one side, the Blessed One said this to the monks:

“Bhikshus, what is this loud noise, great noise, that sounds to me like fishermen hauling a great catch?”

9 When this was said, the venerable Yasoja said this to the Blessed One:

“These, bhante, are the some five hundred monks who have arrived in Sāvathī to see the Blessed One.

These visiting monks were exchanging greetings with the resident monks, while lodgings were being arranged, and robes and bowls were being put away—that was the loud noise, the great noise.”

10 “Go, bhikshus, I dismiss you! You are not to stay near to me.”

“Yes, bhante,” the monks replied to the Blessed One. Having rise from their seats, they saluted the Blessed One, and left, keeping their right side to him.

Having arranged their lodging in order, taking their robe and bowl, they left for Vajjī country.

On the river Vaggu,mudā bank

11 Journeying in stages, they reached Vajjī country, where they went to the river Vaggu,mudā.³ Having reached the river Vaggu,mudā, they built leaf-huts, and there entered their rains.

12 Then the venerable Yasoja addressed the monks who had entered the rains retreat,

² *Ke pan'ete, ānanda, uccā,saddā mahā,saddā kevaṭṭā maññe maccha,vilope' ti.*

³ It is said that a group of monks, called the Vagga,mudā,tīriyā (“those of the Vaggu,mudā banks), clearly distinct from Yasoja and his companions, when food was scarce in Vajjī country, went about praising one other's super-human 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 3:480 f)

“Avuso, the Blessed One has dismissed us out of the desire for our welfare and good, with compassion, out of compassion.

Come, avuso, let us dwell in a manner by which the Blessed One will be pleased!”

“Yes, avuso,” the monks replied the venerable Yasoja in assent.

13 Then the monks, dwelling secluded, diligent, exertive, and resolute, within that very same rains retreat realized all the three knowledges.⁴

The Buddha summons the Vaggu,mudā monks

14 Then the Blessed One, having stayed in Sāvattṭhī for as long as wished, left on a walk heading for Vesālī. Walking the journey in stages, he reached Vesālī.

15 There the Blessed One stayed in the Hall of the Gabled House, in the Great Forest [Mahā,vana], near Vesālī.

16 Then the Blessed One, having read the minds of the monks on the banks of the river Vaggu,mudā, addressed the venerable Ānanda:

“This direction, Ānanda, seems to have become light to me! This direction, Ānanda, seems to have become radiant! That is, the direction where the monks dwell on the banks of the river Vaggu,mudā.

It would not be bad for me to go and [26] inspect that quarter.⁵

Ānanda, you should send a messenger to the monks in the area of the Vaggu,mudā banks, saying:

“The teacher summons the venerables. The teacher wishes to see the venerables.”

17 “Yes, bhante,” the venerable Ānanda replied to the Blessed One, and approached a certain monk. Having approached the monk, he said this to him:

“Come, avuso, approach the monks of the Vaggu,mudā banks, and say:

“The teacher summons the venerables. The teacher wishes to see the venerables.”

“Yes, avuso,” the monk replied to the venerable Ānanda.

18 Then, just as a strong man would stretch his bent arm and would bend his stretched arm, even so, he vanished from the Hall of the Gabled House in the Great Forest and appeared before the monks on the Vaggu,mudā banks.

The Vaggu,mudā monks visit the Buddha

19 Then the monk said this to the monks on the Vaggu,mudā banks:

“The teacher summons the venerables. The teacher wishes to see the venerables.”

“Yes, avuso,” the monks replied to the monk, and having tidied up their lodgings, taking their robes and bowls—just as a strong man would stretch his bent arm and would bend his stretched arm, even so, they vanished from the Vaggu,mudā banks and appeared before the Blessed One in the Hall of the Gabled House in the Great Forest.

20 Now at that time, the Blessed One was seated in imperturbable concentration.⁶

⁴ *Atha kho te bhikkhū vūpakaṭṭhā appamattā ātāpino pahit’attā viharantā ten’evantara,vassena sabb’eva tisso vijjā sacchākaṃsu.* The phrase *vūpakaṭṭhā appamattā ātāpino pahit’attā viharantā* is stock: M 1:177; A 3:218; U 24. The first word, *vūpakaṭṭha* alone often refers to a practitioner’s effort to rid the mind of sensual thoughts (M 36/-1:246f = 85/2:93). Sometimes, *eka* is added at its head (*ekā vūpakaṭṭhā appamattā ātāpino pahit’attā vihareyya*): V 2:258; A 3:218 (Ke Se ekeka...), 4:280: see **Vatthūpama S** (M 7.22/1:49) = SD 28.12 n. “The three knowledges” (*tisso vijjā* or *te,vijjā*) are: (1) the recollection of past lives; (2) clairvoyance (the divine eye) or knowledge of karma; (3) the knowledge of the destruction of mental influxes or “inflows” (*āsava-k,khaya,ñāṇa*) (the *asavā* are sense-desire, existence, views and ignorance) (M 2.10/1:8, 9.70/1:55; D 33.1.10.58/3:220, 34.1.4.10/3:275; A 3.59/1:166 f, 3.67/1:197-199, 6.63/3:414, 10.102/5:211): see also **Tevijja S** (D 13) = SD 1.8 Intro 2.2. For a list of 6 direct knowledges & defs, see **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2.89-100/1:77-100) = SD 8.10.

⁵ *Gantuṃ appaṭikūlāsi me manasi kātuṃ.*

⁶ *Āneṇja samādhī*, “The imperturbable,” *āneṇja* or *ānañja*, ie the 4th formless attainment. See **Mahā Suññatā S** (M 122). Majjhima Comy says of the Buddha, “Thinking, I will become free both ways,” he sits in an imperturbable formless attainment (*āneṇja,arūpa,samāpatti*), a meditation based on the 4th dhyana or one of the 4 formless attain-

Then, it occurred to the monks,

“In what state in the Blessed One dwelling now?”

21 Then it occurred to the monks,

“The Blessed One is dwelling in the imperturbable concentration now.”

And so they all too sat in imperturbable concentration.

22 Then the venerable Ānanda, when the night was far advanced, when the first watch has ended, rose from his seat, arranging his robes to one side, approached the Blessed One, and with palms in the lotus gesture, said this to the Blessed One”

“The night, bhante, is far spent; the first watch has ended. The guest monks have sat for a long time. Bhante, may the Blessed One greet the guest monks.”

When this was said, the Blessed One remained silent.

23 For the second time, the venerable Ānanda, when the night was far advanced, when the second watch has ended, rose from his seat, arranging his robes to one side, approached the Blessed One, and with palms in the lotus gesture, said this to the Blessed One”

“The night, bhante, is far spent; the second watch has ended. The guest monks have sat for a long time. Bhante, may the Blessed One greet the guest monks.”

For the second, too, the Blessed One remained silent.

24 For the third time, the venerable Ānanda, when the night was far advanced, when the last watch has ended, rose from his seat, arranging his robes to one side, approached the Blessed One, and with palms in the lotus gesture, said this to the Blessed One”

“The night, bhante, is far spent; the last watch has ended. The guest monks have sat for a long time. Bhante, may the Blessed One greet the guest monks.”

The Buddha praises the Vaggu,mudā monks

25 Then the Buddha, having emerged from the meditation [concentration], addressed the venerable Ānanda:

“If you, Ānanda, had known, you would not have spoken in such a manner.

These five hundred monks, Ānanda, and I were all sitting in the imperturbable concentration.”

26 Then, the Blessed One, understanding the significance of the occasion, uttered this udana [inspired utterance]:

27 *Yassa jito kāma,kaṇḍako
akkoso ca vadho ca bandhanañ ca;
pabbato`va so ṭhito anejo
sukha,dukkhesu na vedhatī sa bhikkhū ti*

Who has conquered desire’s thorn,
abuse, flogging, and binding:
that one stands unmoved on a rock,
that monk is unshaken by happiness or sorrow.

— evaṃ —

090525; 090528; 091118

ments (MA 4:161): see M 122.9d+10d/3:112 = SD 11.4 Intro (3a). See also **Āneñja,sappāya S** (M 106/2:261-266) = SD 35.13.