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## Deva,hita Sutta

The Discourse on Deva,hita | S 7.13

Theme: Where giving brings great fruit (brief)

Translated &amp; annotated by Piya Tan ©2014

1 Sutta highlights

**1.1** The Deva,hita Sutta (S 7.13) is a short discourse on giving to the best person. The Buddha is ill with some “wind” problem, which the Sutta commentary specifies with “stomach wind” (*udara,vāta*).<sup>1</sup> He asks his attendant, Upavāṇa [§2n] to get some hot water for washing.

Upavāṇa goes to the brahmin Deva,hita’s house and stands silently and mindfully at the door. Deva,hita is impressed with Upavāṇa’s calm demeanour [§5.2], and after learning the reason for Upavāṇa’s visit, has the hot water and a pouch of molasses sent to the Buddha, and he himself visits the Buddha.

The Buddha is given the hot water for washing, and some warm molasses to drink. The Buddha recovers, and the brahmin Deva,hita (we are not told when) approaches the Buddha, and questions him on “where” (*kattha*) should we make a proper gift, so that it brings great fruit [§11.2]. This is, of course, a question related to the ancient Indian notion of “merit” (*puñña*).<sup>2</sup>

The Buddha replies that the best recipient of a worthy gift is the arhat, the noblest of beings, of whom he describes in two verses [§6]. This is a brief answer. A longer teaching on the same topic is given in **the Issattha Sutta** (S 3.24).<sup>3</sup>

**1.2 The Dhammapad’atthakathā**, the Dhammapada commentary, gives an abridged version of this Sutta in the form of a narrative (DhA 26.4). The key details are essentially the same,<sup>4</sup> but the Dhammapada verse that it invokes, which is the second last verse here [§12], has two additional lines at the end:

*Pubbe,nivāsam<sup>5</sup> yo vedī  
sagg’āpāyaṅ ca passati.  
atho jāti-k,khayaṃ patto  
abhiññā,vosito muni.  
sabba,vosita,vosānam  
tam ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇam*

Who is a knower of past abodes,  
and see heaven and hell,  
that one has reached the destruction of birth,  
a sage accomplished in direct knowledge. 677  
*He has accomplished the ending of the all—  
him I call a brahmin.* (Dh 423)

The last two lines effectively declare that a brahmin is not one by birth or status, but by his moral virtue and spirituality. In other words, breaking the rut the class (or caste) system, the Buddha defines a “holy person” as anyone who is spiritually liberated, regardless of birth.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On other illnesses of the Buddha and their explanations, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, Singapore, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2004: §§20-28.

<sup>2</sup> For an important explanation, see **Issattha S** (S 3.24) @ SD 44.18 (2.4).

<sup>3</sup> **Issattha S** (S 3.24/1:98-100) @ SD 44.18.

<sup>4</sup> ≈ DhA 26.40/4:232-234.

<sup>5</sup> **Pubbe,nivāsa** is a common term, and is curiously always sg, ~am (an “uncountable” n), eg Tha 63, 70, 104, 227, 330, 332, 379, 516, 562, 677; Dh 423; also BHS (eg Uv 33-47). The same applies to *pubba,jāti*, “past birth.” Thus, as a rule, we should tr this as “past life” or “past existence.” However, this is clearly Pali idiom, alluding to the fact we that we exist as only one individual at a time, and in an uncountable sense. For example, we have refs to a number of existences being recalled, eg “I know my own 7 lives” (*jānāmi attano satta jātiyo*, Tha 434). Cf this stock from **Bhaya Bherava S** (M 4): “I recollected manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births, three births,...one hundred thousand (births)” (*so aneka,vihitam pubbe,nivasam anussarati, seyyathīdam: ekam pi jātim, dve pi jātiyo, tisso pi jātiyo...jāti,sata,ashassam pi*) (M 4,27/1:22), SD 44.3. Comys give *pubbe,nivāsa* as one of the “3 knowledges” (*te,vijjā*) of Buddhism, ie, the recollection of past lives, the knowledge of the deaths and rebirths of beings (the divine eye), and the attainment of the end of birth, viz arhathood (DhA 4:233,13 f ≈ SnA 476,20 f: on these direct knowledges, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13) @ SD 1.8 (2.2.2). Further see Thī:N 76 n63.

<sup>6</sup> **Vāsetṭha S** (M 98), SD 37.1, deals with this in great details.

The “all” (*sabba*) here refers to the sense-faculties (the 5 physical senses and the mind),<sup>7</sup> which the arhat has mastered and transcended by attaining dhyana.<sup>8</sup> This is, in fact, the very last verse of Dhammapada.

## 2 Wind illness

**2.1** The Commentary to the Devahita Sutta says that the Buddha had occasional attacks of wind (*vāta*) as a result of his six years of asceticism before the great awakening. In this case, it is wind in the stomach (*udara,vāta*), that is, probably a distended belly or some kind of gastric problem (SA 1:258).

**2.2** The ancient Buddhist texts, such as **the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62) define “wind” (*vāta*) as follows:

whatever that is wind [air], wind-like [air-like] and clung to, within oneself, separately, namely,<sup>9</sup>  
*up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the chest,*<sup>10</sup> *winds that course through the limbs,*<sup>11</sup> *in-breath and out-breath,*  
 or whatever else that is wind, wind-like and clung to, within oneself, separately.

(M 62,11), SD 3.11

**2.3** According to **the Visuddhi,magga**, “winds” are responsible for the various internal motions of the body, namely, “up-going winds” (*uddhañ,gamā vātā*) for vomiting and belching, “down-going winds” (*adho,gamā vātā*) for the expelling of faeces and urine (Vism 350). “Wind” here clearly refers to elemental “motion,” not to the object moved.

**2.4** In traditional Indian and traditional Asian medicine generally, “wind” refers to the quality of the body (such as a distended belly and gas) and the faculties of movement (such as muscular aches and joint pains), including ailments such as epilepsy. Illness tends to occur when the 4 basic elements (earth, water, fire and wind) are out of balance due to overwork, lack of food and sleep, and exposure to diverse weather, from hot to cold to rain. Such an imbalance can also arise from known conditions, such as common cold, diabetes, or hypertension.

**2.5** According to Alexander Berzin, in traditional Tibetan medicine, “wind refers not only to the gases within the body but also to the energy in the body, which includes the electrical energy of the nervous system.”<sup>12</sup> In traditional Malay medicine, too, “wind” is regarded as a causal agent in many illnesses, such as rheumatism or “sakit angin,” which translates as “wind illness.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See **Sabba S** (35.23), SD 7.1.

<sup>8</sup> See **Dhyana**, SD 8.4.

<sup>9</sup> See **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118), SD 7.13 (2.1.1).

<sup>10</sup> *Koṭṭha* means “the stomach or abdomen” (PED); and, *kucchi* is “stomach.” As such, here I take *koṭṭhasayā* to be cognate with or related to Skt *koṣṭhya* (mfñ), meaning “proceeding from the chest, emitted (as a sound) from the centre of the lungs” (SED), which makes clear sense here.

<sup>11</sup> “Winds that course through the limbs,” *aṅgam-aṅgānusārino vātā*. In ref to this, **Peter Harvey** says, “Note that the ‘motion/air’ element might be related to the modern concept of electrical discharges of the nerves... In that case, the mind would move the body by effecting the electrical modulation of nerve discharges.” (1993:7 digital ed). In contemporary terms, these “winds” clearly refer to the oxyhaemoglobin, ie, the oxygen in the blood flowing through the body.

<sup>12</sup> The Berzin Archives, 1993:

[http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/study/tibetan\\_astrology\\_medicine/medicine/intro\\_tibetan\\_medicine.html](http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/study/tibetan_astrology_medicine/medicine/intro_tibetan_medicine.html).

<sup>13</sup> J D Gimlett & H W Thomson, *A Dictionary of Malayan Medicine* [1939], KL: Oxford Univ Press, 1971:4 sv “angin.”

## The Discourse on Deva,hita

S 7.13

### 1 Originating in Sāvathī.

#### The Buddha is ill

2 Now at that time, the Blessed One was ill with winds,<sup>14</sup> and the venerable Upavāṇa<sup>15</sup> was the Blessed One's attendant.

3 Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Upavāṇa,  
“Come, now, Upavāṇa, get me some hot water.”

4 “Yes, bhante.” the venerable Upavāṇa replied in assent.

Then he dressed himself, and taking robe and bowl, went to the house of the brahmin Deva,hita. Having reached it, he stood silently at one side.

#### The brahmin Deva,hita

4 The brahmin Deva,hita, saw the venerable Upavāṇa standing at one side.

5 Seeing him, he addressed the venerable Upavāṇa in verse: [175]

5.2	<i>Tuṅhī, bhūto bhavaṃ tiṭṭhaṃ muṇḍo saṅghāṭi, pāruṭo. Kiṃ patthayāno kiṃ esaṃ kiṃ nu yācituṃ āgato 'ti.</i>	The master stands silently, shaven-headed, garbed in an upper robe. What is your wish? What do you seek? What have you come here to beg for?	673
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[The venerable Upavāṇa:]

6	<i>Arahaṃ sugato loke vāteh 'ābādhiko muni. Sace uṅhōdakaṃ atthi munino dehi brāhmaṇa.</i>	The arhat [worthy], the well-farer in the world, the sage, is ill with winds. If there is hot water, please give it to the sage, brahmin. (Tha 185)	674
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6.2	<i>Pūjito pūjaneyyānaṃ sakkareyyāna sakkato apacito apaceyyānaṃ<sup>16</sup> tassa icchāmi hātave 'ti.</i>	To the worshipped by those worthy of worship, the honoured by those worthy of honour, the respected by those worthy of respect, to him I wish to bring it. (Tha 186)	675
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<sup>14</sup> The “winds” (*vāta*) here are, according to ancient Indian and Buddhist medicine, one of the 3 bodily humours, and one of the 8 causes of illness: see **Sīvaka S** (S 36.21), SD 5.6 for 8 causes of bodily pains. The 3 humours (*ti-dosa*; Skt *tri,doṣa*) are bile (*pitta*), phlegm (*śleṣman*) and wind (*vāta*). Comy notes that the Buddha has the occasional “wind” ailment as a result of his 6 years of asceticism before his awakening (SA 1:258): see **Sīvaka S** (S 36.21/-4:230 f), SD 5.6.

<sup>15</sup> **Upavāṇa** or Upavana is an elder of Sāvathī and one of the Buddha's attendants. See Tha 185 f for his verses (also S 7.13; cf Miln 134, Miln:H 1:187 n8) & Tha:RD 350 for an allusion to this incident (ThaA 2:56 f). On his orig: Ap 22/70,22-74,7 (ApA 343,27 f). **Deva,hita S** (S 7.13) records how Upavāṇa, as the Buddha's attendant, mindfully attends to him when he was suffering from wind illness (S 7.13/1:174 f ≈ DhA 4:232,18), SD 44.16. In **Upavāṇa S** (S 35.70), he asks the Buddha on the meaning of *sandiṭṭhika* (directly visible; seen for oneself) which the Buddha explains it as that of direct awareness of lust as it arises through sense-experience (S 35.70/4:41-44), SD 62.7. In **Pāsādika S** (D 29), he fans the Buddha as he teaches, and the Sutta title is to his credit (D 29.41/3:141), SD 40a.6. **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16) records him as standing behind the reclining Buddha and fanning him during his last days (D 16,5.4/2:138,25), SD 9. See CPD sv & **Upavāṇa S** (S 35.70), SD 62.7.

<sup>16</sup> Ce Ke Se *apacineyyānaṃ*, *Ṭikā oloketabbā*.

### Deva,hita serves the Buddha

7 Then the brahmin Deva,hita, having ordered a man to take the hot water on a pingo, gave the venerable Upavāṇa a pouch of molasses.<sup>17</sup>

8 Then the venerable Upavāṇa approached the Blessed One, and having gone up to him, had him bathed in the hot water.<sup>18</sup> And having mixed the molasses with hot water, he gave it to the Blessed One.<sup>19</sup>

9 Then the Blessed One's illness subsided.

### Devahita approaches the Buddha

10 Then the brahmin Deva,hita approached the Blessed One, and having gone up to him, exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, the brahmin Deva,hita sat down at one side.

11 Sitting thus at one side, the brahmin Deva,hita then addressed the Blessed One in verse:

11.2	<i>Kattha dajjā deyya,dhammaṃ kattha dinnam maha-p,phalam katham hi yajamānassa katham ijhati dakkhiṇā'ti.</i>	Where should one make a proper gift? Where does the given bring great fruit? For the alms-giver—how does the giving win success—how indeed? <sup>20</sup>	676
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[The Blessed One:]

12	<i>Pubbe,nivāsam<sup>21</sup> yo vedī sagg'āpāyaṇ ca passati. atho jāti-k,khayaṃ patto abhiññā,vosito muni.</i>	Who is a knower of past abodes, and sees heaven and hell, that one has reached the destruction of birth, a sage accomplished in direct knowledge. (Dh 423) <sup>22</sup>	677
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14	<i>Ettha dajjā deyya,dhammaṃ ettha dinnam maha-p,phalam Evam hi yajamānassa evam ijhati dakkhiṇā'ti.</i>	It's here that a proper gift should be given, here, what is given has great fruit. This is the way for the alms-giver— his giving wins success—this is how!	678
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15 When this was said, the brahmin Deva,hita said this to the Blessed One:

“Excellent, master Gotama! Excellent, master Gotama! Just as if one were to place upright what had been overturned, or were to reveal what was hidden, or

<sup>17</sup> *Atha kho deva,hito brāhmaṇo unḥādakassa kājaṃ purisena gāhāpetvā phāṇitassa ca puṭam āyasmato upavāṇassa pādāsi.*

<sup>18</sup> *Uṇh'odakena nhāpetvā* [Be Se so; Ce Ee nahapetvā].

<sup>19</sup> *Uṇhōdakena phāṇitam āloletvā bhagavato pādāsi.*

<sup>20</sup> A more detailed answer to the questions of this verse is given in **Issattha S** (S 3.24), SD 44.18.

<sup>21</sup> **Pubbe,nivāsa** is a common term, and curiously is always sg, ~am, eg Tha 63, 70, 104, 227, 330, 332, 379, 516, 562, 677; Dh 423; also BHS (eg Uv 33-47). The same applies to *pubba,jāti*, “past birth.” Thus, as a rule, we should tr this as “past life” or “past existence.” However, this is clearly Pali idiom, alluding to the fact that we exist as only one individual at a time. For example, we have refs to a number of existences being recalled, eg “I know my own 7 lives” (*jānāmi attano satta jātiyo*, Tha 434). Cf this stock from **Bhaya Bherava S** (M 4): “I recollected manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births, three births,...one hundred thousand” (*so aneka,vihitam pubbe,nivasam anussarati, seyyathidam: ekam pi jātim, dve pi jātiyo, tisso pi jātiyo...jāti,sata,ashassam pi*) (M 4,27/1:22), SD 44.3. Comys give *pubbe,nivāsa* as one of the “3 knowledges” (*te,vijjā*) of Buddhism, ie, the recollection of past lives, the knowledge of the deaths and rebirths of beings (the divine eye), and the attainment of the end of birth, viz arhatood (DhA 4:233,13 f ≈ SnA 476,20 f: on these direct knowledges, see **Te,vijja S** (D 13) @ SD 1.8 (2.2.2). Further see Thī:N 76 n63.

<sup>22</sup> = Dh 423abcd, but Dh add 2 more lines (ef): The “**all**” (*sabba*) here refers to the sense-faculties, which the arhat has mastered: see Intro (1.2).

were to show the way to one who was lost, or  
 were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms,  
 even so, in numerous ways, has the Dharma been made clear by master Gotama.

I go to the Blessed Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks. May the Blessed Gotama remember me as a lay-follower who has gone for refuge from this day forth for life.”

— evaṃ —

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