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(Sotāpatti-y-aṅga) Vassa Sutta

The Rain Discourse (on the limbs of streamwinning) | S 55.38

Theme: The true faith of the saints

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2014

1 Introduction

1.1 The Sutta is a short statement on the 4 limbs of streamwinning [1.3] illustrated by a parable of mountain rain. The parable a well known pericope or stock passage, and recurs in almost identical form in these suttas:

Upanisā Sutta	S 12.23,27/2:32,3-10	SD 6.12
Parisā Sutta	A 3.94,5/1:243,28-34	SD 72.15
Kāla Sutta 2	A 4.147,2/2:140,22-29	SD 62.18
(Āhāra) Avijjā Sutta	A 10.61,3/5:114,6-13 + 6/5:117,20-27	SD 31.10
(Āhāra) Taṇhā Sutta	A 10.62,3/5:117,20-27 + 6/5:119,4-11	SD 31.11

1.2 THE WATER-CYCLE PARABLE

1.2.1 The water parable itself [§2] is well known and is applied in different ways in other suttas [1.1]. The parable itself has a sutta of its own, **the (Sotāpatti-y-aṅga) Vassa Sutta** (S 55.38), where it illustrates the nature of the 4 limbs of streamwinning (*sotāpatti-y-aṅga*), that is, faith in the 3 jewels, and moral virtue dear to the noble saints.¹

1.2.2 The Commentary gives the following explanations.

In the phrase “**having gone beyond**” (*pāraṃ gantvā*), “the beyond” (*para*) is nirvana, that is, having reached it.

“**They lead to the destruction of the influxes**” (*āsavānaṃ khayāya saṃvattanti*). This does not mean that they reach nirvana first, and later to the destruction of the influxes. Rather, they lead them there even as they go to nirvana² (SA 3:289).

1.2.3 The water parable illustrates the 4 limbs of streamwinning as follows. Just as water from the heights flows down to lower levels, in the same way, those with the 4 limbs of streamwinning will surely move towards full awakening. Or, put more traditionally, as stated in this famous pericope, as given in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1),

One who knows and sees these truths³ thus is called a **streamwinner**, no longer³ bound for the lower world,⁴ sure of liberation, bound for awakening.⁵ (S 25.1,6), SD 16.7

¹ *Sotāpatti-y-aṅgāni*, alt tr “limbs of streamwinning” (D 33.1.11(13)/3:227; Pm 2:189 f). These are preliminary practices that lead to the attainment of streamwinning. In **Paññā, vuḍḍhi S** (A 5.246) these same 4 qualities are called *vuḍḍhi, dhamma*, “virtues conducive to growth” (A 5.246/2:245); cf the 5 factors of noble growth (*ariya, vuddhi*), A 3:80. See SD 3.3(3). Cf *sotāpānassa aṅgāni* in **Pañca, bhera, bhaya S** (S 12.41/2:68-70), SD 3.3.4(2).

² *Āsavānaṃ khayāya saṃvattantīti* na paṭhamam nibbānaṃ gantvā pacchā saṃvattanti, *gacchamānā eva saṃvattanti*. (SA 3:289)

³ The main truth here is that of the perception of impermanence (*anicca, saññā*): for full text, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

⁴ *Avinipāta*, alt tr “not fated for birth in a suffering state”; opp of *vinipāta*, “the world of suffering,” another name for the 4 woeful courses (*duggati*) or the 4 lower worlds (*apāya*) (Vism 13.92 f). Sometimes 5 woeful courses (*pañca, gati*) (D 3:234=33.2.1, A 11.68) are mentioned: the hells (*niraya*), the animal birth (*tirachāna, yoni*), the ghost realm (*pitti, visaya*), the human world (*manussa*) and the heavenly world (*deva*). Of these, the first three are woeful, with the asura-demons (*asura, kāya*) as the fourth woeful course. The remaining two are “happy courses” (*sugati*). For a discussion, see Nyanaponika & Bodhi (tr), *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 1999:14-19.

⁵ *Yo bhikkhave ime dhamme evaṃ jānāti evaṃ passati ayaṃ vuccati sotāpanno avinipāta, dhammo niyato sambodhi, parāyano ti*. “This statement makes it clear how the stream-enterer [streamwinner] differs from those on the way to streamwinning. The faith-follower accepts the teachings on trust (with a limited degree of understanding),

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S 55.38

The mountain-rain parable⁶

2 *Seyyathā'pi bhikkhave upari,pabbate thulla,phusitake deve vassante [deve gala,galāyante]⁷
taṃ udakaṃ yathā,ninnaṃ pavattamānaṃ*

<p><i>pabbata,kandara,padara,sākhā paripūrā kusobbhā paripūrā mahā,sobbhā paripūrā kunnadiyo paripūrā mahā,nadiyo paripūrā</i></p>	<p><i>pabbata,kandara,padara,sākhā paripūreti, kusobbhe⁸ paripūrenti, mahā,sobbhe paripūrenti, kunnadiyo paripūrenti, mahā,nadiyo paripūrenti, mahā,samuddaṃ⁹ paripūrenti.</i></p>
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2 Just as [in a crashing thunderstorm]¹⁰ the rains fall in huge drops on the mountain-tops,
the waters flowing down along the slopes, fill the mountain clefts, gullies and streams.
When the mountain clefts, gullies and streams are full, they fill the ponds.
When the ponds are full, they fill the lakes.
When the lakes are full, they fill the rivulets.
When the rivulets are full, they fill the rivers.
When the rivers are full, they fill the great ocean. [32]

The limbs of streamwinning

3 *Evam eva kho bhikkhave ariya,sāvakassa
yo ca buddhe avecca-p,pasādo
yo ca dhamme avecca-p,pasādo
yo ca saṅghe avecca-p,pasādo,*

yāni ca ariya,kantāni sīlāni,

ime dhammā sandamānā pāraṃ gantvā āsavānaṃ khayāya saṃvattantīti.

the Dhamma-follower through investigation; but the stream-enterer has *known and seen* the teachings directly. I read Se: *evaṃ jānāti evaṃ passati.*" (S:B 1099 n270)

⁶ This parable is a well known pericope: see Intro (1.1).

⁷ At A 10.61,3/5:114,7 + 6/5:115,28 (but omitted in some MSS), 10.62,3/5:117,21 + 6/5:119,5.

⁸ *Kusobbha* (vl *kusubbha*, A:Ee 5:115,28 passim) = *ku*, "small, insignificant" + *sobbha* [cf Skt *śvabhra*] a hole, (deep) pit, D 2:127,28 (for burying *sūkara,maddava*, the Buddha's last meal); M 1:11,1 (in ref to *āsava*, "influxes"), 2:100,5*; A 1:243,31 (passim, also vl *subbha*), 2:140,26, 3:389,22 (with *papāta*), 5:114,11, 115,30, 117,23, 119,5; J 6:166; Tha 229 (see Tha:N 169n); SnA 355, 479); a water-pool, S 2:32,6; Sn 720a (see Sn:N 314n); Vism 186; as adj, S 3:109,8 (+*papāta*), ie "deep"; *kusobbha*, a small collection of water, a puddle, S 2:32,6, 118,25; Sn 720b; *mahā,sobbha*, the ocean, S 2:32,7, 118,24.

⁹ *Mahā,samudda,sāgaram* throughout, Saṃ 1. 269; only *samuddaṃ*, A 1:243,33; *samuddaṃ sāgaram*, A 4:147,-28; *mahā,samuddaṃ sāgaram*, A 5:116,1.

¹⁰ At A 10.61,3/5:114,7 + 6/5:115,28 (but omitted in some MSS), 10.62,3/5:117,21 + 6/5:119,5.

3 In the same way, bhikshus, for the noble disciple these things—

- (1) wise faith¹¹ in the Buddha,¹²
- (2) wise faith in the Dharma,
- (3) wise faith in the Sangha, and
- (4) moral virtue dear to the noble ones¹³—

flow onwards and, having gone beyond, they lead to the destruction of the influxes.¹⁴

— evaṃ —

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¹¹ “Faith,” *saddhā*. The suttas speak of 2 kinds of faith (*saddhā*): (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlaka,saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati,saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,8, 401,23); also called *avecca-p.pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69). “Wise faith” is syn with (2). *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243 3:163 & Comy). **Gethin** explain the 2 kinds of faith as being the cognitive and the affective: “Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith in its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody...the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary.” (Gethin 2001:107; my emphases). See also ERE: Faith; Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387. On the streamwinner’s faith, see SD 3.3 (5).

¹² For full defs of the virtues of the 3 jewels and the moral virtue, see **Pañca Vera Bhaya S 1** (S 12.41,11-14), SD 3.3.

¹³ “Moral virtue dear to the noble ones,” *ariya,kantāni sīlāni*. This is explained at Vism 221 f. SA says that the noble ones do not violate the 5 precepts; hence, such virtue is dear to them (SA 2:74).

¹⁴ “Mental influxes,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “in-and-out-flow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as influxes, taints (“deadly taints”, RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untr. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*dīṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of three influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsava*s is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: *āsava*.