

15

Pati,pūjikā Vatthu

or **Patipūjikāya Vatthu** The Story of the Husband Honourer | **DhA 4.4**

or **Pati,pūjika,kumārī Vatthu** The Husband-honouring Girl

Theme: Loves transcends time and space

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2016, 2019

1 Story summary

- §§1-5 **Patipūjikā Vatthu**, the story of the husband-honourer (DhA 4.4), is about an unnamed female deva, wife of the deva Māla,bhārī, “garland-wearer,” in Tāva,tīmsa, the heaven of the 33 devas. **Patipūjikā**, as she is called, dies, even as she sits in a tree, plucking flowers for Māla,bhārī. Reborn in a Sāvattihī family, she remembers her deva-husband and wishes to return to him.
- §§6-11 At 16, she marries and has 4 sons. She continues to make offerings to the monks, dedicating it to being reborn with Māla,bhārī. She lives morally virtuous as a lay person. One evening, she dies and is reborn with the deva-husband again.
- §§12-15 Māla,bhārī, seeing her, asks where she has been all morning. She relates her story [§12]. He is surprised that despite the brevity of human life, they live heedlessly without regard for decay and death.
- §§16-17 The Commentary on the relativity of time: 100 human years (average human lifespan) is but a night and a day in Tāva,tīmsa, whose devas’ lifespan is 1000 times long, lasting 36 million years.
- §§18-25 Back on earth, the monks learn of Patipūjikā’s death and her vow. When they ask the Buddha about her, he explains everything to them. The Buddha ends his teaching with **Dh 48**.

2 Story significance

2.0 From a careful study of the Patipūjikā Vatthu (DhA 4.4), we can tease out its significance as follows:

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| (1) Divine beings or aliens? (Are there far more “technologically” advanced beings?); | [2.1] |
| (2) The relativity of time (An early awareness of different time-zones.); | [2.2] |
| (3) Rebirth and its nature (Can we choose our rebirth?); | [2.3] |
| (4) The universality of impermanence (The significance of streamwinning). | [2.4] |

2.1 DIVINE BEINGS OR ALIENS? The Patipūjikā Vatthu (DhA 4.4) is another of the numerous Buddhist stories of intelligent beings other than humans—those of the heaven of the 33 devas (*tāva,tīmsa*).¹ This is an “earth-bound” heaven whose beings are sense-based, that is, dependent on sense-pleasures, although these are much more refined than the physical pleasures of the humans.²

Early Buddhism accepts the existence of such devas or “gods,” as stated in **the (Majjhima) Saṅgārava Sutta** (M 100).³ This is an acknowledgement of the existence of other intelligent beings beyond humans and our world, that is, to say aliens. Alongside such a cosmological teaching, there is an even more significant understanding that such existence—indeed, all existence—is subject to time; hence, they are all impermanent. This entails a repetitive cycle of rebirths and re-deaths. This Patipūjikā Vatthu also reminds us of the brevity of human life, and that we should, as such, never neglect our spiritual cultivation.

¹ On *deva*, see SD 54.3a (3).

² On the key-terms here, see SD 54.3a (4.1.1).

³ M 100,42/2:212 f (SD 10.9).

2.2 THE RELATIVITY OF TIME. The **Patipūjikā Vatthu** is an interesting story that illustrates the early Buddhist awareness of the relativity of space and time. 100 human years (average human lifespan) is but a night and a day in Tāva,tiṃsa, whose devas' lifespan is 1000 times long, lasting 36 million years [§§12-15]. The celestial beings in the higher heavens have even longer lifespans. However, no matter how long their lifespan may be, they will still “fall” (*cavati*), that is, die, from their heavenly state. When they do, they will, as a rule, head for the subhuman states, including the hells on account of their bad karma ripening.⁴ Understandably, devas generally fear hearing about **impermanence**, and do not like listening to teachings on impermanence—as states in **the (Anicca) Sīha Sutta** (S 22.78).⁵ [2.4]

2.3 REBIRTH AND ITS NATURE

2.3.1 The Patipūjikā Vatthu (DhA 4.4) is a story about a female deva. Having passed away from Tāva,-tiṃsa (the heaven of the 33), she aspires to be reborn back into Tāvatiṃsa to be with her deva husband. As a human, she lives a morally virtuous life and makes merit dedicated to just this aspiration. At the end of her human life, she is indeed reborn in Tāvatiṃsa as she has aspired.

2.3.2 Rebirth by aspiration

2.3.2.1 This is a case of “rebirth by aspiration” (*saṅkhār'upapatti*), as elaborated in **the Saṅkhār'upapatti Sutta** (M 120). The Majjhima Commentary glosses *saṅkhāra* as *paṭthāna*, “aspiration, wish” (MA 4:146), which, here, denotes a conscious mental effort, a “determination.”⁶ The Sutta records the Buddha as teaching how, by cultivating moral virtue, we can choose the happy rebirth that we desire.

2.3.2.2 Moral virtue, in this case, is defined as **the fivefold noble growth** (*pañca ariya,vaḍḍhi*),⁷ which are as follows: faith, moral virtue, spiritual learning, charity and wisdom.⁸ In practical terms, this means that we should cultivate a mind of faithful joy rooted in a wholesome understanding of the Dharma of the suttas, supporting this with the practice of open-handed giving, and reflecting on the impermanence of all our actions, which generates wisdom. In the joyful peace of such a mind, we should aspire, not to be reborn anywhere, but to gain **streamwinning** in this life itself.⁹

2.4 THE UNIVERSALITY OF IMPERMANENCE. The deva Māla,bhārī, in **the Patipūjikā Vatthu** (DhA 4.4), shows his wisdom in noticing the brevity of human life relative to the lifespan of the Tāvatiṃsa devas. We are not told, however, whether he is a streamwinner or a learner on the path. We know, for example, that **Sakra**, the lord of Tāvatiṃsa, is a streamwinner.¹⁰

On the other hand, it should be noted, too, that the devas of Tāvatiṃsa enjoy perhaps the greatest of “heavenly pleasures,” as we can humanly imagine them. There is a hint that Māla,bhārī is no ordinary deva, but one who may be a streamwinner (at least), like Sakra. Anyway, the purpose, of the Sutta, it should be noted is about time and impermanence.¹¹

⁴ See **(Nānā,karaṇa) Puggala S 1** (A 4.123), SD 23.8a.

⁵ S 22.78/3:84-86 (SD 42.10).

⁶ See SD 3.4 (1) on the key terms of M 120.

⁷ See SD 3.4 (2.4, 3-4).

⁸ Viz, *saddhā, sīla, suta, cāga* and *paññā*: see **Saṅkhār'upāpatti S** (M 120,3/3:99), SD 3.4.

⁹ See **Entering the stream** (SD 3.3).

¹⁰ On Sakra as a streamwinner, see **Sakka,pañha S** (D 21,2), SD 54.8.

¹¹ On the reflection of impermanence bringing the greatest spiritual fruit, see **Velāma S** (A 9.20,5.1(11)), SD 16.6. On the perception of impermanence bringing streamwinning, see **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

2.5 THE 56 QUALITIES OF GOODNESS

2.5.1 The Patipūjikā Vatthu tells us that the female deva reborn amongst humans lived such a moral life of diligence that she develops all the “**56 kinds of wholesome states**” (*cha-p,paññāsa kusala,dhamma*). Neither the story itself nor its Commentary tells us what these qualities are. However, it is well known that this set of wholesome states are listed in the Abhidhamma. This also attests to the lateness of the story, which is, after all, a commentarial account.

2.5.2 The Dhamma,saṅgāṇī, the 1st book of the Abhidhamma, opens with this question followed by the 56 kinds of wholesome states. Each of these states or factors are then defined accordingly.

2.5.2.1 The 56 kinds of wholesome states:

*Katame dhammā kusalā
Yasmiṃ samaye kāmāvacaraṃ
kusalaṃ cittaṃ uppannaṃ hoti,
somanassa,sahagataṃ ñāṇa,sampayuttaṃ
rūp'ārammaṇaṃ vā
sadd'ārammaṇaṃ vā
gandh'ārammaṇaṃ vā
ras'ārammaṇaṃ vā
phoṭṭhabb'ārammaṇaṃ vā
dhamm'ārammaṇaṃ vā
yaṃ yaṃ vā pan'ārabbha tasmim samaye*

What are the wholesome states?
Whenever a wholesome thought pertaining to the sense-world arises, accompanied by gladness, associated with knowledge, with form as object, or sound as object, or smell as object, or taste as object, or touch as object, or thought [mind-object] as object, then, at that time:

THE GROUP OF 5 HEADED BY CONTACT

- (1) *phasso hoti*
- (2) *vedanā hoti*
- (3) *saññā hoti*
- (4) *cetanā hoti*
- (5) *cittaṃ hoti*

there is contact;
there is feeling;
there is perception;
there is volition;
there is mind [consciousness];

THE 5 DHYANA-FACTORS

- (6) *vitakko hoti*
- (7) *vicāro hoti*
- (8) *pīti hoti*
- (9) *sukhaṃ hoti*
- (10) *cittass'ekaggatā hoti*

there is thinking;
there is pondering
there is joy [zest];
there is happiness;
there is one-pointedness of mind;

THE 8 FACULTIES

- (11) *saddh'indriyaṃ hoti*
- (12) *viriy'indriyaṃ hoti*
- (13) *sat'indriyaṃ hoti*
- (14) *samādh'indriyaṃ hoti*
- (15) *paññ'indriyaṃ hoti*
- (16) *man'indriyaṃ hoti*
- (17) *somanass'indriyaṃ hoti*
- (18) *jīvit'indriyaṃ hoti*

there is the faculty of faith;
there is the faculty of effort;
there is the faculty of mindfulness;
there is the faculty of concentration;
there is the faculty of wisdom;
there is the faculty of mind;
the faculty of mental joy;
the faculty of life [life-faculty];

THE 5 NOBLE PATH-FACTORS

- (19) *sammā,diṭṭhi hoti* there is right view;
 (20) *sammā,saṅkappo hoti* there is right intention;
 (21) *sammā,vāyāmo hoti* there is right effort;
 (22) *sammā,sati hoti* there is right mindfulness;
 (23) *sammā,samādhi hoti* there is right concentration;

THE 7 POWERS

- (24) *saddhā,balaṃ hoti* there is the power of faith;
 (25) *virīya,balaṃ hoti* there is the power of energy;
 (26) *sati,balaṃ hoti* there is the power of mindfulness;
 (27) *samādhi,balaṃ hoti* there is the power of concentration;
 (28) *paññā,balaṃ hoti* there is the power of wisdom;
 (29) *hiri,balaṃ hoti* there is the power of moral shame;
 (30) *ottappa,balaṃ hoti* there is the power of moral fear;

THE 3 ROOT-CAUSES

- (31) *alobho hoti* there is non-greed;
 (32) *adoso hoti* there is the non-hate;
 (33) *amoho hoti* there is the non-delusion;

THE 3 MENTAL FACTORS FOR WHOLESOME ACTION

- (34) *anabhijjhā hoti* there is non-covetousness;
 (35) *avyāpādo hoti* there is non-ill will;
 (36) *sammā,diṭṭhi hoti* there is right view;

THE 2 MENTAL FACTORS GUARDING THE WORLD

- (37) *hiri hoti* there is moral shame;
 (38) *ottappaṃ hoti* there is moral fear;

THE 2 FACTORS FOR CALM

- (39) *kaya,passaddhi hoti* there is bodily serenity;
 (40) *citta,passaddhi hoti* there is mental serenity;

THE 2 FACTORS OF AGILITY

- (41) *kaya,lahutā hoti* there is bodily agility [lightness, quickness];
 (42) *citta,lahutā hoti* there is mental agility;

THE 2 FACTORS OF MALLEABILITY

- (43) *kaya,mudutā hoti* there is bodily elasticity [malleability];
 (44) *citta,mudutā hoti* there is mental elasticity;

THE 2 FACTORS OF ADAPTABILITY

- (45) *kaya,kammaññatā hoti* there is bodily adaptability [preparedness];
 (46) *citta,kammaññatā hoti* there is mental adaptability;

THE 2 FACTORS OF DEXTERITY

- (47) *kaya,pāguññatā hoti* there is bodily dexterity [soundness];
 (48) *citta,pāguññatā hoti* there is mental dexterity;

THE 2 FACTORS OF RECTITUDE

(49) *kāy'ujjukatā* [*kāy'ujukatā*] *hoti*

there is bodily rectitude [straightness];

(50) *citt'ujjukata* [*citt'ujukatā*] *hoti*

there is mental rectitude;

THE 2 FACTORS OF MINDFULNESS

(51) *sati hoti*

there is mindfulness;

(52) *sampajaññaṃ hoti*

there is clear comprehension;

THE 2 ASPECTS OF MEDITATION

(53) *samatho hoti*

there is mental calm;

(54) *vipassanā hoti*

there is insight;

THE 2 KINDS OF MENTAL DISCIPLINE

(55) *paggāho hoti*

there is the exertion;

(56) *avikkhepo hoti*

there is the non-distraction.

*Ye vā pana tasmim̐ samaye aññe pi atthi
paṭicca samuppannā arūpino dhammā—
ime dhamma kusalā.*

Or whenever there are any other formless
states that have dependently arisen—
These are the wholesome states.

2.5.2.2 Of the factors of the 1st wholesome state given in sets, most of them are unique, but some of them repeat. Of these:

18 states occur only once each: *phassa, saññā, cetanā, vicāra, pīti, jīvit'indriya, kaya, passaddhi, citta, passaddhi, kaya, lahutā, citta, lahutā, kaya, mudutā, citta, -mudutā, kaya, kammaññatā, citta, kammaññatā, kaya, paguññatā, citta, paguññatā, kāy'ujjukatā, citt'ujjakatā.*

Those states that occur more than once, are either a modified sense or a different expression, thus:

7 states occur twice: *citta* as *citta* (mind) and as *man'indriya* (faculty of mind); *vitakka* as *vitakka* (thinking) and as *samma, saṅkappa* (right intention or thought); *saddhā* (faith) as a faculty, *saddh'indriya*, and as a power, *saddhā, bala*;

hiri occurs moral shame, and as a power, *hiri, bala*;

adosa as non-hate, and as non-covetousness, *anabhijjhā*;

1 state occurs thrice: *vedanā* as feeling, as happiness (*sukha*), and as mental joy (*somanass'indriya*);

2 states occur 4 times: *virīya* (effort) as a faculty (*viriy'indriya*), as right effort (*sammā, vāyāma*), as a power (*virīya, bala*), and as exertion (*paggāha*); *sati* (mindfulness) as a faculty (*sat'indriya*), as right mindfulness (*sammā, sati*), as a power (*sati, bala*), and as mindfulness;

1 state occurs 6 times; and *samādhi* (concentration) as calm (*samatha*), one-pointedness of mind (*cittass'ekaggatā*), as a power (*samādhi, bala*), as right effort (*sammā, sati*), and as non-distraction (*avikkhepa*);

1 state occurs 7 times.

paññā (wisdom) as a faculty (*paññ'indriya*), as right view (*sammā,diṭṭhi*) as a path-factor, as a power (*paññā,bala*), as non-delusion (*amoha*), right view (*sammā,diṭṭhi*) as a mental factor for wholesome action, clear comprehension (*sampajañña*), and as insight (*vipassanā*).

Hence, there are actually only a total of **30 wholesome states**.

2.5.2.3 If we take this exhaustive list of wholesome factors that the female deva possesses, she is certainly a very spiritually developed individual, perhaps even a streamwinner. However, there is no mention of her spiritual attainment beyond the mention of this list of wholesome factors.

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Pati,pūjikā Vatthu

The Story of the Husband-honourer

DhA 4.4

1 “Even as a man is gathering flowers” (*pupphāni h’eva pacinantan’ti*).¹²

2 This Dharma teaching was given by the Teacher while he was staying at Sāvattḥī regarding one named Patipūjikā. [363].

The deva Māla,bhārī

3 The story begins in the world of the 33 devas (Tāva,timsa). It is said that a devaputra named Māla,bhārī (“Garland,wearer”), entered the pleasure-garden attended by 1000 young female devas.¹³ 500 of them climbed the trees, plucked flowers and threw them down, and the other 500 gathered them and decked the deva,putra.

4 One of these young female devas, even as she sat on a tree-branch, fell away¹⁴ from that state, her body vanishing like the flame of a lamp, and received a new conception in a family in Sāvattḥī.

5 Born with the memory of her former state, that she was the wife of the deva, Māla,bhārī, she made votive offerings of scents and garlands (to the sangha), aspiring to be reborn with her former husband.

¹² Comy omits *pacinantam*.

¹³ “Young female devas,” *deva,dhītā*. The term *deva,putta*, however, means either “young male deva,” or generically, a deva belonging to a host or a “lesser deva.” There is also *devata*, which means (1) deity (a generic term for devas and brahmas, ie, all divine beings), (2) deity (abstract n), godliness. See SD 54,2 (3.2.3).

¹⁴ “Fell away” (*cutā*, past part of *cavati*). This is a tt for the passing away of a heavenly being. See SD 54.3a (3.3.5); SD 54.8 (2.2.3.1).

Patipūjikā as a human

6 When she was 16, she married into another family. Even then, whenever she gave the monks ticket-meal or fortnightly-meal or rains-meal [during the rains-retreat],¹⁵ she would say: “May this act of truth benefit me with the attaining of rebirth with my former husband!”¹⁶

7 The monks noted, thus: “This woman, upon waking and rising wishes only for her husband.” Hence, they called her Patipūjikā (Husband-honourer).

8 She regularly cared for the refectory, where she prepared seats for the monks. Whenever people wished to give ticket-meals, fortnightly-meals and so on, they would bring and offer them to her, saying: “Lady, please offer these to the sangha of monks!”

9 Going to and fro in this manner, she obtained all at once the 56 kinds of wholesome states.¹⁷

Patipūjikā's merit-making

10 She became pregnant and, at the end of 10 lunar months, gave birth to a son. When her son was old enough to walk, she gave birth to another, and then another, until she had 4 sons.

11 One day, she gave alms, paid homage to the monks, [364] listened to the Dharma, and kept the precepts. At the end of that day, she died suddenly of an illness, and was reborn in the presence of her former husband.

Patipūjikā back in Tāvātimsa

12 During all that time, the other female devas were decking the deva (Māla, bhārī) with flowers. When the deva Māla, bhārī saw her, he said: “We have not seen you since morning! Where have you been?”

“I passed away from this existence, husband.”

“What are you saying?”

“Just that, husband.”

“Where were you reborn?”

“In a family of Sāvattī.”

13 “How long did you remain there?”

“With the passing of 10 lunar months, I left my mother's womb. When I was 16, I married into another family. I bore 4 sons, gave alms and so on, aspiring to be reborn with you, husband.”

“How long is the life of humans?”

“About a hundred years.”

“Only that long!”

“Yes, husband.”

Relativity of time

14 “If humans are reborn with so short a life, do they spend their time sleeping and heedless, or do they make merits such as giving alms?”

¹⁵ “Ticket-meal, etc,” *salāka, bhattam pakkhika, bhattam vass'āvāsikāni* (Ee; Be Ke vassa, bhattam).

¹⁶ *Ayam me sāmikassa santike nibbattana'atthāya sacca, kāro hotu'ti vadati.*

¹⁷ *Cha-p, paññāsa kusala, dhamme.* See (5).

“What are you saying, husband? Humans are ever heedless! It is as if they are reborn with a lifespan of an incalculable number of years, without any regard for old age or death.” [2.4]

15 The deva Māla, bhārī felt a sense of deep samvega [urgency]. He said:

“If, as you say, humans live for only about a hundred years, and if they spend their time heedless, when will they ever be free from suffering?”

16 Now, a hundred of our years are but a night and a day in the world of the 33 devas. Thirty such nights and days make a month. Twelve such months make a year. Their lifespan is a thousand such celestial years. [365] Or, in human reckoning, 36 million years.¹⁸

17 Therefore, he thought to himself:

“If human lifespan is so short, it is highly improper for them to indulge in a life of heedlessness.”

The monks learn of Patipūjikā’s death

18 On another day, the monks, having entered the village, found the alms-hall uncared for, with no seats prepared, without drinking-water.

“Where is Patipūjikā?” they asked.

“Bhante, how could we expect to see her? Yesterday, after you noble sirs have eaten and left, in the evening, she died.”

19 Thereupon, the monks who were still worldlings, recalling her kind services to them, were unable to hold back their tears. As for those monks who have attained arhathood, a sense of spiritual urgency arose in them.

The lesson of the story

20 After their meal, they left their residence, went to the Teacher and asked him:

“Bhante, Patipūjikā, as soon as she has risen, she was active doing various acts of merit, thinking only of her husband. Now she is dead. Where is she reborn?”

21 “Bhikshus, she is reborn with her own husband.”

“But, bhante, she is not with her husband!”¹⁹

“Bhikshus, she yearned not for that husband. Her husband is the deva Māla, bhārī in the world of the 33 devas. She fell from that state while decking him with flowers. Now she has returned to where she was before and has been reborn with him.”

22 “Is that so, bhante?”

“Yes, bhikshus.”

“O, how short, bhante, is the life of beings! Early this morning she served us with food, but in the evening, she sickened and died.”

23 The Teacher replied:

“Yes, bhikshus, short, indeed, is the life of beings! Even as beings, with their desire for objects of pleasures, with their defilement of sensuality, are never satisfied, death overcomes them [366] and carries them off, weeping and wailing!”

So saying, he uttered this verse:

¹⁸ *Tisso ca vassa, koṭiyo saṭṭhim ca vassa, sata, saḥassāni*. This is according to **Vibhaṅga** calculation (Vbh 422, 28-34): SD 54.3a (2.2.1.1). For the lifespans of other devas, see SD 54.3a (Table 3.5).

¹⁹ That is, not reborn in her erstwhile family in Sāvattḥī.

24 *Pupphāni h'eva pacinantam
vyāsatta,manasam naram
atittam yeva kamesu
antako kurute vasan'ti*

(Dh 48)

Even while a man is gathering flowers,
with his heart caught in pleasure,
even before his desires are satisfied,
death the end-maker overpowers him.

25 At the end of the teaching, many attained the fruit of streamwinning and so on, and good arose for the benefit of the masses.

— evam —

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