

The business of omissions

A comment on the Bhadraka Sutta (S 42.11), SD 55.7

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The Bhadraka Sutta (S 42.111) is a short teaching based on the “essential truth teaching” where the Buddha teaches “the arising and passing away of suffering” to the headman Bhadraka. Instead of giving a theoretical teaching, the Buddha, using a surprisingly mundane analogy, teaches us how to see the truths in an empirical and verifiable way. In short, it is a quick introduction to early Buddhist **epistemology** (theory of knowledge).

The Sutta’s Commentary says that this Sutta is an example a teaching on “samsaric suffering” (*vaṭṭa, dukkha*), but this term is not found in the suttas, where we only have the **3 kinds of suffering**: physical suffering (*dukkha, dukkhatā*), suffering due to change (*viparināma, dukkha*) and the suffering of the 5 aggregates (*saṅkhāra, dukkha*). This interesting puzzle is discussed in the introductory notes of SD 55.7.

Lost passages

The Bhadraka is a short and straightforward text, but seems to have lost a couple of its passages. We know this from at least two premises. The first is that, following **the oral tradition**, the protagonist (Bhadraka in this Sutta) repeats the key passage/s defining what he has been taught. Secondly, the Burmese, the Sinhalese and the Pali Text Society versions of the Tipiṭaka has clearly omitted these passages spoken by Bhadraka who agrees to the Buddha’s teaching.

What is most interesting is that the missing passages are found in full in the Siamese edition (the Syam Rattha or Royal edition). After the Buddha has explained to Bhadraka that whatever suffering that arises—whether in the present, the **past** or the **future**—“all that is rooted in desire ... ” However, Bodhi’s translation has only this equivalent of that passage, which is a paraphrase of the 3 passages of the Buddha’s teaching to Bhadraka:

14.2 “Whatever suffering arises, [4:329] all that is rooted in desire, has desire as its source; for, desire is the root of suffering.”¹

Yaṃ kiñci dukkhaṃ uppajjamānaṃ uppajjati sabban taṃ chanda, mūlakaṃ chanda, nidānaṃ chandi hi mūlaṃ dukkhassāti.

The full passages

As a rule, the protagonist (the recipient of Dharma-teaching) will repeat, in full, the key passages of what has been taught to him. This is, in fact, reported in the Siamese edition of **the Bhadraka Sutta**:

14.3 Whatever suffering that arose in **the past, all that is rooted in desire**, has desire as its source; for, desire is the root of suffering.

¹ §14.2 is the section number in the SD translation. “4:329” is the Samyutta reference in the PTS edition.

Yaṅkiñci **atītam** addhānaṃ dukkhaṃ uppajjamānaṃ uppajji sabban taṃ chanda, mūlakaṃ chanda, nidānaṃ chando hi mūlaṃ dukkhassāti.

14.4 Whatever suffering that will arise in **the future**, **all that is rooted in desire**, has desire as its source; for, desire is the root of suffering.

Yaṅkiñci **anāgatam** addhānaṃ dukkhaṃ uppajjamānaṃ uppajjissati sabbantaṃ chanda, mūlakaṃ chanda, nidānaṃ chando hi mūlaṃ dukkhassāti

The passages restored

Both the Burmese edition (Be) and the PTS edition (Ee) omit **§14.3**; but it is found in Sinhala edition (Ce) and **the Siamese edition** (Se:SR). With the help of the Siamese edition, we are thus able to faithfully reconstruct the passage in translation.

Be, Ee and Ce omit **§14.4**, which is found **only** in the Siamese edition (Se:SR 18:402,12-14) and the Khmer edition (now very difficult to be found). This is sufficient evidence to give the full reading. This omission is usually attributed to “transmission error,” which means either the copyist’s error or the editor’s oversight.

Why is the Siamese Tipiṭaka omitted?

Sadly, Bodhi’s translation in “The Connected Discourses of the Buddha” commercially published by Wisdom Books (2000:349) omits these passages. In note 353 (page 1451), he seems to notice this omission but does not refer to the Siamese Tipitaka at all. In fact, in all his translations, he only refers to the PTS, the Burmese and the Sinhala editions, and sometimes even quotes from the Chinese Agamas, but completely ignores the Siamese Tipitaka (which is quite complete and redacted a few times). It is probably the oldest of the modern Tipitakas, published in the late 1890s.

Such an omission is a serious flaw in Bodhi’s translations. He also regularly omits thousands of *bhikkhave* (O bhikkhus) and similar vocatives in his translations, and, as a rule, shortens repetitive passages (the peyyālā) which are essential for a fuller understanding of the suttas for practical and reflective purposes. Such omissions are probably necessary to conform to the demands of a commercial publication.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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