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Lobha Sutta

The Discourse on Greed | It 1

Theme: When greed is totally abandoned, non-returning arises

Translated by Piya Tan ©2020

1 Summary and significance

1.1 SUMMARY AND SIGNIFICANCE

1.1.1 The Lobha Sutta (It 1), the very first sutta of the Iti,vuttaka [2], is a teaching on the truth that the destruction of **greed** (*lobha*) leads to **non-returning** (*anāgāmita*). The Sutta has only 2 parts:

- (1) The thesis: **that the destruction of greed leads to non-returning** [1.1.2]; and
- (2) **the closing verses**, elaborating on the thesis.

1.1.2 Non-returning

1.1.2.1 The Sutta’s thesis is the Buddha’s statement: “**Greed, bhikshus, is the one thing you must abandon. I will (then) be your guarantor for non-returning**” (*Eka,dhammaṃ bhikkhave pajahatha, ahaṃ vo pāṭibhogo anāgāmitāya*) [§3]. In this sentence, **greed** (*lobha*) is a synecdoche (shorthand) for all **the 5 lower fetters** (*oram,bhāgiya saṃyojana*),¹ which are:

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|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) personality view; | <i>sakkāya,ditthi</i> |
| (2) spiritual doubt; | <i>vicikicchā</i> |
| (3) attachment to rituals and vows; | <i>sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa</i> |
| (4) sensual lust; | <i>kāma,rāga</i> |
| (5) repulsion. | <i>paṭigha</i> |

The lower fetters bind us to the sense-world (*kāmāvacara*); hence, they are also called the “**internal**” fetters (*ajjhatta,samyojana*) because they imprison us in our physical body, that is, the 5 physical senses.² Technically, “greed” refers to the 4th fetter, “sensual lust.” The first 3 fetters are broken by **the stream-winner** (*sotāpanna*), who, when he further weakens the 3 unwholesome roots (greed, hate and delusion), becomes **a once-returner** (*sakad-āgāmī*).³

Up to this point, no dhyana (*jhāna*) attainment is necessary. When the once-returner is able to attain dhyana, and overcome his attachment or reliance on the physical body (the 5 senses), he overcomes **sensual lust**, and at the same time, overcomes its opposite, **repulsion**, too. With this attainment, he becomes **a non-returner** (*anāgāmī*).⁴ [1.1.2.2]

¹ They are the 1st 5 of the 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*), of which the last 5 are the “higher fetters” (*uddham,bhāgiya saṃyojana*), viz: (6) lust for form existence (*r(pa,rāga)*); (7) lust for formless existence (*ar(pa,rāga)*); (8) conceit (*māna*); (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*); (10) ignorance (*avijjā*). So called because they fetter us to the higher world, viz the form-realms and formless realms (*rūpârūpāvacara*); hence, they are called “external” fetters (*bahiddhā,samyojana*): **Ajjhatta Bahiddhā Saññojana Sutta** (A 2.4.5), SD 80.5. On **the 10 fetters**, see SD 57.27 (1.1.2.2).

² See **Ajjhatta Bahiddhā Saññojana S** (A 2.4.5), SD 80.5.

³ On **the streamwinners**, see SD 10.16 (11); on the once-returner, SD 10.16 (12).

⁴ On **non-returning**, see SD 10.16 (13), and **the arhat**, SD 10.16 (14).

1.1.2.2 Interestingly, the Iti,vuttaka’s first 6 suttas deal with **non-returning**, and also a number of other Iti,vuttaka suttas, thus:

It 1/1.1.1/1	Lobha Sutta	the discourse on greed
It 2/1.1.2/1 f	Dosa Sutta	the discourse on hate
It 3/1.1.3/2	Moha Sutta	the discourse on delusion
It 4/1.1.4/2	Kodha Sutta	the discourse on anger
It 5/1.1.5/3	Makkha Sutta	the discourse on scorn (hypocrisy)
It 6/1.1.6/3	Māna Sutta	the discourse on conceit
It 45/2.2.8/39 f	Paṭisallāna Sutta	the discourse on solitude
It 46/2.2.9/40 f	Sikkhānisaṃsa Sutta	the discourse on the benefits of training
It 47/2.2.10/41-43	Jāgariya Sutta	the discourse on wakefulness
It 96/3.5.7/95 f	Kāma,yoga Sutta	the discourse on devotion to sensual pleasures

All these suttas deal with different aspects of overcoming the defilements or fetters , which then bring about the attaining of non-returning. This non-technical approach to the attaining of non-returning probably reflects an early canonical time before the 10 fetters were formulated.⁵

1.2 RELATED SUTTA

Both the Lobha Sutta (It 1) and **the Lobha Pariññā Sutta** (It 9), SD 57.27, share the same closing verse. At first glance, the verse seems to fit the prose of **It 1**, but seems to contradict the prose of **It 9**. In **It 1**, both the prose and the verse speak of the abandoning of greed as leading to non-returning [1.1.2.1]. However, in **It 9**, the prose speaks of “the destruction of suffering” (*dukkha-k.khaya*), which is arhathood.

The last line of the verse says that those who have truly abandoned greed “return not to this world ever again” (*punāyanti | imam lokam kidācanam*) [§5ef]. In **It 1**, this refers to **non-returning**. The very same verse recurs in **It 9**, but from the prose teaching, we can see that there is a wordplay, a double entendre (double meaning): it can refer to “non-returning” or to the “end of rebirth,” that is, **arhathood**. In the case of **It 9**, this line clearly should be read as referring to the latter. Hence, there is no contradiction at all, only a wordplay.⁶

2 The Iti,vuttaka and its compiler

2.1 THE ITI,VUTTAKA

2.1.1 Title

Iti,vuttaka, meaning “thus-said (teachings),” is the name of the 4th book of the Khuddaka Nikāya, a collection of 15 canonical works, ranging from the oldest (such as the Sutta Nipāta) to the latest (such as the Apadāna), and also a canonical commentary (the Niddesa). It is so called because every one of its 112 short suttas opens with the phrase, *vuttam h’etam bhagavata, vuttam arahatā’ti me sutam*, “This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, heard by me spoken by the Arhat.”

This sentence (the phrase “by me”) is traditionally said to have been spoken by the laywoman disciple, Khujj’uttarā. [2.2]

⁵ On the evolution of the 10 fetters, see SD 18.7 (9.1.5.9); SD 55.17 (3).

⁶ Cf SD 57.27 (1.2).

2.1.2 Contents

2.1.2.1 It comprises suttas mainly addressed to monks,⁷ dealing with ethical matters and the occasional doctrinal problems. Its teachings are pithy, addressing such topics as lust, hate, delusion, anger, wholesome conduct, meditation, existence and non-existence, nirvana. It is not a continuous work and so has no sequence in contents.

2.1.2.2 Its suttas are grouped into 4 collections (*nipāta*), with each having 1 to 5 chapters (*vagga*), thus:

Eka(ka) Nipāta	ch 1: It 1-10; ch 2: It 11-20; ch 3: It 21-27;
Duka Nipāta	ch 1: It 28-37; ch 2: It 38-49;
Tika Nipāta	ch 1: It 50-59; ch 2: It 60-69; ch 3: It 70-79; ch 4: It 80-89; ch 5: It 90-99;
Chakka Nipāta	Brāhmaṇa,dhamma,yāga Vagga: It 100-112

2.1.3 Composition

2.1.3.1 Each sutta has an opening prose section—a brief statement on a teaching or an observation by the Buddha. The teachings are expressed in prose and then repeated in verse form in about 50 suttas (that is, just less than half of its total contents). Sometimes, an idea is briefly stated in prose and then elaborated in verse. In a few cases, only a single verse relates to the prose section, while there are a few verses which seem unrelated to the prose.

2.1.3.2 The verses probably form the ancient nucleus of the Iti,vuttaka suttas. **The prose** portions, which introduce or sometimes explain the verses, were added later by the sutta redactors. Occasionally, the prose and verses supplement each other. However, there are occasions where the **prose** is an independent sutta, and its accompanying **verses** seem to be appended without any apparent connection, or even appear to contradict one another.⁸ Such suttas invite the skill of the skilled practitioner to notice the subtler connections, noticeable only from personal experience.⁹

2.2 KHUJJ'UTTARĀ

2.2.1 Khujj'uttarā (Uttarā the hunchback) was a treasurer's daughter but later became a maid-in-waiting of queen Sāmāvatī, who has faith in the Buddha. Unable to leave the palace, she instructs Khujj'uttarā to buy and offer flowers to the Buddha. Khujj'uttara, however, dishonestly keeps part of the money for herself.

One day, while listening to the Buddha, she becomes a streamwinner. She spends all her ill-saved money on flowers. When questioned by Sāmāvatī, she tells her the truth. Impressed, Sāmāvatī asks her to regularly listen to the Buddha's teachings and then instruct them (Sāmāvatī and the 500 women-in-waiting) accordingly. They all became streamwinners.

2.2.2 After Sāmāvatī and the 500 women die in a tragic fire, Khujj'uttarā continues listening and teaching the Dharma (DhA 2.1,6/1:208-210). She is declared by the Buddha to be foremost of laywomen who are widely learned (*bahu-s,suta*) (A 1:26) [7]. According to Dhammapāla, the teachings that Khujj'uttarā

⁷ **Rāga S 2** (It 69/57 f), SD 52,10b), is the only It sutta that mentions "monks or nuns."

⁸ Eg **Addhā S** (It 63), SD 68.9; **Dhātuso Saṃsandana S** (It 78); **Upaparikkha S** (It 94), SD 33.14. Note that in **Lobha Pariññā S** (It 9,5), the verse seems to contradict the prose [1.2].

⁹ See Ency Bsm, sv Itivuttaka: the first half of the articles has errors.

received from the Buddha (which she conveyed to Sāmāvati) are canonized as **the Iti,vuttaka**, the 4th book of the Khuddaka Nikāya (ItA 24-32,11).¹⁰ [2.1]

2.2.3 Since all the Iti,vuttaka suttas are teachings given by the Buddha at **Kosambī**, and repeated there by Khujj,uttarā, there was no need to specify the location of their teaching, thus: “At one time, the Blessed One stayed at Kosambī” (*ekaṃ samayaṃ bhagavā kosambiyā viharati*). Instead, we see the formula: “**This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, heard by me spoken by the Arhat**” (*vuttam h’etaṃ bhagavatā vuttam arahatā’ti me sutan’ti*) [§1]. (ItA 31-33).¹¹

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Lobha Sutta

The Discourse on Greed

It 1

1 This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, heard by me spoken by the Arhat.¹²

THE THESIS

2 “One thing, bhikkhus, you must abandon. I will (then) be your guarantor for **non-returning**.¹³ What is that one thing?

3 **Greed, bhikkhus, is the one thing you must abandon. I will (then) be your guarantor for non-returning.**”

4 This is the matter of what the Blessed One said, concerning which he uttered thus:¹⁴

<p>5 <i>Yena lobhena luddhāse sattā gacchanti duggatīṃ taṃ lobhaṃ samma-d-aññāya pajahanti vipassino pahāya na punāyanti imaṃ lokaṃ kudācanan’ti</i></p>	<p>“Whatever greed, on account of which greedy beings go to the suffering state, that greed those wise with insight abandon with right understanding; having abandoned it, they return not to this world ever again.”¹⁵</p>
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6 This matter [meaning] too was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.¹⁶

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¹⁰ For her full story, see **Sāmāvati,vatthu**, DhA 2.1 esp (DhA 1:208-210, 226-231); tr at DhA:B 1:281 f, 292 f; also AA 1:418-445; ItA 1:29-34; SD 8.6 (8.2); SD 15.11 (1.3.31); SD 57.19b (1.2.2).

¹¹ SD 8.6 (8.2); SD 16.14 (1). Further see DPPN: Khujjutarā.

¹² *Vuttam h’etaṃ bhagavata, vuttam arahatā’ti me sutam*. This is said to be spoken by the laywoman **Khujj’uttarā** [1.2.2.3]: see SD 16.14 (1).

¹³ *Eka,dhammaṃ bhikkhave pajahatha, Ahaṃ vo pāṭibhogo anāgāmitāya*.

¹⁴ *Etam atthaṃ bhagavā avoca, tath’etaṃ iti vuccati*.

¹⁵ This verse recurs in **It 9** (§9), SD 57.27.

¹⁶ *Ayam pi attho vutto bhagavatā. Iti me sutan ti*. The foll verse is quoted at Kvu 477 (Kvu:SR 273); cf V 2:205.