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## Velāma Sutta

The Discourse on Velāma (the brahmin) | A 9.20

Theme: On right giving and the best practice

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

### 1 Sutta origin

**1.2** According to **the Dhammapada Commentary**, the Buddha teaches the Velāma Sutta to console **Anātha,piṇḍika**, the sangha’s foremost lay supporter, and donor and builder of Anātha,piṇḍik’ārāma in Jeta,vana, on discovering that he has been reduced to poverty and feels disappointed in not being able to provide the sangha with excellent fares.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Sutta opens with Anātha,piṇḍika saying that he is only able to offer “**a coarse mess of broken rice grains along with sour gruel**” [§1].

The Buddha goes on to explain that it is not what one gives that matters spiritually, but **how** one gives it [§§2-3]. He then relates **a Jātaka story** of his past life as the brahmin Velāma, when he prepares a huge donation but fails to find a suitable recipient. Velāma’s story is given in full in the Aṅguttara Commentary to the Sutta,<sup>2</sup> wherein it is only a brief version.

**1.3** The introductory story to **the Khadir’aṅgāra Jātaka** (J 40)<sup>3</sup> also refers to the Velāma story. This Jātaka is of course related to Anātha,piṇḍika. A female terrestrial deity lives with her children in the upper story of his mansion, and they will come down to the ground floor whenever the Buddha visits Anātha,piṇḍika. Seeing that Anātha,piṇḍika is fervently generous, she tries to check his generosity by talking to his manager and his eldest son, but fails in her attempts.

Finally, when Anātha,piṇḍika’s wealth is exhausted, the deity approaches Anātha,piṇḍika and warns him of his impending ruin. He however orders her out of the house, and she has to obey. In despair, she seeks the help of Sakra, who suggests that she should recover all his debts, and also reveals to him some lost hidden treasure.

She conveys the message to Anātha,piṇḍika, but before pardoning her, takes her to see the Buddha, who then relates the Khadir’aṅgāra Jātaka. The Velāma Sutta is also given on this occasion. This Sutta is often referred to in the Commentaries, where it is well known as “**Velāma’s great sacrifice**” (*velāma mahā,yañña*), listed amongst the great givings or sacrifices made by the Bodhisattva.<sup>4</sup>

### 2 Significance of the Sutta

**2.1** The teaching of the Velāma Sutta is very similar to that of **the Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 142).<sup>5</sup> Due to the almost calculative nature of the astronomical numbers (84,000) [§4] and the hierarchy of gifts

<sup>1</sup> DhA 9.4/3:10 f.

<sup>2</sup> AA 4:180-183.

<sup>3</sup> J 40/1:226-334. For a continuation of the story, see **Siri J** (J 284/2:409 ff). Cf **Visayha J** (J 340/3:128-132 = Jātaka, -māla no 5), where in a past life, our Bodhisattva again makes generous gifts until Sakra’s seat heats up. See also J 1:45.

<sup>4</sup> DA 1:234; MA 1:135; AA 2:12; DhA 3:11; KhA 222; ItA 1:91, 2:48; J 1:228; VbhA 2084/414 (mentioned together with Vessantara’s giving).

<sup>5</sup> M 142/3:253-257 (SD 1.9.3); MA 3:90,14-19; AA 4:100,6-9. Both these Comys mention *velāma,mahā,yañña* (A 9.20), SD 16.6; *mahā,govinda,mahāyañña* (D 19,46-48), SD 63.4; *mahā,sudassana,mahā,yañña* (D 17) + SD 36.12 (4.1.1.1), also C 1.4; *vessantara.mahā,yañña* (J 547/\*\*\*) amongst the countless great sacrifices (*aneka,mahā,yañña*), which are part of his 10 perfections (*dasa pāramī*) leading to buddhahood. Cf king Pasenadi’s “incomparable giving”:

[§5b], the Velāma Sutta and the Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta—at least their hyperbolic numbers and hierarchy of giving—clearly lack the simplicity of the early Suttas. They are evidently late compilations, even post-Buddha. The Velāma Sutta, however, climaxes in a very ancient teaching—that of the perception of impermanence.<sup>6</sup> [2.3]

**2.2** While the legend of Velāma’s great offering is related for the benefit of Anātha,piṇḍika (the Buddha’s chief layman supporter), another similar story—that of “the incomparable giving” (*asadisa,dāna*)—is given in connection with king Pasenadi (the Buddha’s chief royal supporter).<sup>7</sup> This legend is related as a story of the past in **the Āditta Jātaka** (J 424) in connection with giving alms to pratyeka-buddhas,<sup>8</sup> and in **the Asadisa,dāna Vatthu** (DhA 13.10) regarding king Pasenadi’s incomparable giving to the Buddha and the sangha.<sup>9</sup> Velāma’s giving clearly outdoes even Pasenadi’s “incomparable giving.”

**2.3** The most significant part of the Velāma Sutta is its closing, that is, the statement that the perception of impermanence (*anicca,saññā*), if done “**for even the moment of a finger-snap**” [§5.2] is better than the cultivation of lovingkindness, or observing the precepts, or going for refuge, or building a monastery, or feeding the Buddha, or feeding the Sangha, or doing any other kind of material giving. It is important to also see this in proper context: it does not mean here that the perception of impermanence could or should be done to the exclusion of the other mentioned teachings (especially the cultivation of loving-kindness, the observance of precepts, going for refuge and practising charity). Rather, they should be practised in relation to one another, with priority given to the perception of impermanence.

The perception of impermanence here should be taken in the context of streamwinning, especially those teachings given in two remarkable suttas related to lay spiritual training (but also suitable for monastics who are not striving for arhathood), namely, **the Sa,upādisesa Sutta** (A 9.12)<sup>10</sup> and **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1).<sup>11</sup> In fact, the last practice on the list (the most important), that is, the perception on impermanence, leads to the very first person on the list, that is, the one endowed with right view (that is, the streamwinner).

**2.4** Finally, it is important to understand that the Velāma Sutta is not about numbers, but *a reminder on the priority of spiritual practice*—that the teaching comes before the teachers. Giving may well be good, but it has an instrumental purpose, that of serving as a wholesome support for mental concentrations, which in turn should be instrumental in one’s realizing insight wisdom, leading to spiritual liberation.

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**Asadisa,dāna Vatthu** (DhA 13.10/3:182-192), SD 22.10; & Kūṭa,danta’s sacrifice: **(Pasenadi) Yañña S** (S 3.9/1:75 f), SD 22.11.

<sup>6</sup> The 6 advantages of contemplating impermanence are listed in **(Ānisaṃsa) Anicca Saññā S** (A 6.102): “(1) All formations will be appear transient to me (*sabba,saṅkhārā ca me anavaṭṭhito khāyissanti*). (2) My mind will not delight in all the world [or in the world of the all] (*sabba,loke ca me mano nābhiraṃissati*). (3) My mind will rise above all the world (*sabba,lokā ca me mano vuṭṭhahissati*). (4) My mind will tend towards nirvana (*nibbāna,poṇaṇi ca me mānasam bhavissati*). (5) The mental fetters will be broken by me (*saṃyojanā ca me pahānaṃ gacchanti*). And (6) I shall attain to supreme recluseship (*paramena ca sāmaññaena samannāgato bhavissāmī ti*)” (A 6.102/-3:443), SD 93.7.

<sup>7</sup> That is, after the death of Bimbisāra, a streamwinner and chief royal supporter. He dies from the tortures inflicted on him by his own son, Ajāta,sattu. See **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2/1:47-86), SD 8.10 (1), esp D 2,99-102 (the Sutta conclusion).

<sup>8</sup> J 424/3:469-474 @ SD 22.10a (1.2).

<sup>9</sup> DhA 13.10/3:182-192 @ SD 22.10 (3.2).

<sup>10</sup> A 9.12/4:378-382 @ SD 3.3(3).

<sup>11</sup> S 25.1/3:225 (SD 16.7).

### 3 The Sa,upādisesa Sutta

**3.1 In the Sa,upādisesa Sutta** (A 9.12), the Buddha, on being questioned by Sāriputta regarding the destiny of other sectarian wanderers, gives a teaching of the 9 kinds of saints (5 kinds of non-returner, the once-returner, and 3 kinds of streamwinner), and concludes with these words, on the ease of becoming a streamwinner:<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, Sāriputta, here a certain person fulfills moral virtue, but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom.<sup>13</sup> With the total destruction of the 3 fetters,<sup>14</sup> he is a **single-seeder**,<sup>15</sup> having taken only one more human birth, makes an end of suffering.<sup>16</sup>

This, Sāriputta, is the 7<sup>th</sup> person ...

Furthermore, Sāriputta, here a certain person fulfills moral virtue, but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom.<sup>17</sup> With the total destruction of the 3 fetters, he is a **clan-to-clan-goer**,<sup>18</sup> having re-arisen and wandered amongst two or three families, makes an end of suffering.<sup>19</sup>

This, Sāriputta, is the 8<sup>th</sup> person ...

Furthermore, Sāriputta, here a certain person fulfills moral virtue, but gains only limited concentration, gains only limited wisdom.<sup>20</sup> With the total destruction of the 3 fetters, he is a **seven-at-most**,<sup>21</sup> having re-arisen and wandered amongst gods and humans for seven lives at the most, makes an end of suffering.<sup>22</sup>

This, Sāriputta, is the 9<sup>th</sup> person who having died with the aggregates of existence remaining is freed from hell, freed from the animal kingdom, freed from the preta realm [the realm of the departed], freed from the state of misery, the bad destination, the suffering state.

Sāriputta, some of the wanderers of other faiths are foolish and unintelligent; some will know those with the aggregates of existence remaining as those with the aggregates of existence

<sup>12</sup> See **Sa,upādisesa S** (A 9.12/4:378-382), SD 3.3(3).

<sup>13</sup> *Idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī.* PTS ed has wr: *idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ na paripūrakārī, paññāya na paripūrakārī.*

<sup>14</sup> They are the first 3 of **the 10 fetters** (*saṃyojana*): (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vici-kicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no. 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram,bhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham,bhāgiya*). For details on the 3 fetters, see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

<sup>15</sup> *Eka,bījī.*

<sup>16</sup> *Puna ca paramṃ Sāriputta idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī. So tinnam saṃyojanānam parikkhayā eka,bījī hoti ekañ-ñeva mānusakam bhavam nibbattetvā dukkhass'antam karoti.*

<sup>17</sup> *Idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī.*

<sup>18</sup> *Kolaṃ,kola.*

<sup>19</sup> *Puna ca paramṃ Sāriputta idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī. So tinnam saṃyojanānam parikkhayā kolaṅkolo hoti, dve vā tīṇi vā kulāni sandhāvitvā saṃsaritvā dukkhass'antakaro.*

<sup>20</sup> *Idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti, samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī.*

<sup>21</sup> *Satta-k,khattu,parama.*

<sup>22</sup> *Puna ca paramṃ Sāriputta idh'ekacco puggalo sīlesu paripūrakārī hoti samādhismiṃ mattaso,kārī, paññāya mattaso,kārī. So tinnam saṃyojanānam parikkhayā satta-k,khattu,paramo hoti, satta-k,khattu,paramam deve ca mānuse ca sandhāvitvā saṃsaritvā dukkhass'antam karoti.*

remaining; some will know those without aggregates remaining as those without aggregates of existence remaining.

Sāriputta, these are the 9 persons who, having died with the aggregates of existence remaining, are freed from hell, freed from the animal kingdom, freed from the preta realm, freed from the state of misery, the bad destination, the suffering state.

Not until now, Sāriputta, has this Dharma discourse been declared to monks, nuns, laymen or laywomen. What is the reason for this?

So that after hearing this Dharma discourse, they do not bring heedlessness upon themselves! Moreover, Sāriputta, this Dharma discourse has been given by me simply because of my being questioned. (A 9.12/4:381 f)

**3.2** What is interesting about the Sa,upādisesa Sutta is that it does not mention arhathood as a goal, and concludes with the mention that if such a teaching were openly promoted, the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen would be “heedless,” that is, not consider arhathood when they are capable of doing so. But in the course of his teaching, when questioned, he nevertheless gives this short-cut, as it were, to awakening.

**3.3** A survey of the early suttas will reveal a 10<sup>th</sup> type of “saint” (or saint-to-be) as it were, one which later authorities called “**the lesser streamwinner**” (*cūḷa,sotāpanna, culla,sotāpanna*). This is the person working his way to become a streamwinner in this life itself. The main teaching for such postulants is the perception of impermanence, mentioned at the climactic close of the Velāma Sutta.

#### 4 (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta

The best known sutta that speaks of entering the stream here and now, that is, becoming a **lesser streamwinner**, is the short but remarkable (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1),<sup>23</sup> whose key passage runs as follows:

Bhikshus,	
<u>the eye</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.
<u>The ear</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.
<u>The nose</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.
<u>The tongue</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.
<u>The body</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.
<u>The mind</u>	is impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

Bhikshus, one who has faith thus, who firmly believes in these truths [is convinced of these truths], is called a **faith-follower**,...<sup>24</sup>

Bhikshus, one who accepts these truths after pondering over them with some wisdom thus,<sup>25</sup> is called a **truth-follower**,

he has entered the fixed course of rightness, entered the plane of superior persons, gone beyond the plane of the worldlings.

<sup>23</sup> S 25.1/3:225 @ SD 16.7; also the other 9 suttas in **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25). See also Gethin 2001:133-138.

<sup>24</sup> *Yo bhikkhave ime dhamme evaṃ saddahati adhimuccati, ayaṃ vuccati saddhā'nusārī okkanto sammatta,niyāmaṃ sappurisa,bhūmim okkanto vītivatto putthajjana,bhūmim.* The operative verbs here are *saddahati* (“he has faith (in)”) and *adhimuccati* (“he resolves, adheres to, is sure of”). I have rendered *adhimuccati* here as “(he) firmly believes...”.

<sup>25</sup> *Yassa kho bhikkhave ime dhammā evaṃ paññāya mattaso nijjhānaṃ khamanti.*

He is incapable of doing any intentional deed  
by which he might be reborn in hell, or in the animal world, or in the ghost realm.  
He is incapable of dying without attaining the fruit of stream-winning.<sup>26</sup>

(S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7

The message of this short but remarkable Sutta—and the Velāma Sutta, especially its closing instruction—is clear: the reflection on impermanence is the beginning of the path of awakening through stream-winning. Whether we merely have faith in the impermanence of the six senses (that is, as a faith-follower, *saddhā'nusārī*), or accept this truth after wisely examining (that is, as a truth-follower, *dhammānusārī*), we are assured of becoming a streamwinner. We would not die without having realized the fruit of stream-winning in this life itself.

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## Velāma Sutta

### The Discourse on Velāma (the brahmin)

A 9.20

1 (Thus have I heard.)

At one time, the Blessed One was dwelling in Anāthapiṇḍika's Park in Jeta's Forest near Sāvattihī. Then, the houselord **Anātha,piṇḍika** approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he saluted him and sat down at one side.

1.2 When Anātha,piṇḍika was seated thus at one side, the Blessed One said this to him:<sup>27</sup>

"Houselord, **are alms given in your family?**"<sup>28</sup>

"Yes, bhante, alms are given in my family; but it consists of a coarse mess of broken rice grains along with sour gruel."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Abhabbo taṃ kammaṃ kātuṃ yaṃ kammaṃ katvā nirayaṃ vā tiracchāna, yonim vā petti, visayaṃ vā uppajjeyya. Abhabbo ca tāva kālaṃ kātuṃ yāva na sotāpatti, phalaṃ sacchikaroti.*

<sup>27</sup> **Jātaka Comy** says that Anātha,piṇḍika regularly goes to see the Buddha twice a day, sometimes with numerous friends (J 1:9 ff). The Jātaka Comy adds that he sometimes visits the Buddha thrice a day (J 1:226). However, he never asks the Buddha a single question fearing that it might weary him (recalling that the Buddha was "a delicate prince"). He does not wish the Buddha to feel obliged to answer him in return for his generosity to the sangha. As such, the Buddha would usually address him first, as on this occasion (DhA 1:3). There is however at least one discourse given in response to Anātha,piṇḍika's questioning, ie, regarding who are those worthy of offerings (A 2.4.4/-1:62 f), and he also consults the Buddha regarding the marriage of his daughter, Cūḷa Subhaddā (DhA 3:466). Further, see **Anātha,piṇḍika S 1** (S 55.26), SD 23.2a (1).

<sup>28</sup> Comy notes that this question is not asked concerning gifts to the sangha, but to the world in general (*lokiya, mahā, janassa*) (AA 4:178). Cf *Vinaya Texts* 3:9n; S 1:318 = S:W 1:115 & AA 795; D 2:354.

<sup>29</sup> *Diyyati me bhante kule dānaṃ; tañ ca kho lūkharṃ kaṇḍajakarṃ bilaṅga, dutiyan ti.* Comy: The Blessed One does not ask this regarding alms to the sangha of monks. For, in Anātha,piṇḍika's home, excellent food is constantly given to the monks. But the alms given to the masses is coarse, which does not please Anātha,piṇḍika. Hence, the Buddha asks with that intention." In fact, this Sutta is given to Anātha,piṇḍika when he has become poor. A Chin parallel, EĀ 27.3 (T2.125.644b22-23), confirms this in an almost identical account: 貧家恒行布施。又飲食麤弊。不與常同 *pín jiā héng xíng bùshī, yòu yǐnshí cū bì, bù yǔ cháng tóng*, "My poor family will always practise giving, but the food is coarse and not the same as before." MĀ 155 (T1.26.677a13-14): 家行布施。但為至麤不能好也 *jiā xíng bùshī, dàn wéi zhì cū bùnéng hǎo yě*, "My family practises giving, but it's mostly coarse food, I cannot afford good quality."

## The wrong way of giving (by the false person)

2 <sup>30</sup>“Houselord, whether one gives a gift [alms] that are coarse or choice, when<sup>31</sup>  
 one gives carelessly [without thoroughness], *asakkaccaṃ deti*  
 one gives thoughtlessly, *acittī, katvā deti*<sup>32</sup>  
 one gives not with one’s own hands, *asahatthā deti*<sup>33</sup>  
 one gives as if throwing something away [what would be discarded],<sup>34</sup> *apaviddhaṃ deti*  
 one gives without seeing what is to come [future fruit],<sup>35</sup> *anāgamana, diṭṭhiko deti*  
 then, wherever that almsgiving bears fruit,<sup>36</sup>  
 his mind will not turn to the enjoyment of good food,  
*his mind will not turn* to the enjoyment of fine clothes,  
*his mind will not turn* to the enjoyment of splendid carriages,  
*his mind will not turn* to the enjoyment of the 5 cords of sense-pleasures in their sweetness.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>38</sup>One’s [393] sons or women [wives and daughters] or servants or messengers or workers  
 will not have the desire to listen to one,  
*will not have the desire* to give ear,  
*will not have the desire* to focus their minds to understand.  
 Why is that?  
 Such, houselord, is the result of deeds done carelessly.

<sup>30</sup> This whole section: *Lukhañ ca pi gahapati dānaṃ deti pañītaṃ vā, tañ ca asakkaccaṃ deti, acittikatvā deti, asahatthā ca deti, apaviddhaṃ deti, anāgamana, diṭṭhiko deti; yattha yattha tassa tassa dānassa vipāko nibbattati, na uḷārāya bhatta, bhogāya cittaṃ namati, na uḷārāya vattha, bhogāya cittaṃ namati, na uḷārāya yāna, bhogāya cittaṃ namati, na uḷāresu pañcāsu kāma, guṇesu bhogāya cittaṃ namati.*

<sup>31</sup> These are the 5 wrong ways of offering alms: also at **Asappurisa Dāna S** (A 5.147).

<sup>32</sup> Be *acittikatvā*; Ce *avintīkatvā*; Ee *acittikatvā*; Se *apacittim katvā*.

<sup>33</sup> Omitted in Ce.

<sup>34</sup> “As if throwing something away,” *apaviddhaṃ*, also “rejected, abandoned (often of a dead body),” D 3:256,2 ≠ M 2:22,20 (MA 4:81,10: **apaviddhan ti chaḍḍetu, kāmo hutvā vammike uragaṃ pakkhipanto viya deti**, “he gives with the desire of throwing away, as if casting a snake onto an anthill”); S 3:143; Sn 200; Dh 292; Th 315; J 3:426,20\*, 6:499,6\*.

<sup>35</sup> Ie, with a view that it will come to nothing. These 4 lines as at **Cūḷa Puṇṇama S** (M 110.12/3:22), where M:ÑB has: “Here an untrue man (*asappurisa*) gives a gift carelessly, gives it not with his own hand, gives it without showing respect, gives what is to be discarded, gives it with the view that nothing will come of it” (M:ÑB 893).

<sup>36</sup> See S 1:92.

<sup>37</sup> “Nor to the enjoyment ... in their sweetness,” *na uḷāresu pañasu kāma, guṇesu bhogāya cittaṃ namati.*

<sup>38</sup> This para: *Ye pi’ssa te honti puttā ti vā dārā ti vā dāsā ti vā pessā ti vā kammakarā ti vā, te pi na sussusanti na sotam odahati na añña, cittaṃ upaṭṭhapenti.*

## The right way of giving (by the true individual)

3 Houselord, whether one gives a gift [alms] that are coarse or choice, when<sup>39</sup>

(1) one gives with **care** [with thoroughness],<sup>40</sup>

*sakkaccaṃ deti*

(2) one gives after **some thought**,<sup>41</sup>

*citti, katvā deti*

(3) one gives **with one's own hands**,

*sahatthā deti*

(4) one gives **not as if throwing something away**,<sup>42</sup>

*anapaviddhaṃ deti*

(5) one gives **seeing what is to come**,<sup>43</sup>

*āgamana, diṭṭhiko deti*

then, wherever that almsgiving bears fruit,

his mind will turn to the enjoyment of good food, or

*his mind will turn to the enjoyment of fine cloth*, or

*his mind will turn to the enjoyment of splendid carriages [vehicles]*, or

*his mind will turn to the enjoyment of the 5 cords of sense-pleasures in their sweetness.*

One's sons or women [wives and daughters] or servants or messengers or workers will have the desire to listen to one, and

*will have the desire to give ear*, and

*will have the desire to focus their minds* to understand.<sup>44</sup>

Why is that?

Such, houselord, is the result of deeds done with care.

<sup>39</sup> These are the 5 right ways of offering alms: also at **Sappurisa Dāna S** (A 5.147): also SD 23.7 (3.1). An almost identical list of 5 conditions of giving is found in **Cūḷa Punnama S** (M 100,23/3:24), SD 45.4. First 4 factors at **Pāyāsi S** (D 23,32.19, pl), SD 39.4. For various conditions of giving, see **Aputtaka S 2** (S 3.20/1:91-93), SD 22.5 (2).

<sup>40</sup> See (**Khetta**) **Desanā S** (S 42.7,2), SD 51.12.

<sup>41</sup> (**Aṭṭha**) **Dāna Ss 1-2** (A 8.31-31/4:236 = SD 6.6) advise here thus: "One gives thinking, "This is an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind," ie to facilitate one's spiritual development.

<sup>42</sup> That is, not "dumping" away things that we do not want any more, but rather by way of sharing our good fortune, and to do so mindfully.

<sup>43</sup> *Āgamana, diṭṭhiko deti*, lit "he gives with the view of the coming," ie with a view of its wholesome karmic results. Cf *ayañ ca etad-aggā, sannikkhepo nāma catūhi kāraṇehi labbhati: atth'uppattito āgamanato ciñña, vasito guṇātirekato ti*, "and as regards this laying down of **the foremost position**, one gains it in 4 ways, namely, (1) on account of the arising of the goal (*attha*), (2) on account of regard for the future (*āgamana*), (3) on account of the virtue of habit (*ciñña*), and (4) on account of one's exceptional virtue (AA 1:125,6)—which is spoken in connection with those disciples who have attained to their respective foremost positions. That is to say, after doing various acts of merit, with their minds wholesomely focuses, they aspire towards their desired position. Similarly, as taught in such suttas, esp the last (and most important) reason for giving—one gives thinking, "This is an adornment for the mind, a support for the mind" (*cittālaṅkāraṃ citta, parikkhār'attham*): see (**Maha-p, phala**) **Dāna S** (A 7.49/4:59-62), SD 2.3, **Dāna S 1** (A 8.31/4:236), SD 6.6a, & **Dāna Vatthu S** (A 8.33/4:236 f), SD 6.6c. On *āgamanto*, see AA 1:128,23, 132,17, 133,15, 134,5.

<sup>44</sup> This para: *Ye pi'ssa te honti puttā ti vā dārā ti vā dāsā ti vā pessā ti vā kammakarā ti vā, te pi na sussusanti na sotam odahati na añña, cittaṃ upaṭṭhapenti.*

## The Velāma Jātaka<sup>45</sup>

### The brahmin Velāma's giving

**4** Long ago, houselord, there was the brahmin **Velāma**. He made a giving, a **great giving**, such as these:<sup>46</sup>

- (1) he gave 84,000 golden bowls full of **silver**;
- (2) he gave 84,000 silver bowls full of **gold**;
- (3) he gave 84,000 copper bowls full of **gems**;
- (4) he gave 84,000 **elephants**, caparisoned in gold, with golden banners, each covered with a golden net;
- (5) he gave 84,000 **chariots**, spread with lion-skins, with tiger-skins, with leopard-skins, with saffron-coloured blankets, with gold trappings, with golden banners, each covered with a golden net;
- (6) he gave 84,000 **milk cows** spread over with fine jute cloth,<sup>47</sup> with silver milk-pails;<sup>48</sup>
- (7) he gave 84,000 **maidens**, adorned with jewelled ear-rings;
- (8) he gave 84,000 **couches**, [394] spread over with long-furred rugs, and coverlets embroidered with long-furred rugs, embroidered white woollen sheets, choice rugs of Kadalī deer hide, spreads with red canopies, and crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the head and feet;<sup>49</sup>
- (9) he gave 84,000<sup>50</sup> **pieces of cloth** of fine flax, of fine silk,<sup>51</sup> of fine wool, of fine cotton.

And what more to say of **the food and drinks**: food hard and soft, food to be licked and drunk,<sup>52</sup> flowing like a river, I say!

<sup>45</sup> This canonical Jātaka is not found amongst the commentarial 547 Jātakas. See **Myths in Buddhism**, SD 36.1 (3.4.3). Cf **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17), SD 36.12.

<sup>46</sup> *Bhūta, pubbaṃ gahapati velāmo nāma brāhmaṇo ahoṣi, so eva, rūpaṃ dānaṃ adāsi mahādānaṃ*. Clearly, it is on account of these 9 kinds of giving that this Sutta is located in the book of nines, **Navaka Nipāta**.

<sup>47</sup> *Caturāsīti dhenu, saḥassāni adāsi dukūla, santhanāni kaṃsūpadhāraṇāni*. Be *sandhanāni*; Ce *sandassanāni*; Ee *Se santhanāni*. DPL gives *dukūla* as “fine cloth.” Cf E M Hare’s tr of *dukūla, santhanāni*, “with tethers of fine jute” (A:H 4:263). PED defines *sandāna* as “A cord, tether, fetter.”

<sup>48</sup> Comys gloss *kaṃsūpadhāraṇāni* with *rajata, maya, khīra, paṭicchakāni* (AA 4:184,14) ≈ *rajata, maya, doha, bhājanāni* (SA 2:325,19), “silver vessels for milk.” *Kaṃsa* usu means “bronze.” DP explains *kaṃsūpadhāraṇa* as “yielding a pailful of milk, or with a metal milking-pail.” AA adds that the milch cows’ horns were covered with sheaths of gold; garlands of jasmine were placed around their necks’ their 4 feet had ornaments; fine jute cloth spread over their backs; a golden bell was tied around their necks (AA 4:184,14-18). Some of this can still be seen practised in India today.

<sup>49</sup> *Caturāsīti pallaṅka, saḥassāni adāsi gonak’atthatāni paṭik’atthatāni paṭalik’atthatāni kadali, miga, vara, pacattharanāni sa, uttara-c, chaddāni ubhato lohitaḥpadhānāni*. Almost as at **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17,2.5/2:187), SD 36.12.

<sup>50</sup> Comy says that conventionally 1 *koṭi* is 20 pairs of cloth, but here 10 (pairs of) garments are meant (AA 4:184,-20); prob ref to dhoti and kurta: SD 43.8 (2.3.1.2).

<sup>51</sup> Evidently, silk was available in India in the Buddha’s time. Recent microscopic analysis of archaeological thread fragments found inside copper-alloy ornaments from Harappa and steatite beads from Chanhu-daro, two important Indus sites, have yielded silk fibres, dating to c 2450-2000 BCE: see Ball, “Rethinking silk’s origin,” 2009 & Good, Kenoyer & Meadow, “New evidence for early silk in the Indus civilization” 2009. On silk in the Indian sub-continent, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk\\_in\\_the\\_Indian\\_subcontinent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_in_the_Indian_subcontinent).

<sup>52</sup> *Annassa pānassa khajjassa bhajjassa leyyassa peyyassa*. *Leyya*, from *lihati*, to lick or to be licked, such as honey, molasses, palm sugar, something syrupy.



5 Houselord, you might think, thus:

‘Perhaps, this brahmin Velāma who gave those great gifts were someone else. But, houselord, it is not to be viewed thus.

At that time, houselord, **I was the brahmin Velāma**; I made that great giving.

But then, there were none worthy of the gifts; no one purified [blessed] the gifts.<sup>53</sup>

### Greater than the great giving

An inverse scale of true practice

#### 6 THE CULTIVATION OF LOVINGKINDNESS

- (1) For, houselord, though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving, were he to feed a single person endowed with [attained to] **right view** (*diṭṭhi, sampanna*),<sup>54</sup> greater would be the fruit.
- (2) And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving,<sup>55</sup> even if he had fed 100 persons of right view, greater would be the fruit were he to feed **a single once-returned**.
- (3) And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving, even if he had fed 100 once-returneds, greater would be the fruit were he to feed **a single non-returned**.
- (4) And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving, even if he had fed 100 non-returneds, greater would be the fruit were he to feed **a single arhat**.
- (5) And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving, even if he had fed 100 arhats, greater would be the fruit were he to **[395] feed a single pratyeka-buddha**.
- (6) And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving, even if he had fed 100 pratyeka-buddhas, greater would be the fruit were he to feed **the Tathagata**, arhat [worthy one], fully self-awakened one.<sup>56</sup>
- (7) And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving, even if he had fed **the sangha of monks with the Buddha at the head**, greater would be the fruit were he to **build a monastery** dedicated to the sangha of the 4 quarters.

<sup>53</sup> *Tasmim̄ kho pana gahapati dāne na koci dakkhiṇeyyo ahoṣi, na taṃ koci dakkhiṇaṃ visodheti*. This means that no one was “pure” enough, ie, has the past good karma of being able to enjoy the giving, and the present wholesome mind of rejoicing in it, benefitting the giver.

<sup>54</sup> That is, a streamwinner (*sotāpanna*) (AA 4:185): see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

<sup>55</sup> Be omits this line throughout this section; the line is found in other MSS.

<sup>56</sup> Note here that **the Tathagata** (the Buddha) is mentioned only once as an individual. This testifies to the teaching of a single Buddha in a world system: **Pavāraṇā S** (S 8.7), SD 49.11; **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10.

- (8) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving, even if he had, built a monastery dedicated to the sangha of the 4 quarters, greater would be the fruit were he, bright with faith, to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha.*
- (9) *And, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving, even if he had, bright with faith, taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, greater would be the fruit were he, bright with faith, to take upon himself the training-rules<sup>57</sup>— to abstain from taking life, to abstain from taking the not-given, to abstain from sexual misconduct, to abstain from false speech, to abstain from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which causes heedlessness—*

6.2 greater would be the fruit were he to cultivate a heart of lovingkindness for even just as long as it takes to tug at a cow's teat (to milk it).<sup>58</sup>  
[for even just as long as a whiff of incense fragrance].<sup>59</sup> [§7.3]

## 7 THE PERCEPTION OF IMPERMANENCE

For, houselord, even though the brahmin Velāma made that giving, that great giving, **greater would be the fruit:**

were he to feed	<i>a single person</i> endowed with [attained to] <u>right view</u> , and
were he to feed	100 <u>persons</u> of right view, and
were he to feed	<i>a single once-returned</i> , and
were he to feed	100 once-returneds, and
were he to feed	<i>a single non-returned</i> , and
were he to feed	100 non-returneds, and
were he to feed	<i>a single arhat</i> , and

<sup>57</sup> This is one of the canonical locations for the well known **5 precepts** (*pañca, sīla*) that we recite today.

<sup>58</sup> "If he were to cultivate ... just as long as it takes to tug at the cow's teat (to milk it)," *antamaso gaddūhana, mattam pi metta, cittam bhāveyya*. Comys gloss **gaddūhana, matta** as *goduhana, mattam* (lit "the extent of a cow-milking") or more fully, *gāvīm ṭhane gahetvā ekam khīra, bindum dūhana, kāla. mattampi*, "for just the time it takes, having tugged at the cow's teat, to get a drop of milk"; alternatively, they gloss it as *gandha, ūhana, mattam* (lit "the extent of a scent-sniff"), ie the time it take for a single sniff of a piece of incense nipped between two fingers (MA 4:195 = SA 2:224 = AA 4:195). The expression also occurs in **Okkha S** (S 20.4/2:264) in the same connection, ie the moment it takes to cultivate lovingkindness, as praised by the Buddha. The expression is also found in **Bakkula S** (M 124,33/3:127 = SD 3.15), where Bakkula claims that he had never been sick for even such a short moment. From here on, PTS repeats the whole of §5b, concluding with the following section.

<sup>59</sup> "If he were to cultivate ... just as long as it takes to tug at the cow's teat (to milk it)," *antamaso gaddūhana, mattam pi metta, cittam bhāveyya*. Comys gloss **gaddūhana, matta** as *goduhana, mattam* (lit "the extent of a cow-milking") or more fully, *gāvīm ṭhane gahetvā ekam khīra, bindum dūhana, kāla. mattampi*, "for just the time it takes, having tugged at the cow's teat, to get a drop of milk"; alternatively, they gloss it as *gandha, ūhana, mattam* (lit "the extent of a scent-sniff"), ie the time it take for a single sniff of a piece of incense nipped between two fingers (MA 4:195 = SA 2:224 = AA 4:195). The expression also occurs in **Okkha S** (S 20.4/2:264) in the same connection, ie the moment it takes to cultivate lovingkindness, as praised by the Buddha. The expression is also found in **Bakkula S** (M 124,33/3:127 = SD 3.15), where Bakkula claims that he had never been sick for even such a short moment. From here on, PTS repeats the whole of §5b, concluding with the following section.

were he to feed	100 arhats, and
were he to feed	<i>a single pratyeka-buddha</i> , and
were he to feed	100 pratyeka-buddhas, and
were he to feed	<b>the Tathagata</b> , arhat [worthy one], fully self-awakened one, and
were he to feed	<u>the sangha of monks with the Buddha at the head</u> , and
were he to build	<u>a monastery dedicated to the sangha of the 4 quarters</u> , and
were he, bright with faith,	<b>to take refuge</b> in the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha, and
were he, bright with faith,	to take upon himself <b>the training-rules</b> —
to abstain from	taking life,
to abstain from	taking the not-given,
to abstain from	sexual misconduct,
to abstain from	false speech,
to abstain from	strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which causes heedlessness—

7.2 greater would be the fruit were he to **cultivate a heart of lovingkindness** [396]

for even just as long as it takes to tug at the cow's teat (to milk it).<sup>60</sup>

[for even just as long as a whiff of incense fragrance];<sup>61</sup>

7.3 greater still would be the fruit were he to cultivate **the perception of impermanence**<sup>62</sup>

for even *the moment of a finger-snap*.<sup>63</sup>

— evaṃ —

<sup>60</sup> "If he were to cultivate ... just as long as it takes to tug at the cow's teat (to milk it)," *antamaso gaddūhana, mattaṃ pi metta, cittaṃ bhāveyya*. Comys gloss **gaddūhana, matta** as *goduhana, mattaṃ* (lit "the extent of a cow-milking") or more fully, *gāvirṃ ṭhane gahetvā ekaṃ khīra, binduṃ dūhana, kāla. mattampi*, "for just the time it takes, having tugged at the cow's teat, to get a drop of milk"; alternatively, they gloss it as *gandha, ūhana, mattaṃ* (lit "the extent of a scent-sniff"), ie the time it take for a single sniff of a piece of incense nipped between two fingers (MA 4:195 = SA 2:224 = AA 4:195). The expression also occurs in **Okkha S** (S 20.4/2:264) in the same connection, ie the moment it takes to cultivate lovingkindness, as praised by the Buddha. The expression is also found in **Bakkula S** (M 124,33/3:127 = SD 3.15), where Bakkula claims that he had never been sick for even such a short moment. From here on, PTS repeats the whole of §5b, concluding with the following section.

<sup>61</sup> "If he were to cultivate ... just as long as it takes to tug at the cow's teat (to milk it)," *antamaso gaddūhana, mattaṃ pi metta, cittaṃ bhāveyya*. Comys gloss **gaddūhana, matta** as *goduhana, mattaṃ* (lit "the extent of a cow-milking") or more fully, *gāvirṃ ṭhane gahetvā ekaṃ khīra, binduṃ dūhana, kāla. mattampi*, "for just the time it takes, having tugged at the cow's teat, to get a drop of milk"; alternatively, they gloss it as *gandha, ūhana, mattaṃ* (lit "the extent of a scent-sniff"), ie the time it take for a single sniff of a piece of incense nipped between two fingers (MA 4:195 = SA 2:224 = AA 4:195). The expression also occurs in **Okkha S** (S 20.4/2:264) in the same connection, ie the moment it takes to cultivate lovingkindness, as praised by the Buddha. The expression is also found in **Bakkula S** (M 124,33/3:127 = SD 3.15), where Bakkula claims that he had never been sick for even such a short moment. From here on, PTS repeats the whole of §5b, concluding with the following section.

<sup>62</sup> Comy: **The perception of impermanence** is strong insight at its peak, an immediate condition for the path (*anicca, saññān'ti maggassa anantara, paccaya, bhāvena sikhā, patta, balava, vipassanaṃ*, AA 4:187,7 f). Note that the perception of impermanence is mentioned only *last* and only *once*, making it the Sutta's climax (the key teaching).

<sup>63</sup> "For even the moment of a finger-snap," *accharā, saṅghāta, mattaṃ*. Also in **Cū!accharā S** (A 1.6,3-5/A 1:10), in the same context of lovingkindness. See (2.3). This is the "supreme worship" (*anuttara pūjā*) [*parama, pūñā*, (D 16,-5.3.2) + SD 9 (7.2)] the Buddha referred to as the practice of the Dharma in accordance with the Dhamma at the time of his passing away. (AA 4:187,19 f)

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