60.7  

**Yassa dāni ... kālam maññāti**

Formula for departure or invitation?

A brief study by Tan Beng Sin (Piya Tan) ©2023

1 **Yassa dāni bhagavā kālam maññāti**

1.1 **OCCURRENCES OF THE FORMULA**

1.1.1 SD 60.6 (3.3)

We did a brief study of the above formula in SD 60.6 (3.3). This is a more elaborate examination of it. The phrase *yassa dāni bhagavā kālam maññāti ti*, “It’s time, let the Blessed One do as he deems fit,” is stock. It appears in other situations (with other people), with some syntactical variations to reflect the social context. Here it serves simply as a polite announcement that the meal-offering is ready and that the Buddha may arrive at the meal-hall at his convenience.

There are well over 50 occurrences of the *yassa dāni* pericope in the Pali canon (almost all in the suttas, a few in the Vinaya), used in various situations, as will be seen below.

1.1.2 Joy Manné’s paper (1993)

1.1.2.1 As a young student of early Buddhism, scholar Joy Manné, wrote a paper about the *yassa dāni* stock phrase entitled “On a departure formula and its translation.”¹ To be clear, Manné did not actually discuss the *yassa dāni* formula in general, but a special occurrence of it, which she identified as a “departure formula,” of which there are many instances in the suttas. This was research she did as part of her doctoral dissertation in 1991.²

As the text for the departure formula, Manné quotes this pair of sentences:

(a) *Handa ca dāni mayarī (bhante) gacchāma, bahu,kiccā mayarī bahu,karāṇīyā ti;*

   “Well, (bhante,) I must go now. I have many duties and much work.”

(b) *Yassa dāni tvam (mahā, rāja) kālam maññasī ti.*

   “It’s time, (maharajah,) do as you deem fit.”

This departure formula (Pali) is often found in the narrative passages of the suttas. Manné has numbered them as (1) and (2), but I have used (a) and (b) respectively so as not to be confused with the numbering in my list below, which is romanized. The speaker of (a) is the “great king” (*mahā, rāja*), while is the Buddha as respondent. Hence, (a) the actual departure formula, and (b) the formal response.³

1.1.2.2 Manné’s paper is an example of how a scholar would approach sutta as literature by trying to figure out the various possible nuances, situations or contexts of the dialogue in which the stock phrase occurs. According to Manné:

The question is[:] do the various translations of this formula reflect the different situations in which it occurs, and are they therefore sensitively responding to the sense and atmosphere of

---


³ Curiously, Manné qu N Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966: ch III. But there is no such discussion at all in Wagle’s book. Moreover, the book is poorly written, sketchy and repetitive.

http://dharmafarer.org
the texts when they vary their terminology? Or is there one consistent translation that would fit all cases?

This is not simply a matter of words. The suttas are not only religious documents: they are also narrative literature. The choice of words in a sutta is intended to influence us, and the words we choose (or accept) in translation both reflect and influence our understanding and interpretation of the sutta.

Formulas play an important part in this (as in other) oral literature. They function, whatever their length, not only to indicate the type of literature but also as a short-hand for setting an atmosphere, for indicating a particular state of affairs, for summarising a character, for showing social status and for creating expectations on the part of the listener, as well as to render the communication of the Teaching consistent and easily memorable.

If we correctly and fully grasp what its formulas imply, we are aided in our appreciation of this literature. If we misunderstand them we may also miss important points, make false interpretations and generally be led astray.

(Manné 1993:29, paragged)

Manné’s suggestions are clearly applicable when we study the suttas as literature; she is aware that suttas are “not simply a matter of words.” She even accepts the fact that they “are not only religious documents; they are also narrative literature” but she tells us no more; she stops right there.

1.1.2.3 Understandably, too, her paper, interesting and intuitive as it is, is limited by her notion that it is “narrative.” She misses a vital quality that thinking Buddhists see in the suttas—that the early texts are authentic spiritual records of the awakening experiences of the Buddha and the early saints, and thus a guide for Buddhist seekers today.

When we study the suttas carefully, especially as an integral whole, and work the trajectories of the various texts and contexts of the suttas, these will guide us to the kind of practice and path of freedom as envisioned in early Buddhism. When we fail to do this or see the suttas in worldly ways, then we have misunderstood the nature and purpose of the suttas. Then, as Manné concludes, “If we misunderstand them we may also miss important points, make false interpretations and generally be led astray.”

1.1.2.4 The suttas often contain “narratives” that contextualize and connect the events related to their teachings, and sometimes give related details of the lives or acts of the Buddha, his early disciples and other actors of the times. And, yes, the yassa dāni formula is a well-known part of this common social narrative of the day. In this case, this yassa dani stock plays quite a direct role in the sutta narratives; it is simply an invitation formula—as we shall clearly see in the cases we have listed below [1.2].

Manné’s paper, as we have noted, discusses and speculates on only one aspect of the yassa dani formula, that is, as a departure formula—as the title, “On a departure formula and its translation” suggests—that is when the visitor or audience politely takes leave of the Buddha. Here, it should be noted that the Buddha himself is never recorded as using the bahu,kicca dismissal formula. [1.2.0]

---

5 On this point, see Wagle 1955: ch III.
7 See eg J Bronkhorst, The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1986; where, among other methods, the study of particular formulas has been used to show the character of and early influence upon Buddhist meditation.
1.1.3 The departure formula in the suttas

1.1.3.1 Here is a list of sutta references for the occurrences of the departure formula—handa ca dāni ... yassa dāni ... [1.1.2.1]—along with their respective contexts: [S = Sutta]

(1) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni tvam, mahārāja, kālaṁ maññasī ti
• Sāmañña, phala S (D 2,103/1:85), SD 8.10: King Ajāta,sattu takes leave of the Buddha,
• Kaṇṭha, katthala S (M 90,18/2:133), SD 10.8: King Pasenadi takes leave of the Buddha.

(2) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ bho gotama, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni tvam, ambaṭṭha, kālaṁ maññasī ti
• Sāmañña, phala S (D 2,103/1:85), SD 8.10: King Ajāta,sattu takes leave of the Buddha,

(3) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ bho gotama, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni tvam, brāhmaṇa, kālaṁ mañnasī ti
• Mahā, parinibbāna S (D 16,1.6/2:76), SD 9: chief minister Vassa,kāra takes leave of the Buddha.
• (Sattaka) Vassakāra S (A 7.20,15/4:21), SD 55.10b: same as preceding.

(4) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ marisa, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni tvam, mahārāja, kālaṁ maññasī ti
• Āṭāṇatiya S (D 32,11/3:205), SD 101.1: the 4 great kings take leave of the Buddha.
• Same (D 32,12/3:206), SD 101.1: the Buddha relates the whole incident to the monks.

(5) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ bho gotama, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni tvam, aggivesanā, kālaṁ mañnasī ti
• Mahā Saccaka S (M 36,55/1:251), SD 49.4: Mahā Saccaka (Aggi,vessana) takes leave of the Buddha.

(6) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni tvam, pessa, kālaṁ mañnasī ti
• Kandaraka S (M 51,6.3/1:342), SD 32.9: elephant driver’s son Pessa takes leave of the Buddha.

(7) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ bhante ānanda, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni tvam, mahārāja, kālaṁ mañnasī ti
• Bahiṭṭa S (M 88,20/2:117), SD 49.12: King Pasenadi takes leave of the elder Ānanda.

(8) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni tvam, gaha,pati, kālaṁ mañnasī ti
• Upāli (Gaha,pati) S (M 56,18.5/1:380), SD 27.1: the houselord Upāli takes leave of the Buddha.

(9) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni, mahārāja, kālaṁ mañnasī ti (Buddha to King Pasenadi) 3rd person
• Angulimāla S (M 86,14.13/2:102), SD 5.11: King Pasenadi takes leave of the Buddha.
• Dhamma, cetiya S (M 89,20/2:125), SD 64.10 (forthcoming): King Pasenadi takes leave of the Buddha.

(10) “handa ca dāni mayaṁ bhante, gacchāma bahu, kicca mayaṁ bahu, karaṇiyā ti. yassa dāni tvam, mahārāja, kālaṁ mañnasī ti
• Kosala S 2 (A 10.30/5:69), SD 64.15: King Pasenadi takes leave of the Buddha.

---

8 Where the PTS paragraph refs differ from those of the SD, please use the PTS vol:page refs to locate the quote.
1.1.3.2 Manné (1993:30-32) discusses how the departure formula has been rendered by various leading translators (Dīgha translations T W Rhys Davids & C A F Rhys Davids, and Majjhima translations by I B Horner) and a scholarly essay (G MacQueen’s study of the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, D 2). After some discussions on the departure formula as used by the following people:

King Ajāta, sattu in the Sāmañña, phala Sutta (D 2), [1.1.3.1 (1)]
Mahā Saccaka in the Mahā Saccaka Sutta (M 36), [1.1.3.1 (5)]
the elephant driver’s son Pessa in the Kandaraka Sutta (M 51), [1.1.3.1 (6)]
the chief minister Vassa, kāra in the Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta (M 108), [1.1.3.1 (12)]

Manné concludes that there is no differentiation of special social ranking (such as the king speaking to the Buddha) but that it is simply a polite form of leave-taking used by others towards the Buddha or by the Buddha himself towards others⁹ [1.2]. Manné criticizes the scholars mentioned above for suggesting that the departure formula suggests anything other than being a formal polite departure formula (Manné 1993:30-36).

In fact, Manne analyzes the yassa dāni stock only as a “departure formula.” She seems to be aware that it has other usages but does not go into them.

We shall now examine the other usages of the yassa dāni formula as it appears in the suttas.

1.2 THE YASSA DĀNI FORMULA

1.2.0 Occurrences of the formula

The stock phrase yassa dāni tvāṁ kālaṁ maññatī ti appears in the suttas, with some syntactical variations to reflect the social context. It translates literally as “for which now one thinks of the time” or “for which this now may one think it the time.” There are well over 50 occurrences of the yassa dāni stock phrase in the Pali canon (almost all in the suttas, a few in the Vinaya), used in various situations, as we have listed below.¹⁰

In the lists below [1.2.1-1.2.5], the following asterisk (*) convention designates the usages of the yassa dāni formula, in at least 3 ways, as follows:
* as departure formula [1.1.3]
** as invitation/announcement formula
*** as dismissal/taking leave formula

---

⁹ Manné 1993:33-42.
¹⁰ This list is not comprehensive; other occasions are further listed below.
1.2.1 ...11 yassa dāni kālaṁ maññasi

(1) Sāmañña,phala Sutta** Jivaka to King Ajāta, sattu D 2,9/1:49 SD 8.10;
(2) Mahā,parinibbāna S*** the Buddha dismisses Ānanda D 16,3/6:2:104 12 SD 9;
11[3] Āyu,sankhār’ossajjana S*** – *ditto* – U 6.1/63 (SD 9);
(4) Mahā Sudassana Sutta army is ready for Queen Subhaddā D 17,2/7:2:189 SD 36.12;
(5) Upāli Sutta** doorkeeper to Nāta, putta M 56,22/1:382 SD 27.1;
(6) Dhamma,cetiya Sutta** Dīgha Karāyana to King Pasenadi M 89,5/2:119 SD 64.10;
(7) Vinaya (Cv 6.1.3)** monks to a Rājagaha seth V 2:147,3;

1.2.2 yassa dāni tvaṁ … kālaṁ maññasi

(8) Sāmañña,phala S* the Buddha to King Ajāta, sattu D 2,103/1:85 SD 8.10;
(9) Ambaṭṭha Sutta* the Buddha to brahmin Ambaṭṭha D 3,2/12:1:106 SD 21.3;
(10) Mahā,parinibbāna S* the Buddha to brahmin Vassa, kāra D 16,1.5/3:2:76 SD 9;
(11) Mahā Saccaka Sutta* the Buddha to brahmin Aggivessana M 36,55/1:251 SD 49.4;
(12) Kandaraka Sutta* the Buddha to Pessa, a mahout’s son M 51,6.3/1:342 SD 32.9;
(13) Upāli Sutta* the Buddha to the houselord Upāli M 56,18.4/1:380 SD 27.1;
(14) Raṭṭha, pāla Sutta*** the Buddha dismisses Raṭṭha, pāla M 82,16/2:61 SD 92.5;
(15) Anguli, māla Sutta* The Buddha to King Pasenadi M 86,14.3/2:102 SD 5.11;
(16) Bāhikataka Sutta* Ānanda to King Pasenadi M 88,20/2:117 SD 49.12;
(17) Dhamma, cetiya Sutta* the Buddha to King Pasenadi M 89,20/2:124 SD 64.10;
(18) Kanṭakatthala Sutta** servant to King Pasenadi M 90,17/1:2:133 SD 10.8;
(19) Kanṭaka-t, thala Sutta* the Buddha to King Pasenadi M 90,17.7/2:133 SD 10.8;
(20) (Brahma, vihara) Subha S* the Buddha to māṇava Subha M 99,29/1:208 SD 38.6;
(21) Saṅgārava Sutta** brahminee Dhananjanī to Saṅgārava M 105,5/2:210 SD 10.9;
(22) Gopaka Moggallāna S* Ānanda to brahmin Vassa, kāra M 108,28/3:14 SD 33.5;
(23) Puṇṇ̣ṿovāda Sutta*** the Buddha dismisses Puṇṇ̣a M 145,6/3:269 SD 20.15;
[24] = Puṇṇ̣a Sutta*** – *ditto* – S 35,8/4:62,31 (SD 20.15);
(25) Khemā Therī Sutta* the Buddha to King Pasenadi S 44,1/4:379,29;
(26) (Catukka) Vassakāra S* the Buddha to Vassa, kāra A 4,187,7/2:181 SD 45.6;
(27) (Sattaka) Vassakāra S* the Buddha to Vassa, kāra A 7,20/15:4/21 SD 55.10b;
(28) (Navaka) Siha, nāda S* Sāriputta takes leave of the Buddha A 9,11,1/3:4/373 SD 28.2a;
(29) Meghiya Sutta*** the Buddha dismisses Meghiya A 9,3.5/2:4:356 = U 4.1 SD 34.2;
(30) Kosala Sutta 2* the Buddha to King Pasenadi A 10,30/5:69 SD 64.15;
(31) Meghiya Sutta*** the Buddha dismisses Meghiya U 4,1.5/2:34 = A 9.3 SD 34.2;
(32) Dabba Sutta 1*** the Buddha dismisses Dabba U 8.9/92;

1.2.3 yassa dāni ... kālaṁ maññathi (pl)

(33) Mahā,parinibbāna S* informing the Kusināra followers D 16,6,12.2/2:159 SD 9;
(34) Āṭānāṭiya Sutta*** the Buddha dismisses the 4 great kings D 32,11+12/3:205 f SD 101.1;
(35) Thapatayā Sutta** announcing the Buddha’s arrival S 55,6,5/5:348,27 SD 42.7;

11 Here, the ellipsis (...) means that sentences below precedes the formula; “… bhante bhagavā …” means this phrase occurs in place of the ellipsis in the header.
12 Buddha to distracted Ānanda.
13 Square brackets here refer to a reprise of the prec title.

http://dharmafarer.org
1.2.4 ... yassa dāni kālam maññatha (pl)

(36) **Mahā,parinibbāna S** ** Vāsetṭhas told about the parinirvana**

(37) **diitto**

(38) **Sāṅgīti Sutta*** ** the Buddha dismisses the audience**

(39) **Avassuta Sutta*** ** the Buddha takes leave**

(40) **Pañcaka** Sārandada ** S** ** to Licchavīs, about Buddha’s arrival**

(41) **Pāṭaligāmiya Sutta*** ** the Buddha dismisses the audience**

(42) **Vinaya (Mv 6.28.6)*** ** the Buddha dismisses the audience**

1.2.5 yassa dāni ... kālam maññati (3 sg, polite):

(43) **Pottoṭhapāda Sutta*** ** Potṭhapāda dismisses the Buddha**

(44) **Mahā,parinibbāna S*** ** Vassakāra takes leave of the Buddha**

(45) **Mahā,parinibbāna S** ** brahmin Vassakāra to the Buddha**

(46) **diitto** ** Ānanda invites the Buddha**

(47) **Sāṅgīti Sutta** ** inviting the Buddha to the new hall**

(48) **Mahā Govinda Sutta*** ** Govinda takes leave of King Reṇu**

(49) **diitto** ** Govinda takes leave of 6 kshatriyas**

(50) **diitto** ** Govinda takes leave of 7 brahmins**

(51) **diitto** ** Govinda takes leave to renounce**

(52) **Sekha Sutta** ** inviting the Buddha for a meal**

(53) **Raṭṭha,pāla Sutta*** ** the Buddha dismisses Raṭṭhapāla**

(54) **Brahmāyu Sutta** ** the Buddha consents to meet Brahmāyu**

(55) **diitto** ** consent relayed to Brahmāyu**

(56) **Avassuta Sutta*** ** the Buddha takes leave (backache)**

(57) **Vesāli Sutta** ** Ānanda invites the Buddha**

(58) **Bharaṇḍu Sutta** ** the Buddha invited to a hermitage**

(59) **Nārada Sutta** ** Piṣaka is told to invite King Munḍa**

(60) **diitto** ** Piṣaka invites King Munḍa**

(61) **Pāṭaligāmiya Sutta** ** Pāṭali followers to the Buddha**

(62) **Vinaya (Mv 6.28.3)*** ** Pāṭaligāma followers invite the Buddha**

1.3 CONCLUSION

1.3.1 Variations of the yassa dāni formula

We should note that phrase (1) of the departure formula—bahu, kicca ... bahu, karaṇīya [1.1.2.1]—is simply a statement that one is busy with worldly affairs, just as we would say: “Please excuse me, I have some business to attend to.” Any other significance of the occasion is not reflected in this formula, but in the circumstance itself.

For example, in the case of the Kandaraka Sutta (M 51), if Pessa the elephant driver’s son does not depart but stays on “for a moment” to listen to more of the Buddha’s teaching, he, being a wise person, would have understood it to his great benefit.17

---

14 Anuruddha’s instruction to Ānanda.
15 Ānanda’s instruction to the Mallas.
16 Cf kālo bhante (D 9.4.17), SD 9; cf yāno kālo mahārāja (M 90,17.1), SD 10.8.
17 M 51,7/1:342 (SD 32.9).

http://dharmafarer.org
In the Sāmañña,phala Sutta (D 2), after King Ajāta,sattu has left, the Buddha states that if the king had not killed his own father, he would have attained at least streamwinning from listening to the teaching that had been given to him. His departure has nothing to do with his not attaining streamwinning. Interestingly, it should also be noted that one does not become a streamwinner (or any of the path saints) by merely listening to a sutta teaching; one has to be spiritually right and ready for it, too.

1.3.2 The yassa dāni sentence itself

In the departure formula [1.1.2.1], phrase
(1) *handa ca dāni* .... the opening of the leave-taking formula (followed by the rest of the formula).
(2) the polite acknowledgement (often by the Buddha but not always).

Phrase (2) is the actual *yassa dāni* formula, and it may function as a departure formula, as an invitation or announcement formula, or as a dismissal or leave-taking formula. In other words, phrase (2) may function independently as a formal and polite meaning phrase, basically, “It’s time, sir!”

231101 231114 231221 240411