

(Assāda) Pubbe Sambodha Sutta

The Discourse on “Before the Self-awakening” (on Gratification)

[The world can never satisfy us completely]
(Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.101/1:258 f)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

Introduction

1 *Sukha, somanassa*

The second noble truth, that is, the conditions for the arising of suffering, is here called *sukha, somanassa* (bodily pleasure and mental joy) [§1b], the literal opposite of which is *dukkha, domanassa* (physical pain and mental pain). In meditation terms, that is, on a deeper level, it is another antonym, that is, *abhijjhā, domanassa* (covetousness and displeasure). There is an interesting related passage from **the Pubba or Pubb’eva Sambodha Sutta** (A 3.101) referring to *sukha, somanassa* (physical and mental pleasure):

Monks, before my awakening, when I was still a bodhisattva, this thought occurred to me... “Whatever bodily pleasure and mental joy (*sukha, somanassa*) there are in the world, *that* is the gratification (*assāda*) in the world; that the world is impermanent, suffering and of the nature to change, that is the danger (*ādīnava*) in the world—the removal and abandoning of desire and lust for the world, *that* is the escape from the world.” (A 3.101/1:258)¹

We see the close connection that *abhijjhā, domanassa* has with the two negative terms—*assāda* and *ādīnava*—have here. Both has the sense of being hindrances to spiritual development. My own understanding here regarding the naming of the first two mental hindrances as *abhijjhā, domanassa* is to show that with their elimination the other hindrances are eliminated, too. This is further confirmed by the Commentaries:

But here since taking *abhijjhā* [covetousness] includes *kāma-c, chanda* [sense-desire], and taking *domanassa* [mental pain] includes *vyāpāda* [ill will], therefore it should be understood that the abandoning of the hindrances is spoken of by indicating the pair that is strong among those items that make up the hindrances.² (DA 3:759 = MA 1:244 = VbhA 220)

Brahmavamso,³ agrees with this interpretation. Here, Gethin adds a parenthetical note: “The taking of *domanassa* includes *vyāpāda* because all *citt[ā]* rooted in aversion is accompanied by unpleasant mental feeling.” (2001:49 f & n95).⁴

As there is another discourse in the Saṃyutta with the same name and a similar teaching, I have disambiguated our discourse here as **the (Assāda) Pubbe Sambodha Sutta** (A 3.101), and the Saṃyutta discourse as **the (Dhātu) Pubbe Sambodha Sutta** (S 14.31), reflecting their respective themes.

¹ Pointed out to me by Robert Eddison (through email communication).

² *Yasmā pan’ettha abhijjhā, gahaṇena kāma-c, chando domanassa-g, gahaṇena vyāpādo saṅghaṃ gacchati tasmā nīvaraṇa, pariyāpanna, balava, dhamma, dvaya, dassanena nīvaraṇa-p, pahānaṃ vuttaṃ hoti ti veditabbaṃ.* “The taking of *domanassa* includes *vyāpāda* because all *citta* rooted in aversion is accompanied by unpleasant mental feeling.” (Gethin’s n, 2003:50)

³ Personal meeting, 30 March 2003.

⁴ See SD 13.1(4.2e).

2 Assāda, ādīnava, nissaraṇa

The three terms—*assāda*, *ādīnava* and *nissaraṇa*—often appear as a set in the texts. The Commentaries relate them to the four noble truths thus:

danger (*ādīnava*) refers to the truth of suffering;
gratification (*assāda*) refers to the truth of the arising of suffering, that is, craving; and
escape (*nissaraṇa*) refers to the ending of suffering, nirvana. (DA 2:512; MA 2:11)

It is interesting to see that the sequences are reversed here. In fact, understandably, the *assāda* model is an experiential one, used to show suffering as *cause* first: one seeks various forms of gratification, and this leads to suffering. Whereas the *sacca* model is a sort of therapeutic list: the ailment, the cause, the cure, and the prescription. Although the fourth truth, that of the path, is not directly mentioned here, it is implied as the means of escape. Among the suttas that specifically deal with these three truths are:

Upādāna Sutta (S 12.52/2:84 f): dependent arising by way of the parable of the bonfire;
(Dhātu) Pubba Sutta (S 14.31/2:169-171): applied to the four elements;
Assāda Sutta 1 (S 22.26/3:27 f): applied to the five aggregates (as questions);
Assāda Sutta 2 (S 22.27/3:29): applied to the five aggregates (as a quest);
Satta-ṭṭhāna Sutta (S 22.57/3:61-65): applied to the five aggregates (synchronic);
Pubbe Sambodha Sutta (A 3:101/1:158 f): the world can never satisfy us completely = SD 14.6;
(Loka) Assāda Sutta (A 3.102/1:260): escape is possible = SD 14.7.

Indirect but important mention of the three truths are also found in the following suttas:

Cūḷa Sihanāda Sutta (M 11.7/1:65): in terms of arising and disappearance of wrong views;
Puṇṇama Sutta (M 109.12/3:18 = S 22.82.12/3:102 f): applied to the five aggregates = SD 17.10.
Cha, chakka Sutta (M 148.28-39/3:285-287): the latent tendencies are explained in connection with each of the 6 senses;
Devadaha Sutta (S 22.2.11-13/3:7 f): applied to the five aggregates;
Pubba Bodha Sutta 1 (S 35.13/4:6-8): applied to the six internal sense-bases = SD 14.9;
Pubba Bodha Sutta 2 (S 35.14/4:8): applied to the six external sense-bases = SD 14.10; and
(Ānanda) Santaka Sutta 1 (S 36.15.2-4/4:219 f): applied to feelings.

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The Discourse on “Before the Self-awakening” (on Gratification)

(A 3.101/1:258 f)

The questions

1a Bhikshus, before my self-awakening, when I was still a bodhisattva, it occurred to me:

“Now what is the gratification (*assāda*)⁵ in the world?
What is the danger (*ādīnava*) in the world?
What is the escape (*nissaraṇa*) in the world?”

1b Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:

‘Whatever bodily pleasure and mental joy⁶ that arise in the world, this is the gratification in the world. That the world is impermanent, unsatisfactory, subject to change, this is the danger in the world. The removal of sensual lust, the abandoning of sensual lust, this is the escape from the world.’

The knowing

2 Bhikshus, so long as I did not directly know, as they really are, thus—the world’s gratification as [259] gratification, and the danger as danger, and the escape as escape—for that long I did not claim⁷ that I had awakened to the supreme full self-awakening in this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

But, bhikshus, when I directly knew, as they really are, thus—the world’s gratification as gratification, and the danger as danger, and the escape as escape—then I claimed that I had awakened to the supreme full self-awakening in this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans. The knowledge and vision arose in me:

‘Unshakable is my liberation of mind—this is my last birth. There is now no more rebirth!’

The quest

3 Bhikshus, I went in search of gratification in the world. Whatever gratification there is the world, that gratification I have found.

Bhikshus, to whatever extent there is gratification in the world, that gratification I have clearly seen by wisdom.

Bhikshus, I went in search of danger in the world. Whatever danger there is the world, that danger I have found.

Bhikshus, to whatever extent there is danger in the world, that danger I have clearly seen by wisdom.

Bhikshus, I went in search for an escape from the world. Whatever escape there is the world, that escape I have found.

Bhikshus, to whatever extent there is an escape from the world, that escape I have clearly seen by wisdom.

The awakening

4 Bhikshus, so long as I did not directly know, as they really are, the world’s gratification as gratification, and the danger as danger, and the escape as escape,

for that long I did not claim that I had awakened to the supreme full self-awakening in this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

⁵ On these 3 terms—*assādam ādīnava* and *nissaraṇa*—see above Intro (1).

⁶ “Physical pleasure and mental joy,” *sukham somanassam*, alt tr, “bodily comfort and mental pleasure.” See above Intro (2).

⁷ “did...claim,” *paccaññāsim*, aor of *paṭijānāmi*, “I claim,” from *paṭijānāti* (3rd sg). See S 4:7, 5:423; A 1:259, 4:56.

Living Word of the Buddha SD 14.6* **A 3.101 Before the Self-awakening (on gratification)*

But, bhikshus, when I directly knew, as they really are, thus—the world’s gratification as gratification, and the danger as danger, and the escape as escape—

then I claimed that I had awakened to the supreme full self-awakening in this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

The knowledge and vision arose in me:

‘Unshakable is my liberation of mind—this is my last birth. There is now no more rebirth!’”

— evaṃ —

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