

**(Loka) Assāda Sutta****The Discourse on Gratification (Regarding the World)**

[Escape from suffering is possible]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.102/1:260)

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

**1 Introduction**

The Assāda Sutta, which starts abruptly, is clearly a continuation of **the Pubba Sambodha Sutta** (A 3.101);<sup>1</sup> hence, it is sometimes called the Pubba Sambodha Sutta 2. Both suttas deal with the same topic, that of the set of three terms—*assāda*, *āḍīnava* and *nissaraṇa*.<sup>2</sup> However, while the Pubba Sambodha Sutta deals with the negative aspect, that is, the arising of suffering, the Assāda Sutta speaks of the possibility of escape from such suffering. In both the suttas, it is clear that the Buddha has discovered this escape from suffering.

The Commentary to **the Cūḷa Sīhanāda Sutta** (M 11.7/1:65) says the arising (*samudaya*) of the views of being (*bhava, diṭṭhi*) and non-being (*vibhava, diṭṭhi*) are due to any of these eight conditions (*attha-t, thāna*): the five aggregates, ignorance, contact, perception, thought, unskilful consideration, evil friends, and the voice of another.<sup>3</sup> The passing away (*atthaṅgama*) of wrong views, by way of conditions (*paccaya*), is the path of stream-entry which removes wrong views. Both these arising and disappearance may also be momentary (*khaṇika*). Their gratification (*assāda*) may be understood as the satisfaction of the psychological need that they impose on one; their danger (*āḍīnava*) is the continual bondage that they entail; the escape (*nissaraṇa*) from them is nirvana (MA 2:11).

See also **the Cha, chakka Sutta** (M 148) where the latent tendencies are explained in connection with each of the 6 senses.<sup>4</sup>

**2 The key tenses**

What is interesting in the Assāda Sutta is the use of the different Pali verbs and tenses for the two different groups of people mentioned here: *sattā lokassa* (the world's beings) and *samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā lokassa* (the world's recluses and brahmins). In §2 the world's beings who did not have any direct knowledge (*na abbhāññāsum*) of *assāda*, *āḍīnava* and *nissaraṇa* are described in the *past tense*: “they dwelled (*viharīmsu*) with a mind that is not free....” The word *abbhāññāsum* (“they do not directly know”) is the past tense 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural of *abhi-jānāti* (“he directly knows”), the noun of which is *abhiññā*.

In the case of those beings (in the same paragraph) who *had* direct knowledge (that is, personal experience) (*abbhāññāsum*) of these three states, “they dwelt (*viharanti*) with a mind that is free....” Here, however, the present tense 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural (*viharanti*, “they dwell”) is used.

Then, in the following §3, the world's recluses and brahmins who lack understanding (*nāppajānanti*) of the three states “do not dwell (*na... viharanti*) accomplished...” Both negative verbs are in the present tense. And finally, in the case of the world's recluses and brahmins who understand (*pajānanti*) these three states, they will dwell (*viharissanti*) accomplished in their goal. The first verb is in the present tense, and the second (spiritual accomplishment) is in the future tense.

In canonical Pali, the past tense (aorist) is not always as well demarcated in time as in modern English. The Pali aorist is used for all kinds of past actions: the historical or narrative past (especially the present perfect, *desesim*, “I have taught”). As Warder notes, when more precise demarcations of time

<sup>1</sup> A 3.101/1:258 f = SD 14.6.

<sup>2</sup> See **Pubba Sambodha S** (A 3.101/1:258 f) = SD 14.6 Introd (2) for details.

<sup>3</sup> Pm 1:138.

<sup>4</sup> M 148.28-39/3:285-287 = SD 26.6.

relations are needed, participles are used in conjunction with the main verb.<sup>5</sup> However, from the Sutta context, it is clear that the Buddha is referring to the nature of spiritual development before the Teaching (only past tense), and when the Teaching is available (all three tenses).

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## The Discourse on Gratification (Regarding the World) (A 3.102/1:260)

**1** Bhikshus, if there were no gratification in the world, beings would not be attached to this world. But, bhikshus, as there is gratification in the world, beings are attached to this world.

Bhikshus, if there were no danger in the world, beings would not be revulsed<sup>6</sup> by this world. But, bhikshus, as there is danger in the world, beings are revulsed at this world.

Bhikshus, if there were no escape from the world, beings could not escape from this world. But, bhikshus, as there is an escape from the world, beings can escape from this world.

**2a** (1) BEINGS IN THIS WORLD. Now, bhikshus, so long as the world's beings had not directly known, as it really is,

the gratification as gratification,

the danger as danger,

the escape as escape,

to that extent, bhikshus, they dwelt with a mind that is *not free* from it, not detached from it, not released from it, confined to this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

**2b** But, bhikshus, so long as the world's beings had directly known, as it really is,

the gratification as gratification,

the danger as danger,

the escape as escape,

to that extent, bhikshus, they dwelt with a mind that is *free* from it, detached from it, released from it, not confined to this world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans.

**3a** (2) RECLUSES AND BRAHMINS IN THE WORLD. Now, bhikshus, the world's recluses and brahmins who have not understood, as it really is, the gratification as gratification, the danger as danger, the escape as escape, those recluses, bhikshus, are not regarded as recluses, these brahmins are not regarded as brahmins, by me. And these venerable ones do not dwell accomplished, having realized, through direct knowledge here and now for themselves, the goal of recluseship, or the goal of brahminhood.

**3b** But, bhikshus, the world's recluses and brahmins who have known, as it really is,

the gratification as gratification,

the danger as danger,

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<sup>5</sup> See AK Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 1974:26 & 235-239.

<sup>6</sup> OED (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) has only this def: "(transitive) To drag, draw, or pull back; to tear away," and records its earliest usages as follows: **1669**, W Simpson, *Hydrologia Chymica* 78: "This virulent acrimony... becomes by a retrograde motion revulsed into the veins." **1673**, William Harvey, *Anatomical Exercises concerning the motion of the heart and blood* ii 123: "To take away the blood... that it might be revulsed from the lungs." The more common forms of this word are the n "revulsion" and the adj "revulsive." The Merriam-Webster 3<sup>rd</sup> New International Dictionary however has "revulsed," which it defines as "affected with or having undergone revulsion." Since the context here is very clear, it is helpful to revive this dying word.

the escape as escape,  
these recluses, bhikshus, are regarded as recluses, those brahmins are regarded as brahmins, by me. And these venerable ones will dwell accomplished, having realized through direct knowledge here and now for themselves the goal of recluseship, or the goal of brahminhood.

— evaṃ —

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