

**(Pasenadi) Yañña Sutta****The Discourse on the Sacrifice (by Pasenadi)**

[The better sacrifice]

(Saṃyutta Nikāya 3.9/1:75 f)

Translated &amp; annotated by Piya Tan ©2007

**1 Pasenadi falls for a married woman**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION.** The (Pasenadi) Yañña Sutta is a case for the ethicization of the Vedic sacrifice. The true sacrifice, as admonished in **the Kūṭa,danta Sutta** (D 5), is one that does not harm oneself, others or the environment. On the contrary, it is benefits all those who participate, and even beyond that.<sup>1</sup> **Kūṭa,danta** was a brahmin who had planned to make a Vedic sacrifice (*yañña*) of the 700s (“seven hundred bulls, seven hundred bullocks, seven hundred heifers, seven hundred goats, and seven hundred rams”), but was given good advice by the Buddha on the true sacrifice.

**Pasenadi**, on the other hand, was a king<sup>2</sup> whose lecherous exploits brought its own karmic fruits upon him, made worse by bad advice from his religious advisors (to offer a great sacrifice entailing great loss of innocent lives), that is, until his wise queen Mallikā advises him to consult the Buddha. This discourse records the Buddha’s admonition to Pasenadi on the true sacrifice. Various commentaries explain both the background of the discourse, as well the interesting past karmic stories related to it.

**1.1 A RECONSTITUTED SYNOPSIS.** The Commentaries to the Saṃyutta (SA), to the Dhammapada (DhA), to the Jātaka (J), and the Peta,vatthu (PvA), give about the same background story to the (Pasenadi) Yañña Sutta. I will begin with a synopsis of the story following the common lines of the four accounts, with interesting details from the native SA commentary, the J account, the DhA account, and finally the PvA account, thus:

Saṃyutta Commentary	[1.2]		
Jātaka Commentary	[1.3]	<b>Loka,kumbhi Jātaka</b>	(J 314/3:43-48)
Dhammapada Commentary	[1.4]	<b>Aññatara,purisa Vatthu</b>	(DhA 5.1/2:1-19)
Peta,vatthu Commentary	[1.5]	<b>Seṭṭhi,putta Peta,vatthu</b>	(PvA 4.15/279-282)

1.1.1 THE KING FALLS FOR A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN. All the versions (SA, DhA and PvA), except J, recount how rajah Pasenadi, on a tour of Sāvattī on his elephant, sees a beautiful woman, looking like a “an image of divine nymph” (*dev’accharā,paṭibhāgam*),<sup>3</sup> peering through a window on the seventh floor of her house,<sup>4</sup> gazes at the king, and then withdraws, “like the full moon going behind a bank of clouds,” and the king almost falls from the elephant’s back!<sup>5</sup> PvA continues with this psychological observation:

His heart was possessed by the onslaught of defilements that had arisen on account of a strong visual object that he had never seen before. Although he had **[280]** a harem of people endowed with distinctive qualities, such as good family, beauty, and decorum, his mind was bound to that woman on account of the heart’s frivolous nature and intractability.<sup>6</sup> (PvA 4.15/279 f)

On reaching the palace, he has the woman’s background investigated. On discovering that she is married and that her husband is a poor man, the king hires him, planning to kill the hapless man, and have

<sup>1</sup> D 5/1:127-149 = SD 22.8 Intro (3).

<sup>2</sup> Pasenadi must be relatively young at this point, as he is still not certain who the Buddha is [1.1.5].

<sup>3</sup> PvA 4.15/279. On the *accharā* (Skt *apsaras*), see **Subha Thī 374** = SD 20.7(§9) n.

<sup>4</sup> DhA 5.1/2:1. PvA 4.15/279 only says that she was on the upper terrace of a certain house looking down at the king’s majesty.

<sup>5</sup> DhA 5.1/2:1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ārammaṇe sahasā samuppannena kilesa,samudācārena pariyuṭṭhita,citto sati’pi kula,rūpācār’ādiguṇa,-viseva,sampanne antepura,jane sabhāva,lahukassa pana duddamassa cittassa vasena tassam’ itthiyam’ paṭibaddha,-mānaso hutvā* (PvA 4.15/279 f).

his wife for himself. The man is given “a shield and a sword,” and so becomes a king’s servant.<sup>7</sup> He does all his tasks well and the king is unable to find any fault with him. So the king sends him on an perilous errand (on foot) to a naga-haunted river bank, about a league (11.25 km = 7 mi) away, to bring back some “red and blue lotuses, and red-hued clay.”<sup>8</sup> The instruction is that he has to return with the clay and lotus before nightfall before the city gates are closed, under the pain of death.<sup>9</sup>

1.1.2 THE SERVANT’S STRATEGY. DhA adds a heart-warming episode here. The king’s servant, fearing for his life, hurries home and tells his wife he has to leave immediately. He takes some half-cooked rice still boiling in the pot, and pouring some curry over it, puts it in a basket, with the curry dripping away. As he hurried along, the rice is cooked. In due course, setting aside a portion of rice, he began eating. When a traveller comes along, he offers the untouched portion to him, and then casts a handful of rice into the water, and cries out loudly thrice:

All you nagas [dragons], suparnas [winged spirits], and deities inhabiting this river area, hear my word, the king desiring to punish me, orders me to bring him red and blue lotuses, and red-hued clay. Through giving rice to the traveller, I have gained a thousand rewards (*sahass’ānisamsa*), and by giving rice to the fish in this water, I have gained a hundred rewards (*sat’ānisamsa*). I give all this accumulated merit to you! Bring me red and blue lotuses, and red-hued clay!

(DhA 5.1/2:4)<sup>10</sup>

The naga king appears in the form of an old man, and after making the king’s servant repeat his offering thrice, gives him the flowers and clay.

1.1.3 THE KING’S DESPERATION. Meantime, king Pasenadi, to ensure that his plan would work, orders the city gate to be closed earlier than before, and keeps the gate key himself. The servant arrives just after the gate is closed, and despite his pleas, the gate-keeper is unable to open the gate. So he throws the red earth onto the threshold, hangs the flowers over the door, and cries out loudly thrice:

You kind dwellers of the city, know you that I have accomplished the king’s orders! The king wishes to destroy me without reason!

(DhA 5.1/2:5)

Then thinking, “Where shall I go now?” concludes, “The monks are soft-hearted (*mudu, hadayā*). I will go and sleep in the monastery.” (In times of happiness, notes the DhA, beings here do not even know the monks exist, but in times of overwhelming difficulties, they desire to go to the monastery!) (id). So while the man sleeps peacefully in the monastery, king Pasenadi is unable to sleep a wink, consumed by passion’s fever (*kāma, pariḷāha*), thinking of the beautiful married woman. He thinks, “At dawn, I will kill that man and fetch the woman here.”

1.1.4 THE BRAHMIN’S DESPERATION. At that very moment, he suddenly hears the eerie sounds, *du sa na so*,<sup>11</sup> that seem to be “as if uttered from a huge throat, out of distress.”<sup>12</sup> Terrified, he is unable to sleep for the rest of the night. The next morning, he consults with the brahmin purohit (the palace chaplain). The brahmin is totally in the dark about the matter, but tactfully does not admit it, fearing loss of wealth

<sup>7</sup> *Rāja, purisa* (PvA 4.15/216); *sevaka* (DhA 5.1/2:2), and adds that while slaves (*dāsa*) could excuse themselves on account of even a minor ailment (such as a headache or a backache), a “servant” (*sevaka*) cannot (DhA 5.1/2:3).

<sup>8</sup> *Kumud’uppalāni c’eva aruṇa, vatī, mattikañ ca* (DhA 2:3); *aruṇa, vaṇṇa, mattikañ ratt’uppalāni* (PvA 216).

<sup>9</sup> PvA 4.1/215. The episode of the red-hued earth and red lotus is mentioned as a stock insert from **Amba, sakkhara Peta, vatthu** (PvA 4.1), which has a similar story of a Licchavī king named Amba, sakkhara of Vesālī.

<sup>10</sup> Here again the lateness of DhA is evident: “the transference of merit” (*patti, dāna*) is hardly mentioned as a spiritual practice in the Canon, much less the numerical measuring of merit! However, it should be understood that such stories are told for the edification of an audience that was already familiar with such worldliness, as a skillful means to inspire them onto a more spiritual level.

<sup>11</sup> This is the DhA & J sequence of sounds, which is the best known version (DhA 5.1/2:6; J 314/3:43); SA: *sa so na du*; PvA: *sa na du so* (PvA 4.15/280). See 1.3.

<sup>12</sup> *Mahatā kaṇṭhena uccāritāni viya vissara, vasena* (PvA 4.15/280).

and honour. So he replies, “It is a serious, maharajah!” When the king asks him further, he declares, “Your life is in danger!”<sup>13</sup>

The **J** account (which is probably the oldest)<sup>14</sup> [1.3] and the **PvA** account<sup>15</sup> [1.5], however, give a more realistic and humorous account. A group of brahmins proposes an “**all-four sacrifice**” (*sabba,catukka yañña*), that is, four elephants, four horses, four bulls, four humans, four quails and so on. The excited brahmins think, “We will be feasting on meat and fish, and receive great wealth!” and having told the king, “Your majesty, we need this, we need that,” scurry about here and there according to their plans.<sup>16</sup>

According to **DhA**, the purohit then instructs the king to offer an “**all-hundred sacrifice**” (*sabba,sata,yañña*), that is, a hundred elephants, a hundred bulls, a hundred cows, a hundred asses, a hundred thoroughbred horses, a hundred rams, a hundred fowls, a hundred pigs, a hundred boys, a hundred girls! For he thinks to himself, “If I were to ask the king to get only wild animals, people will say that I want to eat them myself!” As such, he cunningly included elephants, horses and humans, too!<sup>17</sup> [1.4]

In the **SA** account, probably the latest, the purohit connives with the other brahmins, so that when the king asks them how to put things right, they propose that the king offer the “**all-five-hundred sacrifice**” (*sabba,pañca,sata yañña*) [1.2.1].

1.1.5 MALLIKĀ’S INTERCESSION. Pasenadi’s wise chief queen, **Mallikā**, noticing all the commotion of the preparations for the great sacrifice, asks the king about it. The king tells her that he has heard the four eerie sounds in the night. Here, we have two versions of Mallikā’s wise intercession. The **DhA** version presents her as a strong woman who actually scolds the king!

Queen Mallikā said, “You are a blind fool, maharajah! You may have a great store of food, you may feast on curries and sauces cooked by the bucketful, you may rule over two kingdoms, but still your wisdom is weak!”

“Why do you say that, my queen?”

“Where have you ever heard of a life being saved by the death of another? Just on account of a blind fool of a brahmin’s word, why must you fling suffering upon that people? In a nearby there resides the foremost person in the world of gods and humans, endowed with unlimited knowledge concerning the past and the rest. Go and ask him, and do as he instructs you.”<sup>18</sup>

(DhA 5.1/2:7)<sup>19</sup>

Again, we here see **J** giving a more dignified and believable account. After the king has told Mallikā about the nocturnal sounds, queen Mallikā asks him,

“But, your majesty, have you asked the foremost brahmin in this world with its gods and humans about the meaning of these sounds?”

“Who, my queen, is this foremost brahmin in this world with its gods and humans?”

“The great Gotama, the fully self-awakened one.”

<sup>13</sup> *Brāhmaṇassa mahā, andhakāraṃ pavitthassa viya na kiñci paññāyati, “na jānāmi ti vutte pana “lābha, sakkāro me parihāyissatī ti bhāyitvā “bhāriyaṃ, mahārājā ti āha. “Kiṃ ācariyā ti? “Jīvitantarāyo te paññāyati ti.*

<sup>14</sup> See DhA:B 1:58.

<sup>15</sup> PvA 4.15/280.

<sup>16</sup> *Bahuṃ maccha, maṃsaṃ khādissāma, bahuṃ dhanam labhissāma ti ussāha-p, pattā hutvā “idam laddhum vaṭṭati, idam laddhum vaṭṭati, devā ti aparāparam caranti. (J 314/3:44)*

<sup>17</sup> DhA 5.1/2:6 f.

<sup>18</sup> *Mallikā devī, “Andha, bālo ‘si, mahā, rāja, kiñcāpi mahā, bhakkho ‘si, aneka, sūpa, byañjana, vikatikaṃ doṇa, - pākam bhojanam bhujjasi, dvīsu raṭṭhesu rajjam kāresi, pañña pana te mandā ti āha. “Kasmā evaṃ vadesi, devī ti? “Kham tayā aññassa maraṇena aññassa jīvita, lābho diṭṭha, pubbo, andha, bālassa brāhmaṇassa katham gahetvā kasmā mahā, janassa upari dukkham khīpasi, dhura, vihāre sa, devakassa lokassa agga, puggalo atī ‘ādīsu appaṭhata, ñāṇo sathā vasati, tam pucchitvā tass’ovādam karohī ti (DhA 5.1/2:7).*

<sup>19</sup> The wise Mallikā is presented here almost as a shrew or battleaxe. Well-loved as Mallikā is by Pasenadi, any royal queen of the Buddha’s time is unlikely to scold the king with such a tirade. Clearly, this is a work of a time when kingship was given much less respect (such during the time of the Mahāvihāra in Sri Lanka when Buddhaghosa worked on the Commentaries).

“My queen, I have not consulted the fully-self-awakened one.”

“Then, go and consult him.”<sup>20</sup>

(J 314/3:44)

1.1.6 THE MEANING OF THE FOUR SOUNDS. According to the **J** account, Pasenadi approaches the Buddha and asks him about the nocturnal sounds, whether he knows their significance. When the Buddha says that he knows, the king invites an explanation from the Buddha, who then says:

Maharajah, in their past existences, these men misconducted themselves with the women under the protection of others. As a result, they were reborn in the four iron-cauldron hell that surrounds Benares, boiling in the caustic molten iron that spewed scum on the surface. For 30,000 years, they went under sinking to the bottom of the pot, and for another 30,000 years, they rose upwards. When they reached the pot’s mouth, they looked around at the four classes of people, and composed these four stanzas, wishing to tell them. They were unable to do so, except for uttering a single syllable before sinking into the iron cauldron again. (J 314/3:45)<sup>21</sup>

The **DhA** account, in its story of the past, relate how in the time of Kassapa Buddha, four seths’ sons (*setthi,putta*),<sup>22</sup> intoxicated with their wealth,<sup>23</sup> indulge in a life of vice climaxing in adultery, resulting in their being reborn into the great hell<sup>24</sup> [1.4].

All the four versions mention the full stanzas of the four sounds, their sequence vary.<sup>25</sup> According to the Buddha, the hell-beings are trying to say the following stanzas:

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|---|---|--|
| 1 | <i><b>D</b>ujjīvitam ajīvimhā<br/>ye sante na dadamhase<br/>vijjamānesu bhogesu<br/>dīpaṃ nākamha attano ti</i>       | We have lived evil lives:<br>although we have, we did not give,<br>although there is wealth,<br>we made no island for ourselves.                                     |
| 2 | <i><b>S</b>aṭṭhi vassa,sahassāni<br/>paripuṇṇāni sabbaso<br/>niraye paccamānānaṃ<br/>kadā anto bhavissatī ti</i>      | For sixty thousand years<br>fully throughout<br>we are boiling in hell:<br>when will it end?   |
| 3 | <i><b>N</b>atthi anto kuto anto<br/>na anto paṭidissati<br/>tadā hi pakataṃ pāpaṃ<br/>mama tuyhañ ca mārisā ti</i>    | There is no end, when will it end?<br>No end is to be seen!<br>For such it is when evil is done<br>by me and you, good sirs!   |
| 4 | <i><b>S</b>o’ham nūna ito gantvā<br/>yonim laddhāna mānusiṃ<br/>vadaññū sīla,sampanno<br/>kāhāmi kusalaṃ bahun ti</i> | When I am, gone from here, then,<br>attaining birth in a human womb,<br>being bountiful, <sup>26</sup> endowed with moral virtue,<br>I will do much wholesome deeds. |

(Pv 4.15/67 f; SA 1:143 f; J 314/3:46-48; DhA 5.1/2:11 f; PvA 4.15/281)

<sup>20</sup> “*Kim pana deva, imesaṃ saddānaṃ nipphattim sadevake loke aggabrāhmaṇaṃ pucchitthā ti?* “*Ko esa deva, sadevake loke aggabrāhmaṇo nāmā ti?* “*Mahā,gotamo sammā,sambuddhō ti.* “*Devi, sammā,sambuddho me na pucchitō ti?* “*Tena hi gantvā pucchathā ti.* (J 314/3:44)

<sup>21</sup> Clearly here J:C 3:30, HT Francis & RA Neil (1895) have improvised their “translation,” since it does not reflect the Pali Comy.

<sup>22</sup> A seth (*setthi*) is a rich entrepreneur.

<sup>23</sup> PvA 4.15/280.

<sup>24</sup> DhA 5.1a/2:9-14.

<sup>25</sup> The foll stanzas follow the DhA & J sequence of sounds, which is the best known version (DhA 5.1/2:6; J 314/3:43); SA: *sa so na du*; PvA: *sa na du so* (PvA 4.15/280). See (1.3).

<sup>26</sup> Ie generous, charitable, affable, approachable, open to being asked.

1.1.7 THE HAPPY ENDINGS. **The Loha,kumbhi Jātaka** (J 314), in its account of how the king of Benares, too, hears the same four sounds, recounts that the Bodhisattva then explains to the king that the hell-beings, on account of the gravity of their evil karma, are each only able to utter a single syllable, unable to complete their stanzas. Then he assures the king that nothing would happen to him (on account of having heard the four sounds). Thus reassured, the king proclaims that all the sacrificial victims are to be freed and the sacrificial pit destroyed. And the Bodhisattva, after bringing succour to the people, stays there a few days, and then without any break in his dhyana (or in his meditation), is reborn in the Brahma world.<sup>27</sup>

Both the SA account and the DhA account (in its story of the present) report that rajah Pasenadi confesses his wrongdoing (of coveting the wife of another) and is contrite. He admits to the Buddha, “Bhante, today I know how long a night is!” And the king’s servant, sitting there, thinks, “I have received the support of someone strong!” and says to the Teacher, “Bhante, today I know how long a league is!”<sup>28</sup>

The Buddha combines the two sayings, and says: “For some, the night is long; for others, the league is long—but for the fool, long is samsara!” So saying, he gives a discourse on this verse:

<i>Dīghā jāgarato ratti dīgham santassa yojanam dīgho bālānam samsāro saddhammam avijānatam</i>	Long is the night to the sleepless, long is the league to the weary, long is samsara <sup>29</sup> to the foolish who knows not the True Teaching.	(Dh 60)
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Lust keeps king Pasenadi up all night, thinking of the beautiful woman he desires. The three unwholesome roots (lust, hate, delusion) keep us restless and sleepless (when we should be resting and re-energizing ourselves). This is the wakefulness is distressing because we find ourselves cooped up in a claustrophobic manner in the thick shell of ignorance, which can only be broken through with right awakening.

The beautiful woman’s husband, fearing for his life and wondering if he could ever fulfill his task, finds even the distance of a mere league to be very long. While a physical journey sooner or later brings us to our destination, after which we could have a good rest and go on with our business, our mental journeys autopiloted by ignorance and craving is always tiresome, distressing and fruitless because it keeps us in a cyclic rut of our latent tendencies, or to stray into the dangerous jungles of mental proliferation.

Although our present life is the most precious thing we can ever have, we rarely give it much serious or proper thought. Apparently, we tend to feel mindlessly secure as we wander the same routine streets of samsara, from bed, to meal, to work, to play, to sleep, and to replay everything day after day. The point is that samsara is full of dangerous busy traffic and hidden corners, which we are, sooner or later, forced to turn into, and we rarely ever know what lies waiting around that corner. That is, unless we have a good map of the place, a good sense of direction, and travel on the safe side of the road. Then we will escape from the walled city of Samsara and reach the city of Nirvana.

The PvA account, referring to the story of the present, too, says that after the Buddha has explained these verses in detail, the unnamed king’s servant (who has fetched the lotuses and red clay) becomes a streamwinner. The DhA adds that many others, too, become streamwinners and so on, and that the public benefit from the Buddha’s discourse.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, king Pasenadi himself, deeply moved by samvega, abandons his covetousness for wives of others, and is satisfied with his own women.<sup>31</sup>

The DhA adds that the king then releases all the sacrificial victims. The men and women who were sacrificial victims then praise queen Mallikā: “Long live our noble queen Mallikā, on whose account we

<sup>27</sup> *Bodhisatto mahā, janassa sothim katvā katipāham vasi tvā tatth’eva gantvā aparihīna-j, jhāno brahma, loke uppajji.* (J 314/3:48)

<sup>28</sup> SA 1:144; DhA 5.1/13 f.

<sup>29</sup> *Samsāra*, the cycle of births and deaths in suffering.

<sup>30</sup> DhA 5.1/2:12 (omitted in DhA:B 2:107).

<sup>31</sup> PvA 4.15/282.

have received our lives!”<sup>32</sup> Later in the evening, the monks in the Dharma Hall discussed how wise she is, how by her own wisdom she has given the gift of life to all those people. The Buddha on hearing this, relate two stories of the past on how Mallikā had even in the past done the same thing. [1.4]

**1.2 THE SAṂYUTTA COMMENTARY (SA)**, in the briefest account of the three (with very little narrative but a few interesting details), relates that king Pasenadi, as a result of his lustful thoughts, hears four eerie cries—*sa so na du*—apparently from nowhere.

1.2.1 THE BRAHMIN’S PLOY AND MALLIKĀ’S RESPONSE. The next day, after a sleepless night, the anxious king asks his purohit, who sees this as an excellent opportunity to obtain great gains,<sup>33</sup> and thinks,

“Prosperity or disaster has nothing to do with this dream of this king, but with what there is in this house. It gives to the recluse Gotama, and to Gotama’s disciples, but the brahmins receive nothing! I will procure alms for the brahmins!” and said:

“This is serious, maharajah! The dream portends one of three disasters, that is, there will be danger to the kingdom, danger to life, or there will be no rain.”<sup>34</sup> (SA 1:142)

Then the purohit assembles a chapter of brahmins in the palanquin pavilion (*sivika, sālā*) and explains the situation to them, and then arranges them into three groups. When the king asks them how to put things right, the great brahmins (*mahā brāhmaṇa*)<sup>35</sup> propose that the king offer the “**all-five-hundred sacrifice**” (*sabba, pañca, sata yañña*), but the king remains silently neutral about it. The second and third groups of brahmins, too, tell the king to offer the sacrifice. So finally the king orders that the sacrifice be offered. The brahmins bring together various living beings, such as bulls, and so on, to be killed. A great commotion arises in the city.

When queen Mallikā learns about what has transpired, she sends the king to see the Buddha, although it is early in the day. After the king has told the Buddha regarding the four sounds, the Buddha tells him that they are the cries of four adulterers boiling in the cauldrons of the great hell (*mahā, niraya*). The Buddha then tells the king not to fear anything at all, and explains the four sounds in full. After listening to the Buddha’s discourse, the king is repentant (confessing to his “long night”), and the king’s servant is relieved (confessing to his “long league”). The Buddha combines their sentiments into **Dhamma, pada verse 60** and discourses on it, as already stated above, after which the king’s servant becomes a stream-winner [1.1.7]. (SA 1:141-144)

1.2.2 THE FOUR BASES FOR WELFARE.

**(1) The original great sacrifices.** The Saṃyutta Commentary of the (Pasenadi) Yañña Sutta then closes with two important explanations of the four great sacrifices (*mahā yāga*). It says that in the times of the ancient rajahs (*porāṇa, rāja*), the four great sacrifices were actually **the four bases for welfare** (*saṅgaha, vatthu*), thus.<sup>36</sup>

<u>Brahminical</u>		<u>Buddhist</u>	
<i>Aśva, medha</i>	the horse sacrifice;	<i>Sassa, medha</i>	the giving of food to the wise;
<i>Vaja, peya</i>	the fertility drink;	<i>Vācā, peyya</i>	pleasant speech;
<i>Puruṣa, medha</i>	the human sacrifice; and	<i>Purisa, medha</i>	beneficent conduct; and

<sup>32</sup> DhA 5.1/2:14.

<sup>33</sup> DhA says that the brahmin (purohit) *does not know* the significance of the king’s haunting encounter, and to save his neck, comes up with the best advice he knows: offer a sacrifice! (DhA 5.1/2:6 f).

<sup>34</sup> “*Imassa rañño iminā supinena vuḍḍhi vā hāni vā n’atthi, api ca kho pana yaṃ imassa gehe atthi, taṃ samaṇassa Gotamassa hoti, Gotama sāvakaṇaṃ hoti, brāhmaṇā kiñci na labhanti, brāhmaṇānaṃ bhikkhaṃ uppādessāmī ti, “Bhāriyo ayam, mahārāja, supino tīsu jāṇīsu ekā paññāyati, rajj’antarāyo vā bhavissati jīvit’antarāyo vā, devo vā na vassissatī ti āha.* (SA 1:142)

<sup>35</sup> The officiants of the *śrāddha* (ancestral ritual).

<sup>36</sup> The 4 bases of welfare (*saṅgaha, vatthu*) are: (1) generosity (*dāna*), (2) pleasant or convincing speech (*piya, vācā*), (3) beneficial conduct (*attha, cariyā*), and (4) just impartiality (*samānatattā*): see **Ujjaya S** (A 4.39/2:42 f), (**Aṭṭha**) **Mettānisamsa S** (A 8.1/4:151); (**Pasenadi**) **Yañña S** (S 3.9/1:76); Sn 303; It 21; J 4:302; SnA 321.

*Śamyā,prāsa*<sup>37</sup> the staff-throwing.

*Sammā,pāsa* right regard for others.<sup>38</sup>

In this way, the people could live happily with their doors “unbolted” (*nirargaḷa*).<sup>39</sup> (SA 1:144)

**(2) From Okkāka’s time.** During the time of rajah Okkāka (the legendary ancestor of the Sakyas), however, the brahmins interpreted the bases of welfare (which they increased to five, including *nirargaḷa*)<sup>40</sup> as bloody sacrifices involving slaughter and violence, calling them the “five sacrifices” (*pañca yañña*) (SA 1:145). The *nirargaḷa*, apparently was an unrestrained form of *aśva,medha*.<sup>41</sup>

The *aśva,medha* or horse sacrifice was the most important and complex of Vedic rituals, performed by a king to celebrate his glory. The ritual is described in detail in various Vedic writings, especially the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.<sup>42</sup> A hand-picked stallion was allowed to roam freely for a year under the protection of royal guards. If the horse entered a foreign country, its ruler had either to fight or to submit.

If the horse remained uncaptured, it was brought back at the year’s end and publicly sacrificed in a fertility rite [Fig 3]. The wandering horse was said to symbolize the sun’s orbit around the world, that is, the king’s power over the earth. On successful completion of the sacrifice, the king could assume the title of *cakravartī* (universal monarch). The ritual was believed to ensure the prosperity and fertility of the whole kingdom.

It is a well known historical fact that the Buddha condemns the horse sacrifice, which consequently seems to have suffered a decline. Samudra Gupta (c 330-c 180 BCE), however, is known to have issued coins commemorating his successful completion of an *aśvamedha*. It was performed by Puṣyamitra Śuṅga (r 187-151 BCE). It may have continued well into the 11th century, when a Chōḷa king was believed to have performed it, too.

The *puruṣa,medha*, properly translated as “the sacrifice of the Puruṣa (primal man),” is sometimes understood as actual human sacrifice (as described in the Buddhist Commentaries). The Yajur Veda describes people from all classes and of all descriptions being tied to the stake and offered to Prajāpati, a high god.<sup>43</sup> However, even in Vedic times it appears that the sacrifice was taken to be only symbolic, re-enacting the creation of man and the universe (according to brahminical lore).<sup>44</sup>

The *vaja,peya* is a sort of fertility rite. *Vaja* means rice (connoting food) and *peya* means a drink. As the name suggests, the *vaja,peya* sacrifice is believed to bring in a bountiful crop and plentiful rain (and water). While the sacrificer (*yajamāna*) takes a ritual bath (*avabhr̥tha snana*) at the end of the sacrifice, the king himself holds up a white umbrella for him. In one version of the ritual, the sacrificer is “bathed” in the rice (poured over with the rice) that is left over from the ritual.

The *śamyā,prāsa* was apparently part of a great soma sacrifice (where the juice of hallucinogenic soma plant was offered to the gods and drunk). All that we know about it is what we find in the Commentaries. The Sutta Nipāta Commentary explains it as: “Here, *sammā,pāsa* means ‘they are well thrown.’ It refers to a great soma-sacrifice (*satra,yāga*; Skt *satrā,yāga*). Everyday, they walk anti-sunwise with movables such as sacrificial pots, etc, from the spot where they have immersed these into the river Sarasvatī, and having thrown a peg (*sammā*; Skt *śamyā*), they build an altar where it has fallen”

<sup>37</sup> BHS *śamyā,prāsa*.

<sup>38</sup> Note the demythologizing in each case, incl *nirargaḷa*, which is reinterpreted as “unbolted.”

<sup>39</sup> BHS *nirargaḷa* (“unbolted”), see Mvst 2:100.3.

<sup>40</sup> BHS *nirargaḷa*; Skt *nirargaḷa*.

<sup>41</sup> BHSD: *nirargaḷa*.

<sup>42</sup> The *Aśva,medha* (horse sacrifice) is described in detail in the Yajurveda (TS 7.1-5, YV VSM 22-25 & comy in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, ŚBM 13.1-5). The Ṛgveda gives a brief description of the sacrifice, notably in hymns ṚgV 1.162-163, but does not allude to the full ritual as found in the Yajurveda.

<sup>43</sup> The *Puruṣa,medha* is described in the Yajurveda (VS 30-31). The verse describes people from all classes and of all descriptions tied to the stake and offered to Prajāpati (the Creator). The ceremony evokes the mythical sacrifice of Puruṣa, the “Cosmic Man,” and the officiating brahmin recites the Puruṣa,śukta (Ṛgveda 10.90 = AVS 5.19.6 = VS 31.1-16).

<sup>44</sup> Human sacrifice however is not uncommon in India. Even up to about 200 years ago, for example, a boy is sacrificed at the Kali temple everyday. Sporadic cases of ritual human killing still occur today, although many go unreported. See eg <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,322673,00.html>.

(SnA 1:321 f). The Aṅguttara Commentary and the Iti,vuttaka Commentary explains in identical terms, adding an interesting detail, that the peg is a “small stick thrown through a plough’s yoke-opening (or hole)” (AA 4:70).<sup>45</sup> Apparently, this is another fertility rite, understandably common in agrarian society of ancient India.

**(3) A modern interpretation.** The modern Thai monk thinker, **Prayudh Payutto**, reminds us how the Buddha redefines (or ethicizes) these sacrifices as the four royal conditions for welfare (*rāja,saṅgaha,vatthu*), that is, the ethical bases for a successful and just governance, as including:<sup>46</sup>

- *Sassa,medha*: the skilled promotion of agricultural technologies and policies.
- *Purisa,medha*: shrewd government administration through policies and appointment of honest and capable officials who are provided with adequate social benefits.
- *Sammā,pāsā*: community support through policies to support equity for all persons.
- *Vācā,peyya*: pleasant speech when advising, greeting and encouraging appropriate actions.

(Payutto, 2000:22-24)

**1.3 THE JĀTAKA COMMENTARY (J)** tells the story of Pasenadi in **the Loha,kumbhi Jātaka** (J 314).<sup>47</sup> Its story of the present does not mention Pasenadi’s exploit to take the beautiful married woman for himself [1.1]. The Jātaka reciters probably presume the audience’s familiarity with Pasenadi’s story, and so, in its story of the present, plunge straight into the account of the four hellish sounds. [1.1.4-7] When king Pasenadi consults his purohit, he, seeing his opportunity to gain material benefits, refers the king to an assembly of conniving brahmins who propose an “**all-four sacrifice**” (*sabba,catukka yañña*), that is, four elephants, four horses, four bulls, four humans, four quails and so on.<sup>48</sup> [1.1.4]

On noticing the great commotion and outcry regarding the sacrifice, the wise queen Mallikā intercedes [1.1.5]. On Mallikā’s advice, Pasenadi sees the Buddha, who reassures the king that the sounds will in no way adversely affect him. In fact, these same four sounds, says the Buddha, is heard by Brahma,datta, the ancient king reigning in Benares. This is of course **the Loha,kumbhi Jātaka**.

Like the other accounts, the Loha,kumbhi Jātaka relates how the purohit and brahmins propose that the king offer an “all-four sacrifice.” Now the Bodhisattva is then an ascetic residing in his solitary retreat in the Himalayas. After his lovingkindness meditation, he sees this development, and decides to intervene. He appears in the king’s garden, where he meets the purohita’s eldest pupil who is disillusioned with his teacher’s ploy. He relates what has transpired to the Bodhisattva, who then asks if the king has ruled justly. When the young brahmin says yes, the Bodhisattva instructs him to bring the king to him.

The Bodhisattva then explains to king Brahma,datta that the hell-beings, on account of the gravity of their evil karma, are each only able to utter a single syllable, unable to complete their stanzas. Then he assures the king that nothing would happen to him (on account of having heard the four sounds). Thus reassured, the king proclaims that all the sacrificial victims are to be freed and the sacrificial pit destroyed. And the Bodhisattva, after bringing succour to the people, stays there a few days, and then without any break in his dhyana (or in his meditation), is reborn in the Brahma world.<sup>49</sup>

The Buddha relates the Loha,kumbhi Jātaka to rajah Pasenadi to put his mind at ease. In typical Jātaka narrative style of recounting how the present event often has its past-life versions, the four nocturnal sounds that Pasenadi heard are said to have occurred to another royalty, Brahma,datta, the king of

<sup>45</sup> *Divase divase yuga-c,chiggale pavesana,dandaka,sankhātāṃ sammāṃ khipitvā tassa patit’okāse vedim katvā samhārimehi yūp’ādīhi sarassatī,nadiyā nimugg’okāsato pabhuti paṭilomaṃ gacchantena yajitabbassa satra,yāgass’etaṃ adhivacanaṃ* (AA 4:70). Same as at ItA 1:94, except that the phrase *divase divase* is omitted,

<sup>46</sup> The *rāja,saṅgaha,vatthu* is commentarial (SA 1:144 f; AA 4:69; ItA 1:93; SnA 321), but are based on the Suttas: S 3.9/1:76; A 4.39/2:42, 8.1/4:151; It 21; Sn 303: see Intro (1.2.2) above.

<sup>47</sup> J 314/3:44-48.

<sup>48</sup> *Bahuṃ maccha,maṃsaṃ khādissāma, bahuṃ dhanam labhissāma ti ussāha-p,pattā hutvā “idaṃ laddhum vaṭṭati, idaṃ laddhum vaṭṭati, devā ti aparāparam caranti.* (J 314/3:44)

<sup>49</sup> *Bodhisatto mahā,janassa sotthim katvā katipāham vasi tvā tatth’eva gantvā aparihīna-j,jhāno brahma,loke uppajji.* (J 314/3:48)

Benares, in ancient times, that is when the Buddha was still a Bodhisattva, cultivating his perfections (*paramī*).

At the end of the Jātaka, the Buddha, making the story's connections, declares that Sāriputta was the young brahmin, and he was the ascetic himself.

**1.4 THE DHAMMAPADA COMMENTARY (DhA)** gives the most detailed account of the Pasenadi story in **the Aññatara, purisa Vatthu** ("The story of a certain person," DhA 5.1). It has a principal or frame story (the present story of Pasenadi's adulterous intentions),<sup>50</sup> followed by three embedded or nested stories of the past: the first story, placed in the time of Kassapa Buddha, is about four seths' sons (*setthi, -putta*),<sup>51</sup> who, intoxicated with their wealth,<sup>52</sup> indulge in a life of vice climaxing in adultery, resulting in their being reborn into the great hell,<sup>53</sup> and two about Mallikā's past lives.

The frame-story story is basically similar to the other accounts, except for an interesting observation of human nature. The narrator notes that the king's servant, having returned and finding the city gate closed, resigns himself to his fate, and seeks refuge for the night in the monastery, thinking, "The monks are soft-hearted (*mudu, hadayā*). I will go and sleep in the monastery." (In times of happiness, notes the DhA, beings here do not even know the monks exist, but in times of overwhelming difficulties, they desire to go to the monastery!) (DhA 5.1/2:5).

That same night the king hears the four eerie sounds. After a sleepless night, the king consults his purohit, and is advised to offer an "**all-hundred sacrifice**" [1.1.4]. Queen Mallikā, alerted by the commotion of the sacrifice preparations, intercedes, and in fact scolds the king, instructing him to consult the Buddha. The Buddha reassures the king, and explains the meaning of the four sounds. After the king has left, in the evening, the monks speak of Mallikā's wisdom and compassion [1.1.5]. The Buddha confirms their view, and tells two nested stories of the past relating to her compassionate wisdom.

Of the two nested stories concerning Mallikā's past lives, the first relates how she, as **Dinnā** (chief queen of the youngest of the captured kings), uses her wisdom to save the lives of the hundred kings and their consorts from being sacrificed as votive offerings by an ambitious king of Benares to a tree-spirit.<sup>54</sup>

At the end of the first story, queen Dinnā weeps and then laughs, confusing the king. The second story of the past relates queen Dinnā's own account of how she suffers a long time in hell for beheading an ewe, and as such suffered a long time in hell (so she *cries*, recalling this). Now having obtained release from that suffering, she *laughs*.<sup>55</sup>

At the end of the story, the Buddha declares that the king of Benares was Pasenadi Kosala, Dinnā was queen Mallikā, and the tree-spirit was the Buddha himself, closing the whole account with these verses:

*Idha socati pecca socati  
pāpa, kārī ubhayattha socati  
so socati so vihaññati  
disvā kamma, kiliṭṭham attano.*

Here he sorrows, hereafter he sorrows,  
the evil-doer sorrows in both places:  
he sorrows, he is afflicted,  
seeing his own defiled karma. [Dh 15]

*Evam ce sattā jāneyyūm  
dukkhāyam jāti, sambhavo  
na pāṇo pāṇinaṃ haññe  
pāṇa, ghātī hi socati.*

If beings were to know thus,  
that this suffering is born with birth,  
no living being would kill another being:  
for, he who kills living beings sorrows. [J 18/1:168]

**1.5 THE PETA, VATTHU COMMENTARY (PvA)** story is given in **the Setthi, putta Vatthu** (PvA 4.15).<sup>56</sup> It is clearly the latest of the accounts for a couple of reasons:

<sup>50</sup> DhA 5.1/2:1-9.

<sup>51</sup> A seth (*setthī*) is a rich entrepreneur.

<sup>52</sup> PvA 4.15/280.

<sup>53</sup> DhA 5.1a/2:9-14.

<sup>54</sup> DhA 5.1b/2:14-17.

<sup>55</sup> DhA 5.1c/2:17-19. The weep-and-laughing episode is also found in the Asita episode of the child Siddhattha (Sn 689, 691; SnA 487-489; J 1:54 f).

<sup>56</sup> PvA 4.15/279-282.

(1) The story is told as a preta story, even though the seths' sons (*setthi,putta*) are hell-beings, which probably means that the story-tellers are retelling an ancient story using a more popular genre: the preta-story.

(2) The episode of the king's servant going on his quest to fetch the lotuses and red clay is not related in full, but the audience is told to refer to the pericope in **the Amba,sakkhara Peta,vatthu** (PvA 4.1/-217).

The PvA account however gives an interesting psychological insight into king Pasenadi's mind—“His heart was possessed by the onslaught of defilements that had arisen on account of a strong visual object that he had never seen before”—as already mentioned [1.1.1].

Despite the lateness of the PvA account, it relates that the group of brahmins proposes only an “**all-four sacrifice**” (*sabba,catukka yañña*) and not something bigger. However, PvA humorously recounts that the excited brahmins think of having a great feast and receiving much wealth!” and so scurry about according to their plans [1.1.4].

**1.6 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND OTHER MOTIFS.** A really good story tickles our latent tendencies, which explains why we love to know them, and keep on enjoying them. The latent tendency of lust stimulates the pheromone flow, which tends to make us addictive to it. The latent tendencies are *lust, aversion and ignorance*, that is, the true roots of unwholesome emotions, and they manifest themselves on a pre-conscious level as *greed, hate and delusion*, that is, the unwholesome roots of deeds and speech. We see all these negative psychological roots in the stories surrounding the Pasenadi story.

**1.6.1** First, there is the “**lust at first sight**” motif found in the different versions of the story. Like any absolute monarch of ancient times, Pasenadi thought he could take what he wants, even the wife of another. He only catches a glimpse of the married woman, but that is enough to blind him with lust. He desires to have her. However, does not do this openly, lest it brings about a public outcry which would then destabilize his power. So he conscripts the poor man as his servant (who, interestingly, unlike slaves, has to execute the king's orders without any question). He sends the servant on a wild goose chase.

The terrified servant knows the peril he is in, and does his best to succeed in his task, and he does so. But the king is better prepared: he makes sure that the city gate is closed well before the servant returns so that he “fails” in his mission. The servant loudly announces at the gate that he has accomplished his task so that at least the door-keeper hears him, if not some of the citizens. Undoubtedly, his indomitable perseverance arises from his love for his wife, which fortunately is stronger than the king's lust for her.

Having done all he could with his worldly powers, the servant then retreats to a monastery to spend the night. He is confident that the monks are “soft-hearted” enough. The story-teller sarcastically notes that people will grasp at straws when they are in danger: they turn to religion only when the world seems to turn against them.

That same night, while the tired servant sleeps peacefully, but the lustful king, in his troubled sleeplessness, hears four hellish sounds. In his desperation, he listens to the bad counsel of his brahmins, preparing himself to fall from the frying-pan of lust into the fire of violating numerous innocent lives in a huge sacrifice. The Buddha relates a *jātaka* story, in which the sufferings of four adulterers, suffering on account of their lust, are illustrated. This teaching effectively kills the king's lust for the women of others for good.

**1.6.2** Another important theme is that of “**compassionate wisdom**,” centering around queen Mallikā. Learning of the brahmins' ploy to have a great sacrifice, Mallikā advises the king to instead consult the Buddha. According to one account, she actually scolds that king to for being so foolish as to believe the self-serving brahmins. In fact, because of her intercession, many lives are saved, the king's mind is put at ease (concerning the four sounds), and with the king brought back to his senses, the servant, too, is saved. All's not well, but ends well, thanks to Mallikā, and the Buddha.

**1.6.3** Then, there is the “**numbers**” motif, that is, the number of sacrificial victims, is interesting in that they vary in the accounts. Interestingly, both the canonical account [2.1] and SA mention **500 sacrificial victims**, the largest number of all the accounts [1.2.1]. Such a number would clearly impress the audience that the king is very wealthy, and that the brahmins are very greedy. The DhA account mentions only a hundred sacrificial victims (still a large number for a single sacrifice).

Interestingly, it is **PvA**, the latest account, that mentions the smallest number of victims, only *four* each. It is likely that when the PvA account was composed, such bloody sacrifices were less popular, and the impact of the story shifts to the sufferings of the hell-beings themselves. The story is however included in the Peta, vatthu without any mention of pretas! It is likely that by the time of its composition by Dhamma, pāla (around mid-6th century),<sup>57</sup> the term *peta* (Skt *preta*) still retained its old meaning of “the departed,” and not a specific class of beings.<sup>58</sup>

**1.6.4** The fourth, and clearly universal, theme is that “**life is precious**,” especially with regards to the first precept (against taking life). Although the message of respect for life is not as apparent as, say, in **the Kūṭa, danta Sutta** (D 5), it underlies all the stories all the same. The (Pasenadi) Yañña Sutta however clearly describes the sufferings of the workers, how they are mistreated by the brahmins:

There were slaves, messengers, and labourers, but they did all their work being driven by the rod [by the fear of punishment], or driven by fear, or weeping, with tears in their faces. [§5]

The Kūṭa, danta Sutta happily states that in a wholesome sacrifice, as in that given by the ancient king Mahā Vijita, there is neither killing nor suffering, thus:

NO KILLING. Now, brahmin, in the sacrifice, no oxen were killed, no goats were killed, neither chickens nor pigs were killed, nor were any life put to death;<sup>59</sup> no trees were cut down, no bunches of darbha grass<sup>60</sup> were mown down to serve as sacrificial grass.

NO SUFFERING. There were slaves, messengers, and labourers, but they did all their work without being driven by the rod [by the fear of punishment], nor driven by fear, nor weeping, with tears in their faces. Indeed, those who wished to work, did so. Those who did not wish to work, did not. The sacrifice was accomplished with only ghee, oil, fresh butter, curds, honey and molasses.<sup>61</sup> (D 5.18/1:142) = SD 22.8

The Buddha often and clearly denounces live sacrifices and meaningless rituals. So effective is the Buddha’s message that the violent Vedic sacrifices declined in popularity, and with the work of kings like Asoka, this message of non-violence and compassion are further enhanced and widespread.

## 2 Related suttas

**The (Pasenadi) Yañña Sutta** should be studied with **the Kūṭadanta Sutta** (D 5). In the former, 500 sacrificial animals of each kind are said to have been prepared for sacrifice; in the latter, the brahmin Kūṭa, danta prepares 700 sacrificial animals of each kind: in either case, the Buddha admonishes the sacrificer on what is the best sacrifice. The four great Vedic sacrifices (*mahā, yāga* or *yāga, vadha*) are, in fact, mentioned by name in the Buddha’s verse admonition to Pasenadi on the “best sacrifice” (S 393-397) [§6]. Such a sacrifice is related in the Kūṭa, danta Sutta as a *jātaka* of the ancient king Mahā Vijita.<sup>62</sup> [1.6.4]

Giving (*dāna*) and charity (*pariccāga*) are two foundation qualities for the Buddhist life, especially for the laity. Ritualistic giving is not beneficial, or at best, has a limited benefit, because it is only an

<sup>57</sup> KR Norman *Pali Literature*, 1983b:134-137.

<sup>58</sup> However, see **(Saddhā) Jāṇussoṇī S** (A 10.177/5:269-273 = SD 2.6), where the Buddha tells Jāṇussoṇī that “ancestral offerings” (*saddhā*; Skt *śrāddha*) only pretas, but not hell-beings, animals, humans, nor devas. One possible explanation here is that *peta* is probably an early term for the beings in between births, ie, the intermediate existence (*antarā, bhava*). See **Is rebirth immediate?** = SD 2.17.

<sup>59</sup> This sentence up to here similarly appears in **Pāyāsi S** (D 23.31/2:353 f): see Intro (3.2) above.

<sup>60</sup> Darbha grass, *dabbha*, ie, bunches of kusha (*kusa*, *Poa cynosuroides*), a grass with long pointed stalks (MW). The sacrificial animals were laid on the darbha grass and ritually killed.

<sup>61</sup> *Sappi, tela, navanīta, dadhi, madhu, phāṇitena c’eva so yañño niṭṭhānam agamāsi*. See Intro (3.4).

<sup>62</sup> D 5.18/1:141 = SD 22.8.

external expression, even display, without the true participation of the mind and heart. Some kinds of giving may even be manipulative, such as when our agenda is to look good in others' eyes.<sup>63</sup>

The (Aṭṭha) Mettānisaṃsa Sutta (A 8.1)<sup>64</sup> and the Mettā Bhāvanā Sutta (It 1.3.7),<sup>65</sup> both with an identical set of verses, similar to the (Pasenadi) Yañña Sutta, are apparently very ancient, as they are also found in the Gandhārī Dharmapada (Dh:G 194-198):<sup>66</sup>

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | <i>Yo ca mettāṃ bhāvayati,<br/>appamāṇam patissato<br/>tanū saṃyojanā honti,<br/>passato upadhi-k,khayam</i>   | Who cultivates lovingkindness<br>immeasurably, ever mindful,<br>his mental fetters are<br>destroyed, because he sees.  |
| 2 | <i>Ekam pi ce pāṇam aduṭṭha,citto<br/>mettāyati kusali<sup>68</sup> tena hoti<br/>sabbe'va pāṇe manasā'nukampī<br/>pahūtam ariyo pakaroti puññaṃ</i>                   | <sup>67</sup> If he has a hate-free mind for even a single living being,<br>he shows lovingkindness: he is thereby wholesome.<br>He has a mind of compassion towards all life,<br>the noble one creates abundant good [merit]. |
| 3 | <i>Ye satta,sanḍam paṭhaviṃ jinitvā<sup>69</sup><br/>rājīsayo yajamānānupariyagā<sup>71</sup><br/>assa,medham purisa,medham<br/>sammā,pāsam vāja,peyyam niraggaḷam</i> | Having conquered the earth and its multitude of beings, <sup>70</sup><br>the royal seers go about sacrificing<br>the horse sacrifice, the human sacrifice,<br>the peg-throw, and the lavish soma fertility drink—              |
| 4 | <i>mettassa cittassa subhāvitassa<br/>kalam pi te nānubhavanti soḷasim<br/>canda-p,pabhā tāra,gaṇā'va sabbe<br/>yathā na agghanti kalam pi soḷasim</i>                 | a well-cultivated mind of lovingkindness,<br>they attain not even a sixteenth part, <sup>72</sup><br>just as the starry constellations' light is not equal<br>to even a sixteenth part of the moon's light.                    |
| 5 | <i>Yo na hanti na ghāteti<br/>na jināti na jāpaye<br/>mettaso<sup>73</sup> sabba,bhūtānam<br/>veran tassa na kenacī ti</i>   | Who kills not, nor causes another to kill,<br>who conquers not, nor causes another to conquer,<br>he is one with lovingkindness to all beings:<br>there is no hate in him towards anyone.                                      |
- (A 8.1/4:150 f (SD 30.6) = It 1.3.7/19-22 (SD 30.7))<sup>74</sup>

### 3 Vedic sacrifices

The four great Vedic sacrifices, known as *mahā yāga*, are also mentioned in the **Brāhmaṇa Dhammika Sutta** (Sn 2.7),<sup>75</sup> which relates the origin of these sacrifices in morally virtuous practices.

<sup>63</sup> For various wrong reasons for giving, and the right one, see eg **Kiṃ,dada S** (S 1.42/1:32) = SD 2.9; **Dutiya-puttaka S** (S 3.20) = SD 22.5; see **Dāna S 1-2** (A 8.31-32/4:236) = SD 6.6 Intro for other suttas; on the proper way of giving, see **Dutiya-puttaka S** (S 3.20/1:91-93) = SD 22.5 Intro (2).

<sup>64</sup> A 8.1/4:150 f = SD 30.6.

<sup>65</sup> It 1.3.7/19-22

<sup>66</sup> See Dh:G (tr John Brough, 1962:149 f, 241 f).

<sup>67</sup> On the occurrence of both *kusala* and *puñña* here, see SD 18.7 Intro (6.4).

<sup>68</sup> Ce PTS; Se *kusalam*.

<sup>69</sup> Ce Se; PTS *vijetvā*..

<sup>70</sup> "Multitude of beings," *satta,sanḍa*, foll DPL: *sanḍa*; PED (sv *sanḍa*): "teeming with beings"; A:H 4:104: "the teeming earth"; but Brough (Dh:G 1962: 242 n192) disagrees.

<sup>71</sup> Ce Se; PTS *-pariyayā*.

<sup>72</sup> "A sixteenth part," *kalam pi...soḷasim* (ie, an iota). Comy, however, often gloss it as "a sixteenth of a sixteenth" (eg SA 1:59, 314; UA 172).

<sup>73</sup> Ce Se; PTS *mettāṃso*.

<sup>74</sup> Be Se; Ce Mettā Ceto,vimutti Sutta. Verses 3-4 are qu at KhA 168.

<sup>75</sup> Sn 2.7/284-315/50-55.



**Fig 3** Illustration of the Rāmāyaṇa by Sahib Din, 1652. Kauśalya is depicted slaying the horse (left) and lying beside it (right).

There is a whole Jātaka story, **the Bhūri,datta Jātaka** (J 543), one of the greatest of Buddhist moral tales that singlemindedly criticizes Vedic and brahminical philosophy. Although this is a commentarial work, illustrating the Bodhisattva's perfection of wisdom, its spirit is clearly canonical in denouncing bloody sacrifices and giving an entirely ethical and spiritual dimension. At the height of the tale, the Bodhisattva, called **Mahosadha**, declares:

**940** *Sace hi so sujjhati yo hanāti  
hato pi so saggam upeti thānam  
bho,vādī bho,vādinā mārayeyyūn  
ye cāpi tesam abhisaddaheyūn.*

If he who kills were to be innocent,  
if the killer were to find a place in heaven,  
then sir-caller [brahmin] should sir-caller kill,  
and let us firmly have faith in them!

**941** *N'eva migā na pasū no'pi gāvo  
āyācanti atta,vadhāya keci  
vipphandamāne idha jīvik'atthā  
yaññesu pāṇe pasum ārabhanti.*

Nor even deer, nor beast, nor cattle, too,  
ever beg for themselves to be killed,  
struggling here, their purpose is to live,  
as they seize cattle and beings for sacrifice.

**942** *Yūp'ussane pasu,bandhe ca bālā  
cittēhi vaññehi mukham nayanti  
ayam te yūpo kāma,duho parattha  
bhavissati sassato samparāye.*

Only fools would stand before the pole that binds cattle:  
they are led by the mouth with colourful thoughts  
that this sacrificial pole will grant their wishes beyond,  
(and) that it will be forever so in this present life.

(J 543.7/6:210 f)<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For a delightful but at times too free tr of this passage, see J:C 6:110 (tr EB Cowell, 1895).

## The Discourse on the Sacrifice (by Pasenadi)

(S 3.9/1:75 f)

1 At Sāvattḥī.

2 At that time a great sacrifice has been set up for rajah Pasenadi of Kosala. And five hundred bulls, five hundred bullocks, five hundred heifers, five hundred [76] goats, and five hundred rams were brought to the sacrificial posts to be sacrificed.<sup>77</sup>

3 There were slaves, messengers, and labourers, but they did all their work being driven by the rod [by the fear of punishment], or driven by fear, or weeping, with tears in their faces.<sup>78</sup>

4 Then, some monks, having dressed themselves in the morning and taking robe and bowl, entered Sāvattḥī for alms. Then the monks, having gone on their almsround in Sāvattḥī, and having finished their meal of almsfood, went up to the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side. Sitting thus at one side, the monks said this to the Blessed One:

5 “Here, bhante, a great sacrifice has been set up for rajah Pasenadi of Kosala. And five hundred bulls, five hundred bullocks, five hundred heifers, five hundred goats, and five hundred rams were brought to the sacrificial posts to be sacrificed.

There were slaves, messengers, and labourers, but they did all their work being driven by the rod [by the fear of punishment], or driven by fear, or weeping, with tears in their faces.”

6 Then the Blessed One, having understood the situation, uttered these verses for that occasion:<sup>79</sup>

393 *Assa,medhaṃ purisa,medhaṃ  
sammā,pāsaṃ vāja,peyyaṃ  
niraggalaṃ mahāārambhā  
na te honti maha-p,phalā.*

The horse sacrifice, the human sacrifice,  
the peg-throw, the soma fertility drink,<sup>80</sup>  
the unbolting:<sup>81</sup> they are great commotions<sup>82</sup>—  
they do not bring great fruit.

394 *Ajelakā ca gāvo ca  
vividhā yattha haññare,  
na taṃ sammaggatā yaññaṃ  
upayanti mahesino.*

Where goats and cattle  
of various kinds are killed,  
to such a sacrifice, those right in conduct,  
the great seers, go not.

395 *Ye ca yaññā nirārambhā  
yajanti anukulaṃ sadā,  
ajelakā ca gāvo ca  
vividhā n’ettha haññare*

Where the sacrifice is not violent,  
families by custom<sup>83</sup> always sacrifice,  
but neither goats nor cattle  
of various kinds are killed,

<sup>77</sup> *Pañca ca usabha,satāni pañca ca vacchatarā,satāni pañca ca vacchatarī,satāni pañca ca aja,satāni pañca ca urabbha,satāni thūnūpanīṭāni honti yaññ’atthāya.* As in **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5.1/1:127) = SD 22.8, but where the number of sacrificial animals are 700 (*satta...satāni*) each. In either case, the number is probably exaggerated, but is here symbolic of the king’s wealth. Interestingly, the Comy stories about such sacrifices give a smaller number of victims [1.1.4]

<sup>78</sup> See **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5.18b/1:141 & 20b/1:142) = SD 22.8 for the opp case.

<sup>79</sup> Cf the lovingkindness verses at **Mettā Bhāvanā S** (S 1.3.7/21 f) = SD 30.7.

<sup>80</sup> These sacrifices are mentioned at S 1:76; A 2:42, 4:151; It 21; Sn 303; J 4:302; SnA 321. Skt: *aśva,medha puruṣa,medha śamyā,prāsa vāja,peya nirargaḍa* (Divy 634.7, 11, 18, 21). See Intro (1.2.2(2)). For philological analyses, see Dh:G (Brough 1962:242 n196) & Sn:N (KR Norman 1992:206 n303).

<sup>81</sup> BHS *nirargaḍa* (“unbolted”), see Mvst 2:100.3.

<sup>82</sup> Comy explains *mahārambha* as “great duties, great things to be done” (*mahā,kiccā mahā,karaṇīyā*) (SA 1:146), while Īkā adds that it is “the acts of killing many animals” (*bahu,pasu,ghāta,kammā*) (SAT:VRI 1:157)

<sup>83</sup> Comy says that this refers to the regular alms-offering started by the people earlier, and which goes on unbroken down the generations (SA 1:146). Īkā: “By custom” (*anukulaṃ*), which Comy explains as “that which has come down through the family” (*kulānugataṃ*) (SAT:VRI 1:158).

**396** *etaṃ samma-gatā yaññaṃ  
upayanti mahesino,  
etaṃ yajetha medhāvī  
eso yañño maha-p-phalo.*

to that well conducted sacrifice  
the great seers go;  
a wise person should sacrifice thus:  
This sacrifice is of great fruit.

**397** *Etaṃ hi yajamānassa,  
seyyo hoti na pāpiyo  
yañño ca vipulo hoti  
pasīdanti ca devatā ti.*

For, offering this sacrifice  
is better, never bad,  
its fruit is abundant,  
and the gods are pleased.

— evaṃ —

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