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(Aṭṭhaka Assa) Khaluṅka Sutta

The (Eights) Discourse on the Restive (Horses) | A 8.14

Theme: Psychological defence mechanisms

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

1 Early Buddhist psychology

1.1 The (Aṭṭhaka Assa) Khaluṅka Sutta (A 8.14)¹ is a very important and interesting text in the study of a psychological aspect of the settled monastics in terms of *sāraṇija*, which here has the sense of “deference” or “face,” that is, a regard for status and authority.² The discourse lists eight kinds of reactions of a “restive” monk who is accused of misdeeds. His negative behavior is compared to the reactions of a restive horse, showing its intractability.

This short Khaluṅka Sutta is a remarkable document on the Buddha’s acute sense of observation and has provided grist for the mills of the modern psychotherapists. Rune Johansson, in his article “Defense mechanisms according to psychoanalysis and the Pāli *Nikāyas*” (1983)³ gives an insightful modern analysis of this sutta which helps one appreciate it and understand its application better.

1.2 In his article, Johansson analyzes the 8 types of persons [§§10-17] in terms of “frustration” that psychoanalysts have found to be behind all **psychological defence mechanisms**.⁴ The Buddha’s key teaching is immanent suffering or existential unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), which is defined in the well known statement: “to wish for something and not to obtain it is suffering” (*yam p’icchaṃ na labhati tam pi dukkhaṃ*, D 2:305)

In his study of the Sutta, Johansson identifies examples of how people react to frustration, that is, by way of regression [§§10, 13, 16], aggression [§11], projection [§12], compensation [§14], isolation [§§15, 16] and denial [§16]. “We see then,” concludes Johansson, “that nearly all of the defense mechanisms discussed by psychoanalytic writers have actually been discovered and described, although not explained and named, in this passage” (1983:19).⁵

1.3 In other words, what we have here are examples of “psychological cases” analyzed by the Buddha himself. However, the Khaluṅka Sutta merely lists the cases, comparing them to 8 kinds of intractable horses, as being negative emotional and spiritual states, without further comment. Many of the Buddha’s longer discourses or sections of them, especially those of the Dīgha Nikāya and the Majjhima Nikāya, are “hypothetical case histories,” as Joy Manné calls them.⁶

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The Discourse on the Restive (Horses) (the Eights)

A 8.14

1 Bhikshus, I will teach you regarding eight kinds of restive [inferior]⁷ horses and the eight faults in a horse,⁸ and eight types of restive persons and the eight faults in a person.

¹ Another horse-simile sutta is **(Navaka) Assa Khaluṅka S** (A 9.22/4:397-400).

² On *sāraṇija*, see **Piṇḍolya S** (S 22.80), SD 28.9a (3).

³ See esp 1983:17-21; see biblio for details.

⁴ On defence mechanisms, see SD 24.10b (2).

⁵ For other similar passages where defence mechanisms are mentioned, see Johansson 1983:20 f.

⁶ Joy Manné, “Case histories from the Pali Canon I & II,” JPTS 1995:1-128. See biblio for details.

⁷ “Restive,” *khaluṅka*. The Pali word has two senses: it connotes (as direct meaning) “restive, excitable, shaking, agitated” and denotes (as derived meaning) “unbroken, inferior” as regards horses here. While the horses in the first 6 similes are “excitable” [2-7], the last two are simply unmoving [8 f]. Cf **Ass’ājāniya S** (A 8.14/ 2:250), where the

Listen, bhikshus, pay close attention to it, I will speak.”
 “Yes, bhante!” the bhikshus answered the Blessed One in assent.
 The Blessed One said this:

The 8 kinds of horses

2 “And what, bhikshus, are the eight kinds of restive [inferior] horses and the eight faults in a horse?

(1) Here, bhikshus, a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’⁹ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer,

instead it backs¹⁰ [191] and twists the chariot around its hindquarters.

Even so, bhikshus, here a certain horse is restive.

This, bhikshus, is the first fault in a horse.

3 (2) Again, *bhikshus, here a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer,*

instead it jumps back [lifting its two hind legs], hits the carriage railing and breaks the triple bar.

Even so, bhikshus, here a certain horse is restive.

This, bhikshus, is the second fault in a horse.

4 (3) Again, *bhikshus, here a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer,*

instead [it bows its head so that the yoke falls to the ground,] its thigh¹¹ strikes the chariot, loosens the pole and it tramples on it.

Even so, bhikshus, here a certain horse is restive.

This, bhikshus, is the third fault in a horse.

5 (4) Again, *bhikshus, here a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer,*

instead it goes the wrong way and runs the chariot off the road.

Even so, bhikshus, here a certain horse is restive.

This, bhikshus, is the fourth fault in a horse.

6 (5) Again, *bhikshus, here a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer,*

instead it rears up its front quarters and paws the air.

Even so, bhikshus, here a certain horse is restive.

This, bhikshus, is the fifth fault in a horse.

7 (6) Again, *bhikshus, here a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer,*

but ignoring him, ignoring the goad, it gnashes the bit [192] free¹² and wanders about where it wishes.

Even so, bhikshus, here a certain horse is restive.

This, bhikshus, is the sixth fault in a horse.

8 (7) Again, *bhikshus, here a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer,*

it neither moves forward nor back, but stands right there like a post.

qualities of thoroughbreds are listed; **Sandha S** (A 9.10/5:322-326) uses these two kinds of horses as similes; (**Ti-assa) Khaluṅka S** (A 9.22/4:397).where three kinds of restive horses are mentioned.

⁸ “Faults in a horse,” *assa,dose*. The word *dosa* (Skt *doṣa*), as meaning “fault, defect” is rarely found in the Nikāyas, where it (Skt *dveṣa*) is usually used to mean “anger, ill will, hate” often in combination with *rāga* (lust) and *moha* (delusion) (eg V 1:183; D 3:146, 159, 182, 214, 270; M 1:15, 47, 96 f, 250 f, 395, 489; S 1:13, 15, 70, 98, 5:34 f; A 1:134, 187, 201, 2:172, 191, 203, 3:181, 338; Dh 20; Sn 270, 506, 631; It 2=6, 45, 57).

⁹ “Go forward!” *pehī ti*, which Comy glosses as *gacchā ti* (AA 4:104).

¹⁰ “Moves back,” *paṭisakkati*.

¹¹ “With its thigh,” *satthim*, lit “thigh”.

¹² “Gnashes the bit free,” *dantehi mukhādhānam viddhamṣitvā*, lit “having destroyed the bit with its teeth.”

Even so, bhikshus, here a certain horse is restive.

This, bhikshus, is the seventh fault in a horse.

9 (8) *Again, bhikshus, here a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer,*

it folds its forelegs and hind legs together and just sits right there on its four legs.

Even so, bhikshus, here a certain horse is restive.

This, bhikshus, is the eighth fault in a horse.

These, bhikshus, are the eight kinds of restive [inferior] horses and the eight faults in a horse.

The 8 kinds of restive persons

10 And, bhikshus, what are the eight types of restive persons and the eight faults in a person?

(1) Here, bhikshus, the monks accuse a monk of an offence.¹³ That monk, being thus accused of an offence by the monks, strongly objecting¹⁴ to the accusation, pleads forgetfulness. “I do not remember! I do not remember!”¹⁵

Bhikshus, just as a restive horse is told, “Go forward!” while being beaten and goaded by the trainer, instead it backs and twists the chariot around its hindquarters—even so, bhikshus, is this person like that, I say. Such, bhikshus, is this certain person with a fault here.

This, bhikshus, is the first fault in a person.

11 (2) *Again, bhikshus, here the monks accuse a monk of an offence. That monk, being thus accused of an offence by the monks, strongly objecting to the accusation, [193]*

exclaims, ‘What is there to your foolish and ignorant talk? Think about what you should say!’¹⁶

Bhikshus, just as a certain restive horse is told, “Go forward!” while being beaten and goaded by the trainer, instead it jumps back [lifting its two hind legs], hits the carriage railing and breaks the triple bar—even so, bhikshus, is this person like that, I say. Such, bhikshus, is this certain person with a fault here.

This, bhikshus, is the second fault in a person.

12 (3) *Again, bhikshus, here the monks accuse a monk of an offence. That monk, being thus accused of an offence by the monks, strongly objecting to the accusation,*

retorts, ‘You, too, have committed such and such an offence! You make amends for yours first!’¹⁷

Bhikshus, just as a restive horse is told, “Go forward!” while being beaten and goaded by the trainer, but [it bows its head so that the yoke falls to the ground,] its thigh strikes the chariot, loosens the pole and it tramples on it—even so, bhikshus, is this person like that, I say. Such, bhikshus, is this certain person with a fault here.

This, bhikshus, is the third fault in a person.

13 (4) *Again, bhikshus, here the monks accuse a monk of an offence. That monk, being thus accused of an offence by the monks, strongly objecting to the accusation,*

¹³ “Offence,” *āpatti*, ie an infringement of a monastic rule.

¹⁴ “Strongly objects,” *paṭippharati*. The Pali word has two senses: it connotes “to effulge, shine forth, stream out, emit,” and figuratively denotes “to splurt out, bring against, object” (PED).

¹⁵ *Na sarāmi na sarāmi ti asatiyā ‘va nibbeṭheti*. “To be reproved by the order of monks is of course a frustration, and this monk replies that he does not remember. This is a defense, and it may be that he has really forgotten. In this case we have the defense mechanism of **repression**. If his defense is a conscious lie, it is of course still a defense but not a defense mechanism in the psychoanalytic sense, since these are always unconscious transformations of forces in the id.” (Johansson 1983:18)

¹⁶ *Codakam yeva paṭippharati “kin nu kho tuyham bālassa avyattassa bhaṇitena, tvam pi nāma bhaṇitabbam maññasī ti*, lit “What is there by speaking with your foolishness and ignorance? Think about what should be said!”; alt tr: “What right have you to talk, an ignorant fool? Why do you think you must speak?” “This is evidently a case of **aggression**, ie the most original and ‘natural’ way of reacting to frustration.” (Johansson 1983:18).

¹⁷ *Tvam pi kho ‘si iṭhan, nāmam āpattim āpanno, tvam tāva paṭhamam paṭikarohī ti*. “When somebody does not recognize an undesirable motive in himself but accuses others of having it, this is called **projection**. Our text gives a very clear example of this mechanism.” (Johansson 1983:18). This is also an example of the logical fallacy of “tu quoque” (Latin, “You, too”), where a criticism is answered by another criticism, instead of a counter-argument.

evades the issue by raising various others,¹⁸ brushes aside the issue, and shows anger, ill will and discontent.¹⁹

Bhikshus, just as a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer, instead it goes the wrong way and runs the chariot off the road—even so, bhikshus, is this person like that, I say. Such, bhikshus, is this certain person with a fault here.

This, bhikshus, is the fourth fault in a person.

14 (5) *Again, bhikshus, here the monks accuse a monk of an offence. That monk, being thus accused of an offence by the monks, strongly objecting to the accusation, speaks before the order, gesticulating his arms.²⁰*

Bhikshus, just as a [193] restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer, instead it rears up its front quarters and paws the air—even so, bhikshus, is this person like that, I say. Such, bhikshus, is this certain person with a fault here.

This, bhikshus, is the fifth fault in a person.

15 (6) *Again, bhikshus, here the monks accuse a monk of an offence. That monk, being thus accused of an offence by the monks, strongly objecting to the accusation, ignores the order, ignores his accusers, wanders about as he wishes as an offender.²¹*

Bhikshus, just as a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer, instead ignoring him, ignoring the goad, it gnashes the bit free²² and wanders about where it wishes, even so is this person like that, I say. Such, bhikshus, is this certain person with a fault here.

This, bhikshus, is the sixth fault in a person.

16 (7) *Again, bhikshus, here the monks accuse a monk of an offence. That monk, being thus accused of an offence by the monks, strongly objecting to the accusation,*

says, ‘But I have not committed any offence! I have not committed any offence!’ And by his silence, he vexes the order.²³

Bhikshus, just as a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer, it neither moves forward nor back, but stands right there like a post, even so, bhikshus, is this person like that, I say. Such, bhikshus, is this certain person with a fault here.

This, bhikshus, is the seventh fault in a person.

17 (8) *Again, bhikshus, here the monks accuse a monk of an offence. That monk, being thus accused [195] of an offence by the monks, strongly objecting to the accusation,*

¹⁸ “Evades...another,” *aññen ’aññam paṭicarati*, lit “wanders about from one to another.” This is an example of **isolation**.

¹⁹ *Aññen ’aññam paṭicarati, bahiddhā katham apanāmeti, kopañ ca dosañ ca appaccayañ ca pātukaroti*. “This man evidently finds no intelligent defense but reverts to a rather childish and disorganized behaviour. This is what the psychoanalysts call **regression**, although there are also aggressive elements.” (Johansson 1983:18)

²⁰ *Saṅgha,majjhe bāhu,vikkhepaṃ bhaṇāti*. Johansson follows Hare’s mistranslation of *bāhu,vikkhepaṃ* (*bāhu*, “arm” + *vikkhepaṃ*) reading it as *bahu* (much) + *vikkhepaṃ*. “It is not mentioned what this monk had to say, so the Buddha probably just wanted to draw the attention to his performance. Probably the monk wanted to make a good impression by an imposing performance: in this way he could make his fellow monks forget the real issue, ie his offense. The order of monks admires and has use for a good speaker and can therefore disregard minor offenses. Such an attempt to hide a weakness by a good achievement in a different field is what we call **compensation**.” (Johansson 1983:18)

²¹ *Anādiyivā saṅgham ānādiyivā codakam sāpattiko va yena,kāmaṃ pakkamati*. “This monk seems to refuse to see the problem and try to disregard it completely and behave as if it did not exist. This means that he **isolates** himself from his problems: he uses then another psychoanalytic mechanism of withdrawing from the demands of life by refusing to see some of his own tendencies.” (Johansson 1983:19)

²² “Gnashes the bit free,” *dantehi mukhādhānaṃ viddhamsivā*, lit “having destroyed the bit with its teeth.”

²³ *N’evāham āpanno ’mhi, na panāham āpanno ’mhī ti. So tunhī,bhāvena saṅgham viheseti*. “This would be a case of **denial**. The monk refuses to see his own offense and may sincerely believe that he is innocent. Evidently an act of **repression** is then also involved; this may have created a certain tenseness which makes him silent, and this annoys his fellow monks. He refuses to discuss the problem, since he dares not even direct his own consciousness to it.” (Johansson 1983:19). On this kind of silence, see **Silence and the Buddha**, SD 44.1 (2.1).

says thus, ‘Why do you bhantes fuss so much over me? Let me now give up the training and return to the low life [to life as a layman]! Having given up the training and returned to the low life, he says thus, ‘Now, bhantes, are you satisfied?’’²⁴

Bhikshus, just as a certain restive horse is told, ‘Go forward!’ while being beaten and goaded by the trainer, it folds its forelegs and hind legs together and just sits right there on its four legs—even so, bhikshus, is this person like that, I say. Such, bhikshus, is this certain person with a fault here.

This, bhikshus, is the eighth fault in a person.

These, bhikshus, are the eight kinds of restive persons and the eight faults in a person.

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²⁴ “*Kin nu kho tumhe āyasmanto atibāḥam mayi vyāvaṭā yāva idānāham sikkham paccakkhāya hīnāyāvattissāmī ti, So sikkham paccakkhāya hīnāyāvattitvā evam āha, “Idāni kho tumhe āyasmanto attamanā hothā ti. “Now... are you satisfied?” idāni kho tumhe āyasmanto attamanā hothā ti, lit “Now bhantes be satisfied!” “This monk evidently was conscious of his offense, but his self-image would not permit him to repent and make amends. Therefore he withdraws from the whole situation. This can be understood as another case of **isolation** or **restriction of the ego**. In this case, the self-image is saved by a physical escape from the problem and in the case mentioned earlier, by a psychological screening-off.” (Johansson 1983:19)*