

Caṅkama Sutta

WT: Caṅkama Sutta The Discourse on Walking | S 14.15/2:155-157

Theme: In friendship like tends to attract like

Translated by Piya Tan ©2006, 2010

1 Birds of a feather

1.1 THE GREAT SAINTS. The Caṅkama Sutta is a short and simple statement on that nature of friendship, that is, that like tends to attract like. A good person tends to attract good friends, a bad person bad friends. In the former case, such a friendship is a basis for spiritual friendship, while the latter is a basis for bad friendship.¹

It is not common that such great luminaries of the early noble sangha are gathered in other place before the Buddha. Mahā Kassapa, for example, is well known as a solitary forest dweller.² This period must have been one of the rains-retreat period, when the monks lived together for three monks (from the full-moon of June-July to the day after the September-October full-moon).

Only seven of the 80 great elders³ are mentioned here, that is,

| | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| (1) Sāriputta | great wisdom | (<i>mahā,paññā</i>) |
| (2) Mahā Moggallāna | great psychic power | (<i>mah'iddhika</i>) |
| (3) Mahā Kassapa | ascetic practice | (<i>dhutavāda</i>) |
| (4) Anuruddha | the divine eye | (<i>dibba,cakkhuka</i>) |
| (5) Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta | Dharma speaker | (<i>dhamma,kathika</i>) |
| (6) Upāli | Vinaya expert | (<i>vinaya,dhara</i>) |
| (7) Ānanda | great learning | (<i>bahu-s,suta</i>). |

Clearly, the theme here is wisdom (*paññā*), in which **Sāriputta**, the wisest of the monks after the Buddha,⁴ is listed first as the Buddha's right hand monk. **Moggallāna**, Sāriputta's closest friend and the Buddha's left-hand monk, is able to attain to the fourth dhyana at such a speed that he is declared to be the foremost of those monks who have psychic power.⁵

Mahā Kassapa is very wise, too, but is better known for his ascetic practice, a sort of mirror of the Buddha's ascetic life as the Bodhisattva, and as a standard for sangha purity in times to come. Traditionally, almost all the Buddhist schools look up to Mahā Kassapa as *the* "Dharma heir" of the Buddha. To the Theravadins and followers of early Buddhism, he is a sort of "reflection" (*chāyā*) of the Buddha and they emulate his "forest," or contemplative yet idyllic, life-style.⁶ The Mahayanists generally regard him as the first "ancestor" (after the Buddha) in their various lineages.⁷

Anuruddha, through his awakening, attained the "divine eye" or clairvoyance (*dibba,cakkhu*), for which he was declared to be foremost amongst the monks (A 1:23).⁸ With this ability, he is able to know not only the karmic circumstances of a being's death or rebirth, but also read another's mental process, as he famously does in connection with the Buddha's passing.⁹

¹ See **Bad friendship** = SD 64.17.

² See Mahā Kassapa Thera, *gāthā* 1051-1081.

³ PmA 1:6; ThaA 3:205; VbhA 388: see **Aṭṭha,puggala S** (A 9.59) = SD 15.10a Intro (7).

⁴ On Sāriputta and Moggallāna, see DhA 1.8/84-114; J 1:2-85; V 1:23 f, 39-43; cf KhpA 202-206; PvA 19-23. See also Piya Tan, **The Buddha and His Disciples**, 2004 ch 5.10-36.

⁵ On Moggallāna, see Piya Tan, **The Buddha and His Disciples**, 2004 ch 5.30-35.

⁶ See Mahā Kassapa Thera, *gāthā* 1051-1081.

⁷ On Mahā Kassapa, see Piya Tan, **The Buddha and His Disciples**, 2004 ch 6.4. On the Chan and Zen lineages going back to Bodhidharma, and then to Mahā Kassapa, see **How Buddhism became Chinese** = SD 40b.5.

⁸ A 1:23, 3.128/1:281 f; Tha 916 f; Ap 35. See **Anuruddha Upakkilesa S** (M 128) @ SD 5.18(5).

⁹ D 16.6.8-9/2:156 f = SD 9.

Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta is Aññā Koṇḍañña's nephew.¹⁰ In the **Ratha,vinīta Sutta** (M 24), he is presented as a monk who is well above socializing, living a contented secluded life, yet a most skillful teacher.¹¹ He is Ānanda's teacher, on account of whose teaching, Ānanda becomes a streamwinner.¹² As such, Puṇṇa is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of those monks who are Dharma speakers.¹³

Upāli, it is told, joins the order under some level of duress.¹⁴ In due course, it is recorded in the **(Dur-*abhisambhava*) Upāli Sutta** (A 10.99), desires to be a forest, but is advised by the Buddha to Buddha to stay in the community.¹⁵ Living in a monastic community, Upāli become one who is the most well-versed in the Vinaya-masters, and is declared by the Buddha as the foremost of monks who are Vinaya experts.¹⁶

Ānanda is the Buddha's personal attendant (*upaṭṭhāka*) during the last 25 years of his life.¹⁷ In terms of learning, Ānanda has two constant benefits from this special association, that is, he could consult the Buddha at any time should he have a doubt, and if he misses a teaching, the Buddha would repeat it to him (AA 1:293 f). Ānanda is also declared by the Buddha to be foremost of monks who have a retentive or eidetic (photographic) memory (*satimanta*, A 1:24). All this contribute to the fact that he is also foremost of those monks who are greatly learned, and this is despite the fact that he is only a streamwinner¹⁸

1.2 "ELEMENT"(DHĀTU). In the concluding section of the Caṅkamaṇa Sutta [§§18-21], where the Dharma teaching is found, we find the key term *dhātuso*, "on account of element." It is interesting that it is found in the Dhātu Saṃyutta, "the element collection" (S 14/2:140-177). The ten suttas of the first chapter (*vagga*) (S 14.1-10) deals with the 18 elements, that is, the six sense-faculties, the six sense-objects, and their corresponding types of consciousness. The second chapter opens with three suttas on miscellaneous types of elements (S 14.11-13). This is the most common sense of *dhātu*.

This is followed by 26 suttas (S 14.14-29) where the word *dhātu* means "personal disposition," which is not so common. As noted by Bodhi, "With respect to numerous contrasting qualities, good and bad, the point is made that people come together because of personal affinities rooted in these qualities." (S:B 528). The Caṅkamaṇa Sutta (S 14.15) is found in this section.

2 Who really is Devadatta?

Who really is Devadatta? This is not a historical question,¹⁹ but a reflective one. We could rephrase the question as: "What do we learn from the Devadatta story?" We learn little by smugly accepting Devadatta as the archetypal evil monk, as it were, and leave it at that. Then we would have the problem of truly understanding or trying to understand the early Buddhist notion of not-self (*anattā*), that there is really no abiding entity.

The point is that people can change, and Devadatta can change. The fact that Devadatta is listed at all in the Caṅkamaṇa Sutta is very significant. Let work with the Pali council fathers and reciters who present Devadatta, despite being a monk, as a habitual evil-doer, the foremost, as it were, of all those who have evil desires (*pāp'icchā*).

The first point we should note is that the Buddha allows him to be ordained at all, and despite his persistent and numerous evil-doings, does not throw him out of the sangha. We see here the Buddha great compassion in allowing him to stay on. We could argue that Devadatta might have been a bad monk, but if he were a layman, he might have been worse. Being a monk for Devadatta, as such, is a sort of lesser evil.

¹⁰ Mantāni is Aññā Koṇḍañña's sister and mother of Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta (1.62/5; BA 51). He is ordained by Aññā Koṇḍañña (BA 51).

¹¹ M 24.2/1:145 f = SD 28.3.

¹² See **(Puṇṇa) Ānanda S** (S 22.83/3:105 f) = SD 71.11.

¹³ A 1:23; S 14.15/2:156.

¹⁴ V 2:182 f; DhA 1.12a/1:133-138.

¹⁵ A 10.99/5:201-29 & SD 30.9 esp (2.3).

¹⁶ V 1:325-328 etc; A 1:25, 4:143; DhA 1.12a/1:133-138; B 1.61/5; BA 44.

¹⁷ Tha 1041-1043. See **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.5.14/2:144) = SD 9.

¹⁸ On Ānanda, see Piya Tan, **The Buddha and His Disciples**, 2004 ch 6.3.

¹⁹ For a more detailed study, see **Devadatta** = SD 71.4.

Secondly, the Devadatta story, or rather stories, as told by the ancient texts, especially the Commentaries, relating how evil he can be, are reminders that even the good, indeed the best of men, can or must face great difficulties. It is natural that a Buddha is one who specializes in dealing with adversities, and even in attracting them. Yet in being tolerant of Devadatta, allowing him to stay on as a monk, we see him serving as a foil to the Buddha, throwing into clear relief and showing how great the Buddha's compassion is.

There is Devadatta in everyone of us when we, overwhelmed by greed, hate or delusion, act on them causing pain and strife in others. Yet, in our happier moments, we wish that all this had not happened, that we had had better control of ourselves. Evil deeds are, as a rule, unwholesomely done, that is, there are done with a bad mindfulness, or weak awareness. We are not really aware of the true consequences of our bad actions.

We are able to get out of the Devadatta mode when we accept ourselves as we really are, and work from there with lovingkindness, with the determination that we can be better. True self-love is the ability and willingness to look within ourselves for that inner peace and joy, that is the ground for clear mind that attract insight wisdom.

Finally, the very fact that Devadatta is a monk in the Buddha's time, living in his presence, shows that he has accumulated a lot of good karmic fruit. Indeed, even as Devadatta dies, being swallowed up by the earth, the Buddha predicts that in the distant future, he would become a pratyeka-buddha named Atth'is-sara.²⁰ The lesson of the Devadatta story then is clear: there are no evil people, only evil tendencies.

— — —

²⁰ DhA 1:147; Miln 111.

The Discourse on Walking

S 14.15/2:155-157

1 At one time, the Blessed One was residing on Mount Vulture Peak near Rājagaha.

Birds of a feather

2 Then, the venerable Sāriputta was pacing and down with some monks, not far away from the Blessed One.

3 The venerable Mahā Moggallāna, too, was pacing and down with some monks, not far away from the Blessed One.

4 The venerable Mahā Kassapa, too, was pacing and down with some monks, not far away from the Blessed One.

5 The venerable Anuruddha, too, was pacing and down with some monks, not far away from the Blessed One.

6 The venerable Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta, too, was pacing and down with some monks, not far away from the Blessed One.

7 The venerable Upāli, too, was pacing and down with some monks, not far away from the Blessed One.

8 The venerable Ānanda, too, was pacing and down with some monks, not far away from the Blessed One.

9 Devadatta, too, was pacing and down with some monks, not far away from the Blessed One.

The monks' specialties

10 Then the Blessed One addressed the monks,

“Do you, bhikshus, see **Sāriputta** pacing and down with some monks?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“All of them, bhikshus, are monks of great wisdom.²¹

11 Do you, bhikshus, see **Mahā Moggallāna** pacing and down with some monks?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“All of them, bhikshus, are monks of great psychic power.²²

12 Do you, bhikshus, see **Mahā Kassapa** pacing and down with some monks?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“All of them, bhikshus, are monks of ascetic practice.²³ [156]

13 Do you, bhikshus, see **Anuruddha** pacing and down with some monks?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“All of them, bhikshus, are monks with the divine eye.²⁴

14 Do you, bhikshus, see **Puṇṇa Mantāni,putta** pacing and down with some monks?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“All of them, bhikshus, are monks who are Dharma speakers.²⁵

15 Do you, bhikshus, see **Upāli** pacing and down with some monks?”

²¹ He is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of monks who have great wisdom (*mahā,paññā*) (A 1:23).

²² He is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of monks who have great psychic power (*iddhimanta*) (A 1:23).

²³ He is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of monks who keep up ascetic practice (*dhutavāda*) (A 1:23).

²⁴ He is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of monks who have the divine eye (*dibba,cakkhuka*) (A 1:23), also called knowledge of death and rebirth” (*cut’upapāta ñāṇa*) or “knowledge of how beings fare according to their karma” (*yathā,kammūpaga ñāṇa*). Given in Vbh 334.13 as *sattānaṃ cutūpapāte ñāṇaṃ*. See **Miracles** = SD 27.5a esp (5.4).

²⁵ He is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of monks who are Dharma speakers (*dhamma,kathika*) (A 1:23).

“Yes, bhante.”

“All of them, bhikshus, are monks who are Vinaya experts.”²⁶

16 Do you, bhikshus, see **Ānanda** pacing and down with some monks?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“All of them, bhikshus, are monks of great learning.”²⁷

17 Do you, bhikshus, see **Devadatta** pacing and down with some monks?”

“Yes, bhante.”

“All of them, bhikshus, are monks of evil desires.”²⁸

Beings gather by way of the elements

18 “Bhikshus, it is, indeed, *on account of element* that beings associate and fit in.²⁹

Those of a low inclination associate, fit in, with those of a low inclination.³⁰

Those of an inclination to good, associate, fit in, with those of an inclination to good.

19 In times past, too, bhikshus,

on account of element that beings associate and fit in;

those of a low inclination associate, fit in, with those of a low inclination;

those of an inclination to good, associate, fit in, with those of an inclination to good.

20 In future times, too, bhikshus,

on account of element that beings associate and fit in;

those of a low inclination associate, fit in, with those of a low inclination;

those of an inclination to good, associate, fit in, with those of an inclination to good. **[157]**

21 Even now, in the present, too, bhikshus,

on account of element that beings associate and fit in;

those of a low inclination associate, fit in, with those of a low inclination;

those of an inclination to good, associate, fit in with those of an inclination to good.

— evaṃ —

100821; 100823; 100917

²⁶ He is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of monks who are Vinaya experts (*vinaya, dhara*) (A 1:24).

²⁷ He is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of monks who have great learning (*bahu-s, sutā*) (A 1:24).

²⁸ On Devadatta, see Intro (2).

²⁹ “Associate and fit in,” *sāmsandanti samenti* (pl) of *sāmsandati sameti*.

³⁰ *Hīnādhimuttikā hīnādhimuttikehi saddhīm sāmsandanti samenti*.