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(Sattaka) Mettā Sutta¹

The (Sevens) Discourse on Lovingkindness

or, (Puñña) Mettā Sutta The Discourse on Lovingkindness (as Merit) | A 7.58a

or Paṭhama Mā Puñña Bhāyī Sutta = Ma Puñña Bhāyī 1 The First “Do Not Fear Merit” Discourse

Theme: The spiritual benefit of lovingkindness

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003; rev 2010

1 Introduction

1.1 Related suttas. In the PTS edition, this Sutta is placed immediately after **the (Moggallāna) Pacalā Sutta**,² as if it is a part of that Sutta. This short inspiring Sutta appears, with some minor textual variations, in the first half of **Mā Puñña Bhāyī Sutta** (It 1.3.2/14-16), and is referred to once in **the Khuddaka Commentary** (KhA 230) and twice in the Jātaka (**the Araka Jātaka**, J 169; **the Dhamma-dhaja Jātaka**, J 220). In the Araka Jātaka (J 169), similar words are ascribed to the Bodhisattva when he was the teacher Araka.³

1.2 Lovingkindness. The Sutta has two key themes: lovingkindness (*mettā*) and merit (*puñña*). Firstly, the two are closely related and done together, as it were. Whatever act of merits (bringing good karmic fruits) done through body, speech and mind, are done with a heart of **lovingkindness** (*mitta.cittena*). In simple terms, we could say, act with “love.” However, this love is one by which we unconditionally accept oneself, as we accept others. Hence, lovingkindness (*mettā*) is just the right term

1.3 Merit

1.3.1 Secondly, **merit** (*puñña*) refers to the 3 “grounds for merit-making” (*puñña,kiriya,vatthu*), or the bases for merit-making, or bases of good karma, namely, giving (*dāna*), moral virtue (*sīla*) and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). More fully, they are called

- (1) the ground for merit-making based on giving (*dāna,maya puñña,kiri,vatthu*);
- (2) the ground for merit-making based on moral virtue (*sīla,maya puñña,kiri,vatthu*), and
- (3) the ground for merit-making based on mental cultivation (*bhāvanā,maya puñña,kiri,vatthu*)
(D 33,1.10(38)/3:218)

1.3.2 These merit-making practices are quite widely found even outside of the Buddha’s teaching, that is, even when there is no Buddha or the Buddha Dharma around. These are a sort of universal code of good conduct which bring happy rebirths and great blessings.

Giving (*dāna*) or charity is universally accepted good and ethical action, as such an action tends to benefit both the recipient and the giver.⁴

Moral virtue (*sīla*) is the respect for the body (life, property and personal freedom) and right speech (truthful, socially harmonious, pleasant and useful).

¹ Due to editorial oversight in the PTS Pali ed, this sutta is treated as part of **Moggallāna or Pacalā S** (A 7.58), and DPPN does not note this error: for the Sutta, see SD 4.11.

² A 7.58/4:85-88 @ SD 4.11.

³ See **Araka S** (S 7.70), SD 16.17(2).

⁴ On the 5 benefits that a giver gets, see **Dān’ānisaṃsa S** (A 5.35/3:41), SD 45.3.

Cultivation (*bhāvanā*) here refers to training our minds to be free from thoughts of violence, ill will and wrong views. To be free of “wrong views” basically refers to selfless thoughts, especially those moved by lovingkindness.

These are the kinds of good deeds that the Buddha declares he practised as a Bodhisattva, and on account of its great good karmic fruits, he enjoyed all kinds of worldly and divine blessings, as exemplified in **the (Puṇṇa) Mettā Sutta**.

1.3.3 The Mā Puñña Bhāyī S (It 22) calls them giving (*dāna*), taming (*tama*) and control (*saññama*).⁵ Another key text dealing with merit is **the Puñña, kiriya, vatthu Sutta** (A 8.36).⁶

1.3.4 For the kind of actions that would bring us to the path and on to full awakening, we need to abstain from the 10 unwholesome courses of karma (*akusala kamma, patha*), and to practise the 10 wholesome courses of karma (*kusala kamma, patha*). Briefly, the 10 unwholesome and 10 wholesome courses of karma are as follows:⁷

<u>Unwholesome courses of karma</u>	<u>Expressed through</u>	<u>Wholesome courses of karma</u>
(1) killing	the body (bodily karma)	abstaining from killing
(2) stealing		abstaining from stealing
(3) sexual misconduct		abstaining from sexual misconduct
(4) false speech	speech (verbal karma)	truthfulness
(5) divisive speech		unifying speech
(6) harsh speech		pleasant speech
(7) frivolous chatter		beneficial talk
(8) covetousness	the mind (mental karma)	non-covetousness
(9) ill will		lovingkindness
(10) wrong view		right view

Table 1.3.4 The courses of karma

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(Sattaka) Mettā Sutta

The (Sevens) Discourse on Lovingkindness

or, The Discourse on Lovingkindness (as Merit); or, The First “Do Not Fear Merit” Discourse

A 7.58a

1 Bhikshus, be not afraid of merit.⁸ This “merit,” [89] is another name for happiness. For, I know very well, I have for a long time experienced the desirable, pleasant and agreeable fruits of meritorious deed often performed.

⁵ It 22/15), SD 2.11b.

⁶ A 3.86/4:241-243 @ SD 22.17.

⁷ On these 10 unwholesome and wholesome karmic courses, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41,11-14), SD 5.7 & **Sañcetani-ka S** (A 10.206,7.2-12), SD 3.9.

⁸ “Merit,” *puñña*, given in the plural (*puññānaṃ*) in Pali, but in modern English, “merit” is an uncountable noun. In the pl sense, it refers to “acts of merit.” On merit, see **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 (6.3) *Puñña*.

2 For 7 years I cultivated a heart of lovingkindness.⁹ Having cultivated a heart full of lovingkindness for 7 years, I did not return to this world¹⁰ for 7 aeons¹¹ of world-contractions and world-expansions.¹² Whenever a world was destroyed, I was reborn among the devas of streaming radiance (*ābhassarā*).¹³

3 When the world unfolded [evolved] again,¹⁴ I was reborn in an empty celestial palace [Brahma-vimāna].¹⁵ And there I was Mahā Brahmā, the Vanquisher, Unvanquished, Overlord [Almighty].¹⁶ And 36 times I was Sakra, leader of the devas,¹⁷ and many hundred times I was a universal monarch, a just and righteous king.¹⁸

There were, bhikshus, these **7 jewels** (*satta ratana*) of mine, that is to say, the wheel jewel, the elephant jewel, the horse jewel, the gem jewel, the woman jewel, the steward jewel, and the commander jewel as the seventh.¹⁹ Furthermore, bhikshus, another thousand were my sons, brave, heroic in limb and form, the crusher of the armies of others. Victorious over this earth, surrounded by the ocean, I ruled with neither rod nor sword [with neither fear nor violence], but justly.

- 4 *Passa puññānaṃ vipākaṃ kusalānaṃ sukhesina
mettaṃ cittaṃ vibhāvetvā satta,vassāni bhikkhave
satta,samvaṭṭa,vivaṭṭa,kappe na-y-imaṃ lokam punāgamaṃ [90]*

See the wholesome fruit of the happiness-seeker's merit!
Having cultivated a lovingkind heart for seven years, bhikshus,
After seven world-cycles of shrinking and expanding, I return not to this world.

- 5 *Samvaṭṭamāne lokambhi homi ābhassarūpago
vivaṭṭamāne lokambhi suññaṃ brahmūpago ahum*

When the world rolled back, I arrived in the Ābhassara world,
when the world rolled open, I arrived in an empty Brahma world.

⁹ *Satta vassāni metta,cittaxm bhāvesim* [Be *bhāvesi*]. Comy does not tell us when the Bodhisattva did such a practice: see SD 49.3 (4.2.1.2).

¹⁰ Comy: He had attained to dhyana with lovingkindness and thus did not return to this world, that is, the sense sphere (*kāma,loka*) (AA 4:44).

¹¹ "Aeon," *kappa*, is divided into 4 phases of cosmic expansion, stable state, cosmic contraction, stable state (A 4.156, 7.62). **Pabbata S** says that an aeon would last longer than it would take a man (assuming he is long-lived) to wear down a mountain a league (7 mi=11.25 km) high, a league wide, a league round by stroking it once a century with a fine muslin (S 15.5).

¹² Buddhist cosmology speaks of a "pulsating" universe, that is, in modern terms, a cycle "big bang," steady state, "big crunch," steady state, ad infinitum. See **Brahma,jāla S** (D 2,39-40/1:17), SD 25.2.

¹³ *Ābhassarā*, the highest of the 3 Brahma worlds, all part of the 2nd dhyana plane. When the universe is devolves through "fire," all lower worlds are destroyed, while the beings are mostly reborn in Ābhassara (or in a parallel universe): see **Aggañña S** (D 27.10/3:84 f), SD 2.19 esp n on "mostly" at D 27.10a; Vism 13.41-44/416 f. See ItA 1:76. On parallel universes, see **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29.2/5:59 f), SD 16.15; Kvu 13.1/476.

¹⁴ Presumably for the 8th time: Comy is silent.

¹⁵ "Celestial palace," *brahmā,vimāna*. Alt tr "heavenly mansion," that is, the divine realm or "celestial realm" of a particular deva.

¹⁶ *Abhibhū anabhibhūto añña-d-atthu,daso vasa,vattī*: **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1,5/1:18,7), SD 25.2; **Bhaddaji S** (A 5.170/3:202,9); (**Puñña**) **Mettā S** (A 7.58a,3/4:89,9), SD 2.11a; (**Satta**) **Suriya S** (A 7.62,10/4:105,3), SD 47.8; Comy: DA 1:111. Attr to Buddha in: **Pāsādika S** (D 29,29.4/3:135,20 = Nc 276); (**Tathāgata**) **Loka S** (A 4.23,3/2:24,13 = It 112/122,7), SD 15.7 (2.1.2);

¹⁷ The lifespan of devas in Tāvātimsa is equivalent to 36 million human years (A 3.70,19/1:213).

¹⁸ See It:M 22 n82.

¹⁹ For details, see **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17/2:169-199), SD 36.12.

- 6 *Satta-k,khattuṃ mahā,brahmā vasa,vatti tadā ahurṃ
cha-t,timsa-k,khattuṃ dev'indo deva,rajjam akārayim*

For seven times Mahā Brahmā, almighty, such was I,
Thirty-times I ruled as Sakra, lord of the devas.

- 7 *Cakka,vatti ahurṃ rājā jambu,dīpassa issaro
muddhāvasitto khattiyō manussāhipatī ahurṃ*

A world monarch was I, the lord of Jambu,dvīpa [the Jambul Continent],
a head-anointed kshatriya, the overlord of men was I.

- 8 *Adaṇḍena asatthena vijeyya paṭhaviṃ imāṃ
asāhasena dhammena samena anusāsīyaṃ*

This world I conquered without rod or sword,
without violence, admonishing justly and harmoniously [impartially].

- 9 *Dhammena rajjaṃ kāretvā asmim paṭhavi,maṇḍale
maha-d,dhane mahā,bhoge aḍḍhe ajāyisaṃ kule*

I ruled justly in this circle of the earth;
families grew wealthy, great in wealth, great in enjoyment.

- 10 *Sabba,kāmehi sampanno ratanehi ca sattahi
Buddhā saṅgāhakā loka tehi etaṃ sudesitaṃ*

All sense-pleasures were fulfilled through the 7 jewels—
this the Buddhas has thoroughly taught to the world.

- 11 *Esa hetu,mahantassa pathavyo yena vuccati
Pahūta,vittūpakaraṇo rājā homi patāpavā*

This, it is said, is the cause for becoming a great earth-ruler,
abundant in wealth and means, a glorious king was I.

- 12 *Iddhimā yasavā homi jambu,saṇḍassa issaro
Ko sutvā na-p,pasīdeyya api kaṇhābhijātiyo [91]*

Accomplished and famous was I as lord of Jambu,dvīpa:
Who, hearing this, would not have faith [not be inspired], even the swarthy low-born?

- 13 *Tasmā hi attha,kāmena mahattam abhikaṅkhatā
Saddhammo garu,kātabbo saraṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ*

Therefore, for those wishing for wellbeing, those yearning for greatness,
should revere the true teaching, recollect the Buddha's teaching.

— evaṃ —

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