

## 13

## Time and Time Again

Reflections on cyclic life  
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## SD 16.13(1)

## Udaya Sutta

The Discourse to Udaya | S 7.12/1:173 f [Ee S 7.2.2]

Traditional: S 1.7.2.2 = Saṃyutta Nikāya 1, Sa, gāthā Vagga 7, Brāhmaṇa Saṃyutta 2, Upāsaka Vg 2

Theme: The repetitive cycle of life

At Sāvattihī.

Then, in the morning, the Blessed One, having dressed, and taking bowl and robe, approached the brahmin Udaya. Then the brahmin Udaya filled the Blessed One’s bowl with boiled rice.

A second time,<sup>1</sup> in the morning, the Blessed One, having dressed, and taking bowl and robe, approached the brahmin Udaya. And a second the brahmin Udaya filled the Blessed One’s bowl with boiled rice.

A third time, in the morning, the Blessed One, having dressed, and taking bowl and robe, approached the brahmin Udaya. And a third time the brahmin Udaya filled the Blessed One’s bowl with boiled rice, after which he said this to the Blessed One:

“This nuisance of the ascetic Gotama keeps coming again and again!”<sup>2</sup>

[The Blessed One:]

Again and again, Again and again, Again and again, Again and again,	they sow the seeds; down comes the rain; <sup>3</sup> the farmers plough the fields; the land yields grain;	<i>Punappunam c’eva vapanti bījam punappunam vassati deva,rājā punappunam khettaṃ kasanti kassakā punappunam aññam upeti raṭṭham</i>
Again and again, Again and again, Again and again, Again and again,	the beggars beg; the master gives give; when the master gives’ given, they find a place in heaven;	<i>punappunam yācakā yācayanti punappunam dāna,patī dadanti punappunam dāna,patī daditvā punappunam saggam upeti thānam</i>
Again and again, Again and again, Again and again, Again and again,	the milkers milk the cows; the calf goes to its mother; you struggle and suffer; the foolish finds the womb;	<i>punappunam khīranikā duhanti punappunam vaccho upeti mātaram punappunam kilamati phandati ca punappunam gabbham upeti mando</i>
Again and again, Again and again, But when one has found one great in wisdom	he is born and he dies; they take him to the cemetery. the path to no more rebirth, is not born again and again!	<i>punappunam jāyati miyyati ca punappunam sīvathikam haranti maggāñ ca laddhā apunabbhavāya na punappunam jāyati bhūri,pañño tī<sup>4</sup></i>

<sup>1</sup> Comy says that the Buddha visited Udaya on three separate consecutive days (SA 1:257). This is actually self-evident, as Bodhi notes, “Although the text itself conveys the impression that the Buddha went to the same house for alms three times on the same morning, this would be contrary to proper monastic etiquette, so [SA] must be reliable on this point.” (S:B 451 n464).

<sup>2</sup> *Pakaṭṭhako yaṃ samaṇo Gotamo punappunam āgacchatī ti. Pakaṭṭhaka*, from Skt *prakaṣaka*, “harasser, disquieter (name of the god of love),” from *prakaṣ*, to trouble, to disturb” (SED 654cd). The Buddha’s humour is evident here, as he gives a higher meaning to “again and again” (*punappunam*).

<sup>3</sup> *Puna-p,punam vassati deva,rājā*, lit “again and again the rain-gods rains down.” See SD 55.12a (5.3.4).

S 1.7.2.2

Saṃyutta Nikāya 1, Sagāthā Vagga 7, Brāhmaṇa Saṃyutta 2, Upāsaka Vagga 2

S 2.4.1.3

Saṃyutta Nikāya 2, Nidāna Vagga 4, Anamatagga Saṃyutta 1, Paṭhama Vagga 3

When this was said, the brahmin Udaya said to the Blessed One:

“Marvellous, Master Gotama! Marvellous, Master Gotama! Venerable sir,

just as if one were to place upright what had been overturned,

or were to reveal what was hidden,

or were to show the way to one who was lost,

or were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms,

in the same way, in numerous ways, the Dharma has been made clear by the Blessed Gotama.

Let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who from today has gone for refuge for life.”

— evaṃ —

Now, here is a contemporary version of this poem:

## SD 16.13(2)

## Singapore Again and Again

(A contemporary sutra)

Piya Tan

Again and again,	we study hard;
Again and again,	the exams come;
Again and again,	the results show;
Again and again,	we look for jobs.
Again and again,	we get hired;
Again and again,	we face the day;
Again and again,	the traffic jams;
Again and again,	we're late for work;
Again and again,	we get fired.
Again and again,	we do wrong;
Again and again,	we get caught;
Again and again,	we're punished;
Again and again,	we're free;
Again and again,	we start all over.

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<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to compare **Udaya S** with Ecclesiastes, esp **Ecc 3.1-8**: “To everything *there is* a season, | A time for every purpose under heaven: | 2| A time to be born, | And a time to die; || A time to plant, | And a time to pluck *what is* planted; | 3| A time to kill, | And a time to heal; || A time to break down, | And a time to build up; | 4| A time to weep, | And a time to laugh; || A time to mourn, | And a time to dance; | 5| A time to cast away stones, | And a time to gather stones; || A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; | 6| A time to gain, | And a time to lose; || A time to keep, And a time to throw away; | 7| A time to tear, | And a time to sew; || A time to keep silence, | And a time to speak; | 8| A time to love, | And a time to hate; || And a time of war, | And a time of peace (NKJV). Such passages evoke a cycle of fleeting vanity or purposelessness in life. Ecclesiastes is also greatly concerned with death. It however proposes that until God decides what to do next, or while man lives, he should enjoy life, work and companionship. It is an Old Testament book, and reflects little of the novel New Testament notions, esp of resurrection. In fact, **the Jewish Encyclopedia** notes, “had it not been adopted before the doctrine of the Resurrection became popular, it is probable that the author's views on that subject would have caused his book to be excluded therefrom.” Another interesting point is that the Hebrew name for God is not found in it, and it probably had as its source an outside text or teaching. Most scholars agree that Ecclesiastes was compiled around 250 BCE (well after the Buddha, during Asoka’s time). It is one of the most Buddhist books of the Bible, and serves well as a bridge to the Dharma.

Again and again,	we are born, and then we die;
Again and again,	we're burned, we're buried;
Again and again,	back to earth, fire, water and wind;
Again and again,	our loved ones pray and cry;
Again and again,	we are born and reborn;
Like plants we grow,	like beasts we herd on:
Who really see change	are truly happy and free.

Notice how real the feeling is with this contemporary version. We may laugh—that is because it is an irony: we work hard, play life games, and yet they all finally come to nothing as it were, but only to repeat like Sisyphus' labour—and we think it's fun!<sup>5</sup>

## Ultimate language

Traditional examples of the use of **ultimate or Dharma language**—or *logos*—are found, for example, in the exposition of the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path in the First Discourse,<sup>6</sup> or in the verse spoken by Assaji to Sāriputta the first time they met.<sup>7</sup> Often enough the Buddha would follow up with analogies and illustrations of what he has expressed in the Dharma language (for example, the **Assu Sutta**, S 2:180).

## SD 16.13(3)

## Assu Sutta

The Discourse on Tears | S 15.3/2:179 f = SD 10.16(3.1)

Traditional S 2.4.1.3 Saṃyutta 2, Nidāna Vagga 4, Anamatagga Saṃyutta 1, Paṭhama Vagga 3

Theme: The true nature of cyclic life

1 At Sāvatti ...

2 “Bhikshus, this cycle of life and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) is without a knowable beginning.

<sup>8</sup>A beginning point<sup>9</sup> of beings roaming and wandering on, shrouded in ignorance, fettered by craving,<sup>10</sup> cannot be discerned.<sup>11</sup>

3 What do you think, bhikshus, which is more: the stream of tears you have shed as you roamed and wandered through this long course, weeping and wailing from being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable—this, or, the waters in the four great oceans?”

4 “As we understand the Dharma taught by the Blessed One, venerable sir, *the stream of tears we have shed as we roam and wander through this long course, weeping and wailing from being united with*

<sup>5</sup> See **Yodh'ājīva S** (S 42.3), SD 23.3 (1).

<sup>6</sup> See **Dhamma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11/5:420-424), SD 1.1.

<sup>7</sup> See V 1:40; J 1:85; Mvst 3:60 (cf Mvst 3:328), & Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004:5.11.

<sup>8</sup> *Pubba,koṭi na paññāyati, avijjā,nīvaraṇānaṃ sattānaṃ taṇhā,saṃyojanānaṃ sandhavataṃ saṃsaratāṃ.*

<sup>9</sup> From this statement—and the lack of a similar one on an “ending point”—it is likely that *anamat'agga*, as used here, means “without a knowable beginning.” See prec n & SD 48.3 (1.2.3).

<sup>10</sup> According to **Vijjā,bhāgiya S** (A 2.3.10), while craving prevents (“fettters”) liberation, ignorance hinders (“shrouds”) wisdom, (*rāg'upakkiliṭṭhaṃ vā ... cittaṃ na vimuccati, āvijj'upakkiliṭṭhā vā paññā na bhāviyati*, A 2.3.10/1:61).

<sup>11</sup> “Cannot be discerned” *na paññāyati. Paññāyati* (the passive of *pajānāti*, “to know, understand”) means “to be known, to be clear or evident, to be perceived, seen or taken for, to appear” (It 89; DhA 1:14, 95, 2:75). The implication here is that a “beginning” or an “ending” of the time-space continuum does not exist as a fixed reality. Time has neither beginning nor ending. The physical universe may end but it will re-arise ad infinitum.

*the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable*—this alone is more than the waters in the four great oceans.”

**5** “Good, good, bhikshus! It is good that you understand the Dharma taught by me in such a way.

**6** This stream of tears you have shed as you roamed and wandered through this long course, weeping and wailing from being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, is more than the waters in the 4 great oceans.

**7** (1) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a mother.

As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

**8** (2) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a father.

As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

**9**<sup>12</sup> (3) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a brother.

As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

**10**<sup>13</sup> (4) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a sister.

As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

**11** (5) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a son.

As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

**12** (6) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the death of a daughter.

As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

**13** (7) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the loss of relatives.

As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

**14** (8) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced the loss of wealth.

As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the four great oceans.

**15** (9) For a long time, bhikshus, you have experienced loss through illness.

As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the waters in the 4 great oceans.

**16** What is the reason?

<sup>12</sup> §§9+10 omitted in PTS ed, but found in other MSS.

<sup>13</sup> §§9+10 omitted in PTS ed, but found in other MSS.

Because, bhikshus, with neither a beginning nor an ending<sup>14</sup> is this samsara. A first point is not to be discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.

**17** For such a long time, bhikshus, you have suffered painfully, suffered deeply, suffered disastrously, swelling the graveyards.<sup>15</sup>

**18** Surely, bhikshus, this is enough to feel revulsion towards all formations, enough to become dispassionate towards them, enough to be liberated from them.”

— evaṃ —

The experiential part of the Discourse on Tears (“weeping and wailing...”) is in ultimate language because the truth reference is a direct one, that is, the discourse relates personal experience. The imagery portion (“the 4 great oceans...”, “death of a mother...” etc) uses the conventional language of the world.

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<sup>14</sup> On *anamataḡga*, see SD 28.7a (2); SD 48.3 (1.2.3).

<sup>15</sup> *Evaṃ dīgha, rattarāṃ vo bhikkhave dukkharāṃ paccanubhūtarāṃ tibbarāṃ paccanubhūtarāṃ vyasanarāṃ paccanubhūtarāṃ kaṭasi vaḍḍhitā.*