

12

(Khattā) Desanā Sutta

The Discourse on Teaching (the Fields) | S 42.7

Or Be Ce **Khettûpama Sutta** The Discourse on the Parable of the Fields

Theme: The parable of the 3 fields: the Buddha's priorities

Translated by Piya Tan ©2011, 2017

1 Sutta summary and highlights

1.1 SUMMARY AND SIGNIFICANCE

1.1.1 Sutta highlights

1.1.1.1 The (Khattā) Desanā Sutta (S 42.7) is a short but helpful discourse in response to a question asked by a Jain follower, “Why does the Blessed One go about and teach the Dharma thoroughly (*sakkacca*) to some, but not so thoroughly to some?” [§4]. The Buddha replies by clarifying his priorities when he teaches the Dharma.

The Buddha *first* teaches “**my monks and nuns**” (*mayham bhikkhu, bhikkhuniyo*) [§6.1] (including the monastic novices and postulants) because they have dedicated their lives to the Dharma. Secondly, he teaches the Dharma to “**my laymen and laywomen**” (*mayham upāsakā upāsikāyo*) (celibate and non-celibate) [§7.1] because “they live with me for their island, with me for their cave, with me for their shelter, with me for their refuge” (*ete hi ... maṃ, dīpā maṃ, lenā maṃ, tāṇā maṃ, saraṇā viharanti*) [§§6.3, 7.3]. [1.1.2.1]

1.1.1.2 Thirdly, the Buddha teaches “**my outside sectarian recluses, brahmins and wanderers**” [§8.1], which is a direct reference to the headman, Asi.bandhaka,putta himself, whom the Buddha is teaching. The reason for this, declares the Buddha, “because if they were to understand even a single sentence of it, that would be to their benefit and happiness for a long time” [§8.3].

The Dharma, in other words, benefits *anyone* who attends to it properly. Truly being a **Buddhist** is not about membership of a group or temple, or even going for refuge merely as a ritual or even a show of faith. Rather, **being a Buddhist** is about self-transformation, a bettering of our mind and personality, inspiring us with a vision for self-awakening.

1.1.1.3 The word *sakkacca*, as mentioned in the translation note [§4 n] means “thoroughly.” The Sutta’s Commentary says that the Buddha always teaches the Dharma in a thorough manner. The routine of buddhas is regular like that of a lion’s. He is like a lion in rut pacing about, who then makes a single quick move seizes any animal like a hare or a cat. Even so, the Buddha may teach the Dharma to one or two monks, or to a large group of monks, or of nuns, or laymen, or laywomen, or outside sectarians—he teaches with the same thoroughness throughout.¹ (SA 3:104).

The Subcommentary (*ṭīkā*) adds that the Dharma is taught “with the same flavour of great compassion to all beings who have respect for the true Dharma.” (SAṬ:Be 2:381).² From all this, it is clear—at least in the exegetes’ minds—that the Buddha, despite having his priorities, teaches the same Dharma *in a thorough manner*, no matter whether his audience is a monastic, a lay person, or a non-Buddhist.

¹ *Sīha, samāna, vuttino hi buddhā, yathā sīho pabhinna, vara, vāraṇassa’pi sasa, biḷār’ādīnam pi gahaṇ’atthāya eka, sadisam eva vegarṃ karoti, evaṃ buddhāpi ekassa desentā’pi dvinnarṃ bahūnarṃ bhikkhu, parisāya bhikkhuni, upāsaka, upāsikā, parisāyapi tiṭṭhiyānam pi desentā sakkaccam eva desenti.* (SA 3:104)

² *Saddhamma, gāravassa sabba, sattesu mahā, karuṇāya ca buddhānarṃ samāna, rasattā* (SAṬ:Be 2:381).

1.1.1.4 We may, of course, add that *sakacca* also means “with respect,” and that such teachings are always geared towards the levels and needs of the respective audiences. We are often told, for example, that the Buddha teaches with a “gradual talk” (*ānupubbī,kathā*). Here is the full pericope:³

(A) The Blessed One ... gave them a **progressive talk** —that is to say, he spoke
 on giving, *dāna*
 on moral virtue and *sīla*
 on the heavens, *sagga*
 and proclaimed the danger, vanity and disadvantage of sensual pleasures, *kām’ādīnava*
 and the advantage of renunciation. *nekkhamm’ānisaṃsa*

(B) When the Blessed One
 perceived that their minds were ready, pliant, hindrance-free, elevated and lucid,
 then, he explained to them the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas,⁴ that is to say,
suffering, its arising, its ending, and the path.⁵

(C) THE DHARMA-EYE
 And just as a clean cloth, with all its stains removed, would take dye well,⁶
 even so, in (the listener), while sitting right there,
 there arose the dust-free stainless Dharma-eye [vision of truth],⁷ thus:
“All that is of the nature of arising is of the nature of ending.”⁸
 (*Yaṃ kiñci samudaya,dhammaṃ sabbantaṃ nirodha,dhamman’ti*)

1.1.1.5 We see 3 important stages in the “gradual talk” pericope [1.1.1.4]. The 1st stage comprises the teaching itself, that is, from the most basic teaching leading up to that on renunciation, or from being of the world to *leaving* the world for the spiritual life. The turning-point from the world to the spiritual life is the teaching on the benefits of renunciation—the freedom that we enjoy by defying or moving away from the gravity-field of the physical senses and sensual pleasures.

(A) Once we are out of the gravity field of the senses, it is easier to see the bigger picture of the true nature of the physical senses: they are all **impermanent** (*anicca*). What is impermanent, is subject to change, to become other. We are not in control of them: they incessantly flow with everything else that exists. Hence, to take any such experience out of their momentary context, to delude oneself that this will satisfy us in any way. This the root of suffering: whatever is subject to change is **unsatisfactory** (*dukkha*).

This brings us to section (B), where the Buddha affirms the nature of suffering, its arising, its ending and the path to its ending to the mind that has caught a glimpse of this reality. As the listener has a vision of the 4 truths, one truth is clear to him is the impermanence of all conditioned states, that is, all that *was, is* and *will be* in this universe.⁹

³ On the gradual teaching, see **Mahā’padāna S** (D 14,3.15), SD 49.8a. For pericope, see SD 49.8b (7.3 esp 7.3.2); SD 21.6 esp (1); SD 46.1 (4.1); SD 30.8 (3.4.2) skillful means of speech.

⁴ *Buddhānaṃ sāmukkaṃsika dhamma,desanā*. This is an occasion when the Buddha teaches the 4 noble truths directly to the laity: see SD 49.8a (7.3).

⁵ This is stock: V 1:15, 2:156, 192; D 1:110, 148, 2:41; M 1:379; A 3:184, 4:186, 209; U 49.

⁶ *Seyyāthā’pi nāma suddhaṃ vatthaṃ apagata,kāḷakaṃ sammad eva rajanaṃ patogaṇheyya*. See **Vatthūpama S** (M 7,2/1:36), SD 28.12.

⁷ *Evam eva khaṇḍassa ca rāja,puttassa tissassa ca purohita,puttassa tasmim yeva āsane vi,rajani vīta,malaṃ dhamma,cakkhuṃ udapādi*. On the Dharma-eye, see (7.5).

⁸ This Dharma-eye (dhamma,cakkhu) pericope is part of the “progressive talk” (*anupubbī,kathā*) pericope: see n at D 14,1.35 (SD 49.8a).

Essentially, he sees the rise and fall of things—“All that is of the nature of arising is of the nature of ending.” He also realizes another aspect of “ending” (*nirodha*), that is, the stopping of all such uroboric cycle of causes and effects, of samsaric conditionality. This understanding is sufficient to make him let go of any kind of **identifying** himself with his mind or body, name or form. *The body* is definitely impermanent and he easily lets go of identifying with it.

The nature of the mind is much more complex. He is only able to understand that it is the source of all the sufferings that he experiences. Hence, it is **in here** (the mind) that he has to work on to find the answer—not outside of himself. *The answer is in here, not out there*. Hence, rituals and vows—that appeal to some kind of external agency for succour and solution—no more appeal to him. He has also removed all **doubts** of his own capability of rising above suffering if he moves on further up the path of awakening. He has become a streamwinner.

1.1.1.6 Streamwinning (*soṭāpatti*) is the first stage on the path of awakening. This is often the stage that a layman or laywoman gains when he comes to some deep level of understanding of the Buddha’s teaching. With a bit more of loosening the grip of greed, hate and delusion (the 3 unwholesome roots),¹⁰ he is able to attain once-returning. The lay listener, as a rule, is unable to attain beyond this level. The reason is simple enough: he is still indulging in sensual pleasures—this is the way of worldly life.¹¹

The monastic life of renunciation, on the other hand, is an effective alternative to the worldly life. Indeed, it is the only way to awakening—meaning that it entails letting go of the world or renunciation. Joining the monastic order only prepare us for **true renunciation**. We first prepare ourself for this by restraining our body and speech—this is the training in moral virtue, as the basis for the training of mental cultivation.

The training in moral virtue is the initial or social aspect of the monastic life of renunciation. Keeping to the precepts and the Vinaya helps us fit into the monastic community and benefit from it. The training in mental concentration is the most effective means of spiritual renunciation—the letting go of the 5 physical senses, and to a significant extent, the mind, too.

When we are fully free of the 5 senses—we become fully mental beings—we attain dhyana (*jhāna*), which means that we have, at least temporarily, overcome attachment to sensual pleasures. This is the beginning of the path of awakening leading to non-returning and to arhathood. Indeed, this is the purpose of the monastic life: to provide us with the ideal conditions for attaining non-returning or even arhathood in this life itself.

1.1.1.7 By now, we should have a better idea why the Buddha gives the highest priority to the training of **the monastics**. Perhaps, we can rephrase this as: the Buddha gives the first priority to teaching those who are able to attain non-returning or arhathood in this life itself. As his second priority, the Buddha teaches the laity so that they can attain at least streamwinning, if not once-returning, in this life itself. This is the kind of training that also inspires great faith in the path-saints because they are able to catch a better glimpse of true reality, especially by way of the universal nature of impermanence.

Hence, in closing, the Commentary adds: it is said that the fourfold assembly (monks, nun, laymen and laywomen), hearing the Dharma, show faith—and keep faith (in the Teacher and devote themselves to

⁹ Doctrinally, this refers to the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*), for the “totality formula” of which, see (**Dve**) **Khandha S** (S 22.48) + SD 17.1a (3); **Anatta, lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59, 17-21) SD 1.2.

¹⁰ On the 3 unwholesome roots, see **Mūla S** (A 3.69), SD 18.2; SD 4.14 (1.5); SD 50.20 (3.1.3).

¹¹ See the case of the layman once-returner Mahānāma who is still troubled by greed, hate and delusion: **Cūḷa Dukkha-k, khandha S** (M 14), SD 4.7.

attaining the fruit of the teaching); hence, these teachings are said to be “**thorough teachings**” (or the “thoroughly taught,” that is, such teaching of the Teacher is a work of success).¹² (SA 3:104; SAṬ:Be 2:38).

1.1.2 Sutta significance

1.1.2.1 Note that the Buddha gives **the very same reason** for his teaching the “monks and nuns” as his first priority, and for teaching “my laymen disciples and laywomen disciples,” his second priority. That the Buddha teaches both “my monks and nuns” and “my laymen disciples and laywomen disciples” for the same reason, *despite the difference in priorities*, is very significant. In fact, these two pairs form the well known “fourfold assembly” (*catu,parisa*) of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.¹³

1.1.2.2 There are two important reasons for the significance of the fact that the Buddha teaches both the monastics and the laity for the same reason. **The first reason** is that they are both “**disciples**” (*sāvaka*), meaning that they are all saints of the path—streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners and arhats.¹⁴ In other words, they are the members of the “noble community” (*ariya,saṅgha*), the totality of the true individuals.¹⁵

1.1.2.3 The members of **the noble community** [1.1.2.5] are further divided into 2 more types: the learners (*sekha*) and the non-learners (*asekha*) or adepts.¹⁶ **The learners** (*sekha*), as the name suggests, are the ready learners of the Dharma, that is, *the streamwinners, the once-returners and the non-returners*—both monastic and lay. They are those to whom the Buddha would give *his highest priority* in terms of teaching because they are like the good field: they are mentally and spiritually ready to listen and understand the Dharma; hence, to spread the Dharma, too.

The non-learners or adepts (*asekha*) are *the arhats*, who have awakened just like the Buddha, and have nothing more to learn.¹⁷ Since they are awakened, they do not need any more instruction in terms of their practice on the path. However, the Buddha would often still teach them the Dharma as “teaching or theory” to extend or refine their understanding of the Dharma, so that they become effective teachers and propagators of the Dharma.

1.1.2.4 Indeed, it is **the arhats**, totaling 500, gathered together in **the “1st council”** (*paṭhama saṅgīti*, “the first recital”) at Rājagaha in north India, three months after the Buddha’s passing, to put together the Dharma into *the earliest canon of teachings*, known as the Dharma-Vinaya (*dhamma,vinaya*).¹⁸ **The Dharma** comprises the teachings, especially the suttas or “threads” of the early teachings of the Buddha

¹² *Catasso pana parisā saddahitvā okappetvā suṇantīti tāsāṃ desanā sakkacca,desanā nāma jātā* (SA 3:104). **Catasso pana parisā** satthu,gāravena attano ca saddhā,sampannatāya **saddahitvā okappetvā suṇanti**, tasmā tā desanā,phalena yujjanti. *Kicca,siddhiyā satthu desanā tattha sakkacca,desanā nāma jātā* (SA 2:381). Subcomy given within parentheses.

¹³ On the “fourfold assembly,” see **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,3.35), SD 9; **Pāsādika S** (D 29,12) + SD 40a.6 (2.2).

¹⁴ On the 4 kinds of saints, see **(Catukka) Samaṇa S** (A 4.239), SD 49.14; **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,42-47), SD 3.13; **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,9-12), SD 7.13; **Samaṇa-m-acala S 1** (A 4.87), SD 20.13 + S 2 (A 4.88) SD 20.14.

¹⁵ On the ariya,saṅgha, see **Aṭṭha,puggala S** (A 8.63) SD 46.4; **Saṅghānussati**, SD 15.10a.

¹⁶ See **Sekha S** (M 53) SD 21.14; **(Sekha) Uddesa S** (A 3.85) SD 3.3(2).

¹⁷ On the sameness of the awakening of the Buddha and of the arhats, see **Sambuddha S** (S 22.58), SD 49.10.

¹⁸ On canonical records of the 1st council, see Cv 11 (V 2:284-293) (tr V:H 5:393-406); VA 4-30 (tr N A Jayawickrama, *The Inception of the Discipline*, London, 1962:3-27).

and his saints, and **the Vinaya** is the body of rules governing and guiding the monastics as a community that practises, preserves and propagates the Dharma by their own example and wisdom.¹⁹

Although scholars are uncertain about the historicity of the 1st council, the fact remains that there is a fixed and full canon of the Buddha's Dharma teachings and Vinaya instructions that has come down to us—that is, **the “Pali Canon.”** In the few centuries that follow the Buddha's passing, scholastics of the monastic community compiled a 3rd “basket” (*piṭaka*) of the canon—**the Abhidhamma**, the basket “connected with the Dharma”—which is an attempt to systematize the Buddha's teachings into philosophical and psychological sets and systems by way of the analysis and synthesis of matter, mind, mental factors and nirvana.²⁰ Hence, by Asoka's time (4th century BCE), the early Buddhist canon came to be called the **Ti,piṭaka**, “the 3 baskets” of the early Buddhist texts, comprising those of the Vinaya, the Sutta and the Abhidhamma.

1.1.2.5 A broader interpretation of the Buddha's priorities in the audience for his teaching is to take the first “field” (*khetta*)—the best one—as comprising *the totality of the monastic community*, both the awakened and the unawakened. In other words, this comprises both **the “conventional community”** (*sammuti saṅgha*) of monastics as well as **the “noble community”** or “community of the noble ones” (*ariya saṅgha*).

The “conventional community” (*sammuti saṅgha*) comprises duly ordained monastics who keep to the Vinaya rules, and live their lives devoted to attaining awakening in this life itself, that is, attaining at least streamwinning.²¹ They become monks and nuns by a corporate act (*saṅgha, kamma*) of a properly assembled chapter of monastics led by a preceptor. Hence, they are **de jure** monastic members.

The “noble sangha,” on the other hand, on account of their having attained one of the 4 stages of sainthood—as streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners or arhats—are, on account of their attainment and spirituality, the natural or true members of the community of noble saints. They form the **de facto** Dharma community or *ariya saṅgha*.²²

1.1.2.6 Technically, we can say that while the noble sangha forms the **ecclesia**—from the Greek *ek-klesia*, “convocation,” originally meaning “assembly, congregation, council,” that is, *saṅgha*—and that the conventional sangha comprises the **oikoumene** (from the Greek *oikouménē*, literally “inhabited (world)”).²³ This latter refers to the Buddhist community as a whole—all those who declare the Buddha as their original and only teacher and follow his teachings, or simply put, this is what we generally call “the (global) Buddhist community.”

1.1.2.7 The Buddha, when teaching, gives the first priority to **the conventional sangha** for the simple reason that they comprise individuals who have formally and avowedly dedicated themselves to the 3 trainings (*sikkha-t, taya*)—in moral virtue, mental concentration and wisdom²⁴—that is, to gain awakening (at least streamwinning) in this life itself [1.1.2.5]. This is the meaning of the phrase, **“they live with me for their island, with me for their cave, with me for their shelter, with me for their refuge”** [§6.3; 1.1.3].

¹⁹ For scholarly summaries on the 1st council, see R Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford, 1998:39-49; C S Prebish, in (*Routledge*) *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, London, 2007:250-252.

²⁰ Traditionally, the first 6 of the 7 books of the Theravāda Abhidhamma—the Dhamma, saṅgāṇī, the Vibhaṅga, the Kathā, vatthu, the Puggala Paññatti, the Dhātu, kathā and the Yamaka—are based on “analysis” (*vibhaṅga*) of matter, mind and reality, while the 7th—the Paṭṭhāna—on their “synthesis” (*paccaya*) or conditionality.

²¹ See **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

²² On the conventional sangha and the noble sangha, see SD 45.16 (2.2.2.1).

²³ US “ecumene”; UK “oecumene.”

²⁴ On the 3 trainings, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6.

1.1.2.8 Having said all that, we should now understand that the Buddha does not really make a conscious effort or plan ahead in *choosing* his audience. He is ever ready to teach those who ask and those who are able—even when they are *unwilling* but ready to understand him. Of course, naturally, the monastics are, as a rule, always able and available before the Buddha, ready to listen and receive the Dharma.

This readiness or “**propinquity**” (to use a psychosocial term, meaning “closeness in a physical sense or a kinship sense”) reflects this ready connection between the Buddha and his audience, and the fellowship amongst the members of the spiritual community, especially the monastic sangha. This Dharma readiness and fellowship is reflected, for example, in **the Dhamma,cetiya Sutta** (M 89) and **the (Anuruddha) Upakkilesa Sutta** (M 128).²⁵

For our purposes, we can broaden our usage of propinquity and highlight the sense, “closeness or affinity in a spiritual sense,” as suggested by the word *vissāsa*. It is often translated as “trust,” as in this well-known Dhammapada quote: “The trusty are the best kinsmen” (*vissāsa,pāramā ñātī*, Dh 204c).²⁶ This is the kind of spiritual affinity that is described in **the Cūḷa Go,siṅga Sutta** (M 31) and **the Dhamma,cetiya Sutta** (M 89).²⁷

1.1.2.9 The fact that the Buddha gives the first priority of his teaching to the monks is attested by the fact that most of the suttas that have been handed down to us to this day are addressed to “**monks**” (*bhikkhave* or *bhikkhavo*). However, we should also note that although we mostly see the “monks” being addressed during the teachings, they are merely the occasion for the teaching, not the only audience for instruction.

The vocative, “monk” or “monks,” in the suttas, can easily be deduced from their contexts to show that the teachings are addressed to all present—except where the context clearly dictates otherwise, such as when it concerns monastic rules. “Monk” or “monks” here, then, merely serve as a synecdoche, a shorthand, for addressing *all present* and everyone reading or studying the suttas, whether they are monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, Buddhist or non-Buddhist.

The case for meditation is clearly stated by Buddhaghosa, who, in his commentary on *bhikkhu* at the start of **the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), explains that this vocative refers to *anyone*, even the laity—during meditation, especially practising the 4 satipatthanas—the contemplation of the body, of feelings, of the mind, and of dharmas or mental states—when even the laity attains the “monk-state” (*bhikkhu,-bhāva*) on account of their practice.²⁸

1.1.2.10 With this understanding, we can say that, on a higher or deeper level, when the Buddha teaches—*personally* while he is still alive, and now *through the suttas*—he is not addressing any *person*, but our minds. As long as our minds attend to such study or teaching, the Buddha *is* addressing us even now, whether we are monastic or lay. The more we practise the teaching, the better we understand it, the closer we approach the teaching Buddha.

The Buddha declares that **the Dharma is above even himself**, that he himself lives dependent on the Dharma. This means that the better we understand the Dharma, the closer we are to the Buddha; the more we practise the sutta teachings, the clearer we see the teaching Buddha. While the Buddha is alive,

²⁵ M 89,11/2:120 f (SD 64.10); M 128,11/3:156 (SD 5.18).

²⁶ On *vissāsa*, see SD 38.4 (4.2); SD 49.3 (1.1.5.6).

²⁷ **M 31**/1:205-211 (SD 44.11); **M 89**/2:118-125 (SD 64.10).

²⁸ Laity attains the “monk-state” during meditation, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 10,3A) + n, SD 13.3; SD 13.1 (3.1.1.5); SD 16.7 (1.1.1.2). “Monk/s” addresses all attending, see SD 4.9 (5.3); SD 13.1 (3.1.1).

he is the teacher; after the Buddha has passed on, the Dharma is the teacher. The Buddha is dead, long live the Dharma!²⁹

1.1.3 “My” (*mayham*)

1.1.3.1 In the (**Khettā**) **Desanā Sutta** (S 42.7), the Buddha declares that he teaches the Dharma in the following priorities:

- (1) to “my monks and nuns” (*mayham bhikkhu, bhikkhuniyo*) [§6.1];
- (2) to “my laymen and laywomen” (*mayham upāsakā upāsikāyo*) [§7.1]; and
- (3) to “my outside sectarian recluses, brahmins and wanderers” (*mayham añña, titthiyā samaṇa, brāhmaṇa, paribbājakā*) [§8.1].

Some scholars and translators have wondered if there is a scribal or transmission error in the third sentence.³⁰ One translator even rendered *mayham* not as a genitive, but as a dative, “to me,” for example, “Just like the field that is excellent are the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis *to me*” (S:B 1139 emphasis added). This translation is certainly a clever one, and may well be right, but it seems too simple and something seems to be missing.

1.1.3.2 If we follow the rule of *lectio difficilior potior*, “the more difficult reading is the stronger”—a rule that clearly applies to our present context—we get a more interesting reading which, I am certain, is closer to the original intention of the text. There is hardly any issue with the reading in the first two sentences. Only the third sentence seems problematic: Why would the Buddha address “my (*mayham*) outside sectarian recluses, brahmins and wanderers”?

From the Sutta context, we must say that the Buddha has a good reason—indeed a skillful means—to inspire faith in his listener, the headman Asi.bandhaka,putta, who is a Jain follower. In addressing “my outside sectarian recluses, brahmins and wanderers,” the Buddha at once establishes a rapport with **the headman, Asi.bandhala,putta**. In fact, he is indeed inspired, approves of the Buddha’s teaching, and, at the Sutta’s close, goes for refuge [§13].

More broadly, *mayham* in the genitive case, highlights the fact the Buddha’s teaching is for everyone, especially non-Buddhists, to “come and see” (*ehi, passika*).³¹ The (**Khettā**) **Desanā Sutta**, then, testifies to the fact that even a non-Buddhist is able to appreciate his teaching. It is such a quality that evinces the distinction of Buddhism being **the world’s first missionary religion**—one that reaches out to others, and welcomes them to freely practise the Dharma, unlike the exclusivist attitude of the brahmins and their religion in the Buddha’s time.

1.1.3.3 The Commentary and Subcommentary explain the Buddha’s remarks [1.1.3.1] here as follows:

- “I have found a ground of support, that is, this island (of Dharma)”; hence, it is said, “with me for their island” (*maṃ, dīpa*).

[“**I’m an island**” (*ahaṃ dīpo*) on account of the certainty of not being overcome by the 4 floods (*ogha*),³² that is, the influxes (*āsava*) of sensual lust (*kāma*), existence (*bhava*), views (*diṭṭhi*) and ignorance (*avijjā*).³³]

²⁹ On the Dharma being above the Buddha, see **Gāraṇa S** (S 6.2) SD 12.3. On the Dharma as teacher, see **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (SD 16,6.1/2:153), SD 9.

³⁰ F L Woodward thinks that the presence of *mayham* in the 3rd sentence (regarding the non-Buddhists) is “possibly for the sake of framework” (S:F 4:222). This is, of course, not helpful.

³¹ On *ehi, passika*, see SD 15.9 (2.4).

³² See **Ogha Pañha S** (S 38.11), SD 30.3(1.4).

- “I have a place to live in, that is, this cave”; hence, it is said, “with me for their cave” (*maṃ, leṇā*).
[“I’m a cave” (*ahaṃ leṇo*) on account of the certainty of being free from all troubles.]
- “I have protection, that is, this shelter”; hence, it is said, “with me for their shelter” (*maṃ, tāṇā*).
[“I’m a shelter” (*ahaṃ taṇaṃ*) on account of being protected from all sufferings and fears.]
- “I have that which destroys fear, that is, this refuge”; hence, it is said, “with me for their refuge” (*maṃ, saraṇa*).
[“I’m a refuge (I’m my own refuge) from all dangers and violence.”]
Thus, I have made this (Dharma) my dwelling (*vihāra*).³⁴ (SA 3:104; SAT:Be 2:381)

1.1.4 The parables

1.1.4.1 We will now briefly examine **the two sets of parables** in the (Khettā) Desanā Sutta. The first set of parables is that of the “3 fields” [§§5-8]; the second is that of the “3 water-pots” [§§9-12]. While the former parables are *images of fertility and growth*—of readiness and potential—the latter (storing and using of water) reflect *preservation and propagation of the Dharma*. Together—the fields and water—suggest life and growth in terms of the Dharma.

1.1.4.2 In **the parable of the 3 fields**, the first field is the *best* one, with good soil [§6]: this represents the monks and nuns, who are the richest ground for planting the Dharma. They will richly flower and fruit into **arhathood**, and the arhats are the best exemplars and exponents of the Buddha Dharma. The second field is a *moderate* one [§7], representing the laymen and laywomen, who are the best candidates for the attaining for **streamwinning**, the very first real step on the path of awakening.

The third field—“poor, hard, salty, bad soil”—comprises the non-Buddhists, that is, *outside sectarian the recluses, the brahmins and the wanderers*. At the right time, the Buddha will still teach the Dharma to them, because if they could understand *even a single sentence of Dharma*, it “would be to their benefit and happiness for a long time.” This is, indeed, the case with the headman Asi.bandhaka,putta.

1.1.4.3 **The parable of the 3 water-pots** builds on the richness of the preceding parable of the 3 fields. Water is a vital ingredient in any successful farming and growth, and needs to be properly stored and effectively utilized for maximum productivity, harvest, marketing and profit. The first pot is the best one, without any crack at all: it stores water well, and the water is fully and properly used. This is like *the monks and nuns* who, having heard the Dharma from the Buddha, are more likely to attain arhathood. They become deserving Dharma-heirs who preserve and propagate the Buddha’s legacy.

The second pot is not cracked, but water seeps through, entailing some wastage (inaccessibility or inability to understand the Dharma). *The water* represents the Dharma, while *the seepage or wastage* is result of the laity’s worldliness. Still, the wise and attentive **laity** are good candidates for streamwinning. They, too, become effective Dharma-heirs, as exemplars and exponents of the Dharma legacy.

³³ See (Catukka) Yoga S (A 4.10/2:10), SD 105.1. An older list of 3 influxes comprises those of sensual lust (*kāma’-āsava*), of existence (*bhav’āsava*) and of ignorance (*avijjāsava*): see SD 30.3 (1.3.2).

³⁴ *Maṃ, dīpāti, ādīsu ahaṃ dīpo patiṭṭhā etesaṃ’ti maṃ, dīpā. Ahaṃ leṇo allīyana-ṭ, ṭhānaṃ etesaṃ’ti maṃ, leṇā. Ahaṃ tāṇaṃ rakkhā etesaṃ’ti maṃ, tāṇā. Ahaṃ saraṇaṃ bhaya, nāsaṇaṃ etesaṃ’ti maṃ, saraṇā. Viharantīti maṃ evaṃ katvā viharanti. (SA 3:104). Catūhi’pi oghehi anabhibhava, nīyatāya ahaṃ dīpo. Sabba, parissayehi anabhibhava, nīyatāya ahaṃ leṇo. Sabba, dukkha, parittāsanato tāyaṃ’atṭhena ahaṃ tāṇaṃ. Sabba, bhaya, himsanato ahaṃ saraṇaṃ’ti yojetabbaṃ. (SAT:Be 2:381). Subcomy with [brackets].*

The third pot is *both cracked and oozy*—the lack of wisdom and worldliness of the non-Buddhists prevent them from fully benefitting from the Buddha’s teaching. However, we know of numerous sectarian recluses, brahmins and wanderers, who, having heard the Dharma, become arhats or saints. In fact, in the earliest years of the Buddha’s ministry, they are *the Buddha’s only mission field*. From this field arises the first 60 arhats,³⁵ the world’s first missionaries, who then widely spread the Buddha Word.

As the Buddhist community grows, these arhats become the teachers of the community. As for the Buddha, he continues to teach the non-returners, the once-returners and the streamwinners, so that they, too, mature as arhats to become Dharma exemplars and teachers.

The best students here are, of course, **the monks and nuns** who form the community around the Buddha, ever present and ready to hear him teach. **The laity** visit the Buddha on special days and occasions for Dharma instruction, or, when the occasion arises, the Buddha approaches them to instruct them in the Dharma. This is, then, the natural order of priorities for the Buddha’s teaching, not necessarily from choice, but readily responding to the presence and readiness of his audiences.

1.2 THE GĀMAṆI SAṂYUTTA

1.2.1 The Gāmaṇi Saṃyutta (S 42), teachings “connected to headmen,” is a collection of 13 suttas centering on questions asked by 10 “headmen” (*gāmaṇi*). All of them address the Buddha politely as *bhante*, unlike many of the brahmins who address him by name. However, it is unlikely that any of them are followers of the Buddha at the start of the respective suttas. In each case, the Buddha instructs them with reasoned arguments and careful analyses of their questions so that they are convinced and go for refuge.

Here is a summary list of the suttas of the Gāmaṇi Saṃyutta:

	<u>SD no</u>	
S 42.1	84.20	Caṇḍa Sutta. To Caṇḍa, on the conditions for anger.
S 42.2	20.8	Tāla,puṭa Sutta. To Tāla,puṭa, on how an actor-dancer became a monk.
S 42.3	23.3	Yodh’ājīva Sutta. To Yodh’ājīva, on the mercenary killer’s karma.
S 42.4	69.17	Hatth’āroha Sutta. To Hatth’āroha, same teaching as S 42.3.
S 42.5	69.16	Ass’āroha Sutta. To Ass’āroha, same teaching as S 42.3.
S 42.6	39.9	(Pacchā,bhūmaka) Asi.bandhaka,putta Sutta. To Asi,bandhaka,putta: prayers do not affect a person’s destiny or afterlife.
S 42.7	12.1(3.2)	(Khetṭā) Desanā Sutta, abridged version of the following.
S 42.7	51.12	(Khetṭā) Desanā Sutta. To Asi,bandhaka,putta, on the parable of the 3 fields: the Buddha’s priorities.
S 42.8	57.9	Saṅkha,dhama Sutta. To Asi,bandhaka,putta, on how lovingkindness limits the effects of our karma.
S 42.9	7.11	(Asi.bandhaka,putta) Kulā Sutta. To Asi,bandhaka,putta, on the 8 causes of the destruction of families.
S 42.10	4.21	Maṇi,cūḷaka Sutta. An excerpt of the following.
S 42.10	100.9	Maṇi,cūḷaka Sutta. To Maṇi.cūḷaka: monastics prohibited from accepting money.
S 42.11	110.7	Bhadra Sutta. To Bhadraka, on the arising and passing away of suffering on account of our present existence.
S 42.12	91.3	Rāsiya Gāmaṇi Sutta. To Rasiya, on the different types of ascetics in terms of spiritual excellence. Cf Kāma Bhogī Sutta (A 10.91), SD 100.8 (part parallel).
S 42.13	65.1	Pāṭaliya Sutta. To Pāṭaliya: right view is truly having no views and living a wholesome life.

³⁵ On the first 60 arhats, see **The great commission**, SD 11.2; SD 45.16 (1.3.1).

1.2.2 ASI.BANDHAKA,PUTTA

1.2.2.1 Asi,bandhaka,putta is a headman (*gāmaṇi*) in Kosala³⁶ and a Jain, follower of the Nirgranthas (S 4:37). The Commentaries are curiously silent on him—except for the Netti-p,ṅkaraṇa Commentary, which says “Asi,bandhaka,putta is the name of Asi,bandhaka’s son, the village headman, on account of his seniority” (*asibandhaka,putto’ti asi,bandhakassa nāma putto, gāme jeṭṭhakatāya gāmaṇī*).³⁷

1.2.2.2 The Gāmaṇi Saṃyutta has 4 suttas, recording his interviews with the Buddha. In the first, **the (Pacchā,bhūmaka) Asi,bandhaka,putts Sutta** (S 42.6), the Buddha teaches him that prayers do not really benefit or affect a person’s destiny or afterlife but only reflects our helplessness, when we should be exerting effort to live or act in a manner that brings about blessings to us, or that is more beneficial for our spiritual development.³⁸ (SD 39.9)

1.2.2.3 In the second discourse, **the (Khetṭā) Desanā** (S 45.7), he questions the Buddha regarding the Buddha’s “bias” or priorities when teaching the Dharma, seemingly teaching more “thoroughly” to the monastics than others. The Buddha explains his priorities in terms of spiritual readiness and fruitfulness. (SD 51.12)

1.2.2.4 The third discourse, **the Saṅkha,dhama Sutta** (S 45.8), the Buddha rebuts the Jain teaching that all bad karmic actions lead to hell. The Buddha explains how karma really works, and how loving-kindness can limit the effects of karma. (SD 57.9)

1.2.2.5 The fourth discourse, **the (Asi.bandhaka,putta) Kulā Sutta** (S 45.9), is perhaps the most interesting of the four. The headman is initially instructed by the Jain leader, Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta, to confront the Buddha in debate and debunk him. The headman meets the Buddha as instructed, and asks how the Buddha and his monks can be compassionate to the people when they continue to receive almsfood from them during a famine. The Buddha explains and wins him over. (SD 7.11)

It is likely that this last Sutta records the headman’s first meeting with the Buddha—ironically, on the instruction of the Jain leader himself. Convinced and inspired by the Buddha’s teaching, he visits the Buddha three more times. In every case, the headman goes for refuge at the close of the sutta.

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³⁶ Kosala, also called “the kingdom of the Kosalas.” It was divided into Northern Kosala (*uttara kosala*) on the banks of the Sarayu river (the modern Gaghara) and extending northward to the foothills of the Himalaya, and Southern Kosala (*dakkhiṇa kosala*) extending southward to the Vindhya mountains. During the Buddha’s time, Kosala (under king Pasenadi) was the most powerful kingdom in north India, but eventually it was overshadowed by Magadha.

³⁷ NetA:Be 109; cf Nettibhāvinī:Be 166. Further, on his name, see SD 39.9 (1.2).

³⁸ On the proper and effective way to help the departed, see **Tiro,kuḍḍa Pv** (SD 2.7); **Tiro,kuḍḍa S** (SD 48.1 (8)).

The Discourse on Teaching (the Fields)

S 42.7³⁹

1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Pāvārika's mango grove near Nālandā.⁴⁰

Asi,bandhaka,putta's question

2 Then, the headman Asi,bandhaka,putta⁴¹ approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side.

3 Seated at one side, the headman Asi,bandhaka,putta, said to the Blessed One:

"Bhante, does the Blessed One live in compassion for the good of all living beings or does he not?"⁴²

3.2 "Yes, headman, the Tathagata *does* live in compassion for the good of all living beings."

4 "Then, bhante, **why does the Blessed One go about and teach the Dharma thoroughly to some, but not so thoroughly to some?**"⁴³ [315]

The 3 fields

5.2 "Now, then, headman, I will question you in return about this.⁴⁴ Answer as you deem fit.⁴⁵

5 Now, what do you think, headman? Suppose a farmer here has 3 fields: one excellent, one moderate, and one of poor, hard, salty, bad soil.⁴⁶

5.2 When that farmer wants to sow his seeds, which is the field wherein he would sow first: *the excellent one, or the moderate one, or the one of poor, hard, salty, bad soil?*"⁴⁷

THE WISE FARMER

5.3 "Bhante, when the farmer wants to sow his seeds, he would sow that foremost field (first).

Having sown therein, he would sow that moderate field.

Having sown therein, he would or would not sow that inferior field, *one of poor, hard, salty, bad soil.*

5.4 Why is that? Because, in any case, it may do for cattle-food."⁴⁸

³⁹The main texts for this translation is Ee = S 4 (ed M Feer 1893; rev P Jackson 2014:314-317).

⁴⁰Be Se *naḷandā*.

⁴¹Ee *asi.bandhaka,putto gāmaṇi*; Se *-gāmaṇī*; Ce *asi.bandhaka,putta,gāmaṇī*.

⁴²*Nanu bhante bhagavā sabba,pāṇa.bhūta,hitānukampī viharatīti*. Ce omits *-pāṇa-*.

⁴³*Atha kiñ carahi bhante bhagavā ekaccānaṃ sakkaccaṃ dhammaṃ deseti, ekaccānaṃ no tathā sakkaccaṃ dhammaṃ desetīti*. *Sakkacca* (adv; orig ger of *sakkaroti*, "to show respect") (BHS *satkrtya*, Mvst 1.10) means "respectfully, carefully, duly; thoroughly" often with *upaṭṭhahati*, "to attend (to), serve. Here, we have the older and more common usage of *sakkacca* as meaning "thoroughly (with enthusiasm and respect)." On this old use of *sakkacca*, see **Pāyāsi S** (D 23,32.16/2:356 f), SD 39.4; (**Khetta**) **Desanā S** (S 4:314,5/4:314), SD 51.12; **Sugata Vinaya S** (A 4.160,5/2:147), SD 6.7; **Velāma S** (A 9.20,3/4:392), SD 16.6; V 4:190, 275; Tha 1054 (SD 75.3); Dh 392; J 1:480; PvA 26, 121; *~kāri*, zealous (S 3:267; Miln 94). On *sakkacca*, further see (1.1.1.3).

⁴⁴*Tena hi gāmaṇi tañ,ñev'ettha paṭipucchissāmi*.

⁴⁵*Yathā te khameyya, tathā naṃ vyākareyyāsi*. *Khameyya* (impersonal) comes from *khamati*, "to be fit, seem good, esp in *yathā te khameyya*": **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,35/1:60), SD 8.10; **Pāyāsi S** (D 24,5.3/2:319), SD 39.4; **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72,18/1:487), SD 6.15; *sabbaṃ me na khamati*, "I disapprove of it all," M 1:497 f; *na khamati*, "it is not right," D 2:67.

⁴⁶*Idha [Be Idha'ssu] kassakassa gaha,patino tīṇi khettāni, ekaṃ khettāṃ aggāṃ, ekaṃ khettāṃ majjhimāṃ, ekaṃ khettāṃ hīnaṃ jaṅgalaṃ ūsaraṃ papa,bhūmi*.

⁴⁷*Asu bhante kassako gahapati bījāni patiṭṭhāpetu,kāmo yaṃ aduṃ khettāṃ aggāṃ, tattha patiṭṭhāpeyya*.

(1) THE FOREMOST FIELD (*agga khetta*)

6 Headman, just like that best field are **my monks and nuns**.

6.2 I teach them the Dharma

that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending,
both in spirit and in letter.

I make known to them the holy life that is wholly perfect and pure.

6.3 Why is that? Because, headman, they live with me for their island,
with me for their cave,
with me for their shelter,
with me for their refuge.⁴⁹

(2) THE MODERATE FIELD (*majjhima khetta*)

7 Then, headman, just like that moderate field are **my laymen disciples and laywomen disciples**.

7.2 I teach them the Dharma *that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the holy life that is wholly perfect and pure.*

7.3 Why is that? Because, headman, *they live with me for their island, with me for their cave, with me for their shelter, with me for their refuge.*

(3) THE POOR FIELD (*hīna khetta*)

8 Then, headman, just like that field of poor, hard, salty, bad soil, [316] are **my outside sectarian recluses, brahmins and wanderers**.⁵⁰

8.2 To them, too, I teach the Dharma *that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the holy life that is wholly perfect and pure.*

8.3 Why is that? Because if they were to understand even a single sentence of it, that would be to their benefit and happiness for a long time.

THE 3 WATER-POTS

9 Suppose, headman, a person has **3 water-pots** (*udaka,maṇika*):⁵¹

One water-pot is not cracked, not letting water seep through and go to waste.⁵²

One water-pot is *not* cracked but water seeps through and goes to waste.⁵³

One water-pot is cracked and water *seeps* through and goes to waste.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ *Antamaso go,bhattam pi bhavissatīti*. Comy: This means that after the grainless and fruitless sheaves have been harvested, they are tied together and let stand for cattle to feed on during hot weather. (*Go,bhattam pīti dhañña,phalassa abhāvena lāyitvā kalāpa,kalāpaṃ bandhitvā ṭhapitaṃ gimha,kāle gunnam pi khādanam bhavissatīti attho*, SA 3:104).

⁴⁹ *Ete hi gāmaṇim maṃ,dīpā maṃ,leṇā maṃ,tāṇā maṃ,saraṇā viharanti*.

⁵⁰ *Mayhaṃ añña,titthiyā samaṇa,brāhmaṇa,paribbājakā*, alt tr: “my recluses, brahmins and wanderers, those of other religions.” See (1.1.3).

⁵¹ Comy says that the *udaka,maṇika* is distinctive vessel that got its name because it looks like a belly with a gir-dle of jewels around it. (*Udaka,maṇiko’ti kucchiyaṃ maṇika,mekha,lāya evaṃ laddha,nāmo bhājana,viseso*, SA 3:104). Subcomy adds that it is a “great water-vessel” (*mahantaṃ udaka,bhajanam*, SAṬ 2:381). It is prob a large unglazed clay vessel like the local “*tempayan*” (Malay).

⁵² *Eko udaka,maṇiko acchiddo ahāri aparihāri*. *Ahāri*, mfn (neg verbal adj of *harati*, “to take, carry”). *Aparihāri*, mfn (opp *parihāri*, from *pari* + √HR, to take): Comy = “not absorbing”; S 4:316,9 f (*achiddo ahāri ~ī*, referring to *udaka,maṇiko*). Comy: *Ahāri aparihārīti udakaṃ na harati na pariharati na pariyaḍiyatīti attho*, “(It) means that the water does run out, nor goes to waste, nor exhausted”) (SA 3:104). Ṭikā adds: “*Ahāri* means that the water is not lost due to it oozing out (of the vessel). *Aparihāri* means there is no leaking anywhere” (*Bahi vissandana,vasena udakaṃ na haratīti ahāri, parito na paggharatīti aparihāri*, SA:Be 2:381).

⁵³ *Eko udaka,maṇiko acchiddo hāri parihāri*.

9.2 What do you think, headman? If the man wants to store water, where would he store it first:
in the water-pot that is *not cracked, not letting water seep through and go to waste*;
or, in the water-pot that is *not cracked but water seeps through and goes to waste*;
or, in the water-pot that is *cracked, and water seeps through and goes to waste*?"

9.3 "Bhante, if the man wants to store water, he would do so in the water-pot that is *not cracked, not letting water seep through and go to waste*.

Having stored water therein, he would then store water in the water-pot that is *not cracked, but water seeps through and goes to waste*.

And having stored water therein, he may or may not go on to store water in the water-pot that is *cracked, and water seeps through and goes to waste*.

9.4 Why is that? Because, in any case, it may do for (just) washing things.⁵⁵

(1) THE GOOD WATER-POT

10 Headman, just like the water-pot that is *not cracked, not letting water seep through and go to waste*, are **my monks and nuns**.

10.2 I teach them **[317]** the Dharma

that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending,
both in spirit and in letter.

I make known to them the holy life that is wholly perfect and pure.

10.3 Why is that? Because, headman, they live with me for their island,
with me for their cave,
with me for their shelter,
with me for their refuge.

(2) THE OOZY WATER-POT

11 Then, headman, just like the water-pot that is *not cracked but letting water seep through and go to waste* are **my laymen disciples and laywomen disciples**.

11.2 I teach them the Dharma *that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the holy life that is wholly perfect and pure.*

11.3 Why is that? Because, headman, *they live with me for their island, with me for their cave, with me for their shelter, with me for their refuge.*

(3) THE CRACKED AND OOZY WATER-POT

12 Then, headman, just like the water-pot that is *cracked and letting water seep through and go to waste*, are **my outside sectarian recluses, brahmins and wanderers**.

12.2 To them, too, I teach the Dharma *that is good in its beginning, good in its middle and good in its ending, both in spirit and in letter. I make known to them the holy life that is wholly perfect and pure.*

12.3 Why is that? Because if they were to understand even a single sentence of it, that would be to their benefit and happiness for a long time."

Asi,bandhaka,putta goes for refuge

13 When this was said, Asi,bandhaka,putta said to the Blessed One:

"Excellent, master Gotama! Excellent, master Gotama!

Just as if, master Gotama, one

were to place upright what had been overturned, or

⁵⁴ *Eko udaka,maṇiko chiddo hāri parihāri.*

⁵⁵ *Antamaso bhaṇḍa,dhovanam pi bhavissatīti.* Be Ce Se -*dhovana,mattam*, "for just washing"

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 master Gotama.
I go to the master Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks.
May the master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge from this
day forth for life.”

— evaṃ —

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