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Venāga,pura Sutta

The Discourse at Venāga,pura | A 3.63

Theme: The Buddha's meditations and happiness

Translated by Piya Tan ©2006

1 The Buddha's mental state

While in **the (Saṅgha) Uposatha Sutta** (A 4.190), the Buddha describes the mental state of the saints in general, “Bhikkhus, there are monks in this community of monks who dwell having attained the state of devas...the state of brahmas...the imperturbable...the state of noble ones,”¹ in the Venāga,pura Sutta, the Buddha describes his own mental state, but omitting mention of the four formless attainments (*ānejjā-p-patta*).²

The Buddha says that he attains these states “whenever I like, with neither difficulty nor trouble.”³ The Commentary explains that “(attains) with neither difficulty,” that is, “(attains) without difficulty” (*akicchā,lābhī*), means that it is attained “without unsatisfactoriness” (*adukkha,lābhī*), that is, painlessly. The phrase “nor trouble,” that is, “without trouble,” means “obtaining abundantly” (*vipula,lābhī*) (AA 2:293). These words come from a popular stock passage on the saint's ease at attaining dhyana, thus:

Here and now, attaining to the four dhyanas, the higher mind, as he wishes, without any difficulty, without any trouble [in abundance], he dwells happily.⁴

The Buddha adds that when he is in each of those states (*evam,bhūta*), whether he is sitting, walking, standing or reclining, he is similarly in a state that is heavenly (*dibba*), or perfect (*brahma*), or noble (*ariya*). In connection with the first two states—the heavenly and the perfect—the Commentary says:

Cattāri hi rūpa-j,jhānāni samāpajjitvā caṅkamantassa caṅkamano dibba,caṅkamo nāma hoti, samāpattito vuṭṭhāya caṅkamantassāpi caṅkamo dibba,caṅkamo yeva. Thān'ādisu'pi es'evanayo.

Having attained the four dhyanas, he does the walking, that is, the “heavenly walk.” Having arisen from the attainment, too, he does the walk. Standing and the rest, too, are like that.

(AA 2:294)

In this exegesis, supramundane dhyana (*lok'uttara jhāna*) is meant, that is, the dhyana of the Buddha and the arhats, who can conduct their daily lives, even sleep, in dhyana. Moggallāna, for example, could at once get into the fourth dhyana to perform various psychic wonders.⁵

¹ A 4.190/2:182-184 = SD 15.10b.

² For a comparison of the teachings of the two suttas, see **(Saṅgha) Uposatha S** (A 4.190), SD 15.10b.2.

³ *Nikāma,lābhī akicchā,lābhī akasira,lābhī*.

⁴ *Catunnam jhānānam abhīcetasikānam dīṭṭha,dhamma,sukha,vihārānam nikāma,lābhī akiccha,lābhī akasira,-lābhī*. Comy glosses *nikāma,lābhī* as “attaining it whenever he desires it” (*yathā,kāma,lābhī*); *akiccha,lābhī* as “attaining it without difficulty” (*adukkha,lābhī*); and *akasira,lābhī* as “attaining it abundantly” (*vipula,lābhī*) (DA 3:897). This is stock: **Sampasādaniya S** (D 28.19/3:113), **Sekha S** (M 53.6+18+19+23/1:354, 356, 357, 358), **Gopaka Moggallāna S** (M 108.17/3:11), **Kāya,gatā,sati S** (M 119.36/3:98), **Navaka Bhikkhu S** (S 21.4/2:278), **Mahā Kappina S** (S 54.7/5:316), **Uruvela S 2** (A 4.22.3/2:23), **Vassa,kāra S** (A 4.35.3/2:36 f), **Putta S** (A 4.87.5/-2:87), **Nāgita S** (A 5.30.2/3:31 ×3), **Samapa,sukhumāla S** (A 5.31.7/3:33), **Phasu,vihāra S** (A 5:104/3:132), **Asekha S** (A 5.106/3:134), **Catuddisa S** (A 5.109/3:135), **Arañña S** (A 5.110/3:135), **Nāgita S** (A 6.42.2/3:342 ×2), **Yasa S** (A 8.86.2+3+4+5/4:341-343 ×6), **Kosala S 2** (A 10.30.9+10/5:67 f ×4), **Subhūti S** (A 11.15.13/5:341). The words *nikāma,lābhī akiccha,lābhī akasira,lābhī* indirectly refers to dhyana in **Venāga,pura S** (A 3.63/1:181-184 ×9).

⁵ ThaA 3:177-179; DhA 3:242; cf Mvst 1:4 ff.

2 Venāga,purika Vaccha,gotta

In the **Venāga,pura Sutta** (A 3.63), we meet with **Venāga,purika Vaccha,gotta** as the spokesman for the villagers there who profusely praises the Buddha. The Commentaries are silent regarding him, and he does not seem to appear anywhere else in the early Canon.

It is possible that he is identical with the well known wanderer Vaccha,gotta, who is said to be a native of Rāja,gaha.⁶ For, as a wanderer, he is known to have visited such places as Vesālī (M 1:481), Sāvattthī (M 1:481, 483: S 3:257), and Nāṭikā (S 4:401) to meet the Buddha. The Aṅguttara Commentary explains *venāga,purika* as meaning “resident of Venāga,pura” (*venāga,pura,vāsī*) (AA 2:291), which means that he is not a native there, and probably a visitor who has gone there to meet the Buddha, or even followed the Buddha there, and introduced the Buddha to the Venāga,pura villagers.

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The Discourse at Venāga,pura

A 3.63

The Buddha visits Venāga,pura

1 At one time, the Blessed One was wandering in Kosala country in stages (on a teaching tour)⁷ with a large community of monks, and they came to Venāga,pura,⁸ a brahmin village of the Kosalas.

1.2 The brahmin householders⁹ of Venāga,pura heard this:

“It is said that the recluse Gotama, the son of the Sakyas, who went forth from a Sakya clan,¹⁰ has been wandering [peregrinating] in the Kosala territories in stages with a large community of monks and has come to the brahmin village of Venāga,pura.

1.3 Concerning this Blessed One, this fair report has been spread about, thus:¹¹

‘So, too, is he the Blessed One:¹² for, he is arhat, fully self-awakened one, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, well-gone, knower of the worlds, unexcelled trainer of tamable people, teacher of beings human and divine, awakened, blessed.

1.4 Having realized by his own direct knowledge this world with its gods, its Māras and its Brahmās, this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its rulers and people, he makes it known to others. He

⁶ ThaA 1:235. See **Aggi Vaccha,gotta S** (M 72), SD 6.15 (1) & **Mahā Vaccha,gotta S** (M 73), SD 27.4 (1-2).

⁷ “Touring...in stages,” *cārikam caramāno*, lit “walking the walk,” that is, wandering about teaching the Dharma and ministering the people. See n ad loc in **Tevijja S** (D 13.1/1:235), SD 1.8.

⁸ This seems to be the only place that this name is mentioned: a hapax legomenon.

⁹ *Brāhmaṇa,gahapatikā*, also spelt as *brāhmaṇa,gahapati*, which is invariably a collective term, never an individual, ie, the landed community of the brahmin villages (*brāhmaṇa,gāma*) or fiefs (*brahma,deya*) as a whole. This classification is based on land-ownership (ie their economic function), who nonetheless still identified with the larger priestly class. As such, individually, theu (such as Kūṭa,danta, Caṅkī, etc) are still referred to simply as *brāhmaṇa*. See Chakravarti 1987:72 f.

¹⁰ The Vinaya records the Buddha as having gone forth from a kshatriya family (*khattiya,kula*): **Culla,vagga** 6.2 (V 2:161). A stock passage speaks of the Buddha as “the recluse Gotama, a Sakya son who went forth from the Sakya clan” (*samaṇo...gotamo sakya,putto sakya,kulā pabbajito*): **Mv** 22.2/V 1:35; **D** 4.1/1:111, **13.7/1:236**; **M** 41.2/-1:285; **A** 3.63.1/1:180; **Sn** p103. On his renunciation, see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26.14/1:163), SD 1.11, **Soṇa,-daṇḍa S** (D 4.6/1:115), SD 30.5, **Kūṭa,danta S** (D 5.7/1:131), SD 22.8(7a) & **Caṅkī S** (M 95.9/2:167), SD 21.15, the last three of which say that he is “from a high family” (*uccā kulā*).

¹¹ *Evam kalyāṇo kitti,saddo abbhuggato*: **V** 1:35; **D** 1:49, 116, 236, 2:317; **M** 1:285, 2:167; **S** 5:352; **A** 1:180, 3:58, 4:80 (*kalyāṇo...abbhuggaccheyya*); **Sn** p103; **J** 1:509.

¹² Alt tr: “For the following reasons, too, he is the Blessed One [the Lord]...” On the meaning of *iti pi so*, see **Buddhānussati**, SD 15.7 (2.2) & n.

teaches the Dharma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. He proclaims the holy life that is entirely complete and pure.’

1.5 It is good to see arhats such as these.”¹³

2 Then the brahmin householders of Venāga,pura went up to the Blessed One. Some exchanged greetings with him; [181] some greeted him with their palms together; some announced their name and clan before the Blessed One, and then sat down at one side. Some kept silent and sat down at one side.¹⁴

Venāga,purika Vacchagotta’s praises

2.2 Then Vacchagotta, the brahmin of Venāga,pura, seated down at one side, said this to the Blessed One:

3 “It is wonderful, master Gotama! It is marvellous, master Gotama! How clear are the senses of the master Gotama! How utterly pure and fair is his complexion!”¹⁵

Master Gotama, just as the yellow jujube fruit¹⁶ in autumn is utterly pure and fair,¹⁷ even so is the master Gotama’s complexion utterly pure and fair!

Master Gotama, just as palm fruit just loosened from the stalk is utterly pure and fair,¹⁸ even so is the master Gotama’s complexion utterly pure and fair!

Master Gotama, just as an ornament of Jambū river gold,¹⁹ well worked by a masterly young goldsmith, skillfully beaten, then laid out on a red blanket cloth, shines, burns and radiates, even so is the master Gotama’s complexion utterly pure and fair!

3.2 What now, master Gotama, as regards these great high couches, that is to say, the sofa, the divan, with long-fleeced coverlets, with multi-coloured patchwork coverlets, with flower-embroidered woolen coverlets, with cotton quilts, with coverlets embroidered with animal figures, rugs with fur on one side, rugs with fur on both sides, gem-embroidered coverlets, silk coverlets, dance-floor carpets, horse rugs, elephant rugs, chariot rugs, antelope-hide rugs, choice rugs of Kadalī deer hide, spreads with red canopies, and crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the head and feet²⁰—

all such couches, I am sure,²¹ the master Gotama obtain them whenever he pleases, with neither difficulty nor trouble.”²²

The Buddha’s reply

4 “But, brahmin, all these great high couches, that is to say, the sofa, the divan, with long-fleeced coverlets...spreads with red canopies, and crimson double rests [crimson pillows and bolsters] for the head and feet—

all such couches, are *difficult* to be obtained by those gone forth, and when they obtain them, they are *not* allowable.

¹³ *Sādhū kho pana tathā,rūpānaṃ arahataṃ dassanaṃ hoti ti. Arahataṃ* is 3 gen pl. For details on this statement, see **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65/1:188-193), SD 35.4a (comy n 1d).

¹⁴ Comy says they are “hypocrites and blind fools” (*kerāṭikā c’eva andha,bālā ca*, AA 2:291).

¹⁵ *Acchariyaṃ bho Gotama abbhutaṃ bho Gotama yāvaṃ c’idaṃ bhoto Gotamassa vippasannāni indriyāni parisuddho chavi,vaṇṇo pariyodāto.*

¹⁶ *Badara,paṇḍu*, PTS wr *bhadara*~.

¹⁷ *Seyyathāpi bho Gotama sāradaṃ badara,paṇḍuṃ parisuddhaṃ hoti pariyodātaṃ.*

¹⁸ *Seyyathāpi bho Gotama tāla,pakkaṃ sampati,bandhā,muttaṃ parisuddhaṃ hoti pariyodātaṃ.*

¹⁹ “An ornament of Jambū river gold,” *nekkhaṃ jambonadaṃ* (DhA 3:329 ad Dh 230). SED: *jāmbūnada* = “gold from the Jambū river, any gold.”

²⁰ This list is detailed in **Brahma,jāla S** (D 1), where it is stated “the recluse Gotama abstains from the use of such great high beds and seats” (D 1.15/1:7); *ubhato,lohitakūpadhāno*, alt tr “crimson rests at both ends (of the couch).” See D:RD 1:11-13 & Bodhi (tr), *The All-embracing Net of Views* 1978:59 f. Cf **Mahā Siha,nāda S** (M 12.41/1:76), SD 2.24.

²¹ *Maññe*.

²² Vaccha,gotta is of the impression that the Buddha’s clear senses and good looks are due to his using comfortable couches. See DPPN: Venāga Sutta.

However, brahmin, there are these three great high couches that I obtain whenever I like, with neither difficulty nor trouble.²³

What are the three? [182]

They are, brahmin,

the heavenly great high couch,
the perfect great high couch, and
the noble great high couch.

dibba uccā,sayana mahā,sayana
brahma uccā,sayana mahā,sayana
ariya uccā,sayana mahā,sayana

These are the three great high couches that I obtain whenever I like, with neither difficulty nor trouble.”

The heavenly couch

I. CULTIVATION OF THE DHYANAS²⁴

5 “But what now, master Gotama, is the great high couch that is heavenly that the master Gotama can get as he pleases, with neither difficulty nor trouble?”

“Here, brahmin, I, dwelling dependent on a village or a market town, having risen early in the morning, having dressed myself, and taking robe and bowl, I enter the village of the market town for alms.

When that almsround is over, at the end of the meal, I head for the forest edge.²⁵

There I gather some grass or leaves together into one place and *sit down* there cross-legged, keeping mindfulness before me.

5.2 (1) Thus, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome mental states, I reach and dwell in the **first dhyana**, accompanied by initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness, born of solitude.²⁶

I permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill this very body²⁷ with the zest and happiness born of solitude.²⁸

(2) And, furthermore, brahmin, with the stilling of initial application and sustained application, by gaining inner tranquillity and oneness of mind, I reach and dwell in **the second dhyana**, free from initial application and sustained application, accompanied by zest and happiness born of concentration.²⁹

I permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill this very body with the zest and happiness born of concentration.

(3) And furthermore, brahmin, with the fading away of zest, I remain equanimous, mindful and clearly knowing, and experience happiness with the body. I reach and dwell in **the third dhyana**, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Happily he dwells in equanimity and mindfulness.’

I permeate and pervade, suffuse and fill this very body with the happiness free from zest.

(4) And furthermore, brahmin, with the abandoning of joy and abandoning of pain,³⁰ and with the earlier disappearance of pleasure and displeasure, I attain and dwell in **the fourth dhyana** that is neither painful nor pleasant, and with mindfulness fully purified by equanimity.³¹

²³ “That I obtain whenever I like, with neither difficulty nor trouble,” *nikāma,lābhī akicchā,lābhī akasira,lābhī*: see Intro.

²⁴ Cf V 3:4; M 1:89; Vbh 245.

²⁵ “The forest edge,” reading *van’antam* for *vanam tam* (A:W 1:165 n2).

²⁶ On the omission of “one-pointedness of mind” (*cittassa ek’aggatā*) and “concentration” (*samādhi*) here, see “The Laity and Dhyana,” SD 8 (2005).

²⁷ Here “body” (*kāya*) refers to the “mental body” (*nāma,kāya*), ie feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) (Vism 4.175/169).

²⁸ These are the dhyana factors: *vitakka vicāra pīti sukha* *ek’aggatā*, respectively.

²⁹ The 2nd dhyana is known as “the noble silence” (*ariya,tuṇhī,bhāva*) because within it applied thought and sustained thought (thinking and discursion, *vitakka,vicāra*) cease, and with their cessation, speech cannot occur. (S 2:-273); cf. S 4:293 where *vitakka* and *vicāra* are called verbal formation (*vacī,saṅkhāra*), the mental factors responsible for speech. In Ariya,pariyesanā S (M 1:161), the Buddha exhorts the monks when assembled to “either speak on the Dharma or observe the noble silence” (ie either talk Dharma or meditate).

5.3 Having become such, brahmin, if I *walk up and down*, at such time my walking is heavenly (*dibba*) to me.

Having become such, brahmin, if I *stand*, at such time my standing is heavenly to me.

Having become such, brahmin, if I *recline*, at such time my reclining is heavenly to me.

That, brahmin, is [183] the great high couch that is heavenly that I obtain whenever I like, with neither difficulty nor trouble.”

5.4 “It is wonderful, master Gotama! It is marvellous, master Gotama! And who but the master Gotama obtains such the great high couch that is heavenly whenever he pleases, with neither difficulty nor trouble!

The perfect couch

II. CULTIVATION OF THE FOUR DIVINE ABODES³²

6 But what now, master Gotama, is the great high couch that is perfect that the master Gotama can get as he pleases, with neither difficulty nor trouble?”

“Here, brahmin, I, dwelling dependent on a village or a market town, having risen early in the morning, having dressed myself, and taking robe and bowl, I enter the village of the market town for alms.

When that almsround is over, at the end of the meal, I head for the forest edge.

There I gather some grass or leaves together into one place and *sit down* there cross-legged, keeping mindfulness before me.

6.2 (1) Here, brahmin, I dwell pervading one quarter with a mind filled with lovingkindness; likewise the second quarter, likewise the third quarter, likewise the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, everywhere and to everyone as well as to myself, I dwell pervading the whole world with loving-kindness that is vast, exalted, boundless, without hate, without ill-will.

(2) Furthermore, brahmin, I, dwell pervading one quarter with a mind filled with compassion...pervading the whole world with compassion...boundless, without hate, without ill-will.

(3) I dwell pervading one quarter with a mind filled with altruistic joy...pervading the whole world with altruistic joy...boundless, without hate, without ill-will.

(4) I dwell pervading one quarter with a mind filled with equanimity, likewise the second quarter, likewise the third quarter, likewise the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, everywhere and to everyone as well as to myself, I dwell pervading the whole world with equanimity that is vast, exalted, boundless, without hate, without ill-will.

6.3 Having become such, brahmin, if I *walk up and down*, at such time my walking is perfect (*brahma*) to me.

Having become such, brahmin, if I *stand*, at such time my standing is perfect to me.

Having become such, brahmin, if I *recline*, at such time my reclining is perfect to me.

That, brahmin, is the great high couch that is perfect that I obtain whenever I like, with neither difficulty nor trouble.” [184]

6.4 “It is wonderful, master Gotama! It is marvellous, master Gotama! And who but the master Gotama obtain such a perfect couch whenever he pleases, with neither difficulty nor trouble!

³⁰ “Joy...pain,” *sukha...dukkha*: this refers to *physical* feelings. The next phrase—“pleasure and displeasure,” *domanassa...somanassa*—refers to *mental* feelings, transcended earlier. Mental feelings must be overcome first so that the mind is not distracted by itself, as it were. Then, all the other feelings (arising from the physical sense-contacts) are transcended. On the significance of this, see *Sall’atthēna S* (S 36.6/4:207-210), SD 5.5.

³¹ Here, *Vibhaṅga* gives 3 factors of the 4th dhyana—equanimity (*upekkhā*), mindfulness (*satī*) and one-pointedness of mind (*cittassa ek’aggatā*)—according to the Sutta analysis (Vbh 261), and 2 factors—equanimity and one-pointedness of the mind—according to the Abhidhamma analysis (Vbh 164; Vism 4.183/165). See also *Sāmañña,phala S* (D 2.83/1:75), SD 8.10 & *Dhyana*, SD 8.4 (5.4).

³² More commonly called “the divine abode: (*brahma, vihāra*); also “companionship with Brahmā” (*brahmā, saha-vyātā*, M 97.32/2:194 f, SD 4.9). The full passage (in the 3rd person) on cultivation of the divine abodes (*brahma, -vihāra*) is as at D 1:251, 2:186 f, 3:49 f, 78, 223 f; M 1:38, 127, 297, 335, 351, 369 f, 2:76, 82, 195, 207, 3:225, 4:296, 322, 351; A 1:183, 192, 196, 2:129 ff, 184, 3:225, 4:390, 5:299, 344; Pm 2:39 f; Vbh 272-275.

The noble couch

III. UPROOTING OF THE THREE UNWHOLESOME ROOTS³³

7 But what now, master Gotama, is the great high couch that is noble that the master Gotama can get as he pleases, with neither difficulty nor trouble?”

“Here, brahmin, I, dwelling dependent on a village or a market town, having risen early in the morning, having dressed myself, and taking robe and bowl, I enter the village of the market town for alms.

When that almsround is over, at the end of the meal, I head for the forest edge.

There I gather some grass or leaves together into one place and *sit down* there cross-legged, keeping mindfulness before me.

7.2 I know thus:

‘Lust has been abandoned, cut off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them so that they are not subject to further growth.

Hate has been abandoned, cut off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them so that they are not subject to further growth.

Delusion has been abandoned, cut off at the root, made them like a palm-tree stump, done away with them so that they are not subject to further growth.’

Having become such, brahmin, if I *walk up and down*, at such time my walking is noble (*ariya*) to me.

Having become such, brahmin, if I *stand*, at such time my standing is noble to me.

Having become such, brahmin, if I *recline*, at such time my reclining is noble to me.

7.3 That, brahmin, is the great high couch that is noble that I obtain whenever I like, with neither difficulty nor trouble.”

7.4 “It is wonderful, master Gotama! It is marvellous, master Gotama! And who but the master Gotama obtain such a noble couch whenever he pleases, with neither difficulty nor trouble!

The people of Venāga.pura take refuge

7.5 Excellent, master Gotama! Excellent, master Gotama! 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,
 even so, in numerous ways, has the Dharma been made clear by the Blessed Gotama.

We go to the Blessed Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks. May the Blessed Gotama remember us as lay followers who have gone for refuge from this day forth for life.”

— evaṃ —

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³³ *Mūla*, see **Mūla S** (A 3.69/1:201-205) = SD 18.2.