# Snp 2.7 — Sn 2:7 Brahman Principles

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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## Text

2:7 Brahman Principles

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then many Kosalan brahmans of great means—old, aged, advanced in years, having come to the last stage of life—approached the Blessed One. On arrival, they exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, they sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to him, “Master Gotama, do brahmans at present live in conformity with the brahman principles of ancient brahmans?”

“No, brahmans. Brahmans at present don’t live in conformity with the brahman principles of ancient brahmans.”

“It would be good if Master Gotama described the brahman principles of ancient brahmans, if it wouldn’t burden him.”

“In that case, brahmans, listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, master,” the brahmans of great means responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said:

Seers, before, were austere
& restrained in mind.
Abandoning the five strings of sensuality,
they practiced for their own benefit.
They had no cattle,
no gold,
no wealth.
They had study
as their wealth.
They protected the Brahmā treasure.1
They did not despise what was prepared for them:
food set at doors, prepared out of conviction
for those who seek.

Prosperous lands & kingdoms
honored brahmans with multi-colored clothes,
bedding,  & dwellings.
Brahmans
protecting their principles,
protected by law,2
were not to be violated,
not to be beaten.
No one could block them
from the doors of any home.

For 48 years (young brahmans)
followed the holy life.
Brahmans of old practiced the search
for knowledge & conduct.
Brahmans went to no other (caste),3
nor did they buy their wives.
Living together from mutual love,
having come together, they found joy together.
Aside from the time
after menstruation,
brahmans didn’t engage
in copulation.

They praised:
the holy life, virtue,
being straightforward, mild, austere,
composed, harmless, enduring.
The foremost brahman among them,
firm in perseverance,
didn’t engage in copulation
even in a dream.
Those imitating his practice
praised the holy life, virtue,
& endurance.
They asked for rice, bedding, cloth,
butter & oil.
Having collected all that
in line with rectitude,
from that
they performed the sacrifice.

And in setting up the sacrifice,
they didn't harm cows.

"Like a mother, father,
brother, or other relative,
cows are our foremost friends.
From them comes medicine.
They give food, strength,
beauty,  & happiness."

Knowing this line of reasoning,
they didn't harm cows.
Delicate, with large bodies,
beautiful, prestigious,
brahmans were committed to standards
of what should & shouldn't be done
in line with their principles.
As long as this lasted in the world,
humanity prospered in happiness.

But a perversion came among them.
Seeing, little by little,
the splendor of kings—
women well-ornamented,
chariots yoked to thoroughbreds,
well-made, with elaborate embroideries,
houses & homes,
well-proportioned, planned & laid out
lavish human wealth,
surrounded by circles of cows,
joined with groups of excellent women—
the brahmans grew greedy.

Having composed chants there,
they went up to Okkāka.

“You have much wealth & grain.
Sacrifice! Much is your property!
Sacrifice! Much is your wealth!”

Then the king, lord of charioteers,
induced by the brahmans,
having performed these sacrifices—
the horse sacrifice, the human sacrifice,
sammāpāsa, vājapeyya,  & niraggaḷa4—
gave the brahmans wealth:
cows, bedding, clothes,
women adorned,
chariots yoked to thoroughbreds,
well-made, with elaborate embroideries,
Having had delightful homes,
well-proportioned, filled throughout5
with various grains,
he gave the brahmans wealth.

And they, receiving the wealth there,
found joy together in hoarding it.
Overcome by desire,
their craving grew more.
Having composed chants there,
they went up to Okkāka again.

“Like water & earth,
gold, wealth,  & grain,
are cows to human beings.

This is a requisite for beings.
Sacrifice! Much is your property!
Sacrifice! Much is your wealth!”

Then the king, lord of charioteers,
induced by the brahmans,
killed in a sacrifice
many hundred-thousands of cows.
The cows—
meek like sheep,
giving milk by the bucket—
hadn’t,
with their hooves or horns or
anything else, done
anyone
any harm.
But the king,
grabbing them by the horns,
killed them with a knife.

Then the devas, the Fathers,
Indra, and rakkhasas
cried out,
“An injustice!”
when the knife fell on the cows.

Three were the diseases before then:
desire, hunger,  & aging.
But from violence against cattle
came ninety-eight.
This injustice of violence
has come down as ancient.

The innocent are killed;

the sacrificers fall away

from the Dhamma.

This tradition—ancient, vile—

is criticized by the observant.

Where people see such a thing,

they criticize the sacrificer.

With the Dhamma perishing in this way,

merchants are split from workers,

noble warriors are split far apart,

the wife despises the husband.

Noble warriors, kinsman of Brahmā,

and any others protected by clan,

repudiating the doctrine of their birth, fall

under sensuality's

sway.

When this was said, those brahmans of great means said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. We go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, & to the Saṅgha of monks. May Master Gotama remember us as lay followers who have gone for refuge from this day forward, for life."

vv. 284–315

Notes

1. According to SnA, "Brahmā treasure" refers to such mind states as the development of goodwill. See Sn 1:8, note 1.

2. "Protecting their principles, protected by law": two possible meanings of dhamma-rakkhitā. SnA explains this term with reference to the Dhamma passage, "The Dhamma protects those who live by the Dhamma." (Thag 4:10)

3. I.e., in choosing their wives. See AN 5:191.

4. Three types of sacrifice defined by details in the equipment used.

5. Reading sabbaso with the Thai edition. The other editions read bhāgaso, “laid out.”

## Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 60; MN 93; SN 3:9; AN 5:191