SN 41.5 — Pathama Kamabhu: About Kamabhu (1)

English translation by K. Nizamis.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved; source ellipsis or repetition-omission statement retained. Canonical repetitions were not reconstructed.

Text

At one time, the Venerable Kāmabhū was dwelling in Macchikāsanda, in Ambāṭakavana (the Plum-Mango Grove).

Then, there where the Venerable Kāmabhū was, there Citta, the householder, approached. Having approached and having saluted the Venerable Kāmabhū, he sat to one side. Having sat to one side, the Venerable Kāmabhū then said this to Citta, the householder:

"This was said, householder: [1]

'With faultless part, [2] adorned in white, the one-way chariot rolls on: [3] 'See it coming, undisturbed, with flow cut off, unbound.'

"How, then, householder, should the detailed or expanded meaning of this condensed statement be seen?" [4]

"Was this, Venerable One, spoken by the Blessed One?"

"Just so, householder."

"So then, Venerable One, please wait a moment while I look at its meaning."

And then, Citta the householder, having been silent for a moment, said this to the Venerable Kāmabhū:

"'Faultless part': now this, Venerable One, is a metaphorical expression for the virtues.

"'Adorned in white': this, Venerable One, is a metaphorical expression for liberation.

"'Going one way': this, Venerable One, is a metaphorical expression for mindfulness.

"'Rolls on': this, Venerable One, is a metaphorical expression for advancing and retreating.[5]

"'Chariot': this, Venerable One, is a metaphorical expression for this body of four great elements, produced from mother and father, accumulated out of boiled rice and grain, subject to erosion, abrasion, dissolution and disintegration.

"Lust, indeed, Venerable One, is disturbance, hatred is disturbance, delusion is disturbance.[6] For a monk with poisonous mental influences [7] destroyed, these are abandoned, broken at the root, like a palm made groundless, with sprouts annihilated, such that, thereafter, they have no arising. Because of that, a monk with poisonous mental influences destroyed is called 'one who is undisturbed'.[8]

"'The one who is coming': this, Venerable One, is a metaphorical expression for the arahant.

"'Flow': this, Venerable One, is a metaphorical expression for craving. For a monk with poisonous mental influences destroyed, this is abandoned, broken at the root, like a palm made groundless, with sprouts annihilated, such that, thereafter, it has no arising. Because of that, a monk with poisonous mental influences destroyed is called 'one with flow cut off'.

"Lust, indeed, Venerable One, is bondage, hatred is bondage, delusion is bondage. For a monk with poisonous mental influences destroyed, these are abandoned, broken at the root, like a palm made groundless, with sprouts annihilated, such that, thereafter, they have no arising. Because of that, a monk with poisonous mental influences destroyed is called 'one who is unbound'.

"Thus, indeed, Venerable One, is that which was said by the Blessed One:

'With faultless part, adorned in white, the one-way chariot rolls on: 'See it coming, undisturbed, with flow cut off, unbound.'

"Of this condensed statement, Venerable One, spoken by the Blessed One, thus do I understand the detailed or expanded meaning."

"It is understood by you, householder, it is well-understood by you; [9] for your wisdom-eye proceeds methodically [10] through the profound word of the Buddha."

Translator's Notes

The above translation (as well as other translations at ATI by the present translator) deliberately aims to adhere as closely as possible to the grammar and syntax of the Pāḷi text, while at the same time trying to present an easily readable English text. In this way, the translation may be especially useful for students of Pāḷi who would like to follow the Pāḷi original in parallel to the English translation.

1.

The circumstances under which the Buddha uttered this stanza are depicted in Ud 7.5. There, the Buddha states that Bhaddiya, although outwardly a deformed and unsightly dwarf, is in truth inwardly an Arahant. The Buddha then utters this stanza as a metaphorical depiction of Bhaddiya's true nature.

2.

Nelaṅgo: the commentaries interpret this term as having the sense na (atthi) + ela + aṅga, 'part without fault'. The subcommentary: "Elaṃ vuccati doso, taṃ etassa natthīti nelaṃ" (Myanmar Spk-ṭ ii.372); 'ill-will or hatred' is called 'fault' [elaṃ]; this does not [na] exist for him, thus 'nelaṃ'." The word is in the singular, but I think it should be understood with a synecdochal sense: the part standing in for the whole, or the singular for the plural, as when one might say: "a person of pure word and pure deed", meaning, of course, 'pure words' and 'pure deeds'. This reading is in fact supported later in the text by Citta's interpretation of the metaphor, because he explicitly glosses the singular nelaṅgaṃ with the plural sīlāni, 'virtues'. Bodhi (Connected Discourses of the Buddha, p. 1321) and Ānandajoti [www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net] both translate "With faultless wheel...", retaining the singular, but identifying the 'part' (aṅga) specifically with the wheel of the chariot. While this is perfectly reasonable, I have preferred to take aṅga as referring to every component part of the chariot's constitution. In either case, the image of the chariot's 'faultlessness' fits in very well with the image of its rolling along smoothly and quietly, 'without disturbance' (anīgha): see note 8 below.

3.

Ekāro: the commentaries read this as eka + ara, and interpret araas 'spoke': hence, 'one-spoked'. Bodhi (CDB, p. 1321) and Ānandajoti [www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net] both seem to accept this interpretation, and accordingly translate ekāro ratho as "one-spoked chariot". Here, too, however, I would like to offer an alternative reading. Personally, I find the image of a 'one-spoked chariot' (which is

presumably supposed to mean 'a chariot, each of whose wheels has only one spoke'?) rather odd, particularly given that the word ara, 'spoke', appears to be associated with the idea of the radius of a circle, not its diameter (cf. Monier-Williams, Sanskrit-English Dictionary, p. 86.2; Rhys Davids and Stede, Pali-English Dictionary, p. 76.1; also Cone, A Dictionary of Pāli, Part I, p. 232.2). The only way that I could extract some sense from such an image would be to suppose that, if the 'wheel' represents the Dhamma, and has eight spokes, representing the Noble Eightfold Path, then, in the case of an Arahant, by whom all eight 'spokes' have been realized in practice, only one 'spoke' remains functional: namely, the constant 'mindfulness' (sati) which the Arahant quite naturally practices. So, one could perhaps say that there is only one kind of 'spoke' (rather than, literally, just 'one spoke') in the 'wheel' of the Arahant's practice: namely, mindfulness. Nevertheless, this is a rather abstract interpretation.

Consequently, I would like to suggest a different interpretation, here, of ara, derived from the same verbal root from which the noun ara, 'spoke', is derived, as is the adjective ara, 'swift, speedy': namely, √ṛ, 'to go, to move' (cf. Whitney, Roots, Verb-Forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language, p. 14; Monier-Williams, SED, p. 223.1; Böhtlingk and Roth, Sanskrit Wörterbuch, Vol. I, p. 403.1). Monier-Williams points out a usage of ara at the end of a compound, where it has the sense 'going', and cites the example of the word samara, which is analysed into sam + ara (from √ṛ), 'coming together, meeting, confluence'; hence also 'hostile encounter, conflict, war' (cf. Böhtlingk and Roth, SW, Vol. VII, p. 689.1: sam + ar, (1) 'Zusammenlauf, Zusammenfluss'; (2) 'feindlicher Zusammenstoss, Kampf'). (It should be pointed out that Rhys Davids and Stede seem to have misconstrued the Pāli samara, 'war', as sa + mara, 'with death', i.e., 'that which is accompanied by death'.) Cone (DP, Part I, p. 232.2) cites only muddha-ara as an example ara at the end of a compound; Rhys Davids and Stede define that term as 'head (top) spoke' (PED, p. 538.2).

I propose to read ekāra as eka 'one, single, alone' + ara 'going', on the model of sam + ara. The sense would then be either: (1) that the 'chariot' (representing the Arahant) goes always alone; or (2) that the 'chariot' goes always in one direction (i.e., towards Nibbāna); or that it travels always upon one path (i.e., the Noble Eightfold Path); or that it travels only in one way (i.e., in accordance with the Dhamma). These various possible senses are not mutually exclusive, of course.

With respect to the first interpretation, ekāra as 'lone-going', which implies that the Arahant is completely unattached and lives in seclusion, we may consider that in Ud 7.5 Bhaddiya is described, as seen from afar, following closely behind the mass of approaching monks (dūratova sambahulānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ piṭṭhito piṭṭhito āgacchantaṃ (PTS Ud 76)). The Buddha then describes Bhaddiya as "usually, for the monks, of such an appearance as to be disregarded or despised" (yebhuyyena bhikkhūnaṃ paribhūtarūpaṃ (PTS Ud 76)). Again, Malalasekera, Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names, s.v. 'Ambātakavana' (Vol. 1, p. 162), informs us that the Elder Lakuṇṭaka Bhaddiya "lived there, in solitude, wrapt in meditation", supporting this with a reference to Theragāthā 7.2 (PTS Th 49)).

On the theme of the 'oneness' or 'aloneness' of the Arahant, we might also cite the following stanza from Suttanipāta 5, §1142 (PTS Sn 220). (Note that the commentary analyses tamanudāsino into tamonudo āsino (PTS Sn-a ii.604).)

eko tamanudāsino, jutimā so pabhaṅkaro. gotamo bhūripaññāṇo, gotamo bhūrimedhaso. One sitting alone, dispelling darkness: he, the brilliant maker of light: Gotama, extensive in wisdom, Gotama, extensive in intelligence.

The Cūḷaniddesa also provides a commentary to this same stanza (Myanmar Nidd II, 210-213), wherein, with reference to the word eko, 'one' or 'alone', in the phrase, "eko tamonudāsīno", it says:

ekoti bhagavā pabbajjasaṅkhātena eko, adutiyaṭṭhena eko, taṇhāya pahānaṭṭhena eko, ekantavītarāgoti eko, ekantavītadosoti eko, ekantavītamohoti eko, ekantanikkilesoti eko, ekāyanamaggaṃ gatoti eko, eko anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambuddhoti eko.

'One' (or 'alone'): the Blessed One, by being classified as one who has taken up the ascetic life, is one; by the meaning of being without companions, is one; by the meaning of having renounced craving, is one; absolutely [ekanta] free of passion, is one; absolutely free of ill will, is one; absolutely free of delusion, is one; absolutely without defilements, is one; having gone [gato] by the one-way path (or the one-goal path) [eka-ayana-magga], is one; having fully and perfectly awakened in the one ultimate right and perfect awakening, is one.

Here, in this passage, we find an echo of both of the senses that I have proposed, hypothetically, for ekāra read as 'one-going': namely, both 'going alone' and 'going one way'. Finally, we might consider also this passage from Dhammapada (Ch. 23, §305, PTS Dhp 43):

ekāsanaṃ ekaseyyaṃ, eko caramatandito, eko damayamattānaṃ, vanante ramito siyā. Sitting alone, sleeping alone, walking alone, unwearying, Alone self-tamed: he can be delighted in the forest.

4.

"Kathaṃ... attho daṭṭhabbo?" Literally, "how should the meaning be seen"; hence, "how should it be regarded, understood", etc. A little farther on, we find "atthaṃ pekkhāmi", "I behold or look at the meaning". This use of verbs of 'seeing' with attha, 'meaning', as object, is reinforced at the end of the sutta, where we find pa––a-cakkhu, 'wisdom-eye' as subject, with "gambhīre buddhavacane", "in or through the profound word of the Buddha" as adverbial locative to the verb kamati, 'to proceed or progress (step by step)'. See note 10 below.

5.

Abhikkamati, paṭikkamati: literally, 'stepping forward, stepping back'; hence, 'advancing, retreating'; or 'going, returning'. Bodhi translates this passage: "this is a designation for going forward and returning" (CDB, p. 1321). These correlative terms have some interesting uses in the suttas. The following is an example of one type: "Bāḷhā me dukkhā vedanā abhikkamanti, no paṭikkamanti. abhikkamosānaṃ paññāyati, no paṭikkamo." (MN 97 Dhānañjāni Sutta (PTS MN ii.184), at MN ii.193 f.) This particular formula occurs a number of times throughout MN, SN and AN. Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi translate this as: "My painful feelings are increasing, not subsiding; their increase and not their subsiding is apparent." (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, p. 795, §29.) Thanissaro translates: "My severe pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening." (MN 97, Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) 2008, 'Dhanañjani Sutta: To Dhanañjani'). Keeping a little more closely to the literal sense of abhi-kamati, 'stepping towards, against' and paṭi-kamati, 'stepping back, away', we might also translate: "My excessive painful feelings are advancing, not retreating; their advance is evident, not their retreat."

6.

"Rāgo kho, bhante, nīgho, doso nīgho, moho nīgho." Concerning this term, nīgha, see note 8 on anīgha, below. There has been some discussion in the literature about whether anīgha, which is evidently a negative (or privative) form, should be taken as a + nīgha or an + īgha, and several suggestions about its possible etymology and meaning, but no decisive evidence seems to have been discerned. In the Suttanta Piṭaka, anīgha occurs a number of times, but there are very few occurrences of nīgha (or nigha): for example, here in this present sutta; in SN 45.168, and elsewhere, where this same formula is repeated; in Thī 16.1, §493 (PTS Thī 171) we find "sattisūlūpamā kāmā, rogo gaṇḍo aghaṃ nighaṃ", "like sword-stakes are sensual pleasures, a disease, a boil, pain, nighaṃ", the commentary leaving the sense of nigha obscure: "maraṇa-sampāpanena" (PTS Thī-a 288), "because of arriving at (leading to?) death". Various other commentary references do not really help to clarify the matter, either.

7.

This is a merely provisional rendering of the Pāḷi Buddhist term āsavā, which is a very difficult concept translate into concise English because its meaning is intimately connected with the most essential ideas, principles and motives forming the core teaching of the early Pāḷi Buddhadhamma.

8.

Anīgho. The commentary to this sutta glosses this term: "anīghanti niddukkhaṃ", i.e., "anīghaṃ: without pain or suffering". (PTS Spk iii.93.) The commentary to Ud 7.5, where the origin of this stanza is depicted, says: "anīghanti niddukkhaṃ, khobhavirahitaṃ yānaṃ viya kilesaparikhobhavirahitanti attho" (PTS Ud-a 370). "'Anīghaṃ': without pain or suffering; the meaning is (that he is) completely free of (mental) disturbance [khobha] caused by mental defilements, like a vehicle [yānaṃ] free of shaking [khobha]." This

interpretation of the meaning of anīgha has the advantage of drawing a nice connection between the poetic metaphor and its reference. Just as a faultlessly constructed chariot rolls smoothly and quietly along, without agitation or shaking, so, similarly, the mind of the Arahant, which has been purified of all defilements, remains always undisturbed and untroubled.

9.

"Lābhā te, gahapati, suladdhaṃ te, gahapati!" This is a somewhat formulaic expression, and could be read, quite conventionally, as Bodhi reads it (taking lābha and laddha in their common sense of 'gain, profit'): "It is a gain for you, householder, it is well gained by you, householder..." (CDB, p. 1322). (This accords, in part, with Rhys Davids and Stede, PED, p. 583.1: lābhā as an adverbial dative, and te as 2nd person genitive: "for the gain of you".) This is clearly the proper sense, for example, in Vin 1.1.3, §163 (PTS Vin iii.68), where the type of gain in question is puñña, 'spiritual merit'. Certainly, Citta's correct interpretation of the stanza could be viewed as a source of spiritual merit for him.

Even so, in this present context, I have ventured a slightly different reading. Lābha means 'receiving, getting, acquisition, gain' (from the verb labhati, 'to get, receive, obtain, acquire'). Laddha (past participle of labhati) is 'having obtained, taken, received', and thus suladdha is 'well-received, well-gained'. If we took both occurrences of te as instrumental, 'by you', we might arrive at the alternative rendering that I have proposed. More colloquially expressed, the sense would be: "You got it, householder, you got it well, householder!" This would provide a neat sense, given the context of the 'riddle' that Kāmabhū has posed, and Citta's fairly thorough solution of it.

10.

This is a rendering of the verb kamati (Skt. kramati), which literally means 'to step, to walk (step by step), to go'; thus, among the primary meanings of Skt. krama (lit., 'a step'), we find: "uninterrupted or regular progress, order, series, regular arrangement, succession" (Monier-Williams, SED, p. 319.3). Bodhi translates: "ranges over" (Bodhi, CDB, p. 1322).