

## A Study on the *Velāma Sutta*

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### Abstract

This research studies on the *Velāma Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* preached by the Buddha to the millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika. The studying indicates that the donor's mental attitude and behaviour are more important than the offertory in performing charity, the charity performed within the *Sāsana* is more beneficial than the charity performed outside the *Sāsana*, the charities that can bring about successively greater and greater benefits, the moral purity of the donee is more important than the behaviour of the donor in performing charity and taking refuge in the Triple Gem with faith and devotion, keeping the five precepts, cultivation of *mettā* and contemplation on impermanence of the five aggregates are successively more beneficial than performing charity. These facts are presented together with the accounts from *Pālis* and *Aṭṭhakathās*. It is assumed that studying in the *Velāma Sutta* is to let know the behaviours of virtuous persons and the meritorious deeds and the charities which are successively nobler.

**Key words:** *dāna*, *sīla* and *bhāvamā*.

### Aim and Objectives

This research intends to study the behaviours of virtuous persons and the meritorious deeds and the charities which are successively nobler. The objectives are to understand the features of the *dāna* (charity), to learn the *sīla* (moral duties) and to study the *bhāvanā* (mental cultivating).

### Introduction

The doctrines preached by the Buddha for 45 years of Buddhahood can be divided into many ways. Out of them the most outstanding is division of the *Dhammas* into three *Piṭakas* and into five *Nikāyas*. The *Dhammas* into three *Piṭakas* are the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, the *Sutta Piṭaka* and the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. [Buddhaghosa, Mahāthera. 2001] The *Vinaya Piṭaka* contains monastic disciplinary rules which are prescribed for the monks to be virtuous in good conduct. The *Sutta Piṭaka* contains virtuous doctrines and what to avoid and what to observe and methods of practising meditation. The *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* contains profound doctrines.

The *Sutta Piṭaka* is divided into five *Nikāyas*. [Dhammapāla, Ashin. 1958] Namely: the *Dīgha Nikāya* (a collection of lengthy discourses), the *Majjhima Nikāya* (a collection of medium-length discourses), the *Samyutta Nikāya* (a collection of similar discourses), the *Anguttara Nikāya* (a collection of discourses which gradually increase by one *aṅga*) and the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (a collection of small discourses)

#### Millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika

The persons who are mainly responsible for perpetuation of the three *Sāsanas*, namely, *Pariyatti*

*Sāsana*, *Paṭipatti Sāsana* and *Paṭivedha Sāsana* are monks in the service of *Sāsana*. Moreover, it is the duty of the *dāyakas* (donors) and *dāyikās* (female donors) who believe in *Sāsana* to donate the four material requisites to the *Samgha*. Among the persons who were offering the four material requisites to the *Samgha*, millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika was an outstanding and exemplary donor.

Millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika was a famous person in Sāvatti in the life-time of the Buddha. His childhood name was Sudatta. [Buddhaghosa, Mahāthera. 1957] As he gave foods, clothes and drinks to the poor and the refugeless, he was famous as a great alms giver. [Buddhaghosa, Mahāthera. 1958] *Anāthapiṇ* is a Myanmar word derived from the *Pāli* word *Anāthapiṇḍika*. Anāthapiṇḍika means the giver of food to refuge less or poor persons.

The meaning of Anāthapiṇḍika is explained in the *Abhidhānappadīpikāsūci* as because he used to give alms such as food to the poor people, he is called Anāthapiṇḍika. [မာဂ္ဂလာန၊ အရှင်၊ ငုဇ္ဇ၊] Moreover Anāthapiṇḍika is explained in the *Mūlapaṇṇāsattakathā* as because he fulfils wishes, is free from stinginess, is replete with qualities such as compassion, and always gives alms such as food, he is called Anāthapiṇḍika. [Buddhaghosa, Mahāthera. 1993]

Millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika became a *Sotāpanna* when he worshipped the Buddha for the first time. [Dept. of Religious Affairs Press.1996] The Buddha was then residing at the Simsapa Grove. While residing at the Jetavana monastery, the Buddha conferred *etadagga* title on millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika also called Sudatta for his great alms-giving.

Millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika not only did meritorious deeds by himself, but also prompted and assisted others in making alms-giving. The wealthy man had many friends and he always tried to make his friends to be devoted to the *Sāsana*. The wealthy man

was able to urge not only his family, his relatives, his attendants but also the deity who guarded the door of his house to become *Sotāpanna*. [Buddhaghosa, Mahāthera. 1969]

There are many discourses preached by the Buddha to the millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. There are also discourses preached to him by the great disciples such as Venerable Sāriputta, Venerable Ānanda, etc. These discourses include the doctrine preached to the millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika and the discourses related to members of his family, relatives, friends, attendants, etc.

While the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery in Sāvatti, the Buddha preached the Velāma Sutta to the millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika. The word *velāma* refers to a Brahmin called Velāma. [ဇေယျဒီပဝေါဟာန်ကျမ်းပြုအဖွဲ့၊ ၂၀၁၁] This is the tenth sutta in the *Sihanāda Vagga, Paṭhamapaṇṇāsaka, Navakanipāta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.

### Story of the *Velāma Sutta*

While the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery, the Buddha asked millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika, ‘Are you going to do alms giving at your house?’ The wealthy man supplicated in answer, ‘Venerable Sir, I am going to offer alms-rice with vinegar curry’. Thereupon, the Buddha preached as follows:

A person donates coarse foods or good foods without respect and reverence. He does not personally donate. He donates as if he is discarding. He donates without belief in *kamma* and its results. In every existence the merit of donation bears result, he does not have the desire to eat good food, to wear nice clothes, to ride on good carriage and to enjoy sensual pleasures. That person’s wife and children, servants, slaves and workers do not obey his words. Happening this way is due to his act of disrespect in making offerings.

He donates coarse foods or good foods with respect. He donates with reverence. He personally makes offering. He does not donate like discarding. He donates with firm belief in *kamma* and its results. In every existence, the donation bears result the donor has desire to eat good foods, to wear nice clothes, to ride on good carriage and to enjoy sensual pleasures. That person’s wife and children, slaves, servants and workers are obedient to him. Others are obedient to him on account of alms-giving respectfully and reverently.

In the time of yore, Velāma Brahmin made offerings of eighty-four thousand cups filled with silver, eighty-four thousand silver cups filled with gold, eighty-four thousand copper cups filled with jewels, eighty-four thousand elephants, ornamented by gold ornaments, gold pennants and gold nets, eighty-four thousand carriages covered with lion hides, tiger hides, leopard hides, *Paṇḍukambalā* (orange-colour blanket) and decorated with gold ornaments, gold pennants and gold nets, eighty-four

thousand mulch cows with high yield of milk, eighty-four thousand women wearing ear-tubes, eighty-four thousand thrones, floored with long-furred carpets, white furred carpets, carpets with flower works, antelope hide, canopied with red cloth and double bolsters, eighty-four thousand fine linen garments, silk cloths and cotton cloths. The offering of foods, beverages and eatables was seen as if flowing like a river.

The Buddha said Velāma Brahmin that who made such a great offering was I, the Buddha. At that great offering there was not a donee who was noble and virtuous. Purity of offering could not be accomplished to a single donee. Offering to a *Sotāpanna* who has the right view is more beneficial than the great charity performed by Velāma Brahmin. Offering a meal to a *Sakadāgāmī* is more beneficial than offering meals a hundred *Sotāpannas*. Similarly offering a meal to an *Anāgāmī* is more beneficial than offering meals to a hundred *Sakadāgāmīs*. Similarly offering a meal to an *Arahanta* is more beneficial than offering meals to a hundred *Anāgāmīs*. Offering to a *Pacceka Buddha* is more beneficial than offering to a hundred *Arahantas*. Offering to a *Sammāsambuddha* is more beneficial than offering to a hundred *Pacceka Buddhas*. Offering to the *Samgha* headed by the Buddha is more beneficial than offering to a *Sammāsambuddha*. The donation of a monastery intended for all monks coming from all directions is more beneficial than offering to the *Samgha* headed by the Buddha. Taking refuge in the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the *Samgha* with devotion are more beneficial than the donation of a monastery intended for all monks from all directions. The observance of the five moral precepts together with the refuge in the Triple Gem is more beneficial than by mere taking refuge in the Triple Gem with devotion. Cultivating loving-kindness just for a moment as fleet as the duration of inhaling fragrant perfume once is more beneficial than keeping the five moral precepts with devotion. Again reflecting on the nature of impermanence on the five aggregates repeatedly for a short moment as fleet as the snapping of one’s fingers is more beneficial than cultivating loving-kindness. [Dept. of Religious Affairs Press.1994]

### Discussion

The volition that one wants to give away or offer one’s possession to other in charity is called *dāna* (charity), and the offerings that one makes also denotes *dāna*. Charitable deeds arise depending on one’s volition. Unless one is motivated, one will never give away one’s possession in charity. Therefore, volition is the main force of charity and it also is called *dāna*. Charity done with keen volition can bring great benefit to the donor. The objects of offerings also help in the accomplishment of charitable deeds. If there is no object of offering, no charitable deeds can be done. So the objects of offering also denote *dāna*.

To accomplish an act of charity, four factors; namely donor, donees, objects of offering and volition must be present. Only if the object of offering is obtained lawfully, will the donation be great benefit. *dāna* can give rise to supreme wholesome *kamma* associated with three moral roots if it made in a proper way. Moreover alms-giving yields great benefits, the donee must also be free from lust, anger and delusion or trying to be free from lust, anger and delusion. And the donor must also offer well-prepared offertories to a donee with due respect and reverence and with faith in *kamma* and its results

There are five ways of offering in charity made by ignoble persons. They are *asakkacca-dāna* (offering without proper preparation and without due respect and reverence to the donees), *acittikata-dāna* (offering to donees without enthusiasm), *asahattha-dāna* (offering is not made to the donees personally), *pavidhā-dāna* (offering is made to the donees like discarding an object) and *anāgamadiṭṭhika-dāna* (offering is made to the donees with belief in *kamma* and its results). [Dept. of Religious Affairs Press.1982]

There are ways of offering in charity by virtuous persons. They are *sakkacca-dāna* (offering of well-prepared offertories to a donee with due respect and reverence and with faith in *kamma* and its results), *cittikata-dāna* (offering to the donee with keen volition and enthusiasm), *sahattha-dāna* (offering to the donee by the donor himself), *anapavidhā-dāna* (offering is made respectfully and devotedly), *āgamanadiṭṭhika-dāna* (offering is made with firm belief in *kamma* and its results). [Dept. of Religious Affairs Press.1994]

Of the five kinds of donation made by the virtuous persons, the donor who does *saddhādāna* (offering with faith) based on belief in *kamma* and its results will possess great wealth and very beautiful in complexion in whatever existence he is. [Dept. of Religious Affairs Press.1982]

In offering inferior offertories or in offering superior offertories, if the offering is made with one of the five ways of offering by ignoble persons, the donor will not have desire to use superior articles in every life when his charity bears result. He will have no power influence over the family and relatives. In offering inferior or superior offertories, if the offering is made with one of the five ways of offering made by the virtuous, the donor will have desire to use good things in every life when his charity bears result. He will have power and influence over his family and relatives. Bearing different results is due to the donor's behaviour and mental attitude. Thus in performing works of charity, the donor's mental attitude and behaviour are more important than the offertory.

In performing charity, there are two kinds of charity: charities performed inside the Buddha *Sāsana* and charities performed outside the Buddha's *Sāsana*. When the Buddha was Velāma Brahmin, *mahādāna* (the great offering) of gold, silver, articles of use,

clothes and foods and drinks was the charity outside the *Sāsana*. All charities from offering meal to a *Sotāpanna* to donation of a monastery for all *bhikkhus* coming from the four cardinal directions are charities made inside the *Sāsana*. It is described that offering a meal to a *Sotāpanna* is more beneficial than Velāma Brahmin's *mahādāna* (great charity). Thus the charity performed within the *Sāsana* is more beneficial than the charity performed outside the *Sāsana*.

As offering a meal to a *Sotāpanna*, offering meals to a hundred *Sotāpannas*, offering a meal to *Sakadāgāmī*, offering meals to a hundred *Anāgāmīs*, offering a meal to an *Anāgāmī*, offering meals to a hundred *Anāgāmīs*, offering a meal to an *Arahat*, offering meals to a hundred *Arahats* and offering a meal to the *Sammāsambuddha* are charities performed within the *Sāsana*. These are the charities that can bring about successively greater and greater benefit. In performing charities, the benefit of charity is found to increase successively in the *Aṭṭhakathās* according to the qualities of the donees as follows:

The donor who feeds an animal to its satisfaction will enjoy the five kinds of benefits called long life, beauty, happiness, strength and discerning wisdom in a hundred existences. A donor who offers to an ignoble lay person, will enjoy well-being for a thousand existences. A donor who offers to a lay person endowed with morality, will enjoy well-being for a hundred thousand existences. The donor who makes offering to a person who has dispelled lust and is possessed of mundane super knowledge outside the *Sāsana* will enjoy well-being for a core of existences. The donor who offers to persons from a lay novice who is replete with *Saraṇagamanasīla* (morality which taking refuge) to persons who are established in *Sotāpattimagga* enjoy well-being for an *asankhyeyya* (incalculable, innumerable) existences. Offering to the Buddha will accrue benefits for many *asankhyeyya* existences. [Buddhaghosa, Mahāthera. 1993]

If the Jambudīpa Island is made levelled, covered and the *Ariya* persons are seated, there will be ten rows of *Sotāpannas*, ten rows of *Sakadāgāmīs*, three and a half rows of *Anāgāmīs*, two and a half rows of *Arahats*, a row of *Paccekabuddhas* and a single *Sammāsambuddha*. So offering to the Buddha is more greatly beneficial than offering to other seven kinds of *Ariya* persons. [Buddhaghosa, Mahāthera. 2003] Therefore, in performing charity, the moral purity of the donee is more important than the behaviour of the donor.

Although a donor and a non-donor reach celestial abode or human world because they are equal in endowment with faith, morality and wisdom, if a donor becomes a celestial being, he will superior in lifespan, physical beauty, wealth, followers and influence to non-donor. If he becomes human being, the donor will long-live like Venerable Mahākassapa, Venerable Bākula and Venerable Ānanda, handsome likes Mahāgatim̃ba Abhaya Thera and Treasure Minister and wealthy like Raṭṭhapāla the young man, son of Soṇa the wealthy man, and Yasa the young

man, will have many followers and influence like king Dhammāsoka. [Buddhaghosa, Mahāthera. 1958]

*Dāna* is the foundation of all Perfections. It is the Perfection in *Dāna* that all Bodhisattas fulfil prior to other Perfections. Dana also resembles a package of provision for one who roams about the round of rebirths. A person who has performed a great deal of charitable deeds will become a man of great wealth and high station in whatever existence he will be reborn. Even when in his last existence he realizes the *Nibbāna*, he will realize it more comfortably than one who lacks in charitable deeds. One should not neglect *dāna* because one can rely on it not only in the present life but also in future existences. If one performs charitable deeds with a correct attitude in proper and systematic way, one will realize the *Nibbāna* and be free from the round of rebirths at the earliest.

Charity is giving for the welfare of the donee or giving one's property in paying reverence to the donee. The performer of charity has the good intention for the welfare of all living beings; there is no cause for him to kill life, to steal other's property. Therefore, one who performs charity will be able to keep the morality.

Although it is true that giving alms can bring great benefits, morality is more beneficial than charity. A person can gather more benefit by taking refuge in the Triple Gems with devotion rather than giving alms. Again better than just merely taking refuge in the Triple Gem is to observe the five moral precepts together with the refuge in the Triple Gem.

Actually moral discipline called *Sīla* means restraints in evil physically, vocally and mentally, the avoidance of transgressions. It means purity in thought, word and deed.

Morality is a practice of controlling bodily and verbal actions. Mental action can be most beneficial as well as most heinous, as the case may be among the three kinds of actions. Thus meditation, which can calm the mind, is more beneficial than observing moral precepts. Cultivating loving-kindness just for a moment as fleeting as the duration of milking a cow once or smelling a fragrant perfume once, can bring more benefits than keeping the moral precepts. Again reflecting on the nature of impermanence of the five aggregates repeatedly for a short moment as feeling as the snapping of one's finger can bring more benefits than cultivating loving-kindness.

On that account, taking refuge in the Triple Gem with faith and devotion, keeping the five precepts, cultivation of *mettā* and contemplation on impermanence of the five aggregates are successively more beneficial than performing charity.

## Conclusion

The Buddha, being a supreme person born of mankind, the doctrines preached by the Buddha for 45 years of Buddhahood are being preserved and handed over by successive generations of the Buddha's disciple monks. These doctrines are for the welfare of

all living beings. It is also urged to cultivate the seven properties of the virtuous doctrines such as *saddhā* (faith), *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), *paññā* (wisdom) and wholesome doctrines.

In the *velāma sutta*, the practices of virtuous person can also be found that the donor's mental attitude and behaviour are more important than the offertory in performing works of charity, the charity performed within the *Sāsana* is more beneficial than the charity performed outside the *Sāsana*, the charities that can bring about successively greater and greater benefit the moral purity of the donee is more important than the behaviour of the donor in performing charity and taking refuge in the Triple Gem with faith and devotion, keeping the five precepts, cultivation of *mettā* and contemplation on impermanence of the five aggregates are successively more beneficial than performing charity.

As the doctrines in the *velāma sutta* varied much in the subject-matter; there are many objectives such as *dāna* (charity), *sīla* (observance of moral duties), *bhāvanā* (mental cultivating) and *paññā* (discriminative knowledge). These kinds of meritorious deeds are successively greater in bearing benefits. These doctrines are also the practices of virtuous person. Persons who perform such practices are described to gain freedom from all harms and wellbeing as well as much beneficial in supramundane affairs can be attained.

Therefore, this *sutta* is chiefly instructed that one should perform meritorious deeds which are successively greater in bearing benefits.

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မြန်မာကျမ်းကိုးစာရင်း

မောဂ္ဂလာန၊ အရှင်။ အဘိဓာနပုဒ်ပိကာပါဠိ

သာသနာရေးဦးစီးဌာနပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၁၉၈၂။ ၂၃။

ဇမ္ဗူဒီပအဘိဓာန်ကျမ်းပြုအဖွဲ့၊ (၂၀၁၁)။ တိပိဋကပါဠိ-

မြန်မာအဘိဓာန်၊ အတွဲ-၂၀၊ သာသနာရေးဦးစီးဌာနပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်။ ၆၁၁။