

**A seminar on the Parabhava Sutta
conducted by Sangharakshita
April 1982 in London**

Preface

As I finished transcribing this short seminar on the Parabhava Sutta it is about five years since it was held. I can't recall the exact dates but it was some time in April 1982 that the six of us working in Windhorse Trading at the time Kulananda, Dharmananda, Sumitra and Prajnananda, and Mitras Mike Howes and Chris Harper (now Satyapala and Amoghacitta respectively) - met for four evenings in Bhante's flat above the London Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green. Whether Bhante judged this particular sutta somehow suitable for us I don't know; it is a popular text in the East and known as a complement or antithesis to the Mangala Sutta.

The text occurs as the sixth sutta of the first chapter 'The Chapter of the Snake' - of the Sutta-Nipata and comprises verses 91 to 116 of that chapter. I have appended the complete Pali text and not only the three translations used in the seminar but three others, from the oldest Fausboll 1881 - to the most recent - K R Norman 1985.

This transcript on word-processor is based on original longhand transcriptions by several persons unknown. My thanks go to them, and of course to Bhante for the seminar itself.

A few interpolations in square brackets clarify meaning where necessary. Simple affirmative remarks are sometimes bracketed within the main body of dialogue where appropriate. I have tried to follow the seminar in transcribing 'Dhamma' or 'Dharma'; sometimes one, sometimes the other is used. They are in any case interchangeable. Gross infelicities of style and gross repetitions have generally been eliminated but otherwise the seminar is unedited.

Prajnananda
April 1987

Contents

Session One:

Title and background 1
Translations 2/6

Introduction:

what are devas? do they exist? 6/7
Verse One; translations 8

Verse Two:

translations 8
- loving the Dharma 9
- hating the Dharma 11

- cynicism & enthusiasm 13
- use what inspires you to develop enthusiasm 14
- is work inspiring? if so, how? 15
- turning enthusiasm into inspiration 17

Verse Four: translations 19

- Kalayanamitrata developed on basis of loving the Dharma 20
- men/women relationships: a Sufi analysis 21
- discovering the Dharma through contact with those who practise it 23
- 'delighting in pseudo-liberalism': some examples 24
- the micchaditthi of not taking responsibility 25
- seeing through pretensions need not cause cynicism 26
- more micchaditthis 27
- Jargon as a cover for rationalization 30
- how to actually generate kalyana mitrata 30
- criticism is only skilful on a basis of positivity 32
- need for greater patience & concern for others within FWBO 33

Session Two: Verse Six: translations 35

- addiction to sleep; its nature and cause 36
- need for regular lifestyle & a 'positive routine' 38
- addiction to company; causes 42
- differences between the group and the spiritual community 42
- healthy group activities 44
- the group and the individual 44
- 'being unaroused in energy' 45
- aroused energy distinguished from, but a necessary basis for, virya 46
- need to direct aroused energy towards a positive object 48
- squandering energy after meditation or puja 49
- laziness 52
- & metta 53
- & apathy 53
- & cynicism 54
- 'of angry intelligence' 54
- general tendency to criticize rather than appreciate 55
- value of appreciation 56
- value of politeness & formality as social skills 56

Verse Eight: translations 59

- a bhikkhu can support his mother 60
- importance of relationship with mother & father 62
- modern situation of women: spiritual development of women & attitude towards motherhood 64
- feminist (& general) preoccupation with sex 66
- is a male-dominated society necessarily unjust? 67
- men more likely to develop spiritually for reasons of biological conditioning 69

- women & Christianity 70
- abortion & Buddhism 71
- celibacy as the norm; implications for human species 73
- parenthood: Bodhisattvas as ideal parents 74
- parenthood too casual in modern West 74
- urge to motherhood versus spiritual growth? 76
- modern Western resentment of children 78

Session Three Verse Ten:

- brahmanas & sramanas 79
- development of Hinduism 80
- Buddha's attempt to upgrade brahmanas 81
- falsehood is serious in proportion to status of victim 82
- lying to spiritual superiors indicates lack of openness 82
- the French nun & the lama 83
- need for awareness of who one is communicating with 86

Verse Twelve: translations 87

- covert greed especially bad in Indian cultural context 87
- hospitality & open-handedness in general 88
- treatment of guests 90
- sharing of gifts 90
- giving as a deliberate practice 91

Verse Fourteen: translations 91

- on despising one's roots 92
- snobbery within the Sangha 93
- nature of the laity in the FWBO & in traditional Buddhism 95
- bringing up children as an aspect of spiritual practice 97
- more on marriage & parenthood in India & the West 98

Verse Sixteen: translations 100

- self-abandonment, nihilism & self-destructiveness 100
- the distinction between sensual excess and real exuberance 102
- dangerous sports (e.g. motor racing, mountain-climbing) as the result of alienation 107 - definition of heroism 109

Session Four: Verse Eighteen: translations 111

- adultery: a cause & symptom of lack of contentment 111
- ethical & psychological aspects 113
- when does a sexual relationship constitute 'marriage'? 'open-ended' relationships usually not so 114
- sexual relationships within the Order & Movement as potentially disruptive 116
- sex impossible without emotional involvement 117
- but can be a healthy or neurotic involvement 118

- courtesans, mistresses & concubines 119
- emotional insecurity of Western women 120
- arranged marriages 121
- preferability of Indian situation 123
- is prostitution unskilful per se? 124
- nature of promiscuity 127
- three sexual lifestyles: skilful & unskilful modes of each 128
- shamelessness 130

Verse Twenty: translations 131

- reasons for age-gaps in marriage partners: youner's desire for wealth & security, older's desire for youth 131
- nature of Jealousy 134
- why do sexual relationships become exclusive? 136

Verse Twenty-two: translations 137

- nature of group downfall 137
- need for responsibility in those in authority 138
- need for responsibility in assigning authority 139
- need for clarity in assuming responsibility 140

Verse Twenty-four: translations 141

- ambition can blind to own limitations 142
- need for one's expectations to be realistic 143

Verse Twenty-five: translations 145

- avoidance of sources of downfall leads to happiness 146
- General: why should devatas be concerned with Parabhava? 146
- how was the sutta composed? 147

Appendix One: Text in Pali 149

Appendix Two: Translation by E M Hare - 'Of Suffering' 150

Appendix Three: Translation by Robert, Lord Chalmere 'Failures' 152

Appendix Four: Translation by H Saddhatissa - 'Downfall' 153

Appendix Five: Translation by Narada Thera - 'Downfall' 154

Appendix Six: Translation by V Fausbo11 - 156

Appendix Seven: Translation by K R Norman - 'Failure' 157

APPENDIX

This series of appendices contains six translations of the Parabhava Sutta. Sangharakshita's

version is incomplete, only the first four verses being presented as final in the course of the seminar; readers could devise their own version from the various remarks made. A good bibliography can be found at the back of Saddhatissa's Sutta Nipata. The devata's repetitive questioning stanzas (alternate from 93 to 113 inclusive) are usually omitted or abbreviated by translators.

One: Parabhavasutta in Pali (Omitted)

(150)

Two: Translation by E M Hare - "Of Suffering"

Thus have I heard: Once, when the Master was dwelling near Savatthi in Anathapindika's Park at Jeta Grove, a deva of surpassing beauty, lighting up the whole of Jeta Grove, approached him as night waned; and drawing near, she saluted him and stood at one side, Thus standing, she spoke this verse to the Master:

Devi About man's suffering
We question Gotama:
We ask the Master now
The source of suffering [1/91]

The Master Plain is the weal in life,
Plain is the suffering:
Prosper who Dharma loves,
Suffers who Dharma hates [2/92]

Devi 'Tis truly so we know
Firstly of suffering:
Sir, tell us secondly
The source of suffering [3/93] (151)

The Master Who hath bad men as friends,
Nor maketh friends with good,
Who chooses bad men's ways:
A source of suffering that.

Devi 'Tis truly so we know .. .
Tell us the third .. .

The Master When man loves company
And sleep, when he is lax
And slack, and known for wrath:
A source of suffering that.

Devi 'Tis truly so we know .
Tell us the fourth .

The Master Who being rich, supports

Not parents in their age,
When gone is all their youth:
A source of suffering that.

Devi 'Tis truly so we know .
Tell us the fifth .

The Master Who with false words deceives
A brahman or recluse
Or other mendicant:
A source of suffering that.

Devi 'Tis truly so we know
Tell us the sixth .

The Master When man of wealth and means,
Of gold and property,
Enjoys its sweets alone:
A source of suffering that.

Devi 'Tis truly so we know .
Tell us the seventh .

The Master When man is proud of birth
And purse and family,
And yet ashamed of kin:
A source of suffering that.

Devi 'Tis truly so we know
Tell us the eighth ..

The Master When man on woman dotes,
On drink and dice alike,
And all his savings wastes:
A source of suffering that.

Devi 'Tis truly so we know .
Tell us the ninth .

The Master Who not content with his,
Is seen with others' wives,
Is seen with harlots too:
A source of suffering that.

Devi 'Tis truly so we know .
Tell us the tenth .

The Master When man, passed youth, doth wed
A maid with rounded breasts,

Nor sleeps for Jealousy:
A source of suffering that. [20/110]

Devi 'Tis truly so we know .
Tell us the eleventh .

The Master When woman or when man
A spendthrift or a sot,
Is placed in sovran power:
A source of suffering that. [22/112]

Devi 'Tis truly so we know
Th'eleventh suffering:
Now tell us, sir, the twelfth,
The source of suffering. [23/113]

The Master When born of noble clan,
A man is poor and craves
For much and longs to rule:
A source of suffering that. [24/114]

These sufferings in the world
The wise discern, and blest
With vision Ariyan,
They seek the world of bliss. [25/115]

from Woven Cadences of Early Buddhists (Sutta-Nipata), Oxford University Press, London,
1944

Three: Translation by Robert, Lord Chalmers - "Failures"

Thus have I heard. Once while the Lord was staying at Savatthi in Jeta's Grove in
Anathapindika's pleasure, as night was passing away, a deity of surpassing beauty came to
the Lord, flooding the whole grove with radiance, and, after salutation meet, stood to one
side, addressing the Lord in these stanzas:

Concerning him who fails, I come to ask of Gotama from what that failure springs. [91]

The Lord: Both worth and failure can be quickly seen: - worth still aspires, but failure hates
the light. [92]

The deity: Thus much I see: - first failure stands out plain. Now tell me whence the second
failure comes. [93]

The Lord: The second failure's he who loves the bad, courts not the good, and favours bad
men's creeds [94]

The deity: Thus much I see: - the second failure's plain. Now tell me whence the further
failures come. [95]

The Lord: Third comes the critic, lazy, indolent, and sleek; his constant carping marks him out. [96]

Fourth failure's he who, well-to-do himself, support not aged parents, past their prime. [98]

Fifth failure's he who brahmins guides astray, or anchorites, or other wayfarers. [100]

Sixth comes the wealthy man, with pelf and gear, who keeps his dainties strictly to himself. [102]

He seventh comes whom birth or wealth or clan inflates, till he looks down on kith and kin. [104]

The eighth's the rake who squanders all he gets, fast as it comes, on women, drink, and dice. [106]

Ninth comes the lecher who, not satisfied with his own wives, is seen about with whores, or caught in dalliance with others' wives. [108]

Tenth comes the dotard who, in failing age, a maiden takes to wife, with ripe round breasts, so fair he cannot sleep for Jealousy. [110]

Eleventh failure's he who puts in charge a drunken, spendthrift rake, - of either sex. [112]

Twelfth comes th'ambitious noble, lacking means, who fondly schemes to get himself made king. [114]

The noble sage, whose penetrating eye these failures scans, has won the realms of bliss. [115]

from Buddha's Teachings - being the Sutta-Nipata or Discourse-Collection, Harvard Oriental Series Vol 37, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 1932

Four: Translation by H Saddhatissa - "Downfall"

Thus have I heard: Once the Buddha was living near Savatthi in the Jeta grove at Anathapindika's monastery. Then, one beautiful night, a certain devata, having illuminated the whole Jeta grove with surpassing splendour, came to the Buddha and, making salutations, stood on one side and uttered these words:

1 I wish to ask you, Gotama, about a person who suffers downfall. I have approached you in order to inquire as to the causes of downfall. [91]

2 The Buddha: Easily known is the progressive one, easily known the one who declines: He who loves Dhamma progresses, he who hates it declines. [92]

4 One who loves the company of the vicious finds no delight with the virtuous; he prefers the doctrine of the [vicious] - this is a cause of one's downfall. [94]

6 Being fond of sleep, talkative, [lethargic,] lazy and irritable - this is a cause of one's

downfall. [96]

8 He who being sufficiently affluent does not support his father and mother who are old and infirm - this is a cause of one's downfall. [98]

10 He who deceives by falsehood a priest, monk or any other spiritual preceptor - this is a cause of one's downfall.[100]

12 Having ample wealth, assets and property, enjoying them alone - this is a cause of one's downfall. [102]

14 If a man is conceited through [his birth, wealth or community], and looks down on his own kith and kin - this is a cause of one's downfall. [104]

16 To be a [womaniser], a drunkard, a gambler and to squander all one earns - this is a cause of one's downfall. [106]

18 Not to be contented with one's wife but to be seen with a prostitute or the wives of others - this is a cause of one's downfall. [108]

20 Being past one's youth, to take a young wife and to be unable to sleep for jealousy of her - this is a cause of one's downfall [110]

22 To place in authority a woman given to drink and squandering, or a man of like behaviour - this is a cause of one's downfall. [112]

24 If a member of an influential family (or social or other grouping), with vast ambition and of slender means, seeks power or control over others - this is a cause of one's downfall. [114]

25 Reflecting thoroughly on those causes of downfall in the world, the wise one, endowed with insight, enjoys bliss in a happy state. [115]

This version - published in The Sutta-Nipata, Curzon Press, London, 1985 - contains four slight variations from that used in the seminar (pp5/6), presumably an earlier version:

4 [] originally = 'ignorant and misguided'

6 [] originally absent

14 [] originally = 'being born in a high social class or by his position in society'

16 [] originally = 'playboy'

Five: Translated by Narada Thera - "Downfall"

Thus have I heard. Once the Exalted One was dwelling at Anathapindika's monastery, in the Jeta Grove, near Savatthi. Now when the night was far spent a certain deity whose surpassing splendour illuminated the entire Jeta Grove, came to the presence of the Exalted One and, drawing near, respectfully saluted Him and stood at one side Standing thus, he addressed the Exalted One in verse ...

1 The Deity: Having come here with our questions to the Exalted One, we ask thee, O

Gotama, about man's decline. Pray, tell us the cause of downfall! [91]

2 The Buddha: Easily known is the progressive one, easily known he who declines. He who loves Dhamma progresses; he who is averse to it declines. [92]

3 The Deity: Thus much do we see: this is the first cause of one's downfall. Pray, tell us the second cause. [These lines are repeated after each stanza with due enumeration.] [93]

4 The Buddha: The wicked are dear to him, with the virtuous he finds no delight, he prefers the creed of the wicked - this is a cause of one's downfall. [94]

6 Being fond of sleep, fond of company, indolent, lazy and irritable - this is a cause of one's downfall. [96]

8 Though being well-to-do, not to support father and mother who are old and past their youth - this is a cause of one's downfall. [98]

10 To deceive by falsehood a brahmana or ascetic or any other mendicant - this is a cause of one's downfall. [100]

12 To have much wealth and ample gold and food, but to enjoy one's luxuries alone - this is a cause of one's downfall. [102]

14 To be proud of birth, of wealth or clan, and to despise one's own kinsmen - this is a cause of one's downfall. [104]

16 To be a rake, a drunkard, a gambler, and to squander all one earns - this is a cause of one's downfall. [106]

18 Not to be contented with one's own wife, and to be seen with harlots and the wives of others - this is a cause of one's downfall. [108]

20 Being past one's youth, to take a young wife and to be unable to sleep for jealousy of her - this is a cause of one's downfall. [110]

22 To place in authority a woman given to drink and squandering, or a man of like behaviour - this is a cause of one's downfall. [112]

24 To be of warrior birth, with vast ambition and of slender means, and to crave for rulership - this is a cause of one's downfall. [114]

25 Knowing well these causes of downfall in the world, the noble sage endowed with insight shares a happy realm. [115]

from Everyman's Ethics, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. 1979

Six: Translation by V Fausboll

So it was heard by me: At one time Bhagavat dwelt at Savatthi, in Jetavana, in the park of

Anathapindika. Then when the night had gone, a certain deity of a beautiful appearance, having illuminated the whole Jetavana, went up to Bhagavat, and having approached and saluted him, he stood apart, and standing apart that deity addressed Bhagavat in stanzas:

1 'We ask (thee), Gotama, about a man that suffers loss; having come to ask, Bhagavat, (tell us) what is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [91]

2 Bhagavat: 'The winner is easily known, easily known (is also) the loser: he who loves Dhamma is the winner, he who hates Dhamma is the loser.' [92]

3 Deity: 'We know this to be so, this is the first loser; tell (us) the second, O Bhagavat, what is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [These lines are repeated after each stanza with due enumeration.] [93]

4 Bhagavat: 'Wicked men are dear to him, he does not do anything that is dear to the good, he approves of the Dhamma of the wicked. - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man) [94]

6 'The man who is drowsy, fond of society and without energy, lazy, given to anger, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [96]

8 'He who being rich does not support mother or father who are old or past their youth, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [98]

10 'He who by falsehood deceives either a Brahmana or a Samana or any other mendicant, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [100]

12 'The man who is possessed of much property, who has gold and food, (and still) enjoys alone his sweet things, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [102]

14 'The man who proud of his birth, of his wealth, and of his family, despises his relatives, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [104]

16 'The man who, given to women, to strong drink, and to dice, wastes whatever he has gained, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [106]

18 'He who, not satisfied with his own wife, is seen with harlots and the wives of others, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [108]

20 'The man who, past his youth, brings home a woman with breasts like the timbaru fruit, and for jealousy of her cannot sleep, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [110]

22 'He who places in supremacy a woman given to drink and squandering, or a man of the same kind, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [112]

24 'He who has a little property, (but) great desire, is born in a Khattiya family and wishes for the kingdom in this world, - that is the cause (of loss) to the losing (man).' [114]

25 'Having taken into consideration these losses in the world, the wise, venerable man, who is endowed with insight, cultivates the happy world (of the gods).' [115]

from *The Sacred Books of the East*, Volume X, Part II, Oxford University Press 1881; reprinted Delhi 1973

Seven: Translation by K R Norman with alternative translations by I B Horner and Walpola Rahula - "Failure"

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi, in the Jetavana in Anathapindika's park. Then, as night was passing away, a deity of surpassing radiance, illuminating the whole Jetavana, came up to the Blessed One and stood on one side after saluting him. Standing there that deity addressed the Blessed One with a verse.

91 'Having come to ask the Blessed One, we ask Gotama about the [unsuccessful man]. What is the cause of the [unsuccessful man]?'

92 'The [successful one] is easy to know; the unsuccessful one is easy to know. The successful one loves [the doctrine]; the unsuccessful one hates [the doctrine].'

93 'We know that to be so indeed; that is the first failure. Tell us the second one, Blessed One. What is the cause of the unsuccessful (man)?' [These lines are repeated after each stanza with due enumeration.]

94 'Bad men are dear to him; he does not hold good men dear. He approves of the bad men's [(evil) doctrine]. That is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

96 'If any man is fond of sleep, fond of society, and does not exert himself, (but) is lazy, and [has anger as a characteristic], that is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

98 'If anyone, (although) being able, does not support his mother or father when they are old and past their youth, that is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

100 'If anyone by speaking falsely deceives a brahman or ascetic or [even another mendicant], that is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

102 'A man with abundant wealth, having gold (and) food, enjoys his dainties alone, that is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

104 'If any man, being haughty because of his birth, wealth, and clan, despises his own relative, that is the cause of the unsuccessful man. '

106 'If any man, being a rogue with women, drink, and dice, squanders whatever he has received, that is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

108 'Being dissatisfied with his own wife, he is seen among prostitutes, (and) he is seen among other men's wives. That is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

110 'A man past his youth brings home (a girl) with breasts like timbaru fruit. He cannot sleep for jealousy of her. That is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

112 'He places in (a position of) authority a woman who is [addicted to drink] or a

spendthrift, or even a man of similar character. That is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

114 'One with little wealth (but) great craving is born in a khattiya family. He desires kingship in this world. That is the cause of the unsuccessful man.'

115 'Seeing these failures in the world, [a wise man, a noble one endowed with insight, resorts to the blissful world.]'

() Words supplied in the English though not found in the Pali original.

[] Words for which alternative translations are provided.

91 (et seq) unsuccessful man = declining man

92 successful one = rising man

92 the doctrine = virtue

94 (evil) doctrine = (wrong) views and ways

96 has anger as a characteristic = is of choleric disposition

100 even another mendicant = even any other poor man

112 addicted to drink = addicted to food and drink

115 a wise man, a noble one endowed with insight, resorts to the blissful world = a wise noble man of vision attains a blissful world

from The Group of Discourses, Pali Text Society, London 1985