

Velāma Sutta

AN IX 20 Velāma’s Offering

Translated by Ānanda

Dec. 2020

Once,

The Beloved Teacher lived in Sāvatti,
In Prince Jeta’s grove at Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery.

At that time, the follower Anāthapiṇḍika went to the Buddha,
Paid loving respects and seated himself before him.

Then the Teacher asked:

[Buddha]

“Are alms given in your family Anāthapiṇḍika?”¹

[Anāthapiṇḍika]

“My family offers alms Bhante,
but theirs comprises inferior quality rice crushings
mixed with bran, alongside sour gruel.”²

[Carelessly Offered]

[Buddha]

Anāthapiṇḍika,

¹ “Āpi nu te, gahapati, kule dānaṃ dīyati” ti?

² “Dīyati me kule dānaṃ; tañca kho lūkhaṃ kaṇṇajakaṃ bilaṅgadutiyaṃ” ti

whether the offering is rudimentary or excellent,³

Those who offer carelessly,

without respect,

not from their own hand,

what is to be thrown away,

not realizing that

something good will come from their action;⁴

Whenever the result of their offering revolves back to them,

Their minds do not rejoice [even] when they receive

the best of foods,⁵

the best of clothes,

the best of transports,

or the best of the five senses and their objects,

Their sons and daughters,

wives [or husbands] and helpers,

attendants and workers

will not pay attention,

will not listen to what one says,

Nor will they attend with a caring mind.

Why?

Because this is the result of actions done carelessly.

³ “Lūkhañcepi, gahapati, dānaṃ deti paṇītaṃ vā;

⁴ tañca asakkaccaṃ deti, acittīkatvā deti, asahatthā deti, apaviddhaṃ deti, anāgamanadiṭṭhiko deti.

⁵ na ulārāya bhattabhogāya cittaṃ namati, ... vatthabhogāya... yānabhogāya, pañcasu kāmaguṇesu bhogāya

[Thoughtfully offered]

Whether the offering is rudimentary or excellent,
Those who offer thoughtfully,
 respectfully,
 from their own hand,
 what is not to be thrown away,
 realizing that something good
 will come out of their action;

Whenever the result of their offering revolves back to them,
 Their minds rejoice when they receive
 the best of food,
 the best of clothes,
 the best of transports,
 the best of the five senses and their objects,

Their sons and daughters,
wives [or husbands] and helpers,
attendants and workers
 will pay proper attention,
 will listen to what one has to say,
 and they will attend with a caring mind.

Why?

Because this is the result of actions done thoughtfully.

[Velāma's Story]

In the past, lived a Brahmin named Velāma.
And on one occasion, he carried out an offering,
an extraordinary act of generosity.

- (1) He offered eighty-four⁶ thousand golden bowls
filled with silver coins;
- (2) eighty-four thousand silver bowls,
filled with golden coins;
- (3) eighty-four thousand bronze bowls
filled with gold nuggets;
- (4) eighty-four thousand elephants
with golden adornments,
golden flags,
covered over with golden nettings;
- (5) eighty-four thousand carriages
covered in lion's skin,
tiger's skin,
leopard's skin,
delicate saffron fabrics,
with golden trinkets,
golden flags,
covered over with golden mesh;
- (6) eighty-four thousand cows
dressed in silk outfit
and bronze milking pails;
- (7) eighty-four thousand maidens

⁶ caturāsīti

adorned with jeweled earrings;⁷

(8) eighty-four thousand couches
covered with deep-hair fur carpets,
white wool coverings,
woven coverlets,
Kadali deer spreads,
with sun-shade canopies
and crimson cushions on either sides;

(9) eighty-four thousand measures of
the finest fabrics,
the finest linen,
the finest silk,
the finest wool
and the finest cotton;

And what to mention of food and drinks,
chewables,
eatables,
lickables
and drinkables,
they seemed to flow like rivers.



One might think that Velāma was a myth,
or someone unrelated.

⁷ kaññāsahassāni adāsi āmuttamaṇikuṇḍalāyo. A fairly provocative and distasteful idea to most educated mind of the modern era.

But this is not how it should be understood.

At that time,

I was the brahmin Velāma.

It was me who made this extraordinary offering.

But there was nobody truly worthy of offering,
Nobody that could purify the gift. ⁸



(1) Even if the Brahmin Velāma had only fed
a single person graced by wise understanding,
it would have been much more beneficial. ⁹

(2) Much more beneficial than feeding
a hundred people attained to Dhamma vision
it would be to feed a single once-returner. ¹⁰

(3) Much more beneficial than feeding
a hundred once-returner
it would it be to feed a single non-returner. ¹¹

(4) Much more beneficial than feeding

⁸ Tasmim̐ kho pana, gahapati, dāne na koci dakkhiṇeyyo ahosi, na taṃ koci dakkhiṇaṃ visodheti.

⁹ yo cekaṃ diṭṭhisampannaṃ bhojeyya, idaṃ tato mahapphalataraṃ.

¹⁰ sakadāgāmiṃ

¹¹ anāgāmiṃ

a hundred non-returner
it would be to feed a single arahant. ¹²

(5) Much more beneficial than feeding
a hundred non-returner
it would be to feed a single silent Buddha. ¹³

(6) Much more beneficial than feeding
a hundred silent Buddhas
it would be to feed the Truth-Finder,
the Arahant,
Perfectly All awakened Buddha. ¹⁴

(7) Much more beneficial than feeding
the Truth-Finder,
the Arahant,
Perfectly All-Awakened Buddha
it would be to feed the saṅgha of monks
headed by the Buddha. ¹⁵

(8) Much more beneficial than feeding
the saṅgha of monks headed by the Buddha
it would be to build a vihāra
dedicated to the saṅgha of the four directions. ¹⁶

¹² arahantaṃ

¹³ paccekabuddhaṃ

¹⁴ tathāgataṃ arahantaṃ sammāsambuddhaṃ

¹⁵ buddhappamukhaṃ bhikkhusaṅghaṃ

¹⁶ cātuddisaṃ saṅghaṃ uddissa vihāraṃ kārāpeyya

(9) Much more beneficial than
to build a vihāra dedicated to the saṅgha
it would be to go for refuge
to the Buddha
the Dhamma
and the saṅgha
with a confident mind.¹⁷

(10) Much more beneficial than
to go for refuge
to the Buddha
the Dhamma
and the saṅgha
with a confident mind
it would be to undertake the training in virtue
with a confident mind, that is:¹⁸

1. Refraining from hurting living beings,
2. Refraining from taking what is not given,
3. Refraining from sexual misbehavior,
4. Refraining from speaking lies,
5. Refraining from mind-altering substances.

(11) Much more beneficial than
to undertake the training in virtue with a confident mind
it would be to develop
a heart and mind of Love,

¹⁷ pasannacitto buddhaṅca dhammaṅca saṅghaṅca saraṇaṃ gaccheyya

¹⁸ yo ca pasannacitto sikkhāpadāni samādiyeyya—

even just for the time it takes
to notice a passing scent.¹⁹

(12) And thus Anāthapiṇḍika,
much more valuable than... [all of this]
it would be to cultivate
an unabiding mind.
even just for the time of a finger snap.²⁰

¹⁹yo ca antamaso gandhohanamattampi mettacittaṃ bhāveyya,

²⁰ Aniccaaññaṃ: I take my translation from a-nitya: non-abiding. Traditionally translated as the ‘perception of impermanence,’ other variations are also interesting since this is a fairly broad term, this refers mostly to the four satipaṭṭhānas, free from expectations or association, not-grasping, nor clinging not abiding, therefore, seeing that all is continually changing, passing. AN 7.16 Aniccānupassī Sutta, AN 6.102 Anavatthita Sutta, SN 22.102 Aniccaañña Sutta (yo ca accharāsaṅghātamattampi aniccaaññaṃ bhāveyya)

