

4 - Vignette

Introduction to this week's notes

This week we catch a glimpse of the Buddha's life after he had left home but before he was Enlightened. We do this by studying one of the scriptures, the *Pabbajja sutta*, which means "the discourse on Going Forth". Like many suttas, every line of the Pabbajja sutta is laden with meaning. But it needs to be teased out.

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Pabbajja sutta

(From the "Sutta Nipata" translated by H. Saddhatissa. Curzon Press, 1994)

1. I shall tell you about the renunciation, the manner in which the one with insight renounced the world, and the reason he choose a life of renunciation.
2. "In a home", thought the man, "a life is stifled - impurity is everywhere like dust". "For the wanderer", he thought, "there is space - he lives out in the open, in the air". He saw this was so and set off.
3. He was now a wanderer. So he worked to purify his life: in everything he did and everything he said he avoided the unwholesome and the bad.
4. And as he, the Buddha [to be], the one full of noble characteristics, walked about in search of food he came to Rajagaha, in Magadha.
5. The king, Bimbisara, stood in his palace. Seeing that this man possessed noble characteristics, the king called out to his followers:
- 6 & 7. "Look carefully, friends, he is handsome, shapely and of beautiful complexion. His gait is pleasing. His eyes are cast at only a little distance; he is mindful and does not seem to be from a low family. Send out the palace scouts to find out where he's going".
8. So the king's men were sent out and they followed him inquiring, "Where is the monk going, where is he planning to stay?"
9. The beggar walked on from house to house watching the sense doors, well restrained, alert and mindful. Soon his bowl was full.
10. When his begging-round was over he set off for the hills and made his way towards mount Pandava. The scouts now knew that he would stay there.
11. Seeing that he was going to stay there some sat down and watched, while another scout went back to inform the king.
12. "Your majesty", said the scout, "the monk has settled down on the east side of mount Pandava. He's sitting there in his mountain liar like a lion or a tiger or a bull!"
13. Hearing the scout's words the warrior king set off with great haste to mount Pandava, travelling in his special chariot .
14. The king went as far as he could by chariot and then walked up the mountain to the monk.
15. He sat down beside him, exchanged greetings and respects, and then said:
16. "You are only a young man, sir, a lad in the prime of your life. You are handsome and shapely. You appear to

be a prince of noble birth.

17. Adorning a splendid army, esteemed by a council of nobles, enjoy the wealth that I can bestow upon you. However, please tell me what family you are from?"

18. "King", came the answer, "not far from Himavant, the snowland, is a country called Kosala. The people of Kosala are rich and strong.

19. They come from the race of the sun, and their family name is Sakaya. That was the people I left when I walked away from the wish and longing for [transitory] pleasure.

20. I have seen the miseries of [transitory] pleasure. I have seen the security involved in renouncing them [as ends in themselves]. [Then he sang:]

*So now I will go,
I will go on into the struggle,
This to my mind is delight;
This is where my mind finds bliss.
So now I will go.*