

## Exploring the Ancient Path in the Buddha's Own Words Lesson 3.6.11



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*Paṭhamasamajīvīsuttaṃ -*

**How a Couple can Meet again for Many Lives?**

*“Ubho saddhā vadaññū ca, saññatā dhammajīvino;  
te honti jānipatayo, aññamaññaṃ piyaṃvadā.  
Athāsam pacurā honti, phāsukaṃ upajāyati.*

“When both are bountiful and self-controlled,  
Living restraint a Dhamma-life  
As husband and wife,  
Full of pleasant words for each other,  
They will encounter good fortune in many ways,  
And happy they will dwell together.

This selection of the *Paṭhamasamajīvīsuttaṃ* is dedicated to all devoted couples that have committed themselves to face the challenges of life with ongoing mutual love, appreciation and loyalty. Establishing a steadfast relationship, maintaining life-long affection and fondness through a long life, facing day-to-day vicissitudes and family demands until a last assuring and loving fare-well on the deathbed, is always an inspiring event. Even so, in spite of the common occurrences of being single, of single parents, and people having many intimate relationships in their lifetimes there is still a deep yearning for a reliable, durability long term partnership with one person.

The Buddha's guideline and reply presented in this sutta may foster assurance,

comfort and confidence to all those who aspire long lasting and happy relations. If both partners aspire further to spiritual growth and development they can take encouraging inspiration from the couple *Nakulapitā* and *Nakulamātā* mentioned in this *Paṭhamasamajīvīsuttam*.

It was when the Buddha dwelled at the Bhesakaḷā Grove – *Bhesakaḷāvane* – where he met the couple *Nakulapitā* and *Nakulamātā*. It is said that the Buddha dwelled during eight full rainy seasons in the Bhesakaḷā Grove - *Bhesakaḷāvane* - near Bhaggā in a deer park at the Crocodile Haunt – *Susumāragiri*. *Bhaggā* was the name of a tribe and a country of the same name. *Susumāragiri* was its capital and so called because the sound of crocodiles – *susumāra* – could be heard from the nearby lake. *Bhesakaḷāvane* was woodland that had been the domain of a demon named *Bhesaka*. It was here at one occasion that the Buddha went to see the couple *Nakulapitā* and *Nakulamātā* at their home after being invited. They were so called after their son *Nakula*.<sup>1</sup>

It is said that both, *Nakulapitā* and *Nakulamātā* had a long and close relationship with the Buddha, whom they accompanied through 500 existences as father and mother and as uncle and aunt as well. So there was a close and deep implanted affection that broke out of *Nakulapitā* when they encountered the present Buddha Siddharta for the first time when visiting the Bhesakaḷāvane to pay their respects. Both prostrated at the feet of the Buddha by expressing the deep impulse of sudden recognition<sup>2</sup>: “O’ son, where have you been over this long time, so far away from us?”

Both, *Nakulapitā* as well as *Nakulamātā* were classified by the Buddha amongst those disciples, who were foremost in certain qualities - he considered them as being foremost in intimacy and trustworthiness: *Etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvakaṇaṃ upāsakaṇaṃ vissāsakaṇaṃ<sup>3</sup> yadidaṃ nakulapitā gahapatī<sup>4</sup>!* - *Etadaggaṃ, bhikkhave, mama sāvikaṇaṃ upāsikaṇaṃ vissāsikaṇaṃ yadidaṃ nakulamātā gahapatānī<sup>5</sup>.*

At the event described in the present sutta both of them took the opportunity of the

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<sup>1</sup> *pitā*: father; *mātā*: mother

<sup>2</sup> this incident is related in the *Mahā Buddhavaṃsa*, Great Chronicle of the Buddhas, Volume 6, part 2

<sup>3</sup> *vissāsika/vissāsaka*: trustworthy, intimate, confident

<sup>4</sup> *Chaṭṭhavaggo, Etadaggavaggo, Ekapuggalavaggo, Ekakanipātapāḷi, Aṅguttaranikāya*

<sup>5</sup> *Sattamavaggo, Etadaggavaggo, Ekapuggalavaggo, Ekakanipātapāḷi, Aṅguttaranikāya.*

Buddha's visit at their home to ask a question that many deeply dedicated couples would like to ask: *"Iccheyyāma mayaṃ, bhante, diṭṭhe ceva dhamme aññamaññaṃ passitum abhisamparāyañca aññamaññaṃ passitun"ti.* – "We wish to meet each other not only in this life but also in the lives to come!"

The Buddha's comforting and assuring reply is related in this sutta and quoted at the beginning of this introduction. This answer provides affirmation that with the upkeep of certain wholesome qualities, the practise of moral ethics and generosity such a perspective can be realized.<sup>6</sup>

In another sutta the Buddha explains the respective qualities in more detail and concludes with the same verses<sup>7</sup>. Here he describes the different situations that may occur to partners of likewise moral, immoral or opposite characters. He categorizes the inspiring example of *Nakulapitā* and *Nakulamātā* thus:

*"Idha, gahapatayo, sāmiko hoti pāṇātipātā paṭivirato adinnādānā paṭivirato kāmesumicchācārā paṭivirato musāvādā paṭivirato surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā paṭivirato sīlavā kalyāṇadhammo vigatamalamaccherena<sup>8</sup> cetasā agāraṃ ajjhāvasati anakkosakaparibhāsako<sup>9</sup> samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ; bhariyāpissa hoti pāṇātipātā paṭiviratā adinnādānā paṭiviratā kāmesumicchācārā paṭiviratā musāvādā paṭiviratā surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā paṭiviratā sīlavatī kalyāṇadhammā vigatamalamaccherena cetasā agāraṃ ajjhāvasati anakkosikaparibhāsikā samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ."* – "Here, householder, the husband lives a life abstaining from killing, from taking of what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from wrong speech and from indulging in liquor, wine and other besotting substances that are the occasion for negligence, he lives performing moral and wholesome conduct, dwelling in a home free from the stain of miserliness neither reviling nor abusing brahmins or ascetics and likewise the wife lives a life abstaining from killing, from taking of what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from wrong speech and from indulging in liquor, wine and other besotting substances that are the occasion for

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<sup>6</sup> The profitable duties of both, husband and wife are mentioned in 3.6.5 *Sīṅgālasuttam* - The Buddha's advice to Laypeople -part one and 3.6.6 *Sīṅgālasuttam* -part one

<sup>7</sup> *Paṭhamasaṃvāsasuttam, Puññābhisaṅgavaggo, Catukkanipātapāli, Aṅguttaranikāyo*

<sup>8</sup> *vigatamalamaccherena*: *vigata* + *malam* + *maccherena*: gone + stain + miserliness

<sup>9</sup> *anakkosakaparibhāsako*: *an* + *akkosaka* + *paribhāsako*: not + (someone who is) reviling + abusing

negligence, she lives performing moral and wholesome conduct, dwelling in a home free from the stain of miserliness neither reviling nor abusing brahmins or ascetics.”

The couple *Nakulapitā* and *Nakulamātā* not only inspires through their praiseworthy model of a lifelong committed happy relationship but is also a motivating example for householders that have acquired sufficient qualities to reach at least the stage of a *sotapānna*. Their lives have not only been filled with the qualities described above but also by renunciation<sup>10</sup>. In an incident, where *Nakulapitā* has been seriously ill<sup>11</sup> *Nakulamātā* comforted him to avoid potential worries by expressing a *saccakiriya* – a solemn declaration of truth so *Nakulapitā* may not die full of concern, which has been criticized by the Bhagava<sup>12</sup>. She consoled him that he should not be afraid that after his passing away she:

- may not be able to maintain herself<sup>13</sup>;
- may be getting engaged with another husband<sup>14</sup>;
- may not continue to support the Buddha and the Saṅgha<sup>15</sup>;
- may not continue to uphold virtuous and moral conduct<sup>16</sup>;
- may not obtain serenity of mind<sup>17</sup>;
- nor achieve assurance in the Dhamma and the Saṅgha<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> See her remark in the next paragraph below: ‘*no soḷasavassāni gahaṭṭhakaṃ brahmacariyaṃ samāciṇṇaṃ.*’ Even so this may not be a fully desirable aspiration for every modern couple of the world of today it points to the fact that final liberation can only be achieved by maintaining complete celibacy even if living as householders: *gahaṭṭhakaṃ brahmacariyaṃ.*

<sup>11</sup> *Nakulapitusuttaṃ, Sāraṇīyavaggo, Paṭhamapaṇṇāsakaṃ, Chakkanipātapāḷi, Aṅguttaranikāyo*

<sup>12</sup> “*Mā kho tvaṃ, gahapati, sāpekkho kālamakāsi. Dukkhā, gahapati, sāpekkhassa kālakiriya; garahitā ca bhagavatā sāpekkhassa kālakiriya.*”

<sup>13</sup> “*Kusalāhaṃ, gahapati, kappāsaṃ kantituṃ veṇiṃ olikhituṃ. Sakkomaḥaṃ, gahapati, tavaccayena dārake posetuṃ, gharāvāsaṃ sandharituṃ.*” – “I am well skilled in weaving and knitting wool. After your passing away, I will be able to support the children and to maintain the household.”

<sup>14</sup> “*Tvañceva kho, gahapati, jānāsi ahañca, yaṃ no soḷasavassāni gahaṭṭhakaṃ brahmacariyaṃ samāciṇṇaṃ.*” – “You are aware, householder, as I am as well, that we have lived the celibate life of laypeople for the last 16 years!”

<sup>15</sup> “*Ahañhi, gahapati, tavaccayena dassanakāmatarā ceva bhavissāmi bhagavato, dassanakāmatarā ca bhikkhusaṅghassa.*” – “Because I will, householder, be even more eager to see the Bhagava and the Bhikkhusaṅgha.”

<sup>16</sup> “*Yāvatā kho, gahapati, tassa bhagavato sāvika gihī odātavasanā silesu paripūrakāriniyo, ahaṃ tāsāṃ aññatarā.*” – “Because, householder, I belong to those white robed female laydisciples of the Bhagava who fulfill their virtuous practise.”

<sup>17</sup> *Yāvatā kho, gahapati, tassa bhagavato sāvika gihī odātavasanā lābhiniyo ajjhataṃ cetosamathassa, ahaṃ tāsāṃ aññatarā.* – “Because, householder, I belong to those white robed female laydisciples of the Bhagava who obtain inner tranquillity of mind.”

With this last assertion *Nakulamātā* confirmed that she had reached at least the stage of a *sotapānna* and by the end of her expression of this *saccakiriya* her husband was cured from his ailment. The Buddha likewise confirmed for *Nakulapitā* to have reached the same stage of liberation by having realized the following six qualities: “*Katamehi chahi? Buddhhe aveccappasādena, dhamme aveccappasādena, saṅghe aveccappasādena, ariyena sīlena, ariyena ñāṇena, ariyāya vimuttiyā. Imehi kho, bhikkhave, chahi dhammehi samannāgato nakulapitā gahapati tathāgate niṭṭhaṅgato*<sup>19</sup> *amataddaso amataṃ sacchikatvā iriyati*”<sup>20</sup> - What are the six qualities? These are: unwavering faith in the Buddha, unwavering faith in the Dhamma, unwavering faith in the Saṅgha, noble conduct of sīla, noble knowledge and noble liberation. By possessing these six qualities, the householder *Nakulapitā* has completed confidence in the Tathāgata, has seen nibbāna, the deathless and is one who lives realizing the deathless<sup>21</sup>.”

May the achievements of this happy couple serve as an inspiration for many to follow the same beneficial principles! May many who desire this be enabled to maintain the same matching principles of morality and generosity, and meet again and again until they achieve liberation together!

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<sup>18</sup> “*Yāvatā kho, gahapati, tassa bhagavato sāvikaḥ gihī odātavasanā imasmim dhammavinaye ogādhappattā patigādhappattā assāsappattā tiṇṇavicikicchā viḡatakathamkathā vesārajappattā aparappaccayā satthusāsane viharanti, ahaṃ tāsam aññatarā.*” – “Because, householder, I belong to those white robed female laydisciples of the Bhagava who have attained thorough foothold, firm stand, consolation in the Dhamma and the discipline, I have crossed doubt, left behind all questioning, arrived at confidence and independence from others in the teacher’s dispensation.”

<sup>19</sup> *niṭṭhaṅgato: niṭṭham + gato: perfection, conclusion + gone, arrived at*

<sup>20</sup> *Bhallikādisuttāni, Sāmaññavaggo, Chakkanipātapāḷi, Aṅguttaranikāyo*

<sup>21</sup> *Nakulapitā* had realized these qualities by following the Buddha’s advise presented in *Nakulapitusuttam, Nakulapituvaggo, Khandhasamyuttam, Samyuttanikāyo* and in *Nakulapitusuttam, Saḷāyatanasamyuttam, Saḷāyatanavaggo:*

- Remaining aloof towards the influence of the input of all sense doors, not seeking delight in them, eliminating clinging towards them without developing any attachment: “*Santi kho, gahapati, cakkhuvīñṇeyyā rūpā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajanīyā. ...pe... Santi kho, gahapati, sotaviñṇeyyā saddā...pe... ghānaviñṇeyyā gandhā... jivhāviñṇeyyā rasā...pe... santi kho, gahapati, manoviñṇeyyā dhammā iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajanīyā. Tañce bhikkhu nābhinandati nābhivadati nājjhosāya tiṭṭhati. Tassa taṃ anabhinandato anabhivadato anajjhosāya tiṭṭhato na tannissitaṃ viññāṇaṃ hoti na tadupādānaṃ. Anupādāno, gahapati, bhikkhu parinibbāyati.*

- and likewise remaining aloof towards the influence of the sensorial field of existence and leaving behind attachment by developing awareness of all changes and alterations by not identifying with the notion of self, me or mine: “*..... na rūpaṃ attato samanupassati, na rūpavantaṃ vā attānaṃ; na attani vā rūpaṃ, na rūpasmim vā attānaṃ. Tassa ‘ahaṃ rūpaṃ mama rūpa’nti ..... , ahaṃ vedanā, mama vedanā’ti..... , ahaṃ saññā mama saññā’ti ..... , ahaṃ saṅkhārā mama saṅkhārā’ti ..... , ahaṃ viññāṇaṃ, mama viññāṇa’nti apariyutṭhatṭhāyino, taṃ viññāṇaṃ vipariṇamati aññathā hoti. Tassa viññāṇavipariṇāmaññathābhāvā nuppajjanti sokaparivedadukkhadomanassupāyāsā. Evaṃ kho, gahapati, āturakāyo hoti no ca āturacitto’ti.*