

258hh- Simile of The Sons Flesh

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Puttamansa Sutta: A Son's Flesh

"At Savatthi... "There are these four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born. Which four? Physical food, gross or refined; contact as the second, mental intention the third, and consciousness the fourth. These are the four nutriments for the maintenance of beings who have come into being or for the support of those in search of a place to be born.

"And how is physical food to be regarded? Suppose a couple, husband & wife, taking a few provisions, were to travel through a desert. With them would be their only dear baby son. Then the few provisions of the couple going through the desert would be used up while there was still a stretch of the desert yet to be crossed. The thought would occur to them, 'Our few provisions are used up while there is still a stretch of this desert yet to be crossed. What if we were to kill our only dear baby son, and make dried meat. That way, chewing on the flesh of our son, at least the two of us would make it through this desert. Otherwise, all three of us would perish.' So they would kill their only dear baby son, and make dried meat. Chewing on the flesh of their son, they would make it through the desert. While eating the flesh of their only son, they would beat their breasts, crying, 'Where have you gone, our only dear baby son? Where have you gone, our only dear baby son?' Now what do you think, monks: Would that couple eat that food playfully or for intoxication, or for putting on bulk, or for beautification?"

"No, lord."

"Wouldn't they eat that food simply for the sake of making it through that desert?"

"Yes, lord."

"In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of physical food to be regarded. When physical food is understood, passion for the five cords of sensual pleasures is understood. When passion for the five cords of sensual pleasure is understood, there is no fetter bound by which a disciple of the noble ones would come back again to this world.

"And how is the nutriment of contact to be regarded? Suppose a flayed cow were to stand leaning against a wall. The creatures living in the wall would chew on it. If it were to stand leaning against a tree, the creatures living in the tree would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to water, the creatures living in the water would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to the air, the creatures living in the air would chew on it. For wherever the flayed cow were to stand exposed, the creatures living there would chew on it. In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of contact to be regarded. When the nutriment of contact is understood, the three feelings, pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain are understood. When the three feelings are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.

"And how is the nutriment of mental intention to be regarded? Suppose there were a pit of glowing embers, deeper than a man's height, full of embers that were neither flaming nor smoking, and a man were to come along, loving life, hating death, loving pleasure, resisting pain, and two strong men, having grabbed him by the arms, were to drag him to the pit of embers. To get far away would be that man's intention, far away would be his wish, far away would be his aspiration. Why is that? Because he would realize, 'If I fall into this pit of glowing embers, I will meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain.' In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of mental intention to be regarded. When the nutriment of mental intention is understood, the three forms of craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being are understood. When the three forms of craving are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.

"And how is the nutriment of consciousness to be regarded? Suppose that, having arrested a thief, a criminal, they were to show him to the king: 'This is a thief, a criminal for you, your majesty. Impose on him whatever punishment you like.' So the king would say, 'Go, men, and shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears.' So they would shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears. Then the king would say at noon, 'Men, how is that man?' 'Still alive, your majesty.' So the king would say, 'Go, men, and shoot him at noon with a hundred spears.' So they would shoot him at noon with a hundred spears. Then the king would say in the evening, 'Men, how is that man?' 'Still alive, your majesty.' So the king would say, 'Go, men, and shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears.' So they would shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears. Now what do you think, monks: Would that man, being shot with three hundred spears a day, experience pain and distress from that cause?"

"Even if he were to be shot with only one spear, lord, he would experience pain and distress from that cause, to say nothing of three hundred spears."

"In the same way, I tell you, monks, is the nutriment of consciousness to be regarded. When the nutriment of consciousness is understood, name&form are understood. When name&form are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do."

Q: How to develop complete dispassion towards food?

Nm: By developing that context that the "son's flesh simile" outlined. That will prevent you from having any passion towards food. The simile is not just some shocking poetry. No, imagine eating your own child, how would that feel while you are trying to survive? Now take that context and apply to any food you eat. That's how it should feel, that's the context that you need to sustain. Why? Because the mind will completely turn away from any enjoyment, amusement and any lust towards edible food, edible nutriment, which in return will completely remove any attachment and desire towards the five cords of sensual pleasure because that's what it all comes down to, your consumption of pleasure.

You wouldn't be lost in your consumption of food, you would eat only to the point of overcoming hunger for survival. You wouldn't eat for the sake of eating, for the sake of chewing, for the sake of enjoying, you would only have one goal in your mind. So whenever you eat, always bring that context up, even before you start eating, bring that context up, and then you'll see whether you need to eat and how much to eat, and if there is any passion towards what you're eating. There won't be passion there if you sustain this context because it cannot survive in that environment.

Who knows, maybe their child tasted very nice, in terms of the actual taste, but it doesn't mean that at any given time, mother and father who loved their child, could have enjoyed it. So it's not that the mouth won't perceive agreeability of texture and taste, but in any case, that's not the basis for passion. Loss of context is the basis for passion for agreeability of taste.

Q: Should I be concerned about how I'm eating?

Nm: No, I wouldn't worry about the way you're eating. If the context is there, it doesn't matter which way you're eating.

Q: Would it be useful to try to think about the process of the consumption, like, thinking the food is going inside the body and not going inside 'Me', or it's for the body which isn't "mine", and it's not for my enjoyment and so on?

Nm: All of that is kind of psychologizing. All of those “insights” and the way you can describe it are fine, if the context is there. The context of eating for the right reason only, not too much, not too little, not overthinking it, certainly not giving in to the enjoyment, craving and emotional dependence on agreeable food. But if that context is not there, then, you can analyse it, visualise it in certain ways, and you can contemplate how it's just going into the body which is not yours, etc, but fundamentally, the passion is still there. So that's why the Buddha gave such a drastic simile. All those kinds of thoughts that you try to use when eating, although true, won't work, because the lust is rooted deeper than that. What will work is when you don't want to eat it, but you have to and what will work even more when you don't want to eat it, but you have to and what you have to eat is what is dearest to you. It's not meant to be eaten, so then there will not be even a grain of your being that would want to be eating it, you will only eat to survive. Purely. Same with the simile of the charcoal pit and burning embers, if two men come and drag you towards that pit, your mind would want to be anywhere else except there. Intention would go in any direction except to the pit.

Q: Why can't I just enjoy my food? Why can't I just eat it?

Nm: Because it doesn't belong to you. Your body doesn't belong to you. So how can you eat the food as if it's yours? You can enjoy it if you want. It's not like you cannot. Yes, you can. But then you have to suffer the consequences. In the same sense a fish suffers consequences when he eats the food that a fisherman puts on a hook. The fish enjoys it and as a result of that gets hooked. So it's not that we are outlining some moral law here that you must hate your food and eat it like it's your only child. Do what you like, eat and enjoy if you want to.

Q: But what's the danger?

Nm: Well, exactly. You already know that there is some danger, that's the point. Why do people not like to think about the illness, their own illness or even illness of people that are dear to them? Mortality? Ageing? Why is that? There must be something there that people don't want to admit. Well, chasing pleasure of food or otherwise is tied to that. So if you stop and think about it, you would see that maybe, “I could enjoy food, I could enjoy the senses. But what if there is a catch there?” And again, even the most untrained mind can see, even if you don't know anything about the Dhamma, no values of precepts or whatever else, everybody at some point in their life, sooner or later, thinks, “What's the point in chasing sensual desires, food or otherwise, when it only results in a very, very temporary satisfaction?”

The point is, you already have an inkling that, “Oh, so there is no end to this. And I'm kind of enslaved by it. And that's not a good position to be in. But hey, I'll forget about that because I'll chase the next desire, and next desire and next desire.” And that's how people go through life. So yes, you can do that. But again, there are consequences that you will have to pay the price for. Price of eating, consuming and taking all these things up, that don't belong to you. Then at the end, the bill comes and you realise, “Oh, now I have to pay for all of that. I thought it was mine. I thought I was the owner. I thought it was free.” But it's not. If it were free, it wouldn't be pressuring you so much. It wouldn't be enticing you so much. It wouldn't be trapping you so much, it wouldn't be baiting you so much. There's always a catch.

Q: “When lust for the five types of sensual pleasure is fully understood there is no fetter bound by which the noble disciple might come back to this world.”

Nm: Fully understanding lust and assumptions in regard to the solid food, you will fully understand and remove the ownership of the physical body that depends on the solid food, it won't be taken as yours

anymore. By fully understanding the body, and as the Buddha said in another sutta, by being fully developed in regard to your own body, you will fully overcome the lust towards the five types of sensual pleasure.

Q: "And how is the nutriment of *phassa*/contact/pressure to be regarded? Suppose a flayed cow were to stand leaning against a wall. The creatures living in the wall would chew on it. If it were to stand leaning against a tree, the creatures living in the tree would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to water, the creatures living in the water would chew on it. If it were to stand exposed to the air, the creatures living in the air would chew on it. For wherever the flayed cow were to stand exposed, the creatures living there would chew on it. In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of contact/pressure to be regarded. When the nutriment of contact/pressure is understood, the three feelings, pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain are understood. When the three feelings are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do."

Nm: That's why I like to translate *phassa*/contact as pressure. It's not an impersonal, mechanical or biological "contact". It's the mental pressure. *Phassa* is the pressure to act on account of what is felt, and that's exactly how the cow is feeling. It's not just nonchalant about creatures anatomically chewing on its flesh. No, it's pressured, it's harassed, it's annoyed. It's attacked, it's being devoured, it's uncomfortable. "Contact" is uncomfortable. So do you regard *phassa* as uncomfortable or do you not even see it as a pressure at all? If that's the case, your understanding of or your idea of *phassa* is very inaccurate. And usually it's very inaccurate. People usually think, due to the whole commentarial misrepresentation which explains *phassa* as a physical coming together of the senses, sense objects and consciousness, and then 'poof!', the result of that is sight, sound, etc. As if it has nothing to do with me, and I'm not responsible for it. No, *phassa* is indeed having eyes and sights, but it's being pressured on account of what is felt in regard to that. That's where *phassa* is.

So in other words, if people want to understand *phassa*, if they want to understand the situation of that cow, then find things within your mind, where you are emotionally pressured, on account of anything, sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thought, doesn't matter. If there is pressure there, if there is discomfort there, that's where *phassa* is. And that's what needs to be understood, not psychologically or anatomically explained in terms of sense organs and so on. That's not the *phassa*.

Imagine the cow being devoured by the insects, and you're telling it, "Oh, no, see, this is what's happening to you. In dependence on the body and bodily-touches, body-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition, feeling.", "Okay, yeah, but I'm still pressured, I still suffer. So that knowledge of the explanation of the contact is not freeing me from this discomfort. Thus, it's not the knowledge because if that knowledge truly pertains to the nature of that phenomenon, it will result in freedom from suffering, as the suttas would say." The full understanding of contact results in you being free from the pressure.

"Seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple experiences revulsion towards the body, towards bodily phenomena, towards body-consciousness, towards body-contact, towards feeling. Experiencing revulsion, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion the mind is liberated. With its deliverance he understands: 'Assumption has been fully understood by me.'"

Q: "When the nutriment of contact/pressure is understood, the three feelings, pleasure, pain, neither-pleasure-nor-pain are understood."

Nm: Exactly, because that's where the pressure is, it's where the feeling is. Fully understanding the nature of pressure, you have fully uprooted any resistance or welcoming towards respective feelings. In other words, you're completely free from craving.

Q: Through understanding.

Nm: Yes, by understanding the pressure in regard to the currently enduring feeling, not by explaining it. But by understanding its nature, that will result in complete freedom from it.

Q: I can reflect on how I am subjected to feelings...

Nm: Yes, you could, but first, you need to feel the pressure. You can start these abstract questionings and self interrogations, but you first need to feel the pressure on account of whatever feeling is present there, because it's there. Some pressure always has to be there, you can't be in-between the pressures. No, there's always something felt, which means there's always something pressuring you, big or small, doesn't matter, pressure is there. So, first, you need to stop acting out of that pressure habitually. Then allow the feeling to endure, then the phenomenon of pressure that manifests in regard to that, you can start interrogating its properties, and you can realise that in itself, the "pressure to act" is enough "in itself" it does not imply any action.

For example, an itch does not imply a scratch, you assume a scratch because you don't want the itch. You assume the 'act out of pressure to relieve the pressure' because you don't want the pressure. However, if you remove the gratuitous resistance to the pressure in itself, pressure is just the pressure, thus, it's not pressuring you anymore. But for that, the mind needs to be developed in order to see that without giving in to that subtle attitude of either, "I want this" or "I don't want this". And the only way to develop the mind to see such subtlety, it needs to be able to endure the pressure sufficiently. You don't need to find the right second or moment in-between pressure, so to catch your resistance before it happens. No. How do you become imperturbable? By practising not being perturbed, through enduring? You stop moving and the pressure to move will fade away because you're not feeding it anymore. You also don't practise immovability in regard to everything and nothing? No, in regard to the pressure that's there on account of what you're currently feeling, that's where you practice endurance/*khanti*.

You need to find that level of presently enduring feeling, and don't move there. Everything else is fine, everything else is second to it, everything else will fall in place, if you uproot the craving on the level where it matters.

Q: "And how is the nutriment of mental intention to be regarded? Suppose there were a pit of glowing embers, deeper than a man's height, full of embers that were neither flaming nor smoking, and a man were to come along — loving life, hating death, loving pleasure, resisting pain — and two strong men, having grabbed him by the arms, were to drag him to the pit of embers. To get far away would be that man's intention, far away would be his wish, far away would be his aspiration. Why is that? Because he would realize, 'If I fall into this pit of glowing embers, I will meet with death from that cause, or with death-like pain.' In the same way, I tell you, is the nutriment of mental intention to be regarded. When the nutriment of mental intention is understood, the three forms of craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being are understood. When the three forms of craving are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do.

Nm: What would be a practical example of mental intention?

Q: I want to go...

Nm: I want. That's it. Wanting. I want this, I don't want that. Now, you can think, "Oh, okay, I don't want my wanting or I don't want anything.", but you can't not want your wanting to be free of wanting because that's now what you want. So you can't just want your way out of your desire. The problem with the attitude of wanting is whether it pertains to the five cords of sensual pleasure, one way or the other, subtle or

coarse. Is your wanting still pertaining to your gratuitous assumption of safety in this world? Is it still based on the gratuitous assumption of ownership, your own sense of self. Are those wants still revolving around those things? Because that is what needs to change.

That's why the Buddha encourages us to replace the joys of sensual life with the joys of renunciate life, of a life that says no to sensuality. You can replace the miseries, the suffering of the sensual life with the suffering of the renunciate life because it's better. The experiencing of joys and miseries for as long as you have the body, is not optional. But what's optional is what joys and miseries will be experienced, whether they're going to be pure or not, whether they're going to be causing more attachment or not, whether they're going to be causing more infatuation and lust or not. So replace the sensual ones with the renunciate ones and sustain that and there will be no more problems for you.

You can want anything else except the five cords sensual pleasures, for example. That's it. Sustain that context and you will overcome lust or sensuality, because you're not feeding it anymore through gratuitous sustaining of wanting it, i.e. valuing it.

The joys of seclusion are used to replace the joys of a household life. Pains of seclusion, pains of renunciation, replace the pains of a household life, which are far worse, far more burdening and create much further reaching consequences. Things you do on account of sensuality now, will have many consequences in lives to come, not just in this one. But pains of seclusion, renunciation pretty much end there, because there's nothing done on account of it. No other people are affected by it, so it does not carry the same significance. And yet you used it to now replace all this other burden that would have otherwise have caused you so much more hassle.

That's the mental wanting. It's not like you cannot have it, but you should certainly make sure that none of it is rooted in the domain of the senses, in the domain of assumption of ownership. Is your wanting based on getting more pleasure, or a gratuitous sense of safety? Or is your wanting based on the practicality for living the holy life? Do you want enough food, enough shelter? Enough robes or clothes? Enough means to live by? Or is your wanting based on much more than that? So it's about replacing the bad wanting with good wanting, and then sustaining the good wanting until you can completely disown even that.

Q: Why is it called nutriment?

Nm: Well, because your sense of self, your being, all of your assumptions are fed by it, dependent on it, sustained by it. Whether you want it or not, through acting on it, you're feeding it. It's a direct nutriment for *bhava*, for ego, for conceit, for ownership. It's a vicious circle.

There are four types of nutriment and what's in common with all those nutriments, is that they are nutriments for *bhava*, for your sense of self when you take them wrongly. So the one who is free from nutriment of food is free from *bhava* to that extent. An arahant doesn't stop eating food, but eating food ceases to be the nutriment for his being because he has seen the danger in it. There is no wanting anymore, no desire, no lust in regard to the nutriment of food. Thus, it has ceased to be the nutriment for *bhava*, nutriment for his being and misconceptions. There is no more pressure either. Pressure was your wrong attitude which has been uprooted. As I said, "itch" is enough in itself, it does not require a scratch nor even imply it.

Q: But it's still an itch

Nm: There is still an itch, but it does not pressure towards scratching it's just an itch. So when you are not developed in regard to the itch, your mind cannot resist the thoughts, the delight, the pressure, the possibility of the scratch-to remove the itch. The itch in itself is self sufficient. It's enough. In the itch there is just the itch. And if you start seeing it like that, you will not be pressured to scratch it. The pressure of scratching it will fade away.

As the Buddha said, *phassa*/pressure cannot pressure the groundless one. The one that has no ground for that pressure to land, no ownership, no delight, no lust in those thoughts of, "what if I only scratch it..", none of that, he completely disowned them all, thus the thoughts of scratching do not pressure him anymore. The itch is there. The thoughts of scratching might be there but there is no pressure to scratch and then even the thoughts of scratching will fade away. And then again in the itch there's just the itch, in the seen there's just the seen, in the heard, just the heard and so on.

Q: "And how is the nutriment of consciousness to be regarded? Suppose that, having arrested a thief, a criminal, they were to show him to the king: 'This is a thief, a criminal for you, your majesty. Impose on him whatever punishment you like.' So the king would say, 'Go, men, and shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears.' So they would shoot him in the morning with a hundred spears. Then the king would say at noon, 'Men, how is that man?' 'Still alive, your majesty.' So the king would say, 'Go, men, and shoot him at noon with a hundred spears.' So they would shoot him at noon with a hundred spears. Then the king would say in the evening, 'Men, how is that man?' 'Still alive, your majesty.' So the king would say, 'Go, men, and shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears.' So they would shoot him in the evening with a hundred spears. Now what do you think, monks: Would that man, being shot with three hundred spears a day, experience pain and distress from that cause?" "Even if he were to be shot with only one spear, lord, he would experience pain and distress from that cause, to say nothing of three hundred spears." "In the same way, I tell you, monks, is the nutriment of consciousness to be regarded. When the nutriment of consciousness is understood, name and form are understood. When name and form are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do."

Nm: What's the property of consciousness, practically speaking? What do all those things have in common? They are cognized. It's the subtlest nutriment to understand. By understanding the nutriment food, you can be an anagami, but there will still be subtler forms of lust and aversion for "being", "non-being" and remnants of conceit. Consciousness is the subtlest type of nutriment to understand because it's on the level of the mere cognizing of things.

Are you cognizing those things with the implication of "for me", "mine", "I am"? Or are you cognizing those things as "not for me", "not mine", "not I am"? Just like the Buddha encouraged the noble disciples to regard everything.

Q: Why the simile of spears?

Nm: Any form of cognising already carries the conceit of "for me and mine". So the only way to penetrate through that is to, again, just like the other similes, to regard it as the most horrible, perilous thing in the world, that must not be wanted, and then sustaining that context as the framework for any cognizing that arises until that cognizing is purified (of all conceivings), but you can't do it on the level of cognizing it's just too subtle. And your tool for doing it is cognizing, which is already corrupted by conceivings, by conceit.

What you can do is develop the framework of, "Okay, so any form of cognition, any situation I become self aware in, is like being struck with a spear, it's a peril, a pain, the possibility of death". So, what next? Nothing except sustaining that attitude and context, and there will be no more basis for passion and lust to endure and proliferate. It's like the simile of "heating up a frying pan", when the pan is really hot, even if you throw

a lot of water on it, it will evaporate very quickly. That's how you get rid of the conceit that's affecting your cognition, by providing a hot pan for it to evaporate. The context is the hot pan of dispassion. The context should be, "This cognizing is a spear that I might die as a result of".

Ask yourself, "What is my current situation? What is my current state of mind? What is my current enduring feeling? What's my current body posture?" All of that is a form of cognizing. So on that general level, that peripheral level, not on the particular level of, "I'm cognizing the table, I'm cognizing the book, I'm cognizing the phone,..." No, "I'm cognizing my current situation of such and such feeling enduring and I'm sitting here", that's the spear. The broadest context you can find is the spear, and that's how you can then broaden even that context. Broaden in a sense of developing it further, so it becomes even more unsuitable for passion, for carelessness, for ownership. And if you find that unpleasant, it's only unpleasant because of your ownership that is still there. If there is no ownership, it will not be unpleasant.

Same like when you put disinfecting alcohol on your skin. Unless your skin is broken and infected, it won't hurt. It hurts only because there is a wound. But if you're really unwise you will think, "It hurts because of alcohol, thus I won't put the disinfectant on. I will just let the wound stay because I don't want it to hurt." When you develop the context and it hurts, it hurts because there is a wound which means if the wound heals, it will stop hurting without you needing to abandon the context.

Q: "When the nutriment of consciousness is understood, name and form are understood. When name and form are understood, I tell you, there is nothing further for a disciple of the noble ones to do."

Nm: If you fully developed the context of dispassion in regard to anything that can be cognized, there will be no more passion. In the cognised there will be just the cognised.
