



This is the Pali version of the better-known Sanskrit work, Kāma Sūtra. Discerning readers may notice that the two texts are somewhat different (this one is shorter, for example). I'm translating the word 'kāma' here as 'pleasure', but it really refers to the wanting of pleasure, the grasping after gratification through sensory objects, and thus denotes an emotional response rather than a feeling tone.

It is easy to underestimate the subtlety of the Buddha's teaching here, and to thus caricature Buddhism as being

kāmaṃ kāmayamānassa  
tassa ce taṃ samijjhati,  
addhā pītimano hoti  
laddhā macco yad icchati.

tassa ce kāmayānassa  
chandaḥjātassa jantuno  
te kāmā parihāyanti,  
sallaviddho va ruppanti.

yo kāme parivajjeti  
sappasseva padā siro,  
so imaṃ visattikaṃ  
loke sato samativattati.

khettaṃ vatthuṃ hiraññaṃ vā  
gavāssaṃ dāsaḥporisaṃ  
thiyo bandhū puthu kāme  
yo naro anugijjhati,

abalā va naṃ balīyanti,  
maddante naṃ parissayā,  
tato naṃ dukkham anveti  
nāvaṃ bhinnam ivodakaṃ.

tasmā jantu sadā sato  
kāmaṇi parivajjaye,  
te pahāya tare oghaṃ  
nāvaṃ siñcivā pāragū ti

world-denying. But notice the author of these stanzas is not saying that land, goods, kinfolk, etc. are evil, only that they are dangerous. It is the greed (*anugijjha* literally means going around like a vulture) for these things, which is generated within ourselves, that sets us up for disappointment and injury.

## Kāma Sutta (Sutta Nipāta 766-771)

If someone yearning for pleasure  
Is successful at getting it,  
Of course he has a joyful mind,  
Since he gets what a mortal wants.

But if those pleasures slip away...  
Then the person yearning for them,  
The one creating the desire,  
Is hurt as if stabbed by a knife.

One who circumvents pleasures, like  
The head of a snake with one's foot,  
That mindful one, while in the world,  
Evolves beyond this attachment.

The one who is greedy for land,  
Or for goods, gold, cattle, horses,  
Serving men, women or kinfolk,  
Or for many other pleasures—

His weakness only gets stronger,  
He gets crushed by many troubles,  
And suffering flows in on him  
Like water in a leaking ship.

Thus a person, ever mindful,  
Steers himself away from pleasures.  
Bailing ship, he abandons them,  
And crossing the flood goes beyond.

Mindfulness helps us steer a course  
around such attachment and beyond the  
suffering it brings with it. This ultimately  
represents a form of spiritual evolution  
toward a more empowered way of being  
human.

—A. Olendzki