

(Sandiṭṭhika Dhamma) Brāhmaṇa Sutta The Brahmin Discourse (on the Visible Teaching)

[The nature of the Dharma]
(Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.53/1:156 f)
Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

Introduction

This structure of this sutta is similar to that of **the Brāhmaṇa Paribbājaka Sutta** (A 3.54),¹ that immediately follows it in the Brāhmaṇa Vagga of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, except that the questioner is a brahmin wanderer. Both this sutta and the latter deal with the three unwholesome roots (*akusala mūla*) in relation to self, other and both, but the latter adds the perspective of the three doors of action (the body, speech and mind):

(Sandiṭṭhika Dhamma) Brāhmaṇa Sutta (A 3.63): the three points (self, other, and both);
Brāhmaṇa Paribbājaka Sutta (A 3.54): the three points and the three doors of action.

Both the suttas explain the six qualities of the Dharma in connection with the overcoming of the three unwholesome roots.

In both suttas, the brahmin interlocutor asks the Buddha the same question, thus:

Master, Gotama, ‘The Dharma is visible here and now (*sandiṭṭhika*),’ so it is said. In what way is the Dharma visible here and now, having nothing to do with time (*akālika*), inviting one to come and see (*ehi,passika*), onward-leading (*opāyika*), to be seen by the wise for himself (*paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*)? [1]

The passage in question, of course, refers to the recollection of the Dharma (*dhammānussati*), the full formula of which is: *Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehi,passiko opāyiko paccattam veditabbo viññūhi ti* (Well taught is the Blessed One’s Dharma, visible here and now,...), but the first virtue, *svākkhato* (“well taught”), is omitted. One might surmise here that the key virtue of the Dharma is the first one, that “the Dharma is visible here and now (*sandiṭṭhika*).” The last four virtues are aspects of this second virtue.

The (Devatā) Samiddhi Sutta (S 1.20) has a related discussion on the nature of the Dharma, and should be studied with the (Sandiṭṭhika Dhamma) Brāhmaṇa Sutta (A 3.53).²

— — —

¹ A 3.54/1:157 f.

² S 1.20/1:6-12 = SD 21.4 esp Intro (2.3)..

The Brahmin Discourse (on the visible teaching)

(A 3.53/1:156 f)

The Dharma

1 Then a certain brahmin went up to the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, the brahmin sat down at one side. Sitting thus as one side, he said this to the Blessed One:

“Master, Gotama, ‘The Dharma is visible here and now (*sandiṭṭhika*),’ so it is said. In what way is the Dharma visible here and now, having nothing to do with time (*akālika*), inviting one to come and see (*ehi,passika*), onward-leading (*opanayika*), to be seen by the wise for himself (*paccattam veditabbo viññuhi*)?”³

I. Lust and non-lust

2 “Brahmin, when one is dyed [impassioned] in **lust**, overpowered by it, the mind utterly given over to it, [157] then one plans [thinks of]⁴ one’s own affliction, or another’s affliction, or the affliction of both, and one feels physical pain and mental pain.⁵

But when lust is abandoned, then one does not plan one’s own affliction, nor another’s affliction, nor the affliction of both, and one does not feel physical pain nor mental pain.⁶

In this way, brahmin, the Dharma is visible here and now, having nothing to do with time, inviting one to come and see, onward-leading, to be seen by the wise for himself.

II. Hate and non-hate

3 “Brahmin, when one is riled by **hate**, overpowered by it, the mind utterly given over to it, then one plans [thinks of] one’s own affliction, or another’s affliction, or the affliction of both, and one feels physical pain and mental pain.

But when hate is abandoned, then one does not plan one’s own affliction, nor another’s affliction, nor the affliction of both, and one does not feel physical pain nor mental pain.

In this way, brahmin, the Dharma is visible here and now, having nothing to do with time, inviting one to come and see, onward-leading, to be seen by the wise for himself.

II. Delusion and non-delusion

4 “Brahmin, when one is confused by **delusion**, overpowered by it, the mind utterly given over to it, then one plans [thinks of] one’s own affliction, or another’s affliction, or the affliction of both, and one feels physical pain and mental pain.

But when delusion is abandoned, then one does not plan one’s own affliction, nor another’s affliction, nor the affliction of both, and one does not feel physical pain nor mental pain.

³ These are the qualities of the Dharma in the recollection of the Dharma (*dhammānussati*), the full formula of which is: *Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehi,passiko opanāyiko paccattam veditabbo viññūhī ti*. For a detailed discussion, see Vism 7. 86-88/213-218; see also *Dhammānussati* = SD 15.9, & Introd above.

⁴ *Ceteti*, usu tr “he thinks,” but here (with dat) is contextually best rendered as “he ponders, thinks over, imagines, thinks out, design, schemes, intends, plans” (PED): see also S 2:65. One might, eg, say, “He thinks of becoming a monk.”

⁵ *Ratto kho brāhmaṇa rāgena abhibhūto pariyaḍinna, citto atta, vyābādhāya pi ceteti para, vyābādhāya pi ceteti ubhaya, vyābādhāya pi ceteti cetasikam pi dukkham domanassam paṭisaṃvedeti*.

⁶ This sentence, and the other two [3, 4] means that although pain does arise in the body and negative states may arise in the mind (as result of latent tendencies), one is not troubled by them. As such, it is better to render *paṭi-samvedeti* as “he feels,” rather than “he experiences.”

In this way, brahmin, the Dharma is visible here and now, having nothing to do with time, inviting one to come and see, onward-leading, to be seen by the wise for himself.

The brahmin goes for refuge

5 “Excellent, Master Gotama! Excellent! Master Gotama! Just as if one were to place upright what had been overturned, were to reveal what was hidden, were to show the way to one who was lost, or were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way, in numerous ways, has the Dharma been made clear by the Blessed Gotama.

I go to the Blessed Gotama for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks.”

— evam —

060312; 060905; 081225; 090525