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Suppati Sutta

The Discourse on Sleep | S 4.7/1:107

Burmese, Thai: **Supati Sutta** ; Sinhala : **Soppasi Sutta**

Theme: The wise deserve their rest

Translated by Piya Tan ©2008; 2010

1 The Buddha's daily routine

1.1 THE FIVE PERIODS.

1.1.1 The Supati Sutta (S 4.7) is a brief statement of the Buddha on *sleep*. For a proper perspective of the discourse, we should have some idea of the Buddha's daily routine. The Commentaries¹ mention the Buddha's daily routine as being divided into five periods. Such a description is, of course, commentarial, reflecting a period when the settled monastic system was better organized, rather than the earlier period of wandering monks and mostly natural monastery parks.

The five periods are known traditionally as the "five Buddha routines" or duties (*pañca buddha,-kicca*), thus,

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|--|--------------------------------|------------|---|-------------|
| (1) the morning, ie the pre-lunch routine | (<i>pure,bhatta kicca</i>) | 6.00 am | - | 12.00 noon, |
| (2) the afternoon, ie the post-lunch routine | (<i>pacchā,bhatta kicca</i>) | 12.00 noon | - | 6.00 pm, |
| (3) the first watch routine | (<i>purima.yāma kicca</i>) | 6.00 pm | - | 10.00 pm, |
| (4) the middle watch routine | (<i>majjhima,yāma kicca</i>) | 10.00 pm | - | 2.00 am, |
| (5) the last watch routine | (<i>pacchima yāma kicca</i>) | 2.00 am | - | 6.00 am. |

1.1.2 Before dawn, the Buddha, after rising, would attend to his toilet, after which he sits in solitary meditation until it is time for the almsround. Then he would dress himself appropriately and go out on his almsround, either alone or with a group of monks. He may then either return to his dwelling for his alms-meal, or have it in a place prepared by the laity. In the latter case, after his meal, he would give a discourse to the lay assembly, and then return to his dwelling.

1.1.3 During the pre-noon, on his return to his dwelling, the Buddha would (if it is timely) sit in the pavilion on a prepared seat, and wait for the monks to finish their alms-meal. When he is informed that the monks have finished their meal, he would enter his Fragrant Cell.

1.1.4 Then, in the early afternoon, the Buddha would sit on a footstool in the porch of the Fragrant Cell and exhort the monks. Some monks would approach him for meditation instructions. Then, the assembly would salute the Buddha and retire to their individual quarters, including their forest and remote dwellings. The Buddha then enters the Fragrant Cell and, if he wishes, takes a rest, lying down in the lion-posture,² enjoying nirvanic bliss.

1.1.5 In the mid-afternoon, upon rising, he would survey the world with his divine eye, seeking out those who are ready for instruction and conversion (DhA 1:319).

1.1.6 In the late afternoon, local folks, bringing suitable offerings (such as scent and garlands), would gather in the assembly area (such as an assembly hall) to offer them to the Buddha and the monks. The Buddha would sit in the pavilion and instruct the assembly, after which he would dismiss them.

1.1.7 The nights are divided into three "watches" (*yāma*). Each watch lasts about 4 hours.

1.1.7.1 During the first watch (*purima yāma*, 6.00-10.00 pm), the Buddha, after washing and attending to his toilet, would then enter his cell, if he likes, for a short solitary meditation.

Around that time, monks would arrive from various directions. They would ask for meditation-subjects, or for clarification on some point of Dharma. The first watch progresses with the Buddha admonishing the monks in this way.

¹ DA 1:45-48; SA 1:241-246; AA 1:63-67; SnA 131-134. For Eng tr of **DA 1:45-48**, see Bodhi (tr), *The All-embracing Net of View*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Soc, 1978:103-106.

1.1.72 During the middle watch (*majjhima yāma*, 10.00 pm-2.00 am), often referred to in the suttas as “late in the night” (*abhikkantāya rattiyā*),² the Buddha would admonish devas who visit him. This part of the night is also said to be “exceedingly” (*abhikkantā*) beautiful.³

1.1.7.3 The last watch (*pacchima yāma*, 2.00-6.00 am) is divided into 3 parts: during the first part, the Buddha mindfully walks to and fro (*caṅkamaṇa*), to dispel discomfort and physically exercise himself. In the second part, he rests “on his right side in the lion-posture, with one leg resting on the other, mindful and fully aware, after mentally noting the time for rising” [§2]. And in the third part, he rises and sits in the attainment of great compassion, surveying the world again to seek out those who had associated themselves in wholesome ways with past Buddhas.

1.2 THE SUTTA CONTEXT. In the Supati Sutta, the Buddha is recorded as doing walking meditation for “much of the night” (*bahu-d-eva,ratti*) [§2], which probably refers to the last watch (from 2.00 to 6.00 am). The Buddha, it is said, usually sleeps between 2.00-4.00 am. However, in the Sutta, Māra uses the phrase “when the sun is up [has risen]” (*sūriye uggate*), which refers to daybreak, which is probably when Māra appears to the Buddha, that is, after his walking meditation, the Buddha is taking a short nap.

Māra is basically charging that the Buddha is leading an easy life, sleeping comfortably [§4]. The Buddha, however, replies:

For whom there is no entangling net-trap with the destruction of all birth-bases, ⁴ awake,	of craving to take him anywhere, he sleeps here—what about you, Māra? [§5]
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The last two lines can also be translated as: “With all the birth-bases destroyed, the awakened one (*buddho*) sleeps here—what about you, Māra?” Note the interesting contrast between *awakened* and *sleeps* here. We can see the Buddha’s subtle humour here. Since the Buddha’s work is all done, it is time for a good rest—something which Māra surely cannot rightly claim!

2 Sutta highlights

2.1 CRAVING is compared to a net-trap (*jālinī*), which can also be rendered as “the one with the net (*jāla*)” (a personification of craving). This is a popular imagery, which together with “entangling” (*visattika*) are found elsewhere, such as this verse from the Dhammapada:

For whom the entangling net-trap Takes him nowhere, who is without craving, That awakened one, whose pasture is the infinite— In what way would you lead him?	<i>Yassa jālinī visattikā taṅhā n’atthi kuhiñci netave taṃ buddham ananta,gocaram apadam kena padena nessatha</i> (Dh 180)
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The Dhammapada Commentary explains that “net-trap” (*jālinī*) refers to “craving” (*taṅhā*); and the last line mean that the arhat is not moved by lust, or any other defilement (DhA 3:197). Buddhaghosa explains that “whose pasture is the infinite” (*ananta,gocara*) as meaning that the Buddha’s mind-objects are unlimited on account of his omniscience (*anant’ārammaṇassa sabbaññuta,ñāṇassa vasena*, id).⁵ The

² Eg V 1:26; D 2:220; M 1:142. Comys: = *khīṇāya rattiyā*, “when the night has ended” (DA 2:647; MA 2:124 adds “just after the middle watch,” *majjhima,yāma,samanantare*); = *parikkhīṇāya rattiyā*, “when the night is all ended” (DA 3:961; SA 1:14; KhpA 114; SnA 300). *Abhikkantā* also means “far advanced,” as in “The night is far advanced, bhante, the first watch has ended” (*abhikkantā, bhante, ratti, nikkhanto paṭhamo yāmo*) (DA 3:960 = MA 2:124 = SA 1:14 = 2:375 = VvA 51 = KhpA 114 = UA 175); “the first watch, having been passed away, with the arriving of the middle watch” (*rattiyā paṭhama,yāmaṃ atikkamma majjhima,yāme sampatte*) (AA 3:353). This part of the night is said to be exceeding (*abhikkantā*) beautiful (KhpA 114; SnA 300; VvA 51).

³ KhpA 114; SnA 300; VvA 51.

⁴ See SD 28.11 Intro (3.2).

⁵ On the Buddha’s omniscience, see **Kaṇṇaka-t,thala S** (M 90/2:125-133) = SD 10.8 Intro (2) & **Sandaka S** (M 76) = SD 35.7.

sense here, actually, is quite plain: *ananta* is an epithet for nirvana, and *ananta,gocara* simply means that the Buddha is “one whose pasture is nirvana.”⁶

2.2 VERSE S 460ab. Note that **S 460ab** is the same as Dh 180ab, and they refer to the same person, that is, the awakened saint, including the Buddha. The Saṃyutta Commentary explains that **craving** is said to be a “**net-trap**” (*jālinī*) because it spreads like a net over the three realms of existence (that is, the sense realm, the form realm, the formless realm).⁷ It is said to be “**entangling**” (*visattika*) because it clings onto sense-objects, such as forms.⁸ “**It takes anywhere**” (*kuhiñci netave*), that is, within the three realms of existence (SAṬ). The **birth-basis** (*upadhi*) refers to the aggregates, defilements, volitional formations, and cords of sense-pleasure.⁹

2.3 VERSE S 460d. The Commentary explains **S 460d** as meaning, “Māra, why do you go about irritated, finding fault with this and that like little flies unable to settle on hot porridge?” (SA 1:175). We can also see a touch of humour here. The Buddha, as an awakened being, free from suffering, rests easily and happily. Māra, being unawakened and evil, is ever busy distracting others with worldliness. While the Buddha is restful, Māra is restless!

3 Related discourses

There are two suttas, both entitled **Sakalikā Sutta** or “Discourse on the Splinter” (S 1.38 & S 4.13), dealing with this incident of the Buddha’s bleeding toe. In **the Sakalikā Sutta 1** (S 1.38), the Buddha, after being hurt by the rock splinter, rests in the Maddakucchi Deer Park at Rājagaha, and

...severe pains assailed the Blessed One—bodily feelings that were painful, racking, sharp, piercing, harrowing, disagreeable. But the Blessed One endured them, mindful and fully aware, without becoming distressed. Then the Blessed One had his outer robe folded in four, and he lay down on his right side in the lion posture with one leg overlapping the other, mindful and circumspect. (S 1:27)

Late in the night, he is visited by numerous devas who sing their admiration and praises to him.¹⁰

The Supati Sutta should be studied with **the Sakalika Sutta 2** (S 4.13). The Buddha, his toe being badly hurt by a stone splinter,¹¹ mindfully rests. Then Māra appears to him criticizing him for indulging in the pleasure of sleep, but the Buddha wisely answers him:

[Māra:]

Are you lying in a daze, or drunk in poetry? Alone in a secluded dwelling,	Aren’t there enough goals for you to meet? why do you sleep this, a sleepy face?
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[The Buddha:]

Undazed I lie nor drunk in poetry, Alone I lie in a secluded dwelling,	the goal have I attained, sorrow-free. I lie down with compassion for all beings.
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Even those with a dart in the breast, Even those with a dart fall sleep here:	piercing the heart time after time, so why not I, whose dart is drawn out?
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⁶ Cf *ananta,jina*, a term the Buddha uses in reference to himself when speaking to Upaka (V 1:8; M 1:171; J 1:81; DhA 4:71 f; cf Miln 235; UA 54; Kvu 289; Mvst 3:326): see **Why the Buddha Hesitated** = SD 12.1 (4) verse.

⁷ On the different realms, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11) = SD 1.7 (Table 1.7).

⁸ On **craving** as “entangling” (*visattika*), see (**Vicarita**) **Taṇhā S** (A 4.199/2:211-213) = SD 16.2.

⁹ See S:B 348 n21.

¹⁰ S 1.38/1:27-29 = SD 61.4.

¹¹ The Buddha’s bleeding toe is the result of being hit by a rock splinter that flies off the rock hurled down Mt Vulture Peak by his evil cousin, Devadatta, in an attempt to assassinate him. For a full story, see Cv 7.2.1-4.8 = V 2:184-203, esp Cv 7.3.9 = V 2:193; also Ñāṇamoli, *Life of the Buddha*, 3rd ed 1992:257-272 (ch 13), esp 261 f.

I lie not awake with doubt, nor sleep in fear.
No decline whatever do I see in the world:

Neither night nor day afflicts me.
so I sleep with compassion for all beings.
S 4.13/1:110-112 = SD 61.7

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The Discourse on Sleep

S 4.7/1:107

1 At one time, the Blessed One was residing in the squirrels' feeding ground in the Bamboo Grove near Rājagaha.

2 Then when the night was nearing its end,¹² the Blessed One, having spent much of the night walking back and forth in the open, washed his feet,¹³ entered his dwelling, and lay down on his right side in the lion-posture, with one leg resting on the other, mindful and fully aware, after mentally noting the time for rising.¹⁴

3 Then Māra the evil one approached the Blessed One, and addressed him in verse, thus:

4 [Māra]	<i>Kim soppasi kim su soppasi Kim idaṃ soppasi dubbhago viya suññ'āgāran ti soppasi kim idaṃ soppasi sūriy'uggatê¹⁵ ti</i>	What, you sleep? Why do you sleep? What's this, you sleep like a wretch? Thinking, "Empty abode," you sleep. What's this, you sleep when the sun is up!	459
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5 [Buddha]	<i>Yassa jālinī visattikā taṇhā n'atthi kuhiñci netave sabbūpadhīnam parikkhāya buddho soppati kin tav'ettha mārā ti</i>	For whom there is no entangling net-trap of craving to take him anywhere, with the destruction of all birth-bases, ¹⁶ awake: he sleeps—what about you here, Māra?	460
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6 Then, Māra the evil one, thinking, "The Blessed One knows me! The Sugata [well-gone one] knows me!" pained and saddened, disappeared right there and then.¹⁷

¹² *Atha kho bhagavā bahu-d-eva, rattim abbhokāse caṅkamitvā rattiyaṃ paccūsa, samayaṃ.* The phrase *bahu-d-eva ratti* ("much of the night") should be noted: S 4.7.2/1:107 (only occurrence in the Canon); cf AA 1:241 (in connection with Soṇa Kuṭi,kaṇṇa).

¹³ Comys: The Buddha's body needed no cleansing. Dirt slipped off it as water off a lotus leaf. But he did not neglect human duties, lest it should be said that he was not human (SA 1:174). We see here the start of a mythologization or deification of the Buddha, flowering in the Mahayana.

¹⁴ "After mentally noting the time for rising," *uṭṭhāna, saññāṃ manasi karitvā*: **D 33/3:209**; **M 39.10/1:274**, **53.5+10/1:354 f**; **S 4.7/1:107**, **4.12/14:110 f** (Buddha resting), **35.120/4:105**, **35.239/4:177**, **35.243/4:184**; **A 3.16/1:114**, **4.23/2:40**, **4.58.9/4:87**, **8.9.4/4:168**, **10.67.1/5:123**, **10.68.1/5:126**; **U 8.5/84**. When one is going to sleep is an example of "sleeping mindfully," mentioned in **Sati, paṭṭhāna S** (M 10.8(7)/1:57). In **Pacalā S** (A 7.58), the Buddha exhorts, "Moggallāna, mindful and fully aware, you should lie down lion-like on your right side, placing foot on foot, keeping in mind the thought that on awakening, you would get up quickly, thinking, 'I will dwell without indulging in the pleasure of sleep, or in the pleasure of reclining, or in the pleasure of drowsiness'" (*na seyya, dukhaṃ na passa, sukhaṃ na middha, sukhaṃ anuyutto*) (A 7.58/4:87) = SD 4.11. On this mental noting of rising up again, see also n at **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.4.14/2:135, 16.5.1/2:137) = SD 9 §§4.40, 5.1.

¹⁵ So Ee; Be Ce Se *sūriye uggate*; Ce *suriye uggate*.

¹⁶ See SD 28.11 Intro (3.2).

¹⁷ "Then when the night was nearing its end,...the Blessed One, having spent much of the night," *atha kho māro pāpimā "jānāti maṃ bhagavā, jānāti maṃ sugatō ti dukkhī dummano tatth'ev'antaradhāyī ti*.

— evaṃ —

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