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(Satthā) Sacitta Sutta

The Teacher's Discourse on One's Own Mind | A 10.51/5:92-94

Theme: On self-review

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

Like **the (Abhiṇṇa Paccavekkhitabba) Ṭhāna Sutta** (A 5.57/3:71 f), this is a sutta on self-review. While the Ṭhāna Sutta centres around the reflection on karma—a sort of “preventive” exercise—the Sacitta Sutta is more of a “curative” reflection, where one removes whatever defilement one notices within oneself. In this case, the teaching of **the Vitakka,saṅṭhāna Sutta** (M 20/1:118-122) would be applicable next.

The teachings of the Sacitta Sutta is an interim practice following up on one's moral virtue (through the proper keeping of the Precepts) and before going on to mental cultivation (that is, meditation). This is clearly stated in the closing sentence, where the practitioner who is successful in getting rid of the preliminary mental impurities then goes on to rid the mind of the influxes.

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The Teacher's Discourse on One's Own Mind

A 10.51/5:92-94

If we can't read another's mind, we should read our own

1 [92] At one time the Blessed One was staying at Anātha,piṇḍika's Park in Jeta's grove near Sāvattihī. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks:

“Bhikshus!”

“Bhante!” the monks replied in assent to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this:

2 “Bhikshus, if a monk is not skilled in knowing another's mind, then he should cultivate the skill in knowing his own mind. This is how you should train yourself.

How, bhikshus, should a monk cultivate the skill in knowing his own mind?

How to read our own mind

3 Bhikshus, it is just as a young man or woman, well-dressed, fond of ornaments, while examining the reflection of their¹ own face in a clear, bright and clean mirror or a bowl of water, when they see any dust or dirt on it, would make every effort to remove it.² However, if they see neither dust nor dirt, they would be joyful, with their wish fulfilled, thinking, ‘It is good for me that I am clean!’³

Even so, bhikshus, reviewing⁴ greatly helps the growth of wholesome states for a monk, thus:

‘Do I dwell with much covetousness, [93] or do I dwell very often without covetousness?

Do I dwell with much ill will in mind, or do I dwell very often without ill will?

Do I dwell in the grip of much sloth and torpor, or do I dwell very often free from sloth and torpor?

Do I dwell with much restlessness, or do I dwell very often without restlessness?

¹ I have attempted to provide a gender-neutral rendition here by using the gender-free plural for the Pali singular syntax.

² This simile is applied in **Vitakka,saṅṭhāna S** (M 20.4/1;120 f) in a more dramatic manner to reflect the nature of aversion therapy.

³ “Clean,” *parisuddha*, lit “purified.”

⁴ “Review,” *paccavekkhaṇa*, or examination.

Do I dwell with much <u>doubt</u> ,	or do I dwell very often free from doubt?
Do I dwell with much <u>anger</u> ,	or do I dwell very often without anger?
Do I dwell with a much <u>defiled mind</u> ,	or do I dwell very often without a defiled mind?
Do I dwell with a much <u>agitated body</u> ,	or do I dwell very often without an agitated body?
Do I dwell very often <u>lazy</u> ,	or do I dwell very often exerting myself?
Do I dwell very often <u>lacking in concentration</u> ,	or do I dwell very often concentrated in mind?

4a If, bhikshus, on reflecting, a monk knows thus:

‘I dwell with	much covetousness;
I dwell with	much ill will in mind;
I dwell in the grip of	much sloth and torpor;
I dwell with much	anger;
I dwell with	a very defiled mind;
I dwell with	a very agitated body;
I dwell	very often lazy;
I dwell	very often lacking in concentration’—

then, bhikshus, that monk should apply his utmost will, effort, energy, and unrelenting mindfulness and clear awareness, to the abandoning of the evil unskillful states.

Self-review

Bhikshus, it is just as if a man whose clothes or head [or turban] were on fire⁵ would apply his utmost will, effort, energy, and unrelenting mindfulness and clear awareness, so that the fire on his clothes or turban would be extinguished.

Even so, bhikshus, that monk should apply his utmost will, effort, energy, and unrelenting mindfulness and clear awareness, to the abandoning of the evil unskillful states. [94]

5 However, bhikshus, if a monk, on reflecting, knows thus:

‘I dwell very often	without covetousness;
I dwell very often	without ill will;
I dwell very often	free from sloth and torpor;
I dwell very often	without restlessness;
I dwell very often	free from doubt;
I dwell very often	without anger;
I dwell very often	without a defiled mind;
I dwell very often	without an agitated body;
I dwell very often	exerting myself;
I dwell very often	concentrated in mind’—

then, bhikshus, grounding⁶ himself on these wholesome states, he should further devote himself to the destruction of the mental influxes.⁷

— evaṃ —

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⁵ This popular simile of a man whose head is on fire (*āditta, sīsa*) is found in other suttas (A 2:92, 3:307, 308, 4:320, 321) and the stanzas of the Saṃyutta (S 1:108, 3:143=Nm 44, 119).

⁶ “Grounding,” *paṭiṭṭhita*, lit “established.” Here I follow Bhikkhu Bodhi.

⁷ “Mental influxes,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjā’āsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsava*s is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict under *āsava*.