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(Paṭhama) Pāpaṇika Sutta

Pāpaṇika Sutta 1 The (First) Discourse on the Store-keeper | A 3.19/1:115 f
Theme: The conditions for wealth to arise
Translated by Piya Tan ©2007, 2011

1 The Pāpaṇika Suttas

1.1 PĀPAṆIKA SUTTAS 1 & 2. There are at least two Pali discourses named Pāpaṇika Sutta, that is, the (Paṭhama) Pāpaṇika Sutta (A 3.19) and (Dutiya) the Pāpaṇika Sutta (A 3.20).¹ Both Suttas employ the parable of the store-keeper. The (Paṭhama) Pāpaṇika Sutta or Pāpaṇika Sutta 1 employs the parable to instruct on the tasks of a monastic or practitioner. Like the lazy store-keeper who neglects his work morning, noon and afternoon [§§1-4], the lazy monastic or practitioner neglects his meditation throughout the day [§§4-6]. On the other hand, like the good store-keeper who toils the whole day [§§7-9], the good monastic properly “attends to the meditation sign” throughout the day[§§10-12].

The Pāpaṇika Sutta 1, the shorter of the two, instructs that diligence, the adverb of which is sakkacca² [§§2, 5, 8, 11], meaning “respectfully, carefully, duly, thoroughly;” and is often used with uppaṭṭhahati, meaning “he attends, serves with due honour.”³ Clearly here, the term samādhi nimitta must mean “meditation sign,” as he is said to be working on his meditation and has not attained any “whole-some state,” that is, mental, dhyana or wisdom.

While the first Sutta only reminds the monastic of his meditation task, Pāpaṇika Sutta 2 reminds the practitioner not only to know the Dharma-Vinaya (as theory), but also devotes himself to meditation practice. Hence, it is a longer Sutta than the first.

1.2 PĀPAṆIKA. The word pāpaṇika is resolved as pa (a intensifying prefix) + āpana (stall, shop, market) + ika (a suffix that here denotes a person), meaning “one who runs a stall, store-keeper, merchant.” There is also a late synonymous form, āpanika (store-keeper, merchant).⁴ Another late related form is kārāpanika, “the market value of the work, the value of the workmanship” (DhA 1:412).

The word pāpaṇika, meaning “shop, store” is found elsewhere in the texts. In the Mahā Sakul’udāyī Sutta (M 77), monks who use dust-heap and coarse rag-robos (paṁsukūlikā lūkha, cīvara, dharā) collect pieces of cloth or rags (nantaika) from “the charnel ground, rubbish heaps or shops” (susānā va saṅkāra, kūṭā va pāpaṇikā) and then make them into robes.⁵ Interestingly, here pāpaṇika is used as a noun, or more specifically, a synedocche, that is, a figure where a part stands for the whole, or a shorthand term (such as “the grocer” or “the grocer’s”).

2 Sutta highlights

2.1 THE SUTTA’S SIGNIFICANCE. The Pāpaṇika Sutta 1 exhorts the renunciant or practitioner to keep up his meditation practice through the waking hours, just as a store-keeper or merchant who is diligent (sakkacca) the whole day would be successful and wealthy. The theme, as such, is unrelenting effort and the benefit is wealth.

Understandably, we have two kinds of wealth here. For the store-keeper, it is a worldly wealth, while for the renunciant and meditator, it is a spiritual wealth. In a number of suttas, mostly from the Aṅguttara, where one who exerts such a meditative effort is said to be “accomplished in power” (bala, sampanna),⁶ or has attained to the “power of effort” (virīya bala).⁷

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¹ A 3.19/1:115 f = SD 37.2a & A 3.20/1:116-118 = SD 37.2b.
² Sakacca (BHS satkṛtya, Mvst 1.10): D 2:356 f; S 4:314; A 2:147, 4:392; V 4:190, 275; Tha 1054; J 1:480; Dh 392; PVA 26, 121. Cpds: ~kār, zealous (S 3:267; Miln 94; ~dāṇa, “a gift carefully made” (M 3:24).
³ Vv 12.5; Miln 305; J 4:310.
⁴ V 3:64, 4:248; Miln 341; VA 653; SA 2:202; AA 2:186; DhA 2:189
⁵ M 77:9/2:7 = SD 49.5, which also has pl pāpaṇikā (id); also see Nm 1:224, 2:461; Nc:Be 272; cf V 1:255, 290.

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In the Cakkavatti Sīha,naḍa Sutta (D 26) the “wealth for a monk” (bhikkhu bhoga) is the four divine abodes—that is, lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity—vital qualities for a businessman (hence, they are also known as the social emotions) and the qualities of a professional. For a monastic or a lay practitioner, the divine abodes are powerful meditations that can lead to dhyana, and with proper attention, they can lead to liberation. Basically, this means that, on attaining dhyana or even some level of samadhi, we should spend as much time with it as we feel inclined to, and then emerge from it. With the calm and clear mind, we should then reflect on the nature of impermanence.

2.2 SAMĀDHI, NIMITTA.

2.2.1 Nimitta. A nimitta is a mental object, image or concept which, on being meditated upon, induces some level of deep concentration. A careful examination of the contexts in which nimitta appears in the suttas will show that it is used in at least two different, but partly overlapping senses, that is to say: meaning (1) meditation sign, and (2) basis or condition for a meditative state to arise [2.2.3]. We shall here examine the first meaning first.

The Buddhist Dictionary defines nimitta (the first meaning), following the Commentaries, as follows:

“Mental (reflex-) image,” obtained in meditation. In full clarity, it will appear in the mind by successful practice of certain concentration-exercises and will then appear as vividly as if seen by the eye. The object perceived at the very beginning of concentration is called the preparatory image (parikamma,nimitta).

The still unsteady and unclear image which arises when the mind has reached a weak degree of concentration is called the acquired image (uggaha,nimitta).

An entirely clear and immovable image arising at a higher degree of concentration is the counterpart sign or counter-image (paṭibhāga,nimitta). As soon as this image arises, the stage of neighbourhood (or access) concentration (upacāra, samādhi) is reached.12

(The Buddhist Dictionary: nimitta)

“Access (or neighbourhood) concentration” (upacāra, samādhi) refers to a mental focus when an entirely clear and immovable image (nimitta), called the counter-image (paṭibhāga, nimitta), has arisen. As soon as this image arises, access concentration is reached.13

2.2.2 Samādhi. Once the mental sign (nimitta) has arisen, we are technically in a state of concentration (samādhi). The quality or depth of the concentration depends on how still (samatha) our mind is, that is, how well we can sustain its stability and strength in subtly keeping out any sense of distractions that may try to weaken it. This is where the skill of a teacher or spiritual friend will benefit the student, and must be learnt hands-on, that is, through instructions and with personal effort.

Proper mental concentration in terms of meditation is known as samādhi, more technically, “right samadhi.” On a higher level, when this would lead to attaining to the path, it is called “noble right samadhi” (ariya sammā, samādhi). This last term, found in all the four Nikāyas, emphasizes that the path factors, culminating in right mindfulness, functions to support samadhi:

What, bhikshus, is noble right samadhi, with its vital conditions, with its prerequisites?

There are these (seven factors): right view, right thought [intention], right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness.

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8 D 26.28a(4)/3:77 f = SD 36.10.
9 See Right livelihood = SD 37.8 (6.2.1).
10 See Metta Sahagata S (A 46.54/5:115-121) & SD 10.11 (3).
11 See Cakku S (S 25.1/3:225) = SD 16.7 Intro (1.5).
12 For details, see BDict: kasiṇa, samādhi. For other meanings and usages of nimitta, see PED sv.
13 For details, see Satipaṭṭhāna S (M 10) @ SD 13.1 (3.1d) & Nimitta = SD 19.7 (2-3).
One-pointedness of mind, bhikkhus, equipped with these seven factors, is called noble right samadhi “with its vital conditions, with its prerequisites (sa, upaniso sa, parikkhāro).\(^{14}\)

(D 18.27/2:216 f; M 117.3/3:71; S 45.28/5:21; A 7.42/4:40)

In other words, to have perfect samadhi, all the other path factors must also be perfect or right (sam-mā). At that time, we must be free of any wrong view. In simple terms, as explained consistently in the Commentaries, it is attention directed to the impermanent, seeing it as impermanent, to the suffering as suffering, to the not-self as being not-self, and to the foul as being foul (cf. Vbh 373).

With the power of such a right view, the mind is able to let go of all thoughts and distractions, settle down completely so that we experience what is said to be the “pure mind.” This is our mind just the way it is, pure and bright. As such, the mental sign (nimitta) is often described as some kind of powerful and boundless inner radiance.\(^{15}\)

2.2.2 Samādhi, nimitta

2.2.2.1 “MEDITATION SIGN.” The term samādhi, nimitta\(^{16}\) [§§5+11] appears a total of six times below in the Pāpanīka Sutta 1. The Sutta commentary,\(^{17}\) however, uses the term (its lemma) samatha, nimitta (as found in the Thai reading, which seems to be the better one). Clearly, they are synonyms. The Commentary explains that the calmness sign (samādhi nimitta) is calmness (samatha) (that is, samadhi itself), as well as its object (ārammaṇa), which the Porāṇa Ṭīkā glosses as “counterpart sign” (patibhāga nimitta). The term “non-dispersal sign” (avyagga nimitta) is a synonym of “the calmness sign,” (SA 3:141), which is confirmed by the (Āhāra) Kāya Sutta (S 46.2) below [2.2.2.2].

It is clear that here the term samādhi, nimitta refers to “meditation sign” (that is, the first sense of nimitta) [2.2.1]. The Commentary’s mention of the term “non-dispersal sign” (avyagga nimitta),\(^{18}\) confirms this. Avyagga (Skt avyagra) means “undistracted or unconfused, steady” (J 3:7). It is often found in the suttas in the compound, avyagga, manasa or avyagga, mānasa (Be). “With undistracted mind, with the mind focussed.”\(^{19}\)

2.2.2.2 “BASIS FOR SAMADHI.” Elsewhere we can see another sense of samādhi, nimitta. We have already noted here that samādhi, nimitta has a synonym, that is, the term samatha, nimitta, “calmness sign.” It appears in the (Āhāra) Kāya Sutta (S 46.2),\(^{20}\) where there is this important passage on meditation progress using the model of the awakening-factors (bojjhāga), thus,

And what, bhikkhus, is the food for the arising of the unarisen awakening-factor of concentration (samādhi sambojjhaṅga), or for the cultivating of the arisen awakening-factor of concentration to perfection?

There is, bhikkhus, the calmness sign, the non-dispersal sign.\(^{21}\) Therein, it is the frequent cultivation of wise attention (yoniso, manasikāra, bahulī, kāra). This is the food for the arising of the unarisen awakening-factor of concentration, or for the cultivating of the arisen awakening-factor of concentration to perfection.

(S 46.2.16/5:66) = SD 62.9

\(^{14}\) The term parikkhāra more familiarly refers to a monk’s four requisites: bowl, robes, dwelling, and medicine. Here, it obviously means the factors that are “pre-requisite” for attaining dhyana. In later usage, it is replaced in this sense by its etymological twin parikamma, usu rendered something like “preparatory work.” (Sujato’s fn)

\(^{15}\) See Accharā Vagga (A 1.6.1-2): “Monks, this mind is radiant (pabhassara), but it is defiled by defilements from outside. The ignorant ordinary person does not understand this as it really is. As such, for him there is no personal development.” (A A 6.1-2/1:10). See also The Buddha discovered dhyana = SD 33.1b (6.2).


\(^{17}\) Samatha, nimittan ‘ti samatho ‘pi samatha, nimittan, ārammaṇam pi. Avyagga, nimittan ‘ti tass’eva vevacanaṁ.

(SA 3:141)

\(^{18}\) The Burmese mss generally use a b instead of the v, spelling it as abyagga.


\(^{20}\) Where Se has samādhi, nimitta.

\(^{21}\) Atthi, bhikkhave, samatha, nimittaṁ avyagga, nimittaṁ.
It is clear here that “the calmness sign” cannot be a meditation sign, because it is here described as “the frequent cultivation of wise attention,” which is the “food” or basis for the awakening-factor of concentration.

We see a similar situation in the Cūla Vedalla Sutta (M 44), where nimitta cannot be translated as “meditation sign,” but as “the basis for samadhi.” The run Dhamma, dinnā gives this analysis of samadhi to the layman Visākha:

One-pointedness of mind, friend Visākha, is samadhi. The focusses of mindfulness (sati, paṭṭhāna) are the basis for samadhi. The four right strivings are the prerequisite of samadhi. The cultivation, development, and making much of these same principles is the development of samadhi therein.

(M 44.12/1:301) = SD 40a.9

The Commentary here notes that the four focusses of mindfulness are the basis of samadhi (samādhi,-nimitta) in the sense of being its basis or condition (MA 2:363) [2.2.1]. Bodhi says that here it “would seem incorrect to translate nimitta as ‘sign,’ in the sense of either distinctive mark or object.”

Bodhi, in his Samyutta translation, refers to another case where nimitta cannot be rendered as “sign,” that is, at the beginning of the Uppaṭi, pāṭika Sutta (S 48.40), where we have this passage:

Uppannaṁ kho me idam dukkh’indriyaṁ. Taṁ ca kho sa, nimittaṁ sa, nidānaṁ sa, saṁkhāraṁ sa-paccayaṁ.
Taṁ ca animittaṁ anidānaṁ asaṁkhāraṁ appaccayaṁ dukkh’indriyaṁ uppajjissati n’etam ṭhānaṁ so vijjati

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uppannaṁ kho me idam dukkh’indriyaṁ.</th>
<th>There has arisen in me this pain faculty.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taṁ ca kho sa, nimittaṁ sa, nidānaṁ sa, saṁkhāraṁ sa-paccayaṁ.</td>
<td>That has a basis [a sign], a source, a causal formation, a condition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taṁ ca animittaṁ anidānaṁ asaṁkhāraṁ appaccayaṁ dukkh’indriyaṁ uppajjissati n’etam ṭhānaṁ so vijjati</td>
<td>It is impossible for that pain faculty to arise without a basis [without a sign], without a source, without a causal formation, without a condition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(S 48.40.3/5:213) Bodhi’s translation, last 3 lines not interlinear.

Although technically, Bodhi’s suggestion sounds correct, experientially (that is, in terms of reality), it makes perfect sense to render nimitta even here as “a sign.” Here, sign refers to an “outward appearance” or general appearance, that is, a distinguishing feature. “Sign” here is often contrasted with “details” or “particulars” (anuvyayijana) (M 39.8/1:273). Of one who restrains his senses it is said, “He does not seize at the sign” (na nimitta-g, gāhi) of an object.

In terms of perception, this “sign” (nimitta) is “related to the first evaluation of the raw sense data, because of which the object appears to be, for example, ‘beautiful’ (subha,nimitta) or ‘irritating’ (patigha nimitta), which then usually leads to subsequent evaluations and mental reactions.”

22 Although at M 1:301, this concentration sign is related to the 4 satipatthanas, at M 3:112, it refers to the practice of samatha meditation, since it speaks of quieting the mind leading up to dhyanas. Cf samatha,nimitta, “calmness sign,” which S 5:105 recommends as food for the awakening-factor of concentration (also at D 3:213; S 5:66; cf Dhs 1357; Vism 1.113, 125; Abhs 9.5 = Abhs:SR 54, Abhs:BRs 9.18-20, Abhs:WG 328 (see index); Manual of a Mystic 2); and citta,nimitta, “mind sign” (S 5:151; A 3:423), which Tha 85 relates to non-sensual happiness, “an instance reminiscent of the experience of non-sensual happiness during absorption” (Analayo, Satipaṭṭhāna: The direct path to realization, 2003:237). Cf A 4:419, which recommends developing the “sign,” which in this passage too represents dhyana.

23 M:NB 1242 n464 ad Cūla Vedalla S, M 44.12/1:301; see also S:B 1900 n54. See Nimitta = SD 29.7 (1); also Satipaṭṭhāna Ss = SD 13.1(7): “How to enter the path in one week.”

24 D 2.64/1:70 = D:RD 1:80n; M 33.7/1:221, 38.35/1:269; Vism 1.53-59/20-23.

25 Analayo, Satipaṭṭhāna: The direct path to realization, 2003:225 f. In Nīvarana,pahāna Vaggo (A 1:3), sensual desire arises due to unwise attention to the “sign of beauty,” (A 1.2.1/1:3) and aversion arises due to the “sign of repulsion” (A 1.2.2/1:3). Mahā Vedalla S (M 43) explains that greed, hate and delusion are each a “maker of signs” (nimitta,karana) (M 43.37/1:298), ie, they ascribe a false significance to things as being impermanent, pleasurable, self, or beautiful (ie in terms of the 4 perversions, vipallāsa, A 2:52; Pm 2:80; Bodhi 1980-4, 25 n27). Uddesa Vi-
say that “sign” (nimitta) here refers to a grasping arising through one’s sensual lust (chanda, råga, vasena) or on account of one’s view (diṭṭhi, matta, vasena); “features” (anuvyayajña) here refers to finding delight by grasping at another’s limb or body part (eyes, arms, legs, etc).

However, all this is debatable. But for practical purposes, we could accept nimitta here as “basis,” with the understanding that it refers to the way the “sign” works on the mind, arousing lust or ill will, hence bringing on suffering.

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The (First) Discourse on the Store-keeper

A 3.19/1:115 f

The lazy store-keeper
1 Bhikshus, a store-keeper who possesses three qualities is unable, impossible for him, to attain wealth not yet attained, or having attained wealth to make it grow.

What are the three qualities?
2 Here, bhikshus, the store-keeper does not diligently attend to his work in the morning, does not diligently attend to his work in the middle of the day, does not diligently attend to his work in the afternoon,

3 A store-keeper, bhikshus, who possesses these three qualities is unable, impossible for him, to attain wealth not yet attained, or having attained wealth to make it grow.

The lazy monk
4 Even so, bhikshus, a monk who possesses three qualities is unable, impossible for him, to attain a wholesome state not yet attained, or having attained a wholesome state, to make it grow.

What are the three qualities?
5 Here, bhikshus, the monk does not diligently attend to the meditation sign in the morning, does not diligently attend to the meditation sign in the middle of the day, does not diligently attend to the meditation sign in the afternoon.

6 A monk, bhikshus, who possesses these three qualities is unable, impossible for him, to attain a wholesome state not yet attained, or having attained a wholesome state to make it grow. [116]

The hard-working store-keeper
7 Bhikshus, a store-keeper who possesses three qualities is able, possible for him, to attain wealth not yet attained, or having attained wealth to make it grow.

What are the three qualities?

bhaṅga S (M 138) describes how when consciousness follows the sign, it becomes “tied and shackled by the gratification derived in the sign,” and thereby becomes fettered to the sign (M 138.10/3:225). It is also possible that a grasping at a “sign” may be followed by various types of thought that could be regarded as “association” (Vitakka Saṅṭhāṇa S, M 20.3/1:119).

26 D 3:249; A 1:256, 3:319, 375 f, 4:33, 418 f; J 1:420; Pm 1:60, 91 f, 164, 170, 2:39, 64; Vbh 193 f; Nm 2:390; Nc 141, 141; DhsA 400, 402; cf MA 1:75, 4:195; SA 3:4, 394; Nc 1:55; DhA 1:74.

27 Tihi, bhikkhave, angehi samannāgato pāpaṇiko abhabbo anadhigataṁ vā bhogam adhigantuṁ, adhigataṁ vā bhogam phātiṁ kātuṁ.

28 “Meditation object,” samādhi,nimitta, see Intro (2.2.2).

29 Tihi, bhikkhave, angehi samannāgato pāpaṇiko abhabbo anadhigataṁ vā bhogam adhigantuṁ, adhigataṁ vā bhogam phātiṁ kātuṁ.

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Here, bhikshus, the store-keeper diligently attends to his work in morning, diligently attends to his work in the middle of the day, diligently attends to his work in the afternoon.

A store-keeper, bhikshus, who possesses these three qualities is able, it is possible for him, to attain wealth not yet attained, or having attained wealth to make it grow.

The hard-working monk

Even so, bhikshus, a monk who possesses three qualities is able, it is possible for him, to attain a wholesome state not yet attained, or having attained a wholesome state, to make it grow.

What are the three qualities?

Here, bhikshus, the monk diligently attends to the meditation sign in the morning, diligently attends to the meditation sign in the middle of the day, diligently attends to the meditation sign in the afternoon.

A monk, bhikshus, who possesses these three qualities is able, it is possible for him, to attain a wholesome state not yet attained, or having attained a wholesome state to make it grow.

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