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(Samādhi) Bala Sutta

The Discourse on Strength (in Samadhi) | A 6.72/3:427 f

Theme: How to strengthen our meditation

Translated by Piya Tan ©2013

Introduction

1 The (Samādhi) Bala Sutta (A 6.24) is a short discourse on how to strengthen our meditation, especially in attaining dhyana. The following 6 skills need to be mastered for this purpose, thus:

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| (1) being skilled in the attaining of samadhi, | <i>samādhissa samāpatti, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (2) being skilled in remaining in samadhi, | <i>samādhissa ṭhiti, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (3) being skilled in emerging from samadhi, | <i>samādhissa vuṭṭhāna, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (4) practising with care, | <i>sakkacca, kārī ca hoti</i> |
| (5) practising with commitment [persistence], | <i>sātacca, kārī ca</i> |
| (6) doing what is suitable. | <i>sappāya, kārī ca</i> |

1.1 Skill in the attaining of samadhi (*samādhissa samāpatti, kusalo hoti*). The meditator knows how to gladden (*hāsetvā*) the mind to make it pliant so that it can attain dhyana (SA 2:352). One commentary says that this refers to being adept in knowing and resorting to suitable food and suitable climate, as a result of which is to attain samadhi (AA 1:161, 3:354).

However, a meditator without a strong foundation in Dharma instruction or sutta learning, even when he attains high levels of meditative attainment, may not be able to instruct others effectively. However, when his pupils are patient and wise, they would still be able to learn from such a meditator or teacher.

1.2 Skill in remaining in samadhi (*samādhissa ṭhiti, kusalo hoti*). He knows how to spend time in dhyana, keeping the dhyana stable or deepening it; also keep up the duration of the dhyana (AA 2:161, 3:255). He knows how to clear his mind of the hindrances and grasp the meditation sign (*nimitta*).¹

1.3 Skill in emerging from samadhi (*samādhissa vuṭṭhāna, kusalo hoti*). He is able to emerge from dhyana at a pre-determined time (by the body clock) (AA 3:355); or he is wise in knowing the time-limit in regards to emerging, thinking, “I will exert myself as long as the sun is gone” (*ettakam gate suriye uṭṭhahissāmīti vuṭṭhāna, kāla, paricchedakā paññā*) (DA 3:979; PmA 1:232).

1.4 Practising with care (*sakkacca, kārī hoti*).² He acts with care so as to be able to enter dhyana.³ This also means executing all his duties, chores and tasks diligently,⁴ and performing deeds of merit (such as giving) and other wholesome acts, as a support for his practice.⁵ Simply put, he is not heedless.⁶

1.5 Practising with commitment (*sātacca, kārī*).⁷ He keeps up his effort in working to attain dhyana (S 2:352); in other words, he puts in every effort he can into his practice (Vbh 244). It is said that true practitioners are “committed to their duties” (*kicce sātacca, kārino*).⁸ “Commitment” (*sātacca*) means

¹ On *nimitta* as “meditation sign,” see *Nimitta*, SD 19.7.

² A common phrase: S 3:267×2, 268×3, 3:276, 3:277×8; **Sakkhi Bhabba S** (A 6.72/3:427), (**Chakka**) **Bala S** (A 6.4/3:428)

³ SA 2:352; ThaA 2:142.

⁴ CA 19, 289, 319, 326; Nc:Be 54; SnA 2:482;

⁵ NmA 2:406; DhsA 408; VbhA 468.

⁶ Sn 2:564; Nm 1:59, 2:376; Nc:Be 80, 191, 194, 300.

⁷ A common phrase: **Saṅgīti S** (D 33/3:238×6, 3:239×2), **Das’uttara S** (D 34/278×4); **Ceto, khila S** (M 16/1:101×5, 102×6, 103×8); **Samādhi Mūlaka Sātacca, kārī S** (S 34.9/3:268×5). **Samāpatti Mūlaka Sātacca, kārī S** (S 34.18/3:271×4), **Sakkacca Mūlaka Sātacca, kārī S** (S 3:276), **Sātacca Mūlaka Sappāya, kārī S** (S 3:277×5, 278×6), (**Pañcaka**) **Ceto, khila S** (A 5.205/3:248×4), **Vinibandha S** (A 5.206/3:249×2, 250×2), **Adhigama S** (A 6.79/-3:431, 432), (**Navaka**) **Ceto, khila S** (A 9.71/4:460×4), (**Navaka**) **Cetaso Vinibandha S** (A 9.72/4:461×4); (**Dasa-ka**) **Ceto, khila S** (A 10.14/5:18×6, 19×2, 20×6).

⁸ Dh 293; Tha 636.

persistence of two kinds, continuity or sustained effort (*satata, satata, kiriya, satata, bhāva*, etc), and the proper effort itself (*virīya*).⁹ This means persistently clearing the mind of any thought of the five cords of sensual pleasures (SA 2:390), and directing the mind to constantly reflect on the 3 characteristics¹⁰ for the sake of insight (SnA 1:214). It also means being very patient with ourselves,¹¹ and never heedless.¹² This commitment should be to at least attain streamwinning.¹³ In short, this means enjoying the recluse's life and duties here and now (ThaA 3:53).

1.6 Doing what is suitable (*sappāya, kāri*).¹⁴ He is able to fulfill those qualities that conduce to concentration (SA 2:352).¹⁵ In other words, he knows what is beneficial to his practice and what is not, and cultivates the former and avoids or lessens the latter.

A famous case here is that of Puṇṇa of Sunāparanta, who is said that when Puṇṇa returns to his homeland of Sunāparanta, he first lives on Abbha,hatthi Pabbata (Cloud-hand Hill), where he goes into the traders' village for alms. His younger brother, **Cūla Puṇṇa**, recognizing him, determines that he should remain right there.

Puṇṇa however moves on to the Samudda Giri Vihāra (Sea-hill Vihara), where he marks out his ambulatory (*caṅkama*) with magnetite or lodestone,¹⁶ he had difficulty meditating because of the waves breaking against the magnetite rocks. To effectively meditate, he psychically determines (*adhiṭṭhāsi*) that the sea remains calm.

Leaving Samudda Giri Vihāra, he goes to Mātula Giri (Uncle's Hill), but there the incessant cries of a big flock of birds, day and night, distract him.

Finally, he goes to the Makulak'ārāma Vihāra (Budding Park Vihara) at Makulaka Gāma, which is neither too far nor too near the merchant village (for collecting alms), and it is isolated and quiet so that he is able to do his spiritual exercises. So there he constructs a walkway for walking meditation, and continues with his meditation. (MA 86-88)

The Puṇṇ'ovāda Sutta (M 145) states that within his first rains-retreat in Sunāparanta, Puṇṇa attains arhathood.¹⁷

2 RELATED SUTTAS. There are at least two other suttas that are closely related to the (Samādhi) Bala Sutta, and they should be studied together with. These suttas are as follows:

Himavanta Sutta	A 6.24/3:311,27-30	SD 41.14
Vasa Sutta	A 7.38/4:34,5-9	SD 41.16

These two suttas each have a list of meditation skills some of which are identical, while the others are related in some way.¹⁸

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⁹ DA 3:1030; MA 2:68; SA 2:128; AA 3:324; ThaA 2:250; NmA 2:406; Vbh 249; VbhA 324, 346; DhsA 408; cf DhA 3:452; ThaA 2:269.

¹⁰ On the 3 characteristics, see **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:67 f) = SD 1.2 & SID: ti,lakkhaṇa.

¹¹ VbhA 324; CA 279, 326.

¹² Nc:Be 54; SnA 1:335; UA 375.

¹³ SA 1:331; SnA 1:234. On streamwinning, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

¹⁴ A common phrase: V 1:303; **Samādhi Mūlaka Sappāya, kāri S** (S 34.10/3:268×2, 269×3), **S 3:276-278**, **Sāta-ca Mūlaka Sappāya, kāri S** (S 3:277×2, 278×4); **Upaṭṭhāka S 1** (A 5.123/3:144), **Anāyussā S 1** (A 5.125/3:145), **Anāyussā S 2** (A 5.126/3:145), **Sakkhi Bhabba** (A 6.71/3:427), **(Samādhi) Bala S** (A 6.72/3:427).

¹⁵ SA 2:352; cf AA 3:411.

¹⁶ *Aya, kanta pāsāna*.

¹⁷ M 145.7/3:269, SD 20.15.

¹⁸ For other details, see **Samādhi Samāpatti S** (S 34.1) @ SD 41.12 (1.4.1).

The Discourse on Strength (in Samadhi)

A 6.72/3:427 f

Lacking strength in samadhi

1 Bhikshus, possessing six things a monk is *incapable* of attaining strength [power] in samadhi.¹⁹

What are the six?

2.1 Here, bhikshus, a monk

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| (1) is not skilled in the attaining of samadhi, | <i>na samādhissa samāpatti, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (2) he is not skilled in remaining in samadhi, | <i>na samādhissa ṭhiti, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (3) he is not skilled in emerging from samadhi, | <i>na samādhissa vuṭṭhāna, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (4) he does not practise with care, | <i>asakkacca, kārī ca hoti</i> |
| (5) he does not practise with commitment [persistence], | <i>asātacca, kārī ca</i> |
| (6) he does not do what is suitable. | <i>asappāya, kārī ca</i> |

2.2 Bhikshus, possessing these six things a monk is incapable of attaining strength [power] in samadhi.

Gaining strength in samadhi

3 Bhikshus, possessing six things a monk is *capable* of attaining strength [power] in samadhi.²⁰

What are the six? [428]

4 Here, bhikshus, a monk

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|---|--|
| (1) is skilled in the attaining of samadhi, | <i>samādhissa samāpatti, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (2) he is skilled in remaining in samadhi, | <i>samādhissa ṭhiti, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (3) he is skilled in emerging from samadhi, | <i>samādhissa vuṭṭhāna, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (4) he practises with care, | <i>sakkacca, kārī ca hoti</i> |
| (5) he practises with commitment [persistence], | <i>sātacca, kārī ca</i> |
| (6) he does what is suitable. | <i>sappāya, kārī ca</i> |

5 Bhikshus, possessing these six things a monk is capable of attaining strength [power] in samadhi.

— evaṃ —

130131; 130203; 130406

¹⁹ *Chahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu abhabbo samādhismiṃ balataṃ pāpuṇitum.*

²⁰ *Chahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu bhabbo samādhismiṃ balataṃ pāpuṇitum.*