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Vasa Suttā

The Discourses on Mastery | A 7.38ab/4:34 [A:B 7.40+41]
Vasa Sutta 1 or **Paṭhama Vasa Sutta** The First Discourse on Mastery | A 7.38a/4:34
Vasa Sutta 2 or **Dutiya Vasa Sutta** The Second Discourse on Mastery or
Vasā Sutta The Discourse on the Obedient Wife | A 7.38b/4:34
 Theme: The sevenfold mastery in meditation
 Translated by Piya Tan ©2013

Introduction

1 ONE SUTTA OR TWO? The Pali text Society edition gives this Sutta as a single whole, while the Burmese, Siamese and Sinhalese manuscripts all take it as two separate suttas. The Siamese colophon (*uddāna*), for example, says that there are *dve vasā*, “two (suttas entitled) *vasa*.”

I have followed the PTS edition, and treated them as one sutta, while noting that they can be taken as two suttas. The reason for this is that they do form a coherent whole, as **Vasa Sutta 1** clearly acts as a precursor to **Vasa Sutta 2**. If we take it as being two suttas, we can also name them **Vasa Sutta** and **Vasā Sutta** respectively.

2 WORDPLAY. There is a wordplay on the key-word *vasa*, “mastery,” and *vasā* (f), “a barren cow, an obedient wife.” The second meaning may apply to the latter half of §1 and their cognates, that is to say, we can render it as

Sattahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu cittaṃ vase [Ke vasāṃ] vatteti, no ca bhikkhu cittaṃ vasena vattati.

Bhikkhus, possessing seven qualities, a monk has mastery over his mind, and the monk is not the mind’s “obedient wife.”

Bhikkhu Bodhi’s rendition of this sentence as “Bhikkhus, possessing seven qualities, a bhikkhu exercises mastery over his mind and is *not a servant* of his mind” (italics added) is too free and not reflected in the original Pali.

3 THE SEVENFOLD MASTERY. The **Vasa Sutta** (A 7.38) is a short discourse on the mastery over samadhi in seven ways. The following sevenfold masteries are as follows:

(1) skill in samadhi	<i>samādhi, kusalo hoti</i>
(2) skill in the attaining of samadhi	<i>samādhissa samāpatti, kusalo hoti</i>
(3) skill in remaining in samadhi	<i>samādhissa ṭhiti, kusalo hoti</i>
(4) skill in emerging from samadhi	<i>samādhissa vuṭṭhāna, kusalo hoti</i>
(5) skill in keeping himself fit for samadhi	<i>samādhissa kallita, kusalo hoti</i>
(6) skill in resort for samadhi	<i>samādhissa gocara, kusalo hoti</i>
(7) skill in the resolution for samadhi	<i>samādhissa abhinīhāra, kusalo hoti</i>

3.1 Skill in samadhi (*samādhi, kusalo hoti*). He is one who is adept in analyzing and identifying the 5 dhyana-factors or the 4 dhyana-factors (SA 2:352; PmA 1:231) [1.4.2.1; 2.3.1]. This apparently refers to only a *theoretical* “mastery” of samadhi and dhyanas, such as that of a PhD scholar of meditation studies who however never really tasted them himself. Such a person may be a good teacher of meditation, but sooner or later, he would have to master the practice himself so that he is able to progress himself.

3.2 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 climate, which helps him to attain samadhi (AA 1:161, 3:354).

However, a meditator who does not have 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.

3.3 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

3.4 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).

3.5 Skill in keeping fit for samadhi (*samādhissa kallita, kusalo hoti*). He is capable in keeping the mind fit for dhyana, keeping it adaptable, happy, bright. (AA 3:355). He also knows the suitability of the different kinds of kasinas² (PmA 1:232).

3.6 Skill in samadhi resort (*samādhissa gocara, kusalo hoti*). Having avoided what is not conducive to concentration, he takes up what is helpful for it, know what “sign” (*nimitta*) or “characteristic” (*lakkaṇa*) is best as a concentration object (*ārammaṇa*) (AA 3:355; PmA 1:232). Not only is he skilled in the meditation-work (*kamma-ṭ, ṭhāna*) itself, but also in resorting to proper places for alms (AA 2:352).

3.7 Skill in samadhi resolution (*samādhissa abhinīhāra, kusalo hoti*). He is able to direct his mind to the 1st dhyana and on to higher ones (AA 3:355). Having mastered the different dhyanas and attainments, he cultivates insight in terms of them (PmA 1:233).

4 RELATED SUTTAS. There are at least two other suttas that are closely related to the Vasa 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
(Samādhī) Bala Sutta	A 7.72/3:427,25-428,4	SD 41.15

These two suttas each have a list of meditation skills some of which are identical, while the others are related in some way.³

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The Discourse on Mastery

A 7.38ab/4:34

Vasa Sutta 1 (A 7.38a/4:34)

1 Bhikshus, possessing seven qualities, a monk has mastery over his mind, and the monk is not under the mind’s power [not the mind’s “obedient wife”].⁴

What are the seven?

2.1 Here, bhikshus, as monk

(1) is skilled in samadhi,	<i>samādhi, kusalo hoti</i>
(2) he is skilled in the attaining of samadhi,	<i>samādhissa samāpatti, kusalo hoti</i>
(3) he is skilled in remaining in samadhi,	<i>samādhissa ṭhiti, kusalo hoti</i>
(4) he is skilled in emerging from samadhi,	<i>samādhissa vuṭṭhāna, kusalo hoti</i>

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

² On *kasina*, see *Bhāvanā* = SD 15.1 (9.2). On the 4 colour *kasina* meditations, see *Mahā Parinibbāna S* (D 16.3.29-32/2:110 f), SD 9. On *viññāna kasina*, see SD 40a.12 (3.2.3), see *Viññāna*, SD 17.8a (4.1). See SID: *kasina*.

³ For other details, see *Samādhī Samāpatti S* (S 34.1) @ SD 41.12 (1.4.1).

⁴ *Sattahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu cittam vase [Ke vasam] vatteti, no ca bhikkhu cittassa vase na vattati*. On the wordplay, see (2).

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| (5) he is skilled in keeping himself fit for samadhi | <i>samādhissa kallita, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (6) he is skilled in resort for samadhi | <i>samādhissa gocara, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (7) he is skilled in the resolution for samadhi | <i>samādhissa abhinīhāra, kusalo hoti</i> |

2.2 Bhikshus, possessing these seven qualities, a monk has mastery over his mind, and the monk is not under the mind's power [not the mind's "obedient wife"].

Vasa Sutta 2 (A 7.38b/4:34)

3 Bhikshus, possessing seven qualities, Sāriputta has mastery over his mind, and Sāriputta is not one under the mind's power [not the mind's "obedient wife"].⁵

What are the seven?

4.1 Here, bhikshus, a monk

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| (1) is skilled in samadhi, | <i>samādhi, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (2) he is skilled in the attaining of samadhi, | <i>samādhissa samāpatti, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (3) he is skilled in remaining in samadhi, | <i>samādhissa thiti, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (4) he is skilled in emerging from samadhi, | <i>samādhissa vuṭṭhāna, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (5) he is skilled in keeping himself fit for samadhi | <i>samādhissa kallita, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (6) he is skilled in resort for samadhi | <i>samādhissa gocara, kusalo hoti</i> |
| (7) he is skilled in the resolution for samadhi | <i>samādhissa abhinīhāra, kusalo hoti</i> |

4.2 Bhikshus, possessing these seven qualities, Sāriputta has mastery over his mind, and Sāriputta is not under the mind's power [not the mind's "obedient wife"].

— evaṃ —

130131; 130203; 130408

⁵ *Sattahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato sāriputto cittam vase vatteti, no ca sāriputto cittassa vasena vattati.*
On the wordplay, see (2).