

3h

(Nandana) Hiri Sutta

The (Nandana) Discourse on Moral Shame | S 1.18

Theme: One with moral shame is ultimately free from blame

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2018

1 Sutta summary and translation

1.1 SUMMARY. The (Nandana) Hiri Sutta (S 1.18) has only 2 verses: the first by a deity [S 35*] and the second the Buddha's response to it [S 36*]. Although the Commentary sees S 35 as a question [1.3; 2.2], the verse works just as well as a statement, but with a different tone [1.2]. The deity's verse refers to the existence of a person "restrained by moral shame ... who avoids blame as a good horse does the whip" [S 35*].

1.2 We can translate the Pali verse as a statement, thus:

There is a person, restrained by moral shame, | found somewhere in the world,
who keeps clear of blame | as a good horse does the whip.

This verse, then, is a statement or opinion of the deity. In this case, it is possible that the deity has some idea that such a person exists. Since the deity is long-lived, he could have heard of such a person from the teachings of a past buddha of this world cycle (depending on his lifespan), that is, from the buddhas Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana or Kassapa.¹

1.3 The preferred translation is that of the verse as a question—as done here. The deity appears before the Buddha and asks him whether there is such a person: one who has moral shame so as to be free from any blame [S 35*].

We are not told why the deity focuses on the teaching of moral shame (*hiri*). However, we can take this virtue as a synecdoche (shorthand) for being morally restrained, or even free from all bad (*pāpa*), as stated in the Sanskrit parallel to this verse [3.1.1].

Whether the verse [S 35*] is translated as a statement or a question, the Buddha's reply applies all the same. Such a person is the arhat [S 36*].

2 Sutta significance

2.1 APABODHATI

2.1.1 The Burmese and the Siamese editions read the verb in **S 35c** as *apabodhati*, the PTS 1884 edition (Ee1) as *appabodhati*, while its 1999 edition (Ee2) as *appabodheti*. Both these readings can be rendered literally as "he understands (*bodhate* or *bodheti*) it to be small (*appa*)."² However, *appabodhati* is not actually found in the Pali canon, but is spelt *apabodhati*.³

¹ SD 52.1 (9.1.1.2).

² See eg Rau 1959:167.

³ See S 1:7,23* = Dh 143. See CPD: apa-bodhati; PED: palibuddhati.

2.1.2 The Commentary, however, glosses it as “who, pulling back, understands (*apaharanto bujjhati*, SA 1:37,14-15); hence, it supports the reading *apabodhati* (*apa + bodh*) (CPD).⁴ This commentarial gloss, however, seems somewhat forced, that is, reading more than what the text denotes and context connotes. However, the Dhammapada verses (Dh 143-144) give just such an interpretation [3.1.2].

2.1.3 Apparently, the PTS readings take the word as deriving from *a + pabodh* (*pa + √BUDH*, to understand). However, when we translate S 35c as “who understands blame | as a good horse does the whip,” it does not fully fit with S 35d.

The preferred reading is *apabodhati*, “avoids,” which fits the context best. Thus, we have “who avoids blame | as a good horse does the whip.” This translation also fits well with the closing verse, S 36.

2.2 COMMENTARY’S INTERPRETATION

2.2.1 Although the verse includes no ostensible interrogative, the Commentary interprets it as posing a question. We should take *koci* to be equivalent to *kvaci*, although the Commentary glosses it as a personal pronoun.⁵

2.2.2 The Commentary says: As a good thoroughbred who knows when to pull back from the whip, not letting it strike him, so a monk who is keen to avoid blame—who knows to pull back from it—does not let any genuine ground for abuse strike him.

The deva asks: “Is there any such arhat?” But no one is wholly free from abuse on false grounds. The Buddha answers that such arhats, who avoid unwholesome states from a sense of moral shame, are few.

3 Related texts

3.1 PALI VERSES AND SANSKRIT PARALLEL

3.1.1 The Sanskrit parallel in **the Udāna,varga** (Uv 19.5), alongside its Pali parallels, are as follows:

S 35 = Dh 143

*hirī,nisedho puriso
koci lokasmim vijjati
yo nindaṃ apabodhati
asso bhadro kasāṃ ivāti*

Is there a person, restrained by moral shame
found anywhere in the world,
who avoids blame
as a good horse does the whip?

Uv 19.5

*hrī niṣevī hi puruṣaḥ
prājñō yaḥ susamāhitaḥ
sarva,pāpaṃ jahāty eṣa
bhadraśvo hi kaśāṃ iva*

A person, restrained by moral shame,
whose wisdom is well established—
he abandons all bad
as a well-bred horse does the whip.

⁴ Cf *palibuddhati*, “to ward off, prevent, keep clear of” (PED).

⁵ On the phrase ***koci lokasmim***, cf *koci loke* (Dh 179); also “Now your majesty is not giving gifts anywhere” (*na kho dāni devassa koci dānaṃ dīyati*, S 2.23/1:59,18), where Comy glosses *kocīti katthaci* (SA 1:114.25). Also *kocid eva suvaṇṇa,kāyurā nāga,rājaṃ bharanti piṇḍena* (J 4:92,7*); *katthacid eva game vā nigame vā* (J 4:92,17’); *n’ev’amhākaṃ bhayaṃ koci vane vāḷesu vijjati*, J 6:89,23*; *imasmiṃ vane katthaci ekapadese pi ...* (J 6:89,24’); *na kvaci parihāyāmīti ... na koci parihāyāmīti pi pāṭho, so yev’attho* (BA 267,22). Cf **Sadda,nīti**, *kocīti kvaci* (Sadd 305,30).

3.1.2 Dh 143-144

3.1.2.1 S 35 = Dh 143 is actually the first of a pair of Dhammapada verses, the second verse of which is a very significant one, thus:

<p><i>Asso yathā bhadro kasā, niviṭṭho ātāpino saṃveginō bhavātha saddhāya sīlena ca viriyena ca samādhinā dhamma, vinicchayena ca sampanna, vijjā, caraṇā paṭissatā pahassatha dukkam idaṃ anappakaṃ</i> (Dh 144)</p>	<p>Like a well-bred horse touched by the whip is made assertive and swift— by faith, and by moral virtue, and by effort, by samadhi, and by scrutiny of mental states, endowed with knowledge and wisdom, mindful, you will abandon this suffering in no small way.</p>
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Dh 144 explains that just as the horse is made to exert itself and run faster on account of the whip, on account of faith, moral virtue, effort, samadhi and investigation of mental states, one is endowed with knowledge and conduct, becomes mindful, and so fully abandons suffering.

3.1.2.2 The teaching set—faith (*saddhā*), moral virtue (*sīla*), effort (*virīya*), samadhi (*samādhī*) and investigation of mental states (*dhamma, vinicchaya*)—seems to be found only here in the Dhammapada Commentary. It then defines each of these items (DhA 3:86 f):

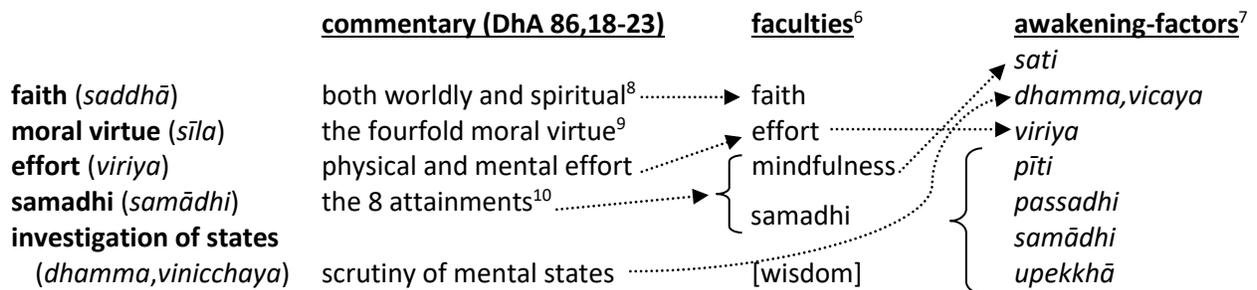


Diagram 3.1.2.2. Comparative table of teaching sets

3.1.2.3 This set of 5 items from the Dhammapada Commentary is interesting and significant [Diag 3.1.2.2] because it is a synthesis or combination—or a *summary*—of two important sets regarding meditation: the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’indriya*) and the 7 awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*). **The 5 spiritual faculties** are a *vertical* or *synchronic* cross-section of our meditating practice: our faith moves us to sit in meditation, effort keeps it going, mindfulness directs us to do it rightly, bringing about samadhi, the mental oneness that helps us cultivate wisdom.

⁶ The 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc’indriya*): respectively, *saddhā, virīya, sati, samādhī* and *paññā*. See **Pañc’indriya**, SD 10.4; SD 3.6 (3); SD 54.3h (3.1).

⁷ The 7 awakening-factors (*satta bojjhaṅga*): respectively, mindfulness, investigation of states, effort, zest, tranquillity, samadhi and equanimity. See **(Bojjhaṅga) Sīla S** (S 46.3), SD 10.15.

⁸ Faith that is “worldly” (*lokiya*), of one who has not reached the path yet (ie, not even a streamwinner); faith that is “spiritual” (*lok’uttara*), of one on the path of awakening (streamwinner onwards).

⁹ “The fourfold moral virtue” (*catu, parisuddhi, sīla*): (1) the restraint of the monastic code; (2) the restraint of the senses; (3) the purification of livelihood; and (4) moral virtue connected with the requisites: see SD 24.6a (2.3).

¹⁰ The 8 attainments (*aṭṭha samāpatti*) are the 4 form dhyanas (*rūpa jhāna*) and the 4 formless attainments (*arūpa samāpatti*): see **(Anupubba) Vihāra S 1** (A 9.32), SD 95.1; SD 8.4 (12.3).

*yo nindaṃ apabodhati*¹⁶
asso bhadro kasāṃ ivāti

(S 35)

who keeps clear of blame¹⁷
as a well-bred horse does the whip?

(The Blessed One:)

3 *Hirī, nisedhā tanuyā*
ye caranti sadā satā
antaṃ dukkhassa pappuyya
caranti visame saman'ti

(S 36)

Few are those restrained by moral shame
who fare ever mindful,
who, having reached suffering's end,
fare evenly amongst the uneven.¹⁸

— evaṃ —

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¹⁶ Be *apabodhati*; Be:Ka Ke Se *apabodheti*; Ce Ee *appabodhati*. See (2.1).

¹⁷ See (2.1.3).

¹⁸ This line recurs in S 12d* (S 1.7/1:4,7), where Comy explains: “(They) fare evenly amongst the uneven” means that they fare harmoniously (*sama*) amongst the disharmonious (*visama*) crowds of the worldly domain, or amongst the disharmonious groups of beings, or amongst the disharmonious classes of defilements (*caranti visame saman'ti visame vā loka, sannivase visame vā satta, nikkāye visame vā kilsea, jāte samarṃ carantīti*, SA 1:26,1-3). In simple terms, this means that the moral person lives joyfully peaceful within and harmoniously with others, even when the environment is unwholesome.