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(Abhabba) Tayo,dhamma Sutta

The Discourse on the Three Things (Regarding Incapability) | A 10.76/5:144-149

Chinese Āgama SĀ 346 = T2.95c17-96b24; SĀ 760 = T2.199c27-200a13; Skt Tripathi 1962(25):204-210

Theme: Why and how to practise the spiritual life

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003; rev 2010

Sutta reflection

Although this Sutta is abridged, that is, the repetitive sentences have been restructured to highlight only the key words, the main sections of the sutta have been given in full. Since this is a sutta for personal reflection these important passages have been given in full. On your first reading, you might intellectualize what you have read. These passages should be read with the heart, that is, with an inquiring mind relating it to one's daily lives and current wisdom.

You should have at least read the whole sutta once right through to have an idea of its structure and general teaching. Then select the section (that is, (A), (B) or (C)) that appeals to you the most and read it reflectively as a daily or periodic practice. Once you have some insight into it, go on to the section you feel least attracted to and read it reflectively. Go back and forth in this manner as you feel comfortable with it.

If you are busy or simply wish to do a very short reflection, the recommended passage is §40, that is, the closing paragraph, which is the key paragraph.

Ideally, each day (otherwise, periodically), in **a quiet moment**, reflect on your daily life in connection with one of the 10 links here and examine how it bears on your personal experience. It is all right if you are not sure about what is going on: simply say to yourself: "I need to be more aware of what is going on here."

This can be done before or after your meditation. This kind of meditation is called the recollection on the Dharma (*dharmānussati*). Close by cultivating lovingkindness within yourself ("May I be well and happy...") and then radiate it to all beings. (One effective method is to recollect a very happy moment during the day or in your life and smile at it with joy and build your lovingkindness from there.)

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The Discourse on the Three Things (Regarding Incapability)

A 10.76/5:144-149

(A) The three great evils

1 Bhikshus, if three things were not found in the world, the Tathāgata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, would not appear in the world, nor would the Dharma-Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata shine in the world.

What are the three?

2 (1) They are **birth, decay [old age] and death**.

If these three things were not found in the world, the Tathāgata would not have appeared in the world, nor would the Dharma-Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata shine in the world.

But because these three things are found in the world, therefore, the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, appears in the world and the Dharma-Vinaya, proclaimed by the Tathagata, shine in the world.

The three unwholesome roots

3 Without giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up birth, decay and death. What are the three?

4 (2) They are **greed, hate and delusion**. Without giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would not be able to give up birth, decay and death.

The three fetters

5 Without giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up greed, hate and delusion.

What are the three?

6 (3) They are **personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows**.¹

Without giving up these three things,² bhikshus, one would not be able to give up greed, hate and delusion. [145]

The three wrong mindings

7 Without giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

What are the three?

8 (4) They are **unwise attention,³ following the wrong way,⁴ and mental sluggishness.⁵**

Without giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would not be able to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

The three wrong attentions

9 Without giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness.

What are the three?

10 (5) They are **unmindfulness,⁶ lack of full awareness,⁷ and a distracted mind.⁸**

Without giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way and mental sluggishness.

¹ For def, see Vbh 915/364.

² These are the first three mental fetters, overcoming which makes one a streamwinner. **The 10 fetters** (*dasa samyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). On *sakkāya* as the 5 aggregates, see Cūḷa Vedalla S (M 44). Spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*) is the uncertainty over what is wholesome and unwholesome, whether a deed should be done or not, etc. It is the lack of a desire to heal oneself, and taking various sides due to one's being indecisive and unwise attention (Vism 14.177/471), in short, not making an attempt to clearly think things out for oneself. Clinging to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*) is holding on to the view that merely keeping to rituals and vows can bring one purification.

³ "Unwise attention," *ayoniso manasikāra*, that is, to regard what is impermanent as being permanent, what is painful as being pleasurable, what is not self as self, what is foul as beautiful (Vbh 936/373; MA 1:64).

⁴ "Following the wrong way," *kummagga sevana*, that is, not keeping to the noble eightfold path (Vbh 936/373).

⁵ "Mental sluggishness," *cetaso līnattam*, that is, sloth and torpor (A 1:3; S 5:64=103; Vbh 345; Nm 412, 492).

⁶ "Unmindfulness," *mutṭha, sacca*, ie the opp of *sati* or *paṭissati*. Vism 4.172/163 explains that full awareness (*sampajañña*) has the characteristic of non-confusion; its function is investigation, manifested as scrutiny. Mindfulness (*sati*) has the characteristic of remembering. Its function is not forgetting, manifested as guarding. *Sampajāno* is also tr as "fully aware," "fully understanding," "clearly comprehending"; see M:ÑB 2001 n147.

⁷ "Lack of full awareness," *asampajañña*, ie opp of *sampajañña*, full awareness. See Pug 2.18/25 & prev n.

⁸ "A distracted mind," *cetaso vikkhepaṃ*, mental restlessness (*uddhacca*) (ThaA 1:176).

The three wrong attitudes

11 Without giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up unmindfulness, lack of full awareness, and a distracted mind.

What are the three?

12 (6) They are **lack of desire to see the noble ones**,⁹ **lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma**,¹⁰ and **a fault-finding mind**.¹¹

Without giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up unmindfulness, lack of full awareness, and a distracted mind.

The three wrong conducts

13 Without giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

What are the three?

14 (7) They are **restlessness**,¹² **lack of restraint**,¹³ and **immorality**.¹⁴

Without giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind. [146]

The three lacks

15 Without giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

What are the three?

16 (8) They are **lack of faith**,¹⁵ **unfriendliness**¹⁶ and **laziness**.¹⁷

Without giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

The three negative emotions

17 Without giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

What are the three?

18 (9) They are **disrespect**,¹⁸ **intractability**¹⁹ and **evil friendship**.²⁰

⁹ “Lack of desire to see the noble ones,” *ariyānaṃ adassana.kamyatāṃ*.

¹⁰ “Lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma,” *ariya,dhammaṃ asotu,kamyatāṃ*.

¹¹ “A fault-finding mind,” *upārambha,cittatāṃ*, an angry mind, a mind aroused by hate (ThaA 2:153).

¹² “Restlessness,” *uddhacca*, that is, distraction, mental wavering, mental turmoil (Vbh 552/255).

¹³ “Lack of restraint,” *asaṃvara*. On experiencing a sense-object one takes in its signs (general appearance) and its details, arousing covetousness and mental pain (Vbh 933/372). On “signs and details,” see *Nimitta & Anuvyañjana* = SD 19.14

¹⁴ “Immorality,” *dussīlya*, that is, wrong action through body, speech and mind (Vbh 933/372).

¹⁵ “Lack of faith,” *assaddhiya*, ie, lack of confidence in the three jewels. There are 2 kinds of *saddhā*, faith, confidence, trust: (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlika,saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170,21); (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati,saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,18, 401,23; MA 2:388, 3:116, 274). *Amūlaka* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected” (V 2:243, 3:163 & Comy).

¹⁶ “Unfriendliness,” *avadaññūta*, being inaffable, niggardly, unkind, contumacious (Vbh 931/371).

¹⁷ “Laziness,” *kosajja*, that is, lack of striving, constantly being distracted by the five strands of sense-pleasures (of the physical senses) (Vbh 928/369 f).

¹⁸ “Disrespect,” *anādariya*, that is, disregard for others, not caring about others (Vbh 931/371).

¹⁹ “Intractability,” *dovaccassatā*, that is, not caring, intractability for admonition, being unresponsive to another’s words (V 4:113 = 185 = Dhs 1325 = Vbh 901/359).

²⁰ “Evil friendship,” *pāpa,mittatā*, opp of spiritual friendship. On evil friends, see eg *Sigāl’ovāda S* (D 31.15-20/3:185 f) = SD 4.1.

Without giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

The three unguarded acts

19 Without giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up disrespect, intractability and evil friendship.

What are the three?

20 (10) They are **lack of moral shame**,²¹ **lack of moral fear**,²² and **heedlessness**.²³

Without giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up disrespect, intractability and evil friendship.

(B) Why we are unable to destroy the three great evils

21 There is this recluse, bhikshus, who lacks moral shame, lacks moral fear and is heedless.

Being heedless, he is unable to give up disrespect, intractability and evil friendship.

As an evil friend, he is unable to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

Being lazy, is unable to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

Being immoral, he is unable to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

Having a fault-finding mind, he is unable to give up unmindfulness, lack of full awareness, and a distracted mind.

Having a distracted [147] mind, he is unable to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness.

Having mental sluggishness, he is unable to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

Having spiritual doubt, he is unable to give up greed, hate and delusion.

And without giving up greed, hate and delusion, he is unable to give up birth, decay and death.

²¹ “Lack of moral shame,” *ahirika*, that is, opp of moral shame, *hiri* (Skt *hrī*) ie a sense of disgust with evil. The Abhidhamma defines moral shame as “to be ashamed of what one ought to be ashamed of, to be ashamed of performing evil and unwholesome deeds” (*yam hiriyati hiriyitabbena hiriyati pāpakānaṃ akusalāṃ dhammānaṃ sam-āpattiyā, ayam vuccati hiri*, Pug 24; cf Vism 14.142/464; J 1:129 f; DhsA 124); cf Dhs:R 18 f. It is one of the 7 noble treasures (*ariya, dhana*, DA 2:34; ThaA 240; VvA 113), ie treasures of generosity (*cāga, dhanai*, D 3:163, 251; A 4:5; VvA 113; cf A 3:53): faith, moral conduct, moral shame, moral fear, learning, generosity, wisdom. Cf Sn 77, 462 (= D 1:168), 719. Moral shame is often paired with moral fear (*ottappa*) (eg M 1:271; S 2:220; A 2:78; It 34; Tikap 61; J 1:127; Vism 221; DhA 3:73), and, as the foundation for morality, called “the world-protectors” (*loka, -pāla*, A 1:51), since they are the preconditions for a functional society. The term *ottappa* is derived from *apa* + \sqrt{TRAP} (to be abashed) [Skt **āpatrapya* > *apatrapā* (Trenckner)]. Andersen suggests that this etym must be preferred to that of Childers: **autappya* > *uttāpa*, *ut* + \sqrt{TAP} (heat) (PG 62). Edgerton (BHSD) has *apatrāpya* and the cpd *hrīr-apatrāpya* (P *hiri, ottappa*). According to **Visuddhi, magga**, the proximate cause for moral shame is self-respect, while for moral fear it is respect for others. Out of self-respect (*attāna garu katvā*), one, like the daughter of a good family, rejects evil-doing through moral shame. Out of respect for others (*param garu katvā*), one, like a courtesan, rejects evil-doing through moral fear (Vism 14.142/464 f). The former is sometimes known as self-regarding moral conduct (motivated by the *shame* the deed entails), while the latter as other-regarding moral conduct (motivated by the healthy *fear* of karmic repercussion). As such these two actions are known as the two bright states that protect the world, if not for which “one would neither respect one’s mother, nor one’s mother’s sister, nor one’s brother’s wife, nor one’s teacher’s wife....” (A 1:51). [In his tr, Ñāṇamoli renders *hiri* as “conscience,” but apparently mis-translates *ottappati* as “is ashamed” and *ottappa* as “shame,” Vism:Ñ 524 f.] See **Hiri Ottappa S** or **Cariya S** (A 2.1.9/1:51) = SD 2.5c.

²² “Lack of moral fear,” *anotappī*, ie opp of *ottappa*, moral fear. See prec n.

²³ “Heedlessness,” *pamāda*, that is, wrong conduct of the doors (body, speech and mind) and being habitually under the control of the 5 strands of sense-pleasures (Vbh 846/350), ie not working for one’s spiritual development.

(C) How to destroy the three great evils

22 (1) Bhikshus, by giving up three things, one is able to give up **birth, decay and death.**

What are the three?

23 (2) They are **greed, hate and delusion.** By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up birth, decay and death.

24 By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up greed, hate and delusion.

What are the three?

25 (3) They are **personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.**

By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up greed, hate and delusion.

26 By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

What are the three?

27 (4) They are **unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness.**

By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

28 By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness.

What are the three?

29 (5) They are **unmindfulness, lack of full awareness, and a distracted mind.**

By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness. [148]

30 By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up unmindfulness, lack of full awareness, and a distracted mind.

What are the three?

31 (6) They are **lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.**

By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up unmindfulness, lack of full awareness, and a distracted mind.

32 By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

What are the three?

33 (7) They are **restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.**

By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

34 By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

What are the three?

35 (8) They are **lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.**

By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

36 By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

What are the three?

37 (9) They are **disrespect, intractability and evil friendship.**

By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

38 By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up disrespect, intractability and evil friendship.

What are the three?

39 (10) They are **lack of moral shame, lack of moral fear, and heedlessness.**

By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up disrespect, intractability and evil friendship.

40 There is this recluse, bhikshus, who has moral shame, has moral fear and is heedful.

Being heedful, he is able to give up disrespect, intractability and evil friendship.

As a spiritual [149] friend, he is able to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

Being assertive,²⁴ he is able to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

Being morally virtuous, he is able to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

Not having a fault-finding mind, he is able to give up unmindfulness, lack of full awareness, and a distracted mind.

Having an undistracted mind, he is able to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness.

Being without mental sluggishness, he is able to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

Being free from spiritual doubt, he is able to give up greed, hate and delusion.

And having given up greed, hate and delusion, he is able to give up birth, decay and death.

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²⁴ “Assertive,” *āraddha, viriya*.