

23

(Dasaka) Appamāda Sutta

The Discourse on Heedfulness (the Tens) | A 10.15/5:21 f
Theme: Diligence is the foremost of wholesome states (in brief)
Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2013

1 Sutta highlights

The **(Dasaka) Appamāda Sutta** (A 10.15), using 10 parables, declares that diligence or heedfulness (*appamāda*) is the foremost of wholesome states which are all rooted in diligence. The Sutta is simply stating the primacy of diligence in spiritual practice. That is all the Sutta teaches, without any elaboration on how to proceed with our practice in this connection.

This brevity of the Sutta is, however, understandable, because the suttas that elaborate on the eight-fold path and related teachings—forming the famous “7 sets” of the 37 limbs of awakening (*bodhi.pakkhiyā, dhamma*) are found in the first 7 chapters of **the Mahā Vagga** (S 5), the fifth and largest of the Saṃyutta Nikāya books.¹

2 The 10 parables

The **(Dasaka) Appamāda Sutta** (A 10.15) is so called because it contains 10 parables illustrating the primacy of diligence, that is, to say, “whatever wholesome states there are, all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them” [§§2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20].² The first parable—that on the Tathagata [§1]—recurs in **the Agga-p, pasāda Sutta** (A 4.24).³

Each of these 10 parables occurs on their own in a special chapter, titled **Appamāda Peyyāla Vagga** (“The Chapter on the Diligence Cycle”) in the fifth and last chapter—the Mahā Vagga (the Great Chapter)—of the Saṃyutta Nikāya (S 45.139-148/5:41-45). The suttas there are named as follows:

(1) Tathāgata Sutta	the Buddha is the foremost of all beings	S 45.139/5:41-43
(2) (Hatthi) Pada Sutta	an elephant hoofprint is the largest of hoofprints	S 45.140/5:43
(3) Kūṭāgāra Sutta	all the rafters meet up at the ridgepole	S 45.141/5:43
(4) Mūla (Gandha) Sutta	kalanusari is the foremost of fragrant roots	S 45.142/5:44
(5) Sāra (Gandha) Sutta	red sandalwood is the foremost of fragrant heartwoods	S 45.143/5:44
(6) Vassika Sutta	jasmine is the foremost of fragrant flowers	S 45.144/5:44
(7) (Cakka, vatti) Rāja Sutta	the wheel-turner is the foremost of kings	S 45.145/5:44
(8) Canda (Pabha) Sutta	moonlight is the foremost light in the night sky	S 45.146/5:44
(9) (Sarada) Suriya Sutta	the autumn sun shines most brilliantly	S 45.147/5:44
(10) (Kāsika) Vattha Sutta	Kasi cloth is the foremost (the finest) of cloths	S 45.148/5:45

All these parables, except for the tenth and last one, are the same as those of **the (Dasaka) Appamāda Sutta** (A 10.15) here, where both sets of parables illustrate the primacy of diligence. The parables of 7 of the above suttas (S 45.141-147), that is, the middle seven suttas, recur in **the Anicca Saññā Sutta** (S 22.102).⁴

Each of the 10 suttas of **the Appamāda Peyyāla Vagga** (S 45.139-148) follows this standard four-fold sequence:

- (1) Diligence refers to the cultivation of the noble eightfold path leading to solitude (*viveka*).
- (2) The cultivation of the noble eightfold path leads to the abandoning of lust (*rāga, vinaya*).
- (3) The cultivation of the noble eightfold path has the death-free state (*amata*) as its goal.
- (4) The cultivation of the noble eightfold path makes us “bend towards nirvana” (*nibbāna, ninna*).

¹ For an intro to **Mahā Vagga**, see S:B 1485-1522 & Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001: 252-258.

² Compare these 10 parables with the 10 in **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102) (some of which are identical) where they illustrate the primacy of the perception of impermanence (S 22.102/3:155-157) @ SD 12.12 (2.0.1).

³ A 4.34/2:34 f = SD 45.13.

⁴ S 22.102, 7-13/3:156 f = SD 12.12.

The Discourse on Heedfulness (the Tens)

A 10.15/5:21 f

[The internal numbering here does not follow that of PTS]

(1) The Tathagata parable⁵

1 Bhikshus, as far as there are beings, whether footless, or two-footed, or four-footed, or many-footed,⁶

whether with form, or formless, or conscious [percipient], or non-percipient, or neither percipient-nor-non-percipient,⁷

the **Tathagata** is the foremost amongst them as the arhat [the worthy], fully self-awakened one.⁸

2 Even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are,⁹

all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them.¹⁰

(2) The elephant's hoofprint parable

3 Bhikshus, just as the footprints of any living being that walks can be placed within **an elephant's hoofprint**,¹¹ and so the elephant's hoofprint is declared to be the foremost of them because of its great size,¹²

4 *even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are,*

all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them.

(3) The parable of the ridgepole and rafters¹³

5 Bhikshus, just as all the rafters of a house with a peaked roof lead to **the ridgepole**, slope towards the ridgepole, converge at the ridgepole, and the ridgepole is said to be their peak¹⁴—

⁵ This parable recurs in **Agga-p,pasāda S** (A 4.34/2:34 f), SD 45.13. On the 10 parables of this Sutta, see Intro (2).

⁶ *Yāvatā bhikkhave sattā apadā vā dvi,padā vā catu-p,padā vā bahu-p,padā vā.*

⁷ *Rūpino vā arūpino vā saññino vā asaññino vā n'eva,saññi,nāsaññino vā.*

⁸ *Tathāgato tesam aggam akkhāyati araham sammā,sambuddho.*

⁹ *Evam evam kho bhikkhave ye keci kusalā dhammā, sabbe te appamāda,mūlakā appamāda,samosaraṇā, appamādo tesam* aggam akkhāyati. *So Ee Se; Be Ce Ke tesam dhammānam*

¹⁰ Comy: How is it (diligence, *appamāda*) is the foremost of them (wholesome states)? On account of benefitting the recipient. For, on account of diligence, they (the wholesome states) are obtained; hence, it is the foremost amongst them. (*Katham esa tesam aggo'ti? Paṭilābhak'aṭṭhena. Appamādena hi te paṭilabbhanti, tasmā so tesam aggo*, SA 3:133).

¹¹ This parable appears in (**Ubho Attha**) **Appamāda S** (S 3.17/1:86), SD 42.22(3.2), & (**Chakka**) **Appamāda S** (A 6.53/3:364 f), SD 42.22. In both cases, the Buddha says that diligence (*appamāda*) is beneficial both here and hereafter.

¹² *Seyyathā'pi mahā,rāja yāni kānici jaṅgalānam* pāṇānam pada,jātāni, sabbāni tāni hatthi,pade samodhānam gacchanti, hatthi,padam tesam aggam akkhāyati yad idam mahantattena. *Be Se jaṅgalānam; Ce Ee jaṅgamānam* (cf SA 1:98, 99; CA 334). This passage recurs in **Mahā Hatthi,padōpama S** (M 28), where it is the key parable for the 4 noble truths being inclusive of “all wholesome states” (M 28,2/1:184), SD 6.16; also in (**Chakka**) **Appamāda S** (A 6.53,5.3/1:86),SD 42.22.

¹³ This parable recurs in **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102) as its second, which is applied to the teaching that the perception of impermanence, properly cultivated, completely destroys all sensual lust, lust for form, lust for existence, ignorance, and the “I am” conceit (S 22.102,5/3:155 f), SD 12.12.

6 even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are,
all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them. [22]

(4) The kalanusari and fragrant roots parable

7 Bhikshus, just as amongst fragrant roots, **kalanusari**¹⁵ is said to be the foremost¹⁶—

8 even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are,
all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them.

(5) The red sandalwood and heartwood parable

9 Bhikshus, just as amongst whatever heartwood, **red sandalwood** is said to be the foremost,¹⁷

10 even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are,
all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them.

(6) The jasmine and fragrant flowers parable

11 Bhikshus, just as amongst fragrant flowers, **jasmine**¹⁸ is said to be the foremost¹⁹—

12 even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are,
all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them.

(7) The wheel-turner and petty princes parable

13 Bhikshus, just as petty princes are all the vassals of **the wheel-turning monarch**, and the wheel-turning monarch is declared to be the foremost amongst them²⁰—

14 even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are,
all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them.

(8) The moon-light and stars parable

15 Bhikshus, just as the light of all the stars do not amount to a sixteenth [an iota] of **moonlight**, and moonlight is declared to be the foremost amongst them²¹—

¹⁴ *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave kūṭāgārassa yā kāci gopānasiyo sabbā tā kūṭāṅgamā kūṭa, ninnā kūṭa, samosaraṇā kūṭam tāsam aggam akkhāyati.* Alt tr: “Bhikshus, just as all the rafters of a pinnacled house meet up at the pinnacle, slope towards the pinnacle, and the pinnacle is said to be their peak [foremost].” This parable recurs in **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102,5.1/3:155) & SD 12.12 (2.2), & **(Chakka) Appamāda S** (A 6.53,10/3:364) & SD 42.22 (1); see also SD 12.12 (2.4).

¹⁵ *Kālānusāri*: see SD 12.12 (2.5).

¹⁶ *Seyyathā pi bhikkhave ye keci mūla, gandhā, kālānusāriyam tesaṃ aggam akkhāyati.* This parable recurs in **(Kālānusāri) Mūla S** (S 45.142/5:44), & **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102,8.1/3:156) & SD 12.12 (2).

¹⁷ *Seyyathā pi bhikkhave ye keci sāra, gandhā, lohita, candanam tesaṃ aggam akkhāyati.* This parable recurs in **Sāra S** (S 48.55,4/5:44), SD 42.19; **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102,9.1/3:156) & SD 12.12 (2)., where see also red sandalwood illus.

¹⁸ *Vassikam*. For jasmine illus, see **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102,10.1/3:156), SD 12.12.

¹⁹ *Seyyathā pi bhikkhave ye keci puppha, gandhā, vassikam tesaṃ aggam akkhāyati.* This parable recurs in **Vassika S** (S 45.144/5:44); **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102,10.1/3:156) & SD 12.12 (2.7).

²⁰ *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave ye keci kuḍḍa, rājāno* [Be kuṭṭa, rājāno; Ee khudda, rājāno; Ce kuḍḍa, rājāno; Se khudda-ka, rājāno] *sabbe te raññō cakkavattissa anuyāntā bhavanti.* This parable recurs at **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102,11.1/3:156) & SD 12.12 (2.8), & **(Cakka,vatti) Rāja S** (S 45.145/5:44).

16 *even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are, all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them.*

(9) The autumn sun parable

17 Bhikshus, just as in autumn, when the sky is clear, free of rain clouds, **the sun**, going through space, dispelling darkness, shines and burns and beams²²—

18 *even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are, all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them.*

(10) The great rivers and ocean parable

19 Bhikshus, just as whatever great rivers there, that is to say, the Ganges, the Yamuna, the Aciravati, the Sarabhi, the Mahi²³—

20 they all flow into **the ocean**, bends towards the ocean, slopes towards the ocean, tends towards the ocean, and the great ocean is said to be the foremost amongst them,²⁴

21 *even so, bhikshus, whatever wholesome states there are, all of them are rooted in diligence, converge on diligence, diligence is declared the foremost amongst them.*

— evaṃ —

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²¹ *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave yā kāci tāra, rūpānam pabhā sabbā tā candima, pabhāya kalam nāgghanti soḷasim canda-p, pabhā tāsam aggam akkhāyati.* This parable recurs in **(Chakka) Appamāda S** (A 6.53 (6); **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102, 12.1/3:156) & SD 12.12 (2.9); **(Tāraka, rūpa) Canda S** (S 45.156/5:44).

²² *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave sarada, samaye viddhe vigata, valāhake deve ādicco nabham abhussakkamāno* [Be Ce Se so; Ee abhussakkamāno] *sabbam ākāsa, gataṃ tama, gataṃ abhivihacca bhāsate ca tapate ca virocate ca.* This parable recurs in **Anicca Saññā S** (S 22.102, 13.1/3:156) & SD 12.12 (2.10); **(Sarada) Suriya S** (S 45.147/5:44).

²³ There are 6 **Pācīna Ss** (S 45.91-96)—the first 5 dedicated to each of the rivers, while the fifth mentions all 5—that mention these 5 rivers: just as these river head for the ocean, so too the noble eightfold path leads to nirvana (S 45.91-96/5:38 f). They are also mentioned in **Satta Suriya S** (A 7.62), where they are all said to dry up when the sun appears in the sky, a parable reflecting on the impermanence of all formations (A 7.62.13/4:101), SD 67.3.

²⁴ There are 3 sets of the 5 “great river” parables, each featuring one of these rivers separately flowing into the ocean, viz: **Samudda Ninna S 1-5** (S 5:39 f), **Samudda Ninna S 6-10** (S 5:40), **Samudda Ninna S 11-15** (S 5:41): these parables illustrate how the noble eightfold path leads to nirvana. A similar Ganges parable is found in **Mahā Vaccha, gotta S** (M 73, 14/1:493), SD 27.4.