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Dhamma, vihārī Sutta 1

The First Discourse on the One Who Lives the Dharma | A 5.73

Theme: The Dharma is experienced with inner calm

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1 Introduction

1.1 SUTTA HIGHLIGHTS

1.1.1 Key terms

1.1.1.1 As the titles of the two related Suttas—Dhamma, vihārī Suttas 1 and 2—suggest, they are related to “living the Dharma,” that is, practising the true teaching. Both Suttas have the same structure, giving 5 comments: 4 wrong approaches and closing with the passage on right practice. The Dhamma, vihārī Sutta 1 is the longer of the two.

1.1.1.2 Here, as we have noted, the word *vihārī* connotes a “practitioner.” One who “dwells in the Dharma,” is also one who practises the Dharma. He lives by the Dharma, and is an exemplar of it. In short, he is a true practitioner, who is surely heading towards awakening.¹

1.1.2 Essence of the Suttas

1.1.2.1 The Dhamma, vihārī Sutta 1 (A 5.73), the longer of the two, says that if we only learn or master the Dharma (*pariyatti*), or only make it known (*paññatti*), or only recite it (to memorize it) (*saṃjñāya*), or only think (or philosophizes) about it (*vitakka*), we are not practitioners, that is, we are not really benefitting from the Dharma.

If we simply “master” the Dharma, we may be only collecting teachings without really tasting the Dharma.² If we merely “teach” the Dharma without having truly experienced it, we are like lifeless sound recorders, or mimics of others, lacking truth and depth.³ If we only “recite” the Dharma, such as trying to master it without any proper foundation in the suttas, we might end up taking it merely as another button on our colourful guru coat.⁴ If we only “think” of the Dharma as a “philosophy,” we are merely giving lipservice to a method of personal development, perhaps merely making a living out of the Dharma without any love for it.⁵ In the end, we have to face the true fruits of our wrong approaches.

This is not to discount all such activities as being worthless. They each should be taken up with the aim of wisely understanding the meaning of the Dharma, that is, to understand the true purpose of the Dharma: *to understand suffering and to be free of it*. The Sutta closes with the Buddha declaring that he has compassionately taught us everything for our spiritual progress. All we need to do now is to close our eyes, and see what the eye and other senses, sense not, that is, to meditate and be liberated. Thus, we “live the Dharma.”

1.1.2.2 The Dhamma, vihārī Sutta 2 (A 5.74) is a shorter statement of the same message. Whatever of the Dharma that we learn, teach, recite or think about, we should make every effort to understand their

¹ See **Miga, jāla S 1** (S 35.63,3) + SD 44.6 (3.1).

² Like a spoon that does not taste the soup (Dh 64): see SD 24.6a (1.2).

³ An example is that of the aged monk Udāyi, who, after the great elders have left, often sits on the Dharma-seat so that visitors thought that he is a wise elder, but he shows his true colours in no time (DhA 5.5/2:31 f): see SD 24.6a (1.2).

⁴ On the animosity and rivalry between scholars and meditators, see (**Dullābha**) **Mahā Cunda S** (A 6.46), SD 4.6.

⁵ See (**Arahatta**) **Māluṅkyā,putta S** (S 35.95), SD 5.9.

true meaning and purpose. This is “going further” (*uttari*) with wisdom, beyond what is merely an external gesture for an inner experience.

The Dhamma,viḥārī Sutta 2 closes just like the Dhamma,viḥārī Sutta 1, with the Buddha reminding us that mastering, teaching, reciting and thinking about the Dharma should be taken up with the purpose of wisely understanding its meaning, that is, to see its purpose and pursue it. The Sutta ends with the Buddha declaring that he has compassionately taught us everything for our spiritual progress. All we need to do now is to look deep into these windows of Dharma joy, and walk through the door of liberation. Thus we “live the Dharma.”

1.1.3 A late sutta

Clearly, the two Dhamma,viḥārī Suttas (A 5.73+74) are late canonical Suttas, but no less important than the early suttas. Firstly, the listing of the classes of teachings clearly means that they have been taught regularly and in detail so as to be systematized into a set of nine teachings [2]. And so we have a sort of canonization of the Buddha’s teachings, which probably occurred soon after the Buddha’s passing so as to preserve the true Dharma.

Secondly, the two short and succinct Suttas remind us of the true meaning and purpose of the Dharma: to calm and clear our mind in meditation and mindfulness for the sake of spiritual liberation. The vitality of these Suttas is that they address the very issues that we, the Buddhists of today, face. Because information about Buddhism is so freely available today we easily mistake the chaff for the grain, so that no matter how much Buddhist information we accumulate, we only feel burdened with it, instead of being lightened and liberated by the Dharma.

We are drawn to entertaining “teachers” with glamorous qualities and worldly qualifications without their having really tasted the Dharma. We see speakers as being charismatic because they have memorized or practised some abstruse or “powerful” teachings without understanding why we are really drawn to such teachers and teachings. We have even carefully argues our ideas about Buddhism and think that we must be right,⁶ without realizing that we have changed our minds so many times before. The Suttas remind us that we now need to start changing ourselves for the better, and to know that we are changing for the better.

2 Listing the teachings

2.1 Although there are isolated occasions, such as at the close of **the Madhu,piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18), where the discourse is called a *sutta*,⁷ the Buddha and the early saints usually refer to their teachings simply as *dhamma*. The notion of *sutta* as a finalized sermon or text is a post-Buddha development. The later Canon often mentions “the 9 limbs of the Teacher’s teaching” or “the Teacher’s 9-factored teaching” (*nav’aṅga satthu,sāsana*), that is, as comprising of the following:

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|-------------------------|--|
| (1) <i>sutta</i> | discourses, Sutta Nipāta prose section, Niddesa, Vinaya, Vibhaṅga, and texts with “Sutta” in their titles; |
| (2) <i>geyyā</i> | discourses mixed containing verses; |
| (3) <i>veyya,karaṇa</i> | prose-expositions, sometimes referring to Abhidhamma; |
| (4) <i>gāthā</i> | verses, such as Dhammapada, Thera,gāthā, Therī,gāthā, Sutta Nipāta verses; |
| (5) <i>udāna</i> | inspired utterances, namely, the Udāna; |
| (6) <i>iti,vuttaka</i> | Thus-said discourses, namely, the Iti,vuttaka; |
| (7) <i>jātaka</i> | birth-stories, namely, the Jātaka; |

⁶ See **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.65), SD 35.4a. See esp point (7), “Do not go by reasoned thought” (*ākāra,parivitakka*) (A 3.65,3.1) + Commentary §3.1 (7).

⁷ M 18,22/1:114 @ SD 6.14.

- (8) *abbhūta,dhamma* marvellous accounts;
 (9) *vedalla* catechetical suttas, such as Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta, Mahā Vedalla Sutta, Sammā Ditṭhi Sutta, Sakka,pañha Sutta, Saṅkhāra,bhājanīya Sutta, Mahā Puṇṇama Sutta. (V 3:8; M 1:133; A 2:5, 3:86)

The term *nav'aṅga satthu,sāsana*, however, is late, found only in the Apadāna, the Buddha,vaṁsa and the Commentaries.

2.2 The Mahā Suññata Sutta (M 122) mentions only the first two of the 9 divisions of the teaching [2.1], that is, *sutta* and *geyya*:

20 “Ānanda, a disciple should not regard the teacher as being worthy of his devotion [fit to be followed] for the sake of the exposition of **sutras** [formulas] or of *geyas* [hymns].

Na kho ānanda arahati sāvako satthāraṃ anubandhituṃ yad idaṃ suttaṃ geyyaṃ veyyākaraṇassa hetu. (M 122,20/3:115), SD 11.4

The Sutta also mentions “exposition” (*veyyakaraṇa*) but here it has a general, non-technical sense, meaning simply “exposition,” that is, giving a teaching or explanation. It is likely that *sutta* and *geyyā* here refer to non-Buddhist teachings of the day.

Clearly, the passage here is not concerned with the listing of the canonical texts, but is advising us against following a teacher merely for the sake of “explanations” of teachings, even of sacred and “powerful” teachings. Instead, we should also engage in proper practice.

In the *spirit* of the Dharma, we can, of course, extend the Buddha’s admonition to also mean that besides a theoretical study of the texts, we need to practise the teaching, especially by way of mental cultivation for the sake of spiritual liberation.⁸

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The First Discourse on the One Who Lives the Dharma

A 5.73

1 Then a certain monk approached the Blessed One. Having saluted the Blessed One, he sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, the monk said this to the Blessed One,

One who is not a *dhamma,vihārī*

1.2 “**One who lives the Dharma;**⁹ one who lives the Dharma,’ bhante, so it is said. In what way, bhante, is a monk *one who lives the Dharma?*”

⁸ See eg **Levels of learning**, SD 40a.4 & **Language & discourse**, SD 26.11 (3.2.1).

⁹ *Dhamma,vihārī*, alt trs: “one who lives in the Dharma,” “One who lives by the Dharma.” “One who lives the Dharma” encompasses both senses and more, incl experiencing the joy, wisdom, etc, of the Dharma.

- 2 (1) “Here, bhikshu, a monk **learns** [masters] the Dharma as
1. the discourses, *sutta*
 2. the discourses with verses, *geyya*
 3. the prose expositions, *veyyākaraṇa*
 4. the verses *gāthā*
 5. the inspired sayings, *udāna*
 6. the thus-said sayings, *iti,vuttaka*
 7. the birth-stories, *jātaka*
 8. the marvellous accounts, *abbhuta,dhamma*
 9. the catechisms. *vedalla.*¹⁰

2.2 He passes the day mastering them;¹¹

but he neglects meditative solitude, he does not engage in internal mental calm.¹²

This monk, bhikshu, is called

one great in learning [mastering], *pariyatti,bahula*
not one who lives the Dharma.¹³ [87]

3 (2) Furthermore, bhikshu, a monk **teaches** to others the Dharma in detail, just as he has heard it, just as he has mastered it,

and he passes the day in making the Dharma known;¹⁴

but he neglects meditative solitude, he does not engage in internal mental calm.

This monk, bhikshu, is called

one great in making known (the theory), *paññatti,bahula*¹⁵
not one who lives the Dharma.¹⁶

4 (3) Furthermore, bhikshu, a monk passes the day **reciting** the Dharma in detail, just as he has heard it, just as he has mastered it:

he passes the day in reciting it.¹⁷

but he neglects meditative solitude, he does not engage in internal mental calm.

This monk, bhikshu, is called

one great in recitation, *sajjhāya,bahula*
not one who lives the Dharma.¹⁸

5 (4) Furthermore, bhikshu, a monk passes the day **thinking and pondering in his mind**, turning over in his mind the Dharma, just as he has heard it, just as he has mastered it:

he passes the day thinking about the Dharma,¹⁹

but he neglects meditative solitude, he does not engage in internal mental calm.

¹⁰ *Idha bhikkhu bhikkhu dhammaṃ pariyāpuṇāti suttam̐ geyyam̐ veyyākaraṇam̐ gātham̐ udānam̐ iti,vuttakam̐ jātakam̐ abbhuta,dhammam̐ vedallam̐.*

¹¹ *So tāya dhamma,pariyattiyā divasaṃ atināmeti.*

¹² *Riñcati paṭisallānam̐, nānuyuñjati ajjhataṃ ceto,samatham̐.* Alt tr: “He does not engage himself in mental calm.”

¹³ *Ayam̐ vuccati bhikkhu bhikkhu pariyatti,bahulo no dhamma,vihārī.*

¹⁴ *Puna c’aparam̐ bhikkhu bhikkhu yathā,sutam̐ yathā,pariyattam̐ dhammam̐ vitthārena paresam̐ deseti, so tāya dhamma,paññattiyā* [only Se: ~saññattiyā; see foll n] *divasaṃ atināmeti.*

¹⁵ Only Ce reads *saññatti,bahulo*, “great in informing,” which seems somewhat forced.

¹⁶ *Ayam̐ vuccati bhikkhu bhikkhu paññatti,bahulo no dhamma,vihārī.*

¹⁷ *Puna c’aparam̐ bhikkhu bhikkhu yathā,sutam̐ yathā,pariyattam̐ dhammam̐ vitthārena sajjhāyam̐ karoti, so tena sajjhāyena divasaṃ atināmeti.*

¹⁸ *Ayam̐ vuccati bhikkhu bhikkhu sajjhāya,bahulo no dhamma,vihārī.*

¹⁹ *Puna c’aparam̐ bhikkhu bhikkhu yathā,sutam̐ yathā,pariyattam̐ dhammam̐ cetasā anuvitakketi anuvicāreti manasānupekkhati. So tehi dhamma,vitakkehi divasaṃ atināmeti.*

This monk, bhikshu, is called
 one great in thinking,
not one who lives the Dharma.²⁰ *vitakka,bahula*

The *dhamma,vihārī*

- 6 (5) Here, bhikshu, a monk **learns** the Dharma as
1. the discourses, *sutta*
 2. the discourses with verses, *geyya*
 3. the prose expositions, *veyyākaraṇa*
 4. the verses *gāthā*
 5. the inspired sayings, *udāna*
 6. the thus-said sayings, *iti,vuttaka*
 7. the birth-stories, *jātaka*
 8. the marvellous accounts, *abbhuta,dhamma*
 9. the catechisms. *vedalla.*

6.2 But he does *not* pass the day merely mastering them,
 he does *not* neglect meditative solitude—he engages in internal mental calm.²¹
 Such a monk, bhikshu, is called
one who lives the Dharma. *dhamma,vihārī*

- 7 Thus indeed, bhikshu, have I shown you
 the one intent on *learning*,
 the one great in *making known*,
 the one great in *reciting*,
 the one great in *thinking*,
 the one great in *living the Dharma*.

Instruction to meditate

7.2 Bhikshu, whatever a teacher should do out of compassion for the good of disciples, for the sake of their welfare, it has been done to you by me.

7.3 These, bhikshu, are the foot of trees;²² these are empty spots.²³
 Meditate,²⁴ bhikshu! Be not heedless! Regret not later!
 This is our instruction to you.²⁵

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²⁰ *Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhu bhikkhu vitakka,bahulo no dhamma,vihārī.*

²¹ Comy explains this as meaning that he practises and cultivates mental stillness [concentration] within himself, and is intently devoted to calmness meditation (leading to dhyana) (*Anuyuñjati ajjhataṃ ceto,samatha'ti niyak'-ajjhate citta,samādhim āsevatī bhāvetī, samatha,kammaṭṭhāne yutta-p,payutto hoti, AA 3:266*).

²² “Those are the foot of trees,” *etāni rukkhā,mūlāni*. “Foot” here is usually single, like “bottom.”

²³ *Suññ'āgāra* is sometimes rendered as “empty abode.”

²⁴ “Meditate!” *jhāyatha*, lit “cultivate *jhāna*” (M 1:45, 118; S 4:133, 4:359, 361, 362, 368, 373; A 3:87, 89, 4:139, 392). Syn *bhāvētha* (2nd pl), “cultivate!” See **Buddha discovered dhyana**, SD 33.1b (3.3.2).

²⁵ This is stock: **Sallekha S** (M 44.18/1:45); **Dvedhā,vitakka S** (M 19.27/1:118); (**Nava Purāṇa**) **Kamma S** (S 4:133), SD 4.12; (**Nava Purāṇa**) **Kamma S** (S 35.146/4:132 f), SD 4.12; **Kāya S** (S 43.1/4:359), SD 12.21(1), & all suttas in the same **Asaṅkhata Saṃyutta** (S 43.2-44/4:360-373); **Yodh'ājīva S 1** (A 5.73.7/3:87), **Yodh'ājīva S 2** (A 5.74,7/89), **Vinaya,dhara S** (A 7.70.4/4:139), **Devatā S** (A 9.19.4/4:392); **Dh 671a**: see SD 34.2 (3.11.1); cf **Mahā Palobhana J** (J 507).