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Accāyika Sutta

The Discourse on the Urgent | A 3.91

Theme: The urgency of the 3 trainings

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2014

1 Sutta highlights

1.1 PARABLE OF THE FARMER'S 3 TASKS

1.1.1 Urgency. The Accāyika Sutta is an instruction on the urgency of the 3 trainings, that is, in moral virtue, mental cultivation and insight wisdom [1.2]. These are the preliminaries to the attaining of sainthood or awakening. In fact, the term, “preliminary tasks” (*pubba karaṇīya*), is used in **the (Pubba Karaṇīya) Khetta Sutta** (A 3.82), to describe the 3 trainings. [1.1.2].

Both Suttas, in its first half, have the parable of the farmer's 3 tasks, that is, he has to *quickly* (1) get his field ploughed and harrowed (hard earth broken, and cleared of rock, stumps and so on), (2) so that the seeds can then be properly sown. (3) Then the field is properly watered. The stress in the Accāyika Sutta is, as the title suggests, the urgency (*accāyika*) of the task, we need to get into this quickly (*sīgha*).

1.1.2 The actual tasks

1.1.2.1 The urgency and speed here refer only to preparing ourselves and directing our energies towards the 3 trainings. The farmer's second task—ploughing and harrowing the field—refers to sense-restraint and keeping to the moral precepts. This entails keeping the body and speech wholesome and undistracted, so that the 5 physical senses are settled—this is training in moral virtue, the first of the 3 trainings.

1.1.2.2 The farmer's second task—sowing the seeds—refers to directing our mind towards the meditation object and keeping it there in a comfortable and focused manner. That's all we can do, we cannot *make* it still. This happens when the conditions are right, that is, when we are really doing nothing, as it were. The farmer has to use the right kind of seeds and those that are good and viable. In meditation, we need to use a suitable meditation object, and to balance or harmonize our meditation.¹

1.1.2.3 The farmer then properly waters the field. Here we see the verbs “irrigate” (*abhineti*) and “drain” (*apaneti*) [§2(3)]. Irrigating the field means just sufficient water is *brought to* the soil and seed at the right time. The word *abhineti* comprises the prefix *abhi-* has a sense of “to” here, and *neti* (from *nayati*,² from √NI, to lead) means “direct” (the waters).

In meditation practice, this refers to directing³ our mind or attention to the meditation-object (*nimitta*),⁴ and keeping it there. Just as water flows from a higher to a lower level, along suitable channels, so too, we naturally direct or attention to the meditation-object, and keep it there in a natural way, without forcing or “willing” this, that is, by thinking.

1.1.2.4 Here we need to let go of thinking, so that we can directly see or feel the meditation-object (such as the breath). When we do directly *feel* it, stillness and bliss arise. This vital and natural process is alluded to in the section of “nature's cycle” [§4]. No matter how fervently we might wish, we cannot make the grain sprout or ear or ripen, except in due time and under the right conditions.

Two important points come to our attention here, that is, moral virtue is the basis for mental cultivation and that good follows good. These are, in fact, the themes of **the (Ekā, dasaka) Cetanā'karaṇīya Sutta** (A 11.2). Simply by creating the right conditions of mind, we allow calm and insight to arise in our meditation.⁵ [1.1.2.3]

¹ On harmonizing our meditation, see SD 10.4 (2): Balancing the practice; SD 47.3b (2.2.5.4). On the 5 faculties (*pañc'indriya*), see *Pañc'indriya*, SD 10.4.

² See DP: *nayati*².

³ On directing the mind in meditation, see **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10/5:154-157) + SD 24.2 (1.2).

⁴ See *Nimitta*, SD 19.7.

⁵ A 11.2/5:312 f @ SD 33.3b.

1.1.2.5 This is also the main theme of **the (Pañcaka) Iṭṭha Sutta** (A 5.43), where the Buddha teaches that prayer is not necessary to meditation, and will not help the process. The Buddha, in fact, declares: “I do not teach that (long life, beauty, happiness, fame, and rebirth in heaven) are to be obtained through prayer (*āyācana,hetu*) or through wishing (*patthanā,hetu*).⁶ If one could obtain them through prayer or through wishing, who would not obtain them?” (abridged). If we wish for mental peace or meditation progress, we should live a life that is conducive to this goal, that is, starting with the training in moral virtue.⁷ The right conditions bring the right results.

1.1.2.6 Returning to the farmer’s watering imagery [1.1.2.3]: he not only “irrigates” (*abhineti*) the field, but he must also “drain” (*apaneti*) it properly and at the right time. The word *apaneti* is resolved as *apa-* + *neti*. We have already noted the meaning of *neti*, “to lead or direct” (the water or the mind) [1.1.2.3]. The prefix *apa-* here means “away.” So *apaneti* means “to lead away,” a sense that is just the opposite of *abhineti*, “to lead or direct *towards*.”

As long as the mind is at peace, “doing nothing” or “nothing happening,” just let it be: smile at it, if you like, to deep and broaden the stillness. However, as long as we are unawakened, sooner or later, ideas and thoughts will intrude or distract us. Ideas arise as soon as any of the physical senses processes an external sense-stimulus. We are distracted as soon as we start to follow such a thought or a memory.

We must at once lead the mind *away* from all this intrusions and distractions. We need to bring to mind back to the meditation-object. Sometimes this is simply done by letting go of the distraction itself. Sometimes, we may need to “welcome” such states with lovingkindness. We accept them just as they are unconditionally, nothing more, nothing less, making no big deal of them. We observe them with loving-kindness, like a doorman welcoming guests, but we do not follow them around. Let them come, let them go; don’t let them stay.

1.2 THE 3 TRAININGS

1.2.1 A gradual process

1.2.1.1 Note the sequence of action in the parable of the farmer’s 3 tasks [§2]: he first ploughs and harrows the field, then sows the seeds, and then waters them properly. Similarly, in the parable allusion, the meditator undertakes (*samādiyati*) the 3 higher trainings, that is, in moral virtue, in mental cultivation (or meditation and mindfulness), and in wisdom.

Here, a note on on the prefix *adhi-*, which is here can have a sense of “higher” because the Sutta refers to monastics, whose avowed tasks are to keep to the monastic rules and discipline, including right livelihood⁸ (this is their training in “**(higher) moral virtue**,” *adhisīla,sikkhā*). In other words, they are not supposed to be pursuing a career, using or accumulating money and property, indulging in sensual pleasures, or getting caught up with the world in any way (even doing “social work”).⁹

1.2.1.2 The prefix *adhi-* is apparently added to each of the component terms of the 3 trainings as a set, and can be left untranslated, that is, simply as follows

adhisīla,sikkhā “training in moral virtue,” or “training related to moral virtue”;
adhicitta,sikkhā “training in mental cultivation” or “training related to mental cultivation”;
adhipañña,sikkhā “training in wisdom” or “training related to wisdom.”¹⁰

The suttas make no distinction between the awakening of the Buddha or the arhats: they are both the same, like the extinguishing of a flame. The only difference may be said to be that the Buddha has “omniscience,” or “all-knowing,” in the sense that the “all” refers to our senses which creates our own worlds.¹¹ The Buddha can know whatever is knowable of the past, present and future.

⁶ “Wishing,” *patthanā*, also “desire, request, aspiration, request, prayer, vow.”

⁷ A 5.43/3:47-49 @ SD 47.2.

⁸ On the monastic right livelihood, see **Right livelihood**, SD 37.8 (1.4).

⁹ On the true purpose of renunciation, see **Danta,bhūmi S** (M 125), SD 46.3; SD 46.15 (2.7.1.4); SD 66.13 (1).

¹⁰ See DP: *adhi*; *adhicittam*; *adhicittasikkhā*; *adhicitte*; *adhipañnam*; *adhipaññā*; *adhipaññāya*; *adhipaññāsikkhā*; *adhisīla*; *adhisīlam*; *adhisīlasikkhā*; *adhisīle*.

¹¹ See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

He can know anything he wants about the past, and what is possible to know about the future. He is fully aware of what is going on before him, and can know anything he wants in the present. In all these cases, he only teaches us what is connected with the goal and at the right time.¹²

1.2.1.3 In fact, the prefix *adhi-* often has the same sense as *abhi-*,¹³ as in *abhidhamma* and *abhivina-ya*, two terms found in the Pali canon, where they have no technical sense. *Abhidhamma* simply means “concerning or relating to the Dharma,” and *abhivina-ya*, “concerning or relating to the Vinaya.”¹⁴ Hence, the phrase *adhikusalesu dhammesu* means “in accordance to wholesome duties,” which is found in **the Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (D 30), where this fits the context very well. On the other hand, rendering it as “higher wholesome states” would sound contrived.¹⁵

1.2.1.4 The word *adhisīla*, meaning “concerning moral virtue,” *adhicitta*, “concerning the mind,” and *adhipaññā*, “concerning wisdom”—that is, the 3 trainings—can also apply to the laity, which only makes good sense. As lay practitioners, we need to undertake the training *concerning* moral virtue, *concerning* mental cultivation, and *concerning* wisdom.

In lay practice, however, moral virtue is usually based on the natural morality of the 5 precepts.¹⁶ However, a lay practitioner may voluntarily opt for a celibate life,¹⁷ or even undertake some extra rules, such as those of moderation in food¹⁸ or of right livelihood.¹⁹ Such a life-style is conducive if we are more inclined towards deeper meditation, or we aspire to renounce the world in due course.

1.2.1.5 “**(Higher) mind training**” (*adhicitta, sikkhā*), in a monastic context, refers to the “higher mind,” that is, the attainment of dhyana (*jhāna*), as mentioned, for example, in **the Ākaṅkheyya Sutta** (M 6).²⁰ To be able to attain dhyana, we must be able to transcend the physical senses and fully immerse ourselves in the radiant mind.²¹

To directly experience the radiant mind, enjoying dhyana, means that we are enjoying a pleasure “not to be feared.”²² Dhyanic bliss is wholesome because it is the basis for insight wisdom that is strong enough to for us to be completely free of the lure of physical pleasure. Once we are able to uproot sensual pleasures, then we would attain non-return, if not arhathood itself. This is indeed the goal of renunciation, as intended by the Buddha.

Dhyana, however, is not for monastics alone. The suttas tell us that even laymen, such as Citta the houselord, are able to easily attain dhyana whenever they wish. In other words, the laity, too, if they are inclined to do so, may practise meditation for the attaining of dhyana.²³ Otherwise, it is quite sufficient that laymen attain at least streamwinning, to begin with.

1.2.1.6 The phrase “**(higher) wisdom training**” (*adhipaññā, sikkhā*) refers to the training of monastics and those lay practitioners who choose a similar path, while “training related to wisdom” (*adhipaññā, sikkhā*) refers to the training of lay practitioners in general. As a rule, as we have noted [1.2.1.5], the monastic path is that of a dhyana-based meditation, entailing the overcoming of sensual pleasures, and leading to non-return or arhathood.

¹² See **Pāsādika S** (D 29,27-29/3:134 f @ SD 40a.6).

¹³ The two prefixes, and also *ati-*, can sometimes be used alternately: see DP: *adhi-*.

¹⁴ See eg V 1:64 = 181; M 1:472, 2:239; A 1:289, 5:24. On *dhamma, vinaya* in this connection, see SD 45.18 (1.3).

¹⁵ D 30,2.13/3:169 @ SD 36.9.

¹⁶ On the 5 precepts, see SD 47.3b (2). On natural morality, see SD 37.8 (2.1.1); SD 40.1 (13.2).

¹⁷ **Pāsādika Sutta** (D 29), eg, mentions “white-dressed celibate laymen disciples” (*upāsakā sāvakā gihī odāta, vasaṇā brahma, cārī*, D 29,85-105) and “white-dressed celibate laywomen disciples” (*upāsika sāvikā gihī odāta, vasaṇā brahma, cārīnī*, D 29,12.106-129): see SD 40a.6.

¹⁸ On the practice of moderation in food, see **Mahā Assa, pura S** (M 39,9/1:273), SD 10.13; SD 32.2 (5.1); SD 37.13 (1.2). See SID: *bhojane mattaññūtā*.

¹⁹ On the right livelihood precepts, see SD 37.8 (1.6.2).

²⁰ The term for “higher mind” in this Sutta is *abhicetasika*, and clearly refers to dhyanas (M 6,9/1:33), SD 59.1. See also SD 33.1b (4.4.3.2).

²¹ See **The radiant mind**, SD 8.3.

²² See M 36,21-32/1:246 f @ SD 1.12.

²³ See **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5.

Essentially, the lay practice need not lead to dhyana, but to some level of inner peace. Such a path involves mindfulness based on such practices as the various forms of perception of impermanence, the best known of which are described in the 10 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25).²⁴ The briefest description of this practice is the one given in **the Dīgha, jānu Sutta** (A 8.54). One who is accomplished in wisdom (*paññā, sampadā*) is said to be “wise, possesses wisdom directed²⁵ to the rising and falling away (of phenomena)²⁶ that is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering.”²⁷

1.2.2 Urgent but natural and gradual

1.2.2.1 SPIRITUAL URGENCY. The training itself cannot be rushed because it is a maturing or ripening process, and takes its own natural time and the right conditions. This is clearly implied in the parable of the farmer’s 3 tasks [§2]. First, he has to properly plough and harrow the field, then sow the seeds, and then water them, in this sequence. It is a step-by-step process, but which must be done “quickly,” a hint not at speed, but at what is urgent (*accāya*): the Dharma is to be practised at once, this very moment.

In practical terms, this urgency specifically refers to our spiritual practice and vision of the path. We should at least aspire towards streamwinning so that we do not waste the blessing and opportunity of this human life to take the first step on the path to awakening. Streamwinning assures us of awakening within 7 lives at the most, perhaps even in this life itself if we are diligent enough.²⁸

The alternative—failing to even attain streamwinning—has no advantages at all but brings on painful consequences, such as rebirth in the subhuman planes as an asura, an animal, a preta, or a hell-being. These are not necessarily separate planes or states of being, but can occur even when we are reborn with a human body. If we lack moral virtue and mental cultivation, then our spiritual lack will weaken our minds so that they devolve into any of these states. This devolution can even occur in this life itself, if we are negative and unwholesome in our habitual conduct. We become our karma even before we die and are reborn.²⁹

1.2.2.2 NATURAL PROGRESS. A life of moral virtue and mental cultivation at least keeps us in our human state, but if we habitually keep up a heart of lovingkindness and mindfulness of impermanence, we enjoy bliss of the divine abodes here and now. Even then such as divine life or angelic being is not a goal in itself, but the ground for cultivating insight wisdom into the true nature of things, so that we awaken to true reality and spiritual liberation. This is, in fact, the essence of the 3 trainings.

It is natural for us to be good, or want to be good, as a result of which we grow and experience the fullness of our being. Bad is painful, because it is unnatural, stunting us from moving on, fettering us to craving for the past, and blinding us in the darkness of ignorance. Dharma-base spiritual training is our passage out of this dark sense of lack into the spaciousness of wellbeing and wisdom.

The natural progress of this spiritual development is clearly evident in the 3 trainings, especially in its most elaborate description in **the “fruits of recluseship”** (*sāmañña, phala*) pericope. This stock passage comprises 3 parts:

- (1) codes of moral conduct, especially early lists of “moralities” (*sīla*) or ethical rules for monastics;
- (2) how morality and mindfulness form the basis for meditation, resulting in the 4 dhyanas; and
- (3) from the 4th dhyana arises the supernormal powers, but most important of all, is the knowledge of the destruction of the mental influxes, that is, the attaining of arhathood.³⁰

1.2.2.3 FREEING THE WILL. The second part of the parable of the farmer’s 3 tasks says that the farmer “has neither magic nor power (to do) thus: ‘Let my grain sprout today! Let my grain ear tomorrow! Let them ripen after tomorrow!’” [§4]. All we can do, after these 3 tasks, is perhaps to weed the ground, keep

²⁴ See eg **(Anicca) Cakhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

²⁵ On directed cultivation, see **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10/5:154-157) + SD 24.2 (1.2).

²⁶ On watching the rise and fall of feeling, see **(Aññathatta) Ānanda S 1** (S 22.37/3:37 f), SD 33.11.

²⁷ A 8.54,15/4:285 @ SD 5.10. For the significance this statement, see **(Sotāpanna) Nandiya S** (S 55.40), esp SD 47.1 (1.1.3.3).

²⁸ See **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

²⁹ On the subhuman states, see SD 2.22 (1).

³⁰ The full *sāmañña, phala* text is found in D 2,43-100/1:43-85 @ SD 8.10. On *sāmañña, phala*, see SD 21.6 (12).

away vermin and ensure that the plants are healthy. The seeds will sprout, the grain will ear and ripen all in their own good time. No amount of will power, wishing or prayer will really help here.

This part of the parable alludes to the natural progress of good meditation. Having taken up the 3 training, we go on to *simply* meditate [1.1.2.4]. We have neither magic nor power, nor need them, to effect the fiat, “Let my mind be free of the influxes through non-clinging today, or tomorrow, or after tomorrow!” [§8]. No amount of wishing or praying will have any positive effect on our meditation: indeed, we could be distracted by such actions and not progress at all. [1.1.2.5]³¹

1.2.3 The 3 tasks of a recluse

1.2.3.1 **The (Tika) Samaṇa Sutta** (A 3.81a) is key or basic text on the 3 trainings (*ti,sikkhā* or *sikkha-t,taya*).

SD 47.13(1)

(Tika) Samaṇa Sutta

The (Threes) Discourse on the Recluse | **A 3.81a**/1:229

Introduction to **Samaṇa Gadrabha Sutta** The Discourse on the Recluse and the Ass³²

Traditional: A 3.2.4.1 = Aṅguttara Nikāya 3, Tika Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 4, Samaṇa Vagga 1

Theme: The urgency of the 3 trainings

- 1 There are, bhikshus, these 3 duties of a recluse to be undertaken by a recluse.³³
What are the three?
- 2 (1) The undertaking of the higher moral training. *adhisīla,sikkhā,samādāna*
(2) The undertaking of the higher mind training. *adhicitta,sikkhā,samādāna*
(3) The undertaking of the higher wisdom training.³⁴ *adhipaññā,sikkhā,samādāna*
- 3 These, bhikshus, are the 3 duties of a recluse to be undertaken by a recluse.
- 4 THE ASPIRATION. Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves, thus:
“Keen will be our desire to undertake the higher moral training!³⁵
Keen will be our desire to undertake the higher mind training!
Keen will be our desire to undertake the higher wisdom training!”
- 5 Thus, bhikshus, should you train yourselves.

— evaṃ —

1.2.3.2 The Pali Text Society (PTS) edition of this Sutta treats **A 3.81a** as the opening section to **the Samaṇa Gadrabha Sutta** (A 3.81). In other words, they form a single coherent sutta.³⁶ Here, only the section on the 3 trainings is quoted as it is germane to our present study.

1.2.3.3 The commentary on **the (Tika) Samaṇa Sutta** (A 3.81a) is helpful to our understanding of the 3 trainings. Here is an instructive excerpt:

Here, this division should be known: *adhisīla* is moral virtue (*sīla*), *adhicitta* is the mind (*citta*), and *adhipaññā* is wisdom (*paññā*). Therein, morality refers to the 5 precepts (*pañca,sīla*),

³¹ In the initial stages of lovingkindness meditation, we do use words, like “May I be well! May I be happy” and so on. These are not prayers but verbal tools to push away distractions and arouse mental focus through inner joy, approaching which we simply stop using these verbal prompts and cues.

³² A 3.81 @ SD 24.10b.

³³ *Tiṇ'imāni, bhikkhave, samaṇassa samaṇiyāni samaṇa,karaṇīyāni.*

³⁴ From start to here, qu at MA 2:313.

³⁵ *Tibbo no chando bhavissati adhisīla,sikkhā,samādāne.*

³⁶ A 3.81 @ SD 24.10b.

higher morality refers to the 10 precepts (*dasa,sīla*), as also to the 4 full purifications by way of moral virtue (*catu,parisuddhi,sīla*).³⁷

But all these moralities are mundane morality (*lokiya,sīla*) (that is, worldly morality), while *adhisīla* is supramundane (*lokiya,sīla*) (that is, leading to the spiritual path).³⁸ (AA 2:345 f)

However, we know that the 5 precepts embody natural morality [1.2.1.4], while the monastic rules are conventional (or promulgated) morality.³⁹ While the former certainly entails karmic consequences, the latter may or may not be karmic, but any lapses would be against the monastic code and has to be addressed if we wish to remain a legitimate member of the spiritual order.

By “**worldly morality**,” the Commentary means that keeping to such precepts only forms the karmic basis for rebirth in samsara, and it keeps us within the loop, so to speak. It is the “**supramundane morality**” that prepares us for the path leading out of samsara.

So here we have another explanation for the use of the prefix *adhi-* in the 3 trainings. They do not actually distinguish between monastic practice and lay practice, but that the “higher” training prepares us for the path of liberation out of samsara and suffering. All of us, whether monastic or lay, are of course advised to undertake the supramundane or “higher” training, for the sake of spiritual liberation.

2 (Pubba Karaṇīya) Khetta Sutta

The **Accāyika Sutta** (A 3.91) recurs almost verbatim in brief version as **the (Pubba Karaṇīya) Khetta Sutta** (A 3.82), but omitting the sections on “Nature’s cycle” [§§4-5] and on “Freeing the will” [§§8-9]:

SD 47.13(2)

(Pubba Karaṇīya) Khetta Sutta

The Discourse on the Field (Preliminary duties) • A 3.82/1:229 f

Traditional: A 3.2.4.3 = Aṅguttara Nikāya 3, Tika Nipāta 2, Dutiya Paṇṇāsaka 4, Samaṇa Vagga 3

Theme: The urgency of the 3 trainings

A farmer’s 3 preliminary tasks

1 THE PARABLE. Bhikshus, there are these 3 preliminary tasks of a houselord farmer.

What are the three?

2 Here, bhikshus, a houselord farmer

(1) first of all, thoroughly ploughs and harrows the field.⁴⁰

(2) When the field has already been thoroughly ploughed and harrowed, he sows the seeds.⁴¹

(3) When the seeds have been sown, at the right times, he irrigates (the field) and then drains (it).⁴²

3 These, bhikshus, are the 3 preliminary tasks of a houselord farmer.

A monk’s 3 preliminary tasks

4 THE PRACTITIONER’S 3 TASKS. Even so, bhikshus, there are 3 preliminary tasks of a monk.

What are the three?

³⁷ On the 4 full purifications by way of moral virtue or purifications of moral virtue, see SD 37.8 (4.0.2) & SD 28.3 (1.2).

³⁸ *Ettha ca sīlam adhisīlam, cittam adhicittam, paññā adhipaññāti ayam vibhāgo veditabbo. Tattha pañca,sīlam sīlam nāma, tam upādāya dasa,sīlam adhisīlam nāma, tam pi upādāya catu,parisuddhi,sīlam adhisīlam nāma. Api ca sabbam pi lokiya,sīlam sīlam nāma, lok’uttara,sīlam adhisīlam, tad eva sikkhitabbato sikkhā’ti vuccati.* (AA 2:345 f)

³⁹ On prescribed morality, see SD 37.8 (2.1.2).

⁴⁰ *Paṭigacc’eva [Be Se; Ce Ee paṭigacc’eva] khettaṃ sukaṭṭhaṃ karoti sumatikataṃ*

⁴¹ *Paṭigacc’eva khettaṃ sukaṭṭhaṃ karitvā sumatikataṃ kālena bījāni paṭiṭṭhāpeti.*

⁴² *Kālena bījāni paṭiṭṭhāpetvā samayena udakam abhineti’pi apaneti’pi.*

- 5 (1) The undertaking of the higher moral training. *adhisīla, sikkhā, samādāna*
 (2) The undertaking of the higher mind training. *adhicitta, sikkhā, samādāna*
 (3) The undertaking of the higher wisdom training. *adhipaññā, sikkhā, samādāna*
- 6 These, bhikkhus, are the 3 preliminary tasks of a monk.
- 7 THE ASPIRATION. Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves, thus:
 “Keen will be our desire to undertake the higher moral training!⁴³
 Keen will be our desire to undertake the higher mind training!
 Keen will be our desire to undertake the higher wisdom training!”
- 8 Thus, bhikkhus, should you train yourselves.

— evaṃ —

3 Related suttas and teachings

3.1 ANOTHER PARABLE OF THE 3 FIELDS. The (Khetta) Desanā Sutta (S 42.7), like the suttas discussed here, contains a field parable. In fact, it refers to 3 kinds of fields—the best field, the middling field and the poor field. A wise farmer, says the Sutta, when sowing seeds, would first sow the first field, which is rich and would yield a good crop.

Then, having sown the first field, he would go on to sow the middling field. Only after that, he may or may not sow the poor field, rough, salty and wit bad ground. If he does sow it, it may at least fodder for cattle.

Just like **the good field** are the monks and nuns, to whom the Buddha would first teach the Dharma. The reason for this is that they have gone to the Buddha for refuge. In other words, they are willing and able to listen to the teaching, and to practise it with the best benefits, especially the attaining arhathood.

Just like **the middling field** are the lay followers, male and female, to whom the Buddha would teach the Dharma, too. The reason for this is the same: they have gone to the Buddha for refuge. As such, they are willing and able to listen to the teaching and practise it with the best benefits, or at least attaining streamwinning.

Just like **the poor field** are the recluses, brahmins and wanderers of other sects. To them, too, the Buddha teaches the Dharma. Even if they were to understand even a single sentence, that would benefit them for a long time.⁴⁴

3.2 SUTTAS ON THE 3 TRAININGS

3.2.1 Samana Vagga. Chapter 4 of the Book of Threes (Tika Nipāta) has 11 suttas all dealing with spiritual training. The following 4 suttas directly address the 3 trainings, that is,

A 3.85/1:231 f	Sikkhā Sutta 1	The First Discourse on Training	SD 3.3(2)
A 3.86/1:232-234	Sikkhā Sutta 2	The Second Discourse on Training	SD 80.13
A 3.87/1:234 f	Sikkhā Sutta 3	The Third Discourse on Training	SD 80.14
A 3.88/1:235	Sikkha-t,taya Sutta 1	The First Discourse on the 3 Trainings	SD 24.10c
A 3.89/1:235 f	Sikkha-t,taya Sutta 2	The Second Discourse on the 3 Trainings	SD 47.17

The Sikkhā Sutta 1 (A 3.85) essentially says that even if a monastic breaks any of “the lesser and minor rules” (*khuddakānukhuddaka sikkhāpada*), cultivates his mind and wisdom only moderately, and does not break any of the rules “fundamental to the holy life, conforms to the holy life” (*ādi, brahma.cariyika brahma.cariya, sāruppa*), he can be rehabilitated, that is, freed of his offence, and he is capable of attaining any of the 4 stages of sainthood, that is, streamwinning, once-return, non-return or arhathood.

The Sikkhā Sutta 2 (A 3.86) has basically the same teaching as that of the Sikkhā 2, except that the former lists out the various types of streamwinners and non-returners.

⁴³ *Tibbo no chando bhavissati adhisīla, sikkhā, samādāne.*

⁴⁴ S 42.7/4:315-317 @ SD 51.6.

The Sikkhā Sutta 3 (A 3.87), too, basically teaches the same thing, except that it lists arhathood first, describing the other saints in a descending order. The other two Suttas list the saints, starting with the streamwinner, in an ascending order.

The Sikkhā-t, taya Sutta 1 (A 3.88) defines the monastic practice of the 3 trainings as follows: moral training entails “keeping to the training-rules that he has undertaken”; mind training is the practice of meditation leading up to the dhyanas; and wisdom training is that of understanding the 4 noble truths.

The Sikkhā-t, taya Sutta 2 (A 3.89) has the same teachings as the Sikkhā-t, taya Sutta 1, but closes with 4 verses on meditation and awakening.

3.2.2 Study on the 3 trainings. For an introduction or overview of the 3 trainings in early Buddhism, we could go on to read *Sīla samādhi paññā* (SD 21.6). This essay covers the following headings:

- (1) The gradual training: its universality and rationale.
- (2) The *sāmañña, phala* (fruits of recluseship) pericope.
- (3) The training and the sequence of the path-factors (the 8 limbs of the eightfold path).
- (4) The 3 trainings and the 10 fetters,
- (5) The training as envisioned in the Commentaries.
- (6) How the 3 trainings benefit us.

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The Discourse on the Urgent

A 3.91

The farmer’s 3 urgent tasks

1 Bhikshus, there are these 3 urgent⁴⁵ tasks of a houselord farmer [ploughman].⁴⁶

What are the three?

2 THE PARABLE OF THE FARMER’S 3 TASKS. Here, bhikshus, the houselord farmer

(1) quickly gets his field well ploughed and well harrowed.⁴⁷

(2) Having quickly got his field well ploughed and well harrowed, he then quickly sows the seeds.⁴⁸

(3) Having quickly sowed the seeds, he then quickly [240] irrigates (the field), then drains (it).⁴⁹

3 These, bhikshus, are the 3 urgent tasks of a houselord farmer.

4 NATURE’S CYCLE. Now, bhikshus, that houselord farmer has neither magic nor power (to do) thus.⁵⁰

“Let my grain sprout today!

Let my grain ear tomorrow!

Let them ripen after tomorrow!”⁵¹

⁴⁵ *Accāyika*, which Comy glosses as “urgent” (*atipātikāni*, AA 2:254), and Tīkā as “that which should occur quickly” (*sīgham pavattabbāni*, AAṬ:Be 2:192).

⁴⁶ “A houselord farmer [ploughman],” *gaha, pati kassaka*. A houselord (*gaha, pati*) is a sort of yeomen (independent landlord who works on his own farm) and owns property, esp real estate (houses and land). The word *kassaka* lit means “one who ploughs,” hence, specifically, a “ploughman,” that is, a farmer who tills his land and owns farm animals. On terms related to *gaha, pati*, see **Patta, kamma S** (A 4.61, 1), SD 37.12.

⁴⁷ *Sīgha, sīgham khettaṃ sukaṭṭhaṃ karoti sumatikataṃ.*

⁴⁸ *Sīgha, sīgham khettaṃ sukaṭṭhaṃ karitvā sumatikataṃ sīgha, sīgham pi bījāni patiṭṭhāpeti.*

⁴⁹ *Sīgha, sīgham bījāni patiṭṭhāpetvā sīgha, sīgham udakam abhineti ’pi apaneti ’pi.*

⁵⁰ *Tassa kho taṃ bhikkhave kassakassa gahapatissa natthi sā iddhi vā ānubhāvo vā,*

⁵¹ *Ajje ’va me dhaññāni jāyantu sve ’va gabbhinī* [Ce; Be *gabbhīni*; Ee Se *gabbhiniyo*] *hontu uttara, sve ’va paccantu ’ti.*

5 But in due time, bhikshus, when the seasons change, that houselord farmer's grain will sprout,⁵² and ear,⁵³ and ripen,⁵⁴ too.⁵⁵

A monk's 3 urgent tasks

6 THE PRACTITIONER'S 3 TASKS. Even so, bhikshus, there are these 3 urgent tasks for a monk. What are the three?

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| (1) The undertaking of the higher moral training. | <i>adhisīla,sikkhā,samādāna</i> |
| (2) The undertaking of the higher mind training. | <i>adhicitta,sikkhā,samādāna</i> |
| (3) The undertaking of the higher wisdom training. | <i>adhipaññā,sikkhā,samādāna</i> |

7 These, bhikshus, are the 3 urgent tasks for a monk.

8 FREEING THE WILL. Now, bhikshus, that monk has neither magic nor power (to do) thus: "Let my mind be free of the influxes through non-clinging today, or tomorrow, or after tomorrow!"⁵⁶

9 But in due time, bhikshus,
on account of his higher moral training,
on account of his higher mind training, too, and,
on account of his higher wisdom training, too,
the mind will be free of the influxes through non-clinging

10 THE ASPIRATION. Therefore, bhikshus, you should train yourselves, thus:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Keen will be our desire to undertake | the higher moral training! ⁵⁷ |
| Keen will be our desire to undertake | the higher mind training! |
| Keen will be our desire to undertake | the higher wisdom training! |

11 Thus, bhikshus, should you train yourselves.

— evaṃ —

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⁵² Comy: White shoots appear only on the third day. (AA 2:354)

⁵³ Comy: Earing begins [grain appear] only after one and a half months. (AA 2:354)

⁵⁴ Comy: The grain ripens in the third month (AA 2:354).

⁵⁵ *Atha kho bhikkhave hoti so samayo, yaṃ tassa kassakassa gaha,patissa tāni dhaññāni utu,pariṇāminī jāyanti 'pi gabhinī 'pi honti paccanti 'pi.*

⁵⁶ *Ajje 'va me anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimuccatu sve vā uttarasve vā 'ti.*

⁵⁷ *Tibbo no chando bhavissati adhisīla,sikkhā,samādāne.*