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Suriy’upamā Sutta 1

Paṭhama Suriy’upamā Sutta The First Discourse on the Sun Parable | S 56.37

Theme: Right view is the basis for the 4 noble truths

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1 Sutta significance

1.1 There are two discourses named *suriy’upamā* (literally, “sun-like”), “the sun parable,” which are simply called as follows:

Paṭhama Suriy’upamā Sutta	or Suriy’upamā Sutta 1	S 56.37	SD 49.15
Dutiya Suriy’upamā Sutta	or Suriy’upamā Sutta 2	S 56.38	SD 49.16

1.2 LIGHT IMAGERIES

1.2.1 Light and darkness

1.2.1.1 Both discourses employ the imagery of light, that is, the sun. **The Suriy’upamā Sutta 1** (S 56.37) uses a short parable of the dawn (*aruṇ’ugga*) as the forerunner or harbinger of sun-rise (*suriyassa udaya*) [1.3]. **The Suriy’upamā Sutta 2** (S 56.38) uses a more elaborate parable of the arising or evolution of the “moon and sun” (*candīma,suriya*) [1.4].

1.2.1.2 In both parables, darkness (*tama, timisa*) is contrasted with light (*āloka, obhāsa*). While in the first Sutta, this contrast is implicitly between night and dawn, the contrast is more elaborate in the second Sutta, where the cosmic darkness is contrasted with the arising or evolution of the moon and the sun in space. [1.3; 1.4]

1.2.2 The moon and sun parables

1.2.2.1 The moon and sun imagery is common in the 4 Nikāyas, especially as the dvandva *candīma,-suriya* (or *-sūriya*), on their own, that is without the word *upamā*, “parable.”¹ In all such cases, only the term, *candīma,suriya*, the “moon and sun,” is used.

The phrase *suriya,candīma*, the “sun and moon” does not seem to occur in the suttas or the commentaries. The term, *suriya,canda*, “the sun and moon,” however, does occur in the commentaries.²

A possible explanation for the phrase *candīma,suriya* is that *candīmā* is traditionally regarded as feminine, while *suriya* is masculine. In a compound, such as in *mātā,pitaro*, “mother and father, parents,” the feminine appears first. Following the English idiom, however, we can also render *candīma,suriya* as “the sun and the moon.”

1.2.2.2 The compound *candīma,suriya*, without the word *upama*, occurs in parables in the following Suttas:

Pāyāsi Sutta	D 23,5.3/2:319	SD 39.4	[1.2.2.3]
Dhan’uggaha Sutta	S 20.6/2:266	SD 52.7	[1.2.2.4]

1.2.2.3 In **the Pāyāsi Sutta** (D 23,5.3), the Buddha points out that just as the sun and moon (*candīma,suriya*) are not “in this world,” they exist as a world of their own; that is, they are “celestial, not human.” The elder Kumāra Kassapa uses this analogy to show prince Pāyāsi that there are other worlds, as a proof of the validity of the Buddha’s teachings. [1.2.2.2]

1.2.2.4 According to **the Dhan’uggaha Sutta** (S 20.6), the sun and moon move faster than a man who is able to run after a flying arrow can catch it (if this were possible). But, even faster than the sun and moon, is the rate of change or decay of the life-formations (*āyu,sanḅhārā*), that is, the physical aspects of a living being. [1.2.2.3]

¹ Search the VRI “Chaṭṭha Saṅgīti CD” (CSCD) with the key “candīmasuriy*” (with the asterisk * as a wildcard sign). See foll n.

² As *sūriya,canda,pajjota*, “the lamps that are the sun and the moon” (eg, DA 3:1007).

1.3 THE SURIY'UPAMA SUTTA 1 (S 56.37)

1.3.1 The Suriy'upama Sutta 1 opens with a dawn parable—just as dawn brings the sun—even so, **right view** brings the realization of the 4 noble truths [§1]. The 4 noble truths are then laid out as theory [§2], and then as practice [§3].

1.3.2 In short, then, the Suriy'upama Sutta 1 states that **right view** is the basis for the understanding and realization of the 4 truths, that is, of full awakening itself. While the Suriy'upama Sutta 1 highlights the 4 noble truths in a concept-based teaching (*dhammādhiṭṭhāna desanā*), the Suriy'upama Sutta 2 highlights the 4 noble truths in a person-based teaching (*puggalādhiṭṭhāna desanā*).³

1.4 THE SURIY'UPAMA SUTTA 2 (S 56.38)

1.4.1 The Suriy'upama Sutta 2 opens with a more elaborate moon and sun parable—light, calendrical time and the seasons depend on these heavenly bodies [§§1-4]—even so, without the appearance of the Buddha, there is only ignorance of the 4 noble truths [§§5-6].

With the appearance of the Buddha, there is the teaching and understanding of the 4 noble truths [§7-8].

The 4 truths are then laid out in theory [§9] and on practice [§10], leading to the realization of true reality and full awakening.

1.4.2 In short, then, the Suriy'upama Sutta 2 states that **the arising of the Buddha** is the basis for the understanding and realization of the 4 truths, that is, of full awakening itself. While the Suriy'upama Sutta 2 highlights the 4 noble truths in a person-based teaching (*puggalādhiṭṭhāna desanā*), the Suriy'upama Sutta 1 highlights the 4 noble truths in a concept-based teaching (*dhammādhiṭṭhāna desanā*). [1.3.2]

1.5 Yogo karaṇīyo

1.5.1 Both the Suriy'upama Sutta 1 [§3] and the Suriy'upama Sutta 2 (S 56.38,10),⁴ close with exhorting us to “apply yourself” to the reality of each of the 4 noble truths. The Pali for “should apply ...” is *yogo karaṇīyo*, which literally means “the yoking (devotion) that should be done.”

The Aṅguttara Commentary, in fact, explains the phrase, *yogo karaṇīyo*, in the same way: “what should be done with devotion and dedication” (*yutta-p, payuttatā kattabbā*, AA 3:116).

1.5.2 Of the 4 noble truths, the Sutta Commentary itself adds: “It is said that the meaning of each of these should be analysed in detail” (*na yena tān'eva vibhajanto vitthārena'pi bhāsati*, SA 1:276).⁵ Technically, this mastery of the 4 noble truths consists of knowing each of them as a truth (theory) (*sacca, -ñāṇa*), as practice (*kicca, ñāṇa*), and as realization or liberating wisdom (*kata, ñāṇa*). Hence, we have a total of 12 modes or aspects (*dvādas'ākāra*) of the truths.⁶

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³ On the 2 teachings (*desanā*), see SD 36.1 (1.11.2); SD 47.20 (1.2.3).

⁴ S 56.38,10 (SD 49.16).

⁵ See also SA 3:293; ThaA 3:194.

⁶ For details on the 3 phases and 12 aspects, see SD 1.1 (6.2).

The First Discourse on the Sun Parable

S 56.37

The dawn parable

1 Bhikshus, there is this forerunner, this harbinger, of sun-rise, that is, dawn.⁷

Even so, bhikshus, for a monk, this is the forerunner, this is the harbinger, of the 4 noble truths, as it really is, that is, **right view**.⁸

Mastering the theory

2 It is to be expected, bhikshus, of a monk with right view that⁹
he will understand, as it really is,

“This is **suffering**”;

idaṃ dukkhaṃ ’ti

he will understand, as it really is,

“This is the **arising** of suffering”;

ayaṃ dukkha, samudayo ’ti

he will understand, as it really is,

“This is the **ending** of suffering”;

ayaṃ dukkha, nirodho ’ti

he will understand, as it really is,

“This is **the path** leading to the ending of suffering.”

ayaṃ dukkha, nirodha, gāminī paṭipadā ’ti

Mastering the practice¹⁰

3 Therefore, bhikshus,

you should apply yourself to (the reality):

“This is suffering”;¹¹

you should apply yourself to (the reality):

“This is the arising of suffering”;¹²

you should apply yourself to (the reality):

“This is the ending of suffering”;¹³

you should apply yourself to (the reality):

“This is the path leading to the ending of suffering.”¹⁴

— evaṃ —

[For **Bibliography**, see the end of SD 49c]

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⁷ *Suriyassa* [only *Be sūriyassa*] *bhikkhave udayato etaṃ pubbaṃ, gamaṃ etaṃ pubba, nimittam, yad idaṃ aruṇ ’-uggaṃ.*

⁸ *Evam eva kho bhikkhave bhikkhuno catunnaṃ ariya, saccānaṃ yathā, bhūtaṃ abhisamayāya etaṃ pubbaṃ, gamaṃ etaṃ pubba, nimittam, yad idaṃ sammā, diṭṭhi.*

⁹ *Sammā, diṭṭhikass ’etaṃ bhikkhave bhikkhuno pāṭikaṅkham.* Ce Ee Se so; *Be tass ’etaṃ.*

¹⁰ This whole section recurs in **Suriy’upamā S 2** (S 56.38,10), SD 49.16.

¹¹ *Idaṃ dukkhaṃ ’ti yogo karaṇīyo* lit, “There should be what is to be done regarding suffering (as a noble truth).”
On *yogi karaṇīyo*, see [1.5].

¹² *Ayaṃ dukkha, samudayo ’ti yogo karaṇīyo.*

¹³ *Ayaṃ dukkha, nirodha, gāminī paṭipadā ’ti yogo karaṇīyo.*

¹⁴ *Ayaṃ dukkha, nirodha, gāminī paṭipadā ’ti yogo karaṇīyo.*