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Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 1

Paṭhama Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta,

The First Discourse on Sāriputta and Moggallāna | A 4.167

Or, (**Catukka**) **Moggallāna Sutta**, The (Fours) Discourse on Moggallāna
or, (**Paṭipadā**) **Moggallāna Sutta**, The Moggallāna Discourse (on the Ways of Progress)

Theme: Moggallāna’s spiritual progress and attainment

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1 Sutta theme

1.1 SĀRIPUTTA AND MOGGALLĀNA

1.1.1 They are the two chief disciples (*agga, sāvaka*) of the Buddha, that is, the right-hand and the left-hand monks, respectively. They have been close friends from two close families since their childhood, and they discover the Dharma and renounce together before the Buddha.¹

1.1.2 In the two **Sāriputta Moggallāna Suttas** (A 4.167+168), the two chief disciples tell each other the nature of their respective modes of spiritual progress leading to their full liberation, that is, arhathood. In our Sutta here—the **Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 1** (A 4.167), Moggallāna tells Sāriputta that his mode of spiritual progress is difficult, but with quick direct knowledge [§5].

1.1.3 These two texts are “**twin**” (*yamaka*) suttas—such as the verses of **the Yamaka Vagga**, the very first chapter of the Dhammapada (Dh 1-20)—that is, they should be read and reflected on together. In the case of the Yamaka Vagga verses, the first of the pair has a negative theme, while the second a positive one. Both the Sāriputta Moggallāna Suttas, however, are positive accounts.

Another example of twin suttas are **the Saṅgha, bheda Sutta** (It 18) and **the Saṅgha, sāmaggī Sutta** (It 19), but their themes are contradictory. The former deals with schism and disunity, while the latter with unity and harmony. The two Sāriputta Moggallāna Suttas, on the other hand, have complementary themes: the two chief disciples tell each other the nature of their respective modes of spiritual progress leading to their arhathood.

1.2 SUTTA STRUCTURE

1.2.1 There are two discourses named **Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta**: in the first (our Sutta here), Moggallāna is the chief interlocutor; hence, it is also called **the Moggallāna Sutta**; in the second, Sāriputta is the chief interlocutor; hence, it is also called **the Sāriputta Sutta**. They are both found in **the Paṭipadā Vagga** of the Aṅguttara Nikāya [2.1.1]. Hence, they could alternatively be called **the (Paṭipadā) Moggallāna Sutta** and **the (Paṭipadā) Sāriputta Sutta**. The texts of the two suttas parallel each other closely, differing only with who is reporting his “way of progress” (*paṭipadā*) [2].

In **the Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 1** (A 4.167)—our Sutta here—Sāriputta visits Moggallāna and on being asked by Sāriputta, Moggallāna tells him that his (Moggallāna’s) mode of spiritual progress is difficult, but with quick direct knowledge [§5]. In **the Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 2** (A 4.168), Moggallāna visits Sāriputta who says that his own mode of spiritual progress is easy, with quick direct knowledge.²

¹ For details on **Sāriputta & Moggallāna**, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, Singapore: The Minding Centre [2002], 2013 ch 5.

² **Sāriputta Moggallāna S 2** (A 4.168/2:155), SD 46.17.

1.2.2 Each of the two Suttas here gives us the impression that they are recording separate events, that is, in **the Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 1** (A 4.147), Sāriputta “approaches” (*upasankamati*) or visits Moggallāna and questions the latter, while in **the Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 2** (A 4.148), it is Moggallāna who visits Sāriputta and questions him.

Taken as they are, these two suttas may appear rather odd and almost mechanical or contrived. For, it would be more natural that the two chief disciples must have met one another, and then question one another regarding their respective modes of progress to arhathood. It might also appear strange that being close friends that they do not know each other’s mode of spiritual progress.

The solution to this apparent puzzle is quite a simple one: the two suttas are composed according to the ancient oral tradition³ by the council elders who recounted the events and teachings, then recited them in a communal recital. The purpose of both the suttas is the same: to help us remember the 4 ways of progress and the respective manners in which the two chief disciples attain arhathood.

2 The 4 ways of progress

2.1 Related suttas

2.1.1 There is a whole chapter (*vagga*)—**the Paṭipadā Vagga**, the Chapter on the Ways of Progress—in the Aṅguttara Nikāya dealing with **way of progress** (*paṭipadā*) [§2] (A 4.161-170), which should be consulted for details. Both **the Sāriputta Moggallāna Suttas 1 & 2** (A 4:167 + 168) are located in this Chapter. [1.2.1]

2.1.2 In **the Sampasādaniya Sutta** (D 28), Sāriputta declares the Buddha’s teaching on the 4 ways of progress as one that is unsurpassable, that is,

(1) difficult progress, with	slow direct knowing,	<i>dukkhā paṭipadā</i>	<i>dandh’ābhiññā</i>
(2) difficult progress, with	quick direct knowing,	<i>dukkhā paṭipadā</i>	<i>hipp’ābhiññā</i>
(3) easy progress, with	slow direct knowing,	<i>sukhā paṭipadā</i>	<i>dandh’ābhiññā</i>
(4) easy progress, with	quick direct knowing.	<i>sukhā paṭipadā</i>	<i>hipp’ābhiññā</i>

2.2 Sāriputta further explains the nature of these 4 ways of progress as follows:

<u>Type of progress</u>	<u>Quality</u>	<u>due to</u>
(1) difficult progress, with slow direct knowing	inferior [low] ⁴	difficulty and slowness
(2) difficult progress, with quick direct knowing	inferior	difficulty
(3) <u>easy progress, with slow direct knowing</u>	inferior	slowness
(4) <u>easy progress, with quick direct knowing</u>	excellent	ease and speed. (D 28,10), SD 14.14 ⁵

An example of the 1st case is the elder **Soṇa Koḷivisa**, after being given a meditation subject by the Buddha, goes into retreat but his progress is severely impaired because he has too many visitors. He struggles in his meditation, especially the walking meditation until his feet bleed. The Buddha then

³ See **The oral tradition**, SD 58.1.

⁴ The first three modes of practice (*paṭipadā*) are here said to be “inferior” (*hīna*), but the fourth is said to be “excellent” or “exquisite” (*paṇīta*). This evaluation is similarly reflected in **Nalaka S** (Sn 714): see SD 18.3 Intro.

⁵ On these 4 modes of progress, see also **Paṭipadā Ss** (A 2:149 f), **Asubha S** (A 2:150-152), **Ubhaya S** (A 2:153); cf **Kosala S 1** (A 5:63); DhsA 182-185.

admonishes him on the middle way. The elder Soṇa is an example of one who exerts great effort (*viriyam dhuram katvā*)¹ and is declared as the foremost of those monks who put forth effort (*aggam āradḍha, viriyānam*, A 1:24).

In the 2nd case, there is the example of Moggallāna, as described in **the Sāriputta Moggallāna S 1** (A 4.167).⁶

For the 3rd case, one is tempted to take Ānanda as an example, since he was only a streamwinner during the Buddha's life, and only became an arhat after the Buddha's passing.

For the 4th case, we have the example of Sāriputta, as reported in **the Sāriputta Moggallāna S 2** (A 4.168) and **the Dīgha, nakha Sutta** (M 74).⁷

2.3 These 4 ways of progress are explained in terms of the 3 motivational roots (*mūla*) and the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc'indriya*) in **the (Vitthāra) Paṭipadā Sutta** (A 4.162).⁸ Buddhaghosa says that the "practice" or "progress" (*paṭipadā*) here refers to meditation leading up to access concentration, while "direct knowing" (*abhiññā*) refers to the knowledge that arises between access and dhyanas (Vism 3.15/86). He further notes that when we are overwhelmed by craving, progress is difficult; when we are overcome by ignorance, direct knowing is difficult; if we do not practise calmness (*samatha*), progress is difficult; if we lack insight (*vipassanā*), direct knowing is difficult (Vism 3.18/87).⁹

3 Moggallāna's way of progress

3.1 In **the Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 1** (A 4.167), in answer to Sāriputta's question, Moggallāna replies that his way of progress, that is, his mode of meditation leading to arhathood or full awakening, is one of "difficult progress, with quick direct knowing" (*dukkhā paṭipadā, khipp'ābhiññā*) [§5]. Sāriputta, on the other hand, attains arhathood with "easy progress, with quick direct knowing," as stated in **the Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 2** (A 4.168 @ SD 46.17).

Moggallāna attains arhathood by swift realization (*khippābhiññā*), that is, *in a week*, but his progress is difficult (*dukkha, paṭipadā*), but needs the Buddha's help; hence, the swiftness in his insight. Sāriputta, on the other hand, takes only slightly longer in his progress (*two weeks*), but his progress is smooth (*sukha, paṭipadā*) and he swiftly gains insight while listening to the Buddha instructing Dīgha, nakha, as recorded in **the Dīgha, nakha Sutta** (M 74), SD 16.1.

Although Moggallāna has the Buddha's personal guidance in his progress, he has a lesser range in insight, whereas Sāriputta is not only independent in his progress but has a wider range of insight; hence, Sāriputta's supremacy in wisdom.¹⁰

3.2 SUTTA RELATING TO MOGGALLĀNA'S MEDITATION AND ARHATHOOD. The details of Moggallāna's meditation progress is recorded in at least three suttas, that is:

Pacalā Sutta	A 7.58 (SD 4.11)	Moggallāna's meditation difficulties
Jhāna Pañha Sutta 1	S 40.1 (SD 24.11)	Moggallāna's attaining the 1 st dhyana
Moggallāna Saṃyutta	S 40.1-9	Moggallāna's attaining of the 9 abodes

⁶ The example here is that of Moggallāna: see **Sāriputta Moggallāna S 1** (A 4.167/2:154 f), SD 46.17; also **Pacalā S** (A 7.58/4:85-91), SD 4.11.

⁷ **Sāriputta Moggallāna S 2** (A 4.168/2:155); **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74/1:497-501), SD 16.1.

⁸ A 4.162/2:149 f (SD 18.3).

⁹ See **Pubba, koṭṭhaka S** (S 48.44/5:220-222), SD 10.7 (4).

¹⁰ **Dīgha, nakha S** (M 74/1:497-501), SD 16.1.

The Pacalā Sutta, on Moggallāna’s struggle in his meditation (A 7.58), is also called **the (Sattaka) Moggallāna Sutta**, the (Sevens) Discourse on Moggallāna, to distinguish it from the Sutta here, which is also called **the (Catukka) Moggallāna Sutta**, the (Fours) Discourse on Moggallāna.

Moggallāna’s struggle for arhathood—how he often regresses but never gives up—is recounted *dhyana by dhyana*, in the first nine discourses of **the Moggallāna Saṃyutta** (S 40.1-9),¹¹ that is, on the 4 dhyanas, the 4 formless attainments, and the signless meditation.¹²

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Sāriputta Moggallāna Sutta 1

The First Discourse on Sāriputta and Moggallāna

A 4.167

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

1 Then, the venerable Sāriputta approached the venerable Moggallāna, and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and friendly exchange was concluded, he sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, the venerable Sāriputta said this to the venerable Moggallāna:

2 “Avuso, there are these **4 ways of progress** [modes of spiritual progress].

What are the four?

(1) difficult progress, with	slow direct knowing,	<i>dukkhā paṭipadā</i>	<i>dandh’ābhiññā</i>
(2) difficult progress, with	quick direct knowing,	<i>dukkhā paṭipadā</i>	<i>hipp’ābhiññā</i>
(3) easy progress, with	slow direct knowing,	<i>sukhā paṭipadā</i>	<i>dandh’ābhiññā</i>
(4) easy progress, with	quick direct knowing.	<i>sukhā paṭipadā</i>	<i>hipp’ābhiññā</i>

These, avuso, are the 4 ways of progress.

3 [PTS 2] Avuso, of these 4 ways of progress, by which way of progress was your mind liberated from the influxes through non-clinging?¹³ **[155]**

4 “Avuso, there are these 4 ways of progress [modes of spiritual progress].

What are the four?

(1) difficult progress, with	slow direct knowing,
(2) difficult progress, with	quick direct knowing,
(3) easy progress, with	slow direct knowing,
(4) easy progress, with	quick direct knowing.

These, avuso, are the 4 ways of progress.

5 Avuso, of these 4 ways of progress, my mind was liberated from the influxes through non-clinging by difficult [painful] progress, with quick direct knowing.”

— evaṃ —

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¹¹ S 40.1-9/4:262-269 (SD 24.11-19).

¹² For further details, see SD 4.11 (1.3).

¹³ *Imāsaṃ āvuso catunnaṃ¹³ paṭipadānaṃ katamaṃ te paṭipadaṃ āgamma anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimuttan’ti.*