

Wrong steps

[Revised version of fb180623 piya]

Impermanent, suffering, non-self

The Saṃyutta Nikāya has a set of 3 related suttas based on the 3 characteristics, that is:

- (1) S 35.165 Micchā Diṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta (SD 53.11) – the reflection impermanence.
- (2) S 35.166 Sakkāya, diṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta (SD 53.12) – the reflection of suffering.
- (3) S 35.167 Attā'nudiṭṭhi Pahāna Sutta (SD 53.13) – the reflection on non-self.

Sutta (1) states that Wrong Views are to be removed by the reflection on **impermanence**.
Sutta (2) states that Self-identity View is to be removed by the reflection on **suffering**.
Sutta (3) states that Self-views are to be removed by the reflection on **non-self**.

But Bh Bodhi, in his **Saṃyutta** translation (numbered respectively as 168, 169, 170 ("The Connected Discourses," 2000:1220 f) erroneously translated all 3 Suttas as related to the reflection on **impermanence**.

Samadhi is, samadhi is not

Ven Dr P Vajirañāṇa, in his "Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice" (Colombo, 1962), writes that

"the object of attaining these [various progressive meditative] stages is to achieve the mastery of Samādhi; for without this mastery of Samādhi his training would be incomplete" (335)

but elsewhere he writes:

"**The samādhi system, therefore, seems to be optional** ... but vipassana ... is indispensable and universally imperative for the attainment of Nirvāṇa, and is regarded in Buddhist teaching as a unique system" (343) (highlights added).

This self-contradiction shows that the book is based purely on a theoretical approach to meditation. The author did not write from personal experience.

Jhāna thinking

Another interesting example of modernist meditation is that of Ven Dr H Gunaratana (a Sinhala monk with PhD in jhāna studies) who holds that **thinking** does and must occur during dhyana!

Gunaratana, for example, writes in an article, "Should we come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā?" (High View, VW: Bhavana Society, 2007), that, in a dhyana state, the meditator:

“sees and knows what is going on in his mind,” and “it is virtually impossible to find evidence in the Suttas that one should come out of Jhāna to practice Vipassanā” (2007:1).

Sadly, he did not search the suttas carefully enough as there are teachings that confirm that jhanas are "thought-free." Again, the writer did not write from personal experience.¹

The word or the way?

All three scholars, interestingly, belong to the Sinhalese scholarly tradition. This illustrates the difficulties that scholars face when they work on books alone. Yet, if we love our work as we love the Dharma, we can always work around or over such small failures. There are bigger things in life to care about.

Of course, such errors, numerous as they may be, do not reflect on the scholarly quality of the rest of their works, which we should continue to hold in the highest esteem. In Japan, broken objects, ordinary but useful or valued, are often repaired with gold sealing together the broken parts. The flaw is valued as something unique in the object's history, which adds to its special beauty.

Do not feed the Gurus

If we are serious practitioners, such errors have little consequence on our practice, which is Dhamma-inspired and sutta-based. We would be badly affected only when we idolize them as infallible Gurus. When we feed the Gurus, they devour us, body and mind.

The point is that even the best of our teachers, often enough, do err, even hold wrong views, as stated in the (Ahita) Thera Sutta (A 5.88)².

We should compassionately ask them about such errors, and learn what we can from all this. The Buddha Dhamma is about learning, training and bettering ourselves.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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¹ See “The Buddha discovered dhyana,” [SD 33.1b \(6.4\)](#).

² See [SD 40a.16](#).