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Sākacchā Sutta 1

The 1st Discourse on Discussion | A 5.65

Theme: The qualities of one with whom it is worthwhile to discuss Dharma

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2015, 2021

1 Sutta significance

1.1 SUTTA CONTENTS

“Sākacchā Sutta” means “discourse on (Dharma) discussion,” and 2 practically identical suttas are given here. **Sākacchā Sutta 1** (A 5.65) [SD 58.5] is spoken by the Buddha, and **Sākacchā Sutta 2** (A 5.163) by the arhat Sāriputta. Both Suttas state that it is “fitting” (*alam*), that is, sufficient or ideal, to discuss Dharma with, since he is able to answer related questions.

1.2 THE 2 SUTTAS

1.2.1 There are 2 suttas entitled **the Sākacchā Sutta**—the discourse on discussion—with identical teaching:

Sākacchā Sutta 1	A 5.65/3:81	taught by the Buddha himself	SD 58.5
Sākacchā Sutta 2	A 5.163/3:190 f	taught by the elder Sāriputta	SD 58.5(2)

Both the Suttas state that the ideal person to discuss Dharma with is one who is accomplished in the “10 rightness” (*dasa sammatta*), that is, an **arhat**. Both the Suttas succinctly define this as comprising accomplishment in moral virtue, in concentration, in wisdom, in freedom and in the knowledge and vision of the path.

1.2.2 Both the Suttas are addressed to the celibate practitioner (*brahmacārī*), thus reminding them that this is *not* a status, but **a state** that they have voluntarily vowed to undertake for training to gain the path in this life itself. This means that a true monastic is one who is a renunciant who keeps to the Vinaya with the purpose of mastering the Dharma leading to awakening.

1.3 SUTTA TEACHING

1.3.1 The path

1.3.1.1 In this connection, we will examine the 2 Suttas in terms of the path of awakening. It is called a **path** (*magga*) since we must “travel” on it, meaning that we need to practise Buddha Dharma, so that we grow and transform ourselves. Monastics are specifically mentioned because they have freely and openly vowed to undertake the training. On the other hand, one who does not do so—who flouts the Vinaya and practises not the Dharma—is living a life of lies, deceit, and shamelessness—like a thief (*cora*).¹

1.3.1.2 Although monastics are highlighted (on account of their renunciation and vows) in the suttas, **the path** can also be traversed by **the laity** who keep the 5 precepts and practise some effective level of mindfulness, even meditation. The basic lay practice is that of the perception of impermanence

¹ On monastics living as “thieves,” see **Arahatta Susīma S** (S 12.70,58), SD 16.8; SD 45.18 (2.3.3.2) almsfood; SD 49.2 (1.1.3) recluses.

(*anicca,saññā*), as taught in any of the 10 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25).² Taking this as our constant practice, we are sure to attain the path as streamwinners even in this life itself. [***]

1.3.1.3 Before continuing, let us familiarize ourselves with the basic definitions of each of **the 8 limbs of the noble eightfold path**. The eightfold path is divided into **the 3 trainings**, also called the **3 aggregates**—those of moral virtue, of mental concentration and of wisdom [1.3.2]. But here, in its natural sequence, **the wisdom aggregate** appears first, headed by **right view**. This list shows how we progress spiritually as an individual, that is, **our inner transformation**, thus:

<u>the noble eightfold path</u>			<u>the 3 trainings</u>
right view	<i>samma ditṭhi</i>	directly seeing the 4 truths	} wisdom (<i>paññā</i>)
right intention	<i>sammā saṅkappa</i>	charity lovingkindness compassion	
right speech	<i>sammā vācā</i>	refraining from false speech refraining from divisive speech refraining from harsh (hurting) speech refraining from frivolous talk	} moral conduct (<i>sīla</i>)
right action	<i>sammā kammantā</i>	refraining from taking life refraining from taking the not-given refraining from sexual misconduct refraining from wrong speech + action	
right livelihood	<i>sammā ājīva</i>		
right effort	<i>sammā vāyāma</i>	preventing unarisen unwholesome states abandoning arisen unwholesome states cultivating unarisen wholesome states maintaining arisen wholesome states	} mental concentration (<i>samādhi</i>)
right mindfulness	<i>sammā sati</i>	contemplation of the body contemplation of feeling contemplation of the mind contemplation of dharmas	
right concentration	<i>sammā samādhi</i>	cultivating the 4 dhyanas	

Table 1.3.1.3. The eightfold path and its limbs³

1.3.2 The 3 trainings (as a path)

1.3.2.1 The pyramid diagram [Table 1.3.2] conveniently illustrates how the limbs of the path should work as sets, and in tandem with one another, gradually building up our moral virtue, concentration and wisdom. In terms of **training** (*sikkhā*), **moral virtue** (*sīla*) is often mentioned first in the sense that it is the *foundation* for the whole path. We must ensure that our *body and speech* are free from any kind of unwholesomeness, that is, not motivated by greed, hate or delusion (the 3 unwholesome roots).⁴

² See eg (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1), SD 16.7.

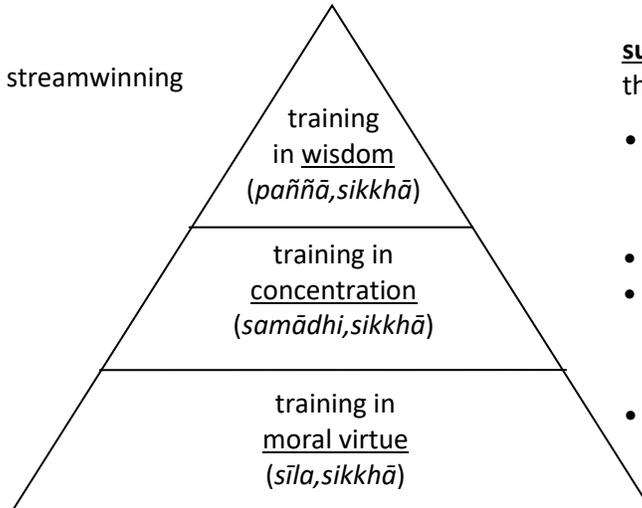
³ This table recurs in SD 10.16 (1.1.2.1).

⁴ On the 3 unwholesome roots (*akusala,mūla*), see **Mūla S** (A 3.69) SD 18.2; SD 4.14 (1.5); SD 50.20 (3.1.3).

mundane path

“outsiders” working for streamwinning

1. right view
2. right intention
6. right effort
7. right mindfulness
8. right concentration
3. right speech
4. right bodily action
5. right livelihood

**supramundane path**

the “noble path” saints

- at least first 3 fetters* broken [1.3.2.2]
- mindfulness & samadhi
- dhyana (for non-returners and arhats)
- “moral virtues beloved of the noble ones”

Table 1.3.2 The 3 trainings (pyramid diagram)⁵

[* The 3 fetters are those of (1) self-identity view, (2) doubt, and (3) attachment to ritual and vows.]⁶

1.3.2.2 A vital aspect of moral virtue is that of habitually freeing our body and speech from the 3 unwholesome roots [1.3.2.1], and refining its purity, by noticing how **impermanent** each action—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching—is (in terms of rising and falling). When our body and speech are wholesomely tamed in this manner, it conduces to the next stage in the training, that of **mental concentration**.

When our body and speech are calm and settled, we direct our attention to calming **the mind**. A simple way to do this is to notice how our thoughts have changed over time (diachronously). As we become more calm mentally, we observe how, even *now* (synchronously), our thoughts are changing. Notice the word “thoughts” (plural): we can hardly hold *one* thought before another takes over, and so on. This is **impermanence**. This is a simple, but effective, habit of cultivating **mindfulness** (*sati*).

1.3.2.3 When we are more skilled at freeing our mind from the unwholesome roots, we will be able to attain **mental concentration** (*samādhi*), the 2nd aspect of the training. When we are able to overcome all the manifestations of *greed and hate*⁷ in the form of the 5 mental hindrances—sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt⁸—then, we attain dhyana (*jhāna*). When this is properly done, that is, we understand that even such a profound mental calm is mind-made, conditioned, impermanent and unsatisfactory, it is called **right concentration** (*sammā samādhi*)

⁵ This table is also found at SD 10.16 (Table 1.3.2).

⁶ The 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, -bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6) lust for form existence (*rūpa, raga*), (7) lust for formless existence (*arūpa, raga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*): SD 10.16 (1.6.6-8); SD 11.1 (5.1.4); SD 3.3 (2); SD 56.1 (4.4).

⁷ The 3rd root, delusion, as a rule, is always there until we are arhats.

⁸ On the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*), see **Nīvaraṇa**, SD 32.1.

1.3.3 Attaining the path

1.3.3.1 The true purpose of the Buddha’s teaching is to gain the path of awakening. The path is only reached by the practice of **renunciation** (*nekkhamma*), that is, the total giving up of greed, hate and delusion. For this reason, true practitioners are called renunciants (*pabbajita*), that is, those who have taken the vows of monkhood and nunhood to renounce the world.

Hence, becoming a monk or a nun is not a status we gain so that we are automatically “venerable” (*āyasmā*), but a reminder to keep true to our practice of the Vinaya and the Dharma, that is, to the **state** of renunciation, so that we progress on the path of awakening.

Dharma practice as a **lay person** may seem harder or slower than as a monastic because we seem to face more distractions. Yet, when this familiarity breeds contempt, the lay practitioner actually has a greater advantage than a false monastic since we are less likely to be nose-led by the notion that the grass is greener on the other side of the hill.

1.3.3.2 When we, as a lay practitioner, understand the nature and purpose of the 5 precepts,⁹ we observe them diligently, so that they become *the bases for mindfulness and concentration*. Then, cultivating **the perception of impermanence**, we will attain streamwinning in this life itself while the false monastic has fallen into the rut of a subhuman state.

For this reason, the suttas consistently speak of the “4 paths” (*magga*) as the noble community (*ariya,saṅgha*) of “**the 4 noble individuals**” (*ariya,puggala*), that is, streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners and arhats, both monastic and lay. Awakening is not about status, but freeing ourselves from the suffering state and attaining the *awakened state*.

Both Nakula,mātā and Nakula,pitā—parents of the boy Nakula,—and both Sigāla,mātā and Sigāla,pitā—parents of Sigāla the young houselord [SD 4.1 (5)]—are all lay disciples who are streamwinners. The latter couple later renounced the world and became arhats in our Buddha’s time.

1.3.3.3 When, as streamwinners, we practise to cut down the 3 unwholesome roots—greed, hate and delusion—we go on to become **once-returners**, that is, we have only one 1 more life to live before we finish off the momentum of our remaining karma. However, failing that (since delusion is a very tricky karmic root to remove), when we weaken the roots of greed and hate (especially through meditation), we go on to become **non-returners**.

Upon dying, whether as humans or as devas, we are reborn in **the pure abodes** (*suddh’āvāsa*), never to return to the sense-world, that is, reborn in a lower world. We finish off our karma through meditation, progressing upwards through the pure abodes until we become **arhats**.

1.3.3.4 On the other hand, even as streamwinners, we have at the most 7 more lives to finish off our karmic momentum before attaining **arhathood**. However, if we are reborn in the brahma realms, especially the formless worlds, a life there, such as in the highest formless realm, is 84,000 world-cycles! Even then, throughout that period, we will live morally virtuous lives, gradually building up our mental powers and moving up the path of awakening.

All these ways of progress are rooted in our understanding the Buddha’s teachings of **the 4 noble truths**, experienced in our reflections of the 3 universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and nonself, especially the first characteristic [1.3.2.2]. Such teachings and their practice are best

⁹ The 5 precepts refine our bodily actions and speech by way of (1) not killing (respect for life); (2) not stealing (respect for other’s happiness); (3) not committing sexual misconduct (respect the freedom of others); (4) not lying (respecting truth and wholesome communication); and (5) not getting drunk or drugged (to keep our mind calm and clear): all this helps us keep our mind ready to for proper mental cultivation.

learned from those who are themselves accomplished in **the tenfold rightness**, one who has himself completed the path, that is, the arhat. The next best alternative is to study and practise those teachings that are taught by the 1st arhat himself, the Buddha, as recorded in the suttas.

1.3.4 The tenfold rightness

1.3.4.1 These 10 qualities are also listed in **the Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta** (M 117), but without mention of the term *asekha* (learner), thus:

- (1) In this regard, bhikshus, right view comes *first*.
And, bhikshus, how does right view come first?
- (2) From right view comes right intention;¹⁰
- (3) from right intention comes right speech;
- (4) from right speech comes right action;
- (5) from right action comes right livelihood;
- (6) from right livelihood comes right effort;
- (7) from right effort comes right mindfulness;
- (8) from right mindfulness comes right concentration;
- (9) from right concentration comes right knowledge;
- (10) from right knowledge comes right freedom.

—Thus, bhikshus, **the learner** on the path is endowed with 8 limbs, but **the arhat** with 10 limbs.¹¹
(M 117,34/3:75 f), SD 6.10

The 8-factored path—the “normal” noble eightfold path we are familiar with—describes the progressive attainment of the learners, that is, the streamwinner, the once-returned and the non-returned. They have not yet fully awakened. The arhat, on the other hand, is fully awakened, just like the Buddha.¹² Thus, **the arhat** is described as having attained right knowledge (*sammā ñāṇa*) and right freedom (*sammā vimutti*). Technically, “right knowledge” refers to the arhat’s direct knowledge into true reality, that he is awakened. “Right freedom” is his review knowledge, his knowing that he has indeed gained awakening and is free from rebirth.¹³

2 Sācakchā Sutta 2 (A 5.163)

SD 58.5(2)

Sācakchā Sutta 2

The 2nd Discourse on Discussion | **A 5.163**/3:190 f

Theme: The qualities of one with whom it is worthwhile to discuss Dharma (by Sāriputta)

- 1** Then, the venerable Sāriputta addressed the monks: “Bhikshus!”
“Bhante!” the monks replied in assent.

¹⁰ Comy: For one with right view of the path (*magga*), the right intention of the path arises. Similarly, for one with the right view of the fruit (*phala*), the right intention of the fruit arises. The other factors (except the last two) apply in the same way as the supramundane path. (MA 4:134)

¹¹ The additional two factors are those of the arhat. Right knowledge (*sammā ñāṇa*) is the review knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇa ñāṇa*) that he has destroyed all defilements, and right freedom (*sammā vimutti*) is his experience of deliverance from defilements. (MA 4:135). This tenfold set is called “the tenfold rightness” (*dasa sammatta*) (D 3:271, 292; M 1:42; A 5:212).

¹² See **Sambuddha S** (A 22.58), SD 49.10. See also **Pavāraṇā S** (S 8.7), SD 49.11.

¹³ On the path of rightness, see SD 10.16 (1.2.2).

1.2 The venerable Sāriputta said this: [191]

“Bhikshus, a monk accomplished in 5 qualities is fitting for his fellow brahmacharis to hold a discussion with. What are the five?

2 (1) Here, bhikshus, a monk is himself **accomplished in moral virtue**, and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of moral virtue.

(2) And he is himself **accomplished in concentration**, and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of concentration.

(3) And he is himself **accomplished in wisdom**, and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of wisdom.

(4) And he is himself **accomplished in freedom**, and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of freedom.

(5) And he is himself **accomplished in knowledge and vision of freedom**,¹⁴ and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of knowledge and vision of freedom.

5 Bhikshus, when a monk is accomplished in 5 qualities, he is fitting for his fellow brahmacharis to hold a discussion with.”

— evaṃ —

Sākacchā Sutta 1

Paṭhama Sākacchā Sutta

The 1st Discourse on Discussion

A 5.65

1 Bhikshus, a monk accomplished in 5 qualities is fitting for his fellow brahmacharis [celibate practitioners] to hold a discussion with. What are the five?

2 (1) Here, bhikshus, a monk is himself **accomplished in moral virtue**, and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of moral virtue.

(2) And he is himself **accomplished in concentration**, and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of concentration.

(3) And he is himself **accomplished in wisdom**, and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of wisdom.

(4) And he is himself **accomplished in freedom**, and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of freedom.

(5) And he is himself **accomplished in knowledge and vision of freedom**, and he answers questions that arise during a discussion on the accomplishment of knowledge and vision of freedom.

3 Bhikshus, when a monk is accomplished in 5 qualities, he is fitting for his fellow brahmacharis to hold a discussion with.

— evaṃ — 210412 210515 210721

¹⁴ *Attanā ca vimutti,ñāṇa,dassana,sampanno ca.*