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(Samādhi) Bala Sutta

The Discourse on Strength (in Samadhi) | A 6.72

Theme: How to strengthen our meditation

Translated by Piya Tan ©2013

Introduction

1 The (Samādhi) Bala Sutta (A 6.24) is a short discourse on how to strengthen our meditation, especially in attaining dhyana. The following 6 skills need to be mastered for this purpose, thus:

(1) being skilled in	attaining samadhi,	<i>samādhissa samāpatti, kusalo hoti</i>
(2) being skilled in	remaining in samadhi,	<i>samādhissa ṭhiti, kusalo hoti</i>
(3) being skilled in	emerging from samadhi,	<i>samādhissa vuṭṭhāna, kusalo hoti</i>
(4) practising with	care,	<i>sakkacca, kārī ca hoti</i>
(5) practising with	commitment [persistence],	<i>sātacca, kārī ca</i>
(6) doing what is	suitable.	<i>sappāya, kārī ca</i>

1.1 Skill in the attaining of samadhi (*samādhissa samāpatti, kusalo hoti*). As a meditator, we should know how to gladden (*hāseti*) the mind to make it pliant so that it can attain dhyana (SA 2:352). One commentary says that this refers to being adept in knowing and resorting to suitable food and suitable climate, as a result of which is to attain samadhi (AA 1:161, 3:354).

However, without a strong foundation in Dharma instruction or sutta learning, even if we reach high levels of meditative attainment, we may not be able to recognize them, or even fear them. Having attained such levels, we might not be able to effectively instruct others for their benefit. However, as pupils, if we are patient and wise, we would still be able to learn from such an experienced meditator or teacher lacking language skills.

1.2 Skill in remaining in samadhi (*samādhissa ṭhiti, kusalo hoti*). We should know how to spend time in dhyana, keeping it stable or deepening it; and also keeping up its duration dhyana (AA 2:161, 3:255). We should know how to clear our mind of the mental hindrances¹ and hold the meditation sign (*nimitta*).²

1.3 Skill in emerging from samadhi (*samādhissa vuṭṭhāna, kusalo hoti*). We should be able to emerge from dhyana at a pre-determined time (by our body clock) (AA 3:355); for example, we should be wise in knowing the time-limit in regards to emerging, thinking, “I will exert myself as long as the sun is gone” (*ettakaṃ gate suriye uṭṭhahissāmīti vuṭṭhāna, kāla, paricchedakā paññā*) (DA 3:979; PmA 1:232).

1.4 Practising with care (*sakkacca, kārī hoti*).³ We should conduct ourselves with care so as to be able to enter dhyana.⁴ This also means executing all our duties, chores and tasks diligently,⁵ and performing deeds of merit (such as giving) and other wholesome acts, as a support for our practice.⁶ Simply put, we should not be heedless.⁷

¹ On overcoming the hindrances, see *Nīvaraṇa*, SD 32.1 & *Saṅgārava S* (S 46.55 @ SD 3.12).

² On *nimitta* as “meditation sign,” see *Nimitta*, SD 19.7.

³ A common phrase: S 3:267×2, 268×3, 3:276, 3:277×8; *Sakkhi Bhabba S* (A 6.72/3:427), (*Chakka*) *Bala S* (A 6.4/3:428)

⁴ SA 2:352; ThaA 2:142.

⁵ CA 19, 289, 319, 326; Nc:Be 54; SnA 2:482;

⁶ NmA 2:406; DhsA 408; VbhA 468.

⁷ Sn 2:564; Nm 1:59, 2:376; Nc:Be 80, 191, 194, 300.

1.5 Practising with commitment (*sātacca,kārī*).⁸ We should keep up our effort in working to attain dhyana (S 2:352); in other words, we should put in every effort we can into our practice (Vbh 244). It is said that true practitioners are “committed to their duties” (*kiṅce sātacca,kārino*).⁹ “Commitment” (*sātacca*) entails persistence of two kinds, continuity or sustained effort (*satata, satata,kiriya, satata,bhāva*, etc), and the proper effort itself (*virīya*).¹⁰

This means persistently clearing the mind of any thought of the 5 cords of sensual pleasures (SA 2:390), and directing the mind to constantly reflect on the 3 characteristics¹¹ for the sake of insight (SnA 1:214). It also means being very patient with ourselves,¹² and never heedless.¹³ This commitment also means that we should aspire to at least attain streamwinning, if not arhathood (as monastics or renunciants), in this life itself.¹⁴ In short, we should respect the Dharma, perform the recluse’s duties, and enjoy the recluse’s life here and now (ThaA 3:53).

1.6 Doing what is suitable (*sappāya,kārī*).¹⁵ We should be able to fulfill qualities or practices that conduce to concentration (SA 2:352).¹⁶ In other words, we should know what is beneficial to our practice and what is not, and should cultivate what is beneficial and avoid or lessen what is not.

A famous case here is that of **Puṇṇa of Sunāparanta**. It is said that when Puṇṇa returns to his homeland of Sunāparanta, he first lives on Abbha,hatthi Pabbata (Cloud-hand Hill), where he goes into the traders’ village for alms. His younger brother, **Cūla Puṇṇa**, recognizing him, determines that he should continue to reside right there.

Puṇṇa, however, knowing this would conduce to socializing and distractions, moves on to the Samudda Giri Vihāra (Sea-hill Vihara), where he marks out his ambulatory (*caṅkama*) with magnetite or lodestone.¹⁷ However, he then has difficulty meditating because of the loud noise of waves breaking against the magnetite rocks. To effectively meditate, he mentally determines (*adhiṭṭhāsi*) that the sea remains calm; in other words, makes great effort to let go of the mental signs that arise from the noise of the waves.

Leaving Samudda Giri Vihāra, he goes to Mātula Giri (Uncle’s Hill), but there he is confronted by the incessant cries of a big flock of birds, day and night. Having to constantly deal with such sounds is difficult at this early stage for him, so that they distract him.

Finally, he goes to the Makulak’ārāma Vihāra (Budding Park Vihara) at Makulaka Gāma, which is neither too far nor too near the merchant village (for collecting alms), and it is isolated and quiet so that

⁸ A common phrase: **Saṅgīti S** (D 33/3:238×6, 3:239×2), **Das’uttara S** (D 34/278×4); **Ceto,khila S** (M 16/1:101 ×5, 102×6, 103×8); **Samādhi Mūlaka Sātacca,kārī S** (S 34.9/3:268×5). **Samāpatti Mūlaka Sātacca,kārī S** (S 34.18/-3:271×4), **Sakkacca Mūlaka Sātacca,kārī S** (S 3:276), **Sātacca Mūlaka Sappāya.kārī S** (S 3:277×5, 278 ×6), **(Pañcaka) Ceto,khila S** (A 5.205/3:248×4), **Vinibandha S** (A 5.206/3:249×2, 250×2), **Adhigama S** (A 6.79/3:431, 432), **(Navaka) Ceto,khila S** (A 9.71/4:460×4), **(Navaka) Cetaso Vinibandha S** (A 9.72/4:461×4); **(Dasaka) Ceto,khila S** (A 10.14/-5:18×6, 19×2, 20×6).

⁹ Dh 293; Tha 636.

¹⁰ DA 3:1030; MA 2:68; SA 2:128; AA 3:324; ThaA 2:250; NmA 2:406; Vbh 249; VbhA 324, 346; DhsA 408; cf DhA 3:452; ThaA 2:269.

¹¹ On the 3 characteristics, see **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59.12-16/3:67 f) = SD 1.2 & SID: ti,lakkhaṇa.

¹² VbhA 324; CA 279, 326.

¹³ Nc:Be 54; SnA 1:335; UA 375.

¹⁴ SA 1:331; SnA 1:234. On streamwinning, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

¹⁵ A common phrase: **V** 1:303; **Samādhi Mūlaka Sappāya,kārī S** (S 34.10/3:268×2, 269×3), **S** 3:276-278, **Sātacca Mūlaka Sappāya,kārī S** (S 3:277×2, 278×4); **Upaṭṭhāka S 1** (A 5.123/3:144), **Anāyussā S 1** (A 5.125/3:145), **Anāyussā S 2** (A 5.126/3:145), **Sakkhi Bhabba** (A 6.71/3:427), **(Samādhi) Bala S** (A 6.72/3:427).

¹⁶ SA 2:352; cf AA 3:411.

¹⁷ *Aya,kanta pāsāṇa*.

he is able to do his spiritual exercises. So there he constructs a walkway for walking meditation, and progresses in his practice. (MA 86-88)

The Puṇṇ'ovāda Sutta (M 145) states that within his first rains-retreat in Sunāparanta, Puṇṇa attains arhathood.¹⁸

2 RELATED SUTTAS

There are at least two other suttas that are closely related to the (Samādhi) Bala Sutta, and they should be studied together with. These suttas are as follows:

Himavanta Sutta	A 6.24/3:311,27-30	SD 41.14
Vasa Sutta	A 7.38/4:34,5-9	SD 41.16

These two suttas each have a list of meditation skills some of which are identical.¹⁹

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(Samādhi) Bala Sutta

The Discourse on Strength (in Samadhi)

A 6.72

Lacking strength in samadhi

1 Bhikshus, possessing 6 things a monk is *incapable* of attaining strength [power] in samadhi.²⁰
What are the six?

2.1 Here, bhikshus, a monk

- (1) is not skilled in attaining samadhi,
- (2) he is not skilled in remaining in samadhi,
- (3) he is not skilled in emerging from samadhi,
- (4) he does not practise with care,
- (5) he does not practise with commitment [persistence],
- (6) he does not do what is suitable.

*na samādhissa samāpatti,kusalo hoti
na samādhissa ṭhiti,kusalo hoti
na samādhissa vuṭṭhāna,kusalo hoti
asakkacca,kārī ca hoti
asātacca,kārī ca
asappāya,kārī ca*

2.2 Bhikshus, possessing these 6 things a monk is incapable of attaining strength [power] in samadhi.

Gaining strength in samadhi

3 Bhikshus, possessing 6 things a monk is *capable* of attaining strength [power] in samadhi.²¹
What are the six? **[428]**

4 Here, bhikshus, a monk

- (1) is skilled in attaining samadhi,
- (2) he is skilled in remaining in samadhi,
- (3) he is skilled in emerging from samadhi,

*samādhissa samāpatti,kusalo hoti
samādhissa ṭhiti,kusalo hoti
samādhissa vuṭṭhāna,kusalo hoti*

¹⁸ M 145.7/3:269, SD 20.15.

¹⁹ For other details, see **Samādhi Samāpatti S** (S 34.1) @ SD 41.12 (1.4.1).

²⁰ *Chahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu abhabbo samādhismim balatam pāpuṇitum.*

²¹ *Chahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu bhabbo samādhismim balatam pāpuṇitum.*

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|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (4) he practises with | care, | <i>sakkacca, kārī ca hoti</i> |
| (5) he practises with | commitment [persistence], | <i>sātacca, kārī ca</i> |
| (6) he does what is | suitable. | <i>sappāya, kārī ca</i> |
- 5 Bhikshus, possessing these 6 things a monk is capable of attaining strength [power] in samadhi.

— evaṃ —

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