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## (Abhabba) Tayo,dhamma Sutta

The Discourse on the Three Things (That One is Incapable of) | A 10.76

Chinese Āgama SĀ 346 = T2.95c17-96b24; SĀ 760 = T2.199c27-200a13;

Skt Tripathi 1962(25):204-210

Theme: Why and how to practise the spiritual life

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003; 2010

### Sutta reflection

Although the Pali of this Sutta is abridged, that is, the repetitive sentences have been restructured to highlight only the key words, our translation gives its main sections in full. This is a sutta for personal reflection. On our first reading such a sutta, we might simply intellectualize what we have read, but it helps to also read with an inquiring mind. These passages are best read with the heart, that is, taking them just as they are and letting them speak for themselves. Their meaning and purpose would become more clear as our minds become stiller and clearer.

We should have read the whole sutta at least once right through to have an idea of its structure and general teaching. Then select the section—that is, (A), (B) or (C)—that appeals to us the most and read it reflectively as a daily or periodic practice. Once we have some insight into it, go on to the section we feel least attracted to and read it reflectively. Go back and forth in this manner as we feel comfortable with it.

If we are busy or simply wish to do a very short reflection, the recommended passage is §40, that is, the closing paragraph, which is the key paragraph.

Ideally, each day (otherwise, periodically), in **a quiet moment**, we should reflect on our daily life in connection with one of the 10 links here and examine how it bears on our personal experiences. It is all right if we are not sure about what is going on: simply say to yourself: “I need to be more aware of what is going on here.”

This can be done before or after our meditation. This kind of meditation is called the recollection on the Dharma (*dharmānussati*). Close with cultivating lovingkindness within oneself (“May I be well and happy...”) and then radiate it to all beings. (One effective method is to recollect a very happy moment during the day or in our life and smile at it with joy and build our lovingkindness from there.)

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## (Abhabba) Tayo,dhamma Sutta

### The Discourse on the Three Things (That One is Incapable of)

A 10.76

#### (A) The 3 great bads<sup>1</sup>

**1** Bhikshus, if 3 things were not found in the world, the Tathāgata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, would not appear in the world, nor would the Dharma-Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathagata shine in the world.

What are the three?

**2** (1) They are **birth, decay [old age] and death.**

If these 3 things were not found in the world, the Tathāgata would not have appeared in the world, nor would the Dharma-Vinaya proclaimed by the Tathāgata shine in the world.

But because these 3 things are found in the world, therefore, the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one, appears in the world and the Dharma-Vinaya, proclaimed by the Tathagata, shine in the world.

#### The 3 unwholesome roots

**3** Without giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up birth, decay and death.

What are the three?

**4** (2) They are **greed, hate and delusion.** Without giving up 3 three things, bhikshus, one would not be able to give up birth, decay and death.

#### The 3 fetters

**5** Without giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up greed, hate and delusion.

What are the three?

**6** (3) They are **personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.**<sup>2</sup>

Without giving up these 3 things,<sup>3</sup> bhikshus, one would not be able to give up greed, hate and delusion. [145]

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<sup>1</sup> On the usage of “bad” as a countable n here & §§21+22 (headings), and the psychological and ethical difference btw “bad” and “evil,” see **Beyond good and evil**, SD 18.7 esp (3). See also SID: pāpa.

<sup>2</sup> For def, see Vbh 915/364.

<sup>3</sup>These are the first 3 mental fetters, overcoming which makes one a streamwinner. **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) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*paṭigha*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*), and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). On **sakkāya** as the 5 aggregates, see

### The 3 wrong mindings

**7** Without giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

What are the three?

**8** (4) They are **unwise attention**,<sup>4</sup> **following the wrong way**,<sup>5</sup> and **mental sluggishness**.<sup>6</sup>

Without giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would not be able to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

### The 3 wrong attentions

**9** Without giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness.

What are the three?

**10** (5) They are **unmindfulness**,<sup>7</sup> **lack of clear knowing**,<sup>8</sup> and **a distracted mind**.<sup>9</sup>

Without giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way and mental sluggishness.

### The 3 wrong attitudes

**11** Without giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up unmindfulness, lack of clear knowing, and a distracted mind.

What are the three?

**12** (6) They are **lack of desire to see the noble ones**,<sup>10</sup> **lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma**,<sup>11</sup> and **a fault-finding mind**.<sup>12</sup>

Cūḷa Vedalla S (M 44). Spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*) is the uncertainty over what is wholesome and unwholesome, whether a deed should be done or not, etc. It is the lack of a desire to heal oneself, and taking various sides due to one's being indecisive and unwise attention (Vism 14.177/471), in short, not making an attempt to clearly think things out for oneself. Clinging to rituals and vows (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*) is holding on to the view that merely keeping to rituals and vows can bring one purification.

<sup>4</sup> "Unwise attention," *ayoniso manasikāra*, that is, to regard what is impermanent as being permanent, what is painful as being pleasurable, what is not self as self, what is foul as beautiful (Vbh 936/373; MA 1:64).

<sup>5</sup> "Following the wrong way," *kummagga sevana*, that is, not keeping to the noble eightfold path (Vbh 936/ 373).

<sup>6</sup> "Mental sluggishness," *cetaso līnattarū*, that is, sloth and torpor (A 1:3; S 5:64=103; Vbh 345; Nm 412, 492).

<sup>7</sup> "Unmindfulness," *mutṭha, sacca*, ie the opp of *sati* or *paṭissati*. Vism 4.172/163 explains that clear knowing (*sampajañña*) has the characteristic of non-confusion; its function is investigation, manifested as scrutiny. Mindfulness (*sati*) has the characteristic of remembering. Its function is not forgetting, manifested as guarding. See SD 54.2h (2.2.1.2). *Sampajāno* is also tr as "fully aware," "fully understanding," "clearly knowing"; see M:ÑB 2001 n147.

<sup>8</sup> "Lack of clear knowing," *asampajañña*, ie opp of *sampajāñña*, clear knowing. See Pug 2.18/25 & prev n.

<sup>9</sup> "A distracted mind," *cetaso vikkheparū*, mental restlessness (*uddhacca*) (ThaA 1:176).

<sup>10</sup> "Lack of desire to see the noble ones," *ariyānarū adassana.kamyatarū*.

<sup>11</sup> "Lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma," *ariya, dhammarū asotu, kamyatarū*.

<sup>12</sup> "A fault-finding mind," *upārambha, cittatarū*, an angry mind, a mind aroused by hate (ThaA 2:153).

Without giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up unmindfulness, lack of clear knowing, and a distracted mind.

### The 3 wrong conducts

**13** Without giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

What are the three?

**14** (7) They are **restlessness**,<sup>13</sup> **lack of restraint**,<sup>14</sup> and **immorality**.<sup>15</sup>

Without giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind. **[146]**

### The 3 lacks

**15** Without giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

What are the three?

**16** (8) They are **lack of faith**,<sup>16</sup> **unfriendliness**<sup>17</sup> and **laziness**.<sup>18</sup>

Without giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

### The 3 negative emotions

**17** Without giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

What are the three?

**18** (9) They are **disrespect**,<sup>19</sup> **intractability**<sup>20</sup> and **bad friendship**.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "Restlessness," *uddhacca*, that is, distraction, mental wavering, mental turmoil (Vbh 552/255).

<sup>14</sup> "Lack of restraint," *asamvara*. On experiencing a sense-object one takes in its signs (general appearance) and its details, arousing covetousness and mental pain (Vbh 933/372). On "signs and details," see **Nimitta & Anuvyañjana**, SD 19.14

<sup>15</sup> "Immorality," *dussīlya*, that is, wrong action through body, speech and mind (Vbh 933/372).

<sup>16</sup> "Lack of faith," *assaddhiya*, ie, lack of confidence in the three jewels. There are 2 kinds of *saddhā*, faith, confidence, trust: (1) "rootless faith" (*amūlika, saddhā*), baseless or irrational faith, blind faith. (M 2:170,21); (2) "faith with a good cause" (*ākāravati, saddhā*), faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,18, 401,23; MA 2:388, 3:116, 274). *Amūlaka* = "not seen, not heard, not suspected" (V 2:243, 3:163 & Comy).

<sup>17</sup> "Unfriendliness," *avadaññūta*, being inaffable, niggardly, unkind, contumacious (Vbh 931/371).

<sup>18</sup> "Laziness," *kosajja*, that is, lack of striving, constantly being distracted by the five strands of sense-pleasures (of the physical senses) (Vbh 928/369 f).

<sup>19</sup> "Disrespect," *anādariya*, that is, disregard for others, not caring about others (Vbh 931/371).

<sup>20</sup> "Intractability," *dovacassatā*, that is, not caring, intractability for admonition, being unresponsive to another's words (V 4:113 = 185 = Dhs 1325 = Vbh 901/359).

<sup>21</sup> "Bad friendship," *pāpa, mittatā*, opp of spiritual friendship: see **Bad friendship**, SD 64.17. On bad friends, see eg **Sigāl'ovāda S** (D 31.15-20/3:185 f), SD 4.1.

Without giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

### The 3 unguarded acts

**19** Without giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up disrespect, intractability and bad friendship.

What are the three?

**20** (10) They are **lack of moral shame**,<sup>22</sup> **lack of moral fear**,<sup>23</sup> and **heedlessness**.<sup>24</sup>

Without giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be unable to give up disrespect, intractability and bad friendship.

### (B) Why we are unable to destroy the three great bads<sup>25</sup>

**21** There is this recluse, bhikshus, who lacks moral shame, lacks moral fear and is heedless.

Being heedless, he is unable to give up disrespect, intractability and bad friendship.

As an bad friend, he is unable to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

Being lazy, is unable to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

Being immoral, he is unable to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

Having a fault-finding mind, he is unable to give up unmindfulness, lack of clear knowing, and a distracted mind.

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<sup>22</sup> "Lack of moral shame," *ahirika*, that is, opp of moral shame, *hiri* (Skt *hrī*) ie a sense of disgust with bad. The Abhidhamma defines moral shame as "to be ashamed of what one ought to be ashamed of, to be ashamed of performing bad and unwholesome deeds" (*yam hiriyati hiriyitabbena hiriyati pāpakānam akusalām dhammānam sam-āpattiyā, ayam vuccati hiri*, Pug 24; cf Vism 14.142/464; J 1:129 f; DhsA 124); cf Dhs:R 18 f. It is one of the 7 noble treasures (*ariya, dhana*, DA 2:34; ThaA 240; VvA 113), ie treasures of generosity (*cāga, dhanai*, D 3:163, 251; A 4:5; VvA 113; cf A 3:53): faith, moral conduct, moral shame, moral fear, learning, generosity, wisdom. Cf Sn 77, 462 (= D 1:168), 719. Moral shame is often paired with moral fear (*ottappa*) (eg M 1:271; S 2:220; A 2:78; It 34; Tikap 61; J 1:127; Vism 221; DhA 3:73), and, as the foundation for morality, called "the world-protectors" (*loka, pāla*, A 1:51), since they are the preconditions for a functional society. The term *ottappa* is derived from *apa* + *VTAP* (to be abashed) [Skt \**āpatrapya* > *apatrapā* (Trenckner)]. Andersen suggests that this etym must be preferred to that of Childers: \**autappya* > *uttāpa*, *ut* + *VTAP* (heat) (PG 62). Edgerton (BHSD) has *apatrāpya* and the cpd *hrīr-apatrāpya* (P *hiri, ottappa*). According to **Visuddhi, magga**, the proximate cause for moral shame is self-respect, while for moral fear it is respect for others. Out of self-respect (*attāna garu katvā*), one, like the daughter of a good family, rejects bad-doing through moral shame. Out of respect for others (*param garu katvā*), one, like a courtesan, rejects bad-doing through moral fear (Vism 14.142/464 f). The former is sometimes known as self-regarding moral conduct (motivated by the *shame* the deed entails), while the latter as other-regarding moral conduct (motivated by the healthy *fear* of karmic repercussion). As such these two actions are known as the two bright states that protect the world, if not for which "one would neither respect one's mother, nor one's mother's sister, nor one's brother's wife, nor one's teacher's wife...." (A 1:51). [In his tr, Ñāṇamoli renders *hiri* as "conscience," but apparently mistranslates *ottappati* as "is ashamed" and *ottappa* as "shame," Vism:Ñ 524 f.] See **Hiri Ottappa S** or **Cariya S** (A 2.1.9/1:51), SD 2.5c.

<sup>23</sup> "Lack of moral fear," *anotappī*, ie opp of *ottappa*, moral fear. See prec n.

<sup>24</sup> "Heedlessness," *pamāda*, that is, wrong conduct of the doors (body, speech and mind) and being habitually under the control of the 5 strands of sense-pleasures (Vbh 846/350), ie not working for one's spiritual development.

<sup>25</sup> On the usage of "bad" here as a countable n, see above, (A) (header) n.

Having a distracted [147] mind, he is unable to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness.

Having mental sluggishness, he is unable to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

Having spiritual doubt, he is unable to give up greed, hate and delusion.

And without giving up greed, hate and delusion, he is unable to give up birth, decay and death.

### **(C) How to destroy the 3 great bads<sup>26</sup>**

**22** (1) Bhikshus, by giving up 3 things, one is able to give up **birth, decay and death**.

What are the three?

**23** (2) They are **greed, hate and delusion**. By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up birth, decay and death.

**24** By giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up greed, hate and delusion.

What are the three?

**25** (3) They are **personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows**.

By giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up greed, hate and delusion.

**26** By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

What are the three?

**27** (4) They are **unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness**.

By giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

**28** By giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness.

What are the three?

**29** (5) They are **unmindfulness, lack of clear knowing, and a distracted mind**.

By giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness. **[148]**

**30** By giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up unmindfulness, lack of clear knowing, and a distracted mind.

What are the three?

**31** (6) They are **lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind**.

By giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up unmindfulness, lack of clear knowing, and a distracted mind.

**32** By giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

What are the three?

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<sup>26</sup> On the usage of “bad” here as a countable n, see above, (A) (header) n.

**33 (7) They are restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.**

By giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

**34** By giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

What are the three?

**35 (8) They are lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.**

By giving up these three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

**36** By giving up three things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

What are the three?

**37 (9) They are disrespect, intractability and bad friendship.**

By giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

**38** By giving up 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up disrespect, intractability and bad friendship.

What are the three?

**39 (10) They are lack of moral shame, lack of moral fear, and heedlessness.**

By giving up these 3 things, bhikshus, one would be able to give up disrespect, intractability and bad friendship.

**40** There is this recluse, bhikshus, who has moral shame, has moral fear and is heedful.

Being heedful, he is able to give up disrespect, intractability and bad friendship.

As a spiritual [149] friend, he is able to give up lack of faith, unfriendliness and laziness.

Being assertive,<sup>27</sup> he is able to give up restlessness, lack of restraint, and immorality.

Being morally virtuous, he is able to give up lack of desire to see the noble ones, lack of desire to listen to the noble Dharma, and a fault-finding mind.

Not having a fault-finding mind, he is able to give up unmindfulness, lack of clear knowing and mental distraction.

Having an undistracted mind, he is able to give up unwise attention, following the wrong way, and mental sluggishness.

Being without mental sluggishness, he is able to give up personality view, spiritual doubt and attachment to rituals and vows.

Being free from spiritual doubt, he is able to give up greed, hate and delusion.

And having given up greed, hate and delusion, he is able to give up birth, decay and death.

— evaṃ —

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<sup>27</sup> "Assertive," *āraddha, viriya*.