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Abhiṅha Paccavekkhitabba Tḥāna Sutta

The Discourse on the States That Should Be Often Reviewed | A 5.57

Theme: Five regular reflections for spiritual development

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

1 Introduction

1.1 The Abhiṅha, paccavekkhitabba Tḥāna Sutta (A 5.57) is a reflection on the 3 kinds of suffering, namely,

- (1) suffering as pain (*dukkha, dukkhatā*),
- (2) suffering as change (*vipariṇāma, dukkhatā*), and
- (3) suffering as formations or inherent suffering (*saṅkhāra, dukkhatā*).¹

The first, suffering as pain, refers to bodily or mental feeling of pain as a response to stimuli, that is to say, “ordinary suffering.” The second, suffering as change, refers to bodily and mental pleasant feelings since they cause pain when they change, that is to say “potential suffering.” The third is the oppressive nature of all states of existence, that is, all conditioned phenomena, due to their continued arising and passing away (including neutral feelings). This might also be called “conditioned suffering.”

1.2 The 3 sufferings are elaborated in this well known declaration in **the Dhamma, cakka Pavattana Sutta**:

- (1) Now this, bhikshus, is **the noble truth of suffering**:
 birth is suffering,
 decay² is suffering,
 [disease is suffering,]³
 death is suffering;
- (2) to be with the unpleasant is suffering;
 to be without the pleasant is suffering;
 not to get what one desires is suffering,
 [sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair, are suffering]⁴
- (3) —in short, the five aggregates of clinging⁵ are suffering. (S 56.11.5/5:421)

In this passage, (1) comprises ordinary suffering, (2) potential suffering and (3) conditioned (or existential) suffering.

1.3 In the Abhiṅha Paccavekkhitabba Tḥāna Sutta, reflections (1)-(3) deal with ordinary suffering. Reflection (4) deals with potential suffering; and reflection (5), with conditioned suffering (as karma), which is synonymous with formations (*saṅkhāra*).

1.4 The Sutta also deals with the 3 intoxications (*mada*). There are at least two other suttas, all from the Aṅguttara Nikāya, dealing with them, that is, **the Sukhumāla Sutta** (A 3.38/1:145 f) and **the Mada Sutta** (A 3.39/1:146 f).⁶ The Abhiṅha, paccavekkhitabba Tḥāna Sutta has a partial parallel in Chinese in Madhyama Āgama (MĀ 117 = T1.607)

1.5 The Abhiṅha Paccavekkhitabba Tḥāna Sutta (A 5.57), with its 5 reviews, is expanded into **the Pabbajita Abhiṅha Sutta** (A 10.48), with its 10 reviews. Both Suttas have the same 5 reviews—nos (6-10) of A 5.57 = nos (1-5) of A 10.48—except that the latter has an additional set of five reviews (nos 1-5) at the start. While the former is addressed both to the renunciant and the lay follower, the latter is addressed only to the renunciant.

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¹ D 3:216; S 4:259, 5:56; Vism 16.34 f/499; cf Kvu 17.4. Here the arrangement of the sufferings is 1, 3, 2.

² *Jarā*, old age, aging.

³ Only in the Vinaya version; not mentioned in Comys.

⁴ Found in most MSS but not in Be and Ce.

⁵ *Pañc’upadāna-k, khandha*, namely, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47; Vbh 1).

⁶ For details, see **Sukhumāla S** (A 3.38/1:145 f), SD 63.7 & also SD 16.19d Intro.

The Discourse on the States that should be often reviewed

A 5.57

THE 5 REVIEWS

1 [71] Bhikshus, there are these five states that should be often reflected upon by a woman or a man, by a householder or a renunciant.

2 What are the five?

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| <p>(1) “It is my nature to age [decay]. I’ve not gone beyond aging.”
This should be often reflected upon
by a woman or a man, by a householder or a renunciant.</p> | <p><i>jarā,dhammo ’mhi anatīto ’ti</i></p> |
| <p>(2) “It is my nature to fall ill.⁷ I’ve not gone beyond illness.”
This should be often reflected upon
by [72] a woman or a man, by a householder or a renunciant.</p> | <p><i>vyādhi,dhammo ’mhi anatīto ’ti</i></p> |
| <p>(3) “It is my nature to die. I’ve not gone beyond death.”
This should be often reflected upon
by a woman or a man, by a householder or a renunciant.</p> | <p><i>maraṇa,dhammo ’mhi anatīto ’ti</i></p> |
| <p>(4) “There is a becoming-other of all that are dear and pleasing to me,a separation from them.”⁸
This should be often reflected upon
by a woman or a man, by a householder or a renunciant.</p> | <p><i>sabbehi me piyehi manāpehi
nānā,bhāvo vīnā,bhavo ’ti</i></p> |
| <p>(5) “I’m the owner of my deeds [my karma],
the heir to my deeds,
the womb of my deeds,
the relative of my deeds,
my deeds are my refuge;
whatever deed I do,⁹
good or bad,
I will be its heir.”¹⁰
This should be often reflected upon
by a woman or a man, by a householder or a renunciant.</p> | <p><i>kamma-s,sako ’mhi
kamma,dāyādo
kamma,yoni
kamma,bandhu
kamma,paṭisaraṇo
yaṃ kammaṃ karissāmi
kalyāṇaṃ vā pāpakaṃ vā
tassa dāyādo bhavissāmi ti</i></p> |

PURPOSES OF THE 5 REVIEWS

Decay

(1) And what, bhikshus, is the reason [purpose]¹¹ that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect, thus,

“It is my nature to age [decay]. I’ve not gone beyond aging”?

⁷ “Disease” (*vyādhi*) here also includes the old sense of “dis-ease” meaning “discomfort, pain” in the physical sense. In this sense, it is the equivalent of *dukkha,dukkha* (D 3:216; S 4:259, 5:56; Vism 16.34 f/499).

⁸ It’s important to note the present simple tense here: it is a true reality of things. The emphasis is on “A becoming-other...a separation” (*nānā,bhāvo vīnā,bhāvo*) (the nominative).

⁹ *Yaṃ kammaṃ karissāmi*, lit “whatever karma I will do.” The future tense here reflects a conscientious evaluation rather than a hindsight, as is clearly intended by the Pali. See foll n.

¹⁰ *Yaṃ kammaṃ karonti, kalyāṇaṃ vā pāpakaṃ vā, tassa dāyādo bhavanti*. As a full stock sentence with prec line: **Abhiṅga Pacca,vekkhitabba Tḥāna S** (A 5.58/3:74) 1 pl future; **Saṃsappanīya Pariyāya S** (A 10.205/5:288, 290, 291), 1 sg present. Cf **Cūḷa Kamma Vibhaṅga S** (M 135,20), SD 4.15. See prec n.

¹¹ “Reason,” *attha,vasa*, lit “power of purpose,” ie, goal, purpose.

3 Bhikshus, beings are intoxicated with youth.¹² In their intoxication, beings commit bad deeds through the body; they commit bad deeds through speech; they commit bad deeds through the mind.

But for one who often reflects on this state [*“It is my nature to age [decay], I cannot avoid it”*], his intoxication with youth will all vanish or at least lessen.

Here, bhikshus, it is for this reason that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect thus, *“It is my nature to age [decay], I cannot avoid it.”*

Disease

(2) And what, bhikshus, is the reason [purpose] that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect thus,

“It is my nature to fall ill. I’ve not gone beyond illness”?

4 Bhikshus, beings are intoxicated with health. In their intoxication, beings commit bad deeds through the body, they commit bad deeds through speech, they commit bad deeds through the mind.

But for one who often reflects on this state [*“It is my nature to suffer disease; I have not gone beyond it”*], his intoxication with health will all vanish or at least lessen.

Here, bhikshus, it is for this reason that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect thus, *“It is my nature to suffer disease. I have not gone beyond it.”*

Death

(3) And what, bhikshus, is the reason [purpose] that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect thus,

“It’s my nature to die. I’ve not gone beyond death”?

5 Bhikshus, beings are intoxicated with life. In their intoxication, beings commit bad deeds through the body, they commit bad deeds through speech, [73] they commit bad deeds through the mind.

But for one who often reflects on this state [*“It is my nature to die; I have not gone beyond it”*], his intoxication with life will all vanish or at least lessen.

Here, bhikshus, it is for this reason that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect thus, *“It is my nature to die. I have not gone beyond it.”*

Impermanence

(4) And what, bhikshus, is the reason that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect thus,

“There’s a becoming-other of all that are dear and pleasing to me, a separation from them”?

6 Bhikshus, beings have *lustful desire* for what is dear. Through being lustful with such delight, they commit bad deeds through the body, they commit bad deeds through speech, they commit bad deeds through the mind.

But for one who often reflects on this state [*“There is a becoming-other of all that are dear and pleasing to me, a separation from them,”*] his **lustful desire for what is dear** will all vanish or at least lessen.

Here, bhikshus, it is for this reason that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect thus, *“There is a becoming-other of all that are dear and pleasing to me, a separation from them.”*

¹² “Intoxicated with youth,” *yobbane yobbana, mado*, often wrongly rendered as “a youth’s intoxication with youth” or “intoxication of youth in youth” (A:WH 3:59). The preoccupation with youth, with health and with life are not limited to the young or the healthy alone. In fact, the sick would be more preoccupied with the desire for health; the aging often fondly think of youth, health and long life. The same phrase *yobbane yobbana, mado* in the subsequent sentence clearly cannot be rendered as “a youth’s intoxication with youth.” For this reason, too, “intoxication” is a better translation than “pride” or “conceit,” albeit both of which are denoted by *mada*. See Intro above.

Moral accountability

(5) And what, bhikshus, is the reason that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect thus,

“I’m the owner of my deeds, the heir to my deeds, the womb of my deeds, the relative of my deeds, my deeds are my refuge; whatever deed I’ve done, good or bad, I’ll be its heir”?

7 Bhikshus, beings have bad deeds of body, bad deeds of speech, bad deeds of mind.

But for one who often reflects on this state [*“I’m the owner of my deeds, the heir to my deeds, the womb of my deeds, the relative of my deeds, my deeds are my refuge; whatever deed I have done, good or bad, I will be its heir”*], his **bad deeds** will all vanish or at least lessen.

Here, bhikshus, it is for this reason that a woman or a man, a householder or a renunciant, should often reflect thus,

“I’m the owner of my deeds, the heir to my deeds, the womb of my deeds, the relative of my deeds, my deeds are my refuge; whatever deed I have done, good or bad, I will be its heir.”

The noble disciple’s reflection

8 (1) If, bhikshus, the noble disciple contemplates thus, [74]

“I’m not the only one who’s of the nature to age [decay], who hasn’t gone beyond aging,

but where beings come and go, pass away and arise, all beings are of the nature to age [decay] and have not gone beyond it,”

then the path arises for him that reflects on this state. He follows, cultivates, often develops the path.

And from following, cultivating, often developing that path,¹³ he abandons **the mental fetters**,¹⁴ eliminates **the latent tendencies**.¹⁵

(2) If, bhikshus, the noble disciple contemplates thus,

“I’m not the only one who’s of the nature to fall ill, who hasn’t gone beyond illness,

but where beings come and go, pass away and arise, all beings are of the nature to suffer disease and have not gone beyond it,”

then the path arises for him that reflects on this state. He follows, cultivates, often develops the path.

And from following, cultivating, often developing that path, he abandons *the mental fetters*, he eliminates *the latent tendencies*.

¹³ In the Book of Ones (*eka nipāta*) of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the abandoning of the mental fetters and the elimination of the latent tendencies are effected with the development of body-centred mindfulness (*kāya, gatā, sati*) (A 1.21.17/1:44). Body-centred mindfulness here may refer to either observing the 32 parts of the body (Vism 8.2), or to the various meditations under the heading of observing the body (*kāyānupassanā*) (M 119). See BDict: *Kāya-gatā-sati*.

¹⁴ **Mental fetters** (*samyōjanā*). There are 10 of them: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rites (*sīla-b, bata, parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) repulsion (*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 illwill (*vyāpāda*). The first 5 are the lower fetters (*oram, bhāgiya*) that bind one to the “lower” realm, ie the sense world, and the rest, the higher fetters (*uddham, bhāgiya*) that bind one to the “higher” realms, ie the form and formless worlds.

¹⁵ **Latent tendencies** (*anusayā*). There are 7 of them: (1) lust for sensual pleasures (*kāma-c, chanda*); (2) repulsion (*paṭigha*); (3) wrong view (*diṭṭhi*); (4) perpetual doubt (*vicikicchā*); (5) conceit (*māna*); (6) lust for existence (*bhava, rāga*); (7) ignorance (*avijjā*). They are listed in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33.2.3(12)/3:254), **Anusaya S** (A 7.11 & 12/ 4:9) and **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 383). They are deeply embedded in one’s mind through past habitual acts and can only be uprooted on attaining the path. (3)-(4) are eliminated upon stream-winning; (1)-(2) upon non-return; (5)-(7) upon arhathood. See Abhs 7.9: “The latent dispositions (*anusaya*) are defilements which ‘lie along with’ (*anuseti*) the mental process to which they belong, rising to the surface as obsessions whenever they meet with suitable conditions. The term ‘latent dispositions’ highlights the fact that the defilements are liable to arise so long as they have not been eradicated by the supramundane paths. Though all defilements are, in a sense, *anusayas*, the seven mentioned here are the most prominent.” (Abhs:B 268). See also Abhs:SR 172.

(3) If, bhikshus, the noble disciple contemplates thus,

“I’m not the only one who is of the nature to die, who hasn’t gone beyond death,
but *where beings come and go, pass away and arise, all beings are of the nature to die and have not gone beyond it,*”

then the path arises for him that reflects on this state.

He follows, cultivates, often develops the path, and from following, cultivating, often developing the path, he abandons *the mental fetters*, he eliminates *the latent tendencies*.

(4) If, bhikshus, the noble disciple contemplates thus,

“I’m not the only one for whom there’s a becoming-other of all that are dear and pleasing, a separation from them,¹⁶

but *where beings come and go, pass away and arise, for all beings there us a becoming-other of all that are dear and pleasing, of being separated from them,*”

then the path arises for him that reflects on this state. He follows, cultivates, often develops the path.

And from following, cultivating, often developing that path, he abandons *the mental fetters*, eliminates *the latent tendencies*.

(5) If, bhikshus, the noble disciple contemplates thus,

“I’m not the only one who is the owner of deeds [karma], the heir to deeds, the womb of deeds, the relative of deeds, whose deeds are my refuge; whatever deed I do, good or bad, I’ll be its heir,

but *where beings come and go, pass away and arise, all beings are owners of deeds, heirs to deeds, wombs to deeds, relatives of deeds, whose deeds are their refuge, whatever deed they have done, good or bad, [75] will be their heirs; whatever deeds they do, they will be heirs to them,*”

then the path arises for him that reflects on this state. He follows, cultivates, often develops the path.

And from following, cultivating, often developing that path, he abandons *the mental fetters*, he eliminates *the latent tendencies*.

Whose nature is to suffer disease and decay, and then to die,
towards such beings, the ordinary person feels disgust.
and if I too were to feel disgust to living beings of such nature,
it would not be proper for me who dwells thus (in the spiritual life).

Dwelling thus, having known the state free from life’s props,¹⁷
I have conquered all intoxication with health, youth, and life,
having seen renunciation as security.¹⁸

As I see nirvana, there is perseverance in me:
now I pursue sense-pleasures no more!

Never again shall I turn back: being one gone beyond by way of the holy life.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Na kho mayh’ev’ekassa sabbehi piyehi manāpehi nānā,bhāvo vīnā,bhāvo.*

¹⁷ “Free from life’s props,” *nirupadhī*, which Comy defines as “the state free from life’s substrate,” referring to the path of arhathood (*arahatta,magga*) (AA 3:260). *Nirupadhi* = *ni* + *upadhi*, (“birth-basis”) lit “that on which something is laid or rests, basis, foundation, substratum.” DP defines the term as both “worldly possessions or belongings” and “attachment to such possessions (forming a basis for rebirth)”. Comys say there are 4 types of *upadhi* (SA 1:31 = SnA 1:44 f): (1) the 5 cords of sense-pleasures (*kāma*) (MA 2:170; ItA 1:64); (2) the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*) (MA 3:171; ItA 1:89); (3) the defilements (*kilesa*) (MA 3:171; SnA 1:45 f; ItA 1:64; Nm 1:103); (4) volitional formation (*abhisāṅkhāra*) (ItA 1:64; Nm 1:103). Often confounded with the near-synonym *upādi* (trace (of clinging), substrate): see **Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S** (M 22,22/2:314), SD 13.2.

¹⁸ Be Se PTS *Nekkhammā daṭṭhu khemato* = Sn 424b, 1098b; cf Sn 598 & SnA 385 where it is glosses as *pab-bajito’mhi*, “I’m one gone forth.”

¹⁹ These stanzas recur in **Mada S** (A 3.39/1:147 f) where it seems to have been abruptly added, probably because it deals with the same subject there. The closing line of the Commentary on Mada S says that the stanzas are spoken by the Buddha in connection with his own efforts towards awakening (*attano āgamaniya,vīriyam*) while seated under the bodhi tree (AA 2:243). This statement may show that these stanzas were originally attached to Mada S, but later also added to Ṭhāna S where they fit in very well.

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