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(Satthā) Sacitta Sutta

The Teacher's Discourse on One's Own Mind | A 10.51

Theme: On self-review

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

1.1 Like **the (Abhiṇṇa Paccavekkhitabba) Ṭhāna Sutta** (A 5.57/3:71 f), this is a sutta on self-review. While the Ṭhāna Sutta centres around the reflection on karma—a sort of “preventive” exercise—the Sacitta Sutta is more of a “curative” reflection, where one removes whatever defilement one notices within oneself. In this case, the teaching of **the Vitakka,saṅṭhāna Sutta** (M 20/1:118-122) would be applicable next.

1.2 The teachings of the Sacitta Sutta is an interim practice following up on one's moral virtue (through the proper keeping of the Precepts) and before going on to mental cultivation (that is, meditation). This is clearly stated in the closing sentence, where the practitioner who is successful in getting rid of the preliminary mental impurities then goes on to rid the mind of the influxes.

1.3¹ The 10 review questions [§3.2] are especially interesting, and should be studied with another similar set of in **the Parihāna Sutta** (A 10.55). They are both very ancient sets of teachings predating the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaraṇa*) and the 10 mental fetters (*dasa samyojana*). While the hindrances are those qualities that prevent any concentration and progress in meditation, the fetters are those defilements that hold us back from breaking free and through into awakening. In either case, they all “weaken our wisdom” (*paññāya dubbhālī, karaṇe*).²

It is possible that **the (Satthā) Sa,citta Sutta** set evolved into the 5 mental hindrances (since it deals mostly with qualities associated with meditation, and ends with “concentration”), while **the Parihāna Sutta** set evolved into the 10 mental fetters (since its last quality is wisdom). However, clearly both sets deal with meditative self-review, and as such are at the roots of the teaching on the mental hindrances. On a broader scale, both sets are also at the roots of the teaching on the mental fetters.

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The Teacher's Discourse on One's Own Mind

A 10.51

If we can't read another's mind, we should read our own

1 [92] At one time the Blessed One was staying at Anātha,piṇḍika's Park in Jeta's grove near Sāvattthī. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks:

“Bhikshus!”

“Bhante!” the monks replied in assent to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said this:

2 “Bhikshus, if a monk is not skilled in knowing another's mind, then he should cultivate the skill in knowing his own mind. This is how you should train yourself.

How, bhikshus, should a monk cultivate the skill in knowing his own mind?

¹ This whole section is mutatis mutandis at SD 43.5 (2).

² On the hindrances, see eg **Mahā Taṇha,saṅkhaya S** (M 38,39), SD 7.10. On the fetters, see **Kīṭa,giri S** (M 70) @ SD 11.1 (5.1); **(Sekha) Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3(2); also S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377.

How to read our own mind

3 Bhikshus, it is just as a young man or woman, well-dressed, fond of ornaments, while examining the reflection of their³ own face in a clear, bright and clean mirror or a bowl of water, when they see any dust or dirt on it, would make every effort to remove it.⁴ However, if they see neither dust nor dirt, they would be joyful, with their wish fulfilled, thinking, ‘It is good for me that I am clean!’⁵

- 3.2 Even so, bhikshus, reviewing⁶ greatly helps the growth of wholesome states for a monk, thus:⁷
- ‘(1) Do I dwell with much covetousness, [93] or do I dwell very often without covetousness?
 (2) Do I dwell with much ill will in mind, or do I dwell very often without ill will?
 (3) Do I dwell in the grip of much sloth and torpor, or do I dwell very often free from sloth and torpor?
 (4) Do I dwell with much restlessness, or do I dwell very often without restlessness?
 (5) Do I dwell with much doubt, or do I dwell very often free from doubt?
 (6) Do I dwell with much anger, or do I dwell very often without anger?
 (7) Do I dwell with a much defiled mind, or do I dwell very often without a defiled mind?
 (8) Do I dwell with a much agitated body, or do I dwell very often without an agitated body?
 (9) Do I dwell very often lazy, or do I dwell very often exerting myself?
 (10) Do I dwell very often lacking in concentration, or do I dwell very often concentrated in mind?’

4 If, bhikshus, on reflecting, a monk knows thus:

- ‘I dwell with much covetousness;
 I dwell with much ill will in mind;
 I dwell in the grip of much sloth and torpor;
 I dwell with much restlessness;
 I dwell with much doubt;
 I dwell with much anger;
 I dwell with a very defiled mind;
 I dwell with a very agitated body;
 I dwell very often lazy;
 I dwell very often lacking in concentration’—

then, bhikshus, that monk should apply his utmost will, effort, energy, and unrelenting mindfulness and clear comprehension, to the abandoning of the bad unwholesome states.

Self-review

4.2 Bhikshus, just as one whose clothes are ablaze, whose head is ablaze, desire, or effort, or industry, or perseverance, or persistence, or mindfulness, or clear comprehension, beyond measure, would be made, to extinguish that blaze on clothes or his head.⁸

³ I have attempted to provide a gender-neutral rendition here by using the gender-free plural for the Pali singular syntax.

⁴ This simile is applied in **Vitakka Saṅghāna S** (M 20.4/1;120 f) in a more dramatic manner to reflect the nature of aversion therapy.

⁵ “Clean,” *parisuddha*, lit “purified.”

⁶ “Review,” *paccavekkhaṇa*, or examination.

⁷ The 10 correlative sentences are as follows, changing only the key underscored words: (1) *Abhijjhālu nu kho bahulam viharāmi, anabhijjhālu nu kho bahulam viharāmi*; (2) *vyāpanna, citto...avyāpanna, citto...*; (3) *thīna, middha, pariyaṭṭhito...vigata, thīna, middho...*; (4) *uddhato...anuddhato...*; (5) *vicikiccho...tiṇṇa, vicikiccho...*; (6) *kodhano...akkodhano...*; (7) *saṃkiliṭṭha, citto...asaṃkiliṭṭha, citto...*; (8) *sāraddha, kāyo...asāraddha, kāyo...*; (9) *kusito...ārad-dha, viriyo*; (10) *asamahito...samahito...*

Another set of 10 qualities, some of which are identical, in the same context, is found in **Parihāna S** (A 10.5,6.2/-5:104), SD 43.5.

Even so, bhikshus, that monk should apply his desire, and effort, and industry, and perseverance, and persistence, and mindfulness, and clear comprehension, beyond measure, to the abandoning of the bad unwholesome states. [94]

5 However, bhikshus, if a monk, on reflecting, knows thus:

I dwell very often	without covetousness;
I dwell very often	without ill will;
I dwell very often	free from sloth and torpor;
I dwell very often	without restlessness;
I dwell very often	free from doubt;
I dwell very often	without anger;
I dwell very often	without a defiled mind;
I dwell very often	without an agitated body;
I dwell very often	exerting myself;
I dwell very often	concentrated in mind’—

then, bhikshus, grounding⁹ himself on these wholesome states, he should further devote himself to the destruction of the mental influxes.¹⁰

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⁸ *Seyyathā’pi āvuso āditta’celo vā āditta,sīso vā tass’eva celassa vā sīsassa vā nibbāpanāya adhimattāṃ*. This is a popular parable in the Aṅguttara, evoking the urgency of self-review and meditation: **Samādhi S 2** (A 4.93/2:93), SD 95.8; **Marāṇa-s-sati S 2** (A 6.20/3:307, 308); **Marāṇa-s-sati S 2** (A 8.74/3:320 f), SD 48.6; **(Satthā) Sa,citta S** (A 10.51,4/2/5:93), SD 5.13; **(Sa,citta) Sariputta S** (A 10.51/5:95) = A 10.51; **Samatha S** (A 10.54/5:99 f), SD 83.8; **Parihāna S** (A 10.5,7.2/5:103+8.2/5:105), SD 43.5. The blazing head (*āditta,sīsa*) parable is mentioned in connection with working at the goal of renunciation, in Comys (MA 1:95; SA 1:48; ThaA 1:112; PmA 1:261). **Jāta-ka Nidāna** records a related simile parable of the burning house, as the Bodhisattva reflects on his life, “The three-fold existence (the sense-world, the form world, and the formless world) appeared to be like a burning house” (*tayo bhavā āditta,geha,sadisā khāyimsu*) (J 1:61).

⁹ “Grounding,” *patiṭṭhita*, lit “established.” Here I follow Bhikkhu Bodhi.

¹⁰ “Mental influxes,” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists four *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is probably older and is found more frequently in the Suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict under *āsava*.