

Lay renunciation

Monastic or lay, the Dhamma is about true renunciation
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Source: (Indriya) Paṭipanna Sutta, S 48.18 (2.1.3.1-3), SD 56.11¹

When we see and accept this reality of our senses and their sense-objects, we begin to leave, to renounce, our “inner crowd” of thoughts, views, drugs, distractions. We then gradually give up our mental proliferations (papañca).

We think less, mind more; what we mind, we see them just as they are, as impermanent, unsatisfactory, non-self. We see this vital teaching in the Sambādh’okāsa Sutta (A 6.26), SD 15.6.²

The highlight of the Sambādh’okāsa Sutta (A 6.26) is Mahā Kaccāna’s exultation that “It is marvellous how the attainment of ‘an opening’ (okāsa) in the confined [crowded, sambādha] has been discovered by the Blessed One” (A 6.26,2). Simply, this means that the Buddha’s teaching and training give us the opportunity to get out of this “crowdedness” (sambādha) on psychological and social levels.

Of special significance is the Sutta phrase “the household life is stifling, a dusty path.” The lay life, after all, is a life of pleasure and procreation. This is clearly brought out by the (Pañcāla,caṇḍa) Sambādha Sutta (A 9.42)³, where sambādha is defined as the 5 cords of sense-pleasures, that is, the pleasures of the 5 physical senses. Numerous passages in the Suttas proclaim that the household life is said to be “stifling” (sambādha), and the way out is renunciation, thus:

"The household life is stifling, a dusty path. The life of renunciation is like the open air. It is not easy living in a house to practise the holy life completely, in all its purity, like a polished conch-shell. What if I were to shave off my hair and beard, put on the saffron robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?" (S 16.11,14/2:219)

Just as Siddhattha renounced his palaces of plenty, power and pleasure, we, too, should follow his example when we tire of the plenty, power and pleasure in our own life. The monastic life, with its Dharma and Vinaya, is the ideal spiritual life that, honestly and properly followed, will bring us to the path of awakening in this life itself.

Even as lay followers, we can live a Dharma-spirited life, keeping to the 5 precepts and practising mindfulness by way of the perception of impermanence (anicca,saññā).

¹ SD 56.11: <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/56.11-Indriya-Patipanna-S-s48.18-piya.pdf>

² <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/15.6-Sambadhokasa-S-a6.26-piya.pdf>

³ (Pañcāla,caṇḍa) Sambādha Sutta (A 9.42), SD 33.2: <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/33.2-Pancalacanda-Sambadha-S-a9.42-piya-160512.pdf>

As we watch the breath, we first notice how we breathe in, but no matter how long we hold the breath, we still need to “give it back,” renounce it: breathe out. Even the breath that gives us life is not ours. We must renounce it.

As the breath slows down, we then notice its rise and fall, its impermanence. As the spaces in between each breath lengthens, we notice the growing peace as it becomes less physical, more mental. We are becoming free of our senses. The freed mind begins to look at itself like two mirrors facing one another.

Whenever we feel a deep space of peace, of profound joy, we simply let it be: just be still with the present moment. At the hint of the slightest thought, just smile at it. Stay with the peace and joy as long as possible. We will feel when we are ready to end the meditation.

What we are running after, all that we are attached to, will become dung in some way. Why be a dung-beetle when we can walk nobly on the noble path of awakening?

Renounce the dung-ball!

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