

GUIDE TO TIPITAKA

BURMA PITAKA ASSOCIATION, 1986

The Suttanta Pitaka is a collection of all the discourses in their entirety delivered by the Buddha on various occasions. (A few discourses delivered by some of the distinguished disciples of the Buddha, such as the Venerable Sariputta, Maha Moggallana, Ananda, etc., as well as some narratives are also included in the books of the Suttanta Pitaka.) The discourses of the Buddha compiled together in the Suttanta Pitaka were expounded to suit different occasions, for various persons with different temperaments. *The discourses were mostly intended for the benefit of bhikkhus, and deal with the practice of the pure life.* There are several other discourses, which deal with the material and moral progress of the lay disciples.

The Suttanta Pitaka brings out the meaning of the Buddha's teachings, expresses them clearly, protects and guards them against distortion and misconstruction. The meaning of Buddha's teachings given in the sutras is clearly, expressed and grasped to avoid misconstrued.

The Suttanta Pitaka is divided into five separate collections known as Nikayas. They are Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya and Khuddaka Nikaya.

(a) Observances and Practices in the Teaching of the Buddha

The Suttanta Pitaka provides both the fundamentals of the Dhamma and the pragmatic guidelines to make the Dhamma meaningful and applicable to daily life. The observances and practices, which form practical steps in, the "Buddha's Noble Path of Eight" Constituents lead to spiritual purification at three levels:

- ***Sila moral: purity through right conduct,***
- ***Samadhi: purity of mind through concentration (Samatha),***
- ***Panna: purity of Insight through Vipassana***

To begin, one must make the right resolution to take refuge in the Buddha, to follow the Buddha's Teaching, and let the Sangha guide you. The foremost disciples who made the declaration of faith in the Buddha and committed themselves to follow his Teaching were the two merchant brothers, ***Tapussa and Bhallika***. They were traveling with their followers in five hundred near the Bodhi tree; they saw the Buddha, after his Enlightenment. The two merchants offered him honey rice cakes. Accepting their offering and thus breaking the fast he had imposed on himself for seven weeks (***49 days***), the Buddha made them his foremost lay disciples by letting them recite after him: There was no Bhikkhu Samghas., then.

"Buddham Saranam Gacchami (I take refuge in the Buddha)."

"Dhamman Saranam Gacchami (I take refuge in the Dhamma)"

This recitation became the set rule of declaration of faith in the Buddha and his Teaching. Later when the Samgha became established, the formula was extended to include the third commitment:

"Samgha Saranam Gacchami. (I take refuge in the Samgha)."

(b) On the right way to give alms.

As a practical step, capable of immediate and fruitful use by people in all walks of life, the Buddha gave discourses

on charity, alms-giving, explaining its virtues and on the right way and the right attitude of mind with which an offering is to be made for spiritual uplift. The motivating force in an act of charity is the volition, the will to give. Charity is a meritorious action that arises only out of volition. Without the will to give, there is no act of giving. Volition in giving alms is of three types:

(i) The volition that starts with the thought 'I shall make an offering' and that exists during the period of preparations for making the offering - Pubba Cetana, volition before the act.

(ii) The volition that arises at the moment of making the offering while handing it over to the donee - Munca Cetana, volition during the act.

(iii) The volition accompanying the joy and rejoicing which arise during repeated recollection of or reflection on the act of giving - Aparā Cetana, volition after the act.

Whether the offering is in homage to the living Buddha or to his relics, this act of volition will give the same result... The discourses explain the wrong attitude of mind, which should not accompany in the act of charity.

Inferior Charity

A donor should not look down on others who cannot make a similar offering; nor should he exult over his own charity. This kind of defiled volitional thought is inferior.

Mediocre Charity

When your act of charity is motivated with expectations of immediate prosperity, happiness, or rebirth in higher existences, then, that volition thought is mediocre.

Superior Charity

When we perform charity based on renunciation, motivated by thoughts of pure selflessness, aspiring only for attainment to Nibbana, then, that act of volition is superior.

Examples abound in the discourses concerning charity and modes of giving alms.

(c) Moral Purity through right conduct, "Sila".

The Practice of **Sila** forms the most fundamental aspect of Buddhism. It consists of practice of **Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood** to purge oneself of impure deeds, words and thoughts. Together with the commitment to the Threefold Refuge (as described above) a Buddhist lay disciple observes the Five Precepts by making a formal vow:

(i) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from killings

(ii) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from stealing.

(iii) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from sexual misconduct.

(vi) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from telling lies.

(v) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from alcoholic drinks, drugs or intoxicants that becloud the mind.

We find in many discourses the statement: *'He refrains from killing, puts aside the cudgel and the sword; full of kindness and compassion he lives for the welfare and happiness of all living things.'* Every precept laid down has these two aspects.

Depending upon the individual and the level of his progress, one may observe other forms of precepts, namely, Eight Precepts, Ten Precepts etc... However, bhikkhus are to observe the higher and advanced types of practices of morality. The lay disciple must observe the five precepts and may occasionally enhance their self-discipline by observing the Eight or Ten Precepts. For Bhikkhus on the path of a holy life, the Ten Precepts are essential necessary prescribed.

Sila or perfect purity serves as a foundation for the next stage of progress that is Samadhi - purity of mind through concentration-meditation.

(d) Practical methods of mental cultivation and development of concentration – “Samadhi”.

Mental cultivation for spiritual uplift consists of two steps. The first step is to *purify the mind from all defilements and corruption and to have it focused on a point.*

- *A determined effort (Right Exertion) must be made to narrow down the range of thoughts in the wavering, unsteady mind.*
- *Then attention (Right Attentiveness) is focus on a selected object of meditation until one-pointedness of mind (Right concentration) is achieved.*

In such a state, the mind, freed from hindrances, clear, pure, tranquil, powerful and bright. It is then ready to advance to the next step to attain Magga Insight and Fruition, never to be reborn in the woeful state again.

The Suttanta Pitaka records numerous methods of Meditation to bring about one-pointedness of mind. In the Suttas of the Pitaka, there are methods of meditation, explained by the Buddha sometimes singly, sometimes collectively to suit the occasion and the recommended purpose. The Buddha knew the diversity of character and mental make-up of each individual, the different temperaments and inclinations of those who approached him for guidance. Accordingly, he recommended different methods to different persons to suit the special character and need of each individual.

The practice of mental cultivation, which results ultimately in one-pointedness of mind, is Samadhi Bhavana. Whoever wishes to develop Samadhi Bhavana must have first established in the observance of the precepts, with the senses controlled, calm and self-possessed, and must be contented. Having established in these four conditions, he selects a secluded spot suitable for meditation. Then he should sit cross-legged keeping his body erect and his mind alert; he should start purifying his mind of five hindrances, namely, sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and doubt, by choosing a meditation method suitable to him, practicing meditation with zeal and ardor. For instance, with the Anapana method he keeps watching the incoming and outgoing breath until he can have his mind fixed securely on the breath at the tip of the nose.

When he realizes that the five hindrances have been got rid of, he becomes gladdened, delighted, calm and blissful. This is the beginning of samadhi, concentration, which will further develop until it attains one-pointedness of mind.

Thus, one-pointedness of mind is concentration of mind when it is aware of one object, and only one of a wholesome, salutary nature. The one-pointedness concentration is attained by the practice of meditation upon one subject as recommended by Buddha.

(e) Practical methods of mental cultivation for development of Insight Knowledge, ”panna”.

The subject and methods of meditation as taught in the suttas of the Pitaka are designed both for attainment of

samadhi as well as for development of Insight Knowledge, Vipassana.

The second step in the practice of meditation, after achieving samadhi, is when the concentrated mind has become purified, firm and imperturbable, the meditator directs and inclines his mind to Insight Knowledge, Vipassana Nana. With this Insight Knowledge, he discerns the three characteristics of the phenomenal world, namely, Impermanence (Anicca), Suffering (Dukkha) and Non-Self (Anatta). The right thought.

As he advances in his practice and his mind becomes more and more purified, firm and imperturbable, he directs and inclines his mind to the knowledge of the extinction of moral intoxicants, Asavakkhaya Nana. He then understands – **the right understanding**..:

- ***The dukkha,***
- ***The cause of dukkha,***
- ***The cessation of dukkha and***
- ***The path leading to the cessation of dukkha.***

He also comes to understand fully the moral intoxicants (asavas) as they really are the cause of asavas, the cessation of asavas and the path leading to the cessation of the asavas.

With this knowledge of extinction of asavas he becomes liberated. The knowledge of liberation arises in him.

- ***He knows that rebirth is no more,***
- ***He has lived the holy life;***
- ***He has done what he has to do for the realization of Magga;***
- ***He has nothing more for him to do for realization of Nibbana..***

The Buddha taught with only one object - the extinction of Suffering and release from conditioned existence. That object is realized through practice of meditation (for Calm and Insight) as laid down in numerous suttas of the Suttanta Pitaka).

Note – here one must live a holy life – be ordained as Bhikkhu or Bhikkhuni.

Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu