

7 Vatthūpama Sutta: The Simile of the Cloth

70. Evaṃ me suttaṃ – ekaṃ samayaṃ bhagavā sāvatthiyaṃ viharati jetavane anāthapiṇḍikassa ārāme. Tatra kho bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi – “bhikkhavo”ti. “Bhadante”ti te bhikkhū bhagavato paccassosum. Bhagavā etadavoca –

“Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, vatthaṃ saṃkiliṭṭhaṃ malaggahitaṃ; tamenam rajako yasmiṃ yasmiṃ raṅgajāte upasaṃhareyya – yadi nīlakāya yadi pītakāya yadi lohitaḥkāya yadi mañjeṭṭhakāya durattavaṇṇamevassa aparisuddhavaṇṇamevassa. Taṃ kissa hetu? Aparisuddhattā, bhikkhave, vatthassa. Evameva kho, bhikkhave, citte saṃkiliṭṭhe, duggati pāṭikaṅkhā. Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, vatthaṃ parisuddhaṃ pariyodātaṃ; tamenam rajako yasmiṃ yasmiṃ raṅgajāte upasaṃhareyya – yadi nīlakāya yadi pītakāya yadi lohitaḥkāya yadi mañjiṭṭhakāya – surattavaṇṇamevassa parisuddhavaṇṇamevassa. Taṃ kissa hetu? Parisuddhattā, bhikkhave, vatthassa. Evameva kho, bhikkhave, citte asaṃkiliṭṭhe, sugati pāṭikaṅkhā.

1. Thus have I heard.⁸⁴ On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park. There he addressed the monks thus: “Monks.”—“Venerable sir,” they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. “Monks, suppose a cloth were defiled and stained, and a dyer dipped it in some dye or other, whether blue or yellow or red or pink; it would look poorly dyed and impure in colour. Why is that? Because of the impurity of the cloth. So too, when the mind is defiled, an unhappy destination may be expected.⁸⁵ Monks, suppose a cloth were pure and bright, and a dyer dipped it in some dye or other, whether blue or yellow or red or pink; it would look well dyed and pure in colour. Why is that? Because of the purity of the cloth. So too, when the mind is undefiled, a happy destination may be expected.

71. “Katame ca, bhikkhave, cittassa upakkilesā? Abhijjhāvisamalobho cittassa upakkilesa, byāpādo cittassa upakkilesa, kodho cittassa upakkilesa, upanāho cittassa upakkilesa, makkho cittassa upakkilesa, paḷāso cittassa upakkilesa, issā cittassa upakkilesa, macchariyaṃ cittassa upakkilesa, māyā cittassa upakkilesa, sāṭṭheyyaṃ cittassa upakkilesa, thambho cittassa upakkilesa, sārāmbho cittassa upakkilesa, māno cittassa upakkilesa, atimāno cittassa upakkilesa, mado cittassa upakkilesa, pamādo cittassa upakkilesa.

3. “What, monks, are the imperfections that defile the mind?⁸⁶ Covetousness and unrighteous greed is an imperfection that defiles the mind. Ill will ... anger ... resentment ... contempt ... insolence ... envy ... avarice ... deceit ... fraud ... obstinacy ... rivalry ... conceit ... arrogance ... vanity ... negligence is an imperfection that defiles the mind.

72. “Sa kho so, bhikkhave, bhikkhu ‘abhijjhāvisamalobho cittassa upakkilesa’ti – iti veditvā abhijjhāvisamalobhaṃ cittassa upakkilesaṃ pajahati ... ‘pamādo cittassa upakkilesa’ti – iti veditvā pamādaṃ cittassa upakkilesaṃ pajahati.

73. “Yato ca kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno ‘abhijjhāvisamalobho cittassa upakkilesō’ti – iti veditvā abhijjhāvisamalobho cittassa upakkilesō pahīno hoti ... iti veditvā pamādo cittassa upakkilesō pahīno hoti, so buddhe aveccappasādena samannāgato hoti – ‘itipi so bhagavā arahaṃ sammāsambuddho vijjācaraṇasampanno sugato lokavidū anuttaro purisadammasārathi satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā’ti;

4. “Knowing that covetousness and unrighteous greed is an imperfection that defiles the mind, a bhikkhu abandons it. Knowing that ill will...negligence is an imperfection that defiles the mind, a bhikkhu abandons it.

5. “When a bhikkhu has known that covetousness and unrighteous greed is an imperfection that defiles the mind and has abandoned it; when a bhikkhu has known that ill will...negligence is an imperfection that defiles the mind and has abandoned it, he acquires perfect confidence in the Buddha thus: ‘The Blessed One is accomplished, fully enlightened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of gods and humans, enlightened, blessed.’

74. “Dhamme aveccappasādena samannāgato hoti – ‘svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko opaneyyiko paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhī’ti; saṅghe aveccappasādena samannāgato hoti – ‘suppaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho, ujuppaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho, ñāyappaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho, sāmīcippaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho, yadidaṃ cattāri purisayugāni, aṭṭha purisapuggalā. Esa bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho āhuneyyo pāhuneyyo dakkhiṇeyyo añjalikaraṇīyo, anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassā’ti.

6. “He acquires perfect confidence in the Dhamma thus: ‘The Dhamma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, visible here and now, immediately effective, inviting inspection, onward leading, to be experienced by the wise for themselves.’

7. “He acquires perfect confidence in the Sangha thus: ‘The Sangha of the Blessed One’s disciples is practising the good way, practising the straight way, practising the true way, practising the proper way, that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals; this Sangha of the Blessed One’s disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world.’

75. “Yathodhi kho panassa cattaṃ hoti vantaṃ muttaṃ pahīnaṃ paṭinissaṭṭhaṃ, so ‘buddhe aveccappasādena samannāgatohī’ti labhati atthavedaṃ, labhati dhammavedaṃ, labhati dhammūpasamhitaṃ pāmojjaṃ. Pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti, sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati; ‘dhamme ... pe ... saṅghe aveccappasādena samannāgatohī’ti labhati atthavedaṃ, labhati dhammavedaṃ, labhati dhammūpasamhitaṃ pāmojjaṃ; pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti, sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati. ‘Yathodhi kho pana me cattaṃ vantaṃ muttaṃ pahīnaṃ paṭinissaṭṭha’nti labhati atthavedaṃ, labhati dhammavedaṃ, labhati dhammūpasamhitaṃ pāmojjaṃ; pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pītimanassa kāyo passambhati, passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti, sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati.

8. “When he has given up, expelled, released, abandoned, and relinquished [the imperfections of the mind] in part, he considers thus: ‘I am possessed of perfect confidence in the Buddha,’ and he gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma,⁹¹ gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is glad, rapture is born in him; in one who is rapturous, the body becomes tranquil; one whose body is tranquil feels pleasure; in one who feels pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated.

9. “He considers thus: ‘I am possessed of perfect confidence in the Dhamma,’ and he gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is glad ... the mind becomes concentrated. [38]

10. “He considers thus: ‘I am possessed of perfect confidence in the Sangha,’ and he gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is glad ... the mind becomes concentrated.

11. “He considers thus: ‘[The imperfections of the mind] have in part been given up, expelled, released, abandoned, and relinquished by me,’ and he gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is glad, rapture is born in him; in one who is rapturous, the body becomes tranquil; one whose body is tranquil feels pleasure; in one who feels pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated.

76. “Sa kho so, bhikkhave, bhikkhu evaṃsīlo evaṃdhammo evaṃpañño sālīnaṃ cepi piṇḍapātaṃ bhuñjati vicitakāḷakaṃ anekasūpaṃ anekabyañjanaṃ, nevassa taṃ hoti antarāyāya. Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, vatthaṃ saṃkiliṭṭhaṃ malaggahitaṃ acchodakaṃ āgamma parisuddhaṃ hoti pariyodātaṃ, ukkāmuḥkaṃ vā panāgamma jātarūpaṃ parisuddhaṃ hoti pariyodātaṃ, evameva kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu evaṃsīlo evaṃdhammo evaṃpañño sālīnaṃ cepi piṇḍapātaṃ bhuñjati vicitakāḷakaṃ anekasūpaṃ anekabyañjanaṃ, nevassa taṃ hoti antarāyāya.

77. “So mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharivā viharati, tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthaṃ [catutthim (sī. pī.)]. Iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokaṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjena pharivā viharati; karuṇāsahagatena cetasā ... pe ... muditāsahagatena cetasā ... pe ... upekkhāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharivā viharati, tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthaṃ. Iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokaṃ upekkhāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjena pharivā viharati.

12. “Monks, if a monk of such virtue, such a state [of concentration], and such wisdom⁹³ eats almsfood consisting of choice hill rice along with various sauces and curries, even that will be no obstacle for him.⁹⁴ Just as a cloth that is defiled and stained becomes pure and bright with the help of clear water, or just as gold becomes pure and bright with the help of a furnace, so too, if a monk of such virtue ... eats almsfood ... that will be no obstacle for him.

13. “He abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness,⁹⁵ likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and

to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

14–16. “He abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion ... with a mind imbued with altruistic joy ... with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with equanimity, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.

78. “So ‘atthi idaṃ, atthi hīnaṃ, atthi paṇītaṃ, atthi imassa saññāgatassa uttariṃ nissaraṇa’nti pajānāti. Tassa evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato kāmāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati, bhavāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati, avijjāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati. Vimuttasmiṃ vimuttamiti ñāṇaṃ hoti. ‘Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā’ti pajānāti. Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave – ‘bhikkhu sināto antarena sinānenā’”ti.

17. “He understands thus: ‘There is this, there is the inferior, there is the superior, and beyond there is an escape from this whole field of perception.’⁹⁶

18. “When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the taint of sensual desire, from the taint of being, and from the taint of ignorance. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: ‘It is liberated.’ He understands: ‘Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.’ [39] Monks, this monk is called one bathed with the inner bathing.”⁹⁷

79. Tena kho pana samayena sundarikabhāradvājo brāhmaṇo bhagavato avidūre nisinno hoti. Atha kho sundarikabhāradvājo brāhmaṇo bhagavantaṃ etadavoca – “gacchati pana bhavaṃ gotamo bāhukaṃ nadiṃ sināyitu”nti? “Kiṃ, brāhmaṇa, bāhukāya nadiyā? Kiṃ bāhukā nadī karissatī”ti? “Lokkhasammata [lokhyasammata (sī.), mokkhasammata (pī.)] hi, bho gotama, bāhukā nadī bahujaṇassa, puññasammata hi, bho gotama, bāhukā nadī bahujaṇassa, bāhukāya pana nadiyā bahujaṇo pāpakammaṃ kataṃ pavāhetī”ti. Atha kho bhagavā sundarikabhāradvājaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ gāthāhi ajjhabhāsi –

19. Now on that occasion the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja was sitting not far from the Blessed One. Then he said to the Blessed One: “But does Master Gotama go to the Bāhukā River to bathe?”

“Why, brahmin, go to the Bāhukā River? What can the Bāhukā River do?”

“Master Gotama, the Bāhukā River is held by many to give liberation, it is held by many to give merit, and many wash away their evil actions in the Bāhukā River.”

20. Then the Blessed One addressed the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja in stanzas:

“Bāhukaṃ adhikakkañca, gayāṃ sundarikamapi
Sarassatiṃ payāgañca, atho bāhumatiṃ nadiṃ;
Niccampi bālo pakkhanno kaṇhakammo na sujjhati.

“Kiṃ sundarikā karissati, kiṃ payāgo kiṃ bāhukā nadī;
Veriṃ katakibbisaṃ naraṃ, na hi naṃ sodhaye pāpakammaṃ.

“Suddhassa ve sadā phaggu, suddhassuposatho sadā;
Suddhassa sucikammaṃ, sadā sampajjate vataṃ;
Idheva sināhi brāhmaṇa, sabbabhūtesu karohi khemataṃ.

“Sace musā na bhaṇasi, sace pāṇaṃ na hiṃsasi;
Sace adinnaṃ nādiyasi, saddahāno amaccharī;
Kiṃ kāhasi gayāṃ gantvā, udapānopi te gayā”ti.

“Bāhukā and Adhikkā,
Gayā and Sundarikā too,
Payāga and Sarassatī,
And the stream Bahumatī—98
A fool may there forever bathe
Yet will not purify dark deeds.

What can the Sundarikā bring to pass?
What the Payāga? What the Bāhukā?
They cannot purify an evil-doer,
A man who has done cruel and brutal deeds.

One pure in heart has evermore
The Feast of Spring, the Holy Day;99
One fair in act, one pure in heart
Brings his virtue to perfection.

It is here, brahmin, that you should bathe,
To make yourself a refuge for all beings.
And if you speak no falsehood
Nor work harm for living beings,
Nor take what is offered not,
With faith and free from avarice,
What need for you to go to Gayā?
For any well will be your Gayā.”

80. Evaṃ vutte, sundarikabhāradvājo brāhmaṇo bhagavantaṃ etadavoca – “abhikkantaṃ, bho gotama, abhikkantaṃ, bho gotama! Seyyathāpi, bho gotama, nikkujjitaṃ vā ukkujjeyya, paṭicchannaṃ vā vivareyya, mūlhasa vā maggaṃ ācikkheyya, andhakāre vā telapajjotaṃ dhāreyya – cakkhumanto rūpāni dakkhantīti; evamevaṃ bhotā gotamena anekapariyāyena dhammo pakāsito. Esāhaṃ bhavantaṃ gotamaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi dhammañca bhikkhusaṅghañca. Labheyyāhaṃ bhotā gotamassa santike pabbajjaṃ, labheyyaṃ upasampada”nti. Alatta kho sundarikabhāradvājo brāhmaṇo bhagavato santike pabbajjaṃ,

alatta upasampadaṃ. Acirūpasampanno kho panāyasmā bhāradvājo eko vūpakaṭṭho appamatto ātāpī pahitatto viharanto nacirasseva – yassatthāya kulaputtā sammadeva agāasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajanti tadanuttaraṃ – brahmacariyapariyosānaṃ diṭṭhevadhamme sayāṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja vihāsi. “Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā”ti abbhaññāsi. Aññataro kho panāyasmā bhāradvājo arahataṃ ahoṣīti.

21. When this was said, the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja said: “Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent, Master Gotama! Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms. I go to Master Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of monks. I would receive the going forth under Master Gotama, I would receive the full admission.”¹⁰⁰

22. And the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja received the going forth under the Blessed One, and he received the full admission. [40] And soon, not long after his full admission, dwelling alone, withdrawn, diligent, ardent, and resolute, the venerable Bhāradvāja, by realising for himself with direct knowledge, here and now entered upon and abided in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the home life into homelessness. He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.” And the venerable Bhāradvāja became one of the arahants.