MN 151 — MN 151 The Purification of Almsfood | Piṇḍapātapārisuddhi Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN151.html

Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

License: CC-BY-NC-4.0 — https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

License URL: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Copyright: Copyright 2014 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, Revised edition 2017

License notice: Copyright 2014 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, Revised edition 2017 This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported. To see a copy of this license visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/. “Commercial” shall mean any sale, whether for commercial or non-profit purposes or entities. Questions about this book may be addressed to Metta Forest Monastery Valley Center, CA 92082-1409 U.S.A. Additional resources More Dhamma talks, books and translations by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu are available to download in digital audio and various ebook formats at dhammatalks.org. Printed copy A paperback copy of this book is available free of charge. To request one, write to: Book Request, Metta Forest Monastery, PO Box 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082 USA.

Attribution: From Handful of Leaves, Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu; https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/SuttaPitaka_251113.epub. Copyright 2014 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, Revised edition 2017 This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported. To see a copy of this license visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/. “Commercial” shall mean any sale, whether for commercial or non-profit purposes or entities. Questions about this book may be addressed to Metta Forest Monastery Valley Center, CA 92082-1409 U.S.A. Additional resources More Dhamma talks, books and translations by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu are available to download in digital audio and various ebook formats at dhammatalks.org. Printed copy A paperback copy of this book is available free of charge. To request one, write to: Book Request, Metta Forest Monastery, PO Box 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082 USA.

Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

The Purification of Almsfood

Piṇḍapātapārisuddhi Sutta (MN 151)

Introduction

Although this sutta does not mention the four noble truths by name, it does speak of the four duties appropriate to those truths: comprehending stress, abandoning the origination of stress, realizing the cessation of stress, and developing the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress. In line with the Buddha’s instructions to his son, Rāhula, that the path of practice is one of reflecting repeatedly on one’s own actions (MN 61), this sutta recommends reflecting repeatedly on the actions of one’s mind to see how far one

has come in carrying out these duties. It's in this way that the practice becomes a skill.

It's worth noting that, in line with the theme of repeated reflection, the organization of this sutta parallels that of MN 61, as does a closely related sutta, MN 121.

* * *

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels' Sanctuary. Then Ven. Sāriputta, emerging from his seclusion in the late afternoon, went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Clear, Sāriputta, are your faculties—pure your complexion, and bright.1 In which [meditative] dwelling do you often now dwell?"

"Lord, I often now dwell in a dwelling of emptiness."2

"Excellent, Sāriputta. Excellent. You often now dwell in the dwelling of a great man, for this is the dwelling of a great man: i.e., emptiness.

"Sāriputta, if a monk should wish, 'May I often dwell in a dwelling of emptiness,' then he should consider: 'On the path by which I entered the village for alms, or in the place where I wandered for alms, or on the path by which I returned from the village for alms, was there in my mind any desire, passion, aversion, delusion, or irritation for forms cognizable via the eye?' If, on reflection, he knows, 'On the path by which I entered the village for alms, or in the place where I wandered for alms, or on the path by which I returned from the village for alms, there was in my mind desire, passion, aversion, delusion, or irritation for forms cognizable via the eye,' then he should make an effort for the abandoning of those evil, unskillful qualities. But if, on reflection, he knows, 'On the path by which I entered the village for alms, or in the place where I wandered for alms, or on the path by which I returned from the village for alms, there was in my mind no desire, passion, aversion, delusion, or irritation for forms cognizable via the eye,' then he should dwell in refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

"Further, the monk should consider: 'On the path by which I entered the village for alms, or in the place where I wandered for alms, or on the path by which I returned from the village for alms, was there in my mind any desire, passion, aversion, delusion, or irritation for sounds cognizable via the ear… aromas cognizable via the nose… flavors cognizable via the tongue… tactile sensations cognizable via the body… ideas cognizable via the intellect?' If, on reflection, he knows, 'On the path by which I entered the village for alms, or in the place where I wandered for alms, or on the path by which I returned from the village for alms, there was in my mind desire, passion, aversion, delusion, or irritation for ideas cognizable via the intellect,' then he should make an effort for the abandoning of those evil, unskillful qualities. But if, on reflection, he knows, 'On the path by which I entered the village for alms, or in the place where I wandered for alms, or on the path by which I returned from the village for alms, there was in my mind no desire, passion, aversion, delusion, or irritation for ideas cognizable via the intellect,' then he should dwell in

refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

"Further, the monk should consider: 'Are the five strings of sensuality3 abandoned in me?' If, on reflection, he knows, 'The five strings of sensuality are not abandoned in me,' he should make an effort for the abandoning of the five strings of sensuality. But if, on reflection, he knows, 'The five strings of sensuality are abandoned in me,' then he should dwell in refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

"Further, the monk should consider: 'Are the five hindrances4 abandoned in me?' If, on reflection, he knows, 'The five hindrances are not abandoned in me,' he should make an effort for the abandoning of the five hindrances. But if, on reflection, he knows, 'The five hindrances are abandoned in me,' then he should dwell in refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

"Further, the monk should consider: 'Are the five clinging-aggregates5 comprehended by me?' If, on reflection, he knows, 'The five clinging-aggregates are not comprehended by me,' he should make an effort for the comprehension of the five clinging-aggregates. But if, on reflection, he knows, 'The five clinging-aggregates are comprehended by me,' then he should dwell in refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

"Further, the monk should consider: 'Are the four establishings of mindfulness6 developed in me?' If, on reflection, he knows, 'The four establishings of mindfulness are not developed in me,' he should make an effort for the development of the four establishings of mindfulness. But if, on reflection, he knows, 'The four establishings of mindfulness are developed in me,' then he should dwell in refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

"Further, the monk should consider: 'Are the four right exertions... the four bases of power... the five faculties... the five strengths... the seven factors for awakening developed in me?' If, on reflection, he knows, 'The seven factors for awakening are not developed in me,' he should make an effort for the development of the seven factors for awakening. But if, on reflection, he knows, 'The seven factors for awakening are developed in me,' then he should dwell in refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

"Further, the monk should consider: 'Is the noble eightfold path developed in me?' If, on reflection, he knows, 'The noble eightfold path is not developed in me,' he should make an effort for the development of the noble eightfold path. But if, on reflection, he knows, 'The noble eightfold path is developed in me,' then he should dwell in refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

"Further, the monk should consider: 'Are tranquility & insight developed in me?' If, on reflection, he knows, 'Tranquility & insight are not developed in me,' he should make an effort for the development of tranquility & insight. But if, on reflection, he knows, 'Tranquility & insight are developed in me,' then he should dwell in refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

“Further, the monk should consider: ‘Are clear knowing & release realized in me?’ If, on reflection, he knows, ‘Clear knowing & release are not realized in me,’ he should make an effort for the realization of clear knowing & release. But if, on reflection, he knows, ‘Clear knowing & release are realized in me,’ then he should dwell in refreshment & joy, training day & night in skillful qualities.

“Sāriputta, all those contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the past who purified their almsfood, did so through repeated reflection in just this way.

“All those contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the future who will purify their almsfood, will do so through repeated reflection in just this way.

“All those contemplatives & brahmans at present who purify their almsfood, do so through repeated reflection in just this way.

“Thus, Sāriputta, you should train yourselves: ‘We will purify our almsfood through repeated reflection.’ That’s how you should train yourselves.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Sāriputta delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

Notes

1. When Moggallāna and Sāriputta were still wanderers, this is what Moggallāna said on first seeing Sāriputta after the latter had acquired the Dhamma eye, the first stage of awakening. See Mv 1.23.6.

2. See MN 121.

3. AN 6:63 defines the five strings of sensuality in this way: “There are these five strings of sensuality. Which five? Forms cognizable via the eye—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked with sensual desire; sounds cognizable via the ear… aromas cognizable via the nose… flavors cognizable via the tongue… tactile sensations cognizable via the body—agreeable, pleasing, charming, endearing, enticing, linked with sensual desire.” It goes on to say, however, that these five strings of sensuality are not the same as sensuality itself, which it defines in these terms:

The passion for his resolves is a man’s sensuality,

not the beautiful sensual pleasures

found in the world.

The passion for his resolves is a man’s sensuality.

The beauties remain as they are in the world,

while, in this regard,

the enlightened

subdue their desire.

So, strictly speaking, one doesn't abandon the five strings of sensuality. Instead, one should abandon one's desire for them. SN 47:6 makes the point that when one is developing the four establishings of mindfulness, one should not wander among the five strings of sensuality. This is in preparation for getting the mind into right concentration, as the standard definition of right concentration (see SN 45:8) states that it begins when one is secluded from sensuality and unskillful qualities. AN 9:38 states that one reaches the end of the cosmos—defined as the five strings of sensuality—when one has entered right concentration, starting with the first jhāna and going up through the three higher jhānas and the four formless attainments. One has crossed over attachment in cosmos when one's effluents are ended.

4. "Monks, there are these five hindrances. Which five? Sensual desire as a hindrance, ill will as a hindrance, sloth & drowsiness as a hindrance, restlessness & anxiety as a hindrance, and uncertainty as a hindrance. These are the five hindrances." — AN 9:64

5. "And what are the five clinging-aggregates that, in short, are stressful? The form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrication clinging-aggregate, the consciousness clinging-aggregate." — MN 141

6. The seven sets of teachings beginning with the four establishings of mindfulness and ending with the noble eightfold path are collectively known as the bodhi-pakkhiya-dhamma, the wings to awakening. In DN 16 and other suttas, the Buddha identified them as the most important teachings to know to maintain the harmony and long life of his Dhamma. See The Wings to Awakening.

For more detail on the establishings of mindfulness, see DN 22, SN 47:40, and Right Mindfulness. For more detail on the bases of power, see SN 51:20 and Bases for Success. For more detail on the five faculties, see SN 48:10 and The Five Faculties. For more detail on the factors for awakening, see SN 46:51–52, MN 118, and Factors for Awakening. For more detail on the noble eightfold path, see SN 45:8 and On the Path.

See also: MN 48; MN 149; SN 48:53; AN 2:5; AN 6:19–20; AN 10:51