SN 1.7 — SN 1:7 Unpenetrated | Appaṭividitā Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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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

Unpenetrated

Appaṭividitā Sutta (SN 1:7)

In light of the question as to how best to translate Buddha, this sutta offers evidence in support of the translation, “awakened.” The verses draw a direct connection between two words derived from the same root: the adjective sambuddha, a variant of buddha, and the verb pābujjhati, which in context clearly means to awaken from sleep.

* * *

Standing to one side, a devatā addressed the Blessed One with a verse:

“Those in whom

phenomena are unpenetrated,

who may be led

by the teachings of others:

Asleep are they;

they haven’t awakened.

It’s time for them

to awaken.”

The Buddha:

“Those in whom

phenomena are well-penetrated,

may not be led

by the teachings of others.

Awakened

through right knowing,

they go among the discordant

harmoniously.”1

Note

1. “Dissonant” and “harmoniously” translate visama and sama, which literally mean, “uneven” and “even.” Throughout ancient cultures, the terminology of music was used to describe the moral quality of people and actions. Discordant intervals or poorly-tuned musical instruments were metaphors for evil; harmonious intervals and well-tuned instruments, metaphors for good. In Pali, the term sama—“even”—described an instrument tuned on-pitch. There is a famous passage (AN 6:55) where the Buddha reminds Soṇa Koḷivisa—who had been over-exerting himself in the practice—that a lute sounds appealing only if the strings are neither too taut or too lax, but “evenly” tuned. This image would have special resonances with the Buddha's teaching on the middle way. It also adds meaning to the term samaṇa—monk or contemplative—which the texts frequently mention as being derived from sama. The word sāmañña—“evenness,” the quality of being in tune—also means the quality of being a contemplative: The true contemplative is always in tune with what is proper and good.

This verse has an added play on words, in that the term “well-penetrated” can also mean “well-tuned.”

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 41; MN 61; MN 97; AN 6:55; AN 6:63