

Conditional relations: cornerstone of Dhamma

BY ISHARA MUDUGAMUWA

Namo Tassa Bhagavatho Arahatho Samma Sambuddhassa
(Homage to The Blessed One, Worthy, and Fully Self-Enlightened...)

*Vichitta Mathi Gambhira-Manantha Naya Mandithan
Pattanan Sammasanthassa-Wimala Mitha Buddhiya,
Yassa Deha Nikkhaminsu-Subha Jabbanna Ransio
Neela Peetha Ratta Setha-Manjittha Pabassara,
Than Lokanathathan Sugathan-Dhammancha Jina Sevithan
Sangha Niranganan Settang-Namami Sirasa Daran.*

The Buddha's body and mind were so purified when he pondered on the Book of Relations - *Patthana*, the seventh treatise of the *Abhidhamma*, that six-coloured rays emitted from his body. I pay homage with my head to the Fully Self-Enlightened and Blessed One. I pay homage with my head to the Dhamma (teachings) of the Blessed One and I also pay homage with my head to the Sangha (Disciples of the Buddha).

Reciting and listening to the *Patthana* is very important. It makes our minds calm, peaceful and serene. *Patthana* chanting also protects us all around, warding off dangers, calamities and disasters and bringing in success, prosperity, good health, peace and harmony. Chanting and listening to the *Patthana* also helps us repeat our reflections on them, preventing our minds from unwholesome and evil tendencies related to greed, hatred and delusion. Chanting *Patthana* guide us to reflect on the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha and thus gain true understanding of the path to Peace and Happiness.

Head of the *Abhidhamma* Department of International Theravada Institute Ven Deniyaya Upasama Thera said that it is beneficial for every Buddhist to recite daily at least a few verses from the *Patthana Vandanā*, recalling the sublime qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

Patthanappakarana

Ven. Upasama Thera has studied the *Abhidhamma* with specialisation in the *Patthanappakarana*, the seventh and most profound book in the basket of *Abhidhamma* and had taught *Abhidhamma* in Burmese language in Myanmar and also in Sinhala at several Sri Lankan monastic education institutes. He is arguably the best academic in the field of *Patthana* studies in Sri Lanka.

"Listening to *Patthana* can even bring an animal to nibbana,". Referring to the story about the hanging bats in a cave where a monk was meditating and reciting the *Patthāna*, Venerable Thera said that there were 500 wild bats living in a dark cave during Kassapa Sammasambuddha's time. Two Theras in the cave too, recite *Abhidhamma* scriptures, question each other, discuss *Abhidhamma*. These bats, though not knowing human language, caught the voice of recitation and listened to it. Every day when the two Theras recite *Abhidhamma*, these bats stop all their work and listen to the voice attentively and grew fond of it. Eventually, these 500 bats died. They were reborn as 500 mighty Devas. When These 500 Devas investigated their cause of rebirth, they found out that it was the *Abhidhamma* recitation that caused this Heavenly rebirth.

It was due to their acquired interest and faith in that *Abhidhamma* voice, instilled peace and merits in their minds. There in heaven, these 500 De-

vas made an aspiration that in lives coming to be, they would fulfill the Paramitas and become the Receivers and Masters of *Abhidhamma* teachings taught by the Buddha. Eventually after many lives, they were reborn as 500 disciples of Arahant Sariputta Thera. Having learned *Abhidhamma* from Arahant Sariputta Thera, these 500 disciples too attained Arahantship.

Concentration

"If we can recite the *Patthana*, we can concentrate on all things. Normally, we think about this or that. And we are quite occupied with our work load, job related things, and emotions, but when we recite the *Patthana*, we can focus on the nature of the dhamma, the conditions. If we do good deeds we will get good returns or things like that. We also feel secure, during the recitation and after the recitation," he said.

Some lay people, hearing the *Patthāna* and the words altered their moods, or restored a sense of personal calm or strength.

Patthana belongs to the "higher teachings" of the Buddha, the *Abhidhamma* of Theravada Buddhism. The term "*Patthana*" (*Pali*) is composed of the prefix "pa," various, and "thāna," cause or condition; thus, *Patthāna* means "various causes or conditions," or "a system of relations." *Patthana* is usually translated as "conditional relations."

The *Patthana*, the last and most complex volume of the *Abhidhamma*, is envisioned as a keystone in the long-term preservation of the Buddha's teachings, which are also understood to inevitably disappear. As a result of these conditions and understandings, a popular ritualised and amplified recitation of this difficult text has been developed to maintain the text's presence in popular consciousness.

This is a conscientious move by Burmese Buddhist practitioners to create opportunities for people to hear the Buddha's teachings, while also providing merit for all of the people involved in the production of the ritualised recitation, including the listeners. The accrual of this merit can provide for a better rebirth, for example, in a time when the future Buddha returns to earth and restores these teachings to humans once again.

Significance of sound

The amplified practices of this festival drew my attention to the significance of sound in the role of place making, not only at the sites of these festivals but also within the monastery I stayed at while completing fieldwork for this thesis. That is, I found sound and a sensibility of sound to be a critical means by which individual and collective memory makes sense and place out of experience. In this iii Burmese Buddhist cosmological context, sens-



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ing sound was an avenue by which to preserve the Buddha's teachings, accrue merit, obtain enlightenment, and expand the sacred space of effective practice.

According to Theravada tradition, the essence of the *Abhidhamma* was formulated by the Buddha during the fourth week after his Enlightenment. The fourth week, the Buddha spent in a jeweled chamber (*Rathana - ghara*) contemplating the intricacies of the *Abhidhamma*. Buddha's body and mind were so purified when he pondered on the Book of Relations, *Patthana* the seventh treatise of the *Abhidhamma*, which six coloured rays emitted from his body.

The *Abhidhamma* stands as an essential pillar of the classical Theravada Buddhist thought. The *Abhidhamma Pipaka* is one of the divisions of the Pali Canon recognised by Theravada Buddhism as the authoritative recession of the Buddha's teachings. This canon was compiled at the three great Buddhist councils held in India in the early centuries following the Buddha's demise: the first, at Rājagaha, convened three months after the Buddha's *Parinibbana* by five hundred senior monks under the leadership of the Elder Mahakassapa; the second, at Vesali, a hundred years later; and the third, at Pataliputta, two hundred years later.

Tripitaka

The canon that emerged from these councils, preserved in Pali, is known as the Tripitaka, the three "baskets" or collections of the teachings.

The first collection, the *Vinaya Pitaka*, is the book of discipline, containing the rules of conduct for the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis—the monks and nuns—and the regulations governing the Sangha, the monastic order. The *Sutta Pitaka*, the second collection, brings together the Buddha's discourses spoken by him on various occasions during his active ministry of forty-five years.

And the third collection is the *Abhidhamma Pipaka*, the "basket" of the Buddha's "higher" or "special" doctrine. This third great division of the Pali Canon bears a distinctly different character from the other two divisions.

Whereas the *Suttas* and *Vinaya* serve an obvious practical purpose, namely, to proclaim a clear-cut message of deliverance and to lay down a method of personal training, the *Abhidhamma Pipaka* presents the appearance of an abstract and highly technical systemisation of the doctrine. The collection consists of seven books: the *Dhammasangani*, the *Vibhanga*, the *Dhatukatha*, the *Puggalappanatti*, the *Kathavatthu*, the *Yamaka*, and the *Patthana*.

Unlike the *Suttas*, these are not records of discourses and discussions occurring in real-life settings; they are, rather, full-blown treatises in which the principles of the doctrine have been methodically organised, minutely defined, and meticulously tabulated and classified. Though they were no doubt originally composed and transmitted orally and only written down later, with the rest of the canon in the first century B.C., they exhibit the

qualities of structured thought and rigorous consistency more typical of written documents.

Great Treatise

The *Patthana*, the "Book of Conditional Relations," is probably the most important work of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* and thus is traditionally designated the "Great Treatise" (*mahaparakarao*). Gigantic in extent as well as in substance, the book comprises five volumes totalling 2,500 pages in the Burmese-script Sixth Council edition. The purpose of the *Patthana* is to apply its scheme of twenty-four conditional relations to all the phenomena incorporated in the *Abhidhamma* matrix. The main body of the work has four great divisions: origination according to the positive method, according to the negative method, according to the positive-negative method, and according to the negative-positive method.

"*Hetupaccayo, ārammanapaccayo, adhipatipaccayo, anantarapaccayo, samanantarapaccayo, saha-jātapaccayo, aññamaññapaccayo, nissayapaccayo, upanissayapaccayo, purejātapaccayo, pacchājātapaccayo, āsevanapaccayo, kammappaccayo, vipākappaccayo, āhārapaccayo, indriyapaccayo, jhānapaccayo, maggapaccayo, sampayuttapaccayo, vippayuttapaccayo, atthipaccayo, natthipaccayo, vigatappaccayo, avigatappaccayoti.*"

The 24 modes of conditional relations

1. *Hetu-paccayo* - root condition
2. *ārammaṇa-paccayo* - object condition
3. *Adhipati-paccayo* - predominance condition
4. *Anantara-paccayo* - proximity condition
5. *Samanantara-paccayo* - contiguity condition
6. *Sahajāta-paccayo* - co-nascent condition

7. *Arammana-paccayo* - mutuality condition
8. *Nissaya-paccayo* - support condition
9. *Upanissaya-paccayo* - decisive support condition
10. *Purejāta-paccayo* - pre-nascent condition
11. *Pacchājāta-paccayo* - post-nascent condition
12. *Asevana-paccayo* - repetition condition
13. *Kamma-paccayo* - association condition
14. *Vipāka-paccayo* - karma result condition
15. *āhāra-paccayo* - nutriment condition
16. *Indriya-paccayo* - faculty condition
17. *Jhāna-paccayo* - jhāna condition
18. *Magga-paccayo* - path condition
19. *Sampayutta-paccayo* - association condition
20. *Vippayutta-paccayo* - dissociation condition
21. *Atthi-paccayo* - presence condition
22. *Natthi-paccayo* - absence condition
23. *Vigata-paccayo* - separation condition
24. *Avigata-paccayo* - non-separation condition.

Each of these in turn has six subdivisions: origination of triads, of dyads, of dyads and triads combined, of triads and dyads combined, of triads and triads combined, and of dyads and dyads combined.

Within this pattern of 24 sections, the 24 modes of conditionality are applied in due order to all the phenomena of existence in all their conceivable permutations. Despite its dry and tabular format, even from a "profane" humanistic viewpoint, the *Patthana* can easily qualify as one of the truly monumental products of the human mind, astounding in its breadth of vision, its rigorous consistency, and its painstaking attention to detail. To Theravada belief, it is the most eloquent testimony to the Buddha's unimpeded knowledge of omniscience.