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Sammatta Niyāma Suttas

The Discourses on the Certainty of Rightness | A 5.151-153

Theme: How to prepare yourself for spiritual liberation

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2003

Introduction

1.1 These are three succinct suttas on the wrong ways of listening to the Dharma and the certainty of rightness (*sammatta, niyāma*) in the same connection, that is, preparing ourselves for spiritual liberation. Like many of the teachings of the Aṅguttara, these suttas are probably summaries or key points of longer suttas found elsewhere (but many of which must have been lost); hence the repetitions in parts. The key points of the three suttas, bearing the same title of **Sammatta Niyāma Sutta**, are as follows:

- (1) He does not belittle the lesson.
- (2) He does not belittle the speaker.
- (3) He does not belittle himself.
- (4) He listens to the Dharma without an agitated mind.
- (5) He listens with a one-pointed mind and giving wise attention.
- (6) He is wise, intelligent, not a dullard.
- (7) He holds no conceit that he knows when he does not.
- (8) He listens to the Dharma without false pretence, not full of false pretence.
- (9) He listens to the Dharma without a hostile mind, not seeking flaws.
- (10) He does not have a fixed mind like a post regarding the Dharma teaching.

1.2 Two other suttas should be studied in this connection: **the Sussūsā Sutta** (A 6.88/3:437),¹ a short text where six conditions are mentioned as preventing one from entering the certainty of rightness; and a prophetic sutta, **the Āṇi Sutta** (S 20.7/2:266 f),² warning students against giving priority to literature that lack spirituality.

1.3 In the Introduction to my translation of **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1), I have proposed that the faith-follower (*saddhā'nusārī*) and the truth-follower (*dhammānusārī*) are the “lesser streamwinner” referred to in the Abhidhamma and Commentaries.³ The lesser streamwinners are said to be on the course of “rightness” (*sammatta*), which here refers to the eightfold path of the saints.

These two individuals, however, are spiritual attainers who are not yet arya, as suggested by **the Sammatta Niyāma Suttas 1-3** (A 5.151-153). These three Suttas, I think, describe the training of the faith-follower and the truth-follower, that is, the lesser streamwinners. This training expedites their attaining streamwinning in this life itself.

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¹ Suggested by Ven Soorakkulame Pamaratana of Sri Lanka. **Sussūsā S** (A 6.88/3:437), SD 4.5.

² **Āṇi Sutta** (S 20.7/2:266 f), SD 11.13.

³ **(Anicca) Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/3:225), SD 16.7 (1.6).

Sammatta Niyāma Sutta 1

The Discourse on the Certainty of Rightness 1 | A 5.151/3:174 f

Theme: How to study the Dharma for Liberation

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[174]

The wrong way of listening to the Dharma

1 Bhikshus, one accomplished in 5 ways even when listening to the true Dharma is unable to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states.⁴ What are the five?

- 2** (1) One belittles⁵ the lesson
- (2) One belittles the speaker
- (3) One belittles oneself
- (4) One listens to the Dharma with an agitated mind
- (5) One listens without a one-pointed mind and without giving wise attention.

Bhikshus, one accomplished in these 5 ways even when listening to the true Dharma is unable to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states.

The right way of listening to the Dharma

3 Bhikshus, one accomplished in 5 ways even when listening to [175] the true Dharma is able to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states. What are the five?

- 4** (1) One does not belittle the lesson.
- (2) One does not belittle the speaker.
- (3) One does not belittle oneself.
- (4) One listens to the Dharma without an agitated mind.
- (5) One listens with a one-pointed mind and giving wise attention.

Bhikshus, one accomplished in these 5 ways when listening to the true Dharma is able to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states.

— evaṃ —

⁴ *Pañcahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato suṇanto pi saddhammaṃ abhabbo niyāmaṃ okkamitum kusalesu dhammesu sammattarā.*

⁵ “One belittles,” *paribhoti = paribhavati*, to treat with contempt, neglect, despise (S 1:69; A 3:174 f; J 3:16; 5:442).

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Sammatta Niyāma Sutta 2

The Discourse on the Certainty of Rightness 2 | A 5.152/3:175

Theme: How to study the Dharma for Liberation

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The wrong way of listening to the Dharma

1 Bhikshus, one accomplished in 5 ways even when listening to the true Dharma is unable to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states. What are the five?

- 2** (1) One belittles the lesson
- (2) One belittles the speaker
- (3) One belittles oneself
- (4) One lacks wisdom, unintelligent, a dullard
- (5) One holds the conceit that one knows when one does not.

Bhikshus, one accomplished in these 5 ways even when listening to the true Dharma is unable to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states.

The right way of listening to the Dharma

3 Bhikshus, one accomplished in 5 ways even when listening to the true Dharma is able to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states. What are the five?

- 4** (1) One does not belittle the lesson
- (2) One does not belittle the speaker
- (3) One does not belittle oneself
- (4) One is wise, intelligent, not a dullard.
- (5) One holds no conceit that one knows when one does not.

Bhikshus, one accomplished in these 5 ways when listening to the true Dharma is able to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states.

— evaṃ —

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Sammatta Niyāma Sutta 3

The Discourse on the Certainty of Rightness 3 | A 5.153/3:175 f

Theme: How to study the Dharma for Liberation

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The wrong way of listening to the Dharma

1 Bhikshus, one accomplished in 5 ways even when listening to the true Dharma is unable to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states. What are the five?

- 2** (1) One listens to the Dharma as a hypocrite, full of false pretences.
- (2) One listens to the Dharma with a hostile mind, seeking flaws.
- (3) One has a fixed mind like a post regarding the Dharma teaching.
- (4) One lacks wisdom, unintelligent, dullard.
- (5) One holds the conceit that one knows when one does not.

Bhikshus, one accomplished in these 5 ways even when listening to the true Dharma is unable to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states.

The right way of listening to the Dharma

3 Bhikshus, one accomplished in 5 ways even when listening to the true Dharma is able to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states. What are the five?

- 4** (1) One listens to the Dharma without being a hypocrite, not full of false pretences.
- (2) One listens to the Dharma without a hostile mind, not seeking flaws.⁶
- (3) One does not have a fixed mind like a post regarding the Dharma teaching.
- (4) One is wise, intelligent, not a dullard.
- (5) One holds no conceit that one knows when one does not.

Bhikshus, one accomplished in these 5 ways even when listening to the true Dharma is able to plunge into the certainty of rightness of wholesome states.

— evaṃ —

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⁶ Cf (Majjhima) Ceto, khila S (M 16,7), SD 51.10.