

Dhammapada 21-23: The Path of Diligence (Appamāda)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 18:25

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa (three times)

I'm looking at the chapter now on diligence, and it's the first three verses. I shall do my usual little bit of chanting.

Appamādo amatapadaṃ, pamādo maccuno padaṃ

Appamattā na mīyanti, ye pamattā yathā matā

Etaṃ visesato ñatvā, appamāde panditā

Appamāde pamodanti, ariyānaṃ gocare ratā

Te jhāyino sātaccakārī, niccaṃ daḷhaparakkamā

Phusanti dhīrā nibbānaṃ, yogakkhemaṃ anuttaraṃ

Translation: "Vigilance is the path to the deathless, negligence the path to death. The vigilant do not die, the negligent are as if already dead. Knowing this distinction, vigilant sages rejoice in vigilance, delighting in the company of the noble ones. Absorbed in meditation, persevering always, steadfast, the wise touch Nibbāna." A better translation would be "attain Nibbāna, the ultimate rest from bondage, the ultimate escape from bondage."

Now, the story is a bit strange and it was very long, so I've narrowed it down to specifics. The King Udena of Kosambī had a few consorts, I dare say, but one of them was Sāmāvati. Now, Sāmāvati had maids, and a Khujjuttarā used to fetch flowers from the forest for her every day. And one day when she got there, the Buddha was giving a sermon. On hearing it, she became a stream-entrant because of her past very good *kamma*.

When she went back, she told Sāmāvati about this and related the whole talk to her and the other maids. They all took on a devotion to the Buddha, so much so that they put holes in the walls of their apartment, of their palace, so that when the Buddha came on alms round, they could bow to him. The reason they put holes in the wall was because they didn't want to tell the king, because they thought he might be a bit upset.

Now his other consort was a very beautiful woman called Māgandiyā. Her father, the brahmin, had actually offered her as a wife to the Buddha, and the Buddha of course said that he was way beyond all

sensual, romantic pleasure—none of that. But then he went on to say, why would he be attracted to a body full of filth? And then he gave a discourse on impermanence. The brahmin and his wife became *anāgāmis*, which means non-returners, but her daughter was offended and she vowed revenge.

So the first thing she did, when she heard that the other wife, Sāmāvātī, had been bowing to the Buddha and looking at him through these holes in the wall, she told the king, Udena, thinking that he would be extremely angry. But when they explained to him what they were doing, he was quite all right with it. So now she began to gaslight, putting little ideas that, in fact, Sāmāvātī was out to kill him or do him great harm.

One time when the king determined to see his wife, taking a lute along—a vina—this Māgandiyā hid a snake in it and put flowers in the hole. When the king got to the queen and her maids, the flowers were taken out, the snake jumped out at him, and he realised then that in fact they had meant to kill him. So he lined them up in a row and took out his bow and arrow and began to shoot them. But the arrow kept missing the target, even though he was an excellent archer, which meant that they were innocent. So he gave up, he let them off.

That wasn't the end of it. Māgandiyā now was really in a very bad mood and she asked her uncle with some relatives to come and burn the palace down. That's what they did—they burned the palace down. When the king heard this he rushed over, and I shall read the last paragraph:

"As soon as he heard the news that all had been burnt, the king rushed to the scene, but it was too late. He suspected that it was done at the instigation of Māgandiyā, but did not show that he was suspicious. Instead, he said, 'While Sāmāvātī was alive, I had been fearful and alert, thinking I might be harmed by her. Only now is my mind at peace. Who would have done this? It must only have been someone who loves me very dearly.'

Hearing this, the foolish Māgandiyā promptly admitted that it was she who had instructed her uncle to do this terrible deed. Thereupon the king pretended to be very pleased with her and said that he would grant her a great favour and honour all her relatives. So the relatives were sent for and they came gladly. On arrival at the palace, however, all of them, including Māgandiyā, were seized and put to death in the palace courtyard. Thus, the evil Māgandiyā was punished for plotting the death of the holy queen and her attendants."

When the Buddha heard of these incidents—he says incidents here, these little things—he then spoke these verses concerning diligence. But frankly, I don't quite know how that fits into the story of diligence, but we shall let that be.

Just a little bit of vocabulary here from the Pali. The word *amata*, the deathless, is often a way that the Buddha talks about Nibbāna. It's a state of deathlessness. *Pada* means footsteps, so the path to the deathless. The quality of diligence is really important. The commentary doesn't say much more. It just says

negligence, on the other hand, is the way to repeated cycle of birth and death. Remember that rebirth is presumed in all the Buddhist scriptures—*saṃsāra*, the onward going. That's what happens to people who aren't diligent.

In the second verse, knowing this distinction, vigilant sages rejoice in vigilance, delighting in the field, sphere, dimension of the noble ones. Just an interesting word there: *gocara* is where the cows go. *Go* is cow and *cara* means to go, so it's basically a pasture. You might say it's their club. The wise ones have distinctly understood the importance of vigilance, and we'll come to that a little later. They rejoice in it—they're happy when they're in that state of vigilance. It's the same for us, I hope.

The third one is absorbed in meditation, persevering always, steadfast, the wise obtain Nibbāna, the ultimate rest from bondage. Here the translation has been put as toil, but *yoga* is a bond. A bond or a yoke—it might in the Dhammapada be referring to the ten fetters. I won't go into them so much, but the ten fetters are what you have to get rid of to become fully liberated. But *yoga* became a technical term later on for the three qualities: acquisitiveness, always trying to hold on and get hold of things and people; wrong view that this would bring happiness; and delusion, which is always basically to do with the sense of self. So long as we believe in some smallest way that we are this psychophysical organism, we'll be seeking happiness through this form, and it will always be disappointing in the end because we die.

In the commentary, the one little line is one has to persevere constantly and with right effort. I had on my tips—if you go into resources and then tips, you'll find one on *appamāda*. There's a verse there that I quoted which says the Buddha says, "I do not see even a single thing that so causes latent unwholesome qualities to arise and arisen wholesome qualities to decline than negligence. For one who is heedless or negligent, latent unwholesome qualities arise and arisen wholesome qualities decline." Of course, there's the opposite when one is actually diligent.

I looked up in the thesaurus the synonyms for this diligence, and I came up with a whole load of words which then happily could be divided into three qualities. First of all, there was mindfulness: attentiveness, vigilance, being heedful. Then there was a sense of care: careful, conscientious, meticulous, thorough, painstaking. Then there was the quality of effort: hard-working, industrious, assiduous, zealous, dogged, perseverance.

So these three qualities are included in the word diligence: mindfulness, right attention; care, so where you put your mind you always put your heart into what you're doing—there has to be a sense of care, even just doing something carefully; and of course that effort, the right effort to complete what one is doing as best one can.

I've suggested that there were some reflections that one can make. At the end of the day one can ask, "How mindful have I been all day?" You don't want to ask it if you're going to be very disappointed. Well no, if you ask it and you're very disappointed, then of course we should encourage ourselves. That's where you make the determination in the evening: "Tomorrow I shall try to be more attentive."

The next one would be, "Have I been careful with everything I've done? Have I been gentle? Have I put my heart into what I'm doing? Have I done it for good reasons?" And then finally, "Did I put the right effort in? Did I actually complete the task, whatever I was doing?"

Of course, this *appamāda* is expressed not only in our doing but in the way we speak and the way we think. Remember, everything starts with something in the head and then manifests through our speech and action.

Just as a little aside, it is one of the seven heavenly virtues as opposed to the seven deadly sins. The first one is chastity: purity, abstinence, and the opposite, of course, is lust and all that. The next one is temperance, and it's put as humanity, equanimity, and the opposite is gluttony. The next one is charity: goodwill, benevolence, generosity, sacrifice, and the opposite is greed. The next one is diligence. Now the Latin word for diligence is *industria*, hence industry, persistence, effortfulness, and ethics, and the opposite is sloth.

Ah, you see, so we'll come to that in a minute. Patience, which is forgiveness and mercy, and the opposite is anger. Kindness, which is satisfaction and compassion—actually the Latin word is *humanitas*, so I don't quite know how that fits—the opposite is envy. And finally, humility: bravery, modesty, reverence, and the opposite is pride.

When I looked up the synonyms for diligence, they also give you the antonyms. That's also something we can remind ourselves: lazy, sluggish, slothful, can't be bothered, do it tomorrow, slapdash. So we've got lots of ways there to consider our actions during the day, even after every action.

This quality of heedfulness—that's Bhikkhu Bodhi's preferred word, heedfulness, but others translate it as diligence—remember that it's his last words. All things, all compounded things are impermanent. *Appamādena sampādehāti*—strive diligently for your liberation. So that was his second to last word before he completed his journey. So that's something to consider.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion, and that by your diligence you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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