

Appamāda: The Path to the Deathless — Dhammapada 22-24

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 17:40

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato
sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.*

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

I'm looking at the Dhammapada, verses 22, 23, 24. They're very similar. I shall do the little chanting.

Appamādo amatapadaṃ, pamādo maccuno padaṃ. Appamattā na miyyanti, pamattā yathā matā.

Etaṃ visesato ñatvā, appamāde paṇḍitā. Appamāde pamodanti, ariyānaṃ gocare ratā.

So it translates as this. This word *pamādo*, that's what we're looking at, *appamādo*, translated variously. Here it's translated as conscientiousness, but as I say, I slightly prefer Gil Fronsdal. He uses the word vigilance.

So the translation is: vigilance is the path to the deathless, negligence the path to death. The vigilant do not die, the negligent are as if already dead.

Then there's a commentary to that. So wise people know very clearly that conscientiousness is the state of the deathless. Therefore they rejoice in conscientiousness, they praise it and pay high attention to it. They are delighting in the sphere of the noble ones. This is, of course, nothing else than *Nibbāna*. So again, the only way to reach this state is to make conscientious effort in this direction, applying all one's energy and striving. So that, of course, reminds you of the Buddha's last words: strive diligently.

The next verse says: knowing this distinction between vigilance and non-vigilance, vigilant sages rejoice in vigilance, delighting in the field of the noble ones. So that's much the same. The commentary just says you cannot proceed on the path towards awakening without it. And if we are negligent, how can we find the energy to purify our hearts. So conscientiousness is the path to the deathless. Only with it we can find the way to our goal, *Nibbāna*. And negligence is the way to repeated cycle of birth and death. Conscientious people are able to achieve or reach *Nibbāna*, thus escaping the rebirths. Whereas the negligent cannot escape, they may as well be dead already.

And the final verse: absorbed in meditation, persevering, always steadfast, the wise experience *Nibbāna*, the ultimate rest from toil.

So again, the commentary adds: continuing the line of reasoning of the previous verses, if one knows that conscientious heedfulness, vigilance or diligence—these are all words for the same *appamāda*—is the key to reaching *Nibbāna*. Applying this to the practice of meditation, one has to persevere constantly and with strong effort. By this we are able to reach *Nibbāna*, to really touch it, here and now. Thus we obtain the highest peace from bondage, the only true peace and freedom available.

Now, I usually read the story, but frankly I can't see any connection whatsoever, which tells you that whoever compiled the Dhammapada thought, now where did this come from? I don't have the ability to find out whether these verses are directly from the Buddha, but most of them are. But anyway, this is the story they attach to it. It's a long story, so I've just reduced it.

So Sāmāvatī was the consort of the King Udena of Kosambī. Now Khujjuttarā was fetching flowers for her and the Buddha was present and she heard a talk and became a first stream entrant, *sotāpanna*. Now she went back and she told Sāmāvatī, the queen, and all the maids, and they began to take on the teaching, and they began to pay homage to the Buddha as he came on alms round. But because they were afraid the king might not like what they were doing, they would do it through little holes in their dwelling.

Now there was another consort, the very beautiful Māgandiyā. This is a parallel story. Her father was a Brahmin and he had offered her to the Buddha as a bride, and the Buddha had rejected it, having no sensual pleasure and reminding him that the body was full of filth. The Brahmin and his wife realised that of course everything is impermanent and, believe it or not, became *anāgāmis*, non-returners. But the daughter vowed revenge. She was very upset with the Buddha.

Anyway, she went and told Udena about these holes. This is the king. But he didn't seem to be concerned. But then she began putting ideas in his head that he was in grave danger. And she hid a snake when the king was going to go over with his lute, his *vīṇā*, and play a few songs for the queen. She hid a snake inside the *vīṇā* and put flowers over the hole. And when they arrived, of course, and the flowers taken out, the snake jumped out and the king was furious.

So he lined up Queen Sāmāvatī with all her maids and fired an arrow to kill them all, just like that. But the loving kindness of the women was such that the arrows failed to connect. Would you believe that? And so this way the king discovered or realised that the women were innocent.

However, Māgandiyā was not satisfied. She asked her husband to go and burn the palace down, which he did, and they all died. Fantastic story, isn't it? You can see this on Hollywood.

And we've got the last paragraph says: as soon as he heard that the palace was burning, he rushed to the scene. But it was too late, and he suspected it had been done by the instigation of Māgandiyā. But he did not show that he was suspicious. Instead, he said, while Sāmāvatī was alive, I was very fearful and alert, thinking I might be harmed by her. Only now I have peace of mind. Who could have done this? It must only have done by somebody who loves me dearly. Now on hearing this, the foolish Māgandiyā promptly

admitted that it was she who'd instructed her husband to do this terrible deed. Thereupon the king pretended to be very pleased with her and said that he would grant a great favour and honour to all her relatives. So the relatives were sent for and they came gladly. On arrival at the palace all of them including Māgandiyā was 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.

And then he said, when the Buddha was told about these incidents, that's what he said. He just talked about *appamāda*. If you can make the connection, you must email me. Anyway, that's by the way.

So we've got this word *appamāda*. *Maccuno* just means death. So it's a very favourite word of the Buddha. Remember that it's his final exhortation. This thing here, strive diligently for your liberation. *Appamādena sampādetthāti*. *Sampādeti* means to strive, it means actually to work hard at trying to get what you want, to fulfil a longing. I rather like that, fulfil a longing.

Then although he mentions lots of virtues which stop unwholesome states arising and develop wholesome states, here's a couple of quotes from the Aṅguttara Nikāya, which is the Collection of Numbers. So the teaching is set out in numbers, one of these, two of those, very Theravāda. And it says: I do not see even a single thing as causes unarisen unwholesome qualities to arise, and arisen wholesome qualities to decline, as heedlessness. That's another word for *pamāda*. One who is heedless—un arisen unwholesome qualities arise and arisen wholesome qualities decline. It's a funny way of saying things but there we are. And then he says in the next verse of course the opposite.

Now what I did was I looked up words for diligence because that's why it's normally translated, and I came up with lots of little words which are approximate. And then when I separated them out, I was quite pleased to see that you could divide these words into mindfulness: attentive, vigilant, heedful. You also had a sense of care with the word diligence: careful, conscientious, meticulous, thorough, painstaking. And diligence also is a sort of effort, to be diligent at your work and all that: hardworking, industrious, assiduous, persistent, zealous. And of course all these words do bring a nuance to the meaning.

So I just made up a little exercise here. You can take each word mindful and just ask yourself, when you reflect on the day or something that you've done, you can always ask yourself these questions: have I been mindful? Have I been careful? Have I been diligent? Did I put the right effort in?

Now, when it comes to spiritual practice, of course, bringing that quality of mindfulness into daily life is very much about being aware of how we are reacting to what we're doing. So even things like eating or gardening, simple tasks, is always to stop for a moment and to make sure that we've got the right intention. It's often the case that you might start off with the right intention, but then it slips into its opposite. So you might be washing the pots and the mind starts wandering off somewhere and you find yourself washing the pots very angrily. And so you have to stop and consider and then restart. So the whole process is one of restarting. You stop, as soon as you see you've gone offline, you've gone off piste, you stop for a minute and just bring yourself back. And that's diligence in the practice.

In ordinary daily life, you can see from the antonyms, from the opposites: lazy, sluggish, slothful, can't be bothered, do it tomorrow. So these are the underlying tendencies. So there is this understanding that when some unwholesomeness arises consciously, it's always there, present underneath, as a potential. So those are your *anusaya*. Here, of course, the Buddha is only concerned with what makes us suffer, what causes problems. But it's obviously also true for all the virtues. So when we find ourselves being gentle, kind, generous, those qualities are also as potential within our hearts.

When you recognise something's come up which you don't like, like you're getting angry with something, or you're getting anxious about something, or you feel a bit down because of something, you have to just be very careful that we don't push it away with a sense of not wanting. So the action of just suppressing something is only going to add more bad energy into the system. So I've got this thing about parking it. So you just put it to the side. You don't use anger or fear to get rid of something. You just put it to the side and turn your attention towards what you want to do. In fact, that's one and the same action. If you just acknowledge, for instance, that there's irritation, and then you acknowledge it and you, as it were, just leave it to the side and you draw your attention to what you want to do. That way you're not suppressing, you're not adding further unwholesome energy into the system. Refuse to be hijacked.

So that's my little presentation for the evening. And I can only hope it is of some help in your practice and that you will be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

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