

Madhupiṇḍika Sutta - The Honey Ball

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Madhupiṇḍika Sutta, the discourse of the Honey- Ball (Honey Comb), is the eighth discourse of the Sihananda Chapter, Mūlapannāsaka, Majjhima-nikaya, ¹. It is necessary to pay attention to the content of the discourse and have an analysis of the matters to be benefited by many.

Madhupiṇḍika Sutta in a Nutshell

On one occasion, the Blessed One lives with the Sakyas in Nigrodha's monastery² in Kapilavattu³. So, the Blessed One puts on robes in the morning and taking bowl and robes enters Kapilavattu for alms. Having walked in Kapilavattu for alms food and returning from the alms round, he enters the Great Forest⁴ and sits at the root of a Beluwa shoot for the day-sojourn. The Sakya Dandapani⁵ too, walking and wandering for exercise, enters the Great forest, approaches the Beluwa shoot where the Blessed One was seated, exchanges friendly greetings, and getting to a side leans on a stick and asks the Buddha what the view or teaching of the Buddha is.

¹ The discourse of middle length sayings

² The monastery that was situated in kapilavattu erected in Nigrodha's place

³ The city where the prince siddhartha lived before the renunciation

⁴ This Mahavana near kapilavattu was virgin forest, uncultivated, stretching up to the Himalayas. It was not like the Mahavana at Vesali which was partly natural, partly cultivated, papannchasudani, Madyamanikaya Commentary

⁵ Dandapani means that he used a golden walking stick although he was not old. Pap. -p.79

Then, the Buddha replies him that he stays without arguing with anyone, dutiful, doubtless and the perception of to be not or not to be. Then, the Buddha approached Nigrodha's monastery and the monks asked the meaning of that view. The Buddha preached the doctrine in brief. The monks wanted to know it in detail. They decided to ask it from Venerable Mahākaccāna thinking that he is intellegent enough to explain it with more details and he could give the meaning of the Buddha's discourse to the monks in a way that they could comprehend it. Thereafter, the monks ask the Buddha the meaning of the discourse he preached in brief. The Buddha emphasises the monks to accept it as Venerable Mahākaccāna explained.

Venerable Ānanda, says this discourse is like a man, hungry and weak, who had got a honey-ball, in whatever manner he tasted it, would enjoy its unmixed taste. In the same manner any clever Bhikkhu would penetrate into the meaning of this exposition and he would gain joy and satisfaction of mind. He then asks the name of this discourse. The Buddha names the discourse as the Honey - Ball.

Significance of the Discourse

The factors found in this discourse are the fundamentals to a proper understanding of the philosophy of early Buddhism.

The inquiry of the Sakya Dandapani and the Response of the Buddha

In this discourse, the Sakya Dndapani ask about the view of the Buddha as

“Kimvādi⁶ samano, kimakkhāyī⁷ ti” “ ?

⁶ kinvadi - of what view?

⁷ kimakkhayi - what does he point our or show? Or what does he talk about?

“ What is the teaching of the recluse, of what views are you?”

As the response for this question, the Buddha replies,

“Yathāvādi kho āvuso sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake, sassamanabrāhmaniyā pajāya sadevamaussāya na kenaci loke viggayha tiṭṭhati, yathā ca pana kāmei visamyuttam viharantam tam brāhmanam akathankathim chinnakukkuccam bhavābhavē vitatanham saññā nānuseññi. Evam vādi kho aham āvuso evamakkhāyī ti.”⁸

“ I have no dispute with anyone in this world of gods and men together with its Māras, Brahmās, the community of recluses and Brahmins and I abide unyoked to sensuality, duties done, doubts dispelled, and without the slightest perception, ‘becoming’ or ‘not becoming’. Friend, I am of this view and teach it.”⁹

● Na kenaci loke viggayha tiṭṭhati - having no disputes in the world

The Buddha didn't dispute with anyone. But, many dispute about the doctrinal matters that He preached about the world, impermanence etc. This is an exemplary behaviour of the Buddha to the entire world. We should not try to dispute with other but we have to be fully equipped with the knowledge so as to respond others if a need arises. The Buddha lived without contending with anyone in the world.

The Buddha enlightens the whole world regarding having disputes with each other in the society and also advises the entire world not to contend with anyone in the world. As ordinary human beings,

⁸ www.metta.lk/ tipitaka/index.html

⁹ www.metta.lk/ tipitaka/index.html

many make the lives worse by engaging in dispute. It is exemplary for every Buddhist to avoid contending even with family members and friends. The other meaning of this saying is that the Buddha as All-knowing One does not dispute with the world. But, the world disputes with Him regarding doctrinal matters like impermanence, not self, ill etc. It is necessary to practise non-contending with the purpose of creating a righteous and peaceful society.

● **Kāmehi visamyuttam - unyoked to sensuality**

The second virtue of the Buddha expressed in this particular discourse is to fare along not fettered to sense pleasure. At present, people all over the world try to get fettered due to sensual pleasures and many undergo sufferings and problems in the world due to it. The Buddha developed his mind not to indulge in sensual pleasure. He did so with the help of the doctrine or the discipline he received through the doctrine. We as Buddhists must strive to be discipline so as not to include in sensuality which causes endless suffering in Sansāra. Buddha had the full control over the five sensory objects. He was not fettered to sense-pleasures.

● **akathaṅkathim - duties done**

As a human being, the Enlightened One has done all the duties he could do for the benefit of the mankind. He took immense sufferings in the Sansāra to achieve Buddhahood. After achieving the supreme enlightenment, he tried to fulfil his duties. That's why he several times concentrated on whether he has all the things needed from a Buddha to the entire world. Having completed them all, the Buddha passed away as a great being. Even at present, the whole world benefits

from the services from the services of the Buddha as he accomplished all his duties.

● **Chinnakukkucca - doubts dispelled**

As normal human beings, we have many doubts regarding doctrinal and non-doctrinal matters. The Buddha had dispelled all his doubts with a firm determination with the training. He got in the sansāric life towards achieving Buddhahood. With the achieving of Buddhahood, he rooted out all his doubts and was in a position to dispel the doubts of all others regarding any matter. Therefore, Buddha is an All-knowing One, Samma Samduddha.

● **Bhavābhavē vītataṅham - Devoid of craving for becoming and non-becoming**

Buddha had uprooted his all craving with the enlightenment. That's why, at the time of achieving Buddhahood, he expressed that he could end all craving. This can be considered a great thing for not indulging in sensory objects and also he didn't have any desire for becoming and non-becoming.

When the Buddha said thus, the Sakya Dandapāni shakes his head, pulls out his tongue, and showing three forks on his forehead, goes away leaning on his stick. It may be because he was influenced by the expression.

Then, the Blessed One, getting up from his seclusion in the evening, approached Nigrodha's monastery, sits on the prepared seat and addresses the Bhikkhus to narrate what happened at the meeting of the Sakya Dandapāni.

After the narration, a certain Bhikkhu asks, "Venerable sir, what is that view?" Then, the Buddha replies.

Perception of Sensory Objects

"Yatonidānam bhikkhu purisam papañcasaññāsankhā samudācaranthi, ettha ce natthi abhinanditabbam abhivaditabbam ajjhosetabbam, esevanto rāgānusayānam. Esevantho patighānusayānam. Esevanto ditthānusayānam. Esevanto vicikicchānusayanāṃ. Esevanto mānānusayānam. Esevanto bhavarāgānusayānam. Esevanto avijjānusayānam. Esevanto dandādānasa tthādānakalahaviggahavivā da tuvantuvampesuññāmusāvādānam. Etthete pāpakā akusalā dhammā aparisesā nirujjhantīti."

"Bhikkhu, on whatever account there is behaviour in the world., you should not be pleased, or welcome it and appropriate it. Then all demeritorious things that rise from the latent tendencies to greed, to hold views, to doubt, to measure, to greed 'becoming' to ignore, to take sticks and weapons, to fight, to takes slides, to dispute, to slander, to tell lies, all these cease remainderlessly."

Perception we gained through our sensory objects is the chief cause for the origion of propensity to attachment, repugnance, views,

perplexity, pride attcament to becoming, ignorance, taking sticks, taking weapons, quarrelling, contending, disputing, accusation, slander and lying speech. If hunman beings, we can stay without being happy with sense perception, without welcoming them and appropriating them we can live without creating demeritorius things. Demerits will result to greed, to averse, to hold views, to doubt and all the above mentioned situations.

papañcasaññāsankhā - Sense Perception

The meaning of the term papañca (and papañca sankhā) has attracted the attention many scholars of Buddhism. Bhikkhu Ñanananda whose book is "Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought" which is one long essay examining this concept papañca begins with the statement. "The term papañca as it occurs in the Pāli canon has presented considerable difficulty of interpretation. "His view is that papañca should be given a more dynamic content such as "prolific conceptualization."¹⁰

E. R. Sarachchandra in his research for the original meaning of papañca is guided to some extent by the significance of the term in the Vedanta and also interprets papañca in terms of nāmarupa. He has tried to establish this meaning notwithstanding the tautology taht results. However, he has discussed at some lenght the relevance of papañca to the process of sense-perception. The face taht identification of oneself with the thinking consciousness gives rise to papañca

¹⁰ Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought, p.10

sankhā has been recognized. Sarachchandra comes to the conclusion about this by looking the formular of sense perception and refers to sense-perception.¹¹

The term papañca saññā saṅkhā can be conception, reckoning or designation. Therefore, papañca saṅkhā can mean concepts, reckonings or designations characterized by the prolific conceptualizing tendency of mind.

After explaining it, the Blessed One gets up from the seat and enters the monastery. Soon after the Blessed One has gone to the monastery, those Bhikkhus think, “Friends, the Blessed One pointed out the above teaching in short to us and entered the monastery. Now, who will explain the meaning of this short exposition?”

Then, those Bhikkhus think that Venerable Mahākaccāna is praised as well-developed and wise by the teacher and also by the co-associates in the holy life. It is possible for venerable Mahākaccāna to explain this short exposition in detail. The bhikkhus, thinking about this, approaches Venerable Mahākaccāna. Having exchanged friendly greetings with him, the Bhikkhus say that the Blessed One pointed out this short exposition and without giving a detailed explanation entered the monastery and asked to explain them the meaning of this discourse.

¹¹ Jayatilleke.K.N, Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge. p.436

Venerable Kaccana's Simile

“Seyyathāpi āvuso puriso sārattiko sārāgavesī sārariyesanam caramāno mahato rukkhassa tittatho sāravato atikkammeva mūlam atikkamma khandham sākāpalāse sāram pariyesitabbam maññeyya, evam sampadamidam, āyasmantānam satthari sammukhībhūte tam bhagavantam atisitvā amhe etamattham paṭipucchitabbam maññatha.”

Venerable Mahākaccāna says that it is like a man wandering in search of heartwood, comes to a standing huge tree ignoring the roots and the trunk, was to search the heartwood in the branches and the foliage. This act of the venerable ones, having ones, having come to the presence of the Teacher, not asking him would come to ask us, is something similar to that.

Venerable Mahākaccāna reveals that it is better to ask the meaning of the discourse delivered by the Buddha in brief for a clear meaning even though he could explain the meaning of it. This shows the reverential respect he had towards the Buddha regarding the doctrinal matters. He gave the above simile regarding asking him for the meaning of the discourse. It is like a man working about aiming at the pith, looking about for the pith of a great, stable and pithy tree, passing by the root, passing by the trunk, might think that pith is to be looked for in the branches and foliage. This is how he matched the situation of asking for details of the discourse from him without asking the Buddha.

Significance of the Buddha

“So hāvuso bhagavā jānam jānāti, passam passati, cakkhubhuto ñānabhuto dhammabhuto, vattā. pavattā, atthassa ninnetā, amatassa dātā, dhammassāmi, tathāgatho. So ceva panetassa kālo ahoṣi yam bhagavantam yeva etamattham paṭipuccheyyātha. Yathā no bhagavā vyākareyya, tathā nam dhāreyyāthāti..”

Venerable Mahākaccāna further explains that blessed one knows what should be known, sees what should be seen, is the one with eyes, the one with eyes, the one with wisdom, has become the Teaching, has become like Brahmā, practises what he preaches, has come to the essence and gives the deathless, is master of the Teaching, This is the time to ask its meaning from the Blessed One so that we could keep it in our minds.

According to Venerable Mahākaccāna, Buddha has many significant qualities that the Buddha know what the Buddha should be known, see what should be seen, he has become vision, become knowledge, become Dhamma, become Bhahmā, he is a profounder, the expounder, the bringer to the goal¹², the giver of the deathless and dammalord, Tathāgatha.

As Buddhists or the followers of the Buddha we have to cultivate three virtues of the Buddha as was explained by Venerable Kaccāna in the discourse. We should know everything that we should know in our lifetime even the realization of the Four Noble Truth. We

¹² attha, matter, meaning

must see the things without indulging in them. With our knowledge on five senses, we have to create a good vision regarding our lives. We should realize and practise the doctrine at the same time we should propound in the skills of life and the doctrine. We have many duties to fulfil as the members of the society. At the same time, we have to reach our goal. It is to understand the reality of life and the deliverance or Nibbana.

Formula of Sense Perception

Later the Bhikkhus say about the praising of the Teacher and Co-associates regarding Venerable Mahākaccāna. Venerable Mahākaccāna decides to explain it if the other does not mind. Venerable Mahākaccāna says that he understands the detailed meaning of this short exposition in the following manner. It is necessary to examine the formular of sense perception in detail as found in this discourse. This discourse provides details about paticcasamuppāda or the dependant origination.

“Cakkhuñcāvuso paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānaṃ. Tinnāṃ sangati phasso. Phassapaccayā vedanā. Yaṃ vedeti, taṃ sañjānāti. Yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi. Yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti. Yaṃ papañceti tato nidānaṃ purisam papañccasaññāsankhā samudācaranti atitānāgathapaccuppannesu cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu.”

“Sotañcāvuso paticca sadde ca uppajjati sotaviññānam ...
 Ghānañcāvuso paticca gandhe ca uppajjati ghānaviññānam ...
 Jivhañcāvuso paticca rase ca uppajjati jivhāviññānam ...
 Kāyañcāvuso paticca phottahabbe ca uppajjati kayaviññānam ...
 Manañcāvuso paticca dhamme ca uppajjati manoviññānam ...”

On account of eye and forms arise eye consciousness. The coincident meeting of the three is contact. On account of contact, feelings arise; what is felt is perceived; of what is perceived, there is thinking; in thoughts, there is diffuseness (papañca); on account of that, diffused perceptive components of forms of the past, future, and present cognizable by the eye consciousness arise and behave in that man.

On account of the ear and sounds arise ear consciousness ...
 On account of the nose and smells arise nose consciousness
 On account of tongue and tastes arise tongue consciousness
 On account of body and touches arise body consciousness
 On account of mind and thoughts arise mind consciousness

When the eye is present, forms are present, eye consciousness is present, and the notion of a contact is present is possible. When the notion of contact is present, a notion of feelings is possible, when there is a notion of feelings, a notion of perception is possible, when there is a notion of perception, a notion of thinking is possible, and when there is a notion of thinking, a notion of diffused perceptive arising and behaving is possible.

When the ear is present, sounds are present, and ear consciousness is present... When the nose is present, smell are present, and nose consciousness is present... When the tongue is present, tastes are present, and tongue consciousness is present... When the body is present, touches are present and body consciousness is present... When the mind is present, thoughts are present mind consciousness is present... When the notion of contact is present, a notion of feelings is possible, When there is a notion of perception, a notion of thinking is possible, and when there is a notion of thinking of notion a diffused perceptive components arising and behaving is possible.

When the eye is not present, forms are not present, eye consciousness is not present the notion of a contact is not possible. When the notion of contact is not present, a notion of feelings is not possible, When the ear is not present, sounds are not present, and ear consciousness is not present..... When the nose is not present, smells are not present, and nose consciousness is not present When the tongue is not present, tastes are not present, and tongue consciousness is not present..... When the body is not present, touches are not present and body consciousness is not present..... When the mind is not present, thoughts are not present, mind consciousness is not present, the notion of contact is not possible. When the notion of contact is not present, a notion of feelings is not possible, When there is not a notion of feelings, a notion of perception is not possible, When there is not a notion of perception, a notion of thinking is not possible, When there is not a notion of thinking, a notion of diffused perceptive components arising and behaving is not possible.

So, this was the explanation of the Venerable Mahakaccana as he understood this short exposition and at the same time requested the monks that if they desired to approach the Blessed One, ask him as he explains and bear it in mind.

The nature of perceptual process is that six sensory organs and their corresponding objects are divided into twelve bases (ayatana). The sensory organs are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. The corresponding objects are form, sound, smell, taste and concepts. The sensory organs are internal to human personality but related to the sensory objects. The relation between the two sets of bases is considered necessary for the arising of the perceptual cognition.¹³

Then, those Bhikkhus, agreeing and delighting in the words of the Venerable Mahākaccāna, get up from their seats and approach the Blessed One, worship, sit on a side and say,

“Venerable sir, the Blessed One pointed out this exposition is short and without giving a detailed explanation, got up from the seat and entered the monastery. So, we approached venerable Mahākaccāna and asked him to explain it to us. Venerable Mahākaccāna explained it to us with those words and those phrases.”

With the explanation of this discourse the Buddha praise the Thera. The Buddha replies the monks,

¹³ Nirvana and Ineffability, p 48.

“Paṇḍitho bhikkhave mahākaccāno, mahāpañño bhikkhave mahākaccāno. Mañcepi tuṃhe bhikkhave etamatthaṃ paṭipuccheyyātha, ahampi naṃ evamevaṃ, vyākareyyaṃ yathā taṃ mahākaccānena vyākataṃ eso cevetassa attho, evañca naṃ dhārethāti.”

Bhikkhus, Mahākaccāna is wise, even if you had asked me, I would have explained it as Mahākaccāna had done it. That is its meaning, so bear it like that.”

How the Discourse got its name

When this was said Venerable Ananda asks the Blessed One,

“seyyathāpi bhante puriso jighacchādubbalypareto madhupindikam adhigaccheyya, so yato yato sāyeyya labhetheva sādum rasam asecanakam, evameva kho bhante cetaso bhikkhu dabbajātiko yato yato imassa dhammapariyāssa paññāya attham upaparikkheyya labhetheva attamanatam labhetha cetaso pasādam.”

“Like a man, hungry and weak, who had got a honey comb, in whatever manner he tasted it, would enjoy its unmixed taste. In the same manner any clever Bhikkhu would penetrate into the meaning of this exposition and he would gain joy and satisfaction of mind.”¹⁴

¹⁴ www.metta.lk/tipitaka/index.html

Venerable Ananda gave his idea on the discourse. He revealed the Buddha that even as a man overcame by hunger and exhaustion might come upon a honey-ball, from each bit of that he would taste he would get a sweet delicious flavour. In the same manner, a monk who is naturally able to mind from each bit that he would examine with intuitive wisdom as to why the naming of this disquisition on Dhamma he should get delight, he would get satisfaction for the mind Based on Venerable Ananda's explanation, the Buddha was kind enough to name this discourse as Madhupiṇḍika or the discourse of Honey-ball

“Ko nāmo ayaṃ bhante dhammapariyāyoti?”

“Venerable sir, what is this exposition of Dhamma called.”

The Buddha names the discourse as the honey-ball in the following manner.

“Tasmātiha tvaṃ ānanda, imaṃ dhammapariyāyaṃ madhupiṇḍikapariyāyotveva naṃ dhārehi.”

“Ananda, bear this, as the exposition of the honey-ball (honey comb).

With this expression, Venerable Ananda rejoices in the words of the Blessed One.

The factors found in this discourse are the fundamentals to a proper understanding of the philosophy of early Buddhism and the formula of sense perception.

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