

Introduction to the Sutta Nipāta

- I. The structure of the Sutta Piṭaka: the five Nikāyas or Āgamas
- II. The Khuddaka Nikāya, “The Minor (or Miscellaneous) Collection”
- III. The Sutta Nipāta
 1. Meaning: *sutta* = discourse; *nipāta* = collection, group, assemblage
 2. Origins of this collection
 3. Contents and prominent themes
- IV. The “three suttas”: the Ratana, the Mahāmaṅgala, and Karaṇīyametta

The Ratana Sutta The Jewels Discourse

Background story: a triple disaster strikes Vesālī

Verse 1: Invocation to the spirits

1. Speaker: the Buddha (through Venerable Ananda)
2. The audience: the spirits (bhūtas)
3. To ward off danger, bestow safety and blessings
4. Means: Determinations of Truth based on the Three Jewels

Verse 2: Instructions to the spirits

1. Mutual help between human beings and spirits
2. The sharing of merit with the devas and spirits

Verse 3: The Buddha as the Peerless Jewel

1. The meaning of “Tathāgata”
 - A. Nikāyas (Anguttara Nikāya 4:23)
 - (1) He has fully awakened to the nature of the world, its origin, cessation, and way to its cessation.
 - (2) He has fully awakened to all knowable phenomena.
 - (3) All that he speaks is just so (*tathā*).
 - (4) He acts in accordance with (*tathā*) his words.
 - (5) He is supreme in all the world.
 - B. Commentaries (e.g., Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā)
 - (1) He has “Thus Come” (*tathā āgata*), by fulfilling the Ten Pāramis
 - (2) He has “Thus Gone” (*tathā gata*), by perfecting the aids to enlightenment
2. The Tathāgata as the best of beings (Anguttara 4:34)
3. The meaning of jewel (*ratana*): whatever is rare, precious, difficult to see, gives delight, is cherished, and fulfills wishes.
4. Making a Determination of Truth (*saccavacana*, *saccavajja*, *saccādhīṭṭhāna*)

Verse 4: Nibbāna as the Dhamma-Jewel

1. Meaning of terms

- destruction (*khayaṃ*): of greed, hatred, and delusion; of craving
- dispassion (*virāgaṃ*): the “fading away” of passion
- deathless (*amataṃ*): freedom from birth, aging, and death
- excellent (*paṇītaṃ*): supreme and of inexhaustible goodness

2. Discovered by the Buddha (*sakyamuni*: “the sage of the Sakyans”) in a state of concentration

3. Nibbāna as the supreme dhamma (Anguttara 4:34): “To whatever extent there are things whether conditioned or unconditioned, dispassion is declared the best among them, that is, ... the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbaana.”

Verse 5: The Concentration of the Path as the Dhamma-Jewel

[Revise translation to read:]

5. The supreme Buddha praised that purity, which they call “the concentration with immediate results” (*samādhim ānantariyakam*). There exists no equal to that concentration. This precious jewel is in the Dhamma. By this truth may there be safety.

1. The Noble Eightfold Path as the best of conditioned dhammas, the best of paths (Anguttara 4:34; Dhammapada 273)

2. The concentration of the world-transcending path

3. Why it is praised as supreme above all other concentrations (*not* above all other things!) (*samādhinā tena samo na vijjati*)

Verse 6: The Eight Noble Persons as the Sangha-Jewel

1. Who are the “eight individuals praised by the good” (*puggalā aṭṭha satam pasatṭhā*)?

2. How they form four pairs (*cattāri etāni yugāni honti*)

3. The worthy disciples of the Fortunate One (*dakkhiṇeyyā sugatassa sāvakā*)

4. Offerings and their fruits (the metaphor of sowing)

Verse 7: The Arahants as the Sangha-Jewel

[Revise translation to read:]

7. Those who exerted themselves well with steadfast minds in Gotama’s teaching, the desireless ones have attained what should be attained. Having plunged into the Deathless, they enjoy the Peace obtained without price. This precious jewel ... (etc.)

1. The importance of effort

2. What should be attained, achieved, and realized

3. The peace without price : the meditative attainment of Nibbana

Verse 8: The Stream-Enterer as Representing the Sangha-Jewel

[Revise translation to read:]

8. Just as a city pillar (*indakhila*) fixed in the earth is not shaken by the winds from the four directions, even so, I declare, is the good man who by direct experience (*avecca*) sees the (four) noble truths... (etc.)

1. Seeing the Four Noble Truths: the mark of a stream-enterer
2. How the Four Noble Truths are seen by direct experience
 - (a) the path of insight-knowledge (*vipassanā-paññā*)
 - (b) the world-transcending breakthrough (*dhammābhisamaya*)
3. How a stream-enterer is “not shaken” like a pillar
4. The ball of cotton and the Indra’s Pillar (see reverse)

Verse 9: The Most Sluggish Stream-Enterer Still Represents the Sangha-Jewel

1. The three classes of stream-enterers
2. The greatness even of the most sluggish stream-enterer
3. Connected Discourses on the Breakthrough (SN chapter 13)
(see appendix)

Verse 10: What Happens With the Attainment of Stream-Entry

1. What is meant by “vision” (= *dassana*; “insight” = *vipassanā*)?
2. The three things that are abandoned
 - (1) *sakkāyadiṭṭhī*: “identity view”, view of an existing self
 - (2) *vicikicchā*: doubt about Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, training
 - (3) *sīlabbataparāmāsa*: clinging to rules and observances
3. What are the four states of misery (*apāya*)?
4. What are the six “crimes” (or better: “deeds”) that a person-attained-to-vision cannot do?

Verse 11: The Character of a Stream-Enterer

[Revise middle sentence to read:]

11. ...For it has been said that such an act is impossible for one who has seen the state (*abhabbatā diṭṭhapadassa vuttā*)....
 1. A stream-enterer’s moral discipline
 2. The practice of confession: “What is the character of those who possesses right view? Although they may commit some kind of offence of a minor type, still they

at once confess it to their spiritual brothers and sisters, and having done that, restrain themselves in the future.” (MN 48)

Verse 12: The Buddha as Teacher of the Dhamma

[Revise translation to read:]

12. Like a grove of trees with flowering tops in the first heat of summer, just so *he taught* the excellent Dhamma, leading to Nibbāna the supreme good. This precious jewel is in the *Buddha*. By this truth may there be safety.

[N.B. *adesayi* is third person singular aorist, with subject *so*, “he,” understood.]

Verse 13: The Buddha as the Excellent One

1. Buddha is excellent one because of his qualities; 2. “knower of the excellent” because he is knower of Nibbāna; 3. “giver of the excellent” because he gives the gift of the teaching; 4. “bringer of the excellent” because he brings knowledge of the path.

Verse 14: The Arahants Attain Nibbāna Without Residue

1. Their “old” karma is destroyed
2. The “new” karma does not produce results
3. The two elements of Nibbāna: with residue and without residue
4. The extinguishing of a lamp

Verses 15-17: Sakka’s verses of praise to the Triple Gem

(correction translation of ‘tathāgata’ in these verses)

Appendix

Samyutta Nikaya 56:39 Indra’s Pillar

“Monks, those ascetics or brahmins who do not understand the Four Noble Truths as they really are—they look up at the face of another ascetic or brahmin, thinking: ‘This worthy is surely one who really knows and sees.’

“Suppose, monks, a tuft of cotton wool or kapok, light, wafted by the wind, had settled on an even piece of ground. An easterly wind would drive it westward; a westerly wind would drive it eastward; a northerly wind would drive it southward; a southerly wind would drive it northward. For what reason? Because the tuft is so light. So it is with those ascetics or brahmins who ... look up at the face of another ascetic or brahmin, thinking: ‘This worthy is surely one who really knows and sees.’ For what reason? Because they have not seen the Four Noble Truths.

“But, monks, those ascetics or brahmins who understand the Four Noble Truths as they really are—they do not look up at the face of another ascetic or brahmin, thinking: ‘This worthy is surely one who really knows and sees.’

“Suppose, monks, there was an Indra’s pillar with a deep base, securely planted, immobile, unshaking. Even if a forceful blast of wind comes—whether from the east, the west, the north, or the south—that pillar would not shake, quake, or tremble. For what reason? Because the pillar has a deep base and is securely planted. So it is with those ascetics or brahmins who ... do not look

up at the face of another ascetic or brahmin, thinking: ‘This worthy is surely one who really knows and sees.’ For what reason? Because, monks, they have clearly seen the Four Noble Truths.

“Therefore, monks, an exertion should be made to understand suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the way to its cessation.”

Samyutta Nikaya 13:1 The Fingernail

The Blessed One took up a little bit of soil in his fingernail and addressed the monks thus:

“Monks, which is more: the little bit of soil that I took up in my fingernail or this great earth?”

“Venerable sir, the great earth is more. The little bit of soil that the Blessed One took up in his fingernail is trifling. It does not amount to a hundredth part, or a thousandth part, or a hundred thousandth part of the great earth.”

“So too, monks, for a noble disciple, a person accomplished in view who has made the breakthrough, the suffering that has been destroyed and eliminated is more, while that which remains is trifling. The latter does not amount to a hundredth part, or a thousandth part, or a hundred thousandth part of the former mass of suffering that has been destroyed and eliminated, as there is a maximum of seven more lives. Of such great benefit, monks, is the breakthrough to the Dhamma, of such great benefit is it to obtain the vision of the Dhamma.”

Samyutta Nikaya 13:11 Sineru the King of Mountains

“O monks, suppose that a man would place on Sineru, the king of mountains, seven grains of gravel the size of mung beans. What do you think, which is more: the seven grains of gravel the size of mung beans that have been placed there or Sineru, the king of mountains?”

“Venerable sir, Sineru, the king of mountains, is more. The seven grains of gravel the size of mung beans are trifling. They do not amount to a hundredth part, or a thousandth part, or a hundred thousandth part of Sineru, the king of mountains.”

“So too, monks, the achievements of ascetics, brahmins, and wanderers of other sects do not amount to a hundredth part, or a thousandth part, or a hundred thousandth part of the achievement of a noble disciple, a person accomplished in view who has made the breakthrough. So great in achievement is a person accomplished in view, so great in direct knowledge.”