

## Similarities & Differences Between Abhidhamma & Sutta Pitaka

When the Abhidhamma is said to surpass the teaching of the Sutta, this is not intended to suggest that the Suttanta teaching is defective in any degree or that the Abhidhamma proclaim some new revelation doctrine unknown to the Sutta nor it intended only for a small circle of disciples or followers. Both the Sutta and the Abhidhamma are grounded upon the Buddha's unique doctrine of the 4 Noble Truth and all the principles essential to the attainment of enlightenment are already expounded in the Sutta Pitaka.

When a distinction is drawn between the 2 methods, this should be understood to be based on what is most characteristic of each Pitaka and should not be interpreted as an absolute. To some degree the two methods overlap and interpenetrate. Thus in the Sutta Pitaka we find discourses that employ the strictly philosophical terminology of aggregates, sense bases, elements, etc. and thus come within the bounds of the Abhidhamma method. Again, within the Abhidhamma Pitaka we find sections, even a whole book (the Puggalappannatti) that depart from the rigorous manner of expression and employ conventional terminology, thus coming within the range of the Suttanta method.

Abhidhamma treats of the same subject as has been treated in the Sutta Pitaka, but there is a difference between the two. The difference does not so much concern the subject, but rather the arrangement and treatment.

Unlike the Sutta, Abhidhamma are not record of discourses and discussion occurring in real-life settings; they are, rather full-blown treatises in which the principles of the doctrine have been methodically organized, minutely defined, giving great attention to details, arrange in column and classified.

The difference between the two in no way concerns fundamentals but is, rather partly a matter of scope and partly a matter of method. In Sutta doctrinal categories as the 5 aggregates, the 12 sense bases, the 18 elements and so forth, are classified only partly, while in the Abhidhamma Pitaka they are classified fully according to different schemes classification, some common to the Sutta, others unique to the Abhidhamma.

The other major area of different concern method. The discourses contained in the Sutta Pitaka were expounded by the Buddha under diverse circumstances to listeners with very difference capacities for comprehension. They are primarily, in intent to set forth in the way that will be most effective in guiding the listener in the practice of the teaching and in arriving at a penetration of its truth. To achieve this end the Buddha freely employs skillful mean to make the doctrine intelligible to his listeners. He uses simile and metaphor; he exhorts, advises and inspires; he was able to direct the mind of his audience to certain direction and adjusts the presentation of the teaching so that it will awaken a positive response. For this reason the Suttanta method of teaching is described as pariyaya-dhammadesana, the figurative or embellished discourse on the Dhamma.

In contrast to the Sutta, the Abhidhamma Pitaka is intended to make known as complete and directly as possible the totalistic system that underlies the Suttanta exposition and upon which the individual discourses draw. The Abhidhamma take no account of the personal inclinations and cognitive capacities of the listeners; it make no concessions to particular pragmatic requirements. It reveals the architectonics of actuality in an abstract, formalistics manner utterly devoid of literary embellishments and pedagogical expedients. Thus the Abhidhamma method is described as the nipariyaya-dhammadhesana, the literal or unembellished discourse on the Dhamma.

This difference in technique between the 2 methods also influences their respective terminologies. In the Sutta the Buddha regularly makes use of conventional language (Voharavacana) and accepts Conventional Truth (Sammuti Sacca), truth expressed in terms of entities that do not possess ontological ultimacy but can still be legitimately referred to them. Thus in the Sutta the Buddha speaks of 'I' and 'You', of 'Man' and 'Woman', of living beings, persons and even 'Self' as though they were concrete realities. The Abhidhamma methods of exposition, however, rigorously restricts itself to terms that are valid from the standpoint of Ultimate Truth (Paramattha Sacca) dhamma, their characteristics, their function and their relations. Thus in the Abhidhamma all such conceptual entities provisionally accepted in the Sutta for purpose of meaningful communication are resolved into their ontological Ultimates into bare mental and material phenomena that are impermanent, conditioned, and dependently arisen, empty of any abiding self or substance.