

CITTA VAGGA (Mind) THE WISE PERSON STRAIGHTENS THE MIND

3 (1) The Story of Venerable Mēghiya (Verses 33 & 34)

While residing on the Cālikā Mountain, the Buddha spoke these verses, with reference to Venerable Mēghiya.

Once, by reason of attachment to the three evil thoughts, lust, hatred, delusion, Venerable Mēghiya was unable to practice Exertion in this mango-grove and returned to the Buddha. The Buddha said to him, "Mēghiya, you committed a grievous fault. I asked you to remain, saying to you, 'I am now alone, Mēghiya. Just wait until some other monk appears.' But despite my request, you went your way. A monk should never leave me alone and go his way when I ask him to remain. A monk should never be controlled thus by his thoughts. As for thoughts, they are flighty, and a man ought always to keep them under his own control."

At the conclusion of the stanzas Mēghiya was established in the fruit of conversion and many other monks in the fruits of the second and third paths.

Explanatory Translation (Verse 33)

*phandanam capalam durakkham dunnivārayam
cittam mēdhāvī ujum karōti. usukārō tējanam iva*

phandanam: pulsating, throbbing; *capalam*: fickle, unsteady; *durakkham*: difficult to guard; *dunnivārayam*: hard to restrain; *cittam*: the mind; *mēdhāvī*: the wise one; *ujum karōti*: straightens; *usukārō iva*: like a fletcher; *tējanam*: an arrow-shaft

In the Dhammapada there are several references to the craftsmanship of the fletcher. The Buddha seems to have observed the process through which a fletcher transforms an ordinary stick into an efficient arrow-shaft. The disciplining of the mind is seen as being a parallel process. In this stanza the Buddha says that the wise one straightens and steadies the vacillating mind that is difficult to guard, like a fletcher straightening an arrow-shaft.

Explanatory Translation (Verse 34)

*ōkamōkata ubbhatō thalē khittō vārijō iva idam
cittam pariphandati mārādheyam pahātavē*

ōkamōkata: from its watery abode; *ubbhatō*: taken out; *thalē*: on dry land; *khittō*: thrown; *vārijō iva*: like a fish; *idam cittam*: this mind; *pariphandati*:

trembles; *mārādheyam*: death's realm; *pahātavē*: to abandon; *pariphandati*: flutters and trembles

When making an effort to abandon the realm of Māra (evil), the mind begins to quiver like a fish taken out of the water and thrown on land.

Commentary

cittam: This term is commonly translated as mind or consciousness and seen as the essence of the so-called being which plays the most important part in the complex machinery of man. It is more appropriately translated as a 'mental state' or, even better, an 'emotional state'. It is this *citta* that is either defiled or purified, and is the bitterest enemy and the greatest friend of oneself. This *citta* seems to be the equivalent of 'soul' in Western thought. In Buddhism, however, the 'soul' as a permanent entity is not recognized. *Citta* which takes its place refers to the emotional state of a person which is not an entity but a fluctuating activity like a flame. Sometimes emotions are excited and sometimes the *citta* is calm (emotions are absent). We might even translate it as the 'temperament' or 'temper'. Writers on Buddhism mistakenly call it 'mind' or 'consciousness'. But what is meant is the 'affective' rather than the cognitive aspects of the mental process. When a person is fast asleep and is in a dreamless state, he experiences a kind of mental state which is more or less passive than active. It is similar to the mental state one experiences at the moment of conception and at the moment of death. The Buddhist philosophical term for this type of mental state is *Bhavanga citta* which means the mental state natural to one's condition of existence. Arising and perishing every moment, it flows on like a stream not remaining the same for two consecutive moments. We do experience this type of mental state not only in a dreamless state but also in our waking state. In the course of our life we experience *Bhavanga* mental states more than any other type of mental state. Hence *Bhavanga* becomes the natural state of mind.

Some scholars identify *Bhavanga* with sub-consciousness. According to the Dictionary of Philosophy sub-consciousness is 'a compartment of the mind alleged by certain psychologists and philosophers to exist below the threshold of consciousness.' In the opinion of some Western psychologists, sub-consciousness and consciousness co-exist.

But *Bhavanga* is not a sub-plane. It does not correspond to F. W. Myer's subliminal consciousness either.

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