

Recollection the Buddha (Buddhānussati, buddhānusmṛti)

Vis. = Buddhaghosa. *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*. tr. By Nyanamoli. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010. PDF, <<http://www.bps.lk>>

1. The Dhajagga Sutta in SN

In the Dhajagga Sutta (SN11:3), the Buddha commends to the monks recollection of the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha—as an antidote to fear.

SN11:3 The Crest of the Standard

At Sāvattḥī. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Bhikkhus!”¹ [610](#)
“Venerable sir!” those bhikkhus replied. The Blessed One said this:

“Bhikkhus, once in the past the devas and the asuras were arrayed for battle. Then Sakka, lord of the devas, addressed the Tāvatiṃsa devas thus: ‘Dear sirs, when the devas are engaged in battle, [219] if fear or trepidation or terror should arise, on that occasion you should look up at the crest of my standard. For when you look up at the crest of my standard, whatever fear or trepidation or terror you may have will be abandoned.’²

...

“Bhikkhus, for those who look up at the crest of the standard of Sakka, lord of the devas; or of Pajāpati, the deva-king; or of Varuṇa, the deva-king; or of Īsāna, the deva-king, whatever fear or trepidation or terror they may have may or may not be abandoned. For what reason? Because Sakka, lord of the devas, is not devoid of lust, not devoid of hatred, not devoid of delusion; he can be timid, petrified, frightened, quick to flee.

“But, bhikkhus, I say this: If you have gone to a forest or to the foot of a tree or to an empty hut, and fear or trepidation or terror should arise in you, on that occasion you should recollect me thus: ‘The Blessed One is an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.’ For when you recollect me, bhikkhus, whatever fear or trepidation or terror you may have will be abandoned. [220]

1 [610](#) This sutta is a popular *paritta* or protective discourse, included in the *Maha Pirit Pota*. The Northern Buddhist tradition has preserved versions in Tibetan and Chinese, translated from the Skt, and Skt fragments also have been found. The various versions are discussed in detail by Skilling, *Mahā Sūtras* II, pp. 441-67.

2 Spk does not gloss the compound dhajagga, but it occurs at AN III 89,17 foll. and is explained at Mp III 267,18 as “the crests of standards raised up from the backs of elephants, horses, etc., or from chariots.” Skilling discusses the Skt words dhvaja and dhvajāgra at length and concludes that “in its early form a dhvaja was a pole surmounted by an emblem, carried as a military or royal symbol” (*Mahā Sūtras* II, p. 457). The emblem is the dhvajāgra, the “crest of the standard,” though it seems that over time the two terms came to be used almost interchangeably. Since the standard often also bore a flag, the word dhvaja eventually was transferred to the flag; this understanding of the term seems to be implicit in Spk’s remark (just below). Dhaja occurs at v. 226a.

“If you cannot recollect me, then you should recollect the Dhamma thus: ‘The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One, directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise.’ For when you recollect the Dhamma, bhikkhus, whatever fear or trepidation or terror you may have will be abandoned.

“If you cannot recollect the Dhamma, then you should recollect the Saṅgha thus: ‘The Saṅgha of the Blessed One’s disciples is practising the good way, <474> practising the straight way, practising the true way, practising the proper way; that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals—this Saṅgha of the Blessed One’s disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world.’ For when you recollect the Saṅgha, bhikkhus, whatever fear or trepidation or terror you may have will be abandoned.

“For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One is devoid of lust, devoid of hatred, devoid of delusion; he is brave, courageous, bold, ready to stand his place.”

This is what the Blessed One said. Having said this, the Fortunate One, the Teacher, further said this:

868 “In a forest, at the foot of a tree,
Or in an empty hut, O bhikkhus,
You should recollect the Buddha:
No fear will then arise in you.

869 “But if you cannot recall the Buddha,
Best in the world, the bull of men,
Then you should recall the Dhamma,
Emancipating, well expounded.

870 “But if you cannot recall the Dhamma,
Emancipating, well expounded,
Then you should recall the Saṅgha,
The unsurpassed field of merit. <475>

871 “For those who thus recall the Buddha,
The Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, bhikkhus,
No fear or trepidation will arise,
Nor any grisly terror.”

2. Practice buddhānussati in MN

MN28. Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta : The Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant’s Footprint (This sutta is teaching the mindfulness of elements. If analyzing the elements does not help the meditator entering equanimity, one should recollects the Buddha to arouse equanimity, the wholesome state. As example given, someone hits you, hurts physically, you should think that the contact, feelings etc five aggregates are impermanent, thus arise equanimity. If not, one needs to recollect the Buddha.)

...

10. “When that bhikkhu thus **recollects the Buddha**, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he arouses a sense of urgency thus: ‘It is a loss for me, it is no gain for me, it is bad for me, it is no good for me, that when **I thus recollect the Buddha**, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in me.’³³⁷ Just as when a daughter-in-law sees her father-in-law, she arouses a sense of urgency [to please him], so too, when that bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he arouses a sense of urgency. But **if, when he recollects the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome becomes established in him**, [187] then he is satisfied with it. At that point, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

...

The Six devotional Recollections³ (AN6:10, AN6:25)

In AN, the six devotional recollections (1:296, 3:70, 6:9–10, 6:25–26, 11:11–13).

AN6:10 Mahānāma

(AN6:25, A shorter version on the six recollections)

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in the Banyan Tree Park. Then Mahānāma the Sakyan approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, how does a noble disciple who has arrived at the fruit and understood the teaching often dwell?”¹²⁵⁶

“Mahānāma, a noble disciple [285] who has arrived at the fruit and understood the teaching often dwells in this way:¹²⁵⁷

(1) “Here, Mahānāma, a noble disciple **recollects the Tathāgata** thus: ‘The Blessed One is an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.’ When a noble disciple recollects the Tathāgata, on that occasion **his mind is not obsessed by lust, hatred, or delusion**; on that occasion **his mind is simply straight, based on the Tathāgata**. A noble disciple whose mind is straight gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. When **he is joyful, rapture arises**. For one with a rapturous mind, the body becomes tranquil. One tranquil in

³ <Buddhist Dictionary by Nyanaponika> anussati

'recollection', meditation, contemplation. The six recollections often described in the Suttas (e.g. A. VI, 10, 25; D. 33) are:

(1) recollection of the Buddha, (2) his Doctrine, (3) his Community of noble disciples, (4) of morality, (5) liberality, (6) heavenly beings (buddhānussati, dhammānussati, sanghānussati, sīlānussati, cāgānussati, devatānussati). (A. III,70; VI,10; XI,12).

In A. I, 21 (PTS: I, xvi) and A. I, 27 (PTS: xx, 2) another 4 recollections are added: mindfulness on death (marana-sati, q.v.), on the body (kāyagatā-sati, q.v.), on breathing (ānāpāna-sati, q.v.), and the recollection of peace (upāsānussati, q.v.). The first six recollections are fully explained in Vis.M. VII, the latter four in Vis.M. VIII.

body feels pleasure. For one feeling pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated. This is called a noble disciple who dwells in balance amid an unbalanced population,¹²⁵⁸ who dwells unafflicted amid an afflicted population. **As one who has entered the stream of the Dhamma,¹²⁵⁹ he develops recollection of the Buddha.**

Endnotes

¹²⁵⁷ The six recollections to follow are commented on in detail in *Vism* chap. 7.

Two Chinese parallels support this supposition. SĀ 156 at T II 432c, T 1537.8 (阿毘達磨法蘊足論) at T XXVI 492c.

¹²⁵⁹ *Dhammasotaṃ samāpanno*. Mp: “He has entered the stream of the Dhamma consisting in insight.” Since the Pāli expression can easily be contracted to *sotāpanna*, I do not see why Mp interprets *dhammasota* as insight (*vipassanā*) rather than the noble path (*ariyamagga*). In SN 55:5, at V 347,24–25, *sota* is used as a metaphor for the noble eightfold path.

Ten Recollections

In AN 1:296–305, Another 4 recollections are added:

(AN1:302) Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpāna-sati*)....

(AN1:303) Mindfulness of death (*marana-sati*)....

(AN1:304) Mindfulness directed to the body (*kāyagatā-sati*)....

(AN1:305) Recollection of peace (*upasamānussati*).

This is that one thing that, when developed and cultivated, leads exclusively to disenchantment ... to nibbāna.”

Buddhānussati in AN 1:296

“Bhikkhus, there is one thing that, when developed and cultivated, leads exclusively to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to nibbāna. What is that one thing? **Recollection of the Buddha.¹⁶¹ This is that one thing that, when developed and cultivated, leads exclusively to disenchantment ... to nibbāna.**”

Note by Bhikkhu Bodhi: Recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*) is the first of the six recollections described more fully at 6:10 and elaborated at *Vism* 197–213, Ppn 7.1–67.

Here is Mp (abridged from the *Manorathapūraṇī*): **“Recollection of the Buddha serves two purposes: giving joy to the mind and promoting insight (*cittasampahaṃsanatthañ c’eva vipassanatthañca*).** How? When a bhikkhu develops a meditation subject like unattractiveness [of the body], his mind may be disturbed, dissatisfied, and joyless.

It does not remain on track but roams around like a wild bull. On that occasion, he should put aside his basic meditation subject and recollect the excellent qualities of the Tathāgata. As he recollects the Buddha, his mind becomes placid and free from hindrances. He can then return to his basic meditation object, develop insight, and reach the plane of the noble ones. Thus **recollection of the Buddha gives joy to the mind. But one can also use this meditation subject**

directly for the purpose of developing insight. After recollecting the Buddha, one dissects the act of recollection into the five aggregates and defines them thus: 'These five aggregates are, in brief, the truth of suffering. The craving that produced them is the truth of the origin. The cessation of craving is the truth of cessation; and the practice that understands cessation is the truth of the path.' Thus one has defined the four truths in the preliminary portion [the stage of insight] and one step by step reaches the stage of the noble ones."

Visuddhimagga

Mindfulness (*sati*) itself is recollection (*anussati*) because it arises again and again; or alternatively, the mindfulness (*sati*) that is proper (*anurūpa*) for a clansman gone forth out of faith, since it occurs only in those instances where it should occur, is "recollection" (*anussati*). (Path of Purification, 186)

The recollection arisen inspired by the Enlightened One is the recollection of the Buddha. This is a term for mindfulness with the Enlightened One's special qualities as its object.

One recollects the special qualities of the Enlightened One, the Blessed One, as follows:

That Blessed One is such since he is accomplished, fully enlightened, endowed with [clear] vision and [virtuous] conduct, sublime, the knower of worlds, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed (M I 37; A III 285).

3. Here is the way he recollects: "That Blessed One is such since he is accomplished, he is such since he is fully enlightened, ... he is such since he is blessed"—he is so for these several reasons, is what is meant. (p. 188)

It explains further the 10 recollections: 2 Dhamma, 3 the Saṅgha, 4 Sila 5 generosity 6 deities (mindfulness with the special qualities of one's own faith, etc., as its object with deities standing as witnesses).

7 The recollection arisen inspired by death is the recollection of death. This is a term for mindfulness with the termination of the life faculty as its object.

8. Mindfulness occupied with the body (*kāya-gatā sati*—lit. "body-gone mindfulness")

9. Mindfulness of breathing

10. The recollection arisen inspired by peace is the recollection of peace. This is a term that has as its object the stilling of all suffering.