

**Salient Articles on  
BUDDHA DESANA  
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## **THE SUBLIMITY OF ABHIDHAMMA**

On this auspicious Fullmoon Day of *Thadinkyut*, which is also known as *AbhidhammaDay*, Buddhists celebrate the festival of lights, to mark the end of Buddhist Lent and also the completion of the preaching of *Abhidhamma*. In the seventh year after the attainment of Buddhahood, the Buddha ascended to the celestial abode. "*Tavatimsa*" and preached the *Abhidhamma* to *Santussita Deva*, who was His mother in a former existence, together with many other celestial beings (*Devas* and *Brahmas*) as a mark of noble gratitude to him (male *Deva*).

During the Lenten period, the Buddha came down daily to earth and spent the day at a retreat near the great lake called "*Anodatta*" and preached *Abhidhamma* to the Ven. *Sariputta*, while His replica left behind by the Buddha's miraculous power was also preaching the same simultaneously in *Tavatimsa* for three rainy months. When the preaching was over at the end of the Lent, the Fullmoon Day, the Buddha returned from *Tavatimsa* to the human world and along the route of His return, many lower and higher celestial disciples respectfully extended a warm welcome and paid homage to the Buddha, adoring and illuminating lights of various colours.

The Ven. *Sariputta*, who was the chief disciple of extraordinary wisdom, repatched to his five hundred disciples, *Bhikkhus*, in various methods in the Sandal wood forest. He was the only noble disciple who was capable of remembering what the Buddha taught in brief. It is indeed impossible in the human world to expound the *Abhidhamma* for three whole months at a stretch.

The Buddha expounded *Abhidhamma* in great detail in *Tavatimsa* while He was preaching it in brief to the Ven. *Sariputta* who again repatched it neither in brief nor in detail to his disciples.

The *Abhidhamma pitaka*, the basket of the Buddha's Higher Teaching, is the most important and extremely essential as it comprises of the profound philosophy of the Teaching, in contrast to the simpler discourses in the *Suttanta Pitaka*. The *Abhidhamma*, however contains the quintessence of His profound Doctrine. According to some scholars, *Abhidhamma* is not an original Teaching of the Buddha, but is a later elaboration of learned *Bhikkhus*. However, many various aspects of the Text attribute the essential themes of the *Abhidhamma* such as, "*Kusala dhamma*" the Wholesome States and '*Akusala dhamma*" the Unwholesome States and "*Abyakata dhamma*" the Indeterminate States or neither Wholesome or Unwholesome States were definitely expounded by the Buddha.

By observing so many systematic and authentic facts in the *Abhidhamma*, we have to admit that *Abhidhamma* must be the product of intellectual genius comparable only to the Buddha. This is quite evident from the intricate, subtle and profound "*Patthana pakarana*" which describes the various causal relations in the minutest detail.

The prefix '*Abhi*' is used in the sense of higher, greater or excellent, meaning "*Atireka*" in Pali or distinguished, exceeding or sublime "*Visittha*" and "*Dhamma*" means Doctrine or Teaching. *Abhidhamma* therefore means the Higher Doctrine or the Sublime Teaching, because it enables one to achieve one's deliverance "*Vimutti*", and also because it exceeds the Teachings in the *Suttanta Pitaka* and *Vinaya Pitaka*, where the Buddha made use of ordinary or conventional terms, such as man, animal, being, tree, etc., whereas in the *Abhidhamma* on the contrary, every thing is minutely analysed and only abstract terms, such as, consciousness, matter, solidity, psychic factor, etc. are precisely

explained. In brief, it is the so-called *Abhidhamma*, the preponderance of the Teaching, because it is conducive to ones deliverance through insight wisdom by realising the thing as it truly is and by virtue of the excellent analytical method of treatment.

The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* consists of seven treatises, namely, 1. *Dhammasangani* - Classification of Dhamma. 2 *Vibanga* - The Book of Analysis. 3. *Dhatukatha* - Discourse on Elements. 4. *Puggala Pannatti* - The Book on Individuals. 5. *Kathavatthu* - Points of Controversy. 6. *Yamaka* - The Book of Pairs. 7. *Patthana* - The Book of Causal Relations. The main things in these subtle and profound books consist of consciousness, mental concomitants, matter and *Nibbana*: and the psycho-physical phenomena, the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eight fold Path, the Law of Dependent Origination, the Principle of Enlightenment, the Transistoriness of all phenomena, the voidance of Self, Ego or Soul or personality, various attainments of individuals, the Insight Knowledge on the theory and practice of meditation, are well founded for the realization of the Path (*Magga*), the Fruition (*Phala*) and *Nibbana*.

By comprehensively studying and understanding the subject of the sublimity of *Abhidhamma*. one can analytically concentrate or contemplate or meditate on oneself as well as on others and thus one comes to realize that the so-called I or he, or she, or man, or woman, or tree, etc. as nothing, but merely a mass or aggregate of mental and material phenomena, just arising and passing away at every consecutive moment. Consequently, one is inclined only towards liberation from the manifold sorrows in "*Samsara*" (round of rebirths).

The *Abhidhamma* expounds that every one of us is composed of mind and body and the mind depends on the body, so also the body depends on the mind. These two phenomena are interdependent and interrelated, yet it is obvious that they are in nature quite different from each other. Mind, in the ultimate reality, being a process of consciousness, is ever arising and passing away; likewise, the physical body too, is momentarily decaying and collapsing. Until and unless we realize each and every one as a composition of mind and matter in a state of constant flux through the knowledge of *Abhidhamma*, we are misdirected with the wrong self-illusivive view '*Attaditthi*', and as a consequence attached to everything and everyone, such as, he, she, my son, my daughter, my husband, my wife, my property and so on. Thus we are almost always confronted with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair, etc.

In brief, from the *Abhidhamma* point of view, in the ultimate sense, the most essential factor for everyone is to develop spiritually with mental peace and happiness in the supreme wisdom of the Path, Fruition and *Nibbana*.

Such being the case, while we are materially offering lights to the Supremely Enlightened One, Buddha, as during the *Thadinkyut* Festival on one hand, we must also carry out the bounded duties for our own nation and *Sasana* to preserve the good tradition on the other in conformity with Buddhist culture.

Culture, which reflects the morality and ethics of the Buddhist Teaching, is the very source of lifeblood for the stability of a nation and the *Buddha Sasana*. The development of culture means to raise the living standard of both the material and spiritual life of the human society. If our culture degenerates, the *Sasana* will decline and so will the nation. Therefore our actual responsibility is to preserve our own *Buddhist* Myanmar Culture and strive to develop, strengthen and heighten the spirit of our traditional *Buddhist* custom.

So in order to celebrate the Festival of lights with religious and cultural essence, we should certainly try to refrain from bad behaviour and speech that are contrary to our noble tradition and heritage and must also strive spiritually for the attainment of a higher standard of character or morality (*Sila*), of concentration (*Samadhi*) and of supreme wisdom (*Panna*), so that we can escape from the miserable whirlpool of *Samsara* and reach *Nibbana*, the Ultimate Bliss and Final Goal of *Buddhism*.