

The danger of the disappearance of the true Dhamma

Cause of Disappearance of the true Dhamma

– extract from Kassapaśaṃyutta, Saddhammapatirūpakasutta (SN 16.13):

“Na kho, Kassapa, pathavīdhātu saddhammaṃ antaradhāpeti, na āpodhātu saddhammaṃ antaradhāpeti, na tejodhātu saddhammaṃ antaradhāpeti, na vāyodhātu saddhammaṃ antaradhāpeti, atha kho idheva te uppajjanti moghapurisā ye imaṃ saddhammaṃ antaradhāpentī.”

“It is not the elements of earth, water, fire, or air that cause the true Dhamma to disappear, Kassapa. Rather, it is the foolish people who arise right here that make the true Dhamma disappear.”

Five things leading to the decline and disappearance of the true Dhamma

– Aṅguttaranikāya – Pañcakanipāta - Catutthapaṇṇāsaka – Saddhammavagga - Paṭhamasaddhamma-sammosasutta (AN 5.154, translation from sutta central)

“Mendicants, these five things lead to the decline and disappearance of the true teaching. What five? It’s

- (1) when mendicants don’t carefully listen to the teachings,
- (2) memorize them,
- (3) and remember them.
- (4) They don’t carefully examine the meaning of teachings that they remember.
- (5) And they don’t carefully practice in line with the meaning and the teaching they’ve understood.

These five things lead to the decline and disappearance of the true teaching.”

– Aṅguttaranikāya – Pañcakanipāta – Catutthapaṇṇāsaka – Saddhammavagga – Dutiyasaddhamma-sammosasutta (AN 5.155)

“Mendicants, these five things lead to the decline and disappearance of the true teaching. What five?

- It’s when the mendicants don’t memorize the teaching—statements, mixed prose & verse, discussions, verses, inspired exclamations, legends, stories of past lives, amazing stories, and elaborations. This is the first thing that leads to the decline and disappearance of the true teaching.
- Furthermore, the mendicants don’t explain the teaching in detail to others as they learned and memorized it. This is the second thing ...
- Furthermore, the mendicants don’t make others recite the teaching in detail as they learned and memorized it. This is the third thing ...
- Furthermore, the mendicants don’t recite the teaching in detail as they learned and memorized it. This is the fourth thing ...
- Furthermore, the mendicants don’t think about and consider the teaching in their hearts, examining it with their minds as they learned and memorized it. This is the fifth thing that leads to the decline and disappearance of the true teaching.

These five things lead to the decline and disappearance of the true teaching.

For further discussions and various citations of suttas and commentaries on the topic (like respect towards rules, the practice of concentration and the 4 satipaṭṭhānas, or rather negligence, laziness, ... – AN 1.114 ff) kindly see <https://classicaltheravada.org/t/list-of-unresolved-issues-in-commentaries/1508/59?u=atulañāna>.

Gradual disappearance of the Dhamma

– commentarial explanation from the Aṅguttara Nikāya, Disappearance of the Teaching (*pariyatti antaradhāna*).

“Pariyatti” refers to the Tipiṭaka—the word of the Buddha together with the Commentaries in Pāli. As long as it (*pariyatti*) remains, the teaching is said to be complete. As time continues, kings and princes become unrighteous. When those kings are unrighteous, their ministers and officials also become unrighteous. Then the people living in kingdoms and provinces (also become unrighteous). Because of their unrighteousness, the god (of rain) does not rain properly. Then the crops do not flourish. When the crops fail, the lay donors are unable to provide requisites to the Saṅgha. The monks, struggling with requisites, are unable to support their student monks.

As time passes, the learning declines; people are unable to retain the meaning, and recite only the words (without understanding). Then, as time continues, people are unable even to retain the full Pāli text; the Abhidhamma Piṭaka is the first to decline. As it declines, the decline begins from the end (i.e., from the latter parts). First, the great treatise Paṭṭhāna declines. When that (Paṭṭhāna) has declined, Yamaka, Kathāvatthu, Puggalapaññatti, Dhātukathā, Vibhaṅga, and Dhammasaṅgaṇī decline in that order.

Thus, when the Abhidhamma Piṭaka has declined, the Suttanta Piṭaka begins to decline from the end. First, the Aṅguttara Nikāya declines. In it, first the Section of Elevens, then the Tens, and so on, until the Ones section declines. When the Aṅguttara has declined, the Saṃyutta Nikāya declines, beginning from the end. First, the Mahāvagga declines, then the Salāyatanavagga, the Khandhavagga, the Nidānavagga, and the Sagāthāvagga. When the Saṃyutta Nikāya declines, the Majjhima Nikāya begins to decline from the end. First, the Uparipaṇṇāsaka declines, then the Majjhimpaṇṇāsaka, and then the Mūlappaṇṇāsaka. When the Majjhima Nikāya has declined, the Dīgha Nikāya begins to decline from the end. First, the Pāṭikavagga declines, then the Mahāvagga, then the Sīlakkhandhavagga. Thus, when the Dīgha Nikāya has declined, the Suttanta Piṭaka is said to be lost.

They retain only the Jātaka together with the Vinaya Piṭaka. Only the lajjī monks (those with a sense of shame) retain the Vinaya Piṭaka. But those who seek gain think: “Even when the Suttanta is taught, no one pays attention,” so they retain only the Jātaka. As time passes, they are unable even to retain the Jātaka. Then among them, the Vessantara Jātaka is the first to decline. Then in reverse order, the Puṇṇaka, Mahānārada, and finally the Apaṇṇaka Jātaka decline. As time passes, the Vinaya Piṭaka too begins to decline from the end. First, the Parivāra declines; then the Khandhaka, the Bhikkhunīvibhaṅga, and the Mahāvibhaṅga. Even then, the Teaching (*pariyatti*) is not yet completely disappeared. As long as even the four-line verses continue among humans, the teaching has not fully disappeared. When a faithful and devoted king places a treasure chest containing a thousand coins on the back of a royal elephant and proclaims: “Let anyone who knows a four-line verse spoken by the Buddha take this thousand!”—and sends the royal drumbeat through the city—Thinking: “Perhaps some heard it the first time, others may hear it later,” he has the drum beaten a second and third time—but still finds no one who knows a verse. Then the royal servants return the treasure chest to the palace. At that moment, the Teaching is said to have completely disappeared. This is what is called the disappearance of the Teaching (*pariyatti antaradhāna*).

Let us strive to be among those who preserve the Dhamma through our practice, understanding, and effort!

Composed by Bhikkhu Atulañña