

SIGNIFICANCE OF PARITTA (PIRIT)

By Ven. Narada, Sri Lanka

Paritta, in Pali, **Pirit** in Sinhala, literally means "Full Protection".

Some important discourses, delivered by the Buddha on several occasions in the sacred Pali language, comprise **Parittas** or **Pirit**. They should not be misunderstood as mysterious spells or Mantras, but on the contrary, they are ethical and philosophical original teachings of the Buddha, dealing with various aspect of the sublime Dhamma.

They are recited by the Sangha or devotees, individually or collectively, to invoke the blessings of the **Tiratana** (Triple Gem) on themselves and on others, both in times of adversity and prosperity. Generally they are recited to ward off evil influences, to get rid of suffering, misfortune, fear, disease, worries, mental troubles, for the sake of prosperity, health, wealth, worldly success, longevity, mental and physical happiness, confidence (**Saddha**), mindfulness (**Sati**), goodwill, peace of mind, balanced mind, mental lightness, softness, adaptability, rectitude, purity and many other attendant blessings.

As a rule Bhikkhus recite **Parittas** in the morning and in the evening in temples. In case of illness and during public ceremonies they are invited to recite **Parittas** individually or collectively. Because of the virtuous conduct and the celibacy of life, Parittas recited by the Sangha is very efficacious.

Of the **Paritta** discourses **Metta Sutta** is very illuminating and very powerful. On hearing that many Bhikkhus who had retired to a forest for meditation could not succeed in their efforts as they were troubled by some invisible beings who were haunting the trees, the Buddha expounded this discourse and advised them to extend their loving-kindness towards all living beings without exception. They did so and, before long achieved their goal.

Due to their power of **Metta** the hostile invisible beings proved amicable to them. **Metta** or loving-kindness possesses a magnetic power. It is limitless in range. Barriers it has not. Distance is no obstacle for the exercise of **Metta**.

By the power of the Buddha's **Metta** prince Rahula who was only seven years of age, seeing the Buddha for the first time, spontaneously remarked: "O ascetic, even your shadow is pleasing to me."

Rojamalla, a distinguished nobleman, who had not much faith in the Buddha, was attracted to His presence by the power of His **Metta**.

The infatuated elephant **Nalagiri**, who rushed towards the Buddha to attack Him, was conquered by Him by the power of His **Metta**, and so was fierce **Angulimala** who later became a compassionate Arahant.

With pure hearts full of boundless love and over-flowing Compassion, hands washed in scented water, all the Bhikkhus hold the sacred thread and forcefully recite in one chorus the **Parittas (Pirit)** radiating their loving-kindness towards all living beings, near or far, seen or unseen, and wishing peace and happiness to mankind, irrespective of caste, class, colour, race, creed or sex.

Peaceful vibrations are conducted through the thread, immersed in water. As such devout listeners hold the thread for protection. Small pieces of thread are also tied around the right arm to ward off evil influences. A small quantity of **Paritta (Pirit)** water is also drunk as it is charged with wholesome vibrations.

Once our Bodhisatta had to pass a forest infested with evil spirits. A Pacceka Buddha seeing him, took a handful of sand and some thread, recited **Paritta (Pirit)** and gave them to him to save him from any danger. Evil spirits did follow him but did no harm. He went to a resting place and surrounded it with the sacred thread. To the evil spirits the thread appeared like flames of fire. The Bodhisatta was thus saved from danger.

Ratana Sutta (Discourse on Jewels) is another favourite **Paritta (Pirit)** the Buddha delivered to ward off hostile influences from evil spirits and to prevent disease and misfortune. In this discourse are extolled the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha. At the end of every verse in this **Paritta** appears an act of truth as follows - **Etena saccena suvathi hotu** - By the power of this truth may there be peace.

Angulimala Paritta is a noteworthy example of an Act of Truth. Venerable Angulimala who was responsible for many killings before ordination as a Bhikkhu, while on his alms tour, saw a pregnant mother in travail. Moved by compassion,

he reported the matter to the Buddha, who taught him the **Angulimala Paritta** which runs as follows:-

"Since my birth as an Ariya never have I intentionally destroyed the life of a living being. By the power of this truth may you be whole and may your child be whole".

Memorising the **Paritta**, he went up to the suffering mother and sitting behind a screen, recited it. Instantly she delivered the child with ease.

The efficacy of this **Paritta** persists to this day. Usually in Buddhist countries, especially in Sri Lanka, this **Paritta** is recited by the Sangha for pregnant mothers.

Even babies that lie in an adverse position in the mother's womb are set aright sometimes by the power of this **Paritta**.

An Act of Truth can create marvels which are inexplicable to us.

At the end of every **Paritta** discourse too, the Sangha makes an Act of Truth thus – **Etena saccavajjena sotthi te hotu sabbada** - By the power of this truthful utterance may peace ever be with you.

Invisible thoughts possess inconceivable powers. Like electricity, mind can be both a constructive and destructive force. One invisible thought is sufficient to save or destroy the whole world. What mind makes, mind can unmake.

At one time the inhabitants of the prosperous city of Vasali were oppressed with three dangers - famine, evil spirits, and pestilence. Famine visited them first, causing several deaths amongst the poor folk. The nauseating smell, emanating from the decaying corpses, attracted many evil spirits to the place. Finally there broke out a pestilence resulting in many more deaths.

The Buddha was invited to this panic stricken city to avert a catastrophe. No sooner the Buddha reached Vasali than a torrential downpour occurred - the rain descending in such volume that all the putrefying corpses were swept away and the polluted air was completely purified. Thereupon the Buddha expounded this **Ratana Sutta** to the Venerable Ananda and instructed him to tour through the city reciting the Sutta as a mark of protection for the inhabitants. Accordingly the Venerable Ananda paraded the streets, reciting this Sutta, and, at the same time, sprinkling sacred water from the Buddha's own bowl.

On the immediate utterance of the **Paritta** evil spirits fled from the city. The pestilence also subsided. The inhabitants were fully protected.

Mangala Sutta (Discourse on Blessings) is another popular **Paritta** which is generally recited on festive occasions such as weddings, house-warming ceremonies, laying of foundation stones and so forth. It deals with 38 kinds of blessings conducive to both material and spiritual welfare. Devas are particularly pleased to hear this **Paritta**.

Together with these three **Parittas** the Sangha often recites the **Dhajagga Paritta** which the Buddha delivered to dispel fear, instill courage and repose confidence in the Triple Gem.

There are several **Parittas** which the Buddha and Arahants had recited in cases of illness.

Once when Venerable **Girimananda** was seriously ill, Venerable Ananda informed the Buddha and invited Him to see the ailing monk.

The Buddha taught the **Girimananda Paritta** to Venerable Ananda and advised him to recite it. The Venerable Ananda did so and he was instantly cured of his illness. This discourse deals with various kinds of contemplation.

When the Buddha was sick Venerable **Cunda**, at his request, recited the **Bojjhanga Paritta** and when Arahants were sick the Buddha Himself recited the **Bojjhanga Paritta** which effected in immediate recovery. The **Bojjhanga Paritta** deals with the seven Factors of Enlightenment. **Bojjhanga Parittas** are of special significance as they were recited from a high spiritual level.

The only **Paritta** that had not its origin in the Buddha but was approved by the Buddha for recitation by the Sangha is the **Atanatiya Sutta** which was composed by **Vessavana**, a king of Devas, mainly for protection from evil-minded non-humans such as demons.

A certain Bhikkhu had an occasion to heal a patient possessed of an evil-minded demon by reciting the **Atanatiya Paritta**. At times the life-span can also be lengthened by the power of **Paritta**. A boy, in the time of the Buddha, who would have died at the age of seven, lived up to 120 years by the power of **Parittas**.

For the efficacy of **Parittas** sound-value also plays a great role.

Parittas as a rule have a soothing effect on the devout hearers. They serve as a tonic to the heart and the mind.

Unless a powerful Kamma intervenes **Parittas or Pirit**, understandingly recited with a heart full of boundless love and universal compassion, will undoubtedly produce wondrous effects on the faithful and attentive hearers.

On two occasions a certain Bhikkhu was almost on the verge of death. By the power of **Paritta** and due to careful medical treatment his life was saved. Doctors declared - It was a miraculous cure.

Bhavetu sabba-mangalam — Rakkhantu sabba-devata
Sabba — Buddhanubhavana — Sada sotthi bhavanti te.

May all blessings be to you !
May all devas protect you !
By the power of all the Buddhas!
May peace and happiness ever be yours!

