

Sarnath

Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Buddha was staying at the Deer Park in Isipatana in Baranasi. There he addressed the group of five thus:

“There are two extremes which should not be followed. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, ignoble, and unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and unbeneficial. Without veering toward either of these extremes, the Tathagata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision and knowledge, and which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, and to Nibbana.

“And what, Bhikkhus, is that middle way which leads to Nibbana? It is the Noble Eightfold Path: that is, Right view, Right thought, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration.

“Here is the noble truth of suffering. Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, union with what is displeasing is suffering, separation from what is pleasing is suffering, and not to get what one wants is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering.

“Here is the noble truth of the origin of suffering. It is craving which leads to renewed existence, along with delight and lust and seeking delight here and there. It is the craving for sensual pleasures, the craving for existence, and the craving for extermination.

“Here is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering. It is the complete fading away and cessation of that craving, the

giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, and non-reliance on it.

“Here is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. It is the Noble Eightfold Path, mentioned before: Right view, Right thought, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration.

“In regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light: namely,

“This is the noble truth of suffering’;

“This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood’;

“This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood’;

“This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering’;

“This noble truth of the origin of suffering is to be abandoned’;

“This noble truth of the origin of suffering has been abandoned’;

“This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering’;

“This noble truth of the cessation of suffering is to be realized’;

“This noble truth of the cessation of suffering has been realized’;

“This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering’;

“This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed’;

“This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering has been developed.’

“As long as my knowledge and vision of these Four Noble Truths as they really are in these three phases and twelve aspects was not thoroughly purified in this way, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Maras, and Brahmas, in this generation with its

A Pilgrim's Companion

ascetics and brahmins and with its devas and humans. When my knowledge and vision of these Four Noble Truths as they really are in these three phases and twelve aspects was thoroughly purified in this way, however, then I claimed to have awakened to that unsurpassed perfect enlightenment. The knowledge and vision arose in me: 'Unshakable is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more renewed existence.'"

The group of five were elated and delighted in the Buddha's words. During this discourse, there arose in Venerable Kondañña the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma: "Whatever is subject to origination is subject to cessation."

The earth-dwelling devas raised a cry: "In the Deer Park in Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One! It cannot be stopped by any ascetic, brahmin, deva, Mara, or Brahma, nor by anyone in the world!" Having heard this, the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings raised the same cry. Having heard their cry, the Tavatimsa devas raised the same cry. Thus, it continued through the Yama devas, the Tusita devas, the Nimmanarati devas, the Paranimmitavasavatti devas, and the devas of Brahma's company.

Thus, at that very moment, the cry spread as far as the Brahma world, this ten-thousandfold world system shook, and an immeasurable glorious radiance, surpassing the majesty of the devas, appeared in the world.

Then the Buddha declared: "Kondañña has indeed understood!" Thereafter, Venerable Kondañña was known as "Añña Kondañña—Kondañña Who Has Understood."

—Samyutta Nikaya 56, 11

Rajagaha

The Road to Rajagaha

Once, a brahmin asked the Buddha, “Master Gotama, why do some of your disciples attain Nibbana and some do not?”

The Buddha replied, “Suppose a man comes to you and says, ‘Sir, I want to go to Rajagaha. Please show me the way.’ Then you tell him, ‘Now, good man, this road goes to Rajagaha. Follow it for awhile, and you will come to a village. Go a little further, and you will come to a town. Go a little further, and you will arrive at Rajagaha with its lovely parks, groves, meadows, and ponds.’ Then, having been thus advised and instructed by you, he takes a wrong road and goes to the west. Then a second man comes to you and says, ‘Sir, I want to go to Rajagaha. Please show me the way.’ You reply in the same way as before. Having been thus advised and instructed by you, he follows the road and arrives safely in Rajagaha. Now, since Rajagaha exists, the path leading to Rajagaha exists, and you are present as the guide, why, when those men have been thus advised and instructed by you, does one man take a wrong road and the other arrive safely in Rajagaha?”

“What can I do about that, Master Gotama? I am only one who shows the way.”

“So too, Nibbana exists, the path leading to Nibbana exists, and I am present as the guide. Yet, when my disciples have been thus advised and instructed by me, some of them attain Nibbana, the ultimate goal, and some do not. What can I do about that? The Tathagata is one who shows the way.”

—Majjhima Nikaya 107

Vesali

The Discourse on Jewels

At one time, Vesali was plagued by famine, disease, and non-human beings. The Buddha taught this sutta so that its recitation would free the city of these troubles.

Whatever beings are assembled here, whether terrestrial or celestial, may they be happy. Let them attentively listen to these words.

Beings, please pay attention! Radiate loving-kindness towards mankind, who day and night bring offerings to you. Protect them with earnestness.

Whatever treasure there be, either here or in the other world; whatever precious jewel there be in the heavenly worlds; there is none comparable to the Tathagata. This precious jewel is in the Buddha. By this truth may there be peace!

The sage of the Sakyas, with a tranquil mind, realized that cessation which is passionless, immortal, and excellent. There is nothing equal to that state. This precious jewel is in the Dhamma. By this truth may there be peace!

The supreme Buddha praised pure meditation which gives immediate results. There is nothing equal to that meditation; This precious jewel is in the Dhamma. By this truth may there be peace!

Eight individuals are praised by good people. They constitute the four pairs. These disciples of the Buddha are worthy of offerings. Whatever is offered to them yields abundant fruit. This precious jewel is in the Sangha. By this truth may there be peace!

Those who are freed from desires, with firm minds, are well-established in the teaching of Gotama. They have attained

A Pilgrim's Companion

that which should be attained—deathless Nibbana. This peace is freely obtained. This precious jewel is in the Sangha. By this truth may there be peace!

Just as the post of a city gate fixed in the earth is not shaken by the winds from the four directions, even so, I declare a good person to be one who thoroughly perceives the noble truths. This precious jewel is in the Sangha. By this truth may there be peace!

Those who comprehend clearly the noble truths well-taught by him who is endowed with profound wisdom, however exceedingly heedless they may be, will experience no more than seven births. This precious jewel is in the Sangha. By this truth may there be peace!

Three conditions are forsaken by one at the instant of gaining insight: self-delusion, doubt, and the indulgence in rites and rituals. That person is incapable of committing any act for which one must suffer in hell, nor will he ever suffer in any of the four states of misery. This precious jewel is in the Sangha. By this truth may there be peace!

Whatever evil deed such a person commits, by his body, speech, or thought, he or she is incapable of concealing it. For it has been said that such an act is impossible for one who has seen the path. This precious jewel is in the Sangha. By this truth may there be peace!

As a clump of trees whose tops are blossoming during the first heat of the summer months, so the sublime doctrine leading to Nibbana was taught for the highest goal. This precious jewel is in the Sangha. By this truth may there be peace!

The excellent one, the knower of the excellent, the giver and bringer of the excellent, has expounded the excellent doctrine. This precious jewel is in the Buddha. By this truth may there be peace!

With the old kamma extinct, no new kamma arising, and their minds detached from future birth, they have destroyed the seeds of

Vesali

existence. Their desires do not spring up again, and those wise ones go out even as this lamp. This precious jewel is in the Sangha. By this truth may there be peace!

Whatever beings are assembled here, whether terrestrial or celestial, let us pay respect to the Buddha. The Tathagata is honored by gods and men! May there be peace!

Whatever beings are assembled here, whether terrestrial or celestial, let us pay respect to the Dhamma. The Tathagata is honored by gods and men! May there be peace!

Whatever beings are assembled here, whether terrestrial or celestial, let us pay respect to the Sangha. The Tathagata is honored by gods and men! May there be peace!

—Sutta Nipata 2,1

The Courtesan Ambapali

During his last tour, the Buddha arrived in Kotigama, near Vesali, with a large number of bhikkhus. To prepare the bhikkhus, the Buddha cautioned them, “Be mindful. While you are in the world, overcome the grief which arises from bodily craving, from the lust of sensations, and from the errors of wrong reasoning. Whatever you do, act always in full presence of mind. Be thoughtful in eating and drinking, in walking and standing, in sleeping and waking, and while talking and being silent.”

The courtesan, Ambapali was delighted to hear of the Buddha’s arrival, and she was eager to meet him. Extremely beautiful, she was also scrupulous about religious matters, so she dressed simply without jewelry, climbed into her carriage, set out, and rode as far as she could. Then she got down and walked to

Day Four

Reading

The Bamboo Acrobat

The Buddha said, "Once, an acrobat set up his bamboo pole and said to his apprentice, 'Come, dear Medakathalika, climb the bamboo pole and stand on my shoulders.'

"'Yes, Teacher,' replied the apprentice. Then he climbed the bamboo pole and stood on the teacher's shoulders.

"The acrobat then said, 'You protect me, dear lad, and I'll protect you. Thus, protected by one another, we'll display our skills, collect our fee, and complete our act safely.'

"'No, Teacher,' the apprentice replied. 'That's not the way it should be done. You protect yourself, and I'll protect myself. Thus, each self-protected, we'll display our skills, collect our fee, and complete our act safely.'

"That is the proper method," the Buddha said. "It's just as the apprentice said to the teacher. 'I will protect myself.' Thus, should the foundations of mindfulness be practiced. 'I will protect others.' Thus, should the foundations of mindfulness be practiced. Protecting oneself, one protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself."

"How does one protect others by protecting oneself? By the cultivation of the four foundations of mindfulness.

"How does one protect oneself by protecting others? By developing patience, harmlessness, loving-kindness, and sympathy."

—Samyutta Nikaya 47,19

Day Ten

Reflection

The Chariot

One who has faith and wisdom yoked in harness,
With conscience as the pole, the mind as reins,
And mindfulness as watchful charioteer,
Rides in a chariot of morality.
Its axle is meditation; energy, its wheels;
And equipoise its balanced shaft.
Clothed in freedom from desire
Defended by non-hatred, harmlessness,
And detachment of the mind,
He wears a leather coat of patience.
Furnished thus, this chariot
Rolls on from slavery to freedom.
This noble chariot, the best of vehicles,
Is built by oneself alone.
It carries the wise from this world
On to certain victory.

—Samyutta Nikaya 45, 4

Day Twenty-one

Reading

Gratitude

The Blessed One said: “A person of no integrity is ungrateful and does not acknowledge the help given to him. This ingratitude is second nature to rude people. It is the mark of a person of no integrity.

A person of integrity is grateful and acknowledges the help given to him. This gratitude is second nature to fine people. It is the mark of a person of integrity.

There are two people who are not easy to repay—your mother and father. Even if you were to carry your mother on one shoulder and your father on the other shoulder for one hundred years and to look after them by bathing and massaging their limbs and they were to defecate and urinate on you, you would not be repaying your parents. Even if you were to establish them in abundant wealth of the seven treasures and in sovereignty over the entire world, you would not be repaying your parents. Why not? Mother and father do so much for their children! They care for them, nourish them, and introduce them to this world. However, one who rouses his unbelieving parents and establishes them in the Dhamma, rouses his unvirtuous parents and establishes them in virtue, rouses his stingy parents and establishes them in generosity, and rouses his foolish parents and establishes them in wisdom, is, to that extent, repaying one’s mother and father.

—Anguttara Nikaya 2, 31-32

Reflection

Advisory Stanzas

Viewing indolence as something frightful, as the root of all defilements and the destroyer of all good, and treating effort, its opposite, as the remover of all dangers, be energetic at all times—this is the advice of the Buddhas.

Viewing confrontation as something frightful and treating non-confrontation, its opposite, as a haven, seek peace at all times—this is the advice of the Buddhas.

Viewing negligence as something frightful and treating diligence, its opposite, as a haven, practice the Noble Eightfold Path—this is the advice of the Buddhas.

—Cariya Pitaka