

# Setting the Wheel of the Dhamma in Motion

## The Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta

A compendium of sources for introductory study presented by

**Anagarika Tevijjo**

\*

First, comes a translation, which was written by

**Bhikkhu Bodhi**

[which we may read, as a basis for discernment of the message in the passage.]

The source of this translation is the

**BuddhaSasana Home Page**  
English Section

---

**Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta**

---

**Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma**

## Translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Baranasi in the Deer Park at Isipatana. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus of the group of five thus:

"Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone-forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathagata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana.

"And what, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathagata, which gives rise to vision ... which leads to Nibbana?

It is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathagata, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which

leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana.

"Now this, bhikkhus, 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; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to re-becoming, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, craving for disbecoming.

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view ... right concentration.

"'This is the noble truth of suffering': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of the origin of suffering is to be abandoned': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This noble truth of the origin of suffering has been abandoned': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of the cessation of suffering is to be realized': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This noble truth of the cessation of suffering has been realized': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering has been developed': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"So long, bhikkhus, as my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths as they really are in their 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 Mara, and Brahma, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans. But when my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was thoroughly purified in this way, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Mara, and Brahma, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans. The knowledge and the vision arose in me: 'Unshakeable is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more re-becoming."

This is what the Blessed One said. Being pleased, the bhikkhus of the group of five delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in the Venerable Kondanna the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma: "Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation."

And when the Wheel of the Dhamma had been set in motion by the Blessed One, the earth devas raised a cry: "At Baranasi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world." Having heard the cry of the earth devas [and] the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings raised a cry: "At Baranasi ... this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped ... by anyone in the world." Having heard the cry of the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings, the Tavatimsa devas ... the Yama devas ... the Tusita devas ... the Nimmanarati devas ... the Paranimmitavasavatti devas ... the devas of Brahma's company raised a cry:

"At Baranasi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world."

Thus at that moment, at that instant, at that second, the cry spread as far as the Brahma-world, and this ten thousand-fold world-system shook, quaked, and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world surpassing the divine majesty of the devas.

Then the Blessed One uttered this inspired utterance: "Kondanna has indeed understood! Kondanna has indeed understood!" In this way the Venerable Kondanna acquired the name "Anna Kondanna-Kondanna Who Has Understood."

***Note:***

[\*] The three phases (tiparivaa) are:

- (i) the knowledge of each truth (sacca-nana), e.g., "This is the noble truth of suffering";
- (ii) the knowledge of the task to be accomplished regarding each truth (kicca-nana), e.g., "This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood"; and
- (iii) the knowledge of accomplishment regarding each truth (kata-nana), e.g., "This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood."

The twelve modes (dvadasakara) are obtained by applying the three phases to the four truths.

---

**[Thus ends the above passage.]**

Having presented this translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi, we, now, go to a quotation from the great Sri Lankan Pali scholar, Narada Thera, for some background explanation of Setting the Wheel of the Dhamma in Motion.

## **Introduction to the First Discourse:**

### **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta**

**by Narada Maha Thera**

*"The best of paths is the Eightfold Path. The best of Truths are the four Sayings. Non-attachment is the best of states. The best of bipeds is the Seeing One."* The Dhammapada

Ancient India was noted for distinguished philosophers and religious teachers who held diverse views with regard to life and its goal. *Brahmajala Sutta* of the Digha Nikaya mentions sixty-two varieties of philosophical theories that prevailed in the time of the Buddha.

One extreme view that was diametrically opposed to all current religious beliefs was the nihilistic teaching of the



materialists who were also termed *Carvakas* after the name of the founder.

According to ancient materialism which, in Pali and Samskrit, was known as *Lokayata*, man is annihilated after death, leaving behind him whatever force generated by him. In their opinion death is the end of all. This present world alone is real. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for death comes to all," appears to be the ideal of their system. "Virtue", they say, "is a delusion and enjoyment is the only reality. Religion is a foolish aberration, a mental disease. There was a distrust of everything good, high, pure and compassionate. Their theory stands for sensualism and selfishness and the gross affirmation of the loud will. There is no need to control passion and instinct, since they are the nature's legacy to men."

[On the other hand,]

Another extreme view was that emancipation was possible only by leading a life of strict asceticism. This was purely a religious doctrine firmly held by the ascetics of the highest order. The five monks that attended on the Bodhisatta, during His struggle for Enlightenment, tenaciously adhered to this belief.

In accordance with this view the Buddha, too, before His Enlightenment subjected Himself to all forms of austerity. After an extraordinary struggle for six years, He realized the utter futility of self-mortification.

Consequently, He changed His unsuccessful hard course and adopted a middle way. His favorite disciples thus lost confidence in Him and deserted Him, saying -- "The ascetic Gotama had become luxurious, had ceased from striving, and had returned to a life of comfort." Their unexpected desertion was definitely a material loss to Him as they ministered to all His needs.

Nevertheless, He was not discouraged. The iron-willed Bodhisatta must have probably felt happy for being left alone. With unabated enthusiasm and with restored energy He persistently strove until He attained Enlightenment, the object of His life.

Precisely two months after His Enlightenment on the Asalha (July) full moon day the Buddha delivered His first discourse to the five monks that [had] attended on Him.

*Dhammacakka* is the name given to this first discourse of the Buddha. It is frequently represented as meaning "The Kingdom of Truth." "The Kingdom of Righteousness" or "The Wheel of Truth."

According to the commentators Dhamma here means wisdom or knowledge, and Cakka means founding or establishment. Dhammacakka therefore means the founding or establishment of wisdom.

Dhammacakkappavattana means The Exposition of the Establishment of Wisdom. Dhamma may also be interpreted

as Truth, and cakka as wheel. Dhammacakkappavattana would therefore mean -- The Turning or The Establishment of the Wheel of Truth.

In this most important discourse the Buddha expounds the Middle Path which He Himself discovered and which forms the essence of His new teaching. He opened the discourse by exhorting the five monks who believed in strict asceticism to avoid the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification as both do not lead to perfect Peace and Enlightenment.

The former retards one's spiritual progress, the latter weakens one's intellect. He criticized both views as He realized by personal experience their futility and enunciated the most practicable, rational and beneficial path, which alone leads to perfect purity and absolute Deliverance.

This discourse was expounded by the Buddha while He was residing at the Deer Park in Isipatana near Benares.

The intellectual five monks who were closely associated with the Buddha for six years were the only human beings that were present to hear the sermon.

Books [however] also state that many invisible beings such as Devas and Brahmas took advantage of the golden opportunity of listening to the sermon.

As Buddhists believe in the existence of realms other than this world, inhabited by beings with subtle bodies

imperceptible to the physical eye, possibly many Devas and Brahmas were also present on this great occasion.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the Buddha was directly addressing the five monks and the discourse was intended mainly for them.

At the outset the Buddha cautioned them to avoid the two extremes. His actual words were:-- "There are two extremes (*anta*) which should not be resorted to by a recluse (*pabbajitena*)," Special emphasis was laid on the two terms "anta" which means end or extreme and "pabbajita" which means one who has renounced the world.

One extreme, in the Buddha's own words, was the constant attachment to sensual pleasures (*kamasukhallikanuyoga*). The Buddha described this extreme as base, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, and profitless.

This should not be misunderstood to mean that the Buddha expects all His followers to give up material pleasures and retire to a forest without enjoying this life. The Buddha was not so narrow-minded.

Whatever the deluded sensualist may feel about it, to the dispassionate thinker the enjoyment of sensual pleasures is distinctly short-lived, never completely satisfying, and results in unpleasant reactions. Speaking of worldly-happiness, the Buddha says that the acquisition of wealth

and the enjoyment of possessions are two sources of pleasure for a layman.

An understanding recluse would not however seek delight in the pursuit of these fleeting pleasures. To the surprise of the average man, he might shun them. What constitutes pleasure to the former is a source of alarm to the latter to whom renunciation alone is pleasure.

The other extreme is the constant addiction to self-mortification (*attakilamathanuyoga*).

Commenting on this extreme, which was not practised by ordinary men, the Buddha remarks that it is painful, ignoble, and profitless. Unlike the first extreme this is not described as base, worldly, and vulgar. The selection of these three terms is very striking.

As a rule it was the sincere recluse who renounced his attachment to sensual pleasures who resorts to this painful method, mainly with the object of gaining his deliverance from the ills of life.

The Buddha, who has had painful experience of this profitless course, describes it as useless. It only multiplies suffering instead of diminishing it.

The Buddhas and Arahants are described as Ariyas meaning Nobles. Anariya (ignoble) may therefore be construed as not characteristic of the Buddha and Arahants who are free from passions. Attha means the ultimate Good, which for a

Buddhist is Nibbana, the complete emancipation from suffering. Therefore, *anattasamhita* may be construed as not conducive to ultimate Good.

The Buddha at first cleared the issues and removed the false notions of His hearers. When their troubled minds became pliable and receptive the Buddha related His personal experience with regard to these two extremes.

The Buddha says that He (the Tathagata), realizing the error of both these two extremes, followed a middle path. This new path or way was discovered by Himself. The Buddha termed His new system *Majjhima Patipada* -- the Middle Way.

To persuade His disciples to give heed to His new path He spoke of its various blessings. Unlike the two diametrically opposite extremes this middle path produces spiritual insight and intellectual wisdom to see things as they truly are. When the insight is clarified and the intellect is sharpened everything is seen in its true perspective.

Furthermore, unlike the first extreme which stimulates passions, this Middle Way leads to the subjugation of passions which results in Peace. Above all it leads to the attainment of the four supramundane Paths of Sainthood, to the understanding of the four Noble Truths, and finally to the realization of the ultimate Goal, Nibbana.

Now, what is the Middle Way? The Buddha replies: It is the Noble Eightfold Path. The eight factors are then enumerated in the discourse.

The first factor is Right Understanding, the keynote of Buddhism. The Buddha started with Right Understanding in order to clear the doubts of the monks and guide them on the right way.

Right Understanding deals with the knowledge of oneself as one really is; it leads to Right Thoughts of non-attachment or renunciation (*nekkhammasamkappa*), loving-kindness (*avyapada samkappa*), and harmlessness (*avihimsa samhappa*), which are opposed to selfishness, illwill, and cruelty respectively.

Right Thoughts result in Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, which three factors perfect one's morality.

The sixth factor is Right Effort which deals with the elimination of evil states and the development of good states in oneself. This self-purification is best done by a careful introspection, for which Right Mindfulness, the seventh factor, is essential.

Effort, combined with Mindfulness, produces Right Concentration or one-pointedness of the mind, the eighth factor. A one-pointed mind resembles a polished mirror where everything is clearly reflected with no distortion.

Prefacing the discourse with the two extremes and His newly discovered Middle Way, the Buddha expounded the Four Noble Truths in detail.

*Sacca* is the Pali term for Truth which means that which is. Its Samskrit equivalent is *satya* which denotes an incontrovertible fact. The Buddha enunciates four such Truths, the foundations of His teaching, which are associated with the so-called being.

Hence, His doctrine is homocentric, opposed to theocentric religions. It is introvert and not extrovert.

Whether the Buddha arises or not these Truths exist, and it is a Buddha that reveals them to the deluded world. They do not and cannot change with time, because they are eternal truths.

The Buddha was not indebted to anyone for His realization of them, as He Himself remarked in this discourse thus: "With regard to things unheard before, there arose in me the eye, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight and the light." These words are very significant because they testify to the originality of His new Teaching.

Hence there is no justification in the statement that Buddhism is a natural outgrowth of Hinduism, although it is true that there are some fundamental doctrines common to both systems.



These Truths are in Pali termed Ariya Saccani. They are so called because they were discovered by the Greatest Ariya, that is, one who is far removed from passions.

The First Noble Truth deals with *dukkha* which, for need of a better English equivalent, is inappropriately rendered by suffering or sorrow. As a feeling *dukkha* means that which is difficult to be endured. As an abstract truth *dukkha* is used in the sense of contemptible (*du*) emptiness (*kha*). The world rests on suffering -- hence it is contemptible. It is devoid of any reality -- hence it is empty or void. *Dukkha* therefore means contemptible void.

Average men are only surface-seers. An Ariya sees things as they truly are.

To an Ariya all life is suffering and he finds no real happiness in this world which deceives mankind with illusory pleasures. Material happiness is merely the gratification of some desire.

All are subject to birth (*jati*) and consequently to decay (*jara*), disease (*vyadhi*) and finally to death (*marana*). No one is exempt from these four causes of suffering.

Wish unfulfilled is also suffering. As a rule one does not wish to be associated with things or persons one detests nor does one wish to be separated from things or persons one likes. One's cherished desires are not, however, always gratified.

At times, what one least expects or what one least desires is thrust on oneself. Such unexpected unpleasant circumstances become so intolerable and painful that some weak ignorant people are compelled to commit suicide as if such an act would solve the problem.

Real happiness is found within, and is not to be defined in terms of wealth, power, honors or conquests. If such worldly possessions are forcibly or unjustly obtained, or are misdirected or even viewed with attachment, they become a source of pain and sorrow for the possessors.

Normally, the enjoyment of sensual pleasures is the highest and only happiness of the average person. There is no doubt some momentary happiness in the anticipation, gratification, and retrospection of such fleeting material pleasures, but they are illusory and temporary.

According to the Buddha non-attachment (*viragata*) or the transcending of material pleasures is a greater bliss.

In brief, (*pancupadanakkhandha*) this composite body itself is a cause of suffering.

There are three kinds of craving.

The first (i) is the grossest form of craving, which is simple attachment to all sensual pleasures (*kamatanha*). The second (ii) is attachment to existence (*bhavatanha*). The third (iii) is attachment to non-existence (*vibhavatanha*).

According to the commentaries the last two kinds of craving are attachment to sensual pleasures connected with the belief of Eternalism (*sassataditthi*) and that which is connected with the belief of Nihilism (*ucchedaditthi*).

Bhavatanha may also be interpreted as attachment to Realms of Form and vibhavatanha, as attachment to Formless Realms since Rupaloka and Arupaloka are treated as two Fetters (*samyojanas*).

This craving is a powerful mental force latent in all, and is the chief cause of most of the ills of life. It is this craving, gross or subtle, that leads to repeated births in Samsara and that which makes one cling to all forms of life.

The grossest forms of craving are attenuated on attaining *Sakadagami*, the second stage of Sainthood, and are eradicated on attaining *Anagami*, the third stage of Sainthood. The subtle forms of craving are eradicated on attaining *Arahantship*.

Right understanding of the First Noble Truth leads to the eradication (*pahatabba*) of craving. The Second Noble Truth thus deals with the mental attitude of the ordinary man towards the external objects of sense.

The Third Noble Truth is that there may be a complete cessation of suffering possible, which is Nibbana, the ultimate goal of Buddhists. It can be achieved in this life itself by the total eradication of all forms of craving.

This Nibbana is to be comprehended (*sacchikatabba*) by the mental eye by renouncing all attachment to the external world.

This First Truth of suffering which depends on this so called being and various aspects of life, is to be carefully perceived, analysed and examined (*parinneyya*). This examination leads to a proper understanding of oneself as one really is.

The cause of this suffering is craving or attachment (*tanha*). This is the Second Noble Truth.

The Dhammapada states: "*From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear; For him who is wholly free from craving, there is no grief, much less fear.*" (verse 216).

Craving, the Buddha says, leads to repeated births (*ponobhavika*). This Pali term is very noteworthy as there are some scholars who state that the Buddha did not teach the doctrine of rebirth. This Second Truth indirectly deals with the past, present and future births.

This Third Noble Truth has to be realized by developing (*bhavetabba*) the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariyatthagikamagga*). This unique path is the only straight way to Nibbana. This is the Fourth Noble Truth.

Expounding the Four Truths in various ways, the Buddha concluded the discourse with the forcible words: "As long, O Bhikkhus, as the absolute true intuitive knowledge regarding these Four Noble Truths under their three aspects and twelve

modes was not perfectly clear to me, so long I did not acknowledge that I had gained the incomparable Supreme Enlightenment.

"When the absolute true intuitive knowledge regarding these Truths became perfectly clear to me, then, only, did I acknowledge that I had gained the incomparable Supreme Enlightenment (*anuttara sammāsambodhi*)."

"And there arose in me the knowledge and insight: Unshakable is the deliverance of my mind, this is my last birth, and now there is no existence again."

At the end of the discourse *Kondanna*, the senior of the five disciples, understood the Dhamma and, attaining the first stage of Sainthood, realized that whatever is subject to origination all that is subject to cessation -- *Yam kinci samudayadhammam sabbam tam nirodhadhammam*.

When the Buddha expounded the discourse of the Dhammacakka, the earth-bound deities exclaimed: "This excellent Dhammacakka, which could not be expounded by any ascetic, priest, god, Mara or Brahma in this world, has been expounded by the Exalted One at the Deer Park, in Isipatana, near Benares."

Hearing this, Devas and Brahmas of all the other planes also raised the same joyous cry.

A radiant light, surpassing the effulgence of the gods, appeared in the world.

The light of the Dhamma illumined the whole world, and brought peace and happiness to all beings.

\*

Taken from "*The Buddha and His Teachings*"

Written by Ven. Narada Thera

Published by Cultural Conservation Trust

**[Thus ends the above text.]**

\*

Following is a translation of the same sutta by Bhikkhu Thanissaro.

## **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta**

SN 56.11

PTS: S v 420

CDB ii 1843

## **Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion**

Translated from the Pali by

**Thanissaro Bhikkhu**

© 1993–2009

[Search [acesstoinight](http://www.dhammadownload.com) for an alternate translation: by Piyadassi]

*Bhikkhu Thanissaro's translation reads, below, as follows:*

**I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One** was staying at Varanasi in the Game Refuge at Isipatana. There he addressed the group of five monks:

"There are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure with reference to sensual objects: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathagata — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding.

"And what is the middle way realized by the Tathagata that — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding? Precisely this Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the middle way realized by the Tathagata that — producing vision, producing knowledge — leads to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding.

"Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress:<sup>1</sup> Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from

the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming — accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there — i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path — right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

"Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me, with regard to things never heard before: 'This is the noble truth of stress'... 'This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended'... 'This noble truth of stress has been comprehended.'

"Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: 'This is the noble truth of the origination of stress'... 'This noble truth of the origination of stress is to



be abandoned' 2 ... 'This noble truth of the origination of stress has been abandoned.'

"Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: 'This is the noble truth of the cessation of stress'... 'This noble truth of the cessation of stress is to be directly experienced'... 'This noble truth of the cessation of stress has been directly experienced.'

"Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, [and] illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: 'This is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress'... 'This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed'... 'This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress has been developed.' 3

"And, monks, as long as this — my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths, as they have come to be was — not pure, I did not claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its deities, Maras, & Brahmas, with its contemplatives & priests, its royalty & common-folk. But as soon as this — my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be — was truly pure, then I did claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its deities, Maras

& Brahmas, with- Knowledge & vision arose in me: 'Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the group of five monks delighted at his words. And while this explanation was being given, there arose to Ven. Kondañña the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.

And when the Blessed One had set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion, the earth devas cried out: "At Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by priest or contemplative, deva, Mara or God or anyone in the cosmos." On hearing the earth devas' cry, the devas of the Four Kings' Heaven took up the cry... the devas of the Thirty-three... the Yama devas... the Tusita devas... the Nimmanarati devas... the Paranimmita-vasavatti devas... the devas of Brahma's retinue took up the cry: "At Varanasi, in the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by priest or contemplative, deva, Mara, or God or anyone at all in the cosmos."

So in that moment, that instant, the cry shot right up to the Brahma worlds. And this ten-thousand fold cosmos shivered & quivered & quaked, while a great, measureless radiance

appeared in the cosmos, surpassing the effulgence of the devas.

Then the Blessed One exclaimed: "So you really know, Kondañña? So you really know?" And that is how Ven. Kondañña acquired the name Añña-Kondañña — Kondañña who knows.

## Notes

1.

The Pali phrases for the four noble truths are grammatical anomalies. From these anomalies, some scholars have argued that the expression "noble truth" is a later addition to the texts. Others have argued, even further, that the content of the four truths is also a later addition. Both of these arguments are based on the unproven assumption that the language the Buddha spoke was grammatically regular, and that any irregularities were later corruptions of the language. This assumption forgets that the languages of the Buddha's time were oral dialects, and that the nature of such dialects is to contain many grammatical irregularities. Languages tend to become regular only when being used to govern a large nation state or to produce a large body of literature: events that happened in India only after the Buddha's time. (A European example: Italian was a group of irregular oral dialects until Dante fashioned it into a regular language for the sake of his poetry.) Thus

the irregularity of the Pali here is no proof either for the earliness or lateness of this particular teaching.

2.

Another argument for the lateness of the expression "noble truth" is that a truth — meaning an accurate statement about a body of facts — is not something that should be abandoned. In this case, only the craving is to be abandoned, not the truth about craving. However, in Vedic Sanskrit — as in modern English — a "truth" can mean both a fact and an accurate statement about a fact. Thus in this case, the "truth" is the fact, not the statement about the fact, and the argument for the lateness of the expression does not hold.

3.

The discussion in the four paragraphs beginning with the phrase, "Vision arose...," takes two sets of variables — the four noble truths and the three levels of knowledge appropriate to each — and lists their twelve permutations. In ancient Indian philosophical and legal traditions, this sort of discussion is called a wheel. Thus, this passage is the Wheel of Dhamma from which the discourse takes its name.

**Provenance:**

©1993 Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

Transcribed from a file provided by the translator.

This Access to Insight edition is ©1993–2009 John T. Bullitt.

Our next source of information and commentary comes from the U Ba Khin Foundation, expounded from within the most highly-respected Burmese Tradition by Mahasi Sayadaw who was, the questioner at the Sixth World Buddhist Council held in Rangoon in 1957 and 1958, and was considered to be the best Pali authority of his times. Below, he gives us an introduction to the backgrounds of the Buddha's first sutta.

**Mahasi Sayadaw**

**Dhammaakkappavatana Sutta**

## **PREFACE TO THE DISCOURSE**

Today is the New Moon day of Tawthalin. Starting from today, we will expound the First Sermon of the Blessed One, which is namely the **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta** commonly known as the Great Discourse on the Wheel of Dhamma.

Being the First Sermon ever delivered by the Blessed One, it is the most ancient and the most straightforward of His Teachings. Rare is the person, amongst the laity of this Buddhist country of the Union of Burma, who has not heard of this discourse. Numerous are those who have committed this Sutta to memory. There are in almost every town and village, religious groups under the name of 'the Wheel of Dhamma Reciting Society', devoted to group recitation of the Sutta and listening to it. Buddhist followers regard this Sutta with great esteem and veneration as it was the First Dispensation of the Blessed One.

There are now in existence numerous Nissaya or other forms of translation, explaining and interpreting the Pali version of the Sutta in Burmese, but there is scarcely any work which explicitly shows what practical methods are available from the Sutta and how they could be utilized by the ardent, sincere meditators who aspire to gain the Path and its Fruition.

We ourselves have expounded this Sutta on numerous occasions, emphasizing on its practical application to meditation. We formally opened this (Rangoon) Meditation Centre with a discourse of this Sutta and have repeatedly delivered the Sermon here. Elsewhere too, wherever a meditation centre was newly opened, we always employed this Sutta as an inaugural discourse.

The Buddhist Canon has three main divisions - the three Baskets or *Ti Pitaka* in Pali:

- 1 the Sutta Pitaka or the Sermon Basket
- 2 the Vinaya Pitaka or the Discipline Basket
- 3 the Abhidhamma Pitaka or the Analytical and Philosophical Basket.

The Discourse on the Wheel of Dhamma is included in the Sutta Pitaka which is made up of the five Nikāyas, namely:

- i the *Digha Nikāya*
- ii the *Majjhima Nikāya*
- iii the *Samyutta Nikāya*
- iv the *Anguttara Nikāya*
- v the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.

The Samyutta Nikāya is divided into five groups known as Vaggas:

- a *Sagāthāvagga*
- b *Nidānavagga*

- c *Khandavagga*
- d *Salāyatanavagga*
- e *Mahāvagga*.

The Mahāvagga is divided, again, into twelve subgroups such as the Maggasamyutta, Bojjhan.gasamyutta, Satipatthānasamyutta, etc, the last of which being Saccasamyutta.

The Wheel of Dhamma appears as the first discourse in the second vagga of the subgroup Saccasamyutta, and it was recited as such in the proceedings of the Sixth Great Council. In the Sixth Great Council edition of the Ti Pitaka, it is recorded on pages 368 - 371 of the third volume of the Samyutta Pitaka. There the introduction to the Discourse reads: '*Evam me sutam, ekam samayam . . .* Thus have I heard.'

These were the introductory words uttered by the Venerable Ānandā when interrogated by the Venerable Mahākassapa at the First Council held just over three months after the passing away of the Blessed One. The Venerable Mahākassapa said to the Venerable Ānandā:

"Friend, Ānandā, where was the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta delivered? By whom was it delivered and on whose account? And how was it delivered?" The Venerable Ānandā answered, "My Lord, Venerable Mahākassapa. Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was staying at the Sage's Resort, the Pleasance of Isipatana (where



Pacceka Buddhas and Enlightened Ones alighted from the sky), in the deer sanctuary, in the township of Benares. Then the Blessed One addressed the group of five bhikkhus, "These two extremes, Bhikkhus, should not be followed by one who has gone forth from the worldly life."

## **THE DATE OF THE DISCOURSE**

This introduction lacks a definite date of delivery of the Discourse. As in all other Suttas, the date was mentioned merely as "Once" or "At one time". A precise chronological data as to the year, the month and the date on which each Discourse was delivered would have been very helpful. But chronological details would appear to be an encumbrance to committing the Suttas to memory and to their recitation. Thus, it is not easy to place a precise date for each of the Suttas.

It should, however, be possible to precisely determine the exact date on which the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta was delivered because it was the First Sermon of the Blessed One and also because reference could be made to internal evidence provided in other Suttas and the Vinaya Pitaka - the Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment on the night of the full moon of Kason in the year 103 of the Great Era. Then, He preached this Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta in the early evening on the full moon day of the following Wãso. This year is 1324 of the Burmese Era, and it is exactly 2506 years since the Buddha's final Parinibbanã.

Taking into account His 45 years of Dispensation before Parinibbanā, it totals up to 2551 years. Thus, it was on the First Watch of the full moon of Wāso 2551 years ago that this First Sermon was delivered by the Blessed One. Western scholars regard this estimation as 60 years too early. According to their calculation, the First Sermon was preached only 2491 years ago. As the event of the Turning of the Wheel took place in the East, we would rather go by the oriental calculation and regard the First Sermon as being taught 2551 years ago.

The deer park, in which the deers were given sanctuary, must have been a forested area with deers roaming about harmlessly. At present, however, the area has been depleted of forest trees and has become an open plain with cultivated patches surrounding human habitations. In ancient times, Paccekabuddhas travelled in space by supernatural powers from the Gandhamādana Mountain and descended to earth at this isolated place. Likewise, the Enlightened Ones of the dim past came here by magical flights and alighted on the same spot to preach the First Sermon. Hence, the name Hermitage or the Sage's Resort.

The Introduction to the Sutta says the Blessed One preached the First Sermon to the group of five bhikkhus while he was staying in the pleasance of the deer sanctuary in the township of Benares. That is all the information that could be obtained from the introductory statement, which is bare and inadequate. It needs some elaboration and we propose to

provide one by drawing materials from other Suttas, also.

## **THREE KINDS OF INTRODUCTIONS**

The introduction to a Sutta explains on whose or what account the Sutta was taught by the Buddha. Introductions are of three kinds:

a) The introduction which gives the background story of the remote distant past. This provides an account of how the Bodhisatta, the future Buddha, fulfilled the perfections required of an aspirant Buddha - beginning from the time of prophecy proclaimed by Dipankara Buddha to the time when he was reborn in the Tusitā Heaven as a king of the devas named Setaketu. There is no need, nor time to deal more with this background story of the distant past.

b) The introduction touching on the background story of the intermediate period. This deals with the account of what passed from the time of existence in the Tusitā Heaven to the attainment of full enlightenment on the Throne of Wisdom. We shall give attention to this introduction to a considerable extent.

c) The introduction which tells of the recent past, just preceding the teaching of the Dhammacakka Sutta. This is what is learnt from the statement "Thus have I heard. At one time . . ." quoted above.

We shall now deal with relevant extracts from the second

category of introductions, drawing our materials from Sukhumāla Sutta of Tika Nipata, Anguttara Nikāya, Pasarāsi or Ariyapariyesana Sutta and Mahāsaccaka Sutta of Mulapannāsa, Bodhirājakumara Sutta and Sangārava Sutta of Majjhimapannasa, Pabbajjā Sutta, Padhāna Sutta of Suttanipāta, and from a number of other Suttas.

## **BODHISATTA AND WORLDLY PLEASURES**

After the Bodhisatta had passed away from Tusitā Heaven, he entered the womb of Mahāmāyā Devi, the principal queen of King Suddhodana of Kapilavatthu. The Bodhisatta was born on Friday, the full moon of Kason in the year 68 of the Great Era, in the pleasure-grove of Sal trees called the Lumbini Grove and was named Siddhartha. At the age of sixteen, he married Yasodharā Devi, daughter of Suppabuddha, the Royal Master of Devadaha. Thereafter, surrounded by forty thousand attendant princesses, he lived in enjoyment of kingly pleasures in great magnificence.

He was thus wholly given over to sensuous pleasure amidst pomp and splendour. One day he came out to the royal pleasure grove for a garden feast and merry-making accompanied by attendants. On the way to the grove, the sight of a decrepit, aged person gave him a shock and he turned back to his palace.

On second occasion, he saw a sick and diseased person and he returned greatly alarmed. When he set forth for the third

time, he was agitated in his heart on seeing a dead man and hurriedly retraced his steps. The alarm and agitation felt by the Bodhisatta were described in the Ariyapariyesana Sutta.

## **THE IGNOBLE QUEST**

The Bodhisatta pondered thus: 'When oneself is subjected to old age, to seek and crave for what is subjected to old age is not befitting. And what are subjected to old age? Wife and children, slaves, goats and sheep, fowls and pigs, elephants, horses, cattle, gold and silver, all objects of pleasures and luxuries, animate and inanimate, are subjected to old age. Being oneself subjected to old age, to crave for these objects of pleasures, to be enveloped and immersed in them is not proper.

'Similarly, it does not befit one, when oneself is subjected to disease and death, to crave for sensual objects which are subjected to disease and death. To go after what is subjected to old age, disease and death (what is not befitting and proper) constitutes an Ignoble Quest (*Anariyapariyesana*).

'Being oneself subjected to old age, disease and death, to go in search of that which is not subjected to old age, disease and death constitutes a Noble Quest (*Ariyapariyesana*).'

## **THE NOBLE QUEST**

The Sutta below describes the Bodhisatta himself engaging, at first, in what we may describe as ignoble quests:

"Now Bhikkhus, before my Enlightenment while I was only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, being myself subject to birth, I sought after what was also subject to birth; being myself subject to old age, I sought after what was also subject to old age."

This was a denunciation or stricture of the life of pleasure he had lived with Yasodharā amidst the gay society of attendant princesses. Then, having perceived the wretchedness of such life, he made up his mind to go in search of the Peace of Nibbana which is free from birth, old age, disease and death. He said, "Having perceived the wretchedness of being myself subject to birth, old age, it occurred to me it would be fitting if I were to seek the incomparable, unsurpassed Peace of Nibbana, free from birth, and old age."

Thus, it occurred to the Bodhisatta to go in quest of Nibbānic Peace, which is free from old age, disease and death. That was a very laudable aim and we shall consider it further to see clearly how it was so.

Suppose there was someone who was already old and decrepit, would it be wise for him to seek the company of another man or woman who, like himself, was aged and frail, or of someone who, though not advanced in age, yet would surely turn old in no time? No, not at all judicious.

Again, for someone who was himself in declining health and suffering, it would be quite irrational if he were to seek companionship in another who was ill and afflicted with painful disease. Companionship with someone, who though enjoying good health presently would soon be troubled with illness, would not be prudent either. There are even those who, hoping to enjoy each other's company for life, got into wedlock and settled down. Unfortunately, one of the partners soon becomes a bedridden invalid, imposing on the other the onerous duty of looking after the stricken mate. The hope of a happy married life may be dashed when one of the partners passes away, leaving only sorrow and lamentation for the bereaved one. Ultimately, both of the couple would be faced with the misery of old age, disease and death.

Thus it is extremely unwise to go after sensual pleasures which are subject to old age, disease and death. The most-noble quest is to seek out what is not subject to old age, disease and death. Here, at this meditation centre, it is a matter for gratification that the devotees, monks and laymen, are all engaged in the noblest quest - the quest for the unageing, the unailing and the deathless.

## **THE RENUNCIATION OF THE BODHISATTA**

On his fourth excursion to the pleasure-grove, the Bodhisatta met a monk. On learning from the monk that he had gone forth from a worldly life and was engage in

meritorious pursuits, it occurred to the Bodhisatta to renounce worldly life, become a recluse and go in search of what is not subject to old age, disease and death. When he had gained what he had set out for, his intention was to pass on the knowledge to the world so that other beings would also learn to be free from misery of being subjected to old age, disease and death. A noble thought, a noble intention indeed!

On that same day and at about the same time, a son was born to the Bodhisatta's consort Yasodharā Devi. When he heard the news, the Bodhisatta murmured, "An impediment (*rāhulā*) has been born, a fetter has been born." On learning of this remark, the Bodhisatta's father, King Suddhodana, named his newborn grandson Prince Rāhulā (Prince Impediment), hoping that the child would indeed prove to be a fetter to the Bodhisatta and become a hindrance to his plan for renunciation.

But the Bodhisatta had become averse to the pleasures of the world. That night he remained unmoved, unsoled by the amusements provided by the royal entertainers and went into an early slumber. The discouraged musicians lay down their instruments and went to sleep there and then. On awakening in the middle of the night, the sight of recumbent, sleeping dancers repulsed the Bodhisatta and made his magnificent palace apartment seem like a cemetery filled with corpses.



Thus at midnight the Bodhisatta went forth on the Great Retirement riding the royal horse, Khandaka, accompanied by his courtier, Channa. When they came to the river Anomã, he cut off his hair and beard while standing on the sandy beach. Then after discarding the royal garments, he put on the yellow robes offered by the Brahma God, Ghantikara, and became a monk. The Bodhisatta was only twenty-nine, then, an age most favourable for the pursuit of pleasures. That he renounced with indifference the pomp and splendour of a sovereign and abandoned the solace and comfort of his consort, Yasodharã, and retinues, at such a favourable age while still blessed with youth is really awe-inspiring.

## **MAKING HIS WAY TO ALARA, THE GREAT ASCETIC**

At that time the Bodhisatta was not yet in possession of practical knowledge of leading a holy life so he made his way to the then famous ascetic Àlãra who was no ordinary person. Of the eight stages of mundane *jhānic* attainments, Àlãra personally mastered seven stages up to the *jhāna* consciousness dwelling on Nothingness (*akiñcaññayatana jhāna*) and was imparting this knowledge to his pupils.

Before the appearance of the Buddha, such teachers who had achieved *jhānic* attainments served as trustworthy masters giving practical instructions on methods of attainments. Àlãra was famous like a Buddha in those times.

The Theravada literature was silent about him. However, in Lalitavistra, a biographical text of the northern School of Buddhism, it was recorded that the great teacher had lived in the state of Vesali and that he had three hundred pupils, following him and learning the practice his doctrine.

## **TAKING INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE HOLY SAGE, ALARA**

How the Bodhisatta took instructions from the holy sage Àlāra was described thus: "Having gone forth and become a recluse in pursuit of what is holy and good, seeking the supreme, incomparable Peace of Nibbāna, I drew to where Àlāra Kālāma was and addressed him thus: 'Friend Kālāma, I desire to lead the holy life under your doctrine and discipline.' When I had thus addressed him, Àlāra replied, 'The Venerable friend Gotama is welcome to remain in this teaching. Of such a nature is this dhamma that in a short time an intelligent man can realize for himself and abide in possession of what his teacher has realized as his own.'" After these words of encouragement, Àlāra gave him practical instructions on practicing the doctrine.

## **REASSURING-WORDS**

Àlāra's statement that his dhamma, if practised as taught, could be realized soon by oneself as one's own was very reassuring and inspired confidence. A pragmatic doctrine is trustworthy and convincing, only if it could be realized by

oneself and in a short time. The sooner the realization is possible, the more heartening it will be. The Bodhisatta was thus satisfied with Àlāra's words and this thought arose in him: "It is not by mere faith that Àlāra announces that he has learned the dhamma. Àlāra has surely realized the dhamma himself, he knows and understands it."

That was very true. Àlāra did not cite any texts as authority. He did not say that he had heard it from others. He clearly stated that what he knew personally he had realized it himself. A meditation teacher must be able to declare his conviction boldly like him. Without having practised the dhamma personally, without having experienced and realized it in a personal way, to claim to be a teacher in meditation, to preach and write books about it after just learning from the texts on meditation methods is most incongruous and improper. It is like a physician prescribing medicine not yet clinically tested and tried by him, and which he dared not administer on himself. Such preachments and publications are surely undependable and uninspiring.

But Àlāra taught boldly what he had realized himself. The Bodhisatta was fully impressed by him, and this thought arose in him: "Not only Àlāra has faith, I also have faith. Not only Àlāra has energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom, I also have them." Then he strove for the realization of that dhamma which Àlāra declared that he himself had learned and realized. In no time, the Bodhisatta

learned the dhamma which led him as far as the jhānic realm of Nothingness.

He then approached where Ālāra Kālāma was and enquired of him whether the realm of Nothingness, which the latter had claimed to have realized it himself and lived in possession of, was the same stage as what the Bodhisatta had now reached, Ālāra replied, "This is as far as the dhamma leads, of which I have declared that I have realized and abide in its possession, the same stage as friend Gotama has reached." Then he uttered these words of praise, "Friend Gotama is a supremely distinguished person. The realm of Nothingness is not easily attainable yet Friend Gotama has realized it in no time. It is truly wonderful. Fortunate are we that we should light upon such a distinguished ascetic companion as your Reverence. As I have realized the dhamma, so have you realized it, too. As you have learnt it, so have I learnt to the same extent as you. Friend Gotama is my equal in dhamma. We have a large community here. Come, friend, together let us direct this company of disciples.

Thus Ālāra, the teacher, recognized the Bodhisatta, the pupil, as completely equal to himself and honoured him by delegating to him the task of guiding one hundred and fifty pupils, which number was exactly half of all the disciples Ālāra had.

But the Bodhisatta stayed at the centre only for a short time.

While staying there this thought came to him: "This doctrine does not lead to aversion, to abatement and cessation of passion, to quiescence for higher knowledge and full enlightenment nor to Nibbāna, the end of sufferings, but only as far as the attainment to the realm of Nothingness. Once there, a long life of 60,000 world cycles follows, and after expiring from there, one reappears in the Karma existences and goes through the sufferings again. It is not the doctrine of the undying that I am looking for." Thus becoming indifferent to the practice which led only to the jhānic realm of Nothingness, the Bodhisatta abandoned it and He departed from Ālāra's meditation centre.

## **APPROACHING THE SAGE UDAKA**

After leaving Ālāra's place, the Bodhisatta was on his own for some time, pursuing the supreme path of tranquillity to reach the undying state of Nibbāna. Then the fame of Udaka or Rāmaputta (the son of Rama or disciple of the sage Rāma) reached him. He drew to where Udaka was and sought to lead the religious life under the dhamma and discipline of the sage Rāma. His experiences under the guidance of Udaka, how Udaka explained to him the dhamma, how the Bodhisatta was impressed with the doctrine and practised it, how he realized the dhamma and recounted to Udaka what he had gained, were described in almost exactly the same words as before.

We have, however, to note carefully that Udaka or

Rāmaputta, as his name implied, was a son of Rāma or a disciple of Rāma. The sage Rāma was accomplished to go through all the eight stages of *jhāna* and reached the highest jhānic realm, of Neither Perception nor Non-perception. However, when the Bodhisatta reached where Udaka was, the old sage Rāma was no more. Therefore, in asking Udaka about Rāma's attainments, he used the past tense '*pavedesi*'. "How far does this doctrine lead concerning which Rāma declared that he had realized it for himself and entered upon it?"

Then there is the account of how this thought occurred to the Bodhisatta: "It is not only Rāma who had faith, industry, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. I also have them." There is also this passage where it was stated that Udaka set him up as a teacher. "You know this doctrine and Rāma knew this doctrine. You are the same as Rāma and Rāma was the same as you. Come, friend Gotama, lead this following and be their teacher." And again the passage where the Bodhisatta recounted, "Udaka, the disciple of Rāma, although my companion in the holy living, set me up as his teacher."

These textual references make it apparent that the Bodhisatta did not meet with the sage Rāma, but only with Rāma's disciple Udaka who explained to him the doctrine practised by Rāma. The Bodhisatta followed the method as described by Udaka and was able to realize the stage, of Neither Perception nor Non-perception. Having learnt the

doctrine himself and realized and entered upon the realm, of Neither Perception nor Non-perception, like the sage Rāma, he was requested by Udaka to accept the leadership of the company.

It was not mentioned in the literature of the Theravadins as to where Udaka resided and how big his following was, but Lalitavistra, the biography of the Buddha of the northern Buddhism, stated that Udaka's centre was in the district of Rajagaha and that he had a company of seven hundred strong. It is to be noted that at the time of meeting with the Bodhisatta, Udaka himself had not attained the *jhānic* realm of Neither Perception nor Non-perception yet. He explained to the Bodhisatta only what stage Rāma had achieved. So when the Bodhisatta proved himself to be the equal of his master by realizing the stage of neither Perception nor Non-perception, he offered the Bodhisatta the leadership of the whole company. According to the Tikā (Sub-commentary), Udaka later strove hard, emulating the example set by the Bodhisatta and finally attained the highest *jhānic* stage of Neither Perception nor Non-perception.

The Bodhisatta remained as a leader of the company at the centre only for a short time. It soon occurred to him: "This doctrine does not lead to aversion, to absence of passion nor to quiescence for gaining knowledge, supreme wisdom and Nibbāna, but only as far as the realm, of Neither Perception nor Non-perception. Once there, a long life of 84,000 world cycles is enjoyed only to come back again to the existence

of sensual pleasures and be subjected to much suffering. This is not the doctrine of the Undying that I long for." Then becoming indifferent to the doctrine which leads only to the realm, of Neither Perception nor Non-perception, he gave it up and, then, he departed from Udaka's centre.

## **PRACTISING OF EXTREME AUSTERITIES IN URUVELA FOREST**

After he had left Udaka's centre, the Bodhisatta wandered about in Magadha, searching on his own the peerless path of tranquillity, the Undying Nibbāna. During his wanderings, he came to the forest of Uruvela near the big village of Senanigamā. In the forest he saw the clear, flowing river Neranjara. Perceiving, thus, a delightful spot, a serene dense grove, a clear, flowing stream with a village nearby which would serve as an alms resort, it occurred to him: "Truly, this is a suitable place for one intent on effort", and he stayed on in the forest.

At that time the Bodhisatta had not yet worked out a precise system of right struggle. Austerity practices were, of course, widely known and in vogue throughout India then. Concerning these practices, three similes came to into His mind.

## **THREE-SIMILES**



A log of snappy wood freshly cut from a sycamore tree and soaked in water cannot produce fire by being rubbed with a similar piece of wet sappy wood or with a piece of some other wood. Just so, while still entangled with objects of sensual desires such as wife and family, while still delighting in passionate pleasures and lustful desires are not yet quieted within him, however strenuously someone strives, he is incapable of wisdom, insight and incomparable full awakening. This was the first simile that occurred to the Bodhisatta.

Even if the sycamore log is not soaked in water but is still green and sappy, being freshly cut from the tree, it will also not produce any fire by friction. Just so, even if he has abandoned the objects of sensual desires such as wife and family and they are no longer near him, if he still delights in thoughts of passionate pleasures and lustful desires still arise in him, he is incapable of wisdom, insight or full awakening. This is the second simile.

According to the Commentary, this simile has a reference to the practices of Brahma dhammika ascetics. Those Brahmins led a holy ascetic life from youth to the age of forty-eight when they went back to married life in order to preserve the continuity of their clan. Thus, while they were practising the holy life, they would have been tainted with lustful thoughts.

The third simile is concerned with dry sapless logs of wood

not soaked in water. These logs of dry wood will kindle fire when rubbed against one another. Similarly, having abandoned objects of sensual desires and weaned himself of lustful thoughts and cravings, he is capable of attaining wisdom, insight and full awakening, whether he practises extreme austerity or whether he strives painlessly without doing anything with which he may to torture himself.

## **EXTREME AUSTERITY OF CRUSHING THE MIND WITH THE MIND**

Of the two methods open to him according to the third simile, the Bodhisatta considered following the path of austerity. "What if now with my teeth clenched and my tongue cleaving the palate, I should press down, constrain and crush the naturally arising thought with my mind."

The Pali text quoted here corresponds with the text in the Vitakka Sandhāna Sutta, but the method of crushing the thought with the mind as described in the Vitakka Sandhāna Sutta was one prescribed by the Buddha after attaining enlightenment. As such, it involves banishment of any lustful thought which arises of its own accord by taking note of its appearance as an exercise of Vipassanā meditation in accordance with the Satipatthāna Sutta and other similar texts. The method of crushing the thought with the mind, as described here, refers to the practical exercises performed by the Bodhisatta before he attained the knowledge of the Middle Path and is, therefore, at variance with the

Satipatthāna method.

However, the Commentary interpretation implies suppression of evil minds with moral minds. If this interpretation were correct, this method, being concordant with Satipatthāna Sutta and other texts, would have resulted in Enlightenment for the Bodhisatta. Actually, this method led him only to extreme suffering and not to Buddhahood. Other austerity practices taken up afterwards also led the Bodhisatta merely into wrong paths.

Austerity practice followed by the Bodhisatta at that time appeared to be somewhat like that of mind annihilation being practised nowadays by followers of a certain school of Buddhism. During our missionary travels in Japan, we visited a large temple where a number of people were engaged in meditation exercises. Their meditation method consists of blotting out a thought whenever it arises. Thus emptied of mind (mental activity), the end of the road is reached, namely, Nothingness, i.e. Void. The procedure is as follows: young Mahayana monks sat cross-legged in a row, about six in number. The master abbot went round showing them the stick with which he would beat them. After a while, he proceeded to administer one blow each on the back of each meditator. It was explained that while being beaten it was possible that the mind disappeared altogether, resulting in Nothingness.

Truly a strange doctrine. This is in reality annihilation of

thought by crushing with mind, presumably the same technique employed by the Bodhisatta to crush the thought with the mind by clenching the teeth. The effort proved very painful for him and sweat oozed out from under his armpits, but no superior knowledge was attained at that time.

## ***JHĀNIC* ABSORPTION RESTRAINING THE BREATH**

Then it occurred to the Bodhisatta: "What if I controlled respiration and concentrate on the breathless *jhāna*?" With that thought, he restrained the in-breathing and out-breathing of the mouth and nose. With the holding of respiration through the mouth and nose, there was a roar in the ears due to the rushing out of the air just like the bellows of a frog making a roaring noise. There was intense bodily suffering, but the Bodhisatta was relentless. He held the in-breathings and out-breathings, not only of the mouth and nose, but also of the ears. As a result, violent winds rushed up to the crown of the head, causing pains as if a strong man had split open the head with a mallet, as if a powerful man were tightening a rough leather strap round the head. Violent winds pushed around in the belly causing misery like being carved-up by a sharp butcher's knife. And there was intense burning in the belly as if roasted over a pit of burning coals. The Bodhisatta, overcome physically by pain and suffering, fell down in exhaustion and lay still. When the deities saw him lying prone, some of them said, "The monk Gotama is dead." Other deities said, "The monk

Gotama is not yet dead, he is dying." Again other deities said, "The monk Gotama is neither dead nor dying. He is just lying still, dwelling in the state of Arahatsip." In spite of all these painful efforts, no higher knowledge was gained.

## **EXTREME AUSTERITY OF FASTING**

So it occurred to the Bodhisatta: "What if I strive still harder, entirely abstaining from food?" Knowing his thoughts, the deities said, "Please, Lord Gotama, do not entirely abstain from food. If you do so, we shall instill heavenly nourishment through the pores of your skin. You shall remain alive on that." Then it came to the Bodhisatta: "If I claim to be completely fasting and these deities should instill heavenly nourishment through my pores and I should thus be sustained, that would be for me a lie." The Bodhisatta rejected the deities offer saying that he refused to be injected with divine nourishment.

Then, he decided to take less and less nourishment, only as much bean soup as the hollow of a hand could hold. Living on about five or six spoonfuls of bean soup each day, his body reached the state of extreme emaciation. The limbs withered, only skin, sinews and bones remained. The vertebrae became exposed in uneven lumps and protuberances. The widely dispersed bones jutted out, presenting an ungainly, ghastly appearance just as in the paintings of the Bodhisatta undergoing extreme austerity. The gleam of the eyes shrunk down in their sockets, looked

like the reflection from water sunk deep in the well. The scalp had shrivelled up like a green, soft gourd withered in the sun. The emaciation was so extreme that if he attempted to feel the belly skin, he encountered the spinal column; if he felt for the spinal column, he touched the belly skin. When he attempted to evacuate the bowel or make water, the effort was so painful that he fell forward on the face, so weakened was he through this extremely scanty diet.

Seeing this extremely emaciated body of the Bodhisatta, the people said, "The monk Gotama is a black man." Others said, "The monk Gotama has a brown complexion." Again others said, "The monk Gotama has the brown-blue colour of the torpedo fish."

So much had the clear, bright, golden colour of his skin now deteriorated.

## **MÂRA'S PERSUASION**

While the Bodhisatta strove hard and practised extreme austerity to subdue himself, Māra came and addressed the Bodhisatta persuasively in beguiling words of pity, "Friend Gotama, you have gone very thin and assumed an ungainly appearance. You are now in the presence of death. There is only one chance left in a thousand for you 'to live'. Oh, Friend Gotama! Try to remain alive. Life is better than death. If you live, you can do good deeds and gain merits."

The meritorious deeds mentioned here by Māra have no

reference whatsoever to the merits accruing from acts of charity and observance of precepts, practices which lead to the path of liberation nor to merits which result from development of Vipassanā Insight and attainment of the Path.

Māra knew of only merits gained by leading a holy life abstaining from sexual intercourse and by worshipping the holy fires. These practices were believed in those times to lead to a noble, prosperous life in future existences. However, the Bodhisatta was not enamoured of the blessings of existences and he replied to Māra, "I do not need even an iota of the merits you speak of. You should go and talk of the merit to those who stand in need of it."

A misconception had arisen concerning this utterance of the Bodhisatta that he was not in need of any merits, that is 'meritorious deeds are to be abandoned, not to be sought for nor carried out by one seeking release from the rounds of existence like the Bodhisatta'. A person once approached me and sought elucidation on this point. I explained to him that when Māra was talking about merit, he did not have in mind the merits which accrued from acts of charity, observance of precepts and development of insight through meditation or attainment of the Path. He could not know of them. Nor was the Bodhisatta in possession then of precise knowledge of these meritorious practices; only that the Bodhisatta was then engaged in austerity exercises taking them to be noble ones. Thus, when the Bodhisatta said to Māra 'I do not need

any merit', he was not referring to the meritorious practices that lead to Nibbāna, but only to such deeds as were believed then to assure one of pleasurable existences. The Commentary also supports our view. It states that in saying 'I do not need any merit', the Bodhisatta meant only the merit which Māra spoke of, namely, acts of merit which are productive of future existences. It can thus be concluded that no question arises of abandonment of meritorious practices which will lead to Nibbāna.

At that time, the Bodhisatta was still working under the delusion that austerity exercises were the means of attaining higher knowledge. Thus, he said, "This wind that blows can dry up the waters of the river. So while I strive strenuously, why should it not dry up my blood? And when the blood dries up, bile and phlegm will run dry. As the flesh gets wasted too, my mind will become clearer: mindfulness, concentration and wisdom will be more firmly established."

Māra was also under the wrong impression that abstention from food would lead to liberation and higher knowledge. It was this anxiety that motivated him to coax the Bodhisatta away from following the path of starvation. With the same wrong notion, a group of five ascetics waited upon him, attending to all his needs, hoping that this abstemious practice would lead to Buddhahood as they intended to be the first recipients of the sermon on liberation.

From the above, it is clear, therefore, that it was a universal



belief in those days that extreme self-mortification was the right path which would lead to Enlightenment.

## **RIGHT REASONING**

After leading the life of extreme self-mortification for six years without any beneficial results, the Bodhisatta began to reason thus: "Whatever ascetics or brahmins in the past had felt painful, racking, piercing feelings through practising self-torture, it may equal this, my suffering, not exceed it."

"Wherever ascetics or brahmins in the future will feel painful, racking, piercing feelings through the practice of self-torture, it may equal this, my suffering, not exceed it; whatever ascetics or brahmins in the present feel painful, racking, piercing feelings through the practice of self-torture, it may equal this, my suffering, not exceed it. But, by this gruelling asceticism I have not attained any distinction higher than the ordinary human achievement; I have not gained the Noble One's knowledge and vision which could uproot defilements. Might there be another way to Enlightenment apart from this path of torture and mortification?"

Then the Bodhisatta thought of the time when, as an infant, he sat alone under the shade of a rose-apple tree, entered and absorbed in the first jhānic stage of meditation while his royal father, King Suddhodhana, was busily engaged in ceremonial ploughing of the fields nearby.

He wondered whether this first *jhānic* method might be the right way to attempt to uncover and discover the Truth!

## **ABSORPTION IN FIRST *JHĀNA* WHILE AN INFANT**

The Bodhisatta was born on the full moon of Kason (April). It appeared that the royal ploughing ceremony was held sometime in Nayon or Wāso (May or June) a month or two later. The infant child was laid down on a couch of magnificent clothes under the shade of a rose-apple tree. An enclosure was then formed by setting up curtains round the temporary nursery with royal attendants respectfully watching over the royal infant. As the royal ploughing ceremony progressed in magnificent pomp and splendour, with the king, himself, partaking in the festivities, the royal attendants were drawn to the splendid scene of activities going on in the nearby fields. Thinking that the royal infant had fallen asleep, they left him lying secure in the enclosure and went away to enjoy themselves in the festivities. The infant Bodhisatta, on looking around and not seeing any attendant, rolled up from the couch and remained seated with his legs crossed. By virtue of habit-forming practices through many lives, he instinctively started contemplating on the incoming, outgoing breath. He was soon established in the first *jhānic* absorption characterised by five features, namely, thought conception, discursive thinking, rapture, joy and concentration.

The attendants had been gone for some time now. Lost in

the festivities of the occasion, they were delayed in returning. When they returned, the shadows thrown by the trees had moved with the passage of time, but the shade of the rose-apple tree under which the infant was left lying was found to have remained steadfast on the same spot. The infant Bodhisatta was sitting motionless on the couch. King Suddhodana, when informed, was struck by the spectacle of the unmoving shadow of the rose-apple tree and the still, sitting posture of the child. In great awe, he made obeisance to his son.

The Bodhisatta recalled the experience of absorption in the respiration *jhāna* he had gained in childhood and he thought, "Might that be the way to Truth?" Following up on that memory, there came the recognition that respiration *jhāna* practice was indeed the right way to Enlightenment.

The *jhānic* experiences were so pleasurable that the Bodhisatta thought to himself: "Am I afraid of (trying for) the pleasures of *jhāna*?" Then he thought: "No, I am not afraid of (the trying for) such pleasures."

## **RESUMPTION OF MEALS**

Then it occurred to the Bodhisatta: "It is not possible to attain the *jhānic* absorption with a body so emaciated. What if I take some solid food I used to take? Thus nourished and strengthened in body, I'll be able to work for the *jhānic* state." Seeing him partaking of solid food, the group of five

ascetics misunderstood his action. They were formerly royal astrologers and counsellors who had predicted, at the time of his birth that he would become an Enlightened Noble One, a Buddha.

There were eight royal astrologers at the court then. When asked to predict what the future held for the royal infant, three of them raised two fingers each and made double pronouncements that the infant would grow up to be a Universal Monarch or an Omniscient Buddha. The remaining five raised only one finger each to give a single interpretation that the child would most undoubtedly become a Buddha.

According to the Mula Pannāsa Commentary (Vol.2, p.92), these five court astrologers forsook the world before they got enchained to the household life and took to the forest to lead a holy life, but the Buddhavamsa Commentary and some other texts stated that seven astrologers raised two fingers each giving double interpretations while the youngest Brahmin, who would in time become the Venerable Kondañña, raised only one finger and made the definite prediction that the child was a future Buddha.

This young Brahmin, together with the sons of four other Brahmins, had gone forth from the world and banded together to form 'The Group of Five Ascetics', awaiting the Great Renunciation of the Bodhisatta. When news reached them later that the Bodhisatta was practising extreme

austerities in the Uruvela Grove, they journeyed there and became his attendants, hoping 'when he has achieved Supreme Knowledge, he will share it with us. We will be the first to hear the message'.

When the five ascetics saw the Bodhisatta partaking solid food, they misunderstood his action and become disappointed. They thought: "If living on a handful of pea soup had not led him to higher knowledge, how could he expect to attain that by eating solid food again?" They misjudged him; thinking that he had abandoned the struggle and reverted back to the luxurious way of life to gain riches and personal glory. Thus, they left him in disgust and went to stay in the deer sanctuary in the township of Benares.

## **ENLIGHTENMENT**

The departure of the five ascetics afforded the Bodhisatta the opportunity to struggle for final liberation in complete solitude. The Mula Pannasa (Vol. 2, pg. 192) gives a description of how, working alone with no one near him for a full fortnight, seated on the throne of Wisdom (under the tree of Enlightenment), he attained Omniscience, the Enlightenment of a Buddha.

The Bodhisatta had gone forth at the age of twenty-nine and spent six years practising extreme austerity. Now at the age of thirty-five, still youthful and in good health, within fifteen days of resumption of regular meals, his body had

filled up as before and regained the thirty-two physical characteristics of a Great Being. Having thus built up strength and energy again through normal nourishment, the Bodhisatta practised the in-breathing, out-breathing meditation and remained absorbed in the bliss of the first *jhāna*, which was characterized by thought-conception, discursive thinking, rapture, joy and one-pointedness of mind. Then he entered the second state of the *jhāna*, which was accompanied by rapture, joy and concentration. At the third state of the *jhāna*, he enjoyed only joy and one-pointedness of mind and at the fourth stage, equanimity and clear mindfulness (one-pointedness).

Early on the full moon day of Kason (April) in the year 103 of the Great Era, i.e. 2551 years ago, counting back from the year 1324 of the Burmese Era, he sat down under the Bo Tree (the Bodhi Tree) near the big village of Senanigāma awaiting the hour of going for alms food. At that time, Sujātā, the daughter of a rich man from the village, was making preparations to give an offering to the tree-spirit of the Bo tree. She sent her maid ahead to tidy up the area under the spread of the holy tree. At the sight of the Bodhisatta seated under the tree, the maid thought the deity had made himself visible to receive their offering in person. She ran back in great excitement to inform her mistress.

Sujātā put the milk rice which she had cooked early in the morning in a golden bowl worth a hundred thousand pieces of money. She covered the same with another golden bowl.

She then proceeded with the bowls to the foot of the banyan tree where the Bodhisatta remained seated and put the bowls in the hand of the Bodhisatta, saying, "May your wishes prosper like mine have." So saying, she departed.

Sujātā, on becoming a maiden, had made a prayer at the banyan tree: "If I get a husband of equal rank and same caste with myself and my first born is a son, I will make an offering." Her prayer had been fulfilled and her offering of milk rice that day was intended for the tree deity in fulfillment of her pledge. However, later when she learnt that the Bodhisatta had gained Enlightenment after taking the milk rice offered by her, she was overjoyed with the thought that she had made a noble deed to the greatest merit.

The Bodhisatta then went down to the river Neranjara and had a bath. After bathing, he made the milk rice offered by Sujātā into forty-nine pellets and ate it. The meal over, he discarded the golden bowl into the river saying: "If I were to become a Buddha today, let the bowl go upstream." The bowl drifted upstream for a considerable distance against the swift flowing current, and on reaching the abode of the snake king, Kala, sank into the river to lie at the bottom of the bowls of the three previous Buddhas.

Then the Bodhisatta rested the whole day in the forest glade near the bank of the river. As evening fell, he went towards the Bo tree, meeting on the way a grasscutter named Sotthiya who gave him eight handfuls of grass. In India holy

men used to prepare a place to sit and sleep on by spreading sheaves of grass. The Bodhisatta spread the grass under the tree on the eastern side. Then with the solemn resolution "Never from this seat will I stir until I have attained the supreme and absolute wisdom", he sat down cross-legged on the grass cover facing east.

At this point Māra made his appearance and contested for the seat under the Bo tree with a view to oppose the Bodhisatta's resolution and prevent him from attaining Buddhahood. By invoking the virtues he had accumulated through the ages, fulfilling the Ten Perfections such as Charity, etc., he overcame the molestations set up by Māra before the sun had set. After thus vanquishing Māra, in the first watch of the night through jhānic meditations, the Bodhisatta acquired the knowledge of previous existences; in the middle watch of the night, the divine eye; and in the last watch of the night, he contemplated on the law of Dependent Origination followed by development of Insight into the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates of grasping. This Insight gave him in succession the knowledge pertaining to the four Holy Paths, resulting finally, in full Enlightenment or Omniscience.

Having become a fully Enlightened One, he spent seven days on the Throne of Wisdom under the Bo tree and seven days each at six other places, forty-nine days in all, enjoying the bliss of the fourth state of Fruition (Fruits of Arahatsip) and pondering long upon his newly found system of Law



*(Dhamma).*

## **EXTREME AUSTERITY IS A FORM OF SELF-MORTIFICATION**

The fifth week was spent under the goatherd (*Ajjapāla*) Banyan tree and, while there, he reflected on his abandonment of the austerity practices: "Delivered am I from the austerity practices which cause physical pain and suffering. It is well that I'm delivered of that unprofitable practice of austerity. How delightful if is to be liberated and have gained Enlightenment."

Māra, who was closely following every thought and action of the Buddha, ever alert to accuse him of any lapses, immediately addressed the Buddha: "Apart from the austerity practices, there is no way to purify beings; Gotama has deviated from the path of purity. While still defiled, he wrongly believes he has achieved purity."

The Buddha replied: "All the extreme practices of austerity employed with a view to achieve the Deathless (the Immortal State) are useless, unprofitable much as the carts, peddles and pushing poles are useless on land, on the sand banks. Fully convinced that they are unprofitable, I have abandoned all forms of self-mortification."

The Commentary also mentions that extreme practices such as scanty diet, scanty clothing, constitute self-torture. That extreme austerity which is a form of self-mortification

should be carefully noted here for better comprehension of the Dhammacakka Sutta when we deal with it.

## **CONSIDERING THE QUESTION OF GIVING THE FIRST SERMON**

Having spent seven days each at seven different places, the Buddha went back to the goatherd's banyan tree on the fiftieth day. Seated under the tree, he considered: "To whom should I best teach the doctrine first? Who would quickly comprehend the Dhamma?" Then it occurred to him: "There is Ālāra Kālāma who is learned, skilled and intelligent. He has long been a person having but little dust of defilement in the eye of the wise. What if I teach the doctrine to Ālāra Kālāma first? He would quickly comprehend this Dhamma."

It is significant that the Buddha had tried to first seek out someone who would understand his teaching quickly. It was of utmost importance to inaugurate new meditation centres with devotees who are endowed with faith, zeal, industry, mindfulness and intelligence. Only such devotees as are in possession of these virtues can achieve penetrative Insight quickly and become shining examples for others to follow. Devotees lacking in faith, zeal, industry, mindfulness and intelligence or enfeebled in mind and body through old age can hardly be source of inspiration to others.

When we first launched on teaching the Satipatthāna Vipassanā Meditation, we were fortunate in being able to

start off with three persons (my relatives actually) endowed with unusual faculties. They acquired the knowledge of awareness of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya ñāna*) within three days of practice and were overjoyed with seeing lights and visions accompanied by feelings of rapture and bliss. Such speedy attainments of results have been responsible for the worldwide acceptance and dissemination of the Mahasi Vipassanā Meditation technique.

Thus, it was that the Buddha thought of teaching his first sermon to someone who would quickly grasp it and when he considered Àlāra Kālāma, a deity addressed him: "Lord, Àlāra Kālāma had passed away seven days ago." Then knowledge and vision arose to the Buddha that Àlāra had indeed passed away seven days ago and had, by virtue of his *jhānic* achievements, attained the Sphere of Nothingness (Akin.caññayatana Brahma Plane - the State of Immateriality).

## **MISSING THE PATH AND FRUITION BY SEVEN DAYS**

"Great is the loss to Àlāra of Kālāma family," bemoaned the Buddha. As Àlāra was developed enough, he would have readily understood the teaching of the Buddha. He could have gained the Path and attained Arahatsip instantly, but his early death had deprived him of this opportunity. In the Sphere of Nothingness, where only mental states exist without any forms, he could not have benefitted even if the

Buddha had gone there and taught him the Dhamma. The life span in the Sphere of Nothingness is also very long, being sixty thousand world cycles. After expiry there he would appear again in the human world, but would miss the teachings of the Buddhas. As a common worldling he would do the rounds of existence, sometimes sinking to the nether world to face great sufferings. Thus the Buddha bemoaned that the loss of Ālāra was very great.

Even nowadays there are people, who are deserving of higher attainments, but pass away without an opportunity of hearing the Satipatthāna Meditation practice as expounded by us, or having heard the Dhamma thus taught but had not yet made the effort to put it into practice. The good people assembled here now hear what we are teaching should see carefully that such rare opportunities for their upliftment should not be ignorantly and carelessly thrown away.

## **MISSING THE GREAT CHANCE BY ONE NIGHT**

Then the Buddha thought of teaching the first sermon to Udaka, son (pupil) of the great sage Rāma. Again a deity addressed the Buddha: "Lord, Udaka Rāmaputta had passed away last night." The knowledge and vision arose to the Buddha that the hermit Udaka had indeed died the previous night in the first watch and by virtue of his jhānic achievements had attained the state of Neither Perception nor Non-perception (*Nevasaññānasaññāyatana* Brahma

Plane). This sphere is also a state of immateriality, a formless state and its life span extends to eighty-four thousand world cycles. This is the noblest, the loftiest of the thirty-one planes of existence, but the Dhamma cannot be heard there. On appearing again in the human world, Rāmaputta could instantly attain Arahatsip, if he could but listen to the Dhamma, because he was already so highly developed. Unfortunately, he would not get such an opportunity again, having missed it by dying one night too early. The Buddha was thus moved again to utter in pity: "Great is the loss to the hermit Udaka, the son (pupil) of the great sage Rāma."

Then the Buddha thought again to whom he should give his first sermon. The group of five Bhikkhus appeared in his divine vision and he saw them living then in the deer Sanctuary which was located in the township of Benares.

## **JOURNEY TO GIVE THE FIRST SERMON**

The Blessed One set out for Benares. Some previous Enlightened Ones had made the same journey by means of miracles. Our Lord Gotama Buddha, however, proceeded on foot for the purpose of meeting the naked ascetic Upaka on the way, to whom he had something to impart.

The Buddhavamsa Commentary and the Jataka commentary state that the Blessed One started on the journey on the full-moon of Wāso. As the deer Sanctuary in Benares was

eighteen *yojanas* (142 miles) away from the Bo Tree and the Blessed One made the journey on foot, the distance could not have been covered in one day unless done miraculously. It would be appropriate, therefore, if we fixed the starting date to be set on the sixth waxing of Wāso.

## **MEETING WITH UPAKA, THE NAKED ASCETIC**

The Blessed One had not gone far from the Bodhi Tree on the way to Gāya (six miles) when he came upon the naked ascetic Upaka, a disciple of the great leader Nataputta of the Naked Sect. On seeing the Blessed One, Upaka addressed him, "Your countenance, friend, is clear and serene; your complexion is pure and bright. In whose name have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Of whose teaching do you profess?" The Blessed One replied:

*Sabbābhibhā sabbaviduhamasami*  
*Sabbesu Dhammesu anupalitto*  
*Sabbin.jaho tanhākkhaye vimutto*  
*Sayam Abiññaya kamuddiseyyam.*

I am one who has overcome all . . . (while common worldlings are affected by what is seen or heard, ending up in suffering, the Blessed One transcends all and remains serene, countenance clear).

Who knows all,  
I am one who has overcome all,  
I am detached from all things;

Having abandoned everything, obtained emancipation,  
By the destruction of desire.

Having by myself gained knowledge,  
Whom should I call my master?

The Blessed One made known his status more emphatically  
as follows:

*na me ācariyo atthi*      I have no teacher,  
*sadiso me na vijjati*      One like me is not,  
*sadevakasmim lokasmin*      In the world of men and gods,  
*natthi me patipuggalo*      None is my counterpart.

Upon this Upaka wondered whether the Blessed One had  
gained the Arahatsip. The Buddha replied:

*Aham hi arahā loke*      I, indeed, am the Arahatsip in the  
world  
*Aham satthā anuttaro*      The teacher with no peer,  
*Ekomhi Sammāsambuddho*      The sole Buddha, supreme,  
enlightened  
*Sitibhotosami Nibbuto*

All passions extinguished, I have gained Peace, Nibbāna.

Upaka then asked the Blessed One where he was bound for  
and on what purpose. "To start in motion the Wheel of Law,  
I go to the Kāsis' town. In the world of blind beings, I shall  
beat the drum of the Deathless," replied the Blessed One.  
Upon this Upaka queried: "By the manner in which you

profess yourself, are you worthy to be an infinite Conqueror?" And the Buddha said:

*Mādisā ve jinā honti, Ye pattā Âsavakkhayam  
jitā me papakā Dhammā, Tasamāhamupaka jino.*

"Those are the Conquerors who, like me, have reached the extinction of cankers. I have vanquished all thoughts, ideas, and notions of evil (sinfulness).

For that reason, Upaka, I am a Jina, a Conqueror, a victorious One."

Upaka belonged to the sect of naked ascetics under the leadership of Nataputtā, who was addressed by his disciples as Jina, the Conqueror.

The Blessed One in his reply explained that only those who have really extinguished the cankers, eradicated the defilements, like him, are entitled to be called a Jina.

## **TRUTH IS NOT SEEN WHEN BLINDED BY MISCONCEPTION**

After this declaration by the Blessed One that he was truly an infinite Conqueror, the naked ascetic Upaka muttered: "It may be so, friend," shook his head and giving way to the Blessed One, went on his journey.

It is important to note carefully this event of Upaka's



meeting with the Buddha. Here was Upaka coming face to face with a truly Enlightened One, but he did not realize it. Even when the Blessed One openly confessed that he was indeed a Buddha, Upaka remained skeptical because he was holding fast to the wrong beliefs of the naked ascetic sect. In these present days too, there are people who follow wrong paths, refuse to believe when they hear about the right method of practice. They show disrespect to and talk disparagingly of those practising and teaching the right method. Such misjudgments arising out of false impression or opinion should be carefully avoided.

Even though he did not evince complete acceptance of what the Buddha said, Upaka appeared to have gone away with a certain amount of faith in the Buddha, as he came back to the Buddha after some time. After leaving the Buddha, he later got married to Capa (Chawa), a hunter's daughter, and when a son was born of the marriage, he became weary of the household life and became a recluse under the Blessed One. Practising the Buddha's teaching, he gained the stage of Once-returner, the *Anāgāmi*. On passing away, he reached the Realm of *Suddavāsa Avihā*, (Brahmā World), where he soon attained Arahatsip. Foreseeing this beneficial result which would accrue out of his meeting with Upaka, the Blessed One set out on foot on his long journey to Benares and answered all the questions asked by Upaka.

## **ARRIVAL AT ISIPATANA**

When the group of five ascetics saw the Blessed One at a distance coming towards them, they made an agreement amongst themselves saying, "Friends, here comes the monk Gotama who had become self-indulgent, given up the struggle and gone back to a life of luxury; let us not pay homage to him nor go to greet him and relieve him of his bowl and robes. However, as he is of noble birth, we will prepare a seat ready for him. He will sit down if he is so inclined."

As the Blessed One drew near to them, they found themselves unable to keep to their agreement because of his illustrious glory. One went to greet him and receive the bowl, the second one took the robe and the third one prepared the seat for him. Another brought water to wash his feet while the other arranged a foot stool. But they all regarded the Blessed One as their equal and addressed him as before by his name Gotama and irreverently with the appellation "my friend". The Blessed One sat on the prepared seat and spoke to them:

"Bhikkhus, do not address me by the name Gotama nor as friend. I have become a Perfect One, worthy of the greatest reverence. Supremely accomplished like the Buddhas of yore, fully Enlightened. Give ear, Bhikkhus, the Deathless has been gained, the Immortal has been won by me. I shall instruct you and teach you the Doctrine. If you practise as instructed by me, you will in a short time, and in the present life, through your own direct knowledge, realize, enter upon

and abide in Arahatsip, the Nibbāna, the ultimate and the noblest goal of the Holy life for the sake of which clansmen of good families go forth from the household life into homeless one."

Even with this bold assurance, the group of five Bhikkhus remained incredulous and retorted thus: "Friend Gotama, even with the abstemious habits and stern austerities which you practised before, you did not achieve anything beyond meritorious attainments of ordinary men (you were not able to transcend human limitations . . . *uttarimanussadhamma*) nor attain the sublime knowledge and Insight of the Noble Ones which alone can destroy the defilements. Now that you have abandoned the austerity practices and are working for gains and benefits, how will you have attained such distinction, such higher knowledge?"

This is something to think over. These five Bhikkhus were formerly court astrologers who were fully convinced and had foretold, soon after his birth, that the young Bodhisatta would definitely attain supreme Enlightenment. But when the Bodhisatta gave up privation and stern exertions, they had wrongly thought that Buddhahood was no longer possible. It could be said that they no longer believed in their own prophecy. They remained incredulous now that the Blessed One declared unequivocally that he had won the Deathless, had become a fully Enlightened One, because they held to the wrong notion that extreme austerity was the right way to Enlightenment. Likewise, nowadays, too, once

a wrong notion has been entertained, people hold fast to it and no amount of showing the truth will sway them and make them believe. They even turn against those who attempt to bring them to the right path and speak irreverently and disparagingly of their well-wishers. One should avoid such errors and self-deception.

With great compassion and pity for the group of five Bhikkhus, the Blessed One spoke to them thus: "Bhikkhus, the Perfect One like those of yore is not working for worldly gains, has not given up the struggle, has not abandoned the true path which eradicates the defilements; he has not reverted to luxury" and declared again that he had become a Perfect One, worthy of great reverence, supremely accomplished and fully Enlightened. He urged them again to listen to him.

A second time, the group of five Bhikkhus made the same retort to him. The Blessed One, realizing that they were still suffering from illusion and ignorance, and out of pity for them gave them the same answer for the third time. When the group of five Bhikkhus persisted in making the same remonstrance, the Blessed One spoke thus: "Bhikkhus, ponder upon this. You and I are not strangers. We had lived together for six years and you had waited upon me while I was practising extreme austerities. Have you ever known me speak like this?" The five Bhikkhus reflected on this. They came to realize that he had not spoken thus before because he had not attained Higher Knowledge then. They began to

believe that he must have acquired the Supreme Knowledge now to speak to them thus. They replied respectfully, "No, Reverend Sir. We have not known you speak like this before."

Then the Buddha said, "Bhikkhus, I have become a perfect one worthy of the greatest respect (*Arahan*), supremely accomplished like the Buddhas of yore (*Tathāgata*), by my own effort I have thus become fully Enlightened (*Sammāsambuddho*), have gained the Immortal, the Deathless (*anatamadhigatam*). Give ears, Bhikkhus, I shall instruct you and teach you the Doctrine. If you practise as instructed by me, you will in no time and in the present life, through your own direct knowledge, realize, enter upon, and abide in Arahathship, the Nibbāna, the ultimate and the noblest goal of the Holy life for the sake of which clansmen of good families go forth from the household life into homeless one." Thus the Blessed One gave them the assurance again.

The five Bhikkhus got into a receptive mood then and prepared themselves to listen respectfully to what Buddha would say. They awaited with eagerness to receive the knowledge to be imparted to them by the Blessed One.

What we have stated so far constitutes relevant events selected from the Intermediate Epoch of Introductions.

We now come to the Recent Past, introduced by the words "Thus have I heard", which gives an account of how the

Blessed One began to set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma by giving the first Sermon.

The time was the evening of the full moon of Wāso 2551 years ago as counted back from this Burmese era 1324. The sun was about to set but still visible as a bright, red sphere; the moon, bright yellow, was just coming up in the eastern skies. The Commentary on the Mahāvagga Samyutta mentions that the first sermon was given while both the sun and the moon were simultaneously discernible in the sky.

The audience consisted of only the five Bhikkhus from the human world, but the Brahmās numbered 18 crores, and the devas, according to the Milinda Pañhā, innumerable. Thus when the five Bhikkhus together with Brahmās and devas, who were fortunate enough to hear the first Sermon, were respectfully awaiting with rapt attention, the Blessed One began teaching the Dhammacakka Sutta with the words: "*Dve me, Bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitabbā.*"

"Bhikkhus, one who has gone forth from the worldly life should not indulge in these two extreme parts (portions, shares) which will be presently explained (*Ime dve anta*)."

Here, anta according to the Commentary interpretations, connotes grammatically *kotthāsa* or *bhāga* which means share or portion or parts of things. However, in view of the doctrine of the Middle Path taught later in the Sermon, it is appropriate also to render Anta as extreme or end. Again, "part or portion of things" should not be taken as any part or

portion of things, but only those parts that lie on the two opposite ends or extremes of things. Hence, our translation as two extreme parts or portions. The Singhalese or Siamese commentaries render it as *lanaka kotthasa* meaning 'bad portion' or part, somewhat similar to the old Burmese translation of "bad thing or practice."

Thus it should be noted briefly first that "One who has gone forth from the worldly life should not indulge in two extreme parts or practices."

*Katame dwe. Yo cāyam kāmesu kāmasukhalōkānuyogohino, gāmmo, pothujjaniko, anariyo, anatthasamhito. Yo cāyam attakilamathānuyogo-dukkho, anariyo, anatthasamhito.*

What are the two extreme parts or practices? Delighting in desirable sense-objects, one pursues sensuous pleasure, makes efforts to produce such pleasures and enjoys them. This extreme part (practice) is low (bad), vulgar being the habit of village and town folks; common and earthly, being indulged in by ordinary common worldlings; not clean, ignoble, hence not pursued by the Noble Ones; profitless and not pertaining to the true interests one is seeking after. Such pursuit after sensuous pleasures is one extreme part (practice) which should be avoided.

Pleasurable sight, sound, smell, taste and touch constitute desirable sense-objects. Taking delight in such objects of pleasure and enjoying them physically and mentally, one

pursues after these sensuous pleasures. This practice, which forms one extreme part is low, vulgar, common, ignoble and unprofitable and should not, therefore, be followed by one who has gone forth from the worldly life.

The other extreme part or practice which is concerned with attempts to inflict torture on oneself can result only in suffering. Abstaining from food and clothing which one is normally used to is a form of self-torture and is unprofitable. Not being clean nor noble, this practice is not pursued by the Noble Ones. Neither does it pertain to the true interests one is seeking after. Thus practice of self-mortification, the other extreme part of practice, should also be avoided. Avoiding these two extremes, one arrives at the true Middle Path.

## **THUS THE BLESSED ONE CONTINUED**

*"Ete kho, Bhikkhave, ubho ante anupāgamma majjhimā patipadā Tathāgatena abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṃ, ñāḍa karaṃ, upasamāya, abhiññāya, sambodhāya, nibbānāya samvattati."*

Bhikkhus, avoiding these two extreme parts, the Blessed One had gained the Supreme Knowledge of the Middle Path, which produces vision, produces knowledge and leads to tranquillity (stilling of defilements), higher knowledge and Nibbāna, the end of all suffering.

Through avoiding the two extremes.  
Through rejecting wrong paths,



The Middle Path is reached.  
And walking this true Path,  
Enlightenment is gained Nibbāna realized.

How the Middle Path , which is also known as the Noble Eightfold Path, produces vision, knowledge and how it leads to tranquillity and Enlightenment will be dealt with in our sermon next week.

May you all good people in this audience, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this great discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma, together with its Introductions, be able to avoid the wrong path, namely, the two extremes and follow the Noble Eightfold Middle Path, thereby gaining vision and higher knowledge which will soon lead to the realization of Nibbāna, the end of all sufferings.

**[Thus ends the above passage.]**

Now, let's read a well-respected translation of this same sutta by Nanamoli Thera who was translating Pali texts under the eye of Nynatiloka Maha Thera, in the middle of the last century, and ,who, after his early and untimely death, left behind and provided Nyaniponika Maha Thera with a treasury of partially translated texts, the finishing and polishing-up of which became one of the basic tasks during Venerable Bodhi's apprenticeship in his first years under Venerable Nyanaponika, in the Forest Hermitage, [which is

just above the Sri Lankan town of Kandy] and which had been the center of the BPS activities, since 1958.

## **Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma**

Translated by

**Ñanamoli Thera**

© 1995–2009

### **Introduction** -

Not doing any kind of evil,  
Perfecting profitable skill,  
And purifying one's own heart:  
This is the Buddha's dispensation.

— Dhammapada 183

The message of the Awakened Ones, so stated as it is in the *Dhammapada* in the plain terms of good and evil, upholds the same values that every great compassionate religion

shares. But the seed of good has to grow in the soil of truth; and how the tree grows depends upon the nature of the soil in which it is planted, and whence it draws nourishment. With men as the custodians of the true, the fulfillment of the good depends upon how truth is conceived by men to be. By their acts they verify it.

A monk called Gotama, it seems, a son of the Sakyans, who went forth into homelessness from a Sakyan clan, has come... Now a good report of Master Gotama has been spread to this effect: "That Blessed One is such since he is accomplished and fully awakened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable leader of men to be tamed, teacher of gods and men, awakened and blessed... He teaches a True Idea that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, with its own special meaning and phrasing; he exhibits a holy life that is utterly perfect and pure." Now it is good to see such Accomplished Ones.

— MN 41

So it was said of him at the time. But what, then, was the fundamental ground of that teaching? Of the many ways that such a question might be answered, perhaps the simplest and best is this: "He expounded the teaching that is peculiar to Buddhas: suffering, origination, cessation and a path" (MN 56). These four are known as the *Four Noble Truths*. This, with the cognate teaching of No Self, may be said to

constitute the fundamental ground of the teaching of Buddhas; this is what marks them, sets them apart and entitles them to the unique epithet "Buddha."

[The first three discourses display precisely, in all its incomparably serene simplicity, without assumptions, that special fundamental teaching, from which all Buddhism branches, and to which it all points back.] The first discourse displays this fourfold Truth as something to be realized and verified for oneself here and now; the second discloses the contradictions which infect all "self" conceits; the third echoes the second from another angle.

The circumstances that lead up to the discovery of these four Truths, and to the delivery of these discourses, were briefly as follows. The Bodhisatta — as he was known before his awakening — was twenty nine when he left the house life, where he enjoyed the extreme of luxury. He went into "exile" in order to find not a palliative but the true and incontrovertible way out of suffering.

This world has surely happened upon woe, since it is born and ages and dies but to fall from one kind of existence and reappear in another. Yet it knows no escape from this suffering, from aging and death; surely there is an escape from this suffering, from aging and death?

— SN 12.65

He studied and practiced under two of the foremost teachers

of *Samadhi* (concentration, or quiet), and reached the highest meditative attainments possible thereby. But that was not enough ("I was not satisfied with that as a True Idea; I left it and went away." — MN 36) He then spent the best part of the next six years in the practice of asceticism, trying every sort of extreme self-mortification. During this time he was waited on by five ascetics, who hoped that, if he discovered the "deathless state," he would be able to communicate his discovery to them. This too failed.

By this grueling penance I have attained no distinction higher than the human ideal worthy of a noble one's knowing and seeing. Might there be another way to awakening.

— MN 36

He decided to try once more the path of concentration, attained through mindfulness of breathing, though this time not pushed to the extremity of quiet, but guided instead by ordered consideration.

I thought: "While my Sakyan father was busy and I (as a child) was sitting in the shade of a rose-apple tree, then quite secluded from sensual desires, secluded from unprofitable ideas, I had direct acquaintance of entering upon and abiding in the first *jhana*-meditation, which is accompanied by thinking and exploring, with happiness and pleasure born of seclusion. Might that be the way to enlightenment?" And following that, memory came the recognition: "That is the

only way to enlightenment."

— MN 36

He now gave up self-mortification and took normal food again in order to restore to his emaciated body strength sufficient for his purpose. Then the five ascetics left him in disgust, judging that he had failed, and was merely reverting to what he had forsaken. But, now in solitude, his new balanced effort in the harmony of virtue, unified in concentration, and guided by the ordered consideration of insight with mindfulness, at length brought success in discovery of the way to the goal he had sought for so long. ("So I too found the ancient path, the ancient trail, traveled by the Awakened Ones of old." — SN 12.65) Five faculties in perfect balance had brought him to his goal: they were the four, namely energy, mindfulness, concentration, and understanding, with faith in the efficacy of the other four — the five that "merge into the Deathless" (SN 48.57). According to tradition, the "Awakening" took place on the night of Vesakha full moon in the fruitful month of May.

It was upon invitation that he resolved to communicate his discovery to others. For his first audience to whom to divulge it he chose the five ascetics who had shared his self-mortification, but had later left him. They were now at Benares — India's "eternal city" — and so in due course he went there to rejoin them.

Just two months after his awakening he preached his first

sermon — the "Setting Rolling of the Wheel of Truth" or "Bringing into Existence the Blessing of the True Ideal" — with the five ascetics for his hearers. The tradition says it was the evening of the Asalha full moon in July, the day before the rainy season begins, and he began to speak at the moment when the sun was dipping, and the full moon simultaneously rising.

This, his first sermon, made one of his listeners, the ascetic Kondañña, a "stream-enterer," with his attainment of the first of the four progressive stages of realization. The other four soon followed in his footsteps. The second sermon, on the characteristic of Not-Self, was preached to the same five, and it brought them to the fourth and final stage, that of arahatship: "and then" as it is said, "there were six arahats in the world" (Vinaya Mahavagga 1).

These are the first two discourses presented; they were the first two sermons ever uttered by the Buddha. The third, the "Fire Sermon," was delivered some months later to an audience of a thousand ascetics converted from the heaven-bent practice of fire-worship.

All three discourses deal only with understanding (*pañña*), among the faculties mentioned above as required to be balanced. But understanding, in order to reach perfection, has indeed to be aided by the others, or in other words to be founded upon virtue ("habit without conflict"), and to be fortified by concentration (though not necessarily developed

to the fullness of quietism). Thus and not otherwise can it reach its goal of unshakable-liberation.

Now the hearers of all these three discourses were, like the Buddha himself, all ascetics already expert in the techniques and refinements of both virtue (*sila*) and concentration (*samadhi*). So the Buddha had thus no need to tell them about what they already knew very well. Similarly, he had no need to expound the doctrine of action (*kamma*) and its ripening (*vipaka*), with which they were thoroughly acquainted through the ancient teachings.

What he had to do was first to show how it is possible to go astray towards the opposite extremes of sensual indulgence and self-torment; and second to describe the facts, to show how things are, clearly and succinctly enough to stir his hearers to the additional spontaneous movement of understanding essential and indispensable for the final discovery of deliverance, each for himself. ("A 'Perfect One' is one who shows the way." — MN 70)

The discourses speak for themselves. Their incalculable strength lies in their simplicity, and in their actuality. The profound truth is there, discoverable even through the misty medium of translation!

**Setting Rolling the Wheel of Truth:**

**(Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana-sutta) \_**



Thus I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Benares in the Deer Park at Isipatana (the Resort of Seers). There he addressed the bhikkhus of the group of five.

"Bhikkhus, these two extremes ought not to be cultivated by one gone forth from the house-life. What are the two? There is devotion to indulgence of pleasure in the objects of sensual desire, which is inferior, low, vulgar, ignoble, and leads to no good; and there is devotion to self-torment, which is painful, ignoble and leads to no good.

"The middle way discovered by a Perfect One avoids both these extremes; it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to peace, to direct acquaintance, to discovery, to nibbana. And what is that middle way? It is simply the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right intention; right speech, right action, right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. That is the middle way discovered by a Perfect One, which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and which leads to peace, to direct acquaintance, to discovery, to nibbana.

"Suffering, as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering — in short, suffering is the five categories of clinging

objects.

"The origin of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is the craving that produces renewal of being accompanied by enjoyment and lust, and enjoying this and that; in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being.

"Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is remainderless fading and ceasing, giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting, of that same craving.

"The way leading to cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is simply the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right intention; right speech, right action, right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

"'Suffering, as a noble truth, is this.' Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the light, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before. 'This suffering, as a noble truth, can be diagnosed.' Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the light, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before. 'This suffering, as a noble truth, has been diagnosed.' Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the light, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before.

"'The origin of suffering, as a noble truth, is this.' Such was

the vision... 'This origin of suffering, as a noble truth, can be abandoned.' Such was the vision... 'This origin of suffering, as a noble truth, has been abandoned.' Such was the vision... in regard to ideas not heard by me before.

"Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this.' Such was the vision... 'This cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, can be verified.' Such was the vision... 'This cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, has been verified.' Such was the vision... in regard to ideas not heard by me before.

"The way leading to cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this.' Such was the vision... 'This way leading to cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, can be developed.' Such was the vision... 'This way leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, has been developed.' Such was the vision... in regard to ideas not heard by me before.

"As long as my knowing and seeing how things are, was not quite purified in these twelve aspects, in these three phases of each of the four noble truths, I did not claim in the world with its gods, its Maras and high divinities, in this generation with its monks and brahmins, with its princes and men to have discovered the full awakening that is supreme. But as soon as my knowing and seeing how things are, was quite purified in these twelve aspects, in these three phases of each of the four noble truths, then, I claimed in the world with its gods, its Maras and high divinities, in this generation with its monks and brahmins, its princes and

men to have discovered the full awakening that is supreme. Knowing and seeing arose in me thus: 'My heart's deliverance is unassailable. This is the last birth. Now there is no renewal of being.'

That is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus of the group of five were glad, and they approved his words.

Now during this utterance, there arose in the venerable Kondañña the spotless, immaculate vision of the True Idea: "Whatever is subject to arising is all subject to cessation."

When the Wheel of Truth had thus been set rolling by the Blessed One the earthgods raised the cry: "At Benares, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the matchless Wheel of truth has been set rolling by the Blessed One, not to be stopped by monk or divine or god or death-angel or high divinity or anyone in the world."

On hearing the earth-gods' cry, all the gods in turn in the six paradises of the sensual sphere took up the cry till it reached beyond the Retinue of High Divinity in the sphere of pure form. And so, indeed, in that hour, at that moment, the cry soared up to the World of High Divinity, and this ten-thousandfold world-element shook and rocked and quaked, and a great measureless radiance surpassing the very nature of the gods was displayed in the world.

Then the Blessed One uttered the exclamation: "Kondañña knows! Kondañña knows!" and that is how that venerable

one acquired the name, Añña-Kondañña — Kondañña who knows. — SN 56.11

## Notes \_

### First Sutta

THUS I HEARD: Words spoken by Ananda Thera at the First Council when all the Discourses were recited, three months after the Buddha's *Parinibbana*.

PERFECT ONE: The Pali word *Tathagata* has several alternative explanations, including *tatha agato* ("thus come," i.e., by the way followed by all Buddhas) *tatha gato* ("thus gone," i.e., to the discovery of the Four Truths), and *tathalakkhanam agato* ("come to the characteristic of the 'real' or the 'such,' namely the undeceptive truth").

NIBBANA: Pali *nibbana*, Sanskrit *nirvana*. The meaning is "extinction," that is, of the "fires" of lust, hate, and delusion, or, more briefly, of craving and ignorance, and so nibbana is a name for the third Truth as liberation. The word is made up of the prefix *nir* (not) and *vana* (effort of blowing; figuratively, craving); probably the origin was a smith's fire, which goes out or becomes extinguished (*nibbayati*) if no longer blown on by the bellows; but the simile most used is that of a lamp's extinguishment, (*nibbana*), through exhaustion of wick and oil.

NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH: The members of the path are

defined in the *Maha-satipatthana Sutta* and elsewhere as follows:

*Right View* of the Four Truths;

*Right Intention* governed by renunciation (non-sensuality), non-ill-will, and non-cruelty (harmlessness);

*Right Speech* in abstention from lying, slander, abuse and gossip;

*Right Action* in abstention from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct;

*Right Livelihood* for bhikkhus as that allowed by the Rules of the Discipline, and for laymen as avoidance of trading in weapons, living beings, meat, intoxicants, and poisons (AN V);

*Right Effort* to avoid unarisen and to abandon arisen evil, and to arouse unarisen and to develop arisen good;

*Right Mindfulness* of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness as given in the *Maha-satipatthana Sutta* — that is, contemplation of the body as a body, of feelings as feelings, of states of consciousness as states of consciousness, and of ideas as ideas;

*Right Concentration* as (any of) the four *jhana* -meditations.

Collectively the first two members are called Understanding (*pañña*), the next three Virtue (*sila*), and the last three

Concentration (*samadhi*). The Noble Eightfold Path is developed in four progressive stages, namely those of stream-entry (where wrong view ritualism and doubt are ended), once-return (where sensuality and ill will are weakened), non-return (where these two are ended) and Arahantship (where lust for form, lust for the formless, conceit, agitation and ignorance are ended), this being the end of craving which causes suffering.

SUFFERING: the Pali word *dukkha*, made up of *dur* (bad, unsatisfactory) and *kha* (state, "-ness") extends its meaning from the actual suffering present in physical pain or mental grief to any unwelcome state of insecurity, no matter how vague.

TRUTH: Pali *sacca* (compare Sanskrit *satya*), from the root *sa* (to be there to be existent, to have reality, etc.) and so literally a "there-is-ness" in the sense of a state that, unlike a mirage, does not deceive or disappoint. The common sense use of truth is by no means consistent, and the word and the notion must, therefore, be handled with some care, taking it here only as treated by the Buddha.

As to individual philosophers' and divines' individual factional truths — that is to say, "The world is eternal" or "The world is not eternal"; or "The world is finite or the world is infinite"; "The soul is what the body is" or "The soul is one, the body is another"; "After death a Perfect One is" or "After death a Perfect One is not" or "After death a

Perfect One both is and is not" or "After death a Perfect One neither is nor is not" — when a bhikkhu has cast off all of these, has renounced and rejected, banished, abandoned, and relinquished them all, he thus becomes one who has cast off all factional truths.

— AN 4.38

But how is truth to be found which is not factional?

There are five ideas that ripen here and now in two ways. What five? Faith, preference, hearsay-learning, arguing upon evidence, and liking through pondering a view. Now something may have faith well placed in it and yet be hollow, empty, and false; and again something may have no faith placed in it and yet be factual, true, and no other than it seems; and so with preference and the rest. If a man has faith, then, he guards truth when he says, "My faith is thus," but on that account draws no unreserved conclusion, "Only this is true, the other is wrong." In this way he guards the truth; but there is as yet no discovery of truth. And so with preference and the rest.

How is truth discovered? Here a bhikkhu lives near some village or town. Then a householder or his son goes to him in order to test him in three kinds of ideas, in ideas provocative of greed, of hate, and of delusion, wondering, "Are there in this venerable one any such ideas, whereby his mind being obsessed he might not knowing, say 'I know,' unseeing, say 'I see,' or to get others to do likewise, which



would be long for their harm and suffering?" While thus testing him, he comes to find that there are no such ideas in him, and he finds that, "The bodily and verbal behavior of that venerable one are not those of one affected by lust or hate or delusion. But the True Idea that this venerable one teaches is profound, hard to see and discover; yet it is the most peaceful and superior of all, out of reach of logical ratiocination, subtle, for the wise to experience; such a True Idea cannot be taught by one affected by lust or hate or delusion."

It is as soon as by testing him, he comes to see that he is purified from ideas provocative of lust, hate, and delusion, that he then plants his faith in him. When he visits him he respects him, when he respects him he gives ear, one who gives ear hears the True Idea, he remembers it, he investigates the meaning of the ideas remembered. When he does that he acquires a preference by pondering the ideas. That produces interest. One interested is actively committed. So committed, he makes a judgment. According to his judgment he exerts himself. When he exerts himself he comes to realize with the body the ultimate truth, and he sees it by the penetrating of it with understanding. That is how there is discovery of truth. But there is as yet no final arrival at truth. How is truth finally arrived at? Final arrival at truth is the repetition, the keeping in being the development, of those same ideas. That is how there is final arrival at truth."

— MN 95 (abbreviated)

This undeceptive truth so arrived at is the Four Noble Truths, of which it is said:

These four noble truths are what is real, not unreal, not other (than they seem), that is why they are called Noble Truths.

— Sacca-Samyutta

Besides this essential static unity of the four truths as undeceptiveness, the dynamic structure of the transfiguration which they operate in combination is expressed as follows:

Who sees suffering sees also the origin of suffering and the cessation of suffering and the way leading to cessation of suffering (and whichever of the four truths he sees, he sees the three therewith).

— Sacca Samyutta

and:

Of these four noble truths, there is noble truth to be diagnosed, there is noble truth to be abandoned, there is noble truth to be verified, and there is noble truth to be developed (kept in being).

— Sacca Samyutta

CATEGORIES: this represents the Pali word *khandha*

(Sanskrit *skandha*), which is often rendered by "aggregate." The five are as given in the second Discourse. They are headings that comprise all that can be said to arise and that form the object of clinging. "The clinging is neither the same of these five categories which are its objects, nor is it something apart from them; it is will and lust in regard to these five categories of clinging's objects, that is the clinging there." (MN 109) The five are respectively compared to a lump of froth, a bubble, a mirage, a coreless plantain-stem, and a conjuring trick.

**CLINGING:** an unsatisfactory and inadequate, but accepted rendering for the Pali *upadana*. The word means literally "taking up" (*upa* plus *adana*; compare the Latin *assumere* from *ad* plus *sumere*.) By the first metaphor it is used for the assumption and consumption that satisfies craving and produces existence. As such it is the condition *sine qua non* for being. What is consumed (or assumed) is the categories (q.v.). The word "clinging" has to represent this meaning. Clinging's ending is nibbana.

**CRAVING:** though the word *tanha* doubtless once meant "thirst" (compare Sanskrit *trsna*) it is never used in Pali in that sense. With ignorance, it is regarded as a basic factor in the continuity of existence. Craving draws creatures on through greed, and drives them on through hate, while ignorance prevents their seeing the truth of how things are or where they are going. Denial is as much an activity of

craving as assertion is. Denial maintains the denied.

CESSATION: *nirodha*, meaning the cessation of suffering through the cessation of craving, is regardable as the removal of a poison, the curing of a disease, not as the mere denial of it opposed to the assertion of it, or the obstruction (*pativirodha*) of it in conflict with the favoring (*anurodha*) of it (see under *Craving*), since both assertion and denial confirm and maintain, alike, the basic idea or state that is required to be cured. Cessation, therefore, is not to be confounded with mere negativism or nihilism. "Any pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on the world is *gratification* that the world is impermanent, pain-haunted and inseparable from the idea of change is the *disappointment* in the world; the removal of desire and lust is the *cure* (the *escape*) in the world." (AN III) The cure or escape is Cessation: the Buddha would not claim awakening till he had diagnosed how these three things came to be.

KNOWING AND SEEING HOW THINGS ARE: the force of the Pali word *yathabhuta*, (literally how (it has) come to be, how (it) is, how (things) exist lies in the direct allusion to the absolutely relative conditionedness of all being. It is given specially thus: "Seeing 'such is form, such its origin, such its going out,'" and so with the other four categories.

THE VENERABLE KONDAÑÑA: one of the five bhikkhus. See Introduction.

Publisher's note:

The Buddhist Publication Society is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for people of all creeds.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is — a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

Buddhist Publication Society  
P.O. Box 61  
54, Sangharaja Mawatha  
Kandy, Sri Lanka

**[Thus ends the above text.]**

Let's, now, take a critical look at one last book, for wider-information's sake, which was written by Bhikkhu Khantipalo, who, first, explores early Theravadin context and, then, leads into later Buddhist traditions, discussing the Wheel of the Dhamma as analogy and symbol, and visual image within a broader historical context.

## **The Wheel of Birth and Death**

**by**

**Bhikkhu Khantipalo**

The Wheel Publication No. 147/148/149

Copyright © 1970 Buddhist Publication Society

### **Contents**

- . Introduction
- . The History of the Wheel
- . The Translation
- . The Later History of the Tradition
- . The Symbolism and its Practical Meaning

- . The Rim of the Wheel (Dependent Arising)
- . Conclusion
- . Notes

*This indeed has been said by the exalted one:*

Two knowable dhammas should be thoroughly known -  
 - mind and body; two knowable dhammas should be  
 relinquished -- unknowing and craving for existence;  
 two knowable dhammas should be realized -- wisdom  
 and freedom; two knowable dhammas should be  
 developed -- calm and insight.

Eight are the bases of unknowing:

Non-comprehension in dukkha, noncomprehension in  
 dukkha's arising, non-comprehension in dukkha's  
 cessation, non-comprehension in the practice-path  
 leading to dukkha's cessation, non-comprehension in  
 the past, non-comprehension in the future, non-  
 comprehension in past and future, non-comprehension  
 in Dependent Arising.

Eight are the bases of knowledge:

Comprehension in dukkha, comprehension in dukkha's  
 arising, comprehension in dukkha's cessation,

comprehension in the practice-path leading to dukkha's cessation, comprehension in the past, comprehension in the future, comprehension in past and future, plus comprehension in Dependent Arising.

Peace it is and Excellence it is, that is to say -- the stilling of all conditions, the rejection of all substrates (for rebirth), the destruction of craving, passionlessness, cessation, Nibbana.

O Bhikkhus, there is that sphere where is neither earth nor water nor fire nor air, nor the sphere of infinite space; nor the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor the sphere of no-thingness, nor the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; not this world, nor another world, neither the moon nor the sun.

That I say, O bhikkhus, is indeed neither coming nor going nor staying, nor passing-away and not arising. Unsupported, unmoving, devoid of object -- that indeed is the end of dukkha.

And this dhamma is profound, hard to see, hard to awaken to, peaceful, excellent, beyond logic, subtle and to be experienced by the wise.

*-- Translated from the Royal Chanting Book (Suan Mon Chabub Luang) compiled by H.H., the 9th Sangharaja*



*of Siam, Sa Pussadevo, and printed at Mahamakut Press, Bangkok).*

---

## **Introduction**

Upon the Full Moon of the month of Visakha, now more than two thousand five hundred years ago, the religious wanderer known as Gotama, formerly Prince Siddhattha and heir to the throne of the Sakiyan peoples, by his full insight into the Truth called Dhamma which is this mind and body, became the One Perfectly Enlightened by himself.

His Enlightenment or Awakening, called Sambodhi, abolished in himself unknowing and craving, destroyed greed, aversion and delusion in his heart, so that "vision arose, super-knowledge arose, wisdom arose, discovery arose, light arose -- a total penetration into the mind and body, its origin, its cessation and the way to its cessation which was at the same time complete understanding of the "world," its origin, its cessation and the way to its cessation. He penetrated to the Truth underlying all existence. In meditative concentration throughout one night, but after years of striving, from

being a seeker, He became "the One-who-Knows, the One-who-Sees."

When He came to explain His great discovery to others, He did so in various ways suited to the understanding of those who listened and suited to help relieve the problems with which they were burdened.

He knew with his Great Wisdom exactly what these were, even if his listeners were not aware of them, and out of His Great Compassion taught Dhamma for those who wished to lay down their burdens. The burdens which men, indeed, all beings, carry round with them are no different now from the Buddha-time. For then, as now, men were burdened with unknowing and craving. They did not know of the Four Noble Truths nor of Dependent Arising and they craved for fire and poison and were then as now, consumed by fears.

Lord Buddha, One attained to the Secure has said:

*"Profound, Ananda, is this Dependent Arising, and it appears profound. It is through not understanding, not penetrating this law that the world resembles a tangled skein of thread, a woven nest of birds, a thicket of bamboos and reeds, that man does not escape from (birth in) the lower realms of existence, from the states*

*of woe and perdition, and suffers from the round of rebirth."*

The not-understanding of Dependent Arising is the root of all sorrows experienced by all beings.

It is also the most important of the formulations of Lord Buddha's Enlightenment. For a Buddhist, it is, therefore, most necessary to see into the heart of this for oneself.

This is done not by reading about it nor by becoming expert in scriptures, nor by speculations upon one's own and others' concepts, but by seeing Dependent Arising in one's own life and by coming to grips with it through calm and insight in one's "own" mind and body.

*"He who sees Dependent Arising, he sees Dhamma."*

Let us now see how this Teaching is concerned with our own lives. The search of every living being is to find happiness, in whatever state, human or non-human, they find themselves. But what it is really important to know is this: *the factors which give rise to unhappiness, so that they can be avoided; and the factors from which arise happiness, so that they can be cultivated.* This is just another way of stating the Four Noble Truths. In the first half of this statement there is *unhappiness* or

what is never satisfactory, called in Pali language, Dukkha.

This Dukkha is the first Noble Truth which we experience *all the time*, usually without noticing it, which does not make the dukkha any less!

First, there is *occasional dukkha*: birth, old age, disease and death, for these events usually do not compose the whole of life.

Then we have *frequent dukkha*: being united with what one dislikes, being separated from what one likes, not getting what one wants, and this is everyday experience.

Finally, as a summary of all kinds of dukkha there is *continuous dukkha*: the five grasped-at groups, that is to say body, feeling, perceptions, volitions (and other mental activity) and consciousness, the components of a human being.

Explanation of these in full would take too long here but all the readers are provided with these kinds of dukkha in themselves. They should look to see whether these facts of existence are delightful or not. This Dhamma "should be thoroughly known" in one's own

person and life, that is where the first Noble Truth may be discovered.

Then *the factors which give rise to unhappiness* were mentioned. Here again one's person and life should be investigated. Now, when living creatures are killed intentionally by me, when I take what is not given, when I indulge in wrong conduct in sexual relations, when I speak false words and when I take intoxicating drinks and drugs producing carelessness -- now are these things factors for happiness or unhappiness?

When I covet the belongings of others, when I allow ill-will to dwell in my heart, and when I have as the tenants of my heart ignorance, delusion, and views which lead astray -- is this for my welfare or destruction?

There are many ways of describing these factors which make for unhappiness, but all of them derive from unknowing and craving which are just two sides of the same thing.

This is the Second Noble Truth of the Arising of Dukkha. When craving is at work, when unknowing 'clouds' one's understanding, then, one is sure to experience dukkha.

Lord Buddha instructs us for our own benefit and for the happiness of others, that this craving "should be relinquished."

Now *happiness* in the second half of the statement above can be of many kinds. Two kinds dependent upon conditions can be seen illustrated by the world, while one kind, unsupported by conditions "should be realized" in one's own heart. We are all looking for happiness so let us see what is needed for it.

First, there is materially produced happiness. This is born of possessions and jugglery with conditions of life "out there." Called *amisa-sukha* in Pali, this happiness is most uncertain; for all the factors supporting it are subject to instability and change. Moreover, they are out in the world and not in one's own heart, so that they call for expert jugglery to save one from *dukkha*. And failure and disappointment cannot be avoided if one goes after this sort of happiness. So this sort of happiness is short-lived and precarious.

A great improvement on this is the happiness which comes from practicing Dhamma, called non-material happiness or *niramisa-sukha*. This kind of happiness is made sure whenever a person performs wholesome kamma, such as doing the following ten things: giving,

moral conduct and mind development, reverence, helpfulness, dedicating meritorious acts to others, rejoicing in the meritorious acts of others, hearkening to Dhamma, teaching Dhamma and setting upright one's views.

People who practice this Dhamma, purifying their hearts in this way, are sure to reap happiness. But this happiness, though more lasting than the first, is not to be relied upon forever. As a fruit of it, one may dwell among the gods for aeons, or be born as a very fortunate man but even the gods have to pass away, let alone man. And the fruits of kamma, good or evil, are impermanent, so it cannot be relied upon to produce a permanent happiness.

This can only be found by removing entirely the cause for dukkha: when craving is uprooted no growth of dukkha can take place. On the contrary, with purity, compassion and wisdom one has reached the Supreme Happiness of Nibbana which is stable, indestructible and never subject to changing conditions. This is the Third Noble Truth of the Cessation of Dukkha by the removal of its cause.

A good deal of hard work is needed to get to this "which should be realized," and that work must be done along the right lines, hence the Fourth Noble Truth.

This is called the Truth of the Path, "which should be cultivated." It comprises elements of wisdom: Right View and Right Attitude; elements of moral conduct: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood; and elements of meditation: Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Collectedness. These will not be explained in detail here.[1]

It is certain that any one who practices Moral Conduct, Collectedness and Wisdom in his life has the conditions which sustain happiness. Dependent on his practice, he may achieve Dhamma-happiness or the Supreme Happiness, according to the degree he practices, for the latter requires well-developed meditation both in calm and in insight.

These Four Noble Truths -- Dukkha, Cause, Cessation, and Path -- are the heart of the Dhamma and they are in the heart of every man who cares to see them. From their seeing and understanding comes happiness but by trying to escape them only more misery is born.



These Truths are illustrated by the formula of Dependent Arising which is found elaborated in various ways. The simplest form is:

*Craving being, dukkha is; by the arising of craving, dukkha arises; craving not being, dukkha is not; by the cessation of craving, dukkha ceases.*

*But Dependent Arising can be given in much more detailed ways than this. The important principle to understand is that whatever is experienced by us, all of that arises due to many conditions. An aspect which grows in size from birth throughout youth, which develops certain characteristics in maturity, and as old age creeps on becomes infirm in various ways, and finally dies.*

*The processes which govern this growth and decline are of great complexity and interdependence. The body, to keep going at all, needs clothes, food, shelter and medicines at least. But once the internal chemistry (also dependently originated) starts the process leading to old age and death, none of the exterior supporting conditions can do more than retard the process for a little while.*

*The body, as a whole, does not arise from "no-cause" (the physical particles and kamma being its immediate*

*causes); nor is it derived from one cause. If examined, nothing which we experience arises from only one or no cause at all; on the contrary our experiences all arise dependently. Sight is actually dependent on the eye as base, the object to be seen, and the operation of eye-consciousness. (There are other factors that also contribute: light, air,...) Similarly, there is ear, sound, ear-consciousness; nose, smell, nose-consciousness; tongue, taste, tongue-consciousness; body, touch, body-consciousness; followed by mind, thoughts, mind-consciousness. All of our experience falls within these eighteen elements and there is nothing which we know outside them.*

It is also important to understand that much of what one experiences arising dependently is the fruit of one's own actions. The happiness one feels and the dukkha one feels, although sometimes brought about by events in the physical world (landslides, earthquakes, a sunny or a rainy day), is very often brought about-by one's own past intentional actions or kamma. And, in the present time, with each deliberate action, one performs more kammas which will come to fruit as experience in the future.

So, if one wants to experience the fruits of happiness, the seeds of happiness must be planted now. They may

come to fruition immediately, in this life, or in a future existence. We make ourselves, we are the creators of ourselves, no one else has a hand in this creation. And the Lord of Creation is no other than our Ignorance or Unknowing. He is the Creator of this Wheel of Samsara, of continued and infinitely varied forms of dukkha, dependent on our own actions. And this Lord resides in the hearts of all such who may be called "ordinary-men." We shall return to this in more detail later.

[Here, there is shift in perspective from the esoterical to the visual in the structure of the text, as Bhikkhu Khantipalo leaves the realm of traditional Theravada texts and begins to deal with the idea of the wheel within a wider context of Buddhist history.]

## **The History of the Wheel**

Dependent Arising is explained many times and in many different connections in the Discourses of Lord Buddha, but He has not compared it to a wheel.

This simile is found in the Visuddhimagga ("The Path of Purification") and in the other commentarial literature. Although Theravada tradition has many [textual] references to this simile, it does not seem to have been depicted [visually] at all.

But in Northern India and especially in Kashmir, the Sarvastivada school[2] was strongly established and besides producing a vast literature upon Discipline and the Further Dhamma (Vinaya and Abhidhamma), they produced also a way of depicting a great many important Buddhist teachings by this picture of the Wheel which is the subject of the present essay.

In Pali it is the *bhava-cakka* or *Samsara-cakka*, which is variously rendered in English as the Wheel of Life, the Wheel of Becoming or the Wheel of Rebirth.

In Sarvastivada collections of stories about Lord Buddha and his disciples (known as *Avadana*), there is one which opens with a story of the wheel. Readers will observe that the story refers to Lord Buddha's lifetime in which he says that He has authorized the \*painting of this picture, [See End Note.] as well as laying down its contents. It is certain that in the Buddha-time painting was well known (it is mentioned several times in the Discourses and the Discipline), while the other facts given in this short introductory story are quite in accord with the spirit of the Pali Discourses. Also, the collection of stories in which this account is contained was compiled, according to some scholars, before the Christian era. So if one does not [actually] believe that this painting was ordained by Lord Buddha, still it has

an age of two thousand years, a venerable tradition indeed. Of all "teaching-aids" this expression of Buddhist skillful-means (*upaya-kosalla*), must surely be the oldest. Now let us turn to the story.

## **The Translation**

"Lord Buddha was staying at Rajagaha,[3] in the Bamboo Grove, at the Squirrels' Feeding-place. Now, it was the practice of Venerable Mahamoggallana to frequent the hells for a certain time, then the animal-kingdom, also to visit the ghosts, the gods and men. Having seen all the sufferings to be found in the hells which beings there experience as they arise and pass away, such as maiming, dismembering and so forth; having witnessed how animals kill and devour others, how ghosts are tormented by hunger and thirst, how the gods lose (their heavenly state), fall (from it), are spoiled and come to their ruin, and how men crave and come to naught but thwarted desires, -- having seen all this, he returned to Jambudipa (India) and reported this to the four assemblies.

Whatever (venerable one) had a fellow-bhikkhu or a bhikkhu-pupil leading the holy life with dissatisfaction, he would take him to Venerable Mahamoggallana

(whilst thinking): 'The Venerable Mahamoggallana will exhort and teach him well'. And (truly) the Venerable Mahamoggallana would exhort and teach him well. And, then such (dissatisfied-bhikkhus) would again lead the holy life with keen interest, even distinguishing themselves with the higher attainments since they had been taught and exhorted so effectively by the Venerable Mahamoggallana.

"At that time (when the Lord stayed at Rajagaha), the Venerable Mahamoggallana was surrounded by the four assemblies consisting of bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, pious laymen and women.

"Now, the illustrious Enlightened Ones who Know, (also) ask questions. Thus, Lord Buddha asked the Venerable Ananda (why the second of his foremost disciples was surrounded by the four assemblies). Venerable Ananda, then, related about Venerable Mahamoggallana's experiences and said that he instructed discontented bhikkhus with success.

"(The Lord replied:) 'The Elder Moggallana or a bhikkhu like him cannot be at many places (at the same time for teaching people). Therefore, in the (monastery) gateways a wheel having five sections should be made.'

"Thus the Lord laid down that a wheel with five sections should be made (whereupon it was remarked:) 'But the bhikkhus do not know what sort of wheel should be made'.

"The Lord explained: 'The five bourns should be represented -- the hellish bourn, that of the animal kingdom, of ghosts, of men, and the bourn of the gods. In the lower portion (of the wheel), the hells are to be shown, together, with the animal-kingdom and the realm of the ghosts, while in the upper portion gods and men should be represented. The four continents should also be depicted, namely, Pubbavideha, Aparagoyana, Uttarakuru and Jambudipa.[4] In the middle, greed, aversion and delusion must be shown, a dove symbolizing greed,[5] a snake symbolizing aversion, and a hog, delusion. Furthermore, the Buddhas are to be painted (surrounded by their) halos pointing out (the way to) Nibbana. Ordinary beings should be shown as by the contrivance of a water-wheel they sink (to lower states) and rise up again. The space around the rim should be filled with (scenes teaching) the twelve links of Dependent Arising in the forward and reversed order. (The picture of the Wheel) must show clearly that everything, all the time, is swallowed by

impermanence and the following two verses should be added as an inscription:

*Make a start, leave behind (the wandering-on)  
firmly concentrate upon the Buddha's Teaching.*

*As He, Leader like an elephant, did Nalagiri rout,  
so should you rout and defeat the hosts of Death.*

*Whoever in this Dhamma-Vinaya will go his way  
ever vigilant and always striving hard,*

*Can make an end of dukkha here  
and leave behind Samsara's wheel of birth and death.*

*"Thus, at the instance of the bhikkhus, it was laid down  
by the Lord that the Wheel of Wandering-on (in birth  
and death) with five sections should be made in the  
gateways (of monasteries).*

*"Now brahmins and householders would come and  
ask: 'Reverend Sir, what is this painting about?'*

*"Bhikkhus would reply: 'We also do not know!'*

*"Thereupon the Lord advised: 'A bhikkhu should be  
appointed (to receive) visitors in the gateway and to  
show them (the mural).'*



*"Bhikkhus were appointed without due consideration (to be guest-receiver), foolish, erring, confused persons without merit.*

*(At this, it was objected:) 'They themselves do not know, so how will they explain (the Wheel-picture) to visiting brahmins and householders?'*

*"The Lord said: 'A competent bhikkhu should be appointed.'"[6]*

## **The Later History of the Tradition**

Tibetan legend says that Lord Buddha outlined the Wheel with grains of rice while walking with bhikkhus in a rice field. However this may be, in India, at least in all the Sarvastivada monasteries, where this painting will have adorned the gateways, arousing deep emotions in the hearts of those who knew its meaning, and great curiosity in others. [It is a measure of how great was the destruction of the Buddhist religion in India that not a single example survives anywhere, since no gateways to temples are known to have survived. Although a solitary painting in Ajanta cave, number seventeen, may perhaps be some form of this wheel.]

In the translation above, the pictures for representing the twelve links of Dependent Arising were not given and it is said that these were supplied from the scriptures by Nagarjuna, a great Buddhist Teacher (some of whose verses are quoted below).

From India the pattern of this wheel was taken to Samye, the first Tibetan monastery, by Bande Yeshe, and there it was the Sarvastivada lineage of ordination which was established. The tradition of painting this wheel thus passed to Tibet, where, due to climatic conditions, it was painted in the vestibule of the temple, there to strike the eyes of all who entered.

Tibetan tradition speaks of two kinds of Wheel: the old-style and the new-style. The old-style is based upon the text translated above, while the new-style introduces new features. The great reformer, Je Tsongkhapa (b. 1357 C.E.), founder of the Gelugpa (the Virtuous Ones, the school of which H.H. the Dalai Lama is the head), gave authority for the division of the Wheel into six instead of five, and for drawing the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in the guise of a Buddha in each of the five non-human realms.

Both these features may be seen upon the drawing of the Tibetan-style Wheel. The sixth realm is that of the

titans (asura) who war against the gods of the sensual-sphere heavens. These troublesome and demonic characters are included in a separate part of the world of the gods in my drawing. The introduction of a Buddha-figure into each realm illustrates the universal quality of a Buddha's great compassion, for Avalokitesvara it is the embodiment of enlightened compassion.

The writer has preferred to retain the old-style representation according to the text as it agrees with Theravada textual renderings.

The terrors and violence of samsara, which are with us all the time, may be seen plainly in the ravishment of Tibet by the Chinese invaders. Tibetan artists have kept this tradition alive to the present day and still paint under difficulties as refugees in India.

This ancient way of presenting Dhamma deserves to be more widely known and appreciated, and Buddhist shrines could well be equipped with representations of it in the present day, to remind devotees of the nature of this whirling wheel of birth and death.

## **The Symbolism and its Practical Meaning**

### **The Hub**

We now turn to the pictures of the Bhava-cakka accompanying this book.

[Unfortunately missing in this e-document, though an actual picture is not really necessary for us to get the visual imagery through a close reading of the text. Read the textual description as a prose poem and reap the advantage of the structural development of the text, which is, actually, much less confusing to conceptualize than a lot of confusing visual images, seen all at once, with no structural indication of where the eye should go. A copy of such a Wheel Diagram is not hard to find, for example, as a postcard, poster or Internet image.]

One is from a Tibetan original after Waddell. The second picture described is a modern version executed by the author [Khantipalo], in which the scenes and figures have been given a contemporary coloring.

The hub of this painting is the central point for us who live in the realm of samsara, so it is the best point to start a description of the symbolism.

In this center circle, [there are] a cock, a snake and a hog wheel around, each having in its mouth the tail of the animal in front. These three, representing Greed, Aversion and Delusion which are the three roots of all

evil, are depicted in the center because they are the root causes for experience in the wandering on.

When they are present in our hearts then we live afflicted in the transitory world of birth and death but when they are not there, having been destroyed by wisdom or pañña, developed in Dhamma-practice, then we find rest, the unshakable peace of Nibbana.

It is notable that Tibetan paintings show these creatures against a blue ground, showing that even these afflictions of mind, although powerful, have no real substance and are void, as are all the other elements of our experience.

The cock of fiery yellow-red represents greed (*lobha*). This greed includes every desire for all kinds of "I wish, I want, I must have, I will have" and extends from the violent passion for gross physical form, through attachments to views and ideas, all the way to the subtle clinging to spiritual pleasures experienced by meditators. The color of the cock, a fiery red, is symbolic of the fact that the passions burn those who indulge in them. Passions and desires are hot and restless, just like tongues of flame, and never allow the heart to experience the cool peace of non-attachment.

The cock is chosen as a symbol of greed because as an animal it is observed to be full of lust and vanity.

In the cock's beak there is the tail of a green snake indicating that people who are not able to "satisfy" their ocean-like greeds and lusts tend to become angry. Aversion (*dosa*) of any form springs up when we do not get what we want, or when we get what we do not want.

This also can be very subtle, from aversion to mental states ranging through hostile thoughts against other beings, to expressions of inward resentment finding their way out in untruthful, malicious or angry words, or as physical violence. The greenness of the snake indicates the coldness, the lack of sympathy with others, while the snake itself is an animal killing other beings by poison and strangulation, which is exactly what aversion does to those who let it grow in their hearts. Our lives can be corrupted by this venomous beast unless we take very good care to remove it.

At the bottom of the picture there is a heavy hog, the tail of which is chewed by aversion's snake, while, in turn, it champs upon the tail feathers of greed's cock. This heavy hog is black in color and represents delusion (*moha*). This black hog, like its brethren everywhere,

likes to sleep for long, to root for food in filth and generally to take no care at all over cleanliness.

It is a good symbol for delusion which prevents one from understanding what is advantageous and what is deleterious to oneself. Its heaviness is that sluggishness of mind and body which it induces in people, called variously stupidity, dullness, boredom; but worry and distraction with skeptical doubt also arise from this delusion-root. One who is overwhelmed by delusion does not know why he should restrain himself from evil, for he can see neither his own benefit with wisdom, nor the benefit of others by compassion -- all is blanketed by delusion.

He does not know, or does not believe that kamma (intentional actions) have results according to kind. Or he has wrong views which lead him astray from the highway of Dhamma.

When people do not get what they want, using either greed or aversion, then, they turn dull and the pain of their desire is dulled by delusion. From this black hog are born the fiery cock and the cold green snake.

These three beasts, none more dangerous anywhere, are shown each biting the tail of the other, meaning that really they are inseparable, so that one cannot have, say,

greed, without the other monsters lurking in its train. Even characters which are rooted predominantly in one of these three, have the other two present, while most so-called "normal" people have a sort of unhealthy balance of these three in their hearts, ever ready to influence their actions when a suitable situation occurs.

These three beasts revolve endlessly in the heart of the ordinary-man (*puthujjana*) and ensure that he experiences plenty of dukkha. One should know for one-self whether these beasts control one's own heart, or not.

## **The First Ring**

Out from the innermost circle, the first ring is divided into two (not shown at all upon the Tibetan version illustrated here), one half with a white background and the other having a black background.

In the former, four people are seen ascending: the bhikkhu holding a Dhamma-light goes on in front, being followed by a white-robed nun (*upasika*), after which, come a man and a woman in contemporary dress. The four of them represent the Buddhist Community made up of monks, nuns, laymen and



laywomen. They are representative of anyone practicing the path of good conduct in mind, speech and body.

They represent as well two classes of persons: "going from dark to light" and "going from light to light." In the first case, they are born in poor circumstances and have few opportunities due to past evil kamma but in spite of this, they make every effort to practice Dhamma for their own good and others' happiness. Thus they go towards the light, for the fruit of their present kamma will be pleasant and enjoyable. The latter class: "going from light to light," are those people who have attained many benefits with plentiful opportunities in their present life, due to having done much good kamma in the past. In the present, they continue with their upward course devoting themselves to further practice of Dhamma in their lives.

What is this Dhamma-practice? There are two lists both of ten factors which could be explained here but the space required would be too great for more than a summary. The first list is called the ten Skilled Kamma-paths,[7] three of which pertain to bodily action, four to speech and three to mental action. "Paths" here means "ways of action" and "skillful" means "neither for the deterioration of one's own mind nor for the harm of

others." The bodily actions which one refrains from are: destroying living creatures, taking what is not given, and wrong conduct in sexual desires. In speech, the four actions which should be avoided are: false speech, slanderous speech, harsh speech and foolish chatter. The three actions of mind which should be avoided are: covetousness, ill-will, and wrong views. Anyone who restrains himself from these ten, practices a skillful path, a white path which accords with the first steps of training in Dhamma.

The other ten factors are called the Ten Ways of making Puñña[8] (meaning actions purifying the heart). They have a different range from the first list of ten, being divided into three basic ways and seven secondary ones. The basic factors are giving (*dana*), moral conduct (*sila*), and mind development (*bhavana*), while the remaining seven are counted as aspects of these three: reverence, helpfulness, dedicating one's puñña to others, rejoicing in other's puñña, listening to Dhamma, teaching Dhamma, and straightening out one's views. These actions lead to uprightness, skillful conduct and to the growth in Dhamma of oneself, as well as the benefit of others.

Those who tread upon this white path going toward the light are able to be born in two bourns: either as men, or

as "shining-ones" -- the gods in the three sorts of heavens of sensuality, subtle form, and formlessness. A life of good practice is thus usually followed by a life in one of these two bourns, called *sugati* or the good bourns.

But Lord Buddha does not declare that *everyone* who has led such a life is necessarily born there. This depends not only upon the intensity of their Dhamma-practice but *also* upon the vision which arises at the time of death. Through negligence at the last moment, one can slip into the three evil bourns difficult to get out of.

The round of Samsara is very dangerous, even for those who lead almost blameless lives. More of this below. To be born in the two good bourns is the fruiting of puñña or skillful kamma and the more purified one's heart, the higher and more pleasant will be one's environment.

In the dark half of the ring, naked beings are tumbling downwards in disorder. Their nakedness symbolizes lack of shame in doing evil and their disorder shows the characteristic of evil to cause disintegration and confusion. "Downwards" means that they are falling, by

the commission of sub-human actions, to sub-human states of existence.

In some Tibetan versions they are chained together and pulled downwards by a female demon, who squats at the bottom. This demoness is craving of tanha (a noun of female gender). This craving is, of course, not outside those who follow the path of evil but in their own hearts.

On this path there are two sorts of persons, those "going, from light to dark" and those "going from dark to dark." The former have good opportunities in this life but do not make use of them, or else use them for evil ends without laying up any further store. Instead, they prefer from delusion to store up evil now which will result in fear and distress in future. Those who go from dark to dark do not have even the advantages of the former group for they are born in conditions of deprivation due to past evil kamma and then, driven on by the fruit of suffering received by them, they commit more evil.

The Ten Unskillful Kamma-paths are the ways along which they walk: destroying living creatures, taking what is not given, wrong conduct in sexual desires; false speech, slanderous speech, harsh speech, foolish

chatter; covetousness, ill-will and wrong-views. They do not delight in making puñña but are by nature, mean, immoral, undeveloped in mind, proud, selfish, grasp at possessions, envious, never listen to Dhamma and certainly never teach it, while their hearts are ridden with confused and contradictory views and ideas.

For their pains, having pursued evil, these beings upon their death, already having destroyed "humanness" in themselves, fall down to the three lower states which are called the Evil Bourns (*duggati*). These are, in order of deterioration and increase of suffering: the hungry ghosts, the animals, and the hell-wraiths. Truly a case of:

*do good, good fruit*

*do bad, bad fruit*

*as the Thai proverb says. These two half-circles are also an illustration of the refrain which closes every one of the Avadana stories: "Thus bhikkhus, completely black kamma bears completely evil effects; completely white kamma bears completely good effects; and composite kamma bears composite effects. Therefore, bhikkhus, abstain from doing completely black kamma and composite kamma; strive to do kamma completely white. Thus, O bhikkhus, must you train yourselves."*

## **The Five Divisions**

The two good bourns and the three evil bourns contain the whole range of possibilities for rebirth. In most Tibetan illustrations, including the one shown [in the book], a sixth bourn is given, by dividing the devas and asuras (the gods and anti-gods or titans). In this section the five, or six bourns will be described, together with the ways to get to them. Birth in any bourn is a fruit or effect, and here we shall see the causes.

A person who has done evil persistently, or even one heavy crime, is likely to see at the time of death a vision, either relating to his past evil actions, or else to the bourn which his past evil actions or kamma have prepared for him. When his physical body is no longer a suitable basis to support life, his mind creates a body ghostly and subtle in substance, which then and there begins to experience one of the evil bourns. But in case his kamma drives him to be born as an animal, there is the vision of animals copulating, and he is dragged into the womb or egg of those animals.

Kamma which leads to birth as an animal is a strong interest in the things which mankind shares with the animals, that is, eating, drinking and sex. If a man

strengthens the animal in himself, to become an "animal-man," he can expect only to be born as an animal. Human beings interested in only these things, strengthening the Evil Root of Delusion in their minds, have already the minds of animals. There is no essential "man-ness" which can prevent such a catastrophe, for no unchanging human soul exists.

If a man wishes to guard himself against this, he must protect the conditions for humanity (*manussa-dhamma*) which are the Five Precepts. Sinking below the level of conduct of these precepts, is to sink into the sub-human levels. Once rebirth as an animal has taken place it is by no means easy to gain human birth again, as Venerable Nagarjuna has written:

*More difficult is it to rise  
from birth as animal to man,  
Than for the turtle blind to see  
the yoke upon the ocean drift;  
Therefore, do you being a man  
practice Dhamma and gain its fruits.*

-- L.K. 59 ("*The Letter of Kindheartedness*" by Acarya Nagarjuna, in "*Wisdom Gone Beyond*", Social Service

*Association Press of Thailand, Phya Thai Road,  
Bangkok, Siam.)*

Kamma dragging one to the hells, which are the most fearful and miserable states, are actions involving hatred, killing, torture and violence generally. People lead themselves to experience hell because they have made the Evil Root of Aversion very strong within themselves.

On the other hand, those who have strengthened the Evil Root of Greed while they were men, having been mean, possessive and selfish, are liable to arise as spirits with strong cravings forever unsatisfied, for which reason they are known as "hungry" ghosts.

However, it does sometimes happen that one who has led an evil life turns sincerely to religion upon his deathbed. When this occurs, with his mind centered upon Dhamma and purified by faith, a person like this may be reborn among men, even arise among the devas. That evil kamma which has been done though it may have no chance to fructify in those good bourns, remains a potential for creating very unpleasant results whenever conditions are favorable to its fruition. The reverse of this may happen, as when good and noble men become distracted at death and so remember some



small evil done, or see a vision of evil done in some past life, the result of which is the arising of unwholesome consciousness leading to the evil bourns.

It is more usual for one who has followed the path of white deeds to be born as a man or among the gods. The basis for the former is the practice of the Five Precepts which constitute the level of humanness. They are in brief: refraining from destroying living creatures; refraining from taking what is not given; refraining from wrong conduct in sexual desires; refraining from false speech, and refraining from distilled and fermented intoxicants which cause carelessness. Those who refrain from such things, having really lived as men, having strengthened the base of humanness in their own hearts, are born again as men well-endowed with the riches of fine qualities; of varied opportunities, as well as with a wealth of worldly goods.

The path to the heavens is cultivated by those who make special efforts to live with purity and self-restraint, exercising loving-kindness toward all beings and so purifying their minds to some extent through meditation. At the time of death, having fulfilled the ten Skillful Kamma paths and the ten Ways of Making Puñña, the heart will be joyful and peaceful to varying degrees, which will result in the experience of arising in

one of the many heavenly levels according to the degree of purity and concentration which has been attained.

All these possibilities are within the scope of the mind, the quality of which can be changed in this way or that by kamma, good or bad. From the type of mind which performs the duty of relinking-consciousness at birth, is determined the kind of sense-organs possessed by a being, and hence the kind of world experienced by him. Perception varies -- as the famous Buddhist verse puts it:

*As a water-vessel is  
variously perceived by beings:*

*Nectar to celestials,  
is for a man plain drinking-water,*

*While to the hungry ghost it seems  
a putrid ooze of pus and blood,*

*Is for the water serpent-spirits  
and the fish a place to live in,*

*While it is space to gods who dwell  
in the sphere of infinite space.*

*So any object, live or dead,  
within the person or without --*

*Differently is seen by beings  
according to their fruits of kamma.*

From such verses we catch a glimpse of the mysterious depths of the mind, and of the truth of the Exalted Buddha's words which open the Dhammapada:

*Before all dhammas goes the mind; Mind is the chief,  
mind-made are they...*

To come now to a description of the picture. In the world of the gods or "shining-ones" (deva, upper right, but topmost in the Tibetan version), the gilded palaces and glittering jewel trees of the gods of sensuality are shown in the lower part of the drawing. The Tibetan picture shows more details of these superlatively beautiful worlds in which there is also a kind of subtle sexual relationship. Being based upon sensuality, as this world of men is, these devas must also pay the price for this -- which is conflict. This conflict is an ever-recurring battle with the asuras, the anti-gods or titans who have in past times fallen through their quarrelsome nature from the heavens and who now enviously try to invade the celestial realms. In my picture, they share a segment of the world of gods and they are equipped

with ancient and modern weapons and are in the dress of soldiers. But they do not only battle with the gods but also among themselves and so a bit of insubordination is depicted as well. The Tibetan picture gives them a world to themselves among the frontiers of which they are fleeing from the victorious heavenly hosts led upon a very large elephant by Sakka, the lord of the sensual-realm gods. These titans only understand force, so the Buddha shown in their world bears a sword with which to duly impress them, after which they may be able to hear a little Dhamma. By contrast, the Buddha appearing among the gods bears a lute, in order to lure them into listening to Dhamma sung in exquisite strains, for it was believed that they would not be interested in mere spoken words!

Above the battling of the sensual-realm gods dwell the Brahmas of subtle form and of formlessness, experiencing meditative happiness, serene joy, or sublime equanimity. The Tibetan picture also shows a magnificent Brahma world palace in the upper lefthand corner. About all this heavenly splendor, Ven. Nagarjuna warns us:

*"Great King, although celestial worlds  
have pleasures great to be enjoyed,  
Greater the pain of dying there.*

*From often contemplating this  
a noble person does not wish  
For transient heavenly joys."*

-- L.K. 98

He goes on to speak of the devas as those

*"Who, dying from celestial realms  
with no remaining merit fruits*

*Must take up their abode  
according to the karma past, --*

*With birth as beast or hungry ghost,  
or else arise in hell."*

-- L.K. 101

The Brahmas of formlessness dwelling for unthinkable ages within the realms of infinite space, infinite consciousness, no-thingness, and neither-perception-nor-non-perception being quite without any form, naturally, cannot be shown, but even their states are not eternal, but come to an end.

*Among men* (upper left in both pictures), the progress of the human-being is shown: birth (a perambulator; old-age, sickness (hospital sign) and death (a bloated corpse

in a graveyard), but with this basis of dukkha, men can also understand Dhamma.

Lord Buddha, the foremost among men, sits highest in the human world teaching Dhamma in a forest grove to his first five disciples. In the original version which my [own more modern] picture follows, He is shown only in the human world, thus emphasizing the value of human birth, during which it is possible to gain insight into Dhamma. The religious aspirations of man are represented by a Hindu temple, a Christian church and Muslim mosque, while a war and a bar show his tendencies towards aversion and greed. The Tibetan picture shows several mundane activities such as plowing the fields, while people climb towards the top of the picture where there is a temple in which they can listen to Dhamma. In the center stands a Buddha carrying the almsbowl and staff, showing to men the way of peacefulness leading to Sublime Peace of Nibbana. This is shown in my picture by the sure Dhamma-path which issues from the mouth of the Exalted Buddha. Upon this way a bhikkhu lends a hand to help householders out of the realms of samsara, leading them forward upon the Eightfold Path. Venerable Nagarjuna has this to say:

*"Who though he has been born a man  
yet gives himself to evil ways,*

*More foolish is he than the fool  
who fills with vomit, urine, dung*

*Golden vessels jewel-adorned --  
harder man's birth to gain than these."*

*-- L.K. 60*

*Hungry ghosts or peta (lower right in my picture, lower left in the Tibetan) crave for food and drink but find that it turns to fire or foul things when they are able to get it. I have shown a huge moon and a tiny sun, as the verse says:*

*"From want of merit, hungry ghosts  
in summer find the moon is hot,  
in winter sun is cold;*

*Barren are the trees they see  
and mighty rivers running on  
dry up whene'er they look at them."*

*-- L.K. 95*

Then there is a sky-going peta being torn to shreds by birds, as seen by Venerable Moggallana; one "resting" upon rocks under a leafless tree which is the simile used

by the Exalted Buddha in the suttas to symbolize the sole comforts of this realm, and two ghosts sunk in the water up to their lower lips, their gaping mouths just a little too high to get any of it. The state of Tantalus was obviously birth among the hungry ghosts! The ghosts all have bloated bellies, extremely slender necks and "needle-mouths." Their sufferings are illustrated further in the Tibetan. They have to bear intense cravings for food and drink and then more sufferings when they manage to get a little of it, for it turns to swords and knives in their bellies. The Buddha in this "abundantly painful" realm carries celestial food to allay the ghosts' cravings. In the words of Ven. Nagarjuna:

*"Lord Buddha has declared the cause  
why beings come to birth as ghosts,  
torments to endure*

*For when as men they gave no gifts,  
or giving gave with avarice --*

*They ghostly kamma made."*

*-- L.K. 97*

*The animals, in the Tibetan illustration, are being encouraged in the Dhamma by a Buddha holding a book, illustrating the point that animals have little*



ability to understand and are in need of wisdom. My picture illustrates the sufferings of animal-life as described by Ven. Nagarjuna:

*"Then should you come to birth as beast  
many are the pains --*

*Killing, disease and gory strife  
binding, striking too.*

*Void of peaceful, skillful acts  
beasts slay and kill without remorse.*

*Some among beasts are slain because  
they produce pearls, or wool, or bones,  
or valued are for meat or hide.*

*Others are pressed to do men's work  
by blows or sticks or iron hook,  
by whipping them to work."*

*-- L.K. 89-90*

In the animal-world where feelings experienced are "painful, sharp and severe," one can see the dukkha, the hunter and the hunted, in my illustration. The birds of the air are being shot while a vulture is feeding on its prey. A wasp struggling in the net of a spider represents the horrors of life among the insects, while among the

larger animals, a buffalo is being forced to work, a deer is being shot and a lion feeds upon his prey. The fish fare no better and are shown being devoured by larger fish, or else hooked and netted by men. Slithering down the division of this world from the hells, there is a gecko. The Tibetan picture illustrates the diversity of animal life and shows, under the waters, the palace of the serpent-spirits or naga, half snake and half man.

The *hells*, which are not permanent states of course, have some new horrors of our day in my picture: for railway lines run into a concentration camp from the chimneys of which belches sinister black smoke, while a uniformed member of some secret police force compels a suppliant hell-wraith to swallow molten metal. Towards the viewer flows the river of caustic soda called Vaitarani which burns the flesh off the bones of those swirling along in it, mingled with a stream of blood from the clashing mountains. Whatever torments hell-wraiths experience, though their bodies are mangled, crushed and ripped apart, yet they survive still for vast ages of time forever experiencing the same kinds of feelings which are "exclusively painful, sharp and severe," unrelenting and uninterrupted:

*"As highest is the bliss that comes  
from all desires' cessation --*

*No higher bliss than this!  
So worst the woe that's known in hell  
Avici with no interval --  
No woe is worse than this!"*

*-- L.K. 85*

In the foreground is the hell of filth where hell-wraiths, who as men had corrupted the innocent, are devoured by gigantic maggots while floundering in a stinking ooze. To the left are the trees of the sword-blade forest which have to be climbed so that hell wraiths are pierced through and through. This particular aspect of hell is said to be the punishment which adulterers bring on themselves. Various murderers and torturers are impaled upon stakes while a steel-beaked bird rips out the entrails of former cock-fighters. Venerable Nagarjuna has some more verses upon these lower and most-miserable states:

*"The criminal who has to bear  
throughout a single day  
The piercing of three hundred spears  
as punishment for crime,  
His pain can nowise be compared  
to the least pain found in hell.*

*The pains of hell may still persist  
a hundred crores of years --  
Without respite, unbearable  
So long the fruits of evil acts  
do not exhaust the force --  
So long continues life in hell."*

*-- L.K. 86-87*

Jetsun Milarepa, the great sage and poet of Tibet, who had seen the heavens and hells and other states, once sung this verse:

*"Fiends filled with cravings for pleasures  
Murder even their parents and teachers,  
Rob the Three Gems of their treasures,  
Revile and falsely accuse the Precious Ones,  
And condemn the Dhamma as untrue:  
In the hell of unceasing torment  
These evil-doers will be burned..."[9]*

Those who now violate the peoples of Tibet and their Dhamma might well take note! This brief survey of the Five Bourns (*pañcagati*) may be concluded with a verse of exhortation from "The Letter of Kindheartedness":

*"If your head or dress caught fire  
in haste you would extinguish it,*

*Do likewise with desire --  
which whirls the wheel or wandering-on  
And is the root of suffering,  
No better thing to do!"*

-- L.K. 104

## **The Rim of the Wheel (Dependent Arising)**

### *The Twelve-linked Chain*

Our description has now come to the Rim, or felly of the Wheel, which depicts the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising. It is these links which chain the entire universe of beings to re-becoming and to suffering.

It is a well-established tradition to explain this chain as referring to three lives (past, present and future). While the present is the only time which is real, it has been moulded in the past. It is in the present that we produce kamma of mind, speech and body, to bear fruit in the future. In the twelve nidanas or "links" around this wheel are set out the whole pattern of life and in it all questions relating to existence are answered. The

teaching of Dependent Arising, central in our Dhamma-Vinaya, is not, however, for speculation but should be investigated and seen in one's own and others' lives, and finally it may be perceived in one's own heart where all the Truths of Dhamma become clear after practice. But people who do not practice Dhamma are called "upholders of the world"; they let this wheel whirl them round from unknowing to old-age and death. The Exalted Buddha urged us not to be "world upholders" but through Dhamma-practice to relinquish greed, aversion and delusion so that by the cessation of unknowing there comes to be a cessation of birth, old-age and death.

Now let us have a look at these twelve links in brief.

### ***First Link: Unknowing (avijja)***

This Pali word "avijja" is a negative term meaning "not knowing completely" but it does not mean "knowing nothing at all." This kind of unknowing is very special and not concerned with ordinary ways or subjects of knowledge, for here what one does not know are the Four Noble Truths, one does not see them clearly in one's own heart and one's own life. In past lives, we did not care to see *dukkha* (1), so we could not destroy *the*

*cause of dukkha* (2) or craving which has impelled us to seek more and more lives, more and more pleasures. *The cessation of dukkha* (3) which perhaps could have been seen by us in past lives, was not realized, so we come to the present existence inevitably burdened with dukkha. And in the past we can hardly assume that we set our feet upon the *practice-path leading to the cessation of dukkha* (4) and we did not even discover Stream-entry. We are now paying for our own negligence in the past.

And this unknowing is not some kind of first cause in the past, for it dwells in our hearts now. But due to this unknowing, as we shall see, we have set in motion this wheel bringing round old age and death and all other sorts of dukkha. Those past "selves" in previous lives who are in the stream of my individual continuity did not check their craving and so could not cut at the root of unknowing. On the contrary they made kamma, some of the fruits of which in this present life I, as their causal resultant, am receiving.

The picture helps us to understand this: a blind old woman (avijja is of feminine gender) with a stick picks her way through a petrified forest strewn with bones. It is said that the original picture here should be an old blind she-camel led by a driver, the beast being one

accustomed to long and weary journeys across inhospitable country, while its driver could be craving. Whichever simile is used, the beginninglessness and the darkness of unknowing are well suggested. We are the blind ones who have staggered from the past into the present -- to what sort of future?

Depending on the existence of unknowing in the heart there was volitional action, kamma or abhisankhara, made in those past lives.

### ***Second Link: Volitions (sankhara)***

Intentional actions have the latent power within them to bear fruit in the future -- either in a later part of the life in which they were performed, in the following life, or in some more distant life, but their potency is not lost with even the passing of aeons; and whenever the necessary conditions obtain that past kamma may bear fruit. Now, in past lives we have made kamma, and due to our ignorance of the Four Noble Truths we have been "world-upholders" and so making good and evil kamma we have ensured the continued experience of this world.



Beings like this, obstructed by unknowing in their hearts have been compared to a potter making pots: he makes successful and beautiful pottery (skillful kamma) and he is sometimes careless and his pots crack and break up from various flaws (unskillful kamma). And he gets his clay fairly well smeared over himself just as purity of heart is obscured by the mud of kamma. The simile of the potter is particularly apt because the word *Sankhara* means "forming," "shaping," and "compounding," and therefore it has often been rendered in English as "Formations."

Depending on the existence of these volitions produced in past lives, there arises the consciousness called "relinking" which becomes the basis of this present life.

### ***Third Link: Consciousness (viññana)***

This relinking consciousness may be of different qualities, according to the kamma upon which it depends. In the case of all those who read this, the consciousness "leaping" into a new birth at the time of conception, was a human relinking consciousness arising as a result of having practiced at least the Five Precepts, the basis of "humanness" in past lives. One should note that this relinking consciousness is a

resultant, not something which can be controlled by will. If one has not made kamma suitable for becoming a human being, one cannot will, when the time of death comes round, "Now I shall become a man again!" The time for intentional action was when one had the opportunity to practice Dhamma. Although our relinking-consciousness in this birth is now behind us, it is now that we can practice Dhamma and make more sure of a favorable relinking consciousness in future -- that is, if we wish to go on living in Samsara.

This relinking-consciousness is the third constituent necessary for conception, for even though it is the mother's period and sperm is deposited in the womb, if there is no "being" desiring to take rebirth at that place and time there will be no fertilization of the ovum.

Appropriately, the picture shows a monkey, the consciousness leaping from one tree, the old life, to another tree. The old tree has died, while the one towards which it jumps is laden with fruits -- they may be the fruits of good or evil. The Tibetan picture shows a monkey devouring fruit, experiencing the fruits of deeds done in the past.

Dependent upon relinking-consciousness there is the arising of mind-body.

## ***Fourth Link: Mind-body (Nama-rupa)***

This is not a very accurate translation but gives the general meaning. There is more included in rupa that is usually thought of as body, while mind is a compound of feeling, perception, volition and consciousness. This mind and body is two interactive continuities in which there is nothing stable. Although in conventional speech we talk of "my mind" and "my body," implying that there is some sort of owner lurking in the background, the wise understand that laws govern the workings of both mental states and physical changes and mind cannot be ordered to be free of defilements, nor body told that it must not grow old, become sick and die.

But it is in the mind that a change can be wrought instead of drifting through life at the mercy of the inherent instability of mind and body. So in the illustration, mind is doing the work of punting the boat of psycho-physical states on the river of cravings, while body is the passive passenger. The Tibetan picture shows a coracle being rowed over swirling waters with three (? or four) other passengers, who doubtless represent the other groups or aggregates (khandha).

With the coming into existence of mind-body, there is the arising of the six sense-spheres.

### ***Fifth Link: Six sense-spheres (salayatana)***

A house with six windows is the usual symbol for this link (but the Tibetan shows a house with one (?) window). These six senses are eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch and mind, and these are the bases for the reception of the various sorts of information which each can gather in the presence of the correct conditions. This information falls under six headings corresponding to the six spheres: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles and thoughts. Beyond these six spheres of sense and their corresponding six objective spheres, we know nothing. All our experience is limited by the senses and their objects with the mind counted as the sixth. The five outer senses collect data only in the present but mind, the sixth, where this information is collected and processed, ranges through the three times adding memories from the past and hopes and fears for the future, as well as thoughts of various kinds relating to the present. It may also add information about the spheres of existence, which are beyond the range of the five outer senses, such as the various heavens, the

ghosts and the hell-states. A mind developed through collectedness (samadhi) is able to perceive these worlds and their inhabitants.

The six sense-spheres existing, there is contact.

### ***Sixth Link: Contact (phassa)***

This means the contact between the six senses and the respective objects. For instance, when the necessary conditions are all fulfilled, there being an eye, a sight-object, light and the eye being functional and the person awake and turned toward the object, there is likely to be eye-contact, the striking of the object upon the sensitive eye-base. The same is true for each of the senses and their type of contact. The traditional symbol for this link shows a man and a woman embracing.

Where contact arises, feeling exists.

### ***Seventh Link: Feeling (vedana)***

When there have been various sorts of contact through the six senses, feelings arise which are the emotional response to those contacts. Feelings are of three sorts: pleasant, painful and neither pleasant nor painful. The

first are welcome and are the basis for happiness, the second are unwelcome and are the basis for dukkha while the third are the neutral sort of feelings which we experience so often but hardly notice.

But all feelings are unstable and liable to change, for no mental state can continue in equilibrium. Even moments of the highest happiness whatever we consider this is, pass away and give place to different ones. So even happiness which is impermanent based on pleasant feelings is really dukkha, for how can the true unchanging happiness be found in the unstable? Thus the picture shows a man with his eyes pierced by arrows, a strong enough illustration of this.

When feelings arise, cravings are (usually) produced.

### ***Eighth Link Craving (tanha)***

Up to this point, the succession of events has been determined by past kamma. Craving, however, leads to the making of new kamma in the present and it is possible now, and only now, to practice Dhamma. What is needed here is mindfulness (sati), for without it no Dhamma at all can be practiced while one will be swept away by the force of past habits and let craving and

unknowing increase themselves within one's heart. When one does have mindfulness one may and can know "this is pleasant feeling," "this is unpleasant feeling," "this is neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling" -- and such contemplation of feelings leads one to understand and beware of greed, aversion and delusion, which are respectively associated with the three feelings. With this knowledge one can break out of the Wheel of Birth and Death. But without this Dhamma-practice it is certain that feelings will lead on to more cravings and whirl one around this wheel full of dukkha. As Venerable Nagarjuna has said:

*"Desires have only surface sweetness,  
hardness within and bitterness --  
deceptive as the kimpa-fruit.  
Thus says the King of Conquerors.  
Such links renounce -- they bind the world  
Within samsara's prison grid.*

*If your head or dress caught fire  
in haste you would extinguish it,  
Do likewise with desire --  
Which whirls the wheel of wandering-on  
and is the root of suffering.  
No better thing to do!"*

-- L.K. 23, 104

In Sanskrit, the word trisna (tanha) means thirst, and by extension implies "thirst for experience." For this reason, craving is shown as a toper guzzling intoxicants and in my picture I have added three bottles -- craving for sensual sphere existence and the craving for the higher heavens of the Brahma-worlds which are either of subtle form, or formless.

Where the kamma of further craving is produced, there arises Grasping.

### ***Ninth Link: Grasping (upadana)***

This is an intensification and diversification of craving which is directed to four ends: sensual pleasures, views which lead astray from Dhamma, external religious rites and vows, and attachment to the view of soul or self as being permanent. When these become strong in people they cannot even become interested in Dhamma, for their efforts are directed away from Dhamma and towards dukkha. The common reaction is to redouble efforts to find peace and happiness among the objects which are grasped at. Hence both pictures show a man



reaching up to pick more fruit although his basket is full already.

Where this grasping is found there Becoming is to be seen.

### ***Tenth Link: Becoming (bhava)***

With hearts boiling with craving and grasping, people ensure for themselves more and more of various sorts of life, and pile up the fuel upon the fire of dukkha. The ordinary person, not knowing about dukkha, wants to stoke up the blaze, but the Buddhist way of doing things is to let the fires go out for want of fuel by stopping the process of craving and grasping and thus cutting off Unknowing at its root. If we want to stay in samsara we must be diligent and see that our *becoming*, which is happening all the time, shaped by our kamma, is *becoming* in the right direction. This means *becoming* in the direction of purity and following the white path of Dhamma-practice. This will contribute to whatever we become, or do not become, at the end of this life when the pathways to the various realms stand open and we *become* according to our practice and to our death-consciousness.

Appropriately, *Becoming* is illustrated by a pregnant woman.

In the presence of *Becoming* there is arising in a new birth.

### ***Eleventh Link: Birth (jati)***

Birth, as one might expect, is shown as a mother in the process of childbirth, a painful business and a reminder of how *dukkha* cannot be avoided in any life. Whatever the future life is to be, if we are not able to bring the wheel to a stop in this life, certainly that future will arise conditioned by the *kamma* made in this life. But it is no use thinking that since there are going to be future births, one may as well put off Dhamma practice until then -- for it is not sure what those future births will be like. And when they come around, they are just the present moment as well. So no use waiting! Venerable Nagarjuna shows that it is better to extricate oneself:

*"Where birth takes place, quite naturally  
are fear, old age and misery,  
disease, desire and death,*

*As well a mass of other ills.  
When birth's no longer brought about  
All the links are ever stopped."*

*-- L.K. 111*

Naturally where there is Birth, is also Old-age and Death.

### ***Twelfth Link: Old-age and death (jara-marana)***

In future one is assured, given enough of Unknowing and Craving, of lives without end but also of deaths with end. The one appeals to greed but the other arouses aversion. One without the other is impossible. But this is the path of heedlessness. The Dhamma-path leads directly to Deathlessness, the going beyond birth and death, beyond all dukkha.

The Tibetan picture shows an old man carrying off a bundled-up corpse upon his back, taking it away to some charnel ground. My picture has an old man gazing at a coffin enclosing a corpse. We are well exhorted by the words of Acarya Nagarjuna:

*"Do you therefore exert yourself:  
At all times try to penetrate  
Into the heart of these Four Truths;*

*For even those who dwell at home,  
they will, by understanding them  
ford the river of (mental) floods."*

*-- L.K. 115*

This is a very brief outline of the workings of this wheel which we cling to for our own harm and the hurt of others. We are the makers of this wheel and the turners of this wheel, but if we wish it and work for it, we are the ones who can stop this wheel.

### ***The Monster***

Both pictures show the Wheel as being in the grip of a fearful monster. In my drawing the monster's name is engraved upon his crown so that people should not think of him as a common demon. He is no such thing, for his name is Impermanence and his crown shows his authority over all worlds whatever. He devours them and they are all, heavens and hells together, securely held in the grasp of his taloned hands. The crown upon his head is adorned with five skulls, representing the

impermanence of the five groups or aggregates comprising the person. His eyes, ears, nose, and mouth have flames about them, an illustration of the Exalted One's Third Discourse in which He says: "The eye is afire..." and so on. Above the monster's two eyes, there is a third one meaning that while for the fool impermanence is his enemy, for the wise man it helps him to Enlightenment. Although the monster has adorned himself with earrings and the like he fails to look attractive -- in the same way, this world puts on an outer show of beauty puts its beauty fades when examined more carefully.

Below the painting of the wheel, some Tibetan examples show parts of a tiger-skin adorning the monster, a symbol of fearfulness. In my drawing I show the monster's tail which has no beginning, looping back and forth. In the same way, we have been born, lived and then died countless times in the whirl of samsara. Sometimes our deeds were mostly good and sometimes mostly bad, and we have reaped the fruit of it all.

### *Some other features*

The whole wheel glows with heat and is surrounded by flames burning with the fires of greed, aversion and

delusion as the Exalted One has repeated many times in His Discourses.

In the upper right corner of both pictures stands the Exalted Buddha shown crossed over to the Further Shore, meaning Nibbana. The Tibetan picture shows him pointing out the moon upon which is drawn a hare, the symbol of renunciation, the way to practice Dhamma, and the way out of this wheel.[10] In my picture, He indicates with his hand the nature of samsara and warns us to beware. He is adorned with a radiance about Him symbolizing the spiritual freedom and majestic wisdom won by Him which can be described in many ways but is finally beyond the limitations of everything known to us.

The Tibetan picture shows in the upper left, a drawing of Avalokitesvara,[11] the embodiment of compassion as the way and the goal for those who follow the bodhisattva-path. My picture has the Path of Dhamma of eight lotuses leading to the wheel of Dhamma. The eight lotuses are the eight factors of the Noble Path, the first two -- Right View, Right Attitude -- being the wisdom-section; the next three -- Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood -- being the morality section; and the last three -- Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Collectedness -- being the section of

collectedness or meditation. The Wheel of Dhamma has at its center suññata, the Void, another name for the experience of Nibbana. Around its hub are the ten petals of a lotus, representing the ten perfecting qualities (parami) which are necessary for complete attainment: generosity, moral conduct, renunciation, wisdom, determination, energy, patience, truthfulness, loving-kindness and equanimity. Eight spokes radiate from the hub, which stand for the practice, by the Arahant, the one perfected, of the Eightfold Path when each factor, instead of being just right, becomes perfect. On the inside of the wheel's nave there are 37 jewels symbolizing the thirty-seven factors of Enlightenment, while the outer edge of the nave is adorned with four groups of three jewels showing the Four Noble Truths in each of the three ways wherein they were viewed by the Exalted Buddha when he discovered Enlightenment.[12]

## **Conclusion**

This picture teaches us and reminds us of many important features of the Dhamma as it was intended to be by the teachers of old. Contemplating all its features frequently helps to give us true insight into the nature of

Samsara. With its help and our own practice we come to see Dependent Arising in ourselves. When this has been done thoroughly all the riches of Dhamma will be available to us, not from books or discussions, nor from listening to others' explanations...

The Exalted Buddha has said:

*"Whoever sees Dependent Arising, he sees Dhamma;  
Whoever sees Dhamma, he sees Dependent Arising."*

\*

*Anicca vata sankhara  
uppada vayadammino  
Uppajjitva nirujjhanti  
tesam vupasamo sukho.*

Conditions truly they are transient  
With the nature to arise and cease  
Having arisen, then they pass away  
Their calming, cessation is happiness.

---

## Notes

1. See Wheel No. 34/35: "The Four Noble Truths." [[Go back](#)]



- 2.** One of the eighteen branches of extinct Hinayana. [[Go back](#)]
- 3.** the familiar Pali forms of names are used throughout. [[Go back](#)]
- 4.** These have not been shown in the accompanying drawing and neither does modern Tibetan tradition represent them. They are, respectively the eastern western, northern and southern continents of the old Indian geography. [[Go back](#)]
- 5.** In modern representations a cock is always shown. [[Go back](#)]
- 6.** Translation by Ven. Pasadiko from the opening paragraphs of the Sahasodgata Avadana, Divyavadana 21, Mithila Edition, page 185 ff. [[Go back](#)]
- 7.** Dasa-kusala-kammapatha. [[Go back](#)]
- 8.** Dasa-puñña-kiriya-vatthu. [[Go back](#)]
- 9.** See "Sixty Songs of Milarepa", Wheel, No. 95/97. [[Go back](#)]
- 10.** Not included in the reproduction given here. [[Go back](#)]

**11.** Not included in the reproduction given here. [[Go back](#)]

**12.** See the Wheel No. 17: "Three Cardinal Discourses" p. 7f. [[Go back](#)]

---

## **The Buddhist Publication Society**

The Buddhist Publication Society is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for people of all creeds.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is -- a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

A list of our publications visit our website at <[www.bps.lk](http://www.bps.lk)>

The Hony. Secretary  
BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 61  
54, Sangharaja Mawatha  
Kandy  
Sri Lanka

or

Barre Center for Buddhist Studies  
149 Lockwood Road  
Barre, MA 01005 USA

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel147.html>

\*Editorial Note: The original Pali Theravada texts preserve the truth of the teaching better than visual art ever could. Art carved in stone, indeed, often outlives the teaching of the original religions, which is why we have the western myth of the so-called, 'lost-secrets.' Pictures are good as illustrations of existing texts, but they should never, as they often do, become objects of worship in and of themselves.

**[Thus ends the above text.]**

\*\*\*

For further reference consult the **Wikipedia** appendix below: It is amazing how just reading just one sutta can become the beginning of what will be a long but successful journey on one's path of life.

# **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta**

**From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**

[Open Internet site to visit links.]

The **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta** is the Buddha's first discourse after he reached Enlightenment. In this sutta, the Buddha discusses the Middle Way, the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths.

This sutta is also popularly known simply as the **Dhammacakka Sutta** or the "Wheel of Dhamma Discourse" (Dhamma, 1997, p. ix).

## Contents

- . 1 Source
- . 2 English title
- . 3 Contents
- . 4 Contemporary scholarship
- . 5 See also
- . 6 Notes
- . 7 References
- . 8 External links

## ] Source

In Pāli literature, this sutta is contained in the Samyutta Nikaya,<sup>[1]</sup> chapter 56 ("Saccasamyutta" or "Connected Discourses on the Truths"), sutta number 11. (Thus, a reference to this sutta can be abbreviated as "SN 56:11").

## [edit] English title

"**Dhamma**" (Pāli) or "Dharma" (Sanskrit) can mean a variety of things depending on its context<sup>[2]</sup>; in this context, it refers to the Buddha's teachings or his "truth" that leads to ones liberation from suffering. "**Chakka**" (Pāli) or "chakra" (Sanskrit) can be translated as "wheel." The "**dhammacakka**," which can be translated as "Dhamma-Wheel," is a Buddhist symbol referring to Buddha's teaching of the path to enlightenment. "**Pavattana**" (Pāli) can be translated as "turning" or "rolling" or "setting in motion."

English translations of this sutta's full title include:

- "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma" (Bodhi, 2000, pp. 1843–7)
- "Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth" (Piyadassi, 1999)<sup>[3]</sup>
- "Setting Rolling the Wheel of Truth" (Ñānamoli, 1993)<sup>[4]</sup>
- "Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion" (Thanissaro, 1993)<sup>[5]</sup>
- "Turning the Wheel of Dhamma" (Dhamma, 1997).

## **[edit] Contents**

In this discourse, the Buddha addresses five monks<sup>[3]</sup> who attended to him just prior to his Enlightenment.<sup>[4]</sup> The Buddha cautions the monks against pursuing either of two extremes: worldly sensual pleasures or painful self-mortification. The Buddha refers to the path that avoids these extremes as the "**Middle Way**" (majjhimā patipadā).

The Buddha then states that the middle way he awakened to involves pursuing a "**Noble Eightfold Path**" (ariyo atthangiko maggo) that includes "right" (sammā) understanding, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration. This path leads to vision, knowledge, peace, enlightenment and Nibbana.

The Buddha then identifies the following "**Four Noble Truths**":

1. Suffering (dukkha) involves birth, aging, illness, death, being with what is displeasing, being separated from what is pleasing, not getting what one wants, and "in brief" the five aggregates-of-clinging (pancupādānakkhandhā).
2. Suffering's origin (dukkhasamudayo) is craving (tanhā) for sensual pleasures, existence and extermination.
3. Suffering's end (dukkhanirodho) comes from the relinquishment of and freedom from this craving.
4. The path leading to suffering's end is the aforementioned Noble Eightfold Path.

These Four Noble Truths should be individually achieved in a threefold manner: the noble truth is recognized, its pursuit envisioned, its attainment fully achieved. The Buddha relays that, once he achieved each of the four truths in this threefold manner, he awakened to unsurpassed perfect "**Enlightenment**" (anuttaram sammāsambodhim ).

While each of the monks listening to the Buddha delighted in his words, one in particular, Ven. Kondanna, understood.

Thus the Dhamma-Wheel had been set unstoppably in motion.

## **[edit]** Contemporary scholarship

Gombrich (1988/2002, p. 61) remarks:

Of course we do not really know what the Buddha said in his first sermon ... and it has even been convincingly demonstrated<sup>[5]</sup> that the language of the text as we have it is in the main a set of formulae, expressions which are by no means self-explanatory but *refer* to already established doctrines. Nevertheless, the compilers of the Canon put in the first sermon what they knew to be the very essence of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

## **[edit]** See also

- *Dharmacakra*
- *Enlightenment*
- *Four Noble Truths*
- *Middle Way*
- *Noble Eightfold Path*

## **[edit]** Notes

1. <sup>^</sup> PTS Pali = S.v.420

2. <sup>^</sup> For instance, in the context of the objects of mindfulness, "dhamma" refers to "mental objects" (see, Satipatthana Sutta).
3. <sup>^</sup> While the Pali text refers to the five as "bhikkhus" (which is typically translated as "monks"), there was no Sangha yet and these five individuals believed in practices of severe self-denial (see, for instance, the Mahasaccaka Sutta ["The Longer Discourse to Saccaka," MN 36][1]). Thus, some commentators refer to them as ascetics.
4. <sup>^</sup> Prior to his Enlightenment, these monks became disgusted with and abandoned the bodhisatta (that is, the as-yet-unenlightened-person-who-was-to-become-a-Buddha) because he had accepted solid food to eat (see the Mahasaccaka Sutta ["The Longer Discourse to Saccaka," MN 36][2]).
5. <sup>^</sup> In Gombrich (1988/2002, p. 61), Gombrich includes an end note here citing "Norman 1982" (see "References" below).

## **[edit] References**

- Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2000). *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the*



*Samyutta Nikaya*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Pubs. ISBN 0-86171-331-1.

- Dhamma, Ven. Dr. Rewata (1997). *The First Discourse of the Buddha*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Pubs. ISBN 0-86171-104-1.
- Gombrich, Richard (1988, repr. 2002). *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. London: Routledge. ISBN 0-415-07585-8.
- Nānamoli Thera (trans.) (1993). *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting Rolling the Wheel of Truth*. Available on-line at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.nymo.html>.
- Norman, K.R. (1982). "The Four Noble Truths: a problem of Pali syntax" in L.A. Hercus *et al.* (ed.), *Indological and Buddhist Studies: Volume in Honour of Professor J.W. de Jong on his Sixtieth Birthday*. Canberra, pp. 377–91.
- Piyadassi Thera (trans.) (1999). *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth*. Available on-line at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.piya.html>.
- Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) (1993). *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the*

*Wheel of Dhamma in Motion.* Available on-line at  
<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.than.html>.

### **[edit] External links**

- Pāli version of the **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta**
- Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta read aloud (talking book) by Guy Armstrong
- Romanized Pāli version with English translation

Connect to Internet to get Wikipedia.