Buddha Day Address with Refuges and Precepts

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 34:41

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and fully Self-Enlightened One.

So just an opportunity to reflect on the Buddha's life. We all know, I think most of us know the general outline of the life, but just to contemplate it a little and to see how it fits in with this taking of refuges and precepts.

Remember that he belonged to this warrior class, the Kshatriya class, which would be landed gentry really and with plenty of time on their hands unlike the workers of course in those days. They lived according to the seasons. There was always one season where you don't do much, like the dry season and the winter season and all that, but even so he would have had a much more relaxed and easy life than most people of his time. If we try to match it with ourselves, our society, seeking for distraction, seeking for pleasure all the time.

And this comes out in one of his little tales, remember, when he wakes up in the morning after an all-night revelling and just sees all these people in disgusting positions and whatnot, and he turns him off. I mean, that's one of the things, the evanescence or the emptiness of sensual pleasure.

The other story, of course, is about meeting these four messengers from the gods, as they're known. Basically, he becomes much more aware of sickness, old age, and death, and the fact that there are people who seem to be sitting under trees, and he wonders what they're about. And there's a suggestion with the ascetics that there may be a way out of this constant rebirth. So remember in his day, the idea, well, as in India and the East today, it's taken for granted that there is a rebirthing process from life after life.

So that had a very poignant feeling for him because what was up for a being was this constant being reborn into lifetimes and lifetimes of being born, growing, sickness, old age, death, being born, grown, sickness, old age and death. And it seems to have been an obsession of the times. And there was a movement of the times where more and more men, mainly, were just leaving the home life and going off to do these various practices. And there were various practices which were on offer.

But when he left home, the one that he seemed to move towards were what came to be known as the *jhān as*, these absorption states. That was seemingly his first effort. And the idea there was that you can create this internal happiness without anything from the outside. So, practising *mettā*, for instance, we can keep making that intention until the heart responds, and eventually you're just filled with this inner bliss, this

inner ecstasy, you might say. And once you can do that, well, it's all right, isn't it? You can sit under a tree. You don't mind eating rotten sausages, anything like that, or cold chips. Doesn't matter, does it? You can just sit under a tree and be happy any time you want because it's there within your power to create a beautiful mental state.

But on both occasions, with both teachers who took him into these various different levels of ecstasy, he always came out and seemingly rediscovered the same old sad, depressed, anxious Siddhartha Gautama, like nothing had really moved at the level of his psychology, nothing had been cleansed, and he was still worried about it all, I presume.

And then he tries mortification exercises and the idea there is that the real problem is the body. So if you think about it, if the body never felt hungry you wouldn't feel greed. So basically you stop eating and you just eat bits of rice and stuff like that, and as long as you keep your body appetites down then you don't get the problems with sensual pleasure. But he discovered that the only thing he gained from that was basically became thin. And it was nothing but more suffering. He didn't actually gain anything from that at all. He said it was unprofitable, ignoble and suffering.

So he left that, if you remember, and to the disgust of his five companions, because they were still all for it. And he's sitting by the roadside there when Sujata comes along with an offering of some rice pudding, which he takes. It seems to have revived him a bit, as you know rice pudding can.

And this is when he remembers this occasion in childhood, and this is why we say he's self-enlightened. Up until then he's tried all these different means and ways and it's not really got him anywhere. But it's this memory from childhood which opens up for him a possibility of investigating his condition. And the memory is of watching his father doing a ploughing ceremony. But it's the manner of watching, you see, that childlike curiosity, which he then takes with him under this tree, making a very clear resolution that he was either going to crack this one or die. That's a pretty heavy resolution, isn't it? And luckily for us and for him, six hours on, he makes this wonderful insight, this wonderful understanding.

And that curiosity, that awareness and curiosity, the way of looking, then becomes the very technique that he passes on to other people, and we call that *vipassanā*. What we're celebrating on a day like this is the effort that this person made 2500 years ago to seek the end of suffering. And when he came to encapsulate all his teaching, you know, 40 years of talking to people about his understanding, he could draw it down in the Pali just to three words: suffering and the end of suffering, *dukkha* and the end of *dukkha*.

So this dukkha, remember, is a very wide meaning. It's not just suffering as we would normally call it. It's dissatisfaction, it's existential angst. Even the mildest discomfort all happens to be dukkha. And he spends the rest of his life teaching this.

So this is, I think, very important to grasp that the awakening that came to him didn't pull him out of existence, didn't make him sit there like a useless log or something. He then got up. There was a

movement of that wisdom down into an attitude and into an action. So the wisdom became compassion, just as an outward flow. Logically speaking, there's no reason why he should have done it, apart from the fact of that empathy with all beings.

And as you know, there was a moment of doubt as to whether anybody would understand it. And some people translate that as a doubt as to whether he would teach or not. But I don't think that's right. I think it's the doubt really as to whether anybody would understand it or not. He definitely wanted to pass on this message. And he walks quite a way, doesn't he, from Bodh Gaya to Isipatana Park to catch up with his old companions.

When he gets to his old companions, of course, they think he's just become lax and he's lost it. So they don't really greet him with any friendliness or anything. But as he comes towards them, they see something's different about him and actually prepare a seat for him as if he's a teacher.

Now, it's very interesting because when he talks to them in the first beginning, what is recorded is he asks them, he says, have you ever heard me talking like this before? So in other words, he's asking them, having displayed his teaching as best as he can, this is his first effort, you might say, and he's asking them, have you ever heard me say anything like this before? And that's what convinces them to practice with him. And the four of them eventually become fully liberated through his teachings.

So when we take the refuge, in terms of taking refuge in the Buddha, that's what we're taking refuge in. We're taking refuge in a personage and the truth of his message, which is the Dharma. And those people who after him were able to liberate themselves and become witnesses of that very teaching. So those are your three refuges in, shall we say, the traditional way. The tradition is that we're taking refuge in this personage.

And this personage is not only our exemplar, remember, he's actually an archetype, in the sense that we all have to travel through that same path in our own way to become fully liberated. So we have to eventually renounce the world as a place where we can find permanent happiness. So long as there's a part of us seeking happiness in the phenomenal world, there'll be no escape from the problems that indulgence brings to us. So at some point through our practice, there has to be this renunciation.

That scares people because you think, well, I'll just end up being a prune-like ascetic. I'll end up being just a dried prune. That's not very attractive, is it? But it wouldn't be if it weren't that, of course, as you give up something, you receive something back, which are the spiritual gifts. And the obvious ones are the seven factors of enlightenment which include calmness, equanimity, this joy that comes with interest. And the heart then responds, begins to express in its attitude the wisdom you have and you end up with this beautiful heart, this beautiful mind, especially in the four illimitables: love, compassion, joy and peace. And then that flows outward into the way you speak, into what you do and into your livelihood.

So, it's not as though we're giving something up for nothing. We're actually giving something up for

something which is far greater. The problem is that you don't know really what you're going to get until you give something up. So remember, it's not like getting rid of your old TV or something and you know which one you're going to get, the new plasma. I mean, that's pretty strange. There's no angst there, is there? But unfortunately, in the spiritual life, you don't quite know what you're going to get when you give something up. And you have to actually give it up before you get something. And it's not as though you can half give it up. You know, say, well, I'll give it up a little bit and just see what's coming. But then nothing much comes. There has to be a renunciation of seeking happiness in the sensual world. But again, we all do it in our own time. There's no rush about this. According to the Buddha's understanding, so long as there's a self, there will be some form of becoming. There'll be some form of existence. So we're never going to be short on time. So we can relax.

Now, in terms of taking refuges and precepts as our personal process of liberation, the Buddha here, taking refuge in the Buddha, really means having the understanding and the confidence that there is something within us to be liberated. That's what you're really spiritually taking your refuge in. And the Dharma is that specific teaching which will help you to attain that liberation. And the Sangha, really you can extend it to anybody and everybody who is actually helping you on the path. So that's the purpose of taking these refuges and precepts.

Now, for those of you who haven't taken them before, who might like to take them, remember that it's not that you have to take them for life or anything like that. One takes them with an honest heart. It's interesting because when you join the order, when you become a monk or a nun in the Buddhist order, in the whole ceremony, there's no time mentioned. There's no question about how long do you expect to stay, or there's no vow that I will be in the order until death do us part. There isn't anything like that. So that means that it's a constant reaffirmation every day. You have to reaffirm, reconfirm your commitment to the monastic order. And that's exactly the same with these refuges and precepts. So it's like every day there should be a point where you reconfirm your commitment to the spiritual life.

So what we'll do is just take a little bit of silence and during that time, just contemplate what taking refuges and precepts means to you and give it your own particular meaning, see? So that when we take it, it's actually something that is directly impinging and affecting, hopefully for the better, your life, your lifestyle. So if we can just sit quietly for a few minutes.

The next part is to undertake the five training rules. So the understanding here, the *sikkhāpada*, the footsteps of training, they're not commandments, they're not thou shalt not, they are I undertake the training rule. And what I think we have to understand is that virtue and the awakening come together. You can't have the one without the other. You can't have a Buddha caught shoplifting. It just doesn't strike you as true. There's something odd about that. So this purification of our morality, purification of our intention, that's what it basically is. The purification of our intention runs hand in hand with the process of insight.

And one of the effects of insight is to actually see how immoral actions actually cause suffering. We're pretty clear about things like guilt and shame and remorse and all that. But also, whenever we do harm, there's also the pain within us, eventually, of knowing that we've caused, we've been at least a catalyst for somebody else's suffering, and that can be quite painful for us to actually deal with.

What we need to do is to keep making that resolution of following these precepts as best we can. We can't expect to follow them absolutely perfectly because we don't have that perfection of mind. But at least on a gross level most of us I think have stopped murdering and thieving. So it's more on the more subtle levels of doing harm that we can become more aware of our actions.

When it comes to, you know, the one that I think a lot of people have difficulty with is not to take intoxicating drinks and drugs. And we live in a culture where, you know, taking a drop of alcohol is quite acceptable. So it's up to you really to decide as to what you feel is allowable, and to know that whenever consciousness is distorted in any way, then there's always a possibility of doing something which is harmful. So it's up to us to decide at what level we want to take these trainings.

So the conjunction of virtue and understanding come together. You can't have the one without the other. And again the Buddha manifests this by this movement from right understanding to right attitude, and from right attitude into right speech, right action, and right livelihood. And remember that this path reverts upon itself. You can start with right livelihood and it will affect your attitude. So it doesn't really matter what you do. You know that old song, it ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it.

It's actually having a right intention that your work is of service, and that immediately begins to affect the heart base as compassion. And compassion, when we begin to experience compassion and love that way, we begin to understand it as interconnectedness. And from interconnectedness you begin to understand that this idea of me is really a composite which is affected by all my relationships. So it takes away this sense of I, begins to undermine the sense of I. And the I is always this sense of self, is always expressing itself, is always trying to find happiness for itself.

So when we go out into work with a selfless attitude, as an attitude of selflessness, of service that immediately undermines the self as something which is always seeking its own pleasure. So this movement from understanding into the heart as attitude and outwards as action, you can take it both ways. And whatever your work is, it's for us to find the reason for doing it, which will be a virtuous reason, and the effect upon the heart and the mind will just naturally arise. Just as the other way, when we sit in meditation with vipassanā and there's some insight, it has an effect on our attitude and eventually into the way we work. So it doesn't matter where you start on this particular path, whether it's as an understanding or as a right attitude or as a right action, the effect will be systemic.

So the thing about the precepts is to just take them at your own level of understanding, at your own level of commitment, constantly just pushing yourself gently towards a more and more virtuous life. Don't put unnecessary pressure on you. There's no need to put unnecessary pressure on ourselves. You always work

from the base where you are and you gently lean. So this is the Buddha's words, to incline towards *Nibbān a*. So if you lean forward fine enough, you take a step. See? All you've got to do is just lean in the right direction.

So let's just spend a few minutes, just a couple of minutes there, just reflecting upon our virtue and what it means to take the precepts.

Thank you.

So what we can do now is actually take them. We'll also read the verses at the back of the sheet, which is basically our *vipassanā* verses, and then some inspiring verses from the Buddha. And then before we say *s ādhu sādhu*, we'll get Mickey to pour this water while I do a little chanting. And that's the basic chant of offering goodwill to all beings, and during that time you can offer whatever merit you have for the benefit of whomever you wish, but it's always good to end off with all beings, that's all.

Okay. So, in the fashion of taking refuge and precepts, you have to chant it after me. Okay.

Namo tassa bhagavato— Hold on, stop. You have to chant it after me, because I'm passing it on to you.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Surāmerayamajjāpamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Surāmerayamajjāpamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

So we can read these Vipassanā verses:

"All conditioned things are impermanent. When this is perceived with wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

All conditioned things are unsatisfactory. When this is perceived with wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

All conditioned things and the unconditioned are not self. When this is perceived with wisdom, one

becomes disenchanted with what cannot satisfy. Just this is the path of purification.

There is the unborn, the undying, the uncreated, the unconditioned, refuge, harbour and home, perfect contentment and peace.

Just as the great ocean has only one taste, the taste of salt, so Nibbāna has only one taste, the taste of freedom.

All conditioned things have the nature to decay, work diligently for your liberation."

So we can ask Mickey to pour the water for us. And while I do this little chanting, bring to mind your goodwill, and offer it to yourself, to whoever you wish, and to all beings. Okay.

Puratthimāya disāya, dakkhiṇāya disāya, pacchimāya disāya, uttarāya disāya, puratthimāya anudisāya, dakkhiṇāya anudisāya, pacchimāya anudisāya, uttarāya anudisāya, hetthimāya anudisāya, uparimāya anudisāya, sabbe sattā, sabbe pāṇā, sabbe bhūtā, sabbe puggalā, sabbe attabhāvapariyāpannā.

Sabbā itthiyo, sabbe purisā, sabbe ariyā, sabbe anariyā, sabbe devā, sabbe manussā, sabbe vinipatikā.

Averā hontu, abyāpajjā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu.

Dukkhamuccantuyad aladdhasampadā na vimuccantuyad aladdhasampadā mā vimuccantu.

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