Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta (MN 9): Right View, Wholesome and Unwholesome Kamma

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 23:01

Good evening, everybody. I messed up yesterday. So that's the way it is sometimes. What can you do? So I shall begin.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

Even though I wasn't here, I know you all kept to your practice. There can be no doubt about that. I have three options when I go on. I can go private, which is just for me, or I can go for only those people whom I've personally invited, or I can go public. So I made the mistake of going private. Well, it wasn't so much a mistake. I thought you'd all be able to beam in because of your extranormal powers, but I was mistaken. I had many emails asking me whether I'd died or not. I haven't died.

What I'm going to do in the evening is try to choose a discourse from the Majjhima Nikāya. It's a great big book. There's 160-odd of these discourses, and just try to make our way through them. What I mean to do is reduce the discourse to a simple formula and then maybe address some of the things.

Now, you may have questions, questions which are not related to what I'm talking about. So it's best to email them and I'll answer them that evening if it's before lunch, because after lunch, I'm preparing this. There were a couple of questions actually that came through. I haven't put their name, unfortunately. "To what extent can it be argued that the Four Noble Truths was the Buddha's most important teaching?" And then, "Are all the stages of the Eightfold Path equally important?" So I'll tackle that tomorrow, if I may. What I'm going to do is chop off the first half hour, which will be these little discussions or talks, and separate them and list them on YouTube so you can have a listen to them later if you can't be here for that.

The discourse is called *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta*, the discourse on right view. The person who's giving it isn't the Buddha himself, it's Sāriputta. Now Sāriputta was known as the general of the Dharma. The Buddha gave nicknames to about 80 of his disciples. So Sāriputta was known as *Mahāpaññā*, the great wise one. Moggallāna, whom I'm sure you know, was a second great disciple. He was called *Iddhimanta*, which means psychic power.

Some of you will know the story of Bāhiya of the Bark Cloth, who asked for instructions while the Buddha was on his alms round. The Buddha said, "Can you wait till later?" And he pleaded with him and said, "No,

I'm an old man." He's over 73. He gave him this teaching, and he was immediately enlightened, but later on gored by a cow. He's known as *Khippābhiññā*, which is the most speedily enlightened person.

There was also Sīvali, that's a story that goes with that, which I might tell some other time, who was known for his ability just to get alms, even when there was a famine. So he was called *Lābhī*, which just means receiver of gifts.

Two women, two nuns that you may know, are Kisāgotamī. She was known as wearing rough robes. She was the one who had lost a child and was crazed with grief. The Buddha sent her to find a mustard seed from a house where there'd been no death. That brought her back to her senses. She ordained and then became fully liberated.

There was also Paṭācārā, which is another terrible story where she lost all her family. If you remember, on the way back with her husband, her husband died from a snake bite. The two children were taken away by the great river. By the time she got to her village to visit her parents, the house had burnt down with her parents in it. So she was in a pretty bad state and she also joined the order and became fully liberated. She was known as *Vinaya-dhāraka*. She was pretty heavy on the old Vinaya, the rule.

The two great lay supporters, Anāthapiṇḍika, so he was the one who bought the first monastery for the Buddha. That's where this actually takes place. This discourse takes place in Jeta's Grove, Sāvatthī. Sāvatthī was the capital of the Northern Kingdom, whose name I forget. That's a senior moment. He bought this field off Jeta, Prince Jeta, and he said he's covered it with gold, meaning he got done for that, because he wanted the grove so much that Prince Jeta could ask for anything he wanted. So he's known as *Dāyaka*, which means supporter. It's a special title that the Buddha gave him. That's a word we use for anybody now who supports the Sangha, the *dāyaka*.

And, of course, there was Visākhā, who was also a very famous supporter of his. The reason I remember it is because she once turned up at the monastery and all the monks were bathing in the rain, in the torrential monsoon rain, completely naked. Well, she was very upset. So she went out and bought all this cloth so that they could cover themselves. It became one of the requisites, one of the eight things that you get when you ordain.

So this is Sāriputta who's been asked this question. The question is, "Is there a way? Is this way the one right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dharma and has arrived at the true Dharma?" In other words, what do you have to have the right view about, the right understanding about, in order to achieve the true Dharma, the true teachings?

And he gives five ways. The first one is unwholesome actions and wholesome actions and their roots as to why we behave like that. Then there's nutriment. That's very rarely taught, the nutriment. And then, of course, there's the Four Noble Truths. And then he goes through dependent origination backwards. So he goes from ignorance all the way through to the end. And then finally, the taints, which, again, some of you

might know.

The word is *āsava*, which is like the sap coming out of a tree, which can make frankincense. It oozes out of the tree. But it's also the oozing of pus from a boil. And I think that's the image we have to have when we think of the *āsava* that we have to get rid of.

So what I want to do this evening is just talk about these unwholesome actions. The list of unwholesome actions, I mean, they're pretty straightforward. The physical ones, you have to stop killing people. And then you have to stop thieving from them. And then, of course, there's sexual misconduct. Now, those things are pretty heavy. They're pretty obvious.

Speech is just a bit more refined. You've got to be on your guard because we're always speaking. If we're not speaking to somebody, then we're speaking to ourselves. False speech, you have to stop telling lies from now on. Malicious speech, that's to do with intent. Remember, you might say something which is not giving somebody a good name for a very good reason, but your intention is to put somebody straight about them if they're employing them. Something like that.

Then there's abusive speech. Sometimes it's translated as gossip, but gossip can be more like malicious speech, can't it? It's more like idle prattle. That's the best translation. We're just talking for talking's sake. Now, those are to do with speech. So the Buddha is asking us to be guarded with that.

And the mental ones, which are covetousness, wanting what other people have, envy. At worst, jealousy. You hate them for having what they have. And there's ill will, of course. You don't want any of that. And, of course, wrong view. Wrong views about things.

Now, these actions have their roots. And I'll give you just one second to guess what the roots are. You won't be surprised. Yes, you've got it. It's greed, hatred, or aversion, and delusion. So this *lobha*, *dosa*, *moh a*. *Lobha* is really just indulging. It's just wanting stuff. It's not a case of "I want these days." It's not a case of "I want more TV or more money." Most people, what we want these days is more. It becomes a noun. How much do you want? You want more. So that's this business of indulgence.

The aversion, which is a word I prefer, is that you're averse to something and your reaction is either to get rid of it or to get away from it. So it's the old fight-flight syndrome. But it's always about manipulating the situation in order to make yourself feel comfortable, most times at the expense of somebody else.

And the delusion, now this digs deep, because it all begins from this false identity, the false identity of who I am. So remember, this business of "I am me" means that I'm seeking my own happiness. I'm seeking happiness in the world. And when the world doesn't fit, then, of course, I get this ill will. And when the world does fit, it's like me, me, me. It's all trying to get more and more of what I have.

So it all roots back always to this problem of identity, always roots back to this problem of identity. And in our practice in vipassanā, we're constantly rediscovering that place within ourselves, which is separating

out of these desires and these ill wills and all the rest of it. That's the process of liberating ourselves from this wrong view as to where we can find happiness.

Now, that's not to deny the natural joys and pleasures of life. It's just the relationship we have to them. That relationship is variously called attachment, indulgence and so on. And so that's why we end up always trying to manipulate the world. So it's important to understand that.

Now, one distinction to be made here, which is pretty important, that whenever you read the discourses, it's always about these pretty heavy stuff, like murder and thieving and malicious speech. And what seems to be missed out, of course, is all the stuff that we generally suffer from in a way, feeling down. I don't like the word depression. It medicalizes it. You just feel down. I felt down today. So I felt down today.

And then there's anxiety. I mean, that's right, isn't it? Especially now with this coronavirus, the anxiety, the fear that's being generated is quite remarkable. And rightly so, if it stops people from being silly. Fear. And then you've got anger, anger which comes up, frustration and all that. And then you've got all the different hindrances. So dullness and lethargy, restlessness, doubt, lots of doubt, things like that.

Now all those come under the umbrella of unwholesomeness. And so, in a way, a better word than morality, which tends to sink us into this "thou shalt not and thou shalt," it's more to do with ethics. It's more to do with the way we relate to the world. We relate to people. That's what it's about.

And everything you have, everything you touch, everything you see, we have a relationship with. As soon as you see a tree, you find you have a relationship with it. You like it. You're enjoying its shade and so on. Even a door, as soon as you see a door, you have a relationship with it. It's something you want to go through or shut behind you. It's one of those.

So you can see, to think about *kamma* at its wider perception of *kamma*, we've got to think about ethics. That's what it's about. And of course, what we're trying to do is to get to the opposite of all this. And of course, that's often stated as non-stealing, et cetera, et cetera. But of course, what we're moving towards is a refinement.

So once we've stopped killing and we start respecting other people, then you get this idea of protecting them and protecting ourselves, protecting life. The Buddha's clear that this is a very treasured, precious life form that we have. It has this dual misery and happiness, joy and woe. But it also has, we have this intelligence, we have this ability to discern. And that's what's going to liberate us, this ability to discern. So we need to be very careful with our bodies.

When it comes to speech, of course, what we're trying to move towards is a kindly speech, a pure speech, a truthful speech, an ability to speak from the heart, to be open, to be honest. Those are the important things about right speech. And the other slightly important thing about that is often to be guarded when you say something. There's a right time to say something and a right time and a wrong time. And choosing the wrong time to say something can cause a bit of upset, especially if it's something you want to say that the

person might not like. So you have to be very careful.

I remember when there was all this business of free speech came up. It was a while back with Islamists. And there was this idea that the right to abuse somebody, that was part of this free speech business, which I can understand, but it's a bit of a hard way to put it. You have a right to state what you understand and believe, even though you know other people might be insulted by it, but then one has to go very gently with that. You don't go around smashing people on the head with your views and opinions. So it's a case of being gentle, kind. So that's the right speech business.

When it comes to the covetousness of will, then, of course, that's as soon as you see it come up in the mind to acknowledge it. I mean, that's the great thing about one of the things about noting that you get in the habit of saying, "Oops, now that's a bit of cheek, that's cheeky." You see what I mean? You point to it, make sure you're aware of it.

So that's this business of morality. Now, it does go. This business of morality is understood to be of prime importance to understand this business of ethics and morality. Some of you may know that there are four stages to liberation. What we call the stream entrant. And that's somebody who's broken through this wrong view of self. It's only a lightning understanding of it. The sense of self is still very strong.

And then the second level is when somebody has such an insight that their greed and hatred is much undermined. And in the third level, the greed and hatred aversion is completely gone. And that simply means that the person is no longer attracted to this level of existence. But there are still five things to go. Restlessness, well, the main one is conceit. And that includes the sense of "I am."

Now, such is the importance of understanding or accepting the law of *kamma*, the law of consequence, that if you do something harmful, something harmful will arise. If you do something wholesome, something wholesome will arise. Somebody who actually takes that on is known as a *cūla-sotāpanna*, so a lesser stream entrant. That's how important the commentaries put to it. I don't think it's in the scriptures themselves. It's the beginning. It's the beginning.

Because why is that? Because our ethics, our morality is an expression of this original delusion. So the purer we get is a feedback to us of our progress. Often in our practice, we often wonder whether we're making any progress. It's a constant question for meditators. "I don't feel any progress." But if you look back five, ten years, maybe 50 years, you should be able to see some progress in your ethics, some progress in the way that you relate to people, that you relate to your work, things like that.

So I'm going to finish there this evening. And I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I've not caused even greater confusion, and that you will, by your sincere practice, liberate yourselves from all suffering sooner rather than later. Very good. So don't forget, if you have any questions, to email me.

The email is on the website, but the simplest one is bbodhi at gmail.com.

So I'd like to begin the meditation and we'll follow the practice that we did two days ago, which I did by myself here talking to nobody yesterday evening.

So settle yourselves into a good posture. For those of you who haven't been here, this is the meditation room. The Buddha that you see up on the lotus, I've had with me since I went to Gaia House in 2001. Oh no, it was before that. It was when I set up a centre in North London, and Venerable Vajirañāṇa, who was then the abbot of the London Buddhist Vihara, offered me this when I set up that centre.

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