Burning - Ādittapariyāya Sutta

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 59:42

So tonight we arrive at the third formal teaching of the Buddha, the Ādittapariyāya Sutta, simply translated as "burning." This completes the trilogy. The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, setting in motion the wheel of the Dharma, starts the whole thing off with the middle way and four truths. Then we have the Anattalakkhana Sutta, the not-self characteristic, and finally this one.

We gave the back story about how the Buddha had a particular audience in mind. There was a particular group of people he wanted to convert—the dreadlocks ascetics who lived and practiced on the banks of the Nerañjarā River, which also runs past the Bodhi tree. When the Buddha was practicing asceticism while still the Bodhisattva, they would have been neighbors, so doubtlessly they knew each other. The Buddha zeroed in on one person in particular, the elder Kassapa brother, spending almost a month hammering away at him with demonstrations of shamanic power. Finally breaking down the resistance, he converted, and all the followers converted, so they were ready to be taught. This is what they were taught.

This is the opening section of the sutta. "Bhikkhus," he says, "everything is burning. And what is this everything that is burning? The eye sensitivity is burning, visual forms are burning, visual awareness is burning, visual contact is burning, and whatever feeling arises dependent upon visual contact, whether pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, that too is burning.

"Burning with what? Burning with the fire of obsession, with the fire of aversion, with the fire of delusion, burning with birth, aging and death, with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

"The ear sensitivity is burning, the nose sensitivity is burning, the tongue sensitivity is burning, the body sensitivity is burning, the mind sensitivity is burning, phenomena are burning, mind awareness is burning, mind contact is burning. And whatever feeling arises dependent upon mind contact, whether pleasant or painful, or neither painful nor pleasant, that too is burning.

"Burning with what? Burning with the fire of obsession, with the fire of aversion, with the fire of delusion. Burning with birth, aging and death, with sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair."

So this is the entry. Everything is burning, and the everything are the six sensitivities, corresponding sense objects, and the corresponding awareness, as well as the feeling—the vedanā—that arises dependent upon them.

At the Buddha's time, it's sometimes said that the Buddha was a Hindu. The Buddha lived at a time before Hinduism, before what we know as Hinduism. What we have at the time was a Vedic tradition which had

begun in the northwest, in what is now Pakistan, and was moving southeast along the Ganges Valley. There was also a whole series of other movements—old indigenous movements, new reform movements. New ideas like karma in our sense of the word were beginning to develop, and there was this whole burgeoning variety of philosophies and practices going on, a mixture of all these influences.

The dreadlocks ascetics were focused on fire worship, shamanism, worship of particular spirits and devas, and sacrifice. The use of sacrifice makes them similar to the Vedic orthodoxy. But they were not orthodox because they clearly believed in some kind of enlightenment which was not part of the Vedic orthodoxy at the time. Like the Bodhisattva and his companions, they practiced a form of tapas, asceticism, generating heat. Tapas means essentially heat. But they did so in different ways than the Bodhisattva and his companions did. This is a different tradition. The worship of the fire, the use of the nāga spirit, the entry into the river on the coldest nights of the year—all indicate a different style of practice.

You notice that for the Vedas that practiced sacrifice and for these people, fire is very important and fire is good. It's the fire of the sacrifice. The early miracles that the Buddha performed all involved fire, columns of light and fire. This is meant to impress these people. The use of tapas, which means heat—you generate heat through your practice—so heat and fire are very positive images in this tradition.

But what the Buddha did was reverse that imagery, and he said cooling is good. You have the word nibbāna, or in Sanskrit and English, nirvana. That's a word coming from the going out of a fire, the cooling of a fire. So the Buddha reverses the imagery of the time. At the time, it was probably quite startling. This is something new. Fire is not good, but cooling is. The going out of the fire is good.

Fire becomes the problem and the extinction of fire becomes the solution. When the Buddha gives this sermon, he's throwing at them an image that they're very familiar with, but he's spinning it around, he's reversing it.

We've spoken before about how the Buddha would focus his teaching or aim his teaching at a specific audience. You can see in this discourse that this is created for Kassapa and his followers. Given that the Buddha knew them beforehand, he may well have thought this whole thing out long beforehand.

where you get the feeling that he was flying by the seat of his pants. This time he seems to have a strategy in mind.

These ascetics practiced with a felt intimacy with the elements—a very elemental style of practice, powerful and direct, focused squarely on the body. There was the labor of preparing the fire sacrifice, the ritual bathing, the ordeal of midwinter in the river, and so on. But this practice was also limited by its dependence upon very specific conditions, without which it simply could not be performed.

They had to have certain possessions. Any ritual-based practice requires the ritual implements—certain things you must have in order to go through the rituals. If you don't have them, you can't do the rituals. Certain places were equally important. This practice was very much grounded in that area, on that river,

in that particular place—the sacred places of river and forest, because these places were home to the specific spirits invoked in the rituals. If you went away from that place, you'd have to start again because you'd encounter different spirits. It's a very location-oriented practice, similar to Australian Aboriginal religion, where the spirits and holy places are tied to specific locations, and certain people have their dreaming around particular areas. Very geographically specific.

Plus you need supplies—wood for the fire, so you must be in a forest; water for the ritual bathing, so you must be at a river. It's very place and possession oriented. You have to do it here. You can't do it anywhere else.

The Buddha's approach is completely different. First, no special equipment is needed. In those days they didn't need even the equipment we have today, and what we use is quite simple, not hugely complicated. Maximum simplicity. Second, the practice is not limited to any special place. Meditation can be done anywhere. One is free to move anywhere.

Notice how these ascetics do not wander—they're locked into this particular place. The Buddha's students wander. They're not confined to any particular location. This was very important for them. In wandering, they could take their entire tradition with them and set up camp and practice wherever they were. They did not need any of the elaborate requirements these ascetics needed.

In other words, his approach to practice is marked by universalism. If you look at Buddhism as a religion, it's an excellent candidate for being the first world religion. It spread outside of India and took root in very different cultures scattered over vast distances. It's transportable, portable, universal—in complete contrast to these fire-worshipping ascetics.

So the first thing the Buddha does with these dreadlocked ascetics—notice they don't simply convert. They say, "You are a teacher." Then instead of saying, "Sit down and I will teach you," as he did with the five companions, he says, "Let's go for a walk." He takes them away from their sacred places to a hill sticking up out of a flat plain, far from their sacred river—pretty much the opposite location from what they're used to. In other words, he's more than telling them, he's showing them

You don't need your sacred places, you don't need the intervention of these spirits that you've been cultivating a relationship with all these years. Completely unnecessary. We're going to do something totally different here. And then he teaches them a felt intimacy with the elements.

Now this is something in common with what they were doing before, but it's a whole different approach. Previously, it was their relationship with the spirits and with the particular place that they were in. Here, the Buddha is saying, you don't need any of that. All you need is what you have, which are the six sense fields. And you have the six sense fields wherever you are. That's all you need.

You don't need spirits, you don't need sacred places, you don't need particular seasons. All you need is to cultivate a felt intimacy with the elemental qualities of experience. In other words, what you need in

particular is an intimacy with vedana, which we talked about before—the realm of affect. And this vedana is intimately connected with the senses.

The Buddha has the term contact—phassa or samphassa. Usually translated as contact, but it comes from the verb phusati, to touch. We are touched by sense objects. The eye is touched by light. The ear is touched by sound. The nose is touched by odors, and so on. With that touch, there is feeling. And they are, as we talked about, inextricably linked. It's this that is the way into the practice, particularly for these ascetics. And in particular, through the body.

When the Buddha analyzes the human being—the self within her world—we talked about how he has two basic ways of doing this. One is the five aggregates, and the other is the six sense fields. Whenever he's talking about anatta, he talks in terms of the five aggregates. When he talks about entanglement in the world of affect, of feeling, he talks about the six sense fields.

You notice that out of the five aggregates, four of them are mental and one is physical. So it's a predominantly mind-oriented way of looking at the human being. In the six sense fields, five of them are physical and one is mental. This is a predominantly physical way of looking at the nature of the human being. The emphasis is on embodiment. This intimacy with vedana, with feeling, is cultivated primarily through body. The role of body in this practice is extremely important.

So the Buddha began by saying everything is burning. Everything. Now this "everything"—sabba—turns up in other discourses. There's one discourse which is extremely useful, the Sabba Sutta, or simply "Everything." The Buddha begins by saying, "I will teach you everything." Now if I went to a dharma talk and the person got up and said, "I'm going to give you a dharma talk on everything," I'd start feeling anxious about whether I'd get home in time for dinner. But in fact, this is a really brief discourse, and we'll just go through the whole thing.

"And what is everything? Eye sensitivity and forms, ear sensitivity and sounds, nose sensitivity and odors, tongue sensitivity and tastes, body sensitivity and tangibles, mind sensitivity and phenomena." So everything is the six sensitivities and the corresponding sense objects.

"Whoever says, rejecting this everything, 'I shall declare another,' if questioned on the foundation of his words, would be unable to explain and would also become distressed."

So if someone says, "Look, yes, the realm of the six senses is very important, but there is something else that's even more important because it's transcendental, it's spiritual," if questioned on the foundation of his words, he'd be unable to explain. What do you base this belief on? What's the foundation? And if challenged on this, he'd become distressed.

If we have a view, and when challenged, we become distressed, why do we become distressed? Obviously we're clinging to the view. But what are the views that we would tend to cling to most ferociously? The ones for which we have no foundation. Which we accept purely on faith. Which we've never actually

investigated. So when someone starts to probe and starts to investigate, we don't know what to say. "But that's what the Holy Book says." But...

What makes you sure that that really is the Holy Book? What makes you sure that this version you have, this book that was several thousand years old—how do you know that this translation is correct?

This is one thing that gets up my nostrils with fundamentalist Christians who believe that the Bible is the literal word of God. How many of them spend the necessary time studying classical Hebrew, ancient Greek, and Aramaic to actually read the word of God? Because those are the languages God spoke in. Usually they don't—they just have some translation. How on earth do they know?

When I was at UQ during my PhD in Buddhist studies, my associate supervisor was a professor in biblical studies. He specialized in the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible. He knew nothing about Buddhism, but he knew everything about studying ancient texts. So I used to hang out with the Old Testament crowd because they were really interesting. What they were doing was quite fascinating.

I remember one time he said, "There's one thing that every biblical fundamentalist has in common: they've never actually studied the Bible." Because, he says, if you read the Hebrew Bible, it's basically a massive storybook. And some of those stories are really, really weird. When you listen to the text being expounded by the fundamentalists, these are the stories they always avoid because they just don't fit the pattern.

So the Buddha is saying, "Well, let's go on. Why would the person become distressed?" Because it is beyond range, is what the Buddha says. But "beyond range" means beyond the range of the senses—in other words, beyond range of experience. So the Buddha is saying if you declare something else, whatever it is you're declaring is beyond experience, and there is no foundation for it except blah blah blah. It's only blah blah blah, and that's all it is, and that's all it ever can be.

The only firm ground to understand what's going on is experience. If there is something for us, if there is something beyond the range of human experience, we cannot know anything about it, and it is completely irrelevant to us. It's just meaningless. What we have is human experience, and human experience comes via the six senses. That's it. End of story.

This is the radical empiricism of the Buddha. So whenever the Buddha speaks about X, whatever it is, what he means is our experience of X. We touched on this when we were talking about life after life. He's more practitioner than philosopher. He does not get caught in metaphysical dead ends. He's just not interested in metaphysical questions. What he's interested in is the nature of experience. And given this, how should we live? That's it.

So this is empiricism, which of course in the European tradition we're quite familiar with—except that in the European tradition it only counts five senses, the physical senses. European philosophers don't see mind as a sense sensitivity or a sense organ. But for the Buddha, he does. He just sees it as obvious. It's a

sensitivity to sense data. It's a sense, just like all the others. Well, it has its own peculiar characteristics, but it's just another sense sensitivity.

The Buddha's empiricism becomes radical when we give up any felt belief in that which is beyond experience. What would it be like to drop everything at all that was beyond experience? What would it be like to live like that?

Well, for example, do we experience our own past? We experience memories, which are creations of the mind, and these memories arise when? In the present. Now, do we experience the past? No. What do our memories tell us about the past?

What would it be like to give up any felt belief in the truth of our memories? That's an interesting question. We actually practice this when we do the meditation practice. If I'm distracted by memory, if I ask myself, "What is this memory telling me? Is it giving me information about the past?" Well, in practical terms, sometimes they say something useful, sometimes not. Memories can be useful. But what they certainly tell us is the state of the present. They tell us the present state of the citta which is producing them. That's what they tell us from the point of view of the practitioner.

So I might find myself obsessing about some painful traumatic event that occurred in the past. Now the power of the memory comes from the assumption that this is telling me something true about me and I am now. This memory is telling me something which is true about me now—my past. But when we become sensitive to the Buddha's radical empiricism, which we do when we do this practice relentlessly, just staying with present experience and seeing how it comes and goes, we learn to realize that actually what this memory is telling me is the current state of this citta right now. And that's all it's telling me. As such, it's very valuable.

So a painful memory comes back, I obsess about it. What this is telling me is that right now the citta is raw and vulnerable and being impacted by mental phenomena that's causing pain. And this whole event is being clothed in the story of my past. But all I can ever experience of my past are mental images that arise now. That's all. There is nothing else out there.

And similarly with the future. What would it be like to give up any felt belief in the future? To recognize in real time that the future does not exist. That all I have are images and associated sensations and feelings that occur now, and what they tell me is what's happening now. They don't tell me anything at all about what will happen.

So this is what the Buddha is getting at, particularly in this discourse where he's talking about the immediacy of the senses. This discourse, "Burning," is talking about the felt intimacy of experience, the touch of the world upon me. And this world is both external and internal. This intimacy of stimulus is always happening. There is never a moment that I'm free of it. It's always happening. This is not some kind of abstract third-person philosophy. This is a felt first-person teaching which is designed to bring the

practitioner back to the feel of this right here and right now. What does this right now feel like?

So contact and feeling, touch and response—it's already happening. I don't have to do anything at all to make it happen. It's already happening. We are already responding. We don't have to do anything extra to respond. We're already doing it. So "Burning" points directly to that fact, with particular emphasis on its pain and drivenness.

Here the Buddha is really focusing on craving, tanha, the restless dissatisfaction that we experience at the heart of things—dis-ease. And this dis-ease is so subtle. When things are going well, we're having a good time, it's so subtle but so omnipresent that we've ceased noticing it. We notice our thoughts and our feelings blowing about in the wind, but we don't notice the restless, dissatisfied, vulnerable, sensitive quality deep within the citta itself at the point of impact—bang—when the object strikes the sensitivity.

So this teaching is all about a particular kind of practice, and the practice is all about intimacy with the immediacy of experience, the response to that, the vedana of it, whether pleasant, painful or otherwise, and the entanglement that occurs because of it. The way that we get entangled with whatever comes through the senses and get tied up with it. So it's about feeling our way into what's really going on.

So it's about sensitivity and receptivity. There's something going on beneath normal consciousness that is subtly coloring everything happening in consciousness. So what is it? What's going on down there?

Whatever it is, it's already here. And it's not a question of looking for it, as we mentioned with vedanā. If we look for it, if we have the idea, the concept, "Well, I have to look for this," that carries with it the assumption that it may not be here, it may not be discoverable. But it is already here. So it's not looking for it, but feeling, sensing what is already happening. And I think this attitude is quite important—this receptive openness to what we know is happening right now. But it's so immediate and so universal that we've stopped noticing it.

So as a practice style, I think this is—remember we did the exercises in "awareing," when we hold the meditation object very lightly, we become aware of the whole field. That's where we're practicing a more receptive quality of practice. And the next day we did restraining the senses, and there we practiced pure receptivity—just whatever comes. So the teaching on burning could be approached through that style of practice, and it can be particularly useful towards the end of a retreat.

So if we've been practicing, working very hard—note, note, note, note. And remember, noting is directed attention. I send the attention out, bang. I seek out the target, bang. Put the awareness on it. And it's an energetic, directed, kind of "out there" style of practice. Energy builds, concentration builds, mindfulness builds, everything becomes much more sensitive, the mind is much clearer.

Towards the end of the retreat, when it begins to register in the consciousness that it's not that far away until the end, then we begin to suspect that the Buddha's teaching on the non-existence of the future may well be false. *[Laughter]* Now he may have been right about the past, but I think he might have made a

mistake about the future because it feels really, really real. Which of course is the imagery coming up fueled by the energy and the clarity and the power of the mind which has spent the past three weeks meditating. So the mind can create a sense of reality which is really strong, precisely because we've been practicing for so long. It's a very interesting phenomenon.

Often we might be tempted to think that the longer we go into the retreat, the fewer the distractions become. That is one trajectory, but you equally have the trajectory where it's not that the distractions disappear—it's that we get a much better quality of distraction. The mind is capable of just producing the most vivid imagery and realities because it's so much more powerful.

So to practice a receptivity—just to receive this—not to fight it, not to try to bury it. "I've got to note harder," or alternatively, "I'll just take a break, just forget about it." But rather start to open up and just receive, feel what's coming through all these senses. And in the case of our relationship to the future, of course it's the sixth sense—the mind.

In this scheme of the six senses, we pointed out the emphasis is clearly on body because it's five of them, and then you have mind as the sixth. Its role is twofold. One is—well, first of all, the five physical senses, I think we mentioned this before, they're like parallel channels that never intersect. So the eyes receive light and color; they do not receive sound. The ears receive sound; they do not receive light, and so on. So there's no intersection. There's five quite discrete channels of information.

And the mind also has its own discrete channel, that of what's called phenomena. This is a translation of dhammās. These are mental phenomena. Sometimes in the older translations you see it translated as mind objects or mental objects. So I can see the inside of this hall—that's physical, coming through the eyes. I close my eyes and I remember or imagine this hall—and that's purely mind, that's the mind channel.

So the mind has its own channel, plus it receives data from the five physical senses as well, and it brings them together in one place, as it were, and it creates a sensual unity. So it creates a felt sense of one place where everything is happening. So when we consider where is seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching taking place, they take place here. So this practice emphasizes the here-ness of experience—even the here-ness of mind. Where am I conceiving myself and my world? Where is that construction of a world taking place? It's taking place here.

When we're lost in narrative, we lose that sense of here-ness. But when we practice with the six senses, we reclaim that sense of here-ness. And here is always now. The two of them go together. It's very much part of working with the senses—the here-ness of experience.

We talked about and played with tracking not-self, anatta, through narrative. So the mind creates the story of myself and my life. Tracking the six sense fields centers on feeling, not narrative. What is the feel of being here now thinking about the future? What is that experience? What touches me with that? How

do I respond to that here now?

This practice is concerned with the world defined by affect, by vedana. It's more intimate than the world defined by narrative and fundamentally more real. Yet, paradoxically, it can be more difficult to notice.

We talked about the power of the mind, its capacity to create an alternative reality. And we are in the habit of living in those alternative realities. The practice of the six senses is all about this reality, including the mental reality—but the mental reality experienced as here, as now. So I'm imagining the future, but I have a clear felt sense that this is happening here, and it's happening now. It's not happening there and in the future.

And this practice—the ground of it—is in our relationship to the body. And again we come back to the role of the body, how important it is.

We gave the example of hanging out the clothes. Hanging out the clothes is very routine physical activity whose narrative power is very weak. So what we find when we're hanging out the clothes is we'll start to spin fantasies and we project our sense of reality there into the fantasies.

The practice of the sense fields entails deliberately staying tuned to the direct sensate feeling aspect of the activity. Is it routine? Well, it's only routine if I think about it, if I compare it to past and future. Oh yes, I've done this before. And once it's over, then I can do something real. That relationship can only exist when past and future are felt to be real.

But what if there really isn't anything except this peg? Then we start to get this direct sensate feeling aspect of the activity. This is where the practice of the sense fields takes place.

This is staying with the body, and again, this is one reason why we do the body work in the morning. It's a way of deliberately entering into the direct, immediate feel of the body and exploring it, exploring what is the nature of the sensation. Because the whole exercise is: where is the sensation this morning? Find it, stay with it, relax into it.

But there's also the direct sensate feel of the mind itself, which is available but much more subtle. So for example, thinking and fantasy, thinking about the future. But what about the direct sensate experience of the drivenness to think? What does that feel like? And the feeling of the unsatisfactory nature, the dukkha nature of this particular thought that I've generated—which I can see because I immediately rush to create another one. If this first one was satisfactory I would have stayed with it. But apparently it isn't because there's this rush to create another one and another one and another one.

What's underneath that and what's the feel of the driven quality of the need to produce all these thoughts? The restlessness and the agitation—this is part of the Buddha's fire imagery. It's hot in the sense that first of all we get emotionally entangled with it. So I'm driven to think of the future. I take it to be real, and then I get tangled up. I better arrange it this way. Maybe that's not the best way. I'll arrange it that way. That'll

be really, really good. Oh, Jesus, that's really going to be good. It's going to be fantastic. How many days? Oh, it's going to be great.

But someone might screw it up. Oh, those bastards. I'd better handle that. I've got to figure out some way to prevent that from happening. Fueling, agitation, burning.

In the Satipatthana Sutta, when the Buddha talks about the six senses, he talks about understanding the sensitivity, the sense object, and the fetter—the sannyojana—that arises dependent upon both. So here he's taking a slightly different approach with the senses, but it's the same thing: the sense of stuckness and drivenness found in our relationship with the senses, the way we get caught up in them, entangled, stuck, unable to move beyond them, driven by them. And so we have this image of fire.

The Buddha's use of fire conveys restlessness and dissatisfaction and a sense of fascination. Isn't it interesting to watch a fire? It really draws the eye in. And it's constantly shifting and moving and going somewhere else—there's no rest in it, there's no peace within it. For the Buddha, what bliss comes from is the cooling of the fire. But in order to find that cooling, we've got to go directly through the fire. That's the only way there.

Let's look at another way in which the Buddha talks about fire, in the Aggivaccha Gotta Sutta—the discourse to Vacchagotta on fire. This is another fire sermon, this one given to Vacchagotta. He was a non-Buddhist ascetic who used to hang around and ask the Buddha questions. He asked very good questions and inspired some very good discourses.

In this particular discourse, Vacchagotta is interested in the nature of the awakened citta. When someone's awakened, fully enlightened, what's the nature of the citta there?

The Buddha says to him, "What do you think, Vaccha? Suppose a fire was burning in front of you. Would you know it was burning in front of you?" So you get this picture—they're sitting around, and imagine this fire right in front of you. Do you know that fire is burning in front of you?

"I would, Mr. Gautama." Vaccha is not a bhikkhu, so he doesn't say *Bhante*. He says "Mr. Gautama."

"If somebody asked you, 'Dependent upon what does this fire burn?' what would you answer?"

"I would answer, 'This fire burns dependent upon grass and sticks.'"

"If this fire was extinguished, would you know that it was extinguished?"

"I would, Mr. Gautama."

"If someone was to ask you, 'When that fire in front of you was extinguished, where did it go? To the east, the west, the north, or the south?' what would you answer?"

"That does not apply, Mr. Gautama. Fire burns dependent upon its fuel of grass and sticks."

Remember, fuel is *upadana*—we talked about this before. The translation of *upadana* is clinging or attachment. So it's fuel and it's also clinging or attachment. "Fire burns dependent upon its fuel of grass and sticks. When that fuel is used up and it does not get any more—no longer fed—it is reckoned as cooled."

So for the Buddha, the goal is for the fire to burn itself out. Everything is burning. What we have to do is become intimate with that experience of burning, and in that intimacy, stop adding to it. When we do that, the fire goes out.

And what can we say about that experience? If the fire goes out, well, you know that the fire has gone out. But what can you say about it? Here the question is: where has it gone? You've said it's gone out, so where has it gone to?

You can see that language doesn't cope. "That does not apply, Mr. Gautama." Language is being directed at something which it cannot cope with. The cooling of the fire represents something which is experienced as obvious—as obvious as "here, there's the fire," but now it's gone out. Bleeding obvious. Yet at the same time, it's impossible to put a concept on it. Whatever concept we put upon it does not apply.

It doesn't fit.

Did that aesthetic ever convert?

Yes, eventually.

Did you know what happened to him?

No, I just know that that particular questioning was around the mind of the awakened one. Where does it go after death? So that was a question about life after life.

You notice how the Buddha brings it back to here and now? Right now, with the fire's gone out, where has it gone? Because there's no difference.

So this is a practice which is immediate, it's physical, five out of the six senses. It has to do with the immediacy of experience and the feeling that arises, the ocean of affect that we all live in, our responses, and seeing—really being clear about those responses and exactly what is going on with them, and going through that fire.

And the fire implies dukkha. This is an image which conveys what the later tradition calls the dukkha ñāṇas. I think maybe tomorrow we'll talk about dukkha since one or two individuals have experienced it during this retreat. Once or twice. Not very much. Mostly it's been bliss. So we'll talk about that.

But through the fire to the other side, which is the going out of the fire. And this is the basic theme of the practice that the Buddha is presenting to the dreadlocks, the ascetics—although now there's no more dreadlocks. They've abandoned those in the rivers.

So he presents all this material about burning, and then he introduces disenchantment. Seeing in this way, the trained, cultivated student is disenchanted with eye sensitivity, disenchanted with visual forms, disenchanted with visual awareness, disenchanted with visual contact, disenchanted with whatever feeling arises dependent upon visual contact, whether pleasant or painful, or neither painful nor pleasant, and so on through the other senses.

And of course we talked about disenchantment in the Anattalakkhana Sutta. So from here on in, it's exactly the same as Anattalakkhana, but it's a different entry point. With the second discourse on not-self, the entry point is via the five aggregates. Here the entry point is the six sense fields.

And this illustrates an aspect of the Buddha's teaching and practices: there's any number of entry points. And basically the entry point for each practitioner depends on where their sensitivities lie. That's the way in. And of course sensitivity can also be associated with pain. So often the pain is the way in. It's the meditator's friend.

Is it?

Who said that?

That's what I've heard.

She's quoting Upāndvā.

As this explanation was being given, the hearts of the thousand bhikkhus were liberated from the taints by not clinging. So one thousand arahants. Bang. So you can see how the whole thing is escalating. The last discourse was five arahants. Then he had various people around Bārāṇasī. By the time he leaves Bārāṇasī, he's got sixty arahants. And now, he's done a lot of legwork over the past month. But whammo, he's got a thousand.

Is this only a month later?

Well, he spent time at Bārāṇasī, so maybe six weeks, two months.

So what was the time scale of this? How long...

First two or three months.

After the awakening?

Well, the two months after the awakening was the first discourse. So let's say this is maybe a couple of months later. So within six months, within the first six months.

So Buddhism is getting bigger and bigger. The Buddha's got this large community.

This community of 1,000 represented something extraordinary—these were very well-known and

respected ascetics. This was 1,000 celebrities gathered in one place. What the Buddha does next demonstrates his remarkable strategic understanding: he takes them to Rajagaha, the capital of Magadha.

The arrival creates an enormous sensation throughout the city. All of these famous ascetics, particularly the three Kassapa brothers who were household names, have come to town together. This is completely unprecedented—they normally never travel as a group. And something is clearly different: they've all shaved their heads, which is seriously unusual behavior for them. There's also this other figure—a young man who seems remarkably close to these established teachers.

The texts tell us that people were genuinely confused, asking each other: Who is the student and who is the teacher? The elder Kassapa, understanding the confusion and recognizing the situation, makes a decisive public gesture. He prostrates before the Buddha, declaring unmistakably: "He is the teacher. I am the student."

In that moment, the Buddha is rocketed to overnight stardom in Magadha. He becomes the number one spiritual teacher in the kingdom—an unprecedented achievement.

You can see the Buddha's brilliant strategic mind at work. Having made that crucial decision perhaps six months earlier—"I must teach, there will be a few people who can understand this"—he has gotten onto a trajectory and now realizes something much grander: I can build an international spiritual movement. And that's exactly what he sets out to accomplish.

From this point forward, everything grows exponentially. His influence expands across kingdoms and cultures. His training as a member of the aristocratic class would have given him that strategic political understanding—he knew how power worked, how to communicate with influential people, how systems of authority functioned.

This aristocratic background, his experience as part of a republican ruling structure rather than a monarchy, profoundly shapes how he organizes the Sangha. The Buddha understood community organizing, the dynamics of leadership, and the principles of effective governance. All of this wisdom flows directly into his creation of the Vinaya and the revolutionary democratic principles that govern monastic life.

The spiritual genius and the political strategist were one and the same person, working in perfect harmony to establish a teaching that would endure for millennia.

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