

04 The Essence of the Awakening

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 14:08

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa

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

So now the next passage I want to read is the one where he tells us really about what constitutes his awakening, or at least the main thrust of his awakening we can say:

"Monks, before my enlightenment, while I was still a Bodhisattva, not yet fully enlightened, it occurred to me: 'Alas, this world has fallen into trouble, in that it is born, ages and dies, it passes away and is reborn, yet it does not understand the escape from this suffering, headed by aging and death. When now will an escape be discerned from this suffering, headed by aging and death?'"

So this is an old theme, isn't it? This goes back really to that youthful time when he wakes up to the existential problems of life. But this seems to tell us that it was on his mind really, even when he was becoming ascetic. This is all before he became liberated.

"And then it occurred to me, when what exists, does aging and death come to be? By what is aging and death conditioned? Then through careful attention, there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: When there is birth, aging and death comes to be. Aging and death has birth as its condition."

It seems pretty obvious really, doesn't it? The scriptures make it a huge breakthrough. But he says, well, what is the primary condition for aging and death? Well, it's birth. So we have to be a little patient because he now goes deeper, of course. So that was his first thought. Well, you've got to start from somewhere. So how is it I'm growing old and having to die? Well, it's because I was born. That's pretty straightforward.

"Then, monks, it occurred to me, when what exists, does birth come to be, existence come to be, clinging, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense bases, name and form... by what is name and form conditioned? Then through careful attention there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: When there is consciousness, name and form comes to be. Name and form has consciousness as its condition."

So here we're running through dependent origination, usual stuff. So these all refer back to themselves. Clinging is dependent on existence, craving dependent on clinging, feeling... it's going back on itself, right? But then he comes to this point of consciousness, name and form. Name and form is really the psychophysical organism. Remember that when he talks about form, at its most subtle level, it's the point where mind and matter meet. So in other words, we can't know a fingernail. You can't be in a fingernail.

You can only know it by the sense of touch. So that's at its more subtle level. So he's come now to this point about consciousness.

"Then, monks, it occurred to me, when what exists does consciousness come to be? By what is consciousness conditioned? Then, monks, through careful attention," so this is the *vipassanā*, "there took place in me a breakthrough of wisdom: When there is name-form, consciousness comes to be. Consciousness has name-form as its condition."

So without the psychophysical organism there can't be consciousness, basically.

"But then it occurred to me, this consciousness turns back. It does not go further than name form. It is to this extent that one may be born and age and die, pass away and be reborn. That is, when there is consciousness with name and form as its condition, and name and form with consciousness as its condition. When name and form is conditioned, the six sense bases; with the six sense bases as conditioned, contact; and so on, the whole path of dependent origination, such is the origin of the whole mass of suffering."

So, he's taken us back to this point of consciousness. Now that consciousness is disputed a little bit. It's an act of knowing. If there wasn't consciousness, there'd be just an automaton, wouldn't there? Just a machine. There's something that knows. But it can only know what it knows through the psychophysical organism. And the psychophysical organism is unknowable without consciousness. So if you took away the psychophysical organism how could consciousness of anything arise? If you took away consciousness how could the knowing, how could you know anything about the psychophysical organism? So these two rest against each other, the one arising completely dependent on the other. That's where the origination starts and ends. You can't go beyond that. You can't go beyond the bubble of your consciousness. Basically what he's saying. You can't get outside the bubble of your consciousness. And you can't get outside the bubble of your psychophysical organism. That's it.

Then he says, "Origination, origination. Thus monks, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetration and light." So these are just synonyms for enlightenment, awakening, understanding. And then of course he goes back on it. So now he's understood how we come to exist, how we go through this process of becoming. So now of course he goes back on that.

"So when what does not exist does aging and death not come to be? With the cessation of what does the cessation of aging and death come about? Then monks, through careful attention, there took place in me a breakthrough by wisdom: when there's no birth, aging and death does not come to be, and with cessation of birth comes cessation of aging and death."

So then, the process of cessation, right? Without the psychophysical organism, you can't have the sixth sense basis. You can't have contact, you can't have feeling, you can't have craving, so on, so on.

"And then it occurred to me, when what does not exist, does consciousness come to be? When what does

not exist, does consciousness not come to be? With the cessation of what, does the cessation of consciousness come to be? Then monks, through careful attention, there took place in me this breakthrough by wisdom: When there's no name and form, psychophysical organism, consciousness does not come to be. With the cessation of name and form comes the cessation of consciousness."

So now he says, "This occurred to me, I have discovered this path to enlightenment. That is, with the cessation of name and form comes cessation of consciousness. With the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name and form. And with the cessation of name and form, there comes the cessation of the six bases, and through the six bases, contact, and so on and so forth. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering. Cessation, cessation, thus monks, in regard to things unheard of before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetration, and light."

That's why here we chant this dependent origination because it's so core to his understanding of how everything happens and everything disappears. And because he saw that, he saw there was nothing in it that was substantial. All this is not self, all this also doesn't have any substance to it. And it's in constant motion, you're constantly turning that wheel, going through that process.

And then as usual he gives us an image: "Suppose a man wandering through a forest would see an ancient path, an ancient road travelled upon by people in the past. He would follow it and would see an ancient city, an ancient capital that had been inhabited by people in the past, with parks and groves, ponds and ramparts, a delightful place. Then the man would inform the king or his royal minister: 'Sire, know that while wandering through the forest I saw an ancient path, an ancient road, travelled upon by people in the past. I followed it and saw an ancient city, an ancient capital that had been inhabited by people in the past, with parks, groves, ponds and ramparts, a delightful place. Renovate that city, sire.' Then the king or the royal minister would renovate that city. And sometime later that city would become successful and prosperous, well populated, filled with people, attained to growth and expansion."

"So too, monks, I saw the ancient path, the ancient road travelled by the perfectly enlightened ones of the past. And what is that ancient path, that ancient road? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path, that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. I followed that path and by doing so I have directly known aging and death, its origin, its cessation and the way leading to its cessation. And I've directly known birth and existence," I always prefer the word becoming, frankly, "clinging, craving, feeling, contact, the six sense bases, name and form, consciousness, volitional formations," that's your *saṅkhāra*, "their origin, their cessation, and the way leading to their cessation. Having directly known them, I have explained them to the monks, to the nuns, to male lay followers and the female lay followers. This spiritual life, monks, has become successful and prosperous, extended, popular, widespread, well-proclaimed among the *devas* and humans."

I can only hope that this little reading and small explanation will drive you swiftly along the road, travelling to *Nibbāna*, sooner rather than later.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.

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