

Sacca: Honesty

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 10:57

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

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Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So, just to carry on with these *pāramī*, the next one is *sacca*. The 'c' in Pali is always 'ch' and it translates as honesty, truthfulness.

I think we can pass over telling the great whoppers. I think we've gone beyond that. But Churchill talked about it. Churchill put it as being economical with the truth. But the other dishonesty is to do with exaggeration. And we tend to exaggerate in order to impress people. It's to do with the three conceits. We're either trying to impress somebody that we're better than we are, or worse than we are, or we're equal to them, even though we know we're not.

So that exaggeration that we put about ourselves, there's also exaggeration about the weather, the climate change, the financial crisis, just the way we talk about it, exaggerating it to create some impression. And so long as, I think it's a case of just being aware of what we're saying and what we're doing. It's always to do with right speech.

But there's a point where I think exaggeration leaves the humorous and moves into just that little area of slight untruth. You just have to be careful. I mean, I've occasionally found myself, when somebody's come up with a Pali word, pretending that I know it. It embarrasses me. And then I've got to go and look it up. And it's just because I've got in my head that I know Pali words, and I don't. I've got to get over the fact that I'm not a Pali scholar. And it's happened to me about, well, once I remember distinctly being corrected, and so I'm humbled and made some excuse about it.

So these things slip in and they're coming from that sense of self, basically. So just being aware of where we exaggerate is just slipping into untruth.

In terms of meditation, it can be a real problem because it was funny, when I used to work with my Eastern teachers, they were often all about honesty. It was because Westerners would talk about their experience. And I never really found out whether it was the fact that Westerners were exaggerating or whether it was the teachers who didn't believe that Westerners could attain these experiences. And I remember once saying to Ajahn Sumedho, I said, they think we're spiritual nerds, like we would think of Easterners at one time as being technological twits. And so there was that confusion, but they were always

on about honesty, being honest in your reporting.

The next one that is of interest is white lies. These are all to do with intentions. What's your intention in not saying something that you ought to say, or in saying something that is not right, but for some good reason? I think in former times it was very difficult to tell somebody they were dying. You always had to pretend that they weren't actually dying, even though the person probably felt that they were dying. These days people are a bit more open about that, but it's a case of having a good reason for not saying the truth and being clear about it.

But I remember once there was an old teacher of mine from primary school whom I met and he became headmaster of a local place. And the catering service decided to serve TVP, textured vegetable protein, instead of meat. And he didn't tell the staff. And then he asked the staff what it was like, and of course they said it was all right, good mince, very nice meat, and all that. And then he told them. And they were very upset, because they felt they'd been used as guinea pigs. It was all right doing it to the kids.

And it was funny, because he told me with this sense of astonishment as to why they were so upset about it. And it was like he was, in other words, what he didn't realise was that in not telling them, he presumed that they would be prejudiced. So if he'd told them that it was TVP, they'd have eaten it with that critical mind and said, well, this isn't like meat, it doesn't have the same crunch, it doesn't have this, it doesn't have that. And he was tricking them in a way. So he got a bit of flack for that. But it just shows you, it was a good intention in a sense. But from his point of view, there was this lack of trust in the teachers that they wouldn't accept this TVP business.

Now, the one that's usually talked about in the commentaries is keeping your word, actually. That's the one they usually go on about, keeping your word. And I think we often find when somebody asks us to do something, we can be a bit too quick with the "yes, I'll do it." Instead of just holding a minute and saying, well, I'll have to think about it, I'll have to look at my diary or something. And you find yourself saying yes and then kicking yourself for doing it.

And then when it comes to the time to actually help them out, moving house or painting and decorating or something, suddenly you're feeling ill. You phone up and say, "Can't come, there's an elephant's just entered the house and I've got to deal with it," things like that, to get out of this hole you've got yourself in. And then you do it and you're feeling rotten all the time for doing it. And all it took was this moment of just saying, well, I'm not sure I can help or what.

There's a lovely incident of that in Sri Lanka. Easterners, because of loss of face, have it very difficult to say no. I came across this when I was in the *kuti*. I was trying to keep the rule very strictly. It was very difficult to do that. And so I would ask the office to buy me something. I can't remember what the object was now, but let's say it was apples. So I would say to them, can you get me so many apples? They were in trust with my money that I had. They were my *kappiya*, the ones who make it allowable.

Well, if they couldn't get apples, they came with a whole load of oranges. They couldn't come to me and say, there aren't any apples. They had to come with something else. But eventually I got fed up because I was wasting all my money. So I had to give up on asking them to do something.

And there was this Australian monk, now this is really going to make you laugh. So he had turned up in Sri Lanka and he had invited this senior monk to come to Thailand with him. And the senior monk couldn't say no. He can't say no. So he does this shake of the head business. And he bought a ticket, bought a ticket. And it was all arranged to meet at the airport, and he never turned up. And it was just too much for this Australian guy. This was the absolute pits, a senior monk. And I found that constantly in the East, the inability to say no and giving you the impression they're coming. And then they don't. Or they say they'll do something and then they don't. And I think it's to do with that Eastern thing about losing face and not being shamed, a shamed culture rather than ours, which is more guilt-ridden.

So I think that's an area where you see in the commentaries, it's only discussed, as far as I remember, to do with this keeping your word.

So that gives you some ideas about this quality of *sacca* of truthfulness, being absolutely honest. And I think the most difficult thing is to be honest with oneself, frankly, to be brutally honest with oneself, to see oneself as one really is. And in a sense, that's the definition of humility. In its proper sense, to see oneself as one really is.

And you come across this way of talking about it in Buddhism. I don't know where this has come from, but when two people meet, there are six people there. There's me as I think I am, there's me as you think I am, and there's me as I really am. And the same applies to you. So how we communicate is a problem and it just shows how we have these self images which don't live up to the way other people see us and they see us from their vantage point they put a twist on us and seeing ourselves as we really are would cut through a lot of this stuff that comes up through honesty.

So it's quite a virtue really. Quite a virtue to develop that.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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