

# 1. Indulgence

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 17:48

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*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.* Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened.

To begin these little homilies on the scriptures, I suppose the obvious one to start with is what's known as the first discourse, the one in which the Buddha begins the turning of the wheel of the law. I'm going to read it out, just the main bit. It's not that long a discourse. I'm going to read out just to the point where it gives us the full layout of his teachings.

"Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Baranasi and the Deer Park at Isipatana. There the Blessed One addressed the monks of the group of five thus: 'Monks, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial, and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the *Tathāgata* has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, and leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*. And what, monks, is that middle way awakened to by the *Tathāgata*? It is this Noble Eightfold Path, that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness. This, monks, is that middle way, awakened to by the *Tathāgata*, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge and leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*."

'Now this, monks, is the noble truth of suffering. Birth is suffering. Aging is suffering. Illness is suffering. Death is suffering. Union with what is displeasing is suffering, and separation from what is pleasing is suffering. Not to get what one wants is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering. It is this craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there. That is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence and craving for extermination. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering. It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-attachment. This, monks, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. It is the noble Eightfold Path.'

So that's the opening of the discourse. He goes on for a couple of more pages where he goes into it just a little bit more. He extends it, basically. What I mean to do is just go through it over a period of time and hopefully just say a few words as to how this understands the meaning of these different phrases.

The first thing to begin with is that the one that it begins with, "thus have I heard." I'm presuming that you don't know anything about the scriptures, so I'll start with the very basics. After the Buddha's death, the enlightened monastics got together and convened a first council, which is up in Vulture's Peak, which you can still visit, right there near the ancient city of Rajagaha, the king's city, which is now called Rajgir.

The one person they were depending upon was Ananda because Ananda had spent the last 20 years of the Buddha's life with him as his attendant. He was a cousin, but the thing about Ananda was he had this phenomenal audio memory and basically they were depending on him to remember what the Buddha had said, what the talks the Buddha had given. The story is that when the Buddha died he'd only attained the first level of attainment, one called the *Sotāpanna*, the stream entrance, and there are four to go—another three to go rather. He put in a lot of effort trying to become fully liberated because the *Arahants* had made this rule that nobody would come to the meeting unless they were fully liberated. So he struggled and struggled and struggled, and the night before this whole meeting was going to take place, he worked all the night and could see that he wasn't going to make it. He could see that. It was getting a bit desperate towards the end of the night, at least it was my interpretation.

Anyway, he lay down to have a rest. And it was on the point of the standing position to the lying position that he went through the rest of the processes of enlightenment. And when he hit the pillow, that was when he'd attained the full liberation. That's the story that surrounds Ananda. So they let him in, and what happened was they would ask him to relate a discourse, they would question that discourse, and slowly but surely this whole set of talks were laid out. All these things, remember, in those times were learnt off by heart, so they were pretty set pieces. You can see from this it's formalised.

All the scriptures begin with "thus have I heard" because it refers back to Ananda's memory of what the Buddha taught. Not to say the other people there didn't make suggestions and whatnot, but basically that's how the scriptures came about. He says that in a sense he couldn't have heard this because he wasn't there at the time because the Buddha was only talking to his five companions, but "thus I heard" must also mean that which came to him and which the Buddha had approved of in some way or other. Because by the time the Buddha died, all these scriptures were being learnt off by heart. They were all set pieces really.

So this talk is given after he became fully awakened and wondered who he could pass this on to, if you remember the story. He remembers his first two teachers and then he learns or begins to realise they both died, either through his superpowers or he learns that they both died. So the next group of people that he thinks about passing this on to were the five companions whom he'd abandoned, whom he left out of despair when he came to the end of those self-mortification exercises.

And so he goes to find them. The distance from where he was liberated, Bodh Gaya, all the way up to Sarnath, which is on the Ganges right up there on the Ganges just outside Varanasi, present-day Varanasi, that's a heck of a long way. So it must have taken him quite a while to get up there. When he finally finds

them, he approaches them and they're a bit disappointed in him. They basically try to ignore him. But as he comes close, they see that something's changed about him. So they offer him a seat. During this whole talk, in another discourse, which relates it in a slightly different way, he's constantly saying to them, "Have you ever heard me talk like this before? Have you ever heard me say something like this before?" And by the end of this first talk, they're pretty convinced that he's had some sort of major breakthrough. In fact, by the end of this talk one of them enters into the level of a stream entrance.

So that's the opening part here. "Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Varanasi, which is present day Varanasi, in the deer park at Isipatana, and there the Blessed One addressed the monks of the group of five thus."

Now he goes on to, there are these two extremes that should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. Now, in the commentaries, it says that when all these scriptures are addressed to monks, you can take it—I forget the term for that in English, where you use one part to refer to the whole, like "all hands on deck." Anyway, here, what he means is anybody who follows the Dharma. So it should be said, for us it's all meditators. These two extremes should not be followed by one who's gone forth into homelessness. That can be taken also to mean anybody who's entered into the spiritual life, into a spiritual way of thinking about things. These two extremes should be avoided.

So the first one is the pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial. I just want to go into that for this particular session.

Remember that he's not talking about pleasures itself. It's always about the pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures. The pursuit of sensual happiness. So, first of all, there are sensual happinesses, such as eating and whatnot. In fact, this can extend to anything which comes in through the six senses, whether you're listening to the radio, anything from sex, drugs, rock and roll. It doesn't really matter what it is, it's the whole gamut of human pleasure in the sensual world. He's not saying there's anything wrong with that. He's saying it's seeking happiness there that's the problem. Seeking happiness in sensual pleasures.

And there are consequences to that seeking happiness in sensual pleasures, and if we keep those things in mind then whenever you are enjoying a sensual pleasure one has to be careful of that overlay of seeking happiness in it which is forming the attachment to it, which is trying to make a sensual pleasure something which we are becoming psychologically dependent on. So in other words, to go, for instance, in nature, just to go walking in the country and to enjoy the country is one thing, but then when you find that during a whole set of bad weather you can't get out to the country and you're feeling depressed, then that's telling you something about your relationship to the country. See what I mean? So it's that relationship that he's saying is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial.

There are five consequences that arise from that attachment. The first one is the whole psychological dependency which at worst is addiction. So anytime you have that psychological need for something, then that is pointing out to us where our dependency lies. And that's the suffering. It's got to be fulfilled. There's

a lack. There's a thirst there for it.

The second one is frustration when you don't get it. That's another sign. You're getting angry because you can't have what you want.

The third one is grief that you've lost it. If you have something and then you lose it and you can't go, then you feel sad about it and grieve. If it's somebody close to you, it also refers to the attachment we have to human beings. They're also part of the sensual world. So when they die, when they fall ill, misfortune hits them, the grief we feel is something else. That's not to be confused with sorrow and compassion. That's another thing, though. But that sense of personal loss, the hole that's left in our hearts, for instance when somebody dies, that is the measure of attachment.

And this underlying constant fear of loss—that's the anxiety. So once you're dependent on something, whether you like it or not there's always going to be that underlying sense of anxiety because we know it arises and passes away. Sometimes it's not going to be there. So our society, which has become so sophisticated, and we have this awful weather like this, there's an underlying anxiety that, you know, the electricity is going to go or the heating is going to stop or people aren't going to get their food because it's not being distributed. These things that we take so much for granted under extreme conditions point to our anxiety about these things, about loss.

And the fifth thing, which is really I think the true psychological motivation for our consumerism, is boredom. So boredom comes about because of the inbuilt obsolescence of pleasure. In other words, you can't keep getting the same buzz from the same thing. So even if you put the sweetest most beautiful chocolate in your mouth, the next one is not going to make it. You've got to have a different type of chocolate. Or you've got to leave it for a long while and then go at it again. So that inbuilt inability for the same sensual pleasure to keep giving you the same buzz comes back to us as a feeling of boredom with it. And that boredom can of course get really very strong, can move to a real aversion with something which was once giving you pleasure.

And the whole of consumerism is not simply giving you pleasure because pleasure is pleasant. It's also because people are constantly running away from boredom. So they're always looking for something new. What's the next thing on the menu? What's the next thing that's new? It's the real underlying power because we are much more motivated to move away from pain than we are to move towards pleasure.

So these five things, when you contemplate it, they bring home why the Buddha thought that the pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasure which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble and unbeneficial. He hasn't got a good word for it at all.

So hopefully that will give you something to reflect upon, especially as we approach Christmas with the food and all that. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all desire for seeking happiness in sensual pleasure, and achieve that enlightenment, that pure happiness of

1. *Indulgence*

*Nibbāna*, sooner rather than later.

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