

The First Noble Truth of Dukkha

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 12:28

*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 one.

So, we've got this Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, turning of the wheel of the law, and having told us that the way to happiness was not through seeking happiness in sensual pleasures — remember it's not a denial of sensual pleasures — nor is it the pursuit of self-mortification, or punishing the body.

And he says he's awakened to the middle way that gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge and leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. And then he says, what, monks, is the middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata? So it is this Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right intention or right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. And this is what leads to peace and so on and so forth.

Now he repeats that, so I'll come back to that. But then he tells us about the noble truths. Now this, monks, is the noble truth of suffering. This is the first noble truth. There's four of them. So there's the noble truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, the fact that there is an end to suffering, and the path leading to that end of suffering.

So here he's telling us what the noble truth of suffering is. The first noble truth: 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 books are written on this, but I'll do a little five-minute commentary. So the first four — birth, aging, illness and death — this of course refers to, goes back to the mythology around his awakening, where as a young man in his middle twenties, he comes across the person who's very sick, a very aged person, and a corpse. I mean, that's how it's put. But basically, somewhere in his mid-twenties, he woke up to the fact that what was waiting for him was sickness, old age, and death, having been born.

But he puts in here birth, so birth of course is suffering. I know that maybe with some caesarean sections the baby doesn't suffer that much, but even so there is suffering. So it's just part of the fabric of life, this suffering.

So here, remember, there's not only just the basic suffering, the *dukkha*, there's the *dukkha dukkhata*,

which means the suffering of sufferings. So he's always making a distinction between the facts of life, which are the sickness, old age and death, which is painful, but the suffering is our relationship to it. So always remember that it's not as though he's denying that there is pain in life. He himself of course never overcame physical pain. He died in pain from some sort of gastroenteritis.

So that's the main thing. And these things are really something to contemplate. It's good to do it once a day. Just remind ourselves there is sickness, old age and death. You don't have to get morbid about it. It's just there is sickness, old age and death.

So every morning after puja, at the end of the puja, before we do the Karaniya Sutta, the Metta Sutta, the sutta on loving-kindness, people send me names of people who are either extremely sick or they're dying. So every morning I read out this list and the list changes and it's just a nice reminder, a grounding.

Then it's more to do with our daily life, so there's the union with what is displeasing is suffering. In other words, being with what you don't like is a pain. That's all he's saying. It's very simple, very straightforward, and it's to do again with our attitude to those situations, those people, those places where we find ourselves, where we don't want to be. So remember, it's not the people, it's not the places that are causing the suffering, it's our relationship to them.

And then there's the opposite, separation from what is pleasing. So not being able to get your coffee when you want it, your tea, not being able to find your friend or somebody you're close to. So separation from what you love, from what you're attached to, is suffering. So again, it's not the coffee that's causing the suffering or the friend who's not there or the fact that you can't get out to the countryside at this particular time. That's not the suffering. The suffering is to do with our relationship to it.

So those two are the opposites: union with what is displeasing and separation from what is pleasing.

And then finally, in a sentence, not to get what you want. So I'm sure you've come across this phrase: to want what you get more than you're always getting what you want. So wanting what you get moves us towards contentment. This is the way it is. And the more we're content with the way things are, the less there is this desire to want to seek happiness in the pleasurable things of life, just to be contented.

So the positive side of "not to get what one wants" is discontent. The negative side is discontent. And if we turn that sentence around itself and just begin to appreciate what we have, to develop a certain gratitude for it, then this contentment rises.

And my last little reminder with the tip of the day, which of course you all read, went on about this business of need and sufficiency and greed. So how do you know what's sufficient? That leads to contentment. What is sufficient?

And I suggest in this that don't come back on it from greed. Don't look at all the things you greed for and then come back to what you think is sufficiency. Start from the point of view of what you really, really,

really need in order to exist. Considering, for instance, the disasters we've had last year like the flooding in Pakistan and the flooding in Australia. So what would you grab and take with you which you think you need? Now that's your basis. Once that's clear, then you can begin to move up into this area of sufficiency.

So what we need is clothes. It doesn't matter whether it's rag clothes or just a cloth. But then, of course, we live in a society and you need certain clothings for certain jobs and relaxation, and so on. If you start from that base of what you need, then it's easier to get to a more realistic sufficiency, that's all.

And then finally, this statement: the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering. Books are written on the five aggregates. The five aggregates is the way the Buddha splits our human experience in the moment for the purpose of showing us where suffering lies.

So obviously there's the body. There are feelings both caused by the body and the mind. In the body, there's perceptions, and feeling and perception always rise together. Then there are these *saṅkhāras*, so these are your conditionings, and this is where you'll find will. It's here in the *saṅkhāra* that there's suffering created or undone. And then there's cognition, that which knows. So you're aware of what it is you're aware of. It's an act of cognition.

So these five *khandhas*, remember, are there with the Buddha. The Buddha after enlightenment still had his five *khandhas*. So it's this business of the process of desire, the process of attachment to them, using them, using these five *khandhas*, which is the body and mind, in order to seek some sort of permanent happiness.

And when we look at what we mean by happiness, I think you'll normally come down to a pleasant, beautiful state of mind. And of course, if you associate real happiness with beautiful states of mind, then it's a no-go, isn't it? Because it keeps changing. And if you could stop the world and say, "This is it, I don't want to move on," then you could use the body and mind to reach this wonderful state. But you can't.

So as soon as you recognize this process of impermanence, then you stop seeking this permanent happiness in the world. And that's what makes you let go of things easier. So when you're in a state of happiness, you're happy. And then after you finish, you remind yourself that's it. It's never going to rise again. You're never going to get the same party. It just doesn't happen.

So that's your first noble truth. This is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering. Union or association with what is displeasing is suffering. Separation from what is pleasing is suffering. And not to get what one wants is suffering. In brief, these five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated, having perceived most deeply the problem of suffering, from all suffering, sooner rather than later.

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