

The Eight Worldly Conditions

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 17:18

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So we're now moving on to the next piece of scripture where we're in the section on the tribulations of an unreflected living. If you remember last week we talked about these two darts, how we make suffering for ourselves by our reactions to things. So this particular part of the scripture is really talking about the vicissitudes of life, the eight worldly conditions.

I shall read it and then we'll see what we can make of it.

These eight worldly conditions keep the world turning round and the world turns round these eight worldly conditions. What eight? Gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. These eight worldly conditions are encountered by an uninstructed worldling and they are also encountered by an instructed noble disciple.

What now is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between an instructed noble disciple and an uninstructed worldling?

Venerable Sir, our knowledge of these things has its roots in the Blessed One. It has the Blessed One as guide and resort. It would be good, Venerable Sir, if the Blessed One would clarify the meaning of that statement. Having heard it from him, we will bear it in mind.

That means us.

Listen then, and attend carefully, I shall speak.

Yes, Venerable Sir, they replied, and the Blessed One spoke thus.

When an uninstructed worldly monk comes upon gain, they do not reflect on it thus: This gain that has come to me is impermanent, bound up with suffering and subject to change. They do not know it as it really is. And when they come upon loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, they do not reflect on them thus: All these are impermanent, bound up with suffering and subject to change. They do not see them as they really are. With such a person, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, keep their minds engrossed. And when gain comes, they are elated. And when they meet with loss, they are dejected. When fame comes, they are elated. And when they meet with disrepute, they are dejected. When praise comes, they are elated. And when they meet with blame, they are dejected. And

when they experience pleasure, they are elated. But when they experience pain, they're dejected. Being thus involved in likes and dislikes, they will not be free from birth, aging and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and despair. They will not be free from suffering, I say.

But when an instructed noble disciple comes upon gain, they reflect it thus: This gain has come to me. This gain that has come to me is impermanent, bound up with suffering and subject to change. And so they will reflect when loss or so forth comes upon them. They understand all things as they really are and they do not engross their minds. Thus, they will not be elated by gain and dejected by loss, elated by fame and dejected by disrepute, elated by praise and dejected by blame, elated by pleasure and dejected by pain, and having thus given up likes and dislikes, they will be freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair. They will be free from suffering, I say.

This is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between an instructed noble disciple and an uninstructed worldling.

Clear?

So what's the Buddha saying here? These things are pretty obvious, some of them are pretty obvious to us. So there are these eight worldly conditions: gain and loss. Well I mean we've just been through this growth in the economy for eight years and then suddenly it collapses. And while it grows nobody thinks this is going to end. It's like this is going to go on forever. And then suddenly it all collapsed. Everybody's in a tizzy. Poor old Prime Minister Brown's chewing his fingernails. It's like a catastrophe. Nobody thought it would come to an end.

Fame and disrepute. Well it might not be disrepute. Just a loss of fame can be a disaster. A couple of weeks back, there was a program on Tony Hancock, the 1960s comedian. And he was famous, and he loved his fame, and he loved being famous. And the new comedy was coming in, all that satirical stuff. This was the week that was, and then Monty Python. And so he became the old hat. And so he began to lose fame, and he became despairing about it. He tried to make it in Australia, failed, committed suicide. Desperate. It gets worse if you disrepute, of course. If you're one of these MPs who got caught up in all that, and they thought they were getting away with it, some of them thought they were actually obeying the rules and regulations, and then suddenly a couple of them find themselves in jail. What a way to go. See, so at one point they're elated, life's wonderful, the next minute they're despairing.

Praise and blame. We all like to be praised for what we do and when we don't get it we don't feel good. It's worse of course if they blame. We had a meditator here just recently who seems to be in a real toxic atmosphere at work in IT. Everybody's blaming everybody. He just finds it so difficult in a blame culture. Instead of saying something's gone wrong, how did it go wrong? How can we stop it going wrong in the future? It's much easier to say, he did it.

When I was in Sri Lanka, there used to be this bird. I think it was a sea bird. I never actually saw it, mainly

because there were so many trees around. But as it flew over, it used to say, "he did it, he did it." And I'd be sitting there saying, "no, I didn't, honestly, I didn't. It wasn't me." Nobody wants to be blamed. "He did it."

And then, of course, there's pleasure and pain. Well, we all know about that. When we're enjoying life, when we're enjoying food, all that sort of stuff, and we're elated by it. And then of course when we're sick, when we're ill, when we don't feel well, when we can't eat and we want to eat and all that, you just get dejected. You're miserable. So you can see how it works.

Now what does he mean? You have to be careful here. What does he mean by elated and dejected? And then he goes on to say of course that the instructed person does not become elated. So you have to be very careful here because if you say to yourself, well this is a great meal, and then you say to yourself, it is subject to change, it's going to finish, I'm not going to enjoy this at all. Then the whole of life becomes miserable. At one time you were enjoying things and then it did get miserable, but now it's all miserable. So you have to be very careful what the Buddha is saying here.

What he means by elated of course is that sense of indulgence, that sense of whoopee, that sense of over excitement in things, and of course this underlying presumption that it's always going to be like this. That's the problem. So it's not a case of not enjoying things. The Buddha experiences and enjoys the taste of food but he does not greed for it.

Now that distinction as we've said before is very difficult for us, but at least we can stop this big depression at the end of things when things go wrong by just this gentle reminder to ourselves that everything changes. What's his little phrase here? That is impermanent, bound up with suffering and subject to change. The suffering comes because of our relationship to what we're enjoying.

So he's saying that when an instructed noble disciple, they remind themselves about this. They understand things as they really are. It does not engross the mind. So in other words, you're not caught up in it. You're not deluded by it. So you have to be slightly careful about that, or else life becomes miserable.

And the other thing is not to be afraid of pleasure just in case you indulge and then you get all the misery, because that fear then stops you really enjoying things. So when it comes to something that you say in advance that you know you're going to enjoy then it's just putting in that right intention, just getting that right relationship.

So if for instance great wealth comes to you because you played the lottery or something, heaven forbid you play that, and you've got all these millions of pounds come your way. So that's great wealth. Now what would you do with it? What they say is that people who get this enormous amount of money, they are elated for one year and that's it. Then they get really depressed and it goes back to ordinary horrible life. So it's a case of if wealth comes to us by whatever means, it's having the right relationship to it. It's using it for our benefit and the benefit of others. And that's where you get your joy.

Do you remember that win from the lottery? It was quite a while ago now, but it was an ordinary fellow.

And when he got his win, he divided it all between his family and friends. Do you remember that? I think everybody went, "you know, I must be a fool, I must be an idiot." And he said, I think it's something about, "there's no point in me being happy if others around me aren't." It's something of that nature. And that was a lovely interconnectedness. So he was happy in the right way. He didn't fall. His mind did not become engrossed.

So what he's saying is that this is actually seeing impermanence. So to see impermanence is to change our relationship to things. There's a lovely phrase that I continuously repeat to myself: there is nothing in the world worth holding on to. It's not only worth holding on to because if you do, like he says, it causes suffering, because it disappears, but because you're not holding on to actually anything. You think you're holding on to something but it's actually in a continual state of change while you're trying to hold on to it. And grasping that fact is a liberation. You can release the grip.

And he's given up likes and dislikes. Now it's not as though when you put food on your tongue you can't say I like this. That's not the problem. It's preferences. So if somebody says, how do you like your tea? Are you one of these people that says, "well, I just leave the bag in for two seconds, shake it about a bit, only a drop of milk, and only one, two or three grains of sugar, no more?" And if it doesn't come up as you have it, it's no good.

Now I had an old friend of mine who died recently, about a year or so ago, and I went to visit and he's got a very elderly mother, about 90. And she says to me, "will you make me a cup of tea?" Oh no, I said, would you like a cup of tea? She says, "yes I would. Make it very weak." I said, okay. So I went out and I made this tea and I brought it back in. And she said, "oh this is ridiculous, it's too weak." I said, how do I know how weak you want it? And she was really upset, so I took it out and made another one. "It's too strong, oh my goodness." She had this sort of, whatever she meant by weak, I never really figured out.

So there's somebody who's suffering because of preference. So if you're the sort of person who says, "well, as it comes," ah, you've liberated yourself from a lot of suffering around tea. Just as it comes. And that's all the Buddha's saying.

Now, how do we do it? Well, he gives us here the technique to do it. He says, any time gain or fame or praise or pleasure comes your way, you just gently repeat to yourself, "this is impermanent, if I don't get it right, it's going to be bound up with suffering and it is itself subject to change." That's it.

So if somebody gives you a gift of a crystal glass, say thank you very much and very quietly say to yourself, "any moment this could be broken, this could break," and when it breaks you just say, "oh look it's broken." What's the problem? It's the same way. You buy something like one of these iPhones. They cost a bit. You buy one and then you say, "this could disappear, this could be stolen." So you leave it by mischance somewhere, and it's stolen. It's gone, that's it. What's the problem? And then out of the goodness of your heart, you say, "may the person who has it be to their benefit. I give it to them freely." But I'll still call the police.

So you're just having to let go of things. Yes, that's right. If you've stolen this, please keep it out of a gift. Receive it as a gift.

So this little bit here, the Buddha is just looking at our experience of life from these eight worldly conditions. So there they are: gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. I can only hope this little reading and my amazing commentary has been of some use and that you will drive yourself hastily to liberation sooner rather than later.

Thank you very much.

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