

Mahākassapa Explains the Cause of Conflict

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 17:37

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa

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Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Carrying on from where we were, the next section Bhikkhu Bodhi calls "the world in turmoil." It's really about conflict, as to why we create conflict.

Before I read this, there's a character here called Venerable Mahākaccāna. There were certain disciples of the Buddha and he would give them a title because of their special qualities. For instance, Sāriputta, who was probably his closest disciple with Moggallāna, he called him the general of the Dhamma, such was his understanding of the teaching. Now Mahākaccāna had the title which ran something like "one who is greatest at saying in detail what I have said cryptically." It's just a couple of words in Pali but in English you have to explain it. This takes us to how the Buddha actually used the methodologies for teaching.

His usual thing would be just to explain something and then add a metaphor or simile. He would normally follow the usual thing of saying what you're going to say, explaining it in detail, and then telling people what you just said. That's the normal approach — if you give a speech, that's what you normally do. He would always add a simile, not always, but generally speaking, he would add a simile or some metaphor at the end of his explanation because some people understand better with imagery rather than an intellectual approach.

But often he would be asked a question and he would just give a cryptic statement and disappear. You get the idea that maybe he's got a lot of people and they're all asking questions. He just says a sentence or two and leaves it at that. The people who were baffled would go and ask the elders. Mahākaccāna was one of the more usual ones if he was around because he had this ability to really pull things to pieces for them.

Mahākaccāna didn't seem to be part of the inner set of the group of monks that generally were around the Buddha and it seems that he would live — he would go back to where he came from, which was at that time a place called Avanti. Avanti was south of the Ganges.

The Buddha, if you know your map of India, he would hang around Varanasi — modern day Varanasi, which in those days was called Benares — and he would wander up north to where his people lived, the Śākya, and then he'd wander over towards Delhi, across the kingdom of Kosala, and he'd even go almost as far as Delhi to people like the Kulus. He's got a big area, if you can imagine. He's walking all the time.

He's not taking a bus or something. He's walking all the time. He covers this quite large area.

But he never seems to go towards Bengal, towards Calcutta way. He seems to be always on that side. It's mainly to do with the people who supported him and probably his family connections because his people, the Śākyas, came under the king of Kosala. They were vassals in medieval feudal terms. They were vassals of the king of Kosala. So this ruling caste would have known each other.

The other thing to remember is that the caste system that's there today was being strengthened around the Buddha's time. We're talking 2,500 years ago. It's becoming much more defined. For instance, towards Bengal, present day Calcutta, the Brahmins had ascended to the chief caste, but this still hadn't happened where the Buddha was. Often the Buddha makes little side remarks about these Brahmins: "a true Brahmin is this and this and this."

There was still the Kṣatriyas or the Khatiyas as they're called in Pali were still the ruling caste — it was the old warrior caste. So there's the Brahmins who were the priestly caste, but they would hold jobs, they were courtiers, they owned farms. The Khatiyas were the soldiers and the rulers. Then there was the agricultural people, the people who owned land, the Vaiśyas. Well, here they're called householders, because at that time I don't think they'd actually gone into Vaiśyas and then Śūdra. I don't think that comes up in the scriptures. You've got basically the Brahmins and the ruling caste and then what's known as the householders. They would have covered quite a large group of people.

At this time, the people who were coming forward who weren't a particular caste were the merchants because of the change, because of the growth of kingship, which was fairly new, and the huge merchandise that was beginning to cross northern India all the way up to Afghanistan and even the Silk Road I think was operating by then over to China. All that was beginning at that time and there were these very nouveau riche, the new rich people who were the merchants.

Just keeping that in mind, then we have these questions. And there were these ascetics, the *samaṇas*. This was basically a movement which must have begun not much earlier than the Buddha's time and then of course carried on — of men mainly and women who would leave society completely and just live out in the forests and would come in for alms round, for food.

It would seem that one of the big entertainments of the day was to go to the local shrine, a park which would also be a shrine, on a full moon where they would listen to these debates between these ascetics arguing against each other. This is the discourse that he's called "the origin of conflicts."

So the Brahmin Ārāmaḍaṇḍa approached the Venerable Mahākaccāna, exchanged friendly greetings with him and asked him, "Why is it, Master Kaccāna, that Khatiyas fight with Khatiyas, Brahmins with Brahmins and householders with householders?"

"It is, Brahmin, because of attachment to sensual pleasures, adherence to sensual pleasures, fixation on sensual pleasures, addiction to sensual pleasures, obsession with sensual pleasures, holding firmly to

sensual pleasures that Khatiyas fight with Khatiyas, Brahmins with Brahmins, and householders with householders."

"And why is it, Master Kaccāna, that ascetics fight with ascetics?"

"It is, Brahmin, because of attachment to views, adherence to views, fixation on views, addiction to views, obsession to views, holding firmly to views that ascetics fight with ascetics."

Now, obviously he's given us all these words which are different ways of looking at our relationship to the sensual world. Sensual world means anything that you experience. It's not just eating, sex, drugs and rock and roll — it's the whole thing. He talks about attachment. Attachment, remember, is a psychological dependency on something which we presume we will be unhappy without. That's what we've done. If you say for instance, "I need a car, I need a cup of tea at 11 o'clock" and if the cup of tea isn't there, well, it's misery, isn't it? That misery is caused because we form some sort of psychological dependency on an object. "I can't live without you" — that's what you say when you're in love, isn't it? "I couldn't live without you." You obviously don't want the other person to die. So that's that sort of attachment.

He talks about adherence — to adhere. It's a stickiness, isn't it? Adhesive. It's a sticky object. You get stuck on things. You can't get it off. It's like this flypaper. Once you've got it in your finger, you just can't get rid of it. So that's the feel of attachment. You're stuck to it and it's stuck to you.

Fixation. Something that's a fixation is stuck in the mind, isn't it? It's a fixer; you can't get rid of it out of your mind. Sometimes you find yourself constantly thinking about something. Remember, these adherences and fixations and everything he's talking about has a positive side of wanting, but remember it also has the negative side of bringing up anger, frustration whenever somebody is taking what you want. And there's always that underlying fear of losing.

Sometimes, if somebody loses their job and they've got a mortgage, then it becomes this constant thing in their mind about how are they going to pay the next mortgage.

Addiction gives us an idea of being enslaved, isn't it? It's an enslavement to something, an addiction. You really can't stop doing it if it gets that bad. And then there's an obsession with it. That again is a mental, emotional thing. These words just give us a different angle on what it is that we suffer from when we form a wrong relationship with the sensual world. And of course holding firmly — he won't let go.

By using all these words, Mahākaccāna is actually showing us that he's thought about the Buddha's words, the Buddha's teaching, and he's seen it from all these little different angles.

When we find ourselves — maybe you found yourself having to see some of the Olympics — and if you haven't got to work or if your iPlayer isn't working, then you get this fixation about it, making sure that you can find a clip somewhere on YouTube.

When it comes to ascetics fighting ascetics, he says that this is the same thing, but it's with attachment to

views, adherence to views, fixation, addiction, obsession, and holding firmly onto views. So views and opinions. You've only got to listen to these parliamentary debates if you really want to waste your time. You can see that they have all these things — they're attached to them, they're adherents, they're fixated on views, they can't see another person's point of view, they're addicted to always talking about it, obsessed by them, holding on.

How can you live, especially in a modern democratic society, without having a view or an opinion? That's a problem, isn't it? We have to understand that it's not the view or opinion which is the problem, but how you relate to it. "I'm right, everybody else is wrong" — so you're in conflict immediately.

One word that I personally like is perspective. If you have a perspective on, say, the economic situation, so you have a perspective, then that does allow you to see another person's point of view, another person's perspective. In so doing, of course, you're able to at least embrace that understanding, bring it close to you, so that there isn't always this negativity, this conflict that you may find between yourself and somebody having another point of view.

If you can, every time you hear yourself saying, "Well, I think" and "I feel," and you hear somebody else say that, then you have to say, "Well, that's an interesting perspective. Would you like to hear mine?" And then try to open them out of it. It sometimes sucks the anger out of the righteousness — oh boy, righteousness — out of the situation.

So that's the origin. This Brahmin is asking, why is it that these people fight against each other? Why is it that these ascetics in those days, but these days everybody, fight each other in terms of views and opinions? It always comes down to this business of this relationship we have with what we have.

What we have to ask ourselves is, is that really necessary? Can I enjoy life without this grasping, without this hand-aching hold onto things? Of course you have to practice that. Once you, or once we've understood that, there's a case of practicing it. Every time you find yourself holding it, just talk to yourself: let go. Let go. And see if anything happens. When they kick you out of your house, then you might... There's only certain things you can let go of. It's the relationship. It's this wrong relationship we have with it.

It's worthy of contemplating that and worthy of making it a daily intention in the morning just to catch oneself getting caught up in things — even the simple things. Somebody offers you a cup of tea — how would you like it? Are you one of these people that says, "Two sugars, a little smidgen of milk, stir to the left," or are you "as it comes"? What liberation that is — completely open to any cup of tea which approaches you.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance and that I've been able to explain this reason as to why we're getting conflict and that this will surely lead you very quickly to your complete liberation sooner rather than later.

Thank you very much.

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