

Righteous Government and Righteous Ruler

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 10:19

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa
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Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened.

So I want to do this chapter from Bhikkhu Bodhi's *In the Buddha's Words*. It's a good compilation and I'm just going to make my way through the section which is called "The Happiness Visible in the Present Life." So that's hopeful, isn't it?

The first part really is about a king. So it's about the ruler, righteous rule. And just before we start, if you remember the stories that accumulated around the Buddha's birth and his life, there's that cute little story where Asita, who's a sage, has a premonition that some great being has been born. And when he finally goes to the Sakyas and he holds the baby in his arms, he says that either this child will be a universal monarch or a fully self-enlightened being. And then he starts crying. And they say, "Why are you crying?" He says, "Because I'll soon be dead and I won't get the benefit of this person's enlightenment."

So, a touching little story. But it reminds you, of course, of Jesus and the temple of Simeon. So, there's always a point when we're recognised. I mean, if a few of you go for a job, one of you is recognised. You're always recognised for your talent, no matter where you are.

So the universal monarch keeps coming up through the scriptures and you could say that he's really the alter ego of the Buddha. It's what the Buddha would have been if he hadn't become fully liberated, if he'd stayed at home and carried on being a warrior of the warrior caste, the Kshatriya.

Anyway, so this is the Buddha talking about this. He says: "Monks, even a wheel-turning monarch, a just and righteous king, does not govern his realm without a co-regent." So the wheel-turning monarch, wheel-turning, refers again to the *dhamma*, turning the wheel of the *dhamma*.

"And when he had spoken this, a certain monk addressed the Blessed One thus: 'But who, Venerable Sir, is the co-regent of the wheel-turning monarch, the just and righteous king?' 'It is the *Dhamma*, the law of righteousness, O monk,' replied the Blessed One."

"In this case, the wheel-turning monarch, the just and righteous king, relying on the *Dhamma*, honouring the *Dhamma*, esteeming and respecting it, with the *Dhamma* as his standard, banner and sovereign, provides lawful protection, shelter and safety for his dependents. He provides lawful protection, shelter

and safety for the Kshatriyas attending on him—that's the warrior caste—for his army, for the Brahmins and householders, for the inhabitants of towns and countrysides, for ascetics and Brahmins, for the beasts and birds. A wheel-turning monarch, a just and righteous king who thus provides lawful protection, shelter and safety for all beings, is the one who rules by *dhamma* only, and that rule cannot be overthrown by any hostile human being."

That's a pretty interesting statement, isn't it? So there's these three things: the lawful rule—that means our government should be giving us lawful protection, presumably that's from attack from the outside; shelter—and I presume that we can include in shelter clothing and all the rest of that that we might need; and safety—safety presumably from financial collapse. And he does this by following the *Dhamma*.

And what we mean by the *Dhamma* here, of course, for the just and righteous king is the five precepts. Now if you think of the five precepts, the first one is not to kill—not to kill any being, but I mean not to kill any human being. So you can imagine if in this world right now every human being were to take that precept, there would in fact be a little bit of a change in the world, to some great degree. So if somebody were to keep the precepts, if this king or if our rulers were to keep the precepts, then it would have an effect upon the whole society.

Now this goes back to the Buddha's position that our basic problem is to get the right relationship to the world. So from his point of view, it's all about ethics. It's all about how we treat people, how we treat the world, how we treat animals and so on. And this always comes from this basic understanding of no harm. That's your platform, no harm. And then from that platform, the positives arise: compassion, love, friendship and so on and so forth. And that's what is meant here by the *Dhamma*, by this wheel-turning monarch and the righteous ruler.

Now, as opposed to that, he says: "Even so, the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the perfectly enlightened one, the just and the righteous king of the *Dhamma*, relying on the *Dhamma*, honouring the *Dhamma*, esteeming and respecting it, with the *Dhamma* as his standard, banner and sovereign, provides lawful protection, shelter and safety in regard to action by body, speech and mind."

So now he's talking individually, now talking about each individual, although himself of course specifically as the fully self-enlightened one, also taking the *dhamma*. So the Buddha has a great respect for what he's discovered, for the understandings that he's come to, which are nothing to do with him personally. It's not as though he's invented them—they're there as basic laws and he respects that and he follows it. And then by that, he actually brings to himself lawful protection and safety and shelter.

So it has both this—you could interpret this as saying that when we live according to the *dhamma*, when we live according to righteousness or however you want to express it, it has both an inward effect and an outward effect. So in that sense, this universal monarch and the fully self-enlightened being refer to us.

"And such bodily action should be undertaken and such should not be undertaken. Such verbal action

should be undertaken, such should not be undertaken. Such mental action should be undertaken and such should not be undertaken."

In other words, when it comes to actions, there are three actions. There's the thoughts that we have, there's the words that we speak and there's the actions that we do. And when we're clear about what we ought to be doing and what we ought not to be doing, then we change our lives. And because we're in relationship, we change the life of others.

So the final passage: "The Tathāgata, the Arahant, the fully enlightened one, the just and righteous king of the *Dhamma*, who thus provides lawful protection, shelter and safety in regard to action by body, speech and mind, is the one who turns the incomparable wheel of the *dhamma* in accordance with the *dhamma* only, and that wheel of the *dhamma* cannot be turned back by any ascetic or Brahmin or by any deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world."

So that's the power of goodness. I mean it's not always obvious in the world as we see it, but eventually, if you keep working at it, keep moving towards goodness, then it has this inner power. It has this inner power. And so that's why he says that it cannot be overcome once it's set in motion. The devas are, of course, the gods, and Māra is the evil one. Even Brahmā, the great powerful god and all that. But from our point of view, it's nobody in the world.

And it's because we generally do not act from the point of view of the *Dhamma* that we fall into all these horrible states.

So next week we'll do more of the specific teachings about how to live the good life. So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later.

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