

2. The Ruler

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 13:52

*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.

I want to carry on this week with the world-conquering monarch, to finish it off, because we're starting at the top with government. If you remember from the last talk, we said that this monarch, the wheel-turning monarch, was in a sense the alter ego of the Buddha—how he would have been if he'd been a righteous king. I also tried to put it in terms of ourselves: there's the Buddha within us and there's us as actors in the world, and each of us have our own domains in the sense of what we can do, our power.

I wanted to go on to this wheel-turning monarch. He says, after hundreds of thousands of years, the king, Daḷanemi, said to a certain man: "My good man, whenever you see the sacred wheel treasure—that's the wheel-turning treasure—has slipped from its position, report it to me." Well, he does. And the king says, "Well, it's time for me to retire now."

So he tells his son that the sacred wheel treasure has slipped from its position. "And I've heard when this happens to a wheel-turning monarch, he has not much longer to live." So he does the right thing. He said he's fed up with human pleasures; it's time to get into heavenly pleasures. And so off he goes: shaves his head and beard, puts on the ochre robes, and goes forth from the household life into homelessness.

Then his son takes over, and seven days after the royal sage had gone forth, the sacred wheel treasure vanished. Bad news! So he's a bit worried about this. He calls upon the sage, and the sage said: "You should know that the wheel treasure has disappeared, but do not grieve or feel sad at the disappearance. The wheel treasure is not an heirloom from your fathers. But now, my son, you must turn yourself into a noble wheel-turner."

He gives him certain things that he has to do for this wheel to turn up. He asks him: "What is the duty?" So he says: "Right, so yourself, depending on the Dhamma, honoring it, revering it, cherishing it, doing homage to it and venerating it, having the Dhamma as your badge and banner, acknowledging the Dhamma as your master, you should establish righteous guard, ward and protection for your own household, your troops, your khattiyas—that's his caste—and vassals, for Brahmins and householders, town and country folk, ascetics and Brahmins, for beasts and birds. Let no crime prevail in your kingdom, and to those who are in need, give wealth.

"And whatever ascetics and Brahmins in your kingdom have renounced the life of sensual infatuation and

are devoted to forbearance and gentleness, each one taming himself, each one calming himself, and each one striving for the end of craving, from time to time you should approach them and ask: 'What, venerable sir, is wholesome and what is unwholesome? What is blameable and what is blameless? What action will in the long run lead to harm and sorrow, and what to welfare and happiness?'

So he does all this, of course, and blow me down, the wheel appears! Now, having the wheel, having now appeared, he also has, of course, the seven treasures of the wheel-turning monarch. They are: this divine wheel, which has all its spokes. And then the sacred wheel treasure appeared to him: thousand spokes, complete with rim, hub and all accessories. So this is this mythical wheel, the Dhamma wheel.

Now he does have other treasures. His other seven treasures are: the elephant—you have a good elephant; a horse, and this horse is special because it can fly through the air; he has a water-purifying gem—that tells you the importance of water in that society; a good woman—that's very important; a treasurer who can see hidden treasure, in other words, where you've hidden your money; and finally, a very wise counsellor. So with these seven treasures, he ends up being this world-turning monarch.

Now, here comes the meat of it, because this Brahmin addresses the Blessed One and asks him: "I've heard that you understand how to conduct successfully the triple sacrifice with its sixteen requisites. Now I do not understand all this, but I want to make a big sacrifice. It would be good if Master Gotama would explain it to me."

These sacrifices were based on the idea of appeasing gods. If you wanted a god to do something, you had to give him something. Even in the Bible, God wants Abraham to kill his son. It's this idea of giving something up to get something, and you have power over the person or over the god. By this time, these sacrifices weren't a case of "let's try and appease the gods." It was more: if the sacrifice was done perfectly, God had to answer. And the thing was that it really wasn't happening very much, and people were losing faith in that sort of big sacrifice.

These sacrifices—like the king's sacrifice—hundreds of horses were slaughtered, and cows. I mean, it was a big thing. It wasn't just get the old sheep dog or something and hang it from a tree. It was all done with precision. In other scriptures it goes into what was necessary for these sacrifices to be perfected. But here this Brahmin has come to him, and the Buddha tells him a story about this king called Mahāvijita.

"So he was rich and of great wealth and resources, abundance of gold and silver, of possessions and requisites, of money and money's worth, and with a full treasury and granary. And when the king was reflecting in private, this thought came to him: 'I have acquired extensive wealth in human terms and I occupy a wide, extensive land which I have conquered. Let me now make a great sacrifice that would be to my benefit and happiness for a long time.' And calling his chaplain—that would have been a Brahmin—he told him his thought. 'I want to make a big sacrifice. Instruct me, venerable sir, how this may be to my lasting benefit and happiness.'"

So his listener, this fellow who's asked him about the sacrifice, would have expected him to go into some detail on how to make these big sacrifices. But the Buddha says to him: "But this chaplain replied: 'Your Majesty's country is beset by thieves. It is ravaged. Villages and towns are being destroyed. The countryside is infested with brigands.'" In other words, he's telling us what the country was like—the country he's actually in now, where the Buddha is living. There were brigands and thieves and everything else.

"And if Your Majesty were to tax this region, that would be a wrong thing to do. Suppose Your Majesty were to think: "I will get rid of this plague of robbers by execution and imprisonment, or by confiscation, threats and banishment." The plague would not be properly ended." Ah, it's interesting, isn't it? To all these politicians that want to punish these people, put them in jail for hundreds of thousands of years: "Those who survived would later harm Your Majesty's realm. However, with this plan, you can completely eliminate the plague. To those in the kingdom who are engaged in cultivating crops and raising cattle, let Your Majesty distribute grain and fodder. To those in trade, give capital. To those in government service, assign proper wages. Then those people, being intent on their own occupations, will not harm the kingdom. Your Majesty's revenues will be great. The land will be tranquil and not beset by thieves. And the people will join their hearts; playing with their children, they will dwell in open houses."

Idyllic, isn't it? "And saying "So be it," the king accepted the chaplain's advice. He gave grain and so on. And those people, intent on their own occupations, did not harm the kingdom. The king's revenue became great. The land was tranquil and not beset by thieves. And the people, with joy in their hearts, playing with their children, dwelt in open houses."

So this is the Buddha's form of government. And just something to reflect upon: he's often—you get Buddhism criticized for not being active, not being proactive, and not being engaged. I think that's beginning to fade now because there's a lot of engaged Buddhism. But the Buddha had his own ideas of how people ought to be ruled, and his two very good friends were the local kings: Bimbisāra down in Benares—modern day Benares—and Pasenadi up in the north. He would have known these people, I think, from childhood. They were his age group, and during his time there was no war between them. It was a very peaceful period. It all began to break up as he was dying. The sons began to—well, Bimbisāra's son went and murdered his father, starved him to death, kicked him off the throne.

But the other form of government, which we'll come to later on, was this more tribal-based custom where it was more like an aristocracy, a bit like the Greeks. So the Buddha's father would have been the head man of that group of people, of that tribe called the Sākyans, who would be elected. Now in this book, Bhikkhu Bodhi says that the Buddha doesn't—he seems to be even-handed with both types of government. But the government he left for the order was of the community type. He didn't leave a Pope; he didn't leave somebody in charge at all. And he said you've got to take the Dhamma as your refuge and yourself as your refuge. So the government that he wanted for the order was the government of elders. I think that's where his heart was, and probably because that's the way he was brought up.

But at least here we see in these discourses that the Buddha was trying, in many ways when he was talking to people in power—Brahmins and such—to express the Dhamma as something which was guiding the society, guiding not only individual behavior but social behavior, monarchical behavior, the behavior of governments.

And you've only got to consider: if everybody in the world just now said they wouldn't kill any other human being, even that would be a tremendous change, wouldn't it? Or stop thieving from people. Especially copper. I saw the headlines about copper. Brilliant, isn't it?

So these are just things to ponder. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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