

The Buddha's Alter Ego

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 24:43

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

This evening we're looking at the Buddha's alter ego, what he would have been if he hadn't become a Buddha. If you remember, eight wise men came to his birth and predicted that he would become a Buddha or a wheel-turning monarch. Seven of them said that, but there was one wise person who said that he would definitely become a self-awakened Buddha.

Now, his tribe, the Sakyan clan, was still governed in the old way. The warrior caste chose one of themselves to become the head person. It was an aristocracy. I'm sure that the Brahmins had some effect and maybe the merchants, but the essence was that somebody else could always be voted to be the head person.

As one tribe became more and more powerful, they began to conquer the different tribes. So the Buddha's own tribe, the Sakyas, were already vassals to the king of Kosala. We know from the way he organized the *Saṅgha*, the monks and nuns, that he didn't really like the monarchical, the autocratic way of ruling. He didn't leave a leader when he died. He said he left the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*, the rule of the order. In Buddhism there's no Pope.

So he offers us this myth about the wheel-turning monarch. What happens is the *Dhamma* wheel appears to this particular king. This wheel appears and the king asks his advisers what the meaning of this appearance was. The counsellor says he has to follow it, and as he follows it the kingdoms will just become vassals to him.

He then follows this *Dhammacakka*, this *Dhamma* wheel, and he flies off into the air with it, taking with him his quadruple army, which is formed by his infantry, archers, chariots and elephants. He has what's known as his seven treasures. So the Buddha has seven factors of enlightenment, and this emperor has seven treasures.

The first thing, of course, is this miracle wheel which will guide him all over the world. He has a miracle horse that can fly through the air. He has a miracle elephant. I don't know what that does. And he has a gem that can cast light over a huge area, like the sun. He has a queen who is, of course, a beautiful woman. It is said that her limbs are cool in the hot season and warm in the cool season. He has a wise counsellor and a successful commander.

What actually gives him his power? It's his moral code, his integrity. Wherever he goes, he establishes peace. So the Buddha then gives us his ten qualities. This is what the Buddha is saying: that somebody who rules a country, our prime ministers and people like that, should have these ten qualities.

The first one is generosity. He's very giving with his wealth, and it makes people feel loyal to him. He sets a good example to the citizens by his ethical conduct. He will personally make sacrifices for the benefit of the people. He is very honest and straightforward. He promotes justice and trust. He's also gentle in approach, and so he can reduce conflicts and enhance peaceful relations.

He has self-control, self-discipline. He doesn't indulge himself. He doesn't give in to anger. He remains calm, and this makes him wise in his decisions. He promotes harmlessness, *ahimsa*, ensuring safety and security without violence, and in this way he spreads safety everywhere. He has patience. He can tolerate when things don't go right. And he advocates non-conflicts and harmony. He resolves disputes amicably, and in this way he maintains the unity of his kingdoms.

It does sound that this emperor has the same qualities as the Buddha. So what goes wrong? After seven of these great wheel-turning monarchs, at a certain point something goes wrong. One of these *Dhammacakka* rulers doesn't follow the rules of morality and becomes greedy. So people became poor, and for the first time in a very, very long time, somebody stole something.

He was brought to this king and the king asked him, "Why did you steal?" He said, "Well, I don't have enough money to keep my family." So the king gives him money. But then the rumour spread around that if you stole, the king would give you money. So people began to steal. After a while, the king realized he'd made a big mistake. Greed had entered into his kingdoms.

So the next thief he had executed. But this only made people more angry and the whole kingdom began to become very lawless. The Buddha said that this would continue until the next self-awakened Buddha appeared, and that Buddha would be called the Maitreya Buddha. This word comes from the word for mother, so it's a Buddha who has a mother's loving disposition.

When it comes to his involvement in local politics, he's very much ready to offer advice. There was the king of Magadha, Ajātasattu. He sent an ambassador to the Buddha to ask him if this was the right time to attack the Vajji Federation. The Vajji Federation was a combination of tribes who elected their own leaders.

The Buddha doesn't say yes or no, but he gives seven reasons as to why a country will remain strong. The first is that the Vajjis meet in harmony and leave in harmony. They don't abolish existing decrees, and I think this refers to their constitution. They respect, esteem and venerate the elders. This is a funny one: they do not forcibly abduct women or girls from their different clans. They respect and esteem their shrines. And finally, they give shelter and security to the *arahats*.

When the ambassador reports this back to the king, Ajātasattu, he uses bribery and deceit to achieve his

goals. A lot of fake news. He gives false news that puts these tribes against each other, and they eventually begin to quarrel. He just walks in and takes over the country.

Here we have an occasion where the Buddha is intimately involved in what is happening in the society around him. There are many other incidents. Since we ourselves are trying to behave like a Buddha, it means that we ought to also become involved in the politics and economics of the day. In this way the Buddha is our exemplar.

So this is the Buddha's alter ego. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused confusion, and that you will by following the example of the Buddha become fully liberated from all suffering. Sooner rather than later.

We can sit for a little while and then we will do the refuges and precepts.

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