

Society

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 21:40

I just realised I didn't have my microphone on. That has now been corrected. I'm sure you know what I said.

In fact, today I was on Hangouts with somebody and a question came up concerning my evening salutation. Why do I say I hope you've had a fruitful day, though I don't say happy? So there was an occasion where my teacher arrived at a meditation centre, Sayadaw U Pandita. And somebody went up and said, "Sayadaw, I'm so happy to see you." And he replied in Burmese and the translator did not translate. Later on, the translator was asked by this person, "What did he say?" And the translator said, "Well, he said, I haven't come to make you happy. I've come to make you aware."

When I say, "I hope you've had a fruitful day," even if it's been an absolutely horrible day — perhaps you're frontline staff, perhaps you've been harassed at work, you're travelling with people breathing coronavirus all over you, you've been frightened, perhaps you've just had a rotten day emotionally — but if you've worked with it with awareness and with investigation, or just, as we know, bearing... Remember, the taints are overcome by enduring, by just bearing with it. And that's been a fruitful day.

If, on the other hand, you had a happy day and you found yourself indulging, excitedly planning stuff, overeating and so forth, that is not a fruitful day. But if you have been aware of these tendencies, and you have renounced them — remember overcoming the taints by renouncing them — that is also a fruitful day. Hence my evening salutation.

Now then, I thought we would leave these taints for a little while and look at what the scriptures say about our society. So I've noticed in the BBC — I forget where I read it now, it might have been in The Guardian or something — it said that there's been an increase in mental illness and drug abuse over this period. So it seems as though lots of people are having real problems with this isolation. And I just wanted to look at some of the scriptures here. I've left the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the middle-length sayings, for a while, and I'm using Bhikkhu Bodhi's book called *The Buddha's Teaching on Social and Communal Harmony*. So this has all the little quotes that I need, saves me reading the whole scripture.

When the Buddha was born — and remember his mother died within a week — his father, Suddhodana, who was, I mean, he wasn't a king so much as a headman, a head of the Sakya group or tribe or clan, call it what you want. And the clan was under the vassalage of the local king of Kosala, who then was Pasenadi, who became a great supporter of the Buddha. And the king, or the headman — call him what you wish — gathered eight sages and asked them to predict what would happen to his son. So seven of them said, well, he could either become a world-conquering monarch or a self-enlightened being. But one of them,

Kondañña, said he would surely become a self-enlightened being.

So in the scriptures, what we have is this sort of alter ego of the world-conquering monarch. And I'll just read a few passages and then we'll go back to something else.

"Even a world-turning monarch, a just and righteous king, does not govern his realm without a co-regent." And a certain monk asked, "Who, Bhante, is the co-regent of a wheel-turning monarch, the just and righteous king?" "It is the *Dhamma*, the law of righteousness," replied the Blessed One. "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."

And then he goes on. So then we have this moment when at some point in the history of this king, of the kings, as he bathed his head on the Uposatha day — which is a religious day, every full moon, where you might go and pay respects to the temple — he ascended the upper palace chamber and there appeared to him the divine wheel treasure with its thousand spokes, its tyre and its nave complete in every aspect. And on seeing it, the head-anointed noble king thinks thus: "Now it has been heard by me that when a head-anointed noble king has bathed his head on the observation day and has ascended to the upper palace chamber, and there appears to him the divine wheel treasure with its thousand spokes, its tyre and its nave complete in every aspect, that that king becomes a wheel-turning monarch. I am then that wheel-turning monarch."

And what happens is that he sprinkles it with some holy water and then it starts moving. And as it moves to the east, he takes his four constituent army — so that's his elephants and his chariots, his cavalry and his infantry — and off he goes. And eventually, by going to the left and the right, east, west, north, he becomes a world-conquering monarch. And whenever he enters a territory, the local king says, "Welcome, great king. Great king, advise us, great king." And the wheel-turning monarch speaks to them. And you won't be surprised: "You should not destroy life. You should not take what is not given. You should not engage in sexual misconduct. You should not speak falsehood. You should not drink intoxicants. And you should enjoy your accustomed enjoyments." And so then he becomes the wheel-turning monarch.

So now there comes a point where somebody comes to the king and says the wheel-turning monarch — so there's a succession of them — "has slipped from its position, and I have heard when this happens to a wheel-turning monarch he has not much longer to live. I have had my fill of human pleasures. Now is the time to seek heavenly pleasures. You, my son, take over control of this land. I will shave off my hair and beard, put on the ochre robes and go forth from the household into homelessness." And having installed his eldest son in due form as king, this particular king, Dalhanemi, shaved off his head and off he went.

Now then, this new king went up and a certain man came to him and said, "Sire, you should know the sacred treasure wheel has disappeared." And the king was grieved and sad and he went to his father and said, "Why is it?" "My son, you should not feel grieved or sad at the disappearance of the wheel treasure.

The wheel treasure is not an heirloom from your fathers. But now, my son, you should turn yourself into a noble wheel turner, and then it may come about that you perform the duties of such a monarch."

And of course he does the same. He does the little rituals and he determines to rule by the *Dhamma* and he becomes a wheel-turning monarch. And this went on for about six kings. But the seventh king to arise in this dynasty did not go to the royal sage — that would have been his father — and ask him about the duties. Instead, he ruled the people according to his own ideas. And being ruled thus, the people did not prosper as well as they had done under previous kings.

The king then ordered his ministers and advisors to come together and he consulted them. And they explained to him the duties of a wheel-turning monarch. And having listened to them, the king established guard and protection for his subjects. But he did not give wealth to the needy. And as a result, poverty became rife. "Thus, from not giving of wealth to the needy, poverty became rife. And from the growth of poverty, theft increased. From the increase of theft, the use of weapons increased. From the increased use of weapons, the taking of life increased, lying increased, divisive speech increased, and sexual misconduct increased. And on account of this, the people's lifespan decreased and their beauty decreased."

Does that ring a little true these days?

So then we have a repeat of this in a different discourse. These are all, by the way, from the long collection, the collection of long discourses. So here we have a similar thing. And this time the chaplain, a brahmin, approaches His Majesty and he says, "Your country is beset by thieves. It is ravaged. Villages and towns are being destroyed. The countryside is infested with brigands. If Your Majesty were to tax this region, that would be the wrong thing to do. Supposing Your Majesty were to think, 'I will get rid of this plague of robbers by executions and imprisonment and by fines, threats and banishment,' the plague would not be properly ended. Those who survive 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, distribute grain and fodder. To those in trade, give capital. To those in government service, assign proper living 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 with joy in their hearts, playing with their children, will dwell in open houses."

What do you think of that?

And of course he does it. He accepts the chaplain's advice. He gave grain and fodder to those engaged in cultivating crops and raising cattle, capital to those in trade, proper living wages to those in government service. And then those people, being intent on their occupations, did not harm the kingdom. The king's revenues 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 there's a little bit of guidance from the scriptures coming from this mythical king who completely rules the world using the *Dhamma* as a basis. So the moral law — if you look at the scriptures, you'll see that the Buddha is only teaching ethics. He teaches ethics and transcendence. Those are the only two things you'll find. I'd be surprised if you find anything else. If you do find something else, send me an email.

Now, you may have heard of Joanna Macy. So she's a well-known deep ecologist. She's an activist, a teacher, written plenty of books. And there's a nice little video that I saw. And she talks about the great turning. She has this understanding, and other people do, that we are at a point where we could have a really great turnaround in the world to a completely different way of living, or at least a much more wholesome way of living.

If we go back to the Buddha's time, that was a time which is called the Axial Age, where we had suddenly a raising of human consciousness. The Buddha, of course, there were the Brahminical sages who were writing the Upanishads. There was Lao Tzu in China, Moses in the desert, and of course, our own Socrates. And the message from all of these people was, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That's one of the basic messages that came from that axial age. There were others too, but that was one of the basic ones.

And she talks about this moment of turning and what's necessary for it to happen. And she talks about three different things. First of all, holding actions to stop the destructiveness of what's happening. So we have, for instance, in this country, 2,000 food banks. I mean, that's the situation where people have to go to food banks to get food. We have the Big Issue, which is a newspaper that homeless people can sell on the streets in order to make a bit of money to pay for rent and stuff. Recently we've had the ecologist Chris Packham stopping the extension to Heathrow Airport by going to the courts and saying it would undermine the aim we have of reducing our carbon footprint. And he's now in the process of trying to stop that HS2, the fast speed railway that's going to rip up half of England in order to get to the north quicker.

And so all these are really trying to undermine the destructiveness of this particular form of economics we have, neoliberal economics. So that's the first thing, that there are people who are trying to limit the damage.

Then she goes on to say that the next thing is that we need alternative structures and patterns of organising. And one of the things she talks about is organic farming, turning away from prosperity towards human happiness, what makes us happy. And the use of plastic, looking at that very closely. So there's all that business of actually doing something differently. And I think in many ways that's beginning to happen perhaps.

But the third one — and really the foundation of any turning point that has to come — is, of course, a change of values, depending on our belief systems. There has to be a *metanoia*, which is a change of perception, a change in the whole way that we view life and the purpose of our lives. And of course, this is

the role of religion.

Science is very good at telling us how things come to be, but it can't answer the question why. All religions always posit something beyond this world that we're actually experiencing. If you turn just to the world and say, "Well, this is it and there's nothing else," then this becomes your aim, to make this world work for you. And it's very difficult not to make it a selfish enterprise. Of course, one begins to understand that if you turn outward, if you start doing things for other people as well as for yourself, then the payback is a deeper personal happiness. But that's not the way at the moment this neoliberalism is asking us to work. It's all about me getting as much as I can, dog eat dog and so forth.

So what we need is, as this wheel-turning monarch shows us, a change of values.

So now I woke up today and I thought, "I'm doing all the work here." I thought, "Bodhidharma, you're doing all the work, you're doing all the research and giving all these talks." So it's about time the listeners did something. So I thought to myself, why not ask them to email me and make a statement, a small statement as to what value they think is the most important? I'm challenging you to send me an email and to state very shortly — because I don't want to read huge pages — what you feel is the most important value. Some change in the way that we look at society. And the one word you can't use is love. OK, that's a four-letter word and you can't use it. You have to find some other word or some other way of expressing yourself.

So I thought I'd leave you with that. And hopefully tomorrow, you have to send me these emails, shall we say, before five o'clock or something, because I have to read them and digest them, try to put them all together. So I shall leave you with that little challenge for this evening. I can only hope that my words have been inspirational in some way and have not depressed you. And we shall turn now to do a little meditation.

Very good.

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