

# The Relay of Chariots — Rathavināta Sutta (MN 24)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 23:43

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Good evening everyone. I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa, Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa* — homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Awakened One.

So I thought this evening we'd move on to the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the middle length discourses, to a discourse number 24 called the Relay of Chariots. Now the interesting thing about this is that it laid down a schema which was later copied in two works: the Path of Liberation by Upatissa, which if I remember rightly was only in the Chinese and then translated. And the way it's written, people think that Upatissa was in fact fully liberated. But a later book, which is more well known, of course, is the Path of Purification, the *Visuddhimagga*, which I hold in my hand here.

This is more of an encyclopedia, if you haven't come across it. It's a great book to dip into, and it's got to be one of the great spiritual manuals of the world because it contains virtually all the teachings and all the practices that are in Theravāda Buddhism. And it's more of a scholastic work. I for one couldn't read it from page one to the end, but it's great to dip into. You can download it as a PDF if you're interested. It's got all the exercises.

So in this discourse, it's seemingly some monks have come down from the Buddha's own territory, you might say his own country, the Sakyan country which remember is just on the southern border of present-day Nepal. At that time, on one occasion the Blessed One was living at Rājagaha in the bamboo grove, the squirrel's sanctuary.

Rājagaha is now Rajgir, you can visit. It was the capital of the southern Magadha and King Bimbisāra would have lived there. It's surrounded by a circle of hills and on one of the hills is Vulture's Peak, which is where most of the Mahāyāna discourses were given and some of the Buddhist discourses in the Theravāda tradition. And on one hill, there's a really magnificent peace pagoda, all white and shiny. And you can go down and you can visit the hut where, what's his name? Oh dear, it's gone out of my head. Bimbisāra's son murdered his father, starved him to death by putting him in that little hut. And you can visit that if you want. And in the middle of Rajgir, it's only a small town now, there's a fountain where people bathe. And there's a yoga center there, a Gandhi yoga center. So if you're ever in that place, you can always pay a little visit.

So that's where the Buddha is. He's in this bamboo grove, the squirrel sanctuary. And a number of *bhikkhu*s from his native land, that's how he's put, who had spent the rains there. They've gone there for the rainy season, which is the monsoon season, July, August, September. And they went to the Blessed One and paying homage sat down at one side and the Blessed One asked them because, "Is there anyone in my own country, my own native land, who is esteemed by the monks and the order, his companions in the holy life? One who has few wishes and he talks to the *bhikkhus* of the fewness of wishes. Content in himself, he talks to them about contentment. Secluded himself, he talks about seclusion. Aloof from society, he talks about the benefits of being aloof from society. Energetic in himself, he talks about arousing energy to the order. Attained to virtue himself, he talks about the attainment of virtue and attaining concentration, he talks about the attainment of concentration, attained to wisdom, he talks about wisdom, attained to deliverance, he talks about deliverance, attained to knowledge and vision of deliverance, he talks about that too and he is one who advises, informs, instructs, urges, rouses and encourages his companions in the holy life?"

And they answer, "Yes indeed there is. There is a venerable and he is highly esteemed in his native land." Now it would seem that this particular monk was ordained by Añña Koṇḍañña who was one of his five companions when he was, you know, before he became liberated, it was the five companions he gave his first talk to. And the first one who got it, you know, the first insight, stream entry, was in fact this Koṇḍañña. And he gave him this name, Añña Koṇḍañña, Koṇḍañña, the one who knows. So he must have been up in the Sakyan territory, probably a Sakyan himself, although I can't find that out at the moment. And he ordained this monk. And he became known, he was given a special name by the Buddha, so Koṇḍañña being the first was given this nickname, Añña, the one who knows, and to Mantāniputta Buddha he gave the nickname of the most eminent amongst preachers, so he was obviously very good at giving talks.

Now, at that time, Sāriputta is with the Buddha and he hasn't met him. So this gives you an idea that by now the order is quite large. Senior monks are ordaining monks, not just the Buddha. And, you know, I mean, in those days, you know, ox carts, no mobiles. How do they communicate? You know, how did you find out where the Buddha was? It was all by hearsay. And the Venerable One, so they, like you hear somebody has come out, oh, the Buddha's making his way to the squirrel's grove. So everybody said, oh, right, well, we'll go and try and meet him there.

So Sāriputta was with the Buddha at the time. And he thought to himself, "It's great gain for Venerable Puṇṇamantāniputta. It is great gain for him to have wise companions and perhaps sometime or other we might meet." So there is that desire in Sāriputta to meet this famous monk from the Sakyan country. It doesn't say that Mantāniputta himself was a Sakyan, he just happened to be in that country when he ordained.

So the Blessed One has stayed long enough and he set out on stages to Sāvatti, so remember that's just north of present-day Varanasi, Benares, and that's where he gave his first talk to the five companions and

wandering by stages he finally arrived there staying at Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's park.

Now the Venerable Puṇṇamantāniputta heard, "Oh, the Blessed One has arrived at Sāvatti and is living there." So somehow the rumour had got and off he goes, determined to see the Buddha. Wandering by stages, he eventually arrived at Sāvatti. And on paying homage to the Buddha, the Blessed One, he sat to one side. The Blessed One instructed, urged, roused and encouraged him with a talk on the *Dhamma*. Then the Venerable Puṇṇamantāniputta, instructed, urged, roused and encouraged by the Blessed One's, delighted and rejoiced in the Blessed One's words, rising from his seat, paid homage, keeping to his right, and went to the blind man's grove for a day's abiding to meditate.

Now then a certain *bhikkhu* went to the venerable Sāriputta and said to him, "Look, this Puṇṇamantāniputta that you speak so highly of, he's just been, he just had a talk, he's just been talking with the Buddha, with the Blessed One and he's delighted and all that and he's gone off and he sat for a day's abiding at the blind man's grove." So of course venerable Sāriputta quickly picked up a mat and followed him and followed close behind the Venerable Puṇṇamantāniputta, keeping his head in sight. So he obviously didn't know he was being followed.

And so they were both sat abiding for the day in the blind man's grove. And then when it was evening, the Venerable Sāriputta rose from meditation, went to the Venerable Puṇṇamantāniputta and exchanged greetings with him. And when the courteous and amiable talk was finished. So don't, you know, mustn't confuse that with useless talk. And when you meet somebody, there's always that little exchange of how are you, how are you doing, and et cetera, et cetera. Especially these days, we don't meet, we've probably forgotten how to do that after this lockdown.

So then he begins to talk to this monk, as if he himself was a beginner or not so new or fairly immature in the order. So he asks him, he says, "Is it for the sake of purification of virtue that we live under the *Dhamma* of the Buddha? Is that the purpose of the Buddha's *Dhamma*? Purification of virtue?" And he says, "No, no, no, that's not."

"Then is it for the sake of the purification of the mind?" He says, "No friend, no it's not that at all." "Is it for the sake of purification of view?" He says, "No friend, I'll explain these things you know when we've gone through them." "Is it for the purification of overcoming doubt that the holy life is lived?" He says, "No friend, no." "Then is it for the sake of purification of knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path that the holy life is lived?" "No." "Then is it for the sake of purification of knowledge and vision of the way?" He says, "No, no, it's not that either." He said, "Then is it for the sake of purification of knowledge and vision that the life is lived under the Blessed One's?" He said, "No, friend, no."

It's interesting that he approached him as "no friend." There's two ways in which, in the scriptures, the monks talk to each other. One is *bhante*, when you are addressing somebody who's older than you in the order, and the other one is *āvuso* which is friend when somebody is your same age in the order, and that means anybody who was ordained five years before you and five years after you. So the monks you meet

who are within that ten-year period, you would have approached as friend, and anybody above you, you would have said *bhante*, and anybody much younger than you, you would have said *āvuso*, friend, but they would have approached you with the word *bhante*. That's just a little aside.

So then Sāriputta repeats all this by simply saying it all and repeating his reply, "No friend." So he goes through it all again. So this is one way that you would make something memorable. You would get the whole thing repeated again from a different angle. So he's asking these questions. He said no. And so Sāriputta says, "I've asked you this question and you said no." So then he finally comes.

"For the sake of what, then, friend, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One?" And here's the answer. "It is for the sake of final *Nibbāna* without clinging that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One."

But now, having stated that, you see, all the questions are asked again with a slightly different angle. "Is purification of virtue final *Nibbāna* without clinging?" So are any of these other six stages final *Nibbāna* without clinging? And of course there's "No. The purification of mind final *Nibbāna*?" "No." He says, "Purification of views?" Says "No." He says, "Purification of overcoming doubt?" "No. Purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path?" "No. Purification of knowledge and vision of the way?" "No, it's not that either," you see. "Then is purification of knowledge and vision final *Nibbāna* without clinging?" Says "No, friend," you see.

So then we get, "Well, none of these six stages that we've talked about are equivalent to *Nibbāna* without clinging," okay? And so he repeats all that. Just he repeats that all that saying that. Right, saying "No, this level is not *Nibbāna* without clinging."

And then there's a nice little sentence here. He says, "But friend, is final *Nibbāna* without clinging to be attained without these states?" Okay, so could you get there without going through these stages? "There's no friend." "But how, friend, should the meaning of these statements be regarded?" So then he repeats all that, you see. In other words, you've got to go through these stages.

And then he says, "If final *Nibbāna* without clinging were to be attained without these states, then an ordinary person would have attained final *Nibbāna*. For an ordinary person is without these states." Now an ordinary person is someone who's not instructed in the *Dhamma*. So what he's saying is, if somebody reaches *Nibbāna* without any of this, then these teachings wouldn't pertain. But they do pertain. You've got to go through these stages.

And then he gives a simile of it, you see. He says, "For some wise men understand the meaning of a statement by means of a simile." So there's always this way of doing it as, shall we say, an academic thing. And there's always a more artistic way of expressing the *Dhamma* through some image, through some simile or metaphor.

So this is where we get the chariots. "Supposing King Pasenadi of Kosala, while living in Sāvatti, so that's where they are at the moment, so the local king was Pasenadi, had urgent business to settle in Sāketa. And

that between Sāvatti and Sāketa, seven relay chariots were kept ready for him. Then King Pasenadi of Kosala, leaving Sāvatti through the inner palace door, would mount the first chariot, and by means of the first chariot, he would arrive at the second chariot." And then he goes through all the business of arriving with the second chariot, gets the third et cetera, et cetera, and then he would arrive at the inner palace door of Sāketa.

"Then when he had come to the inner door, his friends and acquaintances, his kinsmen and relatives would ask him, 'Sire, how did you come from Sāvatti to the inner palace door of Sāketa by means of this relay chariot?'" How then should King Pasenadi of Kosala answer in order to answer correctly? And of course, this gives the reciter an opportunity to say all that again. It's just one of those tricks of the ancient way of remembering things. A mnemonic.

So then he says, "So friend, the purification of virtue is for the sake of reaching purification of heart, mind." So remember the word mind in the scriptures is referring to the combination of the heart and the mind. "Purification of mind is for reaching the purification of view. Purification of view is for reaching the purification of overcoming doubts. Purification of overcoming doubt is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path. Purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path is for the sake of reaching purification of knowledge and vision of the way. Purification by knowledge and vision of the way is for the sake of reaching purification by knowledge and vision. And purification by knowledge and vision is for the sake of reaching final *Nibbāna* without clinging. It is for the sake of final *Nibbāna* without clinging that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One."

And then Venerable Sāriputta, so this is the nice little bit where they finally meet, Venerable Sāriputta asks him, "What is the Venerable One's name and how do his companions in the holy life know the Venerable One?"

"So my name is Puṇṇa and my companions in the holy life know me as Mantāniputta."

Now what I understand from this is that Puṇṇa would have been his ordination name and that people would recognize him as Mantāniputta, the son of Mantāni. I think that probably was the remnants of a matriarchal society where you're known by your mother, Sāriputta, you see, son of Sāri. And that, I think, is kept in Thailand. It's not kept in Burma or in Sri Lanka, where a monk is known by his ordination name. But in Sri Lanka, they often call you by your lay name as a nickname, so when I was there I was Prapita, holy Peter, well you know what I mean.

"So it is wonderful, friend, it is marvellous, each profound question has been answered point by point by the venerable as a learned disciple who understands the teacher's dispensation correctly." So it is gain for his companions in the holy life, et cetera. "Even if it were by carrying the Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta upon a cushion on their heads, that his companions of the holy life would get the opportunity to see and honour him, it would be a great gain for them. And it is a great gain for us, a great gain for us, that we

have the opportunity to see and honour the Venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta."

Now, when this was said, the venerable Mantāniputta said to the venerable Sāriputta, "What is the venerable one's own name and how do his companions in the holy life know him?"

"My name is Upatissa." So that's his ordination name.

My companions know me as Sariputta." Now he's suddenly come across Sariputta. So it's a big shock, you see.

"Indeed, friend, we did not know we were talking to the venerable Sariputta, the disciple who is like the teacher himself." Calling somebody *Satukappa* is the highest of praise. It means you are like the Buddha. "If we had known that this was Venerable Sariputta, we should not have said so much. It is wonderful, friend. It is marvelous. Each profound question has been posed point by point by the Venerable Sariputta as a learned disciple who understands the teacher's dispensation correctly. It is gain for his companions in the holy life. It is great gain for them that they have the opportunity to see and honor the Venerable Sariputta, even if it were by carrying the Venerable Sariputta on a cushion on their heads, that his companions in the holy life would get the opportunity to see and honor him, it would be a great gain for them. And it is a great gain for us, a great gain for us that we have the opportunity to see and honor the venerable Sariputta."

This was how the two great beings rejoiced in each other's good words.

So I'm going to leave that there. And tomorrow I shall explain to you all these different levels of purification of the path.

So a nice little discourse there of two monks meeting and enjoying each other's company. I can only hope you found this little discourse encouraging and I trust that by your practice you will be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later. So we can begin our practice.

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