

Dhp 153-154: The Buddha's Victory Verses

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 17:20

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed noble and fully self-awakened one.

I've chosen the victory verses of the Buddha to end my little five efforts at the Dhammapada. So I shall chant it. This is the one I know, by the way, because we do it every morning.

*Anekajātiṃ saṃsāraṃ sandhāviṃ anibbisaṃ gahakāraṃ gavesanto dukkhā jāti punappunaṃ.
Gahakāraṃ diṭṭho'si puna geḥaṃ na kāhasi sabba te phāsukā bhaggā gahaḥaṃ viṣaṅkhitāṃ
viṣaṅkhāragataṃ cittaṃ taṇhānaṃ khayamajjhagā.*

So the translation: Through many rounds of rebirth have I wandered, looking for the house builder, but not finding him. Painful is repeated rebirth. O house builder, you are seen. You will not build this house again. All your rafters are broken. The ridge pole is destroyed. My *citta* is not conditioned and I have attained the end of all cravings.

Just to go through the Pali there. The word for wander also means to run, so a word like coursing through rebirth after rebirth. I think it gives the idea of that onward going *saṃsāra*. There's a lovely little word, *aneka*, which translates as not one, therefore it means many. It's just a nice way of saying it: not one.

Now, of course, these are called the victory verses of the Buddha, which there's some idea that he spoke them after his awakening. But I dare say he manufactured them. He created them sometime afterwards to express what his kernel insight was. And we shall come to that.

So now the house builder, you have seen, you have been discovered, you have been uncovered. You'll not build a house for me again. Your rafters are broken. Now the word for rafter is also the word for rib, so that makes sense. The ridge pole, the top of the roof is destroyed, and that's basically what the Pali says: the top of the roof.

Now, the *citta* is translated usually as mind, but obviously it can't be part of the *khandhas*, part of the aggregates, because it's not conditioned. The aggregates, which are of course your physicality, your feelings, all your perceptions, concepts, all your habits and momentary consciousnesses that manifest these things, are all conditioned. Now the word here is *viṣaṅkhāra*, so *vi* is another way of saying not, and the word there is *saṅkhāra*, so it's not conditioned.

And then the last verse is *taṇhā*, is again this destruction of this wrong desire based on the delusion of the

house builder, which of course manifests as greed, aversion, and fear as a basic relationship to the world we live in.

So that's the verses. Now, normally speaking, this would evoke then the life of the Buddha, how he became fully liberated, etc. But I think most of you know that. And there's this quite amazing little discourse from the *Samyuttanikāya*, the grouped sayings. They're the small discourses, and it's called "With Khemaka."

So it's about this senior monk. So I'm going to read it, take some time over it, because it's quite delightful.

At one time several senior mendicants or monks were staying near Kosambī at Gosita's monastery. Now at that time the Venerable Khemaka was staying at the Jujube Tree monastery and he was sick, suffering, gravely ill. In the late afternoon these senior mendicants came out of retreat and addressed the Venerable Dāsaka: "Please, Venerable Dāsaka, go to the mendicant Khemaka and say to him: 'Reverend Khemaka, the seniors hope you are keeping well. They hope you are all right. They hope your pain is fading, not growing. That it's fading is evident, not it's growing.'"

So Dāsaka wanders off, and I presume it's quite a way because he's living in another monastery. It would have been close by, but at least he's got to go over and find him. And when, of course, he gets to Khemaka and relates this to him, Khemaka says, "No," he said, "I'm not all right. My pain is terrible and growing, not fading. And its growing is evident and it's not fading."

So Dāsaka then goes all the way back to the seniors, and the seniors say, "Ask him, say: 'Reverend Khemaka, the seniors say that these five grasping aggregates'" — so actually five *khandha* — "'have been taught by the Buddha. That is, the grasping aggregate of form, feeling, perception'" — it's got, and here's a translation from Sutta Central, which is Sujato's website where he's translated all the discourses — he's translated *saṅkhāra* here as choices. Not habits, not volitional condition, but choices. I thought was rather nice — "and consciousness. Do you regard any of these five aggregates as self or as belonging to self?"

Anyway, off Dāsaka goes, and he asks Khemaka this, and he says, "No, concerned, I do not regard anything among the five grasping aggregates as self or as belonging to self." So Venerable Dāsaka goes back and he tells the seniors, and then the seniors say, "That is," you know, because he does not see them as self or belonging to self. "If, as it seems, Venerable Khemaka does not regard anything among these five grasping aggregates as belonging to self or self, then he is a perfected one with defilements ended." In other words, he's an *arahant*.

So off he goes, Dāsaka, to see his poor Khemaka who's suffering — I mean, he's in pain — and he says, "No, I do not regard anything among these five aggregates belonging to self, yet I am not a perfected one with defilements ended. For when it comes to the five grasping aggregates, I'm not rid of the conceit of 'I am,' but I don't regard anything as 'I am this.'"

So off he goes, Dāsaka goes back to the seniors on the other side of the fence, and the seniors send him off again. So the seniors say, the message this time to Khemaka is, "When you say 'I am,' what is it that you're

talking about? Is it the form or apart from form? Is it feeling, perception? What is it you're talking about?"

So Venerable Khemaka now gets fed up with this and he says, "What's the point of running back and forth? Bring me my staff and I'll go and see these senior mendicants myself."

So off he goes. And when he arrives, of course, the usual exchanging of greetings. And then he sat down to one side. So they say to him, "When you say 'I am,' what is it you're talking about?"

"Venerables, I don't say 'I am' with reference to form or apart from form, and that's the same for feeling, perception, choices, *saṅkhāra*, consciousness. But when it comes to the five aggregates, I'm not rid of the conceit 'I am,' but I don't regard anything as 'I am this.'"

Then he gives this simile. "It's like the scent of a blue water lily or a pink one or a white lotus. Would it be right to say the scent belongs to the petals or the stalk or the pistil?" "No, Reverend." "Then reverends, how should it be said?" "It would be right to say the scent belongs to the flower."

"In the same way, reverends, I don't say with reference to form or apart from form, I don't say 'I am.' The same with feeling, perception, conditional volitionings or choices, and consciousness. For when it comes to the five grasping aggregates, I am not rid of the conceit 'I am,' but I don't regard anything as 'I am this.'"

"Although a noble disciple has given up the five lower fetters, they still have a lingering residue of the conceit 'I am,' the desire 'I am,' and the underlying tendency 'I am,' which has not been eradicated."

Now, the five lower fetters go with *sotāpanna*, the stream entrant. Something's broken, but not this sense of self.

"After some time they meditate, observing the rise and fall of the five grasping aggregates: such is form, such is the origin of form, such is the end of form, and the same with feeling, perception, choices, and consciousness. And as they do so, the lingering residue is eradicated."

And then he gives another simile. "Suppose there was a cloth that was dirty and soiled, so the owners gave it to a launderer. The launderer kneads it thoroughly with salt, lye, and cow dung, and rinses it in clear water. Although that cloth is clean and bright, it still has a lingering scent of salt, lye, and cow dung that has not been eradicated. The launderer returns it to the owners, who store it in a chest permeated with scent, and the lingering scent would be eradicated."

"In the same way, although a noble disciple has given up the five lower fetters, they still have a lingering residue of the conceit 'I am,' the desire 'I am,' and the underlying tendency 'I am,' which has not been eradicated. And after some time," etc. "The lingering residue is eradicated."

Now, when he said this, the senior mendicants said to Venerable Khemaka, "We didn't want to trouble you with our questions, but you're capable of explaining, teaching, advocating, establishing, disclosing, analyzing, and clarifying the Buddha's instructions in detail. And that's just what you've done."

That's what Venerable Khemaka said. Satisfied, the senior *bhikkhus* were happy with what Venerable Khemaka said. And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds of sixty senior *bhikkhus* and of the Venerable Khemaka were freed from defilements by non-grasping. So they all became fully liberated.

The distinction here is between a view of self and a sense of self. One incident that comes to mind is concerning smoking. You know, there was a time when smoking was not thought to be particularly harmful. And then during the fifties, especially as I remember, fifties and sixties, it slowly became apparent that in fact it caused things like cancer, lung cancer. And of course, there was the usual effort by the tobacco companies and any company to protect itself with false science and fake news. But when it finally came through, the science did come through, then people became convinced that smoking actually caused cancer and death.

Now, even though the view of the smoker was changed from being non-harmful to being harmful, did they stop smoking? No.

So here, even though the view of a self — seeing this psychophysical organism as me — is broken with the stream entrance, still there lingers on this idea of me, and it's an underlying tendency. So it's very deeply ingrained. And that me, remember, is the way that this awareness, this *satipaṇṇā*, this intuitive awareness, the Buddha within, experiences itself within the five *khandhas*. That's the sense of self you get when you become the observer, the feeler, the knower.

And of course, you can't get rid of that by an act of will. But what Khemaka is saying, and what he's saying that the Buddha said was, you just keep investigating the impermanence of the five *khandhas* of this organism, and at some point, you'll break through that final delusion and become fully liberated.

So the task in hand is very clear. We have to keep meditating, and not only in meditation, but in ordinary daily life, to keep on realizing that everything is arising and passing away. It has no substance and therefore it's not worth clinging to.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused greater confusion, and that you will, by your practice, liberate yourself, as Khemaka did, from all suffering.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.