



# DHAMMA

VENERABLE MAHINDA

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# Dhamma

Venerable Mahinda

Also in this series:

**Volume 1 Buddha (Aug 2021)**

**Volume 3 Sangha (Oct 2021)**

# Venerable Mahinda

Venerable Mahinda was ordained in 1976 under the tutelage of the late Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera. He has taught Mindfulness and Metta Meditation for 45 years in over 20 countries.

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# Preface

The aim of this series on the Buddha Dhamma Sangha is to highlight their great qualities and to draw inspiration for us to walk the Dhamma's path.

When we are living in fear and danger, worry and anxiety, we need to seek refuge in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha. We need their blessings, guidance and protection.

Those who have faith and devotion to the Buddha will naturally find solace in times of need. Those who have developed insights into the Dhamma will have greater awareness and acceptance of the ups and downs of life.

Those who connect with the Sangha will receive the necessary guidance and inspiration along the path.

Many years ago, I heard my teacher saying:

ABHIÑÑEYYAṀ ABHIÑÑĀTAM,  
BHĀVETABBAÑCA BHĀVITAM;

PAHĀTABBAM PAHĪNAM ME,  
TASMĀ BUDDHOSMI BRĀHMAṆA<sup>i</sup>

These words kept resonating in my mind. As I made some effort to understand the meaning of these words, I realised the profoundness of the Buddha and his teachings. I wish to share this Dhamma with all our Dhamma brothers and sisters.

What little I have learned is from my teacher and his teachers' teacher. I am indeed grateful for all their kindness, inspiration and sacrifices. Their teachings are so relevant in these challenging times.

I dedicate Volume 2 in this series on the occasion of the 16th anniversary of the Aloka Stupa at Peats Ridge in NSW, Australia. May all those who have helped in one way or another with the construction and maintenance of the Aloka Stupa continue to grow in the Dhamma's path and swiftly attain their liberation. May the very sight of the Stupa bring peace and happiness to all.

<sup>i</sup> What should be known is known, what should be developed is developed; What should be destroyed is destroyed – therefore I am awakened, O Brahmin.' (Brahmāyu Sutta, MN 91)

# DHAMMA

The word DHAMMA (in Pali) or DHARMA (in Sanskrit), is derived from “*dhṛ*” which means to uphold, to preserve, or to practise. It is a very ancient term, widely used amongst religions in India, and even at the time of the Buddha it had many different shades of meaning.

## Different Teachers, Different Dhammas

The Buddha’s teachings were unique amongst the various religious philosophies that existed in India at the time of the Buddha, around the 6th century BCE. There were two main streams of religious practice in India at that time. They were the BRĀHMAṆA and the SĀMAṆA traditions.

The BRĀHMAṆA tradition refers mainly to the trained priests who conducted rituals and sacrifices for their communities. Some had settled down in

agriculture and trade, and there were some who were also wanderers.

They believed in the supernatural revelation of the Vedas and held the Vedas to be the supreme source of all knowledge. Although they also used logical reasoning, inference and extrapolation to understand the world, their basic belief system depended ultimately on the will of god (ĪŚVARA) and that of the soul (ĀTMAN).

For them, Dhamma was defined as virtuous practices, or good works.<sup>1</sup> Social practices like observing the duties of a householder and leading a righteous way of life were also considered to be Dhamma. In other words, any teaching that preserves, practises and upholds peace and happiness could be regarded as Dhamma.

The SĀMAṆA tradition referred mainly to the wandering ascetics. Amongst the SĀMAṆA there were those who were materialists, rejecting anything supramundane including belief in a soul and

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<sup>1</sup> MW Sanskrit Dictionary

reincarnation. Some were sceptics who doubted that it was possible to truly understand the world and the self. Others were determinists or fatalistic thinkers who believed that everything was predestined, according to fate.

Because of the SĀMAṆA, the meaning of Dhamma developed from the idea of virtuous practices to mean any sort of naturally unfolding phenomena, including the natural order of the universe, such as the law of karma.

All these different schools of thought were constantly quarrelling and competing with each other, each claiming to be the true Dhamma.

# The Buddha-Dhamma

Amidst this climate of philosophical unrest, the Buddha's teachings were unique in that they were not based on divine revelation or a concoction of religious thoughts and superstitious beliefs. They were based solely on the development and purification of the mind through wisdom and the performance of meritorious actions – to see things as they really are and not as they appear to be.

From the Buddhist point of view, there are two main kinds of Dhamma. The first type is LOKIYA DHAMMA, which refers to the worldly or mundane aspect of Dhamma, which promotes peace and harmony within the individual, family, society, nation and the world.

However, the Buddha also gave teachings which point to the LOKUTTARA DHAMMA, which enables one to transcend all worldly phenomena and attain to the highest bliss of Nibbāna by overcoming the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion.

# The Lineage of the Dhamma

For the first 400 years or so, the teachings of the Buddha were maintained as an oral tradition before they were put into writing in Sinhalese script, at Aluvihara in Matale, Sri Lanka, around 78 to 80 BC. The term 'PĀLI' originally referred to the texts of the Buddhist scriptures, which were also called the TI-PITAKA. But later, Western scholars used the word Pali to refer only to the language of the scriptures.

The Ti-Pitaka, or Buddhist scriptures, were written on *ola* leaves (palm leaves) and have been preserved until today as the Pali tradition, which spread mainly to Myanmar, Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries.

Around the 1st century AD, the Kushan Emperor Kanishka organised a Buddhist council at Jalandar, Kashmir, which put another version of the Ti-pitaka into writing, mostly composed in Sanskrit.<sup>2</sup> However, manuscripts found in languages like Gandhari,

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<sup>2</sup> The Life of Huien Tsiang, (1911). trans. Samuel Beal, Rupa Publications.

Sogdian and Turkish show that they were later also translated into many different languages. This tradition spread throughout Central Asia via the silk route to China and the Far East.

Today the Buddhist teachings are preserved as the Theravada (or the Pali tradition), and the Mahayana and Vajrayana (in the Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan traditions). Owing to cultural and certain doctrinal differences there are different interpretations found in the commentaries and sub-commentaries.

However, the fundamental teachings – such as PAṬICCA SAMUPPĀDA, the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, karma and rebirth – are the same. There are also realised and authentic masters in all the three traditions.

# The Heart of the Buddha-Dhamma

At the core of all the Buddha's teachings lies PAṬICCA SAMUPPĀDA, or Dependent Origination, which explains how suffering arises and how suffering ceases. An important aspect of this teaching is based on the principle of causality,<sup>3</sup> which is explained as follows:<sup>4</sup>

IMASMIṀ SATI IDAṀ HOTI  
IMASSUPPĀDĀ IDAṀ UPPAJJATI

When this exists, that exists.

When this arises, that arises.

IMASMIṀ ASATI IDAṀ NA HOTI  
IMASSA NIRODHĀ IDAṀ NIRUJJHATI

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<sup>3</sup> There are four aspects of Dependent Origination. See Rohitassa Sutta, SN 2.26: "TATHATĀ AVITATHATĀ ANAÑÑATHATĀ IDAPPCCAYATĀ AYAM VUCCATI PAṬICCA-SAMUPPĀDO"; 'Dependent Origination is said to have [the characteristics of] objectivity, necessity, invariability and conditionality.'

<sup>4</sup> Assutavā Sutta, SN 12.61

When this does not exist, that does not exist.

When this ceases, that ceases.

This profound insight was what the Buddha realised on the night of his Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree at Bodhgaya.

## Dust in the Eyes of Beings

After the Buddha's Enlightenment, he spent seven weeks enjoying the bliss of Nibbāna and contemplating what he had realised. During this time, he considered that the Dhamma he had attained was so deep, subtle and difficult to realise that he doubted beings in the world, who delight in attachment and pleasure, would be able to understand it. Thus he did not feel inclined to teach.

In the celestial realm, Brahmā Sahāmpati perceived the Buddha's line of thinking. He appeared before the Buddha and begged him to teach, saying "There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who are coming to grief because they do not hear the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma."

With his enlightened mind the Buddha surveyed the world and saw that there were “those with little dust in their eyes, and those with much, ... those easy to teach and those difficult to teach”, and out of compassion for the world he decided to teach the Dhamma.<sup>5</sup>

The Buddha first turned the wheel of the Dhamma at the deer park in Sarnath, where he taught the Four Noble Truths: explaining how suffering arises and how suffering ceases.<sup>6</sup> This was the beginning of his 45 year ministry, expounding the Dhamma for the benefit of beings, showing them the path to liberation from all suffering.

## Causality and the Dhamma

The teachings on the Four Noble Truths are in fact a summary of PAṬICCA SAMUPPĀDA, or Dependent Origination, which is based on causality or cause and effect. There is DUKKHA, or suffering; there is the cause; there is the end to suffering; and there is the Path to end all suffering. This principle of causality

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<sup>5</sup> Āyācana Sutta, SN 6.1

<sup>6</sup> Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, SN 56.11

runs through all the important teachings of the Buddha.

The same is true for the process of enlightenment. In one of the most important discourses in the Tri-Pitaka, the Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Buddha outlines the way to liberation based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

These four – mindfulness on the body, feelings, mind, and the Dhamma – have been expounded in such a manner that one can clearly see how each foundation leads to the next, systematically, and can be verified by the practitioner. This is especially true of the five aspects of mindfulness on the Dhamma: the five mental hindrances, the five aggregates, the six sense bases, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the Four Noble Truths.

When the five mental hindrances are checked, the JHĀNA factors arise, giving rise to the clarity of mind to comprehend the five aggregates, which arise through the six sense bases, thus leading on to the

seven factors of enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> Each of these seven factors of enlightenment condition the arising of the next, ultimately leading to the realisation of Nibbāna. These teachings are truly perfectly expounded.

## The Six Qualities of the Dhamma

The unique attributes of the Dhamma expounded by the Buddha can be understood in terms of the six qualities or virtues that are recited as daily devotions, in what is referred to as DHAMMĀNUSSATI, or contemplation on the Dhamma:

SVĀKKHĀTO BHAGAVATĀ DHAMMO

The Dhamma of the Blessed One is perfectly expounded;

SANDIṬṬHIKO AKĀLIKO

is to be realised by oneself; is not subject to time;

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<sup>7</sup> SATTA-SAMBOJJHAṄĀ: Joy (PĪTI), Investigation of the Dhamma (DHAMMA-VICAYA), Energy (VIRIYA), Mindfulness (SATI), Tranquility (PASSADDHI), Concentration (SAMĀDHI), Equanimity (UPEKKHĀ).

EHIPASSIKO OPANAYIKO

invites investigation; leads onward to Nibbāna;

PACCATTAM VEDITABBO VIÑÑŪHĪ TI

and is to be realised by the wise, each for himself.

## 1. SVĀKKHĀTA

The first quality of SVĀKKHĀTA – perfectly expounded – can be seen in the very first sermon of the Buddha, the Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta, where the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

Within the Four Noble Truths, you will find the Noble Eightfold Path, and in the Noble Eightfold Path, you will find the Four Noble Truths. The fourth Noble Truth is the ‘path that leads to the cessation of suffering’, which is in fact the Noble Eightfold Path. The first path factor of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Understanding (or Right View), which refers to the understanding of the Four Noble Truths.

The Dhamma is also good for you and good for others. That is why the Dhamma is perfectly expounded.

## The Threefold Training

Furthermore, the Dhamma is good in the beginning, good in the middle and good at the end.<sup>8</sup> When we look at the Noble Eightfold Path, we can see it comprises the threefold training:

- 1) SĪLA (morality)
- 2) SAMĀDHI (concentration), and
- 3) PAÑÑĀ (wisdom)

The training begins with SĪLA. When one is virtuous and follows SĪLA, then the mind is free from remorse. When the mind is free from remorse, in a chain of cause and effect, the mental and physical conditions that underlie concentration arise.<sup>9</sup> This is how the Dhamma is good in the beginning.

But while SĪLA provides a solid foundation for mental development by restraining physical and verbal actions, it does not prevent negative actions from arising at the mental level. This is why it

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<sup>8</sup> Visuddhimagga II.69; also cf. Cūḷahatthipadopama Sutta MN 27.

<sup>9</sup> Paṭhama-upanisā Sutta, AN 11.

progresses to SAMĀDHI, the calmness and quietness of mind. Once we have gained stability in the mind, the knowledge and insight of liberation will naturally arise. This is how the Dhamma is good in the middle.

As that knowledge develops, so does the insight into what is needed to break the unwholesome tendencies of greed, hatred and ignorance, the cause of all our suffering, once and for all. This is PAÑÑĀ, the Dhamma which is good in the end.

When we realise how perfectly expounded the Buddha's teachings are, taught in a manner which is clear from start to finish, our faith and confidence in the Dhamma will naturally grow.

## **2. SANDIṬṬHIKA**

The Dhamma is SANDIṬṬHIKA, that is, to be realised or experienced by oneself. The Buddha taught the Dhamma based on his own practice and realisation. Therefore, we too need to examine, investigate and put the teachings of the Buddha into practice ourselves. Hence the three important aspects

of Dhamma known as PARIYATTI, PAṬIPATTI and PAṬIVEDHA – or study, practice, and realisation.

In order to gain a complete understanding of the Buddha-Dhamma we first need to study, reflect on and contemplate its teachings, theories and principles. However, we need to be aware that the knowledge of the Dhamma we gain through these means is only at the intellectual or conceptual level.

In order to translate what we understand at the conceptual level into actual experience and realisation of the truth, we need to apply what we have learnt through the practice of Dhamma, by training our mind through meditation, and applying Dhammic principles in our daily activities. That is how we will gradually come to realise the Dhamma for ourselves.

The Dhamma is to be verified through one's own direct experience. Confidence in the truth of Dhamma is not about simply believing through blind faith. As one realises the Dhamma more and more, one's conviction will naturally grow, because one starts to see the Dhamma for oneself. That is how we

will make greater and greater effort in our practice until we finally realise the ultimate truth for ourselves.

While emphasis is placed on realisation of the truth through our own efforts, we also need to recognise the role of certain Dhamma protectors and SAMMĀ-DIṬṬHI devas, or devas with Right View, who provide the necessary support and protection for Dhamma practitioners, protecting and helping those who are walking the Dhamma's path. The Buddha himself had the support of such devas while he was struggling for enlightenment.

## **Lady Sujātā offers Milk-Rice**

Shortly before the Buddha's Enlightenment, the Bodhisatta was taking a rest underneath a banyan tree near Bodhgaya.<sup>10</sup> It just so happened that a lady called Sujātā visited that banyan tree every year to offer milk-rice.

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<sup>10</sup> The Great Chronicle of Buddhas, (1994). Vol 2.1, Chap 7. Mingun Sayadaw, Ti=Ni Publishing Centre.

When she was a child, she had prayed at the banyan tree thus: “Guardian deva of the banyan tree, if I am married into a rich family of the same caste, I will make an offering of milk-rice to you each year.” The prayer of Sujātā had been fulfilled. As a result, she had been paying homage at the banyan tree and offering milk-rice on the full moon day of Vesākha every year.

Lady Sujātā took great care to prepare the offering. She first let one thousand cows graze on the wood of liquorice; and the milk obtained from these one thousand cows was fed to another five hundred cows, whose milk was fed to another two hundred and fifty cows... and so on, until that milk was reduced to feeding eight cows. In this manner, Sujātā obtained thick, savoury and nutritious cow’s milk to prepare the milk-rice.

While the milk-rice was being cooked, the Four Heavenly Kings stood around the stove to keep watch; Mahā-Brahmā provided an umbrella to cover the cooking-pot; Sakka arranged the firewood and kept the fire at a constant temperature; other devas,

through their supernormal powers, collected nutritious essences from all parts of the world. They did so as if they were gathering honey from honeycombs hanging from branches. Then they poured the nutrients so collected into the pot of milk-rice.

Lady Sujātā brought the offering herself in a golden bowl, and mistaking the Bodhisatta to be the guardian deva of the banyan tree, she proceeded to approach him in a respectful manner. She respectfully offered it to him and departed.

The Bodhisatta then ate the offering and travelled to Bodhgaya, where he made the resolution to sit under the Bodhi Tree until he reached enlightenment. Because the milk-rice had not only been cooked by Sujātā, but also enriched by the help of a host of devas, the Bodhisatta's body was tuned to its perfect condition, and he attained enlightenment that very night.

### 3. AKĀLIKA

The quality of AKĀLIKA refers to the timeless aspect of the teachings of the Buddha. For example, the law of cause and effect was good and applicable more than 2,500 years ago during the time of the Buddha; it is valid and relevant in the present day; and it will be good and relevant for the future too.

The Buddha himself declared that the basic principle of causality found in the PAṬICCA SAMUPPĀDA is always present<sup>11</sup>. It is not something invented by him. A Tathāgata only ‘rediscovers’ this principle from time to time through his enlightened mind and expounds it in a manner that ordinary beings can understand.

The same applies to the teachings on:

- The Four Noble Truths;
- The three characteristics of existence: ANICCA, DUKKHA, ANATTĀ – or impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self;

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<sup>11</sup> Paccaya Sutta, SN 12.20

- METTĀ, loving-kindness – that hatred does not cease by hatred but by love alone,
- As well as to the Buddha's teachings on the basic criteria of SĪLA or morality, namely greed, hatred and delusion versus generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom.

These are all timeless teachings, valid for all times.

Furthermore, the 'timeless' quality of the Dhamma not only refers to the validity of the teachings in terms of past, present and future, it also refers to the here and now. That is, the Dhamma is to be experienced in the here and now.

For example, when we develop mindfulness in our daily lives, as soon as we are mindful and aware of any unwholesome state of mind, such as anger or craving, we have already stepped out of it. In terms of the Four Noble Truths, when we truly see suffering as suffering, the suffering ceases. When we see suffering, we will also see the cause, the cessation and the way how it can be ceased. Realisation takes place immediately, here and now.

It is the same with the realisation of ANICCA or impermanence. While we are in training, we may experience the rising-falling of phenomena in two or even three moments. But as we develop the sharpness of mind, we will experience UDAYA-VAYA, or rising-falling, in just a single moment, not as ‘rising’ and ‘falling’.

That is how AKĀLIKA, the timelessness of Dhamma can be understood: in terms of the here and now, as well as in terms of the validity of the Dhamma in the past, present and future.

## **The Unconditioned**

In fact, the true experience of Dhamma is both timeless and inexpressible. It is an unchanging, unconditioned principle, known as ASANĶHATA-DHAMMA, which we commonly call ‘Nibbāna’. There are also other words used to describe ASANĶHATA-DHAMMA – including the deathless, the unborn, the un compounded, peace, purity, refuge, liberation, and so on – but it is actually indescribable and inexpressible in conventional language based on our ordinary minds.

In contrast to the unconditioned ASAN̄KHATA-DHAMMA, there is also SAN̄KHATA-DHAMMA, which is conditioned truth. This is a relative truth, which is true on the basis of certain causes and conditions.

An example is our assumption that the sun will rise in the sky every morning. This is conventionally true, but when we really stop to think about it, it is dependent on causes and conditions. In the same way, we assume our human life will continue day to day, but this actually depends on conditions such as the availability of food, water, oxygen and so on.

The Buddha-Dhamma contains both the SAN̄KHATA -DHAMMA, conditioned truth, as well as ASAN̄KHATA-DHAMMA, the unconditioned truth.

Both these aspects of the Dhamma are timeless in nature. The principle involved in the Four Noble Truths is the principle of Dependent Origination, or causes and conditions. The realisation of Dependent Origination brings us to Nibbāna, the state beyond all suffering, the unconditioned state. This is why

we say both the principles and the realisation of the Dhamma – the conditioned and unconditioned Dhamma – are timeless.

#### **4. EHIPASSIKA**

EHIPASSIKA is often translated as “come and see”, or come and verify for yourself. It can be explained in the sense that when we apply the Dhamma in our own lives, we will begin to experience a sense of peace and bliss, and there will be a strong urge to reach out to others to share our experience, inviting others to come and see and experience for themselves. This will be experienced by a true Dhamma practitioner.

It also refers to the spirit of investigation, the will to understand both the conditioned and the unconditioned truth contained in the Dhamma for ourselves. This spirit of investigation is well-illustrated in the Buddha’s advice to the Kālāmas, in the discourse known as the Kālāma Sutta.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> AN 3.65

## The Spirit of Inquiry

During the Buddha's time, as now, people were confused by the myriad religious beliefs expounded by different religious teachers who exalted their own philosophies and denounced those of others. Hence the need to carefully understand the Kālāma Sutta, which was given to a certain tribe known as the Kālāmas, who were confused over the various schools of religious thought at that time.

The Kālāmas approached the Buddha to ask how they should know what is true and what is false. This is what the Buddha said:<sup>13</sup>

MĀ ANUSSAVENA,  
MĀ PARAMPARĀYA,  
MĀ ITIKIRĀYA,  
MĀ PIṬASAMPADĀNENA,  
MĀ TAKKAHETU,  
MĀ NAYAHETU,

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<sup>13</sup> *The Buddha and His Teachings*, (1988), p.284-285. Narada, BMSM Publications. See also *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, (2012). Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications; *With the Kālāmas of Kesamutta*, (2018). Sujato, <https://suttacentral.net/an3.65/en/sujato> .

MĀ ĀKĀRAPARIVITAKKENA,  
MĀ DIṬṬHINIJJHĀNAKKHANTIIYĀ,  
MĀ BHABBARŪPATĀYA,  
MĀ SAMANO NO GARŪ TI.

1. Do not accept anything on mere hearsay  
(Thinking that thus have we heard it from a long time ago)
2. Do not accept anything by mere tradition  
(Thinking that it has thus been handled down through many generations)
3. Do not accept anything on account of rumours  
(Believing what others say without any investigation)
4. Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures
5. Do not accept anything merely upon supposition  
(That is, merely upon logical reasoning)
6. Do not accept anything merely upon inference
7. Do not accept anything by merely considering appearances  
(That is, merely by reasoned contemplation)

8. Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your preconceived notions
9. Do not accept anything merely because it seems acceptable  
(Because many people have the same view)
10. Do not accept anything thinking that the ascetic is respected by us  
(And therefore it is right to accept his word)

After expounding the above ten points that should be rejected by one seeking the truth, the Buddha laid out the criteria of acceptance based on the three wholesome roots and the three unwholesome roots. The Buddha asked the Kālāmas:

“Is greed good?” They replied “No”.

Then the Buddha said “Avoid it”.

“Is anger or hatred good?” They replied “No”.

Then the Buddha said “Avoid it”.

“Is ignorance or delusion good?” They replied

“No”. Then the Buddha said “Avoid it”.

Then the Buddha asked “Is generosity good? Is loving-

kindness good? Is wisdom good?” To each of these questions, the Kālāmas replied “Yes”. So the Buddha advised them to avoid greed, hatred and delusion, and to practise generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom.

Greed, hatred and delusion, and their opposites, generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom, form the criteria for judgement of right and wrong, or good or evil in thought, speech and body actions from the Buddhist perspective. The Kālāma Sutta is thus rightly accepted to be a unique charter of religious inquiry.

## 5. OPANAYIKA

OPANAYIKA is another quality of the Dhamma, as it ‘leads onward to Nibbāna’. The Buddha explained the natural process of liberation, based on the principle of causality, in this way: <sup>14</sup>

It is natural, O Monks, that freedom from remorse arises in one ... endowed with virtue...

Happiness arises in one ... endowed with freedom from remorse...

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<sup>14</sup> Paṭhama-upanisā Sutta, AN 11.

Joy arises in one ... endowed with happiness...

Calmness arises in one ... endowed with joy...

Bliss arises in one ... endowed with calmness...

Right Concentration arises in one ... endowed with bliss...

‘Seeing things as they are’ arises in one ... endowed with Right Concentration...

Cessation arises in one ... who ‘sees things as they are’...

Detachment arises in one ... endowed with cessation...

Freedom (or liberation) arises in one ... endowed with detachment.

Just as one good thing leads to another, the peace and blissful experience of the Dhamma will naturally lead us to prioritise our activities and we will gain the courage to give up the lesser, fleeting happiness of sensual pleasures for greater and more lasting spiritual happiness, until we experience the highest bliss of Nibbāna.

In a similar way, when one develops faith in a teacher, one will naturally want to listen to him. Upon listening to the teachings, one will want to understand more. And as our understanding grows, we will want to know how to practise and so on, leading us further and further along the path to liberation until the final goal.

## **6. PACCATTAM VEDITABBA VIÑÑŪHI**

Finally, the Dhamma is to be ‘realised by the wise, each for himself’ (PACCATTAM VEDITABBA VIÑÑŪHI). Just as medicine only works if it is taken and consumed by ourselves and not by others, the Dhamma too needs to be practised and realised by oneself.

However, a certain degree of wisdom is required, in order to appreciate the Dhamma and be able to apply it in our daily lives. Only when we develop a little wisdom to realise the fleeting nature of sensual pleasures will we be able to let go of the lesser happiness for the greater happiness.

In fact, the whole practice of Dhamma depends on the wisdom of Right View, or Right Understanding. If we have the right view or understanding about the nature of our minds and the true nature of our lives, then we will naturally develop Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Body Actions, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. This is the Noble Eightfold Path which will enable us to put an end to all suffering, once and for all.

These six qualities of the Dhamma are very important for us to understand if we wish to make progress on the Dhamma's path. We need to recollect and understand their meaning and know how to apply it in our daily lives. That is how we will realise the Dhamma as truth, through PARIYATTI (theory), PAṬIPATTI (practice) and PAṬIVEDHA (realisation).

# Recollecting the Six Virtues

Understanding the uniqueness of the Buddha-Dhamma, we should listen to the Dhamma not only with respect and gratitude to the Buddha, but we should also recollect the Buddha's true purpose in teaching the Dhamma: to show us the path to liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

We should remember that such sublime and well-expounded teachings of the Buddha are not always available in the world. As such, we should listen to the Dhamma whenever the opportunity arises.

There are times in the world's cycle when such Dhamma is totally obscured from the minds of ordinary human beings. You may have heard that we are in a 'Dhamma-declining' age. It is not that the Dhamma declines, but peoples' minds are so distracted by worldly and mundane knowledge that few take the time and effort to understand their true self and the true meaning of life.

# Dhamma in Practice

The whole teachings of the Buddha, or the Buddha-Dhamma, can be summarised as follows:

SABBA-PĀPASSA AKARAṄAṀ  
KUSALASSA UPASAMPADĀ  
SACITTA PARIYODAPANAṀ  
ETAṀ BUDDHĀNA SĀSANAṀ

Avoid all evil

Do good

Purify one's own mind

This is the teachings of all Buddhas.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding the criteria of the three wholesome roots and the three unwholesome roots which the Buddha explained to the Kālāmas, we avoid unwholesome or unskilful actions, and perform actions which are wholesome and skilful.

Avoiding evil and doing good lays the foundation for the development and purification of the mind.

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<sup>15</sup> Dhammapada 183

When we meditate, we naturally become aware of our thoughts, speech and body actions. When we recall the unwholesome actions that we have done in our lives, guilt and remorse will arise, our minds will be disturbed and we will not be able to concentrate properly. That is why the Buddha taught that we need to develop a good moral foundation by avoiding evil and doing good.

However, from a Buddhist perspective, avoiding evil and doing good alone is not enough. Good moral conduct will lead to positive karma, which will support us in the future, but the development of wisdom is essential in order to gain our final liberation.

That is why the purification of the mind is necessary, to develop the wisdom to see things as they really are and not as they appear to be, to experience the truth of the Dhamma for ourselves.

# Modern Dhamma

In the meantime, listening to Dhamma, discussing and sharing Dhamma are all meritorious activities that will benefit both ourselves and others. In the contemporary world, there are many ways we can skilfully utilise modern communication methods, in addition to the more traditional formats, to bring the Dhamma to a broad range of people.

We should also remember that in propagating the Dhamma, our own actions and behaviour will be an example to others around us.

Ultimately, we need to put the Dhamma into practise in our daily lives, by being mindful of our own thoughts, speech and body actions, to reduce and eventually overcome the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion. This will in turn also have a positive influence on those around us.

# Dhamma Protects the Dhamma Practitioner

DHAMMO HAVE RAKKHATI  
DHAMMA-CĀRIṀ

DHAMMO SUCIṆṆO SUKHAM-ĀVAHĀTI  
ESĀNISAMSO DHAMME SUCIṆṆE  
NA DUGGATIṀ GACCHATI  
DHAMMA-CĀRĪ<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, Dhamma protects the Dhamma practitioner;

Dhamma well-practised brings happiness.

Never to an evil rebirth goes the Dhamma practitioner;

This is the advantage of well-practised Dhamma.

The Dhamma is a protection for us. Firstly, when we cultivate the worldly Dhamma, we are protected from the negative effects of evil actions. And when we realise the supramundane Dhamma, we will be protected from any kind of suffering, because our

<sup>16</sup> Ayoghara Jātaka (510)

minds will be free, no matter what trials or challenges we may have to endure.

## The Parable of the Raft

It is important to understand that the purpose of the Dhamma is to help us reduce and ultimately overcome our greed, hatred and delusion. If we become overly attached to the Dhamma, whether it is the texts, the words or the meaning, it can become a hindrance to the purification of our minds. The Buddha declared in a number of different suttas:<sup>17</sup>

SABBE DHAMMĀ NĀLAṀ ABHINIVESĀYĀ

All Dhammas are unworthy of attachment.

How should we understand this? The Buddha once compared the Dhamma to a raft used to cross the ocean of samsara, to reach the other shore – Nibbāna. The purpose of a raft is for crossing safely over an expanse of water. Having reached the other shore, we would leave the raft behind and not carry it with us wherever we go.

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<sup>17</sup> Cūḷa-taṇhā-saṅkhaya Sutta, MN 37; Pacalāyamāna Sutta, AN 7.61; Duttiya-avijjā-pahāna Sutta, SN 35.80.

In a similar way, we depend on the Dhamma in both its mundane and supramundane aspects to cross the ocean of samsara, but once we have reached the other shore of Nibbāna, as the Buddha advised we “should let go even of Dhammas, to say nothing of non-Dhammas.”<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusion

Practising the Buddha-Dhamma will benefit us on a worldly level, by generating the merits for us to have a peaceful and prosperous life, and to be reborn in human or heavenly realms. But if we don't engage in the Dhamma with the motivation to be liberated from samsara, Dhamma practice will not ultimately lead us out of suffering. A peaceful and prosperous life is a support to enable us to practise for something higher.

We should always appreciate how fortunate we are, to live at a time when we are still able to access the Buddha-Dhamma and when there are still a few

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<sup>18</sup> Alagaddupama Sutta, MN 22

authentic teachers wandering around in the world. We need to make good use of this opportunity to plant the seed of enlightenment in our own hearts as well as in the hearts of the many.

We can do this by making the right connections with the noble ones – Sangha members who have good practice and who are able to guide us along the path to liberation.

# The Significance of the Buddha Dhamma Sangha

The Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are known as the 'Three Jewels' or 'Triple Gem' because of their preciousness. They are the best and most reliable source of refuge.

When we are ill, we will visit a doctor and take the medicine prescribed to cure our illness. In a similar light, in order to cure our suffering in saṃsāra we can look to the Buddha as the doctor, the Dhamma as the medicine, and the Sangha as one who administers the medicine.

The blessings, guidance and protection of the Buddha Dhamma Sangha lead us to success, not only in our worldly pursuits but also in the pursuit of our final liberation and Enlightenment.

We all have the same basic awareness as the Buddha, whether we believe it or not. The difference lies in its clarity. The Buddha's awareness is vast and crystal clear. Our awareness is clouded and tainted by greed, hatred and delusion, along with all their ramifications or manifestations.

As we continue to grow in faith and devotion to the Buddha Dhamma Sangha, and keep on doing good, avoiding evil, and purifying our minds, we will slowly remove the layers of cloud that have been obstructing and obscuring us and eventually attain the awareness and clarity of the Buddha.

YO DHAMMAṀ PASSATI,

SO MAṀ PASSATI<sup>19</sup>

He who sees the Dhamma sees me.

– *The Buddha*

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<sup>19</sup> Vakkali Sutta, SN 22.87

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*Venerable Mahinda*