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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa

Published by

Buddhist Discussion Centre Australia.

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Associated Institution of the World Buddhist University
World Fellowship of Buddhists Regional Centre

May You Be Well And Happy

Introduction to the Sutta

The dhammacakka and anatta lakkhana suttas are well known amongst Buddhists because historically they were the first and second discourses respectively to be spoken by the Buddha after his enlightenment and because contained within them is the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

The dhammacakka sutta teaches the Four Noble Truths that deal directly with the human condition which is essentially the same now as it was then. The Four Noble Truths are concerned with dukkha, its cause, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation.

The word dukkha is derived from du = bad, painful + kha = empty, space so that here it means bad, painful, unsatisfactory, or imperfect. We have left it untranslated in dhammacakka sutta, but in anatta lakkhana sutta we have translated it as unsatisfactory. Concerning the Four Noble Truths the following are points for investigation:

1. The Buddha was not speculating or philosophising; but was teaching what he himself had realised and was teaching the group of five bhikkhus how to experience the same for themselves.
2. These Four Noble Truths apply universally to all beings in all times.
3. These Four Noble Truths can be verified by anybody who puts forth the effort to investigate them in their own life.
4. It is for you to decide for yourself whether they are true or not true.
5. Taken at face value you might consider the Four Noble Truths to be pessimistic or negative, but by using simple word play you could change them into an optimistic and positive form. For example, the last two Noble Truths would become the Noble Truths of real happiness and the way to the attainment of real happiness.

The annata lakkhana sutta was spoken by the Buddha four days after the dhammacakka sutta after all the group of five bhikkhus had attained the path of stream-entry. In this sutta the teaching of not-self is presented in a manner which is concise and direct, but that does not mean that it is an easy teaching to understand.

Only those possessed of keen insight that can see the impermanence of the five aggregates will be able to understand this teaching.

The pali texts of these two suttas can be found together in the mahavagga of the vinaya pitaka and in separate places in the samyutta nikaya.

DHAMMACAKKAPPAVATTANA SUTTA

Setting in Motion The Wheel of Dhamma
(dhammacakkappavattana)

This Sutta was translated by U Dhammino

Thus have I heard: The Bhagava was at one time residing at Benares in the Deer park at Isipatana. There the Bhagava addressed the group of five bhikkhus saying:

"These two extremes, bhikkhus, should not be practised by one who has gone forth. Which two? Indulgence in sense pleasure which is low, the way of villagers, the way of ordinary people, ignoble, and unprofitable; and self-mortification which is painful, ignoble, and unprofitable (2).

"By not approaching these two extremes, bhikkhus, the Tathagata has realized the Middle Way which produces the eye-of wisdom, knowledge, and leads to the cessation of defilements, the realising of truth by higher wisdom, complete enlightenment, and Nibbana (3).

"What is the Middle Way, bhikkhus that the Tathagata has realized which produces the eye of wisdom, knowledge, and leads to the cessation of defilements, the realising of truth by higher wisdom, complete enlightenment, and Nibbana?

"It is just this Noble Eightfold path. Namely: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

"That is the Middle Way, bhikkhus, that the Tathagata has realized which produces the eye of wisdom, knowledge, and leads to the cessation of defilements, the realising of truth by higher wisdom, complete enlightenment, and Nibbana.

"This, bhikkhus, truly is the Noble Truth of dukkha, birth is dukkha (painful, unsatisfactory), ageing is also dukkha, sickness is also dukkha, death is also dukkha; sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain and anguish are also dukkha; to have to associate with those (persons and things) one dislikes is also dukkha: to be separated from those one loves or likes is also dukkha; wishing for what one cannot get is also dukkha; in short, the five aggregates of clinging are dukkha.

"This, bhikkhus, truly is the Noble Truth of the cause of dukkha: It is that craving which gives rise to fresh rebirth and which together with delight and clinging (accepts, enjoys, and) finds great delight in this or that (existence or sense pleasure that happens to arise). Namely, craving for sense pleasures, craving for (better) existence, and craving for non-existence.

"This, bhikkhus, truly is the Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha: It is

the cessation of this very craving, its abandoning and discarding, the liberation and detachment from it.

"This, bhikkhus, truly is the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha: It is just this Noble Eightfold path. Namely: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration (4).

"To me the eye of wisdom arose, the knowledge arose, the wisdom arose, the understanding arose, the light of wisdom arose, that 'This is the Noble Truth of dukkha' which I had never heard before (5).

"To me the eye of wisdom arose, the knowledge arose, the wisdom arose, the understanding arose, the light of wisdom arose, that, 'This Noble Truth of dukkha should be understood' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose ... 'This Noble Truth of dukkha has been understood' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose ... 'This is the Noble Truth of the cause of dukkha' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose ... 'This is the Noble Truth of the cause of dukkha should be eradicated' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose ... 'This is the Noble Truth of the cause of dukkha has been eradicated' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose ... 'This is the Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose ... 'This Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha should be realised' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose 'This Noble Truth of the cessation of dukkha has been realised' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose ... 'This is the Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose ... 'This Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha should be developed' which I had never heard before.

"To me the eye of wisdom arose, the knowledge arose, the wisdom arose, the understanding arose, the light of wisdom arose, that, 'This Noble Truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha has been developed' which I had never heard before.

"As long as, bhikkhus, my understanding of Four Noble Truths, each in three aspects totaling twelve was not pure, I did not to attained highest enlightenment in the world with its devas, maras, brahmas, monks,

recluses, and men (6).

"But when my understanding of the Four Noble Truths, each in three aspects totalling twelve ways was pure, then only did I claim to have attained the highest enlightenment in this world with its devas, maras, brahmas, monks, recluses, and men.

"This knowledge arose to me; 'My deliverance is unshakeable, this is my last life, there is for me now no future rebirth.'"

This is what the Bhagava said. Delighted the group of five bhikkhus rejoiced at the Bhagava's words.

And while this discourse was being given, to the Venerable Kondanna the dustless eye of dhamma arose that, "Whatever is of a nature to arise, all that is of a nature to cease. (7)"

NOTES

1. The Deer Park is located at Sarnath near present day Benares and is still visited by Buddhist pilgrims.

2. These extremes are also to be avoided by a layman who wishes to realize Nibbana. Nowadays the extreme of indulgence in sense pleasures is the most commonly found even amongst spiritual practices. Still today in India there are ascetics devoted to self-mortification through such practices as fasting, always standing on one foot, and sleeping on beds of nails. It is especially important to note these practices are unprofitable. That is, they do not produce any wisdom, knowledge or enlightenment.

3. Nibbana (Skt. Nirvana) is a reality experienced by a mind totally free from greed, hatred and delusion.

4. See mahasatipatthana sutta, sacca section, for a more detailed explanation of the Four Noble Truths.

5. In the following passages the words used are worth noting. Dukkha is to be understood and not attacked; craving is to be eradicated; Nibbana is something realisable; and the path can be and has to be developed and does not arise miraculously.

6. Devas, maras, and brahmas are different classes of beings who enjoy a higher quality of life than humans and are also invisible to the human eye. They have very long lifespans but they still die and can be reborn in another class of beings according to their good or bad actions.

7. This is a way of showing that Kondanna had realised the path of stream entry (sotapatti magga) which is the first of four stages of enlightenment. A stream enterer is said to only be reborn seven times at most before attaining the final stage of arahatship. He is therefore certain to attain arahatship.