Dhamma Talk by The Most Ven. Nāuyanē Ariyadhamma Maha Thero

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9. The Eight-fold Path

Namo tassa Bhagavato, Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa.

Homage to that Bessed one, who is an Arahant and perfectly Self-enlightened.

Yē Dhammāhetuppabhavā tesam hetum Tathāgato āha, tesanca yo nirodho evamvādī Mahāsamano tī (Mv.1 (Mahàkkhandhaka))

Faithful Devotees, who spoke this verse? To whom was it spoken? Where was it spoken? What happened as a result of the speaking and hearing of this verse? What is the meaning of this verse? What part of the Dhamma is explained in this verse?

This verse was spoken by the arahant Ven. Assaji, the most junior among the group of five ascetics called Kondanna, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji, the first five disciples of the Buddha, who shortly after receiving higher ordination all became arahants [while listening to the Anattalakkhana sutta (S.22:59)].

Once when the Ven. Assaji, an arahant, was wandering for alms in the streets of the city of Rājagaha a wanderer (paribbājaka) by the name of Upatissa happened to see him. This wanderer Upatissa had a friend called Kolita who was also a wanderer. Kolita and Upatissa were good friends. Upatissa had been born in a village called Nālaka and Kolita in the village of Kolita in the kingdom of Magadha. They had mastered the three canons of the sacred mantras (Vedas) and were leading a happy life with fame and eminence. They regularly attended a festival called 'Giraggasamajja,' which was held for a continuous period of seven days every year. On one day of the festival, instead of any amusement or gratification, they began to consider thus: will not

these skilful performers, who are now singing and dancing, the hundreds of thousands of viewers, who are enjoying themselves, and the both of us, be dead just as the clouds in the sky would scatter and disappear within the next hundred years? During these hundred years just like the sun and moon set aren't all of us by the year, month, week, day, half-day, hour, minute and second being dragged towards old age and death? Shouldn't we search for liberation from aging and death without delay? These two friends with their minds occupied with this thought, along with their five hundred friends, who were thinking along the same lines, became wanderers (paribbājakas) under the famous teacher Sanjaya. Within a few days they realized that the teachings of Sanjaya would not lead them to liberation. Thereafter the friends wandered all over India looking for the path to liberation. Although they met several who claimed to be Buddhas and arahants none of them had realized the path to nibbana, and so they returned back to the ascetic Sanjaya and rested for a few days. They then decided to go separate ways searching for liberation. On the new moon day of the month of January (Phussa-māsa), eight months after the enlighten-ment of Siddhattha Gotama, the two friends Upatissa and Kolita left the ashram (assama) having made an agreement together: Let whoever first attains the deathless announce it to the other, and went their separate ways in the early morning.

Upatissa, who was blessed with deep wisdom, was extremely delighted at the sight of the Ven. Assaji, who was on alms-round (pindapāta-[cārika]) in the streets of Rājagaha. Upatissa thought to followed him with the idea: 'The way is discovered by those who seek' ('Atthikehi upannātan magganti), then later (after almsround) he prepared a seat at the foot of a tree and offered water so that Ven. Assaji could partake of his meal and afterwards; when Ven. Assaji had eaten, paid respects to him and inquired, Venerable Sir, your faculties are serene and actions are mindfully done and well restrained, who is your teacher? Ven. Assaji calmly replied, My teacher is the Mahāsamana, the Sakyaputta who has gone-forth from the Sakyan people (i.e. Siddhattha Gotama), and I am one of his new disciples. This conversation took place outside of Rājagaha under a tree, and a very important meeting it was. Upatissa then requested Ven. Assaji to tell him about the Buddha's teachings, but as the Ven. Assaji knew that

Upatissa belonged to another sect and may have conflicting ideas he was reluctant to speak and said that he was a new monk and unable to give a long discourse. Upatissa said, let that be friend, and the then spoke in verse, Speak a little or a lot, [but] tell me only the meaning, I only have need of the meaning, what is the use of many [meaningless] words? The verse which is the topic for this talk was the reply. Because Ven. Assaji was an arahant who had attained the four analytical knowledges (catu-patisambhidā-nānāni¹) he was able to give a good introduction to the Buddha and condense the meaning of the Dhamma, in its entirety, into this one brief stanza. Upatissa, having developed and fulfilled wisdom over a period of one incalculable and one hundred thousand great eons (mahā-kappas), on merely hearing the first two lines of the stanza realized the path & fruit of stream-entry (sotāpatti²). Having realized the path to nibbāna, which he had gone to much trouble searching for for so long, he paid his respects and circumambulated Ven. Assaji. He then asked where the Omniscient one (i.e. the Buddha) was staying and went looking for his friend Kolita. Kolita, too, on merely hearing all four lines of the above-mentioned verse from Upatissa, attained the state of streamentry.³

The meaning of the stanza is as follows: Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā - Whatever phenomena connected with oneself, internal, external, animate or inanimate, arising from causes there may be, tesam hetum - (lit. the cause of these) the cause of every result, Tathāgato āha - the Tathāgata has proclaimed, tesanca yo nirodho - and the cessation of the cause, [too,] evam-vādī Mahā-samano - the Great-ascetic speaks [or teaches] thus, i.e. the cause & effect, cause, cessation of

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¹ See p. XX for these four knowledges.

² The state of stream-entry is called *sotàpatti* (a noun from *sota* (= stream) + \dot{a} + \sqrt{pad} (= to enter, fall into or come to)) and the one who attains that state is called a *sotàpanna* (the past participle of the above). At S.55:5 `*sota*' is said to be the flow or stream of the noble eight-fold path (i.e. it flows to nibbàna).
³ This story is related at A.1:189Ý190 Comm.. At A.1:189 Ven. Sàriputta is declared by the Buddha as the one foremost amongst his disciples in regard to great wisdom (*mahà-pa*□aà) and Ven. Mahàmoggallàna (A.1:190) declared as the one foremost in psychic power (*iddhimanta*).

the cause and the way to the cessation of the cause. This stanza is pointing out the four noble truths, which is the most important part of the Dhamma, namely: the truth of dukkha, this is cause & effect, the truth of the origin of dukkha, this is the cause, the truth of the cessation of dukkha, this is cessation of the cause, which is also called nibbāna, and the truth of the path that leads to the cessation of dukkha, this the way to the cessation of the cause. In this four line stanza are included all mundane and supramandane dhammas. Dukkha and the origin of dukkha because they belong to the world they are mundane, and the cessation and path [to cessation] are supramundane.

The truth of dukkha is the five aggregates of attachment, i.e. the materiality ($r\bar{u}pa$), feeling ($vedan\bar{a}$), perception ($sann\bar{a}$), conceptions (sankhāras) and consciousness (vinnāna) that are bound and taken as objects by craving and [wrong] view. The aggregate of materiality is the four great elements of earth (pathavī), water ($\bar{a}po$), fire ($t\bar{e}jo$) & air $(v\bar{a}yo)$ and their derivatives, which number twenty-four, and so twentyeight kinds altogether.⁴ The aggregate of feeling is the agreeable. disagreeable and neutral feelings that arise through the impingement of sights, sounds, odours, tastes, bodily sensations and thoughts with their respective six sense dominions.⁵ The aggregate of perception is the perceiving/recognizing of the characteristics of the six sense dominions' objects. The aggregate of conceptions (sankhāras) is the [fifty] mental qualities (*cetasikas*), with intention (*cetanā*) as the most important one, arising together with consciousness at the time the objects are received through the six sense doors, and has power to bring about results in the future. The consciousness aggregate is the group of consciousnesses, which predominate over all the *cetasikas*, ⁷ that cognizes the objects of the six senses. Animate objects contain all five aggregates whilst inanimate objects contain only a part of the

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⁴ See AS.VI:3Ý5.

⁵ C.f. S.22:79.

⁶ The results may be experienced in the present life and/or future lives; it can also be cause for rebirth in whatever realm, according to the intention (wholesome or unwholesome, subtle or gross).

⁷ C.f. the verse on p. 1 above (chapt. 1).

aggregate of materiality. These five aggregates are subject to constant arising & passing away, again and again need setting right, cause trouble and cannot be kept unchanged however much we try; also as they are oppressing $(p\bar{\imath}lana)$, compounded (sankhata), distressing $(sant\bar{a}pa)$ and changeable $(viparin\bar{a}ma)$ they are dukkha, this is the truth of dukkha (dukkha-sacca).

Now the truth of the origin of dukkha. The longing for $(\bar{a}s\bar{a})$ the sense pleasures such as for seeing beautiful objects, listening to sweet sounds, smelling fragrant odours, tasting delicious flavours, feeling agreeable bodily sensations and the longing for pleasant (sensual) thoughts, as well as longing for one's own requisites, spouse & children, friends & relatives and anything else [fall into the category of] craving for sense pleasures ($k\bar{a}ma-tanh\bar{a}$). Craving for existence ($bhava-tanh\bar{a}$) and craving for non-existence ($vibhava-tanh\bar{a}$) are the truth of the origin of dukkha (samudaya-sacca). Further, all suffering is due to the inability to be satisfied with whatever one gains. Craving ($tanh\bar{a}$), which is described as that which helps accumulate [new aggregates of attachment] ($\bar{a}yathana$), the cause [of dukkha] ($nid\bar{a}na$), a bond (sanyoga) and an impedement (palibodha), is that which, without allowing release from, binds us to repeated existence and dukkha is the truth of the origin of dukkha.

Next we will talk about the truth of the cessation of dukkha. The truth of dukkha and the truth of the cause of dukkha are food, prey and objects of craving. Peace which is not food, prey, object or an abode for craving is the truth of the cessation of dukkha or otherwise called nibbāna. In that state there is no birth, ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair, involvement with the [five] aggregates, woeful states, human worlds, divine realms, brahma realms, other universes, danger from fire, water, wind, earthquakes, the ten unwholesome courses of action, the [five immediate next life result giving] heinous crimes, greed, hatred, delusion, ignorance, craving or attachment. Nibbàna is the escape (nissarana) from

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⁸ Inanimate objects, for example, do not contain mind-made-materiality (*citta-ja-råpa*).

⁹ The following description is found at Vism.XVI;15.

dukkha, the cause of dukkha and the world. It is peaceful because it is not involved with dukkha, the cause of suffering, mind & matter $(n\bar{a}ma-r\bar{u}pa)$ and everything else that is connected with the world. Nibbāna is uncompounded, there is no eating, drinking, medical treatment, modernizing, repairing and since it is free from aging, sickness, death, sorrow and disaster it is an ambrosia (figuratively).

Appamādo amata-padan, pamādo maccuno padan, appamattā na mīyanti, ye pamattā yathā matā. (Dh.21)

The meaning of which is: heedfulness is the path to the deathless (i.e. nibbāna), heedlessness is the path to [birth, aging and] death, the heedful [reach the state of] not dying, 10 those who are heedless are as though already dead.

The truth of the way leading to the cessation of dukkha is the correct discerning of all the mentality and materiality $(n\bar{a}ma-r\bar{u}pa)$ belonging to the above mentioned truth of dukkha as impermanent, dukkha, not self and repulsive, eliminating the craving that belongs to the truth of the origin of dukkha by way of substitution of the aspects perceived $(tadanga^{11})$, suppression $(vikkhambana^{12})$, and eradication $(samucch\bar{e}da^{13})$, and realizes the truth of cessation of dukkha, which is

 $^{^{10}}$ Dh.21 Comm. Ý i.e. because they are endowed with mindfulness (sati); that they don't age and pass away is not intended here, for the heedless the round ($va\tilde{n}\tilde{n}a$) [of births and deaths] has no limit, but for the heedful the $va\tilde{n}\tilde{n}a$ has been severed. Therefore, the heedless are not freed from life and death. The heedful, having developed the quality of heedfulness and quickly attained the paths and fruits, don't take a second and third rebirth, and so they, even though living and dying, are said not to die.

¹¹ At Sn.1 Comm. this is explained as mentioned above, i.e. contemplating the opposite, e.g. impermanence to overcome the perception of permanence, etc., so that the defilements are [temporarily] eradicated.

¹² At Sn.1 Comm. this is explained as [the temporary] eradication [of the hindrances] by suppression by [the power of] concentration.

¹³ At Sn.1 Comm. this is explained as the complete eradication by cutting off [the root of] the defilements by the attainments of the paths and fruits. These three terms are also briefly mentioned at Vism.XIII,12. C.f. also M.2.

the escape (nissarana), secluded (vivēka), not compounded (asankhata), deathless (amata), signless (animitta), desireless (apanihita) and empty (sunnata). This exists in the four supramundane paths, i.e. the wholesome supramundane conscious-nesses of stream-entry, oncereturning, non-returning and arahantship. The factors of the [mundane] eight-fold path, which are to be developed to achieve that, are:

- *Sammā-ditthi* right view
- Sammā-sankappa right thought
- Sammā-vācā right speech
- Sammā-kammanta right action
- Sammā-ājīva right livelihood
- Sammā-vāyāma right effort
- Sammā-sati right mindfulness
- Sammā-samādhi right concentration

(D.22, M.3)

Right view, the first of these, is right understanding. The wisdom applied in the doing of all wholesome actions, i.e. the wisdom involved, e.g. going for refuge to the triple-gem, undertaking the precepts, developing serenity & insight, the ten bases for meritorious actions, ten courses of wholesome actions, ten perfections, four divine abidings, four beneficences (cattāri sangaha-vatthāni), things that should be done (karanīya-dhammas¹4), great auspicious qualities (mahā-mangala-dhammas) and the dhammas that lead to enlightenment (bodhi-pākkhiya dhammas), which is for the purifying of the mind, is sammā-ditthi.

Right thought is the constant application of the mind in accumulating meritorious actions that lead to nibbāna (nekkhamma), developing loving-kindness ($mett\bar{a}^{15}$) and compassion ($karun\dot{a}^{16}$).

¹⁵ Though usually said to be non-anger (*avyàpàda*) in the texts the meaning is essentially the same.

¹⁴ For these and the *mahà-maïgala dhammas* see Appendix I.

¹⁶ Usually referred to, in this context, as non-harming (avihi sà) in the texts.

Right speech constitutes refraining from [deliberately] uttering falsehoods, tale bearing [to cause disharmony], harsh-speech and frivolous speech, and engaging in speech with a wholesome mind.

Refraining from [intentionally] killing living beings, stealing and sexual misconduct, and actively engaging in wholesome physical actions is right action.

Right livelihood¹⁷ constitutes refraining from breaking the five [Buddhist] precepts and ten unwholesome courses of action in regards to making a living, and undertaking a livelihood that is in line with Dhamma.

Right effort is making effort (*ussāha*) to avoid the performing of unwholesome actions not yet performed in this life, ensure that any unwholesome actions done are not repeated, arouse energy to perform wholesome actions not yet done and then repeatedly perform and develop wholesome actions already done.

Right mindfulness¹⁸ is being mindful in order to avoid unwholesome physical actions and promote wholesome actions; not allowing

¹⁷ Right livelihood in its simplest form is stated as simply the giving up of wrong livelihood making a living by right livelihood (D.22; M.141). A very detailed explanation of this for those who are living under the monastic discipline is given at D.1Ý2, especially highlighting the practices that should not be done, e.g. fortune-telling; at A.5:177 there are five means of livelihood mentioned that should not undertaken by lay-disciples: dealing in weapons, [human] beings, [animals for their] flesh, intoxicants and poisons, and, of course by extension, any other occupation that would involve breaking the five precepts of the Buddhist laity.

¹⁸ Apart from the usual definition of $samm\grave{a}$ -sati, in terms of the four presences of mindfulness, it is also described in terms of [the mindfulness involved in fulfilling] the moral training ($s\~ala$) aspect of the noble eight-fold path, e.g. at S.46:6 it says that restraint of the [sense] predominances (indriya- $sa\~uvara$) developed and made much of fulfils the ($t\~a\~oi$ $sucarit\`ani = samm\`a$ - $sa\~ivappa$, $samm\`a$ - $v\`ac\'a$ and $samm\`a$ -kammanta), which in turn fulfils the four presences of mindfulness \Box (satta $bojjha\~iga$) \Box ($vijj\`a$ -vimutti). See also A 10:61 and M 117

unwholesome mental qualities (*cetasikas*) to arise due to physical or mental feelings experienced and develop wholesome *cetasikas*; due to the mind not allowing unwholesome *cetasikas* to arise and develop wholesome *cetasikas*; and concerning the wholesome and unwholesome dhammas in the mind, being mindful to accumulate only the wholesome, not the unwholesome.

Right concentration¹⁹ is the one-pointedness of mind ($ekaggat\bar{a}$), in each wholesome consciousness, that is mindfully caused to arise with each external object taken through the six sense doors, such as the eye, ear, etc.

Mindfully training in order to establish wholesome consciousnesses when performing all activities during the entire day develops separate factors of the noble eight-fold path, such as right view, etc. this is the mundane noble eight-fold path. This practice over a long period of time will gradually develop serenity (samatha) and insight (vipassanā), the dhammas that lead to enlightenment become strong and eventually the four path wholesome consciousnesses, i.e. the supramundane noble eight-fold paths, are attained.

The verse spoken by the Arahant Ven. Assaji to the wanderer Upatissa summarizes all the facts we need to know regarding Sakyamuninda Siddhattha Gotama and [his Teachings, i.e.] kamma, kamma result, cause & effect, dependant origination and the four noble truths. Upatissa attained the state of stream-entry on hearing this verse because he had practiced the mundane noble eight-fold path for a very long period of time (many lifetimes) and had developed his mind. All of us, lay or monastic, if we develop the mind according to the [mundane] noble eight-fold path during this life, one day we can expel the darkness of ignorance and craving and reach the supra-

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¹⁹ Here referring to the preliminary practices (*parikamma*) of meditation up to access concentration (*upacàra-samàdhi*), which belong to the sense sphere wholesome conscious states, stages of progress that, when developed, lead to the attaining of the four jhànas, which formally define *sammà-samàdhi* (when developed in conjunction with *sammà-diññhi* and the other path factors).

mundane paths & fruits and Nibbàna, as would the sunrise eliminate the darkness of night. Until then it is possible to continuously enjoy physical and mental happiness and realize all our wholesome aspirations. This is definitely true.

Attā hi attano nātho, ko hi nātho paro siyā,ā Attanā'va sudantena, nāthan labhati dullabhan. (Dh. 160)

One truly is the protector of oneself, for who else could the protector be? By oneself only, who is well tamed, [one] obtains the protector hard to gain.

One's protector is oneself, not anyone else; when one's own mind is tamed according to the mundane and supramundane noble eight-fold path one obtains a very rare protection, happiness, good fortune and peace.

