

# *The Dhamma Wheel Shakes Up the World*

*December 12, 2014*

There's a steady, gentle rain outside. It's a good night to be inside, not only inside a warm building, but also inside your body. You don't have to pay attention to anything outside. You can let the Dhamma talk just be in the background. You want to focus in on your breath. Work on your Dhamma wheel inside. It's December 12<sup>th</sup>, the twelfth day of the twelfth month, a good day to chant the Dhammacakka because the Dhamma wheel has twelve spokes.

You may have noticed that passage where the Buddha talks about the four noble truths and the three levels of knowledge with regard to each truth: He goes down the list, listing each truth and the three levels of knowledge as they apply to each.

First there's the truth of suffering—which is not that life is suffering. I've said it many times in the past, but I keep hearing people say that life is suffering, so I have to keep repeating the fact that the Buddha never said that life is suffering. He said that there is suffering and he identifies it as the five clinging-aggregates, so that you know what suffering is.

The next thing to know is what to do with it. It's supposed to be comprehended. You want to comprehend what the clinging is. You want to get to the point where you finally have comprehended it to the point of total dispassion for the things you used to cling to. That's the third level of knowledge, when you realize you've completed the task. It's not that you've just comprehended it once. You've comprehended it all the way through. You've done the work.

Then there's the second noble truth, the origination of suffering. What causes suffering? Craving—craving based on ignorance. Once you know what it is, the next question is: What do you do with it? You try to abandon it. Once you see the craving in action, you just drop it. You'll be dropping it many times, but picking it up again, many times until finally you've thoroughly comprehended suffering and stress. That's when you can totally abandon the craving, and you've completed the task.

The third noble truth is the cessation of suffering and stress. And it's the same thing as the completion of the duty for the second noble truth: the abandoning of the craving. That's something you want to realize. There are two things happening here. You're abandoning the craving and you're realizing what you're doing. You're realizing the results that come. And you want to get to the point where

you totally abandon everything, so you can completely realize the cessation of suffering and stress.

Finally, there's the fourth truth, the path of practice to the end of suffering, the noble eightfold path. The duty there is to develop it. That's the second level of knowledge, just knowing the fact that that's the duty. Then the third level of knowledge is knowing that you've totally developed all the factors, and you've completed that your duty with regard to the path..

Those are the twelve spokes of the Dhamma wheel. It's called a wheel because in the Buddha's time, when you had a number of variables and listed all their permutations, they called it a wheel. So this wheel has four truths and three knowledges. Three times four is twelve, so there are twelve spokes. And they all converge on the hub, knowledge of things as they've come to be, which is the knowledge of awakening that comes when all the duties are completed together. In other words, you see things as they've come to be—and then you see what's beyond whatever's come into be.

So that's the wheel. As the title of the talk tells you—and as the devas said when it was done—this talk set the wheel in motion. We've got the Dhamma wheel on the wall up there. If we really wanted to depict the Dhamma wheel properly, we'd have to attach a little motor to it to keep it in motion, because the Dhamma wheel keeps spinning. As the devas said, nobody can stop it. It just keeps spinning and spinning. That's why the Dhamma wheels on King Asoka's columns have so many spokes: The sculptors tried to depict the twelve spokes in motion.

The image of the wheel is also an image of power. The Buddha's teaching totally overcomes all other teachings, because it deals with the most important problem of all, and it deals effectively with it: the problem of suffering and how to put an end to it. And you notice that there are shoulds all the way through. There's a duty to be done with each of the truths. That's a should right there. And then with the path, there are right factors and their opposite is wrong factors. The right factors should be done; the wrong factors should be abandoned.

Sometimes you hear the word, *samma*, right, translated in ways that try to avoid the fact that it actually means “right,” saying, for instance, that a *samma* view is a “harmonious” view or a “highest” view. But the opposite of *samma* in Pali is *miccha*, which very clearly means wrong.

The Buddha's saying there's right view and there's wrong view. There's right resolve and there's wrong resolve. And even before he gets to the topic of what should be done with these things and what's right and what's wrong about them, he starts his talk out by saying that there are wrong ways of doing things that should be avoided altogether. He says you should avoid the two extremes of

sensual indulgence and self-torture. Again, there's a very clear sense of what should and shouldn't be done.

This is a common pattern throughout the Buddha's teachings. Before he tells you the right way of doing things, he makes sure you realize that certain ways of doing things are wrong. His very first sentence in his teaching career was talking about two wrong ways of practicing and what's wrong about them. In later talks, he described this as explaining non-Dhamma as non-Dhamma—in other words, things that are opposed to the Dhamma as clearly being opposed to the Dhamma. That's a very meritorious act because it helps clear the air. Otherwise, people take their old presuppositions and then meld them together with what they hear being taught, and it gets confusing.

Years back, after I'd been giving retreats in Laguna for a few years, one person came up and said, "You know, I think I'm finally hearing what you're saying." And she repeated basically what I'd been saying all day, and had been saying in many previous retreats all along. I mentioned that to her, and she said, "It's only today that I've heard it." She had started in another school of Buddhism and had been melding together what I was saying together with what she'd heard before. Wherever the things I was saying didn't fit in with her assumptions, she just assumed that maybe I wasn't articulate or whatever. So the messages went right past her.

So it's very important: To know the Dhamma, you also have to know what's not Dhamma.

The Buddha wasn't the sort of person who said everything's non-dual or that there's no right or wrong. There are very definitely wrong ways to practice, wrong ways to see things, because they get in the way of putting an end to suffering. Only certain things work. His own analogy is of trying to get milk from a cow. If you twist the horn, you don't get any milk. It's the wrong way to do it. You have to pull at the udder. That's the right way. Now, some people have been twisting the horn and twisting the horn, and finally they just give up. Then they say, "Ah, it feels so much better not to be twisting the horn anymore. Maybe I shouldn't exert any effort at all"—which is better than twisting the horn, but you still don't get the milk.

There are very definite shoulds and should nots here. The shoulds, of course, are conditional on your wanting to put an end to suffering. That's what keeps the Dhamma wheel moving: the desire to put an end to suffering in the hopes that maybe this'll do it. As the devas said, no Mara or Brahma or deva or anybody in the world can put an end to the rolling of the Dhamma wheel. But there are a lot of people who try. They want to convince us that we don't really have good

records of what the Buddha said. Or maybe the Buddha didn't even teach the four noble truths. Or maybe he taught something else and he was misrepresented. People with graduate degrees are telling us this. They're trying their hardest to put logs in the spokes to make the wheel stop turning. What keeps the wheel turning is the fact that there are people who want to put an end to suffering and they want to give this a chance.

So is the Dhamma wheel rolling in your own heart? Look inside. Do you have all the spokes yet? Do you have any of the spokes? As long as you understand what the truths are and what the duties with regard to them are, you've got eight spokes right there. What remains is getting those last four: completing the work in each case. Because it's in completing each of the tasks that all of the tasks get done. They come together and they converge right there at the hub.

Ajaan Chah talks about how when Ajaan Mun and Ajaan Sao were first getting known in the northeast, they stirred up a lot of controversy, because they were saying very clearly definitely that the way people had been things doing for a long, long time was not in line with what the Buddha taught. Families would get divided over who they should support and who they should believe. And you might say, "Well, it would be nice to let everybody be peaceful and say that everybody's right," but that doesn't solve the problem of suffering. You can say, "Okay, anybody that wants to twist the horn can go ahead and twist the horn. Anybody that wants to pull the udder can pull the udder. And anybody that who wants to just sit back and not do anything can just sit back and that's perfectly fine. That way we can live in peace." But it's not a question of allowing people to do what they want. It's a question of making sure that twisting the horn and doing nothing don't get presented as the Dhamma, because otherwise people will get confused—and will feel cheated if they spend their lives twisting the horn because they thought that that was what the Buddha taught.

We get different results from different actions, which is why some actions are right in terms of putting an end to suffering and stress, and some actions are wrong. When you look at the Buddha's teaching career, very often he would start out and say, "This is wrong," and then he'd tell you what's right. You'd have to decide: Are you going to go with him? You have to make a choice. It is either/or.

And as he said, any harmony that's not based on the Dhamma is not true harmony. Or if there's any controversy among members of the sangha of monks as to what's the right way to interpret a certain passage or what exactly the passage was, or what the Buddha taught on a particular topic, he said you get everybody to vote. But if they voted to change things, it still wouldn't be right. It would be invalidated by the fact that it was opposed to the Dhamma.

So the Dhamma's not something to be changed. It's something to be tested. If you change it, then you deny other people the opportunity to test it. And you deny yourself the opportunity to test it, too.

So this is the Dhamma wheel that shook the world when the Buddha first taught it. And it does shake things up. It asks people to ask new questions. What are they doing that's causing suffering? All too often, suffering is something we blame on somebody else: We're not being treated with proper respect; we're not being whatever. But the Buddha said, "Look inside." Their problem's coming from within. And it can be solved from within.

So he's asking you to make choices. There are people who would rather not have any shoulds placed on them. But again, the Buddha's not placing them on you. He's saying that if you really want to put an end to suffering, *that's* what's pushing you: the fact that you've got suffering and you want to end it. And he's giving you the choice: Do you want to end it this way? Or do you not want to end it at all? Because this way is the way to do it.

So there's an either/or. There's a right and there's a wrong. There's a should and a should not. That's why, when this wheel was set into motion, the world quaked. Not only the world, but everything in the universe quaked, they say, all the way up through the Brahma worlds, because it opened a real possibility to get out of this continued wandering around through suffering that shapes the very basis of all levels of becoming.

So it's up to each of us to see if we want to keep that Dhamma wheel rolling in our hearts and to see what gets shaken up in the process.