

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

(The Wheel of Law)

With the Pali Text
Translation and Introduction by

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Introduction

On the Fullmoon of Esala (July) every year, the Buddhist world celebrates the Festival of Isipatana, which marks the anniversary of the proclamation of the Noble Eightfold Path to the world by the Perfect One. For the Buddhist who appreciates the path of the Blessed One, and for all who have learned to think clearly on matters concerned with inner development and the enrichment of the mental life of mankind, the discovery of the Path and its promulgation constitute landmarks in the history of spirituality.

For seven weeks after the enlightenment, the Buddha, staying near the Bodhi Tree, thought over the implications of the discovery he had made, and its bearing upon the destiny of beings. He had seen life truly as it is; that is, as an arising and a passing away; he knew that when there is an arising, there is only the arising of ill, and when there is a ceasing, only a ceasing of ill. His compassion urged him to pass this knowledge on to the world for the benefit of living beings.

So, after much thought upon the way of presenting the doctrine to the world, he decided to seek out his old companions in struggle, the group of five ascetics, Koṇḍañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji, who, next to two great teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, now dead, had been of greatest assistance to him in his quest. These five were then staying at Isipatana, the Sages' Resort, in the deer sanctuary near Benares, where, according to an ancient tradition, Enlightened Ones first make known their discovery of the freeing truth to mankind. And thither the Buddha went.

Earlier, at the end of the seventh week after enlightenment, while staying under the Goatherd's Banyan in the vicinity of the Tree, the Master had also thought thus, "The truth I have come at is deep, hard to meet with, hard to be awakened to, peaceful, sublime, outside the scope of speculation, subtle, and to be known by the wise. This generation, however, likes attachment, is gladdened by attachment, and delights in attachment. For this generation liking attachment, gladdened by attachment, delighting in attachment, it is hard to meet with this fact, namely, definite conditionality, dependent origination; this too, is a fact hard to meet with, namely the quiescence of all formations, the relinquishing of all essential support, the exhaustion of craving, unstaining, ceasing, extinction. Were I to teach the truth, and were others not to understand me, the fatigue would be to me: the weariness would be to me." But, after seeing that there were at least a few who were capable of developing insight, and after understanding the sufferings of beings, and wishing to relieve them of their burden, he, out of compassion for the many, wished to devote himself to the dissemination of the truth he had found.

Poets have movingly written of the journey of the Blessed One to give the gift of the teaching to his old friends. In the poetic accounts, it is said that trees were full of their flowery dower, cool winds were laden with blossom-scents, and in the fragrant air, birds' music floated throughout the fine pleasant days around the time of the full moon of Āsālha: it was as if nature in the country from Buddhagaya to Benares had got into a festive mood to observe the great occasion of the Setting in Motion of the Wheel by the World-honoured One.

The Buddha did not go far along the main road from the Bodhi Tree before he met a stranger, the ājīvaka (naked ascetic) Upaka, who was struck by the serene personality of the Buddha. Upaka addressing the Buddha said: "Pleasant and fully clear, friend, are your faculties of sense; your complexion is completely pure and bright. With whom have you

gone forth? Or who is your teacher? Of whose teaching do you admit? On that, the Blessed One spoke to Upaka the ājīvaka in verse,

I am one who has overcome all, who cognises all, in all states uncleaving,
Who has abandoned all, and who has been released, having by my self understood,
Whom should I acknowledge? I have no teacher; one like me is not.
In the world with its deities there is not my counterpart:
I indeed am the arahat in the world ; I, the teacher with no peer,
I am the rightly all-enlightened one ; I am one become cooled, extinct.
To set in motion the wheel of truth I go to the Kasi's town ;
In the world of blind beings I shall beat the drum of the deathless.

Upaka : By the manner in which you declare yourself, you are an infinite conqueror.

Buddha: Like me are conquerors whose cankers have been exhausted. Conquered by me are evil states, so Upaka, I am a conqueror.

When these words had been spoken, Upaka the ājīvaka, said, "May it be so", moved his head back and forth, and, taking another road, went away.

After meeting with Upaka, the Master, according to one tradition, by easy stages came to the hilly country of Gaya, Rohithavastu, Uruvilvakala and Anala ; from there he went to Sarathipura and finally to the shores of Ganges. At the last place the ferryman asked money of him to row him across. The Buddha said that he had no money ; then by supernatural power he is said to have passed to the other side of the river. It appears that when Seniya Bimbisara heard about this, he ordered that bhikkhus should be ferried free, henceforth, in his kingdom.

When the Buddha reached Benares he went begging for food; and after his meal went to the Sages' Resort in the sanctuary of the deer. The five when they saw him at a distance were not keen in welcoming him, thinking that he was a slacker because he had given up self-torture. But when he came to their dwelling-place they rose from their seats and paid their respects to him.

Of Koṇḍañña it is said that he was not in mind averse to welcoming the Buddha from the start. The five knew not that the Buddha had attained enlightenment and would not believe at first that the Master had reached the goal. Later, the Buddha was able to convince them that he had. Then he taught them the middle path, and set in motion the Wheel of the Law (Dhammacakka).

That Wheel which was set in motion twenty-five centuries ago is in movement still in the universe of men's minds. It is a movement that increases with the growth of knowledge, of understanding, of wisdom, and the more the peoples of the world rise in culture, the greater are the chances for the continuance and prosperity of the Buddhadhamma. The Dhamma will disappear from the world only when humanity reverts again to barbarism, savagery, and mutual destruction, through irrationalism, debased conduct, or stupid fanaticism. Then alone will it be time for a fresh setting in motion of the wheel by a new Buddha; but there is no need to pass through that dark night of the law, if we are tolerant and patient of each other, and wise to live without hurting and harming one another. Let it be the thought of every Buddhist by day, and his dream by night, to extend the frontiers of the Kingdom of Righteousness founded by the Buddha. We can extend the influence of that kingdom and preserve its power in the world for a long time only by following the principles that govern that kingdom ; these principles are easy to practise if one straightens one's views and obeys the dictates of the good, the true, and the pure, the perfectly selfless, ones, the arahats, of whom the Blessed One is the chief.

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

Thus have I heard,

Once when the Blessed One was staying in the pleasure of Isipatana, the deer sanctuary near Benares, he spoke to the group of five bhikkhus:

“These two extremes, bhikkhus, should not be followed by one who has gone forth from worldly life: sensual indulgence, low, coarse, vulgar, ignoble, unprofitable, and self-torture, painful, ignoble, unprofitable.

Bhikkhus, the middle way, understood by the Tathāgata, after he had avoided the extremes, produces vision, produces knowledge, and leads to calm, penetration, enlightenment, nibbāna.

What middle way, bhikkhus, understood by the Tathāgata, produces vision, produces knowledge and leads to calm, penetration, enlightenment, nibbāna ?

Only this noble eightfold path, namely,

right understanding—*Sammā Diṭṭhi*

right thought—*Sammā Saṅkappa*

right speech—*Samma Vācā*

right action—*Sammā Kammanta*

right livelihood—*Sammā Ājīva*

right effort—*Samma Vāyāma*

right mindfulness—*Samma Sati*

right concentration—*Samma Samādhi*

Truly bhikkhus, this middle way understood by the Tathāgata produces vision, produces knowledge, and leads to calm, penetration, enlightenment, nibbāna.

This, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of ill: birth is ill, decay is ill, disease is ill, death is ill, association with the unloved is ill, separation from the loved is ill, not to get what one wants is ill, in short the five aggregates of grasping are ill.

This, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the source of ill: the craving which causes rebirth is

accompanied by passionate pleasure, and takes delight in this and that object, namely sensuous craving, craving for existence and craving for annihilation.

This, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of ill: the complete cessation, giving up, abandonment of that craving, complete release from that craving and complete detachment from it.

This, bhikkhus is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of ill; only this noble eightfold path namely, right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

With the thought: “This is the noble truth of ill”, there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of ill, and this ill has been understood,” there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of ill, and this ill has been understood”, there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of the source of ill”, there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of the source of ill, and this source of ill has to be abandoned”, there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of the source of ill, and this source of ill has been abandoned”, there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of the cessation of ill”, there arose in me bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of the cessation of ill, and this cessation of ill has to be realised”, there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of ill, and this cessation of ill has been realised”, there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of ill”, there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, “This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of ill, and this way has to be developed”, there arose in me, bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom light, concerning things unknown before.

With the thought, This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of ill, and this way has been developed”, there arose in me bhikkhus, vision, knowledge, insight, wisdom, light, concerning things unknown before.

So long, bhikkhus, as my knowledge, and vision of reality regarding these four noble truths, in three phases and twelve ways, was not fully clear to me, I did not declare to the world with its devas and māras, to the mass of beings with its devas and humans, that I understood incomparable, perfect enlightenment.

But when, bhikkhus, as my knowledge, and vision of reality regarding these four noble truths, in three phases and twelve ways, was fully clear to me, I declared to the world with its devas and māras, to the mass of beings with its devas and humans that I understood incomparable, perfect enlightenment.

Knowledge and vision arose in me. Unshakable is the deliverance of my mind; this is the last birth, now there will be no birth.

Thus spoke the Blessed One and the group of five bhikkhus glad at heart approved of the words of the Blessed One.

As this exposition was proceeding the passionfree stainless view of truth appeared to the Venerable Koṇḍañña, and he knew “Everything that has the nature of arising, has the nature of ceasing”.

When the Blessed One set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma, the Bhummatta devas proclaimed with one voice “The incomparable Wheel of Dhamma is turned by the Blessed One at Isipatana, the deer sanctuary near Benares, and no recluse, brahmin, deva, mara, brahma, or other being in the world can stop it”.

The Cātummahārājika devas having heard what the Bhummatta devas said, proclaimed with one voice, “The incomparable Wheel of Dhamma is turned by the Blessed One at Isipatana, the deer sanctuary near Benares, and no recluse, brahmin, deva, mara, brahma, or other being in the world can stop it”.

This utterance was echoed and re-echoed in the upper realms and from Cātummahārājika, it was proclaimed in Tāvatiṃsa, Yāma, thence to Tusita, Nimmānaratī and to Paranimmitavasavattī. The Brahmakāyika devas, having heard what the Paranimmitavasavattī devas said, proclaimed in one voice, “The incomparable Wheel of Dhamma is turned by the Blessed One at Isipatana, the deer sanctuary near Benares, and no recluse, brahmin, deva, māra, brahmā, or other being in the world can stop it.”

Thus in a moment, an instant, a flash, word of the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma went forth up to the World of Brahmā and the system of ten thousand worlds trembled and quaked and shook.

A boundless, sublime radiance, surpassing the power of devas, appeared on earth.

Then the Blessed One made the utterance, “Truly Koṇḍañña has understood, Koṇḍañña has understood.”

Thus it was that the Venerable Koṇḍañña got the name Koṇḍañña the wise.

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

Evam me sutam:

Ekam samayaṃ Bhagavā Bārāṇasīyaṃ viharati Isipatane Migadāye. Tatra kho Bhagavā pañcavaggiye bhikkhū āmantesi—

Dve' me, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitabbā:

i. Yo cāyaṃ kāmesu kāmasukhallikānuyogo—hīno, gammo, pothujjaniko, anariyo. anattasamhito ;

ii. Yo cāyaṃ attakilamathānuyogo—dukkho, anariyo anattasamhito,

ete te, bhikkhave, ubho ante anupagamma majjhimā paṭipadā Tathāgatena abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṇī, nāṇakaraṇī, upasamāya, abhiññāya, sambodhāya, nibbānāya saṃvaṭṭati.

Katamā ca sā, bhikkhave, majjhimāpaṭipadā Tathāgatena abhisambuddhā—cakkhukaraṇī nāṇakaraṇī, upasamāya, abhiññāya, sambodhāya, nibbānāya saṃvaṭṭati?

Ayam'eva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo—seyyathidaṃ:—

Sammā diṭṭhi, sammā saṅkappo, sammā vācā, sammā kammanto, sammā ājīvo, sammā vāyāmo, sammā sati, sammā samādhi.

Ayaṃ kho sā, bhikkhave, majjhimā paṭipadā Tathāgatena abhisambuddhā—cakkhukaraṇī, nāṇakaraṇī, upasamāya, abhiññāya, sambodhāya, nibbānāya saṃvaṭṭati.

Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ:—

Jāti'pi dukkhā, jarā'pi dukkhā, vyādhī'pi dukkhā, maraṇam'pi dukkham, appiyehi sampayogo dukkho, piyehi vippayogo dukkho, yamp'icchaṃ na labhati tam'pi dukkhaṃ, saṅkhittena pañcupadānakkhandhā dukkhā.

Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkha-samudayaṃ ariya saccaṃ:-

Yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatrataṭṭhābhinandinī—seyyathidaṃ:—kāmatanḥā, bhavatanḥā, vibhavanḥā.

Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ:

Yo tassā yeva taṇhāya asesā-virāga-nirodho, cāgo, paṭinissaggo, mutti, anālayo.

Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ:—

Ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo—seyyathidaṃ:—sammā diṭṭhi, sammā saṅkappo, sammā vācā, sammā kammanto, sammā ājīvo, sammā vāyāmo, sammā sati, sammā samādhi.

1 (i) Idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, nāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.

(ii) Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññeyyan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, nāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā, udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.

(iii) Taṃ kho pan'idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññātan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, nāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.

2 (i) Idaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ. ariyasaccan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, nāṇaṃ udapādi paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.

(ii) *Taṃ kho paṇ'idaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariya saccaṃ pahātabban'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi paññā udapādi. vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*

(iii) *Taṃ kho paṇ'idaṃ dukkhasamudayo ariyasaccaṃ pahīnan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*

3 (i) *Idaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi,*

(ii) *Taṃ kho paṇ'idaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikātabban'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*

(iii) *Taṃ kho paṇ'idaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikatan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi,*

4 (i) *Idaṃ dukkhanirodhagāmini paṭipadā ariyasaccan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*

(ii) *Taṃ kho paṇ'idaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvetabban'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*

(iii) *Taṃ kho paṇ'idaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvitan'ti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi,*

Yāvakiṃvañ-ca me, bhikkhave, imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhutaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ. na suvisuddhaṃ ahosi, n'eva tāv'āhaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyyā pajāya sadevamanussāya anuttaraṃ sammā sambodhiṃ abhisambuddho paccaññāsiṃ.

Yato ca kho me, bhikkhave, imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ suvisuddhaṃ ahosi, ath'āhaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevake loke samārake sabrahmaniyyā pajāya sadevamanussāya anuttaraṃ sammā sambodhiṃ abhisambuddho paccaññāsiṃ.

Nāṇaṃ ca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi, akuppā me cetovimutti ayaṃ antimā jāti, natthi' dāni punabbhavo'ti.

Idaṃ avoca Bhagavā. Attamanā pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū Bhagavato bhāsitaṃ abhinandun'ti. .

Imasmiñ-ca pana veyyākaraṇasmiṃ bhaññamāne āyasmato Koṇḍañña virajaṃ vītamaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi—yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhamman'ti,

Pavattite ca pana Bhagavatā dhammacakke bhumā devā saddam-anussāvesuṃ: Etaṃ Bhagavatā Bārāṇasiyaṃ Isipatane Migadāye anuttaraṃ dhammacakkaṃ pavattitaṃ appativattiyaṃ samaṇena vā brāhmaṇena vā devena vā mārena vā brahmunā vā kenaci vā lokasmin'ti.

Bhumānaṃ devānaṃ saddaṃ sutvā Cātummahārājikā devā saddam-anussāvesuṃ

Cātummahārājikānaṃ devānaṃ saddaṃ sutvā Tāvātimsā devā—Yāmā devā—Tusitā devā.—Nimmānaratī devā—Paranimitavasavattī devā —Brahmakāyikā devā saddam-

anussāvesum:—Etaṃ Bhagavatā Bārāṇasīyaṃ Isipatane Migadāye anuttaraṃ dhammacakkaṃ pavattitaṃ appativattiyaṃ samaṇena vā brāhmaṇena vā devena vā mārena vā brahmunā vā kenaci vā lokasmin'ti.

Itiha tena khaṇena tena muhuttena yāva brahmalokā saddo abbhūggañchi. Ayañca dasa-sahassī lokadhātu saṅkampi sampakampi sampavedhi. Appamāṇo vā uḷāro obhāso loke pāturahosi atikkamma devānaṃ devānubhāvaṃ

Atha kho Bhagavā udānaṃ udānesi:—

Aññāsi vata bho Kondañño, aññāsi vata bho Koṇḍañño'ti.

Iti h'idaṃ āyasmato Koṇḍaññassa Aññā Kondañño t'v'eva nāmaṃ ahosi'ti.