

Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma”

Samyutta Nikāya 56.11, translated from Pāli by Bhikkhu Bodhi. (Bodhi, *In the Buddha’s Words*, pp. 75-78)

THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Bārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus of the group of five thus:

“Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathāgata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

“And what, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata, which gives rise to vision ... to Nibbāna? It is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathāgata...

[1] “Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

[2] “Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to re-becoming, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.

[3] “Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, nonattachment.

[4] “Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view ... right concentration.

“‘This is the noble truth of suffering’: thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light. ‘This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood’: thus... ‘This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood’: thus...

“‘This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering’: thus... ‘This noble truth of the origin of suffering is to be abandoned’: thus... ‘This noble truth of the origin of suffering has been abandoned’: thus...

“‘This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering’: thus... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of suffering is to be realized’: thus... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of suffering has been realized’: thus...

“‘This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering’: thus... ‘This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed’: thus... ‘This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering has been developed’: thus...

“So long, bhikkhus, as my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was not thoroughly purified in this way, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans. But when my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was thoroughly purified in this way, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahmā, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans. The knowledge and the vision arose in me: ‘Unshakeable is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more renewed existence.’”

This is what the Blessed One said. Elated, the bhikkhus of the group of five delighted in the Blessed One’s statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in the Venerable Koṇḍañña the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma: “Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”

And when the Wheel of the Dhamma had been set in motion by the Blessed One, the earth devas raised a cry: “At Bārāṇasī, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any ascetic or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.” Having heard the cry of the earth devas, the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings raised a cry: “At Bārāṇasī ... by anyone in the world.” Having heard the cry of the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings, the Tāvatiṃsa devas ... the Yāma devas ... the Tusita devas ... the devas who delight in creating ... the devas who wield power over others’ creations ... the devas of Brahmā’s company raised a cry: “At Bārāṇasī, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any ascetic or brahmin or deva or Māra or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

Thus at that moment, at that instant, at that second, the cry spread as far as the Brahma-world, and this ten thousandfold world-system shook, quaked, and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world surpassing the divine majesty of the devas.

Then the Blessed One uttered this inspired utterance: “Koṇḍañña has indeed understood! Koṇḍañña has indeed understood!” In this way the Venerable Koṇḍañña acquired the name “Aññā Koṇḍañña — Koṇḍañña Who Has Understood.”



“Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma” [SN 56.11 (Bodhi 75)], study notes

The Middle Way

...between the extremes of sensual indulgence & self-mortification.

The Four Noble Truths

1. suffering/stress (Pāli: *dukkha*)

birth... aging... illness... death...

union with the displeasing... separation from the pleasing... not to get what one wants...

5 Aggregates subject to clinging...

task: to be understood

2. craving, the origin of suffering (Pāli/Sanskrit: *taṇhā/trṣṇa*)

...for sensual pleasures ...for existence ...for extermination

task: to be abandoned

3. the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*)

fading away & cessation of craving... giving up & relinquishing of it... freedom... nonattachment

task: to be realized

4. the way/path leading to the cessation of suffering (*magga/marga*)

the Noble Eightfold Path:

wisdom (*pañña*): view, intention

action (*sīla*): speech, action, livelihood

integration (*samādhi*): effort, mindfulness, concentration

task: to be developed

The 4 Noble Truths are to be known in 3 phases (*tiparivā*):

1. knowledge of each truth (*sacca-ñāna*)

2. ...of the task to be accomplished regarding each truth (*kicca-ñāna*)

3. ...of accomplishment regarding each truth (*kata-ñāna*)

The Five Aggregates subject to clinging

1. Form (*rūpa*): the objects of the 5 physical senses

2. Feeling (*vedanā*): pleasant, unpleasant, or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant

3. Perception (*sañña*): recognition, naming

4. Formations (*saṅkhāra*): volitional mental activity, thoughts & emotions

5. Consciousness (*viññāṇa*): the quality of being aware of a sense-contact

[sutta on the Aggregates: SN 22.56 (Bodhi 335)]

The Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya atthangika magga/arya-aṣṭāṅga-marga*)

1. Right (or Wise) View (*sammā-ditṭhi/dṛṣṭi*)

understanding wholesome/unwholesome actions & results (*kamma/karma*)
orienting one's perspective around the 4 Noble Truths

[sutta on Wise View: MN 9 (Bodhi 323)]

2. Right Intention/Thought (*sammā-sankappa/saṅkalpa*)

right: intention of renunciation ...good will ...harmlessness
wrong: intention governed by desire ...ill will ...harmfulness

[sutta on Wise Intention: MN 19]

3. Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*)

abstaining from false speech; speaks the truth
...slanderous speech; unites the divided, delights in concord
...harsh speech; speech is gentle ...soothing ...loving ...[goes] to the heart
...idle chatter; ...timely ...true ...useful ...of Dhamma ...[with] reason

[sutta on Wise Speech: MN 58]

4. Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*)

abstaining from taking life
...stealing
...sexual misconduct

[sutta on Wise Action: MN 41 (Bodhi 156)]

5. Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*)

acquire wealth ...legally ...peacefully ...honestly ...harmlessly
not dealing in weapons ...beings ...butchery ...poisons ...intoxicants
with no deceit ...treachery ...soothsaying ...trickery ...usury

[sutta on Wise Livelihood: AN 4:61-62 (Bodhi 126)]

6. Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*)

prevent the arising of unarisen unwholesome states,
abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen
understood to refer to the 5 Hindrances

1. sense desire. *antidote*: meditation on impermanence (*anicca*)
2. ill will. *antidote*: meditation on loving-kindness (*metta*)
3. sloth+torpor. *antidote*: walking meditation, visualization of light, recollection of death
4. restlessness+worry. *antidote*: one-pointed concentration (*ekaggatta*)
5. doubt. *antidote*: investigation, inquiry, study

[sutta on the 5 Hindrances: SN 46:55 (Bodhi 270)]

arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen,
maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen
understood to refer to the 7 Enlightenment Factors

1. mindfulness (*sati*)
2. investigation of phenomena (*dhamma-vicaya*)
3. energy (*viriya*)
4. rapture (*pīti*)
5. tranquillity (*passaddhi*)
6. concentration (*samādhi*)
7. equanimity (*upekkhā*)

[sutta on the 7 Enlightenment Factors: SN 46:51 & MN 10 (Bodhi 281)]

7. Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati/smṛti*)

4 Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*):

1. mindfulness of body (*rūpa*):
breathing, 4 postures, actions, body parts, 4 elements, corpse in decay
2. ...of feeling tone (*vedanā*):
pleasant, unpleasant & neither
3. ...of mind states (*citta*):
knowing the presence or absence of: desire, aversion, delusion
the mind in meditative states, including distracted/collected, concentrated, liberated
4. ...of mental phenomena (*dhamma*):
5 Hindrances: sense-desire, ill-will, sloth & torpor, restlessness & worry, doubt
5 Aggregates: form, feeling tone, perception, mental formations, consciousness
6 Sense-bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind
7 Factors: mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, tranquillity, concentration, equanimity
4 Noble Truths: Suffering, its Cause, its Cessation, and the Path to its cessation

[sutta on Wise Mindfulness: MN 10 (Bodhi 281)]

8. Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*)

“unification of mind”/absorption (*jhāna/dhyāna*):

1st jhana: rapture/pleasure (*pīti*) based in seclusion,
with aiming & sustaining of attention (*vitakka+vicāra*).

2nd jhana: rapture/pleasure (*pīti*) based in concentration,
without aiming & sustaining of attention (*vitakka+vicāra*).

3rd jhana: equanimity, mindfulness, & clear comprehension,
with happiness (*sukha*), but without rapture.

4th jhana: neither pleasure-nor-pain, without joy or grief,
one-pointed-ness (*ekaggatā*), & perfection of mindfulness through equanimity.

[sutta on Wise Concentration: MN 39 (Bodhi 250)]

[suttas on the Eightfold Path: SN 45.8 (Bodhi 239) & MN 27 (Bodhi 241)]

Koṇḍañña understands!

“Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”

insight into impermanence (*anicca*), the first of the 3 Marks (*tilakkhaṇa*):

Change/Impermanence (*anicca/anitya*)

Stress/Suffering/Unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*)

Not-self/Emptiness (*anatta/anatman*)

[more on the 3 Marks: SN 22:59 & 22:45 (Bodhi 341-42)]



Further reading: Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words* [all page numbers from this anthology]
Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path* [a beautiful traditional overview]
Kornfield, *A Path with Heart* [an accessible contemporary guide to practice]

Listening: online library of Pali Canon texts & commentary: accesstoinsight.org
online library of talks (audio) by contemporary teachers: dharmafeed.org