


## CHAPTER 5

# THE INVITATION TO EXPOUND THE DHAMMA

“He who imbibes the Dhamma abides in happiness  
with mind pacified.  
The wise man ever delights in the Dhamma  
revealed by the Ariyas.”

—Dhp v. 79

### *The Dhamma as the Teacher*

 In one occasion soon after the enlightenment, the Buddha was dwelling at the foot of the Ajapāla banyan tree by the bank of the Nerañjarā river. As he was engaged in solitary meditation the following thought arose in his mind:

Painful indeed is it to live without someone to pay reverence and show deference. How if I should live near an ascetic or brahmin respecting and reverencing him?”<sup>62</sup>

Then it occurred to him:

Should I live near another ascetic or brahmin, respecting and reverencing him, in order to bring morality (*sīlakkhandha*) to perfection? But I do not see in this world including gods, Māras, and Brahmās, and amongst beings including ascetics, brahmins, gods and men, another ascetic or brahmin who is superior to me in morality and with whom I could associate, respecting and reverencing him.

Should I live near another ascetic or brahmin, respecting and reverencing him, in order to bring concentration (*samādhikkhandha*) to perfection? But I do not see in this world any ascetic or brahmin who is superior to me in concentration and with whom I should associate, respecting and reverencing him.

Should I live near another ascetic or brahmin, respecting and reverencing him, in order to bring wisdom (*paññākkhandha*) to perfection? But I do not see in this world any ascetic or brahmin who is superior to me in wisdom and with whom I should associate, respecting and reverencing him.

Should I live near another ascetic or brahmin, respecting and reverencing him, in order to bring emancipation (*vimuttikkhandha*) to perfection? But I do not see in this world any ascetic or brahmin who is

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62. Aṅguttara Nikāya: part II, p. 20; *Gradual Sayings*, part II, p. 20.

superior to me in emancipation and with whom I should associate, respecting and reverencing him.

Then it occurred to him: "How if I should live respecting and reverencing this very Dhamma which I myself have realised?"

Thereupon Brahmā Sahampati, understanding with his own mind the Buddha's thought, just as a strong man would stretch his bent arm or bend his stretched arm even so did he vanish from the Brahmā realm and appeared before the Buddha. And, covering one shoulder with his upper robe and placing his right knee on the ground, he saluted the Buddha with clasped hands and said thus:

It is so, O Exalted One! It is so, O Accomplished One! O Lord, the worthy, supremely Enlightened Ones, who were in the past, did live respecting and reverencing this very Dhamma.

The worthy, supremely Enlightened Ones, who will be in the future, will also live respecting and reverencing this very Dhamma.

O Lord, may the Exalted One, the worthy, supremely Enlightened One of the present age also live respecting and reverencing this very Dhamma!"

This the Brahmā Sahampati said, and uttering which, furthermore he spoke as follows:

"Those Enlightened Ones of the past, those of the future, and those of the present age, who dispel the grief of many—all of them lived, will live, and are living respecting the noble Dhamma. This is the characteristic of the Buddhas.

"Therefore he who desires his welfare and expects his greatness should certainly respect the noble Dhamma, remembering the message of the Buddhas."

This the Brahmā Sahampati said, and after which he respectfully saluted the Buddha and passing round him to the right, disappeared immediately.

As the Sangha is also endowed with greatness there is also his reverence towards the Sangha.<sup>63</sup>

### ***The Invitation to Expound the Dhamma***

From the foot of the Rājāyatana tree the Buddha proceeded to the Ajapāla banyan tree and as he was absorbed in solitary meditation the following thought occurred to him.

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63. This discourse was delivered by the Buddha while residing at Jetavana, Sāvattihī, long after the establishment of the order of the Sangha. He showed his reverence towards the Sangha by requesting the Queen Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī to offer to the Sangha the robe specially prepared for him.

"This Dhamma which I have realised is indeed profound, difficult to perceive, difficult to comprehend, tranquil, exalted, not within the sphere of logic, subtle, and is to be understood by the wise. These beings are attached to material pleasures. This causally connected 'Dependent Arising' is a subject which is difficult to comprehend. And this Nibbāna—the cessation of the conditioned, the abandoning of all passions, the destruction of craving, the non-attachment, and the cessation—is also a matter not easily comprehensible. If I too were to teach this Dhamma, the others would not understand me. That will be wearisome to me; that will be tiresome to me."

Then these wonderful verses unheard of before occurred to the Buddha:

"With difficulty have I comprehended the Dhamma. There is no need to proclaim it now. This Dhamma is not easily understood by those who are dominated by lust and hatred. The lust-ridden, shrouded in darkness, do not see this Dhamma, which goes against the stream, which is abstruse, profound, difficult to perceive and subtle."

As the Buddha reflected thus, he was not disposed to expound the Dhamma.

Thereupon Brahmā Sahampati read the thoughts of the Buddha, and, fearing that the world might perish through not hearing the Dhamma, approached him and invited him to teach the Dhamma thus:

"O Lord, may the Exalted One expound the Dhamma! May the Accomplished One expound the Dhamma! There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who, not hearing the Dhamma, will fall away. There will be those who understand the Dhamma."

Furthermore he remarked:

"In ancient times there arose in Magadha a Dhamma, impure, thought out by the corrupted. Open this door to the Deathless State. May they hear the Dhamma understood by the stainless one! Just as one standing on the summit of a rocky mountain would behold the people around, even so may the All-Seeing, Wise One ascend this palace of Dhamma! May the Sorrowless One look upon the people who are plunged in grief and are overcome by birth and decay!

"Rise, O Hero, victor in battle, caravan leader, debt-free One, and wander in the World! May the Exalted One teach the Dhamma! There will be those who will understand the Dhamma."

When he said so the Exalted One spoke to him thus:

"The following thought, O Brahmā, occurred to me: 'This Dhamma which I have comprehended is not easily understood by those who are dominated by lust and hatred. The lust-ridden, shrouded in darkness, do

not see this Dhamma, which goes against the stream, which is abstruse, profound, difficult to perceive, and subtle.’ As I reflected thus, my mind turned into inaction and not to the teaching of the Dhamma.”

Brahmā Sahampati appealed to the Buddha for the second time and he made the same reply.

When he appealed to the Buddha for the third time, the Exalted One, out of pity for beings, surveyed the world with his Buddha-Vision.

As he surveyed thus he saw beings with little and much dust in their eyes, with keen and dull intellect, with good and bad characteristics, beings who are easy and beings who are difficult to be taught, and few others who, with fear, view evil and a life beyond.

As in the case of a blue, red or white lotus pond, some lotuses are born in the water, grow in the water, remain immersed in the water, and thrive plunged in the water; some are born in the water, grow in the water and remain on the surface of the water; some others are born in the water, grow in the water and remain emerging out of the water, unstained by the water. Even so, as the Exalted One surveyed the world with his Buddha-Vision, he saw beings with little and much dust in their eyes, with keen and dull intellect, with good and bad characteristics, beings who are easy and difficult to be taught, and few others who, with fear, view evil and a life beyond. And he addressed the Brahmā Sahampati in a verse thus:

Opened to them are the Doors to the Deathless State.  
Let those who have ears repose confidence.<sup>64</sup>  
Being aware of the weariness, O Brahmā,  
I did not teach amongst men this glorious and excellent  
Dhamma.

The delighted Brahmā, thinking that he made himself the occasion for the Exalted One to expound the Dhamma respectfully saluted him and, passing round him to the right, disappeared immediately.<sup>65</sup>

### ***The First Two Converts***

After his memorable fast for forty-nine days, as the Buddha sat under the Rājāyatana tree, two merchants, Tapassu and Bhallika, from Ukkala (Orissa) happened to pass that way. Then a certain deity,<sup>66</sup> who was a blood relative of theirs in a past birth, spoke to them as follows:

64. *Apārutā tesam amatassa dvārā — ye sotavantā pamuñcantu saddham*

65. See Majjhima Nikāya, Ariyapariyesana Sutta, No. 26

66. *Devatās* (Pali) are terrestrial or celestial deities, a class of beings, who, as a rule, are invisible to the physical eye. This particular feminine deity had been related to the merchants in a previous birth. It is interesting to note the non-human element appearing in various places connected with the life of the Buddha.

The Exalted One, good sirs, is dwelling at the foot of the Rājāyatana tree, soon after his enlightenment. Go and serve the Exalted One with flour and honeycomb.<sup>67</sup> It will conduce to your well-being and happiness for a long time.

Availing themselves of this golden opportunity, the two delighted merchants went to the Exalted One, and, respectfully saluting him, implored him to accept their humble alms so that it may resound to their happiness and well-being.

Then it occurred to the Exalted One: "The tathāgatas do not accept food with their hands. How shall I accept this flour and honeycomb?"

Then the four Great Kings<sup>68</sup> understood the thoughts of the Exalted One with their minds and from the four directions offered him four granite bowls,<sup>69</sup> saying, "O Lord, may the Exalted One accept herewith this flour and honeycomb!"

The Buddha graciously accepted the timely gift with which he received the humble offering of the merchants, and ate his food after his long fast.

After the meal was over the merchants prostrated themselves before the feet of the Buddha and said, "We, O Lord, seek refuge in the Exalted One and the Dhamma. May the Exalted One treat us as lay disciples who have sought refuge from today till death."<sup>70</sup>

These were the first lay disciples<sup>71</sup> of the Buddha who embraced Buddhism by seeking refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma, reciting the twofold formula.

### *On the Way to Benares to Teach the Dhamma*

On accepting the invitation to teach the Dhamma, the first thought that occurred to the Buddha before he embarked on his great mission was:

67. *Sattu*, fried flour, and *madhu*, honey, were a regular diet of travellers in India in the ancient days.

68. *Cātummahārājikas*, the guardian deities of the four quarters.

69. The commentary states that the Buddha wished that the four bowls be amalgamated into one.

70. *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I seek refuge in the Buddha), *dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I seek refuge in the Dhamma), is the twofold formula. As the Saṅgha or the noble order was not in existence then they did not recite the third—*saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I seek refuge in the Saṅgha). One becomes a Buddhist by intelligently reciting the three refuges.

71. The Jātaka commentary relates that when these two first converts begged of the Buddha to give them an object of worship the Buddha touched his head and presented them some hair relics.

It is believed that these relics have been enshrined in the modern Swe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon, the pride and glory of Burmese Buddhists. This bell-shaped massive cetiya appears like a golden mountain from a distance.

“To whom shall I teach the Dhamma first? Who will understand the Dhamma quickly? Well, there is Ālāra Kālāma<sup>72</sup> who is learned, clever, wise and has for long been with little dust in his eyes. How if I were to teach the Dhamma to him first? He will understand the Dhamma quickly.”

Then a deity appeared before the Buddha and said: “Lord! Ālāra Kālāma died a week ago.”

With his supernormal vision he perceived that it was so.

Then he thought of Uddaka Rāmaputta.<sup>73</sup> Instantly a deity informed him that he died the evening before.

With his supernormal vision he perceived this to be so.

Ultimately, the Buddha thought of the five energetic ascetics who attended on him during his struggle for enlightenment. With his supernormal vision he perceived that they were residing in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares. So the Buddha stayed at Uruvelā till such time as he was pleased to set out for Benares.

The Buddha was travelling on the highway, when between Gayā and the bodhi tree, beneath whose shade he attained enlightenment, a wandering ascetic named Upaka saw him and addressed him thus: “Extremely clear are your senses, friend! Pure and clean is your complexion. On account of whom has your renunciation been made, friend? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?”

The Buddha replied:

“All have I overcome, all do I know.

From all am I detached, all have I renounced.

Wholly absorbed am I in the destruction of craving  
(arahantship).

Having comprehended all by myself whom shall I call  
my teacher?

No teacher have I.<sup>74</sup> An equal to me there is not.

In the world including gods there is no rival to me.

Indeed an arahant am I in this world.

An unsurpassed teacher am I.

Alone am I the All-Enlightened.

72. The first religious teacher who taught the bodhisatta the jhānas extending up to the realm of nothingness (*ākāraññāyatana*).

73. The second religious teacher who taught the bodhisatta the highest state of mundane mental development, the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).

74. The Buddha uttered these words because he attained enlightenment by himself without the aid of a teacher. He had teachers before his enlightenment, but nobody taught him the way to attain buddhahood. It is therefore not correct to say that Buddhism is a natural outgrowth of Hinduism.

Cool and appeased am I.  
 To establish the wheel of Dhamma to the city of Kāsi I go.  
 In this blind world I shall beat the drum of Deathlessness.<sup>75</sup>

“Then, friend, do you admit that you are an arahant, a limitless Conqueror?” queried Upaka.

“Like me are conquerors who have attained to the destruction of defilements. All the evil conditions have I conquered. Hence, Upaka, I am called a conqueror,” replied the Buddha.

“It may be so, friend!” Upaka curtly remarked, and, nodding his head, turned into a by-road and departed.

Unperturbed by the first rebuff, the Buddha journeyed from place to place, and arrived in due course at the Deer Park in Benares.

### *Meeting the Five Monks*

The five ascetics who saw him coming from afar decided not to pay him due respect as they misconstrued his discontinuance of rigid ascetic practices which proved absolutely futile during his struggle for enlightenment.

They remarked, “Friends, this ascetic Gotama is coming. He is luxurious. He has given up striving and has turned into a life of abundance. He should not be greeted and waited upon. His bowl and robe should not be taken. Nevertheless, a seat should be prepared. If he wishes, let him sit down.”

However, as the Buddha continued to draw near, his august personality was such that they were compelled to receive him with due honour. One came forward and took his bowl and robe, another prepared a seat, and yet another kept water for his feet. Nevertheless, they addressed him by name and called him friend (*āvuso*), a form of address applied generally to juniors and equals.

At this the Buddha addressed them thus:

Do not, O bhikkhus, address the Tathāgata by name or by the title ‘*āvuso*.’ An exalted one, O bhikkhus, is the Tathāgata. A fully enlightened one is he. Give ear, O bhikkhus! Deathlessness (*amata*) has been attained. I shall instruct and teach the Dhamma. If you act according to my instructions, you will before long realise, by your own intuitive wisdom, and live, attaining in this life itself, that supreme consummation of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of noble families rightly leave the household for homelessness.

Thereupon the five ascetics replied:

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75. Majjhima Nikāya, Ariyapariyesana Sutta, MN 26.

By that demeanour of yours, friend Gotama, by that discipline, by those painful austerities, you did not attain to any superhuman specific knowledge and insight worthy of an ariya (noble one). How will you, when you have become luxurious, have given up striving, and have turned into a life of abundance, gain any such superhuman specific knowledge and insight worthy of an ariya?

In explanation the Buddha said:

The Tathāgata, O bhikkhus, is not luxurious, has not given up striving, and has not turned into a life of abundance. An exalted one is the Tathāgata. A fully enlightened one is he. Give ear, O bhikkhus! Deathlessness has been attained. I shall instruct and teach the Dhamma. If you act according to my instructions, you will before long realise, by your own intuitive wisdom, and live, attaining in this life itself, that supreme consummation of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of noble families rightly leave the household for homelessness.

For the second time the prejudiced ascetics expressed their disappointment in the same manner.

For the second time the Buddha reassured them of his attainment to enlightenment.

When the adamant ascetics refusing to believe him, expressed their view for the third time, the Buddha questioned them thus: "Do you know, O bhikkhus, of an occasion when I ever spoke to you thus before?"

"Certainly not, Lord!"

The Buddha repeated for the third time that he had gained enlightenment and that they also could realise the truth if they would act according to his instructions.

It was indeed a frank utterance, issuing from the sacred lips of the Buddha. The cultured ascetics, though adamant in their views, were then fully convinced of the great achievement of the Buddha and of his competence to act as their moral guide and teacher.

They believed his word and sat in silence to listen to his Noble teaching.

Two of the ascetics the Buddha instructed, while three went out for alms. With what the three ascetics brought from their alms-round the six maintained themselves. Three of the ascetics he instructed, while two ascetics went out for alms. With what the two brought six sustained themselves.

And those five ascetics thus admonished and instructed by the Buddha, being themselves subject to birth, decay, death, sorrow, and passions, realised the real nature of life and, seeking out the birthless,



decayless, diseaseless, deathless, sorrowless, passionless, incomparable supreme peace, Nibbāna, attained the incomparable security, Nibbāna, which is free from birth, decay, disease, death, sorrow, and passions. The knowledge arose in them that their deliverance was unshakable, that it was their last birth and that there would be no more of this state again.

The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta,<sup>76</sup> which deals with the four noble truths, was the first discourse delivered by the Buddha to them. Hearing it, Kondañña, the eldest, attained the first stage of sainthood. After receiving further instructions, the other four attained *sotāpatti* ("stream-winner") later. On hearing the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta,<sup>77</sup> which deals with soullessness, all the five attained arahantship, the final stage of sainthood.

### *The First Five Disciples*

The five learned monks who thus attained arahantship and became the Buddha's first disciples were Kondañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji of the brahmin clan.

Kondañña was the youngest and the cleverest of the eight brahmins who were summoned by King Suddhodana to name the infant prince. The other four were the sons of those older brahmins. All these five retired to the forest as ascetics in anticipation of the Bodhisatta while he was endeavouring to attain buddhahood. When he gave up his useless penances and severe austerities and began to nourish the body sparingly to regain his lost strength, these favourite followers, disappointed at his change of method, deserted him and went to Isipatana. Soon after their departure the Bodhisatta attained buddhahood.

The Venerable Kondañña became the first arahant and the most senior member of the Sangha. It was Assaji, one of the five, who converted the great Śāriputta, the chief disciple of the Buddha.




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76. See page 49 ff.

77. See page 55 ff.