

CHAPTER 7

THE TEACHING OF THE DHAMMA

Happy is the birth of Buddhas.
Happy is the teaching of the sublime Dhamma.
Happy is the unity of the Sangha.
Happy is the discipline of the united ones.

— Dhṛp v. 194

The Conversion of Yasa and his Friends

In Benares there was a millionaire's son, named Yasa, who led a luxurious life. One morning he rose early and, to his utter disgust, saw his female attendants and musicians asleep in repulsive attitudes. The whole spectacle was so disgusting that the palace presented the gloomy appearance of a charnel house. Realising the vanities of worldly life, he stole away from home, saying, "Distressed am I, oppressed am I," and went in the direction of Isipatana where the Buddha was temporarily residing after having made the five bhikkhus attain arahantship.¹⁰²

At that particular time the Buddha, as usual, was pacing up and down in an open space. Seeing him coming from afar, the Buddha came out of his ambulatory and sat on a prepared seat. Not far from him stood Yasa, crying, "Oh, distressed am I! Oppressed am I!"

Thereupon the Buddha said, "Here there is no distress, O Yasa! Here there is no oppression, O Yasa! Come hither, Yasa! Take a seat. I shall expound the Dhamma to you."

The distressed Yasa was pleased to hear the encouraging words of the Buddha. Removing his golden sandals, he approached the Buddha, respectfully saluted him and sat on one side.

The Buddha expounded the doctrine to him, and he attained the first stage of sainthood (*sotāpatti*).

At first the Buddha spoke to him on generosity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), celestial states (*sagga*), the evils of sensual pleasures (*kāmadīnāva*), and the blessings of renunciation (*nekkhammānisaṃsa*). When he found that his mind was pliable and was ready to appreciate the deeper teaching he taught the four noble truths.

102. This event took place on the fifth day after the delivery of the first sermon when all the five bhikkhus had attained arahantship.

Yasa's mother was the first to notice the absence of her son and she reported the matter to her husband. The millionaire immediately dispatched horsemen in four directions and he himself went towards Isipatana, following the imprint of the golden slippers. The Buddha saw him coming from afar and, by his psychic powers, willed that he should not be able to see his son.

The millionaire approached the Buddha and respectfully inquired whether he had seen his son Yasa.

"Well, then, sit down here please. You will be able to see your son," said the Buddha. Pleased with the happy news, he sat down. The Buddha delivered a discourse to him, and he was so delighted that he exclaimed:

"Excellent, O Lord, excellent! It is as if, Lord, a man were to set upright that which was overturned, or were to reveal that which was hidden, or were to point out the way to one who had gone astray, or were to hold a lamp amidst the darkness, so that those who have eyes may see! Even so has the doctrine been expounded in various ways by the Exalted One.

"I, Lord, take refuge in the Buddha, the doctrine and the order. May the Lord receive me as a follower, who has taken refuge from this very day to life's end!"

He was the first lay follower to seek refuge with the threefold formula.

On hearing the discourse delivered to his father, Yasa attained arahantship. Thereupon the Buddha withdrew his will-power so that Yasa's father could see his son. The millionaire beheld his son and invited the Buddha and his disciples for alms on the following day. The Buddha expressed his acceptance of the invitation by his silence.

After the departure of the millionaire Yasa begged the Buddha to grant him the lesser¹⁰³ and the higher ordination.

"Come, O bhikkhu! Well taught is the doctrine. Lead the holy life to make a complete end of suffering." With these words the Buddha conferred on him the higher ordination.¹⁰⁴

With the Venerable Yasa the number of arahants increased to six.

As invited, the Buddha visited the millionaire's house with his six disciples.

103. By *pabbajjā*, lit., "going forth" or "renunciation," is meant the mere admission into the holy order by seeking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha.

104. In the early days of the order the higher ordination—*upasampadā*—lit., "replete with a higher morality," was granted with these words. See Ch. 14

Venerable Yasa's mother and his former wife heard the doctrine expounded by the Buddha and, having attained the first stage of sainthood, became his first two lay female followers.¹⁰⁵

Venerable Yasa had four distinguished friends named Vimala, Subāhu, Puṇṇaji and Gavampati. When they heard that their noble friend had shaved his hair and beard, and, donning the yellow robe, entered the homeless life, they approached Venerable Yasa and expressed their desire to follow his example. Venerable Yasa introduced them to the Buddha, and, on hearing the Dhamma, they also attained arahantship.

Fifty more worthy friends of Venerable Yasa, who belonged to leading families of various districts, also received instructions from the Buddha, attained arahantship and entered the holy order.

Hardly two months had elapsed since his enlightenment when the number of arahants gradually rose to sixty. All of them came from distinguished families and were worthy sons of worthy fathers.

The First Messengers of Truth (Dhammadūta)

The Buddha who, before long, succeeded in enlightening sixty disciples, decided to send them as messengers of truth to teach his new Dhamma to all without any distinction. Before dispatching them in various directions he exhorted them as follows:¹⁰⁶

Freed am I, O bhikkhus, from all bonds, whether divine or human.

You, too, O bhikkhus, are freed from all bonds, whether divine or human.

Go forth, O bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods¹⁰⁷ and men. Let not two go by one way. Preach, O bhikkhus, the Dhamma, excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, excellent in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim the holy life,¹⁰⁸ altogether perfect and pure.

105. *Upāsaka* (m) *upāsikā* (f) lit., "one who closely associates with the Triple Gem."

These two terms are applied to male and female lay followers of the Buddha. One becomes an *upāsaka* or *upāsikā* immediately after taking the three refuges, viz:

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi—I take refuge in the Buddha

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi—I take refuge in the Dhamma

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi—I take refuge in the Sangha.

This is the threefold formula (*tevācika*).

106. Mahāvagga, pp.19–20.

107. Note the reference to gods (*devas*).

108. The Pali term *brahmacariya* has no connection whatever with a god or Brahmā. It is used in the sense of noble or holy.

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.”

I too, O bhikkhus, will go to Uruvelā in Senānigama, in order to preach the Dhamma.”

Hoist the Flag of the Sage. Preach the Sublime Dhamma. Work for the good of others, you who have done your duties.¹⁰⁹

The Buddha was thus the first religious teacher to send his enlightened ordained disciples to propagate the doctrine out of compassion for others. With no permanent abode, alone and penniless, these first missionaries were expected to wander from place to place to teach the sublime Dhamma. They had no other material possessions but their robes to cover themselves and an alms-bowl to collect food. As the field was extensive and the workers were comparatively few they were advised to undertake their missionary journeys alone. As they were arahants who were freed from all sensual bonds their chief and only object was to teach the Dhamma and proclaim the holy life (*brahmacariya*). The original role of arahants, who achieved their life's goal, was to work for the moral upliftment of the people both by example and by precept. Material development, though essential, was not their concern.

Founding of the Order of the Sangha

At that time there were sixty arahant disciples in the world. With these Pure Ones as the nucleus the Buddha founded a celibate order which “was democratic in constitution and communistic in distribution.” The original members were drawn from the highest status of society and were all educated and rich men, but the order was open to all worthy ones, irrespective of caste, class or rank. Both young and old belonging to all the castes, were freely admitted into the order and lived like brothers of the same family without any distinction. This noble order of bhikkhus, which stands to this day, is the oldest historic body of celibates in the world.

All were not expected to leave the household and enter the homeless life. As lay followers, too, they were able to lead a good life in accordance with the Dhamma and attain sainthood. Venerable Yasa's parents and his former wife, for instance, were the foremost lay followers of the Buddha.

109. *Samussayatha saddhammaṃ—desayantā isiddhajaṃ
Katakattabbakammantā—paratthaṃ paṭipajjatha.*

All the three were sufficiently spiritually advanced to attain the first stage of sainthood.

With the sixty arahants, as ideal messengers of truth, the Buddha decided to propagate his sublime Dhamma, purely by expounding the doctrine to those who wish to hear.

Conversion of Thirty Young Men

The Buddha resided at Isipatana in Benares as long as he liked and went towards Uruvelā. On the way he sat at the foot of a tree in a grove.

At that time thirty happy young men went with their wives to this particular grove to amuse themselves. As one of them had no wife he took with him a courtesan. While they were enjoying themselves, this woman absconded with their valuables. The young men searched for her in the forest, and, seeing the Buddha, inquired of him whether he saw a woman passing that way.

"Which do you think, young men, is better; seeking a woman or seeking oneself?"¹¹⁰ questioned the Buddha.

"Seeking oneself is better, O Lord!" replied the young men.

"Well, then, sit down. I shall preach the doctrine to you," said the Buddha.

"Very well, Lord," they replied, and respectfully saluting the Exalted One, sat expectantly by.

They attentively listened to him and obtained "The Eye of Truth."¹¹¹

After this they entered the order and received the higher ordination.

Conversion of the Three Kassapa Brothers

Wandering from place to place, in due course, the Buddha arrived at Uruvelā. Here lived three ascetics with matted hair (*jaṭila*) known as Uruvela Kassapa, Nadi Kassapa, and Gayā Kassapa. They were all brothers living separately with 500, 300, and 200 disciples respectively. The eldest was infatuated by his own spiritual attainments and was labouring under a misconception that he was an arahant. The Buddha approached him first and sought his permission to spend the night in his

110. Seeking oneself. This phrase is very significant. *Attānaṃ* is the accusative of *atta* which means self. Here the Buddha was not referring to any soul or spirit latent in man as some scholars attempt to show. How could the Buddha affirm the existence of a soul when he had clearly denied its existence in his second discourse? The Buddha has used this phrase exactly in the sense of "seek yourself" or "look within."

111. *Dhammacakkhu*—This refers to any of the three lower paths, *sotāpatti*, *sakadāgāmi*, and *anāgāmi*.

fire-chamber where dwelt a fierce serpent-king. By his psychic powers the Buddha subdued the serpent. This pleased Uruvela Kassapa and he invited the Buddha to stay there as his guest. The Buddha was compelled to exhibit his psychic powers on several other occasions to impress the ascetic, but still he adhered to the belief, that the Buddha was not an arahant as he was. Finally the Buddha was able to convince him that he was an arahant. Thereupon he and his followers entered the order and obtained the higher ordination.

His brothers and their followers also followed his example. Accompanied by the three Kassapa brothers and their thousand followers, the Buddha repaired to Gayā Sīsa, not far from Uruvelā. Here he preached the *Āditta-Pariyāya Sutta*, hearing which all attained arahantship.



Āditta-Pariyāya Sutta—Discourse on “All in Flames”

“All in flames, O bhikkhus! What, O bhikkhus, is all in flames?

“Eye is in flames. Forms are in flames. Eye-consciousness is in flames. Eye-contact is in flames. Feeling which is pleasurable or painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful, arising from eye-contact is in flames. By what is it kindled? By the flames of lust, hatred, ignorance, birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair is it kindled, I declare.

“Reflecting thus, O bhikkhus, the learned noble disciple gets disgusted with the eye, the forms, the eye-consciousness, the eye-contact, whatever feeling—pleasurable, painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful—that arises from contact with the eye. He gets disgusted with the ear, sounds, nose, odours, tongue, tastes, body, contact, mind, mental objects, mind-consciousness, mind contacts, whatever feeling—pleasurable, painful or neither pleasurable nor painful—that arises from contact with the mind. With disgust he gets detached; with detachment he is delivered. He understands that birth is ended, lived the holy life, done what should be done, and that there is no more of this state again.”

When the Buddha concluded this discourse all the bhikkhus attained arahantship, eradicating all defilements.



Conversion of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the two chief disciples

Not far from Rājagaha in the village Upatissa, also known as Nālaka, there lived a very intelligent youth named Sāriputta ("son of Sāri"). Since he belonged to the leading family of the village, he was also called Upatissa.

Though nurtured in Brahmanism, his broad outlook on life and matured wisdom compelled him to renounce his ancestral religion for the more tolerant and scientific teachings of the Buddha Gotama. His brothers and sisters followed his noble example. His father, Vanganta, apparently adhered to the Brahmin faith. His mother, who was displeased with the son for having become a Buddhist, was converted to Buddhism by himself at the moment of his death.

Upatissa was brought up in the lap of luxury. He found a very intimate friend in Kolita, also known as Moggallāna, with whom he was closely associated from a remote past. One day as both of them were enjoying a hill-top festival they realised how vain, how transient, were all sensual pleasures. Instantly they decided to leave the world and seek the path of release. They wandered from place to place in quest of peace.

The two young seekers went at first to Sañjaya, who had a large following, and sought ordination under him. Before long they acquired the meagre knowledge which their master imparted to them, but dissatisfied with his teachings—as they could not find a remedy for that universal ailment with which humanity is assailed—they left him and wandered hither and thither in search of peace. They approached many a famous brahmin and ascetic, but disappointment met them everywhere. Ultimately they returned to their own village and agreed amongst themselves that whoever would first discover the path should inform the other.

It was at that time that the Buddha dispatched his first sixty disciples to proclaim the sublime Dhamma to the world. The Buddha himself proceeded towards Uruvelā, and the Venerable Assaji, one of the first five disciples, went in the direction of Rājagaha.

The good kamma of the seekers now intervened, as if watching with sympathetic eyes their spiritual progress. For Upatissa, while wandering in the city of Rājagaha, casually met an ascetic whose venerable appearance and saintly deportment at once arrested his attention. This ascetic's eyes were lowly fixed a yoke's distance from him, and his calm face betokened deep peace within him. With body well composed, robes neatly arranged, this venerable figure passed with measured steps from

door to door, accepting the morsels of food which the charitable placed in his bowl. Never before have I seen, he thought to himself, an ascetic like this. Surely he must be one of those who have attained arahantship or one who is practising the path leading to arahantship. How if I were to approach him and question, "For whose sake, Sire, have you retired from the world? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?"

Upatissa, however, refrained from questioning him as he thought he would thereby interfere with his silent begging tour.

The arahant Assaji, having obtained what little he needed, was seeking a suitable place to eat his meal. Seeing this, Upatissa gladly availed himself of the opportunity to offer him his own stool and water from his own pot. Fulfilling thus the preliminary duties of a pupil, he exchanged pleasant greetings with him and reverently inquired:

"Venerable Sir, calm and serene are your organs of sense, clean and clear is the hue of your skin. For whose sake have you retired from the world? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?"

The unassuming arahant Assaji modestly replied, as is the characteristic of all great men, "I am still young in the order, brother, and I am not able to expound the Dhamma to you at length."

"I am Upatissa, Venerable Sir. Say much or little according to your ability, and it is left to me to understand it in a hundred or thousand ways."

"Say little or much," Upatissa continued, "tell me just the substance. The substance only do I require. A mere jumble of words is of no avail."

The Venerable Assaji uttered a four-line stanza, thus skilfully summing up the profound philosophy of the Master, on the truth of the law of cause and effect.

*Ye dhammā, hetuppabhavā —
tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha
tesaṃ ca yo nirodho—
evam-vādī mahāsamaṇo.*

Of things that proceed from a cause,
Their cause the Tathāgata has told,
And also their cessation:
Thus teaches the Great Ascetic.

Upatissa was sufficiently enlightened to comprehend such a lofty teaching though succinctly expressed. He was only in need of a slight indication to discover the truth. So well did the Venerable Assaji guide him on his upward path that immediately on hearing the first two lines, he attained the first stage of sainthood, sotāpatti.

The new convert Upatissa must have been, no doubt, destitute of words to thank to his heart's content his venerable teacher for introducing him to the sublime teachings of the Buddha. He expressed his deep indebtedness for his brilliant exposition of the truth, and obtaining from him the necessary particulars with regard to the Master, took his leave.

Later, the devotion he showed towards his teacher was such that since he heard the Dhamma from the Venerable Assaji, in whatever quarter he heard that his teacher was residing, in that direction he would extend his clasped hands in an attitude of reverent obeisance and in that direction he would turn his head when he lay down to sleep.

Now, in accordance with the agreement, he returned to his companion Kolita to convey the joyful tidings. Kolita, who was as enlightened as his friend, also attained the first stage of sainthood on hearing the whole stanza. Overwhelmed with joy at their successful search after peace, as in duty bound, they went to meet their teacher Sañjaya with the object of converting him to the new doctrine. Frustrated in their attempt Upatissa and Kolita, accompanied by many followers of Sañjaya, who readily joined them, repaired to the Veluvana monastery to visit their illustrious teacher, the Buddha.

In compliance with their request, the Buddha admitted both of them into the order by the mere utterance of the words *etha bhikkhave* (come, O bhikkhus).

A fortnight later the Venerable Sāriputta attained arahantship on hearing the Buddha expound the Vedanā Pariggaha Sutta to the wandering ascetic Dīghanakha. On the very same day in the evening the Buddha gathered round him his disciples and the exalted positions of the first and second disciples in the Sangha were respectively conferred upon the theras Upatissa (Sāriputta) and Kolita (Moggallāna), who also had attained arahantship a week earlier.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi—I seek refuge in the Buddha.

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi—I seek refuge in the doctrine.

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi—I seek refuge in the order.

This is the threefold formula (*tevācika*).

