

## THE FOUR WHEELS OF SUCCESS

*Summary of discourse by Ven. Bhikkhu Buddharakkhita at International Buddhist Society of Pennsylvania on July 19, 2009*

Dhamma has a very broad meaning, which includes the laws of nature. Dhamma literally means: to uphold. Also, it means the Doctrine. The Buddha did not invent Dhamma, however, He rediscovered it. He only came to know of it, because the Dhamma, including the laws of nature, always existed, just like Isaac Newton didn't invent gravity, it always existed. Practicing Dhamma includes understanding laws of nature so we do not harm ourselves, or others (society) or both (the environment), and the discipline to attain ultimate happiness or spiritual success (Nibbana). The ethical conduct includes but is not limited to the Five Precepts (training guidelines), which are a basic code of conduct for any one aspiring for peace and happiness. They are even practiced by many people who don't know anything about Buddhism.

We all want to be successful in life, in the Dhamma, don't we? So we need to know the means to success, which is, the Four Wheels of Success. They are:

- 1) Residing in a suitable place,
- 2) Association with the wise, not to associate with the unwise,
- 3) Setting oneself in the right path, and
- 4) Having done good deeds in the past.

**The First Wheel: Residing in a suitable place.** A place where the Buddha's teaching is flourishing. Also, it means a place where you can find monks, nuns, lay men and lay females practicing the Dhamma. It means a place which is conducive for the practice of Dhamma, generosity, ethical conduct, mental cultivation, without distractions. For instance, we can say that this Temple is a suitable place, good for Dhamma practice, with good surroundings and good neighbors. It is not very easy to find suitable place for practicing the Dhamma. We can say that you are successful in that respect. *I remember once when I was a layperson I was living in a house with four televisions, and the only quiet place without a TV that I could go was the bathroom and hallway. So when I was brushing my teeth, etc. I practiced mindfulness and kept my mind on the Dhamma. I used to do walking meditation in the hallway.*

**The Second Wheel: Not to associate with the unwise, and to associate with the wise.** In Pali language: *asevanā ca balana, panditā nā ca sevanā*. This is best translated as avoiding association with the unskillful, untrained or uninstructed people and associating with the skillful, trained or instructed people, because there is some confusion about who is "wise." Who says that a person is wise or unwise, in other words, from whose point of view? What is the dividing line? Many people will say or think they are wise, when they are not living according to Dhamma, so the better word is "skillful." It means one who thinks, speaks and acts in a way that leads to happiness for oneself, others, and both. As for unskillful, it means one who thinks, speaks and acts in a way that leads to the suffering of oneself, others, and both. Avoiding association with the "unwise" or untrained or skillful person doesn't mean rejecting certain people. Instead, it means interacting with people in a Dhammic way, out of compassion. And if they don't accept our advice and suggestions, then leaving them alone for short while until they understand the way of Dhamma might be viable alternative. In other words, keep a

“psychological distance” out of compassion rather a physical distance. We shouldn’t be judging people, thinking one is “better than” or “worse than” another.

**The Third Wheel: Setting oneself in the right path.** The right path means the Noble Eight Fold Path. The Buddha said: “This is the Middle Path which the Perfect One rediscovered and expounded, which gives rise to vision and knowledge.” Which leads to peace, wisdom and enlightenment and Nibbana. The Right path includes eight factors: Right understanding, Right Thought, and Right Speech, Right Actions, Right Livelihood, Right Energy (Effort), Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

People often say that with their jobs they are too busy, they have no time to set themselves in the right path and practice Dhamma. They maintain that Buddha’s teachings are for monks and nuns. But Buddha taught all kinds of people, including laypersons. Living a lay life doesn’t mean you are too busy for Dhamma, because you can practice Dhamma in whatever you are doing.

*Practicing Dhamma behind the wheel:*

For example, when you drive a car, though the activity looks like mundane, yet you can set yourself in the right path. When you drive faster, remember your safety and others’ safety. You should apply brakes and observe the traffic codes. It is the same with self-control that you practice when you undertake the moral codes in the Dhamma practice. Assuming that you have already taken the five (5) precepts, which fulfills Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood, you can practice the rest of the Noble Eight fold Path!

You can practice *Right Thought* while driving -- practice generosity by yielding; practice lovingkindness towards all beings while driving; practice patience when caught up in traffic or while waiting at traffic lights; when someone cuts you off as they drive crazily, practice compassion rather than getting angry.

You can also practice *Right Mindfulness* while driving. In India, “sati” is used as a word meaning “to remember” or “to recollect.” But Sati as taught by the Buddha means to be aware, to be in the present moment fully aware of everything going on around you. *For example, when Asoka was driving, he had to be totally aware of everything around him to ensure that we arrived here safely.* Mindfulness means to be aware and alert. It means to pay attention, not just have a superficial awareness.

Another example of establishing yourself in the right path is when you are standing in line at a store or buying gas, instead of thinking about someone’s hairdo or the magazines in the display, practice mindfulness - start with feeling the feet on the floor. Do you feel hardness?

*Right Effort* and *Right Mindfulness* work together. While driving, you can make a mindful effort to prevent unskillful thoughts before they lead you into trouble. And if unskillful thoughts arise, such as thoughts of anger about other drivers, then you can stop them or prevent them from building up and leading to words or actions that you would later regret, or remorse. So mindfulness is like a mirror, showing your thoughts to you. Without mindfulness, thoughts quickly become impulsive, habitual, harmful words and actions, and later we feel sorry that we said or did those things. With mindfulness, we can overcome anger, even the very subtle levels

of it. There are subtle levels of anger even in those who are in the first two levels of attaining enlightenment: a sotapanna (stream-enterer) and a sakadagami (once returner).

You practice *concentration* while driving. One has to focus and concentrate, otherwise when he gets distracted with the beautiful scenery, deer, and other drivers, safety is compromised.

So, you see that you can practice the Dhamma anytime, anywhere!

**The Fourth Wheel: Having done good deeds in the past.** Here good deeds mean merit or happiness. So having done merit is a sign of success. But, even the word “good” is relative – others may not agree on what is “good.” We should make sure that we are considering what is really good – Dhammic – for both. What is the dividing line between good and bad? Something is good if it leads to the happiness of oneself, others and both. And something is bad if it leads to suffering to oneself, others or both. You can discern this from your own experience without relying on any external entity.

There is a law of Kamma here. Because of our good deeds, we found a suitable place, we come across and associate with wise friends, and because of our association with wise friends we are able to establish ourselves in the right path in the present moment. And while on the right path, we are practicing the Noble Eight Fold Path which can be summarized as:

- Generosity
- Ethical conduct and
- Mental cultivation.

By practicing generosity, ethical conduct and so on, you create a lot of merit and happiness. Because each wheel of success is the cause and condition for the other wheel, once the Four Wheels start rolling, there is nobody who can stop them.

I wish you success in the Dhamma by practicing the Four Wheels of Success.

#### Question and Answer:

1. How do we develop Metta (loving-kindness) according to Buddhist teachings? How is the development of Metta different from other religions? Other religions have a concept of devotion, like the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man, which opens the heart to develop loving-kindness.

Answer:

According to Buddha’s teachings, we develop Metta by radiating or sending Metta to yourself and then to all breathing or living beings. We can practice Metta not only through our thoughts but also through our actions or speech. And what are the motivations? Well, there are various levels of motivations:

- On one level, knowing our interrelatedness with all beings – if we knew all relations and friends from all past lives, we would find we were related to everyone at some point in our past. Even biologically, we all share the same DNA, the same human source that eventually traveled around and populated the world. Through our wandering in the rounds of birth and death (samsara), it is impossible to find someone who has never been your mother, father, brother, sister and so on. In fact, we are all one Dhamma family.

- Another level, understanding our interdependence on and inter-connectedness on so many levels with other beings in the world. For example, if there were no bees, there would be no pollination, and therefore no food. As for breathing beings, human beings do breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon oxide. The trees exhale oxygen and take in carbon dioxide. So we should value the life of plants and all living beings.
- Yet another motivation is having seen that beings like oneself have desire for happiness and do not want to suffer. In fact, this is a common denominator. Even the smallest insect, if its way is blocked, it would find out another way to avoid the blockage. Therefore, one should methodically cultivate Metta to all beings without exception.

However, it is very important to note that the development of loving-kindness (Metta bhavana) is quite different from other traditions outside the Buddha's teaching. The difference is that we develop Metta as a "basis" and "support" for the development of generosity (Dana), ethical conduct (Sila), and mental cultivation (Bhavana). Here the key words are "basis" and "support". Therefore, Metta is the "basis" and "support" for the attaining final liberation (Nibbana).

Buddhism includes the concept of devotion (bhakti) also, which is devotion to the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Our devotion to the Buddha is not by looking at the Buddha statue and admiring it. Devotion to the Buddha means putting Buddha's teachings (Dhamma) into practice and realizing it yourself. The Buddha said one who sees the Dhamma, sees the Buddha and vice versa. You see, devotion has a deeper meaning in Buddhism. For instance, the Buddha statue and other symbols on the shrine are to remind us of Dhammic qualities. Just like a flag of the U.S symbolizes the U.S. The U.S flag is not the U.S. In the same vein, flowers represent the mark of impermanence, because they wither and wilt from moment to moment. Incense represents the fragrance of virtue which no wind can blow away. In fact, the fragrance of a virtuous person can go against the wind. Water represents the quenching of the thirst of craving. Likewise, the practice of Dhamma will help us to quench the thirst of craving. Candles represent the light dispelling the darkness, or wisdom dispelling ignorance. The Buddha statue represents enlightenment. Our devotion to the Buddha statue would then represent our aspiration to cultivate the qualities of the Buddha (the Buddha-hood of the Buddha), which includes **purity, compassion and wisdom**. In fact, even long after the passing away of the Buddha, there were no Buddha statues. People worshipped the Dhamma Chakka or Chakra (The Wheel of Dhamma) to represent the Dhamma, and then later on Greeks made statues of the Buddha showing his good qualities because people like to have a reminder of the qualities of the Buddha.

2. I have heard many different teachers referring to "both-ways" liberated and "one-way" liberated. And each teacher gives a different explanation. What can you say about liberations?

Answer: "Both-way liberated" means liberated by both "deliverance of mind" and "deliverance of wisdom". With both liberations you can cut off craving and ignorance respectively. This is the cause of suffering in the first place. However, "one-way liberated" means deliverance by wisdom. This cuts off ignorance. All these are mentioned in various Suttas.

Personally, I feel that we have to always go back to the original teaching of the Buddha. If you get confused with the explanation of liberation and other Dhamma, just take a look at the the Buddha's first three (3) cardinal discourses (Suttas). Here the Buddha mentions the only way to Nibbana: for instance in His very First Discourse, the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, the Wheel of Dhamma Discourse, the Buddha taught the Noble Eight Fold Path that leads to final liberation: Right understanding, Right thought , Right speech, Right Actions, Right Livelihood, Right Effort (Energy), Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. Interestingly, after the Buddha taught this Discourse, one person attained the first level of enlightenment. Then He taught the Discourse on Non-self. Then all the five (5) disciples attained the final level of enlightenment. Then He taught the Fire Sermon discourse, and one thousand (1000) attained enlightenment! Therefore, the way to liberation is very clear from the first three (3) cardinal Suttas.

A simple explanation would be to practice the Noble Eight Fold Path and see the five aggregates of clinging (material form, feelings, perception, mental formations, and consciousness) as Impermanence, Suffering and Non-self. This means, do not cling on to anything in the five (5) aggregates. In order to practice this way you need to develop both Samattha (Tranquility or Concentration meditation) and Vipassana (Insight meditation). At the moment of liberation both Concentration and Wisdom are very important.

However, the Commentaries and Sub-commentaries (not the original words of the Buddha) to the Suttas, which are interpretations written by others and refer to additional things like the ancient commentary, The Path of Purification, mentions three (3) gateways to liberation: considering all formations as impermanent (anicca); considering all formations as suffering (dukkha); and considering all formations as non-self (anatta).

Also, the Buddha mentions things differently in different areas of the Suttas, probably because His listeners had some basic practice and already knew what He is talking about, so He didn't repeat a whole series or description every time. Instead He gave compressed teachings. For instance, He taught eight (8) liberations in one of the Discourses and in other another Discourse (Sutta) in Majjhima Nikaya 43, He gave various liberations. He said one of the best deliverances is the unshakable deliverance of the mind – void of lust, hate and delusion, which is equal to final stage of enlightenment (Arahantship). The Buddha taught according the capacity of the audience.

However, it is very important to note, in order to attain Nibbana, the foundation must be laid by the practice of the Noble Eight Fold Path; each of those parts of the 8-Fold Path is necessary. There is no cutting corners. You can't choose to practice some parts, and skip over other parts because you don't want to practice them. Then your efforts won't be successful. The Noble Eight Fold Path enables you to overcome your mental defilements.

The practice of concentration or absorption (Jhanas) or Samattha is part of Right Concentration in the Noble Eight fold Path. It is necessary to have some degree of concentration in order to practice the path that leads to the penetration into the unconditioned phenomena, Nibbana. We can say that deep concentration is a "basis" and "support" for successfully practicing until you attain Nibbana. Again, the key words are "basis" and "support" for attainment of Nibbana.

The Buddha said that a concentrated mind sees things (the five aggregates of clinging) as they really are. On the other hand, we need to practice insight meditation (Vipassana meditation) that will help us to see the true nature of all conditioned phenomena as they really are: that is to say, as impermanent, suffering and non-self. Vipassana (insight meditation) is the “basis” and “support” for the path leading to liberation, Nibbana.

### 3. What is the difference between mindfulness and vipassana?

Answer:

The Pali word for mindfulness is Sati. It means to recollect or remember. Though the original word meant recollecting the past, the Buddha raised the word Sati to a higher philosophical value to mean to remember in the present moment. Therefore, the word Mindfulness suggests paying attention to the present moment. Also, it means to observe, to be alert and aware from moment to moment.

*For instance, if we want to observe a specimen, we have to look into a microscope.*

*The first step is to first adjust the microscope, focus it, align the specimen and then we see so much more than our unaided eyes see.*

In the same way, we have to pay our attention to the body, feelings, mind states and mind objects. With continuous mindfulness, momentarily concentration will organically arise. Then, the next step is the practice of Vipassana (insight meditation).

“Vi” in Pali language means special ways and “passana” means to see, observe, discern, So Vipassana means to see things as they really are, separating out illusion, by seeing that they are Impermanent (anicca), unsatisfactory (dukkha), and without self (anatta). The objects of Vipassana are ultimate realities rather than just a mental glance at the concept or conventional realities.

*For example, we see water, and we just think of the concept of water, without observing the details, the qualities, like the coolness, hotness, hardness etc. A scientist will think of more details, that it is “H<sub>2</sub>O” and what is in the water. But there is so much more to observe of water. The Buddha or person with deep insight would observe in terms of its eight (8) elements: earth, fire, water, air, smell, color, taste, and nutriment essence.*

The proof of the pudding is the mouth! Let us practice the Noble Eight Fold Path.

Take a couple of breaths. What do you feel? Just before we let it out we can discern the first Noble Truth of Dukkha (unsatisfactoriness), the tension and anxiety that we want to release the breath, and once we breathe out, we feel a sense of relief (a taste of freedom). The cause of this unsatisfactoriness is our desire to survive.

In order to observe the breath there are three (3) factors of the Noble Eight Fold Path that work together: Right effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Understanding. So we pay mindful effort to understand the breath as it goes in and out.

And with continuous mindfulness, Right concentration will arise. In order to gain wisdom (Right understanding and Right thought), you need concentration as basis and support for wisdom, in order to see things as they really are. It is important that your mind is not caught in the past or future fantasies. The mind should not be too busy with things other than the present moment, like planning and remembering.

*For example, you can't focus the microscope to clearly see the specimen when you are shaking the microscope around as you are busy eating and doing other things while you are trying to*

*adjust the microscope. So concentration goes along with mindfulness, which leads to vipassana (insight meditation).*