

Lesson 8 – UNDERSTAND THE PATH AND GOAL

Opening chants, meditation and review of last lesson.

Question to think about before the story: What is **Nirvana** (Nibbana)?

Story: Enlightenment

After sitting down under the Bodhi Tree, Siddhartha determined that he will not leave until he attains Enlightenment. He concentrated his mind and meditated deeply until his mind was perfectly calm. He concentrated on breathing. Then in the first part of the night, he remembered his previous lives. In his inner vision he could see his many past lives over eons of time. He knew the way he looked, the food he ate, what pleasures and pains he experienced, the way he died, how he was reborn, what his name was in that life, and the details of so many of his lives.

In the middle part of the night, he developed the “divine eye” that can see the past and future of different beings. He could see that they die and take a new birth according to the good deeds and bad deeds they have done. Depending on their deeds they were pretty or ugly, intelligent or not, happy or unhappy, lucky or unlucky. Depending on how good or bad their deeds were, they were born in heaven, hell, or as animals or humans.

In the last part of the night, he could understand the deepest mysteries and laws of life. He understood how to destroy wrong behavior and suffering. All of his ignorance disappeared. With his pure mind, he suddenly knew the Four Noble Truths, which are: (1) Suffering (Dukkha) (2) The cause of suffering (Samudaya) (3) The end of suffering (Nirodha), and (4) The way to the end of suffering (Marga). That is, he knew that all living beings feel suffering, that the reason for suffering is craving, and that the end of suffering is Nirvana. He suddenly knew that the way to the end of suffering is by these eight factors: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. He knew that was the ancient Noble Eightfold Path discovered by all of the past Buddhas from ages ago.

He also realized that he was fully Enlightened, that he reached the goal of life. The first words that came to his mind were: “For many births I was traveling to find the builder of this house, that is, the cause of birth over and over again, which is so painful. I have seen the house builder (the cause of birth), he shall not build the house again (shall not cause rebirth). The roof has been broken. My mind has attained Nirvana and reached the end of every kind of craving.” Siddhartha had now become a Buddha, which means a person who discovers by himself the Dharma, including the Four Noble Truths, and becomes fully Enlightened. He was then known as Gautama Buddha.

Questions after the story:

1. What tree did he sit under on the full moon day of Visakha, after he ate the milk-rice?
2. What did he concentrate on?
3. What did he remember in the first part of the night?
4. What did he see in the second part of the night?
5. What did he suddenly know in the third part of the night?
6. What is a Buddha?

Quotation of Buddha about the moral of the story:

Ārogya paramā lābhā, santuṭṭhi paramaṃ dhanam, vissāsaparamā ñatī, nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ.”

“Health is the greatest gift and contentment is the greatest wealth. A trustworthy person is the best kinsman, and Nirvana is the highest bliss.”

Dhammapada 204 (15:8)

Application of the moral(s) in the story to our daily lives:

How would you feel if you did not have any more dukkha, not even the tiniest bit, at all, ever? You would have the most extreme peace and happiness, or “the highest bliss,” which is Nirvana. What causes dukkha? Wanting something and not getting it, or not getting exactly what we want, enough of what we want, when we want it. We want to protect and keep what we like, so we are upset if we lose it. We want to avoid or get rid of discomfort, things, places or people we don’t like. All these “wants” make us feel anxious, agitated or unhappy. So dukkha is caused by wanting, also called craving (tanha). The Buddha says “contentment is the greatest wealth.” Contentment means being happy with what we have, not wanting anything. Contentment is the “greatest wealth” because we are most peaceful and happy (our mind is wealthy) when we aren’t wanting anything. So, if we don’t ever have any craving at all, then we don’t ever have any dukkha, and that means we have attained Nirvana. The Second and Third Noble Truths teach us that the cause of dukkha (suffering) is craving (tanha) and the end of dukkha is Nirvana. Nirvana is not like happiness that we experience, because we know that after the fun comes more dukkha - fun and enjoyment doesn’t last very long. With Nirvana, there is no worry about the extreme happiness stopping, decreasing or becoming boring. There is no disappointment, worry or fear about anything. Nirvana is also the end of ignorance, because someone who has attained Nirvana knows the truth of everything, so his mind is “enlightened” with all wisdom, and we say he has attained “Enlightenment.” A person who has attained Nirvana will not be born again after his body passes away, so he will not have to suffer birth, sickness, old age and death ever again.

What does this mean for young people? Should we just forget about Nirvana because we are not monks and we are not even adults yet? No! A good Buddhist should always remember the goal, Nirvana, just like a person driving should remember where he is going, so he doesn’t get lost and have to suffer more. And, a Buddhist must know how to reach the goal, that is, by practicing the Eight-Fold Path, just like the driver must know how to get where he is going, by a map or

instructions how to get there. So the Eight-Fold Path is the path, the way (marga) or the map, to get to Nirvana. This is the Fourth Noble Truth.

But, do we follow the Eight-Fold Path only so we can eventually get to Nirvana in the distant future? No, that is not the only reason. We also follow the Eight-Fold Path so we can be happier right now, in this life. How do we feel when we do helpful actions, when we don't harm others, when we speak kindly and honestly, when we think compassionate thoughts toward others, and when we develop good habits? We become happier, more confident, and more peaceful. So we make our future lives better. Siddhartha saw this while he sat under the Bodhi Tree; he saw that the good deeds of a person resulted in a better future birth - with a nice healthy body, intelligent mind, and pleasant things happening in their lives.

Activities to reinforce the lesson (Choose A or B as appropriate):

A. Students can memorize the elements of the Eight-Fold Path with the following method:

1. Point to your eyes and say "Right View" (or "Samma Ditthi")
2. Put the palm of your right hand on your heart and say "Right Intention" ("Right Thought" or "Samma Sankappa").
3. Point to your mouth and say "Right Speech" (or "Samma Vacha").
4. Raise your hands in front of you and move your fingers in and out and say "Right Action" (or "Samma Kammanta").
5. Lower one of your hands on your side and pretend you are carrying a briefcase, and say "Right Occupation" (or Samma Ajiva").
6. Move both hands over your head and lower them all the way down and say "Right Effort" [whole mind and body effort] (or "Samma Vayama").
7. Point to your head and say "Right Mindfulness" (or "Samma Sati").
8. Place your hands in front of you with palms up and say "Right Concentration" (or "Samma Samadhi").

The teacher can demonstrate first a few times, then the teacher does each action and asks students to say the corresponding words until they all say it correctly. Then the teacher asks students to volunteer to demonstrate, one at a time, until each student demonstrates the process.¹

B. Write the Four Noble Truths neatly on paper, and decorate the paper. Students may write next to each Noble Truth what it means in their own words.

Closing chant: Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā
May all beings have happy minds!

¹ This technique of teaching children to memorize the Eight-Fold Path was presented by Mr. Souksomboun Sayasithsena of Wat Lao Buddhavong of Washington, D.C.