

From *In the Buddha's Words* by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Ch. IV, 1: Upholding the Dhamma in Society

(1) *The King of the Dhamma*

(2) *Worshipping the Six Direction*

1. Introduction to the Selection

by Bhikkhu Bodhi

2. Main Translation of the Selected Suttas

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1. Introduction (to the Selection, Ch IV, 1).

By Bhikkhu Bodhi

Is it the case, as some scholars hold, that the Buddha's original message was exclusively one of world-transcending liberation, with little relevance for people stuck in the routines of worldly life? Did the ancient Buddhists believe that it was only in the monastery that the real practice of the Dhamma began and that only those who left the world were considered proper receptacles of the teaching? Did the Buddha's teachings for the laity have no more than a token significance? Were they mainly injunctions to acquire merit by offering material support to the monastic order and its members so that they could become monks and (preferably monks) in future lives and then get down to the real practice?

At certain periods, in almost all traditions, Buddhists have lent support to the assumptions that underlie these questions. They have spurned concern with the present life and dismissed the world as a valley of tears, a deceptive illusion, convinced that the sign of spiritual maturity is an exclusive focus on emancipation from the round of birth and death. Monks have sometimes displayed little interest in showing those still stuck in the world how to use the wisdom of the Dhamma to deal with the problems of ordinary life. Householders in turn have seen little hope of spiritual progress in their own chosen mode of life and have thus resigned themselves merely to gaining merit by offering material support to the monks.

While the Nikayas reveal the crown of the Buddha's teachings to lie in the path to final release from suffering, it would be a mistake to reduce the teachings, so diverse in the original sources, to their transcendent pinnacle. We must again recall the statement that a Buddha arises "for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude ... out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans" (p. 50). The function of a Buddha is to discover, realize, and proclaim the Dhamma in its full range and depth, and this involves a comprehensive [understanding of the varied applications of the Dhamma in all its multiple dimensions. A Buddha not]108] only penetrates to the unconditioned state of perfect *bliss* that lies beyond *samsāra*, outside the pale of birth, aging, and death; he not only proclaims the path to full enlightenment and final liberation; but he also illuminates the many ways the Dhamma applies to the complex conditions of human life for people still immersed in the world.

The Dhamma, in its broadest sense, is the immanent, invariable order of the universe in which truth, lawful regularity, and virtue are inextricably merged. This cosmic Dhamma is reflected in the human mind as the aspiration for truth, spiritual beauty, and goodness; it is expressed in human conduct as wholesome bodily, verbal, and mental action. The Dhamma has institutional embodiments as well as expressions in the lives of individuals who look upon it as their source of guidance in the proper conduct of life. These embodiments are both secular and spiritual. Buddhist tradition sees the responsibility for upholding the Dhamma in the secular domain as falling to the legendary wheel-turning monarch (*rājā cakkavatti*). The wheel-turning monarch is the benevolent ruler who governs his kingdom in accordance with the highest ethical norms (*dhammiko dhammarājā*) and thereby peacefully unites the world under a reign of universal justice and prosperity. As Text IV,1(1) shows, within the spiritual domain, the Buddha is the counterpart of the wheel-turning monarch. Like the latter, the Buddha relies on the Dhamma and reveres the Dhamma, but whereas the wheel-turning monarch relies upon the Dhamma as principle of righteousness to rule his kingdom, the Buddha relies upon the Dhamma as ethical and spiritual norm to teach and transform human beings and guide them toward proper conduct of body, speech, and mind. Neither the wheel-turning monarch nor the Buddha creates the Dhamma they uphold, yet neither can perform their respective functions without it; for the Dhamma is the objective, impersonal, everexistent principle of order that serves as the source and standard for their respective policies and promulgations.

As the king of the Dhamma, the Buddha takes up the task of promoting the true good, welfare, and

happiness of the world. He does so by teaching the people of the world how to live in accordance with the Dhamma and behave in such a way that they can attain realization of the same liberating Dhamma that he realized through his enlightenment. The Pali commentaries demonstrate the broad scope of the Dhamma by distinguishing three types of benefit that the Buddha's [109] teaching is intended to promote, graded hierarchically according to their relative merit:

1. welfare and happiness directly visible in this present life (*diṭṭhadhamma-hitasukha*), attained by fulfilling one's moral commitments and social responsibilities;
2. welfare and happiness pertaining to the next life (*samparāyikahitasukha*), attained by engaging in meritorious deeds;
3. the ultimate good or supreme goal (*paramattha*), Nibbana, final release from the cycle of rebirths, attained by developing the Noble Eightfold Path.

While many Western writers on Early Buddhism have focused on this last aspect as almost exclusively representing the Buddha's original teaching, a balanced presentation should give consideration to all three aspects. Therefore, in this chapter and those to follow, we will be exploring texts from the Nikayas that illustrate each of these three facets of the Dhamma.

The present chapter includes a variety of texts on the Buddha's teachings that pertain to the happiness directly visible in this present life. The most comprehensive Nikaya text in this genre is the Sigālaka Sutta (DN 31, also known as the Siṅgalovāda Sutta), sometimes called "The Layperson's Code of Discipline." The heart of this sutta is the section on "worshipping the six directions" – **Text IV,1(2)** – in which the Buddha freely reinterprets an ancient Indian ritual, infusing it with a new ethical meaning. The practice of "worshipping the six directions," as explained by the Buddha, presupposes that society is sustained by a network of interlocking relationships that bring coherence to the social order when its members fulfill their reciprocal duties and responsibilities in a spirit of kindness, sympathy, and good will. The six basic social relationships that the Buddha draws upon to fill out his metaphor are: parents and children, teacher and pupils, husband and wife, friend and friend, employer and workers, lay follower and religious guides. Each is considered one of the six directions in relation to its counterpart. For a young man like Sigālaka, his parents are the east, his teachers the south, his wife and children the west, his friends the north, his workers the nadir, and religious guides the zenith. With his customary sense of systematic concision, the Buddha ascribes to each member of each order five obligations with respect to his or her counterpart; when each [110] member fulfills these obligations, the corresponding "direction" comes to be "at peace and free from fear." Thus, for Early Buddhism, the social stability and security necessary for human happiness and fulfillment are achieved, not through aggressive and potentially disruptive demands for "rights" posed by competing groups, but by the renunciation of self-interest and the development of a sincere, large-hearted concern for the welfare of others and the good of the greater whole.

2. Main Translation of Selected Texts

by Bhikkhu Bodhi

(1) *The King of the Dhamma*

1. The Blessed One said: "Monks, even a wheel-turning monarch, a just and righteous king, does not govern his realm without a co-regent."

When he had spoken, a certain monk addressed the Blessed One thus: "But who, venerable sir, is the co-regent of the wheel-turning monarch, the just and righteous king?"

"It is the Dhamma, the law of righteousness, O monk," replied the Blessed One.¹

"In this case, the wheel-turning monarch, the just and righteous king, relying on the Dhamma, honoring

1. As the standard for the wheel-turning monarch, Dhamma is not the Buddha's teaching but the moral law of justice and righteousness on the basis of which the righteous king, rules his country and gains sovereignty over the world. In Indian iconography, the wheel (cakka) is the symbol of sovereignty in both the temporal and spiritual spheres. The world ruler assures kingship when the mystical "wheel treasure" (cakkaratana) appears in him (see Text IV, 6 (5)); the wheel treasure persists as the symbol of his rule. Analogously, the Buddha sets in motion the wheel of the Dhamma, which cannot be turned back by anyone in the world.

the Dhamma, esteemed and respecting it, with the Dhamma as his standard, banner, and sovereign, provides lawful protection, shelter, and safety for his own dependents. He provides lawful protection, shelter, and safety for the khattiyas attending on him; for his army, for the brahmins and householders, for the inhabitants of town and countryside, for ascetics and brahmins, for the beasts and birds.

“A wheel-turning monarch, a just and righteous king, who thus provides lawful protection, shelter, and safety for all, is the one who rules by Dhamma only. And that rule cannot be overthrown by any hostile human being.

“Even so, O monk, the Tathagata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One, the just and righteous king of the Dhamma, relying on the Dhamma, honoring the Dhamma, esteeming and respecting it, with the Dhamma as his standard, banner, and sovereign, provides lawful protection, shelter, and safety in regard to action by body, speech, and mind. [He teaches thus:] ‘Such bodily action should be undertaken and such should not be undertaken. Such verbal action should be undertaken and such should not be undertaken. Such mental action should be undertaken and such should not be undertaken.’

“The Tathagata, the Arahant, the Fully Enlightened One, the just and righteous king of the Dhamma, who thus provides lawful protection, Shelter, and safety in regard to action by body, speech, and mind, is the one who turns the incomparable wheel of the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma only. And that wheel of the Dhamma cannot be turned back by any ascetic or brahmin, by any deva or Mara or Brahmā or by anyone in the world.”

(AN 3:14)

(2) Worshipping the Six Directions

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rajagaha, at the Bamboo Grove, in the Squirrels’ Sanctuary. Then Sigālaka the householder’s son, having got up early and gone out of Rajagaha, was paying homage, with wet clothes and hair and with joined palms, to the different directions: to the east, the south, the west, the north, the nadir, and the zenith.

2. And the Blessed One, having risen early and dressed, took his robe and bowl and went to Rajagaha for alms. And seeing Sigālaka paying homage to the different directions, he said: “Householder’s son, why have you got up early to pay homage to the different directions?” “Venerable sir, my father, when he was dying, told me to do so. And so, out of respect for my father’s words, which I, revere, honor, and hold sacred, I have got up early to pay homage in this way to the six directions.”

“But, householder’s son, that is not the right way to pay homage to the six directions according to the Noble One’s discipline.”

“Well, venerable sir, how should one pay homage to the six directions according to the Noble One’s discipline? It would be good if the Blessed One would teach me the proper way to pay homage to the six directions according to the Noble One’s discipline.”

“Then listen and attend carefully, householder’s son, I will speak.” “Yes, venerable sir,” Sigālaka said. The Blessed One said this: ...

27. “And how, householder’s son, does the noble disciple protect the six directions? These six things are to be regarded as the six directions. The east denotes mother and father. The south denotes teachers. The west denotes wife and children. The north denotes friends and companions. The nadir denotes servants, workers and helpers. The zenith denotes ascetics and brahmins.

28. There are five ways in which a son should minister to his mother father as the eastern direction. [He should think:] ‘Having been supported by them, I will support them. I will perform their duties for them. I will keep up the family tradition. I will be worthy of my heritage. After my parents’ deaths I will distribute gifts on their behalf.’ And there are five ways in which the parents, so ministered to by their as the eastern direction, will reciprocate: they will restrain him from evil, support him in doing good, teach him some skill, find him a suitable wife, and, in due time, hand over his inheritance to him. In this way the eastern direction is covered, making it at peace and free from fear.

29. “There are five ways in which pupils should minister to their teachers as the southern direction: by rising to greet them, by waiting on them, by being attentive, by serving them, by mastering the skills they teach. And there are five ways in which their teachers, thus ministered to by their pupils as the southern direction, will reciprocate: they will give thorough instruction, make sure they have grasped what they should have duly grasped, give them a thorough grounding in all skills, recommend them to their friends and colleagues, and provide them with security in all directions. In this way the southern direction is covered, making it at peace and free from fear.

30. “There are five ways in which a husband should minister to his wife as the western direction: by honoring her, by not disparaging her, by not being unfaithful to her, by giving authority to her, by providing her with adornments. And there are five ways in which a wife, thus ministered to by her husband as the western direction, will

reciprocate: by properly organizing her work, by being kind to the servants, by not being unfaithful, by protecting stores, and by being skillful and intelligent in all she has to do. In this way the western direction is covered, making it at peace and free from fear.

31. “There are five ways in which a man should minister to his friends and companions as the northern direction: by gifts, by kindly words, by looking after their welfare, by treating them like himself, and by keeping his word. And there are five ways in which friends and companions, thus ministered to by a man as the northern direction, will reciprocate: by looking after him when he is inattentive, by looking after his property when he is inattentive, by being a refuge when he is afraid, by not deserting him when he is in trouble, and by showing concern for his children. In this way the northern direction is covered, making it at peace and free from fear.

32. “There are five ways in which a master should minister to his servants and workers as the nadir: by arranging their work according to their strength, by supplying them with food and wages, by looking after them when they are ill, by sharing special delicacies with them, and by letting them off work at the right time. And there are five ways in which servants and workers, thus ministered to by their master as the nadir, will reciprocate: they will get up before him, go to bed after him, take only what they are given, do their work properly, and be bearers of his praise and good repute. In this way the nadir is covered, making it at peace and free from fear.

33. “There are five ways in which a man should minister to ascetics and brahmins as the zenith: by kindness in bodily deed, speech, and thought, by keeping open house for them, and by supplying their bodily needs. And the ascetics and brahmins, thus ministered to by him as the zenith, will reciprocate in five ways: they will restrain him from evil, encourage him to do good, be benevolently compassionate toward him, teach him what he has not heard, and point out to him the way to heaven. In this way the zenith is covered, making it at peace and free from fear.”

(from DN 31: Sigālaka Sutta; III 180-81, 187-91)