

Will The Buddha's Real Dhamma Please Stand Up!

by Venerable Dhammavuddho Mahathera

It is more than two thousand five hundred years since the Buddha's parinibbana (passing on) and there is a proliferation of teachings claiming to be the Buddha's teaching (Dhamma). That being so, many people are confused and led astray. All this was foreseen by the Buddha.

Counterfeit Dhamma

In the Vinaya (Monastic Discipline) books and Anguttara Nikaya Sutta 8.51, the Buddha said the True Dhamma will last five hundred years. This means it will be pure and unadulterated during this period only.

In Samyutta Nikaya Sutta 16.13 the Buddha warned that counterfeit Dhamma will arise in the world, just like counterfeit gold, causing the True Dhamma to disappear. Thus it is imperative that we distinguish clearly the true from the counterfeit, in order to preserve the True Dhamma.

True Dhamma

When the Buddha was about to enter parinibbana he instructed the monks "... What I have taught and explained to you as Dhamma Vinaya, that will be your Teacher after I am gone. " (Digha Nikaya Sutta 16).

The Vinaya is for monastics only (bhikkhus and bhikkhunis) and all schools of Buddhism have similar Vinaya.

So what is the Dhamma of the Buddha? In Anguttara Nikaya Sutta 4.180 the Buddha said that if any monk claims that “This is Dhamma, this is Vinaya, this is the Master’s teaching”, his words should neither be accepted nor rejected. Instead, they should be compared to the Suttas (discourses) and Vinaya of the Buddha. Only when they agree with Suttas and Vinaya can they be said to be the teaching of the Buddha. If not, they should be rejected.

From the above we see clearly that the Dhamma refers only to the discourses (Suttas) of the Buddha, not of any other Teacher. Hence it is that we take refuge only with the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. The Buddha foresaw this danger when he proclaimed in Anguttara Nikaya Sutta 5.88 that a monk who has long gone forth, well known, famous, with a large following of laypersons and monastics, learned in the scriptures, even such a monk can have wrong views. Thus in Digha Nikaya Sutta 16, the Buddha said “Be a lamp unto yourselves, be a refuge unto yourselves, with no other refuge; take the Dhamma as your lamp, take the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge”. Hence the Buddha advises us to depend on our own efforts and on the teaching of the Buddha only.

In Samyutta Nikaya Sutta 20.7, the Buddha also predicted that in the future the monks will not listen to, study, or master, the discourses of the Buddha. Instead they prefer to listen to, study, and master the discourses of disciples (i.e. later monks), thus causing the disappearance of the Buddha’s Dhamma. This is a clear advice from the Buddha that we should only listen to, study, and master the Suttas, not any other books/teachings.

Suttas

To know the real discourses of the Buddha, we have to know what were the discourses of the Buddha during the five hundred years period after the Buddha's parinibbana. Archeological excavations, new discoveries, research, etc. now confirm that during the time of Emperor Asoka, i.e. about two hundred and fifty years after the Buddha's parinibbana, the Dhamma consisted only of five collections (Nikaya) of the Buddha's discourses. These are:-

- (i) Digha Nikaya – long discourses.
- (ii) Majjhima Nikaya – middle length discourses.
- (iii) Samyutta Nikaya – short discourses grouped according to subject/topic.
- (iv) Anguttara Nikaya – short discourses arranged according to numerical content.
- (v) Khuddaka Nikaya – minor miscellaneous collection of discourses.

The complete Pali Nikayas have been preserved until the present-see Prof. Akira Hirakawa's book "A History of Indian Buddhism" page 73. However the Khuddaka Nikaya has grown over the years to become a major rather than minor collection. Only about six books now are consistent with the earlier four Nikayas (see the author's booklet "Liberation").

These then are the most authentic collections of the Buddha's teaching we have available now.

Right View

The Buddha said in Majjhima Nikaya Sutta 117 (Mahacattarisaka Sutta) that in practicing the Noble Eightfold Path, one must attain Right View first. Right View is the first factor, which will lead one to the second, then third, etc. In other words, without Right View one has not entered on the Path. Hence attaining Right View is extremely important. Attaining Right View is synonymous with attaining Stream Entry (First Path/Magga) as it means one has attained the vision of the Dhamma (dhammacakkhu).

According to Majjhima Nikaya Sutta 43 there are two conditions for the arising of Right View: the voice of another (teaching us the Dhamma), and thorough attention. Thus listening to the Dhamma is always stressed by the Buddha, and he called his followers Savaka (listeners). This same sutta says that Right View must be assisted by five factors in order to attain liberation or Arahant hood: moral conduct, listening to Dhamma, discussion of Dhamma, calming the mind, contemplation. This shows the importance of listening to Dhamma from the first step in practicing the Noble Eightfold Path until the very last step when liberation is attained.

Conclusion

It is so sad that many so called Buddhists (“listeners”), don’t listen to (or study) the Buddha’s discourses. They do not realize how difficult it is to meet the Dhamma of a Samma Sambuddha. In Digha Nikaya Sutta 14 the Buddha mentioned only six Samma Sambuddha in ninety-one world cycles (kappa) past, so rare is it to find a Buddha willing to teach! It is due to the proliferation of writings after five hundred years from the Buddha’s parinibbana, all professing to be the Buddha’s teaching, that people are confused.

In Digha Nikaya Sutta 29, the Buddha said he has taught the holy life which is perfect, complete, and utterly pure. If someone were to deduct or add anything to it, then he does not see it. This means that we should listen to or study only the original Dhamma of the Buddha embodied in the five Nikayas as it is complete. It also means that those who wrote the many counterfeit Dhamma do not see the Buddha’s Dhamma, i.e. they do not possess Right View.

This can be seen very clearly, for example in the interpretation of the Bodhisatta (or Bodhisattva) Path, i.e. the path to Buddhahood. Later teachings say that one needs to cultivate the six, or later ten, paramis (perfections of character). The actual Bodhisatta Path is stated very clearly by the Buddha in Majjhima Nikaya Sutta 27 (Culahatthipadopama Sutta). This the Buddha calls “the footprints of the Tathagata (Buddha)”, and consists of seven steps (1) First Jhana (2) Second Jhana (3) Third Jhana (4) Fourth Jhana (5) Recollection of Past Lives (6) Seeing the passing away and rebirth of beings with the Divine Eye (7) Destruction of the asavas (uncontrolled mental outflows) by contemplation of the Four Noble (Ariyan) Truths. So deceptive are the later teachings!