

The Importance of Listening to the Dhamma
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(Translated and summarized by Radhika Abeysekera)

Good friends, it is important that that you listen to this Dhamma talk with full confidence in the Buddha Dhamma and attention, so that you can understand and use this knowledge to realise your spiritual goals. Why is it important that you should listen so carefully to this Dhamma talk? It is important because the Buddha dispensed this Dhamma with immense compassion to all beings, because he saw how long this cycle of life, death and re becoming (*samsara*) is, and how much suffering beings have endured in this *samsaric* journey. It is also important because the Buddha realized the Law of Cause and Effect and Dependent Origination (*hethu pala Dhamma* and the *Paticca Samuppada*) which is the knowledge required to end this *samsaric* journey.

Our lives are like those of fish that live in a fish tank. For them the whole world is this fish tank. Yet, we know that the world is much larger than this fish tank. However, if we could talk to the fish and tell them how large the world really is, the fish will not believe us. We can tell them that the world is not just this tank, that it is very big and tell them about the various countries, buildings, roads and trees but the fish will not believe us, they will say that we are lying. Their world is the fish tank because that is all that they can experience.

Our life is also like that of the fish. We live in a fish tank that we call the world. What we believe is based on what we see and experience. We believe what our eyes can see, what are ears can hear, what our tongue can taste, what our body can touch, what our nose can smell and what our mind can comprehend. The Buddha said this *samsara* is long and steeped in suffering because he could see outside this tank we call the world. The reason the Buddha said that *samsara* is very long is because one cannot see the beginning of beings shrouded in ignorance, suffering with grief and pain whilst traversing this *samsaric* journey.

The Buddha used examples to show us the immense suffering and length of this *samsaric* journey of the past. The Buddha said that the tears that we have shed at the death of our mothers that have transformed their blood to milk and nursed us, our fathers who with effort and sweat have provided for us and our affectionate children and siblings who have died young are more than the waters of the great oceans. The Buddha said that we have taken animal birth and shed more blood in death than the waters of the great oceans. In fact we have taken animal birth more times than we have taken human birth.

The amounts of times we have suffered through birth without sight, birth without hands and feet, accidental death by falling, burning, and serious illness are all veiled from our view. We cannot see our past suffering in *samsara*. That is why, like the fish, we believe that *samsara* is limited to just what we have experienced in this life.

The Buddha said that except for those who have seen the Law of Cause and Effect, and

Dependent Origination that few others will believe this truth. People cannot see *samsara* so they say that this is an exaggeration. The Buddha is not a person who will tell a lie even to place people on the right path. It is out of compassion that the Buddha dispensed the Dhamma to deliver us from suffering. He looked outside the tank and saw the suffering we had each experienced in *samsara*. We do not believe just as the fish because we cannot see. If like the fish, we limit our belief to our six senses, then we will never understand. We have to realize that we have all suffered long in *samsara*. And we also have to understand that the future that we will face and suffer in *samsara*, like the past, is also endless.

The Buddha said that this Dhamma is for his disciples that have wisdom. It is not for those shrouded in ignorance. We do not believe because we cannot, as yet, see for ourselves. But this does not mean that what the Buddha says is not true. The Buddha said that he could tell us when this land that we see as the world will end. He could tell us when the waters we see as the great oceans will dry up and cease to be. He could also tell us when this Himalayan Mountains will eventually be a flat land. But he could not tell us for how long we have traversed shrouded in ignorance, in this *samsaric* journey. This *samsaric* journey is that long and that strong is our ignorance.

How then will we able to end this *samsaric* journey? We can end this journey only during the period known as a Buddha era. This is when we have a Buddha who has realized this truth and has dispensed this knowledge with compassion for the benefit of all beings, and when we are born as human beings and practice his teachings. To practice, we first have to understand the teachings. To understand the teachings we first have to hear them.

We are now in such a Buddha era. We still have the Buddha Dhamma and due to past meritorious deeds we have human birth. Now all we need is the confidence (*sraddha*) and effort (*viriya*) to practice. Our *Bodhisatta* completed the ten perfections (*paramita*) over a period of four world cycles and one infinite period to be a Supreme Buddha. As you know, our *Bodhisatta*, as an ascetic named Sumedha, received the definite proclamation at the time of the Dipankara Buddha. At that time, if he so wished he could have attained the bliss of *Nibbana* in that life. The *Bodhisatta*, with deep compassion, suppressed and gave up his opportunity for liberation for the benefit of mankind and celestial beings. He then sacrificed his eyes, his limbs his life and ultimately his wife and children over countless births to complete the perfections. No other being in this world has sacrificed so much and undergone so much suffering for the benefit of humanity and celestial beings. Even with such compassion and great effort, it took our Buddha another six years during his final birth to realise the truth¹. His birth is a blessing to the world. We are indeed fortunate to have this opportunity. As such, we must listen attentively. We will then understand what we need to do to cross this great ocean of *samsara*.

However, the Buddha does not want us to follow his teachings with blind faith and devotion. We must not follow his teachings just because the Buddha said we should. In the *Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta*, he asked his monks if they believed what he said because

¹ Read “Practicing the Dhamma with a view to Nibbana” by Radhika Abeysekera to understand how long it takes and the great effort required for one to become a Buddha.

he said so. They said “no”, that they believed him because they can see the truth of his teachings. You do not have to practice the Dhamma because the Buddha said “thus” or the venerable monks said “thus”. You must understand for yourself the consequences of doing the unskillful and the consequences of refraining from the unskillful. Similarly you must understand for yourself the consequences of doing the skillful and not doing the skillful. You must also understand why you need to purify your mind and the consequences of not purifying the mind.

*Sadhu sadhu sadhu
May all being be well and happy*

*Radhika Abeysekera
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