SN 56.11 — Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth

English translation by Piyadassi Thera.

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Text

Thus have I heard:

On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Deer Park at Isipatana (the Resort of Seers) near Varanasi (Benares). Then he addressed the group of five monks (bhikkhus):

"Monks, these two extremes ought not to be practiced by one who has gone forth from the household life. (What are the two?) There is addiction to indulgence of sense-pleasures, which is low, coarse, the way of ordinary people, unworthy, and unprofitable; and there is addiction to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy, and unprofitable.

"Avoiding both these extremes, the Tathagata (The Perfect One)[1] has realized the Middle Path; it gives vision, gives knowledge, and leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment and to Nibbana. And what is that Middle Path realized by the Tathagata...? It is the Noble

Eightfold path, and nothing else, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This is the Middle Path realized by the Tathagata which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, and to Nibbana.

"The Noble Truth of Suffering (dukkha), monks, is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, association with the unpleasant is suffering, dissociation from the pleasant is suffering, not to receive what one desires is suffering — in brief the five aggregates subject to grasping are suffering.

"The Noble Truth of the Origin (cause) of Suffering is this: It is this craving (thirst) which produces re-becoming (rebirth) accompanied by passionate greed, and finding fresh delight now here, and now there, namely craving for sense pleasure, craving for existence and craving for non-existence (self-annihilation).

"The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering is this: It is the complete cessation of that very craving, giving it up, relinquishing it, liberating oneself from it, and detaching oneself from it.

"The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering is this: It is the Noble Eightfold Path, and nothing else, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.[2]

"'This is the Noble Truth of Suffering': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This suffering, as a noble truth, should be fully realized': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This suffering, as a noble truth has been fully realized': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before.

"'This is the Noble Truth of the Origin (cause) of Suffering': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Origin of Suffering as a noble truth should be eradicated': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Origin of suffering as a noble truth has been eradicated': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before.

"'This is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, should be realized': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth has been realized': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before.

"'This is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Path leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, should be developed': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before. 'This Path leading to the cessation of suffering, as a noble truth has been developed': such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before.

"As long as my knowledge of seeing things as they really are, was not quite clear in these three aspects, in these twelve ways, concerning the Four Noble Truths,[3] I did not claim to have realized the matchless, supreme Enlightenment, in this world with its gods, with its Maras and Brahmas, in this generation with its recluses and brahmanas, with its Devas and humans. But when my knowledge of seeing things as they really are was quite clear in these three aspects, in these twelve ways, concerning the Four Noble Truths, then I claimed to have realized the matchless, supreme Enlightenment in this world with its gods, with its Maras and Brahmas, in this generation with its recluses and brahmanas, with its Devas and humans. And a vision of insight arose in me thus: 'Unshakable is the deliverance of my heart. This is the last birth. Now there is no more re-becoming (rebirth).'"

This the Blessed One said. The group of five monks was glad, and they rejoiced at the words of the Blessed One.

When this discourse was thus expounded there arose in the Venerable Kondañña the passion-free, stainless vision of Truth (dhamma-cakkhu; in other words, he attained sotapatti, the first stage of sanctity, and realized: "Whatever has the nature of arising, has the nature of ceasing."

Now when the Blessed One set in motion the Wheel of Truth, the Bhummattha devas (the earth deities) proclaimed: "The Matchless Wheel of Truth that cannot be set in motion by recluse, brahmana, deva, Mara, Brahma, or any one in the world, is set in motion by the Blessed One in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Varanasi."

Hearing these words of the earth deities, all the Catummaharajika devas proclaimed: "The Matchless Wheel of Truth that cannot be set in motion by recluse, brahmana, deva, Mara, Brahma, or any one in the world, is set in motion by the Blessed One in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Varanasi." These words were heard in the upper deva realms, and from Catummaharajika it was proclaimed in Tavatimsa... Yama... Tusita... Nimmanarati... Paranimmita-vasavatti... and the Brahmas of Brahma Parisajja... Brahma Purohita... Maha Brahma... Parittabha... Appamanabha... Abhassara... Parittasubha... Appamana subha... Subhakinna... Vehapphala... Aviha... Atappa... Sudassa... Sudassi... and in Akanittha: "The Matchless Wheel of Truth that cannot be set in motion by recluse, brahmana, deva, Mara, Brahma, or any one in the world, is set in motion by the Blessed One in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Varanasi."

Thus at that very moment, at that instant, the cry (that the Wheel of Truth is set in motion) spread as far as Brahma realm, the system of ten thousand worlds trembled and quaked and shook. A boundless sublime radiance surpassing the effulgence (power) of devas appeared in the world.

Then the Blessed One uttered this paean of joy: "Verily Kondañña has realized; verily Kondañña has realized (the Four Noble Truths)." Thus it was that the Venerable Kondañña received the name, "Añña Knondañña' — Kondañña who realizes."

Notes

1.

The Perfect One, one attained to Truth. The Buddha used it when referring to himself. For details, see The Buddha's Ancient Path, Piyadassi Thera, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, p 17, n.4.

2.

For a very comprehensive account of the Four Noble Truths read The Buddha's Ancient Path, Piyadassi Thera, Buddhist Publication Society. Kandy, Sri Lanka (Ceylon).

3.

As the previous paragraphs indicate, there are three aspects of knowledge with regard to each of the Four Noble Truths: 1. The knowledge that it is the Truth (sacca-ñana). 2. The knowledge that a certain function with regard to this Truth should be performed (kicca-ñana). 3. The knowledge that the function with regard to this Truth has been performed (kata-ñana). The twelve ways or modes are obtained by applying these three aspects to each of the Four Noble Truths.