

Dhammapada Gatha & Stories: Lesson 1

Dhammapada is one of the best known books. It is a collection of the teachings of the Buddha expressed in clear verses. These verses were selected from various discourses given by the Buddha in the course of forty-five years of his teaching. Each verse contains a truth (dhamma) and piece of advice.

1. Manopubbangama dhamma
manosettha manomaya
manasa ce padutthena²
bhasati va karoti va
tato nam dukkhamanveti
cakkamva vahato padam

All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner; they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with an evil mind, 'dukkha' follows him just as the wheel follows the hoof print of the ox that draws the cart.

The Story of Thera Cakkhupala

On one occasion, Thera Cakkhupala came to pay homage to the Buddha at the Jetavana monastery. One night, while pacing up and down in meditation, the monk accidentally stepped on some insects. In the morning, some bhikkhus visiting the monk found the dead insects. They thought bad of the thera and reported the matter to the Buddha. The Buddha asked them whether they had seen the thera killing the insects. When they answered in the negative, the Buddha said, "Just as you had not seen him killing, so also he had not seen those living insects. Besides, as the monk had already attained arahatship he could have no intention of killing and so was quite innocent." On being asked why Cakkhupala was blind although he was an arahat, the Buddha told the following story:

Cakkhupala was a physician in one of his past existences. Once, he had deliberately made a woman patient blind. That woman had promised him to become his slave, together with her children, if her eyes were completely cured. Fearing that she and her children would have to become slaves, she lied to the physician. She told him that her eyes were getting worse when, in fact, they were perfectly cured. The physician knew she was deceiving him, so in revenge, he gave her another ointment, which made her totally blind. As a result of this evil deed the physician lost his eyesight many times in his later existences

2. Manopubbangama dhamma
manosettha manomaya
manasa ce pasannena
bhasati va karoti va
tato nam sukha manveti
chayava anapayini.

All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner; they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness (sukha) follows him like a shadow that never leaves him.

The Story of Matthakundali

Matthakundali was a young brahmin, whose father, Adinnapubbaka, was very stingy and never gave anything in charity. Even the gold ornaments for his only son were made by himself to save payment for workmanship. When his son fell ill, no physician was consulted, until it was too late. When he realized that his son was dying, he had the youth carried outside on to the verandah, so that people coming to his house would not see his possessions.

On that morning, the Buddha was arising early from his deep meditation of compassion saw, in his Net of Knowledge, Matthakundali lying on the verandah. So when entering Savatthi for alms-food with his disciples, the Buddha stood near the door of the brahmin Adinnapubbaka. The Buddha sent forth a ray of light to attract the attention of the youth, who was facing the interior of the house. The youth saw the Buddha; and as he was very weak he could only profess his faith mentally. But that was enough. When he passed away with his heart in devotion to the Buddha he was reborn in the heavenly world.

From his heavenly world the young Matthakundali, seeing his father mourning over him at the cemetery, appeared to the old man in the likeness of his old self. He told his father about his rebirth in the heavenly world and also urged him to approach and invite the Buddha to a meal. At the house of Adinnapubbaka the question of whether one could or could not be reborn in a heavenly world simply by mentally professing profound faith in the Buddha, without giving in charity or observing the moral precepts, was brought up. So the Buddha willed that Matthakundali should appear in person; Matthakundali soon appeared fully decked with ornaments and told them about his rebirth in the heaven. Then only, the audience became convinced that the son of the brahmin Adinnapubbaka by simply devoting his mind to the Buddha had attained much glory.

3. *Na hi verena verani
sammantidha kudacanam
averena ca sammanti
esa dhammo sanantano.*

Hatred is, indeed, never can be ended by hatred in this world. It can be ended only by loving-kindness. This is an ancient law.

The Story of Kalayakkhini

Once there lived a householder, whose wife was unable to have children, later he took another wife. The bitter quarrel started when the elder wife poisoned the other wife, who eventually died in child birth. In later existences the two were reborn as a hen and a cat; a doe and a leopardess; and finally as the daughter of a nobleman in Savatthi and monsters named Kali. The monsters (Kalayakkhini) was in hot pursuit of the lady with the baby, when the latter learned that the Buddha was nearby, giving a religious discourse at the Jetavana monastery. She fled to him and placed her son at his feet for protection. The monsters were stopped at the door by the guardian spirit of the monastery and was refused admission. She was later called in and both the lady and the monsters were reprimanded by the Buddha. The Buddha told them about their past disputes as rival wives of a common husband, as a cat

and a hen, and as a doe and a leopardess. They were made to see that hatred could only cause more hatred, and that it could only cease through friendship, understanding and goodwill.

4. *Idha modati pecca modati
katapunno ubhayattha modati
so modati so pamodati
disva kammavisuddhimattano*

Here he rejoices, hereafter he rejoices; one who performed meritorious deeds rejoices in both existences. He rejoices and greatly rejoices when he sees the purity of his own deeds..

The Story of Dhammika Upasaka

Once there lived in Savatthi, a lay disciple by the name of Dhammika, who was virtuous and very fond of giving in charity. He generously offered food and other requisites to the bhikkhus regularly and also on special occasions. He was, in fact, the leader of five hundred virtuous lay disciples of the Buddha who lived in Savatthi. Dhammika had seven sons and seven daughters and all of them, like their father, were virtuous and devoted to charity. When Dhammika was very ill and was on his death-bed he made a request to the monks to come to him and recite the sacred texts by his bedside. While the monks were reciting the Maha satipatthana Sutta, six decorated chariots from six celestial worlds arrived to invite him to their respective worlds. Dhammika told them to wait for a while for fear of interrupting the recitation of the Sutta. The monks, thinking that they were being asked to stop, stopped and left the place.

A little while later, Dhammika told his children about the six decorated chariots waiting for him. Then and there he decided to choose the chariot from the Tusita world and asked one of his children to throw a garland on to it. Then he passed away and was reborn in the Tusita world. Thus, the virtuous man rejoices in this world as well as in the next.

- 5 *Idha socati pecca socati
papakari ubhayattha socati
so socati so vihannati
disva kammakilitthamattano.*

Here he grieves, hereafter he grieves; the evil-doer grieves in both existences. He grieves and he suffers anguish when he sees the depravity of his own deeds

The Story of Cundasukarika

Once, in a village not far away from the Veluvana monastery, there lived a very cruel and hard-hearted pork-butcher, by the name of Cunda. Cunda was a pork-butcher for over fifty-five years; all this time he had not done a single meritorious deed. Before he died, he was in such great pain and agony that he was grunting and squealing and kept on moving about on his hands and knees like a pig for seven whole days. In fact, even before he died, he was suffering as if he were in Hell. On the seventh day, the pork-butcher died and was reborn in Hell. Thus, the evil-doer must always suffer for the evil deeds done by him; he suffers in this world as well as in the next.

6 *Utthanavato satimato
sucikamma nissammakarino
sannatassa dhammajivino
appamattassa yaso bhivaddhati*

If a person is energetic, mindful, pure in his thought, word and deed, and if he does everything with care and consideration, restrains his senses, earns his living according to the Law (Dhamma) and is not unheedful, then, the fame and fortune of that mindful person steadily increase

The Story of the Banker

At one time, diseases broke out in the city of Rajagaha. In the house of the city banker, the servants died on account of this disease; the banker and his wife were also attacked by the same. When they were both down with the disease they told their young son Kumbhaghosaka to leave them and flee from the house and to return only after a long time. They also told him that at such and such a place they had buried a treasure worth a lot. The son left the city and stayed in a forest for twelve years and then came back to the city.

By that time, he was quite a grown up youth and nobody in the city recognized him. He went to the place where the treasure was hidden and found it was quite intact. But he reasoned and realized that there was no one who could identify him and that if he were to unearth the buried treasure and make use of it people might think a young poor man had accidentally come upon buried treasure and they might report it to the king. So he concluded it was not yet time to unearth the treasure and that meanwhile he must find work for his living. Dressed in old clothes looked for work. He was given the work of waking up people to get up early in the morning and of going round announcing that it was time to prepare food, time to fetch carts.

One morning, King Bimbisara heard him. The king, who was a keen judge of voices, commented, "This is the voice of a man of great wealth." A maid, hearing the king's remark, sent someone to investigate. During that period, the king announced a certain ceremony must be performed in the locality of the labourers, and that every household must make contributions. Kumbhaghosaka had no ready cash for such an occasion. So he was forced to get some coins from his treasure. As these coins were handed over to the maid, she substituted them with her money and sent the coins to the king. Then the man was called into the palace.

At the palace, the king told Kumbhaghosaka to speak out the truth and gave him assurance that he would not be harmed on this account. Kumbhaghosaka then admitted that those coins were his and also that he was the son of the city banker of Rajagaha, who died in the decease twelve years ago. He further revealed the place where the treasure was hidden. Subsequently, all the buried treasure was brought to the palace; the king made him a banker and gave his daughter in marriage to him.