

*Namo Tassa,  
Bhagavato,  
Arahato,  
Sammā-  
Sambuddhassa.*

Homage To Him,  
The Exalted One,  
The Worthy One,  
The Perfectly  
Self-Enlightened One.

## PREFACE

The Buddha's teachings are profound and hard to see. This we may understand just by looking at the thoughts of The Buddha Himself just after His enlightenment:<sup>1</sup>

**This Dhamma that I have arrived at is profound (*gambhīro*), hard to see (*du-ddaso*), and hard to understand (*dur-anubodho*), peaceful (*santo*) and sublime (*pañīto*), unattainable by mere reasoning (*atakk-āvacaro*), subtle (*nipuṇo*), to be experienced by the wise (*paññita-vedanīyo*). But people delight in the home, take delight in the home, and rejoice in the home.<sup>2</sup>**

**It is hard for such people to see this thing, namely causality (*ida-ppaccayātā*), dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppādo*).<sup>3</sup>**

**And it is hard to see this thing, namely, the stilling of all formations (*sabba-saikhāra-samatho*), the relinquishing of all attachments (*sabb-ūpadhi-paṭinissaggo*), the destruction of craving (*taṇhā-kkhayo*): dispassion (*virāgo*), cessation (*nirodho*), Nibbāna.**

**If I were to teach the Dhamma, others would not understand Me, and that would be wearisome for Me, that would be troublesome for Me.<sup>4</sup>**

Having in this way reflected on the Dhamma, our newly enlightened Buddha decided not to teach:<sup>4</sup>

**With difficulty have I arrived [at this]: enough now with making it known.**

**This Dhamma is not understood by those overcome by lust and hatred.**

**Going against the stream (*paṭi-sota-gāmiṃ*), subtle (*nipuṇaṃ*), profound (*gambhīraṃ*), hard to see (*du-ddasaṃ*), and infinitesimal (*aṇuṃ*),<sup>5</sup>**

**Those excited by lust cannot see it, being covered by a mass of darkness.**

Please always remember these words. Please always remember that even The Buddha Himself says the Dhamma is in many ways profound and hard to see.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M.I.iii.6 'Pāsa-Rāsi-Suttaṃ' ('The Mass of Snare's Sutta') (This sutta is also called 'Ariya-Pariyesanā-Suttaṃ' ('The Noble Search Sutta'))

<sup>2</sup> the home: the Pali is *ālaya* (PED: 'orig. roosting place, perch, i.e. abode, settling place, house'). This word has been translated in various ways. But since the Commentary explains it in many ways as being addicted to the five strands of sensual pleasure (delight in sights, sounds, odours, flavours, and touches), the original meaning may serve very well: delight in the home life, family, food, home pleasures, etc., from which one goes forth into the holy life.

<sup>3</sup> causality (*ida-ppaccaya-tā*): lit. 'this is the cause of that'; dependent origination: lit. 'dependent-co-arising (*paṭicca-sam-uppādo*).

<sup>4</sup> The commentary raises the question why The Buddha would now be disinclined to teach when He as the Bodhisatta had worked over an infinite number of lives to become a Fully Enlightened One who teaches. It explains that it was only now, upon realizing the Dhamma, that He understood how profound the Dhamma is. And considering how attached people are to sensual pleasures, He considered it futile to try to teach them the profound Dhamma. In this connection, see His simile of the two friends and the hill in M.III.iii.5 'Danta-Bhūmi-Suttaṃ' ('The Tamed Stage Sutta').

<sup>5</sup> *aṇu* means 'atom / atomic'.

Then The Buddha looked into the world with His Buddha Eye. And He saw how very different are the inclinations of beings, how very different is the disposition of their faculties.<sup>7</sup> He saw that even though almost all beings are unable to understand the Dhamma, a very small number are in fact able to understand the Dhamma, and are able to realize Nibbāna, if they meet the right teacher, and practise the right way. For the welfare and happiness of that small number, The Buddha then decided to teach the profound Dhamma:

**Opened are the doors to the Deathless:**

**They escape, whoever have ears (*sota*) and are faithful (*saddha*).**

The Dhamma is profound and hard to see because it opens the doors to the Deathless, Nibbāna. What is the Dhamma? It is the Four Noble Truths. And not only are the Four Noble Truths profound and hard to see, the second Noble Truth alone, dependent-origination, is most profound and hard to see.

The Dhamma is so deep and profound that even a wise person like a Paccekabuddha cannot teach it. But we can learn the Dhamma and teach the Dhamma. Why? Because we have the Pāli Texts and Commentaries: they explain the Dhamma as taught by The Buddha. We must never forget that the teachings are The Buddha's.<sup>8</sup> They are not our teachings, because we have not ourselves discovered the deep and profound Dhamma. That is why we can say that when we teach and discuss the method of meditation as it is given in the

<sup>6</sup> In, for example, S.V.XI.vi.3 '*Dhammadinna-Suttaṃ*' ('The Dhammadinna Sutta'), one Dhammadinna and his five hundred lay followers ask The Buddha to instruct them in the Dhamma. The Buddha tells them they should 'study the suttas that are profound, profound in meaning, supramundane, connected with emptiness.' The lay-followers then admit that it is difficult for laypeople to study such suttas because of their addiction to sensual pleasures. And they ask for a simpler teaching. The Buddha then instructs them to train themselves to have absolute faith in The Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, and to possess the precepts unbroken, leading to concentration.

<sup>7</sup> The Buddha explains these two powers in, for example, M.I.ii.2 '*Mahā-Sīha-Nāda-Suttaṃ*' ('The Great Lion's-Roar Sutta'): 'Again and further, Sāriputta, the Tathāgata understands according to reality how beings have different inclinations (*nān-ādhimuttikatam*). And whatever, Sāriputta, different inclinations beings have the Tathāgata understands according to reality, this then, Sāriputta, is a Tathāgata's Tathāgata power, because of which power the Tathāgata assumes the bull's stance, roars the lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets in motion the divine wheel... the Tathāgata understands according to reality other beings, other people's disposition of faculties (*indriya-paro-pariyattam*)... this then, Sāriputta, is a Tathāgata's Tathāgata power.' The Venerable Sāriputta refers to this power in D.iii.5 '*Sam-Pasādanīya-Suttaṃ*' ('Serene Faith Sutta'): 'Also unsurpassed is the Blessed One's way of teaching the Dhamma in regard to disposition towards instruction (*anusāsana-vidhāsu*).'

<sup>8</sup> In S.III.I.vi.6 '*Sammā-Sambuddha-Suttaṃ*' ('The Fully-Enlightened Buddha Sutta'), The Buddha explains: 'The Tathāgata, bhikkhus, Arahant, Fully-Enlightened Buddha, is the producer of the unproduced path, the generator of the ungenerated path, the declarer of the undeclared path, the one who knows the path, the one who is wise in the path, the one is expert in the path: and as followers of the path, bhikkhus, his disciples dwell, afterwards becoming possessors [of the path]. This then, bhikkhus, is the difference, this is the determinant, this is what makes the Tathāgata, Arahant, Fully Enlightened Buddha, other than a wisdom liberated bhikkhu.' See also the Buddha's explanation of the faithful disciple (*saddhassa sāvakassa*) in M.II.ii.10 '*Kīṭāgiri-Suttaṃ*' ('The Kīṭāgiri Sutta'): 'For a faithful disciple, bhikkhus, who were to begin probing the Teacher's Dispensation, this accords with the Dhamma [this is the proper way to regard things]: "The Blessed One is the Teacher, I am a disciple; the Blessed One knows, I do not know (*jānāti Bhagavā, n-āhaṃ jānāmi*ti)."'

Pāli Texts and Commentaries, we are not teaching according to a method of our own; it is according to The Buddha's teachings.

As a bhikkhu, a humble disciple of The Buddha, we can teach only what The Buddha taught: we cannot teach a method of our own. Compared to The Buddha and His eighty great disciples, we are just insignificant bhikkhus. How could we teach a method of our own?<sup>9</sup>

We should learn from The Buddha's great disciples; they were all very humble. When asked by other bhikkhus to explain something taught by The Buddha, many great disciples would say with modesty:<sup>10</sup>

It is as if, friend, a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, (passing over the base and trunk of a great tree standing possessed of heartwood) were to think that heartwood is to be sought in the branches and leaves. This is what the Venerable Ones have done: face to face with the Teacher, having passed over the Tathāgata, you think we are to be asked about this matter.

He, friend, the Exalted One, knowing knows, seeing sees, as the eye, as knowledge, as the Dhamma, as the Divine One, is the speaker (*vattā*), the setter in motion (*pavattā*), the revealer of the meaning, (*at-thassa ninnetā*), the giver of the Deathless, the lord of the Dhamma, the Tathāgata. Just then was the occasion when you should have asked the Exalted One Himself, and as the Exalted One were to explain it, so were you to take it.

When even the eighty great disciples were so humble, how can we fail to be humble too?

It is, therefore, very important that we have the right attitude when learning and discussing the Dhamma. In the '*Alagadd-Ūpama*' sutta of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, The Buddha describes the wrong way to learn and discuss the Dhamma:<sup>11</sup>

Here, bhikkhus, some hollow men (*mogha-purisā*) master the Dhamma: suttas, prose & poetry, expositions, verses, utterances, sayings, life stories, wondrous events, and catechisms. But having mastered that Dhamma, they do not investigate the meaning of those teachings with wisdom. Not having investigated the meaning of those teachings with wisdom, they do not arrive at a considered acceptance.

They master the Dhamma just for the sake of criticizing, and for the sake of engaging in disputation. And the benefit for which they mastered the Dhamma, that benefit they do not experience.

Those teachings, being badly grasped, lead to their long-term harm and suffering. What is the reason? Badly grasped, bhikkhus, are the teachings (*du-ggahitattā, bhikkhave, dhammānaṃ*).

By learning the Dhamma in this way, one does not reap the benefits that are to be gained from learning the Dhamma: one does not attain the Path&Fruition Knowledges, one does not overcome suffering. Instead, one generates much demerit (*a-puñña*). To explain this danger, The Buddha uses the simile of a snake:

It is as if, bhikkhus, there were a man needing a snake, seeking a snake, wandering in search of a snake. And he were to see a great snake. He were to grasp its coils and tail. And that snake having twisted round were to bite his hand or arm or some other limb or

<sup>9</sup> See further 'Error! Reference source not found.', p.66.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, M.III.III.iv.3 '*Mahākaccāna-Bhadd-Eka-Ratta-Suttaṃ*' ('The Mahākaccāna One- Excellent-Night Sutta').

<sup>11</sup> M.I.iii.2 '*Alagadd-Ūpama-Suttaṃ*' ('The Snake-Simile Sutta')

member. Because of that he would come to death or deadly suffering. What is the reason? Badly grasped, bhikkhus, was the snake.

In the same way, bhikkhus, some hollow men (*mogha-purisā*) master the Dhamma: suttas, prose & poetry, expositions, verses, utterances, sayings, life stories, wondrous events, and catechisms. But having mastered that Dhamma, they do not investigate the meaning of those teachings with wisdom. Not having investigated the meaning of those teachings with wisdom, they do not arrive at a considered acceptance.

They master the Dhamma just for the sake of criticizing, and for the sake of engaging in disputation. And the benefit for which they mastered the Dhamma, that benefit they do not experience.

Those teachings, being badly grasped, lead to their long-term harm and suffering. What is the reason? Badly grasped, bhikkhus, are the teachings (*du-ggahitattā, bhikkhave, dhammānaṃ*).

We should not forget this teaching. The Dhamma is very dangerous if we misunderstand it. So whenever we undertake to learn the Dhamma, and to discuss the Dhamma, we should always remember why we are doing it. It is to attain the Path&Fruition Knowledges, to overcome suffering. With that in mind, the Dhamma is to our long-term welfare and happiness. The Buddha compares that to catching a snake with skill:

It is as if, bhikkhus, there were a man needing a snake, seeking a snake, wandering in search of a snake. And he were to see a great snake. He were to grasp it, well grasped with a forked rod; he were to seize it, well seized by the neck. Then however much, bhikkhus, that snake were to throw its coils round his hand or arm or some other limb or member, not because of that would he come to death or deadly suffering. What is the reason? Well grasped, bhikkhus, was the snake.

In the same way, bhikkhus, some clansmen master the Dhamma: suttas, prose & poetry, expositions, verses, utterances, sayings, life stories, wondrous events, and catechisms. And having mastered that Dhamma, they investigate the meaning of those teachings with wisdom. Having investigated the meaning of those teachings with wisdom, they arrive at a considered acceptance.

They do not master the Dhamma just for the sake of criticizing, and for the sake of engaging in disputation. And the benefit for which they mastered the Dhamma, that benefit they experience.

Those teachings, being well grasped, lead to their long-term welfare and happiness. What is the cause? Well grasped, bhikkhus, are the teachings (*su-ggahitattā, bhikkhave, dhammānaṃ*).

When we discuss the Dhamma, we should speak according to the Pāli Texts and commentaries. And our purpose in discussing the Dhamma should be nothing more and nothing less than to overcome suffering, to escape from the round of rebirth. We should speak just the truth. It is the same when we discuss the Vinaya rules: we speak according to what has been formulated by The Buddha. We never discuss the Vinaya rules merely to criticize those bhikkhus who do not keep the Vinaya rules.

If, whenever we discussed the Vinaya rules, our intention were only to criticize, that would not be a proper Vinaya discussion, and nobody would be able to learn the Vinaya. Likewise, we discuss the Dhamma not for criticism, but for the destruction of our defilements and Nibbāna's realization. The Buddha makes this very clear in the '*Mahā-Sati-Paṭṭhāna*' sutta:<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> D.ii.9 '*Mahā Sati-Paṭṭhāna-Suttanī*' ('The Great Mindfulness-Foundation Sutta')

**The only way, bhikkhus, is this path, for beings' purification, for sorrow and lamentation's overcoming, for pain and displeasure's disappearance, for the true way's attainment, for Nibbāna's realization: that is, the four mindfulness-foundations (*sati-paṭṭhāna*).**

We hope all who study and discuss the Dhamma will always bear the ultimate goal in mind, and tread on the right path towards it without deviation.

May they attain Nibbāna at the earliest.

Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw