

Four Vows Study Group – Study Materials

Red Clay Sangha

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Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (Samyutta Nikaya LVI, 11) **(Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma, Transl. Bikkhu Bodhi)**

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Baranasi in the Deer Park at Isipatana. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus of the group of five thus:

"Bhikkhus, these two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone forth into homelessness. What two? The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, the way of worldlings, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathagata has awakened to the middle way, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana.

"And what, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathagata, which gives rise to vision ... which leads to Nibbana? It is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, bhikkhus, is that middle way awakened to by the Tathagata, which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana.

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to re-becoming, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming, craving for disbecoming.

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.

"Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is this noble eightfold path; that is, right view ... right concentration.

"This is the noble truth of suffering': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of suffering is to be fully understood': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This noble truth of suffering has been fully understood': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of the origin of suffering is to be abandoned': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This noble truth of the origin of suffering has been abandoned': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of the cessation of suffering is to be realized': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This noble truth of the cessation of suffering has been realized': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision ... and light.

"This noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering has been developed': thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.

"So long, bhikkhus, as my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was not thoroughly purified in this way [*], I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Mara, and Brahma, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans. But when my knowledge and vision of these four noble truths as they really are in their three phases and twelve aspects was thoroughly purified in this way, then I claimed to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment in this world with its devas, Mara, and Brahma, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its devas and humans. The knowledge and the vision arose in me: 'Unshakeable is the liberation of my mind. This is my last birth. Now there is no more re-becoming.'"

This is what the Blessed One said. Being pleased, the bhikkhus of the group of five delighted in the Blessed One's statement. And while this discourse was being spoken, there arose in the Venerable Kondanna the dust-free, stainless vision of the Dhamma: "Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation."

And when the Wheel of the Dhamma had been set in motion by the Blessed One, the earth devas raised a cry: "At Baranasi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world." Having heard the cry of the earth devas, the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings raised a cry: "At Baranasi ... this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has

been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped ... by anyone in the world." Having heard the cry of the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings, the Tavatimsa devas ... the Yama devas ... the Tusita devas ... the Nimmanarati devas ... the Paranimmitavasavatti devas ... the devas of Brahma's company raised a cry: "At Baranasi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, this unsurpassed Wheel of the Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One, which cannot be stopped by any recluse or brahmin or deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world."

Thus at that moment, at that instant, at that second, the cry spread as far as the Brahma-world, and this ten thousandfold world-system shook, quaked, and trembled, and an immeasurable glorious radiance appeared in the world surpassing the divine majesty of the devas.

Then the Blessed One uttered this inspired utterance: "Kondanna has indeed understood! Kondanna has indeed understood!" In this way the Venerable Kondanna acquired the name "Anna Kondanna-Kondanna Who Has Understood."

Relationship between Four Vows and Four Noble Truths

Bodhisattva Vows

- Beings are numberless, I vow to save them.
 - First Noble Truth – Existence of Suffering
- Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them.
 - Second Noble Truth – Cause of Suffering
- Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them.
 - Third Noble Truth – End of Suffering
- Buddha's Way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it.
 - Fourth Noble Truth – The Noble Eightfold Path

| | Cause | Effect |
|-------------|---|--|
| Favorable | NT #4 path Action: Develop Timeframe: Beyond time D. Buddha Way is Boundless Vow to Become Now/Future | NT #3 end of suffering Action: Realize Timeframe: Future C. Dharma Gates are Endless Vow to Enter Now/Future |
| Unfavorable | NT #2 Cause of suffering Action: Abandon Timeframe: Past A. Beings are Numberless Vow to Free Now/Future | NT #1 There exists suffering Action: Understand Timeframe: Now B. Delusions are Inexhaustible Vow to End Now/Future |

Mahanidana Sutta (MN 15)

The Great Discourse on Causation (transl. Bikkhu Bodhi)

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Exalted One was living among the Kurus, where there was a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadhamma. Then the Venerable Ānanda approached the Exalted One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. Seated, he said to the Exalted One:

“It is wonderful and marvellous, venerable sir, how this dependent arising is so deep and appears so deep, yet to myself it seems as clear as clear can be.”

“Do not say so, Ānanda! Do not say so, Ānanda! This dependent arising, Ānanda, is deep and it appears deep. Because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma, Ānanda, this generation has become like a tangled skein, like a knotted ball of thread, like matted rushes and reeds, and does not pass beyond saṃsāra with its plane of misery, unfortunate destinations, and lower realms.

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Are aging and death due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘They are.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there aging and death?’ one should say: ‘With birth as condition there is aging and death.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is birth due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there birth?’ one should say: ‘With existence as condition there is birth.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is existence due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there existence?’ one should say: ‘With clinging as condition there is existence.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is clinging due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there clinging?’ one should say: ‘With craving as condition there is clinging.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is craving due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there craving?’ one should say: ‘With feeling as condition there is craving.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is feeling due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there feeling?’ one should say: ‘With contact as condition there is feeling.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is contact due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there contact?’ one should say: ‘With mentality-materiality as condition there is contact.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is mentality-materiality due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there mentality-materiality?’ one should say: ‘With consciousness as condition there is mentality-materiality.’

“Ānanda, if one is asked: ‘Is consciousness due to a specific condition?’ one should say: ‘It is.’ If one is asked: ‘Through what condition is there consciousness?’ one should say: ‘With mentality-materiality as condition there is consciousness.’

“Thus, Ānanda, with mentality-materiality as condition there is consciousness; with consciousness as condition there is mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality as condition there is contact; with contact as condition there is feeling; with feeling as condition there is craving; with

craving as condition there is clinging; with clinging as condition there is existence; with existence as condition there is birth; and with birth as condition, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this entire mass of suffering.

Six Paramitas

- (1) generosity (dāna),
- (2) morality (śīla),
- (3) patience (kṣānti),
- (4) vigor (vīrya),
- (5) concentration (dhyāna),
- (6) wisdom (prajñā)

Magga-vibhanga Sutta: An Analysis of the Path (Samyutta Nikaya 45.8 Transl. Thanissaro Bikkhu

I have heard that at one time the Blessed One was staying in Savatthi at Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery.

There he addressed the monks, saying, "Monks."

"Yes, lord," the monks responded to him.

The Blessed One said, "I will teach & analyze for you the Noble Eightfold Path. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, lord," the monks responded to him.

The Blessed One said, "Now what, monks, is the Noble Eightfold Path? Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

"And what, monks, is right view? Knowledge with regard to stress, knowledge with regard to the origination of stress, knowledge with regard to the stopping of stress, knowledge with regard to the way of practice leading to the stopping of stress: This, monks, is called right view.

"And what is right resolve? Being resolved on renunciation, on freedom from ill will, on harmlessness: This is called right resolve.

"And what is right speech? Abstaining from lying, abstaining from divisive speech, abstaining from abusive speech, abstaining from idle chatter: This, monks, is called right speech.

"And what, monks, is right action? Abstaining from taking life, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from unchastity: This, monks, is called right action.

"And what, monks, is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood: This, monks, is called right livelihood.

"And what, monks, is right effort? (i) There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (ii) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the abandonment of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen. (iii) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (iv) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen: This, monks, is called right effort.

"And what, monks, is right mindfulness? (i) There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself — ardent, aware, & mindful — putting away greed & distress with reference to the world. (ii) He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves — ardent, aware, & mindful — putting away greed & distress with reference to the world. (iii) He remains focused on the mind in & of itself — ardent, aware, & mindful — putting away greed & distress with reference to the world. (iv) He remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves — ardent, aware, & mindful — putting away greed & distress with reference to the world. This, monks, is called right mindfulness.

"And what, monks, is right concentration? (i) There is the case where a monk — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful (mental) qualities — enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. (ii) With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance. (iii) With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' (iv) With the abandoning of pleasure & pain — as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress — he enters & remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This, monks, is called right concentration."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted at his words.

10-Fold Noble Path

(We find this 10-fold sequence at many places in the main nikayas, mostly in the Anguttara:

DN 18, DN 33, DN 34; MN 8, MN 65, MN 78, MN 117; AN 4.89, AN 4.206, AN 10.103 – AN 10.115, AN 10.117, AN 10.119 – AN 10.134, AN 10.144 – AN 10.166, AN 10.239; SN 14.29, SN 45.26, SN 55.26)

8-Fold noble Path + Right Knowledge + Right Release

Shantideva's Bodhisattva Vow
(From the Way of the Bodhisattva, Ch 3, transl Padmakara Translation Group)

21.

Just like the earth and space itself
And all the other mighty elements,
For boundless multitudes of beings
May I always be the ground of life, the source of varied sustenance.

22.

Thus for everything that lives,
As far as are the limits of the sky,
May I be constantly their source of livelihood
Until they pass beyond all sorrow.

23.

Just as all the Buddhas of the past
Have brought forth the awakened mind,
And in the precepts of the Bodhisattvas
Step-by-step abode and trained,

24.

Likewise, for the benefit of beings,
I will bring to birth the awakened mind,
And in those precepts, step-by-step,
I will abide and train myself.

25.

Those who thus with clear intelligence
Take hold of the awakened mind with bright and lucid joy,
That they may now increase what they have gained,
Should lift their hearts with praises such as these:

26.

"Today my life has given fruit.
This human state has now been well assumed.
Today I take my birth in Buddha's line,
And have become the Buddha's child and heir.

27.

"In every way, then, I will undertake
Activities befitting such a rank.
And I will do no act to mar
Or compromise this high and faultless lineage.

28.

"For I am like a blind man who has found

A precious gem inside a heap of dust.
For so it is, by some strange chance,
That bodhichitta has been born in me.

29.
“This is the supreme draft of immortality
That slays the Lord of Death, the slaughterer of beings,
The rich unfailing treasure-mine
To heal the poverty of wanderers.

30.
“It is the sovereign remedy
That perfectly allays all maladies.
It is the tree that gives relief
To those who wander wearily the pathways of existence.

31.
“It is the universal bridge that saves
All wandering beings from the states of loss,
The rising moon of the enlightened mind
That soothes the sorrows born of the afflictions.

32.
“It is the mighty sun that utterly dispels
The misty ignorance of wandering beings,
The creamy butter, rich and full,
That’s churned from milk of holy teaching.

33.
“Living beings! Wayfarers upon life’s paths,
Who wish to taste the riches of contentment,
Here before you is the supreme bliss.
Here, O ceaseless travelers, is your fulfillment!

34.
“And so, today, within the sight of all protectors,
I summon beings, calling them to Buddhahood.
And, till that state is reached, to every earthly joy!

Platform Sutra Huineng (From Ch 6, Repentance, transl. Red Pine)

Good friends, having taken refuge in the three-bodied buddha, let us now make Four Boundless Vows. Good friends, recite after me:

'I vow to save all beings, no matter how numberless.
I vow to end all afflictions, no matter how countless.
I vow to master all teachings, no matter how limitless.
I vow to attain buddhahood, no matter how transcendent.'

Now recite this three times.

Good friends, as for 'I vow to save all beings, no matter how numberless,' it isn't Hui-neng who does the saving. Good friends, every being you can think of saves themselves with their own nature in their own bodies.

What does it mean 'they save themselves with their own nature'? The wrong views and afflictions, the ignorance and delusions in their own material bodies already possess the nature of original enlightenment. It is just this nature of original enlightenment that saves them with right views. Once they realize the prajna wisdom of right views, they dispel their ignorance and delusion, and each being saves themselves. The false are saved with truth. The deluded are saved with awareness. The ignorant are saved with wisdom. The bad are saved with goodness. And the afflicted are saved with enlightenment. Those who are saved like this are truly saved.

As for 'I vow to end all afflictions, no matter how countless,' this means to get rid of the delusions of your own mind. And 'I vow to master all teachings, no matter how limitless' means to study the true, unexcelled Dharma. And 'I vow to attain buddhahood, no matter how transcendent' means always to practice with humility, to respect all beings, to avoid attachments, to give rise to prajna from your own awareness, and to put an end to delusions. It is through self-realization that buddhahood is attained. This is the power of making vows.

Major Bodhisattvas

Sakyamuni/ Siddhartha Gautama- became “The Buddha”, Shakyamuni Buddha

Manjusri – carries a sword (to cut away delusion), rides a lion; pervasive appearance (e.g. Prajnaparamita, Avatamsaka, Lotus and Vimalakirti Sutras). Represents great bodhisattva wisdom

Samantabhadra (Universal Worthy) – rides six-tusked white elephant (tusks = paramitas), often carries wish-fulfilling gem, lotus or sceptre). Appears in Lotus and Avatamsaka Sutras; referred to in liturgy. Represents great bodhisattva activity

Avalokiteshvara (Regarder of the Cries of the World - aka Guanyin, Kannon, Kanzeon, Chenseri, etc). Appears in Lotus Sutra (Ch 25 extracted and frequently utilized as a discrete sutra) and Heart Sutra. Myriad forms; male, female, hermaphrodite; often multi-armed and/or multi-headed; sometimes eyes on hands; carries many implements. Represents great bodhisattva compassion

Kshitigarba (Earth womb). East Asian bodhisattva often depicted as protector of children.