

Buddha's First Three Sermons

(Presented in order: The Fire Sermon is #3)

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56:11)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Vārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana. There he addressed the group of five monks:

“There are these two extremes that are not to be indulged in by one who has gone forth. Which two? That which is devoted to sensual pleasure in connection with sensuality: base, vulgar, common, ignoble, unprofitable; and that which is devoted to self-affliction: painful, ignoble, unprofitable. Avoiding both of these extremes, the middle way realized by the Tathāgata—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding.

“And what is the middle way realized by the Tathāgata that—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding? Precisely this noble eightfold path: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the middle way realized by the Tathāgata that—producing vision, producing knowledge—leads to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to unbinding.

“Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress: Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming—accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there—i.e., craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.

“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this noble eightfold path—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. “Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of stress’ ... ‘This noble truth of stress is to be comprehended’ ... ‘This noble truth of stress has been comprehended.’

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of the origination of stress’ ... ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress is to be abandoned’⁵ ... ‘This noble truth of the origination of stress has been abandoned.’

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of the cessation of stress’ ... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress is to be realized’ ... ‘This noble truth of the cessation of stress has been realized.’

“Vision arose, insight arose, discernment arose, knowledge arose, illumination arose within me with regard to things never heard before: ‘This is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress’ ... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress is to be developed’ ... ‘This noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress has been developed.’

“And, monks, as long as this—my three-round, twelve-permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be—was not pure, I did not claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, in this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk. But as soon as this—my three-round, twelve permutation knowledge & vision concerning these four noble truths as they have come to be—was truly pure, then I did claim to have directly awakened to the right self-awakening unexcelled in the cosmos with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, in this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk. Knowledge & vision arose in me: ‘Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the group of five monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words. And while this explanation was being given, there arose to Ven. Kondañña the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation. And when the Blessed One had set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion, the earth devas cried out: “Near Vārāṇasī, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by contemplative or brahman, deva, Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone at all in the cosmos.” On hearing the earth devas’ cry, the Devas of the Four Great Kings took up the cry... the Devas of the Thirty-three... the Devas of the Hours... the Contented Devas... the Devas Delighting in Creation ... the Devas [Muses?] Wielding Power over the Creations of Others... the Devas of Brahmā’s Retinue took up the cry: “Near Vārāṇasī, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma that cannot be stopped by contemplative or brahman, deva, Māra, or Brahmā, or anyone at all in the cosmos.”

So in that moment, that instant, the cry shot right up to the Brahmā worlds. And this ten-thousand-fold cosmos shivered & quivered & quaked, while a great, measureless radiance appeared in the cosmos, surpassing the effulgence of the deities. Then the Blessed One exclaimed: “So you really know, Kondañña? So you really know?” And that is how Ven. Kondañña acquired the name Añña-Kondañña—Kondañña who knows.

The Five (Brethren) – Pañca Sutta (SN 22:59)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Vārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana. There he addressed the group of five monks:

“Form, monks, is not self. If form were the self, this form would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible (to say) with regard to form, ‘Let my form be thus. Let my form not be thus.’ But precisely because form is not self, this form lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible (to say) with regard to form, ‘Let my form be thus. Let my form not be thus.’

“Feeling is not self....

“Perception is not self....

“Fabrications are not self....

“Consciousness is not self. If consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible (to say) with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’ But precisely because consciousness is not self, consciousness lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible (to say) with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’

“What do you think, monks? Is form constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, lord.”

“And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, lord.”

“... Is feeling constant or inconstant?” — “Inconstant, lord.” ...

“... Is perception constant or inconstant?” — “Inconstant, lord.” ...

“... Are fabrications constant or inconstant?” — “Inconstant, lord.” ...

“What do you think, monks? Is consciousness constant or inconstant?”

“Inconstant, lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, lord.”

“And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus, monks, any form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: Every form is to be seen with right discernment as it has come to be: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Any feeling whatsoever....

“Any perception whatsoever...

“Any fabrications whatsoever...

“Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: Every consciousness is to be seen with right discernment as it has come to be: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’

“Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the group of five monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words. And while this explanation was being given, the minds of the group of five monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from effluents.

Aflame – Āditta-pariyāya Sutta (SN 35:28)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Gayā at Gayā Head with 1,000 monks. There he addressed the monks: “Monks, the All is aflame. Which All is aflame? The eye is aflame. Forms are aflame. Eye-consciousness is aflame. Eye-contact is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on eye-contact—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I tell you, with birth, aging & death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs.

“The ear is aflame. Sounds are aflame...

“The nose is aflame. Aromas are aflame...

“The tongue is aflame. Flavors are aflame...

“The body is aflame. Tactile sensations are aflame...

“The intellect is aflame. Ideas are aflame. Intellect-consciousness is aflame. Intellect-contact is aflame. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on intellect-contact—experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain—that too is aflame. Aflame with what? Aflame with the fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. Aflame, I say, with birth, aging & death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs.

“Seeing thus, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with eye-consciousness, disenchanted with eye-contact. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on eye-contact, experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain: With that, too, he grows disenchanted.

“He grows disenchanted with the ear...

“He grows disenchanted with the nose...

“He grows disenchanted with the tongue...

“He grows disenchanted with the body...

“He grows disenchanted with the intellect, disenchanted with ideas, disenchanted with intellect-consciousness, disenchanted with intellectcontact. And whatever there is that arises in dependence on intellectcontact, experienced as pleasure, pain or neither-pleasure-nor-pain: With that, too, he grows disenchanted. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words. And while this explanation was being given, the minds of the 1,000 monks, through lack of clinging/sustenance, were released from effluents.

Additional Sutra Materials

Magandiya Sutta (MN 75) [Extract]

“Māgaṇḍiya, it’s just as if there were a man blind from birth who couldn’t see black objects... white... blue... yellow... red... the sun or the moon. Now suppose that a certain man were to take a grimy, oilstained rag and fool him, saying, ‘Here, my good man, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, & clean.’ The blind man would take it and put it on.

“Then his friends, companions, & relatives would take him to a doctor. The doctor would concoct medicine for him: purges from above & purges from below, ointments & counter-ointments and treatments through the nose. And thanks to the medicine his eyesight would appear & grow clear. Then together with the arising of his eyesight, he would abandon whatever passion & delight he felt for that grimy, oil-stained rag. And he would regard that man as an enemy & no friend at all, and think that he deserved to be killed. ‘My gosh, how long have I been fooled, cheated, & deceived by that man & his grimy, oil-stained rag!’—“Here, my good man, is a white cloth—beautiful, spotless, & clean.”

“In the same way, Māgaṇḍiya, if I were to teach you the Dhamma —‘This is that freedom from Disease; this is that unbinding’—and you on your part were to know that freedom from Disease and see that unbinding, then together with the arising of your eyesight you would abandon whatever passion & delight you felt with regard for the five clinging-aggregates. And it would occur to you, ‘My gosh, how long have I been fooled, cheated, & deceived by this mind! For in clinging, it was just form that I was clinging to... it was just feeling... just perception... just fabrications... just consciousness that I was clinging to. With my clinging as a requisite condition, there arises becoming...birth... aging & death... sorrow, lamentation, pains, distresses, & despairs. And thus is the origin of this entire mass of stress.’”

Iti 93.

This was said by the Blessed One, said by the Arahant, so I have heard: “Monks, there are these three fires. Which three? The fire of passion, the fire of aversion, the fire of delusion. These are the three fires.”

The fire of passion burns in a mortal
delighting in,
smitten with
sensual desires;
the fire of aversion, in a malevolent person
taking life;
the fire of delusion, in a bewildered person
ignorant
of the noble teaching.
Not understanding these fires, people
—fond of self-identity—

unreleased from Māra’s shackles,
swell the ranks of hell,
the wombs of common animals, demons,
the realm of the hungry ghosts.
While those who, day & night,
are devoted
to the message
of the rightly self-awakened,
put out the fire of passion,
constantly perceiving the foul.
They, superlative people,
put out the fire of aversion
with good will,
and the fire of delusion
with the discernment leading
to penetration.
They, the masterful, untiring by night & day,
having put out [the fires],
having, without remainder,
comprehended stress,
are, without remainder,
totally unbound.
They, the wise, with an attainer-of-wisdom’s
noble vision,
right gnosis,
directly knowing
the ending of birth,
come to no further becoming.

Ud 1:10 Bāhiya (Bāhiya Sutta)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī at Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. And on that occasion Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth was living in Suppāraka by the seashore. He was worshipped, revered, honored, venerated, and given homage—a recipient of robes, alms food, lodgings, & medicinal requisites for the sick. Then, when he was alone in seclusion, this line of thinking appeared to his awareness: “Now, of those who in this world are arahants or have entered the path of arahantship, am I one?”

Then a devatā who had once been a blood relative of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth—compassionate, desiring his welfare, knowing with her own awareness the line of thinking that had arisen in his awareness—went to him and on arrival said to him, “You, Bāhiya, are neither an arahant nor have you entered the path of arahantship. You don’t even have the practice whereby you would become an arahant or enter the path of arahantship.”

“Then who, in this world with its devas, are arahants or have entered the path to arahantship?”

“Bāhiya, there is a city in the northern country named Sāvattthī. There the Blessed One—an arahant, rightly self-awakened—is living now. He truly is an arahant and teaches the Dhamma leading to arahantship.”

Then Bāhiya, deeply chastened by the devatā, left Suppāraka right then and, in the space of one night,¹ went all the way to where the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattthī at Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Now on that occasion, a large number of monks were doing walking meditation in the open air. He went to them and, on arrival, said, “Where, venerable sirs, is the Blessed One—the arahant, rightly self-awakened—now staying? We want to see that Blessed One—the arahant, rightly self-awakened.”

“The Blessed One has gone into town for alms.”

Then Bāhiya, hurriedly leaving Jeta’s Grove and entering Sāvattthī, saw the Blessed One going for alms in Sāvattthī—serene & inspiring serene confidence, calming, his senses at peace, his mind at peace, having attained the utmost tranquility & poise, tamed, guarded, his senses restrained, a Great One (nāga). Seeing him, he approached the Blessed One and, on reaching him, threw himself down, with his head at the Blessed One’s feet, and said, “Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my longterm welfare & bliss.”

When this was said, the Blessed One said to him, “This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms.”

A second time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One, “But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One’s life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my longterm welfare & bliss.”

A second time, the Blessed One said to him, “This is not the time, Bāhiya. We have entered the town for alms.”

A third time, Bāhiya said to the Blessed One, “But it is hard to know for sure what dangers there may be for the Blessed One’s life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me the Dhamma, O Blessed One! Teach me the Dhamma, O One-Well-Gone, that will be for my longterm welfare & bliss.”

“Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bāhiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of stress.”

Through hearing this brief explanation of the Dhamma from the Blessed One, the mind of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth right then and there was released from effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance. Having exhorted Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth with this brief explanation of the

Dhamma, the Blessed One left. Now, not long after the Blessed One’s departure, Bāhiya was attacked & killed by a cow with a young calf. Then the Blessed One, having gone for alms in Sāvattthī, after the meal, returning from his alms round with a large number of monks, saw that Bāhiya had died. On seeing him, he said to the monks, “Take Bāhiya’s body, monks, and, placing it on a litter and carrying it away, cremate it and build him a memorial. Your companion in the holy life has died.”

Responding, “As you say, lord,” to the Blessed One, the monks—placing Bāhiya’s body on a litter, carrying it away, cremating it, and building him a memorial—went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed

down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to him, “Bāhiya’s body has been cremated, lord, and his memorial has been built. What is his destination? What is his future state?”

“Monks, Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth was wise. He practiced the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma and did not pester me with issues related to the Dhamma. Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth, monks, is totally unbound.”

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed:

Where water, earth,
fire, & wind
have no footing:
There the stars don’t shine,
the sun isn’t visible.
There the moon doesn’t appear.
There darkness is not found.
And when a sage,
a brahman through sagacity,
has realized [this] for himself,
then from form & formless,
from bliss & pain,
he is freed.

The Debating Hall – Kutūhalasālā Sutta (SN 44:9)

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Master Gotama, a few days ago a large number of contemplatives, brahmans, and wanderers of various sects were sitting together in the Debating Hall when this conversation arose among them: ‘This Pūraṇa Kassapa—the leader of a community, the leader of a group, the teacher of a group, honored and famous, esteemed as holy by the mass of people—describes a disciple who has died and passed on in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.” Even when the disciple is an ultimate person, a foremost person, attained to the foremost attainment, Pūraṇa Kassapa describes him, when he has died and passed on, in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.”

“This Makkhali Gosāla... This Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta... This Sañjaya Velaṭṭhaputta... This Pakudha Kaccāna... This Ajita Kesakambala—the leader of a community, the leader of a group, the teacher of a group, honored and famous, esteemed as holy by the mass of people—describes a disciple who has died and passed on in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.” Even when the disciple is an ultimate person, a foremost person, attained to the foremost attainment, Ajita Kesakambala describes him, when he has died and passed on, in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.”

“This contemplative Gotama—the leader of a community, the leader of a group, the teacher of a group, honored and famous, esteemed as holy by the mass of people—describes a disciple who has died and passed on in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.” But when the disciple is an ultimate person, a foremost person, attained to the foremost attainment, the

contemplative Gotama does not describe him, when he has died and passed on, in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there.” Instead, he describes him thus: “He has cut through craving, severed the fetter, and by rightly breaking through conceit has made an end of suffering & stress.”

“So I was simply befuddled. I was uncertain: How is the teaching of Gotama the contemplative to be understood?”

“Of course you are befuddled, Vaccha. Of course you are uncertain. When there is a reason for befuddlement in you, uncertainty arises. I designate the rebirth of one who has sustenance, Vaccha, and not of one without sustenance. Just as a fire burns with sustenance and not without sustenance, even so I designate the rebirth of one who has sustenance and not of one without sustenance.”

“But, Master Gotama, at the moment a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, what do you designate as its sustenance then?”

“Vaccha, when a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, I designate it as wind-sustained, for the wind is its sustenance at that time.”

“And at the moment when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, what do you designate as its sustenance then?”

“Vaccha, when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, I designate it as craving-sustained, for craving is its sustenance at that time.”

To Koṭṭhita – Koṭṭhita Sutta (AN 4:173)

Then Ven. Mahā Koṭṭhita went to Ven. Sāriputta and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Sāriputta, “With the remainderless fading & cessation of the six contact-media [vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, & intellection], is it the case that there is anything else?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “Don’t say that, my friend.”

[Ven. Mahā Koṭṭhita:] “With the remainderless fading & cessation of the six contact-media, is it the case that there is not anything else?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “Don’t say that, my friend.”

[Ven. Mahā Koṭṭhita:] “...is it the case that there both is & is not anything else?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “Don’t say that, my friend.”

[Ven. Mahā Koṭṭhita:] “...is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “Don’t say that, my friend.”

[Ven. Mahā Koṭṭhita:] “Being asked if, with the remainderless fading & cessation of the six contact-media, there is anything else, you say, ‘Don’t say that, my friend.’ Being asked if... there is not anything else...there both is & is not anything else... there neither is nor is not anything else, you say, ‘Don’t say that, my friend.’ Now, how is the meaning of your words to be understood?”

[Ven. Sāriputta:] “The statement, ‘With the remainderless fading & cessation of the six contact-media, is it the case that there is anything else?’ objectifies the unobjectified.¹ The statement, ‘... is it the case that there is not anything else... is it the case that there both is & is not anything else... is it the case that there neither is nor is not anything else?’ objectifies the unobjectified. However far the six contact-media go, that is how far objectification goes. However far objectification goes, that is how far the six contact-media go. With the remainderless fading & cessation of the six contact-media, there comes to be the cessation of objectification, the stilling of objectification.”

Thig 5:10 Patācārā

[I thought:]

“Plowing the field with plows,
sowing the ground with seed,
supporting their wives & children,
young men gather up wealth.
So why is it that I,
consummate in virtue,
a doer of the teacher’s bidding,
don’t gain unbinding?
I’m not lazy or proud.”
Washing my feet, I noticed
the
water.
And in watching it flow from high
to
low,
my heart was composed
like a fine thoroughbred steed.
Then taking a lamp, I entered the hut,
checked the bedding,
sat down on the bed.
And taking a pin, I pulled out the wick:
Like the flame’s unbinding
was the liberation
of awareness.