

## Discourse of the Elephant's Footprint

"*Appamādena Sampādetha!*". Just by uttering these two words our truly Enlightened Buddha delivered a profound and complete Dhamma talk. Amazing, isn't it? "*Appamādena Sampādetha!*". Most of us who are familiar with Theravada Buddhism are used to hearing these two precious words very often at the end of receiving the precepts from bhikkhus. But, do you all know what they mean? Do you know what they are saying as a Dhamma talk? Very briefly, it says, "Strive on with diligence". In other words it says, "Whatever you do, always be heedful".

King Kossala of Savutthi once came to the Buddha and said to the Blessed One, "Venerable Bhante, as a king I have so many affairs of state to deal with that I cannot come into your presence three times a day like other donors of temples/pagodas and monasteries. I have so much work that I cannot come even once a day. Therefore, oh! Blessed One, I beseech you, please grant my humble self a Dhamma lesson in brief (in a nutshell).

During the days of the Buddhas, the very wise and farsighted people and those bhikkhus who practiced very diligently would beg for brief sermons only. For instance, monks like the Ven. Bahuya used to request for only concise Dhamma talks. After the sermons they would promise to retreat into quiet, peaceful places and practice with great diligence and determination. Also, they would promise to return to hear more of the Dhamma. That is how they would practice.

King Kossala asked for a brief sermon only. He did not promise to practice in a quiet place; he did not say that he would come for more talks either. There are two types of requests for delivering a Dhamma talk. One type is in which the sermon is requested by a person who really wants to practice according to the sermon. The other type of request is one in which the person asking for the talk asks carelessly without much interest. King Kossala's request was made not because he was prepared to practice as was preached. He was like this all his life with the sasanā. There are many Suttas and Jatakas delivered by our Buddha referring to king Kossala. There is even the "Kossala Sutta" in the Samyutta Nikaya which happens to be quite long. But they did not affect the king very much

Even though he was close to the Buddha, the king did not appear to be so clever; he did not seem to have understood the fine points of the Dhamma. He felt affection for the Blessed One as he would for his nephew or a relative. It was a pity that he did not realize the real attributes and the unique qualities of the Buddha. He would merely listen to the sermons and discourses of the Enlightened One without absorbing anything. That is why the authors of the commentaries considered the king to be ignorant and dim of mind. In other words, he was considered a rather simple person.

When the Buddha asked the king why he wanted the sermon to be brief, the reply was that as a king there were many things that he had to do. The Buddha then asked him what kind of sermon and how brief a talk he wished to hear. To this the king replied,

"Bhante, Please give a talk about all the effects today of past causes and all the effects in the future from present causes – all of them very briefly into one dhamma. For example, If there is a footprint of an elephant on the ground, it is so large that there can fit into it the footprints of any other animals such as horses or cows or deer or whatever else. In the same way one single word uttered by the Gautama would contain all the Suttas, the Vinaya, the Abhidhamma, *sāla*, *samādhi*,

*paṇḍā* - and everything. So it would be the '*Hatthipada desanā*' or 'The Elephant's Footprint Dhamma'. Please deliver such a dhamma talk."

So the Buddha said, "Very well, I shall give a Dhamma talk such as the footprint of the elephant into which any other animal's footprint will fit in - a single word that contains Sutta, Vinaya, Abhidhamma, *sāla*, *samādhi* and *paṇḍā*. Listen, oh king. It is this,

"*Appamādena, mahā-rājā, Sampādettha!*"

"Practice with *Appamāda* oh, king". And thus the 'Elephant's Footprint' dhamma talk was delivered and concluded! King Kossala Just kept staring up at the face of the Buddha. After a moment the king requested, "As I have so many matters to attend to, please deliver a brief dhamma talk," he asked a second time. The Enlightened One said, "Practice with *Appamāda*", for the second time and, yet again the same for the third time at the king's third request. The king, however, was completely unaware that the brief sermon had been delivered - three times already!

The king's organs of hearing were too small to receive the enormity of the Buddha's word. If talks are too brief and the ears are too large, then people with such ears become dissatisfied. That is with people who are too clever and have too much knowledge. For them, too few words will be like not feeding them enough. But, for dull people with too little knowledge, brief but profound Dhamma words will not penetrate their mind.

It was as if a frail, skinny, sick person had been treated to a rich banquet. The king's powers of the mind were too weak, too deficient to absorb the profundity of the Buddha's precious words. The Dhamma was too wide for him to comprehend. The Buddha's talk was not only as big as the elephant's footprint; it was as wide as the sea.

When the king asked the Buddha to please deliver the talk, the Blessed One replied that the talk had been delivered. The king was surprised and asked what the talk was about. When the Buddha said that it was about "*Appamādena sampādettha*", the king said that he still couldn't understand. So he asked the Buddha to please explain it. The Buddha then said, "Listen oh! King. '*Appamāda*' means 'mindfulness' (*sati*). Be mindful. Only with mindfulness you will be full of morality (*sila*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paṇḍā*). Without mindfulness, *sila*, *samādhi* and *paṇḍā* cannot be attained. Mindfulness is the basis for the whole of the *sāsanā*. That is why "The Great Sathipatthāna Sutta" was delivered. *Sati* - it is the foundation of morality, concentration and wisdom. *Sati* has the power to keep the ever wandering mind to focus on one spot. It is mindfulness that can calm and still the fidgety, monkey-like mind to be attentive to one object only. The mind is tied to that one object with the rope of *sati*. That way the mind begins to realize '*paramattha*' - ultimate reality. As the mind is focused on one object only, it becomes '*ekagatta*' - one-pointedness. That is the moment that *samādhi* - concentration enters. That is how and why mindfulness is used to cultivate *samādhi*.

"Then, as the mind gets to be one-pointed, *sati* raises up what has been dormant (sleeping) in the mind. What are these dormant things which lie in the mind? What are the characteristics of the mind? That which knows the sensual is the mind. So, what does the mind do? Every time the mind senses, feeling appears; perception comes to be; formations occur. Whenever the mind passes away, so do feeling, perception and formations. This does not happen to the mind alone. They all happen at the same time and together. The feeling, perception, formations and volition that accompany the mind are all aroused by *sati*, and the mind identifies them. Therefore, *sati* does two

things - it has two functions. One is that it holds and binds the senses. The other is that it arouses the dormant senses. In effect, *sati* is the keeper of the mind.

"Oh, king . That is what is meant by "*Appamādena sampādettha*". Act with mindfulness. With full mindfulness, *sati*, *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom) will also be replete (full). For instance, *sīla* (morality) is abstention from bodily, verbal and volitional wrongdoing. *Sati* will see that you do no wrong. So, *sati* develops your morality. As soon as you let go of *sati*, your *sīla* is broken. Also, *sati* protects you against the 'hindrances' *nāvarana*. The moment you drop your mindfulness, the 'hindrances' enter your mind one by one. That is why *sati* can control your mind so that you can develop *samādhi*.

The wisdom to recognize and to discern consciousness (*citta*) and the associated mental factors (*cetasika*), perception (*saññā*), and volition (*cetanā*) - all are developed by *sati*. That is why the Buddha said in the "Mahasatthipatthana Sutta" that there is only one way - without *sati*, the *sāsanā* will collapse.

Bodily actions are disciplined by *sati*; *samādhi* is developed by *sati*; the knowledge to discern materiality & mentality, the wisdom that knows things in very small detail - all are dependent on *sati*. So, all the three disciplines are based on *sati* .

Oh, king! The Dhamma of '*appamāda*' is the road to the deathless which is Nibbāna. To live negligently, to live with indifference, with carelessness, to live heedlessly - that is to live with '*pamāda*' – which is walking along the road to Death. So, as long as you walk on the road of '*pamāda*' you are going to meet Death. That means heedlessness leads to that death which leads to rebirth. When you die after a life of heedlessness, a life without *sati*, you are going to be reborn in *samsāra*. You can never get to Nibbāna, the deathless state. Without *sati* it is impossible to develop *silā*, *Samadhi* and *pañña*. Without these three you might as well be dead! This is how the Buddha explained to the slow-witted king.

"Oh, king. With mindfulness in hand you are on the road to that Deathless state of Nibbāna. Without '*sati*' you are on the way to death. Those with mindfulness do not die. Those without '*sati*', even though they maybe alive and breathing, they are like the dead. Their morality is dead, their concentration and wisdom are dead. So, although they are not dead it is as if they are living in the land of the dead. That is why, in whatever you do, wherever you may be, always have mindfulness in hand. Always practice with mindfulness.

"Oh, king, just as all the footprints of cows, goats, sheep and of all the other animals' footprints can fit into the footprint of an elephant, so it is in the '*apamādena*' Dhamma that *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are contained. Oh, king, even though the stars in the sky shine so brightly, their lights fade when the moon appears. Such is the '*apamāda*' Dhamma like the moon."

Before an Enlightened Buddha appears on this earth two-legged beings (bipeds) argue as to who is the most noble (exalted). They argue that the Brahmins are the noblest; or the king; or the devas; or the Sakkyā King; or the Brahmas, and so on. But, as soon as an Enlightened One appears all two-legged beings kneel at the Buddha's feet. That is why the Buddha is undoubtedly the Most Exalted. Similarly, of all the dhammas the Dhamma of '*apamāda*' is the most exalted.

However, King Kossala did not appear to have absorbed any bit of the Buddha's sermon. Instead, he put his hands together in '*añjalā*' and asked to be excused as he had to attend to many affairs of state. As he arose to leave, the Buddha said, "So, go. Realise your own time and do your own work." And so the King bowed and left. You all know your own time. So, let us leave.