

A FEW REACH THE OTHER SHORE

6 (10) The Story of Dhamma Listeners (Verses 85 & 86)

While residing at the Jētavana Monastery, the Buddha spoke these verses, with reference to a congregation of people who had come to listen to a religious discourse in Sāvattī. On one occasion, a group of people from Sāvattī made special offerings to the monks collectively and they arranged for some monks to deliver discourses throughout the night, in their locality. Many in the audience could not sit up the whole night and they returned to their homes early; some sat through the night, but most of the time they were drowsy and half-asleep. There were only a few who listened attentively to the discourse.

At dawn, when the monks told the Buddha about what happened the previous night, he replied, “Most people are attached to this world; only a very few reach the other shore (nibbāna).”

Explanatory Translation (Verse 85)

manussēsu yē janā pārāgāminō tē appakā athā itarā ayaṃ pajā tīraṃ ēva anudhāvati

manussēsu: of the generality of people; *yē janā:* those who; *pārāgāminō:* cross over to the other shore; *tē:* they; *appakā:* (are) only a few; *atha:* but; *itarā:* the other; *ayaṃ pajā:* these masses; *tīraṃ ēva:* on this shore itself; *anudhāvati:* keep running along

Of those who wish to cross over to the other side only a handful are successful. Those others who are left behind keep running along this shore. Those masses who have not been able to reach liberation continue to be caught up in Saṃsāra.

Explanatory Translation (Verse 86)

yē ca khō sammadakkhātē dhammē dhammānuvattinō tē janā suduttaram maccedhēyyaṃ pārāṃ ēssanti

yē ca khō: whosoever; *sammadakkhātē:* in the well articulated; *dhammē:* teaching; *dhammānuvattinō:* who live in accordance with the Teaching; *tē janā:* those people; *suduttaram:* difficult to be crossed; *maccedhēyyaṃ:* the realm of death; *pārāṃ essanti:* cross over

The realms over which Māra has sway, are difficult to be crossed. Only those who quite righteously follow the way indicated in the well-articulated Teachings of

the Buddha, will be able to cross these realms that are so difficult to cross.

Commentary

Dhammē Dhammānuvattinō: the teaching of the Buddha and those who practice the Teaching. The Buddha expounded his Teaching, initially, to the Five Ascetics and preached his first sermon — “The Turning of the Wheel of Truth”. Thus did the Enlightened One proclaim Dhamma and set in motion the matchless ‘Wheel of Truth’. With the proclamation of the Dhamma, for the first time, and with the conversion of the five ascetics, the Deer Park at Isipatana became the birth place of the Buddha’s Dispensation, and of the Sangha, the community of monks, the ordained disciples. The Buddha addressed his disciples, the accomplished ones (arahats), and said: “Released am I, monks, from all ties whether human or divine. You also are delivered from fetters whether human or divine. Go now and wander for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the gain, welfare and happiness of gods and men. Let not two of you proceed in the same direction. Proclaim the Dhamma that is excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, excellent in the end, possessed of the meaning and the letter both utterly perfect. Proclaim the life of purity, the holy life consummate and pure. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who will be lost through not hearing the Dhamma. There are beings who will understand the Dhamma. I also shall go to Uruvelā, to Sēnānigama to teach the Dhamma. Thus did the Buddha commence his sublime mission which lasted to the end of his life. With his disciples he walked the highways and byways of Jambudīpa, land of the rose apple (another name for India), enfolding all within the aura of his boundless compassion and wisdom. The Buddha made no distinction of caste, clan or class when communicating the Dhamma. Men and women from different walks of life — the rich and the poor; the lowliest and highest; the literate and the illiterate; brahmins and outcasts, princes and paupers, saints and criminals — listened to the Buddha, took refuge in him, and followed him who showed the path to peace and enlightenment. The path is open to all. His Dhamma was for all. Caste, which was a matter of vital importance to the brahmins of India, was one of utter indifference to the Buddha, who strongly condemned so debasing a system. The Buddha freely admitted into the Sangha people from all castes and classes, when he knew that they were fit to live the holy life, and some of them later distinguished themselves in the Sangha. The Buddha was the only contemporary teacher who endeavoured to blend in mutual tolerance and concord those who hitherto had been rent asunder by differences of caste and class. The Buddha also raised the status of women in India. Generally speaking, during the time of the Buddha, owing to brahminical influence, women were not given much recognition. Sometimes they were held in contempt, although there were solitary cases of their showing erudition in matters of philosophy, and so on. In his magnanimity, the Buddha treated women with consideration and civility, and pointed out to them, too, the path to peace, purity and sanctity. The Buddha established the order of nuns (*Bhikkhunī Sāsana*) for the first time in history; for never before this had there been an order where women could lead a celibate life of renunciation. Women from all walks of life joined the order. The lives of quite a number of these noble nuns, their strenuous endeavours to win the goal of freedom, and their paeans of joy at deliverance of mind are graphically described in the ‘Psalms of the Sisters’ (*Thērigāthā*).