

CHAPTER 7

DHAMMA PADA

Introduction

'Dhammapada' is one of the fifteen 'Books' of the Khuddaka Nikaya of the Sutta Pitaka. 'Dhamma' means 'Law' or 'religion'. 'Pada' signifies 'path', 'part' of a verse or base. Term "Dhammapada" can therefore be translated as either 'Base of religion' or 'Utterances of religion'.

Dhammapada is an Anthology of 423 pali verses grouped into 26 chapters classified and titled according to their subject matter. The subject matter embodied in the verses covers mainly themes ethical in character but includes, at the same time, some fundamental doctrines of the Buddha's teaching.

The opening verses are striking as an exposition of a feature of the Law of Kamma and a characteristic of the human mind. A whole chapter is devoted to amplify the quality of Heedfulness (*Appamada*), a virtue repeatedly extolled by the Buddha in many Suttas. The chapter on the Mind (*Citta Vagga*) is a detailed study of the nature and functioning of the human mind from the standpoint of the Suttas.

Other important doctrinal subjects within the Dhammapada verses are the following,

- I. The qualities of the Arahant - (Arahatta Vagga)
- II. Impermanence and Decay of the human body - (Jara Vagga)
- III. The Noble path to Deliverence (Magga Vagga)
- IV. Danger of Craving as a cause of Suffering (Tanha Vagga)
- V. Holy Being (Brahmana Vagga)
- VI. The Concept of self (Atta Vagga)
- VII. Ideal Life of the Recluse (Bhikkhu Vagga)
- VIII. The qualities of the Buddha (Buddha Vagga)
- IX. The qualities of the wise person (Panditha Vagga)

The over-all concern remains the didactic exhortation on subjects of ethical significance. Importance of Morality as a virtue highlighted in great detail, Bane of addiction to evil, benefits of virtuous conduct, living according to the tenets of the Dhamma, correct observance of Precepts, upholding the sanctity of life, avoidance of hatred, detachment from lust, evils of subservience to passions, the frailties that make a Fool, are some of the themes that are dealt with in the ethical exhortations. Universal truths such as the value of health, strength of unity, evils of rivalry occur as themes of some of the verses. The Chapter on the Holy Man (Brahmana Vagga) presents Buddha's interpretation of the concept of the 'Brahmin' as one possessing noble and sublime qualities and not one who derives such identity by accident of birth.

The verses are self-contained statements on a diversity of topics defeating a generic description. According to scholars they address the three-fold objectives of Buddha's teaching, to wit, (1) human welfare here and now. (ii) favourable rebirth in the next life and (iii) attainment of the ultimate good. From the standpoint of literary assessment. Dhammapada is an anthology of elegant poetry embodying a profusion of symbolic imagery and making free use of simile as a pedagogical device.

All verses are utterances of the Buddha made on different occasions in accord with the subject in issue and the temperament of the listener, the audience or the interlocutor (where the utterance is a reply to a specific question). The background episode of every verse is narrated in the Commentary to Dhammapada (Dhammapadatthakata) compiled by Venerable Buddhaghosa.

DHAMMAPADA STANZAS

(The Pali text, English translation and a brief summary of the moral content of the stanzas).

75. *Aòòà hi labhupanisa* – *aòòà nibbanâgamini*
Evam etam abhinnâya – *bhikkhu Buddhassa savako*
Sakkaram nabhinandeyya – *vivekam anubruhaye*

The path that leads to worldly gain is one and the path that leads to Nibbana is another. The Bhikkhu should understand this distinction and should not find delight in worldly patronage and should cultivate detachment.

Comment

The path to Nibbana is one of renunciation and spiritual development, fundamentally different from the path to gain worldly benefits. The disciple of the Buddha who is a renunciate should understand this difference. He should avoid rejoicing in receiving worldly benefits and dedicate himself to a life of detachment.

89. *Yesam sambodhi angesu* – *sammâ cittam subhâvitam*
Âdânapatinissagge – *anupâdâya ye ratâ*
Khinasavâ jutimanto – *te loke parinibbutâ*

Those whose minds have developed the Factors of Enlightenment, who have forsaken clinging, who take delight in Nibbana, who are free from cankers and who glow with wisdom have attained Nibbana in this very life.

Comment

Buddha's concept of the Wise man is one who can discern the Right from the wrong path, practise detachment and renunciation and is free from corruption. The stanza enumerates a number of qualities of the Wise Man.

123. *Vânijo va bhaya, maggam* – *appasattho mahaddhano*
Visam jivitukâmo va – *pâpâni parivajjaye*

Just as a merchant with great wealth but small escort avoids a perilous route and as one desiring to prolong life avoids the risk of poison so should one avoid evil deeds.

Comment

The ethical teaching of the Buddha can be reduced to two limbs with the exhortations "avoid all evil" and "cultivate good" (*sabba pâpassa akaranam* – *kusalassa upasampadâ*). The stanza emphasizes the need for eternal vigilance to withstand tendencies and temptations

towards evil. The circumspection of the Caravan leader should be the standard of the Buddhist disciple in avoiding lapsing to evil.

135. *Yathâ dandena gopâlo - gâvo pâceti gocaram*
Evam jarâ ca maccu ca - ayum pâcenti pâninam

Just as a cowherd drives his cattle to pasture with a goad, even so do old age and death drive the life force of beings.

Comment

This stanza focuses our attention to a universal truth that disease and death are inescapable destinies of all. It is the fear of disease and death that drives all beings to find an escape.

146. *Ko nu hâso kimânando - niccam pajjalite sati*
Andhakârena onaddha - padipam na gavesatha

Why this laughter why this jubilation, when the world is eternally ablaze? Being shrouded in darkness, why do you not seek the light?

Comment

The stanza accentuates the Buddhist concept of the sensuous world where all sensuous enjoyments are really attractions to ruin like blazing fires. Beings are shrouded by the darkness of delusion. The message is that beings should not remain in the darkness but endeavour to see the light of reality.

190. *Yo ca buddham ca dhammam ca - sangham ca saranam gato*
Cattâri ariya saccâni - sammapaððâya passati

191. *Dukkham dukkha samuppâdam - dukkhassa ca atikkamam*
Ariyancatthagikam maggam - dukkhu pasamagaminam

He who has gone, for refuge, to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha understands with true knowledge, the Four Noble Truths which are, the Truths of Suffering, Cause of Suffering, Cessation of Suffering and the Noble Eightfold Path.

Comment

Taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha with irrevocable devotion is the perfection of Right Understanding (*Sammâ ditthi*). The true knowledge born of such conviction enables the disciple to comprehend ultimately the Four Noble Truths including as the fourth Truth, the Noble Eightfold path.

202. *Natthi râgasamo aggi - natthi dosasamo kali*
Natthi khandhasamâ dukkhâ - natti santiparam sukham

There is no fire comparable to lust, no crime equal to hatred and no suffering like suffering originating from the Aggregates. There is no bliss surpassing the bliss of peace. (Nibbana).

Comment

Lust is likened to a foe since unsatisfied lust torments beings like a raging fire. Lust is the first of the three root defilements. Hatred is the second. Hatred is directed against a person and has the characteristics of a crime derided by society. Nibbana by all standards is the supreme, incomparable bliss. The symbolic representation of conceptual entities is a favourite style of Dhammapada.

216. *Tanhâya jâyati soko - tanhâya jâyati bhayam*
Thanhaya vippamuttassa - natthi soko kuto bhayam

From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear, for him who is totally free from craving there is no grief. Whence fear?

Comment

According to the analysis of the Four Noble Truths, Craving is the cause of suffering and grief. Such potentiality of Craving is a source of fear. For the person who overcomes craving there is no cause for grief. There is no fear either since the source of fear is no more.

239. *Anupubbenā medhāvī – thokathokam khane khane*
Kammāro rajatassa eva – niddhane malam attano

Progressively, little by little, from moment to moment, the wise person should remove his impurities just as a smith removes the dross off the silver.

Comment

Buddha has repeatedly emphasised the need to be heedful regarding one's tendency to degenerate into mental depravity. Buddha recognized individual variations of persons and the practical difficulty of an average person to efface all mental impurities in a single stroke. Hence He recommended 'Gradual Training' (*Anupubba sikkhā*) according to which one may discard mental impurities in stages. However one should not slacken but remain heedful and progress little by little and reach perfection.

240. *Ayasā vā malam samutthitam – taduttāya tam eva khādati*
Evam atidhonacarīnam – sakakammāni nayanti duggatim

Just as rust springing from iron erodes the iron itself, even so misdemeanours lead the transgressors of rules to misery.

Comment

Wrongful deeds lead the wrongdoers themselves to their own misery in the same way as the rust that springs from the surface of a piece of iron erodes the iron itself. It is the law of kamma that harmful effects flow from evil acts.

276. *Tumhehi kiccam ātappam – akkhātāro tathāgata*
Patipannā pamokkhanti – jhāyino marabandhanā

You yourselves must exert on your task; *tathāgatas* only point the way. The meditative ones who enter the path are delivered from the bonds of Mara

Comment

The stanza embodies a profound doctrine fundamental in the teaching of the Buddha. Buddhas unlike other religious prophets, are not Saviours who redeem the faithful votaries from sin and grant them eternal felicity in paradise. Buddhas appear in this world only to show the path to Deliverance and guide the disciples to their goal. Disciples have to follow the guidance of the Buddha, fulfil the requirements with their own exertion in order to attain the goal of Enlightenment and emancipation. Buddhas are only 'showers' of the way,

277. *Sabbe sankhārā aniccā ti – yadā pannāya passati*
Atha nibbindhati dukkhe – esa maggo visuddhiyā

The three characteristics of existence are Impermanence (*Anicca*), Suffering (*dukkha*) and Non – Self (*Anattā*). Expanded they mean that all conditioned things are impermanent, and subject to suffering and all phenomena (*Dhamma*) are without self. The stanza states the first of the three universal Truths that all conditioned things are impermanent. When one discerns this fact with wisdom, one gets disgusted with the Aggregates that are impermanent. This realization is the path of purity leading to Insightful knowledge (*Vipassanā òāna*).

338. *Yatha pi mule anupaddavē dalhe*
Chinno pi rukkho punareva ruhati
Evampi tanhanusaye anuhate
Nibbanti dukkham idam punappunal

Just as a tree with roots and firm, though cut down sprouts up again, even so, until the latent craving remains not rooted out, sorrow springs up again and again.

365. *Salābham natimaddeyya – n' addeṣam pihayam care*
Anneṣam pihayam bhikkhu – samadhim nadhigacchati
366. *Appalābho pi ce bhikkhu – Salābham nāti mannati*
Tam ve deva pasansanti – suddhajivim atanditam

365. One should not despise what one has received, nor envy the gains of others, The Bhikkhu who envies the gains of others does not attain meditative concentration.
366. If a monk does not despise what he receives even though it may be little if he is pure in livelihood and not slothful, even the gods praise him.

Comment

The stanza highlights a behaviour expected of a Bhikkhu, in terms of the prescribed rules of conduct to be abstemious in the use of material requisites of life. He should appreciate even the little he receives without being petulant and refrain from envying the gains of others. Such conduct will be praised even by the deities.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the importance of Dhammapada as a 'Handbook of Buddhism'
2. Briefly outline five doctrinal themes dealt with in the Dhammapada
3. "Dhammapada is a perfect compendium of Buddha's teaching comprising all the essential principles elaborated at length in the Pali Canon." Elucidate this statement.
4. Examine how skillfully Buddha uses similes to explain abstruse doctrinal principles in the Dhammapada stanzas.
5. Signify the moral embodied in a given stanza.
6. Writers and translators have given the Dhammapada the sub title "The Buddha's Path of Wisdom". State whether this sub - title is appropriate.