

The Buddhist Way of Subduing Anger with Special Reference to Kakacūpamasutta

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Abstract

This paper intends to introduce and remind all monastics and laypeople on how to train oneself in the Buddhist-way of subduing anger. This teaching of the Buddha on how he taught his disciples, the tools or similes he used in a specific situation at that time, and how to practice it in everyday life is found in the *Pāli* Canon in different discourses in the *Nikāya*. Among the various important suttas on this teaching, which is still meaningful to all Buddhists till today, is the *Kakacūpamasutta*, found in the *Majjhima Nikaya*.

This article will point out the details with regard to this *Sutta* as well as other important related discourses. Practicing patience with loving-kindness to overcome anger is the main point of this article. The Buddha revealed this teaching to his disciples with the compassion of a teacher who looked upon all sentient beings with loving-kindness and compassion (*mettā and karuṇā*). He made use of the best method to influence other people's minds; patience, loving-kindness, and compassion, to bring about inner peace for all sentient beings and the entire world.

Introduction

The critical situation of the various countries around the world today is getting more serious. The subsistence of social economics and human rights were threatened and many innocent people were killed by terrorist attacks because of the personal conflicts of some people. Why do such kinds of violence happen to us human beings, why do we have to kill each other based on such an untrue principle that “whoever is the stronger one will always conquer and rule the weaker one.” We can see that the violence from the terrorist attacks and wars that killed many people are sometimes propagated by some powerful countries of the world. When we talk about human beings, the first thing that we know is humans are different from animals because human beings are intelligent beings but this does not mean that human beings are the owner of

the entire world. As we share the same earth with each other and the animals, therefore, we need to live together in harmony with each other and with the animals. Human beings have been living in this world for more than two hundred thousand centuries through dependence on each other, if without other living beings, we also cannot survive. Nowadays humans destroy the natural environment and habitat of animals blatantly in the name of development which is the main cause of ecological imbalance and destruction.

Actually, the causes of violence from minor to major, is about social economic competition and is a result of human creation. Every religion teaches people to be a good man, to be kind and compassionate, to help each other, to help society and all living beings. This is the aim of religion, not to harm others, we have to live together harmoniously, with tolerance and also peacefully. But there are some groups with wrong views who use religion in the wrong way and make people lose faith in religion.

Kakacūpama Sutta: The simile of the saw and other similes

The *Kakacūpama Sutta*: the discourse on the parable of the saw or the simile of the saw is one of the important *suttas* found in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (21), *Mūla Paññāsa* 3, *Tatiya Vagga* [*Opamma Vagga*].¹ Generally, every *sutta* was presented by Venerable Ananda, who is one of the great disciples and attendant to the Buddha. It was recorded in the *Pāli* Canon that he always started his presentation with: “Thus have I heard.” The Buddha was staying at Sāvattihī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park, where the Buddha admonished the monk named Moḷiya Phagga who lacked patience. He was very friendly with the *Bhikkhuni* (*Ativelā*) and spent much time with her. It was not very good for the *Bhikkhu*, as there is a danger similar to bringing petroleum and fire close to each other and anything could happen, especially, when they spent too much time together. One day, one *Bhikkhu* saw him instructing her, beyond five or six sentences against the *Vinaya* rules. Firstly, the *Bhikkhu* advised him thus, “Venerable Phagga, it is not very good for you to stay for a long time at the *Bhikkhuni*’s monastery”. When they made criticism on the *Bhikkhuni*, he was displeased and became very angry with anyone who spoke ill

¹ Piya Tan, Trans., “*Kakacūpama sutta: The discourse on the parable of the saw*” M21 Web, 20 January 2016. < <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/38.1-Kakacupama-S-m21-piya.pdf>>

of him and the *Bhikkhuni*,² then he would go to the course of the monk and made the cause of it. When the *Bhikkhu* spoke ill of Venerable Phagguna in front of the *Bhikkhunis*, they also were displeased, and showed anger. Finally, after the *Bhikkhus* could not stop him, they then went to see the Buddha and complained about Moliya Phagguna. The Buddha instructed a certain *Bhikkhu* to go and call Venerable Phagguna to come and meet him. For the first time the Buddha asked him “Is it true that you associated very often with the *Bhikkhunis*”, When the *Bhikkhu* speaks ill of *Bhikkhunis* in your presence, you will be displeased and angry, and make the cause of it, or when they speak ill of you in the presence of the *Bhikkhunis*, they will be displeased and angry, and make the cause of it. He replied honestly, “Yes, Venerable Sir”. The Buddha started the admonition by reminding him that as a monk, whenever anyone speaks ill of the nuns, or even if strike them in anyway, he should not react angrily as if he were a layman. Similarly, if anyone were to do all this to him, he should not react angrily as if he were a layman, but he should be patient and cultivate loving kindness towards them.

With regards to the cultivation of patience, there is another interesting *sutta* named *Sangama Sutta: A Battle* (2).³ In this *sutta*, we can learn from King Pasenadi of Kosala. During the Buddha’s time, King Ajatasattu of Magadha, was a very dangerous king, he attacked King Pasenadi’s kingdom but lost, so King Pasenedi captured him alive. Whatever King Ajatasttu had done wrong, he still was his nephew. Thus King Pasenadi decreed, “Although he killed and destroyed many things, let King Ajatasattu go with just his life”. The monks reported this story of King Pasenadi to the Buddha and the Buddha spoke on this occasion that:

“A man may plunder as long as it serves his ends, but when others are plundered, he who has plundered gets plundered in turn.”

“A fool thinks, ‘Now’s my chance,’ as long as his evil has yet to ripen. But when it ripens, the fool falls into pain.”

² Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, A new Translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya: The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha* 1995. p.217

³ *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 3.15

“Killing, you gain your killer. Conquering, you gain one who will conquer you; insulting, insult; harassing, harassment. And so on, through the cycle of actions, he who has plundered, gets plundered in turn.”⁴

According to the *Punnovada Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* 145,⁵ it is mentioned that there was one monk named Punna, living in Savatthi at Jeta’s Grove, Anathapindika’s Park. He came to see the Buddha and requested brief advice from him. Then the Buddha started teaching him, the six senses (ayattana):

You should be mindfully concentrating on these, there are forms cognizable by the eye, sounds cognizable by the ear, odours cognizable by the nose, flavours cognizable by the tongue, tangible cognizable by the body, mind-object cognizable by the mind, all of these are wished for desired, agreeable and likeable connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust. If a *Bhikkhu* delights in them, welcome them, and remain holding onto them, delight arises in him. With the arising of delight, there is the arising of suffering. If a *Bhikkhu* does not delight in them, nor welcome them, nor remain holding onto them, delight ceases in him. With the ending of delight, there is the ending of suffering.

This *Sutta* is an expression of the first two of the Four Noble Truths, that is, suffering and the arising of suffering. Delight is an aspect of craving. Through the arising of delight regarding the eye and forms, and so on, there arises the suffering of the five aggregates. However, on carefully examining the *Sutta*, we find that the other two noble truths are also expounded here.

The Buddha, in the first part of his advice to Puṇṇa, teaches on the first two truths, that is, suffering and its arising, as they occur through the six senses. In the second part, he teaches the ending of suffering by way of the other two truths, that is, the ending and the path, shown as the abandoning of delight in the six senses and their objects.

In the *Kakacūpama Sutta*,⁶ the Buddha admonished Venerable Moliya Phugguna thus:

⁴ Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Trans, *Sangama Sutta: A Battle* (2). 1999. Web.January27. 2016.
< <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn03/sn03.015.than.html>>

⁵ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, A new Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya: The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha 1995. p.1117

⁶ *Majjhima Nikāya.21, Mūla Paññopamaāsa, Tatiya Vagga [Opamma Vagga]*

“Phagguna, even if anyone, were to speak ill of you to your face, you should abandon any householder’s desire, any householder’s thought.”

“Phagguna, even if anyone were to strike you with the hand, or hurl a clod of earth at you, or hit you with a stick, or strike you with a weapon, you should abandon any householder’s desire, any householder’s thought. “

“In this connection, Phagguna, you should train yourself thus: “My heart will be unperturbed in any way, nor shall I utter any bad speech, but I shall dwell with a heart of loving kindness, moved by goodness, without a hating heart.”

“This is how you, Phagguna, should train yourself.”⁷

We have to practice loving-kindness (Mettā and Karuna) to overcome anger, the Buddha said that:

*“Na hi verena verani, sammantidha kudacanam,
averena ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano.”*

“Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal.”⁸ So every obstacle will be overcome successfully with patience and loving-kindness, without these two qualities, all things cannot be accomplished.

The Significance of Loving-kindness

Nowadays the world is witnessing hatred, war, killing and violence by which peace, harmony, and love in the human race has been significantly decreased. In order to bring the world together with peace and love, it is necessary for every individual to develop loving kindness towards every other living being. This is one of the best method for individual beings to bring inner peace to oneself through the practice of loving kindness (*mettā*) and eventually spreading the same peace and love towards neighbors, countrymen and the whole universe, as it is a direct antidote to hatred and violence.

⁷ Piya Tan. Trans. *Kakacūpama Sutta*, The Discourse on the Parable of the Saw

⁸ Acharya Buddhārakkhita, Trans. *Yamakavagga*: Pair 1996. Web. January 18, 2016.
< <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.01.budd.html>>

Mettā is one of the four Brahma *vihāras* (divine abodes) which is translated as friendliness, loving kindness, universal love. *Mettā* is a crucial and essential foundation, no less for the growth and purification of the individual as for the construction of a peaceful, progressive and healthy society. True *mettā* is selfless, wishing good for every being equally. It is radiated towards all beings with a pure mind of friendship, compassion, and love which grows limitless with practice, and goes beyond all social, religious, racial, political, and economic boundaries. *Mettā* is indeed universal, unselfish and all-embracing love. This *mettā* should be developed like a mother's love to her only child, who saves her child from any kind of danger without caring for her own life.

There is the story of Kalayakkhini according to the *Dhammapada* Verse 5. While residing at the Jetavana monastery in Savatthī, the Buddha taught this verse with reference to a certain woman who was barren, and her rival.⁹

Once there lived a householder, whose wife was barren; later he took another wife. The feud started when the elder wife caused abortion of the younger one, who eventually died in child birth. In later existences, the two were reborn as a hen and a cat; a doe and a leopardess; and finally as the daughter of a nobleman in Savatthi and an ogress named Kali. The ogress (Kalayakkhini) was in hot pursuit of the lady with the baby. When the latter learned that the Buddha was nearby, giving a religious discourse at the Jetavana monastery, she fled to him and placed her son at his feet for protection. The ogress was stopped at the door by the guardian spirit of the monastery and was refused admission. She was later called in and both the lady and the ogress were reprimanded by the Buddha. The Buddha told them about their past feuds as rival wives of a common husband, as a cat and a hen, and as a doe and a leopardess. They were made to see that hatred could only cause more hatred, and that it could only cease through friendship, understanding, and goodwill. Then the Buddha spoke this verse:

“Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world. It is appeased only by loving-kindness. This is an ancient law. “

⁹ The story of Kalayakkhini, Dhammapada Verse 5. Web. February 5, 2016.
< <http://www.tipitaka.net/tipitaka/dhp/verseload.php?verse=005>>

So the advice to gain spiritual progress is to practice patience, loving-kindness, compassion and to concentrate our unstable mind.

The Buddha's admonition to his disciples,

Mettāvihārā yo bhikkhu, pasanno buddhasāsane;

Adhigacche padaṃ santaṃ, saṅkhārāpasamaṃ sukhaṃ. (Dhp. 368.)

“The monks abide in universal love and are deeply devoted to the teachings of the Buddha attain the peace of *Nibbāna*, the bliss of cessation of all conditioned things.”¹⁰

The Buddha encourages the monks in the *Kakacupama Sutta* to practice loving kindness at the cost of their lives by giving a simile of the saw:

"Monks, even if bandits were to savagely sever you, limb by limb, with a double-handled saw, even then, whoever of you harbors ill will at heart would not be upholding my Teaching. Monks, even in such a situation you should train yourselves thus: 'Neither shall our minds be affected by this, nor for this matter shall we give vent to evil words, but we shall remain full of concern and pity, with a mind of love, and we shall not give in to hatred. On the contrary, we shall live projecting thoughts of universal love to those very persons, making them as well as the whole world the object of our thoughts of universal love — thoughts that have grown great, exalted and measureless. We shall dwell radiating these thoughts which are void of hostility and ill will.' It is in this way, monks, that you should train yourselves.

“Monks, if you should keep this instruction on the Parable of the Saw constantly in mind, do you see any mode of speech, subtle or gross, that you could not endure?”

“No, Lord.”

¹⁰ Acharya Buddharakkhita trans. *Dhammapada: A Practical Guide to Right Living* (Selangor: Sukhi Hotu Sdn Bhd 2007) P. 236.

“Therefore, monks, you should keep this instruction on the Parable of the Saw constantly in mind. That will conduce to your well-being and happiness for long indeed.”¹¹

Conclusion

This is why we have to continue practicing patience and loving-kindness to bring about a peaceful establishment in our mind. Then we can share with others our knowledge and practice. If we do not start to do first, then how can they see that we are kind to them. Human beings are similar to animals, even though, they do not know the language of humans but they can sense our friendly or hostile actions. As we have known in the simile of the saw in the *Kakacūpama Sutta*, it gives us the example and the practical aspect of the main purpose taught by the Buddha which still can be applied today.

So anyone can start with the five precepts (*pañca-sila*) which are the basics of Buddhist vows for lay people (*Upasakka-Upasika*), namely, to abstain from killing, stealing, telling lies, sexual misconduct, intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness. These five precepts practiced together with loving-kindness and compassion (*Mettā-Karunā*), and compounded with the simile that the Buddha taught to Venerable Phagguna, will lead us to peace and happiness. All of these practices will enable us to be a good person, helping others and society, and radiating peacefulness to every living being in the entire world.

¹¹ Acharya Buddhārakkhita trans. *Kakacupama Sutta: The Parable of the Saw*
Web, 9 March, 2015 <<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.021x.budd.html>>

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