

Riches Within

Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa's Dhamma Talk given on the 23rd of December, 1975

Translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

When we all live in our own separate places, there's nothing much to make us stop and think. But when we get crowded together, crowded together, more and more crowded together, we become a society of suffering – homes of suffering, villages of suffering, cities of suffering, each city full of blatant suffering, and then it spreads out to the nation; a nation of suffering, a world of suffering. And what would it be like with people all over the world like this?

Who would want to live in such a world of suffering? When people are crowded together, it gives rise to a powerful sense of suffering within the heart. But if each of us lives separately and suffers in private, we don't hear much of each other's crying and misery, and so the world seems a bearable place to live.

When we go into a hospital, we feel differently from when we live as we normally do. As a rule, we don't usually feel too greatly affected by suffering, but when we go into a hospital – which is a gathering place for all kinds of suffering – and we see the patients and hear their moans and cries, it's hard to feel happy and cheerful.

As soon as we visit a hospital, our hearts feel not just a little upset. For the most part, the people who visit hospitals are suffering from mental pain as they visit the people suffering from physical pain who fill the beds with hardly a room left empty. Physical pain and mental pain are gathered together and fill the place. The patients are suffering mentally and physically, while the visitors, their relatives and friends, suffer mentally. In every room you enter, the beds are lined with patients. Nothing but people suffering in body and mind. Cornered. At the end of their rope. When you visit them, you're visiting people at the end of their rope. It's really disheartening.

Every hospital, in addition to being a place for people at the end of their rope, is also a place where people die and their bodies are kept. It's not the case that everyone treated there gets well and goes home. When the disease proves too much for the patient to bear, too much for the doctors, nurses, and medicine to handle, the patient has to die. This

has happened in this bed and that, in this room and that. *Every bed has been a deathbed, every room has been a death room, has kept a dead body on its way to being buried or cremated – but we hardly ever stop and think about it.* If we were to let ourselves think off the beaten track a bit in this way, we might start to wise up and come to our senses somewhat, instead of being heedless and complacent the way we normally are.

Even when we enter a home, any home, and go into the kitchen, which is a constant crematorium for animals day in and day out, we should be able to reflect on the transitoriness¹ of life, because that's what kitchens have been – crematoriums for animals of all sorts – for who knows how long. But we think of the animals as food, which is why these places never strike us as crematoriums. Whatever meat we roast or stew is the flesh of a dead animal, so it's all an affair of cremation. But instead we think: "It's food," so we don't like to view the kitchen as a crematorium – but the only difference is in how we look at it.

The way we look at things can make us happy, sad, disgusted, fearful, brave – all from the way we see them. This is why the Buddha taught us not to be complacent.

The day we went to distribute things to the refugees in Nong Khai, they came pouring out as soon as they saw us coming, their eyes fixed on us in a combination of hunger, thirst and hope. And then when we were distributing the things . . . Oho! It made you feel so sorry for them, really sorry for them. I don't know where they all came from – every direction – filling the entire field until there was no room left for anyone to pass through. People suffering pain and hardship, with hardly anyone there to give them help. As soon as they saw that good-hearted people had come to visit, their hopes rose that at last they'd get help – because this is what necessity had driven them to. The same would have been true for us had we been in their situation. They couldn't help it. They had to come pouring out, young and old, men and women, filling the place.

When they had received our presents – things to help relieve their sufferings – they were so happy, both because their hopes had been met and because their sufferings would be eased. For example, even though that night was just as cold as the previous nights, they would now feel warmer than on those nights when they hadn't had any blankets. The same was true with food. Just as their food was running out, more food, together with clothing had come, which was enough to give them some comfort and to relieve their worries to some extent. They couldn't help but feel happy – because after all, we had not taken just a few things to

¹ Transitoriness (Impermanence) is one of the three characteristics of all things in the universe. This means that they all arise and cease and are subject to change.

give them. We handed out a lot, until it seemed that every family there was satisfied. Who wouldn't feel glad?

This is the clear sort of result that comes from making donations, from being generous. The object we give leaves our hand as a willing sacrifice, from pure motives, and then it's there in the hand of the other person. It leaves the hand of the donor and appears in the hand of the recipient. The donor is happy, the recipient is happy – some of them even start crying, as we saw that day, whether from happiness or what, it's hard to guess.

This is the power that comes from helping one another, something with a great deal of value in the area of the heart. All of us differ in the depth and strength of our feelings – some people will feel very glad, others will simply feel good that today things are a little less difficult than before because they have food and blankets to protect them from the cold, and some will think of the donors with gratitude. But at any rate, the recipient feels proud with the pride of receiving, the donor feels proud with the pride of giving, which is why generosity has been something very essential for the world since time immemorial.

Generosity means giving, making sacrifices. It's something that people have been doing since who-knows-when. If we were to stop being generous or to stop making sacrifices for one another, the world wouldn't be able to last as a world – because even animals are generous with one another, just like human beings. They share their food with one another just like we do. They live together and eat together, feeding their offspring and caring for them. Take ants, for example: Each one helps carry food back to the nest. Other animals take food back to their hole or their hollow in a tree and eat it together.

We human beings live in families, in social situations. To the extent that we are involved with others, to that extent we make sacrifices for one another, beginning with the sacrifices that parents make for their children and continuing with those that we make for society at large. We live together by being generous, by making sacrifices for one another. Our hearts and our lives depend on one another, which is why we need to do this.

Our Lord Buddha, from the very beginning when he was developing his perfections for the sake of Buddhahood, made a practice all along of giving gifts, of being generous, until his good name spread far and wide in every direction because of his generosity. Once he had gained Awakening and become the Buddha, people made offerings and gave him gifts as an act of generosity everywhere he went. Even heavenly beings

performed acts of generosity for him. Wherever he went, things would appear on their own, without his having to ask anyone for them. People kept feeling moved to bring him offerings and gifts, to the point where one day a group of monks had gathered and were saying, “Wherever the Buddha goes, people honour him and bring him heaps of offerings. This is due to the power of his Buddhahood”.

The Buddha happened to overhear this and so went to correct them: “The fact that people bring large numbers of gifts wherever I go doesn’t come from the power of my Buddhahood. Instead, it’s due to the power of the generosity I’ve practised all along. Even my Buddhahood has come from the various forms of goodness, beginning with generosity, which I’ve worked hard to develop. It didn’t arise on its own, complete with its powers and charisma, simply from my being a Buddha. Even Buddhahood has to come from developing goodness, such as the perfection of generosity, before one can be a Buddha.” That’s what he told them.

For this reason, generosity is not only a basic prerequisite for human society, but it also develops as an ingrained habit for those who practice it. People who like to be generous want to keep on being generous wherever they go. It becomes a habit ingrained in the heart. Especially when there’s someone to teach and help them understand the benefits of generosity, the habit then develops even further until the desire to make sacrifices becomes a permanent part of their character. In addition, wherever they go, wherever they’re born, they are never lacking or poor. This is because of the power of the generosity they’ve practised in previous lifetimes.

Take Ven. Sivali as an example. Wherever he went, the streets and villages would be full of people wanting to present him with gifts – nothing but gifts all over the place, everywhere he would go. He was second only to the Buddha in terms of the gifts people gave him.

In his previous lifetimes, he had been an avid donor. Wherever he went, generosity was a basic part of his character. It was something he really enjoyed doing. No matter how rich or poor he was he never stopped being generous. All he asked was that he have enough to share and then he’d share it without hesitation. He never held anything back. This then developed into an ingrained habit with him. As a result, when he ordained and attained the Dhamma as a disciple of the Buddha, he was foremost among the disciples in terms of the gifts and offerings he received. No one else, except for the Buddha himself, could match him in this respect. This was all because of his ingrained habit.

This is why the various Arahant disciples excelled in different areas – each of them had developed habits emphasising different aspects of in-

ner goodness. There were many of them who, after becoming Arahants, didn't receive a lot of offerings or respect from people, but they excelled in other areas – all of which were aspects of the inner goodness that had helped them attain the Dhamma and gain release from suffering. But the external results still showed. Even though they attained Arahantship, there weren't large numbers of people to present them with gifts in keeping with their attainment. This is because they had developed other sorts of ingrained habits instead.

An ingrained habit is something implanted deep in the heart, something we have done so consistently that it comes naturally to us, without anyone having to tell us – something we feel comfortable and right about doing, something we simply want to do, of our own accord. This is the point where it's called an ingrained habit.

Returning to the subject of suffering, every person has his or her sufferings, yet when we live in our own separate places and go our separate ways, our sufferings aren't much to speak of. When we get crowded together in large numbers, though, our sufferings increase and become more and more pitiful, more and more appalling, to the point where the whole nation becomes one great big mass of suffering. No one would want to live in such a world. And why should they? It'd be nothing but a mass of suffering.

When we reflect on this inwardly, we can see that we each have our own mass of suffering and discontent at all times. What do we want from this assemblage we call our 'self'? The whole thing is nothing but a mass of suffering and discontent. If we want to escape from this suffering without any lingering attachments to anything, if we see suffering as a great threat to ourselves, then we have to accelerate our efforts. We have to be solid, steady, and stable in all that we do – everything of every sort. Our efforts, our exertion, our persistence, our powers of endurance have to be great because of our desire for release. Our mindfulness and wisdom must try to find approaches for examining things so that we can get past them step by step.

But if we're complacent, that's not the way it is with us at all. As soon as we meet with a little bit of pleasure, we get complacent, just like a foolish person with his money. As soon as he earns a little bit, he spends it all on his own amusement, with no thought of trying to save it. Whether the things he buys are necessary or not, he doesn't care, just as long as he can buy them. He spends without holding anything back, without thinking at all, and so he becomes an habitual spender without any thought for what's reasonable or necessary. When he finally reaches a dead end, there's no way out for him. So he sinks into misery

because of the poverty that comes from being extravagant, from being a spendthrift, from thinking only of the immediate present and not taking the long view. And this is because he hasn't got the intelligence to prepare for the future.

As for people who use their discernment, they spend their money only when necessary. When they buy anything, it's because they see its necessity – and they really benefit from it. What they put away as savings is for the sake of real necessities in the future. This is what it means to be discerning. Here we're talking about external wealth.

The same sort of thing applies to amassing internal wealth, too. As far as external wealth is concerned, we make sure we have enough to get by in the world, enough to keep the body going without suffering from poverty. We make sure that our homes and the other necessities on which the body depends are adequate. As for our inner necessities – that is, noble wealth (*ariya-dhana*), the wealth lying beyond the reach of all dangers and enemies – this refers to our inner worth, our inner quality, which no one else can steal or run off with.

If there are still any seeds within us that will lead to our being reborn on any level in any place, in line with the affairs of our defilements, we should try at least to have inner quality and inner goodness on which we can depend so that we won't suffer too much and so that we can get by and keep going. This is an important treasure or an important tool for making our way along the path to the land of security.

Weakness is something by which we create obstacles for ourselves, one after another, so that we don't gain the benefits we should be capable of. This is why we're taught to abandon it – because weakness, laziness, taking the easy way out, are all affairs of defilements and not any sort of Dhamma that can give us shelter or security.

The affairs of the Dhamma are the exact opposite. Every word, every phrase of the Buddha's Dhamma teaches us to consider things, to take the initiative, to be diligent, hard-working and persistent, to contend with things no matter how heavy the task. All we ask is to know the reason for going to a certain point, for following a certain path, and then we'll try to go, no matter what the difficulties may be. *This is the way of sages. This is the sort of fighting spirit they have.* They never say things like: "It's too hot ... too cold ... I don't feel like doing it. It's too early ... too late ... I don't feel up to it." They never say these things at all.

To say these things is a sign of a lazy person, finding excuses to tie himself down. When it becomes a question of doing good, people like this find nothing but problems with which they create thorns and ob-

stacles in their path so that they're left with no way to go. As a result, they end up lying on their bed of thorns. When they prepare their bed, they don't think about what they're doing. All they think about is ease and pleasure in the present. But as for the suffering that will come from that ease and pleasure, they don't give it a thought, which is why they keep running into things they don't want, things they don't desire, over and over again.

As for wise people, they use their mindfulness and wisdom to evaluate things, to gauge the consequences until they see them clearly. Then they advance, with no thought of turning back. Even if it means death, they're ready and willing to die. After all, everyone in the world has to die. Every living being in the world has to go. No one – not a single one of us – is going to be left. *So if we're going to die, let's die well.* If we have to make an effort, it's something we can do while we're still alive. After we die, there's nothing we can do. If we're going to correct our faults, we should do it while we're still living, because after we die we can't correct them at all. This is what reason teaches us.

So try to correct your faults. Correct them until they're all gone, and then you'll be released from their penalty – like a prisoner who is released from his penalty, released from jail, and attains his freedom. The heart released from the penalty of its faults, from its inner *kamma*, becomes a free heart. Freedom is ease. When we're free, we are infinitely at ease. There's no one who can come to force or coerce us. Compared to what it is now, the heart when it's free is a hundred thousand times more happy and serene – to the point where nothing at all can compare!

Who wants to be anyone's servant or slave? And yet when we're slaves to the defilements, we don't seem to mind. This is why we're caught in their trap, why we're forced to suffer hardship and pain. *So we should see them as our enemies and then wrestle with them until we come out victorious. The heart will then be free, in and of itself. Fight without stopping! Don't retreat. No matter how many defilements may be lordling it over the heart, they can all be dethroned through the power of your combat, your resistance, your destruction of them. The heart then becomes free.*

When the heart becomes free, there's nothing – nothing but happiness and serene security. There's nothing more easeful than freedom of the heart.

"I go to the Dhamma for refuge" – to the Dhamma surpassing the world, which arose from the Buddha's right practice. That same right practice is the path that will take us to the security of that Dhamma.

"I go to the Sangha for refuge." The Noble Disciples have followed

the path ahead of us, and we're following it in their wake. They have all gained release from suffering and caught up with the Buddha. We follow in their footsteps with our right practice. Wherever we live, we have Dhamma in our hearts. The defilements fear a person with Dhamma in the heart – don't think that they don't. The defilements contain both fear and bravery in themselves, but because they're found in our hearts, we feel both fear and bravery in line with them. But once we're really rid of them, there's no bravery, no fear – just the evenness, consistency, and constancy of excellence at all times. This isn't a matter of defilement; it's a matter of the genuine Dhamma. That's what it's like.

So we must try to accelerate our efforts. Our breath keeps running out each second. Even though it keeps coming in and out, as if it weren't running out, still it's running out in line with the principles of its nature, bit by bit, step by step, and there's nothing we can do to get it back. When it keeps running out, running out, it finally reaches the point where it really runs out and there's no breath left to us. When there's no breath left to us, what do they call us? They say that we're *dead*.

When you die, I ask that you die only in body. Don't let the inner goodness, the inner worth in your heart die, too. Make sure that your heart has inner worth to hold to, because the heart is of vital importance. It's your greatest treasure. Make sure you try to nourish and enhance it through your efforts so that it shines within you. As the Buddha says: "The superlative treasure is the heart."

All our other possessions are simply external things which we depend on from day to day, but don't dismiss them. Everyone alive has to depend on external things to nourish and support the body so that it will develop and grow. But ultimately we have to depend on the goodness that forms the essential core of the heart to establish us securely in the life after this, as long as our defilements aren't yet over and done with.

When our defilements are gone – through the effort of our practice that has reached a state of fullness, penetrating ultimate truths, ultimate causes and effects – that's the end of the problem of repeated death and rebirth. Our heart becomes a great treasure just like the treasure the Buddha awakened to. When the Noble Disciples reached the Dhamma, it was this same great treasure. They no longer had to spin around like whirligigs, taking birth and dying, dying and taking birth like we do to the point where we ourselves can't keep track of the times. Who knows how we could count them? It's like following the tracks in a cattle pen. You can't tell which tracks are old ones, which ones are new, because they're all over the pen. How could anyone follow them? They turn here

and turn there, cross over one another this way and that. Wherever you go, wherever you look, there's nothing but cattle tracks all over the place – because the cattle trample all around in there day and night, day after day. You can't tell which tracks are going in, which ones are going out, because the cattle are stuck there in the pen with no way to get out.

Death and rebirth, death and rebirth. They happen over and over again like this all the time, to the point where we can't keep track. When there's death and rebirth, there's also the suffering and discontent that come part and parcel with them. When we cut the cause of death and rebirth, there's no more over and over again. This is what the final cessation of suffering and discontent is like.

When we use our mindfulness and wisdom to evaluate things and build up plenty of inner goodness, when we work constantly at developing both inner wealth and outer wealth, we're said to be wise. As long as we're alive, we can depend on these things as we lead a life of inner quality and worth, calm and at peace because of the goodness we've developed. When the time comes for us to be separated from our material wealth – such as the body, which we regard as one of our most important possessions – we can then depend on our inner wealth, the inner quality and worth we've developed, as the basic capital for establishing ourselves on a good level in a good rebirth. This is in keeping with the fact that inner quality acts as a supporting factor for the person who has developed it by doing what is good. In one of the basic tenets of the Dhamma, it's said:

dhammo have rakkhāti dhammacārim

“The Dhamma protects the person who practices it” from falling into evil places. What are evil places? Places no one would want to go. What causes people to be born in such places? Evil, that's what.

When you realise this, you should do your best to develop goodness so that you can go to a good place and have your hopes fulfilled. In other words, develop inner goodness within the heart. Don't be complacent or heedless of the fact that days, nights, months, and years keep passing by, passing by. Make sure your goodness develops smoothly and consistently. The important point lies with you. It doesn't lie with the days, nights, months, and years. You have to regard yourself as the crucial factor. How are you going to develop yourself through the various forms of goodness so as to be safe, secure, and at peace? Try to develop goodness to the point where it meets your needs, or to the utmost of your ability. This is called clearing the path that goes the good way – both now and

in the future – instead of creating brambles and thorns on which to cut yourself and get hurt.

When we go the good way, we meet with joy. *‘Idha nandati:’* We find joy in the present life. *‘Pecca nandati:’* When we leave this life, we find joy in the next life. We find joy both in this world and in the next. We meet only with rewarding things through the power of the inner worth we’ve developed in our hearts. Wise people develop nothing but goodness in this way, which is why they meet with nothing but goodness and discover only good things to pass along to us – as the Buddha did. He searched for what was good and so found what was good and passed it along to the living beings of the world. Even up to the present day, these good things – the teachings he brought out of the truth of the Dhamma – have yet to run out.

His teachings were accurate and correct, in line with cause and effect, in line with the truth, and the principles of truth. As for us, we’re like the deaf and blind. If we don’t place our trust in people with good eyes and ears, whom will we trust? Ignorance is heaped full inside us. Darkness and blindness fill our hearts, and we don’t know which way is the way to go. Days, nights, months, and years keep passing away, passing away, *but our ignorance won’t pass away unless we work to strip it away* – which is why we have to strip off the blindness of our own ignorance and foolishness so that our minds will be bright and able to see the path.

The Buddha had outer eyes and the inner eye, outer wisdom and inner wisdom, so we should place our trust in him in line with the phrase we repeat, “I go to the Buddha for refuge.” Get so that it goes straight to the heart. Straight to the heart! Place your life in his hands by following the practice like a warrior, like a student trained by a master.

The teachings of the religion lead to this point, step by step, from the very beginning. The Dhamma, you know, can be said to be broad, but can also be said to be narrow because it all comes down to one point – the heart. The heart is what experiences both good and evil. The heart is what does good and evil, and the results – good and bad, pleasant and painful – all come down to the heart. This is why the Buddha taught,
mano pubbaṅgama dhammā

“The heart comes first,” the heart is chief, the heart is the principle factor. All dhammas² come down to the heart. They don’t lie anywhere else. So this is where we should straighten things out. Get so that the heart is shining and bright.

The body is something filled with suffering and discontent, but the heart can be filled with happiness. This is where they differ. The body is pitch dark in line with the crudeness of its elements, but the heart can

⁶ *dhammā*, dhammas: in the plural means objects of the mind, concepts, theories.

be dazzlingly bright through the power of the Dhamma. This is where the heart becomes a ‘Dhamma element’, when it’s fully bright within itself because absolutely nothing is left to obscure it.

So. Get rid of its stains. Wash them away. It will then be fully bright in a way that blankets the cosmos. This one heart is the only thing with a power this great. It blankets the whole cosmos, with no sense of too near or too far. It’s always just right through its own gentleness, its own brightness. So gentle that there’s no word to describe it, so bright that it blankets the cosmos in radiance by day and by night. This is called ‘*āloko udapādi*’: The dawning of light within the heart.

Everything within us, everything in the world, comes down to this one heart. The important essence lies here and nowhere else. So make an effort to free this heart, to straighten it out in line with your abilities – or to the utmost of your abilities. You’ll then come to possess a rewarding treasure within the heart – the great, extremely rewarding treasure of the heart’s own purity.

I ask that you take this and contemplate it well. The treasure for which you have hoped for so long will be yours and yours alone.

