

## *Water for the Fires of the World*

*Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa's Dhamma Talk given on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, 1981*

*Translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu*

**T**he Lord Buddha was a frugal man – one who continually made sacrifices. Frugality, thrift, and moderation are all qualities that go together, but they don't mean stinginess. Stinginess is one thing; frugality, thrift and moderation are something else. Frugality means having principles. Stinginess means being miserly and unable to get along with anyone. People don't like to associate with stingy people because they're afraid their livers will fall prey to the long reach of the stingy person who is greedy and selfish, who excels at taking advantage of others.

Stinginess, selfishness, and greed are all part of a set. When people have a great deal of stinginess, their greed is great. Their selfishness is great and deep-rooted as well. They're happy when they can take advantage of others. These qualities make it hard – make it impossible – for them to get along with anyone at all. Whenever they associate with anyone, they're simply waiting for a chance to eat out that person's liver and lungs. Those who associate with them will have to lose their livers, their lungs, their large and small intestines, and so on until they have nothing left because stinginess, selfishness, and greed keep eating away the whole time.

Even when selfish people make sacrifices, it's like bait on the barb of a hook waiting to snag fish in the mouth. They give a little in order to get a lot in return. People of this sort are a danger that we human beings are subject to – a danger in no way inferior to any of the others we have to face. Honest people, principled people, and stupid people are all falling prey to this sort of thing.

When stingy people make sacrifices, each little bit is like pulling taffy. Have you ever seen taffy? They sell it in the markets – or at least they used to. Whether they still sell it or not, I don't know. It's very sticky. When you pull off a piece, you have to pull and pull and pull until – NUPP! – and all you get is a little tiny piece. NUPP! – just a little piece and that's all. "I'm making a donation . . ." they announce it to the nation. If they could, they'd have it announced on radio and television. "I'm a good-hearted soul making a donation of so-and-so much." It's nothing but taffy. If even the slightest piece comes off, it has to go NUPP!

How can people of this sort say they believe in merit and the law of *kamma* (*karma*)? Actually, all they believe in are the defilements that are lording over their heads. They make the announcement to please their defilements, in hopes that other people will respect them. Even though there's no real goodness to them, they're satisfied if other people say they're good. This is why when we are stingy we are dangerous to the world, to our fellow human beings and other living beings in general. And this is why the Dhamma teaches us to beware of being stingy – because it makes us destroy ourselves, first of all, and then others, without limit.

To be generous, to make sacrifices makes us good friends with other people and living beings in general. Wherever we go, we're at peace. The ability to make sacrifices comes from good will and benevolence, from being generous and gentle toward all our fellow human beings and other living beings in the world.

Our Lord Buddha was called “*mahā kāruṇiko nātho hitaya sabba pāṇīnam*.” Listen to that! “A refuge of great compassion for the benefit of all beings.” This came from his moderation and frugality. This was the path he followed. This is why people who follow his path never come to a bad end. Instead, they prosper and attain peace.

In particular, they prosper in their hearts, which is more important than any other sort of prosperity there is. If there's prosperity in our hearts, then the world can live in happiness and peace. But if there's only material prosperity, with no prosperity in the heart, it can't give the world any happiness. In fact, if there's no Dhamma at all seeping into the heart, external prosperity can do nothing but make the world more hot and troubled than before. If there's prosperity both in the world and in the heart, then material prosperity is an adornment for our beauty and well-being.

The Buddha and his disciples – who left home to practice so that they could share the Dhamma with us – sacrificed everything of every sort. They laid their lives on the line and struggled through all sorts of hardships. And not all the disciples were ordinary people like us. Quite a few of them came from the families of kings, financiers, and landowners, from very refined backgrounds. But when they went forth into the homeless life, they made themselves into rags and footmats. Their path of practice was frugal and sparing, beset with poverty. They didn't concern themselves much with external plenty or wealth. Instead, they were concerned with the wealth and fullness of the Dhamma in their hearts. They didn't leave room in their hearts for any of the values that pride places on things. They abandoned all values of that sort so as to become

rags without any vanity or conceit. But as for their inner quality, these rags wrapped gold in their hearts. Their hearts contained riches; the treasures of concentration, wisdom, all the way to the greatest treasure – release in the heart.

Just now I mentioned moderation. Moderation means not forgetting yourself, not getting reckless with luxury and pride. It means having standards in the heart, without being concerned over how many or how few possessions you have. If you have things to use, you keep using them as long as they're still serviceable. If they wear out, you keep fixing and repairing them until you can't fix them any further. Only then do you let them go. Even when you let them go, you find other uses for them until there's no use left to them at all. That's when you throw them away. This is how things were done in the Buddha's time. Ven. Ānanda, for instance, when his robes were worn out, would chop them into shreds and mix them into the clay he used to plaster his dwelling. Whether it was because India is very hot or what, I don't know, but at any rate they used clay to plaster their dwellings. They didn't throw things away. If anything still had a use, they'd keep trying to fix it and put it to use in that way.

In our present day there was Ven. Ācariya Mun. His robes, bathing cloths, even his handkerchiefs – I don't know how many times he patched and darned them. They were so spotted with patches and stitches that they looked like leopard skin. And he wouldn't let anyone replace his robes with new ones, you know. "They're still good. Can't you see?" Imagine how it felt when he said that! That's how he took care of his things, and how he taught us to take care of ours as well. He wasn't excited by new things at all.

Whenever monks came to search him out, he'd prod them on in the area of concentration and wisdom. He'd teach them the Dhamma for the sake of peace, calm, and inner prosperity. As for external goods, I never heard him discuss them. He wasn't interested. And he himself was prosperous within. In whatever he looked for, he prospered. If he looked for Dhamma, he prospered in Dhamma. Whatever he looked for he found – because all these things exist in the world. If we look for suffering, we'll find suffering. If we look for happiness, we'll find happiness. Whatever we really look for, we find. *After all, these things all exist in the world, don't they? So why shouldn't we be able to find them?*

This is why we should look for virtuous qualities to give peace to our hearts. The world is hot and troubled because the hearts of the world are hot and troubled. And the reason they're hot and troubled is because they have no Dhamma to put out their fires. There's nothing but fire,

nothing but fuel, stuffed over and over into the heart of every person, and then it spreads out to consume everything. No matter how broad or narrow the world may be, it's hot and troubled – not because of physical fire, not because of the heat of the sun, *but because of the fires of passion and craving, the fires of anger and delusion. That's why the world is aflame.*

If we have water to put out these fires, in other words, if we have Dhamma to act as our standard for evaluating the way we treat one another and living beings in general, if we have Dhamma as our protection, then the world can cool down. We can live together with good will, compassion and forgiveness, seeing that our hearts and the hearts of others have the same value – equal value – that we're all alike in loving happiness and hating pain. This way we can be mutually forgiving because we respect one another's intentions and aren't vain or condescending, abusive or oppressive with one another.

The main problem is the type of person who tries to climb up on the heads of other human beings and hopes to relish happiness alone in the midst of the sufferings of the rest of the world. People like this take the rest of humanity as their toilet. They climb up and defecate on other people's heads, reserving happiness and the status of humanity for themselves alone, while they turn everyone else into a toilet. How on earth can anyone live with wicked people like this? They go too far beyond the bounds of morality and the rest of the world for anyone to forgive them. People of this sort can't live in peace anywhere or with anyone. And because they're the type with no moral sense, they're bound to be very destructive to the common good. Even the Lord of the hell doesn't dare take them into his register for fear that when they go to hell they'll disrupt the place and blow it apart.

As for people who sympathise with each other and see that all human beings are of equal value, they find it easy to be forgiving and to live with one another in peace. They don't despise one another for belonging to this or that class or for having only this or that much wealth – all of which are simply a matter of each person's *kamma*. After all, no one wants to be poor or stupid. Everyone wants to be intelligent, wealthy, and highly respected. But when it isn't possible, we have to leave it to the truth that living beings differ in their *kamma*. *Whatever past kamma you have, you experience it and make use of it in line with what you've got.* If we can forgive each other, with the thought that each living being has his or her own *kamma*, we can live together in peace. If we believe in the Dhamma, we have to believe in *kamma* and not in the defilements that make us arrogant and proud.

Don't go mixing up the *kamma* of different people, thinking: "That person is beneath me ... I'm above that person ... That person is stupider than I am ... I'm smarter than that person." If you compare *kamma* like this, it leads to pride, disdain, hard feelings, and ends up in trouble. If we respect the fact that each of us has his or her own *kamma*, there's no trouble and no reason for hard feelings. Just as when we respect the fact that each person has his or her own spouse – even when we mix together in our work, what harm can it do? Each of us realises which is theirs and which is ours. In the same way, each person's good or bad *kamma* is his or her own affair. If we don't mix them up, the world can live in harmony.

So! This is how the principles of the religion teach us to understand things and to conduct our lives so as to make peace within ourselves. The result is that society, too, will be at peace, if we all practice the Dhamma in line with our position in life.

We should try to train ourselves at least somewhat, you know. If we don't train ourselves, there's no good to us. Anything, no matter what, if it doesn't get trained and put into shape there's no use for it at all. Like wood – whether it's hardwood or softwood, it has to be cut into beams, boards and so forth before it can serve the purpose for which we intend it. So you should train yourself in whichever direction you want to be good. If you hope to be good just by sitting around, it won't work. You'll be good only in name: Mr. Good, Ms. Good. The good is only in the name. *The people behind the names aren't any good unless they train themselves to be good.*

