

Asalha Puja

July 5, 2020

Tonight's Asalha Puja. It's the day of our refuges—all three of them. Visakha is the day for the Buddha. Magha is the day for the Sangha. But Asalha is for all three, because all three are intimately connected. This was the day on which the Buddha gave his first sermon, and so in that sense, it's the beginning of the Dhamma. As Ajaan Suwat pointed out, there's *sabhava-dhamma*, which is just the truth, the way things are. That's always been there, and always will be. But then there's *sasana-dhamma*, the Dhamma of the teachings, and that's available only from time to time.

When the Buddha taught the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, that was the beginning of the sasana-dhamma. And it's because of the sasana-dhamma that we know about the Dhamma of truth. So it's an important refuge. At the same time, in teaching that Dhamma, the Buddha was able to get his first disciple. The head of the five brethren gained the Dhamma eye, where he was able to glimpse the deathless, seeing what was subject to origination and passing away, and what was not subject to origination and passing away. That was the beginning of the noble Sangha. The Buddha then immediately made him a bhikkhu, which was the beginning of the conventional sangha.

And we depend on both. The conventional Sangha is the vehicle that keeps the teachings alive, and it enables us to become members of the noble Sangha. And, of course, the fact that the Buddha was able to teach the Dhamma and gain his first disciple was proof that he wasn't just a private Buddha. He was a complete Buddha.

So that event was the beginning of all three refuges in their complete form. And you have to remember they're all connected. It's because of the Buddha that we can know the Dhamma. And of course, it's because of the Dhamma that the Buddha was able to find true happiness. The Sangha is what keeps these teachings alive.

Now, that distinction between the Dhamma as the truth and the Dhamma as the teachings reminds us the Dhamma as the teachings is not always going to be around. All kinds of things can come to make it go away. However, we've got the opportunity right now to practice it. That's how you keep it alive. So when you remember that the Dhamma as a teaching is not always going to be here, that thought should give you a sense of urgency to take advantage of it while you've got it.

Don't let your petty concerns get in the way. Otherwise, we keep finding reasons to get upset about this, worked up about that, and it deflects our attention from what's really important—which, as the Buddha pointed out in his first sermon, is the problem of suffering. It's something that we create ourselves, even though we don't want it. But because the causes lie within, and we've got the potentials to create a path within that can undercut those causes, we have to keep our focus inside. That's where the real problem is. So don't let yourself get deflected from the real problem off into subsidiary problems, because solving the little problems is not going to solve the big one.

You can't say, "I'll wait until this thing outside gets straightened out or that thing outside gets straightened out, then I'll be happy to practice." We have to practice in an imperfect world. The world was imperfect at the time of the Buddha. It's imperfect now. But we can build the perfections within us in the midst of outside imperfections. The traditional image is of a lotus. It grows in the mud, comes up out of muddy water, but when that lotus blooms, the inside of the flower is pure. So try to find that purity within your heart. Purify the heart, because that's what all these teachings are about. That's the refuge they provide.