

RELENTLESS LAW OF RETRIBUTIVE KAMMA

By Ven. Shanti Bhadra Thera

Savatthi, known as Sahet-Mahet today, is a place of great importance in the history of Buddhism. It was there that the Buddha spent nearly twenty five Vassana (rainy) seasons, nineteen in the Jetavanarama (monastery) built by the well-known wealthy devotee of the Buddha. Anathapindika and six in Pubbarama built by Maha Upasika Visaka. Many important sermons were delivered in Savatthi which are recorded in the Sutta Pitaka – one of the three Buddhist Canons (Tipitaka) which contains all the popular discourses of the Buddha. In this city, only the ancient Buddhist ruins remain to remind us of the Buddha and the great Arahats of old and to bring to our minds most poignantly the inexorable Law of Anicca (Change) taught by the Buddha. The Ananda Bodhi planted in front of Jetavanarama on the instructions of the Buddha still flourishes giving shade to weary pilgrims and pointing out to the world that Buddhism has sent roots deep into the Indian soil and that it will re-assert itself in the course of time.

On one occasion, two thousand two hundred and fifty or more years ago, the son of a wealthy land-owner living in the out-skirts of Savatthi, saw many people going to Jetavana Vihara towards sun-down with flowers and incense. Being curious – curiosity is one of the busiest passions of the idle rich – to know where the people were wending their way, he followed them. They went to the Vihara and having paid obeisance to the Buddha sat down in the open preaching hall. He, named Mahapala, too, sat quietly in a corner of the hall.

The Buddha noticed Mahapala. He understood the workings of Mahapala's mind; he preached the Dhamma gradually leading the mind of Mahapala from the elementary stages of the doctrine to the deeper and deeper aspects of it (**Samukkansika desana**). At the end of the sermon, Mahapala approached the Buddha and begged him to admit him to the Order of the Sangha. The Buddha explained to him the preliminary rules of the Order and asked him whether he had the permission of his near and dear relations. He said that he had a brother called Cullapala and that he would obtain his agreement.

Mahapala went home and told his brother to take charge of all the land, cattle and wealth they had as he intended to become a monk. Cullapala was greatly astonished at the change and reasoned with him not to do so but live the household life and at the same time to do much Kusala Kamma (meritorious deeds). Mahapala was adamant; he pointed out to his brother the difficulties and obstacles in living the Higher Life in all its purity engaged in the busy activities

and temptations of the day to day life. Though reluctantly, Cullapala had to yield to the reasoned pleadings of his brother.

Mahapala returned to Jetavanarama and was ordained a monk. He lived five years with his teacher learning the preliminaries of a monk's life and at the end of the period he met the Buddha and enquired from him the principal functions of a monk. The Buddha explained to him that "**Gantha Dhura**" consisted in the study and the dissemination of a Dhamma while "**Vipassana dhura**" meant the constant application to meditation and mindfulness in order to weed out all the defilements of the mind – "mental diseases – and realise Nibbana – the peace that passeth all sense-limited and mind-bound understanding. Mahapala chose the second and requested the Buddha to give him all instructions needed to attain that state.

Having received the necessary guidance from the Buddha, Mahapala accompanied by sixty like-minded monks went into a remote village far from the "madding crowds" to apply themselves wholeheartedly to meditation. The people of the village built them simple huts and provided them with the few other frugal necessities of a monk. Mahapala addressed his fellow-brothers and said that as they had direct instructions from a living Buddha, it should be their unremitting endeavour to practise the Dhamma and make it a living reality in their lives as early as possible; he pointed out that it would not be possible to please the Buddha with hypocritical ways and half-hearted efforts. Mahapala himself resolutely determined to practise meditation in the three postures, standing, sitting and walking; but never to stretch himself to sleep until the goal is achieved.

Mahapala unremittingly applied himself to meditation with great earnestness. Lack of sleep gradually began to tell on him; his eyes became weak and sick. The physician of the village give him ointments for the eye and advised him not to tire himself so much as the body needed a certain measure of rest and sleep to maintain it in good health. Mahapala overlooked his instructions; he was determined to realise Nibbana at the cost of his eyes and health. In this way, he pursued his meditation and at the end of the Three months the attainment of Nibbana and blindness came simultaneously. Therefore, he was called Cakkhupala Thera – the blind Thera.

After the three months, Cakkhupala Thera left the village and went back to Savatthi. He lived in a small kuti (cell) in the precincts of Jetavanarama. It was his practice to promenade daily in the mornings and evenings. On one occasion, while promenading and being blind, he had trampled and killed many insects on the ambulatory. Later, when some visiting monks who had come to Jetavanarama saw the dead insects in the ambulatory enquired who had done that. They were informed that the blind monk had been walking up and down

there; they railed at him and commented to the other monks that this monk had done nothing while he was in possession of good eyesight and now groping blindly doing what was very unseemly.

They went to the Buddha and reported the matter to him. He enquired from them whether they had seen him doing it; on replying in the negative, the Buddha pointed out that Cakkhupala had done that unconsciously and that he was an Arahant who was free from all thoughts of ill-will and hatred. The monks wished to know what past Kamma had made him blind. The Buddha related to them his past life as a physician and how he had blinded a poor woman intentionally with thoughts of hate and revenge; that deleterious action had dogged him from birth to birth relentlessly in Samsara and that even as an Arahant he had to bear the brunt of his misdeed. He explained to them how the mind moulded one's destiny and how Kamma (bad or good action) followed on throughout Samsara and concluded saying; - "Mind is the forerunner of (all evil) states of mind. Mind is chief; they are mind made. If one speaks or acts with a soiled mind the consequence is that suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoofs of the draught – ox".

Kamma is a force, in virtue of which, action follows reaction, as night follows the day. Kamma accounts for all the differences in the world; Kamma has many faces and varied potentialities commensurate with our actions; differences in body such as beauty and ugliness, health and sickness and different mental abilities varying from idiocy to genius all originate in Kamma. Kamma answers why some inherit riches and fine linen while others get kicks instead of kindness, rags for garments and dogs for comforters. Christmas Humphreys puts it beautifully and succinctly thus - "Kamma is an ever-generating force. It may be as a thunder cloud, so fully charged that nothing can delay its equally complete discharge; it may be as a snow-ball on the mountain side, so small and slowly moving at first that a slight expenditure of effort will bring its growing power to rest".

