

A Raft - SIMILE OF DHAMMA

The Buddha has taught the Dhamma to be like a raft, he first made the simile of the snake in the *Alagaddupama Sutta*.

"Bhikkhus, a certain foolish man learns the prose sections, prose and verse sections, the answers and explanation expositions, stanzas, solemn utterances, thus said sections, birth stories, wonderful things, a series of questions and answers. He thoroughly learns the Teaching but does not examine the meanings with wisdom. So he cannot take pleasure in the Teaching. He learns the Teaching for the purpose of finding fault. He takes a wrong grasp of the Teaching and that conduces for his unpleasantness for a long time. The reason is the wrong grasp of the Teaching. Like a man wandering in search of a serpent would come to a huge serpent, he would take hold of the serpent by the hood or the tail and it would turn round and sting the hand or foot or any other limb. On account of this wrong grasp of the serpent he would meet death or deadly unpleasantness. In the same manner a certain foolish man learns the prose sections, prose and verse sections, the answers and explanation expositions, stanzas, solemn utterances, thus said sections, birth stories, wonderful things, a series of questions and answers. He thoroughly learns the Teaching but does not examine the meanings with wisdom. So he cannot take pleasure in the Teaching. He learns the Teaching for the purpose of finding fault. He takes a wrong grasp of the Teaching and that conduces for his unpleasantness for a long time. The reason is the wrong grasp of the Teaching."

The meaning of the above stanza should be carefully examined. A lot of people misunderstood the above stanza, and when they were being admonished, they charged back with anger on those who admonished them for their welfare. This should be wisely avoided.

As a matter of fact, the people who admonish others for the correctness of the Buddha Dhamma and the welfare of others are not the same as those who only learn the Dhamma to find faults.

"Bhikkhus, a certain son of a clansman learns the prose sections, prose and verse sections, the answers and explanation expositions, stanzas, solemn utterances, thus said sections, birth stories, wonderful things, a series of questions and answers. He thoroughly learns the Teaching and examines the meanings with wisdom and is convinced of the Teaching. He does not learn the Teaching to find fault with it, nor does he learn it for the purpose of release through hearsay. He experiences the meanings. He has taken hold of the Teaching correctly, and it conduces for his pleasantness for a long time. It is because of the correct grasp of the Teaching. Like a man

wandering in search of a serpent would come to a huge serpent and would take hold of it with a forked stick or hold it by the neck, it may coil round the man's hand or foot or any other limb small or large, yet he would not come to death or deadly unpleasantness, because of the correct hold of the snake. In the same manner, a certain son of a clansman learns the prose sections, prose and verse sections, the answers and explanation expositions, stanzas, solemn utterances, thus said sections, birth stories, wonderful things, a series of questions and answers. He thoroughly learns the Teaching and examines the meanings with wisdom and is convinced of the Teaching. He does not learn the Teaching to find fault with it, nor does he learn it for the purpose of release through hearsay. He experiences the meanings. He has taken hold of the Teaching correctly, and it conduces for his pleasantness for a long time. It is because of the correct grasp of the Teaching."

As the Buddha taught, one should examine the Dhamma with wisdom so one may experience its meaning and put it to practice. One should not merely hold on to the Dhamma without examination and investigation.

The Buddha further taught,

"Suppose that a man, in the course of traveling along a path, were to come to a great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious & risky, the further shore secure & free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. The thought would occur to him, 'Here is this great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious & risky, the further shore secure & free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. What if I were to gather grass, twigs, branches, & leaves and, having bound them together to make a raft, were to cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with my hands & feet?' Then the man, having gathered grass, twigs, branches, & leaves, having bound them together to make a raft, would cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with his hands & feet. Having crossed over to the further shore, he might think, 'How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don't I, having hoisted it on my head or carrying on my back, go wherever I like?' What do you think, monks: would the man, in doing that, be doing what should be done with the raft?"

"No, lord."

"And what should the man do in order to be doing what should be done with the raft? There is the case where the man, having crossed over, would think, 'How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands & feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don't I, having dragged it on dry land or sinking it in the water, go wherever I like?' In doing this, he would be doing what should be done with the raft. Even so monks, I have taught you the Dhamma like a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Knowing the Dhamma to be like a raft, you should let go even of [skillful] qualities, to say nothing of those that are not."

As Buddhists, letting go of the skillful qualities is perhaps, the hardest thing. However, we should all be mindful that attachment does not lead to our welfare. Therefore even when we are well established in our virtues, we should not attach to them.

May all beings gain insight and be freed from sufferings!

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!