

Dhamma Talk: On Chants

Introduction

1. So we've been using the chant sheets that Ron has compiled for some time, and I've wanted for a while to share with you some of the meaning behind these chants, and some background
2. When I was studying in Sri Lanka, we had compulsory Religious education (and that was not as bad as it sounds – we had to meditate a lot, which turned out to be rather useful, all things considered) and one of the things I had to learn was the meaning of these chants, among many others
3. The chants that we have selected for everyday use are rather special, and they are used by Buddhists all over the world. When I was in school, we chanted the Namothassa, as well as the itipiso, the swakkhato, and the supatipanno (among others) every morning before attending classes.
4. The chants are also, well, chanted, before any religious occasion, and they are played on morning tv in some channels (just so you know)
5. I will, for lack of time, be speaking on just Itipiso, and swakkhato, and I felt that would be appropriate since we have only chanted those two. Also, they are the more meaningful and symbolic chants, and I had rather a lot to share with you about them.

Body

1. So, to start with the itipiso.
 - a. This talks about the qualities of the Buddha
 - b. Not qualities that define a Buddha
 - i. Since Enlightenment defines a Buddha
 - c. But instead qualities that a Buddha are said to possess
2. One of the fascinating ideas that comes up when you read this is the 3 kinds of Buddhas, and the distinction between them
 - a. There are 3 main sorts of Buddha; in order of rarity, they are:
 - i. Samma Sambuddha
 - ii. Sleeping Buddhas
 - iii. Arahants
 - b. Samma Sambuddhas are Buddhas, like Gautama Buddha, who have attained enlightenment through their own effort, and have the will to share their knowledge with the world
 - c. Sleeping Buddhas are also Buddhas who have attained enlightenment through their own effort, but who do not, or supposedly cannot, share their knowledge with the world
 - d. Arahants are enlightened beings who attain enlightenment by following the path set down by a Samma Sambuddha
 - e. The chant does talk about the qualities that are exclusive to the different Buddhas, and I will address these in turn.
3. So, to move on to the 9 qualities

- a. Arahant: Any Buddha is an enlightened being, and the word arahant describes that fact. By this standard, even a Samma Sambuddha is an arahant, and that is what the word arahant describes.
 - i. He has discarded defilements
 - 1. No more greed, aversion, ignorance
 - 2. No more suffering
 - ii. Surpressed the impulses connected with the eradication of defilements
 - iii. Transcended the wheel of rebirth
 - iv. Worthy of being given offerings
 - v. Withholds no secrets
 - 1. He preaches all he knows
- b. Samma Sambuddho: as a Samma Sambuddha, he has attained enlightenment through his own effort and renounced the world
- c. Vijjacharana Sampanno: He is endowed with clear vision and good conduct.
 - i. Endowed with Threefold vision
 - 1. Ability to recall all his past births and those of others
 - 2. Can see into future time and space
 - 3. Arahant hood
 - ii. And Eightfold Wisdom, including
 - 1. Divine eye
 - 2. What is grandly translated as the Exquisite knowledge pertaining to the life of holiness
- d. Sugatho
 - i. His path is good, and the destination is excellent; the methods he used are harmless and blameless
- e. Lokavidu
 - i. Having known, experienced, and having understanding of all aspects of worldly life
- f. Anuttaro Purisadhammasarathi
 - i. Anuttaro means Unmatched
 - ii. PDS means the ability to persuade others through the power of the dhamma
 - 1. This would mean that he could lead potentially sociopathic people such as the murderer Angulimala (who we talked about last semester) away from a life of crime, and into the monastic life
- g. Sattha deva Manussanam
 - i. He is a teacher of gods and men
 - ii. This is a reference to the idea that the Buddha is a great teacher, and not a savior per se; an idea that I will get back to when I talk about the Dhamma
- h. Buddhho
 - i. This means 'Awakened', means that the Buddha is 'Awakened' in comparison to those non enlightened ones such as ourselves who are asleep in terms of our understanding of the wheel of samsara, or rebirth

- i. Bhagava: This is translated into having great compassion and kindness; is a reference to the fact that as a Samma Sambuddha, he has the great compassion and kindness that drives him to preach the Dhamma to others.
- 4. And now we move on to the Dhamma.
 - a. Swakkhato Baghavata Dhammo:
 - i. This means the Dhamma was expounded by the Buddha, that it is well expounded, and that it is excellent at beginning, middle and end.
 - b. Sandhittiko
 - i. This means that the Dhamma, if well studied, gives excellent results in the here and now; that if one studies and adheres to the Dhamma, they could witness the results of their adherence to the Dhamma in real terms.
 - ii. An example of this is the Emperor Dharmasoka, who started out as a very warlike emperor who fought hard and killed many people in the process, and eventually, through the mitigating influence of Buddhism, became a more compassionate and 'mellow' individual.
 - 1. His epithet was changed from Chandasokha, which means warlike Asoka, to Dharmasoka, which means holy Asoka.
 - c. Akaliko
 - i. The word means 'Timeless', and this is also a reference to the fact that the effects of adhering to the Dhamma will appear in the here and now
 - ii. It also is a reference to the timelessness of the Dhamma: the buddha's teachings will fade in time, but the relevance of his doctrine is timeless
 - d. Ehipassiko
 - i. This is a very intriguing section: It is an invitation for people to "come and see, inspect and criticize." It implies that there is nothing mystical or mysterious about the dharma.
 - ii. The idea is similar to that expounded in the Kalama sutta, which I talked about some time ago
 - e. Opanayiko
 - i. Means that the Dhamma leads one to peace and Happiness
 - f. Pachchattam vedhitabbo Vinnuhiti
 - i. This means that the dhamma is to be comprehended individually by the wise
 - ii. Refers to the fact that no one can study it on behalf of another: it has to be understood individually
 - iii. Also a reference to the fact that the Buddha is not a savior but a teacher

Conclusion

I really am glad for the chance to talk about the chants; I don't think the Buddha would have liked the idea of chanting things without having any idea what they mean, even if they do sound nice. I tried to give some background information, and some information about what the chants actually mean, and I hope their meaning is now more clear.