

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE *DHAMMA*: THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

What is Buddhism?

“This doctrine is profound, hard to see, difficult to understand, calm, sublime, not within the sphere of logic, subtle, to be understood by the wise.”

~ Majjhima Nikaya

16.1 **TIPITAKA**

- 16.1.1 The Buddha has passed away, but the sublime Teaching, which He expounded during His long and successful ministry and which He unreservedly bequeathed to humanity, still exists in its pristine purity.
- 16.1.2 Although the Master has left no written records of His Teachings, His disciples preserved them, by committing to memory and transmitting them orally from generation to generation.
- 16.1.3 Three months after the Death of the Buddha, in the eighth year of King Ajatasattu’s reign, 500 pre-eminent *Arahants* concerned with preserving the purity of the Doctrine held a Convocation at Rajagaha to rehearse it. The Venerable Ananda Thera, the Buddha’s beloved attendant who had the special privilege and honour of hearing the discourses from the Buddha Himself, and the Venerable Upali Thera were chosen to answer questions

about the *Dhamma* (Doctrine) and the *Vinaya* (Discipline) respectively.

- 16.1.4 The First Council compiled and arranged in its present form the Pali Tipitaka, which represents the entire body of the Buddha's Teaching.
- 16.1.5 Two other Councils¹ of *Arahants* were held 100 and 236 years later respectively, again to rehearse the Word of the Buddha because attempts were being made to pollute the pure Teaching.
- 16.1.6 About 83 B.C., during the reign of the pious Sinhala King Vatta Gatami Abhaya², a Council of *Arahants* was held, and the Tipitaka was, for the first time in the history of Buddhism, committed to writing at Aluvihara³ in Ceylon.
- 16.1.7 Thanks to the indefatigable efforts of those noble and foresighted *Arahants*, there is no room either now or in the future for higher critics or progressive scholars to adulterate the pure Teaching.
- 16.1.8 The word *Tipitaka*⁴ means three Baskets. They are the Basket of Discipline (*Vinaya Pitaka*), the Basket of Discourses (*Sutta Pitaka*) and the Basket of Ultimate Doctrine (*Abhidhamma Pitaka*).

16.2 VINAYA PITAKA

- 16.2.1 The *Vinaya Pitaka*, which is regarded as the sheet anchor of the Holy Order, deals mainly with the rules and regulations of the Order of *Bhikkhus* (monks) and *Bhikkhunis* (nuns). For nearly twenty years after the Enlightenment of the Buddha, no definite rules were laid down for control and

discipline of the *Sangha* (Order). Subsequently as occasion arose, the Buddha promulgated rules for the future discipline of the *Sangha*. Reasons for the promulgation of rules, their various implications, and specific *Vinaya* ceremonies of the *Sangha* are fully described in the *Vinaya Pitaka*. The history of the gradual development of *Sasana*⁵ from its very inception, a brief account of the life and ministry of the Buddha, and details of the three Councils are some other additional relevant contents of the *Vinaya Pitaka*.

16.2.2 The *Vinaya Pitaka* consists of the following five books:

- i. *Parajika Pali* (Major Offences)
- ii. *Pacittiya Pali* (Minor Offences)
- iii. *Mahavagga Pali* (Greater Section)
- iv. *Cullavagga Pali* (Lesser Section)
- v. *Parivara Pali* (Epitome of the *Vinaya*)

16.3 SUTTA PITAKA

16.3.1 The *Sutta Pitaka* consists chiefly of instructive discourses delivered by the Buddha to both the *Sangha* and the laity on various occasions. A few discourses, expounded by disciples such as the Venerable Sariputta, Moggallana, and Ananda, are incorporated and are accorded as much veneration as the Word of the Buddha Himself, since they were approved by Him. Most of the sermons were intended mainly for the benefit of *Bhikkhus*, and they deal with the Holy Life and with the exposition of the Doctrine. There are several other discourses which deal with both the material and the moral progress of His lay-followers. The *Sigalovada Sutta*, for instance, deals mainly with the duties of a layman. There are also a few interesting talks given to children.

16.3.2 This *Pitaka* may be compared to a book of prescriptions, since the discourses were expounded on diverse occasions to suit the temperaments of various persons. There may be seemingly contradictory statements, but they should not be misconstrued as they were uttered by the Buddha to suit a particular purpose; for instance, to the self same question He would maintain silence, when the inquirer was merely foolishly inquisitive, or give a detailed reply when He knew the inquirer to be an earnest seeker after the Truth.

16.3.3 The *Sutta Pitaka* consists of the following five *Nikayas* (Collections):

- i. *Digha Nikaya* (Collection of Long Discourses)
- ii. *Majjhima Nikaya* (Collection of Middle-length Discourses)
- iii. *Samyutta Nikaya* (Collection of Kindred Sayings)
- iv. *Anguttara Nikaya* (Collection of Gradual Sayings)
- v. *Khuddaka Nikaya* (Smaller Collection)

16.3.5 The fifth is subdivided into fifteen books:

- i. *Khuddaka Patha* (Shorter Texts)
- ii. *Dhammapada* (The Way of Truth)
- iii. *Udana* (Paeans of Joy)
- iv. *Itivuttaka* (“Thus said” Discourses)
- v. *Sutta Nipata* (Collected Discourses)
- vi. *Vimana Vatthu* (Stories of Celestial Mansions)
- vii. *Peta Vatthu* (Stories of Petas)
- viii. *Theragatha* (Psalms of the Brethren)
- ix. *Therigatha* (Psalms of the Sisters)
- x. *Jataka* (Birth Stories of the Bodhisatta)
- xi. *Niddesa* (Expositions)
- xii. *Patisambhida* (Book on Analytical Knowledge)
- xiii. *Apadana* (Lives of *Arahants*)
- xiv. *Buddhavamsa* (History of the Buddha)
- xv. *Cariya Pitaka* (Modes of Conduct)

16.4 ABHIDHAMMA PITAKA

16.4.1 The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* is the most important and most interesting of the three containing as it does the profound philosophy of the Buddha's teaching in contrast to the simpler discourses in the *Sutta Piaka*. *Abhidhamma*, the Higher Doctrine of the Buddha, expounds the quintessence of His profound teachings.

16.4.2 While the *Sutta Pitaka* contains the conventional teaching (*vohara desana*), the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* contains the ultimate teaching (*paramattha desana*).

16.4.3 It is generally admitted by most exponents of the *Dhamma* that knowledge of the *Abhidhamma* is essential to comprehend fully the Teachings of the Buddha, as it presents the key that opens the door of reality.

16.4.4 The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* is composed of the following seven works:

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| i. <i>Dhammasangani</i> | (Classification of <i>Dhamma</i>) |
| ii. <i>Vibhanga</i> | (Divisions) |
| iii. <i>Dhatukatha</i> | (Discourse on Elements) |
| iv. <i>Puggala Pannatti</i> | (The Book on Individuals) |
| v. <i>Kathavatthu</i> | (Points of Controversy) |
| vi. <i>Yamaka</i> | (The Book of Pairs) |
| vii. <i>Patthana</i> | (The Book of Causal Relations) |

16.5 NOTES ON CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. See Mahavamsa Translation pp. 14-50.
2. Ibid. pp. 19-50.
3. A hamlet in the interior of Ceylon, about 24 miles from Kandy. *Buddhaghosupatti*, a biography of the Great Commentator

Buddhaghosa, states that the amount of books written on ola leaves when piled up would exceed the height of six elephants.

4. Samskrit – Tripitaka
5. Dispensation – *Sasana* is the Pàli term applied to the whole Buddhist Church.