

Study and Discussion Questions for *Early Buddhist Discourses*

Chapter Fifteen: The Lion's Roar on the Wheel-turning Monarch (*Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*)

Study Questions

- 1) What should be a *bhikkhu*'s guiding light and refuge?
- 2) What are just kings called in this discourse?
- 3) What are the key characteristics and duties of a "wheel-turning monarch?"
- 4) Is the "sacred wheel-gem" something passed down by inheritance?
- 5) What two characteristics of the people are affected by their moral degeneracy?
- 6) Why does civilized society degenerate and eventually revive in kingdom described in the discourse?
- 7) What are the proper functions and responsibilities of the king (government) in regard to the poor?
- 8) By what principle should a king govern the people?
- 9) How did the "wheel-turning" king conquer adjacent lands? What moral precepts did he preach to them?
- 10) According to the discourse, how are moral and socio-economic conditions related?
- 11) What does the king fail to do that brings the utopian society to an end and initiates the downward spiral of society?
- 12) What goes wrong with the king's initial strategy for dealing with stealing?
- 13) What was the unintended effect of the king's institution of capital punishment for thieves?
- 14) List the ten "bad deeds" referred to in section 18.
- 15) Describe the lowest point in the degeneration of society (the "weapon-period").
- 16) How do the people put themselves back on the right track to civilized existence? List the ten "good deeds" referred to in section 22.
- 17) What spiritual leader does the Buddha predict will come in the distant future when the utopian society is reestablished? How does this person relate or compare to the Buddha himself?
- 18) What does King *Samkha* do once the government infrastructure is rebuilt and the utopian society restored?
- 19) Briefly describe the five virtues of the *bhikkhu* (life span, beauty, happiness, enjoyment, and strength).

Discussion Questions

- 1) Is the story of the degeneration and regeneration of society to be taken literally? If not, is the story best described as a "myth," an "allegory" or a "parable?"
- 2) What is the main message of the story of the degeneration and regeneration of society?
- 3) Is the discourse correct in suggesting that the government is responsible for three things: the safety of the people, the material welfare of the people, and the promotion of moral

- conduct among the people? Do governments today see these three areas as the primary responsibilities of a good government? Is the Buddha promoting a form of socialism?
- 4) Is good government the foundation of the moral conduct of the people? Is it the responsibility of political leaders to model moral behavior for the populace? Do bad governments have deleterious effects on the moral well-being of the people? If so, how so?
 - 5) The discourse implies that the king's implementation of capital punishment backfires—that such violence breeds only more violence—is the Buddhist position on this plausible? Can the threat of force or violence be used effectively to encourage lawful behavior among citizens?
 - 6) The spiral of social degeneration began when the king failed to provide money to the poor. Does this help explain the crime, violence, and immorality found in our world? Are poverty and criminality related in the way the discourse suggests?
 - 7) Is the Buddha recommending monarchy as the best form of government?
 - 8) What connection (if any) holds between the long story and the discussion of the five virtues of the *bhikkhus* at the end of the discourse?