

## **Dhamma Talk 4: Cutting Down the Forest and Seeking the Light**

Dhamma Speaker: Bhante Pannasara ; On August 16th Saturday

### **Introduction**

Friends in the Dhamma,

The Buddha often used powerful, simple images to point us toward deep truths. In the Theragāthā, the verses of the elder monks, we find a teaching that is short in words but vast in meaning:

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Pāli Text (Theragāthā 1.11–1.12):

Na vanam chindati mā rukkhā,  
na vanam chindate mano;  
vanatthā vanam chindanti,  
tesam chinnaṃ hoti vanam.

Ko nu hāso kimānando,  
niccam pajjalite sati;  
andhakārena onaddhā,  
padīpaṃ na gavesatha.

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### **Meaning**

#### **First stanza:**

“Do not cut down the forest (of trees), O man, but cut down the forest (of desires) in your mind.

From the forest (of desires) fear is born; when the forest is cut down, fear does not exist.”

#### **Second stanza:**

“What is this laughter, what is this joy, when the world is always burning?

Shrouded in darkness, why do you not seek the light?”

Here, vana (forest) is not the jungle outside, but the mental jungle of craving, hatred, and delusion — the kilesas that block our peace.

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## **Part 1 – The Outer Forest vs. the Inner Forest**

The Buddha's first point is clear:

We often focus on changing the outer world — cutting down literal trees, moving to new places, rearranging our lives — thinking this will solve our problems.

But the real forest is inside.

- Trees of greed (lobha).
- Trees of hatred (dosa).
- Trees of delusion (moha).

Even if you move to a quiet forest monastery, if you carry this jungle inside, you will still have no peace.

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## **Part 2 – Why the Forest is a Danger**

A forest is:

- Dense — it hides the path.
- Dark — it blocks the sunlight of wisdom.
- Full of hidden dangers — snakes, wild animals, and traps.

Similarly, when our mind is tangled in craving and attachment, we cannot see clearly, wisdom is blocked, and the “wild animals” of anger and jealousy attack us.

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## **Part 3 – A Story from the Canon**

The Bamboo Cutter

Once, a man earned his living cutting bamboo. The Buddha saw him and said:

“You can cut bamboo all your life, but unless you cut the bamboo of craving, you will never be free.”

The man reflected that his mind was overgrown with the bamboo of greed and anger. He ordained and began “cutting” the inner forest through meditation.

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## **Part 4 – How to Cut the Inner Forest**

The Buddha gives us three tools:

1. Sīla (Morality) – Prevents planting new “trees” of unwholesome kamma.
2. Samādhi (Concentration) – Makes the mind steady and sharp, like a well-honed axe.
3. Paññā (Wisdom) – Sees where the roots are and cuts them completely.

If we lack wisdom, we only trim branches — and the forest grows back quickly.

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## **Part 5 – The Burning World**

The second stanza shifts the image.

The Buddha asks: “What is this laughter, what is this joy, when the world is always burning?”

This is not a call to abandon all joy, but a warning against heedless enjoyment while our “house” is on fire.

The world is burning with:

- The fire of greed.
- The fire of hatred.
- The fire of delusion.

This is the same teaching as the Ādittapariyāya Sutta — the Fire Sermon.

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## **Part 6 – Story of the House on Fire**

A man was sitting comfortably in his house, entertaining guests, unaware that the attic was on fire.

A friend came to warn him, but he replied, “Don’t spoil my fun.”

Moments later, the flames spread, and panic set in.

We too live in a burning house — the fire is impermanence, aging, illness, and death. If we ignore this, our laughter is empty.

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## **Part 7 – Darkness and the Lamp**

The verse continues: “Shrouded in darkness, why do you not seek the light?”

- Darkness = ignorance (avijjā).
- Light = the Dhamma, wisdom, mindfulness.

If we live in darkness, we stumble and hurt ourselves. If we seek the light, we find a safe path.

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## **Part 8 – A Zen Connection**

A Zen master once told his students:

“If you want the garden to be beautiful, pull out the weeds by the roots, not just trim the leaves.”

This is the same as the Buddha’s advice — don’t just manage your cravings, remove them completely.

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## **Part 9 – Modern Examples**

Today's forests and fires include:

- Craving for likes and attention on social media.
- Anger toward those with different opinions.
- Delusion that happiness lies in possessions.

We can “log” these mental trees by mindfulness — noticing when desire sprouts, when anger grows, when confusion spreads.

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## **Part 10 – Closing Reflection**

Friends,

Let us not spend our lives cutting outer trees while our inner forest grows wild.

Let us remember that the world is burning and that we are living in a temporary shelter.

May we take up the axe of wisdom, the rope of mindfulness, and the discipline of morality, clearing the jungle within.

When the forest is gone, fear disappears.

When the light is found, the darkness is gone.

This is the peace of Nibbāna.