

# THE SUTRA OF BEQUEATHED TEACHINGS

When Shakyamuni Buddha first set in motion the wheel of the Dharma he awakened Ajnata-kaundinya, and in his last discourse on the Dharma he awakened Subhadra. All those to be awakened had awakened. Lying between two sala trees, he was about to enter Nirvana. It was the middle of the night, calm and without a sound. For the sake of all of his disciples he briefly spoke of the essentials of the Dharma:

Oh monks! After I pass away, respect and cherish the precepts. Following the precepts is like coming upon a light in the darkness, like a poor person finding a great treasure. You should know that the precepts are your teacher. To have the precepts is the same as if I were to remain in the world. Those who would hold the pure bhikshu precepts should not engage in trade, covet fields and dwellings, rule over other people, or keep servants or animals. You should refrain from practicing agriculture and accumulating wealth, just as you would avoid a fire pit. You ought not to cut grass and trees, plow the soil, or dig the earth. Mixing medicines, telling fortunes, observing the stars' positions, casting horoscopes by the phases of the moon, and calculating auspicious calendar days are things that should not be done.

Control your bodies; eat at the proper times; conduct yourselves in purity. You should not concern yourself with worldly affairs or act as an envoy, perform magic or mix potions, selfishly cultivate the friendship of powerful people, show special friendliness to the wealthy, or treat with contempt those who lack wealth or worldly abilities. With a clear mind and right mindfulness you should seek Awakening. Don't conceal your wrongdoings, express mistaken views, or lead people astray. When you receive offerings, know what is a proper amount and be content with it. After you receive an

offering, do not hoard it.

Now I shall speak briefly about how to protect the precepts. The precepts are the basis of true liberation. Therefore they are called the Pratimoksa, “that which leads toward liberation.” By relying on the precepts you will give rise to all of the dhyana concentrations and to the wisdom of the cessation of suffering. For this reason, you should keep the precepts and not break them. If you keep the precepts, you will create favorable causes and conditions. If you do not keep the precepts, no good merit can arise. Therefore you should know that the precepts are sources of great merit and virtue.

Oh monks! If you are able to abide in the precepts you should restrain the five senses. Do not leave the senses unguarded, allowing their five desires to arise. It is like a cowherd brandishing a stick in order to keep cows from wandering into another person’s planted field. If you indulge the five senses, the five desires will become boundless and they will control you. It would be like a violent, uncontrolled horse, which plunges into a ditch and drags his rider down with him. The pain of being injured by a robber lasts only one lifetime, while the harm caused by bondage to the five senses extends through many lifetimes, creating great suffering. Do not neglect to be mindful! For this reason, the wise restrain their senses and are not enslaved to them. They guard their cravings and do not let them run wild. If you let them drag you around they will destroy you.

The master of the five senses is the mind. For this reason, you should restrain it with care. The deluded, grasping mind is to be feared more than poisonous snakes, wild beasts, or vengeful robbers: even great fires and raging floods do not bear any comparison to it. It is like someone who, running hastily with a jar of honey in their hands, looks only at the honey and does not see a deep hole in front of them. Again, it is like a mad elephant unrestrained by shackles, or like a monkey jumping around in a tree: both are difficult to restrain. Restrain the grasping mind immediately and do not let it run wild. If you indulge your cravings, you will lose the good fortune of having been

born human. If you gain control of your mind, there is nothing that you cannot achieve. Therefore, monks, you should strive diligently to master your minds.

Oh monks! When receiving food and drink you should accept it as medicine. Do not take more of what you like and less of what you dislike, just take enough to support your body and to avoid hunger and thirst. As a bee takes only the pollen from flowers without harming their color or scent, so, monks, should you accept just enough of people's offerings to avoid distress. Don't exploit their good intentions by asking for too much. This can be compared to a wise man who knows the strength of his ox and does not overload it.

Oh monks! Throughout the day practice the teachings with determination. Don't waste your time! Likewise, in the evening and in the early morning do not neglect your efforts. Even in the middle of the night, continue your practice by reciting the sutras. Do not let your life pass by in vain by sleeping excessively. You should remember that the fire of impermanence is consuming the whole world. Seek to Awaken yourself, and do not wastefully sleep. Greed, anger, and delusion are always ready to destroy a person, even more so than a deadly enemy. How can you sleep excessively and let down your guard? The passions of greed, anger and delusion are like a poisonous snake residing in your mind. They are no different than a dangerous cobra sleeping in your room: drive them out with the help of the precepts. Only after the sleeping snake is gone can you sleep peacefully. If you sleep while the snake is still there, you are without conscience. The clothing of conscience, among all finery, is the very best. Conscience is like a prod, which can control one's wrongdoing. Therefore, monks, you should always follow your conscience, and never ignore it even for a moment. If you depart from your conscience, you will lose all merit. One who knows shame knows the good teaching. One who is shameless is no different than a wild beast.

Oh monks! Even if someone dismembers you joint by joint, you must restrain

yourselves and not allow anger and hatred to arise. Likewise, you must guard your mouths and avoid evil speech. If you give way to hateful thoughts, you will obstruct your own way and lose the benefits of your merit. Patience is a virtue, which even the keeping of the precepts, and the undertaking of ascetic practices, cannot equal. One who practices patience can truly be called a powerful, great being. Someone who cannot accept the poison of abuse with patience and joy, as if they were drinking ambrosia, can't be called someone of wisdom who has entered the Way. Why is this? The evil effects of anger and hatred shatter all of one's good dharmas and, furthermore, destroy one's good name. You should know that an angry and hateful mind is more destructive than a raging fire. Always guard yourself and do not allow hatred to enter. No robber steals more merit than hatred. Those who do not practice the Way have no teaching by which to restrain their desires; even hatred is forgivable in them. Those who have left home and practice the way of freedom from grasping should never harbor anger, resentment, and hatred, just as thunder and lightning do not occur in a light, feathery cloud.

Oh monks! Deeply consider this: You have abandoned ornamentation, you wear plain clothes, and you practice begging. If arrogance arises you should extinguish it immediately. Arrogance is not appropriate even for those living in the world, let alone for those who have left home to enter the Way, who humble themselves and practice begging in order to achieve liberation.

Oh monks! Flattery is incompatible with the Way since it produces nothing but deceit. One who has entered the Way, therefore, does not indulge in it. For this reason, you should cultivate upright, honest minds.

Oh monks! You should know that a person with many desires, who chases after personal gain, experiences much suffering. Someone with few desires, who does not crave anything, does not experience this sorrow; simply for this reason you should

practice restraining desires. How much more so should you practice it because it gives rise to all good merit. Those with few desires do not selfishly manipulate others, nor are they dragged around by their sense addictions. The mind of one with few desires is tranquil and has no worries. Whatever is at hand is enough; there is never an insufficiency. For one who has few desires there is Nirvana. Such is the practice of having few desires.

Oh monks! If you want to be free from all suffering you must know contentment. The state of contentment is the condition of prosperity and ease. One who is contented is happy even when there is only the earth to lie on. One who is not contented is dissatisfied even when dwelling in celestial palaces. One who is not contented is poor no matter how rich they may be. One who is contented is rich no matter how poor they may be. One who is not contented is constantly jerked around by the five sense desires, and is therefore pitied by one who is contented. Such is the practice of contentment.

Oh monks! If you seek the bliss of unchanging tranquility, leave the hubbub of worldly society and practice in seclusion. One who dwells in spiritual solitude is honored by Indra and all of the gods. For this reason you should not cling to worldly groups, but instead practice in seclusion, intent upon the extinction of the roots of suffering. One who delights in worldly crowds experiences the suffering associated with them, just as, when a large flock of birds lives together in a tree, it is in danger of withering and collapsing. If you are attached to the world, you will sink into suffering, just as an old elephant, drowning in a swamp, cannot get out. Such is the practice of seclusion.

Oh monks! If you diligently practice right effort, nothing will be difficult. Therefore you should diligently practice it. A constant trickle of water will eventually bore a hole in a rock. If the mind of a practitioner is indolent, it would be like someone who rubs wood to start a fire and rests before the wood is hot. Even though such a person wants a

fire, it cannot be had. Such is the practice of right effort.

Oh monks! Seeking for a wise advisor or benefactor does not compare with cultivating mindfulness. If you do not lose mindfulness, greed anger and delusion cannot arise. For this reason, you should always maintain mindfulness. If you lose mindfulness, you will lose all merit. If the power of your mindfulness is strong, you cannot be harmed by the five sense desires, even if they arise, just as if you entered a battlefield wearing armor, having nothing to fear. Such is the practice of not losing mindfulness.

Oh monks! If you unify your mind, it will abide in concentration. When your mind is concentrated, you can understand the arising and passing away of all things in the world. For this reason, you must always practice concentration with diligence. If you attain concentration the mind will not be scattered. Just as a household that conserves water keeps the banks of its pond in good repair, so the practitioner, for the sake of the water of wisdom, should concentrate in meditation and not let samadhi power leak out. Such is the practice of concentration.

Oh monks! If you have wisdom, you will be free from grasping. Always truthfully examine yourselves and do not let wisdom be lost. Then, through my teaching, you can attain liberation. If you do not do so, you are not a follower of the Path. Truly, wisdom is a sturdy ship that carries you across the sea of old age, sickness, and death. It is a great lamp illuminating the darkness of ignorance. It is excellent medicine for all sickness. It is a sharp axe that cuts down the tree of greed, anger, and delusion. For this reason, through learning, contemplating, and practicing, you should increase your wisdom. If you have the brightness of wisdom, you will clearly see into the nature of things even with the fleshly eye.

Oh monks! If you engage in useless talk, your minds will become scattered and confused. Even if you have left home you will not attain liberation. For this reason, you should avoid useless talk. If you want to attain the bliss of Nirvana, you need only

extinguish the evil of idle, useless discussion.

Oh monks! Of all meritorious activities, you should wholeheartedly concentrate on shunning every form of ego indulgence, just as you would avoid a robber. The beneficial teaching of the compassionate World Honored One has now been completed. You must strive diligently to practice it. Whether you live in the mountains or by the water, under a tree, in a remote place, or in a quiet room, set your mind on the teaching that you have received, and do not let it be forgotten. You must always endeavor to practice the teaching with right effort. If you do nothing, you will regret it in the future. I am like a good doctor who recognizes illness and prescribes medicine. The doctor does not determine whether or not the medicine is taken. Again, I am like a good guide who shows people the best Path. If they do not take the Path after hearing about it, it is not the fault of the guide.

Oh monks! If you have any doubts about the Four Noble Truths, ask about them immediately. Do not harbor doubts without seeking to resolve them. Three times the World Honored One exhorted those present, but no one in the assembly spoke out, for they had no doubts.

Then Aniruddha, perceiving the minds of those assembled, said to the Buddha: World Honored One! Though the moon may grow hot and the sun grow cold, the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha cannot change. The truth of suffering taught by the Buddha is of true suffering which cannot be turned into happiness. Grasping is truly the cause, and there is no other cause. Suffering is destroyed when its cause is destroyed. The Path of the destruction of suffering is indeed the true Path, and there is no other Path.

World Honored One! Everyone here is without doubts regarding the Four Noble Truths. In this assembly, there are those who have not yet accomplished their task. When they see the passing of the Buddha they will be grieved. But even those who have just entered the teaching will attain Awakening when they hear the Buddha's words, just

as in the dark of night a flash of lightning illuminates the road. If there are those who have already accomplished their task and crossed the sea of suffering, they will only have this thought: How swift is the passing of the World Honored One! When Aniruddha spoke these words, everyone in the assembly clearly understood the meaning of the Four Noble Truths. But the World Honored One, wishing that all in this great assembly might become stronger, spoke further with a mind of great compassion:

Oh monks! Do not grieve! Even if I were to live in the world for as long as a kalpa, our coming together would have to end. There can be no coming together without parting. The teaching, which benefits both self and other, has reached completion. Even if I were to live longer there would be nothing to add to it. Those who were to be Awakened, whether in the heavens or among human beings, have all been Awakened. Those who have not yet been Awakened all possess the conditions for attaining Awakening. If all of my disciples practice the teaching from now on through generation after generation, the Dharma Body of the Tathagata will exist forever and will not be destroyed. Therefore you should know that all things in the world are impermanent; coming together inevitably means parting. Do not be troubled, for this is the nature of life. Diligently practice right effort; you must seek liberation immediately! With the light of wisdom, destroy the darkness of ignorance. Nothing is secure. Everything in this life is precarious.

Now I attain Parinirvana. It is like getting rid of a bad illness. This thing that we should not cling to is what we call the body. It is drowned in the sea of birth, old age, sickness, and death. How could there be a wise one who would not rejoice at being liberated from it?

Oh monks! You should always wholeheartedly seek the way of liberation. All things in the world, whether moving or motionless, are characterized by disappearance and instability.

Stop now! Do not speak! Time is passing. I am about to cross over. This is my final teaching.