

# Dharma

## SUTRA ON THE BUDDHA'S BEQUEATHED TEACHING (T.389)

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### SUTRA PREFACE

When Shakyamuni Buddha first turned the Wheel of Dharma, he crossed over the Venerable Ajnatakaundinya. The very last time he spoke the Dharma, he crossed over the Venerable Subhadhra. All of those whom he should have crossed over had already been crossed over. He lay between the Twin Sala trees and was about to enter Nirvana. At this time, in the middle period of the night, all was quiet, without any sound. Then for the sake of all of his disciples he spoke on the essentials of the Dharma.

### UPHOLDING THE PRECEPTS

All of you Bhikshus, after my Nirvana, you should reverence and honor the Pratimoksha. It is like finding a light in darkness, or like a poor person obtaining a treasure. You should know that it is your great teacher, and is not different from my actual presence in the world. Those of you who uphold the pure precepts should not buy, sell or trade. You should not covet fields or buildings, or keep servants or raise animals. You should stay far away from all kinds of agriculture and wealth as you would avoid a pit of fire. You should not cut down grass or trees, plow fields or dig the earth. Nor may you compound medicines, prophesize good and evil, observe the constellations, cast horoscopes by the waxing and waning of the moon, or compute astrological fortunes. All of these activities are improper.

Regulate yourselves by eating at the appropriate time and by living in purity. You should not participate in worldly affairs or act as an envoy, nor should you become involved with magical spells and elixirs of immortality, or with making connections with high ranking people, being affectionate towards them and condescending towards the lowly.

With an upright mind and proper mindfulness you should seek to cross over. Do not conceal your faults or put on a special appearance to delude the multitudes. Know the limits and be content with the four kinds of offerings. When you receive offerings, do not store them up. This is a general explanation of the characteristics of upholding the precepts. The precepts are the root of proper freedom; therefore they are called the Pratimoksha (lit. the root of freedom). By relying on these precepts, you will give rise to all dhyana concentrations, and reach the wisdom of the cessation of suffering. For this reason, Bhikshus, you should uphold the pure precepts and not allow them to be broken. If a person is able to uphold the pure precepts, he will, as a result, be able to have good dharmas. If one is without the pure precepts no good merit and virtue can arise. Therefore you should know that the precepts are the dwelling place for the foremost and secure merit and virtue.

### RESTRAINING THE MIND

All of you Bhikshus, if you are already able to abide by the precepts, you should restrain the five sense organs, not allowing them to enter the five desires as they please. It is like a person tending cattle who carries a staff while watching them, not allowing them to run loose and trample others sprouting grains. If you let your five sense organs run loose, not only will the five desires become boundless, they will be uncontrollable. They are like a violent horse unrestrained by reins who drags a person along so that he falls into a pit. If you are robbed or injured you will suffer for a single life, but the injury from the plundering done by the five sense organs brings misfortunes which extend for many lives.

Because their harm is extremely heavy, it is impermissible to be careless.

For this reason wise people restrain the five sense organs and do not go along with them. They restrain them like thieves who are not allowed to run loose. If you let them run loose for a while, before long you will observe their destruction. Since the five sense organs have the mind as their ruler, you should restrain the mind well. Your mind is as dangerous as an extremely poisonous snake, a savage beast or a hateful robber. A great fire rushing upon you is still not a satisfactory analogy for it. It is like a person carrying a container of honey who, as he moves along in haste, only pays attention to the honey, and does not notice a deep pit. It is like a mad elephant without a barb, or a monkey in a tree jumping about, which are both difficult to restrain. You should hasten to control it and not allow it to run loose. Those who allow their minds to wander freely lose the good situation of being a human being. By restraining it in one place there is no affair which cannot be completed. For this reason, Bhikshus, you should vigorously subdue your mind.

#### MODERATION IN EATING

All of you Bhikshus, you should receive various kinds of food and drink as if you were taking medicine. Whether they be good or bad, do not take more or less of them, but use them to cure hunger and thirst and to maintain the body. Bhikshus should be the same way as bees gathering from flowers, only taking the pollen without harming their form or scent; receive peoples' offerings to put an end to distress, but do not seek to obtain too much and spoil their good hearts. Be like a wise man, who having estimated the load that suits the strength of his ox, does not exceed that amount and exhaust its strength.

#### AVOIDING SLEEP

All of you Bhikshus, during the day, with a vigorous mind, cultivate the Dharma and don't allow the opportunity to be lost. In the first and last periods of the night also do not be lax, and during the middle period of the night, chant Sutras to make yourself well informed. Do not let the causes and conditions of sleep cause your single life to pass in vain, so that you don't obtain anything at all. You should be mindful of the fire of impermanence which burns up all the world. Seek to cross yourself over and do not sleep. The robber afflictions are always about to kill you even more than your enemies. How can you sleep? How can you not rouse yourself to awaken? With the hook of the precepts you should quickly remove the poisonous snake afflictions that are sleeping in your heart. When the sleeping snake is gone, then you can sleep at ease. Those who sleep even though it hasn't yet gone, are without shame. The clothing of shame, among all adornments, is the very best. Shame can be compared to an iron barb which can restrain people from doing evil. Therefore you should always have a sense of shame, and not be without it even for a moment, for if you have no sense of shame you will lose all of your merit and virtue. Those who have shame have good dharmas; one without it is no different from the birds and beasts.

#### AVOIDING ANGER

All of you Bhikshus, if a person dismembered you piece by piece your mind should be self-contained. Do not allow yourself to become angry. Moreover, you should guard your mouth and not give rise to evil speech. If you allow yourself to have thoughts of anger, you will hinder your own Way, and lose the merit and virtue you have gained. Patience is a virtue which neither upholding the precepts

nor the ascetic practises are able to compare with. One who is able to practise patience can be called a great person who has strength; if you are unable to happily and patiently undergo the poison of malicious abuse, as if drinking sweet dew, you cannot be called a wise person who has entered the Way. Why is this? The harm from anger ruins all good dharmas and destroys one's good reputation. People of the present and of the future will not even wish to see this person. You should know that a heart of anger is worse than a fierce fire. You should always guard against it, and not allow it to enter you, for of the thieves which rob one's merit and virtue, none surpasses anger. Anger may be excusable in lay people who indulge in desires, and in people who do not cultivate the Way, who are without the means to restrain themselves, but for people who have left the home-life, who cultivate the Way and are without desires, harboring anger is impermissible. Within a clear, cool cloud, there should not be a sudden blazing clash of thunder.

#### AVOIDING ARROGANCE

All of you Bhikshus, you should rub your heads for you have relinquished fine adornments, you wear the garments of a Buddhist monk, and you carry the alms bowl to use in begging for your livelihood; look at yourself in this way. If thoughts of arrogance arise you should quickly destroy them, because the increase of arrogance is not appropriate even among the customs of lay people, how much the less for a person who has left the home-life and entered the Way. For the sake of liberation, you should humble yourself and practice begging for food.

#### AVOIDING FLATTERY

All of you Bhikshus, a mind of flattery is contradictory to the Way. Therefore you should have a straightforward disposition of mind. You should know that flattery is only deceit, so for people who have entered the Way, it has no use. For this reason, all of you should have an upright mind, and take a straightforward disposition as your basis.

#### REDUCING DESIRES

All of you Bhikshus, you should know that people with many desires, because they have much seeking for advantage, have much suffering. People who reduce their desires, who are without seeking or longing are without this trouble. Straight-away reduce your desires and in addition cultivate appropriately. One who reduces his desires is more able to produce all merit and virtue. People who reduce their desires, do not flatter in order to get what they want from others. Moreover they are not dragged along by their sense organs. People who reduce their desires have, as a consequence, a mind which is peaceful, without worry or fear. In meeting with situations they are always satisfied and never discontent. One who reduces his desires has Nirvana. This is known as reducing desires.

#### CONTENTMENT

All of you Bhikshus, if you wish to be free from all suffering and difficulty, you should be content. The dharma of contentment is the dwelling of blessings, happiness, and peace. People who are content, although they might sleep on the ground are peaceful and happy. Those who are not content, although they might abide in the heavens, are still dissatisfied. Those who are not content, even if they are rich, they are poor. Those who are content, although they might be poor, they are rich. Those who are discontent are always dragged along by their five sense organs, and are pitied by those who are

content. This is known as contentment.

## SECLUSION

All of you Bhikshus, seek quietude, the Unconditioned peace, and happiness. You should be apart from confusion and disturbances, and dwell alone in seclusion. People who dwell in quietude are revered by the heavenly ruler Shakra and all the gods. For this reason you should renounce your own group and other groups, and dwell alone in seclusion in order to contemplate the basis for the cessation of suffering. If you delight in crowds, you will undergo a lot of affliction. It is like when a flock of birds gathers in a great tree, it is in danger of withering and collapsing. One who is bound and attached to the world drowns in a multitude of suffering, like an old elephant sunk in mud, who is unable to get himself out. This is known as seclusion.

## VIGOR

All of you Bhikshus, if you are vigorous no affair will be difficult for you; for this reason all of you should be vigorous. It is like a small stream flowing for a long time which is able to bore through stone. If, on the other hand, the mind of one who cultivates frequently becomes lax, it is like trying to make a fire by friction but resting before there is any heat; though one wants to make a fire, the fire is difficult to obtain. This is known as vigor.

## MINDFULNESS

All of you Bhikshus, seeking for a Good and Wise Advisor, or for a wholesome benefactor, does not compare with mindfulness. If you do not neglect mindfulness, none of the thieves of the afflictions can enter you. For this reason all of you should constantly collect the thoughts in your mind. If you lose mindfulness you will lose all merit and virtue. If your power of mindfulness is firm and strong, though you enter among the thieves of the five desires, they cannot harm you. It is like entering a battle wearing armour, thus there is nothing to fear. This is known as mindfulness.

## DHYANA CONCENTRATION

All of you Bhikshus, if you collect your mind, it will be concentrated. Because the mind is concentrated, the production and destruction of the appearances of dharmas in the world can be known. For this reason, all of you should constantly and vigorously cultivate concentration. If you attain concentration your mind will not be scattered. It is like a household that uses its water sparingly and is able to regulate its irrigation ditches. One who cultivates concentration is also the same way; for the sake of the water of wisdom he well cultivates dhyana concentration so it doesn't leak away. This is known as concentration.

## WISDOM

All of you Bhikshus, if you have wisdom, you will be without greed or attachment. Always examine yourselves, and do not allow yourselves to have faults, for it is in this way that you will be able to obtain liberation within my Dharma. If one is not like this, since he is neither a person of the Way, nor a layperson, there is no name for him. One with wisdom has a secure boat for crossing over the ocean of birth, old age, sickness, and death. Wisdom is also like a great bright lamp in the darkness of ignorance, a good medicine for those who are sick, and a sharp axe for cutting down the tree of afflictions. For this reason all of you should increasingly benefit yourselves by learning, considering, and

cultivating wisdom. Even though a person only has flesh eyes, if he has illuminating wisdom, he has clear understanding. This is known as wisdom.

#### NOT HAVING IDLE DISCUSSIONS

All of you Bhikshus, if you have all sorts of idle discussions, your mind will be scattered, and even though you have left the home-life, you will not attain liberation. For this reason, Bhikshus, you should quickly renounce a scattered mind and idle discussions. If you wish to be one who attains the happiness of still tranquillity, you only need to be good and eliminate the evil of idle discussions. This is known as not having idle discussions.

#### SELF-EXERTION

All of you Bhikshus, with respect to all merit and virtue, you should always have a single purpose. Relinquish all laziness as you would leave a hateful thief. That which the greatly compassionate World Honored One has explained for your benefit is already finished; all of you need only to practice it diligently. Whether you are in the mountains, in a desolate marsh, beneath a tree, or in an empty and quiet dwelling, be mindful of the Dharma you have received and do not allow it to be forgotten. You should always exert yourselves and practise it vigorously. You don't want to reach the time of death and be filled with remorse because of a life spent in vain. I am like a good doctor who understands illnesses and prescribes medicine. Whether it is taken or not is not the responsibility of the doctor. Moreover I am like a virtuous guide who points out a good path. If those who hear of it do not walk down it, it is not the guide's fault.

#### CLEARING UP ALL DOUBTS

All of you Bhikshus, if you have doubts about suffering and the other Four Truths, you may quickly ask about them now. Do not harbour doubts and fail to clear them up.

At that time the World Honored One repeated this three times, yet no one asked him a question. And why was this? Because the assembly did not harbour any doubts.

At that time Venerable Aniruddha contemplated the minds of the assembly and said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, the moon can become hot and the sun can become cold, but the Four Truths proclaimed by the Buddha cannot be otherwise. The Truth of Suffering taught by the Buddha is actually suffering, and cannot become happiness. Accumulation is truly the cause of it, besides which there is no other cause. If one is to destroy suffering, the cause of suffering must be destroyed, because if the cause is destroyed then the result is destroyed. The path leading to the destruction of suffering is truly the real path, besides which there is no other path. World Honored One, all of these Bhikshus are certain and have no doubts about the Four Truths."

#### LIVING BEINGS WHO WILL CROSS OVER

"When those in this assembly who have not yet done what should be done see the Buddha cross over to Nirvana they will certainly feel sorrow. Those who have newly entered the Dharma and heard what the Buddha taught, will all cross over. They have seen the Way, like a flash of lightning in the night. But those who have already done what was to be done who have already crossed over the ocean of suffering, will only have this thought: 'Why has the World Honored

One crossed over to Nirvana so soon?'

Aniruddha spoke these words. Everyone in the assembly had penetrated the meaning of the Four Holy Truths. The World Honored One wished all in that great assembly to be firm, so with a mind of great compassion he spoke again for their sake.

"All of you Bhikshus do not be grieved or distressed. If I were to live in the world for a kalpa, my association with you would still come to an end. A meeting without a separation can never be. The Dharma for benefitting oneself and others is complete. If I were to live longer it would be of no further benefit. All of those who could be crossed over, whether in the heavens above or among humans, have already crossed over, and all of those who have not yet crossed over have already created the causes and conditions for crossing over.

#### THE DHARMA BODY IS ALWAYS PRESENT

From now on all of my disciples must continuously practise. Then the Thus Come One's Dharma body will always be present and indestructible. You should know therefore, that everything in the world is impermanent. Meetings necessarily have separations, so do not harbour grief. Every appearance in the world is like this, so you should be vigorous and seek for an early liberation. Destroy the darkness of delusion with the brightness of wisdom. The world is truly dangerous and unstable, without any durability.

My present attainment of Nirvana is like being rid of a malignant sickness. The body is a false name, drowning in the great ocean of birth, sickness, old age and death. How can one who is wise not be happy when he gets rid of it, like killing a hateful thief?

#### CONCLUSION

All of you Bhikshus, you should always singlemindedly and diligently seek the way out of all the moving and unmoving dharmas of the world, for they are all destructible, unfixed appearances. All of you, stop; there is nothing more to say. Time is passing away, and I wish to cross over to Nirvana. These are my very last instructions.

THE END