

Traveling to the Other Shore

Buddha's Stories on the Six Perfections

佛陀：六波羅密的啟示



By

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Translated by

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Cover designed by Mei-Chi Shih

Published by Buddha's Light Publishing

3456 S. Glenmark Drive,

Hacienda Heights, CA 91745, U.S.A.

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ISBN: 978-1-932293-28-9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Xingyun, da shi.

Traveling to the Other Shore : Buddha's Stories on the Six Perfections / by Venerable Master Hsing Yun ; translated by Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center ; edited by Tom Manzo & Shujan Cheng.

p. cm.

Translation of selections from Chinese.

ISBN 978-1-932293-28-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Spiritual life--Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order. 2. Paramitas (Buddhism) 3. Perfection--Religious aspects--Mahayana Buddhism. I. Manzo, Tom. II. Cheng, Shujan. III. Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center. IV. Title.

BQ9800.F6392X5548 2008

294.3'4432--dc22

2008010773

Acknowledgements

We received a lot of help from many people and we want to thank them for their efforts in making the publication of this book possible. We especially appreciate Venerable Tzu Jung, the Chief Executive of the Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center (F.G.S.I.T.C.), Venerable Hui Chi, Abbot of Hsi Lai Temple, Venerable Yi Chao, the director of F.G.S.I.T.C. for their support and leadership; the volunteers from I.B.P.S. in Austin, Denver, Los Angeles, Toronto, Vancouver, London and Manchester for their translation; Tom Manzo, Jeanne Tsai, Shujan Cheng and Amy Lam for their editing; Lou enia Ortega and Robin Tullius for their proofreading; George Fan and Kevin Hsyeh, for preparing the manuscript for publication; and Mei-Chi Shih for her book and cover design. Our appreciation also goes to everyone who has supported this project from its conception to its completion.

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Preface

In order to understand the content of a religion and determine whether it is relevant and applicable to our daily lives, we must first get to know its founder. Can the founder be historically verified? Are the character and wisdom of the founder, as exemplified in his teachings, perfect and without flaws? Is every action worthy of respect and emulation? Is his nature completely purified? With proper belief and practice, can his teachings truly direct the average human being to liberation from the suffering of life?

These questions cannot be ignored, because the reason for believing in a religion should not be to merely seek momentary assurance of the spirit, and temporary comfort of the mind. The ultimate goal is to liberate ourselves from the cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death, and to attain happiness. Therefore, before we confirm our belief in a particular religion, considering these factors is important.

Sakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, was born on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, around 500 B.C.E. He was born in India, one of the four sites of ancient civilization. These facts are well documented in history. Thus, we should not view the Buddha as an imaginary person or god who suddenly appeared and disappeared without a trace. In addition to these facts, we also have knowledge of his parents and the many years of hardship he underwent in his cultivation before becoming the Buddha - an enlightened one. These facts are commonly recognized by academics and theologians worldwide.

Sakyamuni Buddha was born, raised, and enlightened in this world. In this human realm, he is the light of wisdom in the long dark night and a lifeboat in the endless sea of suffering. His character has reached the perfect state and his nature has been thoroughly purified. He is free of the bondage of all worldly afflictions and has transcended the suffering of life

and death. While he was alive, he taught for over forty years, elucidating the way of liberation and showing us the path. The Dharma is filled with great wisdom and enlightenment, teaching us how to transcend suffering, attain happiness and ultimately enlightenment.

After thorough and continued study of the Buddha's teachings, we will find that Buddhism is a religion to believe in, a discipline to study, and a practice to be put into action. Although Buddhism can be found all over the world, it is unfortunate that some Dharma teachers emphasize theory and neglect the day-to-day practice that is the true spirit of the Buddha's teachings. Sakyamuni Buddha is the most appropriate and exemplary model for all of us as we develop our belief in this most complete and profound religion. When we can promulgate the spirit of the Buddha to enlighten and liberate all sentient beings, including ourselves, then we can indeed earn the respect of others and yield beautiful and bountiful results.

The Great Buddha

Around 500 B.C.E., the great being, the teacher of gods and human beings, the perfectly enlightened one, Sakyamuni Buddha, was born near the present border of India and Nepal. His father, King Siddhodana, was the ruler of the Sakyas; his mother was the virtuous and capable Queen Maya.

The prince was born in the Lumbini Grove in the late spring, when the sun was shining brightly and the flowers were exceedingly fragrant. Two streams of water, like glimmering silver chains, cascaded down from the sky into a golden basin that had emerged from the earth to bathe the newborn prince.

Immediately after his birth, the little prince took seven steps; with each step, a lotus flower blossomed beneath his feet. With one finger pointing at the sky and another to the ground, he pronounced, "This is my last rebirth into this world, and my purpose is to attain Buddhahood. I will reveal the way to all beings." It was said that the infant prince could speak with the roar of a man because he had already accumulated countless lifetimes of merit.

Shortly thereafter, Asita, the hundred-year-old sage, came to the court and made a prophecy regarding the prince. He said, "If the prince follows a worldly path, he will certainly become a universal wheel-turning emperor, ruling with supreme goodness and encountering no obstructions in his reign. If he renounces worldly life, he will become a Buddha, showing the Way to all beings."

King Siddhodana gathered an assembly of mystics and scholars to choose an auspicious name for the newborn prince. They finally agreed on the name "Siddhartha," which means "the accomplished one."

Unfortunately, on the seventh day after the birth of the prince, his mother, Queen Maya, died. The role of raising the

prince then fell to his maternal aunt, Prajapati. As a child, the prince was extremely bright. By the age of twelve, he had full comprehension of what were then known in India as the "Five Revelations of Science" and the "Four Vedas of Philosophy. "

In addition to his academic excellence and sharp intellect, the prince's skills in the martial arts were unparalleled. Once, while in an archery contest, his cousin, Devadatta, was expected to win as he had accurately shot an arrow through three drums. When Siddhartha took his turn, he flawlessly shot one arrow through seven drums. The spectators cheered with enthusiasm, and the king nodded with approval and pride. Everyone offered the prince their most sincere blessings.

The young prince was also handsome, and attracted the attention of many young aristocratic ladies. In due course, the king arranged for Yasodhara, the daughter of King Superbuddha, to be his bride. Yasodhara soon gave birth to a son whom Siddhartha named Rahula, which means "hindrance."

Amidst Siddhartha's material comforts and his relationship to his wife and son, he began thinking about renunciation. In order to prevent this, King Suddhodana used exquisite wine, lovely music, and beautiful women to calm his son's heart and entice him to continue leading the princely life. The king built Siddhartha three extravagant palaces for the various times of the year. He hoped to intoxicate his son with material pleasures so that he would not consider the idea of leaving home to cultivate.

To the king's dismay, worldly pleasures could not stop the prince from feeling lonely and empty at heart. In that era, huge discrepancies existed between the various castes; these

inequalities pounded at the prince's mind and brought him great sadness. He was also deeply troubled by concerns about the brevity of life and the inevitable suffering of aging, sickness, and death.

Were these issues resolvable? Was it possible to live without suffering? In the end, Siddhartha's determination and compassion were stirred to such a degree that he decided to renounce his privileged life and search for the answers to his questions.

After a long period of deliberation, the prince finally asked for the king's approval to renounce the life of a royal householder and go forth as a homeless wanderer.

King Suddhodana was shocked as if struck by a thunderbolt. Lightly caressing his son with trembling hands, he asked him to give up such thoughts and invited him to ascend the throne.

With great resolve and respect, the prince replied, "Father, it is not my wish to be a king. I do, however, have four other wishes. If you can give me assurance of fulfilling these wishes, then I will consider changing my mind."

Hastily, the king asked, "What are your four wishes?" The prince replied, "My four wishes are: first, that there will be no aging in life; second, that there will be no suffering from sickness; third, that there will be no death; and fourth, that all things will never deteriorate or decay." King Suddhodana shook his head for he knew he could give no such assurances. The prince was determined to find a way to fulfill these four wishes on his own.

On a quiet moonlit night, in his twenty-ninth year, Siddhartha secretly left the palace with his personal attendant, Chandaka, determined to find a way to liberate mankind from the cycle of birth and death.

After traveling quite some distance from the royal city,

Siddhartha removed his royal garments and princely jewels. He also cut his hair to indicate his resolve not to return to the worldly life. Pointing to his garments and jewels, he said to Chandaka, "Please take these back to my father and tell him that I have abandoned personal ties of family and affection for the sake of all beings. Ask him not to worry about me and tell him that I will not return until I have attained Buddhahood."

Siddhartha then went into the forest to learn from the various teachers who were practicing austerities there. King Suddhodana was extremely sad at his son's departure, and eventually sent five noble men to look for him.

When these five noble men finally caught up with him, Siddhartha told them, "I went forth from the life of a householder not to escape reality, desert my country, or forsake the love of my father. In fact, I intend not only to save my people, but also the whole world. I love not only my father; I love all sentient beings. I am determined to be liberated from the cycle of aging and sickness, and have set forth on this journey. I have the willpower and the courage to move forward. I realize that, even with the power and position of a king, these questions could not be answered. I pleaded three times for my father's approval to renounce, but did not succeed. In order to achieve a higher purpose, I cannot help but temporarily leave my loved ones. Please dismiss the thought of asking me to return. How can I re-enter the burning house of impermanence from which I just escaped? Even if the sun turns cold or the mountain snow melts and becomes an ocean, my resolve to leave home and seek the truth will never be shaken."

Quite unexpectedly, the five noble men were so moved by Siddhartha's words that they decided to stay and join the former prince in his quest for truth. For six years, he studied

under others and practiced austerities. After learning all he could from these teachers, Siddhartha began his own ascetic cultivation.

There were times when he consumed only one grain of sesame and one grain of rice. Despite all of Siddhartha's efforts in practicing austerities, he found he was no closer to his goal of enlightenment. Siddhartha realized the futility of his efforts. Neither excessive denial nor extreme indulgence was the proper way of cultivation. He realized that the proper way is the Middle Way, which avoids the two extremes of deprivation and over-indulgence. Just as Siddhartha abandoned the five sensual pleasures of royal life, he also gave up the austerities of asceticism.

He proceeded to cleanse himself in the Nairanjana River. Weak as he was from lack of food, Siddhartha could not get up from the bank of the river. A young shepherd girl took pity on him and offered him a bowl of milk. After accepting the offering from the shepherd girl, he gained strength and resolved to continue with his search. Siddhartha sat on a tuft of grass underneath an enormous bodhi tree and vowed to remain seated there in meditation until he attained enlightenment.

After twenty-one days, on the eighth day of the second lunar month, he attained enlightenment while gazing at the bright stars in the night. When Siddhartha attained enlightenment, he became the perfectly awakened Buddha and earned the right to be seated on the Vajra Throne (Diamond Throne) at the center of the universe.

After the prince of the Sakyas became the Buddha, he traveled to the Deer Park Monastery where he gave his first discourse. There, the Buddha met with his five former disciples in ascetic practices. He explained to them the Four Noble Truths. This first teaching of the Buddha is known as the first

turning of the Dharma Wheel. While listening to the Buddha's words, Kaundmya, one of the five ascetic disciples, gained the understanding known as the Dharma Eye, and saw the truth of the universe clearly and purely. All five of the former ascetics were ordained and eventually attained arhatship. This episode reveals the origin of the Triple Gem of Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Thereafter, the light of the Buddha began to shine.

Among the Buddha's followers, some were former leaders of other religious traditions, such as Sariputra, Maudgalyayana, Mahakatyayana, Mahakasyapa, and others; some were renounced princes such as Aniruddha, Ananda, and the Buddha's own son, Rahula; some were rulers such as King Bimbisara and King Prasenajit; some were laborers such as Upali the barber and Nidhi, who disposed of human waste; some were Queen Vaidehi, Mallika, Amalo; and some were prostitutes, including a girl called Lotus Color.

The teachings of the Buddha are truly vast and like the limitless ocean that accepts all tributaries. They are like the sun and the moon, which illuminate all lands. Compassion and enthusiasm are reflected in the pure and complete nature of Buddhahood.

From Magadha in the South, to Sravasti in the North, from Varanasi to Pisali, the Buddha traveled to all points along the river Ganges. During his forty-nine years of teaching, from the heights of the Trayastrimsa Heavens to the depths of the dark hells, the Buddha never ceased in his work to liberate all sentient beings.

On the fifteenth day of the second month in the lunar calendar, at eighty years of age, the Buddha entered parinirvana while he was between two sala trees in Kusmagara. The Buddha is forever protecting us with his Dharma Light. The Buddha is a great teacher and worthy of universal respect.

Giving Comes in Many Forms

Beautifully woven throughout the teachings of Buddhism is an emphasis on the act of giving. With even a rudimentary glimpse at Buddhism, we can see that giving is essential to manifesting the generous and compassionate spirit of the Buddha in our lives, current and future, and in the lives of others. By slowly reading the stories contained within these pages, leaving time enough between them for a quiet pause that allows you to imagine yourself as one of the participants in the story (perhaps even the Buddha!), you may be able to understand and interact with the concept of giving from a Buddhist perspective.

Part One, "Sincere Offerings, Endless Merit," brings to life the idea that there is no standard, conventional, expected form of giving that must be adhered to in all generous acts in order for the gift to be a valid and sincere offering with bountiful results. The breadth, color and meaning of the Buddha's teachings are infinitely and beautifully inclusive, and the act of giving is no different. With sincere intentions and a joyful heart, whether food, incense, flowers, an umbrella, thread, clothing, shelter, or even the Dharma is given, both the moment and the act are rich with goodness, merit and the generous spirit of the Buddha.

Similarly, a broad range of results may occur from the act of giving. From the lives of kings, bhiksus, disciples, shepherds, and even parrots, we see the act of giving advancing cultivation, demonstrating reverence and respect, bringing convenience and comfort, extending welcome and gratitude, and accumulating merit.

May the following stories inspire you to create, in each moment, a way to practice generosity.

The Giving of the Dharma

One day around noon, the bhiksus Judona and Anshilobi were returning to the Jetavana Monastery from their alms rounds in Sravasti. While walking, Judona began to express his concerns to Anshilobi, "Today, while receiving these heartfelt offerings from the devotees, I felt quite restless and ashamed. It occurred to me that with such meager achievements in my cultivation, I am not worthy of such pious and sincere offerings."

Anshilobi replied, "I could not agree with you more. The people express such generosity in making these offerings. How can we return their kindness? It is said that by making sincere offerings one will receive the merit of countless fortunes. Does this mean that our merit will decrease and that we have sown the seeds of future poverty?" On the way back to the monastery the two continued to discuss their worries.

After returning, they still were disquieted and decided to bring their concerns to the Buddha. Approaching the Buddha, they joined palms, greeted him respectfully and explained their dilemma. Upon hearing his disciples' worries, the Buddha asked, "After receiving the offerings, did you not preach the Dharma which leads to liberation from suffering and the attainment of happiness?" "Yes, Lord Buddha." "Did the people understand the teachings?"

"Yes, we told them how to find happiness and richness within themselves. The people were truly happy to hear the teachings."

The Buddha praised the bhiksus, saying, "By teaching the Dharma, you are actually practicing another form of giving. There are two ways to practice generosity: the first is by giving the Dharma, the second by giving money. In this world, householders primarily practice generosity by giving money, while the sangha practice through giving the Dharma. The giving of money can bring future fortune and prosperity, but it

does not necessarily eradicate the defilements. It is just like filling up a dark room with treasure. Will the treasure give light to see by?"

"It cannot be done, Lord Buddha. Even gold and diamonds cannot make a dark room bright."

"Thus I say to you, the giving of the Dharma works as a lantern to brighten up the darkness. The light of one single lantern can eliminate darkness that has existed for even a thousand years. Never doubt the efficacy of the teachings and do not be afraid. With mindfulness, strive on!"

After listening to the Buddha, the bhiksus realized that the giving of the Dharma is no different from the giving of money. Thereafter, they continuously cultivated with diligence.



The Offering of Sandalwood

In the town of Rajagrha, there lived a maidservant serving in a noble household. She was kind and gentle and sincerely devoted to the Triple Gem. Always eager to be of service to others, the maidservant often helped grind sandalwood into powder to be used for offerings.

At this time, the Buddha and his followers were staying near Rajagrha. As the maidservant left her house, she happened to encounter the Buddha while he was on his way to town to beg for alms. She was overjoyed and hurried home to fetch some sandalwood powder. Returning, she met the Buddha on the road, saluted him with joined palms, and applied the sweet-smelling powder to his feet. Then, miraculously, the Buddha filled the air with the fragrance of sandalwood, which spread throughout the town. When the maid witnessed this apparent miracle, her belief grew even stronger and she prostrated herself fully in front of the Buddha. At that moment, she vowed to always practice unlimited generosity and to eventually achieve Buddhahood to liberate sentient beings.

After hearing the maid's vow, the Buddha smiled. He turned to his disciples and said, "This young woman who applied sandalwood powder to my feet will not be reborn into the evil realms for the next ninety kalpas. Additionally, her body will always be pure and fragrant, and she will enjoy happiness here in the human realm. In her final life, she will complete her cultivation as a Pratyeka-buddha."

The Offering of Flowers

On a spring day one year, while the Buddha was teaching in the city of Rajagrha, he heard a melancholy song coming from afar. Without a sound, the Buddha sat down by the stream. Before long, a group of people, men and women, young and old, quietly approached him. They had freshly-picked flowers in their hands. When they saw the Buddha, majestic and radiant and surrounded by his bhiksus, they were thrilled as if they had come upon a great treasure. Unthinkingly, they all rushed toward the Buddha, prostrated themselves, and said, "Lord Buddha, when we saw your awe-inspiring appearance, we realized that you were in fact the Buddha we have heard so much about. You are the teacher of the world. The king has sent us to collect flowers to decorate his palace. If we fail to collect the flowers, our lives will be in jeopardy; we will be whipped and tortured. Now that we have met you, Lord Buddha, we feel like the sick who have found a doctor to cure them. Our joy is beyond description! Please accept our offerings of flowers."

The Buddha smiled kindly and said, "I cannot accept your offerings. The flowers were picked for your king. If you offer these flowers to me, you will all be punished. I cannot bear to see this happen."

"Lord Buddha, please believe our sincerity in offering you these flowers. It is such a rare occurrence to have a buddha born into this world. In fact, such an encounter happens only once in billions of kalpas. We want to make these offerings to you, even if it means we will have to sacrifice our brief and tortured lives. Thus we can accumulate the conditions for future liberation from pain and suffering."

"What if the king learns what you have done and punishes you?" asked the Buddha.

"Lord Buddha, we will not reconsider, even though we may be punished. By the merit accumulated from these offer-

ings, we will not be reborn into the three evil realms, but will instead gain rebirth in a good and happy place."

Only those who understand that life is characterized by suffering can have the determination necessary to gain liberation. Seeing the purity of their motives and the depth of their understanding, the Buddha smiled and nodded, indicating his willingness to accept their offerings. The flower pickers then spread the flowers around the Buddha and his bhiksus. All at once, the air was filled with fragrance far and wide.

The Buddha then taught them the Six Paramitas of the Mahayana. On hearing this wonderful teaching, all the flower pickers made sincere vows to practice these perfections. They deeply understood the Dharma and made great progress in their cultivation, soon reaching the point of non-regression. The Buddha happily prophesized, "In the future, you will all become Buddhas and will be honored as 'Wondrous Flower Buddhas.'"

The flower pickers then prostrated themselves in front of the Buddha and happily left.

With true sincerity, offerings to the Buddha, even offerings of flowers, can lead to future Buddhahood.

The Offering of an Umbrella

One day, the Buddha was on his way to a village in Yutanloey to teach the Dharma. It was summertime and the weather was hot and humid. The air was still, without any breeze.

Near the road, there was a shepherd who saw light emanating from the body of the Buddha. He thought to himself, "The Buddha is the most exalted being of the three worlds. It is remarkable that he puts up with such heat to teach the Dharma. This is too much!" He quickly wove an umbrella out of straw and followed after the Buddha to shade his head. He followed the Buddha until he finally found himself becoming separated from his flock. He then put the umbrella down to go and gather the wandering sheep.

When the Buddha saw what had just happened, he smiled lightly. At this time, hundreds of thousands of glittering beams emerged from his mouth. Each beam split into tens of millions of rays of light. The light reached all corners of the universe in all of the ten directions, including the thirty-three heavens and the eighteen levels of hell. All the beasts and hungry ghosts were bathed in the light of the Buddha. When the celestial beings, devas, and asuras saw the light of the Buddha, they all came forward with flowers, incense, and music to make offerings.

Ananda knelt in front of the Buddha and asked, "Lord Buddha, can you explain why you smiled? Can you tell us what brought this about?"

The Buddha replied, "Ananda, did you see that shepherd?"

"Yes, Lord Buddha," said Ananda.

"Ananda, it was out of respect that the shepherd wove the umbrella to shade me from the sun. With such merit, he will be reborn in the heavens, or within nobility in the human world, and will be shaded with beautiful and precious umbrel-

las. Thirteen kalpas later, he will renounce the household life and become a Pratyeka-buddha by the name of Azupota."

After the disciples heard what the Buddha said, they were overjoyed for the shepherd. All the various beings then prostrated themselves and left the Buddha to continue his travels.



The Offering of a Spool of Thread

In the town of Sravasti lived a weaver by the name of Suma. He was poor and did not own any property. He earned his meager living by weaving for others.

One day, he thought to himself, "I must be poor because I did not give alms in my previous lives. This is why I deserve such poverty in my present life. If I do not begin giving alms now, my next life will probably be even worse."

At that time, the Buddha was staying with his followers at the Jetavana Monastery outside of Sravasti. Knowing that the Buddha would pass by on his alms rounds, Suma went and asked a neighbor for a small spool of thread, then sat and waited by the roadside for the Buddha to pass.

When the Buddha walked by, Suma, with all his heart, offered the thread. The Buddha accepted the offering and manifested a hole in his clothes so that he could use the spool of thread to stitch it up.

Suma was overjoyed to see the Buddha using the spool of thread to mend his clothes. He prostrated himself in front of the Buddha and vowed, "May the merit from such an offering enable me in my future lives to guide all ignorant beings with the torch of wisdom; to support all sentient beings who have no one to depend on; to take care of all sentient beings who need care; to comfort all sentient beings who are restless in body and mind; to teach the Dharma to all sentient beings in order to help them reach the eternal realm of truth, goodness, beauty, and sacredness; and to help all sentient beings attain liberation."

After the Buddha heard his vows, he prophesied that in the future the weaver would become a buddha by the name of "Ten Thread Buddha."

The Offering of Clothes

One day, while not feeling well, the Buddha rested quietly. News of the Buddha's illness reached King Bimbisara, who ordered the royal doctor Jivaka to go and attend to him.

After the Buddha recovered, Jivaka was eager to make an offering but could not decide what would be appropriate. Finally, he remembered that when he had treated the king of the neighboring country he was given a fine article of clothing. The clothing had been made for royalty so it should be suitable for someone like the Buddha, he thought.

Jivaka offered the clothing to the Buddha saying, "Lord Buddha, after meeting with the Blessed One and his disciples, one thing has been continually on my mind. The Lord Buddha is always saying that on this Earth, the only thing that is relatively precious is our body. If this is so, why do the bhiksus continue to dress in such ragged and dirty robes? From a medical point of view, of which I have some knowledge, it is just unsanitary. This article of clothing that I offer you was a gift from the king of a neighboring country; I wish the Lord Buddha to accept it as an offering so that I may accumulate some merit. I also wish the Lord Buddha to tell the bhiksus to stop wearing ragged and dirty robes."

The Buddha was not offended, but was happy to receive Jivaka's generosity. He passed along the doctor's words to his disciples telling them, "All clothes, no matter whether they are old or new, should be plain and also clean. They should be dried under the sun for disinfection. On the one hand, it is not appropriate that we let our minds be tainted by the appearance of beautiful clothes; on the other, it is not fitting to insist on wearing ragged and dirty clothes as a symbol of a lack of attachment."

After the Buddha's words become known, the people of Rajagṛha all wanted to make offerings of clothing to the bhikṣu community.

The King of Parrots Welcomes the Buddha

Once, the Buddha and his bhiksus were traveling from the Jetavana Monastery to Magadha. On the way they passed through an immense forest.

This particular forest was inhabited by tens of millions of parrots ruled by a kindhearted parrot king. Perched on top of a tall tree, the parrot king saw at a distance the awe-inspiring Buddha and his group of bhiksus heading towards the forest. He swiftly flew to meet them and spoke in a human tongue, "Lord Buddha, I live in this forest just a short distance from here. It is almost dusk. I hope that the Buddha will kindly come to rest in my forest for the night, so that I may accumulate some merit." The Buddha smiled and nodded.

After the Buddha agreed, the parrot king quickly flew up into the woods and summoned all his subjects, saying, "The Enlightened One will soon arrive in our forest. We should go to the edge of the forest to welcome him and his bhiksus."

No sooner had he said this than all the parrots followed their king to welcome the Buddha. When they saw the Buddha and his bhiksus arrive, they whispered praise among themselves for his awe-inspiring compassion.

The moon was high in the sky above the forest as the Buddha and his bhiksus sat to meditate under the trees. Bright silver rays showered the faces of the Buddha and his bhiksus, making them look even more majestic.

The parrot king was thrilled with joy to see how serenely the Buddha and his bhiksus meditated. For the entire night, the king kept a vigil, circling around the Buddha and his bhiksus to make sure that they were not harmed by the lions and tigers of the forest. Though he took no rest, he was too excited to feel tired.

Early the next morning, the Buddha and his bhiksus left

the forest to continue on to Rajagrha. From the sky, the parrots escorted the sangha along the way and were reluctant to leave. It was truly a magnificent sight!

The king of the parrots then flew ahead to inform King Bimbisara, flying into King Bimbisara's throne room and calling out, "Your Majesty! The Buddha and his bhiksus will soon be here. Please prepare some food offerings and get ready to welcome them outside the city gate."

After listening to the parrot king, King Bimbisara thanked him repeatedly. He then quickly ordered preparations of sumptuous food, and with his officials went outside the city gate with streamers and flowers to welcome the Buddha.

The Buddha was surprised by the warm welcome and asked, "Your Majesty, how did you know I was coming?"

"The king of the parrots told me; otherwise, I would have been remiss in welcoming you."

That night, the king of the parrots died naturally, without experiencing any pain. Due to the merit from welcoming the Buddha, he was reborn into the Trayastrimsa Heaven. To show his gratitude to the great Buddha, the parrot joyfully brought flowers down from heaven as offerings to the Buddha. The Buddha happily accepted them and taught the parrot king the Four Noble Truths. The king of the parrots was overjoyed to hear the Buddha's teachings, and soon attained arhatship.



The Giving of the Dharma by a King

King Prukasa of a great kingdom in central India was a good friend of King Pinsa of Magadha. Unfortunately, King Prukasa had yet to hear the Buddha's teachings and was ignorant of the Dharma.

One day, King Prukasa gave his friend King Pinsa a gift of a decorative flower made of precious gems: pearls, gold, silver and agate. After King Pinsa accepted it, he in turn offered the flower to the Buddha and said, "Lord Buddha, King Prukasa is my best friend. He gave me this precious flower that I am now offering to you. From the merit of this act, I hope that King Prukasa will let go of his prejudices and come to visit Lord Buddha to listen to the Dharma. The only thing that bothers me now is that I don't know what to give him in return."

The Buddha told King Pinsa, "It is best if you return the favor by writing your friend about the workings of the twelve links of dependent origination. From this teaching, his belief in the Dharma will grow and his comprehension will increase."

Following the Buddha's instructions, King Pinsa quickly wrote to King Prukasa, explaining the nature of the twelve links. He concluded his message with these words, "I appreciate your generosity in giving me such a precious decorative flower. Now, I am returning the favor with the flower of the Dharma. Please study this carefully, and you will gradually understand the wondrous Law of Cause and Effect. Upon receipt of this letter, study the material and together we can share the experience of the Dharma."

Upon receiving King Pinsa's missive, King Prukasa took up the advice of his friend and studied the teaching of conditioned origination in great detail. As he contemplated and pondered the teaching, he understood its meaning and recognized the wonder of the Dharma. He exclaimed, "The power

of the Dharma is amazing. The Dharma calms the mind and brings peace and joy to a country. The five desires for fortune, sensuality, fame, good food, and sleep are the causes of human suffering. I have been infatuated with them for kalpas. Only today I realize the great significance of life. Now when I examine this world, there is nothing really worthwhile for me to be attached to or to crave."

Soon after, King Prukasa transferred his throne to his son. He dedicated himself completely to investigating the Dharma and lived the life of a devoted Buddhist.

Among all offerings, the offering of the Dharma is supreme. The merit from the giving of the Dharma never decreases but only increases. Thus, the offering of the Dharma is the most precious and honorable offering.

The Giving and Upholding of the Precepts

One early morning, after residing and teaching at the Jetavana monastery in Sravasti for quite sometime, the Buddha decided to practice walking meditation. While he was walking, a majestic-looking heavenly being approached the Buddha and prostrated himself with sincere respect. He entreated the Buddha:

How do I obtain good reputation?

How do I obtain great fortune?

How do I obtain an immortal reputation?

How do I obtain benevolent relationships?

The Buddha then replied:

Upholding the precepts creates a good reputation.

Almsgiving creates great fortune.

Being true in actions and words creates an immortal reputation.

Being kind and generous creates benevolent relationships.

The heavenly being then prostrated himself, thanked the Buddha with great joy and immediately vanished into thin air.

Fame, reputation, wealth, and power are coveted and pursued by both mankind and gods. One who practices according to the Buddha's teachings of giving, upholding the precepts, and being true in actions and words will enjoy great fortune and endless prosperity in this life and in lives to come.

As mentioned in this saying: Giving is like sowing, and kind hearts are like seedlings. When seeds are sown, there

will be a harvest. This is the never-changing law of Cause and Effect.



JS Sincere Offerings, Endless Merit

In this world, not everyone has the luxury of being able to make offerings of substantial material value. In fact, for many people, offering anything at all is difficult. When one has only a single item of clothing to wear or barely enough food to eat, it may seem that one possesses nothing of value to give. Unfortunately, some people may scoff at anyone in this apparent predicament, feeling superior when they witness what seems to be a meager, inadequate offering, especially when the offering is being presented to the Buddha. All of us, however, may take comfort in the themes presented in the following stories, which teach us that an offering, regardless of its worldly value, is imbued with the power to demonstrate proper reverence as well as to generate limitless merit, when it is given with proper intentions.

Through stories of a young child offering make-believe rice, an impoverished woman with only fetid rice to offer, a couple so poor that they share one pair of trousers, and other stories, we learn that the actual, physical substance of an offering is unimportant. Our intentions, our attitude, and the spirit in which we make an offering are where the Buddha reminds us to focus. With a sincere heart and a pure mind, even the smallest act of giving can generate immeasurable merit. Conversely, an expensive, extravagant offering that is given with ulterior or malicious motives will lack beneficial results and will be regarded as what it is, a false act.

We need not trouble ourselves with our ability to present superior offerings or lavish gifts. Such a focus on external, material

objects directs us away from our inner selves, where our real wealth resides, and away from the true spirit of offering. When we possess a heart and mind of sincere intentions, our internal treasure trove from which to find an appropriate offering is limitless; anything we give is a perfect offering and can create abundant merit. From a heart full of joy and purity nothing inadequate or lacking can be given!



The Eighty-four Thousand Stupas

One day, as the Buddha and Ananda were on their alms rounds begging for food in Sravasti, they saw a group of children playing by the side of the road. Each child was busy making various buildings out of sand. They also used sand to make imaginary treasures and even rice. Among the children was a little boy who happened to look up as the Buddha passed by. He was filled with respect and joy and wanted to offer some of the make-believe rice to the Buddha. Since the boy was too short to reach the make-believe rice, he asked another boy to help him, "Can you please let me sit on your shoulders so that I can reach that bowl of sand-rice to offer it to the Buddha?" The other boy happily agreed. When the little boy offered the sand grains to the Buddha, the Buddha gently lowered his alms bowl to receive the sand offering. After the offering, the Buddha instructed Ananda, "Please use this sand to plaster the walls of our monastery."

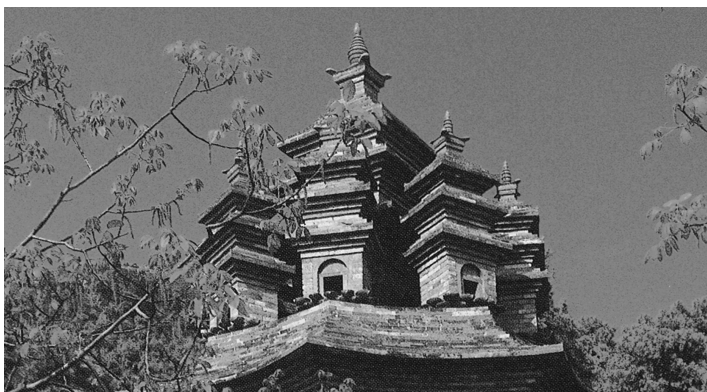
When they finished their alms rounds, the Buddha and Ananda returned to the Jetavana Monastery. Ananda then used the sand from the alms rounds to plaster the walls of the monastery. The sand was only enough to cover one small area. After Ananda finished washing up, he went to tell the Buddha that there was not enough sand.

The Buddha told Ananda, "The boy offered me the sand with a pure, joyful mind. Though the sand covers only one portion of the wall, a hundred years after I enter parinirvana, the merit of this offering will ripen and the boy will become a king by the name of Asoka. The second boy who hoisted him on his shoulders will become a senior official to King Asoka. He will rule the Kingdom of Jambudvipa and will propagate the Buddha's teachings far and wide. The King and his minister will make grand offerings, and distribute the Buddha's relics all over Jambudvipa. They will also build eighty-four thousand stupas in my honor."

Ananda was overjoyed at what he heard. He politely asked the Buddha, "Lord Buddha, what kind of merit did you accumulate in your previous lives to enjoy the good fortune of having so many stupas built in your honor?"

The Buddha then explained to Ananda that in one of his past lives, he was a king by the name of Posachi. During that lifetime, he gave away eighty-four thousand brilliantly painted portraits of a previous buddha to other lands so that the people there might have an opportunity to pay homage to a buddha. The merit of this good deed was why the Buddha was going to have eighty-four thousand stupas built in his honor. After hearing the Buddha's words, Ananda and the other disciples were filled with gladness and enthusiasm for the Dharma.

The nature of merit depends on the nature of intention when making the offering. The little boy made his offering to the Buddha with an earnest, most respectful, and joyful mind. Later, he used his open mind to build Buddhist stupas and spread the Dharma. This is why he reaped the karmic effect of becoming a king.



Nanda's Lamp Offering

While the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana Monastery in Sravasti, tens of thousands of people would come everyday to listen to the Dharma. They would bring along with them all sorts of clothing and food to offer to the sangha.

There was a poor, lonesome woman named Nanda who frequently came to listen to the Buddha's teachings. She was saddened when she saw the king, his minister, and the rich all make such fine offerings, and she knew that she would never be able to do the same. "How can a poor person like me, having to beg for every single meal, have anything to offer to the Buddha?"

Then she recollected a saying she had heard, "If you wish to know the causes set up in your previous lives, you only need look at the results in your present life. Who is to blame for Nanda's desperate situation? Nanda, who thoroughly understood this lesson of the Dharma, knew that she could alter her grinding poverty only through making offerings and giving alms. She also realized that with wisdom, she could find a way to accumulate merit and attain liberation from suffering.

The next day, Nanda was very happy because she received an old piece of cloth while begging. She traded the cloth for a copper piece and bought an oil lamp to make an offering of light to the Buddha.

Nanda's wish to make an offering was realized when she lit the lamp and placed it before the Buddha. As she joined her palms and prostrated herself in front of the Buddha, she pronounced these words with utmost sincerity, "May the brightness of this lamp rid me of the ignorance which has been with me for many lives, may this light eradicate my bad karma, and provide me with great wisdom. Lord Buddha, please bless me with your compassion!"

Numerous lamps were laid in front of the Buddha by the

many people praying for their own futures. Before dawn the next day, Maudgalyayana went to check the lamps. He found the lamps offered by the king and ministers were dim and dying out. The lamp from Nanda, however, was glowing extraordinarily brightly and the wick seemed unused. After daybreak, Maudgalyayana began to snuff out the lamps with a fan. While the other lamps died out, Maudgalyayana could not put out Nanda's lamp, no matter how he tried. Puzzled, he rushed to the Buddha for an answer. The Buddha explained, "Not only can Nanda's lamp not be put out by your fan, even if you were to splash it with all the water from the four great seas or blow at it with great gusts of wind, it would never be extinguished. This is because the owner of the lamp offered it with bodhi mind. Maudgalyayana, if one offers with arrogance or in an attempt to attract fame, the merit it creates is bound to be minimal. Regardless of how many material things one offers, offerings made with a self-serving attitude can only create limited merit."

At that time, Nanda again came to pay homage to the Buddha. The Buddha kindly stretched out his hand and gently touched her head as he prophesized, "In a future asamkhya kalpa, you will become a buddha by the name of Bright Lantern and will be honored with ten different buddha titles." Nanda then renounced her household life and joined the sangha as a bhiksuni.

When the many devotees who were present heard what the Buddha had just said, they joyfully vowed to uphold the teachings and to be generous in almsgiving, thus lighting up bodhi lamps within themselves in offering to the Buddha.

The Tathagata Field of Merit Is Boundless

One day, the Buddha and an assembly of bhiksus traveled through the city of Brahamangaya. When the king of the city heard of the Buddha's unparalleled powers and how he was able to captivate the crowds with his teachings, he became fearful and suspicious of the Buddha. In order to limit the Buddha's influence on his people, the king proclaimed that whoever offered alms to the Buddha or listened to his teachings would be punished by having to pay five taels of gold.

When the Buddha entered the city, he went from door to door begging, offering sentient beings an opportunity to plant the seeds of future merit. With the proclamation strictly enforced, all the city dwellers quickly closed their doors as soon as they saw the Buddha approaching. No one dared offer any food to the wandering mendicant. The Buddha circled through the whole town but did not receive a single offering; he was ready to give up and leave the city.

In the city, there was a maidservant who had a strong desire to make an offering to the Buddha and his followers. She was totally destitute and felt she had nothing worthy to offer.

As the Buddha happened to pass her door, the maidservant was about to throw out a bowl of fetid rice porridge. When she saw that the Buddha's bowl was empty, the pure thought of wanting to make an offering arose in her mind. Since she dare not offer the spoiled food directly to the Buddha, she said, "Here is some food to be thrown away. Whoever wants it can help themselves."

The Buddha understood her intention and accepted the offering. Additionally, he praised her, saying, "This poor maid has made this offering with such a sincere heart. Because of this she will enjoy great happiness in the celestial

realms for fifteen kalpas. When her time in the celestial realms is up, she will not fall into the three evil realms but will renounce the household life to cultivate Buddhahood, eventually attaining enlightenment."

While the Buddha was making this remark, there was a Brahman bystander who could not believe that the offering of a putrid bowl of rice porridge could lead to such tremendous merit. He thought the Buddha was lying and deceitful, so he questioned him impolitely. To rid the Brahman of his doubt, the Buddha revealed one of his auspicious signs. He stretched his tongue over his face until it reached the top of his forehead. Looking at the Brahman, he asked, "Have you ever read about this in the scriptures? Would one who has such a broad and long tongue lie?"

"Anyone with such a broad and long tongue would definitely not lie. I really did not think that such a minute offering could incur such great merit."

"Have you ever seen a nigrodha tree with an arbor large enough to shade five hundred wagons? A tree that can shade five hundred wagons cannot be too small."

"Yes, I have seen such a tree. It is truly enormous."

"Do you know the size of the seed from which that tree springs?"

"It is about one-third the size of a mustard seed."

"Who would believe that from something so tiny, so massive a result would be possible?"

"I have seen this happen."

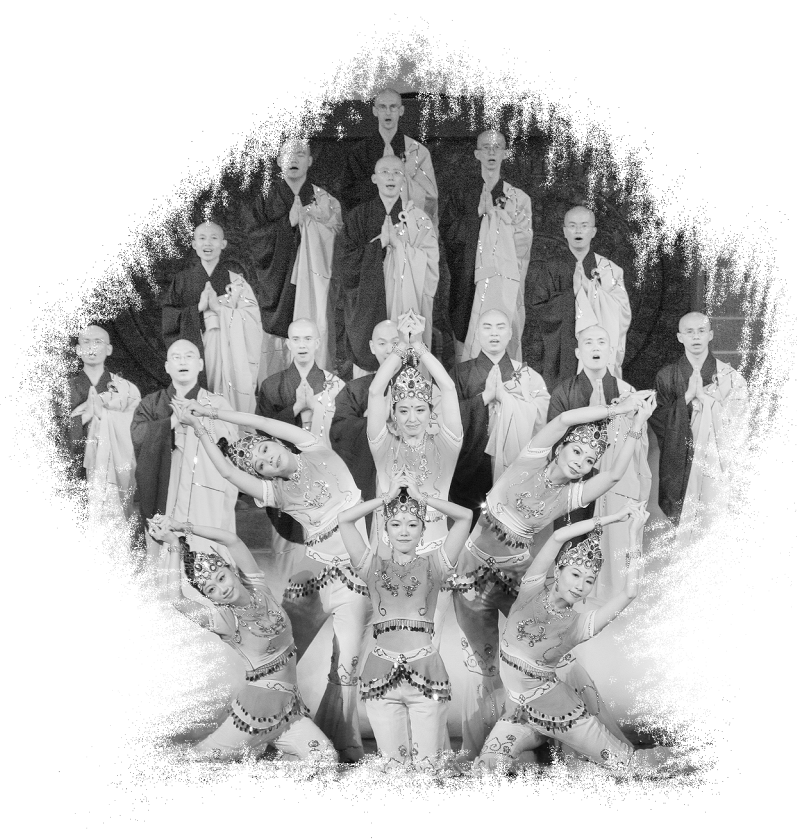
"So have I. The old maidservant is able to receive great merit because of the richness of the Tathagata field of merit," the Buddha gently explained to the Brahman.

After listening to the explanation, the Brahman finally understood and thanked the Buddha. He prostrated himself

respectfully to the Buddha and repented. As the Buddha taught the Brahman, his belief grew stronger, and eventually he asked to be accepted as a follower of the Buddha.

The conversion of the Brahman prompted many other Brahmans in the city to change their attitudes towards the Buddha, and many made him offerings and invited him to their homes to teach the Dharma.

The King was also touched. As a result, together with his people, he took refuge in the Triple Gem and vowed to cultivate diligently.



A Brahman Couple's Offering

A mere offering of a ladle of gruel can enlighten the mind. Drawing respect from the celestial and human realms. Skeptics need only look at the seed of the bodhi tree; Though small as a mustard seed, it produces a spacious shade.

During the Buddha's lifetime, the sangha subsisted on alms obtained from devotees. It was a sangha rule at the time not to do any cooking. One day, the Buddha led his followers into town on their alms rounds. They came to a stop at the door of a Brahman's house. The lady of the house, who was busy cooking, suddenly sensed a light around her. The light was very different from the light of the sun or moon. As it shone, it gave a very soft and comfortable feeling. She turned around and discovered the Buddha and his followers standing outside her door. She was so impressed by the dignified appearance of the Buddha and the stateliness of the bhiksus that she felt great respect for them. She wished very much to offer the freshly cooked rice to them, but knew that such an act of generosity would anger her husband, who did not believe in the Dharma. All of a sudden, she felt sad and repented her past kama that had led her to her present life of womanhood—a life full of restrictions, deprived of freedom, and a total lack of self-determination. She finally thought of a way out. She put the rice in a bowl and squeezed out its juice. She then scooped out a ladle full of the gruel and offered it to the Buddha, who accepted it with gladness and recited this verse:

Compare an offering of one hundred white elephants,
Decorated with necklaces of bright pearls and precious
stones,
To an offering of a ladle of gruel given with a pure
mind to the Buddha;

The latter accumulates greater blessing.

At that moment, the woman's husband happened to come out of the house and hear the verse. He was curious and asked the Buddha, "What is a ladle of gruel worth? What is so precious about it? What you just said sounded deceptive and unacceptable! How can anyone believe it?"

The Buddha replied kindly, "I have long practiced the Six Paramitas; what I have said is absolutely true. You should have trusted in me since I have attained enlightenment." The Buddha went on to say, "On the street of Raya in Sravasti, have you seen the huge tree which is several tens of feet tall?"

"I have seen it. This giant tree is the only shady spot where people can escape from the summer's heat."

The Buddha continued, "You recognize the enormity of the tree. Do you realize how small its seed was when it was first planted?"

"Roughly the size of a mustard seed," the Brahman answered without hesitation.

"Don't you think it's strange that a seed as small as a mustard seed can grow into a tree large enough to cover half the sky? It is not really that strange; it is just a law of nature and the cycle of cause and effect. Now that your wife has offered a ladle of gruel, doesn't it seem reasonable that the future results can be immeasurable? What is more, my field of merit is immense and can provide the most wondrous treasure of the Dharma. Your willingness to pay homage and make an offering to the Buddha will definitely yield limitless blessings."

The Buddha's words won the Brahman couple's respect and conviction, and they became totally dedicated to making offerings to the sangha. When they died, they were reborn into a heaven realm, where they enjoyed eternal happiness. "Almsgiving is not something that only the rich and

wealthy can afford, it is not confined simply to money donations. When one sees others make offerings, if one does not feel jealous or angry but instead feels happy for the almsgiver, the merit one accrues is equivalent to that of the person who gave the alms. It is so easy to practice such deeds, should we not all do this?"

When the Brahman couple died, the Buddha told his disciples, "The couple that offered the ladle of gruel was reborn into a heaven realm where they will enjoy eons of happiness. They also have permanently escaped falling into the evil realms. After thirty kalpas, they will be reborn into this world and accomplish Buddhahood here."

Do not pass up the opportunity to perform a good deed
just because it is small;
Do not commit a bad deed just because it is minor.
A small offering based on a simple earnest right view can
yield enormous results.
Like a fruit-laden tree that starts out as a tiny seed,
Merits within the human and celestial realms are the
results of consistent giving.

"One should cultivate merit by upholding the Triple Gem;
Giving merely a penny can generate ten thousand in return."

Such a saying is truly worth believing.

Giving and Receiving Offerings with an Unbiased Mind

In Sravasti, people often made offerings to the Buddha and the sangha he led. The offerings were made in large ceremonies hosted by a single family, several families, a group of individuals, a whole street, or even the whole town. These offering ceremonies were always conducted with much excitement and fanfare.

Once, the residents of a particular street got together to hold an offering ceremony for the Buddha and the sangha. For days, everyone was busy preparing the offerings. People on the street discussed the ceremony, and all the households hoped their offerings would please the Buddha.

In Sravasti, there was a poor man who made his living doing odds jobs for people. He thought, "Though I cannot afford to offer fine rice, I can still offer some pudding." He sprinkled some flour with water, kneaded it into a circle, wrapped it in a leaf, and cooked the dough in boiling water. With the pudding in hand, he patiently stood in line waiting for his turn to make an offering to the Buddha.

It was a long time before it was his turn. When he came before the Buddha, he thought of how plain his offering was, so he just stood there. When he saw the Buddha's kind face, seemingly beckoning him to come forward, he finally let go of his worries and approached the Buddha. Saluting the Buddha with joined palms, the old man put his pudding into the Blessed One's alms bowl.

In front of the Buddha was an array of delicacies and fine offerings. The Buddha did not pick any of these fancy offerings, but rather chose the old man's pudding. Word circulated among the devotees of how the Buddha, without any disdain, ate the plain pudding offered by the poor old man.

The news spread all over the city of Sravasti and drew the

king and his officials to the poor man. They admired him for receiving such incredible merit. They gathered around him and asked him, "Spare us some of your merit. We are willing to pay you two hundred gold coins, or even five hundred gold coins!"

The poor man did not know what to do, so he asked the Buddha for advice. The Buddha told him, "Take whatever they offer and transfer the merit to all sentient beings." Soon the poor worker collected ninety million gold coins. At dusk, the king summoned him to the palace and offered him a high position and a good salary.

All the disciples who attended the ceremony returned to the monastery and discussed what had happened. One of them said, "My Dharma friends, the Buddha enjoyed the poor man's pudding as if it were a delicacy and ate it without disdain. The poor man also received lots of offerings and even became an official in the palace. In a short time, he became prosperous and successful."

When the Buddha heard what had become of the poor man, he decided to explain the originating causes of his good fortune:

In the past, in the city of Varanasi, the people held a ceremony in which they offered flower and food offerings to their respective tree gods. At that time, a poor man saw people paying respect to the tree gods, and he too thought about making an offering. But then he changed his mind because all he had with him was plain pudding, and he thought the deities would accept only heavenly food. He was about to eat it himself when he heard a tree god said, "Sincere man, do not feel inferior. I know you are not a wealthy man, so I will not look down on your offering. Let me receive your food now."

The poor man paid heed to the tree god and offered up his pudding. The tree god said again, "What do you wish for?"

"I wish to be free from poverty," answered the poor man.

"That is very easy. Do not worry. This tree is surrounded with jeweled pitchers. Tell the king. Once the king finds these treasures, he will be so delighted he will offer you fortune and rank."

The poor man left the tree god and proceeded as he was instructed. All that was predicted came true and the poor man was finally rewarded with great fortune and the esteemed position of finance minister.

The Buddha paused for a moment before he continued, "The poor man was the poor worker you are talking about; I was the tree god in a past life. Bhiksus, when we receive offerings, we need to keep an unbiased and equal mind. You should not favor only the refined and be disgusted with the plain and coarse. This way, you give all sentient beings the opportunity to accumulate merit. If we prefer certain offerings over others, we are acting with a biased mind, and our acceptance of the offerings will be impure."

In Giving It Is the Thought That Counts

There was once a poor couple that lived in a deserted coal pit. The walls of their pit were bare, and they were so poor they had to share a single pair of trousers. Whenever the husband went out, the wife had to stay home, half-naked. Similarly, when the wife went out the husband was forced to remain in the pit without any trousers to wear. One day, they heard that the Buddha and his disciples would be begging for alms in the neighborhood. They discussed the matter between themselves saying, "Because in our previous lives we did not give alms and cultivate our blessings, we are now suffering from such dire poverty. After waiting for so long, the Buddha is finally preaching in our area. How can we miss such a great opportunity to give alms?"

As they talked, the wife sighed deeply and said, "There is nothing here in our pit fit to give the Buddha. What can we offer?"

The husband thought for a while and said firmly, "No matter what, it would be better to starve ourselves to death than let this great opportunity slip by us. We cannot miss the chance to accumulate merit. Well, the only decent piece of property we have is this pair of trousers. Let us take them and make an offering of them to the Lord Buddha."

Happily, they took off the trousers and offered them to the Buddha. The disciples were startled with embarrassment. Covering their noses, they shoved the pair of trousers back and forth among themselves. They did not know what to do with them. Finally, Ananda brought back the trousers to the Buddha and asked for his advice, "Lord Buddha," he said, "This pair of trousers is too filthy to wear. Let me throw them away!"

The Buddha then compassionately said to the disciples,

"Dear bhiksus, do not think that way. An offering from the poor is most precious. Bring them here and let me wear them."

Ananda, full of remorse, went with Maudgalyayana to the river to wash the trousers. As soon as they dipped the trousers in the river, waves began to appear and the water started to rise and fall. In panic, Maudgalyayana used his supernatural powers to bring Mount Sumeru to suppress the waves. Though he tried and tried, it was in vain, and the waves were not calmed. The two of them finally gave up and rushed back to report to the Buddha. At that time, the Buddha was having his meal. He gently picked up one rice grain and told them, "The swells on the river are due to the praise the Naga King of the Four Seas has for the poor couple and their determination to make an offering to me. Throw this grain of rice into the river, it should take care of the waves."

Ananda was puzzled, "Lord Buddha, how can a small rice grain calm the waves if even Mount Sumeru cannot?"

The Buddha smiled and said, "Just give it a try and see."

Skeptically, Ananda and Maudgalyayana threw the grain of rice into the river. Indeed, the river returned to its original calmness. The two marveled at such a wonder! Was it possible that the strength of Mount Sumeru could not compare to that of a grain of rice? When they returned to the monastery, they immediately asked the Buddha for an explanation. The Buddha nodded and said, "True nature is without differentiation. From the point when the rice seed is sown, it undergoes irrigation, fertilization, harvest, and finally sale. To reach the state of a rice grain, it must go through various efforts and hard work. The merit that is contained in a grain of rice is immeasurable and boundless. The same explanation applies to the trousers that the poor couple offered. Those trousers were

their entire fortune, and because of the couple's enormous generosity, the trousers contained immeasurable, boundless merit. Even the Naga King of the Four Seas saw that the merit of the offering of the rice grain and of the dirty trousers were equally limitless and boundless, both arising from a sincere thought. Recognizing their equivalency in merit, he gladly retreated, giving praise to such wonderful generosity. Thus, we can see that as long as we make offerings with sincerity, the power of even a small rice grain or a dirty article of clothing is equal to that of tens of millions of Mount Sumerus."

Later on, the following verses were written to describe the story and to caution stubborn beings:

**The Buddha views one grain of rice
To be as significant as Mount Sumeru.
Those who do not see this truth
Will pay by being reborn as animals, bearing skins
and having horns.**

True Merit Comes from Sincerity

In the city of Rajagrha, the townspeople were discussing how to raise funds to make offerings to the Buddha and his bhiksus. It was decided that each person would donate one hundred coins. In the midst of the crowd was a poor man named Roosterhead. When they saw how impoverished he looked, they told him, "Go away! You don't have any money so you are not allowed to participate."

Roosterhead was sad and discouraged. When he returned home, he let out a deep, heavy sigh. Seeing him so depressed, his wife asked, "What is the matter? Who has given you such a hard time?"

He explained, "People tend to judge others by their outward appearance. They fail to look beyond the exterior. Though poor, I have a sincere heart. Due to our poverty, I was not allowed to participate in the preparation of offerings to the Buddha and his bhiksus."

The wife smiled, "I see. This is easy to fix. You can borrow some money from an elder, Foser Mitolo. You see, you will be able to participate in the offerings ceremony after all."

Roosterhead happily went to the elder's house to ask for the loan. He said to the elder, "I will return your money in ten days; if not my wife and I will work as your slaves." With such an assurance, the elder gladly loaned him two hundred coins. With his newfound wealth, Roosterhead hurried back to the meeting. When he got there, he told the townspeople, "I now have the money for the offering. Please let me participate in the ceremony."

Wanting nothing to do with Roosterhead, the townspeople coldly replied, "Well, we are done with the fund raising. Now that we have enough money, we don't need your belated contribution."

Although he had to endure various hardships and was humiliated, Roosterhead's sincere desire to make an offering

to the Buddha remained unshaken. Roosterhead discussed the matter with his wife, and they decided to go and see the Buddha. The couple told the Buddha what had happened. The Buddha comforted them compassionately and said, "Tomorrow, when my bhiksus and I come to accept your offering, you may also invite the king to partake in the offering."

Roosterhead was so thrilled that he jumped for joy. He rushed off to the royal palace and told the king excitedly what the Buddha had said, "Your Majesty! I have been given the great distinction of offering alms to the Buddha at my house tomorrow. The Buddha has requested me to invite your Majesty to partake of the offering." As the king was a follower of the Buddha, he readily accepted the invitation.

At that time, Shakra, King of the Devalokas, was touched by such devout piety. He told Vaisravana, Lokapala of the Northern quarter, "In the human world, there is a poor man named Roosterhead who is joyfully preparing to make an alms offering to the Buddha and his bhiksus. Why don't you go and help him prepare for the feast?" Vaisravana was delighted to help and conjured into being many delicacies and gourmet foods.

Shakra then told Devaputramara, "In the human world, there is a poor man named Roosterhead who is joyfully preparing to make an alms offering to the Buddha and his bhiksus. Why don't you go and help him transform his house into a large assembly hall?"

The next day when Roosterhead and his wife awoke, they found their house transformed into a spacious, well-decorated hall. All about them they found mountains of sumptuous offerings, pleasing foods, and refreshing drinks.

When the Buddha and his bhiksus arrived, Roosterhead and his wife were able to offer them a worthy feast of finely

prepared delicacies. At this time, devas from the heavens came to pay homage, while the king and his officials stood looking on. It was a grand and majestic affair. After receiving the offerings, the Buddha expounded the Four Noble Truths. The humble couple and the king were full of joy.

Those who had earlier refused to allow Roosterhead to participate in making offerings were very much ashamed. They finally realized that the true merit of an offering depends on the degree of sincerity, and not on the size of the offering or on the wealth of the person making it.



Using Wisdom to Liberate a Sea Spirit

Once, when the Buddha and his bhiksus were staying at the Jetavana Monastery in Sravasti, a merchant about to set sail to look for treasure at sea came to the monastery to make an offering. He was hoping to ensure a safe journey while treasure hunting at sea. He invited the Buddha and his bhiksus to come to his house the next day to receive an offering of alms. The Buddha happily accepted.

The following day, the merchant prepared a feast of gourmet food to offer to the sangha. After the meal, the Buddha prayed for the merchant and expounded the Dharma. He praised the merchant for making offerings, which would bring him much merit. The merchant was so delighted that he prostrated himself in front of the Buddha.

The Buddha then advised the merchant, "While treasure hunting at sea, you have to beware of the many dangers and disasters that lurk in the deep. It is best for you to take refuge now in the Triple Gem. If you are mindful of the Triple Gem and observe the Five Precepts, you will calm the fires of hatred and anger and as a result will come to no harm." Hearing what the Buddha said, the merchant pleaded to receive the Five Precepts and become a Buddhist.

With his great wisdom, knowledge of the winds, and ability to read the ocean currents, the merchant was chosen by his companions to lead the group. They respected him as a person of virtue and talent. Before long, they were ready to set sail.

After they had been under way for a few days, they encountered a hurricane. A malevolent sea spirit transformed himself into a flesh-eating monster and appeared amidst the waves. He tried to prevent the ship from moving forward. The monster was fierce and ugly. His body was dark green. He gritted his teeth and brandished his sharp claws while shoot-

ing fire from his mouth. He looked at the merchants and said, "I bet you have never seen any creature as fierce as I am!"

Although the merchant was frightened and trembling, he remembered the Buddha's instructions. He was mindful of the Triple Gem and prayed for the Buddha's blessing. Immediately his fear vanished. He looked at the monster sternly and admonished him, "I have seen others more fierce than you. You are nothing special!"

The monster growled, "Who can be more fierce than me?"

The merchant said, "When one has committed the ten evil deeds and held erroneous views, one will fall into hell as punishment. In hell, the wardens and demons will come to chop the person up, drag him around, and herd him up mountains covered with knives. They will force him to shimmy up trees made of razor sharp swords. They will push him into boiling water or fiery furnaces. They will throw him onto raging fires, lock him up in glacial vaults, and later cook him in a cauldron filled with human waste. They will torture this unfortunate being with many other punishments for thousands and millions of years. After being subjected to such grueling tortures, would such a person not appear ten times more fierce than you?"

Upon hearing the merchant's reply, the monster disappeared quietly. The ocean once again regained its calm.

For days, the ship sailed on. Then the malevolent sea spirit transformed himself into a dying man, weak and emaciated, and appeared on a raft next to the ship. He called out to the merchant, "I bet you have never seen anyone as wasted as I am."

The merchant replied, "I have seen others thinner than you. You are nothing special."

The spirit screamed, "Where have you seen others more

wasted than me?"

"When people are ignorant of the pernicious nature of greed and jealousy, they become ever more self-absorbed, stingy, and wicked. They do not realize the importance of giving alms. After death, they will fall into the realm of the hungry ghosts. The ghosts' hollow bellies are the size of mountains, while their throats are as thin as the eye of a needle. Their hair is messy, and their faces are dark and withered. Since they have not eaten anything for centuries, they are much more wasted than you."

Upon hearing this, the spirit disappeared into the sea again.

The ship sailed on for another few days before the malevolent sea spirit reappeared, this time as a graceful young man. He called out to the merchant, "Have you ever seen anyone as graceful and elegant as I am?"

The merchant replied, "I have seen many others who are much more graceful and handsome than you."

The spirit roared, "Where have you seen such beings?"

The merchant replied, "When one is wise and virtuous, remains always mindful of the Triple Gem, diligently upholds the Five Precepts, and practices the ten meritorious acts, one shall gain rebirth into one of the celestial realms. Beings there have a stature and facial features that are incomparably wonderful and handsome. Comparing you to such a being would be like comparing a monkey to a heavenly goddess."

The sea spirit was ashamed. He thought, "What a knowledgeable merchant. He can discuss the law of cause and effect extensively. Why don't I give him a test?" With this in mind, he scooped up some water with his palms and asked the merchant, "Let's compare the amount of water in my hands with the water in the ocean, which is more?"

"There is more water in your hands than there is in all of

the ocean," the merchant replied.

The spirit answered, "These are the facts in front of you. Thus, I find your words hard to believe."

"You are right. However, you cannot judge things by worldly knowledge. Why? No matter how much water there is in the ocean, it will dry up when this world comes to an end. Yet, if you sincerely offer this small amount of water to the Buddha, your parents, a beggar, or a beast, the merit of this offering would last incomparably long, long after this material world has disappeared. For this reason, I say the amount of water in your hands is more than the water in the ocean."

When he heard the merchant's explanation, the sea spirit was delighted. He gave the merchant various kinds of valuable treasures. He also asked the merchant to carry back some rare and precious offerings to the Buddha and his bhiksus.

After the merchant and his companions returned to Sravasti, they proceeded to the Jetavana Monastery to pay homage to the Buddha. They offered the Buddha the treasure from the sea spirit. Joining their palms, the merchants prostrated themselves in front of the Buddha and said, "Lord Buddha, due to your advice, we managed to return unscathed from our treasure hunting at sea. We have personally experienced the truth of your teachings and humbly beseech you to accept us as your disciples."

The compassionate Buddha accepted their requests. They renounced their household lives and began to cultivate as the Buddha's disciples, ultimately achieving arhatship.

Attaining Enlightenment with a Verse

There were once five Brahman brothers who lived during the time of the Buddha. Four of them went into the mountains to acquire supernatural powers. Only the youngest brother, Funa, remained in the village where he lived in poverty as a farmer.

One day while on his daily alms rounds, the Buddha ran into Funa. The moment Funa saw the Buddha's dignified and blissful countenance, he was filled with great respect and joy, and offered his best rice to the Buddha. The following day, when Funa carried his hoe to work in the rice paddy, he could not believe what he saw. He had planted his rice seeds less than half a month ago but overnight they had grown into golden rice, which he then sold for an excellent price. He became a very rich man and improved his living conditions.

The four older brothers cultivating in the mountains had grown concerned about their younger brother. Eventually they decided to go together and visit him. When they arrived at Funa's house, they were amazed to see their brother so full of happiness. They asked Funa, "How has life been lately? You look good, better than before. Do you have any good news to share with us?" Funa told his brothers what had happened, about making an offering to the Buddha and becoming rich.

They were surprised and wished that they could offer something nice to the Buddha, so they, too, could share in such great merit. However, they had no desire to listen to the Buddha's teachings, nor did they wish to achieve liberation; they only wanted to attain worldly benefit. They asked Funa to prepare four balls of rice for them to offer to the Lord Buddha.

When the oldest brother made his offering, the Buddha said, "Everything is impermanent." The oldest brother quickly covered his ears with his hands and left.

When the second brother made his offering, the Buddha said, "Such is the law of arising and cessation." The second oldest brother quickly covered his ears and left.

When the third brother made his offering, the Buddha said, "When all arising and cessation ends." The third brother, too, quickly covered his ears and left.

Finally, when the fourth brother offered his rice ball to the Buddha, the Buddha said, "Nirvana is the ultimate tranquility." He, too, covered his ears and left.

When they returned home, they discussed what the Buddha had said to them. They joined the four sentences together into a verse and meditated on it. In the end, they understood the significance of the verse, and they all obtained the holy fruit of a non-returner (Anagamin). After they gained this degree of understanding, they went to the Buddha to pay their respects and to ask for forgiveness. They asked to become the Buddha's disciples. Later on they all attained arhatship.

It is only when we remove our pride and listen humbly with open minds that the Buddha's teachings can become deeply implanted in our hearts.

III Planting Seeds of Prosperity

Previous Causes and Conditions

In Buddhism, it is not possible to make choices or assume attitudes that will not have a direct effect on our lives in the future. This is the truth of a basic Buddhist concept - the Law of Cause and Effect. In this section, we sympathize with those who were stingy and greedy in their past lives, and we celebrate with those who were generous in their past lives, for everyone's present situation attests to the nature of their actions in the past.

In these stories, we encounter mean animals, suffering humans, and agonized hungry ghosts. Through their stories of suffering, pain and constant difficulties, the connection is clearly made between their present situation and their behavior in the past. How does one become a biting and hated snake? Deceit, evil, greed and stinginess dominated past interactions with others. Why is one reborn as a dog? By persistently acting in an unkind and uncharitable manner, rebirth in the lower, animal realm is likely.

Intermingled with snakes, dogs and ghosts we find a young woman with a radiant golden complexion, an infant born while the Buddha preaches the Dharma, and a disciple with incredible abilities. Unlike the miserable beings discussed above, these beings were generous and charitable in their past lives, setting up conditions for prosperity, happiness, and well being in the future.

We all have the choice to sow the seeds for joy and good fortune, or the seeds for poverty, pain and loneliness. We all have personal responsibility for determining our karmic map. Each moment is an opportunity to define our future. What kind of seeds are we planting?

The Foremost in Total Recollection of Sutras

While the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana Monastery in Sravasti, some bhiksus came to speak to him about doubts they had regarding Ananda's extensive knowledge. They respectfully greeted the Buddha and asked, "What good deeds had the Venerable Ananda done in his past lives which enable him to remember every word of the Dharma taught by the Buddha in this life?"

The Buddha said, "Bhiksus, pay attention and listen carefully. The reason Ananda is now foremost in knowledge is because of the great merit he accumulated from his previous lives. A very long time ago, a bhiksu accepted a sramanera as a disciple. The bhiksu was a very strict teacher and required the sramanera to recite and memorize the sutras everyday. If the sramanera could commit the sutras to memory, the bhiksu was very pleased. If not, he severely reprimanded the sramanera. The sramanera had to go out to beg for food everyday. On the days it did not take long to beg for enough food, he had ample time to memorize the sutras and the teacher was very pleased. On the days it took him a long time, he did not have sufficient time to memorize the sutras well and was punished by his teacher. As a result, the sramanera was in constant worry.

"One morning, the sramanera went out begging for food. After a long time, he still could not get any offerings and was very worried. He realized that when he got back to the monastery, he would not have enough time to study and his teacher would be upset with him. The more he thought about the predicament he was in, the more frustrated he became; finally, he burst into tears. Just at that moment, an elder was walking towards the sramanera from the opposite direction. When he saw how sad and unhappy the sramanera was, he

waved to him and said, 'Since you have voluntarily decided to renounce the household life, you should be joyful and free of worries. Why are you crying so early in the morning?'

"The sramanera told the elder the whole story. When he finished, the elder told him, 'I see; you need not worry anymore. From now on, come to my house everyday and I will offer you food. After you finish eating, you can then concentrate on memorizing the sutras. In the future, you can spread the Dharma to benefit all beings.'

"After the sramanera heard the elder's offer, his tears turned into a smile, his sorrow into happiness. The sramanera realized he would not need to worry about begging for food and not having time to study from then on. He would be able to work extra hard on his sutra studies; both the sramanera and his teacher were very pleased."

The Buddha told the bhiksus, "The master at that time was Dipamkara Buddha, and I was the sramanera. The Ananda of today was the compassionate elder who offered me food. Because in his past life Ananda offered food to the motivated sramanera, he is now able to have total recollection of all I have said without fail."

The sutras say: Before attaining Buddhahood, one should nurture good relationships. We should form a multitude of good affinities with others and give others convenience. The more relationships we cultivate, the greater the convenience we will get in return. When we continuously give and help others, we are in effect helping ourselves. "Self" and "others" are one, and not antithetical. It is through helping others that we can fulfill ourselves.

The Dharma Drum

Not far from Sravasti, there was a garden named Jetavana in which there flourished many trees and fragrant flowers. There was also a magnificent lecture hall and sleeping quarters. The Buddha frequently taught the Dharma there and liberated many sentient and celestial beings.

One day, a bright auspicious light shone up from the garden into a heavenly palace located in one of the Deva realms. Within the palace, Prince Bhilo saw the light and understood that it heralded a teaching of the Buddha. Without hesitation, the prince rode down on the light beam until he came to the Jetavana Monastery. After prostrating himself before the Buddha, the prince stood aside and waited in silence.

When a crowd had assembled, Prince Bhilo stood up with joined palms and respectfully addressed the Buddha, "Lord Buddha, your kindness and compassion have so benefited every being among us that I can never give enough praise to your greatness. Humbly I beseech you to make clear an issue that has long bothered me."

"Very well," the Buddha replied, "I will certainly try to answer your question; do speak."

The prince continued happily, "Lord Buddha, people all over the world wish to be healthy, free of sickness and worries; they wish to be fruitful and to be in high rank and position; they wish to possess much good food and clothing. They simply open their hands and wait for the easy life to come to them. In reality no one can gain anything without making an effort. Is it not true that one who is unwilling to work will never gain anything in return? Is it not true that in the end they will have more sorrows than happiness? Lord Buddha, among the three thousand great chiliocosms, how many beings are actually able to have the happiness and peace they wish for? Lord Buddha, you are the enlightened one, please kindly explain."

The Buddha replied with praise, " You have asked well. There are correct ways to accumulate merit. Otherwise nothing will be gained. Regardless of whether you reside in the heavens or on earth, one always has to bear the consequences of one's good and bad deeds. No one can escape their karma or transfer their karma to other people. Those who have done good deeds will definitely be rewarded with good fortune while those who have perpetrated evil will face only misfortune. This is the law of cause and effect. No one gains merit because of good luck, and no one suffers misfortune for no reason. Misfortune and good fortune are like shadows which follow us everywhere, this is as natural as the response that an uttered sound triggers in the ear."

"Excellent, Lord Buddha! I recall an incident from a past life when I was a king on earth. As a result of a profound understanding of almsgiving and merit, my kingdom became powerful and prosperous, and my people were blessed with peace and happiness.

"One day, after I had been king for many years, it dawned on me that human life is short and that, in order to sow the seeds of one's merit, one should often give alms to benefit all sentient beings. The next morning, I assembled all the ministers and addressed them: 'I want to engage in a large scale almsgiving and will need a gigantic drum for people within one hundred miles to hear its drumbeat and come to receive alms. Whoever can make such a drum will be handsomely rewarded.'

"A dead silence followed; all the ministers knew that this was not an easy task. After a long while, one of the ministers, Kuang Shang, stood up and said: 'Your Highness, in order to repay your kindness and benefit our people, I will try my best to accomplish the task.'

"Everyone admired his loyalty and all recommended him

highly. I, too, was delighted and exclaimed approvingly, 'Marvelous!'

"'However,' Kuang Shang moved forward and said, 'in order for this project to be successful it may require an immense amount of capital.'

"'This is no problem.' I then ordered the royal treasury to be opened and said, 'However much you need to expend is at your disposal.'

"With my approval Kuang Shang then set out to carry out the task. He gave orders to transport all sorts of valuables, foods and provisions from the royal treasury to outside the city and sorted them into groups. Then, he sent out notices to inform all of the citizens: 'Our kind King has opened the royal treasury for people who live in poverty and are in need of food or clothing.' In addition, each month Kuang Shang also sent his most capable messengers to deliver sufficient monthly offerings to the monks and Brahmans in different locations.

"Thus, this news spread from near to far, from one person to ten, from ten to a hundred, and soon the whole country heard the news. All the people in need made the long trip to the royal city. Even people from neighboring countries came for the relief. The smaller, poorer countries were so touched by my kindness that they came together to pledge their allegiance to my country.

"Everyday there was a flow of people of all ages coming to receive the relief. It was as busy as a marketplace outside the royal city. With their arms laden, people bowed to the palace with respect and praised incessantly the kindness and morals of my country. 'Oh, Merciful king! You care for us like family. We will forever support you and receive the protection of your righteous governance.'

"A year went by and, unaware of any of these happenings, I summoned Kuang Shang to inquire about the progress

of making the drum. Kuang Shang replied, 'For quite some time now, I have fulfilled the imperial decree.'

"With surprise, I asked 'Why haven't I heard the drumbeat?'

"Your Majesty will definitely hear the drumbeat of the Dharma for a radius of at least a hundred miles, even for a radius of a thousand miles if you make an inspection tour outside the city.' Kuang Shang reported respectfully.

"I immediately took some guards and rode off to inspect the country. In every city and town, there was prosperity and affluence. People were radiant with happiness and thanked me profusely for my generosity. I was perplexed to see the scene and asked Kuang Shang, 'Why is it that we have so many citizens and why is it that they are so happy and enthusiastic in welcoming me?'

"Kuang Shang replied, 'Last year you commanded me to construct a drum. The purpose of the drum was to spread the virtuous news of your almsgiving. How could animal skin and withered wood do justice in proclaiming your Majesty's virtuous reputation? With the authority granted by you, I decided to make good use of the goods and valuables in the royal treasury. I appointed capable people to deliver offerings to the sangha regularly at different locations on behalf of your Majesty. By making regular offerings to the sangha the right religion can be upheld. I believe the only way to make a country strong and the people happy and in harmony is to permanently keep the Dharma alive. Only by using the Dharma to beautify the human mind will the world naturally be a pure land. I distributed the goods and valuables to relieve the poor in our country; even the neighboring countries also came from hundreds and thousands of miles away to receive our alms. They were deeply touched by the virtue of your kindness and wanted to follow you. Now that you have witnessed

the joy of the people and heard their praises, you have seen the Dharma drum that I have constructed."

After listening to Prince Bhilo, the Buddha added with joy, "Throughout my lifetimes of cultivation, I, like you, also came across many difficult obstacles. Fortunately, I had many supporters. I rendered favors to others and at the same time I was also indebted to many for their kindness. In order to truly achieve your goals it is imperative to be kind and generous to others."

Prince Bhilo was moved by the Buddha's words, and understood that even heavenly beings should continue to practice almsgiving and cultivate generosity.



Giving Opens the Door

While traveling in the country of Kausala, the Buddha met an old lady. She was a maidservant whose job it was to carry buckets of water to her master. Everyday, she was at the community well to draw water. The Buddha told Ananda, "Ananda, take your bowl and ask the old woman for some water."

Ananda did as the Buddha instructed. He walked towards the old woman with his bowl and asked for some water. The old woman knew the water was for the great Buddha and was filled with joy. She delivered the water to the Buddha in person and quickly put the bowl on the ground as she approached closer to the Buddha. She ran up to the Buddha and tightly embraced him. Ananda was upset by her impolite behavior and rushed up to pull the woman away. The Buddha stopped him and said, "Ananda, hundreds of lives ago, she was once my mother. When she saw me, her maternal love made her want to hold me like she used to in the past."

The old woman was surprised by the Buddha's words. Her heart was filled with joy as if she had just found a precious jewel.

The Buddha instructed Ananda to seek out the old woman's master. The master soon arrived and prostrated himself at the feet of the Buddha. The Buddha said to him, "Can you please help and free this old woman so that she may spend her remaining days to cultivate as a bhiksuni? If so, she will surely become an arhat one day."

The master was also a devotee of the Buddha and gladly accepted the Buddha's suggestion to permit the old woman to become a bhiksuni. Soon afterwards, the old woman renounced the household life and followed Ananda to the monastery where the bhiksuni Prajapati, the Buddha's maternal aunt, shaved her head.

In a very short time the old woman, through diligent cul-

tivation, attained arhatship. Among the bhiksunis, she was regarded as the foremost in the comprehension of the sutras.



The Unborn Baby Girl with Joined Palms

Once, when the Buddha was preaching the Dharma in Rajagṛha, there was an intelligent and virtuous woman named Pilou. She was not only a good wife and a kind mother but also a well-respected role model in the society. Her influence on others was very great. In this assembly she encouraged thousands of other women to attend and hear the Buddha's teachings. Although the women were new to the Buddha's teachings, they joined their palms together and listened to the Buddha attentively.

During the exposition, the Buddha stopped and turned to Aniruddha, "Aniruddha, what do you see? Do you see anything unusual?"

Aniruddha stood up and replied respectfully, "Lord Buddha, everyone is listening to your preaching with joined palms. In addition, I see a baby girl in Pilou's womb; she is also listening to you with her palms joined together. I think this is unusual."

Pilou was indeed pregnant at that time. The baby girl, with the accumulation of merit from her previous lives, was influenced by her mother's kindness. Even though she was still in her mother's womb, she already listened to the Dharma with joined palms.

The Buddha exclaimed, "Excellent, excellent, Aniruddha, among the many arhats, only you have divine eyes. You can see what others cannot. Aniruddha, have you ever seen pre-birth birds and insects also listen with joined palms as their mothers are listening to the Buddha's teachings? This is because the Buddha's perfect voice can reach the entire world and inspire all beings to listen with joined palms."

After the Buddha finished teaching, he emanated light

from his body to show the assembly an extraordinary sight. Without any hindrance, the light illuminated everything in the universe. Under the Buddha's compassionate light, there was no longer any differentiation between internal and external. Nothing was hidden from view. This light, like a giant monitor, reflected and revealed everything without discrimination. With the Buddha's incredible power, everyone in the audience could see objects they had never seen before. All were overjoyed.

Suddenly, Pilou could feel that it was time to give birth to her baby. She stood up and bowed to the Buddha, excusing herself. Taking her leave, she then gave birth to her baby girl.

After the baby girl was born, music played in the heavens and beautiful flowers rained down. Other women quickly wrapped the baby with a new garment.

The lead disciple of the Buddha, Sariputra, stood up and asked the Buddha, "Where does this baby girl come from? What merits has she accumulated in her previous lives to be born on such a magnificent occasion?"

The Buddha told the crowd the baby's story. He said, "This baby girl came from a faraway place, the southeast of our world, called Jambunada. For many lifetimes she faithfully practiced the Dharma and performed many charitable deeds. She vowed to be reborn in one of the assemblies for the Buddha's teachings. Therefore she was reborn here so that her vow could be fulfilled."

The auspicious events of the Buddha's teachings and the birth of the baby girl filled the audience with joy. Everyone vowed to take refuge in the Buddha's teachings, lifetime after lifetime, and to liberate all beings infinitely.

Doing the Impossible

Once in Sravasti, there lived a young man who was the son of a well respected elder. Due to the accumulation of merit from his previous lives, he decided to become a monk after he heard the Dharma. However, he only wanted to live with his friends and relatives, not with other practitioners; he was also reluctant to study and recite the sutras as a means of cultivation.

One day, the Buddha urged the young monk to go into the aranya (forest) so he could concentrate on cultivating. The monk immediately followed the Buddha's advice and settled in the forest, where he cultivated diligently. Soon he attained arhatship and gained the six supernatural powers. All the other bhiksus were surprised and puzzled. They asked the Buddha, "Lord Buddha! To attain enlightenment is incredibly rare. Yet, take the example of this bhiksu. With your guidance, even this worldly bhiksu was able to settle in the aranya and attain arhatship and the six supernatural powers. This is absolutely wonderful!"

The Buddha replied, "As a matter of fact, not only was he able to settle down to cultivate in this life, he was able to do so in his previous lives."

"How did he do this in his past lives?" the bhiksu asked.

The Buddha said, "Let me tell you a story. There was once a fairy that lived as a recluse in the woods. One day, the forest suffered a severe drought; all fruits and trees withered. At the time, the fairy was a good friend to a rabbit. The fairy said to the rabbit, 'I think I should go to the village today to beg for food.' The rabbit replied, 'Please do not go. I can supply you with food.' Then the rabbit went and collected some branches and piled them up together. He said to the fairy, 'You must accept my body as an offering to you now. It will rain soon and three days after the rain, new fruit will grow again. You can then pick the fruits to eat, and you need not go into

the village to beg for food.' No sooner had the rabbit said these words then he set the branches on fire and threw himself into the flames.

When the fairy saw this, he thought, 'What a compassionate being! He sacrificed his own precious life in order for me to survive. Not everyone is capable of such generosity.' Sadly and reluctantly he ate the rabbit.

"This tremendous manifestation of the spirit of a bodhisattva doing the impossible sent tremors throughout the world, even up to Shakra's palace in the heavens. Shakra pondered, 'What has happened that caused the palace to quake?' Using his powers, Shakra discovered what a difficult deed the rabbit had done and was deeply moved. He immediately summoned the rain, relieving the drought. Therefore the fairy was able to resume living peacefully in the forest and continue his cultivation, eventually attaining five supernatural powers. The fairy is today the bhiksu; I was the rabbit then. By giving up my life, I was able to help the fairy continue his cultivation and finally attain his supernatural powers. Thus, today I was able to persuade him to leave his relatives and friends behind, and to settle in the forest. Consequently, he was able to attain arhatship and the six supernatural powers in this lifetime."

Almsgiving is Like Sowing Good Seeds

In Sravasti there was a rich person by the name of Deva who treated people unkindly. He was unwilling to donate even a small amount of money to benefit others. Despite the fact that he possessed a great fortune, he still lived like a pauper. Everyone in the city regarded him very negatively. After he died, he had no heirs. According to the law, all his financial assets and properties then reverted to the national treasury. This made the people of Sravasti very happy and became a hot topic for discussion among them.

King Prasenajit, confused by the moral issue involved in this case, went to seek the Buddha's counsel. "Lord Buddha! How can misers like Deva possess so much wealth in this lifetime?"

The Buddha replied with a smile, "Your Majesty! This is the karmic effect from his past life. In the past, Deva had made offerings to a Pratyeka buddha and in doing so, sowed many good seeds and thus good fortune for his forthcoming lives. However, this was his last life of prosperity."

The king asked again, "Although he did not do any good deeds when he was alive, he did not do any bad deeds either. In his forthcoming lives, will he ever be as rich as he was in this life?"

The Buddha shook his head and replied, "Impossible! He used up all his remaining merit. Since he was not charitable in this life and did not gain any merit, he will not enjoy such good fortune in the future."

In the *Cause And Effect Sutra*, there is the following verse:

Poverty or wealth does not come about without reasons,

**Long cherished relationships should not be forced.
If one does not sow in the spring,
One will stare at an empty field when fall comes.**

Everything in this world, good and bad, gain and loss, have and have not, there is always a relationship between cause and effect. Nothing can escape the law of cause and effect. Why are some people rich while others are poor? This is because some people are lazy and do nothing all day long; consequently, they cannot make a living, and soon will run out of money. On the other hand, some people are hardworking, giving, caring, and know how to form good affinity with others. Naturally they will make good money and prosper.

In the Buddhist practice, giving is regarded as "cultivating the field of fortune." As long as the seeds are planted, there will certainly be a harvest. When the time is right, good fortune and reward will come.



Karma from Past Lives

In the city of Sravasti, there was an old man who was about two hundred years old. He heard that the Buddha could tell a person's past, present and future matters, that the body of the Buddha exhibits the thirty-two marks of perfection, and that his mind is full of the eighty kinds of goodness. Longing to see the Buddha, he hobbled with the help of a cane on a long journey to meet the Buddha.

At that time the Buddha was staying in a monastery in the countryside. When the old man reached the front gate of the monastery, Indra, one of the Buddha's disciples was guarding the gate. When Indra saw the old man's dirty appearance, he refused to let him into the monastery. The old man was furious and yelled from outside the monastery, "I might be poor and dirty but I am also very lucky to be living at the time of the Buddha. I want to know about the law of cause and effect and how to be freed from all afflictions. How can you not let me in to learn the Dharma? I heard that the Buddha is compassionate and non-discriminating towards all living beings. I have traveled a great distance, suffered many hardships and braved all kinds of weather hoping to see the Buddha. Why do you refuse me entrance?"

Hearing this from inside the monastery, the Buddha invited the old man in. The old man's anger quickly turned to joy. With the utmost respect, he went in, prostrated himself before the Buddha and said, "Lord Buddha! I am truly an unfortunate person. I have been poor all my life and have continually suffered hunger, cold, and physical pains. I no longer wish to live yet I cannot die. Everyday I struggle between life and death. If not for the preciousness of the human form, I would have forsaken this life long ago. When I heard that the Buddha was here, my heart was filled with joy and I longed to see Lord Buddha just once before I die. Just a moment ago, I was outside the gate and was not allowed to enter. My sor-

row was beyond words and I was afraid that I would not have the strength to make it back to my home. Just when I was at a loss for what to do, Lord Buddha took compassion on me and invited me in. Now that I have seen the Blessed One, I feel most grateful. I hope that the suffering from my bad karma can quickly come to an end. With Lord Buddha's compassion, I can be reborn into a good situation."

The Buddha said to the old man, "Poor old man, you have suffered much in this life. However, since you are sincere and earnest in learning the Dhamma, you have now generated the karma to be reborn into a good family in your next life."

The old man, with grateful tears in his eyes, continued, "Lord Buddha, what is the cause of my life-long hardship, poverty, and loneliness? Lord Buddha, please enlighten me regarding the cause of this karma."

The Buddha looked at him and said, "The circumstances of one's life depend upon the conditions from previous lives. We reap what we sow. In a previous life, you were a wealthy prince. But you took advantage of your subjects, always taking from them and never giving alms. Once a sramanera came to you and asked you for a new robe. Not only did you not help him, you thought that he was an extortionist and locked him up for seven days and nights. When the sramanera was released, he ran into a gang of starving bandits who wanted to kill and eat him. When the prince saw this, his conscience was awakened and he said to himself, 'Although I did not give the sramanera alms, how can I let these bandits kill him?' The prince quickly went to rescue the sramanera's life. This sramanera was Maitreya Bodhisattva and you were the prince! Your poverty in this life is due to the karma generated by your miserliness and greed. Your longevity is due to the karma generated by saving the sramanera's life. There is no escape

from the consequences of karma."

After listening to the Buddha, the old man pleaded, "Lord Buddha, please have compassion on me in my declining years and allow me to become a sramanera. In this way, my life will not be wasted."

The Buddha accepted the old man's request and smiling gently said, " Good, I will shave off your hair now."

Upon hearing the Buddha's words, the silvery hair of the old man fell to the floor of its own accord and the old man was miraculously garbed in a monk's robe. The old man soon realized his wish and attained arhatship.

The Buddha will not let people who are earnest in learning the Dharma fail. If our vows are sincere, they will eventually be fulfilled. In this way, the wish of the old man was fulfilled.

The Princess' Enlightenment

The queen of Varanasi had a daughter who had a golden shiny complexion and purplish-green hair. When the princess was sixteen, her parents wanted to find her a good husband. The princess told her parents, "Unless I can find a man whose skin is as golden and whose hair is as purplish-green as mine, I will never marry." The king and queen searched everywhere, but no one in their country matched the description.

At that time, the Buddha was living in Sravasti. A merchant from there visited Varanasi and told the king, "There is a man in Sravasti whose appearance is more magnificent than that of the princess." The king was pleased to hear this and immediately ordered the merchant to invite the Buddha to Varanasi.

The merchant then sent word to the Buddha, mentioning the princess's incomparable beauty and hoping that the Buddha would marry her.

At that time, the Buddha was expounding the Dharma at the Jetavana Monastery. When the messenger brought the news, the Buddha already knew in advance what the matter was about. Without waiting for the messenger to finish relating the news, the Buddha replied, "All suffering in this world is caused by love. With birth, there certainly will be aging, sickness, and death. With death, there is sorrow and sadness. Therefore, love is the cause of all suffering."

After the princess read the Buddha's reply, she contemplated its meaning and attained five supernatural powers. She left her parents and appeared before the Buddha. When the Buddha saw her, he smiled and emitted five colors of shining light from his mouth.

When Ananda saw this wondrous sight, he asked the Buddha for the cause of such a manifestation. The Buddha explained, "During the life of Kasyapa Buddha, the golden princess was the wife of a poor man. Her husband was dis-

abled and could not walk. Their life was full of suffering. One day Kasyapa Buddha passed by their hut and taught the poor woman the cause and effect for being rich or poor. He expounded the Dharma to her, and taught her the sutras. The golden girl, with gratitude, made an offering to Kasyapa Buddha. As a result of this merit, she was reborn in this world as the princess of Varanasi. Because she loved to give alms and to recite the sutras, she was endowed with an auspicious shiny golden complexion and purplish-green hair."

After listening to the Buddha, the bhiksus understood that the merit from reading sutras and giving alms was boundless and unthinkable. Therefore, they all decided to work diligently on the path of cultivation.



Stinginess Leads to the Animal Realm

One day, when the Buddha was teaching in the city of Sravasti, he visited the house of a merchant named Dutti. The merchant happened to be out.

The merchant had a white pet dog. Everyone in the household doted on the dog and treated it like a person, feeding it with delicious food and providing it with a comfortable bed to sleep in.

When the Buddha entered the courtyard, the dog was enjoying his meal on his bed. When it saw the Buddha walk in, it jumped down from the bed and started barking loudly. The Buddha spoke to the dog kindly, "Little white dog, you were stingy and uncharitable in your previous life. This is why you were reborn into the animal realm as a dog in this life. You must realize this."

After listening to the Buddha, the dog became very sad. When Dutti came home, he noticed his pet behaving strangely. He asked his servant, "Has anyone done anything to upset my dog?"

The servant replied, "The Buddha was here today." Since the dog was very precious to Dutti, he was furious to learn that the visit of the Buddha had upset his dog. He immediately set out to confront the Buddha and asked, "Lord Buddha! Why did you visit my house for no reason? My beloved dog is now unable to eat or sleep. What happened?"

The Buddha calmly explained, "Dutti, I had my reasons to visit your home. Your beloved dog was your father in its previous life. If you do not believe me, go home and ask the dog yourself."

Shocked, Dutti asked, "Lord Buddha, what did my father do in his past life to be reborn as a dog?"

The Buddha replied, "In his past life, your father was stingy and greedy. He never helped other people and was obsessed with money. He buried his treasure in a pit under

your house. After he died, no one knew of this. When you go home, you may ask the dog to show you the hiding place."

Duti returned home with mixed feelings and said to his dog, "If you were truly my father in your past life, show me where you hid your treasure."

The dog seemed to understand and nodded in response. It crawled under the bed and started digging and barking as if to say that the treasure was there. Realizing what the dog was trying to tell him, Duti also began to dig and found the hidden money and treasure. He was both shocked and confused.

Duti wanted to do something benevolent with the newly found riches and decided to offer them to the Buddha and his bhiksus. He asked the Buddha, "Lord Buddha! Please enlighten me on the relationship between cause and effect."

The Buddha smiled and replied compassionately, "People die young because they took many lives in their past lives; longevity goes to people who spared and saved many lives; people are poor because they stole things or were greedy in their previous lives; people are wealthy because they gave generously in past lives; people have bad thoughts because they kept bad company in their previous lives; the wise of today were associated with benevolent friends in their past lives. It will take thousands of years to describe all the examples of cause and effect. Thus, you must be prudent."

Duti was filled with Dharma joy. He prostrated himself to the Buddha and left happily. From then on, he was no longer a miser and no longer ignorant. He learned to give alms in order to sow the seeds to cultivate merits for future lives.

Greed and Stinginess Lead to the Hungry Ghost Realm

Along the banks of the Ganges River, countless hungry ghosts were said to dwell. These ghosts had long hair and sunken eyes due to prolonged starvation. They anxiously searched for food all day long, but were often unable to find anything to suppress the hunger pangs that agonized them.

For some hungry ghosts, all they could find was blood and foul-smelling excrement. They had never heard of such a thing as "water." When they approached what appeared to be water, it immediately turned into foul blood or fire; at times there were demon guardians armed with swords and weapons guarding the "water" to prevent hungry ghosts from approaching it. In summer time, the rain that fell on hungry ghosts would suddenly turn into fire and burn their bodies.

Some ghosts were very skinny and withered, and looked like burnt trees. Their hair was very long and messy. They haunted toilets, eating the excrement and drinking the urine. Some ghosts had huge bellies as big as a drum and throats as thin as a needle. They were unable to swallow anything and would cry sorrowfully.

Hungry ghosts endured limitless and boundless suffering without any chance of being liberated. One day, the Buddha passed by this place. All the hungry ghosts rushed to prostrate themselves in front of the Buddha respectfully. They cried out, "Lord Buddha, our savior! We are the beings that fell into the realm of hungry ghosts; we endure endless suffering. It is very difficult to find food and drink. We are very hungry. Please help us."

The Buddha replied kindly, "Starving ones! The cause for your suffering in this life is your greediness, stinginess, and unwillingness to give alms in your past lives. If you repent now for the past karmic deeds and begin to practice

giving, you will have much merit and be liberated from suffering. Giving is the way to eliminate greediness and poverty."

The ghosts listened to the Buddha's speech, but they were unable to understand the teaching. In pain, they cried, "Lord Buddha, We are too stupid and too confused. We cannot think correctly, especially since we have starved for so long. We are unable to understand your teachings, even after hearing your words. Lord Buddha, please have compassion on us and liberate us. We are willing to repent and vow to do good deeds from now on. We shall not be greedy or stingy, and we shall give joyfully, as you have instructed."

After the Buddha listened to their sincere repentance, he was very pleased and told them, "Starving ones, repentance is the way to get rid of bad karma. With repentance in your heart, you will be liberated from the ghost realm. You may now drink from the river at will."

The hungry ghosts were overjoyed and jumped into the river. With the Buddha's blessings, the water in the river no longer turned into fire, blood or excrement. Instead it was the pure water of the Dharma. It purified the hungry ghosts' filthy, wicked minds and cleansed their ugly bodies.

Afterwards, the Buddha compassionately taught them the six ways to liberation: giving, upholding precepts, patience, meditation, wisdom, and diligence. Upon learning the way to liberation, the ghosts all vowed to follow the Bodhi Way. From then on, they were liberated from the ghost realm and regained their peace and freedom.

Too Stingy to Give

In a bamboo grove not far from Rajagrha lived a fierce poisonous snake. Whenever travelers passed by the grove the snake would get very angry, rise up and stare at them with its venomous eyes. If people approached a little closer, the viper would kill them by spewing a venomous gas or biting them with its poisonous fangs. These fatal incidents were reported to King Bimbisara, who was expected to find a resolution. Since many people had already been killed in their efforts to subdue the snake, the king could not think of anything to do. The only hope was to ask the Buddha for assistance.

At that time, the Buddha was residing at Grdhrakuta (Vulture Peak) in Magadha, where he was teaching many bhiksus. King Bimbisara and his ministers came up to the mountain to pay homage to the Buddha. With their palms joined together, they prostrated themselves at the feet of the Buddha and said, "Great Lord Buddha! The Compassionate One! We have come here today to make a special plea. We hope that you, Lord Buddha, can shine your light of compassion onto the bamboo grove. We hope that we can rely on your fearlessness to subdue a venomous snake there so that it will stop harming people."

The Buddha promised to fulfill the king's request. One day, the Buddha walked alone into the bamboo grove where the snake was hiding. From a distance the snake saw the Buddha approaching. It was filled with hatred and glared at the Buddha angrily. With its mouth agape and red tongue protruding, the snake leaped up to attack the Buddha. The Buddha exerted his power of compassion and emanated a five-colored radiance from his five fingertips. When the brilliant light fell on the snake, it was tamed instantly; its venomous gas dissipated, and its heart was filled with joy. It looked up at the Buddha and thought, "Where does such a person come from who can emanate such wonderful light to

make my body and mind cool and happy?"

Knowing the snake to be tamed now, the Buddha spoke to it, "Kind-faced elder, do you realize the wrong-doings in your past? Although you were a wealthy man in your past life, you were miserly, greedy, dishonest and jealous. You were mean, deceitful, and committed evil acts indiscriminately. You never gave alms, not even a grain of rice to poor beggars. What was worse is you offered them only angry stares and curses. As a result of all these actions, you have become such an ugly snake in this life. Why is it that you do not repent? Why do you continue to have bad thoughts and hurt passers-by? In addition to weighty bad kamma from your past, you are continuously accumulating even more. When can you be free from suffering? If you continue your current behavior, your suffering shall be endless for hundreds of thousands of kalpas to come, with little chance of liberation."

The kind and compassionate voice of the Buddha deeply touched the heart of the poisonous snake. He was ashamed and repented sincerely before the Buddha. When the Buddha saw that the snake had realized his wrongdoings he said, "Due to your immorality in past lives, you have lived this life in the form of a snake. Now that you have realized your wrongdoings and have accepted the Buddha's teachings, you will be liberated from the sea of suffering."

After hearing this, the poisonous snake opened its mouth and spoke, "As the compassionate Buddha's disciple, I will never defy your kind teachings. I vow to abide by them always."

"Very well then, come into my alms bowl." As soon as the Buddha said this, the snake crawled into the bowl. Holding the bowl in his hand, the Buddha walked out of the bamboo grove.

The king and his people rushed into the forest after they

heard the wonderful news. When the snake saw the people, he felt ashamed and disliked his snake form. He died shortly thereafter and was reborn into the Trayastrimsa Heaven because of his sincere repentance.

One day, the sound of a celestial being praising the Buddha could be heard in the sky above the Venuvana-monastery (the Bamboo Grove Monastery):

Majestic Great Lord Buddha, well cultivated in both
virtue and wisdom,
Enlightening the ignorant, your compassion equals the
warmth of the sun,
Cleansing away the filth of defilement, rising above the
sea of life and death,
Through the unimaginable power of Dharma, a snake
was reborn into the heaven realms.

After the kind-faced elder was liberated, he advised people with great fortune not to be miserly and unwilling, but to give to others, so that they themselves would not be reborn as snakes.

AN Being Wise and Thoughtful: Giving in a Proper Manner

In this section, we enter into an eclectic compilation of stories that serves as a culmination of the four part series on giving. While we have already established that any type of offering, when given with the proper spirit, is not only acceptable but also beautiful, there are ways to bestow offerings that respect specific situations and maintain the utmost propriety and regard for Buddhist traditions as well as the Dharma. The variety of circumstances that we encounter in these stories teach us about the proper timing and proper gifts for particular situations, as well as allowing us to revisit the proper attitudes and intentions when giving. With mindful attention to these factors - timing, substance, and attitudes - we can learn Buddhist principles and enter into the Dharma with greater clarity and understanding.

This is certainly so for a Brahman we visit who attempts to give an offering to the Buddha after the Buddha expounds the Dharma. This is also true for a group of kings who wish to give the Buddha an expensive gift as he is begging for alms. As each of these characters, and many others, listen to the Buddha elaborate on the proper manner in which to give, they are invited into a deeper relationship with the Dharma.

Offerings themselves - whether large or small - can also create opportunities for learning the Dharma. The grand donation of a monastery provides the space for monastics to cultivate a spiritual life, and to teach the Dharma to the people of the city. The simple donation of a bowl of milk can provide strength for someone to continue on the journey to enlightenment. We cannot possibly compre-

hend or foresee the benefits of thoughtful and pure-hearted acts of giving. Here, in these pages, we can enjoy a glimpse into some of the possibilities.



The Establishment of Buddhist Monasteries in India

When Prince Siddhartha left his palace to cultivate in the remote forest, he passed by Rajagṛha, the capital city of the Magadhas. There he made a promise to King Bimbisara that, after attaining enlightenment, he would return to liberate the king.

The Buddha truly kept his promise to King Bimbisara. One day, the Buddha, accompanied by the three Kāśyapa brothers, went to Vulture Peak outside the city of Rajagṛha. The townspeople were already very interested in the Buddha and were equally curious to learn how the three Kāśyapa brothers had become disciples of the Buddha. The town was filled with joy and vitality.

When King Bimbisara learned that the Buddha had arrived at Vulture Peak, he was delighted and immediately dispatched a messenger there to welcome the Buddha and his bhikkhus. The King, along with his ministers, family, and attendants, proceeded to the Bamboo Grove Monastery on the outskirts of Rajagṛha, where they welcomed the Buddha as he arrived. King Bimbisara was finally able to realize his wish to meet the Buddha and listen to the Dharma.

Through the course of the evening, the Buddha spoke to the king and his ministers about the Four Noble Truths. He pointed out the suffering, impermanence, and transient nature of life. He taught them how to end suffering and how to attain happiness. After listening to the Dharma, they were deeply moved and all became the Buddha's followers.

The king was most grateful and was eager to find a way to repay the Buddha. Suddenly, he thought about the Bamboo Grove. The grove was beautiful, serene and well kept. The King thought if he built a monastery as an offering to the Buddha then the Buddha would stay in Rajagṛha more often.

Then the king and his people would have the opportunity to listen to the Buddha's teachings. The king told the Buddha about his plans, and the Buddha replied, "Excellent, you may start the construction!"

Finally, the construction of the Bamboo Grove Monastery, also called the Venuvana monastery, was completed. It consisted of sixteen areas, each with a courtyard and sixty structures, plus five hundred buildings and seventy-two assembly halls. The King invited the Buddha and his follow-ers to live in the monastery. From that point on, the Buddha often stayed in Rajagriha to teach the Dharma. This was the beginning of Buddhist monasteries in India.



Construction of the Jetavana Monastery

After the Buddha had been teaching the Dharma in the Bamboo Grove Monastery for some time, more and more people became his followers, and more and more people wanted to make offerings to him.

One day, the Buddha was invited to a merchant's home to accept offerings. It happened that the merchant's brother-in-law, Sudatta, was visiting from the city of Sravasti. Sudatta was a wealthy merchant who was also a very kind and giving man. He loved to help the weak and the poor, and had earned the title "Anathapindika," meaning "Benefactor of orphans and widows."

After Sudatta listened to the Buddha's wondrous teachings, he was deeply moved. Joyfully, he expressed his desire to become a disciple of the Buddha and his earnest wish to have the Buddha teach the Dharma in Sravasti, in the country of Kosala.

After a moment of thought, the Buddha replied, "Sravasti is in the north and I have been considering going north to teach the Dharma. However, I have many followers, and it would be difficult to settle there unless there are suitable accommodations for all my followers."

Sudatta replied, "Lord Buddha, my country is very big, its people kind and honest. It is not far from Lord Buddha's homeland, and is governed by a kind king, King Prasenajit. Like your imperial father, he treats his people with love and care, and is very much respected by everyone. I would like to build a monastery there similar to the Bamboo Grove Monastery here. Please have compassion for the ignorant people of my country and bring all of your followers with you to share the Dharma with us."

The Buddha discerned Sudatta's good intentions. He

spoke to him on the merits of giving, saying, "Anathapindika, you have given a great deal to people, expecting nothing in return. Your behavior provides a good example for people and exemplifies the true meaning of the Dharma. You understand that you cannot keep material possessions for yourself because they are impermanent. The best way to hold onto your wealth is to use it wisely by helping and benefiting others. Giving can help other people, and it can also help oneself. We need to live reasonably financially, but not be too overly greedy in acquiring money. Then, the mind of giving and compassion will grow naturally, and jealousy and conceit will disappear. This is the power of giving and the cause of liberation.

"You aspire to build a monastery in your country. This is not the giving of material goods but the giving of the Dharma treasure. Some people give to have fame or to spare themselves from poverty; they indulge in the pursuit of fortune, to gain sensual pleasure, good food and accommodations. In contrast, you plan to donate a monastery because you have a great vision, a vision that other living beings will attain Dharma joy and liberation by learning the teachings. You no longer harbor ignorant attachments in your mind. Go, begin the construction of the monastery; when it is completed I, the Buddha, will be there as you wished." The elder Sudatta was overjoyed by the Buddha's teachings. He bowed to the Buddha and departed for his country the same day.

Returning to his country, Sudatta started looking for a suitable site for the monastery. He soon discovered that the only place suitable was a forested garden that belonged to Prince Jeta. This garden was serene, scenic, and filled with fragrant flowers and lush trees. He knew that this garden was the prince's favorite, and it would be difficult to convince him

to sell it. However, the elder would not give up just because the ideal location belonged to someone else.

He went to Prince Jeta to present his request, "Your Royal Highness! I believe that you have heard of the great Buddha. He is the teacher of human beings and the brilliant light of truth. To benefit all our countrymen with his wondrous teachings, I would like to invite the Blessed One to our country so that we may all learn to liberate ourselves from the afflictions of birth and death forever, and enter the realm of pure joy. I wish to construct a precious spiritual center for him and his bhiksus to stay in where they can teach the Dharma. I have traveled throughout the country and encountered great difficulty in finding a suitable location. I sincerely feel that the Royal Prince's garden is the only ideal place to build a monastery for the Buddha. For the well being of all our countrymen, Your Royal Highness, please allow me to purchase the royal garden. May the light of the Buddha soon be on our country."

After hearing the elder Anathapindika's request, Prince Jeta, the son of King Prasenajit of Kosala, was in a quandary. Had a royal prince ever relinquished his favorite garden, even to a well-known elder? Would the elder be offended by a refusal?

The prince eventually decided to ask for an unreasonably large sum of money to deter the elder's pursuit. The prince said, "Elder Anathapindika, you realize that this is my favorite garden. You have just stated your wish to invite the Buddha to teach the Dharma in our country, and that you would like to purchase my garden. I shall transfer ownership to you if you pave the entire garden with gold.

The elder Anathapindika was not intimidated by the demand. He went home, told his servant to open the vault and

sent many carts of gold to pave the garden. The prince was moved by Anathapindika's sincerity. He said to Anathapindika, "Elder, even though I sold you the land, I did not sell you the flowers and the trees. Please let me have the opportunity to make an offering to the Buddha."

Upon hearing this, Anathapindika was filled with joy. He immediately departed for the Bamboo Grove Monastery in Magadha. He asked the Buddha to send a disciple to design and oversee the construction of the new monastery. Later, he told the Buddha how he had bought the land from Prince Jeta. The Buddha smiled kindly, "One should never underestimate the power of determination. We will call the monastery the Jetavana Monastery. I will send Sariputra. Please work with him and follow his instructions."

Under the guidance of Sariputra and the dedication of Anathapindika, the construction of Jetavana Monastery was quickly completed. From then on, the Buddha spent most of his time between the Bamboo Grove and the Jetavana monasteries, spreading the Dharma.

Rules for Donating Monasteries

After Rahula, the Buddha's son, was enlightened, his position in the Sangha had risen tremendously. As his reputation grew, he received the most offerings from devotees.

For monks whose conviction to the Dharma was not strong, their cultivation would often deteriorate when they began to receive abundant material offerings. Rahula, who was enlightened, was not burdened by material items. He always shared offerings with others.

Once the Buddha was teaching in a village near Kapilavastu, one of the local elders who had been a devoted Buddhist decided to become a follower of the Buddha. The elder had a special affinity towards Rahula and always provided Rahula with whatever he needed.

Later, the elder built a monastery for Rahula to live in. There were many traveling monks during that time, therefore the monastery also provided accommodations for them. Unfortunately, the elder often interfered with the management of the monastery because he had built and donated it. Rahula spoke to the Buddha about the situation and asked for his advice. The Buddha said to him, "Rahula, according to my rules, Buddhist lay devotees cannot interfere with matters in the Sangha community, even if they have donated the monastery. You should ask the elder what his intention was when he donated the premises. If it was for the purpose of giving alms, then whatever was given away does not belong to him anymore. If his purpose was to control the monastery, tell him that the monastery is not a business; monasteries are overseen and managed by the Sangha. Devotees may build monasteries and thereby help propagate the Dharma, but they must not interfere with their management."

Rahula told the elder exactly what the Buddha had said. The elder, however, did not have a profound understanding of the Dharma and was overly attached and confused. He was

unable to let go. Therefore, Rahula became an eyesore for the elder. One day, when Rahula left for Sravasti to go to the Jetavana Monastery, the elder seized the opportunity to give the monastery to other Buddhist monks to live in.

When Rahula returned to the monastery and discovered that it had become the residence of other monks, he was forced to return to the Jetavana Monastery. The Buddha was surprised that Rahula had returned so quickly and asked why. After listening to Rahula's story, the Buddha realized how difficult it is for people who do not have a thorough understanding of the Dharma to uphold the Buddha's teachings.

Finally, the Buddha gathered all the Buddhist monks and announced to them, " If a donor offers you something that he once had given to someone else, you should not accept it."

This rule was created not to protect Rahula but to avoid future conflicts. Unfortunately, the Buddha's concern was right on target. To this day many conflicts and fights regarding temple properties stem from laymen interfering in temple management.

The Story of Lah-Bah Porridge

In the lunar calendar, December 8th marks the day of the Buddha's enlightenment. On this day, special Dharma events celebrating the enlightenment of the Buddha take place in every temple. Lah-Bah Porridge (Lah means the 12th month, Bah means the 8th day) is presented as an offering and is also served to the participants.

What is the origin of this tradition? This goes back to the time before the Buddha became enlightened, when he was still Prince Siddhartha. At that time, he had been meditating as an ascetic in the forest for six years. As a part of his austere practice, he ate only one sesame seed and one grain of rice a day, living a tranquil and simple life without worldly desires, to strengthen his mind. Over time, however, he realized that it was difficult for those addicted to material pleasure to become enlightened. It was also equally difficult for those engaging in self-mortification by extreme ascetic practices to become enlightened. He realized that the best course was to avoid the extremes. By living one's life without indulging in pleasure or tormenting oneself needlessly, thereby following the Middle Way, one can then attain enlightenment.

After this realization, he got up from his seat, walked into the Nairanjana River and let the ever-pure river water wash away the mud stains on his body. The prince's body was so emaciated and weak, that he fell by the riverbank. After awhile, he used a tree branch to support himself to stand, but after walking a few steps, he fell again.

At that time, there was a shepherd girl named Nandabala by the river. When she saw the weak young monk lying helplessly on the riverbank, she immediately felt pity for him, and offered him a bowl of milk.

When the prince accepted the milk from the shepherd girl, it tasted indescribably delicious to him. After he drank it, he slowly regained his strength. Then, he walked across the

river, climbed up to Mount Gaya, sat down in the lotus position under a lush bodhi tree, and began his meditation. Finally, on the night of December 8th, under the bright stars he attained enlightenment.

Chinese Buddhists commemorate this episode in which the shepherd girl offered milk to the prince. Thus, every year on December 8th of the lunar calendar, they offer to the Buddha porridge cooked with eight different ingredients of rice, grain, and fruits, called "Lah-Bah Porridge."

This also has become a tradition for non-Buddhists. Nowadays, it is customary for people to cook and eat Lah-Bah Porridge on December 8th.

Generosity Creates Infinite Merit

While the Buddha resided at the Bamboo Grove Monastery, every morning he would go into Rajagriha with his alms bowl to beg. In the town, there was a Brahman named Huo Yu. The first time he saw the Buddha approaching from afar, he quickly prepared many delicacies to give as offerings to the Buddha. When the Buddha returned for a fourth time begging alms, Huo Yu started to wonder, "Why does the Buddha come to my house so frequently? Could it be that he is greedy for my offerings?"

When the Buddha realized what Huo Yu was thinking, he said to him, "Year after year in the midst of spring rains, farmers work hard tilling their land. Time and time again they sow seeds in the fields. This way, they will have good harvests year after year. Similarly, when someone repeatedly asks favors of you, you offer your help. Each time you help and give, you gain praise and respect from others, and your merit becomes countless and immeasurable. Giving alms is similar to planting seeds; the more you sow the more abundant your harvest will be. In particular, the Triple Gem is a field of merit for sentient beings. If you wish for plentiful merit, you should tend the Dharma field well. You will definitely be rewarded with immeasurable merit."

When Huo Yu heard this, he was ashamed of his impure thoughts and sincerely repented.

Only by sowing in the spring can you harvest in the fall. Only through almsgiving can you receive good fortune in future lives. If you want to harvest certain fruits, you have to plant accordingly. Only through giving can you receive in return. Giving should be done joyfully because only then is it in accordance with the cultivation of equanimity, one of the four Immeasurable Mindfulnesses.

A Stone Bowl for the Buddha

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha remained seated in meditation for quite some time. He contemplated the following, "Although I have attained enlightenment, there are innumerable sentient beings who need my help to liberate them. I should give them the opportunity to do good deeds and cultivate merit. All buddhas of the past sustained their human bodies by begging for alms. I, too, should follow their example and allow sentient beings to accumulate merit by offering alms."

When the Four Lokapalas (deva kings) who had been guarding the Buddha learned of his intention, they happily brought four gold bowls to the Buddha. They prostrated themselves to the Buddha and said, "Lord Buddha, we are the Four Lokapalas presiding over the Four Heavens called Vaisravana (North), Virudhaka (South), Virupaksa (West) and Dhrtarastra (East). When we learned of your enlightenment, we were overjoyed. We have just found out that you intend to beg for alms. We would like to present you with a special offering of these gold bowls. Please understand our sincerity and accept our offerings."

"Lokapalas, I am greatly pleased by your earnest offering; yet such precious gold bowls are not suitable for my use in alms begging. Please take them back."

The Four Lokapalas were not discouraged by the Buddha's refusal. They immediately returned to their heavenly palaces and brought back four silver bowls to offer to the Buddha. The Buddha again refused. They then offered four bowls of crystal, of gems, of agate, and of white coral, respectively. Each time, the Buddha gently turned down the offerings.

The Lokapalas were at the end of their wits. While they despaired, Deva King Vaisravana suddenly thought of something and exclaimed, "Now I remember! Once, when deities

from the Green Heaven came to play, they gave me a stone bowl. I did not want to accept it, so I asked them to take it back to use as a food container. One of the deities then told me, 'You must not use this stone bowl as a food container. You should treasure it as if it were a precious stupa, because one day there will be a Buddha in the human world named Sakyamuni. When he achieves his Buddhahood, you should offer this bowl to him.' Since then, I have been safeguarding this bowl as a treasure."

After listening to King Vaisravana, the other Lokapalas exclaimed with joy, "Wonderful! Why did we not think of this? How can the Buddha use a gold or silver bowl in the defiled human world? If sentient beings who are lacking in merit see the bowls made of gold and silver, such extravagance may stir up their greed. Will this cause them to accumulate further bad kama? This is the reason why the benevolent Buddha will not use such expensive bowls for alms begging."

Swiftly they each rushed back to their heavenly palaces and each returned with a stone bowl filled with heavenly flowers and laced with fragrance. All four came before the Buddha, prostrated themselves and said, "Lord Buddha, we have now realized why you would not accept our offerings of gold and silver bowls. We would like to offer these stone bowls to you in the hope that you will accept them."

The Buddha beamed with compassion and responded, "Lokapalas, as you pointed out, it is more becoming for me to use stone bowls in this human world. I will now accept these bowls that you have offered with pure and sincere hearts. However, I do not need four of them, but if I accepted a bowl from only one of you, it would not be fair to the other three."

The Buddha then took all four stone bowls and held them in his left hand while pressing with his right hand. Using his

supernatural powers, he combined the four bowls into one sturdy, pure, and smooth bowl. After the Lokapalas finished making their offerings, they prostrated themselves joyfully and departed.

This is how the Buddha began to use a stone bowl for alms begging.



Reaping What One Sows

King Prasenajit had a daughter named "Virtuous Light," who was intelligent and beautiful. She was loved by her parents and respected by everyone in the palace.

One day, the King said to the princess, "My dear daughter, you were born in a royal family, live amidst luxuries and you are respected by all the people. It is I who have granted you all this glory and wealth." Since Virtuous Light believed in the Buddhist teachings and understood the truth of reaping the Kammic results of one's wholesome and unwholesome acts, she replied, "Your Majesty, fortune and prosperity result from one's own deeds and are not granted by others. What I have in this life comes from the power of my past good deeds, not from you." King Prasenajit repeated his words three times, but he got the same answer. He was enraged by his daughter's refusal to agree with him and said to her, "Today we shall find out how great and blessed your own rewards are!"

The King ordered his officials to find the poorest young beggar in the city, and then he had his daughter marry the young beggar. The King said to Virtuous Light, "If you have your blessed rewards, you should enjoy wealth and esteem without me. From now on, we will see if what you have said is true."

Upon hearing this, Virtuous Light replied, "Surely I have my own blessed rewards." Then she left the palace with that poor young beggar.

Virtuous Light asked her husband, "Are your parents still alive?" He replied, "My father was a respected elder in Sravasti when he was alive. However, after my parents passed away, I had nobody to rely on and was forced to beg for a living."

"Do you still remember where your parent's home is?"

"Certainly I know where it is, but the house was ruined a long time ago, leaving nothing but an empty lot."

Virtuous Light and her husband decided to return to the deserted empty lot where his home had been. As Virtuous Light walked around the empty lot, every place she stepped on the ground promptly gave away to reveal countless treasures. With those treasures, Virtuous Light built a magnificent palace and hired many servants, maids, and entertainers.

One day, King Prasenajit thought of his daughter, wondering about her present circumstances. One of his attendants told him, "Virtuous Light owns a palace, and her wealth is no less than that of Your Majesty."

The King finally believed in the incredible Karmic force of one's own deeds. He said, "It is true what the Buddha has said, one surely reaps the results of one's own wholesome and unwholesome acts."

So the King went to the monastery to ask the Buddha, "What good deeds did my daughter do in her former lives that have caused her to be born in a royal family with radiant aura?" The Buddha replied, "Ninety-one Kalpas ago, there was a Buddha named Vipasyin. At that time the King was called Pantou. The King built a Stupa to make offerings to the Buddha's relics. After Vipasyin Buddha entered parinirvana, the Queen placed an exquisitely jeweled crown on the head of the Buddha statue and placed pearls from her own crown on the sides of the door. Suddenly, bright lights shone all around and the Queen made a pledge, "In my future life may my body be radiant with light and golden in color. May I be born with honor and wealth and not fall into the three evil paths or encounter the eight difficult conditions." That Queen is Virtuous light.

"Furthermore, during the time of Kasyapa Buddha, there was a lady who wished to make a sumptuous meal offering to

Kasyapa Buddha and his four great disciples. When the lady's husband tried to stop her, she persuaded him by saying, "Please do not stop me! All the good blessings I enjoy now are the result of making offerings to the Tathagata in the past." The husband then allowed her to proceed with the offering. That husband is now Virtuous Light's husband and that lady is Virtuous Light. Since that husband tried to stop her offering, he had to endure poverty in this life. He followed his wife's advice afterwards, so he has a prosperous life now. It is true that wholesome and unwholesome acts bring corresponding results."

After hearing the Buddha's instruction, King Prasenajit deeply understood the cause and effect of one's actions. He left joyfully and stopped being arrogant after that meeting with the Buddha.

When the blessed rewards come, they rush in just like a torrent of water and cannot be stopped. When one does not have sufficient good deeds and virtuous causes the wealth that they seek will elude them. The enjoyment of good fortune and longevity is not decided by deities or by another person. How can we obtain wellbeing and longevity? It depends on the causes and effects planted by us. We should cherish our present blessings and merits and plant wholesome causes and conditions for the future, so that we will always enjoy happiness.

Advice to the Merchants

After traveling to teach the Dharma in the faraway country of Vrji, the Buddha returned to Vaisali, where he and his bhiksus took up residence in a peaceful grove. Merchants from far and wide had heard of the Buddha's great virtue, and joyfully went to the grove where he was staying. After prostrating themselves, the Buddha taught them the Dharma.

Some of the merchants were planning to travel to the country of Heng Shi Lo to trade. They asked the Buddha to come to their homes to accept their offerings before their departure. The Buddha accepted their invitation with joy. Pleased, the merchants returned to their respective homes to prepare the offerings.

The following day, the Buddha and his bhiksus visited the merchants' homes. The merchants offered delicacies one by one, which the Buddha received with great mindfulness, knowing how sincerely they had prepared their offerings and how they had endured daily dangers and difficulties in obtaining the means to make such offerings. He then spoke to the merchants on the nature of the Dharma. He said, "In your journey, it is unavoidable that you will at times find yourselves in some secluded forest where irrational fears may take hold of you. At such times, you should be mindful of three things to alleviate your fears. First, you should contemplate the Buddha's name to build your faith; in doing this, your fears will naturally subside. Second, you should contemplate the Dharma. The Dharma can help you rid yourselves of the fire of defilement. With a clear mind, you should be able to perceive the law of dependent origination. Third, you should contemplate the Sangha. When you think about the virtues and integrity of the bhiksus, and then contemplate the virtues of the Buddha, all your fears will disappear.

"Make offerings to bhiksus of food and clothing, contemplate right mindfulness, and give with right understanding."

The Buddha then related this verse to the merchants on the making of offerings:

When making offerings to bhiksus of food and clothing;
Contemplate right wisdom and right understanding.
Making pure offerings is like cultivating a field of merit;
If you can do so, the benefit from such merit will give
you peace all night long,
Your wishes will be granted,
And you and your horse will have a safe journey.
You will be safe both day and night; all evils will be far
away.
It is just like a rich field planted with fine, good seeds;
When watered and fertilized, the harvest will be bountiful.
Keeping the precepts is like good fields planted with fine
seeds;
Maintain righteous actions, and there will be wonderful
fruits in the end.
By making offerings, you prepare meritorious virtues;
When actions come from wisdom, abundant crops will
naturally grow.
Make offerings to the Buddha with respect;
You are planting great merit and will receive great goodness.
To look at the world with wisdom, you must first have
right view;
With right view you will see the right path, and you will
rise up and progress.
Stay away from all defilements and pursue the way of
nirvana;
Leaving suffering behind is to complete virtue.

After this, the Buddha traveled to a new location to teach the Dharma with his bhiksus.

The Buddha Does Not Teach for the Sake of Offerings

Once while teaching in the country of Kosala, the Buddha met a Brahman farmer named Pruladopoche. The farmer and his five hundred field hands were busy plowing the fields. From a distance, the farmer saw the Buddha's eminent demeanor. He stopped plowing and wiped the sweat from his brow. Then he walked towards the Buddha and said, "Lord Buddha, I work hard tilling and seeding my land to provide my own food so that I do not have to beg from others. The Lord Buddha should also farm his own land in order to provide himself with food."

The Buddha replied, "I, too, am also cultivating my own land."

The Brahman was puzzled and pressed the Buddha, "I have never seen you use any plows to till the land. May I ask how the Buddha cultivates his land? Could you enlighten me so that I can broaden my knowledge and obtain the true way of tilling land?"

The Buddha looked at the Brahman and saw through his unfriendly intentions. Then he answered slowly and patiently, "I use faith as seeds, Dharma as the fine land, wisdom as the plow, repentance as the carriage shaft, upholding the precepts as the cattle halter, and asceticism as the timely rain. My mindfulness is comparable to that of the skillful farmer who watches every inch of his land, guards his body and speech, and stores an adequate amount of food in his barn. I also pull the weeds of defilement to get an abundant harvest. I cultivate diligently so as not to leave my land fallow. With stability, I work quickly so as not to regress, until a worry-free state is attained. Any cultivator who tends his land in this way can earn the fruits of immortality and go beyond the three celestial realms. Such a cultivator will eradicate all defilement."

After listening to the Buddha's words, the Brahman's arrogance became respect. He experienced an uprising of faith and praised the Buddha as the supreme cultivator. Afterwards, the Brahman prepared delicious food as an offering to the Buddha. The Buddha refused and said, "I do not accept offerings for my teaching. I teach only to benefit all sentient beings and not to gain offerings. Since I have finished teaching you, I shall not accept your offering." Therefore, the Buddha would not accept the Brahman's offering.

Giving without Reservation

In Sravasti, there was an elder named Jinaputra. Although he had a tremendous amount of treasure piled high like a mountain, he was stingy and greedy beyond comparison. His house had seven gates, each of them manned by security guards who were instructed not to permit beggars into the courtyard. The walls of the house were heavily coated with lime to prevent rats from climbing over them. Wire netting was installed over the courtyard and gardens to stop birds from flying into the garden. Pets were not allowed so that food would not be wasted on feeding them.

One day, the Buddha sent Ananda, most knowledgeable of the monks, to convince Jinaputra of the dangers of stinginess. Although Ananda elaborated on the merits of almsgiving, Jinaputra's mind was made up and he could not be convinced. The next day, the Buddha sent Aniruddha, who was foremost in transcendental vision, to convince Jinaputra. He also failed. Then the Buddha sent Mahakasyapa, Maudgalyayana and Sariputra; they also could not help Jinaputra to change his stingy ways. Sariputra pleaded with the Buddha with the hope that the great virtues of the Buddha could help Elder Jinaputra to discard his miserly greed and gain wisdom.

When the Buddha came to the house of the elder Jinaputra, he prostrated himself to the Buddha to pay his respects and then sat down. The Buddha then told him of the five great merits of giving alms. The elder was skeptical and asked, "How does the act of giving alms give rise to the five great merits?"

The Buddha said, "The first kind of giving is to refrain from killing. One who upholds this precept treats all human beings with compassion and naturally bears no fear of anything."

The elder thought to himself, "People kill because of

poverty. I am so wealthy now that there is no need for me to kill. I can uphold this precept."

"The second kind of giving is to refrain from stealing. One who upholds this precept treats all beings with compassion and naturally bears no fear of anything."

The elder thought to himself, "People steal because of poverty. Now that I have loads of jewels at home, there is no need for me to steal. I can uphold this precept."

"The third kind of giving is to refrain from harmful, lustful behavior. One who upholds this precept treats all beings with compassion and naturally bears no fear of anything."

The elder thought to himself, "Only those who do not have wives engage in harmful lustful acts. Now that I have tens of thousands of wives and concubines, there is no need for me to covet others' wives. I can uphold this precept."

"The fourth kind of giving is to refrain from dishonest speech."

The elder thought to himself, "One only speaks dishonestly because one is poor and has to cheat to make a living. Now that I have limitless wealth and billions of acres, there is no need for me to lie. I can uphold this precept."

"The fifth kind of giving is to refrain from consuming intoxicants."

The elder thought to himself, "The consumption of intoxicants can lead to thirty-six types of misdemeanors. Families are broken and countries are lost because of the consumption of intoxicants. The Buddha has spoken righteously and I should uphold these precepts."

Thus, the elder told the Buddha, "Lord Buddha, I am willing to take refuge and uphold the Buddha's precepts."

At this moment, the elder contemplated, "If disciples are ready to take their master's advice, they should offer some riches, regardless of how much it may be, to repay his benev-

olence." So he went to his warehouse to pick out the most inferior white blanket he had as an offering to the Buddha. No matter how hard he tried he could not decide which rug was the most inferior. Instead, each successive rug he picked seemed better than the one before. This went on and on, and he still could not find a satisfactorily poor rug. Unable to reconcile himself to his own stinginess, the elder found himself in extreme conflict, much like the struggle between the Asuras and the Trayastrimsa devas.

Knowing the elder was struggling with himself over whether he should be generous or stingy, the Buddha said to him, "It is impossible to be generous and miserly at the same time. When it is time to give, act promptly! Why should you hesitate?" When the elder heard these words, he was extremely remorseful and he immediately picked a white blanket to offer the Buddha. The Buddha continued to preach to him the wondrous Dharma. Finally, the elder opened his mind and understood the teachings. He attained the pure eye of the Dharma and was no longer fearful of the Dharma. He took refuge in the Triple Gem, became an upasaka, and was wholeheartedly devoted to observing the Five Precepts for the rest of his life.

True Wealth

In ancient India, there was a country called Douwayshiang. The king and his people practiced heresy.

One day, the king had a benevolent thought and decided to hold a great almsgiving. Following the Brahman tradition, he opened up seven of his treasuries and piled up jewels as high as a mountain. When beggars came, he allowed them to grab a handful of jewels to take home with them. After several days, the mountain of treasure did not seem to be any smaller.

The Buddha understood that these were the right conditions for him to encourage the king to strive towards total liberation for the sake of all beings. So the Buddha transformed himself into a homeless wanderer and set off to visit Douwayshiang.

When the Buddha arrived in disguise, the king asked him, "Please make your desires known to me. Do not be embarrassed. I will fulfill all your needs."

The mendicant replied, "I have come from a faraway place, and I am begging for some funds to build my house."

"Very well! You may take a handful of treasure home with you."

The mendicant grabbed a handful of treasure and left. He walked seven steps, but then turned back and returned the treasure. The king asked, "What are you doing? Don't you want the treasure anymore?"

The mendicant replied, "These jewels are only enough to build my house. If my son wants to get married, they will not be enough. I think it is best not to take them at all."

"Then take three handfuls home!" said the king.

The mendicant took the treasure. Once again, he walked seven steps and then turned back to return the treasures. Again the king asked, "Why do you not take the treasure this time?"

"Well, this is enough to hold the wedding for my son, but without fields, workers and livestock, how would we survive? I think I should just forget it!"

"Take seven handfuls then," said the king.

The mendicant took the treasures, walked seven steps, and once again turned back. The king could not help but ask, "Why do you yet again return the treasure?"

"Your Majesty, as long as there are sons and daughters in the families, they will get married someday. These jewels will definitely not be enough. I may as well forget about the whole thing."

"Then let me offer you the whole mountain of treasure."

The mendicant accepted but not long after, he returned again. This time, the king was both angry and bewildered. He asked, "I have already given you countless treasure. You should not have any problems now. Why are you returning the treasure to me again?"

"Your Majesty, initially I intended to live on this treasure. But I then thought of the brevity of human life and the impermanence of worldly phenomena. No matter how much treasure I have, I will never be content; instead it will increase my greed and sorrow. It is better for me to arrest my greed and pursue Buddhahood so that I can attain ultimate liberation."

After listening to the mendicant's explanation, the king finally comprehended the essence of the Buddha's teachings. Thus he was converted to Buddhism.

The Buddha emanated a brilliant radiance as he leaped into the sky chanting the following verse:

Even if you accumulate treasure as high as the sky,
Though it may fill up the whole world, it does not
compare to seeing the Dhamma.
Evil may seem like goodness; love may not be apparent.

Treating suffering as pleasure, that is the way of the foolish.

When the king saw the Buddha's radiance and heard the verse, he was deeply moved, and led his officials to take refuge in the Triple Gem. Subsequently, they all achieved Stream Entry, the first cultivation level of arhatship.



Upholding the Precepts

The Precepts

Central to the teachings of Buddhism is the idea that one should in no way bring harm to oneself or others. As we become more skilled in and attentive to how to embody this supremely compassionate idea in our daily lives, we rely on the precepts to guide us. Precepts are principles that provide a moral and ethical framework to teach us to treat others and ourselves with utmost kindness. One who is merely beginning to pay keen attention to upholding the precepts may experience a brief period of feeling limited. As spiritual practice deepens, however, upholding the precepts creates a profound freedom, for they keep us unshackled from the prison of our own wrongdoings, and their inevitable ill effects, and move us toward greater compassion for all, and to liberation.

Although there are a number of precepts within the Buddhist doctrine, the stories on the following pages explore three apparently simple precepts that encompass all others: be mindful of our body, speech and mind. Through encountering human beings just like ourselves who do not follow these precepts, we experience poor choices and ignorant decisions. As we immerse ourselves in the lives of businessmen, hunters, farmers, disciples, and the like, we are reminded of situations in our own lives when we have not acted out of compassion, or when we have chosen a path of selfishness and dishonesty, rather than the path of virtue. Subsequently, we may take to heart the Buddha's teachings about moral and ethical behavior.

In our daily lives, we are privileged, and challenged, with countless, daily opportunities to uphold the precepts. Through each con-

scious choice, through each mindful action, we have the chance to elevate our conduct and manifest the spirit of the Buddha. As the true message of each story unfolds for you, may your heart fill with compassion, and may you strive to uphold the precepts with joy. Truly, your life, and the lives of others will be blessed.

The Three Precepts

Once there was a young man from a rich family in Sravasti. After he had listened to the Buddha's teachings, he decided to take refuge in the Triple Gem and become a monk. After his ordination, an elder monk tried to explain the precepts to him. He said, "My friend! There is such and such a precept, then there are two more precepts, here again are two, three, nine, ten more precepts, this one is a minor precept and this one is a major one, this is a pratimoksa precept (for liberation), this is a fundamental one, this is a precept to purify our actions and so on." The elder talked on and on.

The young man thought, "There are so many precepts, it is difficult to abide by them all. If I cannot observe them all, what is the purpose of becoming a monk? Maybe I would be better off getting married, raising a family and doing charity work."

So he asked the senior monk, "Venerable, since I cannot uphold all the precepts, I do not see the purpose of being a monk. I have decided to return to the life of a householder. Please take my robe and alms bowl."

"Well, since you want to give up being a monk, please follow me to say goodbye to the Buddha." The senior monk then took him to see the Buddha.

"Lord Buddha, since this bhiksu said he cannot uphold all the precepts and has asked to return his robe and alms bowl, I thought it best to bring him here to see you."

The Buddha said, "Bhiksu, why did you impress him with so many precepts? He can only try his best. Next time you should not teach a beginner in this way. Leave the young bhiksu to me." The Buddha then spoke to the young man, "Bhiksu, you don't have to abide by all these precepts. But there are three precepts by which you must absolutely abide."

The young bhiksu asked, "What are those three precepts?"

"From now on, you have to be mindful of your actions, speech, and mind. Do no wrongdoings with your body, speech, and mind. Now you can go. Do not give up being a monk. If you take these precepts diligently, you will be liberated and find happiness."

The young bhiksu was satisfied and bowed to the Buddha to accept these three precepts. He then vowed respectfully to the Buddha and left. He remained a monk and studied with other bhiksus.

With the three precepts in mind, the young bhiksu realized, "Although the venerable had tried to explain many different precepts to me, I could not understand. It is only after the Buddha condensed all those precepts into three that I could understand. The Buddha is a great king of the Dharma." From that moment, the young monk's wisdom grew rapidly and after several days he attained arhatship.

After the other monks heard what had happened, they discussed the event among themselves saying, "Friend, when faced with a young bhiksu who is ready to give up being a monk, the Buddha is able to simplify all the precepts into three. The young monk has now attained arhatship. How great the Lord Buddha is!"

Just at that time, the Buddha walked by the monks and asked, "Bhiksus, what are you talking about?" The monks told the Buddha about their discussion. The Buddha said, "Bhiksus, if you have to lift a heavy package, would it not be easier if you divided it into several smaller pieces? Listen to this story: Once there was a farmer in a village near Varanasi. One day, he was working in the field, which was on top of the ruins of an old village. There was a rich man who used to live in that old village. It happened that the rich man, before he died, buried a big piece of gold, (its width the size of a thigh and its length four times one's forearm), in the area where the

farmer was working. One day, while the farmer was digging in the field, his hoe hit something hard. He thought it was a tree root. After clearing the dirt off the surface, he discovered it was the big piece of gold. He covered the gold back over with dirt and quietly went to another field to work.

Before sunset, he put the cattle yoke and his hoe to one side and started to dig the piece of gold out. He tried to move the gold, but it was too heavy to even budge. He sat down and thought, "I can use one portion of the big gold for my living expenses, store one portion, invest one part for business, and donate one part to charity." With this in mind, he cracked the gold into four pieces, which could then be easily lifted out of the ground. When he got home, he put the four pieces of gold in a safe place. Since he used one part of the gold for charity, he was able to be reborn into good families for many lives to come.

The wise know how to simplify complexity: the foolish complicate matters unnecessarily. When we uphold the precepts, we should emphasize substance rather than form. The purpose of upholding the precepts is to attain liberation.

If we are attached to the form of the precepts, we restrict ourselves and lose sight of their initial purpose.

Adapting Precepts to Accommodate Changing Needs

During the summer retreat for the rainy season, there was once a dispute in a distant Sangha community. The Buddha decided to send Upali there to settle the dispute. Upali declined saying, "Lord Buddha, please send someone else to take care of the matter."

"Why don't you want to go?"

Upali replied, "Lord Buddha, the community is far away and it often rains there. To get there, an overnight stay along the way is necessary. Since bhiksus are allowed only one robe, when it rains the robe will become soaked and it will not dry in time to proceed. The wet robe will stick to my body, and it will be heavy and uncomfortable. Therefore, I think it is best if you send someone who is located closer to that community to resolve the dispute."

The Buddha thought for a moment, then asked again, "How long does it take to get there from here?"

"It takes two days to get there, another two days to settle the dispute and two more days to return; that is a total of six days," answered Upali.

After listening to Upali, the Buddha announced, "During the summer retreat, if a journey of six days or more is required, a sramanera can own two sets of robes."

While the Buddha oversaw the Sangha, maintaining its purity and harmony, he also considered the necessities of daily life. He was keenly aware of the bhiksus' hard work, and he was sensitive to their needs. To the Sangha, the Buddha was like a kind father who educated and protected his bhiksus.

The Buddha imparts happiness to everyone. He will oblige anyone as long as the request exists within the context of social morality, the law, and the Dharma. From this incident, we know that the Buddha's precepts can be adapted to accommodate changing needs.

The Greater Sage Is No Sage

Once there were two business partners in Sravasti. They made their money by transporting goods to the countryside and selling them there for profit. On the way home one day, the younger businessman thought, "For a long time, my friend has not been eating well. He must be very tired both physically and mentally. When he gets home there is a chance he will gorge himself on a lot of rich food and die of indigestion. If this happens, I will divide the money into three portions. I will give one portion to his sons and take the remaining two." With this plan in mind, he kept procrastinating about actually dividing the profits fifty-fifty with his still living partner.

Though the greedy young man did not want to divide the money, his elder partner insisted. Finally, the elder partner got his share. The elder then went to the monastery to pay homage to the Buddha. The Buddha asked him, "It is very late now. In the past, when you returned from your travels, you would wait until the next morning before coming to see me. Why do you come so quickly today?" The elder explained to the Buddha what had happened with his younger partner and the money.

The Buddha told the elder, "Devotee, your young partner is not an honest fellow. His deception did not start in this life, but dates back from the previous one. In his previous life, he was also a deceptive businessman. He tried to cheat you now just as he tried to cheat righteous people in his past life."

"Please tell me the story, Lord Buddha."

The Buddha told the following story: A long time ago in a city, there was a businessman who was considered by others to be a sage. He was in a business partnership with another man named Greater Sage. They loaded goods on five hundred carriages and went to the countryside to sell their merchandise. When they tried to divide the profits on the way

home, Greater Sage told the sage, "I should have two-thirds of the money."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the sage.

"You are a sage. I am a greater sage. A sage should get one share while a greater sage should get two. This is only reasonable."

"We invested the same amount of money to buy the goods, but you now want two shares. How can this be reasonable?"

"Simply because I am a greater sage."

So they quarreled. Greater Sage thought of a trick. He asked his father to hide inside a big hollow tree. He told his father, "Father, pretend you are a tree god, and when we come to see you, please say that it is reasonable for the greater sage to have two-thirds."

After Greater Sage had collaborated with his father, he went to see his partner and said, "Friend, it is not important what I say, the tree god knows best. Let us consult with the tree god."

The two men went to the tree. Greater Sage prayed loudly, "Tree god, please give your judgment on our dispute."

The father, waiting inside the tree, answered, "Tell me your story."

"O, tree god! My partner is a sage. I am a greater sage. We made a business investment. How should we divide the profits?"

"A sage should get one-third, while a greater sage should get two-thirds," answered the father.

After the sage heard the verdict, he wanted to find out if the tree god was real. So he picked up a bunch of hay and set the tree on fire. As the flames grew higher, the father could not hide inside the tree any longer. He climbed up to the top of the tree and fell to the ground. He confessed, "The sage is

truly good while the greater sage is actually not good. I got burned and bruised because of my own son, Greater Sage."

Finally, they divided the money into two equal portions, and both the sage and Greater Sage received what they deserved.

Whether one is wise or ignorant does not depend on one's name but on one's conduct and ethics. Although Greater Sage has a good name, he did not act accordingly. His good name, therefore, was wasted.

A good name is certainly important, but it is more important to conduct oneself morally and ethically.

How the Hunters Changed Their Livelihood

In Rajagrha, there was a high mountain where flowers, trees, birds and animals were plentiful. The scenery was very picturesque. Hundreds of families lived as hunters at the foot of this beautiful and plentiful mountain. The men would leave their homes before dawn to go hunting on the mountain. In the evening they would return with the bloody carcasses of the animals they had killed during the day. The women waited at the doors for the men to return with the kill. These people, unfortunately, knew very little about kindness, justice, and ethics. They led very barbaric lives indeed.

The Bamboo Grove Monastery where the Buddha and his bhiksus often resided was not far from this mountain. One day, while the Buddha was in samadhi, he saw that the time was ripe to teach these hunters. He traveled to their village and sat under a big tree. A light emanated from his body and shone on all the surrounding trees and stones, turning them a vibrant golden color. At this time, the men were out hunting on the mountain, so only the women saw the brilliant light. The women went to the Buddha and paid homage to him by prostrating themselves. The Buddha used his wonderful and soft voice to tell them, "Because of the affinity I have with all of you, I have specifically come to show you the way. You should arouse thoughts of mercy in your minds and not live a life of killing animals. The kamma of killing animals is very severe. A person cultivating the way should not engage in such harmful acts. It is barbaric to kill and separate animals' families just to satisfy your hunger. Of course we must take care of our needs, but we cannot, meanwhile, forget to have concern for others, including animals."

The women, deeply moved by the Buddha's voice, began to cry. They said to the Buddha, "We are a village of hunters

and survive on the animals that our husbands kill. We would like to offer the Lord Buddha food, but we are afraid to offend him by offering meat, our only source of sustenance."

The Buddha answered kindly, "According to the dictates of compassion, Buddhist practitioners forego the eating of animal foods. Please do not be concerned about offerings. All the same, I appreciate your kindness."

The women pleaded again, "Lord Buddha, since you did not kill these animals, what harm is done if you eat this meat?"

The Buddha told them, "For ages, men have eaten countless fish and animals. Instead of killing animals for food and using their lives to support your own, why not prepare some healthy vegetables and grains? If we continue to consume the bodies of slaughtered animals, we will, of course, share in the negative karma produced from killing. After we die, we will fall into the evil realms indefinitely. If we eat vegetables and grains, we will have a long and healthy life, and not generate any negative karma from killing. Killing animals and eating meat may lead to poor health and sudden death. Killing others to support one's own life creates endless bad karma. If we can be compassionate and abstain from killing, we can avoid trouble wherever we go."

By that time, the men were beginning to return from hunting. When they saw their women sitting with the Buddha, they were very angry. They picked up their bows and arrows and prepared to kill the Buddha. The women stopped them immediately. "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! This is the Buddha. Don't be arrogant and rude."

The hunters took a closer look at the Buddha and found him to have a very awe-inspiring appearance. They came forward and prostrated themselves before him, asking for forgiveness. When the Buddha saw their compassion arising, he

explained to them the ill effects of killing. After listening to the Buddha's convincing words, the hunters happily accepted his advice. They all took refuge in the Triple Gem and promised to abide by the Five Precepts. Eventually, they moved away from the mountain and changed their occupation to farming. They vowed never to hunt again.

Lies Are Like a Dirty Basin

Rahula was the first sramanera in Buddhist history, being only nine when he renounced the household life. At that age he could not fully understand the Buddha's teachings. Although he had a mild temperament and behaved well, he also enjoyed telling lies just for the fun of it. One day, when a royal visitor came looking for the Buddha, Rahula randomly directed the visitor to different locations so the visitor went on a wild goose chase looking for the Buddha, as Rahula playfully watched.

When the Buddha heard of this mischief, he made a special trip to Rahula's hut. He told Rahula to bring him a basin of water to wash his feet. Stunned by the Buddha's serious demeanor, Rahula quietly prepared the basin of water.

After washing his feet, the Buddha asked, "Rahula, is the water in this basin suitable for drinking?"

"No, Lord Buddha!" Rahula said, "The water is very dirty after being used to wash your feet. Of course it is not suitable for drinking."

"You are just like this water, which was initially clean and pure. You were a royal prince who had given up worldly pleasures to become a sramanera; yet you have not worked hard to pursue truth, to purify your mind and body, and to be prudent in your speech. The filth of the three poisons, greed, anger and ignorance, has defiled your mind, just as the initially clean water is now dirty," said the Buddha.

Lowering his head, Rahula was ashamed to look at the Buddha and remained silent. The Buddha told him to throw the water away. When Rahula returned, Buddha asked, "Would you now use this basin as your rice bowl?"

"No, Lord Buddha! This basin is not clean. It has dirty stains on it and therefore cannot be used as a food container."

"You are like this basin," the Buddha continued. "Although you are a sramanera, you have not cultivated the precepts, meditative concentration and wisdom diligently. Nor have you purified your behavior, speech and thoughts.

How can your mind hold the food of the great path?"

The Buddha gently kicked the basin, causing it to roll around. Rahula looked scared. "Are you worried that I might break the basin?" asked the Buddha.

"No! Lord Buddha. It does not matter if it is damaged. The basin is nothing but a crude container."

"Rahula! Just as you do not care about this basin, people will not care about you either. You are a monk, yet you do not pay attention to your own conduct. You play tricks and tell lies. Eventually, nobody will care about you, and at the end of this life you will remain unenlightened and lost."

After the Buddha's admonition, Rahula completely reformed all of his naughty tendencies. He strictly upheld the precepts and diligently cultivated his mind. Day after day he practiced discretely and finally became one of the Buddha's ten greatest disciples, foremost in esoteric practice.

One of the five precepts of Buddhism is to abstain from lying. Impure speech can lead to an impure mind. The consequences of wrongful speech, like the dirty stains on the foot basin, can contaminate our pure mind. How can we not be careful then about our speech?

False Speech Leads to Negative Karma

Tuo Biao was one of the Buddha's senior bhiksus. He had already achieved arhatship. His diligent cultivation and radiant appearance earned him much respect and admiration from the general public. Due to his efficiency and capable administration, the Buddha had Tuo Biao manage all monastery affairs. He attended to the daily necessities of the Sangha and was responsible for the maintenance of the monastery. Indeed, Tuo Biao managed everything very well. Almost everyone was satisfied with his work and recognized him as foremost in administration.

Regardless of his capabilities, Tuo Biao was not able to please everyone. The monastic community consisted of tens of thousands of monks, and the job was truly taxing. Indeed, it was not surprising that there were a few monks who were not satisfied with Tuo Biao's leadership.

Among the sangha members, there was a bhiksu by the name of Mi To. Every time he went out on his alms rounds, he received nothing but plain and unappetizing food. Bhiksu Mi To did not think about the real reasons for this bad treatment; instead, he directed his anger at others. One day he went to see Tuo Biao to start an argument.

"Tuo Biao, though everyone praises your work, I am not happy with your actions and conduct," complained Mi To.

Tuo Biao replied, "I myself feel ashamed. The Buddha gave me the responsibility of taking care of the monastic community. Though my ability is limited, I try to do my best to make sure everyone is happy. I do not expect everyone's praise."

Bhiksu Mi To did not accept Tuo Biao's explanation and continued angrily, "First, I am unhappy about the arrangement of the alms rounds. You always assign me to the poorest and

most remote areas. I am never given the chance to carry my alms bowl into the city. In addition, you always give the best bedding and robes offered by the lay devotees to others and leave the worst for me. You have been most unfair in the handling of the monks' welfare. If you do not change, I will find an opportunity to hurt you."

"Well, Mi To, you must realize that if we cultivate diligently, there will come a time when we will have accumulated enough merit for devotees to make offerings to us. Regarding the good or bad retribution that you encounter, you should examine yourself and not blame others. Those who are assigned to carry alms bowls in the city should appear respectful and dignified. The Dharma is like a mirror and we should always reflect ourselves in that mirror."

Mi To did not appreciate Tuo Biao's kind advice, and only grew more hostile. He spread rumors everywhere that eventually reached his own sister's ears. Mi To's sister was a bhiksunī and she knew that her brother's accusations against Tuo Biao were false. She repeatedly asked her brother to stop, but he continued to spread malicious gossip. Later, many senior monks in the Sangha began to dislike Mi To for his rumors and started to avoid his company.

In light of this situation, the Buddha called for an assembly in order to teach the Dharma. He explained to the monks that one who likes to slander and gossip will be disliked by people. Bhikṣu Mi To's rumors and gossip hurt nobody but himself. Now everywhere he goes, he is no longer welcome. When he traveled to Rājagṛha, the elders there asked him to go to Śrāvastī. When he was in Śrāvastī, the elders there asked him to go to Rājagṛha. Mi To had only himself to blame for his difficulties; actions, indeed, bring consequences.

The Buddha's teaching is absolutely correct. Scornful people hurt nobody but themselves.

The Ill Effects of Unkind Words

Once when the Buddha was staying at the Jetavana Monastery, there was a quarrel among six groups of bhiksus. When the Buddha learned what was occurring, he asked the six groups of bhiksus to come together. When they assembled, the Buddha told them the following story:

In the past, when the city of Dechashilo was ruled by King Gandhara, a cow gave birth to a calf. A Brahman bought the calf from the farmer. The Brahman named the calf "Full Joy." He kept the calf in his daughter's garden and brought it milk and rice soup to eat everyday. He had a tender spot in his heart for Full Joy.

Time went by and Full Joy grew into a cow. Full Joy thought, "The Brahman has spent a lot of time and energy on me. Now that I am the strongest cow in the whole of Jambudvipa it is time for me to demonstrate my ability and show my gratitude for his kindness."

One day Full Joy told the Brahman, "Brahman, please go to the elder who raises cows and tell him that I can pull one hundred carts. You can bet one thousand pieces of gold on me."

The Brahman went to the elder and asked him, "Who has the strongest cow in town?" The elder named a few cows but finally said, "None of them can beat my cow."

"I have a very strong cow, too. He can pull one hundred carts!" the Brahman said.

"Where is a cow like that?" the elder questioned in disbelief.

"I have one at home," the Brahman replied excitedly.

The elder was not afraid of losing so he bet one thousand pieces of gold against the Brahman's cow.

They went back to the Brahman's home to fetch Full Joy. The Brahman chained one hundred carts together and loaded them with sand and stones. He gave Full Joy a bath and fed

him delicious rice. He decorated the cow and yoked him up. He raised the whip and ordered, "Move, liar! Pull, liar!"

Full Joy was shocked at being called a liar. Why did the Brahman use such a word? The cow was shocked and froze. When the elder saw Full Joy freeze, he asked the Brahman to hand over the gold.

The Brahman had no choice but to hand over the gold. He released the cow. All that night he lay in bed, depressed. Full Joy came over and asked, "Brahman, why are you laying here?"

The Brahman answered unhappily, "I lost one thousand pieces of gold. How can I sleep?"

"Brahman, I have lived in your place for a long time. Have I ever broken or stepped on any bowls in all that time? Have I ever defecated or urinated in the wrong place?" Full Joy asked.

"No, never at all," the Brahman answered quickly.

"Then why did you call me a liar?" The cow continued, "It is your fault you lost because you called me that. Now go to the elder and bet again with two thousand pieces of gold, but do not ever call me a liar."

The Brahman listened to the cow and the next day went to see the elder to bet more gold.

Again, the Brahman chained together one hundred carts. He put the yoke on the decorated Full Joy and then patted the cow on the back, softly saying, "Sage, move forward! Sage, please pull!" Finally Full Joy gladly pulled the carts and arrived at the finish line.

The elder gave the Brahman his two thousand pieces of gold. Many bystanders also gave money to reward the cow. With Full Joy's help, the Brahman gained a large amount of money.

The Buddha concluded, "Bhiksus, nobody likes unkind

words. Even animals do not like them."

After the Buddha rebuked the six groups of bhiksus, he made rules instructing his monks to speak gently, honestly, compassionately, and kindly, and to abstain from malicious and offensive utterances. In addition to hurting others, unkind words also hurt oneself.

The Precept Prohibiting Meat Consumption

In Varanasi, there was a bhiksu who was sick with diarrhea. He was in pain and rested in bed. A Buddhist woman by the name of Subee visited him and asked, "Where do you feel discomfort? Have you taken any medicine?"

"I have a stomachache, but I just took medicine."

"Do you want something to eat?"

"Not really, except I have a craving for meat."

"Well, I will ask my servant to bring some meat over when I return home."

Subee immediately went home and ordered her servant to buy some meat from the market. Unfortunately, there was no meat to be found in the whole city, for the killing of animals for their flesh was forbidden by local law. The servant was helpless and went home empty handed.

As Subee wondered what she could do, she thought of her promise to the bhiksu. She did not want to break the promise and worried that the bhiksu might die if he did not get some meat. The bhiksu was so young it would be a shame for him to die so soon. So she got a knife and cut a piece of her own flesh to serve to the bhiksu.

Strangely enough, soon after the bhiksu had eaten the meat, he recovered from his illness, while Subee's wound, on the contrary, became more and more serious. Eventually she could not move and was only able to lie in bed moaning.

When Subee's husband came home and learned that his wife was seriously ill, he rushed to see her and asked the cause of her illness.

Not wanting to hide anything from her husband, Subee told him what had happened. Her husband was both surprised and pleased. He said, "Subee, I admire your respect for the sangha. Your strong belief gave you the strength and the abil-

ity to demonstrate great tolerance by sacrificing your own flesh. Because of your willingness to give, I believe the bhiksu will fully recover from his illness. However, I am worried that your wound will only get worse."

Feeling extremely weak, Subee replied, "Yes, I am getting sicker by the day and face the danger of death. Life is impermanent; where there is birth, there is death. This is true for everyone, and I am no exception. I am ready for death when it comes. I only wish to have the opportunity to see the Buddha and to make an offering to him so that I may gain merit to be reborn into a good family."

Her husband gladly promised her that her wish would be fulfilled. He sent word to the Buddha, inviting him and his bhiksus to come and receive offerings. The Buddha accepted the invitation.

The following day, the Buddha and his bhiksus came to Subee's house to accept offerings. After a while, the Buddha asked, "Why do I not see Subee around, where is she?"

Subee's husband replied, "She is very ill and resting in bed. She is too weak to get up to pay the Buddha her respects. Please forgive her, compassionate Buddha."

The Buddha said solemnly, "I would really like to see her."

Subee's husband said, "Alright, I will call for her to come."

Her husband knew that she could not leave her bed but because he saw the Buddha's compassion and solemnity, he went to her room and asked her, "The Buddha would like to see you." She responded, "Oh! Is it the Buddha's order?" She suddenly rose from her bed with great strength. Although the wound was still there, her pain had disappeared. She then walked out to the Buddha and prostrated herself.

The Buddha spoke gently, "Subee, you sacrificed your own flesh to keep your promise. Your intentions were great

and pure, but it was wrong of you to do that. Regardless of the form a sacrifice takes, it should never be forced, nor should it impose undue suffering on oneself or others. Only then will cultivation be righteous and fruitful."

The Buddha's simple lesson embedded itself in Subee's heart, and she realized that one who practices the Buddha's teachings must follow the Dharma. By doing so, the result attained from doing good deeds will be incomparable.

When the Buddha returned to the Sangha, he immediately gathered everyone together and explained the incident. Upon hearing this, the bhiksu knew that he had eaten human flesh and regretted it deeply. From that point on, the sangha was forbidden to eat meat.

Meat consumption can eradicate the seeds of our compassion. Since all beings have buddha nature, those who truly practice the Dharma will not want to eat meat. For our own good, the Buddha instituted the precept that prohibits meat consumption.



Intoxication Leads to Irrationality

Abstention from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and consuming intoxicants are the Five Precepts that all Buddhists strive to uphold. The basic idea behind the Five Precepts is that one should in no way harm oneself or others.

Most people do not understand the prohibition against consuming intoxicants since intoxication does not necessarily cause direct harm to others. If it is not an evil act in itself, why is it included as one of the Five Precepts?

One of the Buddha's disciples, Svagata, had miraculous powers. He had once even tamed a wicked serpent. One day he was drunk and lay unconscious beside the road. When the Buddha saw him, he remarked, "Right now he cannot even tame a frog. Intoxicants can cause one to become irrational and to lose the ability to judge wisely. Therefore, they should be avoided by those who seek to develop clarity of mind."

In Buddhism, clear thinking is very important. Intoxication makes us lose our reason and clear headedness. While intoxicated not only do we damage our own state of mind, it may cause us to lose our reputation or even do harm to others. This is the reason that the Buddha asks us to abstain from consuming intoxicants.

The Dangers of Intoxication

One day, when the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana Monastery, he explained to the layman, Nadika, the dangers of intoxication. He said, "There are three kinds of alcohol; rice wine, fruit wine, and medicinal herbal wine. No matter which kind of wine you drink, it will interfere with the mind and result in a loss of control. People get into serious trouble because of alcohol and create bad kamma for themselves. For this reason all types of alcohol should be avoided."

Nadika was still confused, "I don't understand. Why is this so?" he asked.

The Buddha explained further, "the benefits of drinking are minimal; however, there are thirty-five ill effects:

1. Money is wasted. In an intoxicated state, one loses self-control and spends money excessively.
2. Intoxication opens the doors to all sorts of diseases and ailments.
3. Intoxication may create conflict. After drinking, people may be inclined to argue with others.
4. Intoxication may lead one to undress inappropriately and act distastefully, thus creating embarrassment.
5. Intoxication ruins one's reputation so that one loses the respect of others.
6. Intoxication causes one to lose the ability to judge wisely.
7. Intoxication may cause one to lose future benefits, besides losing all that one already has.
8. The intoxicated can have difficulty in keeping secrets.
9. Intoxication may keep one from success in one's career.
10. Intoxication may lead to sorrow. Mistakes made while drunk can lead to later regrets and sorrow.
11. Intoxication drains your energy.
12. Intoxication leads to diminished health.
13. Intoxication may lead to disrespect for your father.

14. Intoxication may lead to disrespect for your mother.
15. Intoxication may lead to disrespect for sramaneras.
16. Intoxication may lead to disrespect for Brahmins.
17. Intoxication may lead to disrespect for one's elders,
because alcohol reduces one's ability to differentiate right
from wrong.
18. Intoxication may lead to disrespect for the Buddha.
19. Intoxication may lead to disrespect for the Dharma.
20. Intoxication may lead to disrespect for the Sangha.
21. Intoxication may lead one to associate with immoral people.
22. Intoxication may lead one to shy away from good people.
23. Intoxication may lead one to violate the precepts.
24. Intoxication may lead one to have no remorse for their
wrongdoings.
25. Intoxication may lower one's ability to control emotions
and desires.
26. Intoxication may lower one's ability to control sexual
desires.
27. Intoxication may cause others to despise you.
28. Intoxication may result in repudiation by friends and
relatives.
29. Intoxication may lead one to practice unwholesome
teachings.
30. Intoxication may lead one to turn away from wholesome
teachings.
31. Intoxication may cause one to be mistrusted by wise people.
32. Intoxication may keep one from attaining nirvana.
33. Intoxication may sow the seeds for future derangement
and foolishness.
34. Intoxication may lead to the hell realms.
35. Intoxication may lead one to be reborn ignorant and
foolish in the human realm.

"Since being intoxicated can result in any or all of these faults, one should avoid consumption of intoxicants," the Buddha concluded.



VI The Merit of Upholding the Precepts

As mentioned in Part Three of this collection, life is governed by the Law of Cause and Effect. Although we may sometimes wish this were not the case, due to our behaviors that may not reap the most desirable outcomes, no one is excluded from this universal truth, and no actions are without subsequent and logical results. We can, however, derive comfort from this natural process, for, as we witness in the following stories, our adherence to moral and ethical behavior grounded in the precepts will indeed result in a life of innumerable merit.

This section focuses once again on precepts, but extends further into a discussion of the merits accumulated as practitioners uphold these guiding principles with diligence and purpose. In each story, the Buddha expounds the Dharma in a manner distinctly relevant to the situation at hand, and teaches the protagonists - as well as us - the many benefits that result from pure and principled living. Among these auspicious benefits are prosperity, a cleansed heart, peace of mind, the eradication of suffering, transcendental wisdom, fortunate rebirth, and the accumulation of abundant merit.

Indeed, we can have faith that bountiful merit logically awaits those who lead virtuous lives. May we all be inspired to take to heart and mind, and then to action, the teachings of the Buddha found in these stories.

Upholding the Precepts Brings Merit

When the Buddha resided at the Jetavana Monastery in Sravasti, there lived an elder by the name of Sudatta. Sudatta had seven sons, and was deeply perturbed because his sons had no faith in the Buddha's teachings; they did not want to take refuge in the Triple Gem, nor would they uphold the Five Precepts.

One day, Sudatta said to his sons thoughtfully, "My sons, in this life, you must take refuge in the Triple Gem, uphold the Five Precepts and form affinities broadly in order to cultivate much merit and good conditions."

All seven sons refused, "Father! It is impossible for us to comply with your wishes. We will not take refuge in the Triple Gem, and upholding the Five Precepts is completely out of the question."

Sometimes, in order to guide people towards the Buddha's teachings, one may need to employ skillful means to pique their interest first. With fatherly love, Sudatta decided to entice his sons. "I will reward you each with one thousand ounces of gold if you take refuge in the Triple Gem and uphold the Five Precepts," he said.

His sons finally agreed, and the father rewarded them with one thousand ounces of gold as promised. Sudatta then went together with his sons to pay respects to the Buddha.

After prostrating themselves before the Buddha, Sudatta respectfully stood to one side and addressed the Blessed One: "Lord Buddha! My seven sons had no faith in the Dharma, nor did they delight in taking refuge in the Triple Gem or upholding the Five Precepts. I have bestowed upon each of them one thousand ounces of gold as a condition for taking refuge and upholding the Five Precepts. Lord Buddha! Under these circumstances, will my seven sons receive blessings and merits in their future lives?"

The Buddha replied, "Excellent! Excellent! You fre-

quently assist others and offer them peace and security. For this, you have accumulated great merit and virtue. Through your help, your seven sons will all gain great merit."

To enhance and deepen the elder's faith and confidence, the Buddha continued, "There is a country in the north called Takasasila where the land is spacious and the people all live very comfortably. The country has a treasury full of vast amounts of gold, silver, rare gems, seashells, carnelian, pearls, amber, crystals, lapis lazuli, and all kinds of other wonderful precious items. The people there may take as much from the treasury as they need. They have done so for seven years, seven months and seven days, yet the treasury has not diminished. If we take this treasury and its seven thousand ounces of gold, increase the sum total one hundred fold, one thousand fold or infinitely, the final result is still less than the amount of merit gained by your seven sons."

After listening to the Buddha, the elder was filled with the joy of the Dharma. He invited the Buddha to his house for an alms offering. The Buddha kindly accepted and went to the elder's house, where he delivered his teachings to the seven sons. Through the teachings, the seven sons rid themselves of worries and afflictions. They developed deep belief and great confidence in the Dharma. They all attained the pure eye of transcendental wisdom; from then on, the seven sons sincerely took refuge in the Triple Gem and upheld the Five Precepts.

Dharma Water

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha traveled all over northern India to spread the Dharma. One day, he passed through a forest alongside the Sundari River. A Brahman ascetic was living in this area. When he saw the Buddha approach, he was most pleased and excitedly rushed out to meet him.

The Brahman asked, "Would you like to bathe in the Sundari River?"

"What is so special about this particular river?" the Buddha inquired.

The Brahman answered, "In the ancient days, it was in this river that the holy sages liberated many people from their suffering. Therefore, if you jump into this river to bathe, all the wrongdoings from your past will be washed away and you will have good fortune, purity, and liberation."

The Buddha looked at the river, gazed at the Brahman intently and asked, "Can this be so?"

The Brahman replied, "It is definitely true. Bathing in this river is the secret of my success in cultivation."

The Buddha then spoke, "Taking a bath in the Sundari River will not get rid of all bad kama. The same holds true for the Ganges, Gaja and Salva Rivers. Even if one bathes in a holy river for a hundred thousand years, one still cannot rid oneself of all troubles and impurities."

The Brahman was astonished at the Buddha's response. The Buddha continued, "The water in the Sundari River is just like any other water. It will wash dirt from your body. If you want to wash the dirt from your heart, you need the pure Dharma water."

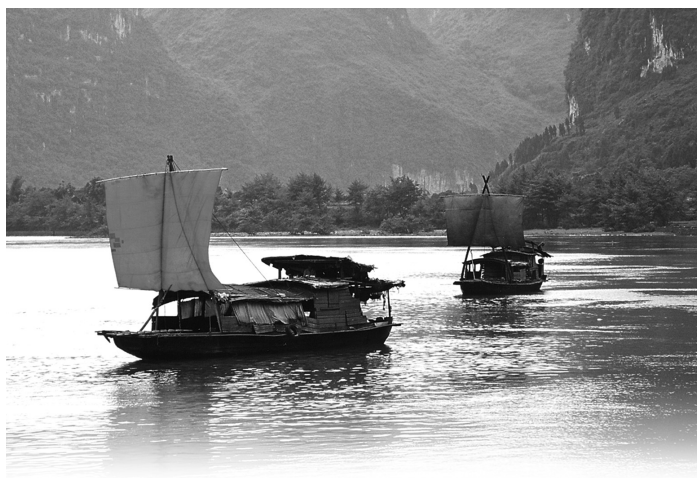
The Brahman felt as if his mind had been instantly illuminated by this novel way of teaching. Eagerly he asked, "What is the pure Dharma water?"

The Buddha answered, "Rinse your heart with whole-

some deeds; wash your mind through diligent cultivation; cleanse your being by upholding the Five Precepts of abstaining from killing; abstaining from stealing; abstaining from sexual misconduct; abstaining from lying and abstaining from consuming intoxicants; have a deep belief in the law of kama and its result; do not be jealous of others. This is the true meaning of using the pure Dharma water to cleanse your mind and heart."

After listening to the Buddha's explanation, the Brahman's heart was deeply touched. He felt as if he had been given a priceless rare gem. Overjoyed, he gratefully prostrated himself to the Buddha and left.

Bathing in a stream or river will only cleanse our body's dirt; self-cultivation with the pure water of Dharma will truly cleanse our hearts and minds.



Not Killing Is an Aspect of Compassion

On a mountain about few hundred miles away from the city of Rajagriha, there lived a family of hunters. They worshiped animal spirits and had never heard of the Triple Gem, the Buddha, the Dharma or the Sangha.

One day, the Buddha was passing by. The hunters were instantly taken by the Buddha's wonderfully dignified appearance. They prostrated themselves to the Buddha with joy. The Buddha then explained to them the evil consequences of killing and the merit derived from protecting lives. They were delighted with the Buddha's words and said, "We are a family making a humble living through hunting. We wish to offer you a meal. Please accept our offering."

The Buddha replied, "Eating meat is not in accord with the Buddhist teachings. Besides, I have already eaten. Please do not trouble yourselves."

Then the Buddha continued, "There is such an abundance of food in this world; why don't you find other sources of nourishment that will benefit your bodies and minds. When you take lives to sustain your own, you are destined to fall into the evil realms. You will also encounter difficulties during cultivation. People can live on many different types of grains and crops. Let us have pity and compassion for all animals on the land and in the sea. After all, animals cherish their lives, too. Killing them to feed ourselves only brings us bad karma and endless suffering. Only compassion and mercy will bring us peace without suffering."

The Buddha then spoke the following verse:

Have compassion and do not kill,
Constantly be careful of your actions,
Then untimely death will not befall you

And you will be free of calamity wherever you are.
Not killing is compassion,
Be careful with your speech and guard your mind,
Then untimely death will not befall you
And you will be free of calamity wherever you are.
Be respectful of all beings,
Never harm any lives,
Then you will be free of all worries,
And be reborn into the Brahmadeva Heavens.
Always have kindness and compassion,
Be pure and live by the Buddha's teachings,
Then you will be content and satisfied,
And be liberated from birth and death.

After listening to the Buddha's teachings, the hunters believed in the Dharma with joy. They became farmers and did not kill again.

One of the branches of the Noble Eightfold Path is Right Livelihood. The Buddhist teachings do not agree with killing as a way to earn one's living. Selling illicit substances, weapons, or being a butcher are ways of making one's livelihood at the expense of others. Killing others to earn a living chokes off the seeds of compassion and invites evil karma. To cultivate wisdom we should avoid killing.



Protecting the Six Senses

Among the Buddha's various disciples, there was a wide disparity in their learning capabilities. Some understood the teachings instantly while others took more time and required more patience to be taught. The Buddha was a patient teacher and always looked for expedient means to help those with difficulties in understanding. There was one disciple who had spent twelve years, day after day, meditating under a tree next to a pond; yet he still had not attained enlightenment. Instead, his mind was cluttered by greed, hatred and delusion. This lack of progress disturbed the young monk considerably.

One night, the disciple was meditating under the tree again. The Buddha was touched by the monk's diligent efforts and decided to help. He went up to the tree and sat down beside the monk and meditated with the monk. At midnight, the moonlight broke through the clouds and shone upon the ground. A starving dog happened to see a turtle crawling under the tree. When the dog attempted to bite the turtle, the smaller creature quickly retracted its head, extremities and tail into its shell. This rendered the dog powerless, and the turtle was able to preserve its life.

Seeing this, the Buddha turned to the disciple and said, "This turtle knows how to use its shell to protect its extremities and save its life. Human beings are not so smart. They do not realize that life may end at anytime. Impermanence is constantly surrounding us, just like this dog waiting for an opportunity to eat the turtle. People immerse themselves in sensory delights. They allow their six sensory organs, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, to pursue the temptations of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind objects. They permit themselves to be the easy prey of evil and to be trapped in the endless cycle of rebirth within the six realms. This is the tragic consequence of not preserving the senses and guarding the mind." The Buddha then spoke this verse:

Protect your six senses like a turtle;

Guard your thoughts like a castle;
Use wisdom to combat unwholesome thoughts;
Suffering will end when you win the battle.

After listening to the Buddha's teaching, the disciple finally awakened and achieved deep understanding. He continued to cultivate himself diligently, and came to enjoy the wonderful joy of the Dharma.

Upholding the Precepts Brings Peace of Mind

Once King Prasenajit of Kosala came to listen to the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha put this question to the king, "Your Majesty, I have a question for you. Suppose a person whom you trust rushed over to alert you that the four great mountains surrounding your country were about to collapse and cause massive landslides. All of your people would be in imminent danger. What would you do to escape?"

"Lord Buddha! If this were to happen, no escape would be possible. At a time like this, I would concentrate on being mindful and would diligently uphold the precepts. I would also do my best to help my people over-come their suffering."

Hearing his reply, the Buddha praised King Prasenajit. "Your Majesty, you are absolutely right. The four great mountains that I just mentioned represent the cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death. These four aspects of life are inevitable, constantly posing a threat to our bodies and well-being. In order to seek peace of mind, how can we afford not to cultivate our minds, uphold the precepts and practice generosity?"

The human body is composed of the four great elements: earth (solidity), water (fluidity), fire (warmth), and wind (air). According to the law of conditionality, once these four components dissociate, it is like the four great mountains simultaneously collapsing and causing massive landslides. What can we do?

VII Patience

Almost daily, we encounter difficult situations that test our patience, tolerance, and ability to act with compassion. The Buddha was no different. He, too, lived in this world, amidst the challenges of communal living and teaching the Dharma, and therefore was constantly involved in moments of potential conflict. The difference between the Buddha and ordinary people exists in our tendency to react to trying circumstances and unruly people with distaste, anger, and retaliation, instead of with the kindness and patience that the Buddha offered to everyone, even to those who intentionally brought harm to him.

Emphasized in these stories is the truth that when we do not practice patience, we barricade ourselves from learning the Dharma and from being able to practice it with success. Impatience promotes a rigid, closed mind, while patience creates virtue, wisdom and strength. As we learn and practice the principle of patience, our ability to be deeply affected by the teachings and apply them in our daily lives increases immensely.

In the following stories, we have the opportunity to witness several different people, including the Buddha, embroiled in difficult situations in which they could choose to react with frustration and hate, or patience and tranquility. Generating and employing patience is not easy, but through the Buddha's example and the Buddha's teachings, hearts filled with anger and ignorance become softened. As we can see, even in the most humiliating and defeating moments, such as when vicious insults or fistfuls of dirt are hurled, truth, wisdom and compassion will prevail when patience is practiced.

When You Insult Others, You Insult Yourself

One day, the Buddha put on his robe, took his bowl, and went to Sravasti to beg for alms. Along the way, he encountered a Brahman who began to swear at him angrily. The Buddha ignored the man and continued to walk peacefully. The Buddha's calm and tranquil manner angered the Brahman even more. He grabbed a handful of dirt from the ground and threw it at the Buddha. A sudden gust of wind blew the dirt back on to the Brahman. With his face covered with dirt, the stunned Brahman stood there very embarrassed.

The Buddha said to him kindly, "If someone insults a peaceful, pure person for no reason, that person will reap the consequences of his action."

In the Sutra of Forty-two Sections, the Buddha said, "A wicked man who wants to hurt the virtuous is like someone who raises his head to spit into the sky. The spittle will return and descend upon the person. Likewise, when dust is thrown into the wind, it comes back to where it came from. Virtue cannot be discredited, while evil inevitably destroys itself." This is so easy to understand that we should practice it in our speech and actions.

Truth Will Prevail

Once the Buddha was lecturing in Kausambi. Unfortunately, there were many there who were envious of the sangha. They hired rogues to discredit the Buddha and his followers before the town's people. Under these circumstances, it was very difficult for the Buddha and his disciples to get enough food from their alms rounds. After a while, Ananda spoke to the Buddha, "Lord Buddha! Let us leave this area. We have better places to go."

The Buddha asked him, "What if the next village is just like this one? What will we do? Will we run away again?"

Ananda replied, "We have to resolve our food situation first."

The Buddha said, "No, Ananda, we have to confront difficulties and try to resolve them now. If we keep running away from them, the pain will never cease. We have to patiently wait here until the situation gets better. Then we can go to other places."

Not long after this, the influence of the malicious rogues indeed faded away. After listening to the Buddha's teachings, people were moved and filled with great joy, and all the vicious rumors fell apart. At that time, the Buddha spoke to his disciples, "Evil and virtue, praise and slander, suffering and happiness, all exist in this world. Only those who understand the truth of life will not be disturbed by the eight worldly winds of praise and ridicule, fame and infamy, gain and loss, happiness and suffering. They understand that all phenomena will eventually fade away."

Truth may be ignored temporarily, and evil may prevail for the moment. If you persist with what is right, the truth will prove itself and you will win long-lasting recognition.

Do Not Return Anger with Anger

During his nearly 50 years of teaching the Dharma, the Buddha suffered many attacks and challenges from both Brahmins and adherents of other traditions. In addition, the Buddha also had to face people who were upset that some of their family members had chosen to renounce the household life to join the sangha. During such confrontations, the Buddha was always able to move the family members with his great compassion and wisdom.

One day, a young man from a very wealthy family decided to follow the Buddha and become a monk. His father was enraged and rushed to the Buddha's monastery. Without a single word of greeting, he cursed and yelled while the Buddha listened quietly. After the father grew tired, the Buddha calmly asked him, "Do you often have friends come over to your house, elder?"

"Of course, so what of it?" the father answered curtly.

"I suppose you entertain them with wine and food," the Buddha continued.

"Certainly."

"What if you prepared a banquet and the guests did not accept any of the food, then who would the food belong to?"

"If the guests did not accept the food, I would certainly be the one the food belonged to," the old man replied.

"Then, elder, I decide not to accept your angry words. Please take them back home with you. If I were to use abusive words against you now, I would be like a guest who shared this food with you. No, I will not have any of these dishes." The Buddha continued, "One who has wisdom harbors no hatred. One who uses hatred against hatred and retaliates with an eye for an eye is not wise. On the contrary, if one does not use hatred, one can control oneself and be in harmony with others."

Like thunder echoing in an empty canyon, the Buddha's

words shook the old man. He suddenly realized that the Buddha was a sage with great wisdom, and that was why so many people willingly followed him and became monastics. Reflecting upon his own rude behavior and disrespect towards the Buddha, the old man felt deeply ashamed. He immediately apologized to the Buddha and asked to hear more of the teachings. After hearing the Buddha's teachings, he went home with great joy and supported his son's decision to become a monk. Later the old man also became a devoted follower of the Buddha.



The True Meaning of Patience

Purna was one of the Buddha's ten great disciples. He was a well-known arhat, foremost among those preaching the Dharma. He traveled everywhere spreading the Buddha's teachings. At one time, Purna was planning to go to a largely uncivilized area in the north to spread the teachings. Before leaving, he went to the Buddha to respectfully bid him farewell.

The Buddha praised Purna's courage, but advised him, "Purna, that area is uncivilized; people there are fierce and violent. It will be very difficult to spread the Dharma there. Perhaps you should not go."

Purna replied confidently, "When the people are violent, uneducated and lacking in morality, that is all the more reason to go. Hopefully, they will be nourished by the refreshing rain of the Dharma."

"You are right, but they may not be able to accept the teachings. They may even speak ill of you and curse you," said the Buddha.

Purna answered, "It will be all right as long as they do not beat me."

The Buddha continued, "What if they beat you with sticks and stones?"

"That will be all right. I only hope they do not kill me so I can still spread the Buddha's teachings," answered Purna.

The Buddha then asked, "What if they have no mercy and kill you?"

Purna replied very respectfully, yet with great determination, "Lord Buddha, even if they kill me, I still will have no regrets. I am your disciple. I am happy to have the opportunity to give up my life for the sake of truth. I will honestly thank those people for helping me fulfill my wish to spread the Buddha's teachings."

The Buddha praised Purna's willingness to sacrifice his

own life for the sake of truth and for his resolve to spread the Dharma with such perseverance and patience. Thus, the Buddha granted Purna permission to go on his journey.

As stated in the *Sutra of the Teachings Bequeathed by the Buddha*, "The virtue derived from patience is far beyond the virtue of upholding the precepts and practicing asceticism. One who is steeped in patience is considered a great man with unparalleled fortitude." Patience is not passive. Being patient does not imply simply accepting or inviting poor treatment. Patience represents wisdom, strength, and the readiness to shoulder responsibilities. People who truly understand the meaning of patience will put the benefit of others before their own and will not regret making any sacrifice. Purna was a wise man who truly understood the meaning of patience.



The Virtue of Patience

Before renouncing worldly life to become the Buddha, Prince Siddhartha was given a son by Princess Yasodhara. This son was named Rahula, which means "hindrance." At a young age Rahula joined the sangha under Sariputra's guidance. Being young, Rahula was prone to misbehaving.

After the Buddha reprimanded Rahula for his misbehavior, Rahula stayed near his teacher Sariputra and followed his instructions carefully. Rahula made great progress in cultivation.

Sariputra always took Rahula along when the Buddha was teaching the Dharma. Whenever Sariputra was meditating, Rahula would sit next to him quietly. When Sariputra was out spreading the Buddha's teachings, he would also take Rahula along to learn from experience. While begging for alms, Rahula would always follow behind his teacher. Within the sangha, Sariputra's reputation for virtue and cultivation was second only to that of the Buddha. Therefore, he was an excellent teacher for Rahula.

One day, Rahula and Sariputra were in the city of Rajagriha begging alms. They encountered a hoodlum. The hoodlum threw sand into Rahula's bowl and hit him on the head with a stick. While blood was dripping down Rahula's face, the hoodlum mocked him scornfully, "You monks are always surviving by begging for alms. You are always talking about compassion and patience. Now that I've smashed your head, we'll see how patient you really are."

Upset, the seventeen-year-old Rahula gritted his teeth but remained silent. Sariputra consoled him by saying, "Since you are the Buddha's disciple, you should have patience. You should not harbor any hateful thoughts, and you should always show compassion to every being. The Buddha teaches us not to become proud when we are honored and not to become hateful when we are humiliated. Therefore, Rahula,

you should control your anger and maintain your patience. No one is more courageous than the one who is patient. Among all virtues in the universe, none is greater than patience!"

After listening to Sariputra's advice, Rahula walked silently to the riverbank, washed the blood off his face, and bandaged the wound with a piece of cloth. Seeing this, Sariputra felt comforted, yet he was still saddened by the incident.

Rahula continued to walk patiently and silently behind his teacher. When they were returning to the monastery, Rahula said to Sariputra, "I no longer mind the pain, but there is too much violence and wickedness in the people of this world. I am not angry at this world, but it just occurs to me that we may not be able to bring the Buddha's message to everyone. The Buddha teaches us to be compassionate and kind to people. However, many violent people mistreat us. Although practicing patience brings merit, foolish and ignorant people look down on us. Instead they respect cold-hearted people more. People reject the Buddha's compassionate teachings as if they were dealing with foul-smelling corpses. The heaven rains sweet nectar for the pigs, yet the pigs would rather eat stinky food and live in the mud. The Dharma preached by the Buddha will not have any effect on people who choose to be violent and mean."

This was the first time that Rahula had ever shared his reflections on the world, or given any indication of the fruits of his cultivation. Sariputra was delighted and recounted the incident to the Buddha. The Buddha was also pleased with Rahula. He commended Rahula's attitude towards the hoodlum and affirmed his view of the world.

The Buddha further emphasized, "People who do not understand patience will not benefit from the Dharma. Those who harbor anger and hatred toward others are straying from

the Dhamma and the Sangha. As a result, they will fall into the evil realms. When we can bear the malicious conduct of others, we will avoid misfortune and gain both peace and tranquility. People with wisdom have penetrating insight into the causes and effects of all things. They practice patience and are able to overcome their anger. People who lack wisdom are not able to accept the essence of these teachings. Physical, mental and emotional satisfaction is regarded as precious by the world while the Dhamma is regarded as inferior. In reality, however, they are all impermanent. Many worldly people find it difficult to practice the wholesome teachings of compassion and kindness. People with wicked habits are uncomfortable exercising good behavior. People with strong desires do not like a life without them. Under these circumstances, practitioners have to exercise patience. Patience is the element that can enrich our cultivation and allow us to attain enlightenment. Patience is like a ship on the ocean: it can ferry us to the other shore and liberate us from suffering. Patience is an antidote for disease; it will save our lives. I was able to become the Buddha and earn respect from all beings because the precious cultivation of patience has made my mind peaceful and tranquil."

Rahula had been beaten and bloodied for no reason. But the fact that he could practice patience like a sage, even at his youthful age, brought happiness to both the Buddha and Sariputra. Due to Rahula's unfortunate experience, the Buddha delivered a valuable lesson on the practice of patience, a lesson that greatly moved Sariputra. Afterwards, Rahula tearfully thanked the Buddha for his encouragement.

Patience Is the Greatest Force

Once, while travelling in Magadha, the Buddha entered the territory of the King of the Ghosts, who was busy meeting with other spirits when the Buddha arrived. A ghost ran to tell the king, "Congratulations! Tonight the Buddha will stay with you. You are going to have great blessings!"

The king said, "To me, he is only a stranger. Let me check to see if he really is the Buddha or just an average mortal."

The king immediately went home. When he saw the Buddha, he yelled "Monk! Get out of my place!" Peacefully the Buddha stepped out of the king's home. As the Buddha was leaving, the Ghost King yelled again, "Monk! Come back!" The Buddha was a humble sage, so he entered the hall again without complaint. The Ghost King ordered the Buddha back and forth three times. A fourth time he yelled, "Monk! Get out of here!"

This time the Buddha answered, "King of the Ghosts, you have asked me to leave three times. I am not going to step out again."

The king said, "Well, you may stay as you wish, but I am going to ask you several questions. If you cannot give me satisfactory answers, I will tear your chest open, let the blood gush from the wound, and then throw you into the Ganges River."

"Ask whatever you like. You will be happy with my answers," said the Buddha.

The King of the Ghosts asked, "How can one attain peace and happiness? How can one obtain a good reputation? How can one cross the river of hindrance? How can one travel over the sea of suffering? How can one end all suffering? How can one gain peace of mind?"

The Buddha answered kindly, "Practicing the Dharma can bring you peace and happiness. Upholding the precepts can earn you a good reputation. Belief will enable you to cross all

rivers of hindrance. Not being self-indulgent and willful can liberate you from the sea of suffering. Diligent cultivation can end all suffering. Wisdom can secure you peace of mind."

The King of the Ghosts was happy to hear such enlightening answers. From then on, he pledged to follow the Buddha and uphold the Dharma.

What is the greatest force in this world? It is the patience to endure humiliation. The Buddha said, "If a practitioner cannot readily endure slander, humiliation and ridicule, he will not be a person of great moral fortitude." All the brute force and weapons in the world, though intimidating, cannot truly conquer people. Only patience and perseverance can persuade the stubborn. Those who are unable to endure humiliation cannot perfect their cultivation.

Being Humble and Patient, One Gains Longevity

One day a child of about six came to see the Buddha. The child asked, "Great Lord Buddha, please give me longevity."

"Little child, why do you ask for longevity at such a young age?" asked the Buddha kindly.

The child answered respectfully, "A fortuneteller told me once that I would have both merit and wisdom, but not many years of life. Lord Buddha, with your kindness, please show me a way to prolong my life."

The Buddha replied, "Good little child, all of your suffering and happiness are the result of your past good and bad deeds. You should know that no one but yourself has control over this." The Buddha added, "My sweet child, to ensure a long and peaceful life, you must be humble, patient, and respectful to people."

The child followed the Buddha's instructions. From then on, the child was humble, patient, and respectful in his everyday life. Several months later, a ghost who had been harboring a grudge against this child from a previous life transformed himself into a Brahman. He came to see the child, intending to kill him out of revenge. The child, not knowing the Brahman's motive, treated the ghost with due respect. The ghost was quite surprised and thought to himself, "This child is so kind and benevolent. How can I kill such a child? I should let those who are respectful receive the same respect from others and those who are humble and patient be happy and blessed." At that moment, all of his hatred and anger dissipated. He then bid farewell to the child and never returned.

By being humble, patient, and respectful, the child avoided a destiny of calamity and was able to live a long life. This shows us that if we can follow the Buddha's teachings and be humble and patient, we can transform people through virtue.

True Victory Comes from Practicing Patience

Once, while teaching the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* to the assembly, the Buddha could see that Subhuti was close to eradicating his attachment to self and other. In order to further invigorate Subhuti's efforts, the Buddha recounted an instance from one of his former existences that illustrated the benefit of "giving with no expectations or any feeling of gratification" and "liberating all beings without any idea of self."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, once in one of my previous lives I cultivated alone in the forest. I was practicing sitting meditation under a tree, contemplating the subtlety of the universe and the origination of things. I was surrounded by the fragrance of blossoming flowers carried on a gentle breeze. Suddenly, the sound of joyful laughter made me open my eyes. In front of me there were several well-dressed ladies, clothed in imperial attire and adorned with glittering jewels, giving the impression that they must be celestial goddesses or the wives of noblemen.

"Hand in hand they walked up to me and asked, 'Cultivated one, why are you meditating in such a remote mountain forest by yourself? Aren't you afraid that tigers and wolves may harm you?'

"Sitting up straight, I nodded to them and replied, 'Honorable ladies, I am indeed the only person meditating in this forest. One does not need any company to cultivate. If one is kind, even venomous snakes and fierce animals will do no harm. In the cities, wealth, sex, tyrants, and power-mongers are just like the fierce animals in the forest.'

"Abruptly, the ladies gave up their flirtatious ways and humbly requested that I teach them the Dharma. I picked a tiny red flower and continued, 'Ladies, life ought to be a pursuit of happiness. Happiness, however, may be of the true or

false type, or of the permanent or transient type. Unfortunately, people are often fooled by false and transient happiness. Look at this little red flower; its fragrance and beauty will not last forever. You cannot rely on youth, beauty, physical strength, or health. Cultivation provides meaning in one's life; it can elevate your spiritual growth and expand your outlook on life. This is what is most important in life.'

"While I was speaking to the women, a man in kingly attire rushed out of the shrub with a sword. He came up to me and shouted, 'Who are you? I am King Kalinga! How dare you flirt with my concubines!'

"Confronted by his rude manners, I replied calmly, 'Your Majesty, it is unbecoming to treat a stranger in this manner.'

"'Why did my name not strike terror in your heart? How dare you seduce my concubines!'

"'Your Majesty, please do not say that. Practicing patience is one of my disciplines for my cultivation. I will not say anything in response. However, you have created bad karma by your speech and will face negative consequences in the future.'

"'So, you are practicing your disciplines. Let me cut apart your body and we'll see how well you hold onto your practice.'

"Subhuti, although my eyes were plucked out, and my ears, nose, hands, too, were cut off, yet there was no hatred in my heart because I was determined to liberate all beings and practice compassion. In the spirit of saving all beings, without any notion of self, I gradually accumulated the wisdom and merit to attain Buddhahood. King Kalinga has long since fallen into an evil realm. I, steeped in the practice of patience, was able to progress towards Buddhahood. Subhuti, those who

use violence will not win. Through their evil actions they undermine their own intentions. Only those who can practice patience are able to attain the ultimate peace of liberation."

Upon listening to this story, Subhuti was deeply moved, attained realization of the truth of non-self and understood the impermanence of all phenomena.

Lacking patience and the ability to endure humiliation, it is impossible to succeed in the practice of the Dharma.

Kill Hatred Not People

There once was a Brahman whose daughter was full of anger and hatred. His troublesome daughter constantly irritated and enraged him. Once he was so furious that he thought of killing her to eliminate his troubles. As he pondered the idea, he reconsidered and thought to himself, "Maybe I should visit the Buddha first and seek his advice. The Buddha may help me resolve my problems."

So he went to see the Buddha and asked, "What kind of people can I kill and still be free of guilt? What method can I use so that I can be worry-free? What kind of people can I kill to earn your praise?"

"That is simple," replied the Buddha. "You must keep this in mind. Killing your thoughts of hatred and anger will give you a peaceful mind and earn my praise."

When people anger easily, tragic events often occur. In this world, no matter how irritating and malicious a person is, he or she does not deserve to be killed. Only thoughts of hatred and anger should be killed, not people.

WJJI Diligent Effort

Some people practice with great diligence, approaching each moment with sincere effort and determination. Others drift through life with no purpose or will, allowing opportunities to develop their character and to help others simply slip away. It can hardly be said that the results of these two behaviors are the same. With diligent effort, anything is possible! As evidenced in these stories, diligent effort has the power to end brutal wars, generate a favorable and precious human birth, halt a ravaging epidemic, and elevate us to our full potential. Lack of effort and hard work creates a life full of regrets and squandered potential, and gives rise to negative karma that impacts our future lives for years to come.

The following stories vividly demonstrate the positive results of diligent effort and the negative results of idleness. In one story, we encounter a devastated, sorrowful and desperate elderly couple that misused their youth, rendering them destitute and pitiful in their advanced age. How might their situation have differed if they had worked hard and cultivated with diligent effort in their younger years? The Buddha explains to us what a promising life they could have lived. In another story, we witness the bountiful fruits of diligent effort, as a young man accomplishes more in one lifetime than four average people combined typically achieve. He was not a superhero, only a man who understood that with diligent effort, anything is possible.

Another focus of this section is how diligent effort is related to precious human birth. The Buddha teaches us that it is extremely difficult to be reborn as humans. Without diligent effort in cultivation, we may not gain the human rebirth again. In one tale, a meander-

ing ocean turtle demonstrates the rarity of human rebirth. In another, even a toad is reborn into a heavenly realm due to his intent focus on the teachings. From creatures great and small, and through the Buddha's wondrous words, we are taught to seize the present moment to diligently cultivate. May these stories encourage you to delay no longer in striving to reach your fullest potential!



Four Types of Horses

When the Buddha resided at the Karanda-venuvana in Rajagriha, he observed some bhiksus practicing very diligently, while others were idle and lazy. The Buddha used this occasion to explain the teachings and bring joy to the assembly.

"There are four types of horses in Rajagriha. The first type knows to speed up when it sees the shadow of its master's whip. It is keenly aware of its surroundings and can anticipate the driver's command. The second type knows to speed up when its master's whip lightly touches the hair on its flank. It can feel the driver's command. The third type speeds up only when its master's whip strikes its body. It obeys orders when it feels pain. The fourth type becomes alert and begins to walk slowly only when its master pokes it with a spike and it feels extreme pain."

A bhiksu seated in front of the Buddha said, "Lord Buddha, I understand now. Among these four types of horses, the first type is the best."

"Very good, bhiksu. Now that you have understood that the first type of horse is the best, you should also know that people can be divided into four categories, just like the horses." The Buddha then explained the four types of people: "The first type of person feels terrified when they hear of another's illness and death. They know that life exists only with each breath. Everyday they practice diligently and keep their thoughts in accord with right view. The second type feels terrified when they see someone become ill and die. Only then do they practice diligently and keep their thoughts in accord with right view. The third type feels the impermanence of life only after they see their family members become ill, grow old and die. Only then do they practice diligently and keep their thoughts in accord with right view. The fourth type begins to practice diligently and keep their thoughts in accord with

right view only when they themselves are seriously ill and facing death.

"Bhiksus, which type would you rather be?" the Buddha asked as he concluded his lecture.

All the bhiksus vowed to be either the first or the second type of person, not the third or the fourth. From then on, they all concentrated on right mindfulness and practiced diligently. They were filled with gratitude to the Buddha and revered him as their great teacher.

The Importance of Diligent Effort

One day, as the Buddha travelled with his monks, he asked Ananda to explain the teachings to the other monks. Ananda chose to emphasize the importance and merit of diligent effort in his talk. After Ananda finished, the Buddha asked him, "Ananda, did you praise the virtue of diligent effort?"

"Yes, Lord Buddha, I did praise the virtue of diligent effort," answered Ananda. "Diligent effort is worthy of praise. When one works hard to perform wholesome deeds uninterrupted, it is called diligent effort. Diligent effort is not only essential for attaining Buddhahood but it is also necessary for the pursuit of worldly knowledge and success in daily life. All successes come from hard work. One cannot succeed by being lazy and self-indulgent. Diligent effort is praiseworthy."

When Ananda finished speaking, the Buddha looked at him in agreement and told the monks, "A lazy person will earn no riches. A lazy monk cannot break through the cycle of birth and death. All great accomplishments come as a result of diligent effort."

Diligent effort is one aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path. There are four types of effort to which the Buddha exhorts us. The first is the effort to bring what is good into existence. The second is to maintain and increase the good that already exists. The third is the effort to prevent what is unwholesome from arising. The fourth effort is to eliminate existing unwholesomeness. As written in *The Mahaprajna-paramita Sutra*, the practice of diligent effort is the foundation of all wholesome deeds. Diligent effort promotes all paths of cultivation, even enlightenment.

Human Birth Is Precious

There is a quotation from a sutra that says: "Although it is difficult to be born as a human in the cycle of birth and death, we are now humans in this life. Although it is rare to hear the Buddha's teachings, we have heard them in this life. If we do not now liberate ourselves from suffering in this precious life as humans, in what future life will we have another chance to do so?" How difficult is it to be reborn as a human?

One day the Buddha asked his bhiksus, "If the entire earth had become a vast ocean, and there were a blind sea turtle in this vast ocean that had lived for an infinite number of kalpas (an extremely long period of time), once every hundred years, this turtle would raise its head above the surface of the waves. In this ocean there was a drifting log with a single hole just large enough for the turtle's head. What are the chances that the turtle would surface at the right spot so that his head would go right through the hole in the log when he came up for air? Once every hundred years? How difficult would that be?"

Ananda answered, "Very difficult, Lord Buddha. The turtle might be on the east side of the ocean while the log might be floating on the west side. When both the turtle and the log move about in this vast ocean without any set direction, the chance of the turtle encountering the log is extremely minute."

The Buddha said to Ananda, "Although the blind turtle and the log were far apart, it was sometimes still possible for them to come across each other. However, for those foolish and ignorant people who are caught in the cycle of birth and death and bob up and down in the sea of suffering, it is far more difficult for them to be reborn as humans again than it is for the turtle to fit its head right through the hole."

"Lord Buddha, why is that?" asked Ananda.

"Many people do not act justly, lawfully, wholesomely or truly. They harm each other, the strong bully the weak, engen-

dering immeasurable bad karma. Bhiksus, such beings do not understand the Four Noble Truths—suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way to end suffering. In order to avoid this woeful future from befalling you, you need to practice the Dharma diligently."

After listening to the Buddha's teachings, the bhiksus realized how precious human birth is and that they should devote themselves to cultivation diligently according to the Way.

As the Buddha once said, "The chance of being a human is as minuscule as the dirt caught under our nails, while the chance of losing our human existence is as great as all the dirt on the earth." As humans, we should use our time here in this life to diligently cultivate precepts, meditation and wisdom, and thus attain Buddhahood.



Work Hard When You Are Young

One morning, Ananda accompanied the Buddha on his way to teach the Dharma in Sravasti. Along the way, they saw a very old couple in worn-out clothes, kneeling in front of a fire beside a garbage pile. Their eyes were full of sorrow and desperation.

Later on the Buddha asked Ananda, "Did you see that old couple?"

"Yes, Lord Buddha," answered Ananda.

The Buddha then related to Ananda the nature of cause and condition. "If the couple had started working hard to establish a business during their youth, they would have been the richest people in Sravasti by now. Or, if they had renounced the household life to join the monastics to learn the Dharma and cultivated diligently, they would have attained arhatship. If they had continued to work diligently in adulthood, they would have been rich or have attained the holy fruit of non-returners. If they had consistently worked diligently during their middle age years, they would have lived comfortably or have attained the holy fruit of once-returners. If they had worked tirelessly during their old age, they would have been self-sufficient or have attained the holy fruit of stream-entrants. Now, at an advanced age, they have unfortunately accomplished nothing; they have lived neither a peaceful life nor attained any level of cultivation."

The Buddha continued, "If people do not cultivate diligently according to the teachings, or work hard in worldly matters during their youth, when they get older they will be like old swans living out the last years of their life in an empty pond. Then they will spend their remaining years dragging around a worn-out body and grieving over unfulfilled potential.

"Therefore, Ananda, people should cherish the time of their youth, and all stages of their lives, using them wisely.

Present idleness can only be the cause of future regret. It is never too early to begin cultivating oneself." The tone in the Buddha's voice was full of compassion for all sentient beings.

Human or Bovine Potential

There once was a butcher who raised a thousand cows. Everyday he would slaughter one to sell. After five hundred days, there were only five hundred cows remaining. The cows continued to play on the ranch, not knowing that their death loomed ahead.

One day the Buddha passed by the ranch and saw the cows. He felt great pity upon seeing their predicament, and said to his disciples, "How foolish and ignorant these cows are! They watch their playmates disappear one by one, yet they are unaware of approaching death and still play happily."

Looking at the cows, the Buddha sighed, "Actually, not only are cows foolish and ignorant; humans are the same. A cow on the way to the slaughterhouse, each step it takes is a step closer to death. Likewise for humans, each passing day is one day closer to the final moment of one's life. Life is as fleeting as a bolt of lightning or the spark from a flint. How can we not hurry to cultivate ourselves to attain liberation?"

How precious is this human life of ours? By understanding and diligently cultivating the Way humans are the most precious among all sentient beings. However, if we are lazy and self-indulgent, then human life will be no different from that of a cow. It is our decision to take control of our lives; do you want to be a human or a cow?

Heavenly Rebirth

The great compassionate Buddha, the benevolent one and great teacher of all, always had concern for all sentient beings, especially those who had yet to be liberated from the sea of suffering. Therefore, he often taught the Dharma along the banks of the Ganges River.

Whenever the Buddha expounded the Dharma, all beings, including earthly and celestial, nagas, ghosts, birds, and animals, came to listen. It is said that the Buddha spoke in a universal voice that all beings could comprehend.

One day an old toad was listening intently to the Buddha's teachings. An old man with a cane squeezed into the crowd. He accidentally rested his cane on the toad's back. The toad was so focused on the Buddha's voice that he did not feel the cane on his back. Unfortunately, the toad was crushed when the old man moved the cane to support himself.

Where did the toad go after death? Incredibly, at the moment of his death, the toad was listening so intently that he comprehended the profound meaning of the Buddha's teachings. With the resulting merit and blessings, even though the physical body was dead, the toad was immediately reborn as a celestial being in one of the heavens. After being reborn as a celestial being, he used the divine eye to observe his past life. He discovered that he was a toad in his previous life and that, with the help of listening to the Buddha's teachings and the Buddha's power, he was reborn in heaven. He then descended from the sky and scattered flowers on the toad's carcass. He was thankful that the toad did not look down on himself and that it understood the importance of listening to the Buddha's teachings.

If a toad can be reborn in heaven by listening to the Buddha's teachings, how can humans not do the same?

The Origin of the Buddhist Mala

While the Buddha was residing and teaching at Grdhrakuta, there was a small country nearby that was frequently invaded by its larger neighboring countries. At the same time, a raging epidemic was ravaging the poor country. The people were suffering terribly, and their king was extremely worried.

One day the king quietly paid a visit to the Buddha. He asked the Buddha how to cultivate so that he could bring relief from these sufferings and worries. The Buddha strung together 108 wooden beads into a mala, which means garland of beads. Then, he taught the king to recite the Buddha's name in his mind for each bead, moving along the string of beads until he had completed the entire mala 200,000 times. With body and mind focused, he would naturally become tranquil and happy.

The Buddha gave the mala to the king, who received it joyfully. Upon returning to the palace, the king made thousands of malas and distributed them to his relatives and subjects. Throughout the day, the king held the string of beads in his hands and recited the Buddha's name. Citizens everywhere also began to do the same. A short time later, the warfare miraculously ceased and the epidemic ended. From then on, the king became even more diligent in his cultivation of the Way, and the country was filled with tranquility and peace.

This is the origin of the Buddhist mala.



Diligent Effort Is the Seed of Wealth

Devadatta, an ambitious monk and the Buddha's own cousin, convinced Ajatasatru to kill his own father, King Bimbisara of Magadha, just to ascend to the throne more quickly. For his illicit help, every day Devadatta received five hundred carts of food offerings from King Ajatasatru. When the Buddha learned of this, he said, "Those who have many greedy thoughts will soon have many worries and troubles. Those who spend too much time taking care of excessive possessions will not have time for cultivation. In particular, for those who take more food than they can eat, this is not only wasteful but will also harm their merit and blessings."

Upon hearing this, Ananda was greatly concerned. He said, "Lord Buddha, I fear that our benefactors may claim that all of the monks are living in excessive luxury."

The Buddha said without hesitation, "We should have rules. A family has rules, so too does a country. We should not allow members who are lazy and who are trying to escape reality to be in the Sangha. Such brethren should be dealt with according to the rules of the Sangha."

Ananda persisted, "But how can we cultivate diligently?"

The Buddha replied, "In this world, a household accumulates wealth through hard work. We should work as focused as ants and as diligently as bees. By doing so, we can establish a peaceful, wealthy and happy world. We should not depend on other people, waiting to receive their charity. There is no difference between the giving of material goods and the giving of the Dharma. Lay devotees offer material goods such as food, while the monastics offer the teaching of the Dharma. In this way both sides are benefited. If the monastics only seek fame and offerings but do not vow to teach the Dharma, they will definitely end up with negative retribution."

The Buddha's words were like a wake-up call to those disciples who initially were envious of Devadatta.



Overcoming Oneself

Once there was a man who decided to renounce the worldly life to cultivate as a bhiksu under the Buddha's guidance. The bhiksu's parents were very unhappy about his decision and would not stop trying to persuade him to give up his renunciation. They continually tried to shake his resolve by tempting him with the joy of family affection and the prospects of material wealth. As a result, the young bhiksu was constantly torn between his love for his family and his strong conviction in the Dharma.

After much thought, the young bhiksu finally summoned up enough courage to do something about the situation. He went to the Buddha and asked how to overcome the worry inside his mind. The Buddha told him this story:

There once was a sage who had started life as a farmer. For a long while he worked very hard in his fields. Later he left his farm to become a monk, yet he was unable to adjust to monastic living. Eventually he gave up being a monk and returned to farming. Farming, however, was very difficult, and again the man left home to lead a monastic life. Unfortunately, he still could not adapt to the rigorous routine of daily observances and the diligent practice of meditation. Since he felt unable to live a pure and simple life of cultivation, he decided to return to worldly life again. Back and forth, he switched between the two livelihoods, now a monk, now a farmer. He was unable to stay in either one long enough and consequently unable to achieve any success. During the entire time, the Buddha remained patient and compassionate, and always allowed the man to change his mind, over and over.

Finally, on one occasion after he had been a monk for quite a long time and had not thought of giving up, he saw a hoe that he had previously used as a farmer, and his mind was stirred. He recalled his life as a farmer, when he would begin

working at dawn and rest at sunset, living a rather carefree life. Tempted by these thoughts, he took the hoe and set out for his old farm. Before he realized it, he had reached the edge of a river. As he looked into the river, he had a realization, "This hoe has made me switch between farming and being a monk so many times. Isn't life too short to waste? Today I have decided never to return to worldly life again." Resolutely, he threw the hoe into the river. The hoe quickly sank, leaving behind only ripples on the surface of the water. As the hoe sank, all his struggles and doubts vanished with it, and he felt liberated.

At that very moment, a boat was sailing up the river, carrying a king and his soldiers returning victoriously from war. The monk called out, "Although you have won the war and defeated your enemy, still you were unable to overcome yourself. Today, I have finally overcome the toughest of foes and have overcome myself. When I cast away the hoe, I let go of all attachments and overcame my internal struggles. Now I truly am a victor."

Then the Buddha kindly said to the troubled young monk, "The worst enemy is not outside of ourselves but our own greed, anger, delusion and affliction. To cultivate is to battle against our own defilements. Only those who can conquer themselves are the true victors."

After listening to the Buddha's story, the young monk understood and vowed to become a great man.

Four Sons

There once was a woman who was a very devout devotee of the Buddha. Every morning she prostrated herself before the Buddha and was never negligent or lazy in her practice. One day she invited the Buddha to her home to receive offerings. The Buddha understood her intention and asked, "You wish to make offerings. What kind of merit do you wish to receive?"

The woman replied respectfully, "If there is merit, I wish to have four sons."

The Buddha asked, "Why do you ask for four sons?"

"Lord Buddha, if I have four sons, I hope that they will fulfill my wishes when they grow up. I wish that the eldest would go into business and earn a lot of money, that the second son would farm and have great harvests of wheat and rice every year, that the third son would study and become a government official to glorify our family, and that the fourth son would practice the Dharma and attain enlightenment to help his parents and all people. Then all my wishes would be fulfilled."

After hearing her words, the Buddha said, "Cultivate accordingly and your merit will come to fruition."

The woman made her offerings to the Buddha happily. She later became pregnant and gave birth to a boy. Unlike other children, this boy was very intelligent from an early age and his parents loved him very much. Although the woman had wished for four sons she did not have any more children. Thus the boy received all of his mother's love and attention.

One day, the boy's mother told him about her offering and her wish for four sons. The boy always remembered her story. When he grew up, he first learned to run a business. With his cleverness and intelligence, he brought in much wealth in less than a year. His parents were overjoyed. Then he stopped doing business and turned to farming. With his diligent effort,

his land produced twice the usual harvest. All the neighbors praised him. Now the family not only had money, but grain as well. He then proceeded to fulfill his mother's third wish by becoming a government official and thereby glorifying the family. Being a talented person, he quickly became a high-ranking official. There certainly were very few worries once the son reached his high position and the family was wealthy. However, the son was still not satisfied. A year later, he told his mother, "Mother, I have already fulfilled three of your wishes. There is only one left. If I leave home now and become a monk, all your wishes will be completely fulfilled."

The woman understood her son's request to leave home to fulfill her final wish. Her son happily bid farewell to his mother and asked the Buddha to allow him to join the Sangha. With the guidance of the Buddha's teachings, his own merit and diligent practice, he soon became a great arhat. He later returned home to help his parents and his family to attain enlightenment. From then on, he preached the Dharma to benefit and help all beings.

Seize the Moment

One day a Brahman came to Jetavana Monastery in Sravasti to visit the Buddha and to request the teachings. The Brahman asked, "Lord Buddha, how many Buddhas will there be in the future?"

The Buddha told the Brahman, "There will be as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River."

Upon hearing this, the Brahman thought aloud, "If there will be as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, I should be able to follow one of them and cultivate pure living." So he happily bid farewell to the Buddha and left.

Halfway home the Brahman thought, "I only asked the Buddha how many Buddhas there will be in the future. I did not ask how many there were in the past." He immediately returned to Jetavana and asked the Buddha.

The Buddha answered, "There were as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River."

The Brahman thought, "In the past there were as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River. I did not meet and learn from any of them. In the future, there will be as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River. I may still be unable to meet and learn from them. Does this mean I will miss the chance to learn and practice the Dharma in all of my many lives? If this is true, I should treasure this opportunity and learn from the current Buddha."

Therefore the Brahman returned to the Buddha and expressed his wish to become a monk. The Buddha assented, saying, "You may leave home to join the monastics and practice the Dharma according to the doctrine and rules." Not too long after that, the Brahman attained arhatship by diligently following the teachings.

"It is difficult to be reborn as a human; it is rare to

hear the Buddha's teachings." We should seize the moment to learn the teachings now. We should not waste time waiting for the perfect conditions because many opportunities may pass us by.



JN Meditation as Path of Cultivation

Meditation is one of many paths of cultivation that Buddhism teaches. Considering the Buddha's own process of awakening, we know that it was through prolonged sitting meditation under a bodhi tree that he eventually attained true enlightenment. Through this example, we can quite easily believe that the practice of meditation is beneficial and helps us to make progress in our spiritual development. However, meditation is gradual and not easy, and we tend to become impatient and anxious for results.

In the following stories, we encounter several examples of practitioners advancing in their spiritual development through meditation, but not without proper and substantial effort, and not without experiencing some setbacks in the beginning. Some practitioners become restless or fall asleep, others become angry and distracted as they practice, still others enter into the practice with uneasiness and awkwardness. We, too, in our meditation practice may experience discomfort, distractions, and even irritation as we attempt to embark on this path of spiritual cultivation. We may find comfort, however, in the following stories in which the Buddha shows us how to settle our minds, and how to regard meditation practice the way a farmer cultivates his fields. Like carefully tilling the land and planting seeds, only through the gradual passage of time and the commitment of effort can we produce a good harvest. We must have patience and tolerance for meditation to be effective.

In addition, we are introduced to the power of meditation in the

following stories. Incredible things can happen and terrible wickedness can be averted through the strength and merit of pure concentration. With persistence and perseverance in our meditation practice, we can better comprehend and practice the Dharma.



The Gradual Way to Progress in Meditation

Every evening the bhiksus living in the Jetavana Monastery practiced sitting meditation. After the meditation session the Buddha often talked about the benefits of meditation or the meaning of meditative concentration, so that the bhiksus would be able to progress properly without going astray.

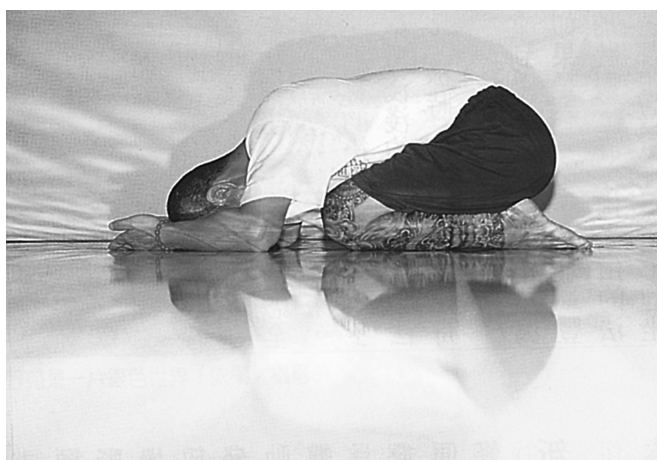
One evening, some of the new monks were having difficulty applying the master's instructions effectively, no matter how hard they tried. Bothered by their ineffectiveness, some showed their concern on their faces, some were restless, while others became drowsy and fell asleep.

While in meditation, the Buddha used his spiritual power to observe his disciples' states of mind. When he saw the situation, he immediately came out of meditation and addressed the young bhiksus, "Meditation is just like the work of a farmer cultivating his field. Some time after planting the seeds, the seeds will begin to grow, blossom, and eventually bear fruit. Only after the fruit ripens can the farmer reap the harvest. Sitting meditation is like tilling the land. You need to practice it step by step, not too fast and not too slow, and gradually you will make progress. As a result, your spiritual power will naturally grow. This is the way to progress in sitting meditation."

The troubled disciples finally understood the nature of gradual cultivation in sitting meditation. One of the disciples stood up and addressed the Buddha, "Lord Buddha, if we can practice diligently everyday in the way you described, we will never regress in our aspiration to cultivate ourselves according to the Way. We will definitely attain liberation."

The Buddha then delivered this earnest advice, "Well said, my fellow bhiksus! One should cultivate diligently in

sitting meditation just as a farmer cares for his land. Proper cultivation requires frequent irrigation with the Dharma water of right understanding and right view. One must continually remove the weeds of erroneous views and strive diligently so that a great harvest may be reaped."



Progress in Cultivation Depends on Personal Effort

After the Buddha attained enlightenment, he returned to his native town of Kapilavastu. It happened to be time to shave his head, so his disciples looked for a barber to do the shaving. Among the Sudras, the lowest caste of society, there lived a barber named Upali. He was a very good barber. He would later become one of the Buddha's ten great disciples, distinguished for upholding the precepts. He was recommended to be the Buddha's barber.

Upali was very apprehensive when he heard that he was going to shave the head of the most venerable Buddha. He was hesitant, so he went home to speak to his mother about his concerns. His mother encouraged him, "The Buddha is an enlightened sage of great wisdom. He will not look down on you for being a member of the Sudras. Let me accompany you to see the Buddha." Upali was like a small child with stage fright. Encouraged and urged on by his mother, he anxiously began to shave the Buddha's head.

Upali carefully picked up the razor and intensely concentrated on shaving the Buddha's head. Standing by Upali's side, his mother asked the Buddha, "Lord Buddha, what do you think about Upali's technique?"

"His lower back seems to be bent," said the Buddha.

Upali was particularly careful because he was cutting the Buddha's hair. Trying to be respectful and humble, he had bent his lower back. Upon hearing the Buddha's reply, he quickly straightened his lower back. At this moment, he entered the first dhyana, the first level of meditation. Like finishing a child's game and moving to adulthood, Upali had advanced his level of attainment. After a while, his mother asked the Buddha again, "How does Upali look now?"

"Now his body seems to be too stiff," the Buddha replied.

Upali thought he should not be too nervous and so relaxed his body and mind, but still concentrated completely on the shave. At this time, he entered the second dhyana.

A little while later, his mother asked, "Lord Buddha, how is Upali doing now?"

The Buddha said, "His inhalation and exhalation with each breath are too heavy."

Upali immediately adjusted his breathing so it would not generate any sound or be too heavy. With this calm and even breathing he entered the third dhyana.

His mother asked the Buddha again, "Lord Buddha, how is Upali doing now?"

The Buddha turned to the disciples beside him and said, "Goodness! Upali has entered the fourth dhyana. His mind is now free of all thoughts. Hurry! Take the razor out of his hand and hold on to him so that he does not fall down."

The crowd removed the razor from Upali's hand. Upali was completely in the state of the fourth dhyana. In the fourth level of dhyana, one's mind is totally free of thoughts and is in harmony with the emptiness of the universe, no longer affected by differentiation.

Due to his attention to details, Upali was able to attain the fourth dhyana while cutting hair. Later he joined the monastics and became one of Buddha's ten great disciples. Upali came from a humble background and was born poor, but he was not treated differently from those disciples who were from affluent families with noble upbringings. Everyone is equal in the Buddha's monastic assembly. It is easy to see that the Buddha promoted true equality when one hears of how Upali left his household life to join the monastics, eventually attaining arhatship.

It is very difficult to bring about complete equality in all walks of life in any society. How can the poor be equal to the rich? How can the ignorant be equal to the wise? How can the elderly be equal to the young? In society, people have various occupations and widely diverse ways of living. It is not easy to achieve equality. In contrast, when people come to the Buddha, they are equal, regardless of their age, gender, social status, or wealth. Any differences they may manifest are only according to their own cultivation and practice.

The Power of Meditation

Once Sariputra, one of the Buddha's leading disciples, was practicing meditation on Mount Grdhrakuta. While in a deep state of samadhi, he was visited by two local spirits, one good and one evil. The first spirit was Upogalo and the second was Kalaka. From a distance, both spirits saw Sariputra sitting with his legs crossed in the lotus position. The evil Kalaka said to the good Upogalo, "Today I will strike this monk in the head and kill him."

"Hush! You should not say such things. This monk is the Buddha's disciple. He ranks first among the disciples in wisdom. Because of his penetration of emptiness, he has great power and virtue. If you try to hurt him, you will descend into the hells for eons and suffer tremendous pain."

Kalaka replied, "Are you afraid of monks? They are the easiest people in the world to bully. You just watch. When I strike him, his head will be instantly smashed to pieces."

"Indeed I am afraid of monks!" Upogalo exclaimed. "Although it is easy to take advantage of them due to their practice of patience, the power of their virtue is infinite. If you strike this monk, he will only suffer for a moment. You, however, will be troubled for eons."

The evil spirit would not listen to the advice. He struck Sariputra's head with his fist. The good spirit could not bear to watch, so he vanished. Sariputra felt a slight touch, like a leaf falling on his head. He opened his eyes. At that moment, the evil spirit's face was bleeding and he was already descending into hell.

When Sariputra came out of samadhi, he went to the Bamboo Grove Monastery to see the Buddha. The Buddha asked him, "Sariputra, do you feel any discomfort now?"

"Lord Buddha, I have never been ill before, but now I do have a slight headache."

"Sariputra! It is fortunate that you were in the state of

samadhi today. Because of your concentration, Kalaka's blow could not hurt you. Normally, Kalaka can break Mount Sumeru into two pieces with his fist, not to mention a human skull. The merit of samadhi is indeed powerful. All bhiksus should diligently cultivate in this way!"

Patience Is Like the Roots of a Tree

Once, a bhiksu named Poser was meditating alone under a tree in a quiet forest. When he attained the first dhyana, a flock of birds flew over and rested on the tree above him. Their non-stop chirping distracted his concentration and kept him from advancing to the next level of dhyana. He became quite upset and angry. After he had chased away the birds, he settled down to meditate again. A short while later, a band of mischievous monkeys showed up. He was so disturbed and agitated that he gave up meditating and went back to the monastery.

The Buddha noticed Poser's frustration and wanted to help him. "Poser, the hillside is a good place for meditation. Why do you look so bothered?"

"Lord Buddha, all the different animals in the forest were constantly disturbing me. I could not find peace even though I moved to several different locations," Poser replied.

The Buddha explained, "Poser, meditation practice must be done in the right way. It is not necessary to rely on the serenity of the external environment. It is like driving a horse carriage. If the driver simply whips the carriage, the vehicle will not move forward. When one practices meditation, one first needs to let go of attachment to the external environment. Then, one needs to practice patience next. Only then can one settle the mind and make progress."

Poser asked with great respect, "Lord Buddha, after the strength of patience is attained, what should one learn next?"

"Patience is like the roots of a tree. Once the roots are solidly grounded, the tree will flourish. After gaining strength through the practice of patience, one should use wisdom to help to see and develop right understanding. With right understanding, one may then overcome all afflictions and defilements."

"Lord Buddha, I finally understand now. I will meditate

according to your guidance." Poser then prostrated himself to the Buddha. He was filled with joy and left.

K Grounded in Wisdom and Goodness

Wickedness and foolishness can be contagious. Fortunately, so can goodness and wisdom. Because this is so, it is imperative that we choose our company wisely, seeking association with those who can help us build our character and gain wisdom, rather than those who move through life recklessly, abandoning morality and remaining distracted from what is truly good and wise. When we are not careful about selecting our companions, or when we are thoughtless about how we react when confronted with another person's wrongdoing, we can easily become seduced by unwholesome pursuits and remain mired in ways of thinking and acting that keep truth, wisdom, and goodness at a distance.

Again and again, in the following stories, we visit the Buddha in situations where someone - a Brahman, a disciple, a clan of angry men - is caught in the claws of adversity and wrongdoing. Through the Buddha's skillful teaching, these people are encouraged not to be enticed into unseemly behavior by the imprudent actions of others. If you are wronged - as in the case of men who were robbed by a wicked woman - should you then seek punishment and revenge? The Buddha teaches us that seeking knowledge of our own hearts is much more valuable. If you are embroiled in controversy - as in the case of a massive dispute over water rights - should you battle to the bitter end? Again, we are taught that peace and harmony are much more important than being victorious.

Only through discovering our compassionate hearts and striving for harmony can we be grounded in goodness and wisdom. Like the cultivated elder we meet, when we maneuver through life with the eye of wisdom and an unshakable faith, we will be able to diffuse and overcome wickedness, instead of being overpowered by it or engaging in it ourselves.

Keep Company with the Wise

Among the Buddha's ten leading disciples, Sariputra was known to be the wisest; Maudgalyayana was known for his supernatural powers; Purna was known for his teaching ability; Subhuti comprehended emptiness profoundly; Katyayana was the best at giving discourses; Mahakasyapa was known for his asceticism; Aniruddha possessed the divine eye; Upali was the foremost in upholding the precepts; Ananda was the most learned; and Rahula was famous for his modesty.

The above describes how each of the ten principal disciples of the Buddha excelled in different areas. The differences led to a most peculiar phenomenon among the sangha. Over time, the bhiksus followed the disciple who best suited their temperament, thus splitting off naturally. Each of the ten great disciples led respective groups of bhiksus in practice. Even Devadatta had his own group.

Observing the situation, the Buddha said to his disciples, "The benevolent associate with the benevolent, and the evil with the evil. This is similar to how milk mixes with milk, and butter with butter. Do you see how Sariputra leads his group of bhiksus?"

"Yes, we do." the disciples answered.

"All the bhiksus in his group possess great wisdom and discursive talents."

"Do you see the group of bhiksus led by Maudgalyayana?"

"Yes, we do." the disciples again replied.

"They all possess supernatural powers," the Buddha remarked. He continued. "Do you see Purna, Subhuti, Katyayana, Mahakasyapa, Aniruddha, Upali, Ananda, and Rahula leading groups of bhiksus as well?"

"Yes, we do," the disciples answered in unison.

The Buddha pointed out, "Respectively, they are good at teaching, interpreting emptiness, debating, ascetic practices,

clear vision, upholding the precepts strictly, erudition, and esoteric practices."

The Buddha continued, "Do you see Devadatta also leading many bhiksus?"

"Yes, we do."

"Well, they are all perfumed by unwholesome deeds," the Buddha remarked.

Casting his glance over his disciples, the Buddha continued in a firm tone, "Do not associate with the evil or the ignorant, associate with the benevolent and the wise. If a man keeps constant company with evil men, even if he originally did not commit unwholesome deeds, he will eventually get himself into trouble and will gain an evil reputation."

On hearing the Buddha's words, over thirty of the bhiksus in Devadatta's group left Devadatta and returned to the Buddha. They sincerely prostrated themselves before the Buddha, repented, and asked for a chance to turn over a new leaf. They then cultivated with diligent effort and quickly attained arhatship.

Things aggregate according to their innate tendencies. The type of company we keep is very important because we tend to behave like the friends we have, whether they are good or bad. When we associate with the benevolent and the wise, it is like entering an orchid garden. After a while, we will not notice the fragrance. On the other hand, associating with evil or ignorant friends is like staying in a fish warehouse. After a prolonged stay, we will be desensitized to the foul smell. We must be careful in choosing our friends.

The Wisdom of the Buddha

Once, while the Buddha was traveling from town to town teaching the Dharma, he passed through a desert. In the desert he met two merchants. The merchants asked the Buddha whether he had seen their lost camel.

The Buddha replied, "Is the camel blind in the left eye, limping on the left foot, and missing its front teeth?"

"Yes, that is our camel," answered the merchants.

"No, I have not seen your camel," said the Buddha.

When they heard the Buddha's reply, the merchants asked skeptically, "How can you say that you have not seen our camel if you could describe its characteristics so perfectly? You probably stole our camel." Having said this, they escorted the Buddha to the village council.

After the council heard the merchants' accusation, they asked the Buddha, "How did you know that the camel's left eye was blind?"

The Buddha replied, "Seeing that only the grass on the right side of the road was chewed up, I surmised that the camel could not see on its left side."

"How did you know that their camel limped on its left foot?"

"If you look at the footprints on the road, the right footprints are deeper than the left footprints. Therefore the camel must be limping on its left side."

"How about the missing front teeth?"

"Of the blades of grass the camel chewed up, the ones in the middle were still intact. From that, I gathered that the camel's front teeth were missing."

After the Buddha's explanation, the two merchants had nothing to say. The Buddha continued, "Do not worry. Your camel was not stolen; there weren't any human footprints alongside those of the camel. Just keep searching and eventually you will find your camel."

After the Buddha finished speaking, the council concluded, "Merchants, the Buddha did not steal your camel. Do not use your shallow reasoning to doubt such a distinguished person."

The Buddha was the enlightened one with perfect wisdom and virtue. Ordinary people like us cannot fathom his wisdom, just like a cup cannot measure the amount of water in the ocean.



Looking for the Heart

Once, when the Buddha was on his way to Uruvilva, he stopped in a forest and meditated quietly under a tree. A woman carrying a large bundle passed by the Buddha. He did not pay her any attention. Later on, a group of men came up to the Buddha and asked him, "Has a woman carrying a large bundle passed by?"

"I was not observing the road. Why are you looking for the woman?" the Buddha asked.

"There are thirty men in our group, and we all live in the nearby forest. Twenty-nine of us already have wives. Only one is yet to be married. Having sympathy for him, yesterday we found him a woman. Little did we know that she was not an ordinary woman, but a prostitute. She seduced all thirty of us in one night. When we got up this morning, we found that she had stolen all of our goods and escaped. We are searching for her to reclaim our belongings. Have you seen her or not?"

The Buddha listened to them silently. After a while, the Buddha said, "Is this what bothers you? Let me ask all of you: Which is more important, your body or the woman and your possessions?"

The men were deeply touched after the Buddha asked them such a simple question. Their minds were calmed. Every gesture and every word from the Buddha was able to make a strong impression on their hearts.

"Our bodies are more important than anything else." they answered unanimously. Every one of them now realized what was more important.

"Give up chasing after that woman. Rediscovering your heart is truly more important than recovering the lost possessions."

"How does one rediscover the heart?" asked the men.

The Buddha then taught them the Four Noble Truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering,

and the way to end suffering. The men's belief in the Buddha grew, and they eventually took refuge in him.

Normally, when one loses money or clothing, one will search for it. However, when one loses what is of most value, the heart, one does not think to search for it. The most important thing in life is to rediscover your heart, to know yourself and to be in charge of your own destiny.

The King of Heaven Seeks Out the Dharma

One day, when the Buddha was teaching at the Jetavana Monastery, King Brahmaloka descended from heaven and came before the Buddha to listen to the Dharma.

The king of heaven asked, "Lord Buddha, can you kindly tell me which is the sharpest sword, which is the most potent poison, which is the most furious fire, and which is the darkest night?"

The Buddha answered, "King of heaven, you should know that harsh and unkind words form the sharpest sword; greed is the most potent poison; worldly worries form the most furious fire; and ignorance is the darkest night."

The king of heaven asked, "In the three worlds, who receives the most benefit, who suffers the greatest loss, what forms unbreakable armor, and what is the best weapon?"

The Buddha answered, "Those who give receive the most benefit; those who are greedy, who look only for gain and never intend to reciprocate, suffer the greatest loss; patience forms unbreakable armor; and wisdom is the best weapon."

The king of heaven asked, "In all the realms, who is the most cunning thief, what is the most precious treasure, what is the greatest cause for attachment, and what treasure can we rely on most?"

The Buddha answered, "Unwholesome thoughts are the most cunning thieves; morality is the most precious treasure; mind is the greatest cause of attachment; being liberated from the cycle of birth and death is the treasure upon which we can rely on most."

The king of heaven continued, "What quality is the most attractive, what quality is the most disgusting, what is the most horrible pain, and what is the greatest enjoyment?"

The Buddha answered, "Goodness is most attractive; evil

is most disgusting; regret is the most horrible pain; and liberation is the greatest enjoyment."

The king of heaven asked, "What is the reason for death in this world, what can spoil a friendship, what is the most serious fever, and who makes the best doctor?"

The Buddha answered, "Ignorance is the root of death; jealousy and selfishness spoil friendship; hatred is the most serious fever; and the Buddha is the unsurpassed doctor."

The king of heaven thought for a while and asked again, "Now, I have one more question to ask you. What cannot be consumed by burning fire, what cannot be destroyed by raging floods, what cannot be torn asunder by blustering wind but still remains the source of all existence?"

The Buddha replied, "The merit created from good karma is the answer to all. It cannot be consumed by burning fire, nor destroyed by raging floods, nor torn asunder by the winds, yet it still remains the source of all that exists in the universe."

After listening to the Buddha's words of wisdom, the king of heaven was full of Dharma joy. He paid homage to the Buddha and departed.

Victory Creates Enmity

In the eastern part of Sravasti, outside the Deer Park Pavilion, there was a very tall, old tree. The top of this tree was like a canopy. One day, the Buddha sat in meditation under this tree. An elderly Brahman named Bharadvaja came before him and, without provocation, started to yell and shout loudly. The Buddha remained undisturbed in meditation, ignoring the Brahman's rude behavior.

After a while, the Buddha left his seat to practice walking meditation. Bharadvaja followed him and continued his ranting. The Buddha continued to ignore him. After walking meditation, the Buddha sat under another tree to rest. Bharadvaja rushed up to him and demanded, "Lord Buddha, admit that you have lost."

The Buddha serenely said, "When two parties are involved in a fight, the winning party always infuriates the losing party. The losing party can neither eat nor sleep at ease. Why seek troubles for yourself? Why don't you forget about who won and who lost, and try to live your life in peace?"

The compassion of the Buddha and the wisdom of his teachings shamed Bharadvaja; he immediately backed down.

Nirvana Is Like an Extinguished Fire

Ancient India was a land rich in diverse teachings and systems of thought. One day, Vacchagotra, a follower of a tradition other than Buddhism, visited the Buddha at his monastery to ask him questions about enlightenment.

Vacchagotra asked, "Lord Buddha, where does a being go to be reborn?"

"Vacchagotra," the Buddha answered, "I do not teach that there is any such place where we go for rebirth."

"Then does this mean a being doesn't go anywhere?"

"When we use the words 'going' or 'not going,'" the Buddha replied, "It is already inappropriate thinking." The Buddha then asked Vacchagotra a question, "How would you describe the fire burning in front of you?"

"I can only say that the fire is burning."

"Yes! What would you say if I asked you why the fire burns?"

"I can only guess that the burning is caused by the firewood."

"What then would you say if the fire were to go out?"

"All I can say is that the fire has gone out."

"What would you say if I asked you again where did the fire go after going out?"

"I would say that this question is inappropriate. Fire burns because of firewood. If there is no wood, then certainly there is no fire. An extinguished fire does not go anywhere."

"Exactly, Vacchagotra. Human beings in this mundane world suffer deeply from the burning of the self-caused fires of greed and anger. If one can understand the cause of suffering and then uproot the cause, the fire of worry will consequently burn no more. Then one can experience a pure and peaceful life. This is what it means when it is said 'liberate from suffering and achieve nirvana.' Therefore, the descrip-

tion of 'going' or 'not going' is inappropriate."

At that moment, Vacchagotra finally understood what is meant by the saying "Nirvana is like an extinguished fire." He then prostrated himself to the Buddha and left with great joy.



Reason Overcomes Ignorance

One day, the Buddha went to the house of an honorable elder to deliver his teachings. After listening to the Buddha's wonderful words, the elder cast away his ignorance and defilements and attained the pure eye of Dharma. He took refuge in the Triple Gem and became a disciple of the Buddha, and resolved to uphold the Five Precepts for the rest of his life.

Right after the Buddha left the elder's house, Mara, the deluder, transformed himself and appeared as the Buddha. He then went to the elder's house, intending to disrupt his cultivation.

The elder thought, "Lord Buddha has just left me, why would he return so soon?" In confusion, he pretended to ask, "Lord Buddha, what brought you back?"

Mara replied, "I once told you that you are a knowledgeable, talented, and wise person. However, after observing you closely over a period of time, I came to the conclusion that you are truly mired in ignorance and lack wisdom. Earlier I told you about the Four Noble Truths, suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way to end suffering. But they are not truth; it is a false doctrine practiced by deviants."

Upon hearing this, the elder, with his profound wisdom, immediately detected Mara's plot. He scolded Mara righteously, "Stop! Say no more! I have attained the eye of wisdom and my belief is unshakable. Even with your numerous transformations, there is no way you can shake my resolve to attain the truth. You are as ridiculous as comparing the light of a firefly's tail with the light of the sun, or as comparing the height of a trash pile with that of Mount Sumeru. You should know that the strength of a sparrow cannot match that of an eagle."

With his plot exposed, Mara was so ashamed that he could no longer concentrate on his deception and reverted to his original form. He ran away with his tail between his legs.

Mediating the Fight over Water Rights

In India, the hot season is from March to May, the rainy season from June to September, and the cold season from October to the next February. After a long dry spell, when there was insufficient rain during the rainy season, people would often fight each other over water rights.

One year, to the east of the Buddha's native home, along the banks of the Loshini River, the Sakya clan and the Keliya clan were again fighting over water. The conflict had almost escalated into a bloody battle when the Buddha came to the middle of the river, where the two clans had met to fight. The Buddha said to them, "Please listen carefully. Which is more important, water or life? You should never be impulsive and lose your lives fighting over water. People need each other's help the most in hard times. No matter what happens, you must not let conflicts escalate to bloodshed."

Both clans laid down their weapons after hearing the Buddha's sincere words. They soon resumed their friendship and lived in peace and harmony.

Anathapindika's Teaching

Once, while the Buddha was staying at the Jetavana Monastery in Sravasti, the elder Anathapindika came to the monastery to visit him. The elder and the Buddha sat down to discuss the Dharma.

The elder began, "Lord Buddha, is it true that if the people of my household sincerely believe in the teachings, they will enjoy rebirth into one of the heavens after they pass away?"

After listening to the elder, the Buddha affirmed, "Yes, what you say is true." The Buddha then asked the elder, "Where did you hear such wondrous words of wisdom?"

The elder answered, "Lord Buddha, I did not hear it from anyone, or anywhere, not even from your explanations of the Dharma."

Surprised, the Buddha asked, "Since you did not hear this from me, nor from the bhiksus or bhiksunis, nor from any of the countless celestial beings, how did you come to this wonderful knowledge?"

The elder told the Buddha, "Since I became a follower of the Buddha's teachings, whenever a woman was pregnant in my household, I would advise her that, for the child's health, she should take refuge in the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. After she had safely given birth, both the mother and the child would take refuge in the Buddha's teachings together. After people had developed true confidence in the Dharma, I would then teach them to uphold the Five Precepts. I also extended the same advice to the servants and their families of my household.

"When people got rid of their servants, I would tell those servants that I would willingly employ any of them as long as they were willing to take refuge in the Triple Gem and uphold the Five Precepts. If they were unwilling to follow my instruction, I would proceed no further. Likewise, if guests

came to my house, they would also have to take refuge in the Triple Gem and uphold the Five Precepts. If they came to learn from me, or wanted to borrow from me, I would first ask them to take refuge in the Triple Gem and uphold the Five Precepts. Only then would I grant their requests.

"When I invited the Buddha, bhiksus and bhiksunis, I always remembered to pray for my parents, brothers, wife, relatives, teachers, the king, the cabinet ministers, and all the countless celestial beings, wishing all of them to be blessed and to gain wisdom! I have learned from the Buddha that when people make offerings and pray often, it will result in great merit and they will be reborn into one of the heavens. If people make frequent donations of land, houses, clothing and bedding to others, through their generosity, they also will be reborn into one of the heavens."

After the Buddha had listened to the elder, he was very pleased and said, "Yes, wise man, because you have strong belief in the Dharma and cultivate accordingly, you are able to speak such brilliant words. I am certain that everyone staying or living in your household will be reborn into one of the heavenly realms."

As Anathapindika listened to the Buddha's approving words, he had even more confidence in the Dharma. Happily, he said goodbye to the Buddha and went home.



Foolish Person, Foolish Acts

"What a fool!" At one time or another we have all had a similar reaction to our own and others' behavior. While we should refrain from excessively criticizing others, since this act would injure them and lead us to think that we are superior to them, it is important to recognize when others are acting foolishly. It is even more important for us to be aware of our own foolishness, for this awareness enables us to awaken from our ignorance and begin living in accordance with the teachings. In the following collection of stories, we witness the unnecessary suffering and harm that is often the result of foolish behavior. Foolish people act without thinking, without wisdom, and without the teachings as their solid foundation. They lose their fortunes, cause pain to close friends and family, stunt their spiritual progress, and subject themselves to ridicule.

The Buddha is not shy when describing to foolish people their foolish acts; however, after describing the foolishness, he is compassionate and benevolent in teaching them how foolish behavior may arise. We see unwise conduct resulting from erroneous views, from blindly following teachings without developing right understanding, from hasty decisions that occur when one desires immediate gratification, from previous bad karma, from trying to maintain an external image that doesn't reflect the true level of cultivation within, etc. Through a better understanding of why people behave foolishly, we are more likely to eradicate these behaviors in our own lives.

Our lives may be a constant process of making foolish mistakes, recognizing the error of our ways, slowly gaining the wisdom

necessary not to repeat these silly choices, and ultimately being able to act in accordance with the Dharma in every situation. However gradual the awakening, this is true spiritual progress! When we can stop acting out of habit and ignorance, and make choices that truly embody the spirit of the Buddha, we will have achieved spiritual maturity. Don't give up! It is within our reach to transform our foolish acts that harm others and ourselves into wise acts that benefit all beings.

Foolish Person, Foolish Acts

Once there was a wealthy man who had merit but not much wisdom. He lived on a farm and possessed much fertile land, good horses, and a lot of money. However, he was foolish and ignorant and could barely tell right from wrong, good from bad. Therefore he did embarrassing and laughable things quite often.

One day he went into town on an errand. While in town, he came across a man whose back had been whipped and who was applying fresh horse manure on his wounds. Out of curiosity, he stood there and watched for a while. Finally, he asked the wounded man, "Don't the wounds on your back hurt? Why are you applying horse manure to them? Doesn't it make them hurt even more?"

The wounded man forced a smile and replied, "Yes, it hurts very badly when I put fresh horse manure on my wounds. But, horse manure disinfects the wounds so they will not get any worse."

Upon hearing this, the wealthy man became extremely happy because he thought that he was lucky to have learned the secret of healing wounds. He memorized the information and walked home joyfully. Arriving home, he asked his family, "Do you know why I am so happy?"

"I guess the master must have found gold on his way home," said a servant, trying to please the rich master.

The wealthy man quickly stopped smiling and said very seriously, "I did not find any gold, but I did learn a great secret, a secret that contains true wisdom."

His family jokingly chided him, "It is not often that our master gains great wisdom. You must not hide it from us. Tell us the secret!"

The wealthy man applauded happily, "Sure, sure. Just watch what I am about to do."

He ordered a servant, "Go get a whip."

The servant dared not disobey an order from his master. He fetched a whip then stepped aside to wait for further instruction.

The wealthy man quickly removed the clothes from his torso and exclaimed, "I am going to teach you a great truth." He then ordered sternly, "Whip my back two hundred times." The servants hesitated and none went forward. The wealthy man became angry, "What, how dare you disobey my order? Go ahead and whip me."

The servants dared not disobey their master. One of them picked up the whip reluctantly and started to whip his master's back. The lashes fell like rain again and again on the master's back. After a while, fresh blood started to flow from the wounds. The master's tender skin was torn open all over his back. The master then ordered his servants, "Go quickly! Fetch some fresh horse manure and apply it to my wounds."

The servants went to get the horse manure and applied it all over the master's back. Regarding himself very wise and intelligent, the foolish wealthy man happily told his family, "Although my back was severely whipped, the wounds will heal quickly in a few days because the fresh horse manure will disinfect them. Don't worry, you shall see. This is the great wisdom I learned today, and now I have shared it with you."

Later, when the Buddha was told this story, he said to his disciples, "When some people see others benefit by acting a certain way, they immediately copy the action, with no regard as to whether it is applicable to their own situation or not. This is very ignorant and may cause much unnecessary suffering and harm. To cultivate and realize the truth, one must practice right understanding and follow the teachings appropriate to one's situation. This is the way for one to truly liberate oneself from suffering and attain happiness."

A Fool Cannot Benefit from What Is in Front of Him

One day, while the Buddha was meditating in his room, a very distressed man came and knelt in front of the Buddha, awaiting the Buddha's teaching. After a while, the Buddha opened his eyes and asked, "Is there anything wrong? You can tell me."

"Lord Buddha, since I started following the Buddha's teachings, my father has strongly objected to my beliefs. He thinks the Buddhist precepts are too extensive and too strict and that it is impossible for one to uphold them. He believes if one cannot uphold all the precepts, then one may as well not uphold any at all. With this reasoning, he insists on maintaining erroneous views. Regardless of my repeated persuasions, he still refuses to accept my view. I am worried that he will be trapped in the endless cycle of birth and death, fall into the evil paths and suffer forever. I beg for your mercy to save my father."

The Buddha said, "Your father is an intelligent man. Just tell him this story I am about to tell you. He will abandon his false views and recognize the Way, like one who leaves bewilderment and returns to enlightenment."

"What is the story? Please tell me."

Then the Buddha told the story:

Once upon a time, a fool walked in a vast, empty field for several days without drinking a drop of water. He was so thirsty that he could not see clearly, and his whole body was feverish. He searched everywhere for water without success.

Suddenly, in the distance he saw a river with very clean, clear water. The fool just stood there and stared at the river for a long time without making any attempt to drink from it. Puzzled, a passerby asked, "Aren't you dying of thirst? Why don't you drink the water now that you have found it?"

With his parched mouth and throat, the fool explained, "You just do not understand. There is so much water, how could I possibly drink it all? I am afraid that my stomach is unable to hold it all. I am not going to drink any of it."

Later, when others heard of his reasoning, they shook their heads in disbelief and remarked, "What a fool! How pitiful he is!"

When the Buddha finished the story, the young man rushed back home and repeated the story to his father. After hearing the story, his father understood the lesson in it, and started to learn the Buddha's teachings.

There is an immeasurable amount of water in a river, yet it only takes a ladle of water to relieve one's thirst. There are countless methods described in the Buddha's teachings for attaining enlightenment. Yet one only needs to truly learn and diligently practice one of these methods in order to benefit tremendously from the teachings.

Making Charcoal out of Incense

Once, there was a young man from Sravasti, who gave up the household life upon hearing the Buddha's teachings. For five years in the monastery, the young man cultivated with diligent effort. After these years, with permission from the Buddha, the young bhiksu left the assembly of monks and traveled to a distant mountain to cultivate in solitude.

Less than three months later, while the assembly was still praising his commitment, the young bhiksu returned looking depressed. The Buddha kindly asked, "Why are you back so soon?"

The young bhiksu answered reluctantly, "Lord Buddha, since I left your side, I have cultivated diligently. Yet I still have not attained enlightenment. I realize that the path to Buddhahood is long. Since I could not reach it, I might as well return home to earn a living. At home I can take care of my family and fulfill my obligations as a son."

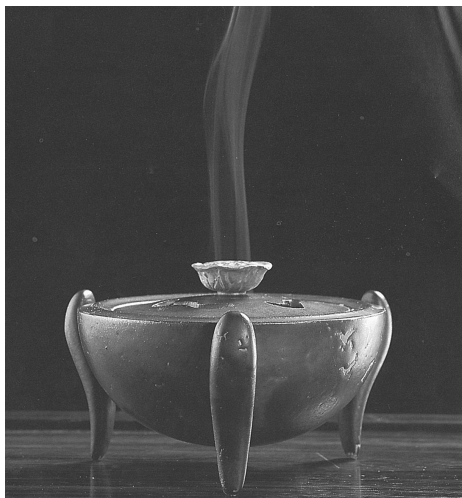
Gently, the Buddha responded, "You became a bhiksu because you believed in my teachings. Wouldn't you rather earn others' respect through your diligence in practice rather than getting rebuked for your lack of effort?"

The Buddha then told the young bhiksu a story: "Once upon a time there was a young man who collected sandalwood used in making 'aguru incense' from the deep ocean. After a little more than a year, he collected enough to return home. He loaded up a wagon full of the wood and went to the market. However, since the price of his incense was very high, no one bought any from him. After a few days, he still could not sell any, and he became very frustrated. He then saw the merchant next to him doing brisk business selling charcoal. The charcoal was much cheaper than his incense and sold out almost immediately. Wanting to sell his sandalwood quickly, the young man burned it and sold it as charcoal. In the end, he received less than half the money he would have

received for the incense."

Finishing the story, the Buddha looked at the young bhiksu and said, "There are many people in this world who vow to learn the Dharma and who are very diligent in the beginning. But after they begin, they soon find that the Dharma is as vast as the ocean. Since they cannot swallow it all in one mouthful, they feel frustrated and want to retreat. They would rather die of thirst than take another drink. People like this are as foolish as the young man who burned his 'aguru incense' into charcoal."

Most people do not want to wait too long to achieve results. Even in spiritual practice, they only want to invest in methods that produce instant achievements. In the end, they will be like the young man who burned precious "aguru incense" into charcoal, losing the precious treasure that they originally had.



The Blind Men and the Mosquitoes

Once, when the Buddha was traveling from Sravasti to Magadha, he stopped for several weeks just outside a small village where a large number of blind people lived. One day, the blind folks in the village gathered to talk among themselves. One of the blind men said, "When we work in the forest, we are constantly bitten by mosquitoes and we really suffer. We should use our knives and arrows to kill off those mosquitoes. We can listen to the mosquitoes' buzz and then swing our knives and shoot our arrows in the direction of the buzz." Once the decision was made, the blind men went into the forest to destroy the mosquitoes. However, they came back badly injured, and many fell to the ground along the road back to the village.

These unfortunate blind men were stumbling back to the village as the Buddha and his bhiksus were about to head into the village for their alms rounds. When some of the villagers saw the Buddha arriving, they set up a special place at the entrance to the village to pay homage and make offerings to the Buddha. The Buddha saw the injured men among the villagers and asked, "There are so many injured men. What happened to them?"

The Buddha's followers said, "They planned to go to war with mosquitoes; instead, they fought among themselves because they could not see. As a result, many of them were injured."

"The foolish blind men set out to destroy mosquitoes, but they ended up hurting themselves instead. This is not the first time this has happened. The same thing happened in their previous lives," the Buddha replied.

"Lord Buddha, what happened in their previous lives? Please tell us." At their request, the Buddha then told the story of the previous lives of these blind men.

"A long time ago, in Kasi, there was a village where many

woodcutters lived. One day, an old gray-haired woodcutter was chopping wood near his home. A mosquito came along and bit the man on his head. The old man felt the pain on his head and said to his son sitting nearby, 'There is a mosquito on my head, and its bite is as painful as a knife wound. Get it away from me quickly.'

"Father! Don't move, I will kill the mosquito.'

"The old man kept pressing his son, 'Hurry up, please get the mosquito off my head!'

"Father, I am coming!' The son picked up an axe and stood behind his father. As he swung the axe to kill the mosquito, he split his father's head in two. The old man died instantly.

"At the same time, there was a merchant staying with the woodcutter's family. He saw what happened and thought to himself, 'A clever enemy is better than a foolish friend. For though he may want to do me harm, his fear of punishment will keep him from doing it.' He shook his head and said, 'A foolish companion is indeed worse than a clever enemy. The foolish son split his father's head in order to kill a mosquito. What terrible stupidity!'"

The Buddha concluded, "In their previous lives, they also killed their own people instead of the mosquitoes!"

In our daily lives, we must apply wisdom and use appropriate means to resolve our problems. It is not necessary to use an axe to kill a mosquito. Without skillful and intelligent means, one cannot manage one's affairs properly, and may even cause harm to oneself.

Do Not Wait to Be Generous

In a remote rural area, there was a foolish farmer who had a cow. When the cow began to produce milk, the farmer was happy yet worried because he did not know how to store the milk. Whenever he saw the cow, he would feel helpless and sigh heavily. On one hand, he was worried when the cow did not produce milk; and on the other hand, he was also at a loss when the cow did produce milk as he had no way to store the milk.

Finally, he gave the situation serious thought, and suddenly said, "Now that I have this cow, I want to show it off to my friends. I will hold a feast and invite all my friends in the city. I will serve milk to all my honored guests and use this excellent occasion to make some new friends."

After the decision was made, he started preparations for the feast. He went in person to the city to invite his friends. The invitations took all day, and it was not until sundown that he came home exhausted. That night he was too excited to sleep. He tossed and turned in his bed all night as he fantasized about the wonderful banquet he was going to give. Suddenly, a question came into his mind, "According to my calculations, I have invited a large number of friends. If I serve one cup of milk per person, I would need a large quantity of milk. Starting from today, if I stock up all the milk that I collect every day, there will not be enough containers available to store the milk. Also, the weather is getting warmer, and fresh milk will turn sour in just a few days."

While he was pondering the storage problem, an idea came to him, "Ah, I have it! I have it! I will store all the milk in the cow's stomach, and then I shall take the milk out of the cow all at once at the party. This will save me a lot of trouble and the guests will be served fresh milk." The farmer was quite pleased with the arrangement. He went back to bed, and soon was smiling in his sleep.

The next morning, the farmer kept the nursing calf away from its mother and stopped milking the cow. He brought nutritious food to feed the cow every morning and every evening. He bathed the cow and looked after the cow with tender care, hoping the cow would produce more milk for the party.

On the day of the party, the farmer was busy preparing for the event. His house was spotlessly clean and tidy. He put on his new clothes and stood at the door waiting for the arrival of his guests. When all the honored guests from the city arrived, the farmer escorted them to their seats and said, "Thank you, all my honored guests, for coming to my humble house in this remote rural area. I am very pleased indeed. I have a cow that produces delicious milk. I have all the milk stored in the cow so that I can serve you fresh milk today. The milk is extremely fresh."

He then brought out the cow. To his shocking discovery, the farmer found that the cow's milk glands had shriveled and that there was not a drop of milk remaining. The anxious farmer cursed, "I have saved the milk from each day in the cow's abdomen. Why did it disappear? Who stole it? Whoever that despicable person is will have to pay for this."

All the guests in the party burst out laughing, and they mocked and jeered their host. The farmer was so embarrassed that he wanted to cry, but he held back his tears like the unspoken misery of a mute who had just ingested bitter herbs.

The Buddha said, "One who is benevolent and cultivates according to the bodhisattva way will not wait until he is wealthy in order to give alms and do good deeds. To do otherwise is a grave mistake. One should do good deeds at any perceivable moment and be charitable at all times. If not, the outcome will be similar to that of the foolish farmer who, in the end, got nothing. This is so regrettable."

Laying the Foundation

One day a foolish and ignorant merchant visited his friend. He noticed that his friend's residence was a three-story mansion and the decor was tasteful and expensive. The merchant was envious and thought to himself, "I have worked hard most of my life and have as much money as my friend, but I live in a one-story house. I should build myself a mansion and live comfortably ever after."

The merchant asked his friend, "How much does it cost to build a mansion like yours?" When his friend told him the cost, he was shocked. He thought to himself, "It cost so much! It is too expensive, too expensive!"

This merchant was a miser. He was stingy and unwilling to part with his money, but he had a taste for luxury. When he returned home, he continued to think of ways to build himself a mansion. After a while, he said, "Ah! I have a good idea. My friend's mansion has three stories. Why don't I just build the third floor and forget about the second and first floors. Then I can save two-thirds of the cost."

He made up his mind and set out to look for a contractor. On the way, he passed by a builder's workshop. He went in and asked, "Can you build me a three-story mansion?"

When the builder greeted the merchant, he saw a well-dressed merchant with a big fat protruding stomach. The builder presumed the merchant was rich and invited him in. He presented the merchant with many blueprints. The merchant was illiterate, so he shook his head and said, "No need to look at this. I am having some trouble with my eyes and it is inconvenient to read here. I will take you to see my friend's mansion so you can see the kind of mansion that I have in mind."

The builder went with the merchant. On the way, the merchant repeatedly reminded the builder, "You must understand, I want my mansion to be an exact copy of my friend's."

It has three stories. I have seen the third floor, and it is so beautiful and elegant." The builder replied, "No problem! No problem at all! I have built mansions over ten stories tall, not to mention three story mansions."

The merchant and the builder agreed on a price based on the cost per story, and construction started in the vegetable garden behind the merchant's house. A month later, the foundation was ready, but the first floor was not yet finished. The merchant came to the site and saw the progress of the construction. He was extremely angry and yelled, "For goodness sake! Your work is too slow. It has been a long time since you started construction, and you still have not finished building my mansion. I wanted you to build only the third floor. Why didn't you listen to me? And why are you building from the first floor up?"

"All people build their houses from the first floor up. The foundation must be well laid, and then the house will be built one level at a time from the ground floor up."

"Nonsense! I only want the third floor. I do not want the first and second floors. You have made me waste so much money and you have upset me very much. You are fired! I am going to hire some other workers."

The builder was so angry that his face turned red, and the veins on his neck bulged. He told the merchant, "You stupid fool! I have never met anyone like you. Go and ask anybody if there is a house that was built without a foundation."

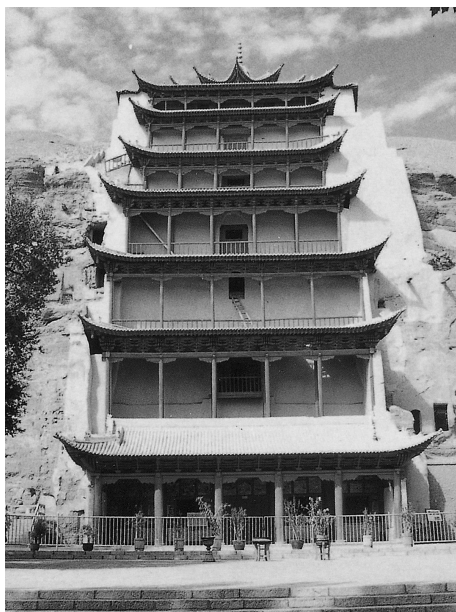
Afterwards, the merchant visited all the builders in town. None was able to build his third-floor-only mansion. The merchant still would not give up; instead, he blamed his anger on others. He told them, "You are all worthless. None of you can build a beautiful third-floor-only mansion. What is the point of building the useless first and second floors?"

After the Buddha told the story to the bhiksus at the

Jetavana Monastery, he then told them, "You should cultivate according to the course that I have set out. Then, you should not be in too much of a hurry. You should plant your feet firmly on the ground before starting to take steps. Everyone should start from the basics of the precepts, meditative concentration, and wisdom. When one dreams of attaining Buddhahood instantly, one is like the foolish merchant who just wanted to build a third-floor-only mansion. If one only wants results, one will not be successful, and one's efforts in cultivation will fail. Only those who cultivate step by step can learn the Dharma."

Among the audience was a king who liked what he had heard. He stood up and said, "Lord Buddha, I hope I can further my cultivation to elevate myself from the status of a king to an arhat, then to a bodhisattva, and finally to Buddhahood. Then I shall be able to liberate countless sentient beings."

The Buddha nodded and smiled.



The Blind Men and the Elephant

One day, a huge elephant suddenly showed up on the east side of Sravasti. The presence of the elephant created excitement in the city because everyone wanted to see exactly how big the creature was. The crowd grew larger and larger, and people were as excited as if a circus had come to town. At this time, there happened to be some blind men living in the city. They also wanted to know what an elephant was like. How could a blind man see? They decided that they could get an idea of what an elephant looked like by using their hands.

They all walked up next to the elephant and began to touch its body. The first blind man touched the elephant's abdomen, the second touched the elephant's ear, the third touched the elephant's leg, the fourth touched the tail, and the fifth touched the trunk. Afterwards, they discussed among themselves what they thought an elephant would look like. The one who touched the elephant's ear said, "I know that an elephant is like a dustpan." The blind man who touched the elephant's abdomen said, "Oh! No! No! An elephant is like a piece of a wall, flat and big."

"You are both wrong," said the blind man who touched the elephant's tail, "An elephant is definitely like a huge rope." After the first three blind men spoke, the fourth blind man, who had touched the elephant's leg, said with an air of confidence, "You are all making wild guesses. An elephant is not like a dustpan, a wall or a rope. It is like a pillar, round and tall."

Finally, the one who touched the elephant's trunk said, "All of you are wrong. An elephant is like a hook."

Five blind men all gave different descriptions of an elephant and none of them would accept the others' opinions. When the Buddha heard the story, he said to his disciples, "None of the five men saw the real elephant. The whole and true appearance of an elephant can only be seen with the eye

of wisdom. Foolish and ignorant sentient beings that think they know everything are like these blind men feeling an elephant. They are stubborn, biased, and cannot see the complete truth of the universe."



Deva's Decline

One day, King Prasenajit of Sravasti went to the funeral of a man named Deva, who had been the richest person in Sravasti. On the way back to his palace, he went to visit the Buddha at the Jetavana Grove.

The Buddha had just finished his meal and was practicing walking meditation when he saw the king entering the grove. He was surprised by the visit and asked the king, "Your Majesty, has anything happened?"

"No, nothing in particular. I just wanted to tell you something."

"What is it? Please tell me."

"Lord Buddha, Deva, a merchant, has died from an illness. I just came from his funeral; now the whole town is talking about his death."

"Why?"

"Lord Buddha, Deva was a very wealthy man. While he was alive, he had never done anything nice for others, not even in small gestures. People in this town have very bad memories of him. His death has made people laugh and gossip. I feel very sorry for him. He was such a wealthy man, yet he did not leave anything in this world for people to be proud of, to respect, or to remember him by. Instead, the bad memories of him will last for many years. Isn't this stupid? With such a huge fortune and no heirs, now that he is dead, he is unable to take anything with him. He was a slave to his money." After the king finished, he felt very sorry for Deva.

The Buddha asked, "Since he did not have an heir, what will happen to his fortune?"

"Lord Buddha, the only thing we can do is to follow the law. All of his fortune will belong to the kingdom. I heard that, in gold alone, we found more than eight thousand sacks in his storehouse. He was very frugal and lived like a pauper. He did not know how to enjoy his wealth or use his money;

he was really a stupid person."

The Buddha sighed and responded, "Your Majesty, you are right. I hope you will always retain this kind of judicious wisdom. If Deva had used his wealth wisely and helped people, people would now be mourning his death. If he had also followed the guidance of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, and been kind and generous, then his merit would be even greater. According to my teachings, a person who truly knows how to handle money is one who can use money justly without wasting it and is willing to help others all the time. If one knows how to help himself and others, then his wealth will not be wasted."

After the Buddha spoke, the king asked, "Lord Buddha, why was a stingy person like Deva so wealthy?"

"King Prasenajit, of course there is a reason. In one of his past lives, Deva had made offerings and supported a Pratyeka Buddha; therefore he had planted many seeds of kindness. This is why he had enjoyed many lifetimes of good fortune. This life was his last life of wealth. His good fortune has ended."

The king asked, "Lord Buddha, although he was not charitable, he was not a bad man either. In his next rebirth, will he be wealthy like he was in this life?"

"Your Majesty, Deva already exhausted all of his good fortune. In this life, he did not give or plant good seeds; as a result, he will not have such good fortune in his next life."

The king went into deep thought and said, "Lord Buddha, Deva's death has given me a real warning. I will follow the Buddha's teachings in regards to material possessions, wealth and the handling of the royal treasury."

The king then got up, and prostrated himself to the Buddha. Filled with Dharma joy, he went back to his palace to reign according to the Dharma.



Open Mind, Clear Understanding

Sadly, many of us spend our lives in confusion and discord, mired in the three poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion. We needlessly suffer because we allow our minds to wander aimlessly, adrift in meaningless or immoral thoughts. This need not be so; we can be free from these afflictions! This section teaches us how to achieve an open mind and clear understanding. The Buddha teaches us that when we use the Dharma to settle our distracted and cluttered minds, and allow the Buddha's teachings to open our hearts, then we will know true peace and happiness.

In the following stories, we are given numerous examples of people for whom the light of the Dharma has not yet penetrated their being, and therefore, they remain trapped in closed minds and murky understanding. Some of the most important teachings of the Buddha are encapsulated here, directing us toward greater and greater clarity, and ultimately, true liberation. As Brahmins, disciples, kings, and ordinary citizens struggle through life's challenges, some of them seeking to challenge the Buddha, others humbly asking for his help, the Buddha compassionately shows them how to remove their delusions and attain the highest wisdom. We, along with the characters in the stories, learn the importance of choosing our friends wisely, following truth that is universal, certain, and everlasting, taming our arrogant hearts, seeing through impermanence, letting go of our clinging minds, and understanding the essence of dependent origination as well as the nature of cause and condition.

Engaging in these practices and embodying these teachings is not always easy, but it is essential in the cultivation of an open heart

and mind. Indeed, it is possible to attain true peace and freedom, but we must remain diligent in becoming more and more open to the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha is tireless in helping people clarify their minds and soften their greedy, hateful and deluded hearts. May we, too, be tireless in letting the light of the Dharma illuminate our pure and original nature, and diligent in taking daily, continuous steps on the path toward ultimate liberation.



Open Mind, Clear Understanding

In Buddhism, the phrase "Open Mind, Clear Understanding" is used to describe the new understanding we gain from learning the Dharma.

One day, the Buddha was speaking with his bhiksus at the Jetavana Monastery, "When fog, haze, clouds, and dust block the sky, the stars cannot shine through. In the same way, a person will be confused when internal desire, hatred and delusion and external fame and profit cloud his intelligence and no way can be found for one to be liberated and at ease. Bhiksus, you should discard all hatred, greed, and delusion so that your mind can be open and clear."

For those bhiksus who had long been practicing the Dharma, this brief teaching from the Buddha was like a soothing balm, filling their minds with clarity and happiness.

A beam of sunlight can only shine into a room that has been dark for a thousand years when the door opens a crack. The light of wisdom can shine through even our most primordial delusions. The stubborn mind needs the Buddha's light to remove its age-old ignorance. Opening the heart and welcoming in the light of the Dharma is the way to happiness and liberation.

The Profound and Wondrous Truth of Dependent Origination

One day Ananda passed by an archery show while he was out on his alms rounds. On his return, he said to the Buddha, "I saw a wonderful feat today. A man shot an arrow right through a tiny keyhole from a great distance away. Is this not difficult?"

The Buddha answered, "It certainly is, but there is something else even more difficult than that."

"What can be more difficult than shooting an arrow through a tiny key hole?" Ananda asked skeptically.

"Let's say someone pulled a strand of hair out and split it into one hundred parts and then shot at one of those parts. Wouldn't you agree that this is millions of times more difficult than what you just saw? To understand, to accept, and to believe the truth of dependent origination is the most difficult task in the world."

After hearing this, Ananda nodded his head and agreed.

"Dependent origination" is a mysterious and everlasting truth in life and in the universe. It is what the Buddha realized when he attained enlightenment. It is the underpinning of cause and effect. It is through interrelationship and interdependency that everything in this world comes into being. After gaining insight into "dependent origination," the Buddha spent forty-nine years teaching what he had discovered so that others might find the truth for themselves. This teaching is the characteristic that makes Buddhism different from other religions. *The Rice Straw Sutra* says, "To see 'Dependent origination' is to see the Dharma, to see the Dharma is to see the Buddha." This shows how profound and difficult it is to understand "dependent origination."

Four Kinds of Dharma Joy

One day, the Buddha led his disciples to the village of Sanghagara, in the country of the Salvas, to spread the teachings. Since the people of the village had already heard of the Buddha, they all came early in the morning to listen to the wondrous Dharma.

One villager stood up and said, "Lord Buddha, before you came, a few Brahmans and religious teachers told us that their teachings are the truth, and that all others are false. Lord Buddha, please teach us how to recognize what is truth and what is falsehood."

"People of Sanghagara, for any statement to be qualified as the truth, it must be universal, certain and eternal in nature. For example, birth must be followed by death; this is a truth that is universal, certain and everlasting. You should follow the teachings that are reasonable and logical. Avoid false views that are illogical and unreasonable."

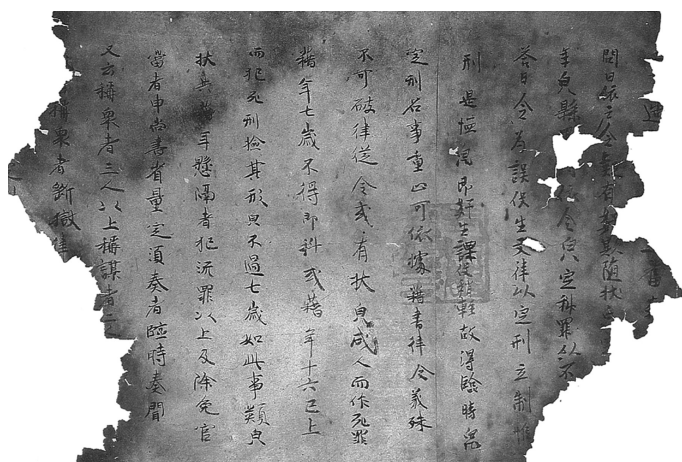
"Compassionate Buddha, would you please explain this to us in more detail?"

"People of Sanghagara, these four guidelines will help you discern truth from falsehood. Through them you will obtain wisdom and happiness:

1. Keep right view in your mind with regards to rebirth. Uphold the precepts and cultivate pure living.
2. Cultivate joy for the Dharma and develop a strong moral fortitude. Other's malicious words and actions should not disturb your calm.
3. Contemplate good and evil and their resulting karma in your mind. Then you will no longer wish to have disputes with others or incur animosity.
4. Have kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity in your heart. Be considerate of others at all times. You will then keep fear and worry far away from you.

These four paths will provide you with much wisdom and happiness."

The people in the village of Sanghagara were overjoyed upon listening to the Buddha's teachings. They were grateful that the Buddha had brought them the seeds of future enlightenment. They prostrated themselves to the Buddha and circled the Buddha three times before departing.



Four Kinds of Friends

Friends are like mirrors: benevolent friends will encourage one to correct one's mistakes and to promote one's good character, while bad friends can serve as warnings on how not to behave. Many people in this world end up treading the wrong path because they make the wrong kinds of friends. The wrong kinds of "friends" impede one's ability to tell right from wrong. Therefore, we must be very careful in choosing friends.

One day, a devotee asked the Buddha, "How does one find friends who have common goals and purposes?"

The Buddha said to him, "There are four kinds of friends that you should know about."

"What are they?" asked the devotee.

"Some friends treat you like flowers; other friends are like a balance, the mountains, or the earth. These are the four kinds of friends," replied the Buddha.

The Buddha continued, "What kind of friends treat you like flowers? When flowers are in full bloom, people will wear them on their heads. After they have withered, people then throw them away. Some people only want to be your friends when you are rich, and leave you when you are poor. These people treat friends like flowers.

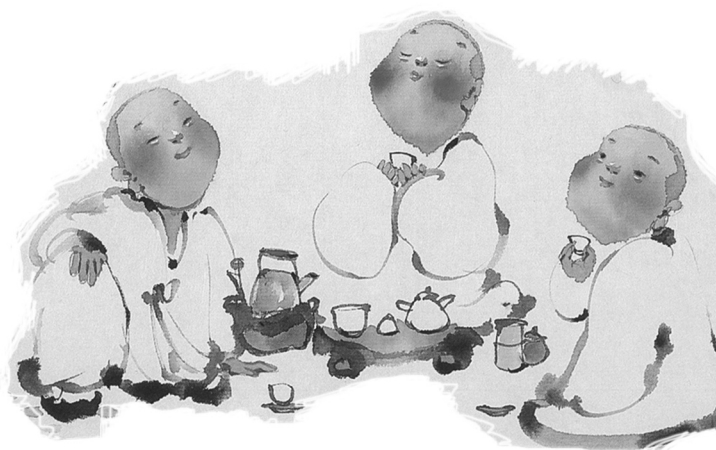
"In what way can a friend be like a balance? A balance drops when a heavy object is placed on it and rises up when a light object is placed on it. Some people show their respect when you have something they want. They become arrogant and distant when you no longer have anything to offer them. These people are like a balance in the way they treat friends.

"In what way can a friend be like a mountain? If birds and animals gather on a gold mountain, their feathers or fur will shimmer with a golden light. When friends share their glory and good fortune, they are the kind of friends who are like mountains.

"In what way can a friend be like the earth? The earth yields hundreds of types of grains and treasures for all living beings to live on. Likewise, some friends share everything they have with you and help you in every way they can. This kind of friend is like the earth."

"Among the four kinds of friends, how does one distinguish one from the other?" asked the devotee.

The Buddha replied, "The first two types of friends befriend you when you are rich, and abandon you when you are poor. They honor you when you bestow them with gifts, and are aloof when you stop giving. They are superficial friends. Do not consider these people close friends. As for the latter two types of friends, they share happiness and joy with others, and they protect and care for all beings. These are the kinds of friends one should closely associate with."



Three Ways to Train a Horse

When the Buddha was teaching, he always adapted his teachings according to the needs of the individual, just as a doctor would prescribe the appropriate medicine for an illness. The Buddha would talk in ways familiar to the people he was addressing.

One day, a horse trainer came sincerely seeking the Buddha's teachings. Knowing this person's livelihood, the Buddha spoke to him about horses. "You are very knowledgeable in the ways of training horses; you understand their temperament. Let me ask you, how many methods are there to train horses?"

The horse trainer answered immediately, "There are three ways to train horses. The first one is the gentle approach, the second is the firm approach and the third is a combination of the two."

"What would you do if none of these methods worked?" asked the Buddha.

"Then there would be no alternative but to kill the horse." The horseman replied. He continued to ask the Buddha, "Lord Buddha, what kinds of methods do you use to teach living beings?"

The Buddha answered, "I also use three methods. The first is the gentle approach, the second is the firm approach, and the third one is a combination of the two."

"What would you do if none of these methods worked?" asked the horseman.

The Buddha answered resolutely, "There would be no alternative but to kill the person."

The trainer was astonished at what he heard. "Lord Buddha, isn't killing a violation of the Dharma?"

The Buddha solemnly said, "Killing is unwholesome and creates grave karmic consequences. When I said I would kill the person, I did not mean it in a literal sense. Those living

beings that cannot be changed by means of the three methods, I would not speak to or teach. One who is not receptive to the teachings is as beyond liberation as if he were dead."

The horseman finally understood what the Buddha meant. He prostrated himself before the Buddha and requested to take refuge in the Triple Gem and uphold the Five Precepts. From then on he refrained from unskillful behavior and practiced kindness.

One of the Buddha's titles is "Trainer of the Mind." For beings with strong personalities, the Buddha prescribes the gentle approach of kindness and compassion. For those who are meek and cowardly, the Buddha prescribes confidence to strengthen their mind. For those who have a mixture of these characteristics, he prescribes a combination of both, just like the horseman. Sentient beings have myriad spiritual illnesses, thus the Buddha employs myriad skillful means. The Buddha's kindness and compassion is indeed boundless.

Three Ways to Tame an Elephant

A-di-daw was brought up in a family that was devoted to the Buddha. Knowing of the Buddha's great powers to relieve the suffering of humanity, he decided to go to the Buddha and beg him to relieve him from the distress in his mind.

The Buddha kindly asked A-di-daw, "What is your name and where do you come from?"

With reverence, A-di-daw knelt down and replied, "My name is A-di-daw, and formerly I was an elephant trainer for your father, King Suddhodana."

The Buddha then asked, "What are the methods you used to tame elephants?"

A-di-daw answered, "I tame elephants in three steps. First, I hook the elephant's mouth with a steel hook. Then I put a bit in its mouth to control its movements and prevent escape. Second, I cut down its food supply so that the elephant will be too hungry and too weak to rebel. Third, I beat the elephant with a stick to inflict pain and fear in it. In this way, an elephant may soon be tamed."

The Buddha questioned, "What is the purpose of each of these steps?"

A-di-daw replied, "Hooking the elephant's mouth subdues its wild and arrogant nature; limiting the elephant's food supply helps to control its fierce temperament; beating the elephant with a stick brings it into submission. Through these means, an elephant is subdued and tamed."

The Buddha asked, "What is the ultimate purpose of taming an elephant?"

A-di-daw responded, "A tamed elephant can be used by a king to ride on safely. It can also be sent off and deployed to the battlefield."

Now the Buddha asked, "You know how to tame elephants, but do you know how to tame your mind?"

"No, Lord Buddha, I do not know how to tame my mind.

Please teach me the way."

The Buddha continued, "I also have three ways of taming the mind so that one may experience the joy of inner peace. First, one must learn to restrain his speech and refrain from false and malicious utterances. Second, one must subdue stubbornness with compassion, kindness and straightforwardness. Third, one must cultivate wisdom to eradicate the anger and hatred brought forth by attachment, conceit and ignorance. These are the ways I teach sentient beings so that they may be free from suffering and attain the blissful state of nirvana.

Having heard the Buddha's teachings, A-di-daw attained enlightenment and true inner freedom was discovered.

The Buddha, a great teacher, was very good at drawing analogies and making comparisons to suit the situation. When speaking to a musician, the Buddha would calm the musician's mind with music; when talking to a horse trainer, the Buddha would make use of the principles and methods of a horse trainer to enlighten him. To an elephant trainer, the Buddha presented his teachings with references to elephant training. While special skills are needed to tame a fierce and wild animal, we definitely need the wisdom and skills of the Dharma to tame the deluded, arrogant human mind.

The Verse

One morning, the Buddha put on his robe, took his bowl and entered the city of Sravasti to beg for alms. An elderly Brahman with a cane was also begging from door to door. The Buddha asked the Brahman, "At your advanced age, why do you still need to beg door to door?"

The Brahman answered, "Well, I have seven sons. Over the past few years, I have arranged for all of them to get married and start their own families. I have also distributed my properties equally to all of them. Now that I am penniless, I am no longer welcome in their households. Since I have no other means of making a living, I need to beg door to door."

The Buddha said, "If I tell you a verse, will you memorize and recite it? Also, will you share it with your sons when you return to the assembly of the Brahmins?"

The Brahman replied, "I will happily memorize and share the verse, Lord Buddha."

The Buddha then recited for him the following verse:

When my sons were born, I was overjoyed,
I worked hard to accumulate wealth for their wellbeing.
I made sure all of them found a spouse,
Yet, they abandoned me in the end.
They give only lip service to their parents,
They pay me no respect.
Like sons of demons, they ignore and ostracize their
dying parents.
Like young horses in the barn, they show no respect
or deference,
They push and shove the aged.
My sons are no different,
They have no love or respect.
They left me so I was forced to beg,
My sons were not as reliable as this cane.

I can use this cane to protect myself from mad dogs
and to herd sheep and horses.
It provides support when I am walking, and keeps me
company when I fall asleep.
I use it to sound the depth of water, and lean on it to
get up.
The cane has so many virtues.
It loves me more than my sons do.

After reciting the verse, the Buddha explained its meaning at length to the Brahman. The Brahman duly memorized the verse. Upon returning to the gathering place of the Brahmans, he recited the verse in front of his sons. After his sons heard the verse, they were ashamed of their own behavior and came forward to embrace him. They took him home, gave him a warm bath and dressed him in the best of clothes. From then on, they all respected and obeyed their father.

The Brahman was most grateful to the Buddha for his benevolence. He honored the Buddha as his teacher and presented him with the best possible clothing as an offering.

Condemnation of Frivolous Debate

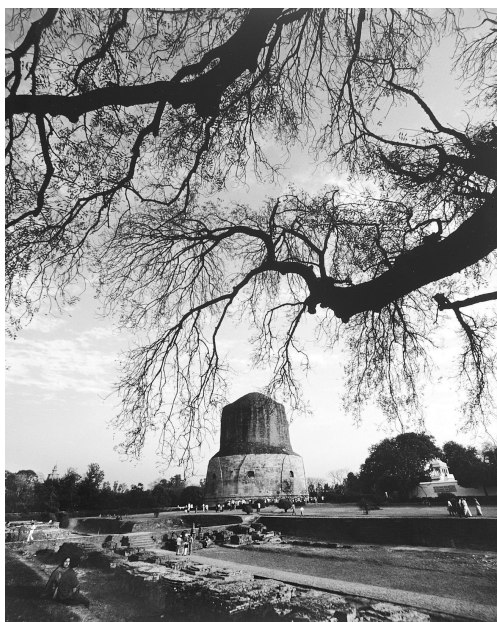
The Buddha appeared in the world to benefit living beings, to show all living beings the wisdom of Buddhahood. To this end, the Buddha presented his teachings in an active and wise manner, and he forbade his disciples from engaging in any meaningless discussions. However, during that time period, Indian scholars were engaged in several popular debates such as, "Is the universe permanent?" "Are spirit and body one or two separate entities?" "Do human beings exist after death?" and so forth. The Buddha forbade his disciples from engaging in such meaningless discussions.

Within the Buddha's monastic assembly, there were a few disciples who were curious about these topics. A disciple named Malunkyaputra was particularly insistent about finding the answers to the questions he had asked the Buddha on numerous occasions. He even threatened to leave the order if the Buddha did not give him any answers. Upon hearing his threat, the Buddha looked around at his disciples and then at the anxious Malunkyaputra. Without answering him directly, the Buddha told the following parable instead, "There once was a man who was struck by a poisonous arrow. His family and friends quickly found a doctor to treat his wound. When the doctor was about to remove the arrow, the man stopped him. He wanted to know who had shot him, with what type of arrow and what kind of material the arrow was made of. He wanted the answers first before receiving any medical treatment. Before he could get the answers, however, the poison killed him."

The Buddha looked at his disciples again and said, "Is the universe permanent? Are spirit and body one or two separate entities? Do human beings exist after death? Even if these questions were answered, the answers would not help us to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death. What we should be concerned with is how to see through impermanence. How

can we be liberated from the suffering we endure in the cycle of birth and death? Do not waste your precious time discussing meaningless topics. You should follow my teachings and cultivate yourself." The Buddha's teachings awakened his disciples, and they no longer indulged in these discussions.

The Buddha places no emphasis on debates that are purely about knowledge. Later on, Nagarjuna also condemned discussions on these topics as frivolous. What the Buddha cares about are the practical issues regarding the relief of afflictions and the transcendence of birth and death. If one does not cultivate and only wastes time on frivolous topics, it will be like climbing a tree in search of a fish.



Avoiding the Second Arrow

The Buddha was an excellent teacher, respected by both human and celestial beings. He was able to discern the most appropriate teaching method for each individual's level. He always had appropriate examples to explain the basic truths of life. Through his skillful means, his disciples were able to understand the Dharma and put what they had learned into practice.

One day, the Buddha asked his disciples, "Suppose there are two people, one has learned the Dharma and the other has not. When they encounter pleasant situations, they both feel happy. When they encounter difficult situations, they both experience 'suffering.' What is the difference between these two people?"

The disciples looked at each other and did not know the answer. They asked the Buddha for clarification.

The Buddha said, "When a person who is unversed in the Dharma encounters suffering, he often feels miserable and despondent. He feels so confused and puzzled that he does not know how to make himself at ease. It is like being shot by an arrow only to be shot again by a second arrow of anguish and helplessness. He feels extreme pain and suffering. On the other hand, when a person well versed in the Dharma encounters suffering, he does not feel sorry for himself, blame others for his suffering, or become confused. Therefore, through the wisdom gained from the Dharma, he spares himself the additional suffering of being shot by a second arrow."

"As a Buddhist, one should not indulge in attachments to joy and happiness. Once one starts to get lost in the intoxication of joy and happiness, one will experience great pain when the pleasant sensations go away. The ending of joy and happiness is the second arrow, which brings anguish," the Buddha explained further.

After hearing the Buddha's explanation, all his disciples

were happy that they were practicing the Buddha's teachings in their daily lives. They were not confused by the sensations of happiness and suffering because they had learned the teachings by heart. Through the analogy of the second arrow, they often reminded themselves not to indulge in the useless emotions of anguish and helplessness.

People generally cannot help themselves when intoxicated by happiness or mired in suffering. They are not able to pull themselves out of their own misery or rise above their emotions. It is a shame to be tripped by the same rock twice; likewise, it is unfortunate to be shot by two arrows. How does one cultivate the awakened mind? When one learns not to dwell on either happiness or suffering, one has attained the highest form of wisdom.

The Liberation of King Mahakalpina

In the Buddha's time, King Prasenajit was the ruler of Sravasti. To the south of Sravasti was a country called Suvarna-bhumi (The Golden Land). At that time, King Mahakalpina had just ascended to the throne. With his bravery and wisdom, he ruled thirty-six thousand small kingdoms. Under his rule, there were numerous soldiers, all highly trained and motivated to fight. King Mahakalpina was invincible, and none of his neighbors dared provoke him. Surprisingly, King Mahakalpina had not had any contact with the kingdom of Sravasti, which was located in the midst of his vassal states.

One day, a merchant came to Suvarna-bhumi and offered a fine rug to the king. The king was very pleased. He asked the merchant, "This rug is beautiful. Where was it made?"

The merchant replied, "Your Majesty, this rug was made in the central region."

The king asked, "What is the name of that area?"

"That area is called Sravasti," the merchant answered.

"Why haven't the people of Sravasti come to pay homage to me and make offerings?"

"Your Majesty, the kingdom of Sravasti is not subject to your rule. Both kingdoms are about the same size and about the same power. Therefore, the ruler of Sravasti will not come to pay homage to you."

King Mahakalpina thought to himself, "With the power I have, I should be able to dominate the entire world. Why is it that this kingdom in the central region does not come to pay homage to me? I will have to subjugate it."

So he asked the merchant again, "Who has the most power in that region?"

"The king of Sravasti, of course."

King Mahakalpina immediately dispatched a messenger to Sravasti, carrying a letter of challenge. The tone of the let-

ter was arrogant and condescending. It read, "My power prevails over the entire earth. Why have you not paid homage to me? Today, I am sending my messenger to remind you of your duty. If you are lying in bed, you should sit up instantly when you hear this message. If you are sitting, you should stand up immediately. If you are eating, you should stop chewing and spit out your food. If you are taking a bath, you should put your clothes on instantly. If you are standing, you should leave immediately and come see me within seven days. If you dare to ignore my orders, I am not to be blamed for attacking your country."

When King Prasenajit received this letter of challenge, he was worried and went to see the Buddha. The Buddha offered a solution to King Prasenajit. Upon hearing the Buddha's plan, King Prasenajit was extremely pleased and went back to his palace. He told the messenger, "Although I am powerful, there is another king nearby who is more powerful than I am. He is a holy king who believes in the Dharma. You should go to see him and give him your king's orders." With the directions given, the messenger then went to the Jetavana Grove.

Meanwhile, using his supernatural powers, the Buddha turned himself into a chakravartin, a holy wheel-turning king, bearing the thirty-two blessed marks. He ordered Maudgalyayana to be his commander of arms, and he turned the main hall of the Jetavana Grove into a jeweled capital. In the capital, there were palaces made out of all kinds of precious materials, and the trees were made out of seven kinds of jewels. There were lotus flowers of many different colors, blooming and shining everywhere. The Buddha, as a chakravartin, sat in the middle of the palace, elegant and powerful.

When the messenger entered the capital and saw the king, he was very frightened and thought to himself, "King

Mahakalpina is arrogant and stupid to provoke a holy wheel-turning king. This time he is in trouble." There was nothing he could do but give the letter of challenge to the holy wheel-turning king. After reading the letter of challenge, the king did not stir. Instead, he threw the letter on the floor and stepped on it. He told the messenger, "I am a holy wheel-turning king. I am held in awe by people in all the ten directions. How dare King Mahakalpina not come to see me? You go back to your country immediately and give your king my orders. As soon as my message arrives, he must sit up immediately. If he is already sitting, he must stand up right away and come to me as soon as he can. If he is lying in bed when he receives my order, he must get up and leave immediately. He must come to see me within seven days. If he does not arrive on time, he will not be forgiven."

After the messenger returned to his country, he gave King Mahakalpina a detailed account of what had taken place. The king regretted his actions. Accompanied by sixteen thousand kings of his vassal states, he went to see the holy wheel-turning king. After he paid his respect to the holy wheel-turning king, he thought, "Although the appearance of the holy wheel-turning king is much more magnificent than mine, he may not be stronger than I am." At that moment, the holy wheel-turning king ordered his commander to fetch a bow for King Mahakalpina. King Mahakalpina could not pick up the bow. The holy wheel-turning king then picked up the bow and proceeded to draw the bow with just his fingers. Simultaneously, the three thousand great chiliocosms within the universe were shaken. Then the king took an arrow, drew the bow and shot it. As soon as the arrow left the bow, it split into five smaller arrows. Each small arrow emitted innumerable rays of light. On top of each ray of light appeared a lotus flower as large as a cartwheel. On top of each lotus sat a

chakravartin, adorned with seven jewels. Infinite light covered all three thousand great chiliocosm of the entire universe. All sentient beings of the five realms were full of joy; the minds and bodies of the celestial beings were purified upon seeing this light and hearing the Dharma. Some of them attained enlightenment while others vowed to attain ultimate truth. Beings in the three lower realms received relief from their endless suffering and were reborn in the human or heavenly realms.

Upon seeing this supernatural transformation, King Mahakalpina and the kings of his vassal states were convinced of the holy wheel-turning king's power. They all attained the pure eye of the Dharma. After gaining the confidence of the visiting kings, the Buddha transformed himself back into his original form, and all his bhiksus gathered around him. King Mahakalpina and all the visiting kings resolved right then and there to join the sangha. The Buddha kindly accepted their requests. King Mahakalpina's hair and beard fell off of their own accord. Covered in robes, they sat quietly contemplating the wonderful Dharma. Eventually they all attained arhatship.

The Real Magician

In the town of Rajagrha lived a learned magician named Bhadrapada. He excelled in sorcery and was regarded as the best magician in town. Almost everyone in the kingdom of Magadha, except for the Buddha's followers, was enchanted by his magic and believed in him.

When Bhadrapada learned of the Buddha's virtues and accomplishments, he was deeply worried and thought to himself, "All the people in the town of Rajagrha respect and believe in me, except for the Sramana Gautama. I must go and test him. If he loses, he will have to become my disciple, and then all the people in town will also turn to me and respect me." Bhadrapada decided to put his plan into action and immediately headed for Vulture Peak where the Buddha was residing at the time.

At Vulture Peak, the Buddha was teaching the people using sixty kinds of pure voices. The Buddha's splendid glory shone more brilliantly than a million suns. His dignified countenance was like a full moon on a fall night. His appearance was perfect and his eyes were pure and beautiful like lotuses. Although Bhadrapada saw for himself how the Buddha carried himself with dignity, he was still filled with prejudice and arrogance. He told himself, "Today, I must try to figure out this buddha. If he truly is the Buddha, he must know what I am thinking about." Then, he walked up and prostrated himself before the Buddha, saying, "Will you kindly accept my humble offerings tomorrow?"

The Buddha looked at Bhadrapada and realized that the cause and condition for liberating him and the people of Rajagrha had matured. The Buddha accepted the invitation without any hesitation.

Bhadrapada thought that the Buddha did not know what his intentions were. He was quite pleased with himself and left. Maudgalyayana, the disciple accompanying the Buddha,

was annoyed and said, "Lord Buddha, you know that Bhadrapada came here to deceive you and all the bhiksus. Why did you accept his invitation?"

With patience and compassion, the Buddha explained, "Maudgalyayana, since I have long rid myself of greed, anger, and delusion and have settled on the right path for kalpas, how can anybody deceive me? You know that his magic is not real power. Maudgalyayana, can Bhadrapada make the three thousand great chiliocosms holy and majestic?"

"No." answered Maudgalyayana.

"With only a little effort, I can manifest worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges within a single thread of my hair. Maudgalyayana, a buddha is one who truly possesses magic."

Meanwhile, Bhadrapada found the dirtiest place in the town of Rajagṛha. He conjured up a glorious offering pavilion decorated with flags and umbrellas, flowers and incense, and seven avenues of gem trees, each with a lion throne. In addition, he conjured up five hundred attendants and plenty of food and drink for the bhiksus. At this time, the four devakings came down to the offering pavilion. They were full of joy and praise for the magician's illusion and said, "We want to help make offerings to the Buddha. Is it alright if we make another offering pavilion over to the right?" The magician happily agreed.

A glorious pavilion appeared immediately. Sakra, King of the Devaloka, came down with his 30,000 sons to talk with the magician about making offerings to the Buddha. He insisted on making another glorious pavilion on the left side. The magician, surprised, agreed.

Another magnificent pavilion soon appeared. When Bhadrapada looked at these three majestic sites, he felt

remorseful and decided to make them disappear. He tried all his magical powers, but failed. The magic and sorcery that he was so good at in the past did not work at all.

Sakra instinctively knew of Bhadrapada's worries and told him, "If anyone gains a thought of benevolence by seeing your offering pavilions, the merit created will be limitless. It will be the cause for them to attain Buddhahood in the future." Hearing this, Bhadrapada was much relieved.

Early the next morning, the town's Brahmachari learners, Brahmins, followers of the Buddha, and many curious people all came to the offering pavilions, wondering who would gain the upper hand. The Buddha also came with his bhiksus.

This time, upon seeing the Buddha's majestic appearance, Bhadrapada lost his arrogance. He prostrated himself in front of the Buddha and repented for his attempt to deceive the Buddha at the monastery the day before. He confessed that he had originally planned to humiliate the Buddha by making the illusive glorious pavilions vanish during the offering ceremony for the Buddha and his bhiksus; however, he could not make his sorcery work at all.

The Buddha said compassionately, "Never mind, Bhadrapada, all living beings and the things around us are illusory. The bhiksus, our physical bodies, food and drink, attendants, the three thousand great chiliocosms, and all things within are the results of combining causes and conditions. Now you can use the food and drink you conjured up to make offerings to all those who have gathered here."

The Buddha's principal disciples, Mahakasyapa, Maudgalyayana, Sariputra, Subhuti, Ananda, Maitreya Bodhisattva, and Manjusri Bodhisattva, each praised the magician with verses to ease his mind. The Buddha displayed his power by manifesting in various forms at different places. Bhadrapada saw the Buddha simultaneously accepting offer-

ings at Ajatasatru's palace, making alms rounds, preaching at the Jetavana Monastery, and teaching in the Thirty-three Heavens and at various locations in the town of Rajagrha. He praised the Buddha with utmost sincerity and said, "Lord Buddha, you are a true magician!" The Buddha then taught Bhadrpada the Dharma. With the Buddha's guidance, Bhadrpada finally decided to take refuge in the Triple Gem and became one of the Buddha's bhiksus.

"If one understands the law of cause and condition, one will find spring in the midst of autumn frost and winter snow." According to Buddhism, all dharmas are inter-related by causes and conditions, and all phenomena are the culmination of causes and conditions. If one understands cause and condition, one will understand the ups and downs of all sentient beings, the conditional causation of worldly lives, and the truth of the universe. The Buddha, knowing the magician's intent to humiliate him, was merciful and compassionate in his dealings with him. The arrogant magician was finally touched and took refuge in the Triple Gem. At the same time, the Buddha also planted the cause and condition for people of Rajagrha to attain Buddhahood in the future.

Letting Go

A Brahmacari, holding a flower in each hand, came to pay homage and make offerings to the Buddha. The Buddha said to the Brahmacari, "Let go."

The Brahmacari dropped the flower in his left hand. Again the Buddha said, "Let go!" He then dropped the flower in his right hand. Nevertheless, the Buddha repeated, "Let go!"

This time, the Brahmacari asked, "Lord Buddha, both my hands are empty. What else do you want me to let go of?"

The Buddha said, "I am not asking you to let go of the flowers in your hands. I am teaching you to let go of your clinging mind. Only when you have let go of everything, with nothing else to let go of, will you find your resting place."

The Brahmacari finally discovered the truth of letting go.

How can one live a truly free and peaceful life? We have to practice letting go. We have to let go of our greed for worldly wealth, honor and pleasure. We have to abandon our clinging to the anguish, worries and sorrows of life. Further, we have to let go of the delusive concept of "abandonment," until there is nothing else to abandon. The true meaning of letting go is captured by this saying from the sutras, "There is nothing to begin with, where is there for dust to alight?"

Glossary

Anagamin: A "nonreturner." The noble person who has attained the third level of the supramundane path. An Anagamin will not be reborn in the human realm again, but will have one rebirth in the heaven realm and attain arhatship there.

Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi: Literally, "unexcelled complete enlightenment." This is the enlightenment of a Buddha.

Arhat: Literally, a "Worthy one." The noble person who has eliminated all afflictions and passions and has attained the fourth level of the supramundane path. An Arhat will no longer be subject to rebirth.

Asamkhya kalpa: Innumerable, countless kalpas. A kalpa is an extremely long period of time.

Asceticism: Skt. "dhuta," which means to eliminate afflictions and sufferings, to cultivate the purification of the mind and the body, and to abandon greedy desires.

Asuras: Demigods.

Bhiksu: A fully ordained Buddhist monk.

Bhiksuni: A fully ordained Buddhist nun.

Bodhi: Enlightenment. In the state of enlightenment, one is awakened to the true nature of oneself, the Buddha Nature.

Bodhisattva: "Enlightened being," refers to anyone who

seeks Buddhahood and vows to liberate all sentient beings.

Brahman: Or "brahmin," the priestly caste, the highest of the four castes in the Hindu society.

Buddha: "Awakened one." When "the Buddha" is used, it usually refers to the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni Buddha.

Buddhahood: The attainment and expression that characterizes a Buddha. Buddhahood is the highest goal of all beings.

Buddha Nature: The inherent nature that exists in all beings. It is the capability to attain Buddhahood.

Buddhism: Founded by Sakyamuni Buddha around 2,500 years ago. Its basic doctrines include the Three Dharma Seals, the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, the six perfections, and the concepts of impermanence and emptiness. While Buddhism has been a popular religion in South, Central and East Asia, it is currently growing in the West.

Cause and Condition: Referring to the primary cause (cause) and the secondary causes (conditions). The seed from which a plant or a flower grows is a good illustration of the primary cause; the elements of soil, humidity, sunlight, and so forth, could be considered the secondary causes.

Cause and Effect: The most basic doctrine in Buddhism, which explains the formation of all relations and connections in this world. This law means that the arising of each and every phenomenon is due to its own causes and conditions, and the actual form or appearance of all phenomena is the effect.

Chiliocosm: A thousandfold world. In Buddhist cosmology, a world consists of its Mount Sumeru, continents, seas, and ring of iron mountains, and a thousand worlds constitute a "small chiliocosm." A thousand small chiliocosm constitute a "medium chiliocosm." A thousand medium chiliocosm constitute a "great chiliocosm", which is also called "three thousandfold chiliocosm."

Dependent Origination: The central principle that phenomena do not come into existence independently, but only as a result of causes and conditions, thus, no phenomenon possesses an independent self-nature; this concept is also referred to as interdependence.

Dharma: With a capital "D": 1) the ultimate truth, and 2) the teachings of the Buddha. When the Dharma is applied or practiced in life, it is 3) righteousness or virtues. With a lower case "d": 4) anything that can be thought of, experienced, or named; close in meaning to "phenomena."

Dharma joy: The joy that arises in the mind after listening to or learning the Buddha's teachings.

Dhyana: Meditation.

Emptiness: Skt. "sunyata." A fundamental Buddhist concept, also known as non-substantiality or relativity. It means that all phenomena exist due to dependent origination and do not have a fixed or independent nature. In Buddhism, it can be divided into two categories: 1) Associated with individuals and called "non-substantiality of persons." 2) Associated with phenomena and called "non-substantiality of dharmas." Therefore, the concept of emptiness is related to dependent origination and impermanence.

Five Precepts: The five basic precepts of Buddhism: no killing, no stealing, no lying, no sexual misconduct, no use of drugs and alcohol.

Four meditation stages: Also known as four dhyanas and four states of meditative concentration. 1) In the first meditation stage, accompanied with applied and sustained thought, one's mind is focused, and one experiences rapture and happiness borne out of seclusion from desire and unwholesome mental states. 2) In the second meditation stage, there is internal confidence and unification of the mind without applied and sustained thought, and one experiences rapture and happiness borne out of concentration. 3) In the third meditation stage, with the fading away of rapture, one abides in equanimity, mindfulness, and awareness and experiences happiness throughout the body. 4) In the fourth meditation stage, one experiences equanimity and purity of mindfulness. The feelings of joy and happiness are absent.

Impermanence: One of the most basic truths taught by the Buddha. It is the concept that all conditioned dharmas, or phenomena, will arise, abide, change, and disappear due to causes and conditions.

Four Noble Truths: One of the most fundamental Buddhist teachings about the nature and existence of suffering: 1) the truth of suffering, 2) the truth of the cause of suffering, 3) the truth of the cessation of suffering, and 4) the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

Kalpa: An extremely long period of time, the time for a world system, to undergo the process of formation, abiding,

destruction, and nonexistence.

Karma: This means, "work, action, or deeds" and is related to the law of cause and effect. All deeds, whether good or bad, produce effects. The effects may be experienced instantly or they may not come into fruition for many years or even many lifetimes.

Liberation: Skt. "vimoksa;" which means being free from all afflictions, sufferings, and the cycle of birth and death.

***Mahaprajna-paramita Sutra (Sutra of the Great Wisdom)*:** Also known as the *Sutra on the Perfection of Great Wisdom*; T: vol. 5 - vol. 7; six hundred fascicles in total; translated into Chinese by Xuanzhuang during the Chinese Tang Dynasty.

Mahayana: Literally, "the Great Vehicle." One of the two main traditions of Buddhism, the other being Theravada. Mahayana Buddhism stresses that helping all sentient beings to attain enlightenment is as important as self-liberation.

Maitreya Bodhisattva: Maitreya is the Buddha of the future.

Mala: Garland of beads.

Merit: The blessings of wealth, health, intelligence, etc., which are accrued through virtuous conduct and benefiting others.

Middle Way: A teaching of Sakyamuni Buddha, which teaches the avoidance of all extremes.

Nirvana: Pali "nibbana." The original meaning of this word

is "extinguished, calmed, quieted, tamed, ceasing." In Buddhism, it refers to the absolute extinction of all afflictions and desires; it is the state of liberation, beyond birth and death. It is also the final goal in Buddhism.

Noble Eightfold Path: The path leading to enlightenment as taught by Sakyamuni Buddha. It includes: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Non-self: Skt. "anatman" or "niratman;" Pali "anattan." A basic concept in Buddhism. It means that all phenomena and beings in the world have no real, permanent, and substantial self.

Parinirvana: A synonym for "nirvana." It is the state of having completed all merits and perfections and eliminated all unwholesomeness. Usually, it is used to refer to the time when the Buddha physically passed away.

Prajnaparamita Sutra(s): "Prajnaparamita" is "the perfection of wisdom," or "the understanding that brings sentient beings across the sea of suffering to the other shore." A generic term for the sutras that deal with the teaching of the perfection of wisdom.

Pratimoksa: Precepts. The rules of conduct for guarding against unwholesome actions of one's body, speech and mind, thereby leading one to liberation.

Pratyeka-buddha: Literally, "solitary awakened one." One who attains enlightenment on his own, without having heard the teachings of a Buddha.

Pure Land: Another term for a Buddha Realm, which is established by the vows and cultivation of one who has achieved enlightenment.

Sacred Fruit of the Non-returner: The fruition of the third level of the supramundane path.

Sacred Fruit of the Once-returner: The fruition of the second level of the supramundane path.

Saha: The world of endurance, the world in which Sakyamuni Buddha taught.

Sakrdagamin: A “once-returner.” The noble person who has attained the second level of the supramundane path. A Sakrdagamin will have only one more rebirth in the human world alternate with one rebirth in the heaven realm. before attaining arhatship.

Samadhi: A deep state of meditative concentration; a state in which the mind is concentrated in a one-pointed focus and all mental activities are calmed. In samadhi, one is free from all distractions, thereby entering a state of inner serenity.

Samsara: The cycle of repeated birth and death.

Sangha: The community of Buddhist monks and nuns; or the community of all Buddhists.

Sentient Being: Any living being that has consciousness.

Six Paramitas of the Mahayana (Six Perfections): The six "perfections" or virtues practiced by enlightening beings: generosity, upholding the precepts, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom.

Six Realms: The various modes of existence in which rebirth occurs, ranging from the lower realms of hell, hungry ghost, and animal to the higher realms of human, asura, and heaven.

Stream Entry: A stream-enterer is the noble person who has attained the first level of the supramundane path.

***Sutra of Bequeathed Teachings (Last Teachings of the Buddha Sutra)*:** This sutra describes the Buddha's last teachings before he entered parinirvana. These teachings instruct the disciples to uphold the precepts, see them as the teacher, and rely on them for guidance to regulate the mind and the five sense organs, eliminate afflictions and attain Buddhahood.

Sutra: Literally, "threaded together." The discourses directly taught by the Buddha.

***Sutra of Cause And Effect*:** A sutra that explains the teachings of cause and effect.

***Sutra of Forty-Two Sections*:** The first sutra translated into Chinese, completed by Kasyapamatanga and Zhu Falan. The content is concise and explains the basic doctrines of early Buddhism.

Ten directions: East, west, south, north, southeast, southwest, northeast, northwest, above, and below.

Trayastrimsa Heaven: Also known as the Heaven of Thirty-three, is the second of the six heavens in the world of desire.

Triple Gem: The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Twelve Nidanas of Conditioned Origination: Also known as the twelve links of dependent origination. Nidana means a link (in the chain of causation), and is used to describe the process by which a being comes into existence. The twelve links are ignorance, mental formation, consciousness, name and form, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, and aging and death.

Upasaka: A lay male Buddhist follower.