

Learning the Wisdom of Enlightenment

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Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (BDK)
The Society for the Promotion of Buddhism

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Foreword

We are now living in a culture in which taking time to reflect on our past conduct calmly and thinking of the world thoroughly are difficult because we live in a civilization of excessive activity and massive amounts of information. However, when we think of the fact that we were born into this world as unique beings different from other creatures, are we not absorbed into the thought that we should move with the times until the end of our lives?

Our predecessors called such a life a “bubble-like ephemeral life” or “birth and death while drinking and dreaming.” Do you want to have such a way of life?

About 2,500 years ago, Buddha was born as a prince of the Shakya Clan in Nepal but left his palace to seek the Truth. After finally attaining Enlightenment, he started teaching people how to live a good life and thus Buddhism was born.

What Buddha regarded as the most important thing in life is “to observe carefully one’s own mind.”

By doing so, it will become clear how wonderful you are, how foolish you are, and how your mind is deeply related to peace and beauty in the world as well as how to obtain true happiness.

Buddhism has been spreading around the world by developing as a variety of fruitful trees in history, while retaining its original essence: “to observe carefully one’s own mind.” This leads us to true happiness.

This guidebook to Buddhism is for people who want to stop and observe their own mind on occasion and to realize the reality of who they are. It is for people who wish to live correct and fulfilling lives. Just open this book casually and start reading freely from wherever you want. You will surely encounter an array of illuminating words that will nourish your mind.

BUKKYO DENDO KYOKAI (BDK)
Society for the Promotion of Buddhism

Notes on Compilation

This book consists basically of excerpts with commentaries from *Bukkyo-seiten* (The Teaching of Buddha) published by BUKKYO DENDO KYOKAI (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism), though some stories are included from other sources.

Indian proper nouns are in principle English transliterations of Sanskrit words.

The sources or meaning of passages from sutras quoted here are specified.

CHAPTER 1

Words of Truth

1. Overcoming Hatreds

Hatreds never cease by hatreds in this world.
By love alone do they cease.
This is an ancient Law.

Dhammapada

At the San Francisco Peace Conference [in 1951], a Sri Lankan representative quoted this passage and declared that his country would not demand compensation [for the damages caused by Japanese war activities]. This caused a huge sensation. In spite of the fact that his country had suffered huge damages, he maintained that they should forget the animosity and make an effort for securing peace.

Fifty years later, synchronized terrorist attacks occurred on September 11, 2001 in New York. The animosity caused by these incidents led to the American war in Iraq and Afghanistan, which conversely created the Islamic State (IS). The chain of hatred seems endless. However, there are some movements to cut the chain.

When an Islamic group blew up the two Giant Statues of Buddha in Bamiyan in 2001, there were some movements to try to destroy mosques as revenge in Sri Lanka, a Buddhist country.

However, an elderly Buddhist monk argued that “even if we are hit, we should not hit back. Instead, let us erect statues on that rocky hill again.” Some children who heard this message donated their meager allowances and said, “Please rebuild the statues with this.” The amount of money was very small, but this news spread around the world and led to huge donations, which enabled the making a new grand statue of Buddha.

Also, bereaved families of the victims of 9/11 have started communicating with Muslims whom they had previously regarded as their enemies, and they recognized that Muslim families had been victimized by American retaliatory attacks in Afghanistan.

The only way to cut chains of hatred is to forget about animosity toward opponents.

Buddha encouraged us to give up hatred and animosity and to live happily because this is an eternal truth.

2. A Greater Victory

To conquer oneself is a greater victory
than to conquer thousands in a battle.

Dhammapada

“Oneself,” that is, our individual self, is the subject of our awareness, intentions and action.

Here it means the true self, but our individual self is always influenced by our desires and attachments making the self extremely difficult to control.

Therefore, it can be said that the person who is able to dismiss hard-to-control temptations caused by desire conquers one’s “self,” and

the person who is able to keep on doing good deeds is more victorious than those who defeat ten million men [in the battlefield].

In order to overcome the “self,” one needs to know the self.

Once, on the way to Buddhagaya, Buddha left the road for a dense forest and sat under a tree. About thirty young men chasing a young woman appeared and asked Buddha if he had seen her. Buddha said to the young men, “Instead of chasing a woman, seek yourself.”

And he allowed them to become his disciples.

But what is this “oneself” to be sought?

In his last days, Buddha taught his disciples, “Do not depend on others but depend on yourself to live.”

What he meant by “yourself” is not, of course, the self that is full of desires and attachments but the “true self,” which is free from them.

Clearly, the final goal of a Buddha is to realize the “true self.”

3. A Flower without Fragrance

To utter pleasant words without practicing them
is like being a fine flower without fragrance.

Dhammapada

Those who can but do not practice what they preach are like beautiful roadside flowers without any scent. Even if you are attracted to them at first, you will feel disenchanted upon approaching them.

As the Chinese classic, “The Analects of Confucius,” says, “Those with flattering tongues and sneering faces have little benevolence.” People who do not act in accordance with what they have said will lose the trust of others.

It could be even worse. Insincere speech could be lying depend-

ing on circumstances. Lying goes against one of the five basic precepts that Buddhists must follow.

- 1) Not killing
- 2) Not stealing
- 3) No Debauchery
- 4) No False Speech
- 5) No Consumption of Alcohol

Thus, lying goes against the above fourth precept.

Nevertheless, as the proverb says, “Lying could also be an *upaya* [expedient means].” There are some apparent situations in which lying could be acceptable in order to avoid causing hardship for yourself or someone else.

For example, it used to be common among doctors to inform terminal cancer patients of a false disease on purpose to avoid causing any psychological shock.

As to cancer notification, there are various opinions and stand-points even now. It is necessary for doctors to have a deep understanding of the feelings and circumstances of patients and their families.

It is necessary to have compassion to judge whether nice words amount to a lie or *upaya*.

4. My Possessions

So long as a man cannot control his own mind, how can he get any satisfaction from thinking such thoughts as, “This is my son” or “This is my treasure”? A foolish man suffers from such thoughts.

Dhammapada

“I am what I own” is a proposition based on a very modern way of thinking.

For example, your children could be described as your other selves.

Even so, however, both your children and belongings are not something that you can freely manipulate.

Against your expectation, your children might rebel against you, run away from your home and even die of illness. Each child is an independent person and is different from his/her parents in their ways of thinking and behavioral patterns. It is not easy for you to control your children as you would wish.

You may partially or completely lose your possessions for various reasons. You might go bankrupt or your house might be washed away by a flood.

If they were truly yours, you could control them as you wish.

When we think deeply, however, we cannot always control ourselves. We hope that all of our conveniences will last, but reality often betrays our wishes.

In Buddhism, we understand that the nature of our lives requires us “to face the reality of impermanence.”

Buddha teaches us, “To realize that nothing is our property is wisdom and is the way to escape from suffering.” That is to say, he

teaches us that all things, every material object, our minds and the environment surrounding us are not things about which we can say, “This is mine.” This is because everything in this world is impermanent and is in the process of changing.

5. Mastery of Oneself

Everyone is the master of himself
and is the oasis he can depend on;
therefore, everyone should control himself above all.

Dhammapada

We often lose ourselves. Even though we know this well, we sometimes cannot control ourselves.

We may often say, “Damn! I was defeated by him.” We may become desperate and say, “I have lost all my money and social status. How can I live from now on?” Often, things do not go as well as we wish. Disease and lost love can cause serious mental traumas.

In 2008, random street assaults occurred at Akihabara, Tokyo. The young phantom killer drove his truck into a crowd on a car-free mall, and then slashed passersby with a dagger at random. The number of casualties was 17, which made this incident one of the worst cases of random assault in recent history.

The young man said, “There were things that did not go as well as I had wished, but I could not tell anybody. I wished I had had someone who cared for me.” Although what he did was impermissible, many alienated young people might share the same feeling.

However, to think that something does not go as well as we wish means we are at the mercy of our ego. We always suffer from frustra-

tion as our ego wants to have something unreachable and urges us on forever. This could be said to be a part of our human nature. Feelings of hurt can be healed, and it is we ourselves who must treat our broken minds just as we have to eat by ourselves when we are hungry.

We cannot beg somebody else to do it. By controlling our ego and lust by ourselves we can gain harmony with ourselves.

6. Buddha's Teaching

To avoid all evil, to seek the good, to keep the mind pure:
this is the essence of Buddha's teaching.

Dhammapada

Once Bai Juyi (772–846), a poet in the Tang dynasty of China, visited a renowned high priest of Zen to ask: “What is the essence of Buddha's teaching?” Then, the monk replied, “Do not do anything bad and do only good things.”

Immediately, Bai Juyi responded, “What? If so, even three-year-old toddlers can say the same thing.” Then the priest said, “Although three-year-old kids can correctly say this, 80-year old men cannot faithfully live accordingly.”

Listening to this, Bai Juyi could not say anything more and only kept bowing his head.

This is a story from a famous Zen saying, and what the Zen monk said was a quotation from the *Dhammapada*. As quoted above, in the original passage of the sutra, “to purify one's mind” is consistent with their conversation.

Bai Juyi probably belittled him a bit since what the monk said was so simple.

We tend to lose our judgment on right and wrong when we are haughty and arrogant. If we could live by purifying our minds even a little bit in everyday life, such haughtiness and arrogance will naturally shrink and eventually disappear. To keep us from being haughty and arrogant, we should place ourselves in another person's position so that we can realize many new things.

Let us live bright and joyful lives while feeling gratitude about the fact that we are alive, thanks to all other beings. This is what Buddha discovered and taught.

7. Value This Moment

The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, and not to anticipate troubles, but to live wisely and earnestly for the present.

Majjhima Nikāya

We may suddenly become unable to breathe one day and might have to be hospitalized, or we may linger between life and death because of a traffic accident.

We are not sure what will happen in our lives. There is a possibility that we will die tomorrow, which nobody can predict.

Our life is ephemeral, which is why we have to judge carefully what is most important for “now.” Buddha taught that it is vain to grieve over the past and that it is foolish to dream only about the future or to worry about tomorrow.

It is important to realize how we are in the now rather than in the past or future. That is why he taught us to do earnestly what we should

do right now. This passage teaches us that those who truly realize how to be in the present moment can naturally decide how to live.

“Every Day is a Good Day” is a similar passage in Zen Buddhism. This is a famous passage written by Yunmen Wenyan (862 or 864–949 CE), a Zen monk who lived in the Tang dynasty in China and can often be found on alcove scrolls in tea ceremony rooms.

This passage does not mean that “every day is a peaceful good day.” Rather, it means that it would be a good day if we could live each and every day without being swayed by the joys or sorrows of everyday life. To live without being preoccupied by the circumstances we face makes our everyday life wonderful.

8. Preciousness

Hard is birth as a man,
hard is the life of mortals,
hard is the hearing of the Sublime Truth,
hard is the appearance of a Buddha.

Dhammapada

Our life does not always flow as we wish. Whenever something happens, we worry, lament, suffer and feel anguish. If such mental wounds are unavoidable, what should we do?

Buddha’s teaching makes us accept inherent anxieties positively.

We have to accept inescapable matters as part of the “reality of impermanence.” However, this does not mean that we have to lament the reality of impermanence, but it teaches us to have the strength to overcome this reality.

There is a Japanese word, “*anshin*,” which literally means peace of mind.

As a matter of fact, this word originated from Buddhist terminology whose pronunciation is “*anjin*.” Its meaning is also slightly different and signifies an immovable state of mind.

In Buddhism, to live positively with vigor, wisdom and gratitude towards diverse everyday occurrences of joy, anger, and sadness is called the “life of an immovable state of mind.”

However, it is really difficult to live as such because we do not have enough strength to accept sadness and suffering positively. We need to be gifted with good circumstances.

Because it is difficult, it is also rare to realize it. If we could live as such, we have to recognize that it would be rare. Those who are aware of this rarity should feel gratitude for the conditions that enabled them to be born as humans and to encounter Buddha’s teaching.

Thanks to being born as humans, it is possible to live as such.

9. The Mistakes of Others

It is easy to point out the mistakes of others,
but hard to admit one’s own mistakes.

Dhammapada

We humans cannot grow by ourselves alone. Through associating with many other people, we learn many lessons that allow us to grow.

If we learn from the good traits of others and do not imitate their bad habits, we will feel joy in getting along with them. However, once we come to dislike someone, we tend to notice his/her faults

and defects and then, if he/she acts badly, we often lose patience and cannot forgive them.

In that case, we may unconsciously keep our distance from such people, and we will not be able to approach them and help them correct their mistakes.

However, if the wrongdoing is ours, we tend to justify the mistake, make excuses about it, or sometimes cover it up, which could worsen the situation. Because we cannot apologize and say, "I am sorry," we put ourselves into a helpless situation.

Confucius says in his *Analects*, "If we make a mistake, we should remedy it without hesitation." We tend to criticize others easily but find it difficult to admit our own mistakes and always make various excuses, even though we all wish to be honest. In Buddhism, we say "*zange*" in Japanese, which means repentance and confession of our wrongdoings to Buddha or priests as a condition for receiving forgiveness.

There are some people who always repent what needs to be repented.

Before pointing out the mistakes of other people, let us take a few minutes to reflect on ourselves.

CHAPTER 2

Buddha's Parables

1. Parable of the Poisoned Arrow

Suppose a man were pierced by a poisoned arrow, and his relatives and friends got together to call a surgeon to have the arrow removed and the wound treated.

If the wounded man objects, saying, “Wait a minute. Before you pull it out, I want to know who shot this arrow. Was it a man or a woman? Was it someone of noble birth or was it a peasant? What was the bow made of? Was it a big bow or a small bow that shot the arrow? Was it made of wood or bamboo? What was the bow string made of? Was it made of fiber or of gut? Was the arrow made of rattan or of reed? What feathers were used? Before you extract the arrow, I want to know all about these things.” Then what will happen?

Before all this information can be secured, no doubt, the poison will have time to circulate through his body and the man may die. The first duty is to remove the arrow and prevent its poison from spreading.

Majjhima Nikāya

WE CANNOT KNOW EVERYTHING.

Intellectual analysis and curiosity are necessary and important for us to grow as humans. We always question, "Why?" and try to seek an answer. By knowing, we increase our knowledge, widen our views and deepen our understanding about the world and human beings.

Acquired knowledge is useful to solve various problems that we face in our life and to improve our environment. Human beings have been making progress by using knowledge effectively. To know is joyful and enriches our life. But what we do not know is limitless. The more we know the more we realize what we do not know. Several life spans would not be long enough to know everything in this world.

There are questions that are inherently impossible to answer. For example, "Is the universe eternal or not eternal?" "Is the universe limitless or limited?" Buddha did not answer when he was asked such questions. He just kept his silence.

One day, a man appeared and demanded, "Buddha, if you know, answer me. If not, just say you don't know. I want to practice after listening to your answer.

Buddha replied, "What I have not taught is to be understood as something not to be taught. I will never talk about issues such as, 'Is the universe eternal or not eternal.' Therefore, you will never get an answer from me. If you insist that you will not practice until you get my answer, you will not be relieved from your suffering. What I am teaching is the way to be liberated from suffering."

Buddha did not teach us for the sake of satisfying our intellectual curiosity or concerns, nor to increase our knowledge. He taught to liberate us from our immediate suffering.

WHAT IS OUR PRIORITY?

Even if we could satisfy our intellectual curiosity and concerns, that would be irrelevant to our liberation from our suffering.

Whether the universe is eternal or not, whether it is infinite or not, birth, old age, illness, death, grief, sadness, distress and worry do exist in reality.

Buddha taught that to solve the suffering that is rooted deep within our minds was the most urgent issue.

To escape from the world of burning suffering is so urgent that we cannot afford to waste our time to get involved in other issues that are irrelevant or trivial to the immediate problem. While accumulating knowledge and pursuing answers for less important issues, we can all die in this burning world of suffering.

Of course, it is urgent for us to get rid of the poisoned arrow immediately and treat the wound.

Buddha felt compassion for people who live and die in suffering and therefore kept teaching lessons about how to escape from suffering by reawakening us to the real cause of suffering. This is what we learn from this insightful parable.

2. Parable of the Raft

Once there was a man on a long journey who came to a river. He said to himself: "This side of the river is very difficult and dangerous to walk on, and the other side seems easier and safer, but how shall I get across?" So, he built a raft out of branches and reeds and safely crossed the river. Then he thought to himself: "This raft has been very useful to me in crossing the river; I will not abandon it to rot on the bank but will carry it along with me." And thus he voluntarily assumed an unnecessary burden. Can this man be called a wise man?

Majjhima Nikāya

FEAR OF MISUNDERSTANDING WHAT IS RIGHT

Once we become convinced that something is right, we come to believe that the idea is our own and nobody else's and that our idea is special and the only correct one even though it is just one of many.

Even if the idea is mistaken and we know it, we are reluctant to admit it. What is worse, if somebody else points it out as a mistake, we have even more difficulty to admit it. Why? It is because the idea has become equal to us.

That our own idea is pointed out as mistaken is what we ourselves deny. If we deny it, it becomes difficult for us to live and thus we strive to defend ourselves. In order to defend ourselves, we believe that our idea must be correct by all means. This is called "attachment," which means our minds cling to our possessions or to ourselves.

When everybody clings to their own idea, uncontrollable conflicts occur. Since we believe that only we are right, we think that everybody

else's idea is wrong. People do not accept the ideas of others and vice versa. If so, nobody can attain satisfaction. Nevertheless, nobody gets rid of their attachments. We prefer conflict and discontent rather than being denied the comfort of our convictions.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE NOW?

When we reflect on ourselves, we will actually realize how hard it is to get rid of our attachments. As this parable of the raft indicates, we should not cling to even what is right and sometimes we should abandon it and leave it behind. It goes without saying that the same is true for what is wrong.

Then, how should we treat the raft?

"This raft enabled me to cross the river safely. What a useful raft, indeed! Now I will just leave it here or let it sink in the water and start walking towards my destination."

Those who can think in this way are the ones who understand the raft properly. The raft is for crossing a river, not for shouldering after that. If the raft appropriately served its purpose, we should leave it behind with gratitude and without any attachment to it.

TO ADVANCE FROM ONE SUBJECT TO ANOTHER AS WE LEARN

There are various stages in human development and each stage requires a proper teaching.

Even if a teaching was appropriate in the previous stage, it might be inappropriate in the next stage, which deserves a new and

proper teaching. If we are wedded to the teaching for the previous stage and excessively cling to it, we might fail to adjust ourselves to a new stage.

Without fixation to the teachings for the previous stages, we should leave them behind with gratitude and should turn our attention to learn and practice a new teaching for each new stage.

3. Three Kinds of Letters

There are three kinds of people in the world. The first are those who are like letters carved in rock, and they easily give way to anger and retain their angry thoughts for a long time. The second are those who are like letters written in sand, and they give way to anger also, but their angry thoughts quickly pass away. The third are those who are like letters written on running water, and they do not retain their passing thoughts. They let abuse and uncomfortable gossip pass by unnoticed, and their minds are always pure and undisturbed.

Āṅguttara Nikāya

CHOOSING NOT TO GET ANGRY

It is generally thought that anger is one of the natural feelings of humans and therefore it is taken as a matter of course that we get angry at what deserves anger.

This seems too obvious for us to question, as if we have no choice but to get angry from the outset.

On the other hand, we are all swayed by anger. We often get angry at trifles and, after all, get fed up with ourselves. Though wishing to control anger somehow, we have difficulties doing so. Some people say, “Anger is unavoidable because we are human, and humans get angry.” Some others would go even further to say, “We are human because we have anger. Without it we are not human.” Those people have only one stereotype about human nature as being prone to anger.

The above parable of the three kinds of letters provides us three models of being human.

A man like a letter engraved on a rock means a man whose anger does not disappear any more than does a letter carved on the rock. A man like a letter inscribed on sand signifies a man whose anger disappears quickly, just like a letter on the sand. A man like a letter written on the surface of water symbolizes a man who does not get angry from the outset.

If we observe carefully, we will notice that not everyone gets angry in the same way in the same situation. Upon being bullied, there are some who get angry and some who do not.

To say, "We cannot help getting angry because we are human," is an excuse for those who do not know the other ways of being human.

4. Parable of an Old Well

Here is another allegory. A man who committed a crime is running away. Some guards are following him, so he tries to hide himself by descending into a well by means of some vines growing down the sides. As he descends, he sees vipers at the bottom of the well, so he decides to cling to the vine for safety. After a while his arms get tired, and he notices two mice, one white and the other black, gnawing at the vine.

If the vine breaks, he will fall to the vipers and perish. Suddenly, on looking upward, he notices just above his face a beehive from which occasionally falls a drop of honey. The man, forgetting all his danger, tastes the honey with delight.

“A man” means one who is born to suffer and die alone. “Guards” and “vipers” refer to the body with all its desires. “Vines” refer to the continuity of human life. “Two mice, one white and the other black” indicate fleeting time, days and nights, and the passing years. “Honey” indicates the physical pleasures that lure suffering beings into the passing years.

Sūtra of a Parable

EVEN IN AN EXTREME SITUATION,
HUMANS ARE ATTACHED TO DESIRE.

This parable of the old well skillfully portrays the essence of being human. We are so foolish that we tend to forget our predicaments by tasting sweet honey, no matter how extreme the situation surrounding us might be.

The great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, introduced this parable as an old Asian fable in his “*A Confession*,” in which he confessed that

honey did not taste sweet any more when he came to face his own death. It is because he painfully understood that life is limited, and death is unavoidable.

What this parable teaches us is that our life tends to be like this. The guards and poisonous snake imply the “results of being driven by lust.” That the wisteria vine was being chewed by the two mice symbolizes our “limited life.” The white and black mice signify “day time and night time,” and the ephemeral sweetness of the honey is the “lust in front of us,” while the wisteria vine is none other than “human life.”

Our life is frail. If we cling to temporary pleasures before us, we will ruin ourselves.

In our given life, time is limited. We all have to die and cannot bring back time. Realizing the importance of cultivating our minds, we should not waste our lives by being enslaved by desire. Let us live our limited lives without regret.

5. Lotus Flowers Emerging from the Mud

Just as pure and fragrant lotus flowers grow out of the mud of a swamp rather than out of the clean loam of an upland field, so from the muck of worldly passions springs the pure Enlightenment of Buddhahood. Even the mistaken views of heretics and the delusions of worldly passions may be the seeds for Buddhahood.

Enlightenment is a precious pearl. A person must descend to the bottom of the sea, braving all dangers of the jagged coral and vicious sharks. That person must face the perils of worldly passion in order to secure the precious pearl of Enlightenment. One must first be lost among the mountainous crags of egoism and selfishness before there will be an awakening of the desire to find a path that will lead that person to Enlightenment.

Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra

WHAT IS THE FLOWER THAT BLOOMS BEAUTIFULLY IN THE DEFILED WORLD?

In spite of being rooted in the mud, lotus flowers bloom beautifully without being contaminated by the mud. More accurately, it should be said that they do so because they are in the mud. It is a flower that never blooms in the highland or from the dry earth.

This parable uses the lotus flower as a metaphor to teach us that it is those with a lot of worldly desires who can develop a pure aspiration for Enlightenment.

There is a keyword in Buddhism called “*tenmei-kaigo*,” which means the conversion of delusion into Enlightenment.

Each of us is living with distress. By sincerely and directly facing our troubles without avoiding them, we can find a clue to overcoming them. In other words, the distress can be the spiritual nourishment for our life. Our troubles are like the mud that nurtures the lotus flower.

Saicho, often called Dengyo-daishi, the founder of the Japanese Tendai School of Buddhism, said, "To help others while leaving aside oneself is the utmost compassion."

It is compassion, to see things from other people's points of views, that is the essence of Mahayana Buddhism and the core of the Bodhisattva path, the path of helping suffering people with worried minds. Buddha feels other people's sufferings and worries about them as if they were his own and is motivated to save them as if he has forgotten himself.

"Lotus flowers emerging from the mud" symbolizes the noble Bodhisattva path of acting with compassion for others continuously even in this filthy and chaotic world.

Also, the image of lotus blossoms growing straight out of the mud makes us think of the environment of the entire world. The lotus portrays none other than the human developmental process toward maturity.

6. Crude Gold

Buddha-nature is, indeed, the most excellent characteristic of human nature. Buddha teaches that, although in human nature there may be endless varieties of men and women, there is no discrimination with regard to Buddha-nature.

Pure gold is procured by melting ore and removing all impure substances. If people melt the ore of worldly passion and egoism, they will be able to recover the same pure Buddha-nature.

Śūraṅgama-sūtra

THREE KINDS OF HUMAN BLIND PASSIONS

Each of us has a variety of different innate characters. There are differences between men and women, for example. However, we all share the same superb characteristic called “Buddha-nature,” which refers to everyone’s innate potentiality to become a Buddha. This must be hard to believe without incipient knowledge.

We are foolish enough to experience perplexity, anxiety, anger, jealousy and suffering every day, and therefore Buddha seems far from us, which is, however, because our passions blind us.

Gold is beautiful and shiny. Gold medals shine on the breasts of medalists on podiums. However, gold is not shiny from the beginning because gold ore contains various other materials. It is only when we remove the impure substances and polish it that gold starts to shine.

The same is true for human talent and ability, which have to be trained to give full play to our capabilities. Our mind is not shiny like that of Buddha from the beginning. It is only when we get rid of the

impure substance called blind passion and polish it little by little that our Buddha-nature starts to shine. Buddhism teaches us that there are roughly three kinds of blind passions: greed, anger and ignorance.

All of these arise from our self-centered way of thinking expressed as our desire to do something as we wish, our anger at being hurt by someone, and our foolishness of assuming that our properties and families are our possessions. If we become aware of our blind passions and get rid of them, our Buddha-nature emerges and eventually exerts its potentiality.

7. Collar of the Garment

There is an old story told of a man who fell into a drunken sleep. His friend stayed by him as long as he could but, being compelled to go and fearing that the man might need something, the friend hid a jewel in the drunken man's garment. When the drunken man recovered, not knowing that his friend had hidden a jewel in his garment, he wandered about in poverty and hunger. A long time afterwards the two men met again, and the friend told the poor man about the jewel and advised him to look for it.

Like the drunken man of the story, people wander about suffering in this life of birth and death, unconscious of what is hidden away in their inner nature, pure and untarnished, the priceless treasure of Buddha-nature.

Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra

THE HIDDEN JEWEL WITHIN US

The rich man in this story signifies Buddha and the poor man his disciple. After leaving his friend, the poor man became sober, that is to say, he benefitted from his friend's wonderful influence on him, and resumed his journey in poverty.

Several years later, he met his close friend again and learned about the jewel hidden in his garment's collar. If he had noticed it, he would not have needed to continue his journey in poverty. Realizing that the jewel would cover a lifetime of expenses, he appreciated his friend's kindness and felt tears welling up.

The jewel here symbolizes Buddha-nature, i.e., the potentiality to become a buddha. This parable teaches us that everybody has the

great Buddha-nature just as the jewel had been stitched into the collar of this man's garment.

Despite the Buddha-nature being innate, it does not reveal its marvelous functions because it is covered by the thick layer of blind passions that we are wearing. Without noticing our own true nature and polishing it, we are as if we had not had it from the beginning.

We are always running about in confusion like this poor wanderer without noticing the gift from Buddha.

However, those who have gone through life and death experiences come to realize the preciousness of ordinary life and feel gratitude to the working of Buddha, which is beyond human understanding. When we become aware that we are supported by Buddha, the stainless Buddha-nature carefully stitched in the collar starts to shine.

8. Parable of the Moon

When the moon sets, people say that the moon has disappeared, and when the moon rises, they say that the moon has appeared. In fact, the moon neither goes nor comes, but shines continually in the sky. Buddha is exactly like the moon. He neither appears nor disappears. He only seems to do so out of love for the people whom he teaches.

People call one phase of the moon a full moon, and they call another phase a crescent moon. In reality, the moon is always perfectly round, neither waxing nor waning. Buddha is precisely like the moon. In the eyes of men, Buddha may seem to change in appearance, but, in truth, Buddha does not change.

The moon appears everywhere, over a crowded city, a sleepy village, a mountain, a river. It is seen in the depths of a pond, in a jug of water, in a drop of dew hanging on a leaf. If a man walks hundreds of miles the moon goes with him. To men, the moon seems to change, but the moon does not change. Buddha is like the moon in following the people of this world in all of their changing circumstances, manifesting various appearances, but in his essence he does not change.

Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra

BUDDHA'S LAST WORDS

When we travel far away or think of people in distant places, we sometimes realize that the moon above us is also shining on our hometown and our loved ones, and we feel relieved.

The moon reveals itself to all of us equally. We know that the apparent waxing and waning of the moon does not mean that it decreases or disappears in reality. Ancient Indians also knew this and

therefore used the image of the immutable and omnipresent moon as a metaphor to describe Buddha.

Though Buddha was born and passed away as a human, he taught wisdom and compassion that can save everyone. The passage quoted above from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* is the story of Buddha's last journey just before he entered Nirvana, the eternally peaceful world.

Buddha says to his weeping disciples at his death bed, "I am leaving this world. From now on, you should rely on what I have taught you."

It is Buddha's teaching of wisdom and compassion that is the essence of Buddhism, which is immutable. Wherever we are, it exists anytime and anywhere, shining on us like the moon. If we doubt its existence and turn our backs, it disappears.

When we face mishaps, we often say something like, "There is neither God nor Buddha." In these occasions, we merely lose sight of Buddha just like we do of the moon for a while. As long as we have a seeking mind, Buddha will appear again without a doubt.

INVISIBLE BUT ALWAYS EXISTING TEACHINGS

The wisdom of Buddha is the wisdom to realize the right path. We occasionally cling to our possessions and honor, which can lead us to strife, jealousy, hurting others and suffering. When we seek the cause of all of this, we will find our self-centered greed. There is no limit or end to human desire. However, human life is short and our grief for family members, friends and loved ones who pass away will come someday without exception. Time never goes backward, and it would be in vain to cry over the loss of people who can never come back again.

Eventually our own life will be over. We cannot live happily if we hurt others as well as ourselves by being swayed by greed. Buddha teaches us with his wisdom the cause of sufferings and the right path for solving problems. His teaching is with us anytime and anywhere.

Accordingly, Buddha is reaching out to all of us by revealing his deep compassion. He teaches us to have a compassionate mind towards all sentient beings that will bring peace and happiness to the world.

Like the moon that always exists regardless of its visibility, Buddha's teaching eternally exists and does not leave us whether he is alive or not. Buddha is always guiding us with his teaching.

CHAPTER 3

Buddhist Stories

1. Poppy Seeds

Once there was a young woman named Kisagotami, the wife of a wealthy man, who lost her mind because of the death of her child. She took the dead child in her arms and went from house to house begging people to heal the child.

Of course, they could do nothing for her, but finally a follower of Buddha advised her to see the Blessed One, who was then staying at Jetavana, and so she carried the dead child to Buddha.

The Blessed One looked at her with sympathy and said: “To heal the child I need some poppy seeds; go and beg for four or five poppy seeds from some home where death has never entered.”

So the distraught woman went out to look for a house where death had never occurred, but her efforts were in vain. At last, she was obliged to return to Buddha. In his quiet presence, her mind cleared, and she understood the meaning of his words. She took the body away and buried it, and then returned to Buddha and became one of his disciples.

*Commentary on the Verses of the Theris
(Therigatha-atthakatha)*

MOTHER TOO SAD TO ACCEPT THE DEATH OF HER CHILD

There is no sadness deeper than that of losing one's child.

Kisagotami lost her mind because of the death of her infant son, her only child. Unable to accept it, she went to Buddha holding the corpse and begged, "Please cure this boy."

Watching the distraught Kisagotami, Buddha did not tell her that her child had already died. Instead, he tried to calm her down and said, "I need poppy seeds to cure your child."

In India, people used poppy seeds as a daily foodstuff and therefore every household had them. However, Buddha set just one condition: "The poppy seeds must be obtained from a house where nobody has died at all." Buddha said this is to make her realize something.

Having desperately searched for such a household and failed, Kisagotami finally realized the meaning of Buddha's words and accepted the death of her child. What did she find out and how did she accept the death of her child? First of all, there was no house in the town where nobody had passed away. In other words, everybody in every single house had experienced the death of family members and gone through the ensuing grief. Kisagotami was no exception.

Human life inevitably ends with death. Certainly, infant death is an unfortunate and deeply sad experience, but nobody can restore a dead person to life. However sad, we must accept it. When she saw the gentle eyes of Buddha, she finally regained her sanity.

COMPASSIONATE MIND AND THE POWER OF EXPEDIENT MEANS

Kisagotami accepted the death of her child and buried him in a tomb.

This does not mean that her grief was over. Having realized that bereavement came not only to her but also to everybody and that nobody can escape from death, she could move forward a little bit.

She had paid attention only to her child and herself before, but this tragedy led her to understand the suffering of other people. In order to save herself and others from suffering, she wanted to learn the teachings of Buddha and became one of his disciples. This story describes Buddha's compassionate mind and skillfulness of using expedient means.

People in the town were sympathetic but did not know what to do for her. But Buddha not only looked after the distraught mother affectionately but also led her to realize the reality of impermanence by herself. Buddha's words, "Bring back the poppy seeds obtained from a house where nobody has died at all," were expedient means to lead her to the truth. It is often useless to tell the truth directly to desperate people. In such occasions, it is necessary to be with them to support them and find a way to lead them to a realization by themselves.

2. Panthaka Brothers

Culapanthaka became a disciple of Buddha together with his elder brother, Mahāpanthaka, but unlike the elder brother, he was incapable of memorizing even one passage of a sutra.

Not being able to watch his younger brother's lack of progress, the elder brother became angry and told the younger brother to leave the order and go home.

Noticing that Culapanthaka was deeply dejected, Buddha asked him the reason and told him, "Truly foolish men do not know that they are foolish. But you know that you are foolish, so you do not need to worry about your foolishness." Buddha handed a piece of rag to Culapanthaka and recommended him to do some cleaning while chanting "Get rid of dust, wash off the dirt." Following this suggestion, the simple and honest Culapanthaka devoted himself to cleaning while repeating this phrase.

Eventually, he realized that the cleaning was meant to polish his own mind, and he finally attained Enlightenment.

From "Genben shuoyiqie youbu pinaiye"
(*Mūla-sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhaṅga*)

TO GET RID OF DUST AND IMPURITIES

In Buddhism, memorization and accumulation of knowledge are not necessarily important. However much knowledge we might accumulate, we cannot attain Enlightenment only by knowledge.

On the contrary, those who are proud of their knowledge tend to be arrogant, which can hinder their attainment of Enlightenment. In other words, those who seriously practice the teaching are the ones who come to realize their faults and live more peaceful and happier lives.

What is common among people seeking Enlightenment is that they have high ideals, which is why they can see their faults more clearly and naturally become humble.

Culapanthaka had high ideals too, which was why he was ashamed of himself and felt depressed. However, while chanting “Get rid of the dirt, get rid of the dust,” he came to know his mind better. Although really foolish people neither have ideals nor reflect upon themselves, they nevertheless think themselves smart.

Enlightenment means to get rid of the dirt and dust from our minds. In Buddhism, dirt and dust are called “blind passions.” It is because of these blind passions that we judge things by our likes and dislikes as well as feel delighted if things go well in our favor and distressed if not. In our life, there are more things that do not go well in our favor and we often feel distressed. If we get rid of dirt and dust from our minds even a little bit, we can decrease our suffering and become happier.

3. Harp Strings

There was a young man named Srona, who was born into a wealthy family but was of delicate health. He was very earnest about gaining Enlightenment and became a disciple of the Blessed One. On the path to Enlightenment, he tried so hard that finally his feet bled.

The Blessed one pitied him and said, “Srona, my boy, did you ever study the harp at your home? You know that a harp does not make music if the strings are stretched too tightly or too loosely. It makes music only when the strings are stretched just right.”

“The training for Enlightenment is just like adjusting the harp strings. You cannot attain Enlightenment if you stretch the strings of your mind too loosely or too tightly. You must be considerate and act wisely.”

Srona found these words very profitable and finally gained what he sought.

Vinaya, Mahāvagga

WHAT IS THE RIGHT DEGREE?

Srona, a disciple of Buddha, had been said to be good at playing the harp. He had a serious personality and had been practicing very hard since his ordination but had been distressed because he had not achieved his goal yet. This is a parable about the strings of a harp by which Buddha gave advice to him from the standpoint of the “Middle Way.” Following his own experience, he said, “We are not on the path to Enlightenment when we indulge ourselves in extravagance driven by our desires. Neither do ascetic practices lead to Enlightenment when all they do is make your body fatigued.”

Buddha thus taught alternative ways to live apart from both the life of extravagance and asceticism. The alternatives were to follow the concrete Noble Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Behavior, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

He taught that the correct Middle Path leads us to Enlightenment. However, it is difficult to explain what is the “middle” or what is “correct.” What is correct and what is not? Where is the middle? To begin with, does the middle really exist somewhere?

THE MIDDLE BETWEEN THE TWO EXTREMES

By citing some examples, Aristotle explained that the golden mean (or golden middle way) was ideal for human relationships. If a hot-tempered man and a docile man are the two extremes, the middle is a moderate man. By the same token, he said that the middle between a reckless man and a coward is a “courageous man,” and the middle between a braggart and a self-deprecating person is an “honest man.”

CHOOSING A PERSON AS A FRIEND

The ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius also said that the middle way has a supreme value in ethics. He said that he would choose a moderate person as his friend. If there is no such person, he would rather get along with a mad man (a violent and wicked person) or an obstinate man (a stubborn and headstrong person). The reason is that the mad man is “full of the go-ahead spirit and aggressively moves forward

to get what he wants,” while the obstinate man is “so passive and low-keyed that he would never do anything other than what is necessary.”

For Confucius, the middle way means the middle between these two extreme personalities. That is to say, the middle way that Buddha valued was a universal idea shared by two philosophers in Greece and China who were nearly his contemporaries.

At the end of the original story, Buddha says, “Therefore, do your best with balance.” This should be the guideline for those of us who tend to lose our balance and run to extremes.

4. Country Where Aged People Were Abandoned

Once upon a time there was a country that had the very peculiar custom of abandoning its old people in remote and inaccessible mountains.

A certain minister of the State found it too difficult to follow this custom in the case of his own aged father, and so he built a secret underground cave where he hid his father and cared for him.

One day a god appeared before the king of that country and gave him a puzzling problem, saying that if he could not solve it satisfactorily, his country would be destroyed. He presented the problem, saying, "Here are two serpents; tell me the sex of each."

Neither the king nor anyone in the palace was able to solve the problem, so the king offered a great reward to anyone in his kingdom who could.

The minister went to his father's hiding place and asked him for the answer to that problem. The old man said: "The solution is easy. Place the two snakes on a soft carpet, and the one that moves about is the male, while the one that keeps quiet is the female." The minister took the answer back to the king and the problem was successfully solved.

Then the god asked other difficult questions, which the king and his retainers were unable to answer, but which the minister, after consulting his aged father, could always solve.

Here are some of the questions and their answers. "Who is the one who, being asleep, is called the awakened one, and, being awake, is called the sleeping one?" The answer is this: "It is the person who is training for Enlightenment. He is awake when compared with those who are not interested in Enlightenment, but he is asleep when compared with those who have already attained Enlightenment."

"How can you weigh a large elephant?" "Load it on a boat and draw a line to mark how deep the boat sinks into the water.

Then take out the elephant and load the boat with stones until it sinks to the same depth, and then weigh the stones.”

What is the meaning of the saying, “A cupful of water is more than the waters of the ocean?” This is the answer: “A cupful of water given in a pure and compassionate spirit to one’s parents or to a sick person has an eternal merit, but the waters of the ocean will someday come to an end.”

Next, the god made a starving man who was reduced to skin and bones complain, “Is there anyone in this world more hungry than I?” “The man who is so selfish and greedy that he does not believe in the Three Treasures of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and who does not make offerings to his parents and teachers, is not only more hungry but he will fall into the world of hungry demons and there he will suffer from hunger forever.”

“Here is a plank of Chandana wood. Which end was the bottom of the tree?” “Float the plank in water, and the end that sinks a little deeper is the end that was nearest to the root.”

“Here are two horses apparently of the same size and form. How can you tell the mother from the son?” “Feed them some hay, and the mother horse will push the hay toward her son.”

Every answer to these difficult questions pleased the god as well as the king. The king was grateful to find out that the answers had come from the aged father whom the minister had hidden in the cave, and he withdrew the law of abandoning old people in the mountains and ordered that they were to be treated kindly.

Samyuktaratnapīṭaka-sūtra

THE MEANING OF ACCUMULATING YEARS

In contemporary Japan, it seems that the young and healthy are regarded as valuable. The word “elderly” is becoming an expression that makes us uncomfortable. Buddhism, however, has a completely

opposite understanding about aging. In Zen Buddhism, monks with leading positions are called “elder master,” which means that the word “elder” originally was an honorific prefix to express spiritual maturity and richness.

The reason why the minister of this country with this peculiar custom could answer each difficult question from the god was because his old father had accumulated rich knowledge as well as wisdom in his long life and therefore could advise him.

However, it is not enough to understand this story merely as an example of the usefulness and venerability of the elderly.

The difficult questions that the god asked the king, such as how to determine the sex of snakes, the weight of an elephant, the bottom of a plank of Chandana wood, the mother or son of the identical-looking horses, could be answered by the accumulated knowledge in this world. But the other questions about “the one who is under training for Enlightenment,” “a cupful of water,” and “who is more hungry than I” are related to the Buddha’s teaching. Studying Buddhism is aspiring to become an awakened person to the truth.

Even a scoop of water is more valuable than that of the ocean when it is served for other people. It is those who value Buddha (Awakened One), Dharma (Truth that Buddha taught) and Sangha (people learning Buddha’s teaching) that can live satisfactory lives without spiritual starvation.

This story indicates that the value of aging lies in such deep wisdom about life.

5. Offering of Garments

When Syamavati, the queen-consort of King Udayana, offered Ananda five hundred garments, Ananda received them with great satisfaction.

The King, hearing of it, suspected Ananda of dishonesty, so he went to Ananda and asked what he was going to do with these five hundred garments.

Ananda replied: “Oh, King, many of the brothers are in rags, so I am going to distribute the garments among the brothers.”

“What will you do with the old garments?”

“We will make bed covers out of them.”

“What will you do with the old bed covers?”

“We will make pillow cases.”

“What will you do with the old pillow cases?”

“We will make floor covering out of them.”

“What will you do with the old floor covering?”

“We will use them for foot towels.”

“What will you do with the old foot towels?”

“We will use them as floor mops.”

“What will you do with the old mops?”

“Your Highness, we will tear them into pieces, mix them with mud and use the mud to plaster house walls.”

Every article entrusted to us must be used with good care in some useful way because it is not “ours” but is only entrusted to us temporarily.

Saṃyuktaratnapīṭaka-sūtra

WHAT IS THE SUBSTANCE OF OLD CLOTHES?

This story, of course, teaches us that we have to make the best use of things, but that is not all.

We usually think that clothes are just for wearing. But clothes are made of cloth that can be used in a variety of ways.

Worn-out clothes could be used as bed covers, pillow cases, floor coverings, foot towels, mops and, at the end, being mixed with mud, even can be used to plaster walls.

Accordingly, by changing its function, a piece of cloth keeps alive forever. Life has different functions, and even material things exist continually, changing their shapes and uses.

We are apt to cling to a fixed idea, which we are not even aware of.

In Japan, saffron or black robes bring up the image of garments for Buddhist monks and almost nothing else. However, this means we have a stereotypical idea.

Robes were so named as clothes to be used for some specific purposes, but they are not fixed entities. The reality is that robes are clothes made of cloth.

Once pieces of cloth are given a specific name like “robe,” we unconsciously focus on a fixed image of the robe as an independent entity, forgetting about the cloth that can become many other things with different functions and names. We have such unconscious attachments in our daily life. The pieces of cloth in this story teaches us to discard any fixed notion of existence.

6. Gratitude to a Bamboo Thicket

In a bamboo thicket at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains, there once lived a parrot together with many other animals and birds. One day a fire started in the thicket from the friction of the bamboo stalks rubbing against each other in a strong wind, and the birds and animals were frightened and confused. The parrot, feeling compassion for their fear and sufferings, and wishing to repay the kindness he had received in the bamboo thicket where he could shelter himself, tried to do all he could to save them. He dipped himself in a pond nearby and flew over the fire and shook off the drops of water to extinguish the fire. He repeated this diligently with a heart of compassion out of gratitude to the bamboo thicket.

This spirit of kindness and self-sacrifice was noticed by a heavenly god, who came down from the sky and said to the parrot, “You have a gallant mind, but what good do you expect to accomplish with a few drops of water against this great fire?” The parrot answered, “There is nothing that cannot be accomplished by the spirit of gratitude and self-sacrifice. I will try over and over again and then over again in my next life.” The great god was impressed by the parrot’s spirit and together they extinguished the fire.

Samyuktaratnapīṭaka-sūtra

COMPASSIONATE ACTIVITIES THAT MOVED A HEAVENLY GOD

In order to reciprocate the favor that the bamboo thicket had given him, the parrot tried to extinguish the fire by wetting his wings again and again. The heavenly god told him that he could not extinguish the fire by such a futile attempt. The bird heard his words but did not

listen to the advice. Instead, he maintained his strong conviction that any action performed out of gratitude and compassion would accomplish its aims.

What this story teaches us are the three minds of gratitude, compassion and devotion, which the parrot called on to reciprocate the received favors. In the collection of stories on the past lives of the Buddha, we frequently find the phrase, "To be aware of kindness received, and to seek to repay it."

In Japan, this phrase was changed from the Chinese "*zhien baoen*" (知恩報恩) to "*hoon-kansha*" (報恩感謝) and has become widespread to the extent that it is now often used as a catch phrase for bargain sales. Originally, however, it meant "to be conscious of kindness and acknowledge a duty to repay it." To reciprocate received favors means to be aware of the fact that we are supported by many things and we should take action to repay them out of gratitude.

As to compassion, Webster's dictionary has an excellent definition: "The deep feeling of sharing the suffering of another, together with the inclination to give aid or support or to show mercy."

In Buddhism, "compassion" means to treat another with loving care as if he/she is one's own child, to share another's happiness, and to devote oneself to helping another willingly.

This story teaches that any action based on a noble spirit to accomplish something can be subject to harsh criticism as well as be a huge encouragement to those who are apt to think that an individual cannot do anything alone.

7. A Third Floor Without a Foundation

Once there was a wealthy but foolish man. When he saw a beautiful three-storied house of another man, he envied it and made up his mind to have one built just like it, thinking he was himself just as wealthy. He called and ordered a carpenter to build it. The carpenter consented and immediately began to construct the foundation, the first story, the second story, and then the third story. The wealthy man noticed this with irritation and said, “I don’t want a foundation or a first story or a second story: I just want the beautiful third story. Build it quickly.”

A foolish man always thinks only of the results, and is impatient without the effort that is necessary to get good results. No good can be attained without proper effort, just as there can be no third story without the foundation and the first and second stories.

Upamā-śakata-sūtra

THERE IS NO BUILDING WITHOUT A FOUNDATION

Everything has a foundation. Without it, we cannot expect great success. This is a matter of course but, unexpectedly, we are apt to forget. This story deals with a rich but foolish man, who orders a carpenter to build the third floor without the foundation, the first and the second floors.

Whether it is work or study, basics are the most important. It is only after learning the basics well that we start working from the ground up. Building foundations is a process of striving and hardship, without which we cannot achieve anything.

According to the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, the last words of Buddha were, “Everything is changing. Make steady efforts and commit yourself to Enlightenment.” Here too, he taught the importance of perseverance. In ancient Chinese Buddhism, step-by-step methods of learning Buddhist scriptures were established. According to them, Buddha taught the most profound teaching (*Huayan*) at first, but nobody could understand it and therefore, he had to reorganize his teaching, moving step by step from easy ones to the higher ones, i.e. from *Agama*, *Vaipulya*, *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Saddharma Puṇḍarika Sūtra*, the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, and so on.

In Japanese Buddhism, there is a phrase, “Three years for Yogachara, eight years for Abhidharma.” This means that if you study Abhidharma, the basics of Buddhism, for eight years, you can understand the abstruse Yogachara in three years.

Of course, any academic study requires learning from the basics in order to move forward. Foundations are most important and cannot be ignored.

8. Abandoning Oneself to a Tiger

Once there was a prince named Sattva. One day he and his two elder brothers went to a forest to play. There they saw a famished tigress that was evidently tempted to devour her own seven cubs to satisfy her hunger.

The elder brothers ran away in fear, but Sattva climbed up a cliff and threw himself down to the tigress in order to save the lives of the baby tigers.

Prince Sattva did this charitable act spontaneously, but in his mind, he was thinking: “This body is changing and impermanent. I have loved this body with no thought of throwing it away, but now I make it an offering to this tigress so that I may gain Enlightenment.” This thought of Prince Sattva shows the true determination to gain Enlightenment.

Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra

BUDDHA'S PRACTICES IN HIS PREVIOUS LIVES

This is one of the “Jataka” stories, which are the accounts in the scriptures of the past lives of the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, when he had been a Bodhisattva seeking Enlightenment before he was born in this world. Needless to say, this Prince Sattva was the Buddha in his previous life. He had accumulated virtues like this and after multiple reincarnations, he was finally born in this world.

Buddha was born as a prince of the Shakya Clan in present-day Nepal in the 5th century B.C., left his life of luxury in his palace to become a humble ascetic at the age of 29, and six years later he achieved

Enlightenment and came to be called a Buddha, the Awakened One, which is an undeniable historical fact.

However, many of his followers came to assume that Buddha had not attained Enlightenment only in six years. They thought that Buddha had been engaged in virtuous activities before he was born in this world. Only after having prepared for his final Enlightenment was he born in this world.

Many stories of Buddha's previous lives have been told and transmitted among his followers until now.

Most of the stories about Buddha's virtuous activities had to do with his compassionate self-sacrifice for others' well-being. As the above story indicates, it is notable that his compassion was not only toward humans but also for all sentient beings.

That he attained Enlightenment and became a Buddha means that he obtained wisdom to see the truth of himself and the world as it is. So, what is the truth as it is?

SACRIFICING LIFE FOR US

Unconsciously, we take it for granted that each of us has an independent life and are living with the belief that "This is my body," "This is my mind," "This is my life," etc. as if everything were in our possession. But such is not our true self.

Nobody has been born as a result of being determined to be born. All of us were gifted with life from our parents and were born into this world. Since our birth up until now we have been living while appropriating numerous lives of sentient beings such as fish and birds as our daily food.

Nevertheless, we are prone to think, “My life is mine and therefore I decide my way of living by myself which is irrelevant to you.”

This is related to what Prince Sattva thought: “I have loved this body with no thought of throwing it away.” To give his life to a famished tiger seems to be an unrealistic story indeed. However, when we think of the fact that our lives are sustained by sacrifices of others’ lives, a new door is opened, and we are awakened to our true self.

All sentient beings have been offering their lives for us but are we living to reciprocate their favors?

Of course, to throw away our lives to a tiger seems impossible for us to do, but we should have the spirit to dedicating our lives to the well-being of others.

9. Young Ascetic in the Himalayas

Once there was a person who sought the True Path in the Himalayas. He cared nothing for all of the treasures of earth or even for all the delights of heaven, but he sought the teaching that would remove all mental delusions.

The gods were impressed by the man's earnestness and sincerity and decided to test his mind. So, one of the gods disguised himself as a demon and appeared in the Himalayas, singing, "Everything changes, everything appears and disappears."

The seeker heard this song, which pleased him very much. He was as delighted as if he had found a spring of cool water for his thirst or as if a slave had been unexpectedly set free. He said to himself, "At last I have found the true teaching that I have sought for so long." He followed the voice and at last came upon the frightful demon. With an uneasy mind he approached the demon and said, "Was it you who sang the holy song that I have just heard? If it was you, please sing more of it."

The demon replied, "Yes, it was my song, but I cannot sing more of it until I have had something to eat; I am starving."

The man begged him very earnestly to sing more of it, saying, "It has a sacred meaning for me and I have sought this teaching for a long time. I have only heard a part of it; please let me hear more."

The demon said again, "I am starving, but if I can taste the warm flesh and blood of a man, I will finish the song."

The man, in his eagerness to hear the teaching promised the demon that he could have his body after he had heard the teaching. Then the demon sang the complete song.

"Everything changes,

Everything appears and disappears,

There is perfect tranquility

When one transcends both life and extinction."

Hearing this, the man, after he wrote the poem on rocks and trees around him, quietly climbed a tree and hurled himself to the feet of the demon, but the demon had disappeared and, instead, a radiant god received the body of the man unharmed.

Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra

THE STORY THAT BECAME THE MODEL OF THE JAPANESE “IROHA-UTA” POEM

This is also one of the Jataka stories depicting one of his previous lives. In terms of abandoning his life, it is similar to the previous story about “throwing away one’s body to a tiger,” but this one is slightly different because he did so by listening to the true teaching.

The poem that the seeker, a young ascetic in the Himalayas, heard from the demon clarifies the fundamental truth of Buddha’s teaching.

The teaching is that every suffering and distress in this world is caused by attachments and therefore, when we realize that everything is impermanent and we get rid of attachments, we will be relieved.

A famous Japanese poem called “*Iroha-uta*” is said to have been created based on this story. This was sophisticatedly composed as a pangram using all 50 syllables and 48 Japanese *katakana* letters in the Japanese syllabary only once, and has been used as a text for early education. It goes like this in pronunciation with voiced consonants:

色は匂へど	散ぬるを	<i>Iro wa nioedo chirinuru o</i>
我が世誰ぞ	常ならむ	<i>Wa ga yo dare zo tsune naran</i>
有為の奥山	今日越えて	<i>Ui no okuyama kyo koete</i>
浅き夢見じ	酔ひもせず	<i>Asaki yume miji yoi mo sezu</i>

The meaning of this poem is something like this:

As fragrant blossoms eventually wither away, there is
nothing permanent in this world.
Being dazzled by transient forms, I have been lost on the
winding mountain road.
But, today, I will cross over this deep mountain of the
ephemeral world.
I will not have any shallow dreams nor live like a drunkard
any more.

This poem is not exactly the same as what the young ascetic in the Himalayas had heard from the demon, but it is safe to say they shared the same meaning.

NOTHING IS PERMANENT IN THIS WORLD

The “ephemeral world” of “this deep mountain in the ephemeral world” in the poem means the created world where everything is comprised of various causes and conditions and, hence, ceaselessly changing.

Nevertheless, we are reluctant to admit this reality and wish to remain unchanged forever. We simply assume that being young and healthy is our happiness, and old age, sickness as well as death are misfortunes.

As long as we think this way, our life is nothing but a process of getting worse and worse, moving toward misery, and we have to end our lives at the abyss of hopelessness.

The teaching that those who were born have to die without exception seems very pessimistic, but this is a truth that has nothing to do with pessimism or optimism.

When we accept this truth as it is, we can have a peaceful mind filled with humility and gratitude about our given life without being arrogant. Then, we can face death without fear and live life to its fullest in each moment here and now.

It is not easy to reach such a spiritual state but the young ascetic in the Himalayas in this story sought the path leading to it and tried to transmit the way by writing down what he heard from the demon on the nearby trees and rocks. This is the Buddhist teaching that has been transmitted until now.

10. Legend of King Ajatashatru

While Buddha was alive, there was a powerful king called Ajatashatru. This king was very cruel and fond of killing. He lied, vilified and spoke with a double tongue. His mind was full of greed, anger and foolishness. He viciously murdered his father, King Bimbisara, because his attachment to greed led to a feud with his father. However, after seizing the throne by killing his father, he was stricken with a fever out of deep guilt. Nobody wanted to be near him since his body had skin boils all over and smelled awful.

The king muttered, "I have received retribution. It won't be long before I will go to hell and suffer torments." His mother, Queen Vaidehī, looked after him with various medicines, but it was all in vain.

The king lamented and said, "These boils were not caused by my body but by my mind. Nobody can cure them." He told his doctor, Jīvaka, "My disease is very serious. I murdered my father, who had ruled this country righteously. Even a great doctor with effective medicine and treatments cannot cure my illness. I cannot help but go to hell."

Then, Jīvaka replied, "King, you did commit a crime but now you are deeply regretting it. You are now repenting and are ashamed of your sin. This will lead you to be cured of the afflictions of your mind." The doctor recommended him to visit Buddha, who was also a great doctor of the mind.

Then, the king heard a voice from heaven, "You should go to Buddha to be saved." It was the voice of his late father, King Bimbisara, who worried about his son. Having heard the voice, King Ajatashatru was so frightened that he fainted in agony, and his sickness became even worse.

Watching the physical and mental suffering of Ajatashatru from a distance, Buddha said, "I will not enter into Nirvana for Ajatashatru's sake. For Ajatashatru signifies the need for the salvation of all people attached to blind passion." He then

emitted a beam of moon-like serene light that illuminated the king's body, and all the skin boils on the king's body immediately disappeared. Having recovered from his illness, the king with some anxiety visited Buddha with Jīvaka in order to find a cure for his spiritual disease.

Meeting the king, Buddha called out, "King Ajatashatru," as if he accepted everything in his mind. The king was fearful of retribution for his sins, and therefore, he doubted that the voice had been directed towards him at first. However, gradually he realized that the compassionate voice was really for him, and his mind was filled with joy.

Buddha told him, "King Bimbisara was able to become a king thanks to his offering to me in the past. If I had not received it, he could not gain the throne and you would not have killed your father. This means that if the murder of your father the king is a crime, I have to share the same punishment because I created the condition for your sin."

Ajatashatru was deeply touched and moved by Buddha's compassionate mind and gained the mind of Enlightenment. He firmly determined that he would not regret going to hell and to suffer any torment if it meant that he could rid evil from the minds of all people.

Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra

TO ENCOUNTER A COMPASSIONATE MIND WHILE IN DISTRESS

There are sad events and unexpected miseries in life by which we occasionally realize hitherto unnoticed aspects of ourselves and we thereby change our way of life by receiving kindness from people around us.

The protagonist of this story, King Ajatashatru, became the king of a country by killing his own father to satisfy his greed for power. When he heard that those who kill their fathers will go to hell and

writhe in agony, he realized what he had done and fell into an abyss of agony with his body and mind deeply afflicted.

It was his parents and Jivaka, as well as Buddha, who held out their hands to help the lamenting Ajatashatru. These four people shared the same attitude toward Ajatashatru. Sincerely facing the agonized man, they attended to him with acceptance and compassion.

In Buddhism, to care for others and share their suffering with them is called the “practice of compassion.” Thanks to such a compassionate mind, Ajatashatru’s mind was put at ease.

His mother, Queen Vaidehī, never abandoned her son in the abyss of loneliness and desperation and looked after him until the end. The physician Jivaka told him that the repentance that arose in Ajatashatru’s mind was the most important thing for being human. Repentance means a feeling of regret and shame for one’s sins or misdeeds. Jivaka recommended that he listen to Buddha’s teaching and seek the way to Enlightenment.

And it was the father who encouraged Ajatashatru to meet Buddha, the father who worried about the future of his son despite having been killed by his son.

WHO IS AJATASHATRU?

When Buddha saw that Ajatashatru had fainted in agony upon hearing his late father’s voice, he said, “I will not enter Nirvana for Ajatashatru’s sake.” That is to say, he declared that he would not enter the world of Enlightenment until all the people living with distress were saved.

Buddha gently told Ajatashatru, who had visited him expecting to be condemned because of his sin, “A part of the responsibility for

your crime lies with me because I was involved in creating the conditions for it. So, your crime is also mine.”

Buddha’s deep compassionate mind changed Ajatashatru, who had been terrified by his own crime and its retribution. Though he was anguished, Ajatashatru realized that he was not alone and an unprecedented mind of “wishing for the happiness of others” arose in him.

This means that Ajatashatru, who had been chasing his self-centered greed, encountered a great turning point. Now he came to have a compassionate mind and wished to live for others. Thus, another disciple of Buddha was born.

Now then, who is this self-centered Ajatashatru?

As a matter of fact, Ajatashatru is not a mere character of the story. He is also a symbol of each one of us.

To realize that “I am nobody else but Ajatashatru!” is another message of this story.

CHAPTER 4

Teaching of Truth

1. Poems of Enlightenment

Through many a birth in samsara have I wandered in vain,
seeking the builder of this house (of life).
Repeated birth is indeed suffering!

O house-builder, you are seen!
You will not build this house again.
For your rafters are broken and your ridgepole shattered.
My mind has reached the Unconditioned;
I have attained the destruction of craving.

Dhammapada

WORDS WHEN BUDDHA ACHIEVED ENLIGHTENMENT

Quietly sitting in a cross-legged position, Buddha entered into deep meditation under the Bodhi Tree in Buddha Gaya and, while rejecting all the temptations from the devils that beleaguered him in the early morning of the 49th day, he finally attained Enlightenment.

He found the cause of human sufferings and realized how to get rid of it.

These poems describe the moment of his Enlightenment as it was.

The house of the “house-builder” in these poems refers to people who have been continuously reincarnated, and the builder stands for the power that drives them. Thus, these poems imply that Buddha had been wandering in reincarnation after reincarnation to identify the cause of sufferings.

For a long time, Buddha had been born again many times in the cycle of reincarnation and had been wandering in agony without attaining the wisdom of Enlightenment.

But he finally found the “builder,” which was attachment that had been creating delusions.

It was his serene state of mind at the moment of Enlightenment that these poems are depicting.

These two poems appear not only in the *Dhammapada* but also in other early Buddhist scriptures such as *Udānavarga* and *Jataka*.

2. Dependent Arising

Thus I have heard.

Once Buddha was sitting under a Bodhi tree on the banks of the Nairanjana River, where he attained Enlightenment for the first time. He remained sitting with his legs crossed for seven days while enjoying the state of Enlightenment. After the seven days, Buddha stood up from his seat and considered the truth of dependent arising in its regular order and then in reverse order as follows.

When this is, that is.

From the arising of this comes the arising of that.

When this isn't, that isn't.

From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.

Khuddaka Nikāya

THE TRUTH THAT BUDDHA FOUND

This story is about “dependent arising,” the first realization of the Enlightenment of Buddha.

After his Enlightenment, Buddha enjoyed the state of Enlightenment while sitting for seven days and then began thinking of dependent arising.

What is the cause of human sufferings? It must be attachment to our mind enslaved by our greed. Buddha realized that the cause of all sufferings was the mental function of chasing after desire and satisfaction, which is called “*katsuai*” (lit. thirsty lust) in Japanese.

He thought that our ceaseless wishing was because “we have not

realized the truth.” The delusion caused by such ignorance is called “*mumyo*” (lit. no brightness) in Japanese.

Buddha observed many times that our lust is born because of our ignorance, and he indicated this causal relationship by the phrase, “When this is, that is.”

As the expression of Buddha’s state of mind at the moment of Enlightenment, these verses have been transmitted and have persisted widely up until now, and are chanted every day even now, especially in monasteries of the Southern Buddhist tradition, which is more commonly known as Theravada Buddhism.

That is to say, when ignorance is, lust is. Ignorance and lust are entangled with each other and create endless cycles of suffering. What, then, should we do? To put it conversely, without ignorance, there is no lust.

Buddha clarified these causal relationships from the beginning to the end of suffering in twelve stages, which is the teaching called the “twelve links of dependent arising.”

That is to say, starting from ignorance, action, consciousness, name and form, the six-fold sphere of sense contact, contact, sensation, craving, grasping, being, birth, old age and death arise in turn and repeat this cycle from ignorance again. In other words, ignorance precedes all the sufferings of life, old age and death, which creates ignorance again and repeats this cycle again.

Accordingly, to realize the origin and extinction of suffering is the Buddha’s Enlightenment, which has been saving many people up until now.

3. The Four Noble Truths

The world is full of suffering. Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness and death are sufferings. To meet a man whom one hates is suffering, to be separated from loved ones is suffering, to be vainly struggling to satisfy one's needs is suffering. In fact, life that is not free from desire and passion is always involved with distress. This is called the Truth of Suffering.

The cause of human suffering is undoubtedly found in the thirsts of the physical body and in the illusions of worldly passion. If these thirsts and illusions are traced to their source, they are found to be rooted in the intense desires of our physical instincts. Thus, desire, having a strong will-to-live as its basis, seeks that which feels desirable, even if it is sometimes death. This is called the Truth of the Cause of Suffering.

If desire, which lies at the root of all human passion, can be removed, then passion will die out and all human suffering will be ended. This is called the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

In order to enter into a state in which there is no desire and no suffering, one must follow a certain Path. The stages of this Noble Eightfold Path are: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Behavior, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. This is called the Truth of the Noble Path to the Cessation of the Cause of Suffering.

People should keep these Truths clearly in mind.

Anguttara Nikāya

BUDDHA'S FIRST SERMON

Pursuing the cause of human suffering and the way to extinguish it, Buddha renounced the world at the age of twenty-nine and attained

Enlightenment at the age of thirty-five, the age at which he achieved his goal.

Since then he taught people for forty-five years. What he taught in his first sermon was the so-called “Four Noble Truths”: the Truth of Suffering, the Truth of the Cause of Suffering, the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering and the Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering.

This is a very logical and scientific teaching, which makes Buddhism very different from other religions.

They say that the Four Noble Truths are similar to the method that physicians use to cure patients. For example, if we apply the first “truth of suffering” to severe stomach pain, the next “truth of the cause of suffering” is finding the cause of the stomach ache. The next “truth of the cessation of suffering” is the state in which the pain is cured, and the last “truth of the path to the cessation of suffering” is the effort to prevent oneself from having a stomach ache again by not overeating and by decreasing stress. Before explaining this in detail, we should clarify the meaning of the Chinese character 諦 for “truth” as it is used in the Four Noble Truths to avoid any possible misunderstanding. This character can mean “giving up” in contemporary Japanese, but in Buddhism it signifies Enlightenment or truth.

WHAT IS THE TRUTH OF SUFFERING?

The first truth of suffering means that living is suffering, which is a reality that everybody experiences. The various kinds of suffering are described in Buddhism as the “four and eight kinds of suffering.” The four sufferings are the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death.

Adding another four makes the eight kinds of suffering as follows: separation from loved ones, association with things unpleasant, the inability to satisfy desires, and the suffering from our attachment to our cognitive experiences that consist of five unstable aggregates. Accordingly, human life is nothing but a series of sufferings, which is why our birth in this anguished world is the first suffering.

WHAT IS THE TRUTH OF THE ARISING OF SUFFERING?

Nevertheless, Buddha taught that we can overcome suffering because whether we perceive events as suffering or not depends on our minds. For example, aging is suffering for ordinary people, but it is merely a natural phenomenon and is not perceived as suffering by Buddha. If we are not influenced by the cause of suffering, then we will not recognize the “four and eight kinds of sufferings” as anguish. The “truth of the arising of suffering” means that there is always a cause for each suffering.

WHAT ARE THE TRUTH OF THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING AND THE PATH TO THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING?

The next truth of the cessation of suffering is found in the Enlightenment that Buddha attained at the age of thirty-five. After that, it is reported that many disciples of Buddha reached this stage of mind.

What is important here is that every Buddhist can reach the same stage of mind. In order to realize the cessation of suffering, we are required to practice the Eightfold Correct Path, which is the content

of the truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering. By this methodology, our blind passion will disappear, and attachment decreases so that we can be free from suffering. This is similar to the fact that the correct way of living prevents us from overeating and having a stressful life.

4. Five Walls

There are five things that no one is able to accomplish in this world: first, to cease growing old; second, to avoid becoming sick; third, to escape from death; fourth, to deny extinction when there is extinction; and fifth, to deny exhaustion.

Ordinary people in the world sooner or later run into these facts, and most people suffer consequently, but those who have heard the Buddha's teaching do not suffer because they understand that these are unavoidable.

Aṅguttara Nikāya

UNAVOIDABLE THINGS

There are harsh realities in life that we can never handle by ourselves. They are old age, sickness and death from which nobody can escape. Every material thing decays, perishes and eventually disappears.

In Buddhism, old age, sickness, death, extinction and exhaustion are called the “Five Walls,” which nobody can avoid. There is nothing in this world that eternally exists without change.

How, then, should we live?

When we face such inevitable realities, can we calmly think that we are not alone and that every sentient being shares the same realities?

Also, as we crash into the “Five Walls,” can we anticipate in advance these questions: “Will I become distressed, weakened, and sad? Might I cry out loudly, get confused, become unable to eat anything, get pale, and lose interest in work? My rivals will be glad, while my friends will worry about me.” If we can expect these situ-

ations, we will surely be able to pull out the poisonous arrow called worries.

If we listen to Buddha's teaching and face up to realities, our worry would disappear and our minds would be calm. It is this serene state of mind that is called Nirvana or Enlightenment.

5. Unbalanced Perspective

Since everything in this world is brought about by causes and conditions, there can be no fundamental distinctions between things. The apparent distinctions exist because of people's absurd and discriminating thoughts.

In the sky, there is no distinction between east and west. People create these distinctions out of their own minds and then believe them to be true.

Mathematical numbers from one to infinity are each complete numbers, and each in itself carries no distinction of quantity; but people make the distinctions for their own convenience, so as to be able to indicate varying amounts.

Inherently there are no distinctions between the process of life and the process of destruction. People create differences and call one birth and the other death. In action, there is no distinction between right and wrong, but people make distinctions for their own convenience.

Buddha keeps away from these discriminations and looks upon the world as he would a passing cloud. To Buddha every definitive thing is an illusion. He knows that whatever the mind grasps and throws away is insubstantial; thus he transcends the pitfalls of images and discriminative thought.

Avataṃsaka-sūtra (Huayan jing)

KEEPING ONE'S DISTANCE FROM OPPOSING OPINIONS

The *Dhammapada*, which is said to be a very faithful account of the Buddha's teachings, says that sages and ideal monks are the people who can control the temptation to go to opposing extremes. The opposing extremes in this context refer to extreme ways of living such as hedo-

nism and asceticism. But later researchers understood this to mean two opposing extremes, for instance, existence or non-existence, good or bad, right or wrong, etc.

It is true that the more complicated the issue, the more we tend to set up opposing extreme opinions in order to sort out the problem and make it easier and more amenable to comprehensible argumentation.

However, many problems in our real lives are so complex that any simplistic black and white decision will be unconvincing. Nevertheless, we, to no small extent, jump into hasty differentiations that lead to wrong conclusions and improper behavior.

As this *Avatamsaka-sūtra* (*Huayan jing*) says, there is no distinction between east and west in the sky, but people beneath the sky argue that this way is the West or that way is the East.

Buddhism teaches that it is important to abandon such polarizing views and clarifies the substantial reason that there is neither accord nor opposition from the outset as seen from the teachings of “dependent arising” and “emptiness.”

The above passage of the sutra exemplifies this teaching, which might be a little difficult to understand, but please read this carefully and take it as mental and spiritual sustenance.

6. Emptiness

This concept of universal oneness—that things in their essential nature have no distinguishing marks—is called “Sunyata.” Sunyata means non-substantiality, the un-born, having no self-nature, no duality. Because things in themselves have no form or characteristics, we can speak of them as being neither born nor destroyed. There is nothing about the essential nature of things that can be described in terms of distinctions; that is why things are called non-substantial.

As has been pointed out, all things appear and disappear because of causes and conditions. Nothing ever exists entirely alone; everything exists in relation to everything else.

Wherever there is light, there is shadow; wherever there is length, there is shortness; wherever there is white, there is black. Similarly, the self-nature of things cannot exist alone, and that is why it is called non-substantial.

By the same reasoning, Enlightenment cannot exist apart from ignorance, nor ignorance apart from Enlightenment. Since things do not differ in their essential nature, there can be no duality.

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra

THERE IS NOTHING SUBSTANTIAL IN THIS WORLD

Emptiness is, in the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit, *śūnya*, which means zero. This is a numerical concept that ancient Indians discovered and led to ideas such as plus and minus, the decimal system, etc. It means not only zero but also the fundamental state of existence.

In the world of emptiness, everything is equal and essentially unsubstantial. This emptiness is our world itself where every being

is born and passes away. In this world, we differentiate objects and sometimes we suffer due to our attachment to them. But the objects that we cling to do not have any substance and therefore are essentially fictitious.

How about a fountain in a park, for instance? The water from a fountain in a public park ceaselessly splashes while changing from moment to moment, which is the same as with our blood. As the water keeps gushing from the fountain while continuously maintaining its shape, our life keeps changing as we shape an individual “I.”

Accordingly, despite the fact that everything does not have an unchanging substance, we form attachments to various things as if they had static existences. Through the perspective of “emptiness,” we can liberate ourselves from such attachments. Buddha teaches us to notice how vain it is to cling to unsubstantial entities.

7. Purity

Behind the desires and worldly passions that the mind entertains, there abides the fundamental and true essence of mind, which is clear and undefiled.

Water is round in a round receptacle and square in a square one, but water itself has no particular shape. People often forget this fact.

People see this as good and that as bad, they like this and dislike that, and they discriminate existence from non-existence; and then, being caught in these entanglements and becoming attached to them, they suffer.

If people would only give up their attachment to these imaginary and false discriminations, and restore the purity of their original minds, then both their minds and their bodies will be free from defilement and suffering and they will know the peacefulness that comes with their freedom.

Śūramgama-sūtra

JAPANESE “DOKOISHO” IS A BUDDHIST WORD

In Buddhism, the human mind was thought to be inherently radiant and immaculate, which led to the development of the idea that humans have an immanent Buddha-nature, which is the potentiality to attain Enlightenment. In Japan, the Chinese characters 清淨 (Chi. *qing-jing*) are pronounced “*seijo*” in ordinary Japanese contexts, meaning cleanness, but, in the Japanese Buddhist context, they are pronounced “*shojo*,” signifying the state of mind that is clean and free from blind passions and sins. This “*shojo*” is said to be the origin of everyday exclamations that we utter when we lift heavy things, such as when

we say, “*dokkoisho*” and “*yokkoisho*,” whose English counterparts are probably something like “heave-ho.” These exclamations are thought to be derived from “*rokkon shojo*,” which Japanese mountain ascetics chant when they climb steep mountains such as Mt. Fuji. In order to keep their pace for climbing, they repeatedly and rhythmically chant “*rokkon shojo, oyama wa seiten*,” meaning “my six sense organs are clean, and the weather of this great mountain is fine.” This seems to have been corrupted into the popular sayings, “*dokkoisho*” and “*yokkoisho*.”

The six sense organs are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, i.e. the six faculties of human perception. “*Rokkon shojo*” thus means, “I will get rid of various lusts born from my six sense organs and return to the original state of purity.” When we say, “*dokkoisho*,” or “*yokkoisho*,” upon standing up or sitting down, other people might think that we have gotten so old that we feel that our own bodies have gotten heavy.

However, if we understand that these words are derived from “*shojo*” or cleanness, we might be able to take them as cheerful encouragement for us to go back to the original luminous state of our existences.

To think only that somebody has “gotten old” when he/she unconsciously utters these words might be the result of having limited ourselves to a stereotype. Now, however, we should take these words as cheerful encouragement for ourselves.

8. Buddha-nature

We have spoken of the pure and true mind as being fundamental; it is the Buddha-nature, that is, the seed of Buddhahood.

One can start a fire if one holds a lens between the sun and moxa, but where does the fire come from? The lens is at an enormous distance from the sun, but the fire certainly appears in the moxa by means of the lens. But if the moxa did not have the nature of combustibility, there would be no fire.

In like manner, if the light of Buddha's Wisdom is concentrated upon the human mind, its true nature, which is Buddhahood, will be enkindled, and its light will illuminate the minds of people with its brightness, and will awaken faith in Buddha. He holds the lens of Wisdom before all human minds and thus their faith may be quickened.

Śūramgama-sūtra

HUMANS BY NATURE CAN BECOME BUDDHAS

How to understand human existence and treat the human mind are the subjects of inquiry that thinkers and religionists of all ages and countries have been seriously pursuing.

Of course, there are many different ideas about this subject. One example is what a certain group in Mahayana Buddhism maintained and emphasized, namely, the idea that "everyone has the Buddha-nature, i.e. the same nature that Buddha has, and therefore everybody can surely become a Buddha." Eventually, this idea formed the mainstream of East Asian Buddhism.

Especially in Japan, this idea further evolved into other ideas such as "every being has the Buddha-nature," "even grasses and trees can be

Buddhas,” and “every existence is a manifestation of Buddha-nature as it is.”

To put it in starkly easier terms, they say, “A criminal who commits crimes is, in reality, not different from Buddha at all.” “Even a tree and a flower have the same luminosity and beauty as Buddha.” “Our delusional mind does not exist anywhere at all.” These generous views of humans and the world make us feel comforted, don’t they?

One of the sources of such ideas was the teaching of Buddha-nature mentioned in the previous page. At the point at which the Buddha-nature encounters good conditions, a small light of faith is lit and eventually leads to Enlightenment. Ideas about Buddha-nature clarifies this process. Please value these ideas and calmly ask yourself, “What am I seeking?” “Do I have the Buddha-nature inside of me?” You will probably realize something deep in your mind.

9. Three Ways of Practice

For those who seek Enlightenment, there are three-ways of practice that must be understood and followed. First, there are disciplines for practical behavior; second, one must have right concentration of mind; and third, there is the understanding of wisdom.

What are disciplines? Everyone, whether he is a common man or a way-seeker, should follow the precepts for good behavior. He should control both his mind and body and guard the gates of his five senses. He should be afraid of even a trifling evil and, from moment to moment, should endeavor to practice only good deeds.

What is wisdom? It is the ability to perfectly understand and to patiently accept the Fourfold Noble Truths, to know the reality of suffering and its nature, to know the source of suffering, to know what constitutes the end of suffering, and to know the Noble Path that leads to the end of suffering.

Those who earnestly follow these three ways of practice may rightly be called the disciples of Buddha.

Aṅguttara Nikāya

THREE WAYS OF PRACTICE THAT BUDDHISTS SHOULD LEARN

In Buddhism we practice in order to reach the state of Enlightenment that Buddha attained. Let us suppose that those trying to reach such a state are spiritual athletes. What are the methods that such athletes use to train their spirituality? Ordinary athletes build up their bodies by repeating exercises such as running, jumping, throwing, etc. Spiritual trainings are also necessary, and there are three kinds: the precepts, meditation, and wisdom, which were mentioned in the sutra on the

previous page. Here, we will explain the relationship of the three ways of practice in reverse order. What the spiritual athletes have to do in the last place is to understand the “Four Noble Truths,” which requires profound wisdom.

The practice for obtaining such wisdom is the right concentration of mind, i.e. mediation such as sitting meditation to achieve mental stability.

As warm-up exercises for mental concentration, we have to keep the precepts. We generally think of mind and body as being separate but, in reality, they are closely related to each other. By keeping the precepts, we can control both mind and body.

Accordingly, these three ways of practice are the training methods for spiritual athletes. How about you? Do you want to become a spiritual athlete?

10. The Noble Eightfold Path

If desire, which lies at the root of all human passion, can be removed, then passion will die out and all human suffering will be ended. This is called the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

In order to enter into a state where there is no desire and no suffering, one must follow a certain Path. The stages of the Noble Eightfold Path are: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Behavior, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. This is called the Truth of the Noble Path to the Cessation of the Cause of Suffering.

People should keep these Truths clearly in mind, for the world is filled with suffering, and if anyone wishes to escape from suffering, he must sever the ties with worldly passion, which is the sole cause of suffering. The way of life that is free from all worldly passion and suffering can only be known through Enlightenment, and Enlightenment can only be attained through the discipline of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Vinaya, Mahāvagga

NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH FOR THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING

Buddhism teaches the Four Noble Truths, i.e. the Truth of Suffering, the Truth of the Cause of Suffering, the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, and the Truth of the Noble Path to the Cessation of the Cause of Suffering.

The Buddha's state of mind in which there is no worldly passion and suffering is called the "Truth of the Cessation of Suffering," which is the goal to be achieved. In order to do so, we have to practice the eight correct methods called the "Eightfold Noble Path," whose con-

tents are nothing but the “Truth of the Noble Path to the Cessation of the Cause of Suffering.”

Can we get rid of worldly passion and suffering so easily? It is safe to say that to get rid of worldly passion and suffering is to accept them as they are and surmount them.

In order to do so, it is taught that the following are necessary:

Right View

Right Thought

Right Speech

Right Behavior

Right Livelihood

Right Effort

Right Mindfulness

Right Concentration

Among them Right View is especially emphasized. Having a view involves making correct decisions about things and events including, of course, good things and bad things.

In Buddhism the Four Noble Truths that enable us to see reality as it is are basic because they are the first steps for overcoming worldly passion and suffering.

11. The Perfection of Six Practices

The perfection of six practices for reaching the other shore of Enlightenment are: the path of making offerings, the path of keeping the precepts, the path of endurance, the path of endeavor, the path of the concentration of mind, and the path of wisdom. By following these paths, one can surely pass from the shore of delusion over to the shore of Enlightenment.

The practice of making offerings gets rid of selfishness; the practice of the precepts keeps one mindful of the rights and comforts of others; the practice of endurance helps one to control a fearful or angry mind; the practice of endeavor helps one to be diligent and faithful; the practice of mental concentration helps one to control a wandering and futile mind; and the practice of wisdom changes a dark and confused mind into clear and penetrating insight.

Making offerings and keeping the precepts form the necessary foundation on which to build a great castle. Endurance and endeavor are the walls of the castle that protect it against outside enemies. Concentration and wisdom are the personal armor that protects one against the assaults of life and death.

Avataṃśaka-sūtra

SIX PRACTICES IN MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

The “perfection of six practices” is the most basic six practices that Mahayana Buddhist practitioners are engaged in. The perfection here is called *pāramitās* in the ancient Indian language, and it has two meanings: “to cross to the other shore” and the “supreme thing.”

The six practices are: offerings to others, precepts to be kept,

endurance to withstand hardship, endeavoring to act earnestly, concentration of mind for meditation, and wisdom to see the truth.

In the early Buddhism prior to Mahayana, the “three-ways of practice,” i.e. precepts, meditation, and wisdom, were basic. It is notable that three more practices, i.e. endeavor, offerings, and endurance, were added.

In early Buddhism, the primary concern was the Enlightenment of practitioners themselves, but in Mahayana Buddhism, saving other people also came to be emphasized, which is illustrated by the fact that offerings and endurance were newly added.

The precepts in the early Buddhist organization were very numerous and strict, but those of Mahayana Buddhism are the simple “ten wholesome precepts.” They are: not killing, not stealing, not committing adultery, not lying, not speaking divisively, not speaking harshly, not speaking idly, not being greedy, not being angry, and not having wrong views.

Among them, “speaking divisively” means to speak in order to set people against each other, “speaking harshly” means to speak ill of others, and “speaking idly” means to use flowery language.

Concentration of mind and wisdom are complementary and inseparable and therefore are sometimes expressed with the compound word “*zhiguan*” in Chinese or “*shikan*” in Japanese. “*Shikan*” is a Mahayana Buddhist meditation method for eliminating worldly thoughts and for observing our own mind clearly. This is a crucial practice for the achievement of Enlightenment.

Buddha taught that if we master the “perfection of six practices,” we can attain Enlightenment and become free from suffering.

12. Four Unlimited States of Mind

There are Four Unlimited States of Mind that the seeker of Enlightenment should cherish. They are compassion, tenderness, gladness and equanimity. One can remove greed by cherishing compassion; one can remove anger with tenderness; one can remove suffering with gladness, and one can remove the habit of discriminating between friends and enemies by cherishing an equitable mind.

It is great compassion that makes people happy and contented; it is great tenderness that removes everything that does not make people happy and contented; it is great gladness that makes everyone happy and contented with a mind of joy. There is great peacefulness when everyone is happy and contented, and then one can have equal feelings toward everybody.

Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra

ALTRUISTIC MIND

Compassion, tenderness, gladness, and equanimity are called the “Four Unlimited States of Mind” that we should have toward others.

Compassion and tenderness are often used together as a compound term as if they were inseparable words. However, compassion and tenderness refer to different states of mind in Buddhism.

The basic meaning of “compassion” is friendship and that of “tenderness” is sympathy. “Compassion” is the mind of trying to provide joy and happiness to others, while “tenderness” is the mind of trying to relieve the sadness and suffering of others. “Gladness” means to rejoice with others who have been relieved from suffering and have become happy. To suffer together when others are suffering

is compassion and tenderness, while to be glad is to be joyful with others who are happy.

“Equanimity” is the mind of devoting oneself to others but without attachment. When we do something good for others, we tend to gloat over what we have done and become condescending, but “equanimity” here is free from such feelings. Also, “equanimity” is said to mean the mind without any discriminatory way of thinking. If we obtain these “Four Unlimited States of Mind,” we can get rid of our greed, anger and suffering and be so generous to the extent that our discriminating feelings toward friends or foes would disappear.

“Unlimited” means innumerable. These four minds are modified by this adjective because they are aimed toward innumerable people and putting them into practice invites immeasurable bliss and virtue.

13. The Middle Way

Suppose a log is floating in a river. If the log does not become grounded, does not sink, is not taken out by someone, or does not decay, ultimately it will reach the sea. Life is like this log caught in the current of a great river. If a person does not become attached to a life of self-indulgence, or through renunciation does not become attached to a life of self-torture, or does not become proud of his virtues, or does not become attached to his evil acts, or does not become contemptuous of delusion in his search for Enlightenment, such a person is following the Middle Way.

Samyutta Nikāya

THE LIFE OF NON-ATTACHMENT

It is ideal for a log to float on a river all the way to the ocean without encountering any obstacle. Are we living without any obstacles like this log?

But we always tend to be hooked onto or attached to something. For example, don't you sometimes think or feel in the following ways?

My egocentric consciousness sometimes becomes stronger.

I worry about what others are doing or thinking.

I feel that I have been always choosing easier ways.

I lied about doing what I have not done.

Every day I get mad or dissatisfied.

I lose control of myself because of joy or anger.

Non-attachment to things might seem like a matter of course but in reality, it might be very difficult to achieve.

The Middle Way is the state of mind free of attachment and delusion. It is a way of living that cannot be achieved through an indecisive and passive attitude.

However difficult it might be, if we consciously live while practicing this ideal Middle Way even a little bit, we can surely live our lives more freely as we wish.

14. Best Offering

If one gives away a gift only when it is convenient to do so, or because it is easier to give than not to give, it is an offering, of course, but it is not a True Offering. A True Offering comes from a sympathetic heart before any request is made, and a True Offering is given not occasionally but constantly.

Neither is it a True Offering if after the act there are feelings of regret or of self-praise. A True Offering is one that is given with pleasure, forgetting not only oneself as the giver, but also the one who receives it as well as the gift itself.

A True Offering springs spontaneously from one's pure compassionate heart with no thought of any return and is accompanied by the wish for both giver and receiver to enter into a life of Enlightenment together.

Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra

OFFERINGS ARE NOT MATTERS OF PRIDE

The first of the Perfection of Six Practices, which are the most important Buddhist practices, is "offering." Offering here does not mean giving some money to Buddhist priests when we have funeral services or memorial ceremonies but is a practice that Mahayana Buddhist practitioners are supposed to carry out in daily life. This is because the mind of compassion toward others is to be expressed by giving something and is regarded as being of utmost importance and is indispensable in Mahayana Buddhism.

If we are proud of our offering or brag about it, such an offering cannot be in accord with Buddhist practice. It is important to do it with a clean and pure mind without any trace of pride or vanity.

Since ancient days, there is a word meaning “triple pure donation,” which means there should not be any attachment to the person who makes the offering to the receiving person, or to the things offered. It is offerings made in this way that are to be valued.

SEVEN NON-MATERIAL OFFERINGS OTHER THAN MONEY OR THINGS

We tend to think that an offering involves giving money or things to others but there is more to it. There are non-material offerings such as comforting behavior toward others such as smiling and speaking kind words. There are “seven non-material offerings.” To put it simply, they are bodily help, mental support, tender eyes, smiling face, heartfelt words, giving up one’s seat, and providing accommodation.

Among them, the offering of heartfelt words is one of the basic virtues in Buddhism. Dogen, the founder of the Japanese Soto School of Zen, said, “Kind words have a power that can turn everything around.” As to bodily offerings, that is, offerings of one’s labor service, the supreme example is the sacrifice of one’s own body to hungry animals. The *Lotus Sutra* even teaches burning one’s body as an offering to Buddha. Of course, these are exceptional and not appropriate kinds of offering that ordinary people can easily do in everyday life.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT AND BEST OFFERING?

Generally speaking, there are three kinds of offerings in the Perfection of Six Practices. They are “material offerings,” “Dharma offerings,” and “offerings of fear-elimination.”

“Material offerings” are money or goods, “Dharma offerings” involve the sharing of Buddha’s teaching and knowledge with others, while “offerings of fear-elimination” has to do with giving a fearless mind to others. It is surprising that attempts to help others eliminate their anxieties and fears is included in the Buddhist notion of “offering.”

To give a fearless mind to others seems extremely difficult, but this can be accomplished by standing with suffering people, listening to their problems and staying with them to the end.

This “offering of fear-elimination” is surely the most important and best kind of offering.

CHAPTER 5

Life of the Buddha

Birth as a Prince of the Shakya Clan

The Shakya clansmen dwelt along the Rohini River which flows among the southern foothills of the Himalayas. Their king, Shuddhodana Gautama, established his capital at Kapilavastu and there had a great castle built and ruled wisely, winning the acclaim of his people.

The Queen's name was Maya. She was the daughter of the King's uncle who was also the king of a neighboring district of the same Shakya clan.

For twenty years they had no children. But one night, Queen Maya had a strange dream in which she saw a white elephant entering into her womb through the right side of her chest, and she became pregnant. The King and the people looked forward with anticipation to the birth of a royal child. According to their custom the Queen returned to her parents' home for the birth, and on her way, in the beautiful spring sunshine, she took a rest in the Lumbini Garden.

All about her were Ashoka blossoms. In delight she reached her right arm out to pluck a branch and as she did so a prince was born. All expressed their heart-felt delight with the glory of the Queen and

her princely child; Heaven and Earth rejoiced. This memorable day was the eighth day of April.

The joy of the King was extreme, and he named the child, Siddhartha, which means "Every wish fulfilled."

In the palace of the King, however, delight was followed quickly by sorrow, for after several days the lovely Queen Maya suddenly died. Her younger sister, Mahaprajapati, became the child's foster mother and brought him up with loving care.

A hermit, called Asita, who lived in the mountains not far away, noticed a radiance about the castle. Interpreting it as a good omen he came down to the palace and was shown the child. He predicted: "This Prince, if he remains in the palace, when grown up will become a great king and subjugate the whole world. But if he forsakes the court life to embrace a religious life, he will become a Buddha, the Savior of the world."

At first the King was pleased to hear this prophecy, but later he started to worry about the possibility of his only son leaving the palace to become a homeless recluse.

Agony in the Life of the Palace

At the age of seven, the Prince began his lessons in the civil and military arts, but his thoughts more naturally tended to other things. One spring day he went out of the castle with his father. Together they were watching a farmer at his plowing when he noticed a bird descend to the ground and carry off a small worm which had been turned up by the farmer's plough. He sat down in the shade of a tree and thought about it, whispering to himself:

“Alas! Do all living creatures kill each other?”

The Prince, who had lost his mother so soon after his birth, was deeply affected by the tragedy of these little creatures.

This spiritual wound deepened day by day as he grew up; like a little scar on a young tree, the suffering of human life became more and more deeply engrained in his mind.

The King was increasingly worried as he recalled the hermit’s prophecy and tried in every possible way to cheer the Prince and to turn his thoughts in other directions.

The King arranged the marriage of the Prince at the age of nineteen to the Princess Yashodhara. She was the daughter of Suprabuddha, the Lord of Devadaha Castle and a brother of the late Queen Maya.

For ten years, in the different Pavilions of Spring, Autumn and the Rainy Season, the Prince was immersed in rounds of music, dancing and pleasure, but always his thoughts returned to the problem of suffering as he pensively tried to understand the true meaning of human life.

Abandonment of Worldly Life to be an Ascetic

“The luxuries of the palace, this healthy body, this rejoicing youth! What do they mean to me?” he thought. “Someday we may be sick, we shall become aged; from death there is no escape. Pride of youth, pride of health, pride of existence—all thoughtful people should cast them aside.”

“A man struggling for existence will naturally look for something of value. There are two ways of looking—a right way and a wrong way. If he looks in the wrong way, he recognizes that sickness, old age and death are unavoidable, but he seeks the opposite.”

“If he looks in the right way, he recognizes the true nature of sickness, old age and death, and he searches for meaning in that which transcends all human sufferings. In my life of pleasures, I seem to be looking in the wrong way.”

Thus, the spiritual struggle went on in the mind of the Prince until his only child, Rahula, was born when he was 29. This seemed to bring things to a climax, for he then decided to leave the palace and look for the solution of his spiritual unrest in the homeless life of a mendicant.

He left the castle one night with only his charioteer, Chandaka, and his favorite horse, the snow-white Kanthaka.

Result of Ascetic Practices

His anguish did not end, and many devils tempted him saying: “You would do better to return to the castle for the whole world will soon be yours.” But he told the devil that he did not want the whole world. So, he shaved his head and turned his steps toward the south, carrying a begging bowl in his hand.

The Prince first visited the hermit Bhagava and watched his ascetic practices. He then went to Arada Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra to learn their methods of attaining Enlightenment through meditation; but after practicing them for a time he became convinced that they would not lead him to Enlightenment. Finally, he went to the land of Magadha and practiced asceticism in the forest of Uruvilva on the banks of the Nairanjana River, which flows by the Gaya Village.

The methods of his practice were unbelievably rigorous. He spurred himself on with the thought that “no ascetic in the past, none

in the present, and none in the future, ever has practiced or ever will practice more earnestly than I do.”

Enlightenment Under the Bodhi Tree

Still the Prince could not realize his goal. After six years in the forest he gave up the practice of asceticism. He went bathing in the river and accepted a bowl of milk from the hand of Sujata, a maiden, who lived in the neighboring village. The five companions who had lived with the Prince during the six years of his ascetic practice were shocked that he should receive milk from the hand of a maiden; they thought him degraded and left him.

Thus, the Prince was left alone. He was still weak, but at the risk of losing his life he attempted yet another period of meditation, saying to himself, “Blood may become exhausted, flesh may decay, bones may fall apart, but I will never leave this place until I find the way to Enlightenment.”

It was an intense and incomparable struggle for him. He was desperate and filled with confusing thoughts, dark shadows overhung his spirit, and he was beleaguered by all the lures of the devils. Carefully and patiently he examined them one by one and rejected them all. It was a hard struggle indeed, making his blood run thin, his flesh fall away, and his bones crack.

But when the morning star appeared in the eastern sky, the struggle was over, and the Prince’s mind was as clear and bright as the breaking day. He had, at last, found the path to Enlightenment. It was December eighth, when the Prince became a Buddha at thirty-five years of age.

From this time on the Prince was known by different names: some

spoke of him as Buddha, the Perfectly Enlightened One, Tathagata; some spoke of him as Shakyamuni, the Sage of the Shakya clan; others called him the World-honored One.

The First Discourse and Missionary Journey

He went first to Mrigadava in Varanasi where the five mendicants who had lived with him during the six years of his ascetic life were staying. At first, they shunned him, but after they had talked with him, they believed in him and became his first followers. He then went to the Rajagriha Castle and won over King Bimbisara, who had always been his friend. From there he went about the country living on alms and teaching men to accept his way of life.

People responded to him as the thirsty seek water and the hungry food. Two great disciples, Sariputra and Maudgalyayana, and their two thousand followers, came to him.

At first the Buddha's father, King Shuddhodana, still inwardly suffering because of his son's decision to leave the palace, remained aloof, but then became his faithful disciple. Mahaprajapati, the Buddha's stepmother, and Princess Yashodhara, his wife, and all the members of the Shakya clan began to follow him. Multitudes of others also became his devoted and faithful followers.

Nirvana at Kusinagara

For forty-five years the Buddha went about the countryside preaching and persuading people to follow his way of life. But when he was eighty,

at Vaisali and on his way from Rajagriha to Shravasti, he became ill and predicted that after three months he would enter Nirvana. Still he journeyed on until he reached Pava, where he fell seriously ill from some food offered by Chunda, a blacksmith. Eventually, in spite of great pain and weakness, he reached the forest that bordered Kusinagara.

Lying between two large *sala* trees, he continued teaching his disciples until his last moment. Thus, he entered into perfect tranquility after he had completed his work as the world's greatest teacher.

Under the guidance of Ananda, the Buddha's favorite disciple, his body was cremated by his friends in Kusinagara.

Seven neighboring rulers as well as King Ajatasatru demanded that the relics be divided among them. The people of Kusinagara at first refused and the dispute even threatened to end in war; but under the advice of a wise man named Drona, the crisis was resolved, and the relics were divided among the eight great countries. The ashes of the funeral pyre and the earthen jar that contained the relics were also given to two other rulers to be likewise honored. Thus, ten great towers commemorating the Buddha were built to enshrine his relics and ashes.

The Last Teaching of the Buddha

Beneath the *sala* trees at Kusinagara, in his last words to his disciples, the Buddha said:

“Make of yourself a light. Rely upon yourself, do not depend upon anyone else. Make my teachings your light. Rely upon them, do not depend upon any other teaching.

“Consider your body: think of its impurity. Knowing that both its pain and its delight are alike causes of suffering, how can you indulge

in its desires? Consider your 'self'; think of its transiency; how can you fall into delusion about it and cherish pride and selfishness, knowing that they must all end in inevitable suffering? Consider all substances; can you find among them any enduring 'self'? Are they not all aggregates that sooner or later will break apart and be scattered? Do not be confused by the universality of suffering, but follow my teaching, even after my death, and you will be rid of pain. Do this and you will indeed be my disciples.

"My disciples, the teachings that I have given you are never to be forgotten or abandoned. They are always to be treasured, they are to be thought about, they are to be practiced. If you follow these teachings, you will always be happy.

"The point of the teachings is to control your own mind. Keep your mind from greed, and you will keep your behavior right, your mind pure and your words faithful. By always thinking about the transiency of your life, you will be able to resist greed and anger, and will be able to avoid all evils.

"If you find your mind tempted and so entangled in greed, you must suppress and control the temptation; be the master of your own mind.

"A man's mind may make him a Buddha, or it may make him a beast. Misled by error, one becomes a demon; enlightened, one becomes a Buddha. Therefore, control your mind and do not let it deviate from the right path.

"You should respect each other, follow my teachings, and refrain from disputes; you should not, like water and oil, repel each other, but should, like milk and water, mingle together.

"Study together, learn together, practice my teachings together. Do not waste your mind and time in idleness and quarreling. Enjoy

the blossoms of Enlightenment in their season and harvest the fruit of the right path.

“The teachings which I have given you, I gained by following the path myself. You should follow these teachings and conform to their spirit on every occasion.

“If you neglect them, it means that you have never really met me. It means that you are far from me, even if you are actually with me; but if you accept and practice my teachings, then you are very near to me, even though you are far away.

“My disciples, my end is approaching, our parting is near, but do not lament. Life is ever changing; none can escape the dissolution of the body. This I am now to show by my own death, my body falling apart like a dilapidated cart.

“Do not vainly lament but realize that nothing is permanent and learn from it the emptiness of human life. Do not cherish the unworthy desire that the changeable might become unchanging.

“The demon of worldly desires is always seeking chances to deceive the mind. If a viper lives in your room and you wish to have a peaceful sleep, you must first chase it out.

“You must break the bonds of worldly passions and drive them away as you would a viper. You must positively protect your own mind.

“My disciples, my last moment has come, but do not forget that death is only the end of the physical body. The body was born from parents and was nourished by food; just as inevitable are sickness and death.

“But the true Buddha is not a human body—it is Enlightenment. A human body must die, but the Wisdom of Enlightenment will exist forever in the truth of the Dharma, and in the practice of the

Dharma. He who sees merely my body does not truly see me. Only he who accepts my teaching truly sees me.

“After my death, the Dharma shall be your teacher. Follow the Dharma and you will be true to me.

“During the last forty-five years of my life, I have withheld nothing from my teachings. There is no secret teaching, no hidden meaning; everything has been taught openly and clearly. My dear disciples, this is the end. In a moment, I shall be passing into Nirvana. This is my instruction.”

Commentary on the Biography of the Buddha

Historical Buddha

As time passes, great religionists, especially founders of religions, tend to be regarded not as ordinary humans like us and they come to be worshiped as deities by their followers.

The same was true for the founder of Buddhism, who lived about 2,500 years ago. Therefore, there were some scholars in the past who denied the existence of the historical Buddha. Today, however, there is no one who doubts his existence thanks to archaeological evidence.

The key to knowing about the historical Buddha is the Pali Tripitaka, the earliest sacred scriptures of Buddhism, as well as archaeological, geological and geographical source materials.

Recent academic research in Europe and Japan have gradually made known the historical Buddha's life and thought. The "Historical Buddha" in "The Teaching of Buddha" published by Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, contains some legendary elements but there is no significant discrepancy with the results of contemporary academic research.

Buddha was born as the eldest son of King Shuddhodana, the ruler of Kapilavastu in Nepal, the center of the Shakya clan.

It is said that his mother, Queen Maya, was on her way back to her parents' home to give birth to her baby when she stopped at the Lumbini Garden and her labor started. Soon after giving birth to her baby, she passed away.

Buddha's surname and given name

Buddha's family name was Gautama, meaning "the best cow," which is why we often call Buddha as an individual "Gautama Buddha" today. Originally, Buddha was not a proper noun but a common noun meaning "an awakened man" or "an enlightened man." Upon translating Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, "Buddha" was transliterated as "*fó*" (佛) and later "*fótuó*" (佛陀).

Buddha's given name was Siddhartha, which means "a man who achieved his goal." In Japan, he is also called "Oshaka-sama" or "Shaka" because he is from the Shakya clan. Other names are "Shakamuni," meaning "the sage of the Shakya clan," and "Shakamuni-seson," meaning "Shakamuni, the World-Honored One" or "Shakuson" for short.

Period when Buddha lived

There have been various opinions about the years of the Buddha's birth and death, but today's generally accepted theory is that his life spanned the years 463 to 383 B.C.

In his day, Brahmanism, which centered around the ruling priestly class of Brahmins, was the predominant religion. However, as trade

and manufacture developed, the agrarian society of the clan system, which had supported Brahmanical religion, culture and society, gradually collapsed and a number of small countries came into existence.

Some of these countries had republican or aristocratic systems but bigger countries with hereditary kings gradually absorbed them. As a result, kings came to be regarded as having the highest social status while the Brahman class lost their authority.

Buddha's father, Shuddhodana, was called "King" but, in reality, he seemed to govern the country with a kind of republican system. In the religious world of that time, many world-renunciant religious free thinkers called "*śramaṇa*" (man striving for liberation), who were not satisfied with Brahmanism, had already appeared.

To seek the Eternal Buddha

In such a social condition, Prince Siddhartha was raised in a motherless family. He seriously tackled the issue of unavoidable human sufferings such as birth, aging, sickness and death, and renounced the world to become a wandering monk.

At the age of thirty-five, he finally attained Enlightenment and taught people for forty-five years. At eighty, after delivering his last discourse to his disciples on Vulture Peak in Rajagriha, he left for his birth place in Nepal, but on the way, he became sick and realized that he was close to death.

At that moment, Buddha taught his disciples, "Be a light unto yourselves. Rely upon yourself, and do not depend upon anyone else. Make my teachings your light. Rely upon them, and do not depend upon any other teaching." His last words were about practicing reason

and morality, which will bring people benefits and happiness. He said, “After my death, the Dharma shall be your teacher.” He quietly passed away under a pair of *sala* trees, facing the west with his head toward the north and one leg resting on the other.

Later, his excessively worshipful disciples gradually tended to seek an eternal Buddha in addition to the historical Buddha. They came to believe that there were various Buddhas with a variety of names and appearances in other worlds and were teaching the Dharma just like Shakyas Buddha had done in this world, and this development expanded the religious world of Buddhism a great deal.

Eight Stages of Buddha's life

The eight pivotal episodes in the life of Buddha are called the “Eight Stages of the Buddha's Life,” which are generally described as follows:

1. 降兜率 Descending from Tuṣita Heaven (to this world)
2. 托胎 Entering into the womb (of his mother Queen Maya)
3. 降誕 Birth
4. 出城 Leaving the palace (to engage in religious training)
5. 降魔 Subduing demons (overcoming afflictions under the Bodhi tree)
6. 成道 Attaining Enlightenment (becoming a Buddha)
7. 轉法輪 Turning the wheel of Dharma (teaching the truth to his disciples)
8. 涅槃 Entering the final Nirvāṇa (passing away under the *sala* trees)

The goal of Buddhism is for practitioners to become awakened ones, which means to attain Enlightenment and become a Buddha. Therefore, the sixth stage is the most important among the “Eight Stages of the Buddha’s Life.”

The Three Treasures of Buddhism

After the death of Shakyā Buddha, Buddhism was summarily referred to as the “Three Treasures,” which are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. It is faith in these Three Treasures and observance of the precepts that are regarded as official proof of being a Buddhist.

“Buddha” means the Buddha who founded the teaching.

“Dharma” means what the Buddha taught.

“Sangha” means the group of people who maintain the teaching.

To put it simply, the “Three Treasures” are the Buddha, the scriptures and the priests. Prince Shotoku (574–622), a well-respected, semi-legendary regent of ancient Japan, stipulated in his *Seventeen-Article Constitution*, which he wrote in 604 and is one of the oldest constitutions in the world, that people should “sincerely revere the Three Treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.”

A Pictorial Biography of Buddha

〔託胎〕 [Pregnancy]

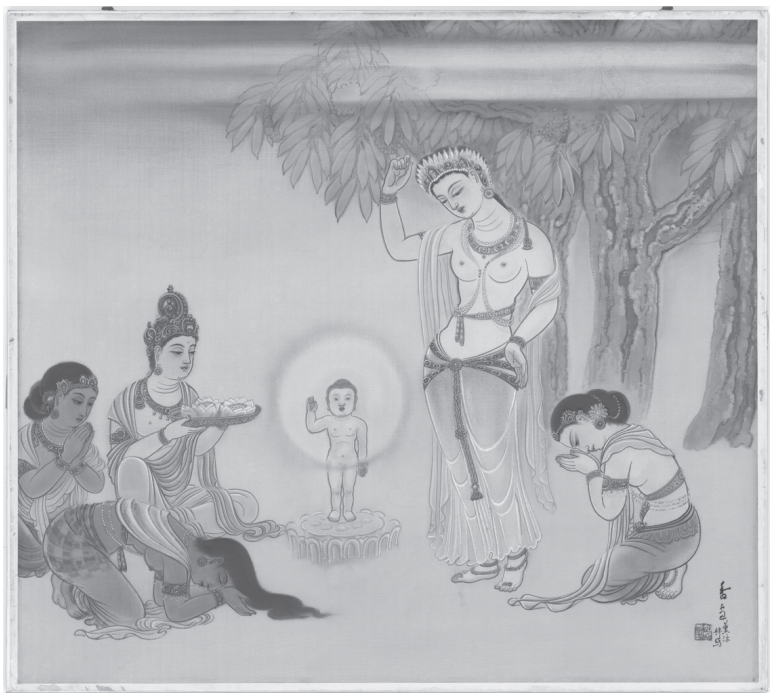
It was a white elephant with six golden tusks that appeared in Queen Maya's dream. She dreamed that an elephant entered into her womb



through the right side of her chest. When she woke from the strange dream, she realized that she had been impregnated.

〔降誕〕 [Birth]

Prince Siddhartha emitted a golden light and stood on a lotus flower. As soon as he was born from Queen Maya's right armpit, he took seven steps, then raised his right arm up and his left arm down and is said



to have declared, “In the heavens and on earth, I am the only one to be respected.” This means that “each person deserves respect as he or she is.”

〔出城〕 **[Abandonment of the palace]**

One night, Siddhartha left the castle from the north gate on his horse Kanthaka with his charioteer, Chandaka. He changed his clothes to the



humble robe of an ascetic practitioner and cut his hair with his sword. He then let Kanthaka as well as Chandaka go back to the palace and started walking alone.

〔牧女の供養〕 [Offering from a maiden]

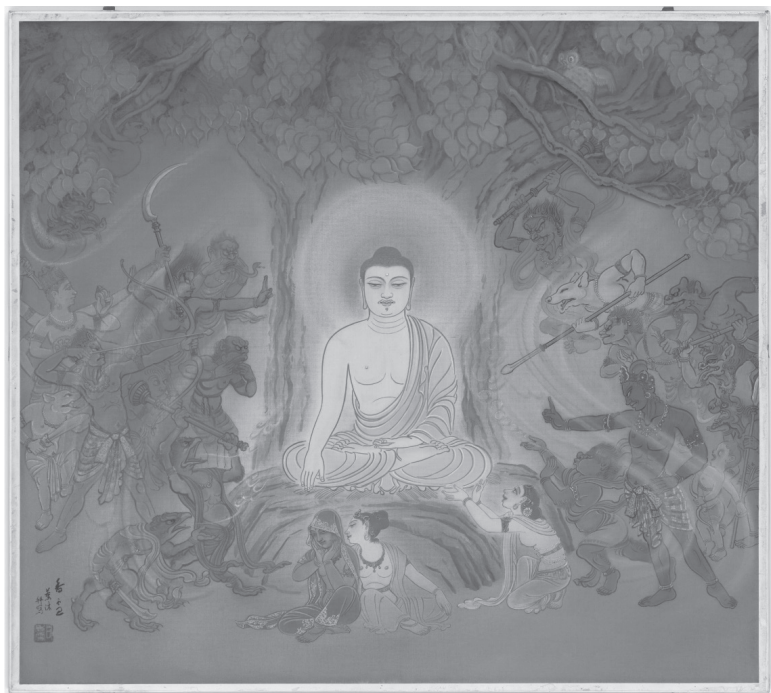
Siddhartha received a bowl of milk porridge from Sujata. Thanks to the milk, Siddhartha recovered his health and his body emitted golden



light. He sat down on the roots of the Bodhi tree and entered into meditation, having firmly determined not to stand up again until he obtained Enlightenment.

〔成道〕 **[Enlightenment]**

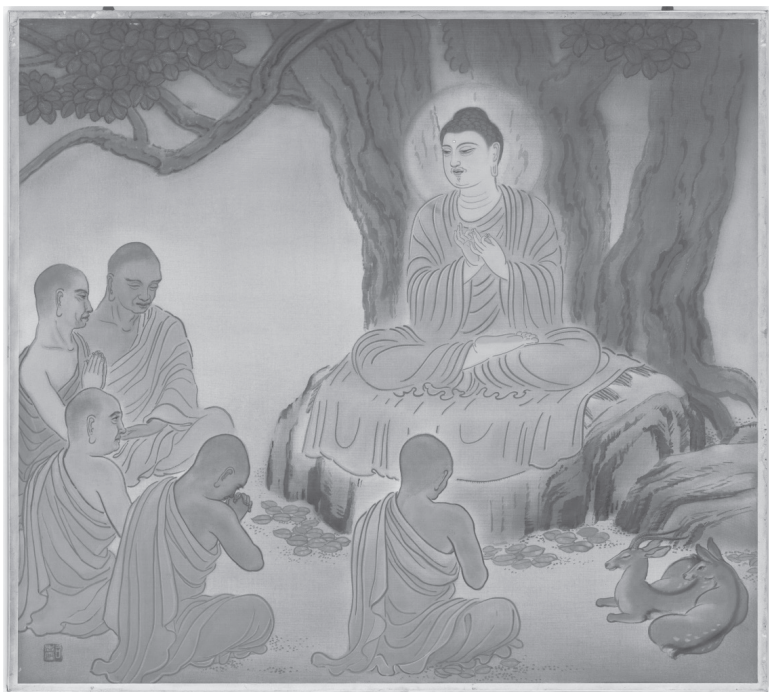
As soon as Siddhartha entered into meditation, demons took notice and tried to prevent him from attaining Enlightenment. The demons



were afraid that a human could overcome the fear of death. However, Siddhartha defeated all of them and finally reached Enlightenment.

〔轉法輪〕 **[Turning the wheel of Dharma]**

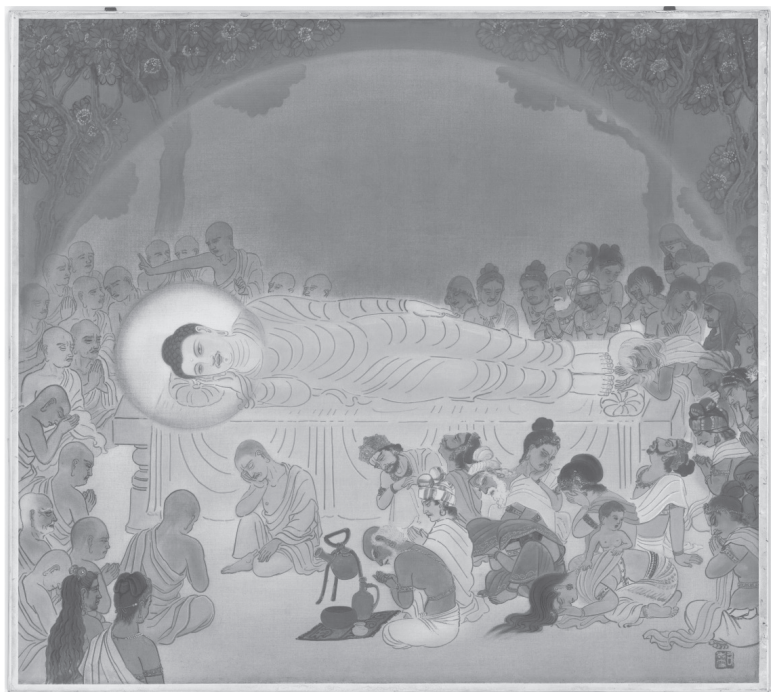
Five ascetics were living in the Deer Park at that time. They had thought that Siddhartha had failed and given up his hard discipline, but as soon as Siddhartha appeared in front of them, they realized that



he had achieved Enlightenment. It was those five men who became the first disciples of the Buddha.

〔涅槃〕 [Nirvana]

While being looked after by his disciples, Buddha passed away and entered into *parinirvana* under two *sala* trees while facing west with his head toward the north and his right hand supporting his head.



Afterword

Have you ever seen an orange book entitled “The Teaching of Buddha” published by Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (BDK) in a hotel where you have stayed? This book consists of extracts from various Buddhist scriptures, or sutras, and was compiled and published in an effort to produce a readable book that would provide spiritual nourishment for everybody. However, we have learned from readers that we might need an additional explanatory book that meets the needs of contemporary people.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (BDK), the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism, we planned to publish a companion guidebook that would make Buddha’s teaching more accessible for contemporary people. Members of the editorial board of “The Teaching of Buddha” hereby compiled this book, “Learning the Wisdom of Enlightenment: Supplementary Reading Material for the Teaching of Buddha.” We requested contributions from the following writers: Zenno Ishigami, Shoshin Ichishima, Ichigyo Oyama, Kiyotaka Kimura, Makio Takemura, Kenneth Tanaka, Yasuaki Nara, Tatsuo Haya, Sengaku Maeda, Kenryo Minowa, Chizuko Yoshimizu, Yoshiyasu Yonezawa, Shogo Watanabe (in the order of the Japanese syllabary).

We hope that this book will deepen your understanding of “The Teaching of Buddha” and that Buddha’s teaching will be the guiding principle for the lives of our readers.

Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai is a public interest incorporated foundation.