

*The Scripture of
the Buddha's Last Teachings.*

THE SCRIPTURE OF THE BUDDHA'S LAST TEACHINGS.

From the time when Shakyamuni first turned the Wheel of the Dharma to ferry Ajñata Kaundinya to the Other Shore until the last time He gave voice to the Dharma to carry Subhadra there, those responsive to being ferried had all been taken across and now He lay among the four twin sala trees about to enter parinirvana. At midnight when all was calm and not a sound was heard, He gave a summary explanation of the essentials of the Dharma to His disciples:

“O you monks, after I enter into eternal meditation, you should deeply honour, esteem and revere as precious the Ten Great and the Forty-eight Less Grave Precepts; just as darkness encounters brightness or a destitute person receives a treasure, so you should recognize these as your Great Teachers; whilst I abided in this world there were indeed none different from These for Me. Those of you who keep to these Pure Precepts are not to go about seeking to deal in commerce, barter or sale, or to live secure in field and home tending and nurturing family, clan, servants and animals; you should stay clear of any other kinds of profiteering and treasure hunting as if you were avoiding the fiery pit itself. Do not go about wantonly

destroying or trampling down the vegetation, clearing the land and digging up the soil literally or figuratively. You should not mix and blend potions and nostrums, engage in forecasting fortune or misfortune, stare up at the positions of the stars and planets to infer how you should go forth based on their waxing and waning or make up calendars to try to compute and fix the future. When regulating the body, eat wholesome foods for self-sustenance. Do not go about participating in worldly affairs by circulating yourself as a messenger, do not engage in sorcery in search of some elixir of eternal life, seek to be intimate with people of influence and position or be close with those who treat others rudely or with contempt; none of these should you do. With an upright heart and appropriate thoughts you should seek to ferry others to the Other Shore. Do not go about trying to conceal your faults and shortcomings or display how different you are from deluded creatures. In making the four offerings which are your joy in awakening your heart, your reverence for the Dharma, your resolve to train and your practice, know your capacity and be content with that. Be quick to go about doing services and work but do not seek to amass tasks; these guides summarize the characteristics of keeping to the Precepts. The Precepts are what is appropriate to, and in accord with, the foundation and source of liberation, this is why they are called the Pratimokshas or what leads one toward liberation, accordingly, these Precepts can beget various meditations and the wisdom that eradicates suffering. O monks, keep to these Pure Precepts without giving

others cause to slander you. If you can keep to these Pure Precepts you should know that this can have spiritual benefits for self and others; for those who do not have the Precepts, all goodness, merits and virtues cannot produce for them what they need to know. The Precepts are foremost for well-being, the abiding place of merit and virtue.

O you monks, since you can already abide in the Precepts, you should work on regulating your five senses; do not wantonly enter into the desires that arise from them. You are, for example, just as an ox-herder who holds his staff in hand and need but show it to his ox. Do not indulge in idleness, letting that which does not keep to the Precepts sow its seeds and grow its crops for, if you indulge your five senses, not only will your desires, which know no bounds, be ungovernable, they will also be as an unruly horse that, uncontrolled by a bridle, threatens to drag the trainer along until he tumbles into some hole. As if a kalpa's worth of injury and pain would come to an end in one lifetime! The calamities and misfortunes created by the thieving done by the five senses stretches from generation to generation; because their harm is exceedingly heavy, great caution is necessary. Wise is the one who is the governor and regulator of his senses and not their follower; treat them as though they were thieves; do not let them indulge in indolence and evasiveness. If you let them indulge themselves, they will soon enough see to their own obliteration for the lord and master of these five senses is the discriminatory mind, therefore you should govern your mind well. The

evasiveness of the discriminatory mind goes far beyond the dreadfulness of poisonous serpents, fierce beasts, ruthless robbers or blazing infernos, yet it is not enough merely to instruct it through metaphors for it is just like someone with a handful of honey who wheels about recklessly whilst focussing on the honey and fails to see the deep pit before him. It is like a crazed elephant without any restraints or like a monkey who has taken to the trees and prances about, leaping and jumping; only difficulties and suffering can constrain it; you should hasten to damp its ardour and not give it license to be indulgent for someone who indulges his mind loses his good practices. Govern it in a single situation and there will not be any affair you will be unable to manage; therefore, O monks, you should be diligent and skilfully progress by bending that discriminatory mind of yours to submission.

O you monks, when receiving food or drink you should look upon it as upon the ingesting of medicine; do not give rise to fluctuations in judgment by weighing it on the scales of good and bad. Be prompt to ingest it as a support for your body which removes hunger and thirst, at the same time be as the honeybee who, whilst gathering pollen from a flower, only takes the nectar and does not spoil or destroy the flower's colour, shape or scent. When receiving an offering from another, partake of it whilst ridding yourself of any feelings of irritation and dislike; to feel that you have not got very much, and therefore seek after more, destroys the good-hearted intention of the donor. It is just the same as with the shrewd person who measures

the strength of an ox by how much it can bear and does not go to excess so that he wears out its strength.

O you monks, during the daytime practice the good Teachings with a diligent heart for there is no time to lose; the early evening and early morning should not be wasted. If you recite the Scriptures in the middle of the night, expend your breath by yourself; do not doze off and let your eyes close lest you allow your whole life to pass in vain without realization. Be mindful that the fires of impermanence incinerate all worlds so be quick in seeking to ferry yourself to the Other Shore and do not doze off, letting your eyes indeed close. The defiling passions rob, continuously waylay and slay people; they are far worse than a household filled with resentful people. How can you afford to doze off ? You must arouse yourself and waken from your slumber; a defiling passion is a poisonous serpent asleep in your heart; it is like having a black viper in your room whilst you sleep. You must quickly snare this serpent by keeping to the Precepts, drive it off and remove it from your room; once the somnolent serpent has departed, you can sleep peacefully and in safety. If it does not depart and you close your eyes to it, you are the same as a person who lacks true modesty, that is you will lack awareness of your susceptibilities and remorse for your shortcomings, for, of all things splendrous, modesty is foremost; it is as a cast-iron restraint which can restrain others without recourse to any other thing. O monks, you should always act with a modest heart without neglecting it even for a short while; if you separate yourself from your feelings

of modesty then you lose merit and virtue. When there are people who are modest then there will be good Teaching; if people lack modesty, there is no difference between them and birds or beasts.

O you monks, if someone should come to dismember your every joint, you should pacify your heart, not glare angrily or hatefully at the person, guard your mouth and refrain from spouting hot words of hate. If you indulge in a raging or resentful heart then you make yourself an obstacle in your own path and lose the benefits of your merit and virtue; forbear for virtue's sake and keep to the Precepts for, if you act in this way, you reach what seems impossible. The one who can behave with forbearance is called a great and powerful person. If there are those who cannot be joyful and delight in others, forbearance will accept the poison of their malice and curses as a person drinking the Sweet Dew. He or she, namelessly entering the Way, is indeed the one with discriminate wisdom. Why is this? Because the mischief from anger, hatred and resentment can break one's own Teachings and destroy another's reputation so that now, and in the future, people will not be delighted to meet them or you. You should realize that an angry heart depends on a fierce flame, so be on guard, without crossing over into anger and resentment, lest you let these thieves of kalpas of merit and virtue gain entrance. When common folk embrace their greeds they are people who walk not in the Way; they lack the Teaching to restrain themselves so that their anger can still harbour resentment and find fault with others. When monks walk

in the Way they are people who do not hanker after things so that attachments, which give rise to anger and resentment, become all but impossible. Just as one who, at the first sound of thunder amidst the chill and bracing clouds, starts up a fire, it is not fitting to enkindle anger at the first signs of coldness or trouble.

O you monks, you should polish your heads and, having relinquished ornaments and other adornments, wear appropriate robes of a subdued colour; holding a suitable vessel in your hands, beg alms for your livelihood. Look at yourself in the following way. If arrogance or pride arise you should quickly eradicate them; arrogance and pride are not seemly even for common folk who follow worldly ways so how much less are they seemly for a person who has left home to enter the Way. Will you yield yourself to those attitudes when you go forth to beg alms for the sake of liberation?

O you monks, the mind that is flattering and fawning acts contrary to the Way, therefore keep your heart honest and forthright for you should realize that flattery and fawning are merely done for the sake of imposing on others or making fools of them. O monks, maintain an upright heart which will serve you as the foundation for your honesty and forthrightness.

O you monks, recognise the person who has many cravings; his misery and troubles are many because he seeks for many benefits, gains and advantages. The person of few cravings is free from seeking after things or yearning for them, hence he is free of such sufferings; he desires little, only esteeming what is fitting for

his spiritual training and practice; by desiring little, so much more is he able to bring forth fine merits and virtues. The person of few desires is free of flattery and fawning when searching out the intentions of others. The heart of someone who behaves with few desires is, as a consequence, composed and free from gloom, anxiety, sorrow or fear; when coming in contact with things, he finds a surplus for there is never an insufficiency. The one who has few desires has Nirvana for this is the name for 'having few desires'.

O you monks, if you wish to be free from miseries and woes, look into contentment which is synonymous with knowing what is enough; the Teaching of contentment is none other than the location of true wealth, ease, security and peace. The person who is contented, though he sleeps upon the bare ground, is still at ease and satisfied; someone who is discontented, even if he were ensconced in a celestial palace, would still not find this tallying with his ideas and tastes. The one who is discontented, though rich, is poor; the person who is contented, though poor, is rich. The one who is discontented always does what his five desires latch onto; he does that which causes grief to, and arouses the compassionate pity of, one who is contented. This is what I mean by the term 'contentment'.

O you monks, if you seek to be tranquil and quiet, liberated from the insistence of the defiling passions, at ease and content, then you should part company with confusion and bustle and dwell at your ease in some solitary place. The person who dwells in quietude continually forsakes what those in the heavens esteem

so highly amongst themselves, therefore withdraw from those about you, as well as from other crowds, and, in a place of solitude apart from them, reflect on the source of the eradication of suffering at your leisure. If you are one who enjoys the company of others then you will take on the woes of their company, just as with a flock of birds that gather in some huge tree, there is the lament of dead branches breaking off under their weight. When the world binds itself around us, we drown in the suffering of such company just as an old elephant, sunk down in the mire, is unable to drag himself out.

O you monks, if you are diligent in your devotion to progress, training will not be difficult for you, therefore be diligent and devote yourselves to progress just as a small stream, ever flowing, can bore holes in rocks. If the mind of the trainee is often inattentive and remiss, it will be just the same as making a fire by friction and blowing on it before it is hot enough to catch ablaze; although your desire to train can blaze up, the fires of training are hard to arrive at. This is what I call 'devotion to progress'.

O you monks, seek fine understanding, search out good assistance and do not neglect being mindful. If you are one who does not neglect mindfulness, the thieves of passional defilement will not be able to enter, therefore, you monks, always keep your minds alert, for the one who loses mindfulness loses his merits and virtues. When the strength of your mindfulness is constant and vigorous, though the five desires would break in to rob you, they will do you no harm;

you will be as one who puts on armour before entering a battle and will have nothing to fear. This is what I call 'not neglecting mindfulness'.

O you monks, when your mind is kept alert, then you are in meditation; because your mind is in meditation, you are able to know the world, birth and death, as well as the characteristics of all things, therefore you monks should always study and practice the ways of meditation with finest diligence. When you achieve meditation, your heart is not in turmoil or your mind scattered; just as a household that would be frugal with water arranges dikes and pond banks carefully, so a trainee does likewise. Therefore, for the sake of the water of discriminate wisdom, practice meditation well that you may prevent the loss of that water through leaks caused by the defiling passions. This is what I call 'doing meditation'.

O you monks, when you have discriminate wisdom, you will not be attached to desires; by constant self-reflection and watching what you do, you will not bring about any loss through the defiling passions; within My Teachings this is what can bring you to liberation. If someone denies this, not only is he not a person of the Way, he is also not an ordinary, everyday person either; indeed, there is no name for such a one. Genuine discriminate wisdom is the sturdy craft that ferries others across the sea of old age, disease and death; it is also a great bright lamp for the darkness of ignorance, a wonderful curative for all disease and suffering. It is a sharp axe for felling the trees of defiling passions, therefore you monks should improve

yourselves by means of this wisdom which you attain through hearing, thinking about and putting into practice My Teachings. When someone has the radiance of this wisdom then, though he be blind, he will clearly see what people are. This is what 'discriminating wisdom' is.

O you monks, if your mind plays around with all kinds of theories and opinions it will be confused and in disorder and, though you have left home to be a monk, you have still not yet realized liberation; therefore, O monks, quickly abandon your disordered mind and your playing around with your theories and notions. If you wish to enjoy the pleasure that comes from calmness and the extinction of defiling passions, thoroughly eliminate the affliction of playing around in your head. This is what I mean by 'not playing around with theories and opinions'.

O you monks, you should wholeheartedly discard all forms of looseness and self-indulgence in favour of merits and virtues just as you would keep away from a malicious thief. What the World-honoured One desires with His great compassion is to benefit all by means of their ultimate realization of their identity with Buddha. Be it deep in the mountains, in an uninhabited valley or under some tree, your place of seclusion is your abode of peace. Keep in mind what you have received of the Teachings; do not let yourself be forgetful of Them and thereby lose Them; always be as diligent as possible in your practice and mastery of Them; the unreality of the unconditioned after death spawns gloom and regret. Like a good physician, I

understand illness and prescribe curatives for you to take; not to take them is not the doctor's fault. I also resemble a skilled guide who leads others to a clear pathway; not to heed him and not to travel the path is not the mistake of the guide. If you, in your sufferings, have any doubts about the Four Noble Truths, you can forthwith ask Me about them for, to fail to eradicate your doubts, is indeed to fail to seek for certainty."

The World-honoured One then made this same offer twice again but, among those present, none asked. Why was this? Because, within the assembly, none had any doubts.

Then Aniruddha, the Buddha's chief disciple with divine vision, scrutinizing the minds of the assembled, said to the Buddha, "O World-honoured One, the moon can make us hot and the sun can be cold to us. The Buddha has told us that the Four Noble Truths should not make us different from each other. The Buddha has also told us that the reality of the Truth of suffering is that suffering, which is the inability to make ourselves happy, exists, that the reality of the defiling passions is the cause of that suffering and this cause is not different for any of us, that if suffering is extinguished then this cause is extinguished because, when a cause is eliminated, its fruits are also eliminated and that the path to eliminating it is, in reality, the Path of Truth and there is no other way. O World-honoured One, these monks have certainty and are free of doubts about the Four Noble Truths. If there is anyone within this assembly who has not yet accomplished what needs to be done then, upon seeing the

Buddha enter parinirvana, let him give rise to feelings of pity for others. If you have already penetrated His Teachings you have heard what the Buddha has voiced which is to help ferry all to the Other Shore; it is as a flash of lightning seen in the night which helps one see the Way. If what needs to be done is already accomplished and you have already crossed the sea of suffering, keep just this thought in mind, the parinirvana of the World-honoured One is exactly the same as shouldering the burden of all ills!”

Although Aniruddha spoke these words, the assembly had all thoroughly penetrated the meaning of the Four Noble Truths. The World-honoured One, desiring to help all in this great assembly to realize certainty, spoke to them from His heart of great compassion,

“O you monks, do not harbour grief and woe within your bosoms. Were I to abide in this world for the space of a whole kalpa I must still enter into eternal meditation; to remain for such a length of time, and not ultimately to depart, is an impossibility. The Teaching that to spiritually benefit yourself by training benefits others contains all; were I to abide longer there would still be no more to obtain from Me than this. As for those who should be able to ferry others to the Other Shore, if humans are in some heaven they have already been completely carried across; those not yet carried across have also all already created the cause for their being ferried; you yourselves are now already past this. O My disciples, the Principles which I have extended, expanded and employed are the Dharma-body of the Tathagata which always abides and is not

extinguished, therefore you should realize that the world is not forever, of necessity we part from it, so do not cling to grief for the world is ever thus. Be diligent in your devotion to progress and quickly seek liberation; with the clarity of your discriminate wisdom and insight eradicate the darkness of delusion for the world is truly susceptible to fear and mistrust and wants strength and stability. Since I now enter into eternal meditation, you should strive to rid yourself of what I call 'the embodied self' as though it were something foul that was polluting you, for it is this illusory self which will sink down into the great ocean of birth, old age, disease and death. To get rid of it is like recovering from a bad illness. How can any of you, who has the wit to try, fail to feel anything but joy when you have freed yourself from the false ego for then you will have slain the malicious thief that it is?

O you monks, with wholehearted devotion always seek to get back on the path. All that is mutable or immutable in all worlds defeats and destroys the signs of uncertainty. Bring them to a halt! Do not ask Me to say more for the time is nigh when I would pass and I wish for my parinirvana. These are My last Teachings and instructions."