

**Part Seven:**  
**NĀGĀRJUNA'S STORIES ON VARIOUS TOPICS**



## The Cowherds Test the Buddha's Omniscience

As described in the *Cowherding Analogies Sutra*, Bimbisāra, king of the state of Magadha, invited the Buddha and five hundred disciples to stay for three months. Because the King required fresh milk and yoghurt with which to make offerings to the Buddha and the Bhikshu Sangha he told the cowherds to come and dwell at a place close by. Every day, they delivered fresh milk and yoghurt. At the end of the three month period, the King, out of kindness for the cowherds, told them, "You may go to see the Buddha and then afterwards you may come back and look after the cows." All of the cowherds then set out to pay a visit to the Buddha. While on the road they had a discussion among themselves, saying, "We have heard people say that the Buddha is omniscient. We are all lesser fellows of inferior station. How would we be able to determine that an omniscient man actually exists?"

Because all of the Brahmans are fond of yoghurt, they were always coming and going at the cowherds' place and thus came to be quite friendly with them. Because of this, the cowherds had come to hear the names of all of the various Brahmanical scriptures.

They continued, "As for all the difficult questions about the teachings in the four Vedas on techniques of healing, fighting, astrology, sacrifices to the gods, singing, dancing, debating, and all of the other sixty-four kinds of worldly arts like these—because this son of King Suddhodana has studied broadly and is very learned—if he were to know about all of these matters, it would not qualify as remarkably difficult. But he has never been a cowherd. We'll ask him about the secret methods involved in raising cows. If he is able to understand them, then he actually is an omniscient man."

After they had finished their discussion, they entered the bamboo gardens from the front and saw the light of the Buddha illuminating the forest. They moved forward, peeked at the Buddha, and saw him sitting beneath a tree, his shape like a mountain of gold. It was as when butter is thrown on the fire and its flames are intensely bright. It was as if molten gold had been showered all over the bamboo grove. They gazed insatiably upon his form as it radiated purple golden light. Their minds were greatly delighted and they said to themselves:

Now this lion of the Shakyān clan,  
As to whether or not he possesses omniscience,  
On seeing him no one fails to be delighted.  
This matter alone would be sufficient as proof.

His light is the foremost illumination.  
 His countenance is extremely rare and precious.  
 The physical characteristics abound in awesome virtue.  
 They all measure up to the name of "Buddha."

Every characteristic is distinctly clear.  
 In awesome spirituality, he is utterly replete.  
 He is cloaked in meritorious qualities.  
 Of those who see him, none fail to adore him.

His body dwells amidst an orb of light.  
 Whoever looks upon him can never see enough.  
 If there is someone who possesses omniscience,  
 Certainly he would possess these meritorious qualities.

All of the paintings portrayed in various hues  
 And the images embellished with jeweled adornments  
 Might try to compare with this exquisite figure,  
 But could never succeed if even only by simile.

He is able to satisfy all who gaze upon him,  
 Causing them to develop the most supreme bliss.  
 Whoever looks upon him gains pure faith.  
 Certainly he is a man who's omniscient.

After having thought in this way, they paid reverence before the Buddha, sat down, and then asked, "What methods does a cowherd perfect that he is able to cause the herd to flourish and what methods might he fail to perfect that the herd thereby fails to grow and fails to become peaceful and secure?"

The Buddha replied, "There are eleven methods by which the cowherd is able to cause the herd to flourish. What are these eleven? They are: knowing the color; knowing the characteristics; knowing how to groom; knowing how to properly dress sores; knowing how to make smoke; knowing the good road; knowing the proper place for cattle; knowing the good place to ford; knowing the peaceful and secure place; knowing how to preserve the flow of milk; and knowing how to care for the lead bull.

"If the cowherd knows these eleven methods, he will be able to cause the herd to multiply. The bhikshu is also like this. If he knows eleven methods, he is able bring about increase and growth of wholesome dharmas.

"What is meant by 'knowing the color'? One is knowledgeable about the relative value of cattle which are black, white and various other colors. The bhikshu is also like this. He knows that all forms

are themselves the four great elements or are composed of the four great elements.

“What is meant by ‘knowing the characteristics’? One recognizes the characteristics of cattle which indicate auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. Whether or not a cow will be harmonious with another herd is known on the basis of its characteristics. The bhikshu is also like this. On seeing the characteristics of wholesome karma, he knows one is a wise person. On seeing the characteristics of bad karma, he knows one is a stupid person.

“What is meant by ‘grooming’? When the blood of cattle is being sucked by insects, then there is an increase in sores as a result. By grooming, one gets rid of this harm and then the cow is happy and its hair is glossy. The bhikshu is also like this. When the insects of unwholesome and deviant initial and discursive thought drink the blood of one’s roots of goodness, this increases the sores of the mind. When they are gotten rid of, one abides in peacefulness and security.

“What is meant by ‘dressing sores’? This refers to employing dressings made from cloth or leaves of grasses in order to prevent the noxious bites of mosquitoes and biting flies. The bhikshu is also like this. He employs the dharmas of proper contemplation to cover up the sores of the six sense faculties and thus does not allow himself to be harmed by the stings of the noxious insects of afflictions such as desire and anger.

“What is meant by knowing how to create smoke in order to get rid of mosquitoes and biting flies? When from a distance, the cow sees smoke, then it will come towards the dwellings. The bhikshu is also like this. He speaks in strict accord with what he has heard and gets rid of all of the mosquitoes and biting flies of the fetters. He employs the [signal-fire] smoke of speaking Dharma in order to lead beings forth that they might enter into the dwelling of non-self, the the true character [of dharmas], and emptiness.

“What is meant by knowing the road? This refers to knowing the good and bad roads for having the cattle come and go. The bhikshu is also this way. He knows that the eight-fold path of the Āryas is able to take one to nirvāṇa and distances himself from the bad paths of annihilationism and eternalism.

“What is meant by knowing the appropriate location for cattle? When one knows the appropriate location for cows, one is able to cause the cattle to multiply and to have but little disease. The bhikshu is also like this. When the Dharma of the Buddha is spoken,

he gains a pure Dharma bliss and his roots of goodness increase thereby.

“What is meant by knowing where to ford? One knows the place where it is easy to enter, where it is easy to cross, where there are no waves or noxious pests. The bhikshu is also like this. He is able to go to the abode of a learned bhikshu and inquire about Dharma. The one who speaks Dharma is aware of the relative sharpness of mind and relative weight of afflictions possessed by the person before him. Thus he influences him to choose a good fording place and to succeed in making a safe crossing [from cyclic births and deaths to nirvāṇa].

What is meant by knowing a peaceful and secure place? One knows of a place to dwell which has no tigers, wolves, lions, noxious insects or venomous animal life. The bhikshu is also like this. He knows the peacefulness and security of the four stations of mindfulness where there are none of the noxious demons and venomous beasts of the afflictions. The bhikshu enters into these and thus is peaceful, secure and free of calamity.

What is meant by preserving the flow of milk? The cow produces milk out of affection for the calf. By leaving whatever milk is in excess of the need, the cow is happy and there continues to be an unexhausted supply. The lead bull as well as the cowherds benefit from this every day. The bhikshu is also like this. The laypeople donate clothing and food. One must know how to be conservative in the amount one accepts and thus one is able to prevent this resource from being exhausted. If this is the case, then the donors are happy and their faith is not cut short and yet the recipients have no shortage of essentials.

“What is meant by knowing how to care for the lead bull? If one protects the big bull, he will be able to guard the herd. Therefore one ought to care for it and protect it and not allow it to become gaunt. It should be given sesame oil to drink, provided with the adornment of a necklace and given the distinction of metal-covered horns. It should be kneaded and brushed and effusively praised. The bhikshu is also like this. When among the multitude of Sangha members, there is a great man possessed of awesome virtue who is able to protect and benefit the Buddha Dharma, is able to utterly defeat in debate non-Buddhists and is able to influence the eight-fold assembly to succeed in planting roots of goodness, one should afford him respect and make offerings to him according to whatever

he needs.”

When the cowherds had heard these words, they thought to themselves, “What we cowherds know doesn’t go beyond three or four of these subjects and the master cowherds at the very most aren’t familiar with more than five or six subjects.” Now that they had heard this discourse, they exclaimed over hearing what none of them had heard before and agreed, “If he is aware of these matters, then he must know all the rest as well. Truly, he is an omniscient man.” They then had no further doubts.

# The City of the Kings' Abode

## Translator's Note

Nāgārjuna brings up three stories here in the context of discussing the place wherein the Sutra was set forth. Rājagṛha, the town in India's Bihar State known today as "Rajgir" means literally: "Kings' Abode."

## Exegesis Segue

**Question:** Cities such as Śrāvastī, Kapilavastu and Vārāṇasī each contain the domiciles of kings. Why then is this city [of Rājagṛha] alone referred to as "City of the Kings' Abode?"

**Response:** (See below.)

## The First Story of Rājagṛha's Origins

There are people who say that the king of Magadha had a son who was born with a single head, but two faces and four arms. Because the people of the time took this to be inauspicious, the king sliced off the head from the body and then cast it aside in the wilderness. A female *rākṣasa* ghost named Līlā put his body back together again and then suckled and raised him. Later he grew into a great man whose power rivaled that of all of the kings of the neighboring states. He established sovereignty throughout the country, and sent all of the former kings, eighteen thousand in all, to dwell together in the area surrounded by these five mountains. He used his great power to rule over all of Jambudvīpa. Because of this, the people of Jambudvīpa named this mountain "City of the Kings' Abode."

## The Second Story of Rājagṛha's Origins

Again, there are some people who say that the city where the king of Magadha formerly dwelt was subject to runaway fires. Each time the city burned, it was rebuilt. It happened like this seven times, after which the people were worn out from conscription and the king was greatly distressed and terrorized. He then assembled his advisors and solicited their opinions on the best course of action. There were those who came down in favor of the idea that the city should be moved to another place. The king then began to search for a new place to dwell. He saw these five mountains arranged in a circle like a city wall, built a palace in the area surrounded by them and then settled there. Because of this it came to be named "City of the King's Abode".

### The Third Story of Rājagṛha's Origins

And then again, long ago in ancient times, this country had a king who was named Vasu. His mind became weary with worldly dharma and as a result he left home and became a rishi. At this time the home-dwelling brahmins were involved in a doctrinal debate with the hermits who had left the home life. The home-dwelling brahmins insisted that the scriptures require that ritual offerings to the gods necessitate slaughtering animals and eating their flesh. The hermits who had left the home life insisted that one should not slaughter animals and eat their flesh in the course of making ritual offerings to the gods. They argued back and forth until finally the brahmins who had left the home life said, "Here we have a king who has left the home life and become a hermit. Do you all trust in him or not?"

The home-dwelling brahmins all said, "We trust in him."

The brahmins who had left the home life said, "We will use this man as an arbiter. Tomorrow we shall pose the question to him." Then, that very evening, the home-dwelling brahmins were first to pay a visit to the abode of Vasu the hermit. After having asked all manner of questions, they said to Vasu, the hermit, "In tomorrow's debate you must help us." The next morning at the appointed time for the discussion, the hermits who had left the home life asked Vasu the hermit, "In the course of performing ritual offerings to the gods, should one slaughter animals and eat their flesh or not?"

Vasu the hermit said, "According to the dharma of the Brahmins, during the course of performing ritual offerings to the gods, one should slaughter animals and eat their flesh."

The hermits who had left the home life said, "But what do you yourself actually think? Should one slaughter animals and eat their flesh?"

Vasu the hermit replied, "Because it is a sacrifice to the gods, one ought to slaughter animals and eat their flesh. Because these animals die in the course of a sacrifice made to the gods, they are able to be reborn in the heavens."

The hermits who had left the home life exclaimed, "You are utterly wrong! You have told a great lie!" Then they spat upon him and said, "Disappear, you criminal!" At this time Vasu the hermit sank into the ground up to the level of his ankles. Because he had only just opened for the first time the door to extreme offenses, the hermits who had left the home life said, " You ought to speak true

words. If you deliberately lie, your body will sink into the earth."

Vasu the hermit said, "I know that because one slaughters the sheep and eats its flesh on behalf of the gods, there is no offense," whereupon he immediately sank farther into the earth up to the level of his knees. In this manner he gradually sank up to his waist and then up to his neck.

The hermits who had left the home life said to him, "You are now undergoing present and immediate retribution for your lying. However, if you change your ways and speak the truth, although you have sunken into the earth, we will still be able to get you out again and bring it about that your offense will be pardoned."

At that time Vasu the hermit thought to himself, "I am a noble and serious person and thus should not make two different, [contradictory] statements. Moreover, it is the dharma of the four Brahmanical Vedas to praise, for all manner of reasons, the methods for making offerings to the gods. If I, one single person, die [on account of this], how is that even worth reckoning? Then he single-mindedly stated, "It should be that there is no offense in slaughtering animals and eating them during the course of making offerings to the gods."

The hermits who had left the home life said, "You are man with heavy offenses. May you be pushed away. It's useless to even lay eyes on you." At this time his entire body sank into the earth. From that point on even until the present day, they have always used the method prescribed by Vasu, the hermit king, of slaughtering sheep in the course of making offerings to the gods. Just as the knife is about to fall, they say, "It is Vasu who kills you."

The son of Vasu, named "Wide Chariot," assumed the throne. Later, he too grew weary of worldly dharmas, but was not also able to leave the home life. He thought to himself, "My father, the former king, left the home life, but even while still alive was swallowed up by the earth. However, to continue to rule the nation is to create more great offenses. How then should I now conduct myself?"

When he was thinking like this, he heard a voice from space, saying, "If when traveling, you see a place which is seldom seen and rare, you ought to build a home and live there." After it had made this statement, he no longer heard the voice.

It was not long after that the King ventured into the country to go hunting. He saw a deer that was running as fast as the wind. The King then chased after it but could not catch up to it. He pursued it without stopping. None of the hundred officials and

retainers could keep up. As he traveled on farther ahead he saw a ridge of five mountains which ran in a steep and solid circle. The ground was flat and even. Delicate grasses which were fine and soft together with fine flowers covered the soil. All kinds of trees and flowers and fruits flourished there. The land was enhanced by pure-watered warm springs and bathing pools. Heavenly flowers and heavenly incense floated down everywhere and everywhere there was the sound of heavenly music. At that time the *gandharva* music-makers retreated on seeing the king approach.

He thought, "This place is rare and such as has never been seen before. Now I ought to build a home right in center of this area and live here." Just as he had finished this thought, the multitude of ministers and the hundred officials, following his tracks, arrived at the spot. The King told the ministers, "Formerly, the voice which I heard from empty space said, 'If when traveling, you see a place which is seldom seen and rare, you ought to build a home and live there.' Now I have seen this rare place. I ought to build a home and live here." He then abandoned the original city and came to dwell amidst these mountains. This king was the first to dwell there. After that the succeeding kings each dwelt there as well. Because this king originally established his palace there, the place gained the name "City of the Kings' Abode."

This concludes the summary explanation of the origins of City of the Kings' Abode.

## Mahākāśyapa and Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa

Again, Mahākāśyapa, the elder, oversaw the compilation of the three-fold treasury of Dharma on Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa. When all the beings which he was able to cross over to liberation had been crossed over, he wished to follow the Buddha by entering nirvāṇa. After he had risen in the early morning and had gone into The City of Kings' Abode to make his alms rounds, he ascended Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa and told all of his disciples, "Today I shall enter the nirvāṇa without residue." After he had said this he went into his dwelling and sat in full lotus whereupon non-outflow dhyāna samādhi permeated his being.

The disciples of Mahākāśyapa went into the city of Kings' Abode and told all of the gentry, "Are you aware or not that the Honorable Mahākāśyapa is this very day going to enter the nirvāṇa without residue? When the various gentry folk heard these words, they became greatly saddened and distressed, saying, "The Buddha has already crossed into extinction. Mahākāśyapa maintains and protects the Dharma of the Buddha. Now, today, he too is about to enter the nirvāṇa without residue.

In the late afternoon, the various gentry folk and the bhikshus all assembled on Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa. In the late afternoon Mahākāśyapa, the elder, arose from dhyāna, joined the assemblage and sat down. He spoke in praise of the teaching of impermanence, saying, "Because all composite dharmas are a product of causes and conditions, they are therefore impermanent. Because, formerly nonexistent, they now exist, and then pass again into nonexistence, they are therefore, impermanent. Because they are impermanent they do therefore conduce to suffering. Because they conduce to suffering, they are therefore not self. Because they are not self, he who is possessed of wisdom should not become attached to the concepts of 'I' and 'mine.'" If one becomes attached to 'I' and 'mine,' then one becomes subject to an immeasurable amount of worry, distress, suffering and affliction. In all worldly spheres, one should abhor seeking and separate oneself from desire. In this fashion, he spoke in many ways about the suffering inherent in the World, leading forth his mind to cause it to enter nirvāṇa.

After he had delivered this discourse, he donned the *saṃghāṭī* robe obtained from the Buddha, and, taking hold of the robe and bowl and, grasping his staff, just like the golden-winged *garuḍa*, he rose up into space, appearing in the four different physical postures

of sitting, lying down, walking and standing. His one body then manifest an immeasurable number of bodies which filled up the world to the east. Then these immeasurable number of bodies became one body again. From the top of his body he threw forth flames while from below he gushed forth water. Then, from the top of his body he gushed forth water while from below he threw forth flames. In the south, in the west, and in the north as well, it was also like this.

After the minds of those assembled had come to feel aversion for worldly existence and had been filled with delight, on the top of Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa, complete with bowl and robe, he uttered an oath, "May my body be caused to not decay, so that when Maitreya becomes a Buddha, this skeleton of mine will appear once again, and on account of these causes and conditions, beings will be caused to obtain deliverance." After he had contemplated in this manner, he entered directly into the rock on the top of the mountain, just as if he were entering into soft mud. After he had entered, the mountain closed shut again behind him.

Later on, when the normal lifespan of people reaches 84,000 years and their normal height reaches eighty feet, Maitreya Buddha will appear. The Buddha's body will be one hundred and sixty feet tall and the Buddha's face will itself extend twenty-four feet while his nimbus will span several miles (lit. "ten *li*").

At that time when beings hear that Maitreya Buddha has appeared, countless people will follow the Buddha in leaving the home life. When the Buddha is in the midst of the great assembly and first speaks Dharma, ninety-nine *koṭis* of people will gain the way of arhatship and will be replete with the six superknowledges. On the second day, ninety-six *koṭis* of people will gain the way of arhatship. On the third day ninety-three *koṭis* of people will gain the way of arhatship. From this time onward he will bring an innumerable number of people to deliverance.

Eventually, after a long time, the people will become lazy and reluctant. When Maitreya sees that the people in the assembly are like this, he will use his toe to split open Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa. At that time Mahākāśyapa's skeleton, dressed in the *saṃghāṭī* robe will come forth and pay reverence at the feet of Maitreya. He will ascend into space and manifest again the various transformations described before. Then in the midst of space, he will make his body disappear as he enters *parinirvāṇa*.

The disciples of Maitreya Buddha will then be astonished and will ask, "Who was that man who looked so like a person, but yet was so small? His body was wearing the Dharma robes and he was able to display these transformations."

Maitreya Buddha will say, "That was a disciple of the former Buddha, Śhakyamuni. His name was Mahākāśyapa. He cultivated dwelling in an *araṇya* where he had but few desires and was easily contented. Among the bhikshus who cultivated the *dhūta* practices he was foremost. He was a great arhat who had obtained the six superknowledges and the two-fold liberation (*ubhayato-bhāga-vimukta*). At that time the lifespan of people was a hundred years, with a few exceeding it, but most not reaching it. If he, with such a small body, was able to succeed at such a great matter, why do not all of you, with such large bodies and sharp faculties, engage in such meritorious deeds as this?"

Then, all of his disciples will become repentant and will develop great renunciation. Maitreya Buddha, according with the minds of those beings, will speak all manner of dharmas for their sakes. There will be those who gain arhatship, the stage of the *anāgāmin*, the stage of the *sakṛd-āgāmin*, and the stage of the *srota-āpanna*. There will be those who plant the roots of goodness of the pratyekabuddha. There will be those who gain the stage of the non-retreating bodhisattva who has realized the unproduced-dharmas patience. There will be those who obtain rebirth in the heavens where they shall experience all manner of blessings and bliss.

### Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

On account of this one should realize that Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa is an auspicious place replete with meritorious qualities and is a place where āryas like to dwell. The Buddha is the lord of the Āryas. It is for this reason that the Buddha mostly dwelt at Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa.

## Śāriputra Explains Pure Sustenance

“Bhikshu” is a reference to one who relies on alms. It is on account of the purity of this means of sustaining one’s life that [the Buddhist monk] is referred to as a “bhikshu.” This point is illustrated by this story from the scriptures.

Śāriputra went into the city to make his alms rounds and having obtained his food sat down to eat, facing a wall. At this time, a brahmacarinī name Śucimukhī came along and saw Śāriputra and asked Śāriputra, “Śramaṇa, are you eating?”

He replied, “Yes, I’m eating.”

Śucimukhī asked, “Do you *śramaṇas* eat with your attention directed downwards?”

He replied, “No, Sister.”

“Do you eat with your attention directed upwards?”

“No.”

“With your attention directed to the [four] directions?”

“No.”

“With your attention directed to the four intermediary points?”

“No.”

Śucimukhī said, “There are four methods employed in eating. I asked you about them and you said ‘no’ in every case. I don’t understand. You ought to explain.”

Śāriputra said, “There are those who have left the home life who blend herbs, sow grains, plant trees, or engage in other such forms of impure means of sustaining one’s life. These methods are referred to as sustenance gained with one’s attention directed downwards.

“There are those who have left the home life who observe the stars, the constellations, the sun, the moon, the wind, the rain, thunder and lightning, and lightning bolts, these impure means of sustaining one’s life. These methods are referred to as sustenance gained with one’s attention directed upwards.

“There are those who have left the home life who manipulate and flatter the noble and powerful, who deliver messages for them in all four directions, or who employ clever words and covetousness, these impure means of sustaining one’s life. These methods are referred to as sustenance gained with one’s attention directed in all directions.

“There are those who have left the home life who study all manner of incantational techniques, or who practice divination and calculation of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness and all kinds of

other impure means of sustaining one's life such as these. These methods are referred to as sustenance gained with one's attention directed towards the intermediary points. Sister, I do not fall into any of these four types of impure means of sustaining one's life. I employ the pure alms round to sustain this life."

At this time, when Śucimukhī had heard the explanation of the dharma of pure sustenance, she was delighted and developed faith and understanding. Śāriputra, on account of having spoken Dharma for her, realized the path of the *srota-āpanna*.

## Subhadra, the Brahmācārin

Subhadra, the brahmācārin, was one hundred and twenty years old and had obtained the five superknowledges. He dwelt on the shore of lake Anavatapta. One night, in a dream, he saw everyone blind and standing naked in the dark. The sun fell from the sky, the earth was broken, and the great oceans had all dried up. A great wind arose and blew away Mt. Sumeru. When he woke up he was frightened and thought, "Why was it like this? Is my life about to end or is the lord of heaven and earth about to fall? He was bewildered and unable to understand it. Because he had dreamt this terrible dream, a god who had been his spiritual guide in a former life descended from above and said to Subhadra, "Don't be frightened. There is a man possessed of omniscience known as the Buddha, who, tomorrow, in the middle of the night, will enter the nirvāṇa without residue. Therefore your dream had nothing to do with you."

Then, that very next day Subhadra went to the forest in the state of Kuśinagara and saw Ānanda walking along and said to Ānanda, "I have heard that your master describes a new path to nirvāṇa, and that this very day, in the middle of the night, he will choose to enter extinction. My mind is afflicted with doubts. Please, I wish to see the Buddha that he might resolve the cause of my doubts."

Ānanda replied, "The Bhagavān's body is exhausted. If you approach with difficult questions, it will weary and trouble the Bhagavān."

Subhadra repeated his request until he had asked three times. Each time Ānanda replied as before. The Buddha overheard this from a distance and ordered Ānanda, "Allow Subhadra the Brahmācārin to come forward and freely pose difficult questions. This will be my very last conversation and my very last disciple to gain the Path."

At this time Subhadra was able to have an audience with the Buddha. After he had greeted the Bhagavān, he sat down to one side and thought, "Although the followers of all of the non-Buddhist traditions renounce the ties of love and affection, of wealth and treasure, nonetheless they do not gain the Path. Only the Śramaṇa Gautama has found the Path." After he had finished this thought, he asked the Buddha, "Here in this land of Jambudvīpa, all of the Six Masters say of themselves, "I am possessed of all-knowledge. Is this talk true or not?"

At this time, the Bhagavān, replied with a verse, saying:

From the time I was twenty-nine years of age,  
 I left the home life and studied the way of the Buddha.  
 From the time I left home until now,  
 It has already been more than fifty years.

Of the pure precepts, dhyāna, and wisdom  
 The non-Buddhists possess not even a fraction.  
 If they do not possess even a minor fraction,  
 How much the less could they possess all-knowledge.

“If one does not possess the eight-fold correct path, then one does not possess the first fruit, the second, the third, nor the fourth fruit [of cultivating the Path]. If one possesses the eight-fold right path, then one possesses the first fruit, the second, the third, and the fourth fruit. Subhadra, here in my Dharma there exists the eight-fold right path. Herein there exists the first fruit of the Path, the second, the third, and the fourth fruit of the Path. The dharmas of the others, the non-Buddhists, are all empty. They have no path, no fruit, no *śramaṇas*, and no [genuine] brahmans. And so, like this, in the midst of the Great Assembly, I truly roar the lion’s roar.”

When Subhadra, the brahmacārin, heard this Dharma, he gained the way of the arhat. He thought to himself, “I should not enter *parinirvāṇa* after the Buddha.” Having thought in this way, he arranged himself in full lotus before the Buddha and, resorting to his own spiritual powers, he generated fire from within his body which then burned up his body. He thereby thereupon chose to cross into cessation.

## On Viewing Mākandika's Corpse

The disciples of Mākandika, the brahmacārin, placed his corpse in a litter, and holding it aloft, carried it through the city, with many of them calling out, "Whoever views the body of Mākandika will gain the way of purity. How much the more so if they pay reverence to it or make offerings." Many people believed what they said. The bhikshus heard this and asked the Buddha, "Bhagavān. What about this matter?"

The Buddha then uttered a verse in reply:

Men of lesser minds seek purification through what their eyes see.  
People like these have no wisdom and have no actual path.  
The afflictions of all the fetters fill up their minds.  
How could they, merely by viewing, gain the way of purity?

If it were by the eye's seeing that one gained purity,  
What use would there be in wisdom or the treasure of meritorious  
qualities?

Through wisdom and meritorious qualities, one then attains purity.  
As for gaining purity through viewing with the eyes, there is no such  
thing.

## Why Ānanda was So Called

**Question:** What are the causal circumstances for the Venerable Ānanda receiving such a name? Was it as a result of causal circumstances from former lives? Was it a name given to him by his father and mother? Or was it based on particular causes and conditions that he was given this name?

**Response:** It was as a result of causal circumstances from former lives. It was also a name given to him by his father and mother. And it was also a name stemming from particular causes and conditions.

**Question:** What were the causal circumstances from former lives?

**Response:** In a former life, Shakyamuni Buddha was a potter named "Great Brilliance." At that time there was another Buddha also known as Shakyamuni who also had disciples named Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, and Ānanda. The Buddha went with his disciples and spent a night at the abode of the potter. At that time the potter made gifts of three things: grass sitting mats, lamp light, and rock-honey chutney. He presented them as offerings to the Buddha and the bhikshu sangha and then made a vow, saying, "May I become a buddha in the future in a world afflicted with ageing, sickness, death, and the five evils. May I also have the name Shakyamuni and may my disciples' names also be the same as these." Because of the vow of the Buddha, Ānanda is now so-named.

Additionally, in life after life, Ānanda made a vow, "May I be foremost among the learned disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha and may my name be Ānanda."

Furthermore, in life after life, Ānanda cultivated patience and ridding himself of anger. For this reason he was particularly handsome from birth. Because those who saw him were delighted on account of his handsomeness, his father and mother named him Ānanda [which means "delightful"]. These are the past life reasons for his name.

Why did his father and mother give him this name? In the past, there was a king of the Solar clan named "Lion Jaws." The king had four sons. The first was named "Pure Rice." The second was named "White Rice." The third was named "Bushel of Rice." The fourth was named "Ambrosia Rice." There was a daughter named "Ambrosia Flavor." The Pure Rice King had two sons, the Buddha and Nanda. The White Rice king had two sons, Badi and Tisha. The

“Bushel-of-Rice King” had two sons, Devadatta and Ānanda. The Sweet Dew Rice King had two sons, Mahānāman and Aniruddha. The daughter, Ambrosia, had a son named Dānapāla.

It was in the midst of these circumstances that Siddharta Bodhisattva gradually grew up and rejected the station of the wheel-turning sage king. In the middle of the night, he left his home and went to the banks of the Nairāñjanā River in the state of Uruvilvā. For six years, he cultivated ascetic practices. At that time because the pure Rice King lovingly remembered his son, he constantly sent messengers to ask after him as he desired to know the news: “Has my son gained the way or not?” “Has he become sick or has he died?”

The messengers came and addressed the king, saying, “The Bodhisattva only has skin and bones and ligaments holding them together., that’s all.” His life force is very fragile and weak. Whether it’s today or whether it’s tomorrow, he will not have much longer.”

When the king heard their words, he was greatly distressed and his thoughts were sunken in a sea of worry and affliction. “My son not only failed to become the wheel-turning king, he was also unable to gain buddhahood. What utterly tragic suffering that he should gain nothing whatsoever and then die!” Thus he became afflicted with anguish, lost in desolation, and paralyzed with bewilderment. It was at that time that the Bodhisattva abandoned the site of his ascetic practices and partook of the many-flavored rice gruel with milk whereupon his body was restored to health. After bathing in the waters of the Nairāñjanā, he proceeded to the bodhi tree and sat beneath it on the adamantine seat, vowing to himself, “Without breaking away from this full-lotus posture I must succeed in realizing omniscience. So long as I fail to realize omniscience, I shall never get up.”

It was at this time that the king of the Māras led a multitude followers, eighteen *koṭis* in number, to the site where the bodhisattva sat, daring to test his attainment. On account of the power of the bodhisattva’s wisdom, he utterly vanquished the demon armies. Māra was no match for him and in making his retreat, thought to himself, “As I can’t overcome the Bodhisattva, I’ll go afflict his father.” He then went to the place of the Pure Rice King and, intending to deceive him, announced, “This very night, in the very last watch, your son was finally finished.” When the king heard these words, he collapsed onto his bed, agonizing like a fish in hot sand.

The king wept pitifully and then uttered a verse:

Those spurious words pronounced by Ajita—  
 A propitious omen with no validation—  
 An auspicious entitlement assuring achievements—  
 But nothing whatsoever was finally gained.

At this time, the tree-spirit of the bodhi tree was in a state of great joy and taking heavenly *māndārava*, flowers he went to the place of the Pure Rice King and spoke forth a verse:

Your son has already gained the Path.  
 The hordes of demons have been broken and scattered.  
 His brilliant light shines like that of the rising sun  
 Which universally illumines the lands of the ten directions.

The King said, “Earlier, there was a deity who came and said, ‘Your son is already finished.’ Now you come and say that he has destroyed the demons and realized the Path. These two pronouncements are contradictory. Whose can be believed?”

The tree spirit continued, “These are true words, not false words. The ‘deity’ who came earlier and who attempted to deceive you by saying, ‘He’s finished’ was a demon who came to afflict you because he was full of jealousy. Today, the gods, dragons, and spirits make offerings with flowers and incense and suspend celebratory banners in the sky. Your son’s body is radiating light which illumines heaven and earth.”

When the king heard these words, his mind gained liberation from all anguish and affliction. The King declared, “Although my son forsook the wheel-turning kingship, as he has now attained the Dharma-wheel-turning kingship, he has certainly gained great benefit and nothing has been lost.” The King became greatly delighted in mind.

It was at this time that a messenger arrived from the abode of the Bushel-of-Rice King and addressed the Pure Rice King, saying, “Your highness’s younger brother has fathered a son.”

The King’s mind was filled with great delight. He said, “Today is a greatly auspicious day. It is a day of rejoicing.” He said to the messenger who had come, “This boy should be named ‘Ānanda’ (‘joy’).” This is how the name was given by the parents.

How was the giving of the name reliant upon particular causes and conditions? Ananda’s physique was as elegant and pure as a fine bright mirror. One’s age, one’s beauty, and the appearance of

one's countenance are all reflected in the body. His body was bright and pure. When women looked upon him, they tended to be moved to thoughts of desire. It was on account of this that the Buddha permitted Ānanda to wear his robe with the shoulder covered. Thus it was because Ānanda was able to bring delight to the minds and eyes of those who gazed upon him that he was named Ānanda ("joy").

### **Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments**

At this point, the commentator offers words of praise:

His face was like the pure and full moon.  
His eyes were like the blue lotus blossom.  
The waters of the great sea of the Buddha Dharma  
Flowed on into the mind of Ānanda

He was able to bring to the mind and eyes of any person  
Who looked upon him a feeling of great joyfulness.  
All who came seeking to see the Buddha—  
He introduced them all with no loss in decorum.

## The Bodhisattva Shakyamuni Encounters Puṣya Buddha

**Question:** How long does it take for the bodhisattva to be able to plant the causes for the thirty two marks [of a buddha's body]?

**Response:** The very slowest is one hundred kalpas. The very quickest is ninety-one kalpas. As a bodhisattva, Shakyamuni cultivated the thirty-two marks to completion in ninety one great kalpas. This is as described in a sutra:

Long ago and far away in the past there was a buddha named Puṣya. At that time there were two bodhisattvas. One was named Shakyamuni. One was named Maitreya. Puṣya Buddha wished to observe whether or not the mind of Shakyamuni Bodhisattva was completely still yet. He then contemplated and saw it. He knew that his mind was not yet completely still. And yet all of his disciples' minds were all completely still. Moreover Maitreya bodhisattva's mind was already completely still and yet the minds of his disciples were not yet completely still.

Puṣya Buddha then thought like this: "A single person's mind may easily be quickly transformed. The minds of a multitude of people, however, are difficult to treat so quickly. After he had thought in this manner, Puṣya Buddha wished to cause Shakyamuni Bodhisattva to quickly attain the realization of buddhahood. He ascended onto snow mountain and in the jeweled cave entered the fire samādhi.

At this time Shakyamuni Bodhisattva had manifest as a non-Buddhist rishi. He had ascended that very mountain to gather herbs. He chanced to observe Puṣya Buddha sitting in the jeweled cave having entered into the fire samādhi, radiating brilliant light. After he had laid eyes on Puṣya Buddha, his mind became so delighted that, as a demonstration of faith and reverence, he stood on one foot, pressed his palms together before that buddha and proceeded to contemplate him single-mindedly. For seven days and seven night he stood like this with his eyes without even blinking his eyes. Employing a verse, he praised the Buddha:

Within and beneath the heavens, there are none like the Buddha.  
Throughout the world systems of the ten directions, there are none  
who can compare.

Though I have seen completely everything throughout the world.  
Nowhere is there anyone who can compare to the Buddha.

For seven days and seven nights, with eyes unblinking, he engaged in true contemplation of the Bhagavān. He thereby leapt over nine kalpas and thus was able to gain *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* in a period of ninety-one kalpas.

## The King Śibi Jātaka Tale

**Question:** How does one bring to perfect fulfillment *dāna pāramitā* (the perfection of giving)?

**Response:** One is able to give everything without reservation even to the point that when one gives of one's body, one's mind has no regrets. It is like the case of King Śibi who gave his body for the sake of pigeon. In a former life, Shakyamuni Buddha was a king who was named Śibi. This king had gotten the *dhāraṇī* of dedicating his life to rescuing and protecting [the helpless]. He possessed a mind of kindness and compassion which he invested with great vigor. He looked upon all beings in the same way that a mother looks with love upon her child.

At that time the world had no buddha. The life of [the god] Śakra devendra was coming to an end and he was about to fall. He thought to himself, "Where is there a buddha, an omniscient man?" He posed difficult questions everywhere and was unable to cut off his doubts. Realizing that none of them were buddhas, he returned to the heavens and sat down in a state of worry and distress. The god Viśvakarman, a master of clever transformations, asked him, "Why is the Lord of Heaven so worried and distressed?"

He replied, "I have been seeking after an omniscient man and have been unable to find one. It is because of this that I am worried and distressed."

Viśvakarman said, "There is a great bodhisattva who is perfect in giving, upholding the precepts, dhyāna samādhi, and wisdom. It will not be long before he becomes a buddha."

Śakra replied in verse:

Bodhisattvas who have brought forth the great resolve,  
The eggs of fish, and blossoms of the [celestial] *āmrātaka* tree—  
These three things are numerous at the time of initial causation,  
But at the time of fruition, they are all extremely scarce.

Viśvakarman responded, "King Śibi of the Ushinar clan upholds the precepts, is vigorous, is greatly kind, greatly compassionate, is possessed of dhyāna samādhi and wisdom, and shall before long become a buddha."

Śakra devendra said to Viśvakarman, "We ought to go and test him. We shall know then whether or not he has the characteristics of a bodhisattva. You should change into a pigeon and I shall change into a falcon. Then you pretend to be frightened and fly into

the armpit of the king. I'm going to pursue you."

Viśvakarman said, "Why should we aggravate this great bodhisattva with this matter?"

Śakra devendra uttered a verse:

For my part I'm not of evil mind.  
Just as with true gold, one ought to test it.  
By this we shall test the bodhisattva  
And know if his mind is resolute or not.

After he had spoken this verse, Viśvakarman acquiesced and then changed his body into that of a red-eyed, red-footed pigeon. Śakra devendra changed his body into that of a falcon which flew swiftly in pursuit of the pigeon. The pigeon straightaway came and flew into the armpit of the king. His entire body quivered in fright, his eyes moved about [anxiously] and let out cries of distress.

At this time many people  
Gathered together and said,  
"This king is greatly kind and humane.  
Everyone rightfully testifies to his believability.

"Just so, this pigeon, a little bird,  
Takes refuge in him as if entering his own abode.  
The characteristics of the bodhisattva are just like this  
It will certainly not be long before he becomes a buddha."

At this time the falcon was in a nearby tree. It called to King Śibi, "Give me back my pigeon. It belongs to me."

The King said to the falcon, "I took it in first. It's not the case that it belongs to you. When I first brought forth the resolve [to realize buddhahood], I took on responsibility for all of these beings and so wish to deliver them all to liberation."

The falcon said, "The King desires to bring deliverance to all beings. Am I not included within this "all beings"? How is it that I alone do not experience your pity so that you now take away my meal for today?"

The King replied, "What food do you require? I have made a vow that whatsoever being comes and takes refuge with me, I shall certainly rescue and protect it. Whatever food you require shall also be provided to you."

The falcon said, "I require freshly-killed warm flesh."

The King thought to himself, "It's difficult to obtain something like this. Unless one kills a being oneself there is no source from

which to obtain it. How could I take the life of one so as to bestow [life] on another?" After thinking like this, his mind became fixed and he then spoke a verse to himself:

This, the flesh of this body of mine  
 Ever belongs to ageing, sickness and death.  
 It shall before long grow foul and rot.  
 As he requires it, I therefore shall give it.

After he had reflected in this way, he called a person to bring a knife whereupon he cut flesh from his own thigh and gave it to the falcon. The falcon said to the King, "Although the King has given me warm flesh, he should be principled in doing so, thereby making sure that the weight of the flesh is equal to that of the pigeon. Let's not countenance any cheating here."

The King ordered, "Bring some scales and balance this flesh against the pigeon. The pigeon became heavier and the King's flesh became lighter. The King ordered someone to carve the flesh from the other thigh but it was still too light and hence not sufficient. Then they successively carved the flesh extending on down to his two feet, up to his two hips, from both sides of his chest, from his neck and from along his spine. All of the flesh from his entire body was gone. The body of the pigeon was still heavier. Just as before, the flesh of the King was lighter.

The close officials and near relatives then set up a curtain and sent away everyone who was watching, [saying], "With the King in his present state, no one could bear to look upon him. King Śibi said, "Don't block off the people. Allow them to enter and see." He then spoke a verse:

The gods, men, and asuras  
 All may come and look at me.  
 With the great mind and the unsurpassed resolve.  
 One thereby seeks realization of the Buddha Path.  
 If one seeks to gain the Path of the Buddha,  
 He should be able to endure great suffering of this sort.  
 If one is unable to make his resolve solid,  
 His determination will then cease.

It was at this time that the bodhisattva, with blood-smeared hands, grasped at the scales, wishing to climb up on it. He fixed his mind on using his entire body to balance the weight of the pigeon.

The falcon said, "Great King, this matter is going to be difficult

to manage. What is the use in going about it like this? Just give the pigeon back to me.”

The King said, “The pigeon came and sought refuge with me. I’ll never give it to you. I’ve lost an innumerable number of bodies without providing any benefit to beings. Now I wish to employ my body in seeking to ease the way to buddhahood.”

He grasped at the scales with his hands. At that time the bodhisattva’s flesh was gone and his sinews were cut and he was unable to control his movement. He wished to rise up but fell back, thinking to himself self-critically, “You should make yourself strong. Don’t allow yourself to become confused and depressed. All beings have fallen into the great seas of distress and anguish. You, one man, have made a vow whereby you desire to cross them all over to liberation. How can you allow yourself to lazily indulge in depression? This suffering is very slight. The suffering of the hells is greater. If you compare this to it, this still doesn’t equal that of even one of the sixteen divisions of hell. I now have wisdom, vigor, the upholding of precepts, and *dhyāna samādhi*, and yet I am still beset with this suffering. How much the more so is this the case with people in hell who are devoid of wisdom.”

The bodhisattva then single-mindedly desired to rise up and so again grasped at the scales. He asked the people, “Support me.” The bodhisattva’s mind was then fixed and devoid of any regret.

All of the gods, dragon kings, asuras, ghosts, spirits, and the ordinary people greatly praised him, saying, “He acts like this for the sake of a single small bird. This matter is rare.”

It was then that the great earth quaked in six ways. The waves of the great sea churned up and withered trees brought forth flowers. The heavens let fall scented rain and then scattered rare blossoms. The heavenly maidens sang praises, “He will certainly achieve the realization of buddhahood.”

Then the spirits and rishis from the four directions all came and praised him saying, “He is a true bodhisattva. He will certainly soon realize buddhahood.”

The falcon said to the pigeon, “Finally, even when tested like this, he has not spared his body or life. He is a true bodhisattva. He then spoke forth a verse:

Produced from the soil of kindness and compassion,  
He is a seedling growing forth of the tree of omniscience.  
We should be making offerings to him  
And should not give him such distress and affliction.

Viśvakarman said to Śakradevendra, “Lord of Heaven, you have the spiritual power. You can cause the body of this king to return to normal.”

Śakradevendra said, “He has no need of me. This king has made a vow to himself with the joyfulness of the great mind that he will not spare his body or life in inspiring everyone and causing them to seek the Buddha Path.”

Śakra asked the King, “With the bitter suffering of having your flesh carved away, didn’t your mind become afflicted and sink into [discouragement]?”

The King said, “My mind remained joyful. It was neither afflicted nor sunken.”

Śakra said, “Who could believe that your mind did not sink into discouragement?”

In response, the bodhisattva then made a “vow of truth,” saying, “If while my flesh was carved away and my blood flowed forth I was neither angry nor afflicted, and if I remained single-minded and undiscouraged in seeking the Buddha Path, my body ought to immediately return to normal and become just as before.” Having uttered these words his body immediately became once again just as it had been before.

When the men and gods witnessed this, they were all moved to great compassion and joy, exclaimed at this occurrence of what had never been before, and declared, “This great bodhisattva shall certainly become a buddha. We should make offerings to him from the very depths of our hearts. We pray that he will soon gain the realization of the Buddha Path and that, having done so, he will bring us to mind in the future.”

At this time Śakradevendra and Viśvakarman each returned to the heavens. All manner of characteristics such as these illustrate what is involved in the fulfillment of *dāna pāramitā*.

## King Sutasoma's Dedication to Truth

**Question:** What is meant by the fulfillment of *śīla pāramitā* (the perfection of moral virtue)?

**Response:** It consists in not even sparing one's own life in guarding and upholding the precepts of purity. A case in point is that of King Sutasoma who, on account of the Great King [of the *rākṣasa* ghosts,] Kalmāṣapāda, went so far as to give up his life to avoid transgressing the prohibitions.

In the past there was a king named Sutasoma. This king was assiduous in his upholding of the precepts and so always resorted to truth in speech. He got into his carriage one morning and, taking along his courtesans, set out to the gardens to roam about and enjoy himself. As he was leaving the city gates, he came upon a brahman who having come to request alms, said to the King, "The King is a great man endowed with many blessings whereas I am but a pauper. May it be that I receive compassionate consideration and a measure of offering in response to this entreaty?"

The King replied, "I'll consent to this. I respect the dictates of the Bhagavān that one should engage in giving. But it must wait until I return from this excursion." Having said this, he went on into the gardens where he bathed and enjoyed himself. Then, a two-winged king named Kalmāṣapāda<sup>1</sup> flew down from the sky, plucked up the King from amidst his courtesans and flew off with him. It was just like when the golden-winged [*garuḍa*] bird scoops up dragons from the sea. All of the women wept and wailed. Everyone in the gardens was in shock and everywhere inside and outside the city walls the people were in a commotion of grief and agitation. Kalmāṣapāda carried off the King, soared high up into the sky and then flew away to the mountain where he dwelt. There he kept the King together with ninety-nine other kings.

The tears of Sutasoma flowed down like raindrops. King Kalmāṣapāda inquired of him, "Oh great King of the *kṣatriya* lineage. Why is it that you cry like an infant? When a man is born, he is bound therefore to die. Whosoever comes together must eventually separate."

King Sutasoma replied, "I do not fear dying. I only regret the breach of trust. Even from the very time I was born, I have never uttered a falsehood. But when I was going out the gates this morning, there was a brahman who had come to request alms from me. At that time I consented and told him that, on my return, I would

bestow some benefaction on him. I am not concerned about my own mortality. If I fail in my obligation to him, I shall naturally become guilty of deception. It is solely for this reason that I weep.”

King Kalmāṣapāda said, “If in your mind you are so fearful of having uttered this falsehood, I will allow you to return. Having then made offerings to the brahman, you must then return within seven days. If after seven days you have still not returned, then, as I still possess the power of these two wings, it won’t be difficult to seize you.”

King Sutasoma was able to return to his native state where he was able to freely make offerings. He established the Prince as the King. At a great assembly of the citizenry he apologetically took leave of them, saying, “As my wisdom does not extend to all things, there are ways in which my rule has not accorded with Dharma. May we nonetheless continue to enjoy your loyalty and forgiveness. Now, in accordance with the fact that my person is no longer my own, it is only right that I return straightaway.”

All of the citizens of the country and the relatives of the King bowed down and beseeched him to remain, pleading, “We pray that we may remain in the King’s thoughts and that he will continue to offer this country the shade of his loving kindness. Don’t make that Kalmāṣapāda, a king among the ghosts, the basis of your considerations. We will raise up an iron fortress and mount a surprise attack. Although Kalmāṣapāda may have supernatural powers, we need not fear him.”

The King replied, “We cannot proceed in such a fashion.” And then he uttered a verse, saying:

Truth in speech is the first among the precepts.  
 Truth in speech is the ladder to the heavens.  
 Truth in speech is minor yet major.  
 False speech is the means for entering the hells.

Now I in maintaining truth in speech,  
 Would rather cast aside my body and life.  
 In my thoughts, there are no regrets at all.

Having pondered the matter in this fashion the King immediately set out to the abode of King Kalmāṣapāda. When Kalmāṣapāda saw him in the distance he was delighted and said, “You are a man of true words. You do not fail in the essential of trustworthiness. Everyone cherishes his own life. Although you had been liberated from certain death you have come back again to attend to the matter

of trustworthiness. You are a great man.”

At that time King Sutasoma spoke in praise of truth in speech, saying, “Truth in speech. This is what makes a man. As for one who utters words which are untrue, he is not a man.” In this fashion, he spoke all manner of praises of truth and criticisms of falsehood.

As Kalmāṣapāda listened to this, thoughts of faithfulness became purified in him, whereupon he said to King Sutasoma, “You have spoken well about this. I am now releasing you and since you have gained your freedom, I am releasing the other ninety-nine kings as a gift to you. If you wish, they may each go back to their home country.” After he had said this, all one hundred kings were able to return.

### **Nāgārjuna’s Concluding Comments**

All manner of characteristics such as these which are described in the *jātaka* tales describe what constitutes the fulfillment of the *pāramitā* of *śīla* (The perfection of moral virtue).

### **Notes**

1. The Chinese frequently renders Kalmāṣapāda as “Deer Foot,” which, for consistency, I have reconstructed throughout.

## The Bodhisattvas Prasannendriya and Agramati

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On Reality-based Skillful Means

#### Sutra:

They were skillful in bringing about deliverance in accordance with reality.<sup>1</sup>

#### Exegesis:

There are dharmas propounded by non-Buddhists which, although they are able to bring about "deliverance" of beings, do so in a way which does not accord with reality. How is this so? It is because of the deficits inherent in all manner of erroneous views and fetters.

Although the followers of the Two Vehicles teachings do have those whom they bring to deliverance, they effect deliverance through inappropriate methods. How is this so? This is on account of the fact that, because they do not possess omniscience, the thought which they devote to skillful means is relatively shallow. Only the bodhisattvas are able to effect deliverance in accordance with reality. The difference here is analogous to that between two ferry men on a river, one of whom relies on a raft fashioned of reeds and floats, and the other of whom employs a ship. There is an obvious difference in the relative merits of the two approaches to ferrying people across. The bodhisattva's skillful deliverance of beings is just like this.

Then again, one might say that this is comparable to methods of healing disease. Bitter herbs, needles and cauterization induce pain in the process of effecting a cure. On the other hand, one may use a method of healing such as the miraculous medicine known as *śuddhaśāntā*<sup>2</sup> which the patient needs only lay eyes upon to effect the complete cure of a multitude of maladies. Although the two methods are the same in the sense that they both bring about the alleviation of disease, still, there is a difference as regards relative superiority of technique. The respective approaches employed by the Hearers and the Bodhisattvas in the teaching and deliverance of people correspond to this analogy.

The teaching of the Hearer disciples consists in gaining the Path through the contemplation of suffering, resorting to the rigorous implementation of the *dhūta* practices,<sup>3</sup> and through sitting in dhyāna meditation, applying oneself with diligent mind in the beginning, middle and latter periods of the night. The teaching

of the bodhisattvas consists in achieving purification of the mind through contemplating the [true] character of all dharmas as being devoid of either that which binds or that which liberates. This is as illustrated in *The Origins of Mañjuśrī*.

**Story: The Bodhisattvas Prasannendriya and Agramati**

Mañjuśrī addressed the Buddha, saying, “Greatly Virtuous One, in the past, during the course of my previous lifetimes, innumerable *asaṃkhyeya* kalpas ago, there was at that time a Buddha named *Siṃhanādarāja* (lit. “King of the Lion’s Roar”). The lifespan of that Buddha and the beings in that world was a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *nayutas* of years. That Buddha employed the teaching of the Three Vehicles in delivering beings to liberation.

The name of that country was “Thousand Rays of Light.” The trees in that country were made of the seven kinds of precious things. Those trees emitted innumerable pure sounds of Dharma, sounds proclaiming emptiness, signlessness, wishlessness, neither production nor extinction, and the non-existence of anything whatsoever. When beings heard these sounds, their minds became liberated and they succeeded in bringing the Path to realization.

At that time when the Buddha *Siṃhanādarāja* proclaimed the Dharma, during the first assembly, ninety-nine *koṭīs* of people gained the path of arhatship. Within the assembly of bodhisattvas, it was the same. All of these bodhisattvas gained the unproduced-dharmas patience They entered into all manner of dharma gateways and saw innumerable buddhas. They paid their respects to them, made offerings to them, and were able to bring countless beings to deliverance. They gained innumerable *dhāraṇī* gateways and became able to realize innumerable *samādhis* of all different kinds. Those bodhisattvas who had but recently established their resolve and who had newly entered the entrance to the Path were inexpressibly numerous. The innumerable adornments of this buddhaland exhausted the descriptive power of words.

At that time when that buddha had completed his teaching and transformation of beings, he entered upon the *nirvāṇa* without residue. His Dharma dwelt in the world for sixty thousand years. Eventually, the Dharma sound of those trees ceased to come forth. At that time there were two bodhisattva bhikshus, one of whom was named *Prasannendriya* (lit. “Joyous Faculty”), and the second of which was named *Agramati* (lit. “Superior Intellect”).

As for this Dharma Master Prasannendriya, in his comportment he was virtuous and in his character he was direct. However, he did not repudiate worldly dharmas, nor did he indulge in making discriminations as to what was good and what was bad. The disciples of Prasannendriya were intelligent, were pleased by Dharma, and were brought to delight through listening to the most abstruse levels of meaning.

Their master did not devote himself to praising the virtues of having but few desires and knowing when enough is enough, nor did he extol the merits of the prohibitions or cultivating the *dhūta* (ascetic) practices. He simply proclaimed that the true character of dharmas is [consistent with] purity. He told his disciples, “All dharmas, even if they are marked by sensual desire, marked by hatefulness, or marked by delusion—the marks of all of these dharmas are identical to the true character of dharmas. There is nothing therein which should serve to hang one up or obstruct one.”<sup>4</sup>

He employed this skillful means to instruct his disciples and afford them entry into the “single-mark” wisdom. At that time his disciples came to have no more hatred or resentment with respect to other people. Because their thoughts were free of resentment, they gained the patience with regard to beings. Because they gained the patience with regard to beings, they were then able to realize the patience with regard to dharmas. They dwelt in the dharma of reality, remaining as unmoving as mountains.

The Dharma Master Agramati was pure in his observance of the prohibitions. He cultivated the twelve *dhūta* practices and gained the four dhyāna absorptions as well as the four formless samādhis. The disciples of Agramati were of dull faculties and were much inclined to make discriminations as to this being pure and that being impure. Thus their minds were easily moved and turned about.

There was a time when Agramati went into the town and, having arrived at the house of one of Prasannendriya’s disciples, he sat down in the appointed seat and proceeded to extol the observance of the prohibitions, the limitation of desires, the knowing when enough was enough, the cultivating of the *dhūta* practices, and the taking up of dhyāna meditation and the cultivation of stillness in a quiet place. Additionally, he proceeded to disparage Prasannendriya, saying, “When this man speaks Dharma, he instructs people in a way which influences them to enter into erroneous views. He

speaks of lust, hatred, and delusion as being devoid of any characteristic features which should constitute an impediment. He is a man whose conduct is rather mixed. He is not entirely pure.”

This disciple was one possessed of sharp faculties and who had achieved the patience with regard to dharmas. He asked Agramati, “Greatly Virtuous One, by what characteristic does one know this dharma of sensual desire?”

[Agramati] replied, “Sensual desire is characterized by afflictions.”

He asked, “Do these desire-associated afflictions reside outwardly or do they reside inwardly?”

[Agramati] responded, “These desire-associated afflictions do not reside inwardly nor do they reside outwardly. If they resided inwardly, then it shouldn’t be the case that they rely on outward causes and conditions for their arising. If they resided outwardly, then they should have nothing to do with oneself and should not therefore be able to afflict oneself.”

The layperson then declared, “If it is the case that sensual desire does not come from the inside or from the outside or from the east or from the west or from the south or from the north or from any of the four midpoints or from above or below, and if it is the case that one can search everywhere and be entirely unable to find any real aspect in it, this dharma then is neither produced nor destroyed. If it is devoid of any mark of production or extinction, it is empty [of any inherent existence] and thus is entirely devoid of anything whatsoever which exists. How then can it be that it is able to be afflictive?”

After Agramati had listened to this declaration, he was not pleased and was unable to offer a reply. He got up from his seat and said words to this effect: “Prasannendriya has engaged in an extensive deception of many people and has influenced them to take up an erroneous path.”

This Agramati Bodhisattva had not yet studied the dhāraṇī of sound. When he heard words which had been spoken by the Buddha, he was delighted. When he heard the doctrines of other paths, he was filled with aversion. When he heard of the three roots of unwholesomeness, then he would be displeased. When he heard of the three roots of wholesomeness, then he would be greatly delighted. When he heard of birth and death, then he would become worried. When he heard of nirvāṇa, then he would be happy.

[Agramati] departed from that layperson's house, went to the forest, entered the monastery, and announced to the Bhikshus, "You should all be aware that this Prasannendriya Bodhisattva has engaged in deceptions whereby he has extensively influenced people to engage in the unwholesome and the improper. How is this so? He has said, 'As for the characteristics of lust, anger and delusion as well as those of all other dharmas—they are all characterized by mutual non-obstruction.'"

At this time Prasannendriya thought, "This man is extremely hateful, is covered over by unwholesome karma, and is going to fall into committing a grave offense. I should now speak the most profound Dharma. Although he will gain nothing from it now, still, it will constitute for him a cause and condition for the path of Buddhahood in a future age. Then Prasannendriya called an assembly of the Sangha and single-mindedly uttered a verse:

One's sensual desire's identical with the Path.  
 And so it is with hate and delusion.  
 In just this way, amidst these three,  
 One finds the Path of innumerable buddhas.

So if a man discriminates  
 'Twixt lust and hate, delusion and Path,  
 This man strays far away from Buddha,  
 Just as heaven's far from earth.

The Path, lust, hatred, and delusion  
 Are all one dharma, all the same.  
 Should one who hears this cringe in fear,  
 He's far away from Buddha's Path.

The dharma of lust's not born or destroyed,  
 And cannot cause the mind affliction,  
 But if one has a view of self,  
 This lust leads forth to the wretched destinies.<sup>5</sup>

Seeing dharmas of existence and nonexistence as different,  
 One can't leave existence or nonexistence.  
 But knowing existence and nonexistence as same,  
 Transcending supremely, one achieves Buddha's Path.

[Prasannendriya] spoke more than seventy verses of this sort. At that time thirty thousand gods gained the unproduced-dharmas patience. Eighteen thousand Hearer disciples, because they did not cling to any dharmas, achieved liberation. At that time Agramati Bodhisattva fell into the hells where he underwent sufferings for

an immeasurable period of ten million *koṭīs* of years. When he came out again and was born among men, for seven hundred and forty thousand existences, he was always slandered. He did not even hear the word “buddha” for an innumerable number of kalpas thereafter.

When [the karmic burden of] these offenses gradually became lighter he was able to hear the Buddha’s Dharma. He then became able to leave the home life and become a monk for the sake of the Path, but, [even then], he relinquished the precepts (i.e. returned to lay life). In this manner, for sixty-three thousand existences, he always relinquished the precepts. Then, for an innumerable number of existences he was able to remain a *śramaṇa* but, although he no longer relinquished the precepts, his faculties remained dark and dull.

This Prasannendriya Bodhisattva is now a buddha far away to the east, one hundred thousand *koṭīs* of buddhalands away. His land is known as “Jeweled Adornment” and his buddha name is “Sun-Surpassing Brilliance King” (*Sūryālokasamatikrāntarāja*).

Mañjuśrī said, “At that time that bhikṣu Agramati was myself. I observe that for just such a period of time I endured this immeasurable amount of suffering.”

Mañjuśrī again addressed the Buddha, saying, “If there be a man who seeks the path of the Three Vehicles and who doesn’t wish to undergo all manner of suffering, he should not [attempt to] discredit the [true] character of dharmas, cherishing hatefulness in doing so.”

The Buddha asked Mañjuśrī, “What benefits did you gain from listening to those verses?”

He replied, “When I heard these verses, [they served as the causal basis for] my achieving the ending of the multitude of sufferings such that [eventually], in life after life, I gained sharp faculties and wisdom. I became able to understand the profound Dharma and became able to skillfully expound the profound meaning. I became foremost among the bodhisattvas in this regard.”

### Nāgārjuna’s Concluding Comments

Examples such as these illustrate what is meant by “skillful explanation of the [true] character of dharmas.” This is what is meant by “They were skillful in bringing about deliverance in accordance with reality.”

## Notes

1. The Sutra refers here to the bodhisattvas in attendance upon the Buddha when he delivered these teachings on the perfection of wisdom.
2. Transliteration per Lamotte.
3. This refers to twelve beneficial ascetic practices specifically recommended by the Buddha. They are to be distinguished from the *non*-beneficial ascetic practices specifically discouraged by the Buddha. The former include such practices as always sitting in meditation (i.e. never lying down), limiting one's indulgence in food to a single meal each day, limiting one's clothing to a single set of robes, dwelling in a quiet place distant from the hustle and bustle of civilization, etc.
4. For those unfamiliar with this teaching, it may be worth noting that it is not intended to endorse coursing in desire, hatefulness, or delusion. Its intention is simply to diminish fixed mental attachments by countering a tendency to make polarizing discriminations constituting obstacles to liberation. The teaching *does* presume an already clear awareness of the need to eliminate the three poisons from one's thoughts, words and actions.
5. The obvious conclusion from considering the flip-side of "But if one has a view of self, this lust leads forth to the wretched destinies," is that, since only the Āryas have transcended a view of self, failure to carefully observe the moral virtue precepts regarding sexual misconduct is virtually certain to lead to present and future suffering. One might think of this stanza as Prasannendriya's "warning label" on his very profound and very transcendent teaching.