

Part Seven:
NĀGĀRJUNA'S STORIES ON VARIOUS TOPICS

Three Brothers Become Enlightened

The Bodhisattva is able to employ all manner of skillful means to personally cut off all of these kinds of afflictions¹ and is also able to employ clever skillful means to bring about the cutting off of other people's afflictions. For example, when the Buddha was in the world, there were three men, an elder brother, second brother, and youngest brother who had heard that there was a courtesan in Vaiśālī named Āmrapālī, a courtesan in Śrāvastī named Sumanā, and a courtesan in Rājagṛha named Utpalavarnā.

Each of the three men had heard people extol these three women as being incomparably lovely, so much so that, day and night, they were obsessed, could not put those women out of their thoughts, and then, in their dreams, dreamt that they had an affair with them. Upon awakening, they thought, "These women did not come to us, nor did we go to see them, and yet a sexual encounter was consummated." Because of this they experienced an awakening and wondered, "Could it be that all dharmas like this?" At this time they went to see the Bodhisattva Bhadrapāla to inquire about this matter.

Bhadrapāla replied, "Actually, all dharmas are precisely like this. In every case, they arise from thought." He continued to bring forth many instances like this and, for the benefit of these three men, employed skillful means whereby he cleverly explained the emptiness of all dharmas. At this time, these three men straightaway achieved the stage of the *avaivartika* (irreversibility).

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

All of these bodhisattvas are like this. In all manner of ways, they cleverly explain dharma for the benefit of beings, influencing them to cut off all manner of views, entanglements and afflictions. This is what is meant when it is said, "They were able to cut off all views and entanglements as well as all afflictions."

Notes

1. This story occurs as commentary on the passage which reads, "They (the bodhisattvas) were able to cut off all kinds of views and entanglements as well as all afflictions."

The Buddha's Omniscience Converts a Brahman

Question: How many grains of sand are there in the Ganges River?¹

Response: Their number is so great that it is unknowable by any numerical categories. Only the Buddhas and Dharma-body bodhisattvas are capable of knowing their number. Buddhas and Dharma-body bodhisattvas are even able to calculate how many atoms are arising and perishing throughout all of the continent of Jambudvīpa, how much the more so are they able to know the number of sands in the Ganges.

For example, once, when the Buddha was sitting beneath a tree in the forest beyond the Jeta Grove, a brahman arrived where the Buddha was and asked of the Buddha, "How many leaves are there on the trees of this forest?"

The Buddha immediately replied, stating a particular number of leaves. The Brahman thought doubtfully to himself, "Who would be able to corroborate this?" Then the Brahman went over to a tree and, removing a number of leaves, stashed them away and then returned to the Buddha, asking, "Precisely how many leaves are there in the forest, now?"

The Buddha then immediately replied that now the number of leaves had been reduced by a certain number, noting precisely the number of leaves which had been removed. When the Brahman realized this, his mind became filled with reverence and faith. He requested that the Buddha allow him to become a monk, after which he gained the path of the Arhat. We can know from this that the Buddha can know the number of sands in the Ganges.

Notes

1. The number of sands in the Ganges was commonly used by the Buddha in representing inconceivably large numbers. The question here is in response to such an instance.

The Buddha, the Servant, and the Doubting Brahman

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Why the Buddha Shows His Tongue

Sutra:

At that time the Bhagavān put forth his characteristically broad and long tongue, extending it so that it entirely covered the great trichiliocosm and then he smiled happily. From the root of his tongue he sent forth innumerable tens of millions of *koṭīs* of light rays. Each of these light rays transformed into a thousand-petalled golden-colored lotus blossom. Atop each of these blossoms, there sat a transformation buddha who had assumed the full-lotus posture and who was proclaiming the six *pāramitās*. Those beings who heard this became certain thereby to realize *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*. Likewise, this [supernatural transformation] extended in the same manner to reach a Ganges-sands' number of buddhalands throughout the ten directions.

Exegesis:

Question: How is it that one of such great virtue, venerability and solemnity as the Buddha, the Bhagavān, would stick out his broad, long tongue? It seems rather like a mark of contemptuousness.

Response: In the above three instances of emitting light, the illumination reached to beings throughout the ten directions and caused them to gain liberation. Now, [the Buddha] wishes to speak the *mahāprajñāpāramitā*. The *mahāprajñāpāramitā* is extremely profound, difficult to understand, difficult to comprehend, and difficult to believe in and accept. For this reason, [the Buddha] extended his broad and long tongue as a form of certification [of believability]. Where one possesses a tongue with characteristics such as this, one's words are necessarily truthful.

Story: The Buddha, the Servant, and the Doubting Brahman

As an example, once, some time ago, when the Buddha had concluded the rains retreat in Śrāvastī, Ānanda followed the Buddha in traveling about from state to state. They were about to arrive at a particular brahman city. It happened that the king of that city was well aware of the Buddha's spiritual virtues, and that he was able to convert multitudes of people and influence the minds of the masses. [That king thought], "If now [the Buddha] comes here, who would find any further satisfaction with me?" He then issued a restrictive decree: "Whosoever donates food to the Buddha or listens to the

words of the Buddha is thereby bound to pay a levy of five hundred gold pieces.”

Having arrived in that jurisdiction after the restrictive decree had been laid down, the Buddha led Ānanda into the city to collect alms, the two of them proceeding with alms bowls in hand. The people of the city had all shut their doors and did not respond, whereupon the Buddha departed with his bowl still empty.

At that time one household's old servant came out the door carrying a cracked clay bowl brimming with spoiled gruel, intending to dispose of it. She noticed the Buddha, the Bhagavān, coming along with an empty bowl. The old servant observed the Buddha's major physical marks and his minor characteristics, his golden color, the white hair mark [between his eyebrows], the cowl [on the crown of his head], his ten-foot halo, his empty bowl, and realized that he had no food.

When she had seen this, she thought, “A person of such spiritual stature as this deserves to dine on the fare of the celestial kitchens. That he now voluntarily condescends to allow his body to appear carrying an alms bowl and walking along on alms rounds is certainly on account of his great loving-kindness and compassion for everyone.” Her thoughts of faith were pure and, although she desired to present a fine offering to him, she had no means to accord with her wish. Feeling much abashed, she addressed the Buddha, saying, “Although I wish I could provide a suitable offering, I am unable to obtain anything more than this. If the Buddha has need of this lowly fare, he may take it.”

The Buddha was aware that her thoughts were imbued with a pure faith and reverence and so extended his hand and accepted with his alms bowl the food which she had given. The Buddha thereupon smiled and emitted five-colored rays of light which everywhere illumined heaven and earth and then returned, entering through that characteristic feature on his brow.

Ānanda placed his palms together, knelt, and addressed the Buddha, “Pray, may the Bhagavān consent to explain the causes and conditions whereby he now smiles. I wish to hear his reasons.”

The Buddha asked Ānanda, “Did you or did you not notice that this elderly woman, with a mind imbued with faith, made an offering of food to the Buddha?”

Ānanda said, “I did see that.”

The Buddha said, “Because this elderly woman made an offering

of food to the Buddha, she shall enjoy a period of fifteen kalpas in the heavens and among people wherein she shall be the recipient of blessings and bliss and shall not fall into the wretched destinies. Thereafter, she shall be reborn as a man, shall leave behind the home life, shall study the Path, shall realize pratyekabuddhahood, and shall enter the nirvāṇa without residue.

At that time there was a brahman standing close to the Buddha who then uttered a verse, saying:

You Sir are [a scion] of the *kṣatriyan* Solar Clan
 And a prince of the house of the Pure Rice King,
 And yet, to gain food, you now tell a great lie.
 As reward for what crime do you reap such rank fare?

At that time the Buddha extended his broad and long tongue until it covered his face up to his hairline. He then asked the brahman, "In your perusal of the classical teachings, have you or have you not found any indication that a person could have a tongue like this and yet still tell a lie?"

The brahman replied, "If a person's tongue is capable of covering the nose alone, then there will be no falseness in his words, how much the less [could there be any false speech] in an instance where it can reach up to the hairline. Although, I now believe that the Buddha definitely does not speak falsely, still, I do not understand how such a small offering could have a retribution so great as this."

The Buddha asked the brahman, "Have you or have you not ever seen anything in this world which only rarely occurs and which is only seldom seen?"

The brahman replied, "I have indeed seen such a thing. I once was traveling on the road with other brahmans when I saw a single *nyagrodha* tree the shadow of which was still not used up even when shading a caravan of five hundred merchant wagons. This was a phenomenon which occurs but rarely and which is but rarely encountered."

The Buddha asked, "Is the seed of that tree large or is it small?"

He replied, "It is but one third the size of a mustard seed."

The Buddha asked, "But who could believe you when you say that there is a tree of such great size but which has a seed so extremely small?"

The brahman replied, "It is actually so, Bhagavān. I have seen it with my own eyes. This is not a falsehood."

The Buddha said, "So too it is that I have seen that this elderly woman by making a faithful offering to the Buddha thereby gains such a grand resultant retribution. It is just like the tree where the cause is minor but the effect is great and is a result brought about by the Thus Come One's magnificent field of merit.

The brahman's mind opened up and he understood. He made a full reverential prostration, casting the five parts of his body down to the ground and repenting of his error before the Buddha, saying, "My thoughts have been uncivil and thus I have stupidly failed to believe in the Buddha."

The Buddha spoke Dharma for him in various ways whereupon he gained the initial fruit of the Path (first-stage arhatship). He immediately raised his arm into the air and cried out loudly, "Everyone! The gate of sweet-dew ambrosia has been thrown open! Why don't you all come out?!"

Each of the brahmins in the city then remitted five hundred gold pieces to the king. They welcomed the Buddha and made offerings to him. They all exclaimed, "We have gained the flavor of sweet dew. Who would want to be sparing of five hundred gold pieces?" Then everyone came out, whereupon the restrictive decree became entirely unenforceable. This brahman king himself, together with his ministers and subjects, took refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma. All of the people of the city developed a pure faith. In just this fashion, the Buddha extended his characteristically broad and long tongue for the sake of those who did not yet believe.

The Monk, the King and the Naked Ascetics

Once, in South India, there was a Dharma Master who was holding forth from the high seat on the meaning of the five moral virtue precepts. Within the Assembly, there were many followers of non-Buddhist paths who had come to listen. It happened that at this time the King himself challenged [the monk] with a difficult question, saying, "If it's really as you claim, then those who serve liquor to others as well as those who drink it themselves bring down upon themselves the retribution of being 'crazy' and dull-minded. [If that were so], then it ought to be the case that in this present age those who are crazy are in the majority whereas those who are normal are in the minority. However, those who are now crazy are very few, whereas those who are not crazy are the more numerous. Why is this the case?"

At this time, those followers of other paths [who had come to listen] chorused their approval, "Ah, good indeed! This difficulty is quite a profound one. On account of the King's incisive wisdom, this bald pate fellow in the high seat will definitely be unable to reply."

At that time the Dharma Master responded by simply raising his arm and pointing to those followers of non-Buddhist paths, whereupon he proceeded to discourse on an entirely different topic. Then the King immediately understood. But those followers of other paths reacted by exclaiming to the King, "The King's difficult question was extremely profound and this fellow didn't know any way to respond to it. He was embarrassed by knowing no answer and so just stuck up his finger and then changed the subject."

The King then addressed those followers of non-Buddhist paths, "The Dharma Master on the high seat gave his answer by pointing. Because he wished to spare all of you the embarrassment, he chose not to reply with words. He was pointing in your direction and indicating thereby that all of you are crazy, and that therefore the crazy ones are not in the minority.

"You all smear your bodies with ashes, go around naked and shameless, fill skulls with excrement which you then eat, pull out your hair, lie down on thorns, suspend your bodies upside down, subject your noses to smoke, plunge into the water in the winter, and then roast yourselves before a fire in the summer. All such things as these which you practice are contrary to the Path and are indications of mental derangement.

“Moreover, the practice which you all engage in of peddling meat and salt constitutes a direct miscarriage of brahmanical dharma. During the ceremonial offerings to the heavens, you receive cattle as donations and then immediately turn around and sell them off and yet say of yourselves that you are in accord with the Dharma. These cattle are [sold with the knowledge that they will be slaughtered and consumed as] meat. How could deceiving people in this way be anything but a transgression?

“What’s more, you say that when one goes into the auspicious river, the filth of one’s offenses is all gotten rid of. This amounts to claiming that there are no causal factors inherent in committing karmic offenses or engaging in meritorious deeds. What a crime it is to deal in beef and profiteer in salt! As for claiming that by going into the auspicious river one can get rid of one’s offenses—if one is able to get rid of one’s offenses that way, then one is also able to get rid of one’s merit in that same way. Wherein does this auspiciousness lie?

“All such [supposedly efficacious] practices as these are devoid of [valid] causal factors and yet, by forced interpretation, you claim that these represent [effectual] causes and conditions. This all amounts to mental derangement. All such different indications of mental derangement apply to you. Because the Dharma Master wished to spare you embarrassment, he simply pointed at you and refrained from discussing the matter.”

The Arhat, the Elephant, and Causality

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On Causality

Question: As for [the Sutra's statement], "The hungry became satisfied and the thirsty were able to drink," what causal factors bring about hunger and thirst?

Response: They arise on account of a scarcity of merit . There is an absence of conducive causes originating in previous lives and an absence of conducive conditions in this present life. It is on account of this that one becomes afflicted with hunger and thirst. Then again, it may be that in previous lives this individual stole the food of buddhas, arhats, or pratyekabuddhas or else stole food which was reserved for the personal consumption by one's parents. Now, although one may take birth in an era where one might encounter the Buddha, still, on account of the gravity of one's offenses, he will continue to be afflicted by hunger and thirst.

Question: Nowadays we have people who, although they have taken birth in an evil age, they are still able to enjoy fine food and drink. There have also been individuals who have taken birth in an era where they could encounter the Buddha, but who have nonetheless been especially afflicted with hunger and thirst. If one is a person who has committed offenses, it should not be that one can take birth in an era where he might encounter the Buddha. If one is a person possessed of karmic blessings, it should not be that he could be born into an evil age. How is it that these circumstances could occur?

Response: The causes and conditions associated with each individual person's karmic retribution are different. Some people possess the causes and conditions for being able to see the Buddha but lack the causes and conditions requisite to adequacy in food and drink. Others possess the causes and conditions requisite to adequacy in food and drink but lack the causes and conditions for being able to see the Buddha. The situation of these latter individuals is analogous to that of a black snake who lies curled up around a [wish-granting] *mani* pearl. There are even cases of people who, although they have realized arhatship, are nonetheless still unable to be successful in searching for alms food.

Story: The Arhat, the Elephant, and Causality

We have in addition an illustrative case of two brothers who, at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, left home [to become monks] in search

of the Path. One of them upheld the precepts, recited the Sutras, and sat in dhyāna meditation. The other brother sought extensive contacts with the *dānapatis* (lay benefactors) while also cultivating all manner of merit-generating karmic deeds. When it came to the time when Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in the World, one of the brothers was reborn into the household of an elder while the other brother was reborn as a great white elephant whose strength was such that he was able to smash the ranks of rebel insurgents. The son of that elder left home to study the Path and succeeded in gaining the six superknowledges and arhatship. However, on account of possessing only a scant amount of merit, whenever he sought alms food, it was difficult for him to come by any.

One day, [the arhat] took up his bowl and entered the city to seek alms food, but was unable to get any anywhere. He happened upon the stable of the white elephant and witnessed the King's providing to the elephant all manner of sustenance in great abundance. He then said to this elephant, "In comparing myself to you, [I see that] we both have committed offenses." The elephant was so moved by this comment that he became choked up and could not eat for three days. The elephant keeper panicked and sought out this man of the Path. Once he had found him, he inquired, "What spell did you cast that it caused the King's white elephant to become so ill that he can't eat?"

[The arhat] replied, "In a previous life this elephant was my younger brother. It was at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha that we left home together to study the Path as monks. I dedicated myself exclusively to upholding the precepts, reciting sutras and sitting in dhyāna meditation, but entirely neglected the practice of giving. My younger brother busied himself exclusively with extensively seeking contacts with *dānapatis* and all manner of giving, neglecting all the while to uphold the precepts or pursue his studies.

Because [my brother] did not uphold the precepts, recite sutras or sit in dhyāna meditation, he has now been reborn as this elephant. However, because he extensively cultivated the practice of giving, his food and drink are replete and marked by all manner of abundance. Because I only cultivated the Path and did not cultivate the practice of giving, although I have now gained the Path, whenever I seek alms food, I remain unable to come by any."

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

On account of these circumstances, we can see that causes and conditions differ from case to case. Although one may take birth at a time when he might be able to see the Buddha, still, he might continue to be afflicted by hunger and thirst.

The Buddha Cares for a Sick Bhikshu

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On the Origins of Illness¹

(Nāgārjuna comments here on the line of sutra text which reads, "... those who were afflicted with illness were cured..."):

There are [basically] two categories of illness: [In the case of the first], one may become afflicted with all manner of sickness as retribution for karmic activities in former lives. [Secondly], one may also become afflicted with all manner of sickness in the present incarnation, this due to the influence of [such pathogenic factors as] coldness, heat, and wind.

Among the disorders originating in the present incarnation, there are two categories: The first consists of internal disorders wherein non-regulation of the five organs precipitates the arising of firmly-entrenched pathologies originating from former lives. The second consists of all manner of externally-arising disorders involving such phenomena as vehicular accidents, bolting horses, being crushed, falling down from a height, or [being afflicted with] a soldier's sword, a knife, or a club.

Question: What are the causes and conditions for becoming afflicted with physical maladies?

Exegesis: If in one's previous lives one took pleasure in inflicting all manner of cruelties involving lashing with a whip, beating with a club, imprisonment, and tying up, then in one's present life, one becomes afflicted with illness. [Then again,] if in this present life one is unaware of how to take care of one's body and so does not observe proper measure in eating and drinking or is irregular in one's sleeping habits, one may develop all manner of illnesses on account of this. And so there are four hundred and four categories of illness like these. On account of the Buddha's spiritual powers, those afflicted with illness were able to become cured.

Story: The Buddha Cares for a Sick Bhikshu

An exemplary case is told of the Buddha when he was in the state of Śrāvastī. There was a layman who had invited the Buddha and the Sangha to take their meal in his home. The Buddha had five reasons whereby [in some cases] he might choose to accept his meal while continuing to abide in the monastic dwelling: First, out of a wish to enter samādhi; second, out of a wish to speak Dharma for the gods; third, out of a desire to stroll about and inspect the dwellings of the bhikshus; fourth, to look in on the bhikshus who were

ill; and fifth, in instances where no prohibitions had been instituted, to formulate prohibitions for the benefit of the bhikshus.

At this time the Buddha, keys in hand, went in order from one door to the next, entering the rooms of the bhikshus. He observed a bhikshu who suffered from illness, but whom no one was looking after. [The monk] was lying there in his excrement and urine and was unable to rise from that position. The Buddha asked the bhikshu, "How is it that you are so afflicted with suffering and yet no one is looking after you?"

The bhikshu replied, "Bhagavat, I am, by nature, lazy. When others have fallen ill, I have never seen fit to look after them. Therefore, when it happened that I was taken ill, others have not bothered to look after me, either."

The Buddha said, "Son of good family, I shall look after you. At that time [the god] Shakra Devānām Indra bathed him with water and the Buddha rubbed his hands along the [bhikshu's] body. When he rubbed his body, all of the suffering and pain immediately disappeared and was cured. His body and mind became peaceful and restored. At this time the Bhagavān gently and slowly supported this sick bhikshu as he got up, took him outside of the dwelling, saw to his getting cleaned up, and to his dressing in [fresh] robes. Then he gently and slowly assisted him in going back in whereupon he provided him with a fresh sitting mat and allowed him to sit down.

The Buddha then said to the sick bhikshu, "For a long time now you have not been earnest in striving to gain what has not been gained, to arrive at what has not yet been reached, and to become aware of what has not yet been realized. Consequently you now undergo suffering and distress like this. [This being the case,] it may yet be that you are bound to undergo even greater suffering in the future."

When the bhikshu heard this he thought to himself, "The kindness of the Buddha is immeasurable and his spiritual powers are countless. When he used his hand to rub me, the anguish and pain immediately disappeared such that, in body and mind, I became filled with happiness."

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

On account of this, [we can know that] the Buddha employs his spiritual power to cause those who are sick to be cured and those who are disfigured to become whole again.

Notes

1. Although Nāgārjuna explains that there *are* specific karmic causes behind the arising of many unfortunate circumstances such as sickness, disfigurement, and premature death, still, this in no way alters the need for all Buddhists to look upon all with equally genuine compassion entirely free of patronizing or cruel judgmentalism. In this connection, there is another important fact worthy of our consideration: We are all more-or-less equally possessed of an abundance of such disaster-generating causes in our past-life karmic history. Hence it is only a matter of time before the same fate (or even worse) befalls us, this unless we have the humility to use such examples of suffering as motivation to purify and thus neutralize our own karmic transgressions. Thus, even if one were tempted to fall into an attitude of condescension, cognizance of our shared karmic vulnerability should make the folly of such responses entirely obvious.

Gaṇḍaka's Miraculous Restoration

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On the Origins of Disfigurement¹

(Nāgārjuna comments here on the line of sutra text which reads, "... those who's bodies were disfigured were made whole again..."):

What is meant by being "disfigured"? If there is a person who in a former life mangled someone's body or cut off someone's head or sliced off someone's hands or feet or mangled parts of someone's body or who perhaps destroyed images of the Buddha or broke the nose of a Buddha image or did these things to images of worthies or sages, or who perhaps destroyed images of his father or mother—on account of these offenses, he may take on a physical form which in many ways is not complete.

Moreover, it may be a retribution for unwholesome dharmas to take on a body that is ugly. If in this present life one is victimized by thieves or if one is subjected to capital punishment or if one encounters all manner of causes and conditions whereby one is caused to be disfigured, or if perhaps one becomes afflicted with wind-type, cold-type or heat-type diseases whereby one's body develops horrible sores or where parts of the body start to decay—this is what is meant [in this Sutra passage] by "disfigured."

Story: Gaṇḍaka's Miraculous Restoration

[And so it indicates in the Sutra passage that] they received the great kindness of the Buddha and were all made whole again. An exemplary case in point is that of a servant in the Jeta Grove named Gaṇḍaka. (Chinese textual note: In Chinese, "Gaṇḍaka" means "put together.") He was a nephew of King Prasenajit. He was handsome, brave, strong and possessed a mind which was harmonious and wholesome in nature. When the King's most senior consort saw him, she became attached to him and called to him softly, desiring thereby to influence him to go along with her intentions. But Gaṇḍaka did not go along with her and so the consort became greatly enraged and slandered him maliciously by accusing him of being guilty of what had been her own offense.

When the King heard this accusation, he had him sliced apart, joint after joint, and then had his body cast upon the charnel ground. That evening, at the moment just before his spirit was about to depart, the tigers, wolves and *rākṣasa* ghosts came around desiring to eat his body. At that moment the Buddha arrived at his side and let his light shine upon his body. His body suddenly became

as before and he became overjoyed. The Buddha then spoke the Dharma for his benefit whereupon he immediately realized the third stage of the path [of arhatship]. The Buddha then led him by the hand back to the Jeta Grove whereupon this man exclaimed, "My body had already been broken and had already been cast off. The Buddha put my body back together! Now I shall devote the rest of my life to serving with this body the Buddha and the Bhikshu Sangha."

The next day, when King Prasenajit heard of this matter, he came to the Jeta Grove and said to Gaṇḍaka, "I wish to repent to you for this transgression of mine. In truth you were blameless, but on false grounds, I subjected you to punitive injury. I am now going to present to you half of this country over which you may rule."

Gaṇḍaka replied, "I have already developed a revulsion [for worldly possessions]. As for the King, he is blameless. Disastrous mistakes from my former lives have made this event appropriate retribution for my offenses. I am now going to put my body to work in service to the Buddha and the Sangha and so will not be coming back again."

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

[Instances] like this [illustrate what is meant when the Sutra records that] if there is a being who is disfigured and imperfect, when he is illumined by the Buddha's light, he is immediately restored to normalcy. And so it says, "Even all of those who were disfigured became whole. When illumined by the Buddha's light they were immediately restored to normalcy."

Notes

1. Please see note to previous story clarifying the concept of karmic origins of unfortunate present-life experiences.

The Buddha's Skillful Means on Behalf of Monastics

The Buddha was abiding in the state of Vaiśālī when once he said to Ānanda, "There has developed within my body a type of hot wind energy for which it is appropriate to use cow's milk as a treatment. Take my bowl, beg for some milk and bring it forth."

Ānanda took up the Buddha's bowl and, early in the morning, went into Vaiśālī where, arriving at the door of a layman, he stood there. At that time [the layman] Vimalakīrti was walking by and noticed Ānanda standing there holding a bowl, whereupon he asked Ānanda, "Why is it that so early in the morning you stand here holding a bowl?"

Ānanda replied, "The Buddha's body is afflicted with a minor ailment for which one should use cow's milk as a treatment. And so it is that I have come to be here."

Vimalakīrti said, "Stop. Stop, Ānanda. Don't slander the Thus Come One. The Buddha is the Bhagavān. He has already gone beyond all unwholesome dharmas. What illness then could he possibly have? Don't allow non-Buddhists to hear such coarse speech. They will slight the Buddha and say, 'The Buddha can't even save himself from his own illnesses. How, then, could he save others?'"

Ānanda responded, "This was not my idea. It was face-to-face that I received the Buddha's order that he required cow's milk."

Vimalakīrti then said, "Although this was an order from the Buddha, it was but a skillful means. It is on account of this now being an age of the five evils that he employs this appearance for the sake of bringing everyone to deliverance. If in the future there are any bhikshus who are afflicted with illness they will have to seek medicines from the laity. [In such a case] the laity will say, 'You can't even save yourselves from your own illnesses. How could you save other people?' Those bhikshus then may say, 'Even our great master was afflicted with illnesses. How much the less could the likes of us whose bodies are [as fragile] as reeds or sesame be able to escape affliction by illness?'"

"On account of this situation, the laity and others will provide the bhikshus with medicines whereby they are allowed to peacefully and securely sit in dhyāna meditation and cultivate the Path. Even non-Buddhist rishis are able to employ herbs and incantations to get rid of the illnesses of others. How much the less could it be the case that the Thus Come One who possesses the virtue of omniscience would have an illness afflicting his own body which he couldn't cure himself? It were better that you stand silently holding

the bowl and so obtain the milk. Don't allow others of unorthodox persuasion to hear of this."

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

On account of this we should know that the Buddha was acting this way merely as a skillful means and was not actually afflicted with illness. All of the other cases of his supposedly undergoing retribution were also of this sort.

The Buddha Attempts to Connect with an Old Woman

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: The Rarity of Meeting a Buddha

The Buddha said that there is one situation which is difficult to encounter. It is that of meeting up with a buddha, one of the Bhagavāns. He also said that in a period of ninety-one kalpas, only three kalpas have buddhas whereas the rest of the kalpas are all empty. They have no buddha. It is extremely lamentable.

The Buddha explained this circumstance for the sake of those who are burdened by severe karmic offenses and who have not planted the roots of goodness whereby they might see a buddha, stating, "The difficulty of encountering an age in which there is a buddha is like that of encountering the blossoms of the *udumbara* tree which appear only once in a great long time." People with karmic offenses such as these turn about in the three wretched destinies. Perhaps they may come to abide among men or gods at a time when a buddha appears in the world but, still, these people do not succeed in seeing him even then.

As it has been told, there were nine hundred thousand households in the city of Śrāvastī among whom three hundred thousand actually saw the Buddha, three hundred thousand heard of the existence of the Buddha but never saw him, and the remaining three hundred thousand neither heard of nor saw him. Although the Buddha dwelt in the state of Śrāvastī for twenty-five years, still, these beings neither heard of him nor saw him. How much the less did those who dwelt at a distance.

Story: The Buddha Attempts to Connect with an Old Woman

In addition, we have the exemplary case wherein the Buddha once went together with Ānanda into the city of Śrāvastī seeking alms food. At just that time there was a poverty-stricken old mother who was standing at the end of the street. Ānanda said to the Buddha, "This person is pitiable. The Buddha should bring her to deliverance."

The Buddha replied, "This person has no conducive causes and conditions."

Ānanda said, "Would that the Buddha would just go forth and approach her. When this person sees the Buddha's special characteristics and becomes aware of the light which he radiates, she will develop a delighted mind and will thereby create conducive causes and conditions."

The Buddha then went forth and approached her with the result that she turned her body so that her back was towards the Buddha. The Buddha then approached her from each of the four sides and in each case she turned her back towards the Buddha and raised her head so as to gaze upwards. And so the Buddha approached from above with the result that she then lowered her head so as to look downwards. The Buddha emerged from the ground beneath her, but she then covered her eyes with both hands and, even then, was unable to gaze at the Buddha. The Buddha then inquired of Ānanda, “Well, just what further causes and conditions would you wish to have created now?”

Nāgārjuna’s Concluding Comments

There are people such as these who are lacking in the causes and conditions requisite to being brought to deliverance. They are unable to succeed in seeing the Buddha. It is for this reason that the Buddha said that the rarity of being able to encounter the Buddha is comparable to that of being able to see the blossoms of the *udumbara* tree. This is analogous to the situation of the hungry ghosts who, even when rainwater is abundant and easily found everywhere, still remain constantly thirsty and unable to find anything at all to drink.

Bodhisattvas Appearing in the World

Translator's Note

Nāgārjuna concludes a reply to a question as to why the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas of the ten directions don't seem to manifest in the world by offering a few stories testifying to their actually having appeared in response to sincere believers.

The Leper Cured Through Devotion to Samantabhadra

There are times when the Buddhas and the great Bodhisattvas come and cross over beings who, frightened and in extreme difficulty, are single-minded in calling upon them. For instance, in the west of the state of Greater Tokharestan, in a place where the Buddha's summit-mark abides, there was a leper at a Buddha stupa who drew close to an image of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. He then singlemindedly took refuge in him, bore in mind the meritorious qualities of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, and prayed that he could get rid of this disease. At that time the image of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva poured forth a stream of light from the right hand which gently massaged across the [leper's] body, whereupon the disease disappeared entirely.

Samantabhadra Appears to a Bhikshu Reciting the *Lotus Sutra*

Then again, in one country, there was a bhikshu who dwelt in an *aranya*¹ and specialized in the study of the Mahāyāna [teachings]. The king of his country would often lay down his hair in the path of the bhikshu that he might walk over it as he went by.² There was another bhikshu who spoke to the King, saying, "This man, O Great King, is not one who spends that much time reciting scriptures. Why is it that you make such great offerings in this fashion?"

The King replied, saying, "There was one day when, in the middle of the night, I wished to go and see this bhikshu. And so I immediately proceeded to where he dwells. I saw this bhikshu inside of his cave reciting the *Lotus Sutra*. At the same time, I observed a person made of gold-colored light sitting astride an elephant with his palms together as a sign of respect. As I grew closer, he disappeared. I then queried the greatly virtuous one as to how it was that, on account of my coming, the man of gold-colored light disappeared. The bhikshu then said to me, 'That was Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva himself has stated: "If there is anyone who recites the *Lotus Sutra*, I will come to him

astride a white elephant in order to offer him instruction.” It is because I recite the *Lotus Sutra* that Samantabhadra Bodhisattva himself comes here.”

The Monk Who Saw Amitābha and Whose Tongue Would Not Burn

Additionally, in another country, there was a bhikshu who recited the *Amitābha Buddha Sutra* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā*. When this man was about to die, he spoke to his disciples, saying, “Amitābha Buddha and his great assembly have all come. I shall depart forthwith and return [to Amitābha’s pureland].”

In just another instant, his life had come to an end. After he had passed on, his disciples gathered firewood and cremated him. The next day they found that his tongue had not been burned. Because he had recited the *Amitābha Buddha Sutra*, he saw the Buddha himself come to him. Because he had recited the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā*, his tongue could not be burned.

Nāgārjuna’s Concluding Comments

These are all manifest events which have occurred in the present era. As recorded in the scriptures, the instances of buddhas and bodhisattvas coming are quite numerous. Everywhere there are people such as these whose fetters arising from offenses and defilements are but slight. If they are single-minded in their mindfulness of the Buddha and if their faith is pure and they have no doubts they will certainly be able to see the Buddha. In the end, it will not have been in vain.

Notes

1. An *araṇya* is an often solitary dwelling, usually for meditation or study, usually in a quiet place away from the city.
2. The intention being to cover rough or muddy places in the path and thus make a smoother path for the passing monk.

Maudgalyāyana Seeks the Bounds of Buddha's Voice

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On the Nature of Buddha's Voice

As for the esoteric aspect of the Buddha's speech, there are those who can hear the voice of the Buddha even at a distance of a third of a mile. There are those who can hear it at a distance of three miles, thirty-three miles, three hundred and thirty miles, three thousand, three hundred miles, thirty-three thousand miles, or even at a distance of innumerable and measureless miles, or even throughout all of empty space. It is also the case that, even in a single Dharma assembly, some people may hear a discussion of giving, others may hear a discussion of the moral precepts, and still others may hear a discussion of patience, of vigor, of dhyāna absorption, of wisdom, or of still other topics such as those from among the twelve categories of scriptural text or the eighty-thousand-fold collection of other dharmas. This phenomenon wherein different individuals may hear different [dharmas] matching differences in their own minds constitutes the esoteric aspect of the Buddha's speech.

Story: Maudgalyāyana Seeks the Bounds of Buddha's Voice

There was one time when Maudgalyāyana wished to discover the precise reach of the Buddha's voice and so immediately employed his own spiritual powers, traveling to and stopping in a place at a distance of immeasurable thousands of myriads of *koṭīs* of world systems away. He still heard the voice of the Buddha just as clearly as if he were right close by. In the world system where he stopped, there was a buddha who was eating together with his great assembly of followers. The people of that land were huge. Maudgalyāyana stood on the edge of one of their begging bowls, whereupon one of that buddha's disciples asked that buddha, "Where did this human-headed bug come from? He's walking around in the clothes of a *śramaṇa*. That buddha replied, "Don't slight this man. He is a [monk] possessed of spiritual powers who is a disciple of a buddha named Shakyamuni who dwells an immeasurable number of buddha lands off in the east."

That buddha then asked Maudgalyāyana, "Why have you come here?"

Maudgalyāyana replied, "It is because I am seeking to find how far the Buddha's voice can reach that I have come here."

That buddha told Maudgalyāyana, "Even if you were to follow the Buddha's voice for an immeasurable number of *koṭīs* of kalpas, you would still be unable to find the limit of its reach.

Hastaka's Three Insatiableness

Translator's Note

Nāgārjuna relates the following story in commenting on a section of sutra text wherein the Bodhisattva Samantaraśmi (lit. "Universal Brightness") departs from the assembly of Ratnākara Buddha (lit. "Accumulation of Jewels") to pay his respects to Shakyamuni Buddha.

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: The Bodhisattva's Insatiableness

Question: If the capacity of all buddhas is identical with respect to observance of the precepts, dhyāna absorptions, wisdom, and also with respect to the deliverance of beings, why is it that this Samantaraśmi Bodhisattva desires to come and pay his respects to Shakyamuni Buddha?

Response: The bodhisattvas are all always insatiable in their desire to see the Buddhas, insatiable in their desire to hear the Dharma, and insatiable in their desire to see the Bodhisattva Sangha. The Bodhisattvas are all weary of and abhor worldly dharmas.

Story: Hastaka's Three Insatiableness

[The bodhisattva's] insatiableness with respect to the above three matters is similar to the case of the layman Hastaka who came from the Pure Abode Heaven wishing to see the Buddha. His body was so fine and delicate that it verged on disappearance and, like melting frankincense resin (*taila*), it was unable to stand up on the ground.

The Buddha said to the layman Hastaka, "You should transformationally create a coarser body by contemplating the characteristic of the earth element." The layman Hastaka immediately accorded with the Buddha's instructions, bore in mind the characteristic of the element earth and then made obeisance at the feet of the Buddha and stood off to one side.

The Buddha then inquired of the layman, "With respect to how many things have you become insatiable that, as a result, you have gained rebirth in the Pure Abode Heaven?"

He replied, "It is on account of being insatiable with respect to three matters that I have been born in the Pure Abode Heaven: First, I have been insatiable in desiring to see the Buddhas and make offerings to them. Second, I have been insatiable in desiring to hear the Dharma. Third, I have been insatiable in making offerings to supply the needs of the Sangha. Just as, while the Buddha dwells

in Jambudvīpa, the Four Assemblies constantly follow along after the Buddha for the purpose of hearing the Dharma and inquiring about Dharma, so too my fellow gods from the Pure Abode Heaven follow along with me in listening to the Dharma and in inquiring about the Dharma.”

Nāgārjuna’s Concluding Comment

Even the Hearer disciples are insatiable when it comes to listening to Dharma. How much the more so would this be the case with the Dharma-body bodhisattvas. It is for this reason that Samantaraśmi Bodhisattva came to see Shakyamuni Buddha and to also see the bodhisattvas and the *mahāsattvas* who abide here and who [in the future] will inherit the [Buddha’s] honored position.

The Limits of Mañjuśrī's Samādhi Power

As described in the *Assemblage of Buddhas Sutra*, Mañjuśrī wished to view that assemblage of Buddhas, but was unable to arrive for it. The Buddhas had all returned to their original places. When Mañjuśrī arrived at that place where the Buddhas had all come together, there was a woman close to that buddha's seat, immersed in samādhi. Mañjuśrī entered and, having bowed at the Buddha's feet, inquired of the Buddha, "Why has this woman been able to draw so close to the Buddha's seat whereas I have not?"

The Buddha told Mañjuśrī, "Rouse this woman, cause her to arise from her samādhi, and inquire of her yourself."

Mañjuśrī then snapped his fingers to rouse her but she was unable to be roused thereby. He yelled loudly but still she was unable to be roused by that. He then tugged her by the hand, but that couldn't rouse her either. Finally, he employed his psychic powers, shaking the entire great trichilocosm, but still this did not succeed in rousing her. Mañjuśrī addressed the Buddha, saying, "I am unable to cause her to be roused."

At this time the Buddha emitted a great beam of light which illuminated the world system towards the nadir. There was therein a bodhisattva named Apahr̥tanīvaraṇa (lit. "Dispeller of the Hindrances") who immediately emerged therefrom and who came to this Buddha's place, made reverential obeisance at the Buddha's feet, and then stood off to one side. The Buddha then instructed Apahr̥tanīvaraṇa Bodhisattva, "Rouse this woman." Thereupon [that bodhisattva] snapped his fingers and this woman immediately arose from samādhi.

Mañjuśrī addressed the Buddha, inquiring, "Why is it that even though I shake the entire great trichilocosm I am still unable to rouse this woman whereas Apahr̥tanīvaraṇa Bodhisattva need only snap his fingers one time and so rouses her from samādhi?"

The Buddha told Mañjuśrī, "It was on account of this woman that you first set your resolve on *anuttarasamyakṣambodhi* whereas it was on account of Apahr̥tanīvaraṇa Bodhisattva that this woman first set her resolve on *anuttarasamyakṣambodhi*. It is for this reason that you are unable to rouse her. You have not yet completely gained the meritorious qualities associated with the Buddhas' samādhis. This bodhisattva has achieved sovereign independence in the samādhis. It is on account of having entered to some degree the samādhis of the Buddhas while not yet having achieved sovereign independence in them that this situation is as it is.

The Buddha's Love of Meritorious Deeds

Question: Given that beings such as the Buddha do not [have any further need to] seek karmic blessings, why does he persist in making offerings?

Response: For an immeasurable number of *asamkhyeyas* of kalpas, the Buddha has cultivated every type of merit and has constantly practiced all manner of good. It was not solely for the sake of seeking reward, respect, or merit that he has made offerings. For example, when the Buddha was still abiding in the World, there was a blind bhikshu who, although he could not see a thing with his eyes, still used his hands to sew his robe. When once his thread slipped out of the needle, he called out, "May whoever loves to generate merit come thither and assist me by threading my needle."

At that time the Buddha came to where he was and said to the bhikshu, "I am a man who loves to generate merit. I will assist you by threading the needle."

This bhikshu recognized the Buddha's voice, quickly got up, donned his robe, made obeisance at the Buddha's feet, and addressed the Buddha, saying, "The Buddha's merit is already complete. Why is it that he states that he loves to generate merit?"

The Buddha replied, "Although my merit is already complete, I am deeply aware of the causes of merit, of the resulting reward of merit, and of the power of merit. It is on account of this merit that I have become the most supreme among beings. It is for this reason that I love it." After the Buddha had praised the generation of merit for the sake of this bhikshu, he next spoke Dharma for him which accorded with his mind. The bhikshu then achieved the purification of the Dharma eye and the return of sight to his fleshly eyes.

Moreover, although the Buddha is already complete in merit and has nothing further which he needs, it is for the sake of teaching disciples that he says to them, "If even I still engage in the generation of merit, how can you fail to do so?"

This is like a 100-year-old dancer who, though a geriatric, still continued to dance only to be scolded by someone who said, "Old man, you're already a hundred years old. What use is it for you to continue to dance?"

The old man replied, "I have no need of dancing. It is solely because I wish to teach my children and grandchildren that I do so." The Buddha is just like this. Although his merit is already complete, it is for the sake of teaching disciples to generate merit that he himself engages in the making of offerings.

The Arhat Upagupta Meets an Elderly Nun

Translator's Note

Nāgārjuna employed this story in reply to a question regarding the importance of "single-minded respectfulness and carefulness."

Nāgārjuna's Introductory Comments

Furthermore, [this single-minded respectfulness and carefulness is important] on account of the fact that people's minds are for the most part scattered as if they were either crazy or intoxicated. Being single-mindedly respectful and careful is the essential prerequisite for the development of all meritorious qualities. If one is able to focus one's mind, then one is able to succeed in dhyāna meditation and is thus then able to realize true wisdom. If one is able to develop true wisdom, then one is able to achieve liberation. If one is able to achieve liberation, then one is able to put an end to suffering. Matters such as these are all realized through single-mindedness.

The Story

For example, one hundred years after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, there was a bhikshu named Upagupta who had become an arhat possessed of the six superknowledges. In the world at that time he was a great guiding master for the entire continent of Jambudvīpa. At that time there was a bhikshuni who was one hundred and twenty years old. When this bhikshuni was young she had seen the Buddha. Upagupta came with the intention of entering her dwelling as he wished to enquire about the Buddha's countenance and comportment. He sent a disciple on ahead of him. The disciple said to the bhikshuni, "My great master is Upagupta. He wishes to come and see you for the purpose of inquiring about the Buddha's countenance and comportment."

The bhikshuni then took a bowl filled to the brim with sesame oil and set it beneath the doorway so as to test him and thus evaluate whether or not he himself was possessed of the awesome comportment. When Upagupta entered he slowly pushed aside the door but still spilled a little of the sesame oil. Having sat down he asked the bhikshuni, "Did you actually see the Buddha or not? What were his countenance and comportment like? Describe them for me."

The bhikshuni replied, "I was young then. I saw the Buddha come and enter into the village. Everybody said, 'The Buddha has come!' I followed along with everyone else. When I went out and

saw the light, I bowed down, whereupon my gold hair clasp fell to the ground and slid underneath a large bench where it was very dark. The Buddha's light illuminated the darkness so that I could see everything. Thus I became immediately able to retrieve the hair clasp. It was starting from this very time that I became a bhikshuni."

Upagupta then asked, "When the Buddha was in the World, what were the comportment and manners of the bhikshus like?"

She replied, "When the Buddha was in the World there was one group of six bhikshus who were utterly shameless and the most poorly behaved. But their manner of displaying the awesome comportment was still superior to yours. How is it that one can know this today? When the six bhikshus entered a doorway they would not have caused the oil to spill. Although they were poorly behaved, they still knew how to carry forth with the awesome deportment of a bhikshu. Whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, they did not depart from the Dharma standards. Even though you are an arhat possessed of the six superknowledges, you are still not such as can be compared to them."

When Upagupta heard these words, he was greatly ashamed. And so it is for this reason that we refer to being possessed of single-minded respectfulness and carefulness. Being single-mindedly respectful and careful is the mark of a good person.

The Life of Śāriputra

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Śāriputra's Wisdom

Question: The *prajñāpāramitā* is a dharma associated with the Bodhisattvas and the Mahāsattvas. Why then is it that the Buddha addresses Śāriputra herein?

Response: Among all of the disciples, Śāriputra was foremost in wisdom. This is as indicated by a verse spoken by the Buddha:

If one were to take the wisdom of any being,
This with the exception of the Buddha,
And desired then to compare it to Śāriputra,
His wisdom and his knowledge are such that,
Supposing it consisted of sixteen parts,
That person would still not possess even one.

Story: The Life of Śāriputra

Also, Śāriputra was wise, knowledgeable, and possessed of great meritorious qualities. From the time he was eight years old he was able to recite from memory the eighteen classics and was able to penetratingly understand the principles of all of the classics and their related texts. At that time in the state of Magadha, there were two dragon-king brothers, one named Giri and the other named Agra. They sent down the rains in accord with the seasons so that there were no drought-afflicted years. The population was grateful to them and so always amassed at the abode of the dragons on the second full moon of spring to celebrate them with a grand festival. On these occasions, there would be music and philosophical debates which lasted the entire day. This had been the unchanging custom from ancient times on up to the present. Consequently this great festival came to be named after the dragons.

It was the custom on these occasions to set up four seats of honor, the first being reserved for the King, the second for the Prince, the third for the Prime Minister and the fourth for a master of dialectics. At that time the eight-year-old Śāriputra asked the assembled people there, "For whom are these four seats of honor prepared?"

Those people replied, "They have been prepared for the King, the Prince, the Prime Minister, and a master of dialectics."

Śāriputra then assessed the physiognomy of all of the brahmans and others who were present, observed that none of them were superior to himself, and so ascended the seat prepared for a master of dialectics, sitting down there in the full lotus posture. Those men

assembled there were struck with doubt and consternation and so thought to themselves that either this was just a little ignorant fool or else it might be one whose wisdom surpassed that of men.

Although they admired his extraordinary spiritual demeanor, each of them remained prideful of himself. Embarrassed by his youth, they did not speak to him directly, but rather each dispatched a young disciple as a surrogate to subject him to questioning. The import, phrasing, and principle behind each of his replies utterly surpassed the ken of ordinary men. At that time those dialecticians exclaimed at what they had never before encountered in their entire lives. The fool, the sage, the elder, and the young—all alike were humbled.

The King was extraordinarily delighted and so immediately ordered his officials to make a grant of [the taxes from] an entire village as perpetual support for him. The King ascended onto the platform atop his elephant, rang a bell, and proclaimed this. Thus there was no place throughout the sixteen great states and the six great cities where he did not become a celebrated figure.

At that time there lived a man, the son of a diviner, whose personal name was Kolita and whose family name was Mahāmaudgalyāyana. Śāriputra befriended and grew close to him. The talent and intelligence of Śāriputra were universally esteemed even while the extraordinary character of Maudgalyāyana was the most acclaimed. These two men were comparable in talent and wisdom and were peers in the practice of virtue. When traveling about, they kept each other's company, and when abiding in any place, they stayed in close proximity. They pledged a pact of lifelong friendship.

Later on, they both renounced the worldly life and left home to study the Path, each becoming disciples of a particular brahmacārin. They sought for the entry onto the Path, but even after a long time, they found no subtleties through their studies with him and so asked their guru about the matter. Their guru, one who was named Sañjaya, replied to them, saying, "I have sought the Path for many years now and still do not know whether or not I have reached the fruition of the Path. Could it be that I am not the man for it and thus, even [in spite of my efforts], I cannot be successful in this?"

Later, their guru was stricken ill. Śāriputra stood at the head of his bed while Maudgalyāyana stood at the foot of his bed. Struggling for breath, [the guru's] life was about to draw to an end when he sighed with sadness and then laughed. The two men simultaneously

asked the meaning of the laugh, whereupon the guru replied to them, saying, "The common people of the world have no eyes. They have been laid waste by love. I can observe now that the King of Suvarṇabhūmi (lit. "Land of Gold") has died and that his wife has thrown herself on the funeral pyre, seeking thereby to be reborn together with him. But the actions and retributions of each of those two people are quite different and so their places of rebirth will be distantly separate."

The two men then recorded their guru's words wishing to look into whether they were false or true. Later on there arrived in Magadha a businessman from Suvarṇabhūmi. The two men inquired of him regarding that which they had recorded and, as it turned out, matters were in accord with the words of their guru. They then exclaimed disappointedly, "Could it be that we are not such as can succeed at this? Or could it be that our guru [deliberately] kept us in the dark?" The two men then vowed to each other that if either of them was first to gain the sweet-dew ambrosia, they must both finally share in its flavor.

At this time the Buddha had crossed over the Kāśyapa brothers and their thousand followers and had then proceeded next to travel throughout the neighboring states until he arrived at the City of the Kings' Abode (Rājagṛha) where he paused and remained at the Bamboo Grove. Meanwhile, our two brahmacārin masters had heard of the Buddha's coming forth into the world and so came together to the City of the Kings' Abode wishing to learn further news of him.

There was at that time a bhikshu named Aśvajit (one of the five bhikshus) who had donned his robes, had taken up his bowl, and had entered into the city for the purpose of obtaining alms. Śāriputra observed his deportment and attire, his extraordinary countenance, and the fact that all of his senses were still and quiet. Consequently he went up to him and inquired, "Whose disciple are you? Who is your guru?"

[The monk] replied, "He is the prince of the Śākyan clan who grew weary of the sufferings of old age, sickness, and death, and who consequently left behind the home life, studied the Path, and realized *anuttarasamyakṣambodhi*. It is he who is my guru."

Śāriputra asked, "That which your guru teaches and passes on to you—pray, explain it for me."

[The monk] immediately replied in a verse, saying,

Because in years I am so young,
 And because my time in study has also been preliminary and shallow,
 How could I proclaim what is ultimately true,
 And broadly speak of the Thus Come One's meaning?

Śāriputra said, "Briefly speak of its essentials." The bhikshu Aśvajit then spoke this verse, saying:

All dharmas are produced of causes and conditions.
 These dharmas—he explains their causes and conditions.
 These dharmas come to an end through causes and conditions.
 The Great Guru explains it in just this way.

When Śāriputra heard this verse, he immediately realized the initial stage of the Path. He returned to report of his experience to Maudgalyāyana. Maudgalyāyana could see that [Śāriputra's] countenance was harmonious and blissful and so, in welcoming him, asked him, "Have you gotten the flavor of the sweet-dew ambrosia? Explain it for me!"

Śāriputra then uttered for him the verse he had heard. Maudgalyāyana said, "Speak it for me again." He immediately spoke it for him again whereupon [Maudgalyāyana], too, realized the initial stage of the Path.

Thereupon those two masters went together to where the Buddha dwelt, each bringing along his following of two hundred and fifty disciples. When the Buddha observed from a distance that these two men were coming together with their disciples, he asked the Bhikshus [assembled at his side], "Do you all see or do you not those two men at the head of all those brahmacārins?"

The Bhikshus replied, "Yes, we have observed them."

The Buddha said, "Of these two men, one is the foremost among my disciples in wisdom and the other is foremost in the development of spiritual powers."

That great group of disciples came and slowly approached the Buddha. Having arrived, they made obeisance, stood off to one side, and then together asked the Buddha, saying, "Bhagavān, we all desire to leave the home life and take up the precepts under the auspices of the Buddha's Dharma."

The Buddha said, "Come well, O Bhikshus." Immediately their hair and beards spontaneously fell away, they became complete with robe and bowl, and they succeeded in taking on the moral precepts. After only a half month, when the Buddha was speaking Dharma for the sake of the brahmacārin named "Long Nails" (Dīrghanakha), Śāriputra realized the path of arhatship.

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments:

As for his having realized the Path after only a half month, such a person was surely bound to become a master who would follow along after the Buddha in turning the wheel of Dharma. It should surely have been that, in the station of one on the path of learning, he had already naturally entered into all dharmas and had already gained a complete awareness with respect to many different varieties of them. Thus it was that, on account of this, only a half month [after becoming a monk], he succeeded in bringing the path of arhatship to realization. The meritorious qualities of these sorts which he possessed were extremely numerous. It was on account of this that, although Śāriputra was an arhat, the Buddha nonetheless chose to address Śāriputra as he proceeded with the explanation of the extremely profound Dharma of the *prajñāpāramitā*.