

Part Seven:
NĀGĀRJUNA'S STORIES ON VARIOUS TOPICS

Subhūti and Floral Appearance Bhikshuni

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Why Subhūti Speaks Here

Question: Why then is it that it was only at the beginning and only briefly that [the Perfection of Wisdom] was addressed to Śāriputra whereas, later on, it was addressed in great measure to Subhūti? In a case where one takes being foremost in wisdom as the basis [as with Śāriputra], it should be addressed in great measure to him instead. What's more, why was it even addressed to Subhūti at all?

Response: Śāriputra was foremost in wisdom among the Buddha's disciples. Subhūti was foremost among the disciples in cultivation of the non-disputation samādhi. It is the characteristic of the non-disputation samādhi that one may constantly contemplate beings while not allowing one's mind to become agitated and while also primarily practicing compassion for them. The great bodhisattvas employ vast and magnanimous vows by which they cross over beings. In terms of compassion, he was much the same. It was on account of this that [the Buddha] ordered him to speak [the Perfection of Wisdom].

Story: Subhūti and Floral Appearance Bhikshuni

Additionally, this Subhūti took pleasure in the practice of the emptiness samādhi. For instance, at the conclusion of the period of the Summer retreat when the Buddha had been dwelling in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven and was about to return to Jambudvīpa, Subhūti was dwelling in a rock cave and thought to himself, "The Buddha is descending from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. Should I go to where the Buddha is or should I not go to where the Buddha is?" He thought further, "The Buddha always says that, if one employs the wisdom eye to contemplate the Dharma body of the Buddha, then that is the most supreme manner in which to see the Buddha."

At this time, because the Buddha was descending from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the four-fold community assembled. The gods were able to view people and people were also able to see the gods. Among the seats there were places for the Buddha as well as for a wheel-turning sage king and a great assembly of gods. The adornments of that assembly place were such as had never been before.

Subhūti thought to himself, "Although this great assembly is extraordinary and special, this situation will not abide for long.

Any dharma which is subject to deterioration is bound to revert to impermanence. It is on account of this that it is an elementary tenet of the contemplation of impermanence that all dharmas are empty and devoid of any substantiality." As he carried on this contemplation, he suddenly gained realization of the Path.

Everyone in the assembly sought at that time to be the first to see the Buddha, show reverence, and present offerings to him. There was a bhikshuni named "Floral Appearance" (Utpalavarṇā) who wished to escape the disadvantage of being seen then as just another woman. Thus she then transformed herself into the appearance of a wheel-turning sage king bringing the seven precious things and a thousand sons. When the members of the assembly saw this, they all retreated from their seats by getting up and standing aside. When the transformationally-created king reached the place where the Buddha was, it reverted to the original person of the bhikshuni who was then able to be first to pay respects to the Buddha.

The Buddha then said to the bhikshuni, "It is not the case that you were the first to pay your respects. Subhūti was the first to pay his respects to me. How was this so? Subhūti contemplated and realized that all dharmas are empty. This constitutes seeing the Dharma body of the Buddha. He was by this able to make a true offering, an offering which is the most supreme among offerings. It is not the case that the making of offerings is achieved by reverence before that body which is subject to birth."

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comment

It is for this reason that it is said that Subhūti constantly cultivated the samādhi of emptiness. His practice corresponded to the emptiness attribute of the *prajñāpāramitā*. It was for this reason that the Buddha ordered him to speak forth the *prajñāpāramitā*.

The Story Behind Śāriputra's Name

Question: Why was he named “Śāriputra”? Was it a name made up by his parents or was it instead a name based upon his practice of virtue?

Response: It is a name created by his parents. The most blissful location in Jambudvīpa was the state of Magadha wherein there was a great city by the name of “Kings’ Abode”. The king at that time was Bimbāsāra. There was a great dialectician by the name of Māṭhara. Because he was very capable in debate, the King had bestowed upon him the income from taxes on a village not far from the city. This Māṭhara subsequently came to settle into a home where he took a wife and gave birth to a daughter whose eyes resembled those of the *śāri* bird and who was then named “Śāri.” Next, he produced a son whose knee bones were coarse and large who was named Kauṣṭhila. (Chinese textual note: “In Chinese, “Kauṣṭhila” means “big knees.”) Because this brahman had taken up the life of a householder busy with the raising of a son and daughter, his expertise deteriorated and was lost as regards those classics and other texts he had studied earlier. What’s more, he did not apply himself to further studies.

At this time there was a great brahman dialectician from south India known as Tiṣya. He had entirely penetrated and become acutely familiar with all of the eighteen great classics. This man entered into the city of Kings’ Abode wearing a burning flame atop his head and girding his belly with brass plate mail. Someone asked him why he dressed this way to which he then replied, “The classics and other texts which I have studied are extremely many. I fear that my belly might burst and tear open. That’s why I gird myself with mail.”

He was also asked, “Why do you wear a burning flame atop your head?”

He replied, “It’s on account of the great darkness.”

A member of the crowd asked, “The sun has arisen and now illuminates clearly. Why do you speak of ‘darkness’?”

He replied, “There are two kinds of darkness. The first is when the light of the sun does not shine. The second is when the darkness of stupidity brings about obscurity. Now, even though we do enjoy the brightness of the sun, still, stupidity continues to engender darkness.”

A member of the crowd said, “It’s just that you have not yet met the brahman Māṭhara. If you were to encounter him, your belly

would shrink and your brightness would become dim.”

This brahman then went directly to the side of the drum and proceeded to beat upon the debating drum. When the King heard this, he asked, “Who is that?”

The assembly of officials replied, “There is a great dialectician from South India, a brahman named Tiṣya. It is because he seeks to issue a debate challenge that he has begun beating on the debate drum.”

The King was delighted and so immediately called forth an assembly whereupon he announced to them, “As there is one who is capable of presenting a challenge, let there now be a debate with him.”

When Māthara heard of this, he became seized by self-doubt, thinking, “Because I have lost all I knew and have not taken up further studies, I do not know whether or not I will now be able succeed in debate.” But he forced himself to come forth. After he set forth, he observed two bulls in the street who proceeded to gore one another with their horns. He thought to himself, “This bull represents me. That other bull represents him. I can take this as an omen by which to know who will be victorious.” The bull he had seen as representing himself was no match for the other and so he became greatly distressed and worried. He then thought to himself, “Given a sign such as this, it must be that I shall be no match for him.”

When he was about to enter the assembly, he saw a mother carrying a vase of water who fell down and broke the vase directly in front of him. He thought to himself again, “This, too, is inauspicious.” Consequently he felt extremely unhappy. When he had entered into the assembly he caught sight of that dialectician and saw that his countenance and look of confidence were replete with superior signs. As a result, he knew that he was no match for that man. After all this things had not gone his way, he went ahead and joined in the debate. After he became involved in the debate, he stumbled into a fallacious position [and so lost the debate].

The King was greatly delighted, exclaiming, “Such a greatly wise and intelligent man has come to my kingdom. In return, I want to grant him the tribute from an entire village.”

The assembly of officials discussed it and said, “A single intelligent man comes and then you make a grant to him of the proceeds from an entire village while you fail to offer any reward to meritorious officials. If you only esteem those who debate, we fear that this

is not the way to establish the state and succeed in preserving the [royal] house. The dialectician Māṭhara has now proved himself to be no match. It should be that his grant is taken away and awarded to the victor. If there comes to be yet another victor later, then it should be given to him in turn."

The King accepted their advice and so took [that grant] and gave it to the man who came later. Māṭhara then said to Tiṣya, "You are an intelligent man. I will give you my daughter as a wife. My son will come along with her. I want now to travel afar to another country so as to continue in the pursuit of my original aspirations."

Tiṣya took [Māṭhara's] daughter as a wife. When his wife became pregnant, she had a dream in which she saw a man whose body was girded in armor and who held a *vajra* in his hand. He smashed all of the mountains until he came to stand next to a huge mountain. When she woke up she told her husband, "I had a dream like this."

Tiṣya replied, "You will give birth to a male child who will smash all of the dialecticians in defeat. There will be only one man over which he will be unable to be victorious. He will become a disciple to him."

When Śāri was pregnant, on account of her son, she, too, became especially intelligent and well able to carry on in debate. Every time her younger brother Kauṣṭhila debated with her, he was overcome and was no match for her. He realized then that the son with whom she was pregnant must certainly be greatly wise and so thought that, if even before birth he was like this, how much the more so will it be the case once he is born.

Consequently, he immediately left behind his home and pursued his studies in South India where, [due to the intensity of his studying], he never even paused to trim his nails. He studied the eighteen types of classics as well as the related texts, doing so to the point where he developed a penetrating and sharp understanding of them all. It was on account of this that he came to be known by the people of the time as "The Long-nailed Brahmācārin."

Seven days after his sister gave birth, she swaddled the child in white cloth and showed it to the father. The father thought, "As I am named 'Tiṣya,' name him after me as 'Upatiṣya.'" (Chinese textual note: "In Chinese, *upa*" means "following after" and "Tiṣya" is the name of a star.) This was the name created by the parents. Because he was born to Śāri, everybody came to refer to him as "Śāriputra". (Chinese textual note: In Chinese, *putra*" means "son.")

Moreover, in life after life Śāriputra had vowed to become the disciple foremost in wisdom to the Buddha Shakyamuni and to then be known as “Śāriputra.” In this sense, “Śāriputra” is a name finding its origin in past life vows. It was for [all of] these reasons that he was named “Śāriputra”.

Question: If it is as you have said, why was he not then known as “Upatisya,” but was rather referred to simply as “Śāriputra”?

Response: The people of the time prized and esteemed his mother. She was foremost in intelligence among all the women. It is for this reason that he was known as “Śāriputra.”

Śāriputra, the Buddha, and the Pigeon

Then again, it was not the case that Śāriputra himself was possessed of all-knowledge. When compared with the wisdom of the Buddha, his (own level of wisdom) was comparable to that of an infant. This is as described in the *Avadāna Sutra*:

The Buddha was dwelling in the Jeta Grove. When it came time for the meal, he proceeded to walk forth [on the alms round]. Śāriputra followed along behind the Buddha. At this time there was a hawk pursuing a pigeon. The pigeon flew towards the Buddha and stood alongside the Buddha. As the Buddha was walking past him, his shadow fell upon and covered the pigeon. The pigeon then became calm, its frightfulness immediately disappeared, and it ceased its squawking [in terror].

After this, Śāriputra came along, whereupon his shadow then fell upon and covered the pigeon. The pigeon then proceeded to squawk and tremble just the same as before.

Śāriputra then addressed the Buddha, saying, “The Buddha and I are both free of the three poisons. Why then is it that, when the shadow of the Buddha covered the pigeon, the pigeon became quiet and ceased to be filled with terror, whereas when my shadow fell upon the pigeon, he then began to squawk and tremble again, just as before?”

The Buddha replied, “In your case, the residual propensities associated with the three poisons have not all been brought to an end. It is for this reason that, when your shadow came to cover [the pigeon], its fearfulness would not go away.

“Now, when you contemplate the past-life causes and conditions associated with this pigeon, for how many lifetimes do you observe that it has been incarnating as a pigeon?”

Śāriputra immediately entered the “past-life-recall” samādhi, observed that this pigeon had come forth from a previous lifetime as a pigeon and, in this same manner, noted that for one, two, and three lifetimes, and so forth until we come to eighty thousand great kalpas, it had always incarnated in the body of a pigeon. Beyond this span of time, he was unable to see any farther back into the past.

Śāriputra arose from his samādhi and addressed the Buddha, saying, “This pigeon has always incarnated as a pigeon throughout the last eighty thousand kalpas. Beyond this, I am unable to know about any lifetimes previous to these.”

The Buddha said, “Well, if you’re unable to know completely the circumstances of the past, try contemplating this pigeon’s future lifetimes, observing how long it will be before it succeeds in gaining liberation.

Śāriputra immediately entered the “seeking-knowledge-[of-the-future]” samādhi. He contemplated and observed that, even after one, two, three lifetimes, and so forth until we come to eighty-thousand kalpas of lifetimes, this pigeon would still not have become liberated from being reincarnated in the body of a pigeon. In this case, too, he was unable to see beyond this span of time.

He arose from samādhi and addressed the Buddha, saying, “I observed that this pigeon would still be unable to avoid incarnation in the body of a pigeon even after one lifetime, two lifetimes, and so forth until we come to eighty-thousand kalpas of lifetimes. I am unable to have knowledge of the circumstances beyond this period of time. I am unable to have knowledge extending to the very limits of past and future time. Thus I could not search out how long it will be before this pigeon succeeds in gaining liberation.

The Buddha then told Śāriputra, “The circumstances associated with this pigeon extend beyond the limits of what may be known by the Hearer disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas. For an additional Ganges sands’ number of great kalpas, it will continue to always be reborn in the body of a pigeon. Then, after its karmic punishments have come to an end, it will finally succeed in escaping from this circumstance. After it has circulated about in the five destinies, it will then succeed in becoming a human. Then, after five hundred such lifetimes, it will succeed in developing sharp faculties.

“At that time there will be a buddha who will cross over to liberation countless *asaṃkhyeyas* of beings and will then enter the nirvāṇa without residue (*nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*). When the Dharma which he leaves behind is still abiding in the world, this person will become a five-precept *upāsaka* who hears a bhikshu praising the meritorious qualities of the Buddhas. It will be at that very time that he will generate for the very first time the aspiration to become a buddha. Then, for a period of three *asaṃkhyeya* kalpas, he will cultivate the six *pāramitās*, perfect [the practices associated with] the ten grounds, and will then succeed in becoming a buddha. After he crosses countless beings over to liberation, he himself will then enter the nirvāṇa without residue.”

Śāriputra then repented before the Buddha, saying, “I am unable

to know even the origins and destiny of a single pigeon. How much the less am I able to fathom all dharmas. If I was able to gain knowledge comparable to such wisdom as this which the Buddha possesses, then, as the price of gaining the Buddha's wisdom, I would not find it an inordinate hardship even to have to enter the hells and undergo countless kalpas of suffering."

A Layman Witnesses Buddha's Concentration

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Buddha's Accomplishment in Meditation

Furthermore, the Buddha's accumulation of the meditative absorptions is entirely perfect.

Question: As for [the Buddha's] upholding of precepts, one is able to know of this on account of the purity of his physical and verbal karma. As for his wisdom, one is able to know of it on account of his making distinctions in his explanations of Dharma and through his ability to dispel the doubts of beings. But, as for his meditative absorptions, one is not even able to know about this in the case of other persons, how much the less would one be able to know about it in the case of the Buddha?

Response: Because his great wisdom is perfect, one should know that his dhyāna absorptions must be entirely perfect. This is analogous to when one sees a lotus blossom which is huge: One necessarily knows that the pool [in which it grew] is both deep and large. It is also just as when there is a lamp whose brightness is great. One necessarily knows that it must also contain a lot of *perilla* oil. Also, because the power of the Buddha's superknowledges and spiritual transformations is incalculable and incomparable, one knows that the power of his dhyāna absorptions is also entirely perfect. This is also just as when one sees a result which is grand, one therefore knows that the cause must be great as well.

Story: A Layman Witnesses Buddha's Concentration

Furthermore, there are times when the Buddha himself has explained this matter for the sake of others, saying, "The qualities of my dhyāna absorptions are extremely profound." This is just as set forth in the scriptures where it is stated that the Buddha was once in the country of Ādumā, sitting beneath a tree in the forest, having entered into dhyāna absorption. At this very time there was a huge rainstorm attended by crashing thunder and lightning bolts. There happened to be a team of four bull oxen and two plowmen who all died from fright on hearing the sound, after which, in a just a brief moment, the sky became clear again. The Buddha then arose and began to walk about.

There was then a layman who, having bowed reverently at the feet of the Buddha, followed on along behind the Buddha and addressed the Buddha, saying, "Bhagavān, there was just now such a crashing of thunder and flashing of lightning bolts that a team of

four bull oxen and two plowmen all died from terror on hearing the sound. Did the Bhagavān hear it or not?"

The Buddha said, "I did not even hear it."

The layman said, "Was the Buddha sleeping during this time?"

The Buddha said, "No, I was not sleeping."

[The layman] asked, "Well, was it then a case of his having entered into the 'no-thought' absorption?"

The Buddha said, "No. I was still possessed of thought. It was just that I had entered into absorption, that's all."

The layman said, "This is something which has never been before."

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

The greatness of a Buddha's dhyāna absorption is extremely profound. He may be possessed of thought and abiding in dhyāna absorption, whereupon there occurs such a great sound as this which, even while entirely awake, he nonetheless does not hear at all.

Ānanda Witnesses Buddha's Sunrise Samādhi

Nāgārjuna's Preamble

As noted in another scripture, the Buddha himself told the Bhikshus, "The meditative absorptions which the Buddha enters into and comes out of are such as Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana have not even heard the names." So how much the less would they be able to know what they are all about. There are, for example, the Samādhi King Samādhi, the Lion's Sport Samādhi, and so forth. When the Buddha enters into them, he is able to cause the worlds of the ten directions to shake and move about in six ways. He emits a great brilliant light which transforms into an incalculable number of Buddhas which universally fill up the ten directions.

Story: Ānanda Witnesses Buddha's Sunrise Samādhi

As a case in point, Ānanda once thought to himself, "In the past, at the time of Burning Lamp Buddha, the world was a fine one, the lifespan of the people was long, and they were easy to teach and bring across to liberation. Now, in the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, the world is an evil one, the lifespan of the people is short, and they are difficult to teach. Will the Buddha nonetheless go ahead and enter nirvāṇa even though the Buddha's work will not have been completed?"

It was early in the morning when [Ānanda] expressed this concern to the Buddha. The sun had already risen. At that very time the Buddha then entered into the sunrise samādhi. Just as when the sun rises, its light illuminates all of Jambudvīpa, so, too, it was with the body of the Buddha. His hair pores all sent forth light which universally illuminated worlds throughout the ten directions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.

Each and every one of the rays of light put forth a seven-jeweled thousand-petalled lotus blossom. Atop each and every one of the blossoms, there was a buddha seated there. Each and every one of those buddhas sent forth an incalculable number of light beams. From within each and every one of those rays of light there was put forth a seven-jeweled, thousand-petalled lotus blossom. Atop each and every one of those blossoms there was a seated buddha.

All of these buddhas universally filled up worlds throughout the ten directions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges and each of them carried forth with the teaching and transforming of beings. In some cases they spoke Dharma. In some cases they remained silent.

In some cases they were walking along. In some cases they engaged in displays of the superknowledges wherein they transformed their bodies and poured forth from them either water or fire. In manners such as these they employed all sorts of skillful means whereby they crossed over to liberation beings throughout the ten directions who were immersed in the five destinies of rebirth.

On account of receiving assistance from the awesome spiritual power of the Buddha, Ānanda was able for a time to completely observe these phenomena. The Buddha then withdrew his manifestation of the fulfillment of spiritual power and then arose from samādhi, asking of Ānanda whether or not he had seen these phenomena and whether or not he had heard these phenomena.

Ānanda replied, "Having received the assistance of the Buddha's awesome spiritual power, I have indeed seen and I have indeed heard."

The Buddha asked, "Given that the Buddha possesses powers such as these, is he able to bring the Buddha's work to ultimate completion or is he not?"

Ānanda replied, "Bhagavān, even in a case where beings filled up worlds throughout the ten directions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, if the Buddha were to employ powers such as these for just a single day of his life, he would still certainly be able to completely implement the work of the Buddha."

Ānanda exclaimed, "This is a matter such as I have never experienced before. Bhagavān, the Dharma of the Buddhas is immeasurable, inconceivable and ineffable."

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comment

From this we can know that the Buddha has completely perfected the dhyāna absorptions.

The Novices' Lesson to a Benefactor

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Recollection of the Sangha

Furthermore, the practitioner should engage in recollection of the Sangha, [thinking], "The members of the Sangha are my true companions on the road to nirvāṇa. We all possess identical standards of moral virtue and we all possess identical views [of what constitutes right Dharma]. Thus I should be delighted and single-mindedly engage in respectful behavior, acquiescence, and non-contrariness [in relations with them]. My former companions include wives, sons, servants, citizenry, and other such persons who engage in much unwholesomeness of many varieties. These people were companions on the road to the three wretched destinies. Now, I have gained Āryas as companions with whom I may progress peacefully and securely [along the path] to nirvāṇa."

"The Buddha is comparable to the king of physicians. The Dharma is like excellent medicine. The members of the Sangha are like those who look after the sick. I should uphold the precepts purely, maintaining right mindfulness, and, in accord with manner in which the Buddha set explained the medicine of Dharma, I should comply and follow along with that.

"The Sangha are one of the causes and conditions conducing to my cutting off of the disease of the fetters. They are those so-called "nurses" of the sick. Therefore, I should engage in recollection of the Sangha."

Story: The Novices' Lesson to a Benefactor

Moreover, the Sangha is possessed of countless perfections in the sphere of the [three trainings]: moral-virtue precepts, the dhyāna absorptions, and wisdom. The depth of its meritorious qualities is unfathomable. This is illustrated by the case of a wealthy and noble elder who had faith in and took pleasure in the Sangha. He addressed the manager of Sangha affairs, saying, "I wish to issue invitations according to their proper order to the Sangha, so that they might come to my household for meals." Day after day, he invited them in proper order until the sequence extended on down to the Śrāmaṇeras (the novices). It was at that point that the manager of Sangha affairs did not permit the Śrāmaṇeras to accept the invitation.

The Śrāmaṇeras then inquired, "What is the reasoning behind not allowing the Śrāmaṇeras to go as well?"

He replied, “It is because the Dānapati (the benefactor) doesn’t enjoy inviting those who are still so young.” He then uttered a verse, saying:

Those whose beard and hair are white like snow—
 Those whose teeth are gone and whose skin is wrinkled—
 Those with hunch-backed gait and emaciated form—
 He enjoys inviting the ones who are of just this sort.

These Śrāmaṇeras happened to all be great arhats. Thus, just as if one had smacked a tiger on the head, they immediately got up from their seats and uttered a verse, saying:

This *dānapati* is a man who has no wisdom.
 He looks at forms but does not fix on virtues.
 He rejects these signs indicating youthful years,
 And seizes only on the withered and dark complexions of the old.

As for revering the appearance of those of a venerable old age, it is just as explained by the Buddha in a verse:

As for the so-called marks of the venerable elder,
 It’s not necessarily through aging that one is deemed an “elder.”
 The form may be emaciated, the beard and hair white,
 Whilst growing old has been in vain and within there’s no virtue.

If able to relinquish effects of karmic offense and blessings—
 If one is vigorous in the practice of the brahman conduct—
 When one thus manages to transcend all dharmas—
 This is what qualifies one as a venerable elder.

The Śrāmaṇeras then thought once again, “We shouldn’t just sit by and observe this person of *dānapati* status indulging in calculations regarding the relative goodness of different members of the Sangha. They then uttered another verse:

Within the realm of praise and castigation,
 Although our minds behold them all as one,
 This person destroys the Dharma of the Buddha,
 Hence we shouldn’t fail to provide him some instruction.

We should swiftly go forth to his household,
 And employ the Dharma to serve him with a lecture.
 If we refrain from bringing him across to liberation,
 Then this would amount to abandonment of beings.

The Śrāmaṇeras immediately transformed their bodies so that they all assumed the appearance of old age. Their beards and hair were white like snow. Their eyebrows grew long and draped down

over their eyes. Their skin became so creased as to appear like waves. Their spines became bent like bows. Their two hands grasped canes as they walked. And so, in proper order, they accepted the invitation. The entire body of each of them trembled and quavered so much so that, whether walking or standing, they remained unstable. They were like the white willow tree which, under the influence of the wind, moves and shakes.

When the Dānapati saw this group, he was delighted and welcomed them to come in and sit down. After they had sat down for only a moment, they instantly reverted in appearance to their youthful forms. The Dānapati was startled and alarmed and so said:

“For a venerable old appearance like this
To change back and become the body of a youth—
It’s as if you’ve drunk the elixir which turns back the years.
Pray, what is the source of this matter being thus?”

The Śrāmaṇeras said, “Don’t be overcome by doubts or fear. It is not the case that we are non-humans. You have aspired to engage in calculations regarding the quality of the Sangha. This is an endeavor which is bound to be extremely injurious. Because we felt pity for you, we manifest transformations of this sort. You should develop a profound understanding about this: The assembly of Āryas is not such as can be fathomed. This is as described herein:

It’s comparable to employing the beak of a mosquito,
Assuming that one might still thus plumb the ocean’s depths.
Among all of the gods and all of the humans,
There are none who can fathom those in the Sangha.

The Sangha takes meritorious qualities as noble,
And even then, they still make no distinctions.
And yet you resort to a person’s age in years
In order to judge all who possess great virtue.

Greatness or pettiness are a function of one’s wisdom.
They are not based on being either elderly or youthful.
The wise ones earnestly bring forth their vigor
And, although still young, are nonetheless elders.

Those who are lazy are lacking in wisdom.
Although in years aged, still, they are nonetheless young.

“That you now engage in judging the qualities of the Sangha is a grave error. It is as if one wished to use a single finger to plumb the very bottom of the great sea. Such an endeavor is laughed at by

the wise.

“Have you not heard the Buddha declare that there are four situations where although something is small, still, one cannot look on it lightly? Although a prince may be small, he will become the king of the country. This is one who cannot be slighted. A baby snake, although small, possesses poison which can kill a man and hence it, too, cannot be looked on lightly. A small fire, although still just faint, is nonetheless able to burn up the mountains and wilderness. It too cannot be looked upon lightly. A śrāmaṇera, although but small, may have obtained the superknowledges of the Ārya and thus he is the one who one most cannot slight.

“Furthermore, there are four kinds of people who are comparable to the *āmra* (mango) fruit: Those who are unripe and yet appear to be ripe; those who are ripe and yet appear to be unripe; those who are unripe and so do appear to be unripe; and those which are ripe and so do appear to be ripe.

“The disciples of the Buddha are just like this. There are those who have perfected the meritorious qualities of an ārya, and yet, as regards their deportment and speech, they do not seem to be good people. There are those who, by their deportment and speech, appear to be good persons, and yet they have not perfected the meritorious qualities of an ārya. There are those who, by their deportment and speech do not appear to be good persons, and who have not in fact perfected the meritorious qualities of an ārya. And then there are those who possess deportment and speech which appear like those of the good person and they have indeed perfected the meritorious qualities of an ārya.

“Why is it that you have not remained mindful of these words and so have desired to make judgments regarding the qualities of the Sangha? If it was your desire to destroy the Sangha, this then is actually just self-destruction. You have committed a grave error.

Those things which have already transpired cannot be pursued. However, in the future, if you bring forth a wholesome mind, you will be able to get rid of your doubts and regrets. You should listen to what we explain:

The assembly of the Āryas cannot be fathomed.
 It would be difficult to judge on the basis of deportment.
 One can't assess either by one's family or name.
 Nor can one know on account of great learning.
 One also can't know through the quality of awesomeness,
 Nor can one deduce through one's elderly age.

One cannot know either from a demeanor that is solemn.
And again, one cannot know through one's eloquent words.

The waters of the great sea of the assembly of Āryas
On account of their meritorious qualities, is extremely deep.

The Buddha praised this Sangha on one hundred bases.
A gift to them, though little, brings a reward which is much.
This third of the Jewels is famous even in distant quarters.
Thus for such reasons, one should make offerings to the Sangha.

One should not make discriminations based on either age or youth,
By much knowledge, scant learning, brilliance, or dullness.
Just as in viewing the forest, one does not distinguish
Which [tree] is *campaka*, which *eraṇḍa*, and which *śāla*.

If you wish to be mindful of Sangha, accord then with this:
One shouldn't so foolishly make discriminations regarding āryas.

When Mahākāśyapa left off the home life,
His monk's robe was worth a hundred thousand in gold.
He wished to take on the humble robes of an almsman,
And sought for more coarse ones but couldn't obtain them.

In the Sangha's assembly of Āryas, it is also like this:
One may seek for the least among the fields of merit.
Still, he rewards a donor a hundred thousand fold.
One might search for one who is inferior, but one cannot be found.

In the waters of the great sea of the assembly of the Sangha,
The formulation of precepts is what forms the line of its shore.
If there be one who has broken the precepts,
He finally isn't counted as being in the Sangha.

It's just as it is with the great ocean's waters,
Which does not abide with corpses [and so casts them ashore]."

The Dānapati listened to this matter. When he had observed the effect of these spiritual powers, he was so shocked that the hairs of his body stood on end. He pressed his palms together and addressed the Śrāmaṇeras, saying, "Āryas, I now repent. I am but a common person whose mind is constantly embracing offenses. Still, I have a minor doubt which I now wish to ask about." He then uttered a verse:

Those of great virtue have passed beyond doubt.
And now I myself have here managed to meet them.
But if once again I don't set forth a question,
This would be foolishness in the midst of foolishness."

The Śrāmaṇeras responded, “Go ahead and inquire according to your wishes and we shall reply as befits the question.

The Dānapati asked, “Which situation is more supreme as regards merit: a pure faith in the Buddha Jewel or a pure faith in the Sangha Jewel?”

They replied, saying, “We have never perceived any relatively greater or lesser stature between the Sangha Jewel and the Buddha Jewel. Why is this?”

Story within the Story: Buddha Refuses Bhāradvāja’s Offering

“Once when the Buddha was making his alms rounds in Śrāvastī, he went repeatedly for alms to the household of a brahman named Bhāradvāja. This led the brahman to think, ‘Why is it that this *śramaṇa* comes here time after time? It’s as if I owe him some debt.’”

“At that point the Buddha uttered a verse:

‘The seasonal rains fall time after time.

The five sorts of grain ripen time after time.

Time after time, one may cultivate meritorious karma.

Time after time, one receives the fruits in reward.

Time after time, one takes on the dharma of rebirth.

Thus, time after time, one’s then bound to die.

The Dharma of the Ārya is perfected time after time.

Who then, time after time, goes through birth and then death?’

“After that brahman had listened to this verse, he had this thought, ‘The Buddha is a great Ārya who knows my mind utterly.’ He then felt ashamed, took the bowl, entered his house, and filled it with fine cuisine which he then offered up to the Buddha. The Buddha refused to accept it and then said, ‘Because I gained this food through the utterance of a verse, I cannot eat it.’

“The Brahman said, ‘Then to whom should I present this food?’

“The Buddha replied, ‘I do not perceive that there is anyone, whether god or man, who can digest this food. You should take this food to a place of little vegetation or immerse it in water free of insects.’”

“Then, following the Buddha’s instructions, he took the food and placed it in water free of insects, whereupon the water simultaneously boiled and poured forth smoke and fire. It was just as if he had thrown in intensely hot metal. When the brahman had observed this he was alarmed and frightened, exclaiming, ‘This is unprecedented that even his food possesses such spiritual powers

as this.' He then returned to where the Buddha was, bowed down his head in reverence at the feet of the Buddha, repented, begged to leave the home life, and took on the moral precepts. The Buddha then said, 'Come forth well.' [Bhāradvāja's] beard and hair immediately fell away, whereupon he became a *śramaṇa*. He gradually cut off the fetters and succeeded in gaining the way of the arhat."

The Main Story Continues

"Additionally, there was the case wherein Mahāgautamī made an offering to the Buddha of precious gold-colored upper and lower robes. The Buddha knew that the assembled members of the Sangha were able to accept and use them. So he told Gautamī to give these upper and lower robes to the assembled members of the Sangha. One can know from this that there is no issue of greater or lesser merit between the Buddha Jewel and the Sangha Jewel."

The Dānapati then asked, "If it is the case that the Sangha is able to digest and is able to accept something given to the Buddha as a gift, why didn't the Buddha instruct that the monks be allowed to eat the food offered by the brahman Bhāradvāja?"

The Śrāmaṇeras replied, "This was done for the sake of displaying the great power of the Sangha. If he had not observed that such food placed in water possessed such great spiritual potency, he would have had no way of knowing that the power of the Sangha is so great. Because, [in the case of Mahāgautamī's offering], the Sangha was then deemed fit to accept something given to the Buddha, we know that the power of the Sangha is great.

"This is analogous to the process used by a master of herbal potions in his testing of toxic herbal potions. If he were to first give it to a chicken, causing the chicken to immediately die, and he were then to drink the potion himself, one would then know that the herb master possessed an awesome power which is great indeed. Therefore the Dānapati should realize:

If a person regards the Buddha with fondness and respect,
He should also regard the Sangha with fondness and respect.
One should not engage in making such distinctions,
For the both of them qualify as 'jewels.'"

At that time when the Dānapati had listened to this matter, he was delighted and said, "I, so-and-so, from this very day forward, whenever I might go among the ranks of the Sangha, whether they be young or old, I shall single-mindedly treat them with faith and

respect, and shall not dare to make any discriminations regarding them.”

The Śrāmaṇeras said, “If your mind possesses a faithful respect in the unsurpassed field of blessings, you shall succeed before long in gaining the Path. Why?:

Those of much learning, observers of precepts,
The wise, and adepts in dhyāna absorption,
They all enter into the ranks of the Sangha,
As the myriad streams all return to the sea.

Just as the manifold herbs and the shrubs,
Have come to abide in the snow-mantled mountains,
And just as the hundred-fold crops, shrubs, and trees
All do depend on and rest on the earth,

Just so, all the persons who are graced with much goodness
All come to abide in the ranks of the Sangha.

“Furthermore, haven’t you heard that, for the benefit of Dīrgha, a general among the ghosts and spirits, the Buddha praised three sons of good family, namely Aniruddha, Nandika, and Kimbila? The Buddha said, ‘If all of the world’s gods and humans became single-minded in their recollection of these three sons of good family, then, during the long night [of cyclic existence], they would gain incalculable benefits.’

“Because of this one ought to bring forth redoubled faith and reverence for the Sangha. These three men did not by themselves constitute the Sangha. Since the Buddha stated that recollection of just these three men brings such fruits as reward, how much the more so would such effects arise from single-minded pure recollection of the entire Sangha. Therefore, the Dānapati should invest the full extent of his powers in recollection of the name of the Sangha. This is as explained in a verse:

This community of all of the Āryas
Makes up a heroic and valiant army
Which crushes the demon king rebels.
These are companions on through to nirvāṇa.”

The Śrāmaṇeras provided to this *dānapati* all manner of descriptions of the meritorious qualities of the Sangha’s āryas. When the Dānapati had finished listening, his entire household, both young and old, all experienced the perception of the four truths and gained the path of a *śrota-āpanna*. For these reasons, one should single-mindedly engage in recollection of the Sangha.

Two Brothers Throw Away Their Gold

Nāgārjuna's Preamble

Furthermore, valuable material possessions constitute the causes and conditions for all sorts of afflictions and offense karma whereas observing the precepts, developing dhyāna absorption, and bringing forth wisdom and all of the many other sorts of good dharmas constitute the causal bases for the realization of nirvāṇa. Therefore one should constantly engage in the spontaneous riddance of valuable material possessions, how much the less should one fail to engage in giving even in the presence of an excellent field of blessings?

Story: Two Brothers Throw Away Their Gold

This is illustrated by the case of two brothers who, free of any escort, were traveling down the road, each carrying ten pounds of gold. The elder brother had this thought, "Why don't I just go ahead and kill my younger brother and take his gold? On such a deserted wilderness road as this, no one would know."

The younger brother also had thoughts wherein he wished to kill the elder brother and confiscate his gold. Thus, the elder and younger brothers were each entertaining evil thoughts, such that what they were saying and what they were envisioning were at odds.

The two brothers then suddenly and spontaneously came to their senses, felt remorse, and then thought, "We are inhuman! How are we any different from birds and beasts? We are brothers born of the same mother and yet now, just for the sake of a little gold, we begin to consider such evil thoughts."

The two brothers arrived at the edge of a deep river and then the elder brother threw his gold into the water, whereupon the younger brother exclaimed, "Good indeed! Good indeed!"

Next, the younger brother threw his gold into the water as well, whereupon the elder brother also exclaimed, "Good indeed! Good indeed!"

The two brothers then turned to each other and simultaneously asked, "Why did you say, 'Good indeed! Good indeed!'"

They each replied, "On account of this gold, I contemplated unwholesome thoughts desirous of inflicting harm. Now, because I've gotten rid of it, I say, 'Good indeed!'" They each described it in this way.

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Discussion

From this, one knows that material wealth is a cause and condition for evil thoughts. One should constantly engage in spontaneous relinquishing of it, how much the more so should one avoid failure to give when such giving will cause one to obtain great karmic blessings. This is as illustrated in a verse:

A Verse in Praise of Giving

To give is the treasury of the jewels of practice,
It's also a good and an intimate friend,
Which, beginning to end, brings forth benefit and increase.
There's nothing whatever that's able to destroy it.

This giving is an excellent and well-sealed covering.
It's able to block rains of hunger and thirst.
This giving is a solid and durable vessel.
It's able to ferry across an ocean of poverty.

The miserly nature marks inauspiciousness and failure.
Because of it, one becomes anxious and fearful.
It's cleansed with the waters which flow forth from giving.
This then creates benefits linked to one's blessings.

Being miserly and sparing brings neither clothing nor food.
To the end of this life, there's no delight and no bliss.
Though one speaks of possessing such valuable artifacts,
This isn't any different from the misery of poverty.

The household dwelt in by the miserly person
Is aptly compared to a burial tomb site.
For any who would seek out one just avoid it at great distance.
In the end, there is no one inclined to go hence.

So any who are miserly and greedy like this,
Are such as the wise are inclined to reject.
Though energies of this life haven't yet been exhausted,
Still, he's no different at all from a man who has died.

A miserly man has no blessings or wisdom,
And for the practice of giving feels no firm commitment.
When about to plunge down in the chasm of death,
He's maudlin and clinging, feeling bitter distress.

He grievously weeps that he goes on alone.
The fires of sorrow burn throughout his whole being.
But those who love giving are peaceful and happy
And when their lives end, then they feel no such anguish.

The man who strives on in the practice of giving
Finds fame and renown throughout all ten directions.
He's loved and respected by those who are wise
So that entering any gathering, he's free of dismay.

At the end of this life, he's reborn in the heavens,
And then, in the long term, nirvāṇa is certain.

In all sorts of ways such as this, one criticizes miserliness and praises giving. This is what is meant by recollection of the giving of material wealth.

The Buddha Questions Monks on Mindfulness of Death

Nāgārjuna's Preamble: Recollection of Death

As for "Recollection of Death," there are two sorts of death: death by natural causes and death due to other causal factors. The practitioner is constantly mindful of these two kinds of death and so bears in mind that this body, if not slain by another, will certainly die of its own accord. Among composite dharmas such as these, one shouldn't entertain a thought of belief that one might not die even for a moment as brief as a finger snap.

This body is constantly involved in dying and does not await the arrival of old age [for its occurrence]. One should not depend on this body, beset as it is by all manner of calamitous afflictions and by the fierce process of deterioration, hoping somehow that one might be able to remain secure and unaffected by death. Thoughts of this sort are entertained only by foolish people.

The four great elements within the body are engaged in mutual destruction. The situation is analogous to that of a person carrying around a basket of venomous snakes. How could a wise person see any peace or security in this? It is difficult to guarantee with any certainty that, breathing out, one will be able to breath in again, that breathing in, one will be able to breath out again, and, that falling asleep, one will be able to wake up again. Why is this? It is because this body, both inwardly and outwardly, is beset by many adversaries. This is as explained in a verse:

A Mindfulness of Death Verse

Perhaps one will die while still in the womb.
Perhaps one will die at the time of one's birth.
Perhaps one will die at the height of one's strength.
Perhaps one will die just as old age arrives.

This may also be compared to when a fruit ripens
And through many causes and conditions proceeds then to fall.

One might seek a means to leave this behind.
The hated thief, the evil of death
Such a thief is so hard to trust.
Only when abandoned will security be gained.

Even supposing one's a man of great wisdom,
With unsurpassed powers of awesome virtue,
Whose become free of the past and the future,
Still, in the present, none can escape it.

Nor may one cleverly and politely decline.
 There's no point in requesting to be set free.
 Nor is there some place from which to fend it off
 And thus thereby be able to avoid it.

Nor is it the case through observance of precepts
 Or by practice of vigor one then might be freed.
 The thief of death is devoid of pity.
 When it comes, there's no place to avoid it.

Therefore the practitioner, ensconced in an impermanent and fragile life span, should not trust in or hope for survival.

Story: The Buddha Questions Monks on Mindfulness of Death

This point is illustrated by an instance when the Buddha was explaining for the Bhikshus the meaning of the reflection on death. There was one bhikshu who arranged his robes to one side, [barring his right shoulder], and then addressed the Buddha, "I am able to cultivate this reflection on death."

The Buddha asked, "How, then, does one cultivate it?"

The Bhikshu replied, "I cherish no hope to live beyond another seven years."

The Buddha declared, "You are negligent in your practice of the reflection on death."

There was another bhikshu who said, "I cherish no hope of living beyond another seven months." There was yet another bhikshu who spoke of living only another seven days, and others who spoke of but six, five, four, three, two, and a single day.

The Buddha responded, "All of you are negligent in your cultivation of the reflection on death." Then there was one who spoke of the period from dawn to mealtime and another who spoke of the space of a meal. To both of these, the Buddha replied, "You, too, are negligent in your cultivation of the reflection on death."

Then one more bhikshu arranged his robes to bare the right shoulder and addressed the Buddha, "When I exhale, I cherish no hope of being able to inhale again. When inhaling, I cherish no hope of being able to exhale again."

The Buddha then replied, "This does constitute a genuine cultivation of the reflection on death which reveals no negligence. Bhikshus, all composite dharmas are newly produced and destroyed in each successive moment. The duration of their abiding is so extremely brief that they are like a magical conjuration deceiving those practitioners deficient in wisdom."

The Traveling Brahman's Quest for Pure Food

If one contemplates food in this manner [as prescribed by the correct contemplation on the nature of food], then one develops the reflection on its repulsiveness. Because of this revulsion with respect to food, one develops a disgust with all of the five objects of desire.

This is illustrated by the case of the Brahman who cultivated the dharma of maintaining purity. Because of a situation associated with his work, he traveled to a country noted for its lack of purity. He thought to himself, "How am I going to be able to avoid this defilement? It is solely through restricting myself to eating dry foods that I will be able to maintain purity."

Observing that there happened to be an elderly matron who was selling cakes with a white filling, he then told her, "I have encountered a situation requiring me to abide here for a hundred days. If you will continue to make these cakes and bring them to me, then I shall pay you a premium beyond their value." The elderly matron then made these cakes every day and delivered them to him. The Brahman became covetously attached to them. He would eat his fill and then abide in happiness.

When the elderly matron first made these cakes, they were completely white in their purity. Later on, however, they became colorless and lacking in flavor. He then asked the elderly matron, "Why have they now become like this?"

The matron replied, "It's because the open sore from the abscess has healed over."

The Brahman asked, "What do you mean by that?"

The matron explained, "The wife whom I serve in the great estate developed an abscess in the pelvic region which has been treated through the application of flour, ghee, and sweet grass. When the abscess came to a head, the pus began to flow out and was mixed in with ghee cakes. It's been like this day after day. I've been using this in making the cakes which I have presented to you. It's because of this that the cakes were so fine. But now, the lady's abscess has healed over. How could I succeed in finding any more?"

When the Brahman heard this, he beat his head with his two fists, hammered on his chest and began to groan and vomit, [exclaiming], "How could I have so violated this dharma of purity?! I'm doomed!"

He then forsook his responsibilities there and fled back to his home country.

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

The situation of the practitioner is just like this. He becomes attached to these beverages and foods, is delighted by them and takes pleasure in feasting upon them. He observes their fine appearance, subtle texture, magnificent fragrance, and delectability. He fails to contemplate their impurity. When later he undergoes a bitter retribution, what use will regret be then?

If one is able to contemplate that food is , from beginning to end, just like this, he will develop thoughts of aversion and disgust. On account of leaving behind the desire for food, all of the other four objects of desire will be relinquished. Then he will abandon all of the pleasures within the desire realm, will cut off these five types of desire and will also cut off the five inferior category fetters [comprised by desire, hatefulness, the view of the body as self, the seizing upon unprincipled prohibitions, and delusion-based doubtfulness]. On account of all sorts of causal factors such as these, one abhors karmic offenses and no longer courses in fond attachments. This is what is meant by the reflection on the repulsiveness of food.

The Buddha's Unceasing Zeal

As for [the Buddha's] "zeal is undiminished," it is because the Buddha knows the favorable aspects of good dharmas and thus is constant in his zeal to accumulate good dharmas that his zeal remains undiminished. It is because his mind is free of any sense of weariness or satiety in his cultivation of good dharmas that his zeal remains undiminished.

For example, there was once a venerable elder bhikshu who, with eyes dimmed [with age], was doing some sewing on his own saṅghāṭī robe when the thread slipped from the needle. He called out to the others, saying "Whoever delights in merit might care to help me thread this needle."

At that very moment, the Buddha manifest before him and called back, "I'm a man whose delight in merit is insatiable. Bring your needle over here."

The bhikshu's vision was struck by the stately brilliance of the Buddha's light at the same time that he recognized the Buddha's voice. He addressed the Buddha, saying, "The Buddha has already entirely exhausted the boundaries and depths of the immeasurable sea of merit. How then could it be that he is still insatiable in this?"

The Buddha told the bhikshu, "The resulting rewards from merit are extremely profound. No one knows as well as myself the favor it bestows. Although I have indeed exhausted its boundaries and depths, it is because I originally employed the mind of zeal insatiably that I have now succeeded in becoming a buddha. It is on account of this that, even now, I still do not desist. Although there is no further merit which I might be able to acquire, my mind of zeal remains unceasing."

The gods and worldly men were then startled and struck with the realization: "If even the Buddha remains insatiable in his pursuit of meritorious deeds, how much the more should this be the case with other people!" When the Buddha spoke Dharma for this bhikshu, his fleshly eyes immediately became clear and his wisdom eye became perfected as well.

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Discussion

Question: Those such as the Buddha have already cut off all zeal within the sphere of good dharmas. Why then does one now claim that his zeal is undiminished?

Response: When one speaks of having already cut off all zeal within the realm of good dharmas, this properly refers to that zeal which strives to acquire something not yet acquired and, once having acquired it, zealously strives to accumulate even more of it.

The Buddha is completely free of all such forms of zeal. The Buddha has already perfected every form of merit. There is none which he has not already acquired and no such means by which he might accumulate yet more. When now we speak of “zeal,” it is in accordance with the earlier statement wherein it was said that, although the Buddha has perfected the acquisition of every form of meritorious quality, his mind of zeal [for the nobility of] the endeavor still remains unceasing.

This is analogous to the case of the [wheel-turning sage king’s] precious horse which, even when having reached the destination, still cherishes the aspiration to continue going forth and does so unceasingly, even on to its very death. So too it is with the Buddha Jewel.

This is also comparable to the great conflagration which occurs at the end of the kalpa. It completely burns up the entire trichilocosm and then, due to the intense strength of its flames, it still does not cease. The wisdom fire of the Buddha is also just like this. It burns up all of the afflictions. Then, even after it has illuminated all dharmas, that zeal conforming to wisdom still does not cease.

Additionally, even though all of the good dharmas and meritorious qualities of the Buddha have already become completely perfected, because beings have still not all been liberated, his zeal to cross them all over to liberation continues on, unceasing.

The Buddha Praises Vigor

Additionally, this “vigor” is a concept of which all Buddhas are fond. For example, in the case of Shakyamuni Buddha, he was able to overstep nine kalpas [cultivating the Path] on account of the power of his vigor. This allowed him to achieve rapid acquisition of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*.

Also, as it is told, there was one time when the Buddha instructed Ānanda, “You should proceed with the speaking of Dharma for the Bhikshus. Since my back is aching, I am going to take a short rest.” Then the Bhagavān folded his *uttarasāṅga* robe in four layers, laid it on the ground, arranged the *saṅghātī* cloak as a pillow, and lay down.

Ānanda proceeded to discourse on the meaning of the seven limbs of bodhi. When he reached the “vigor” limb of bodhi, the Buddha, as if startled, rose to a sitting position and called over to Ānanda, asking “Are you praising the concept of vigor?”

Ānanda replied, “I am praising it.”

This same [question-and-answer] then occurred a total of three times, whereupon the Buddha declared, “Good indeed! Good indeed! The skillful cultivation of vigor carries one all the way through even to *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*, how much the more does it lead to acquisition of the other dharmas.”

Nāgārjuna’s Concluding Comments

And so it is based on this idea as well that the Buddha’s vigor is held to be undiminished. Hence, even when afflicted with physical maladies, it was still unceasing. How much the more was this the case when he was free of maladies.

Furthermore, the Buddha set aside the bliss of his extremely deep dhyāna absorptions and, employing all sorts of physical forms, all sorts of language, and the power of all sorts of skillful means, strove to cross beings over to liberation. Sometimes he traveled fearfully dangerous roads. Sometimes he consumed horrible meals. Sometimes he endured cold or heat. Sometimes he encountered all manner of perversely difficult challenging questions, abusive speech, scolding, and disparagement.

He endured it all without succumbing to disgust. Although the Buddha, the Bhagavān, was already sovereignly independent in all dharmas, still, he carried on with these endeavors and never fell into laxness in them.

The Buddha's Liberation of Subhadra

As another example [of the Buddha's unceasing dedication to carrying on with the practice of vigor], when the Buddha had finally finished with work of bringing beings across to liberation and lay there between the two trees in the Śāla-tree Woods, a brahmacārin named Subhadra arrived and declared to Ānanda, "I heard that the All-knowing One is preparing to pass into extinction this very night. I wish to have an audience with the Buddha."

Ānanda stopped him, saying, "The Buddha has fallen into a state of extreme exhaustion from extensively discoursing on Dharma for the members of the Community."

The Buddha heard this exchange from a distance and called over to Ānanda, "You must permit Subhadra to enter. He is my very last disciple."

After Subhadra gained entry, he inquired of the Buddha on the subject of his doubts. When the Buddha then spoke Dharma adapted to his mind, he was able to cut off his doubts, to gain realization of the Path, and to enter the nirvāṇa without residue even before the Buddha had done so.

The Bhikshus addressed the Buddha, saying, "Bhagavān. This is so extremely rare! Even in these very last moments, the Buddha has taken pity on a non-Buddhist brahmacārin and taken up a discussion with him."

The Buddha declared, "It is not only in this one life that there has been liberation even in the very last moments. In a previous life, before I had realized the Path, I also brought about his liberation in the very last moments. It was long ago in the past, innumerable *asaṃkhyeya* kalpas ago. There was a huge forest, the trees of which served as home for a multitude of birds and animals. A wildfire rose up, burning everywhere on three sides. There remained only one unaffected boundary, formed by a stream. The multitude of creatures were all driven there, attempting to escape for their lives, and then finding no more ground.

"At the time, I was a physically very large and extremely strong deer which stretched on across, planting its forelegs over on one bank while crouching its hind legs low on the other bank. It thus allowed the horde of creatures to make the ford by scrambling across its back.

"Although my skin and flesh were completely ruined by this, I endured it through the power of compassion right on through to

the very moment of death. At the very last, a rabbit came along. My strength had already been completely drained. Nonetheless, I pushed on with the power of perseverance and endured long enough to allow it to get across. After it had crossed, my back broke and I fell down into the waters and perished.

“And so occurrences of this sort have been going on for a long time. It is not the case that this has only happened just now. Those who made it across first are my present-life disciples. That very last rabbit was this very man, Subhadra.”

In life after life, the Buddha has delighted in the practice of vigor. Even now, it does not cease. It is on account of this that his vigor is said to be undiminished.

The Buddha's Imperturbability

Additionally, there was the case of Satyaka Nirgranthīputra who, with his belly girded in copper plate [lest it burst from all of his accumulated knowledge], boasted: "There is no one anywhere who, on being subjected to my challenges, fails to stream with profuse perspiration and then meet their destruction [in debate]. Everything from the great elephant on down to trees, tiles, and stones streams with perspiration on overhearing my challenges."

Having uttered these boasts, he arrived at the dwelling place of the Buddha to engage the Buddha in debate. The Buddha then interrogated him and, in every case, he was unable to reply. His own perspiration soaked the ground and his entire body was as if soaking wet.

The Buddha then announced to Nirgrantha, "Earlier, you boasted that there was no one who, on hearing your challenges, would not be reduced to streams of perspiration. But now it is you whose perspiration flows so profusely that it soaks the ground. Now, as you visually assess the appearance of the Buddha, do you notice any perspiration, or not?" The Buddha then removed his [upper] *uttarāsaṅgha* robe and instructed him further by asking, "So where is the perspiration?"

Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

Again, there might be others who would have said, "Since there are cases where one's head perspires and yet the body does not perspire, it must certainly be the case that now, although the Buddha's head is not perspiring, his body could be perspiring." It is for this reason that the Buddha proceeded then to take off his *uttarāsaṅgha*, revealing his torso. On account of this, those followers of non-Buddhist traditions gained great faith and were all thus enabled to enter the Dharma of the Buddha. This is an instance of [the Buddha's] physical actions according with wisdom-based causal factors.

The Śālmali Tree Sacrifices a Limb

Nāgārjuna's Introduction

Question: When one enters the [right and certain] Dharma position (*samyaktva niyāma*), one passes beyond aging, sickness, and death, cuts off all of the fetters, demolishes the three wretched destinies, and so forth, all as explained earlier. Why then does one only mention here the surpassing of the grounds of the Hearer disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas? One also abides in all sorts of different meritorious qualities. Why then does one only mention here the abiding at the [irreversible] ground of the *avaivartika*?

Response: The abandoning of unwholesome endeavors and the acquisition of meritorious qualities shall be discussed in proper sequence along with the meritorious qualities in which one comes to abide. One should hew to the appropriate sequence in the treatment of dharmas. One cannot just set them all forth simultaneously and in a precipitate manner.

Moreover, of those things which might be feared by the bodhisattva when he has first generated the determination [to become a buddha], there is nothing which surpasses the grounds of the Hearer disciples and the Pratyekabuddhas. Even the prospect of definitely falling down into the hells would not inspire such terror as this. This is because it would still not involve the eternal destruction of the Path of the Great Vehicle. Thus arhatship and pratyekabuddhahood are equated with the eternal destruction of the Great Vehicle.

Story: The Śālmali Tree Sacrifices a Limb

By way of analogy, there once was a *śālmali* tree growing out in an empty field with immense limbs and branches which spread out broadly. Many birds flocked together on it to roost for the night. A single pigeon came along afterwards and came to rest on a single branch. Suddenly that branch extending all the way back to the base of the limb split off and came crashing down. [Having observed this], the spirit of the marsh inquired of the tree spirit, "You have been able to endure holding up even the big birds such as eagles and vultures. Why then, when it came down to this little bird, you weren't able to bear up?"

The tree spirit replied, "This bird had come thither from roosting on my nemesis tree, the *nyagrodha*. Having eaten of the fruits from that tree, it had come to roost upon me. It was bound to excrete its

stools. From the seeds which thus fell down to the ground, that detestable tree would grow up yet again [right here]. Thus the harm to be sustained would certainly be great. It was for this reason that, even with the presence of just this one pigeon, I was possessed by immense distress and fear. I would rather sacrifice one whole limb so that what is thereby preserved would be so great.”

Nāgārjuna’s Concluding Comments

The bodhisattva, mahāsattva is just like this. He does not have such great fear with respect to all of the heretical paths and hordes of demons, or with respect to the fetters and evil karmic deeds as he possesses with respect to arhatship and pratyekabuddhahood. Why is this the case? The implications of the proximity to a bodhisattva of Hearer disciples or pratyekabuddhas are just like those presented to the tree by that pigeon. They threaten to ruin the Great-vehicle mind and eternally destroy the karma of buddhahood. It is for this reason that the text only refers here to [the issue of] surpassing the grounds of the Hearers and the Pratyekabuddhas.

As for dwelling at the [irreversible] ground of the *avaivartika*, from that very time when he generates the determination [to become a buddha] on forward to the present, he has always delighted in the prospect of dwelling at the ground of the *avaivartika*. Having heard that there are so many bodhisattvas who retreat, when he generates the determination, he formulates an aspiration wherein he wonders, “When might I finally be able to surpass the grounds of the Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas and then come to dwell at the ground of the *avaivartika*? It is for this reason that the text refers here to the ground of the *avaivartika*.

The Buddha Inspires Renunciation in the Pāpīyaka Monks

Through the concept of limitlessness, beings are able to generate renunciation with regard to the long-enduring nature of birth and death.

As an example, we have the case of the forty bhikshus from the Pāpīyaka region, observers of the twelve pure practices, who came to where the Buddha dwelt. The Buddha explained for them the practice of renunciation. The Buddha asked them, “How much water is carried by the five rivers, the Ganges, the Yamunā, the Sarayū, the Aciravatī, and the Mahī, as they flow from their headwaters to the great ocean?”

The Bhikshus replied, “An extremely great amount.”

The Buddha declared, “Even greater than all this water is the amount of blood lost by only one single person during the course of a kalpa in which, as an animal, he is butchered, sliced, skinned, and stabbed, and in which [as a human], on account of occasional criminal offenses, he has his hands and feet cut off or is subjected to decapitation. In this way, the amount of blood lost from bodies taken up throughout a limitless number of great kalpas is indescribably great in quantity. So too it is with the tears shed in weeping and the milk drunk from one’s mothers. In reckoning the amount of bones piled up from a single person in a single kalpa, they would be even greater in mass than that huge Vaipulya Mountain. (The notes in red state: “This is brought up because people in India constantly see this mountain and so are easily moved to faith [through this description].”) In this fashion, one undergoes the suffering involved in birth and death throughout an immeasurable number of kalpas.”

After the Bhikshus had heard this, renouncing and abhorring the world, they immediately achieved realization of the Path.

Losakatiṣya's Near Starvation

[When it is said] that the bodhisattva fulfills the wishes of all beings, this refers to those who, [by the nature of their karmic circumstances], should be able to gain [such fulfillment]. Thus, the bodhisattva's mind has no boundaries. Nor is it possible to measure the resultant retribution associated with their karmic blessings. It is only on account of thick obstacles [created from] beings' immeasurable number of *asaṃkhyeya* eons of offenses that they are unable to obtain [fulfillment of those wishes].

Take for example Śāriputra's disciple, the bhikshu named Losakatiṣya. He upheld the precepts and was vigorous. In going out in quest of alms, he once went six days and yet was not able to come by [any offerings]. When it came to the seventh day, his life was at the point verging on death. There was a fellow cultivator of the Path who acquired alms food and brought it to him. However, a bird suddenly took it away.

Śāriputra then told Maudgalyāyana, "Use your great spiritual powers to guard this food and cause him to succeed in getting it." Maudgalyāyana then took the food straightaway and gave it to him. When it was just about up to [Losakatiṣya's] mouth, it transformed into mud. Additionally, Śāriputra obtained alms food and took it and gave it to [the monk], whereupon his mouth spontaneously clamped shut.

Finally, the Buddha himself came and brought food and gave it to him. On account of the causes and conditions of the Buddha's immeasurable amount of merit, he was able to cause him to succeed in eating some food. After this bhikshu had eaten, his mind became delighted and he became doubly possessed of both faith and reverence.

The Buddha told that bhikshu, "Conditioned dharmas are all characterized by suffering." He then explained the four truths for his sake. The bhikshu then immediately gained the ending of outflow impurities and the liberation of his mind, whereupon he gained the path of arhatship. There are beings of only scant merit whose offenses are more extreme than this whom even the Buddha is not able to rescue.