

**A STRAND OF DHARMA JEWELS
AS ADVICE FOR THE KING**

The Rāja Parikathā Ratnāvalī

Composed by Ārya Nāgārjuna

Sanskrit-to-Chinese Translation by Tripiṭaka Master Paramārtha

English Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra

CHAPTER TWO

ADVICE ON VARIOUS TOPICS

II. CHAPTER 2: ADVICE ON VARIOUS TOPICS

A. ANALOGY: THE "PERSON" IS AS INSUBSTANTIAL AS THE PLANTAIN

001

Just as when, part-by-part, one pulls apart a plantain plant
So that it utterly ceases to exist, leaving no trace,
When, according to the six elements, one takes apart a "person,"
It too is found to be entirely empty in just this same manner.

B. THE BUDDHA DECLARED THE ABSENCE OF ANY INHERENT EXISTENCE IN DHARMAS

002

Thus it is that the Buddha rightly proclaimed
That all dharmas are devoid of any "self."
There is only a dharma of naming referencing the six elements.
One may judge with certainty that, in reality, there is no "self."

1. THE BUDDHA DISALLOWED BOTH EXISTENCE AND NON-EXISTENCE OF "SELF"

003

As for the two concepts of "self" and "non-existence of self,"
If analyzed in accord with reality, they cannot be apprehended.
It is for this reason that the Thus Come One excluded
The two extremes of "self" and "non-existence of self."

2. SO TOO IN THE CASE OF DUALITY-BASED DESIGNATIONS

004

As for statements based on knowing via seeing, hearing, [*et cetera*],⁶¹
The Buddha stated that they are not inherently either true or false.
Because they are products of interdependent duality,
Such dual [concepts] have no reality-based [intrinsic] existence.

005

When one contemplates the world in terms of ultimate reality,
It transcends the "true" even while transcending the "false."
Hence, from a reality-based standpoint, the world's perspective
Falls into the fallacy of reifying both existence and non-existence.

3. THE RATIONALE FOR THE BUDDHA'S REMAINING SILENT

006

Where all dharmas at issue universally fail to accord [with reality],
 How could the Buddha have been able to affirm
 Boundedness, unboundedness,
 Both, or neither, [*et cetera*]?⁶²

4. CHALLENGE: THE BUDDHA ERRED IN DECLARING BEINGS BOUNDLESSLY MANY

007 [Challenge]:

Past buddhas have been incalculably many.
 Those of the present and the future surpass enumeration.
 That they would surpass the limited number of beings
 Across the three times was made obvious by the Buddha.⁶³

008

The world is free of any causes for increase [in beings].
 The limits to this become apparent as a stricture imposed by time.
 [Yet you say:] "As the world transcends existence and non-existence,
 How could Buddha make definitive assertions on boundedness?"

5. RESPONSE: NOT SO. THE WORLD IS ILLUSORY, TRANSCENDS DUAL CONCEPTS, ETC.

009 [Response (9a-15d)]:

Because this Dharma is so profound,
 When with the common person, it is kept secret and not discussed.
 The teaching that the world is like an illusory conjuration
 Is the sweet-dew ambrosia (*amṛta*) of the Buddha's teaching.

010

This is comparable to a magically-conjured elephant⁶⁴
 Which, even being such, may be seen to appear and disappear.
 As for this elephant as well as its appearance and disappearance,
 From the perspective of reality, it is discerned to be non-existent.

011

The world too is like an illusory conjuration.
 The perceptibility of its production and destruction is also just so.
 The world as well as its production and destruction,
 From the perspective of reality, is in every case false.

012

A magically-conjured elephant has no place from which it comes.⁶⁵
 When it goes, it has no continued residing anywhere, either.
 It serves only to delude the minds of beings.
 In reality, its "existence" involves no abiding at all.

013 (Emendation via Sanskrit Text)

[*Tathā māyopamo loko naiti yāti na kutrācit |
cittamohanamātratoād bhāvatvena na tiṣṭhati*]

[Even so, the world is like a magical conjuration
Which comes from nowhere and goes to nowhere.
It merely serves to delude the mind,
For its “existence” involves no abiding at all.]⁶⁶

014

The essential nature of the world transcends even the three times.
If so, what reality could there be to the world?
Apart from mere statements about existence versus non-existence,⁶⁷
In reality, “existent” and “non-existent” have no intrinsic meaning.

015

Hence Buddha, when compelled to speak in terms of the tetralemma,
Declined to make definitive statements regarding the world.⁶⁸
Since “existence” versus “non-existence” polarities are all false,
This [silence as a response to] fallaciousness was not itself fallacious.⁶⁹

C. AS OBVIOUS TEACHINGS AREN'T EASILY ABSORBED, IT'S TRUER YET OF SUBTLITIES

016

This body's characteristic of being impure
Is a mind state known even at coarse levels of realization.
Though constantly and repeatedly observed,
It may yet fail to enter and abide in the mind.

017

How much the more might this be so for right Dharma's subtleties,
Being so extremely recondite and free of dependent bases?
Given they are difficult to realize with a scattered mind,
How could it be that they might easily enter?

D. HENCE THE BUDDHA INITIALLY REFRAINED FROM PROCLAIMING THE DHARMA

018

Therefore the Buddha, on first gaining realization of the Path,
Refrained from proclaiming it and was about to enter nirvāṇa.
This was because he perceived that this right Dharma,
Due to its extreme profundity, is difficult to comprehend.

E. MISUNDERSTANDING DHARMA MAY EVEN LEAD TO ONE'S DOWNFALL

019

In a case where the Dharma is understood incorrectly,
It may bring immediate harm to those not acutely intelligent.
Thus, by seizing on it in a manner not according [with its intent],
They may fall into a pit of defilement by wrong views.

020

If a person's awareness of Dharma lacks clear comprehension,
Through elevating himself and taking the Dharma lightly,
He may initiate slanders, bring ruin on himself,
And plummet headfirst down into the hells.

1. ANALOGY: AS IN THE RIGHT OR WRONG USE OF SUPERIOR FOOD AND DRINK

021

This is analogous to [gaining access to] superior drink and food.
If one is extreme in consuming it, he encounters perilous harm.
If, however, if he is reasonably measured in his eating,
He gains long life, strength, health, and happiness.

022

If one is skewed in the way he understands right Dharma,
He encounters suffering in just this same way.
If, however, he is able to accord with reason in understanding it,
He brings on both happiness and bodhi as a result.

F. THE WISE AVOID SLANDER OF RIGHT DHARMA AND WRONG ATTACHMENTS

023

With respect to right Dharma, the wise person
Avoids both slander and erroneous attachments.
With respect to right knowledge, he brings it forth in a useful way.
He thus succeeds in creating circumstances according to his wishes.

G. FAILING TO UNDERSTAND THIS DHARMA PERPETUATES CYCLIC EXISTENCE

024

On account of failing to completely understand this Dharma,
People generate and increase the view imputing existence of "self."
On account of this, they create the three types of karmic actions⁷⁰
And consequently take birth in both good and bad destinies.

H. DIRECT INSTRUCTIONS TO THE KING

1. ONE MUST PERSEVERE IN THE PERFECTIONS

025

So long as one has not yet gained realization of this Dharma,
Able to demolish the view imputing existence of "self,"
One should be constantly reverential and generate right effort
In the practice of moral virtue, giving, patience, and the rest.⁷¹

2. THE DHARMA SHOULD BE ONE'S PRIORITY IN THE BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END

026

Where, in the carrying out of works, Dharma comes "first,"
Even to the point that Dharma also comes "middle" and "last,"
It is said that, staying free of falseness and reliant on true principle,
You will avoid sinking away in the present and future.

a. DHARMA ENSURES REPUTATION, HAPPINESS, FEARLESSNESS, AND FUTURE FELICITY
027

Because of Dharma, in this present life, one gains a fine reputation,
One enjoys happiness, and one is free of fear when nearing death.
Then, in future lives, one gains both wealth and happiness.
One should therefore be constant in one's service to the Dharma.

3. DHARMA IS THE ESSENCE OF RIGHT AND SUCCESSFUL GOVERNANCE
028

It is only through Dharma that there is right governance.
It is because of the Dharma that the country expresses its affection.
If the ruler inspires the love of the people,
In both present and future, he will not be deceived.

4. ACTIONS CONTRARY TO DHARMA ARE WRONG GOVERNANCE AND BEGET DISASTER
029

If he governs in a manner contrary to Dharma,
The ruler encounters disgust and abhorrence in his officials.
Because the world is moved to detest and abhor him,
He finds no cause for joy in either the present or the future.

030
Where royal policy involves cheating and deceiving others,
This evokes great difficulties as well as the wretched destinies.
Where doctrine promotes evil intelligence and wrong livelihood,
How could one assert that this is right?

031
Where a person is devoted to the deception of others,
How could this be described as right endeavor?
Because of this, for a myriad lifetimes,
He will constantly encounter cheating and deception by others.

5. RELINQUISHING OF FAULTS AND EMULATION OF GOODNESS DISTRESS ADVERSARIES
032

If one desires to cause distress among one's adversaries,
One need only abandon one's faults and adopt their good qualities.
It is through this means that one perfects one's own benefit
And straightaway causes distress and affliction in adversaries.

6. USE FOUR MEANS OF ATTRACTION TO DRAW FOLLOWERS AND SPREAD DHARMA
033

Take up giving, pleasing words,
Beneficial actions, and salutary joint endeavors.⁷²
I pray that you will draw in the people of the world
And that, based on this, you will propagate right Dharma.

7. THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MERITORIOUS QUALITIES

a. THE KING SHOULD REALIZE "TRUTH" GENERATES TRUST; LIES DIMINISH IT

034

When a king utters a single truthful discourse,
It is the same as building in the people a solid trust in him.
By the same token, when he esteems the telling of lies,
He fails to produce in others any confident trust in himself.

035

The power of sincere intentions to create an absence of opposition
Is constrained by the extent to which they may benefit others.⁷³
It is this sort of discourse which defines truthfulness.
Whatever stands in opposition to this amounts to false speech.

b. "RELINQUISHMENT" COUNTERS ROYAL FAULTS; MISERLINESS DAMAGES VIRTUE

036

A single act of relinquishing wealth, if done with shining clarity,
Is as if able to place a sovereign's faults in the shade.
In the same way, if a ruler is prone to miserliness or graft,
This is able to inflict damage on a king's manifold virtues.

c. CULTIVATION OF "STILLNESS" ELICITS ESTEEM; A BRILLIANT KING GOVERNS FROM DEEP SERENITY

037

If a king employs stillness in dealing with every sort of evil,
His virtue being profound, he is loved and esteemed by the people.
Because of this, the sovereign made brilliant by the teachings
Responds to present circumstances from the midst of stillness.⁷⁴

d. "WISDOM" MAKES THE KING IMMOVABLE, INDEPENDENT, AND UNDECEIVABLE

038

On account of wisdom, the king may become unshakable.
By comprehending matters himself, he need not trust in others.
In order that he might never encounter cheating and deception,
He most certainly should pursue cultivation of wisdom.

e. THESE FOUR BASES OF MERITORIOUS QUALITIES ENGENDER GOODNESS AND PRAISE

039

If he relies on truth, relinquishing, stillness, and wisdom,
A king thereby perfects these four forms of goodness.
Just as they praise the right Dharma of these four qualities,⁷⁵
So too is he praised by both men and gods.

8. ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR THE KING

a. DEVELOPING WISDOM THROUGH HUMILITY, PURITY, WISDOM, AND COMPASSION

040

Insofar as he is able to be humble in discourse, to abide in purity
 Made immaculate through wisdom and compassion,
 And to constantly congregate with the wise,
 The King's dharma and wisdom will come forth and grow.

b. ON THE RARITY OF SWIFTLY CHANGING TO WHAT IS GOOD

041

People who discourse on what is good are rare.
 Those who listen to words encouraging goodness are also rare.
 A third type of person is the most superior:
 It is whoever can swiftly implement teachings on goodness.

042

Even if what is good is not what one finds pleasing,
 Once aware of its implications, one should swiftly cultivate it.
 This is comparable to when, though a medicine is bitter,
 One inclined to be cured should still force himself to take it.

c. ON THE NEED TO CONTEMPLATE IMPERMANENCE

043

As for long life, freedom from disease, and one's position as king,
 One should constantly contemplate their impermanence.
 As a consequence, thoughts turn toward renunciation and alarm,
 And one then focuses the mind on the practice of Dharma.

044

One perceives that he is definitely bound to die
 And that death brings on sufferings arising from evil deeds.
 The wise person, for the sake of happiness even in the present,
 Should therefore refrain from committing any karmic offenses.⁷⁶

045

Having already experienced moments free of fear
 Followed by encounters with fearsome experiences—
 Even as one now experiences moments of mental peace,
 How can he fail to be apprehensive over what might follow later?⁷⁷

d. ON THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF INTOXICANTS

046

Through consuming intoxicants, one encounters others' disdain,
 Brings harm to one's works, and reduces one's physical strength.
 Due to the stupidity it induces, one courses in wrong endeavors.
 Therefore the wise man does away with consumption of intoxicants.

e. ON THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF GAMING AND ENTERTAINMENTS

047

Competitive gaming and other such entertainments⁷⁸
 Generate covetousness, ill-will, distress, and deviousness.
 They are causes for deceptiveness, falseness, and harsh speech.
 Therefore one should always keep one's distance from them.

f. ON COUNTERING LUST THROUGH REALIZING IMPURITY OF THE BODY

048

The fault of indulging lustful excess arises
 From the perception that a woman's body is "pure."
 If one investigates and ponders the contents of the female body,
 One finds, in reality, not even one tiny part of it is pure.⁷⁹

049

A woman's mouth is a vessel containing saliva and spittle.
 Scum on the teeth and tongue is odorous and filthy.
 The nasal cavity smells on account of the oozing of mucous.
 And where the eyes' tears flow, various sorts of matter abide.

050

The abdominal cavity is a chamber of feces, urine, and intestines,
 Whereas the rest of the body is but a mass of bones and flesh.
 Because deluded persons are fooled even by what is disgusting,
 They become attached by lust to this body.

051

The sense-faculty orifices are the most foul-smelling and filthy,
 Thus they are the cause for disgust and loathing of the body.
 If one generates affection even for them,
 What then could serve as the basis for the abandoning of desire?

052

It is comparable to a pit full of feces and urine
 In which the swine enjoy playing about.
 When, in the impure orifices of the body,
 One has much desire to sport, it's just the same.

053

The basis for the existence of these orifices
 Is the need to expel the body's dirt-like waste.
 Deluded persons mistakenly become affectionately attached,
 Failing to regard what serves their own welfare.