

## CHAPTER 13

### Distinctions with Regard to the Giving of Dharma

#### XIII. CHAPTER 13: DISTINCTIONS WITH REGARD TO THE GIVING OF DHARMA

##### A. DHARMA GIVING IS SUPREME AND THE WISE SHOULD PRACTICE IT

The bodhisattva should cultivate the giving of material wealth in the above-discussed manner and should also cultivate the giving of Dharma, doing so in accordance with this statement:

Of the many sorts of giving, the giving of Dharma is supreme.  
Thus the wise should cultivate its practice.

Of all of the kinds of giving, the foremost, the most superior, and the most sublime is the giving of Dharma. This is the type of giving that the wise should practice.

##### B. Q: WHY DO YOU SAY ONLY THE WISE SHOULD PRACTICE DHARMA GIVING?

**Question:** Why do you say that [only] the wise should engage in the practice of giving Dharma.

##### C. A: ERRONEOUS INTERPRETATIONS DO NOT BENEFIT ANYONE

**Response:** If those who are not wise pursue the giving of Dharma, they will set forth erroneous interpretations. By setting forth erroneous interpretations they will fail to benefit themselves and will also fail to benefit others.

##### 1. Q: WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "ERRONEOUS INTERPRETATIONS"?

**Question:** What is meant here by "erroneous<sup>199</sup> interpretations"?

##### 2. A: WRONG IDEAS OF SPURIOUS ORIGIN (FOUR CASES FROM SCRIPTURE)

**Response:** When the Buddha was on the verge of entering nirvāṇa, he told Ānanda:

From this day forward, one should rely upon the sutras. Do not rely on persons. Ānanda, what is meant by relying on the sutras and not relying on persons?<sup>200</sup>

If a bhikshu comes and speaks thus: "In his presence, I have heard this from the Buddha, and in his presence, I have received this from the Buddha. It is Dharma, it is good, and it is as taught by the Buddha," neither accept nor reject the words of this bhikshu, but rather, having listened carefully, one should search for what has been said in the sutras and in the moral code.

If it is not included in the sutras, is not included in the Vinaya, and it also contradicts the true character of dharmas,<sup>201</sup> one should

reply to this bhikshu, saying, "Perhaps this dharma is one that was not spoken by the Buddha. Perhaps the Venerable One has mistakenly accepted it as such. Why? This dharma is not included in the sutras and is not included in the Vinaya, either. What's more, it contradicts the true character of dharmas. Therefore this is non-Dharma, not good, and not taught by the Buddha." Having realized this, one should then immediately reject this.

Now suppose some other bhikshu comes and speaks thus: "There is a large sangha in which I reside wherein there is a senior monk, one who understands the sutras and who is skillful in explaining the moral code. In his presence, I have heard this from him, and in his presence, I have received this from him. It is Dharma, it is good, and it is as taught by the Buddha."

Again, neither accept nor reject the words of this bhikshu, but rather, having listened carefully, one should search for what he has said in the sutras and in the moral code. If it is not included in the sutras, is not included in the Vinaya, and it also contradicts the true character of dharmas, one should reply to this bhikshu, saying, "Venerable One, that sangha of bhikshus—regarding their understanding of the character of dharmas and the character of what constitutes goodness—perhaps they have spoken of these things in a manner that is contrary to Dharma and contrary to goodness. Perhaps the Venerable One has mistakenly accepted it. Why? This dharma is not included in the sutras and is not included in the Vinaya, either. What's more, it contradicts the true character of dharmas. Therefore this is non-Dharma, not good, and not spoken by the Buddha." Having realized this, one should then immediately reject this.

Suppose yet another bhikshu comes and speaks thus: "There are many bhikshus where I abide who preserve the sutras, preserve the Vinaya, and preserve the *māṭṛkās*."<sup>202</sup> In their presence, I have heard this from them, and in their presence, I have accepted this from them. It is Dharma, it is good, and it is as taught by the Buddha."

Neither accept nor reject the words of this bhikshu, but rather, having listened carefully, one should search in the sutras and in the moral code for what he has said. If it is not included in the sutras, is not included in the Vinaya, and it also contradicts the true character of dharmas, one should reply to this bhikshu, saying, "Venerable One, that sangha of bhikshus—regarding their understanding of the character of dharmas and the character of what constitutes goodness—perhaps they have spoken of these things in a manner that is contrary to Dharma and contrary to goodness. Perhaps the Venerable One has mistakenly accepted it. Why? This dharma is not included in the sutras and is not included in the Vinaya, either. What's more, it contradicts the true character of dharmas. Therefore this is

non-Dharma, not good, and not taught by the Buddha.” Having realized this, one should then immediately reject this.

Suppose yet another bhikshu comes and speaks thus: “There is a senior bhikshu where I abide, one who understands much, one who is aware of much, and one whom people revere. In his presence, I have heard this from him, and in his presence, I have received this from him. It is Dharma, it is good, and it is as taught by the Buddha.”

Neither accept nor reject the words of this bhikshu, but rather, having listened carefully, one should search for what he has said in the sutras and in the moral code. If it is not included in the sutras, is not included in the Vinaya, and it also contradicts the true character of dharmas, one should reply to this bhikshu, saying, “Venerable One, that sangha of bhikshus—regarding their understanding of the character of dharmas and the character of what constitutes goodness—perhaps they have spoken of these things in a manner that is contrary to Dharma and contrary to goodness. Perhaps the Venerable One has mistakenly accepted it. Why? This dharma is not included in the sutras and is not included in the Vinaya, either. What’s more, it contradicts the true character of dharmas. Therefore this is non-Dharma, not good, and not taught by the Buddha.” Having realized this, one should then immediately reject this.

These four cases illustrate what is meant here by “erroneous interpretations.” It is therefore said that the wise do not rely upon erroneous interpretations, but rather practice pristinely pure Dharma giving.

D. Q: HOW DOES ONE KNOW THAT DHARMA GIVING IS SUPREME?

**Question:** How is it that one knows the giving of Dharma is the foremost among all forms of giving?

E. A: THE SUTRAS SAY SO

**Response:** The sutras state that there are two types of giving, the giving of material wealth and the giving of Dharma, and that, among those two types of giving, it is the giving of Dharma that is superior.

F. A SUTRA EXPLAINS PROPRIETY IN SPEAKING DHARMA AS FOLLOWS:

Furthermore:

In *The Sutra of the Resolute King*,<sup>203</sup>

there are praises of Dharma giving’s merit  
and explanations of propriety in the speaking of Dharma.

One should always cultivate and practice in accordance with these.

If the bodhisattva wishes to bestow Dharma on beings, he should follow and cultivate in accordance with the passages in *The Sutra of the Resolute King* that praise the meritorious qualities possessed by a

teacher of Dharma and that set forth the correct ceremonial procedures involved in speaking Dharma. It stipulates the following:

1. FOUR QUALITIES OF A QUALIFIED DHARMA SPEAKER

The speaker of Dharma should incorporate four dharmas in his practice. What are those four?

First, he is to be one possessed of vast and extensive learning while also being well able to bear in mind [the meaning of] all the phrases and passages [of the scripture at hand];

Second, he is to be resolutely and skillfully cognizant of the marks of production and extinction as they manifest in all worldly and world-transcending dharmas;

Third, having acquired the wisdom arising from *dhyāna* concentration, he accords with the Dharma set forth in the sutras while also remaining free of any contentiousness;

Fourth, neither adding anything to nor taking anything away [from the Dharma set forth in the sutras], he practices in accordance with what is proclaimed therein.

2. FOUR CORRECT BEHAVIORS WHEN ASCENDING THE HIGH SEAT TO TEACH

There are four additional dharmas that are to be observed when the speaker of Dharma occupies the lion throne. What are those four?

First, when about to ascend to the high seat, one should first respectfully pay reverence to the great assembly in attendance and then afterward ascend to that seat;

Second, in audiences including women, one should contemplate impurity [of the body];

Third, in one's deportment and bearing, one maintains the appearance of a great man. As one spreads forth the sound of Dharma, one's countenance appears harmonious and pleased, inspiring all in attendance to accept [one's words] with faith. One does not teach non-Buddhist scriptures and one's mind remains fearless;

Fourth, in the face of harsh words and challenging questions, one should practice patience.

3. FOUR MORE CORRECT BEHAVIORS FOR WHEN ONE SITS ON THE HIGH SEAT

There are four additional dharmas pertaining to sitting in the high seat. What are those four?

First, one brings forth the motivation to be of abundant benefit to beings;

Second, one does not conceive of the idea of a self in connection with any being;

Third, one does not conceive of the words as synonymous with the dharmas [that they describe];

Fourth, one vows, “May any being who hears me speak on Dharma thereby gain irreversibility in the path to *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*.”

#### 4. ANOTHER FOUR CORRECT BEHAVIORS WHEN SITTING ON THE HIGH SEAT

There are another four dharmas pertaining to sitting in the high seat. What are these four?

First, one is well able to abide securely within the gateway of *dhāraṇī* practice<sup>204</sup> and in resolute faith in the Dharma;

Second, one is skilled in realization of the *pratyutpanna samādhi*, diligent in the practice of vigor, and pure in observance of the moral precepts;

Third, one sees no happiness inhering in any place of rebirth, does not covet offerings, and does not seek to obtain any sort of karmic reward;

Fourth, one’s mind is free of any doubt regarding the three gates to liberation.

#### 5. EIGHTEEN MORE QUALIFICATIONS FOR ONE WHO SITS ON THE HIGH SEAT

Additionally:

One is well able to bring forth deep samādhis;

One is completely adherent to the awesome deportment;

One has a strong memory;

One’s thoughts are imbued with stable wisdom;

One refrains from joking and teasing;

One refrains from acting with a frivolous demeanor;

One refrains from shamelessness;

One refrains from falling into delusion and confusion;

One’s discourse remains free of error;

One’s sense faculties remain well-guarded;

One does not covet fine flavors;

One is careful to maintain proper deportment with one’s arms and legs;

One does not forget what one has chosen to bear in mind;

One enjoys practicing the *dhūta* austerities,<sup>205</sup>

One is well able to make distinctions regarding worldly and world-transcending dharmas;

One’s mind is free of doubts and regrets;

One’s discourse is inexhaustible in its phrasing and in its command of scriptural passages;

And one seeks to promote the security and benefit of the audience and also refrains from finding fault with them.

If one is in possession of dharmas of this sort, then one should occupy the lion throne.

## 6. FOUR MORE DHARMAS TO BE OBSERVED WHEN SITTING ON THE HIGH SEAT

There are yet four more dharmas in this connection:

- First, one does not slight oneself;
- Second, one does not slight audience members;
- Third, one does not slight the topic that is being discussed;
- Fourth, one does not [teach Dharma] for the sake of obtaining offerings or support.

## G. A SCRIPTURAL CITATION REGARDING THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING OF DHARMA

[Nāgārjuna introduces another passage from scripture]:

The Buddha spoke to Ānanda, saying, "On which dharmas should the speaker of Dharma speak? Ānanda, whichever dharma one may discuss—it cannot be demonstrated, it cannot be described, it is signless, and it is unconditioned."

"O Bhagavat, if this is the case, how can they be discussed?"

"Ānanda, this Dharma is extremely profound. When the Tathāgata expounds [on Dharma], he uses an expedient device that involves four factors:

- First, the sound of his voice;
- Second, names;
- Third, verbal discourse;
- Fourth, principles.

"Additionally, there are four causal circumstances associated with his speaking about the Dharma for others:

First, it is done for the sake of liberating beings who are amenable to being liberated;

Second, in doing so, he only deals in designations associated with forms, feelings, perceptions, formative factors, and consciousnesses;

Third, he uses all sorts of phrases and sentences to benefit beings;

Fourth, although, in speaking, he uses such names, [their referents] still cannot be apprehended.

"This is just as when there is a basin of clean, unsullied oil in which an observer can see an image of his own face. Ānanda, have you ever seen or heard of any wise man, virtuous woman, or disciple of an *ārya* who was able to claim, 'I have seen a real person right there in a basin of oil!'"

"Bhagavat, I have neither heard nor seen any wise man, virtuous woman, or disciple of an *ārya* who has claimed, 'I have seen a real person in a basin of oil.' Why is that so? One who is wise would know ahead of time that even the basin of oil was not [intrinsically] existent. How much the less might he claim the existence of a person there. It is solely by resort to artificial naming that one may claim the existence of a basin of oil in which one sees a person's image."

“Ānanda, the Tathāgata is just the same in this respect. It is only through reliance upon names that there is an artificial existence of anything of which he speaks.

“Ānanda, there are four causes and conditions involved in the Tathāgata’s speaking about the Dharma for others:

When beings hear this, their minds experience peace and happiness and they plant the causes for attaining nirvāṇa.

The sound of the Tathāgata’s proclamation of Dharma pervades the worlds of the ten directions. When beings hear this, their minds are delighted, they abandon the wretched destinies, and they gain rebirth in the Tuṣita Heaven.

In the sounds of the Tathāgata’s voice, there is nothing that is either masculine or feminine. Men do not seize on any feminine aspects and women do not seize on any masculine aspects.

The sound of the Tathāgata’s voice does not cause distress to beings nor does it interfere with [the correct representation of] any dharma. It is resorted to solely in order to make manifest the nature of the sounds.”

#### H. CONCLUSION: IN DHARMA GIVING, ONE SHOULD PRACTICE ACCORDINGLY

The speaker of Dharma should practice in accord with these ideas [discussed above] and should perform the giving of Dharma in compliance with these practices. As for the karmic results that accrue to the giver and the receiver, these should be extensively discussed later on.