

## *The Scripture on the Conduct that Eases the Way*

The World-honoured One, desiring to clarify the meaning of His Teaching, spoke thus in verse:

“If there be any Bodhisattva here who, in the evil days to come, with a heart free from fear and awe, desires to preach on this Discourse of Mine, you must hold to a Bodhisattva’s perspectives on practice and relationships.

Be constant in keeping your distance from those who would rule and their offspring, ministers and officials, from those who play at brutal and dangerous games, are devoid of scruples or steer their lives by chance as well as from non-Buddhists such as Brahman priests.

Seek no friendship or companionship among those vain and conceited ones who avidly pursue the Lesser Course in their study of the Triple Canon, with Precept-breaking monks who are Arahants in name only, with monks who take joy in flirtatious laughter, with those who are deeply attached to all manner of craving or are seeking instant nirvana, as is common with lay folk; with none of these seek familiarity.

However, if such people, out of goodness of heart, come to you as a Bodhisattva to hear of the Buddha’s Way, then, as a Bodhisattva with heart free from fear and awe and cherishing no expectations, you should speak with them on the Teaching.

Do not seek to entice into intimacy or close friendship such as are widowed, young or equally vulnerable to some form of seduction; do not keep company with butchers, meat-cutters, hunters or fishermen, for they slaughter and slay for gain; do not keep company with those who hawk meat for their living and those who parade and market people for sex; do not consort with such ones.

With violent and dangerous sports and all manner of frivolous games, as well as with dissolute people, you should not seek to involve yourself whatsoever.

You should not, in some screened-off place, talk about the Teaching alone with one of the opposite sex.

When you preach on the Dharma, take care to avoid making a joke of it.

When entering a village in quest of food, seek a monk to accompany you; if no monk is available, keep your mind wholeheartedly on the Buddha.

These, then, are what are called the perspectives on practice and relationships.

By maintaining these two perspectives you can teach with ease and contentment.

Further, when you do not act as if there were superior, middling and inferior Dharmas, or as though things were material or independent of cause, real or unreal, when you do not make such distinctions as ‘This is a man’ or ‘This is a woman’, and when you do not grasp after things, failing to recognize them because you do not discern them as desirable, this then is what is called a Bodhisattva’s perspective on practice.

All that are called ‘things’ are void of self-existence, having no permanence, neither arising nor perishing: this is what wise ones call a Bodhisattva’s perspective on relationships, whereas those whose views are topsy-turvy decide by discrimination whether all things exist or do not exist, are real or unreal, produced or not produced.

As for you, abide in seclusion, train and pacify your mind, dwelling peaceably in your meditation and immovable as Mount Sumeru, regarding all things as though they had no permanence, as if they were as insubstantial as space, lacking solidity, not arising or coming forth but motionless

and unreceding, ever remaining in their oneness: this is what is called a Bodhisattva's perspective on relationships.

If there be any monk who, after My entering into eternal meditation, holds to these perspectives on practice and relationships, then, when he talks on this Discourse of Mine, he will have no timidity or weakness.

When this Bodhisattva at times enters the quiet of his room and, whilst holding properly to mindfulness, looks upon all things according to their true significance, let him then rise from his meditation and, for the sake of rulers of nations, their offspring and subjects, be they Brahmans and others, help turn their hearts around by clearly expounding and explaining this Discourse of Mine with a heart and mind at ease, free from timidity and weakness.

O Manjusri, this is what is called a Bodhisattva's being steadfast in the first means for he will then be able, in future generations, to preach on this Discourse which is the blossoming of My Teaching.

"A Bodhisattva ever delights, and is at ease, in giving voice to the Dharma; in a pure and clean place he spreads out his mat, anoints himself with sesame oil after having bathed away dust and dirt, puts on a fresh, clean robe so that he is completely clean within and without and then, calmly seated on his Dharma seat, he teaches according to how he is questioned.

Be there monks of either gender, lay disciples of either gender, rulers, their offspring, and retainers or other people, he expounds the subtlest meanings to them all, ever with a gentle countenance.

If there is any objection or difficult question, he responds to it according to its meaning, elaborating and making distinctions through apt illustrations and parables.

By these skilful means he urges them all to give rise to their will to train so that, steadily advancing, they may penetrate the Buddha's Way.

Having rid himself of any tendencies to indolence and of any idle thoughts and fancies, he is free from all worry, grief and care and, with a tender and compassionate heart, proclaims the Dharma, day and night, ever propounding the unsurpassed Teaching of the Way by varied illustrations and innumerable parables, he reveals It to sentient beings which causes them all to rejoice.

Of garments, bedding, drink, food, medicine and all such things he has no expectations; with singleness of mind, he thinks only of the cause of his teaching the Dharma, vowing to complete the Buddha's Path by helping all others to do the same; this is his great reward, contentment and offering.

After My entering into eternal meditation, if there be any monk capable of proclaiming this Discourse which is the wondrous blossoming of My Teaching, his heart will be free from envy and rancour, from all irritations and obstacles, and from sorrow and depression as well as from the curses and slanders of others.

Further, he will be free from fear and dread of their adding the insult of injury from sword or cudgel; he will not be driven off for he is steadfast and at ease in his forbearance.

The wise one, in such ways as these, will train his mind so well, and be able to dwell so content and at ease, as I have already said, that the merits and virtues of this person are beyond any power to fully express in number or in illustration even were thousands upon thousands of kalpas to be given for the task.

If you wish to give voice to this Discourse of Mine, you should forsake all envy, anger and pride and all thoughts arising from a suspicious, deceitful, twisted or dishonest heart, ever cultivating the practice of maintaining integrity.

Do not disparage others or, for amusement's sake, discuss the Teachings or lead others to doubt or regret by saying: 'You will never become Buddhas' but, as a disciple of the Buddha, when giving voice to the Dharma, be ever gentle, patient and compassionate with all, never cultivating thoughts of indulgence or idleness.

Toward the great Bodhisattvas in all the Ten Quarters who practice the Way out of pity for all beings cultivate a reverent mind by thinking, 'These are my great teachers'; for all World-honoured Buddhas engender thoughts of them as peerless parents and then, eliminating all feelings of pride and arrogance, give unobstructed voice to the Dharma.

Such is the third method: let the wise protect and guard it for wholehearted devotion to these practices in ease and contentment is revered by beings beyond count.

Ever act with patience and forbearance, and with pity for all beings, for only then can you give voice to a Discourse which the Buddhas will extol.

In later ages to come, you who would keep to this Discourse of Mine, be you layman, monk or one not yet on the Bodhisattva path, by all means cultivate compassion by thinking, 'Since those who do not hear, or have faith in this Discourse of His, will suffer a great loss, I, having realized the Buddha Way through skilful means, will expound this Dharma to them that they all may abide in It.'

Like a powerful monarch whose chariot wheels roll everywhere, one who, to his soldiers who are meritorious in battle, presents many rewards such as elephants, horses, chariots, carriages and ornaments to adorn their bodies, as well as fields, houses, villages and cities, or gives them raiment, various kinds of precious jewels, servants and wealth, joyfully bestowing all, but only for the one who is most valiant and strong and capable of the most difficult of deeds does the monarch take from his own head the lustrous pearl to give to him, so too is it with a Tathagata; Lord of all Dharmas, Whose great strength lies in His patience and His treasure Trove of enlightened wisdom.

Out of His great compassion and benevolence, and in keeping with the Dharma, He transforms the world.

Seeing all human beings suffering in torment and distress, and craving to find deliverance as they struggle against the demons of Mara, He gives voice to various Teachings for the sake of all these sentient beings and, by the most skilful of means, proclaims the various Scriptures but, once He finally knows for sure that these beings have their full strength, then, and only then, at last, does He offer this Flower of the Dharma to them just as the monarch took from his head the bright pearl as his gift.

This Discourse of Mine is the most precious among all the Scriptures; I have always guarded It, kept It safe and never revealed It rashly or too soon; now, indeed, this is the time to proclaim It to you all.

After My entering into eternal meditation, whoever seeks the Buddha's Way and desires peaceably and amicably to give voice to this Discourse of Mine should make himself intimate with the four modes of conduct as they have been given.

Whoever of you reads this Discourse completely, and attends to Its meaning, will be ever free from worry, grief, gloom, suffering and disease, of countenance bright and clear ; you will not live in destitution, meanness or squalor and all sentient beings will delight to look upon you with a fondness they feel for one sainted or wise; the offspring of devas will be given you as ministers; swords and cudgels will not add their injury to you; things poisonous will leave you unharmed. If any, from hatred or malice, would abuse you, their mouths will close up tight; fearless will you roam like the Lord of lions and the radiance of Your wisdom and insight will shine forth illumining like the sun.

When you dream, you will behold only things wondrous; you will see Tathagatas, seated upon their Lion Thrones of Meditation, as They give voice to the Dharma to the hosts of surrounding monks: you will behold nagas and spirits, asuras and others, in number as the sands of the Ganges, as they pay reverence with hands held in gasshō, and you will catch sight of yourself proclaiming the Dharma to them.

You will also behold Buddhas, Their bodies like burnished gold, emitting boundless rays of light which illumine all as, with voices melodious as Brahma's, They thunder forth the Dharma.

Whilst some Buddha gives voice to the Supreme Dharma to the fourfold host of disciples, you will see yourself in their midst extolling the Buddha with your hands in gasshō.

On hearing the Dharma, you will fill with joy and, making your offering, will receive the sacred invocations and give witness to the wisdom of never regressing.

The Buddha, knowing that, in heart and mind, you have penetrated deep into the Buddha's Way, will then predict your success in realizing Supreme and Perfect Enlightenment, saying, 'You, my good child, shall, in an age to come, obtain wisdom beyond measure by realizing the Great Way of the Buddha.

Your realm will be splendrous and immaculate, of breadth beyond compare; there you too will have your fourfold host of disciples who, with hands in gasshō, will listen to you proclaim the Dharma.'

You will also see yourself in some mountain grove putting the good Teachings into practice by proving for yourself what is real and what appearance and, deep in meditation, you will meet the Buddhas of all the Ten Quarters.

Like burnished gold are the bodies of these Buddhas, adorned with a hundred auspicious marks, for whoever, hearing the Dharma, gives voice to It for the sake of others, ever has good dreams like these.

Again, in a dream or vision, you will be transformed into a lord who forsakes palace, family and kin, as well as the most exquisite pleasures the five senses crave, to journey forth to the place of training at the foot of a Bodhi tree where, seated on your Lion Throne of Meditation, you will seek the Way until seven days pass and you realize what 'the Wisdom of the Buddhas' is.

Having thus succeeded to the Supreme Way, you will arise and, turning the Wheel of the Dharma, proclaim to the fourfold host of disciples My Teaching for thousands of myriads of kalpas.

After giving voice to the undefiled Wondrous Dharma and ferrying the countless sentient beings to the Other Shore, you will then enter nirvana like a lamp ceasing to smoke when its flame is extinguished.

If any of you in the evil ages to come give your voice to this pre-eminent Dharma, you shall obtain a great bounty such as the merits here foretold."